

Ternate Malay: a grammatical description
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Ternate Malay is one of many languages in which words display little overtly expressed features to express grammatical properties. Words may serve different syntactic functions without any change in their formal shape. Morphological processes may be applied to certain items but serve merely to add semantic aspects to the base rather than to fulfil grammatical needs. The resultant items show similar flexibility and may serve various syntactic functions as do those without affixation. Words receive their meaning through the relationship with other words. The linguistic context as well as the non-linguistic situation in which they occur determine how the words and strings of words are best interpreted.

The hearer can use various strategies to achieve the most suitable interpretation. Certain lexical items facilitate the parsing of strings of words, indicate the type of utterance, or express speaker's attitude and feelings. The frequency of the certain usages as well as the presence of prosodic features may be helpful to determine the most suitable interpretation.

These aspects are illustrated in the following examples. In example (1) *isap* 'to suck' is used predicatively and expresses a verbal meaning 'to suck, to absorb'. The construction *isap suar* 'to suck sweat' could also be interpreted as modifier of the head *kain-kain* 'cloths', expressing the meaning 'sweat absorbing cloths'. The situation may determine which interpretation works best. In example (2) *jalang* is the head of a Y *pe* X construction which expresses a possessive meaning 'her walking'. In this context *jalang* receives *de facto* a nominal interpretation. Example (3) is taken from a story about drinking and smoking habits and the speaker tells that he does not drink alcohol because he is afraid, *tako* 'afraid'. From the context it is clear that *tako* serves a predicative function while the subject and experiencer is implied. *Tapi* serves as a function word that joins clauses together; it implies a contradiction. The bound element *ba-* is attached to the base *isap* 'suck' and gives it a habitual meaning aspect. In the context and situation of this example it has the specific meaning: *ba-isap* 'to smoke (cigarettes)'. *Baisap* serves as subject which enforces a nominal interpretation of the word, 'the smoking'. The word *jalang* 'street, walk' serves a predicative function and has to be interpreted with a verbal meaning 'to walk, move'. The linguistic context and the situation helps the reader to achieve the most suitable reading of these sentences.

- (1) baru kain-kain **isap** suar to?
then cloth-cloth suck.[V] sweat QT
and the cloths absorb sweat, right?
- (2) de pe **jalang** laeng-laeng lagi.
3SG POSS walk.[N] different-different again
she walks in a different way. (Lit. 'her walking is different')
- (3) tako tapi **ba-isap** **jalang** trus.
afraid CONJ HAB-suck.[N] walk.[V] continue
I'm afraid but the smoking continues.

The paper aims to discuss some of these aspects and to provide a short grammatical description of Ternate Malay.