

A FUNCTIONAL DESCRIPTION OF THE PREPOSITION *Sa* IN TAGALOG

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INTRODUCTION

The *sa* construction is important and ubiquitous in Tagalog having a wide range of applications in prepositional phrases and being occasionally identified as the source of “confusion” and many glaring errors” among Tagalog speakers of English or Japanese (Vinluan 1970). What *sa* seems to be lacking most is an adequate grammatical description which takes in the general range of its occurrences in the phrase. The grammatical description outlined here is meant to serve as the basis for a new classification of this preposition.

Sa is usually presented grammatically as a locative preposition occurring within some kind of relative-location phrase (Alejandro 1972; Bowen 1965). The phrase itself may function syntactically as prepositional realised as an adjunct, postmodifier in a noun phrase, complementation of a verb, or complementation of an adjective; or it may be as a straightforward adjectival phrase (see Schachter and Otones, 1972: 259-260), i.e. *sa* plus an unmarked noun, nominalisation, or *sa*-form personal pronoun, “kay” or “kina” plus a personal pronoun or a *sa*-form deictic pronoun. We can glimpse how *sa* functions grammatically by showing two simple Hiligaynon sentences (all sample sentences are taken from the pages of the Manila Times except the Hiligaynon examples which were collected from informants in the Visayas in 1990):

1. *Ang tao nga napatay and iya amigo nagkadto sa simbahan*

the + man + that + died + the + his + friend + went + *to* + church
 (The man, whose friend died, went to church)

The form of the sentence is as follows:

Mar + N + (prt + vi + spro + N1) Vi + Mar + N2

This sentence contains the subject-predicate word group *Ang tao nagkadto sa simbahan* in which *sa* functions as a simple prepositional locative—which is how *sa* is conventionally described. The description becomes a little more complex when we see *sa* in two grammatically contrastive contexts but with similar (though not identical) meaning:

2. *Yara na sila sa dalan nasional sa diin madamo ang matahom nga mga harden*

There + already + they + on + road + national + in + where + many + the + pretty + filler + plural marker + garden
 (They are there already on the national road where there are many beautiful gardens)

The form of the sentence is as follows:

D + prt + nom pro + mar + n + adj + (prt + adj + mar + adj + prt + pl mar + N1)

In this sentence we note the main clause *Yara na sila sa dalan nasional* contrasts with the insert sentence beginning with *sa*: *sa diin madamo ang matahom nga mga harden*. In these two sentences (roughly a main clause [1] and an insert sentence [2], the structure [1] employs *sa* as part of the adverb *sa diin* (as subordinator). However, *sa diin* functions as the relative connecting the insert sentence to the antecedent *dalan*; within the insert sentence, the relative functions as an adverb modifying the predicate *matahom*.

We can explain the meaning of *sa* in this context simply as follows: the insert sentence modifies the noun *dalan*, which is the object of the marker *sa*. Motus (1971: XX, 161-166) classifies *sa* as an adverb generally marking location in the utterance.

Although the range of prepositional complements of the preposition + noun phrase type are not as varied in Tagalog as they are in say Spanish or English, Tagalog does, in fact, possess a number of key prepositions or *pang-ukol*. The three standard are: *nasa* (in, at, on) expressing location, *kina* (with) used with animate objects and *sa* (in, at on) expressing direction. One of the most difficult to use for the non-native speaker of Tagalog is *sa*. Undoubtedly, the reason for this is its multiplicity of functions expressing numerous types of relational meaning in the Tagalog phrase construction. We know that there are, of course, various types of relation between entities. Place, Time, Instrument and Cause have been identified as the most typical (see Quirk and Greenbaum, 1973: 143).

DIVERSITY OF PREPOSITIONAL USAGE

In Tagalog, *sa* has been generally described as a “simple preposition” (Vinluan, 1970; De Guzman, 1989). We usually define a simple preposition as consisting of just one word, unlike a complex preposition which consists of more than one word. In English, for example, we have Verb/Adjective/Conjunction + Prep as in “owing to”, “due to”, “because of” and so on. The preposition *sa* is conventionally classified in terms of just one of the above types: place or direction (ibid; above). On closer examination, however, *sa* seems to possess a more complicated range of prepositional and prepositional complement usages. Bowen (1965) attempted to redescribe the *sa*-constructions in terms of ‘possessive’, ‘preferential’ and ‘locative’ but this also seems to be a somewhat narrow classification leaving out, for example,

the various metaphorical meanings contained in *sa*. I have categorised *sa*-type prepositional phrases following closely the grammatical description of prepositions provided by Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartik (1973). The diversity of the prepositional usages of the *sa* construction can be described as follows:

1. Place

(Positive direction, dimension, negative direction, relative destination, positive position, passage across, passage through, abstract use of place prepositions).

(A) Positive Direction

Pupunta ako *sa* Iloilo

(I am going to Iloilo)

Pumunta siya *sa* palengke

(I went to the market)

Pupunta kami *sa* Cavite

(we are headed for Cavite)

Paki dahil mo ako *sa* airport

(please take me to the airport)

(B) Dimension

Maraming tao *sa* Maynila

(there are many people in Manila)

Ang loob ng bahay ay may pintang puti

(the inside of the house is painted white)

Kailangan ang ilaw *sa* libis

(it is necessary to have light across the slope)

Siya ay nakita ko *sa* tindahan

(I saw him at the store)

(C) Negative Direction

Ang matanda ay bumaba *sa* kotse
 (the old woman got off—down—the car)

(D) Relative Destination

Lumundag siya *sa* ibanaw ng bakod
 (she jumped over the fence)
 Ang aklat ay inilagay ay sariwa
 (I put the book on the table)
 Dumausdos ang batang lalaki *sa* atip na yero
 (the boy slid over the iron roofing)
 Dumausdos ang batang lalaki *sa* atip na yero
 (the boy slid onto—and stayed on—the iron roofing)

(E) Relative Position

Sa likod ng pinto
 (behind the door)
 May mga taong nagtitira *sa* ibaba
 (there are people living below)
 May tao *sa* loob ng paaralan
 (there is a man inside the building)

Note the semi-metaphorical use of *sa* to express the notion of ‘vicinity’ as in the English expression to live ‘on’ the river, 24th Street, etc. Consider the sentence: *Nakatira ako sa Taft Avenue* for ‘I live on Taft Avenue’.

(F) Positive Position

Nakaupo sila *sa* bangko
 (they sit on the bench)

Ang itlog *sa* buslo ay sariwa
 (the eggs in the basket are fresh)
 Nasa ilalim ng mesa ang pusa
 (the cat is under the table)

- (G1) Passage — (across): *sa* ibabaw/mula *sa* puno hanggang dulo
 Lumundag siya *sa* ibabaw ng bakod
 (she jumped over the fence)

There is a metaphorical extension of this usage in Tagalog to express “by means of” but which can be classified most neatly as ‘over’ much as in English we say someone is ‘talking over the air’. Consider the Tagalog sentence: Aswit siya *sa* radyo (“she will sing over the air”).

- (G2) Passage—(through): *sa*
 Nagalagos kami *sa* kagubatan
 (we passed through the jungle)

- (H) Abstract Use of Place Preposition *sa*
 Wala kang tiwala *sa* akin
 (you have no confidence in me)
Sa akin ay hindi maari iyan
 (to me that cannot be)

- (I) Metaphorical Use of Place Preposition *sa*
 Isusmubong kita *sa* Tatay
 (I’ll tell on you)

2. Time

(A) Time (*sa*)

Sila ay darating *sa* Linggo

(they are arriving on Sunday)

Marahil ay mayayari na ang bagong paaralan *sa* taong darating

(by next year the schoolhouse will have been finished)

Nagsusulat ako *sa* gabi

(I usually write at night)

(B) Duration (*sa* buong panahong itinagal ng)

Sila 'y nagpalumagag *sa* buon panahong itinagal ng pagdiriwang

(They stayed throughout the celebration)

Siya ang pangulo namin *sa* taong ito

(she is our president throughout this year)

3. Instrumental/Agentive

The instrument in this type of phrase is usually, as Quirk and Greenbaum (p. 160) explain, an inert and normally inanimate cause of an action, the 'agentive' being the inanimate initiating cause. This is the case in Tagalog. Consider the following sentence.

Bakit galit ka *sa* akin?

(why are you so angry with/to me?)

4. Possession

It should be noted that this possessive (predicate) construction sometimes deletes the *sa* leaving the *sa* form of the pronoun intact.

Ang sulat na nakita ko ay *sa* iyo

(the letter I saw is yours)

5. Recipient

'Intended recipient' (for some person) employs a 'for' phrase and in Tagalog *sa* is frequently used in combination with 'para'. In fact, when it is deleted the sentence may become ambiguous. Schachter and Otnes (1972: 259) provide a useful example of this with the sentences: "Para *sa* titser ang pontimpen" ('The fountain pen is for the teacher') and '*Sa* titser ang pontimpen' which may also mean 'the fountain pen is the teacher's'—the *sa* phrase being interpreted as a possessive.

Ang barong ito ay para *sa* iyo

(this dress is for you)

Ang isang sipi ay *sa* iyo. Ang matitira ay *sa* akin

(one copy is for you, the other is mine)

Nagbigay ako ng salu-salo *sa* aking kaibigan

(I gave a party for my friend)

6. Purposive

Whereas the above phrases employ *sa* alone there is a type of adjectival phrase in which "*para*" is used and cannot be deleted but which bears similarities to the above recipient usage. This can be illustrated by the following (from Schachter and Otnes, *ibid*):

Para *sa* pagluluto ng kanin ang palayok na ito

(this pot is used for cooking rice)

Para *sa* pagsasayaw ang sapatos

(the shoes are used for dancing)

7. Stimulus (With/At)

This expresses the relation between an emotion and the abstract

stimulus (in the example below it is “resultado”) and can be likened to a passive construction.

Nabigo ako *sa* naging resultado ng iksamin

(I am disappointed with the result of the test)

8. Referential

(about/concerning) (Hinggil *sa*/Tungkol *sa*)

Referential uses of *sa* occur as the complementation of a verb as with the verb ‘nalalaman’ (know) in the example. The *sa* phrase is typically preceded by ‘tungkol’, ‘nauukol’ or ‘hinggil’.

Wala akong nalalaman tungkol *sa* bagay na iyon

(I don’t know anything about this matter)

Hinggil *sa* negosyo ang usapan nila

(Their conversation is about business)

We note, en passant, the syntactic versatility of the *sa* construction since we can as easily re-write the last example from a pre-modifying prepositional phrase to a post-position occurring at the end of the phrase.

Ang talumpati ay tungkol *sa* negosyo

(the talk is about business)

9. Opposition (labag *sa*)

The ‘support’, ‘solidarity’ or ‘sympathy’ usage of *sa* is well documented (see Recipient and Purposive sections above). *Sa* can also, in combination with ‘labag’, convey the contrary idea of opposition as in the phrase:

Labag *sa* batas ang kaniyang ginawa

(what he did is against the law)

10. Source/Origin

Source and origin phrases occur frequently with/are preceded by “mula”, “tubo” or “buhat”. But when the source phrase is preceded by either “buhat”, “galing” or “mula” the meaning expressed is that something, a package say, has been sent from somewhere and has arrived. As in the following expression:

[Mula/Buhat/Galing] *sa* Iloilo ang tren
(the train has arrived from Iloilo)

With “tubo” (usually though not always present in the phrase) is the meaning “from” to express that a person comes from (‘hails from’) a particular place or country as in the following:

Ang ganong guro ay nanggaling *sa* Inglatera
(the new teacher came from England)

The preposition *sa* is conventionally classified among the pang-ukol group of locative prepositions or by syntactic representation as adjectival phrase markers. However, closer inspection shows the multi-functional role of *sa* in the sentence. Certainly, within the sentence and depending upon the verb which accompanies it *sa* may indicate: on, of, in, at, by, from, with, to, etc. When sentences are contrasted meanings such as dimensionless location, positive position and direction, relative position, destination, source and origin, opposition and quasi-agent, etc. can be observed. In prepositional phrases such as “hanggang *sa* ...” (up to, as far as) *sa* functions like the French *jusqu’a* as in the sentence: “Magkano ang pamasaha hanggang *sa* Cebu? (How much is the fare up to Cebu?)”.

***Sa* IN THE ADVERBIAL PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE**

Within the clause the *sa* prepositional phrase unmistakably functions as an adverbial. Typical of this usage is the usage of the word “bumaba” (which can be loosely be classified as a phrasal verb) to refer to any kind of going down from a higher position to a lower position or place, e.g. to go down the stairs, get off a bicycle, etc. Consider the following sentences:

Nagmamamadali siyang bumaba *sa* kab

(he got out of the taxi in a hurry)

and

Paano tayo bababa I bus na ito?

(How can we get off this bus?)

In these sentences *sa* is inseparable from the head (bumaba) and modifiers (“kab” and “bus”) which follow them and in these cases *sa* has an adverbial function. It must be noted, however, that this adverbial function occurs only in the presence of a prepositional object. When it is absent we have sentences such as the following:

Para na dito. Bababa na ako.

(Stop here, I'm getting off. na = already, non - a temporal adverb;
ako = I - pronoun).

Another brief example of how *sa* takes on a verbal function in the prepositional phrase is the various forms associated with *dadaan*. This verb is well known to foreign learners of Tagalog since it translates into the very common Filipino-English usage “pass” as in:

1. I'll pass for you at 7 (= I'll pick you up at 7)

2. I'll pass Tokyo (= I'll go via Tokyo)
3. I'll pass by the library and borrow a book (= I'll stop by the library and borrow a book)

This versatile Tagalog verb is used in Filipino English to mean “go by”, “stop for”, “pick up”, and “go.” Note, however, the combination “... *sa* Tokyo” for “via Tokyo” and “*dadaan sa ...*” for “stop by”. We can therefore translate these sentences as follows:

1. *Dadaanan* kita nang a las siyete
2. *Dadaan* ako *sa* Tokyo
3. *Dadaan* ako *sa* aklatan at manghihiram ako ng libro

The preposition *sa* has multiple functions not only to express the meanings of relation conventionally associated with prepositions such as TIME and PLACE etc In *sa* we can recognise a wide range of types of relationships. These types have been noted and illustrated with examples from Tagalog.

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