

On some ways to test Tagalog nominalism from a crosslinguistic perspective

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Daniel Kaufman's core proposal is that much of what is typologically special about Tagalog syntax is rooted in the language having nouns but not verbs as its core lexical categories. He sees this at two levels. First, bare roots in Tagalog are nominal rather than verbal; for example, *bili* on its own means 'price bought for' rather than 'buy'. Second, he claims that fully inflected "verbs" in Tagalog are also really nouns; they are nouns that refer to the various participants in an event, as formations like *employer* and *employee* do in English. Thus, a form like *b-um-ili* should be literally glossed as 'buyer', while *b-in-ili* should be glossed as 'bought-thing'. From this hypothesis, Kaufman derives certain other distinctive features of Tagalog syntax—notably the fact that only subjects/topics can be extracted in this language, from the fact that NPs (unlike VPs) are often islands to extraction in languages of the world.

This is an intriguing, somewhat radical, and potentially elegant proposal. As Kaufman himself points out, it falls squarely within a broader class of proposals, which have been investigated off and on for many years within different descriptive traditions. These proposals share the idea that one source of the differences among languages is differences in their stocks of lexical categories.

Such proposals need to face a certain built-in challenge in order to be sustained. They need to be developed within a crosslinguistically valid theory of the lexical categories in order to be meaningful. For example, saying that English has a noun/verb distinction and Tagalog does not seems to presuppose that there is a universally valid sense of noun and verb that is in principle applicable to both languages. This is especially true of Kaufman's version, because he says not merely that the noun-verb distinction is neutralized in Tagalog, but that it is neutralized in favor of the nominal categories: the language has words comparable to nouns in English, not words comparable to verbs in English, nor words that have the grammatical properties of both. I commend Kaufman for developing his view in this way. I think that if there are interesting and meaningful parameters in this domain, they must be of this type. But one cannot make an argument that Tagalog has nouns but not verbs purely internal to Tagalog. Within Tagalog one might manage to show that there are no significant differences in the grammatical possibilities of different lexical roots, and one could identify what grammatical properties those words had. But it takes some crosslinguistic work beyond this—explicit or implicit—to show that that category is a noun, rather than a verb or some novel category.

Kaufman clearly recognizes the logic of this point, when he writes (p. 24) "The main contribution of the present work is to bring to light several nontrivial connections between Tagalog morphosyntax and ostensibly universal features of nominal morphosyntax." And yet he says relatively little about what exactly these ostensibly universal features of nominal morphosyntax are, and no clear theory of what it is to be a noun is developed, defended, or adopted. To my mind, this weakens his argument somewhat.

I myself have been interested in the possibility that languages might differ parametrically in their stocks of lexical categories, and that this might be the root cause of certain typological differences—for example, the claim that Mohawk has no adjectives but only verbs, or the claim that Warlpiri has no nouns but only adjectives, and this plays a role in determining its special brand of nonconfigurationality (Baker 2001). I learned from this that some real work needs to be done to develop the theory of lexical categories to the point where hypotheses like this have clear implications and thus become empirically testable. This led me to the theory of nouns, verbs, and adjectives that I put forward in Baker 2003. Since Kaufman does not endorse any particular theory of the lexical categories, I consider here what would be the results of combining his nominalist analysis of Tagalog with my particular view of the noun-verb distinction. This combination of ideas leads to some new ideas about how the nominalist hypothesis could be tested in Tagalog.

At the core of my theory of lexical categories is the claim that verbs license specifiers within their maximal projections (the verb phrase), whereas nouns (and adjectives) do not. In other words, verbs are intrinsically predicates, whereas nouns can only become predicates by combining with a functional head (Pred, see Bowers 1993). Kaufman adopts a slightly idiosyncratic version of this view in his structure in (56).

An important empirical consequence of this difference, I claim, is that it is possible for an intransitive verb to act like an *unaccusative* predicate, whose sole argument behaves in some respects like the object rather than the subject of a transitive verb. In contrast, nouns can never act like unaccusative predicates, since their subjects are never generated directly inside NP, but only inside PredP. One reflection of this difference is that the “subject” argument of some verbs can incorporate into the verb in languages like Mohawk (Baker 1996), whereas the subject of a predicate nominal can never incorporate into the noun:

- (1) a. Wa'-ka-wir-Λ'-ne'. (unaccusative verb)
 FACT-NsS-baby-fall-PUNC
 'The baby fell.'
- b. *Wa'-t-ka-wir-ahsΛ''tho'. (unergative verb)
 FACT-DUP-NsS-baby-cry-PUNC
 'The baby cried.'
- c. *Ka-nerohkw-a-nuhs-a' (OK: Ka-nuhs-a' ne o-nerohkwa-kvha.)
 Ns-box-Ø-house-NSF Ns-house-NSF NE Ns-box-former
 'That box is a house.' (nominal predicate)

Similar patterns are found in other languages, including Italian, Russian, Hebrew, Japanese (Baker 2003:62-76) and the Turkic language Sakha.

Given this, I would expect participant-denoting nominalization to neutralize the unergative/unaccusative distinction found in the underlying verbs. So if Mohawk had the relevant sort of nominalization (it does not), noun incorporation into 'crier' and 'faller' should be equally impossible:

- (2) a. *[baby-[cry+er]]
 ‘The baby is a crier.’
- b. *[baby-[fall+er]]
 ‘the baby is a faller.’

This is consistent with what is known: I know of no indication in the literature that participant-denoting deverbal nouns are exceptions to the general rule that nouns cannot incorporate into other nouns (although the question has rarely been asked).

Let us take this back to Tagalog. Kaufman’s nominalist hypothesis together with my theory of the noun-verb contrast makes the interesting new prediction that the unaccusative-unergative distinction should not exist in Tagalog syntax; all ‘verbs’ should behave like unergative predicates, because they are really nouns.

What is known about this matter? In fact, there seems to be relatively little research on (syntactic) unaccusativity in Tagalog to date. However, Sabbagh (2005:103-106) puts forward one unaccusativity diagnostic that could be relevant. (I thank Norvin Richards for calling this to my attention.) Sabbagh shows that when a patient voice clause is negated with the particle *hindi*, the genitive-case agent can appear between *hindi* and the verb. In contrast, when a clause in agent voice is negated with *hindi*, the genitive-case theme cannot appear before the verb:

- (3) a. Hindi ni Maria b-in-asag ang pinggan. (p. 105)
 not GEN Maria PV-break NOM plate
 ‘Maria didn’t break the plate.’
- b. *Hindi ng pinggan b-um-asag si Maria.
 not GEN plate AV-break NOM Maria
 ‘Maria didn’t break the plate.’

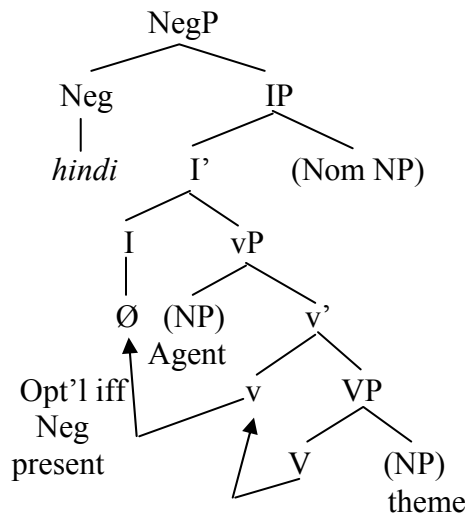
Sabbagh then applies this to intransitive verbs in the recent past form, in which there is no voice morphology or nominative-case argument. With agentive verbs like ‘work’, the sole argument of the verb can appear before the verb, but with nonagentive verbs like ‘tear’, it cannot:

- (4) a. Hindi ni Maria ka-ta-trabaho lang. (p. 106)
 not GEN Maria REC-PERF-work just
 ‘Maria has not just worked.’
- b. *Hindi ng aki-ng damit ka-pu-punit lang.
 Not GEN my-LKdress REC-PERF-tear just
 ‘My dress did not just tear.’

Since the sole argument of a verb like ‘tear’ behaves like the object of a transitive verb and not like the subject of a transitive verb, Sabbagh concludes that it is unaccusative—and that the unaccusative/unergative distinction exists for verbs in Tagalog.

Sabbagh does not propose an explicit analysis of this phenomenon, but it is not hard to construct one under the “standard” view that Tagalog has ordinary verbs, and a relatively normal clause structure. Following Guilfoyle, Hung, and Travis 1992:394-396 (GHT), suppose that the theme in Tagalog is generated in the complement of V (to its right), the agent is generated in the specifier of v (to its left), and V moves through v to Infl to derive verb initial order typical of Tagalog (terminology updated slightly). To this, let us add the new assumption that *hindi* renders the movement of the verb to Infl optional. (Perhaps *hindi* can be a head that intervenes between v and Infl, or it is just above IP and licenses an empty head in the Infl position.) If the agent does not move higher (as it may in an agent voice construction), it remains in Spec, vP. As a result, it comes before the verb when the verb raises only as far as v, but not otherwise. In contrast, when the theme does not move higher, the base position it stays in is after the verb even if the verb does not raise at all. This is shown in the structure in (5).

(5)



There is then no way to derive *hindi*-NP_{theme}-verb order under these assumptions, and the difference between unaccusative and unergative verbs can be explained.

Could Kaufman’s nominalist theory be developed so as to duplicate this result? I will not say that it cannot be done, but I foresee some problems. First, it is not clear where recent past clauses (cf. GHT:396) fit into his theory in the first place. They are neither bare roots (alias simple nouns) nor voice-inflected words (alias derived nominalizations). Are they nouns at all? If so, what kind? If not, then Kaufman’s view needs to be qualified, since verbal projections exist after all in Tagalog.

Suppose that they are (event-denoting?) nouns. It is perhaps not implausible to say that agents and themes are generated in different positions within the structure of an event-denoting NP, so that element of (5) might carry over, with NP in place of vP. But it is not so plausible to say that a noun can move out of the NP to a clausal functional projection like Infl, as must happen in affirmative clauses under my proposal. We know that verb-to-Infl movement is found in many languages (Pollock 1989), but noun-to-

Tense movement apparently is not. This then could be a stumbling block in an effort by Kaufman to account for Sabbagh's paradigm within the nominalist hypothesis.

Along a different track, I would also like to point out that there are interesting issues to work out concerning how the various participant-denoting nominalizations that Kaufman's view depends on are derived from a morphological perspective. His idea is that *bumili* means 'buyer', *binili* means 'the bought one, the buyee', *binilhan* means 'the buying place', and so on. At first glance, this seems quite plausible, in that nominalization derivations like these do exist in many languages. But the familiar cases all involve nominalization from a verbal root—like *buyer* from *buy* in English. Taken literally, this cannot be exactly what happens in Tagalog on Kaufman's view, because there is no verbal root to derive these forms from, only a nominal root. This raises the question, of whether it is as plausible to derive nominals meaning "participant X in an event of Ying" if there are not roots that are predicates of events in the first place. Can one go straight from a core noun meaning to a participant-in-event reading? It is not out of the question: English has a few denominal agentive nominalizations like *hatter* (the agent of events of making, selling, or repairing hats) and *lawyer*, and such derivations can be reasonably common and productive across languages. However, their syntactic and semantic properties are not well studied, with regard to questions such as whether they are thematically stable, what their argument-taking properties are, and so on. Until this is done, a piece is missing for evaluating how plausible this central element in Kaufman's view is from a typological perspective.

As an example of the sort of issues that could arise, I mention one fact from a recent study of agentive nominalizations across languages (Baker and Vinokurova to appear). Although agentive nominalizations can contain a theme argument, they cannot contain adverbs (Rappaport Hovav and Levin 1992). In this respect, they contrast minimally with event-denoting nominals, which can contain adverbs, as shown in (6).

- (6) a. [the finding of the wallet so quickly] (was a big relief).
 b. [the finder of the wallet (*so quickly)] (received a reward).

The contrast seems to be crosslinguistically stable, appearing also in Greek, Sakha, Mapudungun, and other languages. Baker and Vinokurova argue that it is a principled gap, rooted in how the structure is composed. Productive agentive nominalization is the result of using a nominal head in place of the Voice/v head, and (most) adverbs are introduced by functional heads higher than Voice (Cinque 1999). Hence, there is no place for adverbs inside an agentive nominalization. Agentive nominalizations also differ from headless relative clauses that refer to the subject, since the latter do tolerate adverbs. Hence, we find contrasts like the following in Mapudungun:

- (6) a. *lef kūdau-fe; *lef ñomüm-kawell-fe
 quickly work-AG.NOM; quickly tame-horse-AG.NOM
 'one works quickly; one who tames horses quickly'
 b. [Lef illkunngel-lu]
 quickly get.angry-PTPL
 'the one who gets angry quickly'

Suppose this is true, and correctly grounded in Universal Grammar. Then, combining this observation with Kaufman’s claim, one derives the striking prediction that agent voice clauses in Tagalog should not have “low” adverbs (and probably this would carry over to the other voices as well). If they do allow adverbs, constructions like Kaufman’s (7) should probably be analyzed as headless relative clauses rather than agentive nominalizations after all, on a par with (6b) rather than (6a).

Does Tagalog have adverbs? I am no expert, and it might be interesting from the perspective of Kaufman’s nominalism that many so-called adverbs are actually adjectives in Tagalog. But it seems that they are not all of this type. Kaufman himself has done an impressive study of the various kinds of adverbs that exist in Tagalog, arguing that certain theories developed for adverbs in European languages apply to Tagalog as well (Kaufman 2006). Two potentially relevant examples he cites are:

- (7) a. P-um-asok nang madalas sa opisina si Ben.
 AV-enter nang often OBL office NOM Ben
 ‘Ben went to the office often.’
- b. B-in-atikos siya uli ng mga guro.
 PV-criticize 3sg.NOM again GEN PL teacher
 ‘He was criticized again by the teacher.’

If these examples are really to be analyzed as ‘Ben is a goer often to the office’ and ‘He is a criticizee again of the teacher’, then they would run afoul of the robust generalization that participant denoting nominalizations do not contain adverbs.

In conclusion, I have used my experience with the properties of lexical categories in other languages to propose some new ways in which Kaufman’s nominalist hypothesis might be tested. Although I lack the relevant expertise in Tagalog syntax, my educated guess from looking at the literature so far would be that the tests will come back negative—that Tagalog has both an unergative/unaccusative distinction and true adverbs. If this guess is wrong, then the success of Kaufman’s account will be that much more spectacular. If my guess is right, though, this case will replicate my own experience with looking for parameterization in the lexical categories that a language might have: all the plausible cases I was aware of did not hold up under additional scrutiny (see Baker 2003). And yet, I know of nothing about Universal Grammar that rules out proposals like Kaufman’s on general grounds. So articles like his are very pertinent: we do need to define exactly what languages lacking a particular lexical category would look like, determine whether there are such languages, and figure out what this means one way or another.

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