

Mermaid construction in Tagalog:

Preliminaries

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1. Introduction

Japanese has sentences which starts with a clause and concludes with a noun and the copula. The construction is frequently observed in Japanese. Examples include (1) where the ‘Clause’ is indicated by means of preceding and following square brackets.

- (1) [*Hanako=wa Nagoya=ni ik-u*]
Hanako=TOP Nagoya=DAT/LOC go-NONPST
yotee=da.
plan=COP.NONPST
Literal translation: ‘Hanako is a plan [she] goes/will go to Nagoya.’
Free translation (i): ‘Hanako plans to go to Nagoya.’
Free translation (ii): ‘It is Hanako’s intention to go to Nagoya.’

Tsunoda (1996) coined a label ‘the noun-concluding construction’ to refer to this construction. In 2009 he coined a new label ‘the mermaid construction’ (hereafter ‘MMC’). Tsunoda (1996) proposes the prototype of the mermaid construction (‘MMC’) as follows.

- (2) Prototype of the MMC:
[Clause] Noun Copula

This prototype of the MMC is based on the MMC in Japanese, a predicate-final (or verb-final) language. Tagalog is a predicate-initial (or verb-initial) language. Nonetheless, it has the mirror image of the kind of the MMC found in Japanese and other predicate-final (or verb-final) languages. This is, to my knowledge, the first MMC that has ever been reported from any predicate-initial language.

The Tagalog MMC is of two types.

- (3) Finite type:
Noun(-)Linker [Clause (finite)]
- (4) Infinitive type:
Noun(-)Linker [Clause (infinitive)]

Tagalog has no copula verb, and consequently, its MMC contains no copula verb. There are differences between the two types in terms of (i) morphology (finite vs. infinitive), (ii) syntax, and (iii) semantics.

In the finite type, the predicate of the ‘Clause’ is in a finite form, and the ‘Clause’ by itself can be used as a sentence. The noun in the ‘Noun’ slot is *mukha* ‘face’, a loan word from Sanskrit. The finite type has evidential meanings: inference and visual evidence.

In the infinitive type, the predicate of the ‘Clause’ is in the infinitive form, and the ‘Clause’ by itself cannot be used as a sentence. The nouns that can occupy the ‘Noun’ slot are *plano* ‘plan’, *tradisyon* ‘tradition’, *destino* ‘destiny’ (all are loans from Spanish), *balak* ‘plan’ and *kapalaran* ‘fate’. The infinitive type indicates ‘X plans to ...’ (a modal meaning), ‘X has the practice of VERBing’ (an aspectual meaning), or ‘X is destined to ...’ (a modal meaning).

2. Initial illustration

An example of the finite type is (5) (*mukha* ‘face’), and an example of the infinitive type is (6) (*plano* ‘plan’).

- (5) *Mukha-ng sa-sabog=na ang bulkan.*
face-LK AF:CONT-erupt=already TOP volcano
LT: ‘Face that the volcano will erupt already.’
FT: ‘It seems the volcano will erupt soon.’
- (6) *Plano-ng apruba-han nang gobyerno ang pag-import nang bigas.*
plan-LK approve-PF:INF GEN government TOP
NMLZ-import GEN rice
LT: ‘Plan for the government to approve the import of rice.’
FT: ‘The government plans to approve the import of rice.’

3. Mermaid construction

3.1 Introductory notes

The prototype of the MMC shown in (2) is based on the MMC in Japanese, a predicate-final (or verb-final) language.

Tagalog would not be expected to have the MMC. There are at least two reasons for this.

First, almost all of the languages in which the MMC is attested are predicate-final (or verb-final). However, Tagalog is predicate-initial (or verb-initial).

Second, the MMC may be said to resemble external Adnominal clauses (hereafter ACs) in that the noun is not an argument (or an adjunct) of the clause. In view of this, the MMC would be expected to occur in languages in which external ACs are abundant and highly acceptable. However, in Tagalog, external ACs are only marginally acceptable.

Despite these expectations, Tagalog does have the MMC. It is a predicate-initial (or verb-initial) language. Its MMC is the mirror image of the kind of the MMC found in Japanese and other predicate-final (or verb-final) languages. The Tagalog MMC is of two types: (3) and (4).

3.2 Finite type

3.2.1 Structure

In the finite type, the noun that occupies the ‘Noun’ slot is *mukha* ‘face, facial expression’. It is interesting to note that this word is a loan word from Sanskrit: *mukha* ‘mouth, face, countenance’. According to Yasunari Imamura (p.c.), its descendent *mukh* (with *a* dropped) is still used in Modern Hindi, with the meaning of ‘face’.

The use of the word *mukha* is not limited to educated people. The Philippines has been trading with India since as far back as the 7th century, and this trade has influence in language: about a fourth of modern Tagalog vocabulary is of Sanskrit origin. Other common Tagalog words of Sanskrit origin include *guro* ‘teacher’, *asawa* ‘spouse’, and *wika* ‘language’.

In Tagalog, *mukha* ‘face, facial expression’ can be used outside the MMC. When it is used in the MMC, the MMC has evidential meanings: visual evidence and inference.

The predicate of the ‘Clause’ may be nominal, e.g., (8); adjectival, e.g., (10); or verbal, e.g., (12). When the predicate is verbal, it is in a finite form. However, when the predicate is a nominal or adjectival, the distinction between finite and nonfinite forms is virtually non-existent. Whichever the predicate is, the ‘Clause’ can be used as a sentence

by itself. Compare the following pairs of examples.

Nominal predicate:

- (7) *Binata=pa=siya.*
 bachelor=yet=3SG:TOP
 ‘He is still a bachelor.’
- (8) *Mukha-ng binata=pa=siya.*
 face-LK bachelor=yet=3SG:TOP
 LT: ‘Face that he is still a bachelor.’
 FT: ‘It seems he is still a bachelor.’

Adjectival predicate:

- (9) *Malusog si Erap.*
 healthy TOP Erap
 ‘Erap is healthy.’
- (10) *Mukha-ng malusog si Erap.*
 face-LK healthy TOP Erap
 LT: ‘Face that Erap is healthy.’
 FT: ‘It seems Erap is healthy.’

Verbal predicate:

- (11) *Sa-sabog=na ang bulkan.*
 AF:CONT-erupt=already TOP volcano
 ‘The volcano will erupt soon.’
- (12) *Mukha-ng sa-sabog=na ang bulkan.*
 face-LK AF:CONT-erupt=already TOP volcano
 LT: ‘Face that the volcano will erupt already.’
 FT: ‘It seems the volcano will erupt soon.’

The MMC may look similar to ACs. Note that *mukha* ‘face’ can in no way be an argument of the ‘Clause’. In this respect, the MMC differs from internal ACs, but it may be said to resemble external ACs.

As noted above, the predicate of the ‘Clause’ occurs in a finite form (at least when it is a verb). There is no restriction on the inflection of the predicate of the ‘Clause’. It can occur in any focus/aspect/mode form. Examples follow.

- (13) *Mukha-ng b-um-i-bili ngayon ang lalaki nang*
 face-LK AF:IPFV-buy now TOP man GEN
bago-ng kotse.
 new-LK car
 ‘It seems the man is buying a new car now.’
- (14) *Mukha-ng b-in-ili kahapon nang lalaki*
 face-LK PF:PFV-buy yesterday GEN man
ang bago-ng kotse.
 TOP new-LK car
 ‘It seems the man bought the new car yesterday.’

3.2.2 Semantics

The MMC with *mukha* ‘face, facial expression’ has evidential meanings. More specifically it denotes the following:

- (a) visual evidence: on the basis of what the speaker actually sees, he/she states that a situation is likely to occur, or:
- (b) inference: the speaker makes an inference on the basis of the surrounding situation.

Examples have already been given. An additional example is the following. (It contains an instance of ‘headless relative clause’: *ang ipiniprito nang lalaki* ‘(the one that) the man is frying’.)

- (15) *Mukha-ng isda ang i-p-in-i-prito nang lalaki.*
 face-LK fish TOP PF:IPFV-fry GEN man
 LT: ‘Face that the one that the man is frying is fish.’
 FT: ‘It seems to be fish that the man is frying.’

The speaker may utter this sentence in a situation where he/she makes this judgment on the basis of the smell.

Similar meanings can be expressed by using adverbs. Among them, sentences with *para* ‘seemingly’ apparently takes the same form as the MMC with *mukha* ‘face’.

- (16) *Para-ng binata=pa=siya.*
 seemingly-LK bachelor=yet=3SG:TOP

‘It seems he is still a bachelor.’

- (17) *Para-ng* *malusog* *si* *Erap.*
 seemingly-LK healthy TOP Erap

‘It seems Erap is healthy.’

- (18) *Para-ng* *sa-sabog=na* *ang* *bulkan.*
 seemingly-LK AF:CONT-erupt=already TOP volcano

‘It seems the volcano will erupt soon.’

Compare these sentences with (8), (10), and (12), respectively. Apparently, they take the same form at least superficially: *mukha/para* + linker + clause. They are also similar in meaning, only with slight differences in terms of probability of the situation happening or occurring. Although *para* can be used in situations that one can actually see just like *mukha*, the likelihood of the occurrence of the situation is greater with *mukha* than with *para*.

In fact, many adverbial expressions take the same form described above, especially those that denote frequency: *madalas* ‘often’, *lagi* ‘always’, *madalang/bihira* ‘rarely’, *beses* ‘times’, etc.

- (19) *Dalawa-ng* *beses* *sa* *isa-ng* *buwan* *na*
 two-LK times OBL one-LK month LK
nag-bi-bilyar *si* *Noy.*
 AF:IPFV-billiard TOP Noy

LT: ‘Two times in a month that Noy plays billiard.’

FT: ‘Noy plays billiard twice a month.’

The form observed in (19) is parallel to the structure of the mermaid construction given above: Noun (*dalawang beses sa isang buwan* ‘twice a month’) + Linker + Clause. One might argue, then, that *mukha* is grammaticalized and it now has an adverbial function that denotes evidentiality.

However, there are structural differences between the MMC with *mukha* and those with the adverbial expressions illustrated above. In the MMC with *mukha*, the first part (‘Noun’) and the second part (‘Clause’) cannot be inverted, irrespective of whether an inversion marker is employed or not. See (20) and (21). In contrast, in (19), the first part can be postposed, although this is not common. Compare (20) and (22).

- (20) *Mukha-ng* *u-ulan.*

face-LK AF:CONT-rain

‘It seems it will rain.’

(21) **U-ulan-g* (*ay*) *mukha*.

AF:CONT-rain-LK INV face

(22) *Nag-bi-bilyar* *si* *Noy* *na* *dalawa-ng* *beses*

AF:IPFV-billiard TOP Noy LK two-LK times

sa *isa-ng* *buwan*.

OBL one-LK month

‘Noy plays billiard twice a month.’

Comparison of (20)-(21) and (22) suggests that *dalawang beses sa isang buwan* ‘twice a month’ is something like an adverbial phrase, while (20) is an established construction, with a rigid relative order of words/phrases. *Mukha* is not an adverbial element. It is a part (and an important part) of the MMC.

This argument, however, does not apply to the word *para* ‘seemingly’, which cannot be postposed, just like *mukha* cannot. However, *mukha* and *para*, both of which express evidentiality of an action or state occurring, exhibit a difference in word order when negated. Compare (23)-(24) and (25)-(26).

(23) *Hindi=siya* *mukha-ng* *binata*.

NEG=3SG:TOP face-LK bachelor

‘He does not seem to be a bachelor.’

(24) *Mukha=siya-ng* *hindi* *binata*.³

face-3SG:TOP-LK NEG bachelor

‘He does not look like a bachelor.’

(25) **Hindi=siya* *para-ng* *binata*.

NEG=3SG:TOP seemingly-LK bachelor

(26) *Para=siya-ng* *hindi* *binata*.

seemingly=3SG:TOP-LK NEG bachelor

‘He does not seem to be a bachelor.’

In Tagalog, a negative particle occurs clause-initially, that is, before the predicate of the clause. Compare (9) with (27), and (11) with (28).

(27) *Hindi* *malusog* *si* *Erap*.

NEG healthy TOP Erap

‘Erap is not healthy.’

(28) *Hindi pa sa-sabog ang bulkan.*
 NEG yet AF:CONT-erupt TOP volcano

‘The volcano will not erupt yet.’

The contrast between (23) and (25) shows the structural difference between the MMC with *mukha* and sentences with an adverbial expression. The fact that the negative particle *hindi* can naturally occur before *mukha*, but not before *para* indicates that *mukha* behaves as the predicate of the sentence, just like a noun of the mermaid construction, while the *para* does not. This suggests again that *mukha* is not an adverbial element but ‘Noun’ of the MMC.

3.3 Infinitive type

[1] Predicate

The structure of the infinitive type is shown in (4). The predicate of the ‘Clause’ is finite in the finite type (at least when it is a verb). However, it is the infinitive form of a verb, that is, a non-finite form, in the infinitive type. The difference between finite forms and the infinitive form is roughly as follows.

- (a) Finite forms inflect for focus and aspect.
- (b) Infinitive forms inflect for focus, but not for aspect.

In the infinitive type, the verb in the ‘Clause’ is non-finite, and the ‘Clause’ cannot be used as a sentence by itself.

[2] Nouns

The nouns that can occupy the ‘Noun’ slot in the infinitive type include *plano* ‘plan’, *tradisyon* ‘tradition’, *destino* ‘destiny’ (all borrowed from Spanish); *balak* ‘plan’, and *kapalaran* ‘fate’. They have an evidential, an aspectual, or a modal meaning.

(29) *Tradisyon-g ipag-diwang nang manga Filipino*
 tradition-LK PF:INF-celebrate GEN PL Filipino
ang Easter.
 TOP Easter
 LT: ‘Tradition for Filipinos to celebrate Easter.’
 FT: ‘Filipinos have the practice of celebrating Easter.’

[3] Actor nominal (1): preposition

In Tagalog, generally, when an actor nominal agrees with the verb in terms of focus marking, it must be preceded by the topic preposition. When the actor nominal does not agree with the verb, it is preceded by the genitive preposition. The same applies to the MMC of the finite type.

However, the above does not apply to the MMC of the infinitive type. When the actor nominal agrees with the verb, its behavior is different from that described above. In some instances, the actor nominal may be preceded either by the topic preposition (as is generally the case with an actor nominal used as the topic) or by the genitive preposition (as is generally the case with an actor used as a non-topic).

- (30) *Kapalaran-g ma-wala si /ni Pilar sa*
 fate-LK AF:INF-disappear TOP/GEN Pilar OBL
Maynila upang ma-kita si Pepe.
 Manila in order to PF:INF-see TOP Pepe
 LT: 'Fate for/of Pilar to get lost in Manila in order to see Pepe.'
 FT: 'Pilar was destined to get lost in Manila in order to see Pepe.'

In other instances, the actor nominal can be preceded by the genitive preposition. But the use of the topic preposition is unacceptable or only marginally acceptable. This is despite the fact that it agrees with the verb (in the actor focus).

- (31) *Plano-ng b-um-isita ni /*si Noy sa Davao*
 plan-LK AF:INF-visit GEN/*TOP Noy OBL Davao
bukas.
 tomorrow
 LT: 'Plan of Noy to visit Davao tomorrow.'
 FT: 'Noy plans to visit Davao tomorrow.'
- (32) *Kapalaran-g ma-talo ni /?si Erap noon-g*
 fate-LK AF:INF-lose GEN/?TOP Erap last-LK
eleksyon.
 election
 LT: 'Fate of/for Erap to lose in the last election.'
 FT: 'Erap was destined to lose in the last election.'

[4] Actor nominal (2): relative order

There is a difference in the behavior of the actor nominal between the infinitive type and the finite type. This difference has to do with the genitive marking of the actor nominal.

In the infinitive type, if the actor nominal is preceded by the genitive case, it may precede the verb and occur immediately after the ‘Noun’ of the MMC. This is possible both (a) when the actor nominal agrees with the verb (in the actor focus), e.g., (33), and (b) when the actor nominal does not agree with the verb (in a focus other than the actor focus), e.g., (34) and (35) (the patient focus).

- (33) *Kapalaran ni/*si Pilar na ma-wala*
 fate GEN/*TOP Pilar LK AF:INF-disappear
sa Maynila upang ma-kita si Pepe.
 OBLManila in order to PF:INF-see TOP Pepe
 LT: ‘Fate of Pilar to get lost in Manila in order to see Pepe.’
 FT: ‘Pilar was destined to get lost in Manila [when she went]
 to see Pepe.’
- (34) *Plano nang gobyerno-ng apruba-han ang*
 plan GEN government-LK approve-PF:INF TOP
pag-import nang bigas.
 NMLZ-import GEN rice
 LT: ‘Plan of the government to approve the import of rice.’
 FT: ‘The government plans to approve the import of rice.’
- (35) *Tradisyon nang manga Filipino-ng*
 tradition GEN PL Filipino-LK
ipag-diwang ang Easter.
 PF:INF-celebrate TOP Easter.
 LT: ‘Tradition of Filipinos to celebrate Easter.’
 FT: ‘Filipinos have the practice of celebrating Easter.’

Compare, for example, (30) and (33). In (68), the actor nominal (*Pilar*) occurs immediately after the ‘Noun’ (*kapalaran* ‘fate’) and it must be preceded by the genitive postposition, and not by the topic preposition. In (30), the actor nominal does not occur immediately after the ‘Noun’, and it may be preceded by the topic preposition or by the genitive preposition.

Only the actor nominal can precede the verb and occur immediately after the

‘Noun’.

In contrast to the infinitive type, the finite type (the ‘Noun’ is *mukha* ‘face’) does not allow the actor nominal to occur immediately after the ‘Noun’ *mukha*, irrespective of whether the actor nominal is the topic, cf. (37), or not, cf. (39). Compare (36) and (37), and (38) and (39).

- (36) *Mukha-ng bi-bisita si Noy sa*
 face-LK AF:CONT-visit TOP Noy OBL
Davao bukas.
 Davao tomorrow
 ‘Noy seems to be going to Davao tomorrow.’
- (37) **Mukha ni Noy na bi-bisita sa Davao*
 face GEN Noy LK AF:CONT-go OBL Davao
bukas.
 tomorrow
 LT: ‘Face of Noy that will visit Davao tomorrow.’
 Intended meaning: ‘(As above)’
- (38) *Mukha-ng t-in-anggap=na nang gobyerno*
 face-LK PF:PERF-receive=already GEN government
ang kanila-ng pagkakamali.
 TOP 3PL:OBL-LK mistake
 ‘The government seems to have acknowledged its mistake.’
- (39) **Mukha nang gobyerno-ng t-in-anggap=na*
 face GEN government-LK PF:PERF-receive=already
ang kanila-ng pagkakamali.
 TOP 3PL:OBL-LK mistake
 LT: ‘Face of the government that received their mistake already.’
 Intended meaning: ‘(As above)’

3.4 Semantics of the two types

We have seen one noun (3.2) and five nouns (3.3) that can occupy the ‘Noun’ slot of the MMC. They can be summarized as in Table 1. As can be seen, they are highly grammaticalized in the MMC, in terms of semantics at least.

Table 1. Semantics of the MMC

outside MMC meaning of MMC

<i>mukha</i>	‘face’	evidential: visual evidence and inference
<i>plano</i>	‘plan’	modal: ‘plan to do’
<i>tradisyon</i>	‘tradition’	aspectual: habitual
<i>destino</i>	‘destiny’	modal: ‘be destined to do’
<i>balak</i>	‘plan’	modal: ‘plan to do’
<i>kapalaran</i>	‘fate’	modal: ‘be destined to do’

4. Summary and concluding remarks

Tagalog would not be expected to have the MMC. First, it is predicate-initial (or verb-initial), whereas almost all of the languages in which the MMC is attested are predicate-final (or verb-final). Second, the MMC may be said to resemble external ACs in that the noun is not an argument (or an adjunct) of the clause, and the MMC might be expected to occur in languages where external ACs are abundant. However, in Tagalog, external ACs are only marginally acceptable.

Despite these two expectations, Tagalog does have the MMC. This MMC is the mirror image of the prototype of the MMC, attested in predicate-final languages. The Tagalog MMC is of two types.

In the finite type, the verb of the ‘Clause’ is in a finite form, and the ‘Clause’ can be used as a sentence by itself. The ‘Noun’ is *mukha* ‘face’, a loan from Sanskrit *mukha*, and the MMC has evidential meanings of visual evidence and inference: ‘the situation is likely to occur’.

In the infinitive type, the predicate of the ‘Clause’ is in the infinitive form, that is, a non-finite form, and the ‘Clause’ cannot be used as a sentence by itself. At least five nouns are attested in the ‘Noun’ slot. Two of them are loans from Spanish, while the remaining two are native Tagalog words. The infinitive type has an evidential, a modal, or an aspectual meaning. The infinitive type exhibits an unusual behavior in terms of the case and the relative position of the actor nominal.

Lastly, it is interesting to note that the nouns used for either type of the mermaid construction are mostly loan words. This might have something to do with the preference for verbal constructions of the language *per se*, but it remains for further research.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude toward Tasaku Tsunoda for his invaluable comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this article. I am also indebted to Maureen Joy Saclot for her help in providing data and for helpful comments.

Abbreviations

AC - adnominal clause; ADV - adverbial; AF - actor focus; BF - beneficiary focus; CF - causal focus; CONT - contemplated; DF - direction focus; EXCL - exclusive; FT - free translation; GEN - genitive; HON - honorific; IF - instrumental focus; INCL - inclusive; INF - infinitive; INV - inversion marker; IPFV - imperfective; LF - location focus; LK - linker; LT - literal translation; NEG - negative; NMLZ - nominalizer; OBL - oblique; PF - patient focus; PFV - perfective; PL - plural; Q - question particle; RF - reason focus; SG - singular; TOP - topic.

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