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## AN INTRODUCTION TO BERAWAN PHONOLOGY

Beatrice Clayre with Denny Belawing Wan

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Language

The Berawan live in the north of Sarawak in East Malaysia, along two main tributaries of the lower Baram river, the Tinjar and the Tutoh. The Berawan language is spoken by some 3-4000 people, and three or four dialects are recognized. This study describes the dialect spoken by the people of Long Terawan on the Tutoh river (see Figure 1).

Like all the indigenous languages of Borneo, Berawan is an Austronesian language. The Berawan are sometimes described as Kenyah, and indeed, sometimes refer to themselves as Kenyah, but both Hudson (1978: 26) and Blust (1974, 1992: 410; 1995: 123-4) have shown that the language belongs to a group of languages spoken in the lower Baram area, some of which, such as Lemeting or Lelak now appear to be extinct (Blust 1995: 123).

# AN INTRODUCTION TO BERAWAN PHONOLOGY

by

Beatrice Clayre with Denny Belawing Wan

## 1.0. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. The Language

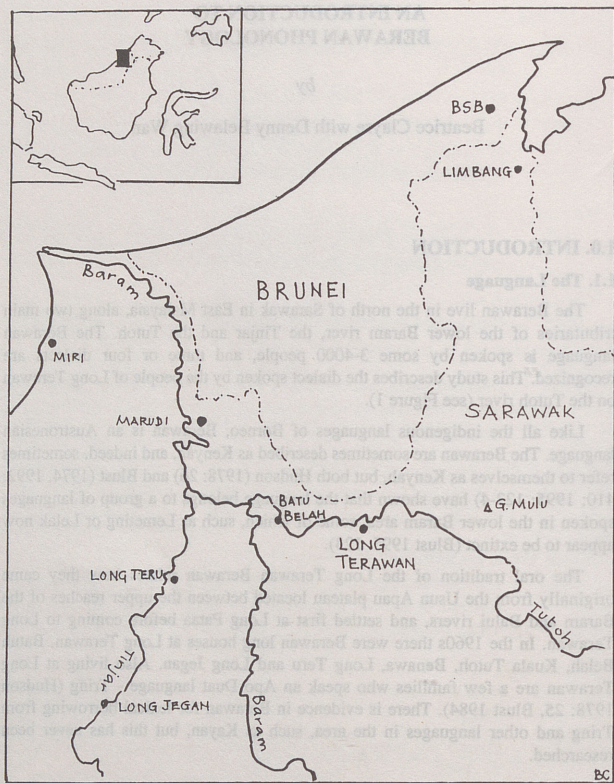
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The oral tradition of the Long Terawan Berawan relates how they came originally from the Usun Apau plateau located between the upper reaches of the Baram and Balui rivers, and settled first at Long Pataa before coming to Long Terawan. In the 1960s there were Berawan long houses at Long Terawan, Batuh Belah, Kuala Tutoh, Benawa, Long Teru and Long Jegan. Also living at Long Terawan are a few families who speak an Apo Duat language - Tring (Hudson 1978: 25, Blust 1984). There is evidence in Berawan for lexical borrowing from Tring and other languages in the area, such as Kayan, but this has never been researched.

### 1.2. Previous work on Berawan

In 1913, Sidney Ray published a list of about 180 words collected at Long Pataa in 1899. In 1977-8, a wordlist of some 1700 words (but only about 1000 different roots) was collected by John Proctor while working as an ecologist with the Royal Geographical Society Mulu Expedition. He used Asmah Haji Omar's phoneme system to write the language (Proctor 1979: 103). Neither Ray nor Proctor's lists record the presence of long consonants or long vowels in the language, and the difference between a lengthened vowel, an /h/, or a glottal at the end of a word is not accurately recorded.



**Figure 1:** Map showing Berawan settlement.



Asmah Haji Omar published an outline of Berawan in 1983, in which she mentions the non-phonemic gemination of consonants which "seem to geminate in the context of a strong stress on a preceding vowel".

The first published reference to the occurrence of both vowel and consonant lengthening in the language was made by Peter Metcalf in a study of prayers or invocations uttered by Berawan living in the Tinjar area (Metcalf 1989: xiii).

Robert Blust had already noted the Berawan long consonants in 1971, during the course of fieldwork in Sarawak, but he did not publish them until 1992, a delay which he attributed in part to uncertainties concerning the vowels (Blust 1992: 411; Blust 1995). More recently, Iovanna Conдах reported on an acoustic analysis of some of the long consonants in Blust's Berawan data (Conдах ms.).

### 1.3. Background to this study

In 1991, while conducting research in Sarawak on the Lun Bawang and Sa'ban languages, Beatrice Clayre (BC) was approached by Timo Belawan of Long Terawan who requested help to write his language, particularly the 'difficult sounds'. Serious study of the language was not possible at that time, but in 1992, back in Britain, contact was made with a Berawan, who agreed to help in a study of his language.

This analysis of the phonology is, therefore, based on the speech of one man, Denny Belawing Wan (DBW), aged 34, a native of Long Terawan who had been living in England for a year when the study began. The research was carried out intermittently over a period of about ten months.<sup>1</sup> The Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) speech analysis programme, CECIL was used to analyse some five hundred of the approximately eight hundred words recorded on cassette. The programme was used after difficulties had been encountered resolving some of the long consonants and determining vowel length.<sup>2</sup>

In order to check the conclusions reached from data obtained in wordlists, several sentences and frames were also recorded and examined but no detailed study was made of the phrase or sentence level.

Because this analysis is based on the speech of one speaker, and on limited data (DBW had to return to Sarawak before the analysis was completed) the results must be regarded as preliminary, particularly with regard to the diphthongs.

Following his return to Sarawak in 1993, DBW was able to consult with other Berawan concerning proposals for an orthography.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the present paper, our work on Berawan has resulted in a paper on 'Verb affixes in Berawan' which was presented at the Seventh International Conference of Austronesian Linguistics in Leiden, Holland, in 1994 (Clayre 1994), and, in collaboration with Dr. Paloma García-Bellido of Oxford University, a paper on 'Prosodic constraints and representations in the Berawan word' (García-Bellido and Clayre 1997).



### 1.4. Symbols and abbreviations

Symbols and abbreviations used in this paper are explained on page 238. The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA 1993) is used to write the phonetic data<sup>4</sup>. Square brackets enclose words written phonetically, slashes enclose words written phonemically. In diagrams, round brackets indicate optional items.

## 2.0. THE BERAUAN WORD

The minimum word in Berawan consists of one nuclear syllable (S). For example:

[kʌm] /kam/ 'basket'; [nʊm] /num/ 'six'; [bi:] /bi:/ 'lip'.

The maximum expansion of a word consists of a nuclear syllable preceded by one or two pre-nuclear syllables (s). The typical word consists of two syllables. No word longer than three syllables was recorded.<sup>5</sup> Three-syllable words usually consist of a two-syllable root plus a prefix. In the following examples of two- and three-syllable words the syllable boundaries are indicated here, as elsewhere in this paper by a full stop.

[pʊ.kʊʔ] /pukoʔ/ 'machete'; [nʌ.pʊ:n] /napa:n/ 'winnow' (vb)  
[ŋə.lʊ.bɪn] /ŋelubin/ 'roll' (tr.vb); [lə.mʊ.lo:n] /lemulo:n/ 'person'

The typical Berawan word may be diagrammed as:

(s<sub>3</sub>) (s<sub>2</sub>) S<sub>1</sub>

in which S<sub>1</sub> represents the nuclear syllable and s<sub>3</sub> and s<sub>2</sub> the pre-nuclear syllables. See Figures 4a & b.

The nuclear syllable (S) is the ultimate syllable of the word. It is the only syllable in which all the vowel phonemes (except schwa) may occur and it is also the location of length contrasts in both vowels and consonants. Since long consonants and long vowels occur only in S they are not analysed as full phonemes of the language, but rather as a feature, or prosody, of the nuclear syllable.

Stress in Berawan falls on the nuclear syllable (S). It is marked by length and by higher, often rising, pitch, and not by high average amplitude. The same pattern was also recognized in sentence utterances (see García-Bellido and Clayre 1997 §4.1.3. and Fig. 5b).

## 3.0. THE SYLLABLE

There are two syllable types in Berawan: pre-nuclear and nuclear.