

Topicality of 'Topic' in Tagalog

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Much has been said about the nature of the so-called 'topic' NP in Philippine languages: whether it is topic, subject, or neither, etc. The difficulties in identifying it lie in the fact that the notion of topic or topicality itself is a vague one, and thus whether a certain constituent in a language is topic or not cannot be determined within the language. This paper discusses topicality of the NP in question in Tagalog from typological perspectives, by comparing its distribution and behaviors with those of the prototypical topic in other languages such as Japanese.

In general, there are three means to mark topic in languages: morphological means (via grammatical marker which marks topic); syntactic means (by preposing or inverting it to the sentence-initial position); and phonological means (via pause after it and/or intonation). Tagalog, among other Philippine languages, uses all these three means, with the phonological means occurring along with the syntactic one. This paper focuses on the morphological and syntactic means, and discusses the nature of the NP marked by a 'topic' marker *ang* occurring in its basic, i.e. post-verbal, position and that of the pre-verbal position.

Observation reveals that the occurrence of the post-verbal *ang*-NP shows little similarity with that of topic in other languages, while its nonoccurrence exhibits great similarity with that of other languages. This is arguably because the occurrence of the NP in question is greatly affected by patient-orientedness which penetrates into the grammar of Tagalog and other Philippine languages in general. In discourse, in the neutral context in which the discourse topic is

yet to be established, the occurrence of the *ang*-NP exhibits actor-orientedness, while it is also affected by transitivity of verbs. Thus, one of the difficulties in elucidating the nature of the *ang*-NP lies in the fact that its choice is made according not only to topicality in sentences or discourse but to grammatical patient-orientedness and transitivity.

While the occurrence of post-verbal *ang*-NP is greatly affected by patient-orientedness, that of pre-verbal NP is notably actor-oriented. That is, the actor nominal is grammatically privileged to be preposed to the sentence-initial position to become textual topic, i.e. the actor NP can be preposed even if it is not a sentential topic. This actor-orientedness is also evidenced by text frequency. Although the pre-verbal topic construction seems to be stylistically limited, the pre-verbal topic is shown to mark the viewpoint of the following sentence(s) and its change in text.

Thus, although the post-verbal *ang*-NP and the pre-verbal *ang*-NP both exhibit topicality to a certain degree, their roles and functions are different. While the topic function is generally concentrated in one type of constituent in other languages, it is shared by two *ang*-NPs in Tagalog. Also, the degrees of topicality of the NPs in question are expected to be different among Philippine languages, depending on the degrees of grammatical patient-orientedness and prevalence of pre-verbal topic construction.