Language allows us to express an infinite number of ideas, but requires that we package this information into a linear string of words. The Sasak language, spoken in Eastern Indonesia, readily allows a number of different word orders. So what determines speakers’ choices? In order to answer this question, this dissertation utilizes traditional elicitation and interviews, two language production experiments, and an analysis of transcribed Sasak narratives.

This work foremost documents sentence structure in two Sasak dialects. Data from complex sentences is used to argue that – despite surface differences – Eastern and Central Sasak dialects maintain many of the same grammatical patterns. Moreover, these data also support arguments that Indonesian languages have two grammatical subject positions, as well as allow us to argue in support of Aldridge’s (2008) hypothesis that the Indonesian language verbal prefix (/meng-/) may have originated as a marker of intransitive clauses.

The second half of the dissertation examines factors that shape speakers’ grammatical choices, and it investigates potential universal biases identified in literature related to Bock and Warren’s (1985:50) work on Conceptual Accessibility, or, “ease with which the mental representation of some potential referent can be activated in, or retrieved from, memory”. Results from two language production experiments show that nouns that refer to living things, are relatively longer, and are more salient in the discourse, exhibit a bias to occur in an earlier sentence position. These results are then discussed in relation to results from an analysis of transcribed narratives.