# THE PEPET IN SAMA-BAJAW

A. KEMP PALLESEN



## 1. TOPIC OF DISCUSSION

PAN *ə, the so-called 'pepet' vowel of Proto-Austronesian, described by Conant (1912) as the "original indifferent vowel... colorless and indefinite in pronunciation", is notable for the variety of its realisations in the daughter languages. This variety is described for Sama-Bajaw[1], a sub-grouping of Austronesian, where it finds especially rich expression. Some explanatory hypotheses are proposed for the splitting of PAN *ə into three Proto Sama-Bajaw phonemes.

## 2. SAMA-BAJAW AS A DISTINCT SUB-GROUPING

Sama-Bajaw languages occur in greatest number and diversity along the Sulu Archipelago (Philippines) and up into Sibuguey Gulf on the western end of Mindanao. Other languages of the group are Abaknon (AB)[2] in the

Central Philippines; Sabah Bajau (NB) on the West Coast of Sabah, Malaysia; and a number of closely related but geographically dispersed groups (IB) in Indonesia - in Sulawesi, the Moluccas, and the Lesser Sunda Islands.

The position of the Sama-Bajaw subgrouping within Austronesian has not yet been satisfactorily determined. It is a Hesperonesian sub-group, but the data do not clearly support the generally accepted assignment to the Philippine Hesion[3]. Central Sulu (CS) languages share 31% of cognates with both Malay and Cebuano on a 372 word list[4], and 38% with Siocon Subanon, a Meso-Philippine language of western Mindanao. Sabah Bajau (NB) shares 37% with Malay and 32% with Siocon Subanon. (The 54% which Central Sulu languages share with Tausug, a displaced Southern Bisayan language spoken in Central Sulu, is due to considerable linguistic convergence.) The sub-group is atypical, though perhaps not unique (if Sangir is a member of the Philippine Hesion), in having *h as the regular reflex of PAN *R.

Within the sub-grouping Sama-Bajaw is divided into six sections on the basis of cognacity, syntactic typology, and reflexes of PSB phonemes. The dividing lines of these sections correspond to discontinuities in chains of mutual intelligibility. Since it is not important for the topic of this paper, this internal subdivision is not discussed in further detail, beyond noting that apart from relationships with (AB), which shows a considerable degree of convergence with Central Philippine languages, the lowest internal Sama-Bajaw cognate relationship is between (CS) and Indonesian Bajaw (IB), with 54%.

## 3. THE DATA

Accurately recorded data based on the Elkins word list, and considerably augmented in several cases, are available for all sections of Sama-Bajaw and form the basis of this study. The notation is essentially phonemic unless otherwise indicated. The Proto Sama-Bajaw forms cited are from a corpus of about 2500 reconstructions currently in preparation.

## 4. NORMAL PROTO SAMA-BAJAW REFLEXES OF PAN *ə

Sama-Bajaw languages exemplify Conant's[5] 'law of gemination'. Gemination in SB is the result of two processes: (1) the gemination of a single medial consonant, and (2) the assimilation of the first consonant of a heterorganic cluster formed by the reduplication of a monosyllable. Non-geminate homorganic clusters are formed by the assimilation of an infixed *ŋ[6] to the point of articulation of the following consonant.

A following homorganic cluster, geminate or otherwise, is the essential environment for the reflection of PAN *ə as *ə[7]. Elsewhere, i.e. where this environmental condition is not met, the reflex of PAN *ə is *ʉ[8] or *a. PSB is thus like Malagasy in having diverse reflexes of PAN *ə in penult and ultima, but it does not conform to Conant's[5] observation that "the Philippines languages, wherever they show this double vocalism, have a in the penult". The phonemic status of *ə and *ʉ in PSB is discussed in Section 8.

4.1 The three PSB reflexes of PAN *ə are now presented and exemplified for the penultimate and ultimate syllables, i.e. for the dissyllabic words which comprise the great proportion of the Proto-Austronesian corpus. The proposal of this paper is that the differentiation of PAN *ə into the PSB reflexes *ə, *ʉ and *a is most satisfactorily explained by positing contrastive stress in the dialect of PAN[9] from which PSB most immediately derives, at least in those words which contain PAN *ə. This stress hypothesis is discussed in Section 6.

*ə is the reflex of unstressed PAN *ə in the penult; *a is the reflex of unstressed PAN *ə in the ultima, when the vowel of the penult is other than PAN *ə; *ʉ is the reflex of PAN *ə elsewhere, i.e. of stressed PAN *ə in penult and ultima, and of unstressed PAN *ə in the ultima when the vowel of the penult is also PAN *ə:

PAN *Rəbáh *'to throw down, destroy'* > *həbbaq *'to topple'*; PAN *səpsép *'to suck'* > *səssʉp; PAN *lípət *'to fold'* > *lipat *'to fold in two'*; PAN *láŋah *'kind of plant (sesame)'* > (*)lʉŋa[10] *'Sesamum orientale'*; PAN *kémkəm *'to keep close'* > (*)kʉmkʉm *'to hold in closed fist'*; PAN(B) *SáRə(Ct) *'constriction, to tighten'* > (*)hʉgʉt[10] *'to be secure'*; PAN *hajéŋ *'charcoal'* > *arʉŋ; PAN *lə(ŋ)béŋ *'grave, ditch'* > *ləbbʉŋ *'to bury'*.

4.2 Lack of data makes it impossible to give an adequate description of the PSB reflexes of PAN *ə in the antepenultimate syllable. The one PAN example which has a PSB reflex is unsatisfactory because of the ambiguity of the Ja. and Ml. evidence for PAN *ə[11]:

PAN *sərampaŋ *'sprout, tine'* (the citations in VLAW suggest *'fish spear'* as a more satisfactory gloss) > *sahapaŋ *'multi-tined fish spear'*. There are numerous comparisons, however, between Malay and Sama-Bajaw which show that SB regularly has *a where Ml. has ə in the antepenult (the possible loan status of some of the following forms does not affect the point of the relationship between the vocalisms):

PSB *jambatan *'bridge, pier'* : Ml. jəmbatan, jambatan *'bridge'*; *kəranjaŋ *'open-weave basket'* < PAN *karanzaŋ : Ml. kəranjaŋ *'basket'*;

(*)salassay < *(salәssay) *'to settle a dispute'* : Ml. sәlәsay *'to solve, settle, complete'*. It seems probable that the correspondence of PSB *a and Ml. ә in the antepenult reflects PAN *a.

Although the PAN > PSB evidence is sparse, the internal evidence of Sama-Bajaw supports the reconstruction of five vowels in the antepenultimate syllable: *a, *i, *u, *ә, *ʉ. Three of these are of interest here[12]; *a is included because of the partial overlap of its reflexes with those of *ә and *ʉ.

4.21 *a is posited for the correspondence: e (occasionally a in (YK), ә (occasionally a) in (NB)[13], a in other languages:

(*)bagunbun *'dust'*. (ZB, NS.2-3, CS.5, SS.4) bagumbun, (YK) begumbun, (NS.4-9, WS, CS.2, SS.1-4, Tsg.) bagunbun.

*saruduŋ *'roofed area'*. (YK) seuduŋ *'extension of roof overhang'*, (CS.2) sauduŋ *'roofed, unwalled part of house'*, (NB.1) sәruduŋ *'cooking area'*.

4.22 *ә is posited for the correspondence: a in (AB), i (with a few exceptions) in (ZB) and (NS-SS), e or i in (YK)[14], ә in (NB), and a or i in (IB)[15]:

*dәbuhiq *'last night'*. (AB) dabuqi, (YK) debuhiq, (NS-SS) dibuhiq, (NB) dәbuiq, (IB) dabuiq.

*әnsәllan *'oil'*. (YK) isellan, insellan, (CS.2,5) әnsәllan, (CS.3, JM) insәllan, (NB) әnsәlan, [IB.9] ansәlan.

4.23 *ʉ is posited for the correspondence: a in (AB), u in (ZB, YK, NS-SS and JM), u or ә in (NB), a or i in (IB). Only the (AB) and (IB) reflexes distinguish this set from *u.

*kʉhapoq *'grouper, rock cod'*. (YK, NS.3, WS.1, CS.2) kuhapoq, (SS.4) kuhapuq, (IB.1) kiapuq.

*tʉqolan *'bone'*. (AB) taqulaŋ, (ZB.3, CS.2-3, SS) toqolaŋ (*tuqolaŋ).

The internal PSB evidence thus suggests that PAN *ә in the antepenult split into the reflexes *ә and *ʉ, a split analogous to that described for the penult. The primary conditioning factor in the antepenult, however, does not appear to be contrastive stress, as is posited for the penult (in Section 6). The small number of examples permits only the following tentative conclusion at this stage:

In the antepenultimate syllable *ʉ is the reflex of PAN *ә before the consonants *h, *w and *l; *ә is the reflex of PAN *ә otherwise.

*h and *w are consonants which do not geminate, and this limitation inhibits the reflex of PAN *ә as *ә in the penult (discussed in