

Nominal anchoring functions of Porohanon common noun markers<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract**

Porohanon, spoken in the Municipality of Poro, Camotes, Cebu is a member of the Central Bisayan branch of the Bisayan complex (Zorc, 1977). Previous descriptions of this speech variety (Wolff, 1967; Zorc, 1977; Ballo, 2011) have tended to classify its common noun markers into NOMINATIVE, GENITIVE, and OBLIQUE case forms. These forms are also purported to encode distinctions of DEFINITE vs. INDEFINITE and SPECIFIC vs. NONSPECIFIC; notions which fall under what Balogh, Latrouite, and Van Valin (2020) call “nominal anchoring”. The current study reevaluates the functions and present-day forms of these common noun markers using written and spoken data. The following classification is proposed:

	ABS	ERG	GEN	OBL
Specific	<i>an</i> [ʔan]/ <i>ang</i> [ʔaŋ]	<i>san</i> [san]/ <i>sa</i> [sa]	<i>san</i> [san]/ <i>sa</i> [sa]	<i>sa</i> [sa]
Nonspecific	<i>in</i> [ʔin] / = <i>y</i> [j]	<i>sin</i> [sin]	<i>sin</i> [sin]	

Table 1: Porohanon Common Noun Markers

The syntactic alignment of Porohanon is also reassessed considering more contemporary research on ergativity in Philippine languages.

Keywords: *Porohanon, nominal anchoring, definiteness, specificity*

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<sup>1</sup> List of Abbreviations:

1 – first person, 2 – second person, 3 – third person, A – the most agentive core argument of a transitive verb; APPL – applicative; ABS – absolutive; CAUS – causative; COMPL – completive; CONJ – conjunction; DEF – definite; DIST – distal; E – extended argument; ENU - enumerative; ERG - ergative ; EXCL – exclusive; GEN – genitive; HAPP – happenstance; HES – hesitation pause; INDF – indefinite; INF – infinitive; INTR – intransitive; IPFV – imperfective, IRR – irrealis; LNK – linker; LOC – locative; NONSPEC – nonspecific; O – the most patientive core argument of a transitive verb; OBL – oblique; PL – plural; PFV – perfective, POS – postposed form; PRE – preposed form; PROX – proximal; PST - past; Q – question word; REAL – realis; S – the single core argument of an intransitive verb; SG – singular; SPEC – specific; STEM – stem-forming affix; STAT – stative; TR – transitive; = – clitic boundary; -- morpheme boundary

## Introduction

Nominal anchoring (Balogh, Latrouite, and Van Valin, 2020) is a vital component of any language. As a human system employed to refer to entities in the real world or to participants in a situation, various linguistic resources and structures are utilized to meet these needs.

Notions traditionally associated with this such as **definiteness** and **specificity** have enjoyed a wide coverage and exhaustive discussion in the philosophy of language and theoretical linguistics literature (see Balogh, Latrouite, and Van Valin, 2020 for a cursory survey).

This paper examines the common noun markers of Porohanon spoken primarily in the Municipality of Poro, Camotes, Cebu, Philippines. The common noun markers are analyzed for their nominal anchoring functions in written and spoken data. The present study is intended to be another building block toward a more comprehensive grammatical description of Porohanon; relatively understudied and underdescribed compared to other varieties and languages of wider communication such as Cebuano and Waray.

R. David Zorc's monumental *The Bisayan Dialects of the Philippines: Subgrouping and Reconstruction* (1977) proved to be an indispensable resource for the current study. One can even say that the work has already laid-out the main lines of inquiry and has documented the most significant aspects of the grammars of Bisayan varieties. Apart from lacunae in the Porohanon data acknowledged by the author up-front (Zorc, 1977, p. 269, 276), another niche that the current study intends to occupy is presenting findings from **naturalistic speech data**. While traditional sentence elicitation may already uncover the basic structures at work, it is my belief that transcriptions of continuous speech recordings would yield valuable complementary observations. Several language-specific resources were also consulted and will be cited throughout the rest of the paper.

### Referential expressions in Philippine languages

McFarland (1978, p. 151) operationalizes **reference** based on his definition of what a **referent** is, a “non-linguistic entit[y] which [is] talked about”. Reference, therefore, is “the linguistic process whereby referents are identified.”

Referential expressions, or “reference expressions” (McFarland, 1978, p. 141)<sup>2</sup>, in Philippine languages tend to fall into four (4) types: (1) common referential expression, (2) personal referential expressions, (3) personal pronouns, and (4) deictics. In McFarland's model of Philippine syntax, the following are the ways these types are distinguished:

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<sup>2</sup> A terminological (and perhaps, conceptual) note: McFarland (1978) has elaborated on his choice of using “reference expressions” or “REs” rather than the more common (but also less theory-neutral) label “noun phrase” or “NP”. I tend to agree with McFarland's choice and will be employing this label throughout the paper, even if more contemporary studies such as Reid and Liao (2004) still use the label “noun phrase/ NP”.

Common Referential Expression	“Names of objects and places are marked, and treated syntactically, as common reference expressions.” (p.154)
Personal Referential Expression	“In Philippine languages, labels which are attached to persons and personified beings (personal names) are marked as personal referential expressions.” (p. 154)
Personal Pronouns	“Personal pronouns distinguish referents on the basis of the speaker-addressee relationship.” (p. 154)
Deictics	“Deictic pronouns distinguish referents on the basis of the spatial relationship (nearness or remoteness) to the speaker, and perhaps the addressee” (p. 154)

Table 1: McFarland’s (1978) Classification of Referential Expressions

This paper will only focus on the first type which are the common referential expressions in Porohanon.

On the structure of common referential expressions, McFarland (1978, p. 141) states that “A CRE (something like a common noun) in its most general form consists of a CRE article and a predicate phrase”.

Reid and Liao (2004, p. 464), meanwhile, describe referential expressions as “strongly right-branching, with heads preceding modifiers”. This right-branching tendency dictates that “determiners” (Reid and Liao, 2004, p. 464) (roughly equivalent to “articles” in McFarland, 1978 and Balogh, Latrouite, and Van Valin, 2020) appear before the so-called “head noun”.<sup>3</sup>

### Porohanon common noun markers

Table 2 below lists the forms of the common noun markers in Porohanon. They are categorized according to the core cases ABSOLUTIVE (ABS), ERGATIVE (ERG), and GENITIVE (GEN) with the OBLIQUE (OBL) marker in the final column:

ABS	ERG	GEN	OBL
<b><i>an</i></b> [ʔan]/ <i>ang</i> [ʔaŋ]	<b><i>san</i></b> [san]/ <i>sa</i> [sa]	<b><i>san</i></b> [san]/ <i>sa</i> [sa]	<b><i>sa</i></b> [sa]
<b><i>in</i></b> [ʔin] / = <i>y</i> [j]	<b><i>sin</i></b> [sm]	<b><i>sin</i></b> [sm]	

Table 2: Porohanon Common Noun Markers

The forms in boldface have already been identified by Wolff (1967, p. 66) and Zorc (1977, p. 85) and are, for the most part, corroborated by the data I have gathered. The rest of the alternant forms not in boldface will be discussed in the following subsections.

<sup>3</sup> Reid (2002) has argued elsewhere that these monosyllabic forms prevalent in Philippine languages commonly analyzed as “determiners” or “articles” are better taken to be the head nouns in these constructions, and that the following verb or noun serves as its complement.

## **Ergativity in Porohanon**

Firstly, a comment on syntactic alignment. In previous studies (Santiago, 2018, 2019), I have labelled the case forms of Porohanon referential expressions as NOMINATIVE (NOM)-GENITIVE (GEN)-OBLIQUE (OBL) following the categories adopted by past studies.

Wolff (1967) employs a NOMINATIVE-GENITIVE-LOCATIVE classification for the “construction markers” of Porohanon.

Meanwhile, Zorc (1977, p. 69) writes, “The case system of Bs [Bisayan] nominals includes three categories: **nominative**, **genitive**, and **oblique**. [emphasis added]”. He adds that we find NOM forms occurring mainly as “topics of a clause”, his choice for describing the most privileged syntactic argument. Meanwhile, there is considerably more nuance to the types of nominals that are cast as GEN and OBL according to their “form, meaning, distribution, and use” (p. 69)

McFarland (1978), analyzing Bikol Legazpi and Tagalog, employs a similar case inventory, calling these “basic surface forms for each type of RE [reference expression]” (p.141).

The classification in Reid and Liao (2004) is identical to that of Wolff (1967): “We choose to distinguish between case forms such as NOMINATIVE, GENITIVE, LOCATIVE, etc. marked either morphologically (i.e., by the actual form either of the nominal itself or one of its co-constituents), or syntactically (i.e., by word order), and case relations, namely PATIENT, AGENT, CORRESPONDENT, MEANS, and LOCUS.”

Worth noting at this juncture is that they do analyze Philippine languages as exhibiting an **ERGATIVE** syntactic alignment; a claim absent in the studies cited previously. However, they prefer to stick to using the term NOMINATIVE over the term ABSOLUTIVE to refer to the “least indispensable complement of a basic predication.” (p. 435) They also describe NOMINATIVE as the “typologically more general term”.

Ballo’s (2011) undergraduate capstone research project on Porohanon essentially adopts Wolff’s (1967) inventory of “construction markers”.

The present stage of my research on Porohanon has enabled me to put forward a more informed stance on the issue.

The variables “S, A, O”<sup>4</sup> are used to categorize the various referential expressions and their relation to the predicate of a clause. Slightly modifying Dixon’s (1968, 1972) original formulation, the variables are defined as follows:

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<sup>4</sup> This system was first introduced by Dixon (1968, 1972) as a heuristic for demonstrating the different syntactic alignment exhibited in the marking of arguments in Dyirbal in contrast to other Indo-European languages such as English.

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- S – the single core argument<sup>5</sup> of an intransitive verb
- A – the most agentive core argument of a transitive verb
- O – the most patientive core argument of a transitive verb

Following this set of variables, one of the parameters identified for prototypical transitive constructions is a distinct source of action (A) apart from the most affected entity (O) (Nolasco, 2009, p. 9). An intransitive construction, on the other hand, involves the convergence of the “source of action/ most agentive core argument” and the “most affected entity/ most patientive core argument” on a single argument of the clause, thus labelled (S).

Non-core arguments—those least “immediately-involved”<sup>6</sup> arguments in a clause which cannot be considered, S, A, or O—are encoded as obliques or OBL. Typically, **spatial**, **temporal** expressions are encoded as obliques.

In example (1), it will be noted that S in Porohanon takes the ABS common noun marker *an* [ʔan]:

(1) *Mobarog an puza*

mo-barog	<b>an = puza</b>
IRR.IPFV.INTR -stand	<b>ABS = child</b>
	<b>S</b>

‘The child will stand.’ (#272, UP Dept. of Linguistics 775-sentence list)

A single core argument *puza* ‘child’ of an intransitive verb *mobarog* ‘will stand’ is then considered an “S” in our heuristic. In this situation, the child is both the source of the action of standing (*mobarog*) and the entity affected by it. Let us look at another example, this time with a second referential expression.

(2) *Ara sa bay ang daga.*

Ara	sa = bay	<b>ang = daga</b>
EXIST	OBL = house	<b>ABS = young.lady</b>
		<b>S</b>

‘The young lady is in the house.’ (#5, UP Dept. of Linguistics 775-sentence list)

Since *ara* [ʔa.raʔ] ‘EXIST’ predicates on the existence of only a single core argument *ang daga* ‘the young lady’, the second referential expression *sa bay* ‘in the house’ is not as immediately

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<sup>5</sup> This modification of Dixon’s original formulation is done to acknowledge Mithun and Chafe’s (1999) reservations with the commensurability of the notion of ‘subject’ for typologically diverse languages.

<sup>6</sup> This characterization of “immediacy of involvement” in the action/event expressed by the predicate follows Mithun (1994) in her description of the ABSOLUTE as the “participant that is the most immediately or directly involved in an event or state” (p. 255).

involved in the clause. It only serves to indicate the location of the young lady's existence. It is thus encoded as an OBL. Therefore, we can consider *ang*<sup>7</sup> as the marker of S.

Example (3) shows a very prototypical transitive construction wherein the source of action (A) is fully differentiated from the most affected entity (O). Moreover, the action expressed by the verb itself and its voice morphology indicates a very effortful and intentional (Nolasco, 2009) act on the part of the entity encoded as A:

(3) *Giputol sa taw an kahoy gamit an sundang.*

gi-putol	<b>sa = taw</b>	<b>an = kahoy</b>	gamit	an = sundang
REAL.PFV.TR-chop	<b>ERG = person</b>	<b>ABS = wood</b>	STAT.use	ABS = axe
	<b>A</b>	<b>O</b>		<b>E</b>

'The person chopped the wood using an axe.'

(#347, UP Dept. of Linguistics 775-sentence list)

Setting aside for now the extended argument *an sundang* 'the axe', one can observe that the main clause shows the person *taw* marked with *sa* and the wood *kahoy* marked with *an*. The shared marking of the S and the O with the common noun marker *an* points toward an ergative syntactic alignment on the formal level. This alignment on the formal level is what Reid and Liao (2004) seem to acknowledge, yet, they do not go all the way and label their cases as ERG and ABS in favor of the "typologically-neutral" labels NOM and GEN.

More on the predicate *giputol* 'chopped', indeed, this action of chopping a piece of wood with an instrument such as an axe involves much effort and intention on the part of its source, a person. Also, the entity being chopped, a piece of wood, undergoes a transformation in its physical state, what Nolasco (2009) in his revision of Hopper and Thompson's (1980) transitivity parameters categorizes as "total affectedness" (p. 8)

Nolasco (2009) adds that "most work subscribing to the ergative analysis has tended to focus on the formal aspects of the phenomenon, downplaying its semantic, pragmatic and discourse motivations... The meaning-based and formal evidence points to the robust manifestation of the

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<sup>7</sup> As one will notice in Table 2, the final nasal of the ABS common noun marker of *Porohanon* may be realized as either [n] or [ŋ]. Wolff (1967, p. 66) and Zorc (1977, p. 85) both record the form with the final alveolar/dental nasal ("qan" in their transcription). My language consultant also makes the noteworthy claim that *an* [ʔan] is the one that is "original Porohanon". (J. Andriano, personal communication, 22 April, 2018)

Instances of assimilation to the velar position such as the one documented in example (2) may well be just a synchronic phonological process. However, we cannot discount the status of this alternation as a sociolinguistic variable possibly pointing to Cebuano's pervasive and continuous influence on *Porohanon* since other Central Bisayan languages such as Waray and Masbatenyo (Rosero, 2011, p. 44) retain *an* to a higher degree.

ergative-absolutive relation in Philippine-type languages...” And thus, this excursus into transitivity in Porohanon has been essential in demonstrating its ERG-ABS syntactic alignment.

### On the distinction between the grammatical relations ERG and GEN

Now, something needs to be said about distinguishing the grammatical relations ERG from GEN, even if their common noun marker forms are identical.<sup>8</sup> I insist that the source of the action in a transitive construction, the ERG, is a grammatical relation distinct from the possessor (Kroeger, 2005, p. 104), the GEN. The homophony of the forms for these two grammatical relations can be observed in example (4) below:

- (4) *Gisuwat sa taw an pangan sa daga*  
Gi-suwat                      sa = taw                      an = pangan                      sa = daga  
REAL.PFV.TR-write                      ERG = young.man                      ABS = name                      GEN = young.lady  
'The young man wrote the young lady's name.'  
(#354, UP Dept. of Linguistics 775-sentence list)

The ERG-marked argument *taw* ‘young man’ is the source of the action *gisuwat* ‘wrote’ which affects the argument *pangan* ‘name’, marked as the ABS. The action of the young man gives rise to the name on the written page. Meanwhile, the one who possesses that name, the *daga* ‘young lady’ is in a different case, the GEN.

### On the apparent homophony among the ERG/GEN and OBL common noun markers

Not only can the markers for ERG/GEN fall together, so can the common noun marker for OBL, as seen in the referential expression *sa bay* ‘the house’ in example (2) above. The linguist who wishes to describe the common noun marker system of Porohanon must now contend with three (3) distinct grammatical relations—the ERG, GEN, and OBL—converging on one form: *sa* [sa].

Wolff (1967), later cited by Zorc (1977), did not record this phenomenon for Porohanon. This homophony was probably not yet apparent in the late 60s in the speech of John Wolff’s language consultants (Wolff, 1967, p. 78).

Zorc, however, makes the important observation that “the Ceb [Cebuano] oblique and definite genitive markers are homophonous (sa).” (1977, p. 97)

Ballo (2011) also notes that the marker *san* is already falling into disuse among speakers of Porohanon.

Once again, like the case of the ABS common noun marker *an* [ʔan]/ *ang* [ʔaŋ] discussed in footnote 7, one can stop at stating that this is simply a process of apocope, or the loss of the final

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<sup>8</sup> McFarland (1978) rightly observes that “The various cases in Philippine languages are not so clearly or discretely marked as in many languages.” (p. 140)

segment of a morpheme (Crowley & Bower, 2010). But, more than that, could this be another indication, a sociolinguistic variable, that Porohanon is becoming more and more like Cebuano<sup>9</sup>?

### Definiteness and specificity in Philippine languages

Among the notions of nominal anchoring, definiteness seems to be the one that has received the most coverage in key works of Philippine morphosyntax. Despite the frequent reference to this notion, different scholars seem to have different versions of it and acknowledge different manifestations of it.

Constantino, for example, considers the “simple, predicative, definite sentence” (1965, p. 108, 1971, p. 1) to be the kernel sentence from which other construction types are derived through transformations. Dr. Constantino (1971) later elaborated on this notion, stating that “they [simple, predicative, definite sentences] are definite in that both their subject and predicate are ‘marked’, that is, each is preceded or followed by an article or affix.” (p. 2)

The “Definiteness Hypothesis” of Dr. Constantino, then, seems to be hinged on the mere presence or absence of an article or affix in the subject and predicate of a sentence. This is so that sentence pairs such as: *Ang bata ang kumain sa mangga*. ‘It was the child who ate the mango.’ and *Bata ang kumain sa mangga*. ‘It was a child who ate the mango.’ (Constantino, 1971, p. 2) are treated as definite and indefinite, respectively, based on the presence of *ang* in the first constituent.

Cubar ([1975] 2019) wrote an extended critique of this analysis, calling him out, among other things, on his decision to label the second *ang* in sentences such as those above a “predicate marker”. Dr. Cubar writes:

“It is obvious that we have here a different notion of what a *noun phrase* is. For Constantino, *ang tumakbo* ‘the one who ran’, *ang kinain ng bata* ‘that which was eaten by the child’, *ang maganda* ‘the one that is pretty’, and *ang nasa kahon* ‘that which is in the box’ are not noun phrases because their heads or centers are not nouns. He would call the first two phrases **verb phrases**, the third **adjective phrase**, and the last **particulate phrase**. However, these phrases have unmistakable nominal readings. They are what linguistic philosophers call **definite reference expressions** – expressions which are used for naming objects.” (p. 73)

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<sup>9</sup> Notably, I was able to interview Atty. Lourdito Borlasa, one of Prof. John Wolff’s original language consultants, when I had conducted fieldwork in Poro, Camotes, Cebu last 2018. He is of the opinion that *Porohanon* is already a dialect of Cebuano, just as Wolff argued in his 1967 paper. My other language consultants, on the other hand, stress the unintelligibility of *Porohanon* to Cebuano speakers. They can understand and can easily switch to Cebuano, but Cebuano speakers from the “mainland” have a difficult time understanding their *tinaga-Poro* ‘(lit.) from Poro’ speech. (E. Marquez, personal communication, 12 December, 2018)



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Dr. Cubar still anchors the notion on the presence of article/ affix-marking in the sentence constituents. However, he offers a more detailed discussion of referential expressions based on “degrees of definiteness”. A definite common noun, according to him, “derives its definiteness either from the presence of its referent in the common immediate environment of the speaker and the hearer, or from linguistic anaphora, including the use of definitizing attached relative clause.” (p. 84) Addressing another point of contention in Constantino’s analysis, Dr. Cubar writes that, “A speaker uses the definite form of a noun phrase when he assumes that the existence of a referent has been registered in the consciousness of the hearer, or when he believes that the referent has been sufficiently described such that it has a determined identification for the hearer.” (p. 91)

McFarland problematized the same thing three years later in his article *Definite objects and subject selection in Philippine languages* (1978) beginning with his conception of reference already cited earlier in this paper. “Definite reference”, according to McFarland, “indicates that the referent is specific and known to the speaker and known to the addressee.” “Indefinite reference”, on the other hand, “indicates that the referent is non-specific or unknown to the speaker or unknown to the addressee.” (p. 153)

Reid and Liao (2004) write that “In all Philippine languages, Nominative phrases typically have a definite interpretation, that is, the speaker assumes that the addressee knows the general reference of the actant which is the head of the phrase.” An “indefinite actant”, on the other hand, “is typically expressed by a phrase carrying the Correspondent case relation in an intransitive clause and is marked with a Locative, Genitive, or Oblique Determiner...” (p. 469)

Let us now turn to the notion of specificity. McFarland (1978) had already discussed specificity in relation to his notion of definiteness. According to him, “A referent may be specific, non-specific, or generic. In the first case, the speaker is saying something about a particular, i.e. specific individual.” (p. 151) A speaker refers to something generic when s/he refers to “a whole class of entities” or uses a form “intended to apply to all members of that class.” Therefore, “[i]f the referent is specific, it has an identity. That is, it has an existence which is distinct from all other referents, even those which may be very similar to it.” (p. 152)

McFarland’s crucial contribution lies in his disambiguation of specificity from definiteness: “The identity of a specific referent may or may not be known to the speaker. When I say that a speaker knows the identity of a referent, I mean that (1) he is in possession of a file of prior knowledge about that referent and that (2) he is aware that the referent currently being discussed is the same as the one to whom this prior knowledge relates.” (p. 152)

McFarland’s keenness to the negotiatory nature of discourse is evident in the following statement:

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“If the identity of the referent is known to the speaker, he must make a judgment as to whether the addressee also knows [sic] the identity. If he judges that the addressee already possesses a file of information about the referent, the speaker must choose a linguistic expression which will enable the addressee to locate that file and to add the new information to what is already there. If he judges that the addressee does not have such a file, he may choose a linguistic expression which indicates to the addressee that he is not expected to have a file on the particular referent, and that he may or may not choose to open such a file. Such information is carried by ‘indefinite noun phrases’ and existential sentences.” (p. 152)

Reid and Liao (2004) maintain the distinction between definiteness and specificity by saying that:

“Knowing the general reference of an actant does not imply that the addressee knows the specific actant being referred to. Although Nominative phrases are typically definite, they may or may not be specific. The degree of specificity often depends on the presence of a demonstrative, either as the head of the noun phrase, or as a post-head modifier, or on the presence of some other post-head modifier such as a genitively marked noun phrase, or a relative clause. A number of languages mark a distinction between specific and non-specific phrases, with the specific phrase being invariably marked by a form which is either a demonstrative, or can be shown to have been a demonstrative at some earlier stage of the language.” (p. 471)

Table 3 below summarizes the key points pertaining to definiteness and specificity across the cited literature:

Notion	Constantino 1965	Constantino 1971	Cubar [1975] 2019	McFarland 1978	Reid and Liao 2004
Definiteness	-	FORMAL CRITERION: Presence of subject/ “predicate” marking thru article or affix	FORMAL CRITERIA: Presence of constituent marking thru article or affix, Linguistic anaphora, Definitizing attached relative clause  SEMANTICO-PRAGMATIC CRITERIA: Presence of referent in the common immediate	FORMAL CRITERION: Reference expression marking  SEMANTICO-PRAGMATIC CRITERION: Specificity and knownness to the hearer and addressee	FORMAL CRITERION: Case-marking (Nominative, typically for definite, Locative, Genitive, or Oblique for indefinite)

			environment of the speaker and hearer, Registration in the consciousness of the hearer, Determined identification for the hearer		SEMANTICO-PRAGMATIC CRITERION: Assumption of the speaker that the addressee knows the general reference of the actant
Specificity	-	-	-	FORMAL CRITERION: Reference expression marking  SEMANTICO-PRAGMATIC CRITERIA: Particularization of an individual, Existence which is distinct from all other referents	FORMAL CRITERION: Presence of a demonstrative, Presence of some other post-head modifier such as a genitively marked noun phrase or relative clause

Table 3: Summary of Notions of Definiteness and Specificity in Constantino (1965, 1971), Cubar ([1975] 2019), McFarland (1978), Reid and Liao (2004)

### Definiteness and specificity in Porohanon

We return to the discussion of the common noun marker forms of Porohanon. Wolff (1967) distinguishes the first row of markers as “definite” from the second row which are “indefinite” Much like Constantino, however, he takes as a given the reader’s notion of definiteness and does not elaborate on it anywhere else in the paper:

	ABS	ERG	GEN	OBL
Definite	<i>an</i> [ʔan]/ <i>ang</i> [ʔaŋ]	<i>san</i> [san]/ <i>sa</i> [sa]	<i>san</i> [san]/ <i>sa</i> [sa]	<i>sa</i> [sa]
Indefinite	<i>in</i> [ʔin] / =y [j]	<i>sin</i> [sm]	<i>sin</i> [sm]	

Table 4: Porohanon Common Noun Markers (revised according to the Wolff, 1967 classification)

Zorc (1977) stipulates that for the entire Bisayan complex, “All dialects that have two genitive markers **can make a distinction between definite and indefinite.**” (p. 84) He recognized the “differences in formation” of these common noun markers, stating that the vowel [a] almost always

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occurs in “general, definite, or past” markers and the vowel [i] almost always occurs in “indefinite or nonpast” markers. (p. 86)

How does definiteness, purported to be the feature that distinguishes the two forms in the ABS, operate in naturalistic speech?

The following excerpt is from a Pear Film narrative (Chafe (Ed.), 1980)<sup>10</sup> recorded with Mr. Joseph Andriano, 33 years old (at the time of recording), from Brgy. Teguis, Poro, Camotes, Cebu. After watching the video and thinking of what to say for a few moments, he begins by introducing his narrative:

- (5) *Ara nakoy istorya nimo, Sir Vincci.* (Joseph Andriano – Pear Story, 0:00)  
ara = na = ko = y = istorya (ka)nimo Sir Vincci  
EXIST = COMPL = 1SG.GEN.POS = **ABS.INDF** = story 2SG.GEN.PRE Sir Vincci  
'I already have a story for you, Sir Vincci.'

Wolff (1967) observed that “The indefinite Cebuano marker *y* refers to an indefinite subject only in certain set of expressions.” (p. 66) Tanangkingsing (2011) later wrote that “...the referent is indefinite and is marked by the neutral marker =*y* that phonologically attaches to the preceding unit” (p. 146)

Wolff states that Porohanon makes a distinction that Cebuano does not make, in that it still has two unreduced forms for the “subject marker” *an* vs. *in*. This is reflected in Table 4 above. It seems, though, that contemporary speakers of Porohanon like Sir Joseph tend to reduce this indefinite ABS marker, just like in Cebuano.

The phonological change is not yet absolute, however, since there are still instances where =*y* retains its full form *in* [ʔin]. See the following sentence from the article *PESO 'MANG REHESTRO* from the Porohanon Newsletter (September-October, 2012):

- (6) *Inin pagpang-rehistro nga gibuhāt sa PESO wa ini in bazad.*  
inin pag-pang-rehistro = nga = gi-buhāt sa = PESO wa ini in = bazad  
ABS.DEM.PROX INF-DISTR-register = LNK = REAL.PFV.TR-do OBL = PESO NEG LOC.PROX **ABS.INDF**-payment  
'This registration to PESO, this has no payment.'

Now, let us return to Sir Joseph’s Pear Story narrative to see how the supposed definite counterpart of the ABS common noun marker functions. Our young male protagonist has gone off after his fall from the bicycle he was riding. However:

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<sup>10</sup> The video is available on Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bRNSTxTpG7U&t=154s>.

<sup>11</sup> Public Employment and Service Office

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(7) *Nan sara, nalimtan na niza, uh, an iza kalo.* (Joseph Andriano – Pear Story, 02:13.01)

nan sara            n(k)a-lim(o)t-an = na = niza

uh    **an** = iza = kalo

CONJ now        REAL.PFV.(STEM).HAPP-forget-APPL = COMPL = SG.GEN.POS HES    **ABS.DEF** = 3SG.GEN.PRE = hat

‘And now, he had already forgotten his, uh, his hat.’

In this example, the common noun marker *an* is selected for *iza kalo* ‘his hat’. Designating *an* as definite within the larger context of discourse would be peculiar because **this is the first time this referent is introduced**. Without the aid of the video, it is only through sentence (7) that our young male protagonist is specified as actually wearing a hat. If this is the very first time this referent *iza kalo* ‘his hat’ is “pushed into the scene” in this narrative, why is it being marked with a supposedly “definite” common noun marker when there is no prior knowledge of this referent on the addressee’s part?

Specificity might be the more appropriate notion to associate with this form; especially since Reid and Liao (2004) consider the presence of genitive marking an indicator that this referent is specific. Indeed, with the third-person, genitive, preposed pronoun *iza*, the speaker’s proposition is that that *kalo* ‘hat’ is only the young male protagonist’s and no one else’s.

Let us try to examine the ERG and GEN common noun markers this time. In this part of the story, the three children met by the young male protagonist have returned the hat which he had dropped. In return, the boy who owns the hat gave them each a pear. So the children part ways and the gang of three who helped the boy on the bicycle go along the path toward the farmer picking the pears from a tree:

(8) *An tulo ka puza, padung didto sa nangipo sin peras.* (Joseph Andriano – Pear Story, 02:35.01)

an = tulo ka-puza

pa-dung didto

sa = n(p)ang-ipo

**sin** = peras

ABS = three-ENUM-child

CAUS-go LOC.DIST

OBL = REAL.PFV.DISTR-pick    **GEN.INDF?** = pear

‘The three children went back to the one who was picking pears.’

Analyzing the common noun marker *sin* as indefinite in the referential expression *sin peras* does not seem to work because the very beginning of the Pear Film is a shot of a middle-aged man up in a ladder on a tree picking pears. More importantly, it has already been established early on in Sir Joseph’s narrative that this man in the video is, indeed, a man who picks pears. To consider *sin* as indefinite would be ignoring this knowledge of the referent by the speaker and addressee.

Analyzing it as **nonspecific**, however, would yield a more accurate reading. *sin* could be classified as nonspecific since it was shown that the farmer had already picked multiple baskets of pears. What Sir Joseph’s proposition is here is that the farmer is a person **who simply picks pears**. Not one, particular, individuated pear, but rather just entities that would be considered pears.

Can we, therefore, consider *san/sa* the **specific** counterpart? Let us see:

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- (9) *Diin ang Cebu giagian sa bagzo nga Yolanda.* (Abel Garciano – Unforgettable experience, 14:24)  
 diin                      ang = Cebu              gi-agi-an                      sa = bagzo = nga = Yolanda  
 LOC.Q.PST              ABS = Cebu              TR.REAL.PFV-pass-APPL      **ERG.SPEC** = storm = LNK = Yolanda  
 ‘Where the storm which is Yolanda passed by Cebu.’

Sentence (9) comes from the shared experiences of Mr. Abel Garciano, a municipal official at the Local Government Unit of Poro, when Super Typhoon Yolanda hit Eastern Visayas in 2013. In sentence (9), we see the ERG marker *sa* marking the common noun *bagzo* ‘storm’. *Bagzo* is then being modified by a relative clause *nga Yolanda* ‘which is Yolanda’. Following McFarland (1978) and Reid and Liao’s (2004) criteria, the particular, individual referent of *bagzo* is being specified not only through the use of the marker *sa*, but also through the relative clause *nga Yolanda*.

**Conclusion**

Evidence from recordings of continuous discourse have shown that in terms of nominal anchoring, the common noun markers of Porohanon seem to encode a SPECIFIC vs. NONSPECIFIC reading of the referent, rather than a DEFINITE vs. INDEFINITE distinction as earlier assumed by Wolff (1967) and Zorc (1977).

Thus, I propose the following common noun marking system for Porohanon:

	ABS	ERG	GEN	OBL
Specific	<i>an</i> [ʔan]/ <i>ang</i> [ʔaŋ]	<i>san</i> [san]/ <i>sa</i> [sa]	<i>san</i> [san]/ <i>sa</i> [sa]	<i>sa</i> [sa]
Nonspecific	<i>in</i> [ʔin] / =y [j]	<i>sin</i> [sin]	<i>sin</i> [sin]	

Table 5: Revised Porohanon Common Noun Markers

Does this mean that definiteness as a nominal anchoring strategy is totally absent from the system of Porohanon? The possibility is that it may be encoded in other forms of referential expression marking such as in deictics, pronouns, and suffixes.

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