Tagalog general number and incorporation

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Tagalog alignment is still a controversial topic. Some argue that it is ergative (Aldridge 2004) and others assume an accusative alignment (Richards 2000, Rackowski 2002). This controversy is due to its unique voice system and the various semantic consequences associated with voice. In this presentation, I introduce new data in the form of general number (GN) and I assert that Tagalog is a pseudo-incorporating language.

Voice in Tagalog has several semantic consequences. For instance; scope, telicity, and specificity. There are several voices, this presentation will highlight the contrast between the two most frequently used voices; agent voice and patient voice.

Ang-arguments, regardless of their grammatical relation, are specific (Billings 2005, Himmelmann 1998) whereas *ng*-arguments are typically non-specific. This means that the subject in (1)-a and the object in (1)-b are specific.

(1)   a.   B⟨um⟩ili ng libro ang babae.
            AV.buy   NG book ANG woman
            'The woman bought one or more books.'

        b.   B⟨in⟩ili ang libro ng babae.
            PV.buy ANG book NG woman
            'The woman bought the book.'

(2)   B⟨um⟩ili ng pula=ng libro ang babae.
        AV.buy   NG red=LK book ANG woman
        'The woman bought a red book.' / *'The woman bought one or more red books.'

Previous analyses on specificity are relevant to GN such that nouns with GN are obligatorily non-specific. Corbett (2000:16) briefly describes Tagalog GN where unmarked nouns can be singular or plural. Thus a bare form like *aso* can mean 'dog' or 'dogs'. The addition of the plural morpheme *mga* before the noun forces a plural interpretation (*mga aso* = 'dogs').

There are several important restrictions on GN in Tagalog. First, only objects can have GN readings, subjects are specified for number. For both 1a and 1b, there is exactly one woman who performed a buying action. Second, only unmodified object may have a GN reading. In (2), the modified object blocks a GN reading. There is an additional restriction on GN not previously noted in the literature, namely, that GN is voice dependent. Only unmodified objects in agent voice sentences have GN interpretations (see (1)-a). Unmodified objects in patient voice sentences only denote a singular noun, see ((1)-b). The facts about GN in Tagalog shares the semantic characteristics of noun incorporation (NI).

However, the facts about GN in Tagalog do not share the syntactic characteristics of NI. One of the main tenets of NI is that the incorporated noun must be morphologically attached or in close association with the verb (Johns 2007:537). Tagalog has free post-verbal word order such that GN interpretations are unaffected whether a sentence has VOS or VSO word order. Because the distance between the 'incorporated' noun and the predicate plays no role in whether or not there is a GN interpretation, I assert that Tagalog is a pseudo-incorporating language. Pseudo NI can vary from language to language. It is generally similar to traditional NI but with some syntactic or semantic difference(s). Niuean, a genetically related language,

is also documented to have pseudo NI but it differs from Tagalog in that it allows modified noun phrases to be incorporated (Massam 2001).

I present semantic argumentation distinguishing agent voice from patient voice. Patient voice predicates are computed as transitives where agent voice predicates computed as incorporating predicates. GN objects are interpreted within VP where specific objects shift out of VP for interpretation (Diesing 1992). Based on the analyses of Chung and Ladusaw (2004), I apply the operations of RESTRICT and SPECIFY to agent voice and patient voice predicates to arrive at semantic completion. Word order differences are the result of different interpretations at PF and LF. My presentation will expand on this.
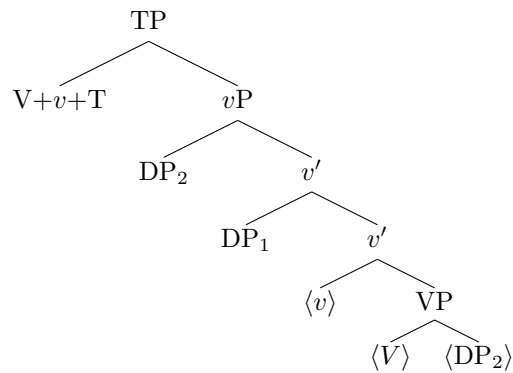

Figure 1: Verb initiality based on V-head movement

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