

NULL OBJECT CONSTRUCTIONS IN TAGALOG*

Lareina Milambiling
University of Western Ontario

1. Introduction

Null arguments have been discussed in more well-known languages such as French and English, and past research has shown that null arguments vary from language to language (Massam & Roberge 1989). For instance, French examples of null arguments are illustrated in (1):

- (1) a. La course a pied garde ___ en forme.
'Running keeps in shape.'
- b. Ceci amène ___ à conclure ce qui suit.
'This leads to conclude what follows' (Massam & Roberge 1989).

Although (1) is ungrammatical in English, null arguments can be found in certain discourse contexts, such as in recipe contexts (RC) or other instructions (Massam & Roberge 1989). In these discourses, it is the object that is dropped, as illustrated in (2). Throughout the paper, I will refer to this as object-drop.:

- (2) Take 3 eggs. Break ___ into a bowl. (Massam & Roberge 1989)

This preliminary research compares null arguments in English and Tagalog recipes, examines what can be dropped in Tagalog RC and shows that it is always the topic. I will refer to this as topic-drop. As background for the consideration of this research, section 2. introduces Tagalog verb and sentence structure. In the following sections (2.1, 2.2 and 2.3), I show how goal-topic verbs, beneficiary-topic verbs and direction-topic verbs can license topic-drop in Tagalog RC. In section 2.4 I argue that actor-topic verbs cannot license topic-drop in Tagalog RC. In section 3. and 3.1 I compare null arguments in English and Tagalog RC and show the similarities and differences. And in section 4., I show that while English null arguments are limited in distribution, Tagalog null arguments are widespread.

2. Tagalog verbs and sentence structure

First, it is important to understand Tagalog verbs and sentence structure. Over the last 20 years, most of the work on the syntax of Philippine languages has been focused on the question of whether or not these languages can be said to have grammatical subjects. Two sides of this debate has suggested that these arguments are of a basic transitive clause that should be analyzed as being the subject, or that these arguments should be seen as containing the nominative case markings of a topic (Kroeger 1993). In this paper I use Schachter's (1976)

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terminology and assume that the most salient argument in sentence is a topic, not a subject.

In Tagalog, the noun phrase (NP) that is the topic is indicated by the morphology of the verb (Schachter 1976). The topic is also preceded by the morpheme *ang*, the nominative case marker in Tagalog, as shown in (3) (Kroeger 1993). "...There are actor-topic (AT) verbs, goal-topic (GT) verbs, direction-topic (DT) verbs and beneficiary-topic (BT) verbs... and the topics that occur with these verbs may be called the actor-topic, the goal-topic, etc..." (Schachter 1976). In these glosses, I will continue to use Schachter's (1976) terminology and the abbreviations AT, GT, DT and BT are used to indicate that the verbs are marked respectively as actor-topic, goal-topic, direction-topic and beneficiary topic¹. As well, T preceding the glosses of nouns and pronouns indicate that the nouns or pronouns are marked as the topic.

In the following Tagalog RC examples, the dropped argument can correspond to different thematic roles (goal, beneficiary and direction), but it is always the topic as indicated by the verb morphology.

2.1 Goal-topic and null arguments in RC

In this section, I introduce the goal-topic verb morphology and show that goal-topic verbs can license topic-drop in Tagalog RC. For goal-topic verbs, the suffix *-in* is added to the verb (Schachter 1976), as illustrated below:

- (3) Aalisin ng babae
 GT-will-take-out woman
- ang bigas sa sako para sa bata.
 T-rice sack child
 'A/the woman will take the rice out of a/the sack for
 a/the child.' (Schachter 1976)

In (3), the goal-topic morphology on the verb *alis* 'will-take-out' indicates the topic of the sentence, the goal *bigas* 'rice'.

Goal-topic verbs can license null arguments in RC. In the following examples the antecedent *ang sampalok* 'tamarind fruit' is overtly expressed in the (4)a, and then is a dropped in (4)b. The null argument in (4)b is licensed by the goal-topic morphology of the preceding verbs *alisin* 'take out' and *ligisin* 'squeeze'. The dropped argument is the thematic goal of the verbs and corresponds to the topic of the clauses, as indicated by the goal-topic morphology discussed above.

- (4) a. Context:
Lutuin ang sampalok sa tubig
 GT-look T-tamarind fruit in water
- hanggang lumambot.
 until soft
 'Cook the tamarind fruit in water until soft.'

¹ These verb forms in recipes are not imperatives and the agent 'you' is understood but not overtly present.

b. Example of topic drop in GT voice:

Alisin _____ at
 GT-will-take out _____ and

ligisin _____
 GT-squeeze
 ‘Take out and squeeze.’ (Kain na! 1993)

2.2 Beneficiary-topic and null arguments in RC

In this section, I introduce the beneficiary-topic verb morphology and show that beneficiary-topic verbs can license topic-drop in Tagalog RC. For beneficiary-topic verbs, the prefixes *ipag-* or *i-* is added to the verb as illustrated in (5) (Schachter 1976, Kroeger 1993).

- (5) Ipagalis _____ ng babae _____ ng bigas
 BT-will-take-out woman G-rice

 sa sako ang bata
 sack T-child
 ‘A/the woman will take some rice out of a/the sack _____ for the child.’
 (Schachter 1976)

In (5), the beneficiary-topic morphology on the verb *alis* ‘take out’ indicates the topic of the sentence, the beneficiary *bata* ‘child’.

Beneficiary topic can license topic-drop in Tagalog RC as shown in (6). The beneficiary-topic or antecedent *ang mga sandwich* ‘the sandwiches’ is overtly expressed in (6)a, and then is a dropped in (6)b. The null argument in (6)b is licensed by the beneficiary-topic morphology of the preceding verb *igulong* ‘roll’. The dropped argument is the thematic beneficiary of the verbs and corresponds to the topic of the clauses. This topic is indicated by the beneficiary-topic morphology discussed above.

- (6) a. Context:
Balutan _____ ng arina _____ ang mga sandwich.
 DT-shroud of starch T-the sandwiches.
 ‘Cover sandwiches in starch.’ (Kain na! 1993)

b. Example of topic-drop in BT voice:

Igulong _____ sa binating itlog _____ at
 BT-roll _____ in beaten egg and

pagkatapos ay _____ sa breadcrumbs.
 when done then in breadcrumbs.
 ‘Roll in beaten egg and then in breadcrumbs.’ (Kain na! 1993)

2.3 Direction-topic verbs and null arguments in Tagalog RC

In this section, I introduce the direction-topic verb morphology and show that direction-topic verbs can license topic-drop in Tagalog RC. For direction-topic verbs, the suffix *-an* is added to the verb (Schachter 1976) as illustrated in (7):

- (7) Aalisan ng babae ng bigas
 DT-will-take-out woman rice
- ang sako para sa bata
 T-sack child
 ‘A/the woman will take some rice out of the sack for a/the child.’
 (Schachter 1976)

In (7), the direction-topic morphology on the verb *aalisan* ‘take out’ indicates the topic of the sentence, the direction *sako* ‘sack’.

Direction-topic verbs can license topic-drop in Tagalog RC as shown in (8). The direction-topic or antecedent *ang asukal, tubig, langka, mantikilya at gatas* ‘the sugar, water, jackfruit, butter and milk’ is expressed in the (8)a, and then is a dropped in (8)b. The null argument in (8)b is licensed by the direction-topic morphology of the preceding verb *Pakuluan* ‘boil’. The dropped argument is the thematic direction of the verbs and corresponds to the topic of the clauses. This topic is indicated by the direction-topic morphology discussed above.

- (8) a. Context:
 Pakuluan ang asukal, tubig, langka at
 DT-boil T-the sugar, water, jackfruit and

 mantikilya. Ibhos ang gatas.
 butter. BT-pour T-the milk.
 ‘Boil the sugar, water, jackfruit and butter. Pour in the milk.’
- b. Example of topic-drop in DT voice:
 Pakuluan ____ hanggang lumapot.
 DT-boil until condense.
 ‘Boil until thickens.’ (Kain na! 1993)

In Tagalog RC, the goal-topic verb is used most frequently, which is because ingredients of a recipe tend to be the thematic goal of the verb of the sentence. The beneficiary-topic verb form and directional-topic verb form can also both be used, but in specific cases.

2.4 Actor-topic and null arguments in Tagalog RC

In this section, I show that actor-topic verbs cannot license topic-drop in Tagalog RC. For actor-topic verbs, the prefix *mag-* is put in front of the verb as illustrated in (9) (Schachter 1976).

- (9) Magalis ang babae ng bigas
 AT-will-take-out T-woman rice
- sa sako para sa bata.
 sack child

‘The woman will take some rice out of a/the sack for a/the child.’ (Schachter 1976)

In (9), the actor-topic morphology on the verb *Magalis* ‘will-take-out’ indicates the topic of the sentence, the actor “*babae*.”

However, actor-topic (AT) voice cannot license topic-drop in Tagalog RC. This is illustrated in (10), the actor-topic verb *magbalot* ‘wrap’ cannot license the topic-drop of the antecedent *ang mantikilya* ‘the butter’.

(10) a. Context:
Isama ang mantikilya.
 BT-add T-the butter
 ‘Add butter.’

b. Example of topic-drop in AT voice:
 *Magbalot ___ sa asukal.
 AT-wrap in sugar.

The correct verb morphology to license this null argument would be direction-topic morphology as in (10)c.

c. Example of topic-drop in DT voice:
Balutan ___ sa asukal.
 DT-wrap in sugar.
 ‘Cover with sugar.’

The actor-topic morphology of a Tagalog verb is not able to license topic-drop because the element that is dropped in RC never corresponds to the thematic actor and therefore actor-topic is not possible.

3. Similarity between null arguments in Tagalog RC and English RC

In English RC, both “affecting” and “non-affecting” verbs can license null arguments or object drop (2) (Massam & Roberge 1989). Like English both “affecting” and “non-affecting” Tagalog verbs license null arguments, as illustrated in (11) and (13). Examples (2) and (11) illustrate “affecting” English and Tagalog verbs licensing null arguments in RC. In (2), the affecting verb *break* licenses the object-drop of *eggs*.

(2) Take 3 eggs. Break ___ into a bowl. (Massam & Roberge 1989)

In (11), the “affecting” verb *talupan* ‘peel’ also licenses the topic-drop of *ang patatas* ‘the potatoes’.

(11) Ilaga ang patatas at talupan ____.
 BT-put T-the potatoes and DT-peel
 ‘Take potatoes and peel.’

Examples (12) and (13) however illustrate “non-affecting” verbs that are grammatically licensing null arguments in English and Tagalog RC. In (12), the “non-affecting” verb *melt* licenses the object-drop of *ice cubes*.

- (12) Take several ice cubes and melt ___ slowly over hot water.
(Massam & Roberge 1989)

In (13), the “non-affecting” verb *Pagtaklubin* ‘cover’ licenses the topic-drop of the topic *ang dalawang gilid* ‘the two sides’.

- (13) a. Context:
Lagyan ng binating cream
DT-Put the beaten cream

sa ibabaw ang dalawang gilid.
on top T-the two sides
‘Place the beaten cream on both sides.’

b. Example of “non-affecting” verb licensing topic-drop in Tagalog RC:
Pagtaklubin ____.
‘Cover’ (Kain na! 1993)

3.1 Difference between null arguments in Tagalog RC and English RC

As discussed above, Tagalog drops topics and not objects in RC. I propose that objects are not dropped in Tagalog RC because objects in Tagalog must be non-specific/indefinite (Adams & Manaster-Ramer) and the null argument in Tagalog RC is necessarily definite. The topic in Tagalog must always be marked as definite (Schachter 1976) and therefore can be dropped.

While the nominative case marker *ang* is a definite article (Adams & Manaster-Ramer) that can be used for any argument role, the genitive case marker *ng* is used for Possessors, Actors, Instruments and indefinite Objects (Kroeger 1993). In Tagalog RC, the presence of *ng* before arguments indicates that they are indefinite objects, as illustrated in (14), as well as in above examples.

- (14) a. Example from ingredient list in Tagalog RC:

Pork Chop Fricassee

6 hiwa ng bacon
6 slices bacon
‘6 slices bacon’

6 piraso ng pork chop
6 pieces pork chop
‘6 pieces pork chop’

2/3 tasa ng tubig
2/3 cup water
‘2/3 cup water’

1/3 tasa ng white wine

1/3 cup white wine
 '1/3 cup white wine'

1 tasa ng button mushrooms
 1 cup button mushrooms
 '1 cup button mushrooms' (Kain na! 1993)

As in ingredient lists of English RC, Tagalog RC ingredient lists contains indefinite objects. These indefinite objects are indicated by the preceding *ng*. And in (13), it is only the topic that is preceded by the definite article *ang* and becomes definite when used in the instructions, the rest of the ingredients remain indefinite and are indicated as so by the morpheme *ng*.

- (13) a. Context:
 Lagyan ng binating cream sa ibabaw ang dalawang gilid.
 DT-Put the beaten cream on top T-the two sides
 'Place the beaten cream on both sides.'

b. Example of dropped topic:
 Pagtaklubin ____.
 'Cover.' (Kain na! 1993)

Another difference is that unlike English object drop, null arguments or topic-drop can occur in non-recipe or non-instruction contexts in Tagalog. In (16), direction-topic verb *labhan* 'wash' licenses the topic-drop of the topic *ang damit* 'the outfit' found in (15). In (17), the direction-verb *pupunasan* 'dry' licenses the pro-drop of the antecedent *ang mga pinggan* 'the dishes', which is the topic.

- (15) Context:
 Madumi ang damit ko.
 [are] dirty T-the outfit my.
 'My outfit is dirty.'

- (16) Example of topic drop outside RC or instruction context:
 Labhan mo ____.
 DT-wash you.
 'Wash.'

- (17) Outside RC or instruction context with topic drop in same sentence:
 Huhugasan ko ang mga pinggan,
 DT-wash me T-the dishes

at pupunasan mo ____.
 and DT-dry you.
 'I will wash the dishes, and you dry (them).' (Kroeger 1993)

- (18) Huhugasan ko ____ at pupunasan mo ang mga pinggan.
 DT-wash me and DT-dry you the dishes.
 'I will wash and you dry the dishes.' (Kroeger 1993)

4. Conclusion

Both English and Tagalog allow for null arguments in recipes, but Tagalog does not follow the same pattern as English. English object-drop is limited in distribution but Tagalog topic-drop is widespread. I propose that topic-drop in Tagalog RC is the same as topic-drop found elsewhere in Tagalog. Just like the dropped arguments in Tagalog RC, the dropped arguments in (16), (17) and (18) are the thematic directions of the verbs and corresponds to the topic of the clauses, as indicated by the direction-topic morphology.

However, it is also important to note that in addition to topic-drop, Tagalog can also license pro-drop outside of RC. Within the following pro-drop examples, Tagalog can license object-drop:

- (19) Examples of object-drop in Tagalog outside RC:

Niluto ni Josie ang pagkain
GT-cook Josie T-food

at hinugasan ang mga pinggan ____.
and DT-wash T-the dishes

‘The food was cooked by Josie and the dishes washed (by her).’ (Kroeger 1993).

- (20) Nanghuhuli ang ama ko ngisda at nagtitinda
AT-Catch T-father my fish and AT-sell

ang ina ko ____.
T-mother my

‘My father catches fishes, and my mother sells (them).’ (Kroeger 1993)

- (21) Kung makikita ko siya, ibibigay ko ang sulat mo ____.
if GT-see I him GT-give I T-letter your
‘If I see him, I will give (him) your letter.’ (Kroeger 1993).

In conclusion, we note that Tagalog null arguments do not follow the same patterns as English null arguments. English object-drop is limited in distribution but Tagalog topic-drop is widespread. Future research comparing the different kinds of null arguments (topic-drop vs. object-drop vs. pro-drop) in Tagalog and other languages will offer an even more comprehensive perspective on this matter.

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