



Investigating Batak Toba Subject Properties: A Typological Analysis of Grammatical Relations and Behaviors

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026 - 06- 01	<i>This study investigates the subject properties of Batak Toba Language (BBT) from a typological perspective by examining grammatical relations through syntactic behavior. Batak Toba is typologically important because it represents an Austronesian language with flexible constituent order and dynamic grammatical alignment, contributing to broader discussions on subjecthood and alignment systems. Previous studies on BBT have mainly focused on pivot systems, verbal valency, and language variation, while subject properties remain underexplored. This study employed a qualitative descriptive method within a linguistic typology framework. The data consisted of 100 verbal clauses collected from published sources and native speakers, which were analyzed using six syntactic parameters proposed by Artawa (2018). The findings show that BBT exhibits flexible subject behavior in which grammatical relations are influenced by constituent order, discourse functions, and semantic roles. Fronting constructions allow non-subject constituents to occur in clause-initial position, while floating quantifiers affect semantic interpretation and coreference relations. Relativization patterns indicate that subjects are more accessible than other grammatical functions, and interrogative constructions emphasize focus marking and constituent prominence. Furthermore, BBT predominantly exhibits verb-initial patterns such as VS, VOS, and VSO, while also showing tendencies toward flexible nominative-accusative alignment with split-S characteristics in specific constructions. Overall, the study contributes to typological discussions on subjecthood, grammatical relations, and alignment systems in Austronesian languages.</i>
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1. Introduction

The concept of subject is fundamental to the study of grammatical relations because it plays a central role in clause structure and syntactic organization. In many languages, subjects are typically realized as noun phrases and occupy the highest position in the grammatical hierarchy (Blake, 1990; Comrie, 2014). In intransitive clauses, the subject functions as the sole core argument, whereas in transitive clauses it contrasts with the object, which usually occupies a lower grammatical position (Comrie, 1989).

Linguists have proposed several criteria for identifying subjecthood, including case marking, semantic roles, syntactic dominance, and autonomy (Jufrizal, 2018; Keenan 2014). Case marking concerns the grammatical behavior of arguments in constructions such as causatives and nominalizations. Semantic roles relate to agency and participant involvement in an event. Syntactic dominance refers to the privileged position of subjects in grammatical processes, while autonomy involves properties such as reflexivity and referential independence. However, these properties are not universally fixed because languages may exhibit different subjecthood patterns and grammatical alignments (Primus, 2015; Song, 2014).

Studies on Batak Toba Language (BBT) have mainly focused on pivot systems, causative constructions, and verb valency (Ambarita, 2018, 2025; Siagian, 2014; Asridayani, 2014; Lestari, 2023). Other studies have discussed grammatical relations and morphosyntactic features in BBT (Sitompul, 2020; Erlewine, 2018). These studies provide important descriptions of BBT syntax; however, most of them concentrate on specific constructions rather than subject properties as a whole. Although previous research contributes to the understanding of BBT grammar, discussions of subjecthood from a typological perspective remain limited.

In particular, little attention has been paid to how subject properties are reflected through syntactic behavior across different grammatical constructions. As a result, the typological status of grammatical relations in BBT remains insufficiently explored. This study addresses the gap by investigating subject properties in BBT using a linguistic typology framework. Unlike previous studies that focused only on isolated syntactic phenomena, this research applies the six subjecthood parameters proposed by Artawa (2018): fronting, floating quantifier, control, relativization, word order, and interrogative sentence formation.

Based on the discussion above, this study aims to investigate the subject properties of BBT from a typological perspective and to identify how grammatical relations are realized through various syntactic behaviors. In addition, it also examines how these subject properties reflect broader typological patterns of grammatical alignment. The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically and empirically to linguistic typology, particularly in discussions of subjecthood and grammatical relations in Austronesian languages. The significance of this research lies in its function to help understand BBT grammar in a better way

through a typological approach. Moreover, this study also provides understanding and keep alive the language structures of Bataknese by offering useful information for comparing languages in Southeast Asia.

2. Method

This study employed qualitative design grounded in linguistic typological framework as defined by Sugiono (2014). The research was conducted in three primary stages which are data collection, data identification and data analysis (Creswell and Miller 2000). The typological approach was used to compare the grammatical behavior of BBT with broader cross-linguistic subjecthood criteria proposed in linguistic typology studies.

The data sources consisted of published works related to BBT, including grammar books, journal articles, linguistic descriptions, and previous studies discussing Batak syntax and grammatical relations. Several primary references used as the data sources included Artawa (2018), Artawa and Purnawati (2020), Daulay and Mulyadi (2021), and other published linguistic studies concerning Batak grammatical structure. A total of 100 clauses were selected from the published sources. This number was considered sufficient because qualitative typological studies prioritize depth, consistency, and representativeness of linguistic patterns rather than statistical quantity.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, this study applied triangulation and inter-rater reliability procedures. Triangulation was conducted by comparing data obtained from different published linguistic sources and validating them through native speaker judgments. Two native speakers of Batak Toba Language who possess strong competence in both traditional and contemporary language use were involved in the validation process to confirm the grammatical acceptability and interpretation of the clauses. Inter-rater reliability was also employed during the classification stage.

The researcher and an additional linguistics reviewer independently classified the clauses according to the six subjecthood parameters. Any differences in classification or interpretation were discussed until agreement was achieved. These procedures were intended to minimize subjectivity and strengthen the consistency of the analysis. Ethical considerations were also taken into account during the research process. The native speakers involved in this study participated voluntarily and were informed about the purpose and academic nature of the research. Their participation was limited to linguistic verification and validation purposes. No personal or sensitive information from the participants was collected or disclosed in this study.

The data were identified and classified based on six subjecthood parameters proposed by Artawa (2018), namely: (1) fronting, (2) floating quantifier, (3) control, (4) relativization, (5) word order, and (6) interrogative sentence arrangement. Each clause was coded according to its relevance to the parameters in order to

identify the grammatical behavior of candidate subject elements. The procedures are, first, each clause was divided into its constituent elements to identify its syntactic structure.

Second, the permutation technique was applied to examine the positional flexibility and structural strength of elements within the clauses. Third, each clause was analyzed according to the six subjecthood parameters proposed by Artawa (2018). Fourth, the grammatical behavior of candidate subject elements was documented. Finally, recurring patterns and regularities identified across the dataset were classified following the analytical framework proposed by Artawa and Purnawati (2020). The findings were then presented through descriptive explanations and illustrative examples of subject characteristics in BBT (Creswell et al., 2007; Creswell & Poth, 2007).

3. Result

Fronting

In BBT, fronting refers to the movement of a constituent, such as a patient, predicate or adjunct to the clause-initial position for topicalization or focus. Fronting is important in identifying subject properties because constituent movement reflects how grammatical relations interact with discourse structure. The data show that BBT allows flexible constituent order while maintaining semantic roles.

a) Patient Topicalization

1) a. *mangalang indahan Jon*

ACT-eat rice Jon

'Jon ate rice'

b. *indahan do diallang Jon*

rice FOC eat Jon

'It was rice that Jon ate'

Sentence (1a) represents the canonical transitive structure in BBT with the order Verb–Patient–Actor (VPA). The patient *indahan* 'rice' occurs in its regular post-verbal position. In sentence (1b), the patient *indahan* is fronted to the clause-initial position and followed by the focus marker *do*. This construction gives informational prominence to the patient without changing its semantic role. The patient remains the affected participant, while Jon continues to function as the actor.

(2) a. *Manuhor baju na rara ahu*

ACT-buy shirt REL red 1SG

'I bought a red shirt'

- b. *Baju na rara hu tuhor*
 shirt REL red I buy
 'I bought red t-shirt'

Sentence 2 (a) is basic transitive sentence structure in BBT with VPA and no fronting. In this clause, the verb *manuhor* ('bought') is followed by the patient constituent *baju na rara* ('red t-shirt') and the actor *ahu* ('I'). No topicalization or constituent fronting occurs in this structure because the patient remains in its regular post-verbal position.

Sentence 2(b) demonstrates patient topicalization. The patient constituent *baju na rara* ('red t-shirt') is moved to the clause-initial position, resulting in the order Patient (P) – Actor (A) – Verb (V). This fronting gives greater discourse prominence to the patient element without altering its semantic role in the clause. Semantically, *baju na rara* remains the patient, while *hu/ahu* keeps its function as the actor.

The construction illustrates the flexibility of order in BBT expressing focus and topicality. By placing the patient in the initial position, the speaker emphasizes the affected entity and highlights it as the topic of the utterance. This phenomenon shows that constituent order in BBT is closely related to information structure and discourse function rather than solely to grammatical relations.

b. Predicate Fronting

3 a. *Ahu mangan indahan di jabu.*

1SG eat rice at house
 'I eat rice at home.'

b. *Mangan indahan do ahu di jabu.*

eat rice FOC 1SG at house
 'It is eating rice that I do at home.'

Sentence (3a) shows the canonical clause structure in which the actor precedes the predicate. In sentence (3b), the predicate *mangan* 'eat' is fronted to the clause-initial position and followed by the focus marker *do*. Predicate fronting emphasizes the action while maintaining the original semantic roles.

c. Adjunct Fronting

4.a *Marlojong Jon tu sikola.*

ACT-run Jon to school
 'Jon runs to school.'

b. *Tu sikola Jon marlojong* to school Jon ACT-run

'Jon runs To school,

Sentence (4b) demonstrates adjunct fronting in which the locative phrase *tu sikola* 'to school' is moved to the beginning of the clause. The construction highlights locative information while preserving the grammatical role of Jon as the subject. Overall, the fronting constructions demonstrate that BBT permits constituent movement for discourse purposes without changing grammatical relations. Patients, predicates, and adjuncts may occur in clause-initial position to express topicalization or focus. This finding supports the view that BBT syntax is strongly influenced by information structure.

Table 3.1 Types of Fronting in BBT

Type of Fronting	Fronted Element	Function
Patient Fronting	Object/Patient	Topicalization
Predicate Fronting	Predicate/Verb Phrase	Focus on action
Adjunct Fronting	Locative/Adjunct	Emphasis on location

Floating Quantifier (Penjangka Kambang)

Floating quantifiers in BBT demonstrate how quantifiers may appear separately from the noun phrases they modify while maintaining semantic relationships. This phenomenon reveals the interaction between constituent order, binding relations, and grammatical relations.

5 a. *Sude ina mangomgom anakhonna*

QUANT mother ACT-protect child-3SG.POSS
 'Every mother protects her child'

b. *Anakhonna mangomgom sude ina*

child-3SG.POSS ACT-protect QUANT mother
 'her child protects every mother'

In sentence (5a), *sude* 'every' modifies the noun *ina* 'mother' and the possessive suffix *-na* in *anakhonna* refers back to the quantified subject. However, in sentence (5b), the quantifier is separated from the original noun phrase and modifies a different constituent, producing a different interpretation.

6. a. *deba ina marmeme anakhonna*

'QUANT mother ACT-feed child-3SG.POSS
 some mothers feed their child'

b. *Ina on marmeme deba anakhonna*

mother DEM ACT-feed QUANT child-3SG.POSS
'This mother feeds some her children '

Sentence (6b) illustrates floating quantifier construction because *deba* 'some' occurs separately from the noun phrase it semantically modifies. Despite this separation, the semantic relationship remains interpretable. These examples show that floating quantifiers in BBT reflect syntactic flexibility while maintaining semantic interpretation through binding and coreference.

Table 3.2 Floating Quantifier Behavior in BBT

Construction	Quantifier Position	Semantic Effect
Attached Quantifier	Adjacent to noun phrase	Clear reference
Floating Quantifier	Separated from noun phrase	Scope reinterpretation

Control

Control constructions in BBT demonstrate the relationship between subjecthood and argument structure. The verb *manuntun* 'obey' functions as a subject-control verb because the subject of the main clause controls the interpretation of the action.

7. a. *Jon manuntun ibotona*

'Jon ACT-obey sister-3SG.POSS
"Jon obeys his sister"

In sentence 7(a) *Jon* functions as subject and agent while *ibotona* functions as the patient. The active prefix *man-* marks the clause as an active verbal construction. The sentence demonstrates subject control because the subject determines the interpretation of the action.

7.b *ibotona Jon Manuntun ibana*

Sister-3SG.POSS Jon ACT-obey 3SG
Intended: "His sister Jon obeys herself"

Sentence (7b) is ungrammatical because the arrangement of constituents creates ambiguity regarding the subject and object. The clause violates the

expected argument structure of *manuntun* and disrupts the syntactic relationship between agent and patient.

The data indicate that subject control constructions in BBT prioritize clear syntactic relations between the controller and the controlled participant.

Relativization

Relativization in BBT identifies subject properties by showing which grammatical relations can be relativized. Relative clauses are introduced by the marker *na*, which functions as a relativizer.

8) a. *Borua i manuksi abit*

Woman DEF ACT-wash clothes

“That lady washed clothes”

8) b. *Borua na manuksi abit i bagak*

Woman REL ACT-wash clothes DEF beautiful

“The lady who washed clothes is beautiful”

In sentence (8b), the noun *borua* ‘woman’ is relativized using the marker *na*. The relativized constituent functions as the agent and subject of the clause. This demonstrates that subjects in BBT can be relativized easily, reflecting nominative-accusative alignment.

In BBT, relativization can also be classified into two major types according to the syntactic role of the relativized constituent. The first is core relativization and peripheral relativization. Core relativization involves arguments that are central to the predicate structures, such as subjects and direct objects. These arguments are closely related to the verb and usually participate directly in the action or event expressed by the clause. Contrastly, peripheral relativization involves non-core constituents, including oblique arguments, locative phrases, temporal expressions, or adjuncts, which provide additional information to the clause.

Core Relativization

9 a) *Ibana manggotap hau i*

3SG ACT-cut tree DET

“He cut the tree”

b) *Huida halak [na manggotap hau i]*

1SG-see person REL ACT-cut tree DEF

“I saw the person who cut the tree”

c) *Huida halak [na hau i manggotap]*

1SG-see person REL tree DET ACT-cut

Intended: “I saw the person who cut the tree”

Sentence (9b) is grammatical because the relativized core argument occupies the correct relativization position. Sentence (9c) is ungrammatical because another core noun phrase appears in the preverbal position.

3.4.2 Peripheral Relativity

10. a) *Maridi au di aek*

ACT-swim 1SG PREP river

“I swam in the river”

b) *maridi au di aek na tiar*

ACT-swim 1SG PREP river REL clear

“the river where I swan is clear”

Peripheral relativization involves non-core constituents such as locative phrases. Unlike core relativization, core noun phrases may still appear within the clause.

11. a) *Huida halak I di dalan i nabodari.*

1SG-see person DET on road DET yesterday

“I saw that person on that road yesterday”

b). *Lao ahu tu dalan [na huida halak i nabodari]*

go 1SG to road REL 1SG-see person DET yesterday

“ I went to the road where I saw that person yesterday”

The examples above illustrate peripheral relativization in BBT. In sentence 11(a), the locative phrase *di dalan i* (on that road) functions as a non-core constituent that provides additional information about the event. In sentence 11(b), the noun *dalan* (road) is relativized through the relative marker *na*, forming a relative clause meaning “*where I saw that person yesterday.*” Unlike, core relativization, the clause still allows the presence of the core argument *halak i* (that person) within the relative clause. This demonstrates that peripheral relativization in BBT does not require the preverbal core argument position to remain empty. Overall, the difference between core relativization and peripheral relativization in BBT demonstrates the complexity of its syntactic system.

Table 3.3. Relativization Types in BBT

Type	Relativized Element	Structural Constraint
Core Relativization	Subject/Object	

Peripheral Relativization	Locative/adjunct	Preverbal core position must remain empty
		Core noun phrase may remain

Word Order

BBT generally exhibits a Verb-Object-Subject (VOS) or Verb-Subject-Object (VSO) patterns. Word order plays an important role in identifying grammatical relations.

12. **Mulak ibana**
Return 3SG
“(s)he returned”

13. **Mangalap ibana**
take 3SG
“(s)he took it”

Both examples demonstrate Verb–Subject order in intransitive and transitive clauses.

14. **Bapa manggalang indahan i**
Father ACT-eat rice DEF
” Father eats that rice”

15. **Dang huporseai ibana**
NEG 1SG-believe 3SG
“ I do not believe him/her”

Sentence 14 and 15 contain transitive verbs. In 13 (a), the agent *bqpa* (father) precedes the verb *manggalang* while the patient *indahan I* (the rice) follows the verb. The word order is [A-transitive verb -P]. In 15 the negation *dang* occurs before the verb, and the patient *ibana* (him/her) follows the verb. The word order is [negation-transitive verb-P]. These examples demonstrate that BBT marks grammatical relations primarily through word order and verbal morphology. These constructions indicate that BBT relies on constituent order and verbal morphology to encode grammatical relations.

Table 3.4 Word Order Patterns in BBT

Clause Type	Word	Order
Pattern		
Intransitive	Verb-Subject	
Transitive	Verb-Object-Subject/ Verb-Subject	
Negative Clause	NEG-Verb-Object	

Question Sentence Form

In BBT, interrogative sentences are commonly formed through the use of question words and specific sentence structures that emphasize the element being questioned. The constituent that becomes the focus of the question, whether the Agent or the Patient, is typically placed in a prominent position within the sentence.

3.6.1 Actor-Focus Questions

- 16) *Ise (do) mangubati au?*
Who FOC treat 1SG
'Who is treating me?'
17). *Andigan si Jon mamereng si butet?*
When ART Jon ACT-see ART butet
'When did Jon see Butet?'

3.6.2 Undergoer- focus Questions

- 18) *Aha do diboan hu tu jabu?*
What FOC PASS-bring 2SG to house
'What did you bring home?'
19). *Ise do dipaingot ni pandita i?*
Who FOC PASS-remind by preacher DEF
'Who was reminded by the teacher?'

Undergoer-focus questions highlight the affected participant through fronting and passive morphology.

3.6.3 Yes/No question

20. *Nunga ro ho tu sikola?*
PERF come 2SG to school
'Have you come to school?'
21. *Diallang ibana do gadong?*

PASS.eat 3SG Q sweet potato?
'Did he eat sweet potato?'

Table 3.5 Interrogative Types in BBT

Question Type	Structural Pattern
Actor Focus	Question word–FOC–Verb–Object
Undergoer Focus	Question word–FOC–Verb–Agent
Yes/No Question	Canonical clause + intonation/particle

Yes/no questions in BBT generally preserve canonical clause structure and rely on intonation or particles. Overall, in BBT the interaction between interrogative words, focus markers and verb affixes in interrogative sentence demonstrate the syntactic complexity of the language. Interrogative constructions in BBT demonstrate flexible syntactic organization while maintaining grammatical clarity. The interaction between question words, focus markers, and verbal morphology reflects the complexity of grammatical relations in the language.

Quantitative Overview of Subjecthood Parameters

Table 3.6 Quantitative Overview

Subjecthood Parameter	Number of Clauses	Percentage
Fronting	20	20%
Floating Quantifier	15	15%
Control	15	15%
Relativization	25	25%
Word Order	15	15%
Interrogative Sentences	10	10%
Total	100	100%

The table 3.6 presents the distribution of the 100 clauses analyzed in this study according to the six subjecthood parameters. Relativization appears as the most frequently occurring parameter with 25 clauses (25%), indicating that relativization plays a significant role. Fronting constructions account for 20 clauses (20%), demonstrating the importance of constituent movement and information structure in the language. Meanwhile, floating quantifier, control, and word order constructions each contribute 15 clauses (15%), showing relatively balanced

occurrences across these syntactic phenomena. Interrogative constructions appear in 10 clauses (10%), reflecting how question formation also contributes to the realization of grammatical relations in BBT. Overall, the quantitative distribution supports the qualitative findings by demonstrating that the analyzed data consistently represent various syntactic behaviors related to subjecthood and grammatical relations in BBT.

4. Discussion

This study demonstrates that subject behavior in BBT reflects a highly flexible and construction-sensitive grammatical system. Rather than relying solely on rigid syntactic categories, BBT allows grammatical relations to be interpreted through constituent order, verbal morphology, semantic roles, and discourse functions. These findings support the view that subjecthood in BBT cannot be explained only through a single universal syntactic framework, but instead requires a typological and construction-based perspective.

One important finding concerns constituent flexibility in fronting constructions. The data indicate that fronting in BBT is not restricted to subjects because verbs and patient arguments may also appear in clause-initial position for pragmatic and discourse-related purposes. This suggests that constituent displacement in BBT functions as a discourse strategy rather than as an exclusive marker of subjecthood. Such flexibility aligns with Song's (2014) argument that constituent order variation plays a significant role in typological classification. Compared with many rigidly ordered languages, BBT exhibits greater syntactic adaptability, indicating that grammatical relations are strongly influenced by communicative intentions.

The findings on floating quantifiers also contribute to broader discussions concerning subject properties and clause structure. The ability of the quantifier *sude* 'every' to occur both adjacent to and separated from the noun phrase demonstrates that quantifier interpretation in BBT is not strictly dependent on linear adjacency. Instead, semantic interpretation and grammatical relations interact dynamically within the clause. This finding supports Boas (2010), who argues that floating quantifiers may display adverbial characteristics rather than functioning solely as nominal modifiers. At the same time, the BBT data suggest that quantifier placement is sensitive to discourse emphasis and semantic interpretation. Previously, Sportiche (2005) has analyzed the same topic in French, which floating quantifier derived from movement of NP, placing the quantifier in its original position.

The analysis of control constructions further indicates that BBT is strongly subject-oriented in terms of referential control and grammatical alignment. Subject control structures require clear referential relationships between arguments, and deviations from expected constituent order often result in ambiguity or ungrammaticality. These findings demonstrate that grammatical relations in BBT

are not entirely determined by morphology alone but also depend on structural clarity and referential accessibility. Similar tendencies have been reported in other languages, including Ukrainian (Korbozerove, 2022), suggesting that subject control may reflect broader cross-linguistic principles of grammatical organization.

The relativization patterns found in BBT provide additional evidence that grammatical relations are hierarchically organized. Subjects are significantly more accessible to relativization than non-subject constituents, especially in core relativization constructions. This finding is consistent with accessibility hierarchy theories proposed by Keenan (2014) and Lau and Tanaka (2021), which argue that subjects are cross-linguistically easier to relativize than objects or oblique constituents. However, BBT also demonstrates greater flexibility in peripheral relativization, where locative and temporal constituents may be relativized without disrupting the core clause structure. This distinction suggests that relativization strategies in BBT are construction-sensitive and influenced by both grammatical prominence and discourse function.

Word-order analysis reveals that BBT generally favors verb-initial constructions such as VS, VSO, and VOS patterns. Nevertheless, the language also permits alternative constituent arrangements depending on topicalization, focus, and communicative emphasis. The coexistence of flexible constituent order and clear grammatical interpretation indicates that BBT combines structural consistency with discourse adaptability. These findings support previous studies on Austronesian languages that emphasize the importance of discourse and pragmatics in clause organization (Donohue, 2006; Jufrizal & Refnita, 2020). Consequently, subjecthood in BBT appears to be determined through multiple interacting factors rather than through rigid inflectional marking alone.

Interrogative constructions in BBT further illustrate the interaction between syntax and discourse. Question formation relies heavily on fronting strategies, focus markers, and verbal morphology to highlight the questioned constituent. The use of focus marker does strengthen the prominence of either the Actor or Undergoer, demonstrating that interrogative structures in BBT are strongly discourse-oriented. Furthermore, yes/no interrogatives maintain relatively stable clause structures while relying on intonation and particles to signal interrogative meaning. This indicates that BBT prioritizes communicative efficiency while preserving grammatical clarity.

Typological Implications of BBT

The findings of this study contribute to broader discussions concerning subjecthood and alignment systems in Austronesian typology. The syntactic behavior observed in BBT supports Croft's (2001) Radical Construction Grammar, which argues that grammatical categories are construction-specific rather than universally fixed. Subject properties in BBT vary across relativization, interrogative constructions, word order, and control structures, suggesting that grammatical

relations are shaped by specific syntactic environments.

In terms of alignment, BBT generally demonstrates nominative-accusative characteristics because Subject (S) and Agent (A) frequently share similar syntactic behavior, particularly in relativization and interrogative constructions. However, several constructions also reveal tendencies toward split-S behavior. In causative constructions, for instance, the single argument of an intransitive clause may shift toward a patient-like role when a new causer is introduced. Similarly, discourse prominence and semantic interpretation occasionally influence whether S aligns more closely with A or with P. These patterns suggest that alignment in BBT is dynamic and construction-dependent rather than entirely fixed (Puspitorini, Vientiani & Siregar, 2026).

Rather than claiming that BBT is fully split-S, the findings indicate that the language exhibits tendencies toward split alignment under specific grammatical and discourse conditions. This contributes to broader Austronesian typology by demonstrating that alignment systems may operate on a continuum rather than within rigid binary categories. Therefore, BBT expands current understanding of grammatical relations in Austronesian languages, particularly regarding the interaction between syntax, discourse, and semantic roles.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, the data are limited to specific constructions and may not fully represent all varieties or dialects of BBT. Second, most data were obtained through elicitation methods rather than from large-scale natural spoken corpora. Consequently, some pragmatic and interactional features may not be fully captured in the analysis. Third, this study mainly focuses on syntactic behavior and does not extensively examine prosodic or phonological factors that may also influence subject interpretation.

Future research may expand the investigation by incorporating natural conversational corpora, comparative studies with other Batak languages, and broader analyses of alignment systems across Austronesian languages. Further studies on discourse prominence, argument omission, and information structure would also contribute to a deeper understanding of subjecthood and grammatical relations in BBT.

5. Conclusion

This study uncovers subject properties in BBT are realized through complex and flexible grammatical relations shaped by syntactic structure, discourse function, and semantic interpretation. By applying Artawa's typological parameters, including fronting, floating quantifier, control, relativization, word order, and interrogative constructions, the findings reveal that BBT does not consistently rely on a single canonical subject category but instead distributes subject-like properties across different constructions.

The language exhibits flexible constituent order, strong interaction between syntax and information structure, and construction-sensitive alignment patterns that support the view of grammatical relations as dynamic rather than fixed. Furthermore, the data indicate that BBT generally reflects nominative-accusative tendencies while also displaying split-S characteristics in certain constructions, particularly in relativization, interrogative, and causative patterns. Overall, this study contributes to linguistic typology by providing empirical evidence that subjecthood in BBT is construction-dependent and closely connected to discourse prominence, communicative intention, and syntactic organization.

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