

ON THE PRAGMATICS OF FOCUS

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1. INTRODUCTION

In English, we can talk about the Tigers winning the baseball championship in at least four different ways. We can say:

1. The Tigers won the baseball championship.
2. The baseball championship was won by the Tigers.
3. It was the Tigers who won the baseball championship.
4. It was the baseball championship that the Tigers won.

These sentences all refer to the same event - the same extralingual reality. What, then, is the difference? The English speaker can readily sense that the difference lies in the context of situation in which each would be appropriate. When or in what situation do we say it one way and when another? It is easy to see that there are contextual constraints on the latter three and which one is used depends on what was said before or *what* the interlocutors were talking about. On the other hand, sentence 1 is more neutral. One could start a new topic of conversation with it. However, if one said "The baseball championship was won by the Tigers" it implies that the listener already knows that the baseball championship was being played and that the speaker was simply telling him *who* won. The third and fourth sentences are both contrastive. "It was the Tigers - not the Yankees (or some other team) - who won the baseball championship". Similarly, to say "It was the baseball championship that the Tigers won" implies that it was not the football championship - in case you did not know that the Tigers were a baseball team - that the Tigers won.

This is precisely the sort of thing I have been trying to figure out for Tagalog. In Tagalog, focus¹ selection works along similar principles, although the mechanics and the discourse dynamics are different. Similar forms function differently and similar functions are realised by different forms. Furthermore, within the rubric of 'passive form' in Tagalog, other noun arguments may be made the 'subject' or the 'in-focus NP' of the sentence, accompanied by the appropriate verb morphology.

Some linguists have said that, unlike English, the goal-focus sentence type that parallels the English passive (sentence 2 above) in its form, occurs more frequently than the actor-focus type (the 'active' like sentence 1 above). It has also been said that the goal-focus construction, although formally like the English passive, does not function in Tagalog in the same way that the passive does in English.

If these observations are accurate, as they seem to be, the obvious question is: Why is it so? The obvious answer appears to be: The choice of focus construction depends on *what* we are talking about. When we are talking about an

Paul Geraghty, Lois Carrington and S.A. Wurm, eds *FOCAL I: papers from the Fourth International Conference on Austronesian Linguistics*, 43-57. *Pacific Linguistics*, C-93, 1986.

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event, the Tagalog system provides multiple options for grammaticalising the *focus of orientation of talk*: not just the actor or goal (agent or patient) but also the location, instrument, or beneficiary may be the in-focus NP. This means, then, that the speakers have a wider choice as to which facet of an event or situation talk must be oriented to. Furthermore, when the goal (patient or direct object) is 'definite', specific, or referential (recoverable in context), it has to be encoded as the surface subject of a goal-focus (formal passive) sentence.²

In the past ten years or so, especially since the first international Austronesian conference (Hawaii, 1974) when Austronesian scholars from different traditions came together perhaps for the first time, parallel insights and the outlines of some form of underlying unity in the pragmatic systems of Austronesian languages have begun to emerge. The sense of what the pragmatics consisted of, however, remained largely implicit in the descriptions of the syntactic structures. It became clear nonetheless that *focus* (in the Philippine linguistics sense), or some form of marking in the verb that the associated NP was 'in focus', ultimately motivated contrasts of *voice*, *aspect*, or *transitivity*. The fact that formally passive sentences in certain Austronesian languages are not necessarily 'real' passives (Milner 1974 and Tchekhoff 1974) and that they function in discourse differently from the English passive (McCune 1979) has been convincingly argued in the literature.

Several studies, based wholly or in part on Philippine language data, have also brought out the relationship between *focus* selection and discourse organisation (among them, Pike 1962, 1963; Naylor 1973, 1974, 1975; Hopper and Thompson 1980). They have brought out the important fact that *focus selection is constrained by the context*³ and by the function of sentence types in the flow of discourse.

The difference in discourse function of the Tagalog goal-focus (the formal passive) construction is reflected in the fact that such a 'passive' construction occurs with much higher frequency in Tagalog discourse than the English passive does in English discourse. It has even been argued that it is the passive, not the active, construction that is basic in Tagalog (Ceña 1977).

Yet, to date, a relative frequency study of the occurrence in discourse of the goal-focus (GF) construction has yet to appear. The need for this sort of 'concrete' evidence has long been felt, however (Kess 1979). Such a study should confirm or deny the oft-repeated statement (as yet unsupported) that the GF construction is of equal or greater frequency than the actor-focus (AF) or 'active' construction in Tagalog.

Obviously, counting just for the sake of counting may be of little or no value. But not only must we count occurrence of focus constructions but we must also account for their pragmatic motivation. Thus, as a tool for the analysis of the dynamics of discourse, a relative frequency study provides an irrefutable and revealing record of usage on which we can base our analyses and interpretations with a good measure of confidence. Furthermore, as the discussion below will show, relative frequency data yield a number of extremely valuable insights into discourse organisation that may otherwise not become apparent. Certain such insights are of even greater importance than simply providing conclusive evidence for certain intuitions or impressions (e.g., as pointed out above, the higher incidence of GF constructions in Tagalog). At the same time, relative frequency data will, hopefully, enable us to describe these insights in more explicit terms.

What the present study proposes to do, therefore, is to seek additional insights into the pragmatics of *focus* on the basis of a relative frequency count

of AF and GF sentences in different types of discourse and in different types of text that typically occur at certain points in the discourse.

In Naylor 1973, 1975, a pilot study of relative frequency of occurrence of the various focus construction types, as they occurred in a variety of selected texts, provided the data for the study of *topic*, *focus*, and *emphasis* in the Tagalog verbal clause. The frequency figures from that earlier study were not reported at that time. However, they have now been combined with the frequency figures from the present study. (Tables 1 and 2 show the combined frequency figures except when otherwise noted.)

The purpose of the earlier pilot study was limited to the determination of the overall frequency of occurrence of the various focus constructions and the relative frequency of occurrence of these same focus types at *points of introduction of new subject matter*, taking into account certain contexts of situation in which certain subtypes occurred. The present study on the other hand is an expansion of the earlier one in terms of a much enlarged corpus of material and of more detail in the description of the observed occurrences of AF and GF construction types. It is also an expansion in the sense that we have developed greater capacity for deeper insights into the dynamics of focus as well as the dynamics of discourse in the intervening years. There is a marked contrast in the state of the art of discourse analysis between 1971 and 1984. We can now avail ourselves of a large body of literature - a veritable groundswell that began in the late 1970s - that deals with virtually all aspects of text study and discourse analysis.

It is interesting to note at this point that the patterns that emerged as a result of the earlier pilot study were essentially paralleled by the patterns that emerged from the present study. One wonders if simply *more* material would yield any more valuable information than we already have. Perhaps, rather than simply increasing the data base, it might be more fruitful to analyse in greater detail the occurrence of AF and GF clauses, *as well as nonverbal clauses*, in relation to their position in the discourse and then, position by position, across the different genres, styles, and registers. We should then be able to define paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationships among the major sentence types, relative to positions in discourse and type of discourse.⁴

2. METHOD

The material used for the present study included: stories, stories in comic format (verbal-pictorial mode with preponderance of dialogue), stories in play format, articles and essays, newspapers (unlike English newspapers, these consisted of only a few tabloid pages), regular columns in magazines or newspapers, letters, a television newscast, and taped conversations.

All forms that carry a focus marker were tabulated and categorised as to syntactic function, i.e. nominal, verbal, adjectival, adverbial. Whenever a focus-marked form functioned as a verbal predicate, its clause was tabulated as a verbal clause and further classified into AF or GF. Whenever a focus-marked form occurred as a predicate noun or adjective, its clause was tabulated as a non-verbal clause. (See Table 2.) Furthermore, the tabulations were distinguished as to position in the discourse: whether it was introductory or initial, developmental or medial, and for some texts, also if it was closure or final. (See Table 1.)

Operating on the hypothesis that 'intransitive' or AF clauses tend to code 'backgrounded' material and new information (therefore introductory material)

and that 'transitive' or GF clauses tend to code 'foregrounded', referential (old information) or developmental material, each clause that did not fit into this categorisation was *noted for features* that may help to explain the *motivation* for its use. In other words, we have assumed, a priori, on the basis of what we know about the syntax and semantics of AF versus GF sentence types, that AF is the unmarked choice for introductory material and GF for developmental material. Therefore, when marked choices occurred, it was also assumed that they were motivated by semantic, syntactic, pragmatic, or sociocultural constraints.

'Relative clauses' were not counted as verbal clauses since these are arguably neither verbal in function nor clausal in structure. The construction that most other linguists have analysed as 'relative clause' is, in Tagalog, actually a modifier phrase. It is identical in form and function to the Tagalog modification structure.⁵

A separate table (Table 3) identifies more categories of text within a particular discourse format. It was deemed necessary to do this for this particular story - a popularisation in comic format of a serious novel. The condensation of the novel required more narrative interludes to cover intervening events between the highlighted scenes presented in dialogue-pictorial form.

In the course of doing the present study, the high frequency of nonverbal sentences, earlier noticed but hitherto unstated, came forcibly to our attention.⁶ For the present study, therefore, nonverbal-sentence frequency was also tabulated but only to show overall frequency of occurrence in the various genres and types of text, relative to the AF and GF sentences and their combined totals (see Tables 2 and 3 below). Since the present study is about the pragmatics of focus, and focus is a defining feature of verbal sentences in Tagalog, further detail on nonverbal-sentence occurrence did not seem relevant for the purposes of this paper.⁷ The tabulation of nonverbal sentences was therefore done without regard for details of functional distribution within the various genres. On the other hand, since nonverbal sentences are part of the larger discourse picture, their frequency of occurrence relative to that of verbal sentences does provide the breadth of perspective that only such information can delineate. Such a perspective is necessary for a fuller and deeper understanding of the pragmatics of focus itself. In fact, it has now become clear that unless the functions of nonverbal sentence types are taken into account, we cannot have a fully adequate description of the pragmatics of focus (as realised by verbal sentences).

Finally, it should be pointed out that the frequency data from the earlier (1972) pilot study were combined with those of the present study. Since they were not perfectly parallel in regard to the categories distinguished and tabulated, appropriate notes regarding discrepancies are given in the tables.

3. DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF FREQUENCY DATA

3.1 Overall relative frequency

As we can see in Table 1, it is indeed the fact that in terms of total frequency of occurrence across various genres and types of text, and without taking into account the variations by genre and type of text, *GF sentences occur more frequently than AF sentences*. Note, however, that it is not that much higher in frequency of occurrence than the AF, as the total figures on the lower right-hand corner will show at a glance.

3.2 Introductory text

I have grouped together under the category of 'introductory text' sentences that occur as titles or headlines, as the initial sentence of the body of the discourse, introducers of a new topic of discourse or starters of a new episode.

It appears to be the consensus of opinion among several analysts of discourse organisation that sentences of the *actor-focus* type tend to introduce new topics of discourse and/or, present background information; they are seen as being on the lower end of the transitivity scale, thus tending to be *descriptive* rather than *narrative* in character (cf. Hopper and Thompson 1980).

The total figures in Table 1 for the relative frequency of occurrence of AF and GF sentences in introductory text confirm the above hypothesis. AF sentences occurred far more frequently. Yet if we examine the breakdown by genre, we can observe that the higher incidence of AF sentences is true of *only three genres*: stories (narratives), play format, and actual conversations. Furthermore, the ratio of AF to GF sentences in these discourse types was extremely high: almost 2 to 1 in narratives, and more than 4 to 1 in both the play format and the conversations. In the *other six genres*, however, GF sentences showed higher incidence over AF sentences: by a slight margin in the comic format and articles and essays, by a roughly 3 to 2 ratio in columns and the television newscast, and by 2 to 1 in newspapers and letters.

Already two important considerations emerge from this examination of the data. First, it is clear that *overall relative frequency figures* for AF and GF sentences do not reveal any more than the *simple ratio* of AF to GF sentences in discourse; they do not tell us about *how* focus functions in discourse. Secondly, this emphasises the crucial importance of *distinguishing types of discourse or genres* in the study of discourse pragmatics, in which the pragmatics of focus figures as one of the component 'networks' or systems. (At this point, we must bear in mind that the hypothesis stated above was formulated with specific reference to narrative text in Hopper and Thompson 1980.)

As we shall see in the discussion of the data with reference to developmental material, these considerations are just as important for the study of the pragmatics of focus in other types of text that occur at other points in the discourse, or that play a different role in the flow of discourse.

The taped conversations do confirm the hypothesis that AF sentences tend to introduce new topics of talk. From some of the things we know off-hand about the nature of conversation, it is easy to see why the ratio of AF sentences in introductory text should be so high. There is no narrator to mediate and the interlocutors have to continually provide background and transition themselves.⁸

The play format would parallel conversation and the narratives of course typify the basis on which Hopper and Thompson formulated their hypothesis. That these should show a high ratio of AF sentences in introductory material needs no further explanation, given the generally accepted function of AF sentences as coders of new information.

On the other hand, given the generally accepted notion that the GF sentence type 'refers' to something 'known' or 'given' or 'recoverable' somewhere in the context, that is 'referential' and therefore *does not convey new information*, it would be puzzling that GF sentences should occur in introductory material at all. Not only does it function to introduce new information, but it even does so with greater frequency than the predictable AF sentence type in a good number of genres. We are therefore challenged to account for *when* and *why* GF sentences occur in introductory text.

Table 1: relative frequency of actor-focus and goal-focus

	Stories	Comics Format	Play Format	Articles Essays	Columns	News- papers	Letters	TV News- cast	Convers- ations	TOTALS
Intro- ductory										
AF	224	77	210	61	11	60	2	26	201	872
GF	127	83	49	66	15	130	4	39	46	559
Develop- mental										
AF	217	438	290	189	67	53	24	17	80	1375
GF	349	471	478	237	123	185	22	31	259	2155
Closure										
AF	8*	1**	-	6***	7	-	3	-	-	25
GF	5*	2**	-	9***	3	-	6	-	-	25
TOTALS (does not include figures for 'Closure')										
AF	441	515	500	250	78	113	26	43	281	2247
GF	476	554	527	303	138	315	26	70	305	2714

*based on 35% of the material; **based on 68% of the material; ***based on 50% of the material

Table 2: Relative frequency of actor-focus, goal-focus, and nonverbal clauses in various genres

	Stories	Articles Essays	Single Topic	Columns	News- papers	Letters	TOTALS
AF	263	132	109	85	30	29	648
GF	309	178	111	141	73	32	844
Nonverbal	340	163	188	156	54	115	1016
	Comics Format	Play Format	TV News- cast	Convers- ation	TOTALS		
AF	383	500	43	186	1112		
GF	446	527	70	208	1251		
Nonverbal	602	830	28	666	2126		

First of all, we need to refine our concept of the *given-new* opposition. This has been sufficiently dealt with in the literature (e.g. Halliday 1968, 1973; Naylor 1973, 1974, 1975; and others). Yet it never seems to be superfluous to call attention to the fact that the *given-new* distinction is not necessarily realised by *discrete* forms or parts of sentences and that the concept is a *complex* of networks - multisystemic and multidimensional, neither simplex nor unidimensional. Thus, a sentence constituent may be *given* within one system of contrast and *new* within another system of contrast in the network. Without going into digressive detail at this point, suffice it to say that Naylor (op.cit.) has argued that in Tagalog, the pragmatic opposition lies in the *general-particular* rather than the *given-new* contrast. It follows, therefore, that: while GF sentences are undeniably referential, they may nonetheless convey *new* information, the *newness* consisting of *particularisation*, *contrastiveness*, or *the mere fact of being newly brought into the focus of attention* of the interlocutors.

These two concepts, referentiality and the general-particular contrast, as realised in the GF sentence type, provide options and linguistic resources that are fully exploited in journalistic text. (It should be noted again at this point that these were the discourse types in which the GF construction occurred with much greater frequency in introductory material than the AF sentence type.) In the examples that follow, the use of *marked* order reinforces the referentiality quotient, making it more pronounced and its immediacy greatly heightened.

As headings for news items, the newspapers in particular showed a great abundance of sentences of the following structure:

- (1) Piskal, pinagdusa ni Marcos.
fiscal penalised
Fiscal (prosecuting attorney), penalised by Marcos.
- (2) Custodio, 50 pa, pinawalan.
Custodio 50 yet freed
Custodio (proper noun), 50 others, freed.
- (3) Tsuper binaril ng pulis.
driver shot policeman
Driver shot by policeman.

There is a 'general rule' in Tagalog, by which the speaker is constrained to use the GF construction whenever the patient or 'direct object' or goal is 'definite'. Thus, the AF sentence,

Bumili si Pedro ng sapatos.
Pedro bought (a pair of) shoes.

contrasts with the GF sentence,

Binili ni Pedro ang sapatos.
Pedro bought the shoes.

The implication in the GF sentence is that Pedro bought *the* shoes - that we know about, that we had talked about earlier.

The GF sentence conveys the assumption of shared information, either through communication or through shared knowledge and shared experience in the shared cultural context. This shared information provides the basis for the 'definiteness'. As a discourse notion, 'definiteness' derives from the recoverability of the referent of the 'definite' NP in the context, linguistic or extra-linguistic, and not simply the old grammar-book definition of what the definite article indicates (cf. Naylor 1984).

We might point out here that, contrary to previous general impressions, recoverability of the referent is not necessarily in the preceding context; i.e. it is not necessarily anaphoric. It may be 'cataphoric'. In fact, *all discourse-initial sentences are necessarily 'cataphoric'* since they direct attention to what follows. Discourse-initial sentences also introduce what is to be developed - defined, circumscribed, or expanded in subsequent text. The referent may in fact be recoverable in *subsequent* rather than in preceding text (cf. Naylor 1985).

Given these observations about the GF construction and the pragmatic features associated with it on the one hand, and the thematic nature of discourse-initial and certain sentence-initial constituents on the other, it should now be easy to see what pragmatic motivations may account for the occurrence of GF sentences in introductory material in Tagalog discourse.

Let us now turn to some examples from the material used in the present study.

For example, in one of the taped conversations, the interlocutors were first cousins whose aunt left them an inheritance in her will. When the will was first introduced in the conversation, it was as the in-focus NP ('subject') of a GF sentence.

When someone is being introduced to someone else, the introduction is phrased as a GF sentence because it is 'known', by his or her presence, *who* is the subject of the introduction.

Yet another context in which the GF construction occurs discourse-initially is in the modern short story. Quite often, the story begins *in medias res* and we find a GF sentence opening the discourse. The author *presumes* that the reader *knows what* he or she is talking about and if the reader does not know at that initial point, the reader will know as the story unfolds - another example, and a common one, of cataphoric referentiality.

3.2.1 Performatives, quotatives, and adversatives

Performative and quotative sentences usually focus on *what* was said, thought, or promised, etc.; therefore, the verb of the Tagalog performative or quotative sentence tends to be in goal focus. (The promise or quotation is not coded as an *ang*-NP however.) This means that if the introductory sentence in the discourse is a performative or a quotative, it will usually be a GF construction.

There are a good number of verbs in Tagalog that are transitive in form but intransitive in meaning. They generally convey a state of affairs that may in one sense or another be considered adverse in its effect (cf. Dardjowidjojo 1979). For example:

- (1) Baka kulangin tayo ng pambudbod.
might be short of we of topping
We might be wanting for (something to use) for topping (on the cake).
- (2) Minalas si Juan.
bad-lucked Juan
Bad luck befell Juan.

These verbs are rarely if ever used in other than the goal focus, regardless of whether they are introducing a new topic of discourse or not.

3.2.2 The comic format

This genre shows a slightly higher frequency for GF sentences in introductory material. Comic stories, however, are a breed apart because there are pictures that complement or supplant words. In fact, I have observed in a full-length (52-page) comic story that precisely when the action gets intense, the picture says it all and there are no words that appear other than "Bang! Bang!" or "Oops!", etc. The narrator comes on rather frequently and this brings in narrative sequences to a format that would otherwise be like a play or dialogue simulating natural conversation. When it comes to introductory text, the comic

format shows an interesting divergence between narrative and conversational segments of the discourse in the matter of which focus construction occurs more frequently. The narrative introductory material shows a preponderance of AF constructions whereas the conversational introductory material shows a preponderance of GF constructions.

Because of its uniqueness, I have shown in Table 3 the breakdown of the figures given in Table 1 for this genre.

Table 3: Relative frequency of occurrence of actor-focus, goal-focus and nonverbal clauses in the comic version of *Noli me Tangere* (a famous novel written by José Rizal in Spanish, subsequently translated into English and Tagalog)

	AF	GF	NonV
Setting	-	1	3
Introductory			
Narrator	28	17	27
Dialogue	25	38	53
Developmental			
Narrator	135	109	80
Dialogue	192	281	438
Closure			
Narrator	1	-	-
Dialogue	2	-	1

3.3 Developmental text

All the sentences that develop what the introductory sentence or cluster of sentences has introduced form part of the developmental segments of the discourse. In the columns in Table 1 where figures for 'Closure' do not appear, the figures for 'developmental' include concluding sentences as well. (Unfortunately, the decision to distinguish closure from developmental was not made until the tabulation process was halfway through. As a result, I have figures for closure for only part of the material. I was convinced, however, that even such fragmentary data was better than none at all.)

Once introduced, the topic of discourse becomes referential and part of shared information. Thus, in developmental text, we can predict that there would be a preponderance of GF constructions. All across the various discourse types, this is in fact what Table 1 shows quite consistently. The differences in ratio of GF to AF sentences in each discourse type is only a matter of degree. For example, newspaper items consistently dealt with only one topic of discourse; as a result, the rest of the text after the first sentence or after the heading and subheading tended to be anaphoric. The GF sentence, being one of the anaphoric devices available in the Tagalog system (Naylor 1984), occurred much more frequently in newspaper text. Similarly, columnists tend to deal with one topic at a time and we can see that in this genre, the ratio of GF to AF sentences is quite high: roughly 2 to 1.

The figures for the play format, the television newscast, and the conversations - all conversational in character - all show remarkably high ratios of GF to AF sentences, with the conversations showing a ratio of higher than 3 to 1. (These same genres showed extremely high ratios of AF to GF sentences in introductory material.)

Again, given that AF sentences tend to code new or background information, how would they function in developmental text?

We have observed that AF sentences tended to occur in non-introductory text whenever:

- (1) They coded intransitive actions. There are no other options for coding intransitives in Tagalog. Whatever their function in discourse might be, intransitive actions are coded as AF constructions. This in fact turned out to be the most common reason for the occurrence of the AF construction in developmental text;
- (2) the sentence in initial position was repeated for rhetorical effect;
- (3) when forming a series of parallel constructions for aesthetic effect, then an initial AF sentence would be followed by developmental AF sentences;
- (4) when the focus of attention is on the actor, the AF construction may occur in developmental text. For example, in a selection on *what people do* on All Saints' Day, we observed that when talk centred on the cemetery itself and *what people did to it*, GF sentences were used; on the other hand, when talk centred on people themselves and *what they did* on that day, then AF sentences were used even in the developmental segment of the selection.

3.4 Closure

Although the figures for 'closure' are too small to be significant, it is interesting to note that they show, on the whole, a tendency to pattern similarly to introductory text.

3.5 Nonverbal sentences

As I have earlier pointed out, nonverbal clauses quite unexpectedly turned out to be of high frequency in Tagalog discourse. In Table 2, we can see that, in 7 out of 10 columns, nonverbal constructions far exceed either GF or AF constructions in relative frequency. (In my earlier study, I did not include nonverbal clauses in my tabulations. I did jot down however among my notes that with respect to a certain book, nonverbal clauses appeared to predominate.)

In the remaining three columns, the nonverbal constructions nonetheless show high frequency in two of the columns - higher than AF and not much lower than GF. Only in the television newscast was the frequency of occurrence of nonverbal sentences relatively low.

The column in Table 2 marked 'single topic' consists of articles that centre on one topic: e.g. biography, Christmas (and what it means to some famous movie stars). In this type of discourse, topicalisation in the form of nonverbal or equational sentences (pragmatically equivalent to the English cleft constructions), does occur with very high frequency.

3.6 Oral-style and written-style discourse

By 'oral-style' discourse, I refer to discourse that is conversational or conversational in style, or a simulation of conversation. It may be written or spoken text. Similarly, 'written-style' discourse refers to discourse, spoken or written, that carry most of the features of written text. Oratory, for example, may be spoken but the style is written.

The figures in all three tables show a higher ratio of GF to AF sentences in the oral-style types of discourse (the play format, the television newscast, the conversations, and the comics format). In Tables 2 and 3, we also see a remarkably high frequency of occurrence of nonverbal sentences in the oral-style discourse. These two sentence types correlate with the mode of oral communication and its setting. Unique to conversational settings is the *immediacy of reference*,⁹ linguistic as well as extra-linguistic. Given the fact that GF constructions 'focus' on *what was done to something or someone that we already know about, and that nonverbal sentences are referring*, rather than narrating, predications we can only surmise that *immediacy of reference* must be a distinctive feature of spoken discourse, and by extension, of oral-style discourse. (Much work is currently being done in the area of oral versus written discourse, e.g. the work of Tannen and others in Tannen 1982, 1984.)

While these observations need - and ought - to be further explored, the figures in Tables 2 and 3 and the correlative pragmatic features of the GF and nonverbal sentence types are compelling. At least for Tagalog, they appear to be diagnostic of oral-style discourse and from the point of view of the pragmatics of focus, these figures are highly revealing of what may turn out to be one of the important functions of the GF construction: as a vehicle for immediacy of reference.

4. CONCLUSION

The relative frequency counts tabulated in Tables 1, 2, and 3 *do not reveal* a marked separation of functions-in-discourse of AF and GF constructions. The figures are equivocal and undecided. My observations lead me to believe that the correlation between low transitivity with introductory material and high transitivity with developmental material does not hold for Tagalog, not even for narrative discourse. AF sentences (low transitivity) can code *highly active* meanings and therefore make for narrative movement. The following examples from the corpus under study will illustrate this:

- (1) Umikot at humarap sa kausap ang nangangalit na tao.
turned-AF and confronted-AF interlocutor the irate linker man
The irate man turned and confronted his interlocutor.
- (2) Sumugod ang lalaki.
chased the man
The man ran in hot pursuit.

Similarly, GF (high transitivity) constructions can code inactive, descriptive meanings, e.g. adversative examples as given above. Furthermore, GF (highly transitive) sentences, in their participial force may be descriptive in the way participial adjectives are. The incidence of AF sentences in developmental text is high; so is the incidence of GF sentences in introductory material.

It has become clear that *transitivity may not* be the relevant contrast in the pragmatics of focus in Tagalog. There are strong indications that the parameters within which the verbal system of Tagalog functions are marked by other contrasts; e.g. active-stative, centrifugal-centripetal, and others that we have yet to discover.

We have begun to ask if in fact discourse coherence is itself a function of the verbal system in Tagalog. The fact that so very many nonverbal sentences occur in recorded usage has brought up the question of how do verbal and nonverbal constructions function together in the organisation of discourse.

We have begun to glean some likely answers. Nonverbal clauses must also contribute to the flow of discourse. With their occurrence in great numbers, discourse would come to a long standstill if nonverbal clauses contributed nothing to the flow of discourse. The fact is that *all clauses* - verbal and nonverbal - *have a topic*. Nonverbal sentences are not endowed with transitivity. Furthermore, we know that the focus relationship singles out the topic *ang-NP*, thus making the topic salient. Perhaps, ultimately, focus functions as a vehicle for *topic salience*, and in the final analysis, focus functions as a coherence device only by virtue of its association with the topic.

From the lack of sharp definition of discourse functions of the AF and GF clause types, from the remarkably high incidence of nonverbal sentences, and from all the other foregoing observations, we are led to the conclusion that Tagalog discourse is organised in terms of *topic - topic continuity* and *topic movement* rather than transitivity (cf. McGinn 1982).

Any account of Tagalog discourse organisation in terms of transitivity and the function of verbal clause types in the organisation of discourse ignores a *large part* of discourse as well as an *integral part* of the system. Transitivity fits Tagalog discourse only loosely and incompletely; it leaves out much that needs to be accounted for if we are to describe the discourse dynamics of Tagalog with a modicum of adequacy.¹⁰

While this study may prove sufficient for the study of the pragmatics of focus, the study of the pragmatics of focus is not sufficient for a study of the dynamics of Tagalog discourse.

This study, however, is a step in the right direction. We have already begun to take the next step - in the same direction.¹¹

NOTES

1. In Philippine linguistics, the term *focus* has a unique meaning. It refers to the syntactic-semantic relationship between the verb and the surface subject, signalled by the verb's focus affix in conjunction with the subject form of noun phrases and pronouns. For example, a sentence is in *actor focus* if the surface subject is in the role of actor and the verb carries an actor-focus affix.
2. See Naylor 1984.
3. M.A.K. Halliday (1973, personal communication): Context does not determine choice and it is still the speaker who *chooses*; context merely constrains.
4. We must caution here that it is important not to confuse high frequency of occurrence with structural basicness. Markedness, rather than basicness, is what is correlatable with frequency.

5. The modification structure is: Head + Linker na + Adjective/Adverb. The so-called relative-clause structure is: Head + Linker na + Verb. Thus, ang titser na maganda *the beautiful teacher* is no different from ang titser na umalis *the teacher who left* (lit. **the left teacher*). In fact, the underlying predications are structurally identical as well in Tagalog: maganda ang titser *the teacher (is) beautiful* and umalis ang titser *the teacher left*, respectively.

If I understand Stanley Starosta correctly, he shares this general point of view (personal communication at FOCAL). Barry Miller, in his ECAL-IV paper (August 1985) also concurs. In Naylor 1976, this has been argued within a theory of attributive syntax in Tagalog.

6. Dr Mary Bresnahan had made a similar observation in the course of writing her dissertation, based on a Tagalog novel and other Tagalog texts.
7. A more detailed account of the discourse function of nonverbal sentences is the subject of another study, now in progress, part of which is reported in Naylor 1985.
8. It must be kept in mind that we are talking about the high frequency of AF sentences in dialogues and conversations in *introductory material only*. As we shall see below, the AF sentence is *not* the most frequently occurring sentence type in these genres in terms of overall frequency.
9. In more recent work that touches on anaphora, we observed that in oral-style discourse, the constituent that is subject to anaphoric processes (substitution and deletion) is never far - usually, only one clause away but never more than two clauses away, either immediately preceding or the next but one clause before. In this connection, we can perhaps talk about 'phoric distance', which in oral-style discourse has to be short but which, in written-style discourse may be longer, due to the nature of the setting. (Since this is not the subject of the present study, I cannot go into further detail on this.) It may be that GF and nonverbal sentences are diagnostic of oral-style discourse because of their association with short 'phoric distance'. These observations are still highly tentative at this time, however.
10. cf. Naylor 1986. In most recent developments of my work on focus, I have come to the conclusion that focus and transitivity are systems that are entirely different but interrelated in ways that parallel the contrast between aspect and tense. Focus is to aspect as transitivity is to tense. Just as languages in general are said to have both tense and aspect, so do they have both transitivity and focus. But just as some languages are said to have verbal systems based on aspect and others on tense, we can also say that some languages have verbal systems based on focus and others on transitivity. Focus is perspectival and therefore pragmatically based. Transitivity, on the other hand, is a matter of case relations and therefore semantically based. Both transitivity and focus are, however, realised by the syntax. (The parallels with tense and aspect are fairly obvious. Like tense and aspect, focus and transitivity are interrelated and they perform similar functions in the grammar of different languages but they are nonetheless two entirely different systems based on contrasts that are quite different in nature.)
11. cf. Naylor 1985. Other papers given at the Fourth Eastern Conference on Austronesian Languages (ECAL-IV), held in Ann Arbor, August 2-4, 1985 showed a similar orientation: e.g. those of Miller, Weeda, Basham, etc.

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