



Clausal subjectivity and topicalisation in siladang

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Abstract

This paper raises the problem of clausal subjectivity and topicalisation in Siladang language. The nature of subjects refers to the links between an agent and its topic. Agents become the grammatical roles which are based on semantic roles, while topics are primarily concerned with pragmatic functions. The discussion of pragmatic functions is intended to find out whether the Bahasa Siladang is categorized as either the subject prominent language group or the topic prominent language. This study is based on the theoretical framework of language typology in regard with the difference between the language that accentuates the subjects with the language that accentuates the topics as what has been suggested by Li and Thompson (1976 (see Li (Ed.), 1976: 457-489).

Keywords: clausal subjectivity, topicalisation, left-dislocation, fronting, siladang

1. Introduction

Bahasa Siladang (Siladang language), or BS for short, is a language spoken by Siladang people living in Sipapaga and Aek Banir villages in Panyabungan Subdistrict, Mandailing Natal Regency, North Sumatera Province. Discussion on BS syntax under the headings of typological study is oriented to the basic structure of clauses is aimed at seeking whether the BS accentuates the subject or highlights the topic in its syntactical typology; this section at a glance discusses the pragmatic functions in relation to the BS sentence. The study of these functions can support and bridge the discussion that departs a simple sentence.

The nature of subject correlates to the link between the agent and the topic. Agents are grammatical roles based on semantic roles, while topics are on pragmatic functions. The discussion on pragmatic functions is intended to find out whether the BS is classed as the subject prominent language or grouped as the topic prominent language. This study is based on the theoretical framework of language typology in concerned with the difference between the language of the subject with the language that accentuates the topic as suggested by Li and Thompson (1976 (see Li (Ed.), 1976: 457-489).

Subjects or subjectivity is related to grammatical discussion while the topics that are related to the functions or pragmatic roles are defined not as semantic roles. In this paper, the topics of sentence are limited term proposed by Comrie (1989: 64). He argued that the topics of sentence are concerned about what the sentence is about, or what the sentence talks about (see also Artawa, 1998: 65)^[3]. Blake (1994) sets the topic boundary as 'what is spoken to' which becomes the opposition to the comment, for example, what is said about the topics. Blake further said that the topics are usually the given information and are specifically expressed as subjects. Topics can also be positioned outside of the actual clauses which are marked by changes of intonation.

2. Literary Background

Gundel (1988)^[8] (in Jufrizal 2007)^[12] argued that the topic-syntactic construction is typologically categorized as 'double subjects' construction including the type of simple sentences in the standard variety of languages which highlight the topics. However, such constructions exist only as a marked choice of form in the language that significantly accentuates the subject. Artawa (1998: 68)^[3] stated that the opinions and studies carried out by Gundel with respect to the topic-comment constructions support what Li and Thompson (1976) have proposed. In line with the study of language typology by these two linguists, Bahasa Indonesia is classified as a language that accentuates the subject; however, they argued that Tagalog, one of languages of the other Austronesian languages, is a language that does not accentuates the subjects or topics.

There is the tendency called dual subject construction which possesses special positions in the languages that highlight the topics. The construction of the whole sentence in this language group is usually indicated by one sentence having two adjacent NPs to the left of the predicates; one of the NPs carries the function of 'topic' and the other brings the function of 'subject'; thus, this condition creates the construction of double subjects. Consider the following examples in (1) and (2) from Li and Thompson (1976: 468).

- (1) *Sekana wa tai ga oisili* (Japanese)
Fish TOP red biter SUB delicious
'The red fish (topic) biter is delicious'.
- (2) *Néiki shu yézi da* (Chinese)
The tree leaves big
'The leaves of the tree (topic) are big'.

In the examples in (1)-(2), both topics and subjects exist. Li and Thompson explained that in (1) the topic is marked by the

particle *wa* and the subject by *ga*. In (2), the *Néiki shu* 'the tree' becomes the topic and the NP *yézi* is the subject and in this sentence the topic can be removed with a pause. The topics in the examples (1)-(2) above are positioned at the beginning of the sentence. In this connection, the topic-comment constructions in the languages highlighting the topic are classed as the unmarked construction; however, the languages giving prime to the topic-comment constructions are determined as the marked construction.

The clausal topicalisation is the derived clause that gets the effect of pragmatic functions in the grammatical level. The term 'topicalization' is used here to refer to the syntactic constructions (derivatives) in which the noun phrase (NP) in the basic construction (canonical) which takes their positions in the post-verbal position (predicate) appears in the initial position before the subject or directly before the verb in the languages with verbal sequences. In this case, the subject appears in the object position. The sentence topic is related to preposition expressed by the sentence. The definition of topic in terms of 'contradiction' relation between the form and its preposition, in fact, derived from the traditional definition of 'subject'. Topics must not necessarily be the grammatical subjects, and grammatical subjects do not necessarily have to be topics. The topics are also defined as foreground expressions, or as an element that governs the framework of predictive distance, time, or features which are governed by main prediction. The topic refers to the sentence-relation which is pragmatically constructed by using pragmatic relations that must be understood as meanings that are contended by a particular context of discourse.

According to Artawa (1998: 68)^[3], traditionally the subject of a sentence is understood as an element that specifies what that phrase is. If this view is approved, it can be said that passive sentences should be understood as a matter of 'patient' (not 'agent') because passivity is a syntactic process that moves the patient into the subject and the agent becomes adjunct. In English, the subject is usually the initial argument (front). However, it does not mean that all of the initial arguments are subject. There is another construction that the initial argument is not the subject of a sentence. Such constructions are referred to as left-dislocation and topicalisation.

So topicalisation is a syntactic construct that places a constituent that normally follows a verb, moved forward preceding the subject NP. Topics are not necessarily all left-most sentence elements or the left-most NP on the outer structure, although this is probably the most common position. Not the entire initial argument is the subject. There is a syntactic construction that the original argument is not the subject of the sentence. See the following examples in (3) and (4) which are quoted from Artawa 1998: 68^[3].

(3) *Mary, she came yesterday.*

(4) *Mary, I know.*

The construction in (3) is an example of a so-called left-dislocation and the one in (4) is an example of topicalisation. The difference between them is that in the left-dislocation construction there is a pronoun in the actual clause that refers to the initial noun phrase of the clause, whereas the topicalisation construction does not have such phenomenon.

In (3) the pronoun *she* is an anaphoric which refers to the NP *Mary*.

In the review to find out and conclude whether BS can be classified as a language promoting the subject or a language accentuating the topic, there are three things to consider which were discussed by Artawa (1998)^[3], for instance, (i) left-dislocation, (ii) topicalisation, and (iii) fronting,

3. Results and Discussion

1. Left-dislocation

The examples of left-dislocation in BS can be seen in (5)-(7):

- (5) *Kepala kampung, iənə di surau*
Head village, he in mushollah
'About the village head, he is in the musholah'
- (6) *Batang Gadis i, aənə janeh*
Batang Gadis this-ART, water-POS3TG limpid
'About Batang Gadis river, its water is limpid'.
- (7) *Uvong i, anggīnə əndəh mamali oto*
Person-ART brother-POS3TG already buy car
'In regard with that man, his younger brother has purchased a car'.

In clause (5) the noun phrase (NP) is dislocated to the left and is definite (in BS the name of person/greeting of honor/general noun need not be marked/zero marking). The NP is followed by a complete sentence whose subject refers to the NP which is transmigrated to the left as exemplified in pronoun *iənə* 'he/she'. Furthermore, in clause (6), the construction of left-dislocation showing the possessor-possessee relationship is also prevalent in the BS. This means that such construction shows that there is possessor-possessee relationship between NPs which undergo left-dislocation in which the subject follows the NPs. In (6), the NP dislocated to the left also indicates the possessor-possessee relationship. The actual clauses in examples (5) and (6) have nonverbal predicates and the construction showing possessor-possessee relationship like this can also happen between NPs which are moved out to the left of their verbal predicate clauses as also shown in (7) which becomes transitive construction plus prefix *ma-* construction.

2. Fronting

The core argument in BS is an unmarked element. Oblique, on the other hand, is marked by preposition and the relation of oblique can be moved out to the front position through the process of fronting. Here are two examples of fronting in (8)-(9).

- (8) *Amai tuhə mamitokkan galas da naik mejo*
Mother old put glass Prep on table
'Grandmother put the glass on the table'.
- (9) *Da naik mejo amai tuhə mamitokkan galas*
On table mother old put glass
'On the table grandmother put the glass'.

In sentence (8), the noun phrase (NP) *da naik mejo* 'on the table' has a preposition *da* and is termed as the 'oblique'. The relation of oblique may be transformed to the fronting as shown in (9).

3. Topicalization

The following examples in (10)-(13) show the existence of core arguments being moved to the left. This transformation shows that the objects are topicalised; therefore, readers can learn about the topicalisation in BS from the examples.

- (10) *Udin mamacah botu gəɔɔŋ*
Udin Active-pecah stone big
'Udin broke big stone'
- (11) *Botu gəɔɔŋ Udin pacah*
Stone big Udin break
'The big stone Udin broke'.
- (12) *Sisi budək mamokol beduk*
Active-pommel beduk (traditional; drum)
'The kids are pommelling the beduk'.
- (13) *Beduk sisi budək pokol*
Beduk kids pommel
'Beduk the kids are pommelling'.

In (10) the NP *botu gəɔɔŋ* 'big stone' is the core argument (object/patient) and so is the NP *beduk* in (12). These two core arguments become the initial elements in each of the clauses in (11) and (13). Thus, the object/patient in BS can be topicalised. The object/patient topicalisation leads to the loss of the prefix marker *ma-* from the verbs.

The sentence 'topic' is a type of sentence in which its pattern structure consists of topic + comment). The 'topic' element in this case includes the NP and the 'comment' has a sentence consisting of subject and predicate. A 'topic' sentence can be constructed from a basic sentence by moving one of the NPs to the starting position, making it the topic of the new phrase. The initial position is filled with pronouns representing the NP; consider the following examples in (14) and (15) below.

- (14) *Dagen sibudək i kuvəŋg togo*
Body kid DEF less healthy
'The kid is not well'.
- (15) *Sibudək i dagəŋnə kuvəŋg togo*
Kid DEF body-POS3TG less healthy
'The kid's health is not good'.

Gundel (1988) ^[8] believed that the rule of subject forming becomes the most common features in languages that highlight subjects as it is encountered in English. In such a type of language, the 'topic-comment' structure does not typically specify the syntactic structure. The tendency for phrases that refer to the 'topic' in the initial position of a sentence occurs primarily by the close relationship between the subject and the topic. However, the rules of subject forming are more limited, if they also occur, in languages that powerfully feature the topics, such as Lisu and Mandarin languages.

4. Conclusions

Based on the above description, the applicative construction of BS is categorized to tend to obey the rules of object forming. These rules appear more prevalently than the rules of subject creation that occur only in a small portion of the application; it also occurs in a number of verbs that have a certain semantic aspect. Referring to Gundel's opinion (in Artawa 1998) ^[3],

when a productive language has its rules of subject forming and of left-dislocation in its marked sentence structure, this language is classified as the one which accentuates the subject.

There are, in fact, several reasons why BS can be regarded as the language that accentuates the subject. First, the grammatical requirements of its basic structure are determined as the subject-predicate construction. The second reason is there is active-passive construction in BS with high productivity. Third, even though BS can topicalise the patients/objects, it is not a basic construction but a derivative construction. The fourth reason is that the rules of object forming are not considered topicalisation because the sentence element that makes the object is oblique-related element. Fifth, the topic-oriented structure of 'double subject' in BS is not the basic sentence structure. Finally, there is the absence of morphosynthetic markers for the elements to be considered as the topic. Topicalisation becomes the marked sentence structure as well as the left-dislocation. However, the subject-predicate construction also becomes the unmarked sentence structure. With respect to pragmatic functions, the BS is typologically determined as the subject prominent language and as a results, its basic structure is oriented to the the subject-predicate construction.

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