

NASAL TRANSITIVE PREFIXES IN SPOKEN JAKARTA INDONESIAN¹

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This paper investigates the distribution of the verbal prefixes *meN-* and *N-* in Spoken Jakarta Indonesian. *MeN-* is associated with more formal speech, and *N-* with more colloquial, but both are fairly frequent in moderately informal speech. Clauses with *meN-* proved to be slightly lower in transitivity than clauses with *N-*. In addition, *meN-* is found in fuller clauses, and *N-* in more abbreviated ones. This is probably due to the association of the two affixes with two different registers, since formal speech is characterized by more complex syntax and more complete utterances, while colloquial speech tends to contain more elliptical utterances.

1 INTRODUCTION

Indonesian is a variety of Malay. Malay is here defined as a large group of dialects and/or closely related languages (including Standard Malay and Standard Indonesian) spoken in the Malay Peninsula, Southern and Central Sumatra, Jakarta, and some coastal regions of Kalimantan, Sulawesi and Maluku (Teeuw 1961). All of these varieties belong to the same branch of Western Malayo-Polynesian, and are most closely related to the languages of Java and Bali, somewhat more distantly to those of northern Sumatra, and still more distantly to those of the rest of Indonesia and the Philippines (Dyen 1965). Indonesian developed in this century from Balai Pustaka Malay, which in turn developed from a combination of Low Malay, the Malay used as a lingua franca in the Dutch East Indies, and High Malay, of the 19th century (Rafferty 1985). High Malay is generally considered to be a descendant of Early Modern Malay.

Since Indonesian was adopted as the national language relatively recently, and was not the native language of any major ethnic group in Indonesia, native speakers of Indonesian are still in the minority. The majority of the population natively speaks some identifiable regional language, although that regional language may be a Malay dialect quite closely related to Indonesian. However, in the post-Independence years a group has appeared, consisting of ethnically Indonesian native speakers of Indonesian. These people are to be found in Jakarta and some other large cities. They are usually the children of immigrants to the area, especially (though not exclusively) in households resulting from inter-ethnic marriages. Some are monolingual Indonesian speakers, while others are bilinguals who tend to have greater fluency in Indonesian than in the other languages that they speak.²

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²Kridalaksana (1985) estimates that the monolingual Indonesian speakers form 10% of the total population of Indonesia, while bilinguals for whom Indonesian is a first language form another 25%.

The variety of Indonesian they speak on a daily basis, which I call Spoken Jakarta Indonesian, (hereafter SJI), diverges markedly from the Standard Indonesian promoted by the Centre for Language Development and utilized in speeches and news broadcasts. In fact, it would be fair to say that Standard Indonesian is basically a written dialect, that is spoken by native and non-native speakers alike only in the most formal circumstances, far more formal than those in which the data discussed in this paper was collected. Colloquial Indonesian varieties, in Jakarta and elsewhere, has developed through a process of accommodation between this highly restricted dialect and whatever other varieties are present in a given location. In Jakarta, the most significant source varieties would be Betawi, Chinese Malay, Javanese, and Sundanese.

This contribution looks at one aspect of the verb morphology of SJI, the nasal transitive prefixes. The SJI verbal system, like that of other varieties of Malay/Indonesian, involves an alternation between two voices, or focuses, usually called active and passive, or actor focus and patient focus, or actor trigger and patient trigger (the terminology adopted in this paper). The alternation between actor trigger (hereafter AT) and patient trigger (hereafter PT) in Indonesian is marked by verbal prefixes (a nasal prefix for AT and *di-* for PT) and clitic pronouns (for PT) (Wolff 1980; Dardjowidjojo 1978). Unlike other varieties, SJI has two actor trigger prefixes, *meN*-³ (from Standard Indonesian) and *N*- (from Betawi), illustrated in examples 1 and 2 respectively. This paper explores the different functions of these two prefixes in conversational data.

- (1) T: *na:h, kalo interior design tuh*
 well if interior design that
me-rencana-kan bagian ruang dalam-nya
meN-design-kan section space inside-GEN
- T: Well, in interior design you design the interior.
- (2) B: *dari dulu dulu remaja selalu ya yang,*
 from before before youth always yes REL
- S: *iya,*
 yes
- B: *yang ng-urus deh gitu ya.*
 REL *N-arrange EMPH like*⁴ yes
- B: it's always been the young people yeah who,
 S: yeah,
 B: who like run things and all that yeah.

All the data in this study was collected over several months in late 1986 and early 1987. The data consists of a number of naturally occurring narratives taken from seven hours of tape-recorded conversations among native speakers of Indonesian, eight male and six female, born and raised in Jakarta in the post-Independence era, and all at least high school graduates, all from the middle socioeconomic class. They came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, but all were from either Indonesian-speaking or bilingual Indonesian/ regional language-speaking households. Since the data is spoken, and was collected in Jakarta, it may be taken to represent a particular variety of Indonesian, Spoken Jakarta Indonesian (hereafter referred to as SJI).

³The capital N stands for a nasal which varies in place of articulation according to the nature of the following segment in both *meN*- and *N*-.

⁴*Gitu* in colloquial Indonesian is used in the same sense that *like* is in certain dialects of American English, as a hedge or filler (e.g. "It was like totally awesome.")

2 PREVIOUS STUDIES

There are no studies which compare the functions of *meN-* and *N-* in SJI, although Wouk (1999) compares their frequencies in more formal and less formal speech. However, there is a body of work on the use of transitive verb morphology in Indonesian and Betawi, both from a formal and a functional standpoint. Some of these studies focus on factors determining the use of PT, but several explicitly discuss the use of AT forms as well. Formal studies of Indonesian, such as Tchekoff (1980), Cartier (1976 and 1979), and Chung (1976, 1978) identify *meN-* as active, but do not address its function. Functional studies of Indonesian and Betawi tend to highlight aspects of discourse transitivity in explaining the use of *meN-* and *N-*.

Discourse transitivity, as defined by Hopper and Thompson (1980) involves a number of parameters, some having to do with the A, some with the O, and some with the verb. The parameters are: number of arguments, kinesis, aspect,⁵ punctuality, volitionality, affirmation, mode, agency, affectedness of O, and individuation of O. Values of two or more arguments, kinetic, telic, punctual, volitional, affirmative, realis, agentive, highly affected O and highly individuated O are associated with high discourse transitivity, while values of one argument, non-kinetic, atelic, durative, non-volitional, negative, irrealis, non-agentive, unaffected O and non-individuated O are associated with low discourse transitivity. In addition, clauses high in discourse transitivity are associated with the foreground, or timeline, of a narrative, while those low in discourse transitivity are associated with the background.

Kaswanti Purwo (1986) suggests that the alternation is partly aspectual and partly pragmatic. *MeN-* verbs are telic, durative and narrative; non-*meN-* verbs are atelic, punctual and performative. The aspectual difference that Kaswanti Purwo mentions is familiar from transitivity studies, and suggests that *meN-* verbs are lower in transitivity than affixless verbs and *di-* verbs.

Verhaar (1988) argues that Indonesian is a split ergative language with two systems, ergative and accusative, and four clause types, active, passive, ergative and anti-passive. Within the ergative system clauses with *meN-* are anti-passive, and clauses with *di-* or a clitic are ergative; within the accusative system clauses with *meN-* are active and clauses with *di-* or a clitic are passive. Active and antipassive cannot be formally distinguished; neither can passive and ergative. Rather they are distinguished by the type of context in which they occur. Verhaar suggests that ergative and anti-passive structures are used in colloquial Indonesian, while active and passive structures are used in formal Indonesian. Since ergative clauses are the prototypical high discourse transitivity clause type, and antipassives are the prototypical low transitivity clause type, Verhaar's analysis clearly associates *meN-* in colloquial Indonesian with low discourse transitivity.

Wouk (1994) argues that the use of actor-trigger and patient-trigger can be explained in written Indonesian by appealing to a combination of factors, including referential status of the participants, recency of prior mention (lookback) of the patient, and textual cohesion. Actor-trigger is shown to correlate with absence, non-referentiality or unidentifiability of a patient, with identifiable patients not present in the preceding clause (a form of local discontinuity), and with discontinuity within the structure of a text. The importance of the referential status of the patient in this analysis is striking, since referentiality of patient is a characteristic associated with high transitivity.

Wallace's (1977) analysis of Betawi predates the notion of discourse transitivity, but refers to a number of its parameters. He reports that *N-* is associated with absence or non-referentiality of a goal, imperfective, durative or habitual action, and non-indicative mood (intended, potential, attempted). These are all familiar parameters of transitivity, and the nasal prefix appears to correlate strongly with low transitivity.

⁵Hopper and Thompson use the cover term aspect to refer to one particular type of aspectual distinction, that of telicity.

Wouk (1999), investigating register variation in SJI, shows that both *meN-* and *N-* co-occur in both formal and informal registers, but that *meN-* strongly predominates in the formal register (72 out of 77 AT clauses), while in the informal register the both are fairly frequent but *N-* predominates (65 out of 113 AT clauses).

3 COMPARISON OF *MEN-* AND *N-*

The data base for this study consists of seventeen naturally occurring narratives produced on a variety of occasions by eight different speakers, five women and three men. Some of these are basically monologues involving little or no feedback from the listeners; others are told more interactionally with questions and answers, discussion and digressions. These narrative sections were chosen because the existence of a plot which can be followed makes it much easier for an outsider to determine such crucial indicators of discourse transitivity as the eventiveness or non-eventiveness of an utterance, or the referentiality of a referent. All clauses with nasal prefixes containing potentially transitive verb roots (those which could take two arguments in the form in which they were used) are included for this study. There are 44 containing *meN-*, and 82 containing *N-*.

I first examined these data in terms of wide range of variables, some relating to the actor, some to the patient, and some to the entire clause, which help to measure the level of discourse transitivity of the clause, and the relative topicality of the two participants. I also looked at the effect of register shifting on choice of affix. Not all of these factors proved relevant for this study; however, the comparison did reveal some interesting differences between the way the two prefixes were used, some relating to discourse transitivity measures, and others relating to the structure of the clause.

There proved to be no significant difference between the two prefixes with respect to the status of the actor. For both, the prototypical actor is identifiable, animate, syntactically zero, and last mentioned in the immediately preceding clause. There it is either the actor of an actor trigger (AT) clause or the subject of an intransitive one, and syntactically either zero or pronoun. The prefixes did not vary significantly in the extent to which they deviated from this prototype.

Neither was there any significant difference with respect to parameters of discourse transitivity relating to the clause as a whole. Both prefixes followed a low transitivity profile, showing strong associations with irrealis, non-eventive, off-the-timeline clauses. This was to have been expected, given that both have been shown to be associated with low transitivity in related dialects such as Betawi and Standard Indonesian.

Patient status, on the other hand, did prove to be relevant to the choice between *meN-* or *N-*. It appears that *meN-* is more strongly associated with lower transitivity than *N-* with respect to animacy (Table 1) and referential status (Table 2) of the patient.

prefix	animate	inanimate
<i>meN-</i>	8 (21%)	34 (48%)
<i>N-</i>	30 (79%)	37 (52%)
	$C^2 = 6.435,$	$p = .01$

We note in Table 1 that *meN-* is much more likely (about 4:1) to have an inanimate patient than an animate one. Additionally, *N-* is much more likely than *meN-* to have an animate patient (again, about 4:1). However, they are equally likely to have an inanimate patient. Thus the significant variable effecting differential usages of *meN-* and *N-* here is animacy, with inanimacy being neutral in this regard.

Table 2 Referentiality of Patient

prefix	no patient	non-refer	non-ident	ident
meN-	2 (12%)	25 (53%)	6 (40%)	11 (23%)
N-	15 (88%)	22 (47%)	9 (60%)	36 (77%)
	$C^2 = 18.253, p = .001$			

In Table 2, we note that the usage of the two prefixes seems random with respect to non-referential and non-identifiable patients (although there are relatively few of the latter); and that *N-* is much more likely than *meN-* to be used at both ends of the referentiality scale, that is, both with no patient (intransitively) and with identifiable patients. The former correlation (that between *N-* and identifiable patients) is consistent with the findings in Table 1; that is, with *N-* more likely to be associated with higher transitivity values, but the former is not. To understand it, we need to look more at the structure of the clauses themselves.

Table 3 Structure of AT Clauses

prefix	no argument	one argument	two arguments
meN-	7 (17.5%)	23 (38%)	14 (52%)
N-	33 (82.5%)	36 (62%)	13 (48%)
	$C^2 = 11.590, p = .01$		

When used transitively, *meN-* is more likely to occur with explicitly expressed arguments, as opposed to zero anaphora. In Table 3, we see that in clauses with no expressed argument, *N-* is by far the more preferred form (33 of 40, or 83%), while in those with one argument *N-* is preferred at a ratio of approximately 3:2. Additionally, *N-* is much more likely to occur with no argument or with one argument than with two arguments. Thus, we can say both that clauses with less arguments tend to co-occur with *N-*, and that *N-* tends to co-occur with clauses with less arguments. This helps to explain the anomalous results in Table 2. Clauses with no patient will fall in the one argument category if the actor is overt, or in the no argument category if the actor is non-overt, and thus will be much more likely to occur with *N-*.

Clauses with *N-* were less complete than those with *meN-* with respect to the use of auxiliaries, as well as with respect to number of expressed arguments. In the data set examined, 20 of the 44 *meN-* clauses (45%) contained an auxiliary, while only 20 of 82 (24%) of the *N-* ones did.

The first clause of Example 3 illustrates the clause structure typically found with *meN-*, containing an auxiliary, an explicit actor, and an explicit but non-referential patient. The final clause of examples 4 does the same for *N-* clauses, containing a verb with no auxiliary or overt arguments, but with a recoverable, identifiable patient.

- (3) C: *setiap saya mau mem-bina hubungan,*
 each I want *meN-build* connection
temen-temen saya pasti meng-hancur-kan
 friend-friend I surely *meN-destroy-kan*
- C: every time I try to start a relationship, my
 friends are sure to ruin (it).

- (4) R: *saya ngga mau, ah, ude cape-cape, minta ny-ebrang-in*⁶
 I not want ah already tired request N-take across-in
- R: I didn't want to, ah, (I) was already tired,
 (she) requested that (I) take (her) across.

These differences in structure between *meN-* and *N-* clauses would appear to reflect the register marking function of the affixes. More formal speech, like written language, is characterized by more complete clauses; colloquial speech by shorter ones with a greater use of zero anaphora. Thus *meN-*, because of its association with formal register, would appear increasingly less appropriate than *N-* as the number of arguments decreases, consistent with the data just presented.

The situation with auxiliaries may be viewed as intermediate in this regard. Although auxiliaries are common in colloquial speech, and thus cannot be considered a mark of formality, they do make a clause longer, and it may be this factor that increases the likelihood of the use of *meN-* rather than *N-*

4 SUMMARY

A comparison of clauses with *meN-* and *N-* shows that, while both are often found in clauses that are low in discourse transitivity, there is a transitivity difference between the two, with *meN-* being even lower in transitivity than *N-* in terms of status of the patient. However, the differences are not so great that they must be considered two separate clause types, with totally separate discourse functions. Rather, they seem to represent minor variations within a low transitivity AT framework, allowing the speaker to make a finer set of distinctions than would be possible with a single AT prefix.

The other differences between *meN-* and *N-*, relating to occurring in a fuller or more abbreviated clause, have no connection with transitivity, and appear to be due to the sociolinguistic function of register differentiation, which associates *meN-* with formal register and *N-* with informal register.

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⁶The root here is *sebrang*; the initial voiceless consonant is deleted when the nasal prefix is attached.

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Appendix: Transcription Conventions

Punctuation reflects intonational patterns, not syntactic structures. A period represents falling intonation, a comma represents a slight fall, and a question mark represents a rise. Spelling generally follows Standard Indonesian orthography. However, when there is more than one pronunciation of a word in colloquial speech, the spelling reflects the pronunciation used.

The following abbreviations are used in glossing the transcriptions:

EMPH	emphatic particle
REL	relative clause marker
GEN	genitive marker

Table 1 Animacy of Particle

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