

Tagalog sluicing reanalyzed

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Sluicing is known to rely on the embedded question formation strategy that is available in a given language. Regular sluicing is based on the semantic and syntactic parallelism between the matrix clause and the elided part (1), while in pseudosluicing the elided part is a copular clause which does not have to show syntactic parallelism (2). Note that, following Barros (2014), the term pseudosluicing is used here slightly differently than in Merchant's (1998) original proposal for Japanese: like sluicing, pseudosluicing is taken to be a type of TP-ellipsis, not an instance of independently available copula drop combined with pronoun drop.

- (1) [IP *Someone left the door open*], but I don't know [CP *who_i* [IP *t_i left the door open*]].
- (2) [IP *Someone left the door open*], but I don't know [CP *who_i* [IP *t_i that was*]].

The ability to ameliorate island violations is a well-known effect of sluicing (Merchant 2001, a.o.). Tagalog sluicing however has been claimed to be sensitive to islands (Kaufman & Paul, 2006; henceforth K&P). Furthermore, it is unclear whether Tagalog has regular sluicing or pseudosluicing. The goal of this paper is to revisit the critical Tagalog data and argue that its sluicing is not exceptional.

K&P report two unusual properties of Tagalog sluicing: sensitivity to islands, illustrated in (3), and the requirement that the matrix clause correlate of the embedded argument wh-word be overt (absence of 'sprouting' as described by Chung et al. 1995), shown in (4).

- (3) *[[*Kilala ni Kim ang taong [may binabasa]*] [*pero hindi niya sasabihin [kung ano.]*]]
know GEN Kim NOM person-LNK EXT read-IPRF.PV but NEG 3sg say-IRR.PV COMP what
Intended: *Kim knows the person who was reading (something) but she won't say what.*
- (4) *[[*Kumakanta si Maria*] [*pero hindi ko alam [kung ano.]*]]
sing-IPRF.AV NOM Maria but NEG 1sg know COMP what
Intended: *Maria was singing but I don't know what.* (examples from K&P)

Closer investigation shows that neither of these observations holds. Complex NPs, coordinate structures, and RC islands do not block sluicing. Consider sluicing with a complex NP island:

- (5) [*Narinig ni Kim ang balita [na inayos ni Fred ang problema]*], [*pero hindi niya alam kung alin*].
hear-PRF.PV GEN Kim NOM news COMP sort-PRF.PV GEN Fred NOM problem but NEG 3sg know COMP which
Kim heard the news that Fred solved a problem, but she doesn't know which.

Next, the second assumed property of Tagalog sluicing - absence of 'sprouting' – does not stand to scrutiny either. Our Tagalog consultants do not find (4) ungrammatical altogether. There is an almost even split in judgments between speakers, with some preferring (6) to (4), and vice versa. Example (6) utilizes the existential construction with *may*, an impersonal predicate used to introduce indefinite arguments (Keenan, 2009; Aldridge, 2012):

- (6) [[*May kinanta*] si Maria sa handaan] [*pero hindi ko alam kung ano.*].
EXT sing-IPRF.PV NOM Maria DAT party but NEG 1sg know COMP what
Maria sang something at the party, but I don't know what.

The difference between (4) and (6) lies in information structure: while (4) is neutral/broad focus (i.e., a suitable reply to *What happened?*), (6) emphasizes the object (i.e., a suitable reply to *What did Mary sing?*).

Given these new facts, the unacceptability of (3) results not from the presence of an island as such, but from the fact that the relative clause also contains an existential construction with *may*. While islands alone do not block sluicing, as shown in (5), and neither does the existential construction on its own, as in (6), the two phenomena together create a cumulative effect which leads to a degradation in judgments. If so, the unacceptability of (3) may follow from a particularly heavy processing load, a proposal which has been offered for at least some apparent island violations (Kluender 1998, 2004). To further test this proposal we are currently conducting a judgment-task experiment.

K&P further point out that it is impossible to tell whether the default Tagalog sluicing strategy is regular sluicing or pseudosluicing, based on the fact that speakers often resort to a pseudosluicing construction containing the demonstrative pronoun *iyon* ‘that’ when spelling out the ellipsis site in sluicing:

- (7) [[[*May ibinigay*] si *Kim* kay *Bill* *kahapon*,] [*pero hindi ko alam* [*kung ano iyon*.]]]
 EXT give-PRF.PV NOM Kim DAT Bill yesterday but NEG 1sg know COMP what that
Kim gave Bill something yesterday, but I don't know what it is.

However, it might be the case that in a language allowing both, there is no way to differentiate between the two. Under Barros’ (2014) approach to ellipsis licensing - the so-called Unconstrained Pseudosluicing Hypothesis - the identity condition on sluicing cannot distinguish between copular and non-copular sluices in the determination of identity. Barros (2014) reaches this conclusion by formulating the identity condition on sluicing as a conjunction of two independent conditions, the Remnant Condition (“The remnant must have a syntactic correlate, which is a semantically identical XP in the antecedent”), and the Sluice Condition (“The sluiced question and the Question under Discussion (QuD) made salient by the antecedent must have the same answer at any world of evaluation”). The combination of the two conditions is simultaneously rigid enough and flexible enough to allow both sluicing and pseudosluicing when both are possible in the ellipsis site.

Therefore, there are three main conclusions to be made: (i) Tagalog sluicing shows island sensitivity only in cases where the antecedent clause contains an existential construction; (ii) the possibility of sprouting depends on the information structure of the clause; (iii) applying Barros’ (2014) approach to sluicing licensing, it follows naturally that in cases where both sluicing and pseudosluicing is available, Tagalog will allow either. Most importantly, Tagalog sluicing adheres to the known cross-linguistic generalizations on the nature of sluicing.

Selected references:

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