

## The Malay verbal prefix *meN-* and its functions

The verbal prefix *meN-* in the Malay language is a versatile device. Among the various functions of this prefix identified in the literature, the most important are perhaps: (i) active voice marker (Sneddon, 1996, inter alia); (ii) agentive marker (Wouk, 1989); (iii) transitivity marker (Chung, 1976); or (iv) case marker (Guilfoyle, Hung and Travis, 1992).

Meanwhile, Soh and Nomoto (2009) have suggested that the *meN-* prefix is a progressive aspectual marker. In their study, they claimed that there are four different tests to identify stative verbs in Malay. The four tests are: (i) negative imperative test (*jangan* + V); (ii) adverb *perlahan-lahan* ‘slowly’ test; (iii) *memujuk* + V ‘to persuade to V’ or *memaksa* +V ‘to force to V’ test; and (iv) pseudo-cleft test. Soh and Nomoto (2009) conclude that transitive stative verbs derived with the applicative suffix *-i* are incompatible with these tests when in their bare form but pass when affixed with *meN-*. The outcome of the negative imperative test for the verb *suka* ‘like’ is shown in (1a-b). Inflected with *meN-* and *-i* the predicate is compatible with the prohibitive (1a), but as a bare root, it is now (1b).

(1a) *Janganlah menyukai orang yang pernah menyakiti hati anda!*  
NEG-PART meN-like-i person REL ever meN-hurt-i heart POSS.3SG  
‘Don’t like the person who has ever hurt your heart!’

(1b) \**Janganlah suka orang yang pernah menyakiti hati anda!*  
NEG-PART like person REL ever meN-hurt-i heart POSS.3SG  
[Soh & Nomoto,2009:161]

Soh and Nomoto (2009) conclude from this alternation that the bare form is stative. Inflected with *meN-* the form becomes eventive and therefore the *meN-* prefix should be understood as an aspectual marker.

The aim of this paper is to test the above prediction against a corpus of natural speech and to determine which classes of verbs participate in the stative~eventive *meN-* alternation.

We have compiled a corpus of natural speech using the Hansards of the House of Representatives of the Malaysian Parliament (Dewan Rakyat Parlimen Malaysia). The corpus covers the period between 24 June 2013 and 26 May 2016, covering the period of *Parlimen Ketiga Belas*, and contains approximately 4.8 million words. We have checked the accuracy of the transcription against public recordings of the parliamentary debates available on YouTube and other news streaming websites. The transcriptions appear accurate with only minor edits, which perhaps follow an internal stylesheet.

We will report the extend of the stative-eventive *meN-* alternation in this dataset by comparing verbs occurring in both their bare and affixed form in sentence structures compatible with the tests proposed in Soh and Nomoto (2009). In addition, we will also consider the distribution of these verbs with the progressive *sedang*, compatible with Vendler’s (1957) definition of stativity.

## References

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