

THE PHONOLOGY OF VOWEL SEQUENCES AND THE DIVERSITY OF MALAY DIALECTS: AN OPTIMALITY THEORETIC ACCOUNT

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the phonology of vowel sequences in four major dialects of Malay, namely Kelantan Malay, Kedah Malay, Perak Malay and Johor Malay. All these dialects disfavour the occurrence of vowel sequence in the surface representation as it incurs onset violation. Thus, underlying vowel sequences are resolved by phonological processes, such as V-deletion, C-insertion, fusion, diphthongization, and ambisilabicity. Each dialect employs different strategy in resolving the sequences, which consequently gives forth dialectal diversity in the language. The theoretical approach that is adopted in this study is Optimality theory (Prince & Smolensky (1993) and McCarthy and Prince (1993a & b). The pivotal analytical proposal of OT is that a grammar is a hierarchical ranking of universal well-formedness constraints. Phonological diversity in the Malay dialects is analysed in this study as the result of each dialect imposing a different language or dialect particular ranking on those universal well-formedness constraints.