Relative Clause Asymmetry: The Case of Tagalog

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Tagalog focus system

1. **AGENT FOCUS**

   \[
   \text{H < um> a-habol } \quad \text{an lalake } \quad \text{nang babae} \\
   \text{<AF>IPPV-chase FOC man } \quad \text{NFOC woman}
   \]

   ‘The man is chasing a/the woman.’

2. **PATIENT FOCUS**

   \[
   \text{H < in> a-habol nang lalake } \quad \text{an babae} \\
   \text{<PF>IPPV-chase NFOC man } \quad \text{FOC woman}
   \]

   ‘A/the man is chasing the woman.’

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Subject/object asymmetry in relativization

3. **AGENT RELATIVE CLAUSE**

   \[
   \text{lalake } \eta \quad [\text{h < um> a-habol _ nang babae}]
   \text{man = L <AF>IPPV-chase NFOC woman}
   \]

   ‘the man who is chasing a woman’

4. **PATIENT RELATIVE CLAUSE**

   \[
   \text{babae } \eta \quad [\text{h < in> a-habol nang lalake _}]
   \text{woman = L <PF>IPPV-chase NFOC man}
   \]

   ‘the woman who a man is chasing’

5. **UNGRAMMATICAL AGENT RELATIVE CLAUSE**

   \[
   *\text{lalake } \eta \quad [\text{h < in> a-habol _ an babae}]
   \text{man = L <PF>IPPV-chase FOC woman}
   \]

   ‘the man who is chasing the woman’

6. **UNGRAMMATICAL PATIENT RELATIVE CLAUSE**

   \[
   *\text{babae } \eta \quad [\text{h < um> a-habol _ an babae}]
   \text{woman = L <AF>IPPV-chase FOC man}
   \]

   ‘the woman who the man is chasing’

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Asymmetry in RCs

- **Agent RC > Patient RC**
  - Found in many non-acc languages and some erg-abs languages

- **Agent RC < Patient RC**
  - Indication of ergativity (e.g., Aldridge 2004, De Guzman 1988, Liao, 2004)

- **Agent RC = Patient RC**
  - Indication of symmetricity? (e.g., Foley 1978)

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Tanaka et al. (2014)

PREVIOUS PRODUCTION STUDY
Figure 1. Sample agent RC item

A boy is pushing a girl.
Another boy is pushing a monkey.
Who has the arrow? [answer]

Figure 2. Sample patient RC item

A monkey is pushing a girl.
A boy is pushing another girl.
Who has the arrow? [answer]

Figure 3. Children’s accuracy

- Results compatible with other non-acc languages

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% Accuracy

Agent RCs: 80.0%
Patient RCs: 39.1%

p = 0.015

Children
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Figure 4. Adults’ accuracy

- No significant difference in accuracy between two RC types
- Indication of symmetry or ceiling effect?
  - More sensitive measurement needed

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% Accuracy

Agent RCs: 98.8%
Patient RCs: 99.9%

Adults
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Manifestation of “advantage”

- Higher accuracy rate
  - The proportion of target responses are higher

- Shorter reaction time (RT)
  - Participants take less time to respond

The current study

- Four dependent measures
  - Accuracy from production
  - RT from production
  - Accuracy from comprehension
  - RT from comprehension
Method

- Participants
  - 26 adults

- Materials
  - 33 sets of pictures
    - 3 practice items
    - 10 items with animate patients (5 agent RCs; 5 patient RCs)
    - 10 items with inanimate patients (5 agent RCs; 5 patient RCs)
    - 20 intransitive items

- Participants’ responses were audio-recorded and transcribed
Analysis

- Accuracy = Percentage of target responses
- Reaction times = The duration between the beep and the onset of speech in the recording

Method

- Participants
  - 15 adults
- Materials
  - 5 verbs (basa ‘wet/splash,’ buhat ‘carry,’ habol ‘chase,’ tulak ‘push,’ yakap ‘hug’)
  - 10 items (5 agent RCs; 5 patient RCs)
- Data were recorded using the MouseTracker software (Freeman & Ambady 2010; Botja, Chung, & Wagers, to appear)
Analysis

- **Accuracy** = Percentage of target responses
- **Reaction times** = The duration between the onset of the prompt and the click

Figure 10. Overall comprehension results

Summary of findings

<table>
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<th>Accuracy</th>
<th>RT</th>
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<td>Production</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comprehension</td>
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Discussion

- Children's results are compatible with those reported for other nominative-accusative languages
- Adults' results suggest Tagalog is not a nom-acc language, at least not a typical one.
- The lack of asymmetry in adults' production and comprehension points toward a symmetrical voice language (Foley 1998)
What about children?

- A factor unrelated to alignment might be responsible for their preference for agent relative clauses.

- They may not yet have realized that the language is symmetrical.

Future directions

- Is there really no RC advantage among adults? Might other experimental techniques uncover an asymmetry that has thusfar evaded detection?

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References