

Booed Off the Stage: When Funny Nasals Just Aren't Funny Anymore

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This paper discusses word-medial consonant clusters in Jakun Malay, a Malay variant spoken by one of the Orang Asli groups in Peninsular Malaysia. Like many other Malay dialects, word-medial consonant clusters in Jakun Malay consist of a nasal followed by a voiced or voiceless stop. Another similarity with these Malay dialects is that when the stop element of the word-medial cluster is voiced, it tends to either be given a lenis pronunciation or is not pronounced at all. When the stop is not pronounced, the remaining nasal has been called a “funny nasal” because it does not spread its nasality to the following vowel, as would be expected. This is because the stop element of the word-medial cluster is still phonemically present and checks the spread of nasality to that vowel.

Where Jakun Malay deviates from these other Malay dialects is that, in some cases, the stop element is not only absent phonetically, but phonemically as well. This results in an unchecked spread of nasality to the following vowel. This innovation can be further demonstrated by looking at nasal prelosion and stop prenasalization, both of which occur predictably based on the nasality of this vowel.