

***Bakat* Passive in Balinese and *Kena* Passive in Indonesian: A Comparative Study**

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ABSTRACT: This study investigates the grammatical properties of analytic passive constructions in two languages: the *bakat* passive in Balinese and the *kena* passive in Indonesian. Although Indonesian *kena* passive has received substantial attention in prior work, the Balinese *bakat* passive remains largely underexamined. This research provides the first detailed description and analysis of *bakat* passive, addressing a significant gap in Balinese grammatical research. For *kena* passive, despite the availability of basic descriptions, recent studies of comparable constructions in languages such as Mandarin and Vietnamese underscore the need for a renewed analytical perspective. Incorporating these insights, this study proposes an updated analysis of Indonesian *kena* passive aligned with the depth and rigor of current cross-linguistic research.

The study primarily employs elicitation, involving regular sessions with native speakers to obtain grammaticality judgments, semantic interpretations, and other linguistic data. Additional evidence from Balinese and Indonesian corpora is used to test and refine the proposed hypotheses. The findings show that *bakat* passive and *kena* passive function as auxiliary verbs marking noncanonical passive constructions. Both encode “non-intentional” meaning through specific combinations with verbal roots of corresponding lemmas. They can also co-occur with canonical passive markers *-a* in Balinese and *di-* in Indonesian. These results advance our understanding of passive structure and syntactic organization in natural language.

KEYWORDS: Balinese, grammar, linguistics, Indonesian, passive

INTRODUCTION

‘Passive’ falls under a grammatical phenomenon known as *diathesis*. Diathesis is one of the most extensively studied areas in linguistic research on Austronesian languages, including Balinese and Indonesian. However, previous studies on diathesis in these two languages have focused on what is known as synthetic diathesis, where diathesis categories are indicated as part of the verb. For example, Balinese is described as having three distinct diatheses (Artawa (2013); Udayana (2013)):

(1) a. **Agentive diathesis (actor voice):**

Tiang ng-odot be.

1 AV-cut meat

‘I cut the meat.’

b. **Objective diathesis (object voice):**

Be-ne godot tiang.

meat-DEF OV.cut 1

‘I cut the meat.’

c. **Passive diathesis: -a**

Ia orahin-a kema teken meme-ne.

3 tell-PAS go.there by mother-POS

‘He was told to go there by his mother.’

The verb is marked with the nasal prefix *N-* in the active sentence (1a), with the suffix *-a* in the passive sentence (1c), and appears unmarked (or with zero diathesis marker \emptyset) in the objective diathesis (1b). These three types of diatheses are also found in Indonesian. The *bakat* passive in (2) and the *kena* passive in (3) are classified as analytic passives, where the passive construction is marked by an auxiliary verb (i.e., *bakat* and *kena*).



(2) **Balinese pasif bakat:**

Maling-e bakat tangkap-a teken polisi.

thief-DEF BAKAT catch-PAS by police

‘The thief got caught by the police.’

(3) **Indonesian kena passive:**

Pencuri itu kena tangkap oleh polisi.

‘The thief got caught by the police.’

These analytic passives have received less attention than their synthetic counterparts. For instance, Artawa (2013) mentions the three diatheses in (1) and the *ka-* passive, but not the *pasif bakat*. The entry for *bakat* in the Balinese dictionary Sutjaja (2009) only lists its use as a main verb meaning ‘to obtain; to be caught’, without noting its passive construction. This study therefore addresses this gap by examining Indonesian *kena* passive, which has been described in grammars (Sutjaja, 2009), although to our knowledge Sneddon et.al. is the only journal article that focuses on it. This study investigates the grammatical properties of both passive constructions, with the following problem formulations.

1. How do these two analytic passives relate to the *-a*, *ka-*, and bare passives (in *pasif bakat*) and the *di-*, *ter-*, and bare passives (in *kena* passive)?
2. What meanings condition or influence the use of *pasif bakat* and *kena* passive?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Extensive research has been carried out on passive constructions in both Indonesian and Balinese. However, the majority of these studies concentrate on canonical passive patterns, such as the *-a* and *ka-* passives in Balinese and the *di-* passive in Indonesian. The following section reviews relevant studies for each language.

The *ka-* Passive and the *-a* Passive in Balinese

In cross-linguistic typology, passive constructions are commonly viewed as structures derived from their active counterparts. That is, passive forms emerge through systematic changes in the syntactic configuration and the grammatical roles associated with the active clause. Consider the examples below:

(4) a. *Dia membeli buku.*

‘He/She bought a book.’

Sentence (4b) is ungrammatical because *buku* is interpreted as new, indefinite information, which cannot appropriately occupy the subject position in a passive structure. In contrast, in (4c), the noun phrase is definite and already established in the discourse, thereby maintaining the referential continuity between the active and passive clauses. The lack of such a referential anchor in (4b) results in its unacceptability.

The acceptability of passive alternations is also influenced by the degree of transitivity associated with the verb (Quirk, et al (1985), (1972)). Although verbs such as *melihat* ‘to see’ and *menyaksikan* ‘to witness’ both denote perception, *menyaksikan* is more highly transitive because it implies active engagement and a capacity to report event details. A similar contrast appears between *mempunyai* and *memiliki*: *memiliki* conveys stronger control over an entity, making *Rumah itu dimiliki oleh dia* more acceptable than *Rumah itu dipunyai oleh dia*. This aligns with tendencies in English, where the house is owned by him is more natural than the house is had by him, and the noun owner is far more conventional than haver.

These distinctions relate closely to volitionality—whether an event is intended or accidental. Non-volitional events tend to involve stative verbs with spontaneous event structures, while intentional actions are typically durative. In Indonesian, this semantic contrast is reflected morphologically through *di-* (intentional passive) versus *ter-* (non-intentional passive):

(5) a. Sampah itu *disapu* oleh dia.

b. Sampah itu *tersapu* oleh dia.

A comparable pattern is observed in Balinese. The suffix *-a* marks passives with intentional action, whereas the prefix *ka-* denotes non-intentional passive events (Udayana, (2013) (2025)). According to Udayana, et.al (2025), however, the *-a* passive derived from third-person pronouns is often perceived as belonging to a lower speech level within the Balinese *unggah-ungguh*



system. Consequently, the *ka-* passive is frequently employed as a higher-register alternative. Nonetheless, Udayana (2025) does not address the possibility of additional passive forms expressing non-intentional meaning beyond *ka-*.

The *ter-* and *di-* Passives in Indonesian

Indonesian also possesses other means of encoding non-intentional passives in addition to the *ter-* construction (Udayana (2002)). In their analysis, Udayana (2002) provides a detailed comparison of the *di-* and *ter-* passives, concluding that *di-* generally marks intentional passive events, while *ter-* signals accidental or non-volitional occurrences. These passives are examined in relation to their discourse properties; for example, the *di-* passive can be used to convey politeness in specific pragmatic contexts. However, the study does not discuss additional passive forms, such as the *kena* passive, which also plays an important role in Indonesian grammar.

Research on passive constructions in Indonesian and Balinese has been conducted extensively; however, most studies focus on canonical passive forms, such as the *-a* and *ka-* passives in Balinese and the *di-* passive in Indonesian. The following review summarizes the literature on each language.

The *ka-* Passive and the *-a* Passive in Balinese

In cross-linguistic studies, passive constructions are typically understood as derivatives of active clauses. In other words, passive forms arise through structural and functional transformations from their active counterparts. Consider the following examples:

(6) a. Dia mem-beli buku.

‘He/She bought a book.’

b. * Buku di-beli oleh dia.

(Unacceptable)

c. Buku itu di-beli oleh dia.

‘The book was bought by him/her.’

Sentence (6b) is ungrammatical because the noun *buku* refers to new, non-definite information, which is unsuitable in subject position in a passive construction. In contrast, in (6c) the noun is definite or discourse-given, preserving the referential link between the active and passive sentences. Thus, in a narrative context, the entity *buku* in both active and passive clauses refers to the same discourse referent, whereas in (6b) this referential connection fails, rendering the sentence unacceptable.

The transformation from active to passive also depends on the verb’s degree of transitivity (Quirk et.al (1972) (1985)). For example, the verbs *melihat* ‘to see’ and *menyaksikan* ‘to witness’ both denote perception, but *menyaksikan* has higher transitivity because it implies active involvement and the ability to report event details. A similar contrast exists between *mempunyai* and *memiliki*: *memiliki* conveys stronger control, making *Rumah itu dimiliki oleh dia* more acceptable than *Rumah itu dipunyai oleh dia*. This pattern parallels English, where *The house is owned by him* is more natural than *the house is had by him*, and the noun owner is more common than haver.

The degree of transitivity is related to volitionality, distinguishing intentional from non-intentional passive meanings. Non-intentionality is typically associated with stative or non-action verbs, whose event structures are spontaneous, whereas intentional actions are durational. In Indonesian, this contrast is reflected in the difference between *di-* passives (intentional) and *ter-* passives (non-intentional):

(7) a. Sampah itu *disapu* oleh dia.

b. Sampah itu *tersapu* oleh dia.

A similar phenomenon occurs in Balinese. The suffix *-a* marks intentional passive actions, whereas the prefix *ka-* indicates non-intentional passive meaning (Udayana (2013) and Udayana et.al (2025)). However, according to Udayana et.al (2025), the *-a* passive derived from third-person pronouns is often considered low-register within the Balinese *unggah-ungguh* (speech level) system. As a result, the *ka-* passive is frequently used as its substitute in higher registers. Nevertheless, Udayana et.al (2025) does not address whether other passive forms expressing non-intentional meaning exist beyond *ka-*.



The *ter-* and *di-* Passives in Indonesian

Indonesian also has alternatives for expressing non-intentional passives besides the *ter-* passive (Udayana (2002) In their study, Udayana (2002) provides an extensive discussion of the *di-* and *ter-* passives, concluding that *di-* indicates intentional passive events, while *ter-* expresses non-intentionality. These two passives are analyzed in relation to their discourse functions; for instance, the *di-* passive can be used for politeness-related pragmatic purposes. However, Udayana (2002) does not examine other passive types, such as the *kena* passive in Indonesian.

Data analysis is conducted continuously, involving organization, categorization, and pattern identification to ensure accurate results. Findings are presented using the informal method, which relies on clear descriptive explanations suited to qualitative research. This study uses a comparative qualitative approach to examine non-intentional passive constructions in Balinese and Indonesian. Since this phenomenon appears in both languages, analyzing only one would not meet the research goals. Non-intentional passives typically arise from specific semantic or syntactic triggers, making cross-linguistic comparison essential.

The study draws on secondary sources, folktales, and online materials to capture natural usage. Data were selected based on linguistic relevance, accessibility, and their ability to represent both formal and informal contexts. Elicitation through interviews with native speakers provides additional judgments on grammar and meaning. Balinese data are supplemented by suarasakingbali.com, while Indonesian examples come from the Leipzig Corpora Collection.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Findings are presented clearly and logically, using concise language to enhance readability. This study employs an informal descriptive method, presenting results through sentences and verbal explanations, which is considered more suitable for qualitative analysis than statistical methods.

This study addresses two primary questions:

1. How are the two analytic passives related to Balinese *-a*, *ka-*, and bare passives (*bakat passive*) and Indonesian *di-*, *ter-*, and bare passives (*kena passive*)?
2. What semantic factors influence *bakat passive* and *kena passive*?

The findings can be summarized as follows.

Balinese *Bakat* Passive: Main Verb vs. Auxiliary Verb

In Balinese, *bakat* passive is categorized as an adversative passive, reflecting non-intentional or unplanned actions (Alexiadou, A. (2012). Alexiadou, A. & Schäfer, F (2013) Davies (1995), Nomoto (2021)). While non-canonical in form, it plays a significant role in expressing speaker intent and the event structure of a sentence.

The verb *bakat*, as a lexical root, undergoes nasal assimilation in declarative sentences. The nasal prefix (archiphoneme N) assimilates with the initial segment of the root, producing homorganic forms:

Bilabial: N + *bayah* → *mayah* ('to pay')

Alveolar: N + *tampah* → *nampah* ('to slaughter')

Palatal: N + *sampatang* → *nyampatang* ('to sweep')

Vowel-initial: N + *amah* → *ngamah* ('to take')

Exceptions occur when the root begins with a nasal, resulting in clusters (*ngnot*→*ngenot*).

Declarative sentences illustrate these patterns:

Cicing m-(p)akpak tulang Ento → 'The dog ate the bone'

Nyoman ny-(s)ampatang Lulu Ento → 'Nyoman swept the trash'

When functioning as a main verb, *bakat* undergoes the same nasal assimilation. However, in naturally occurring declarative contexts, *bakat* often acts as an auxiliary verb, marking non-intentionality, similar to Indonesian *ter-* passive and Balinese *ka-* passive:

Bakat tuni ny-(s)ambat ng-(g)elah Tunangan uli Buleleng Pasti Ento lakar buin takonang-a
'(I) unintentionally mentioned having a boyfriend from Buleleng; surely it will be asked again.'

Balinese Canonical Passive: *-a* Passive and *ka-* Passive

-a Passive is the canonical Balinese passive, historically derived from Old Javanese. In Old Javanese, *-in-* indicated intentionality, while *ka-* indicated non-intentionality. Balinese retained *-a* as a replacement for *-in-*, derived from the third-person pronoun *ia*.



8a. Active: *Ia ny-(j)emak Buku ento* → ‘He took the book’

b. Passive: *Buku ento jemak-a teken Ia* → ‘The book was taken by him’

The suffix *-a* functions both as a passive marker and as a third-person proclitic. Combining it with the full pronoun yields ungrammaticality, demonstrating its proclitic function. Non-canonical *-a* marks passive clauses where the patient is foregrounded. Register considerations (high level/low level) affect acceptability:

9a. *Buku nika ambil-a antuk Ida* → marginally acceptable

b. *Buku nika ka-ambil antuk Ida* → fully acceptable

In formal/high-register contexts, *ka-* is preferred to express respect, while *-a* may carry low-register connotations.

Semantic Basis of Balinese *bakat* Passive

The auxiliary verb *bakat* conveys non-intentionality, linking it to *ka-* passive and aligning it conceptually with Indonesian *ter-* passive. When the underlying action is intentional, canonical *-a* or *di-* forms are used; when non-intentional, *bakat*, *ka-*, or *ter-* forms indicate the semantic shift.

Comparative Insights: Balinese and Indonesian Passives

The analysis demonstrates the following generalizations:

- Both languages distinguish intentional vs. non-intentional actions at the passive level:
 - Balinese: *-a* (intentional), *ka-* / *bakat* (non-intentional)
 - Indonesian: *di-* (intentional), *ter-* (non-intentional)
- Auxiliary verbs (*bakat*, *can*, etc.) in both languages often signal non-canonical passive constructions associated with unplanned events.
- Phonological and morphological markers, such as nasal assimilation in Balinese, reflect the verb’s syntactic status as main or auxiliary and influence grammatical acceptability.

These findings suggest a cross-linguistic universality in how intentionality and non-intentionality are encoded in passive constructions, while the surface morphology remains language-specific.

*ka-*Passive

The *ka-* passive in Balinese, as mentioned above, is a borrowing from Old Javanese Udayana et.al (2025). Similar to the *ka-* passive in Old Javanese, Balinese *ka-* passive expresses unintentional passive or adversative passive. Therefore, a sentence like (10b) can be paraphrased as “The book was accidentally taken by him.” It is known that *ka-* passive is neutral with respect to speech levels. So, *ka-* can be used in both low and high speech registers, as shown in the following examples:

10 a. *Ia m-(b)eli buku ento*

3 AV-buy book that

‘He/she bought that book’

b. *Buku ento ka-beli teken ia*

Book that PAS-buy by 3

‘That book was bought by him/her’

11 a. *Ida n-(t)umbas buku nika*

3 AV-buy book that

‘He/she bought that book’

b.? *Buku ento tumbas-a antuk ida*

Book that buy-PAS by 3

‘That book was bought by him/her’

c. *Buku ento ka-tumbas antuk ida*

Book that PAS-buy by 3

‘That book was bought by him/her’



Comparing (11b) and (11c), one might argue that the *ka-* form tends to be used in high speech registers. However, this view is easily refuted, because, as mentioned earlier, the *ka-* form is neutral with respect to speech level.

The logical consequence of using *ka-* in (11c) is that, fundamentally, what distinguishes the *-a* passive from the *ka-* passive in Balinese is that *ka-* (as in Javanese) expresses unintentional passive, while *-a* indicates intentional passive. Therefore, using *ka-* in the context of (11b) to form (11c) cancels out the “unintentional” element associated with *ka-*, positioning it instead as an intentional passive. This is evident in Balinese speakers’ routine use in speech events, as found in literature related to Balinese story collections.

12. Di suba-ne jam 09.00 WITA makejang pelamar *ka-kumpulan* lan *tunden-a* ka lantai Dua
‘After 9:00 WITA all applicants were gathered and asked to enter the second floor’ (KP:18)

In (12), *ka-* passive is coordinated with *-a* passive, which can be paraphrased as: “The applicants were intentionally gathered and also intentionally asked to come to the second floor.” This means that *ka-* passive can functionally take the position of intentional passive, which was originally relevant only to unintentional passive. Consequently, this gives rise to what we call “*bakat* passive,” as discussed in the following subsection.

***Bakat* passive and *Polih* Passive**

After presenting canonical *-a* passive and non-canonical *ka-* passive in Balinese, there is another type of passive called *bakat* passive (low register) and *polih* passive (high register). Consider the following examples:

- 13 a. Cang *bakat* m-(b)eli baju busan
1 can AV-buy clothes earlier
‘I accidentally bought the clothes earlier’
- b. Baju *bakat* beli cang busan
Clothes can OV-buy 1 earlier
‘The clothes were accidentally bought by me’
- c.? Baju *bakat* beli-a teken cang
Clothes can buy-PAS by 1
‘The clothes were accidentally bought by me’
14. a.? Meme *bakat* ng-adep jaja ditu
Mother can AV-sell snack there
‘Mother accidentally sold the snack there’
- b. Jaja *bakat* adep-a teken meme ditu
Snack can buy-PAS by mother there
‘The snack was accidentally sold by mother’

Sentences like (13a) are fully acceptable as declarative active sentences. However, comparing (13a) and (14a) shows asymmetry. Both are declarative, but (13a) is pragmatically smooth, while (14a) seems slightly odd. This is linked to egophoricity, which involves first-person awareness in an action (self-knowledge marking).

Balinese has speech levels; for high registers, *bakat* passive is not suitable, but *polih* passive is.

- 15a. Ida *polih* n-(t)umbas kwaca wau
3 can AV-buy clothes earlier
‘He/she accidentally bought clothes earlier’
- b.? Ida *bakat* n-(t)umbas kwaca wau
3 can AV-buy clothes earlier
‘He/she accidentally bought clothes earlier’



c.? Kwaca nika *polih tumbas-a* antuk ida
Clothes that can buy-PAS by 3
'The clothes were accidentally bought by him/her'

d. Kwaca nika *polih ka-tumbas* antuk ida
Clothes that can PAS-buy by 3
'The clothes were accidentally bought by him/her'

Here, *-a* passive gives the impression of a general, lower-class speaker, whereas changing the marker to *ka-* makes the sentence acceptable for high register.

Bakat /Polih Passive Filled with ka-

As discussed above, *bakat* is an auxiliary verb. Unlike English *get*, which contributes directly to passive formation, Balinese *bakat* does not inherently link to syntactic passive formation; it primarily conveys unintentionality. Its presence is crucial because in high register, intentional passive (*-a*) is avoided for politeness, and *ka-* replaces it. Through this linguistic change, the unintentional meaning originally carried by *ka-* shifts, and *bakat* passive emerges as a replacement, as seen in (16).

16 a.? Ia *bakat ka-tundik* teken Cang
3 BAKAT PAS-touch by 1
'He/she was accidentally touched by me'

b. Ia *bakat tundik* cang
3 BAKAT touch 1
'He/she was accidentally touched by me'

Kena Passive

Kena passive in Indonesian is a non-canonical passive, differing from the canonical *di-* passive. Canonical passives are characterized by demotion of the agent, promotion of the patient, and a specific marker. *Kena* passive shares these features with *ter-* passive: it expresses unintentionality, often adversative. Historically, *kena* passive is related to Balinese and Javanese *ka-* passive, etymologically derived from *kena* or *kenek*.

Kena as a Main Verb: kena as a main verb can be seen in the following examples

- 17a. Ternyata Pak Kusnadi *kena* dampak buruknya
b. Endy mengatakan apabila Lotus dipasarkan, tidak *kena* sasaran
c. Karena kasus Gayus ini, jaksa Cirus *kena* getahnya
d. Wibisono pun *kena* teguran dan dipaksa mengantar Helena

Kena as an Auxiliary Verb: kena as an auxiliary verb can be seen in the following examples

- 18a. Nanti kalian *kena tipu* lagi
b. Dia *kena semprot* oleh Keane
c. Harimau takut *kena tendang*
d. Rumah Marshanda terancam *kena sita*

Comparison between bakat Passive and kena Passive

Bakat is suitable in declaratives only for first-person pronouns, whereas *kena* is unsuitable in active declaratives:

- 19 a. Cang /*ia *bakat* m-(b)eli baju
'I/*he accidentally bought clothes'
b. *Saya/*dia *kena* mem-beli baju.

Both verbs are suited for reportative sentences, characteristic of passive constructions. Both are non-canonical, but *bakat* conveys unintentionality, and *kena* also conveys unintentionality with slightly different nuance compared to *di-* passive.

Examples from Leipzig corpus:

- 20a. Berapa banyak uang di rekeningnya yang *kena dibobol*.



- b. Gula ilegal yang *kena ditertibkan*
- c. Dia *kena dicengkeram* oleh jari-jari tangan

The nuance is that *kena* refers to surface-level, unintentional impact, while *kena di-* refers to the core of the target, aligning more with intentional passive.

CONCLUSION

Based on the study of *bakat* passive in Balinese and a comparative analysis with *kena* passive and canonical passives marked by the prefixes *di-* and *ter-* in Indonesian, several conclusions can be drawn.

Passive sentences, in general, are derived from active sentences. They function as reportative constructions, describing prior events expressed in active sentences. This is evident in interactive contexts, where reporting an event to a co-present interlocutor often sounds awkward if expressed in the passive voice, especially when using an agent-by phrase in the first or second person. In such interactions, the active sentence alone sufficiently conveys the speaker's or listener's perspective. Consequently, in these contexts, passive constructions can be rendered in a short form without the agent-by phrase, or they may even be omitted entirely, since the reporter and the reported participant are simultaneously present.

Passive constructions in interactive contexts are generally appropriate only when referring to a third party. In this respect, auxiliary verbs in Balinese and Indonesian, such as *bakat* and *kena*, function as reportative markers, suitable for expressing non-canonical passive constructions.

The Balinese auxiliary *bakat* carries an inherently ambiguous meaning. Its connotation of unintentionality cannot be interpreted solely at a cognitive level. For example, in declarative sentences uttered by first-person speakers, *bakat* expresses the speaker's regret over an action performed, as indicated by the main verb. This demonstrates that *bakat* functions as a reporting tool, which is a defining feature of passive constructions (canonical), where the agent is demoted and may be omitted, and the patient is promoted to the grammatical subject.

Similarly, the Indonesian auxiliary *kena* follows a comparable interpretive process. *Kena* indicates that the action affects a target domain, but this domain does not necessarily correspond to the core target. Thus, contexts involving regret (with *bakat*) or actions failing to reach the primary target (with *kena*) sequentially illustrate that both auxiliaries form involuntary or unintentional passive constructions.

It is important to note that both *bakat passive* and *kena passive* mark unintentionality through their specific combination with the verbal root of a lemma. However, each auxiliary can also combine with canonical passives (*-a* in Balinese, *di-* in Indonesian). In such constructions, the auxiliaries *bakat* and *kena* prioritize involuntary or unintentional meaning, while their combination with *-a* or *di-* shifts the emphasis to intentional or voluntary passive constructions.

In sum, the interplay between auxiliary verbs and canonical passive morphology in Balinese and Indonesian reflects a nuanced system in which unintentionality and intentionality can be selectively foregrounded, highlighting the functional versatility of non-canonical passives in these languages.

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