

The case of Tagalog Case: revisiting ditransitives.

Tagalog has been described to have a four-way “voice” alternation depending on which argument can be A'-extracted. This argument, which I will call the *pivot*, is indexed on the verb as an affix, labeled Actor Voice (AV), Patient Voice (PV), Locative Voice (LV), or Circumstantial Voice (CV) accordingly. Various proposals over the years have tried to identify the mechanisms behind these alternations, but pinning down a fully satisfying hypothesis has been a challenge, to say the least. In this paper, through a reexamination of asymmetries between obligatory and non-obligatory ditransitives, I propose an analysis, hinging on Dependent Case Theory, that both unifies previous accounts of Tagalog verbal morphosyntax and explains issues of speaker variation in less common constructions like causatives and benefactives.

The mechanism behind pivot marking and verbal “voice” morphology lies in Case agreement. One privileged DP in a sentence, the pivot, enters (at least) two Agree relations: one for topic [1,2], the other for Case [3]. Agreement-driven movement of the pivot DP to the TopP, above IP, is covert [1]. Along the way, however, there is a middle-field position to which this DP must be shifted for EPP: the specifier of an Agr head [4]. This Agr head has uninterpretable case features that get checked with the pivot's, copying the pivot's Case features, following Rackowski [3], as in (1).

(1) Spell-out of Agr:	[NOM]	↔	AV <i>m-</i>
	[ACC]	↔	PV <i>-in</i>
	[DAT]	↔	LV <i>-an</i>
	elsewhere	↔	CV <i>i-</i>

As for how Case is assigned, first, certain types of verbs, such as ditransitives, assign a lexical dative case [DAT] to one of its arguments, often with the thematic role of GOAL or SOURCE; I assume this argument to be in the Spec-*v* position. Then, adopting Dependent Case Theory [5,6], I claim that other argument DPs are assigned as such: first, within the *v*P domain, if there are two arguments (as with ditransitives), the lower of the two (most often the THEME argument in the complement of V) receives oblique case [OBL]. If there is only one argument within the *v*P domain, no case is assigned at this point. Assuming this verbal domain is within is a “weak phase” à la Baker [5], i.e., allowing for case assignment across the phase boundary, this argument then becomes a candidate for dependent accusative case [ACC] should there be a higher DP within the CP/TP domain, such as an argument with the AGENT role. Any remaining caseless DPs receive default nominative case [NOM]. This, together with treating pivots as topics instead of the structurally highest argument, aligns Tagalog case assignment with crosslinguistically robust generalizations of nominative as unmarked. As such, for marking on nouns, pivot marker *ang* surfaces on D when it has the topic feature and *sa* when a non-pivot has the [DAT] case feature. Otherwise, it surfaces as *ng* [2,9].

(2) Spell-out of D:	<i>ang</i> (PIV)	↔	[TOP]
	<i>sa</i>	↔	[DAT]
	<i>ng</i> (NPIV)		elsewhere ([NOM], [OBL], [ACC] etc.)

I illustrate all this with ditransitive examples in (3) and (5), the key differences being the syntactic treatment of the goal. With (3), with the root *dala* ‘bring’, we have non-obligatory ditransitivity. Pivots are underlined:

- (3) a. Nag-dala ang lalaki ng bulaklak (Ø_P) sa babae. AV
 PRF.AV-bring PIV man NPIV flower to DAT woman
 ‘The man brought the woman some flowers.’
 / ‘The man brought some flowers to the woman.’
- b. D<in>ala-Ø ng lalaki ang bulaklak Ø_P sa babae. PV
 <PRF>bring-PV NPIV man PIV flower to DAT woman (infinitive: dalh-in)
 ‘The man brought the flowers to the woman.’
- c. D<in>alh-an ng lalaki ng bulaklak ang babae. LV
 <PRF>bring-LV NPIV man NPIV flower PIV woman
 ‘The man brought the woman some flowers.’
- d. I-d<in>ala ng lalaki ang bulaklak sa babae. CV
 CV-<PRF>bring NPIV man PIV flower DAT woman
 ‘The man brought the woman the flowers.’

Here, the goal has two possible syntactic positions, either generated in Spec-*v*, thus getting DAT lexically from *v*, or within a headless prepositional phrase, getting DAT lexically from P (as is well-attested with other prepositions within the language and crosslinguistically). When the external argument is the pivot, we thus

get a surface-ambiguous AV sentence as in (3a). I illustrate these two underlying structures in (4). Essentially, in AV, Tagalog has a trivial “dative alternation” for non-obligatory ditransitives. Sentence (3a) can start from either (4a) or (4b).

- (4) a. [_{VoiceP} man-NOM [_{vP} woman-DAT [_{vP} bring flower-OBL]]] gets LV and CV
 b. [_{VoiceP} man-NOM [_{vP} [_{vP} bring flower-ACC] [_{PP} woman-DAT]]] gets PV

When the goal is the pivot, however, it must be in the Spec-*v* position; prepositional phrases are not allowed to be pivots in Tagalog. LV, reflecting DAT from the pivot goal, follows straightforwardly. However, when the theme is the pivot, we get two possible verb forms: PV in (3b) and CV in (3d). For the former, the goal argument must be in its PP form. This ensures that Dependent Case assignment does not give OBL to the theme, leaving it free to take dependent ACC. The latter, on the other hand, has the goal argument in Spec-*v*: with the OBL pivot, the verb takes CV morphology.

In (5), with the root *bigay* ‘give’, we have **obligatory** ditransitivity:

- (5) a. Nag-bigay ang lalaki ng bulaklak sa babae. AV
 PRF.AV-give PIV man NPIV flower DAT woman
 ‘The man gave the woman some flowers.’
 *b. B<in>igay-∅ ng lalaki ang bulaklak sa babae. PV
 <PRF>give-PV NPIV man PIV flower DAT woman (infinitive: *bigy-in)
 Intended: ‘The man gave the woman the flowers.’
 c. B<in>igy-an ng lalaki ng bulaklak ang babae. LV
 <PRF>give-LV NPIV man NPIV flower PIV woman
 ‘The man gave the woman some flowers.’
 d. I-b<in>igay ng lalaki ang bulaklak sa babae. CV
 CV-<PRF>give NPIV man PIV flower DAT woman
 ‘The man gave the woman the flowers.’

Note that, as shown in (5b), PV is illicit for obligatorily ditransitive verbs. The fact that this differs from (3b) is crucial. I propose that for verbs like *bigay* in (5), the goal argument must be generated in the Spec-*v* slot. Thus, for (5b), PV marking cannot obtain: the theme cannot get ACC as it is always c-commanded by the goal, giving it dependent OBL. The verb of a theme pivot here thus surfaces with the elsewhere case of CV morphology as in (5d).

In short, PV can only obtain when there nothing generated in Spec-*v*. This will always be the case for monotransitives. In fact, movement to this position for objects of monotransitives is possible in instances of Differential Object Marking, where non-generic theme DPs are headed with *sa* instead of *ng* [7]. For intransitives, meanwhile, verbs always have AV *m-*; the absence of a c-command relationship will always lead to the sole argument receiving default NOM.

One advantage of this approach is that it can account for a benefactive alternation seen with non-ditransitives. In (6), LV obtains if the pivot were generated as a goal in Spec-*v*, taking DAT. CV obtains instead if the pivot had a different case, perhaps a benefactive case bestowed by an applicative head.

- (6) I-b<in>ili / B<in>ilh-an ng lalaki ang babae ng bulaklak.
 CV-<PRF>buy / <PRF>buy-LV NPIV man PIV woman NPIV flower
 ‘The man bought the woman flowers.’

It could also account for causee pivots in causative constructions. Canonically, these take CV, but some speakers also accept LV. If we treat the causative as a projection nested under Voice [8], there are two possible places for the causee to be generated. Whether the verb surfaces with CV or LV depends on whether the pivot starts in Spec-Caus or in Spec-*v* (treated as the goal of the causing event, perhaps) before moving to Spec-Caus. I illustrate this in (7):

- (7) I-p<in>a-bili / P<in>a-bilh-an ng lalaki ang babae ng bulaklak.
 CV-<PRF>CAUS-buy / <PRF>CAUS-buy-LV NPIV man PIV woman NPIV flower
 ‘The man had the woman buy flowers.’

References. [1] Richards 2000, “Another Look at Tagalog Subjects.” [2] Chen 2017, *A Reexamination of the Philippine-Type Voice System...* [3] Rackowski 2002, *The Structure of Tagalog...* [4] Hsieh 2020, *Beyond Nominative...* [5] Baker 2015, *Case*. [6] Marantz 1991, “Case and Licensing.” [7] Latrouite 2011, “Differential Object Marking in Tagalog”. [8] Nie 2020. “Morphological causatives are Voice over Voice” [9] Erlewine et al. 2019 “The typology of nominal licensing in Austronesian voice languages”