

SUBJECTS IN TAGALOG AND ICELANDIC*

Norvin Richards

MIT

A number of researchers have investigated the syntactic properties of a class of Tagalog nominals marked with *ang* and *si*, variously known as 'topics', 'foci', 'triggers', or 'subjects'. Many Austronesianists (e.g., Payne 1982, De Guzman 1988, Gerdts 1988, Maclachlan and Nakamura 1994) regard these as markers of absolutive case, and see Tagalog as an ergative language. Others (Guilfoyle, Hung, and Travis 1992, Richards 1990, 1993) claim that *ang* and *si* mark nominative case, and describe Tagalog as a nominative-accusative language. In this paper I argue from data on binding, weak crossover, quantifier float, and topic-drop, among other phenomena, that the closest syntactic analogue to the Tagalog topic is the preverbal XP in V2 languages such as Icelandic. Tagalog topicalization is thus argued to be unrelated to any syntactic notion of Case.

1. Introduction

There has been a fair amount of controversy over the right way of thinking about alternations like that shown in (1) (Tagalog), involving a phenomenon I will refer to as "topicalization"¹:

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¹ Throughout this paper I will be using Schachter's (1976) terminology for describing the Tagalog topicalization system; thus, verbs will be marked AT for Actor-Topic, GT for Goal-Topic, DT for Direction-Topic, etc.; similarly, T stands for Topic, A for Actor (roughly, the logical subject), G for Goal (roughly, the direct object), and so forth. In (1a), for example, the verb is in the Actor-Topic form, because the actor *lalaki* 'man' has been topicalized, while in (1b) the verb bears Goal-Topic morphology that signals the topicalization of the goal *bigas* 'rice'. I will also follow Schachter in using *Li* for the Tagalog "linker", about which I will have nothing to say here.

- (1) a. *Bumili ang lalaki ng bigas*
 AT-bought T man G rice
 'The man bought rice'
- b. *Binili ng lalaki ang bigas*
 GT-bought A man T rice
 'A man bought the rice'

There are two major camps on this question that I am familiar with, both of which represent the difference between (1a) and (1b) as one involving voice. For those who regard Tagalog as a Nominative-Accusative language (e.g., Guilfoyle, Hung, and Travis 1992, Richards 1990, 1993), (1a) is in the active voice, while (1b) represents something like the passive. This account takes *ang* and *si*² to be markers of nominative case. Others (including Payne 1982, De Guzman 1988, Gerdts 1988, and MacLachlan and Nakamura 1994) claim that Tagalog is an Ergative-Absolutive language; on this view, (1b) is the active voice, while (1a) is an antipassive. For those pursuing this view, *ang* and *si* are markers of absolutive case. I will try to argue here that both of these approaches are mistaken and that Tagalog topicalization has nothing to do with case, thus agreeing in spirit with Shibatani (1988). Rather, I will claim that the alternations in (1) are more similar to those in (2) than they are to phenomena involving voice (Icelandic, from Rögnvaldsson and Thráinsson 1990, 3):

- (2) a. *Ég hef aldrei hitt Maríu*
 I have never met Maria
- b. *Maríu hef ég aldrei hitt*
 Maria have I never met

In Icelandic, as in a number of other languages, some element must move to a position preceding the verb (the so-called "verb-second" or "V2" phenomenon). The question of what drives this movement is a difficult one, and one I do not propose to go into here. It is typically assumed, however, that the driving force behind V2 phenomena has nothing to do with case. Not only do V2 phenomena have no effect on the

² These two markers appear to have the same grammatical function; *si* is used with proper names, and *ang* with other nouns.

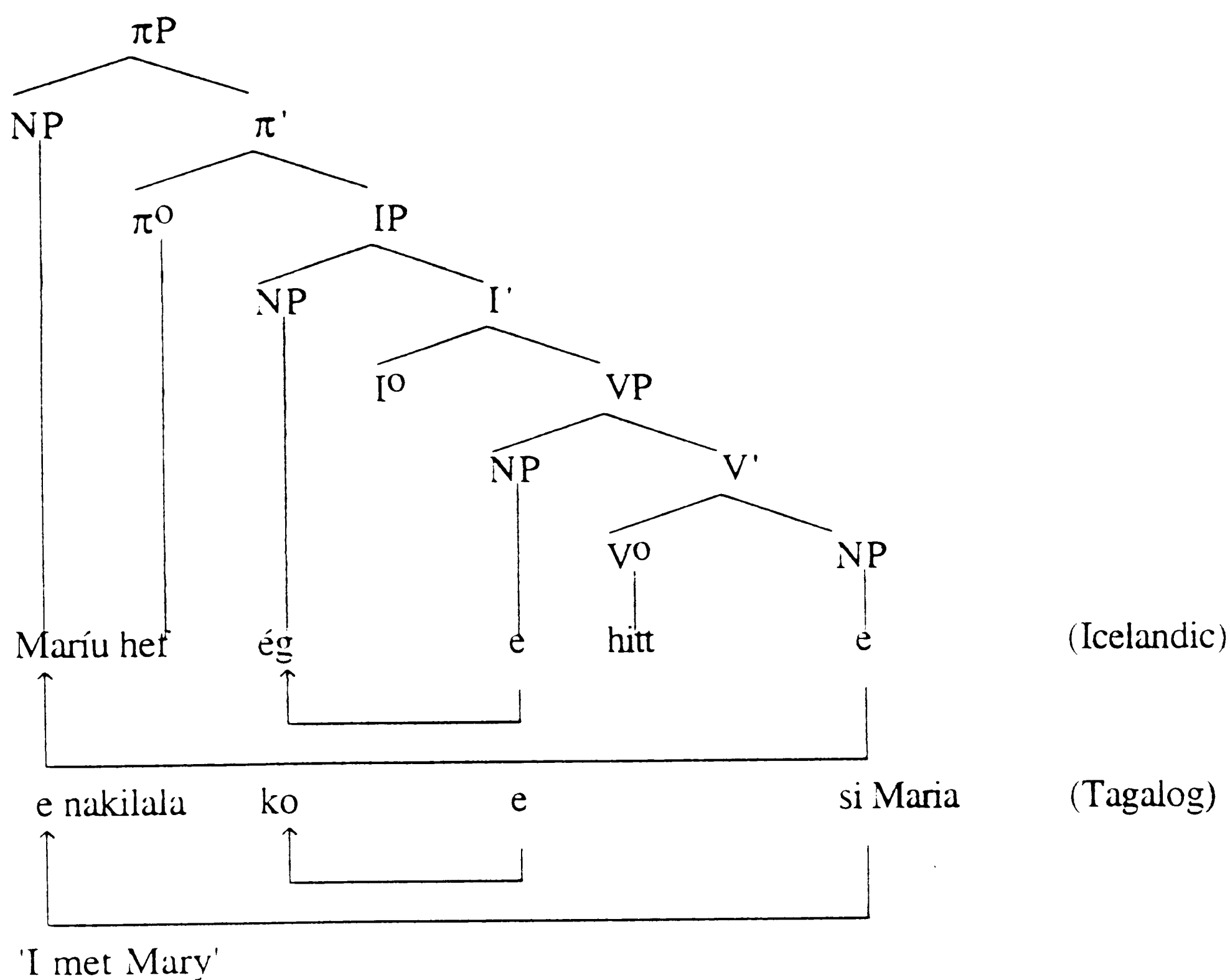
morphological expression of case in V2 languages, but the movements in question have a very different syntactic character from those we associate with case-driven movement, as we will see. I will try to show here that Tagalog topicalization is syntactically similar to the movement of elements to the pre-verbal position in V2 languages (I will focus particularly on Icelandic, although the claims made here should generalize to any V2 language). According to this theory, *ang* and *si* are not markers of a case at all; rather, they mark the same feature that drives *Maríu* to move to the pre-verbal slot in (2b).³

A variety of recent papers (Branigan 1992, Jonas 1992, Harley 1995) have argued for the presence of an A'-specifier above the position in which the subject typically receives case, which is typically occupied by the subject in many languages; I will refer to this functional projection as π P, which is Branigan's (1992) name for it. Branigan (1992), Jonas (1992), and Harley (1995) all take this position to be that occupied by the element preceding the verb in V2 clauses. I will try to argue here that the Tagalog topic also occupies Spec π P. Thus, I will be assuming that Tagalog and Icelandic share the structure in (3):⁴

³ A natural question arises at this point; if *ang* and *si* are not Case-markers, what is the status of the other morphemes typically taken to mark Case in Tagalog (*ng*, *ni*, *sa*, and so on)? I will have to leave this question an open one for now. It may be that these are true Case-markers, or they may be reanalyzable along the lines developed in this paper as marking roles in another licensing system which bears no relation to Case.

⁴ Verb movement is not shown here; I assume, for example, that the Tagalog verb is base-generated under V^0 and raises to some higher position (I^0 or π^0).

(3)



According to this story, the only relevant syntactic difference between Icelandic and Tagalog is that movement to Spec πP in Icelandic is overt, while the Tagalog equivalent involves movement at LF. Of course, there are some obvious morphological differences between the Icelandic and Tagalog cases. For example, Tagalog verbs typically bear morphology indicating which nominal has been topicalized (the infixes *-um-* and *-in-* in (1) are examples of this); I assume that this is an overt instantiation of π^0 . Icelandic verbs, on the other hand, bear no such morphology. Syntactically, however, Tagalog and Icelandic are quite similar in the relevant respects, as we will see.

2. Tagalog=Icelandic

To begin with, Tagalog topicalization behaves like A'-movement for Binding Theory, which is surprising on a theory in which topicalization is case-driven:

- (4) a. *Nagmamahal si Juan sa kanyang sarili*
 AT-loves T Juan Loc his self
 'Juan loves himself'

- b. *Minamahal ni Juan ang kanyang sarili*
 GT-loves A Juan T his self
 'Juan loves himself'

Topicalization of an anaphor (by hypothesis, movement of the anaphor to a position c-commanding its binder) violates neither Condition C nor Condition A. This is not typical of A-movement:

- (5) * *I believe himself to seem to John to be smart*

On the other hand, movement to the preverbal position in a language like Icelandic does behave this way (Steingrímur Karason, p.c.):

- (6) a. *Jón elskar sjálfan sig*
 John loves himself

- b. *Sjálfan sig elskar Jón*
 himself loves John

Syntactically, then, Tagalog topicalization looks more like movement to the preverbal slot than it does like case-driven movement. Case-driven movement of a reflexive to a position c-commanding its binder is ruled out by the binding theory, as seen in (5). Such a configuration presumably violates Condition C, since the name *John* is A-bound. Icelandic and Tagalog topicalization, on the other hand, both fail to trigger this effect, which suggests that topicalization is not case-driven in either language.

Another parallel between Tagalog and Icelandic topicalization has to do with the behavior of extraction. Adherents of the π P-based explanation of V2 phenomena will have to provide an explanation for the facts in (7) and (8) (Icelandic, (7) adapted from Rögnvaldsson and Thráinsson 1990, 14; (8) from Eiríkur Rögnvaldsson and Höskuldur

Thráinsson, p.c.):

- (7) a. [_{CP} *Hvern* [_{πP} *hefur* [_{IP} *María* *kysst*]]]?
 whom has Mary kissed
- b. * [_{CP} *Hvern* [_{πP} *María* *hefur* [_{IP} *kysst*]]]?
 whom Maria has kissed
- (8) a. [_{CP} [_{πP} *Steingrímur* *hefur* [_{IP} *gefið* *Maríu* *bókina*]]]
 Steingrímur has given Mary the-book
- b. [_{CP} [_{πP} *Bókina* *hefur* [_{IP} *Steingrímur* *gefið* *Maríu*]]]
 the-book has Steingrímur given Mary
- c. [_{CP} *Hverjum* [_{πP} *hefur* [_{IP} *Steingrímur* *gefið* *bókina*]]]?
 whom has Steingrímur given the-book
- d. * [_{CP} *Hverjum* [_{πP} *bókina* *hefur* [_{IP} *Steingrímur* *gefið*]]]?
 whom the-book has Steingrímur given

In main clauses, extraction apparently cannot take place if Spec π P is occupied by another nominal. One way of describing this would be to say that extraction must take place via Spec π P; that is, to say that only elements in Spec π P can be extracted. The famous Tagalog ban on extraction of non-topics, of course, looks very similar:

- (9) a. [_{CP} *Sino* *ang* [_{πP} *hinalikan* [_{IP} *ni* *Maria*]]]?
 who DT-kissed A Mary
 ‘Who did Mary kiss?’
- b. * [_{CP} *Sino* *ang* [_{πP} *e* *humalik* [_{IP} *si* *Maria*]]]?
 ↑ _____ |
 who AT-kissed T Mary
 ‘Who did Mary kiss?’

On this story, (9a) is parallel to (7a), and (9b) to (7b); if the subject is made into the topic, extraction cannot take place, while if the extracted object is made the topic the structure is well-formed.

Icelandic, like many V2 languages, has a process of “topic-drop” (Sigurðsson 1993, 254-255):

- (10) a. (*Ég*) *þekki* *það ekki*
 (I) recognize that not
 b. (*það*) *þekki* *ég ekki*
 that recognize I not
 ‘I don’t recognize that’
 c. *Núna* *þekki* **(ég) *(það) ekki*
 now recognize I that not
 ‘Now I don’t recognize that’

That is, Icelandic allows certain elements to drop just in case they are topicalized. Tagalog seems to behave similarly. For example, (11a), but not (11b), is an appropriate response to ‘Why is Juan sick?’ (Marlon Abayan, p.c.):

- (11) a. *Baka kumain (siya) ng tambakol*
 maybe AT-ate T-he G mackerel
 ‘Maybe he ate mackerel’
 b. *Baka kinain *(niya) ang tambakol*
 maybe GT-ate A-he T mackerel
 ‘Maybe he ate the mackerel’

Rizzi (1992) notes a peculiar fact about topic-drop in German which he attributes to Cardinaletti (1990). Apparently dropped topicalized subjects can be of any person, while non-subject topics must be 3rd person (from Rizzi 1992):

- (12) a. (*Ich*) *habe es gestern gekauft*
 (I) have it yesterday bought
 ‘I bought it yesterday’
 b. (*Das*) *habe ich gestern gekauft*
 (that) have I yesterday bought
 ‘I bought that yesterday’

- c. *(*Dich*) *habe ich nicht gesehen*
 (you) have I not seen
 'I haven't seen you'

At least some Tagalog speakers apparently have judgments which are strongly reminiscent of the German facts. The conversation in (13a), involving drop of a 3rd person goal-topic, is more felicitous than that in (13b), which contains a dropped 2nd person goal-topic (Marlon Abayan, p.c.):

- (13) a. A: *Ano ang ginawa ng kapatid mo kagabi?*
 what T TT-did A sibling your last-night
 'What did your sister do last night?'

B: *Pumunta siya sa Makati*
 AT-went T-she L Makati
 'She went to Makati'

A: *A, oo, nakita ko yata doon*
 oh yes TT-saw A-I it-seems there
 'Oh yes, I think I saw (her) there'

- b. A: *Ano ang ginawa ninyo kagabi?*
 what T TT-did A-you-pl last-night
 'What did you do last night?'

B: *Pumunta kami sa Makati*
 AT-went T-we-excl L Makati
 'We went to Makati'

?? A: *A, oo, nakita ko yata doon*
 oh yes TT-saw A-I it-seems there
 'Oh yes, I think I saw (you) there'

On the other hand, (14) is perfectly acceptable (say, in place of B's response in (13a)):

- (14) *Pumunta (kami) sa Makati*
 AT-went T-we-excl L Makati
 ‘(We) went to Makati’

Thus, in both Tagalog and German, dropped actor-topics, but not dropped goal-topics, can be 1st or 2nd person. On a theory in which German and Tagalog topics are syntactically similar, this is unsurprising; Tagalog thus appears to be behaving, again, like a V2 language.

It has often been noted that Tagalog topics must be specific, or definite, or “old information”, or something of that kind. In fact, this has been one of the arguments offered against equating the Tagalog topic with subjects in other languages, on the grounds that such semantic restrictions seldom apply to subjects (Bowen 1965, Schachter and Otnes 1972). Interestingly, the Icelandic topic appears to also be associated with a definite reading. Topicalization of indefinites is considerably more awkward than topicalization of definites (Höskuldur Thráinsson, p.c.):

- (15) a. *Jón keypti bókina*
 Jon bought the-book
 b. *Jón keypti bók*
 Jon bought a-book
 c. *Bókina keypti Jón*
 the-book bought Jon
 d. ??*Bók keypti Jón*
 a-book bought Jon

Thus, in Icelandic, as in Tagalog, Spec π P appears to be associated with definiteness in some way.

The claim that *ang* marks absolutive case seems to encounter difficulties with phenomena involving weak crossover. Tagalog topicalization has effects on weak crossover that are unexpected if *ang* is a marker of absolutive case:

- (16) a. **Nagmamahal ang kanyang_i ama ng bawat anak_i*
 AT-loves T his father G every child
 ‘His father loves every child’

- b. ?*Minamahal ng kanyang_i ama ang bawat anak_i*
 GT-loves A his father T every child
 'His father loves every child'

The quantifier in (16a) is unable to bind the pronoun as a variable. This effect is standardly attributed to the ban on weak crossover. QR of the quantifier to a position c-commanding the pronoun will create a weak crossover configuration, since no A-positions associated with the quantifier will c-command the pronoun. Interestingly, topicalization of the quantifier remedies this weak crossover effect, as we can see in (16b). This is not what we expect if *anak* in (16b) is absolutive and *ama* is ergative (Basque and Nisgha, from Bobaljik 1993, 60):

- (17) a. **Nor maite du bere amak?*
 who-ABS love AUX.3sA/3sE his mother-ERG
 'Who_i does his_i mother love?'
 b. **Næ-gat † ti-sipən-s nɔx^w-t*
 who-one ND FOC-love-DM mother-3s
 'Who_i does his_i mother love?'

Here we see that making a quantificational element absolutive does not typically allow it to bind a variable in an ergative nominal. Icelandic topicalization, however, does remedy weak crossover, just like Tagalog topicalization (Höskuldur Thráinsson and Eiríkur Rögnvaldsson, p.c.):

- (18) a. **Foreldrar hans kenna sérhverjum strákk að keyra*
 parents his teach every boy to drive
 'His_i parents teach every boy_i how to drive'
 b. ?*Sérhverjum strákk kenna foreldrar hans að keyra*
 every boy teach parents his to drive
 'Every boy_i, his_i parents teach how to drive'

Once again, *ang*-marked nominals behave like Icelandic topics, and not like bearers of a particular case.

We have now seen arguments from a number of domains suggesting that Tagalog topicalization be treated as syntactically similar to topicalization in Icelandic. Several arguments have been advanced against understanding nominals marked with *ang* as

topics; let us move on to consider these. Kroeger (1991) offers one such argument. Following Bresnan and Mchombo (1987), he claims that topics are “what is under discussion, whether previously mentioned or assumed in discourse” (Bresnan and Mchombo 1987, 746). One prediction of this definition of topics, Kroeger says, is that Tagalog sentences like (19) should not be possible answers to a question like “What did you buy?”. As he notes, this is false (Kroeger 1991, 79):

- (19) *Binili ko itong damit*
 GT-bought A-I T-this dress
 ‘I bought this dress’

Here the topic *itong damit* ‘this dress’ must crucially be new information; it cannot represent information already presupposed in the discourse, or the answer would be uninformative. This is incompatible, however, with the notion of topic as Kroeger has defined it; topics must be old information, previously mentioned in the discourse. Kroeger concludes that *ang/si*-marked nominals cannot be topics, in his sense.

Here we run into terminological difficulties (probably mine, not Kroeger’s). There may well be good reasons to reserve the term ‘topic’ for a class of nominals fitting Kroeger’s definition. In any event, Kroeger’s observations do not damage the case being made here for equating the Tagalog and Icelandic phenomena. Icelandic sentences which, on this account, are structurally equivalent to (19) are also well-formed responses to questions like “what did you buy?”

- (20) *Þessa bók keypti ég*
 this book bought I
 ‘I bought this book’

Thus, Kroeger’s arguments serve to show that the class of nominals referred to as “topics” in the literature probably do not form a natural class; at the very least, a distinction should be drawn between Icelandic and Tagalog topics, on the one hand, and topics in the sense Kroeger defines, on the other.⁵ A full-scale investigation of the semantics of topicalization is beyond the scope of this paper, unfortunately, but it seems clear that with regard to the diagnostic discussed by Kroeger, Tagalog and Icelandic continue to behave similarly.

⁵ We might also want to distinguish the cases of ‘topicalization’ studied here from ‘topicalization’ in non-V2 languages, as in *Fish, I’m very fond of*.

Another argument against understanding *ang*-marked nominals as topics has been based on quantifier float. For some Tagalog speakers, as Schachter (1976) observes, the quantifier *lahat* 'all' may float to a position immediately following the verb. Such floated quantifiers are always construed as modifying the topic (Schachter 1976, 501):

- (21) a. *Sumusulat lahat ang mga bata ng mga liham*
 AT-writing all T pl. child G pl. letter
 'All the children are writing letters'
- b. *Sinusulat lahat ng mga bata ang mga liham*
 GT-writing all A pl. child T pl. letter
 'The children are writing all the letters'

If quantifier float is a diagnostic of argumenthood, this is unexpected on the theory of Tagalog topicalization developed here.

Suppose we consider the properties of quantifier float in some other languages. Comparison of Tagalog with Icelandic is impossible in this case, as floated quantifiers in Icelandic are not subject-oriented (adapted from Bobaljik 1995, 249):

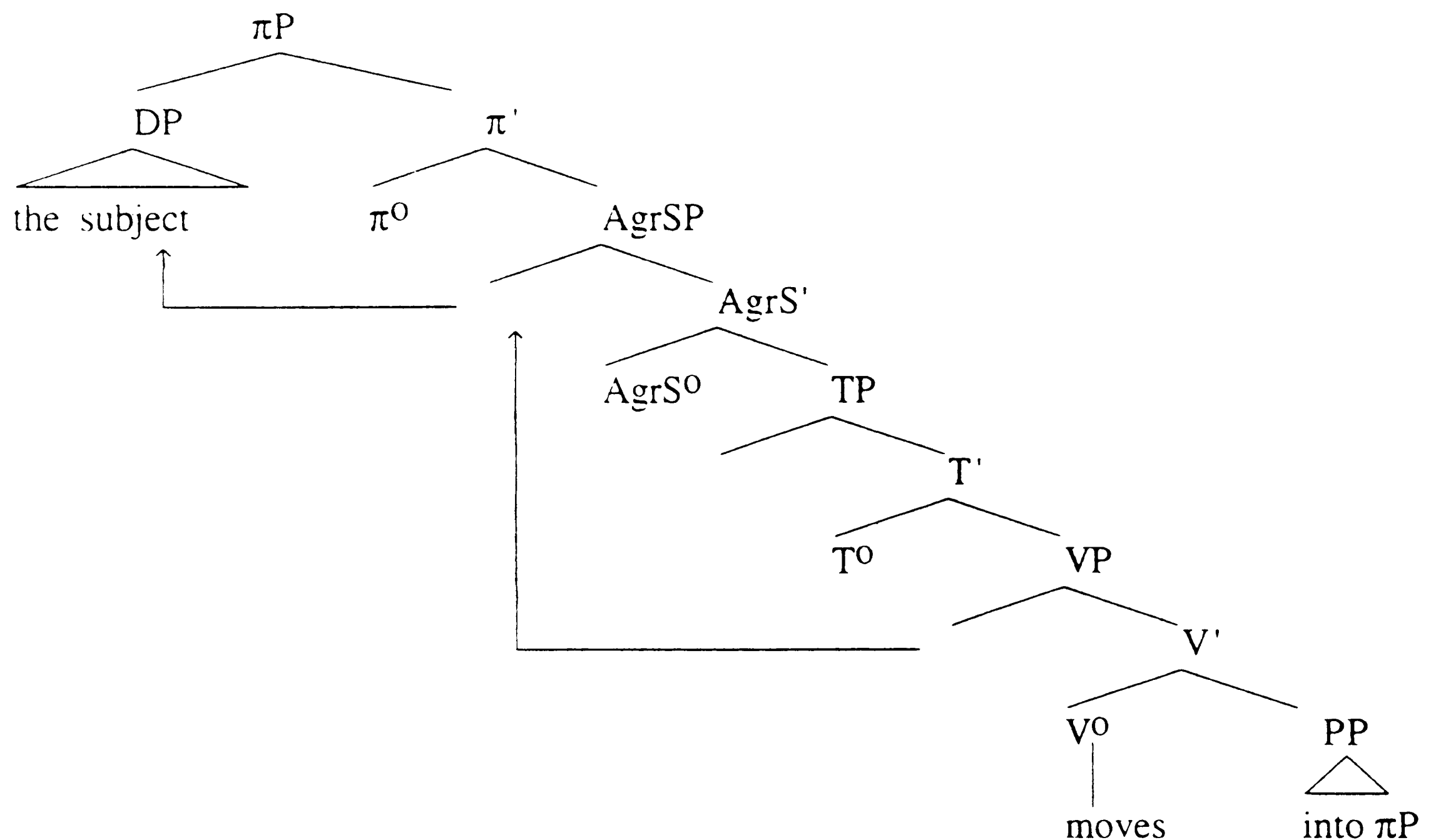
- (22) a. *Strákarnir máluðu húsið allir rautt*
 boys-the painted house-the all red
 'All the boys painted the house red'
- b. *Það borðuðu margir strákar bjúgun ekki öll*
 there ate many boys sausages-the not all
 'Many boys didn't eat all of the sausages'

Icelandic floated quantifiers may be associated either with the subject, as in (22a), or with the object, as in (22b). Note that this might make us uneasy about using floated quantifiers as a diagnostic for structure; floated quantifiers clearly have different properties in different languages, and we have no theory that tells us what those properties might be, or what the differences show.

Ignoring this problem for a moment, let us consider quantifier-float in English. The English equivalent of (22b) is not well-formed ("Many boys didn't eat the sausages all" is not a good English sentence), so perhaps English floated quantifiers are subject-oriented in the relevant sense, and a meaningful comparison with Tagalog can be made. Now we need to go on to investigate the notion of "subject-orientation" at work here. According to Branigan's (1992) theory of clause structure, in ordinary

transitive sentences the subject is base-generated in an internal subject position (Spec VP), moves to a position associated with nominative Case (Spec AgrSP), and then moves to Spec π P:

(23)



Thus, 'subject-orientation' might consist of Spec AgrSP-orientation, or of Spec π P-orientation, on this theory, since both of these positions are typically occupied by the subject. To determine which of these approaches to subject-orientation is the right one, we should consider some sentences in which elements other than the subject move to Spec π P. According to Branigan (1992), the sentences in (24) involve movements of this kind:

(24) a. *Into the bar stumbled three drunken stevedores*

b. *"Tagalog is really Icelandic!" yelled the deranged linguist*

In (24a, b), the preposed elements *into the bar* and *"Tagalog is really Icelandic!"* are supposed to have moved into Spec π P. Note that the subject is still associated in some way with AgrSP, since it controls subject agreement:

(25) a. *Into the bar stumble three stevedores*

b. **Into the bar stumbles three stevedores*

Thus, we can determine whether floating quantifiers are AgrSP-oriented or π P-oriented by seeing whether subjects in sentences like (24) and (25) can control floating quantifiers. As we see in (26), they cannot:

(26) a. **Into the bar all stumble the stevedores*

b. **Into the bar stumble the stevedores all*

This suggests that English floating quantifiers are π P-oriented (like their Tagalog counterparts, on the proposal developed here). Far from being an argument against the theory developed here, then, the quantifier-float facts actually constitute a weak argument in its favor.

In this section I have laid out a number of arguments against the idea that *ang* and *si* are markers of a case, suggesting that they mark the syntactic feature which drives movement to the preverbal slot in V2 languages (such as Icelandic). We have seen that Tagalog topicalization behaves like Icelandic topicalization, and unlike case-driven movement, with regard to binding theory, wh-extraction, “topic-drop”, a definiteness effect, and weak crossover. I then went on to consider two arguments against understanding *ang* and *si* as topic markers. We saw that Tagalog and Icelandic behave alike with regard to Kroeger’s semantic diagnostic for topichood. The properties of quantifier-float were then investigated and argued not to militate convincingly against the analysis proposed here.

If we take these parallels between Tagalog and Icelandic topicalization seriously, we are inclined toward an analysis that posits the same structure for both; that is, we are inclined to assume that topicalization in Tagalog, as in Icelandic, involves movement to an A’ specifier c-commanding the position in which the subject gets case. In the next section we will see how this assumption simplifies our understanding of the structure of Tagalog.

3. Tagalog case

The preceding section reviewed a number of phenomena which are unexpected under a theory in which Tagalog topicalization involves movement to the position in which the subject gets case in English. By taking advantage of recent refinements of the Internal Subject Hypothesis, according to which the subject is associated with several external subject positions with different properties, we can account for these phenomena straightforwardly. Furthermore, by not assigning the topic either nominative or absolutive case, we avoid problems involving case-assignment to the other nominals in the sentence; this can now take place in the usual way.

According to the accusative view of Tagalog, the topic is in the nominative case, and direct objects which are not topics bear accusative case. Such a view must invent some ad hoc mechanism for assigning case to non-topic actors. Actors are clearly arguments and not adjuncts; they can bind reflexives, as shown in (27):

- (27) *Ibinigay ni Juan ang premyo sa kanyang sarili*
 GT-gave A Juan T prize D his self
 'Juan gave the prize to himself'

MacLachlan and Nakamura (1994) argue against the nominative-accusative view, pointing out that the case-marking on actors is identical to that on possessors of nominals, an otherwise unattested pattern (they claim) in nominative-accusative languages. The mechanism invented to assign case to the non-topic actor would therefore have to be fairly exotic:

- (28) a. *lapis ko*
 pencil A-I
 'my pencil'
- b. *Binili ko ang lapis*
 GT-bought A-I T pencil
 'I bought the pencil'

On the account developed here, on the other hand, no difficulties arise, since topicalization does not involve movement to a case position. The subject can receive case in the usual way. If we decide to view Tagalog as an accusative language, then Tagalog actors and possessors both bear nominative case. This is an attested pattern in nominative-accusative languages; Tagalog possessors look very much like their

Hungarian counterparts ((30) is Hungarian, from Abney 1987, 44 and 46):

- (29) a. *lapis ko*
pencil A-I
- b. *aking lapis*
D-I pencil
'my pencil'
- (30) a. *a te vendeg -e -d*
the you-NOM guest POSSESSED 2s
'your guest'
- b. *Peter -nek a kalapja*
Peter DAT the hat
'Peter's hat'

Hungarian possessors can be assigned either nominative or dative case, as can be seen in (30). On the account developed here, *ni* could be seen as a marker of nominative case, and Tagalog could be taken to have both dative and nominative possessors as well.

According to the ergative view of Tagalog structure, sentences like (31) must be antipassives, since the subject is in the absolutive case; that is, the object must not receive case from the verb:

- (31) *Kumain ang lalaki ng tambakol*
AT-ate T man G mackerel

In the story developed here, on the other hand, the marker *ang* has nothing to do with the case assigned to *lalaki*; (31) may very well be an active sentence. Kroeger 1993 has argued convincingly against the view that (31) is an antipassive, since the direct object behaves syntactically like an argument of the verb. Kroeger outlines several tests for argumenthood, only one of which I will describe here. PRO in adjunct clauses cannot be controlled by non-arguments in Tagalog. This can be seen in (32) (adapted from Kroeger 1993, 43); here, the marker *sa* on *hari* 'king' effectively marks it as an adjunct:

- (32) *Bumisita si Juan_i sa hari_j [nang nagiisa PRO_{i/*j}]*
 AT-visited T Juan D king Adv AT-one
 ‘Juan visited the king alone’

(32) can only be understood as meaning that Juan was alone, not that the king was alone. (33a) and (33b), by contrast, are both ambiguous (adapted from Kroeger 1993, 47):

- (33) a. *Hinuli ng polis_i ang magnanakaw_j [nang pumapasok PRO_{ij} sa bangko]*
 GT-caught A police T thief Adv AT-enter D bank
 ‘(The) police caught the thief entering the bank’
- b. *Nanghuli ng magnanakaw_i ang polis_j [nang pumapasok PRO_{ij} sa bangko]*
 AT-caught G thief T police Adv AT-enter D bank
 ‘The police caught a thief entering the bank’

Note that in (33b), PRO can be controlled by the direct object even when the verb is in the actor-topic form; that is, even in the putative antipassive. This seems to suggest that non-topic direct objects are in fact arguments of the verb, contrary to the ergative view. Accounts of Tagalog that describe it as ergative must therefore invent a new mechanism to license the direct object in “antipassives”, just as the nominative-accusative account must invent a new way for non-topic subjects to acquire case. The theory developed here, on the other hand, does not need to complicate existing accounts of case, since topicalization is not taken to be case-driven movement.

4. Conclusion

At the beginning of this paper I noted that a controversy exists on the question of whether Tagalog is a nominative-accusative or ergative-absolutive language. This controversy has been predicated on the assumption that topicalization is case-driven movement; that is, that markers like *ang* and *si* mark nominals as bearing either nominative or absolutive case. I have tried to show here that this view is incorrect, and that movement to the topic position in Tagalog is more like movement to the pre-verbal slot in languages like Icelandic than it is like passive in English. If this conclusion is right, the question of Tagalog’s case system will have to be completely re-thought. There are, of course, interesting differences between Icelandic and Tagalog topicalization which may shed light on this question (for example, the unmarked

Tagalog topic appears to be the direct object, which is not the case in Icelandic), but these are matters beyond the scope of this paper.

According to what I have said here, the major difference between Tagalog and Icelandic is simply that Tagalog topicalization is associated with rich verbal and nominal morphology, while Icelandic topicalization is signalled by changes in word order. In the domain of case, pairs of this kind are well-documented; we typically think of languages like Latin as expressing case by means of rich morphology, while languages like Chinese use changes in word order. If the theory sketched here is right, Tagalog and Icelandic are another such pair with respect to a licensing system which has nothing to do with case.

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Building 20D
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Cambridge, MA 02139
United States
[norvin@mit.edu]

