"Taglish" Verbs: How English Loanwords Make it into Philippine Languages

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1. Introduction.

Next to the voice or focus system in Philippine languages, there is probably no other topic that has caught the attention and linguistic imagination of language researchers in our country than the phenomenon called "Taglish". "Taglish" is a very widespread predominantly spoken "mixed" language variety, whose phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics have been greatly influenced by English and Tagalog. In fact, the Filipino linguist Bonifacio Sibayan boldly predicted in 1985 that the future intellectualized variety of the national language called Filipino will be "Taglish." (See Notes, below)

To language typologists, the has all the makings of a box office mystery considering that Tagalog has been characterized as exhibiting strong ergative or ergativity features. For instance, with English being undoubtedly accusative, it is a wonder how Tagalog speakers nevertheless easily meld their patient-dominant language structures with those of an agent or subject dominant tongue? A very important question is likewise raised: why did the mixture process express itself in and acquire certain predictable morphological patterns and forms that it did and not other forms?

We chose to indirectly answer this question in our on-going study of the "Taglish" phenomenon. In this paper, we will present our preliminary findings on this behavior of the "Taglish" verb. Our goal in this paper is to show the patterns and constraints by which English lexical items are formally encoded into the verbal constructions of Tagalog. Moreover, we will attempt to provide phonological, morphosyntactic and pragmatic explanations for those encoded forms.

We believe that this venture into morphosyntax and search for semantic, pragmatic and cognitive explanations for morphosyntactic phenomena distinguish our study from earlier works on code-switching in the Philippines, such as those done

by Bautista (1990, 1997 and 2000), Pascasio (1984, 1986) and Cruz (1993). We will not diverge on an extensive discussion of these works here, however. Suffice it to say that these scholars undertook their analysis in the accusative framework, that is, they used grammatical notions and categories applicable to accusative type languages and forgetting that Philippine Languages are of the agglutinative type. These works have grossly underestimated the crucial role played by language typology, meaning the cross-linguistic similarities and differences between languages, in the grammaticalization process by which foreign elements are introduced and accommodated into the native language. In sum, they have disproportionately emphasized the product over and above the process that, understandably, led to static descriptions based on English "functions".

The data for our study was obtained from the following oral and written materials: twelve (12) Filipino tabloids; one (1) broadsheet; one (1) magazine in Filipino; one (1) novel in Filipino; transcriptions by Bautista (1974) of ten (10) episodes of the popular series "Pulong Pulong sa Kaunlaran" and transcriptions done by Cruz in her 1993 study. We will label this data set, RNT. Each text was dismantled into clauses from which tokens of "Taglish" forms were extracted. The inflectional and voiced alternations of "Taglish" verbs were established through elicitations from native speakers and language consultants. Moreover, we also consulted McFarland's "Frequency Count of Filipino" (1989) for identifying high frequency "Taglish" forms.

The methodology adopted in this study proceeds from the basic tenets of the functional-typological approach. This approach views language as multi-propositional and maintains that understanding of language necessitates an understanding of the communicative, pragmatic and cognitive functions of linguistic forms. The ideal source for data therefore are naturally occurring texts both oral and written with the elicitation method serving as complementary means.

At this point we wish to define the terms "Filipino", "Tagalog" and "Taglish" and how they are used in this study. "Tagalog" is the term used by majority of Filipinos to refer to

the national language. "Filipino", which used to be "Pilipino", is the term presently in official use for the same referent. "Taglish" is a variety of Tagalog. More precisely, it is the mixed or code-switching variety, with a still predominantly Tagalog syntax and affixation interspersed with English borrowings. "Taglish" verbs are a product of this mixture process. Examples of "Taglish" verbs are:

(1) a. hihahanting
b. kinikidnap
c. nire-recruit
d. nag-long distance

Aside from these, we decided to include in this study inflected forms of English verbs so long as the syntax where these forms were found was Tagalog. An illustrative example is the following:

(2) *Excited* na *excited* na ako.

II. Main Findings:

The most interesting find to us, so far, is the probable existence of what we call a preferred voice pattern for "Taglish" verbs. This voice pattern shows an overwhelming partiality to three (3) voice alternations, namely: MAG-, MA- and I-, to the almost total and complete marginalization of the -UM-, -IN and -AN affixes. This finding is supported by frequency counts on the three sets of data (RNT, Bautista's and Cruz's).

The voice pattern for "Taglish" verbs contrasts sharply with that of pure "Tagalog" verbs. Table I shows the occurrences of the principal Tagalog verbal affixes from the novel "Alay Ko ... Puso Ko" by Edgar M. Reyes, whom many consider as the most prolific and productive contemporary Tagalog novelist.

Our count serves to confirm that done by McFarland (1984). McFarland counted the following occurrences of the verbal affixes in his very impressive study as follows: -IN (19%), MA- (18%), -UM- (14%), MAG- (13%), -AN (11%) and I- (8%). Please refer to Table II.

We compared these two counts with those of the three sets of data for "Taglish" verbs (RNT, Bautista's and Cruz's) and we stumbled upon an impoverished voice pattern for this type of verb. Our set of data produced the following actual use of the verbal affixes, in descending order: MAG- (36%), I- (21%), MA- (17%), Zero (8%), -IN (4%) and –UM- (2%). Bautista's data did not show any substantial divergence from what we discovered: MA- (27%), MAG- (21%) I- (21%), ZERO (15%), -IN (1%), -AN (1%) AND –UM- (0%), And neither did Cruz's: I- (33%), MAG- (28%), MA-(19%), Zero (8%), -IN (5%), -AN (1%) and –UM- (1%).

Given this distribution of voice alternations, the question naturally arises: Is this pattern due to an arbitrary constraint, or is there a factor, linguistic or otherwise, that induces the surface patterns and trigger the choice of a particular voice form?

III. Semantic/Pragmatic Motivations

In order to find a plausible solution to these questions, we found it useful to employ the notion of "transitivity" as elucidated by Hopper and Thompson (H&T) (1980). In their cross linguistic study, H & T claimed Transitivity to be a "crucial relationship in language having a number of universally predictable consequences in grammar". Instead of equating transitivity solely with the presence of an object, H & T identified ten (10) components of this very important notion, each of which involved a different fact "or the effectiveness and intensity by which an action is transferred from one participant to another." To H & T, it was not a matter of a certain construction being outright intransitive or outright transitive but rather how high or how low it was in the transitivity continuum depending on the number of features it scored on the high or low column.