

On the Transitivity of Actor Focus and Patient Focus Constructions in Tagalog

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This paper offers functional explanations for the transitivity of the Actor Focus (AF) and the Patient Focus (PF) constructions in Tagalog. The existing studies with regard to these two structures are ambivalent as to what can be considered as the basic transitive construction. That is, both are posited to have the same functional role of encoding a transitive event. However, in this paper, it will be shown that the AF construction has a functional role of encoding an intransitive event, and the PF construction, a transitive event. Moreover, it will be pointed out that the two clause structures have different meanings and are used in different contexts. I posit the view that AF constructions with *-um/m* affix including those containing a semantic actor and a semantic patient are intransitive. Conversely, the PF structures with *-in, -an, i-* affix in the verb where semantic actor and semantic patient are always present are transitive clauses. Accordingly, in addressing the issue of transitivity, the contention whether it is definiteness or referentiality which triggers the use of Actor Focus (AF) and Patient Focus (PF) construction will be problematic. If sentences (1) *Kumain si Maria ng mangga* 'Maria ate mangoes/a mango' and (2) *Kinain ni Maria ang mangga* 'Maria ate the mango' are to be considered, there is an element of truth in claiming that AF construction in (1) correlates with indefiniteness of the patient while definiteness of the patient explains the use of PF construction in (2). There is however an Actor Focus (AF) construction where a patient is definite and the AF verb is a relativized verb, such as (3) *Si Maria ang kumain sa mangga* 'It is Maria who ate the mango'. Considering (3), the question still remains: what triggers the use of AF and PF constructions? To account for the issues of transitivity and definiteness, I cast my analyses under the transitivity hypothesis of Hopper and Thompson (1980) with particular emphasis on Agency, Affectedness of P and Individuation of O.

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