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Abstract

On the multifunctionality of compound prepositions in Indonesian

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The use of compound forms (e.g. English ‘on top of’) has generally been noted as being motivated by semantic and pragmatic factors. For example, semantically, the English expression ‘in front of the TV’ is more specific rather than ‘in the room’ since the former expression refers to a narrower/smaller space within the room, thus reflecting a mental partitioning of a region into smaller spaces (Svorou 1994: 6). Similarly in Indonesian, it has been claimed that the expression *di dalam rumah* ‘inside the house’ is more specific than *di rumah* ‘in the house, at home’ since it denotes a part of the house (Chaer 1990: 27).

Pragmatically, it has been claimed that a compound form can be used to give emphasis to a location, thus *on top of* is more emphatic than *on* in ‘Open your eyes! There it is right *on top of* the newspaper’ (Lindstromberg 1998: 56). The use of a compound form may also indicate a marked location, while the corresponding simple form suggests an unmarked location (Levinson 1999, 2000), e.g. ‘The lamp is *on top of* the desk’ suggests an unusual viewing angle, that is, one that is different from the usual direct contact relation suggested by *on*.

In this paper I argue that these accounts only partially explain the use compound prepositions in Indonesian. Alternations between simple and compound forms and between two compound forms in a stretch of discourse remain unaccounted for. By gleaning insights from studies of discourse anaphora and information structure (Fox 1987a, 1987b, Stirling 2001) and discourse-functional studies of prepositions (e.g. O’Dowd 1998), I will show that, as well as being motivated by semantic and pragmatic considerations, compound use is also driven by discourse factors. Based on a corpus of written and spoken Indonesian I propose that such alternations can be considered as an example of a non-nominal discourse anaphoric marking that is associated with referent accessibility and discourse continuity. As the more explicit or marked member of the simple/compound opposition, compounds serve such functions as to introduce the beginning of discourse settings (cf. Casad 1996), to add an affective dimension to discourse, and to describe locations or situations in a contrastive way.

References

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