

# Passive subtypes in Sarawak Malay

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This paper discusses passives in Sarawak Malay (Malaysia) based on two datasets: the Sarawak component of *Korpus Variasi Bahasa Melayu* (Nomoto 2019a) and the example sentences from Mohd. Ali (2015). Regarding the available subtypes, Sarawak Malay does not differ from Standard Malay. It has three subtypes of *di-* morphological passives and bare passives of the DP type, in which the agent is an overt noun phrase without the preposition *oleh* ‘by’. However, Sarawak Malay differs from Standard Malay in two respects: (i) the DP type is the most frequent among the *di-* passive subtypes and (ii) the agent follows the verb in bare passives. These characteristics are also observed in Classical Malay and Balinese, respectively. I argue that these characteristics reflect the fact that Sarawak Malay retains an older stage of Malay(ic) in western Borneo, the homeland of Malay.

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The passive voice is one of the most intriguing areas of research in Malay linguistics because Malay passives have various subclasses and some of them are not found in other languages. There are two major passive types: morphological and bare passives. (1) shows an example for each type in Standard Malay. The morphological passive involves an overt morpheme indicating voice. The relevant morpheme is *di-* in Standard Malay and many other Malay varieties. Hence, I will refer to the morphological passive as the *di-* passive below. In the bare passive, on the other hand, voice is not indicated overtly, and the verb appears bare.

### (1) a. *Di-* passive

*Dokumen itu sudah di-semak oleh mereka.*

document that already PASS-check by them

‘The document has already been checked by them.’

### b. Bare passive

*Dokumen itu sudah mereka semak.*

document that already they check

‘They have already checked the document.’

As discussed in section 2, variations exist among Malay varieties in two respects. The first kind of variation concerns the possible expressions of the external argument (I will hereafter use the term ‘agent’ instead for simplicity). In principle, the agent expression

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can be (i) implicit, (ii) DP,<sup>2</sup> (iii) ‘by’ PP, or (iv) DP + ‘by’ PP. However, not all of these options are employed in all varieties. Moreover, further restrictions may exist on the type of agents in terms of person, definiteness/specificity, and so forth. The second kind of variation concerns the frequencies of the available subtypes. Two varieties having the same range of agent expression options does not mean that they use the available options in the same manner. To encode the same event, one variety may prefer the ‘by’ PP type *di-* passive, whereas the other may prefer the DP type bare passive.

This paper discusses these two kinds of variations in Sarawak Malay (Malaysia; ISO 693-3: zlm-sar), which is referred to as *Dialek Melayu Sarawak* ‘Sarawak Malay Dialect’ in the local literature. The variety that Cole, Hermon & Yanti (2008) call ‘Kuching Malay’ is deemed the same variety.<sup>3</sup> Sarawak Malay is the mother tongue of the Malay people in Sarawak, but it is also a lingua franca among different ethnic groups in the state, including the Ibans, the largest group. Many studies have been conducted on Sarawak Malay (see Collins (2016) and the references cited therein). However, almost all of them deal with lexical items (phonology, morphology and lexical semantics). Few studies exist that specifically deal with phrasal and discourse level phenomena: Bhaludin (1983), which is mentioned by Collins (2016:21–22) but, unfortunately, I have not had a chance to actually see so far, and section 12 of Cole, Hermon & Yanti (2008).

This paper is organized as follows. Before discussing Sarawak Malay data, I will first define the passive voice in section 2. This is important because the passive voice has been defined in many ways by different authors, and the empirical phenomena referred to as ‘passive’ may vary considerably depending on the definition of the term; what one considers active can be passive for others and vice versa. After offering a concrete definition, I will elaborate on the two kinds of variations mentioned above. Against this background, section 3 discusses passive subtypes in Sarawak Malay. Section 4 concludes the paper with a brief discussion of implications of the findings about Sarawak Malay passives for the historical development of *di-* passives in Malay(ic).

## 2. Passive subtypes and their variations

### 2.1 The definition of the passive voice

In this paper, the passive voice is defined in terms of whether the internal argument of a verb (i.e. theme, patient, etc.) is licensed by default. The passive voice is a construction where the internal argument is *not* licensed in a default manner, that is, in the same way it is licensed in the corresponding active clause. Instead, the internal argument is licensed in a special manner, normally by placing it in the subject position. This definition differs from Keenan & Dryer’s (2007), who define the passive in terms of the agent; the agent argument is suppressed in the passive. Notice that while Keenan & Dryer’s passive reduces the lexically specified valency of the verb, the valency remains intact in my definition.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Modern grammatical theories distinguish two types of noun phrases: NPs and DPs. Semantically, NPs are used predicatively, whilst DPs or determiner phrases are used argumentally. Syntactically, DPs are usually analysed as headed by a determiner, taking an NP to its complement, and hence structurally more complex than NPs. Note that the abbreviation ‘NP’ also has a loose use that does not distinguish between the two kinds.

<sup>3</sup> Kuching is the capital of the state of Sarawak, Malaysia.

<sup>4</sup> For a view similar to mine, see Baker, Johnson & Roberts (1989). The idea that (anti)passives involve valency reduction is a key assumption underpinning the so-called symmetrical voice hypothesis (Foley

In my definition, *English* in (2b) occurs in the subject position because it cannot occur in the default object position. In Keenan & Dryer's definition, it is there because *they* in (2a) is no longer available.<sup>5</sup>

- (2) a. They speak English in Singapore.  
 b. English is spoken in Singapore.

We might as well call the construction like (2b) 'undergoer voice' instead to distinguish it from Keenan & Dryer's passive voice. I will not do so, however, as the term 'passive' is commonly used in the literature to refer to the English construction in (2b) as well as the corresponding Malay construction. Furthermore, as concerns Malay and related Austronesian languages, the definition in terms of the internal argument offers more insight to our understanding of the voice systems of these languages. It enables classifying passives into subtypes by means of various agent expressions.

In functional approaches, the passive is often defined as a construction whose agent is 'backgrounded'. Indeed, the agent is backgrounded in (2b). However, the agent in (2a) is also backgrounded; hence, sentences like (2a) will count as a kind of passives. Givón (2001:127) calls them 'non-promotional "impersonal" passives'. Under a formal definition, as given here, (2a) is never a passive sentence. The backgrounding effect is one of the consequences of the internal argument becoming the subject, but not a determinant of the passive voice. Other consequences include special ways of licensing (e.g. case marking) and a phonological reduction of the agent.

## 2.2 Passive subtypes

Malay passives can be classified by two criteria: (i) verbal morphology and (ii) how the agent is expressed. These two criteria are independent of each other and crosscut the set of passive sentences.

### 2.2.1 Classification by verbal morphology

By verbal morphology, passives can be divided into *di-* and bare passives. The *di-* passive involves the overt passive voice marker *di-*, whereas the bare passive has no overt passive voice marker. (1) is repeated below as (3).

- (3) a. *Di-* passive

*Dokumen itu sudah di-semak oleh mereka.*  
 document that already PASS-check by them

'The document has already been checked by them.'

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2008), which claims that the Philippine-type voice system is fundamentally different from the active-passive and the ergative-antipassive voice systems in that it does not involve valency reduction. Here, I suggest that the relevant assumption may be problematic.

<sup>5</sup> In fact, agent suppression alone cannot account for (2b), and something special must be said about the licensing of the internal argument. This is because it is not possible to have a pleonastic subject and have the internal argument in the object position: \**It is spoken English in Singapore.*

## b. Bare passive

*Dokumen itu sudah mereka semak.*  
document that already they check

‘They have already checked the document.’

Previous studies often point out characteristics other than verbal morphology to distinguish bare passives from *di-* passives and corresponding constructions in related languages. Such characteristics have led some authors to treat bare passives as a voice construction fundamentally distinct from *di-* passives, referred to as ‘object(ive) voice’ (e.g. [Arka & Manning 1998](#); [Cole, Hermon & Yanti 2008](#); [Legate 2014](#)).

In fact, these characteristics do not hold true across the languages that are thought to have bare passives. First, the agent is claimed to be obligatorily overt. Mualang, an Ibanic language of Western Kalimantan, poses a counterexample. Mualang allows a covert agent in certain contexts ([Tjia 2007](#)). The agent position is indicated by *pro* in (4).

(4) Mualang ([Tjia 2007](#):177)

*Manuk pro pakay p-amis da pian.*  
chicken eat CAUS-finished LOC bathing.place

‘The chickens were eaten up at the bathing place.’

Second, the agent is claimed to be adjacent to the verb only in bare passives. However, the agent must be adjacent to the verb in *di-* passives too, if it is not preceded by the preposition *oleh* ‘by’.

Third, the agent is claimed to precede the verb in bare passives. This characteristic is not valid across varieties/languages either. The Balinese construction in (5), called ‘basic verb construction’ by [Artawa \(2013\)](#), is a bare passive construction, assuming that its ‘nasal verb’ counterpart corresponds to the morphological active with the prefix *meN-* in Standard Malay. Here, the agent *follows* the verb.

(5) Balinese ([Artawa 2013](#):10)

*Nasi-n oke-ne amah bangkung.*  
rice-LINK 1SG-POSS eat pig

‘A pig ate my rice.’

Likewise, according to [Clynes \(2001\)](#), in Brunei Malay, the agent follows the verb when it is a third person pronoun, as shown in (6).

(6) Brunei Malay ([Clynes 2001](#):27, quoted from [Abdul Hamid & Palaniappan \(1998\)](#))

*ani sadakahkan=nya pulang k-arah urang miskin, usin ani*  
this donate=3 too to-to person poor money this

‘This too was donated by him to the poor, this money’

As we shall see below, our Sarawak Malay data also contain bare passive sentences whose agent follows the verb, as in Balinese and Brunei Malay.

Fourth, the binding contrast between (7a) and (7b) pointed out by Arka & Manning (1998) is often cited as evidence for the claim that while the agent DP in bare passives is an argument, in *di-* passives the agent DP is an adjunct (e.g. Musgrave 2001; Cole, Hermon & Yanti 2008; Sato 2010; Kurniawan 2013; Legate 2014; Riesberg 2014; Jeoung & Biggs 2017). However, Arka & Manning also point out that (7c) patterns with (7a), but not (7b).

(7) Standard Indonesian (Arka & Manning 1998)

- a. *Diri=nya<sub>i</sub> mesti dia<sub>i</sub> serahkan ke polisi.* (bare passive)  
 self=3 must 3SG surrender to police  
 ‘S/he must surrender herself/himself to the police.’
- b.?*\*Diri=nya<sub>i</sub> selalu di-utamakan Amir<sub>i</sub>.* (*di-* passive)  
 self=3 always PASS-prioritize Amir  
 ‘Amir always gives priority to himself.’
- c. *Diri=nya<sub>i</sub> selalu di-utamakan=nya<sub>i</sub>.* (*di-* passive)  
 self=3 always PASS-prioritize=3  
 ‘S/he always gives priority to herself/himself.’

In my view, what differentiates (7a) and (7c) from (7b) is the fact that the agent is pronominal in the former, but not the voice. Contrary to Arka & Manning’s assumption, *dirinya* in (7) is not a reflexive pronoun on par with the English *himself/herself*. It has properties of reflexive as well as non-reflexive pronouns (Cole & Hermon 2005; Kroeger 2014; Nomoto 2015). In Nomoto (2015), I proposed that *dirinya* is a normal DP with a possessor pronoun, but not a special reflexive pronoun. *Dirinya* is decomposed into the noun *diri* ‘one’s physical self’ and the third person enclitic pronoun =*nya*. Given its meaning, *diri* functions like an identity function, that is, it virtually has no significant semantic contribution. As a pronominal, the enclitic =*nya* can take a local as well as non-local antecedent, as shown in (8). This explains the dual binding property of *dirinya*.

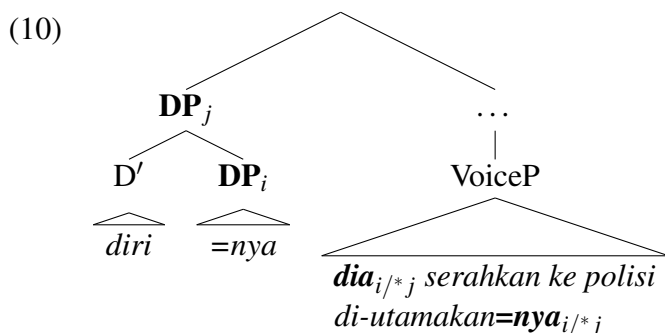
- (8) *Ali<sub>i</sub> kata [Siti<sub>j</sub> selalu memuji anak lelaki=nya<sub>i|j</sub>].*  
 Ali say Siti always praise child male=3  
 ‘Ali says Siti always praises his/her son.’

Moreover, contrary to Yanti et al.’s (2018) description, *dirinya* does not need to have a c-commanding antecedent in the same clause, as illustrated by (9), in which *dirinya* refers to the ‘spouse’ mentioned in the preceding discourse.

- (9) *Begitu Anda tahu tentang hal terjelek dalam diri=nya sebelum Anda*  
 thus 2SG know about thing worst in self=3 before 2SG  
*menikah itu lebih baik, ....<sup>7</sup>*  
 marry that more good

‘Thus, it is better if you know about the worst thing about him/her before getting married, ....’

What matters in these examples is whether the passive agent (i.e. *dia*, *Amir* and *=nya*) can be bound by *dirinya* in the subject position. According to the binding theory, non-reflexive pronouns must not have a local c-commanding antecedent (Condition B) whereas non-pronominal referring expressions must not have a c-commanding antecedent anywhere in the sentence (Condition C). The degraded acceptability of (7b) follows straightforwardly as a Condition C violation. No Condition B violation occurs in (7a) and (7c) because, strictly speaking, the agent *dia/=nya* is not coreferential with the subject *dirinya* as a whole, rather with the pronoun *=nya* inside it, as schematically shown in (10). Notice that while the entire DP *dirinya* c-commands the agent *dia/=nya*, the pronoun *=nya* inside it does not, hence no Condition B violation.<sup>8</sup>



Finally, [Yanti et al. \(2018\)](#) propose a nominalization test to diagnose whether a passive agent is an argument or an adjunct. As they correctly show, the *oleh* agentive PP in a *di*-passive clause is an adjunct (e.g. the *oleh* PP is optional); hence, such a clause can be nominalized (11). By contrast, a bare passive agent is an argument, and nominalization is ungrammatical (12).

- (11) a. *Uang itu sudah di-curi oleh Ali.*  
 money that already PASS-steal by Ali  
 ‘That money was stolen by Ali.’

<sup>7</sup> <http://ahlujannah.blogspot.com/>. This sentence was taken from the IND MXD2012 subcorpus of the Leipzig Corpora Collection ([Goldhahn, Eckart & Quasthoff 2012](#)) using MALINDO Conc ([Nomoto, Akasegawa & Shiohara 2018](#)).

<sup>8</sup> Binding facts are more complicated than presented here and assumed by most authors (see also [Kroeger 2014](#)). For instance, my two Indonesian consultants judged sentence (i), which parallels (7a), as ungrammatical (but grammatical if *dia* is not bound by *dirinya*).

(i)\* *Diri=nya<sub>i</sub> sudah dia<sub>i</sub> kritik.*  
 self-3 already 3SG criticize  
 (For: ‘S/he already criticized herself/himself.’)

Under my analysis, this judgement is expected to arise if the distinction between *dirinya* ‘his/her physical self’ and *=nya* ‘s/he’ is made in (7a), but not in (i). In the latter, the indices of the two DPs become identical. This seems to be what is actually happening, given that the main difference between the two examples is the verb used. Surrendering in (7a) is more likely to involve physical movement than criticizing in (i). Hence, the agent’s physical self is construed as more distinct from the agent in the former.

- b. *sudah di-curi-nya uang itu oleh Ali (membuat teman=nya  
already PASS-steal-NMLZ money that by Ali make friend=3  
sedih)  
sad*

‘Ali’s having stolen the money (made his friend sad)’

(Yanti et al. 2018:27)

- (12) a. *Uang itu sudah ku=curi.  
money that already 1SG=steal*

‘I have already stolen that money.’

- b. \**sudah ku=curi-nya uang itu (membuat teman=ku sedih)  
already 1SG-steal-NMLZ money that make friend=1SG sad*

(For: ‘my having stolen the money (made my friend sad)’)

(Yanti et al. 2018:27)

However, nominalization of a *di-* passive clause is ungrammatical if the agent is a DP immediately after the verb, similarly to bare passives. Consider (13).

- (13) a. *Uang itu sudah di-curi Ali.  
money that already PASS-steal Ali*

‘That money was stolen by Ali.’

- b. \**sudah di-curi-nya Ali uang itu (membuat teman=nya  
already PASS-steal-NMLZ Ali money that make friend=3  
sedih)  
sad*

(For: ‘Ali’s having stolen the money (made his friend sad)’)

In short, when defining bare passives across varieties/languages, the only universal difference between *di-* and bare passives is the presence/absence of an overt passive voice marker. All other putative distinctive characteristics of bare passives are characteristics specific to individual varieties/languages that are shared by a number of varieties/languages.

### 2.2.2 Classification by agent expressions

Four subtypes can be identified by classifying passives according to the way the agent is expressed. Nomoto (2016) refers to them as follows:

- Implicit type: No overt agent expression
- DP type: DP adjacent to the verb
- Oleh type: Oleh ‘by’ + DP
- Hybrid type: Third person enclitic =*nya* and *oleh* ‘by’ + DP

Classical Malay (more specifically, Early Modern Malay) has all four subtypes. In (14), the implicit agent position is indicated by *pro*.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The examples in (14)–(17) were taken from *Hikayat Abdullah* (Abdullah 1963 [1849]) using the Malay Concordance Project (Proudfoot 1991).

## (14) Implicit type

*Dari mana datang Enci' Nakhoda dan apa di-cari pro?*  
 from where come Mr. Captain and what PASS-look.for

'Where did you come from and what are you looking for, Captain?'

(Abd.H 43:1)

## (15) DP type

a. *tiada ia di-makan hulat*  
 not it PASS-eat worm

'it [= knowledge] is not eaten by worms'

(Abd.H 23:11)

b. *Serta di-lihat=nya nakhoda itu*  
 and PASS-look=3 captain that

'And he [= my father] looked at the captain'

(Abd.H 43:13)

## (16) Oleh type

*Maka duit itu di-ambil oleh ibu bapa=nya*  
 and money that PASS-take by mother father=3

'And the money was taken by their parents'

(Abd.H 17:11)

These three types are also available in modern Standard Malay and most Malay varieties. In addition to these, Classical Malay has the fourth type, in which the agent is encoded twice in a clause, namely by the third person enclitic =*nya* and by an *oleh* agentive phrase, as in (17). It is thus a hybrid of the DP type and the *oleh* type.<sup>10</sup>

## (17) Hybrid type

*oleh ibu bapa=ku di-jemputkan=nya=lah segala adik kakak dalam*  
 by mother father=my PASS-invite=3=PART all sibling in

*Melaka*  
 Malacca

'my parents invited all their siblings in Malacca'

(Abd.H 32:4)

### 2.3 Passive typology

As noted at the outset of this section, the two criteria for classifying passives, that is, verbal morphology (section 2.2.1) and how the agent is expressed (section 2.2.2), are independent of each other. Hence, a typology of passive subtypes is possible by considering different combinations. Table 1 shows the resulting typology with a schematic sentence form for each variant in a hypothetical Standard Malay-like variety that has all possible variants. The hypothetical morpheme  $\alpha=$  in [8] is the third person proclitic form of the

<sup>10</sup> Nomoto (2016) claims that the hybrid type is an instance of clitic doubling. He further suggests that the implicit type and the *oleh* type are special cases of the DP type and the hybrid type, respectively, in which the DP adjacent to the verb is covert.



**Table 1. Typological space for the passive subtypes**

Subtype		<i>Di-</i> passive		Bare passive
Implicit	[1]	Theme <i>di</i> -V		[5] Theme V
DP	[2]	Theme <i>di</i> -V Agent		[6] Theme Agent V
<i>Oleh</i>	[3]	Theme <i>di</i> -V <i>oleh</i> Agent		[7] Theme V <i>oleh</i> Agent
Hybrid	[4]	Theme <i>di</i> -V= <i>nya oleh</i> Agent		[8] Theme $\alpha$ =V <i>oleh</i> Agent

	Classical Malay		Standard Malay		Balinese		Tanjung Pauh Kerinci		English		Tagalog	
Implicit	1	5	1	5	1	5	1	5	1	5	1	5
DP	2	6	2	6	2	6	2	6	2	6	2	6
<i>Oleh</i>	3	7	3	7	3	7	3	7	3	7	3	7
Hybrid	4	8	4	8	4	8	4	8	4	8	4	8

**Figure 1. Cross-linguistic comparison of passive subtypes**

pronoun *dia* ‘s/he’, which does not exist in Standard Malay.<sup>11</sup>

Figure 1 summarizes the subtypes available in various languages. The cell numbers correspond to those in Table 1, and the cell for the subtype available in the relevant language is shaded. Note that we are only concerned with verbal morphology and agent expressions, but not with word order. The Balinese and Tanjung Pauh Kerinci tables are based on the analyses of Nomoto (2018) and Yanti et al. (2018), respectively. Malay and Balinese have a rich system of passives, whereas the systems of English and Tagalog are not as developed.<sup>12</sup>

### 3. Passive subtypes in Sarawak Malay

In the previous section, I defined the passive voice and presented the potentially possible passive subtypes. Now, I will address see which passive subtypes are actually available in Sarawak Malay.

#### 3.1 The data

The data comes from two sources. One is the Sarawak component of *Korpus Variasi Bahasa Melayu* (Nomoto 2019a), and the other is Mohd. Ali Salim’s book *Dialek Melayu Sarawak* (Mohd. Ali 2015). Both are searchable on MALINDO Conc (Nomoto, Akasegawa & Shiohara 2018).<sup>13</sup> The data consists of 1,123 sentences or 8,251 (non-punctuational) tokens. The naturally evolved orthography is used in both datasets, where the same letters are used as in Standard Malay. Thus, the phonemes /e/ and /ə/ are both

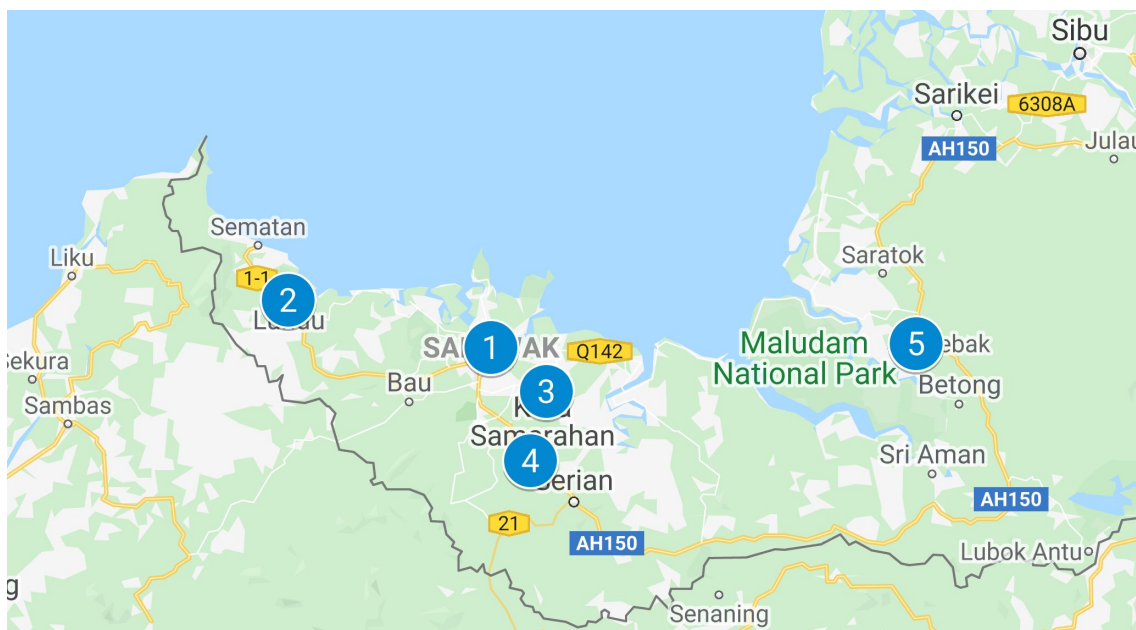
<sup>11</sup> The lack of the third person proclitic in the paradigm is not peculiar to Standard Malay. According to Sander Adelaar (p.c.), Toba Batak lacks not only third person but also second person proclitic forms, which he views as reflecting the markedness of the first person.

<sup>12</sup> Tagalog employs different passive markers depending on the semantic role of the internal argument, with each construction given a special name such as ‘X voice/focus/topic’. The same effect is achieved by applicative suffixes in Malay and Balinese. This difference is not reflected in the table.

<sup>13</sup> <https://malindo.aa-ken.jp/conc/>

represented by *e* and /k/ and /ʔ/ by *k*. This causes no problem for a syntactic study such as the present one.

Within Sarawak Malay, two major subdialects are distinguished in the literature, that is, the subdialect spoken in the Sarawak River Basin (e.g. Kuching) and the subdialect spoken elsewhere in Western Sarawak (e.g. Lundu, Samarahan, Sadong and Saribas) (Collins 2016:chapter 3). The map in Figure 2 shows the locations of these places. The realization of the word-final /a/ is one of the differences between the two. It is realized as [a] in the former whereas it is also realized as [ɔ] or [ə] in the latter (Table 2). In both datasets, the word-final /a/ is usually spelt as *a* ([a]), but *o* ([ɔ]) is also observed, especially with Speakers 3 and 5 in *Korpus Variasi Bahasa Melayu*.



**Figure 2. Map of Sarawak Malay subdialects**

**1. Kuching 2. Lundu 3. Samarahan 4. Sadong 5. Saribas (Map data © 2020 Google)**

**Table 2. Word-final /a/ in different places (based on Collins 2016:62, 66)**

Underlying form		Kuching	Lundu	Samarahan	Sadong	Saribas
/nama/	'name'	nama	nama	namə	namə	namə
/kata/	'to say'	kata	kata	katə	katə	katə
/tiga/	'three'	tiga	tiga	tigə	tigə	tigə

Both texts are morphologically annotated and formatted as XML files. In the XML format, an item is enclosed by a set of tags representing its category, as in `<x>...</x>`. A category may have attributes, which are given in the key-value format, as in `<x key=value>`. The annotated data for *Korpus Variasi Bahasa Melayu* is publicly available.<sup>14</sup> For *di-* passives, I manually added annotations for the passive agent. I named the relevant attribute *pa* (for passive agent). Its possible values are *pro* (for the implicit type),

<sup>14</sup> [https://github.com/matbahasa/Melayu\\_Sarawak/blob/master/var\\_sarawak.xml](https://github.com/matbahasa/Melayu_Sarawak/blob/master/var_sarawak.xml)

DP, *oleh* and hybrid. The annotated XML data looks like (18) (slightly modified from the original format). The same sentence is given in the conventional three-line format in (19).

(18) <s>  
 <w rt="geruk">Geruk</w>  
 <w rt="Seman">Seman</w>  
 <w rt="kembang">kembang</w>  
 <w rt="pangkak" p="di-" pa="DP">dipangkak</w>  
 <w rt="gamang">gamang</w>  
 <pu>.</pu>  
 </s>

[s: sentence; w: word; rt: root; p: prefix; pu: punctuation]

(19) *Geruk Seman kembang di-pangkak gamang.*  
 neck Seman swell PASS-sting hornet

‘Seman’s neck got swollen, stung by a hornet.’ (Mohd. Ali 2015:25)

### 3.2 Available subtypes

In terms of the available subtypes, Sarawak Malay patterns with Standard Malay. Its *di*-passives have the implicit, DP and *oleh* types, whereas its bare passives only have the DP type (cf. Figure 1).

#### 3.2.1 *Di*-passives

Regarding *di*-passives, it has the implicit type (20), the DP type (21) and the *oleh* type (22), but lacks the hybrid type.

(20) Implicit type

a. *Musang dah kenyang, burung di-tipu pro tek.*  
 civet already full bird PASS-cheat PART

‘The civet was already full; the bird was cheated.’ (Sarawak201808)

b. *Sidak ya ndak alah di-padah pro, ntingai.*  
 3PL that won’t lose PASS-tell stubborn

‘They won’t listen (= relent when they are told to change their mind); they are stubborn.’ (Mohd. Ali 2015:32)

(21) DP type

a. *Apabila tek burung makan ikan, di-embak nya terbang.*<sup>16</sup>  
 when PART bird eat fish PASS-bring 3SG fly

‘When the bird ate the fish, it carried away the fish up in the sky.’  
 (Sarawak201812)

b. *Semah sik ny-[s]ingo di-tunggah emak nya.*  
 Semah not ACT-look.around PASS-call mother 3SG

‘Semah did not look around when called by his mother.’  
 (Mohd. Ali 2015:47)

(22) *Oleh* type<sup>17</sup>

- a. *Tiba-tiba dekat pokok tetangga ikan di-embak oleh burung.*  
suddenly at tree neighbour fish PASS-carry by bird

‘Suddenly at the neighbour’s tree, a fish was carried away by a bird.’

(Sarawak201803)

- b. *Dah yo tek, alu di-buang oleh burung tek lalu nyey makan*  
already that PART then PASS-discard by bird PART then 3SG eat  
*tek lalu embak ya dalam babas.*<sup>17</sup>  
PART then carry that in shrub

‘After that, [the fish] was discarded by the bird, and then it [= the civet] ate (the fish) and carried it into the shrubs.’

(Sarawak201819)

Before turning to bare passives, I would like to discuss three findings regarding *di-* passives. First, in 12 out of the 23 instances of the DP type in *Korpus Variasi Bahasa Melayu*, the agent is *nya* or a variant (cf. footnote 16), as in (21a). Sarawak Malay resembles Classical Malay in this respect. In passing, *nya* is not as frequent in Mohd. Ali (2015), that is, only 3 out of the 37 instances.

Second, many instances of the DP type are found with second person agents. This is different from Standard Malay.<sup>18</sup> In Standard Malay, first and second person agents are extremely limited and sometimes judged unacceptable. Some examples of second person agents are given below. Notice that the implicit agent *pro* in (23) also refers to the addressee.

<sup>16</sup> The morpheme *nya* (variants: *nyo*, *nye(y)*) in Sarawak Malay is a free pronoun, but not an enclitic as in Standard Malay. Unlike =*nya* in Standard Malay, it can occur in the subject position, as in (22b) and (23). It is thus spelt separately from the preceding word.

<sup>17</sup> The following two variants of *oleh* were attested in the data: *uleh* and *leh*.

<sup>17</sup> This example shows that Sarawak Malay has the bare active voice. The clause starting with the underlined verb *embak* ‘to carry’ is not a bare passive but a bare active clause, with the subject being unexpressed (because it is identical to that of the preceding clause, i.e. *nyey* ‘it’) and the object *ya* ‘that’ following the verb. In the morphological active, the prefix *N-* is added to the verb to make *ng-embak*, as in (i). The *di-* passive form *di-embak* is found in (22a).

(i) *Jadi, nya makan ikan, terus ng-embak ikan ya terbang.*  
so 3SG eat fish immediately ACT-carry fish that fly

‘So, it [= the bird] ate a fish and flew away with the fish.’

(Sarawak201818)

<sup>18</sup> According to Verhaar (1978:note 9), second person agents are also common in (the equivalents of) *di-* passives in Sundanese and several North-Sumatran languages.

- (23) *Sang kancil madah “Eh, jangan di-gigit pro,” nya madah, “Bukan kaki kamek tuk bemban di-gigit kita tuk.*  
 TITLE mousedeer say eh don’t PASS-bite 3SG say not  
*foot 1SG this shrub? PASS-bite 2SG this*  
 ‘The mousedeer said, “Eh, don’t bite,” he said, “My foot isn’t a shrub, you’re biting it.”’  
 (Sarawak201811)
- (24) *Nok ni baju di-kenan kau?*  
 REL where clothes PASS-like 2SG  
 ‘Which clothes do you like?’  
 (Mohd. Ali 2015:31)
- (25) *Apa di-mbak kau?*  
 what PASS-bring 2SG  
 ‘What did you bring?’  
 (Mohd. Ali 2015:32)
- (26) *Adek, sakit kaki aku di-tinjak kau!*  
 ouch hurt foot 1SG PASS-step.on 2SG  
 ‘Ouch, my foot hurts because you’re stepping on it!’  
 (Mohd. Ali 2015:68)

Lastly, a number of authors have noted a tendency that after an event is introduced by an active clause, (all) subsequent events by the same agent are encoded in the passive voice (e.g. Hopper 1979 and Cumming 1991 for Classical Malay, Kaswanti Purwo 1988 for Standard Indonesian). However, McCune (1979) already pointed out that this was a tendency and many exceptions were found in the Standard Indonesian at that time. Recently, both Shiohara (2015, 2018) and Djenar (2018) showed that currently the predominant voice choice for coding successive events is the active, though the tendency observed in Classical Malay still remains. Sarawak Malay also preserves the old tendency. This is illustrated by the example in (27).

- (27) *Makan ikan, ikan di-gugok atas yo tek, di-ambik nyo tek, di-embak nya lari.*  
 eat fish fish PASS-drop on that PART PASS-take 3SG PART PASS-carry  
 3SG run  
 ‘Ate the fish, the fish was dropped on it, taken by it, carried away by it.’  
 (Sarawak201825)

More investigation is required to see whether this pattern is a typical strategy for encoding successive events or just a vestige of an earlier stage of the language.

### 3.2.2 Bare passives

While *di-* passives are frequently used, examples of bare passives are not easy to find. Interestingly, unlike Standard Malay, the bare passive agent follows the verb in Sarawak Malay. Some clear examples from Mohd. Ali (2015) are given in (28)–(30). The verb and the agent are indicated by underlining and boldface, respectively. In these examples, the bare passive is used in an embedded clause, which is a typical syntactic environment in which bare passives are used in Standard Malay. The corresponding morphological active (*N-*) and passive (*di-*) verb forms are also presented for comparison.

- (28) *Baju nak pake Azlan agik sembab, yo bebau.* cf. *make, dipake*  
 clothes REL wear Azlan still damp that stink  
 ‘The shirt that Azlan wears is still damp; it stinks.’ (Mohd. Ali 2015:60)
- (29) *Nang bena nak padah kau marek.* cf. *madah, dipadah*  
 indeed true REL tell 2SG yesterday  
 ‘What you told yesterday is indeed true.’ (Mohd. Ali 2015:69)
- (30) *Ndak cukup nasi se-besen pake makan Bujang nak rangkak gilak*  
 won’t enough rice one-basin for eat Bujang REL gluttonous very  
 yo. cf. *makan*,<sup>19</sup> *dimakan*  
 that  
 ‘A basin of rice won’t be enough for that gluttonous Bujang to eat.’  
 (Mohd. Ali 2015:60)

Only two instances were found in *Korpus Variasi Bahasa Melayu*. Although they are from different speakers, they involve the same verb, i.e. *embak* ‘to carry’, and the same agent expression, i.e. the third person pronoun *nye(y)*. Neither example contains an explicit subject, which I assume refers to *ikan (yo)* ‘(the) fish’ in the first clause.

- (31) *Bilo nyo ng-ambik ikan, embak nye atas pokok.* cf. *ngembak, diembak*  
 when 3SG ACT-take fish carry 3SG top tree  
 ‘When it [= the bird] took the fish, it carried the fish up to a tree.’  
 (Sarawak201820)
- (32) *Ikan yo tek di-ambik oleh munsang a tek, embak nyey berekot*  
 fish that just.now PASS-take by civet that just.now carry 3SG run  
*lari yo tek.* cf. *ngembak, diembak*  
 run that just.now  
 ‘The fish was taken by the civet, the civet ran away with it.’  
 (Sarawak201825)

Sentence (33) may be another example of the bare passive, but the ‘bare verb-agent’ word order may also be the result of inversion from a bare active clause or a special construction involving verbs of saying (e.g. *kata urang* ‘said people’).

- (33) *Jadi, suruh nya boyak timbui.* cf. *nyuruh, disuruh*  
 so order 3SG crocodile come.up  
 ‘So, it [= the mousedeer] told the crocodile to come up.’  
 (Sarawak201811)

<sup>19</sup> For *makan*, the morphological active form is identical to the bare form because the prefix *N-* is dropped before a nasal. Semantic considerations suggest that *makan* in this example is the bare form. If it were the *N-* active form, the sentence would mean ‘A basin of rice won’t be enough to eat that gluttonous Bujang’, which does not make sense.

**Table 3. Frequencies of *di-* passive subtypes**  
(KVBM: *Korpus Variasi Bahasa Melayu*; MA: [Mohd. Ali 2015](#))

Subtype	KVBM		MA (no <i>cerpen</i> )		MA (with <i>cerpen</i> )	
	Frequency (%)		Frequency (%)		Frequency (%)	
Implicit	19	(34.5)	23	(43.3)	39	(45.9)
DP	23	(41.8)	27	(50.9)	37	(43.5)
<i>Oleh</i>	13	(23.6)	3	(5.7)	9	(10.6)
Total	55	(100.0)	53	(100.0)	85	(100.0)

**Table 4. Frequency rankings across Malay varieties**

Variety	Frequency ranking	Source
Standard (speech)	implicit > <i>oleh</i> > DP	<a href="#">Nomoto &amp; Kartini (2014)</a> , <a href="#">Nomoto (2019b)</a>
Standard (writing)	implicit > DP > <i>oleh</i>	<a href="#">Nomoto &amp; Kartini (2014)</a>
<b>Sarawak</b>	<b>DP &gt; implicit &gt; <i>oleh</i></b>	<b>This study</b>
Classical ( <i>Hikayat Abdullah</i> )	DP > implicit > <i>oleh</i> > hybrid	<a href="#">Nomoto &amp; Kartini (2016)</a>
Classical ( <i>Hikayat Marakarma</i> )	DP > <i>oleh</i> > implicit > hybrid	<a href="#">Nomoto &amp; Kartini (2016)</a>

### 3.3 Frequencies of *di-* passive subtypes

I examined the frequencies of the three *di-* passive subtypes (i.e. implicit, DP and *oleh*). It was found that although Sarawak Malay has the same three subtypes as Standard Malay, their distribution differs from that in Standard Malay and resembles that in Classical Malay.

Table 3 summarizes the results. Two kinds of results are shown for [Mohd. Ali \(2015\)](#), one without the *cerpen* (short story) data and another with all data. I excluded the *cerpen* data because it turned out to be a translation from Standard Malay. The results from KVBM and MA (no *cerpen*) exhibit the same pattern: DP > implicit > *oleh*. The frequency ranking changes if the *cerpen* data is included: implicit > DP > *oleh*.

As seen in Table 4, the former pattern is the same as that reported for the *Hikayat Abdullah* data of Classical Malay (except that Classical Malay also has the hybrid type), while the latter is the same as that of the written register of Standard Malay. Given the potential source language influence, it can be said that the former (i.e. DP > implicit > *oleh*) is the frequency ranking of the authentic Sarawak Malay. Crucially, in Sarawak Malay *di-* passives, the agent most often occurs as a DP immediately after the verb, similarly to *di-* passives in Classical Malay and quite opposite to spoken Standard Malay, in which the relevant pattern is the least frequent. Furthermore, this pattern of the agent immediately following the verb is exactly the same as the word order in bare passives discussed in section 3.2.2. This commonality supports the claim that the two constructions form a continuum in a single voice (i.e. passive), but not two fundamentally different voices such as passive vs. objective ([Nomoto & Kartini 2016](#)).

#### 4. Conclusion

This paper has reported two aspects of variations in Malay passives, namely the available subtypes and their frequencies, with regard to Sarawak Malay. It was shown that while Sarawak Malay has the same number and subtypes as in Standard Malay, that is, three types of *di-* passives (implicit, DP and *oleh*) and the DP type bare passive, the relative frequency ranking among the three *di-* passive subtypes patterns with Classical Malay rather than Standard Malay, with the DP type being the most frequent. Sarawak Malay differs from Standard Malay and most regional Malay varieties in its bare passives. The agent follows, rather than precedes, the verb. This is similar to bare passives in Balinese (cf. (5)) and, partially, Brunei Malay (cf. (6)).

Historical linguists generally agree that western Borneo is the homeland of Malay (Collins & Awang 2017). Hence, it is possible that the verb-agent order found in Sarawak Malay, a Malay variety spoken in that area, was the original word order of the (bare) passive in Malay(ic).<sup>20</sup> In terms of syntactic derivation, the verb-agent order requires an extra verb movement that is not necessary for the agent-verb order, as shown in (34). This movement is necessary to provide a host for a prefixal voice marker such as *di-*,<sup>21</sup> but it is difficult to motivate for  $\emptyset$  unless it is diachronically inherited.

- (34) a. Verb-Agent order  
 Theme  $\emptyset$  [<sub>VP</sub> Agent [<sub>v'</sub> v<sub>pass</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> V ]]]
- 
- b. Agent-Verb order  
 Theme  $\emptyset$  [<sub>VP</sub> Agent [<sub>v'</sub> v<sub>pass</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> V ]]]
- 

Finally, it is interesting to see which passive subtypes are available/unavailable in other Malay varieties and what the frequency ranking among the available subtypes is. According to Yanti et al. (2018), *di-* passives only have the DP type in Tanjung Pauh Kerinci. By contrast, Adelaar (2005b) states that Cocos Malay only has the implicit type *di-* passive. How about other varieties? The relative frequency among the available subtypes has seldom been discussed in the literature. However, this study demonstrated that it is an important piece of information in capturing the characteristics of a variety, especially when one compares it with other varieties.

<sup>20</sup> Another possibility is that the bare passive developed from the DP type *di-* passive through the loss of the prefix *di-*: *di-V Agent* → *V Agent*. In this case, the shared order between Malay and Balinese will be a sheer coincidence. Moreover, such a hypothesis is contrary to Yanti et al.'s (2018) view that *di-* passives developed from bare passives (after Malay was brought in to Sumatra).

<sup>21</sup> See Adelaar (2005a, 2009) for hypotheses about the etymology of *di-*. The syntactic derivation in (34a) suggests that the precursor of *di-* occurred in front of the agent, as with the case with the so-called passive markers *kena* (followed by a bare passive clause) in Standard Malay and similar markers in Thai, Vietnamese, Khmer and Chinese languages (cf. Nomoto & Kartini 2012). After *di-* had established itself as a passive voice marker, the extra movement became unmotivated and was lost in bare passives (but not in *di-* passives), resulting in the agent-verb order in most modern Malay varieties. Such a developmental path differs from the path envisioned by Yanti et al. (2018) and also from Nomoto's (2018) proposal on the developmental path of the Balinese counterpart of *di-* passives. They claim that *di-* and its Balinese equivalent originate from a third person element attached to the verb.



## Abbreviations

1	first person	PASS	passive
2	second person	PL	plural
3	third person	POSS	possessive
ACT	active	PP	preposition phrase
CAUS	causative	REL	relativizer
D	determiner	SG	singular
DP	determiner phrase	v	little verb
LINK	linker	vP	little verb phrase
LOC	locative	V	verb
NMLZ	nominalizer/nominalization	VP	verb phrase
NP	noun phrase	VoiceP	Voice phrase
PART	particle		

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