

Towards a Better Understanding of Peripheral Voice in Tagalog

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Tagalog is well known for its intricate voice system that allows almost any participant of an event to appear as the subject of a sentence. When choosing a subject among core arguments, referential prominence, i. e. definiteness or specificity, has often been suggested as the decisive criterion (Sabbagh 2016; Foley and Van Valin 1984). However, Latrouite (2011) presents evidence that this claim is too strong and uses prominence considerations on three levels – referential, event-structural, and information-structural – to account for her data. According to her, information-structural considerations can override considerations on the other two levels¹:

- (1) *Nag-hi~hintay sa akin sa gubat ang nag-iisa-ng tao-ng puwede ko-ng*
AV.RLS-IPFV~wait DAT 1SG.DAT DAT forest NOM alone-LK person-LK can 1SG.GEN-LK
pa-kita-an ng tunay na ako – si Gale.
CAUS_{pa}-see-LV GEN true LK 1SG.NOM NOM Gale.

The only person to whom I can show my true self is waiting for me in the forest – Gale.

“In the woods waits the only person with whom I can be myself. Gale.”

(*The Hunger Games*, tag.: p. 5, eng.: p. 6)

Here, Actor and Undergoer are both definite and animate. The Actor is, however, more prominent on the information-structural level since it is focused. The imperfective form of the verb additionally gives the Actor event-structural prominence.

Tagalog also allows for voice constructions that take non-core arguments, such as causes or instruments, as subjects. These peripheral voice forms have been the subject of recent studies (e. g. Klimenko and Endriga 2015), but it remains unclear in which contexts speakers use these voice forms and whether the prominence considerations discussed by Latrouite (2011) apply here as well. If so, one can expect information-structural prominence to be the most important of the three levels, which would make these constructions an suitable testing ground to understand which aspects of information structure make a referent “information-structurally prominent”.

On my poster, I will present the results of a small study on the use of peripheral voice forms. I focused on the use of two forms termed *causative focus* and *instrumental focus* by Schachter and Otnes (1972) in contexts that do not impose syntactic constraints on voice selection. I will refer to them as *causative voice* and *instrumental voice* from here on. These verb forms select an inanimate cause of an event or an instrument as subject; participants which would otherwise appear as peripheral adjuncts introduced by *dahil sa* (because of) or *gamit ang* (using).

Statistics based on the Tagalog translation of *The Hunger Games* trilogy suggest the information-structural status of a participant plays a role in the choice of peripheral voice forms. To verify this, eight consultants were given short text passages taken from the novels. At some point in each text passage, they were asked to choose between a sentence containing one of the peripheral voice forms or a less marked construction conveying the same semantic content, e. g.

- (2) *original:*
Sa halip, i-k(in)a-gulat ko ang igting sa boses niya.
instead CV-(RLS)CAUS_{ka}-surprise 1SG.GEN NOM tension DAT voice 3SG.GEN
Instead the tension in her voice surprises me.

¹AV: Actor voice, CAUS: causative, CV: circumstantial voice, DAT: dative, GEN: genitive, IPFV: imperfective, LK: linker, LV: location voice, NOM: nominative, PL: plural, RLS: realis, SG: singular, STAT: stative.

(3) *modified:*

Sa halip, na-gulat ako dahil sa igting sa boses niya.
instead STAT.RLS-surprise 1SG.NOM because DAT tension DAT voice 3SG.GEN
Instead I am surprised because of the tension in her voice.

(*The Hunger Games*, p. 38)

Due to the scarcity of instrumental voice constructions in the corpus, most target sentences involved causative voice.

The consultants' preferences showed that in most cases both forms were acceptable. However, they preferred to code causes as a peripheral adjuncts if the referent wasn't an eligible topic in that context, i.e. if it was not activated or at least accessible from the immediate context (Lambrecht 1986). Their preference for the peripheral voice construction increased with the activation-status of the subject suggesting that information-structural prominence considerations license the use of peripheral voice forms.

Independent of informations-structural considerations, some verbs are more readily accepted in the causative voice than others. This seems to be true for emotional states in general but some of them appear to be lexicalized forms with a specialized meaning. In these cases the periphrastic construction is not acceptable:

- (4) a. *Na-matay ang pusa ko kahapon.*
STAT.RLS-die NOM cat 1SG.GEN yesterday
My cat died yesterday.
- b. *I-k(in)a-lu~lungkot ko.*
CV-⟨RLS⟩-IPFV~sad 1SG.GEN
I am sorry.
- c. *#Na-lu~lungkot ako.*
STAT-IPFV~sad 1SG.NOM
intended: I am sorry.

Unlike other causative voice forms, speakers do not perceive these verb forms to be particularly formal.

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