

Chapter 1

A Framework for All that is to Follow

This is not a book of exercises but it can replace one or supplement one for students who want to master Cebuano or just use Cebuano description as a model for learning how to describe languages. There should be no prerequisites to using this book other than the ability to read it with care and interest. If you notice there is no Introduction, I wrote several of them but there is no time left for fluff; if more people don't start taking this language seriously, it is going to be swallowed up by Tagalog and English and turned into a pidgin-dialect, which would be a tragedy for the language that claims more native speakers than any language in the 7100 islands of the Philippines archipelago.

Now let's get on with it.

There is a basic sentence pattern in Cebuano that is unique, that is, not a feature of European languages. If you learn it now, it will open up this whole language for you. It helps you understand every type of sentence that is complete and grammatical; even if this structure doesn't apply to some sentence, by having the same framework for all sentence types, it provides a consistency of viewpoint by which different sentence types can be contrasted.

Much of the information presented in this chapter will be repeated in more detail in the next few chapters. Chapter 3 in particular presents this same information but taking five times more pages to do it. Chapters 2 and 4 support each other in the same way. Once you have digested the first four chapters you will already be able to start translating intermediate-level Cebuano, using the rest of the chapters for reference as you need them to expand your abilities, or just studying them for fun because you are a serious student who wants to know everything. Once you finish Chapter 4 you can skip around the rest of the book as much as you want. This book is not finished, I haven't worked on it since 2008, and is a work in progress. But it is meant to be accurate and usable, whether perfect or not. It is especially meant to be a lot better than anything else available. My goal if I can ever find the time is to redo it from the beginning without all the grammatical jargon.

There are four POSITION CLASSES available for each sentence, which we will show as a simple table, the SENTENCE TEMPLATE. The parts of all sentences occur in this order with apparent exceptions that occur regularly according to simple rules. Here is the sentence template:

PREPOSIT	POSTPOSIT	COMPLEMENT	LINKER
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The default word order of Cebuano is different from European languages such as English. For example, the verb in a verbal sentence comes first in Cebuano. This ordering of sentence constituents is one of the things that defines the characteristic rhythm of Cebuano. Verbs are one kind of preposit.

There are several types of sentences that each "predicate" differently—that's what makes each type unique from the others. A verbal sentence expresses its message or *predicates* using a verb. The PREDICATE in all sentence types tells us what kind of words we need for subject and object, or COMPLEMENTS. The complements are the kinds of words needed to complete the sentence, and the predicate is what prescribes these words as well as the grammar that relates them to each other so the sentence meaning is clear.

Another type of sentence is an adjectival sentence, in which the predicate is an adjective. The adjective selects the complements and assigns grammar. There will be no verb in the main part of an adjectival sentence. All the sentence types follow the same pattern: the word type that is predicate also names the sentence type in the terminology we use; in the sentence, the predicate defines, selects, and arranges the functions and relationships of those words—complements—needed to complete the sentence.

Here are a few examples, showing the default word order, “predicate first”. We call the first sentence position the PREPOSIT position class. The complement position class is for subjects and objects.

PREPOSIT	POSTPOSIT	COMPLEMENT	LINKER
Moadto		kamí sa lungsod.	
Pulá		ang prutas.	
Lalaki		siyá.	

These examples will now be explained.

Moadto kamí sa lungsod. We will go to town.

Since it has a verb, it’s a verbal sentence. The verb is predicate so it is in preposit position. Every sentence has to have a predicate. Many complete sentences in Cebuano have only one word: the predicate is required and sometimes no complements are needed.

Verbal sentences predicate differently according to SEMANTIC VERB CLASS.

(The word “semantic” refers to “meaning”. Words like “subject” and “object” don’t refer to meaning in Cebuano; a “subject” doesn’t always “do the action of the verb” as we have been taught about English. So we need two ways of describing complements (the word types prescribed or *selected* by the predicate to complete the sentence). Subjects and objects are GRAMMATICAL RELATIONS. They fulfill structural functions by following grammar rules. The functions they perform are marked on them with prefixes, suffixes, or words that precede them as MARKERS of grammar. Grammatical Relations aren’t about what the word means; for example an object isn’t always “the thing that the action is done to” as we learned about English. It is important to learn the difference between functional categories used to describe complements (Grammatical Relations) and meaning categories used to describe complements, which are called SEMANTIC ROLES. For example, in very general terms, a DOER is a catch-all Semantic Role, the thing or person that does the action of the verb. And a DOEE is a catch-all Semantic Role, the thing or person that the action is done to. In Cebuano a subject or an object can be either a doer or a doee, depending on the verb’s voice.)

To move on we will now explain semantic verb classes.

The verb *moadto* “go” is a motion verb.

The verb *gihatag* “give” is a conveyance verb because something is being moved or conveyed from one place or person to another. The verb *mipalit* “buy” is a conveyance verb. Verbs meaning “sell, take, carry, send, etc.” are all conveyance verbs because something is moving or being conveyed.

The verb *nahiapas* “follow and catch up with someone” is a motion verb. The conveyor is moving, that is, conveying himself, so there is no separate word (participant) for theme (the thing being moved).

There are several different verb classes, each one with its characteristic ROLE CALL. Each verb class selects certain Semantic Roles to complete its role call: a conveyance verb (such as *hatag* “give”) prescribes a set of complements—its role call—that includes a CONVEYOR, a THEME (something moved or conveyed), and sometimes a PLACON (a place or a person that is the destination of the conveyance).

On the other hand, the verb *ádto* “go” has fewer PARTICIPANTS. (Participants are complements and they refer to the same kinds of words. Sometimes they are called arguments. The difference between the correct use of the three terms “complement, participant, argument” is not very important to this discussion.) The sentence using a motion verb such as a verb meaning “go” obligatorily selects only CONVEYOR (the person or thing that moves itself) and sometimes PLACON (the person or place that is destination of the moving.)

Other verb classes will select different Semantic Roles. For example, *patáy* “kill” doesn’t involve moving a THEME to a PLACON; instead it involves an act whose doer—AGENT—permanently or seriously changes the condition of another participant, called PATIENT. Sensory verbs on the other hand such as *nakità* “see” select a doer that is EXPERIENCER and a doee that is STIMULUS.

Summarizing what we now know about Semantic Roles: doer roles include conveyor, agent, and experiencer. Doee roles include theme, patient, and stimulus. Sometimes doer roles are subject—according to how they are marked grammatically—and sometimes doer roles are object. Adjunct semantic roles exist such as placon—a person or place that serves as the location of action—and INSTRUMENT—the thing used as an inanimate agent or tool to perform the action. Sometimes adjunct roles are marked subject, sometimes object. The rules for how this works are very fascinating and will be taught in depth throughout this study. Different verb classes select different Semantic Roles as their complements.

The function of “what to mark subject” is called VOICE. In English we have only active and passive voice; in Cebuano there are many voices, each named after a Semantic Role that is assigned the subject Grammatical Relation.

Returning to our example of a verbal sentence with *moadto* as its predicate:

PREPOSIT	POSTPOSIT	COMPLEMENT	LINKER
Moadto		kamí sa lungsod.	

kamí is one of the words that means “we”.

sa lungsod means “to the town”.

Moadto kamí sa lungsod. We will go to town.

The verb *ádto* “go” selects a conveyor as doer but no theme since the conveyor is moving himself.

The placon is the place gone to. To summarize what we know about this sentence:

moadto = predicate, selects the complements {*kamí* = conveyor, *sa lungsod* = placon}.

To complete the picture for now, we’ll mention in passing that *kamí* is a subject and the word *sa* preceding *lungsod* marks *lungsod* as object. The root of the verb is *ádto* and the affix *mo-* attached to the verb root tells us that we are using one of the doer voices, that is, a doer role is going to be subject.

Since *kami* and *sa lungsod* are the complements of the verb, they go in complement position in the sentence template. The sentence template defines overall sentence structure and the complement slot can contain both subject and object.

The next example is an adjectival sentence since the adjective *pulá* “red” is its predicate.

PREPOSIT	POSTPOSIT	COMPLEMENT	LINKER
Pulá		ang prutas.	

Pulá ang prutas. The fruit is red.
ang prutas means “the fruit”.

An adjectival sentence in Cebuano selects only a subject as its complement; the adjectival predicate describes or modifies the subject by adding to its meaning. The reason we call *ang prutas* a subject is because of its grammatical marking. If it was marked with *sa* we might call it an object; but the word *ang* marks subjects. For example if we substituted “the man” for “we” in the first example, since the doer of the verb *moadto* is a subject, the word meaning “man” (*tawo*) would be marked subject by *ang* which usually can be translated “the”. *Moadto ang tawo sa lungsod.* The man will go to town.

Besides verbs and adjectives, which are commonly used as predicates in verbal and adjectival sentences respectively, there are nominals. Nominals form a category or words that share common grammatical functions. The category includes nouns, pronouns, and noun phrases. Here are examples of nominals:

prutas, lungsod nouns
ang puláng prutas, “the red fruit” subject noun phrase
sa dakóng lungsod, “the big town” object noun phrase
kami, “we” subject personal pronoun (replaces a subject noun or noun phrase)
kaná, “that, it” subject demonstrative pronoun
siyá, “he, she, it” subject personal pronoun
kaniya, “him, her, it” object personal pronoun
íya, “his, hers, its” possessive personal pronoun or possessive adjective
níya, “his, hers, its” possessive personal pronoun or possessive adjective

A nominal phrase, no matter how long it is, serves as one complement of the predicate—object or subject. It can be replaced with a noun or a pronoun, and vice versa. All complements (except locators) are marked for GRAMMATICAL CASE or just “case”. Case is a different way to spell something depending on (for one) what Grammatical Relation it represents (such as *siyá*, *kaniya*, *íya*). Case has other uses too, such as marking a pronoun as a possessive adjective. This will all be explained in detail later. *Ang, sa* and other words are CASE MARKERS, also known as phrase markers since they precede a nominal (noun phrase of one or more words) and mark its grammatical case.

Ang íyang prutas “his fruit” includes a subject marker *ang* so we know that the nominal is a subject, but the possessive adjective *íya* “his” also modifies the noun. The complement as a whole—the whole nominal or noun phrase—is a subject and *íya* is just an adjective within the phrase. This adjective is not in preposit position so it is not the predicate of the sentence. It is connected to its noun by the LINKER *-ng* which is the short form of the linker *nga*. We’ve already seen these examples of this linker:

ang puláng prutas “the red fruit” subject noun phrase (puláng = pulá + nga)

sa dakóng lungsod “the big town” object noun phrase (dakóng = dakô + nga)

ang íyang prutas “his fruit” subject noun phrase (íyang = íya + nga)

When linking an adjective to a noun like this, *nga* is just joining two words to form a single meaning: red + fruit = “red fruit”. Adjectives and nouns can occur in either order:

ang prutas nga pulá “the red fruit” (subject)

sa lungsod nga dakô “the big town” (object)

ang prutas níya “his fruit” (subject)

In the last phrase, *nga* is not used since *íya* already has a separate form *níya* that is used when it follows the word it modifies.

Nga is used to link other things in Cebuano besides just adjectives and nouns. We will soon look at more complex sentences like the one in the chart below, in which *nga* or some other linker is used to link whole sections of sentences which we analyze in tiers or layers, each tier populating a row of the sentence template:

PREPOSIT	POSTPOSIT	COMPLEMENT	LINKER
Gusto		siyá	nga
moadto.			

Gusto siyáng moadto. He wants to go. (Here the two verbs or PREDICATE PARTNERS *gusto* “want” and *moadto* “go” are linked by *nga*. This will be explained completely below.) In such an application, *nga* is called a PREDICATE LINKER.

For our third sentence type—corresponding to a third predicate type—we will look at this example:

PREPOSIT	POSTPOSIT	COMPLEMENT	LINKER
Lalaki		siyá.	

Lalaki siyá. He is a man.

lalaki is a noun that means “man”. (*Tawo* used above is more generic; sometimes used to mean “man”, it really means “person”.) *Lalaki* is in the same case as subjects but is not a subject; it is a predicate of a sentence type that uses a noun as its predicate. Such sentence types will be described thoroughly later. For now just remember that all predicates and predicate partners always occur in preposit position. There can be two or more preposit in a sentence, and if they aren’t adjacent there will be more than one tier or row in the table; each predicate partner then has its own preposit slot, heading up its own tier. If there is more than one tier, the tiers are linked, as in *Gusto siyáng moadto*. Here the linker *nga* is linking *gusto* and *moadto*, not *siyá* and *moadto*. *Gusto siyá nga* is the first tier and *nga* is there only because there is a second tier; it is the tier structure and the existence of a linker that tells the listener that *gusto* and *moadto* are working together to form a single predicate “want to go.” This will make a lot of sense once you begin to FEEL the common rhythm that underlies every Cebuano sentence.

Case grammar works like this: there is a case—a spelling and marking pattern—and there are its applications, the things it is used for. The case and its applications are not the same thing. For example, the nominative case is used for subjects. Normally there will be only one nominative nominal in a verbal sentence, but some sentences such as those with a noun for a predicate can have two nominals marked by

the nominative case. They are not both subjects. The nominative case is used for not only marking subjects, but also for marking the nominal predicate of a sentence that has a nominal predicate, as well as other uses. The other cases also have more than one use. For example, the genitive case marks possessive adjectives as we saw, which are not Grammatical Relations—not complements, not subjects or objects—but just adjectives. But the same genitive case also marks certain complements—secondary subjects, also called genitive doers—so you have to know the difference between a case and its spelling patterns and the various applications of that case. The dative case is another spelling pattern. It is used to mark objects, which are Grammatical Relations and complements—needed to complete the verb’s meaning. But it is also used to mark adjuncts, for example,

Gihatag níya kanakò ang kwarta dídto sa lungsod. He gave me the money in town.

Here *sa lungsod* is not a complement—you know it isn’t needed to make a complete sentence because it can be omitted and the sentence will still be complete. An adjunct gives information but it doesn’t make or break a sentence. So here, *sa lungsod* is an adjunct, a PLACE ADJUNCT. Marking adjuncts is just another application of the dative case. In the sentence above, we have the following constituents:

gihatag “gave” (theme voice: theme is subject)

níya “he” (secondary subject; doer is genitive in theme voice)

kanakò “me” (dative personal pronoun, object)

ang kwarta “the money” (nominative noun, subject = theme)

dídto “there” (a locator or place pronoun; doesn’t add to the sentence’s meaning in this instance but separates *kwarta* and *sa lungsod* to avoid ambiguity: *...ang kwarta sa lungsod... ..the money of the town...)

sa lungsod “in the town” (place adjunct, dative case)

In the next chapter we will give the charts that have to be constantly referred to and eventually memorized in order for this study to continue productively. The third chapter will give the details of many sentence types with their corresponding predicates, analyzed by the tier structure table or sentence template.

* The asterisk symbol is used to indicate that the following is being presented as wrong or ungrammatical speech. Footnotes will be indicated only by numerals.