Looking for Parts of Speech in a Philippine Language.
Does Bikol have Nouns and Verbs?

As it is widely known, Austronesian languages are a special challenge to the universality hypothesis that every language distinguishes parts of speech, at least nouns and verbs. Within Austronesian languages, the Philippine languages take an exceptional position in this respect because of their agglutinating and inflecting features, which make them resemble the Indo-European languages in certain aspects. (s. also Himmelmann (2004: 1))

Some authors claim that there is no parts of speech distinction in some Austronesian languages at all (e.g. Gil (2000) for Riau Indonesian, Mosel & Hovdhaugen (1992) for Samoan). Other grammarians, on the other side, still presuppose the "classical" categories, nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs etc., and try to describe the grammar of Philippine languages in these terms (e.g. Lobel & Tria (2000) for Bikol).

Mainly based on data collected by myself during fieldwork trips to the Bikol region (January-March 2005 and January / February 2006), I will present my analysis of word class categorization in Bikol.

The crucial point with respect to the definition of parts of speech is the correspondence of behaviour of lexemes on the various levels of language, i.e. the semantic, the syntactic and the morphological level. (cf. Sasse (1993: 648-652), Hengeveld (1992)). It is exactly this correspondence of the grammatical levels which is very weak in languages of the Philippine type.

Bikol, like related Philippine languages, has a very flexible lexicon, i.e. independent of its basic semantic meaning, almost every lexical root can undergo almost every kind of derivation and appear in every syntactic function. The lexemes are not prespecified for a certain morphological and syntactic behaviour. (cf. also Himmelmann for Tagalog (2004); (to appear)).

The following examples illustrate this high "functional elasticity":

In (1) machine-gun is combined with a TAM-affix and used predicatively.

1) na-sabat-an sinda kan patrolya kan hapon, m-in-achine-gun sinda, ...

ST-meet-UG 3PL.AF ARG patrouille ARG Japan {BEG.UG}machine-gun 3PL.AF

'They met a Japanese patrol, and were fired by machine-guns ...'

In (2a) lana 'oil' is combined with a TAM-affix and is used referentially. In (2b) it is also combined with a TAM-affix but used predicatively. In (2c) the same lexeme has the function of reference, without any affixation.

2a) Dakul-on pa ang l-in-ana=mo

much-INT still PB {BEG.UG}oil=2SG

'You have put too much oil.'

(lit.: (It is) very much, your putting of oil.)

2b) Ma:-lana man sana ini-ng ano.

FUT.AG-oil also just DEM.PROX.AF-LK SUBST

'The stuff produces it's own oil, anyway.'

(lit.: (It) will produce oil anyway, the “thing”.)
2c) *Ali-on=ko an iba-ng lana?

away- PB some-LK oil

UG=1SG

'Should I remove some of the oil?'

(lit.: I remove it, the some of oil)

But in spite of this high functional elasticity of the Bikol lexemes, with respect to morphosyntax and syntax, there are certain limitations on the level of word forms. These include e.g. pluralisation by the partial reduplicated infix -Vr- as well as comparison and attenuation, which are only possible for word forms marked for TAM and voice. Word forms which are excluded from these morphosyntactic changes are also syntactically excluded from the attributive function.

Examples for constraints of comparison:

3a) *mas-ayam but: mas-ma-ayam

COMP-dog COMP-ST-dog

intended: 'more dog(s)'

'having more dogs'

3b) *pinaka-ogma but: pinaka-nag-ogma

SUP-joy SUP-BEG.AG-joy

intended: 'most fun'

'having most fun'

3c) *mas-pag-turog but: mas-ma-turog

COMP-DERIV- sleep

COMP-ST-sleep

intended: 'more sleep'

'sleepier'

Examples for constraints of -Vr-pluralisation:

4a) ang mga lalaki na h-ar-a-langkaw

PB PL man LK {PL}ST.SP-tall

'the tall men'

4b) ang mga lalaki na mga ha-langkaw

PB PL man LK PL ST.SP-tall

'the tall men'

4c) * ang l-ar-alaki na h-ar-a-langkaw

PB {PL} man LK {PL}ST.SP-tall

'the tall men'

Based on these results, I will argue for a nominal and a verbal "word form category" in Bikol, which are established by the criteria of comparison and pluralisation. Because of the lack of correspondence between the semantic, the morphological and the syntactic level, I state however that Bikol has no parts of speech distinction in the strict sense.
Abbreviations

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<thead>
<tr>
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<td>AF</td>
<td>“ang”-form</td>
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<td>UG</td>
<td>undergoer voice</td>
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References


