

THE DIACHRONY OF MALAY: WHAT "JUST HAPPENS"?

John McWhorter

In this talk I will argue that the current varieties of Malay represent two stages of significant grammatical simplification, which various lines of evidence suggest must be traced to non-native acquisition in the past. First, Malay or Indonesian itself is an unusually "uncluttered" grammar compared to its relatives, and the fact that Malay has for so long served as a regional lingua franca is unlikely to be unconnected to this unusual grammatical state. Second, the colloquial Malay dialects such as Riau Indonesian and Jakarta Indonesian represent another wave of non-native acquisition, such that their grammars are less complex overall than that of many creole languages and can be argued to be creoles themselves. My argumentation will include a comparative perspective, applying to Austronesian, and especially "Indonesian-type" languages in general.