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## Phrasal alternation in Kerinci

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## 10 Summary

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Central to this description – and indeed the grammar – of Pondok Tinggi is the unique process of phrasal alternation, that is, the distribution of absolute and oblique forms across several word categories. This concluding chapter ties together the issues discussed in the previous chapters, all of which aimed to foreground naturalistic speech.

Almost all lexical items in PT exhibit two alternate forms, which in the existing literature have been labeled absolute and oblique. These forms differ in the phonological shape of their final-syllable rime. In addition, all lexical items in PT are either ‘K-words’ or ‘G-words’. A so-called G-word contains a non-prenasalized obstruent or ‘G-phoneme’ (/b/, /d/, /g/ and /ʃ/), whereas a K-word does not. The occurrence of a G-phoneme typically triggers pronunciations realized in a higher place of articulation of the vowel in the final root syllable than those of K-words. Cumulatively, the shape of PT words involves four parameters: the absolute form, oblique form, K-class and G-class, all triggering distinct final-syllable rimes. The ABS-OBL alternation occurs on a phrasal level, whereas the phenomenon of G/K-words is morphophonological.

The phenomenon of the Absolute-Oblique alternation involves all basic linguistic domains. It is a morphophonological phenomenon; what alternates is the final syllable rime of lexical roots. As mentioned above, the alternation occurs on the level of the phrase. A word on its own appears in the absolute form. The (covert or overt) restricting element in a phrase triggers the oblique form of the preceding lexical item. On a broader syntactic level, the alternation displays greater complexity. Throughout this dissertation, examples have been provided in which the alternation determines whether a construction is a phrase or a clause.

Before summarizing the patterns of alternation which form the backbone of this dissertation, I should first briefly call attention to words that do not display regular phrasal alternation. These non-alternating words include adverbs, function words, some relatively recent loanwords, some words combined with affixes, personal pronouns, inalienable words and historically petrified words. All other word groups do alternate.

Furthermore, a limited number of lexical items can occur either in the absolute or the oblique form in the same environments without a change of meaning. I have termed words belonging to this class *words in free*

*variation*. It is worth mentioning that free variation is not systematic; these words occur predominantly in synchronic active and passive constructions.

Chapter 2 outlined the phonology of PT, discussing the phonemes of the language – consonants, vowels and diphthongs – their distribution, minimal pairs and other phonological phenomena.

Chapter 3 introduced the two patterns of alternation in PT: phrasal alternation and G/K-words, also discussing the effects of prefixation on word shape.

Chapter 4 described the personal pronouns: their forms, functions and position. It also called attention to possessive constructions, kinship terms and alternative expressions to refer to the speech participants

Chapter 5 focused on the nominal construction. In this domain, the absolute form is the default form for nouns standing on their own within a phrase (1). When the referent of the noun in question is restricted by the presence of a possessor overtly expressed or otherwise recoverable from the context, the noun occurs in the oblique form (2).

- (1)        *kucae?* (\**kuce?*)  
             cat.A  
             1. ‘A cat’  
             2. ‘Cats’
- (2)        *kuce?* (\**kucae?*)  
             cat.O  
             ‘[Her/his/their/our/my/your/the] cat’

Phrasal alternation determines whether a construction is considered a phrase or a clause. The oblique form of a head noun marks a noun phrase (3), whereas absolute head nouns occur phrase-finally and can constitute a clause together with an adjective (4).

- (3)        *kuce?* *kurauh*  
             cat.O   skinny.A  
             ‘A skinny cat’
- (4)        *kucae?* *kurauh*  
             cat.A   skinny.A  
             ‘It is a cat which is skinny’

Within the *Core Structure* – the basic element of a noun phrase – PT exhibits the following basic word order: head noun > adjective > possessor. This canonical order cannot be intervened by other elements. Categories

outside the CS (i.e. NUMP, PP and RC) do not require the oblique form of the final element inside the CS. The occurrence of prepositional phrases and/or relative clauses is interchangeable; PP can precede or follow RC with no requirement of adjacency. Table 10.1 depicts the distribution of the phrasal alternation in the nominal domain.

Environment	Absolute	Oblique
Default form	√	-
Phrase–non-final position in CS	-	√
Phrase–final position in CS	√	√
Phrase–final position in CS (with specifying entity restricting the referent of the NP in question)	-	√
Nominalization	-	√
Replacing the function of the historical suffix <i>*-an</i>	-	√

**Table 10.1. Phrasal alternation in nouns**

Most deviations from the standard pattern outlined here have been observed in the arena of compounds. Local constructional specifications seem crucial to account for why the expected alternations do not surface in certain constructions. Further research is necessary to determine the various types of compounds and associated alternation patterns.

Chapter 6 examined adjectival constructions, which can function as attributes, predicates and adverbs. The ABS-OBL alternation for adjectives is roughly similar to that of nouns, since adjectives are also part of the Core Structure. Here, too, the position of the adjective within a phrase determines its alternation (Table 10.2).

Environment	Absolute	Oblique	
Default form	√	-	
Phrase–non-final position	-	√	
Phrase–final position	√	√	
Comparative degrees	☉-comparative	√	-
	<i>lābih</i> X ‘more X’	√	-
	<i>kuran</i> X ‘less X’	-	√
	<i>samo</i> X ‘same X’	-	√
	<i>sa-</i> X ‘as X as’	-	√
	<i>ta-</i> X ‘the most X’	√	-
	<i>palin</i> X ‘the most X’	-	√
ADJ + <i>na</i> ‘really’	√	-	

Environment	Absolute	Oblique	
Intensifying degree over time ( <i>makin</i> )	√	-	
Preceded by adverbs	-	√	
			<i>maliwa?</i> 'too'
			<i>saŋa?</i> 'very'
			<i>bukon maae</i> 'remarkably'
<i>bijeh</i> 'very'			
<i>talampo</i> 'too'			
<i>ka-</i> + reduplicated noun or adjective roots	-	√	

**Table 10.2. Phrasal alternation in adjectives**

Chapter 7 discussed numeral constructions. Numeral constructions – encompassing numeral units, (optional) classifiers, and partitives – also exhibit ABS-OBL alternation. Like nouns and adjectives, the use of phrasal alternation determines whether a construction of an NP combined with a numeral constitutes a phrase or a clause. The position of the quantified element in relation to the numeral/classifier is not fixed and can both precede and follow it. The numeral/classifier does not have to appear adjacently to the head noun and may ‘float’ anywhere in the construction. Table 10.3 displays the distribution of the phrasal alternation in numeral constructions.

Environment	Absolute	Oblique
Default form (not followed by other numerals or elements)	√	-
Numeral used as a noun or quantifier	√	-
Phrase-final position	√	-
Phrase-non-final position	-	√
With the prefix <i>ka-</i> in collective numerals	-	√
With the prefix <i>ka-</i> in ordinal numerals	√	√
With the prefix <i>ba-</i> in collective numerals	√	-

**Table 10.3. Phrasal alternation in numerals**

Chapter 8 examined the verbal domain, where the outcome of phrasal alternation is determined by the specific construction. Oblique active forms must take an object argument (5). Oblique forms can also occur in the phrase-final position (6), indicating that the referent of the verb is restricted by a covert object which is identifiable from the context. Absolute forms in phrase-final position cannot take an object and treat any following segment as an adjunct (7).

- (5)            *no        manjat        dindon*  
                  3.SG   ACT.climb.O   wall.A  
                  ‘S/he climbed a wall’

- (6) *no manjat*  
3.SG ACT.climb.O  
'S/he climbed [it]'
- (7) *no manja? tapei gunea*  
3.SG ACT.climb.A edge.O mountain.A  
'S/he climbed at the side of the mountain'

Similarly, passives formed by the prefix *di-* take the oblique form when the verb is restricted by an overt agent (8) or covert agent (9). When the agent is irrelevant, the prefix *di-* takes an absolute root (10). Absolute elements directly following *di-* passives function as patients affected by the action expressed by the verb (11). Note that in the latter case, the same elements can also constitute a polite imperative.

- (8) *di-gigit anyae?*  
PASS-bite.O dog.A  
'[He/she/it] was bitten by a dog'
- (9) *akau di-gigit*  
1.SG PASS-bite.O  
'I was bitten by [it]'
- (10) *akau di-gigoi?*  
1.SG PASS-bite.A  
'I was bitten'
- (11) *di-gigoi? anyae?*  
PASS-bite.A dog.A  
1. 'A dog was bitten'  
2. 'Please, bite a dog!'

In active, passive and other constructions, the alternation is determined by syntactic factors, specifically whether the verb is followed by an object or a complement. Table 10.4 presents an overview of the conditions triggering absolute and/or oblique forms.

Environment		Absolute	Oblique
Active	No object argument	√	-
	Clausal complement	-	√
	Overt nominal object directly following the verb	-	√

Environment		Absolute	Oblique
	Covert nominal object identifiable from the context	-	√
Canonical passive (P1)	Unspecified agent	√	-
	Overt agent directly following the verb	-	√
	Covert agent identifiable from the context	-	√
	<i>di-V + wot</i>	√	√
Passive type 2 (P2)		√	-
Intransitive		√	-
Imperative <sup>145</sup>		√	-

**Table 10.4. Phrasal alternation in verbs**

Chapter 9 discussed the derived verb constructions. Verbs are derived from prefixation processes. Prefixes that are used are *maN-*, *N-*, *pa-*, *ba-*, *ta-* and *ka-*.

Three general types of derived verb constructions can be distinguished with regard to use of the absolute and oblique alternation. The first type exhibits the regular absolute-oblique alternation. The second type consists of frozen oblique forms reflecting the historical suffix *\*-an*. Since this derivational process has taken place on a morphological level, these petrified forms do not alternate on a syntactic level. The third type are compounds, i.e. prefixed verb forms with an additional element, which do not show the regular absolute-oblique alternation. Oblique-absolute or absolute-oblique compound constructions are possible. Prefixation does not affect the ABS-OBL alternation of these compound forms.

Derivational processes do not only occur with verbal roots, but also with other roots. The patterns of all possible derivational processes with all types of roots in PT are presented in appendix 3.

Demonstratives typically trigger the oblique form of the element preceding it if they are part of the same noun phrase and if the preceding element is mono-morphemic. The demonstrative triggers the absolute form in three environments: 1) when the demonstrative is used as a pragmatic marker, 2) when it functions as an independent pronoun, and 3) when it is preceded by a complex attribute in the shape of a derivation, a relative clause or also an expression indicating a possessor. These constructions ‘block’ the rule that elements preceding a demonstrative must occur in the oblique form, which is true for regular mono-morphemic roots.

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<sup>145</sup> Imperatives with *mo?* ‘don’t’ and *mahaē* ‘let’s’ behave like other verbs in declarative clauses.



To sum up, the oblique form is used when its referent is restricted by a patient in active constructions, by an agent in passive constructions, or by a modifier (i.e. an adjective, an overt or covert possessor or a demonstrative) in nominal constructions. The oblique form is used when the speech participants share contextual information about what is being discussed. The absolute form is used with generic and neutral reference (neutral as to specificity).

There is an obvious similarity in the distribution of absolute and oblique forms in noun phrases and verb phrases. Furthermore, syntactic adjacency is a determining factor. Syntactically, elements that are in a closer position to each other tend to trigger the oblique form of the first element, whereas the elements that are more peripheral tend to yield the absolute form.

Typologically speaking, the phenomenon of phrasal alternation in Kerinci differs in significant ways from the so-called 'construct state' in Hebrew, Arabic, etc. Oppositions between construct and absolute states in these languages are chiefly morphological, although there might be phonological implications resulting from changes in stress patterns. In Kerinci, however, the opposition was primarily phonological in nature and presumably related to the language's tendency of phrase-final stress, in which absolute forms reflect phrase-final and hence stressed words and oblique forms reflect phrase-non-final and hence non-stressed words. The opposition eventually became semantic, so that the oblique form can now occur phrase-finally in combination with an implied restricting specification.

This dissertation is only a first step to understanding the phenomenon of phrasal alternation, as there are great differences between Kerinci dialects, as shown throughout the dissertation (cf. Steinhauer and Usman 1978; Prentice and Usman 1978; Usman 1988; Steinhauer 2002; Mckinnon 2011; Mckinnon et. al 2012 inter alia). In future research, I hope to situate phrasal alternation in a wider typological framework on similar phenomena.

