

West Damar Language, An Isolate in South-Eastern Indonesia

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West Damar or Damar Batumerah spoken in the two villages on the north-western coast of Damar island in South West Maluku was firstly documented by us in the framework of the documentation project we started during our residence on Ambon island in 1963-1965.

The language is no doubt Austronesian and shares a number of endemic lexical items and features characteristic to the neighboring languages, like Kisar (Meher), Leti, Moa, Sermata, Wetan and others (Chlenova 2005). Lexicostatistically DB shows a significant proximity to these languages, although the coefficient of proximity is lower than inside the Kisar-Leti dialect chain. The following factors were obtained: 62.6% with Nila, 61.6% with Serua, 64.6% with Daweloor, 64% with Leti, 58% with Roma, 49% with Selaru, 51% with Yamdena, 48% with Kei, 42% with Fordata (Chlenov 1976).

Not only are the lexicostatistical indices of DB with neighboring languages lower than expected, but its historical phonology shows significant specificity by which DB differs from all languages of the area. One specific innovation for Kisar (Meher), Leti, Moa, Sermata, Roma, Nila, Serua, Daweloor, Wetan, Selaru is the merger of PAUS *r, *R, *d, *D, *j into Proto-Southwest Maluku (PSWM) *r (?), whereas PAUS *l and *Z retain their specific reflexes.

<u>Leti</u> :	warni	- -	*wakar	'root'
	iran	- -	*ijuN	'nose'
	nure	- -	*niuR	'coconut'
	mori	- -	*uDip	'live'
	ru	- -	*Duwa	'two'
	utne	- -	*quZan	'rain'
	lim	- -	*lima	'hand'

<u>Serua</u> :	nnera	--	*wakar	'root'
	sellyora	--	*laud	'sea'
	telru	--	*toluR	'egg'
	nirnu	--	*ijuN	'nose'
	rua	--	*Duwa	'two'
	usna	--	*quZan	'rain'
	walu	--	*walu	'eight'

DB merges PAUS *r, *d and *D into *r*, while *R reflexes remain separate as *ch*, *j as *w*, *Z as *h*, and *l as *l*. Nowhere in the whole area of Southern Maluku is such phonological structure found.

DB :	mori	--	*uDip	'live'
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rowo	--	*daRaɣ	'blood'
riwnyo	--	*ribu	'thousand'
talcho	--	*toluR	'egg'
nucho	--	*niuR	'coconut'
echecheya	--	*ikuR	'tail'
uhnoni	--	*quZan	'rain'
hollo	--	*Zalan	'path'
lawoni	--	*qajaw	'sun'
wwi	--	*pija	'how much'
limo	--	*lima	'five'
telli	--	*telu	'three'

These examples demonstrate that DB occupies a very specific place in the Eastern Indonesian area, so that further study of this until now untouched language may be of importance for different problems of classification of the languages of the Eastern part of the Malay archipelago.

REFERENCES

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