

OBJECT RELATIVES AND EASE OF PASSIVIZATION IN INDONESIAN

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INTRODUCTION

One interesting aspect of relative clauses in Indonesian is the peculiar characteristic of object relativization such as (1), which is part of a sentence written on a campaign pamphlet of a presidential candidate during the recent Indonesian presidential election.

- (1) [*Semua yang SBY lakukan* ___]: bukti, bukan janji nyata, bukan wacana
all REL SBY do proof not promise concrete not discourse
'All that SBY did: proof, not just promise, not just talk'

Although relativization of objects such as (1) is grammatical in Indonesian, it is very rarely produced by speakers of Indonesian. Instead, speakers of Indonesian appear to add one extra step by turning the object of an active sentence into a grammatical subject of a passive sentence and then relativizing the subject, as seen in (2).

- (2) [*Semua yang* ___ *dilakukan SBY*]: bukti, bukan janji nyata, bukan wacana
all REL do SBY proof not promise concrete not discourse
'All that was done by SBY: proof, not just promise, not just talk'

In other words, when relativizing the object, speakers of Indonesian prefer a relative clause like (2) to a relative clause like (1). This phenomenon is very different from that in English. In fact, when relativizing the object, speakers of English prefer a relative clause like (3a), the English translation in (1), to a relative clause like (3b), the English translation in (2).

- (3) a. [*All that SBY did* ___]: proof, not just promise, not just talk
b. [*All that* ___ *was done by SBY*]: proof, not just promise, not just talk

Another obvious difference can be seen from the following relative clauses quoted from the two versions (Indonesian and English) of *Tempo* 10-16 August 2009.

- (4) a. ... menewaskan buronan kakap [*yang* ___ *paling dicari polisi lebih dari tujuh tahun.*]
b. ... killed the most-wanted fugitive [*who police had been hunting* ___ *for more than seven years.*]

As we see in (4), for the Indonesian version it is the subject of a passive sentence that gets relativized (subject relative), while for the English version it is the object of an active sentence that gets relativized (object relative).

Given these facts, how do we explain the preference of Indonesian speakers for avoiding direct relativization of objects even though it is grammatical in the language? The present paper attempts to provide answers to this question. It is organized into two sections. The first section describes the asymmetrical distribution of object and subject relatives based on Tjung's (2006) study. The second section provides a tentative explanation for why Indonesian speakers prefer indirect relativization of objects rather than direct relativization of objects.

THE DISTRIBUTION OF OBJECT AND SUBJECT RELATIVES IN INDONESIAN

Tjung (2006) conducted a study on the occurrence of subject and object relatives using the data from adults and children. For the adult data, he examined three corpora of adult spontaneous speech in Jakarta Indonesian as well as administered a grammaticality judgment experiment and an elicited production experiment. For the children data, he examined the distribution of subject and object relatives produced by Jakarta Indonesian-speaking children in naturally occurring speech and administered the elicited production experiment.

First of all, results from the grammaticality judgment demonstrated that all the tested adults consistently judged object relatives to be grammatical. The three corpora of adult spontaneous speech, however, show that the relative clauses produced by adult speakers have a strange distribution, i.e., relativization of objects is grammatical, but it is rare. That is, out of 277 instances of relative clauses, 265 are subject relatives and only 12 are object relatives. The low frequency of object relatives was confirmed by the results of the elicited production experiment. That is, out of 480 object relative trials, only 3 object relatives were produced by adult speakers.

The children data also showed the rare distribution of object relatives compared to subject relatives. That is, out of 597 instances of relative clauses, 587 are subject relatives and only 10 are object relatives. Results from the elicited production experiment also showed the low frequency of object relatives, i.e., out of 960 object relative trials, only 34 object relatives were produced by children.

EXPLAINING THE LOW FREQUENCY OF DIRECT RELATIVIZATION OF OBJECTS IN INDONESIAN

It has been claimed that European languages like English differ from Western Malayo-Polynesian languages like Tagalog, Toba Batak, and Indonesian in encoding semantically transitive propositions (Hopper and Thompson 1980, Fox 1987, Shibatani 1988, among others). In English the active construction is the principal unmarked construction type that conveys semantically transitive propositions. That is, in this construction, subjects are the prototypical realization for agents and topics. The passive construction represents the marked construction type that conveys semantically transitive propositions. Passivization in English involves defocusing of an agentive entity. There are two syntactic consequences of this: (a) the agent is either not syntactically encoded at all or is encoded in a less syntactically prominent position (oblique position), (b) a nonagentive nominal, typically a patient, is promoted to grammatically prominent position (subject position). Markedness is correlated with formal complexity. Formally, a marked form is more complex than its unmarked counterpart. For example, in English, a passive form involves the auxiliary *be*, the past participle form of a verb, and the marking of an agent by the preposition *by*; all of these are absent in a simple active sentence.

In contrast, in Western Malayo-Polynesian languages like Tagalog, Toba Batak, and Indonesian agents are rarely realized as subjects. Therefore, the passive (or non-agent-topic) construction, rather than the active (agent-topic) construction, is often preferred in conveying semantically transitive propositions, especially for cases in which the patient is definite and/or specific. Thus, unlike the English passive, the passive (nonagent-topic) construction in these languages represents the unmarked form rather than the marked form, as we see from the correlation of markedness with formal complexity. That is, the passive (non-agent-topic) construction in Western Malayo-Polynesian languages does not show more formal complexity than its corresponding active (agent-topic) construction. For example, in Toba Batak the verb in the active construction is marked with the prefix *MANG-*, while the passive is marked with the prefix *DI-*; in Standard Indonesian, the verb in the active construction is marked with the prefix *MEN-*, while the verb in the passive construction is marked with the prefix *DI-*.

Similar to the English passive, the patient in the passive (non-agent-topic) construction of Western Malayo-Polynesian languages is promoted to grammatically prominent position (subject position). However, as distinct from the passive in English (in which the agent is often demoted and often missing), the agent often remains an integral part of the construction. As a result, the passive (non-agent-topic) construction in Western Malayo-Polynesian languages like Tagalog, Toba Batak, and Indonesian may share some of the structural properties of the English passive, but it does not share the functions of that passive (Cooreman, Fox, and Givon 1984). The passive (non-agent-topic) construction in Western Malayo-Polynesian languages like Tagalog, Toba Batak, and Indonesian appears to have the function of the active construction in European languages like English. Consider the following two passages from the Catholic Eucharistic text in Indonesian (Verhaar 1983).

- (5) a. *Yesus mengambil roti,*
 b. *diucapkannya doa syukur,*
 c. *dibagi-baginya roti itu,*
 d. *dan diberikannya kepada murid-muridnya.*
- (6) a. *Yesus mengambil roti,*
 b. *mengucap doa syukur,*
 c. *membagi-bagi roti itu,*
 d. *dan memberikannya kepada murid-muridnya.*

As we see in the above examples, in Indonesian semantically transitive propositions can be encoded by either passive sentences, in which the verb is marked by the prefix *DI-* and the patient occupies the subject position, or active sentences, in which the verb is marked with the prefix *MEN-* and the agent occupies the subject position. Note that although the agent in (5) is demoted, it is not missing. It appears that passive and active sentences in Indonesian can be equally used to encode semantically transitive propositions without any loss of semantic outcome when both the agent and the patient are present.

What is the consequence of these facts for the differences between object relativization in Indonesian and English? Hawkins (1999) and Gibson (2000) have demonstrated that in experimental settings there is a clear preference for subject relatives than object relatives. According to these researchers, object relatives consistently require greater processing cost than subject relatives. I would like to suggest that in all languages, including English and Indonesian, subject relatives are preferred over object relatives because of less processing cost, but the preference for subject relatives is even bigger if a language allows the ease of passivization.

The ease of passivization is related to how semantically transitive propositions are encoded. In English semantically transitive propositions are mainly encoded through the active construction, while in Indonesian semantically transitive propositions can be equally encoded either through the active construction or the passive construction. The ease of passivization in Indonesian makes it possible for indirect relativization of objects to be realized as subject relatives, which explains why this type of relativization is preferred by speakers of Indonesian because of its less processing cost than direct relativization of objects. To summarize, the differences between the realization of object relativization in Indonesian and English can be diagrammed as follows:

Direct Relativization of Objects	
English	productive
Indonesian	rare
Indirect Relativization of Objects Through Ease of Passivization	
English	rare
Indonesian	productive

This account consequently predicts that all languages should be like Indonesian if they have a means of easily turning object relativization into subject relativization through the ease of passivization. One piece of evidence in support of this claim is provided by the results of Zukowski's unpublished work on an elicited production study with adults (personal communication). Zukowski tested 14 normal English-speaking adults using an elicited production experiment. In this study, Zukowski deliberately chose human beings as the stimuli for patients and animals or insects as the stimuli for agents. The kinds of transitive events that people and small animals or insects participate in as patients and agents are adversative events such as *the eagle is attacking the man* or *the crab is pinching the man*. Under this condition, Zukowski reported that the participants were attempting to relativize underlying objects (patients) through passivization (i.e., by using subject relatives containing passives) such as *the man that is being attacked by the eagle* or *the man that is being pinched by the crab* more frequently than through active sentences (i.e., by using object relatives) such as *the man that the eagle is attacking* or *the man that the crab is pinching*. The results of this study suggest that English may behave like Indonesian when the passive construction is expected under certain circumstances. That is, in English active sentences have a prototypical human agent subject and a nonhuman patient. Thus, when given stimuli with a human patient and a non-human agent, the participants in Zukowski's experiment were able to use passives more frequently.

CONCLUDING REMARK

Object relatives in Indonesian show a peculiar characteristic. That is, although object relatives are grammatical, they are very rarely produced by speakers of Indonesian; instead speakers of Indonesian produce subject relatives in which the subjects of passive sentences get relativized. I argued that the ease of passivization in Indonesian makes it possible for indirect relativation of objects to be realized as subject relatives. Speakers of Indonesian prefer this type of relativization because of its less processing cost than direct relativization.

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