

A unified analysis of funny control

Hiroki Nomoto

This paper discusses a construction in Malay/Indonesian which Gil (2002) calls the funny control construction. The construction consists of a certain class of predicates followed by a passive clause as in (1).

- (1) Mat Rempit itu cuba di-tangkap polis.
motorcycle gang that try PASS-catch police
(i) ‘The motorcycle gang tried to be caught by the police.’
(ii) ‘The police tried to catch the motorcycle gang.’

As the translations above show, the construction is in principle ambiguous, though the ambiguity is usually resolved pragmatically (cf. Kaswanti Purwo 1984). The ambiguity arises because the external argument of funny control predicates (i.e. ‘tryer’) can be identified not only with the external argument (i.e. ‘catcher’ = *polis* ‘police’) but also with the internal argument (i.e. ‘catchee’ = *Mat Rempit itu* ‘the motorcycle gang’) of the lower predicate.

The ambiguity has been explained by positing two different syntactic categories for funny control predicates. Usually, one leading to the normal control reading as in (i) is a main/control verb and another leading to the crossed reading as in (ii) is an auxiliary/raising verb. This type of dual categorial analysis is made by most researchers (e.g. Shoho 1995; Musgrave 2001; Sato 2004; Polinsky and Potsdom in press). One problem of such an approach is that it brings about redundancies in the lexicon since all funny control predicates, whose number exceeds ten at the least, will have two lexical entries. Shoho (2004) and Fukuda (2007) propose analyses which obtain the same effect by moving I to V (Shoho) or V to Aux (Fukuda).

This paper presents a new analysis which differs from the analyses above. I claim that the funny control construction is ambiguous because the external θ -role of funny control predicates can be assigned ambiguously, either to the internal or the external argument of the lower predicate. θ -role assignment, whether ambiguous or unambiguous, must be completed in a local domain, which is defined as the XP projected by the prefix *meN-* (and perhaps some other prefixes) (ν P) and a complementiser (CP). Crucially, the prefix *di-* does not introduce a locality. Ambiguous θ -role assignment becomes impossible when the lower verb has a locality introducing prefix. This explains why (2) below is not ambiguous.

- (2) Polis cuba [**men-**(t)angkap Mat Rempit itu].
police try ACT-catch motorcycle gang that
(i) ‘The police tried to catch the motorcycle gang.’
(ii) *‘The motorcycle gang tried to be caught by the police.’

In (2), the prefix *meN-* introduces a locality (indicated by the brackets) and thus makes *Mat Rempit itu* ‘the motorcycle gang’ inaccessible to the θ -role assigner *cuba* ‘try’. By contrast, in (1), not only *Mat Rempit itu* but also *polis* is accessible to *cuba* because the prefix *di-* does not introduce a locality and hence the local domain is the matrix clause. I assume that assignment of internal θ -role is not free unlike external one. This prevents (1) from having the interpretation ‘the motorcycle gang tried to catch the police.’

Locality introduction by the prefix *meN-* is not an ad hoc stipulation just to explain the funny control construction. It works in general in the grammar of Malay/Indonesian, e.g. extraction of arguments (Saddy 1991; Soh 1998). The present analysis is superior to previous analyses because it utilises a general mechanism which is already available elsewhere whereas previous proposals hypothesise something special to the funny control construction.

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