

A Brief Syntactic Typology of Philippine Languages*

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This paper is a brief statement of the typological characteristics of the syntactic structures of Philippine languages. It utilizes a lexicalist theoretical framework to provide comparability among the examples cited. The word order of both verbal and non-verbal predicational sentences is examined, with pronominal and non-pronominal complements, topicalization, and auxiliary verbs. Philippine languages are analyzed as morphologically ergative. The morphological criteria for determining the syntactic transitivity of verbal sentences are examined, concluding that verbal affixation alone is an insufficient criterion. Attention is paid to the notion of focus, rejecting the concept of voice as an explanation for the phenomenon. The various forms of syntactically transitive verbs that have been described by others, for example, as signaling agreement with the Nominative NP, are here described as carrying semantic features, marking the manner of their instantiation with reference to the Nominative NP. The structure of noun phrases is examined. Morphological case marking of NPs by Determiners is claimed for Genitive, Locative, and—for some languages—Oblique NPs, but it is claimed that for most languages, Nominative full NPs are case-marked only by word order. Semantic agreement features distinguishing forms of Determiners for common vs. personal, definiteness, specificity, spatial reference, and plurality of their head nouns are described. Relative clause formation strategies are described. Most are head-initial, with gapping of the Nominative NP. “Adjectives” in NP’s are typically relative clauses having stative verbs as predicates.

Key words: Philippine languages, typology, syntax, ergativity, transitivity, focus, topic