



Experiencer Construction in Indonesian

Zikriani^{1*}, Mulyadi², Muhammad Yusuf³

^{1,2,3} Linguistics, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan

Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2025-12-11 Revised: 2026-02-13 Accepted: 2026-05-31	<i>This study examines the morphosyntactic realization of experiencer constructions in Indonesian using corpus-based data. A qualitative analysis was conducted on 500 clauses collected from the Indonesian CQPweb corpus and spoken data from YouTube. Applying distributional analysis and the X-Bar framework, the study investigates how experiencers and stimuli are structurally encoded across different verb classes. The findings reveal three major construction types: experiencer as subject, experiencer as object, and dative experiencer. These constructions systematically correlate with psychological verb classes and display variation in argument realization. Indonesian encodes experiencer roles through syntactic position and prepositional marking rather than morphological case. This research provides the first systematic corpus-based account of Indonesian experiencer constructions and contributes to broader discussions on argument structure and semantic role mapping in Austronesian languages.</i>
Keywords: Experiencer Construction, Indonesian Syntax, Psychological Verbs, Argument Structure, Corpus Linguistics.	
DOI: 10.24256/ideasv14i1.8784	
Corresponding Author: Zikriani Zikriani2000@gmail.com Linguistics, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan 20155, Indonesia	

1. Introduction

Experiencer constructions involve clauses in which a participant undergoes a psychological, cognitive, perceptual, or emotional state rather than performing a prototypical action. Unlike agentive constructions, experiencer clauses display variability in how semantic roles are mapped onto syntactic structure. In Indonesian, experiencers may appear in different grammatical positions, as illustrated below:

(1) *Saya takut.*

(2) *Berita itu mengejutkan Rina.*

(3) *Cerita itu mengingatkan masa kecil kepada Rina.*

In (1), the experiencer functions as subject. In (2), the experiencer appears as object, while the stimulus occupies subject position. In (3), the experiencer is realized in a prepositional (dative-like) phrase. These patterns indicate flexibility in argument realization.

Cross-linguistic studies have shown that experiencers frequently occupy non-canonical positions (Belletti & Rizzi, 1988; Croft, 1993; Comrie, 2012). However, Indonesian has not been systematically analyzed using corpus-based morphosyntactic methods. Existing research often focuses on isolated verb groups without integrating structural analysis and authentic usage data.

This study addresses the following questions:

1. What types of experiencer constructions occur in Indonesian?
2. How are experiencers and stimuli structurally realized across verb classes?

The study aims to provide a systematic corpus-based description of Indonesian experiencer constructions and clarify how semantic roles are mapped to syntactic structure.

2. Method

This research adopts a qualitative descriptive approach focusing on morphosyntactic analysis.

Data Sources

The dataset consists of 500 clauses containing psychological predicates collected from:

1. The Indonesian CQPweb corpus (written data).
2. Publicly available YouTube videos (spoken data), including interviews, discussions, and conversational speech.

Spoken materials were selected purposively based on clarity of audio and the presence of psychological verbs.

Data Collection

Data were retrieved through targeted searches using keywords representing psychological verbs (e.g., *takut*, *ingat*, *mengejutkan*, *menyenangkan*, *mengingatkan*). Spoken data were manually transcribed and rechecked for accuracy.

Data Analysis

The analysis proceeded in four stages:

1. Identification of experiencer constructions.
2. Classification based on syntactic pattern.
3. Distributional tests (substitution, deletion, transformation).

4. Structural analysis using the X-Bar framework.

All classifications were repeatedly reviewed to ensure consistency. Spoken data were used solely for linguistic analysis and were drawn from publicly accessible sources.

3. Result and Discussion

Analysis of 500 clauses reveals three major types of experiencer constructions in Indonesian:

1. Experiencer as subject
2. Experiencer as object
3. Dative experiencer

Table 1 summarizes the distribution of these constructions.

Construction Type	Frequency	Percentage
Experiencer as subject	290	58%
Experiencer as object	150	30%
Dative experiencer	60	12%
Total	500	100%

Experiencer-as-subject constructions are the most frequent, while dative constructions occur least frequently. The distribution indicates that Indonesian more commonly encodes psychological states as internal experiences rather than externally caused events.

Experiencer as Subject

In this pattern, the experiencer occupies subject position. These constructions are commonly associated with emotion, cognition, volition, and sensation verbs.

Examples:

- Saya gelisah.
- Dia ingat kejadian itu.
- Aku ingin pulang.

These clauses typically describe internally generated psychological states and may occur without explicit stimuli.

Experiencer as Object

In this pattern, the stimulus functions as subject, while the experiencer appears as object. This construction is typically associated with causative psychological verbs.

Examples:

- Berita itu mengejutkan Rina.
- Penjelasan itu membingungkanku.

These constructions involve an external stimulus that triggers a psychological effect on the experiencer.

Datival Experiencer

In datival constructions, the experiencer is realized in a prepositional phrase introduced by *kepada*, *bagi*, or *untuk*.

Examples:

- Cerita itu mengingatkan masa kecil kepada Rina.
- Pengalaman itu memberikan pelajaran bagi mereka.

This pattern expresses indirect psychological impact and relies on analytic marking rather than morphological case.

Distribution Across Verb Classes

Experiencer constructions occur across several psychological verb classes. The distribution observed in the dataset is summarized below.

Verb Class	Typical Construction
Emotion	Subject, Object, Dative
Cognition	Subject, Object
Perception	Subject, Object
Volition	Subject
Sensation	Subject, Object

Emotion verbs show the widest structural variation, while volitional verbs strongly favor experiencer-subject constructions. This indicates that lexical semantics plays an important role in determining argument realization.

Structural Representation

Structural analysis using the X-Bar framework confirms that experiencers may occupy subject, object, or complement positions depending on construction type. Selected structural diagrams are provided in Appendix A.

4. Discussion

The results demonstrate that Indonesian experiencer constructions exhibit systematic variation in the mapping between semantic roles and grammatical functions. This aligns with typological findings that experiencers are structurally flexible rather than fixed (Belletti & Rizzi, 1988; Croft, 1993).

A key contribution of this study is the demonstration that Indonesian encodes experiencer roles through syntactic position and prepositional marking rather than morphological case. This reflects an analytic alignment strategy characteristic of many Austronesian languages.

The findings also support Dowty's (1991) proto-role theory, as experiencers in Indonesian display varying degrees of control and affectedness depending on construction type. Experiencer-subject constructions represent internally generated states, whereas object and datival constructions reflect externally

triggered experiences.

Compared to many Indo-European languages, Indonesian shows a highly flexible system of argument realization, allowing experiencers to appear in multiple structural positions depending on verb semantics.

Limitations

This study is limited to 500 clauses from selected written and spoken sources. It does not examine dialectal variation or prosodic features. Future research may expand the corpus and compare Indonesian with related Austronesian languages.

5. Conclusion

This study aims to describe the patterns of experience construction in Indonesian and to understand how the roles of experience and stimulus are realized in various syntactic structures. Based on an analysis of 500 data from spoken and written corpora, it was found that experiential constructions in Indonesian are realized through three main patterns, namely experience as subject, experience as object, and dative experience. Of the three, the experience-subject construction is the most dominant pattern and shows that mental experiences in Indonesian are generally presented as the internal state of the speaker.

In addition to syntactic patterns, this study also reveals that experiential verbs can be grouped into four categories, namely emotional, cognitive, perceptual, and volitional verbs. These four categories exhibit different syntactic behaviors depending on their semantic properties. Emotional verbs have the widest distribution, while perception and cognition verbs tend to require explicit stimuli. In terms of valency, experiential verbs consist of intransitive, transitive, and ditransitive verbs, each of which presents a different semantic relationship between the experience and the stimulus.

Overall, the results of this study show that Indonesian has a flexible system of experience representation, not only placing the experiencer in one syntactic position, but allowing it to move depending on the needs of the predicate. These findings show that the role of the experiencer in Indonesian is dynamic and lies on a continuum between internal and external, thus supporting the typological view that the experiencer is a semantically unstable role.

This study contributes to the study of Indonesian semantics and syntax, particularly in understanding patterns of mental experience representation. However, further study is still needed, especially comparing experience constructions across genres, language varieties, and dialectal variations, or linking them to prosodic representation in spoken language. Further research is expected to enrich our understanding of the behavior of experiential verbs and semantic role mapping in Indonesian.

Appendix A

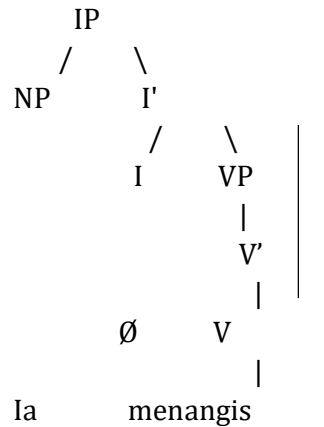
X-Bar Structural Diagrams

Experiencer as Subject

S-P

(1) Ia menangis

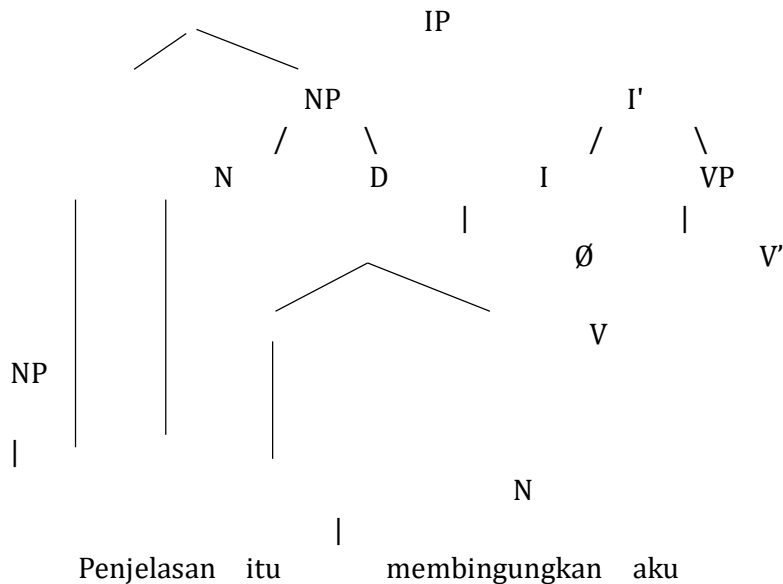
Diagram X-Bar



The X-Bar structure for the sentence “He cried” has a simple X-Bar structure because it only consists of a subject and predicate without any objects or additional modifiers. At the highest level, there is an IP (Inflectional Phrase) which serves as the container for the entire sentence structure.

Experiencer as Object

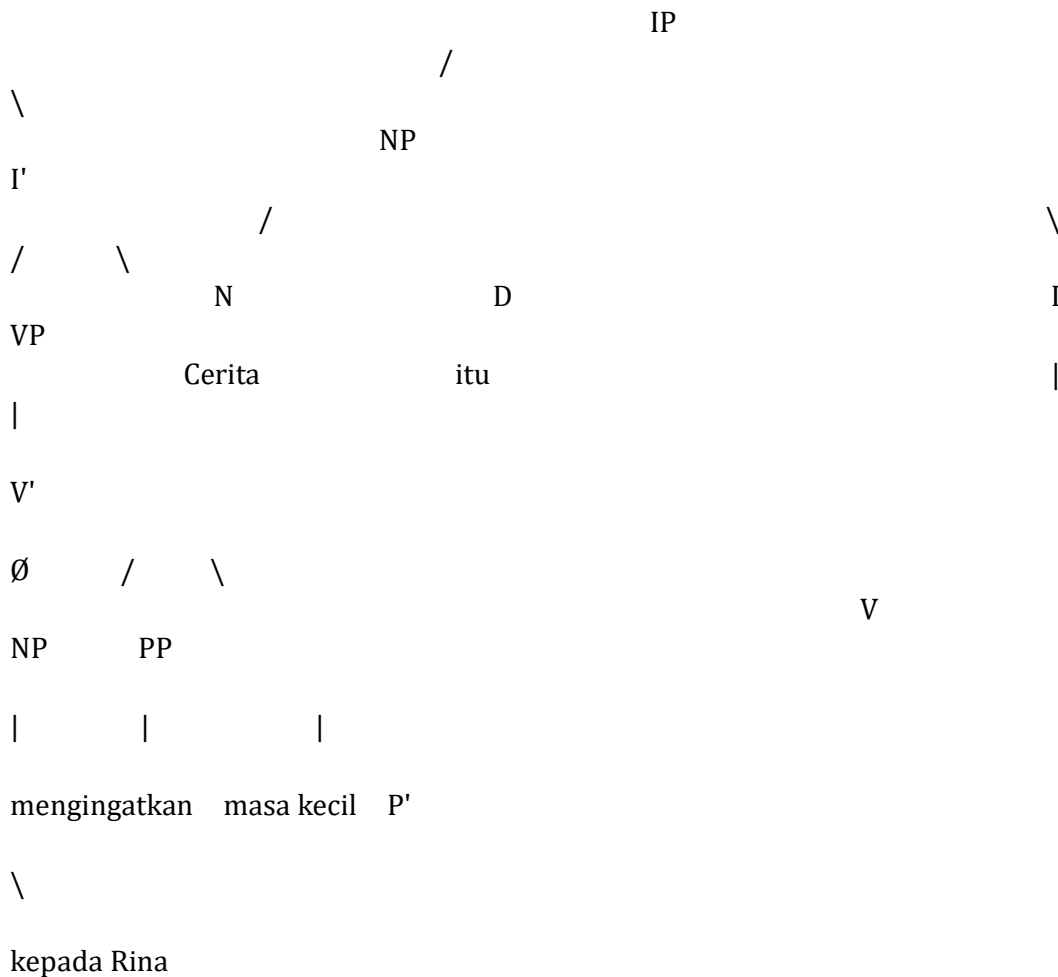
(2) Penjelasan itu membingungkanku



The X-Bar structure for the sentence “That explanation confused me” shows the syntactic relationship between the subject, predicate, and object in a phrase hierarchy. In the Spec-IP position, there is the NP “The explanation,” which acts as the subject and becomes the reference for the action in the predicate.

Experiencer as Dative

(3) Cerita itu mengingatkan masa kecil kepada Rina



The X-Bar structure for the sentence “The story reminded Rina of her childhood” is a predicative construction involving three main semantic roles, namely stimulus, theme, and dative experiencer.

Appendix B

Extended Grammatical Tests

Experiencer as Subject

(1) Intransitive Psychological Verb

- Aku gelisah. ✓
- ? Gelisah aku. ?
- * Gelisah peristiwa itu aku. *

The inversion in (1b) is marginal in neutral contexts, while (1c) violates Indonesian argument structure by inserting a stimulus without appropriate

marking.

(2) Cognitive Verb

- a. Saya ingat. ✓
- b. ? Ingat saya. ?
- c. * Ingat jawaban itu saya. *

The verb *ingat* in the intransitive pattern does not license a direct stimulus preceding the subject without structural adjustment.

(3) Experiencer-Subject with Complement

- a. Dia senang coklat. ✓
- b. Coklat menyenangkannya. ✓
- c. ? Coklat disenangi dia. ?
- d. * Senang dia coklat. *

Form (3b) represents a derived object-experiencer structure, while (3d) violates canonical word order.

Experiencer as Object

(4) Causative Psychological Verb

- a. Peristiwa itu mengejutkan mereka. ✓
- b. Mereka dikejutkan peristiwa itu. ✓
- c. ? Mereka dikejutkan oleh peristiwa itu. ?
- d. * Mengejutkan peristiwa itu mereka. *

The passive form in (4b) is acceptable, while (4d) disrupts Indonesian argument ordering.

(5) Verb with Temporal Modifier

- a. Coklat itu menyenangkan dia tadi malam. ✓
- b. Dia disenangkan coklat itu tadi malam. ✓
- c. ? Dia disenangkan oleh coklat itu tadi malam. ?
- d. * Menyenangkan dia coklat itu tadi malam. *

The ungrammaticality in (5d) results from incorrect predicate–argument sequencing.

Datival Experiencer

(6) Prepositional Dative Construction

- a. Coklat itu menyenangkan baginya. ✓

b. Cokelat itu menyenangkan. ✓

c. ? Baginya coklat itu menyenangkan. ?

d. * Menyenangkan coklat itu baginya. *

The dative experiencer requires prepositional marking and cannot appear in predicate-initial inversion.

(7) Dative with Adjunct

a. Kenangan itu menyenangkan untuknya saat malam. ✓

b. Kenangan itu menenangkannya saat malam. ✓

c. ? Untuknya kenangan itu menenangkan saat malam. ?

d. * Menenangkan kenangan itu untuknya saat malam. *

The ungrammatical pattern (7d) confirms that Indonesian does not allow predicate-subject-dative inversion in this construction type.

General Observation

These grammaticality tests confirm that Indonesian experiencer constructions are sensitive to argument order and valency. Experiencer-subject constructions display greater flexibility, while object and dative constructions exhibit stricter structural constraints. The tests support the classification presented in the Results section.

Acknowledgment

We would like to express their gratitude to all individuals who contributed to the completion of this study, especially the participants whose linguistic data were included in the analysis. We also thank colleagues who provided constructive feedback during the preparation of this manuscript.

6. References

- Belletti, A., & Rizzi, L. (1988). *Psych-verbs and θ -theory*. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory*, 6(3), 291–352.
- Bickel, B. (2001). *The syntax of experiencers in the Himalayas*. In P. Bhaskararao & K. V. Subbarao (Eds.), *The yearbook of South Asian languages and linguistics* (pp. 1–26). SAGE.
- Bresnan, J. (2001). *Lexical-functional syntax*. Blackwell.
- Comrie, B. (2012). *Alignment of case marking of full noun phrases*. In M. S. Dryer & M. Haspelmath (Eds.), *The World Atlas of Language Structures Online*. Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology.
- Croft, W. (1993). *Case marking and the semantics of mental verbs*. In J. Pustejovsky (Ed.), *Semantics and the lexicon* (pp. 55–72). Springer.
- Dalrymple, M. (2001). *Lexical functional grammar*. Academic Press.

- Dowty, D. R. (1991). *Thematic proto-roles and argument selection*. *Language*, 67(3), 547–619.
- Hasan, A. (2018). *Valensi verba dalam bahasa Indonesia: Kajian sintaksis dan semantik*. *Jurnal Ilmiah Kebahasaan*, 14(2), 101–120.
- Ismayanti, D., & Syam, A. T. (2022). The Community Manipulation through Big Brother™ s Tyranny in George Orwell™ s Nineteen Eighty-Four. *IDEAS: Journal on English Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature*, 10(2), 1556–1569.
- Kroeger, P. (2005). *Analyzing grammar: An introduction*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lakoff, G. (1987). *Women, fire, and dangerous things: What categories reveal about the mind*. University of Chicago Press.
- Levin, B. (1993). *English verb classes and alternations: A preliminary investigation*. University of Chicago Press.
- Levin, B., & Rappaport Hovav, M. (2005). *Argument realization*. Cambridge University Press.
- Mulyadi. (2016). *Konstruksi verba perasaan dalam bahasa Indonesia: Kajian semantik-sintaksis*. *Linguistik Indonesia*, 34(1), 1–14.
- Pustejovsky, J. (1995). *The generative lexicon*. MIT Press.
- Rappaport Hovav, M., & Levin, B. (1998). *Building verb meanings*. In M. Butt & W. Geuder (Eds.), *The projection of arguments* (pp. 97–134). CSLI Publications.
- Setiawan, E. I., Masruddin, M., & Zainuddin, Z. (2023). Semiotic Analysis and Ethnography Study on the Implementation of Local Wisdom in Economic Field at Luwu Society. *IDEAS: Journal on English Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature*, 11(2), 1912–1925.
- Shibatani, M. (2006). *On the conceptual framework for voice phenomena*. *Linguistics*, 44(2), 217–269.
- Sneddon, J. N., Adelaar, A., Djenar, D. N., & Ewing, M. (2010). *Indonesian: A comprehensive grammar* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Song, J. J. (2018). *Linguistic typology: Morphology and syntax*. Routledge.
- Sudaryanto. (2015). *Metode dan aneka teknik analisis bahasa*. Duta Wacana University Press.
- Sugiyono. (2018). *Metode penelitian kualitatif, kuantitatif, dan R&D*. Alfabeta.
- Thompson, S. A. (1996). *Object complements and the structure of experiential constructions*. *Studies in Language*, 20(3), 483–512.
- Van Valin, R. D., Jr., & LaPolla, R. J. (1997). *Syntax: Structure, meaning, and function*. Cambridge University Press.
- Verbeke, S. (2010). *The role of the experiencer in Indo-Aryan languages*. *Studies in Language*, 34(2), 281–310.
- Verbeke, S., Willems, K., & Van der Auwera, J. (2015). *Experiencer constructions in a typological perspective*. *Linguistics*, 53(3), 599–644.
- Wierzbicka, A. (1999). *Emotions across languages and cultures: Diversity and*

universals. Cambridge University Press.