Aspect and modality in Indonesian
The case of sudah, telah, pernah, and sempat

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ABSTRACT
In this paper, I describe four Indonesian aspect markers, sudah, telah, pernah, and sempat, showing that the main opposition between them relies not only on their aspectual meanings, but also on the various modalities they express. The opposition between the very frequent markers sudah and telah is analysed in detail. The syntactic and semantic survey shows that these two markers are not synonyms in most contexts.

KEYWORDS
Indonesian, bahasa Indonesia, marker, aspect, modality, sudah, telah, pernah, and sempat.

The pre-verbal aspect markers in Indonesian form a complex system, where a modal meaning often appears entangled with aspect. In this paper¹, I intend to deal with four markers, sudah, telah, pernah, and sempat, that are often described as perfective aspect markers. It seems surprising that the Indonesian language has four different grammatical morphemes available to express one aspect; our hypothesis is that there are more than nuances between the aspect meanings of these markers, and that they are loaded with various modality meanings too. I will examine in detail sudah and telah, two very frequent markers of the perfect, and I will argue against a common view that these two markers are synonyms.

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