

SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF THETA ROLES OF VERBS IN THE MAH MERI LANGUAGE

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Abstract: The Mah Meri language, one of the severely endangered languages of Malaysia, is facing the threat of extinction. In order to save valuable information of this language, this paper focuses on one of its aspects, the Theta Roles in relation to the verbs. Using Radford's (1997 & 2009) theory of Theta Roles, this study analyzes and explores the verb phrase of Mah Meri. The main objective of this study is to establish the Theta Roles in relation to verbs in the Mah Meri language. In order to fully understand the verb structures, the morphological entities of affixes such as prefixes and suffixes are studied. Moreover, the word order of the sentential constructions are also analyzed according to active and passive forms. These are done in tandem with analyzing the pronouns in relation to the placement of verbs in a Mah Meri sentential construction. It is found that Theta Roles are present in the data except for the Theta Role Recipient. However, this is not due to the lack of the Theta Role of Recipient in the Mah Meri language; rather it is due to the limitation of the scope in this study as data is analyzed based on the interviews only. On the other hand, the Theta Role of Agent is clearly evident in the Mah Meri language.

Keywords: Mah Meri Language, Argument Structure, Theta Roles, Thematic Relations

INTRODUCTION

It is unfortunate to note that the linguistic studies on the Mah Meri language are limited in number, if not practically scarce. In general, there are a few Mah Meri linguistic studies available in the area of phonology and phonetics, and also on its grammar. However, to the researcher's knowledge, only one study has focused specifically on the syntax of the language. Following

Blagden's study, the language of Mah Meri was analyzed to be an Austroasiatic Mon-Khmer language in previous times. This view was supported by Omar (2006) and Sebeok (1942). Sebeok (1942) discussed the Mon-Khmer origins of the Sakai language. He mentioned of Blagden's arrival at this conjecture by presenting morphological, lexical arguments, and numerical systems analysis. Nevertheless, in recent times,

Mah Meri is said to have adopted the Austronesian features of the Malay language (Omar, 2006). One of the most notable studies on Mah Meris was headed by Omar and her team from the University of Malaya, resulting to the publication of a book entitled 'Bahasa Mah Meri' which was published in 2006. This book is a valuable asset as it presents the basic grammatical structures and vocabulary of the Mah Meri language. In this research, several aspects were highlighted: Ethnography of the Mah Meri people in Kampung Bukit Bangkong, Phonetics and Phonology, Phonemes, Morphology, Verb Phrase, Adjectival Phrase, and Syntax. However, each of these categories was not explored in detail as its main aim was to provide a general account.

Yok (2006) had given a traditional account of syntactic structures of Mah Meri. Such accounts of the syntactic structures of its sentences are divided into Declarative Sentences, Sentences with a Null-Subject, Theme-Rheme, Negative Sentences, Passives, Interrogatives as well as Imperatives. Besides, Peh and Arshad (1981) have also described the syntactic structures of the Mah Meri people in Kampung Sungai Bumbun in Carey Island. In Yok's study, the syntax of Mah Meri concentrated on the aspects of traditional grammar. The participants in Yok's study were from Kampung Sungai Bumbun. In terms of participants, both studies were conducted on the native speakers who were above 40 years old. Besides, Kruspe (2004) has also studied phonetics and phonology of Mah Meri language. She also studied phonetics of the Mah Meri language with Hajek. Kruspe and Hajek (2009) indicated that the Mah Meri language was without a written tradition. Thus, this research contributes

to the dearth of literature on the phonetic forms or written representations of the Mah Meri language. In another work closely related to the Mah Meri language about the registers in Mah Meri (Stevens, Kruspe, & Hajek, 2006), it is found that Mah Meri shows a two-way register system. As a preliminary finding, the researchers found that Mah Meri language's registers to be akin to the complexity of other Mon-Khmer languages. Another contribution of Kruspe was publication of a dictionary of Mah Meri in 2010. She collected the data from the Mah Meri community in Bukit Bangkong. Similarly, Omar (2006) also compiled a dictionary of the Mah Meri language. The words in this dictionary are translated into both Malay and English.

Although generative grammarians indicate that the terms of Theta Role and Thematic Relations are interchangeably used. Carnie makes a distinction between the two terms (as cited in Veesar, Srinivass, & Kadhim, 2015a). Carnie (2007) defines Theta Roles as 'a bundle of thematic relations associated with a particular argument'. In contrast, the term 'Thematic Relations' is referred to as the semantic relation between an argument and a predicate (Veesar, Kadhim, & Srinivass, 2015b). Thus, there may be more than one possible Thematic Relations for an argument with a predicate (Veesar, Kadhim, Shah, & Khuhro, 2016a). Nevertheless, according to Theta-Criterion Theory, each argument is assigned one and only one theta role and each theta role is assigned to one and only one argument (Chomsky, 1988). Hence, an argument may have many possible Thematic Relations but assumes only one type of Theta Role. It is seen that although there are five thematic relations linked to the argument of

Theme; for example, the definite Theta Roles are only three in relation to the predicate. Hence, each argument only assumes one prominent and syntactically dominant Theta Role (Veesar, Kadhim, & Bagudu, 2016b). An argument having more than one Theta Roles is considered ungrammatical in the opinion of Carnie (2007). Hence, this is a marked difference from the understanding of Carnie compared to Radford (1997).

Nevertheless, even though Carnie pointed out that though he might not necessarily agree with the terms of Theta Role and Thematic Relations to be used interchangeably, he did not object to the practice entirely. This is due to the norm of interchangeably using the Theta Role and Thematic Relations terminologies. However, both Radford (1997; 2009) and Carnie (2007) agree on the basis of analyzing Theta Roles. To illustrate, both of them stress that in order to analyze Theta Roles, utmost importance must be given to predicates and arguments. Both elaborate that recognition of predicates and arguments are essential to identify the argument's Theta Role. In Luraghi and Parodi (2008), the term Theta Role is expressed through the symbol - role. In their book, they mentioned that the term Theta Roles refers to the semantic roles. Furthermore, they express that in Transformational Generative Grammar (TGG), the relations of semantics between verbs and their arguments are already designated in terms of Theta Roles. To further elaborate this point, a Theta Role is a semantic role which has a Noun Phrase or Determiner Phrase by default. These NPs or DPs might assume the role of Agent, Patient, Theme, Experiencer and Beneficiary. It is further elaborated that the argument assumes their specific Theta Role during the process of Merge.

METHOD

Mah Meri, also known as Besis and Betise', is an aboriginal Mon-Khmer language spoken in Malaysia. It is the only such language spoken on the coast in Malacca outside of the capital Kuala Lumpur. The small number of speakers is increasing. The number of speakers in 2003 was 3,000 speakers. With regard to data collection, Tok Batin Salleh, the Head of Kampung Sungai Rambai was the only participant for this particular study. The data were collected from interviews with Tok Batin Salleh in the Mah Meri language. In particular, the researcher's focus was to ask questions in relation to the participant's daily activities such as food, entertainment, culture, and so forth. The participant was interviewed on two occasions in November 2012.

The first interview was conducted a week after an engagement ceremony. To elaborate, firstly, the interviewer obtained verbal consent for the requirement of the research from the participant. To do so, the interviewer stated the purpose and objectives of the research to the participant. The participant was selected based on his age, health condition of oral organs of speech and also the fluency of the language. In addition to this, the researcher included an additional criterion which was fluency of both the target language of Mah Meri and the language of interview which was standard Malay. The researcher also required the participant to be fluent in both Mah Meri and standard Malay language due to the researcher's inability to speak Mah Meri fluently. Besides, the participant was also asked his permission to record the interviews using an mp3 player for the purpose of documentation. After the consent was obtained, the researcher proceeded to

conduct the interview based on the familiar themes in the participant's life.

The next step in order to elicit the data is to understand the terminologies of the Theta Roles according to Radford (1997). Hence, in

referring to his understanding of Theta Roles, the researcher determines the arguments with predicates accordingly. His understanding theory of Theta Roles is summarised below.

Table 1. Radford's understandings of Theta Roles

Role	Gloss	Example
THEME	Entity undergoing the effect of some action	Mary fell over
AGENT	Entity instigating some action	Debbie killed Henry
EXPERIENCER	Entity experiencing some psychological state	I like syntax
LOCATIVE	Place in which something is situated or takes place	He hid it under the bed
GOAL	Entity representing the destination of some other entity	John went home
SOURCE	Entity from which something moves	He returned from Paris
INSTRUMENT	Means used to perform some action	He hit it with a hammer

Theta-role (θ -role) is a bundle of thematic relations associated with a particular argument. While in Theta-Criterion, each argument is assigned one and only one theta-role. Each theta-role is assigned to one and only one argument. Therefore, relating to the table above, the sentential constructions in the data pay close attention to the arguments. Arguments, which are also known as noun phrase (NPs), are identified in the Mah Meri language. Once the argument is identified, the predicate related to the arguments are analysed. For example, if the researcher examines the sentential construction, *e ed suka nasi pulut wajik*, it is clear that there are two arguments in this particular sentential construction. The argument *e ed* assumes the role of Experiencer while the argument *nasi pulut wajik* undertakes the role of Theme.

In relation to the second objective of the study, the analysis focuses on the three main verb types of language, namely Transitive, Ditransitive and Intransitive. This is also following Radford's explanation of transitivity and valency. Hence, all the sentential constructions with arguments and predicates are analysed according to

their semantic relation to one another. This research also addresses the verb structures of Mah Meri having Theta Roles by examining their transitivity and valency. Other aspects like pronouns are taken into account accordingly.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Theta Roles play a pertinent role in deducing the initial level of understanding a Mah Meri sentential construction. The semantic understanding of the constituents can determine whether a sentential construction is syntactically correct. The sentential constructions in the data pay close attention to the arguments. Arguments are identified in the Mah Meri Language. Once the argument is identified, the predicate related to the arguments is analyzed. Therefore, all the sentential constructions with arguments and predicates are analysed according to their semantic relation to one another. This paper also addresses the verb structures of the Mah Meri language that having Theta Roles through their transitivity and valency. Hence, the Theta Roles are addressed in the following order: Agent, Theme, Experiencer, Benefactor, Instrument and Locative.

1. Agent

All sentences which bear the Agent Theta Role are featured. However, only ten verbs are demonstrated here in this

section to avoid redundant information in the analysis. The related verbs which are linked to this section include:
Kabe/Beh, Masak and Hagak.

a. Agent Theta Role in Relation to the Verb *Kabe/ Beh*

- 1) *e ed beh nasi pulut wajik sendiri (Mah Meri)*
saya buat nasi pulut wajik sendiri (Malay)
I make rice pulut wajik myself (English)
I make pulut wajik rice by myself.
- 2) *kedo e ed yang beh wajik untuk e ed*
isteri saya yang buat wajik untuk saya
Wife I that make wajik for me
My wife makes wajik for me.
- 3) *ngki golbeh nake*
dia ambil buat itu
he take make that
He takes (and) makes that.
- 4) *ngki macam-macam kejak kabe*
dia macam-macam kerja buat
he various work do
He (has) done various types of work.

From the data in above, it is clear that the verb *beh* is a contraction of the verb *kabe*; thus, they have the same semantic denotation. In the examples 1 and 2, the predicate/verb *beh* is linked to the Agent theta role. To reiterate, an Agent is identified as someone who initiates an action and could be capable of volition. In the sentential construction of 1, the noun *e ed* is deciphered as the Agent who is initiating the action of making *pulut wajik rice*. In contrast, the sentential construction of 2 shows the noun *kedo e*

ed as an Agent. Similar to sentence 1, sentence 2 has also an Agent who is capable to make *pulut wajik* rice and acts out on her own volition. However, in the sentential construction of 3, it is established that the Agent is the noun *ngki*. *Ngki* is described as an Agent that is capable of volition and able to initiate the action. The same pattern emerges with the noun constituent *ngki* in the sentence of 4. Similarly, *ngki* in this sentential construction is also the initiator and acts with volition.

b. Agent Theta Role in Relation to the Verb *Masak*

- 5) *bila e ed hagak suroh gendei masak nasi pulut wajik*
bila saya nak suroh isteri masak nasi pulut wajik
when I want ask wife cook rice pulut wajik
When I want (it), (I) ask (my) wife (to) cook pulut wajik rice.

In the sentential construction of 6, the constituent assuming the role of Agent is the noun *gendei*. In relation to the verb *masak* which means 'to cook', *gendei* is acting on her own volition in the act of

- 6) *e ed masak gulei goreng kari*
 saya masak gulai goreng kari
 I cook gravy fried curry
 I cook gravy fried (fried food) and curry.

From the sentential construction above, it can be identified that *e ed* is the noun constituent linked to the verb *masak*. This is due to the fact that *e ed* is the initiator of the action. Additionally, the noun

cooking. In another example, the verb *masak* is linked to the agent theta role through a noun constituent. The sentence below shows another example.

constituent *e ed* commits the act of *masak* voluntarily on his own accord. Thus, from the given example, it is confirmed that *e ed* is the Agent in this sentential construction.

c. Agent Theta Role in Relation to the Verb *Hagak*

- 7) *bila e ed hagak suroh gendei masak nasi pulut wajik*
 bila saya nak suroh isteri masak nasi pulut wajik
 when I want ask wife cook rice pulut wajik
 When I want (it), (I) ask (my) wife (to) cook pulut wajik rice.

- 8) *e ed hagak cok laut ari ujan telok ketam*
 Saya nak pergi laut hari hujan cari ketam
 I want go sea day rain find crab
 I want (to) go (to the) sea, (the) rainy day (was) rain(ing) (to) look for crab.

- 9) *e ed hagak beli barang kemaih*
 saya nak beli barang kemas
 I want buy thing jewellery
 I want to buy jewellery.

In the sentential construction of 7, it features the same sentence as in 5. In this sentence, two verbs are featured. Previously, the verb discussed in relation to the Agent is *masak*. However, in this sentential construction, the verb *hagak* is taken to examine the Agent theta role. In this particular sentence, the noun *e ed* is the Agent who is acting on his own volition in the quest for *pulut wajik* rice. Next, in the sentential construction of 8, the noun *e ed* assumes the role of an Agent. In particular, *e ed* now has the volition of desiring to go to the sea. Therefore, this

noun constituent can initiate the action of *hagak*. In the last sentential construction of 9, *e ed* is also the Agent by having the volition of *hagak*. The noun *e ed* expressed his want of buying jewellery and it is a possibility for *e ed* to carry out the aforementioned act.

d. Agent Theta Role in Relation to the Verb *Suroh*

Another predicate involved in the sentential construction in b and c is the verbs *uroh*. With reference to the same sentence featured in number b and c, the

verb *suroh* which means 'ask' is related to the noun constituent of *e ed*. This adds to the number of predicates related to *e ed*. As demonstrated earlier, the noun *e ed* shows its capability to have the action of wanting the *pulut wajik* rice. In the next verb *suroh*, *e ed* is also an initiator of the action of asking for the *pulut wajik* rice.

e. Agent Theta Role in Relation to the Verb *Beli*

In this section, the verb discussed in relation to an Agent theta role is *beli*. As seen in sentence 10 below, the argument

- 10) *e ed beli barang hak pasaraya ataupun kedai runcit*
saya beli barang di pasaraya ataupun kedai runcit
I buy grocery at supermarket or shop grocery
I buy grocery at (the) supermarket or grocery shop.

- 11) *e ed hagak beli barang kemaih*
saya nak beli barang kemas
I want buy thing jewellery
I want to buy jewellery.

f. Agent Theta Role in Relation to the Verb *Cok*

Another verb linked to the Theta Role of Agent is the verb *cok*. In the example below, the Agent is identified by the noun *e ed*. In this case *ed* is understood as

- 12) *selalu e ed cok pekan Banting*
Selalu saya pergi pekan Banting
always I go town Banting
I always go (to) Banting town.

The sentential construction shows *e ed* as the initiator or participant who by his own volition frequents the town constantly. Below are other different

- 13) *ngki cok leh*
dia pergi lah
he go
He goes.

which assumes the role of Agent is the noun *e ed*. It is shown that *e ed* is capable of volition of the action *beli*. Therefore, *e ed* can also be understood as the initiator of the action of buying groceries in a particular supermarket or a grocery shop. In the last sentential construction of 11, *e ed* is also the Agent by having the volition of *hagak*. The noun *e ed* expressed his wish of buying jewellery and it is a possibility for *e ed* to commit the aforementioned act.

the participant which is involved in the action of going to Banting town. Here, the noun *e ed* is also the initiator of the action *cok*.

sentential constructions involving the Theta Role of Agent in other situations utilising the verb *cok*.

14) *hik cok leh gol bara kei*
 awak pergi lah ambil barang itu
 you go take thing that
 You go (and) take that thing.

15) *e ed hagak cok laut ari ujan telok ketam*
 saya nak pergi laut hari hujan cari ketam
 I want go sea day rain find crab
 I want (to) go (to the) sea, (the) day (was) rain(ing) (to) find crab.

All of the sentences above reveal different constituents or participants representing the role of Agent. From the data above, sentences 13, 14 and 15 have the noun constituents of *ngki* 'he', *hik* 'you' and *e ed* 'I', respectively. In sentence 13, *ngki* acts as an Agent as the participant is able to commit to the act of going. Furthermore, *ngki* is the initiator of this action. In a similar setting, the noun constituent of *hik* conveys the role of Agent as well. *Hik* shows the ability or has the volition to commit the act of going in order to retrieve things. The last sentential construction demonstrates the

noun constituent *e ed* as the Agent. This is proven by the constituent's ability of committing the act of *cok*. Furthermore, *e ed* is able to initiate this action by his own willpower.

g. Agent Theta Role in Relation to the Verb *Caik*

In the sentential construction using the verb *caik*, it is found that the accompanying Agent is *e ed*. The participant *e ed* is seen to commit the act of *caik* or find. Furthermore, the Agent is the initiator of this action. This can be gathered from the following sentence below.

16) *kadang-kadang e ed caik udang caik ka bawal ka ngaik*
 Kadang-kadang saya cari udang cari ikan bawal ikan ngaik
 Sometimes I find prawn find fish pomfret fish ngaik
 Sometimes I find prawn, pomfret fish, or ngaik fish.

h. Agent Theta Role in Relation to the Verb *Naik*

The verb *naik* is used with the Theta Role of Agent. In the example below, the noun constituent of *e ed* is the initiator of

the action *naik*. Besides that, the participant *e ed* is also capable of the action of riding a boat.

17) *e ed naik pahuk*
 saya naik perahu
 I ride boat
 I ride (a) boat.

i. Agent Theta Role in Relation to the Verb *Nyut*

18) *e ed nyut dei eh doh yal*
 saya balik petang air pasang
 I return evening water high
 I return (in the) evening (when the) tide is high.

- 19) *hinong ngki nyut*
sekarang dia balik
now she return
Now, she (has) return(ed).

As shown above, sentences 18 and 19 show two different constituents taking the role of Agent. The noun constituents are *e ed* and *ngki* respectively. In 18, *e ed* plays the role of an Agent in the action of *nyut* or returning, and in 19, the Agent theta role is taken by the noun constituent *ngki*.

- 20) *e ed hagak ka bawal gol jaring bawal*
saya nak ikan bawal ambil jaring bawal
I want fish pomfret take net pomfret
I want (a) pomfret fish, (so) I take the pomfret net.

- 21) *hik gol barang nakei*
awak ambil barang itu
you take thing that
You take that thing.

- 22) *nake gol moyang*
itu ambil moyang
that take ancestor

That (person) takes (the) ancestor. (Any person from whom one is descended) In the featured sentential constructions above, each sentence has a different constituent representing the Agent theta role. In sentence 20, the noun constituent *e ed* is the Agent for the action of *gol*. In the sentence 21, the noun constituent *hik* is represented as the Agent. In contrast, sentence 22 shows a problem in the representation of Agent. In this particular sentence, there is no apparent argument which takes on the predicate of *gol*. This is because the only

j. Agent Theta Role in Relation to the Verb *Gol*

An Agent theta role is also apparent in a few sentential constructions which include the verb *gol*. This verb carries the meaning of take.

particular constituent that is present is an expletive *nake*. Thus, even though it may be understood from the context that the speaker was referring to a person, *nake* cannot be an Agent because an expletive cannot assume a Theta Role as it is not an argument and does not refer to any entity.

2. Theme

All sentences which possess the Theta Role or Thematic Relation of Theme are featured and discussed in this particular section.

a. Theme Theta Role in Relation to the Verb *Suka*

- 23) *e ed suka nasi pulut wajik*
saya suka nasi pulut wajik
I like rice pulut wajik
I like pulut wajik rice.

24) *budak budak e ed suka kuih wajik*
 budak budak saya suka kuih wajik
 child child I like dessert wajik
 My children like wajik dessert.

25) *e ed suka lagu Jobok*
 saya suka lagu Melayu
 I like song Malay
 I like Malay songs.

From the sentential constructions above, there are three noun constituents which are identified as Themes of the sentences. The noun constituent of 23 'e ed' is the Agent for the sentential construction of the sentence *e ed beh sendiri kuih wajik (Mah Meri)*. In the next sentence, the noun constituent *budak-budak e ed* assumes the theta role of Theme because it is the topic of sentence. Consequently, in sentence 25, the noun constituent *e ed* is acknowledged as the Theme of that

particular construction. Therefore, all of these aforesaid arguments are linked to the verb *suka* as the Theme for each sentential construction.

b. Theme Theta Role in Relation to the Verb *Kabe/Beh*

The other verb which is closely related to the Theta Role of Theme is the verb *beh*. The verb *beh* is linked to some noun constituents assuming the Theta Role of Theme such as *kuih wajik, wajik and kejak*.

26) *e ed beh sendiri kuih wajik*
 Saya buat sendiri kuih wajik
 I make myself dessert wajik
 I make wajik dessert myself.

27) *kedo e ed yang beh wajik untuk e ed*
 isteri saya yang buat wajik untuk saya
 wife I that make wajik for I
 My wife makes wajik for me.

28) *ngki macam-macam kejak kabe*
 dia macam-macam kerja buat
 he various work do
 He (has) done various types of work.

In the sentential construction of 26, the noun constituent assuming the Theme theta role is *kuih wajik*. In sentence 27, *wajik* undertakes the role of Theme whereas in sentence 28, *kejak* is the identified Theme. For each Theme it is understood from the sentences that each identified noun constituent is undergoing an action. As an example, in

sentence 26, *kuih wajik* is undergoing the action of being made by the other noun constituent *e ed*. Sentences 27 and 28 also show *wajik* and *kejak* as entities that are experienced or perceived. Thus, the examples above show that the Themes linked to the verb *kabe*, also known as *beh*, are *kuih wajik, wajik* and *kejak*.

c. Theme Theta Role in Relation to the Verb *Beli*

The next verb that is explored to find the Theme theta role is the verb *beli*

which denotes the meaning of buy. The following examples illustrate the Theme theta roles.

29) *e ed beli barang hak pasaraya ataupun kedai runcit*
saya beli barang di pasaraya ataupun kedai runcit
I buy grocery at supermarket or shop grocery
I buy grocery at (the) supermarket or grocery shop.

30) *e ed hagak beli barang kemaih*
saya nak beli barang kemas
I want buy thing jewellery
I want to buy jewellery.

In the sentential construction above, it is found that the Theme for sentence 29 is the noun constituent *barang* while in latter sentence of 30 *barang kemaih* has the

Theta Role of Theme. In examples, the nouns *barang* and *barang kemas* undergo the action of sentences.

d. Theme Theta Role in Relation to the Verb *Hagak*

31) *e ed hagak cok pantai*
saya nak melawat pantai
I want visit beach
I want to visit the beach.

32) *e ed hagak beli barang kemaih*
saya nak beli barang kemas
I want buy thing jewellery
I want to buy jewellery.

In the above sentences, the noun constituents undertaking the position of Theme are *pantai* and *barang kemaih* respectively. In the sentential construction of 31, the noun constituent of *pantai* is the entity which is experienced or perceived by *e ed*. In comparison, the sentential construction of 32 exemplifies *barang kemas* as the entity which is the object of perception of the noun constituent *e ed*. Thus, it is evident that both *pantai* and *barang kemas*

are Themes as they undergo a psychological aspect of change through the noun constituents of *e ed*.

e. Theme Theta Role in Relation to the Verb *Caik*

The verb *caik* is pertinent in discussing the Theta Role of Theme. The verb *caik*, meaning find shows many examples of Theme in a sentential construction. The following sentence below elucidates the idea.

33) *kadang -kadang e ed caik udang caik ka bawal ka ngaik*
Kadang-kadang saya cari udang cari ikan bawal ikan ngaik
Sometimes I find prawn find fish pomfret fish ngaik
Sometimes I find prawn, pomfret fish (and) ngaik fish.

From the sentential construction above, the identified Themes are the noun constituents; *udang, ka bawal* and *ka ngaik*. From the above sentence, it is understood that these noun constituents are experienced by the finder. For example, the experience of *caik udang* or

finding prawns is an experience which *e ed* undertakes. Correspondingly, the other noun constituents such as *ka bawal* and *ka ngaik* are also the entities which are perceived by *e ed*. Therefore, the Themes present in the above sentence are *udang, ka bawal* and *ka ngaik*.

f. Theme Theta Role in Relation to the Verb *Keghat-Keghat*

- 34) air mawar mawar keghat keghat
 air mawar mawar dikerat kerat
 water rose rose slice slice
 (For the) rose water, the rose (petals) are sliced.

In the sentential construction above, the verb *keghat-keghat* is affecting the noun constituent *mawar*. From the sentence, it is understood that *mawar* undergoes an action. In this case, the noun *mawar* undertakes the action of being sliced. Hence, the Theme of this sentence is *mawar* or rose as it is affected by the action.

explored. All sentences which bear the Theta Role of Experiencer are featured in this section.

a. Experiencer Theta Role in Relation to the Verb *Suka*

The Theta Role of Experiencer can be seen in the sentential construction related to the verb *suka*. The verb *suka* is paired with the Theta Role of Experiencer as it shows feelings.

3. Experiencer

In this section, the Theta Role or Thematic Relation of Experiencer is

- 35) *e ed suka nasi pulut wajik*
 saya suka nasi pulut wajik
 I like rice pulut wajik
 I like pulut wajik rice.

- 36) *budak budak e ed suka kuih wajik*
 budak budak saya suka kuih wajik
 child child I like dessert wajik
 My children like wajik dessert.

- 37) *e ed suka lagu Jobok*
 saya suka lagu Melayu
 I like song Malay
 I like Malay songs.

Closely related to the predicate *suka* is the Experiencer of each particular sentential construction. In relation to the particular sentences above, 35 demonstrates the noun constituent *e ed*

as the Experiencer. Next, the Experiencer for the sentence of 36 is the noun constituent of *budak-budak e ed*. Lastly, the identified Experiencer for 37 is *e ed*. From the sentences above, it is clear that

the Experiencers are the ones who experience or perceive the events. In this case, the sentential constructions indicate that *e ed* and *budak-budak e ed* are the ones

that perceive the idea of liking either *pulut wajik* rice, *wajik* dessert or Malay songs.

b. Experiencer Theta Role in Relation to the Verb *Rasa*

- 38) *e ed rasa nasi pulut wajik lawan kopi sedap*
saya rasa nasi pulut wajik dengan kopi sedap
I feel rice pulut wajik with coffee tasty
I feel (that) pulut wajik rice with coffee (is) tasty.

In the above sentential construction, the Theta Role of Experiencer is discussed with the verb *rasa*. The verb *rasa* (feel) is perceived by the Experiencer *e ed*. In this example, *e ed* is the perceiver of the action *rasa*. Thus, it can be said that the argument *e ed* is the experiencer.

4. Benefactor

The Theta Role of Benefactor is found in a sentential construction. The relevant

- 39) *kedo e ed yang beh wajik untuk e ed*
isteri saya yang buat wajik untuk saya
wife I that make wajik for I
My wife makes wajik for me.

From the sentential construction, it is determined that the Theta Role of Benefactor is the noun constituent *e ed*. The noun constituent *e ed* is the Benefactor of the *wajik* dessert which is made by his wife for him. Thus the verb 'beh' is the predicate of the sentence which undergoes the benefactor role.

5. Instrument

The Theta Role of Instrument is also found in the sentential constructions.

- 40) *e ed naik pahuk*
saya naik perahu ke pantai
I ride boat to beach
I ride a boat to the beach.

sentential construction is discussed below.

a. Benefactor Theta Role in Relation to the Verb *Beh*

In relation to the Theta Role of Benefactor, the verb *beh* is examined in a sentential construction. This can be identified from the example below.

The discussion for the Theta Role of Instrument is presented below.

a. Instrument Theta Role in Relation to the Verb *Naik*

The Theta Role of Instrument is found in the sentential construction involving the verb *naik*. Following two examples link the verb *naik* with the Theta Role of Instrument.

- 41) *Daud ke kejak naik moto*
Daud ke kerja naik motor
Daud to work ride motorcycle
Daud rides (the) motorcycle to work.

There is an Instrument linked to each sentential construction in 40 and 41. For the first sentence of 40, the noun constituent is *pahuk*. *Pahuk* (boat) is considered the Instrument as it is the entity with which action occurs. It can also be said that it is a theme of the sentence as it undergoes the action. However, here in this sentence it is used as an instrument to go to the beach. In this example, the action of *naik* occurs with the Instrument of *pahuk*. In another similar setting, the noun constituent assuming the role of Instrument in 41 is *moto*. From the sentence above, the action of *naik* only occurs with the entity of *moto*. Therefore, it is deduced that two examples of Instrument found are *pahuk* and *moto*.

- 42) *Daud kejak mesin rumput hak Banting sampai ke Tembuk.*
Daud kerja mesin rumput di Banting sampai ke Tembuk.
Daud work machine grass at Banting until to Tembuk.
Daud works (with) grass-cutting machine from at Banting to Tembuk.

The above example shows that the action had taken place from *Banting* to *Tembuk*. Thus, the Locative in the above sentence is *Tembuk*.

- 43) *e ed beli barang hak pasaraya ataupun kedai runcit*
saya beli barang di pasaraya ataupun kedai runcit
I buy grocery at supermarket or shop grocery
I buy grocery at (the) supermarket or grocery shop.

From the example above, it is evident that the arguments *pasaraya* and *kedai runcit* are the Locatives in which *e ed* carried out the action of *beli*. Thus, the places involved in this sentence are the supermarket and the grocery shop.

6. Locative

The Theta Role of Locative is one of the categories of Theta Roles discussed in this study. The sentential constructions which are linked to this category involve the verb *kejak*, *beli*, *sekolah* and *geteik*. The following examples show the Locatives in their own respective settings.

a. Locative Theta Role in Relation to the Verb *Kejak*

The Theta Role of Locative is found to be linked with the verb *kejak*. In the sentential construction below, the identified locatives are the noun constituents *Banting* and *Tembuk*.

b. Locative Theta Role in Relation to the Verb *Beli*

In the next sentential construction, it is determined that the noun constituents assuming roles of Locatives are *pasaraya* and *kedai runcit*. The following sentence below shows the Locatives in their environments.

c. Locative Theta Role in Relation to the Verb *Sekolah*

In the following sentence, the argument undertaking the role of a Locative is Sekolah Teluk Datuk.

- 44) *ngki sekolah hak Sekolah Teluk Datuk*
dia sekolah di Sekolah Teluk Datuk
she school at School Teluk Datuk
She studies at Teluk Datuk School.

The noun constituent which assumes the Locative theta role in the above sentence is clearly stated. This is because the action of *sekolah* takes place in the aforementioned Location. Hence, *Sekolah Teluk Datuk* is the responsible Theta Role of Locative in the above sentence.

- 45) *ngki geteik asrama ngot*
dia tinggal asrama tidak
he live hostel not
He does not live (at the) hostel.

- 46) *Hanom hak geteik asrama*
Hanom di tinggal asrama
Hanom at live hostel
Hanom lives at (the) hostel.

In both sentential constructions of 45 and 46, the argument *asrama* is identified as the Locative for each example. Both highlight the aspect that *asrama* is the place of the action. Thus, it can be said that the argument for each sentence assumes the role of a Locative.

7. Goal

In this section, the last category of Theta Roles, i.e. Goal is explicated. The Goal is defined as the entity towards which a motion takes place. This may involve an abstract motion. The findings show that verbs which are linked to Goal are *beh*, *cokand gol*. However, the last example is highlighted to show the preposition of *ke*

d. Locative Theta Role in Relation to the Verb *Geteik*

In the next Theta Role of Locative, the verb *geteik* is discussed in the following sentences.

acting as a replacement for a verb. The following examples expound the related Goals with the verbs in their respective settings.

a. Goal Theta Role in Relation to the Verb *Beh*

The Goal theta role is seen in the following sentences. The Theta Role of Goal is found to be the noun constituent *e ed*. The argument *e ed* shows the goal towards which the action of *beh wajik* is intended. The argument *e ed* is classified as a non-abstract goal as *e ed* is a person. To illustrate, the sentence involving the Theta Role of Goal is given below.

- 47) *kedo e ed yang beh wajik untuk e ed*
isteri saya yang buat wajik untuk saya
wife I that make wajik for I
My wife makes wajik for me.

From the sentence above, it is argued that goal theta role is located at the end of the sentence. The noun constituent *e ed* is the goal having the Goal theta role. It is used with the other noun constituents such as *kedo e ed* and also *wajik*.

- 48) *selalu e ed cok pekan Banting*
selalu saya pergi pekan Banting
always I go town Banting
I always go (to) Banting town.

- 49) *hikcok leh gol bara kei*
awak pergi lah ambil barang itu
you go take thing that
You go (and) take that thing.

- 50) *e ed hagak cok laut ari ujan telok ketam*
sayanak pergi laut hari hujan cari ketam
I want go sea day rain find crab
I want (to) go (to the) sea, on (the) rainy day (to) look for crab.

The Theta Role of Goal can be seen in all three sentences above. In 48, the Goal is *pekan Banting*. It is the goal of the argument *e ed*. In 49, the Goal is identified as *bara* (thing). The argument *bara* is paired with another argument *hik*. In 50, the Goal is *laut*. Hence, the noun constituents which assume the role of Goal are *pekan Banting*, *bara* and *laut* respectively.

- 51) *nake gol moyang*
itu ambil moyang
that take ancestor
That (person) takes the ancestor.

In the sentence above, the Goal is assumed by the noun constituent

b. Goal Theta Role in Relation to the Verb *Cok*

Another verb which is related to the Theta Role of Goal is *cok*. Cockatrices the meaning of go. In this section, the related sentential constructions which feature the verb *cok* with the Theta Role of Goal are shown below.

c. Goal Theta Role in Relation to the Verb *Gol*

Another verb which can be seen to include the Theta Role of Goal is *gol*. The verb *gol*, or also known as *kagol*, denotes the meaning of take. In relation to this verb, the sentential construction below provides evidence for this Theta Role.

moyang. However, the noun constituent is seen to be omitted from the sentence.

However, the determiner *nake* serves as a marker of a missing noun constituent. In this situation, the seemingly missing noun constituent is pursuing the entity of *moyang*.

d. Goal Theta Role in Relation to the Preposition *Ke* Acting as a Verb

52) *kadang kadang ke laut*
kadang kadang ke laut
sometimes to sea
Sometimes (I go) to the sea.

From the example above, it is identified that the Theta Role of Goal is assumed by the noun constituent *laut*.

8. Discussion of Sentences without Any Theta Roles

This section discusses the sentences without any Theta Roles. These are the sentences which do not fit under any category under Radford's definition (1997) of Theta Roles. Radford (1997) clarified that in order for Theta Roles to be analysed, the predicate and the argument must be present at all times. However, it is found that some sentential constructions in Mah Meri can still be logical or grammatically correct without

53) *nelayan pon dak le*
nelayan pun tidak lah
fisher man also not
(I'm) also not a fisherman.

In the sentence above, a Theta Role is unavailable as it does not fulfil the rule of having a predicate. Thus, even though a noun constituent is present, the sentential construction cannot be analysed due to the aforementioned reason.

In the following sentence, there is no verb constituent involved. However, it is found that the preposition *ke* (to) acts as a verb predicate. In this case, it is analysed that sentences can function with the preposition *ke* as a replacement for the verb *cok*. This finding is explicated through the sentential construction below.

having a predicate. Hence, this section discusses in detail the Theta Roles involved such as Agent, Experiencer, Theme, Goal, Recipient, Source, Location, Instrument and Benefactive.

a. Discussion of Sentential Construction 1

In the sentential construction below, it is analysed that no Theta Role is present. The reason for the absence of any Theta Role is due to the lack of predicate or verb in the particular sentential construction. The following sentence explicates the lack of verb in the sentence uttered by the speaker.

b. Discussion of Sentential Construction 2

The next sentential construction contains a noun constituent. However, this type of sentential construction could not have a Theta Role as it also lacks a predicate. The following example shows this.

- 54) *nama kenon suluk Ajin*
nama anak sulung Ajin
name child first Ajin
(The) first child's name (is) Ajin.

The example above indicates zero predicate. However, it does have a noun constituent 'Ajin'. Since the sentence has zero predicate; thus, its noun constituent cannot be assigned any Theta Roles.

- 55) *bali pon ada*
bali pun ada
pomelo also available
There is also pomelo.

In the above sentential construction, the noun constituent which is present is *bali*. *Bali* is translated as pomelo (a type of fruit) cannot take on any Theta Role as there is no predicate available. Hence, it is concluded that from the sentence above that no category of Theta Role can be assigned to the noun constituent *bali*.

- 56) *nama ngki Daman*
nama dia Daman
name he Daman
His name (is) Daman.

- 57) *nama ngki Lina*
nama dia Lina
name she Lina
Her name (is) Lina.

- 58) *nama ngki Hanum*
nama dia Hanum
name she Hanum
Her name (is) Hanum.

As seen above, there is no indication of any predicate in the sentential construction for all the sentences in d. It is found that only a noun constituent is

c. Discussion of Sentential Construction 3

The discussion continues with another type of sentential construction. The sentence below shows the lack of a predicate as well.

d. Discussion of Sentential Construction 4

Further discussion of sentential constructions without any Theta Roles is discussed in this section. Like the previous sentential constructions, no verb or predicate can be determined from any of the sentential constructions. The following examples explicate the findings.

present in each sentence. As seen in 56, the noun constituent *Daman* cannot be assigned any Theta Roles as it is not linked with any predicates. Hence,

Daman cannot be constituted for an argument of any Theta Role. In a similar setting as 56, the sentential construction of 57 is devoid of any predicate. In 57, the identified noun constituent for this sentential construction is *Lina*. Lastly, the sentence 58 also indicates the absence of any predicates. It features the same syntactic placement as demonstrated in 56 and 57. In addition, it also includes a single noun constituent, *Hanum*. Nonetheless, the conclusion is the same for all the sentential constructions in d. All of these sentential constructions indicate the deficiency of verbs. Hence, none of the aforementioned noun constituents of *Daman*, *Lina* and *Hanum*

- 59) Tok Batin darjah enam huk
Tok Batin darjah enam sahaja
Tok Batin standard six only
Tok Batin studies till standard six only.

The sentential construction above discusses the two separate entities of noun constituents. Nonetheless, it is determined that a verb or a predicate is unrepresented in the sentential construction above.

- 60) adat hum penting
adat mandi penting
Tradition bathe important
(The) bathing tradition (is) important.

As seen in the sentential construction above, there is no particular predicate in the sentence. However, it is seen that *adat hum* is a noun constituent. However, due to the lack of predicates, this noun constituent cannot assume any Theta Role due to the lack of predicates. Hence, this sentential construction cannot be analysed for the Theta Role.

can undertake any Theta Role in their respective sentences.

e. Discussion of Sentential Construction 5

The sentential construction 5 echoes the idea of an absent predicate. This finding is also prevalent in the previous discussion in relation to the sentential constructions without a verb. However, it is interesting to note that instead of one noun constituent present, the sentence featured below has two different noun constituents. To illustrate, the sentence construction is shown below.

f. Discussion of Sentential Construction 6

The sixth type of sentential construction found in the Mah Meri language that is not represented by any Theta Role is shown below.

CONCLUSION

From this data, all Theta Roles are found to be presented except for the Theta Role of Recipient. However, this is not due to the lack of the Theta Role of Recipient in Mah Meri. Rather, it is due to the limitation of the scope in this study as the data analyzed was based on the limited interview. The Agent theta role is a prominent one in the Mah Meri language; it has the highest level of occurrence in the data. The researcher

observed some repeated noun constituents as Agents. Some of these noun constituents are *e'ed* (I), *ngki* (he/she) and *hik* (you). However, other noun constituents are also found such as *kedo e'ed* (my wife). Besides *kedo e'ed*, the researcher detected proper names to have also taken on the roles of the Agent. These proper nouns are such as *Hanom*, *Bakhtiar*, and *Daud* to name a few.

The second type of Theta Role found in the study is Theme; having second highest occurrence in the data. It is seen that Theme is often paired along with the Agent theta role. However, it is interesting to note that the Theta Role of Theme has the most variety of types. Unlike the Theta Role of Agent which are often the same repeated noun constituents, the Theta Role of Theme is found to be more dynamic. Some examples of the Theme are *laut* (sea), *barang kemaih* (jewellery), *udang* (prawn), *ka awal* (pomfret fish) and *mawar* (rose) to name a few.

The third type of Theta Role is the Theta Role of Experiencer. The researcher found that the Theta Role of Experiencer is very similar to that of the Theta Role of Agent; assuming that the agent is in the specifier of a light verb, these observations suggest that the experiencer is in the specifier of the thematic verb, like theme arguments (Radford, 1997). The same type of example is found to assume the role of an Experiencer. These examples include the use of the noun constituent *e'ed* (I). The other noun constituent which undertakes the Experiencer theta role is *budak-budak e'ed* (my children). However, it is found that Experiencer theta role occurs less in the data as compared to Agent.

The fourth type of Theta Role denotes the Theta Role of Benefactor. The Theta Role of Benefactor is found to

be present in one of the sentential constructions in Mah Meri. The noun constituent which carries the role of Benefactor is *e'ed* (I). In comparison, the fifth type of Theta Role of Instrument shows a different set of noun constituents assuming the role. The examples of Instrument are the noun constituents of *pahuk* (boat) and *moto* (motorcycle). Finally, the Theta Role of Locative shows variation as well. Some of the noun constituents found to carry this role are *anting*, *Tembuk*, and *pasaraya* (supermarket). Thus, it can be concluded that Mah Meri has all theta roles except Recipient. However, the cause is not due to lack of the theta role of recipient in the Mah Meri, but it is perhaps due to the limited data.

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Golf Ball

Two Golfers were approaching the first tee. The first guy goes into his golf bag to get a ball and says to his friend - "Hey, why don't you try this ball." He draws a green golf ball out of his bag. "Use this one - You can't lose it!" His friend replies, "What do you mean you can't lose it?!!!" The first man replies, "I'm serious, you can't lose it. If you hit it into the woods, it makes a beeping sound, if you hit it into the water it produces bubbles, and if you hit it on the fairway, smoke comes up in order for you to find it." Obviously, his friend doesn't believe him, but he shows him all the possibilities until he is convinced. The friend says, "Wow! That's incredible! Where did you get that ball?" The man replies, "I found it."

(Source: <http://www.study-express.ru/humour/funny-stories.shtml>, picture: www.google.co.id)