

Endangered Language: Batek Lexicon and Loan Words

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Abstract

The Batek of North Eastern Aslian of Peninsular Malaysia live along the Lebir, Aring, Sat, Yong, Keniam and Tembeling rivers which are located in the heart of the Malaysian National Park. Their way of life has been documented by Endicott (1988) and Lye (2005). The present preliminary findings are from the Batek Te' who live along the riverbank of Tembeling River, Pahang. Since their contact with local and foreign visitors, they have begun to learn and use loan words of the dominant Malay language. Some of this very small number of Aslian has also started using the easier version of their Austroasiatic language as the main language is no longer popular and claimed to be difficult especially among the young. This research paper describes some findings of lexicons that describe dwellings, time, water, and some loan words. It is hoped that these findings will shed some light for further descriptive studies to preserve this language.

Keywords: Batek, Orang Asli, Loan words

1. Introduction

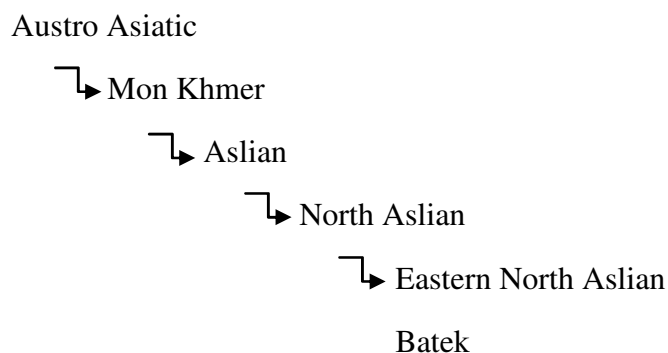
The aborigines of the Peninsular Malaysia or Orang Asli consisted of eighteen ethnically and linguistically distinct sub-groups (Carol Yong Ooi Lin, 2008 cited in Ramlee Mustapha *et al*, 2010). A person is considered as Orang Asli if one of his or her parents is a member an Orang Asli ethnic group and lives according to the laws, beliefs and ritual of that group (Orang Asli Act, 1954). There are three main ethnic groups of Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia-Senoi, Proto Malays and Negritos. Each ethnic group has its own dialectic sub-groups (Ramlee Mustapha *et al*, 2010). The Negrito can be found in the states of Kelantan, Pahang, Terengganu, Perak and some parts of Kedah, while the Senoi can be traced in Perak, Pahang and Kelantan. The Proto Malays can be found in the states of Pahang, Johore, Selangor and Negeri Sembilan (Dentan, 1997). The Orang Asli ethnic groups can be divided in the following categories:

Table 1: Orang Asli ethnic classification (Centre for Orang Asli Concerns, 2006)

Negrito	Senoi	Aboriginal Malay (Proto Malay)
Kensiu	Semai	Temuan
Kintak	Temiar	Jakun
Jahai	Jah hut	Semelai
Lanoh	Che Wong	Orang Kanaq
Mendriq	Mah Meri	Orang Kuala
Batek	Semaq Beri	Orang Seletar

The Negritos, ('little Negroes') or 'Semang' is the smallest yet the oldest of the Orang Asli population and believed to have been in the Malay Peninsula for at least 25,000 years. The present-day Negritos are the direct descendants of the early Hoabinhians, who lived between 8,000 BC and 1,000 BC during the Middle Stone Age and are largely nomadic foragers, As the name suggests, the Negritos are physically small in stature, dark-skinned, typically woolly or frizzy hair, and with broad noses, round eyes and low cheek-bones (Nicholas, 2006). The Negritos fall under the Aslian category in language classification, which is a sub-group of the Mon Khmer languages under the Austro Asiatic language tree. Orang Asli Batek falls under the Negritos ethnic group and its language is a sub-group of the Eastern North Aslian. The family tree of the Batek language can be illustrated below:

Figure 1: Austro Asiatic Language Tree



(Source: Raymond, G. (ed), 2005)

1.1. Endangered Language

Minority languages throughout the world are facing a serious threat of extinction. It is expected that in another one hundred years, eighty percent of the world's languages will become extinct (Woodbury, n.d). There are various factors contributing to language lost such as fewer speakers, fewer domains of use and structural simplification (Dorian, 1980 as cited in Kindell, 2011). Other reasons include urbanization, industrialization or economic changes (Grimes, 2001). According to Fish (1991), one of the characteristics of a threatened language is the language is used only orally with no literacy (as cited in Kindell, 2011).

Batek language is the descendent of the Mon Khmer language from the Austro –Asiatic language tree. It is a part of the Aslian language under the North Aslian category (Refer to Figure 1). As such, Batek language shares some similarities with other Aslian languages such as Jahai, and Kensiu (Burrenhult, 2006, Fazal Mohammed, 2011). Certain words carry similar meaning with a little modification in pronunciation such as *hiyaq* (Kensiu) and *hayaq* (Batek) to refer to dwellings. Batek language is considered to be an endangered language with estimated number of speakers less than one thousand in 2006 (Lewis, 2009).

Various research have been done on the Orang Asli Batek (Lye, 2002, Endicott, 1988, Nurul Fatanah *et al*, 2010) but limited work was done on the Batek language save for the works of Fazal Mohammed (2009) on the syntactic structure of the Batek language. As such this exploratory work

serves the purpose of documenting the Batek language with the hope of providing the catalyst for further documentation of the language.

1.2. Batek

The Batek are of the Northern Aslian ethnic group and most of them live along river banks. Traditionally, the Batek are hunters-gatherers (Lye 2005, Endicott, 1988). As such their main source of income is the commercial extraction of forest products such as rattan and aromatic woods (Lye, 2002). Endicott (1979) was the first to suggest the sub-groups among the Batek people (as cited in Nurul Fatanah *et al*, 2010) which are Batek De', Nong, Iga, Teh and Te' with minor differences in dialects. Batek De' dwells by the Lebir River in Kelantan (Endicott 1988) and some live near river banks of Aring, Kelantan (Fazal Mohamed 2009). In Pahang, only two groups are found-Iga and Te' (Nurul Fatanah *et al*, 2010). Batek Te' now dwells along the Tembeling River in the Malaysian National Park in Pahang. The development of ecotourism in the Malaysian National Park, has allowed the Batek Te' men to be involved in ecotourism activities as guides, boatman or doing odd jobs for the local Malays (Lye, 2002, Zuriatunfadzilah, Rosniza and Habibah, 2009, Nurul Fatanah *et al* 2010). However, the Batek women are not encouraged to work and most spend the day at their settlement. Nonetheless, they are involved in art craftsmanship. According to the informants in the study, the women are involved in making decorations on the *belau* or blowpipes that are sold to the tourists in the Malaysian National Park. Despite some concerns regarding the changing lifestyle of the Batek due to the encroachment of ecotourism, Zuriatunfadzilah, Rosniza and Habibah (2009) found that the Batek are still resistant to cultural change saved for their changing of clothing style. According to the informants, Batek Te' is also known as Batek Hep (*hep* means jungle) as they dwell in the jungle by the rivers. There are a few small villages which are not by the riverbanks but within walking distance from the river. However, due to their nomadic nature, they will not remain in any one village for a long time.

Lye (2002) concentrated her work on the Batek Te' in the Malaysian National Park, documenting their way of life, and their interaction with the natural environment. Endicott (1988) documented the Batek De's social structure as well as their beliefs and interactions with their natural environment. Nurul Fatanah *et al*, (2010) looked at cultural customs and traditions of the Batek Te' while Zuriatunfadzilah, Rosniza and Habibah, (2009) studied the impact of ecotourism on Batek Te's cultural heritage. However, the Batek language is the least known and studied language compared to other Aslian languages in Malaysia. Kruspe (2009) conducted a study of loan words on Chewong, another Aslian ethnic group in Malaysia whereas Burrenhult (2006) conducted various works on the Jahai language.

2. Language Description

2.1. Batek Dwellings

The dwellings of the Batek are made from bamboo or *buluk* and generally consist of several types of hut. The first type is called *hayaq* pronounced with a nasalized final syllable, which literally means 'house'. *Hayaq* refers to the roof of the hut. The roof is made from *pedo* leaves-a type of palm like plant and the Batek refer to this plant as *cium cum* or *chem cum*. The leaves are called *hapoi* when they are cut down from the trees and weaved together to make a roof. The type of rattan or *awei* used to make the roof varies according to its function and durability. For example to make the frame of the roof, *awei chil chil* is used because of its strength and durability. However, to string all the *hapoi* together a different type of rattan is used and the Batek would use either *awei kesoi* or *awei ghiu*. These types of rattan are not known for its rigidity but would make a sturdy rope due to its flexibility.

The roof consists of two layers: the first layer is called *hayaq* and is arranged horizontally, and another layer of roof called *en tep* which is placed vertically as an additional protection. *Hayaq* can also be categorized into two sub categories based on its construction. The first is *hayaq ha tek* which

looks like a beach hut that is open on one side and has a roof that slopes down to the ground on the other. *Tek* in Batek means the earth or land thus for *hayaq ha tek*, means the floor is made from flattened earth with leaves strewn for covering. The second type of *hayaq* is called *hayaq lantei*. *Lantei* is a loan word from the Malay ‘lantai’ which means ‘floor’. Thus, this type of hut looks like an A-type hut and includes raised flooring made from bamboo. Due to their nomadic nature, most settlement are filled with these type of *hayaq* as they are easier to construct has better ventilation and offers adequate cover from the heat of the sun.

The second type of hut is called *deng* and it is a hut complete with bamboo floors and walls. It offers a much better protection from the elements compared to a *hayaq*. Nowadays, the Batek people have also incorporated modern materials into their *hayaq*, such as, tarp for better protection from the rain since Malaysia has a tropical climate. This type of *hayaq* is called *hayaq kimah* (*khemah* is a Malay word for tent). They have also resorted to using basic modern cooking utensils such as kettles to boil water, pots for cooking rice; *wes* (pocket knife), *belanak* (kitchen knife) and *weng* (machete) for cutting. Both the words *wes* and *weng* are pronounced with a slight nasalized sound.

Table 2: Words related to dwellings in Batek

Batek	English equivalent
<i>hayaq</i>	hut
<i>buluk</i>	bamboo
<i>Hapoi</i>	leaves from a palm like tree
<i>awei</i>	rattan
<i>en tep</i>	roof
<i>ha tek</i>	land/earth
<i>deng</i>	type of hut
<i>wes</i>	pocket knife
<i>belanak</i>	kitchen knife
<i>weng</i>	machete

2.2. Parts of the Body

In describing body size, the word *kanek* is used to describe somebody who is small. For example, *kanek li* means somebody who is small and thin. Although the word for ‘thin’ is *jeghahit*, *kanek* is more commonly used. However, the word *kanik* is also used to describe anything that is small, or less in numerical value. For example, *kanek li* is also used to refer to a small group of people. When describing someone who is fat or big in size, the words *bow* and *menchok* are used. The word *bow* generally means big and is used to describe anything that is big. For example *tom bow* can be literally translated as ‘big water’ and is used to describe when the water level in the river is high during the rainy season. Normally an adverb is added to the word *bow* or *kanek* for added emphasis. The word *benir* serves as an adverb to put an emphasis on the noun *bow*, *kanik* or *menchok*. For example:

Batek	English equivalent
<i>kanik benir</i>	really small
<i>bow benir</i>	really big
<i>menchok benir</i>	really fat

Sok in Batek carries the meaning hair or fur. In describing parts of the body that has hair, Batek would use a combination of the word *sok* and the particular part of the body. As an example, the word hair is described as *sok kui*, the combination of the word *sok* (*hair*) and *kui* (head), hence it literally means ‘hair of the head’. As such, English words such as eye lashes and eyebrow are translated into *sok met* (hair of the eye/eye lashes), and *sok cincin* (eyebrow). Table 3 lists the Batek words used to describe the human body.

Table 3: Word list to describe the human body

Batek	English
<i>jangkek</i>	chin
<i>daguk</i>	heel
<i>sok kui</i>	hair
<i>sot met</i>	eye lashes
<i>sok cincin</i>	eye brow
<i>met</i>	eye
<i>kui</i>	head
<i>cas</i>	hand
<i>can</i>	foot
<i>cheng</i>	stomach
<i>keghok</i>	spine
<i>tulang</i>	bone
<i>tapak cas</i>	palm
<i>tapak can</i>	sole of the foot

2.3. Time

Batek Te' do not have a clock sense of time. They have no clock hours but depend on the position of the sun to determine time. In describing day time, 'morning' is *kenalop* with voiceless dental and aspirated diphthong. 'Noon' is *benket*, when the sun is at its peak. Afternoon is *bezoi*, and night is *hanget* where the velar voiced nasal is of softer tone than English [sin] or [ran], and midnight is *tengah hanget*. The word 'tengah' is a loan word from the Malay language which means 'middle' or 'mid', thus *tengah hanget* literally means 'middle of the night'.

Day is *ketok* and *ketok bede'et* means *a good day* while *ketok jebek* means bad weather or a storm is approaching, where thunder and lightning are heard in the sky. When the day is hot, Batek would describe it as *panah*, a loan word from Malay's 'panas'. However, the pronunciation is very much similar to the word 'panah' in Malay or 'arrow'. However, it has to be said that *panah* strictly refers to the condition of the weather as in order to refer to something that is hot, the word *bed* is used as in the phrase *tom bed* or 'water hot'.

Tomorrow is *'ghi sok*, loaned from the Malay 'hari esok' with addition of the uvular /R/ and the dropping of glottal /h/ in 'hari' as well as the vowel /ɪ/ in 'esok'. *Sak minggu* is 'one week' which is a Malay loan phrase. It is *sak taun* for one year, 'satu tahun' in Malay where the glottal /h/ is dropped. Similarly, *sak bulan*, *sak ratus taun* is 'sebulan' or a month and 'seratus tahun' or century. *Sak* is derived from the word 'sa' which in the Malay language means 'one'.

Table 4: Word list to describe time

Batek	English
<i>kenalop</i>	morning
<i>benket</i>	noon
<i>bezoi</i>	afternoon
<i>hanget</i>	night
<i>tengah hanget</i>	middle of the night
<i>ghi sok</i>	tomorrow
<i>sak minggu</i>	one week
<i>sak taun</i>	one year
<i>sak bulan</i>	one month
<i>sak ratus taun</i>	one hundred years

2.4. Water

Rivers to the Batek people is very important as a source of water, food and also for washing. The Batek villages along the Tembeling River lay only a few steps away from the riverbank. In Batek, *tom* is used

to refer to water or river; depending on the context the word is used. For example, the phrase *tom bow* would mean ‘water big’ as the word *bow* means ‘big’ or ‘fat’. This phrase is used to refer to the water level in the river when the tide is high. The phrase *tom menjek* or ‘water deep’ is used to describe when the water is deep. *Tom kanek* means ‘water small’ and is used to describe when the water level in the river is low during low tide. This is not to be confused with *tom katek* which means ‘water short’ or shallow water. In addition, *tom deghas* is ‘fast water’, taking on the loan word ‘deras’ from Malay which means ‘fast’ to refer to the river when the current is strong. On the other hand, another loan word from Malay, ‘tenang’ which means ‘calm’ is used to describe calm water- *tom tenang*.

2.5. Loan Words

Batek borrow words from the Malays if the words do not exist in their original lifestyle. Most of their words are related to their environment and should a new item be introduced that is not readily available in their natural surroundings, the simplest way is to borrow the Malay word for the particular item especially when the introduction is through exposure to the Malays. However, there are words in Malay that are used by the bateks but mean differently. For example, the word *dagu* in Batek would mean the heel but in the Malay language, the word *dagu* would refer to the chin. Another example is the word *tajam*, which in the Malay language would mean sharp but in Batek, the word *tajam* means sharp pain. In order to describe pain, the Batek would use several words, each depicting varying degrees of discomfort. If it is a common tolerable pain, the word *petis* will be used. For example, the phrase *petis kui* or loosely translated as ‘pain head’ is headache. If the pain is more of a sharp and stabbing pain, the word *tajam* would be used. In addition, if the pain is extreme, the word *payah* is used. *Payah* in the Malay language means ‘difficult’. Perhaps the use of the word *payah* to signify pain may be due to the inability or incapability to perform any work, hence the use of the word that resembles difficulty in Malay.

In Batek language, there are different words to describe ‘cold’. If the body feels cold, they would use *temeket* but if referring to cold water, a different word is used *jem* or *belahet*. These two words are not interchangeable and have to be used in the right context. The opposite of *jem* is *bed* which means hot but only in context with an item e.g. *tom bed* which means ‘hot water’. If the Batek is referring to the heat from the sun the word *panas* or *pezeing* (*panas*-Malay) is used

Other loan words include words like *gagah* (*gagah/kuat*-Malay) which means strong, *tulang* (*tulang*-Malay) for bones, *besilak* (*bersila*-Malay) which means sitting crosslegged and *telanggil* or *tasandung* (*terlanggar/tersandung*-Malay) which means trip over, *ghebus* (*rebus*-Malay) which means boil. Another example of a loan word from Malay language is the word *dapet* (*dapat*-Malay) or receive/get. However, there is also another word in Batek that has the same meaning as *dapet*, which is *jit*. During data collection, it was noticeable that the younger Batek would use the word *dapet* when referring to things that they received or did not get instead of the word *jit*. The word *jit* would only be used by the elderly Batek. An example would be:

Malay	Batek	English
saya tidak dapat	<i>Neng dapet</i>	I did not get

It was also observed that when the borrowed word is pronounced, there is a distinct additional consonant added to it. A common addition is the velar [k] if the last syllable of the word ends with the vowel [u]. For example:

Malay	Batek	English
perahu	<i>perahuk</i>	boat
paku	<i>pakuk</i>	nail
kayu	<i>kayuk</i>	wood
duku	<i>dukuk</i>	type of fruit

Initially it was thought that the Batek only add the velar [k] to the vowel [u] if the word is a noun. However, when [k] is also added to the word *tahu* / *tahuk* / or ‘know’, it shows that the rule applies to other loaned words from Malay that end with a vowel. Other examples include:

Malay	Batek	English
lagi	<i>lagik</i>	more
nangka	<i>nangkak</i>	jackfruit
beli	<i>blik</i>	buy
juga	<i>jugak</i>	also

However, the word ‘juga’ is also pronounced as / *dʒugə* /, taking the local Malay dialect. Batek also use loaned words from Malay in describing numbers. The numbers are also pronounced with the additional velar ‘k’ at the end of the word. For example:

Malay	Batek	English
satu/sa	<i>sak</i>	one
dua	<i>duak</i>	two
tiga	<i>tiga</i>	three
empat	<i>ampat</i>	four
lima	<i>limak</i>	five

However, it must be noted here that this rule is only applied to loan words and not words of Batek origin. Batek also tend to simplify their language to make it easier to pronounce and assimilate two words. As an example:

<i>Ai loo moh dik?</i>	What are you doing?
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Ai loo means ‘what’, *moh* is ‘you’ and *dik* can be loosely translated as ‘doing’. However, during normal everyday conversation, the words have been shorten and combined to form- *Ai lo me dik?* The word *moh* has been changed to *me* thus making it easier to pronounce. However, when used as the pronoun ‘you’, for example in the question form ‘*moh mentan bah?*’ (are you tired?), the word *moh* is pronounced fully. In daily conversation, the phrase *Cib ba kau* or loosely translated as ‘I travel here’ sounded very much like *sebakau*. Another example is the phrase *cibedet* to mean walk carefully or safely. The phrase comprises two words that are *cib* which means ‘walk’ and *bede’et* which actually mean something that is pleasant. However, when spoken, a deletion occurs and the syllable ‘e’ is dropped to form *cibedet*. It is noticeable in everyday conversation; the consonants are deleted to perform a glide to make the pronunciation easier and faster. The researchers found it quite difficult to grasp the words since the pronunciations vary when used in daily conversations.

It is noticeable with the current data that the words in the Batek language lack the alveolar ‘r’. It appears at the beginning that the words may carry the rolling sound of ‘r’ but upon deeper analysis of the existing data, the actual sound is the uvular [R] and the alveolar ‘z’ with a nasalized sound.

Initial understanding	Actual Batek	Malay
Kerok	<i>keghok</i>	tulang belakang (spine)
Hari dek	<i>ghi dek</i>	hari ini (today)
Nyarum	<i>nyaghum</i>	menerung (menerung leaves)

In addition, if the Malay word has the alveolar [r], for example in the word ‘cari’ (find), batek would pronounce the word as ‘*caghi*k replacing the alveolar [r] with the uvular [R].

One interesting discovery which the researchers feel need to be dealt more but not within the scope of the current research is the language shift among the Batek people. It was discovered that during data collection, words that were used to describe certain things were different from one Batek to another based on their age and also level of exposure to the Malay and the outside world. During an

interview with an informant who was about twenty years old and works as a tourist guide, most of the words used had a very strong Malay language influence. For example, when asked to describe ‘jump’ he would use the word *lompet* or *lonjet* which are very much similar to the Malay word ‘lompat’ and ‘loncat’. However, the same word was asked to an older Batek and a similar yet slightly differently pronounced word was given- *lumpet*. Similarly, a Batek informant who was in his mid thirties, used the word *pilngal* to describe crazy behaviour or craziness. However, when the same word was mentioned to an elderly lady, she used the word *ngau* which according to her means crazy. On the other hand, the word *pilngal*, according to her carries the meaning ‘laugh’ as used in the sentence:

<i>Yek kan pilngal</i>	(Do not laugh at me)
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There is a strong case for Malay influence as the first two informants are in direct contact with the Malay community on a daily basis, be it for work or business purposes. However, the last informant, an elderly lady, has very minimal, if no interaction with the Malay community. Another argument that the researchers would like to point out is that during the observation, interaction between the local guide and the informant was a mixture of code switching between Batek and the Malay language. It was observed that they were a few Malay words which were inserted in the sentences by the informants. The reason behind this remains unclear as it could be to aid understanding between them or it could be because they are used to code switch and had integrated Malay words in their daily conversation.

3. Conclusions

Despite the similarities and loaned words from the Malay language, Batek language offers a wider opportunity for further research. The current work is merely an exploratory look into the Batek language system. There are other avenues of the language which needs to be dealt with in greater detail such as the vowel system and the extensive use of fillers in the daily conversation. It is hoped that this research would help to propagate further work into documenting, preserving and maintaining the indigenous language of the Malaysian Orang Asli.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank the Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia for the financial support (Fundamental Research Grant Scheme) for this work. We would also like to extend our gratitude to Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Pahang, Malaysia for the academic support.

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