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? (2) *Opai yang inya mem-oli? who COMP AV-bring what COMP 3sgAV-buy book 'Who buys a book?' '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? (4) Opai yang inya m-oli? what COMP 3s_G buy what COMP 3s_G N-buy 'What did he buy? 'What did he buy?

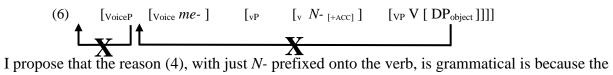
This same pattern is additionally found in relative clauses. If *meN*- was only one prefix, both (2) and (4) should be ungrammatical. This suggests 1) that *meN*- and *N*- are two individual prefixes, and 2) that only *me*- blocks DP movement, while *N*- does not.

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

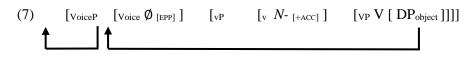
Aldridge (2008)'s and Nomoto (2008)'s analyses for why object extraction is not possible. They propose that *meN*- occupies *v* and lacks an EPP feature, and that prevents an object from moving to the edge of the vP phase. I update this analysis and argue that *me*- still lacks an EPP feature, but instead 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)
$$[v_{\text{oiceP}} \ [v_{\text{oice}} \ me^{-}] \ [v_{\text{P}} \ [v \ N^{-}_{\text{[+ACC]}}] \ [v_{\text{P}} \ V \ [DP_{\text{object}}]]]]$$

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.



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*-.



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.

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