

The Temuan language of Ulu Selangor

A study based on materials from the Adela S. Baer collection in the Orang Asli Archive

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The language spoken by the Temuan people of Peninsular Malaysia is one of several non-mainstream varieties of Malay. Relatively understudied, the non-mainstream Malay of these so-called 'Proto-Malays' might nevertheless hold important information regarding the early linguistic interactions between the Malays and the Orang Asli, and perhaps even provide clues regarding the position of the 'Proto-Malays' in the history of the settlement of the Peninsular. Such questions, including the plausibility of the notion of 'Proto-Malay' as a linguistic unity, can only find useful answers when we learn more about the languages and dialects under consideration.

This study is one such effort in this direction. It is a descriptive and comparative study of the Temuan dialects spoken in Ulu Selangor and is based primarily on materials collected by the scientist Adela Baer during her fieldwork in Peninsular Malaysia in the 1970's. Baer's materials are currently housed at the Orang Asli Archive at Keene State College in New Hampshire, USA. In addition, observations made during the author's own brief recent visits to Temuan settlements in Ulu Selangor over the past two years are used to confirm and corroborate the data in the Baer collection.

Two items form the core of this study:

1) Baer (1999): the Temuan-English-Malay lexicon, compiled by Baer with the help of Temuan native Jalil Mohamad. This valuable lexicon consists of approximately 3,200 entries and, while transcribed in a non-standard phonetic alphabet, contains enough detail to enable a comparative study with standard Malay. Given the intense contact between Temuan and Malay over the centuries, it is unsurprising that the lexicon would reveal layers of borrowings which often obscure correspondence relationships. This work carefully sifts through and lays out the various systematic correspondences observed. Two such examples will be provided here: a) while Malay /r/ is sometimes reflected as /r/ in Temuan as well (e.g. Temuan /rambut/ ~ Malay /rambut/, many other entries show a correspondence between Malay /r/ and Temuan zero, or a debuccalized variant in intervocalic position, which is possibly a glottal stop, transcribed as ' by Baer. (Temuan /akit/ ~ Malay /rakit/; /aka/ ~ /akar/; /o'ang/ ~ /orang/; /ku'us/ ~ /kurus/); b) several Temuan words show the non-lowering of the high vowels /i/ or /u/ that has also been observed in several other Malay dialects, e.g. (Temuan /utak/ ~ Malay /otak/; /usak/ ~ /rosak/; /bungsu/ ~ /bongsu/; /ilok/ ~ /elok/; /kibau/ ~ /kerbau/). In addition to the Malay correspondences, work is also being carried out to uncover the etymologies of words of apparent Ausro-Asiatic origins in the lexicon.

2) Baer (1971-72): a recording of a Temuan saga entitled *Mamah Bungsu Gunong Tujoh* narrated by a Temuan named Mahomat from Kampung Ulu Serendah, Ulu Selangor. This recording runs for approximately 2 1/2 hours, and, in its original format, was partitioned over several tapes. This study will report on the progress of transcription work that will be carried out for this narrative, which the author has arranged with the Orang Asli Archive at Keene State College. It is hoped that the transcription will serve, first and foremost, as a visible documentation of the folklore that forms an integral part of Temuan cultural legacy. Additionally, the detailed phonetic transcriptions here will be useful when cross-referenced with the transcriptions of the Temuan lexicon, besides providing additional empirical information regarding the syntax, morphology and intonational properties of the language. The completed transcribed work will be added to and made available through the Orang Asli Archive.

References:

Baer, Adela

1971-1972 'Mamah Bungsu Gunong Tujoh, Mahomat (narrator)' in Adela S. Baer Papers: Series 5: Temuan Sound Recordings, 1971-1972, Box 4, CD #4-6. Orang Asli Archive, Keene State College Library, Keene, NH.

Baer, Adela

1999 'A Temuan-English-Malay Lexicon' in Adela S. Baer Papers: Series 2: Manuscripts, 1968-1999, 2001, Digital File. Orang Asli Archive, Keene State College Library, Keene, NH.

The Orang Asli Archive is housed at Mason Library, Keene State College, Keene, NH.
(<http://www.keene.edu/library/orangasli/>)