

Movement across *meN*- and unaccusatives in Malay

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1. Introduction

Problem:

The verbal prefix *meN*- in Malay blocks DP movement across it in transitive sentences (Saddy 1991; Soh 1998; Cole and Hermon 1998).

However, no such blocking effect is found in intransitive sentences that contain verb roots that are usually considered unaccusative.

This is unexpected given that Malay syntax is sensitive to the unergative/unaccusative distinction (Nomoto, forthcoming-a), in accordance with the Unaccusative Hypothesis (Perlmutter 1978).

Proposal:

No blocking effect is observed in intransitive sentences with *meN*- because all intransitive *meN*- sentences are unergative.

Implications:

- (i) The semantic associations of unergative/unaccusative structures:
The association between an unergative structure with an internally caused event and an unaccusative structure with an externally caused event as proposed in Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995) needs to be loosened.
- (ii) Lexical versus structural approaches to the unergative/unaccusative distinction:
Our analysis supports specifying the unergative/unaccusative distinction through syntactic structure.
- (iii) The function and meaning of *meN*-:
Our analysis provides a new data point for evaluating competing analyses of *meN*-.

2. Background

2.1 The verbal prefix *meN*-

There is no consensus as to the grammatical function or the semantic contribution of *meN*-.

MeN- has been claimed to be an active voice marker (Sneddon 1996; Voskuil 2000; Son and Cole 2004; Nomoto and Shoho 2007), a transitive marker (Chung 1976; Cole and Hermon 1998), an agentive (trigger) marker (Wouk 1989; Cumming 1991; Gil 2002; Englebretson 2003), an objective Case marker (Guilfoyle, Hung and Travis 1992) or recipient (Voskuil 1993), an object clitic/antipassive marker (Fortin, in press), an agreement marker (Willett 1993), among others.

More recently, we showed that *meN*- has aspectual effects, and that it shares with a progressive marker a restricted distribution in stative sentences (Soh and Nomoto, forthcoming).

Despite this, there is general agreement about its syntactic effect, namely it blocks DP movement across it.

2.2 The ban on DP movement across *meN*-

A-bar movement of a DP may not cross the prefix *meN*- in Malay (Saddy 1991; Soh 1998; Cole and Hermon 1998).¹

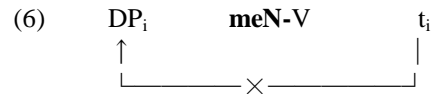
- (1) a. Apa Ali beli?
 what Ali buy
 ‘What did Ali buy?’
 b. [_{CP} Apa_i [_{TP} Ali beli t_i]]
- (2) a. *Apa Ali **mem**-beli?
 what Ali MEN-buy
 b. *[[_{CP} Apa_i [_{TP} Ali **mem**-beli t_i]]]

¹ See Hasal (2005) for cases where this restriction does not appear to hold.

- (3) a. Siapa (**mem**)-beli buku itu?
 who MEN-buy book that
 'Who bought the book?'
 b. [_{CP} Siapa_i [_{TP} t_i (**mem**)-beli buku itu]]

A-movement of a DP is also blocked by *meN*- (Cole and Hermon 1998; Nomoto 2008, forthcoming-b).²

- (4) a. Buku itu sudah Ali baca.
 book that PRF Ali read
 'Ali has read the book.'
 b. [_{TP} Buku itu_i sudah [_{vP} Ali baca t_i]]
- (5) a. *Buku itu sudah Ali **mem**-baca.
 book that PRF Ali MEN-read
 b. *[_{TP} Buku itu_i sudah [_{vP} Ali **mem**-baca t_i]]



3. Problem

MeN- does not appear to block DP movement in sentences containing verb roots that are usually considered unaccusative.

This is unexpected given that Malay syntax is sensitive to the unergative/unaccusative distinction (Nomoto, forthcoming-a), in accordance with the Unaccusative Hypothesis (Perlmutter 1978).

3.1 The unergative/unaccusative distinction in Malay

On the use of the terms 'unergative/unaccusative verbs/roots' in this section

Unergative verbs/roots: verbs/roots that appear in an unergative structure.

² Cole and Hermon's (1998) argument is based on sentences like (4), which are often referred to as object-preposed sentences (Chung 1976; Willett 1993), whereas Nomoto's argument is based on the distribution of *meN*- in 'funny control' sentences.

Unaccusative verbs/roots: verbs/roots that appear in an unaccusative structure.

As we will argue later in section 4, an unergative structure may contain an unergative or an unaccusative root.

While we make use of these terminologies, we are not committed to the idea that the unergative/unaccusative distinction is specified on the verb.

3.1.1 The positioning of the argument

The sole argument of a class of unaccusative verbs can appear in a pre-verbal or a post-verbal position, while the sole argument of an unergative verb can appear only in a pre-verbal position (Nomoto, forthcoming-a).

- (7) Unaccusative verbs
 a. Se-orang lelaki tinggi datang dari jauh.
 1-CLF man tall come from far
 'A tall man came from a distance.'
 b. Dari jauh datang se-orang lelaki tinggi.
 from far come 1-CLF man tall
 'From a distance came a tall man.'
- (8) Unergative verbs
 a. Se-orang lelaki tinggi pergi ke pasar.
 1-CLF man tall go to market
 'A tall man went to a market.'
 b. *Ke pasar pergi se-orang lelaki tinggi.
 to market go 1-CLF man tall

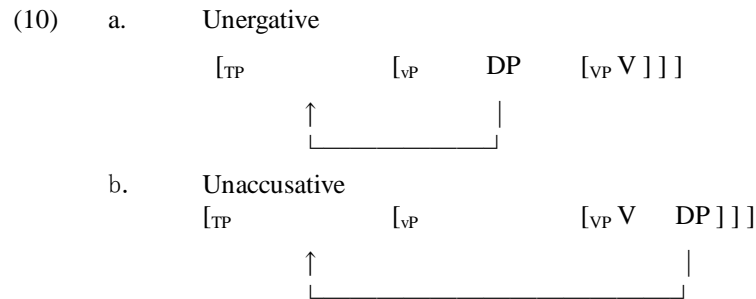
The word order with the argument of an unaccusative verb in a post-verbal position is observed much more frequently in adverbial clauses, especially conditionals (Nomoto, forthcoming-a).

- (9) a. Bagaimana kita hendak mengambil tindakan
 how we will take action
 jika sesuatu berlaku di luar pengetahuan kita?
 if something happen at outside knowledge our
 'How are we going to react if anything happens without our knowing it?'

(Utusan Malaysia, 29/01/2002)

- b. ... jika **berlaku** *sesuatu* *kecemasan*
 if happen something emergency
 mereka akan menghubungi saya atau Dr. Tan dengan segera.
 they will contact me or Dr. Tan with quick
 ‘... if any emergency happens, they will contact me or Dr. Tan immediately.’
 (Utusan Malaysia, 11/11/2002)

The contrast between unergative and unaccusative verbs in the possible positions of their sole argument is in accordance with the Unaccusative Hypothesis (Perlmutter 1978), which specifies that an unergative verb has an external argument, while an unaccusative verb has an internal argument.³



Assuming that the post-verbal position is an object position, the argument of an unaccusative verb may appear there as that is its projected position. The argument of an unergative verb may not as there is no point in the derivation where its argument occupies an object position.

3.1.2 Causativization with the suffix *-kan*

The suffix *-kan* has multiple functions and meanings (see, e.g. Asmah 1993; Cole and Son 2004; Kroeger 2007; Son and Cole 2008)⁴. Causativization is

3 Unlike Chomsky (1995), we assume following Marantz (1997) and Chomsky (2001) that the verbal structure of an unaccusative is also headed by a *v*, though of a different type than that heading the verbal structure of a transitive and an unergative sentence. The *v* of an unaccusative lacks an external argument.
 4 *-kan* is associated with the introduction of a causer argument and the promotion of a benefactive or an instrumental argument PP to a direct object DP. Although there are substantial differences between Malay and Indonesian with respect to the functions of the suffix *-kan*, the causative use is common to both.

one of them.

Causativization with *-kan* is possible with an unaccusative verb root, but not with an unergative verb root (Vamarasi 1999:27-33).

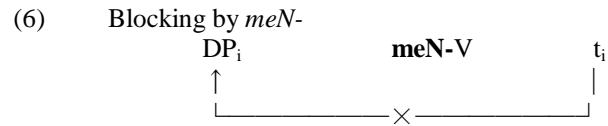
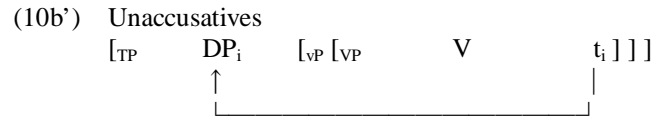
- (11) a. Unergative roots + *-kan*
 pergi ‘to go’ *pergi-kan/*mem-(p)ergi-kan⁵
 *‘to cause x to go’
 nyanyi ‘to sing’ nyanyi-kan/me-nyanyi-kan
 *‘to cause x to sing’
 fikir ‘to think’ fikir-kan/mem-(f)ikir-kan
 *‘to cause x to think’
- b. Unaccusative roots + *-kan*
 datang ‘to come’ datang-kan/men-datang-kan
 ‘to cause x to come’
 jatuh ‘to fall’ jatuh-kan/men-jatuh-kan
 ‘to cause x to fall’
 wujud ‘to exist’ wujud-kan/me-wujud-kan
 ‘to cause x to exist’
 ber-laku ‘to happen’ per-laku-kan/mem-per-laku-kan
 ‘to cause x to happen’

This is expected if causative *-kan* introduces an external argument and can only combine with a root that is not associated with an external argument.

3.2 No blocking effect

Given the Unaccusative Hypothesis and the blocking effect of *meN-*, we expect not to find unaccusative *meN-* sentences with its sole argument in a pre-verbal position.

5 Wolff (1980:210) lists *mem-(p)ergi-kan* as meaning ‘to send out’ (= to cause x to go). Vamarasi (1999:33) states that it does not exist in Indonesian and regards it as an accidental gap. Two Indonesian speakers we consulted confirmed Vamarasi’s observation. The relevant form appears to be non-existent in Malay too.



Contrary to our expectation, such sentences exist.

Turun 'fall' is an unaccusative verb. Its argument may appear in a pre-verbal or a post-verbal position.

- (12) a. Kalau *harga minyak* tidak **turun**, kita akan bankrup.
if price oil not fall we will bankrupt
'If the oil price doesn't fall, we'll go bankrupt.'
- b. Kalau tidak **turun** *harga minyak*, kita akan bankrup.
if not fall price oil we will bankrupt
'If the oil price doesn't fall, we'll go bankrupt.'

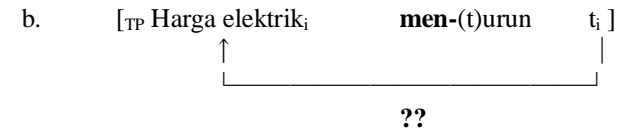
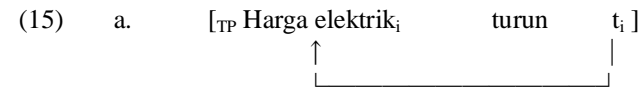
Turun 'fall' may also be causativized with the suffix *-kan*.

- (13) Kerajaan telah **men-(t)urun-kan** harga minyak.
government PERF MEN-fall-KAN price oil
'The government has lowered the price of oil.'

However, it may also occur with the prefix *meN-*, with its argument in a pre-verbal subject position.

- (14) a. Harga elektrik turun.
price electricity fall
'The electricity price fell.'
- b. Harga elektrik **men-(t)urun**.
price electricity MEN-fall
'The electricity price is falling.'

(14b) is unexpected because the movement of the internal argument crossing *meN-* does not give rise to ungrammaticality.



4. Proposal

No blocking effect is observed in intransitive sentences with *meN-* because all intransitive *meN-* sentences are unergative.

4.1 The positioning of the argument

MeN- sentences with an unaccusative root pattern like unergatives and unlike unaccusatives in the positioning of its sole argument.

Unergative roots

The argument of an unergative root may only appear in a pre-verbal position, regardless of the presence of *meN-*.

- (16) Unergative root
- a. Kalau anak nyanyi dalam kereta api,
if child sing in train
ibu bapa-nya harus menegur-nya.
parents-3SG should reprimand-3SG
'If a child sings in the train, his/her parents should reprimand him/her.'
- b. *Kalau nyanyi anak dalam kereta api,
if sing child in train
ibu bapa-nya harus menegur-nya.
parents-3SG should reprimand-3SG

- (17) Unergative root with *meN-*
- a. Kalau anak **me-nyanyi** dalam kereta api,
 if child MEN-sing in train
 ibu bapa-nya harus menegur-nya.
 parents-3SG should reprimand-3SG
 ‘If a child sings in the train, his/her parents should reprimand him/her.’
- b. *Kalau **me-nyanyi** anak dalam kereta api,
 if MEN-sing child in train
 ibu bapa-nya harus menegur-nya.
 parents-3SG should reprimand-3SG

Unaccusative roots

The argument of an unaccusative root differs in its possible positions depending on the presence of *meN-*.

Without the prefix *meN-*, it may appear in a pre-verbal or a post-verbal position.

- (18) Unaccusative root
 (= (12)) a. Kalau harga minyak tidak **turun**, kita akan bankrup.
 if price oil not fall we will bankrupt
 ‘If the oil price doesn’t fall, we’ll go bankrupt.’
- b. Kalau tidak **turun** harga minyak, kita akan bankrup.
 if not fall price oil we will bankrupt
 ‘If the oil price doesn’t fall, we’ll go bankrupt.’

However, with the prefix *meN-*, it may only appear in a pre-verbal position, patterning like an unergative root with or without *meN-*.

- (19) Unaccusative root with *meN-*
- a. Kalau harga minyak tidak **men-(t)urun**, kita akan bankrup.
 if price oil not MEN-fall we will bankrupt
 ‘If the oil price doesn’t fall, we’ll go bankrupt.’
- b. *Kalau tidak **men-(t)urun** harga minyak, kita akan bankrup.
 if not MEN-fall price oil we will bankrupt

This patterning suggests that the sole argument in a *meN-* intransitive sentence is always an external argument regardless of whether the verb root is considered unergative or unaccusative.

4.2 Causativization with *-kan*

If [*meN-*+ unaccusative root] is associated with an unergative structure, we expect that the suffix *-kan* cannot attach to it with a causative interpretation.

- (20) *Causative
-
- ```

 graph TD
 Causative[*Causative] --- Node1(())
 Node1 --- meN[meN-]
 Node1 --- Node2(())
 Node2 --- Root[Root]
 Node2 --- kan[-kan]

```

If a causative [*meN-*+ unaccusative root + *-kan*] form is available, it must have the structure in (21) rather than the structure in (20) above.

- (21) Causative
- 
- ```

  graph TD
    Causative[Causative] --- Node1(( ))
    Node1 --- meN[meN-]
    Node1 --- Node2(( ))
    Node2 --- Root[Root]
    Node2 --- kan[-kan]
  
```

This expectation is borne out.⁶

While forms like *men-(t)urun-kan* ‘to lower’ exist as causatives, it is a result of the merging of *meN-* to *turun-kan* as in (21), rather than the merging of *-kan* to *men-(t)urun* as in (20).

Evidence for this analysis comes from the fact that the existence of a *meN-X-kan* causative entails that of a *X-kan* form, but not a *meN-X* form.

6 Son and Cole (2008) also argue for the structure in (21), though their argument is based on constructions involving *-kan* other than causatives (i.e. benefactives, goal-PP constructions and inherent ditransitives). They claim that *-kan* introduces an internal argument and is an overt instantiation of the head of Result phrase (RP). Assuming that *meN-* occupies the Voice head (which they take to be equivalent to *v*), they postulate RP below VoiceP and VP as follows:

(i) [_{VoiceP} External Argument *meN-* [_{VP} **V** [_{RP} *-kan* XP]]].

(22)	<i>meN-X-kan</i>	<i>X-kan</i>	<i>meN-X</i>
	meny-(s)ampai-kan 'to convey'	sampai-kan 'to convey'	*meny-(s)ampai (sampai 'to reach')
	men-(t)idur-kan 'to put to sleep'	tidur-kan 'to put to sleep'	*men-(t)idur (tidur 'to sleep')
	mem-ber-henti-kan 'to dismiss'	ber-henti-kan 'to dismiss'	*mem-berhenti (ber-henti 'to resign') ⁷

We do not find *meN-X-kan* verbs that do not have *X-kan* forms.

That *-kan* is more closely related to the verbal root than *meN-* has been argued for on the basis of phonological evidence from a related language, Indonesian. Cohn and McCarthy (1998) treat *X-kan* as a prosodic unit (= Prosodic Word or PrWd) to the exclusion of *meN-* to account for stress patterns and syllabification in Indonesian.

- (23)
- | | |
|----|-----------------------------|
| a. | [X] _{PrWd} |
| b. | [X-kan] _{PrWd} |
| c. | meN-[X-kan] _{PrWd} |

To the extent that stress and syllabification in Malay are the same as Indonesian in the relevant respects, the independently proposed structure corroborates our analysis.

⁷ Some authors (e.g. Vamarasi 1999; Kroeger 2007) conclude that a prefixed form like *ber-henti* 'to resign; to stop (intransitive)' is unaccusative based on the fact that its base (*henti* in this case) can be causativized with *-kan* as in *meng-henti-kan* 'to stop (transitive)'. Other verbs that are concluded to be unaccusative based on the same reasoning include *meng-hilang* 'to disappear', *men-jadi* 'to become', *meng-alir* 'to flow', *meny-(s)eberang* 'to cross' and *men-(t)angis* 'to cry'. Such an analysis is problematic as it ignores the difference between bare forms and prefixed forms. The causative diagnostic also indicates that bare forms are unaccusative, and does not suggest that the prefixed forms are necessarily unaccusative as well.

To sum up,

- All intransitive sentences with *meN-* are unergative, regardless of whether the roots are considered unergative or unaccusative (contra Vamarasi 1999; Postman 2002; Kroeger 2007).^{8,9}
- Therefore, no DP movement takes place across *meN-*.

5. Implications

5.1 The semantic associations of unergative/unaccusative structures

Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995) propose that verbs have structured lexical semantic representations from which syntactic structures are projected.

They relate the unergative structure with a verb that describes an eventuality that is conceptualized as 'internally caused', and the unaccusative structure with a verb that describes an eventuality that is conceptualized as 'externally caused'.

Under this view, *turun* 'fall' is a variable behaviour verb (like *roll* verbs in English (Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995:209)) in that it may have an unergative use as well as an unaccusative use.

With an animate volitional/agentive argument, the eventuality may be conceptualized as internally caused, and hence unergative. With an inanimate argument, the eventuality is conceptualized as externally caused, and hence unaccusative.

- (24)
- | | | |
|----|--|---|
| a. | Dia turun dari bus.
he alight from bus
'He alighted from the bus.' | (internal causation;
unergative syntax) |
| b. | Harga minyak turun.
price oil fall
'The oil price fell.' | (external causation;
unaccusative syntax) |

However, the situations described by (25a) and (25b) are both conceptualized

⁸ Vamarasi (1999:29) contends that prefixless verbs are all unaccusative. However, this claim is too strong because it does not allow for the existence of prefixless unergative verbs, which we believe exist (e.g. *pergi* 'to go' (8)). Also, the same prefixless verb can be both unaccusative and unergative (variable behaviour verbs) (e.g. *turun* 'to fall; to alight' (24)).

⁹ See Soh (1994: 14) for an early suggestion of this possibility.

as externally caused. Yet, (25a) without the prefix *meN-* involves an unaccusative structure, while (25b) with the prefix *meN-* involves an unergative structure.

- (25) a. Harga elektrik turun. (external causation;
price electricity fall unaccusative syntax)
'The electricity price fell.'
- b. Harga elektrik **men-**(t)urun. (external causation;
price electricity MEN-fall unergative syntax)
'The electricity price is falling.'

This means that the connection between the type of the eventuality described (whether internally or externally caused) and argument realization in Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995) needs to be loosened.

5.2 Lexical versus structural approaches to the unergative/unaccusative distinction

Two approaches to argument realization (unergative/unaccusative distinction):

- (i) Lexical:
Verbs have structured lexical semantic representations from which syntactic structures are projected (Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995; Rappaport Hovav and Levin 1998, 2002)
Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995) on unergative/unaccusative distinction:
- Verbs are specified as being unergative or unaccusative, and an unergative verb describes an internally caused event while an unaccusative verb describes an externally caused event.
 - Arguments are projected in accordance with the verb's categorization as unergative or unaccusative.
 - Different nuances of verb meaning are due to different lexical verbs.
e.g. An intransitive verb describing an externally caused event is unaccusative, while one describing an internally caused event is unergative.
- (ii) Structural:
The meaning of a verb in a given use is determined compositionally from the meaning of the verb root and the syntactic environment in which the verb appears (Ritter and Rosen 1998; Marantz 1997; Borer 2005; Pytkäinen 2008; Ramchand 2008)

Borer (2005) on unergative/unaccusative distinction:

- Verbs are not specified as being unergative or unaccusative.
- Arguments are projected freely.
- Different nuances of verb meaning are associated with the different structure in which the verb appears.

Because a single root with the same relevant meaning may have an unaccusative or unergative use depending on the surrounding structural elements in the functional domain (i.e., the presence of *meN-*), the analysis supports specifying the unergative/unaccusative distinction through syntactic structure (e.g., Borer 2005), rather than lexical encoding (Perlmutter 1978; Perlmutter and Postal 1984; Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995; Rappaport Hovav and Levin 1998, 2002).

5.3 The analysis of the function and meaning of *meN-*

This new observation about the occurrence of *meN-* being associated with the existence of an external argument (which need not be an agent; cf. Dowty 1991; Ramchand 2008) enables us to re-evaluate the various analyses of *meN-* and to separate out analyses that are compatible with this new fact, from ones that are not.

(26) How various analyses of *meN-* fare with the new observation

Previous analyses of <i>meN-</i>	Compatible with new observation
Active voice marker	yes
Transitive marker	no
Agentive marker	no
Objective Case marker/recipient	yes
Object clitic/Antipassive marker	no
Agreement marker	yes
Aspectual marker	yes

This helps narrow down existing competing analyses of *meN-*.

6. Future work

Why is it that *meN-* has the particular effect that it does?

Is it a syntactic effect due to *meN-* being a *v* that requires an argument in its Spec or does *meN-* contribute a certain meaning that is relevant to the argument realization of the verb?

Aspectual effects of *meN-* (Soh and Nomoto, forthcoming)

The difference between (27a) and (27b) is an aspectual difference.

- (27) a. Harga elektrik turun. (external causation;
price electricity fall unaccusative syntax)
'The electricity price fell.'
- b. Harga elektrik **men-**(t)urun. (external causation;
price electricity MEN-fall unergative syntax)
'The electricity price is falling.'

In (27a) without the prefix *meN-*, the decline of the electricity price is understood to be abrupt, and the decline is conceived in its entirety.

In (27b) with the prefix *meN-*, the decline of the electricity is understood to be gradual and involve multiple substages. This aspectual effect is typical of the progressive.

While this aspectual effect of *meN-* is clear in a subclass of verbs that *turun* 'fall' belongs, namely those that describe degree achievements, the aspectual effect of *meN-* is subtle with other verbs.

- (28) a. Siti **nyanyi** di program Variasi Aidilfitri di TV3.
Siti sing in program Variasi Aidilfitri on TV3
'Siti sang in the *Variasi Aidilfitri* show on TV3.'
- b. Siti **me-nyanyi** di program Variasi Aidilfitri di TV3.
Siti MEN-sing in program Variasi Aidilfitri on TV3
'Siti sang in the *Variasi Aidilfitri* show on TV3.'

In Soh and Nomoto (forthcoming), we argue that *meN-* has a "progressive-like" aspectual effect not only in the subclass of unaccusative verbs like *turun* 'fall', but also with other transitive and intransitive verbs, and that it shares with a progressive marker a restricted distribution in stative sentences.

Q: How is this aspectual effect of *meN-* related to the finding in the present study about intransitive *meN-* sentences being unergative?

While previous studies on the unergative/unaccusative distinction have explored the relation between situation aspect and argument realization (e.g., Dowty 1991), to the extent that *meN-* can be viewed as a progressive view point marker, the present study raises the question about what role, if any, viewpoint

aspect may play in argument realization.

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