SYNTACTIC CATEGORIES IN TAGALOG

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Professor Kenneth Pike, in his plenary lecture "Matrix Formatives in N-Dimensional Linguistics", spoke of the "Eurocentrism" of linguistics. A vivid example of such Eurocentrism is provided by various descriptions and analyses of clause structure in Tagalog. Thus 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.

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 toward freeing the study of Tagalog from its Eurocentric 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 syntactic categories, or "parts of speech". Specifically, I propose that Tagalog possesses but a single open syntactic category. In other words, Tagalog does not distinguish between categories such as noun, adjective, verb and sentence, nor does it distinguish between lexical categories and their phrasal

1In addition to a single open syntactic category, Tagalog also possesses a closed syntactic category of clitics characteristically occurring in Wackernagel's sentence-second position. Whether Tagalog has additional closed syntactic categories must remain open to future investigation.
projections, that is to say between nouns and noun-phrases, adjectives and adjective-phrases, verbs and verb-phrases, and so forth.

In the absence of familiar distinctions such as noun/adjective, noun/verb, and so forth, a new term is needed to denote the single undifferentiated open syntactic category of Tagalog. An opportunity hereby presents itself to redress the Greek and Latin bias of linguistic terminology. Accordingly, I propose the Tagalog term parírala "phrase" to denote the single open syntactic category of Tagalog, and, more generally, any open syntactic category that is the only such category in its language.

Any discussion of syntactic categories must be based on a clear understanding of what a syntactic category actually is. By "syntactic category" I shall mean a set of words or phrases exhibiting similar syntactic behaviour. In many instances, members of a syntactic category may also share morphological and/or semantic properties; however, the existence of a syntactic category can only be supported on syntactic grounds. Ideally, a syntactic category will be associated with a substantial array of syntactic rules and principles, each of which applies to every member of the syntactic category in question and to no members of any other syntactic categories. In reality, however, syntactic categories generally contain prototypical members, to which all the relevant rules and principles apply, and also less prototypical members, to which some of the rules and principles may fail to apply. Thus, the viability of a syntactic category is proportionate to the number of rules and principles that make reference to it, and the degree to which these rules and principles apply to coextensive sets.

Thus, in order to show that Tagalog has a single open syntactic category, parírala, it is necessary to demonstrate that there exists no set of syntactic rules and principles converging to define any of the familiar syntactic categories, noun, adjective, verb, and so forth, or any other syntactic category consisting of a proper subset of all words and phrases in Tagalog. Claims of non-existence are risky propositions: one has to look everywhere to be absolutely certain that what one seeks does not exist. I have not looked everywhere

2A number of scholars, for example Schachter and Otanes (1972), Gil (1982, chapter 6), and Shkarban (1992), have claimed that various syntactic categories are less readily differentiated in Tagalog than in other languages. The present claim is more far-reaching in that it expressly denies the viability of such categories altogether.
-- and even if I had, considerations of space would have prevented me from reporting on this here. However, I have looked in what I consider to be some of the more likely places, and found no evidence whatsoever for distinguishing between two or more open syntactic categories in Tagalog. I therefore offer the claim that Tagalog has a single open syntactic category, parirala as an interim conclusion, to be supported or perhaps modified by future investigation.

The extent to which Tagalog syntax is unlike that of English and other European languages is perhaps most evident in live texts. The following passage from the newspaper *Balita* (18.7.1990, p.2) reports on the rescue operations following a devastating earthquake:


"Ten "Huey" transport helicopters were sent yesterday to Central and Northern Luzon by command of Air Force chief Maj. Gen. Gerardo Protacio, to assist in the searching and freeing of the victims of the earthquake. Nine helicopters from the Visayas and Bicol region will assist too in the extensive rescue operation."

As evidenced by the morpheme-by-morpheme gloss and subsequent translation, the Tagalog passage can be rendered into grammatical English in such a way that the linear order of the major lexical items in Tagalog is perfectly preserved in the English translation. Nevertheless, in spite of such superficial similarity, the syntactic structures of the Tagalog passage and its

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3In the morpheme-by-morpheme glosses provided in this paper, the following abbreviations are used: AT "actor topic"; DIR "direct (case)"; DT "direction topic"; GER "gerund"; IA "indirect action"; INF "infinitive"; IPFV "imperfective"; IT "instrumental topic"; LIG "ligature"; LT "locative topic"; OBL "oblique"; PERS "personal"; PFV "perfective"; PL "plural"; PT "patient topic"; SG "singular"; STAT "stative"; TOP "topic"; 1 "first person".
English translation could not be more different. In traditional terms, the first sentence would be analyzed as consisting of a nominal predicate *Sampung "Huey" transport helicopters "Ten "Huey" transport helicopters*, plus a topic phrase, marked with *ang*, comprising the remainder of the sentence, and headed by a nominalized verbal form *pinapunta "were sent"*. A similar analysis would be proposed for the second sentence as well. Thus, unlike the English translation, the Tagalog passage appears to display a highly marked construction, in which a nominal phrase functions as predicate, while a verbal complex plays the role of argument. However, the most cursory examination of Tagalog texts, written and spoken, reveals that such constructions are widespread and natural, thereby belying their traditional characterization as more highly marked.

The prevalence of such constructions can be readily explained by abandoning the assumption that Tagalog contains two major syntactic categories: verbs, or verb phrases, typically occurring in predicate position, and nouns, or noun phrases, characteristically occurring in argument position. In general, the primary motivation for syntactic categories is distributional. Thus, in English, verb phrases are what combine with noun phrases to produce sentences: a verb phrase cannot occur in a noun phrase position, and a noun phrase cannot occur in a verb phrase position. However, in Tagalog, there seem to be no such distributional constraints. Rather, the following generalization appears to hold: *anything can go anywhere*. Hence, in the absence of any constraints on the distribution of words and phrases in Tagalog, there is no reason to posit more than a single open syntactic category, namely, parirala.

Evidence for the claim that anything can go anywhere is presented in examples (2) - (5) below, illustrating some of the most basic construction types in Tagalog. Examples (2) - (5) provide templates into which words or phrases may be inserted. Under each template, examples are provided of words traditionally assumed to belong to different syntactic categories; these are marked as "E-nouns", "E-verbs" and "E-adjectives" respectively, where the prefix "E-" stands for "English". That is to say,

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4Often, such constructions are translated into English with a cleft construction, for example "It was ten "Huey" transport helicopters that were sent ...". However, such a translation is clearly inappropriate in the present context, thereby casting doubt on the traditional characterization of the Tagalog construction as consisting of predicate followed by *ang*-marked topic argument.
these are words whose equivalents in English are nouns, verbs and adjectives respectively, and are commonly assumed to be so also in Tagalog. However, as evidenced in examples (2) - (5), E-nouns, E-verbs and E-adjectives can occur anywhere in the templates: the resulting constructions, listed below each template, are all grammatical 5. Example (2) illustrates the so-called "predicate-plus-argument" construction, discussed in the context of example (1); this construction is associated with a template of the form L ang B, where L and B are arbitrary parirala, and ang is the so-called "topic-marker":

(2) __________ ang __________
    lolo            bangkero            E-nouns
    grandfather    boatman              E-verbs
    lumabas        bumalik              E-adjectives
    AT:PFV-go:out  AT:PFV-return
    malungkot      mabait
    STAT-sad       STAT-kind

(a) Lolo ang bangkero
    "The boatman is a grandfather"
(b) Lolo ang bumalik
    "The one who returned is a grandfather"
(c) Lolo ang mabait
    "The kind one is a grandfather"
(d) Lumabas ang bangkero
    "The boatman went out"
(e) Lumabas ang bumalik
    "The one who returned went out"
(f) Lumabas ang mabait
    "The kind one went out"
(g) Malungkot ang bangkero
    "The boatman is sad"
(h) Malungkot ang bumalik
    "The one who returned is sad"
(i) Malungkot ang mabait
    "The kind one is sad"

As evidenced by constructions (2a-i), E-nouns, E-verbs and E-adjectives may occur in either position in the template; all nine combinations are grammatical. Example (3) illustrates the so-called "noun-plus-modifier" construction, associated with a template of

5Some speakers may find some of the constructions more felicitous than others. However, the same is true also for their English translations. The factors involved in such judgements would appear to be semantic or pragmatic rather than syntactic.
the form \( L -ng/na B \), where \( L \) and \( B \) are arbitrary parirala, and \(-ng/na\) is the ligature:\(^6\)

\[
\begin{array}{ccc}
\text{lolo} & \text{bangkero} & \text{E-nouns} \\
\text{grandfather} & \text{boatman} & \text{E-verbs} \\
\text{lumabas} & \text{bumalik} & \\
\text{AT:PFV-go:out} & \text{AT:PFV-return} & \\
\text{malungkot} & \text{mabait} & \text{E-adjectives} \\
\text{STAT-sad} & \text{STAT-kind} & \\
\end{array}
\]

(a) lolong bangkero  
"a grandfather who's a boatman"  
"a boatman who's a grandfather"  
(b) lolong bunalik  
"a grandfather who returned"  
"one who returned who's a grandfather"  
(c) lolong mabait  
"a kind grandfather"  
"a kind one who's a grandfather"  
(d) lumabas na bangkero  
"one who went out who's a boatman"  
"a boatman who went out"  
(e) lumabas na bunalik  
"one who went out who returned"  
"one who returned who went out"  
(f) lumabas na mabait  
"one who went out who's kind"  
"a kind one who went out"  
(g) malungkot na bangkero  
"a sad one who's a boatman"  
"a sad boatman"  
(h) malungkot na bunalik  
"a sad one who returned"  
"one who returned who's sad"  
(i) malungkot na mabait  
"a kind sad one"  
"a sad kind one"

Again, as evidenced by constructions (3a-i), E-nouns, E-verbs and E-adjectives may occur in either position in the template; all nine combinations are grammatical. In fact, each of the constructions is ambiguous, and can be interpreted either as head-followed-by-modifier (as in the first translation), or as

\(^6\)The form of the ligature is determined morphophonemically: a suffix \(-ng\) if the preceding word ends in a vowel, \(-n\), or \(-ng\); a free form \(na\) otherwise.
modifier-followed-by-head (as in the second translation). 7

Example (4) illustrates constructions containing the marker *ng*, involving a template of the form *P ng L*, where *P* and *L* are arbitrary parirala:

(4)  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pinsan</td>
<td>ng lolo</td>
<td>E-nouns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cousin</td>
<td>ng lumabas</td>
<td>E-verbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pinatay</td>
<td>ng AT:PFV-go:out</td>
<td>E-adjectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PT:PFV-kill</td>
<td>malungkot</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mapayat</td>
<td>STAT-sad</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STAT-thin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) "pinsan ng lolo"
   "a grandfather's cousin"
(b) pinsan ng lumabas
    "one who went out's cousin"
(c) pinsan ng malungkot
    "a sad one's cousin"
(d) pinatay ng lolo
    "killed by a grandfather"
(e) pinatay ng lumabas
    "killed by one who went out"
(f) pinatay ng malungkot
    "killed by a sad one"
(g) mapayat ng lolo
    "a grandfather's thin one"
(h) mapayat ng lumabas
    "one who went out's thin one"
(i) mapayat ng malungkot
    "a sad one's thin one"

In traditional terminology, *ng* is characterized, alternatively, as either a "case marker", mediating between verb and noun, or a "genitive marker", linking between two nouns. However, such a dual characterization is an artifact of an unwarranted distinction between verbal and nominal categories. Thus, as evidenced by constructions (4a-i), E-nouns, E-verbs and E-adjectives may occur in either position in the *ng* template; all nine combinations are grammatical.

Constructions with *ang*, -*ng/na* and *ng* may be recursively combined to form more complex constructions; again, at each stage, anything can go anywhere. Example (5) below illustrates one such possibility, involving a template of the form *P ng L ang B*:

7In some cases, one of these interpretations is more readily available than the other; these factors need not concern us here.
(5) pinsan ng lolo ang bangkero E-nouns
cousin grandfather
pinatay lumabas boatman
PT:PFV-kill AT:PFV-go:out bumanik E-verbs
mapayat malungkot mabait E-adjectives
STAT-thin STAT-sad STAT-kind

(a) Pinsan ng lolo ang bangkero
"The boatman is a grandfather's cousin"
(b) Pinsan ng lolo ang bumanik
"The one who returned is a grandfather's cousin"
(c) Pinsan ng lolo ang mabait
"The kind one is a grandfather's cousin"
(d) Pinsan ng lumabas ang bangkero
"The boatman is one who went out's cousin"
(e) Pinsan ng lumabas ang bumanik
"The one who returned is one who went out's cousin"
(f) Pinsan ng lumabas ang mabait
"The kind one is one who went out's cousin"
(g) Pinsan ng malungkot ang bangkero
"The boatman is a sad one's cousin"
(h) Pinsan ng malungkot ang bumanik
"The one who returned is a sad one's cousin"
(i) Pinsan ng malungkot ang mabait
"The kind one is a sad one's cousin"
(j) Pinatay ng lolo ang bangkero
"The boatman was killed by a grandfather"
(k) Pinatay ng lolo ang bumanik
"The one who returned was killed by a grandfather"
(l) Pinatay ng lolo ang mabait
"The kind one was killed by a grandfather"
(m) Pinatay ng lumabas ang bangkero
"The boatman was killed by one who went out"
(n) Pinatay ng lumabas ang bumanik
"The one who returned was killed by one who went out"
(o) Pinatay ng lumabas ang mabait
"The kind one was killed by one who went out"
(p) Pinatay ng malungkot ang bangkero
"The boatman was killed by a sad one"
(q) Pinatay ng malungkot ang bumanik
"The one who returned was killed by a sad one"
(r) Pinatay ng malungkot ang mabait
"The kind one was killed by a sad one"
(s) Mapayat ng lolo ang bangkero
"The boatman is a grandfather's thin one"
(t) Mapayat ng lolo ang bumanik
"The one who returned is a grandfather's thin one"
(u) Mapayat ng lolo ang mabait
"The kind one is a grandfather's thin one"
(v) Mapayat ng lumabas ang bangkero
"The boatman is one who went out's thin one"
(w) Mapayat ng lumabas ang bumalik
   "The one who returned is one who went out's thin one"
(x) Mapayat ng lumabas ang mabait
   "The kind one is one who went out's thin one"
(y) Mapayat ng malungkot ang bangkero
   "The boatman is a sad one's thin one"
(z) Mapayat ng malungkot ang bumalik
   "The one who returned is a sad one's thin one"
(&) Mapayat ng malungkot ang mabait
   "The kind one is a sad one's thin one"

As evidenced by constructions (5a-&), E-nouns, E-verbs and E-adjectives may occur in any of the three positions in the template; all twenty-seven combinations are grammatical. Thus, examples (2) - (5) provide prima facie evidence in support of the claim that anything can go anywhere. In so doing, they provide support for the claim that Tagalog has but a single open syntactic category, parirala.

We may accordingly represent the syntactic structures of the above constructions as follows:

\[
\text{P} \quad \text{P} \quad \text{P}
\]

\[
\text{Lumabas} \quad \text{ang bangkero} \quad (2d)
\text{lumabas} \quad \text{na} \quad \text{bangkero} \quad (3d)
\text{pinatay} \quad \text{ng lolo} \quad (4d)
\]

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8A more complete syntactic representation might include a specification of head-modifier relations. Specifically, the constructions represented in (2) and (4) are head-initial, while those in (3) may be either head-initial or head-final. Evidence for such head-modifier relations is provided, inter alia, by the projection of the morphological feature of voice, for example the patient-topic infix -in- in (5j).
Figure 1: Syntactic Structures in Tagalog

The existence of a single open syntactic category parirala in Tagalog accounts for a wide variety of syntactic properties that are unusual from a cross-linguistic, typological perspective; three such properties are considered below.

The first property is that of free constituent order. Although scrambling of the Warlpiri variety is not possible -- Tagalog provides ample evidence for the existence of hierarchic binary-branching constituent structure -- the relative order of sister constituents is quite unconstrained. Consider the following examples:

(6) (a) itong bangkero
      TOP: this-LIG boatman
      (b) bangkerong ito
          boatman-LIG TOP: this
          "this boatman"

(7) (a) malungkot na bangkero
       STAT-sad LIG boatman
       (b) bangkerong malungkot
           boatman-LIG STAT-sad
           "sad boatman"

(8) (a) nasa bahay na bangkero
       in house LIG boatman
       (b) bangkerong nasa bahay
           boatman-LIG in house
           "boatman in the house"
(9) (a) bunalik na bangkero
    AT:PFV-return LIG boatman
(b) bangkerong bunalik
    boatman-LIG AT:PFV-return
    "boatman who returned"

Examples (6) – (9) illustrate the relative order of E-
nouns and E-determiners, E-adjectives, E-prepositional-
phrases and E-relative-clauses respectively. While in
English and in most other languages, the relative order
of nouns and their modifiers is fixed, in Tagalog, as
shown above, the corresponding orders are quite free.
The reason, of course, is that Tagalog does not have
nouns, determiners, adjectives, prepositional phrases
and relative clauses: they are all parirala.

The second property of Tagalog resulting from the
existence of a single open syntactic category is the
absence of grammatical relations such as subject and
direct object. Consider the following constructions:

(10) (a) Sumulat ang bata
    AT:PFV-write TOP child
    "The child wrote"
(b) Isinulat ang liham
    PT:PFV-write TOP letter
    "[X] wrote the letter"
(c) Sinalat ang pangulo
    DT:PFV-write TOP president
    "[X] wrote to the president"
(d) Pinagsulat ang mesa
    LT:PFV-write TOP table
    "[X] wrote on the table"
(e) Ipinansulat ang lapis
    IT:PFV-write TOP pencil
    "[X] wrote with the pencil"

Example (10) presents a typical paradigm 'in which the
stem sulat "write" is marked with five different voice
affixes determining the thematic role of the ang-phrase:
actor, patient, direction, locative and instrumental
respectively. Whereas in English and most other
languages, the unmarked voice is that which associates
topic with agent, thereby giving rise to the grammatical
relation of subject, in Tagalog a variety of affixes are
available, and if any is unmarked, it is the patient-
topic rather than the agent-topic affix\(^9\). Thus, Tagalog
lacks the usual grammatical relations of subject, direct
object, and so forth.

\(^9\)See, for example, De Guzman (1976, 1979), Cena (1977), and Gil
The absence of grammatical relations in Tagalog is a straightforward consequence of the absence of distinct open syntactic categories. Grammatical relations result from the relationship of government that holds between a verb and its nominal arguments. However, if a language has no verbs or nominal arguments, government cannot hold, and there will be no grammatical relations. The renowned voice affixes of Tagalog may thus be viewed as an alternative means for expressing thematic roles, in the absence of an ordinary nominal case marking system.

The third property of Tagalog resulting from the existence of a single open syntactic category is the absence of NP-movement: with no NPs, there can be no NP-movement. Thus, WH-question words, although usually construction-initial, are actually in situ, in the first, or so-called "predicate" position of the template illustrated in (2) above:

(11)  (a)  * Kanino₁ ang sumulat ang bata ng liham [e₁]
       OBL-who TOP AT:PFV-write TOP child DIR letter
(b)  * Kanino₁ ang isinulat ng bata ang liham [e₁]
       OBL-who TOP PT:PFV-write DIR child TOP letter
(c)  Sino ang sinulatan ng bata ng liham
       TOP-who TOP DT:PFV-write DIR child DIR letter

"Who did the child write a letter to?"

Similarly, instead of relative clauses, a complex but gapless parirala modifies its head in accordance with the template illustrated in (3) above:

(12)  (a)  * pangulong₁ sumulat ang bata ng liham [e₁]
       president-LIG AT:PFV-write TOP child DIR letter
(b)  * pangulong₁ isinulat ng bata ang liham [e₁]
       president-LIG PT:PFV-write DIR child TOP letter
(c)  pangulong sinulatan ng bata ng liham
       president-LIG DT:PFV-write DIR child DIR letter

"the president that the child wrote a letter to"

In both cases, it is of course the productive voice affixes that prevent massive loss of expressive power, permitting phrases of various thematic roles -- in (11) and (12) above the direction -- to be questioned and relativized.

Although the presence of a single open syntactic category in Tagalog is a syntactic property, it bears morphological and semantic consequences as well. In many languages, morphological word classes may reflect syntactic categories; however, in Tagalog there are no such categories to be reflected, and hence morphological word classes are partly arbitrary, and partly motivated by semantic factors. For example, many descriptions of
Tagalog grammar take the presence of voice and aspect morphology to be characteristic of a syntactic category of verb. Nevertheless, as shown in (2) – (5) above, words with voice and aspect marking, E-verbs, may occur anywhere. Moreover, the class of words that can take voice and aspect morphology is much larger than in most languages, including, among others, characteristically nominal items such as names, eg. pumasa-Maynila AT:PFV-at-Manila "went to Manila"; proforms, eg. suma-akin AT:PFV-OBL-OBL:1:SG "was mine"; deictics, eg. pumarito AT:PFV-OBL:this "came here"; and interrogatives, eg. umano AT:PFV-what "did what". Admittedly, not every word in Tagalog can take voice and aspect morphology; however, the class of words that are marked for voice and aspect does not share any syntactic properties that would justify positing a syntactic category of verb.

The existence of a single open syntactic category in Tagalog bears important semantic consequences too. Some logical forms for basic constructions in Tagalog are proposed in (13) below:\(^{10}\):

\[
\begin{align*}
(13) \quad & (a) \text{ single word: } B \quad B(x) \\
& (b) \text{ template (2): } L \text{ ang } B \quad L(\lambda x B(x)) \\
& (c) \text{ template (3): } L \text{ -ng/na } B \quad (\Lambda \Lambda L(\lambda y B(y)))(x) \\
& \phantom{(c)} \quad (\Lambda B(\lambda y L(y)))(x) \\
& (d) \text{ template (4): } P \text{ ng } L \quad (P/(\lambda y L(y)))(x) \\
& (e) \text{ template (5): } P \text{ ng } L \text{ ang } B \quad (P/(\lambda y L(y)))(\lambda x B(x))
\end{align*}
\]

In accordance with (13a), a single word \( B \) has the logical form \( B(x) \), a predicate applying to a free variable. For example, bangkero means "x is a boatman", bimalik means "x returned", and mabait means "x is kind". As suggested in (13b-e), larger phrases are associated with more complex logical forms, involving a lambda operator "\( \lambda \)" (read: "such that") and an associational operator "/" (read: "of"). The above formulae thus make reference to the single open syntactic category pariralaya, regardless of whether the relevant phrases correspond to nouns, verbs, adjectives, or any other syntactic category in English.

In this paper, I have provided prima facie evidence to the effect that Tagalog has but a single open syntactic category, namely pariralaya. By abandoning the traditional parts-of-speech distinctions between noun,
verb, adjective and the like, a further step has been
taken towards freeing the description of Tagalog grammar
from the confines of Eurocentrism. Nevertheless, in the
quest for a global linguistics, it is important not to
throw the baby out with the bath water. Although
distinctions between syntactic categories play a major
role in most current syntactic theories, such theories
also provide the necessary apparatus for accommodating
cross-linguistic variation when it is encountered.
Thus, within generative grammar, some recent work has
explored patterns of cross-linguistic variation with
respect to inventories of functional categories, such as
INFL and DET, under the aegis of parametric variation.
The results of this paper raise the possibility that
parametric variation may account for differences in the
inventories not just of functional categories but of
lexical and phrasal categories as well.

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REFERENCES


