Discourse-based Analysis of Subjecthood in Tagalog*
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1. Introduction

In examining Philippine languages, one is often confronted with the controversy of two related issues of the Philippine voice system and the status of 'subject'. My study explores the nature of 'subject' in Tagalog using a quantitative discourse-based analysis. Before presenting my work in progress on my thesis, I would like to provide a brief background of Tagalog and some of the current analyses relating to this problem.

2. Overview of Tagalog Syntax

Tagalog has been regarded as a verb-initial language where the nominals that follow are each preceded by a particle. There are three forms of particles that are extensively used in this language. The three forms are ang, ng, and sa. These forms usually come before common nouns. The particle ang has a special function that reflects the syntactic relation of the nominal that is preceded by ang to that of the affix on the verb. Thus, a certain affix on the verb would trigger a nominal that has one of the semantic roles actor (A), goal (G), locative (L), benefactive (B), or instrument (I) to be preceded by ang. Although ang has been labelled topic in some studies, I have chosen to identify this particle as a focus (FOC) marker.¹ The particles ng and sa, on the other hand, are more constrained with respect to the semantic roles of the nominals in which they introduce. The particle ng usually precede nominals that function as either actor or goal and the particle sa before locative or genitive nominals.

Verbal predicates, on the other hand, receive various forms of affixes which encode both aspect and a verbal focus system. In some cases, it is easy to distinguish the affix which signals the focused nominal and the affix which encodes the aspect as demonstrated in (1).
(1) H -in- iram  -an nang babae  nang pera  ang
-PERF-borrow-LF  A-woman  G-moneyFOC

bangko.
L-bank

'The woman borrowed money from the bank.'

In this construction, we find that the verbal suffix -an is a
locative focus (LF) and the infix -in- marks the perfective
(PERF) aspect. Thus, in (1), the locative nominal receives the
focus particle ang. From this example, we find that certain
verbal affixes may trigger foregrounding on any one of the
nominals that correspond to the affix on the verb. For example,
an instrumental prefix ipina- foregrounds (i.e., the NP is
preceded by the particle ang) the nominal with the semantic role
instrument. There is no restriction on the semantic roles of NPs
that can be focused in a Tagalog sentence. Therefore, an actor
nominal, a goal/patient nominal, a locative nominal or any
argument of other semantic roles are all eligible to be focused.

The affixation system in Tagalog is quite complex
because there are cases in which it is difficult to determine the
function of the affix on the verb. Example (2) illustrates this
point.

(2) B-in- ili ng bata  ang gulay  sa palengke.
-PERF/GF-buy  A-child  FOC  G-vegetable  L-market

'A child bought the vegetable from the market.'

In this construction, there is only one verbal affix, the infix -in-.
Based on the previous example we may conclude that this infix
functions as the aspectual marker. However, we find that this
infix also functions as the goal focus (GF) marker as given in
the gloss. Although the role of -in- is ambiguous in this
example, we find that in cases like this, there is always a
nominal that is focused. Thus in a basic Tagalog clause, one
noun phrase is always formally foregrounded with the particle
ang.
3. Theoretical Approaches to Philippine Voice System

Currently, there have been three different approaches to the voice system: the Passive Analysis, the Ergative Analysis, and the Topic Theory. With respect to the status of 'subject', there are two positions. The first position considers the relevance of 'subject' in Tagalog and the second position considers it otherwise. Since the issue of the voice system and the status of 'subject' in Tagalog are related, I will start by introducing the approach taken in relation to the issue of voice and then relate this approach to the issue of 'subject'.

The Passive Analysis follows Bloomfield (1917), Blake (1925) and Bell (1979) in the analysis that Tagalog and other Philippine languages are accusative in type and that the goal-focus sentences are passive constructions and therefore the marked form. This approach often views the *ang* marked nominals to be in the nominative case and thus the 'subject' of the sentence as illustrated in the intransitive sentence (3) and transitive sentences (4a-b).

(3) L -um- angoy ang lalake.

-PERF -swim-IT NOM/(ABS) man

'The man swam.'

(4a) B -um- ili nang libro ang lalake.

-AF-PERP-buy-T ACC/ACT G-book NOM A-man (OBL)/(ANTIPASS)

'The man bought a book.'

(4b) B -in- ili nang lalake ang libro.


'The book was bought by a man.'

'(A man bought the book.)'

In these examples, (4a) is considered the active sentence and (4b) the passive based on which nominal is foregrounded by the particle *ang*. 
The second approach follows De Guzman (1988), McGinn (1988a), Foley and Van Valin (1984), and Cooreman, Fox and Givon (1984). The Ergative Analysis considers Tagalog as ergative in type based on both formal grounds and discourse-based approach. In examples (3) through (4a-b), I have indicated the alternative gloss for this approach in parentheses. The ergative approach considers the goal-focus sentence as the basic unmarked ergative construction as shown in (4b) and the corresponding antipassive construction in (4a). One criticism that can be raised immediately here is that, in most ergative languages, the antipassive usually has a marker different from the other particles that normally mark other nominals. This is not true for Tagalog as both (4a) and (4b) are equally marked morphologically. This is why even in most analyses taking this approach, Tagalog has been viewed to a certain extent as morphologically different from true ergative languages like Dyirbal. With respect to the issue of the status of 'subject', there are conflicting views on this issue. For some, the nominal that functions as the semantic 'agent' is often implicated as the 'subject' of the sentence, while for others the absolutive nominal is considered the 'subject' based on the effect of conjoining two sentences.

The third approach, the Topic Theory, considers Tagalog as neither accusative nor ergative in type but rather treats the goal-focus construction as a distinct topic construction. In this analysis, the notion of 'subject' is not applicable to Tagalog and other Philippine languages and consequently treats ang marked nominals as 'topics.' Schachter (1976), after considering and evaluating all the possible candidates for the syntactic role 'subject', concluded that no single syntactic category in Philippine languages truly corresponds to the notion of 'subject' as found in other languages. Furthermore, Schachter (1977:284) posits that the Philippine data point to a unique distinction of 'subject' properties related to what he called "reference-related properties" and "role-related properties."

In all three approaches described, the method of analysis has been based on formal grammatical processes with the