

Existential clauses in Papuan Malay

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“Papuan Malay” is a collective term that denotes the easternmost varieties of Malay spoken on the western part of the island of New Guinea. This paper presents a description of the different types of existential clauses in North Papua Malay, the variety of Papuan Malay spoken along Papua’s north coast (Donohue forthcoming: 1–2). This description is based on recordings of spontaneous conversations between Papuan Malay speakers in the Sarimi area which is located about 300 km west of Jayapura.

In Papuan Malay existential clauses are formed with the existential verb *ada* ‘exist’. Structurally, two distinct types of existential predicate clauses can be distinguished: (1) intransitive clauses with one core argument and (2) transitive clauses with two core arguments.

Intransitive one-argument existential clauses serve two functions. One function is to assert the existence of the subject such that ‘N/NP exists’ or ‘There is N/NP’. A second function is to denote possession, such that ‘PNP exists’ with the possessum having a definite reading.

In two-argument existential clauses the existential verb *ada* ‘exist’ links the two core arguments. Such ditransitive existential constructions also serve two functions. One function is to emphasize the existence of the subject in a particular state such that ‘THEME indeed exists as NP’ giving the emphatic reading ‘THEME is (indeed) NP’. A second function is to encode the notion of possession of an indefinite possessum such that ‘POSSESSOR exists POSSESSUM’ giving the reading ‘POSSESSOR has POSSESSUM’.

Examples

(1) **ada babi de pana makan**
exist pig 3SG bow.shoot eat
‘**there was a pig** (and) she bow shot (and) ate (it)’

(2) **bapa pu motor ada**
father POSS motorbike exist
‘**father had a motorbike**’ (Lit. ‘**father’s motorbike exists**’)

(3) **dong bilang, a de ada sakit**
3PL say ah 3SG exist sick
‘they said, ‘ah, **he’s being sick**’

(4) **sa ada anak**
1SG exist child
‘**I have children**’

References

- Donohue, Mark. forthcoming. Papuan Malay. In Orin D. Gensler (ed.) *Malay/Indonesian linguistics*. London: Curzon Press.
- Dryer, Matthew S. 2007. Clause types. In Timothy Shopen (ed.) *Language typology and syntactic description. Volume 1: Clause structure*, 2nd edn.. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press. 224–275.