The Syntax of Isamal Language: The Principles and Parameters Theory

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Abstract

The current study presents a syntactic analysis of the indigenous language of Isamal of the Samal Islands of Davao Gulf in Mindanao, Southern Philippines. This study analyzes the Isamal verbs and the syntactic projection of Isamal verbs using the Principles and Parameters Theory. It aims to establish the categorical and semantic selections of Isamal verbs, determine the argument/thematic structure of Isamal verbs and represent the syntactic structure of the argument/thematic structure of Isamal verbs.

Introduction

The current study presents a syntactic analysis of the indigenous language of Isamal of the Samal Islands of Davao Gulf in Mindanao, Southern Philippines. This paper establishes the argument and the thematic structures of the Isamal verbs and presents the structural representation of the argument/thematic structure of Isamal verbs.

Background of the Study

All languages in the Philippines belong to the Austronesian family of languages. Although these languages belong to the same language family, they are not mutually intelligible. Typologically, these languages are classified as agglutinating languages, a type of language which has complex morphology (O'Grady, et. al., 2001). Studies of verb morphology of these languages indicate that each of the verbal affixes represents grammatical and semantic categories. When these verbal affixes are affixed to any verb stem, the resultant verb tells the

kind of complements this verb takes as expressed by the argument structure of the verb. Syntactically, when the predicate is composed of a verb phrase (VP), any of the complements can function as the subject-complement or the non-subject-complement of the verb. This is discussed in relation to Isamal in the succeeding sections.

Isamal is the indigenous language spoken by the Samal people, one of the indigenous groups of people in Samal Islands. The Samal Islands are in the central part of Davao Gulf in Southern Mindanao. Its official name is the verbose **Island Garden City of Samal** as inscribed in the Republic Act 8471 signed into law on January 30, 1998 by the then President **Fidel V** Ramos. The total indigenous population is more or less 13,000 or approximately 15% of the total population of 85,000. The Isamal speakers comprise 8,500 or 10% of the population.

Objectives of the Study

This study analyzes the Isamal verbs and the syntactic projection of the Isamal verbs using Principles and Parameters Theory. It aims to:

(1)   establish the categorial- and semantic selections of Isamal verbs;
(2)   determine the argument/thematic structure of Isamal verbs;
(3)   represent the syntactic structure of the argument/thematic structure of Isamal verbs.

Theoretical Background

This study employs the analytical tools of Principles and Parameters Theory (P&P). Being part of mainstream generative linguistics, P&P is the Chomskyan theory which deals with the universal properties of natural language grammars. This theory lends a hand to the very core of the nature of generative linguistic inquiry related to Universal Grammar (UG), the biological endowment that makes human beings speak a language. The study of UG is concerned with the commonalities among grammatical properties of the languages as well as the parameters that serve as the differentiating property of the languages (Radford, 1997).

Various modules or theories composed the architecture of P&P. Among these modules, X-Bar Theory, Theta Theory, Case Theory, Binding Theory, and Movement Theory are employed in this study. Each theory is summarized below.
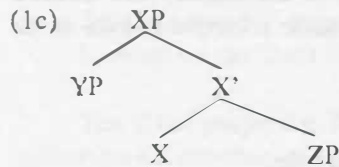
X-Bar Theory

X-Bar Theory is part of the grammar that regulates the structures of the phrasal categories among all languages. This theory is responsible for the structural representation of the lexical information of the lexical categories as based on the Projection Principle. The Projection Principle states that all lexical information is syntactically represented. The X-Bar schematas subsume all the phrase structure rules as graphically represented below.

(1). X Bar Schemata

(1a) XP ⟶ YP X'
(1b) X' ⟶ X' ZP
(1c)

```
          XP
         /  \
       YP    X'
            /  \
           X    ZP
```
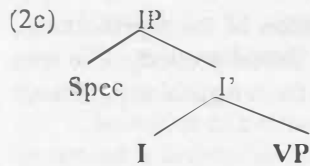
In the schemata, X represents the lexical head which projects to the phrasal category XP The lexical head X (notated also as X^0) combines with the **ZP**, the complement, to form the intermediate X' (read: X-bar). The X' combines with the **YP**, the specifier (**Spec**), to form the XP, the maximal projection of the lexical head X. The X can be any of the major lexical categories – noun (**N**), verb (**V**), adjective (**A**), and preposition (**P**). Thus we have the **N', V', A', P'** and consequently the **NP, VP, AP, PP**.

X-Bar Theory proposes that the sentence is headed by the functional category **INFL** (read: inflection or I). According to the X-Bar Theory, the sentential structure has the following format:

(2a) IP ⟶ Spec; I'
(2b) I' ⟶ I; VP
(2c)

```
          IP
         /  \
      Spec   I'
            /  \
           I    VP
```

This is the IP-analysis of the sentential structure. In this analysis, the sentence is termed as the **inflectional phrase (IP).** Each IP is headed by the **INFL** or **I** which dominates the functional categories of **agreement (Agr),**

tense (T) and other verbal inflections (Haegeman, 1994). The **I** combines with the **VP** to form the **I'**. The **Spec** combines with **I'** forming the **IP**. The NP which is directly dominated by the IP functions as the subject of the matrix IP. The subject is the occupant of the **[Spec, IP]** syntactic position. The verb complements are directly dominated by the **VP**

Theta Theory

Theta Theory is concerned with the selectional properties of the lexical item. Central to the Theta Theory is (1) the study of the grammatical relation of the NP to the verb which encodes the thematic relation of the verbs, and (2) the syntactic principle of the Theta Criterion. According to Ouhalla (1999), the relationship between the selectional properties of the lexical item and the syntactic representation is regulated by the syntactic principle known as the **Theta Criterion**.

(3)   Theta Criterion
      (3a) An argument must be assigned a theta role.
      (3b) A theta role must be assigned to an argument.

The Theta Criterion is the condition on the representation of the thematic structure of the lexical categories. The selectional and the lexical properties of the lexical category are encoded in the thematic structure. The lexical properties of the lexical category are required to be represented in all syntactic levels of representation. This requirement is encoded in the general principle, the **Projection Principle**, which is the condition on the structural representations of the lexical categories. Haegeman (1994) defines the Projection Principle as follows.

(4)   Projection Principle
      All lexical information is syntactically represented.

It is incorporated in the P&P that the condition of the representation must be according to the subcategorization of the lexical property. The term subcategorization refers to the categorial feature and the categorial requirements of the lexical item.

Case Theory

Central to Case Theory is the study of Case. Case is the morphological category which encodes the information on the grammatical roles of the NP – whether

the NP functions as the subject or the object of the sentence (O'Grady, et.al., 1996). Case Theory determines the distribution of the case forms of the NP This is the module of the grammar which deals with the Case properties of the NP. All of the NPs are within the scope of the condition of the Case Requirement which requires all NPs to have Case. This is one of the reasons why NPs move to be assigned its Case. The Case Requirement condition is either the **Case Filter** or the **Visibility Hypothesis** (Haegeman, 1994). The definitions are as follows:

(5) Case Filter
     Any NP is unlicensed if it has phonetic content but no Case.

(6) Visibility Hypothesis
     All Case-less NP-arguments are not assigned a theta role and are not licensed by the Theta Criterion.

The Case properties of NPs and the principles of the Case Theory determine the distribution of the said NPs. Ouhalla (1999· 220) stated that "the original empirical basis of the Case Requirement relates to the fact that when an NP is in a non-Case-marked environment it gives rise to ungrammaticality. An NP is in a Case-marked environment if it is in a specific structural relation of locality, called government, to a transitive category, or if it is in a Spec-head agreement relation with a non-lexical category which includes Agr."

On the assignment of Cases, accusative Case is assigned by transitive verbs to its objects. Oblique Case is assigned by the prepositions to its NP-complement. Partitive Case is assigned by unaccusative verbs to its indefinite objects. Nominative and genitive Cases are assigned under the Spec-head agreement. The Cases can be assigned under the relationship of sisterhood. This structural relationship is termed as **Government** and is defined as follows:

(7) Government
     α governs β if and only if:
     (7a) α is an X° category
     (7b) α c-commands β
     +

The notion of c-command is crucial to the definition of government. C-command is defined as follows:

(8) C-command
     α c-commands β if and only if:
     (8a) the first branching node dominating α also dominates β
     (8b) α does not dominate β

Binding Theory

Binding Theory is the module of grammar which deals with the regulation of the distribution of NPs by their referential properties and the principles involved. This module distinguishes four types of NPs, namely, **anaphors, pronouns, r-expressions,** and PRO. Using the feature matrix, these NPs have the following feature specification as shown in Table 1:

NP Type	Features	
anaphor	+a	-p
pronoun	-a	+p
r-expression	-a	-p
PRO	+a	+p

Table 1.
The Feature Specification of NPs

Using the feature matrix to differentiate the NP types, the features 'a' and 'p' refer to the properties of anaphoricity and pronomininality respectively. **Anaphors** include reflexives and reciprocals. Its occurrence in the sentential structure is licensed by its dependence on the corresponding antecedents. **Pronouns** are NP types which do not need antecedents in the sentence. In some cases, pronouns have antecedents whose identities are construed by using coindexation. **R(eferential)-expressions** are NPs which are neither anaphoric nor pronominal. This type of NP includes names and other variable traces in the sentence bearing the feature matrix [-a,-p]. **PRO** is a null NP which occupies the [Spec, IP] position of non-finite clauses. Its feature matrix shows that PRO behaves like an anaphor and a pronominal.

Binding is defined as follows.

(9)   Binding
        α binds β if and only if
        (9a) α c-commands β and
        (9b) α and β are coindexed.

The Binding conditions are as follows:

(10) Binding conditions
        (10a) An anaphor must be bound in its domain
        (10b) A pronominal must be free in its domain
        (10c) An R-expression must be free.

A domain is defined as a governing category (GC). The definition of GC captures the complimentary distribution of the anaphors and the pronominals in the domain. Governing categories can be a clause or an NP. GC is defined as follows:

(11) Governing Category (GC)

The GC of α is the minimal domain which contains α, the governor of α, and the subject.

The Movement Theory

Movement Theory is the module of grammar which deals with the phenomenon of movement taking place in the structural representation. The general rule of movement is embodied in only one condition known as **Move Alpha**.

(12) Move Alpha

Move any category anywhere.

The movement of the category has two bases: (1) based on the target of movement, the moved element; and (2) based on the landing site, the syntactic position where the element can be moved. The view on movement is based on Chomsky (1986) which states that the movement is restricted to this condition: the head or the whole phrase can be moved.

Within the scope of the **Trace Convention**, the result of every movement is the existence of a **trace (t)**. The trace is the element in the vacated position of the moved category, the antecedent. The relationship between the trace and the antecedent is encoded in the term coindexation. The index, represented by subscript letter, is used to determine that the coindexed elements – the trace and the antecedent – are just one. This coindexation is harmonious to the concept of Recoverability Condition. According to Ouhalla (1999), the Trace Convention and the Recoverability Condition are defined as follows.

(13) Trace Convention

The transformation movement results in a trace in the original position of the moved category.

(14) Recoverability Condition

The content of the null category must be recoverable from the coindexed overt category in the sentence.

Methodology

The variety of Isamal analyzed in this study is the variety spoken in the second district of Peñaplata, Island Garden City of Samal, Mindanao, Philippines. In analyzing the syntactic structure of Isamal, I employed the analytical tools of the Principles and Parameters Theory. In the mainstream generative linguistics, the generative linguist makes use of his introspection if he is a native speaker of the language he is working on. Saturation normally comes to the point in relying on one's native speaker judgment. The native speaker-linguist has to consult fellow native speakers in gathering the data. If the linguist is not a native speaker, he makes use of the intuition of the native speakers of the language he is researching. In the literature of generative linguistics, **intuition** and **introspection** are technical terms which refer to the judgment on grammaticality and acceptability of an utterance done by the native speakers (Ouhalla, 1999). These judgment criteria are used in the gathering and analyzing of the Isamal data since Isamal has no written literature or any corpora available.

The Informants

Foremost, I made use of myself as one of the informants, thus, employing introspection in the data gathering. It is my training in formal linguistics and my state of being a native speaker of Isamal that warrant me to employ introspection. The other native speakers, whom I consulted regarding their intuition, are primarily my grandmother Bai Kaumata, my mother, Maria Elena Cabaluna-Jubilado, my cousins Brenda Villabrille and Edison Villabrille. The validity of their utterance of the Isamal language they speak lies in the fact that they were born to Isamal parents; they have lived in Samal for more than 20 years; and they speak the language like native speakers.

The Procedure

With the intuitive aspect of data gathering, the data was gathered by doing interview primarily focusing on sample sentences and lexical categories. This was done by using the eliciting materials on sentence patterns and lexical categories which were used as standard by the Department of Linguistics at the University of the Philippines. The spoken data were recorded and transcribed.

Data analysis made use of the different modules of P&P, namely, X-Bar, Case, Theta, Binding, and Movement theories. The analysis started with the Lexicon of Isamal by subcategorizing the verbs employing categorial selection (c-selection) and semantic selection (s-selection). After subcategorizing the verbs, the establishment of the argument/thematic structure of Isamal verbs was made. Using the X-bar format of IP-analysis, the argument/thematic

structures of the Isamal verbs were represented in the syntactic structures. This paper subscribed to and employed the VP-Internal Subject Hypothesis (VISH) which conceptualizes that the subject originates from the VP. This hypothesis makes possible the close relationship between the structural representation of the lexical categories and their argument structure.

The Syntax of Isamal

This section discusses the subcategorization of Isamal verbs, the establishment of the argument/thematic structures of Isamal verbs, and the structural representation of the argument/thematic structures of Isamal verbs.

Categorial Selection

C-selection is the type of subcategorization involving syntactic categories. The result of the study showed that there are five categorial frames available for Isamal verbs. Observe the frames below and the sample verbs with the inflectional affixes:

Frame 1   [V; __NP, (PP) NP]

Root	/mag-/, /-um-/ Act-Focus	/-un/ Obj-Focus	/ipaN-/ Instr-Focus	/-an/ Loc-Focus
1. timbak 'to shoot'	tumimbak	timbakun	ipanimbak	timbakan
2. badas 'to whip'	magbadas	badasun	ipambadas	badasan
3. tugtug 'to play music'	tumugtug	tugtugun	ipanugtug	tugtugan
4. utud 'to cut'	mag-utud	utudun	Ipang-utud	utudan
5. dami 'to throw'	magdami	damihun	ipandami	damihan
6. dadyaw 'to fix'	magdadyaw	dadyawun	ipandadyaw	dadyawan

Frame 2. [V; __NP PP NP]

Root	/mag-/ Act-Focus	/-un/ Obj-Focus	/ipaN-/ Instr-Focus	/-an/ Loc/Ben/Rec-Focus
7. lasak 'to place'	maglasak	lasakun	ipanlasak	lasakan
8. sanggat 'to hang'	magsanggat	sanggatun	ipananggat	sanggatan
9. atag 'to give'	mag-atag	atagun	ipang-atag	atagan
10. bili 'to buy'	magbili	biliun	ipambili	bilian

Frame 3. [V; __PP NP]

Root	/mag-/ Act-Focus	/-un/ Obj-Focus	/ipaN-/ Instr-Focus	/-an/ Goal-Focus
11. lugsad 'to go down'	lumugsad	lugsadun	ipanlugsad	lugsadan
12. saka 'to go up'	sumaka	sakahun	ipanaka	sakahan
13. slna:n 'to go'	sumina:n	sinanun	ipansinan	sinanan

Frame 4. [V; __NP {NP, PP, CP}]

Root	/mag-/ Act-Focus	/-un/ Obj-Focus	/ipaN-/ Instr-Focus	/-an/ Goal-Focus
14. dumdum 'to remember'	magdumdum	dumdumun	ipandumdum	dumduman
15. lawng 'to say'	maglawng	lawngun	ipanlawng	lawngan
16. andum 'to hope'	mag-andum	andumun	ipang-andum	anduman
17. ukum 'to decide'	mag-ukum	ukumun	ipang-ukum	ukuman
18. usip 'to ask'	mag-usip	usipun	ipang-usip	usipan

Frame 5. [V; __]

Root	/ma-/Experiencer-focus
17. sakit 'to be sick'	masakit
18. muwa 'to be ashamed'	mamuwa

The categorial feature [+V, -N] is assigned to the verbs only. Here the shortened form of the feature [V] is used. The subcategorization properties in terms of c-selection of the verbs are shown by the categorial frames: [____NP, (PP), NP], [__NP, PP, NP], [__PP, NP], [__NP {NP, PP, CP}] and [__]. The verb frames simply mean that each verb appears before the respective categories or no category at all.

In the case of the inflectional affixes, these affixes encode the grammatical relation between the verb and the complements. The inflectional affix when attached to the verb signifies the type of subject in the sentence. **Mag-** and **– um** verbs have actors as subject. **–Un** verbs have objects as grammatical subject. **IpaN-** verbs have instruments as subject. **-An** verbs have goals, benefactives, recipients and locatives as subject. For psych verbs, the affix **ma-** signifies experiencer subjects. The syntactic environment of the verbs is shown by the frames themselves. The c-selection of the example verbs is relative to the inherent meaning of the verb root/stem.

Semantic Selection

S-selection is the type of subcategorization involving semantic categories. This type of selection operates in terms of the È-roles (read: theta roles). In this paper, I adopted the inventory of the thematic relations found among languages following Cowper (1992) and Haegeman (1994). Below is the inventory of theta roles and their definition:

1   Agent/ Actor – the one who initiates the action expressed by the verb
2.   Patient/ Theme – the person or thing which undergoes the action expressed by the verb.
3   Experiencer – the entity that experiences some psychological state expressed by the verb.
4.   Benefactive   the entity that benefits from the action expressed by the verb.
5   Goal – the entity towards which the activity expressed by the verb is directed
6.   Source – the entity from which the something is moved as a result of the activity expressed by the verb.
7   Locative- the place in which the action or state expressed by the verb is situated.
8   Instrument   the entity used for the accomplishment of the action expressed by the verb.
9   Recipient – a subtype of the thematic relation Goal which occurs if the verbs used are, e.g., English verbs: give, award, donate, and receive.

If c-selection employs categorial frames, s-selection uses Θ-grid in the representation of the thematic relations. The Θ-roles which express the relation of the NP to the verb are enclosed in the Θ-grid. Using the example verbs 1-20, the s-selection of the sample verbs are seen below:

1   timbak <agent, locative, instrument, theme>
2.   badas <agent, locative, instrument, theme>
3   tugtug <agent, locative, instrument, theme>
4.   utud <agent, locative, instrument, theme>
5.   dami <agent, locative, instrument, theme>
6.   dadyaw <agent, locative, instrument, theme>
7.   lasak <agent, locative, instrument, theme>
8.   sanggat <agent, theme, instrument, locative>
9.   atag <source, theme, instrument, recipient>
10.   bili <agent, theme, instrument, benefactive>
11   lugsad <agent, goal, instrument, theme>
12.   saka<agent, goal, instrument, theme>
13   sinan <agent, goal, instrument, theme >
14.   dumdum <agent, goal, instrument, theme >
15.   lawng <agent, goal, instrument, theme >
16.   andum <agent, goal, instrument, theme >
17.   ukum <agent, goal, instrument, theme >
18.   usip <agent, goal, instrument, theme >
19   sakit <experiencer>
20.   muwa <experiencer >

The foregoing s-selection using the same set of verbs supports the idea that every syntactic category like NP, PP, CP serves as the canonical structural realization of theta roles. The selectional properties of the sample verbs are indispensable in the structural representation of sentences as regulated by the Projection Principle. Aside from the Projection Principle, the Θ-Criterion also regulates the relationship between the thematic properties of the verbs and their syntactic representation. This is further explained in the next part which deals with the argument structure of the verbs.

The Argument/Thematic Structures of Isamal Verbs

Following the **Principles and Parameters Theory**, the complements are called **arguments** – the participants in any given event as expressed by the verb's meaning. The information which tells which arguments does the verb or the predicate take is called **argument structure** (Ouhalla, 1999). In this paper,

each of the arguments corresponds to the thematic or theta role assigned by verb to any of its arguments. As defined, a theta role is a semantic category denoting the type of role assigned to any argument. This information is encoded in the thematic structure of the lexical head, in this case, a verb. By convention, the representation of the arguments is done by using Arabic numerals and theta roles by their names. Thus the verbs 1-20 have the following argument structures below·

1   timbak: V; /um:un:ipaN:an/: < 1, 2, 3, 4>

<agent, locative, instrument, theme>

2.   badas: V; /mag:un:ipaN:an/: < 1, 2, 3, 4>

<agent, locative, instrument, theme>

3   tugtug: V; /um:un:ipaN:an/· < 1, 2, 3, 4>

<agent, locative, instrument, theme>

4.   utud: V; /mag:un:ipaN:an/: < 1, 2, 3, 4>

<agent, locative, instrument, theme>

5   dami. V; /mag:un:ipaN.an/· < 1, 2, 3, 4>

<agent, locative, instrument, theme>

6.   dadyaw: V; /mag:un:ipaN:an/· < 1, 2, 3, 4>

<agent, locative, instrument, theme>

7   lasak   V; /mag:un:ipaN:an/· < 1, 2, 3, 4>

<agent, locative, instrument, theme>

8   sanggat: V; /mag:un:ipaN:an/· < 1, 2, 3, 4>

<agent, locative, instrument, theme>

9   atag: V; /mag:un:ipaN:an/· <1, 2, 3, 4>

<source, theme, instrument, recipient>

10.   bili   V; /mag:un:ipaN:an/· <1, 2, 3, 4>

<agent, theme, instrument, benefactive>

11   lugsad: V; /mag:un:ipaN:an/: <1, 2, 3, 4>

<agent, goal, instrument, theme>

12.   saka: V; /mag:un:ipaN:an/· <1, 2, 3, 4>

<agent, goal, instrument, theme>

13.   sinan: V; /mag:un:ipaN:an/: <1, 2, 3 4>

                                     <agent, goal, instrument, theme >

14.   dumdum: V; /mag:un:ipaN:an/· <1, 2, 3, 4>

                                         <agent, goal, instrument, theme>

15   lawng: V; /inag:un:ipaN:an/: <1, 2, 3, 4>

                                     <agent, goal, instrument, theme>

16.   andum. V; /inag:un:ipaN:an/: <1, 2, 3, 4>

                                       <agent, goal, instrument, theme>

17   ukum. V; /inag:un:ipaN:an/· <1, 2, 3, 4>

                                     <agent, goal, instrument, theme>

18   usip: V; /mag:un:ipaN:an/: <1, 2, 3, 4>

                                     <agent, goal, instrument, theme>

19.   sakit: V; /ma/· <1>

                <experiencer>

20.   muwa: V; /ma/: <1>

                <experiencer>

These argument/thematic structures of verbs are encoded in the Lexicon as part of the lexical properties of the verb. Employing the other modules of the grammar, the syntactic representation of the argument/thematic structures of Isamal verbs is presented in the following section.
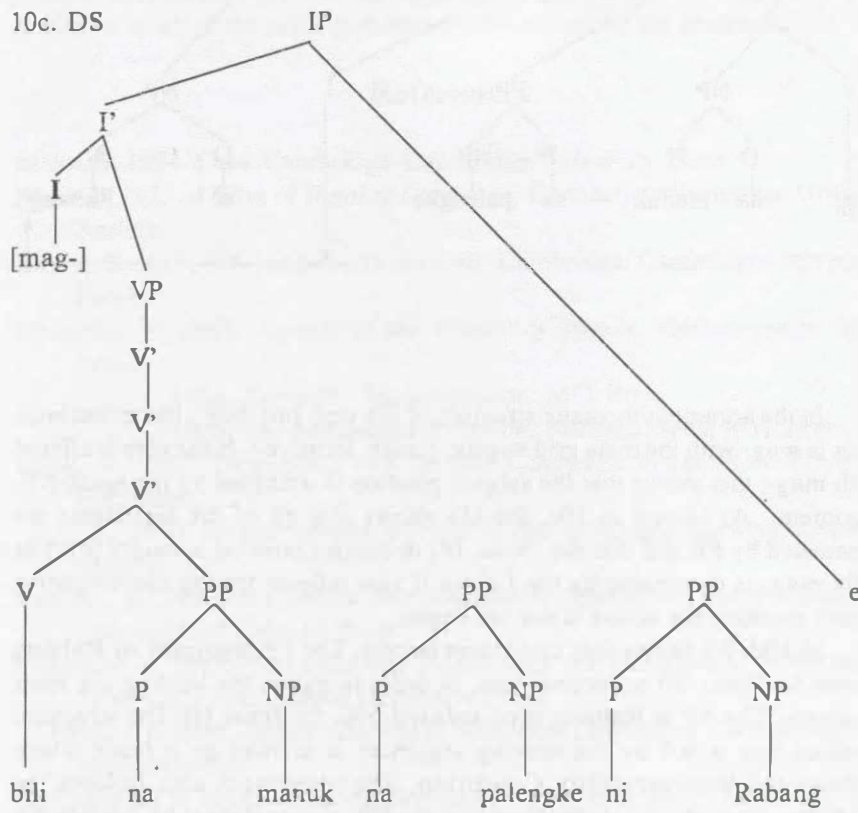
The Structural Representation of the Argument/ Thematic Structures

In representing the syntactic structures, I am using the pre-MP X-Bar format of the IP analysis. This type of representation posits that there are four levels of representation, namely, DS, SS, Phonetic Form (PF), and Logical Form (LF). In this paper, I use the DS and the SS representations before the branching off to PF and LF For the purpose of exemplification, I use the argument
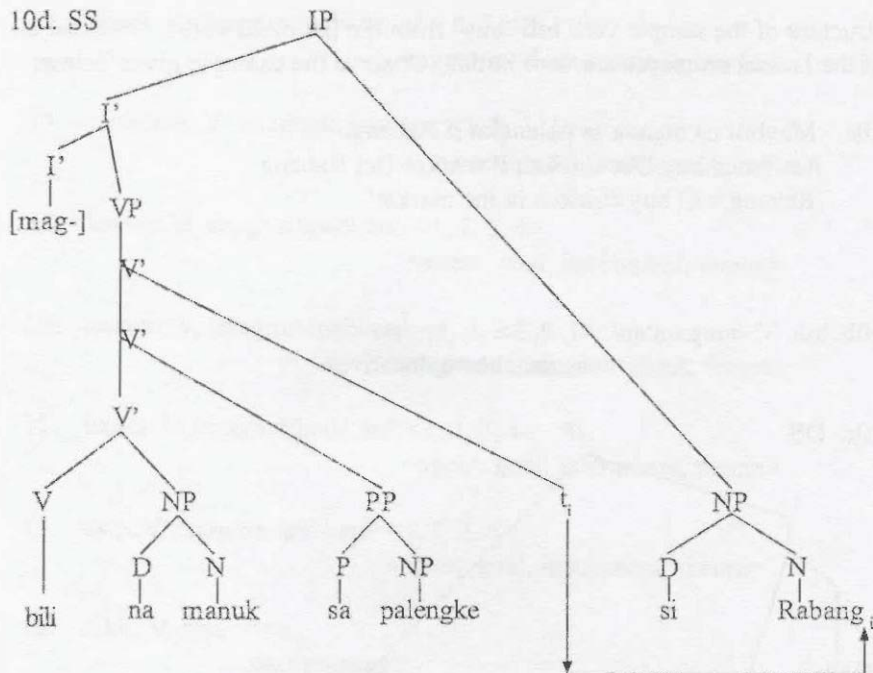
structure of the sample verb bili 'buy' from the list of 20 verbs. Note that all of the Isamal sentences are verb initial. Observe the example given below:

10a.   Magbili na manuk sa palengke si Rabang.
       Act-focus-buy Det chicken P market Det Rabang
       'Rabang will buy chicken in the market'

10b. bili. V; /mag:un:an/: <1, 2, 3>
                          <agent, theme, locative>

10c. DS

10d. SS

In the argument/thematic structure of the verb **bili** 'buy', the inflectional affix is **mag-** with the theta grid <agent, theme, locative>. If the verb is affixed with **mag-**, this means that the subject position is occupied by the agent-NP-argument. As shown in 10c, the DS shows that all of the arguments are dominated by PP and that the [Spec, IP] or subject position is empty (e). The affix **mag-** is dominated by the I since it also inflects for the contemplative aspect meaning the action is not yet begun.

In 10d, SS shows that movement occurs. The PP-argument **ni Rabang** moves to [Spec, IP] to receive case. In order to move, the landing site must be empty. The NP **si Rabang** is co-indexed with the **trace (t)**. The structural position that is left by the moving argument is marked by a **trace** which follows the **Recoverability Condition**. The movement also follows the **Visibility Hypothesis** which states that the NP argument must be 'visible' for the assignment of case. It follows that a NP with no case is not licensed. In the structural case it is assigned to the subject-NP **si Rabang** by the Infl-**mag-**. The theme has the CSR of NP **na manuk** 'the chicken' It is assigned case by the

verb via government. The locative has the CSR of PP **sa palengke** 'in the market' It is assigned case by the preposition.

All the arguments are represented. The theta roles and cases are assigned; therefore the sentence is grammatical.

Conclusion

In this study, I showed that the lexical properties of the verbs are structurally represented. It follows that selectional properties lead to the subcategorization of the verbs. From the structural representation, we can see that all complements are all VP-internal lending support to the VISH. We can deduce that any of the complements of the verbs can function as the grammatical subject so long as it adheres to all of the principles and conditions set by the grammar.

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