

1. The Structure of the 4th Sentence in Malay: A Pragmatic Explanation
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The Structure of the 4th Sentence in Malay: A Pragmatic Explanation

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Tatabahasa Dewan (2004:322) basically categorises the basic sentence in Malay into 4 basic structures as follows: (1) Noun Phrase + Noun Phrase, (2) Noun Phrase + Verb Phrase, (3) Noun Phrase + Adjective Phrase, and (4) Noun Phrase + Prepositional Phrase. This categorisation is based on surface level sentences produced in both verbal and written form by users and speakers of Malay. In structures 1, 2 and 3, the heads which make up the constituent of the subject and predicate have clear meaning and can be clearly delineated in the mind of the Malay speaker. In structure 4, however, the head which makes up the constituent of the predicate, which is the prepositional phrase, is clearly different from the heads forming the constituent of structures 1, 2 and 3, as it does not represent any conceptual meaning to users and speakers of Malay. In other words, the preposition which is the head of the prepositional phrase in the predicate does not have any concrete or abstract referential meaning. The question of how and why a prepositional phrase whose head is a preposition can represent one of the basic structures of a sentence in Malay has not been fully explained. A preposition which does not carry any conceptual meaning should essentially make it more difficult for the phrase to be understood by users and speakers of Malay. This is, however, not the case. It seems that the prepositional phrase which appears as the predicate of some sentences in Malay carry a meaning which can be understood by users of the Malay language. This question therefore merits a thorough analysis and explanation based on actual usage of the language by users and speakers of Malay in their daily lives. A research of this nature can only be appropriately dealt with by employing knowledge from the field of pragmatics, the only area in linguistics which can explain and describe meaning and language usage based on context. Using the pragmatic approach, specifically the Relevance theory, the researcher believes that the question related to the structure of the 4th basic sentence which is widely used in Malay can be explained in a more critical and empirical manner, especially by employing the principles of cognitive and communicative relevance as well as the ideas put forth by Sperber and Wilson (1986, 1995).

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