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Alignment and the Syllable Coda Condition in Malay: An Optimality Account

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Abstract

Although Malay may have single-member codas, there is a restriction in the language, which prohibits a small class of consonants from occupying the coda position. In the phonological analysis of syllable structures, the prohibition of some segments in the coda is governed by the Syllable Coda Condition (Itô 1986), which has usually been conceived of as a negative condition ruling out particular configurations syllable-finally. In the earlier analysis of Optimality Theory, the Syllable Coda Condition is governed by a formal constraint generally referred to as CODA COND and defined in prose. For example, CODA COND for Axininca Campa (McCarthy & Prince 1993a &1994) is as follows: CODA COND - A coda consonant is a nasal homorganic to a following stop or affricate. In recent Optimality Theory, this constraint has been reinterpreted and reformalised in terms of an alignment statement requiring consonants to be left-aligned with a syllable (Itô & Mester 1994), as formally defined as follows: CODA COND - Align-Left (C, σ). Following Itô & Mester's (1994), I argue that Malay has four constraints subsumed under the CODA COND constraint family, namely, ALIGN-STOP, ALIGN-OBST, ALIGN-RHOTIC and ALIGN-NASAL. These constraints are distinct, and therefore they are separately ranked in the constraint hierarchy. Illicit coda segments in Malay are resolved by three different strategies - feature delinking, feature spreading and root node delinking. The effects of CODA COND constraints ALIGN-STOP, ALIGN-OBST, ALIGN-RHOTIC and ALIGN-NASAL are represented in four phonological phenomena called Debuccalisation, Obstruent Devoicing, r-Deletion and Nasal Assimilation, respectively.

Keywords: syllable coda condition, debuccalisation, obstruent devoicing, r-deletion, nasal assimilation.