

**The 1610 *Arte y reglas de la lengua tagala*
Revisited: An Advanced Grammar for Spanish
Missionaries of the Seventeenth Century**

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Abstract

A study of the linguistic and grammatical activity during the Spanish colonial times in the Philippines shows that the missionaries decided to learn the vernaculars, rather than impose Spanish, in order to carry out their mandate of evangelizing the natives. The best known among these missionary grammarians was the Dominican Fr. Francisco Blancas de San José who wrote the Tagalog grammar *Arte y reglas de la lengua tagala* in 1610 for the use of his confreres. An analysis of the grammar reveals the author's good mastery of the language and a description of specific linguistic features, which have preserved their validity to this day, despite the limited tools available to the grammarian at the time. Regardless of its imperfections, the *Arte y reglas de la lengua tagala* represents one of the first attempts at a description of Tagalog and provides contemporary linguists with a good starting point for modern and more accurate descriptions of the language.

Keywords: missionary linguistics, Tagalog, linguistic description, grammar writing

An oft-unchallenged opinion in Philippine history classes is the alleged deliberate keeping of the natives in the dark by the Spanish missionaries all throughout the colonial period. This was done supposedly by some kind of linguistic deprivation, i.e., by not teaching them Spanish. A contrary position, for which we may probably have more historical evidence, is that the Spanish missionaries turned to the native languages *nemine contradicente* for the purpose of evangelizing the natives, done in faithful compliance with a general directive from the competent ecclesiastical authorities. Precisely, the Synod of Manila held in 1582 had unanimously recognized that the Philippine islands belonged to the natives and that the spread of the Gospel should as a consequence be done in the native languages.

In order to facilitate the missionaries' learning of the different languages, the more capable of them wrote grammars and vocabularies, which their confreres benevolently corrected and at times generously updated as the years went by. Philippine linguist Dr. Nelly Cubar wrote in 1974: "... the study of Philippine linguistics prior to 1900 is a discovery of untold wealth... The bibliographies on Philippine material during the Spanish era present mute evidence of such great works on Philippine languages, for truly in those times of unsophisticated linguistic studies, they should be considered great." True enough, a scientific analysis of these grammars reveals grammatical features of Philippine languages that had been singled out and described "ahead of time" using methods which were more apt for describing ancient languages, otherwise known as "classical" languages (cf. Vibar, 2010).

Of all the native languages that the missionaries set about to learn, Tagalog turned out having the most number of grammars and vocabularies thereof, both published and unpublished. This fact is partly attributable to the division of the archipelago into contiguous areas among the first four missionary orders who arrived with the expeditions, i.e., the Augustinians (1565), Franciscans (1578), Jesuits (1581), and the Dominicans (1587). Done in obedience to an order issued by the Council of the Indies to the Governor and the Bishop of Manila, such distribution resulted in each religious order receiving the task of studying two to four languages, which always included Tagalog. The strategic importance of Manila, whose language was Tagalog, may have

also contributed to the apparent popularity of the language among the missionary grammarians.

Armed with their knowledge of formal Latin and Spanish grammars, the missionaries embarked on the difficult undertaking of abstracting and committing into writing the rules of the mental grammar, or the “grammar stored in the brain,” of Tagalog speakers as well as those of the other Philippine languages. The classical grammar categories of tense, conjugation, mood, case, etc., were skillfully used, taking very much into account that those languages were foreign and did not belong to the same language family as their own languages did. Instead of shackling the grammarians, their linguistic background in fact made their work easy and proved to be an advantage because the rules of Latin and Spanish (technically, functioning as “reference” languages) gave them a stable basis for comparison and contrast. Accordingly, the classical categories were not forcibly superimposed on the new (foreign) languages, but actually facilitated the process of identifying similarities and differences among the native languages on the one hand, and between them and the reference languages on the other. The use of the contrastive method¹, firmed up by their direct contact with and observation of the natives in their day-to-day life, served to heighten the missionary grammarians sensitivity especially with respect to the unique features of the native languages, e.g., the use of affixes *-um-* and *mag-* in verbal compositions, preposing of articles for case differentiation (e.g., *Si Pedro* – nominative, *ng tao* – accusative, etc...), and the causative² mood of verbs for which they coined the term *facere facere*, etc. Whenever identical categories could not be found in the reference languages, near equivalents or substitutes that perform the same function were resorted to, e.g., the application of the labels “noun” and “verb” in Pampango even if this language (and perhaps all other Philippine languages) does not clearly distinguish between these two categories unless an affix is attached to the base or stem (Ridruejo, 2003).

¹ Contrastive analysis is the system of comparing the structural differences and similarities of a pair of languages.

² The causative mood of verbs is a mechanism which enables one to command another to do something without even mentioning the word “command,” (e.g., *pakainin mo siya* – make him eat or [I command you to] make him eat).

Still, the use of Latin and Spanish (functioning technically as “metalanguages”) in describing the Philippine languages is not generally viewed positively by many, averring that the natural power of language was employed to force upon a foreign way of thinking. Supposedly, Latin and Spanish were used by the missionaries—and by gratuitous implication, the institution(s) which they represented—as an instrument for preserving the “superiority” of Latin and for the effective indoctrination and colonization of the natives. Be that as it may, one cannot say that these languages prevented the grammarians from discovering unique features without inviting raised eyebrows from language scholars who have actually studied the morphology and syntax of Philippine languages. After all, everybody knows that poisoning the well does not do anyone a favor and much less so when accusations are made without showing incontestable evidence to prove the imputed wrongdoing.

Putting aside debates and polemics on what agenda some or all those missionaries might have kept in their hearts, and entrusting such occupations to psychologists and literary critics, we can focus our attention on the task at hand. What shall be discussed here is an early seventeenth century description of Tagalog, which will hopefully show why it continues to fascinate linguists and language students and researchers to this day.³

Tagalog grammars, the missionary grammarians, and Laktaw

As mentioned, there were more grammars and dictionaries of Tagalog, vis-à-vis other Philippine languages, during the period of Spanish presence in the archipelago. Sueiro (2007) gives us the following figures:

³ In the process of studying the grammars of other Philippine languages written during the colonial times and comparing them with contemporary ones, one can see that Tagalog syntax has not changed very much, that the analysis of some of its grammatical features reveals a systematic language, and that some of the characteristics of other Philippine languages, like Pampangueno and the Visayan languages, can also be found in it.

Table 1. Grammar books and dictionaries of Philippine languages during the Spanish period

	Gramática	Vocabulario
Tagalog	33	33
Bisaya (Cebuano, Hiligayno, Waray-waray)	32	21
Ilocano	15	12

Judging by the volume and technical excellence of the grammars alone, one cannot help but say that the linguistic activity carried out by these missionaries in the Philippines was impressive. Filipino lexicographer and grammarian Pedro Serrano Laktaw (1853-1928) (cited in Quilis 1997, p. 15) wrote on the prologue of his Tagalog dictionary (1914) that Tagalog was spared all the *contrasentidos e inconsecuencias* [contradictions and inconsistencies] which the orthography of many modern languages, like English, suffer by adopting the Roman letters into its writing system, thanks to the timely intervention of

...varones graves de indiscutible ciencia y de sobresalientes aptitudes lingüísticas que, con laudable determinación, a las evidentes ventajas del alfabeto romano procuraron incorporar las elementales e innatas perfecciones del *baybayin*.

[...serious men with undisputed knowledge and outstanding language skills who, with praiseworthy determination, endeavored to incorporate (into their linguistic descriptions) the basic and innate perfections of the *baybayin*.] (This translation and all translations of Blancas de San José's texts below are mine.)

Laktaw continued:

Tanto se trabajó entonces en el idioma tagalog que, aun cuando nos circunscribiésemos a lo que únicamente atañe a la lingüística, haciendo abstracción completa de cuanto se refiere a otros asuntos, como dramas, tratados de religión,

medicina popular, etc. muy bien podríamos dar a dicha época la denominación de *edad de oro* de la literatura tagálog, ya por el número y condiciones de las obras que entonces se habían dado a luz, ya por la calidad de sus respectivos autores.

[Such was the work done on the Tagalog language that, even if we were to restrict ourselves to what only pertains to linguistics, completely disregarding what concerns other areas such as dramas, treatises on religion, popular medicine, etc., we may very well call this period the *golden age* of Tagalog literature for both the quantity and quality of the works produced at the time and for the excellence of their respective authors.]

One of these “serious men” was Fr. Francisco Blancas de San José, author of *Arte y reglas de la lengua tagala* (1610), the first published grammar of the Tagalog language. For quick reference, Pedro Alcala's first European grammar of Arabic was published in 1505; the first American-Indian grammar in 1558; and the first English grammar in 1586. Blancas de San José came to Manila in 1595 and was assigned by his Dominican superiors to Bataan. Along with this grammar, he also wrote *Arte para aprender los indios tagalos la lengua española*, a grammar for the Tagalog speakers to learn Spanish, and started a vocabulary or dictionary but did not succeed in completing it. Right at the end of his message to the priest-ministers of the Gospel (*A los padres ministros del Evangelio*), he confesses that he was not able to study and include all the varieties of Tagalog in this short work despite fourteen years of study due to the quantity of work he has had to carry out. He says:

Es materia muy varia la de la lengua: y esta no lo es menos que otras, pues dentro de los limites de Tagala tiene Comentan⁴, Laguna y Tagalos: y yo no lo he podido andar todo...

⁴ *Comentan* or *Kumintang* is the old name of Batangas. The author refers to the different regional dialects or variants of the Tagalog language. Since Fray Blancas de San José was based in Bataan, it can be assumed that the *Arte* was based on samples of the Bataan dialect (or version) of Tagalog.

[This subject of languages is made up of many different things: and this [language] is no less than the others, because within the confines of the Tagalog language, there exist Comentan, Laguna and Tagalos: and I have not been able to cover all of them...]

What follows is an analysis of the important points of Blancas de San José's work.

The *Arte y Reglas* of 1610

The *Arte y reglas de la lengua tagala* may have been a breakthrough since it was used as a model by the other missionary grammarians of both Tagalog and other Philippine languages at least until the 18th century⁵. Its objective was to teach the Tagalog language to the missionaries in order to facilitate their task of evangelization. Various references to earlier Tagalog grammar manuscripts both by the author himself and other grammarians indicate that there were earlier Tagalog grammars but none of them were printed for a wider distribution.

The book is divided into two main parts—the *Arte tagala* (pp. 5-24) and *Libro de las reglas* (pp. 25-311). Some preliminary pages were included, containing a hymn dedicated to the *Purísima Virgen y Verdadera Madre de Dios María* [Mary, the Most Pure Virgin and True Mother of God], a prayer to learn the language which is necessary for preaching, a dedication to the priest-ministers of the Gospel, and some instructions for understanding the content of the book. The *Arte* begins after the fifth instruction.

Features of Tagalog described by Blancas de San José

Being a language-teaching grammar, the book provides very little grammatical descriptions that can be called “scientific” or “technical,” but it abounds in practical lessons that show the use of specific

⁵ By the 19th century, the grammarians were already using prescriptions by the Academia Real de la Lengua Española, and no longer primarily being guided by model grammars.

combinations of roots and affixes. For example, the fifth chapter shows the different uses and forms of *mag-* as a verb-forming affix.

A major function of *mag-* is to indicate reciprocation. For example, when *mag-* is attached to the root *away* [reñir] [to fight], i.e., *magaway*, it means *reñir dos* [for two persons to fight]. The reciprocal verb is conjugated as follows: *nagaaway* (present), *magaaway* (future), *nagaway* (past), *nacapagaway* (plusquamperfect). Another form of the reciprocal *mag-* verb takes the form *mag-* + root + *-an*, e.g., *magbacaban* [arroja os piedras lanças o otra cosa tal] [throw stones, lances, or another similar thing]. *Mag-* can also be used to express that something has the appearance or semblance of another (real) thing or that something big is expressed in its diminutive form, or that a game denoted by the verb is being played. The verb structure is *mag-* + reduplicated root + *-an/-ban*, e.g., *pana* [flecha] [arrow] becomes *magpanapanaan* [flechilla de niños o como tal] [a small arrow for kids or something that appears like it], and *babay* [casa] [house] becomes *nagbábabaybahayan* [estã haziẽdo casas] [they are playing house]. Two other uses of the *mag-* construction are to express relations, e.g., *magyna* [madre y hijo o hija]; and to form frequentative nouns, e.g., *baca* [guerra] [war] becomes *magbabaca* [hombre exercitado en ella (la guerra)] [a man who is trained in it (war)]. (Vibar, 2010, pp. 10-11)

Out of necessity, the author provides theoretical explanations from time to time, but he does not schematize the grammar into a logically organized list of topics and prefers to stick to a simple two-part structure. The extract below, for example, is an explanation of the rules governing voice.

The basic difference between the active and passive voices is the following:

La activa se vse quando se habla alguna cosa en general cõ

modo no determinado: lo qual se conocera en ver que en nro Español no tiene aquel articulo el, la, lo. Pero la passiva se vse quando se habla de alguna cosa como señalada, y con modo determinado. (Blancas de San José [henceforth, BSJ], 1610, p. 74)

[The active voice is used generally when one speaks of something in an indefinite way which is recognizable in Spanish by the absence of the article “the.” But the passive is used when speaking of something specific and definite.]

The relative meagerness of the first part, i.e., the *Arte Tagala*, also contributes to its simplicity. Notwithstanding this fact, one cannot help but appreciate the grammar’s adequacy to meet the missionaries’ evangelical needs.

Phonology⁶

Language is a system of arbitrary vocal sounds developed by a social group for communication. Thus, a grammarian cannot help but deal with these distinctive sounds. Blancas de San José, instead of presenting an inventory of all Tagalog consonants and vowels, chooses to comment on specific letters or phonetico-orthographic symbols (Quilis 1997), specially about the manner they differ from the ones used in Spanish and Latin, and identifies letters (technically, sounds or *phonemes*⁷) which are not used in these latter languages. Some examples are given below. A method which was unheard of at the time but already used by Blancas de San José is the recourse to *minimal pairs* (or set) in distinguishing one phoneme from another (or others) with similar features. In modern phonetics, minimal pairs (sets) are two words (or a set of words) that differ in only one sound (phoneme) in the same position in each word, e.g., hit and hid (his, hip, hill).

⁶ Phonology is the study of the distribution and patterning of speech sounds in a language and of the tacit rules governing pronunciation.

⁷ Phonemes, the smallest distinctive sound feature of a language which may effect a change in meaning, are classified into two groups: segmentals (vowels and consonants) and suprasegmentals (e.g., tone and stress).

The voiceless glottal fricative (or the initial sound of ‘hirap’)

As he was writing for speakers of a language that does not pronounce the letter *b*, the author points out the large number of Tagalog words that pronounce the phoneme /h/, without which such words would mean differently. He then gives a long list of minimal pairs, e.g., *hirap* [trabajo] [work] (sic.): *yrap* [mirar con mal ojo] [to look at someone with a condescending eye], *cabataban* [sufrimiento] [suffering]: *cabataan* [niñeria] [childishness], *vbo* [cough]: *hubo* [naked] to name a few. The last example shows that Blancas de San José perceived the presence of the glottal stop /ʔ/ before the initial vowel of *vbo* and that it is distinct from the voiceless glottal fricative /h/.

The voiced and voiceless velar stops (or the final sounds of ‘bulag’ and ‘bulak’)

Then a warning is given about changing the final *c* /k/ for a *g* /g/ as in the words *bulag* [ciego] [blind] and *bulac* [algodon] [cotton], which are a minimal pair contrasting the voiced /g/ and the voiceless /k/ velar stops. Since the sounds /k/ and /g/ seldom occur in the final position in Spanish, it is so easy for these missionaries to interchange them when found in this position.

Two pairs of vowels in free variation (or the “Visayan shibboleth”)

Bobong [roof]..., *bobol* [knot]... At some stage the missionaries might have asked—“Why do the natives confuse their vowels?” To help the missionaries understand the mystery and consequently learn how to put their message across without fear of error and perhaps ridicule, the author deals with the problematic vowel pairs “*o* and *u*” and “*e* and *i*” [ordinarily represented in phonetic symbols as [ɔ]:[ʊ] and [ɛ]:[ɪ] respectively]. When pronounced, these vowels could be clearly differentiated, but when written in the native script, they were generally interchanged by the native speakers. Supposedly, a Tagalog speaker would say *parini*, *hinibila*, and *lupa* rather than *parene ca* [come here],

henebela [being pulled], and *lopa* [soil]. Neither would he say *bubung* [roof] and *bubul* [knot], but *bobong* and *bobol*. To end his caveat, Blancas de San José quips that neither would anyone want to argue with the Tagalog people on how they write these in Spanish letters since *sabemos que escriben las dichas vocales siempre al reves de como las pronuncian* [we know that they write these vowels in a manner which is always contrary to the way they pronounce them].

A quick look at the ancient Tagalog script would reveal that Blancas de San José's explanation is not wrong. Among the 17 symbols in the script, one finds only three vowels, namely, *a*, *i*, and *u*. Based on this, one sees that [ɪ] and [e] are in “free variation,” i.e., they can exist in the same environment without affecting the meaning of the word in which they are found, or simply, that they are interchangeable, e.g., *babai* and *babae*. Likewise, [ɔ] is in free variation with [ʊ], e.g., *ubu* and *ubo*. The mid vowels [e] and [ɔ] are relatively new phonemes, which became distinct from [ɪ] and [ʊ] (respectively) with the progressive inclusion of Spanish loan words into Tagalog such as *tela* [cloth] as opposed to *tila* [maybe], *oso* [bear] to *uso* [fad], and *mesa* [table] to *misa* [Mass].

Syllable stress

Described as well is the suprasegmental phoneme, stress, but Blancas de San José admits having great difficulty in describing it. He says:

Veniendo a los acentos para mi lo hallo por dificultosissimo el declarar algo por escrito, porque es comunissima en esta lengua una pronunciaciõ q̄ ni es penultima producta ni penultima correpta, ni claramente en la vltima; sino tiene vn apresuramiento q̄ dexa indiferente el acento y no es claramente alguno de los que nosotros sabemos y usamos.
(pp. 300-301)

[Regarding the accents, I find it extremely difficult to state anything in writing because it is very common in this language to have a pronunciation which is neither *penultima*

producta (i.e., the syllable that precedes the last would be long and spacious) nor *penultima correpta* (the accent is not placed on the penultimate but on the antepenultimate syllable), nor clearly with an accent on the last syllable, but it has a kind of haste which renders the accent irrelevant and it is not clearly one that we know and use.]

Notwithstanding what is said above, Blancas de San José manages to identify minimal pairs that illustrate his point, e.g., *lalaquí* with an accented penultimate syllable is the Spanish word *macho* [male], while *lalaquí* with the accent on the antepenultimate syllable is the Spanish *crecera* [s/he/it will grow]. In addition, he realizes that the pronunciation of Tagalog words does not simply depend on the position of the accent. He notes that there are words which are pronounced *seguidillo y abreniado un poco, todo junto* (BSJ, 1610, p. 301) [successive and a little shortened, all in one breath], e.g., *bato* [stone]. He ends the section concluding that meaning differentiation in a single form (word) emerges from the varied places that the accent can be located.

Morphology⁸

The *Arte tagala* presents the basic knowledge that a language learner needs to have acquired before he can move to the *Libro de las reglas*. In twenty pages, the author formally discusses declension, case, and number of nouns and adjectives; the types of pronouns (personal, interrogative, and demonstrative); the verb “to be,” i.e., the Latin substantive verb *sum es fui*; and finally, verbs in general.

The parts of speech

There are seven parts of speech: nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, pronouns, prepositions, and particles, in addition to the quantifiers and numerals which the author discusses in another chapter. These

⁸ Morphology is the internal construction system of words and its study.

categories are used in the manner that grammarians of the classical languages would use and construe them to be. For instance, *nombre* includes nouns, i.e., *nombre sustantivo* [substantive noun], and adjectives, i.e., *nombre adjetivo* [adjective noun]; *partícula* [literally, “particle”] refers to both the real particles and the affixes; and the term *preposiciones* [literally, “prepositions”] is used to refer to anything placed before any word, e.g., markers of nouns, prefixes.

Only nouns and verbs are closely examined here.

Nouns

What are known as nouns are labeled *nombres sustantivos*. Four types are identified: *apelativos/comunes* or “common nouns,” *nombres propios* or “proper nouns,” *nombres verbales* or “verbal nominatives,” and *frequentativos* or “frequentative nouns.” According to the way nouns are constructed, there are two classes, namely, simple and derived nouns. Then there are the *abstractos* “abstracts,” e.g., *runung* [knowledge], *cabutihán* [goodness]. Lesson 1 of *Arte tagala* tells us the properties of nouns:

Todos los nombres vniversalmẽte son inuvariables en la voz: de manera que la misma voz es para singular y plural, y para todos los casos. Empero quanto a los casos se varian cõ vnas preposiciones que se les anteponen. (BSJ, 1610, p.5)

[The forms of all nouns are universally unchanging in such a way that the same form is used for both singular and plural and for all cases. The cases of nouns are indicated by the markers that accompany them.]

Many lessons and examples about nouns which originally appeared in Blancas de San José’s grammar continue to appear in contemporary grammars of Tagalog, which attest to the validity of his descriptions. Below are some examples:

Pluralization of common nouns by adding the particle *mga* before the noun it modifies, e.g., *ang mga (manga) bata* [children]

La variacion quanto a los numeros se haze con esta particula, manḡa, la qual antepuesta a los nombres Appelativos, los haze del numero plural: ora seã sustantivos ora adjetivos y de qualquiera calidad seã. (BSJ, 1610, p. 6)

[Variation in terms of number is made with the particle *manḡa* which is preposed to common nouns, which pluralizes them, be they nouns or adjectives and of whatever quality they may be.]

Examples: *manḡa tavo* [hombres] [men], *manḡa cagalinḡan* [bondades] [lots of goodness], *ang manḡa ysusulat* [las cosas que se hã de escribir] [things that have to be written], *ang manḡa Pedro* [los Pedros, los que se llamã Pedros] [those named Peter].

Pluralization of proper nouns by changing *si* to *sina*

Commenting on the example *ang manḡa Pedro*, Blancas de San José says that strictly speaking there are no plural forms for proper nouns, and if in Spanish the expression *los Pedros* is used, although improperly, *ang manḡa Pedro* is also used in much the same way. A better way is to say *ang manḡa pinanḡanḡalanang Pedro* [los que se llamã Pedro][those named Peter].

The author then gives the precise meaning of the markers *sina*, *nina*, and *cana* [*kana*] (plural forms of *si*, *ni*, and *kay* respectively), i.e., *sina Pedro* is used if the speaker is not referring to Peter alone but to Peter in company of others and as their head, e.g., *Pedro y su casa* [Peter and his household] or *Pedro y aquellos que estan con el sin nombrallos* [Peter and those who are with him without naming them]. The same rule applies to *nina* and *cana* [*kana*].

Verbs

Tagalog verbs are usually composed of a root or a base and one or more affixes, e.g., *kain* (root) and *-um-* (affix). The meaning is indicated by the

root, and the affixes combined with the roots show the relation of the topic, i.e., the focused noun phrase in a sentence, to the verb and the character of the action.

The grammarian's good grasp of Tagalog verbs is seen in his description of specific verbalizing affixes. At the beginning of the *Libro de las Reglas*, he describes the verbs that use the affixes *um-* and *mag-*, i.e., the active forms, and those using the affixes *y-*, *in-*, and *-an*, grouped as *las tres pasivas* [the three passive⁹ forms] (see pp. 9-10). Rather than spending time and space explaining the active forms, he gives a long commentary on the importance of the passive:

Todo la machina principal desta lengua estriva sobre las tres passivas que llamamos la vna de .y. y la otra de in, y la otra de ,an, y assi el ñ esta bien puesto y fundado en ellas, realmente, es como señor desta lengua, y tiene la mayor y mas substancial parte della andada. Y el que en esto que es la substancia y fundamento estuuiesse corto y mal fundado, no es possible dezir cosa adrechas, ni aprouechar se biẽ de las de mas reglas: pues todas son como accidẽte comparadas a esta materia por su gran importancia, y por la mucha dependencia que todo lo de mas tiene desto. (BSJ, 1610, p. 46)

[The main machine of this language originates from the three passives that we call (a) *y*, (b) *in*, and (c) *an* that he who is well grounded on these really is like the master of this language and has the best and most substantial part of learning the language. Moreover he who in this, which is the substance and basis of this language, is lacking and insufficiently grounded cannot say anything correctly. Neither can he take good advantage of the rest of the rules because everything seems unimportant compared to this device due to its great importance and to the heavy dependence of the rest on it.]

⁹ Passivization of verbs is the process of demoting the agent in a sentence and the subsequent promotion of other nouns with varied semantic roles.

Tagalog verbs can be classified on the basis of their affixes. These affixes are indicators of the sentence's topicalized or focused noun phrase, e.g., the actor (*mag-* and *-um-* verbs), e.g., *kumain siya ng tinapay*; goal (*-in* verbs), e.g., *kinain niya ang tinapay*; location (*-an* verbs), e.g., *kinainan niya ang panadiryá*; instrument (*-ipang-* verbs), e.g., *ipinangkain niya ang kutsara*; or beneficiary of the action (*-i-* and *-ipag-* verbs), e.g., *ipaghain mo siya ng tinapay*. What Blancas de San José identifies as active forms are exactly the *mag-* and *-um-* verbs that put the actor in focus, i.e., the noun in the nominative case. The three passive forms, on the other hand, are those that topicalize specific noun phrases other than the actor by means of specific affixes.

Another way to classify Tagalog verbs is by grouping them into causative and non-causative or indicative forms. Blancas de San José does not talk about this grouping scheme but speaks of the so-called *facere facere* abbreviated as *ff*, which corresponds to our causative verbs. Inasmuch as the causative is not grammaticized¹⁰ in either Spanish or Latin, this description constitutes a novelty. The grammars of other major Philippine languages also constantly describe this feature. At the start of the third chapter of the *Libro de las reglas*, he says:

Este nombre inuētarō los primeros Padres de muy loable memoria, que primeros que todos trabajaron en la lengua, para denotar ñ la persona ñ haze, ora en nominativo en la activa ora en gen. en la passiva no haze la accion significada por la tal rayz, sino que la manda hazer a otro. Digo pues que para dezir en esta lengua el mandar hazer algo (ora se llame facere facere, ora como cualquiera lo quisiere nombrar) no es menester vsar del termino ñ corresponde a este Español, mandar; porque tiene otro camino esta lengua, y es esta particula, Pa, la qual allegada a la rayz, dize que aquel de quien se habla manda hazer aquello. Denotar se ha esta palabra facere facere con estas dos .ff. ... (BSJ, 1610, p. 80)

¹⁰ Grammatization is the process of expressing certain concepts, e.g., negation, pluralization, and definiteness, by affixes and other non-lexical (functional) categories, e.g., the concept of possibility is expressed in English by the non-lexical category *must* and negation (aside from the affixes *in-* and *un-*) is conveyed by the morpheme *not* (O' Grady, W. et al., 2001).

[The first missionaries, of very praiseworthy memory, who were the first ones to work on this language, invented this name to say that the person who performs an activity, either in the nominative case in the active form or in the genitive case in the passive form, actually does not perform the action signified by the root but orders someone else to do it. It is because to express the request for something to be done (whether it is called *facere facere* or by any other name) it is not necessary to use the term equivalent to the Spanish *mandar* (to command), because this language has another way and it is the affix *pa*, which when joined to a root, expresses that he who is spoken of asks that something be done. The term *facere facere* has come to be denoted by the two letters *ff*..]

As if the single *ff* was not difficult yet, a double *ff* is uncovered and described as follows:

Ya aqui se va tocando vna dificultad sobreañadida al .ff. ya dicho, que es otro .ff. y se podria llamar .ff. doblado: pues es *facere facere* del *facere facere*. (BSJ, 1610, p. 91)

[Here an added difficulty is touched upon, i.e., another *ff* and which can be called double *ff* because it is the *facere facere* of *facere facere*.]

Blancas de San José gives the following examples: *pacanin mo* [dale de comer, o manda le comer] [make him eat or ask him to eat], but *ypapacaen mo* [manda que le den de comer o manda que le manden comer] [ask them to give him food or command them to command him to eat].

Syntax¹¹

Topicalization

The contemporary theme of topicalization or sentence focus is taken up by Blancas de San José also using classical terminology, i.e., via the

¹¹ Syntax refers to the way elements of a sentence are strung together. It is the part of grammar that deals with the arrangement of sentence constituents.

noun/pronoun case system. The nominative case marks the topicalized nouns while the non-nominative cases indicate the nontopicalized ones.

In talking about the first passive, i.e., the *y*-passive, he says

La cosa que padece y acerca de quiẽ se ha de exercitar lo q̄ el verbo dize, se pone en nominat. y la que haze en genit. ysulat ni Pedro yto: esto sea escrito de Pedro. (BSJ, 1610, p. 47)

[The thing (i.e., the patient) that suffers (i.e., receives) the action and the person over which what the verb indicates is exercised carries the nominative case; the actor, the genitive, e.g., *Ysulat ni Pedro yto* (esto sea escrito de Pedro) (may this be written by Peter).]

In this example, the demonstrative pronoun *yto* is in the nominative case while the proper noun in the noun phrase *ni Pedro* (the actor in the sentence) is preposed with a non-topic marker *ni*. Accordingly, the proper noun is “downgraded” to the genitive case and the pronoun (the goal) subsequently acquires greater prominence.

The non-relation, comment marker “ay”

Until recently, many have thought that the *ay* in the sentence *Siya ay matapang* is the linking verb *to be*. Right in the first section of Lesson 5 of the *Arte*, Blancas de San José shows why the Latin verb *sum es fui* [to be] has no exact equivalent in the Tagalog language (see pp. 7-8). There is no doubt in his mind that *ay* is not the verb “to be.”

The grammarian has observed that Tagalog speakers frequently use *ay* even when the Tagalog construction requires a substantive verb if expressed in Spanish or Latin. Apparently, when the Tagalog people speak the language, they always put a *descansillo y gracia* [short pause and grace] in the middle. At the same time, in some cases, e.g., in nonverbal sentences, he knows that neither *ay* nor any of its substitutes is present, e.g., in *sino yaon* [who is that], *ano yto* [what is this] even if it is clear that in Spanish these sentences correspond to *¿que es esto?* [what is this?] and

¿que es aquello? [what is that?] which obviously cannot stand without the substantive verb. Blancas de San José says:

Itē en quantas cosas hablan estos hermanos ponen en medio este descansillo y gracia o como le quisieren llamar, aunq̄ nunca aya ni memoria de sum es fui. v.g. nāg nabubuhay pa dito sa lupa ang. A.P.Iesu Christo ay &c. Itē esta pregūta sino yaon, ano yto, ni tiene, ay, ni suplientes, y claro esta q̄ en Romance le correspōde el, es, bien lleno: que es esto? que es aquello? (BSJ, 1610, p. 15)

[Also, many times these brothers of ours put in this short rest and grace, or however they might want to call it, even if there is not even a shadow of *sum es fui*, e.g., *nāg nabubuhay pa dito sa lupa ang. A.P.Iesu Christo ay* &c. (when our Lord Jesus Christ was still living with us in this world, etc.). Moreover, in the question *sino yaon* (who is that) or *ano yto* (what is this), there is no *ay* nor its substitutes, but in Spanish it is clear that *es* (is) fully corresponds to it: *que es esto?* (what is this?), *que es aquello?* (what is that?).]

The normal word order of sentences in Tagalog is such that the comment or so-called “predicate” is followed by the topic or “subject.” Put in another way, the verb is followed by the topic and the rest of the comment, e.g., *tumakbo ang bata*. When this sequence is reversed, the comment is set off from the topic by *ay* as in sentence (a) below, or simply by a sustained terminal juncture as in sentence (b). Thus, *ay* has often been referred to as “inversion marker,” or a “non-relation, comment marker.”

- | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| (a) ang bata-y tumakbo | (b) ang bata, tumakbo |
| (the child-OP ran-away) | (the child, ran-away) |

After searching for the equivalent of the Latin and Spanish substantive verb, Blancas de San José concludes:

NO Ay palabra que diga sum, es, fui, en quãto significa ser, ni ñ particularmente lo supla: sino que de suyo en esta lengua le suple o subintelectamente se entiende, puestas las de mas partes de la oracion, quanto a modos y tiempos, y quãto a todo. Podria offercer se le a alguno que se suple cõ esta particula, ay, como diziẽdo, si Pedro, ay, matapang: pero no es assí, por ñ esta particula, ay, no es sino vn sõsonete y gracia ñ ponen en medio quando precede del sujeto de quien dizen algo: y sino bueluan al reues aquella misma oraciõ, si Pedro, ay matapang, diziendo, matapang si Pedro; la qual esta muy buena y perfecta, y vease donde esta el, ay, supla ñ el sum es fui. (BSJ, 1610, pp. 14-15)

[There is no word that expresses *sum, es, fui* inasmuch as it means “to be”; neither is there any word that specifically substitutes for it. But in this language by itself *sum es fui* is substituted or is subintellectually understood when the other parts of the sentence, in the form of moods and tenses, etc., are present. It may seem to some that the particle *ay* substitutes for it, e.g., *si Pedro, ay, matapang* (Peter is brave), but it is not so because this particle, *ay*, is nothing but a tapping and grace placed in the middle of the sentence when the subject about whom something is said takes the first position. Otherwise, the sentence *si Pedro, ay, matapang* is said in reverse, i.e., *matapang si Pedro*, which sounds very good and perfect, and thus one sees where the *ay* that substitutes *sum es fui* is.]

Failing to find an exact substitute for *sum, es, fui*, Blancas de San José declares that it is “substituted” for [*lo supla*] or is subintellectually understood when the other parts of the sentence (i.e., moods and tenses, etc.) or “accidents of the verbs” are in place. In addition to this finding, he discovers that if *ay* is done away with, the sentence may be said in reverse, i.e., *Si Pedro, ay, matapang*, becomes *matapang si Pedro*. By this, Blancas de San José reveals the inversion signal function of the two-letter word *ay*.

A good first approximation to the study of Tagalog

Notwithstanding the popular *a priori* judgment that the grammars of Philippine languages written by the missionary grammarians were full of errors simply because the authors were foreigners, a linguistic analysis of the different grammars reveals that the descriptions were generally valid, insightful, and even advanced for the period (cf. Vibar, 2010). Neither does the conviction that the translation of native concepts to Latin and/or Spanish was used for strange motives take away the merit of the grammarians who painstakingly learned the new languages and expressed them in terms of essential principles, i.e., “reducido a reglas.”

Blancas de San José, author of the first published Tagalog grammar, managed to uncover the features of the language, i.e., those similar to and different from Spanish and Latin, those it has in common with all languages of the islands, and the ones that are unique to it. And these discoveries were made with the aid of a metalanguage and a grammatical framework that theoretically, given contemporary standards and the availability of modern linguistic theories, would impede the accurate description of Tagalog. No claim is made that the descriptions were perfect but it can be said that this pedagogical or teaching grammar reveals a good grasp of the Tagalog mental grammar despite the objective limitations of linguistic methods in use at the time.

Regardless of the imperfections of the *Arte y reglas de la lengua tagala*, this grammar represents one of the first attempts at a description of Tagalog. Together with the other grammars on Tagalog, it provides contemporary linguists with a good starting point for modern and more accurate descriptions, and gives leads on other features that perhaps we have not given due attention. At any rate, Francisco Blancas de San José deserves to be recognized for his contributions to the study not only of Tagalog but also of other languages since his grammar became a benchmark and a beacon for the other missionaries who came to the islands to learn and codify the languages and use this knowledge to spread the kingdom of God to all the four corners of the world.

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