Givenness of individuals and eventualities: Perspectives from Malay passives

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The notion of givenness (Chafe 1976) is usually discussed of individual-denoting referential noun phrases (e.g. Prince 1992; Gundel et al. 1993). However, Schwarzschild's (1999) study of accentuation patterns in English shows that the notion is also relevant to other constituent types such as verb phrases, and plays a role in information structure-related linguistic phenomena. Riester (2008) also discusses the givenness of non-individuals as well as individuals. In Nomoto and Kartini (2014), we analysed the fact that the agent of *di-* passives in Malay appears to be restricted to third person as a result of the influence of the givenness of the eventuality described by the passive verb phrase on that of the agent. Specifically, the low givenness of the former forces the latter to be also low, and hence first and second person agents are not suitable, as they are speech act participants and highly given.

In this presentation, I review our analysis of Malay passives, making a few modifications, and discuss issues concerning the givenness of eventualities (typically expressed by verb phrases) and its interaction with that of individuals (typically expressed by noun phrases).

Formal encoding of givenness. The givenness properties of noun phrases are usually regarded as lexically specified. For example, *the* in English encodes as part of its meaning the givenness of '*the* NP'. We suggested that the passive prefix *di-* lexically encodes the givenness properties of the verbal phrase (vP) it projects. I modify this analysis as follows (to resolve a syntactic problem): *di-* heads a functional projection above vP, which I regard as VoiceP following Cole et al. (2008), and lexically encodes the givenness properties of its complement vP in the form of a selectional restriction. The claim remains the same: morphemes exist that encode givenness properties (in addition to other meanings) for both noun and verb phrases.

Implicit agent. *Di-* passives are most frequently used with an implicit agent. We analysed an implicit agent as an unspecified null pronoun (*pro*), and claimed that *pro* is low in givenness due to its unspecified nature. The latter claim runs counter to the accepted view that the more given a denotation is, the less phonetic material the linguistic expression associated with it contains. Gundel et al. (1993) thus identify "Ø (zero) NPs" as the form with the highest givenness status "in focus" in languages such as Japanese. We suggested that *pro* is distinct from Ø. However, that causes proliferation of covert forms. I argue that they capture different stages of the same entity: *pro*/Ø is inherently low in givenness (before interpretation) but can be understood as referring to highly given referents through contextual restriction (after interpretation).

Givenness of eventualities. Schwarzschild defines givenness differently for individuals and non-individuals, i.e. by coreference and entailment (modulo necessary type-shifting) respectively. Baumann and Riester (2012) inherit these two means, but associate them with whether the relevant denotation is referential (coreference) or non-referential (entailment). While this allows one to extend the criteria developed for individuals to eventualities, the actual givenness identification task is not straightforward. In theory, an event is high in givenness if the same action involving the same participants has occurred in immediate discourse. Such a repetition situation, however, seldom occurs, unlike repetitions of the same individual. Turning to the next highest events, the same action can be conducted by the same agent on a different theme; it can also be conducted on the same theme by a different agent—which event is higher in givenness? Moreover, the givenness of the participants probably affect that of the event in which they participate. We did not address these questions, but instead reinterpreted Hopper's (1983) notion of "foregrounding" as indicating low givenness. If this is justified, the givenness of eventualities is (also) determined by—more accurately, correlates with (or possibly *is*)—Transitivity (Hopper and Thompson 1980), which is measured by factors such as telicity and affectedness.

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