

The role of Malay in the establishment of Proto-Austronesian phonology and vocabulary

There are two reasons why Malay has had a crucial place in the reconstruction of the PAN phonology and its vocabulary. First, Malay has for nearly two thousand years played an important role as a lingua franca throughout Nusantara (including the Philippines) and as such had contact, direct or indirect, with all of the languages there, in some cases very intensive contact. That means that like the case of Latin and the European languages, the languages of the region are replete with forms whose ultimate origin was Malay. Second, as the one of the languages well known to our scientific predecessors, Malay was a primary source of comparison with other Austronesian languages. Austronesian reconstruction began with a consideration of Malay and other Austronesian languages. In this paper I would like to reexamine the contribution of Malay to our knowledge of Proto-Austronesian phonology, emphasizing those areas of Proto-Austronesian phonology in which Malay provides crucial evidence not available from any other Austronesian language. Also I will review the recent history of the study of Proto-Austronesian phonology and show how the efforts to free the field from its original Malayo-centric orientation have revolutionized the over-all picture of Proto-Austronesian phonology and vocabulary.

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