

Does Sasaknese have Inflectional Phrase?

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ABSTRACT

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In generative grammar, particularly within X-bar theory, all syntactic structures are endocentric. This principle dictates that a clause or sentence must be analyzed as an inflectional phrase (IP), with the inflectional category as its head. While this principle has been attested across numerous languages and is considered universal, languages like *Javanese* exhibit patterns distinct from inflectional systems such as English. This study examines the existence of inflectional phrases in *Sasaknese*, which have not been discussed yet in any other studies of Sasak language, using data from *Sasaknese* book collected through observational methods. The analysis confirms that *Sasaknese* lexicons expressing tense, aspect, and modality belong to inflections and project maximally as an Inflectional Phrase.

I. Introduction

In the traditional framework of constituent structure, syntactic constructions are categorized as either endocentric or exocentric depending on the presence of a head element within the construction. Endocentric constructions, like noun phrases (NP) and verb phrases (VP), contain a head that shares the same grammatical category as the phrase itself. In contrast, exocentric constructions do not have a head element inside them. Examples of exocentric constructions under this model include clauses and sentences [1]. A phrase is a unit that potentially consists of two or more words, but does not possess the propositional characteristics of a sentence. In other words, in actual usage, a phrase may consist of only a single word [2]. This definition aligns with the view of generative syntax. For instance, Radford states that a phrase is a group of elements that form a constituent, without being limited by the number of elements it contains [3].

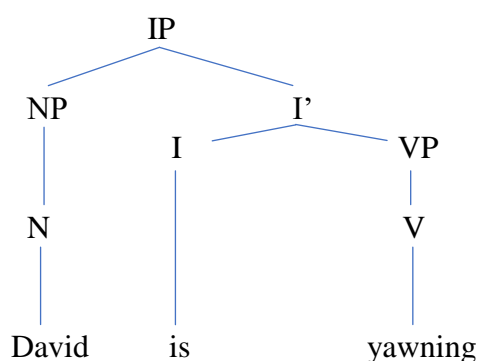
From a textual perspective, phrases can be classified into various types, such as Noun Phrases (NP), Verb Phrases (VP), and Prepositional Phrases (PP), among others. These categories are determined by the word classes that define the phrase type [3]. For example, a Prepositional Phrase (PP) generally consists of a preposition followed by a complement belonging to a different category. It is identified as a PP because the preposition or relational term appears first, preceding its complement [2]. The structure and syntactic behavior of Prepositional Phrases vary across languages, largely influenced by the morphological characteristics unique to each language.

Unlike the traditional model, the generative approach to constituent structure claims that all syntactic constructions are endocentric, meaning the head of a phrase belongs to the same category as the phrase itself [4]. According to this perspective, a clause or sentence is no longer represented as a Sentence (S), as in the traditional framework [5], but rather as an Inflectional Phrase (IP), where the inflection (I) functions as the head. This implies that the highest level of any syntactic construction is a phrase named after its head's category. The concept of the inflectional phrase has been identified in several languages, including English, which features a complex system of inflections [6]. English grammar requires the main verb in a clause to be finite or tensed, and it includes modal verbs that consistently precede the main verb. This contrasts with languages like *Sasaknese*, which permit non-verbal predicates. Consequently, specific tests are necessary to verify the presence of inflectional phrases in *Sasaknese*. This study aims to demonstrate that the notion of the inflectional phrase is a universal syntactic concept that can also be applied to *Sasaknese* data.

The concept of inflection and inflectional phrases is closely related to the classification of word categories, which are generally divided into two main types: lexical categories and functional categories. Lexical categories include nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and prepositions. In contrast, functional categories consist of elements such as determiners and inflections. The primary difference between these two lies in their meaning: lexical categories convey lexical or content meaning, while functional categories provide grammatical meaning and are essential for the structure of syntax [1].

One of the most common ways to create a visual representation of syntactic structure is through tree diagrams [7]. Within the X-bar theory framework, each category can serve as the head of its maximal projection, which is known as a phrase. In other words, a phrase represents the highest projection of a head. In English, examples of inflectional elements include modal verbs like 'will,' 'can,' and 'should,' as well as auxiliary verbs such as 'is,' 'am,' and 'are.' Because these elements serve grammatical functions, they are classified as functional categories. In syntactic structure, the inflectional category acts as the head of the inflectional phrase or sentence, indicating that a sentence is an endocentric construction with inflection as the head and the verb phrase as its complement.

(1)



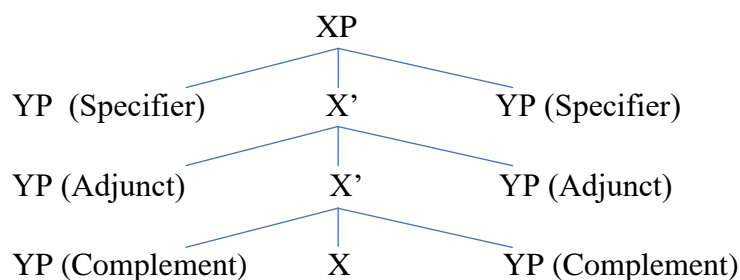
The phrase structure diagram illustrates that the sentence "David is yawning" is analyzed as an Inflectional Phrase (IP). The auxiliary verb 'is' functions as the head of the phrase and is categorized as an inflection (I), while 'yawning,' as a verb phrase (VP), acts as the complement of this head. In this context, the complement enhances the meaning of the head, and the head governs the structure of the phrase. The use of the -ing form in 'yawning' is triggered by the presence of the auxiliary verb 'is,' which grammatically requires this form. Consequently, 'is' and 'yawning' are understood as a single constituent unit. Based on X-bar theory, this structure also indicates that the head position is always located directly below X' (X-bar) and adjacent to its complement XP. This contrasts with adjuncts, which are positioned below X' and adjacent to X', and specifiers, which are located below XP and adjacent to I'. The structure and rules for the positions of specifiers, complements, and adjuncts within X-bar theory can be seen in examples (2) and (3).

(2) a. $XP \rightarrow YP \ X'$

b. $X' \rightarrow X \ YP$

c. $X' \rightarrow X' \ Y/YP$

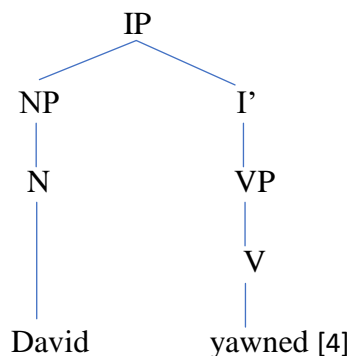
(3)



Adapted from [4]

The head, which is the most fundamental projection of a phrase, does not always appear explicitly in the surface structure. This means that within a phrase, the presence of the head may be invisible or unexpressed [4] [8]. In the structure of an Inflectional Phrase (IP), the inflectional category (I) is sometimes left empty, especially in sentences that lack modals or auxiliary verbs. This phenomenon can be observed in the following examples.

(4)



In the phrase structure presented, the verb ‘yawned’ is a finite verb because it carries the suffix ‘-ed,’ which indicates past tense. This verb functions as a simple predicate and does not have an explicit head. However, it is still part of the I’ (I-bar) projection because the verb phrase (VP) includes an inflectional element marking tense. Moreover, the I’ category can contain not only a VP but also a combination of I and VP. This means that an inflectional phrase may have an inflection as its head or may lack a head altogether. When an IP has a head, its complement must be a VP. If there is no auxiliary verb, the I position remains empty, as shown in example (4).

Numerous studies of Sasak language have already been conducted and presented in various forms such as thesis and article journals [9]. The concept of IP has been found in many languages, including English. There is also previous study discussing IP in *Javanese* which is done by [1]. His research is as the literature review of the X-bar theory explains the linguistics phenomena in various languages in the world. However, his study is different from this study in terms of the object of the study. This contrasts with languages like *Sasaknese*, which permit non-verbal predicates. Consequently, specific tests are necessary to verify the presence of IP in *Sasaknese*. Therefore, in this study, we explain the Inflectional Phrase in *Sasaknese* using X-bar theory which have not been examined yet in any other studies of Sasak language or related language typologies.

Base Sasak ‘Sasak language’ is closely related to languages on both its neighbouring islands: *Samawa*, spoken in the western part of Sumbawa Island, and *Balinese* spoken in Bali Island, to the east and west of Lombok respectively [10]. The regional languages of West Nusa Tenggara Province itself consist of three languages in which one of them is Sasak language [11]. Sasak ethnic group is the native ethnic group who live in Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara [12]. The use of language in this society is varied and the practices of the Sasak culture are also maintained [13].

The Sasak language, spoken by the majority of people on the island of Lombok in daily communication within families and village communities, does not have official status and is rarely used for reading and writing purposes by most of its speakers.

Sasak language has the uniqueness compare with other languages. The uniqueness from the vocabulary and variety of dialects. For instance, between English and Sasak language, it is proven that from vocabulary are different, the word *lolo* is for tree, the word *mangan* is for eat and etc. Not only that aspect that made Sasak language have the uniqueness. In spoken language, Sasak has five different dialects that place in Lombok island [14]. *Sasak* speakers distinguish five language varieties, named based on specific linguistic features (referred to as shibboleths, meaning ‘this way or that way’) and roughly associated with geographic locations [15].

- a. *Ngeno-Ngene*: central west coast and central east to north east coast;
- b. *Meno-Mene*: around the towns of Puyung and Praya, central Lombok;
- c. *Nggeto-Nggete*: around Suralaga and Sembalun in the north-east;
- d. *Kuto-Kute*: around Bayan in the north (also called *Ngeno-Mene*);

e. *Meriahq-Meriku*: south central area around Bonjeruk and Sengkol (Pujut), and near Selong in east.

Speakers characterise the dialect differences by pointing to lexical divergence and differences in grammatical forms, eg. clitic pronouns, aspect/mood markers, prepositions [16]. Dialectal differences in the *Sasak* language are marked by variations in vocabulary as well as differences in grammatical forms, such as the use of clitic pronouns, aspect and mood markers, and prepositions. Each *Sasak* variety employs particles that remain morphologically unchanged (non-inflectional) to indicate aspect, mood, and evidentiality. These particles typically appear in the second position within a clause (known as the Wackernagel position) and carry distinct meanings related to temporal aspect, sentence modality, and polarity, both in declarative and non-declarative clauses [17].

II. Method

The data for this study were primarily gathered from the *Sasaknese* book *Dende Mirah Buaq Ate Kembang Mate*. The main reason this book is chosen because of the limited of availability of books or newspaper which is authentically and specifically written in Sasak language, that may not be found in other sources that are not in Sasak language. This book is one of five book of reading materials for elementary school students of 4th to 6th grades in West Nusa Tenggara.

In addition to this written source, we also consulted with native *Sasaknese* speakers to supplement the data and to verify the grammatical correctness of certain examples. Reflexive-introspective [18] is applied considering that one of the authors is the native speaker of the *Sasaknese*. To generate some of the data, and to ensure the accuracy and acceptability of the grammatical structures, we also cross-checked the findings with native speakers who participated as informants in this research.

The data were analyzed using distributional method that the determining tool is the language itself [18]. The techniques used in data analysis are deletion, substitution and insertion techniques [18] to test of substitution or replacement of a constituent. Those are basic techniques used to analyze and determine sentences structure. The analysis was conducted from its lexical categories which are defined morphosyntactically, which are morphological criteria or morphological properties and distribution or position in a syntactic structure [4]. The data were project syntactically through Chomsky's X-bar tree diagram representation.

III. Results and Discussion

According to the X-bar, all phrases have a similar structure to what we've just seen for XP as seen in examples (2) and (3). One way to represent that is to take a variable to stand for the actual lexical category. The head X, which could be V or A, will combine with one phrase and form a constituent X-bar. When V combines with its complement, we get a V-bar, if an adjective combined with a complement we would get an A-bar. And then the resulting phrase combines with another phrase, the V-bar combines with another phrase and we would get the VP or more generally an X-bar combines with another phrase and we get the XP.

The complement of X is sister to the head, and then the phrase which is higher up in the structure, which is the sister to the x-bar, is called specifier. A head (an X) projects two levels of phrase: it projects to an X-bar, which can contain the head and its complement to the head; and further to te XP, which contain also the specifier.

Unlike English, *Sasaknese* does not have inflections on the verbs, and so finite and non-finite verbs cannot be identified from the morphological form. This is due to the fact that tense, aspect, and mood are expressed by using certain lexicons. *Sasaknese* has a tense marker expressed by the lexicon *gin – gen – eaq – iaq – jaq – eaq* 'will' for the future tense. *Sasaknese* has a tense marker expressed by the lexicon *uah – wah* (for perfect aspect), *kenyake – kenye – kenyeje – jengke* (for progressive aspect) [15].

The lexicon expressing tense and aspect occur before a verb or in a preverbal position, and it is not allowed to reverse the position. This distribution, which is similar with the distribution of English auxiliaries. The following examples show that the position of tense and aspect markers is only between subject and the verb, as in (5-a) and (6-a). The placement of tense and aspect markers after the verb as in (5-b) and (6-b), in the final position after an object as in (5-c) and (6-c), or in the initial position before the subject as in (5-d) and (6-d). are resulting in ungrammatical and unacceptable constructions in *Sasaknese*.

- (5) a. *Inaq Ayub {uah/eqq/jengke} be-ketoan sai aran dait leq mbe asal=ne.*
mother NAME PERF/will/PROG ask who name CONJ PREP where from=3S
'Mrs. Ayub asked her who is she and where does she come from.'
- b. **Inaq Ayub be-ketoan {uah/eqq/jengke} sai aran dait leq embe asal=ne*
mother NAME ask PERF/will/PROG who name CONJ PREP where from=3S
- c. **Inaq Ayub be-ketoan sai aran dait leq embe asal=ne {uah/eqq/jengke}*
mother NAME ask who name CONJ PREP where sai from=3S PERF/will/PROG
- d. **{uah/eqq/jengke} Inaq Ayub be-ketoan sai aran dait leq embe asal=ne*
PERF/will/PROG mother NAME ask who name CONJ PREP where sai from=3S
- (6) a. *Dende Mirah uah biase irup kance keluarga Amaq Ayub.*
girl NAME PERF usual live CONJ family fathey Ayub
'Dende Mirah feels comfortable staying with Amaq Ayub's family.'
- b. **Dende Mirah biase irup {uah/eqq/jengke} kance keluarga Amaq Ayub*
girl NAME usual live PERF/will/PROG CONJ family fathey Ayub
- c. **Dende Mirah biase irup kance keluarga Amaq Ayub {uah/eqq/jengke}*
girl NAME usual live CONJ family fathey Ayub PERF/will/PROG
- d. **{uah/eqq/jengke} Dende Mirah biase irup kance keluarga Amaq Ayub*
PERF/will/PROG girl NAME usual live CONJ family father Ayub
- (7) *Ie uah mulai lupa=ang Raje, Ratu, kance pengirupan=ne leq istane.*
3-S PERF start forget=3S king, queen, CONJ live=3S PREP palace
'She is no longer missing her parents and her luxury live at the palace.'
- (8) *Ie uah maraq jari anak Amaq dait Inaq Ayub mesaq.*
3-S PERF like become child father CONJ mother Ayuq alone
'She's like their own child.'

The examples (5), (6), (7), and (8) above imply that the lexicons expressing tense and aspect from a constituent with the verb that follows as the position of these lexicons is definite. This also shows that the lexicons behave like auxiliaries in English, and so we can claim that they are inflections. Meanwhile, the verb that follows the tense or aspect lexicons is the complement.

Another group of lexicons that fill the I category is modals. In *Sasaknese*, modals behave like tense and aspect markers in the sense that they occur before a verb. However, the distribution of a modal is slightly different from the distribution of tense and aspect markers, as seen below:

- (11) *"Melen=ku ngaken bembeq siq te-panggang kedemenan=ku no!"*
MOD=1S N.eat goat PREP N.grill favourite=1S DEF
'I want to eat my favourite dish, a grilled lamb!'
- (12) *"Melen=ku jaje beras saq sengeh!"*

MOD=1S snack rice REL fragrant

“I want to eat snack! (an aromatic Sasak traditional snack)”.

(13) *Dende Mirah lapah mele=ne mangan, laguq inaq Ayub ndeq=ne be-doe nasiq dait kandoq.*

girl NAME hungry MOD=3S N.eat, CONJ mother NAME NEG=3S rice CONJ vegetable

‘Dende Mirah is starving, but Mrs. Ayub doesn’t have anything to eat.’

The examples in (11), (12), and (13) above show that modals in *Sasaknese* do behave like English or Javanese modals. They occur directly before a verb or in the initial position before the subject, as in the interrogative or exclamation sentences.

The category that people associate with modals, such as will/can/ought/may/must/shall is the category of Inflection or Infl or I. And Inflection here covers agreement. It also covers tense. Following the X-bar, they’re going to project an I-bar and an IP. The modal is an I category, it projects an I-bar, and that I takes a VP as its complement. Therefore, in a sentence, rather than being a VP, modal is an IP. And it contains a VP, the VP that’s the complement of the modal. This will actually allow us to explain another difference between the behaviour, the syntactic behaviour, rather than morphological, of modals as opposed to verbs, as opposed to main verbs. And that is the relative position of modals, main verbs and negation, for one, and also certain adverbs, for another. Thus, in English modals always precede sentential negation. However, in *Sasaknese*, modals can also be found in the beginning of sentences such as sentence (11) *Melenku ngaken bembeq siq tepanggang kedemenanku no* and sentence (12) *Melenku jaje beras saq sengeh*, where the modal *melen* ‘want’ follows by *Sasaknese*’s clitic =*ku*.

(15) a. *Dende Mirah tures langsung nulung inaq be-kelaq-an.*

girl Mirah get up directly N.help mother cook

‘Dende Mirah wakes up and directly helps her mother to cook.’

b. *Dende Mirah tures nulung inaq be-kelaq-an langsung.*

girl Mirah get up N.help mother cook directly

‘Dende Mirah wakes up and directly helps her mother to cook.’

c. *Dende Mirah eaq langsung tures nulung inaq be-kelaq-an.*

girl Mirah will directly get up N.help mother cook

‘Dende Mirah wakes up and will directly help her mother to cook.’

d. **Dende Mirah tures nulung langsung inaq be-kelaq-an*

girl Mirah get up N.help directly mother cook

We find a similar pattern with adverbs. So adverbs have a lot more freedom in the way they occur than negation does. Adverb *langsung* ‘directly/immediately’ sometimes occur at the beginning of sentences as in example (15-a) *Dende Mirah tures langsung nulung inaq bekelaqan*, or it can occur at the very end as example (15-b) *Dende Mirah tures nulung inaq bekelaqan langsung*. Moreover, many adverbs can also occur in the middle of the sentence, in which case we call them sentence-medial adverbs. And if we look at the ones when they’re occurring in the middle of sentences we notice that modals *uah/eq/jengke* ‘PERF/will/PROG’ can immediately precede adverbs when these adverbs are in the middle as example (15-c) *Dende Mirah eaq langsung tures nulung inaq bekelaqan*. If the main verb immediately precedes the adverbs, it makes the sentence

become ungrammatical and unacceptable as in (15-d) *Dende Mirah tures nulung langsung inaq bekelaqan*, in which case the adverb would separate the verb from the direct object.

The sentence in (15) shows that the adverb *langsung* ‘directly/immediately’ can occur before the verb as in (15-a), in the final position as in (15-b), or in the middle position as in (15-c). This flexible position of adverb is common across languages because adverbs do not form a constituent with a verb. This, surely different from Inflections, which have a fixed position. This shows that modals in *Sasaknese* should be treated as inflections, which have the maximal projection as Inflectional Phrase.

The next following examples (16), (17), (18), and (19) have IP as their maximal projection. In sentence (16), we found determiner phrase or DP as *Kanak nike* ‘that child’, and VP as *ngaku aran Dende Mirah, putri Raje Banjar Sari*. In sentence (17), we found NP as *Amaq Ayub* ‘Mr. Ayub’, and VP as *tedoq doang dengah peketonan Dende Mirah*.

(16) *Kanaq nike ngaku aran Dende Mirah, putri Raje Banjar Sari.*

child DEF N.confess name girl NAME, princess King Banjar Sari

‘She said that she is Dende Mirah, a daughter of King Banjar Sari.’

(17) *Amaq Ayub tedoq doang dengah pe-ketoan-an Dende Mirah.*

father Ayub silent only hear question=3S girl NAME

‘Mr. Ayub is not answering her questions.’

(18) *Ie te-suruk ansuh aiq, be-ronas, mopoq, dait be-tulung inaq Ayub mongkaq.*

3-S PASS-ask bring water, wash (dishes), wash (clothes), CONJ help mother Ayub cook

‘She must help Mrs. Ayub to do the household.’

(19) *Inaq Ayub tenaq ie jok pawon.*

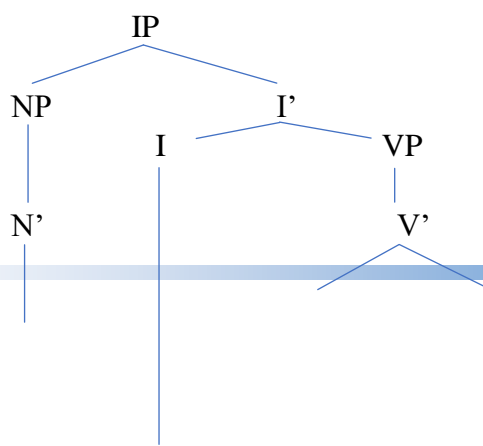
mother NAME invite 3S PREP kitchen

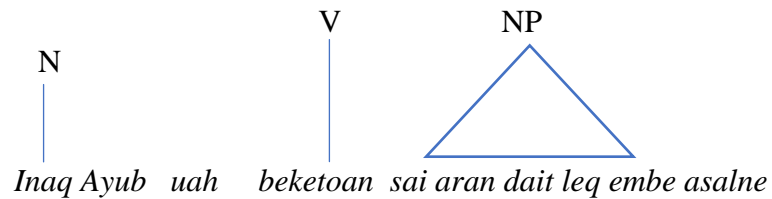
‘Mrs. Ayub took her to the kitchen.’

A modal or another auxiliary, such as have/be, seems to be types of verbs, so in English for example they carry the same kind of tense information that verbs do, so they seem to have verbal properties, we could say that these are kinds of verbs. Therefore, auxiliaries and modals are verbal heads. They project VPs, and they take a complement. However in *Sasaknese*, the affixes carry the tense information such as in sentence (18), we found NP as *Ie* ‘She/He’, and the prefix *te-* in *tesuruk* ‘asked’, prefix *be-* in *beronas* ‘washes dishes’, nasal *m-* in *mopok* ‘washes clothes’, prefix *be-* in *betulung* ‘helps’ carry tense information in VP as *tesuruk ansuh aiq, beronas, mopoq, dait betulung* would project an V-bar, which would contain also the complement of the nominal head *inaq Ayub mongkaq*, and then it would further to an NP.

The following phrase structure trees (20) illustrates the position of auxiliary and the verb complement in an IP.

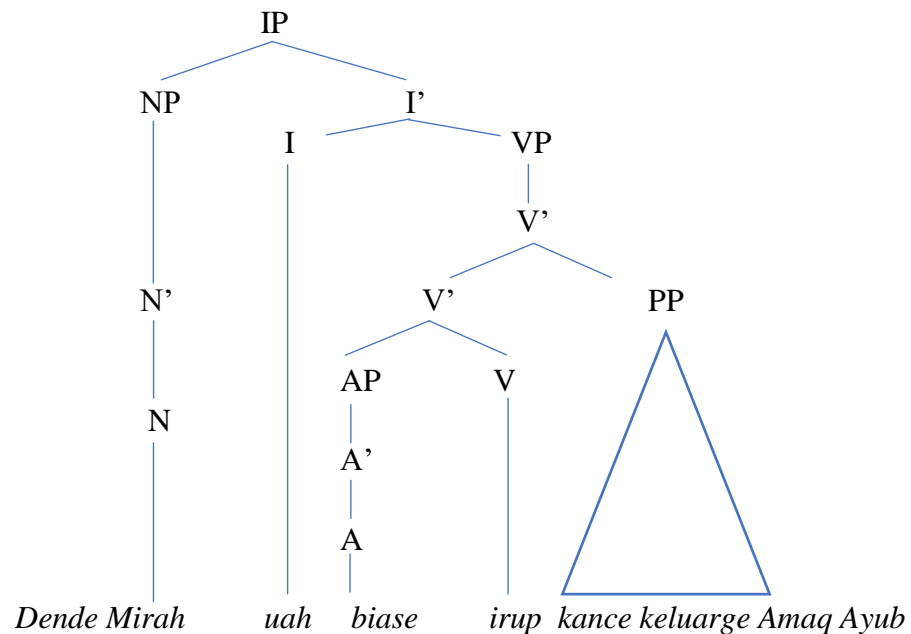
(20)





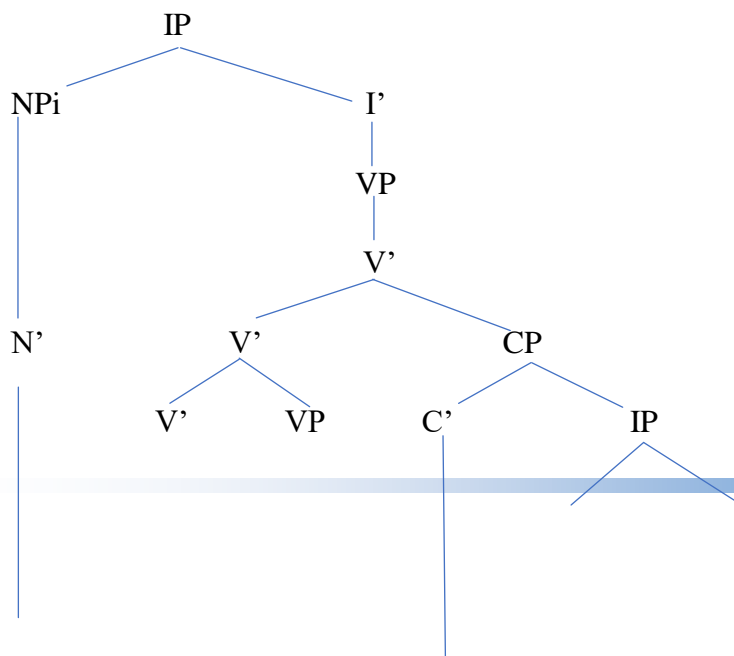
The constituent structure (20) shows *Sasaknese* has the inflectional phrase which I category precedes the VP category. The lexicon *uah* ‘will’ has the I category, which is the inflection category, and it has the complement *beketoan sai aran dait leq embe asalne*, which has the category VP. The Subject of the sentence, *Inaq Ayub* occurs in the NP category, and it has the specifier position.

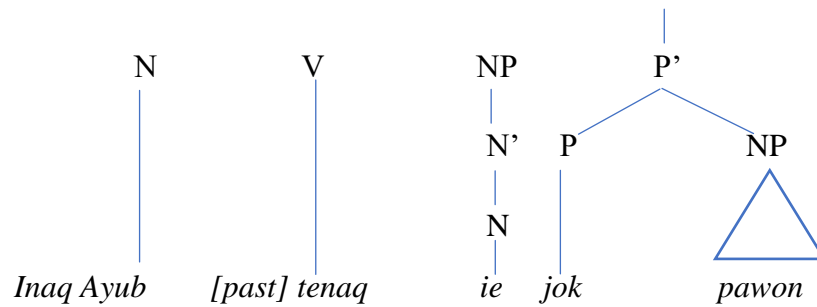
(21)



Furthermore, the constituent structure above (21) also shows that *Sasaknese* has the inflectional phrase which I category precedes the VP category. *Sasaknese* has the inflectional phrase which I category precedes the VP category. The lexicon *uah* 'will' has the I category, which is the inflection category, and it has the complement *biase irup kance keluarga Amaq Ayub*, which has the category VP. The subject of the sentence, *Dende Mirah* occurs in the NP category, and it has the specifier position. This constituent structure applies to all tense and aspect markers in *Sasaknese*.

(22)





The sentence (19) has the phrase structure tree above (23) that shows that *Inaq Ayub tenaq ie jok pawon* is an IP (Inflectional Phrase). This sentence has N *Inaq Ayub* ‘Mrs. Ayub’ as subject, which would project an N-bar and then it would further to an NP. The IP would contain I’ and I [past tense]. Moreover, the head VP *tenaq* ‘invite’ as predicate has the complement NP *ie* ‘her/him’ as object, and finally PP as *jok pawon* which P *jok* ‘to’ as the head of the NP *pawon* ‘kitchen’.

IV. Conclusion

Based on the analysis within the framework of generative grammar and X-bar theory, this study demonstrates that Sasaknese exhibits an Inflectional Phrase (IP) as a core syntactic structure. Despite lacking overt verbal inflection, Sasaknese employs specific lexicons to express tense, aspect, and modality (e.g., *uah* for perfect aspect, *eaq/jaq* for future tense, *jengke* for progressive aspect, and modals like *melen*). These lexicons function as inflectional heads (I) and occupy a fixed preverbal position between the subject and verb, mirroring the distribution of auxiliary verbs in languages like English. Their syntactic behavior—such as the inability to occur post-verbally, pre-subject, or clause-finally without causing ungrammaticality and unacceptability—confirms their role as functional heads projecting an IP. The verb phrase (VP) consistently serves as the complement to this inflectional head, adhering to the endocentric principles of X-bar theory. Additionally, the contrast between the rigid positioning of inflectional lexicons and the flexible placement of adverbs (e.g., *langsung*) further supports their classification as inflectional elements. Thus, Sasaknese aligns with the universal claim that clauses are hierarchically structured as IPs, reinforcing the applicability of generative syntax across typologically diverse languages.

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