

Chapter 1

THE SOUND SYSTEM

The Malay and Indonesian sound system has 25 consonants and six vowels. The vowel system is discussed first, followed by the consonants. Concluding the chapter is a discussion of timing and word stress.

Each sound is discussed as to where it occurs in the word, that is, in closed or open syllables (explained in the following section), and whether at the beginning of a word (initially), in the middle of a word (medially), or at the end of a word (finally); how it is represented in the writing system, and how it compares to similar sounds in English.

Examples first show words as they are represented in the standard writing system. This is followed by the English gloss or meaning, and finally by a linguistic representation of the sounds. A [.] indicates the division between syllables, and [:] indicates lengthening of a vowel.

1.1 Vowels

Malay and Indonesian have a basic six vowel system. Each of these vowels has a long and short variant. The long variant occurs in open syllables, that is, syllables ending in vowels, and the short variant in closed syllables, that is syllables ending in consonants. Vowels are sounds in which there is very little obstruction of the air as it leaves the mouth.

/i/ This is a high front unrounded vowel. This means that the tongue is high and located toward the front of the mouth, and the lips are stretched. In open syllables it is long, [i:], and is similar to the pronunciation of "ee" in the English word "beet". English speakers, however, tend to pronounce the [i:] with a "y" off-glide. This means that after the initial pronunciation of [i:], the body of the tongue rises toward the top of the mouth, or hard palate, as it does in the pronunciation of [y]. Malay and Indonesian speakers do not do this and students should be careful not to let this happen.

<i>ini</i>	this	/i:.ni/
<i>siapa</i>	who	/si:.apa/
<i>pagi</i>	morning	/pa.gi:/