

## What is Kerinci?

### An closer look at the geography of its core properties

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The Traditional Malay(ic) varieties spoken in western Jambi Province (Sumatra, Indonesia) show impressive diversity and challenge long held assumptions about the nature of Traditional Malay. Research in the region has focused on Kerinci, a network of divergent Malay(ic) varieties spoken in the Kerinci Regency, and is represented by works such as Steinhauer & Usman (1978), Prentice & Usman (1978), Usman (1988) Steinhauer (2002), and Mckinnon (2011).

Kerinci has traditionally been assumed to constitute a distinct language that (with the exception of migrant communities) is geographically restricted to Kerinci Regency. This paper scrutinizes traditional typological and geographic assumptions about Kerinci. I provide an overview of the core typological characteristics of Kerinci and show that some less-studied varieties of Malay spoken outside of Kerinci (and, indeed, outside of Jambi Province) show many of the same core grammatical characteristics.

This paper specifically focuses on two grammatical phenomena discussed at length in previous descriptions of Kerinci: First, I show that a unique morphological marking in Kerinci, the so-called ‘absolute/oblique’ alternation, can be found in traditional Malay varieties spoken in areas outside of Kerinci. This alternation is illustrated in (1). Each of the lexemes listed in (1) exhibits two morphosyntactically distinct forms, which differ in the phonological shape of their root-final syllable rime (1).

#### (1) Root alternation in Kerinci (Mckinnon, 2011)

Absolute	Oblique	Gloss	Indonesian
pikɛ	pikæ̃	think	pikir
gahi	gahɔŋ	salt	garam
dahih	dahiwɰ	blood	darah

Secondly, I show some of the core phonological characteristics of Kerinci are also well attested in Malay varieties spoken outside of Kerinci. For example, most Kerinci varieties exhibit dramatic vowel splits/shifts that were historically conditioned by the voiced obstruent series. The table in (2) illustrates the effects of these changes: Reflexes of the historical vowel \*a in final syllables exhibit a higher place of articulation if the word contains a voiced obstruent consonant.

(2) Vowel raising in Kerinci (Mckinnon, 2011)

<u>*rime</u>	<i>no voiced obstruent</i>	Gloss	<i>w/voices obstruent</i>	Gloss
*-as	mal <u>eh</u> /mal <u>əh</u>	'lazy'	bal <u>ih</u> /bal <u>iyh</u>	'reply'
*-ah	kal <u>ah</u> /kal <u>əh</u>	'less/lose'	dah <u>ih</u> /dah <u>iw</u>	'blood'
*-a	kato/kat <u>ə</u>	'word'	dadu/dad <u>iw</u>	'breast'

I show that similar vowel changes are common in Malay varieties spoken in western Jambi, as well as in other traditionally Malay speaking areas of Sumatra.

**References:**

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