

## The Verb Phrase of Mendriq

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### ABSTRACT

Mendriq is a moribund language spoken by Orang Asli in Kuala Lah, Kelantan, Malaysia. This language is spoken by only 245 people in three villages, namely Kampung Kuala Lah, Kampung Baru and Kampung Kuala Stail. This paper analyzes transitive and intransitive verb phrases in Mendriq. The primary data of Mendriq language were obtained through fieldwork funded by a research grant (UKM-GUP-PLW-08-11-047). The composition of the data collected through field work was sorted to meet the scope of this paper. The data of Mendriq language were analysed descriptively. Findings from the study indicate that Mendriq has transitive and intransitive verbs. Its transitive verbs present two arguments, namely; internal and external arguments. The intransitive verbs, on the other hand, are divided into two types, and these are known as unaccusative and unergative verbs. The intransitive verbs with external argument are known as unergative verb, while the intransitive verbs with internal argument are known as unaccusative verb.

*Keywords:* Mendriq language, Minimalist Programme, verb, transitive, intransitive

### INTRODUCTION

The aboriginal community is the first community to populate Malay Peninsula about 5000 years ago. However, there

are various races among these aborigines, and they do not comprehend each others' languages. In other words, each sub-race of the aborigines in Malay Peninsula speaks different languages. According to the statistics provided by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in Malaysia (DAA, 2006), the number of Aborigines until December 2006 reached 141,230 people. DAA subdivided them into three tribes

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known as Negrito, Senoi and Proto-Malays. The language of each tribe is given a name based on the name of the tribe who speaks the language. The Negrito's languages are Kensiu, Kintak, Lanoh, Jakun, and Mendriq, while the Senoi languages consist of Temiar, Semai, Semoq Beri, Che Wong, and Jah Hut. Meanwhile, the Proto-Malay languages are Temuan/ temoq and Semelai. However, due to the limitation of space, only the Mendriq language is discussed in this paper.

Mendriq is a language used by the indigenous people in Kuala Lah Mendriq, Gua Musang, Kelantan. There are about 245 people who speak this language. They live in Kuala Lah, a village in Kelantan. Mendriq, which is an endangered language, portrays interesting sentence structure. Due to the limitation of vocabulary/ diction, this paper only describes the types of verb that are available in this language. The data described in this paper are the primary data collected from the native speakers of Mendriq. The data collected through field work were sorted accordingly in order to meet the scope of this paper.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive analysis based on the perspective of qualitative analysis. This field study was conducted over a period of six months, with the permission from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. The data were collected using the interview technique. Ten native speakers were identified for the purpose of this study. They were in the range of 65 to 75 year old. This study used the classification suggested by

Chambers and Trudgill (1990) in selecting informants. The selected informants were chosen using the NORMs approach, which is an acronym for 'Non-mobile', 'Old', 'Rural' and 'Male'. This means that the best informants should be men who met the criteria and have not left the area, older, and are still living in the rural areas.

The data collection method basically involved indirect and direct techniques and the conversations were recorded. The aboriginal people were interviewed separately. The interview technique involves questions and answers. All the informants were requested to talk about their young age, how to hunt animals in the forest, how to farm, how they respect the young and old age, day-to-day activities in their lives, their living conditions now and before, their opinion about life before independence and after independence, their hopes for progress and their views on education. All these questions were asked in Malay but the questions were answered in Mendriq. The conversations were recorded using Sony digital recorder.

The conversations in the recordings were then translated by an interpreter. This translator was specially appointed by the Department of Aboriginal, Kelantan. All the recorded conversations were then translated and ambiguous sentences were referred back to the informants.

### *Verb Phrase*

Phrase is a group of words that forms a syntactic unit. A syntactic unit is known as a verb phrase, a noun phrase, an adjective

phrase and so on. Verb is the most important word in a sentence construction, which in turn forms the predicate of a sentence. Verb can also have a dominant partner known as object.

A verb phrase consists of one word or several words and takes a verb as its head. A verb can be transitive or intransitive (Nik Safiah Karim, Farid M. Onn, Hashim Haji Musa, & Abdul Hamid Mahmood, 2008, p. 365). In addition, Abdullah Hassan (1993, p. 153) elaborates that a verb shows an action, or a state of an action. Md Isa Hassan (1993, p. 37), on the other hand, states that a verb is a word that heads a verb phrase. In summary, we can conclude that a verb is a compulsory word in a verb phrase. In general, a verb serves as a predicate in a sentence.

Thus, a verb is an important element in sentences which will determine its object. For example in Malay, Arbak Othman (1985, p. 146) divides verbs into four types which are known as active transitive verbs, intransitive active verbs, passive verbs and accomplishment verbs. Asraf (1998), on the contrary, divides Malay verbs into three types, namely, intransitive verbs, transitive verbs and passive verbs. According to Asmah (1993, p. 100), transitive verbs can be divided into transitive and ditransitive. For Asmah (1993), a transitive verb can be followed by an object, such as:

- a. He *wrote a letter*.  
V      object
- b. He *read books*  
V      object

A transitive verb is a verb that has only one object (such as one-word object), a phrase object or a clause object. Examples are given below. In example (a) the object *a letter* is the object of the verb, while in example (c), the object *he will succeed* that is following the verb is a clause.

- c. We know *he will succeed*  
V      objects clause

A ditransitive verb is a verb that can take two objects. Both objects can be composed of two phrases, or one word followed by a phrase. For example:

- d. He *gave me the book*.

i      ii

- e. He told *me that he did not agree*.

i      ii

Objects found in the text are marked with (i) and (ii), which show that the sentences are ditransitive. In example (i), there are two 2 NP , while in example (ii) the first object is an NP while the second is a clause. In addition, Perlmutter (1978) introduced a non-accusative hypothesis (*Unaccusative Hypothesis*) which states that a non-ergative verb and an accusative verb differ in the position of their argument. An ergative verb argument has an external argument, while a non-accusative argument has an internal argument.

Hence, we can conclude that the verb is the key element in a verb phrase. Verb can have a dominant partner which can select objects and also contain certain features that can provide semantic interpretation

in its syntactic structure. Based on this discussion, the verb phrase of the Mendriq language was analyzed as a descriptive analysis. The analysis was started by looking at the word order of a verb phrase.

#### *Word order in the Mendriq Language*

Basically, the Mendriq language is made of SVO construction. SVO construction refers to sentences with an order of a subject (S), followed by a verb (V) and an object (O). The SVO construction of the Mendriq language can be identified based on the examples below:

1. Yipah tanem teak  
We plant vegetables  
“We plant vegetables.”
2. Yek cangkul batang kayuk hiyek  
I dig classifier sticks potato  
“I’m digging cassava stems.”
3. Hey Ali hasah parang  
Pak Ali sharpening machetes.  
“Uncle Ali is sharpening the machetes.”

Examples (1) to (3) above show that the sentence construction of this language comprises SVO construction. The word *yipah* in (1) and *yek* in (2) are pronouns, while *Ali* in (3) is a proper noun which functions as the subject of the sentence. Next, the word *tanem* in (1), *cangkul* in (2), and *hasah* in (3) are verbs followed by *teak* in (1), *batang kayuk* *hiyek* in (2), and the *parang* in (3), which are nouns in each sentence. In other words, subjects in the language can be a

pronoun and a proper noun (Fazal Mohamed Mohamed Sultan, 2009, 2011).

In addition to the SVO construction, there is a built-in OSV construction in Mendriq as well. This sentence construction originated from the SVO sentences in Mendriq language. Below are the examples:

4. a. Yem yesor bawang  
I sliced onions  
“I cut onions.”  
b. Bawang yem yesor  
onion I sliced  
“I sliced onion.”  
c. \* bawang yesor Yem  
\* onion sliced I
5. a. Yem citoh nasi  
I cook rice  
“I cook rice.”  
b. nasik yem citoh  
rice I cook  
“I cook rice.”  
c. \* Nasik citoh yem  
\* rice cook I
6. a. Yem rebus ikan  
I steam fish  
“I steam the fish.”  
b. ikan yem rebus  
fish my steam  
“I steam the fish.”  
c. \* Ikan rebus yem.  
\*fish steam I.

Based on the examples in (4) to (6), the SVO sentence structure can be identified through the examples in (4a), (5a) and

(6a). On the other hand, the sentence construction that has formed the OSV sentence construction is reflected in (4b), (5b) and (6b). Thus, the OSV sentence construction is an inversion in the sentence construction which occurs when an object is moved to the front and becomes the focus of the sentence.

Focus can be identified by adopting Culicover and Rochemont's (1983, 1990) and Horvath's (1986) suggestion where a syntactic feature [+ focus] or [+ F] should be marked on the word that becomes the focus in the sentence. This type of feature can determine whether a focus word is *in situ* or moved. These are known as a strong focus feature [F] or a weak feature [FW]. Besides that, Mendriq, at the surface structure, does not possess any question marker, such as in the Malay language which has *lah/kah* as a focus marker (Mashudi Kader, 1981; Ramli Md. Salleh, 1994; Jie Xu, 2003). Therefore, we assume that the syntactic feature [+ F] is given directly to the focus word. This assumption is based on the notion that a single sentence will contain at least one constituent focus. For example:

7. Yem rebus ikan<sup>[+ F]</sup>  
I steam fish  
'I steam the fish'

Assuming that the basic structure of a sentence is SVO [[Yem<sub>[S]</sub>] [rebus<sub>[V]</sub>] [ikan<sub>[O]</sub>]], and the syntactic feature [+ F] is assumed to underlie N [ikan]. As a result, the movement of N *fish* to the initial position of a sentence will be caused by the focus constituent found

in *fish* which we have claimed as having a strong focus of the syntactic feature [+ F]. Thus, this situation has allowed N *fish* to move into the next available spec and to surface as OSV. This particular type of sentences is shown in Examples (4)b, (5) b and (6)b.

Besides the OSV and SVO word ordering, the Mendriq language was also tested with the OVS word ordering as in Examples (4)c, (5)c and (6)c. However, the findings show that the OVS word ordering is an unacceptable word ordering in this language. This is proven when the construction has changed the meaning of the sentence. An example is shown in the follow sentence:

8. \*Nasik citoh Yem  
Rice cook I  
"I cook rice."

Sentence in Example (8) has an OVS ordering. In other words, this construction has the subject that becomes the patient due to the object in the sentence. Syntactically, this sentence can be considered as grammatical because the structure N + V + N is acceptable. Semantically, however, N *nasik* has a feature which means (-able) and N *yem* has a feature which means (+ able). Thus, N *nasik* shall not exercise the following features to the meaning of *yem* N because the feature (-able) does not allow the N to be the verb. Therefore, the sentences in example (4)c, (5)c and (6) c become ungrammatical.

Based on our discussion above, the basic form of the Mendriq language is the subject, verb and objects (SVO), as

shown in Examples (4)a, (5)a and (6)a. This basic word ordering has created another word ordering, i.e. OSV, as shown in Examples (4)b, (5)b and (6)b. These variations occur due to the object inversion in those sentences. However, the OVS word ordering is ungrammatical in the language. This indicates that the basic structure of the Mendriq language is only SVO. It is important to note that the Mendriq language does not have the structure form such as OVS in the Arabic, Romanian, Basque, Hungarian and Finnish languages that allow the OVS construction when the emphasis is placed on the object.

### *The Verb Phrase (VP) of Mendriq*

The verb phrase of Mendriq can be divided into transitive and intransitive verbs. The differences can be observed through the needs of each verb in this language. This means any verb that requires an object is known as a transitive verb, while any verb that does not require an object is known as an intransitive verb. Intransitive verb can further be divided into two types known as unergative and unaccusative verbs. The unergative verbs are verbs that have subjects which are marked as agents, while the unaccusative verbs are verbs that have subjects but they are marked with different roles other than agents.

### *The Transitive Verb Phrase*

Transitive verb phrase consists of a verb which requires an object. The data below are sentences that contain transitive verbs:

9. Yek **jagak** anak.  
I take care of children.  
“I take care of children.”
10. Yek **luwit** kayuk.  
I climb tree  
“I climb the tree.”
11. Yek **ceb** ikan lok jalak.  
I catch fish with nets.  
“I catch fish with nets.”
12. Yem **yetuh** tom dalem kamdek  
I enter air in pot  
“I added water into the pot.”

The examples given in (9) to (12) contain verbs that require objects or complements. Verbs like *jagak*, *luwit*, *ceb* and *yetuh* in these sentences are followed by the words that are grouped as nouns to complete the meaning of the sentence. If the following nouns are dropped, the meanings of the sentences will become incomplete. Therefore, the sentences will be ungrammatical. For example:

13. \*Yek **ceb**  
I caught  
“I caught”
14. \*Yek **jagak**  
I take care  
“I care”
15. \*Yek **luwit**  
I climb  
“I climb”

The examples given in (13) to (15) show sentences that do not have objects. Thus, the sentences become ungrammatical because

these verbs cannot stand independently. In other words, the verbs require other elements to complete the meaning of the sentences. The elements required are nouns, as shown in examples (9) to (12) above.

### *The Intransitive Phrase*

Intransitive phrase is a phrase that does not require an object. Intransitive phrase can be divided into two types based on the role played by the verb underlying each verb phrase. A transitive verb requires two arguments known as external argument and internal argument. The external argument refers to the subject, while the internal argument refers to the object. Intransitive verb will only require either the internal argument or external argument which can be identified by the subjects in the sentence. If the subject serves as an agent, the underlying verb phrase will be designated as a non-ergative verb. If the subject serves as the theme, object, tools, etc., the verb will be classified as an unaccusative verb. Therefore, the remaining section will discuss the unaccusative and unergative verbs in Mendriq language.

### *The Unaccusative Verbs*

Unaccusative verbs will only mark the surface subject as object, tool, etc. A descriptive discussion will be shown using the data given in Examples (16) to (18), as follows:

16. Upik ton ugurungling  
Tin the shaking  
“The tin is shaking.”

17. Kayuk bewu ton opelik.  
tree large the fell  
“A large tree fell.”
18. Kipas angin ton epusing lajuk bener  
Fan the circle fast really  
“The fan turns very fast.”

Sentence (16) shows that it is made up of three elements; *upik* as a noun (N), *ton* as determiner (Det) and *ugurungling* as a verb (V). The words in sentence (17) are represented by *kayuk bewu* (N), *ton* (Det) and *opelik* (V). Meanwhile, the words in sentence (18) consists of *kipas angin* (N), *ton* (Det), *epusing* (V) and *lajuk bener* (AdjP).

The verbs in Examples (16) to (18) are intransitive verbs because they do not have any object or complement that follows the verbs. Only the phrase *lajuk bener* in (18) follows the verb. However, these words are not the object of the verb because the appearance of these words is only additional information for the verb. This word is known as the adjunct. These words can be dropped as shown in (19) below, and the resulting sentence is still considered as grammatical by the native speakers.

19. Kipas angin ton epusing  
Fan itu berpusing  
“The fan turns around.”

The noun *upik* in (16), *kayuk* in (17) and *kipas angin* in sentences (16) to (18) is the surface subject of the sentence. However, the subjects in these sentences do not behave as agents because the subjects are not the doer in those sentences but those subjects

are showing the experience behaviour. Therefore, the subjects in verses (16) to (18) are the internal subjects for the verbs. Hence, the subjects are theta marked as theme. As a result, the intransitive verb *ugurungling* in (16), *opelik* in (17) and *epusing* in (18) are known as the unaccusative/ergative verbs which only theta marks its subject as theme.

### *The Unergative Verbs*

Unergative verbs also require only one argument, similar to its counterpart, the unaccusative verbs. However, the only difference is that an unergative verb only assigns an agent role to its surface subject. In other words, unergative verbs only theta marks its external arguments as agents. The descriptive discussion on the unergative verbs in this section utilizes the data given below:

- 20. Gen **kayoh** ba kenteh  
They swim upstream.  
“They swim upstream.”
- 21. Bek **nyanyik** merduk bener.  
Mother sang melodious truth  
“Mother sing melodiously.”
- 22. Tawaw **kenloh** merduk skalik  
Birds chirp once merduk  
“Birds sing melodiously.”

Sentences (20) to (22) contain several categories of words. The N *Gen* in (20), N *bek* in (21) and N *tawaw* in (22) are the surface subjects in the sentences. The V *kayoh* in (20), V *nyanyik* in (21) and V *kenloh* in (22) are the intransitive verbs in (20), (21) and (22) which show that the

surface subjects of the sentences are external arguments for the verbs because the surface subjects act as agents.

There are also phrases that provide additional information in the sentences. These phrases are *ba kenteh* in (20), *merduk bener* in (21) and *merduk skalik* in (22). The phrase *ba kenteh* in (20) is made of preposition (P) *ba* and noun (N) *kenteh*. On the other hand, the phrases *merduk bener* and *merduk skalik* are AdjP. These phrases can be removed or may move to the front position as the focus of the sentences because these phrases are not parts of the following words or phrases. For instance, look at Examples (23) a and b below:

- 23. a. Gen kayoh <\_\_\_\_\_>  
They swim  
“They swim.”
- b. **Ba kenteh** gen kayoh.  
to upstream they swim.  
“They swim upstream.”

The sentences in Examples (23) a and b are intended to show that the elements that follow the verbs in (20) till (22) are adjuncts. This is because the phrase *ba kenteh* in (20) can be dropped, as shown in (23) a. The deleted elements are marked with <\_\_\_\_>. Sentence (23) b shows that the phrase *ba kenteh* can also appear at the initial position of a sentence. Sentences (23) a and b are considered as grammatically correct sentences by the native speakers of Mendriq.

Therefore, the elements following the verbs in sentences (20) till (22) are not merely object phrases but additional

information which is known in the field of syntax as adjuncts. Thus, the verbs in sentence (20) until (22) are known as the intransitive verbs which do not require any object to be in presence in the sentence. Therefore, these types of verbs are known as the unergative verbs which theta marks their external arguments with agent roles. The external arguments will appear as the surface subject of the sentences.

Based on these analyses, the unaccusative and unergative verbs have described that the type of subject surface will determine the type of verb that should occupy the verb position. For example in sentence (16) which is rewritten as (24) below contains theme role which is assigned as the internal arguments of the verb in the sentence. Therefore, *ugurungling* is an unaccusative verb.

24. Upik tons ugurungling  
Tin the shaking  
“Tin is shaking.”

25. Gen **kayoh** ba kenteh  
They swim to upstream  
“They swim upstream.”

The verb in sentence (25) is an unergative verb because the surface subject pronoun *Gen* is known as an external argument of the verb. The surface subject *gen* in sentence (25) plays an agent role.

#### *Auxiliary Verbs and Verbs*

This section discusses the appearance of the verb phrases preceded by auxiliary verbs, as follows:

26. Yek **om** belik bukuk ton.  
I want buy book the  
“I want to buy the book.”
27. Uk **buleh** angket batuk ton.  
He can lift stone the.  
“He can lift the stone.”
28. Uk **ujit** jumpak lok yek  
He need meet with me.  
“He needs to meet with me.”
29. Yek **mestik** jagak duak bridan.  
I must take care two parents.  
“I have to take care both of my parents.”
30. Uk **tengah** bedik alow  
He is make chopsticks  
“He is making chopsticks.”
31. Gen **aken** bedik lapor os.  
They will create kitchen fire  
“They will make a fire wood.”

Sentences (26) to (31) contain auxiliary verbs. There are six types of auxiliary verbs in Mendriq, and these include *om* (want to), *buleh* (can), *ujit* (must), *mestik* (must/should), *tengah* (in progress) and *aken* (will). The sentences that are listed in this section show that the auxiliaries in Mendriq precede the verb. This notion is valid because the resulting sentence is ungrammatical if the auxiliary verbs follow the verb. For example:

32. \* Yek belik **om** bukuk ton.  
I want buy book the
33. \* Uk angket **buleh** batuk ton  
he lift can rock the

Sentences (32) and (33) have placed auxiliary after the verb. These sentences are claimed as ungrammatical by the native speakers. It is clear that there is a syntactic pairing between the words. There is a phenomenon where the transitive verbs should not be separated from their objects by any other words. The auxiliary verbs in Mendriq can further be divided into modals and aspects. According to Asmah (1993, pp. 104-117), modals are words that are capable of describing the situation of an action referred by the verb while the aspect refers to the process of the act that takes place in the past, future or present. Based on the description given by Asmah (1993), the auxiliary verb can be divided as follows in the Mendriq language. The words *om*, *buleh*, *ujit* and *mestik* are classified as modals while the words *aken* and *tengah* are classified as aspects. The classifications were based on the meaning of the auxiliary verbs. For an in-depth discussion, sentences (26) to (31), which were mentioned earlier, will be used only as references to the numbering of the current data in the discussion. In other words, sentences (26) to (31) will not be rewritten in the discussions but we will only refer to the number of the sentences.

Sentence (26) contains *om* in its sentence construction. Based on the context of the sentence, the auxiliary *om* helps in characterizing a person's action which has not happened yet. The auxiliary *buleh* in sentence (27) is helpful in characterizing the ability of a person in committing the act that has occurred. Meanwhile, the auxiliary *ujit* in sentence (28) helps

to characterize the needs of a person in committing the act that will occur, and the auxiliary *mestik* in sentence (29) helps to characterize the requirements of the act that is still progressing. Therefore, the auxiliaries *om*, *buleh*, *ujit* and *mestik* have the criteria of wishes, capabilities and needs in doing the act. The auxiliaries *om*, *buleh*, *ujit* and *mestik* also have the ability to indicate the tense of a sentence.

In addition to the above auxiliary analyses, these auxiliaries also provide the advantage of helping to mark the tenses in their sentences. This analysis claims that *om* and *ujit* indicate future tense, *buleh* indicates past tense while *mestik* indicates present tense. The auxiliaries *tengah*, and *aken* are classified as aspects because they help to explain the actions that will happen in the future, or is still happening right now. The context of *tengah* in sentence (30) shows that the *tengah* helps to explain the action that has not happened yet while *aken* helps to explain the actions in (31) that will be performed by the subject. Thus, the *tengah* and *aken* will be able to indicate past tense while *tengah* indicates present tense and the *aken* indicates future tense.

## CONCLUSION

This descriptive analysis has shown that Mendriq is a language that follows the basic word order of subject (S), verb (V), object (O). Surprisingly, this basic word order is the same as in the Malay language, which is essentially SVO (Ramli Md Salleh, 1994,

p. 98; Fazal Mohamed Mohamed Sultan, 2006, p. 367). This Mendriq word order has also shown that it is capable of moving into a focus position. However, there is no OVS word order in Mendriq because if that order occurs, the resulting sentence will be ungrammatical. This descriptive analysis has found that the verb phrase in the Mendriq language consists of transitive and intransitive verbs. Both types of verb can also be followed by auxiliary verbs that can be divided into modal and aspects. Therefore, this descriptive analysis had explained the various types of verbs and two types of auxiliary verbs in Mendriq.

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