



The Sarawak Museum Journal

Vol. XXXIII No. 54

December 1984



ISSN: 0375-3050

E-ISSN: 3036-0188

Citation: Blust, R. (1984). The Tring Dialect of Long Terawan. The Sarawak Museum Journal, XXXIII (54): 101-136

THE TRING DIALECT OF LONG TERAWAN

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INTRODUCTION

The linguistic situation in the basin of the Baram river of northern Sarawak is one of the most complex on the entire island of Borneo. Although all of the indigenous languages of this region with the possible exception of Kayan-Murik belong to a single large and internally diverse subgroup (Blust 1969, 1972), linguistic differences within the area appear only occasionally to reflect simple differentiation in situ. More commonly, as a result of centuries of migration along the major waterways speakers of closely related languages have become separated and interspersed among speakers of other, sometimes markedly different languages, in an intricate interdigitation of speech communities that plays havoc with the mapmaker's representation of language boundaries.

Long Terawan, on the Tutoh some 12 miles above its junction with the Apoh, epitomizes this striking juxtaposition of disparate ethnolinguistic groups, for here two quite distinct languages are spoken in a single longhouse. The first of these is a divergent dialect of Berawan, the closest relatives of which are found down the Tutoh at Batu Belah, and - more distantly on the Tinjar at Long Teru and Long Jegan. A vocabulary of this language, with sketchy notes on the phonology and grammar, has been published by Proctor (1979).¹

The second language spoken at Long Terawan was described by my informant as "Tring". The name "Tring" or its apparent equivalent "Tren" occurs repeatedly in the literature on ethnic and linguistic classification in Borneo, with a referent that remains in certain respects unclear. A few words of clarification are thus perhaps in order.

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O. INTRODUCTION AND AIMS. The linguistic situation in the basin of the Baram river of northern Sarawak is one of the most complex on the entire island of Borneo. Although all of the indigenous languages of this region with the possible exception of Kayan-Murik belong to a single large and internally diverse subgroup (Blust 1969, 1972), linguistic differences within the area appear only occasionally to reflect simple differentiation *in situ*. More commonly, as a result of centuries of migration along the major waterways speakers of closely related languages have become separated and interspersed among speakers of other, sometimes markedly different languages, in an intricate interdigitation of speech communities that plays havoc with the mapmaker's representation of language boundaries.

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The second language spoken at Long Terawan was described by my informant as "Tring".² The name "Tring" or its apparent equivalent "Trenge" occurs repeatedly in the literature on ethnic and linguistic classification in Borneo, with a referent that remains in certain respects unclear. A few words of clarification are thus perhaps in order.

Nieuwenhuis (1904-07) found people he called "Tring" on the middle course of the Mahakan river in Kalimantan. He included them, together with the Long Glat and other poorly known groups of the Mahakam basin, as members of a putative "Bahau" category of central Bornean peoples.

Hose and McDougall (1912:1:35) mention as tribes that are "closely allied" to the Muruts the Adang, Kelabit, Saban, Kerayan, Libun, Lepu Asing, Tagal, Dusun and Tring, the last of which they locate on the Barau (= Berau?) and Balungan rivers. In a subsequent discussion (1912:2:247) Hose and McDougall assign the Tring, along with the Long Kiput, Batu Belah, Adang and Kedayan to their ill-defined and much contested Kleman-tan group, maintaining that all of these "have partially adopted the Murut

culture.' Despite this vacillation the authors restore the Tring to the Murut group in their final "Classification of the Peoples of Sarawak" (2:230).

Ray (1913:18), basing himself in part on Moulton (1912) and in part on his own fieldnotes, classified Kelabit (written "Kalabit"), Tring (written "Trenng") and Murut as three coordinate branches of a single close-knit language group. To this he adds "The Trengs, according to J.C. Moulton, are said by their descendants in Sarawak to have once occupied the head-waters of the Limbang, Madihit, Tutau and Baram Rivers. They are closely allied to the Kalabits, and comprise the three divisions of the Long Patas, Balaits and Tabuns.....I collected vocabularies of all three dialects in 1899." Ray goes on to say that Balait and Tabun should be recognized as only slightly differing dialects but that Long Pata is distinct, standing closer in certain respects to Long Kiput and other languages of the lower Baram.³

Kennedy (1945 and subsequent revisions) combines "Tring" with Kayan, Kenyah, Long Glat, Segai, etc. in a *Bahau* group which he takes over in part from Nieuwenhuis, and "Trenng" with Adang, Batu Belah, Bisaya, Dusun, Kedayan, Kelabit, Kanowit, etc. in a *Klamantan* group which he adopts from Hose and McDougall. The implication, which appears to be false, is that "Tring" and "Trenng" refer to distinct Bornean ethno-linguistic groups.

Cense and Uhlenbeck (1958:23) refer to Ray's Balait and Tabun vocabularies, and suggest that these "probably also have to be classed with the (Sarawak) Murut group."

The most exact linguistic classification of Tring to date is that of Hudson (1978:24ff). Hudson proposes the term "Apo Duat" for the language group that contains "Kalabit, Lun Daye, Lun Bawang, and closely related dialects." The Apo Duat group divides in turn into two primary branches: 1) Kalabitic (Kelabit dialects "in the upper Baram, Akah and Tutoh rivers in Sarawak's Fourth Division") and 2) Sesayap-Trusan ("Lun Daye and Lun Bawang varieties, together with Adang, Trusan, Tabun, Trenng, Kemaloh, and, probably, Sa'ban").

Although the foregoing survey suffices to show that the Tring (or Trenng) have been linked with various other ethno-linguistic groups by different researchers, the more specific proposals - in particular those based on language-point unambiguously to a close connection with Kelabit-Lun Dayeh. My major aims in this paper are 1. to show that the name "Tring" designates a group of Kelabit dialects which are defined by certain distinctive isoglosses, 2. to show that the Tring dialect of Long Terawan exhibits several phonological innovations not reported to date in other Tring dialects and 3. to show that these innovations suggest a period of contact between Long Terawan Tring and the superficially dissimilar but in fact closely related Sa'ban.

1. BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF TRING. I first worked with George Bidui *qua* Berawan language informant, and it was some time before I discovered that he also spoke Tring. Since he was the only speaker of Tring available to me and my stay in Sarawak was already nearing an end, I was able to work with him *qua* Tring language informant for only one informant