Ibanic dialectology: particle, wave and field

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Abstract

'Ibanic lects', speech varieties including Iban, Seberuang, Kantuk and Mualang, share a clear historical relationship (Hudson 1970). Yet the nature of that relationship is not always clear. How diverse is the Ibanic dialect network? What are the main 'mountains' and 'plains' in the linguistic topography: which named varieties are most distinct and which are most similar? Who understands whom? Which groups are able to communicate using their own lects, and which are forced to switch to a lingua franca to communicate? This paper examines the Ibanic dialect network from three perspectives: that of 'particle', 'wave' and 'field' (Pike 1967). The table below (adapted from Beaugrande 1991) displays aspects of those three perspectives:

Views	particle	wave	field
interrelatedness of units	discrete	continuous	arrayed
modes	feature	manifestation	distribution
perspective	static	dynamic	functional

Utilizing the three perspectives provides distinct and insightful understandings into the Ibanic dialect network. The 'field' perspective highlights the social or ecological situatedness of the various lects, some functioning strictly as home languages, others as languages of wider communication, but all embedded in a larger linguistic ecosystem (Calvet 2006). The 'wave' perspective brings to the forefront the historical movement of innovations from within and without the Ibanic dialect network. The 'particle' perspective, the one most familiar to non-linguists, gets us to think about issues of 'language identification' and mapping: how well do current language maps and the ISO 639-3 language registry (http://www.sil.org/iso639-3/) reflect linguistic reality? In this case, it would seem the answer is 'not very well', so recommendations are given for improvement, both within the constraints of the 'particle' perspective as well as in integrating insights from the 'wave' and 'field' perspectives.

References

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