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Syntactic underspecification in Riau Indonesian

Abstract

Indonesian is known for having a relatively simple morphological and syntactic structure. This is especially true of local Indonesian varieties, where contrast between many categories in Standard Indonesian is neutralized. In the Indonesian dialect spoken in Riau Province, there is no morphological marking of grammatical categories and there is relatively free word order. The first example below is SVO, while the second is OVS.

1. Saya **pakai** kaca mata, Vid Gil 2008:43
1:SG use glass eye FAM|David
[Speaker putting on a new pair of glasses]
'I'm wearing my glasses, David'
2. Honda **pakai** abang Elly Gil 2008:43
motorcycle use elder.brother Elly
[Interlocutor tells speaker to go and buy food; speaker doesn't budge; interlocutor asks speaker why he isn't going; speaker explains]
'Elly's using the motorcycle'

Gil (1994, 2003, 2005) analyzes both of these examples as unmarked sentences. He develops a theory of Riau Indonesian grammar that has only one open grammatical category, which he calls S (Sentence). This means that there are no distinctions between categories like noun, verb, and adjective.

In this paper I show that Gil's analysis does not adequately account for generalizations in Riau Indonesian syntax. I use Gil's data to argue that Riau Indonesian has the basic lexical categories of noun, verb and adjective. Based on these categories, I show that the language has basic SVO word order.

References

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