14

Austronesian

Tagalog and Indonesian

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14.1 Introduction

Many Austronesian languages display *categorial ambiguity* and unexpected patterning across major word classes that are often more strictly delineated in other language families. The Austronesian family comprises over 1,200 languages spoken across Maritime Southeast Asia and the Pacific, from Madagascar in the west to Polynesia in the east. Various languages within this family, specifically the western Austronesian languages known as *Philippine-type* and the Polynesian languages, are well known for their lack of clear morphological distinctions between canonical lexical categories (see Starosta, Pawley, and Reid 1982; Himmelmann 1991; 2005; Mosel and Hovdhaugen 1992; Broschart 1997; Vonen 1997; Mosel 2023). This morphological ambiguity could be interpreted as null conversion or inherent precategoriality, and has consequently generated significant debate in the literature (e.g. Gil 1994; Kaufman 2009a; Ross 2009; Foley 2014; Chen 2017).

This chapter is structured as follows: Section 14.2 reviews four types of categorial ambiguity (noun–verb, verb–adjective, verb–adverb, and adjective–noun). Sections 14.3 and 14.4 overview such ambiguity in Tagalog and several Indonesian languages, and discuss variation in categorial ambiguity in Austronesian. Section 14.5 discusses how these patterns of ambiguity may be understood as conversion from a broader typological perspective and outlines diachronic approaches to the ambiguity and issues for further research. Unless otherwise specified, the data come from fieldwork on Tagalog, Hiligaynon, and Puyuma.

14.2 Patterns of multifunctionality in Austronesian

In discussing lexical category and derivation, a clear division between root classes and word classes must be made, as the domains may show distinct patterns and flexibility in one area and not the other. In the smaller domain, we are interested

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in whether event-denoting, entity-denoting and property-denoting roots have a predetermined morphological potential or whether there exists a certain flexibility between two or more of these categories. In the larger domain, we are interested in whether words with a canonical verbal profile require an extra syntactic layer to fulfil modificational and argumental functions, and similarly whether there is syntactic evidence for adjectives[1] being unmarked modifiers and nouns being unmarked arguments. If there is apparent flexibility, we can then ask whether there exists evidence of null conversion, a process of deriving one category from another, or some other explanation for multifunctional behaviour.

14.2.1 Noun–verb ambiguities

A hallmark of Austronesian languages is a weak morphosyntactic differentiation between nouns and verbs (Starosta, Pawley, and Reid 1982; Broschart 1997; Kaufman 2009b; Gil 2009; Mosel 2023). The ambiguity is often manifested bidirectionally in these languages: Clear cases of action-depicting predicates may occupy argument positions, and clear cases of entity-depicting nouns may surface as predicates.

In many Austronesian languages, a notionally action-depicting word may freely surface in an argument position and function as an argument. In Paiwan, for example, verbal complex forms such as *kan-en* (affixed with the Patient Voice affix *-en*) function as predicates in sentence-initial position (1a). In the postverbal argument position, the same form functions as an accusative-marked object (1b). In the Austronesian literature (Ross 2009; 2012; Blust and Chen 2017), this is commonly referred to as *nominalizer-voice affix homophony*, whenever the same affix (e.g. *-en*) attaches to a root (e.g. *kan* 'eat') to function in either predicate or argument, as in the following examples of Atayal:

(1) a **n-niq-un** maku' na' para' qasa.
RED-eat-PV 1SG.GEN still muntjac that
'I am still going to eat that muntjac.' (ODFL)

b **n-niq-un**.
RED-eat-PV
'{food / thing to be eaten}' (ODFL)

Such noun–verb homophony is an integral and productive aspect of the grammar of Tagalog and other Austronesian languages known as the *Philippine-type*,

[1] In this section, 'noun', 'verb', and 'adjective' refer to notional categories that correspond to semantic prototypes (Croft 2000). We only attempt to substantiate such labels in Section 14.2.

which feature a typologically rare voice system that employs a four-way distinction between what is commonly referred to as actor, patient, locative, and instrumental voice.[2]

Not only can verbs appear in argument positions in Austronesian languages but clear cases of nouns may also function as predicates in Austronesian languages.

14.2.2 Adjective ambiguities

A second broad type of multifunctional behaviour widely attested in Austronesian languages is seen with property-denoting words. In addition to their modifier functions, these adjectives may function as predicates or arguments.

Adjectives may function as modifiers of nouns (2a) and as predicates (2b) without any overt morphological derivation, as in Hiligaynon:

(2) a ang basa nga bayo.
PIVOT wet LK shirt
'the wet shirt'

b basa ang bayo.
wet PIVOT shirt
'The shirt is wet.'

There is also a distributional overlap in many languages between adjectives and nouns, as in Puyuma: *ma-trina* 'big' appears in sentence-initial position as a predicate in (3a), whereas in (3b) it functions as a nominal, marked with the definite case marker *na*:

(3) a Ma-trina na { suwan / aputr / buna }.
AV.STAT-big DEF.PIVOT { dog / flower / yam }
'The dog/flower/yam is big.'

b Sagar=ku kana ma-trina.
like.AV=1SG.PIVOT DEF.ACC AV.STAT-big
'I like the big one.'

Adjective–noun ambiguity is widespread in Oceanic languages. In Hawaiian, for example, attributive verbs function as adjectives when they follow a noun (4a–b). These modifiers can, in turn, function as nouns when preceded by an article (4c):

[2] Following the convention in the literature, the syntactically prominent phrase is glossed as *pivot*.

(4) a Maikaʻi ia mea.
good aforementioned thing
'This (aforementioned) thing is good.'

b he kanaka maikaʻi
ART man good
'a good man'

c Inā ʻoe i hele mai nei me ka maikaʻi …
if 2SG if go DIR PST with DET good
'If you had come here with good [intentions] … '
(Elbert and Pukui 1979: 110, 49, 92)

14.2.3 Adverb–verb ambiguity

Austronesian languages may also exhibit multifunctionality between verbs and adverbs, hence they are commonly referred to as *adverbial verbs*. In the relevant languages, manner adverbs may function as predicates and carry affixal morphology known as *Philippine-type voice*, as verbs do. Compare the Puyuma actor voice-marked predicate in (5a) with the actor voice-marked adverbial in (5b):

(5) a trima=ku dra kiping adaman.
buy<AV>=1SG.PIVOT INDF.ACC clothes yesterday
'I bought clothes yesterday.'

b trakatrakaw=ku beray kana walak dra
secretly<AV>=1SG.PIVOT DEFV.give DEF.ACC child INDF.ACC
kuraw adaman.
fish yesterday
'I secretly gave the child some fish yesterday.'

14.3 The Tagalog prototype

The morphosyntactic flexibility of Austronesian languages shown above is explored below to identify patterns and limits in Tagalog for its uniqueness (14.3.1), and in non-Philippine languages (14.3.2), which may behave similarly despite their typological differences.

14.3.1 The root level

Austronesian languages, especially Central Philippine languages like Tagalog, challenge traditional theories of lexical category on several fronts. This is exemplified on the root level in (6) to (8) with three roots that would a priori be taken as canonically event-denoting, entity-denoting, and property-denoting:

(6) $\sqrt{\text{EVENT}}$

a kain
eat
'eating/eaten thing'

b ma-kain
ADJ-eat
'voracious'

c k<um>ain
<AV>eat
'to eat'

(7) $\sqrt{\text{ENTITY}}$

a bato
stone
'stone'

b ma-bato
ADJ-stone
'stony'

c b<um>ato
<AV>stone
'to throw (a stone)'

(8) $\sqrt{\text{PROPERTY}}$

a ganda
beauty
'beauty'

b ma-ganda
ADJ-beauty
'to become beautiful'

c g<um>anda
<AV>beauty
'become beautiful'

The adjectival *ma-* prefix can attach to all three roots to produce a property-denoting word, and the verbal infix <*um*> can attach to all three roots to produce an event-denoting word. All three roots can appear in their bare form with an entity-denotation. Thus, Tagalog appears not to classify roots as verbal, nominal, or adjectival, nor does it appear to use dedicated derivational morphology, but this does not mean that Tagalog roots just belong to a primordial, precategorial lexical soup. There is, for example, a strict classification in two types of property-denoting roots, according to whether they can take the uninflected adjectival *ma-* prefix, or must take a prosodic morpheme to form resultative-type adjectives. The unusual Central Philippine system seems to be cut across roots of property and event-denoting words that appear to have a nominal meaning, at least in their bare form. Kaufman (2009a) gives the examples in Table 14.1 for what are expected to be event-denoting roots.

Table 14.1 Tagalog root meanings

English	Tagalog	Root	Root translation
'to run'	t<um>akbo	takbo	'a run, pace'
'to eat'	k<um>ain	kain	'eating, meal'
'to think'	mag-isip	isip	'thought, thinking'
'to kill'	p<um>atay	patay	'corpse'
'to see'	ma-kita	kità	'visible thing'
'to destroy'	s<um>irà	sirà	'destroyed part'
'to break'	ma-basag	basag	'a break'
'to walk'	l<um>akad	lakad	'a walk, an errand'

Source: Kaufman (2009a: 12).

Do the nominal meanings of notionally event-denoting roots represent a different way of viewing the world or do they simply undergo null conversion into nouns? The latter, suggested by Chung (2012: 48) is shown in (9), where an obligatory null affix converts roots of various types into nouns:

(9) A null nominalization approach to Tagalog root meaning

a bigay-Ø
give$^{\text{EVENT}}$-V>N
'gift'

b patay-Ø
kill$^{\text{EVENT}}$-V>N
'corpse'

c ganda-∅
beautiful^{PROP}-Adj>N
'beauty'

d saya-∅
happy^{PROP}-Adj>N
'happiness'

Without confirmatory evidence for the underlying root types, null conversion has little or no explanatory value. De Guzman (1996) gives evidence that event-denoting roots are in fact verbal: Tagalog possesses an iterative construction where a bare root is syntactically reduplicated, the reduplicant being introduced by the genitive case marker, as in (10a). Property and entity-denoting roots cannot give rise to this construction, as seen in (10b) and (10c), respectively:

(10) a Bili nang bili ng saging ang bata.
buy GEN buy GEN banana PIVOT child
'The child keeps buying bananas.'

b *Tangkad nang tangkad ang bata.
tall GEN tall PIVOT child
(for 'The child keeps on being tall.')

c *Maestra nang maestra si Maria.
teacher GEN teacher PIVOT Maria
(for 'Maria keeps on being a teacher.')

Core morphology most commonly associated with a particular lexical category has apparent derivational power over roots that do not belong to that category. Peripheral morphology does not always have the same effect, especially when it lacks a core categorial affix as one of its components. Two similar roots, *yaman* 'wealth' and *pera* 'money', constitute a minimal pair for this purpose. Both roots can form adjectival words with the addition of *ma-*, as in (11b) and (12b), and the adjectives can be further prefixed with the superlative prefix *pinaka-*, as in (11c) and (12c). Other adjectival formations that do not involve *ma-*, such as the intensive, which is formed by direct prefixation of *napaka-* to the root, only combine with the naturally property-denoting root, as in (11d), and not with the derived adjective, as shown in (12d):

(11) Property-denoting root as adjective

a yaman
wealth
'wealth'

b Ma-yaman siya.
ADJ-wealth 3SG.PIVOT
'S/he is rich.'

c Siya ang pinaka-ma-yaman.
3SG.PIVOT PIVOT SUPER-ADJ-wealth
'S/he is the richest.'

d Napaka-yaman niya!
INT-wealth 3SG.GEN
'How rich s/he is!'

(12) Entity-denoting root as adjective

a pera
money
'money'

b Ma-pera siya.
ADJ-money 3SG.PIVOT
'S/he is moneyed.'

c Siya ang pinaka-ma-pera.
3SG.PIVOT PIVOT SUPER-ADJ-money
'S/he is the most moneyed.'

d *Napaka-pera niya!
INT-money 3SG.GEN
(for 'How moneyed she is!)

The same generalization holds on a larger syntactic level as well. Adjectival constructions that make use of bare roots may only be built on those roots that are naturally property-denoting. For instance, the exclamative construction shown in (13) embeds a bare property-denoting root within a DP and expresses the notional subject as a genitive possessor:

(13) Ang yaman niya!
PIVOT wealth 3SG.GEN
'How rich s/he is!'

Despite appearing in this nominal structure, the root still maintains adjectival properties, most notably the ability of showing number agreement with a plural subject through CV-reduplication, a quality that is restricted to adjectives. Consider (14):

(14) Plural CV-reduplication with plain and exclamative adjectives

a Ma-ya∼yaman sila.
ADJ-PL∼wealth 3PL.PIVOT
'They are rich.'

b Ang ya∼yaman nila!
PIVOT PL∼wealth 3PL.GEN
'How rich they are!'

In comparison, the bare exclamative construction cannot apply to entity-denoting roots such as *pera*. While (15) is not ungrammatical, it has the interpretation of a simple DP, without the claim that the notional subject is 'moneyed' (i.e. 'rich'):

(15) Ang pera nila!
PIVOT wealth 3PL.GEN
'Their money!' (Not 'How moneyed they are!')

While CV-reduplication can be induced on such an entity-denoting root, as seen in (16a), this ability is strictly dependent on the overt presence of the adjectival prefix *ma-*, as in (16b), which contrasts with property-denoting roots, as seen in (16b):

(16) Plural CV-reduplication with plain and exclamative adjectives

a Ma-pe∼pera sila.
ADJ-PL∼money 3PL.PIVOT
'They are moneyed.'

b *Ang pe∼pera nila!
PIVOT PL∼money 3PL.GEN
(for 'How moneyed they are!')

The picture that emerges is that *ma-*, which is required for most property-denoting predicates in Central Philippine languages, also has the ability to convert non-property-denoting roots into adjectives. A similar pattern emerges with the prefix *pala-* 'aficionado of', as it applies to bare roots without any

categorizing morphology. Here, we find that *pala-* attaches to event-denoting roots naturally but generally excludes entity-denoting and property-denoting roots (with some interesting exceptions, cf. Himmelmann 1987: 81).

A universalist approach to Tagalog could posit that there are, at the very least, adjectival, verbal, and nominal roots but that these all surface as nouns when used in their bare form through a process of null conversion. Furthermore, the normal morphology required by these categories on the word level (e.g. voice morphology for verbs, the *ma-* prefix for adjectives) has the power to convert any of the major lexical categories into the type normally selected for by the root. This still leaves open the question of why all roots would require null conversion into nouns when used in their bare form. Kaufman (2009a) notes an additional problem for this approach in that verbs based on loanwords almost always take a nominal form of the root. This is exemplified in Table 14.2, where we find that verbs built on Spanish loans regularly take a root corresponding to the nominal form in Spanish.

Table 14.2 Tagalog verbs based on loan nouns

Tagalog verb	**Gloss**	**Source**
mag-trabaho	'to work'	Es. noun *trabajo*
mag-preno	'to brake'	Es. noun *freno*
mag-piyesta	'to party'	Es. noun *fiesta*
<um>asenso	'to ascend'	Es. noun *ascenso*
mag-syampu	'to shampoo'	En. noun *shampoo*
mag-swimming	'to swim'	En. gerund *swimming*
mag-iskawting	'to scout'	En. gerund *scouting*
manansing	'to take advantage (a chance)'	En. gerund *'chancing'*

An obligatory process of null conversion from bare roots to nouns in Tagalog cannot account for loan phenomena, which seem to suggest that nominal roots are simply a property of Tagalog rather than a process. If this is the case, a viable alternative is to treat all roots, including notionally property-denoting and event-denoting ones, as nouns, but to posit that semantic distinctions within these nouns determines their grammaticality when combined with various morphological processes.

14.3.2 The sentence level

At the sentence level, Austronesian languages of the Philippines are well known for their near total disregard of lexical categories when it comes to fulfilling the functions of predicate, argument, and modifier. There is little to no evidence

that particular word classes are unmarked in one of these basic functions. Words that we may be tempted to classify as nouns, verbs, or adjectives for their morphology may serve in all three functions without any differentiation. A number of formal analyses beginning with Guilfoyle, Hung, and Travis (1992) bifurcate the clause structure of Philippine-type languages into a predicate phrase and a pivot phrase, as in (17). Schachter and Otanes (1972), De Wolf (1988), Himmelmann (2008), and Kaufman (2009a) further claim that this bifurcation is essentially copular and that phrases of (nearly) any lexical category may occupy the predicate position as well as the pivot position, as illustrated in Figure 14.1. This differs from English and many other Indo-European languages in which the subject position must be occupied by an NP/DP and the predicate must contain a VP.

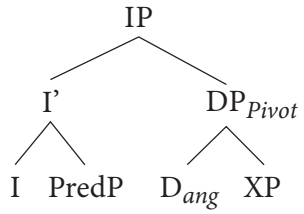

Fig. 14.1 Bifurcated clause structure of Philippine-type languages.

The minimal triplets in (17) and (18) show the symmetry in what morphological categories may occupy the predicate and argument positions, respectively:

(17) Tl. Verbs, nouns and adjectives as predicates

a K<um>a∼kain ang bata.
<AV.INIT>IMPRF∼eat PIVOT child
'The child is eating.'

b Guro ang bata.
teacher PIVOT child
'The child is a teacher.'

c Ma-tangkad ang bata.
ADJ-tall PIVOT child
'The child is tall.'

(18) Tl. Verbs, nouns and adjectives as predicates

a Bata ang k<um>a∼kain.
child PIVOT <AV.INIT>IMPRF∼eat
'The eating one is a child.'

b Bata ang guro.
child PIVOT teacher
'The teacher is a child.'

c Bata ang ma-tangkad.
child PIVOT ADJ-tall
'The tall one is a child.'

To the best of our knowledge, among over 150 Austronesian languages of the Philippines, none have been documented as showing an extra layer of relativization for structures such as (20a) or (20b), where an apparent non-noun functions as an argument. Similarly, no documented language of the Philippines has been shown to employ a copula in structures such as (19b) or (19c), where an apparent non-verb functions as predicate. This remarkable unanimity across a range of otherwise diverse languages suggests that we are dealing here not with derivational layers that happen to be covert but with a more profound structural difference between these languages and those of the Indo-European type.

The symmetry runs deeper yet as the modifier function is just as agnostic to lexical category as the predicate and argument functions. Consider (19), where apparent verbs, nouns, and adjectives serve as modifiers to a noun without any extra derivational layer for the non-adjectives:

(19) Tl. Verbs, nouns, and adjectives as modifiers

a ang batang k<um>a∼kain
PIVOT child:LK <AV.INIT>IMPRF∼eat
'the eating child'

b ang batang guro
PIVOT child:LK teacher
'the child teacher'

c ang batang ma-tangkad
PIVOT child:LK ADJ-tall
'the tall child'

An intriguing alternative to positing that all categories in Tagalog are omni-predicative, omni-argumentative, and omni-modificational is to analyse all argumentative and modificational contexts as equally *derived*. On this analysis, it is not that all categories are equally good modifiers but rather that all categories are equally bad modifiers and require relativization via the linker. There is some credible morphological evidence for this approach. Note that the two primary determiners in Tagalog, *ang* PIVOT and *nang* GEN (*ng* in Filipino orthography) both end in the telltale velar nasal, the post-vocalic allomorph of the linker. Reid (2002) analyses such markers as containing a light noun (simply *a*) followed by the

linker, which serves as a relativizer for whatever category follows, thus offering an explanation as to why headless NPs are ubiquitous in Philippine languages.

There is no parallel evidence to explain the omni-predicative nature of Philippine languages, which tend to lack auxiliaries and other markers of verbalization, but this property has been described for many unrelated languages throughout the world. Rather than null conversion, then, an approach making use of traditional categories must posit a null functional element (i.e. a copula) required for basic predication.

Under normal circumstances, arguments are always preceded by a case-marking determiner in Tagalog and most other Central Philippine languages. If it is the determiners themselves that pave the way for null conversion, we would expect contexts in which arguments appear in their bare form might show their true categorial colours.

14.4 Indonesian and other languages of the Indo-Malaysian archipelago

Indonesian and many other Austronesian languages south of the Philippines differ from Tagalog with regard to how roots are categorized and how bare roots are employed. Despite differences with Philippine languages, Indonesian cannot be said to display an Indo-European type of alignment between root categories, phrasal categories, and syntactic functions, although, as we will show in the following, it may appear one step closer to such a system.

Linkers and obligatory case-marking determiners, which represent a conservative feature of Philippine languages, are lost in most languages south of the Philippines in favour of either a more isolating typology or a more head-marking typology. If these elements are at the root of apparent Philippine null conversion, we expect this flexibility described for Tagalog to simultaneously dissipate, and in broad strokes this is what we find (for an alternative view on isolating typology and categorial flexibility, cf. Gil 2005a; 2005b; Conners, Bowden, and Gil 2015).

14.4.1 The root level

Davies (2010) notes cases where root class determines morphological potential in Madurese following a rather traditional division of noun, verb, and adjective, e.g. nouns can be prefixed with *sa-* 'all, same, one' (20a–b), but verbs and adjectives cannot (20c–f). Notably, the Tagalog cognate of this prefix (sometimes augmented with the locative voice *-an* suffix), albeit unproductive, has no such restriction. As seen in (21), the complement of *sang-* can include voice- and aspect-marked forms such as *tinakpan* and *sinukob*, which are built upon event-denoting roots, as well as event-denoting roots without aspectual inflection, such as *libot* 'wander', in

addition to entity-denoting roots such as *daigdig*. The Tagalog prefix contains the linker in a frozen form (/sa-N/ 'one-LK') and thus accords well with our previous generalization on the correlation between the linker and categorial flexibility. As it turns out, this is true both on the phrasal level as well as in the word-internal sphere:

(20) Ma. a sa-bengko
all-house
'all the houses/same house'

b sa-saba
all-field
'all the fields/same field'

c *sa-baca
all-read

d *sa-toles
all-write

e *sa-penter
all-smart

f *sa-sala
all-bad

(21) Tl. a san-t<in>akp-an
one:LK-<INIT>cover-LV
'all that is covered'

b san-s<in>ukob-∅
one:LK-<INIT>shelter-∅
'all that is sheltered'

c san-libut-an
one:LK-wander-LV
'all that is wandered'

d san-daigdig-an
one:LK-world-LV
'the whole world'

e sang-ayon
one:LK-accord
'agree'

The division of roots into verbal and nominal categories in many languages of the Indo-Malaysian region can also be gleaned from the greater resistance of entity-denoting roots to direct affixation of verbal morphology. For instance, the Indonesian root *orang* 'person' cannot take voice morphology without further derivation (22a). Compare this to its Tagalog counterpart in (23), where the analagous entity-denoting root takes actor voice morphology without further derivation:

(22) Id. a *meng-orang
AV-person

b meng-orang-kan
AV-person-APPL
'to treat like a person'

c ?mem-per-orang-kan
AV-CAUS-person-APPL
'to personify' (English-based neologism)

(23) Tl. a t<um>ao
<AV>person
'to man (a post/place)'

b tau-hin
person-PV
'to be manned, treated as a person'

The dichotomy between entity-denoting roots such as *lagu* 'song' in (24) and event-denoting ones like *nyanyi* 'sing' in (25), which is relatively common in Indonesian, appears to be extremely rare in Philippine-type languages. The nominal root *lagu* cannot take the nominalizer *-an* (24b), nor can it take voice morphology without further derivation, as in (24c). Rather, to form a verb, it requires an applicative to imbue it with argument structure, as in (24d). The verbal root *nyanyi*, on the other hand, can take the nominalizer *-an*, as in (25b), and plain voice morphology, as in (25c), as well as applicatives (25d):

(24) Indonesian nominal root pattern

a lagu
'song'

b *lagu-an
song-NMLZR

c *me-lagu
AV-song

d me-lagu-kan
AV-song-APPL
'to sing a song'

(25) Indonesian verbal root pattern

a nyanyi
'sing'

b nyanyi-an
sing-NMLZR
'song'

c me-nyanyi
AV-sing
'to sing'

d me-nyanyi-kan
AV-sing-APPL
'to sing a song'

There is no shortage of apparent entity-denoting roots in Indonesian that can take voice morphology. To take just two examples out of hundreds, consider (26a–b):

(26) a *melantai*
'AV:floor'
'to install a floor' or 'to hit the floor' (as in a performer or dancer)

b *mengatap*
'AV:roof'
'to install a roof'

Based on this type of data (with and without voice morphology), Gil (2005a; 2005b) has argued that putative morphological restrictions in Malay/Indonesian are due more to a failure of the imagination rather than to categorial restrictions. In other words, if a form like *mengorang* is deemed unacceptable, it is only because the speaker is unable to conceive of an appropriate context for its use at the moment, not because of a mechanistic mismatch in the grammar. This explanation holds true for N>V conversion in English, where the average speaker may not accept verbs like 'to sky', 'to street', or 'to tree', although English grammar clearly licenses such formations, especially with particular technical meanings. This may

be the case for colloquial varieties of Malay/Indonesian as well. Nonetheless, the relative dearth and perceived unacceptability of potential Indonesian words based on very common roots such as **mengorang* 'AV:person', **mendaun* 'AV:leaf', **mengapi* 'AV:fire' in comparison to their better attested Tagalog counterparts (i.e. *t<um>ao* '<AV>person', *ʔd<um>ahon* '<AV>leaf', *<um>apoy* '<AV>fire') has not been explained.

14.4.2 The sentence level

To our knowledge, the vast majority of Austronesian languages of the Indo-Malaysian archipelago appear omni-predicative and copulas dedicated to turning non-verbs into predicates are rarely encountered. It seems to be a safe generalization that omni-predicativity is far more widespread than omni-argumentivity in Austronesian languages. Lamaholot, a Central Malayo-Polynesian language of Flores, allows all major lexical categories to play the role of predicate, as shown in (27). However, it is much more restrictive in what categories are allowed to fill the subject position (see Nagaya 2012: 140 for details):

(27) a ata Lewotobi plaʔe.
person Lewotobi run
'The Lewotobi villager ran.'

b ata Lewotobi belәʔ.
person Lewotobi big
'The Lewotobi villager is big.'

c teʔẽ kmiʔe.
DEM.PROX.NMZ walnut
'This is a walnut.'

As noted earlier, the majority of the Austronesian languages south of the Philippines have lost the historical linker, which signalled modification between words of any two categories. One consequence of this is the development of adjectives into a category of unmarked modifiers and the concomitant development of a dedicated relativizer, which is required to introduce non-adjectival modification, as in (28):

(28) Indonesian verbs, nouns, and adjectives as modifiers

a lelaki *(yang) lari
man REL run
'the man who ran'

b lelaki *(yang) guru
man REL teacher
'the man who is a teacher'

c lelaki (yang) tinggi
man REL tall
'the tall man'

14.5 Conclusion

Categorial flexibility (see Farrell 2001; Bauer and Valera, this volume, for an overview) can be accounted for through null conversion on the word level and other aspects of which may be more amenable to an analysis of null predicators and relativizers in several Austronesian languages.

In Tagalog, which may be representative of a Philippine prototype:

1) lexical roots of all conceptual types obtain an unexpected entity interpretation when used in their bare form;
2) the morphology associated with event-denoting predicates and property-denoting predicates, even that which appears inflectional, displays few selectional criteria and apparent derivational power;
3) peripheral functions (e.g. imperatives) tend to distinguish categories that plain declarative contexts cannot;
4) the structure of Philippine case markers, many of which can be analysed as containing a dummy noun followed by the linker, yields flexibility in what categories may function as arguments;
5) There scarcely exists morphology dedicated to verbalization, nominalization, or adjectivalization, but functional morphology that shows few if any hallmarks of being derivational (e.g. Tl. *mga* PL, *ma*-ADJ, voice morphology) does appear to facilitate conversion.

Our generalizations for Indonesian and other Austronesian languages outside of the Philippines are tentatively given as follows:

1) most Austronesian languages are omni-predicative, allowing noun phrases and adjective phrases to function as predicates without additional conversion;
2) non-verbal predicates do not show all the properties of verbal predicates, especially with regard to the use of TAM categories;

3) more categorial restrictions exist on arguments and modifiers. Non-nominal arguments and non-adjectival modifiers must often be introduced by a dedicated relativizer, a category which does not exist in Philippine languages.

All in all, irrefutable arguments for conversion as opposed to categorial flexibility are not easy to come by in Austronesian languages. A thorough exploration of persistent idiomatic meanings and morphophonological signatures is still lacking. Ambiguity beyond noun–verb homophony and conversion (as opposed to general flexibility) has also been largely overlooked in Austronesian languages. Bridging these two fields offers the potential for better understanding of conversion.