

Interior Sumatran Malayic: Macro-trends in Linguistic Change

The interior of Sumatra is home to a number of divergent Malayic varieties, among them Kerinci Malay, but also many varieties that have never been described previously. These varieties all exhibit alternations in the shape of the root, but they differ greatly in both the form of the alternations and in the function of the alternations in the grammar. Our research team's comparative work on these varieties has revealed two diachronic trends in the phonological development of Malay in the region, trends that in some cases remained strictly phonological in nature, but which in other cases resulted in profound shifts in the morphology and/or syntax of the variety.

The first trend involves incorporation of suffixes and the 3rd person enclitic pronoun into roots. In Jernih (Sarolangun, Jambi), for example, the suffix/3rd person pronoun are typically marked via final-vowel lengthening or ingliding, as in the following examples:

(1) Jernih Sarolangun

ana?	'child'	~	ana:ʔ	'his/her/the child'
bukint	'hill'	~	buki ^ə nt	'his/her/the hill'
nikah	'married'	~	nika:h	'cause to marry'

The second trend involves the development of phrase-level alternations i.e. processes which cause phrase-final words and phrase-medial words to surface with distinct surface forms. For example, in Jangkat (Jambi), for most roots which historically ended with a nasal stop, this sound reflected as an oral stop in phrase-final positions, whereas in phrase-medial positions this sound is retained as a nasal.

(2) Pulau Tengah, Jangkat

a. Noun in phrase-final position

m ^b o	malin	[kučik (*kučin)]
1.SG	ACT-steal	cat
'I stole a cat.'		

b. Noun in phrase medial position (followed by possessor)

m ^b o	malin	[kučin (*kučik)	pa? ali]
1.SG	ACT-steal	cat	mr. Ali
'I stole Mr. Ali's cat.'			

We describe phonological incorporation and phrasal-level alternations in several varieties across the region and show that the phonological manifestation of these processes is quite diverse. We also describe how in some cases the interactions between these two separate processes have led to dramatic morpho-syntactic change, as seen in Kerinci, while in other cases remain phonological in nature.