

Semiotic Analysis of the Cebuano Particle “a” and “aw”

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Abstract— The study is an attempt to understand the possible semiotic meaning of the Cebuano discourse particles “a” and “aw”. The main source of data are various collections of spoken and written discourses: a corpus of short stories from a Cebuano magazine “Bisaya” and from discussions and entertainment programs from local radio stations. Other data came from ordinary conversations of Cebuano speakers. The markers were identified in the transcripts then classified according to which position they occur in the clauses whether initial, within or final and whether they precede or follow certain word categories like before or after a pronominal. Then their functions are analyzed for possible semiotic meanings. Discussions also provide pronunciation guides to particles that are sounded differently in varying contexts. Included in the analyses is finding out whether or not the intended meaning of the clause changes when the markers are uttered in a dissimilar manner.

The Cebuano language has abundant particles like “a” and “aw” that speakers use in conversations. Most particles are single morphemes and they usually occur at the beginning and at the end of a clause. Some particles change their pronunciation when used in another context, others are prolonged when sounded and some with a glottal catch. Generally, just as the pronunciation is changed, so is the meaning. This is because emotions of both the speaker and the receiver can be affected by the way they sound these markers.

The Cebuano discourse particles “a” and “aw” serve as indicators of the speaker’s mood, attitudes and feelings towards certain messages heard and as important hints or cues that signal the upcoming expression. The absence of discourse markers does not necessarily change the meaning of utterances but they serve significant pragmatic functions in conversation. The identification of these markers is an essential step to fully understand the meaning of Cebuano utterances and would lead to better communication when talking with the Cebuano people using these particles.

Keywords— discourse analysis, semiotic analysis, language communication

I. INTRODUCTION

Semiotics is the study of signs and sign processes, indication, designation, likeness, analogy, allegory, metonymy, metaphor, symbolism, signification, and communication. It is closely related to the field of linguistics, which, for its part, studies the structure and meaning of language more specifically. The semiotic tradition explores the study of signs and symbols as a significant part of communications.

Ferdinand de Saussure argued that language is a system of signs. He posits a relational meaning or value based on the

linguistic system and another meaning or signification that involves the use of linguistic elements in actual situations of utterance. Saussure had a view of society as more than the sum total of the individuals in it and similarly meanings available to social actors cannot be reduced to the sum of subjective perspectives. Linguistics, in effect, addresses itself to social facts and meaning is construed through differences of meaning. Fundamental to this process of grasping meaning through differences is grasping language, such that meaning is being clearly inheres in language.

This study is an attempt of this researcher to understand the possible semiotic meaning of the Cebuano discourse particles “a” and “aw”.

Schiffrin (1987) defines discourse markers, also known as particles, as a linguistic device that speakers use to signal how the upcoming unit of speech or text relates to the current discourse state. They are also a class of short, recurrent linguistic items that generally have little lexical importance but serve significant pragmatic functions in conversation (Andersen,2001).They have a core meaning and their more specific interpretation is 'negotiated' by the context, both linguistic and conceptual (Fraser,1999).

There have been several studies made on discourse markers in various languages. However, some researchers observe that there is no generally agreed upon definition of this term. Even the term “discourse marker” has a variety of other names such as discourse particles, discourse connectives, pragmatic markers, cue phrases and so on (Belis & Zuerey, 2006). Another grey area in the study of discourse markers is the lack of agreement among researchers as to what counts as discourse markers. In English for example, Fraser (1990) proposed a list of 32 discourse markers while Schiffrin (1987) considered only 23. The diversity of their views creates a welcoming atmosphere to explore the topic more.

In the case of the Cebuano language, the above disparity of views is not very much felt. For one reason, the subject on discourse markers has up to this day remained less explored by. The Cebuano language is abundant with particles but up to this day only very few studies have been made to fully examine and investigate them. Discourse markers are pervasive in everyday speech and writing, equally true in the Cebuano language. The identification of these markers is an essential step to fully understand the meaning of utterances and written discourses in Cebuano and better understanding of Cebuano people when talking with them.

The goal of this is paper is the analysis of the different semiotic meanings of the Cebuano particles “a” and “aw” that serve as markers in Cebuano discourse.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

What are the possible semiotic meanings of the Cebuano particles “a” and “aw” as used to mark oral and written Cebuano discourse?

In what positions do they occur in the clauses? Do they occur at the beginning, within or after a clause? Do they come before or after certain word categories?

Do the possible semiotic meanings change as their positions are changed?

4. Do the possible semiotic meanings change as their pronunciations are changed?

The research is based on the conviction that the grammatical structure of a language, its morphology and syntax, exists to facilitate discourse as communication. Thus, the morphosyntax of a language can be explained in terms of its discourse structure. But, conversely, much of the discourse structure must be explained in terms of the use of various features of the morphosyntax. The morphosyntax of a language and its discourse structure can be studied together to the mutual elucidation of both. (Otanés, et al., 1984). For Bakhtin (1984) there is no such thing as autonomous discourse because the elements, once used, are historically and socially situated. Moreover, all elements such as words, turns of phrase, and voices are continually changing. Bakhtin's sense of language as mutable, reversible, contaminable, anti-hierarchical and regenerative. Furthermore, Bakhtin added that when each member of a collective of speakers takes possession of a word, it is not a neutral word of language free from the aspirations and valuations of others, uninhabited of foreign voices. No, he/she receives the word from the voice of another, and the word is filled with that voice. The word arrives in his context from another context which is saturated with other people's interpretation. This statement of Bakhtin may hold true to the state of Cebuano discourse particles “a” and “aw”.

Relative to the semiotic analysis of “a” and “aw”, the researcher anchored the discussion on the Ferdinand de Saussure's conception of semiotics as a general science broader than linguistics that involves analyzing and teaching the characteristics of signs, their roles in society, and the rules that they obey. The sign is a twofold entity that consists of a signifier and a signified. Whereas the signifier embodies the physical dimensions—the shape, sound, and even object hood—of a sign, the signified is the concept that this sign represents. In a sense, the signified is the mental image of a concept, whereas the signifier is the word or phrase used to express that concept. (Krampen, 1987)

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Corpus of Data

The main source of data are various collections of spoken and written discourses: a corpus of short stories from a Cebuano magazine Bisaya and from discussions and entertainment programs from local radio stations. Other data came from ordinary conversations of Cebuano speakers.

B. Procedure

The markers were identified in the transcripts then classified according to which position they occur in the clauses whether initial, within or final and whether they precede or follow certain word categories like before or after a pronominal. Then their functions are analysed for possible semiotic meanings. Discussions also provide pronunciation guides to particles that are sounded differently in varying contexts. Included in the analyses is finding out whether or not the intended meaning of the clause changes when the markers are uttered in a dissimilar manner.

C. Results and Discussion

The following particles as found in the corpus show varying attitudes of the speaker towards certain messages heard. In the discourses below, the glottal catch is represented by a question mark (?) as patterned from Tanangkingsing's work in 2010.

1.1.1. The Cebuano particle a

The particle *a* may occur at the beginning and at the end of a clause. It can come before or after any word. It is sounded differently depending on its function in the clause. In (1), *a* has a prolonged sound. It means that the speaker is trying to figure out what to say as a response to the question asked. It may also mean his unpreparedness to give a ready answer.

(1) S1: *Pila gani to kabuok candidates sa Ms. Universe Sheil, katong grupo ni Shamcey Supsup?*

(How many candidates are there in the Ms. Universe Sheil, the group of Shamcey Supsup?)

S2: *Aaa, murag mga eighty plus. (Aaa, maybe more than eighty.)*

The particle *a* may also mean the speaker's indirect persistence of a demand or request as shown in (2). It has a prolonged sound and a glottal catch.

(2) S1: *Mo request ko Kuya bi kanang disco music. (May I request Kuya, a disco music.)*

S2: *Mellow naman atong music ron Day di na pwede disco.*

(We play only mellow song now (Day), we can't play disco.)

S1: *Aaa ?, sige na Kuya. (Aaa?, come on Kuya.)*

In (3), the particle *a* signals the speaker's opposition to an assertion. It may mean disagreement. It is sounded with a glottal catch and not prolonged. The particle *a* in (4) indicates the speaker's feeling of anger and may mean a warning at the same time. It has a prolonged sound.

(3) S1: *Mo abroad naman daw si Michael Ta. Naa gyuy maghilak sa tago ani. (Michael will go abroad Ta. There must be someone who will cry secretly.)*

S2: *A? siya nalang pod akong hilakan. (A? I won't cry just for him.)*

(4) S1: *Kanaug ba diha Tantan mahulog ka gani. (Get down Tantan you might fall.)*

S2: *Dili man habog Ma. (It's not high Ma.)*

S1: *Aaa nangita gyud ug bali ning bataa. (Aaa this child is looking for fracture.)*

As a clause-final particle, *a* may mean an expression of a complement or an appreciation of something as shown in (5). It

is pronounced with a glottal catch. In (6), the *a* is a mark which may mean the speaker's sudden realization of something.

(5) *Kugihana ni Julius a?, maayo man paliwatan, " pasiaaw ni Arlene diri nako.* ("Julius is hardworking *a?* good for breeding", Arlene jokingly told me.)

(6) *"Nadaot man kaha ang pono ni Bay Arsenio, Aaa, basin gidula-dulaan ni Delfin mentras wala pa mi didto sa baylehan."*

(The sound system of Bay Arsenio is not functioning. *Aaa*, maybe Delfin is playing with it while we are not yet there in the dancing hall.) In the discourse (7), the particle *a* may mean the speaker's feeling of dismay.

(7) S1: *" Sigeg gasto imong anak didto Sing, sa gawas perme mokaon", butyag pa ni Nang Betty.*

("Your daughter spends a lot there Sing, she always eats outside", declares Betty.)

S2: *"A?, nag-antos ra gani mi diri ug sigig bulad , bantay lang to inig uli"*

("A?, we even suffer here eating dried fish always, she should watch out when she gets home.")

1.1.2. The Cebuano particle aw

The particle *aw* is a clause-initial particle. It serves as a repair marker in (8) that may mean change or substitution of a part of a previous utterance, thus repairing a statement. In (9), the *aw* means that the speaker is already aware of a certain information

that is later relayed to him/her.

(8) *"Nag-ihaw baya ug baka si Joling Merl, aw, kabaw diay."* ("Joling slaughtered a cow Merl, *aw*, I mean carabao.")

(9) S1: *"Bay Delfin, gipangita raba ka sa imong mama."* ("Bay Delfin, your mother is looking for you.")

S2: *"Aw, nagkita namis Mama, Bay. Puwerte ganing sukoa, hehe."*

("Aw, my mother and I have seen each other already, Bay. She was so mad, he he")

In (10), the *aw* means that the speaker has a wrong assumption of something beforehand and *aw* signals revelation of this wrong assumption. In (11), the clause introduced by the particle *aw* means taking another alternative if a former doesn't work or unavailable.

(10) S1: *Sigi baya gihapon ug kita si Miriam ug iyang bana Gil.* (Miriam and her husband still see each other often Gil.)

S2: *Aw, abi nako ug nagbungol na sila. (Aw, I thought they're not talking to each other.)*

"Kung walay promo sa eroplano, aw, magbarko nalang ko." (If there's no airline promo, *aw*, I'll take the boat.")

TABLE I. THE CEBUANO PARTICLES "A" AND "AW" AND THEIR SEMIOTIC MEANING

Signifier	Signified
1. <i>aaa</i>	= trying to figure out what to say as a response or unpreparedness to give a ready answer.
<i>aaa?</i>	= speaker's indirect persistence of a demand or request
<i>a?</i>	= disagreement to an assertion of the speaker
<i>aaa</i>	= anger or warning
<i>a?</i>	= complement or an appreciation
<i>aaa</i>	= anger or warning
<i>aaa</i>	= sudden realization of something
<i>a?</i>	= feeling of dismay
2. <i>aw</i>	= substitution of a part of a previous utterance, thus repairing a statement
<i>Aw</i>	= awareness of a certain information that is later relayed to him/her
<i>aw</i>	= wrong assumption of something
<i>Aw</i>	= another alternative if a former doesn't work

IV. CONCLUSION

The Cebuano language has particles "*a*" and "*aw*" that speakers use in conversations. These particles are single morphemes and they usually occur at the beginning and at the end of a clause. The "*a*" and "*aw*" particles change their pronunciation when used in different semiotic context, others are prolonged when sounded and some with a glottal catch. Generally, just as the pronunciation is changed, so is the meaning. This is because emotions of both the speaker and the receiver can be affected by the way they sound these markers.

The different placements of "*a*" and "*aw*" in utterances do not affect the semiotic meaning of the utterances.

The "*a*" and "*aw*" particles serve as indicators of the speaker's mood, attitudes and feelings towards certain messages heard. They are important hints or cues that signal the upcoming expression. The absence of discourse markers "*a*" and "*aw*" in Cebuano conversations does not necessarily change the meaning contained in such discourses, but the presence of Cebuano particles "*a*" and "*aw*" serve significant pragmatic functions in conversation. The identification of these markers is an essential step to fully understand the meaning of Cebuano utterances in particular and the Cebuano people in general.

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VII. IMPORTANT INFORMATION

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