Givenness of individuals and eventualities: Perspectives from Malay passives

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1 Introduction

Background

- The notion of givenness is usually discussed of individual-denoting referential noun phrases (e.g. Chafe 1976; Prince 1992; Gundel et al. 1993).

- However, the notion is also relevant to other constituent types such as verb phrases (Schwarzschild 1999; Riester 2008).

Nomoto and Kartini (2014)

- Fact: The agent of *di-* passives in Malay appears to be restricted to third person.

- Analysis: A result of the influence of the givenness of the eventuality described by the passive verb phrase on that of the agent.
  Eventuality: low → Agent: low
  ☺1st/2nd person = speech act participants: high

This paper

- review our analysis of Malay passives, making a few modifications

- discuss issues concerning the givenness of eventualities (typically expressed by verb phrases) and its interaction with that of individuals (typically expressed by noun phrases).

Organization

2 Givenness

What is givenness?

- The notion of givenness has to do with

  - the speaker's assessment
  - of the addressee's consciousness/attention state and knowledge
  - with regard to a referent.

  (e.g. Chafe 1976; Prince 1992; Gundel et al. 1993; Lambrecht 1994)

- A referent is **given** if it is already activated in the speaker's consciousness at the time of utterance.

- A referent is **new** if it is newly activated by the relevant utterance.

- Multiple statuses exist with different degrees of givenness.

The Givenness Hierarchy (Gundel et al. 1993)

(1)   The Givenness Hierarchy

						type
in			uniquely			identi-
focus	> activated >	familiar >	identifiable >	referential >	fiable
	that				
it	*this*	*that* NP	*the* NP	indefinite	*a* NP
	this NP[1]			*this* NP	

- A status entails the statuses to its right.
  e.g. if a referent is 'in focus', it is also 'activated', 'familiar', 'uniquely identifiable', 'referential' and 'type identifiable'.

- This feature captures the fact that one form can be used for multiple adjacent statuses.
  e.g. '*the* NP' (uniquely identifiable) can be used to refer to referents of higher statuses as well.

Evidence for givenness of non-individuals

- Although studies of givenness usually centres around individual-denoting noun phrases, the notion also applies to other semantic types.

- The Coding Protocol for Statuses on the Givenness Hierarchy (Gundel et al. 2006) takes into consideration eventualities and propositions when discussing the usage of the italicized nominals in (2) and (3).

(2)   John fell off his bike. ***This/it*** happened yesterday.
       [*this/it*: John's falling off his bike (event)]

(3)   A: John fell off his bike.
       B: ***That***'s not true.
       [*that*: that John fell off his bike (proposition)]

- While Gundel et al.'s concern lies in the nominal expressions, an adequate description of them presumes that their non-individual antecedents have givenness statuses.

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[1]The DP hypothesis is assumed here, whereby the traditional "noun phrases" are analysed as determiner phrases with a determiner head and an NP complement: [DP D NP].

3   Passive agents in Malay

Passive constructions in Malay

(4)   *Di-* (morphological) passive
       a.   Verbal morphology: *di-*
       b.   Agent: seemingly optional
       c.   Dokumen itu sudah **di-**semak   oleh mereka.
             document that already PASS-check by   them
             'The document has already been checked by them.'

(5)   Bare passive

       a.   Verbal morphology: none
       b.   Agent: obligatory, immediately before the verb
       c.   Dokumen itu   sudah   *(mereka) semak.
             document that already   they   check
             'They have already checked the document.'

Encoding of *di-* passive agents

(6)   a.   *Pro* type: no overt agent, the presence of an agent is entailed
             Surat itu   sudah   di-poskan ***pro***.
             letter that already PASS-post

       b.   *Oleh* type
             Surat itu   sudah   di-poskan **oleh kerani**.
             letter that already PASS-post by   clerk

       c.   DP type: obligatory, immediately after the verb
             Surat itu   sudah   di-poskan **kerani**.
             letter that already PASS-post clerk
             'The letter was already posted (by the clerk).'

Person restriction on the agent

- *Di-* passives strongly prefer third person agents over first and second person ones (Nomoto and Kartini 2014).

- No similar person restriction exists for the agent in bare passives.

(7)   Dokumen itu   sudah   saya/awak/mereka semak.
       document that already I/you/they   check
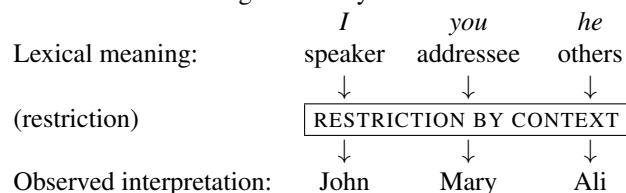   'I/You/They have already checked the document.'

Why?—Nomoto and Kartini's information structure-based account

(8) a. CLAIM 1: The eventuality described by a *di-* passive verb phrase is low in givenness.

   b. CLAIM 2: CLAIM 1 forces the agent to be also low in givenness.

   c. CLAIM 3: The low givenness of the relevant eventuality is encoded by the passive prefix *di-*.

- Claims 1 and 2: Why are first and second person referents rare in *di-* passives?

CLAIM 1		CLAIM 2
Eventuality: low	→	Agent: low
		☺1st/2nd person = speech act participants: high

- Claim 3: Why only in *di-* passives but not in bare passives?
  Bare passives do not involve *di-*.

- Even though the restriction is directly relevant to the agent DP, one cannot just focus on the agent DP.

- This is because the restriction is not on the agent DP in general, but only on that in *di-* passives.

(9) Alternative account
   The agent is suppressed in *di-* passives, but not in bare passives.
   → Low givenness of the *di-* passive agent & no person restriction in bare passives

- No. The agent is not suppressed in all types of *di-* passives.

  - Nomoto and Kartini analyse the *pro* and *oleh* types as containing a null unspecified pronoun *pro* (cf. section 4).

  - An overt agent is obligatory in the DP type.

4   Implicit agent

- Fact 1: Of the three types of *di-* passives, the most frequently used is the *pro* type with an implicit agent.

- Fact 2: The presence of an agent is entailed even though it is not explicitly expressed.

- Analysis: Nomoto and Kartini (2014) analyse an implicit agent as an unspecified null pronoun (*pro*) rather than being absent altogether from the structure.

(10) a. *Pro* type *di-* passive[2]

   b. *Oleh* type *di-* passive

   c. DP type *di-* passive

   d. Bare passive

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[2]In *di-* passives, the verb moves from V to v to Voice to supply the prefix *di-* with a verbal host to attach to. See the proceedings paper for the case features associated with the voice markers, and the overall voice system of Malay that I assume here.

The issue

- The prevalence of the *pro* type appears to run counter to our information-based analysis of *di-* passive agents presented above.

- It is generally agreed upon that the level of givenness inversely correlates with the amount of overt material:
  the more given a denotation is, the less phonetic material the linguistic expression associated with it contains.
  e.g. Gundel et al. (1993): "Ø (zero) NPs" (in Japanese, etc.) is a form with the highest givenness status "in focus".

- If *pro* = Ø, *pro* should be more given than the overt first and second person pronouns.
  → The *pro* type *di-* passive should be at least as infrequent as *di-* passives with first and second person agents, quite contrary to actual fact... ☹

- Nomoto and Kartini (2014): *pro* ≠ Ø. *Pro* is low in givenness due to its unspecified nature.
  → The prevalence of the *pro* type makes sense.
  BUT this causes proliferation of covert forms... ☺

Solution

- Insofar as Malay is concerned, *pro* and Ø capture different stages of the same entity:
  pro/Ø is inherently low in givenness but can be understood as referring to highly given referents through contextual restriction.[3]

- The situation is comparable to the interpretation of pronouns.

(11) Context: John is talking with Mary about their mutual friend Ali.

	I	*you*	*he*
Lexical meaning:	speaker	addressee	others
	↓	↓	↓
(restriction)	RESTRICTION BY CONTEXT		
	↓	↓	↓
Observed interpretation:	John	Mary	Ali

(12) Interpretation of *pro* in *pro* and *oleh* type *di-* passives

	(i) *pro* type (10a)		(ii) *oleh* type (10b)
Lexical meaning:	unspecified	unspecified	unspecified
	↓	↓	↓
(restriction)	↓	CONTEXT	*oleh* 'by' X
	↓	↓	↓
Observed interpretation:	unspecified	specific referent	X

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[3]I put aside instances of Ø that arise from ellipsis.
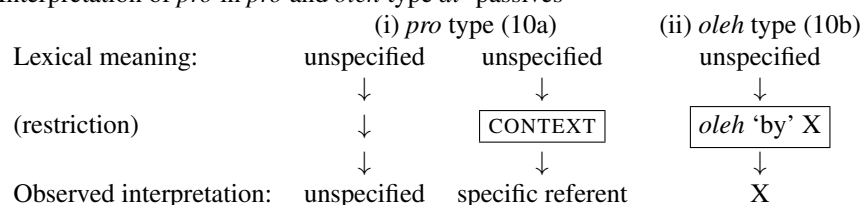
- The originally unspecified referent of *pro* can be restricted by overt and covert context to a first or second person referent, as in (13) and (14).

(13) Beliau **di-temui** *pro* selepas merasmikan Seminar Pengurusan Sukan
      he   PASS-meet   after   officiate   seminar management sport
      Institusi Pengajian Tinggi (IPT) 2010 di UiTM kampus Khazanah Alam
      institution study   high   2010 at UiTM campus Khazanah Alam
      Bandar Jengka di sini.
      Bandar Jengka at here
      'He **was met by** *pro* after he had officiated the 2010 Higher Academic Institution Sports Management Seminar at UiTM, Khazanah Alam Bandar Jengka campus here.'   (*Utusan Malaysia*, 01/01/2011)
      [*pro*: the writer of the article or 'the media' including the writer (1st person)]

(14) Usia tidak mengampunkan segala dosa yang **di-buat** *pro* **oleh kita**.
      age not   forgive   all   sin REL PASS-do   by   us
      'Age does not forgive all the sins that **were committed by us**.'   (DBP Corpus)

Support from Classical Malay

- Classical Malay provides a pattern no longer available in Modern Malay, where an overt pronominal passive agent is restricted by an *oleh* 'by' phrase.[4]
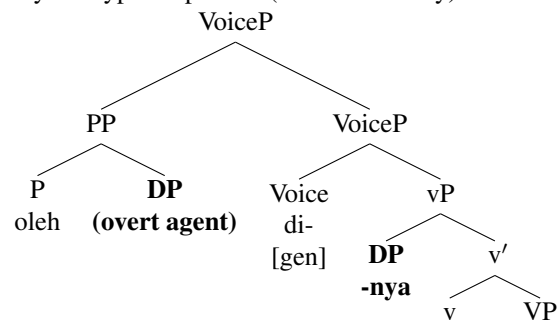
(15) a. Maka **oleh** segala mereka itu akan Raja Suran **di-**bawa**-nya** kepada
          so   by   all   them that of   Raja Suran PASS-carry-3 to
          raja-nya.
          king-3
          'So, they all took Raja Suran to their king.'   (A. Samad 1979:15)

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[4]This construction is reminiscent of Legate's (2012) analysis of Acehnese passives, whereby verbal prefixes in v restrict the agent, as shown in (i). Note that in terms of their semantic function, the verbal prefixes in Acehnese are comparable to the enclitic *-nya* in Malay rather than the passive prefix *di-*; Acehnese does not have a morpheme corresponding to *di-* in Malay. This supports the current analysis where (Malay) *di-* occupies a head higher than v.

(i) a. Aneuk miet nyan *di*-kap   (*lé* uleue nyan).
         child small that 3FAM-biate by snake that
         'The child was bitten (by the snake).'
     b. Aneuk miet nyan *lôn-/ neu-/ geu*-tingkue *lé* lôn/ droeneuh/ gopnyan.
         child small that 1SG- 2POL- 3POL-carry by me   you   him/her
         'The child is carried by me/you/him/her.'   (Legate 2012)

b.   Hybrid type *di-* passive (Classical Malay)

```
                    VoiceP
                  /        \
                PP          VoiceP
               /  \        /      \
              P    DP    Voice     vP
            oleh (overt  di-      /  \
                  agent) [gen]   DP    v'
                              -nya    /  \
                                     v    VP
```

(16)   Interpretation of the third person enclitic *-nya* in *DP* and hybrid type *di-* passives

	(i) DP type (10c)		(ii) Hybrid type (15b)
Lexical meaning:	3rd	3rd	3rd
	↓	↓	↓
(restriction)	↓	CONTEXT	*oleh* 'by' X
	↓	↓	↓
Observed interpretation:	3rd	specific 3rd person referent	X

5   Formal encoding of givenness

(8c)   CLAIM 3: The low givenness of the relevant eventuality is encoded by the passive prefix *di-*.

- Claim 3 is a logical extension of the situation in the nominal domain to the verbal domain.

- The givenness properties of noun phrases are usually regarded as lexically specified. e.g. The demonstratives *ini* 'this' and *itu* 'that' encode different degrees of givenness associated with the DP headed by them, in addition to their deictic meanings.

- Prediction: There should be morphemes that encode givenness in verb phrases too. Moreover, such morphemes should encode givenness on top of other meanings or functions.

- Claim: *Di-* is one such morpheme, which encodes a low level of givenness, besides its syntactic function as a passive voice marker.

- I formulate the givenness property of the passive prefix *di-* as a selectional restriction, as in (17).[5]

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[5]See the proceedings paper for support from Soh and Nomoto's (2011; 2015) similar formulation of the aspectual meaning of the active prefix *meN-*.

(17)   The prefix *di-* in Voice selects for a vP describing an eventuality that is low in givenness.
[VoiceP *di-* [vP[low givenness]   ]]

6   Givenness of eventualities

- The preceding discussion assumes that Claim 1 (the eventuality described by a *di-* passive verb phrase is low in givenness) is correct.

- Although this claim offers a way to capture the low givenness of the *di-* passive agent without stipulation, it is not so easy to prove its correctness.

- There are two main reasons for this:

  1. Theories of givenness have developed through studies of noun phrases, which typically denote individuals rather than eventualities.

  2. In Modern Malay, most passive clauses have a preverbal subject. Consequently, the informational status of the verb phrase gets obscured by that of the subject.

6.1   Previous studies on the givenness of non-individuals

- To my knowledge, it is Schwarzschild (1999) who first provided an explicit definition of the givenness for non-individuals.

- Basic idea: While the givenness of individuals is based on coreference, that of non-individuals is determined by entailment.

- In (18), *murdered John* makes the event denoted by *kill him* given in some sense.

(18)   NObody murdered JOHN although BOB WANted to kill him.[6]
(adapted from (22) in Riester 2008:79)

- It is possible that the events described by the two verb phrases are the same one; the killing is achieved by means of murder.

- But even if not, a murdering event necessarily involves a killing event. So, the event of killing John is not completely new.

- In the second case, givenness is not based on coreference but a lexical relation, specifically *murder* is a hyponym of *kill*.

- As Baumann and Riester (2012) point out, hyponymy like this is verified by entailment, as shown in (19).

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[6]Uppercase letters indicate pitch accents.

(19) $\exists x.\mathrm{murder}(x, j)$ (someone murdering John) *entails*
        $\exists x.\mathrm{kill}(x, j)$ (someone killing John)

- Baumann and Riester (2012) push this idea a step further and propose to differentiate two kinds of givenness:[7]

    - Referential givenness: referential expressions, based on coreference

    - Lexical givenness: non-referenial expressions, based on lexical relations

- The distinction is not between individuals vs. eventualities.
  $\rightarrow$ The criteria developed for individuals can be extended to eventualities.

6.2 Challenges

- The actual (referential) givenness identification task is not straightforward for eventualities.

- The difficulty is due to different natures of individuals and eventualities.

Difference 1: Repetition (= genuine coreference)

- It is common that an individual is repeatedly referred to in discourse, but an eventuality is usually not repeated.
  $\rightarrow$ Criteria based on coreference are not helpful in many cases.

- In theory, an event is high in givenness if the same action involving the same participants has occurred in immediate discourse.
  e.g. The event described by sentence (20a) is higher in givenness than those described by (20b–d).

(20)   [The speaker and addressee are talking about their roommate John.]
        John_1 was eating your bread this morning.
        a.   **He_1 was eating your bread** again.
        b.   **He_1 was eating** your eggs too.
        c.   Mary **was eating your bread** too.
        d.   Mary was watching TV.

- In actual discourse, a repetition situation like (20a) is rare.

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[7]See Appendix in the proceedings paper for details on Baumann and Riester's two kinds of givenness, and their relation to the Givenness Hierarchy of Gundel et al. (1993).

Difference 2: Participants

- Eventualities typically involve more than one individual.

- The same action can be conducted by the same agent on a different theme, as in (20b); it can also be conducted on the same theme by a different agent, as in (20c). —Is there a difference in givenness between these two cases? If so, which event is higher in givenness?

Difference 3: Levels

- A sentence involves at least two levels of referential givenness for eventualities, corresponding to different syntactic phrases denoting eventualities: vP (or VoiceP) and TP.[8]

- Both vP and TP eventualities can serve as an antecedent for nominal expressions indicating particular degrees of givenness such as *(do) it*, *this* and *that* (cf. (2)).

- Although (20a) and (20c) have different degrees of givenness at the TP level, they do not differ at the vP level, as shown in (21).

(21)   a.   [$_{TP}$ He_1 was [$_{vP}$ eating your bread] (again)] (= (20a))
        b.   [$_{TP}$ Mary was [$_{vP}$ eating your bread] (too)] (= (20c))

- Moreover, at the vP level, voice alternation affects givenness.

(22)   [$_{TP}$ Your bread was [$_{vP}$ eaten by him_1] (again)] (cf. (21a))
        a.   TP-level event: John's eating the addressee's bread (regardless of voice)
        b.   vP-level event
              (i)   Active: someone's eating the addressee's bread
              (ii)   Passive: John's eating something
              $\rightarrow$ potential givenness status difference

6.3 "Foregrounding" in discourse as a low givenness indicator

- Nomoto and Kartini (2014) do not address these issues when they claim that *di*-passive verb phrases are low in givenness.

- Instead, they reinterpret Hopper's (1983) notion of "foregrounding" as indicating low givenness.

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[8]I assume that the event argument of a verb is existentially closed at vP (or VoiceP). I also assume that the lexical verb (V) and its projection VP are assigned lexical givenness, in line with Baumann and Riester's (2012) analysis of the lexical noun (N) and its projection NP.

Hopper (1983)

- studies discourse functions of three clause types in the Early Modern Malay text *Hikayat Abdullah*: 'active', 'passive' and 'ergative'.

- argues that what is collectively refrerred to as the passive in the present study in fact consists of two distinct voices, though they share the same morphology and are sometimes indistinguishable.

- The two constructions are distinguished by (i) functional and (ii) formal criteria:

  "passive": (i) backgrounding function, (ii) Theme-V order (always)

  "ergative": (i) foregrounding function, (ii) V-Theme order (not always)

(23)   "passive"

   maka [dua puncha kiri kanan itu] **di-matikan**
   then   two ends   left right   the PASS-knot
   'and the two ends to the right and left are knotted'   (Hopper 1983:71)

(24)   "ergative"

   a.   **di-champakkan-nya** [puntong cherutu itu] ka-dalam kapal
        PASS-throw.away-3   stub   cheroot that into   ship
        'and they threw away the stubs into the boat'

   b.   Maka [segala pengana itu] pun **di-bahagikan-lah**   ka-pada segala
        and   all   cakes   the PUN PASS-distribute-PART to   all
        budak-budak
        boy.PL
        'Then all the cakes were passed around to all the boys'

   c.   maka [duit   itu] **di-ambil**   oleh ibu-bapa-nya, **di-belikan-nya**
        then   money the PASS-take by   parents-his   PASS-use.to.buy-3
        [pengana atau barang-barang makanan], di-makan-nya
         cakes   or   things   eating   PASS-eat-3
        'Then his parents take the money and use it to buy cakes or other things to
        eat, and they eat them.'   (Hopper 1983:72–73)

- Hopper demonstrates the foregrounding and background difference between the two constructions by examining the Transitivity index (Hopper and Thompson 1980) of each of the 100 clauses (= 50 "ergative" + 50 "passive" clauses).

- Result: "Ergative" is more Transitive than "passive."

- Since high Transitivity reflects foregrounding in discourse in Hopper and Thompson's (1980) Transitivity Theory, the high Transitivity of the "ergative" justifies Hopper's definition of the construction as a foregrounding construction.

Nomoto and Kartini's interpretation of Hopper's study

- Hopper treated all clauses with a preverbal theme as "passive" to guarantee the objectivity of the examination.
  → "ergative" = verb-initial passives; "passive" = theme-initial passives

- In short, verb-initial passives are more Transitive than theme-initial passives, and hence have a foregrounding function.

- Since verb-initial passives are free from the informational effect of preverbal theme argument, they reflect the information structure-related meaning of the *di-* passive verb phrase more transparently.

- This statement about Early Modern Malay is also valid in Modern Malay, though it is not as evident as in Early Modern Malay due to the general scarcity of verb-initial passives.

- Hopper's followign characterizations of verb-initial passives apply to Modern Malay: A verb-initial passive clause "focuses purely on the event—the change—itself" and "narrates sequenced events which pertain to the main line of the discourse" (Hopper 1983:84).

Foregrounding and givenness

- Hopper analyses the positioning of a noun phrase before the verb as "a device for arresting the flow of the discourse and holding up the action by momentarily focusing attention away from ACTIONS to PARTICIPANTS" (Hopper 1983:87).

- This quote indicates that by "foreground" Hopper means "require or draw attention of the addressee."

- In terms of givenness, it is a denotation which is not already given enough in the address's consciousness that requires his/her special attention.
  → In verb-initial passive clauses, the verb is low in givenness.

- The second last sentence of Hopper and Thompson's Transitivity article is suggestive of the connection between grounding and givenness:

  While we claim that the discourse distinction between foregrounding and backgrounding provides the key to understanding the grammatical and semantic facts we have been discussing, we also explicitly recognize that grounding itself reflects a deeper set of principles—relating to decisions which speakers make, on the basis of their assessment of their hearers' situation, about how to present what they have to say. (Hopper and Thompson 1980:295)

- It seems to me that the relevant "deeper set of principles" is in fact givenness.

- Givenness has to do with the speaker's assessment of the addressee's consciousness/attention state and knowledge with regard to a referent, which can be eventualities as well as individuals.

- Speakers choose a form that encodes the most appropriate givenness status, e.g. *it* over *that* (English DPs), *di-* over Ø (Malay VoicePs).

7   Conclusion

- This paper has reviewed and elaborated on Nomoto and Kartini's (2014) analysis of the person restriction on the agent of *di-* passives in Malay.

- Two main claims:

  1. The implicit agent *pro* involved in *di-* passives is not distinct from "Ø NPs" in the Givenness Hierarchy: *pro*/Ø is lexically low in givenness due to its unspecified nature and often interpreted as referring to a highly given referent, including speech act participants.

  2. Morphemes exist that encode givenness not only for noun phrases/individuals but also for verb phrases/eventualities.

- The discussion about the givenness of eventualities is still premature. More empirical work is necessary, to demonstrate the low givenness status of *di-* passive verb phrases in Modern Malay and the connection between givenness and Transitivity cross-linguistically.

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