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Malay historical linguistics: more than just regular sound changes

Abstract

Research on the linguistic history of Malayic languages often evolves around the reconstruction of Proto-Malayic phonology and the establishment of sound correspondences. In this talk I try to shift attention to other aspects of Malayic historical linguistics and claim that in their totality these aspects are equally important.

Semantic change is often neglected and sometimes even rejected as incapable of being governed by rules, and therefore speculative *per se*. David Wilkins (1996) showed that directionality is clearly observable in semantic change concerning external body-part terms in Native Australian languages. At least at first sight, this directionality also seems to apply to changes in Malayic and Malagasy body-part terms.

In the domain of phonology itself, some changes can only be understood in the wider context of word structure involving stress (see Robert Blust 1982 and Adelaar 1992 about trisyllabic roots) or word/phrase length in correlation with frequency (Witołd Mańczak 1980). There is furthermore the unusual phenomenon of "retroactive sound change" (Adelaar 2024) which sporadically plays a role. This phenomenon is also called "correspondence mimicry of loanwords" (Nash 1997, Evans 1998), or "etymological nativisation of loanwords" (Aikio 2006). This is when in a loanword a sound change takes place which is not primarily motivated by phonetics but by what native speakers think must have happened in previous borrowing cases that are similar.

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