

Particles and intonation: the expression of information structure in Manado Malay

Language description is more than phonology, morphology, and syntax: linguistics is also the study of intonation and information structure. In most Asian languages, however, they remain largely unexplored territory. For Manado Malay, a first move has been made to chart this terrain with an investigation of how focus is expressed in sentences.

Ruben Stoel

Manado Malay is the variety of Malay spoken in Manado and elsewhere in the northern part of Sulawesi. It is closely related to standard Indonesian, but the two languages are not mutually intelligible, owing to differences in grammar and the lexicon. For example, Manado Malay has many loanwords from Dutch and Ternate that are not used in Indonesian. One of the most striking characteristics of this language is the frequent use of discourse particles.

Discourse particles are words that add an extra dimension to the sentence by expressing the attitude of the speaker. Take for example the sentence *so mo ujang*, which means 'it is about to rain'. By adding a discourse particle, several nuances may emerge, as in the following examples:

<i>so mo ujang sto</i>	'it is probably going to rain'
<i>so mo ujang no</i>	'it is definitely going to rain'
<i>so mo ujang kata</i>	'someone said it is going to rain'
<i>so mo ujang kote'</i>	'I sense that it is going to rain (I felt the first raindrops)'
<i>so mo ujang le</i>	'and now it is even going to rain!'
<i>so mo ujang kwa'</i>	'but it is going to rain!'
<i>so mo ujang komang</i>	'once again it is going to rain'
<i>so mo ujang so?</i>	'is it really going to rain?'
<i>so mo ujang kang?</i>	'it is going to rain, isn't it?'
<i>so mo ujang to</i>	'it is going to rain, as you may know'
<i>so mo ujang dang</i>	'in short, it is going to rain'

There are other discourse particles, and all are used frequently. There is hardly a sentence in daily conversation that doesn't have at least one discourse particle.

A focus-marking particle

The position of discourse particles in the sentence is not fixed. They do not necessarily appear at the end of the sentence, as in the examples above. What, then, determines their position? One hypothesis is that the position in a sentence depends on the focus of that sentence. The focus is the part of the sentence that expresses new information. For example, imagine that *Vence da manyanyi* 'Vence is singing' is used as an answer to the question *Sapa da manyanyi?* 'Who is singing?'. The focus of this sentence would then be the word *Vence*. The same sentence could also be an answer to *Vence da ba-apa?* 'What is Vence doing?' and then the focus would be *da manyanyi* 'is singing'.

The focus of a sentence is thus dependent on the context. But sometimes the context is irrelevant, because no variation in focus is possible. This happens, for example, if the subject appears in sentence-final position, as in *Da manyanyi Vence* 'Vence is singing'. A final subject is never a focus, and the word *Vence* thus cannot be in focus. The basic word order of a Manado Malay sentence is subject-predicate, and sentences with this order can have any focus structure. Predicate-subject sentences, on the other hand, are marked and limited in what may be a focus.

Is there a relation, then, between the focus of a sentence and the position of the discourse particle? Take the sentences (1) *Utu sto da ciong pa Ola* and (2) *Utu da ciong pa Ola sto*. Both mean 'Utu probably kissed Ola', but *sto* follows *Utu* in (1) and *Ola* in (2). If the focus deter-

mines the position of *sto*, we can predict the following: if the focus is on *Ola*, then (2) is correct and (1) is wrong.

However, both sentences are correct with focus on *Ola*. We must therefore conclude that there is no relation between focus and the position of *sto*. In fact, there is no relation between the focus and sentence position of most other discourse particles. Only the discourse particle *no* (which indicates that something is obvious or inevitable) always follows the focus of the sentence. Thus in a sentence with *no*, we know what the focus is, independent of the context. For example, in the sentence *Utu da ciong pa Ola no* 'I am sure that Utu kissed Ola', *no* follows *Ola*, so the focus must be on *Ola*, not on *Utu*.

Sentence intonation

Although *no* is a frequently-used particle, it does not occur in every sentence.

There is another device that marks focus and that does occur in every sentence, the sentence accent. In every sentence in Manado Malay there is exactly one such accent, and this accent falls on the last word of the focus. Discourse particles may also get an accent, but this accent never marks focus.

Words in Manado Malay have stress on either the penultimate or final syllable. This means that, if a word is accented, then the accent is associated with the stressed syllable (but most stressed syllables remain unaccented, since there is only one accent in a sentence). In statements the accent is usually realized as a high tone. This high tone is followed by a low tone, which is associated with the end of the word. This low tone is not an accent, but an edge tone, as it marks the edge of a prosodic phrase (which consists of one or more words).

Every sentence is divided into a number of prosodic phrases, each ending with an edge tone. The last edge tone of the sentence is a low tone, while the other edge tones are high tones. Thus there are two types of high tones: those that mark focus and those that mark a prosodic boundary. The two tone types are easy to distinguish from one another - a high-tone accent is followed by a fall on the same word, while a high edge-tone is followed by a fall on the next word.

An accent tells the listener what the focus of the sentence is. For example, an accent on *Utu* in the sentence *Utu da ciong pa Ola* 'Utu kissed Ola', puts *Utu* in focus, and thus tells the listener that it was Utu, and not somebody else, who kissed Ola. On the other hand, an accent on *Ola* puts focus on *Ola*, thus indicating that the girl that was kissed by Utu is Ola, rather than some other girl.

Position of the accent

In Manado Malay not just any word in the sentence can be accented. An accent always falls on the last word of a syntactic phrase. Therefore, only a full phrase can be put in focus, not a single word, as in English. For example, the English sentence 'Not four kilos, only three kilos' would normally be pronounced with an accent on 'three'. This indicates that there is a contrast between 'three' and 'four'. In Manado Malay this is impossible. In the equivalent sentence *Bukang ampa kilo, cuma tiga kilo* the accent will fall on the final word *kilo*, not on the word *tiga* 'three', because *tiga kilo* is a noun phrase, and the accent must fall on the last word of that phrase.

The relation between focus and accent therefore is not as precise as in English. An accent in Manado Malay indicates which noun phrase (or other type of phrase) is in focus, but it cannot mark focus on a specific word. In English, on the other hand, any word can be put into focus with an accent.

However, although the focus is more precise in English, it may be ambiguous, if, for example, the accented word is the last word of a noun phrase. An accent on 'kilo' in 'three kilos' may focus on the word 'kilo' (only 'kilos' is new information, as in 'not three pounds, but three kilos') or on the entire phrase (both 'three' and 'kilos' are new, as in 'not a bunch, but three kilos'). There is no such ambiguity in Manado Malay, since it is in principle impossible to focus on a single word. Focus marking in Manado Malay is vague rather than ambiguous.

Similarly, the discourse particle *no* must come at the end of a noun phrase, and cannot indicate focus on a single word. For example, in the phrase *tiga kilo no* 'three kilos (definitely)' the position of *no* is final, even if it were contrasted with *ampa kilo* 'four kilos'. The minimal focus domain is thus a noun phrase, no

matter whether focus is marked by an accent or by the particle *no*.

The yang construction

Focus can also be marked by a special construction using the word *yang*. This word is used in Indonesian to introduce a relative clause; in Manado Malay it can be used in the same way. More typically, it indicates that the noun phrase preceding *yang* is in focus. For example, the focus in *Mince yang bilang* 'Mince (was the one who) said it' is likely to be on *Mince*. The noun phrase can be further emphasised by adding the particle *no*, as in *Mince no yang bilang*. The focus of this sentence is marked in three different ways: by using *yang*, with the discourse particle *no*, and with an obligatory accent on *Mince*.

There are thus several devices in Manado Malay that indicate what the focus of a sentence is, including the sentence accent and the discourse particle *no*, yet intonation and discourse particles have other important functions which are worth studying. Intonation can signal the distinction between a statement and a question, as well as several more specialized functions. It is possible that there is some dialectal variation in the intonation of Manado Malay, as there are many second-language speakers, but this is a topic that has not yet been explored. In the near future the intonational system of Manado Malay will be compared first of all with that of other varieties of Malay, to find out if, and how, intonation is used to express information structure in these closely-related languages. ◀

Reference

- Stoel, Ruben. 2005. *Focus in Manado Malay: grammar, particles, and intonation*. Leiden: CNWS Publications.

Ruben Stoel is affiliated with the Institut für Linguistik, Universität Potsdam, Germany. stoel@rz.uni-potsdam.de

[advertisement]



ASIAN FOLKLORE STUDIES

A semi-annual journal dedicated to the study and preservation of Asian traditions

This year's issues include articles on:

- *Silkworms and Consorts in Nara Japan
- *Bridal Laments in Rural Hong Kong
- *Urban Adaption of Paharia in Rajshahi
- *Hmong-American Oral Culture Traditions
- *Cross-dressing, Gender, and Sex

Subscription rates for two issues/year: Institutions US \$40.00, Individuals US \$22.00

Contact address: Editor, Asian Folklore Studies, Nanzan University
18 Yamazato-cho, Showa-ku, 466-8673 Nagoya, Japan
e-mail: nuai@ic.nanzan-u.ac.jp