

Patterns of Nasal Substitution in Malay Dialects

The phonological process in Malay referred to as "nasal substitution" (or "fusion" as it is sometimes called) is a much discussed grammatical fact of the language, and refers to the following well-known alternations:

ENVIRONMENT	nasal+voiceless stop	nasal+voiced obstruent	
prefixal	fusion (/N + p/ -> [m])	cluster (/N + b/ -> [mb])	Table 1
root-internal	cluster (/N + p/ -> [mp])	cluster (/N + b/ -> [mb])	

Besides being a description of the pattern of Standard Malay/Indonesian, Table 1 also applies to a number of dialectal varieties of the Malay-speaking world. However, certain other dialects exhibit alternations which differ from the above in one interesting way or another. In this paper, I examine nasal substitution as they occur in four such dialects: Kelantan Malay, Bangka Malay, Iban Malay and Ulu Muar Malay. I show that the variations in nasal+obstruent interactions shown by these dialects can be characterized in a principled manner. While the details vary among the dialects, the following generalizations are true for all of them:

In root-internal environments (also discussed in Lee 2003):

- (A) nasal+voiced stop sequences either fuse or remain a nasal+voiced stop cluster
- (B) nasal+voiceless stop sequences reduce in favor of the voiceless stop or surface as a nasal+voiceless stop cluster

In prefixal environments:

- (C) nasal+voiced stop sequences either fuse or surface as a nasal+voiced stop cluster
- (D) nasal+voiceless stop sequences always fuse

I discuss each of the three dialects in turn to show that they realize some subset of the possible generalizations in (A)-(D). These facts are supported by facts from nasal harmony as well as from the variations found in the detailed phonetic transcriptions provided in the source literatures (Ajid Che Kob 1985, Nothofer 1997, Adelaar 1992, Onn 1980). Finally, I briefly review some existing formal accounts of Malay nasal substitution (e.g. Onn 1980, Pater 1997) and evaluate the robustness of these analyses when extended to explain the dialectal data.

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