

The Linguistic Position of Sama-Bajaw

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Evidence for a Philippine subgroup which excludes the Sama-Bajaw languages has been known at least since Zorc (1986). This has left the position of the Sama-Bajaw languages within the Austronesian family in limbo. Various scholars have remarked, in some cases following native tradition, that the Sama-Bajaw peoples are immigrants from Borneo. But where in Borneo? Samalan languages do not subgroup with any of the languages of Sabah, and no other leads have been presented to date.

Evidence is presented in this paper that the Sama-Bajaw languages subgroup with the Barito languages of southeast Kalimantan. Various observations suggest that the migrations of the Malagasy and Sama-Bajaw represent divergent responses to Sriwijayan Malay contact with southeast Borneo beginning probably in the late seventh century CE. The Malagasy went west and were eventually cut off from contacts with insular Southeast Asia.

By contrast, the Sama-Bajaw went north, and played a major role in the pre-European spice trade. This role established a mode of life which has persisted among some Sama-Bajaw groups through the colonial period to the present day.