

The Phonology of Nasal Final Prefix *məŋ-* in Malay

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Abstract

This paper examines the phonological behavior of the nasal final prefix /*məŋ-*/ in Malay, specifically the irregular phonological alternations that surface in the morphological derivation of complex words in the language. The alternation is attested with a number of variants that semantically denotes equivalent lexical meaning. For instance, a passive word *diketengahkan* ‘cause to be centralized’ surfaces in three different active forms, namely *mengketengahkan*, *mengetengahkan*, and *mengenengahkan*. Based on the DBP corpus, all the three variants are widely used by the Malay speakers. Previous studies seem to accept only one variant as the norm or the standard form, while the others are regarded illformed and ungrammatical. Such analysis is very prescriptive and does not tie in with the linguistics approach. Linguistics is a descriptive discipline, and an adequate theory should be able to account for all the attested variants, principally if the alternations are phonologically motivated and in agreement with the grammar of the language. This paper attempts to account for all the attested alternations by adopting the theoretical framework of autosegmental phonology. The study proves that the existing variants are wellformed because they are derived by the general phonological rules of the language.