Lexical Categories in Tagalog

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1. Introduction

As has been recognized in previous studies (Gil 1992; Shkarban 1992; Himmelman 1991; Schachter and Otanes 1972; Cappell 1964; Bloomfield 1917), the various parts of speech or word classes traditionally identified in Tagalog are not readily differentiated in terms of their distribution. It has been often described that any position in which a Noun occurs may be virtually replaced by a Verb. Thus, there have been some suggestions that Tagalog may have only full words and particles. This view has been recently articulated and more specifically proposed by Gil (1992:1136) claiming that “Tagalog possesses but a single open syntactic category”, that of full words only. As a consequence, neither are there phrasal projections of differing types to speak of. This implies that Tagalog, on the basis of syntactic criteria, completely abandons word classes such as Verb (V), Noun (N), or Adjective (A), be they labelled syntactic or lexical categories.

Granted, for the moment, that Gil is basically correct in his account (see also Himmelman 1991) of supposedly “different word classes” occurring in identical syntactic positions, what this view disregards in setting up word categories are the semantic and morphological dimensions of these classes. In Tagalog, ample evidence can be shown that classes of words differ in their morphological characteristics as well as in their lexical derivational possibilities. If such lexical categories indeed exist, then the question to ask is why these distinctions appear to be irrelevant on the syntactic level or what value can be derived from keeping these categories.

This paper will argue for the viability of maintaining at least the three major open classes of words V, N and A. Firstly, support will be drawn from their differing semantic and morphological characteristics. Then, some of the more productive lexical derivational possibilities for each category will be presented, showing that one category derives into another category and, correspondingly, each derivation carries a specifiable meaning. Finally, an attempt will be made to explain why the syntax of Tagalog allows these three major categories to share the same significant syntactic positions, and further to show that there are identical structures but whose functions differ; these cases require an identification of specific categories.

2. Open classes of V, N and A

In Croft’s (1991:53ff) cross-linguistic characterization of the major syntactic categories, the semantic classes Action, Object and Property correlate not only with the syntactic categories V, N and A, respectively, but also, correspondingly, to the pragmatic (or syntactic) functions Predication, Reference, and Modification. It may be mentioned, however, that in Tagalog the words in the three semantic categories do not exhibit the difference in morphological markedness with respect to their occurrence in their prototypical and non-prototypical functions that Croft appeals to, i.e. of the three categories, for instance, V is the least marked in the Predicate function, and so forth.
A review of the morphological features typical of each class will reveal its distinctiveness. It is, of course, undeniable that there will always be words that will present problems for classification; nevertheless, the general prototypical features are sufficient enough to warrant the distinctions.

2.1 Morphological characteristics

Below are some morphological characteristics of the proposed V(action), N(object) and A(property) categories and some of the more productive lexical derivational processes operating on each of these classes. Basically, Tagalog employs affixation, various types of reduplication, stress change or a combination of these in its morphology.1

2.1.1 Verbs

From the literature, an action or event root V is described as being typically inflected for voice and aspect; N and A are not. If an N or an A manifests these features, and it also appears independently without them, then the inflected forms belong to the category derived V. The voice affixes generally indicate which of the cooccurring participant roles is selected as the grammatical subject (marked by the particle ang) of the verb. For action and process verbs, the affixes are -in, -an, i-, -um-, and m- (before pag- and pang- stems) and with psychological verbs, the forms are distinguished by the affixes ma-, ma-, an, maka- and ika-. In this manner, each V form is said to agree with its grammatical subject. This type of agreement does not obtain when a basic N or A is used in the predicate function. In addition to its voice-marked infinitive form and three aspectual forms - completed, incompletely and contemplated -, a V manifests a fourth aspect, labelled recently completed. This form carries no voice affix and consequently, unlike the other aspectual forms, it does not select an overt grammatical subject. Below are a few examples of V sets of contrastive forms:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infinitive</th>
<th>Completed</th>
<th>Incompleted</th>
<th>Contemplated</th>
<th>Recently completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) bumili 'to buy'</td>
<td>bumili</td>
<td>bumbili</td>
<td>bibili</td>
<td>kabibili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) magbayo 'to pound'</td>
<td>nagbayo</td>
<td>nagbabayo</td>
<td>magbabayo</td>
<td>ka(pag)babayo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) matulog 'to sleep'</td>
<td>natulog</td>
<td>natutulog</td>
<td>matutulog</td>
<td>matutulog</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another characteristic that volitional and process Vs, but not N nor A, exhibit is a fully reduplicated form conjoined by the particle nang to mean a type of reiteration or repetition of what the V denotes. Alternatively, their V roots may be fully reduplicated,

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1 One other process is compounding, but this will not be discussed here in view of time and space limitations. See De Guzman 1991 for an exposition on Tagalog compounding.

2 For a fuller discussion of these affixes, see De Guzman 1978.

3 Different from the three basic aspect forms, the recently completed aspect does not require an overt grammatical subject. Compare the following:

(a) kabibili lang ng mestra ng kotse  
bought just teacher car  
‘The teacher has just bought a car.’

(b) bumili ang mestra ng kotse  
bought, AV Subj.mkr.  
‘The teacher bought a car.’

(c) binili ng mestra ang kotse  
bought, OV Subj. mkr.  
‘The car was bought by the teacher/The teacher bought the car.’
with the same particle in between, and each form takes its cooccurring agent as the subject. For example:

(4) bumili nang bumili / bili nang bili  ang bata ng\textsuperscript{4} saging
  bought conj bought/ buy conj buy  child  banana
  ‘The child kept buying/always buys (some) bananas.’

(5) *mestra nang mestra  ang  nanay  niya
  teacher conj teacher  mother  her

(6) *maganda/payat nang maganda/payat ang bata
  pretty/thin  conj  pretty/thin  child

Thirdly, a \textsc{v} may also reflect the plurality of its grammatical subject by taking certain affixes such as the following, some with concomitant partial reduplication and stress modification\textsuperscript{5}:

(7) kain ‘eat’: kumain, A(ctive)\textsc{v}(voice)  >  magsikain/mangagsikain, \textsc{a}V, pl.
  kainin, O(bjective)\textsc{v}(voice)  >  pagkakain\textsuperscript{in}, OV, pl.
  kainan, L(ocative)\textsc{v}(voice)  >  pagkakain\textsuperscript{an}, LV, pl.

(8) tapon ‘throw away’: itapon, OV  >  ipagtatap\textsuperscript{on}, OV, pl.
  magtapon, AV  >  magsipagtapon/mangagsipagtapon, AV, pl.
  tapunan, LV  >  pagtatapun\textsuperscript{an}, LV, pl.

Another form that \textsc{v} may appear in is what has been associated with the meaning ‘intensive’. A variety of ways of forming them show particular affixes, forms of reduplication and stress shift as exemplified below:

(9a) magka’in  magka’in ‘to keep eating s.t.’ (< kumain ‘to eat’)
  b. magbibili ‘to shop’ (< bumili ‘to buy’);
  magbabay ‘to keep pounding s.t.’ (< magbay ‘to pound s.t.’);
  magtutulog ‘to sleep continually’ (< matulog ‘to sleep’)
  c. mag-umyi’ak ‘to bawl’ (< umyi’ak ‘to cry’)

In contrast, there are also corresponding moderate forms, meaning ‘action done perfunctorily or with less effort’, expressed by full reduplication of the root and stress shift. For example:

(10a) kum\textsuperscript{a}’in-ka’in ‘eat a little’ (< kumain ‘to eat’)
  b. mag-ay’os-ay’os ‘tidy up a little bit’ (< mag-ayos ‘to tidy up’)
  c. lin-is-linis ‘clean up s.t. a little’ (< linisin ‘to clean s.t. up’)

All these processes equally apply to denominal and deadjectival \textsc{v}s, which derived forms will be shown in the succeeding section on morphological derivations.

2.1.2 Nouns

Unlike in most European languages, Tagalog \textsc{n}s are not inflected. This class typically includes names of persons, places and objects. \textsc{n}s are usually simple roots, although there is a whole host of complex forms derived from \textsc{v}s as well as from \textsc{n}s themselves; some also derive from \textsc{a}s.\textsuperscript{6} The first characteristic of \textsc{n} is a dichotomy

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{4} The particle \textit{ng} is pronounced nang.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{5} Stress is indicated by an apostrophe, ’, before the vowel. Penultimate stress is left unmarked. As in other accounts (Bloomfield 1917:141f; Gonzalez 1970; French 1988:63f), vowel length is treated here as an acoustic correlate of stress. I agree with French 1991 in accounting for a secondary stress on reduplicated syllables or certain prefixes marking either an inflectional or derivational feature.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{6} See Schachter and Otanes 1972 for a comprehensive listing of derivations.}
between common nouns and personal names. They are distinguished by the pairs of particles that mark them in different syntactic functions, namely, *ang/si, ng/ni, * and *sa/kay* 

For example, compare the subject, ergative/genitive, and oblique phrases below:

(11) **ang bata/si Amanda ng mestra/ni Dr. Orteza sa nanay/kay Mrs. Diaz**

child teacher mother

To express plurality, countable Ns are introduced by the plural-marking particle *mga* (pronounced manga), e.g., *mga mestra* ‘teachers’; *mga bahay* ‘houses’, etc. A name of a person introduced by the plural particle corresponding to its function, namely, *sina, nina* or *kina* refers to the person named along with his or her companions. For example: *sina Amanda ‘Amanda and company’, nina Dr. Orteza ‘by or of Dr. Orteza and company’, kina Mrs. Diaz ‘to/at/for Mrs. Diaz and company’.

Unlike V above, N does not typically occur in the reduplicative form with *nang* in between them. It is rather nonsensical for an N to express reiteration or repetition. The rare occasion when N is reduplicated to form a unit, with stress shift, e.g. bahay ‘house’ >*b*ah*’*ay-bah*’ay, the meaning becomes one of serialization ‘house to house; every house’ equivalent to the phrase *bawa’t bahay* ‘each and every house’. To illustrate:

(12) pumunta ang pulis sa bahay.

went policeman house ‘The policeman went to the house.’

(13) pumunta ang pulis sa bah*’*ay-bah’ay.

went house-to-house

Roots that have both an N or a V reading may be confused as instances of the N /V root nang structure when in fact the semantic interpretation can only be adduced to that of a V. It will be recalled that the reduplicated form *Vroot nang Vroot* is an alternant form of the reduplicated Vstem with its voice affix. For example:

(14) dasal ‘prayer; pray’ vs magdasal ‘to pray’ >*das*al nang dasal ‘always/keep praying’. This reduplicated root cannot refer to N meaning ‘prayer after/to/by prayer’.

N roots usually have derived N forms referring to either a place for N, marked by the affix -an, or some abstract notion pertaining to N, marked by ka- an. For example:

(15) big’as ‘rice grains’/bigasan ‘place for storing rice; rice bin’

- akl’at ‘book’/aklatan ‘library’

- langit ‘sky’/kalangitan ‘firmament; heavens’

- buhay ‘life’/kabuhayan ‘livelihood’

V forms with the affix -an, in contrast to the preceding, are members of the verbal voice paradigm. However, some of these forms may also be derived into Ns and be associated with a location or place where something is V-ed. For example: *tapunan* (of the verb *tapon* ‘throw s.t. to someone or some place’) vs. *tapunan ng basura* ‘garbage dump; trash can’ are contrastive V and N, respectively.

### 2.1.3 Adjectives

Descriptive or property words classified as A may also be either roots or complex words. The most common affix in this class is *ma-* attached generally to abstract Ns, which means having or characterized by what is expressed by N. Some examples of root A vs. complex A (derived from N) are as follows:

(16) pay’at ‘thin’ **ma-gand’a** ‘pretty; beautiful’ (< ganda/kagandahan)N ‘beauty’)

- tuy’o? ‘dry’ **ma-sungit** ‘ill-tempered’ (< sungit/kasungitan)N ‘ill-temperedness’

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7 These three functions correspond to three sets of pronouns. (See Schachter and Otanes 1972:88ff.)