

# Hierarchic Structure in Riau Indonesian

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Gil (1994, 2005, 2012, 2013, and elsewhere) proposes an analysis of Riau Indonesian grammar which differs from that of English in (at least) the following three respects, illustrated with reference to sample sentences (1) and (2):

- (1) Rudy likes durian *English*
- (2) Rudy suka durian *Riau Indonesian*
- (3) Gil (1994, 2005, 2012, 2013, and elsewhere)
  - (a) *semantic compositionality and predication*  
Whereas in English, sentences such as *Rudy likes durian* involve a predicate *likes durian* applying to an argument *Rudy*, in Riau Indonesian there is no predicate-argument relation, instead *Rudy*, *suka* and *durian* exhibit a looser semantic relationship of association;
  - (b) *syntactic categories*  
Whereas English has a large inventory of syntactic categories, with *Rudy*, *likes* and *durian* belonging to different syntactic categories, Riau Indonesian is monocategorial — *Rudy*, *suka* and *durian* belong to the same syntactic category;
  - (c) *hierarchic syntactic structure*  
Whereas English has strictly hierarchical syntactic structure, e.g. [*Rudy* [*likes durian* ]], Riau Indonesian has variable syntactic structure, with all of the logically possible constituencies of *Rudy suka durian* being available.

(Note: although referring specifically to the Riau dialect of Indonesian, the above-proposed analysis is applicable, with only minor modifications, to most other colloquial varieties of Malay and Indonesian.)

In response to the above analysis, Jackendoff and Wittenberg (2014 and elsewhere) propose an alternative account of Riau Indonesian, accepting the basic insight that Riau Indonesian has a substantially simpler grammar than that of English, while departing from the analysis in (3) in certain respects:

- (4) Jackendoff and Wittenberg (2014 and elsewhere)
  - (a) *semantic compositionality and predication*  
Riau Indonesian has predicate-argument structure just like English;
  - (b) *syntactic categories*  
Riau Indonesian is monocategorial;
  - (c) *hierarchic syntactic structure*  
Riau Indonesian has flat, non-hierarchical syntactic structure; in particular, it is non-recursive.

In comparison to my analysis, Jackendoff and Wittenberg shift the burden from the syntax to the semantics, characterizing the syntax as simpler but the semantics as more complex. Since Jackendoff and Wittenberg provide no explicit arguments in support of the claim that Riau Indonesian has English-style predication (4a), and agree that it is monocategorial (4b), this paper focuses on the issue of hierarchic syntactic structure (4c).

Jackendoff and Wittenberg argue that the evidence cited in favour of syntactic constituencies in Riau Indonesian is actually of a different, non-syntactic nature, pertaining either to intonation or to semantics. In this paper, I shall review their

arguments and conclude that, for the most part, they are persuasive. However, rather than simply abandoning syntactic constituent structure in Riau Indonesian, I propose an alternative way of dealing with the issue of phonological, syntactic and semantic constituency in general.

Specifically, based on insights gleaned from a substantial body of work in cognitive psychology, I posit an autonomous mental faculty of grouping, manifest in the universal human propensity to form hierarchic constituent structures, or groupings. Such groupings are manifest in a variety of cognitive domains, including (but not limited to) language; moreover, within language, such groupings are manifest in distinct grammatical domains, including intonation, syntax and semantics. Crucially, however, such groupings are not, themselves, part of syntax, nor for that matter even of grammar. Instead, they constitute an abstract non-domain-specific scaffolding enabling linguistic features, intonational, syntactic, semantic, and otherwise, to be read off via interpretative rules, and in so doing, linking these distinct grammatical domains. For example, a three-word sentence in a language might have the following (right-branching) grouping:

(5) [ RUDY [ LIKE DURIAN ] ]

The above grouping is of a highly abstract nature, not part of intonational, syntactic, or semantic structure. However, in different cases, it may be reflected by various combinations of intonational, syntactic, semantic and/or other linguistic features, resulting in derived structures which may accordingly be said to be of an intonational, syntactic, semantic, and/or other nature.

The above approach provides a simple and elegant means for representing the substantial differences between the grammars of Riau Indonesian and English in terms of variation within a common architecture. For example, in a sentence such as (5), a [ LIKE DURIAN ] constituent may be present for both languages; however, whereas in English it might be reflected by intonation, syntax and semantics, in Riau Indonesian it might be reflected by intonation alone. In conclusion, it is suggested that this model provides a convenient way for representing not only variation across languages but also the acquisition of language by children and the evolution of language itself.

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