ACQUISITION OF VOICE AFFIXES IN PSYCHOLOGICAL VERBS IN TAGALOG

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I. Introduction*

Like other Philippine languages, Tagalog is best known for having a complex verbal system which is tied to selecting a cooccurring nominal and marking it as the 'focus' constituent in a given clause structure. This focused nominal is referred to as the grammatical or thematic surface subject, and it plays a central part in many syntactic rules. In the literature, the pertinent verbal affixes that fulfil the grammatical function of signalling the chosen focus nominal have been called either voice (De Guzman, 1978) or focus affixes (Schachter and Otanes, 1972). Thus, with active verbs the common affixes encountered are -um- or m- for the agent/actor focus (AF), -in, i- or -an for the object/patient (OF), -an for the locative or dative (IF), i- for the benefactive (BF) as well as for the instrumental (IF), these last two being distinguished by the different verb stem forms the affix attaches to. If we compare the class of psychological verb forms, we find that the set of affixes used is quite different. The experiencer focus (EF) is usually marked by ma- (attached to a ka-stem) or ma- (attached to a root), the object/theme focus (OF) by ma- or ma- -an or ka- -an and the reason/cause focus (RF) by i- attached to the verb stem with the prefix ka-.

Given these differences, the question that this paper addresses is whether the child acquiring Tagalog as a first language masters the objective or the experiencer form of transitive psychological verb first. My interest in this question derives from the implication the sequence of acquisition bears on the notion that patient is more primary than agent, which leads further to either supporting or disconfirming the Ergative Analysis as a viable approach to the analysis of Tagalog grammar. This question is motivated by a previous study conducted by Galang (1982) on the acquisition of Tagalog verbal morphology which concluded that the goal or object (patient) focus forms of verbs are acquired before the agent focus forms. Since the verbs tested in that study were drawn only from active verbs I wondered if the same conclusion could be generalized to psychological verbs as well. Galang's
study has been used by Cena (1977) and De Guzman (1979; 1990) as supporting, among other arguments, the primacy of patient as subject in Tagalog. With both syntactic and morphological pieces of evidence being backed up by a psycholinguistic study, the justification for considering the Ergative Analysis for Philippine languages (Gerdts, 1988; De Guzman, 1988) is made stronger.

Before I describe the acquisition study to determine the answer to the question stated above, let us look briefly at the basic forms of the verbs, both active and psychological, in some simple structures for easy reference and quick comparison. Likewise, consider the variations of forms within each subclass of psychological verbs.

1. Active Versus Psychological Verbs in Tagalog

The following examples introduce briefly the voice and case marking system in Tagalog. Using the verb roots bilih ‘buy’ and kita ‘see’, the sentences below will show the differences in voice forms between an active and a psychological verb in Tagalog and the corresponding focus nominal, i.e. marked by ang, that each verb form takes as its grammatical subject.

A. Active verb bilih ‘buy’

(1) bumilih ang bata nang saging
    buy-AF FM child banana
    ‘The child bought a banana/bananas.’

(2) bibil(i)hin nang bata ang saging
    will buy-OF child FM banana

(3) bibilhan nang bata ang tindahan sa kanto nang saging
    will buy from-LF child FM store at corner banana

(4) ibibili nang bata nang saging ang nanay niya
    will buy for-BF child banana FM mother his/her

The affix -um- in (1), which at the same time marks the completed aspect of the verb in this focus, identifies the nominal with the agent role as the nominal in focus. This nominal is overtly marked by the particle ang preceding the noun. In sentence (2), the contemplated aspect form of the verb shows the affix -in (it is zero in the incompletely and completed aspect forms) and, correspondingly, the patient/object/theme nominal gets the focus marker ang. It will be noted that the cooccurring agent bata ‘child’ is marked by the non-focus marker nang. In (3), the affix -an signals the locative nominal tindahan sa kanto ‘store at the corner’ as the focus nominal. Lastly in (4), the affix i- points to another nominal, a benefactive, as the focused nominal. The infinitive forms of the voice inflected verbs above are: bumilih(AF), bil(i)hin (OF), bil(i)han (LF), ibili (BF). There are other forms that the root bilih may take, i.e. a variation in stem form
and collocating with a different or the same affix, then focus on other kinds of nominals, e.g. instrument, reason, etc. But depending on the subcategorization of the active verb, the affixes marking the agent, the patient, or the locative are primarily -um- alternating with m-, in alternating with -an or with i-, and-an respectively. Nominals such as instrument, benefactive result or cause, which are peripheral to the meaning of the verb, take the affix i- with varying stem forms.

In contrast, the class of psychological verbs are marked differently. Observe the alternate voice forms (Experiencer Focus, Object Focus, Locative Focus and Reason/cause Focus) below:

B. Psychological verb kita ‘see’:

(5) na+kakita ang bata nang ibon sa puno
saw-OF child bird tree
‘The child saw a bird on a tree.’

(6) nakita nang bata ang ibon sa puno
saw-OF child bird tree

(7) nakitaan/ nang bata nang ibon ang puno
k-in-akitaan child bird tree
saw-LF

(8) i+kinakita na mas mabuti nang laalaki nang larong
saw with-RF better man game
ang kaniyang largabista
FM his binoculars
‘The man saw the game better with his binoculars.’

The infinitive forms of the voice inflected verbs in (5)-(8) are: na+kakita(EF), nakita(OF), makitaan/ kakita+an (LF), i+kakita(RF). From the above examples, we note a different set of affixes and corresponding stem forms the verbs take that indicate the associated focused nominals. Within the class of psychological verbs, there are further complications that be observed in terms of overlaps in voice marking.

Three types of psychological verbs in Tagalog are treated in this study. They are perception, cognition and emotion verbs. In these subclasses, the same thematic role, e.g. experiencer, object, etc., may be marked as the focused nominal by different affixes and stems. To illustrate, the verbs picked out for the study under the three types have the following focus forms:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Root</th>
<th>Experiencer Focus (EF)</th>
<th>Object Focus (OF)</th>
<th>Reason/Other Focus (RF)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Perception Verbs1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) kita ‘see’</td>
<td>MA-KA+kita</td>
<td>MA-kita</td>
<td>I-KA+kita</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(MA-kita-A)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) dinig ‘hear’</td>
<td>MA-KA+dinig</td>
<td>MA-dinig</td>
<td>I-KA+dinig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(MA-dinig-A)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(3) punah 'notice' MA-KA-punah MA-punah KA-punah-AN
(4) damdam 'sense' MA-KA-damdam MA-damdam-AN I-KA-damdam

B. Cognition Verbs
(5) alala 'remember' MA-KA-alala MA-alala (I-KA-alala)
(6) alam 'know' MA-KA-alam MA-(a)lam-AN (I-KA-alam)
(7) isip 'think' MA-KA-isip MA-isip-(AN) (I-KA-isip)
(8) tutuh 'learn' MA-tutuh MA-tutuh-AN KA-tutuh-AN

C. Emotion Verbs
(9) takot 'fear' MA-takot KA-takut-AN (I-KA-takot)
(10) inis 'annoyed' MA-inis KA-inis-AN (I-KA-inis)

From the above examples, we find no absolute systemicity in marking each subclass of psychological verbs. At best, all we can say is that the majority of perception verbs, for example, take MA- and a KA-stem to signal an experiencer form regularly, but the corresponding object and locative forms may vary between MA- or MA- -AN and KA- -AN or MA- -AN, respectively. Under the cognition type, only the cause forms, marked by I- attached to a KA+STEM, is the consistent focus form. Both the experiencer and the object voice forms manifest two alternating forms marked by MA-KA+stem or MA-root (the latter being more frequently found in intransitively used emotion type verbs) and by MA-root or MA-root-AN, respectively. It is only with emotion verbs that we detect a certain degree of regularity in terms of marking, e.g. MA-root indicates an experiencer focus, KA-root-AN, an object/source focus, which morphologically can be identified with the other locative forms. For ease of presentation, we will refer to the affixes as MA-, MAKA-, MA- -AN, KA- -AN, IKA-, without going into a detailed morphological analysis of the verb forms.²

2. The Study

The investigation is limited to determining the acquisition of voice-marked psychological verbs in Tagalog. Although Tagalog verbs are known to manifest an extensive array of possible surface subjects selected from nominals of different thematic roles, the competition in the use of these variant voice-forms is between the basic arguments of the verb, here namely, object and experiencer.

One comprehension and two production tests were administered to four groups of children whose native language is Tagalog. The first two tests - comprehension and production I - involved understanding and producing each test verb, respectively. Production II required the subject to produce the focus nominal that the given verb form entailed. (Due to time limitations, this paper will be only a partial report. It will cover the results of the first two tests, i.e.