

Kalimantan languages: An overview of current research and documentation

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Abstract

This presentation provides an overview of the language situation in Kalimantan, Indonesia, and a report on studies of the languages in the region. We will list language/dialect names in Kalimantan and show maps of the languages in four geographical areas, namely, Northwest (Land Dayak and Tamanic), Northeast (Kayanic, Kelabitic, Kenyahic, Punan, and Sama-Bajau), Southern inland (Barito), and the surrounding area (Malayic), and will give detailed information on language documentation projects mainly in the Kenyah and Punan languages of East Kalimantan and in the Barito languages of Central Kalimantan.

In the northeast part of Kalimantan are recorded many language groups, including the Kenyah that have a high level of differentiation and the Punan, a loose category that groups languages that are unintelligible with each other. Unfortunately many of the languages of the area lack descriptions and availability of data.

If we exclude the Stokhof wordlists (1986) whose material dates back to the beginning of the twentieth century, and overlook the language projects carried out in the whole part of Borneo, mainly in Sarawak and Sabah, no serious documentation work has been undertaken on the Kalimantan languages till the early 2000 when Soriente started a comparative description of the Kenyah languages (Soriente 2004 and 2008) and a documentation project on two Kenyah languages, mainly Lebu' Kulit and Òma Lóngh. This resulted in a book containing a collection of stories in the two languages followed by a glossary (Soriente 2006) and several descriptions of different aspects of the languages (Soriente 2011, a,b,c, and to appear, b). Based on Soriente 2006's book, Blust (2007) published an historical phonology of the Òma Lóngh language. While the project on Kenyah has been carried out, a new interest on Punan and Penan languages has developed and this has led to a new project that aims at documenting a Western Penan language spoken in Kalimantan, Penan Benalui (Soriente to appear, a), Punan Tubu' (Soriente to appear, b and c), and Punan Malinau. These three languages are very different but their study is relevant because this can shed light to the unresolved problem of the classification of Punan languages in particular (see Sellato 1993 and forthcoming) and of the possible Austro-Asiatic origin in Borneo (see Blench 2010, Adelaar 1995). Punan Tubu' folktales have become the object of another documentation project that will produce a book of stories and a dictionary (Soriente to appear, c) while the Punan Malinau is being studied due to its peculiar phonological structure.

As far as Kayan and Kayanic languages are concerned, if very little has been produced after the Holle list (Stokhof 1986) and an epic of high relevance in the Kayan world, *Takna Lawe'*, not much is available on Kayan languages spoken in Kalimantan. Guerreiro (1986, 2009 and to appear) has been involved in the study of Kayanic Busang, Modang and Wehea and is at the moment concentrating on the study of Basap and other languages of the Sajau group.

Some lexical material regarding Punan, Kayan, Kantuk, Iban and Kapuas Hulu has been published by *Pusat penelitian kebudayaan Melayu Universitas Tranjungpura* but unfortunately the information is confusing.

The Indonesian *Pusat Bahasa* has published since 1980 a number of publications concerning the description, the collection of basic vocabulary in different languages of Kalimantan, *Kosakata Swadesh*, and other kind of basic dictionaries, but the information provided is of preliminary nature and sometimes misleading (see also Adelaar 2010).

For the West Kalimantan side, the only running project of language documentation is the one carried out at the MPI Jakarta and formerly coordinated by Uri Tadmor on Land Dayak and Bidayuhic languages like Kualan and Samandang. In 2005 Adelaar published a sketch grammar of Salako or Badameà and in 2007 Tjia published a grammar of an Ibanic language, Mualang. Until 2007 the Institut Dayakologi in Pontianak had in mind the plan to become a center of archiving and documentation of Dayak languages and traditions but the plan never realized.

Little has been described regarding Barito languages. Gudai (1985) provides the grammar sketch of an East Barito language, Maanyan. Inagaki (2005, 2006, 2008) provides extensive documentation of a West Barito language, Kadorih (Dohoi). Hudson (1967, 1978) proposed that there are three subgroups, Barito-Mahakam, East Barito, and West Barito. However, this subgrouping was merely based on phonetic correspondences, not phonological ones. Gudai (1985) and Inagaki (2007) support Hudson's theory on the basis of their phonological analyses but much more work on other Barito languages is needed. An SIL team led by Lalani Wood has collected lexical data on Barito languages but this is still unavailable. Sander Adelaar of University of Melbourne will start a new project for historical/descriptive study on Barito languages this year. This project will be the first attempt to describe Barito languages on a large scale.

Considering the high language diversity, the unresolved problem of the classification of the Punan languages, the hypothesis of an Austro-Asiatic substratum in Borneo, and the presence of so called 'hot spots' for linguistic change (Blust 2007) in this area, much more study is required in many undocumented areas of Kalimantan.

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