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Language Classification in Sarawak: A Status Report*

Paul R. Kroeger, SIL Intl.

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During the past one hundred years and more, wordlists have been published for a large number of the indigenous languages and dialects in Sarawak by anthropologists, missionaries, government servants and travellers. Published accounts are full of vague and impressionistic statements to the effect that “language A is clearly related to language B”, or “A and B are merely dialects of the same language”, etc. However, little systematic work has been done on the comparison and classification of these languages.

The most significant contributions to our understanding of linguistic relationships in Sarawak are found in the work of Ray (1913), Blust (1974a), Hudson (1978), and Wurm (1983). The present paper is an attempt to summarize and synthesize the results of these and other studies, in the spirit of Cense and Uhlenbeck (1958). The goal is to define what has been accomplished, what remains to be done, and what our priorities should be for further research relating to the classification of Sarawak’s indigenous languages. This study cannot claim to be exhaustive¹; it is intended merely to serve as a catalyst for renewed investigation of this very important topic.

1. Overview

One of the major obstacles to be overcome in approaching a subject of this scope is the profusion of language and dialect names, variant spellings of each, inconsistent usages of the same name, etc. In order to minimize the overwhelming effect of the sheer number of names that must be dealt with, I will adopt a “top-down” strategy, describing the situation in broad strokes first, and later going back to fill in some of the details.

The state government classifies the population of the state into the following ethnic divisions (population figures from the Statistics Dept., 1990):

¹ I am aware of a number of relevant works on specific languages which I have been unable to consult, due to severe time constraints. In particular, I have had to ignore almost everything published within the past five years or so, for which I apologize. Nevertheless, I believe that this study reflects in broad outline the current state of our knowledge regarding higher-level relationships.

(1)

Ethnic Group	population	% of total
Iban	493,000	29.5%
Chinese	483,000	28.9%
Malay	348,000	20.8%
Bidayuh (Land Dayak)	140,000	8.4%
Melanau	96,000	5.8%
Other indigenous (= “Orang Ulu”)	91,000	5.5%
Others	19,000	1.1%
total:	1,670,000	100%

The **IBAN**, formerly referred to as Sea Dayak, live primarily in the area between the Rejang and Sadong rivers (see map). They speak a Malayic Dayak language which is more fully documented than any other indigenous language in the state. In addition, the Iban are much more homogenous linguistically than any of the other groups listed in figure (1), apart from the Malays. For this reason, the Iban will receive less attention in the present study than some of the other groups.

The term “Bidayuh” has now replaced the term “Land Dayak” in most contexts, at least in Sarawak. However, the older term still serves a useful purpose as a linguistic classification.² The **LAND DAYAK** groups live in the interior hill country west of the Sadong river basin. The Land Dayak languages do not appear to be closely related to any other language in Sarawak, but they do form a linguistic subgroup with the many Land Dayak languages spoken across the border in West Kalimantan (Indonesian Borneo).

The **MELANAU** live along the lower reaches of the Rejang, the largest river in Sarawak, and spread along the coast from the mouth of the Rejang northeast to the Tatau or thereabouts. The “core” dialects of Melanau form a chain, but from one end of the chain to the other there is a fairly high degree of divergence. Moreover, a number of other languages have at various times been identified as “dialects” of Melanau, and there continues to be considerable debate as to which groups do or do not belong in this category.

The “Orang Ulu” (a Malay phrase meaning ‘up-river people’) is the most diverse category, both linguistically and geographically. It includes literally hundreds of distinct

²For political and geographical reasons, the Bidayuh grouping includes one Malayic Dayak language group, the Selako. Most speakers of Selako live in W. Kalimantan, but several thousand live in the Lundu District, at the extreme western end of Sarawak.

dialect groups, most of them very small. However, the label “Orang Ulu” is purely political, and has no linguistic significance. The major ethno-linguistic groupings covered by this term include the **KAYAN**, the **KENYAH**, and the nomadic **PENAN** and **PUNAN** groups, all located in the Upper Rejang and Upper Baram basins, as well as in Central Kalimantan; the “**KAJANG**”, in the Upper Rejang; the languages of the **LOWER BARAM**; the **KELABITIC** (or **APO DUAT**) languages, including Lun Bawang and Kelabit, at the extreme eastern end of the state; and the **BISAYA**’, located in northeastern Sarawak, Brunei, and southwestern Sabah.

Of the works mentioned above, Blust’s study is especially helpful because he presents not only his conclusions but also a large part of the data on which those conclusions are based. In particular, he presents a complete matrix of cognate percentages for 56 languages and dialects (4 from the Philippines, 2 from Sabah, 3 from southern Kalimantan, and the rest from Sarawak, covering roughly the northern half of the state), together with the actual wordlists on which the calculations were based.

A rough indication of the degree of difference among the state’s language groups is given by the table of cognate percentages, extracted from Blust (1974a), shown in (2). Two words are considered to be **COGNATE** if they are descended historically from the same original word in a common ancestor language. For example, Malay *beras* and Sabah Dusun *wagas* are cognate forms, because they are both derived from the same ancestor form through regular sound changes. The higher the percentage of cognate forms, the closer the degree of similarity between a given pair of languages. The maximum possible value, of course, is 100%.

The percentages in figure (2) were calculated for a 100-word subset of the standard 200-word Swadesh list. “PSC” stands for “percentage of shared cognates”.

(2) **PSC figures from Blust (1974a)**
(rounded off to the nearest percentage point)

Selako (Kg. Pueh) ³							
29	Melanau (Mukah)						
27	45	Bintulu					
23	37	41	Berawan (Long Terawan)				
22	33	39	42	Narum (Lower Baram)			
24	37	36	41	32	Kenyah (Long Dunin)		
20	35	32	35	29	41	Kayan (Uma Juman)	
19	29	28	34	32	40	33	Kelabit (Bario)

What do these numbers tell us? First, note the relatively high PSC between Kenyah and Kayan (41%); the possible relationship between these two groups will be discussed in section 3.1. Second, we can see a slight elevation of scores among Melanau, Bintulu, Berawan and the Lower Baram languages (represented here by Narum). Whether this cluster represents a true linguistic subgroup is an interesting question, which will be discussed in section 3.2. It should be pointed out that the Kenyah scores seem slightly higher than expected with almost every other language,⁴ indicating perhaps some history of borrowing due to contact (direct or indirect) between Kenyah and the other groups. Allowing for this elevation of the Kenyah scores, we can see that the Kelabitic group appears to be quite distinct from everything else in the state.⁵

Selako, as noted in footnote 1, is a Malayic Dayak language; thus the similarity of the other languages to Iban or Malay (not included in Blust's study) should be at about the same level as their similarity to Selako. Blust also did not include any Land Dayak wordlist in his cognate comparisons. I have attempted to estimate how the Land Dayak languages compare with the others listed in (2) by comparing data from Biatah Land Dayak with the wordlists included in Blust's study. This comparison was only partly successful, due to uncertainties about cognate relationships, synonyms, apparent borrowings, etc.; but the range of PSC values in the following table are enough to give some idea of the relative degree of lexical similarity.

³Identified by Blust as "Lundu Land Dayak"; list collected by Topping at Kg. Pueh, Lundu.

⁴This elevation becomes clearer when compared with the corresponding scores for the Penan and Sibon dialects, which are part of the Kenyah chain.

⁵Smith (1984) found Kelabitic (specifically Lun Dayeh) to be even more distinct from any other language spoken in Sabah.

(3) **PSC data from Blust (1974a)**
(Biatah data added from Topping, Kroeger)

Biatah (Kg. Kuab)								
28	Selako (Kg. Pueh)							
31-34	29	Melanau (Mukah)						
26-30	27	45	Bintulu					
26-27	23	37	41	Berawan (Long Terawan)				
22-25	22	33	39	42	Narum (Lower Baram)			
29-30	24	37	36	41	32	Kenyah (Long Dunin)		
26-28	20	35	32	35	29	41	Kayan (Uma Juman)	
21-27	19	29	28	34	32	40	33	Kelabit (Bario)

These figures suggest that Land Dayak, like Kelabitic, is also quite distinct from all of the other language families in Sarawak, but slightly closer to Melanau than to the rest.

It has often been pointed out that lexico-statistical measurements of this kind are an unreliable tool for genetic classification of languages. On the other hand, they are quite useful as a rough measurement of relative synchronic similarity. Moreover, they are one of the quickest and easiest methods of comparison to use, especially when one wants to compare a large number of languages simultaneously. For this reason, in the sections that follow I will make repeated reference to such data, taken from Blust (1974a) and other sources. However, as we will see, it is often the case that different researchers using different wordlists may arrive at quite different cognate percentages for the same pair of languages. For example, Blust (1974a) calculated the following cognate percentages between Murik and two dialects of Kayan, based on a 100-word list:

Kayan (Long Atip)		
72	Kayan (Uma Juman)	
56	58	Murik (Long Semiang)

However, Blust later (1974b) calculated significantly higher cognate percentages among the same three languages, based on a refined 180-word list:

Kayan (Long Atip)		
84	Kayan (Uma Juman)	
65	66	Murik (Long Semiang)

While the absolute values are higher in the second matrix, the relative degree of similarity remains unchanged: in both matrices, the two Kayan dialects are much more similar to each other than either is to Murik. Thus, lexico-statistical measurements can be

quite useful when we can compare figures for many languages calculated by a single researcher and based on the same wordlist, as in figure (2) above; but any one PSC figure in isolation is difficult to interpret.

2. Higher-level subgrouping

2.1. Internal relationships

Blust (1974a) proposes a high-level subgrouping of Borneo languages which he calls the North Sarawak subgroup. The membership of this subgroup is determined almost entirely on the basis of his “Vowel Deletion Hypothesis”. All languages in this group are assumed to be descended from a common ancestor language in which a rule of Vowel Deletion applied in certain very restricted environments. This rule created consonant clusters consisting of a voiced stop or affricate followed by PAN (Proto-Austronesian) *S. The resulting clusters (*bS, *dS, *jS, etc.) later developed in ways different from the simple segments *b, *d, *j, etc. In other words, languages which belong to the North Sarawak subgroup exhibit splits in their reflexes of PAN *b, *d, *j etc., with the less common variant occurring in forms which are reconstructed as containing the triggering environment for the Vowel Deletion rule.

Blust divides the languages considered in his study into three classes: (1) those in which the rule of Vowel Deletion definitely applied at some point in their history, as evidenced by double reflexes of the PAN voiced obstruents; (2) those in which it is clear that this rule has never applied, because they preserve in modern forms the vowels which would have been deleted by the rule; and (3) those in which it is now impossible to tell whether or not the rule once applied, because there is no evidence of a split in the PAN voiced obstruents and the disyllabic environments in which the Vowel Deletion would have applied have been consistently reduced to monosyllables.

Those in class (1) constitute the North Sarawak subgroup. Blust (1974a, p. 176) describes this subgroup as including “all of the coastal languages of western Borneo between Bintulu in the south and Tutong in the north, and all of the non-Kayan-Murik languages of the Baram river basin and the high plateau to the north and east of the Baram headwaters.” He proposes the following subgrouping of these languages:

(4) North Sarawak Subgroup (Blust, 1974a)

- A. Bintulu (isolate)
- B. BERAWAN-LOWER BARAM
 - B.1. BERAWAN

- B.1.1. West Berawan (Long Terawan)
- B.1.2. CENTRAL-EAST BERAWAN
- B.2. LOWER BARAM
 - B.2.1. Tutong-1 (outlier)⁶
 - B.2.2. CENTRAL LOWER BARAM
- C. KENYAH
 - C.1. HIGHLAND KENYAH
 - C.2. LOWLAND KENYAH
- D. DAYIC (= “Apo Duat”)
 - D.1. Lun Bawang/Lun Dayeh
 - D.2. KELABIT GROUP
 - D.2.1. Kelabit dialects
 - D.2.2. Tring

Blust states that the Malayic and Land Dayak languages can be definitely placed in category (2), i.e. excluded from the North Sarawak subgroup. The same holds for various languages of the southern Philippines (Samal, Taosug, Subanon, Manobo, Palawan Batak) which he looked at. In category (3) he includes Kayan, Melanau, the Upper Rejang languages (e.g. “Kajang”), and the languages of south and east Kalimantan.

One of the most surprising aspects of Blust’s hypothesis is his claim that the languages of Sabah belong to the North Sarawak subgroup, rather than grouping closely with languages of the Philippines as most previous writers had assumed. He devotes a long section to defending this position. However, since the focus of the present work is on Sarawak, the issue is somewhat peripheral to our immediate concerns and I will not discuss it further here.

Hudson (1978) classifies the languages of Borneo into 10 major groupings. Those which include Sarawak languages are listed below. (Note that I have changed Hudson’s numbering scheme to match as nearly as possible that used by Blust, for ease of comparison.)

(5) Sarawak Language Groups (extracted from Hudson, 1978)

- A. LAND DAYAK
- B. REJANG-BARAM
 - B.1. BARAM-TINJAR
 - B.1.1. Lelak, Dali, Narom, Miri
 - B.1.2. Belait, Lemiting, Long Kiput
 - B.1.3. Tutong
 - B.1.4. Berawan et al.

⁶See the discussion of Tutong-1 and Tutong-2 in section 4.8 below.

- B.2. REJANG-BINTULU
 - B.2.1. Bintulu
 - B.2.2. Lahanan
 - B.2.3. Kajaman, Sekapan
 - B.2.4. Bukitan, Ukit, Punan Busang, Punan Batu, et al.
- B.3. LOWER REJANG
 - B.3.1. “Core Melanau” (Mukah, Oya, Matu, Rejang, etc.)
 - B.3.2. Kanowit
 - B.3.3. Tanjong
- B.4. REJANG-SAJAU
 - B.4.1. Punan Bah, Punan Biau
 - B.4.2. Punan Merap
 - B.4.3. Sajau Basap
- C. KAYAN-KENYAH
 - C.1. Kenyah (various subgroups)
 - C.2. Punan-Nibong
 - C.3. Kayanic (various subgroups)
- D. APO DUAT
 - D.1. Sesayap-Trusan (incl Lun Bawang/Lun Dayeh, Tring, et al.)
 - D.2. Kelabitic
- E. IDAHAN⁷
 - E.1. Murut-Tidong (incl. Sabah Murut, Tagal, Okolod)
 - E.2. Dusun-Bisaya
- F. MALAYIC

Comparing sections B, C and D in the two classifications (4) and (5), we see a significant degree of agreement. Aside from the position of the Bintulu language, which remains controversial, there are three major differences between the two: (a) Hudson includes the Melanau and Kajang dialects in section B; (b) Hudson includes Kayan in section C; and (c) Blust asserts that his sections A-D form a higher-level subgroup (the North Sarawak subgroup) which excludes not only Land Dayak, Malayic etc. but also Melanau and Kayan.

All three of these differences in classification result from different attitudes regarding the use of split reflexes of the PAN voiced obstruents as a diagnostic. For Blust, this evidence outweighs all else. He argues that, even though no other significant phonological changes have been found to confirm the existence of the North Sarawak subgroup, the Vowel Deletion rule is so well attested and so unlikely to have spread by borrowing that it must be regarded as outweighing other types of evidence, e.g. lexical isoglosses (Blust, 1974a, p. 220). For Hudson, on the other hand, splits in the PAN

⁷ Hudson states that he follows Appell (1968) and Prentice (1970) in using this label for “the Philippinic isolects found in the northeastern part of Borneo”.

voiced obstruents (which Hudson labels “Blust phenomena”) are just one piece of evidence, which must be weighed against other kinds of evidence.

The specific differences between these two classifications will be discussed in greater detail in section 3. First, I will comment briefly on relationships with languages outside of Borneo.

2.2. External relationships

Generally speaking, relatively little work has been done on identifying possible relationships between the languages of Borneo and those spoken outside of Borneo. Hudson divides his presentation of Borneo language groups into two sections, the first entitled “Exo-Bornean Groups” and the second “Endo-Bornean Groups”. (These are not intended to be genetic subgroupings, but simply a way of organizing his discussion.) His “Exo-Bornean” category includes Malayic, which of course is well-represented in Malaya, Sumatra, and other areas of Indonesia outside of Borneo. It also includes his “Idahan” group, i.e. the Dusun-Bisaya and Murut-Tidong languages, most of which are spoken in Sabah. Following Dyen (1965), Prentice (1970) and others, Hudson assumes that these languages group most closely with languages of the Philippines.

The third Exo-Bornean group is Tamanic, spoken in the Upper Kapuas basin in West Kalimantan. Hudson presents evidence of a close relationship between the Tamanic language Mbaloh and the Bugis language of southern Sulawesi. The close relation between the Tamanic and South Sulawesi language groups is convincingly demonstrated by Adelaar (1994).

The close relationship between Ma’anyan and Malagasy has been known for many years, through the work of Dahl and others. Both of these belong to Hudson’s East Barito group, an Endo-Bornean group one of whose members (Malagasy) happens to have migrated out of Borneo to the island of Madagascar.

Skeat and Blagden (1906) noted some examples of apparent cognates (e.g. the words for ‘kill’ and ‘die’) between certain Orang Asli languages of Malaya and the Land Dayak languages. This link seems surprising, since it is hard to imagine how there could have been enough contact between these groups to allow for borrowing of such basic vocabulary items in either direction. Sellato (1993) cites this reference and notes that a number of Punan languages also exhibit cognate forms. He suggests that these forms may point to the existence of a linguistic “substratum”, relic features retained from the

language of an ancient population living in Borneo before the first arrival of Austronesian speakers. This is an interesting suggestion, which should be investigated further.

3. Mid-level subgrouping

We have already noted several clearly defined clusters of languages: Malayic, Land Dayak, Kelabitic, etc. There seems to be no question that each of these clusters constitutes a distinct sub-group, and (at least for the languages of Sarawak) little doubt as to which languages belong to each group. On the other hand, we have also noted a number of cases where there is considerable uncertainty concerning the existence of a proposed sub-group or the linguistic affiliation of a particular language. Two of the most important of these unresolved questions concern the relationship of Kayan to Kenyah, and the relationship of Melanau to various other languages.

3.1 Kayan-Kenyah??

One of the principle differences which we noticed between Blust's classification, shown in (4), and that of Hudson, shown in (5), centers on the relationship between Kayan and Kenyah. Blust includes Kenyah in his North Sarawak subgroup, because at least some of the Kenyah dialects exhibit a split in certain PAN voiced obstruents. He excludes Kayan because there is no such evidence in the Kayan dialects of Sarawak, assigning Kayan to "category 3" (undetermined status). He suggests that the extensive lexical and cultural similarities between Kayan and Kenyah, which led earlier writers to assume a close relationship between the two groups, were in fact the result of prolonged contact and borrowings (pp. 183, 243-244).

Hudson however responds (1978, p. 22):

"Kayanic and Kenyahic isolects exhibit enough similarities, both lexical and phonological, that they ought, for the present at least, to be grouped together. Despite Blust's suggestion ... that Kenyah should be assigned to and Kayan tentatively excluded from his "North Sarawak Group" on the basis of Blust phenomena, only one of [Hudson's] Kenyah subgroups seems unequivocally to exhibit Blust phenomena, while three others do not. On the other hand, Penihing and Lg. Paka' Kayan, which appear clearly to be Kayanic isolects, do exhibit some Blust phenomena."

Hudson also points out that the Kayan dialects of Kalimantan show a much wider range of differentiation than the Kayan dialects of Sarawak, which are relatively homogeneous. Blust's study included only dialects spoken in Sarawak.

The cognate percentages which Blust provides do not give clear evidence either for or against the existence of a Kayan-Kenyah subgroup. As discussed in section 4.4 below, the Kenyah “dialects” of Sarawak can be very different from each other. This high degree of divergence within the Kenyah dialect chain makes it difficult to find clear patterns of relationship with languages outside the chain. For example, the Kayan wordlist from Uma Bawang exhibits a PSC of 51.5% with the Kenyah wordlist from Long Dunin. But this is almost identical to the PSC between the Kenyah “dialects” of Long Anap and Long Wat (53%).

The cognate percentages between Blust’s “true Kenyah” dialects and Kayan vary over a significant range, from a low of 36% to a high of 51.5%; but most seem to be in the 40’s. It may be helpful to compare these figures with the analogous figures for Penan and Sebop, which most writers agree must be included in the Kenyah sub-group. PSC values between “true Kenyah” and Penan range from 47% to 62%; those between “true Kenyah” and Sebop range from 51% to 61%. In each case it is likely that the highest scores are inflated through borrowings due to contact between the language groups involved, so the lower scores should be more relevant for our purposes.

What then can we conclude? It seems clear that Kayan is lexically more similar to Kenyah than to any other language cluster in Sarawak. It is also clear that Penan and Sebop are more closely related to Kenyah than Kayan is. In other words, Kenyah, Penan and Sebop together form a sub-group (Hudson’s KENYAHIC) which does not include Kayan. The relatively low PSC scores between Kayan and Penan (34-41%), and between Kayan and Sebop (30-34%) do not provide much evidence for the existence of a higher-level Kayan-Kenyah sub-group. This issue must be decided using other kinds of evidence, such as shared lexical and phonological innovations. In short, we can only echo the often-expressed sentiment that this is an area where a great deal of research remains to be done.

3.2 Rejang-Baram group

Hudson’s Rejang-Baram group is essentially the union of Blust’s Berawan-Lower Baram group with a group of languages that Blust refers to, without defining precisely, as “Melanau-Kajang” (see section 4.6). The central issue here is whether or not Melanau forms a subgroup with Berawan and the languages of the Lower Baram.

Like Kayan, Melanau is excluded by Blust from his North Sarawak subgroup (and assigned to category 3) because it lacks any evidence of “Blust phenomena”. Bintulu is

often referred to as a Melanau language; and based on lexical similarity alone, Bintulu could be said to be more tightly linked to the Melanau dialect chain than Kanowit, which Blust classifies as a Melanau dialect (see section 4.7). But Blust includes Bintulu, as an isolate, in his North Sarawak subgroup based on the evidence of “Blust phenomena”.

Actually, the difference between Blust and Hudson on the position of Melanau may be less significant than it appears. Hudson (p. 19) notes:

From the standpoint of classification, [the Rejang-Baram group] represents the most difficult set of languages to deal with. The subgrouping given here is quite provisional, and it is assumed that taxonomic relationships within and without the group will be changed, perhaps drastically, as our analytic focus gets sharper. Bintulu is the most likely candidate for reclassification ...”

Blust notes that Kejaman, one of the Kajang dialects, exhibits some evidence of the effects of the Vowel Deletion rule. Thus he regards the position of Melanau-Kajang with respect to the North Sarawak subgroup as being an unresolved question. In other words, both authors agree that further research is needed on this very important group of languages.

4. Specific language families and areas

4.1 Malayic

The Malayic subgroup in Borneo contains various dialects of Malay, as well as several closely related languages spoken by non-Muslim groups, which Hudson (1970) refers to as Malayic Dayak. Malay dialects spoken in Sarawak include Sarawak Malay (Collins, 1987), Brunei Malay, and Kadayan. Other Borneo Malay dialects include Sambas Malay and Pontianak Malay in West Kalimantan, Banjarese in South Kalimantan, and Kutai in East Kalimantan.

Two Malayic Dayak languages are spoken in Sarawak, namely Selako and Iban; both are also spoken in West Kalimantan. Adelaar (1991) states that Selako and Kendayan (or Kanayatn) are dialects of the same language, Kendayan being one of the largest Dayak groups in West Kalimantan.

As Adelaar (1991) points out, the “Malayic Dayak” category is not a linguistic subgroup. In other words, it does not seem to be the case that the Malayic Dayak languages relate more closely to each other than to any other language. Blust (1988) calculates the cognate percentage between Iban and Selako at 54.4%; Blust (1988) and

Nothofer (1991) both calculate that Iban is around 65% cognate with Malay, and Topping (1990) calculates that Selako is also 65% cognate with (Sarawak) Malay. Thus Iban and Selako, the two Malayic Dayak languages of Sarawak, are both more similar to Malay than they are to each other.

Hudson (1970, 1978) divides the Malayic Dayak dialects into two groups, Ibanic (including Kantu', Mualang, and Seberuang in Kalimantan; Iban and Sebuyau in Sarawak) and non-Ibanic (Selako, Kendayan, Keninjal, Semitau, Kayung etc., all in Kalimantan). A careful study of Iban dialects is being planned by the Tun Jugah Foundation. The Saribas dialect has become the *de facto* standard in Sarawak, and most anecdotal reports suggest that the dialect differences within Sarawak are not severe enough to seriously impair mutual intelligibility. One possible exception may be the Rimun dialect, to the east of Serian town, which seems to be quite distinct from Iban proper (Peter Cullip, p.c.).

Some cognate percentages for other Malayic dialects: Kadayan with Brunei Malay, 94-95%; with Standard Peninsular Malay, 80%. Brunei Malay with Standard Peninsular Malay, 82-84% (Nothofer, 1991). Banjarese with standard Bahasa Indonesia, 64.5% (Blust, 1988).

4.2 Land Dayak

Three major Land Dayak languages are spoken in Sarawak: Bau-Jagoi, Bukar-Sadong, and Biatah. (I will refer to these as the Sarawak Land Dayak subgroup.) A fourth, Lara', is reportedly a dialect of the Bakati' language of Kalimantan (Bryant, 1990); it is quite distinct from the first three, and is spoken in Sarawak by at most a few thousand speakers. The fifth group often included under the label "Bidëyüh" is Selako, which (as noted above) is actually a Malayic Dayak language (Hudson, 1970; Adelaar, 1990).

The following cognate percentages among the five "Bidëyüh" languages are taken from Topping (1990); note that Singgai (or Senggi) is one of the major Bau-Jagoi dialects:

(6) **Cognate percentages among the five “Bidëyüh” languages and Sarawak Malay; from Topping (1990)**

Sarawak Malay (Kg. Lundu)						
65	Selako (Kg. Pueh)					
29	*	Biatah (Kg. Kuap)				
*	(25) ⁸	(62) ⁹	Jagoi (Kg. Stungkor)			
28	26	66	76	Singgai (Kg. Senggi)		
36	30	51	*	53	Bukar-Sadong (Kg. Tapuh)	
34	36	*	36	33	36	Lara' (Kg. Pasir Tengah)

(* = no data available)

This table shows that Bau-Jagoi, Bukar-Sadong and Biatah form a cluster in the 50-65% range. Lara' is quite distinct from these three, with scores barely higher than those for the Malayic languages, Selako and Sarawak Malay. This fact is consistent with the following statement by Hudson (1978, p. 18):

The attributes of the LD [Land Dayak] group as a whole are fairly distinctive, making it quite discrete vis-a-vis non-LD languages. However, internally there is a fair amount [of divergence] among the various isolects...

The characteristic attributes of the Land Dayak languages which Hudson mentions include distinctive numerals for 'eight', 'nine' and 'ten'; and /r/ as the reflex of PAN *1. Even though the unity of this group is not evident in the low PSC scores for Lara' with the Sarawak Land Dayak languages, the overall pattern would presumably become clearer by including other Land Dayak languages of West Kalimantan, some of which are known to be more similar to Sarawak Land Dayak than Lara' is.

Within each of the three Sarawak Land Dayak languages (Biatah, Jagoi and Bukar-Sadong), Topping reports considerable dialect variation. Cognate percentages from Topping (1990) for some Biatah villages are listed below; dialect names are from Kroeger (1994):

⁸Jagoi of Kg. Stungkor compared with Selako of Kg. Sebiris.

⁹Jagoi of Kg. Krokong compared with Biatah of Kg. Puruh Semadang.

(7) **Cognate percentages among six Biatah villages
from Topping (1990)**

Pinyawa' (Kg. Ma'ang)					
75	Biatah (Kg. Siburan)				
78	90	Biatah (Kg. Kuap)			
71	*	81	Tibia' (Kg. Taba)		
72	76	80	76	Bipürüh (Kg. Semadang)	
*	*	*	*	78	Bianah (Kg. Padawan)

(* = no data available)

It can be seen that there are significant differences among these dialects, with Pinyawa' being especially divergent. Kroeger (1994) identified eleven named dialects of Biatah, which can be grouped into three major dialect areas (Siburan, Penrissen and Upper Padawan), plus a fourth area (Lower Padawan) containing several fairly distinct dialects including Pinyawa'. The same study proposed that Tringgus and Mbaan be recognized as dialects of a distinct language, Tringgus-Mbaan, which would be the fourth language in the Sarawak Land Dayak subgroup.

Cognate percentages among some Bau-Jagoi villages are listed below:

(8) **Cognate percentages among four Bau-Jagoi villages
from Topping (1990)**

Kg. Krokong			
79	Kg. Kandis (Jagoi)		
72	83	Kg. Stungkor	
72	77	74	Kg. Daun (Senggi)

Again, we see here a fairly high degree of divergence, although native speakers (of the larger dialects) frequently deny there is any loss of comprehension among these groups. Reijffert (1956)¹⁰ identifies the following Land Dayak dialect groups in the Bau district: Tringgus, Gumbang, Sauh (Biratak), Grogoh, Suba, Jagoi, Krokong, Aup, Singhi (Bisingai), Serambu (Sikaruh Birais or Biro'ih), Bombok, and Peninjau. Tringgus we have already mentioned as being closely related to Mbaan. Mr. Kron Aken (p.c.) informs me that Gumbang is also quite distinct from the other Bau dialects, and somewhat similar to Tringgus. I assume all of the other dialects mentioned by Reijffert would be part of the Bau-Jagoi language group, but have no further information about them.

Cognate percentages among some Bukar-Sadong villages are listed below:

¹⁰Compiled in 1899, according to Blust (1994).

(9) **Cognate percentages among four Sadong villages from Topping (1990)**

Kg. Tebedu			
70	Kg. Tapuh		
*	82	Kg. Tubeh	
76	79	88	Kg. Piching

(* = no data available)

Impressionistic reports by Geddes (1954) and others state that all the Bukar-Sadong dialects are mutually intelligible.

4.3 Kelabitic (Apo Duat)

The dialects of this subgroup are all quite similar to each other lexically, as the following matrix demonstrates:

(10) **PSC for eight Kelabitic dialects from Blust (1974a).**

Lun Bawang							
79	Kelabit (Long Napir)						
77	97	Kelabit (Long Seridan)					
79	90	88	Kelabit (Bario)				
77	89	88	87	Kelabit (Pa' Dalih)			
73	86	85	92	91	Kelabit (Long Lellang)		
70	81	80	85	84	84	Sa'ban	
74	81	79	82	80	78	75	Tring

At the same time, they are all quite distinct from any other language in Blust's study, the highest external cognate percentage being 42% with one of the Kenyah dialects. These scores are quite close to those reported by Hudson: lowest internal PSC 70%, highest external PSC 52%.¹¹ Thus the existence and membership of this group is not at all controversial.

It is perhaps more difficult to agree on a name for the group. Earlier writers used the term "Murut" (or Sarawak Murut, or Southern Murut); but this led (and still leads) to endless confusion with the very different Murutic languages of Sabah ("Northern Murut"); see the discussion by Langub (1987). Blust used the term "Dayic", after the name ulun daya (or Lun Dayeh) 'people of the interior', which Blust says these groups normally use to refer to themselves. However, this term seems likely to be confused with the generic "Dayak"; and in Sabah, Lun Dayeh is used as the name for a particular dialect

¹¹Hudson included material from Kalimantan languages and dialects which were not part of Blust's corpus.

(closely related to Lun Bawang). Hudson (1978) proposed the term “Apo Duat”, after a range of mountains on the Sarawak-Kalimantan border. But Peter Martin (p.c.) reports that this name should actually be spelled “Apad Uat”.

In view of these problems, I have provisionally followed Dyen (1965) and others in using the term “Kelabitic”. One disadvantage of this term is that it seems to use the name of the smaller group (Kelabit) to include the larger (Lun Bawang), and so may not be acceptable to the Lun Bawang.

Aside from the question of terminology, one substantive point of contention concerns the internal relationships among these dialects, and in particular the classification of Sa’ban. Hudson proposes a two-way partition of the subgroup, Kelabit vs. everything else, thus grouping Sa’ban with Lun Bawang, Tring and one or two other dialects from Kalimantan. He states that this two-way division is based on phonological and lexical criteria, but does not explicitly state those criteria. However, Hudson does express some doubts about the position of Sa’ban.

Blust (1974a) proposes the opposite partition, namely Lun Bawang vs. everything else, as shown in figure (4) above. This partition is supported by the PSC values in table (10). Blust classifies Sa’ban as a dialect of Kelabit on lexico-statistical grounds. But, as both Blust (p. 250 ff.) and B. Clayre (1992) point out, Sa’ban has (relatively recently) undergone such radical phonological changes¹² that it is no longer mutually intelligible with Kelabit, and many cognate forms are no longer recognizable as such to a non-linguist.

Finally, we should warn the reader that some published references appear to confuse the Kelabitic dialect Tring with the Land Dayak dialect Tringgus, even though the two groups are widely separated both linguistically and geographically.

4.4 Kenyah

As noted above, the Kenyah dialects in Sarawak pose a special problem because there are so many of them and they appear to be so divergent. The complexity of the “Kenyah” ethnic group has often been pointed out, and some authors have even questioned whether such a group can be defined in any meaningful way:

¹²Similar changes, including the attrition of initial syllables and development of voiceless nasals, have occurred in the Būnūk dialect of Biatah and the Mbaan dialect of Tringgus-Mbaan; see Kroeger (1994).

The Kenyah are, like the Kajang, a composite group whose sections have languages mutually intelligible only to a limited extent. Historically, they cannot be treated as a unit for the area considered here [i.e. the Baluy river basin]. (Rousseau, 1974, p. 20)

In both areas [i.e. the upper Baram vs. the lower Baram, Tinjar and Tutoh basins] the Kenyah are far from a homogeneous group, but the diversity is more marked in the latter. In fact the term *Kenyah* as used by the Census is largely a term of convenience, and remains to be defined in a useful ethnographic sense. (Metcalf, 1974, p. 31)

One traditional way of identifying the Kenyah groups was that they use the word lepo' or lepu' for 'house', whereas the Kayan groups use uma'. However, this does not appear to be a hard a fast rule (at least in Kalimantan), since Hudson lists Uma' Timai and Uma Bem as Kenyah dialects. Another diagnostic which Hudson mentions is that Kenyah dialects generally exhibit /j/ as the reflex of PAN *Z, whereas Kayan dialects generally exhibit /s/.

Metcalf (1974) identifies four Kenyah languages, or dialect clusters, in the Baram District: (1) Lepo Umbo', (2) Lepo Tau, (3) Badang and (4) Uma Pawa. Badang is also spoken in the Baluy area, along with other Kenyah varieties (Rousseau, 1974). The Badang apparently prefer not to be identified as Kenyah, perhaps because of old tribal rivalries. Metcalf states that the Uma Pawa group migrated from Belaga to the Baram District after World War II, some settling at Long Dunin on the Tinjar, others at Long Apu on the Upper Baram. He describes Lepo Tau as a "loosely related cluster" of dialects, mostly spoken along the Upper Baram but also including Long Atun on the Tinjar. This organization of the dialects is potentially very helpful, but unfortunately Metcalf does not state the basis for his classification or provide any explicit evidence to support it.

Blust (1974a) included a number of Kenyah dialects, apparently all from the Baram District, in his study. He proposed the following subgrouping of those dialects, based on shared lexical and phonological innovations:

C. KENYAH

C.1. HIGHLAND KENYAH

Type A ('True Kenyah'): Long Anap, Long Atun, Long Jeeh, Long Nawang

Type B: Long Dunin

C.2. LOWLAND KENYAH

Type A: Long San, Long Sela'an, Long Iking

Type B: Long Wat, Sebop
Type C: Penan

In some ways, this classification agrees quite well with Metcalf's statements. Blust's "Lowland type A" corresponds quite precisely to Metcalf's Lepo Umbo', and Blust's "Highland type B" corresponds to Metcalf's Uma Pawa group. Metcalf also states that the Long Wat dialect is quite similar to Sebop. On the other hand, Blust's "Highland type A" seems to be a mixed collection on Metcalf's view, since Metcalf identifies Long Atun as a dialect of Lepo Tau, and Long Jeeh as a dialect of Badang.

Blust himself notes that "the internal subgrouping of the Kenyah languages remains highly problematic." (p. 245) And: "Dialect borrowing is undoubtedly responsible for a large part of the complex pattern of overlapping isoglosses among Kenyah communities, and until this factor is brought more completely under control the internal subgrouping of the non-Highland Kenyah languages must remain tentative." (p. 247)

The cognate percentages among these dialects is shown below (the Long Nawang Kenyah list, which Blust got from Ray (1913), is omitted from this matrix because there were so many gaps):

(11) PSC for eight Kenyah dialects plus Sebop and Penan, from Blust (1974a).

Kenyah (Long Anap)											
82	Kenyah (Long Atun)										
78	79	Kenyah (Long Jeeh)									
77	78	76	Kenyah (Long Ikang)								
69	71	72	67	Kenyah (Long San)							
64	66	69	69	84	Kenyah (Long Sela'an)						
63	63	67	68	81	85	Kenyah (Long Dunin)					
53	56	55	59	64	61	64	Kenyah (Long Wat)				
52	53	51	56	61	60	56	75	Sebop (Long Luyang)			
49	50	52	51	59	62	57	59	59	Penan (Long Labid)		
49	50	53	52	57	60	57	59	59	85	Penan (Long Lamai)	
47	50	51	52	57	62	55	62	62	76	75	Penan (Long Merigam)

These figures seem to confirm the existence of a coherent Kenyahic group (at least in Sarawak) which includes Sebop-Long Wat and Penan as subgroups; but the internal classification of the Kenyah dialects themselves remains something of a puzzle, as Blust states. The most surprising aspect of these PSC scores is the very tight clustering of Long San, Long Sela'an and Long Dunin, all above 80% with each other. Following either Blust's or Metcalf's proposals, we would have expected Long Ikang to be included and

Long Dunin excluded from this group. But Long Ilang appears to be surprisingly distinct from this cluster, scoring less than 70% with any of the other three. The recent migration history of these groups will undoubtedly be an essential clue to sorting out their linguistic relationships.

Hudson (1978) and Wurm (1983) propose very different classifications of the Kenyah languages. However, it is virtually impossible to compare their proposals with those of Metcalf and Blust, because there is so little overlap in the names used to identify language and dialect groups. Also, the studies by Hudson and Wurm include Kenyah dialects spoken in Kalimantan while Metcalf and Blust deal only with those spoken in Sarawak.¹³

4.5 Punan and Penan

Punan and Penan (“e” here represents a schwa) are names which have been used to designate a variety of nomadic groups in Central Borneo. Needham (1954) reviews the tremendous confusion over the usage of these terms, which he calls “one of the major ethnographic problems of southeast Asia.” Based on his extensive fieldwork among the Penan, he makes the following 3-way classification:

1. **Punan Ba** (usually cited as Punan Bah, perhaps because of the old tendency to use “h” for glottal stop); these are settled long-house dwellers who farm rice and identify themselves ethnically as Kajang. This group includes the Punan Ba on the Bah River, the Punan Biau and Punan Tepaleng on the Rejang river, and several settlements in the headwaters of the Tatau and Kemana rivers (Needham, 1954; Clayre, 1971, 1972a). In addition, Clayre (1972a) states that the Siténg people of the upper Mukah River spoke a closely related dialect (now extinct??). Needham states that there is no evidence that this group was ever nomadic.
2. **Nomadic Punan**, hunter-gatherers who eat primarily sago rather than rice. Sellato (1993) states that many of these groups have only recently begun to use iron tools, canoes, fish-hooks, fish-traps and fish-nets. Needham mentions the Punan Aput, Punan Batu and Punan Busang as members of this group.
3. **Penan**, sometimes classified as “jungle Punan” in early Sarawak census reports etc. Some Penan are settled, others still nomadic.

¹³ The treatment of Kenyah and Kayan languages is the only area (at least for Sarawak) where Wurm’s classification differs significantly from Hudson’s. Again, comparison is difficult because of the different names used, but Wurm’s classification of Madang, for example, seems quite different from that of Hudson. I do not know the source of Wurm’s information. Another important source on Kenyah dialects, which I have not yet had a chance to consult, is Rousseau (1990).

Linguistically the Penan dialects form a quite distinct subgroup within the Kenyahic group, as discussed in section 4.4. Metcalf (1974, p. 31) states that the Penan dialects can be classified into two major groups, namely Eastern Penan vs. Western Penan. This classification is confirmed by Rodney Needham (p.c.). Eastern Penan is spoken primarily in the Baram District, while Western Penan is spoken primarily in the Belaga District and also along the Tinjar river. This subgrouping is reflected in the PSC scores in table (11), where the Eastern Penan dialects of Long Labid and Long Lamai are much more similar to each other (85%) than either is to the Western Penan dialect of Long Merigam (75-76%). Needham (p.c.) states that the degree of dialect variation among the Western Penan is greater than that among the Eastern Penan.

The Punan Ba language is often said to be closely related to Kajang, and Clayre (1971, 1972a) seems to accept this view. All writers agree that the Punan Ba are linked to the Kajang by many cultural similarities and intermarriage of their chiefs. However, as discussed in section 4.6, Hudson (1978) classifies Punan Ba as belonging to a separate branch of his Rejang-Baram group from the “core” Kajang languages (Kejaman, Lahanan, Sekapan).

The nomadic Punan dialects do not form a coherent linguistic grouping. Sellato (1993, p. 51) describes the following pattern as being the norm: “i) A given Punan group is currently associated with a given farming group.... ii) The culture of a given Punan group appears very close to that of its nearest agricultural neighbor.... iii) The language of a given Punan group appears closely related to that of its nearest farming neighbors.”

One explanation for these facts is that the Punan represent elements of various settled groups who have “devolved”, or reverted to a nomadic hunter-gatherer way of life. Blust (1989) and others have argued for this interpretation. Sellato (1993), on the other hand, suggests that the various Punan groups do in fact share certain features of language and culture, which may represent a common inheritance, or substratum, from a very old, perhaps pre-Austronesian, ancestor group. Over many years of close contact between the nomads and their settled neighbors, the Punan have adopted many of the linguistic and cultural features of their patrons.

One problem in classifying the Punan languages is that the same group often seems to be called by different names in different areas. (I will make no attempt here to distinguish the Punan groups of Sarawak from those of Kalimantan.) Sellato discusses three related Punan groups which have spread out over a wide area: (1) the Bukat, one

off-shoot of which are the Ukit on the Baluy River; (2) the Sru, now extinct, whose descendent groups include the Lisum, Lugat, Punan Kohi, Punan Serata, Punan Langasa, Punan Boh, Punan Oho', and Punan Merah; and (3) the Beketan, related to the Punan Busang, Punan Iwan, Punan Haput, and others. De Rozario (1901) stated that Sru was closely related to Ukit, reporting that Ukit speakers were able to understand the Sru wordlist published by Bailey (1901).

Hudson includes "Punan" dialects in at least three different subgroups, two under Rejang-Baram and one (Punan-Nibong) under Kayan-Kenyah:

- B.2. REJANG-BINTULU
 - B.2.4. Bukitan, Ukit, Bukut, Sru, Punan Busang, Punan Batu, et al.
- B.4. REJANG-SAJAU
 - B.4.1. Punan Bah, Punan Biau
 - B.4.2. Punan Merap
 - B.4.3. Sajau Basap
- C.2. PUNAN-NIBONG: Bok, Nibong, Punan Gang, Punan Lusong, Punan Silat, Speng

Hudson described his Punan-Nibong subgroup¹⁴ as being "intermediate between Kenyahic and Kayanic isolects." But Needham (p.c.) states that all of the dialects in this group, with the possible exception of Sepéng (Hudson's Speng) are in fact Western Penan dialects. This of course explains why they would group closely with Kenyahic.

The Sihan, living on a tributary of the Baluy, are sometimes referred to as a Punan group. Maxwell (1992) compared his Sihan wordlist with some old published Punan lists, and estimated that Sihan is roughly 55% cognate with Punan Batu and 50% cognate with Punan Busang. Wurm (1983) adds Sihan to Hudson's Rejang-Bintulu subgroup.

4.6 "Kajang" and its neighbors in the Baluy (Upper Rejang) region

"Kajang" is term whose extension has been the subject of considerable debate. Some writers use it to include all the non-Kayan groups in the Upper Rejang region; others restrict it to the Sekapan, Kejaman and Lahanan (or La'an) dialects, plus perhaps Punan Ba. Rousseau (1974a, p. 18) states:

"The basis of the Kajang group is political rather than cultural: they are those inhabitants of the lower Baluy (plus one La'an community in the middle Baluy) who are neither Kayan, Kenyah nor Penan."

¹⁴ Wurm (1983) treats all members of this subgroup as being dialects of a single language.

Of these, he says that the Sekapan, Kejaman and La'anang are

“... closely related to each other and to the Melanau, and used to be sago eaters. Other groups call themselves Kajang apparently out of a need to be associated to a large group: the so-called Punan Ba, the Sihan (formerly a nomadic group), the Seping and the Bah Mali (of which only six individuals are still in the area).”

Rousseau apparently groups Punan Biau and Punan Lanying together with Punan Ba (cf. Hudson's Rejang-Sajau subgroup). He also states that the Punan of the Kakus and Tubau rivers are identical to the Punan Ba, although they do not call themselves “Kajang”. Rousseau does not mention the Ukit or Baketan.

Urquhart (1955) presents wordlists for most of the dialects in this area (all those spoken in the old Kapit district except for Sihan and Punan Busang). Based on a quick and superficial comparison of 154 items from his list, I offer the following rough estimates: Kejaman shares roughly 80% apparent cognates with Lahanan, 69% with Sekapan. Lahanan shares roughly 65% apparent cognates with Sekapan. Punan Ba shares roughly 50% apparent cognates with Bukitan, 52% with Sekapan. Bukitan shares roughly 51% apparent cognates with Ukit.

Blust (1974a) notes the apparent linguistic connection between Melanau and Kajang:

“... it is perhaps justifiable to speak of a ‘Melanau dialect chain’. Moreover, it is evident on inspection even from the scanty materials published by Ray (1913) that members of this dialect chain are coordinate with the ‘Kajang’ languages (Kejaman, Lahanan, Sekapan) of the Upper Rejang in a relatively discrete larger subgroup which might be called ‘Melanau-Kajang’.” (p. 184)

“Of the roughly 200 Kajaman roots cited by Ray (1913), at least 7 appear to be shared exclusively with languages in the Melanau dialect chain.” (p. 228, fn. 14)

These include the terms for: ‘eight’, ‘nine’, ‘speak’, ‘clean’, ‘cold’, ‘sit’, and ‘smoke’. However, Blust notes that Kejaman, unlike any of the Melanau dialects, does show evidence of a split in PAN *b due to the Vowel Deletion rule.

Hudson (1978) splits the Kajang dialects into two separate subgroups of his Rejang-Baram group; these are repeated below:¹⁵

¹⁵ Hudson reports that the members of the Rejang-Sajau subgroup are about 72% cognate with each other, setting them off from other branches of Rejang-Baram, with which they compare at the 60% cognate level. Hudson does not give cognate percentages for the Rejang-Bintulu subgroup. He states (p. 20) that the Lower Rejang (i.e. Melanau) dialects relate to the other branches of the Rejang-Baram group at about the 60% level. Blust does not include the Kajang languages in his lexicostatistic study, but Hudson's PSC

- B.2. REJANG-BINTULU
 - B.2.1. Bintulu
 - B.2.2. **Lahanan**
 - B.2.3. **Kajaman, Sekapan**
 - B.2.4. Bukitan, Ukit, Bukut, Sru, Punan Busang, Punan Batu, et al.
- B.4. REJANG-SAJAU
 - B.4.1. **Punan Bah, Punan Biau**
 - B.4.2. Punan Merap
 - B.4.3. Sajau Basap

Hudson groups Bintulu with several of the “Kajang” languages based on the following facts: all members of this Rejang-Bintulu group (except Lahanan) exhibit a split in PAN *b, but none of them exhibit a split in PAN *j; and all members of this group exhibit the cluster /-gw-/ in their word for ‘two’ (Lahanan degwa, Bintulu gwa, etc.). Note that the members of the Rejang-Sajau subgroup (Punan Ba and its closest relatives) exhibit the same pattern of split in PAN *b, but no split in PAN *j.

I. Clayre (1971, 1972a) supports a Kajang-Bintulu connection, saying that Bintulu is closely related to Sekapan and Punan Ba.

4.7 Melanau

The term “Melanau” was originally an exonym, used by the Brunei Malay to refer to the native peoples to their west. During the early years of the Brooke Raj, it was sometimes used as a cover term for all the non-Malay ethnic groups of Sarawak who were neither Sea Dayak (Iban) nor Land Dayak (Morris, 1989). Today the term is generally used in a more restricted sense, for the non-Malay, non-Iban groups of the Lower Rejang River (up as far as Kanowit) and along the coast from the mouth of the Rejang northeast to Bintulu.

Blust included data from seven Melanau dialects in his study, not counting Bintulu. The cognate percentages he calculated for these dialects are listed below.

scores seem to be considerably higher than Blust’s figures; for example, Blust calculates the PSC for Bintulu with Mukah Melanau at 45%, compared with Hudson’s estimate of 60%.

(12) **PSC for seven Melanau dialects plus Bintulu, from Blust (1974a).**

Bintulu							
51	Balingian						
45	68	Mukah					
46	65	76	Dalat (Kg. Teh)				
45	62	74	83	Dalat (Kg. Kekan)			
44	57	65	73	78	Matu		
40	54	56	63	64?	79	Sarikei (Kg. Jerijeh)	
40	43	49	48	46	48	48	Kanowit

Notice that Bintulu is calculated to be slightly more similar to Balingian than Kanowit is to any of the other dialects. Nevertheless, Blust considers Kanowit to be a dialect of Melanau, and thus outside his North Sarawak group, but Bintulu to be an isolate within the North Sarawak group. The reason for this is presumably that Bintulu shows a split in PAN *b and *d conditioned by the presence of PAN *S, whereas Kanowit and the “core” Melanau dialects show no such splits.

Hudson (1978) classifies the Melanau dialects as shown below:

B.3. LOWER REJANG

B.3.1. “Core Melanau” (Mukah, Oya, Matu, Rejang, Siduan, Teh)

B.3.2. Kanowit

B.3.3. Tanjong

Blust did not include the Tanjong dialect in his study; it is spoken farther up the Rejang river than Kanowit, in the Kapit District, and shares some vocabulary items with the Kajang (Urquhart, 1955).

Zaini Ozea (1989) gives an intuitive, native-speaker’s estimate of mutual intelligibility among these dialects. He classifies the Melanau speech varieties into six dialects, as shown below:

Melanau dialects (Zaini Ozea, 1989)

- a. Kuala Rajang (incl. Rajang, Jerijeh, Belawai, Segalang, Paloh)
- b. Seduan (= Sibuan) (incl. Sibuan, Kanowit, Tanjong, Igan, Banyuk)
- c. Matu-Daro (incl. Matu, Daro, Pulau Beruit, Batang Lasa)
- d. Mukah-Dalat (incl. Mukah, Dalat, Oya, Sg. Kut)
- e. Balingian
- f. Bintulu (incl. Bintulu, Tatau, Niah, Sg. Kemana, Sebiew)

Zaini suggests that, generally speaking, all sub-dialects within groups a, b and c are mutually intelligible with any of the others. An exception is the Igan sub-dialect, which

would be intelligible to other speakers of dialect b (Sibu-Kanowit-Tanjong), or to speakers of dialect c (Matu-Daro), but not to speakers of dialect a. Zaini indicates that Mukah-Dalat (dialect d) is not well understood by speakers of dialects a, b or c, but is mutually intelligible with the Igan sub-dialect. Thus the Igan sub-dialect provides a “link” between Mukah-Dalat and the rest of the dialect chain.

Zaini regards both Bintulu and Balingian as being unintelligible to other Melanau dialect groups, and suggests that at least Bintulu must be classified as a distinct language, rather than a Melanau dialect. This view is consistent with the proposals of Blust and Hudson.

Zaini’s grouping of Seduan (= Sibu or Siduan), Kanowit, and Tanjong into a closely knit cluster agrees with Ray (1913, p. 5-6); but Hudson (1978) places each of these three dialects into different branches of his Lower Rejang subgroup.

Zaini’s estimation of the distinctness of Bintulu and Balingian is consistent with the cognate percentages calculated by Blust (1974a). However, his impression that Kanowit is mutually intelligible with Matu and Jerijeh (= Sarikei) is quite surprising, given the low cognate percentages (48%) which Blust reports.

4.8 Lower Baram

The Lower Baram area is (or was) home to a relatively large number of distinct ethnic groups, most of them very small. The classification of the dialects spoken in this area does not appear to be a matter of great controversy, but there has been a considerable degree of confusion over the usage of certain language names. Some of this confusion appears to date back to Ray (1913), while other cases may be the result of shifts in ethnic identity which have taken place within the past 80 years or so.

Blust’s (1974a) classification of the Lower Baram languages is repeated below:

B. BERAWAN-LOWER BARAM

B.1. BERAWAN

B.1.1. WEST BERAWAN

Long Terawan

B.1.2. CENTRAL-EAST BERAWAN

B.1.2.1. CENTRAL BERAWAN: Batu Belah, Long Teru

B.1.2.2. EAST BERAWAN: Long Jegan

B.2. LOWER BARAM

B.2.1. Tutong-1 (outlier)

B.2.2. CENTRAL LOWER BARAM

Type A: Long Kiput, Lemiting

Type B: Lelak, Dali, Narom, Miri

Compare this with Hudson's (1978) classification of these same languages:

B.1. BARAM-TINJAR

B.1.1. Lelak, Dali, Narom, Miri

B.1.2. Belait, Lemiting, Long Kiput

B.1.3. Tutong

B.1.4. Berawan, Long Pata, Batu Bla

The most significant difference between these two classifications is that Blust proposes a binary partitioning, Berawan vs. everything else, while Hudson makes Berawan coordinate with the three other immediate branches of the group. Aside from this, the two are virtually identical. There is another difference, however, masked by the use of the term "Tutong", which we will discuss below. But first let us consider the position of Berawan.

Blust notes that the Berawan dialects are distinguished from the other Lower Baram dialects (and all other language groups) by a totally unique merger of PAN *b, *k and *R in intervocalic position to /k/ or /kk/. Lexically, the four Berawan dialects which Blust discusses show a moderate degree of convergence, with PSC values ranging from 65% to 80%:

(13) **PSC for four Berawan dialects, from Blust (1974a).**

Long Terawan			
76	Batu Belah		
71	80	Long Teru	
65	76	77	Long Jegan

Leaving aside Tutong-1, which will be discussed below, the languages of his Lower Baram subgroup are only slightly more diverse, with PSC values ranging from 61% to 82%:¹⁶

(14) **PSC for seven Lower Baram dialects plus Berawan (Long Terawan) from Blust (1974a).**

Tutong-1							
53	Kiput						
62	82	Lemeting					
53	64	73	Narum				
53	73	73	81	Lelak			
51	61	69	71	70	Miri		
51	72	76	78	76	78	Dali'	
42	52	53	42	51	41	48	Berawan

These figures are rendered less reliable, and somewhat incoherent, by the fact that the Tutong-1, Lemeting, Lelak, and Dali' lists, taken from Ray (1913), have many gaps. But even ignoring these, the lists which Blust collected himself (Long Kiput, Narum and Miri) seem to support the existence of his Lower Baram subgroup, and to justify excluding Berawan from it.

Returning to the terminological issue mentioned above, it is all too easy to become confused when comparing various classifications for the "Tutong" language. Ray (1913, p. 6) pointed out that there are actually two distinct dialects spoken along the Tutong River. He used the term "Tutong-1" for the language spoken up-river, and "Tutong-2" for the language spoken in the coastal area, near the mouth. Ray published wordlists for both dialects. The Tutong-1 list contains a large number of Dusun-Bisaya lexical items;¹⁷ the Tutong-2 list is quite fragmentary.

¹⁶Metcalf (1974) states that Long Kiput is closely related to Berawan, but this is certainly not evident from the PSC scores in this matrix.

¹⁷Cense and Uhlenbeck (1958, p. 20) noted that Tutong-1 seems to be closer to the "languages of a Philippine-type", i.e. the Dusun-Bisaya and Murutic languages of Sabah, than to other languages in the Baram area.

Martin (1992), following Nothofer (1991), reports that “Tutong-1” is actually Brunei Dusun, which is a Bisaya dialect; while “Tutong-2” is the language known in Brunei as “Tutong”, a Baram-Tinjar dialect most closely related to Lemeting and Kiput (Martin, p.c.). This clarification is crucial in order for us to make sense of much of the published literature on the Baram languages. There seems to be a broad consensus on this issue, but Blust adopts an interesting minority position.

Hudson (1978) and Wurm (1983) each support the “orthodox” position outlined in the previous paragraph. They classify Tutong-1 as belonging to the Dusun-Bisaya sub-group, and Tutong-2 as belonging to the Baram-Tinjar sub-group.¹⁸ Nothofer (1991) identifies Tutong-1 as being a dialect (“Dusun proper”) of the Dusun language of Brunei. He identifies the other dialect of this language as (Brunei) Bisaya. He states that these two dialects are mutually intelligible, and calculates the cognate percentage between them to be 82%.¹⁹ Nothofer states that the closest relative of Tutong-2, i.e. the Tutong language of Brunei, is a language called “Belait”,²⁰ and calculates the PSC between them to be 54%. Nothofer calculates the cognate percentage between Dusun proper (i.e. Tutong-1) and Tutong (i.e. Tutong-2) to be 40%.

Blust does not discuss Tutong-2, using only Ray’s Tutong-1 list in his study. However, he uses phonological and geographical evidence to argue that the Dusun-Bisaya elements in Tutong-1 are the result of borrowing, rather than inherited features. He therefore classifies Tutong-1 as a Lower Baram language. An interesting result of this decision is that the “Tutong” languages referred to in the two classifications of Baram languages displayed above are not the same, even though they occupy exactly the same position in their respective charts. Blust is discussing Tutong-1, while Hudson is referring to Tutong-2.

Obviously there is a need to standardize our terminology here, and to discard the terms “Tutong-1” and “Tutong-2”. The most natural solution would be to follow the usage of Nothofer and Martin, referring to the “Tutong-1” as Brunei Dusun, and referring to the “Tutong-2” simply as Tutong.

¹⁸Note: Wurm uses the labels “Tutong-1” and “Tutong-2”, whereas Hudson omits the numerals, simply using the same name, Tutong, to refer to two different languages.

¹⁹Blust (1974a) calculated much lower cognate percentages, 55% and 50% respectively, between Ray’s (1913) Tutong-1 list and the wordlists Blust himself collected for Bisaya Bukit, spoken in Brunei, and Limbang Bisaya.

²⁰ Hudson lists Belait as a member of the Baram-Tinjar subgroup.

The “Tutong” problem is a good example of the confusion that can arise when geographical names are used to identify ethnic groups. First, we may find several different groups living in the same area or along the same river, as in the case of Tutong. Second, migration of ethnic groups or parts of groups can lead to confusion. A good example involves the “Belait” people of Brunei.

Martin (1992) reports that the term “Belait” has been applied in the past to various different ethnic groups living in the Belait region: Bisaya, Orang Bukit, Tabun, etc.²¹ The language currently called “Belait” is actually Lemeting, which is no longer spoken under that name and is sometimes said to be extinct.²² He suggests that the Lemeting speakers became known as “Belait” when they moved into the Belait district.

5. Suggested priorities for future study

5.1 Melanau-Kajang

One of the central unresolved issues in Sarawak linguistics is the relationship of Melanau to the other languages lying between the Rejang and Baram river basins.

I. Clayre (1972b) has provided a detailed description of one dialect of Melanau; more such studies are needed. For comparative work, I would suggest two topics for immediate investigation:

a. Melanau dialect study

A careful study is needed to determine precisely the nature and extent of the linguistic differences among the various dialects of Melanau, and to measure the degree of mutual intelligibility among them.

b. Kajang and its neighbors

The Upper Rejang basin is linguistically perhaps the most complex and least understood area of the state. It is very important to begin gathering reliable data about Kajang and the other languages in this region. The Kejaman phonological notes and text materials in Strickland (1995) represent an excellent contribution toward this goal, and it is hoped that the useful study of Kejaman by Bibi Aminah (1994 ms.) will soon be published and made available to other scholars. These efforts need to be replicated for the other Kajang dialects, as well as for the non-Kajang languages of that area. This need

²¹ Martin (p.c.) points out that the “Balait” list in Ray (1913) is actually a Kelabit dialect.

²² Some of the other languages which Blust included from Ray (1913) also appear to be extinct, e.g. Lelak and Dali'. Martin (1992) cites Metcalf for the suggestion that the Lelak have intermarried with and been assimilated by the Berawan.

takes on considerable urgency in light of the major development projects currently underway in the area, which will involve the resettlement of several of the language groups in question and radically altered patterns of language contact for all groups.

The study of Kajang could also be important for wider comparative purposes. Blust suggested that Kejaman might provide a link between Melanau and the North Sarawak subgroup; but at the time he proposed this hypothesis, it could not be tested because of a lack of reliable data about any of the Kajang dialects.

5.2 Land Dayak

The Land Dayak group includes a large number of languages covering a wide area in both Sarawak and West Kalimantan. As noted above, there is a great deal of internal diversity to this group but the group as a whole is quite distinct from any other language in Borneo. Two immediate goals should be (1) to determine the internal subgrouping of the Land Dayak group and (2) to begin work on reconstructing Proto-Land Dayak. Then will we be in a better position to determine where Land Dayak fits into the broader linguistic scene. This will require close cooperation by linguists on both sides of the border between Sarawak and West Kalimantan.

5.3 State-wide lexico-statistical comparison

In section 1 we noted that cognate percentages provide a useful measurement of relative synchronic similarity, and are one of the quickest and easiest methods of comparison to use. However, it is very difficult to compare scores calculated by different researchers using different wordlists. It would be very helpful to develop a data-base for comparing all the dialects of the state on a uniform basis, using the same basic wordlist and the same criteria for identifying cognates. Such a comprehensive framework would be very helpful in providing preliminary assessments of the degree of difference among the dialects of Melanau or Kajang, for example, and for comparing the diversity of these dialect chains relative to those of of Kenyah, Kelabit, or the languages of the Lower Baram. Cognate percentages can also add support to subgrouping hypotheses (even though lexico-statistics by itself is not a reliable basis for classification); and the wider and more uniform the lexico-statistical data is, the more useful it can be in this regard.

Such a data-base would obviously be a major undertaking, requiring considerable time to complete and collaboration among a number of researchers. But even in the earliest stages, preliminary results (e.g. for one particular subgroup) could be extremely useful. Moreover, we would not be starting from scratch in the data collection and

analysis, but would be able to build on a rich corpus of published and unpublished materials.

In order to ensure the validity of the results, additional data collection should be carried out by trained researchers, and whenever possible should be either carried out or supervised by a linguist with expertise in the particular language family under investigation. It is recommended that the lexico-statistical comparison not be based on the standard Swadesh list, even though that list has been widely used in the past. Rather, the wordlist adopted should be more specifically relevant to Borneo, and should be as free as possible from the kind of potential ambiguities that make the Swadesh list difficult to work with.

5.4 Other research areas

By suggesting that the topics listed above should be given highest priority, I do not intend to minimize the importance of many other issues that remain to be addressed. Sarawak is an incredibly rich area for linguistic research of all kinds. It is probably safe to say that less than 20% of the state's languages have been documented in any serious fashion; thus in every corner of the state there are great needs for basic grammatical and phonological analysis, lexicography, and dialectology. Moreover, given the small size of many of the groups and the rapid changes taking place in the state, there is broad opportunity and urgent need to investigate issues of bilingualism, language maintenance, language shift etc.

Narrowing the focus specifically to language classification, a number of other questions have been highlighted above. The subgrouping of the Kenyah dialects is a large and difficult question. The Kelabitic group of languages, while not as diverse as the Land Dayak group, raises similar questions in terms of its apparent distinctness from all other groups in Borneo.

The position of Bintulu has been another major issue. As noted in section 4.6, Clayre (1971, 1972a) states that Bintulu is closely related to Punan Ba, which is generally included in the list of Kajang dialects. Blust (1974a) notes that Bintulu is lexically closest to the Kanowit dialect of Melanau. Blust, Asmah (1983) and Bibi Aminah (1992) have provided some good introductory material on this language; further detailed studies are needed.

One could extend the list indefinitely, but I will stop here with the plea that both the academic community and those in positions of leadership in the state place a higher priority on promoting efforts to clarify the linguistic situation in Sarawak.

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