

THE SUBJECT IN PHILIPPINE LANGUAGES: TOPIC, ACTOR,
ACTOR-TOPIC, OR NONE OF THE ABOVE?

by

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0 Introduction

The status of subject and object as linguistic universals is commonly taken for granted. For example, the familiar typological classification of languages as SVO, SOV, etc., presupposes the universal occurrence of S's and O's, and this assumption is also implicit in such recent claims about linguistic universals as Keenan and Comrie's (1972) accessibility hierarchy and the set of claims embodied in David Perlmutter and Paul Postal's theory of relational grammar (1). The assumption in question, however, is less than obviously correct in the case of the languages of the Philippines. Students of Philippine languages, at any rate, have shown a disquieting indecisiveness or diffidence with regard to which, if any, of the sentence constituents that occur in these languages are appropriately identified as subjects and objects. Thus a recent paper (McKaughan 1973) is largely devoted to a retraction of its author's earlier usage of the term subject in his writings on Philippine languages in favor of a different usage for this term. And many grammatical descriptions of Philippine languages manage to avoid the subject-object terminology altogether.

The present paper is centrally concerned with the question of whether or not there are identifiable subjects in the sentences of Philippine languages (and only indirectly concerned with the question of whether or not there are identifiable objects). As background for a consideration of this question, Section 1 of the paper presents a sketch of the characteristic sentence structures found in Philippine language. This is followed by a presentation of arguments for and against the subjecthood of three different classes of sentence constituents: the topic (Sections 2 and 3), the actor (Sections 4 and 5) and the actor-topic (Sections 6 and 7). In Section 8, the conclusion is drawn that these three different constituent classes in fact share the properties commonly associated with subjects, and that this division of labor follows from the characteristics of the constituent classes in question. This section also briefly considers the implications of the facts of Philippine languages for the status of subject as a linguistic universal.

1 Characteristic Sentence Structures

This sketch of the characteristic sentence structure of Philippine languages makes use of examples from Tagalog, but the languages of the Philippines are sufficiently similar that examples from any one language can safely be taken as paradigmatic. (Certain differences among the languages will,

however, be mentioned from time to time, both in the course of this sketch and in subsequent sections.) The sketch will be limited to what may be called simple narrative sentences. (Brief descriptions of two other types of simple sentences, verbless sentences and existential sentences, are given in Sections 2 and 3 respectively.)

The simple narrative sentence of Tagalog consists of a verb followed by a string of (one or more) noun phrases, one of which is marked as what Philippinists commonly call the topic. Formally, the topic is marked either by the use of a topic pronoun form or by a prenominal topic marker. Notionally, the topic is always interpreted as definite. (For further discussion of the semantics of the topic, see below.)

Any non-topic noun phrases that occur in the sentence are marked for case--again, either by the use of a distinctive pronoun form or by a prenominal marker. Unlike topics, case-marked noun phrases may in general be interpreted as either definite or indefinite. The cases do, however, have some semantic labels such as actor, goal, direction, beneficiary, etc. (These labels are not necessarily to be taken at face value; in particular, see the discussion of the actor later in this section.) There is also a case-marking affix on the verb, which indicates the case role of the topic noun phrase. Thus there are actor-topic verbs, goal-topic verbs, direction-topic verbs, and beneficiary-topic verbs (among others), and the topics that occur with these verbs may be called the actor-topic, the goal-topic, etc. Each case role is represented only once per simple sentence, so if there is an actor-topic, there is no other actor phrase in the sentence; if there is a goal-topic, there is no other goal phrase, and so on.

Let us look now at some examples. (In the glosses that accompany these and subsequent examples, the following abbreviations are used: AT, GT, DT, and BT preceding the glosses of verbs indicate that the verbs are marked as, respectively, actor-topic, goal-topic, direction-topic, and beneficiary-topic, and A, G, D, B, and T preceding the glosses of nouns and pronouns indicate that the (pro)nouns are marked as, respectively, actor, goal, direction, beneficiary, and topic.)

- 1 a. Mag-salis ang babae ng bigas sa sako
 AT- will-take-out T-woman G-rice D-sack
- para sa bata.
 B-child

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

- b. Aalisin ng babae ang bigas sa sako
 GT-will-take-out A-woman T-rice D-sack

 para sa bata.
 B-child

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

- c. Aalisin ng babae ng bigas ang sako
 DT-will-take-out A-woman G-rice D-sack

 para sa bata.
 B-child

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

- d. Ipag-salis ng babae ng bigas sa sako
 BT-will take out A-woman G-rice D-sack

ang bata.
 T-child

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

The four sentences of 1 all express the same event, but differ from one another in the choice of topic. The topic marker for common nouns is ang, and the topic phrase of each sentence is underlined. Also underlined is the verbal affix that indicates the case role of the topic. Thus mag- in 1a is an actor-topic affix, -in in 1b a goal-topic affix, -an in 1c a direction-topic affix, and ipag- in 1d a beneficiary-topic affix (2). In the English equivalents of these sentences, the topic must always be marked as definite. Thus 1a requires a translation with "the woman," 1b with "the rice," etc. The non-topic noun phrases, on the other hand, may or must be translated as indefinite (3). As the examples show, the non-topic case markers that occur with common nouns are ng (pronounced [nan]) for both actor and goal, sa for direction, and para sa for beneficiary.

It should be pointed out that, except for the initial position of the verb, the ordering of the constituents in the examples of 1 is arbitrary. That is, any ordering of the actor, goal, direction, and beneficiary phrases is permissible, and the topic may occur in any order in relation to the non-topic phrases. Indeed, there does not even seem (surprisingly enough) to be any clearly preferred ordering of postverb constituents in Tagalog. (But, as will be pointed out in Section 4, there are some other Philippine languages for which this is not the case.)

Before concluding this sketch, I would like to say something more about the semantics of the topic and the actor, since the labels topic and actor, though fairly well established in the usage of Philippinists, may be somewhat misleading to those unfamiliar with Philippine languages, and since the topic and the actor (and their intersection, the actor-topic) are the candidates for subjecthood that will be considered in subsequent sections.

According to Li and Thompson (this volume), the term topic, as generally used by non-Philippinists, designates a sentence constituent that has the following semantic properties: 1) the topic is always "definite"; 2) the topic functions as the "center of attention" established by the discourse context. In the usage of Philippinists, however, it is only the first of these properties that is consistently associated with the constituent that is identified as the topic. That this constituent need not represent the center of attention is evident from examples like 2 and 3, in which the discourse context overtly directs attention to a referent which is subsequently represented by a non-topic nominal:

- 2 Kung tungkol kay Maria, hinuhugasan niya
if about Maria GT-is-washing A-she

ang mga pinggan.
T-dishes

"As for Maria, she is washing the dishes."

- 3 Speaker A: Nasaan si Maria?
where T-Maria
"Where's Maria?"

Speaker B: Hinuhugasan niya ang mga pinggan.
GT-is-washing A-she T-dishes
"She's washing the dishes."

In these examples the center of attention established by the discourse context (the preceding "as for" expression in 2, the preceding question in 3) is clearly Maria, but the pronoun that refers to Maria is the non-topic actor pronoun niya and the sentence topic is ang mga pinggan "the dishes."

While the constituent identified as the topic need not represent the center of attention, this constituent does always have a "definite" referent, and expresses, as Diller (1970, p. 128) puts it, "information assumed by the speaker to be shared by the hearer." It is for this reason that the English equivalents of topics are always definite noun phrases, such as common nouns preceded by the, proper nouns, or personal pronouns. (In fact, at least one Philippinist,

Wolfenden (1971), prefers to use the label definite noun phrase, rather than the label topic, in referring to the constituent in question.) Putting it somewhat differently, we can say that the referentiality of the topic is always presupposed. Unfortunately, however, although the presupposition of referentiality is a necessary condition for topicality, it is not a sufficient one, since there may also be non-topic noun phrases with presupposed referentiality, such as the pronouns in 2 and 3 or all of the underlined expressions in 4:

- 4 Dadalhin ni Rosa ang pera kay Juan
GT-will-take-to A-Rosa T-money D-Juan

para sa iyo.
B-you

"Rosa will take the money to Juan for you."

When a sentence contains more than one noun phrase whose referentiality is presupposed, it is not always clear why one of these noun phrases, rather than another, is chosen as topic (4). Under such circumstances, it seems that there is often a good deal of leeway with regard to the choice of topic, even in a fixed discourse context, but this is a matter that requires further investigation.

To turn now to the semantic properties associated with the actor phrase, the label actor should not be taken as equivalent to agent, at least if agent is associated with some such role as "the typically animate perceived instigator of the action" (c.f. Fillmore, 1968:24). That this interpretation would be inappropriate should be clear from examples 5-7. (In each of these examples the expression representing the actor is underlined. The examples are presented in pairs, with the actor as topic, and an actor-topic verb, in the first member of each pair, and the actor as non-topic, and a goal-topic or direction-topic verb, in the second member of each pair.)

- 5 a. Nagtiis ang babae ng kahirapan.
AT-endured T-woman G-hardship
"The woman endured some hardship."
b. Tiniis ng babae ang kahirapan
GT-endured A-woman T-hardship
"A/The woman endured the hardship."
6 a. Tumanggap ang estudyante ng liham.
AT-received T-student G-letter
"The student received a letter."

- b. Tinanggap ng estudyante ang liham.
 GT-received A-student T-letter
 "A/The student received the letter."

- 7 a. Lumapit ang ulap sa araw.
 AT-approach T-cloud D-sun
 "The cloud approached the sun."

- b. Linapitan ng ulap ang araw.
 DT-approach A-cloud T-sun
 "A/The cloud approached the sun."

The examples of 5 and 6 show that an animate actor is not necessarily the "instigator" of the action, and the examples of 7 show that the actor need not even be animate.

While I know of no really satisfactory generalization about the semantic characteristics associated with the actor (and perhaps none is possible, given the dependency of the interpretation of the actor's role on the interpretation of the verb), I find that the following characterization (taken from Benton 1971:167) will, if interpreted charitably enough, cover most cases: "the entity to which the action of the verb is attributed." (The requisite charitable interpretation allows "action" to serve as a cover term for actions, happenings, and conditions in general.) I also find Benton's term attribute of action more tenable than the term actor, but I shall continue to use the latter on the basis of its being shorter, better established, and innocuous enough once its inadequacies have been explained.

One generalization that can be made about the actor is that it is translated quite regularly by the active surface subject in English. But this cannot be taken as a semantic generalization unless one is willing to claim, and able to substantiate the claim, that some valid semantic characterization of the class of English active subjects is possible. While this claim is not, to my knowledge, one that has been seriously investigated, it may in fact be worth considering, and I shall return to it briefly in subsequent sections.

With the above inconclusive discussion of the semantics of the topic and the actor as background, let us turn now to consider the extent to which the properties of each might warrant its being identified as a subject.

2 The Topic as Subject: Arguments For

A *prima facie* case can be made for considering the topic in Philippine language equivalent to the subject in some other languages on the basis of distribution. Indeed, if one makes the rather common assumption that logically

complete declarative sentences must contain a subject and a predicate, then the topic is the only plausible candidate for subjecthood, since there are fundamental sentence types whose only constituents are a predicate verb, noun, or adjective and a topic nominal. Consider, for example, the following sentences. (Unless otherwise indicated, examples are from Tagalog.)

- 8 Magtatrabaho ang lalaki.
 AT-will-work T-man
 "The man will work."

- 9 Papawisan ang lalaki.
 GT/DT-will-sweat T-man
 "The man will sweat."

- 10 Abogado ang lalaki.
 lawyer T-man
 "The man is a lawyer."

- 11 Matalino ang lalaki.
 intelligent T-man
 "The man is intelligent."

Sentences 8 and 9 consist of an intransitive verb plus a topic noun phrase (5). Sentences 10 and 11 are verbless, or equational, sentences, consisting respectively of a predicate nominal plus a topic and a predicate adjective plus a topic. Thus if one assumes that complete sentences in general contain subjects, there is no choice but to say that the topic nominal is the subject in cases like 8 through 11.

Two other arguments in favor of identifying the topic as the subject may be formulated on the basis of certain recent claims about linguistic universals. First, Keenan and Comrie (1972) have proposed that constraints on the types of sentence constituents that a language allows to be relativized must reflect the universal accessibility hierarchy (example 12) (where ">" means "greater than or equal to in accessibility" with regard to relative clause formation):

- 12 Subj. ≥ DO ≥ IO ≥ OPrep. ≥ Poss-NP ≥ O-Comp.-Particle

What this hierarchy claims is that, if a language allows direct objects (DO) to be relativized, it must also allow subjects to be relativized, if it allows indirect objects (IO) to be relativized, it must also allow direct objects to be relativized, etc. (The remaining abbreviations in 12 stand for prepositional object, possessive noun phrase, and object of comparative particle.) Since the implicational relations in 12 are unidirectional, it follows that if a language allows only one constituent type to be relativized, that consti-

tuent type must be the subject.

Now in Philippine languages it is clear that only topics can be relativized. Relative clauses in these languages have the form of sentences with deleted topics, and the missing topic of the relative clause is always understood as being co-referential with the head of the relative construction. For example, compare the sentences of 13 with the grammatical relative constructions of 14 and the ungrammatical strings of 15. (In the glosses of 14 and 15, Li stands for the "linker" -ng that introduces relative clauses.)

- 13 a. Bumasa ang lalaki ng diyaryo.
AT-read T-man G-newspaper
"The man read a newspaper."
b. Binasa ng lalaki ang diyaryo.
GT-read A-man T-newspaper
"A/The man read the newspaper."
- 14 a. Matalino ang lalaking bumasa ng diyaryo.
intelligent T-man-Li AT-read G-Newspaper
"The man who read a newspaper is intelligent."
b. Interessante ang diyaryong binasa ng lalaki.
interesting T-newspaper-Li GT-read A-man
"The newspaper that the man read is interesting."
- 15 a. *Interessante ang diyaryong bumasa ang lalaki
interesting T-newspaper-Li AT-read T-man
b. *Matalino ang lalaking binasa ang diyaryo
intelligent T-man-Li GT-read T-newspaper

Given the sentence 13a, in which there is an actor-topic verb and a non-topic goal, it is possible to relativize the actor-topic but not the goal (compare 14a and 15a). On the other hand, given the sentence 13b, in which there is a goal-topic verb and a non-topic actor, it is possible to relativize the goal-topic but not the actor. Since only the constituents that Philippinists identify as topics are accessible to relativization, it follows from Keenan and Comrie's claims with regard to the accessibility hierarchy that these constituents must be subjects.

The second recent claim that favors the identification of topics as subjects is one made within the framework of Perlmutter and Postal's theory of relational grammar. According to Bell (1974), relational grammar claims that only "terms of grammatical relations"--i.e., subjects, objects, and indirect objects--may "launch floating quantifiers," where a "floating quantifier" is one which has been permitted "to leave its NP, as in 'The men were all surprised' from

'All the men were surprised'." In Tagalog, the quantifier lahat "all" usually occurs within a noun phrase, but some speakers also use a construction in which lahat follows the sentence-initial verb (c.f. Schachter and Otanes 1972:147-148 for details). In the latter case lahat is always understood as referring to the sentence topic, as in the following examples. (The nouns in the examples are preceded by the pluralizing particle mga ([mana]) glossed as "pl.")

- 16 a. Sumusulat lahat ang mga bata ng mga liham.
AT-write all T-Pl-child G-Pl-letter
"All the children are writing letters."
b. Sinusulat lahat ng mga bata ang mga liham.
GT-write all A-Pl-child T-Pl-letter
"The/Some children write all the letters."

In 16a lahat can only be understood as referring to the actor-topic, in 16b to the goal-topic. Thus, if it is in fact the case that only "terms" may launch floating quantifiers, then the topics of the sentences of 16 are terms, and the simplest account of this fact is provided by identifying the topic as the subject.

A final argument for identifying the topic as the subject may be built on certain facts having to do with grammatical agreement in Kapampangan. Kapampangan is unusual among Philippine languages in requiring that predicate verbs must in some cases be followed by particles that agree in person and number with specified co-occurring noun phrases. The rule is that, subject to certain conditions that need not concern us here (6), in actor-topic sentences there is a single particle agreeing with the topic, while in non-actor-topic sentences there are two particles, one agreeing with the topic, the other with the actor. The examples of 17, taken from Richards (1971), illustrate this rule. (In the glosses accompanying these examples, TAP stands for topic agreement particle and AAP for actor agreement particle. In 17a the TAP is marked as third-person-singular. In 17b the AAP and the TAP are marked as third-person-singular and third-person-plural respectively. As the glosses and translations of the noun phrases show, number is obligatorily indicated in Kapampangan topic and actor phrases, but not in Kapampangan goal phrases.)

- 17 a. Menakit ya ng anak ing lalaki
AT-saw TAP G-child T-Sg-man
"The man saw a child/some children."

- b. Ikit na la ning lalaki ding anak
 GT-saw AAP TAP A-Sg-man T-Pl-child
 "A/The man saw the children."

Now it is clear that, in many languages that have both well-defined subjects and grammatical agreement, it is the subject noun phrase with which the predicate regularly agrees. This being the case, it seems reasonable to suggest (and has in fact been suggested--e.g., by Li and Thompson 1974c) that the control of agreement may be useful as a criterion for distinguishing subjects from other noun phrases. And given that in Kapampangan, if there is any agreement at all there must be agreement with the topic, one might reasonably argue that the Kapampangan agreement data favor an identification of the topic as the subject. (But see Section 4 for another--equally reasonable--interpretation of these data.)

3 The Topic as Subject: Arguments Against

The first argument of the preceding section was based on the assumption that all logically complete declarative sentences have subjects. Given this assumption, and given the fact that there are sentence types in Philippine languages in which the only available candidate for subjecthood is the topic, one must conclude that the topic should be identified as the subject, at least in some cases. The assumption on which this argument is based, however, is open to challenge; for there is at least one sentence type that occurs in Philippine language that does not appear to contain any candidate for the role of subject. The sentence type in question is the existential sentence, some examples of which are given below. (In the glosses of these examples, E is the gloss for the existence marker may.)

- 18 May aksidente (Kagabi).
 E-accident last-night
 "There was an accident (last night)."
- 19 May liham (para sa iyo).
 E-letter B-you
 "There's a letter (for you)."
- 20 May dumarating.
 E-AT-is-coming
 "There's someone coming."

Existential sentences appear to consist minimally of an existence marker and a predicate. They do not contain a topic nominal, and indeed need not contain any nominal at all (c.f. 20). They thus show that the assumption underlying the first

argument of the preceding section is incorrect, and weaken whatever force this argument may have had.

There are also some arguments that can be offered against the claim that the topic should be identified as the subject. To start with perhaps the weakest of these, it was noted in Section 1 that the topic nominal is always definite: i.e., that its referent is always presupposed. Is this, one may ask, a reasonable kind of semantic restriction to be imposed on a subject? Certainly one finds no such restriction on the subject in English or other familiar languages, and the existence of this restriction in the case of the Philippine topic might thus be considered evidence against the hypothesis that the latter is properly identified as a subject.

E.L. Keenan (Definition of Subject, this volume) has suggested, however, that, while subjects need not always be definite, they tend universally to be more regularly referential than objects or other nominals. If this suggestion is correct, it would not be too surprising to find that some languages had regularized the universal tendency and imposed a requirement that subjects must be maximally referential: i.e., definite. Thus the obligatory definiteness of the topic is not necessarily very disturbing to one who advocates identifying the topic as the subject.

Much more disturbing, it seems to me, is the fact that the topic does not play the role that one might expect the subject to play in certain grammatical processes: notably, reflexivization and coreferential complement subject deletion (to borrow Postal's 1970 term). To begin with the case of reflexivization, in all languages that I know of where the identity of the subject is not in doubt, the subject of a simple sentence may control reflexivization but may not itself be reflexivized. (In some languages, such as Swedish, moreover, only the subject may control reflexivization.) It is therefore puzzling, if one believes that topics in Philippine languages are subjects, to discover sentences like 21 and 22:

- 21 Sinaktan ng babae ang kaniyang sarili.
 DT-hurt A-woman T-her-self
 "A/The woman hurt herself."
- 22 Iniisip nila ang kanilang sarili.
 DT-think-about A-they T-their-self
 "They think about themselves."

(Reflexives in Tagalog are formed with a possessive pronoun and the nominal sarili "self.") In the above examples it is clearly the topic that has been reflexivized, the reflexivi-

zation being controlled by the non-topic actor. There are, to be sure, cases in which the topic does appear to control reflexivization, such as 23, which is a paraphrase of 22.

- 23 Nag-iisip sila sa kanilang sarili.
AT-think-about T-they D-their-self
"They think about themselves."

The operant generalization, however, is that it is the actor that controls reflexivization, whether or not the actor is also the topic. And in any case examples like 21 and 22 show that topics do not function as one expects subjects to function with regard to reflexivization.

Just the same point can be made with regard to coreferential complement subject deletion. This is the process said to be involved in the derivation of an English sentence like I want to leave from an underlying structure more like I want s[I leave]. As the name of the process indicates, the process is thought to involve the deletion of the subject of a complement clause. Now consider in this connection the following Tagalog sentences:

- 24 a. Nag-atubili siyang hiramín ang pera
AT-hesitated T-he-Li GT-borrow T-money
sa bangko.
D-bank
"He hesitated to borrow the money from a/the bank."
b. Nag-atubili siyang hirañan ng pera
AT-hesitated T-he-Li DT-borrow G-money
ang bangko.
T-bank
"He hesitated to borrow money from the bank."
c. Nag-atubili siyang humiram ng pera
AT-hesitated T-he-Li AT-borrow G-money
sa bangko.
D-bank
"He hesitated to borrow money from a/the bank."

While the complement clauses contained in these sentences can reasonably be analyzed as involving deletion (see Section 4), it is certainly not the topic that is regularly deleted. Thus the complement clauses of 24a and 24b, which contain goal-topic and direction-topic verbs, do not delete the topic, and it is only in 24c, where the complement clause contains an actor-topic verb, that the topic is deleted. Once again

then, we find that topics do not function as we expect subjects to function with respect to an important grammatical process, and so we are led to look elsewhere in our quest for the subject in Philippine language.

4 The Actor as Subject: Arguments For

The last two arguments of Section 3, although they were presented as arguments against identifying the topic as the subject, can also be considered to be arguments for identifying the actor as the subject. (I am now using the term actor to refer both to non-topic nominals in the actor case and to topic nominals occurring with actor-topic verbs.) That is, it is the actor, rather than the topic, that manifests the properties usually associated with subjects in regard to the processes of reflexivization and coreferential complement subject deletion (also known as equi-noun-phrase deletion). As examples 21 through 23 show, the actor, whether or not it is also the topic, may control reflexivization. On the other hand, the actor may never itself be reflexivized--again, regardless of whether or not it is the topic. Thus the following are ungrammatical (cf. 22 and 23 respectively):

- 25 a. *Iniisip sila ng kanilang sarili.
DT-think about T-they A-their-self
b. *Nag-iisip sa kanila ang kanilang sarili.
AT-think-about D-they T-their-self

Both in controlling reflexivization and in not itself being subject to reflexivization, the actor manifests subject-like properties.

Similarly, it is always the actor that is absent in structures analyzable as involving equi-noun-phrase deletion. If we compare the complement clauses of 24 with their sentential counterparts in 26, we see that in each case the clause may be formed by deleting the actor phrase from the sentence (whether or not the actor is also the topic) and changing the finite verb form to a non-finite form:

- 26 a. Hiniram niya ang pera sa bangko
GT-borrowed A-he T-money D-bank
"He borrowed the money from a/the bank."
b. Hiniraman niya ng pera ang bangko.
DT-borrowed A-he G-money T-bank
"He borrowed money from the bank."
c. Humiram siya ng pera sa bangko.
AT-borrowed T-he G-money D-bank
"He borrowed money from a/the bank"

So if it is the case that equi-noun-phrase deletion involves deletion of a coreferential complement subject (as it consistently does in languages with easily-identified subjects), then we must conclude that the actor should be identified as the subject in Philippine languages.

A number of additional arguments can be given in support of this conclusion. Consider first the way in which the actor functions in imperative sentences. E.L. Keenan (Definition of Subject, this volume) has suggested that in general "the addressee of second person imperatives can be expressed by a subject." In Philippine languages, it is clear that the addressee phrase, when present, is always expressed by an actor (which may or may not also be the topic), as in the following Tagalog examples:

- 27 a. Magbigay ka sa kaniya ng kape
AT-give T-you D-him G-coffee
"Give him some coffee."
b. Bigyan mo siya ng kape
DT-give A-you T-him G-coffee
"Give him some coffee."
c. Ibigay mo sa kaniya ang kape
GT-give A-you D-him T-coffee
"Give him the coffee."

Thus Keenan's generalization holds for Philippine languages only if the actor is identified as the subject.

Moreover, the identification of the actor as the subject is also required in order for another generalization that has been made about imperatives to hold for Philippine languages. The generalization in question is one reportedly proposed by Kenneth Hale (7), to the effect that, where an imperative lacks an overtly indicated subject, a second-person subject is understood. Consider in the light of this generalization the following examples of imperative sentences in Cebuano and Waray. (Tagalog does not provide relevant examples in this case. The Cebuano example (28) is taken from Bell 1974, the Waray example (29), from Diller 1970.)

- 28 Ibalik ang libro kanako
GT-give-back T-book D-me
"Give me back the book."
29 Pagluta hit panihapun
AT-cook G-supper
"Cook supper."

These sentences lack an overt expression of the actor, and a second person actor is understood. Thus, if Hale's generalization

is to apply to them, the understood second-person actor must be the subject.

It can also be argued that the Kapampangan agreement data cited in Section 2 favor the identification of the actor as the subject as much as they favor the identification of the topic as the subject. As was noted in Section 2, actor-topic sentences in Kapampangan have a single particle agreeing with the topic, while non-actor-topic sentences have two particles, one agreeing with the topic, the other with the actor (cf. examples 17a-b). One might thus make the generalization that there is always agreement with the actor (whether or not the actor is also the topic) just as easily as the generalization that there is always agreement with the topic (whether or not the topic is also the actor). So if the control of agreement is a useful criterion for distinguishing subjects from other noun phrases, actor phrases are as subject-like as topic phrases in this respect.

Another subject-like property of actor phrases is relevance to word order. As was mentioned in Section 1, the ordering of noun phrases after the initial verb is extremely free in Tagalog, but this is not true of certain other Philippine languages. For example, in Pangasinan (cf. Benton 1971), the normal order of constituents in sentences that consist of a verb, an actor, and a goal is verb-actor-goal, regardless of whether the actor or the goal is the topic. Now it is usually assumed that the ordering of major sentence constituents is statable in terms of the categories verb, subject, and object. This assumption can be maintained if the actor in a language like Pangasinan is identified as the subject (and the goal as the object--in which case the languages are classifiable as VSO languages). If, however, the actor is not the subject, then we must claim--somewhat uncomfortably, I should think--that word order in Philippine languages is simply not comparable with word order in other languages.

A final argument in favor of identifying the actor as the subject may be built upon the fact, noted in Section 1, that the actor is quite regularly translated by the surface subject of an active sentence in English (8). Even if one does not know how to explain this fact, it seems extremely unlikely that such a regular correspondence should be accidental. But, of course, one would like to be able to explain the fact, and it seems to me at least possible that an explanation is to be found in a semantic property that is shared by the actor in Philippine languages and the active surface subject in English. As was previously noted, one Philippinist claims that the actor expresses "the entity to which the action of the verb is attributed," and this claim, if inter-

puted liberally, seems fairly tenable. Could it be that there is some sense in which active surface subjects in English (and in languages in general) also express "the entity to which the action of the verb is attributed"? Although I think that this is a hypothesis that may be worth pursuing, I have not in fact pursued it. In any case, it seems to me that the fact that actors are translated by subjects--whatever the explanation for this may be--argues for their being subjects.

5 The Actor as Subject: Arguments Against

One reason for questioning the identification of the actor as the subject might be the fact that formally the actor is not one constituent type but two: the non-topic actor (which is identified by means of a distinctive case marker or pronoun form) and the actor-topic (which is identified by means of a distinctive affix on the verb). In other languages, subjects usually appear to constitute a formally homogeneous set (9), and the lack of formal homogeneity in the set of actors might be considered to weigh against the actor's being analyzed as the subject.

In addition to this rather weak argument, there are two stronger ones. First, if, as commonly assumed, logically complete declarative sentences must contain a subject and a predicate (cf. Sections 2 and 3), then the actor cannot in general be the subject. This is because there are many logically complete declarative sentences, belonging to several different sentence types, that do not contain actors--at least if we interpret the term actor, as we have been, as referring either to a non-topic nominal in the actor case or to the topic of an actor-topic verb. The following Tagalog sentences, repeated from earlier sections, illustrate this point.

9 Papawisan ang lalaki
GT/DT-will-sweat T-man
"The man will sweat."

10 Abogado ang lalaki
lawyer T-man
"The man is a lawyer."

11 Matalino ang lalaki
intelligent T-man
"The man is intelligent."

18 May aksidente (kagabi)
E-accident (last-night)
"There was an accident (last night)."

20 May dumarating.
F-AT-is-coming
"There's someone coming."

I know of no evidence to suggest that these sentences contain actors, either overtly or at some abstract level of analysis. It therefore seems to be the case either that the actor is not the subject (or at least not the only subject) in Philippine languages or that these languages must have more than the usual share of subjectless sentences.

A second serious problem is that the actor fails to show certain syntactic properties that have been claimed to be universal properties of the subject. I refer here to the syntactic properties cited in Section 2 as evidence for considering the topic to be the subject: relativizability and the ability to "launch floating quantifiers." While actor-topics are certainly relativizable and able to launch floating quantifiers, these properties appear to depend upon the status of actor-topics as topics rather than their status as actors. Evidence for this is that non-topic actors lack the properties in question, never undergoing relativization and never launching floating quantifiers.

Thus if these properties are indeed properties associated with subjects, actors--or at least non-topic actors--cannot be subjects. It seems clear, then, that in spite of the fair number of subject-like properties associated with the actor, the identification of the actor as the subject remains problematical.

6 The Actor-Topic as Primary Subject: Arguments For

In a generative grammar it is both possible and usual to derive some surface subjects--which may be called primary subjects--directly from underlying subjects and other surface subjects by means of transformations. In this section I present a few pieces of evidence that may favor an analysis in which actor-topics in Philippine languages are generated as primary subjects, while non-actor topics are derived transformationally. (According to this analysis, simple actor-topic sentences in Philippine languages would thus have essentially the same status as active sentences in the standard generative account of English, while non-actor-topic sentences would have essentially the same status as English passives.)

The evidence in question has to do with the fact that certain distinctions that can be made in actor-topic sentences cannot be made in sentences of other types. For example, Bell (1974) reports that in Cebuano certain verbal aspects are normally distinguished only in actor-topic sentences. A similar

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The evidence in question has to do with the fact that certain distinctions that can be made in actor-topic sentences cannot be made in sentences of other types. For example, Bell (1974) reports that in Cebuano certain verbal aspects are normally distinguished only in actor-topic sentences. A similar

claim can be made for Tagalog, where verbs in general are inflectable for three aspects (perfective, imperfective, contemplated) but actor-topic verbs are also inflectable for a fourth aspect, the recent-perfective (cf. Schachter and Otanes 1972:371-375). It is also the case that only actor-topic verbs in Tagalog may be marked (optionally) for agreement with a plural topic, as in 30, and that there are certain derived-verb formations, such as the "social-verb" formation in 31, that are found only with actor-topics:

- 30 Nag(sipag)luto sila ng pagkain
AT-(Pl)-cooked T-they G-supper
"They cooked some food."
- 31 Nakikikain siya ng hapunan sa Nanay
AT-is-eating-with T-he G-supper D-mother
"He is eating supper with Mother."

It seems reasonable to suggest that, if some particular structure is derivationally primary, that structure may be elaborated in certain ways in which other structures are not elaborated. If this suggestion is correct, then the facts just cited may argue for the primacy of the actor-topic sentence type, and hence for an analysis in which the actor-topic is generated as a primary subject.

Such an analysis, moreover, can rather easily be made to accommodate some of the facts cited in previous sections. For example, suppose that, under this analysis, topics in general are regarded as surface subjects--some primary, others transformationally derived. Then some of the subject-like properties of topics that were mentioned in Section 2--e.g., unique accessibility to relativization--may quite plausibly be accounted for as properties associated with surface subjects. Similarly, some of the subject-like properties of actors mentioned in Section 4 may be accounted for as properties associated with underlying subjects. For example, the preferred word order in Pangasinan (actor precedes goal, regardless of topicalization) can be treated as an ordering of the underlying subject (the actor) and the underlying object (the goal). Thus an analysis in which actors are regarded as underlying subjects and topics as surface subjects, and in which the surface subjects are divided into two subclasses, primary (actor-topic) and derived (non-actor-topic), appears to have some merit.

7 The Actor-Topic as Primary Subject: Arguments Against

On the other hand, there are at least three arguments that can be offered against this analysis.

First, sentences in which there is no overt or recoverable actor--e.g., sentences like 9-11, cited in Section 2 and repeated in Section 5--constitute something of a problem for an analysis that treats the actor-topic as the primary subject (though it is a less severe problem than these sentences constitute for an analysis that treats the actor as the subject simpliciter). At the very least, in order to be able to account for such sentences, one would have to modify the claim that the actor-topic is the primary subject to a more modest claim that the actor-topic is the primary subject in sentences whose predicates are transitive verbs.

Second, there are in Tagalog (and, I believe, in other Philippine languages) a good many actor-topic transitive verbs that are distributionally more restricted than their goal-topic counterparts (10). While the goal-topic forms of these verbs may occur as predicates of simple narrative sentences, the actor-topic verbs may not, and are found only in relative clauses and certain nominalizations. (The nominalizations in question appear to be analyzable as headless relative clauses.)

The following examples illustrate these distributional properties:

- 32 a. Tinakot ng lalaki ang bata
GT-frightened A-man T-child
"A/The man frightened the child."
- b. *Tumakot ang lalaki ng bata
AT-frightened T-man G-child
- 33 a. Nasaan ang lalaking tumakot ng bata?
where T-man-Li AT-frightened G-child
"Where is the man who frightened a child?"
- b. Nasaan ang tumakot ng bata?
where T-AT-frightened G-child
"Where is the one who frightened a child?"

As these examples show, the goal-topic verb tinakot occurs as the predicate of a simple narrative sentence (cf. 32a), but the actor-topic verb tumakot fails to occur in such a sentence (cf. 32b), although it may occur in a relative clause (example 33a) of a nominalization (example 33b).

How could this distribution be accounted for in an analysis in which the actor-topic is generated as a primary subject and the goal-topic as a derived subject? Presumably the verbs in question would have to be marked with a lexical feature that would have the effect of requiring them to undergo the goal-topic transformation in just the right cases--i.e., in main clauses but not necessarily in relative clauses,

etc. While such a lexical marking is no doubt possible, it is unappealing, requiring as it does, an otherwise unneeded formal device of considerable power (11). On the other hand, if goal-topic sentences are not necessarily derived from underlying actor-topic sentences, all that is needed to account for the distribution reflected in examples like 32-33 is a contextual feature on certain actor-topic verbs, constraining their insertion to the appropriate contexts.

The third argument against the analysis under consideration, which I owe to Bell (1974), presupposes the correctness of certain syntactic universals that have been proposed within the framework of relational grammar. In this theoretical framework, as was mentioned in Section 2, certain grammatical properties are associated uniquely with so-called terms of grammatical relations: i.e., subjects, objects, and indirect objects. Moreover, the following Relational Annihilation Law is said to hold universally:

- 34 Relational Annihilation Law: If an NP_i assumes a grammatical relation j previously borne by NP_j , then NP_j ceases to bear any grammatical relation; it becomes a chômeur (French for "unemployed person").

According to the Relational Annihilation Law, then, if an underlying subject is transformationally replaced by a derived subject, the original subject, having become a chômeur, will no longer have those properties that are associated uniquely with terms (12).

Now included among the syntactic properties that are said to be unique to terms are control over reflexivization and control over equi-noun phrase deletion (coreferential complement subject deletion). In Philippine languages, as we have already seen, control over reflexivization is vested in the actor, whether or not the actor is also the topic: cf. examples 22 and 23, repeated below:

- 22 Inisip nila ang kanilang sarili
DT-think-about A-they T-their-selves
"They think about themselves."
- 23 Nag-iisip sila sa kanilang sarili
AT-think-about T-they T-their-selves
"They think about themselves."

It is also the case that the actor, whether or not it is also the topic, may control equi-noun phrase deletion, as the following examples show:

- 35 a. Nagbalak siyang mangisda
AT-planned T-he-Li AT-go-fishing
"He planned to go fishing."
- b. Binalak niyang mangisda
GT-planned A-he-Li AT-go-fishing
"He planned to go fishing."

But according to the analysis under consideration, in which the actor is the underlying subject and the topic the surface subject, a non-topic actor must be a subject whose original role has been assumed by another noun phrase. Thus, according to the Relational Annihilation Law, 34, the non-topic actor should be a chômeur, and should not be able to control reflexivization, as it does in 22, or equi-noun phrase deletion, as it does in 35b. Therefore, if the Relational Annihilation Law is valid (and it appears to have a certain amount of cross-linguistic support), the analysis under consideration must be wrong: the actor-topic cannot be a primary subject because the non-topic actor is clearly not a chômeur.

8 Conclusion

Where does all of this leave us, then, in our quest for the subject in Philippine languages? We have seen that, while the topic and the actor each have certain syntactic properties that are frequently associated with subjects in other languages, they each lack some such properties as well. We have also seen that, while there are certain subject-like properties that are unique to actor-topics, an analysis that regards actor-topics as primary subjects, with actors in general corresponding to underlying subjects and topics in general to surface subjects, is probably untenable.

The obvious conclusion, it seems to me, is that there is in fact no single syntactic category in Philippine languages that corresponds to the category identified as the subject in other languages. Rather, there is a division of subject-like properties between the category we have been calling the topic and the category we have been calling the actor, with a few subject-like properties reserved for the intersection of the topic and the actor, the actor-topic. While this conclusion is certainly somewhat surprising, it need not necessarily be regarded as alarming. It may be the case, as a matter of fact, that Philippine languages have a unique contribution to make to our understanding of the nature of subjects in general.

What the Philippine evidence suggests is that there are two basically quite different kinds of syntactic properties that are ordinarily associated with subjects. Since in most

languages these two different kinds of properties are associated with a single syntactic category, linguists have generally not been led to sort the properties out. In Philippine languages, however, the properties are conveniently sorted out by the grammatical systems themselves, so that one is given a clearer view than usual of the basis for the properties, and the properties are seen to make a kind of sense one might not otherwise have attributed to them.

The Philippine evidence points to a distinction between what may be called reference-related properties and role-related properties of subjects. The reference-related properties are those which, in Philippine languages, are associated with the topic. As was explained in Section 1, the topic is always definite, having a "given," or pre-established, referent. And the definiteness of the topic seems to provide a plausible basis for at least some of the syntactic properties that are associated with it. For example, as we have seen (cf. Section 2), only topics can be relativized. Now since the referent of a relativized nominal is necessarily "given"--that is, necessarily identical with the referent of the head of the relative construction--it seems very reasonable to choose for relativization the syntactic category that is regularly associated with a pre-established referent. One might thus suggest that the reason why (or, at any rate, one reason why), in languages with well-defined subjects, the subject turns out to be the most easily relativized category (cf. Keenan and Comrie 1972) is that the subject is the category most often used for expressing a pre-established referent in such languages.

The role-related properties of subjects are those which, in Philippine languages, are associated with the actor. The actor represents "the entity to which the action is attributed" (cf. Section 1), and this semantic property seems to underlie at least some of the syntactic properties of actors. For example, as we have seen (cf. Section 4), only actors are deleted under equi-noun-phrase deletion, an example being 24a, repeated below:

- 24 a. Nag-atubili siyang hiramín ang pera
AT-hesitated T-he-Li GT-borrow T-money

sa bangko
D-bank

"He hesitated to borrow money from the bank."

(Cf. 26a, also repeated below.)

- 26 a. Hiniram niya ang pera sa bangko
GT-borrowed A-he T-money D-bank
"He borrowed money from the bank."

It seems clear that in sentences involving equi-noun-phrase deletion, the action expressed in the complement construction is always overtly attributed to a nominal in the matrix sentence. It therefore makes sense to exclude from the complement itself the nominal that would, if present, be interpreted in this same way--i.e., the actor. Thus one might suggest that the reason why, in languages with well-defined subjects, it is the subject that is omitted in cases of equi-noun-phrase deletion, is that the subject is the category used for expressing the actor, the entity to which the action is attributed.

In addition to properties of subjects that are clearly reference-related (such as relativizability) and properties that are clearly role-related (such as deletability under equi-noun-phrase deletion), there also appear to be properties that may be either reference-related or role-related. According to the Philippine evidence, at least, the governing of agreement is such a property. Thus in Kapampangan there is agreement both with the topic and with the actor (cf. Sections 2 and 4), while in Tagalog, agreement requires a convergence of the topic and the actor in the form of the actor-topic (cf. Section 6). Such a convergence, it seems to me, may also underlie subject-predicate agreement in languages with well-defined subjects.

Apart from providing insight into the syntactic properties associated with subjects in other languages, Philippine languages may have another type of important contribution to make to general linguistic theory. For if the conclusion that I have reached, to the effect that the sentences of Philippine languages do not have subjects, is in fact correct, then obviously it cannot be the case that subject represents a linguistic universal. Rather, it represents a common, but non-universal, clustering of properties which need not in principle be assigned to a single constituent type. Now the universality of subjects has not only been commonly taken for granted; it has also, as was mentioned at the beginning of this paper, been presupposed in the postulation of various other putative linguistic universals. It seems to me that these postulated universals may all need to be re-examined in the light of the Philippine evidence.

Notes

1. My main source of information about relational grammar has been an unpublished paper by Bell (1974), which presents a very clear, though not necessarily authoritative, summary of the theory.

2. The Tagalog verb-case-marking system is more complex than that of many other Philippine languages, in that Tagalog has (and these other languages do not have) a number of different, lexically-determined verbal affixes for indicating actor-topic, goal-topic, etc. Thus, while some Tagalog verbs take mag- to indicate the actor topic, others take different affixes, such as -um- or mang-, for this purpose. There is also considerable lexically-determined variation in Tagalog with regard to the case interpretation of specific affixes. Thus, -an is a direction-topic affix with some verbs but a goal-topic affix with others. For further details, see Schachter and Otnes 1972:284-355.

3. Specifically, the non-topic actor, direction and beneficiary may be indefinite while the non-topic goal must be indefinite. Definite non-topic goals do, however, occur in Tagalog in certain more complex structures--cf. Schachter and Otnes 1972:382-383. And in some other Philippine languages--e.g., Waray (cf. Diller 1970) and Bicol (Talmy Givón, personal communication)--definite non-topic goals may occur in simple sentences as well.

4. In the case of 4 itself, however, it is clear why the goal--rather than the actor, direction, or beneficiary--has been chosen as topic. As was explained in Note 3, a non-topic goal in a simple Tagalog sentence necessarily has an indefinite referent, while a non-topic actor, direction, or beneficiary may have either a definite or an indefinite referent. Thus a simple sentence with a non-topic goal can never be used when the referent of the goal phrase is in fact definite, or presupposed. Under such circumstances, the speaker has no choice but to make the goal the topic, as in 4. If any other topic were chosen in 4, the sentence would necessarily mean "Rosa will take some money to Juan for you" rather than "Rosa will take the money to Juan for you."

5. Like transitive verbs, intransitive verbs are formed with affixes that indicate the case role of the topic. Thus magtatrabaho in 8 contains the actor-topic affix mag-, while papawisan in 9 contains the direction-topic or goal-topic affix -an. In the latter case, it is not in fact clear whether the verb should be classified as direction-topic or goal-topic. This is a problem that could not arise with a transitive verb formed with -an, even though -an occurs with

both direction-topic and goal-topic transitive verbs. For with a transitive verb formed with -an, one could get independent evidence about the case role of the topic nominal: namely, the case marker that the nominal in question took when the case-marking affix on the verb was changed, making some other nominal in the sentence the topic. For intransitive verbs, no such independent evidence is available, since there is no other nominal in the sentence that can be made the topic, and thus there is no possibility of changing the case-marking affix on the verb. Nevertheless, it seems clear that, since -an indicates direction-topic and goal-topic for transitive verbs, it should be associated with these functions for intransitive verbs as well. (I have gone into this matter at what may seem inordinate length because Bell (1974) implies that in Cebuano all intransitive verbs may be regarded as actor-topic. It seems to me that examples like 9 strongly suggest that this is not the case in Tagalog.)

6. For details, see Richards 1971:193-196.

7. My source for this is Bell 1974.

8. The converse of this does not hold, however, since there are various active sentences in English whose translation equivalents in Philippine languages apparently do not contain actors: e.g., certain narrative sentences with intransitive predicates, such as 9 above, as well as all equational and existential sentences.

9. However, ergative languages, in which subjects of transitive and intransitive verbs are formally distinct, obviously fail to conform to this generalization.

10. The Tagalog verbs that show the distributional restrictions in question appear to fall into three semantic classes: 1) verbs that require animate objects, with meanings like "frighten," "surprise," "starve," and "kill"; 2) verbs that denote ways of fragmenting or disintegrating an object, with meanings like "break," "grind," "pulverize," and "burn"; 3) the verbs meaning "remember" and "forget." For details, cf. Schachter and Otnes 1972:296, 299-300.

11. Note that even the powerful device of "positive absolute exception" features proposed in Lakoff (1970) would be inadequate to account for the facts of 32-33, since the positive exception feature in question would have to be conditional rather than absolute.

12. I believe that the Relational Annihilation Law stated in 34 may be an early version, which has since been revised, and that in the revised version a term whose original function has been assumed by another NP may be "demoted" instead of becoming a chômeur. Since terms are hierarchically ranked, with the subject having the highest rank, a

"demoted" subject could conceivably become either a direct or an indirect object. It seems clear, however, that this additional possibility is irrelevant to the cases in Philippine languages that are about to be discussed. That is, there is no basis for analyzing a non-topic actor as an underlying subject that has been relegated to the role originally assigned to a direct or indirect object. In the first place, a non-topic actor may easily occur in a sentence in which the presumed underlying direct and indirect objects are both still intact; e.g.,

- (i) Ipinansusulat niya ng liham sa kanila
IT-is-writing A-he G-letter D-them
ang makinilya
T-typewriter

"He is writing a letter to them on the typewriter."

(In (i), ipinansusulat is an instrument-topic (IT) verb; i.e., a verb that selects as topic the noun phrase expressing the instrument used to perform the action.) And secondly, the surface case-marking of a non-topic actor is not identical to that of either a non-topic goal (the presumed underlying direct object) or a non-topic directional phrase (the presumed underlying indirect object).

ON THE UNIVERSALITY OF SUBJECT: THE ILOCANO CASE*

by

Arthur Schwartz

*I wish to thank S. Grant, D. Moran, and J. Watters for allowing me to incorporate some of their own work on Ilocano. Our informant was Norberta Tagatac from Bantay, Ilocos Sur.