

## **Phonological Convergence in the Malay Archipelago**

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The Malay archipelago is a linguistically diverse region, stretching from Sumatra and its surrounding islands in the west, to the Aru archipelago in the east. Interestingly, Many of the hundreds of languages spoken in the eastern and western parts of the archipelago respectively display some widely distributed phonological similarities. These similarities cut across affiliation and subgrouping, and are too marked and too numerous to be attributed to chance. The most plausible explanation is convergence.

Some of the similarities are detailed below.

- In western languages, final glottal fricatives are more common than initial glottal fricatives, while in eastern languages the reverse is true.
- Schwa and schwa-like vowels are much more common in western languages than in eastern languages.
- Monosyllabic content words—often syncopated forms of polysyllabic words—are not uncommon in western languages, but relatively rare in eastern languages.
- In the east, final vowels are often weakened or deleted, while in west they are sometimes strengthened, e.g. by diphthongization.
- Closed syllables in general are more common in western languages than in eastern languages.
- Syllable-initial consonant clusters occur much more frequently in western languages compared to eastern languages.

As will be shown, all these phenomena are in fact interconnected, and directly related to linguistic rhythm. Languages of the eastern Malay archipelago typically have an automatic penult word accent, or a phonemic word accent system, which is predominantly, penult. On the other hand, languages of the western Malay archipelago frequently lack word-level accent altogether, and instead have a strong accent on the last syllable of the phonological phrase. (In citation forms, this causes words to appear as if they had a final word syllable accent.) It is sometimes possible to tell whether a language originates from the east or the west by its sound.

Finally, it is noteworthy that Malay/Indonesian dialects spoken in the eastern and western parts of the archipelago tend to adopt the overall rhythmic patterns of the surrounding languages. Indonesians can often tell whether a speaker is from eastern or western Indonesia by his or her "accent". Numerous data from various Malay dialects will be provided to illustrate this point.