

THE MARKERS ANG, AY AND NG IN PILIPINO

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In teaching Pilipino to Russian students it becomes clear that it is very difficult to make Russian students of Pilipino understand the peculiarities of the language using such terms as "subject" or "predicate" unless we specify what kind of subject and predicate is meant. There may be various subjects and predicates: grammatical, logical, psychological. These terms are good when applied only to IE languages but they hide the peculiarities of the language when applied to Pilipino. Meanwhile, in teaching foreign languages, it is not the similarities with the native language of the student that cause difficulties but the differences.

I

There are various definitions of the particles ang and ay, especially of the former. The definitions of the former vary from "article" to "subject marker", "noun marker", "substantive marker", etc. At the same time it is almost unanimously agreed that ay is a predicate marker which has the form \emptyset [zero] if the predicate precedes the subject.

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The question is: What subjects and what predicates are marked by these markers? To answer this question let us construct all possible sentences out of the full words ama 'father' and bumabasa 'reads' and the particles ang and ay. The restrictions are: 1) ay never occurs at the beginning of a sentence; 2) both ang and ay never occur at the end of a sentence; 3) ang never precedes ay, ang never precedes ang, ay never precedes ay; and 4) full words are separated by particles.

Theoretically we may construct eight sentences:

I. 1. a. Ang ama ay bumabasa.

['The father is reading.']*

b. Bumabasa ang ama.

['The father is reading. ']

2. a. Ang bumabasa ay ama.

['The person that is reading, is a father. ']

b. Ama ang bumabasa.

['The person that is reading is a father. ']

II. 1. a. Ang ama ay ang bumabasa.

['The person that is reading is the father. ']

*The bracketed English translations were supplied by the editors.

b. Ang bumabasa ang ama.

['The person that is reading is the father. ']

2. a. Ang bumabasa ay ang ama.

['The father is the person that is reading. ']

b. Ang ama ang bumabasa.

['The father is the person that is reading. ']

According to my informants all these sentences may occur in Filipino. Only sentences II, 1. b. is rather unnatural but still can be used.

The difference between sentences a. and b. is one of emphasis, that is, there is more emphasis on the first full word. The b. sentences are more often used, especially in informal speech.

It is the differences between sentences 1. and 2. that needs more explanation.

Let us take the two sentences:

I. 1. a. Ang ama ay bumabasa.

I. 2. a. Ang bumabasa ay ama.

Both sentences can be translated into English as 'The father is reading'. If we come across an isolated English sentence "The father is reading.", we tend (under the magic of written form) to

consider it as one utterance. In context, however, it can be clearly seen that we have two different utterances which in speech are differentiated by stress.

Every narrative sentence may be considered as an answer to a certain question. If the question is: "What is the father doing?" the answer is: "The father is reading.", with more stress on the word "reading". The idea implied is that we know already that the father does something and the information we ask for is: "What exactly is he doing?" In Pilipino the question Ano ang ginagawa ng ama? ['What is the father doing?'] is answered with Ang ama ay bumabasa. ['The father is reading!'] The part of the sentence which gives new information is preceded with particle ay.

If the question is: "Who is reading?" the answer in English is also "The father is reading.", but with more stress on "the father". The idea implied is that it is known already that somebody reads and the information we ask for is: "Who is this person that is reading?" In Pilipino the answer to the question Sino ang bumabasa? ['Who is the person that is reading?'] is: Ang bumabasa ay ama.* ['The person that is reading is a father.'] Here again the part of the

*Ang bumabasa ay ang ama seems to be a more appropriate answer. --Eds.

sentence which gives new information is preceded with particle ay while that giving something already known is preceded with particle ang. In English these two parts of a sentence are differentiated with phonetic means while in Pilipino with particles (probably plus phonetic means).

Similar views have already been expressed in some works. In all narrative predicative sentences something is said about something. In the English sentence "The father is reading," either part of the sentence may render new information depending upon stress while in Pilipino this part is always marked with particle ay/ \emptyset and the part which contains information known already to the speaker is marked with particle ang.

In logic this distinction is known as distinction between the logical subject (that about which something is affirmed or denied of the subject). Evidently, all languages have means to formalize this distinction. In English it is stress, in Pilipino - particles. In the terms of the Prague school of linguistics, ang and ay are used in Pilipino to manifest the actual division of a sentence.

Now for the difference between sentences I. and II. Sentences with two ang particles are called equational. In all languages there are sentences in which the difference between "previously known"

and "new information" is insignificant, that is, both parts of the sentence give almost the same amount of information. The sentence "To understand is to forgive." may serve as an example of an equational sentence in English. The information given in the predicate is almost the same as that given in the subject. With reverse word order we have another sentence, "To forgive is to understand.", in which the subject of the original sentence becomes the predicate and vice versa. The easiness of this transformation indicates that the difference between subject and predicate is insignificant. Such transformation is impossible in sentences like "The father is reading".¹ In IE languages, equational sentences are common in proverbs, tales and the like: "Like father like son.", "Early to bed early to rise.", etc. In addition, these sentences are often used in scientific works. In Filipino, equational sentences are much more common than in IE languages.

To summarize:

1. The difference between sentences a. and b. is in emphasis;
2. The difference between sentences 1. and 2. is that each has different logical subject and predicate;
3. The difference between sentences I. and II. is that of equational and non-equational sentences.

II

The use of such terms as "action", "verb" or "object" is even more confusing than the use of the terms "subject" and "predicate". To apply these terms to Pilipino is to be too Europeocentric.

It is almost unanimously agreed that syntactic relations in Pilipino are manifested by particles. The particle ng (/nang/) has various definitions: possessive marker, object marker, complementary marker. It is said that it manifests possessive, object or complementary relationships. These opinions are evidently based upon translation into English or other IE languages.

Let us compare two sentences:

3. Ang ama ay may-ari ng pahayagan. 'The father is an owner of a newspaper.' and

4. Ang ama ay bumabasa ng pahayagan. 'The father reads a newspaper.'

The usual explanation is: in the first sentence ng manifests possessive relationship while in the second sentence ng manifests object relations. This is true if we look at the translations. But in the Pilipino sentences the relationship between may-ari (possessed) and pahayagan (possessor) in sentence 1. and the relationship

between bumabasa and pahayagan in sentence 2, are manifested by one and the same particle ng. If there is no difference in form we have a reason to suggest that there should be no difference in meaning until proven otherwise by solid grammatical evidence, not by translations alone. Nothing prevents us from translating the second sentence as 'The father is a reading (one) of a newspaper.'

It is rather mysterious why the relationships in sentence 3, and 4, which are manifested by one and the same particle have not been treated alike as possessive relationships. We can say bumabasa ng pahayagan 'a reading one of a newspaper' as well as pahayagan ng bumabasa 'a newspaper of a reading one' - a transformation impossible in the English phrase "reads a newspaper" but quite possible in "a reading (one) of a newspaper" ---> "a newspaper of a reading one".

There is no evidence that in sentence 4 we have relationships other than those in sentence 3. We can continue the list of sentences and still find "possessive" translations. In all these sentences the elements of the predicative phrase can also be interchanged.

5. Ang pahayagan ay binabasa ng ama. 'A newspaper is being read by the father.', lit. 'A newspaper is a reading (material) of

the father.' We cannot say here ama ng binabasa since its meaning becomes absurd although grammatically this is correct. But if we have a phrase like binabasa ng may-akda 'a reading (material) of an author' we can interchange may-akda ng binabasa 'an author of a reading (material)'. The same English phrase, "a reading (material) of the father", cannot be changed into "father of a reading (material)."

6. Ang ina ay binabasahan ng ama. 'The father reads to the mother.', lit. 'The mother is the (one) being read to of the father.' Here we can change binabasahan ng ama into ama ng binabasahan 'the father of the (one) being read to'.

7. Ang ina ay ibinabasa ng ama. 'The father reads for the mother.', lit. 'The mother is the (one) being read for of the father.' An interchange is also possible here: ama ng ibinabasa 'the father of the (one) being read for'.

The predicates of all these five sentences (3-7) are composed of two elements connected with the particle ng and the relationship between these two elements can be viewed as possessive. In all five sentences the two elements can be interchanged.

What then are the words bumabasa, binabasa, binabasahan and ibinabasa? Certainly they are not verbs, at least not verbs in the IE sense. Capell was right when he objected to calling so-called

"passive" forms verbs. His argument is that the pronouns which occur with "passive" forms are possessive. In fact not only pronouns but also nouns are in the possessive form when preceded by ng: binabasa ng ama, binabasahan ng ama and ibinabasa ng ama. The same possessive form occurs in the "active" sentence Ang ama ay bumabasa ng pahayagan.² Capell calls "passive" forms verbal nouns. It is significant that Bloomfield preferred to use new grammatical terms in place of traditional ones and it is more safe to call these words transients which are similar to IE verbs only in the way they can be changed in respect to time. But in IE languages not only verbs can be changed in respect to time - participles in some IE languages can be changed as well. If it is so necessary to find an analogue in IE languages it can be participle.

If we agree that in Pilipino possessive relations are widespread where IE languages use object relations, we may draw some conclusions. In IE languages all events are described as actions - usually of an agent exercising action upon a certain object. For the speaker of IE languages this is natural and usually he is unaware of it. Meanwhile there may be other ways of reflecting the outer and inner world and all happenings in it. In Pilipino these are described not as actions but as possessions and Pilipino is basically a possessive language.

In IE languages the skeleton of a predicative sentence with verb and object is "A is exercising an action upon B": "The father reads a newspaper." The Pilipino equivalent is "A is a B owned by C": Ang ama ay bumabasa ng pahayagan. "The father is a reading (one) of a newspaper."

A speaker of IE languages can say that in Pilipino the "real" subject of action is viewed as a subject of possession. From the point of view of a speaker of Pilipino it can be said that in IE languages the "real" subject of possession is viewed as a subject of action. Both statements are equally true.

Several years ago it was suggested that sentences 4, 5, 6 and 7 differ in focus. This idea proved to be very fruitful and made the analysis of Pilipino sentences much easier. But before speaking of the focus of sentences something should be said of the focus of the language as a whole. In IE languages this focus is on action, in Pilipino on possession.³

NOTES

1 In IE languages with free word order like Russian, the change of word order still does not transform subject into predicate and vice versa if the sentence is not equational.

2 This is true only with nouns but not with pronouns: Ang ama ay bumabasa ko. can never occur; instead we have Ang ama ay bumabasa sa akin. ['The father is reading (something) to me.'] The particle sa is not discussed here. But it can be said that ng and sa are rather similar as in the phrases kotse ng ama ['car of the father'] and kotse sa ama. ['car for the father'] Certainly there is a difference between these two phrases and it is to be hoped that future discussion will only complement and not negate the ideas expressed here.

3 So called root words, if they do not designate concrete material objects, are "possessive" in meaning. Such words as sabi, dala which are translated as "statement" and "load" mean literally "a said (thing)", "a carried (thing)" and in context, as a rule, they have a possessor. Even such a word as laki which is usually translated as "size, bulk" means "(somebody's) increased". This meaning is obvious in a sentence like: Ang batang laki ng lola

ay di-masunurin. 'A child which is being brought up by a Grandmother is not obedient.' (Lit. 'a brought up (one) of a Grandmother').

