

Tagalog, English, and Topicalization

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One of the most perplexing problems which case grammar faces is that of subject selection. As presently formulated, subject selection is based upon the concept of case hierarchy, or case ranking. Thus, the first case in the hierarchy is selected as subject; or, if it is not selected, it is "downgraded" or moved by a specific transformation, acquiring in the process a surface marking which shows that it is a downgraded subject. The problems which arise with this process of subject selection vary from the problem of choosing a Dative case subject in English to the problem of choosing a subject in those languages which display little evidence of case hierarchy. By examining a language which has no case hierarchy, though, we are able to gain insight into a possible theoretical framework for subject selection in all languages--a framework which is not based on the concept of case rankings. One of the languages which has no case ranking is Tagalog. A brief outline of the language will be presented below, and the implications of how Tagalog operates will be discussed in relation to English.

One of the most interesting facets of Tagalog, and the facet which concerns us here, is that the surface structure of a Tagalog sentence is very similar to the deep structure representation proposed for case grammars. That is, each sentence is composed of a verb followed by a series of noun phrases which stand in some case relationship to the verb.¹ With this type of linear ordering,

¹In Tagalog the subject of a sentence may occur in either of two positions. In one position, the subject precedes the verbal phrase. When the subject is in this position, it is always followed by the particle "ay" which indicates the following predicate. The most common syntactic pattern, however, consists of a verbal phrase followed by the subject, or more accurately, the topic of the sentence. Since this is the syntactic construction which conveys the most information about case relationships, I will concentrate here only on the second of the possible syntactic formations.

Tagalog obviously cannot indicate the subject of the sentence by placing the noun phrase before the verb, as does English. Instead, Tagalog "focuses" on one of the case forms as the topic of the sentence. As pointed out by Fillmore (1968), such "topicalization" is comparable to subject selection in English--an idea to which we shall

return later. The "topic" of a Tagalog sentence is the thing which the sentence is about, the most important thing in the speaker's mind. Since linear ordering is of little importance in Tagalog, a chosen noun phrase must be marked as "topic". In its surface realization, the element chosen as topic always follows ang, or si if it is a proper noun, regardless of the position which the noun phrase occupies within the sentence as a whole.

Since the topic is marked by ang, it loses whatever case marking it would have carried had it not been chosen as topic. This loss of marking is compensated for, however, by the fact that the verb is then marked to show the case relationship between the verb and the noun phrase topic. The following sentences illustrate this point:

- (1) Bumibili ng libro si Alex.
- (2) Binibili ang libro ni Alex.

The first consonant and vowel are re-duplicated to show imperfect aspect, and the infix -um- in sentence (1) indicates that the verb bili is in an agentive case relationship with the topic of the sentence. The pronominal marker si identifies the agentive case noun phrase Alex. In sentence (2), the infix -in- indicates that the topic of the sentence is in an objective case relationship with the verb, and ang marks the objective case noun phrase libro. Translations of the two sentences, with the topic placed in subject position, are as follows:

- (3) Alex is buying the book.
- (4) The book is being bought by Alex.

It should also be noted that

- (5) Bumibili si Alex ng libro.
- (6) Binibili ni Alex ang libro.

have the same meanings as (1) and (4), respectively. That is, linear ordering does not show the topic of the sentence, nor does it indicate a change of case relationship between verb and noun phrase.²

²Ambiguities are introduced in some constructions when the surface case forms are re-ordered. These ambiguities will be discussed in more detail below.

Given below are example of five types of topicalization,³ each

³The charts of Tagalog topicalization, and the examples which follow, were taken from Bowen with some modification in manner of presentation. In order to simplify my presentation here, I chose

not to document each chart or example, but rather to refer the reader to Bowen, especially pp. 183, 197-201, 218, 448, and 473.

compared with agentive topic selection, and each followed by illustrations of the constructions. These examples illustrate the process of topic selection and show how topicalization affects pronominal markers. The translations of the examples have the topic in initial position. The ordering of cases in the charts has no special meaning.

PREDICATE		TOPIC
Verb affix		
mag-	ng-Objective	ang-Agentive
-in-	ng-Agentive	ang-Objective

AGENTIVE -- OBJECTIVE

Agentive topicalization:

- (7) Naghihintay siya ng bus.
"He is waiting for the bus."
(8) Nagsusulat si Juan ng liham.
"Juan is writing a letter."

Objective topicalization:

- (9) Hinhihintay niya ang bus.
"The bus is being waited on by him."
(10) Sinusulat ni Juan ang liham.
"The letter is being written by Juan."

PREDICATE		TOPIC
Verb affix		
-um-		
mag-	sa + Locative	ang + Agentive
make-		
-an	ng + Agentive	ang + Locative

AGENTIVE -- LOCATIVE

Agentive topicalization:

- (11) Humahalik sa kamay ng Ninong ang bagong-kasal.
"The newlyweds kiss the hand of the godfather."
(12) Bumibili si Ray ng kendi sa tindahan.
"Ray buys candy at the store."

Locative topicalization:

- (13) Hinahalikan ng bagong-kasal ang kamay ng Ninong.
"The hand of the godfather is kissed by the newlyweds."
(14) Binibilhan ni Ray ng kendi ang tindahan.
"The store is where Ray buys candy."

PREDICATE		TOPIC
Verb affix		
-um- mag- mang-	sa pamamagitan ng + Instrumental	ang + Agentive
ipang-	ng + Agentive	ang + Instrumental

AGENTIVE -- INSTRUMENTAL

Agentive topicalization:

- (15) Gumuhit siya ng larawan sa pamamagitan ng lapis.
"He drew a picture with a pencil."
(16) Nagpasyal sila sa pamamagitan ng kotse.
"They went places in a car."

Instrumental topicalization:

- (17) Ipinanguhit niya ng larawan ang lapis.
"A pencil was used in drawing a picture."
(18) Ipinamasyal nila ang kotse.
"A car was used by them in going places."

PREDICATE		TOPIC
Verb affix		
-um- mag- mang-	para sa + Benefactive	ang + Agentive
i- ipag- ipang-	ng + Agentive	ang + Benefactive

AGENTIVE -- BENEFACTIVE

Agentive topicalization:

- (19) Nanggagapang para kay Ledesma si Kardo.
"Kardo campaigns secretly for Ledesma."

Benefactive topicalization:

- (20) Ipinanggagapang ni Kardo si Ledesma.
"Ledesma is secretly campaigned for by Kardo."

PREDICATE		TOPIC
Verb affix		
-um- ma- mag- mang-	(daniil) sa + Causative	ang + Agentive
ika- ikapag- ikapang-	ng + Agentive ng + Agentive	ang + Causative

AGENTIVE -- CAUSATIVE

Agentive topicalization:

- (21) Yumaman siya dahil sa sweepstakes.
 "He become rich because of the sweepstakes."

Causative topicalization:

- (22) Ikinayaman niya ang sweepstakes.
 "The sweepstakes made him rich."

As illustration of Tagalog topicalization with several noun phrases, consider the following examples:

Agentive topicalization:

- (23) Bumibili ang lalaki ng libro sa tindahan para kay Rose.
 "The man bought the book at the store for Rose."

Objective topicalization:

- (24) Binibili ng lalaki ang libro sa tindahan para kay Rose.
 "The book was bought at the store by the man for Rose."

Locative topicalization:

- (25) Binibilhan ng lalaki ang tindahan ng libro para kay
 Rose.
 "The store is where the book was bought by the man
 for Rose."

Benefactive topicalization:

- (26) Ibinibili ng lalaki si Rose ng libro sa tindahan.
 "Rose was bought the book at the store by the man."

Once more, however, I feel it important to point out that the following sentences convey the same meaning as the Agentive topicalized sentence above:

- (27) Bumibili ng libro ang lalaki sa tindahan para kay Rose.
 (28) Bumibili sa tindahan ng libro ang lalaki para kay Rose.
 (29) Bumibili para kay Rose sa tindahan ng libro ang lalaki.
 (30) Bumibili para kay Rose ng libro sa tindahan ang lalaki.
 etc.

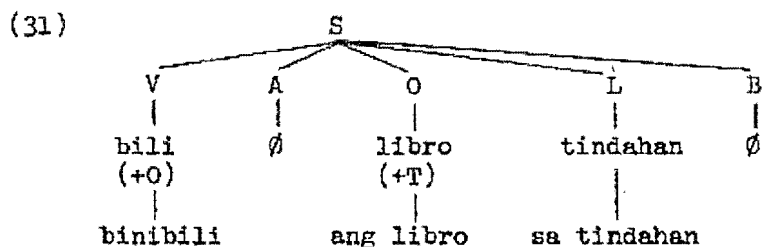
In some instances, ambiguities are created by the linear ordering of the noun phrases--ambiguities which do not occur if the noun phrases are ordered in a different manner. However, the same phenomenon occurs in English (I saw the boy walking towards the railroad station. Walking towards the railroad station, I saw the boy.) and is not indication of case ordering at a deep level.

From this brief outline of the structure of Tagalog, perhaps the reader can see the following points: (a). There is no independent justification for proposing that the case forms are ordered at the deep level. Instead, surface representation seems to support the idea that the deep cases are unordered. (b). Topic selection must occur at the deep level, since the verb must also be marked for topic.

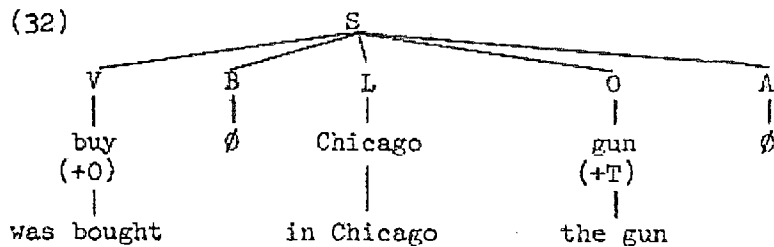
Since the points made above are important for the discussion of English which is to follow, they deserve some amplification. First, Tagalog is a language whose surface structure is unordered in respect to the surface case forms. With such an unordered surface representation, Tagalog offers little motivation for postulating an ordered deep structure. Since most English sentences have a rather definite surface order of cases, it is easy to see why an ordered deep structure was proposed. When there are examples of languages which lack surface ordering, however, the justification for formulating a deep hierarchy is weakened. There must be some independent motivation for a proposal of deep structure hierarchy, and I am unaware of any such motivation. A proposal which is stronger and probably more nearly universal would state that case selection is simultaneous and unordered. That is, instead of having a case hierarchy which would determine the subject of a sentence, there would be instead a simultaneous selection of case forms, one of which would be marked as topic of the sentence. It is, of course, possible that surface ordering would then be required for some languages, but this would primarily be a stylistic feature which would be language specific, and not at all connected with the universal statement of case selection and topic marking. In essence, then, the deep structure which I propose has a verb followed by a set of possible case selections. From the set of possible cases, a group of cases would be arbitrarily chosen at the same moment, with one of the cases arbitrarily being marked as topic. At the same time, the verb would be marked to show which case was being chosen as topic.

This brings us to the second of the points made above--topic selection must occur at the deep level. This point is based upon the idea that the verb must be marked at the deep level, according to which case has been chosen as topic. Such a marking must occur if the verb is to have the proper surface form. Moreover, it is possible that certain verbs cannot have specific cases as topic. If such a case were to be chosen as topic, then the derivation of the sentence would immediately be blocked. Since the verbs already must be marked as to which cases they can occur with, it seems little to add if we state that the cases would be marked plus or minus topic.

Using the theory outlined above, an example of a Tagalog sentence would be as follows:



As an illustration of how this same procedure could be followed in English, consider the following derivation:



The verb "buy" has been marked as having an Objective topic; any verb marked as having Objective topic must have a surface representation of "be + past participle" (tense is ignored here). The Locative case in this example has a surface realization of "in + Loc" and the Objective case, when marked as topic, has either a definite or indefinite article preceding it. It is quite obvious that a stylistic rule would now be applied, moving the noun phrase marked +T (+Topic) to sentence initial position. Following the application of such a rule, the sentence "The gun was bought in Chicago." would be realized on the surface level. Notice that the case orderings at the deep level can be of little importance in English as well as in Tagalog. If the Benefactive were realized as "for Sam" and the Agentive as "by John" in the above sentence ("for" and "by" being the surface markings of Benefactive and Agentive cases respectively when they are marked -T), then the following sentences could be produced, with the only stylistic change being the positioning of the case marked as +T in sentence initial position:

- (33) The gun was bought for Sam in Chicago by John.
- (34) The gun was bought for Sam by John in Chicago.
- (35) The gun was bought by John in Chicago for Sam.
- (36) The gun was bought by John for Sam in Chicago.
- (37) The gun was bought in Chicago for Sam by John.
- (38) The gun was bought in Chicago by John for Sam.

The only requirement for the production of the above sentences is that the deep cases be unordered. Hence, the semantic interpretation would be the same for the sentences since the case forms remain in the same relationship to the verb--only the surface realization would be altered. It is, of course, obvious that some of the sentences contain ambiguities which are not present in other of the sentences. This same phenomenon occurs in Tagalog, as has been mentioned, and may be due to constructions similar to the equational sentences to be discussed below. Nevertheless, all sentences have one reading in which the meaning is the same.

The advantages of considering subject selection to be topicalization as outlined above are obvious. First, "passive voice" is actually a marker of topic selection. The verb is marked as it is in Tagalog, the only difference being that English has fewer verb markers. The "Passive Transformation" and all its accompanying problems are eliminated. Any verb which is marked +O, +D, +B, and possibly +L and +T would have surface realization with "be".

Secondly, such sentences as "Tom was killed in the war" would be produced without dummy Agentive elements. The verb "kill", then, would have an obligatory O, but an optional A in its set of cases. Topic selection would be purely arbitrary if both cases were present.

A second advantage of this framework is the fact that the verb is marked for case topic at the deep level. If the verb cannot take a specific case as topic, then the derivation of the sentence is blocked, as has been mentioned above. Thus, if the psych verbs were marked as not taking Experiencer as +T, then the Psych Movement Transformation would be useless (add to this the idea that the cases are unordered and the transformation becomes even more unnecessary). Such verbs as "resemble", "seem", and "obvious" could also be marked as not allowing E as +T, eliminating the "Experiencer Shunting Transformation". Examination of other advantages of the proposed grammar might lead to even greater simplification.

One possible simplification concerns "Equational Sentences", and once more we shall refer to Tagalog for a clue as to the nature of an English constructions. Consider the following:

- | | | |
|------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| (39) | Maganda ang damit.
beautiful dress | "The dress is beautiful." |
| (40) | Titser ang babae.
teacher woman | "The woman is a teacher." |
| (41) | Babae ang titser.
woman teacher | "The teacher is a woman." |

The Tagalog sentences should suggest to the reader that when an "adjective" is in a case relation with a noun phrase which has been marked +T, the English equivalent places "be" before the adjective and the topic is moved to sentence initial position. "Adjectives", therefore, can be considered as deep level predicates and can be subjected to the same constraints and methods of interpretation as other verbal elements.

The comments above regarding topicalization in English have been rather speculative. However, I feel that the concept of topicalization mentioned in "The Case for Case" is too important to be neglected. As the previous examples tend to indicate, topicalization might lead to a more nearly universal grammatical statement, and it might also greatly simplify the grammar. Obviously, more work needs to be done to ascertain the power and effectiveness of such a concept, but the implications as to power and effectiveness are already apparent.

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