

On Redefining Transitivity for Philippine Languages*

1. Introduction¹

Understanding the structure of any language is a continuing process. It is a process which is directly related to progress in the development of linguistic theory. A striking insight into the intricacy of the magnificent structure that we call language may mold the development of linguistic theory, since any theory must ultimately be proved valid or invalid to the degree it accounts for empirically verifiable data. Likewise such an insight into the structure of a language would almost certainly be a result of prior development in linguistic theory. Thus the development of linguistic theory and the understanding of language structure go hand in hand. No language has ever been completely described, simply because linguistic theory has a long way to go before it can adequately account for all of the intricate phenomena of language.

The purpose of this paper is to present some insights into the structure of Philippine languages, particularly in relation to the concept of transitivity, which are molding the development of Philippine descriptive linguistics and are having an influence on the development of tagmemic theory, within whose assumption these insights have so far been developed.

The usual definition of a transitive clause that one learns in school—a transitive clause is one that expresses an object—is probably quite satisfactory when the clause being described is English. However if one attempts to apply the definition to clauses in Philippine languages several difficulties arise. The first difficulty is to decide on what an Object is in the language under study. If we think we have settled this question and attempt to apply the definition of a transitive clause we discover that many clauses that intuitively seem to be transitive do not contain Objects, and vice versa Objects appear in clauses which seem to be just as intuitively intransitive.

The first part of this paper will deal with means for defining such terms as Object and Subject, the latter part will discuss a redefinition of the term

* Originally published as: On redefining transitivity for Philippine languages. *Philippine Journal for Language Teaching* 4:15-28 (1968).

¹ An earlier draft of this paper, entitled 'An Ivatan Syntax', was presented to the Philippine Association for Language Teaching at their meeting in Benitez Hall, University of the Philippines, May 20, 1967.

transitive for Philippine languages. To illustrate the discussion restricted data will be taken from Ivatan, the language of Basco, Batanes.

2. Situational Relevance and Grammatical Function

In defining a term such as Object for any language, we may give a semantic definition, or we may give a structural definition, or we may combine both semantic and structural definitions. A semantic definition would be one that relates the linguistic form to the situation being described by the clause of which the Object is a part. We might say, for example, that the Object describes the goal of the activity or that the Subject is the actor of the activity. A structural definition, however, would not be concerned with the situational relevance of the object but with its actual linguistic form: by what linguistic features can it be separated from say, a Subject?

It is essential, especially in the description of Philippine languages, that both these aspects of a definition be kept clearly in view if an adequate description is to be given. In order to avoid confusion between these two aspects—the situational relevance on the one hand, and the grammatical function on the other—two sets of terminology have been developed. Thus if we wish to talk about the actual situation being described, terms like *actor*, *action*, *goal* are used; whereas if we prefer to talk about the grammatical function of the linguistic forms, terms like Subject, Predicate and Object are used.

Some clarification of what a situation is, and its relationship to linguistic forms is perhaps necessary. A situation is an activity which is being described, including all the relevant factors, such as reason for the activity, the manner in which the activity is performed, and so on. Thus if we hear a man tell his son to chase the chickens that are eating the *palay* he left to dry in the sun, and then we see the son pick up a stick and quickly drive away the chickens, we can identify in the situation a causer (the father), an actor (the son), an instrument (the stick), a goal (the chickens), a location (the place where the rice is drying in the sun), a reason (the rice is disappearing), a manner (quickly), and so on. This is one situation, and in terms of the activity being performed—chasing chickens—the situational roles of actor, goal, causer, etc., are invariant. Of course we can change our attention to any one of several included activities in

the situation just described, and the situational roles may be different from those related to the 'chasing chickens' activity. In terms of the father addressing the son, the father is now *actor* of the 'speaking' activity; if we focus on the activity of the boy as he picks up the stick, the stick becomes the goal of the activity not the instrument, which is its role in the 'chasing chickens' activity. If we focus on the chickens eating the rice, the chickens are the actors, and not the goal, as they are when the boy begins his chasing. Situational roles of a given activity are invariant then, unless of course the actual situation changes, as when the father decides to help his son chase the chickens and becomes no longer causer, but one of the actors.

Now if we disregard some of the situational roles in the 'chasing chickens' activity that we described, and focus our attention on what we might consider to be the nucleus of the situation, the boy chasing the chickens, we are left with an activity—chasing—and two roles, that of the boy as actor, and that of the chicken as goal. For the sake of a concise report of this real world situation we eliminate peripheral factors of who asked the boy to do the chasing, and why, and where, and how, and with what he did his chasing, and so on. We wish to report only the nucleus of the situation. If we were to report this nuclear situation in English we could do it with any one of the several grammatical constructions. We could simply say, 'The boy is chasing the chickens.' As soon as we have said this, however, we have introduced a factor outside of the situation being reported; we have introduced the observer's point of view. We have so structured our clause in reporting the situation that a speaker of English who hears the statement will understand that our focus of attention or point of view is primarily towards the boy, rather than towards the chickens. This is because we used Active rather than the Passive voice. If our focus of attention were towards the chickens we would have reported the situation as, 'The chickens are being chased by the boy.' In addition, if someone else knew about the activity already and disagreed with our report, we could endeavor to influence him to agree with our point of view by using emphasis either by intonation, as 'THE BOY chased the chickens,' or 'THE CHICKENS are being chased by the boy,' or by restructuring our clause: 'It is the BOY who is chasing the chickens,' or 'It is the CHICKENS that the boy is chasing.' It is obvious that there is no simple one-to-one correspondence between a situation and the grammatical

structure used to report the situation. The situation remains invariant, but we change the grammatical structure to introduce factors apart from the situation we are reporting, factors such as the observer's point of view, emphasis, the truth value of the statement we are making, as for example, 'The boy is not chasing the chickens,' or we can take the role of the non-observer and enquire, 'Are the chickens being chased by the boy?' or 'Is the boy chasing the chickens?', and so on.

Now let us go back to the two simple reports of our situation, 'The boy is chasing the chickens' and 'The chickens are being chased by the boy,' and let us examine the grammatical structures of these two clauses. An analysis of the Active Clause will give us a sequence of Subject, Predicate and Object (using Predicate in the Tagmemicists' manner for describing the grammatical function of the verbal activity). The Passive Clause has a grammatical structure of Subject, Predicate and Complement. These are two different grammatical patterns relatable to each other by transformational rules of the Harris type, since they report a single invariant situation. Both of these clauses have a grammatical Subject, but they report different situational roles. In the Active Clause, the Subject reports the goal. How then do we know there is a Subject in English? What makes an English Subject? Not the fact that it reports an actor, because a Complement can report an actor (as in the passive clause). Not the fact that it reports a goal, since the Object of an Active Clause reports a goal. Subject may be identified in English by a combination of at least three criteria:

- (i) Its position preceding the predicate.
- (ii) The class of nouns, pronouns, nominal phrases and so on which can occur in the position preceding Predicate. Most of the nouns that can occur as Subject of a clause, may likewise occur as Object, and do not help to differentiate Subject from Object, but the pronoun series differ in several persons, thus the forms, I, he, she, we and they, can only be Subject whereas me, him, her, us and them, positively identify Object.
- (iii) The agreement between the 3rd person singular Subject and the present tense of the verb. Thus we say, 'I chase,' and 'you chase,' but 'he chases.'

This type of definition of a grammatical category is a structural definition, in contrast to a semantic definition which we would have if we were to describe Subject as actor of the action.

3. Structural Definition of some Ivatan Grammatical Terms

In Philippine languages there is a greater potential for specifying the point of view of the speaker in reporting an activity than there is in English. In English there are but two voices, active and passive. In most Philippine languages there are at least four voices, and in some there may be five, six or even more voices. Some have labeled the voice which brings the actor of the action into view as Active since it corresponds in some degree to the English Active voice; whereas the other voices are grouped together as various types of Passive, since the focus of the speaker is not on the actor, but on either the goal, or instrument, or some other situational role. Correlated with this interpretation of the structure of Philippine clause types is the use of the term Subject as a label for that grammatical category which reports the focus of attention of the speaker. Thus an Active clause type is one in which the Subject reports the actor, whereas a Passive clause type is one in which the Subject reports a situational role other than actor of the action. Other linguists however have decided against the use of the terms Active and Passive as labels for Philippine voices, and have substituted the term Topic for Subject as a label for the speaker's focus of attention. They have done this because they feel the traditional linguistic uses of the terms Active, Passive and Subject do not adequately cover the situation that we find in Philippine languages. The term Subject has been reserved by this latter group of linguists to label the category which always reports the actor of the action in non-causative clauses.

A simple situation containing an actor, an action, a goal, an instrument and a location, such as, 'The man is frightening a child with a snake in the field,' provides a number of situational roles each of which can be specifically focused upon and become the Topic of a new clause type. The set of clauses thus formed (see Paradigm 1) describing exactly the same situation but with changes in the focus orientation of the speaker, can be called a syntactic paradigm.

Paradigm 1²

(1) a.	mangamòmo	o	tao	so	motdeh	no	boday	do	takey
	SF-frighten	T	man	O	child	A	snake	R	field
b.	amòmohen	no	tao	o	motdeh	no	baday	do	takey
	frighten-OF	S	man	T	child	A	snake	R	field
c.	imòmomo	no	tao	so	motdeh	o	boday	do	takey
	AF-frighten	S	man	O	child	T	snake	R	field
d.	amòmooan	no	tao	so	motdeh	no	boday	o	takey
	frighten-RF	S	man	O	child	A	snake	T	field

‘The man is frightening a child with a snake in the field.’

In Paradigm 1 certain grammatical functions are specified. They are labeled Subject, Object, Associative, Referent and Topic. The Subject reports the actor of the activity, Object reports the goal, Associative reports the instrument, Referent reports the location of the activity, and Topic reports any one of these situational roles as the focus of attention of the speaker.

In Ivatan we do not provide only a semantic definition of Subject, i.e., Subject is actor in non-causative clauses, but we also provide a structural description which includes the fact that noun phrases are introduced by one of a class of so-called “case-marking” particles of which *no* is the form used before singular common nouns; also that the pronoun that may be substituted for a *no* marked phrase comes from a pronoun series of which *ko* is the first person singular form. One other fact helps to structurally define Subject: it is the fact that the prefix *mang-* on the verb, a voice-marking affix, indicates that the Topic is Subject. Or we could say that this prefix indicates that Topic is in a transform relationship to Subject in a clause describing the same situation but with a different focus of attention.

If we ask the question, what is an Object in Ivatan, we can say,

(a) The phrase marked by the case-marking particle *so*.

(b) The phrase which becomes Topic with the voice-marking suffix *-en* or *-hen* on the verb. Likewise we can structurally define the Associative as

² Abbreviations used in this and the following paradigms are as follows: S = Subject, R = Referent, O = Object, A = Associative, T = Topic, SF = Subject focus, RF = Referent focus, OF = Object focus, AF = Associative focus.

the phrase marked by *no* which may be substituted by the *niaken* pronoun series. It becomes Topic with an *i-* prefix. The marker *no* also marks the Subject as we noticed earlier. The markers for Subject and Associative are homophonous—they have the same form, *no*, but have different functions in that one marks Subject and the other Associative. Subject and Associative are differentiated structurally by at least two factors:

- (i) Different pronoun series (Subject uses *ko* for 1st person singular, Associative uses *niaken* for the same person)
- (ii) Word order (Subject always precedes Associative)

Referent, the grammatical category used to report the location of our situation is structurally defined by the use of *do* as the case-marking particle and the pronoun series *diaken*, meaning ‘at my place’ or ‘the place where I am.’ It becomes Topic with the *-an* suffix.

4. Changes in Correlation of Goal with Grammatical Functions

Although Paradigm 1 is built on clauses using the stem *amòmo* ‘to frighten’ in the Predicate, a number of other verb stems could have been used, and with appropriate changes of nouns in the clauses, good meaningful clauses could be made.

Notice that the verb affixes and the case-marking particles would remain unchanged. Such verb stems in Ivatan include the words meaning to get, to destroy, to steal, to smash, to buy, to embrace, to prevent, to raise, and so on. However, if we were to try to fit into this paradigm the verb meaning to peel, to call, to skin, to uncover, to scrape, to extinguish, etc., we would not have grammatical clauses. This is because these stems belong to a different verb stem class, and occur in the Predicate of clauses of a different syntactic paradigm. This is illustrated in Paradigm 2.

Paradigm 2

- (2) a. manarip o tao no ipangan do wakay
 sf-peel T man A knife R camote
- b. itarip no tao o ipangan do wakay
 af-peel S man T knife R camote
- c. taripan no tao no ipangan o wakay
 peel-rf S man A knife T camote

‘The man is peeling camote with a knife.’

In Paradigm 2 we have a new situation—a man peeling camote with a knife. Man is actor, camote is goal of the action, the knife is the instrument used. As in Paradigm 1, the actor is reported by Subject, the instrument by Associative, and both Subject and Associative may occur as Topic of a clause, but we find that the goal of the action is no longer reported by an Object phrase marked by *so*, but by a Referent phrase marked by *do*, and if the speaker focuses his attention on the goal of the activity, the camote, he does not use an Objective focus clause type, but a Referential focus clause type (clause 2c above). He could, if he so desired, indicate a location with a Referent marked phrase, but with this verb stem class he cannot focus his attention on it as he could with verb stems of class 1.

Paradigm 2 illustrates a correlative change involving goal. In Paradigm 1, goal is correlated with Object. In Paradigm 2, goal is correlated with Referent. A further correlative change is illustrated in Paradigm 3, in which the goal of the activity is reported, not by an Object, or by a Referent, but by an Associative phrase, and is made Topic by the *i-* prefix.

In this paradigm, the actor—man—is Subject as in the previous two paradigms, and the location is reported by a Referent phrase as in Paradigm 1. Verb stems which may substitute in the Predicates of Paradigm 3 clauses include those meaning to carry on the head, to bring or take, to follow with, to inter, etc.

Paradigm 3

- (3) a. manlaveng o tao no tamek do takey
 SF-bury T man A weeds R field
- b. ilaveng no tao o tamek do takey
 AF-bury S man T weeds R field
- c. lavngan no tao no tamek o takey
 bury-RF S man A weeds T field

‘The man is burying weeds in the field.’

Each of the above paradigms reports a situation in which the activity is goal-directed. We can therefore call these paradigms: transitive paradigms. Now we can see that in Ivatan as in other Philippine languages, transitivity does not consist, as it does in English, of the presence of an Object. Paradigms 2 and 3 do not have Objects, yet they are transitive, because there is a structural device for reporting the goal of the activity (Referent in Paradigm 2, and Associative in Paradigm 3).

An intransitive paradigm would be a set of transform related clauses reporting a situation in which the activity is not goal directed. Such a paradigm is No. 4. Verb stems which may substitute in this paradigm include most verbs of motion, draw near, depart, go out, enter, pass, dance and so on.

Paradigm 4

- (4) a. omasngen o tao do takey
 SF-draw.near T man R field
- b. iasngen no tao do takey o libro
 AF-draw.near S man R field T book
- c. asngenan no tao o takey
 draw.near-RF S man T field

‘The man is drawing near to the field (with a book).’

The situation reported in Paradigm 4 is very simple, a man holding a book is walking towards a field. The structure of Ivatan allows one to focus attention on the man as actor, with Subjective focus, the field as location, with Referential voice and on the book with Associative. Notice three things.

First, the book is neither the goal of the ‘drawing near’ activity, nor is it the instrument by which the activity is being performed. It is something being taken

along with the actor. We can call the situational role of the book the concomitant of the action. Second, Ivatan grammar does not allow the concomitant to be included in the report of the situation, unless it is focused on specifically. It may not be included in clauses 4a or 4c of the paradigm. How then do we know it is Associative if we only see it with a Topic case-marking particle before it? The structural definition of Associative tells us it is the phrase which becomes Topic when *i-* is prefixed to the verb. Clause 4b exhibits an *i-* prefix on the verb, therefore, the Topic, reporting the concomitant of the action must be Associative. Third, Subject is not focused upon with a *mang-* prefix, as in the transitive clauses, but with the infix *-om-*, providing a further differentiating factor between transitive and intransitive (Subject focus) clauses.

The four paradigms that we have so far talked about define four different verb stem classes in Ivatan. Actually Ivatan has at least twelve different verb stem classes, each with its defining set of clause structures.³

The four paradigms discussed above have all been non-causative. Three of them were transitive, one was intransitive. We have tried to show that just as in English the grammatical Subject may indicate either actor or goal depending on whether the clause is Active or Passive, so in Philippine languages grammatical categories may represent more than one situational role. We have so far seen the Associative represent instrument (in Paradigms 1 and 2), goal (Paradigm 3), and concomitant (in Paradigm 4). We have seen the Referent, or *do* marked phrase, represent location (in Paradigms 1, 3, and 4) and goal (in Paradigm 2).

5. Causative Clauses and the Transitive-Intransitive Dichotomy

The next two paradigms show considerable contrast with the paradigms we have already discussed; contrasts in the correlation of the situational roles with grammatical functions, and contrasts in the correlation of verbal affix with focus of attention.

³ The paradigms in this paper must not be considered complete, nor the clause types as invariant. Non-pertinent variation and some clause types have been eliminated from these paradigms to simplify the discussion. Each clause has been restricted to its nucleus, and can be expanded by a number of other phrases indicating the time of the activity, the manner of the activity and so on. For the complete paradigms, see my monograph, *An Ivatan Syntax*, Oceanic Linguistics Special Publication 2, 1966.

The basic semantic difference between a causative paradigm and a non-causative paradigm is the fact that a causative paradigm reports a situational role not reported by the non-causative paradigm. This is the situational role of initiator of the action or the one who is allowing the action to take place, broadly called the causer of the action.

The first of these two paradigms is a transitive causative paradigm, and therefore reports goal-oriented activity; the second is a non-transitive causative paradigm, and reports activity which is not goal-oriented.

Paradigm 5

- (5) a. mapararayaw o tao do motdeh so libro do takey
 SF-destroy T man R₁ child O book R₂ field
- b. panrarayawen no tao o motdeh so libro do takey
 destroy-RF₁ S man T child O book R₂ field
- c. ipararayaw no tao do motdeh o libro do takey
 OF-destroy S man R₁ child T book R₂ field
- d. pararayawan no tao do motdeh so libro o takey
 destroy-RF₂ S man R₁ child O book T field

‘The man is letting the child destroy the book in the field.’

Paradigm 5 reports a situation where a man is causing (or letting) a child destroy a book in the field. Situational roles are causer, actor, goal, and location. Causer is reported by a Subject phrase, and is focused not by *mang-* or *-om-* as in the non-causative clauses but by *mapa-* (clause 5a). Goal (the book) is reported by an Object phrase marked by *so* in clause 5a, but focused by the affix *ipa-* (clause 5c). This is hardly what would be expected since in non-causative constructions the prefix *i-* is used to focus not an Object phrase, but an Associative phrase. The location is reported by a Referent phrase, focused by *pa- -an* (clause 5d). Notice the phrase that reports the actor of the activity. It is marked by *do* in clause 5a, and appears to be a Referent since it has the Referent case-marker *do*, and the Referent pronoun set *diaken* can be substituted in this position. But in fact it is structurally distinct from the Referent reporting a location since the latter must follow the former, i.e., the first *do* phrase always marks an actor, the second a location. Furthermore, each phrase can become the focus of attention. We noticed in clause 5d that the

location Referent becomes topic with the affix combination *pa-* *-an*. Now notice the affix combination in clause 5b that makes the actor Referent into Topic. It is unexpectedly *pang-* *-en*; unexpectedly, since in the non-causative constructions the suffix *-en* is only used to focus an Object reporting goal, never a Referent, or any other grammatical phrase reporting an actor.

Paradigm 6 provides further interesting data.

Paradigm 6

(6) a.	mapadisma	o	tao	so	motdeh	no	libro	do	bangko
	SF-sit	T	man	O	child	A	book	R	seat
b.	padisnahan	no	tao	o	motdeh	no	libro	do	bangko
	sit-OF	S	man	T	child	A	book	R	seat
c.	ipadisna	no	tao	so	motdeh	o	libro	do	bangko
	AF-sit	S	man	O	child	T	book	R	seat
d.	padisnaan	no	tao	so	motdeh	no	libro	o	bangko
	sit-RF	S	man	O	child	A	book	T	seat

'The man is letting the child sit on a seat, holding a book.'

We stated above that this paradigm is intransitive. But as soon as we look at clause 6a we find an Object phrase marked by *so*. What is an Object phrase doing in a clause that is intransitive? As we noted above, transitivity in Philippine languages does not consist of potential or actual occurrence of an Object, using the term Object as a structurally defined grammatical category. Transitivity consists of goal-directed activity, regardless of how the goal is actually reported. In clause 6a of Paradigm 6, Object does not report a goal at all, but the actor of the action. This should not be considered strange. There does not seem to be too much difference between (1) the situation where in one clause type Object reports goal and in another it reports the actor, and (2) the English Active-Passive system where the Subject reports actor in one clause type, and in another it reports goal. The object of clause 6a reports the actor of the situation being reported in which a man is letting his child sit down on a seat while holding a book. Man is causer reported by Subject and focused by *mapa-* as in the preceding paradigm. The child is actor and as we have seen, he is reported by an Object phrase, focused by the affix combination *pa-* *-en* in clause 6b. There is an interesting parallel here to the preceding paradigm. In

Paradigm 5 it was a Referent phrase that expressed actor, and it was focused by the combination *pang-* *-en*. In paradigm 6 the Object phrase expressing actor is focused by *pa-* *-en*. The use of the suffix *-en* in both cases focuses a phrase expressing an actor. In non-causative paradigms *-en* only focuses an Object phrase expressing goal.

The book that the child is holding is concomitant to the action and is expressed by an Associative phrase, focused in clause 6c by *ipa-* on the verb stem. This is parallel to the non-causative intransitive paradigm where *i-* is likewise used to focus an Associative expressing concomitant.

Finally, we notice the location or site of the sitting activity, on the seat. It is expressed, as we could expect, by a Referent phrase and likewise is focused by *pa-* *-an* in clause 6d, paralleling its non-causative counterpart.

This paper has attempted to show that a large number of clauses in Philippine languages which are transitive in that they express a goal, do not contain structurally defined Objects. This is because the situational role of goal (as with other situational roles) may be expressed by one of several grammatical functions depending upon the class of the verb stem, in the activity nucleus of the situation. This in turn demands a redefinition of transitivity. A transitive clause is one which expresses goal-oriented activity—regardless of whether a formally defined Object is present or not. The contrast between the transitive and intransitive causative paradigms in Ivatan provides further evidence of the need for this redefinition, since an Object occurs in the intransitive paradigm, expressing not a goal, but the actor of the action.