

# Word Order Inverse in Obo Manobo

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A notable feature of many Philippine languages is that transitive clauses display two word orders: VAP and VPA. Although this variation in word order has been noted in the literature, the traditional explanations for this phenomenon, e.g. phonologically short forms precede long forms or pronouns precede full NPs, have been unsatisfactory in that no one explanation accounts for all the data and all the explanations are essentially descriptions of the data rather than explanations of the motivations producing them.

In his discussion of voice and inverse, Givón (1994) has argued that word order may be a grammatical means of signaling an inverse voice function. Taking up this proposal, T. Payne (1994) has provided evidence that in Cebuano (Central Philippines) the VPA transitive clause is a word order inverse. In light of Payne's findings, the question arises, can the inverse analysis be applied to other Philippine languages in which transitive clauses have two word orders, and if so, what grammatical variations do these inverses exhibit?

Obo Manobo, a Southern Philippine language, also has transitive clauses that display VAP and VPA word orders. Furthermore each word order occurs with a unique set of case-marked pronouns, a feature which to our knowledge has not been noted previously for Philippine languages. In this study we argue that the Obo Manobo VPA transitive clause is a word order inverse. We support this claim with a range of evidence: formal (word order and unique pronominal sets), syntactic (tests of syntactic control), semantic (person of pronouns), and functional (measures of the relative topicality of A and P in narrative texts). We show that the VAP active (or direct) construction and the VPA inverse construction are selected in part by a person hierarchy and in part by a topicality hierarchy, hierarchies similar to those governing traditional inverse systems. The study also discusses traditional analyses of word order variations in Philippine languages and shows that only the inverse analysis accounts for all the data and provides a motivation for VAP and VPA word orders and their selection in Obo Manobo in particular and Philippine languages in general.