A reanalysis of the Austronesian nasal prefix: Evidence from Desa, a Malayic language of West Kalimantan

Introduction. The verbal prefix *meN-* in languages of Indonesia has received numerous different analyses over the years, but a consensus has not yet been reached. It is most commonly analyzed an active voice morpheme (Sneddon 1996; Son and Cole 2004, among others), but has additionally has received multiple other analyses (Wouk 1989; Willett 1993; Englebretson 2003, Soh and Nomoto 2015, etc). There is some agreement in identifying its function, namely that it blocks DP movement across it (Saddy 1991; Cole and Hermon 1998, etc). There has additionally been some work on the distinction between *meN-* and *N-* (Kaswanti Purwo 1986; Wouk 2004), but these are often seen as two instantiations of one prefix, where *N-* occurs in more casual speech, while *meN-* occurs in more formal contexts. No previous analysis, however, has noted any distinction between the two in terms of blocking DP movement.

In this talk, I argue that, in some languages, while *meN-* blocks DP movement over it, *N-* does not. My evidence comes from Desa, a previously undocumented Malayic language of West Kalimantan, a language which shows the 'subjects-only' extraction restriction so common to western Austronesian languages, but only when *meN-* is used. I suggest that this is possible because there are two separate affixes, *me-* and *N-,* that occur in different positions (*me-* in Voice, *N-* in *v*) and have individual syntactic functions; more specifically, I propose that *N-* assigns Accusative case, while *me-* is a voice morpheme.

Data. Desa, a previously undocumented language of West Kalimantan, mirrors other more well-studied western Austronesian languages in showing an extraction asymmetry between subjects and objects in A'-movement. Subject *wh*-questions (1) in Desa occur with *meN-*, while object *wh*-questions cannot (2).

(1) Sopai yang mem-oli buku?
     who   COMP AV-bring book
     'Who buys a book?'

(2) *Opai yang inya mem-oli?
     what   COMP 3SG   AV-buy
     'What did he buy?'

The object question in (2) is well-formed when the verb occurs in its bare (unaffixed) form, much like in Indonesian and Malay (as in (3)). Additionally, however, (2) becomes well-formed when *N-* is affixed as well (as in (4)).

(3) Opai yang inya boli?
     what COMP 3SG   buy
     'What did he buy?

(4) Opai yang inya m-oli?
     what COMP 3SG   N-buy
     'What did he buy?

This same pattern is additionally found in relative clauses. If *meN-* was only one prefix, both (2) and (4) should be ungrammatical. This suggests 1) that *meN-* and *N-* are two individual prefixes, and 2) that only *me-* blocks DP movement, while *N-* does not.

Analysis. I argue that *meN-*, which has standardly been analyzed as one prefix in related languages, should be analyzed instead as two prefixes in Desa: *me-* and *N-*. Following Legate (2014) for Indonesian and Malay, I argue that Desa is a split-Voice language (Pylkkännen 2002; Harley 2017) and that *me-* is the overtly realized head of Voice, while *N-* occupies *v*. I follow

Aldridge (2008)'s and Nomoto (2008)'s analyses for why object extraction is not possible. They propose that *meN-* occupies *v* and lacks an EPP feature, and that prevents an object from moving to the edge of the vP phase. I update this analysis and argue that *me-* still lacks an EPP feature, but instead is located in Voice (where VoiceP is a phase instead), and *N-* occupies *v* but does not affect movement. The function of *N-* is to instead assign Accusative case to the internal argument. This is schematized in (5).

(5) [$_{VoiceP}$ [$_{Voice}$ *me-*]   [$_{vP}$ [$_v$ *N-* $_{[+ACC]}$]   [$_{VP}$ V [DP$_{object}$]]]]

The ungrammatical sentence in (2) can be explained as such: *me-* lacks an EPP feature, and therefore the DP$_{object}$ cannot move to the edge of the VoiceP phase. This prevents it from moving out of the phase.

(6) [$_{VoiceP}$ [$_{Voice}$ *me-*]   [$_{vP}$ [$_v$ *N-* $_{[+ACC]}$]   [$_{VP}$ V [DP$_{object}$]]]]

I propose that the reason (4), with just *N-* prefixed onto the verb, is grammatical is because the head of Voice is occupied instead by a null morpheme, which carries an EPP feature and is in complementary distribution with *me-*.

(7) [$_{VoiceP}$ [$_{Voice}$ $\emptyset$ $_{[EPP]}$]   [$_{vP}$ [$_v$ *N-* $_{[+ACC]}$]   [$_{VP}$ V [DP$_{object}$]]]]

In (7), movement is possible, as the null morpheme, with its EPP feature, forces the DP$_{object}$ to move to the edge of the phase, and consequently it can move out of the phase. The prefix *N-* can still affix to the verb, as it does not prevent movement of the DP$_{object}$.

The prefix *me-* can never occur without *N-*. I account for this by proposing that *me-* subcategorizes for a vP with *N-* and thus can never occur with a bare vP. This additionally explains why it is not necessary for *me-* to assign Accusative case. Additional support for *N-* as assigning Accusative case comes from unaccusatives, which do not take *N-*, and some unergatives (like *nari* 'dance'), which can take *N-*. The addition of *me-* is crucially optional but only occurs in active constructions, following colloquial varieties of related languages.

Conclusion. I have argued, based on evidence in extraction contexts, that the nasal prefix *meN-* is two separate morphemes in Desa: *me-* and *N-*. I have offered an analysis of why *N-* can occur in object extraction contexts, but *me-* cannot, based on the syntactic positions of the two morphemes and their functions. These findings crucially differ from other related languages which have *N-* as a prefix but it behaves like *meN-* (Tjung 2006). This could indicate a split in the nasal prefix in a certain sub-branch of Malayo-Polynesian.These findings further highlight the importance of utilizing understudied languages in the development of syntactic theory.

Selected References. Aldridge, Edith. 2008. Phase-based account of extraction in Indonesian. *Lingua* 118: 1440–1469. | Cole, Peter, Gabriella Hermon, and Yanti. 2008. Voice in Malay/Indonesian. *Lingua* 118: 1500–1553. | Harley, Heidi. 2017. The 'bundling' hypothesis and the disparate function of little v. *The Verbal Domain,* eds. R. D'Alessandro, I. Franco, and A.J. Gallego, 3-28. Oxford: Oxford University Press. | Legate, Julie Anne. 2014. *Voice and v: Lessons from Acehnese.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. | Pylkkänen, Liina. 2002. Introducing arguments. PhD diss, MIT.