

Voice and Aspect: Some Notes from Malay

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It is widely assumed that the verbal prefix *meN-* in Malay is an active voice marker (e.g., Chung 1976; Son and Cole 2004; Nomoto and Shoho 2007). This analysis is attractive as it accounts for (i) the canonical argument realization pattern in *meN-* sentences (see (1)); (ii) the absence of *meN-* in *di-*passives and object preposed sentences (see (2) and (3)); and (iii) (to a certain extent) the well-known observation that *meN-* blocks DP movement across it (Saddy 1991) (see (4)).

- (1) Ali membeli buku itu.
Ali meN-buy book the
'Ali bought the book.'
- (2) a. Buku itu dibeli oleh Ali.
book the di-buy by Ali
b. *Buku itu mendibeli/dimembeli oleh Ali.
book the meN-di-buy/di-meN-buy by Ali
- (3) a. Buku itu telah Ali beli.
book the Perf Ali buy
'Ali has bought the book'
b. *Buku itu telah Ali membeli.
book the Perf Ali meN-buy
- (4) a. Apakah yang Ali beli?
what-Q that Ali buy
'What did Ali buy?'
b. *Apakah yang Ali membeli?
what-Q that Ali meN-buy

Recently, it has been demonstrated that *meN-* has aspectual effects. In particular, *meN-* may not appear in stative sentences, and its appearance affects the telicity of degree achievement, but not non-degree achievement sentences (Soh and Nomoto 2009, 2010b). The aspectual effects, in turn, influence how arguments are realized in the sentence (Soh and Nomoto 2010a). To account for *meN-*'s aspectual effects, Soh and Nomoto (2010b) propose that *meN-* requires the sentences it occurs in to describe situations with stages (in the sense of Landman 1992, 2008). These new findings raise questions about the status of *meN-* and the extent to which the aspectual effects of *meN-* follow from its status as an active voice marker.

In this paper, I examine the connection between voice and aspect, and argue that an analysis of *meN-* as an active voice marker cannot explain *meN-*'s aspectual effects. I claim that *meN-* is an aspectual head, and

that the only active voice marker in Malay is phonologically null. I present alternative accounts for properties associated with *meN-* that have been attributed to its active voice status. I argue that the canonical argument realization pattern associated with *meN-* is due to the null active voice marker. The reason why *meN-* may not appear in *di-*passives is not because it is an active voice marker, and hence incompatible with a passive voice marker. Rather it is because the formation of passives involves movement of the object DP across *meN-*, a derivation that is prohibited. I argue that while many accounts of *meN-*'s blocking effects assume that *meN-* is an active voice marker, the blocking effects do not necessarily follow from *meN-*'s status as an active voice marker in these analyses (e.g., Aldridge 1998; Sato, to appear). Some recent phase based accounts treat the obligatory absence of *meN-* in the presence of movement across it as either an agreement phenomenon (Cole, Hermon and Yanti 2008) or in terms of the blocking of vocabulary insertion in the post-syntactic morphological component (Sato, to appear). I argue that these analyses cannot be easily extended to account for the fact that the prefix *ber-*, like *meN-*, also exhibits the same restrictions (Soh 1998).

- (5) a. Apakah yang mereka harap akan diterima?
what-Q that they hope will di-accept
'What do they hope will be accepted?'
- b. *Apakah yang mereka berharap akan diterima?
what-Q that they ber-hope will di-accept

I explore an account of the blocking effect of *meN-* that is due to its status as an aspectual head, with the kind of generality that makes it possible to extend it the prefix *ber-*.