

**Dialect Continuum In Padawan:  
Differences Of Bidayuh Biatah In Kampung Quop,  
Kampung Mambong And Kampung Benuk**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This study was conducted to see if the dialect continuum phenomenon is also present happened in Sarawak. The language that is the focus of the study is the Bidayuh language, especially the Bidayuh Biatah dialect and subdialects spoken in the Padawan area, Sarawak. The research methodology that has been used in this study is, research field by interviewing 12 informants from three villages which are different, as well as corpus data, by using a word list book. This study will analyze and discuss the differences in terms of semantics ie focusing on synonyms, hyponyms, as well as homophones and phonological differences that is, focusing on the dropping and diftongong found in each village This research has indirectly proved and supports the opinion of how the distance factor plays an important role which causes the emergence of many dialects and subdialects in a language.*

**Keywords:** *synonyms, hyponyms, homophones, dropping, diphthongization*

**INTRODUCTION**

*If we travel from village to village in a particular direction, we notice linguistic differences which distinguish one village from another. The further we get from our starting point, the larger the difference will become. This type of situation is known as the Geographic Dialect Continuum (Chambers and Trudgill, 2004).*

The above quote is a brief description of the geographic dialect continuum, which is the focus of this study. In order to study if this phenomenon also occurs in the state of Sarawak, the researcher has chosen the Padawan district as the study location. Padawan District is one of the five districts under Kuching Division (Kuching Division Administration Official Portal, 2020). This district has such a long and deep history that can be traced back 900 years ago (Official Website of Padawan Municipal Council, 2020).

Since this district is located in the western part of Sarawak where the

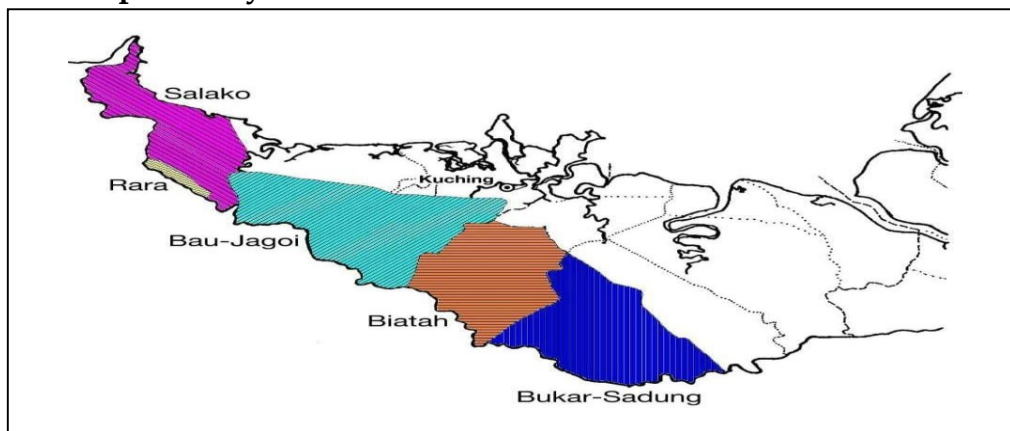
majority of the population is Bidayuh, it is not surprising that most of the population in this district is also Bidayuh. This can be proven by the presence of many Bidayuh villages in this district, and the Bidayuh dialect they use in this district is the Biatah dialect which is different from the Bidayuh dialect in the Serian district which uses the Bukar- Sadong dialect, Bau which uses the Bau-Jagoi dialect, and Lundu who use Rara dialect and Salako dialect (Ik Pahon anak Joyik et al., 2012).

There are many Biatah subdialects in the Padawan district, this is because the Bidayuh subdialects are according to their villages. This is in line with the dialect continuum concept, where the further the distance between the speakers of a dialect the more different the dialects they speak.

In this study, the researcher has chosen three villages, namely Kampung Quop, Kampung Mambong, and Kampung Benuk. The researcher chose these three villages because the distance between each village is significantly far, and this makes it easier for the researcher to detect differences.

In addition, the researcher will choose two aspects of linguistics for this study. The two linguistic aspects chosen in this study are the semantic aspect to know the meaning of a word and the phonological aspect to know the pronunciation of a word.

**Map 1: Bidayuh Dialects That Are Founded in West Sarawak**



Source: <https://dbnasarawak.wordpress.com/articles/first-language-based-multilingual-education-for-minority-communities-a-bidayuh-example/>

**Map 2. Distance Between Each Studied Village Source: Edited From**



Source: <https://www.google.com/maps/@1.3851942,110.3567288,12.53z?entry=ttu>

**Table 1. List of Acoustic Consonants Found in Bidayuh Biatah Dialect**

| Plosive   | Nasal                                       | Affricate            | Fricative               |
|---|---|----------------------|-------------------------|
| P [p]<br>B [b]<br>T [t]<br>D [d]<br>K [k][ʔ]<br>G [g] | M<br>[m]<br>N [n]<br>Ny<br>[ɲ]<br>Ng<br>[ŋ] | Ch<br>[tʃ]<br>J [dʒ] | F [f]<br>S [s]<br>H [h] |
| <b>Lateral</b>  | <b>Trill</b>                                | <b>Semi-Vowel</b>    |                         |
| L [l]   | R [r]                                       | W [w]<br>Y [j]       |                         |

**Table 2. List of Vocals and Diphthongs Found in Bidayuh Biatah Dialect**

| Vocal  | Diphthong  |
|--|--|
| A [a]<br>E [e]<br>[ə]<br>I [i]<br>O [o]<br>U [u] | Ai [ai]<br>Ei [əi]/Eu<br>[əu]<br>Ie [ie]<br>Oi [oi]<br>Ue [uə] |

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In order for this study to be accurate, the researcher has chosen four studies to be used as a guide. In addition, this selected study also aims to help readers get a clearer picture of the study that will be conducted.

The highlight of the first study is the *Dialect Continuum* conducted by Stana Pavić (2011). In his study, he stated that we cannot study the continuum of dialects without touching on cumulative, Levenshtein, geographic, and phonological distance, because these are the tools used to study and explore dialects. This study also tells that the lines that mark the border between two regions that distinguish some linguistic features called isogloss, and they will cause some problems because they are not perfect, and do not always coincide. Among the dialects that are the focus of his research are West Rumi, West Germanic, and North Slavic dialects, as well as 27 Dutch dialects.

The next highlight of the study is *The Continuum of Terengganu Dialect Along the East Coast of Malaysia: A Geolinguistic Study* conducted by Nor Hashimah Jalaluddin, Khairul Ashraaf Saari, and Wan Athirah Adilah Wan Halim (2021). This study states that the leading Malay dialect in the East Coast is the Terengganu dialect, because it has several linguistic peculiarities, such as nasal modification, consonant drop, fricative modification, liquida drop, and

monophthong. The characteristics of this dialect are very different from standard Malay. The findings of this study prove that the characteristics of the Terengganu dialect are widely used and towards the South, and the distribution clearly forms a continuum for the Terengganu dialect. This study states that non-linguistic factors such as history, socioeconomics, and topography also play a major role in regulating the distribution of these dialects. In addition, this study argues that the flat land surface along the coast also helps strengthen the movement and spread of the Terengganu dialect.

*Examining Language Development and Revitalization Initiatives: The Case of Bidayuh Language in Sarawak* conducted by Petricia Nora Riget and Yvonne Michelle Campbell (2020) has also been taken as a study highlight. This study was conducted to evaluate initiatives to develop and revive the Bidayuh language, which is spoken in Sarawak. The main focus of this study is the language development and revitalization initiatives taken by various stakeholders between 1963 and now. This study concludes with some recommendations on how to improve the success of the Bidayuh language revival initiative. In addition, *The Historical Phonology of Hliboi, A Bidayuh Language of Borneo* conducted by Alexander D. Smith (2021) was also used as a highlight of the study. This study concludes that the history of sound changes in Bidayuh Hliboi is characterized by phonetic changes, where following time changes has generated marking in syllable changes. In this study, he also stated that in the Bidayuh Hliboi language, as in other languages found in Borneo, phonetic changes occur after the arrangement of emphasis from throchaic and to iambic and final words.

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### **METHODOLOGY**

In order to make it easier for the researcher to collect the data required for the study, the researcher has chosen two methods, namely in the field and also using corpus data. For the field work data, the researcher has interviewed a total of 2 informants who will then be verified by 3 other informants from each village, making the total number of informants 15 people from 3 villages. The selected informants are based on the NORM principle, so that the data collected can be proven valid. In addition to the NORM principle, the selected informants are also native speakers of Biatah Bidayuh dialect, because the focus of this study is related to that dialect, and not speakers of other Bidayuh dialects.

For the corpus data, the researcher has used a book entitled Daftar Kata Bidayuh Biatah, which was written and self-published by the Dayak Bidayuh National Association (2013) as a guide to compare data collected through field research methods. This book was chosen because it contains words that are often and rarely used in daily speech, therefore, the comparison of semantic and phonological aspects which is the focus of this study can easily be detected. Apart from the book, the researcher also used the Swadesh Word List. The total number of words in this word list is 195 words. This helps the researcher to list words that also aim to see differences that exist in terms of semantics and phonology.

## FINDINGS ANALYSIS

This section will analyze the findings obtained by the researcher. This section is divided into two which discuss the differences in the semantic aspects, and the differences in the phonological aspects of the data that has been collected using the field study method and the corpus data method. The researcher will use the Bidayuh Biatah dialect in Kampung Quop as a guideline.

### Differences in Semantic Aspects

Semantics is a field that studies meaning in language (Nik Safiah Karim, 2001). In the Bidayuh Biatah dialect, a certain meaning can be shared by several words. The difference in word selection may be because the word is used by one village but does not exist or is rarely used by other villagers. This situation is quite difficult for Bidayuh speakers themselves, even though they are from the same area. The semantic aspects that will be analyzed in this study are synonyms, hyponyms and homophones.

### Synonyms

A synonym is a word that has the same or almost the same meaning as another word in the same language (Arbak Othman, 2019). Similar words also exist in the Bidayuh Biatah dialect such as sand, belt, and bottle.

**Table 3. Synonyms**

| English     | Biatah: Quop | Biatah: Mambong | Biatah: Benuk            |
|-------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Sand</b> | [paser]      | [pasir]         | [sumat]                  |
|             | [sumat]      |                 | [səmat]                  |
| <b>Belt</b> | [abət.sinʌŋ] | [bəoŋ.sinʌŋ]    | [sot.pu <sup>wə</sup> ŋ] |
|             | [bə.sinʌŋ]   |                 | [sot.piŋŋ]               |

|               |          |          |          |
|---------------|----------|----------|----------|
| <b>Bottle</b> | [səɾpaʔ] | [ɗʒəbur] | [ɗʒəbur] |
|---------------|----------|----------|----------|

Table 3 shows 3 examples of synonyms found in the Bidayuh Biatah dialect. The first word that has a synonym is **sand**, it was found that Kampung Quop use [paser] and [sumat] while Kampung Mambong uses [pasir] and Kampung Benuk uses [sumat]/[səmat], but both [paser]/[pasir] and [sumat]/[səmat] has the same meaning, which is fine stone details such as those found in coastal areas or at the bottom of rivers (Arbak Othman, 2019). The second word that has a synonym is **belt**, it was found that Kampung Quop uses [abət.sinjaŋ] and [bə.sinjaŋ], while Kampung Mambong uses [bəoŋ.sinjaŋ] and Kampung Benuk uses [sot.puwəŋ] and [sot.piŋgaŋ], but [abət.sinjaŋ], [bə.sinjaŋ], [bəoŋ.sinjaŋ], [sot.puwəŋ] and [sot.piŋgaŋ] carry the same meaning which is a strip of leather, cloth etc. that is worn around the waist to tie trousers or as jewelry (Arbak Othman, 2019). The third word that contains the synonym is **bottle**, it was found that Kampung Quop uses [səɾpaʔ] while Kampung Mambong and Kampung Benuk use [ɗʒəbur], but [səɾpaʔ] and [ɗʒəbur] carry the same meaning which is a container of various shapes made of glass or plastic to fill liquids (Arbak Othman, 2019).

### Hyponyms

A hyponym is a word with a specific meaning that is summarized and the meaning of a more general word (Arbak Othman, 2019). Hyponyms also exist in the Bidayuh Biatah dialect such as lice, worms, and seeds.

**Table 4. Hyponyms**

| English     | Biatah:<br>Quop | Biatah:<br>Mambong | Biatah:<br>Benuk |
|-------------|-----------------|--------------------|------------------|
| <b>Lice</b> | [kədəb]         | [rəgi]             | [gutih]          |
| <b>Worm</b> | [skiror]        | [tamoh]            | [gəndaʔ]         |

|             |   |   |                                   |
|-------------|---|---|-----------------------------------|
| <b>Seed</b> | [ru <sup>w</sup> aŋ.kəju<br>h]<br>[bineʔ] | [ru <sup>w</sup> aŋ.pəmuruh<br>]<br>[bəniʔeʔ] | [ru <sup>w</sup> aŋ]<br>[bəniʔeʔ] |
|-------------|---|---|-----------------------------------|

Table 4 shows 3 examples of hyponyms found in the Bidayuh Biatah dialect. The first word is **lice**, which is a very small insect that is found on hair or on animal fur (Arbak Othman, 2019), for **[gutih]** it is found on hair, while **[kədəb]** and **[rəgi]** are found on animal fur (note: **[gutih]** is an exception, as it can be found on both hair and animal fur). The second word is **worm**, which is a long round animal without legs and bones, usually living in the soil or in the human body (Arbak Othman, 2019), (note: in the Bidayuh Biatah dialect only worms that live in the soil have a name, worms in the human body do not have names in the original language) worms are categorized according to size as either large or small, **[skiror]** is a large-sized worm, while **[tamoh]** and **[gəndaʔ]** are small-sized worms. The third word is **seed** which is a seed that is made into a seed (Arbak Othman, 2019), in the Bidayuh Biatah dialect seeds can be categorized into two which are rice seeds and non-rice seeds, **[bineʔ]/ [bəniʔeʔ]** is rice seeds, while non-rice seeds are **[ruwəŋ.kəjuh]**, **[ruwəŋ]** and **[ruwəŋ.pəmuruh]**.

### Homophones

A homophone is a word that is pronounced the same as another word but has a different meaning or spelling (Arbak Othman, 2019). Homophones also exist in the Bidayuh Biatah dialect such as snake, tooth, eat, flow, small, and narrow.

**Table 5. Homophones**

|                |                         |                            |                          |
|----------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>English</b> | <b>Biatah:<br/>Quop</b> | <b>Biatah:<br/>Mambong</b> | <b>Biatah:<br/>Benuk</b> |
|----------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|

|               |                           |                   |                   |
|---------------|---------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Snake</b>  | [ɗʒəpəh]<br>[ɗʒipəh]      | [ɗʒəpoh]          | [ɗʒipoh]          |
| <b>Tooth</b>  | [ɗʒipəh]                  | [ɗʒəpoh]          | [ɗʒəpoh]          |
| <b>Eat</b>    | [man]                     | [man]             | [man]             |
| <b>Flow</b>   | [aman]                    | [man]             | [man]             |
| <b>Small</b>  | [sit]<br>[səʔ]            | [sit]             | [sit]             |
| <b>Narrow</b> | [sit]<br>[səʔ]<br>[kətis] | [sit]<br>[skidon] | [sit]<br>[skidon] |

Table 5 shows 3 examples of homophones found in the Bidayuh Biatah dialect. The first example is the word **snake** and **teeth** which is pronounced as [ɗʒəpəh]/[ɗʒipəh]/[ɗʒəpoh]/[ɗʒipoh], to distinguish these two words, the vowel in the first syllable plays a very important role, namely the vowel [ə] and the vowel [i], but sometimes the speaker does not change the vowel used, because this word can be distinguished according to the context like other languages that also have words with homophones, for example "**berus** [ɗʒəpəh]/[ɗʒipəh]/[ɗʒəpoh]/[ɗʒipoh]" (brushing teeth) and "**gik** [ɗʒəpəh]/[ɗʒipəh]/[ɗʒəpoh]/[ɗʒipoh]" (there is a snake). The second example is the word **eat** and **flow** which is pronounced as [man], just like snake and tooth, the context is also very important for this word, but not for the speakers in Kampung Quop, because of the existence of the vowel [a] in [aman] to distinguish the two words this. The third example is **small** and **narrow** pronounced as [sit], just like the previous example, the context of use is very important, for example "**buk** [sit]" (small book) and "**ran** [sit]" (narrow road), to overcome this issue there is another word that can be used which is [səʔ] for small and narrow while [kətis] and [skidon] can only be used for narrow.

### Differences in Phonological Aspects

Phonology is a branch of linguistics that studies the system and function of sounds in a language (Nik Safiah Karim, 2001). In Bidayuh Biatah, the phonological process that can be seen clearly is the process of dropping and diphthong. This means that the phonological process that takes place makes it easier for speakers to know the origin of other speakers.

### Dropping

Dropping is a transformation process that occurs in the structure of a sentence that causes the deletion of certain elements in the structure of the sentence (Nik Safiah Karim et al., 2015). In the Bidayuh Biatah dialect this process can occur on vowels or syllables.

**Table 6: Dropping**

|                          | English | Biatah:<br>Quop         | Biatah:<br>Mambong | Biatah:<br>Benuk |
|--------------------------|---------|-------------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| <b>Vowel Dropping</b>    | Child   | [anaʔ]                  | [naʔ]              | [naʔ]            |
|                          | Fish    | [iʔen]                  | [ʔien]             | [ʔien]           |
|                          | Head    | [ubaʔ]                  | [baʔ]              | [baʔ]            |
| <b>Syllable Dropping</b> | Worm    | [ritaməh]<br>[rigəndaʔ] | [tamoh]            | [gəndaʔ<br>]     |
|                          | Night   | [siŋarəm]               | [səŋarom]          | [ŋarom]          |
|                          | You     | [ku.u:]                 | [u:]               | [u:]             |

Table 6 shows the process of dropping vowels and syllables in the Bidayuh Biatah dialect. The process of dropping vowels occurs in the vowels [a], [i], and [u], while the process of dropping syllables occurs in the first syllable. Speakers in Kampung Mambong and Kampung Benuk dropped the

vowel [a] in the word child making it pronounced [naʔ], but speakers in Kampung Quop did not drop the vowel [a] and kept the pronunciation [anaʔ]. Speakers in Kampung Mambong and Kampung Benuk also dropped the vowel [i] in the word **iken** (fish) making it pronounced [ʔien], but speakers in Kampung Quop did not drop the vowel [i] and kept the pronunciation [iʔen]. Speakers in Kampung Mambong and Kampung Benuk also drop the vowel [u] in the word **ubak** (head) making it pronounced [baʔ], but speakers in Kampung Quop do not drop the vowel [u] and pronounce it [ubaʔ]. Syllable dropping occurs in the word [ritaməh]/[rigəndaʔ] (worm) which is the syllable **ri-** making it pronounced [tamoh] in Kampung Mambong and [gəndaʔ] in Kampung Benuk. Syllable dropping also occurs in the word [sinjarəm]/ [sinjarom] (night), where speakers in Kampung Benuk drop the **si-** syllable making it pronounced [narom]. Syllable drop also occurs in the word [ku.u:] (kamu), where speakers in Kampung Mambong and Kampung Benuk drop the word **ku-** making it pronounced [u:].

### Diphthongization

Diphthongization change vowels to diphthongs (Oxford Learner Dictionary, 2024). Diphthongs in the Bidayuh Biatah dialect occur on the second syllable of a word.

**Table 7. Diphthongs**

|       | <b>Biatah:<br/>Quop</b> | <b>Biatah:<br/>Mambong</b> | <b>Biatah:<br/>Benuk</b> |
|-------|-------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Hot   | [pəras]                 | [pəras]                    | [pəraih]                 |
| Plate | [piŋen]                 | [piŋijen]                  | [piŋijen]                |

|     |         |                       |                       |
|-----|---------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Dog | [kəsoŋ] | [kəs <sup>w</sup> əŋ] | [kəs <sup>w</sup> əŋ] |
|-----|---------|-----------------------|-----------------------|

Table 7 shows the diphthongs found in the Bidayuh Biatah dialect. Diphthongs in the Bidayuh Biatah dialect occur on the vowels [a], [e], and [o] causing the vowels to change to [ai], [ie], and [uə] respectively. A clear example of the diphthong [a] becoming [ai] can be found in the word **peras** (hot) which is pronounced [pəras] by speakers in Kampung Quop and Kampung Mambong but changes to [pəraih] when it arrives in Kampung Benuk. A clear example of the diphthong [e] into [ie] can be found in the word **pinggen** (plate) which is pronounced [pingen] by speakers in Kampung Quop but changes to [pinijen] when it arrives in Kampung Mambong and [pingijen] in Kampung Benuk. A clear example of the diphthong [o] becoming [uə] can be found in the word **kesong** (dog) which is pronounced [kəsoŋ] by speakers in Kampung Quop but changes to [kəs<sup>w</sup>əŋ] when it arrives in Kampung Mambong and Kampung Benuk.

### FINDINGS DISCUSSION

This section will discuss what has been analyzed. The main focus in this section is to discuss how semantic differences, namely synonyms, hyponyms, and homophones, as well as phonology, namely dropping and diphthongs, affect the communication between Bidayuh speakers between the villages studied.

Synonyms are found in the words **sand**, **belt**, and **bottle**. Although these words are different but they refer to the same thing, it also makes it easier for speakers to know the origin of other speakers. This is because a word that is used by one village, is not necessarily used by another village. The most obvious example is the word for bottle, [sərpəʔ] which is only used in Kampung Quop, but not in Kampung Mambong and Kampung Benuk, because they use [dʒəbur]. This causes speakers from Kampung Quop to use [dʒəbur]

when referring to a bottle when conversing with speakers from Kampung Mambong and Kampung Benuk, because the speakers of those two villages may not understand what [sərpaʔ] is even though it also refers to a bottle.

Hyponyms are found in the word **lice**, **worm**, and **seed**. The Bidayuh Biatah community categorizes ticks according to where they are found, therefore, [gutih], which is found on hair, while [kədəb] and [rəgi] are found on animals even though they are the same species of tick but the place where they are found is different. Just like worms, which are categorized by size, and seeds, which are categorized by plant type. But don't worry, if you mispronounce it, because you don't know the difference, the native speaker will correct the mistake by stating which is correct.

Homophones are found in the words **snake** and **teeth**, **eat** and **flow**, as well as, **small** and **narrow**. This homophone does not have such an effect on native speakers of the Bidayuh Biatah language, but for people who want to learn this language, it may cause confusion for them. Therefore, the context is very important (as mentioned in the analysis section) to understand for people who want to learn this language so that there is no confusion.

The process of dropping happens to the vowel part and the syllable part. Dropping does not occur in Kampung Quop, it only occurs in Kampung Mambong and Kampung Benuk. Vowel drop occurs on the vowels [a], [i], and [u], in the words [anaʔ], [iʔen], and [ubaʔ], causing these words to become [naʔ], [ʔien], and [baʔ]. Syllable drop, on the other hand, occurs in the syllables **ri-**, **si-**, and **ku-** in the words [ritaməh]/[rigəndaʔ], [siŋarəm]/[siŋarom], and [ku.u:], causing these words to become [tamoh], [gəndaʔ], [ŋarom] and [u:]. Speakers of Kampung Mambong and Kampung Benuk who weaken vowels and syllables while speaking may cause vowel and syllable dropping.

The diphthong process occurs on the vowels [a], [e], and [o]. Just like the

process of dropping, diphthongization also does not happen in Kampung Quop, it only happens in Kampung Mambong and Kampung Benuk. As already stated in the analysis section, the vowel [a] becomes the diphthong [ai] occurs in the word [pəraih] (hot). The vowel [e] becomes the diphthong [ie], which happens in the word [piŋijen]/[pingijen] (plate). Meanwhile, the vowel [o] becomes a diphthong [uə] occurs in the word [kəsuwəŋ]. The factors causing this decline are unknown. The diphthongization that occurs, as can be seen, not only causes the addition of a vowel, but also a vowel change ([o] becomes [u]).

Phonological differences allow the speaker to know the origin of the speaker, while semantic differences can cause confusion, especially during conversation. Therefore, this difference is important to study because it has implications for communication between not only native speakers of the Bidayuh Biatah language, but also for people who want to learn the Bidayuh Biatah language.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the phenomenon of dialect continuum does indeed occur in the state of Sarawak, and not only in Peninsular Malaysia and the European continent. Differences in semantic aspects and phonological aspects that differ according to region make it easier for Bidayuh speakers to know where other Bidayuh speakers come from, even villages. The distance between each Bidayuh village, which is far from each other, may be a factor in the formation of Bidayuh dialects that clearly follow the region, so that they understand each other less, even though they are under one language branch, which is the Bidayuhic language branch, this is appropriate with the history of migration and the nomadic lifestyle of the Bidayuh people. The significant differences

between each Bidayuh dialect and subdialect, may be the reason why speakers of this language need Sarawak Malay dialect as an intermediary language to communicate with Bidayuh speakers from other regions. It is hoped that this study will help researchers in the future to conduct studies related to the dialect continuum, as well as interest the reader in knowing a little about the Bidayuh dialect of Biatah and the subdialects that are below it.

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