The Structure of Complex Existential Sentences in Malay

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In English we have both there's someone who wants to see you and there's someone wants to see you. A parallel pair can be found in Malay too.

(1) a. Ada orang yang nak jumpa awak.
   be person COMP want see you
   ‘There’s a person who wants to see you.’

b. Ada orang nak jumpa awak.
   be person want see you
   ‘There’s a person wants to see you.’

In English teaching in Japan, the second English sentence above is taught as a sentence derived from the first one by way of the omission of the relativiser who. Much the same is the case in the teaching of Malay/Indonesian in Japan. (1b) is thought of as a result of the omission of the relativiser yang from (1a). Shoho’s (1993) list of the environments where yang is optional includes ‘in the noun phrase after ada’.

This paper explores the precise syntactic structure of sentences like (1b), which I call ‘complex existential sentences’ as opposed to ‘minimal existential sentences’ after Chung (1987). I will examine the following three hypotheses regarding the syntactic structure of complex existential sentences: (I) the relative clause hypothesis, (II) the sentence hypothesis and (III) the quantifier hypothesis. Hypothesis I reflects the view in the previous paragraph and assumes the same structure for both (1a) and (1b) except that the complementiser is overt in (1a) but phonetically null in (1b). Hypothesis II analyses the NP following ada ‘to be/to have’ and the second predicate, i.e. nak jumpa awak ‘want to see you’ as a sentence (IP) rather than an NP. Hypothesis III is motivated by Goddard’s (2002) semantic analysis of ada. He claims that Malay ada is quantifier-like, being an exponent of the semantic prime SOME as well as that of THERE is. Accordingly ada is treated as a part of the subject under this hypothesis. I claim that the first hypothesis is the most plausible but the structures of two types of existential sentences are not completely identical.

References