

An Initial Reconstruction of Proto-Lampungic: Phonology and Basic Vocabulary

Karl Anderbeck
SIL International

Lampungic isolects such as Komerling, Pubian and Lampung are spoken by approximately one and a half million people in the western Indonesian provinces of Lampung and South Sumatra. To date there has not been any published reconstruction of earlier stages of Lampungic nor a detailed investigation of its classificatory status within Western Malayo-Polynesian (WMP). Differing subgrouping hypotheses for Lampungic have been posited, whether with Malayic, or Malayo-Javanic, or, most recently, as an isolate. A major problem has simply been the paucity of published data.

Drawing on a recent SIL dialect study as well as earlier sources, this study is an initial attempt to provide parameters for understanding the place of Lampungic within WMP. Specifically, it is a reconstruction of the phonology and basic vocabulary of what is called Proto-Lampungic (PLP). Drawing on the disciplines of dialectology, comparative linguistics and previous reconstructions of relevant proto-languages, a principled distinction between pre- and post-PLP innovations is made. The result is a bundle of features which together can be used to define a Lampungic subgroup and to distinguish it from its neighbors. These are:

1. loss of PMP *h in all positions
2. PMP *q > PLP *h
3. merger of PMP *R and *r in word-initial position
4. PMP *eR sequences > PLP *y/i
5. non-initial PMP *R > PLP *y
6. conditioned merger of PMP *j and *d with PLP *r
7. retention of PMP *z as PLP *j
8. retention of PMP *w
9. (possible) Proto-Hesperonesian *ʔ > PLP *h
10. retention of the PMP four-vowel system, and of diphthongs *-aw and *-uy
11. erratic lexical distribution of PMP *-ay as PLP *-ay and *i
12. Nothofer's (1985:294) "System 3" PAN numeral system

So far none of Adelaar's (2005) 22 other WMP subgroups seems to share enough of these features to make a convincing case for merger with another subgroup or for positing a shared intermediate node under WMP.

Beyond a discussion of its place in WMP, a brief treatment is given of Lampungic's contribution to the discussion of disputed PMP segments such as *r and *-ey.

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