

# PREFOCUS AND VERBAL ORIENTATION IN SARANGANI BILAAAN

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Four types of grammatical focus have been noted by Norman Abrams (1970) for predicates in Bilaan:<sup>1</sup> subject focus, object focus, directional focus, and instrument focus. In an earlier paper (1961) he referred to them as actor focus, goal focus, directional focus, and instrument focus. This focus system in Bilaan cannot be fully grasped without an understanding of the three classes of verbal bases and their different orientations to the participants in an action. In this paper I would like to explore these orientations as well as certain semantic features and case relationships (Fillmore 1968) which seem relevant to the analysis of the prefocus system in Bilaan.

Abrams divides word bases which can be inflected in Bilaan into three syntactic classes on the bases of the kinds of affixes they take. These classes are: verb, noun, and adjective. This paper will deal primarily with verbs.

Most Bilaan verb bases can be inflected with one or more focus markers; however, the majority of Bilaan verb bases can also indicate one kind of focus without any overt affixation. This particular focus is termed the prefocus of the base. In this respect Bilaan is unlike many Philippine languages where, as a rule, a verb base must be affixed with a marker to denote focus.

## 2. ORIENTATION OF BASES

Bilaan verbal bases fall into three basic classes: instrument oriented, object oriented, and subject oriented. This orientation is reflected in the focus system.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The Sarangani dialect of Bilaan has approximately ten thousand speakers, living in the southern part of Cotabato Province on the island of Mindanao. The phonemes of Sarangani Bilaan are: a, á (low back), b, d, e, (high central), é (mid front), f, g, h, i, k, l, m, n, ng, o, ð (glottal stop), s, t, u, w, y. The research on which this paper is based was carried out during residence in Margos, Glan, Cotabato, from 1970 to 1971 under the auspices of the Summer Institute of Linguistics. The analysis was facilitated by the linguistic workshops held at Nasuli, Malaybalay, Bukidnon, By Dr. Joseph Grimes in May-July 1971 and Dr. Alan Healey in March 1972, under the auspices of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, and by the help of Dominga Dakan, a speaker of Sarangani Bilaan, from Margos, Glan, Cotabato.

<sup>2</sup>Sarangani Bilaan verbal bases have been classified grammatically in more detail than this by McLachlin and Blackburn (1968). In their article focus in Bilaan is divided into subject, object, direction, and accessory focus. Seven verb stem classes are described on the basis of their occurrence in verbal clauses. These surface structure divisions reflect the intrinsic case relationships and orientation

## 2.1 INSTRUMENT ORIENTED BASES

An instrument oriented base describes an action in which an instrument is necessary for its performance. Only such instrument oriented bases can point out the instrument of an action as topic (T), and they do this by the lack of an affix on the base. That is, the unaffixed base has instrument prefocus. Instrument oriented bases can be inflected for subject focus with *m-* and for object or direction focus with *n-*.<sup>3</sup>

## 2.2 OBJECT ORIENTED BASES

An object oriented base describes an action in which an object is necessarily involved, and it points out this object as topic by the absence of any affix on the base. That is, the unaffixed base has object prefocus. Object oriented bases affixed with *m-* point out the subject as topic and, affixed with *n-*, point out the direction as topic. An object prefocus base cannot be affixed to point out instrument as topic even though it is possible to use an instrument to perform a particular action. Such an instrument can occur in emphasis position preceding the predicate, but in such cases the object still remains the topic of the clause.

## 2.3 SUBJECT ORIENTED BASES

A subject oriented base is basically intransitive in nature and points out the subject as topic by the lack of an affix on the base. That is, this unaffixed base has subject prefocus. Some subject oriented bases can also be inflected for direction focus with *n-*, others can take no overt affixation for focus.

## 2.4 MULTIPLE ORIENTATION BASES

A base may have a multiple orientation and in that instance is a member of more than one class. A particular verb may be subject oriented as well as instrument or object oriented. *Dyo* 'bathe' is one of these bases with both subject orientation and instrument orientation. In *dyo agu* (bathe I-T) 'I'm bathing' its subject orientation is evident in that this unaffixed form has subject prefocus. As a subject oriented base it can take no overt

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of the verbs. Classes I and VII are instrument oriented bases: Class I bases are transitive action bases and Class VII are intransitive action bases. Class II and Class IV bases are object oriented bases: Class II have an agent as source with a patient which is moved away from the source and in Class IV the subject is an agent and the object is a patient-goal. The object and instrument oriented bases of Classes I, II, IV, and VII, when unaffixed, have as topic the goals and instruments which McLachlin and Blackburn describe as having accessory focus. Class III verbs are neutral verbs and noun bases. Class V verbs are basically multiple prefocus bases. As subject oriented bases they belong to Class V, and as instrument or object oriented bases they belong to Classes I and II, respectively. Class VIA are agent oriented subject oriented bases. Class VIB are noun bases. The case relationships of the bases in McLachlin and Blackburn's classes, as well as those in other classes, are described in the body of the present paper.

<sup>3</sup>Focus markers *n-* and *m-* represented as prefixes in this paper. They also occur as infixes. For an explanation of the morphophonemic changes see McLachlin and Blackburn (1968:119-120).

affixation for any other focus. On the other hand, in *dyo-gu sabun* (bathe-I soap-T) 'I bathe with soap' its instrument orientation is seen. In this form it has instrument prefocus. As an instrument oriented base it can be affixed with *n*- object focus: *danyo-gu tingà-gu* (object-focus-bathe-I child-my-T) 'I'm bathing my child'. It can also be affixed with *m*-subject focus: *damyo agu tingà-gu* (subject-focus-bathe I-T child-my) 'I'm bathing my child'. As an instrument oriented base it denotes a change of state of the patient.

*Slob* 'drop by' is a base with both subject orientation and object orientation. In *slob agu* (drop-by I-T) 'I'm dropping by' its subject orientation is evident and this unaffixed form has subject prefocus. It cannot be overtly inflected for any other focus as a subject oriented verbal base. In *slob-gu kasilà* (drop-by-I sweet-potato-T) 'I'm dropping off sweet potato', its object orientation is evident and denotes the patient's motion away from the agent. In this form it has object prefocus. It can be inflected with *n*- direction focus: *sanlob-gu bali ani* (direction-focus-drop-by-I house-T this) 'I'm dropping (something) off at this house'; and with *m*- subject focus: *samllob agu kasilà* (subject-focus-drop-by I-T sweet-potato) 'I'm dropping off sweet potato'.

## 2.5 NEUTRAL BASES

In Bilaan one finds a number of verbs which are not used in their uninflected form. At first glance they appear to be neutral verb bases containing no specific orientation. They seem to have no prefocused form and to require overt inflection for focus. There is evidence, however, suggesting that these verb bases also have an orientation even though it is not as clearly seen as it is in bases which occur in their prefocused form. There may be several reasons why these bases do not occur uninflected. One reason might be illustrated with the base *basa* 'read' which I consider to be an instrument oriented base. The overt affixation of this base follows the pattern of other instrument oriented bases but the unaffixed instrument prefocused form is not used. Affixed with *n*- object focus the range is in focus: *bnasa-gu liblu ani* (object-focus-read-I book-T this) 'I'm reading this book'. Affixed with *m*- subject focus the agent is in focus: *masa agu* (subject-focus-read I-T) 'I'm reading'. Perhaps the instrument, eyes, is considered so obvious that one normally need not mention it. This instrument may in fact be a part of the semantics of the verb itself. Only when an unusual instrument is used would it be necessary to mention it. For example, when the process of reading Braille was described to a Bilaan speaker, he had no difficulty producing the instrument prefocus form: *basa-n tnalo-an* (read-he finger-his-T) 'he reads with his fingers'. It seems likely that other apparently neutral bases are not in fact neutral but are oriented to subject, object, and instrument just as other verbal bases.

## 3. SEMANTIC CLASSIFICATION OF BASES

### 3.1 SEMANTICS OF INSTRUMENT ORIENTED BASES

Instrument oriented bases can be divided into action and process bases (Chafe 1970, 95-104). Action bases can be subdivided on the basis of transitivity.

3.1a *Transitive Action Bases*, such as *klang* 'cut apart', are instrument oriented bases and have instrument prefocus: *klang-gu balò* (cut-apart-I bolo-T) 'I cut apart (something) with a bolo'. A change of state or condition of the patient is an intrinsic semantic characteristic

of these bases. When such a base is affixed with *n-* object focus its topic object is a patient which is changed: *kanlang-gu kayo* (object-focus-cut-apart-I wood-T) 'I cut the wood apart'. When affixed with *m-* subject focus the topic subject is an agent in the underlying semantics: *kamlang agu kayo* (subject-focus-cut-apart I-T wood) 'I'm cutting the wood apart'. Other examples include: *dak* 'pound', *tbél* 'sew', *taté* 'roast', *fwes* 'open', *banò* 'kill', *tibe* 'cut', *sfā* 'chew', *dyo* 'bathe', and *stifun* 'gather'.

3.1b Another class of transitive action bases which have both instrument and subject orientation are represented by *bgang* 'break' and *fugen* 'fell'. These bases have the same semantic characteristics as those above and the same structural potential except that they rarely occur with *m-* subject focus: *bgang-gu batu basu* (break-I rock-T glass) 'I break the drinking glass with a rock'. *bangang-gu basu* (object-focus-break-I glass-T) 'I break the drinking glass'.

3.1c *Intransitive Action Bases*, such as *ayeng* 'fly', *agu* 'walk', and *ila* 'run away', are instrument oriented bases and have instrument prefocus when unaffixed: *ayeng-an fafak-an* (fly-it wing-its-T) 'It flies with its wings'. Motion of the agent is intrinsically part of the semantics of this class. When such a base is affixed with *n-* direction focus, the topic direction is the source away from which the motion is directed: *nayeng-an kayo én* (direction-focus-fly-it tree-T that) 'It's flying from that tree'. Affixed with *m-* subject focus the topic subject is the agent: *mayeng anuk* (subject-focus-fly chicken-T) 'the chicken is flying'.

Intransitive action bases, such as *kef* 'climb', *tutuk* 'hammer', *yak* 'come up', and *kitak* 'tickle', are very similar to the bases described above. However, when affixed with *n-* direction focus the range of the action is the topic and the type of motion depends on the semantics of the individual verb: *nkef-gu kayo én* (direction-focus-climb-up-I tree-T that) 'I'm climbing up that tree', *knitak-am kenen* (direction-focus-tickle-you him-T) 'you tickle him', and *nanè-la bali én* (direction-focus-stay-they house-T that) 'they stay in that house'.

3.1d *Process Bases*. Instrument oriented process bases, such as *saluf* 'smell' and *ite* 'see' have an experiencer instead of an agent as subject; when unaffixed the base has instrument prefocus: *saluf-gu ilung-gu* (smell-I nose-my-T) 'I smell with my nose'. When affixed with *n-* object focus the topic object is a source or stimulus to the process: *snaluf-an bun nalaf* (object-focus-smell-he odor-T fish) 'he smells the fish odor'. When affixed with *m-* subject focus the experiencer is the topic subject: *smaluf ale* (subject-focus-smell they-T) 'they smell (something)'.

3.1e *Instrument Oriented Nouns*. Although Bilaan verbs are the main theme of this paper, it seems relevant to mention the large number of noun bases which function as verbs. One group of these are nouns used as instruments. Some of these may be affixed with *m-* and *n-* focus markers which in this case have the added function of verbalization. When thus verbalized the use of the instrument is the action of the verb. In some cases where an instrument such as *lifo* 'fire' may have many uses (burn off, singe, cook, warm), one particular use is adopted as the action of the verb: *nlifo-gu mse* (object-focus-use-fire-I rice-T) 'I'm cooking rice', *mlifo agu* (subject-focus-use-fire I-T) 'I'm cooking (rice)'. Other instruments such as *dado* 'a plow' have only one basic use and that use is adopted as the action of the verb: *dnado-gu datal ani* (object-focus-plow-I level-T this) 'I plow this level area', *dmado agu* (subject-focus-plow I-T) 'I'm plowing'. These nouns function like transitive action verb bases and have the same semantic characteristics as that class of verbs.

Some nouns such as *bà* 'mouth' function very much like intransitive action verbs. They can be affixed with *n-* direction focus and *m-* subject focus: *nba-an agu* (direction-focus-mouth-it I-T) 'it is barking at me', *mbà ayem* (subject-focus-mouth dog-T) 'the dog is barking'.

### 3.2 SEMANTICS OF OBJECT ORIENTED BASES

Object oriented bases are divided into action-process and process bases. Action-process bases are subdivided on the basis of their focus potential and semantic characteristics.

3.2a *Action-process Bases.* The first class of action-process bases has an agent-source as subject and a patient which is moved away from the source as an object. This class includes: *blé* 'give', *slob* 'drop off', *dsù* 'sacrifice', *bat* 'throw away', *utà* 'vomit', and *fule* 'plant'. When prefocused the patient-as-object is the topic: *blé-gu lakù-gu* (give-I dress-my-T) 'I'm giving away my dress'. When affixed with *n-* direction focus the goal or range of the action is the topic direction: *nuta-an laku-an* (direction-focus-vomit-she dress-her-T) 'she vomited on her dress', *dansu-an kayo én* (direction-focus-sacrifice-he tree-T that) 'he sacrificed at that tree'. Affixed with *m-* the agent source is in focus: *damsù agu* (subject-focus-sacrifice I-T) 'I am sacrificing (something)'.

3.2b In the second class the subject is an agent and the object is a patient-goal. Some of the members of this class are: *tdò* 'teach or point out', *dlu* 'chase', *tlo* 'call', *dek* 'command', and *lalò* 'follow'. When prefocused the patient-as-goal is topic: *dlu-gu kodà* (chase-I horse-T) 'I'm chasing the horse'. These bases cannot be affixed with *n-* direction focus. When affixed with *m-* subject focus the agent is topic subject: *damlu kenen kodà* (subject-focus-chase he-T horse) 'he's chasing the horse'.

3.2c *Process Bases* such as *linge* 'hear' have an experiencer as subject and the object in focus is a stimulus. When these bases are prefocused the stimulus is the topic object: *linge-gu talu-an* (hear-I say-he-T) 'I hear what he is saying'. When affixed with *m-* subject focus the experiencer is the topic subject: *mlinge ale* (subject-focus-hear they-T) 'they hear'.

Another group of bases which appear to belong in this class are a group of emotion bases which do not occur in their unaffixed form. Perhaps the emotion is the covert object. When affixed with *m-* subject focus the experiencer is the topic subject: *malbut agu* (subject-focus-furious I-T) 'I'm furious', *mlidù kenen* (subject-focus-sad he-T) 'he's sad', *myà kenen* (subject-focus-embarrassed he-T) 'he's embarrassed'.

3.2d *Object Oriented Nouns.* Some noun bases like *ukét* 'bark, peeling' and *saal* 'floor' seem to function like object oriented action-process bases. When such a base is affixed with *n-* direction focus the topic direction is the source away from which the patient is moved: *nukét-am buléng ani* (direction-focus-remove-peeling-you citrus-fruit-T this) 'you remove the peeling from this citrus fruit'. Affixed with *m-* subject focus the agent is topic subject: *mukét agu* (subject-focus-peeling I-T) 'I'm peeling (it)'. This class of nouns has the same surface manifestation as the instrument nouns mentioned earlier in this paper. The decision to separate the two groups was made on the basis of the semantics of the bases themselves. Members of the instrument noun group are indeed instruments such as *gabás* 'saw' or *fune* 'broom', whereas *saal* 'floor', and *ukét* 'peeling' are not instruments.

3.2e Another class of noun bases, which include *tu* 'perspiration', *ulé* 'laugh', and *kaw* 'cough', function like object oriented process bases. These bases cannot be affixed with *n*-direction focus. When affixed with *m*- subject focus the experiencer is the topic subject: *mtu agu* (subject-focus-perspire I-T) 'I'm perspiring'.

Meteorological noun bases like *nus* 'wind', *silà* 'lightning', and *tlitik* 'mist' can also take *m*- subject focus marker. The derived form is an ambient verb with no stated subject, *mnus* (subject-focus-wind) 'the wind is blowing'.

### 3.3 SEMANTICS OF SUBJECT ORIENTED BASES

Subject oriented bases can be divided into three groups: agent-as-subject, patient-as-subject, and experiencer-as-subject.

3.3a *Agent-as-Subject Bases* are basically intransitive. In one class the agent moves in a specific direction which is part of the semantics of the base itself: *subè agu* (go-upstream I-T) 'I am going upstream'. When affixed with *n*- direction focus the range of movement is in focus: *snube-am yéél én* (direction-focus-move-upstream-you river-T that) 'you go upstream on that river', *fnusuk-gu sol én* (direction-focus-enter-I hole-T that) 'I'll enter through that hole', *tnufa-gu lagimit* (direction-focus-go-downstream-I lagimit-T) 'I'm going downstream on the Lagimit (river)'.

3.3b Another class of subject oriented bases, which includes bases such as *ftud* 'rest' and *tadag* 'stand', are used in three ways: With subject prefocus they are used both as action bases with an agent performing an action, and as process-state bases with a patient in a state. *Ftud agu* (rest I-T) is ambiguously 'I am resting', an action, or 'I am at rest', a state. Affixed with *n*- object focus they become action process bases with an object which is a patient: *fantud-gu mata-gu* (object-focus-rest-I eye-my-T) 'I rest my eyes', *tnadag-am kayo én* (object-focus-stand-you tree-T that) 'you stand that tree up'. In this latter usage with *n*- these bases could perhaps be regarded as having a second orientation, but they do not fit well into any of the instrument oriented and object oriented classes described above.

3.3c Another class of subject oriented bases where the subject is an agent includes *slob* 'stop by', *tlang* 'visit', and *dyo* 'bathe'. In this intransitive usage these bases cannot be inflected with either *n*- direction focus or *m*- subject focus. Two of these bases, however, have a second usage: *dyo* instrument oriented (3.1a) and *slob* object oriented (3.2a).

3.3d *Patient-as-Subject Bases*, such as *fugen* 'fall' and *bgang* 'break', are process verb bases and have a patient as subject: *fugen kayo* (fell tree-T) 'the tree fell', *bgang saboy* (broke bottle-T) 'the bottle broke'. As subject oriented bases they have subject prefocus but do not occur with *n*- or *m*- focus markers. However, these bases are also used as instrument oriented bases, and as such have instrument prefocus and can be affixed with *n*- object focus and occasionally with *m*- subject focus (see 3.1b).

3.3e *Experiencer-as-Subject Bases* fall into several sub-classes. Bases like *tlaab* 'trip', *tatek* 'fall', *bnen* 'sneeze', and *tluyab* 'yawn' are process verbs with an experiencer as the topic subject: *tlaab kenen* (fell he-T) 'he fell'.

Other bases such as *bitil* 'hungry', *bsol* 'satisfied', *fulung* 'know how', and *kudang* 'sleep' are states that are the result of a process.

TABLE 1  
TWO CLASSIFICATIONS OF SARANGANI BILAAN VERBAL BASES

Section in paper	Basis of Grammatical Classification				Basis of Semantic Classification			
	Focus Markers				Kind of Action	Underlying Roles		
	Subj.	Obj.	Dir.	Instr.		Subj.	Obj.	Dir.
I.O. Bases								
3.1a	<i>m-</i>	<i>n-</i>		#	change of state	agent	patient	
3.1b		<i>n-</i>		#	change of state	agent	patient	
3.1c	<i>m-</i>		<i>n-</i>	#	motion	agent		source
3.1c	<i>m-</i>		<i>n-</i>	#	motion, action	agent		range
3.1d	<i>m-</i>	<i>n-</i>		#	process	experiencer	stimulus	
3.1e	<i>m-</i>	<i>n-</i>		(noun)	change of state	agent	patient	
3.1e	<i>m-</i>		<i>n-</i>	(noun)	action	agent	patient	
O.O. Bases								
3.2a	<i>m-</i>	#	<i>n-</i>		action-process	agt-source	patient	goal, range
3.2b	<i>m-</i>	#			action-process	agent	pat-goal	
3.2c	<i>m-</i>	#			process	experiencer	stimulus	
3.2c	<i>m-</i>				emotion	experiencer		
3.2d	<i>m-</i>	(noun)	<i>n-</i>		action-process	experiencer		source
3.2e	<i>m-</i>	(noun)			process	experiencer		
3.2e	<i>m-</i>	(noun)			ambient	experiencer		
S.O. Bases								
3.3a	#		<i>n-</i>		motion	agent		range
3.3b	#				action or process-state	agent		
		<i>n-</i>			action-process	agent	patient	
3.3c	#				action	agent		
3.3d	#				process	patient		
3.3e	#				process	experiencer		
3.3e	#				state	experiencer		
3.3e	#				sensation	experiencer		

A group of sensations also seem to be states as a result of a process: *gilak* 'tickle', *katal* 'itch', and *fdē* 'sting'. The subject of these verbs could be considered an experiencer-range: *katal agu* (itch I-T) 'I itch', *katal sigal-gu* (itch arm-my-T) 'my arm itches'.

Experiencer Oriented bases are rarely inflected overtly for focus. When they are, often the result is a verb with restricted or unusual meaning: *bitil* 'hungry', *bnitil ale* (direction-focus-hungry they-T) 'they are experiencing famine'.

## 4. CONCLUSION

When one compares the structural patterns of focus affixation of instrument, object, and subject oriented bases as summarized in table 1, it becomes quite clear that three classes which are not completely identical with structural classes of bases do indeed exist. Although semantic classes it is significant that there are semantic classes which fairly consistently correspond to structural classes.

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