



The Sarawak Museum Journal

Vol. XLI No. 62

December 1990



ISSN: 0375-3050

E-ISSN: 3036-0188

Citation: Allen R. Maxwell. (1990). Ethnographic and Linguistic Notes on *Gigiran* (*Latah*), The Kadayan Hyperstartle Reaction. The Sarawak Museum Journal, XLI (62): 9-20

ETHNOGRAPHIC AND LINGUISTIC NOTES ON *GIGIRAN* (*LATAH*), THE KADAYAN HYPERSTARTLE REACTION

Allen R. Maxwell

(*The University of Alabama*)

The hyperstartle reaction, long associated with peoples of insular and peninsular Southeast Asia (e.g., Galloway 1922, O'Brien 1883, Swettenham 1895), has been identified by various labels in the anthropological literature. Bamouw's discussion of this behavior groups together Southeast Asian *latah*, a similar form of behavior in Mongolia, *imu* found among the Ainu, *saka* of the Wataita of Kenya, *pibloktoq* among the Greenland Eskimo, and similar behaviours found in Tierra del Fuego and Maine (1985: 370-375). The three forms of behaviour which Bamouw associates with *latah* are echopraxia, echolalia, and coprolalia. Bateson and Mead report the occurrence of *latah* in Bali (1942: 92) and Du Bois describes a similar type of hyperexcitability in Alor (1960:154, 157-158). A careful search of the ethnographic literature on Southeast Asia would no doubt turn up additional cases (see, e.g., Simons 1983).

The hyperstartle reaction, which is known in many parts of Southeast Asia by the Malay term *latah*, is called *gigiran* by the Kadayan in Brunei.¹ Before turning to a discussion of this phenomenon among the Kadayan, it will be useful first to consider such etymological evidence as can be assembled concerning the two lexemes *latah* and *gigiran*.

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Allen R. Maxwell
(*The University of Alabama*)

The hyperstartle reaction, long associated with peoples of insular and peninsular Southeast Asia (e.g., Galloway 1922, O'Brien 1883, Swettenham 1895), has been identified by various labels in the anthropological literature. Barnouw's discussion of this behavior groups together Southeast Asian *latah*, a similar form of behavior in Mongolia, *imu* found among the Ainu, *saka* of the Wataita of Kenya, *pibloktoq* among the Greenland Eskimo, and similar behaviours found in Tierra del Fuego and Maine (1985: 370-375). The three forms of behaviour which Barnouw associates with *latah* are echopraxia, echolalia, and coprolalia. Bateson and Mead report the occurrence of *latah* in Bali (1942: 92) and Du Bois describes a similar type of hyperexcitability in Alor (1960:154, 157-158). A careful search of the ethnographic literature on Southeast Asia would no doubt turn up additional cases (see, e.g., Simons 1983).

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LINGUISTIC EVIDENCE

The small amount of linguistic data available seems to indicate that the history of this concept – or at least the lexical and semantic origin – has not yet been fully worked out. Dempwolf reconstructs the Proto-Austronesian (henceforth PAN) form as **latah* 'Schwäche' (Eng. 'infirmary') and gives only three reflexes, Malay and Javanese *latah* 'Nervenschwäche' (Eng. 'nervous debility'), and Tagalog *lata* 'Schwäche' (1938: 92). Zoetmulder's dictionary of Old Javanese contains the form *latah* 'bewildered, perplexed, dumbfounded' (cited in 5 texts) and *kalatahan* with the same meaning (1 text) (1982: 991). The term *latah* is widely used in the Malay Peninsula (e.g., Gimlette 1939: 141-142), and is known in Patani (Fraser 1960: 176), and Java (Peacock 1968:

159-160). In her dictionary of modern Javanese, Horne glosses *latah* as 'a mental disorder present in certain lower-class women past middle age, characterized by involuntary compulsive utterance of obscenities, parodying of others' actions, or other socially or morally offensive behaviour' (1974: 332). Peacock says "*Latah* is a mental disease where a person who is confused by a loud noise begins imitating another's motions" (1968: 159) and describes the greater importance of bodily imitation and manual direction of body movements over verbal direction on the part of Javanese parents and teachers. A Javanese informant told Peacock that *latah* was a "salient feature of Javanese national character" and that the Javanese "have an unusual love for imitating rhythms and sounds"; Peacock refers to *latah* as the "national neurosis" (1968: 159-160).² These sources indicate that the term *latah* is the usual lexeme used to label the hyperstartle reaction among the Javanese.

The puzzling thing is why the Kadayan (and those groups mentioned by Winzeler) use the term *gigiran* instead of *latah* for the hyperstartle reaction. The problem arises from an examination of the etymology of *gigiran*, which suggests another lexical history for the labeling of the concept. My surmise is that *gigiran* (*gigir-an*) is a reflex of the PAN root which Robert Blust reconstructs as **gerger* (dbl. **gigil*) 'shake, shiver, tremble', with the ordinary (i.e., non-Brunei) Malay reflex *gegar*, 'vibration, quivering, shuddering' (item, 146, 1980: 74). The Old Javanese reflex of this root would appear to be *gigir* II 'fright (and its nervous reaction: shuddering, little screams, etc.)' (cited in 1 text). Other forms from this root include *mapi gigir*, 'to pretend to be in a fright or startled' (1 text) and *anggigir-gigir* to give a fright, startle' (1 text). But by far the largest number of citations (8, from 4 texts) is under the derived form *gigiren* 'in a fright, shuddering' (Zoetmulder 1982: 524). There also appears to be an Old Javanese reflex of the doublet cited by Blust, namely *gigil* 'ague, a fever (malarial?) with hot and cold stages and fits of shivering' (3 citations in 2 texts), with derived forms *gumigil* 'to shiver, shudder (with cold, fear)' (3 texts), and *gigilen*, *idem.* (1 text) (Zoetmulder 1982: 523-524). The semantic conclusion which can be derived from the Old Javanese evidence seems clear: the meanings contained in forms connected to the Old Javanese root *gigir* II are semantically closer to what the Kadayan term *gigiran* denotes (discussed below) than to those meanings associated with the (non-Brunei) Malay *latah*.³

There is but scanty linguistic evidence to consider for other groups in Borneo. Richards includes *latah* in his dictionary of Iban but indicates it to be a possible borrowing from Malay (1981: 183). Neither Howell and Bailey (1900-01) nor Scott (1956) include *latah* in their dictionaries of Iban. Under the Iban root *gegar* Richards includes one meaning of 'shiver, shake, unstable', but also marks it as a possible Malay borrowing (1981: 99). Scott gives a meaning 'quick-tempered' for *gegar* (1956:55). Howell and Bailey, however, list under *gegetar*, or *getar-getar*, the meaning 'shaking, trembling', and under the verb root *getar*, 'to shiver, shake', adj. 'unstable' (1900: 49-50). I find no reflex of the doublet PAN **gigil* reconstructed by Blust in the Iban lexicons.

For Ngaju, Hardeland lists only the root *gegar*, *gigiir* 'alarm, noise; quarrel', and a verb *manggeger* 'have a quarrel with someone, scold or blame someone' (1859: 131). For Kadazan, Antonissen gives only the root *gigil*, which in its