

A NOTE ON THE TAGALOG PASSIVE IN THE TOTANES MANUSCRIPT

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It is interesting to note that Fray Sebastian de Totanes (1865) treats the Tagalog passive in a manner highly predictive of the later treatment of the Tagalog verbal paradigm in the descriptive linguistic period. Totanes' *Arte de la lengua tagala* was one of the earlier¹ and most influential descriptions of the Tagalog language by the early Spanish grammarians. Its influence can be seen as reaching beyond the Spanish grammatical period itself and reflections of Totanes' insights and approaches can be directly seen in Blake 1906, 1916, 1925, and, to a lesser degree, Bloomfield 1917.

Totanes devotes the entire second section, known as the *libro segundo*² to the treatment of various aspects of the verb and participle. In Chapter II of the *libro segundo* Totanes provides twelve rules to aid in the use and understanding of the verbs in Tagalog. Of particular interest are rules five (*de la formacion de las pasivas*), six (*del uso de las tres pasivas*), and seven (*cuando se ha de hablar por activa, y cuando por pasiva*).

Totanes makes the same observation regarding the passives that is to be found in the later works cited above by Blake and Bloomfield, as well as an observation that is replicated in more recent descriptive works. According to Totanes, it would appear that "en este idioma es mas frecuente el hablar por pasiva que por activa" (p.28). This is undoubtedly still the case, with the so-called passives seemingly outnumbering the so-called actives. But what has never been completely sorted out is how to predict the active-passive split in voice-marking verbal constructions for given Tagalog verbs, nor which apparent voice-marking affix will predict which apparent focus construction relationship in a sentence with that given verb. Kess (1975, and 1979) has attempted to point out

the fact of multiple overlap and surface ambiguity attached to some affix uses and the difficulty of expecting certain verbal construction types to automatically and unambiguously account for certain semantic focus types. In fact, it is obvious that this one inescapable fact has probably done more than any other factor to enhance the acceptance of semantic investigations as probably holding the key to the focus, topic and case relationships in the Tagalog verbal paradigm.

Secondly, the only reason that such an observation about passives outnumbering actives might even be made is for the historical reason that the first studies of this Austronesian language type is that they were carried out by linguists and grammarians working from the framework of Indo-European linguistic structures. Indeed, here the active is undoubtedly more prevalent than the corresponding passive; documentation to support this position can be readily found in recent psycholinguistic investigations in English and other languages (for example, see Goldman-Eisler and Cohen 1970). Had the situation been reversed historically, the observation would likely also have been reversed. But what is more interesting is that this fact negates the need or use for preserving the active as any kind of starting point in descriptions of Tagalog. There may, however, be some merit to using one particular sentential construction type as a starting point for pedagogical purposes, as was the case with the Bowen text (see Bowen 1965). Here, of course, the question begins to make for divergent approaches - should one take the most numerous construction type as the base form type for descriptive purposes or should one take as base form type the construction type from which other form types can be most easily derived. The question is obviously one with pragmatic overtones on both sides, but one is pragmatism as a reflection of psycholinguistic reality and the other a reflection of the so-called simplicity metric in linguistic practices.

At any rate, this returns one to the basic question of when the passives appear or a given passive appears. Nothing much in this respect has changed since Totanes' time; as he puts it, "una de las mayores dificultades de esta lengua, es saber usar de estas pasivas, segun su significacion" (p.29). The very fact of multiple overlap between the use of some of the case-marking affixes made for difficulties in the structuralist period because form and form alone could not be trusted to always provide unambiguous clues to both syntactic construction type or semantic focus type. This same problem arises for Totanes, for his definitions are based on logico-semantic designations of the sentence types. For example, the definition provided for verbal constructions in general struggles to capture what generality there is, and in at

least one case, the passive in *i-* (*y-* for Totanes) must perforce be fairly broad in its scope. Thus, as Totanes notes,

La regla general es esta: todo lo que es echar, ó como echar hacia fuera, ó apartar de sí: todo lo que es instrumento, ó que tiene veces de él: que en castellano se dice con; todo lo que es causa, ó como causa, respeto, reverencia, ó motivo; que en castellano se dice por, y todo lo que es, determinado tiempo pide pasiva de y.

The definitional statements for the other passives are no clearer, though they are shorter in this respect. For example, in the case of *-an* and *-in-*, Totanes makes the following observation:

Todo lo que es lugar, ó como lugar, pide la pasiva de an.
Y todo lo demas que no es esto pide la pasiva de in.

As Totanes himself admits, the rule is far from fool-proof, but serves as a general indicator of what different semantic intentions seem to be encompassed by the several verbal constructions. As Totanes himself puts it,

Esta regla bien entendida era suficiente, para saber cuando se ha de usar una pasiva, y cuando de otra; pero respecto de la dificultad, es muy general esta regla, y se necesita de alguna individuacion en cada una de estas pasivas

This, however, is exactly the point, and little seems to have changed since the publication of the Totanes manuscript. The key to the formulation of the so-called passives in Tagalog is not one that can rest exclusively on form alone, but is of necessity one that depends upon the semantic intent underlying the sentence construction. The point of the commentary here presented is that only with the attention shift to matters semantic does one seem to entertain any hope of seeing the function and deployment of the Tagalog verbal paradigm revealed. Totanes himself foreshadows modern semantically-oriented studies like those investigations by Naylor (1973) and Ramos (1974). He did note, and was probably the first published grammarian-linguist to do so for Tagalog, that the key may lie in exactly this area of inquiry. For example, Totanes observes that:

Es precision el hablar por activa, siempre que se habla de cosa indeterminada; lo que se conocerá en no llevar alguno de los artículos, los, las, le, de los, de las, etc., ni derivativo, meus, tuus, vester, etc., ni demostrativo alguno como este, ese, de aquel, aquello, etc., que son los determinantes. Vg.: Mata una gallina, es indeterminado porque no dice cual gallina, etc. Y así precisa á hacerse por activa; *maṭay ca nang isang manúc*. Trae agua, lo mismo: *Magdalá ca nang tubig* Llama un muchacho. *Tomauag ca nang isang batá*.

Por lo opuesto, precisa el hablar por pasiva, siempre que llevase la oracion alguno de aquellos determinantes de la

cosa. Vg.: Mata la gallina. Patain mo ang manuc. Trae aquella agua. Dalhin mo yaong tubig Llama á mi muchacho. Tauagin mo ang aquing bata Lo mismo se dice de otra caulquiera que tenga esta ú otra equivalencia.

As a concluding remark, one may observe that it is indeed interesting that little seems to have been resolved on the topic of the exact deployment of the Tagalog verbal paradigm during the early structuralist period, for the simple reason that form is not as trustworthy as it was often taken to be. On the other hand, there was ample suggestion from the pen of Totanes himself that the key may lie in the semantic content of notions like focus and topic, rather than tying it to structural considerations. The Totanes *Arte de la lengua tagala* stands thus as both a valuable initial repository of vital suggestions in terms of avenues of research as well as an object lesson in how the rubrics of one period in the history of scientific concerns are translated into the working methodologies of another period. The moral of the story is that something is always lost in the translation.

N O T E S

1. The reference used here as well as most commonly cited for this manuscript is for the 1865 edition of the *Arte de la lengua tagala*. For example, see Constantino 1971. There were three preceding editions of the manuscript: 1745 (Sampaloc), 1796, and 1850. My thanks are due to Mrs Alice Loranth, Curator of the John G. White collection of Orientalia in the Cleveland Public Library, for briefly making one of the earlier editions (1796) available for comparison.

2. The original manuscript appears in a Spanish slightly archaic by modern standards, and its use of diacritics (e.g. accent placement) differs from that of the modern orthographic practice. Since Spanish is probably a language that followers of scholars of Philippine studies are likely familiar with, excerpts are left in the original to avoid missing the appropriate nuance of Totanes' turn of phrase.

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