

THE PAPAR LANGUAGE

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0. INTRODUCTION

The people of Sabah who speak the language called Papar live in two villages in the north-western section of Kuala Penyu District. The total number of Papar speakers in Sabah is approximately 600-800 (Figure 1).¹

The Papar people are sometimes referred to as the "Bajau Bukit" (lit. *hill Bajau*). This ethnonym serves to cause some confusion since the Papar language relates to the West Coast Bajau language at a range of only 39 to 44 percent of shared cognates (PSC). In addition, the people speaking this language prefer the name Papar when referring to themselves and to their language.

According to a legend, these people originally came from the area near the town of Papar, but the Papar language and the language spoken now in Papar District demonstrate only a very low lexical relationship.

1. LEXICOSTATISTICAL CLASSIFICATION

Smith (in this volume) classifies the Paper language as a separate language within the Dusunic family of languages. Its highest lexical relationship is 72 PSC with the neighbouring Tatana language of Bundu KP. The Papar language relates with the other Dusunic languages in the range of 51-66 PSC, and with the Murutic languages in the range of 53-66 PSC. There are no dialects within the Papar language.

2. TESTING PROCEDURE

The purpose of intelligibility testing at the Papar village of Tinambak KP was to confirm the lexicostatistical classification of Smith that Papar is a distinct language within the Dusunic family of languages. Also since PSC relations between the Papar language and Murutic languages were close to PSC relations between Papar and Dusunic languages, it was considered significant and so desirable to test Papar with a Murut language test tape as well.

Both data collection and intelligibility testing were done only at the Papar village of Tinambak KP since it is the larger of the two Papar villages. Reference tapes from the Tatana language of Bundu KP, the slightly more

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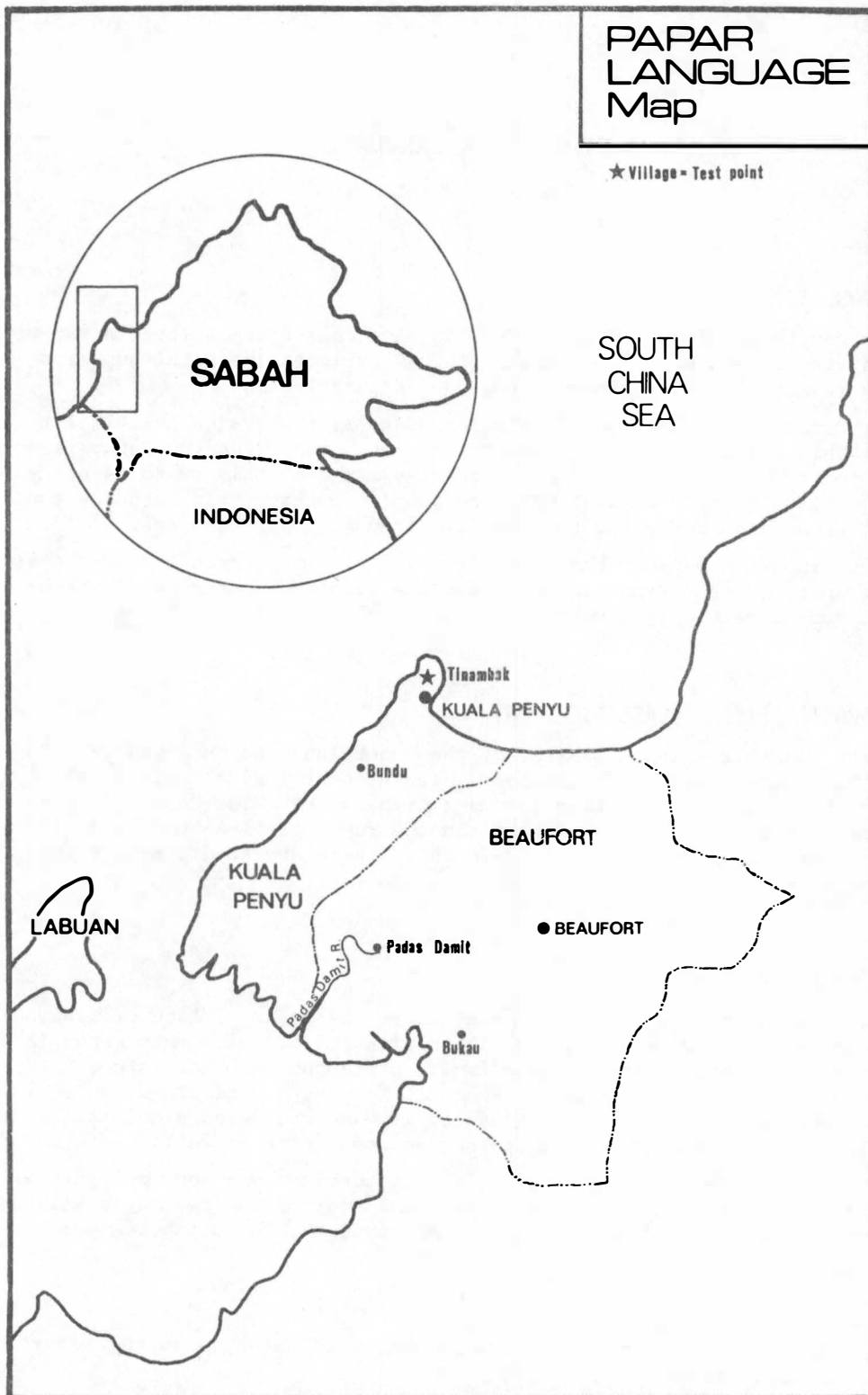


Figure 1: Papar language map

distant Bisaya language of Padas Damit BT, and the Murut language as spoken in Bukau BT were tested. The Murut reference tape from Bukau BT was chosen since it represents the Murut dialect which is closest to the Papar language group both geographically and in terms of PSC relations. In addition, the reference tape from Taginambur KB was used as representing the standard Kadazan/Dusun language and the Bahasa Malaysia tape was used in order to test national language intelligibility.

All of these tapes were considered to be clear with regard to technical quality. The content of the tapes was also considered to be good so as to provide a fair test of intelligibility of the languages under consideration.

Because of the relatively small number of speakers, the Papar language reference tape was not tested in other areas. When Tatana and Bisaya speakers were questioned about the Papar language, however, they maintained that they were not able to understand Papar and so use the national language, Bahasa Malaysia, as a means of communication with the Papar people.

3. TEST RESULTS

Figure 2 gives the results of intelligibility testing at the Papar village of Tinambak KP. The intelligibility testing scores of Papar speakers on the Tatana and Bisaya reference tapes are significantly higher than their respective PSC relations. The intelligibility score on the Tatana story was 96% as compared with a PSC relation of 72. Likewise, average intelligibility of the Bisaya story was 79% compared with 61 PSC. These elevated intelligibility scores appear to be due to language learning on the part of the Papar people. The Papar are a small group, surrounded by predominantly Tatana villages, with Brunei communities located within the area, and Bisaya villages about ten miles away. Most of the Papar people interviewed stated that they were forced to learn another language in order to communicate in the nearby town of Kuala Penyu. Many are fluent in the Tatana language, while others have learned the Brunei language, and the children are studying Bahasa Malaysia in school. Language learning is further encouraged by the frequent intermarriage of the Papar with neighbouring groups. Only two of the subjects interviewed had a Papar father, mother and spouse. The others had at least one member of their immediate family who was not Papar. This has resulted in a nearly total absence of monolingual Papar speakers.

4. NATIONAL LANGUAGE INTELLIGIBILITY

Intelligibility scores on the Bahasa Malaysia reference tape were very high, with only one person in the corpus of eight scoring 80%, and the others scoring 90-100% (Figure 3). The high average score of 93% would support the statements of the Papar people that they have had to learn the national language or the language of a neighbouring group in order to communicate in their daily lives with persons of other language groups. It was also said that many parents encouraged the use of Bahasa Malaysia in the home so that their children will do well in school.

REFERENCE TAPE	DUSUNIC			MURUTIC
	Bundu KP (Tatana)	Padas Damit BT (Bisaya)	Taginambur KB (Kadazan/Dusun)	Bukau BT (Beaufort Murut)
TEST POINT				
Tinambak KP (Papar)	96 (72)	79 (61)	24 (54)	28 (64)

Figure 2: Results of intelligibility testing among speakers of the Papar language in the village of Tinambak KP. (Intelligibility scores are given as percentages; PSC figures are shown in parentheses.)

TEST POINT	AVG. SCORE	SEX M/F	AGE		EDUCATION		
			AVG.	RANGE	ED.	A.E.R.	A.E.S.
Tinambak KP	93	3/5	45	20-61	4	6	3

Figure 3: Comprehension of the national language in the village of Tinambak KP (Papar language). (AVG. SCORE is given as a percentage. RANGE indicates youngest and oldest test subjects. 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 of the subjects in the test corpus (A.E.S.).)

5. CONCLUSION

While the actual intelligibility scores from Tinambak KP would tend to suggest a closer relationship between the Papar language and the Tatana and Bisaya languages than the PSC relations and the lexicostatistical classification of Smith would indicate, the elevated scores are better explained by language learning than by language affinity. The Papar people themselves stated that through intermarriage and the need to communicate with neighbouring groups, other languages are commonly learned. Those other languages would especially be Tatana, Bisaya, and Brunei which is closely related to the national language, Bahasa Malaysia. The test scores confirm this since the scores in Tatana and Bahasa Malaysia were high and the score in Bisaya was higher than would have

been expected based on the PSC figures alone. The inability of the Tatana and Bisaya speakers to understand the Papar language, and the emphasis by the Papar people that the other languages were learned would seem to rule out the possibility that the languages are closely related linguistically.

NOTE

1. Since the Papar people have not been separated from the other larger ethnic groups in Sabah census figures, this is only a population estimate of the number of Papar speakers, based on interviews conducted by the technicians who did the intelligibility testing at Tinambak KP.

