

Noun Modifying Clause Constructions in Besemah Malay

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Theme session: Generalized Noun Modifying Clause Constructions

Traditional treatments of Malay-Indonesian relative clauses describe the constructions as (a) headed by the relativizer *yang*, (b) relativizing only the subject position, and (c) optionally occurring without a head noun (i.e., headless relative clauses). Although some of these properties have been called into question (see Ewing & Cumming 1998, Cole & Hermon 2005, Tjung 2006, Englebretson 2008), analogous constructions headed by *ndik* and *nde* in Besemah Malay, a little-known language of southwest Sumatra, significantly diverge from this characterization.

First, *ndik* and *nde* constructions express an array of meanings that are not typically expressed by *yang*-constructions, including possession and purpose. Second, while a majority of the cases of relative clauses are headless in (colloquial) Indonesian, there are no instances of *ndik* and *nde* with an external head noun. Finally, *ndik* and *nde* constructions do not show strict syntactic restrictions on the relativization of subjects as in many Austronesian languages (Keenan & Comrie 1977). In example (1), the referent is not the unrealized patient argument (i.e., the people that are pushed), but the third person non-subject agent *-nye* (i.e., the person pushing everyone aside). What is more, *ndik* and *nde* constructions occasionally surface with all arguments realized, taking a different semantic interpretation than would be expected in a relative clause construction, expressing manner in (2) and time in (3).

- (1) *Ui [nik ∅ di-pinggir-kah-nye gale] tadi,*
oh NIK UV-edge-APPL-3 all earlier
'Oh, **(the one)** [that (everyone) was pushed to the side **by him**] earlier,'
- (2) *Aku nik ridat [nik die galak be-antuk-an tu=lah.]*
1SG NIK angry NIK 3 want RECP-nudge-RECP that=LAH
'I am the one who is angry **(at how)** [he is always running into people.] '
- (3) *[nik kite main di Sumur,]*
NIK 1PL.INCL play LOC S.
'**(the time)** [we were playing in Sumur,] '

Based on a corpus of spontaneous speech of Besemah Malay, this study shows that *ndik* and *nde* constructions are best analyzed as Generalized Noun Modifying Clause Constructions (GNMCC; Matsumoto 1997, Comrie 1998). This study has further implications for the typology of GNMCC. First, it extends the current areal and genealogical distribution of GNMCC to an Austronesian language of insular Southeast Asia. Second, this study demonstrates how strict syntactic constraints on voice (or focus) for relativization in some Austronesian languages are in fact pragmatically conditioned in *ndik* and *nde* constructions in Besemah Malay.

References

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