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Progressive Aspect, the Verbal Prefix *meN-* and Stative Sentences in Malay

The verbal prefix *meN-* in Malay contributes a progressive-(like) meaning in some intransitive sentences.

- (1) Harga elektrik turun/menurun.
price electricity fall/meN-fall
'The price of electricity fell/is falling.'

This effect of *meN-* is not easily detected in transitive sentences, leading many to consider *meN-* in transitive and intransitive sentences as distinct prefixes (Cole and Son 2004; Fortin, in press), with the transitive *meN-* given analyses that are unrelated to aspect (Voskuil 1993; Soh 1998; Fortin, in press; but see Benjamin 1988; Gil 2002). In this paper, we claim *meN-* has aspectual effects in transitive sentences as well.

Though the distinction is subtle, Malay native speakers have noted *meN-* sentences describe events that are more "in progress" than sentences without *meN-*.

- (2) Saya akan bina/membina makmal kamu.
I will build/meN-build laboratory your
'I will build/be building your laboratory.'

If *meN-* is a progressive(-like) viewpoint aspect marker, one expects it to have restricted distribution in stative sentences (e.g., *John is knowing Bill) (Vendler 1967, Dowty 1979). We argue this restriction holds in Malay, despite some apparent counter-examples.

Our evidence comes from results of a corpus study and native speakers judgments. We identified 1129 *meN-* verbs from a corpus of front-page articles of Utusan Malaysia (January 1-5, 2006). Out of 80 verbs that are semantically "stative", we found very few instances where the verb takes only the prefix *meN-*. There are no examples like those in (3a), which native speakers also judge to be unacceptable.

- (3) a. *Ali menyukai/menghormat cikgu-nya.
Ali meN-like/meN-respect teacher-his
b. Ali suka/hormat cikgu-nya.
Ali like/respect teacher-his
'Ali likes/respects his teacher.'

However, there are many cases with *meN-* appearing with the same verbs when the verbs bear the suffix *-i*.

- (4) Ali menyukai/menghormati cikgu-nya.
Ali meN-like-i/meN-respect-i teacher-his
'Ali likes/respects his teacher.'

We argue sentences like (4) with the suffix *-i* are not statives. Unlike statives, they can appear in imperatives (Smith 1991).

- (5) Sukailah/*sukalah jiran tetangga anda!
like-i-LAH/ like-LAH neighbour your
'Like your neighbours!'

Also, they can appear with *perlahan-lahan* 'slowly', which is odd with states (Maslida 2005).

- (6) Ali belajar menyukai /*suka sekolah baru-nya perlahan-lahan.
Ali learn meN-like-i/like school new-his slowly
'Ali learns to like his new school slowly.'

Furthermore, we argue *sedang* 'currently' does not distinguish states from (durative) events (contra Maslida 2005), and the presence of prepositions (e.g., *pada*, *akan*) after semantically "stative" bare verbs have aspectual effects.

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