

Focus restrictions on grammatical relations in Besemah

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In western Austronesian languages, there has been a fruitful connection between 'floated' quantifiers and grammatical relations such that languages vary in regards to the restrictions that they place on the arguments of the verb that can be targeted by (or 'launch') a 'floated' quantifier (e.g., Donohue 2004). However, the universal quantifier *gale* 'all' in Besemah, an under-described Malayic language of southwest Sumatra, evinces an unusual distribution in the clause and much stronger restrictions on the arguments it can quantify. That is, *gale* 'all' rarely occurs adjacent to the NP it is quantifying but is typically 'floated' away from it, and it almost exclusively quantifies the primary (i.e., 'subject') argument. Based upon both naturally occurring and targeted elicited data, I argue that the distribution and restrictions result from information structural properties of *gale*, such that the universal quantifier is actually a maker of focus. Thus, this paper adds to our current knowledge of focus-marking in Malay varieties, given that prosody does not appear to mark focus in Besemah (McDonnell & Turnbull 2018) and various Malay varieties (e.g., Maskikit-Essed & Gussenhoven 2016), and our understanding of voice and grammatical relations in Malay varieties.

References

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