Contrasting the semantics of Indonesian -*kan* & -*i* verb pairs: A usage-based, constructional approach

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Created 21 January, 2020; Last Update 30 January, 2020

**Abstract**

This paper demonstrates a quantitative method in usage-based, Construction Grammar, namely *Collostructional Analysis*.

# Introduction

Several studies with different theoretical persuasions have attempted to analyse the intricate behaviour of Indonesian verbal suffixes -*kan* and -*i* (Arka, 1993; Arka et al., 2009; Cole & Son, 2004; Kroeger, 2007).

Another area of inquiry is the semantic (dis)similarity between -*kan* and -*i* verb pairs, that is, verb partners with the same root co-occurring with the two suffixes (e.g., *melangkahi* ‘to step over’ and *melangkahkan* ‘to step (the foot) forward’ based on noun root *langkah* ‘step’).

“with a number of words the distinction between -**kan** and -**i** is blurred in *common usage*. In some cases, both -**i** and -**kan** occur with the same meaning. With some there is a recipient or locative object, while with others the object is patient.” (italics ours).

## Usage-based model of language and Construction Grammar

[Table 1](#crosstab-schema-new) shows the schematic crosstabulation design to calculate the mutual association strength (i.e., degree of collocation strength) between a word and construction (in our case, between a given verb and its R1 collocates) (cf. Stefanowitsch & Gries, 2003, pp. 218–219; Stefanowitsch, 2013).

Table 1: crosstabulation design for calculating association strength between a word and a construction

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | word/collocate\_X | other\_words | Sum |
| construction/word\_X | a | c | a+c |
| elsewhere | b | d | b+d |
| Sum | a+b | c+d | a+b+c+d |

Cell a in [Table 1](#crosstab-schema-new) represents frequency of co-occurrence between a given construction/word (first row) and its collocate (first column), and is the cell of interest in determining the direction (positive/negative) of association between the construction and its collocate. Cell b is the frequency of the collocate in other contexts and cell c contains the frequency of the construction with other words (cf. Stefanowitsch, 2013). Let us now flesh this out with the frequencies required in SCA to measure the association between *mengenakan* (the target, verbal lexical construction) and *baju* ‘clothes/apparel’ (the R1 collocate of *mengenakan*) (see [Table 2](#fye-on-example-table1))

We can use the fisher.test() function (the alternative argument is set to "greater" since the observed frequency of cell a is larger than the expected frequency).

# create crosstabulation matrix  
crosstab <- matrix(data = c(83, 1552, 1017, 11884989), nrow = 2, byrow = FALSE)  
  
# give column and row names  
colnames(crosstab) <- c("baju", "other\_words")  
rownames(crosstab) <- c("mengenakan", "elsewhere")  
  
# Run Fisher-Exact test  
pfye <- fisher.test(crosstab, alternative = "greater")  
  
# print out the probability (i.e., p-value)  
pfye$p.value

## [1] 9.412147e-196

The output *p*-value above is extremely small (*p* < 0.001)[[1]](#footnote-1).

From the above examples, *mengenai* is predominantly used in the corpus as a grammaticalised verb, functioning as verbal, subordinator, roughly expressing the meaning of ‘concerning/in relation to’. Note that *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (KBBI) (the Great Dictionary of Indonesian) listed the grammaticalised meaning of *mengenai* as its third meaning, in addition to its lexical meaning (i.e., ‘to come into contact with X’).

1. mengenai lexical meaning.

The results in [Table 3](#top-collocates-kenai) indicate that the primary meaning of a word in a dictionary may not be the most frequent one in usage, especially in the news corpus used in this study. Now let us turn to [Table 4](#top-collocates-kenakan) for the attracted collocates of *mengenakan*.

It is clear that *mengenakan* has substantially different and rather restricted collocational patterns compared to *mengenai*. In this top-20 list, *mengenakan* is exclusively associated with clothing nouns and it conveys a lexical meaning of ‘to put on/wear X (usually clothing)’:

1. 722930 Siswi yang masih mengenakan seragam putih abu-abu itu melemparkan senyuman ke arah kendaraan.

On top of this collocational difference, *mengenai* has different morpho-syntactic distribution in its grammaticalised function as adposition; *mengenai* only occurs in active *meN-* form and never in passive *di-* form (i.e., *dikenai*). Intuition suggests that the passive, lexical meaning *dikenai* conveys different meaning from the active, lexical meaning *mengenai* (as in (8)). Manual scrutiny of 139 usage sentences for *dikenai* in the corpus used in this study reveals that 89.21% of the sentences evoke a conceptual scenario where the syntactic subject is *subjected to* certain regulations (e.g., sanction, tax, fee, obligation, punishment, retribution, etc.) (see 10):

1. dikenai subject to

A small chunck of the usage sentence (i.e., around 5.04%) still convey the physical touching/contact meaning:

1. dikenai touch
2. 891333 … seolah-oleh pecahan-pecahan kaca cermin dikenai cahayanya demikian rupa sehingga percampuran warnanya menjadi tampak melalui pewarnaan yang pekat-kental."

Brief comparison between the active *mengenai* and passive *dikenai* suggests that the passive form may have different, yet common semantic trait compared to its active version, indicating that a given form (e.g., passive) cannot always be regarded as being derived from the other (i.e., the active).

# References

Arka, I. W. (1993). *Morpholexical aspects of the -kan causative in indonesian* [Master Thesis]. University of Sydney.

1. In CollAna, threshold for significance is set to be *p* < 0.05. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)