THE SULUK (TAUSUG) LANGUAGE

David C. Moody

0. INTRODUCTION

The origins of the Suluk (Tausug) people can be traced to the north-east coast of Mindanao in the Philippines, the result of an outward expansion from the Bisayan Islands about 1,500 years ago. About 1200 A.D. there was a movement of Suluk-speaking people into the Sulu Archipelago via contact with Sama-Bajau traders. By the early 16th century, the Suluk people had established themselves and their language in Sulu, and increased their influence during the Malay-patterned sultanate of the 16th and 17th centuries. Suluk dominance in the archipelago has continued since that time (Pallesen 1977:363-375).[1]

The Suluk people of Sabah inhabit communities located in the east coast districts of Labuk-Sugut, Lahad Datu, Sandakan, Semporna and Tawau (Figure 1) as well as in several west coast communities. Though many of these people have been at home in Sabah their whole lives, as have generations of their ancestors, most have immigrated more recently. The 1960 census listed more than 10,000 locally-born "Sulu" people living in Sabah, a figure which remained stable through the 1970 census-taking.[2] By contrast there are now over 100,000 Suluk people living in Sabah's south-east districts alone. A district official indicated that within the last ten years the Suluk population of Tawau District had grown to about 40,000 while that of Semporna District had increased to 70,000.[3]

The term Suluk has come into official use in Sabah to designate these immigrants from the Sulu Archipelago. The people speaking the same language in the Sulu Archipelago refer to themselves as "Tausug", which means *men of the current.*[4] Although Tausug remains the preferred self-referent, they are adapting to the use of the term Suluk. The practice in this paper will be to use the term Suluk generally, qualifying it parenthetically with the term Tausug when the referent's locus of habitation is in the Philippines, i.e. Suluk (Tausug). The term Suluk is sometimes spelled Sooloo, or Sulu. The term Tausug may also be seen as Tau Sug or Taosug (Dunn 1980).

The Suluk language of Sabah has received limited attention in the linguistic literature. A wordlist collected by Anson Cowie was published in 1880.[5] More recently, Asmah Haji Omar and M.B. Hardaker have individually authored sketches of Suluk phonology and grammar, the latter also including a compilation of phrases. In a separate article, Hardaker presented an introductory Suluk vocabulary.

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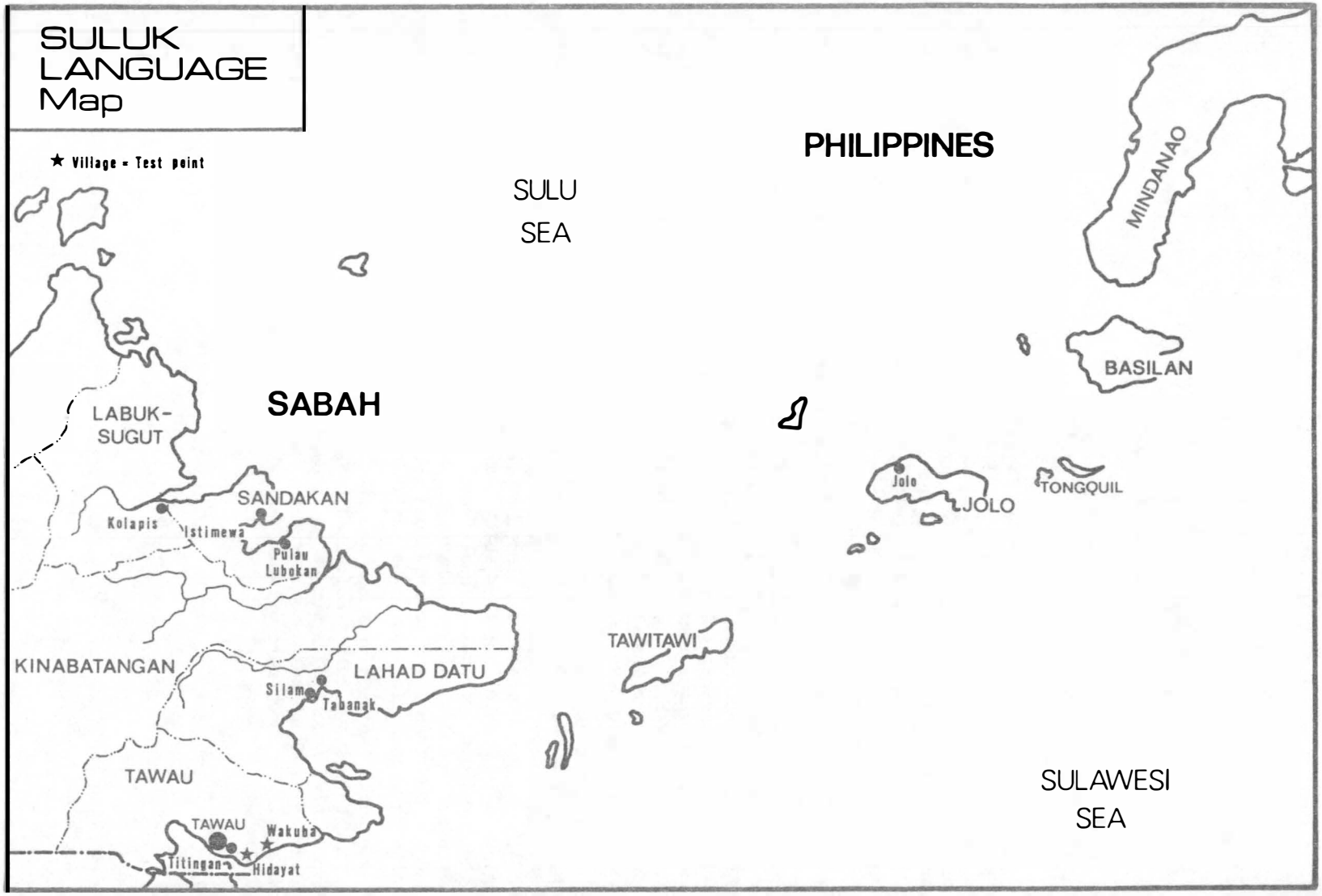

Figure 1: Suluk language map

More research has been done on the Suluk (Tausug) language in the Philippines. Seymour and Lois Ashley have produced articles pertaining to phonology, orthography, verbal cases, and sentence types. Along with Irene Hassan and Nurhadan Halud they have also compiled a Tausug-English dictionary of about 3,500 entries. A four-language phrase book which includes Suluk (Tausug) has also been published for visitors to Zamboanga City, Sulu Province. Literacy related materials including primers, readers and teaching guides by various authors have been published by the Summer Institute of Linguistics of the Philippines. A. Kemp Pallesen's doctoral dissertation is a very satisfying historico-comparative study of Suluk (Tausug) and Sama-Bajau languages in which he establishes evidence for the linguistic convergence between them and draws conclusions pertaining to the history and nature of the contact between the two cultures.

1. LEXICOSTATISTICAL CLASSIFICATION

Suluk (Tausug) is classified as a member of the East Mindanao subgroup of the Central Philippine languages, a descendant of a Southern Bisayan language and most closely related to the Butuanun language from which it separated some 900 years ago (Pallesen 1977:23,333f). Within Sabah Smith (in this volume) has classified Suluk as a language singularly representing one of the nine stock subgroupings of the North-western Austronesian superstock.

The Suluk data collected for lexicostatistical comparison in the present study were gathered from seven communities in Sabah with an eighth wordlist (Jolo) being supplied from the Philippine Branch of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (Figure 1). In Smith's classification, the eight lists represent a single language.

The percentage of shared cognate relations (PSC) for the eight lists are displayed in Figure 2. The range for all eight lists is 77-92 PSC, with each sample relating at 87 PSC with at least one other sample of the group. The four lists from Tabanak LD, Pulau Lubokan SN, Titingan TU, and Silam LD relate to each other in the range 86-92 PSC and thus represent a single core dialect, 85 PSC being Smith's single dialect threshold. The relations between the eight speech samples may be pictured as a dialect chain as in Figure 3. Wordlists 'linked' closest to each other in the 'chain' are most closely related according to cognate percentages. Conversely, the end 'links' are most distantly related lexically. Note that Kolapis LS is obliquely related to the rest of the chain. Its closely relation is 87 PSC with Pulau Lubokan SN of the core 'link', while relating to other Suluk wordlists in the range 79-84 PSC.

For the seven wordlists representative of Sabah Suluk the lexical relations are in the range 82-92 PSC, and mutual intelligibility can be predicted to exist among them. Though the Suluk (Tausug) sample from Jolo PHL is considered as representing the same language, mutual intelligibility would not be predicted between it and the Suluk as spoken in Istimewa SN and Kolapis LS with which it shares relations of below 80 PSC.

The cognate relations between the representatives of Sabah Suluk would make dialect intelligibility testing superfluous according to the survey guidelines. Nevertheless testing was desired in order to confirm the one-language hypothesis for representatives of the language geographically dispersed in Sabah, as well as to ascertain the degree of intelligibility between Sabah Suluk and representatives of other Philippine languages as they are spoken in Sabah.[6]

SK (Istimewa SN)							
88	SK (Tabanak LD)						
89	91	SK (Pulau Lubokan SN)					
87	89	92	SK (Titingan TU)				
84	86	91	88	SK (Silam LD)			
82	84	89	89	86	SK (Semporna SA)		
82	83	87	84	84	82	SK (Kolapis LS)	
77	81	84	84	82	87	79	TG (Jolo PHL)

Figure 2: PSC relations between Suluk (SK) and Tausug (TG) wordlists

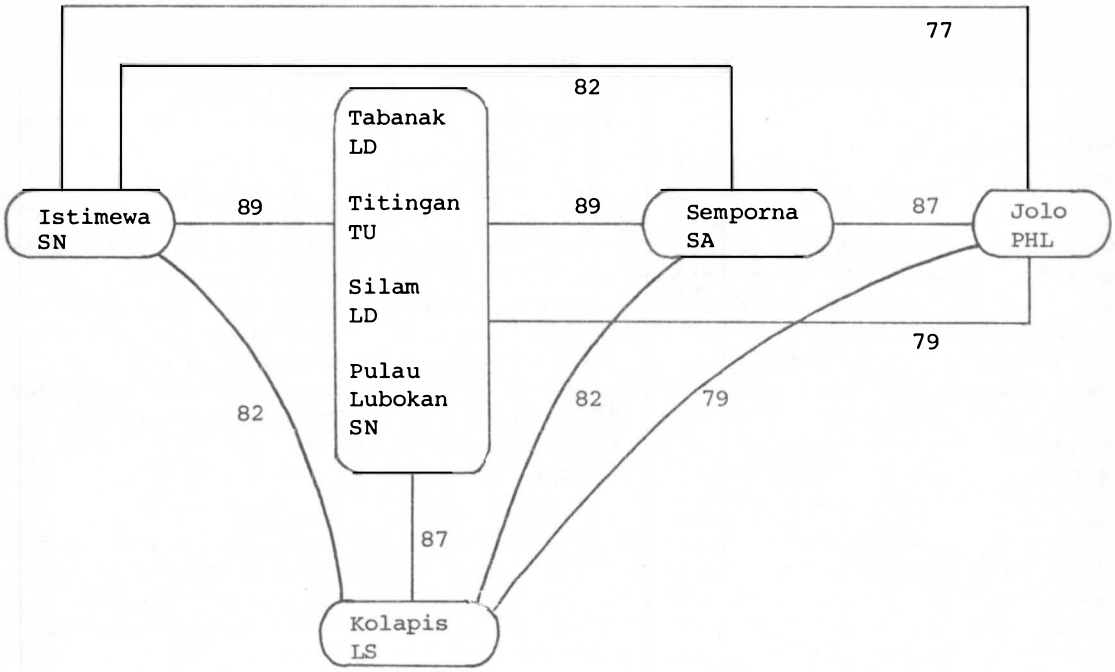

Figure 3: Lexical relations between eight Suluk (Tausug) wordlists presented as a dialect chain

2. TESTING PROCEDURE

Testing was subsequently accomplished in two Suluk villages, both located in Tawau District. The first village was Wakuba TU (Mengkuba in the vernacular) which was established more than 50 years ago. The second was Hidayat TU, a new housing project for the resettlement of Philippine immigrants from the village of Titingan TU in the city of Tawau. Its residents for the most part have lived in Sabah less than ten years, a condition which normally would have prevented its inclusion as a test point. It was included nevertheless because it was desirable to have a second Suluk test point and because it was considered that the comparison between short-term and long-term Suluk residents in Sabah might prove interesting.

As reference tapes had not been previously collected at either test point, the Suluk story recorded at Titingan TU, geographically close to both test points, was used as the hometown tape for both testing situations. The story from Kolapis LS was chosen as a second example of Sabah Suluk, representing also the most geographically distant of the other in-state samples. Two Sama-Bajau stories were included in the test set. One was a Bajau Banaran story which had also been recorded at Titingan TU. The Bajau Banaran language is spoken primarily in the smaller islands to the south of Tawitawi Island's west end. The wordlist representing the same language showed the highest overall cognate relations (53-57 PSC) of any Sabah Sama-Bajau language with Sabah Suluk wordlists. The second was a story recorded in Look PHL, a community in the Tongquil Island group of north-east Sulu Province and representing Sama (or Bajau) Balangingi, a dialect which has had prolonged contact with the Suluk (Tausug) language in the Philippines. Its relationship with the Jolo PHL wordlist was 62 PSC.[7]

3. TEST RESULTS

In both Wakuba TU and Hidayat TU village leaders assembled a complete corpus of ten test subjects. The results of the intelligibility testing are presented in Figure 4. Suluk comprehension of the two Suluk stories is in the range 91-100%, well within the range of single dialect intelligibility. There is significantly less intelligibility of the Sama-Bajau stories, the average scores ranging between 22-62%.

The corpora were not completely homogeneous with respect to the long-term versus short-term residency distinctions. Figure 5 reflects this distinction better, using a period of ten years residency as the criterion for dividing all test subjects into the two groups. For both intelligibility of the Suluk stories and intelligibility of the Sama-Bajau stories the range of average scores is broadened by the regrouping. Short-term residents averaged 89% on the Kolapis LS story, decreasing the lower bound for Suluk intelligibility of Suluk. The new range of 89-100%, while indicating perhaps greater dialect diversity, is still well within the range of single language intelligibility.

REFERENCE TAPE / TEST POINT	SULUK		SAMA-BAJAU	
	Titingan TU	Kolapis LS	Titingan TU -Banaran	Look PHL -Balangingi
Hidayat TU	95 (--)	91 (84)	62 (57)	42 (51)
Wakuba TU	100 (--)	93 (84)	52 (57)	22 (51)

Figure 4: Results of intelligibility testing in two Suluk communities. (The PSC relations indicated (in parentheses) are those for villages represented by 'reference tape' and Titingan TU (Suluk).)

REFERENCE TAPE / TEST POINT	SULUK		SAMA-BAJAU	
	Titingan TU	Kolapis LS	Titingan TU -Banaran	Look PHL -Balangingi
Suluks resident less than ten years	95 6-10 10	89 5½-10 9½	65 2½-8½ 7½	47 2-8 5
Suluks resident more than ten years	100 10 10	94 6-10 10	48 1-8 5½	16 0-4 2

Figure 5: Dialect intelligibility testing results for Suluk speakers grouped according to length of residency in Sabah. (The top score in each box is the average score (cited as a percentage) for all subjects in the group. Below each average score the range of individual scores and the median score (out of 10) are given.)

The new range for Suluk intelligibility of Sama-Bajau is 16-65%. Short-term residents averaged 17% better on the Bajau Banaran story and 31% better on the Sama-Balangingi story. The differences reflect in general the greater contact and bilingualism between the Suluk (Tausug) and Sama-Bajau languages in the Philippines than here in Sabah, though contact in some Sabah communities (e.g. Titingan TU) is not insignificant. The significantly lower scores on the Sama-Balangingi story reflect its more distant geographical locus from Sabah and consequently less frequent contact with Sabah Suluk speakers. Among the nine subjects grouped as long-term residents all but one, a 14 year old girl, lived in Wakuba TU. Although Wakuba TU has a mixed population, its non-Suluk residents are also not Sama-Bajau. Its Suluk residents therefore have much less contact with speakers of Sama-Bajau languages than do the Suluk residents of Hidayat TU who are outnumbered by Sama-Bajau speakers, as was the case in Titingan TU from where they had recently moved. The higher scores for both Hidayat TU and short-term subjects can reasonably be attributed to language learning.

It is yet of interest to determine the relation between Sabah Suluk and Suluk (Tausug) as spoken in its primary centres of the Sulu Archipelago. Further testing between long-term Sabah Suluk residents and Suluk (Tausug) communities of the Philippines is desired in order to establish the current degree of intelligibility between them.

4. NATIONAL LANGUAGE INTELLIGIBILITY

The results of testing Suluk comprehension of the Bahasa Malaysia test tape are displayed in Figure 6. Subjects in Hidayat TU received an average score of only 41% compared with the 69% scored by subjects in Wakuba TU. Again, more insight is gained by regrouping the scores of subjects. If the subjects are grouped according to the length of residency criterion as shown in Figure 7, the difference in the scores is widened. Subjects who have resided in Sabah for less than ten years averaged only 29% comprehension of the national language story. Long-term residents, on the other hand, averaged 86% comprehension.

	AVG. SCORE	SEX M/F	AGE		EDUCATION		
			AVG.	RANGE	ED.	A.E.R.	A.E.S.
Hidayat TU	41	5/5	40	14-65	8	8	7
Wakuba TU	69	5/5	34	16-60	6	8	5

Figure 6: Comprehension of the national language tape in two Suluk villages with sociological data. (RANGE indicates youngest and oldest test subject. EDUCATION figures indicate the number of subjects who had received some formal education (ED.), the average number of years of education those subjects had received (A.E.R.), and the average number of years of education for all subjects in the corpus (A.E.S.).)

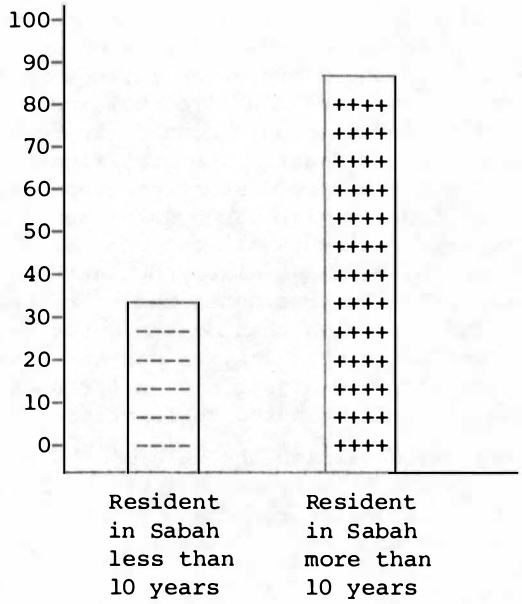

Figure 7: Comprehension of national language in Suluk villages in relation to length of residence in Sabah

A similar comparison can be made if the scores are grouped according to where subjects had received their education. Only the scores of subjects who had received some formal education are considered. This comparison is illustrated in Figure 8. Subjects educated in the Philippines scored 40% as a group, while subjects educated in Sabah scored 100% on the national language story. In both cases the factor of education significantly elevated the scores. Philippine-educated subjects averaged 8.5 years of education per subject and were 83% of the subjects who resided in the Philippines during their school-age years. Sabah-educated subjects averaged 6.3 years of education per subject and were 50% of the subjects who resided in Sabah during school-age years.

5. CONCLUSION

The results of dialect intelligibility testing in the Suluk villages of Hidayat TU and Wakuba TU confirm the lexicostatistical classification proposed by Smith. Two Sabah Suluk speech samples were understood by both long-term and short-term Suluk residents at levels well within the bound of single language intelligibility. Suluk intelligibility of Sama-Bajau speech samples was significantly less, particularly by long-term Suluk residents in Sabah who have been isolated from Sama-Bajau populations.

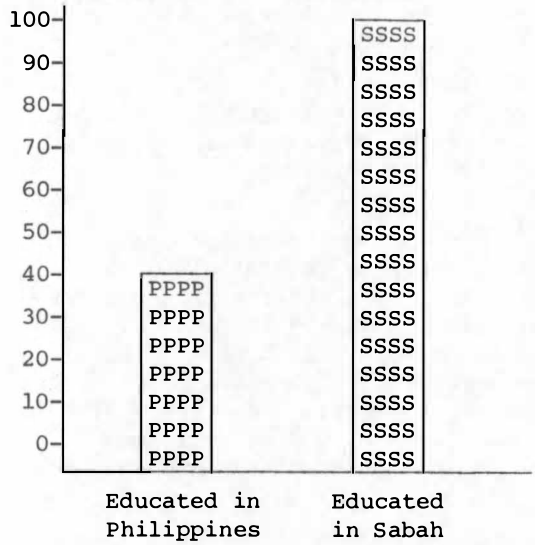

Figure 8: Comprehension of national language in Suluk villages for subjects with formal education in relation to the country in which they had been educated

NOTES

1. Pallesen's reconstruction of Suluk (Tausug) history differs from other popular versions which, he says, indicate the Suluk (Tausug) people predate the Sama-Bajau peoples in the Sulu Archipelago, the latter having supposedly come from Johore on the Malay peninsula. Pallesen's conclusions are based on reconstructions of the respective Suluk (Tausug) and Sama-Bajau parent languages and the tracing of subsequent borrowings between the daughter languages. He is primarily concerned with the nature of linguistic convergence between the Suluk (Tausug) language and the Sama-Bajau language group (Pallesen 1977:1).

2. The 1960 census figure is taken from Hardaker (1963:138 editor's note). The 1970 Sabah census listed 10,907 Suluk within the state.

3. This reported growth of the Suluk people in Sabah is consistent with the situation recorded for the Philippines. Pallesen (1977:11) notes that the Suluk (Tausug) population in the Philippines was about 325,000 in 1972, of whom 190,000 lived on Jolo Island. Since that time, however, the population of the island has been considerably decreased due to a forced dispersion of its residents. It is reasonable that many have come to Sabah where Suluk communities already existed, and where there would be relief from the pressures which burdened them in the Philippines. The Suluk (Tausug) language has broader influence and use throughout the Sulu Archipelago as a trade language.

4. For further notes on the etymology of the terms "Suluk" and "Tausug", see Mohring (1967:243) and Kiefer (1968:438).

5. Mr Cowie collected the wordlist for W.H. Treacher. F.A. Swettenham brought this and other wordlists together for his article published in 1880 by the *Journal of Straits Branch Royal Asiatic Society*. Swettenham's lists were reproduced in *The natives of Sarawak and British North Borneo* by H. Ling Roth, published in 1896 in London.

6. The relationship between Sama-Bajau languages and Suluk has been classified by Smith (in this volume) as that of different linguistic stocks, sharing membership in the North-western Austronesian superstock. This classification is confirmed by Pallesen's data (1977:151). Pallesen states that the two stocks have been in contact for about 700 years, during which convergence between them has occurred. This convergence is still on-going. Bilingualism is common between speakers of the two stocks, occurring in both directions, due to Suluk (Tausug) dominance throughout the archipelago and Sama-Bajau majorities in some areas of the archipelago (Pallesen 1977:23,40).

7. Both the wordlist and tape-recorded story from Look, Tongquil PHL, were provided by the Philippine Branch of the Summer Institute of Linguistics.

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