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THE BINTULU DIALECT- AN INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION¹

This paper attempts to introduce the sound system of the Bintulu speech or dialect- a dialect which is spoken by the people of Bintulu.

The Bintulu speech or 'qaop ba?' is spoken in the surrounding areas of Bintulu such as in Kampung Masjid, Kampung Slnong, Kampung Sibiew, Kampung Jepak, Kampung Batu 10 and further upstream along Began, Silas, Sepadok, Pandan, Labang and Tubau. Other places where this speech system is spoken or used are Tatau, Sual, Sebauh and as far as Niah, Bekenu and Subis.

The term 'ba?' or 'baqi' "besides bearing the meaning of 'person' is also a term referring to the town of Bintulu" (Asmah, 1983). Thus, 'qaop ba?' means Bintulu speech or Bintulu dialect.

Asmah (1983) in her discussion on the Melanau called this speech community as the "Melanau of Bintulu"; however, Blust (1988) in his most recent work on Mukah Melanau claimed that the term "Melanau" does not include Bintulu speakers. Blust defined the linguistic referent of the term 'Melanau' as referring to "a dialect chain which extends along the coast of Sarawak from Balingan in the north to the region of Rejang, Jerijeh and Sarikei villages in the south, and up the Rejang River as far as Kanowit. Contrary to an often-repeated statement, it does not include Bintulu." In his dissertation (Blust, 1974), he termed this linguistic group as a "North Sarawak Isolate". In this paper I will use the term 'Bintulu dialect' to refer to this particular language group.

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Vocabulary of Bintulu dialect has been rather neglected. Apart from wordlist collected by Ray (1913), Ling Roth (1896) and Blust (1974), not many researches or studies has been done on Bintulu dialect as compared to other ethnic groups like the Iban, Melanau and Malay in Sarawak.

The words listed in this vocabulary were partly those collected during visits to Pandan, Labang, Kampung Batu 10, Kampung Masjid and Bintulu town. The words collected from the different localities were part of another ongoing research on Bintulu dialect.¹

For the present vocabulary of Bintulu dialect, both the English and Bahasa Malaysia equivalents are given. It is hoped that the vocabulary will provide sufficient assistance to any individuals who are interested to know and learn the dialect.

It is generally agreed even among the Bintulu speakers that there are subtle variations in the patterns of intonation and pronunciation of speakers from different localities of Bintulu. The following description of Bintulu dialect is an attempt at a 'standard' which will be acceptable wherever it is spoken.

The description of the Bintulu phonology²

A preliminary analysis of the Bintulu dialect leads me to suggest that there are 23 consonant phonemes, 7 vowel phonemes and 5 diphthongs in the language. Asmah (1983) has identified 20 consonants, 6 vowels and 3 diphthongs and Blust (1974) identified 23 consonants, 4 vowels and 5 diphthongs in the language.

The phonemes in the language are as follow:

Consonants								Vowels		Diphthongs		
b	ɓ	p	t	d	ð	g	q	ʔ	i	u	aw	ay
v		s	z	c	j	R	h		e*		ow	ey
m		n		ny	ng					o		oy
		l							ɛ	ʌ*		
w				y					ã	a		

Vowels

- [i] the high front unrounded vowel, e.g. [iqaw] – you, [liqod] – back of body, [vivi]/[bivi] – lips. This vowel is also a long and stressed vowel, e.g. [quʔbid] – pinch, and [siʔii] yesterday.
- [ɛ] the mid low front unrounded vowel, e.g. [ɛng] – waist, [sɛng] – cat, [meley] – buy. This vowel is also a stressed vowel, e.g. [temɛs] – sweet, and [muɾɛp] – alive.
- [ã] the low front unrounded nasal vowel, e.g. [ã] – no/not. (This is the only occurrence for this vowel phoneme in the data). It seems that it is a stressed vowel.
- [a] the low central unrounded vowel, e.g. [alod] – boat, [saʔbay] – brother/sister in-law, [leza] – ginger. It is also a long and stressed vowel, e.g. [tuʔaaʔ] – hard and [beqaop] – to speak.
- [o] the mid-high back rounded vowel, e.g. [ong] – fruit, [amod] – root. It is also a long and stressed vowel, e.g. [uloon] and [oʔ] – yes.
- [u] the high back rounded vowel, e.g. [uRong] – nose, [supiʔ] – nine, [besu] – full after eating. It is a long and stressed vowel, e.g. [asuuʔ] – plank and [quɫEd] – skin.
- *[e] the mid central unrounded vowel, e.g. [mesuʔ] – die, [qel^m] – night. This vowel is a short and unstressed vowel.
- *[ʌ] the mid-low back unrounded vowel, e.g. [az^ng] – large, [sep^ng] – old. It is a short and unstressed vowel. This vowel phoneme appears to be the allophone of the phoneme [e]. Its distribution is limited to the final syllable of a word only.

Note: *[e] and [ʌ] are allophones of the same phoneme [e].