Tagalog has two types of existential construction. The more familiar is exemplified by (1a), in which the existential verb is followed by a nominal constituent whose existence is being asserted. The NP in (1a) is a relative clause. The head NP precedes the clause. The agent in the embedded clause appears with ergative case, which is licensed by the embedded transitive verb. In the other type, shown in (1b), the existential verb is followed by what appears to be a reduced relative clause, with the head NP following the embedded verb. The agent of the embedded predicate appears outside the relative clause and is licensed as the matrix absolutive. What is asserted is that Maria bought something, and that something is a book.

In this paper, I propose a syntactic analysis of the second type of existential construction. This construction possesses a number of surprising characteristics, the most striking being the possibility of extraction from the relative clause. As Sabbagh (2009) shows, the pivot in existentials like (1a) are islands to extraction, as shown in (2a). This is not true, however, of the second type, as shown in (2b). Note that the dislocated constituent is a goal argument of the embedded verb and therefore could not have been base merged as an adjunct in the matrix clause.

Sabbagh (2009) accounts for the impossibility of extraction in cases like (2a) by proposing that the pivot is a DP and therefore constitutes a syntactic island. In contrast, I propose that the second type of existential involves a reduced relative clause structure which contains neither a DP nor a CP layer. The analysis of (1b) is shown in figure 1 on p. 2. The head of the relative clause moves from its base position within the embedded vP to the specifier of the relator phrase, traversing through the edge of the embedded vP. The remnant relative clause, which consists of an aspectual projection immediately dominating a vP, fronts to the specifier of the linker phrase. These two steps borrow heavily from the predicative inversion approach to prenominal relative clauses proposed by Den Dikken (2006). The external argument in the relative clause is pro, bound by the possessor, which is base merged in the matrix [Spec, vP] and values absolutive case with matrix T. The LkP fronts to the edge of matrix vP. This is the constituent whose existence is asserted by the existential verb.

When an XP is extracted from the embedded vP, as in (2b), the moving constituent is first moved to the edge of the embedded vP. From this position, it can move further to the edge of the matrix vP, from which position it can reach its final landing site in clause-initial position. Note that movement to matrix [Spec, vP] will take place before movement of the LkP itself. This ordering is suggested by the possibility of stranding of such constituents in clause-final position, as in (3). I assume that the moving constituent can target the edge of matrix vP either before or after the external argument is merged.

The reduced relative structure is supported by the lack of independent tense in the embedded domain. In contrast to the type 1 existentials, which allow the free occurrence of temporal adverbs in both the embedded and matrix clauses (4a), type 2 existentials do not (4b). This suggests the lack of a TP layer in the reduced relative. The relative base positions of the key constituents proposed in Fig. 1 is further suggested by stranding of the head NP of the reduced relative. The fact that the head nominal of the reduced relative follows the matrix subject suggests a low base position for the relative clause. What is moved to the edge of the matrix vP in (5) is only the AspP. The remainder of the LkP is stranded inside VP.

Numerous studies have been made of existential constructions in Austronesian languages: Chung (1987), Sabbagh (2009), Massam (2009), Polinsky (2008), to name just a few. However, I have yet to encounter type 2 existentials in another Austronesian language, suggesting the importance of studying this construction in Tagalog.

(1) a. May [libro-ng] [b<in>ili ni Maria].
   ‘There is a book which Maria bought.’
   exist book-Lk <Tr.Perf> buy Erg Maria
b. May [b<in>ili-ng libro] si Maria.
   ‘Maria bought a book.’
   exist <Tr.Perf> buy-Lk book Abs Maria

Special Existentials in Tagalog
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(2) a. *Kay Pedro may [bulaklak na i-b<in>igay ni Maria tpp ].
Dat Pedro exist flower Lk App<Tr.Perf>give Erg Maria
‘There is a book which Maria bought from Pedro.’
b. Kay Pedro may [i-b<in>igay tpp na bulaklak] si Maria.
Dat Pedro exist App<Tr.Perf>give Lk flower Abs Maria
‘To Pedro, Maria gave a flower.’
(3) May [i-b<in>igay tpp na bulaklak] si Maria kay Pedro.
exist App<Tr.Perf>give Lk flower Abs Maria Dat Pedro
‘Maria gave a flower to Pedro.’
(4) a. Kanina may [love letter na i-s<in>ulat=niya kahapon].
just.now exist love letter Lk App<Tr.Perf>write=3s.Erg yesterday
‘There was just a love letter which he/she wrote yesterday.’
b. *Kanina may [i-s<in>ulat=siya-ng love letter] kahapon.
just.now exist App<Tr.Perf>write=3s.Abs-Lk love letter yesterday
‘Just now, he/she wrote a love letter yesterday.’
(5) May [App hina-hawak] ang lalaki [LKP tAsp [na [bote ng champagne]]].
exist Prog-hold Abs man Lk bottle of champagne
‘The man was holding a bottle of champagne.’

Fig 1.

References