

Multiple *ter-* prefixes in Malay

Ter- is a verbal prefix in Malay which appears in several types of sentences. In active and causer-marked passive sentences, it causes the action of the verb to sound "accidental." As can be seen in (1) and (2), it often contrasts with the verbal prefix *meng-*. *Ter-* also marks the stative passive, which does not have any implications about the intentionality of the act (see (3)), as well as abilitative sentences for some speakers. I argue that a unified analysis of these *ter-* prefixes is not possible and that multiple types of *ter-* prefixes exist in Malay, based on differences in argument structure, aspectual restrictions, and verbs which only combine with one type of *ter-*.

Soh (1994) argued that the *ter-* prefix triggers a delinking operation, assuming Grimshaw (1990)'s theory of argument structure, which posits both a thematic tier, which links arguments to theta roles, and an aspectual tier, which links arguments to aspectual roles. Soh (1994) claims *ter-* triggers delinking between the arguments and their thematic and/or aspectual roles. Soh argues 1) that the accidental readings are produced delinking the external argument from its aspectual role, 2) that stative passives are produced by delinking the external argument from both its thematic role and its aspectual role and 3) that abilitative *ter-* sentences are produced by delinking both the internal and external argument from their aspectual roles. My consultants do not produce or interpret abilitative *ter-*, so I do not include it in my final analysis. Soh also claims *di-* passives are produced by delinking, of the external argument from its theta role, but does not describe accidental passives because Soh finds them ungrammatical.

I argue that this delinking analysis is not tenable, because 1) it predicts possible delinked forms that do not exist, such as the delinking of only the internal argument, 2) it does not correctly explain the interpretation of stative passives or abilitative sentences, 3) while Soh does not report accidental passives, my consultants produce them and this framework has no method of distinguishing them from *di-* passives, and because 4) it does not predict that *ter-* cannot attach to certain verbs, like those which are inherently volitional like *ajar* 'learn'; in (4).

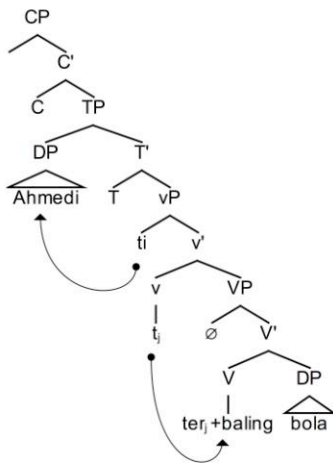
I argue that a unified analysis of *ter-* is not possible and that Malay must have multiple types of *ter-*: a stative *ter-*, which occurs only in sentences without *v* (i.e. sentences with a theme subject), and marks stative aspect, and an accidental *ter-*, which occurs with experiencer/non-volitional causer external arguments, and is actually responsible for assigning the experiencer theta role to those arguments. One reason that there must be at least two types of *ter-* is that certain verbs can only be combined with *ter-* to form a stative passive, and not an accidental form, as in (5). Although it is not yet clear why (5) is only acceptable with a stative reading, it is obvious that it is necessary to make reference to more than one type of *ter-* in order to explain it. Another difference between the two types of *ter-* is that the stative *ter-* is, as expected, never compatible with progressive aspect, as in (6), while the accidental *ter-* is compatible with progressive aspect, as in (7). I argue that these two types of *ter-* occupy different positions in the syntax. Since the *ter-* prefix which provides an accidental reading appears to be closely tied to assigning the theta role 'experiencer' to the external subjects, and contrasts with the 'agentive' marker *meng-*, I hypothesize that *ter-*, like *meng-* in Postman 2002's analysis, is the head of *v*, and therefore responsible for theta role assignment to the external argument, as shown in (8). I argue that stative *ter-*, which only occurs in sentences with theme subjects, marks an aspectual projection, and is not related to theta role assignment, as shown in (9).

A better understanding of *ter-* will provide information on how theta role assignment occurs in Malay, and may add to our understanding of the structural position of other verbal prefixes in Malay.

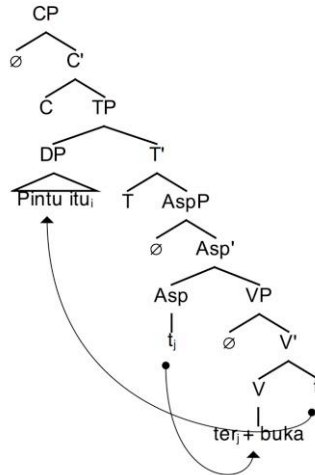
Data

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|---|--|
| 1) Ahmed terbaling bola kepada Ali.
Ahmad ter.throw ball to Ali
'Ahmad accidentally threw the ball to Ali.' | 2) Saya membaling bola kepada John.
1sg meN.throw ball to John
'I (intentionally) threw the ball to John.' |
| 3) Sayur-sayuran ini terpotong.
Vegetables this ter.cut
'These vegetables are cut.' | |
| 4) *Saya terlajar puisi ini.
1sg ter.learn poem this
'I accidentally learned this poem' | |
| 5) Komputer itu terosak (*oleh seseorang).
Computer that ter.broken
'The computer's broken (*by someone).' | |
| 6) *Sayur-sayuran sedang terpotong.
Vegetables PROG ter.cut
'The vegetables are being cut.' | 7) Dia sedang terjatuh.
He PROG ter.fall
'He's falling.' |
| 8) Ahmed terbaling bola.
Ahmed ter.throw ball
'Ahmed accidentally threw the ball.' | 9) Pintu itu terbuka.
Door that ter.open
'The door is opened.' |

Tree for (8)



Tree for (9)



References

- Grimshaw, J. (1990). *Argument Structure*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: M.I.T. Press.
- Postman, W.A. (2002). *Thematic role assignment in Indonesian: A case study of agrammatic aphasia*. Doctoral Dissertation, Cornell University.
- Soh, Hooi Ling (1994). *External arguments and ter- in Malay*. In *Proceedings of the 1994 Annual Conference of the Canadian Linguistic Association*, Volume 2, Päivi Koskinen (ed.), 535-546. Department of Linguistics, University of Toronto.