PARTS OF SPEECH IN TAGALOG

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In what is perhaps one of the most blatant instances of Anglocentricism in linguistics, Pilipino schoolchildren learn from their grammar books that Tagalog sentences are of the form subject-copula-verb--in other words, just like their English counterparts. Alas, it is hard to imagine a more unwarranted imposition of one language's structure upon that of another than is evident in such a statement, or to construct a statement about Tagalog grammar that is wrong in so many ways.

Most linguists now recognize that Tagalog differs from English at least with respect to its basic word order, which is verb-initial: various subject-initial constructions, in which the copula *ay* is inserted, are generally considered to be more highly marked variants. Moreover, it is often observed that Tagalog differs from English also with respect to its inventory of grammatical relations; thus, Schachter (1976, 1977), Gil (1984) and others argue that Tagalog has neither subjects nor direct objects, its basic sentence structure consisting of a verb followed by a string of nominals. Such descriptions go some of the way towards freeing the study of Tagalog from its Anglocentric shackles--but they do not go far enough.

In this paper, I suggest that Tagalog differs from English and other European languages more radically than is generally supposed, not only with respect to its basic word order and its inventory of grammatical relations but also with respect to its inventory of parts of speech, or syntactic categories. Specifically, I propose that Tagalog possesses but a single open syntactic category. In other words, Tagalog does not distingush between categories such as noun, verb, adjective, preposition, sentence, and so on, nor does it distinguish between lexical categories and their phrasal projections, that is to say between nouns and noun-phrases, verbs and verb-phrases, and so forth.

1. Syntactic Categories in Universal Grammar

The principles governing the putting together of words to form sentences differ in numerous fundamental ways from the principles determining the internal constitution of words, and from the principles specifying the ways in which sentences group together to form larger texts: it is this commonplace observation that underlies the autonomy of syntax vis à vis morphology on the one hand and discourse on the other. Moreover, the principles governing the form of sentences differ in many crucial aspects from the principles determining the structure of sentence meanings: it is this equally well-known fact that motivates the autonomy of syntax with respect to semantics.[1]

The autonomy of syntax motivates definitions of syntactic categories making exclusive reference to syntactic properties. Such categories may be based on the following membership criteria:

(1) Syntactic Category Membership Criteria
 (a) For x to be a member of a syntactic category X, x must be a word or string of words.
 (b) For x and y to be members of the same syntactic category X, x and y must share an array of syntactic properties, such as distributional privileges, and participation in relations such as government, binding, and agreement.

Criterion (1a) asserts that syntactic trees stop at words: terminal nodes must contain exactly one word each. It thus rules out items such as the English past or present tense affixes as possible members of a syntactic category since they are formally part of morphology, not syntax. (However, it leaves open the possibility that a word undergo cliticization to another word, or that it be phonologically null.) Criterion (1b) specifies that membership in syntactic categories is determined solely by shared syntactic behaviour. Morphological criteria are irrelevant; for example, if English has a set of words that may be inflected for tense, this constitutes a morphological word class, not a syntactic category. Similarly, semantic criteria play no role whatsoever; for example, if English has a class of words that denotes activities, this constitutes a semantic, not a syntactic, category.[2]

Syntactic categories are thus sets of words and word strings sharing syntactic properties. Like other categories, in grammar and elsewhere in cognition, they comprise prototypical members, exhibiting a large number of shared properties, and less typical members, displaying a smaller number of shared properties. Moreover, different syntactic categories may exhibit different degrees of productivity. Open syntactic categories, usually based on content words, may contain an infinite set of members, whereas closed syntactic categories, often based on function words, typically contain a small number of members.

Universal Grammar provides a set of syntactic categories from which particular languages may choose. Syntactic categories are of the form X^n, where X is some symbol, and n is a non-negative integer. (When n=0, the superscript may sometimes be omitted. The set of syntactic categories in Universal Grammar is defined in terms of a single initial or primitive syntactic category S^0, and two category-formation operators, an unary operator *kernel* and a binary operator *slash*, which apply to syntactic categories to form new syntactic categories:

(2) Syntactic Category Formation (Paradigmatic)
- (a) Initial Syntactic Category S^0
- (b) Category Formation Operators:
  - (i) Kernel: For any category X^n, X^{n+1} is a category, 'the kernel category of X^n'.
  - (ii) Slash: For any two categories X and Y, X/Y is a category, 'X slash Y'.

For example, from the initial category S^0, application of kernel will form the category S^1, while application of slash will yield the category S^0/S^0. These two categories may then form the basis for further applications of these operators. For example, application of kernel to S^1 will form the category S^2, while application of kernel to S^0/S^0 will yield the category $(S^0/S^0)^1$; similarly, applications of slash to S^0, S^1 and S^0/S^0 will produce categories such as S^0/S^1, S^1/S^0, $S^0/(S^0/S^0)$, and so forth. As is evident, the number of syntactic categories is infinite.[3]

The names of syntactic categories encode their syntactic behaviour in accordance with the following two rules:

(3) Syntactic Category Combination (Syntagmatic)
- (a) Slash Combination: $X \rightarrow \{Y, X/Y, X/Y \ldots\}$
- (b) Identity Combination: $X \rightarrow \{X, X \ldots\}$

Rule (3a), Slash Combination, states that an X may consist of one Y plus one or more X/Ys: for example, an S^0 may consist of one S^1 plus one or more S^0/S^1s. Alternatively it may consist of one S^0 plus one or more S^0/S^0s. Rule (3b), Identity Combination, specifies that an X may consist of two or more Xs: for example, an S^0 may consist of several S^0s.

The Syntactic Category Combination Rules are associated with specific values of headedness. If $X = \{Y, X/Y, X/Y \ldots\}$, in accordance with Slash Combination, then Y is the head of X. (A corollary of this is that whenever Y is the kernel category of

X and the daughter of X, then Y is the head of X. However, if X = {X, X ...}, in accordance with Identity Combination, then either (a) one of the daughter Xs is head, or (b) the construction is headless.

For any syntactic category X, the parents of X are the categories from which X is formed by a single application of a category-formation operator. Two cases may be distinguished. First, if X is the kernel category of Y, for some Y, then Y is the single parent of X. For example, S^0 is the single parent of S^1. Secondly, if X is of form Y/Z, for some Y and Z, then Y and Z are the two parents of X. For example, S^0 and S^1 are the two parents of S^0/S^1. Generalizing from here, for any category X, the ancestors of X are the categories from which X is formed by one or more applications of category-formation operators. For example, the ancestors of $(S^0/S^0)^1$ are S^0/S^0, its only parent, and S^0. Note, specifically, that the initial category S^0 is the ancestor of every syntactic category.

The above framework sets the stage for the formulation of constraints on permissible syntactic category inventories in Universal Grammar:

(4) Constraints on Syntactic Category Inventories

(a) The Ancestral Constraint
If X is a syntactic category in a language L, then all of X's ancestors are syntactic categories in L. Moreover, if X is an open syntactic category in L, then all of X's ancestors are open syntactic categories in L.

(b) The Construction Constraint
If X and Y are syntactic categories in a language L, then L must have constructions formed from X and Y.

(c) The Kernel Category Constraint
If X/Y is an open category in a language L, then Y is the kernel category of X.

For example, in accordance with the first clause of the Ancestral Constraint in (4a), $\{S^0\}$, $\{S^0,S^1\}$, and $\{S^0,S^1,S^0/S^1\}$ are possible syntactic category inventories, while $\{S^1,S^0/S^1\}$ is not, since S^0, ancestor to both S^1 and S^0/S^1, is lacking. Furthermore, takind $\{S^0,S^1,S^0/S^1\}$ as the inventory of syntactic categories, the second clause of the Ancestral Constraint allows for the possibility that S^0 and S^1 be open but S^0/S^1 closed, while ruling out the possibility that S^0 and S^1 be closed but S^0/S^1 open. In fact, the Ancestral Constraint entails that the initial category S^0 is a member of every permissible syntactic