

Degree Achievements, Telicity and the Verbal Prefix *meN-* in Malay

Soh and Nomoto (2009) show that the verbal prefix *meN-* in Malay patterns like the progressive in English in being restricted in stative sentences. It is left open whether the restriction is due to *meN-* being a progressive aspect marker or whether it is because *meN-* shares with the progressive a meaning component that makes it incompatible with stative sentences. In this paper, we provide support for the latter explanation. We claim that *meN-* is not a progressive marker, but rather it requires the situation described to be one with stages in the sense of Landman (1992, 2008). This requirement explains why *meN-* has restricted distribution in stative sentences, like the progressive in English (Landman 2008, Rothstein 2008).

Our analysis receives support from *meN-*'s effect on telicity with degree achievement sentences. Like the *for/in* test of telicity in English, a *selama* 'for' phrase in Malay is compatible only with an atelic sentence, and a *dalam* 'in' phrase is compatible only with a telic sentence. While sentence (1) with a bare degree achievement verb may be telic or atelic, its *meN-* counterpart in (2) can only be atelic.

- (1) Harga minyak turun selama/dalam tiga hari.
price oil fall for/in three day
'The oil price fell for/in three days.'
- (2) Harga minyak men-[t]urun selama/?dalam tiga hari.
price oil meN-fall for/in three day
'The oil price was falling for/?in three days.'

Sentence (3) provides further support that degree achievement sentences with *meN-* are descriptions of atelic situations as they cannot appear with the *mengambil masa x untuk* 'take x time to' frame, which is restricted to telic situations.

- (3) Harga minyak meng-ambil masa tiga bulan untuk turun/?men-[t]urun.
price oil meN-take time three month to fall/meN-fall
'The oil price took three months to fall/?be falling.'

These contrasts are corroborated by the different entailments between (4) and (5). (4) entails a fall in oil price from x to y, while (5) entails a fall with stages, e.g., from x to y to z.

- (4) Harga minyak turun. (5) Harga minyak men-[t]urun.
price oil fall price oil meN-fall
'The price of oil fell.' 'The price of oil was falling.'

MeN-'s effect on telicity is not observed in non-degree achievement sentences, as in (6).

- (6) Dia (men)-[t]anam tiga batang pokok dalam masa satu jam.
s/he meN-plant three Cl tree in time one hour
'S/he planted three trees in an hour.' (cf. (1) and (2))

We propose that while *meN-* requires the situation described to be one with stages, it does not change the situation to fit this requirement, but rather selects from existing options ones compatible with it. Following Rothstein (2008), we assume that degree achievements like *turun* may describe a single atomic event (telic, without stages), or a single event consisting of multiple atomic events (atelic, with stages). *MeN-* is compatible only with the description with stages. We argue that *meN-* is not a progressive marker as its apparent effect on telicity is restricted to degree achievement sentences. This is unlike the English progressive, whose effect on telicity is more general (Moen and Steedman 1988, Mittwoch 1988, Krifka 1992, de Swart 1998, Hallman 2009). Our analysis suggests that directed motion verbs/degree achievements are lexically specified as achievements (Rothstein 2008, contra Hay, Kennedy and Levin 1999).