

Prosodic Prominence in Malay

This paper proposes to look at prosodic prominence in the Singapore variety of Malay. The question of prominence in Malay arises because of a prior paper (Tan and Ng, 2009) on the assignment of tones to Malay loanwords in the Min languages of Teochew and Hokkien in Singapore. The main characteristic of Hokkien and Teochew in Singapore is the incorporation of a sizable number of Malay words, adopted into these two Chinese languages, with a systematic allocation of tones to the Malay words. In that paper, the authors propose that tonal assignment on the Malay loanwords can be explained by correlating Malay stress to the Min tones. As per what has been done for English loanwords in Cantonese (Silverman, 1991; Luke, 2000; Luke and Lau, 2008) and English loanwords in Yoruba (Kenstowicz, 2006), the high tones are assigned to stressed syllables in Malay, and low tones to unstressed syllables. While this answer explains the data presented, it contradicts with the current view that there is no lexical stress in Malay (e.g. Tadmor, 1999; van Zanten & van Heuven, 1998, 2004; Goedemans & van Zanten, 2007, Zuraidah *et al*, 2008). In other words, Malay stress cannot be correlated to tones in Teochew and Hokkien if Malay is stress-less.

The purpose of this paper is not to solve the Malay loanwords puzzle in its entirety, though I hypothesize that prominence, not stress, may in fact play a role in the systematicity of the assignment of tones to Malay loanwords in Teochew and Hokkien. In this paper, I focus on the acoustic markers of prosodic prominence in Malay. This paper proposes to answer the following questions:

1. What is/are the acoustic parameters for the production of prosodic prominence in Malay? In other words, how is prominence achieved?
2. Are there specific tonal melodies on the syllables in Malay that can be mapped onto tones in the Min languages?

The experiments will show to what extent each of the three parameters (fundamental frequency, duration and amplitude) is, or may be responsible for the impressions identified as *prominence*. The production experiment involves recording 6 native speakers of Malay in Singapore, 3 males and 3 females, with ages ranging from 30 to 50, responding to a carefully designed set of tasks to elicit prominence in sentence initial, medial and final positions. The tokens are measured acoustically.

The results will provide a picture for the acoustic cues of prominence in Malay, especially the Singaporean variety. It is hoped that this may provide a clue to the tonal assignment of Malay loanwords in Teochew and Hokkien.

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