# The Focus Constituent as Subject of Identificational Sentences *

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## 1. Introduction

Identificational or cleft sentences in Tagalog, as in other Philippine languages, have the structure of an equational sentence in which the two NP constituents are both marked with the particle ang.[1] This structure has been described in at least two different contradictory ways: (a) where the first ang-NP is the subject (or in the literature called topic/focus) and the second ang-NP is the predicate/comment, or (b) the exact opposite sequence in (a), predicate + subject, which is the typical sentence structure characteristic of Philippine languages. The predicate with the particle ang is identified as definite or definitized. Semantically, the relation between the two structurally identical constituents means that a particular person or thing is identified or singled out as the one possessing a particular attribute or the one performing a specific role. In this paper, I will show that the first ang-NP of this kind of construction is the surface subject and at the same time the focus constituent. I will attempt to show some syntactic grounds for such an analysis and propose that identificational sentences in Tagalog follow in effect the more general process of topicalization, where the focused entity appears in initial position.

To illustrate:

(1)  ang  babae  ang  nagluto?  nang  pagkain
          woman        cooked              food

   'The woman was the one who cooked some food.' / It was the woman who cooked some food.'

(2)  si  Maria  ang  maganda
                       pretty

   'Maria is the pretty one.' / 'It is Maria who is pretty.'

(3)  ang  babae  ang  huwes[2]
          woman        judge

   'The woman is the judge.' / 'It is the woman who is the judge.'

Parallel to these three identificational sentences are the following simple predicative sentences consisting of the predicate, i.e., primarily a verb, an adjective, or a noun, and its subject, a

nominal of the type marked with <u>ang</u> or the nominative set of pronouns/
demonstratives or personal names preceded by the marker <u>si</u>/<u>sina</u>.

    (4)   nagluto  ang  babae  nang  pagkain
           cooked       woman        food

       'The woman cooked some food.'

    (5)   maganda  si  Maria
           pretty

       'Maria is pretty.'

    (6)   huwes  ang  babae
           judge       woman

       'The woman is a judge.'

When the predicate is a verb, a corresponding verbal affix indicates
the case role of the subject nominal.  For example, in (4) the verb is
in the active voice and the agent <u>ang babae</u> 'the woman' is the subject.
The direct object is marked by <u>nang</u>, but when this nominal functions as
the subject, it is marked by <u>ang</u> and the cooccurring verb is affixed
with the objective voice affix, in this case -<u>in</u>, illustrated below in
its contemplated aspect form:[3]

    (4.a)  lulutu?in  nang  babae  ang  pagkain
          will cook      woman      food

       'The food will be cooked by the woman.'

    In a sentence where the verb cooccurs with a receiver of an object,
this nominal may also occur as a subject and this grammatical function
is marked by a corresponding affix in the verb.  For example:

    (7.a)  <u>i</u>binigay  nang  guro?  <u>ang libro</u>  sa  bata?
          gave          teacher   book       child

       'The book was given to the child by the teacher.'

    (7.b)  binigy<u>an</u>  nang  guro?  <u>ang bata?</u>  nang  libro

    (7.c)  <u>nag</u>bigay  <u>ang guro?</u>  nang  libro  sa  bata?

    In the following discussion we will make references to the above
basic structures and their relationship to the identificational
construction.

2.   Syntactic Tests for the Cleft Construction

At least three areas will be explored here to test the analysis
that the ang-NP + ang-NP construction is a special construction convey-
ing the identificational meaning and its constituents follow the order
subject + predicate.  We will look at:   (1)  cooccurrence restrictions
between the two main constituents, (2) relativization, and (3)
topicalization.


2.1  Cooccurrence Restrictions

Schachter and Otanes (1972:63-64) identify two types of nominal
predicate:  the unmarked nominal predicate as in (6) above conveying
an indefinite meaning and the marked nominal predicate, consisting of
personal pronouns, demonstrative pronouns and personal nouns or names,
which all express definiteness.  The latter type is exemplified below
and the marked nominal predicates are underlined.

    (8)  <u>siya</u>  ang  amerikano
         He         American
        'He's the American.'
    (9)  <u>iyan</u>  ang  bahay  namin
         that       house

        'That's our house.'

    (10)  <u>si Juan</u>  ang  bunso
                      youngest?

        'Juan is the youngest child.'

Furthermore, Schachter and Otanes formulate a rule of "definitization"
(1972:529-30) whereby an unmarked nominal, an adjective or a verb in
predicate position can be made definite by introducing the marker <u>ang</u>
before them.  Note, however, the forms of the second <u>ang</u>-NP.  To use
their examples:

    (11)  ang  maganda  ang  dumating  kahapon
             pretty       came      yesterday

        'The pretty one is the one that came yesterday.'

    (12)  ang  naroon  ang  para  sa  iyo
             over there  for      you

        'The one over there is the one for you.'

    (13)  ang  binili  ko  sa  Maynila  ang  pinakamabuti
             bought  I      Manila       best

        'The one I bought in Manila is the best.'

The first observation that we can make is that sentences (8) - (10),
with the supposed "definite predicates", are identical in structure to
(1) - (3).  Likewise, their meaning is virtually the same as that of an
identificational structure.  We will note that sentences (11) - (13),
described as having "definitized predicates", also fall under the same
type of construction.  If this is the case, we can then compare the
membership of each constituent and the cooccurrence relationship existing
between the two major constituents.  In the first ang-NP, we see a whole
range of nominals, e.g., common nouns marked by ang, personal nouns
marked by si, nominative personal and demonstrative pronouns, and
nominalized adjectives and verbs with their respective complements.
If we consider the membership of the second ang-NP, we would expect
it to be freely filled by a similar range of word classes as that of
the first ang-NP.  On the contrary, there are certain cooccurrence
restrictions that have to be observed, as pointed out by Schachter
and Otanes (1972:530).  First, with a nominal preceded by ang in the
first constituent, a personal name, a personal pronoun or a demonstrative
cannot occur as the second constituent.  For example:

    (14)  *ang  Amerikana  si  Helen/siya/iyon
           the   American          he or she  /  that yonder

This sentence cannot be interpreted as 'The American is Helen' or 'It
is the American who is Helen.'  At best, (14) can be rendered gram-
matical as follows:

    (14a)  ang  Amerikana  ang  si  Helen

         'It is the American who is named Helen.'

Second, when the first ang-NP is adjectival or verbal, the second NP
can only be a nominalized element, not a nominal.  Thus,

    (15)  *ang  ⎡ mura        ⎤  ⎡ ang  singsing ⎤
               | inexpensive |  |      ring    |
               ⎨            ⎬  ⎨            ⎬
               | nakita  ko |  | si   Helen  |
               | saw     I  |  | siyon      |
               ⎣         ⎦  ⎣ iyon       ⎦

It is clearly shown in (11) - (13) that the second ang-NP is quite
readily filled by nominalizations of various types of predicate
elements.  These two restrictions raise some interesting questions.  If
the second constituent is indeed the subject of the Tagalog cleft
construction, why are basic subject categories such as personal names,
pronouns and even common nouns prohibited from performing this function?
What is preventing them from being predicated?  Couldn't this restriction
be indicating that the second position is actually a predicate position
and is normally filled by unmarked nouns (e.g., N's preceded by ang)
or by nominalizations.  Granting this premise, any subject category in
the basic predicative construction can occur as the subject or the first

ang-NP of the identificational structure, and likewise, any predicate category (i.e., having ruled out 'definite predicates', they being part of cleft constructions) can occur as the predicate or the second ang-NP.

If we push this argument further, it is suggesting that cleft constructions are not formed simply by "definitizing" a given predicate of a basic construction, that is, preceding it with the marker ang. Although some sentences may come out grammatical by doing this, others will not. Consider the verbal sentences in (7):

(7.a') ? ang ibinigay nang guro? sa bata? ang libro

(7.b') ? ang binigyan nang guro? nang libro ang bata?

(7.c') ? ang nagbigay nang libro sa bata? ang guro?

In the above sentences, the first ang-NP cannot be interpreted as predicating or identifying the second ang-NP. If cleft sentences are used in answer to specific information questions, the more natural expectation would be where the subject nominal, which bears the information of the element being identified and to which the out-of-focus constituent still refers, appears as the first ang-NP constituent. Thus:

(7.a") ang libro ang ibinigay nang guro? sa bata?

'It was the book that the teacher gave to the child.'

Referring back to the verbal sentences in (7), we mentioned that there is an agreement relation that exists between the nominal subject and the verb which is expressed by the verbal affix. In (7.a) - (7.c), ang libro is inextricably tied with the verb form ibinigay, ang bata? with binigyan, and ang guro? with nagbigay. Likewise, the same agreement rule operates in identificational sentences. (7.a") will be rendered ungrammatical if this agreement rule is violated. Thus,

(7.a''') *ang libro { ang nagbigay nang guro? sa bata? }
                     { ang binigyan nang guro? sa bata? }

Although the agreement rule does not provide direct evidence for a subject + predicate analysis of cleft sentences, it indicates a strong empirical support for a subject movement analysis. The subject that has been moved is then claimed to remain as the subject with the added information that it is identified or singled out as the nominal to which the nominalized predicate, i.e., the predicate preceded by the marker ang, refers.

## 2.2 Relativization

Relativization in Ilonggo and in Tagalog has been discussed by
Schachter (1973) and (1976), respectively. It operates only on
subjects, i.e. the subject of the sentence underlying the relative
clause which is coreferential to the head nominal being modified by
the clause is said to be deleted and a relative marker na/-ng is
inserted to introduce the remainder of the clause.[4] For example,
from sentences (7), we get:

(7.aa)  ang  libro  na  ibinigay  nang  guro?  sa  bata?

'the book that was given by the teacher to the child'

(7.bb)  ang  bata?  na  binigyan  nang  guro?  nang  libro

'the child who was given a book by the teacher'

(7.cc)  ang  guro?  na  nagbigay  nang  libro  sa  bata?

'the teacher who gave a book to the child'

Applying the relativization rule to identificational sentences (1) -
(3) and taking the order to be subject + predicate, we derive the
following ungrammatical sequences:

(1')  *ang  babae  na  ang  nagluto?  nang  pagkain

(2')  *si  Maria  na  ang  maganda

(3')  *ang  babae  na  ang  huwes

Similarly, if we consider the predicate + subject order, the resulting
sentences are even worse because the subject of the clause is not just
a noun or a pronoun.  (Cf. Schachter, 1973:27).

(1")  *ang  nagluto?  nang  pagkain  na  ang  babae

Does this mean that identificational sentences then don't relativize?[5]

At this point we bring in a variant form of the cleft sentence
where a contrastive marker siya may occur after ang of the second NP
constituent and is linked to the rest of the constituent by the
relative marker in the form -ng, as in:

(1.a)  ang  babae  ang  siya-ng  nagluto?  nang  pagkain

'The woman is the one who cooked some food.'

(2.a)  si  Maria  ang  siya-ng  maganda

'Maria is the one who is pretty.'

With this cleft variant, relative clauses can now be formed following
the rule with the additional deletion of the marker <u>ang</u> before the
remaining portion of the predicate constituent.  Thus, for (1.a),
considering the first constituent as the subject, we have:

    (1.aa)  ang  babae  na  siya-ng  nagluto?  nang  pagkain

            'The woman was the one who cooked some food.'

On the other hand, if we take the second constituent as the subject of
the cleft sentence and relativize on it, we will end up with the
following ungrammatical sequence:

    (1.a")  *ang  siya-ng  nagluto?  nang  pagkain  na  babae

Now consider sentence (3):

    (3.a)  ang  babae  ang  siya-ng  huwes

            'The woman is the one who is the judge.' /  'It is the
            woman who is the judge.'

Relativizing on the first constituent subject, we get:

    (3.aa)  ang  babae  na  siya-ng  huwes

            'The woman who is the one who is the judge.'

Trying the second NP as subject, we still get an ungrammatical result:

    (3.a")  *ang  siya-ng  huwes  na  babae

    From the above evidence, relativization works only with the first
<u>ang</u>-NP, thus, it must function as the subject, and consequently the
second <u>ang</u>-NP must be the predicate.

## 2.3  Topicalization

    In previous writings in Philippine linguistics, the grammatical
subject—the nominal marked by <u>ang</u> or its substitutes—has been
referred to as either topic or focus.  More recently, the confusion in
the use of these terms has been clarified.  In contrast to the subject,
a topic is that constituent which is preposed or fronted before the
predicate.  Compare the following related sentence structures:

    (16)  magbabakasyon  ang  magkapatid  sa  Bagyo  sa  isang  buwan
          will take a       siblings             next   month
          vacation
          [+active]

          'The siblings will take a vacation in Baguio next month.'

(16.a)   sa Bagyo magbabakasyon ang magkapatid sa isang buwan

(16.b)   sa isang buwan magbabakasyon (ang magkapatid sa Bagyo)

(16.c)   ang magkapatid, magbabakasyon sa Bagyo sa isang buwan

(16.d)   ang magkapatid ay magbabakasyon sa Bagyo sa isang buwan

(16.e)   ang magkapatid ang magbabakasyon sa Bagyo sa isang buwan

(16.a) and (16.b) show a locative and a time adverbial topicalized,
respectively.  In (16.c), when the subject is topicalized, unlike
topicalized adverbials, a pause (here indicated by a comma) before
the following constituent is required.  Another instance of the subject
being preposed is as shown in (16.d) where an inversion marker ay
signals the sequence subject followed by predicate.  Except for the
difference in the special meaning that topicalization serves, (16.a) -
(16.d) have the same meaning as (16).  The last sentence (16.e) which
illustrates the cleft counterpart can be related to the preceding
sentences in the following ways:

     (a)  It looks similar to the preceding sentences (16.a) - (16.d)
if we assume that an internal constituent has been preposed;

     (b)  It resembles (16.c) and (16.d) in that the internal ang-
phrase or the subject has been preposed to highlight it and this
process entails a corresponding marker to signify the movement effected,
e.g. a pause in (16.c), ay in (16.d) and ang in (16.e).  As previously
noted in relativization, the ang-phrase or any of its substitute category
forms has to agree with its cooccurring verb form in terms of voice-
marking.

     (d)  The difference is that in (16.e), the marker ang introduced
before the predicate constituent has the effect of nominalizing this
constituent, although the meaning indicates that it is still referring
to the preceding constituent that has been isolated.

     From the fact that preposing or fronting is a general rule performing
a specific function of highlighting or focusing, it appears to be
reasonable to claim that clefting whose special function is to single
out an item for the purpose of contrast is analogous to topicalization,
even though no contrast is involved in the latter.  Like the other
constituents that are allowed to be preposed in topicalization in
Tagalog, it may be said that the clefted subject remains to be the
grammatical subject to which the nominalized predicate refers.  With
this type of account, there can be a unified statement covering
constituent preposing.

3.    The Semantic Aspect of Identificational Sentences

In some investigations (Delisle 1978, Dryer 1975, Schachter 1973, and Stockwell 1977), cleft sentences, by virtue of their meaning, are used in answer to specific WH- or information questions or as a sequel to some preceding statements, such that there could be established certain presuppositions shared by both the speaker and the hearer in regard to the theme of the conversation.  In both cases, there are materials that are known or made known (and therefore shared at the point of delivery, if not before) and which are carried over as presupposed or old information in the succeeding sentence.  Thus, with the question:

    (17)   sino  ang  nagluto?  nang  pagkain

          'Who is the one who cooked the food?'

The answer, as follows, will be appropriate.

    (18)   si  Maria/siya/ang  babae      (ang nagluto?  nang  pagkain)
                  she         woman

         'It's Maria/she/    The woman (who cooked the food).'

Strawson (1966:51) identifies two circumstances in which the identificational construction would be used:  (a) if one knows or believes that someone had done what is contained in the second constituent or that someone or something is to whom certain ascriptions contained in the second constituent is referred; (b) in answer to the hearer's question asking for information as to who did something or who or what has some specific ascription given in the second constituent.  Such explanation leads to widely written conclusions about cleft sentences that in both situations, the hearer has some presuppositions shared with the speaker, such that the presupposed material is that which is contained in the second constituent.  This is alluded to if not directly defined as the subject constituent.  Based on the distinction between presupposed (known/old) information versus focus (unknown/new) information, the Tagalog ang-NP + ang-NP construction must be analyzed as the sequence predicate + subject.  But I find this conclusion not compelling.  I will present two evidences against this claim.  First, consider the following data from two letters of native speakers of Tagalog:

    (19.a)  'tenant'  natin  si  Narda
                   our

         'Narda is our tenant.'

(19.b)  kaya,  tayo  ang  dapat  magpaalis  sa  kaniya
        thus   we    the  ought  cause-to       her
                                 move-out

        'Thus, we are the ones who should tell her to leave.'

(20.a)  ayaw   sila-ng  umalis  sa  inuupahan-ng  bahay
        don't  they     leave       rented        house
        want

        'They don't want to leave the house they're renting.'

(20.b)  dalhin  na  lang  daw  sa  korte  ang  usapan
        take        only  so-      court       matter
                          they-say

        'They'd rather that the matter be taken to court.'

(20.c)  hindi  sila  aalis  hanggang  hindi  daw
        not    they  will-  until            so-they-say
                     leave

        ang  husgado  ang  magpapaalis  sa    kanila
        the  judge         will-cause-to-leave  them

        'They won't leave until it is the judge that tells them to
        leave.'

In the sequence in (19), note that the first person pronoun in the genitive
natin 'our' modifying 'tenant' is picked up as the point of reference
in the following clause where it appears as the first person nominative
tayo 'we'. This is not new information as far as the identificational
clause is concerned; rather, it isolates or identifies and stresses
who the people are whose responsibility it is to evict the tenant.
With the first two sentences in (20), the setting or circumstances
surrounding the tenants' unwillingness to move out of the house and
their challenge to have the matter be decided in court provides no more
new information in (20.c). Like other presuppositions, those in (20.c)
can be gleaned from the preceding statements. What (20.c) serves to
do is simply to emphasize or express the force of the message contained
in the previous sentences by making a definitive stand on the challenge
made in (20.b). In both instances, then, we can safely say that the
first constituents of the cleft sentences do not carry new information.
Does this mean that predicates do not necessarily have to convey new
information or is this suggesting that the first constituent is the sub-
ject? And that it is placed in a position of more prominence while
representing the entity that has a presupposed existence. This focus
constituent is appropriately characterized by the succeeding constituent
(Schachter, 1973:41). What emerges is that the grammatical distinction
between subject and predicate does not hinge strictly on the distinction
between old and new information.

The second argument that can be posited has to do with the varying grammatical relation of the focus constituent. Delisle (1978:422) hypothesizes that the underlying form of cleft sentences is the form given in (a) below and that the two other forms (b) and (c) are derived from (a):

(a) The one who helped us was <u>Frank</u>.

(b) <u>Frank</u> was the one who helped us.

(c) It was <u>Frank</u> who helped us.

On the contrary, Strawson (1966:49-50) exemplifies identificational statements with structures identical to (b) above and refers to what Delisle identifies as presupposed information, i.e. the constituent consisting of the head noun and the relative clause, as the grammatical predicate. This is to show then that the old information in some structures may be expressed in the subject, as in (a) above, or in the predicate, as in (b) and (c). The variety of cleft structures may be multiplied to include what has been labelled pseudo-cleft or <u>WH</u>-cleft. Compared with the very limited way by which cleft or identificational construction is manifested in Tagalog, it appears that it is closely akin to the type (b) construction above. The gloss used which most speakers readily respond to as being the closest translation is that of (b). (Of course, we can excuse those that translate on the basis of a presumed predicate + subject order). Again, we can stress here that the identified person or thing (or the focus or contrastive entity) does not have to be the predicate. It can be the grammatical subject.


4.   Conclusion

Syntactically, the facts about constituency requirements/coocurring restrictions, relativization, and topicalization lend support to a subject + predicate analysis of identificational sentences in Tagalog. Semantically, and pragmatically, there is no necessity that the analysis be restricted to the order predicate + subject; the reverse could equally be a possibility. If the arguments presented here are reasonable enough to qualify as the proper analysis, the next question that must be answered is what advantages there are to such an analysis.

Primarily, the reason for preferring the subject + predicate analysis is to unify a number of generalizations. Of these, the most significant are as follows:  (a)  the selectional restrictions that apply to subjects of predicative sentences will also apply to subjects of identificational sentences; (b) the general rule on relativization will also apply to the identificational construction, instead of positing a different one where the first <u>ang</u>-NP must be the antecedent of the 'deleted nominal' in the relative clause;[6]  (c) the proposed analysis supports and reinforces the psychological motivation behind the process of topicalization.

It is not unfelicitous to view a cleft pattern as disrupting the 'typical word order' in a language, both in terms of left-movement of the constituent in focus and the consequent nominalization of the remaining constituent. (Givon, 1979:78). After all, cleft sentences are a special type of construction.

It has been shown that semantic notions particularly those of focus, presupposition, old and new information may have varying syntactic manifestations and the idea is to determine what particular devices a language uses for these purposes. Where Japanese would perhaps use the particle wa for focus or special emphasis, and English uses it-be construction, Tagalog uses subject preposing.

## Footnotes

* An earlier version of this paper was read at the Canadian Linguistics Association Conference, Halifax, Nova Scotia, May 25-27, 1981.

[1] An ang-phrase subject is normally replaceable by an ang-personal pronoun, an ang-demonstrative pronoun or a si/sina-phrase, all of which may be labelled Nominative.

[2] Note that in some accounts of similar constructions the translation may be misleading. Switching the constituents around results in a different meaning or in an ungrammatical form. For example, ang huwes ang babae 'It is the judge who is the woman.' Normally, this is deemed unacceptable for semantic reasons, vis à vis, that the second constituent if it is to predicate the first is incompatible in the sense that if one knows that someone is the judge, then it is presumed that his or her sex would of course also be known, unless the judge is in a costume where the sex of the person is 'concealed'.

[3] The contemplated aspect form is chosen to show the objective voice affix -in overtly manifested. Its corresponding completed and incompleted forms are linuto? and linuluto?, respectively, where the suffix -in does not show. The infix -in- marks the aspect meaning begun or started. Note that the agent when non-subject is marked by the particle nang.

[4] Another account of a NP with a relative clause would simply posit a movement of the subject of a sentential NP and the insertion of the na/ng relative marker. But the argument here does not rest on the particular analysis of the relative clause.

[5] The above ungrammatical relativized clauses may be salvaged by deleting the marker ang after the relative marker na, but this would not distinguish the structure as having been derived from a cleft construction.

[6] Schachter (1973) has shown quite convincingly the syntactic similarities between cleft and relative constructions.

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