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## TEMPORAL REFERENCE IN INDONESIAN BARE DECLARATIVE SENTENCES

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### Abstract

*This paper presents an account on how bare declarative sentences in Indonesian receive their temporal references. I follow Lin's (2003) proposal of covert tense selectional restriction in Mandarin that governs the selection of an appropriate aspectual viewpoint or aktionsart as the complement of the tense node. Covert present tense can only select imperfective aspectual viewpoint which is denoted by the atelic predicates, and covert past tense can only select perfective aspectual viewpoint which is denoted by telic predicates. Thus, it is suggested that the temporal references of bare declarative sentences in Indonesian can be indirectly indicated by the telicity properties of the predication. That is, if the predicate is telic, bare declarative sentences in Indonesian are inferred to take place in the past. On the other hand, atelic predicate covertly indicates a present eventuality. A discussion on pedagogical contribution of the findings and suggestions for further study are given at the end of this paper.*

**Keywords:** Indonesian, bare declarative sentences, tense, telicity, temporal references, pedagogical contribution.

### INTRODUCTION

It has been widely accepted that Indonesian is classified as one of 'tenseless' languages, that is, languages without systematic verbal morphology for tense. In Indonesian, the same verbal form such as *membangun* 'build' can be used in any temporal points (past, present, or future). To determine its temporal points, Indonesian sentences usually resort to one or the combination of several means such as temporal adverbials, modal auxiliaries, and contextual information. In Indonesian, there are nonetheless a number of such isolated sentences<sup>1</sup> and their temporal location can be inferred without the presence of such elements.

This paper attempts to analyze how the temporal information is conveyed in Indonesian bare declarative sentences. To do so, I adopt Lin's (2003) proposal of covert tense selectional restriction in another 'tenseless' language, Mandarin Chinese. Lin's account relies on several concepts: hypothetical existence of covert tense node<sup>2</sup>, telicity<sup>3</sup>, and the notion of 'default aspect'

<sup>1</sup> Bare declarative sentences are usually found in the language textbook or grammar book.

<sup>2</sup> Covert tense is also termed as silent tense in Wiltsckho (2014).

<sup>3</sup> Kearns (2000, p. 201) explains that "a bounded [telic] event has a shape which gives it a natural finishing point which the same event cannot continue, because it is finished. An unbounded [atelic] event has no inherent natural finishing point and can continue indefinitely." Accomplishments, achievements, and semelfactives such as *eat an apple*, *recognize her*, and *rap the table* are classified as telic predicates, whereas states and processes or activities such as *busy* and *walk to the school* are classified as atelic predicates.

(Bohnenmeyer & Swift, 2001, 2004). In this paper, I particularly show how the telicity determines aspectual view point or *aktionsart*, and which aspectual viewpoint is selected as a complement of certain covert tense node by selectional restriction.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides brief information on how the temporal references of Indonesian declarative sentences are generally obtained. The analysis of the bare declarative sentences is elaborated in Section 3, which is followed by a summary and discussion on the possible benefit of the research for Teaching Indonesian to Speakers of Other Languages in Section 4. Section 5 presents the scope of this study and identifies some possible topics for further studies.

#### OVERVIEW OF TEMPORAL REFERENCES IN INDONESIAN DECLARATIVE SENTENCES

Declarative sentences in Indonesian primarily indicate their temporal locations through overt temporal markers such as temporal adverbs. E.g., *kemarin* 'yesterday', *sekarang* 'now', *besok* 'tomorrow' like sentences (1) and/or aspectual markers such as *sudah* 'perfective', *sedang* 'progressive', *akan*<sup>4</sup> 'will' like sentences (2).

- (1) a. *Kemarin* *Adi membeli sepeda baru.*  
Yesterday Adi buy bike new  
Adi bought a new bike yesterday.
- b. *Sekarang dia berjalan ke sekolah.*  
Now he walk to school  
He is walking to school now.
- c. *Besok kita makan siang di rumah nenek.*  
Tomorrow we eat noon at house grandmother  
We will have lunch at grandmother's house tomorrow.
- (2) a. *Adi sudah membeli sepeda baru.*  
Adi PERF. buy bicycle new  
Adi has bought a new bicycle.
- b. *Dia sedang berjalan ke sekolah.*  
he PROG walk to school  
He is walking to school.
- c. *Kita akan makan siang di rumah nenek.*  
We FUT eat noon at house grandmother  
We will have lunch at grandmother's house.

The temporal reference can also be inferred from implicit contextual time in which the previous sentences/utterances provide a temporal location for the discourse like sentences (3).

- (3) a. *Kemarin* *Adi ke toko sepeda. Dia membeli sepeda baru.*  
Yesterday Adi to shop bike he buy bike new  
Yesterday, Adi went to a bike shop. He bought a new bike.
- b. A: *Budi sedang apa?*  
Budi PROG what  
What is Budi doing?  
B: *Budi berjalan ke sekolah.*  
Budi walk to school  
Budi is walking to school.

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<sup>4</sup> *Akan* 'will' has several classifications in literatures. Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia Online (Accessed June 23, 2016) classifies *akan* 'will' as an adverb. According to Suwono (p.217) and Sneddon et al. (2010, p. 204), *akan* is classified as a modal or auxiliary verb. Grangé (2013, p. 57) places *akan* into the group of aspect markers. In this paper, I adopt the definition provided by Grangé.

However, as I have already indicated in the Introduction, there are isolated sentences in Indonesian, and such sentences convey either past or present time reference. For example, the isolated eventualities (4) and (5) can be inferred to take place in the past and present respectively.

- (4) a. *Budi memecahkan gelas Adi.*  
Budi break glass Adi  
Budi broke Adi's glass.
- b. *Adi membangun rumah.*  
Adi build house  
Adi built a house.
- c. *Dia lahir di Jakarta.*  
He born LOC Jakarta  
He was born in Jakarta.
- (5) a. *Dia sangat pintar.*  
He very smart  
He is very smart.
- b. *Saya percaya kamu.*  
I believe you  
I believe you.
- c. *Adi belajar di kamarnya.*  
Adi study at room=3sg.poss  
Adi is studying in his room.

#### **ANALYSIS OF THE TEMPORAL REFERENCE IN BARE DECLARATIVE SENTENCES**

This study builds on Lin (2003) analysis of the temporal locations in bare declarative sentences of Mandarin Chinese. In his study, Lin noted that "[T]ense are subject to selectional restriction. Thus, a certain tense can only select a complement with a specific aspectual viewpoint or aktionsart" (p. 263). In his proposal, covert present tense can only select an imperfective aspectual reference, and covert past tense can only select perfective aspectual reference, formulated below (6).

- (6) Covert tense selectional restriction (Lin, 2003, p. 264)
- a. Covert present tense must select imperfective AspP as its complement.
- b. Covert past tense must select perfective AspP as its complement.

Lin's proposal would only perform when the notion of 'default aspect' (Bohnenmeyer & Swift, 2001, 2004) is employed. Bohnemeyer and Swift suggest that the default aspectual viewpoint for telic eventualities is perfective, whereas the default aspectual view point of atelic eventualities is imperfective.

By incorporating the selection restriction of the covert tense in the analysis of the temporal reference in Indonesian grammar, it is now explained why bare declarative sentences in (4) have past interpretation and those in (5) have a present interpretation. That is, the former predications possess natural finishing points which are the inherent properties of telic situation, and the later predications (5) do not possess inherent natural finishing points which are the signs of atelicity. Thus, according to the covert tense selectional restrictions, the covert tenses in examples like those in (4) must be restricted to past tense and the covert tenses in examples like those in (5) must be restricted to present tense.

#### **SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH AND ITS PEDAGOGICAL CONTRIBUTIONS**

This paper analyzed how sentences in a 'tenseless' language, Indonesian, receive their temporal interpretation in the absence of explicit temporal adverbs/markers and implicit contextual information. This paper suggests that inherent telicity properties of Indonesian predicates can help determining the temporal reference of sentences in Indonesian. That is, when the temporal adverbs, modal auxiliaries, and contextual time are not available, the telicity of the predicates takes over in denoting the default aspectual viewpoint. Accordingly, the aspectual viewpoints, governed by covert

tense selectional restriction (6), are selected as appropriate complements of the covert tenses. That is, a perfective aspectual viewpoint, indicated by a telic predicate, is selected by covert past tense implying the event takes place in past time; an imperfective aspectual viewpoint, indicated by an atelic predicate, is selected by covert present tense implying a current event.

The literatures and proposal provided at present study are applicable in the field of Teaching Indonesian to Speakers of Other Languages. It is particularly useful for teachers who use and/or develop teaching material based on the grammar-translation method to provide a more precise translation and explanation for temporal reference of the isolated sentence. Nonetheless, the findings can serve as a supplemented material to enrich the language knowledge of Indonesian teachers who practice the communicative language teaching approach and use contextualized teaching materials.

#### **FUTURE STUDIES**

Present study serves as an initial research to analyze the temporal reference of Indonesian sentences from their semantic properties. In this paper, I have only analyzed the bare declarative sentences in Indonesian. There are other types of sentences lacking overt temporal markers and contextual information, i.e. imperative and some conditional constructions, which are not addressed in this study. Moreover, the temporal references for complement clause of verbs, relative clause, and adverbial clauses are also waiting for further investigation.

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