

PRE-VERBAL PRONOUNS IN TAGALOG SYNTAX*

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Clauses in Tagalog are typically verb-initial, but the language also allows a clause type where pronouns occur pre-verbally. This paper proposes one way in which this phenomenon could be integrated with recent theories of Tagalog syntax, which do not give an account for such a case. After demonstrating how pronominal forms alternate in noun phrases according to position, and how this distribution resembles that found in verbal predicates, I propose that the alternation is a question of free-standing forms versus enclitic forms. In this view, pre-verbal pronouns result when a pronoun is stranded in a position where it cannot cliticize.

1. INTRODUCTION

Tagalog is generally held to be a verb-first language, and for the most part it is true that nominal arguments must follow the verb, with pronouns occurring as second-position enclitics. There are some exceptions to this rule, though, as the language also allows a clause type where pronouns occur to the left of the verb. Recent major theories of Tagalog syntax do not account for this phenomenon, and thus I propose a way of deriving this behavior while seeking to remain as consistent as possible with other work.

I begin by discussing the alternation of pronominal forms between pre-verbal and post-verbal positions, and the way that noun phrases resemble verbal predicates in this regard. I suggest that the close resemblance of verb phrases to noun phrases in this regard indicates that the same phenomenon is at work. I argue that in a noun phrase, different morphological forms of pronouns before and after the noun result from a purely positional distinction rather than from a contrast in features. A pronoun preceding the noun takes a free-standing form, whereas a following pronoun takes an enclitic form. Based on the claim that position alone accounts for the difference in form, I argue that an argument pronoun may be stranded to the left of the verb, which results in the same kind of positional contrast as that found in a noun phrase. I use negation as a way to test the hypothesis that the observed morphological contrast is due to stranding of a pronoun.

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1.1. Assumptions

Since my assumptions most closely follow those of Aldridge (2004), I will use the terminology of ergativity when referring to arguments. I do not believe that my argument hinges on the ergative analysis, except regarding the assumptions discussed below about the structural positions where case is assigned. This paper is not intended to be an argument in favor of (or against) the ergative analysis.

Regarding phrase structure, I assume that in a conventional (verb-first) Tagalog clause, the verb moves through head movement to a higher head, above vP but below negation. I follow Aldridge (2004) in assuming that this head is Asp(ect), where aspect features are merged. The external argument is projected in Spec- vP . In a transitive clause, which will be the main clause type that we are concerned with here, the direct object is projected below the verb, and the indirect object is projected below the direct object.¹ In these cases the external argument (ergative) receives inherent case in Spec- vP , and the direct object (absolutive) receives structural case in the specifier of the complement phrase of v (Spec-VP in a basic transitive).

Clitics move after syntax, as argued by Richards (2003). They adjoin to the leftmost head in a particular domain. Aldridge (2002) claims that the domain for argument clitics is CP, based on evidence that clitics adjoin to fronted adjuncts but will not cross the clausal boundary of a pseudo-cleft.

Only the absolutive argument can move out of vP . Rackowski (2002) and Aldridge (2004) have claimed that this is because the absolutive argument moves to the left edge of vP and thus, in accordance with Chomsky's (1999) theory of Phase Impenetrability, it blocks other arguments from being extracted.

2. PRONOMINAL FORMS AND THEIR DISTRIBUTION

Although pronouns normally occur to the right of the verb or some other head in the clause, there are some cases where they can occur clause-initially, to the left of the verb, as with the third-person pronoun *niya* in (1a). This situation may occur when the pronoun in question has ergative case, that is, it is the agent in a transitive clause.² When it occurs pre-verbally, the ergative pronoun takes a different form, morphologically identical to the dative, as with the third-person pronoun *kanya* in (1b).³

¹Rackowski (2002) shows that arguments occur in different positions in different constructions. This point is unimportant for the present paper, which deals almost exclusively with simple transitive (subject-direct object) sentences.

²This phenomenon is somewhat marked when it occurs, and is apparently being lost entirely among younger speakers, but many still recognize it and find it acceptable.

³The gloss abbreviations used in this paper are as follows: Abs=absolutive; Erg=ergative; Obl=oblique; Gen=genitive; Dat=dative; Lk=linker; Intr=intransitive; Pf=perfective (aspect); Inc=incompleted (aspect);

- (1) a. T-in-awag =**niya** ang bata
 Pf-call 3P.Erg Abs child
 b. **Kanya** =ng t-in-awag ang bata
 3P.Erg Lk Pf-call Abs child
 ‘He/she called the child.’ (Naylor 1980: 41)

The distribution of *kanya* and *niya* shown in (1) echoes that of possessor pronouns in an NP, which can likewise occur on either side of the phrasal head in the same alternating morphological forms.

- (2) a. [DP ang pangalan =**niya**]
 Abs name 3P.Gen
 b. [DP ang **kanya** =ng pangalan]
 Abs 3P.Gen Lk name

The same pattern exists for other genitive pronouns (*ko, mo, niya, namin, natin, ninyo, nila*) and dative forms (*akin, iyo, kanya, amin, atin, inyo, kanila*). Italian appears to exhibit the same positions for possessors as Tagalog does, as shown in (3), disregarding the fact that Italian lacks an analogous morphological difference between preposed and postposed pronouns.

- (3) **Italian**
 a. [DP il nome **su**o]
 the name his/her
 ‘his/her name’
 b. [DP il **su**o nome]
 the his/her name
 ‘his/her name’

Similarly, the pre-nominal possessor slot is restricted to only pronouns in both languages.⁴

(4) **Tagalog**

+Q=question marker; Neg=negation. Note that *-in-* is an infix, so the consonant preceding it is actually a part of the morpheme to its right.

⁴It is possible to have a noun in the pre-nominal position as well, but different semantics indicate a very different syntactic structure in that case. Norvin Richards (p.c.) tells me that at least some speakers accept proper names in the dative case (e.g. *kay Huwan*) in this position, but I have so far been unable to verify this decisively.

- a. [DP ang pangalan **ng guro**]
 Abs name Gen teacher
 ‘the name of the teacher’
- b. * [DP ang **ng guro** pangalan]
 Abs Gen teacher name
- c. * [DP ang **ng guro** =ng pangalan] *This doesn’t work whether
 Abs Gen teacher Lk name you add the linker or not*

As it is fairly non-controversial to assume that the possessor in an Italian NP is located in Spec-NP, this analogy suggests that the pre-nominal possessor in Tagalog occupies the same slot. Likewise, I suggest that the similarity of pre-verbal pronouns to pre-nominal possessors may indicate a similar structure, where the pre-verbal pronoun is in the specifier position of the head occupied by the verb. It is not crucial to my argument that a pre-verbal ergative argument in Tagalog be in the specifier of the very phrase headed by the verb, however; it suffices that it is in some specifier that c-commands the verb.

In addition to the contexts illustrated above, pronouns like *kanya* occur in dative DP’s. In this case, the dative pronoun follows the dative marker or preposition *sa*, as shown in (5b).

- (5) a. Nag-bigay =ako ng buklaklak [DP **sa nanay ko**]
 Intr.Pf-give 1P.Abs Gen flower(s) Dat mother 1P.Gen
 ‘I gave flowers to my mother.’
- b. Nag-bigay =ako ng buklaklak [DP **sa kanya**]
 Intr.Pf-give 1P.Abs Gen flower(s) Dat 3P.Dat
 ‘I gave flowers to him/her.’

The word *sa* is generally assumed to be a determiner in (5a), thus accounting for the fact that another determiner cannot be added, making phrases such as **sa ang nanay ko* or **sa ng nanay ko* ungrammatical. The likeness of (5b) gives no reason to think that the *sa* found in (5b) is different from that in (5a). The fact that *kanya* does not move out of the DP [*sa kanya*] is consistent with the fact that elsewhere in Tagalog clitics never cross the boundary of the complement phrase of a determiner.

The pattern emerging is that *kanya* occurs as the leftmost word in certain kinds of phrases (NP and CP), while *niya* occurs as an enclitic, with the two forms in complementary distribution. I suggest that this complementary distribution indicates that the two pronouns express the same basic features, and that the selection of one or the other is made based on positional criteria. In a position where the pronoun is at the left edge of the domain of cliticization, it cannot cliticize and assumes a free-standing form like *kanya*. In a position within the phrase, on the other hand, it joins a host word as a clitic and assumes a clitic form like *niya*.

3. PRE-VERBAL PRONOUNS IN SYNTAX

Second-position clitics in a Tagalog clause occupy the position following the leftmost head or phrase within the CP projection. (6a) is an example of a fronted wh-word adjunct, *bakit* ‘why’, and (6b) illustrates a case where pronouns cliticize to the negative word *hindi*, which always precedes the verb in sentential negation.

- (6) a. *Bakit =ka =niya t-in-awag?* *Pronouns cliticize to fronted wh-word adjunct*
 why 2P.Abs 3P.Erg Pf-call
 ‘Why did he/she call you?’
- b. *Hindi =ka =niya t-in-awag.* *Pronouns cliticize to fronted wh-word adjunct*
 Neg 2P.Abs 3P.Erg Pf-call
 ‘He/she didn’t call you.’

Likewise, when a pronoun occurs clause-initially, it becomes the host word for clitics.

- (7) a. *Kanya =siya =ng t-in-awag.* *Absolutive cliticizes to CP-initial ergative*
 3P.Erg 3P.Abs Lk Pf.call
 ‘He/she called him/her.’
- Kanya =ka =ng t-in-awag* *Absolutive cliticizes to CP-initial ergative.*
 3P.Erg 2P.Abs Lk Pf.call
 ‘He/she called you.’

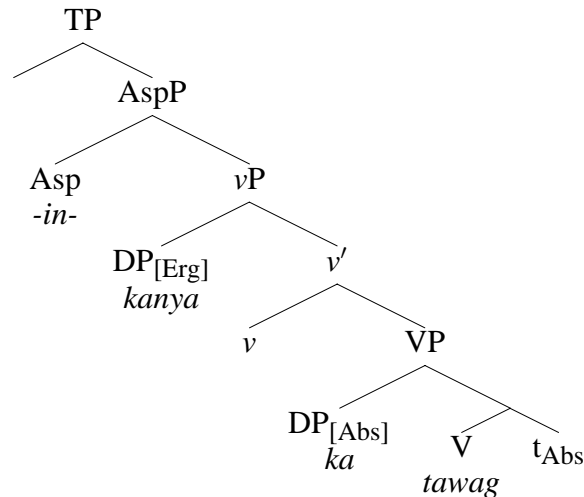
The initial pronoun is the ergative pronoun (semantic subject of a transitive clause), not an absolutive. (8) shows two examples where fronting the absolutive argument is ungrammatical; these are merely representative, as no such example will work.⁵

- (8) a. **Siya =niya =ng t-in-awag.*
 3P.Abs 3P.Erg Lk Pf.call
- b. **Siya kanya =ng t-in-awag.*
 3P.Abs 3P.Erg Lk Pf.call

Given the assumptions about phrase structure stated in §1.1, a sentence like (7b) should have a tree like the one shown in (9), disregarding head movement.

⁵There are constructions that allow fronting of the absolutive, but they require elements which probably indicate additional syntactic structure beyond what we are considering here.

(9)



Normally the verb is assumed to move to Asp, which results in a verb-initial word order. However, if the verb were only to move to a lower head, then the ergative DP would be stranded to the left of the verb. If it is true, as suggested above, that the pre-verbal pronoun form is simply a free-standing form of the enclitic pronoun, then it follows that the stranded DP will take that free-standing form and act as a target for clitic movement. Since the absolutive DP follows the verb in (1b), it is evident that the verb still undergoes leftward movement in the tree in (9); thus, *v* is a reasonable candidate to be the landing site of head movement in cases with pre-verbal pronouns.

3.1. Negative clauses

If the ergative argument becomes clause-initial by being stranded to the left of the verb, then we should expect that adding a higher functional head would disallow pronoun-initial order. The ergative pronoun is assumed to start out no higher than Spec-*v*P, so this head would have to occur above that position in order to provide a useful test. One such higher head is negation.

- (10) a. (= (6b))
 Hindi =**ka** =**niya** t-in-awag.
 Neg 2P.Abs 3P.Erg Pf-call
- b. ?? **Kanya** =**ka** =ng hindi t-in-awag.
 3P.Erg 2P.Abs Lk Neg Pf-call

This evidence indicates that pre-verbal pronouns are not acceptable, or at least not as acceptable, when they begin a clause that has the negation word preceding the verb. Unfortunately the judgements on (10b) are inconclusive. To the degree that the sentence is less acceptable than

(7b), it supports my claim, but since it was not categorically rejected it does not provide decisive evidence.

Note that acceptance of (10b) would also be a problem for the assumed theory of Tagalog syntax, which holds that the ergative pronoun cannot be extracted from *v*P because its route of movement is blocked by a higher absolutive argument. It might be claimed that *kanya* in (10b) undergoes A movement to Spec-NegP or above, and it is thus exempt from the restriction on A-bar movement; this exemption is not provided for under the kind of phase-based arguments made by Rackowski (2002) or Aldridge (2004), however.

3.2. Aspect morphology

If the verb does not always move into the Asp head, as suggested in the analysis above, there is another question that needs to be resolved. Aspect morphology (in this case the *-in-* infix) shows up on the verb, not on some other head, so it must somehow join with the verb. If the verb does not move into Asp, then we must posit an affix-lowering rule to account for the joining of affix morphology to the verb. Since the affix-lowering question is long-standing for English, the problems with this theory could be subsumed under the same debate, which I will not pursue further at this time.

4. CONCLUSION

Dative and genitive pronoun forms have a complementary distribution, and I have suggested that they are free-standing and enclitic forms, respectively, of the same syntactic features. The free-standing forms occur only when cliticization is impossible because the pronoun has been stranded at the left edge of the domain of cliticization. This analysis can account for the alternation of forms in pre- and post-head positions in both noun phrases and verb phrases.

I have proposed an analysis of pre-verbal pronouns where the verb does not move out of *v*P, stranding the ergative pronoun to its left in a position where it cannot cliticize to a leftward host. Facts from negation lend some support to my claim, but this evidence is not decisive.

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