

Distinguishing subjects and topics in Javanese

Background: Grammatical subjects are often related to topics (Sasse 1987, Jacobs 2001). For many Austronesian languages, this relation is argued to be the rule: subjects are necessarily topics (*Javanese*: Poedjosoedarmo 1977, Cole et al. 2002, Sato 2015; *Malay*: Mashudi 1976, Alsagoff 1992; *Malagasy*: Pearson 2005, a.o.). There are two main arguments for this claim. First, in-situ subject questions are ungrammatical (since topics inherently cannot be focused); instead, subject questions are formed via clefting (a fronted *wh*-subject predicate plus a headless relative clause) (Javanese data in (1-2) from Cole et al. 2002:97,100,103):¹

- (1) a. *Sapa meh mangan apel? b. Sapa **sing** meh mangan apel? **JAVANESE**
 who FUT AV.eat apple who REL FUT AV.eat apple
 ‘Who will eat the apple?’ Lit. ‘It is who that...’

Second, subjects must be definite (Cole et al. 2002), as in (2c) with possession. Bare nominals in subject position like *kucing* ‘cat’ cannot be indefinite (‘a cat’) (2a); instead, indefinites must be introduced by the existential predicate *ono* ‘there is’ (2b). If topics are necessarily definite, this explains the ban on indefinite subjects.

- (2) a. *Kucing m-layu. b. **Ono** kucing m-layu. c. Kucing-**e deen** m-layu.
 cat AV-run exist cat AV-run cat-POSS 3SG AV-run
 ‘There was a cat running.’ ‘His cat ran.’

While some languages are viewed as subject or topic-prominent (Li & Thompson 1976), the strict parallelism between pragmatics and syntax like in Javanese where Spec,TP=Topic (Cole et al. 2002) raises the question whether this relation is truly tied to certain syntactic positions.

Aim: I argue that Javanese subjects are usually topics, but are not always—contra Cole et al. (2002)—as shown by novel evidence from answers as well as an intervention test. The data are based on fieldwork, primarily on a dialect spoken in East Java, Indonesia.

Proposal: In answers, a focused TAM marker has a fixed position above TP. Subjects in Javanese can be non-topics in Spec,TP whereas they are topics if they occur above the focused TAM marker. Such topic movement of subjects is optional.

I. Establishing the syntax of answers. In Javanese, one strategy to answer a yes-no question is with an unexpected order of TAM markers, which have a strict relative order otherwise (Cole et al. 2008; Vander Klok 2012). For instance in (3A/A’), the order *kudu* ‘ROOT.NEC’ > *ketoke* ‘DIR.EVID’ is possible in answers (in addition to the default order *ketoke* > *kudu*, (4b)), but impossible otherwise, as shown in a declarative, (4a). The subject *wong Indonesia* can either occur sentence- (3A) or predicate-initially (3A’) with the unexpected TAM order.

- (3) Q: Wong Indonesia kudu nggowo paspor reng bandera toh?
 person Indonesia ROOT.NEC AV.bring passport to airport FOC
 ‘Do Indonesians have to bring their passport to the airport?’
 A: [Wong Indonesia] **kudu ketoke** nggowo paspor reng bandera.
 person Indonesia ROOT.NEC DIR.EVID AV.bring passport to airport
 ‘Indonesians must, it seems, bring their passport to the airport.’
 A’: **kudu ketoke** [wong Indonesia] nggowo paspor reng bandera.
 (4) a. *Wong Indonesia **kudu ketoke** nggowo paspor reng bandera.
 b. ✓ Wong Indonesia **ketoke kudu** nggowo paspor reng bandera.

I argue that the lower TAM marker (*kudu* in 3A) head-moves to a *fixed focused position above TP* (and below TopP). Independent evidence for this movement comes from the syntax of ‘yes’ or ‘no’ in Javanese: TAM auxiliaries alone can serve as an affirmative answer, (5). Following Holmberg (2013, 2015), Focus⁰ (located above TP) is the dedicated landing site for these answer types. The data pattern in (3)-(5) generalizes across all TAM markers.

¹ Glossing: AV ‘actor voice’; DIR.EVID ‘direct evidential’; INT ‘intensifier’; FOC ‘focus’; FUT ‘future’; NEC ‘necessity’; PROSP ‘prospective aspect’; ROOT ‘root modality’.

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- (5) Q: **Kudu** toh Gayus m-bayar dendo? A: **Kudu.**
 ROOT.NEC FOC Gayus AV-pay fine ROOT.NEC
 ‘MUST Gayus pay a fine?’ ‘Yes.’

II. Testing for topichood. Having established that a TAM marker (*kudu*) has raised to Focus⁰, we are now in a position to test the nature of the two positions available for subjects in (3A/A’). Using quantifiers such as ‘at most’, ‘less than’, or ‘few’ which cannot be topicalized (Endriss 2009), such quantifiers are predicted to be unacceptable in topic positions, but acceptable in subject positions. In answer to (6Q), the quantified subject in (6A) located above the focused TAM (*kudu*) is ungrammatical, showing that this position is necessarily a topic position. In contrast, the quantified subject in (6A’) in Spec,TP (located below the modifier *ketoke*) is grammatical, showing that Spec,TP is a grammatical subject position.

- (6) Q: *Do at most 10 students have to bring a computer?*
 A: *[_{TopP} Paling akeh 10 mahasiswa₂ [_{FocP} **kudu**₁ [**ketoke** [_{TP} *t*₂ [_{AuxP} *t*₁ nggowo]]]]]
 -EST many10 univ.student ROOT.NEC DIR.EVID AV.bring
 A’: ✓ [_{FocP} **Kudu**₁ [**ketoke** [_{TP} paling akeh 10 mahasiswa [_{AuxP} *t*₁ nggowo]]]]]
 ROOT.NEC DIR.EVID -EST many10 univ.student AV.bring
 ‘Yes, at most 10 students must, it seems, bring [one].’

I propose that Javanese has a **syntax-pragmatics interface constraint**, where subjects are interpreted as topics. In Spec,TP the pragmatic preference for a topic interpretation can be cancelled, such as in (6A’). In Spec,TopP, however, there is a semantic requirement for a topic interpretation, which cannot be cancelled, resulting in the ungrammaticality of (6A).

III. Additional test for topic vs. subject: Intervention. Object relative clauses are possible in Javanese, (7). If the subject (*muride* ‘the student’ in (7)) were a topic in an \bar{A} position, it would act as an intervener, blocking movement of the object (cf. Pearson 2005 for Malagasy).

- (7) ✓ Buku [sing murid-e ape woco] iku uw-apik.
 book REL student-DEF PROSP read DEM <INT>good
 ‘The book that the student is going to read is good.’

Consequences: I. Aldridge (*to appear*) proposes that in Austronesian languages, only one feature [*uΦ*] on C drives movement. One main result is that subjects are either in Spec,CP or in Spec,vP. This account would not be able to derive the Javanese data, nor other ‘Indonesian-type’ languages, where subjects are argued to occur in Spec,TP (e.g. Chung 2008).

II. The pragmatic preference for subjects to be interpreted as topics in Javanese accounts for why subjects cannot be indefinite in Javanese. I suggest that Indonesian has the same pragmatic preference, but it can be cancelled when indefinites are used as subjects such as *sesuatu* ‘something’ or *seorang* ‘someone’ (Chung 2008).

III. Returning to the data in (1), why are *wh*-subjects in-situ ungrammatical? Javanese grammatically focuses *wh*-subjects, but not necessarily *wh*-objects, reflecting a crosslinguistic pattern where only focused subjects tend to be grammatically marked (Zimmermann & Onéa 2011). I suggest that subject questions in Modern Javanese have maintained the cleft strategy from Old Javanese, which as a V1 language observes Oda’s generalization (Oda 2002, 2005; Potsdam 2009): if a language uses VP-raising to derive V1 order, then it will have a cleft strategy available to form *wh*-questions.

Selected References Aldridge, E. *to appear*. PHI-feature competition: A unified approach to the Austronesian extraction restriction. | Chung, S. 2008. Indonesian clause structure from an Austronesian perspective. | Cole, P., Hermon, G., Inoha, K., & Tjung, Y. 2002. A constraint on *wh* in-situ in Javanese. | Endriss, C. 2009. *Quantificational Topics*. | Holmberg, A. 2015. *The syntax of yes and no*. | Jacobs, J. 2001. The dimensions of topic-comment. | Oda, K. 2005. V1 and *wh*-questions: A typology. | Pearson, M. 2005. The Malagasy subject/topic as an A’ element. | Vander Klok, J. 2012. TAM in Paciran Javanese.