

Malay and Indonesian borrowings in Kenyah Òma Lóngh and Lebu' Kulit

Antonia Soriente

Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology-Jakarta

Kenyah languages, belonging to the Kayan-Kenyah subgroup of the Western branch of the Malayo-Polynesian languages are spoken in a wide area around the border between Indonesia and Malaysia on the island of Borneo. The Kenyah languages, like many of the local languages in the Malay-Indonesian environment are endangered because, among the other reasons, they are spoken by small language communities which are dispersed far from each other and because of the pressure of their respective national languages, Indonesian and Malaysian.

This paper will deal with the impact of the Malay and Indonesian languages on two variants of this Kenyah subgroup, namely Òma Lóngh, spoken by around 3000 people and Lebu' Kulit, spoken by approximately 8000 people in East Kalimantan and Sarawak. Òma Lóngh and Lebu' Kulit represent two distinct branches of the Kenyah subgroup with quite distinct features that separate them from the more commonly known "mainstream Kenyah" languages. Based on a corpus belonging to a language documentation project containing recordings of different kinds collected in a naturalistic environment, this paper will describe and analyze the nature of the influence the Malay and Indonesian languages have had on these languages, specifically in terms of the lexicon, morphology and the syntax.

In the lexicon, where most of the borrowing happens, I will ascertain what kind of semantic fields are more prone to borrowing and further, whether the loanwords follow the phonotactic of the Kenyah variants or are just borrowed as such from Malay/Indonesian. Old loanwords have been assimilated in the phonological system of the two languages respectively but more recent ones have introduced new phonemes in the languages, therefore doublets of the kind *bayen* and *bayar* 'pay' are found in the database. Some interesting examples display the morphological integration of Òma Lóngh prefixes in Indonesian verbs like *bawa* 'bring' that undergoes the morphophonological changes of Òma Lóngh after the affixation of the causative prefix *fe-* becoming *fevavaq* 'to make carry'. Big part of some subsystems are shifting from Lebu' Kulit and Òma Lóngh into borrowed forms from Indonesian like the numeral systems and the naming systems. Kenyah cardinal numerals referring to dates, ages, measures are being more and more often replaced by Indonesian and indigenous names are being replaced by Christian or Indonesian names. There are a number of instances of what Malcolm Ross calls 'metatypical remodelling', or the process whereby 'one language remodels itself grammatically on another transferring typical discourse patterns', here from Indonesian to Òma Lóngh and Lebu' Kulit occurring in the corpus. To conjoin causative and disjunctive clauses, the Indonesian borrowed forms like *jadi*, *tapi*, *karena*, *padahal*, are employed. Other conjunctions like *atau* and grammatical function words such as the preposition *ke* have also been borrowed. As for correlative structures, there are many utterances where the Indonesian word is translated by a local word or just borrowed directly, for example *makin* or *baik... baik*. Example 1. below shows the borrowing of a correlative structure of the type *baik... baik* in Indonesian with the Lebu' Kulit term *tiga* 'baik (good, well.)' while example 2. displays the borrowing of the Indonesian word *sedangkan* in an Òma Lóngh utterance:

1)

tiga pa neng dité pemerinta lu tiga pa neng sekula lu
good also LOC seen government 1PLINCL good juga LOC school 1PLINCL

'both in our government and in our schooling.'

2)

nah sedangkan engne pé dó a'eng òbeq
PRTCL whereas exist parent 3PL NEG want

'... on the other hand his father didn't agree'

The amount and kinds of borrowings depend of course on the kind of stories being told, the genre, the context and on the speaker but they are just one window of the major changes the language is experiencing due to the contact to Malay/Indonesian and the massive change in habits and social ecology. The fact that in more and more families of Òma Lóngh and Lebu' Kulit living in big cities children are not being taught exclusively in their languages but in the national language will eventually bring the process of shifting towards the loss of local languages and with it the loss of cultural self-identity and traditional values.