

Some Problems in the Kavalan Phonology

Paul Jen-kuei Li

Institute of Linguistics, Academia Sinica

Kavalan is an Austronesian language used to be spoken in the northeast coast of Taiwan, but the Kavalan people there have by now been completely sinicized, having lost their native linguistic and cultural identity. The few Kavalan people who have migrated to the east coast of Taiwan still speak their native language in their daily life. This study is based on their speech. In this paper I shall discuss some phonological problems, both synchronic and diachronic, of the Kavalan language.

Unlike most other Formosan language, Kavalan presents many problems for transcriptions and analysis. For one thing, it has geminate consonants in contrast with single consonants, e.g. *sani* 'otter' vs. *sanni* 'itchy'. They occur in word-initial, medial and final position, e.g. *llan* 'sky', *babbar* 'to hit', *paqann* 'to feed'. Geminate consonants may alternate with single consonants for the same lexical item, e.g. *qan* 'to eat', *qannan* 'food'. A phonetic geminate consonant crops up when a consonant cluster occurs in word-initial position, e.g. *tnel* [t̪ɪnnɛk] 'vegetable'. In such a case, the glide vowel [i] and indication of gemination can be omitted from our transcription for simplicity's sake. But then there will be inconsistency of transcription. Geminate consonants may have a grammatical function and indicate emphasis, e.g. *sukaw* 'bad', *sukkaw* 'very bad'. A geminate consonant may be derived by assimilation of one consonant to another, e.g. *ɲmay* 'rice' > **sa-ɲmay* > *sa-mmay* 'to cook rice'. Another source of a geminate consonant is compensatory lengthening due to loss of a preceding vowel, e.g. PAN **batuH* > *btu* [β̪t̪:úʔ] 'stone'. But sources of geminate consonants in many lexical forms are unknown, e.g. *llan* 'sky', *saRRu* 'cool', *summ* 'to urinate'

For another, a noun and verb may differ only in the presence or absence of /a/ in the first syllable, e.g. *btu* 'stone' vs. *battu* 'to throw a stone', *qrizen* 'string' vs. *qarizen* 'to twist a string'. The noun-verb dichotomy is probably due to an earlier stress pattern.: Nouns would have had stress on the ultima and verbs on the initial syllable of these lexically related pairs. This would explain why the first vowel is preserved in verbs, but lost in nouns. Compare the noun-verb distinction based on stress variation in English, e.g. *pérmit* vs. *permít*.

Still another problem is sound changes involving splits in Kavalan: (1) PAN **k* into *q* (before back vowels) and *k*; (2) **l* into *r* and *R*; (3) **R* into *r*, *l* and *R*; (4) **a* into *i* (adjacent to **q*) and *a*; and (5) **e* into *e*, *i*, and *ɿ*(initial syllable). Conditioning environments for all the splits have not yet been completely worked out, and there are notable exceptions to the above suggested rules.