

Word Order and the Syntax of *ang* in Tagalog*

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1 Introduction

This paper challenges the claim made by Rackowski and Richards, made most recently in Rackowski and Richards (to appear), that Tagalog has a process of Specificity Shift in which a specific argument moves to a position above the External Argument. I introduce word order facts, a type of evidence discounted in their past analyses, to argue that their model makes incorrect predictions. Since Tagalog word order facts are often disputed among speakers, I also appeal to facts from related languages Ilocano and Kalagan. I make the claim that the *ang*-argument does not raise above the External Argument.

Rackowski (2002) and Rackowski and Richards (to appear) have recently argued that the process of Specificity Shift¹ plays a central role in selection of the "topic" or *ang*-argument (a concept to be defined shortly) in the syntax of Tagalog. Their proposal seeks to demonstrate that certain facts about Tagalog syntax, notably the pattern of argument specificity and constraints on extraction, follow naturally from Minimalist principles. In this paper, I challenge this claim by introducing word order facts from Tagalog and related languages Ilocano and

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¹ The phenomenon referred to here as Specificity Shift (Rackowski's term) is frequently referred to in the literature as Object Shift.

Kalagan. I argue that, in fact, the *ang*-argument does not raise above the External Argument, although there may perhaps be a shift of a more limited kind.

2 The *ang*-argument and specificity

2.1 Determiners and case

A Tagalog clause has one argument that has a special status indicated by morphological marking.² This status is marked on a DP by the determiner *ang*, and for this reason I have chosen here to call the marked argument the *ang*-argument. Pronominal arguments are also marked for this status by a special set of forms; I refer to these forms as well with the term *ang*-argument, although the determiner *ang* does not actually appear with pronouns.³

Any argument may become the *ang*-argument, and a number of adjuncts may be promoted to argument status to become the *ang*-argument as well. The *ang*-argument is always specific. Specificity of the other arguments depends on the selection of the *ang*-argument as follows:

- (1) Conditions for specificity of arguments
 - a. If the External Argument (EA) is the *ang*-argument, other arguments can have either a specific or non-specific interpretation.
 - b. If an argument besides the EA is the *ang*-argument, other arguments can have either a specific or non-specific interpretation.
 - c. If an internal argument is inherently specific, such as a pronoun or a proper name, the EA cannot be the *ang*-argument; this internal argument must be allowed at least the option of specific interpretation (in accordance with (1b)).

² There is an exception to this: the recent past construction lacks an *ang*-argument. See Rackowski (2002) for discussion of how her analysis handles this construction.

³ For a complete description of Tagalog determiners and pronouns see Schachter & Otones (1972).

(2) and (3) exemplify these patterns:⁴

- (2) Accusative agreement: other arguments are optionally specific

A-alis-in	[ng	babae]	[ang bigas]	[sa	sako]
RED-take.out-ACC	NOM	woman	T	rice	DAT sack
	[para	sa	bata]		
	for	OBL	child		

‘A/The woman will take the rice out of a/the sack for a/the child.’

- (3) Nominative agreement: other arguments are obligatorily non-specific

Mag-a-alis	[ang babae]	[ng	bigas]	[sa	sako]
NOM.ASP-RED-take.out	T-NOM	woman	ACC	rice	DAT sack
	[para	sa	bata]		
	for	OBL	child		

‘The woman will take some rice out of a/the sack for a/the child.’

(Schachter 1976)

Note that in each sentence a different argument is selected as the *ang*-argument, yet the basic character of the semantic relationship between arguments remains the same. What does change are the possibilities for the specificity of each argument. Also note that an External Argument or direct object that has **not** been selected as the *ang*-argument bears the determiner *ng*.⁵

3 Specificity Shift

Richards (2000) and Rackowski (2002) have claimed that in cases where the *ang*-argument is an internal argument, it has undergone a process of Specificity Shift. This operation moves a specific argument to an A' specifier of *vP*, just above the

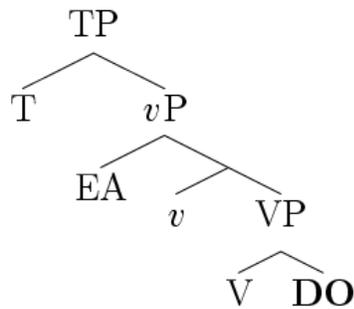
⁴ Gloss abbreviations: NOM=Nominative; ACC=Accusative; DAT=Dative; OBL=Oblique; ASP=aspect; RED=reduplicant. Case affixes on the verb indicate agreement with the case of the *ang* argument. T(case)=the *ang*-argument marker plus the case of the argument. The "T" stands for Topic, and it is a relic of that older term for this argument (cf. Schachter 1976; Richards 2000); I retain the T here for want of a better label.

⁵ The determiner *ng* actually has the phonological form /naŋ/, not /ŋ/ as the Tagalog orthography seems to indicate.

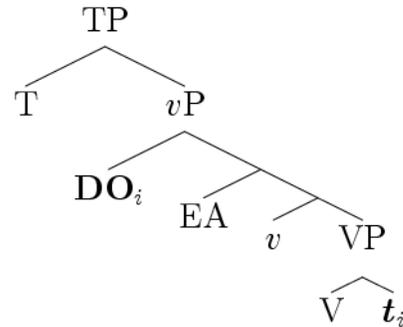
External Argument. The same kind of Specificity Shift has been claimed to exist in Germanic languages such as Icelandic (see Richards (2000); Rackowski (2002); Rackowski & Richards (to appear) and references therein for the comparison between Tagalog and Icelandic). They claim that in Tagalog, Specificity Shift only targets one argument (the highest internal argument), and this first movement blocks subsequent shifts.

The verb is argued to adjoin to the T head (Kroeger 1993), above all arguments. For a clause with only an External Argument (EA) and a direct object (DO), the structure would thus appear as in (4a) before Specificity Shift.⁶ After Specificity Shift, the direct object has moved to a position c-commanding the External Argument, as shown in (4b).

(4) a. Before Specificity Shift



b. After Specificity Shift



Note that in (4b), the direct object (DO) is now closest to the T head above it. Rackowski (2002) argues that T then enters into an Agree relation with the closest argument, in this case the direct object. This Agree relation has a morphological reflex on both the argument, which takes *ang*-argument form as a consequence, and the verb, which copies the argument's Case feature and bears a corresponding agreement affix.

By claiming that the selection of the *ang*-argument results from agreement between T and the closest argument, and by assuming that a specific argument must move to the position closest to T, Rackowski (2002) can explain the pattern of specificity shift described in (1). If an internal argument is specific, it must shift to the left edge of *vP*, where it becomes the *ang*-argument. Thus, the External Argument can only become the *ang*-argument if there is no specific internal argument; this derives condition (1a). If there is an inherently specific

⁶ I have included the T head in the diagram to clarify the overall structure. It should be noted, however, that in the Minimalist framework assumed, the T head is not actually merged into the structure until after Specificity Shift has been completed.

argument then it will always move; this derives condition (1c). Remaining in place would normally cause an argument to be interpreted as non-specific; however, if it cannot move for syntactic reasons (because it is blocked by the first argument that has moved), the semantic consequences of its failure to move are suspended and it may be interpreted as specific or non-specific.⁷ This, in turn, derives condition (1b).

4 Word order

If the *ang*-argument is selected by adjacency to the T head (occupied by the verb), in attested sentences we should expect it to immediately follow the verb in many cases. The careful reader may have already noticed that in (2), repeated here as (5), there is no evidence from the word order that the *ang*-argument *ang bigas* has shifted to the left, since the External Argument *ng babae* appears between it and the verb:

(5) Accusative agreement (= (2))

A-alis-in	[ng babae]	[ang bigas]	[sa sako]
RED-take.out-ACC	NOM woman	T-ACC rice	DAT sack
[para sa bata]			
	for	OBL	child

'A/The woman will take the rice out of a/the sack for a/the child.'

In order to claim that this phrase has in fact shifted to the left, there must be an additional claim that some process that follows Specificity Shift obscures the structure that it produces. Rackowski & Richards approach this problem by stating that “post-verbal word order is relatively flexible in Tagalog, and we assume that the final word order is derived from A-bar scrambling after the stage at which the specificity shift occurs” (to appear: 58). Likewise, Rackowski (2002) states that “word order is generally not available as a structural diagnostic in Tagalog” (36).

I differ from Rackowski and Richards in claiming that word order can in fact be used as a structural diagnostic in Tagalog. Since scrambling is generally held to be optional movement, it should follow that the word order where no argument has scrambled should be available as an option. Tagalog should allow

⁷ This principle of semantic interpretation follows Adger (1994) and Chomsky (2001).

the word order where the *ang*-argument immediately follows the verb, unless independent factors make that order ungrammatical.

In the coming sections I argue that word order facts provide evidence that the *ang*-argument in Tagalog does not move to a position above the External Argument.

4.1 Word order facts in Tagalog

Although Tagalog does indeed have a very flexible word order, there are at least some speakers who have more restrictive judgments. These speakers accept only a subset of the logically possible permutations of argument order. If scrambling is indeed responsible for rearranging arguments, and it is optional movement, then even for speakers with more restrictive judgments the pre-scrambling word order should be an acceptable option. If this order is unavailable, then a theory relying on Specificity Shift must posit an additional obligatory movement to disallow it.

The examples in (6) show two ordering options for a sentence with the same arguments and grammatical relations:

- (6) a. *I-b-in-ili [ang bata] [ng nanay] [ng isda]
OBL-ASP-bought T-DAT child NOM mother ACC fish
'A/the mother bought a/the fish for the child.'
- b. I-b-in-ili [ng nanay] [ang bata] [ng isda]

In (6a), the *ang*-argument immediately follows the verb, in the position we would expect as a result of Specificity Shift. In (6b) the *ang*-argument appears following the External Argument. For speakers who make a grammaticality distinction between these two ordering options, it is sentence (6a), the predicted order, that is ungrammatical.

This word order tendency has been reported by many authors in the past. Some have claimed that it is a property of the External Argument in Tagalog that it occupies the immediately postverbal position (see, for example, Payne 1982). Guilfoyle, Hung & Travis (1992: footnote 20, pp. 394-5) state that “in cases where all the arguments of the verb are lexically realized, the only Topic [= *ang*-argument] that can appear adjacent to the verb is the Agent Topic [= EA *ang*-argument].”

Since Tagalog speakers frequently disagree over this type of word order judgment, however, we should look for other kinds of evidence to support the position that such sentences are ungrammatical. One source of additional evidence is facts from other related languages.

4.2 Evidence from other Philippine languages

The Philippine language family forms a fairly coherent group with very similar syntactic and other properties. Since they share a number of phenomena that are unusual among world languages, they are often referred to in typology as the Philippine Type languages. These languages share the same pattern of argument specificity described in (1), as well as other properties that Rackowski & Richards seek to explain.

Because of their syntactic similarity, I view the word order in other Philippine languages as a valid diagnostic for evaluating syntactic theories about Tagalog. If a theory explaining fundamental aspects of Tagalog syntax is on the right track, it should also make correct predictions for these other languages, or at least provide some additional insight into how they work. A similar strategy has been used in investigating the Romance languages, for example, and has been appealed to by others in the Philippinist literature at various times (Schachter 1976; Guilfoyle, Hung, & Travis 1992; Brainard 1996). In discussing other languages, I continue to use the term “*ang*-argument” to refer to the argument that agrees with the verb. The agreement morphology remains very similar, but the determiner itself changes form. Thus, in the coming discussion “*ang*-argument” must be taken as an abstract designation of an argument with a particular status in the clause, rather than as a reference to a particular morphological marking.

4.2.1 Ilocano

Ilocano is a Philippine language which has a more restrictive word order than Tagalog. Crucially, it lacks a correlate of the Tagalog determiner *ang*. Instead, Ilocano has one determiner *ti* (called the “core” case marker by Rubino (2000)) that marks both the *ang*-argument as well as the External Argument and the direct object, regardless of *ang*-argument status.⁸ Because of its impoverished determiner morphology, word order is the only factor available to determine the roles of arguments.

Ilocano data clearly show that the Agent argument must precede the Object in all cases. I present here one piece of data which can illustrate this point. First, (7) presents a Tagalog example which has another possible word order permutation of the sentence in (2).

⁸ The reader may wonder if the lack of morphological marking might mean that Ilocano does not have an *ang*-argument at all. Ilocano clitics do show a distinction between the *ang*-argument and other arguments, however. The lack of morphological distinction pertains only to full DPs.

(7) (= (40a) in Guilfoyle, Hung, & Travis 1992)

A-alis-in [ng babae] [sa sako] [para sa bata]
red-take.out-acc GEN woman DAT sack for OBL child

[ang bigas].
T-NOM rice

'A/The woman will take the rice out of a/the sack for a/the child.'

Sentence (8a) is a word-for-word translation of (7) into Ilocano. Note that the interpretation is exactly the same as well. Keeping the same interpretation throughout (8), speakers have these grammaticality judgements:

(8) Ilocano

a. Ikkat-en [ti babai] [iti sako] [para iti ubing]
take.out-acc NOM woman DAT sack for OBL child

[**ti bagas**].
T-DAT rice

'A/The woman will take the rice out of a/the sack for a/the child.'

- b. Ikkat-en [ti babai] [iti sako] [**ti bagas**] [para iti ubing].
c. Ikkat-en [ti babai] [**ti bagas**] [iti sako] [para iti ubing].
d. * Ikkat-en [**ti bagas**] [ti babai] [iti sako] [para iti ubing].

Once again, the order in which the *ang*-argument immediately follows the verb is ungrammatical. (8) is notable because, out of four different ordering options, the one we would expect after Specificity Shift is the only one that is unavailable. This evidence from Ilocano is a strong indication that the *ang*-argument is not moving to a position adjacent to T.

4.2.2 Kalagan

Guilfoyle, Hung, & Travis (1992: 412) cite the work of Collins (1970), which they say “briefly describes the word order facts of Kalagan, claiming that the underlying order is: V-Agent [EA]-Object-Instrument-Benefactive-Locative-

Time. She adds that ‘the one regular exception is that when the *ya*-phrase [*ang*-argument] is not the agent, it immediately follows the agent, all other phrases keeping their places.’” Assuming that Collins’s analysis is correct, this gives us evidence for a language in which linear order, and thus presumably structural hierarchy, is consistent and does not match the predictions of Specificity Shift.⁹

Since Kalagan has a fixed word order, an appeal to scrambling no longer seems adequate to explain why the *ang*-argument should not appear immediately following the verb if *ang* status is a result of specificity shift. There are two other possible explanations: either Specificity Shift never takes place, or else another following and obligatory movement rearranges the arguments to give the final word order. The first possibility, as the null hypothesis, seems more plausible, as it is not clear what could motivate a further movement, as well as what its landing site would be.

5 Implications

I have argued against the claim that Tagalog has a Specificity Shift operation that targets the edge of *v*P. This claim is central to the theory proposed by Richards (2000), Rackowski (2002), and Rackowski & Richards (to appear), since other claims that they make are built upon it. By implication, these claims too are called into question by the data just presented.

In particular, from this assumption about the movement of the *ang*-argument to the left edge of *v*P, Rackowski & Richards (to appear) derive the constraint on the formation of relative clauses and argument *wh*-word questions in Tagalog: they must be formed on the *ang*-argument. Their explanation is that at the close of the *v*P phase, only the *ang*-argument, being located at the edge of the phase, is visible to a probe higher in the tree, and so it is the only argument that can move higher. Without an assumption of Specificity Shift, explaining this constraint requires some other type of stipulation.

I do not think that this creates a problem for the principle claim of Rackowski & Richards (to appear), which is about agreement with clausal arguments and extraction out of them. Since that analysis principally concerns adjunct extraction, it should be unaffected by claims about the movement and position of the *ang*-argument.

⁹ The Kalagan data appear to indicate that a movement is indeed taking place, but that it targets a position below the External Argument. While I do not rule out such a movement, Rackowski (2002) presents arguments in favor of an analysis where the *ang*-argument is actually projected in this position, so that it c-commands all other internal arguments. If this is the case, any movement of the *ang*-argument in Kalagan would be very local and would not alter word order.

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