Discourse function of di-clauses in narratives

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The status of *di*-clauses has been a controversial issue mainly because of the gap between its syntactic property and its discourse function. Kroeger (2014) gives a clear summary of this issue; *di*-clause is syntactically passive because the syntactic status of the patient argument is subject, and that of the agent argument is oblique, while it functionally deviates from what is typically called passive, in that "(T)he information status of the patient is irrelevant to the choice of voice marker" (Kroeger (2014: 22)).

In the discussion of prototypical discourse function of passive, Givón (1994:9) suggests that "the patient is more topical than the agent, and the agent is extremely non-topical" in the passive voice, while Shibatani (1984: 832) claims that "Agent defocusing is the main pragmatic function of passives". *Di*-clauses in Malay do not exhibit the discourse function mentioned above, especially when they take VS constituent order, in which the patient is not topical, or less topical than the agent.

In modern Indonesian, however, fewer people use *di*-clauses of this pragmatically atypical type. Cumming (1995: 199, 203) suggests the following functional change of *di*-clauses by comparing the function of *di*-clauses in Classical Malay and Modern standard Indonesian. In Classical Malay, *di*- clauses with VS order (Patient Trigger clause in Predicate Trigger order, in Cumming's term) is an unmarked choice in eventive narratives, irrespective of the topicality of the agent or patient, while in Modern Standard Indonesian: *meN*- clauses with a pre-predicate subject, came to be a basic transitive construction in narratives. The 'eventive' narrative is still expressed by *di*- clauses with VS order, but such use of *di*- clauses is: (i) restricted to highly continuous agents (which can be coded as clitics), (ii) often at the climactic point of the story, and (iii) stylistically marked; some authors do not use this type of syntax at all.

This presentation aims to demonstrate the discourse function of *di*-clauses in the varieties of colloquial/ standard Indonesian and one of the indigenous Malay varieties, namely, Brunei Malay through elicited narratives using a series of illustration as stimulus. To see the use of *di*-clauses in discourse, we collected narratives using a set of illustration titled "Jackal and Crow" as stimulus. Based on the narratives told by 8 people of Brunei Malay and 20 speakers of colloquial/ standard Indonesian in Jakarta, we could see the following discourse features in each variety.

(1) Brunei Malay speakers still use the atypical passive frequently; they use it to indicate the plot except for the climax, and the agent is topical, more precisely, more typical than the patient or as topical as the patient. We could say Brunei Malay fully retains the feature of Classical Malay in this point.

(2) About half of the Indonesian speakers in Jakarta still retain atypical use of passive. The use is most often observed in a climatic point of the story. Thus, we could confirm that the change Cumming (1995) suggested on the standard Indonesian approximately 20 years ago still applies to the present Indonesian.

References

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