CHAPTER 3

THE BIDAYUH LANGUAGE

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is organised into two main themes. Sections 3.2-3.4 focus on the background of the Bidayuh language, intelligibility and phonological variations between various isolects within the Bidayuh speech systems as reported in previous researches. Section 3.5 onwards describes the preservation and development of the Bidayuh language.

3.2 Earlier classification of the Bidayuh people and their language

One of the earliest attempts to place the Bidayuh within the larger linguistic groupings in Borneo was made by Hudson (1978, 1970). The preliminary groupings of the indigenous languages of Sarawak suggested by Hudson is based on identification of diagnostic features shared by members of a category, where each category is discrete when contrasted with other Bornean languages and Borneo groups. Hudson (1978:17-18) in his interim report on "Linguistics relations among Borneo peoples with special reference to Sarawak" places the Bidayuhic isolects of Sarawak in a category together with other Land Dayak groups in the Sambas, Landak, and Sanggau-Sakayam regions of West Kalimantan. Hudson's list of isolects in this category comprises Lara', Lundu, Singhi, Kuap, Beta, Bukar Sadong, Sau, Berang, Karangan, Jagoi, Sentah, Binyadu', Ribun, Pandu, and Sanggau. He concludes that overall the linguistic attributes of the Land Dayak group are fairly distinctive and quite discrete from non-Land Dayak

languages. However, he suggests that "internally there is a fair amount of variation, so that some internal lexicostatistical cognate percentages fall below 50" (Hudson, 1978:17-18; Asmah, 1983; Topping, 1970/1990; Rensch C.R., 2006).

In his preliminary sorting, Hudson (1970) also highlights a misconception in with regard to the Selako of Lundu. He writes that the Selako people (and inevitably their languages) is classified as Land Dayak by previous writers such as Aichner in 1949 and Elam in 1935 although they exhibit none of cultural and linguistic features diagnostic of Sarawak's true Land Dayaks such as Lara', Jagoi, and Bukar Sadong. He notes for examples the absence of the *baruk* (a diagnostic feature of the Land Dayak settlement) during one of his visits to a Selako longhouse at Kampong Pueh, in Lundu district (Also see Schneider, 1994). Instead, he asserts that the language of the Selako people has close linguistic affiliations with languages of other non-Muslim ethnic groups of West and Central Kalimantan (e.g. Madurese, Achinese, and Lampung) and that its origin can be traced from a common ancestor, proto-Malayic.

Hudson (1970, 1978) further contends that the language of the Selako people is *Malayic* rather than *Bidayuhic.* According to Hudson (1978:14) Selako exhibits close linguistic affiliations particularly with the Malay language in various aspects: numerals, lexical cognates, similarity of endings in word-final position, and use of /l/ in place of /r/ in certain morphological environment. Selako numerals are basically Malay in character, with a few exceptions (e.g. /talu/ instead of /tiga/ for 'three'. In contrast, the Bidayuhic isolects generally exhibits distinctive forms for the numerals 'three', 'five', 'eight', 'nine' and 'ten'. In word-final position, in certain lexical items, it has endings similar to Malay i.e. /-an/, /-ang/ and /-ar/ as in the following words: 'batangan' (river), 'binatang' (animal), 'nanang' (to see), 'nangar' (hear). The Selako also has a vowel

system that resembles that of Malay, and lacks the vowel /ə/ which is found in most other isolects of Bidayuh (Hudson, 1970:304-306).

Given that, Hudson (1970:303) has classified Selako in the same category as the Iban and Sebuyau in Western Borneo and coined them *Malayic Dayak.* The term encompasses various isolects that are spoken by non-Muslim Dayaks, which appear to be closely related to Malay than to other Borneo languages. Linguistically, Malayic Dayak isolects share various diagnostic features which contrast them with Bidayuhic isolects. Hudson (1970:305) provides the following examples in support of this argument.

Table 3.1: Lexical contrast between Malayic Dayak and Land Dayak

Lexical items	**Malayic Dayak**	**Land Dayak**
Blood	darah, dahah	Daya', doya, doyo'
To die	mati, mati'; mampus; parai	Kabis, kabəs, kobos, kobe'
Year	thaun, taun, tahutn, tahatn, tahut, tawun	Sawa', sowa, sowa', sowo, sowo'
To sleep	tidur; tindo', tidu', tindok; lona', nona'	Bus, bus, bo'os, bu'əs, biis, bii'

Another example of contrast described by Hudson is the use of /l/ in Malayic Dayak isolects which corresponds to /r/ in Land Dayak groups as illustrated below:

Table 3.2: Phonemic contrast of /l/ and /r/ in Malayic Dayak and Land Dayak languages

Lexical items	**Malayic Dayak**	**Land Dayak**
Bone	tulang, tulakn	turang, turakn, tuhang
Skin	kulit	kurit, kuret, kuhe'
Sky	langit	rangit, ronyit, ronyot, honye'

Likewise, Topping (1990:255) reports that mutual intelligibility between Selako and other Bidayuhic isolects of Sarawak is equally low, i.e. cognates between Selako with Bidayuh isolects spoken in Bau or Kuching area is only 26%, and cognates between Selako with Serian Area 30%. Although it shares many similarities with Malay, nevertheless Selako (as spoken in Kampong Pueh, Lundu District) possesses some linguistic features typical of the Bidayuhic isolects, i.e. vowel lengthening and nasalisation, which is not found in standard Malay.

Before concluding this sub-section, it is worth noting that the dichotomy between language and dialect is not 'clear-cut' in many cases involving languages of indigenous groups in Sarawak (or Borneo). The lack of a body of literature on linguistic description of indigenous groups makes it impossible to do a comparative study of linguistic attributes of various languages for researchers to make legitimate linguistic classification. For that reason, Hudson (1970:317) prefers the term, "isolect" in his discussion on Borneo languages. An isolect is a "named language isolate of undefined scope which is connotationally neutral as to whether the unit so identified is, technically speaking, a separate language or the dialect of a language" (Hudson, 1970: 317). According to Hudson (1978:24), "whether a particular isolect is a language or a dialect in the technical sense can be determined only by comparison with and in reference to one or more other isolects". In this study, the term is also used in this sense.

3.3 The Bidayuh language family

In this sub-section, the major "dialect boundaries" proposed by Rensch, C.R. (2006) is discussed. Earlier on, there is one major publication on the subject by Topping (1990). There are some ambiguities in relation to major groupings by Topping which

need further clarification. Nevertheless, some statistics on cognates between various dialects of Bidayuh are relevant as they represent mutual intelligibility within and across dialect boundaries.

3.3.1 Bidayuh dialect groupings and related languages

Rensch, C.R. (2006:223) suggests "four clusters of rather similar varieties", which are identified as (i) the Western group - Singai-Bratak and other Jagoi dialects (ii) Central group - Biatah-Benuk-Pinyawa'-Anah Rais and other Penrissen and Padawan dialects (iii) Sembaan group - Tringgus Raya-Tringgus Bireng and Sembaan, and (iv) Eastern group - Bukar-Tebakang and other Sadong dialects. Rara, a variety which is spoken in Lundu District (e.g. Kendaie and Pasir Ilir) is grouped together with other Bakati' isolects, i.e. Sara/Riok, Kendayan, and Bekati', which are spoken across the border in West Kalimantan.

This classification is in tandem with Asmah's (1983) earlier classification of the group, but with slight variation. Asmah (1983:444) describes the Bidayuh speech systems as "heterogeneous but very closely related languages" consisting of languages of four major groups: Bukar-Sadong Biatah, Jagoi and Lara. Rensch's classification has excluded Lara from the Bidayuhic group, and instead this isolect is grouped together with other isolects within the Bakati' group on the basis of comparison of cognate percentages (see sub-section 3.2.2 below). Within the larger Proto Land Dayak group, there are three groups of languages that are closely affiliated to each other: Bidayuh, Bakati' and Southern Land Dayak. (See Appendix A).

The Western group (Jagoi) covers the area immediately south-west of Kuching city, i.e. Bau district and part of Lundu district. The Central group (Biatah), which constitutes sub-dialects spoken in Upper-Lower Padawan and Penrissen is in Kuching district, immediately south of Kuching city. The Eastern group (Bukar-Sadong) in the Serian district encompasses the area, 30-80 km south-east of Kuching city. Sembaan, Tringgus Raya and Tringgus Bireng of the Sembaan group are sub-dialects located in Bau district. The Tringgus village is situated near the border with Indonesia. Rara' is spoken by the Bidayuh in Lundu district, 50-60 km west of Kuching city. (Tan, et.al., 2002:16).

3.3.2 Cognates and mutual intelligibility between isolects of Bidayuh

Rensch's basis for dialect groupings is derived from cognate percentages recorded from 25 sub-dialects of Bidayuh. Overall, the mutual intelligibility between Singai-Jagoi and Biatah are considerably closer to each other (69.7%) than Singai-Jagoi with Bukar Sadong (48.9%) or Biatah with Bukar Sadong (50.4%). Each dialect cluster has its own sub-dialects, where mutual intelligibility between sub-dialects recorded is high, ranging from 76.7% -79.6%. The Western, Central and Sembaan groups of clusters constitute a larger western cluster on the basis of having cognate percentages between pairs of clusters ranging between 68-69.7%. Cognate percentages of Bukar (Eastern group) with three representatives of the larger western cluster range between 48.9% - 50.4%. The Sembaan group is treated as a separate cluster from the Central group (Biatah-Penrissen group) because the "cognate percentages between Biatah [a dialect of the Central group] and Tringgus-Raya [representative of Sembaan group] are about nine percentage points lower than those between Biatah and the Penrissen-Padawan dialects" (Rensch, C.R., 2006:224). Consequently, Biatah and

Penrissen-Padawan dialects are subsumed under the category, 'Central group', separated from Tringgus-Raya, which represents the Sembaan cluster. Rensch's study also indicates that *Pinyawa'* (spoken in Lower Padawan area) is lexically much closer to Biatah (79.6%) than it is to Bukar (53.6%) although the sub-dialect has some lexical similarities with the latter (e.g. Pinyawa' dialect *tibu:?*, Bukar dialect *tibu?* 'body'; Pinyawa' dialect *sisuN* , Bukar dialect *sison*, 'milk'). Cognate percentages between Jagoi, Biatah and Bukar with Rara are slightly lower i.e. between 46.3% - 49.5%; hence, establishing Rara as an isolect of Bakati', excluding it from the rest of the Bidayuic clusters. Comparison of diagnostic features of Bidayuhic clusters with Bakati' also suggests that they are likely to be cousins rather than sisters (Rensch, C.R., 2006:226).

Rensch's findings confirm Topping's (1990) general conclusion on mutual intelligibility between regional dialects of Bidayuh. Topping's cognate percentages on the major "dialect clusters" are summarised in the following table:

Table 3.3: The cognate percentages between major dialect clusters in the Bidayuhic sub-family (summarised from MAP 1 in Toppings, 1990:255)

Major dialect areas	**Bau**	**Kuching**	**Serian**
Bau (Jagoi)	-	66%	53%
Kuching (Biatah)	66%	-	51%
Serian (Bukar-Sadong)	53%	51%	-

Note: Bau (Kpg. Senggi), Kuching (Kpg. Kuap), Serian (Kpg. Tapuh)

Though cognate percentages between sub-dialects are significantly higher than between clusters, there is considerable variation within a cluster. Within the Kuching Dialect Area, for instance, cognate percentage between Kampong Kuap (10th mile) and Kampong Ma'ang (24th mile) is much lower (78%) in comparison to cognate percentage

between two villages i.e. Kampong Kuap (10th mile) and Kampong Siburan (17th mile), which are nearer to each other, and recorded cognates of 90% (See also MAP 3, 5, 6 and 7 for illustration of cognate percentages between and across dialect boundaries in Topping, 1990: 257-261). Apparently, remoteness and inaccessibility account for variations between the sub-dialects in the olden days.

3.3.3 Phonological variation between isolects of Bidayuh

There is a great deal of variation in the realisation of the phonemes between isolects of Bidayuh, both within the vowel and the consonant systems (c.f. Rensch, C.R. 2006:38-39). The various dialects of Bidayuh vary considerably in the presence and absence of certain phonemes, and in the realisation of the phonemes in different phonological environments. Some sounds may occur distinctively as phonemes in one dialect, and yet do not contrast in meaning in others.

3.4 Earlier development of the Bidayuh language

The Christian missionaries were responsible for the use of the Bidayuh language in writing since the time of the White Rajah. Preaching and writing of Christian literature was done in the regional dialects, namely Bau-Jagoi, Biatah and Bukar-Sadong. However, there was no common orthography for this purpose. Each of these churches employed different spelling systems for writing in these dialects as they were working independently in various villages (Jonas Noeb & Robert Sulis Ridu, 2006). Until today, the various churches continue to produce and revise materials for the dissemination of the Christians faith.

The missionaries also introduce school to the Bidayuh villages. They started primary schools in several Bidayuh villages. The first one was established in Quop by Walter Chalmers in 1858. They also developed primer, alphabet books and story books for this purpose, though there are not many (See Jonas Noeb & Robert Sulis Ridu, 2006:14 for details). More schools were built during the British occupation including a number of secondary schools in the 1950's. In fact, the dialects of Biatah in the Kuching-Padawan district and Bukar-Sadong in the Serian District were used as the medium of instruction in primary education in these schools until the formation of Malaysia in 1963 (Jonas Noeb & Robert Sulis Ridu, 2006).

Apart from that, the missionaries also learned the language to facilitate their religious activities. Indeed, collecting wordlists of Bidayuh dialects also caught their attention. Much of the information in the following sub-sections, 3.4.1 and 3.4.2 is summarised from Jonas Noeb & Robert Sulis Ridu (2006: 10-20)

3.4.1 Wordlists

A reference wordlist first ever compiled in those days was printed in 1861 and contains 3000 entries in English, Malay and Biatah, collected by Rev. William Chambers. *An English-Sarawak Land Dayak* (Singai dialect) wordlist compiled by Rev. Fr. A. Reijffert was published in 1956, 40 years after his death. Other wordlists produced are: Biatah wordlist (Rev. F. W. Abe), Rara, Salako, and Dayak Lundu wordlist (Rev. William Gomez) and Wordlists of the Land Dayaks in Upper Sarawak, Penrissen and Tebakang dialects (Rev. P. Aicher).

3.4.2 Christian materials

To assist them in their preaching, the Anglican, Catholic and Seventh Day Adventist missionaries were very active producing Christian materials in the language comprehensible to the Bidayuh. The various churches working independently in Bidayuh areas translated lectionaries (not the full bible) and wrote prayer books in various regional dialects of Bidayuh. Rev. Fr. Peter H. H. Howe, an Anglican priest was one prominent priest during that time. Among his major works is *Kitab Payu Bauh*, a translated version of the New Testament in Biatah, which was published in 1963. The latest addition to this contribution is the translation of the *New Testament* (Simanyah Bauh) into the Biatah dialect by Anglican priest Rev. Fr. Gregory Chambers, published in 2003. The *Biatah Old Testamen*t, also translated by Fr. Gregory is now nearing completion. Liturgy and hymns are being translated, and new songs are composed into Salako, Rara and Tringgus by the Roman Catholic churches in Bau and Lundu. The Catholics are also translating the Bible for use in the Bau and Bukar Sadong areas. A Catholic newsletter in Sadong is also regularly published once in every three months.

3.5 Publication of reading materials in the Bidayuh language

To date, not much material has been produced in the Bidayuh dialects. Until recently, the Bidayuh Language Development Project (BLDP) has included the production of reading materials as one of its priorities (see section 3.6.3). A handful of books were published in various regional dialects by Borneo Literature Bureau (BLB). Most of these are short stories extracted from the Bible, and texts on personal hygiene and health (e.g. flies and pregnancy). Initially, the core business of BLB was to encourage local authorship, and to produce materials suitable to meet local needs and

arrange for their publication. However, not much literature in Bidayuh was produced by BLB compared to Iban. A list of BLB publications in various Bidayuh dialects from 1961-1976 is included. (Refer to Appendix B)

In 1970, BLB was terminated in favour of the establishment of Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Malaysia (Institute of Language and Literature, Malaysia) whose main task involves the development and propagation of the Malay language as a symbol of national unity, and as an official language to be used in governmental transactions, schools and the public sector. Since the takeover, publication in the Bidayuh language ceased. Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka's main focus drifted to producing reading and teaching materials in Malay.

3.6 More recent development on the Bidayuh language

Since the colonial period until recently, there has been no organised effort to develop the Bidayuh language. Literary works and publications on Bidayuh culture, customs and traditions, and some linguistic description of various dialects have been produced and compiled. Much of it is operationalised through the Council for Customs and Traditions of Sarawak (*Majlis Adat Istiadat, Sarawak*). The council is a government body responsible for preserving the customs and traditions of various indigenous groups in Sarawak. This council has played an important role in sustaining the indigenous languages, including Bidayuh. Linguistic descriptions of the Bidayuh dialects and writings on the Bidayuh culture, customs and traditions can also be found in journals published by *Borneo Research Council*, and in much earlier publications, such as the *Sarawak Muzeum Journal*, *Borneo Literature Bureau,* and *Sarawak Gazette*.

A grammatical description of dialects of Bau-Jagoi (Kampong Bunan, Serian) and Biatah (Kampong Quop, Penrissen) has been attempted by Asmah (1983). Other linguists who have published as cited by Asmah include Christopher Court (1970) on the Bidayuh dialect spoken in Mentu Tapak, and N.C. Scott on the variety spoken in Kampong Taii (Bukar Sadong dialect). On the whole, there is a lack of a body of literature on the Bidayuh people as well as their languages. The Bidayuh Language Development Project (BLDP) was established partly to remedy this situation.

3.6.1 Preservation of Bidayuh customary law and oral traditions

The Council for Customs and Traditions Sarawak has contributed to the preservation of the Bidayuh language and this involves the collection, transcription and translation of various oral traditions. The Council which was established since 1974 published *Adat Bidayuh 1994* (Bidayuh Customary Law 1994) in English and then translated it into the regional dialects. Apart from that, the Council also collaborated with University of Malaysia Sarawak to produce *Bidayuh Dundan* (Bidayuh Folktales) in Singgai, Biatah, Bukar and English in 2001. Another five titles of Bidayuh folktales were published in the Bukar Sadung dialect in 2004. In 1992, under the *Oral Traditions Project*, organised by the Council for Social Development, 217 Bidayuh oral traditions were recorded in various dialects of Bidayuh (Jonas Noeb & Robert Sulis Ridu, 2006).

3.6.2 The use of the Bidayuh language in the media

Radio Television Malaysia (RTM) Sarawak, runs a radio service in Bidayuh in three regional dialects since 1954. It broadcasts for nine hours a day. News is aired in

the Biatah, Bau-Jagoi and Bukar Sadong dialects. Recordings of Bidayuh songs have been active since 1960's and a song request programme called *lagu pimite* is run by this radio station. Cassettes and VCDs of Bidayuh songs are easily available and sell well in regional towns such as Serian. Apparently, some Bidayuh songs are also heard beyond Bidayuh villages, and are popularised in several districts. These developments naturally support maintenance of the mother tongue.

3.6.3 Bidayuh Language Development Project (BLDP)

Before BLDP was inaugurated, there was no concrete plan to develop the Bidayuh language. In the year 2000, the Research and Development for Singgai (Redeems) decided to obtain help from researchers of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) to assist in the development of the Bidayuh language. BDLP was initiated partly by the need to unify the various sub-groups of Bidayuh. Bidayuh leaders envisage a unified racial group through the promulgation of a common language. BLDP thus reflects part of the culture envisaging the "new" Bidayuh with the objective to increase the vitality of the Bidayuh language. The main objectives of BLDP are: (a) to develop a common spelling system for all dialects of Bidayuh (b) to expand the body of literature written in Bidayuh (c) to produce dictionaries of various dialects and collect lexical items that may be forgotten (d) to develop a curriculum and resources necessary for the teaching and learning of Bidayuh, and (e) to expand the body of literature written in Bidayuh.

3.6.3.1 Activities conducted by BLDP

Work on the BLDP has begun since January 2001. At the time of writing this

thesis, various groups are attempting at a description of the grammar of each regional dialect, and developing dictionaries and reading materials in these dialects. A series of writers' workshops have been conducted since May 2002, training teachers and pensioners to produce reading materials. A seminar on curriculum development which materialised on 4th February 2003 discussed the mechanism for the development of Bidayuh primers and reading materials for various ages. BLDP has also conducted dictionary compiling workshops which started in the year 2003.

3.6.3.2 Linguistic research and orthography

In the first year of the BLDP project, SIL linguists focused on establishing the groundwork for the description of the language. The outcome is a published book on phonological and partly morphological descriptions of the language which form the basis for the reconstruction of the Bidayuh language family and related languages. A pioneering attempt at grammatical descriptions of the Bau-Jagoi group is underway. A unified Bidayuh orthography (which excludes Selako and Rara) was proposed in November 2001, and finalised in August 2003.

3.6.3.3 Dictionaries

Prior to BLDP, only one major dictionary had ever been produced, i.e. *The Bidayuh-English Dictionary*, published in 1988, which was compiled by William Nais, and contained 680 pages of Biatah words with English definitions. Since then, work on dictionaries of various regional dialects (Bukar Sadong, Bau-Jagoi, Rara and Selako) have also started after a unified Bidayuh orthography was finalised. Dictionary project

is an on-going one, and now and then workshops are conducted to train representatives from various districts to assist in compiling dictionaries.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter describes the extent of the heterogeneity of the Bidayuh language. It has reviewed available linguistic works on the major linguistic groupings in the Bidayuh speech systems. Unintelligibility between isolects of Bidayuh can be a major hindrance to communication in the mother tongue. This chapter has shown the extent of mutual intelligibility between various isolects of Bidayuh.