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THE IBANIC LANGUAGES OF WESTERN BORNEO: ADDITIONAL LINGUISTIC DATA

Chong Shin

INTRODUCTION

Self-ascribed Iban number 603,735 and constitute the largest ethnic group in Sarawak (Lam, 2006). A review of published materials reveals that the Iban language in Sarawak is well studied. Materials can be found in many forms, such as working papers, journals, books, dictionaries and other publications¹. With such a large number of resources, do we understand "Iban" linguistics sufficiently? One must bear in mind that in Borneo, apart from the "Iban language" spoken in Sarawak, in Indonesian Borneo (West Kalimantan) many of the "Dayak" groups scattered in the watershed of the Kapuas River between the Sekadau River and Sentarum Lake (Upper Kapuas) are known to speak varieties closely related to "Iban"; see Collins (2004). Furthermore, this area is claimed as the homeland of the Iban group; see Sandin (1968) and Padoch (1982). From a linguistic point of view, Hudson (1970) categorised such varieties as Ibanic. He conducted a linguistic survey of some of Borneo's indigenous languages in Sarawak and West Kalimantan and found that the ethnic terminologies and the languages in Borneo were rather complex. For example, the Selako people who are commonly labelled as "Land Dayak", are, in fact, linguistically different from the "Land Dayak" {Bidayuh}.

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[M]embers of an Ibanic sub-group, comprising such isolects as Sebuyau, Mualang, Kantu’, Seberuang, and the various related Iban dialects of Sarawak and Brunei, may be easily identified on the basis of the presence in word-final position in certain lexical forms of /-ai/ where cognates in other Malayic dialects exhibit /-an/, /-ang/, or, less frequently, /-ar/².

Frankly, there have not been many linguistic studies dealing with *Ibanic* beyond the context of Sarawak. So far, only a few studies, Collins (2004), Rahim (2005) and Chong (2006a), have been published. In Collins (2004), a picture of *Ibanic* linguistics was sketched out, the nomenclature, distribution and phonologies of five Ibanic variants – Ketungau *Sesat*, Seberuang, Desa, Mualang and Bugau. In brief, the Ketungau *Sesat* variant which is spoken in the Sekadau River basin, according to Collins (2004), is one of the most divergent Ibanic languages. Not only does it differ markedly from our notion of Ibanic, based on Sarawak's standard Iban,³ it also displays considerable internal, that is interdialectal, diversity. The Desa variant in Baniang Pendek has shifted /s/ in final position to [h], with some influence on the preceding vowel, for example for the words [bətɛh] 'calf' and [manɛ^h] 'sweet'.⁴ Bugau and Mualang display many apparent differences with standard Iban. In Bugau, forms like [mbaya:], [mɛltak] and [bɛltik] contrast with Iban *lemayar*, *lemetak* and *beleti*.⁵ Rahim (2005), on the other hand, provided basic linguistic descriptions and comparisons of the phonology and morphology of Kantuk, Mualang and Iban. This book depicts in detail the vowel, consonant and diphthong systems as well as affixation of these three variants. However, Rahim (2005) neither presented the exact number of Kantuk, Mualang and Iban variants in the Ibanic-speaking region, nor provided accurate field data in his linguistic descriptions. Chong (2006a) reported on a preliminary survey of several Ibanic variants spoken in the Belitang, Ketungau, Kantuk rivers and Sentarum Lake. Through this work, many Ibanic data, even from remote rural areas were displayed and the Ibanic linguistic situation described. Because of the limitation of the study of *Ibanic* and with the intention of exploring more Ibanic data, a research project was undertaken on the *Ibanic*-speaking groups in West Kalimantan, with support from the *Southeast Asia Studies Regional Exchange Program* (SEASREP), Toyota Foundation.⁵ During the fieldwork, the Ibanic data were collected from several major Ibanic-speaking areas in West Kalimantan (Belitang, Ketungau, Kantuk, Sentarum Lake⁶) and Sarawak (Lundu, Samarahan).

The report presented here discusses the geographic distribution of Ibanic variants in West Kalimantan and Sarawak. There is also a description of some phonological features, drawing chiefly on data from twelve different locations.