Change of state in Malay and the *meN-* prefix again

Change of state (COS) predicates are often derived from other predicates containing a related meaning component. For instance, in English, suffixing *–en* to an adjective can derive a change of state meaning, e.g. *dark*, *darken*. In Malay, one way of deriving a COS predicate is by adding the prefix *meN-* to an adjective. (1) shows a change of state reading which is not available in (2) (all data from Soh and Nomoto 2008).

(1)   Kertas buku ini   **meng-(k)uning**.   (2)   Kertas buku ini   **kuning**
       pages book this   meN-yellow   pages book this   yellow
       The pages of this book are yellowing.   The pages of this book are yellow.

Examples such as (1) might suggest that *meN-* encodes change of state. Yet it is well-known that *meN-* attaches quite generally to different classes of verbs, and need not encode COS, e.g. with transitive verbs such as *baca* 'read', the presence of *meN-* does not seem to have any obvious semantic effect (3-4).

(3)   Saya   sudah **baca** buku itu.   (4)   Saya   sudah **mem-baca** buku itu.
       1sg   Perf   read book that   1sg   Perf   meN-read book that
       I have read that book.   I have read that book.

How, then, does the COS meaning arise in (1)? Building on a recent proposal by Soh and Nomoto (2008) that *meN-* sentences describe events rather than states, this paper proposes that the *meN-* prefix is associated with only a very general meaning of non-stativity and that the COS meaning in (1) arises to satisfy this condition. I propose that morphologically, *meN-* attaches to a stem X of any category, but returns a verb: [$_V$ meN-X]. Semantically, [| [$_V$ meN-X] |] is a non-stative predicate the meaning of which is identical to or as close as possible to [| X |].

I assume that predicate meanings are associated with an event structure component. Rappaport Hovav & Levin (1998) propose that predicate event structures take the form of a few templates, corresponding largely to the Vendler/Dowty aspectual classes with forms such as [State(x)], Become[State(x)], [Cause y [Become[State(x)]], [x Act] etc. Within this approach, my proposal means that [$_V$ meN-X] is associated with a predicate with a non-stative event structure (i.e., any template distinct from [State(x)]). This event structure is identical to that of [| X |] if [| X |] is non-stative. If [| X |] denotes a state, however, as with adjectives such as *kuning* in (1), [$_V$ meN-X] is interpreted as a predicate with the 'closest' non-stative event structure, where 'closest' is defined via the subsumption relation. If [| X |] = P$_{STATE}$ and [| [$_V$ meN-X] |] = Q, then the event structure of Q must properly subsume that of P$_{STATE}$ (i.e. contains a State component as a proper part of its template), and any predicate R ≠ Q whose event structure properly subsumes that of P$_{STATE}$ also properly subsumes the event structure of Q. I define a relation uniting this 'closest' relation with identity so that the meaning of *meN-* remains constant across the different interpretations for [$_V$ meN-X].

The idea that semantically, [$_V$ meN-X] is identical to the meaning of X if X is non-stative accounts for why *meN-* often does not seem to show any obvious semantic effect, especially with activity verbs such as *baca* 'read' and *nyanyi* 'sing'. On the other hand, if X is stative, e.g. an adjective *kuning* 'yellow' or a stative transitive verb such as *anggap* 'consider', [$_V$ meN-X] takes on a change of state reading since [$_V$ meN-X] is by hypothesis non-stative. The template Become[State(x)] is the template 'closest' to [State(x)], since any other template that properly subsumes [State(x)] also properly subsumes Become[State(x)]. This explains why *meng-(k)uning* 'meN-yellow' is interpreted as 'become yellow', but not as 'cause to become yellow'.