

On the status of Takivatan Bunun, an Austronesian language from Taiwan

Rik De Busser

RCLT, La Trobe University

rdbusser@gmail.com

1. Introduction

This paper will give a concise introduction into the Bunun language, an Austronesian language spoken on the island of Taiwan. Special attention will be given to the Takivatan dialect, which was the main focus of my research during the past five years (De Busser (2009b), De Busser (2009a), De Busser (2010)). The introduction first discusses the Austronesian languages of Taiwan. Section 2 contains a short cultural profile of the Bunun people, locates the Bunun language in space, and gives an overview of dialectal variation within the language. Section 3 will focus on Takivatan, one of the five Bunun dialects. It contains a profile of Takivatan phonology and morphosyntax, and will take a closer look at the endangerment status of the dialect.

1.1. *The Austronesian languages of Taiwan*

Tribe	Population	Tribe	Population
Amis	178,067	Sediq	(10,000)
Paiwan	85,718	Tsou	6,585
Atayal	71,452	Saisiyat	5,698
Bunun	50,156	Yami	3,513
Truku	24,578	Kavalan	1,172
Rukai	11,684	Thao	647
Puyuma	11,367	Sakizaya	343
		TOTAL	494,318

Table 1 – Taiwanese aboriginal groups ordered according to population size.¹

¹ Data from CIP (2009: Table 7). No separate data is as yet available for Sediq, but their population is said to be around 10,000.

According to the latest population statistics, there are around 505,000 aborigines on the island, or around 2.1 % of the total population. All belong to one of the 14 indigenous groups in Table 1.

Traditionally, all these people would have spoken Austronesian languages. In reality, the number of speakers associated with each group is considerably lower. No precise figures are available and language fluency varies depending on the local situation and the definition of language fluency, but it is safe to say that in each group no more than 60 % of the actual population are still fluent speakers of their ancestral mother tongue. Transfer to younger generations has (almost) stopped completely, although recently a number of mother tongue education projects have been set up.

1.2. Historical significance

The fact that all indigenous languages in Taiwan are endangered is all the more regrettable because evidence indicates that they are probably the most ancient remnants of the Austronesian language family. The most widely accepted theory about the expansion of the Austronesian people into the Pacific, which is often referred to as the *out-of-Taiwan hypothesis*, postulates that it was a process that started around 6000 ago when the mainland Asian ancestors of Austronesian people crossed the Taiwan Strait from Southern China (possibly from Fujian). They settled on the island of Taiwan for approximately one millennium, by which time they would probably have split into a number of distinct populations. Some of them had developed advanced seafaring technologies during that period and, around 5000 BP, left the island for Luzon in the Northern Philippines. From there on, they expanded into the Southern Philippines and, around approximately 4000 BP, into the previously uninhabited islands of the Pacific (see Bellwood (1984-1985), Bellwood (1997), Gray et al. (2009), and Renfrew (2009) for evidence).

From a linguistic point-of-view, this scenario would imply that the Austronesian language family (which today counts more than 1200 members) eventually originates in the South-Eastern Chinese mainland and that the Austronesian languages of Taiwan (or Formosan languages, as they are often called) are at the very base of the Austronesian language tree. Blust (1999) postulated that the Formosan languages represented at least nine different primary branches from the Austronesian language tree, the other branch being the source of all Austronesian languages spoken outside Taiwan (see Figure 1).

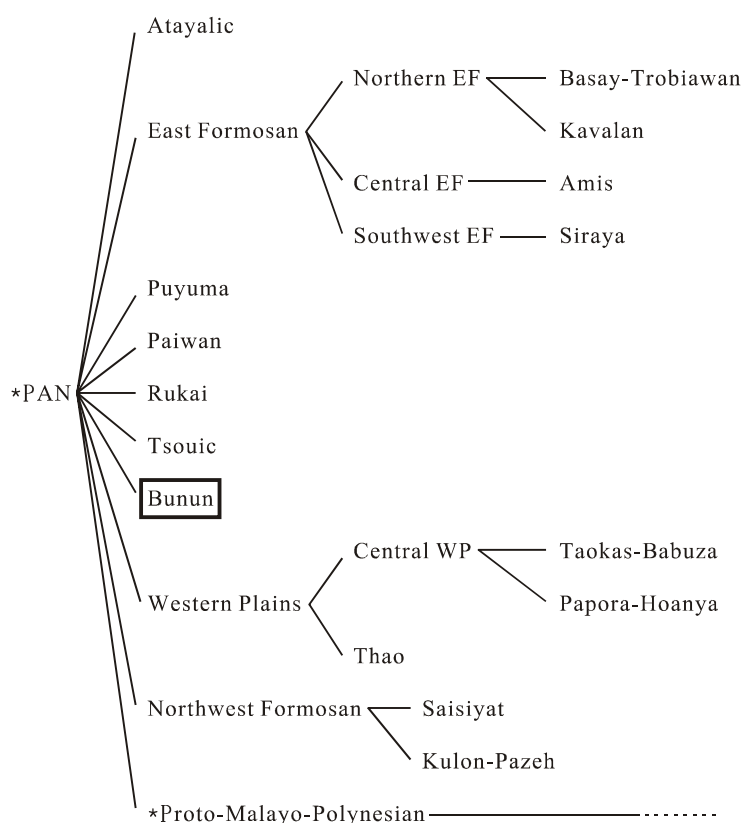


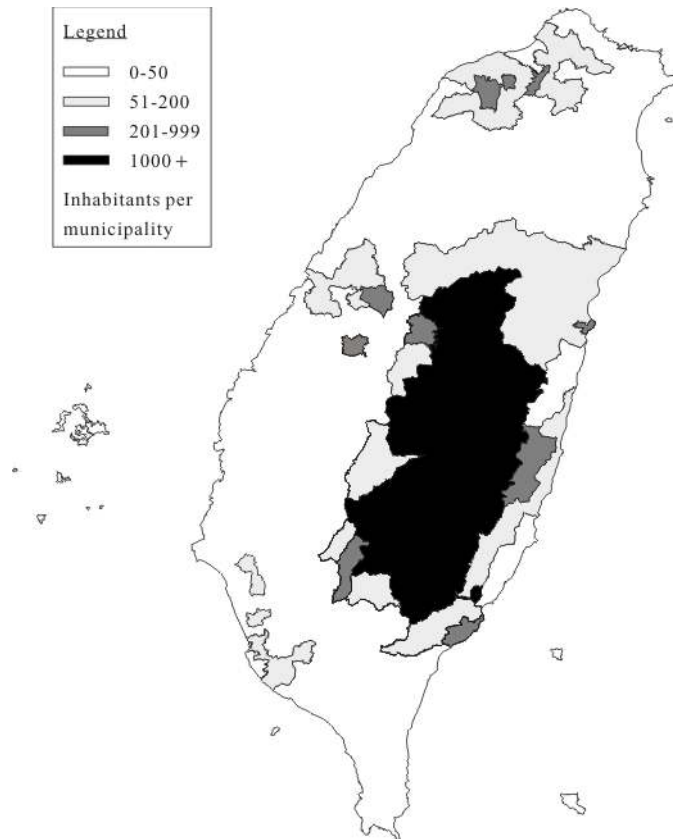
Figure 1 – Formosan languages and the Austronesian language tree, based on Blust (1999)

2. The Bunun language

2.1. *Bunun* people

With 50,156 ethnic members, the Bunun are the fourth-largest of the Taiwanese indigenous tribes. In the days before the Japanese occupation, the Bunun were semi-nomadic hunter-gatherers that lived in villages or small family groups throughout the northern and central parts of the Central Mountain Range. Intertribal warfare involving headhunting was not uncommon, but this habit died out with the coming of Christianity at the end of the 19th century. Bunun society is patrilineal and patrilocal. They had a reputation as skilful hunters and fierce warriors and tended to be hostile towards outsiders. During the Japanese occupation, they were targeted by pacification campaigns of the Japanese government and were eventually moved to centralized lowland villages.

In recent decades, many aborigines in Taiwan have moved to the cities. Nevertheless, a considerable segment of the modern Bunun population somehow feels connected to the mountains and prefers to live in villages near or in the mountains in central and east Taiwan, as can be seen in Map 1.



Map 1 – Distribution of Bunun across Taiwan, based on CIP (2003)

The black area on the map indicates the Bunun heartland and stretches from the township Ren-ai (仁愛鄉) in the county Nantou (南投縣) in the north to Yan-ping (延平鄉) in the county Taitung (台東縣) in the South. All of these areas are in the mountains or at mountain sides and were until recently relatively inaccessible.

Traditionally, the Bunun did not have a stratified society or centralized leadership. Instead, important decisions were made by consensus, after consultation with a selected group of elders (a similar societal organisation has been described for the Sire, an extinct indigenous group). When war or hunt demanded a single leader, this position was typically taken by the person who was most experienced for the task at hand. His status depended on his success as a warrior or hunter and was usually derived from the number of human or animal skulls he had acquired in previous expeditions (Huang (1995) refers to this as the great man model).

A unique aspect of Bunun culture is that it developed (apparently independent of other writing systems) a symbolic notation which was carved on wood to keep track of important events and periods throughout the lunar calendar. An example is given below.



Figure 2 – Example of a Bunun lunar calendar

Each triangle represents one day, the triangular arches refer to times of the month when hunting is allowed, and geometrical figures on sticks indicate that certain agricultural actions are allowed or forbidden.

2.2. *The Bunun language and its dialects*

As we saw in Figure 1, the Bunun language is in all likelihood one of the primary sub-branches of the Austronesian language family. It is traditionally subdivided into five dialects, which corresponds to the five Bunun clans. Traditionally, these dialects are grouped into a northern, a central, and a southern dialect branch, as indicated Figure 3.

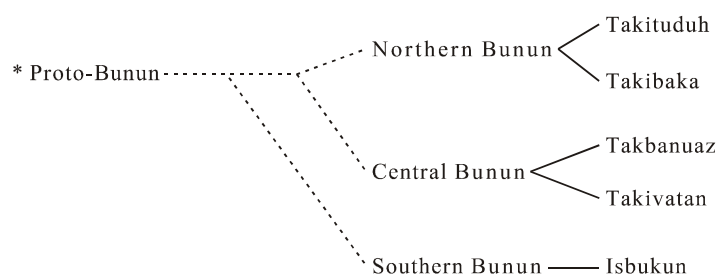


Figure 3 – Bunun dialect tree

This distinction was already made by Japanese anthropologists at the turn of the 19th and 20th century (see e.g. Ogawa & Asai (1935:585ff)), probably based on anthropological as well as linguistic information. No extensive comparative dialectal study has so far been conducted, but Li (1988), the only comparison of Bunun dialects that I am aware of, appears to confirm the original classification.

Lexical, phonological and grammatical differences between dialects are considerable, to the extent that they are only to a degree mutually understandable. Most clans are able to understand the Isbukun dialect, but this is mainly because translations of the Bible were strongly influenced by Isbukun and it has therefore developed into a sort of super-dialectal standard.

3. The Takivatan dialect

The Takivatan dialect is spoken by less than 1700 people that live in a handful of villages in the counties Nantou in the north-west of the island and Hualien in the east. It is the smaller of the two central dialects, the other one being Takbanuað (see Figure

3). Below I give a short overview of Takivatan phonology and morphosyntax

3.1. Phonology

Takivatan has three commonly used phonemic vowels /i u a/; a fourth vowel, /e/, is much rarer and only occurs in interjections and a small number of loanwords. The three endemic vowels can occur in six vowel combinations (/ai/, /au/, /ia/, /iu/, /ua/, /ui/) that behave somewhat like diphthongs but are sequences of distinct vowels from a phonotactic perspective.

There are seventeen phonemic consonants:

	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Velar	Uvular	Glottal
Plosive	p			t	k (g)	q	ʔ
Implosive	ɓ			ɗ			
Nasal	m			n	ŋ		
Fricative		v	ð	s			h
Affricate				(ɕ)			
Lateral				l			

Table 2 – Takivatan consonants

The voiced implosives are cross-linguistically uncommon, have no voiceless equivalents and sometimes realized as plosives, especially between vowels. The affricate /ɕ/ is relatively rare and has only been recorded in loan words from other Bunun dialects, from Japanese, or from other aboriginal languages. There are elaborate systems of stem-reduplication, CV-reduplication and Ca-reduplication.

Stem:

Inherent: *luvluv* ‘wind’

Generic: *maq* ‘what’ > *maq-maq* ‘whatever’

CV:

Intensifying: *tamasað* ‘powerful’ > *ta-tamasað* ‘very powerful’

Habitual: *maun* ‘eat’ > *ma-maun* ‘eat habitually’

Continuative: *baðbað* ‘talk’ > *ba-baðbað* ‘talk continuously’

Distributive: *lusqu* ‘move to’ > *lu-lusqu* ‘each move to a different location’

Plural: *uvaðʔað* ‘child’ > *u-va-vaðʔað* ‘children’

Ca:

Human: *hima* ‘five’ > *ha-hima* ‘five (humans)’

A particular feature is that, unlike other Bunun dialects, Takivatan tends to have rising intonation even in declarative clauses.

3.2. *Morphology and syntax*

Takivatan Bunun is an agglutinative language and is predominantly head-marking. A peculiar aspect it shares with other Bunun dialects and some Austronesian languages in Taiwan is the morphological complexity of verbs. So far, I have recorded over 200 verbal affixes, the majority of them prefixes. They have a variety of functions, as can be gleaned from the following examples.

TAM:

<i>na-</i> ‘irrealis’	<i>siða</i> ‘take’	→ <i>na-siða</i> ‘will take; must take; want to take’
<i>-aŋ</i> ‘progressive’	<i>taldanav</i> ‘wash’	→ <i>taldanav-aŋ</i> ‘(still) be washing’
<i>-in</i> ‘perfective’	<i>taldanav</i> ‘wash’	→ <i>taldanav-in</i> ‘have finished washing’
<i>-in-</i> ‘past/resultative’	<i>sadu</i> ‘see’	→ <i>s-in-adu</i> ‘saw’

Participant cross-reference (CR):

<i>-Ø</i> ‘agent CR’	<i>qulut</i>	‘cut’
<i>-un</i> ‘patient CR’	<i>qulut-un</i>	‘cut (something); be cut’
<i>-an</i> ‘locative CR’	<i>qulut-an</i>	‘cut (in a specific location)’
<i>is-</i> ‘instrument CR’	<i>is-qulut</i>	‘cut using an implement’
<i>ki-</i> ‘beneficiary CR’	<i>ki-saiv</i>	‘give (to somebody)’

Locative:

	<i>han</i>	‘go to, be at’
<i>i-</i> ‘at, in’	<i>i-han</i>	‘be at (a certain location)’
<i>mun-</i> ‘to’	<i>mun-han</i>	‘go to’
<i>sau-</i> ‘until, into’	<i>sau-han</i>	‘go until’
<i>maisna-</i> ‘from’	<i>maisna-han</i>	‘come from’

Event type:

<i>ma₁-</i> ‘dynamic verb’	<i>tas?i</i> ‘build’	→ <i>ma-tas?i</i> ‘build’ (dynamic verb)
<i>ma₂-</i> ‘stative verb’	<i>diqla</i> ‘bad’	→ <i>ma-diqla</i> ‘bad’ (adjective)
<i>min-</i> ‘inchoative verb’	<i>qansiap</i> ‘understand’	→ <i>min-qansiap</i> ‘come to understand’

Causative:*pa-* ‘causative of dynamic verb’*ma-daŋað* ‘help’ → *pa-daŋað* ‘cause to help’*pu-* ‘cause to go towards’*mu-dan* ‘go to’ → *pu-dan* ‘be forced to go to’*pi-* ‘causative of stative verb’*ma-sihal* ‘good’ → *pi-sihal* ‘cause to be good’**Classification of events:***mis-* ‘burning events’ *tabað* ‘burn down’ → *mis-tabað* ‘burn down’*tin-* ‘shock events’ *vuqvuvuq* ‘shake’ → *tin-vuqvuvuq* ‘shake spastically’*pala-* ‘splitting events’ *vaivi* ‘be different’ → *pala-vaivi* ‘set apart’**Verbalising:***pu-* ‘hunt for’ *vanis* ‘wild boar’ → *pu-vanis* ‘hunt for wild boar’*maqu-* ‘use’ *hima* ‘hand’ → *maqu-hima* ‘use one’s hands’*malas-* ‘speak’ *bunun* ‘Bunun’ → *malas-bunun* ‘speak Bunun’

...

There are two main word classes: nouns and verbs. All adjectives are a subclass of stative verbs and most other word classes (with the exception of discourse markers and conjunctive particles) can be defined in terms of how noun-like or verb-like they are.

There are no adverbs in Takivatan, although there is a class of words that expresses time, place and manner and typically behaves in a verb-like manner. Most “adverbial” concepts are expressed by a large class of auxiliary verbs. Auxiliaries are also used for many aspectual and modal concepts and for negation.

- (1)
- Daukdaukʔas mudadan!*

daukdauk-ʔas mu-<da>dan*slowly*-2S.F ALL-<REP>-go

‘You have to go slowly.’ (i.e. ‘you have to drive slowly when you go.’)

- (2)
- Muqnaŋ sak laupaku taquki [...]*

muqna-aŋ sak laupaku taqu-ki*next*-PROG 1S.F now tell-DEF.SIT.PROX

‘And next I will tell [a little bit about how my life was in the old days.]’

A particularity of Bunun dialects and many other Austronesian languages (see e.g. Himmelmann (2006) and Gil (1994)) is that the distinctions between word classes are rather fuzzy. It is perfectly possible for many nouns and personal pronouns to occur in verbal slots and take verbal morphology and many verbs can occur in the location where one would normally expect to find nouns.

Ellipsis, both of constituents and of affixes, occurs frequently, especially in information registers and in the right pragmatic context it is often possible to strip a clause of all its content except for the verbal root and still have a grammatical sentence.

(3) Ni-aŋ-ak pasiða binanau?að
NEG-PROG-1S.AG marry woman
'I didn't marry (a wife) yet.'

(4) Ni-aŋ pasiða
NEG-PROG marry
'I didn't marry (lit: take) a girl yet.'

(5) Ni siða
NEG marry
'I didn't marry her.' or 'I don't (want to) marry.' but not *'I didn't marry her yet.'

For instance, if the speech participants know who is going to marry who, it is possible not to express the first person pronoun and the patient *binanau?að* in (3). When talking in an informal context, example (4) can be further stripped down to (5) by removing all affixal morphology (*pasiða* 'marry' is a morphologically complex form consisting of *pa-* 'high agentivity' and *siða* 'take').

4. Language use and endangerment

Exact data about the number of people that are ethnically Takivatan or that are Takivatan speakers do not exist. However, Table 3 gives an overview of the approximate number of inhabitants of the villages in Hualien and Nantou where Takivatan are known to live.

According to population statistics, there should be around 1456 Takivatan in the administrative district of Ma-yuan, which is exclusively inhabited by Bunun, and around 129 in Qi-mei, which has a mixed Bunun and Amis population. There are said

to be about 100 Takivatan in four villages in the County Nantou. This puts the upper limit for the number of Takivatan speakers at about 1685.

County	Romanized name	Chinese full name	Bunun name	TVN inhab.
Hualien	Ma-yuan	花蓮縣萬榮鄉馬遠村	Bahuan / Kunuan	1456
	Qi-mei	花蓮縣瑞穗鄉奇美村	Kivit	129
TOTAL H				1585
Nantou	Di-li	南投縣信義鄉地利村	Tamađuan	?
	Tan-nan	南投縣信義鄉潭南村	<i>various</i> ²	?
	Shuang-long	南投縣信義鄉雙龍村	Tibaun	?
	Xin-xiang	南投縣信義鄉新鄉村	Sinabalan	86
TOTAL N				± 100
TOTAL H+N				± 1685

Table 3 – Takivatan villages

The Takivatan living in Nantou almost all have been living in mixed villages with other Bunun clans (mainly Takbanuađ) for a considerable period of time and most have switched to the Takbanuađ dialect. In all Takivatan communities, a steady shift to Mandarin Chinese (or occasionally the Southern Min dialect) has been going on for decades. I have never encountered a monolingual speaker of Takivatan (or Bunun in general). In Ma-yuan and Qi-mei, which because of its geographical location has been shielded to a larger extent from mainstream Chinese culture, only some elders over eighty have no knowledge of Mandarin-Chinese at all. However, since most grew up during the Japanese occupation, they were all educated in Japanese and speak it fluently.

People between 50 and 75 usually received education in Mandarin, but typically speak Takivatan at home. They tend to speak their mother tongue fluently, although most switch between Takivatan and Mandarin in daily conversation, even when talking to family and friends of their own age group. Among the age group between 40 and 50 years old, most would still be able to converse more or less fluently in Takivatan to elders but a significant portion uses Mandarin when speaking to peers. People between 30 and 40 never consistently use Bunun in conversations with peers, although some might still speak it at home with their parents and with elders. A large

² Tan-nan and its hamlets are referred to by the following Bunun names: *Laiđuan*, *Masulili*, *Malavi* and *Mađudavan*.

portion of this group has almost completely used knowledge of their mother tongue. The youngest generations have no active knowledge of their ancestral tongue anymore, except for some isolated vocabulary and simple sentences. They exclusively use Mandarin-Chinese in daily conversation and have little interest in the language of their parents and grandparents.

Age	Fluency			Use	Other languages
	<i>Full</i>	<i>Semi</i>	<i>Not</i>		
> 80	All			Always speaking Bunun	Japanese
50-75	All			Mixing Bunun and Mandarin	Mandarin
40-50	Some	Some		Bunun only to elders and family	Mandarin
30-40	Few	Some	Many	Sometimes Bunun, mostly Mandarin	Mandarin
20-30		Some	Most	(Almost) never speaking Bunun	Mandarin
< 20			All	Never speaking Bunun	Mandarin

Table 4 – Mother tongue fluency, knowledge and use among Takivatan

Depending on how language fluency is exactly defined, I would estimate that at the moment not more than fifty to sixty-five percent of the Takivatan have still an active knowledge of their dialect.

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