

Pro drop in Standard Malay

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Introduction

An example from a language textbook

- ▶ Standard Malaysian Malay (henceforth ‘Malay’) allows the so-called *pro* drop, especially in its colloquial variety (Koh 1990).

(1) **Encik Abe:** Helo. Ini rumah Encik Isa, ya?

‘Mr Abe: Hello. Is this Mr Isa’s house?’

Puan Zeti: Ya. Oh, Encik Abe. Nak cakap dengan Isa, ya.

‘Mrs Zeti: Yes. Oh, Mr Abe. You wanna talk to Isa, right?’

(Faridah & Kondo 2017: 50)

(2) a. **Encik** nak cakap dengan Isa, ya. (overt pronoun)

2SG.M.HON

b. **pro** nak cakap dengan Isa, ya. (null pronoun *pro*)

Two types of *pro* drop languages

- ▶ Agreement *pro* drop languages have rich agreement morphology.

(3) Spanish

¿Habl-as español? — Sí, *habl-o* español.
speak-2SG Spanish yes speak-1SG Spanish

‘Do [you] speak Spanish? — Yes, [I] speak Spanish.’

- ▶ Discourse *pro* drop languages lack rich agreement morphology.

(4) Japanese

Supeingo *hanasu?* — Un, *hanasu.*
Spanish speak yeah speak

‘Do [you] speak Spanish? — Yes, [I] speak [it].’

The present study

- ▶ Malay is categorized as a discourse *pro* drop language.
- ▶ The nature of *pro* drop in other discourse *pro* drop languages such as Japanese and Mandarin Chinese has been studied extensively.
- ▶ However, *pro* drop in Malay has not received as much attention.
- ▶ This study
 - ▶ shows that *pro* drop in Malay behaves similarly to that in Mandarin Chinese and Japanese
 - ▶ provides an additional piece of evidence for Huang's (1984) analysis of *pro* drop.

Outline

- ▶ Previous mentions of *pro* drop in Malay
- ▶ Basic description
 - ▶ Subject-object asymmetry
- ▶ Analysis
 - ▶ Huang's (1984) analysis
- ▶ Conclusion
 - ▶ Two types of discourse *pro* drop languages
 - ▶ Taboo object *pro*

Previous mentions of *pro* drop in Malay

Mashudi (2003) Kategori kosong *pro* yang berfungsi frasa nama subjek nahuan dalam bahasa Melayu

► All putative examples of *pro* drop involve a pleonastic subject.

(5) *pro* Sudah ada seekor ular di dalam lubang itu.

‘There already is a snake in the hole.’

(6) *pro* Sedang hujan lebat sekarang.

‘It is raining heavily now.’

(7) *pro* Memang benar bahawa Ali itu kaya.

‘It is indeed true that Ali is rich.’

(8) *pro* Agaknya Amin terlupa.

[*agakanya* = V in M’s analysis]

‘It seems that Amin forgot.’

(9) *pro* Kelihatannya wanita itu sudah hamil. [*kelihatannya* = V in M’s analysis]

‘It appears that the lady is already pregnant.’

Abdullah Zawawi et al. (2022) Subjek nul *pro* bahasa Melayu: Suatu penilaian semula berpandukan kerangka minimalis

- ▶ Only recognize agreement *pro* drop, but not discourse *pro* drop.
- ▶ Only discuss *ada* sentences.

(10) *sub* Ada penyeludup di pulau ini. [sub = empty subject]

‘There are smugglers in this island.’

Nomoto (2022) Aspek nahu dalam penterjemahan bahasa Jepun-bahasa Melayu: Ayat kewujudan dan pengguguran *pro*

- ▶ Compare *pro* drop in Malay and Japanese.
- ▶ Point out that *pro* drop in Malay is more restricted than in Japanese.

(11) Japanese

*pro*₁ Kanshokukaado-o o-watasi-itasimasu node,
meal.completion.card-ACC POL-give-POL because

reji nite *pro*₂ go-teiji-kudasai.
cashier at POL-show-please

‘We will give you a meal completion card, so please present *it* at the cash register.’

(12) *Kami* / **pro*₁ akan memberikan kad pengesahan habis makan, jadi sila tunjukkannya / *pro*₂ di kaunter pembayaran.

Basic description

Distribution of empty arguments (*e*)

- (13) a. *e* Dah makan? ‘Did *you* eat yet?’ (matrix subject)
- b. Siti membeli atau meminjam buku itu?—Dia pinjam *e*. (matrix object)
‘Did Siti buy or borrow the book?—She borrowed *it*.’
- c. Ali kata [*e* akan jumpa Siti]. ‘Ali said *he* will see Siti.’ (embedded subject)
- d. Ali kata [dia akan jumpa *e*]. ‘Ali said he will see *her*.’ (embedded object)
- e. Saya pergi rumah Fatimah dan jumpa ibu bapanya. (possessor)
Ibu *e* masak pisang goreng untuk saya.
‘I went to Fatimah’s house and saw her parents.
*My/*Her* mother cooked banana fritters for me.’

Subject-object asymmetry

- ▶ Huang (1984)
 - ▶ Subject and object empty arguments are distinct entities because they behave differently.
 - ▶ Empty subject = *pro*
 - ▶ Empty object = variable bound by a null topic
- ▶ The same asymmetry seems to exist in Malay.

Subject-object asymmetry in Mandarin Chinese

(14) a. Zhangsan_i xiwang [e_i keyi kanjian Lisi].
Zhangsan hope can see Lisi

‘Zhangsan_i hopes that he_i can see Lisi.’

b. *Zhangsan_i xiwang [Lisi keyi kanjian e_i].
Zhangsan hope Lisi can see

(Intended: ‘Zhangsan_i hopes that Lisi can see him_i.’)

OK with an
overt pronoun

(Huang 1984: 538)

Subject-object asymmetry in Japanese

(15) a. **dare_i-ga** [**e_i** **Bill-o** **nagut-ta**] **to** **it-ta** **ka?**
who-NOM Bill-ACC hit-PST that say-PST Q

‘Who_i said that he_i hit Bill?’

b. ***dare_i-ga** [**Bill-ga** **e_i** **nagut-ta**] **to** **it-ta** **ka?**
who-NOM Bill-NOM hit-PST that say-PST O

(Intended: ‘Who_i said that Bill hit him_i?’)

OK with an
overt pronoun

(Kuroda 1965)

cf. **dare_i-ga** [**e_i** **Bill-ni** **nagur-are-ta**] **to** **it-ta** **ka?**
who-NOM Bill-DAT hit-PASS-PST that say-PST Q

‘Who_i said that he_i was hit by Bill?’

Subject-object asymmetry in Malay

- (16) a. **Ali_i** kata [**e_i** akan jumpa Siti].
‘Ali_i said he_i will see Siti.’
b. ***Ali_i** kata [Siti akan jumpa **e_i**].
(Intended: ‘Ali_i said Siti will see him_i.; OK for ‘... Siti will see him/her_j’)
- (17) a. **Siapa_i** cakap [**e_i** tolong Ali]?
‘Who_i said s/he_i helped Ali?’
b. ***Siapa_i** cakap [Ali tolong **e_i**]? NOT: **Siapa** cakap “Ali tolong (aku)”?
(Intended: ‘Who_i said Ali helped him/her_i?’)
- (18) **Siapa_i** cakap [**e_i** di-tolong oleh Ali]?
‘Who_i said s/he_i was helped by Ali?’

Analysis

Huang's (1984) analysis

- ▶ Subject $e = pro$
- ▶ Object $e =$ variable bound by a null topic \rightarrow indicated by “ t ” here

(19) **neige ren_i** Zhangsan shuo [Lisi bu renshi **t_i**].
that man Zhangsan say Lisi not know

‘**That man_i**, Zhangsan said Lisi didn't know **e_i** .’ (Huang 1984: 542)

(20) [**Top e_i**] Zhangsan shuo [Lisi bu renshi **t_i**].
Zhangsan say Lisi not know

‘***Him_i**, Zhangsan said that Lisi didn't know **e_i** .’ (Huang 1984: 542)

Extension to Malay

- ▶ Prediction: If an empty object is a variable bound by a null topic, it is expected that the prefix *meN-* cannot occur.
- ▶ *MeN-* is known to block DP movement (Saddy 1991; Soh 1998; Cole and Hermon 1998).

(21) *Siapa yang t membeli beg mahal itu?* (subject *wh*-movement)

‘Who bought that expensive bag?’

(21) a. **Apa yang Siti membeli t ?* (object *wh*-movement)

b. *Apa yang Siti beli t ?* ‘What did Siti buy?’

cf. *Apa yang dibeli oleh Siti?* ‘What was bought by Siti?’

(23) a. **Buku ini Siti sudah membeli atau meminjam t ?* (object topicalization)

b. *Buku ini Siti sudah beli atau pinjam t ?*

‘As for this book, did Siti buy it or borrow it?’

Empty objects and *meN-*

- ▶ The prediction is borne out.

(24) Siti membeli atau meminjam buku itu?—Dia {*pinjam*/**meminjam*} *e* .

‘Did Siti buy or borrow the book?—She borrowed it.’

(25) Nadiah menulis surat kepada Siti dan Siti sudah {*terima*/**menerima*} *e* .

‘Nadiah wrote a letter to Siti and Siti has already received it.’

- ▶ This acceptability contrast between bare and *meN-* forms provides a new piece of evidence for Huang’s analysis.

Structure and interpretation of sentences with empty objects

(26) Nadiah menulis surat kepada Siti dan [_{TOPP} [_{DP} \emptyset]_i Siti sudah *terima* t_i]

introduction of

discourse referents

|

l

|

g_i

coreference

movement of null topic DP

‘Nadiah wrote a letter to Siti and Siti has already received it.’

► NOT direct anaphora

(27) Nadiah menulis surat kepada Siti dan [_{TP} Siti sudah *terima* pro_i]

cf. menerimanya

Empty subjects

- ▶ If empty objects are variables, empty subjects must be *pro* (at least in sentences in which both subject and object are empty).
- ▶ If they were variables, sentences in which both the subject and object are empty would involve otherwise impossible multiple extraction.

(28) *Ali kata dia jumpa Siti?—Ali kata jumpa.*

‘Did Ali say he saw Siti?—Ali said [he] saw [her].’

(29) [_{TopP} [_{DP} \emptyset]_i *Ali*_j *kata* [_{CP} *t*_i [_{TP} *pro*_j *jumpa t*_i]]]

No surprising multiple extraction in Malay (Nomoto, in prep.)

► *wh*-movement + focus movement

(30) Toba Batak (Erlewine 2018)

a. *Aha si Potlak man-[t]uhor ___ ___ ? (no focus movement)
what PN Potlak ACT-buy

b. Aha holan si Potlak man-[t]uhor ___ ___ ? (+ focus movement)
what only PN Potlak ACT-buy

‘What did only Potlak buy?’

(31) Malay

a. *Apa(kah) yang Ali membeli ___ ? (no focus movement)

b. *Apa(kah) hanya Ali(lah) yang ___ membeli ___ ? (+ focus movement)

Q

Foc

Conclusion

Summary

- ▶ *Pro* drop in Malay is similar to that in Mandarin Chinese and Japanese, exhibiting a subject-object asymmetry.
- ▶ Huang's (1984) analysis can be extended to Malay.
 - ▶ Subject $e = pro$
 - ▶ Object $e =$ variable bound by a null topic (i.e. no object *pro*)
- ▶ The ungrammaticality of *meN-* in sentences with empty objects provides a new piece of evidence for Huang's analysis.

Remaining issue 1: Two types of discourse *pro* drop languages

- ▶ *Pro* drop is more restricted in Malay than in Japanese (Nomoto 2022)

(11) Japanese

*pro*1 Kanshokukaado-o o-watasi-itasimasu node,
 meal.completion.card-ACC POL-give-POL because

reji nite *pro*2 go-teiji-kudasai.
cashier at POL-show-please

‘*We* will give you a meal completion card, so please present *it* at the cash register.’

(12) *Kami* / **pro*1 akan memberikan kad pengesahan habis makan, jadi sila tunjukkannya2/*pro*2 di kaunter pembayaran.

Translations of overt 1st and 2nd person expressions in Japanese (Nomoto et al. 2023)

- ▶ TALPCo (TUFS Asian Language Parallel Corpus; Nomoto et al. 2018)
 - ▶ 1,372 sentences in the formal conversational register
 - ▶ Japanese sentences translated into 7 Asian languages and English
- ▶ All target languages are discourse *pro* drop languages.
- ▶ However, two clear types exist differing in actual usage of *pro* drop.
→ Why?

Language	Japanese	Korean	Thai	Burmese	Malay	Indonesian	Vietnamese
1st	161	161	164	164	800	788	749
2nd	8	3	15	6	42	31	45

Remaining issue 2: In search of taboo object *pro*

- ▶ Hassall (2005) reports unexpected instances of object relativization with *meN-* and analyses the contexts in which they are found.

(32) Orang asing dan media mereka tidak ada niat baik terhadap kita...
Yang mereka ingin *melihat* ialah negara kita mengalami nasib buruk...
cf. yang ingin mereka lihat

‘Foreigners and their media do not have friendly intentions towards us...
What they would like to see is our country suffering misfortune...’

(Mahathir Mohamed’s speech, Hassall 2005)

- ▶ Taboo object *pro* is expected to be found in similar contexts.
→ Corpus study

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