

# A Syntactic Explanation of Preverbal Particle Order Variation in Indonesian Corrective Speech Acts

Andre Batchelder-Schwab, PhD Candidate, [aschwab@bu.edu](mailto:aschwab@bu.edu)



**Background:** Jakarta Indonesian has strict, fixed word order on preverbal particles for declaratives. All other orders are ungrammatical.

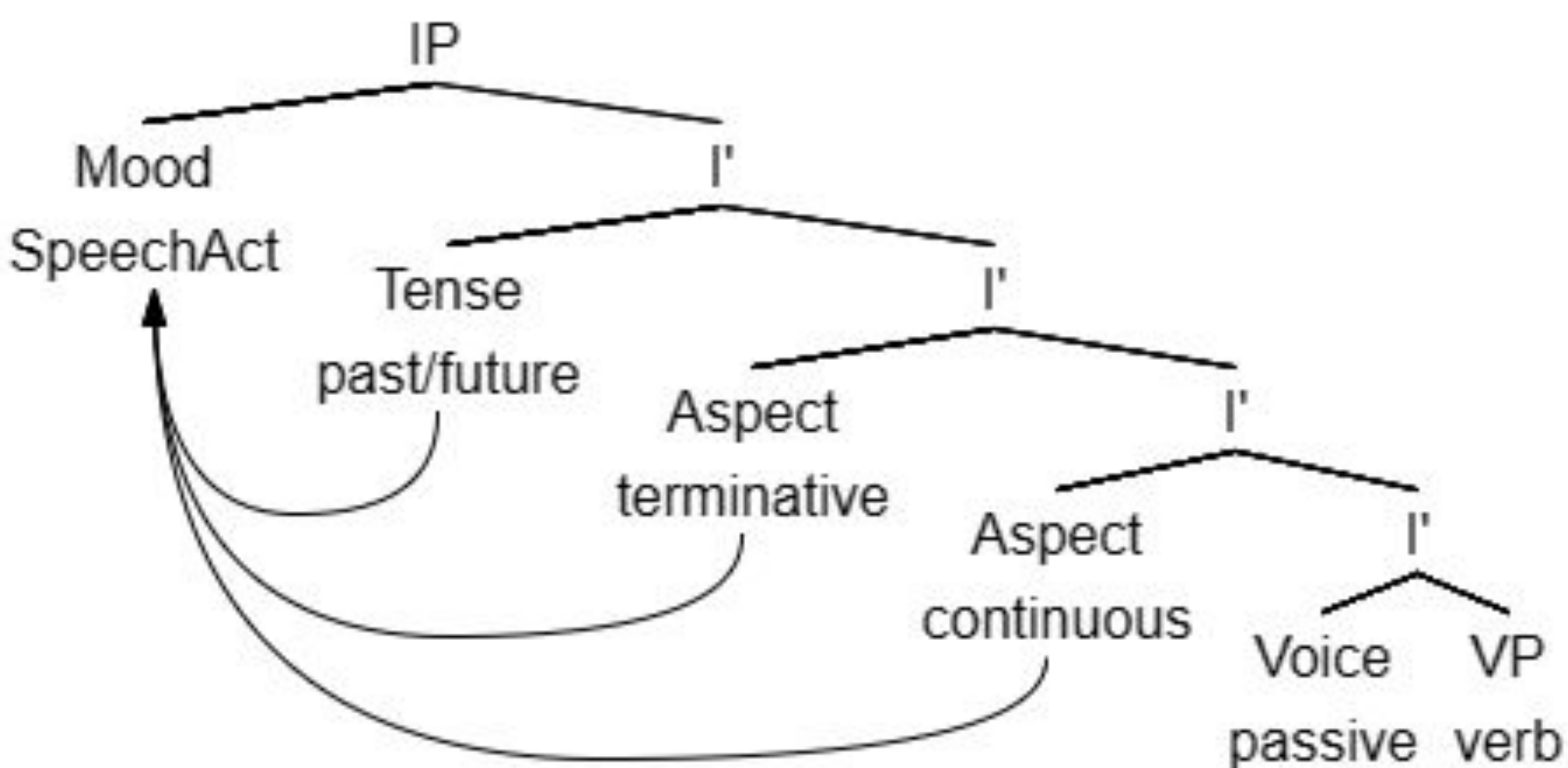
1. Jam due besok kue-nya akan sudah lagi di- makan.  
hour 2 tomorrow cake-the FUT PERF PROG PASS eaten.  
*By 2pm tomorrow the cake will have been being eaten.*

**Puzzle:** Corrective speech (i.e. correcting a metalinguistic misunderstanding) presents a context for particle reordering. English typically uses prosodic strengthening for this.

2. A: Orangorang udah lagi makan kuenya.  
*People have been eating cake*
- B: Orangorang udah di-makan kuenya??  
*People have been eaten by cake??*
- A: Ngak! Orangorang lagi udah \_\_ makan kuenya!  
*No! People have been eat**ING** cake!*

**Distribution:** Only **lagi** and **sudah** (PERF & PROG) can move forward. The tense particle stays chain-initial when misunderstood; neither the passive **di-** nor the lexical verb undertake movement. This is true across different types of verbs and with different particle combinations.

**Syntactic movement:** If we view corrective speech as a *speech act* (Austin 1962; Searle 1979), then the leftmost IP-level head Mood<sub>Speech Act</sub> (Cinque & Rizzi 2016) is the plausible landing space for the particles. The tense particle's movement is presumably surface-ambiguous. The particles never move left of the subject, ruling out a CP-level analysis using Topic and Focus heads (c.f. Ortega-Santos 2016, for Spanish).



**Context:** this data was elicited from one L1 speaker of Jakarta Indonesian in a Boston University field methods course in 2020.

**Resulting puzzle:** Why is the passive particle uniquely ineligible for leftwards movement?

A possible explanation arises from prior syntactic descriptions of Indonesian:

- **Indonesian has V-to-Voice movement**, like related Austronesian languages (Erlewine 2017:18 for Toba Batak; Kurniawan 2013 for Sundanese; Natarina 2018 for Balinese). This is reflected in orthography, where the passive particle is affixed onto the lexical verb, unlike the other tense and aspect particles in this analysis.
- **Indonesian lacks V-to-I movement** (Fortin 2006, c.f. Guilfoyle, Hung & Travis 1992).

Combined, this means that the lexical verb in Indonesian will always move up and merge with the Voice head (in this case, the passive **di-**). However, a structural ban on further upward movement of the lexical verb within the IP (Fortin 2006) effectively guarantees that the passive particle will never partake in movement to Mood<sub>Speech Act</sub> even in otherwise eligible discourse conditions.

## Conclusions:

- This paper adds to the underdeveloped literature on corrective speech acts crosslinguistically, adding alternative syntactic accounts for word-order changes (c.f. Ortega-Santos 2016).
- Exceptional movement restrictions on passive particles may derive from a well-described V-to-Voice movement in Austronesian. However, this analysis requires parameterizing Indonesian as lacking V-to-I movement, corroborating Fortin 2006's analysis.

**References:** Austin, J.L. 1962. *How to Do Things with Words*. Oxford University Press. | Erlewine, M. 2017. Extraction and licensing in Toba Batak. *Language* 94(3). | Fortin, C. 2006. Reconciling *meng-* and NP Movement in Indonesian. *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society* 32(2):47. | Guilfoyle, E., J. Hung & L. Travis. 1992. Spec of IP and Spec of VP: Two subjects in Austronesian languages. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 10. 375-414. | Kurniawan, E. 2013. Sundanese Complementation. PhD Dissertation: University of Iowa. | Natarina, A. 2018. Complementation in balinese: typological, syntactic, and cognitive perspectives. PhD Dissertation: University of Iowa. | Ortega-Santos, I. 2016. Focus-related operations at the right edge in Spanish. *Subjects and Ellipsis*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. | Rizzi, L. & Cinque, G. 2016. Functional Categories and Syntactic Theory. *Annual Review of Linguistics* 2. | Searle, J. 1979. *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts*. Cambridge University Press.