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## VERBAL PREFIXATION IN MALAY: RECONFIGURING PARADIGMATIC RELATIONS Lionel Wee UC Berkeley

- $\boldsymbol{1}$  INTRODUCTION. Malay has four verbal prefixes, which are assumed to have the following properties:
  - (i) they mark voice
  - (ii) they mark volitionality
  - (iii) they form a paradigmatic set

However, problems arise when one tries to be explicit about the ways in which these various assumptions are related. This goal of this paper is to show how these problems can be dealt with, and the assumptions retained.

- **2** VOICE AND VOLITIONALITY. In (1), we see three of the four prefixes. These three are usually assumed to form a paradigmatic set of voice markers (Benjamin 1993; Hassan 1974).
  - (1)
  - a. meN-1: active voice

Ali meN-pukul John Ali meN-hit John Ali hit John

b. di-: passive voice

John di-pukul (oleh Ali) John di-hit (by Ali) John was hit (by Ali)

c. ber-: middle voice

Siti ber-dandan Siti ber-dress up Siti dressed up (herself)

- In (2), we see the fourth prefix, *ter*-, which marks non-volitionality (Wouk 1980; Winstedt 1927).
  - (2) ter-: non-volitionality

Ali ter-pukul John Ali ter-hit John Ali unintentionally hit John The presence of *ter*- raises the following question: what is the relationship of *ter*- to the paradigm? It is claimed that all four prefixes form a paradigmatic set (Benjamin 1993; Hassan 1974). The main reason for this claim is that all four prefixes are mutually exclusive. The alternative would be to simply stipulate that Malay has at most a single slot for a prefix. This is surely undesirable since there is no independent evidence (that I am aware of) that Malay has any kind of slot morphology.

But the assumption that the four prefixes form a paradigmatic set raises a problem: there is no apparent reason why a marker of voice and a marker of non-volitionality cannot co-occur. So, how do we rule out a construction like the one shown in (3), for example, where the prefixes *meN*- and *ter*- are both attached to a verb?

(3) \*meN-ter-VERB

Before attempting to deal with these problems, I will briefly examine two recent attempts to be more explicit about the relationships among the prefixes. We will see that these attempts embody most of the problems already mentioned.

- **3** BENJAMIN 1993. (4) shows a version from Benjamin 1993.
  - (4) meN- 'active (transitive) voice' or 'actor-focus'
    di- 'passive (transitive) voice' or 'patient-focus'
    ber- 'active (intransitive)' or 'middle voice'

The problem here is that the *ter*- prefix is not shown in (4), even though Benjamin clearly makes the claim that "(w)hatever the source and possible earlier meanings of *ter*-, it has ended up in the modern formal language as a component element of the paradigmatic set consisting of the 'voice/valency'..." (p363).

And as we have already noted, even if Benjamin were to treat *ter*- as a non-volitionality marker, this still doesn't account for its inability to co-occur with the other prefixes.

- 4 HASSAN 1974. (5) shows a version taken from Hassan 1974.
  - (5) meN- 'active voice (volitive)' di- 'passive voice (volitive)'

ber- 'middle voice'

ter- 'active/passive voice (non-volitive)'

Notice that in Hassan's version, the notion of volitionality plays a prominent role. Notice also that *ter*- is presented as marking both active as well as passive voice, in addition to marking non-volitionality. This active/passive nature of *ter*- is based on a comparison of (6) with (2).

(6) Kaca itu ter-pijak oleh Ali glass the ter-step by Ali The glass was stepped on by Ali

Unfortunately, Hassan's version is still problematic for the following reasons:

- (i) Since all the other prefixes are marked for both voice and volitionality, why is *ber* not given a volitionality value?
- (ii) *ter* is given two voice specifications; so why are we not given a fiveway distinction instead? That is, what prevents Hassan from giving us the five-way paradigm shown in (7)?
- (7) meN- 'active voice (volitive)'

di- 'passive voice (volitive)'

ber- 'middle voice'

ter- 'active voice (non-volitive)' ter- 'passive voice (non-volitive)'

(iii) There are empirical problems with Hassan's characterization of *meN*-as being 'volitive' in nature; *meN*- actually seems to be neutral or unspecified for volitionality. This is shown in (8), where a *meN*-construction has no problems co-occurring with either an adverbial of intentionality or unintentionality.

(8)

- a. Ali meN-pukul John dengan sengaja Ali meN-hit John with intention Ali intentionally hit John
- b. Ali meN-pukul John dengan tidak sengaja Ali meN-hit John with NEG intention Ali unintentionally hit John

I suggest that the problems for both Benjamin and Hassan result from their subscribing to the same set of unquestioned assumptions. They both seem to be assuming that:

- (i) since there are four phonologically distinct prefixes, there must therefore be a four-way contrast, and
- (ii) this contrast is primarily one of voice.

The result is that they first start with a voice contrast involving the prefixes *meN*-, *di*-, and *ber*-. Then, they run into difficulty trying to fit in the fourth prefix, *ter*-.

What I propose to do is to reject these assumptions, and instead, begin by taking seriously the fact that *ter*- marks non-volitionality. I suggest that the verbal paradigm can be reconfigured into a three-way volitionality contrast, shown in (9). Voice contrasts are actually internal to each volitionality category.

 $\begin{array}{cccc} (9) & & unspecified & & volitional & & non-volitional \\ & Vol \left[ \ \right] & & Vol \left[ + \right] & & Vol \left[ - \right] \end{array}$ 

Before proceeding, let me be clear that I use the notations 'vol [], vol [+], vol [-]' only as convenient shorthand. They are NOT meant to indicate anything like discrete features within any kind of formal framework. As we shall see, a proper

understanding of what is going in the Malay verbal system (as with any other language) requires an appreciation of subtle semantic/pragmatic factors that the speakers make use of in their coding choices. The reification of features, on the other hand, runs the risk of disembodying the grammar from its speakers, and tends to reduce understanding to the mere formulation of algorithms (see Lakoff 1987; Langacker 1987, among others, for more discussion on the errors of an 'objectivist' view of grammar).

- **5** RECONFIGURING THE PARADIGM. The evidence for the volitionality categories comes from two sources:
  - (i) the lexical semantics of the stems that the prefixes attach to, and
  - (ii) the possibility of adding adverbials that explicitly indicate the volitionality of the agent.
- (10) shows that the prefix *meN* can attach to verbs that indicate either volitional or non-volitional behaviour, while *ber* and *ter* are restricted to volitional and non-volitional verbs respectively.

(10) Vol []	Vol [+]	Vol [-]
meN-tari 'dance' meN-curi 'steal' meN-kantuk 'fall asleep'	ber-bual 'discuss'	ter-gelincir 'slip' ter-kejut 'startled'
	ber-lari 'run'	ter-cengang 'astonished'

Consider what happens when adverbials are added. We already saw in (8) that *meN*- can easily co-occur with adverbials of intentionality or unintentionality, which follows from the fact that *meN*- is actually vol []. For convenience, (8) is repeated here as (11).

- (11) meN-: vol []
- a. Ali meN-pukul John dengan sengaja Ali meN-hit John with intention Ali intentionally hit John
- b. Ali meN-pukul John dengan tidak sengaja Ali meN-hit John with NEG intention Ali unintentionally hit John

What is particularly interesting is the way these adverbials interact with the prefixes *ber*- and *ter*-. As (12) shows, because *ber*- is already vol [+], an adverbial of intentionality is considered redundant (12a), while an adverbial of unintentionality is contradictory (12b).

- (12) ber-: vol [+]
- a. ?Ali ber-cukur dengan sengaja
  Ali ber-shave with intention
  Ali intentionally shaved

[redundant]

b. \*Ali ber-cukur dengan tidak sengaja
Ali ber-shave with NEG intention
Ali unintentionally shaved

[contradictory]

Exactly the converse happens with *ter*-, allowing us to conclude that *ter*- is indeed vol [-]. Thus, (13a) is contradictory since the adverbial indicates intentionality, while (13b) is redundant since the adverbial is one of unintentionality.

- (13) ter-: vol [-]
- a. \*Ali ter-tembak orang itu dengan sengaja
  Ali ter-shoot person the with intention
  Ali intentionally shot that person [contradictory]
- b. ?Ali ter-tembak orang itu dengan tidak sengaja
  Ali ter-shoot person the with NEG intention
  Ali unintentionally shot that person [redundant]

What about the prefix di-? (14) shows that the subject of a di- construction, John, can either have been a volitional or non-volitional patient. Thus, di-, like meN-, is unspecified for volitionality.

(14) John di-pukul (oleh Ali) John di-hit (by Ali) John was hit (by Ali)

This means that both meN- and di- are members of the same category where volitionality is unspecified, so that internal to this category is an active/passive voice contrast.

We can therefore ask if there are any voice contrasts internal to the other categories also. Recall from (5) that Hassan recognizes that *ter*- has both active and passive variants. This means that within the category of vol [-], there is an active/passive distinction. In fact, the same can be said for the category of vol [+], represented by *ber*-. Thus, compare (15b) with (1c), which is repeated here as (15a).

(15)

- a. Siti ber-dandan
  Siti ber-dress up
  Siti dressed up (herself)
- b. Kain itu sudah ber-jahit cloth the already ber-sew

  The cloth has already been sewn

The reconfigured verbal paradigm is shown in (16).

(16) The Verbal Paradigm In Malay (Reconfigured)

Vol [ ] Vol [+]<sup>2</sup> Vol [-]
meN-: active ber-: active ter-: active
di-: passive ber-: passive ter-: passive

- (17) abstracts out a schema for the Malay verbal prefix, showing that each prefix represents a volitionality category, and is also marked for voice.
  - (17) Schema For The Malay Verbal Prefix

 $\begin{tabular}{ll} Vol~[X]~~(where~'X'~is~unspecified,~volitional,~or~non-volitional)\\ active\\ passive \end{tabular}$ 

The analysis proposed here results in a paradigm structure that successfully integrates all four prefixes. Volitionality emerges as the crucial feature that distinguishes the three categories. The voice distinction that was assumed to be the primary paradigmatic contrast turns out to be a secondary feature internal to each category.

**6** A POSSIBLE OBJECTION. One might object to the paradigm in (16) on the grounds that it still doesn't account for the mutual exclusivity of the prefixes. The objection might be as follows: Given that *meN*- belongs to a category vol [], what prevents this category from getting a volitionality value from a prefix like *ter*-? After all, we know from (11) that a *meN*- construction can be 'further specified' via an adverbial. What's to prevent *meN*- from receiving this further specification from the prefix *ter*- instead of an adverbial? In other words, the skeptic will claim that unless this objection can be dealt with, we still have no grounds for ruling out a construction like the one in (3).<sup>3</sup>

In fact, there are two possible ways to deal with this objection. One way would be to simply concede that, yes, there is no apparent reason why the vol [] of meN-cannot receive further specification from ter-. The inability of meN- and ter- to co-occur will then not be due to the volitionality values, but to the voice specifications. It is important to bear in mind that the prefixes mark both volitionality and voice. Since meN- only marks active voice, and ter- either active or passive, we can rule out (18a) on the grounds that the voice values conflict. We can also rule out (18b) on the grounds that having two phonologically distinct markers for the same semantic category within the same word amounts to a case of multiple exponence.

- (18)
  a. \*meN-ter-VERB active-passive-VERB
- b. \*meN-ter-VERB active-active-VERB

As Peterson (1994:98) notes, multiple exponence is a marked phenomenon; "(i)n the unmarked case, ME (multiple exponence, LW) of a feature will not be required." The crucial point is that we are not compelled to justify cases where multiple exponence is absent, rather it is claims of multiple exponence that need to be carefully examined. And in fact, it appears that the most uncontroversial cases of multiple exponence tend to be restricted to negation. For example, in Luganda, the verb stem contains two phonologically distinct markers of negation, one involving segmental material and one involving tone.

Bill Weigel (p.c.) points out that there is good reason why negation should be prone to multiple exponence; the presence/absence of negation makes a difference to the content of a clause. If a marker of negation has undergone grammaticalization to a point where only its tone remains, then speakers may feel it necessary to bring in a new (and phonologically more substantial) marker to aid in restoring the salience of negation. On the other hand, voice, and in particular, active voice, is usually unmarked since it is usually inferable from the valence of a verb. In the light of all this, we can rule out multiple exponence of active voice markers.<sup>4</sup>

A second and stronger way to deal with the objection would be to point out that the entire objection is based on a highly questionable assumption in the first place. It assumes that there is no significant difference between encoding non-volitionality in the form of an adverbial, and encoding it in the form of the prefix ter. This kind of assumption only arises if we make the mistake of treating parts of a grammar as being equivalent simply because they appear to have the same truth-values or bear similar 'propositional content'. This kind of mistake is reminiscent of attempts to treat the passive as a purely syntactic variation on the active. But as numerous works have shown us (DeLancey 1981; Langacker 1987; Rice 1987; Shibatani 1985; Van Oosten 1986), the passive is a marked coding choice, carrying a variety of semantic/pragmatic nuances; it presents an event from the perspective of the terminal phase, de-focuses the agent, and thus indicates that the prototypical overlapping of agent and topic does not apply.

Coming back to the case at hand, as Talmy points out, in understanding the relationship between form and meaning, it is necessary to pay attention to salience, defined as "the degree to which a component of meaning, due to its type of linguistic representation, emerges into the foreground of attention or, on the contrary, forms part of the semantic background where it attracts little direct attention ... a semantic element is backgrounded by expression in the main verb root or in any closed-class element (including a satellite - hence, anywhere in the verb complex). Elsewhere, it is foregrounded" (1985:122).

The following examples are Talmy's:

(19)

- Last year I went to Hawaii by plane
- b. Last year I flew to Hawaii

Talmy notes that the sentences in (19) are "virtually equivalent in the total information that they convey, but they differ in that the fact of transit by air is

pivotal" in (19a) by virtue of the adverbial, "whereas it is an incidental piece of background information" in (19b) "where it is conflated within a verb." Likewise, in the following sentences, the notion of non-volitionality is either backgrounded within the verb (20a), or foregrounded as an adverbial (20b). In (20c), the speaker does not commit himself/herself to the volitionality of John's action.

(20)

a. John ter-pukul Ali
John ter-hit Ali
John unintentionally hit Ali

[non-volitionality backgrounded]

b. John meN-pukul Ali dengan tidak sengaja
John meN-hit Ali with NEG intention

John unintentionally hit Ali [non-volitionality foregrounded]

c. John meN-pukul Ali John meN-hit Ali John hit Ali

[volitionality unspecified]

The speaker therefore has to decide if s/he wants to background the volitionality of the action or not. Notice that if the speaker wants to foreground the volitionality, this cannot be done with a prefix; it must be done with an adverbial. And as we have already seen, the only prefix that will co-occur easily with an adverbial is *meN*-. Thus, choosing *meN*- either allows the speaker to remain uncommitted as to the volitionality of the action, or to foreground it. Choosing *ter*- only allows it to be backgrounded.

This actually leads to the interesting possibility (discussed further in Wee 1994b) that the three volitionality categories do not form a flat structure. Rather, they might be hierarchially related as shown below.

(21) volitionality
unspecified backgrounded
vol [ ] vol [+] vol [-]

Thus, the contrast between the volitionality categories is not simply a formal or structural one. They reflect choices that Malay speakers can and must make in deciding how to code the volitionality of an action.

7 SOME DIACHRONIC CONSIDERATIONS. I want to end on a diachronic note, by speculating on how the system of prefixes might have developed. According to Teeuw (1959:145), there was no evidence of *ter*- in Old Malay. There were, however, prefixes such as *mam*-, *ni*-, and *mar*-. These prefixes are respectively assumed to be cognate with the prefixes *meN*-, *di*-, and *ber*- (Coedes 1930; Hopper 1979).<sup>5</sup> The situation is summarized in (22).

(22) Verbal prefixes in Old Malay

meN- (< mam-) di- (< ni-) ber- (< mar-)

So, while we can be fairly certain that among the four prefixes, *ter*- entered the language last, it is unclear in what order the other three prefixes entered the language.

As a hypothesis, let's simply assume that mar- entered the language after mam- and ni-. This is shown in (23).

(23) One Possible Order In Which The Prefixes Entered The Language

Stage one: mam-, ni-

Stage two: mar-

Stage three: ter-

We can now speculate: it is possible that at stage one, there is no volitionality distinction. Both *mam*- and *ni*- represent active and passive variants.

At stage two, mar- enters the language to mark volitional actions. It therefore forms a volitionality category distinct from mam- and ni-, which are now seen as members of a volitionality unspecified category. This gives the vol [] category an internal voice contrast. By analogy then, mar- develops active/passive variants as well.

When *ter*- turns up at stage three, the schema is fairly well 'entrenched' (to use a term from Ronald Langacker). Because of conflicting volitionality values, *ter*- is unable to combine with *ber*-. As such, in order to meet the requirements of the schema, *ter*-, too, develops active/passive variants.

The result is what we see today: a tripartite volitionality system involving four phonologically distinct prefixes.

## NOTES

- 1. The prefix ends in an underspecified nasal which assimilates to the place of the initial consonant of the stem. If the stem begins with a vowel, the nasal appears as a velar. There are some complications. If the initial consonant of the stem is voiceless, it gets deleted. And if the stem begins with an /s/, the nasal appears as a palatal. This is a historical reflex if we assume that the /s/ was originally a palatal stop or fricative (Adelaar 1992:106). In this paper, I will present the prefix separate from the stem in all my examples so that with a stem like *tangis* 'cry', instead of writing *menangis*, the form will be *meN-tangis*. The reason for this is clarity of exposition since it will allow the stem in each case to be easily identified.
- 2. The fact that *ber* marks active and passive voices should not be seen as a rejection of the claim that it is a middle. As Kemmer (1993) has shown, the middle

is actually a complex category defined in conceptual terms, namely, a low degree of event elaboration. In effect, middles display limited transitivity levels, where transitivity is understood as a gradient phenomenon (Hopper and Thompson 1980; Rice 1987). I discuss elsewhere in detail the interaction of volitionality and transitivity in the Malay verbal system (see Wee 1994b).

- 3. I thank Paul Kay for bringing this to my attention.
- 4. Jespersen (1924:333ff) makes a similar point about negation, though he does not explicitly contrast it with other grammatical categories like voice.
- 5. Not surprisingly, disagreements exist. There are claims that di- actually developed from a preposition di that eventually came to replace ni-. Also, it's been speculated that mar- was originally a Batak borrowing rather than a cognate of ber-. See Adelaar 1992 and references therein for a useful discussion of these various positions.

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