Topics, which are never focused: Indonesian modal-*nya* forms

Background. Alwi (1992) observes a curious puzzle: a class of Indonesian (Austronesian) modal adverbs with *se-...-nya* allow for modification with negation and *sudah* 'already', while the corresponding modal adverbs with *-nya* do not, see (1)–(2). These include *semestinya, seharusnya, selayaknya, sepatutnya, sepantasnya* vs. *mestinya, harusnya, layaknya, patutnya, pantasnya*, which all roughly translate to English 'should'; we suggest the different pairs of forms differ slightly in their modal flavour based on the lexical stem (*harus* 'ROOT.NEC', *mesti* 'ROOT.NEC', *layak* 'worthy', *pantas* 'deserving', *patut* 'appropriate') (KBBI; Sneddon et al. 2010).

(1) Tidak [*(se)-harus-nya / *(se)-mesti-nya] kita ter-pancing oleh permainan kasar mereka.
NEG SE-must-NYA / SE-must-NYA 1PL.INCL PASS-fish by play rough 3PL
'We should not be provoked by their rough play.' (Alwi 1992: 139–140)

(2) Sudah [*(se)-harus-nya / *(se)-mesti-nya] dia datang.
already SE-must-NYA / SE-must-NYA 3SG come
'He/she certainly should come.' (cf. Alwi 1992: 119, 123)

New findings. We show, based on new data from a corpus study (Nomoto et al. 2024) and elicitation with 2–8 speakers, that the contrast in (1)–(2) cannot be attributed to several plausible linguistic properties, such as a difference in syntactic height, or in the type of semantic content ((not)-at-issueness/projectivity). We also disregard the hypothesis that the forms differ wrt. PPI (Positive Polarity Item) status (cf. Iatridou & Zeiljstra 2013), since it does not account for (2). Further, the contrast cannot be explained via a difference with modal flavour or force between the *-nya* vs. *se-...-nya*-forms; our corpus study conducted for the stems *harus, mesti* shows no difference for either property. Instead, the data suggests that the *nya*-forms cannot be focused, while the *se-...-nya*-forms can, although what accounts for this is currently not yet understood. We illustrate with *harusnya, mestinya* vs. *seharusnya, semestinya*; this pattern is robust across all forms.

Not a high vs. low syntax. Alwi's distinction between the two types of forms can be related to cross-linguistic data on "high"/sentence vs. "low" adverbs, which differ in, e.g., whether they can occur in the scope of negation (a.o. Tescari Neto 2022 on Brazilian Portuguese). However, *nya*- and *se-...-nya*-forms occur in the same position as a TP-modifier (with the possibility of subject topicalization; Vander Klok et al. *t.a.*). Thus, a structural explanation does not account for (1)–(2). Further, both *sudah* 'already' and *tidak* 'NEG' allow for constituent modification (Kroeger 2014), as in (3). Even if we were to assume a different syntax for the *-nya* vs. *se-...-nya*-forms, the contrast in (1)–(2) is always maintained across clause-initial/final or predicate-initial surface positions.

(3) **Tidak** se-harus-nya anak-anak **tidak** makan.
NEG SE-must-NYA RED-child NEG AV.eat
'It shouldn't be that the children do not eat.'

No difference in at-issueness/projectivity. The negation contrast could also be attributed to differences in the type of semantic content: since negation can only target truth-conditional/at-issue content in its scope, maybe it is the case that *nya*-forms only contribute not-at-issue/projective content, whereas the contribution of *se-nya*-forms is at-issue (cf. Müller 2021 on different classes of German adverbs). While Indonesian independently allows for forms that contribute not-at-issue/projective content (tested with *juga* 'too' and appositives), the diagnostics suggest that the contributions of *nya*-forms and *se-... -nya*-forms do not differ in this respect. **1)** Both forms can be the target of denial, see (4), which is only the case for at-issue content (e.g., Tonhauser 2012).

(4) A: (Se-)harus-nya dia menelepon ibu-nya.
SE-must-NYA 3SG AV.call mother-3SG
'He should call his mother.'
B: Itu tidak benar. Tidak se-harus-nya dia menelepon ibu-nya!
that NEG correct NEG SE-must-NYA 3SG AV.call mother-3SG
(≈'That's not true! He does not *have to* call his mother!')

2) When the forms occur embedded under *berpikir* 'think' or in conditional antecedents, they are interpreted as part of the thought/condition. If they contributed projective content, the modal would be understood as an independent comment on the thought/condition (cf. Tonhauser et al. 2013). This is not what we observe, see (5).

(5) a. Ali berpikir Amina (se-)harus-nya menelepon ibu-nya.
Ali think Amina SE-must-NYA AV.call mother-3SG
'Ali thinks that Amina should call her mother.'
(NOT: 'Ali thinks that Amina calls her mother, as she should.')

b. Kalau Jono (se-)harus-nya membantu putri-nya, dia membantu.
if Jono SE-must-NYA AV.help daughter-3SG, 3SG AV.help
'If Jono should help his daughter, he helps.'
(NOT: 'If Jono helps his daughter, as he should, he helps', which would be tautologous)

Restriction wrt. focus. While *nya*-forms and *se-. . . -nya*-forms do not differ with respect to syntax or the at-issueness diagnostics, they differ regarding focus placement as signaled by the question focus particle *kah* and the declarative focus particle *lah*: with both, the modal-*nya* forms are ungrammatical, while the *se-. . . -nya*-forms are possible; see (6).

(6) a. *(Se-)harus-nya-**kah** menerima hadiah dari seorang yang tidak kita cintai?
SE-must-NYA-FOC AV.accept gift from someone REL NEG 1PL.INCL love
'Should (we) accept a gift from someone we do not love?' (cf. Kroeger 2014:159)

b. *(Se-)harus-nya-**lah** saya ber-olahraga.
SE-must-NYA-FOC 1SG INTR-sport
'I should do sports.'

Towards an account. Our main generalization, when we tie together the data on focus particles in (6) with the data with negation and *sudah* in (1)–(2), is that modal-*nya* forms are barred in focus environments. Specifically, this generalization takes that (i) negation is focus-sensitive (see Beaver & Clark 2008) and (ii) *sudah* 'already' is analyzed as a focus operator (cf. Krifka 2000; Vander Klok & Matthewson 2015). **The proposal that we are exploring** is that *-nya* indicates topicality, while only the *se-. . . -nya*-forms can be contrastive topics. **(I)** Topicality is first suggested by the description of certain *nya-* and *se-...-nya*-forms in Indonesian as "frame-setters" expressing a "stance (mental/emotional attitude) toward the proposition" (Englebretson 2003: 155, a.o. types). This plausibly falls under Jacobs (2001:656) informal definition of frame-setting topicality: *In (X Y), X is the frame for Y iff X specifies a domain of (possible) reality to which the proposition expressed by Y is restricted.* **(II)** Topicality is also suggested by the *-nya* morphology: In the nominal domain, *-nya* (to which *-nya* in modal *(se-)nya*-forms is arguably historically related; Yap et al. 2008) is best described as marking identifiability (Englebretson 2003:161; Sneddon 2006:34) by contributing a uniqueness/maximality requirement (Kaufman et al. *t.a.*). Importantly, if a nominal is to be topicalized, *-nya* (or a demonstrative) is required (Winarto 2021:106).

(7) Film-*(**nya**) gua gak tau siapa yang udah nonton. TOPICALIZATION
Movie-DEF I NEG know who REL PERF AV.watch
'The movie, I don't know who has watched it.' (Winarto 2021:106)

In short, we suggest that *nya*-forms and *se-. . . -nya*-forms are frame-setters (i.e. topical), that differ wrt. the ability to allow for alternative frames: *se-. . . -nya*-forms can occur in focus environments and can therefore be contrastive topics (e.g., Büring 2003), *nya*-forms cannot. Hence, *se-. . . -nya*-forms are comparable to frame-setting adverbs in languages like German that can arguably only occur as contrastive topics (e.g., *gesundheitlich* 'healthwise' in *Gesundheitlich geht es Maria gut* 'Heathwise, Maria is fine', Hinterwimmer 2011:1880). In addition to these contrastive frame-setters, Indonesian is suggested to have adverbial modal *nya*-forms restricted to the information-structural notion of a non-contrastive frame-setting topic.

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