

Sundanese Active Voice: Transitivity, Agentivity or None of the Above?

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Recent years have seen no consensus as regards the syntactic function and semantic role of the active marker in Indonesian-type languages. Researchers such as Chung (1976), Sneddon (1996), Cole and Hermon (1998), and Cole, Hermon and Yanti (2007) have argued that the AV morpheme is a transitive marker. Other researchers (such as Wouk 1989, Cumming 1991, Postman 2002, Gil 2002, and others) maintain that the AV morphology is essentially an agent (trigger) marker. Examples (1-2) exhibit transitive AV-constructions in Indonesian and Sundanese, in which the preverbal argument is an agent and the postverbal argument is a patient.

In this paper, I will demonstrate that both the transitivity and agentivity analyses do not suffice to account for the Sundanese facts, where the AV morphology, the verbal prefix *N-*, is commonly found on intransitives, apparent counterevidence for the transitivity analysis (3). The agentivity analysis is also problematic for the Sundanese facts since the AV morpheme can surface on prototypical unaccusative verbs where the grammatical subject is semantically patient (4). Another problem that the agentivity analysis encounters pertains to two peculiar constructions in Sundanese, namely *meunang* and *pada* constructions. In both constructions, an AV-marked transitive predicate occurs with a grammatical subject that is assigned the thematic role of patient, as illustrated in (5-6) respectively.

Based in part on Nomoto and Soh's (2009) analysis of the AV morpheme in Malay, I will argue that the Sundanese prefix *N-* is the morphological realization of the head of little *v*, or the head of VoiceP in the spirit of Son's (2006) proposal. This little *v* must project a specifier when the AV morpheme occurs on active transitive and unergative intransitive verbs, in which case the specifier will be saturated by a grammatical subject bearing an agent role. With respect to the AV-marked unaccusative verbs, the nasal prefix heads the defective little *v*, that is, a verbal projection that lacks an external argument, following Marantz (1997) and Chomsky (2001). My analysis can naturally capture the distribution of Sundanese AV morphology in a wide range of verb types even when it falls outside the limits of both the agentivity and transitivity accounts.

In sum, I will argue in this paper that Sundanese lacks a necessary correspondence between the occurrence of AV morphology and the thematic role of the grammatical subject and likewise between AV morphology and transitivity.

- Mobil itu menabrak kereta. (Indonesian)

car DET AV.hit cart

‘That car hit the cart.’

- Mobil éta nabrak karéta. (Sundanese)

car DET AV.hit cart

‘That car hit the cart.’

- Barudak keur ngarojay di walungan.

children PROG AV.PL.swim in river

‘The children are swimming in the river.’

- Dompét kuring murag.

wallet I AV.drop

‘My wallet dropped.’

- Kamar ieu geus meunang mulas.

room DET PERF PART AV.paint

‘This room has been painted.’

- Imas pada néang-an ku urang lembur.

Imas PART AV.search-AN by people village

Lit: ‘Imas was searched for by the villagers.’

‘The villagers searched for Imas.’

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