

The verbal prefix *meN-* and the unergative/unaccusative distinction in Malay

Issue: The restriction on A-bar movement across *meN-* in Malay is a well-known fact (Saddy 1991; Soh 1998; Cole and Hermon 1998). Recent studies have pointed out that *meN-* also restricts A-movement (Cole and Hermon 1998; Nomoto 2008). (1), involving an unaccusative verb, however, appears to present a problem to this claim.

- (1) Harga elektrik turun/ **men-**(t)urun.
price electricity fall/ MEN-fall
'The electricity price fell/is falling.'

Assuming the Unaccusative Hypothesis (Perlmutter 1978), *harga elektrik* 'electricity price' originates in an object position and undergoes A-movement to a subject position, crossing *meN-*. Yet, (1) is grammatical.

Proposal: We argue that (1) does not involve movement across *meN-* because while the bare verb (*turun* 'fall') is unaccusative, the corresponding *meN-* form (*men-(t)urun* 'meN-fall') is unergative.

Evidence:

(I) The sole argument of an unaccusative verb may appear post-verbally, unlike that of an unergative verb. *Men-(t)urun* 'meN-fall' behaves like the unergative (*me-*)*nyanyi* 'sing', and unlike the unaccusative *turun* 'fall'.

- (2) Kalau {harga minyak tidak turun/ tidak turun harga minyak}, kita akan bankrap.
if price oil not fall not fall price oil 1PL will bankrupt
'If the oil price doesn't fall, we'll go bankrupt.'

- (3) Kalau {harga minyak tidak men-(t)urun/ *tidak men-(t)urun harga minyak},
if price oil not MEN-fall not MEN-fall price oil
kita akan bankrap.
1PL will bankrupt
'If the oil price doesn't fall, we'll go bankrupt.'

- (4) Kalau {anak (me-)nyanyi/ *(me-)nyanyi anak} dalam kereta api, ibu bapa-nya
if child MEN-sing MEN-sing child in train parents-3SG
harus menegur-nya.
should reprimand-3SG
'If a child sings in the train, his/her parents should reprimand him/her.'

(II) Causativization with *-kan* is possible for unaccusatives, but not for unergatives (Vamarasi 1999). Our hypothesis predicts [*turun* + *-kan*] to be a possible causative, but not [*men-(t)urun* + *-kan*]. While *men-(t)urun-kan* 'lower' exists as a causative, we argue that it is a result of the prefixation of *meN-* to *turun-kan*, rather than the suffixation of *-kan* to *men-(t)urun*, based on the fact that the existence of a *meN-X-kan* causative verb entails that of a *X-kan* form, but not a *meN-X* form. Thus, for *meny-(s)ampai-kan* 'convey' (< *sampai* 'reach'), only *sampai-kan* is found, but not **meny-(s)ampai*.

Implications: Our analysis enables us to maintain the generalization that A-movement across *meN-* is prohibited without having to assume two distinct *meN-*'s, one for transitive verbs and another for intransitive verbs. It associates the occurrence of *meN-* with the existence of an external argument, lending support to previous analyses of *meN-* that relate it to the external argument (e.g., Gil 2002), rather than the internal argument (e.g., Fortin, in press). Because the unergative/unaccusative distinction is not always determined by a (verb) root but may be determined by the prefix *meN-* in the functional domain (i.e., v), our analysis supports specifying the unergative/unaccusative distinction through syntactic structure (e.g., Borer 2005), rather than lexical encoding (e.g., Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995).