

Associate Professor Janet Yong  
University of Malaya

**Abstract**

**The language diversity of Penang Hokkien – a hybrid of native Malay and Hokkien dialect loan words.**

Penang Hokkien is a typical dialect spoken only on the island of Penang by the Chinese who have settled there since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Unlike the Malacca Peranakan or Baba Malay, many of the Penang Peranakan did not have mixed Malay heritage, and the Penang Peranakan community has also tended to remain more Chinese than the Baba Malay.

The Baba Malay language is a Malay-based creole of mixed low Malay and Hokkien Chinese colloquialisms. Penang Hokkien, on the other hand, is Chinese-based but has absorbed Malay linguistic influences. The Penang Peranakan have developed a language that is a cross between native Malay and Hokkien dialect loan words. When the two languages merged, extensive borrowing from either languages is unavoidable. However, linguistic borrowing in Penang Hokkien is far from being always a necessity. Words and phrases are used creatively, spontaneously and habitually in a hybrid style.

This paper discusses the unique phonological, morphological and lexical traits of Penang Hokkien words, phrases and expressions. Nine categories of borrowing from Malay are found: complete borrowing of a whole word, partial copying but retaining its Hokkien Chinese element, complete borrowing with syllable deletion, half a word borrowing, sound change (voice to voiceless and vice versa), either first or last consonant change, vowel change, shortening in the borrowing and switch in word order (Malay to Chinese word order).