Problems of Syntax in the Translation of the Scriptures in Philippine Dialects

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Introduction

One of the most vexing problems in translating the Scriptures into dialects of the Philippines is the order and arrangement of words in the sentence. For each English sentence, there are usually from two to four alternative ways of translating into the dialect, and frequently there are various possible word orders within each main alternative. For example the three following translations are possible for the second line of Acts 2:17, "... I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh":

	1	2	3	4
1.	magbubuhos	ako	ng aking Espiritu	sa lahat ng tao
2.	ibubuhos	ko	ang aking Espiritu	sa lahat ng tao
3.	bubuhusan	ko	ng aking Espiritu	ang lahat ng tao

Although each of the above would normally be rendered in English, "I will pour out my Spirit on all men", there are very real differences in the meaning of the three Tagalog translations. If these sentences are broken into their constituent parts they will each have the equivalents of the following: 1) the verb 'pour', 2) the pronominal actor 'I', 3) the object 'my Spirit', and 4) the locative phrase 'on all men'. It is obvious that the differences between the Tagalog sentences occur in each of these four parts. In each of the verb forms there is the stem *buhos* (which becomes *buhus* with the suffix *an*), a reduplication of the first syllable *bu* (which indicates future tense), and an affix (*mag-, i-,* or *-an*). The form of the pronoun 'I' is different in the first sentence from the form used in the last two; the first word of the translation of 'my Spirit' in the second sentence is different from that in the first and third; and the first word of the translation of 'on all men' in the third sentence is different from that in the first two sentences.

Two pertinent facts should be pointed out. The first is that the distinctive form in each of the last 3 parts of the sentences - *ako* in sentence 1, *ang aking Espiritu* in sentence 2, and *ang lahat ng tao* in sentence 3 - is the part on which the main thought of the sentence is focused. This part of the sentence is emphasized by the use of the particular form employed. The second fact which should be indicated is that the affixes of the verb are integrally related to the type of form used in the other parts of the sentence. In other words, the type of affixation used in the verb decides the form of the pronoun used to indicate the actor, and the first word of each of the other two substantival constructions. To state it in another way, once the particular form of the verb is uttered, the form of the pronominal and substantival constructions following it must "agree" with the verb form used.

In order to understand the differences in meaning in the three translations it is therefore necessary to know both the meaning of the

verbal affixes and to observe the word or group of words which are placed in focus by introducing them with the word *ang* (in sentences 2 and 3), or by the use of the form *ako* (in sentence 1). Some of the meanings of the affixes will be dealt with later in this article. The meaning difference based on the differences in focus may be indicated in English by placing extra stress on the words involved, as follows:

1. *I* will pour out my Spirit on all men.
2. I will pour out *my Spirit* on all men.
3. I will pour out my Spirit *on all men.*

The first sentence may be thought of as the answer to the question, "*Who* will pour out his Spirit on all men?" The second sentence supplies the answer to the question, "*What* will you pour out on all men?" And the third sentence answers the question, "*On whom* will you pour out your Spirit?"

It is needless to say that the determination of the word or words of a sentence which are to receive the primary stress or focus in the translation is often quite difficult. The translator may be tempted to follow the sentence construction of English or whatever language he may be following in the translation. What makes this solution attractive is that nearly always it is possible to follow English sentence construction even though this would not be the normal way to render the thought in the dialect. More frequently, however, the translator realizes that a close following of the English construction is not the best solution, but he may not be able to decide which of the possible alternatives is best. Consequently, it often becomes a matter of which construction "sounds better". While the "sound" is certainly a valid criterion for judging the merits of a construction, the danger of relying entirely on this one criterion is that two or more different native speakers of a particular dialect may disagree as to which sounds better. It is evident that there is the need for determining objectively the difference in shades of meaning between the possible alternatives. To this a study of the meaning and significance of focus should contribute.

The Tagalog Sentence

Although there are various types of utterances which are normal in Tagalog which consist of as few as a single word (such as exclamations, one-word replies like yes or no, etc.), most sentences in Tagalog consist of a predicate (with or without modifiers) and one or more substantival constructions (with or without modifiers). The predicate normally precedes the substantival constructions, although it is possible for the purpose of emphasis to place one or more other units of the sentence before the predicate. The predicate is usually a verb (a conjugated form with affixes) but may be simply a descriptive word (with or without affixes) or a substantive. The predicate may be immediately preceded by a conjunction or a modifier but it is not marked by any particular word. It is usually identified quite readily by its affixes. The substantival constructions, on the other hand, are generally marked by particles which precede them and indicate the relation of that construction with the verb or with other substantival constructions

in the sentence. These particles have been called by Mr. Elmer Wolfenden of the Summer Institute of Linguistics "construction markers". [1]

Classes of Substantival Constructions

The kinds of substantival constructions possible in Tagalog (and in other Philippine dialects) may be classified according to the construction markers which precede them. In fact, since substantives are not declined, this is the only means of distinguishing between them, except of course from the order in which they may be placed.

1. *Ang* and *si*

The first class of substantival construction in Tagalog is preceded by the construction markers *ang* or *si*, the latter with its plural form *sina* being used exclusively with persons. These markers indicate the primary substantival construction or constructions of the sentence or clause, the unit on which the main thought is concentrated or focused. Mr. Wolfenden calls this the subject, which fits well so far as the contrast between subject and predicate is concerned and so long as one keeps in mind that it is the grammatical 'subject' only of the particular Tagalog sentence in which it is used and not necessarily also of the equivalent sentence in English. Others have suggested the term 'topic' to describe this construction. It has the advantage of not being confused with an English "subject" but fails to show the relation between subject and predicate which exists in Tagalog as much as it does in English. This construction will be referred to in this article simply as the *ang* construction. It is a grammatically independent construction, one which is not dependent upon any other construction in the sentence. Thus it may stand alone as in the title of a picture book, e.g. *Si Jesus, Ang Biblia*. This construction always indicates someone or something definite. In this respect the word *ang* corresponds to some extent with the English definite article *the*. This is not to say that every time the English definite article is used in the Scriptures, it must always be translated by *ang*. This, as will be seen, would be impossible, for frequently the article *the* may be used in English with a number of different words in a sentence, whereas *ang* can only be used with one substantive in a clause unless two or more substantives are equated to each other or connected by a co-ordinate conjunction, e.g. *ang buhay ay ang ilaw sa mga tao*, 'the life (was) the light to men' (John 1:4); *ang mga saserdote at ang mga Levita*, 'the priests and the Levites' (John 1:19). Sometimes also Tagalog would employ *ang* where English simply uses an indefinite article, e.g. *walang kapurihan sa kanyang sariling bayan ang propeta* 'a prophet has no honour in his own country' (John 4:44). However, the *ang* construction always refers to someone or something regarded as quite definite in the mind of the speaker. (It may be an individual

[1] Elmer Wolfenden, Jr. and Rufino Alejandro, "Intensive Tagalog Conversation Course" unpublished mimeographed material prepared by the Summer Institute of Linguistics of the University of North Dakota and the Institute of National Language of the Department of Education, Philippines, pages 1 ff.

object or person, or a particular class of things, e.g. *ang propeta* in the example given).

2. *Ng* (pronounced *nang*) and *ni*

The second class of construction markers, *ng* and *ni*, the latter with its plural *nina* being used only for persons, marks the construction as attributive to another construction, usually to one which precedes it. This construction is grammatically dependent either on the predicate or on another substantival construction, e.g. in the sentence *makakarinig ng tinig ng Anak ng Dios ang mga patay,* 'the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God' (John 5:25) *ng tinig* is dependent on the predicate *makakarinig; ng Anak* is dependent on *tinig;* and *ng Dios* on *Anak.* This construction is frequently equivalent to an English *-'s* or *of* phrase to show possession or relationship, but this is only one of the various uses of *ng,* all of which are attributive. In the Philippine National Language as officially taught by the Bureau of Education, there is a distinction made between the use of this marker to introduce a construction equivalent to an adverb in English, and its use to introduce one equivalent to an adjective or noun. The former is spelled *nang* and the latter *ng.* It is however doubtful that any real distinction in meaning is involved (this is borne out by the fact that most Tagalog speakers are not certain which spelling should be used in every instance).

3. *Sa* and *kay*

This third class of construction markers, *sa* and *kay,* the latter with its plural *kina* being used exclusively for persons, serves to indicate the location of the action of the word on which the construction is dependent, which may be the predicate or another substantival construction. The location may be where the action is occurring or the source or the direction of the action, e.g. *Sa templo'y natagpuan niya ang mga nagbibili ng mga baka,* 'in the temple he found those who were selling oxen' (John 2:14); *Umakyat si Jesus sa Jerusalem,* 'Jesus went up to Jerusalem' (John 2:13), and *Lumabas sila sa bayan,* 'They went out of the city' (John 4:30). The equivalence of *sa* constructions to English prepositional phrases has led some to the erroneous conclusion that *sa* is a preposition with the varied meanings of 'in', 'at', 'on', 'by', 'for', 'to', 'with', 'from' and so on. Although there is often some ambiguity as to the precise meaning of such a construction in terms of English translation, the context generally makes it quite clear what the meaning is. For example, a *sa* construction following a verb like 'depart' will indicate the place from which the departure is made. To translate an expression such as 'Jesus departed to Galilee' it is therefore necessary to employ two verbs in Tagalog: *Umalis si Jesus patungo sa Galilea* 'Jesus departed going to Galilee' (or 'Jesus left and went to Galilee').

4. *Na (-ng)*

The first three construction markers are used to introduce major substantival constructions in Tagalog, but *na (-ng* following words ending in a vowel or *n)* is used to join together units within a longer construction. Thus it may join an attribute to a substantive, e.g., *ang tunay na ilaw* 'the true light' (John 1:9), or to a predicate (if it precedes the predicate),

e.g. *laging nakalaan ang panahon ninyo* 'your time is always present' (John 7:6). Frequently, *na* joins a dependent clause to the independent clause of the sentence, e.g. *Kayo ang makapagpatotoo na sinabi ko,* 'You are the ones who (can) testify that I said' (John 3:28). Thus *na* is often equivalent to the English relative pronouns 'who', 'which', 'that'.

5. *Ay* and word order

Ay is a construction marker peculiar to Tagalog and a few other dialects of the Philippines. It differs from the other markers in that it follows rather than precedes the constructions it sets off. It is frequently used after constructions introduced by *ang* or *sa*. It serves simply to indicate that one or more constructions have been placed before the predicate. As stated above, the normal sentence order in Tagalog and other Philippine dialects is: predicate, followed by one or more substantival constructions. However, if the speaker wishes to give additional emphasis to one or more units of the sentence, he may place them before the predicate, in which case he signals that this has been done by inserting *ay* just before the predicate, e.g. *Si Juan ay nagpatotoo tungkol sa kanya* 'John testified concerning Him' (John 1:15). Frequently *ay* is contracted with the word preceding it especially if the word ends in a vowel or *n*, e.g. *Sa pamamagitan niya'y ginawa ang lahat ng bagay,* 'Through Him were made all things' (John 1:3). Although the speaker has a great deal of liberty in selecting various constructions which may be placed in this initial position, there are some which cannot be so placed. For example, a *ng* construction which represents the object or the agent of the predicate cannot precede the predicate in Tagalog, e.g. *Iniibig ng Ama ang Anak* 'The Father loves the Son' (John 3:35). (This could be rewritten *Ang Anak ay iniibig ng Ama,* but not *Ng Ama ay iniibig ang Anak).*

Not only is it possible to place certain constructions before the predicate and in this way give preferential emphasis to them, but it is also possible to accomplish the same thing to a lesser extent by the relative order of constructions after the predicate. The normal order following the predicate is a *ng* construction followed by a *sa* construction followed by an *ang* construction. However, the *ang* construction is frequently brought up to a position preceding the *sa* construction, e.g. *itinaas ni Moises ang ahas sa ilang* 'lifted up Moses the serpent in the wilderness' (John 3:14) although *itinaas ni Moises sa ilang ang ahas* would have been perfectly good Tagalog.

Pronouns

In Tagalog and other Philippine dialects there are three sets of personal pronouns corresponding to the *ang, ng* and *sa* substantival constructions. Thus when a pronoun is substituted for a noun, the corresponding class of pronoun must be used. When only pronouns follow the predicate, the normal order is: The *ng* class followed by the *ang* class followed by the *sa* class, (except that a monosyllabic form takes precedence over one that is polysyllabic). When one or more pronouns and one or more substantives all follow the predicate, the pronouns come first, e.g.

iniibig ng Ama ang Anak 'the Father loves the Son'
(predicate—*ng* construction—*ang* construction)
iniibig niya ang Anak 'he loves the Son'
(predicate—*ng* class pronoun—*ang* construction)
iniibig niya siya 'he loves him'
(predicate—*ng* class pronoun—*ang* class pronoun)
iniibig siya ng Ama 'the Father loves him'
(predicate—*ang* class pronoun—*ng* construction)

If it is desired to place special emphasis on the pronoun, it may precede the predicate. In the case of the *ang* or *sa* class of pronouns they may simply be placed first, followed by *ay*, e.g. *Ako'y nagbabautismo sa tubig* 'I baptize with water' (John 1:26); *sa kanila'y napakitang buhay siya* 'to them He showed himself alive' (Acts 1:3). However, if the *ng* class of pronoun is to be emphasized, it (like the *ng* substantival attributive construction) cannot precede the predicate, but the *sa* class pronoun is used (without *sa*) and joined to the predicate by *na (-ng)*. The following is a table of the various construction markers with the corresponding personal pronouns:

	I (*ang* category)		II (*ng* category)		III (*sa* category)	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
non-personal substantive	ang	ang mga	ng	ng mga	sa	sa mga
personal substantive	si	sina	ni	nina	kay	kina
I	ako	kami	ko	namin	sa akin	sa amin
You and I	kita	tayo	nata or ta	natin	sa kanita	sa atin
You	ka or ikaw	kayo	mo	ninyo	sa iyo	sa inyo
He (she, it)	siya	sila	niya	nila	sa kanya	sa kanila

Verbs

Verb forms in Tagalog and other Philippine dialects are the most difficult units of the language. This is because they use a number of different affixes (occurring as prefixes, suffixes and infixes) which modify the meaning of the verb root in various ways. In Tagalog there are over 20 different affixes and various combinations of these may be employed. As pointed out in the introduction to this paper, there is an obvious relationship between the type of verbal affixes used and the substantival construction markers. It is possible to classify the affixes as to what type of construction is used to denote the actor. Certain affixes are always used with *ang* class actors and others with *ng* class actors. These two kinds of affixation have been called "active" and "passive" respectively. Although this nomenclature seems to be valid, it has two decided disadvantages. For one thing, it is based on a distinction of voices worked out for Indo-European languages. The average Filipino, even though he may know English well, does not regard these verb forms as active and passive and is usually confused if they are so designated. The so called "passive forms" are those

most usually employed (in contrast to English where active forms are used much more frequently than passive ones). Such forms are usually rendered by active forms in English. The second and more important reason for not using these classical terms to describe verb forms in Malayo-Polynesian language, is that it is not so much a matter of what construction may be used to denote the actor, as it is of what element in the sentence receives the emphasis or focus (or to use Wolfenden's term, what element is the subject). Verbal affixes may not only be classified as to the construction of the actor (which seems to English speakers a proper way to do it) but they may be classified as to the element in the sentence which they require to be in the *ang* construction. Thus in Tagalog, the verb affixes may be grouped in 4 different classes:

1) Those which point attention to the initiator of the action.
2) Those which point attention to the object or that to which something is done.
3) Those which point attention to the location of the action.
4) Those which point attention to the person or thing caused to be involved in the action.

1. *Affixes pointing to the initiator of the action:* nag-, -um-, *and* naka-

When any form of these three affixes is used in a verb form, the *ang* construction indicates the initiator of the action. If the object of the action is expressed, it is in a *ng* construction, and if the location of the action is expressed, it is expressed in a *sa* construction. These three different affixes modify the meaning of the verb in various ways: *Nag-* indicates that the action is deliberate; *-um-* that it is non-deliberate or uncaused or incipient; and *naka-* that there is an ability to act with the implication that this was perhaps not previously present. But they have one thing in common that they require an actor which is definitive.

Examples

nag-

Jn. 13:4 *nagbigkis siya ng tuwalya sa kanyang katawan*
'girded he with a towel his body'

1:14 *nagkatawang-tao ang Salita*
'became man the Word'

1:15 *si Juan ay nagpatotoo tungkol sa kanya*
'John testified concerning him'

1:25 *Bakit ka nga nagbabautismo?*
'Why do you baptize?'

3:34 *nagbibigay ng Espiritu ang Dios*
'gives the Spirit God'

13:5 *nagbuhos siya ng tubig sa palanggana*
'poured he water into a basin'

-um-

1:9 *pumaparito noon sa sanlibutan ang tunay na ilaw*
'was coming into the world the true light'

4:30 *lumabas sila sa bayan, at pumaroon sa kanya*
'they went out of the city and came to him'

10:31 *dumampot ng mga bato ang mga Judio*
'took up stones the Jews'

naka-

5:25 *makakarinig ng tinig ng Anak ng Dios ang mga patay*
'will (be able to) hear the voice of the Son of God the dead'

1:33 *Ako man noo'y hindi nakakilala sa kanya*
'I indeed did not know him'

20:12 *nakakita siya ng dalawang anghel*
'saw she two angels'

Acts 3:8 *nakatayo siya at nakalakad*
'stood he and walked'

It should be noted that several of the above examples are translations of intransitive verbs in English. In translating a sentence such as 'he stood and walked' (Acts 3:8) there is hardly any other alternative than to place the actor in focus. However, in a sentence like 'they went out of the city' (John 4:30) it would be possible to translate *linabasan nila ang bayan,* literally, 'the city was outed by them', but such a translation would not be used unless one wished to emphasize the place from which they departed. In the context the translation used in the example is the most natural one. In the translation of John 13:5 it would have been possible to place either *tubig* 'water' or *palanggana* 'basin' in the *ang* construction but the meaning would be altered, for to place either of these two words in focus would require that they be thought of as quite definite. To translate the idea that Jesus poured *some* water into *a* basin, the translation used in the example is the most accurate one.

2. *Affixes pointing to the object of the action:* -in *and* na-

This type of affix indicates action on a definitive object which is expressed in an *ang* construction. If the doer of the action is expressed it is in a *ng* construction, and if the location of the action is expressed it is in a *sa* construction. The *-in* affix indicates direct action on the part of the actor on the object designated by the *ang* construction. The *na-* affix indicates a more indirect action and the actor is often not expressed. There seems to be some similarity in meaning between the *nag-* and *-in* and between the *naka-* and *na-* affixes. The *nag-* affix denotes a deliberate action by a definitive actor on a non-definitive object while the *-in* affix denotes a direct action by a non-definitive actor on a definitive object. The *naka-* affix denotes that a definitive

actor is able to perform an action, while the *na-* denotes that a definitive object has been enabled to have performed on it an action by a non-definitive or unexpressed actor.

Examples

-in

Jn. 12:32 *aakitin ko sa akin ang lahat ng tao*
'I will draw to me all men'

4:23 *sasambahin ng tunay na mga mananamba ang Ama*
'will worship the true worshippers the Father'

5:39 *sinasaliksik ninyo ang mga kasulatan*
'are searching you the scriptures'

9:24 *tinawag nila ang dating bulag*
'called they the former blind (one)'

20:2 *kinuha nila ang Panginoon sa libingan*
'took they the Lord from the tomb'

-na

12:3 *napuno ang buong bahay ng halimuyak ng pabango*
'filled the whole house with fragrance of the perfume'

12:32 *pagka naitaas na ako sa lupa*
'after am lifted up already I from the earth'
(doer of *naitaas* not expressed)

20:1 *nakita niya na naalis na ang bato sa libingan*
'saw she that was taken already the stone from the tomb'
(doer of *naalis* not expressed)

21:4 *hindi nakilala ng mga alagad na yao'y si Jesus*
'did not know the disciples that it (was) Jesus'

20:18 *nakita ko ang Panginoon*
'saw I the Lord'

This kind of affixation is most frequently used in translating an English sentence containing a subject, verb, and object. Since this kind of sentence is probably the most frequently used in English there are many available examples of this kind of affixation in Tagalog. However, it must not be assumed that in every case where English employs a verb with a direct object that Tagalog will use an *-in* or *na-* affixation. It depends entirely on whether the Tagalog regards the equivalent of the English direct object as the goal or the location or the 'involvee' of the action, whether he translates with an *-in* or *-an* or *i-* verbal affixation. In each of the above examples, Tagalog interprets the English object as the goal of the action and uses an *-in* or *na-* affix.

3. *Affixes pointing to the location of the action:* -an

In Tagalog the affix *-an* serves this purpose. It indicates an action performed at a definite location by a non-definitive actor in a *ng*

construction with or without a non-definitive instrument in another *ng* construction. Since in English the location of the action is sometimes expressed as the direct object of the verb, this type of affixation has been confused with the *-in* type discussed above. However, it is quite clear from uses of this same affix with substantival forms that its meaning is location, e.g. *pinto* 'door', 'gate'; *pintuan* 'doorway', 'gateway'.

Examples

-an

Jn. 13:5 *sinimula niyang hugasan ang mga paa ng mga alagad at*
'began he to wash the feet of the disciples and
saka pinunasan niya ng tuwalyang nakabigkis
then wiped he (them) with the towel with which he was girded'

13:18 *tinadyakan ako ng taong kumaing kasalo ko*
'I was kicked at by the men who ate with me'

20:22 *hiningahan niya sila*
'he breathed on them'

12:3 *pinahiran niya nito ang mga paa ni Jesus at*
'she anointed with this the feet of Jesus and
pinunasan ni Maria ng kanyang mga buhok
wiped (them) Mary with her hair'

1:22 *bigyan mo kami ng maisasagot sa mga nagsugo sa amin*
'give us an answer to those who sent us'

Frequently this type of affixation is used to translate an English verb followed by a preposition, e.g. 'he breathed on'; 'I was kicked at' but it is also used to express an action applied to a part of one's body and in certain other situations which only a thorough knowledge of the language will enable one to determine.

4. *Affixes pointing to the person or thing caused to be involved in the action:* i-

The affix in Tagalog which serves this purpose is *i-*. When this affix is used the speaker can have in mind: a) the person or thing which is caused to be involved (expressed in the *ang* construction) b) the doer of the action (which if expressed is in a *ng* construction), and c) either the object of the action (which if expressed is also in a *ng* construction), or the location of the action (which if expressed is in a *sa* construction).

Examples

i-

Jn. 2:11 *inihayag niya ang kanyang kaluwalhatian*
'showed he his glory'

2:16 *ilabas ninyo ang mga bagay na ito*
'take-out you these things'

20:20 *ipinakita niya sa kanila ang kanyang mga kamay*
'caused he to be seen to them his hands
at ang kanyang tagiliran
and his side'

21:6 *Ihulog ninyo ang lambat sa kanan ng daong*
'Cast the net to the right of the boat'

Gen. 27:4 *igawa mo ako ng masarap na pagkain*
'make you (for) me (some) delicious food'

This type of affixation is a sort of left-over basket, into which everything that does not fit into the other three kinds can be placed. Thus the *ang* construction designated by this affixation may refer to the beneficiary of the action, the instrument used, or various other designees. In each case it is a "third" person or thing in addition to at least two other persons or things expressed or implied in the sentence.

Conclusion

To translate any given passage of Scripture into natural Tagalog it is necessary to understand clearly the meaning of the original so as to be able to determine which word or words should be placed in focus and consequently which verb affixation should be used. To facilitate this process it has been suggested that experienced translators might go through a standard English text and underline in each clause the word or words which should be emphasized in the translation.

Building on Sand

Our Lord's words about building a house on the rock and not on sand (Mt. 7:24-27) are so well known that we take the imagery used for granted. Who would think of building a house on sand? The answer is a Dutchman! In areas reclaimed from the sea the top-soil consists of silt, which is not stable enough for the foundations of a house; piles must be driven through the silt until they rest firmly on the underlying layer of... sand! The idea of building on rock is foreign to people in Holland, for hardly anywhere in the country does rock come near enough to the surface for building foundations on, even in the parts which are above sea-level.

None the less all translations of the Bible in Dutch use the image unchanged, and most Christians have never questioned it—though whether all fully appreciate it is another matter. It could be that in some other land the problem raised by retaining the simile unchanged or without note might be more difficult—for example among lake or tree dwellers!

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