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Minimalist Questions for the Nominalist Analysis of Tagalog Syntax

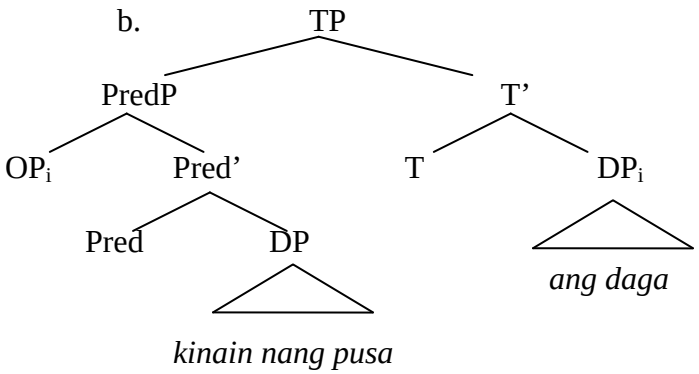
Edith Aldridge
University of Washington

1.0 Introduction

Kaufman (this volume) develops an analysis of Tagalog clause structure in which the main predicate has a nominal, rather than verbal, structure. Kaufman proposes that Tagalog lacks a *v* functional category, forcing lexical roots to merge with *n* and project a nominal predicate. The external argument of a transitive, i.e. non-actor voice, clause is treated as a possessor merged in [Spec, *n*] and assigned genitive case. A DP layer is projected above this which is selected by a Pred functional head. Pred also selects a null operator in its specifier which identifies a missing argument position in the predicate. This missing argument corresponds to the participant in the event denoted by the voice morphology on the verb. In a patient voice clause like (1a), this argument is the patient or theme. The operator is then coindexed with the predicate-external subject. T is treated as a null copula; its specifier houses PredP, while the subject is selected as its complement.

(1) a. [$_{TP}$ [$_{PredP}$ K<in>ain nang pusa] ang daga].
<BEG>eat:PV GEN cat NOM rat
'The rat was the eaten one of the cat.'
('The cat ate the rat.')

b.



This analysis is claimed to account for the celebrated extraction restriction in Philippine languages, according to which the argument identified by the voice morphology on the verb is the only DP eligible to undergo A'-movement. Thus, a theme or patient can be extracted from a patient voice clause, while the external argument is ineligible. An external argument can only be extracted when the verb carries actor voice morphology.

(2) a. Ano ang b<in>ili nang babae?
what NOM <BEG>buy:PV GEN woman
'What did the woman buy?'

b. *Sino ang b<in>ili ang tela?
who NOM <BEG>buy:PV NOM cloth
'Who bought the cloth?'
c. Sino ang b<um>ili nang tela?
who NOM <AV:BEG>buy GEN cloth
'Who bought the cloth?'

In (1b), all DPs except for the nominative DP are contained within the DP dominated by PredP, which is an island to extraction, thus accounting for the inability of any DP but the nominative subject to dislocate.

Another morpho-syntactic characteristic of Tagalog accounted for by the nominalist approach is the fact that voice-inflected verbs can stand alone as nominalizations without additional morphological marking.

(3) a. ang b<um>ili
NOM <AV:BEG>buy
'the buyer/one who bought'
b. ang b<in>ili
NOM <BEG>buy:PV
'the (thing) bought'

However, there are a number of syntactic questions which remain unanswered by the analysis in (1b). In what follows, I summarize some of these questions and the problems which they pose for Kaufman's analysis. I then introduce an alternative Minimalist approach along the lines of Rackoski (2002), Rackowski and Richards (2005), and Aldridge (2004).

2.0 Syntactic Questions for the Analysis

The analysis in (1b) makes strong claims about the islandhood of the predicate and subjecthood of the nominative argument. However, there are reasons to believe that not all nominative arguments are syntactic subjects. It is likewise questionable to claim that predicates never allow extraction. Furthermore, it is not clear how long distance extraction can be accounted for by (1b).

2.1 Scrambling and Extraction of non-DPs

The analysis in (1b) accounts straightforwardly for the inability of genitive DPs to move to clause-initial position. However, a question arises with non-DP arguments. Tagalog has fairly free word order; it is quite natural for non-nominative constituents to follow the subject. Non-DPs are also free to front to clause-initial position.

(4) a. I-bi-bigay=ko ang bulaklak kay Maria.
CV-IMPRF-give=1S:GEN NOM flower to Maria
"I will give the flowers to Maria."

b. Kay Maria=ko i-bi-bigay ang bulaklak.
to Maria=1S:GEN CV-IMPRF-give NOM flower
"I will give the flowers *to Maria*."

Both (4a, b) are unexpected on Kaufman's assumption that the predicate phrase is an island to extraction. Kaufman acknowledges this potential problem, but claims that oblique phrases are base merged as high adjuncts adjoined to PredP. It should be noted, however, that the PPs in (4) are goals, which are presumably arguments of the verb and not adjuncts. Note further that genitive DP arguments can also follow the subject. This directly contradicts the claim that genitive DPs are unable to vacate the PredP.

(5) [$_{TP}$ [$_{PredP}$ B<um>ili t_{DP}] ang babae] nang bahay.
<AV:BEG>buy NOM woman GEN woman
'The woman bought a house.'

2.2 Nonfinite Clauses

In Tagaglog, controlled gaps in nonfinite clauses occur in semantic subject position, which does not necessarily correspond to the nominative argument position. This is one of the classic arguments that the external argument, regardless of case-marking, functions as the syntactic subject in ergative languages (Anderson 1976, Larsen and Norman 1979, Payne 1982, Dixon 1994, Manning 1996, among many others). Furthermore, nominative case is available for the internal argument in (6a).

(6) a Nag-ba-balak ang babae-ng [PRO tulung-an ang lalaki].
AV:BEG-IMPRF-plan NOM woman-LNK help-LV NOM man
'The woman is planning to help the man.'
b Gusto nang babae-ng [PRO b<um>ili nang libro]
want GEN woman-LNK <AV:NONFIN>buy GEN book
'The woman wants to buy a book.'

Neither of these facts is predicted by the analysis in (1b), in which the nominative argument is treated uniformly as the subject. Particularly damaging is the availability of nominative case in (6a). Presumably, nominative case is assigned by T in (1b), since T is the only case-assigning functional category which c-commands the subject DP. It is then surprising that this case is available for assignment in the nonfinite clause in (6a), given that nonfinite T is generally unable to assign case. Note that an analysis based on exceptional case-marking is also not tenable, since nominative case is assigned in the matrix clause and therefore unavailable for the embedded subject.

2.3 Long Distance Extraction

Another question raised by clausal embedding is how to account for long distance *wh*-dependencies. Kaufman treats argument *wh*-questions as base generated copular constructions, rather than being derived through movement. The *wh*-phrase is the predicate, while the rest of the clause, accompanying the nominative case marker, is treated as the subject.

(7) [$_{TP}$ [$_{PredP}$ OP$_i$ [$_{DP}$ Ano]] [$_{T'}$ [$_{DP}$ ang b<in>ili=mo]$_i$]]?
what NOM <BEG>buy:PV=2S.GEN
'What did you buy?'

This does not pose any obvious problems for mono-clausal questions, since the operator launched by the predicate *wh*-phrase can be coindexed with the nominative constituent, which itself refers to the argument identified by the voice morphology of the verb. However, it is difficult to see how coindexation is possible between a *wh*-phase and a predicate which are separated by one or more clause boundaries. In (8), both the matrix and embedded verbs have patient voice morphology. This marking on the embedded verb identifies the gap as the theme of the embedded verb.

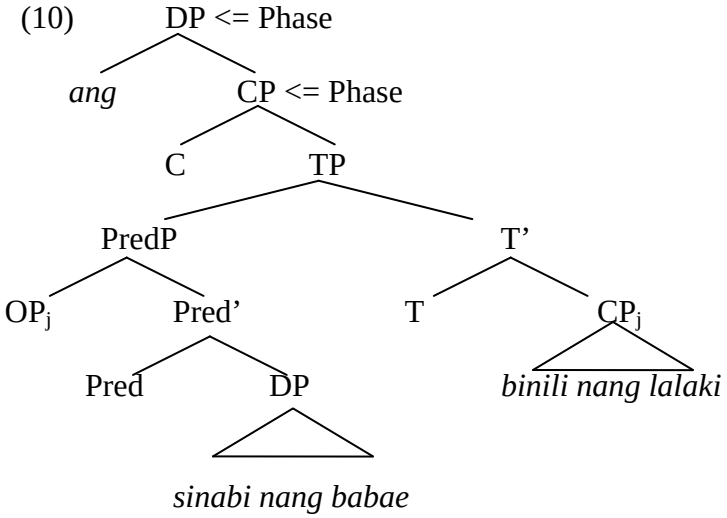
(8) Ano ang s<in>abi nang babae-ng
what NOM <BEG>say:PV GEN woman-LNK
b<in>ili nang lalaki?
<BEG>buy:PV GEN man
'What did the woman say that the man bought?'

What is identified by the patient voice morphology on the matrix verb is the theme of *sinabi* 'said'. This is clear from a monoclausal example, in which the theme is questioned with precisely this voice marking.

(9) Ano ang s<in>abi nang babae?
what NOM <BEG>say:PV GEN woman
'What did the woman say?'

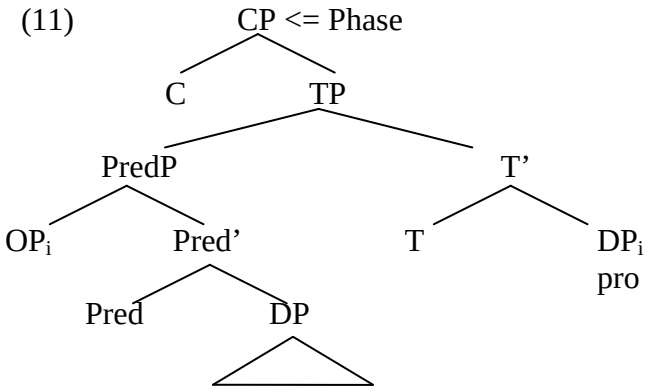
In the long distance example, the embedded CP is presumably the subject of *sinabi nang babae* 'the woman said', since the embedded clause expresses what was said. We therefore expect coindexation between the operator launched by *sinabi nang babae* and the subject CP.

(10)



The embedded subject CP itself contains a predicate which should launch its own operator. This is the operator which is intended to be coindexed with the *wh*-word. However, it is unclear how this can happen, since the operator associated with the gap is separated from the matrix predicate by multiple phase boundaries, beginning with the CP boundary of the complement clause, as shown in (11). This is in turn dominated by CP and DP nodes of the matrix subject shown in (10).

(11)



binili nang lalaki

It is also unlikely that the *wh*-word in (8) can be associated with the operator launched by the higher predicate *sinabi nang babae* 'the woman said'. This patient voice affix does not identify the theme role of the *wh*-word but rather is required regardless of what type of gap appears in the complement clause. (12) shows that an embedded agent gap also requires the same voice marking on the higher verb.

(12)

Sino	ang	s<in>abi	nang	babae-ng
who	NOM	<BEG>say:PV	GEN	woman-LNK
[$_{CP}$	b<um>ili		nang	libro]?
	<AV:BEG>buy		GEN	book

'Who did the woman say bought the book?'

Therefore, it should be clear that the *wh*-phase must be associated with the missing argument in the complement clause. But it is not clear how this long distance dependency can be established in Kaufman's analysis.

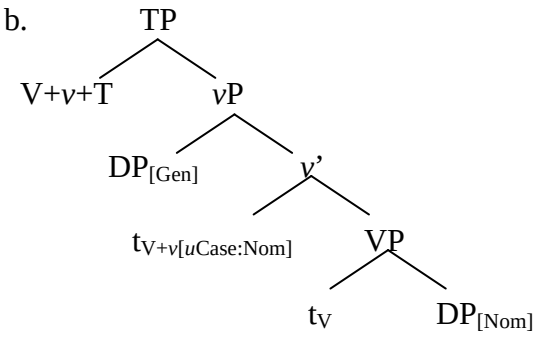
3.0 A Minimalist Alternative

Abstracting away from specific differences among the Minimalist approaches to Tagalog case and word order, all recent accounts have in common the proposal that arguments are base merged in their thematic positions and the external argument asymmetrically c-commands internal arguments within the *v*P (Richards 2000; Rackoski 2002; Rackowski and Richards 2005; Aldridge 2004, 2005, 2008, to appear). In Aldridge's approach, genitive case on an external argument is inherent case assigned by transitive *v* to its specifier, while nominative case is structural case valued on the first DP in the c-command domain of the case-assigning probe, *v* in

a transitive clause[1]. Verb-initial word order is derived by moving the verb to T or an aspectual projection above *v*P.

(13) a. [$_{TP}$ [$_{PredP}$ K<in>ain nang pusa] ang daga].
<BEG>eat:PV GEN cat NOM rat
'The cat ate the rat.'

b.



This analysis accounts for the well known observation that the external argument asymmetrically c-commands internal arguments for the purposes of reflexive and variable binding.

(14) a. S<in>ampal ni Juan ang sarili=niya.
<BEG>slap:PV GEN Juan NOM self=3S:GEN
'Juan slapped himself.'
b. *S<in>ampal nang sarili=niya si Juan.
<BEG>slap:PV GEN self=3S:GEN NOM Juan
'Juan slapped himself.'

Kaufman discounts the use of reflexive binding as evidence for c-command, claiming that binding can be accounted for semantically according to the thematic hierarchy. However, a thematic account cannot easily be extended to quantifier scope interactions. Kaufman's structure in (1b) predicts that nominative arguments uniformly take wide scope over other elements in the clause. However, there is an interesting asymmetry between internal and external argument nominatives. External arguments take wide scope over negation, while internal arguments can scope under negation.

(15) a. Hindi nag-basa ang [lahat nang babae] nang libro.
NEG AV:BEG-read NOM all LNK woman GEN book
'All the women did not read the book.' (No woman read the book.)
=> 'all' > NEG

[1] Aldridge analyzes Tagalog as an ergative language. Genitive case on external arguments is treated as ergative, and nominative case is taken to be absolutive. Genitive case on non-absolutive objects is treated as inherent case assigned by the lexical verb. See De Guzman (1988), Gerdts (1988), Liao (2004), and Payne (1982) for other ergative analyses of Tagalog.

b. Hindi b<in>asa nang babae ang [lahat nang libro]
NEG <beg>read:PV GEN woman NOM all LNK book
'The woman didn't read all the books.' (read some, but not all)
=> NEG > 'all'

The asymmetry can be accounted for by the analysis in (13b) by assuming that internal arguments undergo quantifier raising to the edge of *v*P (Fox 2000 and others). The external argument, whose surface position is [Spec, *v*P], is able to adjoin to TP at LF. Assuming that negation heads a functional projection between T and *v*P, the scope asymmetry in (15) is accounted for straightforwardly.

The fact that the predicate does not form an island in the structure in (13b) also accounts for the scrambling facts in (4) and (5). The celebrated extraction restriction, which applies only to DPs, can be accounted for straightforwardly in an Agree based approach to movement: locality will ensure that it is the highest DP in *v*P which becomes the goal of a probe in the next phase. In Aldridge's implementation, transitive *v* can host an EPP or edge feature, which attracts the nominative DP to its outer specifier. This places the nominative object in the highest position in the edge of *v*P, making it the DP eligible to enter into an Agree relation with a probe in the next higher phase. Internal argument DPs in actor voice clauses do not move to the *v*P phase edge, because actor voice is analyzed as intransitive or antipassive and does not host an edge feature. Consequently, the external argument remains the highest DP in *v*P. It receives nominative case, and will be the DP eligible to undergo movement.

DP focus constructions and *wh*-questions are analyzed as clefts, with the *wh*-constituent forming the matrix predicate. The rest of the clause is treated as a headless relative clause occupying matrix subject position. Long distance extraction receives the same account. The reason that the higher verb needs to have non-actor voice morphology is because only transitive, i.e. non-actor voice, *v* can host an edge feature and allow movement of the null operator from the embedded clause into the higher clause.

(16) Ano [$_{DP}$ ang [$_{CP}$ OP [$_{TP}$ s<in>abi nang babae-ng
what NOM <BEG>say:PV GEN woman-LNK
[$_{CP}$ t_{OP} [$_{TP}$ b<in>ili nang lalaki t_{OP}]]]]]?
<BEG>buy:PV GEN man
'What did the woman say that the man bought?'

Kaufman objects to the cleft analysis on the basis of its use of a null operator. Yet, his analysis also employs a null operator, as shown in (1b). Kaufman also claims that the lack of weak crossover effects argues against a movement analysis of Tagalog *wh*-questions. I point out, however, that Aldridge (2004) does report a weak crossover effect in (17a). The relative lack of a weak crossover effect for some speakers may be due to the well known observation that this effect is ameliorated in null operator constructions (Lasnik and Stowell 1991).

(17) a. Sino$_{*i/j}$ ang y<in>a-yapos nang nanay niya$_i$?
who NOM IMPRF<BEG>-hug:PV GEN mother 3S:GEN
'Who is his mother hugging?'

b. Sino$_i$ ang y<um>a-yapos sa anak niya$_i$.
who Abs IMPRF<AV:BEG>-hug DAT child 3S:GEN
'Who is hugging his/her child?'

In short, Kaufman's case against the Minimalist approach is not convincing. More importantly, the Minimalist approach is able to account for a range of empirical facts which are left unexplained in Kaufman's approach.

4.0 Conclusion

The morphological identity between nominal and verbal uses of argument-taking roots is indeed an interesting characteristic of Tagalog syntax. However, this fact alone does not warrant a fundamental overhaul of syntactic analysis. On the contrary, Distributed Morphology (Halle and Marantz 1993, Harley 1994, and others) also assumes an underlying categorial identity among lexical roots. Surface categorial differences are the result of merger with a categorizing functional head, *v* for verbs and *n* for nouns. Kaufman rejects such an approach to Tagalog, claiming rather that Tagalog lacks a *v* projection altogether. However, part of his reasoning for the absence of verbalizing morphology in the language actually serves to question this claim. Kaufman cites the common method of loan word adaptation in Tagalog, in which a borrowed noun can be used as a verb by adding one of the voice affixes. The ease in which borrowed nouns can be verbalized is claimed as evidence that all predicates in Tagalog are nominal.

(18) mag-basketbol
AV-basketball
'play basketball'

However, the opposite view would equally seem to be valid. The fact that the borrowed noun must be accompanied by the verbalizing prefix also suggests that the prefix is itself a light verb, specifically *v*. Supporting evidence for this view comes from the fact that this type of borrowing is not limited to Tagalog – or even Austronesian languages in general. Japanese also productively verbalizes borrowed noun roots by adding the light verb *suru*.

(19) tenisu suru
tennis do
'play tennis'

Therefore, I think it is premature to reject the potential contribution of a Minimalist and/or Distributed Morphology approach to some of the seemingly exotic aspects of Tagalog syntax.

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