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## Reclassifying the meaning of the prefix *meN-* with color adjectives: analysis using Relevance theory

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### Abstract

This study aims to describe the grammatical aspects associated with the meaning of the prefix *meN-* when joined with color adjectives. Data for this study were obtained from the UKM-DBP corpus which amounted to five million words. This study applied the Relevance theory (TR), bridging cross reference concept (RRS), and ad hoc. The meaning of *menjadi* (become) with the formula 'X *menjadi* Y' was found in lexical with prefix *meN-* when merged with color adjectives. However, utterances *clouds menjadi white (tompok awan memutih)* and *plants meN-green (tumbuhan menghijau)* did not show the meaning of *meN-* in the context. This study led to the reclassification of the meaning of prefix *meN-* with color adjectives which is considered more sensitive to context.

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**Keywords:** prefix *meN-*; color adjectives; Relevance theory; bridging cross reference (RRS); ad hoc

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## 1. Introduction

Liaw & Abdullah (1994), Nik Safiah, Farid, Hashim & Abdul Hamid (2008), and Asmah (2008, 2009) agreed that the explicit meaning of prefix *meN-* when merged with color adjectives is *menjadi* (become). The meaning of *menjadi* (become) with the formula ‘X *menjadi* Y’ is accurate for the following lexical:

- my face definitely *meN-* red (my face definitely **menjadi** red)  
*kulit muka saya pasti memerah (kulit muka saya pasti menjadi merah)*
- her hair *meN-* white (her hair starts to *menjadi* white)  
*urat rambutnya mula memutih (urat rambutnya mula menjadi putih)*
- the valley will *meN-* green (the valley will *menjadi* green)  
*lembahnya akan menghijau (lembahnya akan menjadi hijau)*
- gloomy clouds *meN-* black (gloomy clouds *menjadi* black)  
*awan mendung menghitam (awan mendung menjadi hitam)*
- afternoon shines *meN-* yellow (afternoon shines *menjadi* even more yellow)  
*kilauan sore yang semakin menguning (kilauan sore yang semakin menjadi kuning)*

However, not all prefix *meN-* which affiliated with color adjectives are appropriate to support the meaning of ‘become’ (*menjadi*). For example, *clouds meN-* white (tompok awan **memutih**) are not suitable for the meaning of *clouds menjadi white* (tompok awan **menjadi putih**) because the original color of clouds is indeed white. According to Sperber & Wilson (1986), the importance is the relevancy, not the truth. The same goes for *green plants* (plants **menjadi green**).

Nevertheless, the meaning given by grammarians is limited to ‘become’ (*menjadi*). From the examples given, it appears that there is another underlying meaning of prefix *meN-* with color adjectives. Therefore, there is a need to study the meaning of prefix *meN-* with color adjectives comprehensively and in detail. This study used both empirical and practical approaches to obtain other possibilities implied by the meaning of prefix *meN-*.

Such research is important because the meaning of a word can only be based on its usage. The possibility of different meanings implied by prefix *meN-* based on its context of use is also expected. The combination of relevance theory (TR), bridging cross reference concept (RRS) and ad hoc can explain the meaning of the prefix *meN-* with color adjectives elegantly and systematically.

## 2. Relevance Theory at a glance

This study is based on the Relevance theory propounded by Sperber and Wilson (1986) and revised in 1995. Nor Hashimah (2007) states that Relevance theory is not concerned with anything that is communicated but how we help in guiding the listeners to process what is being communicated based on the manifestation characteristic and cognitive environment. Indirectly, it can help the listeners to produce an interpretation of the actual meaning.

One of the key concepts introduced by Kempson (1986) in Relevance theory is the RRS. RRS is an utterance that has no antecedents which can associate the second sentence with the first sentence in a discourse to help listeners interpret the utterances. Occasionally, early information about what is said does not exist in the audible utterances but additional premises are capable of interpreting a meaning. The additional premises are obtained from the context of the utterances.

The second concept is ad-hoc concept, introduced by Barsalou (1987). Ad hoc concept is divided into two types which are expansion ad hoc (broadening) and constriction ad hoc (narrowing). The concept of expansion ad hoc focuses on the forms of metaphor, allegory and symbolism or non-literal utterances. The constriction ad hoc

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