

Word order and the syntax of *ang* in Tagalog

Rackowski (2002) and Rackowski and Richards (to appear) have recently argued that the topic (*ang* phrase) in Tagalog moves to the left edge of *vP* (or VoiceP in Rackowski (2002)) through a process of specificity shift. This mechanism has many advantages: it explains how case could be assigned to the topic; it predicts the pattern of specificity for different topic arguments; and it allows a derivation of the Philippine languages' topic-only constraint on extraction that follows logically from Minimalist principles.

This theory of specificity shift crucially depends on the assumption that “the final word order is derived from A-bar scrambling after the stage at which the specificity shift occurs” (Rackowski & Richards to appear: p. 58). Before scrambling, the topic argument has a position immediately to the right of the verb (which is adjoined to the Tense head), but after scrambling this sequence is obscured.

Since scrambling is generally considered optional, the pre-scrambling word order should be one of the possibilities available at the end of the derivation. It is troubling that this particular word order (topic after verb) is non-preferred; for many speakers it is even ungrammatical. For example, some speakers have the judgements shown in (1), where the topic *ang bata* may not precede the Agent *ng nanay*:

- (1) Tagalog: ‘A/the mother bought a/the fish for the child.’
- a. ***Ibinili** [**ang bata**] [ng nanay] [ng isda].
 bought-BT TOP child GEN mother GEN fish
- b. **Ibinili** [ng nanay] [**ang bata**] [ng isda].
 bought-BT GEN mother TOP child GEN fish

I argue in this paper that word order presents a critical problem for the analysis of Rackowski and Richards, based on data from Tagalog and Ilocano. Ilocano shares most of Tagalog’s important syntactic properties, yet it has a more restrictive word order than Tagalog, as its determiners have fewer morphological cases. (2) illustrates the problem again: the topic phrase *ti bagas* ‘the rice’ is immediately post-verbal in (2a), which is ungrammatical although this is the ordering that we should expect due to specificity shift.

- (2) Ilocano: ‘A/The woman will take the rice out of a/the sack for a/the child.’
- a. ***Ikkaten** [**ti bagas**] ti babai iti sako para iti ubing.
 take.out-GT TOP rice GEN woman DAT sack for DAT child
- b. **Ikkaten** ti babai [**ti bagas**] iti sako para iti ubing.
 take.out-GT GEN woman TOP rice DAT sack for DAT child

This paper argues that, in clause types other than Actor-Topic (sometimes considered passives), the pre-scrambling position of the topic is second, after the semantic Agent argument. In this view (1b) and (2b) represent the default ordering. I propose an alternative way of forming such constructions, in which the Voice head assigns case rightward for a non-Actor topic. I also suggest a way of deriving the constraint on extraction from a requirement that the argument agree with the verb at multiple stages of the derivation, reminiscent of Huang & Tang’s (1991) analysis of long-distance anaphora in Chinese.

References

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