

Drop, rattle and roll

Reflexes of Proto-Malayic **i*, **u* and **r* in southern Sumatra

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Abstract:

Recent dialect survey in southern Sumatran Malay has yielded surprisingly few phonological features which serve to distinguish one area from another on a macro level. This paper discusses two innovations which show the most promise for dialect grouping and centrality, namely innovations involving reflexes of Proto-Malayic **r* and high vowels **i* and **u*. While both of these innovations have been written about previously (Adelaar 1992, others), data sufficient for the purposes of dialectology have only recently become available.

Reflexes of Proto-Malayic **r* in southern Sumatran Malay are complex and various. Approximately ten different phonetic reflexes of **r* have been identified, not counting the effects that **r* exerts over the vowels around it. In some cases, native reflexes have been replaced by a borrowed apical trill; in many more there is now a lexically-conditioned phonemic split between native and borrowed reflexes. Although complex, there are patterns that can be identified, in terms of geography and phonotactic environment, and these patterns are often suggestive of shared history.

The second innovation, lowering of Proto-Malayic high vowels, requires us to distinguish between occurrences in the ultimate and penultimate syllables, as lowering in those environments differs in terms of triggers and geographic distribution. Ultimate vowel lowering is more frequently non-phonemic, often triggered by closed syllables in general and/or non-oral consonants. Penultimate vowel lowering is phonemic and in some cases lexically-conditioned. Other triggers are more complex. In terms of geographical distribution, penultimate vowel lowering correlates to more “cosmopolitan” influences, while the same cannot be said for ultimate lowering.