

Argument Structure in an Austronesian Language: The Case of Batak Toba of Aek Kanopan Dialect

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the argument structure of Batak Toba, focusing on Aek Kanopan dialect, as part of a broader investigation into Austronesian grammatical typology. The main objective is to describe how arguments are structured, realized, and aligned within clauses, and to identify the typological characteristics underlying these patterns. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, the data were collected through elicitation, participant observation, and interviews with native speakers. The analysis reveals that Batak Toba Aek Kanopan Dialect (BBTAK) exhibits a predominantly accusative alignment, where the single argument of intransitive clauses (S) is treated similarly to the agent of transitive clauses (A), while the patient (P) is marked differently. The study also shows that core arguments in BBTAK are not restricted to nominal phrases, but may also be realized as clauses or propositions, reflecting structural flexibility. These findings contribute to the typological description of Batak Toba and provide empirical evidence for understanding argument structure in Austronesian languages.

KEYWORDS

Argument structure; grammatical typology; Batak Toba; Austronesian languages; accusative alignment.

INTRODUCTION

Argument structure is a fundamental concept in syntactic and typological linguistics, referring to the systematic relationship between a predicate and the participants involved in the event or state it denotes. In general terms, argument structure specifies how many arguments a predicate requires, what semantic roles these arguments bear (such as agent, patient, or experiencer), and how these roles are mapped onto syntactic functions within a clause (Van Valin & LaPolla, 1997; Levin & Hovav, 2005). As such, argument structure constitutes a crucial interface between syntax, semantics, and typology.

Cross-linguistic studies have shown that languages differ significantly in how they encode argument structure. These differences are reflected in valency patterns, grammatical relations, and alignment systems. Comrie (1989) emphasizes that typological variation in argument encoding is closely tied to how languages treat the core arguments of intransitive and transitive clauses. Similarly, Dixon (1994) proposes that the comparison of argument structure across languages must take into account the alignment between the single argument of an intransitive clause (S) and the two core arguments of a transitive clause, namely the agent-like argument (A) and the patient-like argument (P). This typological perspective provides a useful framework for identifying whether a language exhibits accusative, ergative, or other alignment patterns.

Within this theoretical landscape, the distinction between core arguments and peripheral

arguments is central. Core arguments are arguments that are required or licensed directly by the predicate, whereas peripheral arguments are optional and typically expressed through adjuncts (Valin, 1997). The identification of core arguments is not solely based on semantic roles but also on morphosyntactic behavior, such as positional constraints, agreement, or case marking. Therefore, the study of argument structure necessarily involves an examination of both formal syntactic properties and functional-semantic roles.

Austronesian languages are well known for their rich morphosyntactic variation and have long been a focal point of typological research. Scholars have noted that many Austronesian languages exhibit complex interactions between voice systems, argument realization, and grammatical alignment (Blust, 2013; Himmelmann, 2005). Although some Austronesian languages display symmetrical voice systems or exhibit properties that challenge traditional accusative–ergative dichotomies, many regional languages of Indonesia have been shown to pattern predominantly accusatively at the level of core argument alignment (Arka, 2013; Valin, 2005). These characteristics make Austronesian languages particularly valuable for testing and refining theories of argument structure.

Batak Toba is one of the major Batak languages spoken in North Sumatra, Indonesia, and forms part of the Austronesian language family. As a regional language with a large number of speakers and a long tradition of linguistic use in both spoken and written forms, Batak Toba occupies an important position in the linguistic landscape of Indonesia. Previous linguistic research has provided valuable descriptions of several grammatical aspects of Batak Toba, including verbal morphology, voice systems, word order, and the semantic roles associated with core arguments. These studies have contributed significantly to our understanding of how predicates and participants interact in Batak Toba clauses, particularly with respect to voice alternations and role assignment.

However, despite these contributions, research that explicitly and systematically addresses argument structure as a theoretical construct remains relatively limited. Many existing studies tend to treat arguments indirectly, often focusing on surface-level phenomena such as affixation patterns or semantic roles without fully integrating these observations into a broader framework of argument structure and grammatical alignment. Moreover, most descriptions of Batak Toba are conducted at a general or standardized level, implicitly assuming structural homogeneity across dialects. As a result, the potential impact of dialectal variation on argument realization, core argument selection, and alignment patterns has not been sufficiently explored.

Dialectal variation is particularly relevant in typological and syntactic studies, as it may reveal micro-variation that challenges or refines generalizations about a language's grammatical system. In the case of Batak Toba, dialects spoken in different regions may exhibit distinct morphosyntactic strategies for encoding arguments, such as differences in predicate types, argument omission, or the syntactic realization of non-nominal arguments. Without careful dialect-specific investigation, these patterns remain invisible, leading to an incomplete or oversimplified picture of Batak Toba argument structure.

Aek Kanopan dialect, spoken in the Labuhanbatu Utara region of North Sumatra, represents one such understudied variety. To date, this dialect has received little focused attention in formal linguistic analysis, particularly from a syntactic and typological perspective. Preliminary observations indicate that the Aek Kanopan dialect displays distinctive grammatical characteristics that set it apart from more widely described varieties of Batak Toba. Among these characteristics are notable patterns in the realization of arguments, including a high degree of flexibility in how core arguments are expressed syntactically. Core arguments in this dialect may be realized not only as nominal phrases but also as clausal or propositional constituents, depending on the predicate and discourse context.

In addition, Aek Kanopan dialect exhibits variation in predicate types, encompassing verbal and nonverbal predicates that interact differently with their arguments. Such variation raises important theoretical questions regarding the nature of argument licensing, the distinction between core and peripheral arguments, and the mapping between semantic roles and syntactic functions. From a typological standpoint, these features invite closer examination of how the dialect aligns its arguments and whether its patterns conform to, or diverge from, dominant alignment types commonly identified in Austronesian languages.

Therefore, the investigation of argument structure in Aek Kanopan dialect is not merely a descriptive endeavor but also a contribution to broader typological and theoretical discussions. By documenting and analyzing the argument structure of this dialect in detail, the present study seeks to fill an important empirical gap in Batak Toba linguistics and to provide new data that can inform cross-linguistic comparisons within the Austronesian language family. This dialect-focused approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of Batak Toba grammar and highlights the significance of dialectal variation in shaping argument structure and grammatical typology.

Against this background, the present study aims to provide a systematic description of the argument structure of BBTAK. Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) How are arguments structured and realized in BBTAK clauses? (2) What types of constituents function as core arguments in BBTAK? and (3) What grammatical alignment characterizes BBTAK from a typological perspective? By answering these questions, the study seeks to contribute not only to the grammatical documentation of Batak Toba but also to broader theoretical discussions on argument structure and typological variation within Austronesian languages.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach, which is appropriate for capturing the structural and functional characteristics of a language in natural use. In line with this, Sudaryanto (2015: 15) states that qualitative research is a research method conducted on the basis of facts or phenomena that exist in the field, which are empirically alive in their speakers, so that the data obtained or recorded by researchers is data that is true to life in the field. The data consist of spoken utterances in BBTAK collected from native speakers in Aek Kanopan area. Data were obtained through several techniques, including (1) direct elicitation using structured and semi-structured questionnaires, (2) participant observation in natural communicative settings, and (3) in-depth interviews with selected informants. The informants were native speakers of BBTAK who actively use the dialect in daily communication. The data were analyzed using both formal and informal methods. Formally, argument structures were represented through syntactic notation and clause patterns, while informally, explanations were provided in descriptive prose. The analysis focused on identifying predicates, core arguments, peripheral arguments, and their semantic roles. Typological interpretation was conducted by comparing the observed patterns with established typological frameworks (Dixon, 1994; Valin & LaPolla, 1997).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Argument Structure in BBTAK

The analysis shows that BBTAK clauses minimally consist of a predicate and one or more arguments. Predicates may be verbal or nonverbal, and arguments are organized around the predicate according to their grammatical and semantic functions. In intransitive clauses, a single core argument (S) occurs, typically functioning as the subject. In transitive clauses, two core arguments are present: the agent (A) and the patient (P). These arguments occupy

distinct syntactic positions and display different grammatical behaviors.

1. Intransitive Clause Structure in BBTAK

In intransitive clauses of BBTAK, the predicate licenses only a single core argument, traditionally labeled S, namely the sole argument of an intransitive clause. This argument represents the only participant involved in the event or state denoted by the predicate. Grammatically, S functions as the subject and is not accompanied by any additional core argument. The data discussed below demonstrate that this pattern is consistently attested across both verbal and nonverbal predicates in BBTAK.

- (1a) *Ro ibana*
VI-come he/she
'He/she comes.'
- (1b) *Marlange halahi di sunge i*
VI-swim 3PL PREP river ART
'They swim in the river.'
- (1c) *Marende boru i di pesta i*
VI-sing girl ART PREP party ART
'The girl sings at the party.'
- (2a) *Alai danggan baa i*
very good boy ART
'The boy is very good.'
- (2b) *Ganjang jarina*
long finger=POS3SG
'His/her finger is long.'

In example (1a) *Ro ibana* 'He/she comes', the verb *ro* 'come' is an intransitive verb expressing a motion event. This predicate requires only one argument, namely *ibana* 'he/she', which functions as S. Semantically, *ibana* 'he/she' bears the role of actor or mover, that is, the entity undergoing or performing the movement. Syntactically, *ibana* 'he/she' occupies the subject position and appears without any special morphological marking. The predicate *ro* 'come' does not license an object or any additional core argument, and the clause therefore exemplifies a one-place predicate structure, which is characteristic of intransitive clauses.

A similar intransitive pattern is observed in example (1b) *Marlange halahi di sunge i* 'They swim in the river'. The verb *marlange* 'swim' is an activity verb that does not take a direct object. The argument *halahi* 'they' functions as S, referring to a plural group of participants engaged in the swimming activity. The prepositional phrase *di sunge i* 'in the river' functions as a peripheral argument (adjunct) indicating location and does not affect the intransitive status of the clause. The presence of this locative adjunct shows that while intransitive clauses in BBTAK may be syntactically expanded, the number of core arguments remains one, in accordance with typological definitions of intransitivity.

The same structural pattern is also evident in example (1c) *Marende boru i di pesta i* 'The girl sings at the party'. The predicate *marende* 'sing' is an intransitive verb denoting a vocal activity that does not involve an object. The noun phrase *boru i* 'the girl' functions as S, that is, the only core argument licensed by the predicate. Semantically, this argument bears an actor role, while the prepositional phrase *di pesta i* 'at the party' once again serves as a locative adjunct. This example further confirms that locative expressions are optional and do not alter the basic intransitive argument structure of BBTAK clauses.

In addition to verbal predicates, BBTAK also exhibits intransitive clauses with nonverbal predicates, particularly adjectival predicates, as illustrated in examples (2a) and

(2b). In such constructions, the predicate expresses a state or property rather than an action or event, yet it still licenses a core argument in accordance with general principles of argument structure. This shows that nonverbal predicates in BBTAK are fully integrated into the grammatical system of argument licensing. In example (2a) *Alai denggan baoa i* ‘The boy is very good’, the adjective *denggan* ‘good’ functions as the main predicate of the clause. The intensifier *alai* ‘very’ modifies the adjectival predicate but does not affect the clause’s argument structure. The noun phrase *baoa i* ‘the boy’ functions as the single core argument (S). Semantically, *baoa i* ‘the boy’ denotes the entity to which the property ‘good’ is attributed and therefore bears a theme role. Syntactically, it occupies the subject position and appears without any overt morphological marking. The absence of a verbal element does not reduce the grammatical completeness of the clause, demonstrating that adjectival predicates in BBTAK can independently license arguments.

A comparable structure is found in example (2b) *Ganjang jarina* ‘His/her finger is long’. In this clause, *ganjang* ‘long’ serves as an adjectival predicate expressing a physical property. The noun phrase *jarina* ‘his/her finger’ functions as the sole core argument (S) of the clause. The possessive suffix *-na* encodes third-person possession within the noun phrase and does not introduce an additional argument at the clause level. Semantically, *jarina* ‘his/her finger’ represents the entity that bears the property ‘long’, while syntactically it occupies the same subject position as *baoa i* ‘the boy’ in example (2a).

Overall, examples (2a) and (2b) demonstrate that adjectival predicates in BBTAK consistently form intransitive clauses with a one-place argument structure. Whether the subject noun phrase is morphologically simple *baoa i* ‘the boy’ or internally complex due to possessive marking *jarina* ‘his/her finger’, the clause contains only one core argument. These data confirm that argument structure in BBTAK is determined by the valency of the predicate rather than by its lexical category, reinforcing the view that both verbal and nonverbal predicates participate in the same underlying system of argument licensing.

Based on the data presented in examples (1a)–(1c) and (2a)–(2b), intransitive clauses in BBTAK consistently exhibit a one-place predicate structure, irrespective of whether the predicate is verbal or nonverbal. In all cases, the single core argument (S) functions as the grammatical subject, occurs without overt morphological marking, and represents the sole participant involved in the event or state encoded by the predicate. This uniform treatment of S across different predicate types indicates that argument realization in BBTAK is governed by the valency of the predicate rather than by its lexical category. These findings are fully compatible with typological accounts of intransitivity as proposed by Dixon (1994) and Valin and LaPolla (1997), and they provide further evidence that the argument structure of BBTAK is systematic, predicate-centered, and typologically robust, even at the level of dialectal variation.

2. Transitive Clause Structure in BBTAK

Transitive clauses in BBTAK involve predicates that license two core arguments: an agent-like argument (A) and a patient-like argument (P). These arguments are syntactically and semantically distinct and occupy different positions within the clause. Consider the following example:

- (3a) *Manjaha bukku si Tigor*
VA-read book ART Tigor
Si Tigor reads the book.
- (3b) *Manggallang dekke akka dakdanak i*
VA-eat fish children ART
The children eat the fish.
- (3c) *Manuhor obut omak ni si Maria di pajak*

VA-buy fabric mother PAR ART Maria PREP pasar
Maria's mother buys fabric at the market.

The data (3a)–(3c) illustrate the canonical realization of transitive clause argument structure in BBTAK. In these clauses, the predicate plays a central role in determining both the number of arguments and their semantic and syntactic properties. Transitive predicates in BBTAK typically encode intentional actions involving at least two participants, namely an agent (A) and a patient (P), which together constitute the core arguments of the clause. In example (3a), the predicate *manjaha* ‘read’ is a transitive activity verb that denotes an intentional action performed by an animate participant toward an affected entity. The noun phrase ‘*si Tigor*’ functions as the agent (A), as it refers to the participant who deliberately carries out the reading activity. Syntactically, *si Tigor* occupies the subject position and appears as an unmarked nominal phrase, a characteristic feature of agent arguments in BBTAK. In contrast, the noun phrase *bukku* ‘book’ functions as the patient (P), representing the entity that is directly affected by the action of reading. It occurs in object position following the verb and does not exhibit the same grammatical privileges as the agent. The clear functional and positional distinction between *si Tigor* ‘the mane of person’ as A (Agent) and *bukku* ‘book’ as P (Patient) demonstrates the canonical two-argument structure licensed by the transitive verb *manjaha* ‘read’.

A comparable argument structure is observed in example (3b), where the transitive verb *manggallang* ‘eat’ likewise licenses two core arguments. The plural noun phrase *akka dakdanak i* ‘the children’ functions as the agent (A), denoting a group of animate participants who perform the eating action. Despite its plural reference, this agent argument displays the same syntactic behavior as singular agents, occupying the subject position and appearing without special marking. This indicates that number does not affect core argument status in BBTAK. The noun phrase *dekke* ‘fish’ functions as the patient (P), referring to the entity that undergoes consumption. As in example (3a), the patient follows the predicate and is syntactically distinct from the agent, reinforcing the stability and regularity of the transitive argument pattern across different predicates and participant configurations.

The data (3c) further demonstrates the transitive argument structure clause. The predicate *manuhor* ‘buy’ licenses two core arguments, an agent (A) and a patient (P), while also allowing additional non-core constituents. The noun phrase *omak ni si Maria* ‘Maria’s mother’ functions as the agent (A), denoting the animate participant who intentionally carries out the buying event. Although this noun phrase contains an internal possessive construction, its grammatical complexity does not alter its agentive role or its syntactic status as a core argument. The noun phrase *obut* ‘cloth/fabric’ functions as the patient (P), representing the entity that is purchased. In addition, the clause includes the prepositional phrase *di pajak* ‘at the market’, which serves as a peripheral argument (adjunct) expressing locative information. This element is optional and not required by the predicate *manuhor* ‘buy’, thereby distinguishing it clearly from the core arguments A and P.

From an overall perspective, the data in examples (3a)–(3c) show that BBTAK consistently exhibits a canonical transitive argument structure in which predicates license two core arguments with clearly differentiated roles and syntactic behaviors. The agent argument (A) is subject-like, typically animate, and occupies a privileged syntactic position, while the patient argument (P) follows the verb and represents the entity affected by the action. Additional elements, such as locative or other prepositional phrases, function as peripheral arguments and do not affect the core argument structure of the clause.

Based on the typological perspective, the consistent syntactic treatment of agent arguments across different predicates and levels of clause complexity provides strong evidence that BBTAK exhibits an accusative alignment system. In this system, the agent of

a transitive clause (A) patterns with the single argument of an intransitive clause (S), while the patient (P) is encoded differently. This pattern accords with Dixon's (1994) S–A–P framework and supports broader typological claims that many Austronesian languages, including regional languages of Indonesia, display accusative alignment at the level of core grammatical relations.

3. Grammatical Behavior of Core Arguments

The distinction between the core arguments S, A, and P in BBTAK is reflected not only in their semantic roles but also, and more importantly, in their grammatical behavior. In BBTAK, both the single argument of an intransitive clause (S) and the agent of a transitive clause (A) typically occupy the subject position and are realized as unmarked personal pronouns or noun phrases. In contrast, the patient argument (P) consistently appears in object position and follows the predicate. This distributional asymmetry provides an important diagnostic for identifying the alignment system of the language. Compare the following examples:

- (4a) *Parjahat ibana*
criminal 3MSG
He is a criminal.
- (4b) *Mangalean hata i ibana*
VA-give word ART 3MSG
'He gave the word.'

This pattern is clearly illustrated by the contrast between examples (4a) and (4b). The example (4a), *Parjahat ibana* 'He is a criminal', represents an intransitive nonverbal clause. The predicate *parjahat* 'criminal' is a nominal predicate that expresses an identifying or attributive relation rather than an action. As a nonverbal predicate, *parjahat* 'criminal' licenses only one core argument. The pronoun *ibana* 'he' functions as the sole argument of the clause and is therefore classified as S. Semantically, *ibana* 'he' bears a theme or referential role, namely the entity to which the property 'criminal' is ascribed. Syntactically, *ibana* 'he' appears in subject position following the predicate, a word order that is typical of nonverbal clauses in Batak Toba. Crucially, the predicate does not allow any additional core argument, confirming the one-place argument structure characteristic of intransitive predicates.

In contrast, example (4b), *Mangalean hata i ibana* 'He gave the word', illustrates a transitive verbal clause. The verb *mangalean* 'give' encodes a transfer event and therefore licenses more than one argument. In this clause, *ibana* 'he' functions as the agent argument (A), referring to the participant who intentionally performs the act of giving. The noun phrase *hata i* 'the word' functions as the patient (P) or theme, denoting the entity that is transferred. From a syntactic perspective, *ibana* 'ge' again occupies the subject position, while *hata i* 'the word' occurs in object position following the verb. Thus, although *ibana* 'he' fulfills a different semantic role than in the intransitive clause, its syntactic realization remains unchanged.

A comparison of the two examples reveals a crucial typological generalization. Although *ibana* 'he' serves different argument roles—S in the intransitive clause and A in the transitive clause—it is realized in the same syntactic position and shows no formal morphological distinction between these two functions. In both cases, *ibana* 'he' appears as an unmarked pronoun functioning as the subject of the clause. This uniform treatment of S and A stands in clear contrast to the encoding of P *hata i* 'the word', which occupies a different syntactic position and is structurally dependent on the transitive predicate. This systematic pattern provides strong evidence that BBTAK follows an accusative alignment system, in which the single argument of an intransitive clause (S) is treated in the same

way as the agent of a transitive clause (A), while the patient (P) is encoded differently. Such an alignment is fully consistent with Dixon's (1994) S–A–P typological framework and supports broader observations that many Austronesian languages, including regional languages of Indonesia, display accusative behavior at the level of core grammatical relations, even when they exhibit complex voice systems on the surface.

Overall, the data demonstrate that BBTAK exhibits a clear and systematic distinction between intransitive and transitive argument structures. Intransitive predicates license a single core argument (S), whereas transitive predicates license two core arguments (A and P). This distinction aligns with cross-linguistic definitions of argument structure and confirms that argument realization in BBTAK is fundamentally predicate-driven. The consistent mapping between predicate type, number of arguments, and grammatical functions underscores the importance of predicate–argument relations in understanding the syntax of Batak Toba, particularly when dialectal data such as that from Aek Kanopan are taken into account.

Realization of Core Arguments

One notable finding is that core arguments in BBTAK are not limited to noun phrases. While noun phrases constitute the most common realization, core arguments may also be expressed as clauses or propositions, particularly in complement constructions. This flexibility indicates that BBTAK allows complex argument realization, a feature that aligns with patterns found in other Austronesian languages.

a. Core Arguments Realized as Noun Phrases

The most common realization of core arguments in BBTAK is through noun phrases (NPs), as illustrated by the following transitive clause.

- (5a) *Manjaha bukku si Tigor*
VA-read book ART Tigor
'Si Tigor reads the book.'

In example (5a), the verb *manjaha* 'read' licenses two core arguments. The noun phrase *si Tigor* 'the name of person' functions as the agent (A), namely the participant that intentionally performs the action of reading, while *bukku* 'book' functions as the patient (P), that is, the entity affected by the action. Both arguments are realized as lexical noun phrases, which represent the most prototypical form of core argument realization in BBTAK.

b. Core Arguments Realized as Clausal Complements

In addition to noun phrases, BBTAK also allows clauses to function as core arguments, particularly in constructions involving mental verbs or attitude verbs.

- (5b) *Diboto ibana [molo ro si Maria]*
know 3SG COMP come ART Maria
'He knows that Maria comes.'

In example (6b), the predicate *diboto* 'know' licenses two core arguments. The agent argument (A) is realized by the pronoun *ibana* 'he', while the patient or theme argument (P) is realized by the clausal complement *molo ro si Maria* 'that Maria comes'. This clause functions as a propositional unit occupying a core argument position, rather than as a peripheral adjunct. This pattern demonstrates that in BBTAK, core arguments are not restricted to noun phrases but may also be realized as full clauses expressing propositions.

c. Propositional Arguments in Control and Modal Constructions

The realization of core arguments as clauses is also found in control and modal

constructions.

- (5c) *Giot ibana [marlange di sunge i]*
want 3SG VI-swim PREP river ART
'He wants to swim in the river.'

In example (5c), the predicate *giot* 'want' licenses two core arguments. The agent argument is realized by *ibana* 'he', while the second argument is realized by the non-finite clause *marlange di sunge i* 'to swim in the river'. This clause denotes the desired event and semantically functions as a propositional argument, rather than as an optional complement. Accordingly, the clause forms an integral part of the core argument structure determined by the predicate *giot* 'want'.

Core arguments in BBTAK are most commonly realized as noun phrases (NPs), particularly in prototypical transitive constructions. This pattern is illustrated in example (5a) *Manjaha bukku si Tigor* 'Si Tigor reads the book', where the predicate *manjaha* 'read' licenses two core arguments. The noun phrase *si Tigor* 'the name of person' functions as the agent (A), representing the participant that intentionally performs the action, while *bukku* 'book' functions as the patient (P), namely the entity affected by the action. Both arguments are realized as lexical noun phrases, reflecting the most canonical form of core argument realization in BBTAK. This construction demonstrates that NP realization constitutes the default strategy for encoding core grammatical relations in the language.

At the same time, BBTAK also allows greater flexibility in the realization of core arguments, as shown by constructions in which a clause functions as a core argument. This is particularly evident with mental or attitude verbs, as illustrated in example (5b) *Diboto ibana [molo ro si Maria]* 'He knows that Maria comes'. In this clause, the predicate *diboto* 'know' licenses two core arguments: the agent (A), realized by the pronoun *ibana* 'he', and the patient or theme (P), realized by the clausal complement *molo ro si Maria*. Rather than serving as a peripheral modifier, this clause occupies a core argument position and encodes a full proposition, indicating that BBTAK does not restrict core arguments to nominal categories alone.

A similar pattern is found in control and modal constructions, as exemplified in (5c) *Giot ibana [marlange di sunge i]* 'He wants to swim in the river'. Here, the predicate *giot* 'want' selects two core arguments: the agent *ibana* 'he' and a non-finite clausal complement *marlange di sunge i* 'to swim in the river'. This clause denotes the desired event and functions semantically as a propositional argument, forming an obligatory part of the predicate's argument structure rather than an optional adjunct. The presence of such constructions further confirms that clausal realization of core arguments is systematic and predicate-driven in BBTAK.

Taken together, the patterns observed in examples (5a)–(5c) show that the realization of core arguments in BBTAK is both flexible and structurally complex. While noun phrases remain the most frequent and prototypical realization, certain predicates—especially cognitive, attitude, and modal verbs—allow core arguments to be expressed as clauses or propositions. This indicates that argument structure in BBTAK is not constrained by a single syntactic category, but is instead determined by the semantic properties and valency of the predicate. Typologically, this behavior aligns with the observations of Dixon (1994) and Valin & LaPolla (1997) regarding Austronesian languages, which commonly permit clausal complements as core arguments. Consequently, the BBTAK data support the characterization of the language as exhibiting a predicate-centered and typologically coherent argument structure within the broader Austronesian context.

Grammatical Alignment in BBTAK

From a typological perspective, BBTAK exhibits an accusative alignment system, in which the single argument of an intransitive clause (S) is treated in the same way as the agent of a transitive clause (A), while the patient (P) is distinguished morphosyntactically. This type of alignment is reflected in several grammatical properties, including constituent order, syntactic behavior of arguments, and argument marking. The accusative pattern identified in BBTAK supports previous typological findings that many Indonesian regional languages follow an accusative system, despite displaying surface-level variation in voice and valency. Importantly, the dialectal data from Aek Kanopan provide additional empirical evidence that strengthens this typological classification. The accusative alignment in BBTAK can be observed by comparing intransitive and transitive clauses, as illustrated in examples (5a) and (5b).

- (6a) *Ro ibana*
VI-come 3SG
'He/she came.'
- (6b) *Manjaha bukku si Tigor*
VA-read book ART Tigor
Si Tigor reads the book.

In example (6a), the verb *ro* 'come' functions as an intransitive verbal predicate that licenses only one core argument. The pronoun *ibana* 'he/she' serves as the single argument (S). Semantically, *ibana* 'he/she' bears an actor or mover role, while syntactically it occupies the subject position without any special morphological marking. The predicate does not permit an additional argument, confirming its one-place argument structure. In contrast, the example (6b) illustrates a transitive clause headed by the verb *manjaha* 'read', which licenses two core arguments. The noun phrase *si Tigor* 'the name of person' functions as the agent (A), referring to the participant who intentionally performs the action, while *bukku i* 'the book' functions as the patient (P), denoting the entity affected by the action. The presence of two core arguments reflects the valency of the transitive predicate.

Crucially, the agent argument in the transitive clause occupies the same syntactic position as the single argument of the intransitive clause, namely the subject position, and shows no overt morphological marking. In contrast, the patient argument *bukku i* 'the book' occurs after the predicate and is structurally distinct, indicating its different grammatical status. This contrast highlights the shared morphosyntactic behavior of S and A, as opposed to P.

Further evidence for this alignment pattern is found in nonverbal intransitive clauses and transitive clauses with lexical noun phrase agents, as shown in examples (6c) and (6d).

- (6c) *Guru ibana*
teacher 3SG
'He/she is a teacher.'
- (6d) *Mangallang dekke akka dakdanak i*
VA-eat fish children ART
'The children eat the fish.'

The example (6c) represents an intransitive nonverbal clause with a nominal predicate. The predicate *guru* 'teacher' establishes an identifying relation and licenses only one core argument. The pronoun *ibana* 'he/she' again functions as S and occupies the subject position. Its grammatical realization is identical to that found in verbal intransitive clauses, demonstrating that the treatment of S is consistent across predicate types. In example (6d), the plural noun phrase *akka dakdanak i* 'the children' functions as the agent (A), while

dekke ‘fish’ functions as the patient (P). As in earlier examples, the agent is realized in subject position without special marking, whereas the patient follows the verb. The presence of plural marking on the agent does not affect its core grammatical status, indicating that grammatical relations in BBTAK are determined by argument function rather than number.

In general, the data in examples (6a)–(6d) demonstrate that BBTAK consistently treats S and A in the same morphosyntactic way. Both arguments occur in subject position, are expressed as unmarked pronouns or noun phrases, and display identical syntactic behavior in both verbal and nonverbal clauses. In contrast, the patient argument (P) is systematically distinguished by its post-verbal position and its dependence on transitive predicates. This pattern corresponds directly to the accusative alignment model proposed by Dixon (1994), in which S and A form a natural class that is distinct from P. As noted by Comrie (1989), accusative alignment is typically manifested through shared syntactic privileges of S and A, such as subjecthood and the absence of overt marking—properties that are clearly attested in BBTAK. From the perspective of Role and Reference Grammar, this alignment reflects a consistent mapping between macroroles and syntactic functions, with actor roles realized as subjects and undergoer roles realized as objects (Valin & LaPolla, 1997).

The accusative pattern observed in BBTAK aligns with typological generalizations concerning Indonesian and Austronesian languages, which frequently display accusative behavior at the level of core grammatical relations despite the presence of complex voice systems. The dialectal evidence from Aek Kanopan further demonstrates that this alignment is robust not only at the language-wide level but also within specific dialects, thereby reinforcing the typological classification of BBTAK as an accusative language.

CONCLUSION

This study has provided a detailed account of the argument structure of BBTAK within a typological perspective. The analysis demonstrates that BBTAK exhibits a systematic and predicate-centered organization of argument structure, in which the number and type of core arguments are determined by valency of the predicate. Intransitive predicates, whether verbal or nonverbal, consistently license a single core argument (S) functioning as the grammatical subject, while transitive predicates license two core arguments, namely an agent (A) and a patient (P), which are clearly distinguished both semantically and syntactically. The uniform treatment of S and A in subject position, contrasted with the distinct realization of P in object position, provides strong evidence that BBTAK follows an accusative alignment system in accordance with Dixon’s (1994) S–A–P framework and the macrorole-based analysis proposed by Valin and LaPolla (1997).

In addition, the study reveals that the realization of core arguments in BBTAK is not restricted to noun phrases. While nominal arguments constitute the most prototypical and frequent realization, BBTAK productively allows clauses and propositions to function as core arguments, particularly in constructions involving cognitive, attitude, and modal predicates. This flexibility indicates that argument realization in BBTAK is governed by semantic requirements and predicate valency rather than by rigid syntactic categories. Typologically, this pattern aligns BBTAK with broader Austronesian tendencies, in which clausal complements are commonly integrated into core argument structure. Importantly, the dialectal data from Aek Kanopan show that these typological properties are robust even at the sub-language level, thereby contributing valuable empirical evidence to the description of Batak Toba and to cross-linguistic studies of argument structure and grammatical alignment.

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