SOME ASPECTS OF COMPLEX SENTENCE STRUCTURE IN BAHASA MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a tentative description of several processes of complex sentence building in Bahasa Malaysia. Described are several types of embedding and conjoining, and some transformational rules are proposed whereby these are accomplished. Informants for the study were Miss Noraini Aziz of Kuala Selangor (Selangor State) and Miss Latifah Abdol Latif, of Alor Gajah (Malacca State).

Introduction. This paper aims at presenting a general view of some processes of sentence embedding in Malay. For the sake of organization, it will be divided into the following sections: Noun clauses, relative clauses, attributive adjectives, adverbial clauses, nominalizations, compound sentences, embedding onto predicates of modality, stage in the development of an action and predicates of perception, and sentences derived from the application of emphatic and pseudo-cleft transformations.

Not every process is described following the same model. That is, for reasons of simplicity and convenience, sometimes there will be just a prose description of what is evident; other times some schematic representations of strings of elements will be included. Occasionally, formalized rules will be suggested.

As to terminology, use will be made of traditional nomenclatures as well as of some newly-coined terms, as has already been seen in the section divisions enumerated above. Since tense is not always formally indicated in Malay, tense in English translations is often arbitrarily chosen. Moreover, since the main concern here is the syntax of Malay rather than the lexicon, the examples will not include much variety in vocabulary. When dealing with adverbial clauses, the main sentence will be referred to as _A_, the subordinate sentence as _B_.

According to the most general conventions, parentheses will indicate the optional presence of the item(s) enclosed. Braces will indicate that any of the included items is/are possible in the position where they appear.

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Malay examples are in the standard orthography of *Bahasa Malaysia*.

Noun clauses. The process of embedding noun clauses in a matrix is simple and does not involve any transformation other than that which attaches one sentence onto another.

S → matrix + embedded S

Embedded S → Interrogative word + NP + VP + (NP) + (NP)...

The same matrix sentence will be used in the following examples

Saja hendak tahu	apa dia belajar	'what he studies'
'I want to know'	siapa menyanyi	'who is singing'
	bila dia akan datang	'when he will come'
	dimana dia belajar	'where he studies'
	untuk apa dia belajar	'what he is studying for'
	kalau dia belajar	'if he studies'
	$\left\{\begin{array}{l}\text{mengapa}\\ \text{kenapa}\end{array}\right\}$ dia belajar	'why he studies'
	bagaimana dia hidup	'how he lives'
	bagaimana iklim disini	'what the climate is like here'
	bagaimana rupa rumah itu	'what the house looks like'
	bagaimana pantas dia lari	'how quickly he runs'
	bagaimana tinggi dia	'how tall he is'

Notice that the word *bagaimana* has a wider scope than 'how' in English for it covers manner, physical appearance (in which case it has to be followed by rupe) and particular characteristics.

Noun clauses in apposition. A clause is embedded as complement to a noun (or NP) with the conjunction yang at the beginning. Notice that although this word is also used with relative clauses, it has a different function here.

Schematically,

$$[\text{N} + \text{yang} + \text{S} + \text{V} + \ldots]_{\text{NP}}$$

Examples:

$$\left\{\begin{matrix}\text{Berita}\\ \\ \text{Penghabaran}\end{matrix}\right\}\ \text{yang dia lulus dalam ujian itu...}$$

'The news that he passed (in) the test...'

Khabar angin yang dia suka main...

'The rumor that he likes to play...'

Harapan yang dia akan datang...

'The hope that he will come...'

Relative clauses. These are directly embedded after the antecedent NP. As in the case of noun clauses in apposition, the introductory word is yang, which acts as a relative pronoun here. This word does not undergo any changes even when it has different syntactic functions (or to use Case Grammar terminology, when it fulfills different semantic relationships with respect to the verb).

Examples:

Saya lihat budak perempuan yang lulus ujian itu.

'I saw the girl who passed the test.'

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Saya lihat budak perempuan yang dia suka.

'I saw the girl whom she likes.'

Saya lihat budak perempuan yang dia bermain dengannya.

'I saw the girl whom she plays with.'

In the last example the preposition dengan is obligatory. nya is a third person singular marker that appears in final position and in embedded clauses (we shall meet this particle again when dealing with nominalizations).

Saya jumpa permainan yang dia main

'I found the toy with which he plays.'

Notice that whereas English marks accompaniment and instrument with the same preposition, in Malay only accompaniment requires a surface preposition (dengan).

Attributive adjectives. Adjectives modifying a noun or noun phrase appear inside a (relative) clause. Schematically,

N + yang + Adj.

(We assume here that an equivalent to "to be" does not exist.)

The informant observed that yang could be left out in colloquial or fast speech. However, she used it consistently whenever she gave examples.

Examples:

Saya lihat	budak perempuan yang cantek.	'a pretty girl'
'I saw'	orang yang tinggi.	'a tall man'
	kuching yang kechil.	'a small cat'

When the adjective expresses color, the word berwarna 'has (having) the color' is introduced. The string, then, has the following form:

N + (yang + berwarna) + Adj.

Examples:

Saya lihat	burung (yang berwarna) kuning.	'I saw a yellow bird'
	buku (yang berwarna) merah.	'I saw a red book'

Sometimes a noun can act as an attributive and in this case the word yang is left out. The pattern is: N + N. The head noun precedes the attributive noun.

Examples:

rumah papan	'wooden house'
rumah kertas	'paper house'
permainan plastik	'plastic toy'

The language admits the insertion of yang ber- but the resulting phrase is not always acceptable:

Thus,

rumah yang berpapan	'a house that has wood'
rumah yang berbatu	'a house that has stones'
rumah yang berkertes	'a house that has paper'
*permayan yang berplastik	'a toy that has plastic'

(Unfortunately, I do not have enough data to make a generalization as to which kind of nouns can take the 'yang ber-' combination.) It is interesting to notice that the same prefix ber- appeared in the discussion of color adjectives above.

Adverbial clauses.

Time

Introductory word:

bila 'when'

semenjak 'since'

semasa 'while'

Examples:

B A
Bila saya tiba dia sedang tidur.

'When I arrived, she was sleeping.'

Clause order: A + B or B + A

A B
Saya tidak main piano semenjak umor saya sapuloh tahun.

'I haven't played the piano since I was ten.'

Clause order: A + B

(Umor is used when stating age.)

A B
Saya lihat dia semasa saya sedang berjalan kesekolah.

'I saw him while I was walking to school.'

Clause order: A + B or B + A

Place

Introductory word:

dimana 'where'

Example:

A B
Dia letak buku dimana saya jumpa.

'He put the book where I found it.'

Clause order: A + B or B + A

Condition

Introductory word:

kalau 'if'

Example:

B A
Kalau hari hujan saya akan duduk dirumah.

'If it rains, I will stay at home.'

Clause order: A + B or B + A

(hari 'day')

Purpose

Introductory word:

untok 'in order to', 'to'

Example:

Dia pergi kesekolah untok belajar.

'He goes to school in order to study.'

Clause order: A + B. In some cases, however, B + A seems also to be possible.

Reason

Introductory word:

When A + B $\left\{\begin{array}{l}\text{kerana}\\ \text{sebab}\end{array}\right\}$ 'because'. When B + A $\left\{\begin{array}{l}\text{oleh kerana}\\ \text{oleh sebab}\end{array}\right\}$.

Examples:

A B
Saya balek sebab sudah lambat.

'I am going because it is late.'

B A
Oleh kerana sudah lambat saya balek.

'Because it is late I am going.'

On being asked about other ways to express reason, the informant came up with a change in the B clause:

Saya gembira sebab kedatangannya.

'I am happy because of his coming.'

This gave me an insight into a process of nominalization which operates in the language. It will be analyzed here only with reference to the clauses of reason.

I will account for it in terms of structural description and structural change.[2]

Both adjectives and verbs will be treated as verbals.

SD:	X	([subj-Pron])	[Verbal]	Y
	1	2	3	4
SC:	1	∅	[Ke-3-an] (2)	4

Exception: if 2 is *dia*, then it becomes *nya*.

Examples:

Saya gagal dalam ujian itu kerana saya malas.

'I failed (in) the test because I am lazy.'

⇓

Saya gagal dalam ujian itu kerana kemalasan.

'I failed (in) the test because of my laziness.'

Mereka menangis kerana mereka gagal dalam ujian itu.

'They cry because they failed the test.'

⇓

Mereka menangis kerana kegagalan dalam ujian mereka itu.

'They cry because of their failure in the test.'

Dia menang dalam peraduan itu sebab dia cantek.

'She won the contest because she is beautiful.'

⇓

Dia menang dalam peraduan itu kerana kecantikannya.

'She won the contest because of her beauty.'

Kami suka dia sebab dia pandai.

'We like him because he is intelligent.'

⇓

Kami suka dia sebab kepandaiannya.

'We like him because of his intelligence.'

Emphatic sentences. These are the result of a transformation that operates in the following way:

Instructions: Move the formative[3] (or group of formatives) to be emphasized to the very front of the S. If this element is already in the left most position it remains there.

Postpose lah following the formative or group of formatives moved.

Insert the word yang as right-sister of the lah-formative.

The rest of the S remains in the original order.

Schematically,

SD: X Y Z
1 2 3
SC: 3-lah yang 1 2
or
SC: 1-lah yang 2 3

Examples:

Dia tidur didalam kelas. 'He sleeps in class.'

⇓

Didalam kelas lah yang dia tidur. 'It is in class that he sleeps.'

Mariam menangis. 'Mary is crying.'

⇓

Mariam lah yang menangis. 'It is Mary who is crying.'

In the next set of examples, the underlying sentences will be omitted. Only the emphatic sentences will be shown.

Saya lah yang menyebabkan dia menangis.
'It is I who made her cry.'

Budak itu lah yang saya lihat sedang bermain.
'It is the child whom I watch play.' (The informant specified the continuity implied in sedang bermain.)

Dalam bulan Jun lah yang hujan mula turun.
'It is in June that it starts raining.'

Sebab kecantekannya lah yang dia menang dalam peraduan itu.
'It was because of her beauty that she won the contest.'

Buku itu lah yang dia mahu saya baca.
'It is a book that she wants me to read.'

Bandar itu lah yang musuh musnahkan.
'It was the city that the enemy destroyed.'

Musuh itu lah yang memusnahkan bandar itu.
'It was the enemy that destroyed the city.'

Berita yang Tom lulus dalam ujian itu lah yang memeranjatkan.
'It was the news that Tom passed the test that surprised me.'

Compound sentences.

Conjunctions:

dan	'and'
tetapi	'but', 'however'
sama ada...atau	'either'...'or'

There is no special technique for the formation of compound sentences. The conjunction joins the two main clauses and in the case of the disjunctive sama ada...atau, it can precede or follow the subject.

Examples:

Saya belajar dan keluar.
'I studied and went out.'

Kami belajar tetapi tidak lulus ujian itu.
'We studied but (we) didn't pass the test.'

Dia sama ada belajar atau baca buku.
'He either studied or read a book.'

Apparently, there is no direct equivalent in Malay for 'neither...nor'. When asked about this, the informant hesitated and then came up with:

Dia tidak belajar dan tidak baca buku.
'He did not study and (he) did not read a book.'

In the next section we shall deal with embedding of sentences into main predicates that express modality and stage in the development of an action.

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A sentence such as:

Dia berjaya ujian itu.

'He managed to pass the test.'

can be said to be derived from two underlying sentences:

1. Dia berjaya. 'He succeeds.'
2. Dia lulus ujian itu. 'He passes the exam.'

When the embedding of 2 into 1 takes place, the subject is deleted in the latter according to the Malay form of the EQUI-NP transformation[4], unless the subjects of 1 and 2 are not the same, in which case both are kept. No further changes are necessary. We shall see later that the embedded sentences constitute NP complements.

Examples:

Dia cuba lulus ujian itu.	'He tried to pass the test.'
Dia mahu baca buku itu.	'She wanted to read that book.'
Dia suka main.	'He liked to play (enjoyed playing).'
Dia tidak suka membohong.	'He hates to lie (dislikes lying).'
Dia lupa tutup pintu itu.	'He forgot to close the door.'
Dia mula main.	'He began to play.'
Dia berhenti belajar untok menjawab talipun.	'He stopped studying in order to answer the telephone.'
Dia mahu saya makan.	'He wants me to eat.'
Dia mahu saya belajar.	'He wants me to study.'
Dia tidak suka saya menangis.	'He hates (does not like) me to cry.'
Saya tolong dia belajar.	'I helped him study.'

(It is debatable whether tolong can be classed as a modal, but since the question belongs to semantics rather than to syntax, we shall not discuss it here.)

Saya $\left\{\begin{array}{l}\text{benarkan}\\\text{bagi kebenaran kapada}\end{array}\right\}$ Mariam.	'I let Mary go out.' 'I gave Mary permission to go out.'
Saya tidak benarkan Mariam keluar.	'I forbade Mary to go out.'
Dia menyebabkan Mariam menangis.	'He made Mary cry.'

The following two examples are a little idiosyncratic in that because of the lexicon involved, they seem to behave somewhat differently from the norm.

Hari mula hujan.	'It began to rain.'
Literally, 'The day began to rain.'	
Hujan berhenti.	'It stopped raining.'
Literally, 'The rain stopped.'	

It was stated earlier that the embedded sentences constitute NP complements. If that is the case, the Pseudo-Cleft transformation[4] can be applied to Malay.

Instructions for Pseudo-Cleft:

Insert apa yang as left-sister of the main predicate.

Insert ialah as right-sister of the main predicate.

In other terms,

SD:	X	[Main Predicate]	[Embedded S]	Y
	1	2	3	4
SC:	1	apa yang 2 ialah	3	4

Thus:

Dia cuba lulus ujian itu.

'He tried to pass the test.'

Apa yang dia cuba ialah lulus ujian itu.

'What he tried (to do) was to pass the test.'

Further examples:

Apa yang dia mahu ialah lulus dalam ujian itu.

'What he wanted was to pass (in) the test.'

Apa yang dia suka ialah main.

'What he enjoys is playing.'

Now for a few examples to illustrate the embedding of sentences into matrices containing verbs of perception. The process is the same as the one described at the beginning of the section.

Saya lihat Mariam lintas jalan itu.

'I saw Mary cross the street.'

Saya lihat Mariam melintas jalan itu.

'I saw Mary crossing the street.'

The prefix men-[5] marks aspect, it points out the continuation (or duration) of the action. Certain verbs, such as menyanyi 'sing' must take the prefix. *nyanyi does not exist.

Example:

Saya dengar Mariam menyanyi.

'I heard Mary $\left\{\begin{array}{l}\text{sing}\\\text{singing}\end{array}\right\}$.

The verb hangus 'burn', on the other hand, cannot take men-. So continuity of the action requires the word sedang.

Example:

Saya bau kek (sedang) hangus.

'I smelled the cake burning.'

Another verb sharing the same restrictions as hangus is main 'play'.

Example:

Saya lihat budak itu (sedang) main.

'I saw the child $\left\{\begin{array}{l}\text{play}\\ \text{playing}\end{array}\right\}$.

Applying the Pseudo-Cleft Transformation, we get:

Apa yang saya lihat ialah Mariam lintas jalan itu.

'What I saw was Mary crossing the street.'

Apa yang saya bau ialah kek sedang hangus.

'What I smelled was the cake burning.'

Conclusion. As can be seen from the foregoing, Malay is an isolating language to a large extent and consequently word order is a more important feature than word inflexion.

The processes of embedding that have been described here are relatively simple and, it seems to me, Malay would be an easy language to learn, at least as far as its structures are concerned.

The word yang is used with relative clauses, noun clauses in apposition, and emphatic sentences, as well as with the Pseudo-Cleft

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transformation. The last two have other idiosyncratic features also. Otherwise embedding is accomplished by simply adding one sentence to the other.

The description presented here does not purport to be exhaustive and, obviously enough, is open to revision.

Notes

1 Hornby, Albert S. 1960, A Guide to Patterns and Usage in English. Oxford University Press: London

2 There are other ways of accounting for this according to other models of description. This one has been chosen because it seemed to be the most suitable to account for the syntax of the sentences.

3 The term 'formative' is purposely used here to make the rule more general, so that it can cover nouns, verbs, articles, and so forth.

4 Jacobs, Roderick A. and Peter S. Rosenbaum 1968, English Transformational Grammar. Blaisdell Publishing Company: Waltham, Massachusetts

5 men- is an underlying form. It appears in several surface forms, including me-, as here.