

Covert passive agents in Jakarta Indonesian: Unpronounced or missing?

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Passive voice is canonically characterized by the demotion of the external argument to an adjunct position or its omission and existential interpretation (e.g. Keenan and Dryer 2007). Jakarta Indonesian (JI) presents a challenge to this typology: agentless passive clauses in JI are ambiguous between (i) a canonical passive structure with an existentially bound agent and (ii) a construction where the passive agent is expressed as a syntactically active covert pronominal. This null pronoun, which occupies the external argument position, is limited to third person reference, raising implications for the syntax of passive voice and the licensing requirements for nominals.

Canonical passive. In addition to ‘Philippine-type’ actor (AV) and object voice (OV; =Passive Type 2 or *pasif semu*), Malay/Indonesian displays a Indo-European type passive (=Passive Type 1), which is marked with the prefix *di-* and the promotion of an internal argument to pivot position (Chung 1975; Dardjowidjojo 1978; Sneddon 1996; Arka and Manning 1998; Cole et al. 2006, 2008 a.o.). In contrast to AV and OV where the agent is preverbal (e.g. 3 below), the agent of the *di-*passive appears either as a PP (1a) or an immediately postverbal bare NP (1b), suggesting demotion to a non-argument position. Unlike Standard Indonesian (SI), where the *di-*passive is limited to third person agents, the passive in JI is compatible with agents in any person, e.g. 1SG in (1).

- (1) a. Desi di-masak-in **aku** <Desi> nasi goreng.
Desi PASS-cook-APPL **I** rice fried
- b. Desi di-masak-in <Desi> nasi goreng **sama aku**.
Desi PASS-cook-APPL rice friend **with I**
‘Desi was made fried rice by me.’

The demoted status of the passive agent is confirmed by its inability to bind reflexives in pivot position: similarly to English unbound reflexives (e.g. Zribi-Hertz 1989), *dirinya* in (2) must refer to a salient discourse antecedent and not the passive agent. Postverbal passive agents contrast in this respect with preverbal agents in object voice (3), confirming (i) that they occupy different syntactic positions (similarly observed in SI; Arka and Manning 1998) and (ii) that the possibility of coreference between *dirinya* and the agent is not connected to the pronominal status of the agent (cf. Kroeger 2014; Nomoto 2020).

- (2) Cuma diri-nya yang di-pikir-in (sama) Yuni. (3) Cuma diri-nya yang Yuni Ø-pikir-in
only self-3SG C PASS-think-TR (with) Yuni only self-3SG C Yuni OV-think-TR
lit. ‘Only she/he/*herself is thought about by Yuni.’ ‘Yuni only thinks about him/her/herself.’

The agent may also be omitted and interpreted existentially; cf. the semantic oddness of the referential pronoun in the English translation (4).

- (4) Buku-ku di-curi. Aku mau tahu siapa yang nyuri.
book-my PASS-steal I want know who C AV.steal
‘My bag was stolen (#by them). I want to know who stole it.’

As expected of a canonical passive, the *di-*passive is associated with agentive semantics even in the absence of an overt agent, which is evident from the compatibility with agentive modifiers such as the purpose clause in (5); cf. the incompatibility of the same modifier with an unaccusative predicate (6).

- (5) Di-tutup [supaya kamar-nya hangat]. ‘It (=the window) was closed to keep the room warm.’
PASS-close so that room-DEF warm
- (6) #Jendela-nya ke-tutup [supaya kamar-nya hangat]. lit. ‘The window closed to keep the room warm.’
window-DEF INTR-close so that room-DEF warm

The presence of agentive semantics and an existential interpretation for the covert agent in the *di-*passive suggests a structure where the head responsible for introducing the agentive theta-role is syntactically present, but does not introduce an external argument. This is compatible with treating *di-* as the spellout of v^0 which assigns an AGENT θ -role, but does not project a specifier, following Aldridge (2007); Cole et al. (2008) on SI.

A syntactically active agent. In addition to the canonical properties above, the covert passive agent displays several unusual characteristics which suggest that it is (i) referential and syntactically active and (ii) occupies the

external argument position (based on tests discussed in Legate 2012, 2014; Arka and Manning 1998).

Firstly, a covert agent may be interpreted referentially, in contrast to the passive in the English translation (7): while the overt pronoun *dia* is preferred, the utterance in (7) is acceptable without it.

(7) Aku marah sama Yuni [soalnya baju-ku di-buang ?(dia)].

I angry with Yuni because clothes-my PASS-discard s/he

‘I am angry with Yuni because my clothes were thrown out #(by her).’

Furthermore, in contrast to the overt agent in (2), the covert agent may bind a reflexive in pivot position (8).

(8) Cuma diri-nya yang di-pikir-in.

only self-3SG C PASS-think-TR

(*I don’t want to be friends with her...*) ‘She’s selfish (lit. Only herself is thought about by her.)’

This suggests that a syntactically active null argument may be merged in passive Spec,vP. This argument, however, is severely limited in its featural properties: it may only refer to a third person participant. Thus, the covert agent may not bind a reflexive marked for 2SG (9) or refer to a second person discourse antecedent (10; cf. 7)). The contrast between 3 and 1/2 persons emphasizes that this phenomenon is distinct from discourse-driven pro-drop in JI, which targets core arguments and does not differentiate between different persons (Sneddon 2006:109-112).

(9) Cuma diri kamu yang di-pikir-in.

only self 2SG C PASS-think-TR

‘S/he is obsessed with you. (lit. Only yourself is thought about by her.)’ / *You are selfish.

(10) Aku marah sama kamu [soalnya baju-ku di-buang #(kamu)].

I angry with you because clothes-my PASS-discard you

‘I am angry with you because my clothes were thrown out #(by you).’

Passive voice projects an agent, but cannot license it. Based on the mixed behavior of the covert agent in JI passives, we propose that in addition to introducing the agent θ -role, v_{PASS} may project a specifier (e.g. Baker et al. 1989; Collins 2005). In contrast to v^0 in AV and OV, v_{PASS} lacks the ability and requirement to *license* its specifier—this means that an overt argument may never surface there. Conversely, null *pro* is able to surface in Spec, v_{PASS} due to its deficient nature (see Nomoto and Kartini 2014 for similar observations about Malay passives).

Following Barbosa (2019), *pro* corresponds to a minimal nP which is unspecified for ϕ -features. Overt pronouns then result from this minimal nP combining with a featurally-specified D^0 (Ritter 1991; Postal 1966; Elbourne 2001; Déchaine and Wiltschko 2002,a.o.). For a nominal to be licensed, its ϕ -features must be checked by a ϕ -probe through agreement (e.g. Chomsky 2000, 2001; Sheehan and Van der Wal 2018; Kalin 2019; Nie 2020). The featureless *pro* is thus uniquely able to appear in positions where ϕ -licensing is unavailable. However, given its deficient nature, *pro* cannot fulfill ϕ -agreement requirements on a probe, which means that it is *limited* to positions which are not licensed, correctly predicting that it can appear in Spec, v_{PASS} , which cannot license arguments, and cannot appear in the specifier of v^0 in active or object voice, which licenses its external argument through ϕ -agreement. The absence of ϕ -features is compatible with a third person interpretation (e.g. Harley and Ritter 2002; Béjar and Rezac 2003; Anagnostopoulou 2005), resulting in obligatory third person reference for *pro*.

Extension to passive imperatives. In contrast to analyses which explain the unique behavior of third person passive agents by treating the corresponding construction as a special case of object voice (e.g. Arka and Manning 1998 on SI), the present analysis can be extended to account for passive imperatives, which are productively used in both SI and JI (11; e.g. Sneddon 1996:326; Udayana 2022). In this case, *pro* is locally bound by an imperative operator, allowing for a second person interpretation (Zanuttini 2008; Zanuttini et al. 2012). This confirms that the argument-like properties of the covert passive agent are not inherently connected to its third person interpretation.

(11) rendang-nya *pro* cepat di-masak ‘Make the rendang (=meat curry dish) quick!’

rendang-DEF quick PASS-make

Select references. •Barbosa 2019. *LI*. •Cole et al. 2006. *Ocean. Ling.* •Kalin 2019. *Nordlyd*. •Kroeger 2014. *NUSA* 57. •Nie 2020. NYU diss. •Nomoto 2020. *NUSA* 68. •Nomoto & Kartini 2014. *NUSA* 57. •Sneddon 2006. *Colloquial Jakartan Indonesian*. •Udayana 2022. *RETORIKA*. •Zanuttini et al. 2012. *NLLT*.