

## The syntax of *dah* in Colloquial Malay

The morpheme *dah* in Colloquial Malay (CM) has not received much attention in studies of Malay. To the extent that *dah* is mentioned, it is usually referred to as the colloquial counterpart of the aspectual auxiliary *sudah* in Standard Formal Malay (SFM) (e.g., Gan 1991: 29). However, unlike *sudah* in SFM which appears only pre-verbally (Koh 1990: 204), *dah* in CM may appear in three surface linear positions: pre-verbally (1a), post-verbally (1b) and sentence finally (1c).

- (1) a. Aku dah sampai kat KLCC.  
I DAH arrive at KLCC  
'I have arrived at KLCC.'
- b. Aku sampai dah kat KLCC.  
I arrive DAH at KLCC  
'I have already arrived at KLCC.'
- c. Aku sampai kat KLCC dah.  
I arrive at KLCC DAH  
'I have already arrived at KLCC.'

In this paper, I argue that the three surface linear positions of *dah* in fact correspond to two distinct structural positions. In particular, post-verbal *dah* and sentence final *dah* occupy the same syntactic structural position, distinct from that of pre-verbal *dah*. I propose that post-verbal *dah* and sentence final *dah* occupy a position below C but above TP, while preverbal *dah* occupies a syntactic position above the auxiliary *nak* and the negative marker *tidak*.

One piece of evidence for the analysis comes from the fact that post-verbal *dah* and sentence final *dah* cannot co-occur (2a), though they each can co-occur with pre-verbal *dah* ((2b) and (2c)).

- (2) a. \*Aku sampai dah kat KLCC dah.  
I arrive DAH at KLCC DAH
- b. Aku dah sampai kat KLCC dah.  
I DAH arrive at KLCC DAH  
'I have already arrived at KLCC.'
- c. Aku dah sampai dah kat KLCC.  
I DAH arrive DAH at KLCC  
'I have already arrived at KLCC.'

The inability of post-verbal *dah* and sentence final *dah* to co-occur can be explained if they occupy the same syntactic structural position. The ability of post-verbal and sentence final *dah* to appear with pre-verbal *dah* suggests that pre-verbal *dah* does not occupy the same syntactic structural position as either post-verbal or sentence final *dah*.

Support for the particular structural positions of *dah* comes from (i) the relative ordering and scope between *dah* and the question particle *ke*; (ii) the relative ordering and scope between *dah* and the auxiliary *nak* and the negative marker *tidak*; and (iii) the relative scope between pre-verbal and post-verbal/sentence final *dah*.

The analysis helps clarify the connection drawn between CM *dah* and Mandarin Chinese aspectual particle *-le* (e.g., David Gil, comments at ISMIL 13 and 14). Unlike CM *dah*, Mandarin *-le* can only appear in two surface linear positions: post-verbal and sentence final (Li and Thompson 1981). The two linear positions correspond to two distinct structural positions, and according to Soh and Gao (2006) and Soh (2008), post-verbal *-le* occupies a position above vP (below auxiliary and negation), and sentence final *-le* occupies a position below C and above TP. Under the proposed analysis, CM *dah* patterns closely with Mandarin *-le* structurally, with post-verbal and sentence final *dah* sharing the same syntactic position with sentence final *-le*, and preverbal *dah* occupying a structurally higher position than post-verbal *-le*.