Passive agents in Malay: The binding properties and discourse functions of agentive =nya

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Influential work by Arka & Manning (1998) argues that the prefix di- marks a passive, unless the agent is expressed by the pronominal clitic =nya attaching to the verb. They analyze =nya in such cases as a core argument, meaning that the di-V=nya construction involves ergative or inverse alignment, rather than passivization. Their crucial evidence for this claim is an apparent contrast in binding properties between agentive =nya and the agentive PP. I argue that this contrast is due to pragmatic factors, including the high inherent topicality of clitic pronouns, rather than any difference in syntactic status, and that the prefix di- always marks a true passive.

1. Introduction

This paper reviews a variety of evidence concerning grammatical relations in Malay, with special attention to the passive agent. I argue, contra Arka & Manning (1998), that the agent of the di-V=nya construction is not a core argument, and thus (contra Hopper (1979, 1983) and Verhaar (1984, 1988)) that the di-V form is always passive.

I begin in section 2 with an overview of the Malay voice system and a discussion of symmetric voice. Sections 3–4 discuss various syntactic tests for identifying grammatical subjects, and for distinguishing core arguments from oblique arguments and adjuncts. While a number of good subjecthood tests have been identified for Malay, it turns out to be a bit more difficult to distinguish core from oblique. However, this is the crucial difference between passive and Objective Voice: the Objective Voice is transitive (two core arguments) whereas the passive is intransitive (only one core argument). This difference in transitivity follows from the fact that the Objective Voice agent is a core argument while the passive agent is an oblique argument or adjunct.

Section 5 discusses the use of reflexive binding as a way of distinguishing core vs. oblique arguments, focusing in particular on the status of the agentive clitic in the di-V=nya construction. The binding evidence has played a very important role in recent discussions of Malay voice, partly because some of the most useful tests for distinguishing core from oblique cannot be applied to clitics. I argue that, contrary to the claim by Arka & Manning (1998), the binding facts do not prove that the agentive =nya is a core argument. I suggest that the data they cite are best explained by discourse rather than syntactic properties, specifically the inherent topicality of clitic pronouns. If this is correct, then there is no syntactic basis for treating di- as a polysemous prefix; it always marks a passive.

1 I would like to thank my principal Indonesian consultant, Mrs. Nahla Nurhidayah; I Wayan Arka, Ashrafiqin Ahmad, and Regina Yanti for their native-speaker judgments and helpful discussion of the issues discussed here; and Peter Cole and two anonymous reviewers for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

2 I follow Ross (2002), Andrews (2007), Arka (2005), and many other authors in using the label “core argument” to refer to non-oblique arguments of the verb, also called “terms” or “direct arguments.” In the terminology of Role and Reference Grammar, these would be called “direct core arguments.”

Section 6 challenges another kind of argument that has been made for the polysemy of *di*-, based on its discourse functions. Hopper (1979, 1983) and Verhaar (1984, 1988) identify the *di*- form as an “ergative” construction when it encodes main-line events in narrative, and as a “passive” in most other contexts. I argue that only a syntactic definition of the passive can provide a natural explanation for the correlation between voice morphology and syntactic properties that is demonstrated in sections 3–4.

In this paper I deal primarily with the standard forms of the language, Bahasa Malaysia and Bahasa Indonesia. I am aware of some differences between these two varieties with respect to the issues under discussion here, but overall I believe that the same basic analysis will work for the voice systems of both. Where the distinction between the two is not crucial, I use the term “Malay” as a cover term for both of them. Cole, Hermon & Yanti (2008) point out that more significant differences are found in various non-standard vernacular dialects (see also Nomoto 2006), but I will not attempt to address these differences in the present paper.

2. Overview of voice in Malay

Some recent work in Malay/Indonesian syntax, including Arka & Manning (1998), Musgrave (2001), and Cole, Hermon & Yanti (2008), argues for or assumes the voice system shown in (1a–c). This voice system is partially “symmetrical” in the sense of Foley (1998) and Ross (2002) because there are two distinct transitive clause types. One of these (*meN-V*) selects the agent as subject, the other (*Ø-V*) selects the patient as subject, but both are syntactically transitive because they contain two core arguments. We might also refer to this pattern as a “non-demoting” voice alternation, in contrast to the passive and antipassive in which a core argument is demoted to oblique status (or adjunct, under Chomsky’s 1981 analysis). (I have included the Antipassive in (1d) for comparison, but this construction is not attested in Malay.)

(1)  

a. *meN-V* < agent, patient > **Active Voice**
    \[
    \begin{array}{c|c|c}
    \text{SUBJ} & \text{OBJ} \\
    \end{array}
    \]

b. *Ø-V* < agent, patient > **Objective Voice**
    \[
    \begin{array}{c|c|c}
    \text{Core/OBJ} & \text{SUBJ} \\
    \end{array}
    \]

(= Ergative/Inverse)

c. *di-V* < agent, patient > **Passive**
    \[
    \begin{array}{c|c|c}
    \text{(OBL)} & \text{SUBJ} \\
    \end{array}
    \]

d. *** < agent, patient > **(Antipassive – not attested)**
    \[
    \begin{array}{c|c|c}
    \text{SUBJ} & \text{(OBL)} \\
    \end{array}
    \]

The three voices are illustrated in (2). The bare stem form illustrated in (2b) has often been referred to as the “zero passive” or “passive type two”; I follow Arka & Manning (1998) and Cole, Hermon & Yanti (2008) in using the term OBJECTIVE VOICE. This construction is not a passive, for reasons to be discussed below.

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3 Chung (1976a) proposes essentially the same analysis, but seems to say that the agent of the Objective Voice construction is neither oblique nor a true core argument.

4 Himmelmann (2005) uses the term “symmetrical voice” in a slightly different sense, to indicate that two or more voice categories are equally basic or (un)marked in the language.
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(2) a. *Kamu harus mem-baca buku ini.*

2SG must AV-read book this

‘You must read this book.’

b. *Buku ini harus kau=Ø-baca.*

book this must 2SG=OV-read

‘You must read this book.’  
  (Sneddon 1996:249)

c. *Buku ini harus di-baca oleh setiap orang Melayu.*

book this must PASS-read by every person Malay

‘This book must/should be read by every Malay person.’

There are several important differences between the *di-* passive and the Objective Voice (OV) construction. First, the agent phrase in the *di-* passive may optionally be omitted, whether it is understood from context or simply unspecified. When the agent is expressed it appears as a PP, introduced by the preposition *oleh* as seen in (2c); but *oleh* may optionally be dropped if the agent immediately follows the verb. In Objective Voice, however, the agent phrase is obligatory and must appear immediately before the verb stem; it must follow all auxiliaries (as illustrated in (2b) and (3a–c)), negation markers, etc.

Second, the agent of the *di-* passive cannot normally be a first or second person pronoun. The Objective Voice agent must be expressed as a pronoun, but (in the modern standard languages) there is no restriction as to person. So if the agent is a third person pronoun, both of the non-active voices are possible (Sneddon 1996:249–50). Sneddon shows that the OV agent may be a clitic pronoun as in (2b), a free pronoun form as in (3a), or a “pronoun substitute” (e.g. a kinship term or proper name used with first or second person reference) as in (3b–c).

(3) a. *Mobil itu dapat kita Ø-perbaiki.*

car that get 1PL.INCL OV-repair.

‘We can repair the car.’  
  (Chung 1976a: 60)

b. *Surat ini harus adik Ø-tandatangani.*

letter this must younger.sibling OV-sign

‘You (younger sibling) must sign this letter.’  
  (Dalrymple & Mofu 2009)

c. *Buku itu sudah Tini Ø-kembalikan.*

book that already (speaker’s name) OV-return

‘I (Tini) have already returned the book.’  
  (Sneddon 1996:250)

Another important difference between the two non-active voices is the status of the agent. As indicated in (1b–c), the agent of the *di-* passive is an oblique argument, while the Objective Voice agent is a core argument.

In this paper I want to re-examine the empirical evidence which has commonly been cited in support of the analysis outlined above. The empirical basis for the analysis is important, because the concept of symmetric voice is still somewhat controversial.\(^5\)

Symmetric voice poses descriptive, typological, and theoretical challenges to standard ways of thinking about voice. As recently as 20 years ago, a common objection to

\(^5\) I will refer to “symmetric voice” rather than “symmetrical voice,” but do not intend any difference in meaning.
symmetric analyses of Philippine-type voice systems was that no language had been clearly proven to work that way. Before the appearance of Guilfoyle, Hung & Travis (1992, earlier version 1989), most formal theories of syntax provided no mechanism for deriving a symmetric voice alternation. Thus Schachter (1984), having presented clear evidence for a symmetric voice alternation in Toba Batak, pointed out that no available theory of syntax allowed such an alternation. He concluded that syntactic functions such as “subject” and “object” were simply not part of Toba Batak grammar, and therefore not universal. More recently, Pearson (2005) argued that apparent “symmetric voice” alternations in Malagasy and Tagalog are actually instances of A-bar movement, rather than voice (which would involve A movement).

Arka (1998/2003) proved beyond question that Balinese has a symmetric voice alternation, in addition to a true passive (essentially the same inventory proposed in (1a–c)). This was an important milestone. Since that work appeared, if we want to propose a symmetric analysis for some other language (such as Malay), we no longer need to prove that symmetric voice is possible; that has been established. We face only the normal standard of evidence in linguistics — does the symmetric analysis provide the best possible account for the observed data?

The voice system described above (AV, OV, and passive) is not unique to Malay; a number of other Western Malayo-Polynesian languages appear to have the same inventory. Balinese is probably the best documented example of such a language (Arka 2003). West Coast Bajau has a similar system (Miller 2007), as do at least some of the other Sama-Bajau languages (Walton 1986; Kroeger 2004:301–305; Miller 2013). Legate (2012) has recently made a convincing case that Acehnese also has the same three voice categories.

Tjia (2007) describes the same system for Mualang, a Malayic language of western Borneo: N-V active, da-V passive, Ø-V inverse. However, it is not the case that all Malayic languages have these three voice categories. Cole, Hermon & Yanti (2008) show that some Malay varieties in southern Sumatra, including Mudung Darat Malay (Jambi Province), have lost the OV category.

The voice system of Maanyan (a Barito language of Central Kalimantan) appears to be very similar to that of Mualang: N-V active, na-V passive, Ø-V inverse (Gudai 1985, cited in Siewierska & Bakker 2013:171). Toba Batak has a two-voice symmetric system (AV vs. OV), but it does not seem to have a passive voice (Schachter 1984). Goudswaard (2005) describes a similar two-voice symmetric system in Ida’an-Begak (northeastern Borneo).6

What this means is that a clearer understanding of the Malay voice system is likely to help us make progress in the analysis of a number of other languages in the region as well.

3. Subjecthood and transitivity of the di- passive

A standard definition of passive clauses (Perlmutter & Postal 1977; Keenan 1985) involves three essential features: (a) the main verb is semantically transitive (two or more arguments); (b) the agent is not a core/direct argument — it may be omitted

6 Another language which may have a voice system similar to that of Malay is Melanau (northeastern Borneo). Chou (1999), working with the description in Clayre (1972), identifies three voice categories: Actor Focus, Object Focus, and “Verb Focus.” More research is needed to determine the syntactic properties of these categories.
entirely or expressed as an oblique argument or adjunct; (c) the patient is normally expressed as the grammatical subject, although some languages allow an “impersonal passive” in which there is no grammatical subject. Because the agent is not a core argument, a passive clause is syntactically intransitive (only one core argument).

A variety of evidence shows that the di-V construction is a true passive under this definition. The two key questions are these: (a) Is the patient really the grammatical subject? (b) Is the agent a core argument? There is clear evidence which shows that the answer to the first question is “yes,” while the answer to the second question is “no.”

Sandra Chung (1976a) and Marit Kana Vamarasi (1999) have identified a number of subjecthood properties in Indonesian. One of the most widely cited properties is the fact that only grammatical subjects can be relativized, clefted or questioned using the yang gap strategy. Examples (4a–b) show that subjects can be clefted, while direct objects cannot. Example (4c) shows that the patient of the di-V construction can be clefted, providing evidence that it is the grammatical subject.

As a number of authors have pointed out, direct objects in active sentences can be extracted when the AV prefix meN- is omitted, as shown in (4d). This is a fascinating issue, but one which is not directly relevant to voice alternations. The lack of prefix in such sentences is not due to a voice alternation, in contrast to the OV construction in (3a–c); Chung (1978) showed that “stem sentences” like those in (4d) are in fact active. (The position of the auxiliary relative to the agent pronoun is a crucial diagnostic for distinguishing the OV construction from an AV stem sentence.) I will have nothing more to say about stem sentences in the remainder of this paper.

A second subjecthood property is that only grammatical subjects can be controlled. Examples (5a–b) show that complement subjects can be controlled, while complement direct objects cannot. Example (5c) shows that the patient of the di-V construction can be controlled, providing further evidence that it is the grammatical subject.

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b. *Dia menolak untuk [polis mem-(p)eriksa __].
   3SG refuse COMP police AV-investigate
   (for: ‘He refused for the police to investigate him.’)

c. Dia menolak untuk [__ di-periksa oleh polis].
   3SG refuse COMP PASS-investigate by police
   ‘He refused to be investigated by the police.’

The same restrictions apply to the controllee in purpose clauses introduced by *untuk.* Examples (6a–b) show that subjects can be controlled in purpose clauses, while direct objects cannot. Example (6c) shows that the patient of the *di-V* construction can be controlled in purpose clauses.

(6) (adapted from Chung 1976a:89)

a. Kami mem-buka senjata itu untuk [__ mem-perbaiki=nya].
   1PL.EXCL AV-open rifle that COMP AV-repair=3
   ‘We took the rifle apart in order to repair it.’

b. *Kami mem-buka senjata itu untuk [tukang mem-perbaiki __].
   1PL.EXCL AV-open rifle that COMP smith AV-repair
   (for: ‘We took the rifle apart for the gunsmith to repair.’)

c. Kami mem-bawa senjata itu ke toko untuk [__ di-perbaiki].
   1PL.EXCL AV-take rifle that to shop COMP PASS-repair
   ‘We took the rifle to the shop to be repaired.’

A third subjecthood test is that the pronoun form *ia* ‘3SG’ can only function as a grammatical subject. Examples (7a–b) show that *ia* can be a subject, but not a direct object. Example (7c) shows that *ia* can occur as the patient of the *di-* construction, again confirming that the patient is the grammatical subject.

(7) a. *Ia telah men-curi wang itu.
   3SG PERF AV-steal money that
   ‘He/she stole the money.’

b. Harimau itu telah mem-bunuh dial*ia.
   tiger that PERF AV-kill 3SG
   ‘The tiger killed him/her.’

c. *Ia telah di-bunuh (oleh) harimau.
   3SG PERF PASS-steal by tiger
   ‘He/she was killed by a tiger.’ (adapted from Vamarasi 1999:53)

Based on this evidence, there can be no doubt that the patient of the *di-V* construction is the grammatical subject. The second question we need to address (is the agent of the *di-V* construction a core argument?) is potentially more difficult. In many Western Austronesian languages, it is difficult to identify properties which reliably distinguish core from oblique arguments. Several properties have been identified which can help us to make this distinction in Malay. However, several of these tests are difficult to apply to clitic pronouns. We will begin by examining the properties of non-clitic arguments.
First, core arguments in Malay are always expressed as NPs, never PPs. Since the agent of the *di*-V construction can always be preceded by the preposition *oleh*, this provides evidence that it is not a core argument.⁸ Second, Verhaar (1984:36ff) states that adverbials and oblique arguments can be “scrambled” into clause-initial position, whereas this is not possible for core arguments. Sentence (8b), in which the oblique argument is fronted, is grammatical; sentence (8c), in which the direct object is fronted, is ungrammatical. (Direct objects can be topicalized with a resumptive pronoun as in (8d), at least in Indonesian; but this is a different construction.) The fact that the agent of the *di*-V construction can be fronted, as in (9), indicates that it is an oblique argument.

(8) (adapted from Verhaar 1984)

a. *Ali menyembelih ayam besar ini untuk saya.*
   Ali AV.slaughter chicken big this for 1SG
   ‘Ali slaughtered this big chicken for me.’

b. *Untuk saya Ali menyembelih ayam besar ini.*
   for 1SG Ali AV.slaughter chicken big this
   ‘For me Ali slaughtered this big chicken.’

c. *Ayam besar ini Ali menyembelih untuk saya.*
   chicken big this Ali AV.slaughter for 1SG
   ‘This big chicken, Ali slaughtered it for me.’

d. *Ayam besar ini, Ali menyembelih=nya untuk saya.*
   chicken big this Ali AV.slaughter=3 for 1SG
   ‘This big chicken, Ali slaughtered it for me.’

(9) (adapted from Sneddon 1996:259)

*Oleh seorang jururawat Pak Hena di-suruh ke rumah.sakit.*
by one nurse Mr. Hena PASS-send to hospital
‘Mr. Hena was sent to the hospital by a nurse.’

A third test, which seems to work better in Indonesian than in Malaysian, is that only core arguments can launch “floating quantifiers.”⁹ Musgrave (2001) states that when the quantifier *semua(nya)* ‘all’ occurs at the end of the sentence, it can be understood as modifying any core argument, but not an oblique argument or adjunct. In example (10a), the sentence-final quantifier can be understood as modifying either the subject (‘all the children’) or direct object (‘all the sweets’). In example (10b), the sentence-final quantifier can be understood as modifying the subject (‘all the Sasak people’) but not the oblique argument (*with all their children*). The fact that the sentence-final quantifier cannot be understood as modifying the agent of the *di*-V construction in (10c) provides further evidence that the agent is an oblique argument.

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⁸ As noted above, *oleh* is optional if the agent immediately follows the verb. One might wonder whether the agent actually is a core argument when the preposition is omitted, but other criteria suggest that this is not the case.

⁹ Many Malaysians find sentences like those in (10) to be highly unnatural; and to the extent that they can be accepted at all, only the subject can be interpreted as “launching” the quantifier (Ashrafiqin Ahmad, p.c.).
(10) (adapted from Musgrave 2001)


child. RED that like sugar. RED that all

‘All the children like the sweets.’ OR: ‘The children like all the sweets.’

b. Orang-orang Sasak datang dengan anak-anak=nya semuanya.

person. RED Sasak come with children=3 all

‘All the Sasak people came with their children.’

NOT: *‘The Sasak people came with all their children.’

c. Oleh orang Sasak itu kanak-kanak itu di-pukul semuanya.

by person Sasak that children that PASS-hit all

‘The Sasak people beat all those children.’

NOT: *‘All the Sasak people beat those children.’

4. Subjecthood and transitivity of the OV construction

Now let us compare the syntactic properties of the di-V construction with those of the OV construction. The subjecthood tests discussed above show that the patient of the OV construction is the grammatical subject, just as we found for the di-V construction. The OV patient can be clefted (11a), can be controlled (11b–c), and can be expressed by the pronoun ia (11d):

(11)

a. Wayang.kulit=lah yang paling kami Ø-gemari.

shadow.puppet=FOC REL most 1PL.EXCL OV-admire

‘It is the shadow puppets that we most admire/enjoy.’ (Sneddon 1996:282)

b. Sabriyya... menolak untuk [ __ saya Ø-peluk].

(name) refuse for 2SG OV-hug

‘Sabriyya (the author’s baby daughter) ... refused for me to hug (her).’

(http:// sittyasiah.wordpress.com/2013/05/10/my-breastfeeding-drama-part-2/)

c. Saya mem-bawa surat itu untuk [ __ (dapat) kau=Ø-baca ].

1SG AV-take letter that to able 2SG=OV-read

‘I brought the letter for you to (be able to) read.’ (Arka & Manning 2008)

d. ... ia telah saya kenal sejak masih sama-sama kuliah di Yogya.

3SG PERF 1SG acquainted since still together lecture in (name)

‘I have known him since the time we were university students together in Yogyakarta.’

(http://paketongbumen.wordpress.com/tag/imakta/)

While the subjecthood properties are clear, it is somewhat harder to demonstrate that the agent of the OV construction is a core argument, as claimed in (1b). Of course, the fact that it cannot be marked with a preposition supports this claim. However, because the agent of the OV construction must always occur immediately before the verb, the “scrambling” test illustrated in (8)–(9) cannot really be applied. (In any case, if the OV agent is a core argument we would not expect it to undergo that type of scrambling.) Moreover, Musgrave (2001:84) shows that the OV agent (which he treats as a core argument) cannot launch floating quantifiers, for reasons which remain unclear. So we must look for other evidence to confirm its core status.

Arka & Manning (1998) and Arka (2005) suggest that the fixed position of the OV agent, adjacent to the verb, and the fact that it is obligatorily expressed, support
analyzing it as a core argument. This interpretation of the facts seems reasonable. Strict adjacency to the verb is a property of objects in English and a number of other languages, and it seems that oblique arguments are more likely to be optional than core arguments in many languages. Of course, it is not the case that all oblique arguments are optional; verbs like put in English select an obligatory oblique argument: John put the money *(on the table/in his pocket/under his pillow)*. However, when a certain argument position is required to be filled in a particular construction, regardless of the lexical properties of the verb, this seems like a plausible candidate for a core property.

The OV agent is also obligatory in many of the other Western Malayo-Polynesian languages mentioned in section 1 above, including Balinese (Arka 2003), Acehnese (Legate 2012), and all of the Sama-Bajau languages discussed by Miller (2013).\(^\text{10}\) Tjia (2007) states that the OV agent in Mualang is generally obligatory, but can sometimes be omitted under a non-specific interpretation (not for zero anaphora). The OV agent is obligatorily adjacent to the verb in these same languages.\(^\text{11}\)

Some authors have suggested that only core arguments can function as the “controller” (antecedent of PRO) in Malay control constructions. Arka & Manning (1998) state that control predicates like coba ‘try’ require that their controller be a core argument. They contrast grammatical examples (12a–b), where the controllers are AV subject and OV agent respectively, with (12c) where the controller is the PP agent of a di-V passive, which they mark as being ungrammatical. However, Arka (2000) reports that most Indonesian speakers find sentences like (12c) just as acceptable as sentences like (12a–b), and my own preliminary inquiry supports this finding.

\begin{align}
(12)\ a. & \textit{Mereka sudah men-coba } [\textit{mencari kerja di kota}]. \\
& \text{3PL already AV-try search.for work in city} \\
& \text{‘They have already tried to look for work in the city.’} \\
& \text{b. } [\textit{Mencari kerja di kota}] \textit{yang sudah mereka coba}. \\
& \text{search.for work in city REL already 3PL try} \\
& \text{‘To look for work in the city is what they have already tried.’} \\
& \text{c. } (?)[\textit{Mencari kerja di kota}] \textit{sudah di-coba oleh mereka}. \\
& \text{search.for work in city already PASS-try by 3PL} \\
& \text{‘To look for work in the city is what has already been tried by them.’}
\end{align}

It is not clear whether the examples in (12) actually involve control or not. Both Indonesian coba ‘try’ and its Malaysian variant cuba can take noun phrase objects, as illustrated in (13a–b), as well as controlled complement clauses. Moreover, verb phrases in the active voice have a gerund-like use in which they can occupy noun phrase positions, as illustrated in (13c). In order to be sure that the examples in (12) do involve control, we would need to find a way to rule out the possibility that their clausal constituent is simply a nominalized (gerund-like) VP occupying a noun phrase position.

\begin{align}
(13)\ a. & \textit{Sebenarnya doa ini telah saya cuba}, \\
& \text{actually prayer this PERF 1SG try} \\
& \text{b. } [\textit{Coba} \textit{mencari kerja di kota}] \textit{yang sudah mereka coba}. \\
& \text{try search.for work in city REL already 3PL try} \\
& \text{‘To try to look for work in the city is what they have already tried.’} \\
& \text{c. } ([\textit{Mencari kerja di kota}] \textit{yang sudah mereka coba}) \textit{sudah di-coba oleh mereka}. \\
& \text{search.for work in city REL already PASS-try by 3PL} \\
& \text{‘To try to look for work in the city is what has already been tried by them.’}
\end{align}

\(^{10}\) Walton (1986) states that the OV agent in Pangutaran can only be omitted via zero anaphora to a definite antecedent.

\(^{11}\) The OV agent can only be expressed as a clitic pronoun in Sama Bangini’, Central Sama, and Southern Sama; so in these languages, it must not only be adjacent but also phonologically bound.
maka saya mendapati=nya sangat bermanfaat
CONJ 1SG find=3SG very beneficial
(Imam Nawawi, discussing a prayer to find lost objects) ‘Actually I have tried this prayer, and I have found it very effective.’ (http://www.scribd.com/doc/54436336/DOA-Mencari-Barang-Hilang)

b. Pekerjaan pertama yang di-cuba oleh H. dan Q. ialah menjadi polis.
work first REL PASS-try by — and — COP become police
‘The first work that was tried by Hasya and Qistina was becoming policewomen.’
(http://emiliaputeri.blogspot.com/2013_11_01_archive.html)

c. [Mencari kerja di kota] tidak begitu mudah.
search for work in city NEG like that easy
‘To look for work in the city is not so easy.’
(Sneddon 1996:307)
Chung (1976a) uses control into adverbial purpose clauses marked with untuk as a test for core vs. oblique status, stating that only core arguments can be controllers in that construction, but Vamarasi (1999:154) challenges this claim. She does not actually present any examples in which the controller is marked with oleh, but natural examples like that in (14) are attested. A control-based test for core argument status would be extremely valuable if it could be proven to be reliable, because it could be applied equally to clitics, free pronouns, full noun phrases, and pro-dropped arguments. But it seems that so far, all the tests of this type which have been proposed remain controversial at best.

(14) Beberapa regulasi ditetapkan oleh Pemerintah [untuk meningkatkan cakupan pemberian ASI eksklusif di Indonesia].
‘Many regulations were drawn up by the government in order to increase the number of mothers in Indonesia who feed their babies exclusively with mother’s milk (during the first six months of life).’ (http://eprints.undip.ac.id/32667/2/dini_2.pdf)

Another test proposed by Arka & Manning (1998) is that only core arguments can be left-dislocated (topicalized with a resumptive pronoun). They provide examples showing that this is possible for subjects (15a) and OV agents (15b) but not PP agents (15c). Sneddon (1996:280–281) states that this construction is also possible for object NPs (16a–b) and for possessors of subject NPs (16c–d).

(15) (from Arka & Manning 1998)
   a. Orang itu, dia tidak mau datang.
      person that 3SG NEG want arrive
      ‘That person, he refused to come.’
   b. Orang itu, saya yang dia cari-cari.
      person that 1SG REL 3SG seek
      ‘As for that person, I am the one who he is looking for.’
   c. (?*)Orang itu, saya yang di-cari-cari oleh dia.
      person that 1SG REL PASS-seek by 3SG
      ‘As for that person, I am the one who is being looked for by him.’
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(16) (from Sneddon 1996)
   a. Surat itu, saya belum terima=nya.
      letter that 1SG not.yet receive=3
      ‘Concerning that letter, I haven’t received it yet.’
   b. Apa yang terjadi kemudian, anda sendiri mungkin pernah mengalami=nya.
      what REL happen next 2 self possibly EXPER experience=3
      ‘What happened next you yourself have possibly experienced.’
   c. Mahasiswa itu, rambut=nya tidak pernah di-sisir.
      student that hair=3 not ever PASS-comb
      ‘That student, his hair is never combed.’
   d. Pak Ali, istri=nya di-operasi.
      Mr. (name) wife=3 PASS-operate
      ‘Mr. Ali, his wife was operated on.’

However, some Indonesian speakers find (15c) fully acceptable, and the same is true for left-dislocation of the objects of other prepositions as well (17).

(17) a. Mahasiswa itu, Pak Ali memberi 20.000 rupiah kepada=nya.
      student that Mr. Ali give — — to=3
      ‘That student, Mr. Ali gave 20,000 rupiah to him.’
   b. Mahasiswa itu, Pak Ali membeli baju baru untuk=nya.
      student that Mr. Ali buy shirt new for=3
      ‘That student, Mr. Ali bought a new shirt for him.’

More investigation is needed into the restrictions on left-dislocation; but even the undisputed fact that it is possible for certain possessors to undergo left-dislocation means that it cannot be restricted solely to core arguments. Given the current state of our understanding, left-dislocation does not seem to provide a reliable test for core status in Malay.

At the current time, the fixed position of the OV agent, its obligatory adjacency to the verb, and the fact that it is obligatorily expressed, seem to provide the best available evidence for analyzing it as a core argument. These three features are shared by OV agents in Balinese, whose core status is confirmed by a number of other good tests. The evidence in Malay is not as overwhelming, but given the evidence currently available, the most plausible analysis seems to be that the OV agent is a core argument. We turn now to the status of the agentive clitic in the di-V=nya construction.

5. Binding evidence and the status of agentive =nya

Arka & Manning (1998) argue that the agent of the di-V construction is an oblique argument except when it is expressed by the pronoun =nya cliticized to the verb. They analyze the agentive =nya as a core argument, meaning that the di-V=nya construction is not a passive, but a kind of ergative/inverse clause (like the OV). Their primary evidence for this claim is the contrast in binding properties illustrated in (18). Based on the theory of reflexive binding proposed by Manning (1996), Arka & Manning argue that the agent expressed by the clitic pronoun =nya in (18b) must be a core argument, because it can bind a reflexive which is a core argument. The prepositional agent in (18a) is unable to bind a reflexive in the same position, because this PP is not a core argument.
The fact that the OV agent can bind a reflexive which is a core argument, as seen in (18c), is cited as evidence that the OV agent is also core.

(18) (from Arka & Manning 1998)
   a. ?*Diri=nya di-serahkan ke polisi oleh Amir.
      self=3 PASS-surrender to police by (name)
      (for: ‘Himself was surrendered to the police by Amir.’)
   b. Diri=nya selalu di-utamakan=nya.
      self=3 always PASS-prioritize=3
      ‘Himself is always prioritized by him.’ (i.e. ‘He always gives priority to himself.’)
   c. Diri=nya mesti dia Ø-serahkan ke polisi.
      self=3 must 3SG OV-surrender to police
      ‘He must surrender himself to the police.’

One complicating factor in assessing the significance of these examples is that the contrast between (18a) vs. (18b) does not constitute a true minimal pair. If we try to replace the PP in (18a) with the agentive clitic =nya, the result is not fully acceptable, as illustrated in (19).

(19)
   ??Diri=nya di-serahkan=nya ke polisi.
   self=3 PASS-surrender=3 to police
   ‘Himself was surrendered to the police by him.’

It is not clear to me why (19) should be worse than (18b), but this question is beyond the scope of the present paper. The crucial question for present purposes is whether or not the examples in (18a–b) involve real syntactic binding. I suggest that they do not.

Cole & Hermon (2005a) state that the short reflexive form (diri + pronoun) may either be syntactically bound, like a true reflexive, or take a discourse antecedent like a plain (non-reflexive) pronoun. A similar point is made by Kartono (2013), who refers to the short reflexive form as a “half-reflexive”. He illustrates this variable interpretation of the short reflexive with examples like those in (20).

(20) (from Kartono 2013)
   a. Andi mem-(p)ukul diri=nya_{diri}.
      Andi AV-hit self=3
      ‘Andi hit himself/him/her.’
   b. [Mertua=nya Rita]_{mertua} sangat meny-(s)ayangi diri=nya_{diri}.
      mother-in-law=3 Rita really AV-love self=3
      ‘Rita’s mother-in-law really loves herself/her.’
   c. Diri=ku tergila-gila pada=mu.
      self=1SG be.crazy to=2SG
      ‘I am crazy about you.’ (lit: ‘Myself is crazy about you.’)

Example (21) also illustrates the potential for the short reflexive to take a discourse antecedent; such examples are quite common in natural text. Examples (22)–(25) seem to require a LOGOPHORIC interpretation, meaning that the reflexive form is interpreted as referring to the participant whose thoughts, words, or feelings are being reported. The example in (24) is especially interesting in this regard; here the context (a trial for bribery) makes it clear that the logophoric interpretation (‘self’ = Nisa) wins out over
the syntactic binding interpretation (‘self’ = Hambit). This logophoric use is also quite common in natural text.

(21) Adalah amat susah bagi lelaki untuk pulang ke rumah
EXIST very difficult for man COMP return to house

yang mana diri=nya tidak di-hormati.
REL where self=3 NEG PASS-respect

‘It is very difficult for a man to return to a home where he (lit: ‘himself’) is not respected.’  (http://alhafiz.net/search/masa+solat+malaysia/feed/rss2/)

(22) Di-akui oleh=nya, bahwa diri=nya sedang belajar mengendarai mobil.
PASS-admit by=3 COMP self=3 CONT learn drive car

‘It was admitted by him, that self, was just learning to drive a car.’  (http://infojambi.com/topik-utama/5334-kantor-bupati-kerinci-dihantam-avanza.html)

(23) beberapa orang di-akui oleh=nya telah mempengaruhi diri=nya
several person PASS-admit by=3 PERF influence self=3
dalam urusan berakting.
in matter acting

‘Several people are admitted by her [actress Ine Febriyanti] to have influenced herself, in the matter of acting.’ (i.e. helped to train her or influenced her method of acting)  (http://portal.cbn.net.id/cbprtl/cyberwoman/detail.aspx?x=Smart+Woman&y=cyberwoman|0|0|4|13)

(24) Kemudian, diakui Nisa, Hambit meminta dirinya menemani Cornelis
menyerahkan uang tersebut…

‘Then, it was admitted by Nisa, Hambit asked self (= Nisa) to accompany Cornelis to de deliver the aforementioned money…’  (https://koran-indonesia.com/2014/01/terima-rp-75-juta-chairun-nisa-naik-haji/)

(25) Irianti pun mengaku dirinya sama sekali tak diberitahu sang suami jika dirinya
diajukan Presiden SBY sebagai calon Kapolri pengganti BHD.

‘Irianti also swore that she (lit: ‘herself’) was not by any means informed by her husband when he (lit: ‘himself’) was nominated by President SBY (Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono) as candidate for Chief of National Police of Indonesia, replacing BHD (Bambang Hendarso Danuri).’  (http://www.tribunnews.com/nasional/2010/10/14/irianti-tak-pernah-berharap-timur-jadi-kapolri)

I suggest that the contrast illustrated in (18a–b) is due to discourse or pragmatic factors, rather than the syntactic status of the arguments. I suggest that the greater acceptability of (18b) is due to the high inherent topicality of the clitic pronoun =nya. Givón (1983:18) proposes several principles of iconicity to help explain the syntactic encoding of topics. One of these is: “The more disruptive, surprising, discontinuous or hard to process a topic is, the more coding material must be assigned to it” (emphasis in the original). He states that the effects of this principle are observed in the following “scale of phonological size”:

(26) Full NP > stressed/independent pronoun > unstressed/bound pronoun > zero anaphora
[more discontinuous/inaccessible topics] [more continuous accessible topics]
The use of a clitic pronoun for the agent in (18b) implies reference to a highly topical participant, and this topical participant would be available to function as a discourse antecedent for diri=nya, creating the observed co-referential interpretation. The agentive PP in (18a), in contrast, is a form that would not normally be selected if the agent is highly topical. This fact makes it unnatural for the hearer to assume that there is a discourse antecedent for diri=nya which is co-referential with the agentive PP.

If this interpretation of the binding evidence is correct, it becomes possible to view all uses of the di-V construction as true passives. In other words, I am proposing that the agent of the di-V construction is always an oblique argument, whether it is expressed as a PP, post-verbal NP, or clitic pronoun =nya. In all three cases, the agent functions syntactically as an oblique argument. The difference in interpretation with respect to the short reflexive form follows from the discourse properties of =nya rather than its syntactic status.

Whereas Arka & Manning (1998) identify the agentive =nya as a core argument, Arka (2005) refers to it as “semi-core”. Aside from the binding facts cited above, it has very few of the diagnostic properties that Arka uses to identify core arguments.12 Arka notes that this “semi-core” classification is awkward: it seems to imply that the di-V=nya construction is neither passive nor ergative, but some intermediate voice category. However, if the binding evidence is not in this case directly relevant to the core-oblique distinction, then there is no reason not to analyze di-V=nya as a true passive.

Before we accept this conclusion, however, it seems natural to ask whether there is other binding evidence that might support Arka & Manning’s analysis of agentive =nya. Cole & Hermon (2005a) and Kartono (2013) both state that long reflexive forms like diri=nya sendiri are true anaphors, requiring “a c-commanding antecedent in a local domain” (Kartono 2013:30). What happens if we replace the short form diri in examples like (18) with the long reflexive? It turns out that the same contrast emerges: most speakers still find the form where the reflexive is co-referential with agentive =nya (27b) more acceptable than the form where the reflexive is co-referential with an agentive PP (27a). In addition, speakers report that sentences like (27b) have a contrastive or emphatic feel, which is not present in (18b). This may be due to the emphatic function of sendiri.

(27) a. ?*[Diri=nya sendiri di-serahkan ke polisi oleh Amir.]
   self=3 self PASS-surrender to police by (name)
   (for: ‘Himself was surrendered to the police by Amir.’)

   b. Dirilenya sendiri selalu di-utamakan=nya.
   self=3 self always PASS-prioritize=3
   ‘Himself is always prioritized by him.’ (i.e. ‘He always gives priority to himself.’)

If Cole & Hermon (2005a) and Kartono (2013) are correct that diri=nya sendiri must always be syntactically bound within its minimal clause, then the contrast in (27) seems to provide evidence for a difference in syntactic status between agentive =nya vs. agentive PP. However, corpus evidence clearly shows that the long reflexive diri=nya

12 Arka examines a number of tests for core vs. oblique status. He concludes that an immediately post-verbal agent NP is an oblique, but classifies the agentive clitic pronoun =nya as “semi-core.” However, the only syntactic property which distinguishes these two argument types is the apparent “binding” of the short reflexive. Chung (1976a) seems to adopt a very similar analysis of agentive =nya.
*sendiri* can take a discourse antecedent when there is no local antecedent available. Some examples are presented in (28).

   actually self PASS-honored by kings
   ‘In fact he himself (Gautama Buddha) was honored by kings.’

b. *kesombongan=nya itu hanya merugikan dirinya.*sendiri.
   pride=3 that only cheat/harm self
   ‘That pride of his, only harmed himself, (= Pharaoh).’
   (Doa Mengharapkan *Anak Saleh* by Hendri Kusuma Wahyudi (2010), books.google.com/books?isbn=6028236578)

c. *Lagu ini hanya cocok di-nyanyikan oleh=nya.*
   song this only suitable PASS-sing by=3
   *Lagu ini mencerminkan dirinya.*sendiri.
   song this reflect self
   ‘This song is only suitable to be sung by him, (= Korean singer Park Jae-Sang). This song reflects himself, ’

Since long reflexives can take discourse antecedents, the greater acceptability of the agentive clitic as compared to an agentive PP as a potential antecedent for these reflexives may again be due to pragmatic factors rather than syntactic status, specifically the high inherent topicality of the clitic pronoun =nya.\(^{13}\) If this is correct, we would predict that unacceptable examples like (18a) and (27a) should become much better if the agentive PP contained a pronoun (olah=nya) rather than a proper name (olah Amir); and in fact, this does seem to be the case, as illustrated by the minimal pair in (29).

(29) a. *Diri=nya sendiri selalu di-utamakan oleh Amir.*
   self=3 self always PASS-prioritize by (name)
   (for: ‘Himself is always prioritized by Amir.’)

b. *Diri=nya sendiri selalu di-utamakan oleh=nya.*
   self=3 self always PASS-prioritize by=3
   ‘Himself is always prioritized by him.’ (i.e. ‘He always gives priority to himself.’)

Example (29b) might be interpreted as showing that it is possible for the agentive PP of a passive verb to bind a long reflexive in subject position. Similar examples are not uncommon in natural text; a sample of these is presented in (30b–d).\(^{14}\) But since the agentive PP in these examples contains a pronoun, rather than a proper name or lexical

\(^{13}\) Regina Yanti (p.c.) informs me that some speakers find sentences (27a) and (27b) equally acceptable, suggesting that the difference perceived by other speakers may be pragmatic rather than syntactic in nature.

\(^{14}\) Note that example (30d) involves a *ter-* passive rather than a *di-* passive; but the agent is marked with the same preposition, and is clearly oblique.
NP, it seems likely that the intended interpretation arises through coreference with a discourse antecedent, rather than from syntactic binding by a local antecedent.

(30) a. Rio di-manfaatkan oleh=nya untuk kepentingan dirinya.sendiri...
(name) PASS-exploit by=3G for importance self
   ‘Rio was being exploited by her, (= his girlfriend) for her, own (lit: self’s) advantage.’ (http://www.hutanta.com/ebooks/bypass/EB000005JK)

b. Dirinya.sendiri tak tampak15 oleh=nya...
self NEG PASS-seen by=3
   ‘Himself, is not seen by him, (because he only looks at other people).’ (http://thoriqohalfisbuqi.wordpress.com/2010/01/26/suluk-wragul-sunan-bonang-2/)

c. Yang di-pikirkan oleh=nya hanya=lah kepentingan dirinya.sendiri...
REL PASS-think.about by=3G for=FOC importance self
   ‘What he, thinks about is only his, own (lit: self’s) self-interest…’ (http://archiveofourown.org/work5s/513076)

d. … lalu turunlah ruh pada kedua mata maka terlihatlah oleh=nya dirinya sendiri.
   (When God blew the spirit into Adam’s body) ‘… then the spirit descended to his two eyes and he saw himself.’ (lit: ‘himself was seen by him.’) (https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/tasawuf/conversations/messages/1480)

Kurniawan (2013:37–38) notes that agentive PPs can bind subject reflexives in Sundanese: “[A]n actor PP in a passive can bind a reflexive in subject position”, even though “[t]he object cannot be the antecedent for a reflexive in subject position in active clauses.” However, this does not appear to be the case in Malay, at least for the long reflexives. An apparent example of a non-pronominal passive agent binding a subject reflexive is presented in (31); but the agent in this example is a continuing topic from the previous paragraph. So even this example should probably be analyzed as a case of discourse antecedence rather than syntactic binding. Local binding of non-subject reflexives is possible, as illustrated in (32); but examples of this type do not directly bear on the Arka & Manning analysis.

(31) Bukan dirinya.sendiri yang di-amat-amati anak itu.
NEG self REL PASS-monitor child that
   ‘It was not himself that was watched so closely by the child.’ (http://paskalina.wordpress.com/2009/04/30/cerita-anak-anak-dalam-cermin/)

(32) Rio di-manfaatkan oleh Lala untuk kepentingan dirinya.sendiri...
(name) PASS-exploit by (name) for importance self
   ‘Rio, was being exploited by Lalaj, for her, own (lit: self’s) advantage.’

It appears that a non-pronominal passive agent cannot bind a long reflexive in subject position, as illustrated in (33a). However, this is possible with the short reflexive, as illustrated in (33b). The fact that the agent in these examples is indefinite rules out the possibility of a discourse antecedent.

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15 I take tampak to be an irregular passive form, corresponding to the AV form nampak. However, both of these forms can also be used as adjectives meaning ‘visible’.
(33) a. *Bukan dirinya sendiri sahaja yang di-rugikan oleh se-orang pencandu.*
    NEG self only REL PASS-harm by one-CLS addict
    ‘It is not just himself that is harmed by an opium addict.’

b. *Bukan dirinya sahaja yang di-rugikan oleh se-orang pencandu.*
    NEG self only REL PASS-harm by one-CLS addict
    ‘It is not just himself that is harmed by an opium addict.’

To summarize the conclusions of this section, I have argued that all uses of the *di-*V construction can be viewed as true passives. The strongest argument against this hypothesis has been based on the binding properties of agentive *=nya* when it attaches to the verb, but this evidence is best explained in terms of pragmatic rather than syntactic factors. In the absence of clear evidence to the contrary, it seems natural to assume that the prefix *di-* has a uniform syntactic function, regardless of how the agent is expressed. However, the polysemy of *di-* has also been argued on the basis of its discourse functions, an issue to which we now turn.

6. The functions of the *di-* passive

In addition to the syntactic evidence discussed above, the idea that the *di-*V construction is always a passive has been challenged on functional grounds as well. As many authors have pointed out, the *di-*V construction is used in ways not normally associated with passive voice in most other languages. Most notably, the *di-*V construction is used in narrative “to describe a series of chronologically ordered punctiliar actions by a single actor” (Kaswanti Purwo 1988:205).\(^{16}\)

McCune (1979) coined the term “Passive of Narrative Sequence” to refer to this use of the *di-* passive for main-line events in Indonesian narrative. Some linguists regard this description as a contradiction in terms. They feel that if the *di-* form is used to express main-line events it cannot be a passive, because passives universally encode background information. This assumption motivated Hopper (1979, 1983) and Verhaar (1984, 1988) to identify the *di-* form as an “ergative” construction when it encodes main-line events in narrative, and as a “passive” in most other contexts.

Problems with the Hopper-Verhaar type of analysis have been pointed out by McCune (1979), Cumming & Wouk (1987), and Levinsohn (1991), among others. Here I would like to focus on the question of how the term PASSIVE should be defined. In sections 1–5 above I assumed a purely syntactic definition, but Hopper and Verhaar (among others) have assumed that discourse function (backgrounding) must also be part of the definition.

Another influential way of defining voice categories in terms of their discourse functions is proposed by Givón (1994). Building on Cooreman’s work on Chamorro, Givón defines voice categories in terms of topicality as follows:

\[(34) \text{VOICE} \quad \text{RELATIVE TOPICALITY} \]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>AGT &gt; PAT</th>
<th>AGT &lt; PAT</th>
<th>AGT &lt;&lt; PAT</th>
<th>AGT &gt;&gt; PAT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>active/direct</td>
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<tr>
<td>inverse</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>passive</td>
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<tr>
<td>antipassive</td>
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</table>

\(^{16}\) The first event in the series is often presented in active voice (*meN-V*) with subsequent main-line events by the same actor expressed in the passive (Hopper 1983:79).
The degree of topicality for each argument is measured in terms of topic continuity: how recently that argument was previously mentioned in the discourse, how many successive clauses it continues to be referred to, etc. (Givón 1983). The above definition of the active/direct voice states that in an active transitive clause, “the agent is more topical than the patient, but the patient retains considerable topicality” (Givón 1994:8). The definition of the passive voice states that in a passive clause, “the patient is more topical than the agent, and the agent is extremely non-topical” (Givón 1994:9). The crucial assumption in these definitions is that the hierarchy of grammatical relations (subject > direct object > indirect object > oblique) correlates with degrees of topicality, and in particular that syntactic demotion to oblique or adjunct status correlates with greatly reduced topicality.

Givón’s definition reflects the widely-held assumption that passives universally topicalize the patient. If (as argued above) the di-V construction in Malay is a true passive, it provides a counter-example to this assumption. As noted above, this use of the passive is most common precisely when the agent, rather than the patient, is the discourse topic (highest in topic continuity). An example from a Malay short story is presented in (35). 17

(35) **Tudung botol di-rentap keluar, kemudian... di-jurus=nya minyak**

*PASS-cover bottle PASS-pull go.out afterward PASS-pour=3 oil*

*tanah itu ke atas lantai... Botol itu lalu di-himbau=nya ke*

earth that to top floor bottle that then PASS-thrown=3 to

*tengah sungai. Di-keluarkan=nya mancis dari belitan kain di*

*middle river PASS-take.out=3 match from fold cloth at*

*pinggan=nya, lalu di-nyalakan. Di-campak=nya ke lantai perahu.*

*waist=3 then PASS-light PASS-throw=3 to floor boat*

‘She pulled off the bottle cap, then... she poured the kerosene onto the floor (of the boat)... Then she threw the bottle to the middle of the river. She took out a match from the fold of the sarong at her waist, then lit it. She threw it onto the floor of the boat.’

Notice that all of these clauses involve the same actor (an impoverished widow with two children) who is already established as the current topic of discussion. The agent of the passive in each clause is either implicit (zero anaphora) or expressed by the clitic =nya. The patient/subject of the passive may be previously mentioned in the story, like the bottle and the kerosene that it contains; it may be inferable, like the bottle cap; or it may be brand new and unexpected, like the match. The information status of the patient is irrelevant to the choice of voice marker, though it may influence word order (pre-verbal vs. post-verbal position for the subject). Clearly the Malay passive does not (in general) topicalize the patient.

Topicality is also one of the criteria that Hopper and Verhaar use to distinguish “ergative” uses of the di-V construction, which correspond to Givón’s “inverse” category, from those that they recognize as passive. Verhaar (1988:366) states that “ergative Agents cannot be new (e.g. contrastive) information … in the clause, whereas Agents of

passives definitely can.” It is certainly true that agents tend to be highly topical in narrative, not just in Malay but probably in all languages. This fact alone would explain the preference for agents in foregrounded *di*-V clauses to be expressed as clitic pronouns or zero anaphora. Therefore the use of these anaphoric devices does not constitute evidence for distinguishing two different syntactic constructions marked by the prefix *di*.

The discourse function of the passive is an interesting and significant research question. However, as the discussion by Cumming & Wouk (1987) indicates, this question cannot even be asked (in any non-circular way) if the passive is defined in terms of its discourse function; we need to start with a prior definition of the construction, like that stated in sections 2–3, and then ask how it is used.

The Malay data provide another reason to prefer a purely syntactic definition of the passive: only a syntactic definition can reveal the correlation between voice category and verb morphology. Under either the Hopper-Verhaar or the Givónian approach, there is no way to identify the voice category of a Malay sentence simply by looking at it in isolation. It is necessary to look at the wider discourse context, measuring topic continuity or making judgments about foreground vs. background information, before one can distinguish passive from ergative/inverse. Under the syntactic definition proposed in sections 2–3, the morphology on the verb is a direct reflection of voice category, as in English and other familiar languages.

Interestingly, the discourse functions of the passive and OV are not uniform across the languages mentioned in section 2 which have the same voice system as Malay. In Mualang, as in Malay, the passive is the preferred form for encoding main-line events in narrative (Tjia 2007:159). The same is true for Sama Bangingi’, which leads Gault (1999) to refer to the passive construction as “narrative mode.”

However, the pattern of voice selection in Balinese is quite different. Pastika (1999) states that the passive is relatively infrequent in Balinese narrative discourse: passive forms account for only 6.4% percent of all transitive clauses in spoken narrative, and for 9.8% percent in written narrative. Setting aside the passive examples, Pastika found that in spoken narrative the ratio of AV to OV in main clauses was 50-50, whereas in written narrative the ratio was around 70% AV to 30% OV.

Miller (2007) shows that West Coast Bajau has a pattern of voice selection very similar to that of Balinese, providing a striking contrast with Sama Bangingi’. Both of these languages belong to the Sama-Bajau subgroup. Thus even between closely related languages whose voice systems seem to be very similar, the discourse functions of the voice categories, and of the passive construction in particular, can be quite different.18

This shows us again the importance of distinguishing morpho-syntactic categories from discourse functions.

The preference for using passive voice to encode main-line events in Malay narrative appears to be a retention from an earlier stage of the language in which the passive was used even more widely. Cumming (1991:162) compares a sample of narrative material from Classical Malay texts with a sample of narrative material from two modern

18 One difference between the two languages is that in Sama Bangingi’ the OV agent can only be expressed as a pronominal clitic, and is most often first or second person rather than third person; in West Coast Bajau, the OV agent can be a full noun phrase. This would explain some of the difference in frequency between passive vs. OV, but not between active vs. non-active voices.
Indonesian novels. She reports that 73% of the transitive clauses in the Classical Malay sample were passive, compared to 31% for the modern Indonesian sample.\(^{19}\)

This generalized preference for the passive in Classical Malay is preserved in some traditional Malay speech forms, including proverbs and pantun (a four-line rhyme). The proverbs in (36) illustrate how transitive verbs are very commonly expressed in the passive voice, even when the agent seems more topical, as in (36c–d).\(^{20}\) Of course, this is not to say that transitive verbs in proverbs cannot appear in the active voice, only that this happens far less frequently than we would expect.

\(36\) a. *Marah jangan di-pukat, rezeki jangan di-tolak*

\begin{itemize}
\item anger don’t PASS-net
\item fortune don’t PASS-push
\end{itemize}

‘Don’t go looking for offense or reject good fortune/opportunity.’

b. *Alah di-belii, menang di-pakai*

\begin{itemize}
\item lose PASS-buy
\item win PASS-wear/use
\end{itemize}

‘Lose when you buy it, win when you use it.’ (i.e. ‘You get what you pay for.’)

c. *Buruk muka, cermin di-pecah*

\begin{itemize}
\item bad face
\item mirror PASS-shatter
\end{itemize}

‘The face is ugly so the mirror gets smashed.’ (i.e. ‘Shifting the blame to someone else’.)

d. *Di-telan mati emak, di-luah mati bapak*

\begin{itemize}
\item PASS-swallow
\item die mother
\item PASS-spit.out die father
\end{itemize}

‘If you swallow it mother dies, if you spit it out father dies.’ (i.e. ‘Damned if you do and damned if you don’t.’)

One interesting feature of the passive in Classical Malay is that the agentive clitic =nya can occur together with a co-referential agentive PP marked with oleh. Two examples from the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* are presented in (37).\(^{21}\)

\(37\) a. *Maka oleh Patih Gajah. Mada di-pegang=nya tangan Laksamana*

\begin{itemize}
\item PRTCL by vizier (name)
\item PASS-hold=3 hand
\item admiral
\end{itemize}

\begin{itemize}
\item lalu PASS-bring=3 eat
\end{itemize}

‘So Vizier Gajah Mada took the Laksamana’s hand and led him to dinner.’

(Tuah 156:34)

b. *Maka di-lihat=nya oleh orang perahu Laksamana yang datang itu…*

\begin{itemize}
\item PRTCL PASS-see=3 by person
\item boat
\item admiral REL
\item arrive that
\end{itemize}

‘And the people saw the Laksamana’s boat, which was approaching…’

(Tuah 414:27)

This kind of co-occurrence is not generally possible in modern Malay, but it is somewhat reminiscent of the passive construction in Acehnese. A transitive agent in

\(^{19}\) In these calculations, Cumming apparently includes OV clauses together with *di-* passives, referring to both as “Patient Trigger” clauses. However, she states that OV clauses were relatively infrequent in her samples.

\(^{20}\) These proverbs are taken from Hamilton (1955).

\(^{21}\) Data obtained from the Malay Concordance Project of the Australian National University (http://mcp.anu.edu.au).
Acehnese obligatorily triggers a kind of agreement or clitic doubling on the verb in both active and passive clauses. Since the PP agent of a passive is not expected to trigger agreement on the verb, the analysis of the Acehnese construction as a passive has been controversial (Lawler 1977, 1988; Durie 1988). However, Legate (2012) uses evidence from extraction, quantifier float, and word order variation to show that the passive analysis is correct.

7. Conclusion
In this paper I have argued that the di-V construction is not polysemous but has a single use, namely to mark the passive. The main syntactic challenge to this claim involves clauses in which the agent is expressed by the clitic pronoun =nya. However, the main evidence which has been cited in support of analyzing the agentive =nya as a core argument comes from reflexive binding. We have seen that the contrasts in acceptability which form the basis for this argument actually seem to be driven by pragmatics rather than syntactic structure.

Functional arguments for the polysemy of di-V come from the fact that it is used to express the main-line events in a narrative sequence. If “passive” is defined in terms of backgrounding, or in terms of topicalizing the patient, then the di-V construction is not a passive. However, as we have seen, functionally defined voice categories would not correlate with either the morphological markers of voice or the syntactic patterns of the language. The strong correlation between verb morphology and syntactic properties discussed in sections 3–4 would be unexplained under such an approach.

As noted above, the evidence for the core argument status of the OV agent is less clear in Malay than in Balinese, but still sufficient to make this the most plausible analysis. Overall, then, this study supports the work of previous authors who posit a Balinese-type voice system for Malay: a symmetric alternation between two transitive voices, AV vs. OV, plus a detransitivizing passive. The existence of such languages has important implications not only for Malayo-Polynesian studies, but also for formal and typological theories of voice in general.

Abbreviations

| 1 | first person | INCL | inclusive |
| 2 | second person | LOC | locative |
| 3 | third person | NEG | negator |
| AV | actor voice | OBJ | object |
| CLS | classifier | OBL | oblique argument |
| COMP | complementizer | OV | objective voice |
| CONJ | conjunction | PASS | passive |
| CONT | continuous | PERF | perfect |
| COP | copula | PL | plural |
| EMPH | emphatic particle | PRTCL | particle |
| EXCL | exclusive | RED | reduplication |
| EXIST | existential | REL | relativizer |
| EXP | experiential perfect | SG | singular |
| FOC | focus | SUBJ | subject |

References


