

Abstract

This thesis examines the syntax of Tagalog with a particular focus on argument structure and its implications for clause structure. Through cross-linguistic comparison I show that Tagalog syntax is not as exotic as is often assumed and that it can be straightforwardly accounted for using available syntactic tools, primarily the theory of phases and Agree of Chomsky (1999, 2001). This study shows that there is no need to appeal to new parameter settings or new components of the grammar in order to account for the syntactic behavior of Tagalog (cf. Sells 1998, Speas 1998, Carrier-Duncan 1985, Kroeger 1993).

In this work I show that, contrary to widespread assumptions, the voice system of Tagalog does not reflect the thematic role of the subject argument. Instead, returning to the insight of Ramos 1974, I argue that voice morphology on the verb reflects the case that the subject argument receives in its base position. I also argue that the specificity properties of subjects and objects in Tagalog resemble those motivating object shift in Germanic languages; therefore, I conclude that Tagalog instantiates a system of generalized ‘argument shift’. I show that the shift of specific arguments to the edge of the phase is strictly constrained by locality.

The analysis of voice and locality-constrained shift relies on a detailed study of argument positions in Tagalog. Using tests for hierarchical structure such as reflexive and pronominal variable binding, I examine the structural relations among external arguments, applicative arguments, direct objects, and adjuncts and show them to be in accordance with what is known about structural argument asymmetries cross-linguistically.