# PRIORITY OF OBJECT IN TAGALOG

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## 0. INTRODUCTION

In the choice of Topic in Tagalog, a priority is observed, that is, the priority of object complement. Here we may inquire how this priority is motivated.

What is considered to be essential in this respect would be the difference of the degree of definiteness between object complement and the others, i.e., actor and directional complements.

The distinction with respect to definiteness may be crucial in the coding in Tagalog which is characteristically sensitive to definiteness, and this distinction is likely to be reflected in the coding. Thus, we may assume simultaneously the priority of object and the priority of actor/directional complement; theoretically, the latter is as natural as the former.

Now, their actual function is to restrict the coding. Their effects, however, are not equivalent; that is, they are not equally effective in coding restriction. That which Tagalog selects is, indeed, more effective than the alternative.

## 1. CHOICE OF TOPIC

### 1.1. CONSTRUCTIONS

For more than one definite complement, the choice of Topic is illustrated by constructions like (1)-(3) below. Actor complement, directional complement and object complement are hereafter designated by A, D and O; here, they are definite. Meanwhile, /A/, /D/ and /O/ designate actor Topic, directional Topic and object Topic:

(1) A D:
  a. /A/ D: Pumunta sa Baguio si Pedro
    Bumalik sa gusali ang bata
    Sumagot sa propesor si Juan

  b. A /D/: Pinuntahan ni Pedro ang Baguio
    Binalikan ng bata ang gusali
    Sinagot ni Juan ang propesor

    (a) ~(b): 'Pedro went to Baguio'
    'The child returned to the building'
    'Juan answered the professor'

(2) A O:
  A /O/: Binili ni Juan ang bangka
    Ginawa ng modista ang baro
    Binabasa ni Juan ang nobela
    'Juan bought the boat'
    'The dressmaker made the dress'
    'Juan is reading the novel'

(3) A D O:
  A D /O/: Ibinigay ng titser sa istudyante ang premyo
    Dadalhin ng ina sa bata ang regalo
    Binili ni Juan sa tindahan ang libro

'The teacher gave the student the prize'
'The mother will bring the gift to the child'
'Juan bought the book from the store'

Without O as in (1), A and D can be Topics. Whereas, when O exists as in (2) and (3), O is to be Topic; that is, in (2), /A/ is impossible; in (3), on the other hand, neither /A/ nor /D/ is realized.

The priority of O as Topic (hereafter O-priority) is thus illustrated.[1]

## 1.2. O-PRIORITY

Topic in Tagalog is regarded as a controller in the coding rather than topic proper, and we may say that the actual function of the above-mentioned O-priority is to restrict the coding. Meanwhile, when O-priority is interpreted as a coding restriction, it is, nevertheless, possible to assume an alternative coding restriction.

**1.2.1.** First, Topic in Tagalog must be distinguished from topic proper; otherwise, in (2), for example, in accordance with the actual topicality, /A/, as well as /O/, could occur as in (1) where, really, /A/ and /D/ are possible.

The fact that Topic in Tagalog is distinguished from topic proper is easily understood when compared with the topic constructions in Japanese which possess topic proper. In Japanese, in fact, in the case of (2), for example, in accordance with the actual topicality, the counterpart of A or the counterpart of O is topic; that is, both (a) and (b) below occur: in (a) the counterpart of A is topic; in (b), on the other hand, topic is the counterpart of O. Compare (a)/(b) with (2) *Binili ni Juan ang bangka* 'Juan bought the boat':

    a.    John wa sono hune o katta
    b.    sono hune wa John ga katta

where topic is marked by *wa* (*John* is topic in (a), *sono hune* 'the boat' in (b)), while accusative as in (a) and nominative as in (b) are marked by *o* and *ga;* *katta* is 'bought'; *sono* is a demonstrative (employed here to express the definiteness unambiguously).

**1.2.2.** In contrast, Topic is regarded as a controller in the coding, if the manner of agreement is different from ordinary cases (person/number; as to number, however, see below).

Verbs 'agree' with their Topic; namely, the affixes of verbs are selected in accordance with Topic. For instance, in (1a)/(1b): *Pumunta sa Baguio si Pedro/Pinuntahan ni Pedro ang Baguio* 'Pedro went to Baguio', in accordance with Topics /A/ i.e. *si Pedro* in (1a); /D/ i.e. *ang Baguio* in (1b), the affixes *-um-/-an* are applied to the base *punta* 'go'.

Furthermore, it is noted that we know also an agreement in terms of number by means of pluralized verbs, though this agreement is possible for /A/ alone; moreover, it is optional. Namely, for plural /A/, the affixes for the plural, i.e., *magsi-, magsipag-, magsi-*

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[1]However, notice the case where the verbs like *isip* 'think about', *kwento* 'tell a story about', etc. are treated as A O construction (cf. (2)), in which case O's express referential meanings (cf. Schachter & Otanes, 318); in this case, /A/ is possible as well as /O/, unlike (2) above:

    (i)    A O  (O: referential meaning):
            a. /A/ O: Nag-isip siya ng paglalakbay niya
            b. A /O/: Inisip niya ang paglalakbay niya
            (a) $\sim$(b): 'He thought about his trip'

where, while O is definite: *paglalakbay niya* 'his trip', /A/ (*siya*) occurs as well as /O/.
The co-occurrence of (a) and (b) above might be caused by the parallelism between the constructions (i) A O and (ii) A Rf (Rf designates referential adverb) below, where Rf, as well as A, can be the Topic.
    (ii)    A Rf:
            a. /A/ Rf: Nag-usap sina Rudy tungkol sa giyera
            b. /A /Rf: Pinag-usapan nina Rudy ang giyera
            (a) $\sim$(b): 'Rudy and the others talked about the war' (Cf. fn. 5)

*pang-* and *-nga-* can be employed in accordance with the plurality. For instance, while we have *kumakanta siya/sila* 'He sings'/'They sing' irrespective of number, in the case of plural Topic, the alternative by the pluralized verb *magsikanta* sing (pl.)' (imperfective form: *nagsisikanta*) may occur, i.e., *Nagsisikanta sila* 'They sing' (cf. Schachter & Otanes: 334-6).

Topic, thus, being a coding controller, we will see that the actual function of O-priority is to restrict the coding.

**1.2.3.** The coding restriction by O-priority is obvious, when the case where there is no such priority is considered, i.e., (4)-(6) below where we see a 'free' coding (A, D and O are definite):

(4)  A D:  a.  /A/ D
          b.  A /D/

(5)  A O:  a.  /A/ O
          b.  A /O/

(6)  A D O:  a.  /A/ D O
            b.  A /D/ O
            c.  A D /O/

Whereas, with O-priority, as was illustrated by (1)-(3), the coding becomes restricted: if (4) above is intact (see (1)), (5a), in the case of (5), and (6a)/(6b), in the case of (6), are excluded, as is shown by (i)-(iii) below:

(i)  A D:  a.  /A/ D     (1a)
          b.  A /D/     (1b)

(ii)  A O:  a.  /A/ O     excluded
           b.  A /O/        (2)

(iii)  A D O:  a.  /A/ D O  excluded
              b.  A /D/ O  excluded
              c.  A D /O/    (3)

**1.2.4.** Now, as is observed also in languages of subject-controller, the coding restriction itself is natural. In these languages, in fact, the choice of coding controller, i.e. subject, is more or less restricted.

For instance, let us see the case of French illustrated by (7)-(9) below

(7)  a.  Jean va à Paris
     b.  *Paris:* subject = excluded[2]
         'Jean goes to Paris'
(8)  a.  Jean a frappé Paul
     b.  Paul a été frappé par Jean
         'Jean hit Paul'
         'Paul was hit by Jean'
(9)  a.  Jean donne ce livre à Paul
     b.  *Paul:* subject = excluded
     c.  Ce livre est donné à Paul par Jean[3]
         'Jean gives this book to Paul'
         'This book is given to Paul by Jean'

[2]Exceptionally indeed, passive sentences may occur for *(dés)obéir* and *pardonner*, as in *Jean est (dés)obéi* and *Jean est pardonné* (only agentless passives occur for them) vis-à-vis *Paul (dés)obéit à Jean* and *Paul pardonne* à Jean. (Cf. Grevisse     1417.)

[3]Subjects of agented passives are normally animate and sentences like (9c) are very rate.

Here the coding is restricted in (7) and (9). In (7), there is no counterpart of (7a); *Paris* can be by no means be controller, i.e., subject. Likewise, in (9), there is no counterpart of (9a, c); *Paul,* indirect object in (9a, c), cannot be subject.

**1.2.5.** Certainly, as was shown in 1.2.3., O-priority restricts the coding. Meanwhile, it will be, nevertheless, necessary to inquire into another possibility, i.e., that which can be tantamount to O-priority with respect to the coding restriction.

The alternative which we would assume is A/D-priority (cf. fn. 7). This is likely to be motivated by the significant difference with respect to the definiteness between A and D on the one hand, and, O on the other.

With respect to definiteness, A and D are treated alike, as opposed to O. It will be natural that this distinction is reflected in the coding in Tagalog that is characteristically sensitive to the definiteness, giving rise to O-priority or A/D-priority. (In Tagalog, coding controller, i.e. the Topic, must be definite. This characteristic sensitivity to the definiteness is obvious when compared with languages like English where coding controller, i.e. subject, can be indefinite.[4])

From a theoretical point of view, the alternative, i.e., A/D-priority, is equally natural. However, it is, in fact, not tantamount to O-priority. As will be seen below, A/D-priority is, indeed, less effective than O-priority.

## 2. O-PRIORITY VERSUS A/D-PRIORITY

### 2.1. DEFINITENESS

The difference of the degree of definiteness between A and D on the one hand, and O on the other, is significant.

**2.1.1.** First, consider the definiteness of A and D.

As to A, it is usually definite. In fact, when A is indefinite, Tagalog must make use of a particle, i.e., *isa* (applied to A) in order to specify the indefiniteness of A; otherwise, A is expected to be definite. For instance, in constructions like *Ginawa ng modista ang baro,* A is normally definite: "The dressmaker made the dress'; on the other hand, in order to express the indefiniteness of A: 'a dressmaker', *isa* is required, as in *Ginawa ng isang modista ang baro* 'A dressmaker made the dress'.

Meanwhile, D will be very frequently definite as well, which might be shown by the statistics in English mentioned above (cf. fn. 4). According to the statistics, dative object and locative object are very frequently definite: the degree of definiteness of dative object is remarkably high, more than 95%. At the same time, in the case of locative object, the degree of definiteness, if relatively lower than dative object, is, nevertheless, very high (almost 90%).

**2.1.2.** Secondly, consider the degree of definiteness of O.

In contrast to A/D, the degree is by no means high, which might be, once again, shown by the above-mentioned statistics; according to the statistics, in fact, the frequency of the definite direct object is relatively low, that is, about 50%.

Aside from inevitable discordances between direct object and O (see below), this percentage (about 50%) does not mean that O is 'normally' indefinite; it means, instead, that in the case of O, when compared with A/D, the degree of definiteness is significantly low.

Certainly, so long as O is considered independently, it may not be said that the degree of definiteness is totally low; however, when considered in comparison with A/D, it is, nevertheless, true that there exists a significant difference between A and D on the one hand, and O on the other.

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[4]In English (written form), for example, insofar as declarative-active-affirmative sentences are concerned, it may not be said that indefinite subjects are totally exceptional. According to Givón (§2.2). indeed, the percentage is not negligible, about 10%, though usually they occur in the existential construction. In any case, indefinite subjects are not excluded.

Naturally, discordances between direct object (in English) and O are inevitable. For instance, the Tagalog equivalents of the transitive verbs like *help, visit,* etc. have the construction: A D rather than A O, as in. (a)/A/ D: *Tumulong kay Pedro si Juan;* (b) A /D/: *Tinulungan ni Juan si Pedro;* (a) ~ (b) 'Juan helped Pedro'. However, these discordances will not be crucial.

Aside from them, what is to be noted is the discordance resulting from the fact that O can correspond to subjects, that is, subjects of passive sentences. Since they are normally definite (more than 90%, according to the above-mentioned statistics), the frequency of the definite O which includes those which correspond to them may be, other things being equal, a little higher. However, it will not be important, either, because passive sentences occur rather rarely (only 4% for a less educated register, according to the same statistics).

## 2.2. EFFECTS OF O-PRIORITY AND A/D-PRIORITY

With respect to definiteness, A and D are treated alike, as opposed to O; and, as was mentioned, we see two possibilities, i e., O-priority and A/D-priority (cf. 1.2.5.). They make it possible to restrict the coding; but they are not equivalent.

**2.2.1.** Consider the effect of these two possibilities. Beforehand, the difference of the coding restrictions by (I) O-priority (see 1.2.3.) and (II) A/D-priority is illustrated by (10) below (A, D and O are definite):

| (10) | | (I) O-priority | | | | (II) A/D-priority | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (4) | a. | /A/ D | (1a) | (4) | a. | /A/ D | |
| | b. | A /D/ | (1b) | | b. | A /D/ | |
| (5) | a. | /A/ O | excluded | (5) | a. | /A/ O | |
| | b. | A /O/ | (2) | | b. | A /O/ | excluded |
| (6) | a. | /A/ D O | excluded | (6) | a. | /A/ D O | |
| | b. | A /D/ O | excluded | | b. | A /D/ O | |
| | c. | A D /O/ | (3) | | c. | A D /O/ | excluded |

In the case of (II) above, as in the case of (I), the coding becomes restricted for (5) and (6), because, as will be seen, (5b) and (6c) are excluded.

**2.2.2.** Now let us compare the effects by (I) O-priority and (II) A/D-priority. (A, D and O below are definite (see 2.2.1.).)

First, so long as those which occur are A and D (case (4)), the coding which results from (II) is the same as that which results from (I). In the case of (II), because A and D are treated alike (as opposed to 0), that is, because A and D have equal priority, both A and D can be the Topic; hence (4a) and (4b). In the case of (I), on the other hand, since 0 does not occur at all, 0-priority in question is irrelevant to the coding; hence, the coding being intact, both (4a) (see (1a)) and (4b) (see (1b)) occur. Consequently, with regard to (4), (II) is tantamount to (I).

Secondly, (II) restricts the coding in terms of (5) to the same degree as (I), too. In fact, (II) excludes (5b), because, according to A/D-priority, O cannot be Topic when there exists A and/or D; (I), conversely, (5a) is excluded. Hence, with regard to (5) as well as (4), (II) is tantamount to (I).

However, in the case of (6), unlike (4) and (5), (II) is not tantamount to (I): in fact, (II) is less restrictive than (I). In this case, (II) excludes (6c), because, according to A/D-priority, O cannot be Topic when A and/or D exist; at the same time, by virtue of the equivalence of A and D mentioned above, (6a) and (6b) occur. In contrast, (I) excludes (6a) and (6b). As to (6), thus, (II) is considered to be less effective than (I).

In consequence, because (I) and (II) restrict the coding to the same degree for (4)/(5),[5] we may say that (I) is, as a whole, more effective than (II).

Now, what Tagalog actually takes is (I) rather than (II); in other words, Tagalog takes that which is more effective.

## 3. REMARKS AND CONCLUSION

**3.1.** Usually the coding controller (normally designated by 'subject') is, in principle, independent of the definiteness even if it is very often definite. Whereas coding controller in Tagalog (designated by 'Topic') cannot be independent of the definiteness; namely, it must be definite.

The definiteness is, thus, essential in the coding in Tagalog. Hence, the sensitivity to the distinction with respect to the definiteness between (i) and (ii) below may be natural in Tagalog unlike other languages

(i)     O
(ii)    A, D

Meanwhile, the adverbs like B and Rf are likely to belong to the class (ii) rather than (i) in accordance with their definiteness. Consequently, we would have (i')/(ii') below:

(i')    O
(ii')   non-O

From a practical point of view (i.e. when basic sentences are considered), however, we suppose (i)/(ii).

**3.2.** Now the sensitivity to the distinction (i)/(ii) above would motivate O-priority or A/D-priority when a coding restriction is considered vis-a-vis a sort of 'anarchy' (free coding). Certainly, they restrict the coding; but they are not equally effective. That which Tagalog takes is O-priority, and is more effective than the alternative.

Finally, it is noted that the motivation by the distinction (i)/(ii) alone is likely to be natural; since what is essential in the coding in Tagalog is the definiteness rather than semantic role,[6] the motivation by semantic role rather than the definiteness is unlikely.[7] For instance, A-priority (instead of A/D-priority according to the definiteness) or the alternative D/O-priority (instead of the alternative O-priority according to the definiteness) could not be natural despite their effectiveness with respect to coding restriction.

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[5]Likewise, with regard to the benefactive adverb (B), (I) and (II) restrict the coding to the same degree.

Since the definiteness of B is likely to parallel A/D rather than O (compare B with dative object), it is natural that B and A/D (rather than O) are treated alike as opposed to O (rather than A/D).

In fact, for the construction A B, (I) and (II) equally permit (a)/(b) below (cf. (4)).

A B     a. /A/ B    Magnunubena kami para kay Juan
        b. A /B/    Ipagnunubena namin si Juan
        (a)⌢(b):    'We will say a novena for Juan'

In the case of (II), because of the equivalence of A/D and B mentioned above, both A and B can be Topic; hence (a) and (b) above, as in (4). In the case of (I), on the other hand, since O does not occur, O-priority is irrelevant to the coding; hence (a) and (b), once again, as in (4).

Meanwhile, the definiteness of referential adverb (Rf) (see fn. 1) is also like to be near to A/D rather than O, and it seems to be natural that Rf and A/D (and B) (rather than Rf and O) are treated alike, as opposed to O (rather than A/D (and B)). And the treatment of Rf like (ii) of fn. 1 is natural as in the case of B above; here, once again, (I) and (II) are equivalent.

[6]For instance, in the case of (a) and (b) below:

(a)     A O (A: definite; O: indefinite)
(b)     A O (A: indefinite; O: definite)

we have, only in accordance with the definiteness, /A/ O and only /A/ O for (a), on the one hand, and A /O/ and only A /O/ for (b), on the other.

[7]Cf. §1.2.5.

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