

# Reconsidering the syntax of Javanese *wis* ‘already’\*

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## SUMMARY

This paper revisits what the syntax of *wis* ‘already’ is in Javanese. I propose that this marker is neither an adverb nor an auxiliary, but a particle. This new analysis accounts for the syntactic distribution and behaviour of Javanese *wis*, and adds to the cross-linguistic picture of how the aspectual marker *already* can be syntactically represented as either a lexical or functional marker.

## RÉSUMÉ

Cet article réexamine la syntaxe de *wis* ‘déjà’ en Javanais. Je propose que cet élément est ni un adverbe, ni un auxiliaire, mais une particule. Cette nouvelle analyse explique le comportement et la distribution syntaxique du *wis* Javanais, et étend notre compréhension de la manière dont cet élément aspectuel *déjà* peut être représenté comme soit un élément lexique ou fonctionnel.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Markers expressing ‘already’ in natural language have been the focus of numerous linguistic studies, especially concerning its semantics: see König (1977), Löbner (1989, 1999), Michaelis (1992, 1996), Mittwoch (1993), van der Auwera (1993), and Krifka (2000), which have focused on German *schon* and English *already*. A growing trend in recent years in the literature is to better understand the cross-linguistic semantic expression of ‘already’, with work on Colloquial

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\* This paper stems from learning about syntactic spines and limbs from Lisa when I didn’t yet know head from tail. Thank you, Lisa, for your inspiration and continued support both academically and as a friend. Many thanks to you and Glyne Piggott for a wonderful Field Methods Class (now 10 years ago!) which lead to a journey investigating the spine and limbs of Javanese. I endeavour to be a teacher like you, connecting the big with the small and small with the big. Finally, these acknowledgements are not complete without thanking the Javanese speakers who made this paper possible: I am indebted to you—*matur suwon seng akeh!*

Singapore English (Fong 2005), Malay (Soh and Gaijo 2008; Soh 2012), Indonesian (Grangé 2010, Kaswanti Purwo 2011, Olsson 2013), Thai, Vietnamese (Olsson 2013), Medumba (Mucha 2015), and Javanese (Vander Kloek and Matthewson 2015). Compared to these works, there is relatively less research specifically on the syntax of ‘already’; see for instance, Soh (2012) on Malay.

In this paper, I reconsider the syntax of the marker *wis* ‘already’ in Javanese, an Austronesian language spoken primarily in Central and East Java, Indonesia, taking cues from two main research programs—Cinque’s (1999) feature-based approach and Ernst’s (2002) semantic scope approach.

These research programs have competing views as to which module of the grammar is responsible for the syntactic distribution of such markers. Cinque (1999) and subsequent work proposes that there is a fixed syntactic projection for markers to express ‘already’ (and many other types); such markers can either be an adverb (XP), located in a unique specifier of the designated XP, or it can be a functional head ( $X^0$ ) such as an auxiliary or an affix, located in the head of the designated XP. Syntax (and relevant syntactic features) thus governs the distribution and selectional restrictions of markers like those expressing ‘already’.

Ernst (2002) puts forward an alternative proposal where it is the semantics that governs the apparent syntactic distributional or selectional restrictions of adjuncts. Under this approach, markers expressing ‘already’ are adjuncts (XPs) which can—in theory—freely adjoin to any XP between TP and V(oice)P, but in practice are quite restricted because of their *semantic* requirements (pp. 341-347). Ernst does not discuss the possibility of markers expressing ‘already’ to be heads, as the focus of his study is on adjuncts.

The merits of each of these research programs should not be underestimated: Cinque’s approach carefully considers the grammatical category of the markers, and whether they are lexical (e.g. adverbs) as an XP or functional as a head plays an important role in the syntax. Indeed, being located as a limb or on the spine has consequences for movement operations. Ernst’s approach carefully tackles the consequences of semantic incompatibility or selectional restrictions, showing that semantics can cover a lot of ground for the syntax.

These merits will be highlighted in the proposed analysis of Javanese *wis* as a focus particle, which is syntactically an  $X^0$  and, I suggest, distributionally restricted by its semantics. Section 4 will discuss this proposal, focusing on the syntactic facts, and leaving some of the semantic details for future work. In Section 2, I first provide the relevant background on Javanese and the marker under discussion, *wis*. I show in Section 3 that despite suggestive evidence, an analysis of *wis* as an adverb, an XP, or an auxiliary, a  $X^0$ , ultimately cannot account for the full range of data. Section 5 concludes the paper.

## 2 BACKGROUND

### 2.1 A NOTE ON JAVANESE & THE METHODOLOGY

Javanese (Western Malayo-Polynesian; Austronesian) is the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> largest language in the world in numbers of native speakers, with counts of over 80 or 90 million speakers. It is spoken mainly in Java, Indonesia, where three main dialectal groups are identified—West Javanese, Central Javanese, and East Javanese (Hatley 1984). Javanese has a complex and elaborate set of speech levels, used most extensively in the variety spoken in the courtly cities of Yogyakarta and Surakarta/Solo, and present throughout most Javanese varieties, but a less extensive

implementation in many (cf. Smith-Hefner 1989, Connors 2008). The data presented in this paper are primarily in *ngoko* ‘low Javanese’ from the East Javanese variety spoken in Paciran, a village on the north coast of Lamongan regency in East Java.

The data are based on fieldwork by the author (unless otherwise cited), using primarily elicitation tasks with individual speakers of grammatical judgments and, less commonly, translation tasks from Indonesian or English to Javanese. Some examples in this paper are also drawn from recorded natural conversations in Paciran from 2011, which were transcribed by a Paciran Javanese speaker.

## 2.2 PREVIOUS ACCOUNTS OF JAVANESE *WIS* ‘ALREADY’

Concerning the syntactic category of *wis* in Javanese, Robson’s (2002) student grammar includes *wis* among the set of auxiliaries; Vander Klok (2012) also analyzes *wis/wes* as an auxiliary, some evidence for which is expounded in section 3.2. In their grammar, Wedhawati et al. (2006:162-3, 331-2) describe *wis* as an adverb, which can modify a verb phrase or other adverbials.<sup>1</sup>

With respect to the semantics of Javanese *wis*, Vander Klok and Matthewson (2015) argue that this marker is best analyzed as a *focus-sensitive operator*, following Krifka’s (2000) analysis of English *already*. In a nutshell, when *wis* applies to a proposition (containing a Background and a Focus; see Krifka (2000)), it asserts that same proposition and adds the presupposition that the proposition has a faster development speed than the other alternatives.

## 3 SYNTACTIC PROPERTIES OF JAVANESE *WIS* ‘ALREADY’

What are the syntactic category and related position of *wis* ‘already’ in Javanese? There seems to be conflicting evidence, suggesting it could either be an adverb and thus an XP (§3.1) or an auxiliary and thus an X<sup>0</sup> (§3.2). I will propose that it is neither an adverb or an auxiliary, but instead a focus particle: it is a syntactic head that can modify different-sized constituents (§4).

### 3.1 JAVANESE *WIS* ‘ALREADY’ AS AN ADVERB?

On the one hand, *wis* appears to behave like an adverb. It has a wider syntactic distribution than other TAM auxiliaries in Javanese, both in terms of its syntactic location as well as what types of constituents it can modify. Considering first the categorial types *wis* ‘already’ can modify, besides modifying a verbal predicate as illustrated in (1), *wis* ‘already’ appears to also modify adjectival predicates as in (2)<sup>2</sup> and nominal predicates as in (3). From these data points, the generalization arises that *wis* ‘already’ can modify any type of predicate.<sup>3,4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The orthography is variable as either *wis* (more typical in Central Javanese) or *wes* (more typical in East Javanese).

Throughout the paper, I have used *wis* in the text (underlining that the properties described and analyzed of the marker under discussion are assumed to be cross-dialectally stable) and *wes* in the examples from Paciran Javanese (true to how native speakers write their variety).

<sup>2</sup> With states as with the adjectival predicates in (2), an inchoative interpretation arises with *wes* ‘already’. See Vander Klok & Matthewson (2015) for details.

<sup>3</sup> This generalization assumes that adjectival and nominal predicates occur without a (null) copula. Further evidence is required to concretely rule out the possibility of a null copula, along the lines of Richards (2010) for Tagalog, for instance. If it is the case that a null copula is required, the generalization would be that *wis* ‘already’ simply modifies a verbal predicate.

<sup>4</sup> Additional glosses to the Leipzig Glossing rules are the following: AV ‘actor voice’, APPL ‘applicative’, CIRC ‘circumstantial modality’, DEON ‘deontic modality’, E.PST ‘existential past’, EPIS ‘epistemic modality’ FOC ‘focus’, NEC ‘necessity’, POS

- (1) Mida **wes** [<sub>VP</sub> n-umpak kereta api].  
Mida already AV-ride track fire  
'Mida already took a train.'
- (2) a. Dulur-ku sa'iki **wes** [<sub>AP</sub> dhuwur].  
sibling-my now already tall  
'My sibling is tall now.'
- b. Context offered: *Dike'i kontak lens.* '[She was] given contact lenses.'  
Siti, mata-ne **wes** [<sub>AP</sub> biru].  
Siti eye-DEF already blue  
'As for Siti, her eyes became blue.' (Vander Klok & Matthewson 2015:190)
- (3) a. Context (recorded conversation): *Speaker from outside of the village discussing that not so many people consistently use krama 'high Javanese' in Paciran.*  
Memang-e **wes** [<sub>DP</sub> adat-e koyok ngono iku].  
indeed-DEF already custom-DEF like like.that DEM  
'Actually it's already the tradition that it's like that.'
- b. **wes** [<sub>DP</sub> wayah-ne] mbak Jozi ng-ulang?  
already time-DEF Miss Jozi AV-teach  
'Is it already the time for Jozi to teach?'

Second, *wis* 'already' besides occurring predicate-initially, as in (1)-(3), can also occur predicate-finally in the *surface* syntax, but only when introducing an adjunct (a temporal modifier to the VP), either a noun phrase, as in (4) or (5)a, or perhaps a verbal predicate, as in (5)b.

- (4) a. Pak Zaini **wes** teko suwe-ne telo-ng jam  
Mr. Zaini already come long-DEF three-LNK hour  
'Mr. Zaini already arrived 3 hours ago.'
- b. Pak Zaini teko **wes** telo-ng jam  
Mr. Zaini come already three-LNK hour  
'Mr. Zaini arrived already 3 hours ago.'
- (5) a. Aku m-anggon nek Paciran **wes** sa'-ngisor-e lima-ng taun.  
1SG AV-live in Paciran already one-below-DEF five-LNK year  
'I have lived in Paciran for less than five years.'
- b. Aku m-anggon nek Paciran **wes** kurang teko lima-ng taun.  
1SG AV-live in Paciran already less come five-LNK year  
'I have lived in Paciran for less than five years.'

However, *wis* alone cannot occur sentence-initially or sentence-finally:

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'possibility', ROOT 'root modality'.

- (6) a. \* **wes** Pak Suwanan mate-ni lampu-ne.  
 already Mr. Suwanan AV.die-APPL lamp-DEF  
 (‘Mr. Suwanan already turned off the light.’)
- b. \*Pak Suwanan mate-ni lampu-ne **wes**.  
 Mr. Suwanan AV.die-APPL lamp-DEF already  
 (‘Mr. Suwanan turned off the light already.’) (Vander Klok 2012:57)

Given the facts so far, it seems plausible that *wis* ‘already’ is an adverb which can select for a predicate of any type. More concretely, we can hypothesize that *wis* is a limb (XP) in the specifier of a functional projection located above vP (or PredP) but below TP, along the lines of a Cinquean approach. However, this hypothesis doesn’t quite extend to the facts in (4)-(5) where *wis* appears to introduce an adjunct. We now turn to the hypothesis that *wis* is instead an auxiliary, and in doing so, show that the hypothesis that *wis* is an XP adverbial is untenable.

### 3.2 JAVANESE *WIS* ‘ALREADY’ AS AN AUXILIARY?

There is evidence that *wis* behaves as an auxiliary; that is, a head of a functional projection—on the spine of the tree. The strongest evidence comes from intervention effects where a subset of auxiliaries in Javanese can front to  $C^0$  to form a yes-no question (Vander Klok 2015). In this case, *wis* acts as an intervenor, blocking movement of lower heads.

In order to set up this test, we first note that *tau* ‘E.PST’ > *iso* ‘CIRC.POS’ must occur in a strict relative order (Vander Klok 2012): only the order in (7a) is possible. Further, based on their semantics and strict relative order, I assume that the past tense marker *tau* ‘E.PST’ is base generated in  $T^0$  and the circumstantial possibility modal *iso* ‘CIRC.POS’ is base generated lower than  $T^0$  but above  $v^0$ , and finally, both of these markers are auxiliaries (distinct from main verbs and adverbs).<sup>5</sup>

One way to form a yes-no question in Javanese is to raise the auxiliary to  $C^0$ ; this is possible with either *tau* or *iso* independently (Cole et al. 2008; Vander Klok 2015, 2018). However, a head located structurally higher than another will block movement of a lower one. As illustrated in (7), the auxiliary *tau* in  $T^0$  blocks the movement of the lower auxiliary *iso* to raise to  $C^0$  to derive a yes-no question, but not vice-versa. This blocking can be explained by the Head Movement Constraint (HMC; Travis 1984).<sup>6</sup>

- (7) a. bu Risa **tau iso** melayu sampek ro-ng puloh menit toh?  
 Mrs. Risa E.PST CIRC.POS run until two-LNK ten minute FOC  
 ‘Risa once could run up to 20 minutes?’
- b. **tau<sub>i</sub>** bu Risa **t<sub>i</sub> iso** melayu sampek ro-ng puloh menit?  
 E.PST Mrs. Risa CIRC.POS run until two-LNK ten minute  
 ‘Could Risa run up to 20 minutes?’

<sup>5</sup> See Chen et al. (2018) for the semantics of *tau* as an existential relative past tense; Vander Klok (2013) for the semantics of *iso* as a modal lexically specified for existential quantification and circumstantial modal flavour; and Vander Klok (2012, 2015) for an overview of the strict relative order of TAM markers in Paciran Javanese.

<sup>6</sup> Cole et al. (2008) discuss a way to derive this via Attract Closest (Richards 2002).

- c. \***iso**<sub>j</sub>      bu    Risa   **tau**   *t<sub>j</sub>*   melayu   sampek   ro-ng   puloh   menit?  
 CIRC.POS Mrs. Risa E.PST    run    until    two-LNK ten    minute  
 (‘Could Risa run up to 20 minutes?’)

In the same vein, we can use auxiliary fronting to test for the syntactic status of *wis* ‘already’ in Javanese. To first identify the syntactic order of *wis* ‘already’ with respect to other TAM markers, (8a-b) suggests that *wis* ‘already’ obligatory occurs above the modal *iso* ‘CIRC.POS’. If *wis* is located in a specifier position as an adverb, head-movement of *iso* ‘CIRC.POS’ should be possible to C<sup>0</sup> to form a yes-no question. If *wis* is a head, then head-movement of *iso* ‘CIRC.POS’ is predicted to be blocked by the HMC. As shown in (8c), fronting of *iso* ‘CIRC.POS’ results in ungrammaticality, suggesting that *wis* is a head (parallel to (7c) with *tau* ‘E.PST’).

- (8) a. bayi-ne   **wes**   **iso**    melaku.  
 baby-DEF already CIRC.POS walk  
 ‘The baby already can walk.’
- b. \* bayi-ne **iso wes** melaku.
- c. \* **iso**<sub>i</sub>      bayi-ne   **wes**   *t<sub>i</sub>* melaku?  
 CIRC.POS baby-DEF already    walk  
 (Intended: ‘Can the baby already walk?’)

To flesh out this argument further, other known adverb XPs do *not* block movement of auxiliaries to form a yes-no question in Javanese. This is shown in (9) where *sa’iki* ‘now’; *wingi* ‘yesterday’ and *sesok* ‘tomorrow’ do not block *iso* ‘CIRC.POS’. Note that the auxiliary must be in C<sup>0</sup> in (9)b since it can only be interpreted as a question. I assume that the subject *Mbak Kana* is in a higher Topic position.

- (9) a. Mbak Kana **sa’iki**   **iso**            ng-apal-no            Qur’an.  
 Miss Kana now    CIRC.POS AV-memorize-APPL Qur’an  
 ‘Miss Kana now can memorize the Holy Qur’an.’
- b. Mbak Kana **iso**<sub>i</sub>      **sa’iki**   *t<sub>i</sub>*   ng-apal-no            Qur’an?  
 Miss Kana CIRC.POS now    AV-memorize-APPL Qur’an  
 ‘Can Miss Kana now memorize the Holy Qur’an?’

Thus the intervention effects provide strong evidence that *wis* ‘already’ is located on the spine as a X<sup>0</sup> instead of a limb as an XP. But what about its categorial status as an auxiliary? Like other auxiliaries, *wis* cannot occur sentence initial or final independently, as shown above in (6).<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the data in §2.1 showing that *wis* can select for different types of predicates are compatible with *wis* being an auxiliary. Yet the data on syntactic distribution, where *wis* seems to introduce temporal modifiers, suggests that an analysis as an auxiliary is less plausible. Thus while the data showing that *wis* ‘already’ is syntactically located in a X<sup>0</sup> is clear, its categorial status is not.

<sup>7</sup> See Vander Klok (2012) for data showing that the auxiliaries (*tau* ‘E.PST’, *iso* ‘CIRC.POS’, *oleh* ‘DEON.POS’, *ape* ‘FUT’, *kudu* ‘ROOT.NEC’) are ungrammatical in sentence-initial and final positions.

#### 4 PROPOSAL: JAVANESE *wis* ‘ALREADY’ AS A FOCUS PARTICLE

I propose that Javanese *wis* ‘already’ is syntactically categorized as a particle. I present two arguments in favour of this proposal, one syntactic and one morphological. First concerning the syntax of *wis*, most of the data above suggests that *wis* is a sentential modifier – syntactically, it takes a vP (or VoiceP) as its complement, and semantically it scopes over the proposition. Additional data below suggest that the scope of *wis* can be quite small: the different sizes of complements it takes are attributed to whether *wis* is modifying a sentential or a constituent argument. A parallel can be drawn with other focus-sensitive operators such as English *only*, *also*, *even* (Rooth 1985), although some focus-sensitive operators are argued to be more syntactically restricted.

Evidence for constituent modification is shown by syntactic and semantic behaviour localized to a particular constituent. One example of constituent modification is with *wis* ‘already’ modifying the future marker *ape*<sup>8</sup>, which results in the specialized meaning ‘about to’ (e.g. Horne 1961:92). *Ape* ‘FUT’ is analyzed as an auxiliary (Vander Klok 2012). An example from Paciran Javanese is shown in (10):<sup>9</sup>

- (10) Mbak Ulum **wes** **ape** turu.  
 Miss Ulum already FUT sleep  
 ‘Miss Ulum is about sleep.’  
 Comment: *wes ape*: “*wes merem, turu*” ‘already closed her eyes, sleeping’

A further example is shown with constituent modification of the epistemic necessity modal *mesthi* ‘EPIS.NEC’ (analyzed as an adverb in Vander Klok (2012)). Semantic differences arise as to whether *wis* ‘already’ is modifying along the spine or modifies a limb. Consider (11); in (a), the speaker comments that the breakfast is finished by 9am, while in (b), the speaker comments that its certain you take breakfast at 9am. These semantic differences can be accounted for by different syntactic scope: in (11)a, *wis* ‘already’ takes a vP complement, while *wis* only has scope over the modal *mesthi* in (11)b.

- (11) a. U’ud **mesthi** **wes** sarapan nek jam songgo isuk.  
 U’ud EPIS.NEC already breakfast at clock 9 morning  
 ‘U’ud must have already eaten breakfast at 9a.m.’  
 b. U’ud **wes** **mesthi** sarapan nek jam songgo isuk.  
 U’ud already EPIS.NEC breakfast at clock 9 morning  
 ‘U’ud certainly must be eating breakfast at 9a.m.’ (Vander Klok 2012:114)

This scope argument is strengthened whereby *wis* ‘already’ can appear twice in the same sentence, as illustrated in (12), once as modifying the modal *mesthi*, and once as modifying the vP *nyicipi sego goreng* ‘taste fried rice’.

<sup>8</sup> It is not clear whether the semantics of *ape* in Paciran Javanese is best analyzed as a prospective aspect (suggested in Chen et al. 2017) or a relative future marker.

<sup>9</sup> Possible additional constituent modification is modification of the auxiliary *tau* ‘E.PST’ or other adverbs.

- (12) Eva [[**wes** mesthi] [**wes** ny-icipi sego goreng]].  
 Eva already EPIS.NEC already AV-taste rice fried  
 'Eva certainly must have tried fried rice.' (Vander Klok 2012:118)

This example is sharply contrasted with the ungrammaticality of (13), also with two occurrences of *wis* 'already'. In this case, the linear syntax suggests that the first instance of *wis* modifies the vP, and the second instance modifies the temporal adjunct. (cf. independent examples in (4) and (5)). A careful investigation of the application of the focus semantics in this case is required, but it appears that ungrammaticality results because the scope of the first instance of *wis* contains the second; and both instances semantically apply to the same proposition.

- (13) \* Pak Zaini **wes** teko **wes** telo-ng jam.  
 Mr. Zaini already come already three-LNK hour  
 'Mr. Zaini already arrived 3 hours ago.'

Thus, evidence that *wis* 'already' can be a constituent or a sentential modifier is consistent with its syntax as a particle. It is less plausible for an auxiliary—located on the spine above vP—to allow for constituent modification, such as an adverb as with *mesthi* 'EPIS.NEC'.

Turning now to the second argument, we consider the morpheme *-an* in sentence-final position. Although *wis* alone cannot be sentence-final as demonstrated in (6), supplemented with *-an*, sentence-final *wis* is now accepted.

- (14) Nabi Muhammad ngajar ajara-ne Allah **wis-an**.  
 prophet Muhammad AV.teach way-DEF Allah already-AN  
 'The Prophet Muhammad taught the teachings of Allah already.'  
 (Vander Klok & Matthewson 2015:198)

What is the syntactic and semantic role of sentence-final *-an*? There is no obvious change in meaning: for instance, the scope of negation remains the same, where *ora/gak* VP *wis-an* 'NEG VP already-AN' still means 'no longer, not anymore' just like *wis ora/gak* VP 'already NEG VP', instead of 'not yet', where negation would scope over 'already' (Vander Klok and Matthewson 2015:197).

What is interesting is that among the small subset of markers in Javanese which require sentence-final *-an*, they seem to be syntactically all *particles*. Connors (2008:116) reports that for Tengger Javanese, the interrogative particle *kok*, the affirmative particle *ya*, the agreement particle *rak*, and the negative markers *ora* and *dudu* as well as *isih* 'still', *durung* 'not yet' all take *-an* sentence-finally (in declaratives). One example is given in (15) with the particle *ya*. In Surabayan Javanese, Hoogervorst (2010:29) also notes that *-an* must occur with sentence-final *wis* 'already' and *jik* 'still'.

- (15) Masa gèk nyangking koran **ya-an**  
 no.way PROG AV.carry.in.hand newspaper PRT-AN  
 'No way was he carrying a newspaper in his hand right!'  
 (Connors 2008:116, *glosses modified*)

While the grammatical purpose of sentence-final *-an* is not yet clear—it is perhaps for prosodic reasons, the selectional requirement of this morpheme suggests that *wis* is also a particle. Note that beyond its position sentence-finally, *wis* does not need a host – it is not a clitic.

## 5 CONCLUSION

This paper has reexamined the syntax of *wis/wes* ‘already’ in Javanese, proposing that this marker is best analyzed as a focus particle: it is a  $X^0$  that can be a sentential or constituent modifier. It takes a wider range of complements than an auxiliary, but it is not an XP like an adverb. In other words, semantically this focus operator can apply to a proposition or a constituent smaller than a proposition; the details will need to be worked out. Syntactically, we have seen that *wis* ‘already’ can apply to vP (or other predicates) and to vP temporal adjuncts (as a sentential modifier), as well as Adv<sup>0</sup> *mesthi* ‘EPIST.NEC’ and perhaps to Aux<sup>0</sup> *ape* ‘FUT’ (as a constituent modifier).

I end with the perhaps obvious (certainly to Lisa!)—but sometimes difficult—note that one must be careful not to project a specific viewpoint when investigating an ‘already’ marker in a different language: a priori, we cannot expect that the marker under investigation is an adverb because it has the semantics of English *already*. For instance, in Mucha’s (2015) discussion of *already* from the perspective of the Medumba particle *yǎ*, she arrives at the conclusion that there is cross-linguistic syntactic variation where some languages express “already”-like meanings as adverbs, while others use functional heads. At first, Mucha (2015:118) observes that syntactically, *yǎ* in Medumba contrasts with English *already* in that it behaves like a functional head “...and in this respect patterns with a perfect aspect in English rather than with *already*.” But based on its semantics, she argues that Medumba *yǎ* can only correspond to English *already* and not to the perfect aspect, “although it syntactically behaves like a functional head” (Mucha 2015:121). However, Mucha notes that languages having a functional element (i.e., non-adverbial) that expresses *already* or *still* may in fact not be so uncommon, citing Bantu languages such as Haya (Nurse 2008) or Luganda (Comrie 1985).

Mucha’s discussion shows that a comparative study with an underlying assumption that the syntax and semantics may be constant across languages is not tenable: Coming from a well-studied language such as English, it is perhaps easy to construe this kind of narrative where the syntax-semantics mismatch might seem surprising. However, there is actually no reason to have this kind of assumption for modifiers across languages. It is this careful, investigative fieldwork that I have learned from Lisa.

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