

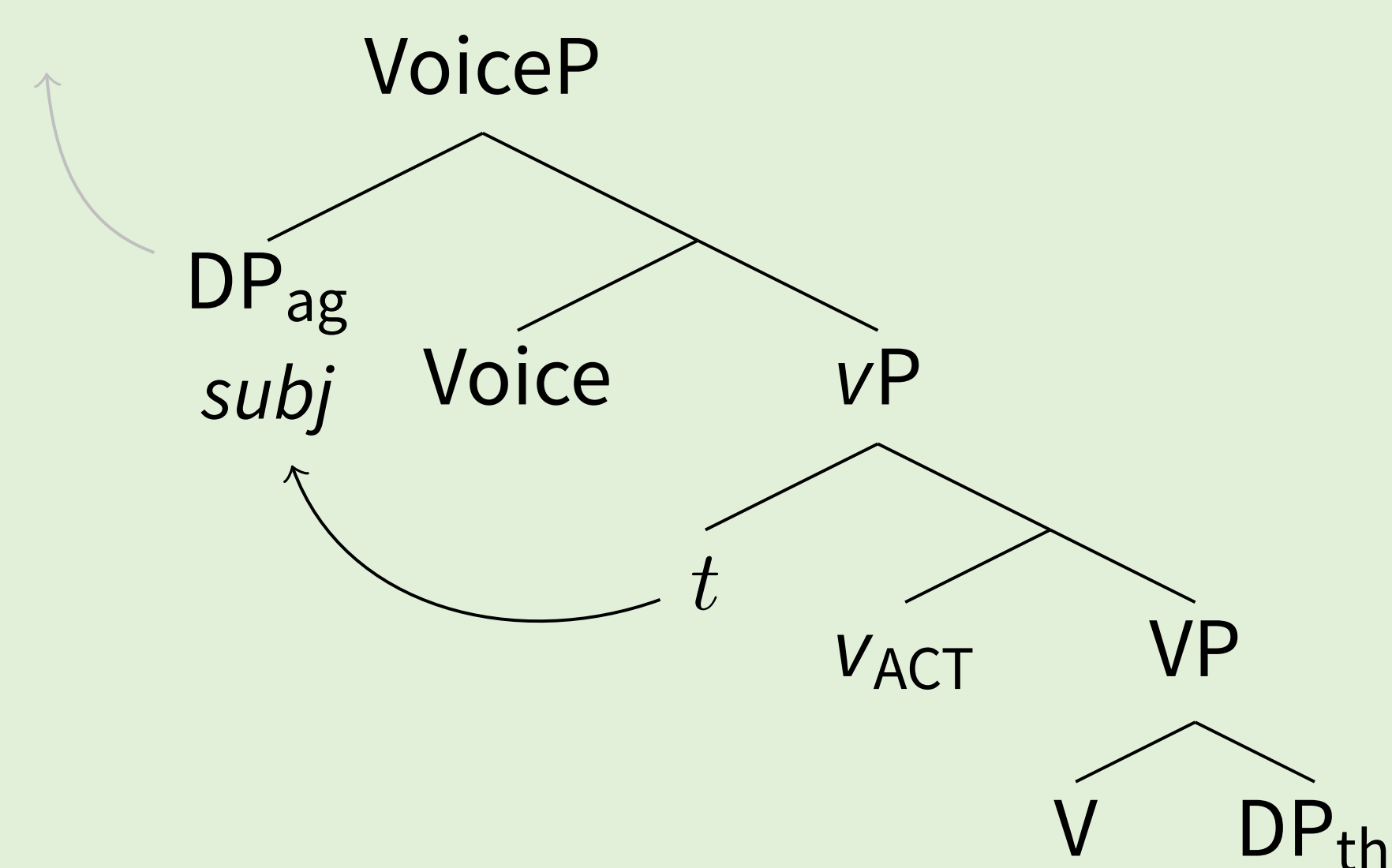
# Malayic active voice *meN-*: One prefix or two?

Michael Yoshitaka Erlewine and Carly J. Sommerlot

Malayic languages (Austronesian) have an **active/passive** voice alternation. Verbs in Standard Indonesian and Malay (SI/SM) bear a ***meN-* active prefix** or a ***di-* passive prefix**:

	active	passive	
<i>tulis</i> 'write'	<b><i>me-nulis</i></b>	<b><i>di-tulis</i></b>	"coalescing" <i>N</i> (replacing verb's stem-initial consonant)
<i>pukul</i> 'beat'	<b><i>me-mukul</i></b>	<b><i>di-pukul</i></b>	
<i>kirim</i> 'send'	<b><i>me-ngirim</i></b>	<b><i>di-kirim</i></b>	
<i>sewa</i> 'rent'	<b><i>me-nyewa</i></b>	<b><i>di-sewa</i></b>	
<i>beli</i> 'buy'	<b><i>mem-beli</i></b>	<b><i>di-beli</i></b>	non-coalescing <i>N</i>
<i>cari</i> 'look for'	<b><i>men-cari</i></b>	<b><i>di-cari</i></b>	
<i>dengar</i> 'hear'	<b><i>men-dengar</i></b>	<b><i>di-dengar</i></b>	
<i>ajar</i> 'teach'	<b><i>meng-ajar</i></b>	<b><i>di-ajar</i></b>	
<i>lihat</i> 'see'	<b><i>me-lihat</i></b>	<b><i>di-lihat</i></b>	no <i>N</i>

Malayic active *meN-* is best analyzed as the combination of **two prefixes** — the **syllabic *me(N)-*** and **coalescing *N-*** — which realize **different functional heads**.



- V head-moves to *v*. Voice lowers to *v+V* at PF.
- *V<sub>ACT</sub>* introduces the agent. *v<sub>ACT</sub>* realizes the coalescing *N-*, replacing the stem-initial consonant.
- Under local adjacency with *v<sub>ACT</sub>*, **Voice realizes *me-***, plus *N* where *v<sub>ACT</sub>* does not realize *N* with coalescence.

## Evidence from *peN-* nominalizations

Nominalizations in SI/SM may use *peN-* or *pe-*, corresponding to the use of *meN-* vs *ber-* (middle):

- (1) a. *men-ulis* 'write' ~ *pen-ulis* 'writer' (Sneddon 1996: 27ff)  
 b. *ber-jalan* 'walk' ~ *pe-jalan* 'walker'

More generally, *peN-* nominalizations are agent-oriented:

- (2) a. *peng-[k]asih* 'one who is loving' (Hassan 1974)  
 b. *pe-kasih* 'one who is loved'

*N-* reflects agent-introducing *v*, explaining *N-* in both active verbs with *meN-* and agent-oriented *peN-* nominalizations.

## Evidence from verbal reduplication

In Riau Indonesian, the active prefix is coalescing *N-*, or else *me-*. Reduplication of active verbs includes *N-* but not *me-*:

- (3) a. *pinjam* 'borrow' > *minjam-minjam* 'borrow repeatedly' (cf. \**minjam-pinjam*)  
 b. *lempar* 'throw' > *melempar-lempar* 'throw repeatedly' (cf. \**melempar-melempar*) (Gil 2002: 258-259)

In Riau Indo., *v* ↔ *N-* and Voice ↔ ∅ if *N-* coalesces; *v* ↔ ∅ and Voice ↔ *me-* otherwise. Reduplication targets *v+V*.

In SI/SM, reduplication includes the nasal *N-* when it undergoes coalescence with the stem-initial consonant, but **does not include *me-* or non-coalescing *N-*** (see e.g. Lapoliwa 1981).

- (4) *tulis* 'write' > active *menulis-nulis* 'write repeatedly' (cf. \**menulis-tulis*, \**menulis-menulis*)

In SI/SM, coalescing *N-* is in *v* while *me-* + non-coalescing *N-* is in Voice. Reduplication targets *v+V*.

In colloquial Johor Malay, non-coalescing *N-* is optionally included in reduplication: (Onn 1976: 178)

- (5) *gali* 'dig' > *menggali-(ng)gali* 'dig continuously'

In Johor Malay, non-coalescing *N-* can also be pronounced in *v*, within the domain of reduplication (*v+V*).

## Evidence from A'-extraction in Desa

Active verbs in (Suak Mansi) Desa may bear either *N-* or *meN-*, but **only *N-* allows non-subject A'-movement across it**:

- (6) Buku to yang opa'-ku {boli / moli / \***me-moli**}.  
 book DEM C father-1SG buy N.buy ME-N.buy  
 'This is the book that my father bought.' (Sommerlot 2020)

The agent (*opa'ku*) in such sentences is in **Spec, *vP***, interrupting Voice and *v*. Voice cannot be pronounced *me-*, as it would then have to prefix to the verb.

## Evidence from co-occurring *di-* and *N-*

In certain regional Malayic languages, *di-* and *N-* can co-occur:

- (7) a. *potong* 'cut' > ***di-motong-nya*** Riau Indonesian  
 b. *pinjam* 'borrow' > ***di-minjam*** (Gil 2002: 265)  
 (8) a. *bunuh* 'kill' > ***di-munuh*** Salako Kendayan  
 b. *rumput* 'weed' > ***di-ngg-rumput*** (Adelaar 2005: 218-219)

*Di-* is in Voice, like *me-*. Although *di-* and *N-* never co-occur in SI/SM (due to their allomorphy rules), **co-occurring *di-* + *N-* can be easily derived in the two-head theory**.

Salako Kendayan also shows "***di* agent (*N*-*V*)" patterns:**

- (9) *Aŋkoà-lah tuàkŋ kalenŋ di=kau matàh-matàh aŋkoà*.  
 DIST-EMPH bone catfish DI=2SG N-break-red DIST  
 'That's the catfish bone you've broken into many pieces.'  
 (Adelaar 2005: 218)

Although Voice (*me-/di-*) must prefix to the verb in SI/SM, **if *di-* becomes a proclitic, it may then attach to the agent**.

**References:** Adelaar 2005. "Structural diversity in the Malayic subgroup." • Denistia 2020. *Quantitative studies on the Indonesian prefixes *pe-* and *peN-** • Gil 2002. "The prefixes *di-* and *N-* in Malay/Indonesian dialects" • Hassan 1974. *The morphology of Malay* • Lapoliwa 1981. *A generative approach to the phonology of bahasa Indonesia* • Onn 1976. *Aspects of Malay phonology and morphology: a generative approach* • Sommerlot 2020. "A reanalysis of the Austronesian nasal prefix: Evidence from Desa, a Malayic language of West Kalimantan"