

Abstract

This study explores the syntactic structure of clefts in Malay, a construction long debated among linguists.

- (1) *Siapa yang meḡ-beri buku=nya?*
 Who C ACT-buy book=3
 ‘Who bought the book?’
 (Aldridge, 2007, p. 1448)

On the one hand, there is the analysis that the cleft is a monoclausal construction with *yang* being a sort of complementiser head marking movement of the focus to the periphery of the root clause (Figure 1), whilst on the other, the analysis is that the cleft is a copular construction with the focus and a headless relative clause marked by *yang* flanking a null copula (Figure 2).

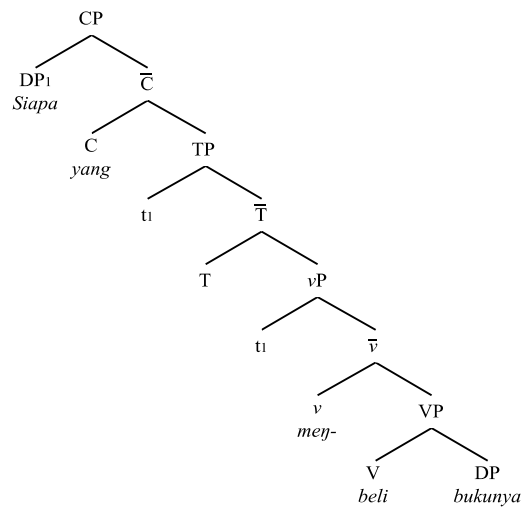


Figure 1: Monoclausal Analysis (Aldridge, 2007)

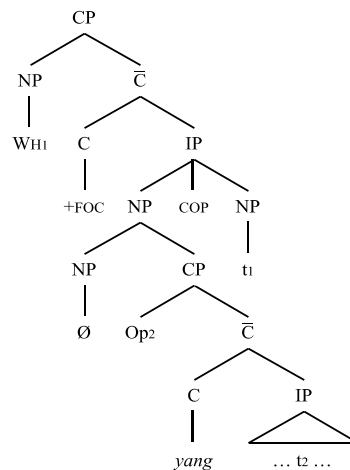


Figure 2: Copular Clause Analysis (Cole & Hermon, 2000)

I argue that the cleft in Malay is a combination of the two analyses; clefts in Malay are actually copular constructions with the visible part of the cleft being embedded under a null copula that takes a null expletive as its subject. This analysis reconciles the apparent monoclausality of Malay clefts with the presence of a covert matrix clause.

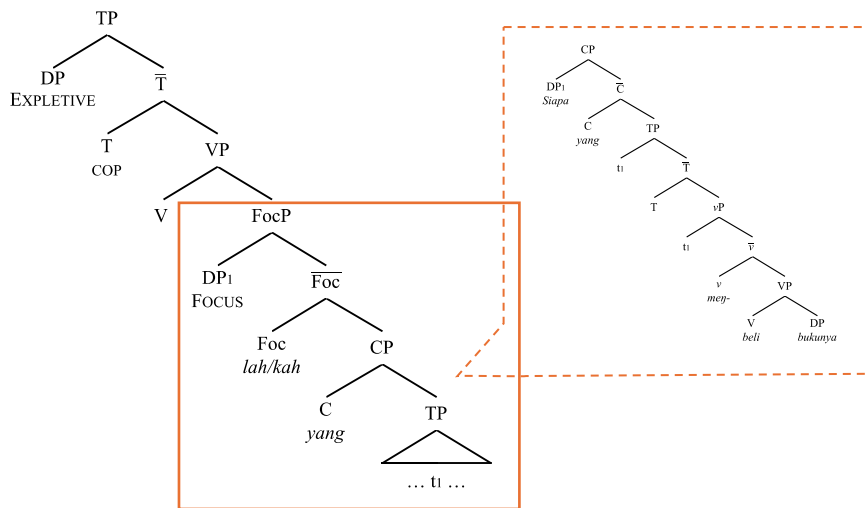


Figure 3: Proposed Structure

By manipulating the restrictions on overt encoding of the copula such as aspect, a matrix copular clause above the visible part of the cleft can be made visible, providing novel evidence of silent syntactic structure in the cleft construction that has gone undetected prior to this. For example, the use of the modal in the sentence below presupposes a temporal interpretation, which necessitates the use of inchoative *jadi*, rather than the atemporal copula, revealing a matrix copular clause without an overt subject.

- (2) *Boleh jadi ibu sendiri yang leka.*
 can become mother self C negligent
 ‘It could be THE MOTHER HERSELF who was negligent.’
 (Shahimi, 2019)

Also by manipulating the restrictions on overt encoding of null expletives in Malay postulated by Mustaffa (2020), it is possible to make visible the matrix copular clause with an overt expletive subject. The example below shows the use of 3rd person singular pronoun *ia* as an overt nonreferential subject, whose spell-out is conditioned by subject-auxiliary inversion, in the matrix clause of a cleft when derived into a polar interrogative.

- (3) *Ada-kah ia Sarawak Report yang banyak mej-laku-kan serang-an...?*
 AUX-Q 3.SG S. C much ACT-do-APPL attack-NMZ
 ‘Was it SARAWAK REPORT who committed attacks a lot...?’
 ("Najib, jangan lupa saman Tun M," 2015)

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