

## THE RUNGUS LANGUAGE

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### 0. INTRODUCTION

The people of Sabah who refer to themselves and to their language as Rungus or Memogun, reside in the Kudat, Pitas, Kota Marudu and northern Labuk-Sugut districts. The largest numbers of Rungus however live on the Kudat and Bengkoka (formerly Melobong) Peninsulas in the northernmost part of Sabah (Figure 1).

There is considerable variation in the literature with regard to the nomenclature applied to this group of people. G.N. Appell, who has done considerable anthropological and linguistic research among the Rungus, says that this group of people, whom he refers to as the Momogun, "... are divided into sixteen or more different, localized and named sub-groups differentiated from each other by dialectical differences, differences in adat (customary ways), and by the conviction of the members of each of these sub-groups that they belong to a separate ethnic entity." (Appell 1963). Appell further classifies Rungus as a language of the Dusunic family of languages. He says that Dusun is an exonym used to refer to the whole language family and that Rungus is an autonym (Appell 1968).

Prentice (1970) classifies Rungus as a member of the Dusunic subfamily within the Idahan family of languages. He further breaks down the Dusunic subfamily into the Coastal Dusun language and the Marudu dialect. Rungus is considered another name for this dialect and is also the name of one of three subdialects distinguished in Prentice's classification. The other two subdialects he mentions are Nulu, located on the northern tip of the Kudat Peninsula and Gonsomon, to the south of the Kudat Harbour.

Clayre (1966) distinguishes between the Rungus dialect of Dusun spoken on the Kudat Peninsula and the Bengkoka dialect of Dusun of the Bengkoka Peninsula. In her comparison of shared cognates between the two she found them to have 90 percent of lexical similarity.

For the purpose of this present study, the name used in referring to this people and their language will be the autonym used by the village people when technicians collected the linguistic data presented here.<sup>1</sup> This name, Rungus, also reflects most clearly the high level of linguistic unity found to exist among these people.

These problems of nomenclature also effect the demographic analysis of the group under study. The 1970 government census figures gave a total of approximately 11,000 Rungus people in Sabah at that time. At an annual growth rate

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Julie K. King and John Wayne King, eds *Languages of Sabah: a survey report*, 283-296. *Pacific Linguistics*, C-78, 1984.

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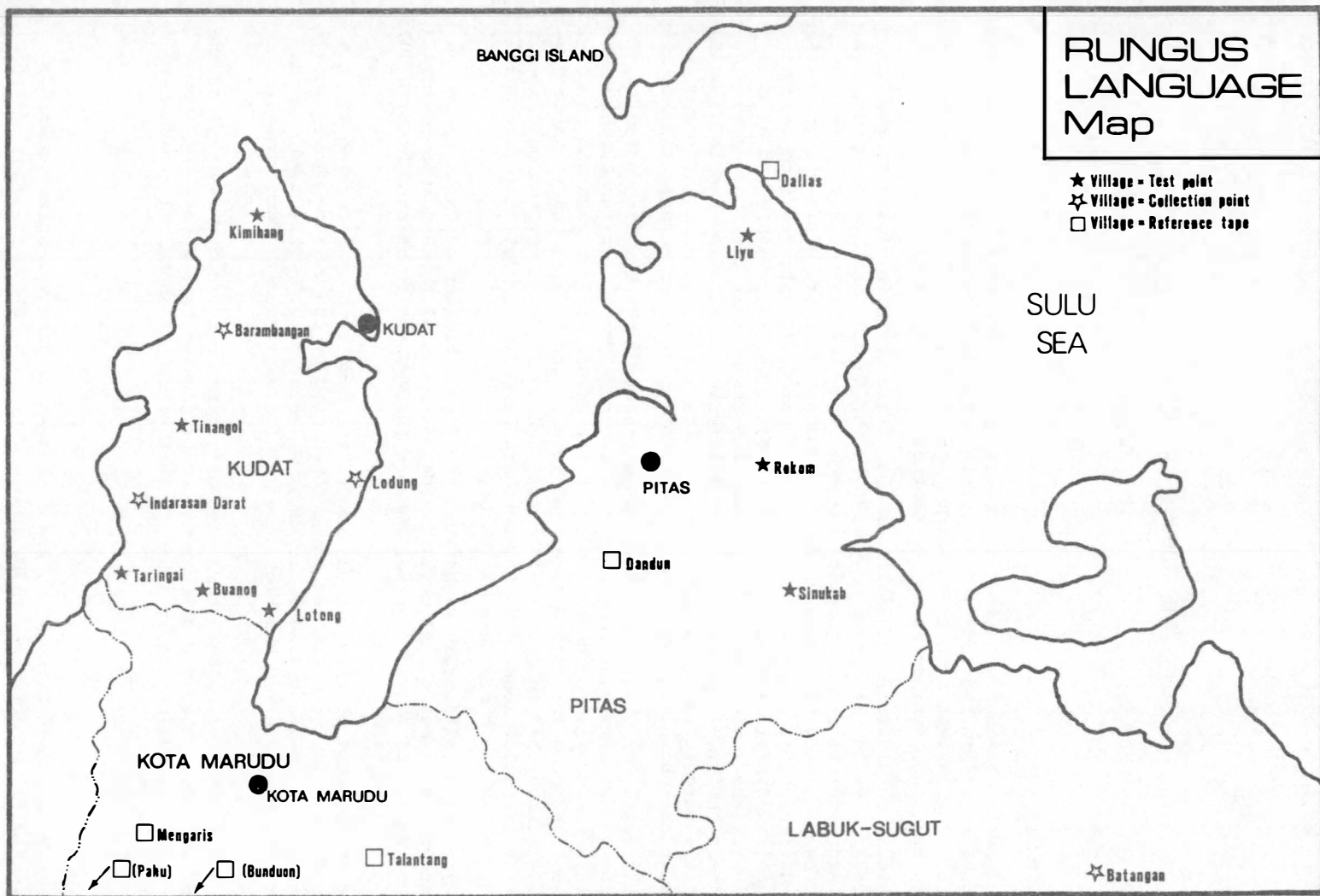


Figure 1: Rungus language map

of about 2%, the total for 1982 should be around 14,000.<sup>2</sup> The figures from the 1980 census are displayed by district rather than by ethnic group and so offer little assistance in current calculations.<sup>3</sup>

Because of the problems of nomenclature mentioned above, it is very likely that some speakers of Rungus as it is defined here, gave a variant autonym to census officials and were then listed even in the 1970 census with that other group rather than with Rungus.<sup>4</sup>

It seems that for the purpose of this study, which is concerned with lexical classification of languages and dialect intelligibility testing, one further source is very reliable in indicating who speaks the Rungus language. Church workers who work among this group have translated some written materials into the Rungus language. On the basis of how widely that material is used in the Rungus areas in the Kudat, Pitas and Kota Marudu districts as well as significant research done by the church workers and the self-designation used by these people, they estimate that there are approximately 40,000 speakers of Rungus in Sabah.<sup>5</sup>

Aside from the sources already mentioned, further linguistic work on the Rungus language is primarily in the form of unpublished manuscripts and mimeographed booklets which have been published locally and have had limited distribution.

In addition to Clayre's dialect comparison including Rungus, which was published in 1966, she also did an earlier comparison of the Ranau, Rungus and Ulu Tuaran dialects of Sabah in 1964 which is unpublished. A further work on Rungus by Clayre is a mimeographed booklet of Rungus root words.

An English-Rungus dictionary was published and mimeographed by the Protestant Church of Sabah in 1966. And there is an Outline of Rungus Grammar by T. Forschner dated 1978, also in mimeographed form.

Various portions of the Christian Scriptures and songs have also been translated into Rungus and mimeographed for distribution in the Rungus areas of Sabah.

Aside from the dialect comparisons by Clayre, the description of the language situation in Kudat District and surrounding areas by Appell and the language classification done by Prentice, to date, in the knowledge of this author, there has been no clear and comprehensive published statement as to the degree of intelligibility within this group or between Rungus and other related groups in Sabah (Blom 1979, Appell 1968).

## 1. LEXICOSTATISTICAL CLASSIFICATION

When 12 wordlists representing the Rungus language from the districts of Kudat, Pitas and Labuk-Sugut were compared, the lexical relations between them ranged from 86-96 percent of shared cognates (PSC). Figure 2 displays this and also shows that Rungus is a close-knit and well-defined unit linguistically, with only minimal lexical variation. Further, Figure 2 shows that the geographically most remote of the villages used in that comparison, Batangun LS, had the consistently lower relations (86-90) PSC. When Batangun LS is excluded from the comparison the range is 88-96 PSC.

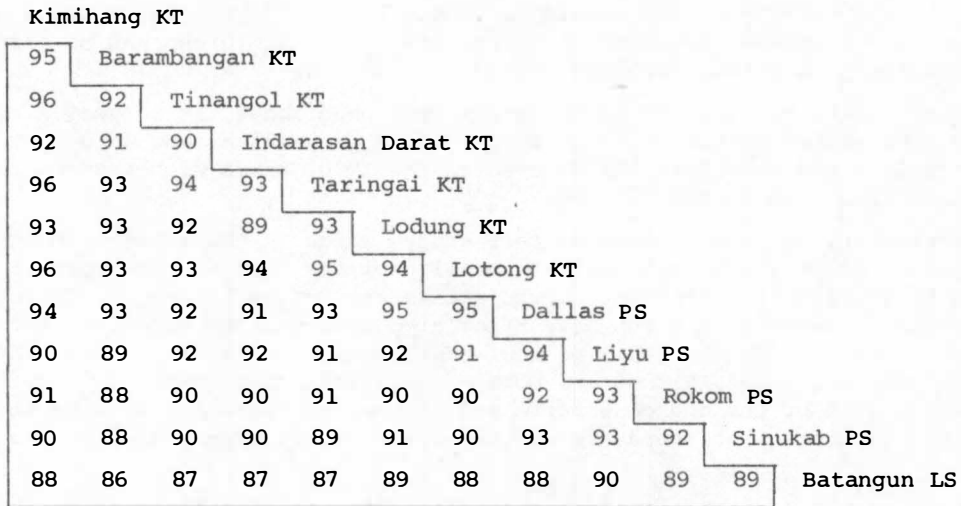


Figure 2: PSC relations of 12 Rungus villages

According to Smith's lexicostatistical comparison (in this volume), Rungus is a language of the Dusunic family of languages. He notes further however that the relation of the Rungus language with other languages of the Dusunic family is 55-77 PSC. Figure 3 shows a comparison of the nine languages and one dialect of the Dusunic family using the wordlist from the village of Liyu PS as a representative of the Rungus language.

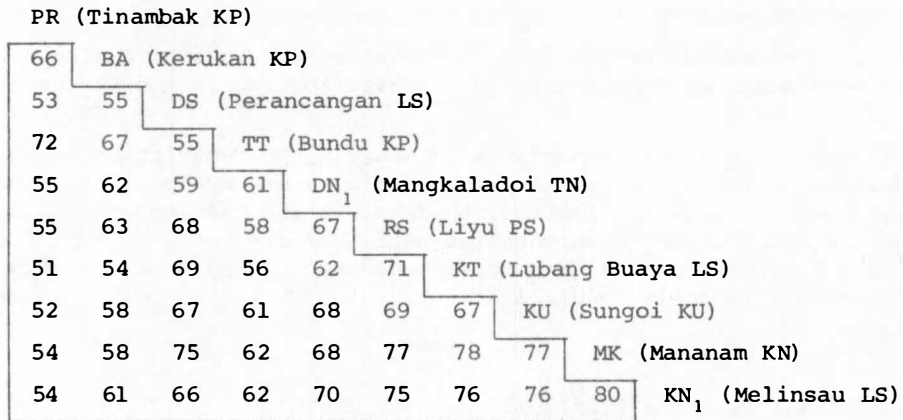


Figure 3: Comparison of PSC scores between examples of nine Dusunic languages and one dialect of Dusunic (KN<sub>1</sub> Melinsau LS).

(PR = Papar; BA = Bisaya; DS = Dumpas; TT = Tatana; DN<sub>1</sub> = "Dusun" representing Lotud; RS = Rungus; KT = Kadazan-Tambanua; KU = Kuijau; MK = "Mangkaak" representing Eastern Kadazan; KN<sub>1</sub> = "Kadazan" representing Sugut Kadazan dialect.) (Adapted from Smith, in this volume.)

Clayre (1966) has done similar lexical comparisons of Dusunic languages of Sabah though her investigation with regard to lexical comparisons was less extensive than Smith's. An additional difference between her work and Smith's is that she used the Swadesh Diagnostic wordlist rather than the larger wordlist adapted from the Philippines which was used by Smith.<sup>6</sup>

On the basis of Clayre's lexical analysis and her threshold for same and different language/dialect, Rungus appears to be the same dialect as her Bengkoka, marginal with her Ranau, Bundu, Tambunan, Penampang and Labuk languages and a different language from her Mangkok and Lotud.<sup>7</sup>

It should be noted then that in general the two comparisons are quite consistent except that in several cases where Clayre's figures are near the borderline of what is considered same or different language (80 and 83 PSC), Smith's are significantly lower. Thus, in Smith's lexicostatistical analysis, Rungus was clearly a different language from all other languages within the Dusunic family of languages.

## 2. TESTING PROCEDURES

Prior to the processing of all of the lexicostatistical data displayed in Figure 3, some preliminary intelligibility testing was done in the Rungus language area to determine the level of intelligibility between Rungus speakers and speakers of other languages within the geographical boundaries of what was then known as the Kudat Division - the Kudat, Pitas and Kota Marudu districts.<sup>8</sup> So the initial testing in the Rungus villages was only with languages which were represented in those three districts (Blom 1979). Aside from testing Rungus subjects with Rungus reference tapes, in the initial testing the subjects were also tested with a language that Smith classified as a peripheral representative of the Central Dusun dialect from Mengaris KM, and two which have been classified as part of the Outer Sugut Kadazan subdialect - Dandun PS and Talantang KM (Smith in this volume).<sup>9</sup> Thus the purpose of the initial intelligibility testing in the Rungus area was to determine the level of understanding between speakers of all of the languages in those three districts.

Seven Rungus villages were chosen for the initial testing. The four test villages from Kudat District were Tinangol KT, Kimihang KT, Lotong KT, and Taringai KT. The three Rungus test villages in Pitas District were Liyu PS, Rokom PS, and Sinukab PS. These seven villages were chosen purely on a geographical basis since the minimal lexical variation revealed by the PSC comparisons was not considered to be significant.

At each of these seven villages the test set included a hometown tape, a reference tape from two other Rungus villages, the two reference tapes from the Outer Sugut Kadazan subdialect from Dandun PS and Talantang KM, the peripheral Central Dusun dialect reference tape from Mengaris KM and the Bahasa Malaysia reference tape (Figure 4).<sup>10</sup>

When the first phase of the entire survey of Sabah was complete and all of the comparisons included in Figure 3 had been analysed, it was considered necessary to test Rungus speakers for their understanding of other examples of Dusunic languages from outside of the Kudat Division, which were considered to be representative of larger and more well-defined languages of the Dusunic family.

Two reference tapes were chosen from the villages of Pahu TA and Bunduon PG. The languages from both of these villages were classified as peripheral villages of the Central Dusun dialect (Smith, in this volume). But the relation between the two is only 74 PSC.

The purpose of this second testing in the Rungus area then was to test the understanding of Rungus speakers with two major Dusunic languages spoken outside of the Kudat Division (→ Kadazan/Dusun).

Because of the very high PSC relations between all of the Rungus villages which had been visited earlier in the survey, two were chosen rather arbitrarily for this further testing. Those villages were Kimihang KT and Buanog KT.

At these two villages only three tapes were used for testing. The first was the reference tape from Tinangol KT representing the Rungus language. The second was the reference tape from Pahu TA representing a dialect of Central Dusun. And the third was from Bunduon PG and also represented a Central Dusun dialect. It should also be noted that the dialect from Bunduon PG is also the dialect which appears in newspapers in Kota Kinabalu and is used for radio broadcasts.

All of the taped stories used in the initial testing and in the second test in the Rungus language area were considered to be good with regard to content and technical quality.

### 3. TEST RESULTS

#### 3.1 Dialect intelligibility testing results in Rungus villages

Figure 4 displays the results of the intelligibility testing in Rungus villages.<sup>11</sup> The results of the first and second testings are given in that figure. It will be clearer however to discuss these results in three groups: 1) Rungus understanding of Rungus, 2) Rungus understanding of Outer Sugut Kadazan, and, 3) Rungus understanding of Central Dusun.

##### 3.1.1 Rungus understanding of Rungus

The results of using Rungus language reference tapes for testing in Rungus-speaking villages are almost entirely predictable from the PSC relations between them. In only four cases, villages scored below 90% intelligibility on either of the two Rungus language reference tapes. That was at Rokom PS where a score of 89% was achieved, at Taringai KT where scores of 84% and 86% were achieved and at Lotong KT where a score of 88% was achieved. In all of the 11 other cases where the Tinangol KT reference tape or the Dallas PS reference tape was used, the subjects scored over 90% intelligibility and so belong to the same language and dialect.

Though the scores from Rokom PS, Taringai KT and Lotong KT are somewhat lower, they are still considered to be the same language and even the same dialect as the other Rungus villages. This is based on a couple of non-linguistic factors which can help to explain the lower scores.

REFERENCE TAPES	RUNGUS		OUTER SUGUT KADAZAN		CENTRAL DUSUN		
	Tinangol KT ("Rungus")	Dallas PS ("Rungus")	Talatang KM ("Garo")	Dandun PS ("Kimaragang")	Mengaris KM ("Tebilung")	Pahu TA ("Dusun")	Bunduon PG ("Kadazan")
TEST POINTS							
Liyu PS ("Rungus")	91 (92)	97 (94)	60 (78)	61 (79)	60 (76)		
Rokom PS ("Rungus")	89 (90)	94 (92)	63 (77)	63 (78)	70 (75)		
Sinukab PS ("Rungus")	96 (90)	95 (93)	62 (79)	65 (79)	67 (76)		
Tinangol KT ("Rungus")	100 100	91 (93)	69 (76)	70 (79)	67 (77)		
Lotong KT ("Rungus")	98 (93)	88 (95)	66 (77)	64 (79)	65 (76)		
Taringai KT ("Rungus")	84 (94)	86 (93)	65 (77)	67 (78)	62 (75)		
Kimihang KT ("Rungus")	96 *100 (96)	95 (94)	72 (78)	72 (79)	71 (76)	*39 (71)	*45 (72)
Buanog KT ("Rungus")	*99 (98)					*44 (71)	*43 (73)

Figure 4: Results of first and second intelligibility testing (shown as percentages) in Rungus villages. (PSC relations are in parentheses; autonyms are in quotation marks; \* indicates a score from the second Rungus testing.)

These villages are considerably more remote than the others which were tested. At the time the testing was done, Rokom PS was still inaccessible by road. Taringai KT at that time, had had a road for only a short time. And Lotong KT, though it was accessible by road, was quite distant from the main road to Kudat town. In all three villages then, communication and transportation between villages was more limited than for the others tested, so that the people did not frequently mix with people from distant Rungus villages.

A second factor tending to lower the scores from these three villages is the lower level of education of the test subjects at Taringai KT, Lotong KT and Rokom PS as compared with the other Rungus test villages (Figure 5). This

factor could influence how well a subject understood the procedures for taking the test and what was expected of him in taking the test.

TEST POINTS	EDUCATION		
	ED.	A.E.R.	A.E.S.
Rokom PS	0	-	-
Taringai KT	0	-	-
Lotong KT	3	4.3	1.3
Liyu PS	4	6	2.4
Sinukab PS	3	4.6	1.4
Tinangol KT	8	6	5
Kimihang KT	7 *4	6.4 *6.2	4.5 *2.5
Buanog KT	*5	*8	*4

Figure 5: Education data for test subjects from eight Rungus villages. (ED. indicates the number of persons in the test corpus who had received some formal education; A.E.R. indicates the average years of education those subjects had received; and A.E.S. indicates the average years of education per subject in the test corpus as a whole; \* indicates data from the second test.)

### 3.1.2 Rungus understanding of Outer Sugut Kadazan

As can be seen in Figure 4, seven Rungus villages were tested for their understanding of Outer Sugut Kadazan. The two Outer Sugut Kadazan reference tapes were from the villages of Talantang KM and Dandun PS. The people from Talantang KM use the autonym "Garo" to refer to themselves and their language. In Dandun PS the autonym "Kimaragang" is used.

In most cases the intelligibility of Outer Sugut Kadazan by Rungus speakers is significantly lower than corresponding PSC relations. In all cases, the intelligibility scores are well below the 80% threshold which defines same or different languages.

So the intelligibility testing confirms the lexicostatistical classification of Smith, who calls Rungus and Outer Sugut Kadazan two separate languages. That the PSC relations are significantly higher than intelligibility testing results should not be disturbing since both figures for each village are well below the point at which two languages are considered to be different.

It is very likely, as the test subjects listened to the tapes from Talantang KM and Dandun PS, that they immediately perceived that the tape was in a

different language from their own. This perceived difference in itself could make the test more difficult and so account for the lower scores.

### 3.1.3 Rungus understanding of Central Dusun

The results of testing Rungus speakers' understanding of Central Dusun are a bit more difficult to evaluate.

Three Central Dusun reference tapes were used at Rungus villages on two separate occasions. In the initial testing, the reference tape from the village of Mengaris KM was used for testing at seven Rungus villages. The range in the relations between Mengaris KM and the seven Rungus villages is 75-77 PSC. The range of intelligibility scores is 60-71%. Though the intelligibility scores are again consistently lower than the PSC relations, this is not disturbing for the same reasons as those mentioned in Section 3.1.2.

The surprising results, however, were those received when the two other Central Dusun reference tapes from Pahu TA and Bunduon PG were used for testing at two Rungus villages - Kimihang KT and Buanog KT.

The results at those two villages, also shown in Figure 4, gave intelligibility scores much lower than corresponding PSC relations and also much lower than the intelligibility testing results with the Central Dusun reference tape from Mengaris KM.

There are two possible explanations for these results. The first is based on the premise that when similarity between two languages becomes less (e.g. lexical similarity), at a point, intelligibility begins to sharply decline. This would help to explain that although the PSC relations of Pahu TA and Bunduon PG with Rungus villages are a matter of only 4-6 percentage points lower than the PSC relations between Mengaris KM and Rungus villages, the intelligibility is drastically reduced.

Another explanation for the great difference in intelligibility scores with the Mengaris KM reference tape and the reference tapes from Pahu TA and Bunduon PG is the location of the three villages in relation to the Rungus language area. The village of Mengaris KM is right on the borderline between the Rungus language area and a different Dusunic language area. The villages of Pahu TA and Bunduon PG are much farther from any Rungus-speaking areas. This explains why the language from Mengaris KM is more familiar to Rungus speakers than are the others. A higher score would then be expected on the Mengaris KM reference tape.

## 3.2 Kadazan/Dusun understanding of Rungus

It is very interesting to note that when cross-testing was done and Rungus language reference tapes were used for testing in Kadazan/Dusun villages, a similar phenomenon occurred as when Kadazan/Dusun reference tapes were played in Rungus villages (→ Kadazan/Dusun). Figure 6 displays those test results. The significant factor is that when these Kadazan/Dusun villages have a PSC relation with Rungus that is in the low 70s, the intelligibility testing results are much lower, as was the case in the Rungus village testing (→ Section 3.1.3). And again, when the PSC's are in the upper 70s as with Outer Sugut Kadazan and Rungus, the intelligibility scores are about ten percentage points lower (→ Section 3.1.2).

TEST POINTS		REFERENCE TAPE	RUNGUS
OUTER SUGUT KADAZAN	Talantang KM ("Garó")	68 (78)	
	Dandun PS ("Kimaragang")	70.5 (79)	
KADAZAN/DUSUN	Tangaban TA ("Dusun")	40 (73)	
	Toboh TA ("Dusun")	19 (70)	
	Sunsuron TA ("Dusun")	39 (71)	
	Kogopon PR ("Kadazan")	48 (74)	
	Kionsom KK ("Dusun")	50 (70)	
	Lumpoho/Pukak TN ("Ulu Tuaran")	45 (72)	

Figure 6: Results of intelligibility testing using a Rungus language reference tape at eight Kadazan/Dusun villages. (Scores are given as percentages; PSC relations are in parentheses.)

#### 4. NATIONAL LANGUAGE INTELLIGIBILITY

National language intelligibility testing was done in Rungus villages only in the initial Rungus testing (Blom 1979). Persons from seven Rungus villages in the Kudat and Pitas districts were then tested for their ability to understand the national language. The results of the testing on the Bahasa Malaysia reference tape are displayed in Figure 7.<sup>12</sup>

The range of average intelligibility scores was 42-81%. It appears from Figure 7 that age and education might be affecting the scores.

The raw data has been reorganised in Figure 8 to show: the average score for males as compared to that of females; the average score for subjects under 35 years of age as compared to that of subjects over 35; and to show the average score for subjects with formal education as compared to those with no formal education.

From Figure 8 it can clearly be seen that educated subjects scored significantly higher than non-educated subjects, and also that male subjects consistently scored higher than female subjects.

TEST POINTS	AVG. SCORE	SEX M/F	AGE			EDUCATION		
			AVG.	MED.	RANGE	ED.	A.E.R.	A.E.S.
Tinangol KT	81	6/4	21	23	14-32	8	6	5
Lotong KT	44	5/5	31	32	13-50	3	4.3	1.3
Kimihang KT	69	6/4	25	24	15-32	7	6.4	4.5
Taringai KT	48	5/5	33	33	17-48	0	-	-
Liyu PS	42	6/4	34	36	18-53	4	6	2.4
Sinukab PS	44	7/3	40	44	30-58	3	4.6	1.4
Rokom PS	43	7/3	37	36	22-50	0	-	-

Figure 7: Results of national language intelligibility testing with socio-logical data for seven Rungus villages. (Scores are given as percentages; RANGE indicates the age of the youngest and oldest test subjects; the education data for each village are listed as the number of test subjects who had received formal education (ED.), the average number of years of education which those subjects had received (A.E.R.), and the average number of years of education per subject (A.E.S.).)

TEST POINTS	CORPUS SCORE	SEX		AGE		EDUCATION	
		AVG. M SCORE	AVG. F SCORE	AVG. UNDER 35 SCORE	AVG. OVER 35 SCORE	AVG. ED. SCORE	AVG. NON ED. SCORE
Tinangol KT	81	81/6	77/4	81/10	0/0	86/8 5M 3F	55/2
Lotong KT	44	46/5	40/5	50/7	26/3	76/3 2M 1F	28/7
Kimihang KT	69	73/6	60/4	68/9	70/1	70/7 4M 3F	60/3
Taringai KT	48	54/5	42/5	50/4	46/6	0/0	48/10
Liyu PS	42	48/6	32/4	58/5	26/5	67/4 3M 1F	25/6
Sinukab PS	44	51/7	26/3	43/3	44/7	50/3 3M	41/7
Rokom PS	43	41/7	40/3	44/5	38/5	0/0	43/10

Figure 8: National language intelligibility results in seven Rungus villages displayed according to sex, age and education. (The average score for each category (shown as percentage) is followed by the number of subjects for which the average applies. The boxes containing scores of those who had received formal education (AVG.ED.SCORE) also show the number of males and females in the educated group. NON-ED. indicates subjects without formal education.)

## 5. CONCLUSION

Dialect intelligibility testing in Rungus villages confirms the lexico-statistical analysis of Smith who classifies Rungus as a "... close-knit, well-defined language without notable dialects." (in this volume, p.31).

In the testing and cross-testing of Rungus with representatives of Kadazan/Dusun languages it was also determined that mutual intelligibility with Outer Sugut Kadazan is scored in the 60s and 70s and mutual intelligibility with Central Dusun languages is even lower. This helps to provide further verification that Rungus is a separate language from those with which it was tested.

## NOTES

1. The use of the name Rungus in this paper, as applied to the people and the language they speak, is different from the use of the same term by G.N. Appell. Here Rungus is used to apply to the language and people who themselves used the term to refer to themselves when the data for this paper was first collected. Appell (1963) uses the term Rungus to apply to only one of possibly more than 16 subgroups of "Momogun". He states further that these subgroups are differentiated on the basis of differences in dialects, customary ways, and by their own belief that they are different from the other subgroups.
2. The 1970 Sabah census listed approximately 11,000 Rungus-speaking people living in Sabah. The 2% annual growth rate figure is merely an arbitrary figure used to estimate a more recent population figure, as such figures are not otherwise available.
3. The 1980 census figures for Sabah are published in the Sarawak Gazette and give population figures by district only. The figure given for Kudat District is 41,872 and for Pitas District is 17,164. The figure of 28,249 was given for the district of Kota Marudu. It must be remembered however that especially in the case of Kota Marudu, but also in the cases of the other two districts, there are other language groups represented by those population figures.
4. It was noted that some Rungus individuals would use the term "Dusun" to apply to themselves and their language. This appeared to be an effort to associate themselves with a larger and more well-known group in Sabah. Though this happened only very rarely in the experience of the technicians who collected the data for this paper, it should be kept in mind that this may have been a more frequent occurrence for the government census-takers and so may skew the population figures with regard to ethnic or linguistic differences.
5. This information was obtained from Rev. Poong Shong Khon and was later confirmed by Mr Johnny Sokuroh, both of the Protestant Church of Sabah.
6. The wordlist which was used for this study in Sabah was adapted from the wordlist used by the Summer Institute of Linguistics in the Philippines. This was done in order to facilitate comparison between the languages of both areas. There are 367 items on this list, 340 of which were used for the calculation of percentage of shared cognate (PSC) figures between languages.

It is not possible to do a completely accurate comparison between Clayre and Smith since they used different wordlists, their criterion for determining "cognateness" may have been different, and the exact locations from which Clayre's lists were taken are not known.

Figure 9 (Clayre 1966) shows the PSC relations between some "dialects of Dusun" including Rungus. The abbreviations, language designations and general locations where they are spoken are as follows:

- Rn = Ranau from around the Ranau area
- B = Bundu Tuhan area down the Tuaran valley and along the western and north-western slopes of Mt Kinabalu
- T = Tambunan - Tambunan area
- P = Penampang dialect around Kota Kinabalu area

