

An Early Paper on Atayal

Scheerer's (1932) paper on Atayal in German is an early publication on Atayal. The earliest one is Ogawa's (1931) *Atayal Vocabulary* in Japanese. Both are based on Squliq, the prestige dialect of Atayal. Each free lexical form usually contains no more than two vowels, as Squliq is spoken today. It is interesting to find that many of the recorded forms by Scheerer contain three or more vowels each, e.g., *atayal* 'person', *kamaturu* 'leech', *tamarinj* 'to work', *hamawak* 'to help along'. This seems to indicate that the Squliq dialect of Atayal still retained many vowels when Scheerer investigated it in 1930, less than a hundred years ago. He made some interesting observations. For instance, he noticed the free phonetic variant of *s - h*, as in *musa - muha* 'to walk'. But he made a mistake of treating the two negatives, *uka* and *uɲat*, as free variants; the truth is that they are used in different dialects.

There are, however, some problems in his transcriptions. First, he left out all the glottal stops, which is phonemic in the language, e.g., *mu* 'my', *muʔ* 'to shoot'. The glottal stop always occurs initially before a vowel if there is no other consonant, e.g., *ʔarinj* 'to begin, from, since', and it may occur adjacent to a consonant, e.g., *msʔut* 'to stop'. Second, he often confused the velar stop /k/ and the uvular stop /q/ and occasionally the voiced velar stop /g/. Third, he missed the high vowel length in the final syllable, as illustrated in (1)¹ below. Fourth, he may have mistranscribed the phonetic schwa ə

¹ (1) is a comparison of transcriptions by Scheerer vs. Li and Egerod.

as *a* in many forms, e.g., *kanaiyiril* ‘woman’, for which Ogawa transcribed as *kənairil*; and similarly, *maraho* vs. *məraho*: ‘ancestor’. Fifth, there are inconsistencies, e.g., *min-hoquil*, *ma-hoqil*, *ma-hoqel* ‘dead, to die’. Perhaps a more serious problem is that his transcriptions are phonetic, rather than phonemic. The weak phonetic schwa in Atayal can be left out in phonemic transcriptions. Despite these problems, the grammatical analysis and quality of his work are most generally sound, especially if we consider the fact his exposure to the language was limited to only a few days.

(1)	<u>Scheerer</u>	<u>Li/Egerod</u>	
	ro	ru’	‘and’
	kai	kai’, ke’	‘language, words’
	bak	baq	‘know’
	yakāhh	yaqih	‘bad, inferior’
	manək	maniq	‘to eat’
	neqon	niqun	‘to be eaten’
	qolāhh	qulih	‘fish’
	poqəŋ	puqin	‘tree stump’
	toqə	tuqii	‘path’
	maraho	mrhuu	‘chief, ancestor’

High vowels are lowered to mid when adjacent to a uvular consonant, /q, h/, or /r/, e.g., /qahuniq/ [qahoniəq] ‘wood’.

Scheerer’s explanation for the words in the texts are helpful. His observation of the morphology is usually accurate and reliable. He was puzzled by the strange suffixes, such as *-iq* or *-niq* (mistranscribed as *-ek* and *-nek* respectively by him) in the forms such as *man-ek* ‘to eat’, *qoho-nək* ‘wood’, and *gal* as in the form *ma-gal* ‘five’, *-nux* or *-ux*, as in the form *batu-nux* ‘stone’, *sak-an-ux* ‘smell bad’. The mystery of the strange affixes he noticed baffled many Austronesian scholars, including Naoyoshi Ogawa, Isidore Dyen, Raleigh Ferrell, Robert Blust, and Otto Dahl. It remained unsettled until half a century later. These are the male forms of speech created at the pre-Proto-Atayalic stage; see Li (1980, 1982) for clarification and further examples.

Scheerer collected six Atayal texts and gave both free translation and word-by-word glosses in German. He also gave “word explanations”, which are actually detailed grammatical notes. Ogawa collected 28 Atayal texts

and published them later in Ogawa and Asai (1935: 34–105). It will be interesting to compare the texts recorded by the different linguists though they may not have recorded the same or similar legends. Ogawa had a very good understanding of the Atayal language with which he worked a number of years.

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