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## A PRELIMINARY ENQUIRY ON BIDAYUH POLITENESS IN THE SPEECH ACT OF REQUEST

Lucila Ang-Abey

### INTRODUCTION

The name Bidayuh is collectively assigned to a group of indigenous Sarawak natives mostly found in the First Division of the State. They are more popularly known as "Land Dayak" to the outside world because that was the name given to them by the earlier foreign writers. Recently, however, some prominent Bidayuh leaders have made known their preference to be referred to as Daya Bidayuh.

Conventionally, the Daya Bidayuh community is divided into four regional groups, namely:

1. Bukar-Sadung within Serian District;
2. Biatah or Bipuruh within the rural areas around Kuching, and including Padawan;
3. Bau-Jagoi within Bau District; and
4. Selakau or Selako-Lara within Lundu District.

The language spoken by the Daya Bidayuh community is also divided into four groups following the same labels.

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*by*

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Speaking to a Daya Bidayuh would make one feel that it is not enough to refer to their tongue as just Bidayuh because the native speakers often requalify themselves as a speaker of Bukar-Sadung, or Biatah, or Bau-Jagoi, or Selakau. In fact, the Daya Bidayuh are linguistically heterogenous. One linguistic group is not intelligible with another in Bidayuh. It is, therefore, not surprising that either English or Malay is used in inter-regional Daya Bidayuh communication. Nevertheless, for ease of reference, this paper will use the term "Bidayuh" to mean any one variety or all the four varieties of the language spoken by the Daya Bidayuh community.

Rather than emphasizing the wide variation of Bidayuh at language level, this study will focus on Bidayuh at sociolinguistic level which may yet narrow

the gap. Specifically, this study aims to investigate the rules of speaking in Bidayuh requests.

As pointed out by Nessa Wolfson (1983), how people speak is part of what they say. Consequently, non-native speakers/language learners may be unable to interpret the meaning of an utterance even though they know all the words. They may interpret what they hear according to the rules of speaking of their own language, thus misunderstanding the speaker's intention. It is also pointed out that rules of speaking, or norms of interaction, are both culture specific and largely unconscious. She means that although the native speakers are totally competent in the uses and interpretation of patterns of speech behavior in their own communities, they are quite unconscious of the patterned nature of their own speech behavior and generally unaware that quite different norms and patterns are likely to prevail in other societies. Wolfson (1983) also observes that a native speaker tends to tolerate a non-native speaker's errors in pronunciation or syntax; but violations of rules of speaking by a non-native speaker is viewed as bad manners because the naive native speaker is often unaware of sociolinguistic relativity. She further acknowledges that the native speaker's intuitions may be a useful tool in the recognition and analysis of sociolinguistic rules but notes that the rules are generally well below the level of conscious awareness. She suggests that through training in sociolinguistic analysis and through careful research, it is possible to discover the underlying patterns which make up the rules of speaking of any language. In other words, although untrained speakers obviously know the rules of their language, they are generally unaware of their structures and the extent to which such usage is patterned. In her opinion, what is needed is systematic empirical analysis of the everyday speech of native speakers so that patterns may be uncovered, described and taught.

What stirred up the curiosity of the researcher is her frequently detecting the word *tiép* (Bau-Jagoi, specifically Bisinghai) in Bidayuh conversations. To an uninitiated non-native speaker, the word sounds like a question tag. It seems to consistently occur in sentence final with a raised tone as in English yes-no question intonation pattern or in English tag question. When she tried using the word, she was often told of using the word wrongly. However, the native speaker cannot explain accurately the meaning and the function of *tiép*. Curiously, the word is not included in the list of A. Reijffert's (1956) *Vocabulary of English and Sarawak Land Dayak (Singhi Tribe)* nor in Borneo Literature Bureau's (1968) *English-Bau/Jagoi Phrase Book*. Another native speaker explained to the researcher that *tiép* is somewhat a politeness tag frequently used in making requests. A closer look at the word, and possibly other words used similarly, would seem to be in order.

This study aims to investigate lexical items like *tiép* across all four Bidayuh varieties as politeness tags:

1. at syntactic level, to determine their positions in a sentence;