In this paper I present materials that were left undiscussed in an earlier study (Benjamin 1993) on the historical sociolinguistics of Malay verbal affixation. Here, I say more about the possible history of Malay (both internal and external) and about the evidence for phonic – or, more strictly, oral-gesture – iconicity in its morphological apparatus. I also say something about certain affixes that were not discussed in the earlier paper.

A wide range of present-day language varieties are covered by the label ‘Malay’. The sociolinguistically ‘Low’ codes consist of the dialects of the various Aboriginal-Malay groups and the non-aristocratic varieties of the Local Malay dialects spoken by the Malays (Orang Melayu) proper. But there are also the ‘High’ codes, consisting of the varieties of Local Malay used by aristocrats (and those addressing them) and the standardized modern national languages known as Bahasa Malaysia and Bahasa Indonesia. (By governmental decisions, the national languages of Brunei and Singapore – there called Bahasa Melayu – have remained practically identical with Malaysian.) The

1 I am grateful to William Foley, Alton Becker and John Wolff for valuable discussions relating to different parts of this paper at various times since it was first mooted in the late 1970s, and to Linda Waugh for a discussion of phonic and oral-gesture iconicity. I must also acknowledge the continuing influence of the seminal paper by Oka and Becker (1974) on the interplay of phonic iconicity with grammar. Syed Farid Alatas willingly served as a sounding board for the acceptability of some of the word forms discussed here. None of these colleagues bears any responsibility for the errors that this paper surely still contains.

2 From a linguistic point of view, we need also to consider such ‘para-Malay’ dialects as Iban (Asmah 1981) and Minangkabau (Moussay 1981), as well as the possibly-Malayic language Duano (Kähler 1946/49). I refer to these speech varieties later.
so-called ‘Classical Malay’ dating from roughly 1400 to 1800 CE and the ‘Old Malay’ of the seventh- to thirteenth-century Sumatran and Javan inscriptions do not fit easily into this typology; but they are relevant to the discussion, and I shall accordingly refer to them as well. Similar considerations apply to those varieties of Malay spoken and written in Indonesia outside the nuclear ethnic-Malay areas, which often long pre-date the emergence of modern Indonesian. For example, Malay-language Christian texts were in use in parts of eastern Indonesia as early as 1548, and printed Christian material in Malay began to appear in 1611 (Collins 1998:26, 41-2), some time before Malay translations of the Qur’an became available.

As discussed in my earlier paper, the differences between the many varieties of colloquial and formal Malay are not merely stylistic but grammatical. Several of the scholarly disagreements over points of Malay grammar are the result of differences between the kinds of Malay under analysis, for the same surface forms (especially the affixes me-, -n- and ber-) often have different meanings in the different varieties. The external history of the standardized forms of Malay is so closely linked to their internal linguistic organization that sociolinguistic factors are crucial to the understanding of certain features of Malaysian and Indonesian grammar. Here, I shall follow up on my earlier suggestion (Benjamin 1993:366) that these factors are compounded of a two-way contrast: (1) as between outsider-orientation and insider-orientation of the speakers towards their immediate situation of discourse and (2) as between event-salience and participant-salience in the semantic and grammatical organization of their predications. This sociolinguistic approach might also help to explain the striking differences in semantic orientation between Malay-type languages and most of the other Austronesian languages.

3 The terms Old Malay and Classical Malay have long been conventional in the scholarly literature. However, James Collins (1998:39) has proposed a rather different division, into 1. Early Malay (from the Srivijayan inscriptions of 682 CE to the literary products of the late sixteenth century) and 2. Early Modern Malay (the period of European contact from the fall of Melaka in 1511 to the late eighteenth century). Collins points out that so-called Classical Malay refers in practice to those exalted styles of writing that deliberately sought to imitate the language of the Malay Annals (the Sulalatus Salatin or Sejarah Melayu), presumed to have been composed in Johor by Tun Sri Lanang around 1612. This has ever since been maintained as the idealized standard of ‘correctness’ in formal Malay, even though it is in reality just one of the many authentic varieties of Malay, both social and regional.
'Low' and 'High' Malay language varieties

The modern ‘High’ varieties of Malay are characterized by:

- the explicit and obligatory marking of participant structure, agency and transitivity
- a lexicon derived morphologically from a relatively small body of roots by reference to certain general and abstract semantic notions
- a preference for participant-dominated subject–predicate sentence organization
- sociocentric modes of expression

These features betoken the there-and-then-orientated, other-cathected mode of consciousness associated with the authority-based, mediated social relations typical of the pre-modern trading states and modern nation-states in which the ‘High’ varieties of Malay have developed (Benjamin 1993, 2005).

The formal, ‘outsider’-orientated varieties of spoken Malay, such as the so-called bahasa dagang (‘trading’ or ‘outsider’ speech) of the Riau Islands, share with standardized Malaysian and Indonesian an insistence on the explicit marking of the orientation of the predicate towards its participants as part of the grammatical core. A true syntactic subject controls the verb, which (in sentences with a controlling agent) may appear marked as active, passive or middle in voice. There is frequently a morphologically marked predicate-complement (patient, goal, beneficiary, location, and so on) towards which the action or process referred to by the verb tends. This pattern, familiar to students of Standard Indonesian and (to a lesser extent) Standard Malaysian, can be summarized as in Figure 1.

The ‘Low’ varieties of modern Malay, on the other hand, are characterized

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4 This usage of the term bahasa dagang is still current in Riau. But in the late seventeenth century, according to Bowrey (1701: Preface), the Malay Language spoken on the Islands, is somewhat different from the true Malay spoken in the Malay Country (that is, ‘the Peninsula stretching down to Johor’), altho not so much, but to be easily understood by each other. The Malay spoken in the Islands is called basa dagang, that is to say, the Merchants or Trading Language, and is not so well esteemed as the true Malay.

5 The term ‘middle voice’ is rarely found in published linguistic studies of Malay, but it is the appropriate term for the functions ascribed to ber- in most accounts of the formal language. Winstedt (1927:81) may well have been the first to apply the term to Malay grammar in English-language accounts, but (as pointed out by Alieva 1963:75) it was also used by the Dutch scholar Tendeloo (1897:121, 1901:156, 197). Currently, the term ‘middle’ (mogen) is used in studies of Malay mainly by French linguists: see, for example, Cartier 1979:182.

6 Alieva (1963:76) presents a partially similar diagram as a summary of Tendeloo’s views. There, however, per- is treated not as a ‘causative’ but as the aorist-aspect (that is, perfective) equivalent to the ‘middle’ affix ber-, which is ascribed ‘durative’ (that is, imperfective) properties.
by the following features:

- A reduced or covert expression of participant structure, agency and transitivity
- A lexicon consisting of a large number of distinct roots displaying relatively little secondary morphological derivation
- A preference for event-dominated, topic-comment sentence organization
- Egocentric modes of expression

These features betoken the here-and-now-orientated mode of consciousness associated with those contexts of life in which the wider social world, at least at the moment of speaking, is not accorded much attention.

Colloquial Malay shares with the ‘insider’-orientated varieties of so-called ‘classical’ Malay a tolerance of unorientated verb-focused utterances, neither active, passive nor middle in voice. An event is merely associated with some person or entity (the topic) that forms its domain but which does not govern it syntactically. Winstedt (1927:65) quotes a classical Malay example of this event-focused approach, as discussed by Blagden (1908:1204), whose interest was in ‘the mental relation of its ideas’ expressed by this kind of Malay:

\begin{center}
\textit{Di-chium-nya dan di-tangis-nya oleh bonda-nya akan anak-nya.}
At-kiss-it and at-weep-it by mother-it towards child-her.
\end{center}

According to Winstedt, Blagden renders this sentence into English as ‘there-was-kissing-and-weeping-over-it by her – by its mother over her child’. The

\footnote{The glossing provided here – which is mine, not Winstedt’s – is phrased so as to favour the}
second part of this sentence, from oleh onwards, has the character of an afterthought, despite serving to make explicit the agent–goal relation implied by the events retold in the first part. Syntactically, this second part is no more than a sentence-adjunct, and it could have been omitted without destroying either the sense or the well-formedness of the sentence. Lewis (1954:11) makes similar comments in her discussion of a colloquial Malay sentence about the preferability of watching a ceremony on television rather than in the flesh:

Dapat tengok semua.
Able see all.

Of this she says,

note […] the omission of a subject pronoun. But it is more likely that, in such a sentence, a Malay has no specific ‘viewer’ in mind. Many Malay ‘sentences’ do not lend themselves to analysis on the lines of European grammatical structure; they consist rather of a sequence of noun-ideas set down side by side, as here, perhaps, ‘There-was-the-possibility-of-seeing-all’.

A further example of this way of speaking occurred in a piece of colloquial-Malay banter that I witnessed during a late-night pop music programme (7 October 1997) on Malaysia’s TV3 channel:

Musician: Mesti cek doktor.
Must check doctor.

Presenter: Apa guna cek doktor? Doktor sentiasa sehat!
What use check doctor? Doctor always healthy!

‘What’s the use of checking the doctor? The doctor’s always healthy!’

This exchange took place during a live phone-in session and appeared to be completely spontaneous. The orientation of the predicate remained morphologically unmarked throughout: there are no affixes in either utterance. In view, implicit in Blagden’s rendering, that the purportedly ‘passive’ prefix di- is identical to the preposition di ‘at’. Winstedt’s own view (1927:70) was that ‘di is only the locative preposition in an idiomatic context’. Adelaar (2005) has independently argued that this identification is correct, at least historically.
her extemporized syntactical pun, the presenter left unaltered the surface forms used by the first speaker, cleverly delaying until the second part of her response any indication of the role-allocation switch she had made. Such a pun could not have worked in more formal Malay, where the role-allocations would have been explicitly marked by the use of extra prepositions, pronouns and verbal affixes.

In this kind of colloquial Malay, the verbal affixes – if they occur at all – frequently take on meanings quite different from those typical of the more participant-salient and outsider-orientated varieties (Benjamin 1993:366-84). In non-standard varieties of Malay, the functions of me- include serving (1) as a connective between verbs in serial-verb constructions and (2) as the indicator of ‘durative’, ‘habitual’ or ‘casual’ Aktionsart. My analysis showed that these various meanings could be linked together, on the assumption that me- had the notion of subjective involvement8 as its underlying meaning (see below). This connected it in turn with the valency-based function that me- exhibits as the marker of ‘agent’-orientation in the formal varieties of Malay. Moreover, it appeared there was a high degree of oral-gesture-based phonic iconicity in the attaching of this meaning to the formative m.

(-)N- as an autonomous element

The prefix me- in its ‘active-voice’ meaning is much less frequent in colloquial Malay than in formal Malay. But the associated nasal mutation, (-)N-, of the initial consonant of the verb root,9 which is usually treated as a trivial consequence of me-affixation (as in tutup ~ menutup ‘close’, or bawa ~ membawa ‘bring’), is very common in colloquial Malay as an independent formative in its own right: tutup ~ nutup. For example, a linguistic study of colloquial Perak Malay (Zaharani 1991:80-4) devotes five pages to N-, while making no mention of me-. The same is true of spoken Indonesian (Lombard 1977:118-9), which regularly uses N-forms of the verb where the formal variety has me-N-. Indeed, as Asmah has pointed out (1968:6), spoken Indonesian retains the N-prefix even where spoken Malaysian is happy to drop it in favour of the naked stem. Indonesian grammar here holds to the requirement that verbal class-membership be explicitly marked, while Malaysian – still in close contact with colloquial Malay – is under no such compulsion. Further light is

8 Small caps (for example, subjective) indicate condensed notional meanings. Articulated conceptual meanings are indicated, in the usual manner, by quotation marks surrounding ordinary letter-forms (for example, ‘close’). Asterisks indicate reconstructed proto-forms (such as *man-) or non-occurring forms (such as *membaca-mbaca).

9 The place of articulation of the nasalizing morphophoneme N is homorganic with that of the consonant it serves to mutate. Thus, it appears variously as m, n, ny [ŋ], ng [ŋ] or zero.
thrown on this by Stephen Wallace in a study cited by Hopper (1979:228): ‘in the spoken Malay of Jakarta, the nasal prefix which corresponds to the meng- of Standard Malay carries somewhat similar meanings of irrealis, continuous, nonsegmented events’. There is evidence that this usage has invaded written Indonesian: Tempo magazine (11 September 1982, p. 3), for example, has saya ingin nulis kapada … ‘I want to write to …’, instead of the expected menulis.’ Nevertheless, almost all modern grammarians of Malay and Indonesian treat me- and -n- as parts of a single prefix (men-) that generates a nasal mutation in the initial consonant of the verb stem (except when those stems begin with l- or r-, a point I return to later). This single-prefix analysis has been repeated in almost every account, even though it has long been known to students of comparative Austronesian that the me- and -n- elements have separate origins.10 As a consequence, n-prefixed verbs, such as nutup, are usually treated as resulting from the omission of the initial me-. Za’ba (Zainal Abidin Bin Ahmad), an important authority, writing here for a native Malay-speaking readership, provides an example of this approach:

‘nengok, ’mbongkok, ’ngayoh, ’ngangkut: yang bětul-nya, měnengok, měmbongkok, dsb. Těrchichit mě-nya dalam chakap mulut […] Pěnuntut-pěnuntut boleh-lah tahu sěndiri bila hěndak měmbunyikan sapěrti sěbutan chakap mulut, dan bila hěndak sapěrti sěbutan měmbacha. (Quoted from Lewis 1952:68; original orthography retained.)

[‘nengok, ’mbongkok, ’ngayoh, ’ngangkut: correctly, měnengok, měmbongkok, etc. The m- slips away in spoken language […] Students will know for themselves when to sound these words according to the spoken pronunciation and when according to the reading pronunciation.’]

This commonly accepted me-dropping analysis is applicable, I believe, to usages in some dialects of spoken local Malay (as, for example, the Kedah peasant speech described by Asmah 1985). On the other hand, the nasal-muta-

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10 See, for example, Brandstetter 1916:169-72, and the footnote by Blagden inserted into Wins-stedt 1927:18. Ross (1995:69-70) has pointed out that this feature belongs more specifically to the Malayo-Polynesian (non-Formosan) branch of Austronesian. He reconstructs as Proto-Malayo-Polynesian the ‘verbal derivational prefix *paw-, and *man- (< *p-m-an- where *-m- is the actor piv-ot infiix). In view of the evidence presented above and in my discussion of Malay pe- and pew- in a later section, it might perhaps be more appropriate to reconstruct the Proto-Malayo-Polynesian form as *(ma)(n)-. This would indicate the continued separability of its constituent parts in many branches of the sub-family. This raises an interesting question. Has the prefix *(ma)(n)- continued to retain an originally overt componentality in most of the daughter languages? Or has the iconic value of its component parts (discussed below) repeatedly led the speakers of those languages to reinterpret an originally single prefix, *man-, as constituting two separable prefixes?
tion element -n- can usefully be regarded, even for the purposes of synchronic analysis, as a largely autonomous verbality marker of some kind, the meaning of which differs from one language variety to another.

As I shall argue later, this view of -n- as an autonomous element fits well with what is known of the Austronesian background to Malay affixation, but it also finds concrete support from within the morphology of present-day Standard Malay. Reduplicated verb forms such as *menutup-nutup* ‘to close repeatedly’ (from *tutup* ‘to close’) are usually treated as resulting from the partial reduplication of the *me*-prefixed form (*menutup*). However, this would require the -n- element to contravene the general Malay principle that ‘no affixes are repeated when affixed to a reduplicated base’ (Abdullah Hassan 1974:50). A solution is suggested by Hendon’s treatment (1966:46-7) of verbal reduplication as a prefix, rather than simple reduplication. This would allow for the analysis of *menutup-nutup*, not as the reduplication of *menutup*, but as the affixation of *me*- to a complex verb stem *nutup-nutup*, the first component of which is itself a reduplicative prefix. In other words, while the *me*- behaves as a typically non-reduplicable prefix, the *n*- element behaves as if it were part of the verb stem, thereby providing evidence that even in modern Standard Malay *me*-n- consists of two partially autonomous affixes, *me*- and *(-)n*-.\(^\text{11}\)

Nevertheless, in Standard Malay usage, both Malaysian and Indonesian, *me*- is regularly followed by -n-, which would seem to reduce the autonomy I am claiming for the two affixes. But just as -n- often occurs without *me*, there are enough examples from other varieties of Malay of *me*- occurring without -n- to support my claim that they are autonomous affixes. In present-day Minangkabau, a Malayic language of West Sumatra, *ma-* is in fact more common than *man-* as a verbal prefix (Moussay 1981:54); and Banjarese Malay (South Kalimantan) allows *ma-* to be prefixed to a wider range of non-prena-salized verb stems than does Standard Malay (Ras 1968:10). The (presumably relatively late) restricting of *me-* to *n-* affixed stems in Standard Malay can be explained in phonological and semantic terms, as I shall argue shortly.

To ascertain the various meanings of *me*- and *(-)n*- in the different varieties of Malay let us look first at the situation in Minangkabau (West Sumatra). According to Moussay (1981:54), a Minangkabau verb prefixed with *ma-*

\(^\text{11}\) In standardized varieties of Malay, however, voiced-stop-initial stems do not retain the -n- in reduplication: *membaca-baca* (not *membaca-nbaca*) ‘to read repeatedly’. Clearly, voicing too is an element, not just nasalization; there appears to be some iconic area here where semantics and phonology overlap. On the other hand, several Malay dialects, including some varieties of written classical Malay, have forms like *memawa* ‘to bring’ in place of the ‘standard’ form *membawa*. One such case exists in the Old Malay inscription of Kedukan Bukit (Palembang), which has *mamāwa* ‘to lead’ (Coedès 1930:34, 75 / 1992:46, 78). I take this variation as evidence that the ‘standard’ pattern has become so through a conscious rejecting of some variants in favour of a more restricted range of forms. As Winstedt (1927:75) says: ‘These rules are fixed only in literary or Riau-Johor Malay, and even then with some few variants and exceptions.’
alone (cognate with Standard Malay me-) carries a ‘transitive’ meaning, while a verb prefixed with man- carries an ‘intransitive’ meaning:

\[
\begin{align*}
mangisi & \text{ ‘to be full’ [ma-n-fill]} \\
maisi & \text{ ‘to fill (something) up’ [ma-fill]} \\
ambo mangaja & \text{ ‘I give a lesson’ [I ma-n-teach]} \\
ambo maaja murik & \text{ ‘I teach a pupil’ [I ma-teach pupil]}
\end{align*}
\]

The etymologically closest Standard Malay version of the second pair of sentences would be hamba mengajar and hamba mengajar murid respectively – both of which contain the complex prefix me-n-.

Now, in a transitive sentence the verb merely mediates between the subject (as source) and the object (as goal): it is the relation between subject and object, not the verb as such, that is ‘in focus’ and carries the pragmatic weight of the sentence. In an intransitive sentence, on the other hand, the verb mediates nothing, for the ‘source’ property of the subject does not proceed beyond the domain of the action or event referred to by the verb. The referent of the verb can then be seen as being much more ‘in focus’ and pragmatically more weighty than it would be in a transitive sentence. It is precisely this ‘in-focus’/‘out-of-focus’ distinction in the verb that is marked by the presence or absence of -n- in Minangkabau.

The same phenomenon is also found in other varieties of Malay and, more widely, in other Austronesian languages. In the possibly-Malayic language known as Duano or Desin Dolaq spoken by the Orang Kuala of Benut (Johor) and across the Straits on and around Rangsang island in Indonesia, the n-prefix seems to indicate that the verb refers to some specific event or process, according to Kähler’s not entirely clear account,

\[
\text{Tätigkeitswörter, die ein Objekt als Erläuterung bei sich haben, kommen nur bei der Aufforderungen mit unverändertem Wortstamm vor..., der als solcher ursprünglich nominale Bedeutung hat. In einfachen Aussagen, verneinten Aussagen etc. treten jedoch bestimmte Änderungen im Anlaut auf, die sich unter der Bezeichnung “Pränasalierung” zusammenfassen lassen. (Kähler 1946/49:19.)}
\]

\[
\text{[Verbs accompanied by an overtly expressed object occur only in the unaltered word-stem form […] which, as such, has an originally nominal meaning. However, in simple utterances, negative utterances etc., there appear certain alterations in the initial sounds which are summarizable under the designation of ‘prenasalization’.]}
\]

Kähler’s examples concern the contrast in forms like telan ~ nelan ‘gulp down’, goreng ~ nggoreng ‘roast’, and jarah ~ nyarah ‘look for’. (I have normalized Kähler’s orthography.) He expressly regards the non-prenasalized variants as
more nominal in character than the prenasalized variants, which by implication are therefore more verbal.

This optional prenasalization of the verb is also reported for (among others) Iban, where it has two varieties (Asmah 1981:47-55), and for Ulu Muar Malay, where it constitutes a free alternant (ῶ-н-) of мū- and мǎн-н-, the local equivalents of Standard Malay мēн- (Hendon 1966:52-3). The semantics may differ slightly from place to place, but in all instances the prenasalized forms are used only when the verb is active and when it refers to some definite process or event – which is exactly the way (-)n- is used in most varieties of colloquial Malay.

The affix (-)n- is best understood, then, as ascribing an indicative or determinate meaning to the verb, employed when the speaker has a particular event or process in mind. But (-)n- also has the effect of marking the verb itself as the weightiest part – the ‘pragmatic peak’ (Van Valin and Foley 1980:338) – of the phrase in which it occurs. If there are no other markers present to indicate where one’s attention is to be focused, such (-)n-affixed phrases are to be understood as being ‘about’ the action or process referred to by the verb, rather than about its consequences or attendant participants.

Admittedly, it is unusual among languages generally for verbs to be marked for referentiality: definiteness is usually expressed as a property of nouns. But, as with case- and role-marking, most of the marking in Austronesian languages is placed on the verb, attesting perhaps to a deep-seated event-domination in these languages. In other language families, such as Indo-European, Semitic or Austroasiatic, referentiality and case are regularly marked on the noun, implying perhaps a greater degree of participant-domination than in most Austronesian languages.12

However, there is a degree of incompatibility between the ‘in-focus’ and the ‘determinate’ meanings of (-)n-, for it is most often the very presence of some referentially ‘definite’ subject- and/or object-participant that makes the verb ‘determinate’. Prototypical ‘determinate’ actions or processes are, after all, those that proceed from a particular source to a particular goal. This is especially the case when the source and goal are themselves of interest – which they are in the more articulated kinds of language associated with outsider-orientated contexts of discourse. Minangkabau appears to acknowledge the possibility of such an inconsistency by dropping the (-)n- in transitive phrases (as we have seen), leaving the ma- alone to serve as the ‘source’-focus marker. There may well exist other as-yet uninvestigated varieties of Malay that behave in the same way. But in most other varieties of Malay, including

12 An alternative explanation would relate to Alieva’s claim (1981) that what she calls the ‘possessive’ syntactical type – as opposed to the ‘nominative’ and ‘ergative’ types – is, or was formerly, dominant in the Austronesian languages, in both process (‘verbal’) and nominal expressions.
the standard languages of Indonesia and Malaysia, the ‘source’-focusing *me-* prefix is found only with (-) affixed stems. However, the compound prefix so formed, *men-* , is notorious for its highly elusive grammatical and semantic properties. As Bowrey (1701: no pagination) put it three centuries ago, ‘[Me, Mem, Men, Meng, Mēnī] are Expletives frequently set before Verbs, and seem to give an Elegancy to the Word, rather than any Addition to its Signification.’ (I say more about this early source on Malay grammar in the final section of the paper.)

The variability that *men-* displays in both usage and meaning bears witness, it seems to me, to the semantic tensions at its core, sometimes pulling together and sometimes pulling in opposite directions.

**Iconicity and the meaning of me-**

Given that its specific functions are so varied, can it be claimed after all that *me-* has any particular meaning? One thing that all examples of *me-* do have in common is the predicative ascribing of an event or process to some particular antecedent or source. I suggest, then, that *me-* carries the notional meaning SOURCE-ORIENTATION. But there is another, closely associated, set of meanings that seems to attach to *me-*: the notions of intent, control, or what Lewis (1952:183) calls ‘impulse’. I shall use the term SUBJECTIVITY to encapsulate these notions.

There appears to be a degree of direct iconicity in this use of *me-* . Throughout the Austronesian languages a prefixed or infixed *m* carries these same SUBJECTIVE meanings,13 even though recent writers have mostly chosen to give it a label – ‘actor-focus’ – that relates to syntactic function rather than meaning. As a sonant issuing from deep within the as-yet-unopened mouth, the speech sound [m] is highly suited to giving direct expression of the feelings one has when about to do something. The deliberate sonance is itself an action, but it is held back by the lips, until ready to be released by opening up to the outside world. In this way, SOURCE and SUBJECTIVITY are directly condensed together in the same symbolic action, but as felt notions rather than thought-of concepts. Note that this has more to do with oral gesture – a subjective modelling of the world through the shapes and felt actions of the vocal organs – than with sound (that is, acoustic) symbolism as usually understood.14

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13 Compare Oka and Becker (1974:244) on Old Javanese: ‘The absence of the initial *m-* indicates distance or detachment from the “action” of the verb. Presence of the *m-* marks closeness or involvement of the speaker (or writer).’

14 Temiar, a Mon-Khmer language of Peninsular Malaysia, displays an even richer pervasion of its morphology by oral-gesture iconicity (Benjamin forthcoming). These include the subjective infix *m-*, which indicates the ‘intensive’ mode in verbs (Benjamin 1976:180-2).
Despite the condensed character of this iconicity, at least three distinct articulatory components are present in [m]: labiality (from the lip closure), voicing (from the larynx), and nasality (from the open velar passage). If for any reason the voicing were cancelled, the nasality would be cancelled with it (since voiceless nasals are not normally found in Malay), and the [m] would become [p]. But if only the nasality were cancelled, with the voicing retained, the [m] would become [b]. This would generate a gradated series of labial sound-gestures opposed to each other in various degrees. If meanings were then calqued iconically upon these sounds, the greatest degree of semantic contrast would attach to the fully-voiced/fully-voiceless contrast of [m] and [p]. The third, less clearly defined element, [b], could then, with its simultaneously less-than-fully-voiced and less-than-fully-voiceless character, serve as a semantic fudge between the polar extremes [m] and [p]:

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{m} \\
\text{b} \\
\text{p} \\
\end{array} \]

Now, the affixal patterns of practically all western Austronesian languages, Malay included, retain the \textit{m-}/\textit{p-} opposition of the proto-language. But Malay is one of the relatively few such languages to have added a \textit{b-} to the array of productive labial-initial prefixes (Brandstetter 1916:172-3; Mees 1967:87-9).\footnote{It is likely that at least some of the few other occurrences of \textit{b-} are loans from Malay. Sasak \textit{bax(r)-}, for example, is reported to indicate ‘intransitive’, ‘durative’, ‘stative’ and ‘reciprocal’ meanings (Clynes 1995:516) – precisely the range it has across the different registers of Malay.}

\footnote{The \textit{p/m} opposition may itself be analysed further, if we accept Wolff’s claim, here as restated by Adelaar (1984:417), that ‘PAN *mær- [that is, *maɣr-] (an ancestral form of ber-) is to be viewed as a combination of a derivational *pær- with an inflectional *-um-. (with regular loss of the first syllable where the initial consonant was *b or *p). His [Wollf’s] claim is based on evidence from Philippine and Formosan languages, where reflexes of PAN *mær- are still analysable as deep-structure combinations of reflexes of *pær- with reflexes of *-um-.’ See also Ross 1995:70 for a more recent review.} Malay thus offers a choice of \textit{me-}, \textit{be-} and \textit{pe-}. In these prefixes the \textit{e} is a wholly-determined ‘inherent’ vowel realized, if at all, as schwa [ə] in Peninsular Malay and the standardized forms of the language, but often as [a], [o], or [u] elsewhere. The written \textit{e}- is little more than an orthographic habit, as witnessed by such pronunciations as [pəmbrentah] for \textit{pemerintah} ‘government’, where the epenthetic [b] emerges as an unintended consequence of the close transition from the [m] to the [r]. In other words, the semantic and iconic weight in these affixes is carried by the consonants alone.

So let us go back to first principles. Assuming that the labial component in all these prefixes points iconically to a source-orientation meaning, what
then is the significance of the voiced/voiceless opposition between \( m \) and \( p \), and of the almost uniquely Malay fudging of this basic Austronesian opposition through the intermediate element \( b \)? One clue to this, as linguists and anthropologists have often noted, is that the absence of a feature can also be taken to signify the presence of an alternative or opposite feature.

For the cultural reasons already discussed, a major alternation in Malay has been the choice between marking the participant and marking the event, in accordance with speakers’ wishes to lend a more articulated or a more condensed mode of expression to their utterances. Let us now see how the \( p- \) and \( b- \) series of affixes fit with this approach.

The ‘agent-noun’ prefixes \( pe- \) and \( pen- \)

As already noted, the affixation of \( -n \) is the precondition for the affixation of \( me- \) (at least, in current standard varieties of Malay): it is \( -n \) that marks the root as functioning verbally, and \( me- \) that joins it predicatively to an agent or source. If, however, the speaker’s attention should now be shifted to the agent itself, thought of as ‘the noun that does \( V \)’, then the influence of \( -n \) (the verbality marker) recedes, allowing the \( me- \) component to lose its nasality and become \( pe- \). This latter prefix, as \( pen- \), is the normal productive affix for forming agent nouns in formal Malay:

\[
\begin{align*}
tulis & \quad \text{‘to write’} \\
menulis & \quad \text{‘be writing’} \\
penulis & \quad \text{‘one who writes’}
\end{align*}
\]

While this \( pen- \) prefix is common in modern Malay, there are also examples of the prefix \( pe- \), without the nasal component. In many such cases, \( pe- \)-prefixed forms exist alongside the \( pen- \)-prefixed forms derived from the same stem, but with differences in meaning that serve to indicate the separate semantic weights of the labial and the nasal components. Consider, for example, the difference (here with a further suffix, \( -an \)) between a ‘topographical map’ (from the semi-official \textit{Atlas Kebangsaan Malaysia})

\[
\begin{align*}
peta petempatan & \\
map \, pe-place-an
\end{align*}
\]

and a ‘relocation map’

\[
\begin{align*}
peta penempatan semula & \\
map \, pe-n-place-an \text{ again.}
\end{align*}
\]
A relocation map refers to the processual consequences of people’s action, while a topographical map refers merely to non-processual, stative features. Here, the presence or absence of \(-N\) is associated with a greater or lesser degree of verbiness in nouns, the basically de-verbal properties of which are already marked by the denasalization of me- to pe-.

Sometimes the lessened verbiness of the pe- derivative lends a ‘passive’ coloration to the meaning as compared to the more ‘active’ sense of the equivalent pen- derivative. Abdullah Hassan (1974:59-63) does in fact refer to these forms as ‘passive nouns’. Among his examples are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Malay</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pengasih</td>
<td>‘one who is loving’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pekasih</td>
<td>‘one who is loved – lover, poet, etc.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>penyakit</td>
<td>‘something that makes ill – illness, disease, etc.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pesakit</td>
<td>‘one who is made ill – patient, etc.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>penunjuk</td>
<td>‘something that shows – pointer’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>petunjuk</td>
<td>‘something which is shown – show items, indexes, etc.’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here, the loss of the event-indicating element \(-N\) has allowed the emergence of goal-like and patient-like meanings that carry a ‘passive’ colour. I suggest, though, that this is in no sense a determinate matter. That some Malay speakers might think of this as a ‘passive’ derivation does not preclude that others should think of it as being more nouny than the somewhat verby pen- derivatives.

The ‘causative’ prefix per-

The derivational chain does not end with pe- and pen-, for there is also a ‘causative’ prefix per- (as in perjalan ‘to make something go’ < jalan ‘to go’) in which \(-r\) has replaced the \(-N\). Conventional grammarians of Malay prefer to treat pe-, pen- and per- as three distinct prefixes, related neither to each other nor to men-. But, as has long been recognized by Austronesianists, the \(-r\) (as well as the \(-N\)) is historically distinct from the labial elements (p-, b- or m-). This \(r\) is widespread in Austronesian languages as an affix adding ‘plural’, ‘iterative’ or ‘distributive’ meanings to verbs or nouns (see, for example, Mees 1967:118-9). Kähler (1956:111) explicitly analyses the Malay prefix in this way:

Das Kausative per- setzt sich vom sprach-vergleichenden Standpunkt gesehen aus dem eigentlich Kausative p(a) und *er, das auch in dem Zustandspräfix ber- enthalten ist, zusammen.
[The causative per-, seen from the viewpoint of comparative linguistics, is composed of the true causative p(a) together with *er, which is also contained in the prefix ber-.]

The prefix per- thus seems to imply the replication of whatever it is that the agent (pe-) is doing or has in mind – which is an appropriate way to derive a ‘causative’ morphology. Causative verbs in per- can, moreover, be treated as verb stems in their own right, capable of further affixation. The linkage of a causative verb to an agent can be marked by adding men-, as in memperjalan(kan) ‘to make something go’; or its linkage to a patient can be marked by adding the ‘passive’ prefix di-, as in diperjalan(kan) ‘to be made to go’.

Nouns in per- also exist, as in this example, which relates to the much older Srivijayan Malay: ‘A dātu according to the inscriptions, held a pardāttuan [modern perdatuan], a dātu province, which was distinguished from land belonging to the king personally, called kādāttuan [modern kedatuan]’ (Hall 1976:75). This clearly implies that a pardattuan ~ perdatuan is something set up intentionally, as signalled by the ‘causative’ per-, while a kadattuan ~ kedatuan is something that contingently comes into being, as indicated by the ‘passive, adversative’ ke-.

The compound prefix memper- is a modern favourite that has been gaining ground for some time, especially in Indonesia. Roolvink (1965) gives interesting statistics on this – even though his semantic argumentation is unclear. Modern literary verb forms in (mem)per- sometimes carry meanings of ‘intensity’ or ‘thoroughness’ rather than simple ‘causativity’, as for example in mem-perbuat ‘to manufacture produce’, which is usually preferred to the simpler membuiat ‘to make’ in the context of modern industrial activity. But note that when men- and per- combine to form memper-, the normal morphophonemic rules of Standard Malay do not apply: the expected form should be *memer-, which does indeed occur in some non-standard varieties of Malay. The form memper- thus betrays only a partial nasalization of the p-. This is confirmation, from within the substance of the language, that the denasalizing of me- to pe-carryes a strongly iconic value (here, agentive) for Malay speakers. The denasalization weighs more heavily than the iconically marked ‘verbality’ carried by the -N- affix, the effect of which is less marked before per- than it would be if, say, the p- were not a prefix but part of the verb root. Such is indeed the case with periksa ~ memeriksa (rather than the expected *memperiksa) ‘to examine’, a word in which the root itself begins with per, from the Sanskrit parikṣā ‘investigation’ (Gonda 1952:203).
The history of ber-

In my previous study (Benjamin 1993:371-85) I drew the following conclusions regarding the wide range of meanings expressed by ber- in the various kinds of Malay. In the more participant-orientated varieties, ber- serves as the verbal marker of middle-voice, reflexive and intransitive meanings. But in the more event-orientated varieties, ber- tends to be used for such aspectual and Aktionsart meanings as ‘aimlessness’, ‘habitual’, ‘static’, ‘non-punctual’. I suggested that the underlying meaning of ber-, in all varieties of Malay, is to indicate that the subject of the verb is being thought of as psychosocially divided in some way. I left the historical investigation of ber- hanging, however, merely suggesting that ‘the development of the Malay affixes has from the start, say two thousand years ago, been bound up in a High/Low diglossia that had effects on the language that were just as profound in the protohistoric period as they were later to be’.

The literature on the historical and comparative linguistics of ber- is too slender to be convincing. The claim that it is cognate with the prefix mag-, common in Philippine and other Austronesian languages, has been made or implied by several authors.17 This has usually been based on the following grounds: first, that Malay r and Philippine g are both descended from Proto-Austronesian *γ (a voiced velar fricative, written as *r, *g or *ɣ in some sources); second, that ber-, represented as mar- in the earliest Malay records, shares its initial be- (< ma-) portion with mag-. But, as we shall see, it is not certain that the r in ber- is a reflex of *γ. There are, in fact, reasons for thinking that it descended from some other Proto-Austronesian phoneme (such as *r) which also became r in Malay. In order to pursue this question, let me first return to the discussion of b as a phonic fudge between the iconically contrasting labial prefixes m- and p-.

As already noted, the prefix pe- co-occurs with both -n- and -r-, to form the ‘agent, utensil’ nominal prefix pen- and the ‘causative’ verbal prefix per-. In recent varieties of Malay, however, me- and be- display a complementary distribution with respect to -n- and -r-. me- combines only with -n-, to form the verbal prefix men-, while be- combines only with -r-, forming ber-, the prefix under discussion here. It looks as if whenever there is to be a voiced labial initial (for whatever reason), -n- selects me-, but -r- selects be-. What little is known of the early history of Malay fits with this view. The possible cognates

of *ber-* in other western Austronesian languages mostly have *m-* not *b-* (as, for example, Batak *mar-*, or — a more doubtful ‘cognate’ — Tagalog *mag-*)

The Old Malay of the seventh-century Srivijayan inscriptions regularly has *mar-* where the later language was to have *bar-* or *ber-*. There appear to have been one or more transitional phases before the complementarity between *m+n* and *b+r* was finally established. For example, an Old Malay inscription from West Java, dating to 942 CE, has both *bar-* and *mar-* in the same text. This has been interpreted variously as a case of free variation, or of transitional indeterminacy, or of two distinct affixes with separate meanings (Teeuw 1959:148). Forms in *mer-* were still retained in some early seventeenth-century texts. And the sizeable number of current Malay plant-, animal- and place-names beginning in *bem-, ben-* or *beng-* (Wilkinson 1932:114-22) suggests that for a while after *mar-* had evolved into *bar-* or *ber-*, the resultant *b-* initial was still felt to be recombinable with -*n-*. But the substitution of -*r-* for -*n-* must have lessened the pressure, allowing the initial *m-* to undergo denasalization to *b-*, with the result that the ancestral form *mar-* became first *bar-* (or perhaps *mbar-*)

18 As Mees (1967:87-8) explains, ‘[...] bentuk *bar* sungguh jarang benar. *Ba* dan *bar* hanya terdapat dalam bahasa2 Dayak, juga dalam bahasa Sumbawara [[...] the form *bar* is extremely rare. *Ba* and *bar* are only found in Dayak languages and also in Sumbawara].’ Winstedt (1927:13) and Brandstetter (1916:118) also noted that *ba(-)* (rather than *bar-* ) is found in some Austronesian languages outside the Malay dialect-continuum. But in at least one variety of Early Modern Malay (see the final section of this paper) both *ba-* and *ber-* occurred, as independent affixes.

19 A passing comment of Winstedt’s (1927:13) suggests that certain usages of *me-* in early Malay texts of the ‘classical’ kind can also be understood as expressing the ‘habitual’ meaning found in some present-day colloquial speech-varieties (see also Benjamin 1993:367-8), rather than the more expected ‘actor-focus’ meaning: ‘It is quite possible that substantival forms like *měntua* [person *me<n>* old], *měrlimau* [fruit *me<r>* citrus]: in the Bodleian Sěri Rama (early seventeenth century) *rumah měrděrma* [house *me<r>* alms] occurs for “almshouse”. Note that in some of these archaic forms, *me-* occurs with -*r-*, rather than with -*n-. I shall return to this point. See Adelaar (2005:133-5) for a phonology-based discussion of these phenomena, not necessarily incompatible with the approach I have taken here.

20 These processes can still be witnessed today in the progressive regularization of the older ‘dictionary’ form *merbahaya* ‘dangerous’ to the now more frequently heard *berbahaya*. The Sanskrit source, with initial *m-*, is *marabhaya*, compounded of *mara* ‘imminent danger’ and *bhaya* ‘danger of all kinds’ (Gonda 1952:60).

21 Another example of such retrogressive assimilation in Malay is provided by *menantu* ‘child’s spouse’, from *bantu* ‘to aid’ +-*in-* ‘passive’.

22 In his discussions of the phonological history of *ber-*, Adelaar (1992a:162-3, 2005:129, 133-5) has rejected the simple denasalization argument in favour of one that involves an intermediate *-*mb- stage, in which the *-b-* was epenthetic. In the modern language, however, the resultant iconic patterning remains in effect one of denasalization.
Mees (1967:88) noted the extremely complicated relations disclosed by the historical study of these prefixes: ‘ma, mağ dan ma+nasal agak tercampur dalam perkembangannya [ma-, mağ- and ma+nasal have become somewhat mixed together in their development]’. Likewise, Foley (1974:29) remarked that ‘one of the striking features of Malay morphology is the confusion in the usage of morphemes, so that many have a patchquilt of multiple uses’. Becker (1979:249) has suggested that ‘a major source of the difficulty in describing these affixes has been that discourse strategies have changed rapidly in the past few hundred years of the history of Malay – and with them the semantics of the verb affix systems’.

Why, then, did -r- and -n- come to be syntagmatic alternants in the slot between the prefix ma- and the verb to which it was joined? The answer lies in the semantic contrast between man- and mar-, which we met earlier when discussing the differences between pen- ‘agent-noun’ and per- ‘causative’. I characterized -n- as the indicative and determinate marker of the notions event or process. This would identify it as a possible Malay reflex of such Austronesian elements as the η ‘definitizer’ in Old Javanese (Oka and Becker 1974:244), the η ligature in many Philippine languages, the ng of the Malay relative pronoun yang, and the Proto-Austronesian ‘emphatic’ nasal substitution η- that according to Dahl (1976:128) became the -N- of the western Austronesian languages.23 The -r- was earlier identified with an Austronesian affix that adds ‘plural’, ‘iterative’ or ‘distributive’ meanings to verbs, but I can find little discussion of this in the recent literature. I am therefore not able to sort out the historical problems raised by the claims of several earlier writers that there is an identifiable element, consisting of a prefixed or infixed liquid consonant (l or r) occurring widely in western Austronesian languages with ‘replicative’ meanings. To make matters more complicated, there are also claims that the r in ber- is derived from an article or pronominal r, cognate perhaps with ro ‘who’ in some Philippine languages and maybe with r- ‘he’ in Bugis.24 Sometimes, -r- even occurs alone as a productive verbal affix:

According to several scholars, denasalization may also have overtaken the ‘passive’ prefix, which was ni- in the Srivijayan inscriptions but is now di- (Teeuw 1959:141). Such a hypothesis would assume, of course, that modern di- is the historical descendant of ni-, a view that does not accord well with the commonly expressed view that di- is a devolved third-person pronoun or, alternatively, a derivative of the locative preposition di. Adelaar (1992a:162, 2005) presents the issues in a nutshell, arguing in favour of a derivation from the preposition di and against its derivation from the Old Malay ni-. As remarked earlier, Winstedt (1927:70) also held that di- ‘passive’ and di- ‘at’ were essentially the same.

23 In a discussion with me in 1993, John Wolff thought that an identification of Malay -N- with the Philippine ligature was unlikely to withstand examination. For further discussion of ‘ligature’ η in Malay and its relatives, see Adelaar 1994:1-8, 2004:15.

24 Brandstetter 1916:172; Winstedt 1927:89; and the footnotes by Blagden in Winstedt 1927:15, 18.
Affixes, Austronesian and iconicity in Malay

Hughes (1995:646), for example, shows that in the Dobel language of the Aru islands (Indonesia) -r- indicates (1) object deletion and (2) co-referential subject, as well as possessing some lexical uses. These verbal functions correspond nicely to the ‘middle-voice’ senses of Malay ber-. Malay itself retains many examples of (-)r- and (-)l- as non-productive affixes, almost always with a ‘distributive’ or ‘pluralizing’ meaning (Winstedt 1927:16-7); and if the verb stem already contains an r, the productive prefix ber- usually dissimilates to bel- (for example, belajar ‘to study’). Taken together, these data suggest that the ancestral proto-phoneme in question is more likely to be an apical flap, corresponding to the *r of Dahl (1973) and to the proto-phonemes written *ḷ and *ḍ by Dempwolff (1938). (The latter has usually been written *d by later researchers, including Wolff.) The proto-phoneme *ɣ, presumably a velar fricative, may therefore be a less likely source for the -r in ber- than is often supposed.

Thus, if the combination voiced-labial+n (that is, man- > men-) means ‘subjectivity + determinate event’, the combination voiced-labial+r (that is, mar- > bar- > ber-) means ‘subjectivity + plural/iterative/distributive’. The latter combination corresponds so closely to the ‘psychosocially-divided subject’ meaning argued for in my earlier paper (Benjamin 1993:375, 383) that we may conclude that modern Malay ber- is a predicative affix compounded of the well-established Austronesian element ma- ‘predicator’/actor-orientation’ and r (whatever its source and original meaning). But since the r of ber- (from earlier mar-) developed within Malay in syntagmatic opposition to the ‘determinate’ -n- of men- (from earlier man-), we may provisionally ascribe the meaning ‘indeterminate’ to r in this context, on the understanding that the various ‘replicative’ meanings belong here too. Ber- still carries the meaning ‘indeterminate’ in many event-salient varieties of Malay (Benjamin 1993:380-3).

This approach provides the rationale for an iconic interpretation of the eventual denasalization of mar- to bar- and then ber- in later Malay. As I argued earlier, the nasality of the m in men- betokens the ‘subjective’ and ‘source’ properties of a controlling agent. But in ‘middle-voice’ ber- prefixed verbs, the grammatical subject refers to a participant that is as much acted upon as acting, or which participates in someone else’s activities, or which is characterized by some static rather than active quality. The ‘subjectivity’ and

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25 John Wolff told me that this claim could well be correct, as the attribution of the ‘iterative’ r formative to Proto-Austronesian *ɣ has not been satisfactorily demonstrated. On the other hand, Wolff (1974) has himself published a strong argument against the reconstruction of both *r and *d in Proto-Austronesian, preferring to treat most such cases as reflexes of *d alone. Although this proposal has so far not found general acceptance, it could mean that the ‘iterative’ (-)r- under discussion here should be seen as a reflex of Proto-Austronesian *d, rather than either *ɣ or *r. In a recent paper, however, *bay- is still Wolff’s favoured reconstruction (Wolff 2006:8).
'source' properties of the grammatical subject are correspondingly reduced, without being entirely extinguished: this is symbolized in the partial but non-complete devoicing of $m$ to $b$.

What of the remaining $ma$- element? This prefix is not so problematical. It is so widespread in Austronesian that Dahl (1973:119) reconstructed it for the proto-language:

$ma$- [forms] words signifying a quality, ‘adjectives’. In Formosan and Philippine languages it is often a quality which is the result of an action. In this case it has the same topic as a goal-focus verb. I therefore also adopt $ma$- (prefix and meaning of the form) as PAN.

It seems possible, then, that Malay $ber$- is not a simple cognate of the $mag$-prefix found widely in western Austronesian languages, even though such an identification might appear obvious at first glance. From the semantic point of view there is in fact not much commonality between these two series of prefixes: one version of Tagalog $mag$-, for example, carries the meaning ‘actor-focus, controlling, transitive’, which would make it equivalent to Malay $men$-, not $ber$-. The only noticeable area of semantic overlap between $mag$- and $ber$- is that they are both used in reciprocal and reflexive expressions.26

Ber- and $men$- as within-Malay creations

My interpretation of these data is that the prefix $ber$- was not received fully preformed (that is, as a cognate of Philippine-type $mag$-) into the earliest Malay as part of its Austronesian heritage. I propose instead that it was synthesized independently in early or pre-Malay out of the elements $ma$- ($ba$-) and $-r$, which were already available in the languages of the general area within which Malay emerged. The fossilized, non-productive ($-l$-) and ($-r$-) containing words mentioned above are so like the productive infixal plural forms in $-a(r)$- found in Sundanese and (presumably as Austronesian borrowings) in the Northern Aslian languages of the Malay Peninsula (Burenhult 2005:74–5, 79) that we may assume that $-r$- and $-l$- were productive in the earliest Malay too. Moreover, given the relative autonomy between $me$- and $-n$- which is observable even in modern Malay, as noted earlier, a parallel analysis may

26 The issue is actually more complicated than this. John Wolff has pointed out to me that there is more than one kind of $mag$- in Tagalog: (1) ‘active’ and (2) ‘middle, reflexive’. That is to say, Tagalog $mag$- covers some of the same semantic territory as both $men$- and $ber$- in Malay. This could be evidence that Tagalog $mag$- and Malay $ber$- are indeed linked in some way, perhaps secondarily. On the ‘adjectival’ $ma$- in Tagalog, see Wolff 1993:231-2.
These features make Malay, especially in its outsider-orientated varieties, different from most other western Austronesian languages in certain striking ways. With just a few exceptions, such as Foley (1974) in his aptly entitled paper ‘Whatever happened to Malay?’ and Alieva’s essays on the subject (1978, 1981, 1983), Austronesian comparatists have done little more than to note the differences, leaving any explanation unattempted.

In the most general terms, Malay differs from its immediate neighbours the Batak languages, and from most of the languages of Borneo and the Philippines, in preferring Subject–Verb–Object (SVO) to Verb–Subject–Object (VSO) as its basic – but not sole – word order. It also organizes its predications on a participant-governed grammatical axis, concerned with the active/passive and transitive/intransitive distinctions, rather than on the basis of various orientations (‘focus’) of the verb towards a grammatically somewhat peripheral topic. The latter pattern, following Foley and Van Valin (1984), is nowadays often referred to as a ‘pivot’-based system (for example, Ross 1995:64). Alieva (1978:327, 1983:38) has summed up these differences under the rubrics ‘nominative/analytical’ (the Malay type) and ‘accusative/synthetic’ (the Tagalog type). In addition to Malay, the nominative/analytical type would include such languages as Chamic (‘Mainland Austronesian’), Javanese and Bugis, implying that areal (Sprachbund) factors have had a role alongside the factors specific to each individual language.

On the basis of his reconstruction of the verb-inflection ‘focus’ morphemes, Dahl (1973:117-21) tentatively reconstructed the accusative/synthetic pattern as having characterized Proto-Austronesian. Among the most widespread of the ‘old’ Austronesian morphemes are the verb infixes *(u)m- ‘actor focus’ and *-in- ‘perfective aspect’; the latter almost always merges with ‘goal focus’ or ‘passive’. These reappear in so many Austronesian languages as prefixes that Dahl (1973:119) felt constrained to reconstruct the ancestral affixes as couplets, respectively *mu-/*um- and *ni-/*in-. Although he does not say so, the original vowel ([ə]?) may well have been reshaped by partial assimilation to the neighbouring consonant: the labial [m] rounding it to [u], and the dental [n] raising it to [i]. If so, we can ignore the vowels and further reduce his proto-forms to just *m-/*m- and *n-/*n-. Dahl also reconstructed as Proto-Austronesian the prefix pa- ‘causative’ and, as already mentioned, ma- ‘predicator, stative, adjectival (that is, quality that is the result of an action)’. Now, all of these affixes are present as productive elements in some or other of the languages geographically close to Malay, as well as in some Malay and possibly-Malayic dialects (such as Duano) – with the important exception that mu- (with that vowel) seems to have been lost or, more likely, merged with ma-.

What, then, did happen to Malay? The data on Old Malay are still sparse
– which should urge caution. But the fact that the extant material derives mainly from seventh-century inscriptions has gone some way to help locate it sociolinguistically as belonging to the High end of any diglossic situation that may have existed (Coedès 1930; De Casparis 1956). Furthermore, since the Srivijayan inscriptions relate to the political adventures of an expansive and largely sea-linked empire that emerged as a response to inter-regional trade, they were probably composed within much the same framework of societal consciousness that later characterized the immediately pre-modern Malay states. This mode of consciousness displayed – and still displays – a special interest in transitivity (between agent and goal) as the key feature to be emphasized in picturing the social world (Benjamin 1993:359-60). Grammatically, this interest is encoded in the largely optional markers that (as prefixes) link the subject to the verb and (as suffixes) link the verb to the object. (See Figure 1.) Clearly, the SVO word order of formal Malay is intimately bound up with this pattern of grammatical organization. The Subject–prefix–Verb–suffix–Object pattern lays more emphasis on the question of who acted on whom or what than on the question of what happened – that is, on the salience of participants rather than events. Sociologically, this corresponds to a historic shift in the character of social relations from many-stranded to single-stranded. This, as Gellner (1988:43-9) has argued, exerts a profound effect on the way in which people use their languages. The alternative Austronesian mode of grammatical organization – to treat the predicate as ‘the nucleus of the clause with both actor and goal as in some sense marginal or lateral to it’ (Dahl 1973:118, citing Pike) – is, of course, the one that most authors have taken as the typical Austronesian pattern from which Malay (along with some other languages) has diverged. This mode would seem to fit more naturally with the sort of sentence organization that differentiates semantically between various ways of looking at the event itself – namely, with the appropriately-affixed verb coming first and the various participants following it as mere sentence-adjuncts of some kind.27

In fact, this opposition is far from absolute: all western Austronesian languages contain examples of both tendencies. The differences rest not in the absolute presence or absence of the two polar types of grammatical organization, but in their relatively dominant or subsidiary character in any particular variety of a particular language at a particular point in time. This is probably the reason for the reconstructibility at the Proto-Austronesian level of alternative prefixal and infixal forms of the most common verbal affixes, as just noted. The prefixal forms (mu-, ni-, and so on) were probably more frequent

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27 For examples, see Ross (1995:64-5) on Atayal (Taiwan) and Tryon (1995:35-6) on Palawan (southern Philippines).
in SVO, participant-salient sentences, as in some Formosan languages today (Ferrell 1972). The infixed forms (-um-, -in-), on the other hand, were probably more frequent in event-salient sentences, which were more likely to follow the VSO pattern.

These syntactic differences are usually accompanied by differences in the meanings of some of the affixes, according as they are infixed or prefixed: -um- and -in- usually encode ‘permanent-state’ aspectual meanings, while Old Malay m(u)- (as man- and mar-) and ni- usually mark ‘temporary-process’ meanings, as in actions and other dynamic changes of state. In other words, the infixes tend to be used for ‘verb-internal’ aspectual meanings, while the prefixes tend to be used for ‘verb-external’ participant-related meanings. I must emphasize that these are tendencies, not absolute distinctions: in the event-salient varieties of (recent) Malay the prefixes too can be charged quite effectively with ‘verb-internal’, Aktionsart-like meanings. But these may, in some sense, be historically secondary usages that came into being as Malay – with a morphological apparatus first developed in a sociolinguistically High context – also became the language of hinterland populations (Benjamin 1993:352-3).

If these suggestions bear any significant resemblance to what happened, say 1,500 to 2,000 years ago, as the Malay dialect-continuum was taking shape, then one would not expect to find in the inscriptive texts many examples of the second of the two patterns (‘event-salient’) just discussed. Direct evidence of its existence in Malay at that time is therefore unlikely to be forthcoming. On the contrary, one would expect the language of the Old Malay inscriptions to be organized in a pattern recognizably similar to that of classical and modern ‘outsider-orientated’ Malay. And that turns out to be the case. Morphologically, this corresponds to the absence of the infixes -in- and -um- from the inscriptive language; instead, we find ni- and ma- (combined, as discussed above, with n or r). The following lines from the Telaga Batu (Palembang) inscription of ca. 686 CE exemplify these usages:

... manujari kâmu drohaka vanun dyâku mālun āda di kâmu
... man+tell you traitor plot loc+me [before?] exist loc+you

tida ya marpâddah dyâku ... nivunuḥ kâmu sumpah.
not it [?] mar+report loc+me ... ni+kill you curse.

‘... if someone tells you that traitors are plotting against me and some of you fail to report it to me ... you will be killed by the curse.’

28 The translation given here is based on that of Adelaar (1992b:394-5). This differs in certain important respects from the earlier reading of De Casparis (1956:33, 38), since it is based on newer linguistic information.
I am suggesting, then, that the peculiar history of the Malay prefixes men- and ber- relates to significant changes in the early period, perhaps 2,000 years ago, consequent on the formation of outward-looking, sea-linked, socially stratified kingdoms. These changes included an emphasis, at the sociolinguistically High end of the scale, on the development of a mostly prefixal, participant-referring, predicative morphological apparatus within a mostly SVO word order. Later, as this morphological pattern spread, along with the Malay language itself, into the erstwhile tribal populations of Borneo, Sumatra and the Peninsula (Benjamin 2002:50-4), it came to be used in a much ‘Lower’ manner, with mostly Aktionsart-like meanings, as already described.

Within the nuclear Malay-speaking area, and probably more widely, the consonant written as r is not usually sounded when it occurs as the first element of what would otherwise be a consonant cluster. This has the consequence that the prefix written ber- (and so analysed by me up to this point) is usually pronounced [bə] in ordinary Malay speech. There are also examples of the omission of r from ber- in the earlier written language, even when employing the Arabic script (Zaini-Lajoubert 1983:107). This makes it plausible that modern be- (without -r) is the descendant in part of the old ‘stative’ adjectival prefix ma-, mentioned earlier. If this is true, the modern descendants of mar- and ma- will have become homophonous in speech ([bə]) in such a manner as to preclude any easy disentanglement of their history. The fact that they have usually been merged, as ber-, in the written language only makes matters more complicated. Teeuw (1959:152) noted that some regional varieties of older written Malay displayed a ‘variation of be- and ber- in contrast to the fairly fixed rules in classical Malay’.

For lack of data, the argument up to this point has necessarily been rather hypothetical. But further evidence on this issue has come to light.

A (re-)discovery, from 1701

I have been arguing that the modern Standard Malay verbal prefixes men- and ber- represent just two of the several possible affixes that could be formed from various combinations of the elements discussed earlier. These are:

- -n- ‘process marker’
- the labial ‘source orientation’ series (all possibly derived from Proto-Austronesian *m-/l-um- ‘stative, adjectival’): (1) ma- ~ me-, (2) its descendants ba- and be-, and (3) pe-
- -r- ‘iterative’ (perhaps derived from Proto-Austronesian *o).

In partial proof of this claim, I showed that several other possible combina-
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Affixes (n-, ma-, mer-, ben-, r-, -r-, pe-, per-, pen-) appear as affixes, both productive and non-productive, in one or other variety of Malay.

However, there is a gap in this list. My argument would obviously be strengthened if there existed varieties of Malay in which ber- contrasted regularly with be- alone. To my knowledge, this has not been reported formally for any current variety of Malay, but Thomas Bowrey (1701: no pagination) shows unambiguously that both of these affixes occurred in the spoken Malay of the late seventeenth century. Bowrey’s Dictionary presents a detailed and careful account of the Malay that the author himself had been speaking until 1688:

[Bly Nineteen Years continuance in East-India wholly spent in Navigation and Trading in most places of these countries, and much of the time in the Malayo Countries, Sumatra, Borneo, Bantam, Batavia, and other parts of Java, by my Conversation and Trading with the Inhabitants of which places, I did Furnish my self with so much of the Malayo Language as did enable me to Negociate my Affairs, and Converse with these people without the assistance of a Prevaricating Interpreter, as they commonly are.

With few exceptions, Bowrey’s important account has remained unnoticed by scholars working on the history of Malay, perhaps because it has yet to be reprinted in a modern edition. I did not know of this source myself until I had already completed the rest of this paper, but it turns out to have a direct bearing on the arguments presented in the previous section.29

Following the dictionary proper, Bowrey provides several pages of ‘Grammar rules for the Malayo language’. As the following extracts demonstrate, he treats ber- as the marker of perfect aspect (‘Preter-tense’) or passive voice, and then goes on to contrast it with another prefix, ba-, to which he ascribes a ‘Present-tense’ participial function. Bowrey’s translations suggest that ba- possessed a ‘continuative’ or ‘durative’ meaning – such as ber- still possesses in most varieties of spoken Malay. As proposed in the previous section, these modern usages (usually pronounced [bol]) may well be the descendants of ba- (< ma-) ‘stative, adjectival’. (In modern spelling, the words employed in Bowrey’s account would appear as aku, sudah, kasih, ajar, pukul, baca, dengar, kena, kira, kilip and kumpul.)

29 I first saw mention of Bowrey’s Dictionary in James Collins’s monograph (1998) on the history of Malay, where it is correctly judged to be of very high quality. I am grateful to the Library of the National University of Singapore for providing me with a copy of the very rare original in their possession. The Dictionary employs the Roman script throughout, thus giving a closer guide to pronunciation than in most of the dictionaries that followed it over the next two centuries, which employed the Arabo-Malay (Jawi) script. The book’s several hundred pages are unpaginated, however, making reference rather difficult.
Thus, the Verb in the Active Voice is only expressed; in the Passive, the Signification is intimated as such by the Particle [ber] or [ta] as for Example,

Āko cassee, I Love.    Āko sooda ber cassee, I am Loved.
Āko ājar, I Teach.     Āko sooda ber ājar, I am Taught.

Participles

By placing the Participle [ba] before any Verb, it becomes a Participle of the Present-tense, as

Bācha, to Read.    Ba bācha, Reading.
Dungar, to Hear.   Ba dungar, Hearing.
Kēna, to Apply.    Ba kēna, Applying.

The Particle [ber] or [ta] plac’d before the Verb, turns it into a Participle of the Preter-tense, as

Kēra, to Think.    Ber kēra or Tā kēra, Thought, Did think.
Killip, to Bind as a book.   Berkillip or Ta killip, Bound as a book.
Coompool, to Gather.    Ber coompool or Tā coompool, Gathered.

And here observe that all passive verbs (just as in the English) are made up of Participles of the Preter-tense, as thus.

Āko sooda Ta Poocool, is, I am beaten, equal with
Āko sooda Berpoocool, I am beaten.

From: Bowrey 1701

Here, Bowrey clearly distinguishes ba- from ber- as separate prefixes with different meanings and grammatical functions. Later, he makes this quite explicit:

Participle of the Present-tense:    Ba Poocool, Beating
Preter-tense:                       Berpoocool, Beaten.

Is Bowrey’s report reliable? I think the answer must be ‘yes’. First, the many hundreds of dictionary pages and the substantial sample conversations that follow them are presented with very great care. Second, despite Bowrey’s use of a very ‘English’ orthography, his transcription of Malay pronunciation is full: he fails only to notate syllable-final h.

Third, r was fully articulated in all positions in all varieties of English until the middle of the eighteenth century, almost a century after Bowrey was at work (Barber 1975:328-30). We must therefore assume that Bowrey himself always sounded his r’s when speaking English, even after a vowel, and that he wrote r only when it represented a fully pronounced [r] or [y] in the seventeenth-century Malay he was describing. Conversely, the absence of r in his transcription must be assumed to correspond to its absence in the pronunciation.
Fourth, Bowrey writes *ta-* throughout where today we would write *ter-* (*ta coompool*, for example, not *tercoompool*). This is consistent with the careful distinction he draws between *ba-* and *ber-*\(^{30}\). Finally, although he sometimes joins *ber-* to the following stem and sometimes writes it as a separate word, he consistently writes *ba* (and *ta*) as a separate word.

As Bowrey makes clear, the variety of Malay he was describing was widely employed throughout the Peninsula and the Islands as the major trading language of the period. It is therefore reasonable to regard it as dominated by ‘outsider-orientated’ and ‘participant-salient’ usages – though not exclusively so, for he also reports it as the language used among the Peninsular Malays themselves. As with the Old Malay inscriptions discussed earlier, this sociolinguistic profile is consistent with the almost exclusively prefixal character of the morphology. Earlier, I suggested that prefixal morphology would, other things being equal, normally be associated with the participant-salience that characterizes language usage in the more single-stranded social circumstances. But other varieties of Malay were spoken, and still are spoken, in peasant and tribal communities, where many-strandedness is more usual. Here, we might expect to find a higher proportion of insider-orientated and event-salient usages, coupled with the continued retention of the older infixal morphology. Let me close, then, by providing some concrete evidence as to what might have become of the infixes -(u)m- and -(i)n-, now forgotten in most varieties of Malay – coupled with a plea for further research.

Although -(u)m- and -(i)n- occur fossilized in several current Malay words, such as *gemuruh* ‘thundering’ from *guruh* ‘thunder’ or *menantu* ‘child-in-law’ from *bantu* ‘help’, they are no longer productive. Kähler (1946/49:28), however, reports -(u)m- as still productive (alongside me-) in Duano, the aforementioned possibly-Malayic language spoken by a seafaring group known in Malaysia as the Orang Kuala, whose settlements are found on the west coast of Johor and on some of the islands off the Sumatran east coast:

Kaen ko ḱad kali bēmēli ikin?
‘Why have you bought so much fish?’

Kähler (1946/49:20) also gives an example of -(i)n- as a passive formative in Duano, though he seems to think this no longer productive:

Djadi mbangan kalo běsoa’ ṭjelah kinin kěmbangan.
‘If a crocodile meets a monkey, the monkey is eaten by the crocodile.’

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\(^{30}\) Bowrey’s account also raises questions about the history of modern *ter-*， which is far from settled (Benjamin 1993:361-3). *Ter-* is not found in Sumatran Old Malay, for example, but *tarka-* does occur in the ninth-century Kedu (Java) Malay inscription (Teeuw 1959:147).
The Duano language is situated right along the middle stretches of the sea-lanes exploited by the early Malay kingdoms. Kähler’s account of Duano shows that, although this is a Malay-like language, it has not been absorbed into the local Malay dialect-continuum; the people’s way of life has allowed them to hold themselves apart from the larger sociopolitical trends. Yet, given their location and the possibly Malayic character of their language, it is not too far-fetched to suggest that we have here a distant echo of the kind of linguistic matrix out of which Malay proper began to emerge around two millennia ago.

Few of the Austronesian languages spoken by the tribal populations of Sumatra and the Peninsular south have yet been studied in any detail. It is possible therefore that there may exist other languages besides Duano that retain such archaic features right in the centre of the nuclear Malay-speaking area. As an indication, consider this: In the mid-1980s, on the offshore Singaporean island of Pulau Seking (then inhabited by descendants of the indigenous Orang Selat people), I recorded a visitor from a neighbouring Indonesian island using such pronunciations as [mɔŋt] for the more usual pungut or (me)mungut ‘to gather’. This is reminiscent of the kinds of phonological processes that occur in the languages spoken by the Orang Asli of Peninsular Malaysia, both Mon-Khmer and Malayic.

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