

Craig D. Soderberg

Foundation for Endangered Languages

craigggg@gmail.com

Cocos Malay, hereafter called Cocos, is referred to in the *Ethnologue* with the ISO code of ‘coa’. The *Ethnologue* considers Cocos to be a Malay-based Creole along with several other Malay-based creoles (Lewis 2009). Cocos is spoken in Australia and in Malaysia. In Australia, it is spoken on the islands of Cocos and Christmas with a total combined population of about 700 speakers on those two islands. In Malaysia, Cocos speakers are found primarily in the eastern and southeastern coastal districts of Sabah (Kunak, Semporna, Lahad Datu and Tawau). In early 2013, the *Ethnologue* listed the population of Cocos speakers in Malaysia as 4,000 and decreasing. The *Ethnologue* also stated that the total number of Cocos speakers in all places around the world is 5,000. However, both of these statements in the *Ethnologue* are not correct. The Cocos population in Malaysia is increasing, not decreasing, and the total worldwide population of Cocos speakers is much larger than the *Ethnologue* estimate. The 1970 population estimate for Cocos speakers in Malaysia was 2,731 (Moody 1984: 93, 100). But the 2012 population estimate for Cocos speakers worldwide is 22,400, with most Cocos speakers living in Sabah, Malaysia.¹ Our study focused exclusively on Cocos speakers in Malaysia. Some Cocos speakers interviewed in our study claimed that their ancestors originated from the island of Cocos (also known as Keeling), southwest of Sumatra in the Indian Ocean. Others claimed that their ancestors originally inhabited the Indonesian islands of the Malay Archipelago and subsequently migrated to Cocos Island and then to Sabah. Two historical accounts of the Cocos can be found in Nanis (2011) and Subiah, Rabika & Kabul (1981).

There were no alternate names for this language in English. But there were two alternate Malay language spellings: Kokos and Kukus.

The ‘North Wind and the Sun’ text was translated and read by Adeka Bin Narel, age 64 at the time of the recording. Mr Narel is fluent in both Cocos Malay and Standard Malay by his own admission. His wife is a Cocos speaker and they speak Cocos at home with their children and grandchildren. They all live in Kampung Cocos in the Lahad Datu district of Sabah, Malaysia.

¹ The 2012 Cocos population estimate is based on the following population data provided by Haji Daud Amatzin and Datu Haji Light Manis, both mother-tongue speakers of Cocos and recognized leaders in the Cocos community: 7000 speakers in Kampung Balung Cocos and other areas in the Tawau District; 2000 speakers in Kampung Scheme Giram, Kunak District; 1000 at Kampung Selamat, Kunak District; 1000 in Kampung Cenerawasih, Kunak; 6000 in Kampung Batu Anam, Lahad Datu and around Lahad Datu; 400 speakers at Scheme Pamol, Sandakan; 300 speakers in Peninsular Malaysia and Kota Kinabalu; 3000 speakers in Katanning, Geraldton, Port Hedland and Perth in Australia; 1000 speakers in Singapore; and 700 are residing in Cocos Keeling Islands today.

This language community is not near any sound studio so the researcher had to produce these audio recordings in a remote section of a private school during a holiday.

Consonants

	Bilabial	Dental	Alveolar	Post-alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Glottal
Plosive & affricate	p b	t̪	d	tʃ dʒ		k g		(ʔ)
Nasal	m		n		ɲ	ŋ		
Fricative			s				ʁ	(h) ²
Approximant	w				j			
Lateral approximant			l					

	PHONETIC REPRESENTATION	ORTHOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATION	ENGLISH GLOSS
p	[¹ pasir]	pasir	'sand'
b	[¹ baʔu]	batu	'stone'
m	[¹ maʔah]	marah	'angry'
w	[¹ wani]	wangi	'fragrant'
t̪	[¹ tana]	tana	'earth'
d	[¹ daun]	daun	'leaf'
n	[¹ nasi]	nasi	'rice'
s	[¹ sagu]	sagu	'sago'
ʁ	[sa ¹ ʔoʔaŋ]	se orang	'a person'
l	[¹ lauʔ]	laut	'sea'
tʃ	[¹ tʃatʃiŋ ¹ tana]	cacingtana	'earth worm'
dʒ	[¹ dʒaŋʔuŋ]	jantung	'heart'
ɲ	[¹ ɲamuk ¹]	nyamuk	'mosquito'
j	[¹ bajaŋ]	bayang	'shadow'
k	[¹ kaki]	kaki	'leg'
g	[¹ gaʔal]	gatal	'itchy'
ŋ	[¹ suŋi]	sungi	'river'
ʔ	[¹ leʔer]	le'er	'neck'

The voiceless plosives /p/, /t̪/, and /k/ are unaspirated, and they are unreleased in syllable-final position.

Cocos differs from standard Malay (Clynes & Deterding 2011) and Indonesian (Soderberg & Olson 2008) due to the presence of the uvular [ʁ]. The uvular [ʁ] always occurs intervocalically. The allophone of the uvular [ʁ], the flapped [r], occurs syllable-finally, as in [ahir-ɲa] 'finally' in the text in the final section of this paper. In the word-initial position, the uvular [ʁ] optionally deletes as in [¹oʔan] ~ [¹ʁoʔan] 'rattan'.

Secondly, Cocos differs from standard Malay and Indonesian regarding the [h]. The [h] is often deleted in Cocos. This is especially true in the word-initial position, as is shown in the following examples:

² It seems that [h] has marginal phonemic status. It only seems to occur among younger speakers of Cocos who seem to be heavily influenced by the Malay language.

Word-initial [h]-deletion

STANDARD MALAY	COCOS	ENGLISH GLOSS
[^h isap ^ɿ]	[ⁱ sap ^ɿ]	'suck'
[^h idun ^ŋ]	[ⁱ idun ^ŋ]	'nose'
[^h ilan ^ŋ]	[ⁱ ilan ^ŋ]	'to lose'
[^h aus]	[^a aus]	'thirsty'
[^h u ^ʔ an]	[^u u ^ʔ an]	'forest'
[^h id ^ʒ au]	[ⁱ id ^ʒ au]	'green'
[^h andal]	[^a andal]	'skillful'

The [h] was also deleted in word-medial and occasionally in word-final positions as the following examples demonstrate:

Word-medial and word-final [h]-deletion

STANDARD MALAY	COCOS	ENGLISH GLOSS
[^h leher]	[^l e ^ʔ er]	'neck'
[^l a ^ʔ bih]	[^l a ^ʔ bi]	'more'

However, word-final [h]-deletion is optional. For example, word-final [h] was optionally deleted with the word [^la^ʔbih] ~ [^la^ʔbi] 'more'. But word-final [h] was not deleted with [^hma^ʔah] 'angry'. Clynes & Deterding (2011) indicated that word-final [h] deletion showed variability as well in Brunei Malay.

Thirdly, some consonants, [f v ʃ z], which occur in standard Malay, at least in a marginal way, according to Clynes & Deterding (2011), do not occur in Cocos.

The glottal stop occurs in the following environments. First, it occurs as an allophone of /k/ syllable-finally, as in [^ʔnamuk^ɿ ~ ^ʔnamu^ʔ] 'mosquito'. Second, it occurs between identical or near identical vowels in some words such as [^le^ʔer] 'neck'. Third, it occurs between a prefix ending in a vowel and a stem beginning with a vowel, irrespective of the vowel quality, e.g. [^sa^ʔo^ʔan] 'a person'.

Vowels

Cocos has six vowel phonemes, /i e ə a o u/. But the vowels /i e o u/ generally lower to [ɪ ɛ ɔ ʊ] in a final closed syllable.

	Front	Central	Back
High	i		u
Mid	e	ə	o
Low		a	

i	[^h bin ^ʔ an]	bintang	'star'
e	[^h besok ^ɿ]	besok	'tomorrow'
ə	[^h bə ^ʔ lian]	belian	'ironwood'
a	[^h ba ^ʔ u]	batu	'stone'
u	[^h bu ^ʔ lan]	bulan	'moon'
o	[^h bo ^ʔ ok ^ɿ]	bonyok	'rotten'

When the schwa, /ə/, occurs, it is not normally given prominence, and it is often elided. One example of elision occurred in line #2 of the recording with [^sa^ʔu^ʔd^ʒu] ~ [^su^ʔd^ʒu] 'agree'.

Vowel sequences

ai	[^h main]	main	'play'
au	[^h lau ^ʔ]	laut	'sea'

In standard Malay, vowel sequences occur root-finally in both open and closed syllables. However, vowel sequences in Cocos only occur in root-final closed syllables such as [ˈmain] ‘play’ and [ˈlauʔ] ‘sea’. They do not occur in root-final open syllables as the following examples illustrate:

Vowel sequences disappear in root-final open syllables

STANDARD MALAY	COCOS	ENGLISH GLOSS
[ˈpajau]	[ˈpajo]	‘deer’
[ˈpisau]	[ˈpiso]	‘knife’
[ˈhidʒau]	[ˈidʒu]	‘green’
[ˈsuŋai]	[ˈsuŋi]	‘river’
[ˈtapai]	[ˈtape]	‘rice wine’
[ˈsampai]	[ˈsampe]	‘until’

Root-final vowel sequences become single vowels in these open syllable environments. Interestingly, the Cocos vowel is not predictable from the Malay vowel sequence. The Malay words ending in [au] could transform into Cocos words ending with [o] as in [ˈpajo] ‘deer’ and [ˈpiso] ‘knife’. But this same Malay vowel sequence could also transform into Cocos words ending in [u], as in [ˈidʒu] ‘green’. Similarly, Malay words ending in [ai] could transform into Cocos words ending in [i], as in [ˈsuŋi] ‘river’, or could transform into Cocos words ending in [e], as in [ˈtape] ‘rice wine’ or [ˈsampe] ‘until’.

Stress

Similar to Indonesian (Soderberg & Olson 2008), stress in Cocos is predictable. Unaffixed words in isolation take primary stress on the penultimate syllable. But if the vowel in the penultimate syllable is a schwa /ə/, the stress is shifted to the ultimate syllable.

Stress examples

[ˈduxi]	duri	‘thorn’
[ˈuʔan]	utan	‘forest’
[ˈakar]	akar	‘root’
[kəˈmaɪn]	kemarin	‘yesterday’
[təˈbu]	tebu	‘sugar cane’

Transcription of recorded passage

ˈkapan ˈaŋin uˈtaka dan maˈtahaʔi /bəkaˈlaʔi ˈsapa ləˈbi ˈkuaʔ // ˈdaʔaŋ sa ˈoʔaŋ
 pəŋgəmˈbaʔa baʔzuba // ˈdoʔaŋ ˈstʊdʒu ˈsapa ˈbisa ˈbuaʔ pəŋgəmˈbaʔa ˈiʔu ˈbuka
 dʒuˈbaʔa / diˈkika / ləˈbi ˈandal // ləˈpas ˈiʔu / ˈaŋin uˈtaka maˈniup saˈkuaʔ
 ˈkuaʔna // ˈtapi ˈmaŋkin ˈkuaʔ ˈaŋin baˈtiup / ˈmaŋkin ˈdəkaʔ pəŋgəmˈbaʔa ˈiʔu
 ˈpəgaŋ dʒuˈbaʔa / ˈsampe ahiʔna / ˈaŋin uˈtaka ˈakun ˈkala // tʔus maˈtahaʔi
 diˈpan ˈtʔarkan / siˈnaʔna dan tʔus pəŋgəmˈbaʔa ˈiʔu ˈbuka dʒuˈbaʔa / ˈsampe ˈaŋin
 uˈtaka tʔəˈpaksa ˈakun ˈbawa maˈtahaʔi ləˈbi ˈkuaʔ //

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Haji Daud Amatzin, Datuk Hj Light Nanis, Margaret Hartzler, two anonymous *JIPA* reviewers and *JIPA* editor, Adrian Simpson, for their helpful comments and suggestions. All errors are my responsibility.

References

- Clynes, Adrian & David Deterding. 2011. Standard Malay (Brunei). *Journal of the International Phonetic Association* 41, 259–268.
- King, Julie K. & John Wayne King (eds.). 1984. *Languages of Sabah: A survey report* (Pacific Linguistics, Series C, No. 78). Canberra: The Australian National University.
- Lewis, M. Paul (ed.). 2009. *Ethnologue: Languages of the world*, 16th edn. Dallas, TX: SIL International. Online version: <http://www.ethnologue.com/>.
- Moody, David C. 1984. The Malayic language family. In King & King (eds.), 91–100.
- Nanis, Datuk Haji Light. 2011. *Masyarakat Cocos*. Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia: Datuk Hj Light Manis.
- Smith, Kenneth D. 1984. The languages of Sabah: A tentative lexicostatistical classification. In King & King (eds.), 1–49.
- Soderberg, Craig D. & Kenneth S. Olson. 2008. Indonesian. *Journal of the International Phonetic Association* 38, 209–213.
- Subiah, Laten, Kelazen Rabika & Mohd N. Kabul. 1981. Sejarah dan kebudayaan suku Cocos. In Khoo Kay Kim (ed.), *Sabah: History and society*, 107–120. Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Historical Society.