

## The Modal Auxiliary *Biso* ‘can’ in Jambi Malay

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This paper focuses on the modal auxiliary *biso* ‘can’ in a variety of Malay spoken in Jambi, Sumatra.

In Jambi Malay *biso* can be used to express ability, permission, and possibility, as shown in (1) and (2) below.

- (1) maria      biso   kərjo   sampe   malam  
Maria      can   work   until   night  
a. ‘Maria is able to work till night.’  
b. ‘Maria is permitted to work till night.’  
c. ‘Maria will probably work till night.’
- (2) oraŋ-tu              biso   baŋun   gərəja-ŋo      lagi  
person-DEM.DIST   can   build   church-3      again  
a. ‘They are able to build their church again.’  
b. ‘They are permitted to build their church again.’  
c. ‘They will probably build their church again.’

Interestingly, when *biso* co-occurs with an aspectual marker such as *la* ‘PFCT’ or *lagi* ‘PROG’, the meaning of *biso* is determined by the ordering between *biso* and the aspectual marker. If *biso* follows the aspectual marker, *biso* is only interpreted as having an abilitative or permissive meaning, as shown in (3).

- (3) maria   la      biso   ŋambe?      baraŋ-ŋo  
Maria   PFCT   can   ACT-take   thing-3  
‘Maria has been able to take the stuff.’  
‘Maria has been permitted to take the stuff.’  
\*‘Maria has probably taken her stuff.’

In contrast, if *biso* precedes one of these aspectual markers, the abilitative and permissive interpretations are not possible. Instead, it can only have the meaning of possibility, as shown below in (4).

- (4) maria   biso   la      ŋambe?      baraŋ-ŋo  
Maria   can   PFCT   ACT-take   thing-3  
‘Maria has probably taken her stuff.’  
\*‘Maria has been able to take the stuff.’  
\*‘Maria has been permitted to take the stuff.’

Cinque (1999) proposes the syntactic hierarchy of modal interpretations. This paper will explore how the above-mentioned facts can be explained syntactically.