

Rhythm in Bidayuh

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The approximately 25 dialects of Bidayuh (Land Dayak) spoken in Sarawak, Malaysia, can be grouped into four clusters of generally intelligible dialects: Eastern Bidayuh (Bukar-Sadung), Central (Biatah-Penrissen-Lower Padawan), Highland (Tringgus-Sembaan-Upper Padawan) and Western (Singai-Jagoi).

In both the ultima and penult of the word, there are differences of vowel duration that create contrasting rhythm patterns.

Six vowels contrast in the ultima: *i, u, ə, e, o, a*. Each of them can occur as normal or as lengthened (V):¹

puʔan 'know (person)' Eastern, Central, Highland, Western.

tuʔan 'primary forest' Eastern, Central, Highland, *tuʔan* Western.

Only four vowels contrast in the penult: *i, u, ə, a*. In Eastern, Central and Highland (but not Western) dialects there are two types of penult vowels, full (\bar{V}) and reduced (\check{V}).²

bāʔuh 'new' Eastern, Central, Highland, *baʔuh* Western.

bǎʔuh 'eagle' Eastern, Central, Highland, *bəʔuh* Western.

būkut 'to punch' Eastern, Highland, *mūkut* Central, *bukut* Western.

būko:ʔ 'bush knife' Eastern, Central, Highland, *bukoʔ* Western.

A full penult vowel is sustained and has consistent quality. Although no single phonetic feature is present in every instance of a reduced vowel, the following features most commonly characterize this type of vowel:

- quick, not-sustainable articulation
- lengthening of a following consonant
- devoicing before a voiceless stop
- deletion, in at least some utterances
- lax vowel quality, e.g., *i > ɪ*
- lowering of high vowels, e.g., *i > e*
- exchange of vowel quality, especially among high vowels, e.g., *i > u*

¹ Western Bidayuh has sequences of rearticulated vowels ([ta.'as] 'ironwood', [ti.'iʔ] 'itchy'), but, otherwise, there are no lengthened vowels.

² In some varieties of Eastern and Central Bidayuh there seems to be no distinction between full and reduced vowels, and in still others the distinction operates only in the low vowel *a*.

The lengthened vowels in the ultima seem to have had two historical sources:

- 1) Some lengthened vowels in Central Bidayuh and rearticulated vowels in Western Bidayuh have developed where a medial *h of Proto Bidayuh has dropped out.

Proto Bidayuh *tǎhas > Eastern, Highland *tǎhas*, Central *ta:s*, Western *taas* 'ironwood'.

Proto Bidayuh *muhun > Eastern, Highland *muhun*, Central *mu:n*, Western *muun* 'descend'.

- 2) Some Proto Bidayuh lengthened vowels have developed where an Austronesian (or PMP) medial laryngeal has dropped out.

PAN *buSek > Proto Bidayuh *bo:k > Central *ubo:k*, Highland *bo:k*, Western *bok* 'hair (of head)'.

PMP *bə[n]tiʔis > Proto Bidayuh *bíte:s > Eastern *bíte:s*, Central *bǎte:s*, Western *bites* 'calf (of leg)'.

The full vs. reduced vowel contrast in the penult seems to be related to differences in accentual pattern in some other AN languages and, apparently, developed from accentual differences in PAN. Specifically, a Bidayuh form with a full vowel developed from an earlier form with final stress while a Bidayuh form with a reduced vowel developed from an earlier form with penultimate stress.

PAN *batú > Proto Bidayuh *bātuh 'stone'.

PAN *telúR > Proto Bidayuh *tūloh 'egg'.

PMP *luZáq > Proto Bidayuh *ŋ-ir-ūjaʔ 'spit'.

PAN *búlan > Proto Bidayuh *būran 'moon'.

PAN *káyuh > Proto Bidayuh *kǎyuh 'wood'.

PAN *sí+kuH > Proto Bidayuh *síkuh, etc. 'elbow'.