What's a topic in the Philippines?

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In this paper, I sketch the history of the use of the term topic in Philippine linguistics between 1957 and 1977 (for a very different presentation, see Thomas 1977). The reason for this choice of dates is simple. In his 1957 description of Maranao, McKaughan (published in 1958) first used the term topic for the grammatical constituent which had traditionally been called subject. By 1973, McKaughan recanted his original reasons for distinguishing the Maranao "topic" from the subject, arguing openly for the universality of the subject category. But in 1976 and 1977 Schachter promulgated a new theory of syntactic typology, in which Philippine topics are systematically distinguished from non-Philippine subjects, and he cited a large body of evidence in support of this distinction.

To be sure, there has been much work in this area since then, in a variety of frameworks (such as Payne 1982, Bell 1983, Foley and Van Valin 1984, Andrews 1985, Gerdts 1988, Shibatani 1988, Manaster Ramer to appear, and many others), all of it ultimately based on, even if usually more or less critical of, Schachter's publications. As a result, it becomes particularly interesting to find out how the topic theory originally arose, why it was given up by its creator, and what made it so successful in later years in spite of McKaughan's disavowal.

To put things in context, it will be well to recall that, from the seventeenth century through the 1950's, many grammars of Philippine languages were written, all of them wedded to the Western grammatical terminology and all of them recognizing a subject category as well as an active and a number of different passive voices. To be sure, this tradition had been challenged by Humboldt (1836-39), who analyzed the traditional three passive voices of the Tagalog verb as verbal nouns, primarily because of the apparent formal identity of the agent of the passive with the possessor of a noun.

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Humboldt's analysis was followed, for various Philippine and other Austronesian languages, by some leading scholars, such as Seidenadel (1909) in his epic grammar of Bontoc Igorot, Vanoverbergh (1955), and, most recently, Capell (1964).

This analysis is obviously wrong (see Manaster Ramer, to appear), nor is it widely accepted anymore, but I suspect that for a time it served channeled the same discontent with traditional grammars which later helped contribute to the success of the topic theory. For, although it was Schachter (1976, 1977) who first gave a clear account of numerous syntactic properties which differentiate such languages as Tagalog both from English and from the expectations of universal grammarians, there had been a feeling for a long time that the Philippine languages were quite different syntactically from the European ones.

The 1950's were, of course, the heyday of the movement to describe every language in its own terms. The new breed of American linguist who arrived in the Philippines in those years naturally sought to develop a new style of description for the exotic languages he found there. While the term topic originated with McKaughan, it took several years before the whole framework of syntactic analysis we now associate with that term took shape. In this analysis, the place of subject is usually taken by topic and that of voice by focus, so that the active and the various voices are renamed actor focus, goal focus, instrument(al) focus, etc.

Interestingly, the terms topic and focus were introduced independently: topic by McKaughan (1958), focus by a group of SIL linguists, including Dean (1958), Healey (1958), and Thomas (1958). (In the same spirit, Newell (1958) used the term highlight, which did not survive.) Both the terms topic and focus appear together in P. M. Healey (1960), Reid (1969), Hidalgo (1970), and many works written since. This is now regarded by many as the standard mode of analysis of Philippine languages (Llamzón 1982), and with the work of Schachter (1976, 1977) it has attracted the attention of theoretical linguists at large.

In terms of motivation for the new terminology, the relevant literature, starting with McKaughan (1958), has claimed that this is precisely where Philippine languages differ

from other languages, ones which are supposed to lack the topic-focus system. Which other languages these are, is often left somewhat vague: McKaughan originally referred specifically to English, but there has been a tendency to loosely contrast all the Philippine languages with all the Indo-European ones (e.g., Hidalgo 1970) or even with all the languages of the world outside the Philippine archipelago (e.g. Schachter 1976, 1977).

So the question arises: what IS a topic? (Since the distinction between voice and focus is correlated with the distinction between subject and topic, the former does not need to be discussed separately.) For most linguists, the term subject has very different connotations from the term topic. The former is a clausal, the latter a sentential or discourse phenomenon. The subject is a formal category having to do with verb agreement, case marking, equi, etc. The topic is a pragmatic category having to do with emphasis, contrast, topic of discourse (i.e. what the discourse is about), etc. The two are quite independent roles of NP's, such that an NP may have both, one, or neither, as noted by Hockett (1958: 201-202), who seems in a large measure responsible for popularizing the term topic in general linguistics.

Yet, in the case of Philippine languages, we find that the new analyses usually do not provide for a subject category at all. They simply claim that the grammatical element which was traditionally treated as the subject is really the topic. (As we will see, the earliest of the topic analyses used the term subject for the actor, but this clearly does not alter the situation described here in any substantive way).

A possible explanation for this discrepancy between what is normally understood by the term topic and what is claimed by the descriptions of many Philippine languages is suggested by Schachter (1977). Schachter shows that the Philippine topic has nothing to do with the notion of topic just described, and claims that only linguists working on non-Philippine languages might confuse the two:

> In the usage of non-Philippinists, the term "topic" designates the constituent that represents the "center of attention" of the discourse (cf. Li and Thompson 1976). That

this usage is NOT relevant to the Philippine-language topic is clear from examples like the following, in which the discourse context overtly directs attention to a referent which is subsequently represented by a nontopic nominal:

Speaker A: Nasaan ang katulong?
where TOP maid
'Where's the maid?'

Speaker B: Inihahanda niya ang pagkain.
GT-prepare A-she TOP food
'She's preparing the food.'

In this example, the center of attention established by the discourse context is the maid, but the pronoun that refers to the maid is the nontopic actor pronoun niya, while the sentence topic is ang pagkain 'the food'.

Schachter's demonstration is clear and convincing as far as the facts of Tagalog are concerned. There can never again be any doubt that the grammatical constituent called topic in Tagalog and its ilk is not a topic in the usual sense of that term, i.e., the center of attention, that which a clause is about, or the like.

However, the implication that this is well understood by Philippine linguists is misleading. It is easy to show that, when topic gets defined at all in Philippine linguistics, it is usually precisely in the way which Schachter showed to be inappropriate. For example:

... in focus, that is, the topic of conversation or discourse, the center of attention [Healey 1960:22]

The topic of a Tagalog sentence usually represents some person, object, idea, or action that the listener is already aware of, either because it is visible to him or because it has been mentioned or implied in the immediately preceding context. The predicate of a Tagalog sentence usually offers new information to the listener, and represents some person, object, idea, or action that the speaker wants the

listener to associate with the topic. [Bowen 1965:23]

Generally one noun phrase is marked as topic or focus of attention in a sentence. [Ramos 1971:52]

The two most general components of Tagalog basic sentences -- i.e., the two *components that occur in all such sentences* -- are a PREDICATE and a TOPIC ... The topic *expresses the focus of attention in the sentence.* [Schachter and Otanes 1972:60]

This gives Schachter's demonstration of the inapplicability of the normal notion to Philippine languages much greater importance than he claims for it. All that Schachter says, or suggests, is that there may be some discrepancy between the way the term is understood by Philippine as opposed to other linguists. But in reality we see that Philippine linguists are the ones who have routinely defined the topics of Philippine languages in precisely the way which Schachter showed to have no applicability to these languages. This means that the Philippine grammatical category of topic is not in fact picked out (denoted) by the definition offered by most of the writers who use the term.

This turns out, moreover, to be a reenactment of an old comedy of errors. For, the definitions of topic just cited are essentially the same as the definitions of subject that have been traditional in Western linguistics and go back to Aristotle's logical notion of subject. As a matter of fact, in descriptions of Philippine languages written in that tradition, we find that the subject is indeed defined in exactly the same terms as in the later topic-oriented descriptions. For example:

... the definite, known object underlying the predication as starting-point of discourse is chosen as subject. [Bloomfield 1917:154]

This notion of subject has largely been given up by logicians (Frege 1879) and linguists (Gabelentz 1901) alike, for the simple reason that it does not pick out (denote) the grammatical category of subject that is actually found in European languages, Frege, for instance, noted that given the notion of subject as that which a sentence is about, in a

sentence like The Greeks defeated the Persians at Plataeae it is equally possible to take the Greeks or the Persians as the subject, even though clearly the Greeks is the grammatical subject. To use an example more like Schachter's, consider the following dialogue:

> Speaker A: Where's the maid?
> Speaker B: John sent her to the store.

Just as in Schachter's example, but this time in English, we see that the grammatical subject of the second sentence is not what Schachter would call the "center of attention".

While such observations may seem obvious today, it took Western scholarship centuries before Frege pioneered logic without a subject notion, and Gabelentz introduced the distinction between grammatical and what he called psychological subject, which, of course, in time came to be called topic in works such as Bloch (1946) and Hockett (1958).

With Schachter's demonstration we have come full circle. The same definition which did not work out for the grammatical category of subject in European languages turns out to fail for the grammatical category of topic in Philippine languages. We seem then to be dealing with a definition in search of a language with a grammatical category to which it would apply. More than a half a century after it was debunked in Western European linguistics, this persistent notion reappeared--under a new name--in Philippine grammar, only to be debunked again, this time by Schachter.

So far, we have established that the traditional definition of subject and the Philippinist's--or any other linguist's--definition of topic are the same. Moreover, as noted at the outset, traditional grammars of Philippine languages applied the term subject to the same grammatical constituent which more recent grammars call topic. There is, therefore, a prima facie case for concluding that we are dealing, not with two distinct analyses, but simply with two different terminologies. Which then leads naturally to the question of why the new terminology was felt to be necessary and why there has been so much ink spilled arguing about subjects vs. topics.

I will argue that there are two separate reasons for what happened. One was the persistent feeling that the Philippine languages are crucially different from European ones. I will discuss this point in detail below, but first I would like to document the other factor involved. This was, apparently, simple confusion about the traditional model on the part of the creators of the new terminology, which, in turn, was due in no small measure to the inexplicitness and occasional confusion of the traditional ideas. The crucial point turns out to be that, for a time, the authors who used the terms topic and/or focus employed the term subject to mean actor (McKaughan 1958, Dean 1958 Hidalgo 1970).

It is almost certainly Leonard Bloomfield who is responsible for this confusion. Bloomfield (1933) quite explicitly states that all English subjects are actors. What is striking is that he does so in the same passage in which he points out that in Latin subjects can be actors or goals and that in Tagalog they can be actors, goals, instruments, or locations. Apparently, Bloomfield refused to treat English passives as a goal-action construction because, unlike Latin or Tagalog, this language does not use special verb forms for the passive. Bloomfield's influence was such that this misanalysis of English became widely accepted in its time, and it is probably thus that it found its way into Philippine linguistics, where his standing was, if possible, even higher than in general linguistics.

Regardless of how the use of subject to mean actor got started, the fact is, as noted by McKaughan (1973), that the reason for his introduction of the term topic in the first place was precisely that he believed that subject meant actor, so that he needed a new term for the real subject (or, as he chose to call it, topic). Once he realized his mistake regarding the term subject, McKaughan urged the abandonment of his 1958 proposals:

When I turned to Maranao, I moved away from the traditional use of the terms 'subject', 'active', and 'passive'. I reasoned then that one thinks of the subject as the actor of the sentence--wrong reasoning as a moment's reflexion on active and passive sentences in English will indicate. But I decided that I

would use the word 'subject' to refer always to the actor of an action, and that I would abandon the active-passive dichotomy. [McKaughan 1973:206]

But here is the problem as I see it now. The term 'subject' is usefully universal. It has the same meaning for every language. Though Philippine languages, are in surface structure quite different from English or other European languages, they do follow certain universal characteristics of language. The subject-predicate relation is one of these, and that fact is obscured by relegating the term subject to a specific role of agent of the action. [p. 208]

I am ready to emphasize now that the phrases introduced by so in Maranao or ang in Tagalog which in turn are verb complements are SUBJECTS of their sentences. These phrases (or their pronoun substitutes) are in the most favored or primary relation to the verb. They have been nominated as subjects, and the predicate is that which says or asserts something about the subject. Please, reader, forgive me for confusing the issue by calling these subjects the 'topic' of the sentence. [ibid.]

This is another full circle, for McKaughan is reintroducing the term subject for the very thing which had traditionally been called a subject.

In other words, McKaughan originally believed that English had only actors (which he called subjects) whereas the Philippine languages had both actors (which he also called subjects) and subjects (which he proposed calling topics). In any event, when McKaughan finally realized that English subjects can be goals (in passives) as well as actors (inactives), he withdrew the original proposal, concluding that subjects are universal.

But, as noted, even if McKaughan finally decided that the universality of subject overrode the differences between the way it works in, say, English and Maranao, in the meantime it has become increasingly clear just how significant these differences are. By introducing the term topic, McKaughan had, perhaps unintentionally, created a handy label for all the

vague feelings of different Philippine linguists about how unique the syntax of the Philippine languages was. This is undoubtedly why the new terminology took root, and also why McKaughan's subsequent retraction has been largely ignored and, when mentioned at all, tends to be misunderstood. For instance, Schachter (1976:493):

> Thus a recent paper (McKaughan 1973) is largely devoted to a retraction of its author's earlier usage of the term subject in his writings on Philippine languages in favor of a different usage of this term.

While this is strictly speaking true, inasmuch as McKaughan has withdrawn his earlier usage of subject for actor, it is misleading, since no mention is made of the fact that McKaughan's main point is to give up the use of the term topic entirely.

Bell (1983) presents McKaughan's latest position correctly, but misrepresents his stated reasons for it. Specifically, she quite incorrectly suggests that McKaughan had anticipated Schachter's discovery that the grammatical topic in Philippine languages (what she calls the "nominative nominal") need not be the real topic (the "bearer of old information" in her terms):

> Recognition of this fact led McKaughan (1973) to abandon his innovative use of topic and analyze the nominative nominal as the subject, but so far his innovation has attracted more followers than his retraction, and the nominative nominal is still analyzed as topic by many Philippinists.

However, as we have seen, McKaughan has consistently maintained the traditional definition of topic alias subject. Even in his latest work, he insists that these nominals "have been nominated as subjects, and the predicate is that which says or asserts something about the subject". In other words, McKaughan's view of the facts of Maranao has not changed between 1956 and 1973, and in point of fact deviates little if at all from what Bloomfield had to say about Tagalog at the beginning of the century. In Schachter's case, on the other hand, it is apparently his understanding of the Tagalog facts that has evolved to a marked extent between 1972 and 1976,

leading to a quantum leap in our knowledge of Philippine syntax. So, while McKaughan has twice tried to alter the received terminology without changing his views of the facts, Schachter has changed his views of the facts without altering the terminology. As a result, the nontraditional terminology introduced by McKaughan in 1956 as an expression of a completely traditional view of the facts has come to serve as the vehicle for Schachter's radically nontraditional understanding of the facts.

So far, I have said nothing about the differences alleged to exist the Philippine topic and the European subject. But, as a matter of fact, starting with Hidalgo (1970), we find a number of such differences cited in support of a contrast between Philippine topics and Western subjects.

Hidalgo (1970) gives three reasons for distinguishing "Indo-European" subject from "Philippine" topic. First, in English the subject is the agent of an active or the patient of a passive. In Tagalog, she shows examples of what traditional grammars call actives where the topic is not an agent (e.g. (1)) and examples of what traditional grammars call passives where the "agent" of the passive is not an agent (e.g. (2)).

> (1)   Namatay sa sakit   si Pedro.
>   AF-died LO disease TOP
>   'Pedro died of a disease.'
> (2)   Ikinamatay ni Pedro   ang sakit.
>   CF-died GEN   TOP disease
>   'Pedro died of the disease.'

The first of these has actor as topic, the second has cause as topic. In both cases Pedro would be analyzed as actor. But there is a fundamental confusion here. After all, English also has constructions in which the grammatical agent is not semantically an agent, e.g., Peter underwent an operation and An operation was undergone by Peter. Moreover, in the topic-focus analyses of the sort espoused by Hidalgo Pedro is still analyzed as actor in sentences like (1), which is in actor focus, and (2).

Hidalgo's other two arguments are better. The second one is that there is no fixed clausal position for the topic in Tagalog the way there is for the subject in English. This

argument, to be compelling, should have been not on the basis on Tagalog, which has very free word order, but rather a Philippine language in which the actor but not the topic has a fixed position in the clause. Indeed, Hidalgo's argument here appears to be a crude attempt to carry over to Tagalog Pike's (1963) description of the differences between English and Bilaan, which does have such fixed word order.

Her third argument, also based on Pike but this time fully applicable to Tagalog, is simply that, while English has only two voices, Tagalog has more than two focuses. Of course, this time there is again a problem with her argumentation since there have been Indo-European languages with more than two voices (such as Classical Greek). (It should also be noted that, while Pike noted these two differences between English and Bilaan, he was not doing this in order to show that each language required a different kind of analysis. On the contrary, his analysis of English is in terms of topic (which he calls focus complement) and focus.)

Entirely different reasons for distinguishing Tagalog topics from English subject are cited by Bowen (1965: 23), who argues that the topic is different from the subject because (a) it follows the predicate rather than precedes it, and (b) because it is always definite. The force of the first argument is unclear since there is nothing in any known notion of subject or topic that precludes it from occurring in a different position in one language than in another, and I will ignore this argument in the rest of this paper, as it has been in the literature. The second argument is, as we will see, based on a false claim about the facts, but it cannot be ignored because of its importance in the literature. To cite just a few of the many works I could refer to, this claim has also been made by Schachter and Otanes (1972: 60), Naylor (1975: 17, 39, 60), and Schachter (1976: 494, 1977: 284). The same claim has been extended to other Philippine languages as well, e.g., Constantino (1971: 14) and Schwartz (1976: 523) for Ilokano, Mirikitani (1972: 119) for Kapampangan, to name just a few. Indeed, it is claimed by Schachter (1976, 1977) to be applicable to all Philippine languages.

The idea that Philippine topics (or, as they were then called, subjects) are definite reaches much further into the past, in fact. Blake (1925: 127) says that the Tagalog subject is

"practically always definite, at least in form". Something similar is implied Bloomfield's (1917: 154) claim, quoted above, that "the definite, known object underlying the predication as starting-point of discourse is chosen as subject". Indeed, many grammarians of Tagalog have interpreted the subject/topic marker ang as a definite article. All this appears to be based on a simple misunderstanding of the Spanish missionary grammars. It is true that in 1745 Totanes (1865: 8) translated ang by the Spanish definite article, but he did the same with the other two Tagalog case markers, ng and sa. In other words, since traditional Western grammar did not recognize such a part of speech as case particle, he took the Tagalog case particles as articles. No claim of semantic definiteness was intended at the time, and no one has ever claimed that all Tagalog nominals are definite! Moreover, Blake (1925:16) himself follows this analysis of all three case particles as definite articles. However, subsequent work on this language (as recently as Naylor 1975) maintains the analysis of ang as a definite article, while dropping this analysis for the other case markers. Blake himself was more cautious: he implicitly recognized the possibility of indefinite topics, by treating sequences like ang isa 'TOP one' as indefinite articles, and qualified his "definite" with "at least in form".

As shown by Bell (1978) and Adams and Manaster-Ramer (1988), Cebuano and Tagalog indeed permit indefinite topics under certain restricted conditions, roughly, if the topic phrase contains an explicit indefinite quantifier with a meaning such as 'one' or 'many', as in example (3) from Cebuano and example (4) from Tagalog. Blake turns out to have been essentially right.

(3) Misulud ang usa   ka   bata.
     AF-enter ANG one LINKER boy
     'A little boy comes in.'
     [From Wolff 1966:34]

(4) Dumarating ang isa -ng dyip.
     AF-comes ANG one LINKER jeep
     'A jeep is coming.'
     [From Bowen 1968:7; translation mine]

Something similar may be true in Ilokano, based on examples
cited by Vanoverbergh (1955: 92, 95):

(5)   Immay ti maysa   a   baket.
        Came TOP one LINKER old-woman
        'An old woman came.'

(6)   Immay ti sabali.
        Came TOP another
        'Another one came.'

In fact, Vanoverbergh (p. 49) claims that it is possible
to contrast definite and indefinite topics in Ilokano, using the
topic marker ti for the indefinites, and the topic marker dagiti
for definites.

(7)   Napan ti tallo.
        Went TOP three
        'Three went.'

(8)   Napan dagiti tallo.
        Went TOP three
        'The three went.'

A similar distinction between definite topics (marked
with an) and indefinite ones (marked with si) is claimed to
exist in Bikol by Mintz (1971: 7-8, 24). Since I have no
detailed research on Ilokano or Bikol, I cannot guarantee these
claims, but the situation in Cebuano and Tagalog is quite clear.

Nonetheless, for Schachter and Otanes (1972) the
obligatory definiteness of the topic and the Pike-Hidalgo
observation about the number of focuses vs. the number of
voices are the two arguments for distinguishing topic from
subject. For Schachter (1976, 1977), topic definiteness
becomes the basis of his whole theory of topic and subject.
(The number of focuses is now no longer cited as an
argument.)

Specifically, Schachter's proposal is that the properties
we traditionally associate with subjects fall into two sets,
which are indeed lumped together by languages spoken
outside the Philippines but are distinguished in all the

Philippine tongues. In these languages, some of the subject properties belong to actors, others to topics.

Schachter does not give a precise definition of actor, but he does say that cases like The woman endured some hardship, which have exact Tagalog analogues, indicate that this term cannot be taken literally:

> a label like PROTAGONIST might be more appropriate than ACTOR... For as in the case with the protagonist of a drama, the referent of the actor is the individual who is viewed as being at the center of events.

He continues with another argument:

> For example, sentences [with -bigay 'give'] and those [with -tanggap 'receive']--like their English equivalents--express essentially the same event... ...the speaker has a choice of the individual to whose role in the event he wishes to give prominence, and in Philippine languages this individual is expressed by an actor nominal. We can therefore say that the referent of the actor nominal is always given ROLE PROMINENCE...".

It should be clear that Schachter intends to capture exactly the same class of nominals that everyone has called actors and is not introducing any new category. It is only the definition that is at issue.

Likewise in the case of the topic, Schachter intends exactly the same class of elements as McKaughan and everybody else who uses this term, but defines it in terms of obligatory definiteness. Schachter emphasizes that this does not mean that every definite NP is a topic, for a clause can have any number of definite NPs. Rather "in the case of the topic nominal, its necessary definiteness is ATTRIBUTABLE to its being a topic". A definite nontopic, on the other hand, could be definite also, for example, if it is a proper noun or a personal pronoun. What defines topic, then, is that if you are one, then you are definite. This special characteristic is said to endow the topic with what Schachter calls REFERENTIAL PROMINENCE.

Having said this much about the definition of topic and actor, Schachter then shows that Tagalog (and more broadly Philippine) topics and actors each have their own set of syntactic properties, which he calls reference-related and role-related, respectively. All of these properties are, of course, characteristic of subjects in non-Philippine languages.

Topics have the following (reference-related) properties:

only they are bound by floating quantifiers,
only they can be relativized,
they do not occur in existential constructions.

Actors have the following (role-related) properties:

they undergo equi NP deletion,
they undergo imperative deletion,
they are referred to by the rules of word order in those
     languages which have fixed word order, (e.g.,
     Pangasinan or, as noted above, Bilaan),
they are antecedents of reflexives.

In addition, Schachter (1976: 501) observes that some subject properties are shared by the topic and the actor in the Philippine. Specifically, he refers to subject-verb agreement, and notes that Kapampangan has agreement with both topics and actors.

It should be obvious that on this account there are profound differences between (Philippine) topics and (non-Philippine) subjects, since the topics will only have a subset of the properties characteristic of subjects. The theory was quite a breakthrough, as can be seen by comparing Schachter's lists of properties with earlier arguments about the difference between subjects and topics. For example, the only fact cited by both Hidalgo and Schachter as justifying the distinction between topic and subject is the fixed position of actors in some in Philippine languages (and subjects in non-Philippine ones). Of the other properties cited by Schachter as typical of topics as opposed to subjects, one, namely, their obligatory definiteness, was cited as an important reason for distinguishing topics from subjects in earlier work by Bowen and by Schachter and Otanes.

In any case, Schachter's definition of topic as being obligatorily definite suffers from an insuperable difficulty: various Philippine languages do allow indefinite topics, as already noted. Moreover, some Philippine languages go further than the languages mentioned so far. In particular, a group of northern Philippine languages appear to construct existential sentences in such a way that the existential NP is marked as topic, contradicting yet another of Schachter's claims about Philippine topics. These languages include Agta (Healey 1960: 70), Ivatan (Reid 1969: 50), and Pangasinan (Fidel of Amurrio 1970). Again, since I have done no work on these languages, I cannot vouch for these claims, but it really takes no special expertise to see that, in the examples cited by these authors, the existential noun phrase is marked with the topic marker.

Aside from showing that Schachter's definition of topic is inadequate, these facts have broader implications as well. They demonstrate that not all Philippine languages behave the same with respect to features central to Schachter's theory of the subject-topic distinction. Given the differences between, say, Tagalog and Agta, it is apparent that the Philippine languages may themselves differ on a feature which Schachter regards as defining the Philippine language type. As a result, the topicless existential construction cannot be recognized as characterizing the languages of the Philippines. It may be added that within Indo-European, too, we find existential constructions of both kinds, those with and those without subjects. German and Polish have both kinds, as a matter of fact. In German, existential constructions with the verb sein 'to be' take subjects, those with the verb geben 'give' take accusative-case objects. In Polish, affirmative existentials (with the verb być 'to be') take subjects, negative existentials (with the verb mieć 'to have') take genitive-case objects. The dichotomy imagined by Schachter (and earlier writers) between Philippine and non-Philippine languages is obviously crosscut by other distinctions that define other typological classifications of languages.

It should be clear by this time that the term topic was originally introduced into Philippine linguistics as a result of simple confusion and that the differences between Philippine and non-Philippine languages alleged at that time are largely

spurious, but that, on the other hand, there do appear to exist significant differences between these two kinds of languages. These differences may, or may not, justify Schachter's continued use of the term topic for the Philippine "subject", though the ever-present danger of confusion with completely unrelated things called topics in other languages may in the end require a change of terminology anyway. At the very least, we should heed Thomas's caution (1977: 60):

> In summary, the terminological confusion is wider than is sometimes recognized, and users of terms need to differentiate clearly between these different kinds of entities.

But Schachter's two major accomplishments are unaffected by the terminological confusion. First, he collected and documented a whole list of properties of Tagalog and some other Philippine languages, most of which are different from those of English and also do not fit into any preexisting typological or theoretical slot. Second, he proposed a crosslinguistic theory to account for these differences in a systematic fashion. I regard this proposal, which seeks to decompose the traditional notion of subject into two in principle independent notions, as a milestone in the history of linguistic thought, on a par with the introduction of the notion of subject in the Middle Ages. I argue elsewhere (Manaster Ramer to appear) that Schachter's model does not correspond to the linguistic realities it purports to describe, but anyone who knows what a mess syntax was in the Antiquity, before the notion of subject was borrowed from logic, will know that in making this comparison I am treating Schachter's work as a giant step in the right direction. Of course, many other relevant proposals have been made since (as noted at the outset) but Schachter's work stands alone for the unparalleled contribution to our sheer grasp of the facts of Tagalog syntax.

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