

The Essant Role: Evidence from Malay/Indonesian

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While many grammatical theories make use of thematic roles such as agent, patient, beneficiary, location and so forth, positions within and across theories differ with regard to several important issues concerning such roles, among which are (a) their *identity*: which roles are actually needed for the description of language; (b) their *granularity*: how specific or general such roles should be; and (c) their *paradigmatic organization*: whether linear or hierarchic, and if hierarchic, how so. Nevertheless, it is generally assumed that arguments in support of one or another position are primarily empirical, based on which characterization of thematic roles best accounts for observed patterns of linguistic features.

This paper cites data from Malay/Indonesian to support the positing of a novel thematic role, that of *essant*. The *essant* role is that associated with the subject of symmetric predications of the kind that, in many languages, make use of a copula. For example, in English, the demonstrative *this* bears the *essant* role in constructions such as *This is John*, *This is a student*, *This is a murder*. Malay/Indonesian provides two lines of evidence in support of the *essant* role: (a) the distribution of negative markers *bukan* and *tidak* (and its variants *tak*, *ndak*, *nggak* and others); and (b) the ubiquitous use of demonstratives *ni* and *tu* in sentence-terminal position. Although the arguments presented in this paper hold across most dialects of Malay and Indonesian, data in this paper is cited from one typical dialect, Riau Indonesian.

The first source of evidence for the *essant* role comes from the distinction between negative markers *bukan* and *tidak* (and its variants). This distinction is often claimed to be sensitive to parts of speech: *bukan* is said to negate nouns, *tidak* adjectives and verbs. However, a number of scholars have observed that *bukan* may also occur with adjectives and verbs, in which case, it is suggested, such usages are licensed by a feature of contrastiveness: *bukan* is said to imply the existence of an alternative to the expression being negated. However, such accounts remain inadequate. Examination of naturalistic texts shows that not all occurrences of *bukan* are contrastive while some occurrences of *tidak* are; moreover, in addition to examples of *bukan* negating adjectives and verbs, there are also cases of *tidak* negating nouns. Instead it is argued that the correct account of the *bukan/tidak* distinction makes reference neither to parts of speech nor to contrastiveness, but rather to the thematic role of *essant*. Specifically, whereas *bukan* negates an expression with respect to the thematic role of *essant*, *tidak* negates an expression with regard to all other possible thematic roles. The proposed analysis characterizes the difference between *bukan* and *tidak* as a purely semantic one. In addition it provides a straightforward explanation for why *bukan* occurs more frequently with words denoting objects while *tidak* occurs more often with words denoting properties and activities, as well as for why *bukan* is commonly associated with a contrastive interpretation.

The second source of evidence for the *essant* role comes from the very common occurrence of demonstratives such as *ni* and *tu* at the beginnings and the ends of sentences. In such cases, their function has proved rather difficult to define precisely, as is evidenced by their often vague and unrevealing characterization as "emphatic" or "pragmatic" particles. But even particles have precise and subtle meanings; it's just that it is often more challenging to render such meanings explicit. The proposed analysis accounts for such sentence-terminal demonstratives in terms of their regular demonstrative function, but with the additional property that they are associated with the thematic role of *essant*. For example, in the very common greeting *Mau ke mana ni*

"want to where DEM:PROX" or "Where are you going?", the demonstrative *ni* possesses its usual deictic function, pointing to a here-and-now situation (hence the choice of the proximate form) in which the interlocutor is involved. Moreover, the situation in question bears the essant role in relation to the remainder of the sentence: a more perspicuous translation reflecting the essant role of the demonstrative would be something along the lines of "This situation is one in which you are going where?".

Thus, although in general Malay/Indonesian provides relatively sparse evidence for the grammaticalization of thematic roles, the *bukan/tidak* distinction and the occurrence of sentence-terminal demonstratives provide support for the enrichment of the universal inventory of thematic roles with the additional role of essant.