

Subject, Topic and Perspective in Functional Grammar and in Philippine Missionary Grammar

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Summary of main conclusions

- 1 The missionaries used Latin case names for languages which did not have such case inflections, of which they were well aware. However, the traditional Latin case names didn't have to be replaced by new ones because the missionaries went back to the original perspectival meanings of these case names (e.g. accusative as the case of direction/movement), and by doing so made them applicable within their pragmalinguistic analyses of these languages.
- 2 In Philippine Missionary Grammar (PMG) perspective is used as a central pragmatic linguistic concept, reflecting the way a speaker wants to present a State of Affairs in terms of backgrounding, foregrounding, topic, focus, direction, contrast, etc. They used this concept not only in their redefinitions of Latin case names, but also in their use of the terms Active and Passive, and thereby actually present an elegant and adequate solution in the current debate on whether Chamorro and Philippine languages have a true passive.
- 3 Philippine Missionaries did not use Nebrija's 'introductiones latinae' as a reference model regarding the use of case names. In fact, what we can see here is a breach in the history of linguistics, the start of a new linguistic approach. They developed their own method of explaining linguistic phenomena and defined cases differently from that found in Nebrija or other grammars that were used at that time. In doing so, they developed a surprisingly modern method very much comparable with modern Functional (Discourse) Grammar (FG).
- 4 The method of PMG is not only comparable with that of FG. In fact, regarding the decision of these missionaries to leave out the notion of Subject in their analyses, they may even be considered to be a step ahead of modern pragmalinguistics. In FG, Subject (together with Object) is considered as a distinct level in the linguistic process of creating a sentence or utterance. In PMG, however, the syntactic notion of Subject is considered unapplicable in sentences where there is an actor involved, because the missionaries rightly saw that this level does not in any way contribute to the pragmatic presentation of these States of Affairs. Therefore, in FG the level of Subject (and Object) should be dismissed as well.