

Long Terawan Berawan phonology: Questions on diphthongs and syllabicity

by Jürgen M. Burkhardt
Language Development SIL (M) Bhd., Malaysia
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe Universität Frankfurt a.M., Germany
juergen-jey_burkhardt@kastanet.org

Abstract

The paper takes a second look at some aspects of the phonology of Long Terawan Berawan (LTB), a language variety spoken on the Tutoh River in North-Sarawak, Malaysia. Of special interest in this language variety is the ultimate syllable. Both Robert Blust (1992) and Beatrice Clayre (1996) identify a phonemic contrast for long versus short consonants in its onset. Moreover, Clayre proves the existence of a phonemic contrast between short and long vowels in the nucleus of this syllable.

Building on the findings above and providing new field data, the present paper examines ambivalent LTB sound combinations in fuller detail, especially the notion of diphthong with respect to syllabicity.

Diphthongs are identified in terms of stress patterns, i.e. a stressed vowel carrying the syllable peak followed by an unstressed non-syllabic semivowel reinterpreted as approximant. Vowel combinations that do not show this stress pattern are identified as constituting the peak of two different syllables. On this basis, some of Clayre's monosyllabic words are reinterpreted as disyllabic and modifications of certain cases of Clayre's ultimate (nuclear) LTB syllable are proposed.