ISSN 1798-4769
Journal of Language Teaching and Research, Vol. 16, No. 3, pp. 957-965, May 2025
DOI: https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.1603.26

A Holistic Study of Merap Language Mapping in Relation to the Term Punan-Merap

R. Yohanes Radjaban
English Literature Department, University of Technology Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Eko Setyo Humanika
English Literature Department, University of Technology Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Burhanuddin Arafah
English Department, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Hasanuddin University, Makassar, Indonesia

***Abstract*—This study aimed to ensure the mapping of Merap language is based on the actual language family, addressing two key questions, including (1) the classification of Merap language within Punan sub-family, and (2) the reason behind its inclusion in Punan sub-family mapping. A qualitative holistic method was adopted, combining historical and factual field data to ensure a comprehensive analysis. The primary data was derived from electronic documents, including online language mapping, and two historical documents by Victor T. King (1993) and Lontaan (1975). Through a detailed examination of these documentary sources, supported by objective and in-depth interviews, significant inaccuracies were identified in mapping the Merap language. One key issue was the historical use of the idiomatic term 'Punan-Merap', which had been misinterpreted as a basis for language mapping. The analysis results showed that Merap language did not belong to Punan sub-family. Instead, the term 'Punan-Merap' referred to a community of Punans living along the Merap River rather than indicating a linguistic relationship. Further analysis suggested that the coexistence of the Punan tribe and the Merap community in various areas of North Borneo has led to the frequent use of 'Punan-Merap' as a collective term. This term has subsequently been misrepresented in language mapping, creating the impression that Merap was a dialect or sub-language of Punan.**

***Index Terms*—mapping, language families, Merap, Punan**

I. Introduction

In modern communication, people are expected to communicate effectively by adhering to logical principles (Yulianti et al., 2023). Despite its central role, language can often confuse listeners due to the frequent use of figurative expressions (Baa et al., 2023). Beyond spoken interactions, language also serves as a tool for written communication between writers and readers, particularly in literature (Asri et al., 2023; Fadillah et al., 2022). Figurative language in literary works, such as metaphors, signs, and symbols, adds aesthetic value by reflecting the writer's emotions, ideas, or states of being (Manugeren et al., 2023; Mutmainnah et al., 2022). The significance of language in communication shows how minor errors can lead to misinterpretations, specifically when messages are conveyed implicitly (Iksora et al., 2022; Kuswanty et al., 2023).

Indonesia is enriched by diverse traditions and customs, representing the cultural wealth of its society (Takwa et al., 2024a). With over a thousand tribes scattered across the archipelago country, each possesses unique traditions, rituals, and a local language (Arafah et al., 2020). The local language, being a cultural product, results from the conventions of a specific community (Mofu et al., 2024). As a cultural product, language is passed down through generations, guiding proper behaviour and respectful communication (Takwa et al., 2024b; Takwa et al., 2022a). Previous investigations showed that the younger generation of the Tolaki Mekongga people in Southeast Sulawesi have experienced a decline in using their local language due to the influence of modernity (Suhadi et al., 2022; Halil et al., 2024). Human behaviour has significantly altered the environment (Jaelani et al., 2024). The widespread use of social media, driven by advancements in information technology, is one of the most profound changes in the modern era (Arafah & Hasyim, 2023a; Arafah & Hasyim, 2023b). Additionally, the introduction of Industry 5.0 has accelerated these changes. The pandemic intensified such a phenomenon, with people relying on gadgets and social media more than ever (Kaharuddin et al., 2024). To address the challenges, awareness about preserving cultural heritage is needed to prevent it from being eroded (Arafah et al., 2021). The preservation of cultural heritage ensures that values and traditions are passed on, shaping the character of younger generations (Misnah et al., 2024; Mokoginta & Arafah, 2022). Building optimism among youth and fostering positive emotions can play an important role in solving the issues (Arafah et al., 2024).

Language covers a lexicon of words and expressions commonly used by a local community (Takwa et al., 2022b). For instance, the Dayak language represents the linguistic diversity of the Dayak people in Kalimantan. According to Lontaan (1975) and Rautner (2005), there are 142 Dayak languages in Kalimantan, which are derived from the seven major tribes

identified in the region (Srisulia, 2012). Dayak people share a deep connection with nature, significantly influencing their way of life (Siwi et al., 2022). Interestingly, the Dayak community is often named after the rivers they inhabit. The practice shows their close relationship with their surroundings and also aids in establishing a clear cultural and linguistic identity (Arafah & Hasyim, 2019). The Kayan tribe refers to Dayak people residing along the Kayan River, while the Merap tribe refers to those living near the Merap River. This pattern applies to other Dayak communities, collectively known as the Indigenous people of Kalimantan (Ngo, 1975). A unique aspect of Dayak culture is the periodic relocation of villages, which changes every 14 to 15 years (Arifin et al., 2022).

When the Dayak community migrates from one river region to another, their tribal names change accordingly. For instance, a group initially residing along the Kayan River and later moving to the Bahau River in North Kalimantan will no longer identify as Kayan but as Bahau people. This naming practice suggests that many of the 142 identified Dayak languages may be linguistic variants or dialects of existing languages rather than entirely distinct ones. The displacement of a community and the resulting renaming of groups often contribute to such linguistic diversity. As a result, some experts argued that the actual number of distinct languages in Kalimantan was likely lower than 142. This perspective aligns with data from Dayak tribe mapping, which shows the dynamic and interconnected nature of their linguistic landscape. The map below, proposed by Srisulia (2012), expresses the distribution of the seven major tribes across Kalimantan, providing valuable insight into the region's complex linguistic and cultural diversity.

Based on the previous mapping, Dayak tribes are categorized into seven major tribal groups: *Ngaju, Apo Kayan, Iban, Klementan, Murut, Punan,* and *Ot Danum*. The sub-family in such groups typically developed as a result of the displacement of their community. To indicate affiliation with one of the seven major tribes, the sub-family often includes the name of their parent tribe followed by the designation (Kompas, 2013). For instance, the Bahau tribe is identified as 'Kayan Bahau,' reflecting its origin from the Kayan tribe, who originally lived along the Kayan River before relocating to the Bahau River. This naming pattern also applies to other tribes, such as *Punan Tuvu, Murut Tahol,* and *Kenyah Kelinyau*. One significant name frequently appearing in the existing literature is 'Punan Merap' (Lontaan, 1975; King, 1993). From the naming structure, it can be interpreted that Merap is a sub-family of Punan. Previous investigations regarding language have been conducted for various purposes, including academic study (Arafah & Kaharuddin, 2019; Arnawa & Arafah, 2023), exploring cultural relations through language (Arafah et al., 2023), and analyzing figurative language in literature to enhance its appeal (Asriyanti et al., 2022). Further linguistic study on the Merap language has produced different results. Contrary to previous assumptions, field data indicates that Merap is not a sub-family of Punan but rather a sub-family of the Kayan tribe. This details how and why such a distinction is made from the focus of this study.

Figure 1. Map of 7 Great Dayak Tribes (Srisulia, 2012)

II. METHOD

This study adopted a holistic qualitative method, focusing on three data types: genetic, objective, and affective. The genetic data referred to historical data about the Dayak tribe, consisting of written documents on Dayak history and events that have become oral traditions passed down through generations. Objective data pertained to the Merap language, comprising data about its speakers, distribution, and linguistic typology. Meanwhile, affective data captured the perspectives and opinions of native Merap language speakers regarding their language and its significance.

To gather genetic data, a literature review on the history of the Dayak tribe was conducted, drawing from sources such as King (1993), Ngo (1975), and Sander (1995). Objective data was collected by recording speech from native Merap speakers to analyze their linguistic typology. Additionally, linguistic comparisons with the Punan Tuvu language enriched

the analysis. Affective data was obtained through in-depth interviews with native Merap speakers, exploring several views on the Merap language and its relationship to the Punan language.

As proposed by previous investigations, a linguistic comparison between Punan and other languages was used to reinforce the study's main argument. This comparison helped to strengthen the language mapping analysis. By integrating data from the three sources, including historical, linguistic, and affective, a thorough examination of the Merap language's history, typology, linguistic relationships, and cultural significance was conducted, leading to a conclusion regarding its classification in the language family.

III. Discussion

A. Data Dian Event Document

A Catholic priest of Dayak descent, Ngo (1975), documented the history of the Dayak people through written records. The work of the priest focused on the distribution of Dayak people, a narrative that has become widely known among Dayak elders across Kalimantan. The documentation, written using a typewriter, consisted of two volumes of unpublished books. In the first volume, Father Ngo recounted the Data Dian Event, a significant historical moment in a place called Data Dian, located upstream along the Kayan River. The Data Dian Event marked the moment when the first Dayak arrived in the Kalimantan region. This set of people attempted to cross the Kayan River in order to be protected from an enemy since their escape from the Chinese Plains around 2,500 BC (King, 1974). Described as seven times the size of an iron tree, Kayan River posed a daunting challenge. To cross, Dayak held onto a rattan rope tied across the river by a leader who had already crossed. The other end of the rope was secured to a tree, serving as a grip for the others. While a portion of the group successfully crossed, the rest were delayed when a shout of "Payau! Payau!" indicating the arrival of a herd of wild deer was heard. This shout intended to prompt some members to hunt deer for sustenance during the journey. Although the shout was heard across the river, there was a misunderstanding due to the distance. The shout "Payau! Payau!" was mistakenly interpreted as "Kayau! Kayau!", which indicated "knife" in Dayak.

The misunderstanding led to confusion among the group, as the person holding the kayak (or knife) near the rattan rope used for crossing the river was believed to have been cut down with a knife. Consequently, the rattan rope was severed, preventing the remaining Dayak from crossing the river. This incident caused Dayak tribe to scatter in Kalimantan. The event became known as the "Data Dian Event," a legendary tale whose factual nature remains uncertain today (Wariso, 1971).

In the second volume, one section of the book discussed the longstanding friendship between the Punan and Kayan tribes, who inhabited the Kayan River region. Observably, some Kayan and Punan people who managed to cross the river continued to face threats from an attacking tribe renowned for their expertise in warfare. Kayan people, whose primary skills were in farming and agriculture, struggled to resist the relentless attacks from the enemy. In need of protection, the Kayan tribe requested assistance from the Punan tribe, who were highly skilled in hunting and using weapons, including the Mandau (tribal sword) and arrows. With the help of the Punan tribe, the Kayan tribe successfully repelled the enemy, securing the Kayan River region as their home. This alliance between the Kayan and Punan tribes have endured since that time. During conflicts, Merap people, who were descendants of Kayan, have often called upon Punan for assistance in warfare. In return, Punan received compensation in the form of harvests and agricultural help. The reciprocal recent relationship continued, as Punan people lived alongside Merap wherever they settled. The mutual aid between these two groups has fostered a strong bond, giving rise to the term "Punan-Merap" to describe their enduring partnership.

B. Tonal Traces in Map

Merap language was the native language of the Kayan tribe, which inhabited the Merap River region. Due to geographical factors, the language was primarily understood by the Merap tribe and other communities residing in the 22 Merap areas, particularly in five villages, including *Langap, Seturan, Sengayan, Adiu,* and *Gong Solok*. According to Hudson (1978), the language belonged to the Kayan Murik language group, part of the Kayan sub-family of Borneo languages. The languages in close contact with Merap included Malay and several other Dayak languages, such as *Tidung, Bulungan, Kenyah,* and *Murut*. These languages intersected frequently due to the engagement of their speakers in trade, market activities, speedboat transportation, or intermarriage. Malay was also widely used in the Merap-speaking community, particularly in schools, government offices, and among sub-district employees, health centres, as well as non-Dayak immigrants. Other languages, including Okolod, Selungai, Lundayeh, Putoh, Punan, and Lengilu, occasionally intersected with Merap, primarily during large Dayak gatherings, specifically the Malinau Dayak Traditional party known as Irau (Radjaban, 2013).

Merap language was used in daily communication by the indigenous people of the Merap tribe and others within the community. It was essential in traditional meetings, marriage ceremonies, and funeral rites. The following were examples of Merap language usage in daily communication, as shown in speech snippets (1) and (2).

(1) a. *Tamae' hakankie nyae' kalam moa tei?* 'Is your father at home?'
b. *Pouh. Tamae' hakankao tae ke mue'.* 'No. My father is going to the field.'

(2) '^{h}*Mue kata' pa. Tetau kata' nei, tetau kapauk klao'*. '(You both) drink the water. (If you both) cut off this water, (you both) break your bonds.'

Datum (1) was an example of speech occurring between speakers of the Merap language in daily conversations, while datum (2) was a speech delivered by the traditional elders of the Merap tribe during the inauguration of a customary marriage bond. In this ritual, water was poured into the mouths of the bride and groom. Anthropologically, such an act symbolized their union, with the marriage bond only being broken upon the death of one of the spouses.

The absence of linguistic documents resulted in the transmission of the Merap language informally to the family sphere. Only native speakers and immigrants integrated into Merap-speaking communities could learn and master the language. Merap language was often considered difficult for non-speakers due to its suprasegmental feature, particularly stress, which significantly determines meaning. Additionally, the articulation of the Merap sound, absent in non-Merap languages, was influenced by stress in the sequence of lexemes.

Merap was a phonemic language that retained traces of tonic language, particularly in its use of tone as a suprasegmental feature affecting meaning. It had some minimal characteristics of syllabic languages, with a phoneme system where each unit was the smallest linear element capable of forming a morpheme and had semantic potential. Furthermore, Merap featured a morpheme that was "shorter" than syllables, specifically through nasalization, resulting from the stressed tone's continuation. For instance, the word /^{h}*our*/ in the sentence ^{h}*Mue kata pa* (Let us drink) showed this feature.

Morphemes in Merap were formed not only by phonemes but also by suprasegmental elements as phonological units. There were phonemic features such as changes in the relative syllable boundary (sign –) to the morphemic boundary or in the morpheme (sign.), which occurred when a root morpheme was prefixed. For instance, /pe/ + /mblai'/ became /pe.mblai/ (buyer), and /pe/ + /nga-hai/ became /pe.ka-hai/ (speaker). The available data indicated that Merap syllables were primarily based on vowel sounds, suggesting each vowel had the potential to form a syllable.

According to the principles of phoneme distribution patterns proposed by Gleason (1961), and in combination with Francis' (1958) distribution patterns, the phonemes of the Merap language could be determined in two ways. Firstly, the phonemes could be determined through the principle of minimal pair contrast, which is considered subminimal pairs. When two sounds appeared in contrasting pairs, they were considered separate phonemes. Secondly, the phonemes of the Merap language could be determined through the principle of phoneme distribution and free variation, which explained that when two sounds were not in complementary distribution or free variation, they were distinct phonemes. By applying these principles, the language's phonemes can be described in Table 1.

TABLE 1
TABLE OF MERA PHONEMES

Consonants		Vowels
Voiceless	Voiced	
/p/ **p**au	/b/ **b**aung	/i:/ k**i**riu
/t/ **t**empeih	/d/ **d**uui	/e/ m**e**ik
/k/ **k**ata'	/m/ **m**ah	/ɑ:/ l**a**kai'
/s/ **s**oya	/n/ **n**uhu'e	/ɔ/ p**o**uh
/h/ **h**ua'	/ŋ/ **ng**orou'	/ʊ/ t**u**ng
	/l/ **l**anae	/ə/ ^{h}mu**e**
	/r/ **r**auh	/ɔʊ/ l**o**u
	/j/ **y**a	/aɪ/ mblai'
	/w/ **w**ae'	/aʊ/ mar**au**
	/ny/ **ny**au	/ʊɪ h**ui**

The lack of sufficient investigations made it challenging to pinpoint the exact roots of the Merap language. However, available data indicated that the core vocabulary of the language was primarily composed of original Austronesian words, many of which were fundamental and retained traces of tonal influence that affected their meaning. This could be observed in the number of phonetically similar words that differed based on their emphasis in speech. The tonal variations played a significant role in shaping the meaning of the language. Furthermore, the vocabulary of the Merap language was relatively limited due to the influence of suprasegmental factors, particularly the stress or tone that determined meaning. Changes in stress points contributed to the formation of words in the Merap language, which led to a relatively short or limited vocabulary. Instead of relying on affixation, which would lead to multi-syllabic words, Merap language used stress variations to generate different meanings. Examples of Merap words with varying stress points and meanings are provided in Table 2.

TABLE 2
TABLE MERAP VOCABULARY WITH DIFFERENT STRESSES

Merap		Meaning (English)	
Initial Stress	Final Stress	Initial Stress	Final Stress
'tuih	tui'	White	Banana
'nyauh	nyau'	knife sharpener	coconut fronds
ʰnie	nie	your mom	this
'moa	moa'	House	field
'lai	lai'	Want	bring
'ngao	ngao'	Menunggu	cat
'hie	hie'	Dia	chicken
'bau	bau'	Rambut	bamboo shoot
'ngue	ngue'	Rotan	dirty

Unlike many other languages in the archipelago country, the Merap language had characteristics of a syllabic language with minimal affixation. This might be attributed to preserving the language's authenticity, largely unaffected by the influence of neighbouring languages. Merap language was native to the tribe residing along Kayan River. Historical records, including those by Ngo (1975), suggested that the early tribes living along the Kayan River migrated to the Bahau River, a tributary of the Kayan River in North Kalimantan, to escape conflicts with the Iban tribe. Over time, prolonged tribal wars led many such groups to move again, settling along the Merap River. The tribe residing along the Kayan River became known as the Kayan tribe, while those near the Bahau River were called the Bahau tribe. The tribe along the Merap River was designated Merap tribe, with the tribe and its language named after the inhabited watershed area. Despite sharing the same language, these three groups, including Kayan, Bahau, and Merap, were distinct.

Kayan language was subjected to significant changes when it interacted with other tribes, such as the Kenyah, Tidung, Chinese, and Malay, which led to a loss of the original tonal characteristics. In contrast, Bahau and Merap languages, experiencing less linguistic influence, retained tonal characteristics, preserving their distinctive linguistic traits.

As a tonal language, Merap language forms words through stress and pressure changes, influencing vocabulary and word formation. The vocabulary of Merap could be similar and relatively limited, as the language did not rely on affixation like other Austronesian languages.

In Merap, word formation often combines two components to create a compound word with a full meaning. These compounds might consist of whole words or root morphemes. There were two key characteristics of compound words in Merap: idiomatic meaning and integrity of form. The idiomatic meaning referred to a meaning that could not be derived from the sum of the individual components, such as *kata' tuih* (white water) and *kata' kawa* (coffee water). The integrity of the form indicated that no additional words or grammatical elements were inserted between the components, as evidenced by *'moa klue'* (school).

C. Different Blood

The results of the interviews conducted in the field showed that the Merap language belonged to the Kayan language sub-family. According to the "Dian Data Document," written by Ngo (1975) and supported by its linguistic features, Merap was confirmed to be a sub-family of the Kayan language. The results corrected the claim that Merap was a Punan sub-language, as stated in previous documents. Lontaan (1975) and King (1993) classified Merap as a Punan sub-language, but this classification needed to be revised. Irang Laing, a traditional elder of the Merap tribe, stated in an interview that it was incorrect to categorize Merap as a sub-family of Punan.

> No way. We are different. We have distinct ancestries. Punan and Merap have indeed formed a close and mutually beneficial alliance throughout history. Yes, it is true that wherever there are Merap people, there are also Punan people. Punan and Merap have coexisted for generations. In history, Punan and Merap have worked together to fight enemies. Punan excelled in combat, while Merap people were skilled in farming and agriculture. Punan helped in battle, and we assisted with food, agricultural products, and other crops. This relationship has been ongoing throughout history. The expression 'Punan-Merap' reflects the closeness of the bond, but it does not indicate any blood relation. (Irang Laing, Sengayan, 4 May, 2017)

Field data also showed that the Kayan tribe consisted of four sub-families, each with its own language. These sub-families inhabited areas along the Kayan, Bahau, Mapan, Ga'ai, and Merap rivers (Ngo, 1975). As explained earlier, the Dayak people often named their tribes after the surrounding rivers. Therefore, the Kayan tribe was the Dayak people living along the Kayan River, and the Merap tribe was the Dayak people living along the Merap River. This naming convention applied to other Dayak tribes as well.

Kayan, Bahau, Mapan, Ga'ai, and Merap languages differed in both phonological and morphological characteristics, but their speakers could understand each other. It was important to note that the Ga'ai and Merap languages still maintained tonal characteristics. Both languages continued to use stress as a suprasegmental element in word formation. In contrast, Kayan, Bahau, and Mapan languages have lost tonal features. Traces of Merap tonal language could be observed in similar morphemes that differed in stress, as detailed in Table 1.

An interview with a traditional leader, Aran Unyat, showed that the Merap and Punan tribes have distinct mother tongues.

> It is different. We are two (Punan and Merap), not of the same blood. Our languages are different. If we were of the same blood, they (Punan) would understand our language. However, they do not understand us, even though we can understand theirs. We are similar to the Mapan, Ga'ai, and Kayan people. They understand our language, and we understand theirs. We share many similarities, specifically with Bahau people. (Aran Unyat, Langap, 5 May, 2017)

This conversation clearly indicated that the Merap tribe could not be classified as a sub-family of Punan. Geographically, the Merap and Punan tribes were distinct, each inhabiting a different region. Merap people lived in agricultural and plantation regions, while Punan people resided outside such zones, even though their proximity allowed regular interaction. An interview with Encau Liah, a Seturan, South Malinau District, Malinau Regency resident, further affirmed this distinction.

> Yes, Punan people always live near us, on the edge of our gardens. When a village is near our fields, it is a Punan village. When there are no bores, they help us clear the fields and sometimes assist in harvesting fruits like bananas and *lae* (durian). We do not pay them; they can take what they need from the garden, but only if necessary. That has always been the way. (Encau Liah, Seturan, Malinau, 5 May, 2017)

Based on the interview and geographical analysis, it was evident that the Merap tribe was not a sub-family of Punan. People who claimed that Merap was a sub-family of Punan likely had never visited the Merap region but had only heard stories, particularly about the "Punan-Merap connection". This showed the close relationship between the two tribes, which was often misinterpreted in the Malinau Regency region.

D. Linguistic Comparison

A historical comparative linguistic study by Aran (2023) from the University of Borner examined the relationship between the Punan and Kenyah Lepo Tau languages. Aran proposed that the Punan language shared 20% of its vocabulary with Kenyah Lepo Tau. According to the study, up until 2,844 BC, Punan and Kenyah Lepo Tau were one language, but they began to diverge significantly around 1,103 BC. Using Morris Swadesh's parameters for calculating language family resemblance based on vocabulary, it was concluded that by 2023, Punan and Kenyah Lepo Tau were distinct languages.

In the study conducted in 2004 and 2008, Soriente showed the significant linguistic differences between Kenyah Lebu' Kulit and Òma Lóng, which further supported Kenyah and Punan as separate languages. In a separate linguistic analysis, Radjaban (2019) proposed that Merap belonged to the Kayan language family. The linguistic features of Merap, particularly phonology, morphology, and syntax, were closely related to those of the Kayan language spoken in five sub-districts, including Seturan, Ga'ai, Mapan, Gong Solok, along the Kayan River, as well as with Merap language spoken along Merap River in Malinau, North Borneo.

TABEL 3
COMPARISON BETWEEN 5 SUB-MERAP VOCABULARY AND PUNAN

Lexemes	***Seturan***	***Ga'ai***	***Mapan***	***Gong Solok***	***Merap***	***Punan***
Man	*lu:ŋ*	*lu:ŋ*	*lu:ŋ*	*lu:ŋ*	*lu:ŋ*	***ulu:ŋ***
you	*kie*	*kie*	*kie*	*kie*	*kie*	***nu***
white	*tuih*	*tuih*	*tuih*	*tuih*	*tuih*	***buhak***
Cold	*ʰŋam*	*ʰŋam*	*ʰŋam*	*ʰŋam*	*ʰŋam*	***səŋəm***
Fish	*tʃan*	*tʃan*	*tʃan*	*tʃan*	*tʃan*	***hikan***

Based on three levels of linguistic analysis, consisting of phonology, morphology, and syntax, the Punan language had distinct differences from the Merap language, as detailed in Table 4.

TABEL 4
LINGUISTIC LEVEL ANALYSES BETWEEN MERAP AND PUNAN LANGUAGE

Linguistic Levels	Merap	Punan
Phonology	Seven diphthongs (au, ai, ao, ɔi, ɔu, ei, eu) (Radjaban, 2019)	Four diphthongs (ai, ɔi, ui, ei) (Melai & Norahim, 2021)
Morphology	Shift stressing is one of the morphological modifications (Radjaban, 2019)	Vowel tense is one of the morphological modifications (Melai & Norahim, 2021)
Syntax	Native question word for quantity typical to the Austronesian family: *kurui*	Native question word for quantity typical to Sanskrit family: *piro*

Table 4 showed the phonological differences between Merap and Punan. For instance, the varieties of vowels and diphthongs, which were key indicators in determining language family relationships, showed significant distinctions. Merap retained tonal traces typical of Proto-Austronesian, while Punan featured vowels and diphthongs in line with the Deuteron-Austronesian language family. Merap used shift stressing as a morphological modification, while Punan adopted vowel tense.

In terms of syntax, the two languages had considerable differences in constructing interrogative sentences. Merap had distinct question words that showed the complexity of its language, indicating a more developed system. In contrast, Punan used fewer question words, suggesting a less complex language structure. Table 4 further presented that the Merap question word "kuru" was typical of the Austronesian family, while the Punan question word for quantity, "*Piro*," was more closely related to the Sanskrit family, resembling the Javanese *Piro*.

IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, the term "Punan-Merap" was commonly found in existing literature. However, classifying Merap as a sub-family of Punan, as executed by Lontaan (1975), King (1993), and other unpublished references, was an inaccurate conclusion. Three data sources, including genetic, objective, and affective, showed that Merap was not a sub-family of Punan but rather a sub-family of the Kayan people. The confusion was understandable due to the frequent use of the term "Punan-Merap," which described the longstanding mutualistic relationship between the Merap and Punan tribes. The historical comparative linguistic study further supported the notion that Punan and Merap languages and Punan and Kayan languages did not belong to the same language family.

Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful to the Rector of Universitas Teknologi Yogyakarta, *LPPM,* and the Head of the English Literature Department for their support and the provision of the study facilities. The authors are also grateful to the respondents for their willingness to participate in the data-gathering process.

References

[1] Arafah, B., Abbas, H., & Hikmah, N. (2021). Saving the Environmental Lessons in Colin Thiele's February Dragon. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, *12*(6), 935-941.
[2] Arafah, B. & Hasyim, M. (2019). Linguistic Functions of Emoji in Social Media Communication. *Opción*, *35*(24), 558-574.
[3] Arafah, B. & Hasyim, M. (2023a). Digital Literacy: The Right Solution to Overcome the Various Problems of Meaning and Communication on Social Media. *Studies in Media and Communication*, *11*(4), 19-30.
[4] Arafah, B. & Hasyim, M. (2023b). Digital Literacy on Current Issues in Social Media: Social Media as a Source of Information. *Journal of Theoretical and Applied Information Technology*, *101*(10), 3943-3951.
[5] Arafah, B. & Kaharuddin. (2019). The Representation of Complaints in English and Indonesian Discourses. *Opción*, *35*(24), 501-517.
[6] Arafah, B., Kaharuddin, Hasjim, M., Arafah, A.N.B., Takwa, & Karimuddin. (2023). Cultural Relations among Speakers of South Halmahera Languages. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *13*(1), 168-174.
[7] Arafah, B., Thayyib, M., Kaharuddin, & Sahib, H. (2020). An Anthropological Linguistic Study on Maccera' Bulung Ritual, Opción, *36*(27), 1592-1606.
[8] Arafah, F. R. B., Ismail, N.S., Rustham, A. T. P., Arafah, B., Arafah, A. N. B., Takwa, & Sarmadan. (2024). Building Optimism Process in Final-Year Students to Finish Their Theses: Case Study of Hasanuddin University Students Threatened with Dropout. *International Conference on Medical Imaging, Electronic Imaging, Information Technologies, and Sensors (MIEITS 2024)*, 13188 (131880W), 1-8.
[9] Aran, M. (2023). *Hubungan Kekerabatan Bahasa Dayak Punan dengan Bahasa Kenyah Lepo Tau: Kajian Linguistik Historis Komparatif* [The Relationship between the Dayak Punan Language and the Kenyah Lepo Tau Language: Comparative Historical Linguistic Study]. Tarakan: Universitas Borneo Tarakan.
[10] Arifin, M. B., Arafah, B., & Kuncara, S.D. (2022). Dayak's Sociocultural Situation through Locality in Lumholtz's Through Central Borneo Travel Writing. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *12*(12), 2695-2703.
[11] Arnawa, I. G. N. E. V. & Arafah, B. (2023). Students' Self-Regulated Strategies in Approaching Second Language Writing. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *13*(3), 690-696.
[12] Asri, D., Arafah, B., Sahib, H., & Abbas, H. (2023). Male Domination in Helen Garner's Monkey Grip. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *13*(7), 1651-1658.
[13] Asriyanti, S., Arafah, B., & Abbas, H. (2022). The Representation of Women's Dependence on Men in Little Women. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *12*(4), 790-796.
[14] Baa, S., Wardani, S. B., Iskandar, Weda, S., & Arafah, B. (2023). Lexical Metaphors in Westlife's Selected Song Lyrics. *XLinguae, 16*(1), 132-154.
[15] Fadillah, N., Arafah, B., & Abbas, H. (2022). The Act of Slavery in the 20th Century as Reflected in Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, *13*(1), 66–72.
[16] Francis, W. N. (1958). *The Structure of American English.* New York: The Ronald Press Company.
[17] Gleason, H.A. (1961). *An Introduction to Descriptive Linguistics*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.
[18] Halil, N. I., Arafah, B., Saputra, I. G. P. E., Hasyim, R. S., Sarmadan, Takwa, & Karma, R. (2024). Preservation of Tolaki Mekongga Language Through Merdeka Curriculum-Based Local Subject Teaching Modules. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, *15*(3), 960-971.
[19] Hudson, A. B. (1978). *The Barito Isolect of Borneo*. New York: Cornell University.
[20] Iksora, Arafah, B., Syafruddin, S., Muchtar, J., & Lestari, P.A. (2022). Typos' Effects on Web-Based Programming Code Output: A Computational Linguistics Study. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *12*(11), 2460-2469.
[21] Jaelani, A., Arafah, B., Abbas, H., & Yudith, M. (2024). Environmental Themes in Michael Punke's the Revenant: An Ecocritical Analysis of Human-Nature Interaction. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *14*(10), 3312–3319.
[22] Kaharuddin, Ahmad, D., Mardiana, Latif, I., Arafah, B., & Suryadi, R. (2024). Defining the Role of Artificial Intelligence in Improving English Writing Skills Among Indonesian Students. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, *15*(2), 568-578.
[23] Karamoy, G. F., Usman, S., Arafah, B., Supit, D., Mofu, H., Septiwiharti, D., & Nadjamuddin, L. (2024). The Relationship between Language Learning Aptitude Beliefs and English Achievement in Students of SMA Advent Unklab Airmadidi Manado. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *14*(9), 2940-2948.
[24] King, V.T., (1974). 'Notes on Punan and Bukat in West Kalimantan,' *Borneo Bulletin*, *6*(2), 39-42.
[25] King, V. T. (1993). *The People of Borneo.* Oxford: Blackwell Publisher.

[26] Kompas. (2013). *Indeks Demokrasi 2015 (Democracy Index of 2015*). Jakara: P.T. Kompas-Gramedia.
[27] Kuswanty, W.H., Arafah, B., Budiman, A.N.A., Ali, T., Fatsah, H., & Room, F. (2023). Students' Perception of Explicit and Implicit Methods in Learning Tenses in SMP DDI Mangkoso. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *13*(6), 1473-1482.
[28] Lontaan, J.U. (1975). *Sejarah Hukum Adat dan Adat Istiadat Kalimantan Barat* [Customary Law History and Customs of West Kalimantan]. Pontianak: Pemda Kalimanta Barat.
[29] Manugeren, M., Arafah, B., Purwarno, P., Siwi, P., Ekalestari, S., & Wulan, S. (2023). An Ecoliterature Approach to Environmental Conservation: Take Four Selected Literary Works as Examples. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *13*(5), 1318-1327.
[30] Melai, Z. & Norahim, N. (2021). *Fonologi Bahasa Punan: Analisis Linguistik Deskriptif* [Phonology of the Punan Language: Descriptive Linguistic Analysis]. Malaysia: Universiti Malaysia Serawak.
[31] Misnah, Arafah, B., Bahri, Usman, S., Ratu, B., Nurwahyuni, & Ruslin. (2024). Lore Lindu Culture-Based Education Learning Development for Elementary School Students. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, *23*(6), 620-639.
[32] Mofu, H., Arafah, B., & Malawat, I. (2024). Ethnolinguistic Study of Marine Fishes' Characters of the Biak Tribe, Papua. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *14*(8), 2532-2542.
[33] Mokoginta, K. & Arafah, B. (2022). Negotiation in Indonesian Culture: A Cultural Linguistic Analysis of Bahasa Indonesia Textbooks. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *12*(4), 691-701.
[34] Mutmainnah, Arafah, B., & Pattu, A. (2022). Racial Discrimination Experienced by Black People as Reflected in Langston Hughes's Poems. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, *13*(2), 350-356.
[35] Ngo, D. A. J. (1975). *Sejarah Orang Kayan* [History of Kayan People]. Jakarta: N.V. Pustaka.
[36] Radjaban, J. (2013). *Sintaksis Bahasa Agabag: Sebuah Kajian dalam Pendekatan Transformational* [Agabag Language Syntax: A Study in a Transformational Approach]. Banyumas: de Mazenod Publication.
[37] Radjaban, J. (2019). *Sintaksis Bahasa Merap: Sebuah Kajian dalam Pendekatan Transformational* [Merap Language Syntax: A Study in a Transformational Approach]. Yogyakarta: Lingkar Antar Nusa Publication.
[38] Rautner, M. (2005). *Borneo: Treasure Island at Risk*. WWF Germany: Frankfurt am Main.
[39] Sander, G. (2013). *A History of Brunei*. London: Routledge.
[40] Siwi, P., Arafah, B., Wulan, S., Purwarno, P., Ekalestari, S., & Arafah, A.N.B. (2022). Treatment of Nature: An Ecocriticism Approach in 'Komat Kamit' of Tejo and Kamba's Tuhan Maha Asik. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *12*(7), 1278-1285.
[41] Srisulia. (2012). *Maps of Indonesia: Borneo,* Jakarta: N.V. Pustaka – Penerbit dan Percetakan.
[42] Suhadi, J., Arafah, B., Makatita, F.P., Abbas, H., & Arafah, A.N.B. (2022). Science and Society: The Impact of Science Abuse on Social Life in Well's The Invisible Man. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *12*(6), 1214-1219.
[43] Takwa, Arafah, B., Hasyim, M., & Akhmar, A.M. (2024a). Cultural Imagery of Tolaki Mekongga Community of Kolaka in Mowindahako Ritual. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *14*(3), 763-770.
[44] Takwa, Arafah, B., Hasyim, M., Akhmar, A. M., Taqfiah, S. J., & Sarmadan. (2024b). Symbolic Meanings in the Mowindahako Ritual of the Tolaki Mekongga Kolaka Ethnic. *International Conference on Medical Imaging, Electronic Imaging, Information Technologies, and Sensors* (MIEITS, 2024), 13188 (131880I), 1-5.
[45] Takwa, Arafah, B., Kaharuddin, Putra, E., Masrur, & Arafah, A.N.B. (2022a). The Shift of Lexicon in Traditional Technology System in Tolaki Community at Konawe District of Southeast Sulawesi. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *12*(5), 980-989.
[46] Takwa, Arafah, B., Sopiandy, D., Taqfiah, S. J., & Arafah, A.N.B. (2022b). Humanistic Values in Metaphoric Expressions of Traditional Marriage in Tolaki Mekongga Kolaka. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *12*(8), 1602-1608.
[47] Usman, S., Arafah, B., Marhum, M., Munir, S., Budi., & Tadeko, N. (2024). The Effect of Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) on Rural Area Students' English Writing. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, *15*(3), 884-892.
[48] Wariso, R.A.M. (1971). *Suku Daya Punan, Pontianak* [Daya Punan Tribe, Pontianak]. Pontianak: Universitas Tanjung Pura.
[49] Yulianti, S., Arafah, B., Rofikah, U., Idris, A.M.S., Samsur, N., & Arafah, A.N.B. (2022). Conversational Implicatures on Saturday Night Live Talk Show. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, *13*(1), 189-197.

R. Yohanes Radjaban is a senior lecturer in the English Literature Department, Faculty of Business and Humanities, Universitas Teknologi Yogyakarta. He obtained his doctoral degree from Universitas Sebelas Maret (UNS) Surakarta, specializing in Descriptive Linguistics. His research interest is in descriptive linguistics and ethnolinguistics. He wrote books on the indigenous languages of Dayak, The Syntax of Agabag (2013) and Merap (2019). He has published articles in national and international journals and presented papers at international conferences.

Eko Setyo Humanika is a senior lecturer in the English Literature Department, Faculty of Business and Humanities, Universitas Teknologi Yogyakarta. He obtained his doctoral and Master's degrees from Universitas Sebelas Maret (UNS) Surakarta, specializing in Applied Linguistics. His research interest is in linguistics and applied linguistics. He has published articles in national and international journals and presented papers at international conferences.

Burhanuddin Arafah obtained his PhD in English (Australian) literature at the University of Newcastle, Australia, in 2003. He earned his Master's degree in American literature at Gadjah Mada University (UGM) Yogyakarta of Indonesia in 1995 and his Bachelor's degree in English literature at Hasanuddin University (UNHAS) in 1988. He is currently a full professor of English literature at the English Literature Study Program, Faculty of Cultural Sciences of UNHAS, Indonesia. He has published four books in the English language and literature and more than 50 research articles ranked in international journals published in the English language. He also has received 24 Intellectual Property Right Certificates from the Indonesian government. His areas of interest are English literature, language education, and cultural studies. He was the Dean of the Faculty of Cultural Sciences of UNHAS from 2009-2017. He is actively involved at the National Accreditation Board-Higher Education, Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia in his position as Assessor.