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Author(s): Michael C. Ewing

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## The Discourse Functions of Relative Clauses in Indonesian<sup>1</sup>

Michael C. Ewing  
University of California, Santa Barbara

### 1. Introduction

In the languages of the world, relativization can occur with nouns serving a variety of grammatical roles both within the relative clause and in the main clause. Recent research indicates that the different possible configurations of relative clauses do not occur with equal frequency in discourse (Fox 1987, Fox and Thompson 1990, Collier-Sanuki 1991). Rather, the functions of relative clauses appear to influence speakers' preferences for certain of these grammatical configurations. As a language that makes extensive use of relativization, Indonesian is particularly useful for investigating the functions of relative clauses in naturally occurring discourse. By examining the relative clauses in a number of Indonesian texts I hope to show that even across a variety of possible grammatical configurations, relative clauses are employed to accomplish the same basic set of discourse functions.

1.1. The Form of Relative Clauses in Indonesian. The structure of a typical Indonesian relative clause is illustrated in (1).

- (1) lampu stop [yang menyala merah]  
light stop REL shine red  
'a stop light [that was red]' (28.13)<sup>2</sup>

The relative clause follows the head noun and is marked by the particle yang. In this and all following examples the head noun is underlined and the relative clause bracketed in both the Indonesian and the free English translation.

In Indonesian, relative clauses can be formed on both direct and oblique arguments. When direct arguments are relativized, no overt occurrence of the relativized noun phrase appears within the relative clause, as is illustrated in (1). I will refer to direct arguments using the labels A, S, and P, taken from Comrie (1978). A represents the most agent-like argument of a transitive clause. S represents the single argument of an intransitive clause. P represents the most patient-like argument of a transitive clause. Examples of relativization on each of these arguments are given in (2) through (4). In this paper I will use the term A-Relative to refer to a relative clause relativized on the A argument within it, S-Relative to refer to relativization on S within the relative clause, and P-Relative for relativization on the P argument.

- (2) A-Relative:

Suhanda dan dua kawannya [yang segera menawarkan burung  
Suhanda and two friend.3POS REL quickly offer bird  
langka itu]  
rare that

'Suhanda and two of his friends [who quickly offered (for sale) one of those rare birds]' (47.9)

(3) S-Relative:

pemuda bertatto [yang ketakutan hingga nekat]  
youth with.tattoo REL afraid until willing.to.take.risk  
'youths with tatoos [who were so afraid they would do anything]' (16.20)

(4) P-Relative<sup>3</sup>:

tanah [yang didiami Mbok Surip] itu  
land REL PASS.occupy Mrs. Surip that  
'the land [that Mrs. Surip occupied]' (24.11)

When oblique arguments are relativized, a pronoun trace, usually the third person enclitic *-nya*, appears in the relative clause, as in (5). In the present paper, however, I will confine discussion to relativization on direct arguments only.

(5) tradisi hukuman [yang tak jelas nilai edukatif-nya] ini.  
tradition punishment REL not clear value educational-3POS this  
'This tradition of punishment [whose educational value is not clear].'  
(29.10)

One of the interesting characteristics of relative clauses is that the argument on which the relative is formed actually serves two grammatical roles. Up to now I have discussed the role of this argument within the relative clause. This same argument also serves another grammatical role in the main clause. This is illustrated by example (6).

(6) Yang membawa senapan menembaki ikan [yang sekarat].  
REL carry rifle shoot fish REL in.agony  
'Those who had rifles shot the fish [that were in agony].'  
(42.5)

Here *ikan* 'fish' acts as the S of the predication *sekarat* 'be in agony' within the relative clause, but in the main clause this same noun phrase is the P of the verb *menembaki* 'to shoot'. Because of this dual nature, I will refer to the relativized noun phrase as the Shared Nominal. In my data, Shared Nominals play a wide range of roles in their main clauses. In this paper, I will discuss only those relative clauses (formed on direct arguments within the relative clause) modifying Shared Nominals that are direct arguments in the main clause.

**1.2. The Data Base.** The data for the present study are from a collection of 92 short articles, mostly of a human interest nature, from the weekly news magazine *Tempo* and reprinted in Setiawan (1987). Of the 347 relative clauses in my data, sixteen have Shared Nominals that serve as oblique arguments within the relative clause. These are not considered here. 116 other relative clauses have Shared Nominals that serve as oblique arguments

in the main clause. These are also not included in this study. This brings the total number of relative clauses in my data base to 215.

1.3. **Information flow.** Interactional aspects of discourse, also called information flow, can affect the choices speakers make among various types of relative clauses and can help to explain the motivation for their use. The information flow factors that I consider here include givenness of the Shared Nominal and the function of the relative clause. These factors have been shown by Fox (1987) and Fox and Thompson (1990) to be useful in looking at relative clauses in spoken data from English as well as spoken data from Tagalog and Toba Batak, two Western Austronesian languages related to Indonesian.

The relative clauses in the data I examined typically serve one of three functions. The first is to characterize or describe the Shared Nominal, as illustrated in (7).

(7) **Characterizing Function:**

**Dua lubang peluru menembus tubuhnya [yang terjungkal di sungai kering].**  
two hole bullet pierce body.3POS REL fall in stream

dry

'Two bullet holes pierced his body [which had fallen into a dry stream].'  
(17.10)

In this example, the relative clause describes the condition of the referent of the Shared Nominal, but does not serve to identify it or locate it within the ongoing discourse.

In contrast, the second discourse function, grounding, refers to establishing the relevance of a referent by tying it to the ongoing discourse. This is typically done in one of two ways. The first type of grounding is what has been called anchoring by Prince (1981): a noun phrase is made identifiable by being linked to a Given noun phrase which is properly contained within it, as in example (8).

(8) **Grounding by Anchoring:**

**Jahjo memergoki Kijang [yang diburunya]**

Jahjo catch kind.of.car REL PASS.chase.3AG

'Jahjo caught the Kijang [that he had been chasing].'  
(28.16)

We see that the A element within the relative clause is the pronominal third person enclitic, *-nya*, which is attached to the verb *diburu* 'to chase'. This relative clause is used to anchor the referent of its Shared Nominal. Kijang, the car, is anchored by its connection to Jahjo, the Given referent of *-nya*.

The second type of grounding that will be discussed is proposition linking. In this case, the relative clause links the referent to a frame invoked earlier in the discourse, as in (9). In this example the referent of the Shared Nominal, Sutarno, is a new character and is made relevant to the discourse by his participation in the situation invoked by an earlier mention of traffic

police. In this frame, the information in the relative clause, the fact that Sutarno does not have the proper permits makes him, and his comments, relevant to the discourse.

(9) Grounding by Proposition Linking:

Mereka ini "tak mau diajak kompromi," ujar Sutarno,  
 they this NEG want PASS.invite compromise say Sutarno  
 salah seorang pengemudi [yang tidak mempunyai izin trayek dan  
 one.person driver REL NEG own permit route and  
 SIM A Umum].  
 drivers.license

'They "won't compromise", said Sutarno, a driver [who didn't have a route permit or driver's license].' (37.7)

The third function performed by relative clauses in my data base is identification. This is the function often traditionally associated with relative clauses: picking out a specific referent from among a number of possible referents. This is illustrated in (10).

(10) Identification Function:

penumpang [yang duduk di depan] terbangun  
 passenger REL sit in front wake.up  
 'the passengers [who were sitting in the front] woke up' (10.8)

Such identification often sets up a contrast: in (10), the contrast is with those passengers elsewhere in the train car.

Fox and Thompson (1990) showed how these discourse functions interact with clause structures to generate high frequencies of certain types of relative clauses. In their data, there was a very small number of A-relative clauses and this prompted them to collapse the A and S arguments into one "subject" category. In my data there are 44 A-Relatives (20% of the total). This is similar to the number of P-Relatives (57 or 27%). In addition, the functions of the A-Relatives appear to be distinct from the functions of S-Relatives. These two points motivate maintaining the separation between A and S in the present study.

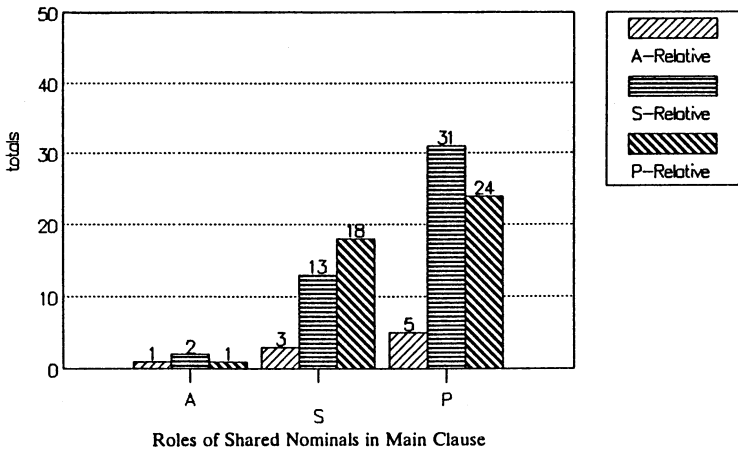
Animacy of referents has also been shown to affect the frequency of certain types of relative clauses and the position in which they occur in main clauses (Fox and Thompson 1990). Therefore, in the following discussion I will examine relative clauses with human and non-human Shared Nominals separately. Some implications of these differences will be discussed later.

2. Discourse functions and the grammatical configuration of relative clauses

As mention above, the Shared Nominal of a relative clause actually has two different grammatical roles, one within the relative clause and one in the main clause. Fox and Thompson (1990) noticed, in the case of non-human nouns, that the Shared Nominal of a P-Relative frequently occurs as the A or S in the main clause. Conversely, they also noticed that the Shared Nominal

of an A- or S-Relative frequently occurs as the P in the main clause. I found a similar pattern in my data which I will discuss briefly by way of introducing the relationship between information flow and the grammatical configuration of relative clauses. I will then go on to discuss three other patterns common in my data, but not discussed by Fox and Thompson. First, still for non-human referents, I will discuss P-relatives in which the Shared Nominal also serves as P in the main clause. I will then turn to relative clauses modifying human referents. Among these there is a strikingly large number of S-relative clauses whose Shared Nominals also serve as S in the main clause. After discussing these, I will turn to A-Relatives.

**2.1. Non-human Shared Nominals.** Figure One illustrates the distribution of non-human relative clauses in my data base. In this graph we can see, for example, reading across the bottom to the middle set of bars, that when non-human Shared Nominals serve as the S in the main clause, they appear in A-relatives three times, in S-relatives thirteen times, and in P-relatives eighteen times.



**Figure One.** Grammatical Role of NON-HUMAN Shared Nominal in main clause, for each of the Grammatical roles in relative clause.

**2.1.1. P-Relatives with the Shared Nominal as S in the main clause.** One of the main functions of relative clauses is to help ground the referent of the Shared Nominal in the ongoing discourse. P-Relatives are especially well suited for this. As has been pointed out by Du Bois (1987) and others, in naturally occurring discourse, the noun in the A position is usually Given, and often pronominal. A P-Relative will frequently contain Given material in its A position, as in example (11).

- (11) Tapi para sopir di Semarang, rupanya, masih mengharap Operasi Rok Span [yang mereka popularkan] itu jadi kenyataan. skirt tight REL they popularize that be fact  
 'But apparently the drivers in Semarang still hoped that "Operation Tight Skirt" [which they had popularized] would happen.' (37.9)

The Shared Nominal operasi rok span 'operation tight skirt' serves as the P of the relative clause predicate popularkan, 'popularize'. In the main clause it serves as the S of the predicate jadi kenyataan, 'be fact'. Notice also that within the relative clause, the A element is pronominal, mereka 'they'. This Given material then anchors the Shared Nominal, "Operation Tight Skirt" to the ongoing discourse. This Shared Nominal is in the S position in the main clause. Such S arguments are not typically provided with a predication which can serve to anchor them in the main clause, so the discourse function of grounding is frequently provided by P-Relatives.

### 2.1.2. S-Relatives with the Shared Nominal as P in the main clause.

Another frequent function of relative clauses is to characterize the Shared Nominal. Intransitive predications are especially well suited for this, as they often provide descriptive material of some sort. Example (12) illustrates an S-Relative which characterizes the referent of the Shared Nominal kepercayaan 'belief' as 'derived from rumors'.

- (12) ternyata mereka sedang menjalankan kepercayaan [yang apparently they PROG conduct belief REL berasal dari isu]. originate from rumor  
 'It seemed they had a belief [that derived from rumors].' (55.3)

Fox and Thompson noted that S-Relatives, because they do not serve a grounding function, are often associated with New referents which are in the P argument position in the main clause. This is because a noun in the P position in the main clause is frequently already grounded by association with the typically Given referent in the A position. In (12) the pronoun mereka 'they' grounds the New P argument kepercayaan 'belief'. A grounding relative clause is thus not necessary and so in such situations, relative clauses are more often exploited for their characterizing function, typically with an S-relative.

### 2.1.3. P-Relatives with the Shared Nominal as P in the main clause.

We will now turn to a relative clause configuration not discussed in Fox and Thompson (1990), P-Relatives whose Shared Nominals act as the P in the main clause. In this combination in my data, the Shared Nominal almost always refers to New information. But unlike the Shared Nominal of an S-Relative that serves as P in the main clause, a Shared Nominal of a P-Relative that serves as P in the main clause is usually not grounded by the main clause. This is precisely the reason these occur with P-relatives which, as mentioned above, can typically provide grounding because the A argument

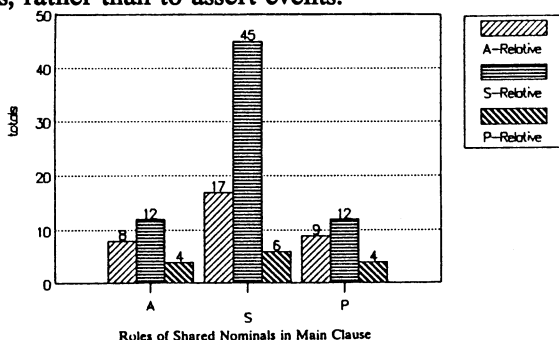
within the relative clause is usually Given material. This grounding function of P-Relatives is useful when the main clause does not contain referents that could serve to ground the Shared Nominal as in (13). In this example gedung 'building' represents New information, but is not grounded by any Given information in the main clause. (In fact it serves later in the clause to ground another New referent, pemilik 'owner'.) Instead, the grounding comes from the Given A argument within the relative clause, mereka 'they'.

- (13) **Karena gedung [yang mereka pakai] diminta kembali pemiliknya.** because building REL they use PASS.request return owner.3POS 'Because the building [that they had been using] was requested back by its owner.' (61.4)

In other cases, P-Relatives function to characterize the Shared Nominal. These are often relative clauses in which an A argument is not mentioned, and its referent may be unknown, as in (14):

- (14) **Keris [yang diberi nama Singkir Geni] itu pun dirawat dagger [REL PAS.give name Singkir Geni that PART PASS.care.for Mbah Salim sebaik-baiknya.** Mbah Salim well.as.possible 'Mbah Salim took care of the dagger, [which was given the name Singkir Geni], as well as possible.' (53.3)

In such cases, the relative clause can offer no anchoring. The Shared Nominal is typically Given, or may be anchored in the main clause. In (14) the Shared Nominal keris 'dagger', is Given information. The relative clause can be used to characterize the Shared Nominal, because grounding is not needed. Interestingly, the majority of P-Relatives in my data are low in scalar transitivity as discussed in Hopper and Thompson (1980) and often contain verbs low in kinesis, such as 'to receive', 'to own', 'to know' and 'to need'. This is consistent with the function of relative clauses to characterize or to ground referents, rather than to assert events.



**Figure Two.** Grammatical Role of HUMAN Shared Nominal in main clause, for each of the Grammatical roles in relative clause.

**2.2. Human Shared Nominals.** Figure Two shows the distribution of relative clause types for each of the direct arguments in main clauses for Shared Nominals with human referents. The two striking patterns which will be discussed below are the overwhelming number of S-Relatives that occur with the Shared Nominal as S in the main clause and the large number, compared to non-human referents, of A-Relatives.

**2.2.1. S-Relatives with the Shared Nominal as S in the main clause.**

The discourse function of identifying was not found frequently among relative clauses with non-human Shared Nominals. Identifying does, however, serve an important function among relatives with human Shared Nominals, especially S-Relatives when the Shared Nominal also acts as S in the main clause, as illustrated in (15).

- (15) **Toh tidak semua wanita bisa lombaan: hanya gadis atau**  
 EMPH not all women can compete only girl  
**wanita [yang belum menikah] yang bisa menjadi peserta.**  
 woman REL not.yet married REL can become participant  
 'Not all women can compete: only girls or women [who aren't married]  
 can be participants. (85.3)

Over one third of the S-Relatives whose heads serve as S in the main clause have such an identifying function. In these cases a general class of referents has been introduced in the discourse, e.g. wanita 'women' in (15). This group is then narrowed to a subset by the relative clause, only unmarried women. The specific referent of the Shared Nominal of such an identifying relative clause is technically New, but is usually inferable from the previous discourse.

Another factor in the large number of S-Relatives in my study is that I have classified verbs of saying as intransitive, and their subjects as S's. This decision was made on the grounds that verbs of saying are generally very low in transitivity.<sup>4</sup> When the S arguments of these verbs of saying take S-Relative clauses, these clauses serve to characterize the referent of the Shared Nominal phrase as in example (16).

- (16) **"Karena dia orang Menado," kata Mamuaya [yang berasal**  
 because 3SG person Menado say Mamuaya REL originate  
**dari Tomohon, Sulawesi Utara.**  
 from Tomohon Sulawesi north  
 "Because he's a Menado person," said Mamuaya, [who came from  
 Tomohon, North Sulawesi]. (98.14)

In this example, the characterization helps to legitimize the speaker's words since Menado is in North Sulawesi. It may be that the semantically bleached quality of verbs of saying offers an opportunity for their subject nouns to be further elaborated without undue informational strain. This elaboration is easily accomplished through the addition of a relative clause. In these situations, the speaker is usually a Given referent and the relative clause generally functions to add extra information characterizing the referent.

This same configuration of relative clause often involves main clauses with predications which Cumming (1991) describes as presentative. These include the existential verb ada, as well as semantically related constructions which also serve to introduce New referents into the discourse. When these presentative predications are used to introduce totally New referents the relative clauses serve to characterize. This characterization, as exemplified in (17), can also serve to help develop the presentative nature of the entire sentence.

- (17) **Tak ada tukang tambal ban [yang tampak].**  
 NEG exist worker fix tire REL visible  
 'There was no tire repairman [(who was) to be seen].' (101.6)

The three discourse functions described above are primarily associated with human referents and would thus help to explain why so many of these relatives are found with human referents. Speaking is clearly an activity of humans (or anthropomorphized entities). Presentative constructions are used to introduce participants into the narrative and the stories analyzed here are (like much human discourse) primarily about humans. Similarly the function of identifying subsets of larger groups seems especially appropriate for pointing out the (again human) main participants in the discourse. This helps to explain why S-relatives with the Shared Nominal in the S position in the main clause are so frequent for human referents.

**2.2.2. A-Relatives.** A-Relatives can serve to make nouns relevant to the discourse by associating them with Given material in the P of the relative clause, as in (18).

- (18) **Banyak tamu dari Jakarta [yang menemuinya]**  
 many visitors from Jakarta REL meet.3PRS  
 'There are many visitors from Jakarta [who have meet him].' (34.24)

In this example, the third person pronominal enclitic -nya on the verb menemui 'to meet', grounds the New referent of the Shared Nominal.

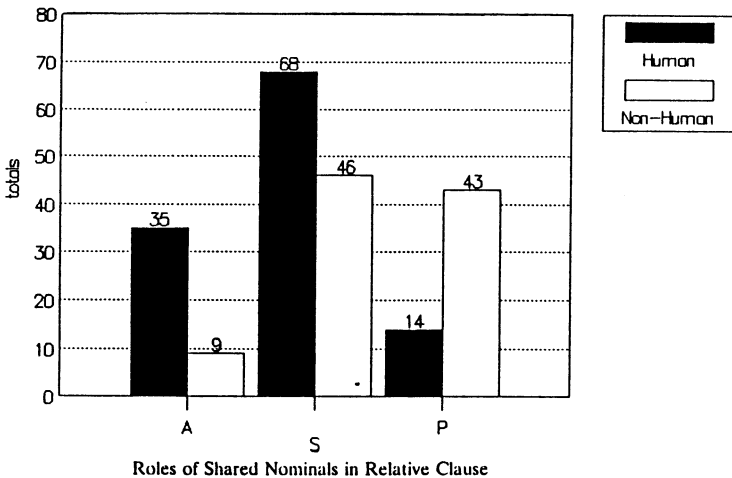
A-Relatives can also serve the function of grounding through proposition linking, when the P referent is not Given, but the propositional content of the relative clause is related to the ongoing discourse, as in (19).

- (19) **Penduduk [yang dapat laporan] datang mengapung bersenjata**  
 residents REL receive report come surround armed  
**sabit, tongkat dan parang.**  
 sickle stick and knife  
 'The residents [who heard the news] came around, armed with sickles, sticks, and knives.' (42.7)

In this example, the P in the relative clause, laporan 'report', is New information, but is clearly inferable as a report about the events which had just been described in the preceding discourse. This is an example of an

A-relative functioning as a proposition linking form of grounding for the New referent of the Shared Nominal, *penduduk* 'residents'.

A-Relatives can serve important discourse functions by grounding the Shared Nominal through either anchoring or proposition linking. The A position in a transitive clause, as well as typically being Given, is also typically filled by human referents in naturally occurring discourse. This fact makes A-Relatives especially well suited for grounding human referents. As illustrated in Figure Three, 35 out of 44 or 80% of the A-Relatives are used with human referents. This is in marked contrast to P-Relatives, which are most frequently used with non-human referents.



**Figure Three.** Animacy of Shared Nominal

Interestingly, however, both Fox (1987) and Fox and Thompson (1990) found very few A-Relatives in the data they examined, while there were large numbers of S- and P-Relatives. Indeed the frequent occurrence of S- and P-Relatives in English as well as the Western Austronesian languages Tagalog and Toba Batak led Fox (1987) to propose an Absolute Hypothesis which claims that languages must have mechanisms for producing S- and P-Relatives. In my data, however, A-Relatives and P-Relatives occur with nearly the same frequency. Why should this be? A first guess might be that Indonesian makes very different use of relative clauses than do English or even related Western Austronesian languages. I would suggest however that the difference is more likely due to medium. The data that Fox and Thompson examined were from spoken discourse, while my data were written.

It has been suggested that the reason relatives made on the A argument do not occur frequently is a manifestation, in relative clauses, of what Du Bois (1987) calls Preferred Argument Structure. According to Preferred Argument Structure, in naturally occurring discourse clauses tend to have only one

argument which is a full noun phrase. This argument will be the S in an intransitive clause, and will tend to be the P of a transitive clause because of the preference mentioned earlier for Given, pronominal A arguments. Fox (1987) suggests that preferred argument structure is not disrupted by relativization. In other words, an A-Relative with a full noun phrase as the Shared Nominal and a full noun phrase as the P argument would violate preferred argument structure and would therefore be dispreferred in spoken discourse. But as has been pointed out by Chafe (1987) and others, written language tends to package larger amounts of information into single units than is typical for spoken language. A-Relatives tend to do exactly this. Although this makes them a dispreferred relative clause type in spoken language, their greater information density is not a problem for written discourse. And so, in written discourse, it is possible for A-Relatives to be utilized for their important grounding functions. And, because the referents of A arguments are generally human, A-relatives are especially frequent with human Shared Nominals.

### 3. Conclusion

I hope to have shown that information flow factors can be used to help explain the distribution of certain types of relative clauses in written Indonesian. While these factors may tend to encourage the frequent use of some configurations of relative clauses (e.g. S-Relatives when the Shared Nominal is the P of the main clause, or P-Relatives when the Shared Nominal is the S of the main clause), these same discourse factors are also exploitable by speakers making use of other configurations of relative clauses. Information flow, in conjunction with what is known about differences in written and spoken language can explain the high frequency of A-Relatives in my data. Clearly further research examining both written and spoken data is needed to develop a more detailed picture of variation in relative clause use in Indonesian.

### Notes

1. I would like to thank everyone at the Linguistics Department of the University of California at Santa Barbara, most especially Sandra Thompson, Marianne Mithun, and Tsuyoshi Ono, whose comments and suggestions helped shape this paper. I, of course, retain responsibility for any errors or shortcomings.

2. Numbering at the end of examples refers to their location by page and sentence number in Setiawan (1987).

3. A passive-like construction is used obligatorily in P-Relatives. While this syntactic requirement raises interesting theoretical issues, e.g. for the Accessibility Hierarchy proposed by Keenan and Comrie (1977), it will not be dealt with here as it does not directly affect the issues discussed.

4. It is possible to have verbs of saying with overt transitive morphology in Indonesian. However, all the examples of verbs of saying in my data base are bare stems without the morphology typically associated with Indonesian transitive clauses (e.g. the voice-marking prefixes meng- and di- or the suffixes -kan and -i).

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