



Nominal Phrase Structure in Indonesian: A Study of Generative Grammar

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ABSTRACT

Nominal phrases are an important syntactic element because they function as the core of clauses and sentences. This study aims to analyze the structure of nominal phrases in Indonesian using a generative grammar approach. Through the X-Bar theoretical framework in generative grammar, this study describes how nominal phrases are formed from lexical categories (N) that can be expanded by adding determinants (D), adjuncts, or complements. Research data were obtained from written texts in the form of news articles, scientific works, and popular literature to show variations in the use of nominal phrases in different contexts. Research data were collected using instruments such as Written Data Documentation Sheets, Nominal Phrase Identification and Extraction Sheets, X-Bar Structure Annotation Tables, Coding and Categorization Guidelines, and Analysis Notes. The analysis shows that Indonesian nominal phrases have a hierarchical structure with a phrase head (N) that can be expanded to the left or right. The existence of determinants, adjectival phrases, prepositional phrases, and relative clauses shows a complex transformation process, but remains consistent with the principles of generative grammar. The results of this study confirm that generative theory is effective in explaining the regularity and universality of Indonesian nominal phrase structures. Thus, this research contributes to the development of syntactic studies and provides a deeper understanding of how Indonesian represents syntactic relations within the framework of universal grammar.

Keywords: nominal phrase, structure, Indonesian, generative grammar

Struktur Frasa Nominal dalam Bahasa Indonesia: Kajian Tata Bahasa Generatif

ABSTRAK

Frasa nominal merupakan salah satu unsur sintaksis yang penting karena berfungsi sebagai inti dalam klausa maupun kalimat. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis struktur frasa nominal dalam bahasa Indonesia dengan menggunakan pendekatan tata bahasa generatif. Melalui kerangka teori *X-Bar* dalam tata bahasa generatif, penelitian ini mendeskripsikan bagaimana frasa nominal dibentuk dari kategori leksikal (N) yang dapat diperluas melalui penambahan determinan (D), adjungsi, maupun komplemen. Data penelitian diperoleh dari teks tulis berupa artikel berita, karya ilmiah, dan literatur populer untuk memperlihatkan variasi penggunaan frasa nominal dalam konteks berbeda. Data penelitian dikumpulkan menggunakan instrumen Lembar Dokumentasi Data Tulis, Lembar Identifikasi dan Ekstraksi Frasa Nominal, Tabel Anotasi Struktur *X-Bar*, Pedoman Koding dan Kategorisasi, Catatan Analisis. Analisis menunjukkan bahwa frasa nominal bahasa Indonesia memiliki struktur hierarkis dengan kepala frasa (N) yang dapat diperluas ke arah kiri maupun kanan. Keberadaan determinan, frasa adjektival, frasa preposisional, dan klausa relatif memperlihatkan proses transformasi yang kompleks, namun tetap konsisten dengan prinsip tata bahasa generatif. Hasil kajian ini menegaskan bahwa teori generatif efektif digunakan untuk menjelaskan keteraturan dan keuniversalan struktur frasa nominal bahasa Indonesia. Dengan demikian, penelitian ini berkontribusi terhadap pengembangan kajian sintaksis sekaligus memberikan pemahaman mendalam mengenai bagaimana bahasa Indonesia merepresentasikan relasi sintaksis dalam kerangka tata bahasa universal.

Kata kunci: struktur, frasa nominal, bahasa Indonesia, tata bahasa generatif

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INTRODUCTION

Language is a system of signs used by humans to communicate, think, and express ideas (Mailani et al., 2022). In linguistic studies, language is understood as an orderly system with specific rules. One very important field of linguistic study is syntax, a branch of linguistics that studies the structure, arrangement, and relationships between elements in a sentence (Alim, 2025). Through the study of syntax, researchers can understand how words are arranged into meaningful phrases, clauses, and sentences. Among the various types of phrases found in Indonesian, nominal phrases hold a central position. Nominal phrases are phrases whose core is a noun and can function as subjects, objects, or complements in sentences (Setiawan et al., 2024). For example, the phrases "a thick book" or "that boy" are nominal phrases consisting of a core noun (book, child) and other supporting elements. The existence of nominal phrases not only completes sentences but also reflects the hierarchical structure of the Indonesian language. Therefore, an in-depth study of the structure of nominal phrases is crucial in the development of linguistic theory. Generative grammar, introduced by Noam Chomsky in 1957, provides a robust theoretical framework for understanding syntactic structure (Ummah et al., 2025). Generative grammar attempts to explain the universal regularities of language using formal principles. One important theory within this framework is the X-Bar theory, which explains that each phrase has a hierarchical structure with a head, complement, and adjunct. Thus, the structure of Indonesian nominal phrases can be understood more systematically through this theory.

Several previous studies have examined the syntactic structure of Indonesian, but most have focused on general sentence or clause analysis. Specific studies of nominal phrases using a generative grammar framework are still relatively limited. However, such analyses not only contribute to the understanding of Indonesian but also enrich the study of linguistics more broadly (Silaban & Sibarani, 2021). Based on this description, this

study focuses on the analysis of nominal phrase structure in Indonesian using a generative grammar framework, specifically the X-Bar theory. This research is expected to provide a clearer picture of how nominal phrases are formed, the elements that comprise them, and how generative principles can be applied to the Indonesian language. Furthermore, the results of this study are also expected to serve as a reference in the development of syntactic studies and language learning, both in academic and practical settings (Silaban et al., 2019).

Based on the background and focus of the research, the research questions are formulated as follows:

- 1) What is the basic structure of nominal phrases in Indonesian when analyzed using a generative grammar framework, specifically X-Bar Theory?
- 2) What elements form nominal phrases in Indonesian, and what are their distribution and hierarchical relationships between them?
- 3) What is the syntactic function of nominal phrases in various Indonesian sentence contexts?

The objectives of this research are to: 1) describe the basic structure of nominal phrases in Indonesian based on the principles of generative grammar; 2) identify and analyze the core elements, complements, and clarifiers that construct nominal phrases; 3) explain the syntactic function of nominal phrases in Indonesian sentence structure.

Theoretical benefits are: 1) contribute to the development of Indonesian syntactic studies through the application of generative grammar theory; 2) enrich understanding of nominal phrase structure from the perspective of modern linguistic theory; 3) add to the scientific literature related to phrase analysis using the X-Bar Theory framework.

Practical benefits are: 1) serve as a reference for language teachers, linguistics students, and researchers in understanding nominal phrase struc-



ture more systematically; 2) assist in the development of teaching materials on phrase structure in syntax or language analysis courses; 3) provide data that can be used for further analysis in translation studies, natural language processing (NLP), and computational linguistics.

Rahayu, A. (2024). Noun Phrases in the Muna Language, MA Dialect. This research describes the behavior of grammatical functions in X-bar theory in forming the FN structure of the Muna Language, Mawasangka Dialect. Furthermore, this research aims to formulate the rules governing the FN structure in the Muna Language, Mawasangka Dialect. Data were collected through observations conducted by native Muna-speaking informants. The data were collected and organized using descriptive methods. The analysis revealed that Muna language noun phrases can be combined with other noun phrases, but only with the help of prepositions. Furthermore, noun phrases can consist of a core noun projection combined with numerals, adjectives, and other modifiers.

Rahmawati, D. A. N., et al. (2025). Analysis of Noun Phrases in Health News in Suara Merdeka Newspaper in September 2024. This article discusses the use of noun phrases in health news in the Suara Merdeka newspaper in September 2024. The purpose of this article is to identify the use of noun phrases by analyzing their types in depth, drawing on research data and explanations of modifying, coordinating, and appositive noun phrases. The research method in this article uses a descriptive approach and a theoretical language approach, based on data collected through listening and note-taking techniques and on distribution analysis to select the data for the study. This study uses informal and formal data presentation techniques, presented in narrative or explanatory form and in tabular form. The results of this study show several discussions: (1) Identification of modifying noun phrases found as many as 29 data, (2) Identification of coordinating noun phrases found as many as 3 data, (3) Identification of appositive noun phrases found as many as 2 data. This research is

expected to be useful as a learning medium, especially for the syntactic unit of noun phrases.

Liswahyuningsih, N. L. G. (2021). Analysis of Translation Techniques from Indonesian Noun Phrases into English," uses Molina and Albir's (2002) theory of translation techniques to analyze how translation techniques are used in translating noun phrases. A qualitative method was used because the research focused on case descriptions. This research focused on examining and describing the types of techniques used in translating noun phrases found in the novel "Bumi Manusia" into "This Earth of Mankind." From the data analysis, it can be concluded that the techniques used in translating Indonesian noun phrases into English found in the novel include adaptation, amplification, borrowing, calque, compensation, transposition, common equivalents, modulation, generalization, description, literalization, and a combination of two or more translation techniques. In the translation results, we can see that the translator attempts to convey the equivalent meaning of complex noun phrases into the target language by combining multiple techniques, ensuring the target text is easily understood by the reader.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative descriptive method with a generative grammar approach. This method was chosen because the study focuses on an in-depth analysis of the syntactic structure of nominal phrases in Indonesian.

The research data sources were written texts in Indonesian from several genres, including news articles from national online media, popular scientific articles from language journals or magazines, and literary works (short stories or novels). The selection of data from various genres aimed to demonstrate variation in the use of nominal phrases across contexts.

Data were collected using a documentation method: Indonesian texts were collected, and nominal phrases within them were identified. The collection process involved intensive reading of the

texts, marking and noting sentences containing nominal phrases, and classifying the data by type and structure of nominal phrases.

RESULT

This study found that nominal phrases in Indonesian have a basic pattern consisting of nouns (N) that can be expanded with determiners (D), adjectives (AdjP), prepositional phrases (PP), and relative clauses (CP). Analysis based on the X-Bar theory shows that the structure of nominal phrases is hierarchical and recursive, allowing for the formation of complex phrases, such as a thick book on an antique wooden table.

Nominal phrases function in various syntactic positions, namely as subjects, objects, complements, and adverbs (Rahmawati, D. A., et al., 2025). The distribution of elements shows that determiners generally precede nouns, while adjectives, prepositional phrases, and relative clauses tend to follow them. Overall, the results of this study demonstrate that the structure of Indonesian nominal phrases is consistent with the principles of generative grammar and supports the idea of universal regularities in human language.

DISCUSSION

1. Characteristics of Nominal Phrases in Indonesian

A nominal phrase is a phrase whose core is a noun (N) and can be expanded with various other elements such as determiners, adjectives, prepositional phrases, and relative clauses (Mahpudin, 2021). In Indonesian, nominal phrases have an important syntactic function because they can occupy the position of subject, object, complement, or adverb in a sentence.

Examples:

1. A smart student (N + Adj)
2. The book is on the table (N + PP)
3. A diligent student (N + Relative Clause)

From the data collected, it was found that Indonesian nominal phrases have a flexible structural pattern. The head element is always a noun, while other elements can be placed to the left (pre-

nominal) or to the right (post-nominal).

2. Analysis of Nominal Phrases Based on X-Bar Theory

Within the framework of generative grammar, X-Bar theory explains that each phrase consists of three main components:

1. Head (X^0): the core element that determines the phrase category.
2. Complement: an element that must be present to complete the meaning of the head.
3. Adjunct: an additional element that is optional.

Based on data analysis:

a. Nominal Phrases with Determinants

Examples:

- a. book, three students.

Structure: [DP [D^0 a/three] [NP [N^0 book/student]]

The determinant (D) is present as a complement to the core noun.

b. Nominal Phrases with Adjectival Modification

Examples: a thick book, a magnificent house.

Structure: [NP [N^0 book/house] [AdjP thick/magnificent]]

Adjectives function as adjuncts that provide additional information.

c. Nominal Phrases with Prepositional Phrases

Examples: the book on the table, the child from that village.

Structure: [NP [N^0 book/child] [PP on the table/from that village]]

PP acts as a complement that is directly attached to the head.

d. Nominal Phrases with Relative Clauses

Examples: the child who studies diligently, the person who came yesterday.

Structure: [NP/ N^0 child/person] [CP who studies diligently/came yesterday]

Relative clauses function as adjuncts to explain the head.



3. Hierarchical Patterns of Nominal Phrases

The analysis shows that the structure of nominal phrases in Indonesian is hierarchical, not linear. This means that each nominal phrase is constructed through recursive rules that allow for unlimited expansion. For example: 'a thick book on an antique wooden table'

Structure: [DP [D° an] [NP [N° book] [AdjP thick] [PP on top [NP wooden table [CP an tique]]]

The example above shows that nominal phrases can be further expanded with adjuncts or complements without changing the head.

4. Syntactic Function of Nominal Phrases

In the data, nominal phrases were found to have several functions:

1. As a subject: A smart student won the competition.
2. As an object: He read the book on the table.
3. As a complement: The prize was a new laptop.
4. As an adverb: Three students came.

This shows that nominal phrases play a central role in Indonesian sentence structure.

5. Relevance to Generative Grammar

The analysis proves that the nominal phrase structure of Indonesian is consistent with the principles of generative grammar (Phitaloka et al., 2025). The head (N) is central to phrase formation, while determiners, adjuncts, and complements are attached according to hierarchical rules. This finding supports Chomsky's theory of the existence of universal regularities in human language.

Furthermore, the results of this study demonstrate that although Indonesian has the typological characteristics of being an agglutinative language with a head-initial pattern, the principles of X-Bar theory can still be applied effectively.

6. Research Implications

The results of this study have several important implications:

1. Theoretical: strengthening the application of generative grammar in analyzing Indonesian language structure.
2. Practical: can be used as a reference in syntax learning in universities and in developing language teaching materials.
3. Applied Linguistics: assisting language analysis in the fields of translation, language technology, and natural language processing (NLP).

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that the structure of nominal phrases in Indonesian is complex, hierarchical, and recursive. Nouns, as the head, are central to phrase formation, while determiners, adjectives, prepositional phrases, and relative clauses function as complements and clarifications. Analysis using the X-Bar theoretical framework shows that each nominal phrase is constructed through syntactic rules consistent with the principles of generative grammar, in which linguistic elements are structured in layers and interrelated.

The results also indicate that nominal phrases in Indonesian can fulfill various important syntactic functions, including as subjects, objects, complements, and adverbs within sentence structures. The element distribution pattern found, with determiners tending to be in the initial position (pre-nominal) and adjectives, prepositional phrases, and relative clauses in the final position (post-nominal), reinforces the typological characteristics of Indonesian as a head-initial language.

Theoretically, these findings enrich the body of linguistic studies, particularly in the field of syntax, and provide empirical evidence that generative theory can be effectively applied to Indonesian. Practically, this research is useful in language and linguistics teaching and can serve as a basis for further research in applied linguistics, such as translation and natural language processing (NLP). Thus, this research not only strengthens the posi-

tion of generative grammar in explaining the structure of nominal phrases in Indonesian but also contributes to the understanding of Universal Grammar, which reflects the general regularities of human language.

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