

# Lexicography in Brunei Darussalam: An Overview

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## Introduction

The motivation to write this paper was twofold. In the first place, I am involved in the compilation of a dictionary of Kelabit, a language related to Murut, one of the indigenous languages of Brunei. This paper represents an opportunity to report on this project and, at the same time, share my experiences and frustrations with others working on dictionary projects in Asia. Secondly, the publication, in 1991, of dictionaries of two of Brunei's indigenous languages, Brunei Malay and Tutong, has provided me with the stimulus to report on the status of lexicographic work in Brunei Darussalam in the last decade of the twentieth century. These two publications, and the on-going Kelabit dictionary project, represent the first serious venture into lexicographical study in Brunei Darussalam.

The aim of this paper, then, is to provide an overview of the status of lexicography in Brunei. The discussion will cover early lexicographic work on the Brunei language groups, a review of present and on-going dictionary projects, and a look to the future. It is hoped that this paper might have the effect of stimulating a further interest in lexicography in Brunei.

As with other parts of insular South East Asia, Borneo has a rich linguistic heritage, with a large number of little-known languages, many in danger of obsolescence. To date, only a small percentage of these languages have been recorded. Even in a country the size of Brunei (576 sq. km.), with a population of just over a quarter of a million people, at least 12 languages or dialects are spoken.

## Language groups in Brunei

I have discussed at some length elsewhere (1991) the language situation in Brunei and I only propose to give the briefest outline here. The languages of Brunei can be conveniently classified in four groups. Firstly, there are the Malay dialects, of which the two most important are *Bahasa Melayu*, the official language of the country, and Brunei Malay, the language of the dominant group in the country, the *puak Brunei*. A form of Brunei Malay is also used by the majority of population in coastal areas of the country, as well as in areas of the Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak neighbouring Brunei (Collins 1990:xviii). According to Notherfer (1991), Brunei Malay is 84 percent cognate with the standard form of Malay. Other Malay dialects (or sub-dialects, cf. Simanjuntak 1988) include Kedayan, Kampong Ayer, bazaar Malay and royal Malay.

The other languages spoken in Brunei, though constitutionally classified as 'Malay', are separate linguistic entities.\* These languages are Dusun, Bisaya, Murut, Belait and Tutong. They are listed in Table 1 below, along with some closely related languages from the states bordering on Brunei territory.

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\* Notherfer (1991) shows that these languages are all less than 40 per cent cognate with Malay.

**Table 1: An outline classification of the non-Malay languages of Brunei Darussalam\***

Group	Sub-category/ alternative nomenclature	Languages
Ida'an	Dusunic/ Dusun-Bisaya	<b>Dusun, Bisaya</b>
Apo Duat	Sarawak Murut/ Kelabitic-Murut	<b>Murut</b> (Lun Bawang, Kelabit, Tring, Lun Dayeh)
Lower Baram (Rejang-Baram)	North Sarawak/ Baram-Tinjar	<b>Belait, Tutong</b> (Bakong, Kiput, Miri, Lelak, Narum, Dali, etc.)

The languages in parentheses indicate closely related languages found in the neighbouring Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak

Two other Austronesian languages are spoken in Brunei, namely, Iban and Penan. These are regarded as immigrant languages and will not enter into the discussion here. Suffice to say that a number of Iban dictionaries have appeared, the most significant being those of Richards (1981), Scott (1956), and Howell and Bailey (1900). Sutlive (1992) is presently engaged on "A Handy Reference of Iban and English" as well as "A Comprehensive Dictionary of Iban and English". There is a real dearth of lexical material on the Penan, although a number of short wordlists have appeared (Nothofer 1991; Zainuddin 1986; Andreini 1933). The on-going work of Sercombe (in preparation) may go some way to filling this gap.

### Early wordlists

A number of early wordlists constitute the first, albeit rudimentary, lexicons for many of the languages of Brunei. These lists are a legacy of the various travellers, administrators, missionaries and anthropologists who visited the shores of Borneo. It would seem to have been common to record lists of vocabularies of the communities with whom they came into contact. However it should, perhaps, be pointed out that such individuals who visited Brunei and collected wordlists never worked on the languages in the way that Newell (1988) suggests occurred in the Philippines. He reports that missionaries left "an impressive volume of lexicographic material" (Newell 1988:46). Nevertheless, it might be useful at this point to refer briefly to a number of the wordlists of Brunei languages, and to consider their significance for language study and, in particular, for lexicographical work in Brunei today.

As early as 1521 some Brunei Malay words were recorded by Pigafetta, the chronicler of Magellan's voyage to the Far East (Skelton 1969). During the nineteenth century vocabularies of a number of languages spoken in Brunei were collected by figures such as Hose, St John and de Crespigny. These were later reproduced by Roth (1896) in his classic work on *The Natives of Sarawak and British North Borneo*. However, by far the most important source of lexical material from Brunei is to be found in Ray's *The Languages of Borneo* (1913). Ray's collection of up to 236 words for over 100 languages or dialects in Borneo includes a number of wordlists

\* After Blust (1972), Hudson (1978) and Prentice (1970).

collected in and around Brunei. The wordlists of Ray and others have received a certain amount of criticism (see, for example, Blust 1969:90; I.A. Clayre 1970:331; Collins 1990:12). Among the problems which have been singled out are the omission of final /h/, failure to recognise the glottal stop, and the assigning of an English sound value to vowel symbols. While much of the criticism is well-founded, I do not subscribe to the view that these wordlists are worthless. On the contrary, for those interested in language contact and the processes of language shift and obsolescence, the work of these early pioneers in Borneo lexicography constitutes a valuable resource. Ray's vocabulary, for example, is the only remaining record we have for a number of language groups.

### Malay vocabularies and lexicons in Brunei

The standard, official language in Brunei is *Bahasa Melayu*. This is almost identical to *Bahasa Malaysia*, although an increasing amount of Brunei Malay lexis is being absorbed into the language and becoming standardised. Up until the present time, no attempt has been made to compile standard Malay dictionaries in Brunei. Instead, there has been a reliance on dictionaries published in Malaysia (such as Iskandar's [1970] definitive *Kamus Dewan*).

Wordlists of Brunei Malay (the local vernacular), however, have appeared from time to time over the last century or so. These include the wordlist of de Crespigny containing 146 words of the "Brunei Low Dialect" (Roth 1896) and the list of Ray (1913) containing 195 words. The first attempt to produce more than just a wordlist with a single word gloss was the vocabulary of Marshall (1921). A significant feature of this vocabulary of over 500 words is that good comprehensive glosses are provided for each entry. Another important and useful feature of Marshall's vocabulary is that entries which also occur in Sarawak Malay, a neighbouring dialect, are identified.

After the appearance of Marshall's vocabulary of Brunei Malay in 1921, a number of additions were made, notably by MacBryan (1922) and Haynes (1940). In 1932, Wilkinson's classic *A Malay-English Dictionary* was published, and this contained a number of dialect forms, including Brunei Malay. Since that time, and prior to the publication of the *Kamus Bahasa Melayu Brunei* (Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka 1991a), the only significant lexical material to have been published has been the series of Brunei Malay vocabulary that appeared in the journal *Bahana* (Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka 1971-1985) over a period of years. This apparent neglect is remarkable given the extremely significant role of Brunei Malay, not only as the lingua franca of the country, but as an important marker of solidarity among the indigenous groups in the Brunei speech community (Martin 1990a).

The need to produce a comprehensive dictionary of Brunei Malay was recognized at the time the *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka* (the Language and Literature Bureau) was established in 1961. Towards this end, a committee was set up in 1971 to look into the production of such a dictionary. The fruits of their labour were seen in 1991 with the publication of a useful, though modest dictionary of Brunei Malay, the *Kamus Bahasa Melayu Brunei* (Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka 1991a). Among the aims of the dictionary are the documentation of Brunei Malay words in order that the young generation will have access to them, as well as to ensure that the words do not become extinct. It is also seen as a reference work for researchers of the language (Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka 1991a:v).

The *Kamus Bahasa Melayu Brunei* provides approximately 2200 entries, with the glosses given in *Bahasa Melayu*. In view of the fact that Brunei Malay is known to have such a rich

lexis, the number of entries is surprisingly low. It appears that although a number of informants were used to build up this lexicon, there does not appear to have been any systematic checking or examination of the literature, including important Brunei literary works and the rich oral literature of the language. Certainly, a cursory glance at one recent text on Brunei culture (Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka 1988), shows a considerable number of words that have not been incorporated into the dictionary. However, this should not detract from the overall importance of the dictionary.

### Lexicographic work on the Lower Baram languages

The publication last year of a Tutong-Malay dictionary (Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka 1991b) was a major achievement and an important contribution to Borneo lexicography. It is not only the first dictionary of a non-Malay language in Brunei, but is the first published dictionary of a language in the very under-researched, though important, 'Lower Baram' group (see Table 1). It is particularly significant in view of the fact that a number of the languages in this group have already disappeared or are in danger of disappearing. For example, Lelak, the original language of Long Teru, is already extinct. On-going studies suggest that Belait (Martin 1992) and Miri (or Miriek) (Bibi Aminah and Abang Ahmad 1992) will also disappear within the next fifty years. However, the position of Tutong in Brunei remains strong, despite the pivotal role of Brunei Malay in interaction between the Tutong community and their neighbours, and the fact that Brunei Malay has encroached into some of the domains of the Tutong language.

The *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka* should be applauded for its efforts in producing the Tutong dictionary. This dictionary, along with a number of descriptive studies of the Tutong language (for example, Ramlee 1991), means that at least one language from this important group is beginning to get the attention it deserves. The dictionary itself, *Kamus Tutong-Melayu, Melayu-Tutong* (Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka 1991b), provides approximately 3000 root entries for the Tutong language. An interesting feature of the dictionary is that each entry is provided with a phonetic transcription. The *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka* has been fortunate to have had the help of Professor Bernd Nothofer in the compilation of the dictionary. One less than satisfactory aspect of the dictionary, however, is the fact that the Malay glosses are, on the whole, limited to single words.

Before closing this section I should include a brief word about Belait (also called *Meting* or *Lemeting*, (see Martin 1990b), the other language of the 'Lower Baram' group still spoken in Brunei. Whereas the Tutong language is able to hold its own, Belait is not, and there are definite signs that the use of this language is declining. I have outlined the reasons for this elsewhere (Martin 1992), and have also provided a vocabulary of approximately 400 words of Belait (Martin, to appear). Suffice to say here, there is an urgent need to provide both a good descriptive study, as well as a sound lexicon of this disappearing language, a language recognized by Blust as being of importance in supporting or disconfirming "changes that have been proposed in the reconstruction of some proto-Austronesian morphemes" (Blust 1970:4-5).\*

### Lexicographic work on the Dusun-Bisaya languages

The Dusun-Bisaya language complex in Brunei has close associations with the Dusunic languages of Sabah (Prentice 1970). The Sabah branch of the Summer Institute of Linguistics has played a leading role in descriptions and lexicons of this language complex, but very little

\* Blust actually refers to *Lemeting*, which is the language used by the people who call themselves 'Belait' (Martin, to appear).

lexicographic work has been done on this group in Brunei. One exception is the work of Kershaw. As part of her study on the folk literature of the Brunei Dusun, she is collecting lexical material (personal communication). It is to be hoped that some form of Brunei Dusun lexicon will result from the important work of Kershaw.

One potentially important work that deserves mention here is the recent *Daftar Kata Bahasa Malaysia-Dialek Bisaya* (Yussin 1992). The Bisaya dialect recorded is that spoken around Limbang and neighbouring Brunei territory. The volume consists simply of a list of approximately 3800 *Bahasa Malaysia* words with their Bisaya equivalents, and their derivatives. The aim of the *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka* (Sarawak Branch) in publishing this and other wordlists of a number of Sarawak languages is to facilitate the enrichment of the national language. In other words, the aim is to enrich *Bahasa Malaysia*, using terms from the various indigenous languages in the country, rather than using words from foreign languages such as English. This is undoubtedly a worthy aim, and is one that should aid national integration, a point made in the introduction to the volume (1992:ix-x), and by Nik Safiah and Abdul Jalil (to appear) in their discussion on the project "Kata Bahasa Sukuan" or ethnic languages word project. The volume is, however, rather one-dimensional, in that there is not even a Bisaya index. The publishers do, though, point out that this, and other, volumes will provide the impetus for setting up full-fledged dictionaries for the languages and dialects of Sarawak (1992:xviii) in the near future.

#### **Lexicographic work on the Kelabitic-Murut language groups**

The Kelabitic-Murut or Sarawak Murut group of languages is represented by Murut (autonym Lun Bawang), the least studied of any of the linguistic groups in Brunei. Apart from a number of early wordlists of Murut communities living around Brunei Bay (Roth 1896; Moulton 1912:100-104), and the wordlist provided by Nothofer (1991), there is no other published lexicographic material on the Brunei Murut. The paucity of information on this group was brought into focus at a recent seminar on the languages and dialects in Brunei.\* Murut was the only language community not to receive any attention at the seminar.

However, there are a number of lexicons of the various Murut isolects spoken in areas neighbouring Brunei. These include the only published lexical material on Tring (Blust 1984), and two dictionary-cum-phrase books on Lun Dayeh (Labo Pur 1965; Padan 1971). In addition, there is an unpublished manuscript of a Lun Bawang-English vocabulary (Southwell, n.d.), and one Lun Bawang dictionary in preparation (Clayre, personal communication). One other dictionary in preparation, *A Kelabit-English Dictionary*, (Blust, et al), is discussed in more detail below.

#### **The Universiti Brunei Darussalam-University of Hawaii Kelabit-English Dictionary Project.**

From the standpoint of general linguistic typology, Kelabit is an extremely interesting language and one of exceptional importance for comparative studies in Borneo (Blust 1969). Unfortunately, though, the material in print on this language is very limited and, to date, there is no linguistically thorough description of Kelabit available.

A joint project between the University of Hawaii and the Universiti Brunei Darussalam was set up in 1990 with the aim of producing a Kelabit-English dictionary within a period of

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\* The "Seminar Dialek", held in Bandar Seri Begawan, 7-9 October 1991, was organized by the *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka*, Brunei.

four years. The starting point for this dictionary was a 1,500 word vocabulary (Blust, forthcoming), which was checked by Kelabit informants in Brunei, and a 328 page computer print-out containing 55,934 two-syllable shapes which are potential Kelabit morphemes. This print-out was prepared by Dr Robert Hsu at the University of Hawaii, based on information provided by Professor Robert Blust. The phonemes of Kelabit and their possible combinations were used to predict all possible root morphemes which might occur in the language. As approximately 90 percent of Kelabit root morphemes appear to consist of two syllables (Blust, personal communication), the computer generation of hypothetical morphemes longer than two syllables was not deemed to be efficient. The use of computer-assisted hypothetical form elicitation, sometimes referred to as "generative elicitation" (e.g. see Carroll 1966), is especially useful in languages such as Kelabit, where there is an almost complete lack of textual material. At present, the process of identifying actual Kelabit disyllables from the computer-generated lists is in progress. Once identified, native Kelabit speakers and their helpers search for derivatives for each entry as well as providing as comprehensive a gloss as possible.

Of course, the problems are innumerable, and I state them here, as other dictionary projects in Brunei and beyond will, no doubt, face similar difficulties. One problem which was the subject of some discussion at the recent Borneo Research Council Second Biennial Conference in Malaysia\*, was the choice of a database in which to store and organise a lexicon. For the Kelabit dictionary, I started using SHOEBOX\*\*, a database management programme which allows the entry, editing and analysis of lexical data. After a number of setbacks, I transferred to an ordinary word processor, but have since gone back to SHOEBOX! Further problems include the lack of a consistent, standard orthography, the almost complete lack of textual material, and no published description of Kelabit morphology. Although these problems are formidable they are not insurmountable. Dictionary projects on such relatively unresearched languages as Kelabit are exciting in that they not only involve the collection of lexical material but, at the same time, they help to unravel the mysteries of the language.

Given the importance of Kelabit in comparative Austronesian studies, as well as the overall lack of information on the Apo Duat isolects, a comprehensive lexicographic description of the Kelabit language is long overdue. Blust (personal communication) is incorporating a considerable amount of Kelabit lexical material into his *Austronesian Comparative Dictionary* (in preparation), a major project, which should be of great significance to Austronesian language studies. Any new lexical items generated in the Kelabit dictionary project may have an immediate practical use in Blust's comparative dictionary.

## Conclusion

This brief paper has attempted to outline the recent developments in Brunei lexicography and to point the way for the future. It is at once apparent that Brunei's languages, neglected for so long, are at last beginning to get the attention they deserve. The year 1991, with the publication of two dictionaries, can be considered a watershed for Brunei lexicography. Another dictionary project, on Kedayan, an important dialect of Malay with approximately 30,000 speakers, is in hand, and is expected to be published in late 1993 or early 1994. It is to be hoped that these projects will extend to the other, lesser known languages of Brunei Darussalam, sooner, rather than later, in view of the general shift away from the use of the smaller languages.

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\* Held in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, 13-17 July 1992.

\*\*Produced by the Summer Institute of Linguistics.

The *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka* and the Universiti Brunei Darussalam are, and should obviously remain, at the forefront of lexicographic research in Brunei. However, I would like to see much more joint research as, for example, that between the Universiti Brunei Darussalam and the University of Hawaii, on the Kelabit Dictionary Project. I would also like to see much more liaison between institutions in Brunei and those in other parts of ASEAN, not just the universities in the region, but other bodies such as the Summer Institute of Linguistics. I personally feel fortunate to have the expertise of the SIL (Sabah Branch) close at hand.

Looking into the future, it would be satisfying to think that a lexicographic description of each of Brunei's languages and dialects might be available by the beginning of the new century. Questions may be asked about the need for this, especially in the light of my earlier comments that some of Brunei's languages are on the point of disappearing. But I believe that whatever the future holds for these languages, we owe it to future generations to record what is, after all, an important part of their cultural heritage. Aside from this, the lexicon of a language can provide important insights into comparative and historical language research. At the same time, a lexicon can be considered as a storehouse of information to which future generations should have access.

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