FROM BORROWED NOUN TO VERB:
A STUDY OF FUNCTIONAL SHIFT IN PHILIPPINE LANGUAGES

ERNESTO H. CUBAR
University of the Philippines

Lexical borrowing is generally an uninteresting phenomenon, at least to those interested only in the study of morphology and syntax. It does not seem to be anything more than the use of a foreign word in a suitable position in a sentence in the borrower language, usually a noun filling a position reserved for nouns, a verb in a slot for verbs, an adjective in a slot for adjectives, and so on. Thus in Tagalog we have sentences like

    (1) Bumili ako ng Betamax.

       isang cranky-ng babae

       magclassify ng data

But the study of loan words can be of interest to a syntactician. There is, for instance, one aspect of borrowing going on in Philippine languages, both major and minor, that is of potential interest and relevance to the study of grammatical structure. I refer to the widespread and commonly observed phenomenon of borrowed noun forms being readily convertible into verbs. We have, again in Tagalog, the following:

    (2) magbeer   magdenims

       maghamburger   magBetamax

       maghelicopter   magkutsara

       magtaxi   magpocket calculator

       mag-English

(For easier communication, the examples will be mainly from Tagalog, and occasionally from Ilocano when I am not sure of the Tagalog examples. I believe that on the basis of some inquiries that I have made, the processes described in this paper are also found in the minor languages of the Philippines, or have the potential to occur in these languages. The big difference is that the incidence of borrowing in minor languages is not as high as in the major ones, especially those spoken in highly urbanized areas, where contact with the outside world is greater. For instance, the equivalent of mag-Betamax would be unlikely in a remote Tinggian village in Abra. But I suppose inarmalite is fairly common now in that province, considering the peace and order situation there.)

There have been studies of loan words in Philippine languages, especially in the major ones. But these studies consist mainly of lists of the more readily recognizable loans. One or two have gone beyond mere listing and have attempted to trace the phonological and semantic changes that loan words have undergone, but as far as I know very little has been done to investigate the nature of functional shift, particularly the formation of verbs out of nouns, both native and borrowed, and to connect this kind of investigation to the study of grammatical structure. Some questions, I believe, are worth asking. For instance, why is the process of verbalizing loan noun forms so easy and natural? Why is it that between mag and um or their equivalents, in languages that overtly make a distinction between the two, verbalized nouns invariably take mag? As case grammar has shown,

convincingly I believe, a major function, if not the main function, of verbal affixes is to indicate the semantic role of the subject of the sentence. That is, the affix indicates whether the subject of the sentence is an agentive (doer), a locative (place), an instrument, or an objective, and so on. Words like beer, eroplano, and Betamax are un-questinably nouns. Yet every verbalized forms like those in (2) has a clear verbal reading or interpretation. Mag-eroplano, for instance, is commonly understood to mean "ride on an airplane" (one may prefer "take" to "ride" but cannot deny the verbal sense). If the affix mag is not the source of the specific verbal reading "ride", and if eroplano is clearly a noun, how does one explain how the interpretation is ever possible?

I suggest that verb forms like magbeer, maghelicopter, magtaxi, and mag-English are syntactically complex. They carry more grammatical categories or elements than surface phonological signals appear to indicate. It is proposed that the common formula for the verbs in (2) is the following:

(3)

<div style="margin-left:2em;">

magVERB {

ng beer

ng hamburger

ng helicopter

ng English

ng taxi

ng denims

ng Betamax

ng kutsara

ng pocket calculator

}

</div>

The nouns came into the borrower language as nouns, functioning as
nominal constituents of a sentence. As will be shown later, they
function as agentive, objective, instrument, locative, etc.

The question about the formula is, what is the entity labelled
"VERB"? Casilda Luzares says it represents an underlying verb. She
was one of the first to make this claim. In a section of her dissertation
on Cebuano verbs, she claimed that the underlying verb is a real verb,
a real lexical item, which is replaced by the accompanying noun.
Applying her analysis to Tagalog, the forms in (2) would have to be
originally the following:

(4)   uminom ng beer

                kumain ng hamburger

                sumakay sa helicopter

                sumakay sa taxi

                magsalita ng English

                magsuot ng denims

                manood ng Betamax

                gumamit ng kutsara

                gumamit ng pocket calculator

Luzares had no explanation why the short forms (the verbalized ones)
all take mag, while some of the replaced (replaceable, she calls them)
verbs take um, others take mag, and still others take mang. For some
verbalized forms, there can be more than one choice of a replaceable
verb. No principled basis was offered for a choice. In magrocking chair,

is the replaceable verb gumamit, umupo, or mag-uguy-ugoy "to rock"?

In armalite-in, is the replaceable verb patayin (sa pamamagitan ng), or barilin? Discovering that she could not find an existing verb for some verbalized nouns, Luzares posited an abstract verb in those particular verbalized forms. In her view, abstract verbs never come to the surface in any form. She listed only four (BEAR, CONSIDER, FEEL, OFFER) for the Cebuano language. There was no attempt to show any relationship between abstract and replaceable verbs.

I have attempted a different analysis on three different occasions. My proposal is to regard all verbalized nouns as having an underlying abstract verb. In my view, abstract verbs are relatively simple in meaning and are, in some sense, generic. They occur only in the semantic consciousness of the speaker and do not surface as lexical items; that is, they do not have phonetic realization. The place of an abstract verb in a sentence is filled by a noun constituent of that sentence, which then serves as stem of the surface verb. However, when a modification is made of the general meaning of an abstract verb, as when a more specific meaning is intended, the abstract verb surfaces as a specific verb that contains the modification.

In the analysis proposed here, there is a single common abstract verb, which I shall label "USE", for the verbal items in (2). (Henceforth a word in capital letters is meant to refer to a semantic entity, as an abstract verb is.) This abstract verb is in a sense the meaning common to them. In some important sense, beer, eroplano, Betamax, English, kutsara, denims, and pocket calculator are "used". The general formula, then, should be something like

(5)

$$
\text{magUSE}
\begin{cases}
\text{ng beer} \\
\text{ng hamburger} \\
\text{ng taxi} \\
\cdot \\
\cdot \\
\cdot
\end{cases}
$$

It is the presence of an underlying verb that accounts for the general verbal sense. This general meaning may be modified by the semantic content of the accompanying noun. For instance, part of the semantic content of beer is that it is something to drink, part of the meaning of taxi is that is something to ride in, and part of the meaning of denims is that it is something to wear. It is the combinations of "USE for drinking", "USE for riding", "USE for wearing (all very awkwardly put, I admit) that are realized as the specific verbs uninom,, sumakay, and magsuot. Without modification, an abstract verb remains unrealized.

In short, replacing a verb, according to Luzares's pioneering work, is a kind of deletion. But the present analysis has nothing to with the deletion of actual lexical items.

The abstract verbs that underlie verbalized nouns are few in number. Presumably, they are found in all languages, except that in some languages, some of them are regularly lexicalized.

The following is a tentative list of abstract verbs:

(6) a. USE   g. EXIST

    b. BECOME   h. INFEST/ATTACK

    c. DO/ENGAGE   i. MOVE/DIRECT TOWARD

    d. HAVE/COME TO HAVE   j. MOVE AWAY FROM

e. MAKE/CREATE   k. CAUSE

f. OCCUR/HAPPEN

Verbalized forms in (6a) (with underlying USE) are probably the most numerous, since most borrowed nouns refer to objects or articles that are "used", and since there are also several native nouns used as verbs, like itak in mag-itak "to use a bolo" and gunting in maggunting "to use/cut with scissors" in Tagalog and kumpay in agkumpay "to use a sickle" and tabako in agtabako "to smoke tobaco" in Ilocano. There can be as many verbalized borrowed nouns in a Philippine language as its speakers care to borrow from other languages.

Verb forms with underlying BECOME include the following:

(7) mag-artista   maghuwes

     magjanitor   magsystems analyst

     mag-astronaut   mag-assemblyman

     mag-BSE   mag-abogado

The nouns in this group make up a well-defined class of nouns, all referring to a profession, calling, or trade. If a noun, native or borrowed, does not refer to a member of a profession, the verbalized form cannot have the reading BECOME. Thus, in Ilocano, aganak does not mean "to become a child/baby", and agtricycle does not mean "to become a tricycle", but "to have a child" and "to ride/use a tricycle", respectively. BECOME often surfaces as a specific verb: maging in Tagalog and agbalin in Ilocano.

Verb forms with underlying DO/ENGAGE IN all refer to activities, like magbasketball, magchess, magtanggo, magswimming, magmountain-climbing, manghusband-hunting, and magjogging. Because of the sense "sports" in the first two, the verbs may surface as maglaro ng basketball and maglaro ng chess.

Magtanggo may be made more specific: sumayaw ng tanggo. As far as I can determine, the rest do not allow any specific verb.

Verb forms with underlying abstract verb HAVE/COME TO HAVE cannot readily take borrowed nouns as stems. The choice seems to be limited to those nouns that are perceived as natural parts of the referent of the subject. For instance, in

(8) Ilk. Nagsabong diay bayabas. (sabong "flower")

The guava tree bore flowers.

the semantic reading of HAVE is clear because of flower is a natural part of a tree. However, in Nagcoat and tie si Jose, the reading HAVE is not natural, since a coat and a tie are not an inherent part of a man. Magcoat and tie belongs to the USE group, like magbeer, mag-English. In Ilocano, as in many other languages, including minor ones, illnesses are perceivable as natural to man. Thus

(9) ag-TB

ag-H fever

agherpes

ag-VD

aggurigor   "to have a fever"

have the readings "to HAVE TB", "to HAVE H-fever", "to HAVE herpes", "to HAVE VD",and "to HAVE a fever." These verbs have in fact alternate forms with the surface verb adda "to have" (may in Tagalog):

(10) Adda TB ni Jose.   "Jose has TB."

Adda H-fever ni Jose.

Adda herpes ni Jose.

Adda gurigor Ni Jose.

Verb forms with underlying MAKE/CREATE, like those with HAVE/
COME TO HAVE, do not take borrowed nouns as stems. Mag-Betamax, mag-
calculator, and mag-TB, as has already been shown, can only have the
sense USE, never HAVE, since the nouns used as stems are not felt to be
native or natively made in the Philippines. Magpancake, which has a borrowed
stem, may have the reading MAKE in a suitable context, as when it is uttered
in a private home, where one does his own cooking, but even then, since
pancake is still felt to be foreign, the ultimate interpretation of mag-
pancake is that it belongs to the USE group, as do maghamburger, magpansit,
magpizzapie, and mag-ice cream. All these verb forms, when uttered outside
the context of a home or by someone who is not known to be a cook, do not
have the reading MAKE/CREATE. But take a verb form with a native noun as stem,
or even borrowed but no longer felt to be foreign, like suman and basi
(Ilocano wine), and the interpretation is unmistakably MAKE/CREATE. Some
typical examples: agbasi "to make basi", "agtagapulot "to make sugar",
agbalay "to build a house", agtambak "to build a dike".

Verbalized noun forms with underlying OCCUR/HAPPEN are not so many.
The following, all from Ilocano, are typical examples:

(11) Nagmartial law.   Martial law OCCURED/HAPPENED.

      Nag-World War II.   World War II OCCURED/HAPPENED.

      Nagtidal wave.   A tidal wave OCCURED/HAPPENED.

When modified in meaning, OCCUR surfaces in the form of a specific verb,
as in

(12) Idi nagbettak ti World War II . . .   When WW II broke out. . .

      Idi immay ti martial law . . .   When martial law came . . .

      Idi immay ti tidal wave . . .   When a tidal wave came . . .

The modified meaning "OCCUR with a sudden beginning" is lexicalized as agbettak, and "OCCUR moving in one's direction" is lexicalized as umay.

A similar analysis can be made of verb forms with nouns referring to meteorological phenomena like agtudo "to rain", agkimat literally "to lightning", and aggurruod "to thunder." It is interesting to note that sentences with OCCUR/HAPPEN verbs do not require a surface subject. According to the proposed analysis subjectless sentences of this kind have an underlying subject. It is just that it has been verbalized or incorporated in the verb, thereby leaving the subject position empty.

Existence and occurrence are semantically very similar, but there is some semantic-syntactic basis for a separate abstract verb EXIST. There are in fact existential sentences in all Philippine languages. The meteorological verb forms discussed above may also be expressed with may in Tagalog and adda in Ilocano, both with meaning "there is", as in

(13)   Adda kimat.

   May lindol.

   May ulan.

Meteorological nouns may therefore be perceived as occuring or existing. Man-made happenings like martial law and War War II, on the other hand, are only interpretable as occurring. Incidentally, In Philippine languages the abstract OCCUR does not always take a noun stem. When this is the case, the resulting sentence appears as a verbless sentence. Notice the following:

(14)   Kailan ang pista?

   Sa Lunes ang kasal ni Tetchie.

   Sa June 18 and commencement exercises.

Literally, these sentences translate into "When the fiesta?". "Tetchie's wedding on Monday", "The commencement exercises on June 18". The time expression kailan, Lunes, and June 18 are not being predicated of the the event nouns pista, kasal, and commencement exercises, as the surface structure minus its meaning would indicate. It is occurence on the dates expressed by the time expressions that is being said of the subject nouns. Like martial law and World War II, pista, kasal and commencement exercises are man-made, and the unmistakable reading is that they occur. Depending on the event noun used as subject, OCCUR may be realized as "ganapin." ipagdiriwang, and other similar verbs.

Typical verbalized nouns with underlying INFEST/ATTACK are anayin, langawin, amagin, lagnatin, ginawin, and ahasin. The nouns anay "termite," langaw "fly", amag "mold", lagnat "fever", ginaw "cold", and ahas "snake" INFEST/ATTACK what is referred to by the subject, as in Lalanggamin ang asukal literally "The sugar will be anted" but more correctly, according to the proposed analysis, "The ants will INFEST/ATTACK the sugar." Without modification, INFEST/ATTACK gets no phonological representation. The agentive or doer noun then fills the position of the verb, leaving the position of the agentive noun empty. The diagram below shows the process just described.

(15)   ATTACK/INFEST-in ng langgam ang asukal.

       (La)langgam-in   _____ ang asukal.

Note that the fully represented sentence patterns exactly like a passive sentence with a surface verb, like Kakagatin ng aso ang bata, where the phrase ng aso is agentive.

The verbalized nouns with underlying INFEST/ATTACK analyzed so far are all native, but any foreign noun that can be perceived as attacking or infesting can be freely verbalized. Many examples come to mind: NPA-in , E.T.-in. Hapon-in, karma-hin, and Ilocano landing-en "to be married, abused, taken away by someone who landed from abroad, like a soldier, returning resident or a newcomer from the United States."

Verb formation with the underlying abstract verb MOVE/DIRECT TOWARD is a highly productive process in all Philippine languages that I have some knowledge about. In this process, an object perceived as being put, placed, moved toward, applied on another or place becomes a verb stem, as in magpinta ng bahay, magdamit ng bata, magbubong ng bahay, and mag-asin ng ulam The nouns pinta "paint", damit "clothes/dress", bubong "roof", and asin "salt" are moved in the direction of the house, child, and ulam. The nouns toward which the motion is made are in fact viewed as "places" of locative, as shown by the fact that when passivized, all these verbs take the suffix-an (pintahan ang bahay, damitan ang bata, bubungan ang bahay, as (i) nan ang ulam). This productivity of the process extends to the use of borrowed nouns as nouns as verbs, like pinta (already mentioned), lipstick, pulbos, coppertone, sapatos, scotch tape, pomada, grade and many other foreign nouns. The requirement that a noun must meet in order to be verbalizable with the meaing DIRECT TOWARD is that it must not be an inherent part of the object to which it is moved or applied on.

The opposite of verb forms with underlying DIRECT TOWARD are those verb forms with underlying MOVE AWAY FROM. Typical of this group are the verbs in magbalat ng mangga "to peel a mango" and magtalbos ng kamote.

"to pick kamote tops". In order for the MOVE AWAY FROM reading to be possible, the verbalized noun must be an inherent part of the entity from which the noun is moved away. The "skin: or peelings are part of a mango, so the interpretation of magbalat is "away from". On the other hand, a lipstick is not an inherent part of a woman (though they are often inseparable). Maglipstick, predictably, has the meaning "toward". Since most borrowed nouns refer to objects that are not natural parts of objects in the world of the speakers of the borrower language, it is easy to see why borrowed nouns are not normally convertible into verbs with the reading "away from." (The interpretations "toward" and "use overlap in borrowed nouns like lipstick.)

The last on the list is CAUSE. This abstract verb always has a phonological realization, making its inclusion in the list questionable. The realization, however, is not in the form of a full lexical item but in the affix pa-, at least in the languages that I know a little about. In Ilocano, we have pagkapien (pa-agkapi-en), paglipsticken, pag-Englishen, meaning "to cause to drink coffee", "to cause to use lipstick", and "to cause to speak English", respectively.

The list of abstract verbs presented in this paper is a highly tentative one. The classificiation needs refinement, and the labelling or terminology is not satisfactory. But the list and the analytical problems encountered, I would like to claim, are highly suggestive of the direction of further work.

As mentioned in the first part of this paper, the abstract verb analysis includes positing verbalized nouns as nominal constituents with roles like agent, instrument, locative and object in the full underlying

form of a sentence. Again, there are grammatical as well as semantic bases
for this analysis. The following is a brief discussion of the functions
of the nouns in verbalized forms.

As agent. Nouns that go with ATTACK/INFEST like anay in anayin have
been shown above as agentives. And so are the nouns used as stems in in-NPA,
Hinapon, and in-E.T.

As object of motion. Nouns that go with MOVE/DIRECT TOWARD are
objects of motion, as in lipstickan and koronahan. Korona and lipstick are
directed toward or moved toward some place of object. Nouns that go with
MOVE AWAY FROM are also objects of motion, except that they are not borrowed.

As direct object.. Most nouns that go with the abstract verb USE
are objective in the underlying form, like kape in magkape.

As instrumental. The sentence Inarmalite ako ng mga rebelde would
be properly analyzed as In-ATTACK ako ng mga rebelde (sa pamamagitan) ng
armalite, where armalite is clearly instrumental. Included in this class
are the stems of verbs like balisungin, itakin and Ilocano kwarenta y sing-
kuen,, the last one meaning "to hit/attack/shoot with a .45 caliber gun."
It would seem that the underlying abstract verb that takes an instrument is
a subclass of INFEST/ATTACK/. However, there are verbalized forms that do not
have the "attack" sense; instead, the reading is "do something by means of",
as in the Ilocano katamen "to finish/smoothen with a plane."

As locative. Aside from movable objects, locatives may also be verb-
alized with underlying MOVE/DIRECT TOWARD. Typical examples are itaxi,
iradio, i-airmail, ideep freeze, imakinilya, and many other similar verbs.

The pattern here is that of ibulsa from i-MOVE/DIRECT TOWARD sa bulsa, which may surface as ilagay sa bulsa, where bulsa is clearly locative. One can form similar verbs with nouns like front page and balcony.

As reservational noun (what Schachter and Otanes define as the entity for which something is intended or reserved). On the pattern of pang-tusok "used for or reserved for piercing", where tusok is a verb, Philippine lang- uages have words equivalent to the Tagalog pang-Linggo, pang-Christmas, pang- center fold, pang-old maid, pang-cold weather, and pang-Tiktik cover. The process involved here is more instrumental noun formation (pang is an ins- trumental prefix) rather than verb formation, and is not properly a part of the subject of this paper but would have to be included in a broader study of functional shift.

Final remarks. Hundred of words from foreign sources have poured into the vocabulary of Philippine languages in the past. This kind of change will continue unabated for some time, especially in the languages spoken in highly urbanized areas. When the nouns among the loans are verbalized, the verbal reading is clear and unmistakable. The explanation offered here is that an abstract verb underlies all formation of verbs from nouns. The process is productive because there is an existing pattern for the verbal- ization of native nouns. Borrowed nouns fitting into the pattern are therefore readily verbalizable.