

LINGUISTIC DIVERGENCE OF DAYAK NGAJU AND KADORIH: A DIALECTOMETRIC AND CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This study explores the linguistic relationship between Dayak Ngaju (DN) and Kadorih (BK), two languages spoken within the Dayak communities of Borneo. Despite their shared Austronesian origin, DN and BK have diverged significantly over time due to geographic, cultural, and social factors. Using a qualitative approach, the research employed interviews, observations, and document analysis to examine their kinship and divergence. Vocabulary comparison using the Swadesh list revealed an 87.5% difference, classifying DN and BK as distinct languages according to Guiter's (1973) dialectometric scale. Interviews and observations highlighted BK's role in preserving ancestral traditions and DN's adaptation to modern social contexts, underscoring their distinct linguistic and cultural functions. The findings emphasize the dynamic interplay between language evolution and cultural identity, providing insights into the linguistic diversity of the Dayak heritage. This research contributes to broader discussions on Austronesian language classification and offers a deeper understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics shaping language development.

Keywords: Dayak Ngaju, Kadorih, Linguistic Divergence, Dialectometry, Austronesian Languages

INTRODUCTION

Language serves as a cornerstone of human culture, acting as a medium for communication, a marker of identity, and a repository of traditions. Among the diverse Austronesian languages spoken in Indonesia, Dayak Ngaju (DN) and Kadorih (BK) hold significant cultural and historical value within the Dayak communities of Borneo. Despite their shared origin, these languages have diverged over time, reflecting the dynamic interaction of linguistic evolution, geographic separation, and cultural adaptation. Studying their relationship not only uncovers the linguistic mechanisms at play but also sheds light on the cultural history of the Dayak people (Sada et al., 2019).

The linguistic relationship between DN and BK raises important questions about their classification. This study investigates whether these languages are dialects of a common ancestral tongue or qualify as distinct languages. The distinction between languages and dialects has been a recurring topic of

debate in sociolinguistics (Susanto et al., 2023). As Keraf (1991) points out, factors such as geographic isolation, cultural shifts, and environmental contexts significantly influence linguistic divergence. Similarly, Markov et al. (2023) notes that older languages often retain complex structures, while newer languages simplify and adapt to contemporary needs. This aligns with Rabiah's (2012) observation that languages in close proximity may evolve differently depending on the social and cultural practices of their speakers.

DN and BK represent an intriguing case of linguistic divergence within the Austronesian family. Both languages are deeply intertwined with the cultural identity of the Dayak people, yet they appear to have followed distinct evolutionary paths. Understanding the kinship and divergence of these languages requires an integrative approach that combines linguistic analysis with cultural context. By exploring their lexical and phonological differences, as well as the socio-cultural factors influencing their

development, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of their relationship within the Dayak heritage.

This research adopts a qualitative approach supported by dialectometric analysis to address these questions. Through interviews, observations, and vocabulary comparison using the Swadesh list, the study examines the extent of linguistic similarity and divergence between DN and BK. The findings contribute to broader discussions on the classification of languages and dialects, as well as the cultural dynamics shaping linguistic evolution.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the linguistic relationship between Dayak Ngaju (DN) and Kadorih (BK) languages. The research aimed to understand the divergence and kinship between the two languages by examining their cultural significance and linguistic features. To achieve this, interviews, observations, and document analysis were conducted. While the primary approach was qualitative, the document analysis incorporated a quantitative element through dialectometric calculations to measure linguistic similarity.

Data Collection

Data for this study were gathered through interviews, observations, and document analysis. Structured interviews were conducted with native speakers of Dayak Ngaju (DN) and Kadorih (BK), focusing on language use, cultural significance, and mutual intelligibility. These interviews included elders and community members who were well-versed in both languages. Observations were carried out in Dayak communities to document the contexts in which DN and BK were used, particularly during traditional ceremonies, daily interactions, and cultural events. Additionally, the Swadesh list of 200 basic words was used to compile and compare vocabulary from both languages, forming the basis for further linguistic analysis.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using qualitative and quantitative methods. Insights from interviews and observations were examined thematically to identify patterns in language use, cultural roles, and asymmetry in mutual intelligibility between DN and BK. Vocabulary data underwent dialectometric calculations to measure linguistic similarity, revealing a score of 12.5%, well below Guitier's (1973) threshold of 81% for dialect classification. This finding confirmed DN and BK as distinct languages. By combining thematic analysis with quantitative measures, the study provided a comprehensive understanding of the linguistic divergence and cultural influences shaping DN and BK, emphasizing the dynamic interplay between language evolution and socio-cultural factors.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Lexical Comparison

The analysis of basic vocabulary between Dayak Ngaju (DN) and Kadorih (BK) was conducted using the Swadesh list, a widely recognized tool in comparative linguistics (Keraf, 1991). Out of 200 basic words, 87.5% were found to differ between the two languages, indicating significant lexical divergence. This result strongly suggests that DN and BK are distinct languages rather than dialects of the same linguistic system.

BK retained a more traditional lexicon, preserving words tied to ancestral practices, rituals, and environmental interactions. For example, terms related to natural elements and traditional tools remained unique to BK, emphasizing its role as an older, culturally embedded language. This finding supports Navare's (2013) assertion that core vocabulary in older languages is closely linked to cultural preservation. In contrast, DN demonstrated modern adaptations, with borrowed terms and simplified vocabulary reflective of increased external influence and urbanization. Such changes align with Kuo and Lai's (2006) observation that younger languages often adapt to the demands of evolving social contexts.

The divergence between DN and BK also reflects the linguistic evolution influenced by geography and socio-cultural dynamics. As Mansfield et al. (2023) explains, languages spoken in close geographic proximity may diverge significantly due to the differing cultural practices of their speakers. BK, predominantly used in rural and traditional settings, has retained its ancestral linguistic features. Conversely, DN, widely spoken in urbanized areas, has undergone modifications to accommodate contemporary communication needs.

Moreover, the findings align with Dunn's (2018) dialectometric framework, which classifies linguistic varieties with less than 81% similarity as distinct languages. The 87.5% lexical difference between DN and BK firmly places them in this category, reinforcing the notion that BK serves as a linguistic predecessor rather than a dialect of DN. The lexical comparison highlights the dynamic evolution of Austronesian languages, driven by historical migrations, environmental contexts, and cultural exchanges (Keraf, 1991).

These results underscore the rich linguistic diversity of the Dayak communities, reflecting their cultural history and adaptability. The significant differences between DN and BK not only emphasize their distinct linguistic identities but also contribute to the broader understanding of language evolution within the Austronesian family.

Dialectometric Analysis

The dialectometric analysis, based on the Swadesh list comparison, confirmed that Dayak Ngaju (DN) and Kadorih (BK) are distinct languages. The vocabulary similarity score was calculated at 12.5%, far below the 81% threshold defined by Dunn's (2018) dialectometric scale for dialect classification. This result underscores the significant linguistic divergence between DN and BK, emphasizing that these are separate languages with their own unique characteristics. The distinctiveness of BK and DN is further reinforced by their differing roles within the

community: BK often represents traditional and ceremonial contexts, while DN serves more as a practical, everyday language.

This divergence is further reflected in the perspectives of native speakers, who highlighted the differences in language usage and mutual intelligibility between BK and DN. BK speakers typically possess fluency in DN, as their older language enables them to bridge the linguistic gap. However, DN speakers often face challenges in understanding BK, indicating BK's greater linguistic complexity and retention of ancestral elements.

"BK is older than DN, and we often understand DN, but many DN speakers struggle to comprehend BK," remarked one BK speaker.

Another participant added:

"BK is deeply tied to our traditional ceremonies, while DN is more common in daily interactions."

These observations illustrate how BK maintains its linguistic and cultural significance, functioning as a repository of heritage. The asymmetry in mutual intelligibility suggests that DN has simplified or adapted elements of BK to accommodate modern communication needs, while BK has preserved its rich traditional vocabulary and structures. This dynamic reflects the natural evolution of languages within a shared cultural and historical framework.

The findings align with Keraf's (1991) assertion that linguistic divergence often results from geographic and cultural separation, even among languages with shared proto-languages. Similarly, Sari et al. (2020) observed that older languages tend to preserve traditional lexical elements, while newer languages adapt to socio-cultural changes. The mutual intelligibility asymmetry between BK and DN mirrors Mufwene's (2012) study of Austronesian languages, which noted that older languages often retain their ancestral complexity, making them harder to grasp for speakers of more modern derivatives. These

studies collectively highlight the intricate relationship between linguistic evolution, cultural context, and geographic factors, further supporting the distinctiveness of DN and BK as separate languages.

Historical and Cultural Influence

The historical and cultural contexts of the Dayak Ngaju (DN) and Kadorih (BK) languages reveal a significant influence on their linguistic development and divergence. Observations indicated that BK is deeply tied to traditional ceremonies, rituals, and oral storytelling, serving as a linguistic vessel for preserving ancestral knowledge. In contrast, DN is predominantly used in daily interactions and modern social contexts, reflecting its adaptation to contemporary life. This distinction underscores the differing roles these languages play within their communities, shaped by historical and cultural needs.

Interviews with native speakers further highlighted the cultural significance of BK. One participant remarked:

“BK is not just a language; it carries the wisdom of our ancestors and connects us to our rituals.”

Another added:

“DN is practical for everyday use, but BK holds our identity as a people.”

These perspectives highlight BK's role in preserving cultural heritage and establishing its identity as a symbolic cornerstone of Dayak traditions, emphasizing its significance in maintaining ancestral values.

The geographic distribution of the Dayak communities also contributes to the differentiation between DN and BK. As Keraf (1991) noted, geographic isolation often leads to linguistic preservation, which is evident in BK's retention of older linguistic traits. DN, by contrast, has evolved through greater interaction with external influences, leading to lexical simplifications and borrowing. This divergence reflects Honkola et al.'s (2018)

view that cultural adaptation and environmental changes are key drivers of linguistic evolution.

Culturally, BK is regarded as a sacred language, used primarily in ceremonies and traditional gatherings, while DN has emerged as a lingua franca for inter-community communication. This dual role aligns with Zlatev and Blomberg's (2015) observation that languages in close proximity often develop complementary functions to meet the distinct needs of their speakers. The historical depth and cultural resonance of BK position it as a language of tradition and identity, while DN's accessibility facilitates broader social integration.

In conclusion, the historical and cultural influences on DN and BK not only define their unique roles but also contribute to their linguistic divergence. BK's preservation of ancestral knowledge and rituals contrasts with DN's evolution as a modern communicative tool, highlighting the dynamic interplay between language, culture, and history within the Dayak communities.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the linguistic relationship between Dayak Ngaju (DN) and Kadorih (BK), classifying them as distinct languages despite their shared Austronesian origin. Vocabulary comparison using the Swadesh list revealed an 87.5% difference, which falls below the 81% threshold defined by Guiter's (1973) dialectometric scale for dialect classification. Cultural and historical factors significantly shaped their divergence, with BK maintaining its role as a ceremonial language closely tied to ancestral traditions, while DN evolved into a practical medium for daily communication. These findings underscore the dynamic interplay between linguistic evolution and cultural adaptation, contributing to the understanding of Austronesian language diversity. Future research could explore the sociolinguistic dynamics of other Dayak languages to further illuminate the regional linguistic and cultural landscape.

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