

Existential Constructions in Tagalog

Overview: This talk propose a syntactic analysis for the two types of Existential Constructions in Tagalog shown in (1)-(2), which I refer to as verbal and nonverbal existential constructions, respectively. My proposal (contra Freeze 1992) maintains that no ‘special’ syntax is associated with the existential construction, and that the syntax of existential constructions is non-distinct overall from the syntax associated with other clause types in the language—verbal as well as non-verbal. I propose an account of some of the ‘unusual’ properties associated with existential clauses—particularly with respect to case—that are not so much structurally based, but are tied instead to the semantic properties of the existential predicate.

Arguments: Freeze (1992) proposes the analysis for existential constructions that is outlined in (3). One important prediction that this analysis makes is that the locative element should exhibit syntactic properties associated with subjects. I argue that this prediction is not borne out. For instance, subjects cannot be fronted to a position before the predicate unless they are followed by *ay* (see (4)). Adjuncts can, however, appear in front of the predicate without *ay* [(5)]. Crucially, the locative element in the existential construction may also precede the predicate—*roón*—(as in (6)), therefore showing that it behaves like a syntactic adjunct rather than a subject.

Problem: The analysis of existential constructions that I adopt is one in which the existential constructions has the same overall syntax that is associated with other clauses types in the language. This conclusion leads to the expectation that existential clauses in (1)-(2) should have a surface profile that is identical to clauses with (intransitive) verbal predicates (as in (7)), and clause whose main predicate is non-verbal (as in (8)). This expectation is not clearly born out, however. In particular, the case patterns of the NP arguments in the existential constructions differ from those of ‘ordinary’ clause types. In verbal existential clauses, the NP argument bears accusative case, while in the non-verbal existential construction, the NP appears to bear no case morphology at all. This is in contrast to the structures in (7)-(8), where the single NP argument invariably bears nominative case.

Analysis: My analysis of the case properties associated with the existential construction are based on the following observation: Arguments bearing nominative case are obligatorily specific/definite (Schachter 1976), but this condition is in conflict with the requirement—imposed by the existential predicate—that the NP be indefinite (more generally, *weak*—in the sense of Milsark 1974) (see (10)). Because of this conflict, case on the NP in the existential cannot be nominative, and must therefore come from some other source. In the case of the verbal existential construction, I claim that the relevant case licenser is *v*, which is responsible for assignment of accusative case to internal arguments (i.e., objects) more generally (following Chomsky 1995; Arad 1998; among many others). In the non-verbal existential construction, however, *v* is not present and there is—moreover—no available case assigner for the NP argument.

My explanation for the case properties of non-verbal existential constructions lies in the claim that the NP argument in these constructions is incorporated into the existential predicate (*roón*), and therefore does not require case (see, Baker 1988; Massam 2001). I claim, moreover, that the element *may*, which appears only in the non-verbal existential construction, is a morpho-syntactic indicator to this incorporation. Specifically, following the insights of recent work by Chung and Ladusaw (2003) on Maori for instance, I claim that *may* is an (indefinite) determiner whose job it is to morpho-syntactically signal semantic incorporation, or—in their terms—the application of the semantic composition operation *Restrict*. I support this analysis with syntactic arguments showing that *may* is a determiner, as well as semantic arguments showing that *may* appears in other contexts with similar semantic properties.

Conclusion: The analysis proposed in this talk brings together basic assumptions about the syntax of verbal and non-verbal clauses along with assumptions about the semantic properties of the existential predicate to explain the specific clustering of properties associated with existential constructions in Tagalog. The overall picture that emerges is quite different from that originally proposed by Freeze (1992), in that it does not rely on construction specific assumptions about the derivation of existential constructions.

Existential Constructions in Tagalog

Data:

- (1) Mayroón -g aksidente dito kahapon.
MAY.there L accident here yesterday
'There was an accident here yesterday.'
- (2) Magkáka-roón [*ng-* [isá-*ng* rebisyón *ng* (sa) librón-*ng* iyán]].
Fut.[] there Obj. one L revision of Loc book -L this
'There will be a revision of this book.' (E 1568)
- (3) *Freeze's Analysis of the Existential Construction*
Existential construction is derived from the predicate locative construction (3a) by a syntactic operation that raises the predicate locative into subject ([Spec, TP]) position.

- a. [TP [T_{TP} T [PP [P_{TP} *dito*] aksidente]] (underlying)
- b. [TP [T_{TP} T [PP [P_{TP} t] aksidente] [P_{TP} *dito*]] (raise locative predicate)

Inversion of subject

- (4) Si Ben *(ay) napakatamad.
Si Ben Top very.lazy
'Ben is very lazy.'

Inversion of locative adjunct

- (5) Sa iskwelah-an k-um-a-kain si Ben.
Loc school Af.eat.imperf si Ben
'Ben eats at school.'

Inversion of the locative in the existential

- (6) Dito (ay) mayroó -ng aksidente kahapon.
here Top MAY.there L accident yesterday
'There was an accident here yesterday.'
- (7) Sunóg ang baura. (8) Na-sú-sunog ang basura.
burnt ang rubbish imperf.be-burnt ang rubbish
'The rubbish is burnt.' 'The rubbish is burning.'
- (9) May(roón-g) manok/ *lahat ng mga manok/ ni Fred /nito sa bahay.
may.there L chicken/ all the chickens/ ni Fred/ them Loc house
'There is a chicken/*the chicken/*all of the chickens/*Fred/*them in the house.'

References: (1) Arad, M. 1998. *VP Structure and the syntax-lexicon interface*, PhD dissertation; (2) Baker, M. 1988. *Incorporation*. Chicago University Press; (3) Chung, S. and B. Ladusaw (2004). *Restriction and Saturation*, MIT Press; (4) Freeze, R. (1992). 'Existentials and other locatives', *Language* 68, 553-595; (5) Massam, D. 'Pseudo Noun Incorporation in Niuean', *NLLT* (6) Milsark, G. 1974. *Existential sentences in English*, PhD dissertation, MIT. (7) Schachter, P. 1976. 'The subject in Philippine languages', in (ed.) Charles Li, *Subject and Topic*, Academic Press