

“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 ongoing 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.

		High	Low
A.	Participants	2 or more participants	1 participant
B.	Kinesis	action	Non-action/state
C.	Aspect	Telic	Atelic
D.	Punctuality	Punctual	Non-punctual/durative
E.	Volitionality	volitional	Non-volitional
F.	Affirmation	Affirmative	Negative
G.	Mode	Realis	Irrealis
H.	Agency	A high in potency	A low in potency
I.	Affectedness of O	O totally affected	O not affected
J.	Affectedness of O	O highly individuated	O non individuated

After applying the afore-cited transitivity features on our data of “Taglish” verbs, it became clear to us that the differences in morphosyntactic coding of these verbs were largely driven by semantic and/or pragmatic factors.

- a. The MAG—construction was used for the intransitive function. Compared with the other two (2) constructions, it is the lowest in the scale of transitivity and is the default construction for one-argument “Taglish” verbs which occur two-thirds (2/3) of the time. The following examples tell us of their highly intransitive or low transitive nature:
 1. Nag-mature siya. “He matured (a lot).”
 2. Hindi lang kami nag-eejoy habang nagbabasa. “We are not only enjoying ourselves while reading...”
 3. Nag-ring ang telepono. “The telephone rang.”

b. The other MAG- construction appearing with two or three other arguments and occurring in one-third of all MAG- forms was performing the anti-passive function. It is a few notches higher than the one-argument MAG- construction, but is lower in the transitivity scale than the MA- and -IN forms. Anti-passives usually appeared with an indefinite and non-referential patient or object, and so could not affect it as completely and as thoroughly as I-or -IN. The anti-passive MAG- affix itself confers a non-punctual and durative meaning into the aciton. It highlights the activity of the agent or actor and not the effect of the action towards a patient or object. The closest equivalent in English of the antipassive MAG-, albeit an awkward one, is 'to perform the act of X-ing an object' or 'to engage, or engaging in the activity of X-ing an object'. Some examples are:

4. ... hindi niya kailangang mag-promote ng pelikula.
"...he doesn't have to engage in film promotion/he doesn't have to promote films."
5. Si Lastimosa ay naglaro ng golf sa The Riviera.
"Lastimosa played golf at the Riviera".
6. Mahirap mag-speculate ng mga pangalan. "It's difficult to engage in name-speculating".

c. The I- form was used for the transitive function. It highlights the participant role of a volitional agent acting deliberately on a thoroughly and completely affected patient or theme. The patient is almost always highly individuated, meaning, "the participant is characterized as a distinct entity or individual in the narrated event", which partly explains the high transfer potential or affectedness potential of an activity or event vis-à-vis a patient or object.

7. Kayat ini-appoint niyang acting secretary general si Roda (NN8) "That is why he appointed Roda acting secretary general."
8. Nagpromise naman... si direk na I-e-edit niya 'yon.
"The director promised that he will edit/cut that portion from the film"

9. In-approve ng MTRCB ang ilang eksena. (BAL6)
 "The MTRCB approved some of the scenes."

e. The MA- construction was used to fulfill the resultative function. This construction highlights the resultant state of a patient and lacks the volitionality element contained in I- or -IN forms. It defocuses the agent, if there is any. When an agent or experiencer is present, the MA- construction expresses an abilitative, accidental or subjective experiential meaning. When they are absent, the meaning conveyed is the spontaneous entry by a patient into a certain state or condition. The more notable examples are:

10. subalit siya ay nakorner ng mga police authorities.
 (B10) "He was cornered by the police authorities."
11. Iwasan mo lahat ng matatamis at Maaachieve mo ang ideal weight na iyong pinapantasya. (Tu6)
 "Stay away from all sweets and you will achieve the ideal weight you've been dreaming of."
12. Dear, na-promote ako sa trabaho. "Dear, I got promoted"
13. Na-tense ako. (AB7) "I became tense."

Having identified the primary functions of these affixes, we can now weigh and locate them along the transitivity continuum. The I-verb represents the transitive end of the scale and the one-argument -UM- and MAG- verb occupy the intransitive other end. Standing in the middle is the two-argument anti-passive MAG- form and the resultative MA- form.

IV. Three (3) Explanations for the "Taglish" Voice Pattern

Since the S-arguments for the -UM- and MAG- verbs have similar markings as that of the object of the I- and MA-forms, with the Agent being marked differently, the morphological voice system as well as the pattern of voice use for "Taglish" verbs unmistakably operate under an ergative

system. This finding agrees well with the thesis of Nolasco (2000) who asserts that the proper characterization of Philippine Languages is: it is an ergative language that is Split-O. According to him, the prototypical Philippine language has one intransitive construction represented by the *-um-* voice affix and its variant, the *m-* replative. He deviates from other subscribers of the ergative analysts by claiming that unlike other ergative languages, Tagalog and other Philippine languages possess not one but three transitive constructions encoded by the voice affixes *in-*, *-an* and *i-*.

The ergative explanation for the "Taglish" voice pattern by itself cannot explain why the host affixes almost invariably involve MAG-, I- and MA- forms. Why not -UM- instead of MAG-? Why not -IN and -AN, instead of I-? It is our firm belief that some Tagalog voice affixes are relatively more specialized than others in terms of semantic functions and assignment of roles to its co-indexed nominals. It is the non-specialized affixes that get to be chosen as hosts for "Taglish" verbs. Note for instance that the -UM- verbs typically express internal action towards the agent, with the MAG- tending to all other actions external to the agent. It is the stem-forming affix *pag-* of the MAG- verb, that can productively combine with nouns (and even adjectives) to denote what Schachter (1987) refers to as "characteristic activities involving the referents of the nouns." These nominal constituents assume a wide variety of roles like patient, instrument, location and even adjuncts. The *-um-* affix can only do this in a very limited way.

For its part, the -IN affix lends itself to the encoding of prototypical patients and punctual actions, while the -AN affix assigns a patient and a location role to its argument. This leaves the I- affix to take on a variety of semantic roles: theme, instrument, reason and beneficiary. It is on this basis that we say that -UM, -IN and -AN are relatively more specialized than the MAG- and I- affixes. It is not surprising, then, that a transitive I- verb almost always has a MAG- counterpart.

But what about MA- verbs? Well, they encode both transitive and intransitive constructions. That is, MA- affixes accommodate both one-argument and two-argument

propositions and assigns a number of roles to its nominals, including: patient, experiencer and percept.

Interacting with ergativity and semantic specialization is a phonological explanation to the "Taglish" verbs are all prefixes. Verbal suffixes shift the stress one syllable forward, and destroy the original stress configuration of the stems thereby interfering with the recognition cues of the bilingual user. Prefixes preserve the original stress of the English lexical items and afford the codeswitcher the luxury of having his cake and eating it too. However, there appears to be an exception to this "rule". An English stem containing a stressed closed penult, like *order*, *hunting* and *order* seems impervious to the Tagalog stress shift and consequently can take the affix -IN. This explanation for the anomaly must be treated as tentative, considering that there are probably other semantic and pragmatic and even historical factors that must be taken into account. Likewise, "Taglish" verbs with -UM- and -AN affixes, however few, cry out for explanation and await further study.

V. Summary and Conclusion

If the characterization of Philippine languages as split-O ergative is correct, then the grammaticalization process of English loanwords to Tagalog verb constructions seem to adhere to the core overlay of an ergative system, albeit an utterly simplified one. For intransitive constructions, the "Taglish" verbs exploit the all around character of the MAG-affix. For transitive constructions, this hybrid verb exploits in turn the unspecialized and ubiquitous I- affix. For resulting constructions, there is the MA- affix to serve as willing host. Encroaching into still unspecialized, unsaturated and semantically bleached areas of the verbal system, without undermining its ergative essence, appear to be the survival strategy of these foreign borrowings. Two other factors--one morphosemantic (semantic specialization) and the other phonological (stress shift) interact with the ergative explanation to lend a credible account of the "Taglish" voice pattern.

VI. Notes

1. This prediction has been partially validated in 1993 by Cruz who showed that tertiary educated bilintuals in the Philippines were using at least three language varieties in this intellectualized spoken discourse. Cruz found out that these bilinguals were employing—at the clause level—Filipino/Tagalog 23% of the time, English 27%, and Filipino-English conversational code-switching variety 50%. She also added that borrowing at the word level constituted 48% of all code-switches compared to 21% and 31% at the clause and phrase level, respectively. This code-switching variety has been described by Cruz to be predominantly Tagalog in sentence structure with English lexical insertions.

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