

# Covert passive agents in Jakarta Indonesian: Unpronounced or missing?

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## 1 Introduction

**Jakarta Indonesian (JI):**<sup>2</sup> three-way voice system (Chung 1975; Dardjowidjojo 1978; Sneddon 1996; Arka and Manning 1998; Cole et al. 2006; Aldridge 2007; Cole et al. 2008 a.o.)

Voice	Structure
Active:	S (N-)V O
Object (=passive type 2 / <i>pasif semu</i> ):	O S (*N-)V
“Indo-European-type” passive:	O *(di-)V ((sama) S)

- (1) *Question: Who took the table?*

Lia sudah **ng-**ambil meja makan-nya.  
Lia already AV-take table eat-NYA  
'Lia already took the dining table.' (active voice)

- (2) *Question: Where is the table?*

Meja makan-nya Lia ambil.  
table eat-NYA Lia take  
'The dining table was taken by Lia.' (object voice)

- (3) *Question: Who took the table?*

Meja makan-nya **di-**ambil Lia.  
table eat-NYA PASS-take Lia  
'The dining table was taken by Lia.' passive voice

### The agent in passive voice may be:

1. a PP

(4) Desi di-masak-in nasi goreng **sama aku**.  
Desi PASS-cook-APPL rice fried **with I**  
'Desi was made fried rice by me.'

2. a verb-adjacent NP

(5) Desi di-masak-in **aku** nasi goreng (**\*aku**).  
Desi PASS-cook-APPL **I** rice fried  
'Desi was made fried rice by me.'

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<sup>2</sup>Unless otherwise indicated, the data are based on the second author's native speaker judgements. The authors are grateful to participants of the Austronesian Reading Group at MIT for discussion and feedback.

3. unpronounced

- (6) Nasi-nya sudah di-masak.  
 rice-NYA already PASS-cook  
 ‘The rice has already been cooked.’

**The puzzle:**

Covert passive agents are typically existential (e.g. Keenan and Dryer 2007) – also true in JI:

- (7) Buku-ku di-curi. Aku mau tahu siapa yang nyuri.  
 book-my PASS-steal I want know who C AV.steal  
 ‘My bag was stolen (#by them). I want to know who stole it.’

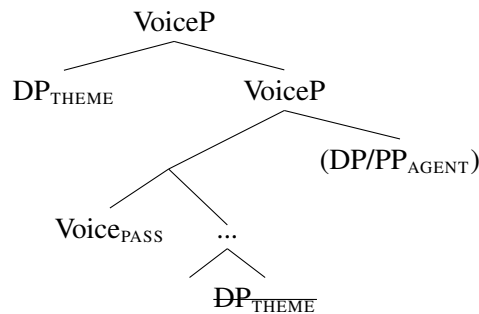
But may also be interpreted referentially (cf. English translation):

- (8) Aku marah sama Yuni [soalnya baju-ku di-buang ?(dia)].  
 I angry with Yuni because clothes-my PASS-discard s/he  
 ‘I am angry with Yuni because my clothes were thrown out #(by her).’

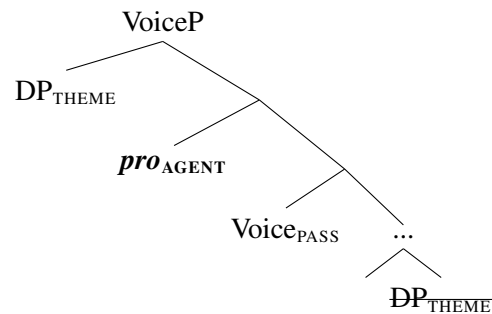
**Proposal:** Passive Voice **may introduce** but **may not license** an external argument.

Agentless passives correspond to two string equivalent structures:

- (9) ✓ agent  $\theta$ -role  
 ✗ external argument  
 ⇒ existential interpretation  
 ⇒ overt agent = adjunct



- (10) ✓ agent  $\theta$ -role  
 ✓ *pro* external argument  
 ⇒ referential interpretation  
 ⇒ *pro* = argument



- *pro* is featurally deficient (Barbosa 2019):  
 ⇒ can merge in Spec, Voice\_PASS (= unlicensed position)  
 ⇒ must be interpreted as third person (except in imperatives)

**Roadmap:** 2 Canonical passive in JI; 3 Syntactically active covert agent; 4 Proposal; 5 Conclusion and extensions.

**2 Canonical passive in Jakarta Indonesian**

‘Canonical passive’ properties of the *di*-passive (Keenan and Dryer 2007):

1. Dedicated passive morphology: prefix *di*-

2. Obligatory promotion of internal argument: if theme is postverbal, it is right dislocated, not in-situ

- (11) a. Yuni masak **nasi goreng-nya** pedas.

Yuni cook **rice fried-NYA** spicy

‘Yuni made the fried rice spicy’

ACTIVE: Agent [VP Verb **Theme** Adverb ]

- b. **Nasi goreng-nya** di-masak pedas sama Yuni.

**rice fried-NYA** PASS-cook spicy with Yuni

‘The fried rice was made spicy by Yuni.’

PASSIVE: **Theme** [VP Verb **Theme** Adverb ] AgentPP

- c. Di-masak pedas **nasi goreng-nya**.

PASS-cook spicy **rice fried-NYA**

‘The rice has been cooked spicy!’

(Comment: *Maybe you weren't expecting the rice to be spicy.*)

PASSIVE: [VP Verb **Theme** Adverb ] **Theme**

- d. \* Di-masak **nasi goreng-nya** pedas.

PASS-cook **rice fried-NYA** spicy

Intended: ‘The rice has been cooked spicy.’

PASSIVE: \* [VP Verb **Theme** Adverb ]

3. Implicit agentive interpretation (contrast with anticausative/unaccusative)

- (12) a. Di-tutup [supaya kamar-nya hangat].

PASS-close so that room-NYA warm

‘It (=the window) was closed to keep the room warm.’

✓passive

- b. #Jendela-nya ke-tutup [supaya kamar-nya hangat].

window-NYA INTR-close so that room-NYA warm

lit. ‘The window closed to keep the room warm.’

\*unaccusative

- (13) a. Pintu-nya di-buka [soalnya Desi mau datang].

door-NYA PASS-open because Desi want come

‘The door is opened because Desi is coming.’

✓passive

- b. #Pintu-nya ke-buka [soalnya Desi mau datang].

door-NYA INTR-open because Desi want come

lit. ‘The door opened because Desi is coming.’

\*unaccusative

(Comment: *Does Desi have magic skills?*)

4. Agent is optional + existential interpretation

- (14) Buku-ku di-curi. Aku mau tahu siapa yang nyuri.

book-my PASS-steal I want know who C AV.steal

‘My bag was stolen (#by them). I want to know who stole it.’

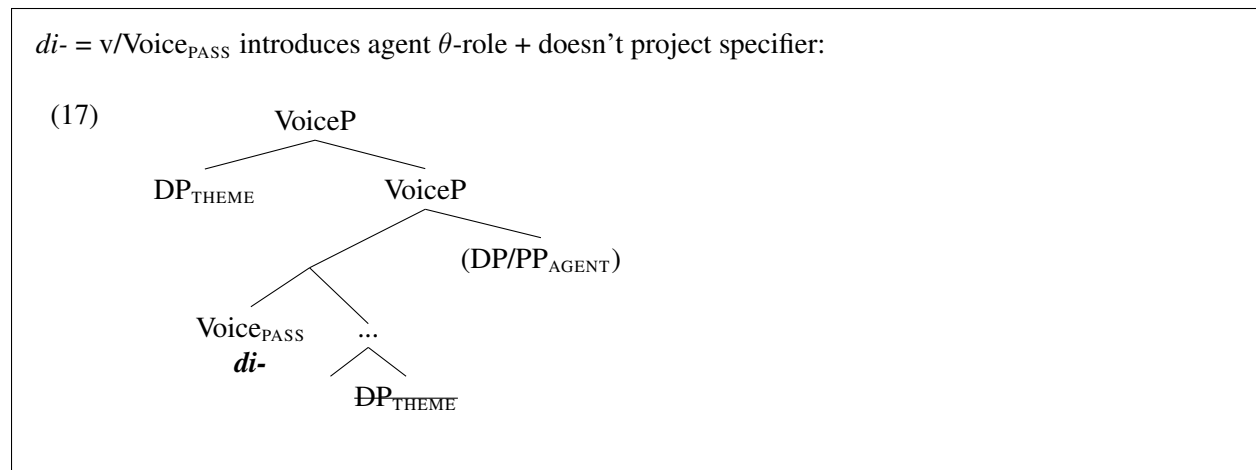
5. Agent is demoted (both PP and bare DP)  $\Rightarrow$  cannot bind pivot reflexive

- (15) Cuma **diri-nya** yang di-pikir-in (sama) **Yuni**.  
 only self-3SG C PASS-think-TR (with) **Yuni**  
 lit. ‘Only she/he/\*herself is thought about by Yuni.’

Contrast with object voice:

- (16) Cuma **diri-nya** yang **Yuni**  $\emptyset$ -pikir-in  
 only self-3SG C **Yuni** OV-think-TR  
 ‘Yuni only thinks about him/her/herself.’

**So far:** Compatible with available analyses of *di*-passive in Malay/Standard Indonesian (Aldridge 2007; Cole et al. 2008; Erlewine and Sommerlot 2023):



**The problem:** The *di*-passive may contain a referential, syntactically active external argument.

### 3 Syntactically active covert agent

Non-canonical property of *di*-passive: possibility of a referential, syntactically active external argument.

1. The covert agent may refer to a contextually salient antecedent:

- (18) Aku marah sama Yuni [soalnya baju-ku di-buang ?(dia)].  
 I angry with Yuni because clothes-my PASS-discard s/he  
 ‘I am angry with Yuni because my clothes were thrown out #(by her).’

- (19) Jendela-nya di-tutup sendiri.  
 window-NYA PASS-close alone  
 (My son is now big enough to do such things...)  
 ‘He can close the window on his own.’

2. The covert agent may bind a reflexive in pivot position:

- (20) Cuma **diri-nya** yang di-pikir-in.  
 only self-3SG C PASS-think-TR  
 (I don't want to be friends with her...)  
 ‘She’s selfish (lit. Only herself is thought about by her.)’

- (21) Cuma **diri mereka** yang di-pikir-in.  
 only **self they** C PASS-think-TR  
 (*I don't like them...*) 'They only think about themselves.'

Similar to agent in object voice:

- (22) Cuma **diri-nya** yang **Yuni** Ø-pikir-in  
 only **self-3SG** C **Yuni** OV-think-TR  
 'Yuni only thinks about him/her/herself.'

Contrast with overt passive agent:

- (23) Cuma **diri-nya** yang di-pikir-in **(sama) Yuni**.  
 only **self-3SG** C PASS-think-TR **(with) Yuni**  
 lit. 'Only she/he/\*herself is thought about by Yuni.'

**Constraint on syntactically active agent:** it must be third person

- Covert agent cannot refer to contextually salient antecedent that is 2SG:

- (24) Aku marah sama kamu [soalnya baju-ku di-buang #(kamu)].  
 I angry with you because clothes-my PASS-discard you  
 'I am angry with you because my clothes were thrown out #(by you).'

- 2SG reflexive cannot be bound by covert agent:

- (25) Cuma **diri kamu** yang di-pikir-in.  
 only **self 2SG** C PASS-think-TR  
 'S/he is obsessed with you. (lit. Only yourself is thought about by her.)'  
 \*'You only think about yourself.'

⇒ Referential passive agent must be (i) covert and (ii) 3 person.

**\*\*Sidenote:** Arka and Manning (1998) observe a similar pattern for *di*-passive with 3 person passive agent expressed as *-nya* in Standard Indonesian

- (26) **Diri-nya** tidak di-perhatikan-**nya**.  
 self-3SG NEG PASS-care-3  
 'S/he didn't take care of himself/herself.'

Difference: *-nya* is an overt pronominal clitic (also used for direct objects and possessors)

JI does not allow for the analogous structure:

- (27) \* **Nasi goreng-nya** di-masak-**nya**.  
 rice fried-NYA PASS-cook-3  
 Intended: 'The fried rice was cooked by him/her.'

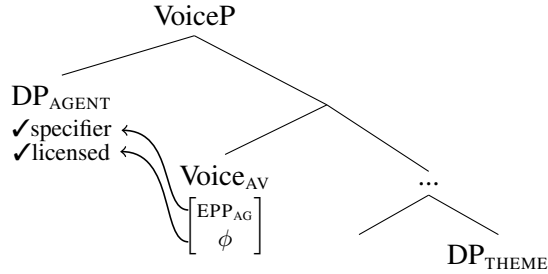
Potential diachronic connection?

#### 4 Proposal: Voice<sub>PASS</sub> projects an agent, but cannot license it

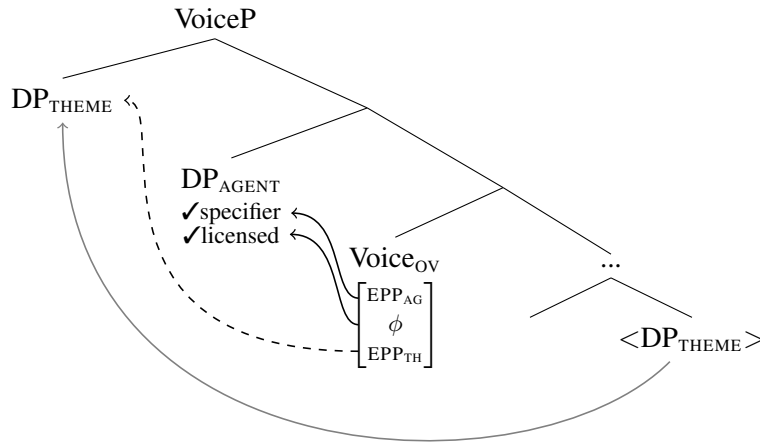
##### The analysis:

- Nominals are licensed / assigned case through  $\phi$ -agreement (e.g. Chomsky 2000, 2001; Sheehan and Van der Wal 2018; Kalin 2019; Nie 2020)
- Voice<sub>AV/OV</sub> projects a specifier and hosts a  $\phi$ -probe  $\Rightarrow$  can license the external argument.

(28) Actor voice:

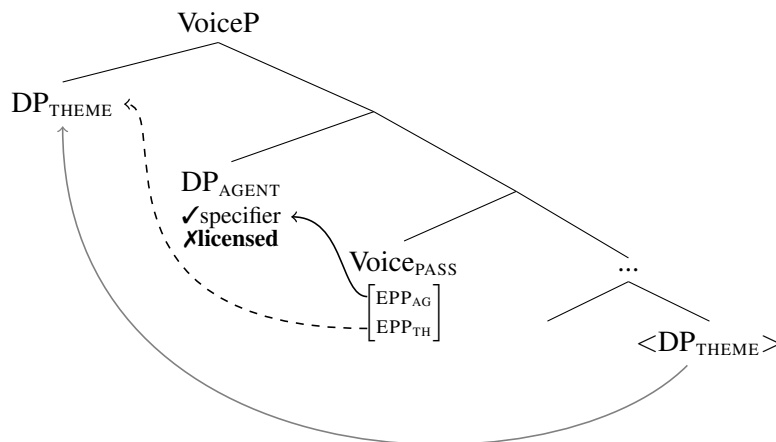


(29) Object voice:



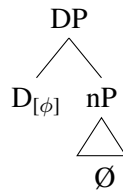
- Voice<sub>PASS</sub> can project a specifier, but does not host a  $\phi$ -probe  $\Rightarrow$  cannot license an external argument.

(30) Passive voice:



- Overt pronouns =  $D^0$  ( $\phi$ -features) + unpronounced nP (Ritter 1991; Postal 1966; Elbourne 2001; Déchaine and Wiltschko 2002,a.o.)
- Null *pro* = featurally deficient minimal nP (Barbosa 2019)

(31) Overt pronoun:



(32) Null *pro*:



- *pro* has no  $\phi$ -features  $\Rightarrow$  does not require  $\phi$ -licensing

$\Rightarrow$  *pro* can appear as agent in Spec, Voice<sub>PASS</sub>

### Explains:

- Why the covert agent must be third person:

Absence of  $\phi$ -features = third person (Harley and Ritter 2002; Béjar and Rezac 2003; Anagnostopoulou 2005)

- Why overt agents cannot bind reflexives, but covert agent can:

Covert agent *pro* is an argument; overt agents are adjuncts.

### Implications:

- Passive Voice does project a specifier.
- $\phi$ -features need to be licensed.
- Necessary distinction:

Third person as absence of  $\phi$ -features (*pro*) vs. featurally specified third person (overt pronoun)

## 5 Conclusion and extensions

JI passive expands the voice typology:

- *di*-passives are canonical in every way, except they allow a referential covert agent in argument position.
- Passive voice not only introduces agentive semantics, but can also introduce an external argument.
- However, it cannot license the external argument.
- Only  $\phi$ -deficient *pro* can appear in argument position.

**Main conclusion:** Passive voice introduces, but does not license, the external argument.

### Extension:

Passives can be used as imperatives (both JI and SI, e.g. Sneddon 1996:326; Udayana 2022):

- (33) rendang-nya *pro* cepat di-masak  
 rendang-NYA quick PASS-make  
 'Make the rendang (=meat curry dish) quick!'

- (34) Kamu itu jangan cuma diri kamu yang *pro* di-pikir-in.  
 you this don't only self you C PASS-think-TR  
 'Don't just think about yourself!'

The puzzle: the addressee of imperatives is universally the notional subject (see e.g. Anderson 1976; Dixon 1994), but here it is the passive agent.

Explained by the *pro* analysis: *pro* can be the notional subject in a passive!

In imperatives, *pro* is locally bound by an imperative operator, allowing for a second person interpretation (Zanuttini 2008; Zanuttini et al. 2012)

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