

Chapter 3

TENSE AND ASPECT

Both tense and aspect refer to time. Tense generally refers to the location in time of one situation relative to the time of another situation. For example, "Alex was walking to the shops" and "Alex is walking to the shops" are two utterances which differ in tense. The first utterance clearly refers to a situation which has taken place prior to the present time, and the second to a situation which is taking place at the present time.

The difference between "Alex walked to the shops" and "Alex was walking to the shops", however, is one of aspect. Aspect refers to comparative duration in time. The time of the first utterance is presented as a single moment, while the time of the second is presented as occurring over a longer period.

Aspect may also refer to comparative end points of time. For example, an utterance such as "She has gone to the shops", expresses a past action which was completed by the present time, and "She had gone to the shops", a past action which was completed by a set time in the past. Also included in aspect is the expression of intended action, as in the utterance "She is going to go to the shops".

Tense is generally shown in Malay and Indonesian by the context of the utterance, and aspect by one of a number of terms which are discussed in the following sections.

3.1 Tense

3.1.1 Interpretation of time by context

In Malay and Indonesian, it is not possible to determine the time of occurrence of the action in an utterance such as *Subri pergi* without a specific context. *Subri pergi* may mean "Subri went", "Subri is on his way", or "Subri will go". Only a specific context or the inclusion of particular words which show aspect will make the intended meaning clear.

For example, if it is clear from the conversation that the situation being discussed has already taken place, such as "Rosnah's party last week", then the statement *Subri pergi* means "Subri went". If, however, people taking part in the conversation are unaware of the situation in which Subri was involved, then the speaker cannot just say *Subri pergi* and expect to be