

Subject and Specificity: The Case of Tagalog

The subject or ‘topic’ of a Tagalog sentence is obligatorily specific and may originate in any theta position of the clause (for discussion on the status of this element see Kroeger 1993, Schachter 1976, 1996, Guilfoyle, Hung, and Travis 1992, Richards 2000). The nature of subject in this language is not connected to case or to a particular structural position, but rather to the specificity of the arguments in the clause. As shown in (1), topics are marked with *ang* and morphology on the verb indicates which underlying role they bear -- in this example agent (AT), theme (TT), or benefactive (BT).

In a clause with an agent and a theme which argument functions as the topic is determined as follows: When the theme is nonspecific it cannot be the topic, but when it is specific it must be topic, while non-topic agents can be either specific or not. If a benefactive is present in an AT or TT sentence it is introduced by a preposition which means that it can be either specific or not, as can be seen in (1) (in order for it to become topic it must first applicativize). In a clause where a benefactive is topic, however, the theme and the agent may both be either specific or nonspecific. To account for this pattern I propose that specific arguments shift to the edge of vP as in Chomsky 1999 as the result of an Agree relation between *v* and the specific argument, followed by raising of that argument to check the EPP feature of the head. *Ang*-marking is the spell-out of this Agree relation on the shifted DP. Shifted DPs do not tuck in (in the sense of Richards 1997) below the agent which is externally merged into a specifier of vP, but rather occupy higher specifiers of vP, perhaps due to a general requirement that specifiers made available in this manner merge outside of thematic specifiers (as hypothesized in Chomsky 1999, 2000). Once moved, the argument in the highest Spec of vP is the closest one to T and so when T requires an Agree relation with some element in its domain this DP is the closest and enters into the relation. The Agreement between T and this DP results in the spell-out on T of voice morphology that agrees with the features of the DP, thus creating the different ‘voices’ of verbs. In the case of AT voice, there are no other specific arguments to raise to vP, so the agent is by default the highest specifier and agrees with T. These various possibilities are schematized in (2). The reason that the theme cannot be specific in the AT voice follows directly from this analysis because the only configuration which can create the AT voice is one where no other argument raises to vP and so T Agreement holds with the only argument in a vP specifier, namely the agent which originated there. If, instead, the theme raises, the Agree relation must necessarily hold between the theme and T (since the theme is then closer to T) and so the configuration for AT voice is destroyed (although the agent may still be specific in this configuration). However, when a different specific argument, such as a benefactive, is present and shifts, the theme can then optionally shift as well, which results in it tucking in below the benefactive, thereby creating a situation where it is possible to have a specific, non-subject theme just in case some argument other than the agent is the topic.

Specificity movement in Tagalog bears a strong resemblance to the phenomenon of object shift in the Germanic languages. In those languages specific objects also shift out of VP and it has been proposed that their shifted position is at the edge of the phase, or vP (Chomsky 1999). Furthermore, Germanic object shift is similar to Tagalog in displaying the effects of shortest move and the Principle of Minimal Compliance since a lower object is allowed to shift only if a higher argument has already done so. In double object constructions it is possible for a specific direct object to shift just in case the indirect object has already shifted (Haegeman 1993, 1996, Falk 1990, Collins and Thráinsson 1996, Den Dikken and Mulder 1991, Neeleman 1994), which parallels the Tagalog restriction on allowing a theme to shift in non-TT voices only if another argument has already done so. The difference between shifting in Germanic and Tagalog, however, is that in Tagalog the operation applies to any specific argument, not just to objects, and, as a result of the Agree relation between the shifted DP and T, whichever argument shifts first is interpreted as the ‘subject’. In Germanic object shift, by contrast, Agreement with and movement to T is restricted to certain DPs because of phi-feature requirements, so other shifted DPs do not interrupt or participate in the relation.

Specificity shift in Tagalog provides a window into specificity-driven movement and argument shift in general, since the process is not obscured by language-specific restrictions on which arguments can participate. The position of an argument is determined by specificity requirements and, because topics in this language are determined on the basis of this position, it is in principle possible for any specific argument to be a ‘subject’, as defined by verbal agreement.

Data

- (1) a. **m**-pag-lu-luto ang lalaki ng adobo para sa asawa *AT*
 AT-pag-asp-cook TOP man CASE adobo P DAT spouse
 “The man will cook adobo for his wife.”
- b. lu-lutu-**in** ng lalaki ang adobo para sa asawa *TT*
 asp-cook-TT CASE man TOP adobo P DAT spouse
 “The man will cook the adobo.”
- c. **i**-pag-lu-luto ng lalaki ng adobo ang asawa *BT*
 BT-pag-asp-cook CASE man CASE adobo TOP spouse
 “The man will cook (the) adobo for his wife.”
- (2) a. [_{TP} T(-TT) [_{vP} ang-NP_{theme} NP_{agent} v [_{VP} V t_{th}]]] *TT*
- b. [_{TP} T(-AT) [_{vP} ang-NP_{agent} v [_{VP} V NP_{th}]]] *AT*
- c. [_{TP} T(-BT) [_{vP} ang-NP_{benefactive} NP_{agent} v [_{AppIP} t_{ben} appl [_{VP} V NP_{th}]]] *BT*

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