

NOTES

Kenaboi: An extinct unclassified language of the Malay Peninsula

John HAJEK
University of Melbourne

1. Introduction

Of all the languages of South East Asia, little-known Kenaboi appears to have truly unique status. Examination of the *Language Atlas of the Pacific Area* (1981-1983) and of the *Atlas of the World's Languages* (1994) shows Kenaboi to be the only language in the region yet to be assigned to a macro-family. In map 26 of the *Atlas of the World's Languages* Wurm (1994) reduces all the languages in and around the Austronesian sphere into ten major groupings, including Trans-New Guinea, Australian, Austro-Asiatic, Austronesian, and Kenaboi. In map 45, dedicated exclusively to the Malay Peninsula four groupings are represented: Austronesian, Austro-Asiatic, Thai-Kadai and Kenaboi. The first three are classed as phyla, but the last is listed on its own solely as a language. An identical pattern of classification is found in the *Language Atlas of the Pacific Area* where in map 37 (Malay Peninsula) Kenaboi is once more marked as a separate entity, but not referred to as a phylum. Language trees found in the appended text to cited maps in both atlases are, however, curiously inconsistent with the content of the maps, and surprisingly enough, with that of the footnotes: Kenaboi is listed in all trees as the first item under Austronesian (Malay Stock).

Although Kenaboi's mysterious position should long ago have pricked the curiosity of linguists, that this has not occurred until now is hardly that surprising since there is almost no mention of it in the recent linguistic literature. Extinct now for many decades, Kenaboi is absent from the world's most comprehensive directory of languages, *Ethnologue* (Grimes 1992), from Parkin's (1991) survey of Austroasiatic groups and languages, as well as Benjamin's (1989) major survey of Asian and Aboriginal Malay research. In recent times the most significant reference to and discussion of Kenaboi is to be found in a footnote to a language map prepared by Benjamin & Bradley (1983) for the *Language Atlas of the Pacific Area*. The note presented below in its entirety has since been reprinted in slightly edited form by Wurm (1994:124, n.6) in his contribution to the *Atlas of the World's Languages*.

“Kenaboi known only from two wordlists incorporated into Blagden's Comparative Vocabulary (1906) has never been definitely

classified. The Austronesian element in it bears no clear relation to any one of the Western Austronesian subgroups, and it contains additionally many elements related to each of the Aslian subdivisions. The speakers of Kenaboi, which must have died out around 1880, presumably became assimilated into the Malay-speaking aboriginal community later known as the Temuan, for there are reports from the 1940's of 'Orang Kenaboi' as an ethnic label of some kind in those areas of Negri Sembilan and Malacca where Temuan speakers are now to be found. Until the classification of the current map, G. Benjamin had assumed that it might be classifiable as belonging to an earlier stratum of Austronesian. However, the Austronesian and Austroasiatic elements in it seem to come from no simple source, and the language may be substratumized Austro-Thai submerged by both Aslian and Austronesian, though other possibilities also remain. Blagden (1906) suggested that it constituted an unrelated isolate. Some indication of the uncertain state of the classification of Kenaboi was added to the already completed map."

It is important to note that the status of Kenaboi has not always been viewed as so controversial. Schmidt (1901), and later Pinnow (1959), Salzner (1960), as well as Voegelin & Voegelin (1977) appear to have been happy to include the language in their classifications of aboriginal languages spoken on the Malay Peninsula, all of which point to affiliation with Mon-Khmer languages spoken further to the north.

It has more recently been suggested by Benjamin (1986) that Kenaboi is not in fact a normal language but may indeed represent a special taboo jargon used in camphor collection. This possibility had earlier been explicitly rejected by Blagden (1906) but is reported by Hajek (in press) to be a possibility, at least for one of the two major varieties of Kenaboi (see also below).

2. The Kenaboi language: its sources and its speakers

Our primary source for all linguistic and historical information on Kenaboi is Blagden (1906) who incorporated the contents of three previously unpublished wordlists in his mammoth comparative vocabulary of Aboriginal languages (both Austro-Asiatic Aslian and Aboriginal Malayan). The two most significant Kenaboi lists were collected by D.F.A Hervey, a former government official resident in Malacca. Hervey was, in Blagden's view (1906:405, n.1, 488), a very experienced word-list collector who was extremely accurate in his transcription, and very capable with regard to any Malay elements. The shortest list is by Vaughan-Stevens, but Blagden is dismissive of it 'as it contains nothing distinctive' and includes only five items from it (1906, 403, n.3). There is no precise indication as to when any of the Kenaboi lists were collected, although there is a suggestion that Hervey's lists date from the 1870s. It is possible that Vaughan-Stevens collected his Kenaboi data in the 1890s since it was in this same period that he published wordlists for other languages spoken in the area, e.g. Besisi (Mah Meri).

There is almost no ethnographic information of any kind on the Kenaboi themselves. We know only that Hervey collected his data in Alor Gajah close to Malacca from speakers resident in Rembau, a small mountainous area further inland in Negri Sembilan. It is assumed, on the basis solely of the ethnonym, that the Kenaboi were originally from the Kenaboi valley (Blagden 1906:401). The Kenaboi river, located in the northernmost reaches of Negri Sembilan, and only some 30 km to the east of Kuala Lumpur, is a small tributary that feeds into the Teriang and the Pahang Rivers.

3. The Kenaboi element in Blagden's (1906) vocabulary

Scholars who might be interested in investigating further the nature of Kenaboi have until now faced a daunting task in wading through Blagden's (1906) comparative vocabulary. His Kenaboi lists are only three of 162 aboriginal wordlists (Aslian and Malayic) combined under alphabetically arranged English headwords. The data themselves are not listed in alphabetical fashion but are sub-grouped according to phonetic similarity. Each item of data is followed by a complex abbreviation indicating precisely the wordlist from which it was taken. In order to properly identify the language in question the reader is then required to consult the wordlist index. For Kenaboi we find the following explanations:

Kena. I --Kĕnaboi (or Kĕnabui), originally probably from Jelebu, c. 3° 8' x 102°, but collected at Alor Gajah, Malacca, 2° 22' x 102° 14' from a clan that had settled near Gunong Dato', Rembau, 2° 32' x 102° 15'. -- Hervey MS.

Kena. II -- The like, another list, collected at the same place. -- Hervey MS.

Kena. Stev. -- Kĕnaboi , locality undefined, but see *Kena. I.* -- Vaughan-Stevens, *op. cit.* (see *Belend. Stev.* and *Bers. Stev.*)

Matters are further complicated by the fact that the listing of English headwords is not fully alphabetical. Often where Blagden felt that English items were semantically closely related, or where he observed what he felt to be very strong lexical or phonetic similarities in words across Aboriginal languages, these could be listed together. Therefore, if a reader is interested in 'night' s/he is required to look under 'day'. To all of this Blagden adds wherever possible suggested parallels in other Mon-Khmer languages, or in the case of borrowings, Malay or other Austronesian etymologies.

The result of Blagden's organization is a practically impenetrable vocabulary, 215 double-columned pages in length, in which the only way to locate Kenaboi items is to work methodically through the whole lexicon looking for the tell-tale abbreviations. The author undertook such a task, with some research assistance. As a result, a total of 307 items have been identified: 216 items marked as *Kena. I.*, 86 items as *Kena. II* and, as noted previously, only five as *Kena. Stev.* It is worth noting too that what appears to be close phonetic transcription is sometimes provided between brackets in Blagden's vocabulary. The source for these is never made clear, but it is possible that these were prepared at a later stage by Blagden himself.

The Kenaboi wordlists have now been compiled and are made available here (see Appendix 1) for the benefit of other scholars.

In a detailed analysis of Kenaboi core vocabulary items in addition to a review of all earlier discussion of the nature and classification of Kenaboi (Hajek, in press), this author, whilst noting that much work still had to be done, came to the following conclusions. First, the existence of a small set of identical items, e.g. *mohôlok* 'older brother', alongside otherwise substantial lexical differentiation between the K1 and K2 lists pointed to the existence of two sub-varieties of the same language. Overall, however, Kenaboi appears to be a strongly mixed language with two clearly definable components: (i) Austro-Asiatic (mainly Aslian), e.g. *lihap* 'bite' and (ii) Austronesian (mainly Malayic), e.g. *orang* 'man'. Although Kenaboi 2 was about equally divided between the two language families, Kenaboi 1 was substantially more Austro-Asiatic (47%) than Austronesian (27%) in character. The latter was also notable for a high proportion (26%) of items that have not yet been properly classified, e.g. *mambu* 'white' and *par* 'water'. The relationship between the two sub-varieties is unknown, although it is possible that Kenaboi 1 is in fact a special taboo variety (given the large unidentified element), and that Kenaboi 2 represents the normal variety of an Aslian that has come to be heavily Malayicized/Austronesianized after extensive and protracted language contact. However, our ability to determine the precise nature of Kenaboi 1 and Kenaboi 2 and the possible relationship between them is hampered by the lack of potentially useful evidence, such as historical or ethnographic information.

Kenaboi word lists¹

Note: Blagden's wordlist abbreviations and his explanations for them are discussed in §3 above.

English	Kena. I.	Kena. II.	Kena. Stev.
to abuse	jäl [jèl]		
after	pintal		
alive	pungas		
animal	měcháng	jo-ón	
angry	jäl [jèl]		
ant	phak [p'hak]		
arm [upper]	râpet	rhûah	
armlet	säl [sèl]		
aunt	ūha' [ûhak]	ūha' [ûhak]	
back of neck	jěngkeng		
bad	mārās [mārās ⁿ s]	ngěrin	
banana	sîtòk		
banana [plantain]		sěnoyon	
barau barau [bird species]	bâchau		
bark [of tree]	longsóng	lantôk	
bear	kahúñ		
bear a child	hěmpäu [hmpèu]	běrênek	
before	kâmoi		
belly	bûlang		
big [large]	bandong		
bird	sâbu		
bite	lihap		
black	sâyã [sâyâ ⁿ]		
blood	chahâ	maham	
blow	pohói		

¹The author wishes to thank Margot Jones and John Bowden for the invaluable assistance in compiling, checking and editing the lists.

English	Kena. I.	Kena. II.	Kena. Stev.
to blow the nose		chesh	
blowpipe	sěláu	těmiang	
blowpipe arrow	sěráng [sěráñ]	domók	
body	bahán		
to boil [food other than rice]	bas		
bone	gus	jaáng	
born, to be	meng		
branch [of tree]	silang		
to break	tal		
breast	râpang		
brother [older]	mohôlok	mohôlok	
brother [younger]	tăk [tè ⁿ k]	tăk [tè ⁿ k]	
to carry [in an <i>ampong</i> a sort of knapsack]	jâras		
cattle [wild]	chěngkhám [chěngk'hám]		
chick [new born]	sělét		
child	chaái [cha-ái ⁿ]	chaái [cha-ái ⁿ]	
chopper	riwai		
to climb	tâbong		
cloud	lingsâ	kâbut	
coconut		sěnâyon	
cold	sědék	âh [òh]	
come	intâ' [intòk]	mâchan	
to cough	pantol		
crocodile	tohol		
to cry	kâyang		
cut	mětás		
dam	běndul		
dark		sěngát	
day	sěri		
daylight		chěhói	
dead	jûlat		

English	Kena. I.	Kena. II.	Kena. Stev.
deer	râjak		
to descend	kětok		
to dip arrow in the <i>ipoh</i> juice	pûtâ		
to divorce	lungkah		
dog	âmun	kětök [kětó ⁿ k]	
drink	tungät [tungèt]		
dry	chěhói		
ear	chěliáh' [chěliòh]	chělio' [chěliok]	
earth	bûkû		
eat	jáháp		
eclipse	jělúm		
egg	buntat		
elephant	gěntúl	běrat	
eye	lang		
eyebrow	těngkang	muh	
face	sampak		
father	sangkat	sangkat	
father-in-law	lahík	lahik	
feather	sîut		
female	sědôk	lîđi	
finger	râwet		
fire	hangoi	[ûs]	
fish	râyap		
to fish with a <i>tanggok</i> net	pâlong		
floor	kěping		
flower	kuntom		
foolish			rampah
foot	jau		
forehead	châlâ		
fowl	bé		
frog	bât [bâ ⁿ t]	chěäl? [ch'èl]	
fruit	gěnyét	sěk [sê ⁿ k]	

English	Kena. I.	Kena. II.	Kena. Stev.
ghost	kěmit		
giddy	sâlut		
to go	songsang		
good	lěsói		
grandfather / grandmother	děkhói [děk'hói]		
granite	pol		
green	padû	kíchau	
hair	sûyut	suk	
hand [forearm]	thā [t'â ⁿ]		
he / she		lěngán	
head	tahal		
heel	tanyû	chěntúl	
hiccough	sintak		
hill	rědám		
hit	bâeng		
honey	sědót	bělîau	
hot	pâsang		
house	sěrôdong		
husband	sâwa	oi	
I	kaban	aku	
ill	lâyû		
insect	jangkau		
iron	pâh [pòh]		
jungle	dol		
kick	kěnyút		
knee	těngkhu [těngk'hu]		
laugh	gînyot		
leaf	râyang		
lightning	singat		
long [time]	lahun		
maize	kěmóng		

English	Kena. I.	Kena. II.	Kena. Stev.
man / male	sěnglòh, orang	rěmól	
mankind	som		
mantis [praying]	panchong		
to marry	sâbit		
mat		jěmpäs [jěmpès]	
monkey, coconut [malay <i>berok</i>]		ko'? [kok]	
monkey [malay <i>chikah</i>]	keretos	chíkah	
monkey [malay <i>kěkah</i>]	roit		
monkey [malay <i>lotong</i>]	bâteng	sěró	
monkey [malay <i>siamang</i>]		untó	
monkey [malay <i>ungka</i>]	jeun	jěngón	
moon	linta		
mosquito	těngět [těngé ^{nt}]		
mother	hâpet	hâpet	
mother-in-law	lahík	lahik	
mountain	tunjuk		
mouth	jěhâp [jěhòp]	rě-ang	
nail	risík		
neck	bâgong		
new	ntě' [ntě ^{nk}]		
night	sêlít		
nose	líang	monchong	
nostril	liang		
now	děhî	tadin	
oil	chělai	dak	
one	môi		
paddle		pěnyungkä [pěnyungkè]	
panther	mârut		
person	som		

English	Kena. I.	Kena. II.	Kena. Stev.
pig	sěrói	rěmâñ	
pleased	lîman	gûrau	
poison [for arrow]			kayas [kyass]
post	těgák		
pumpkin		tûkal	
pregnant	pělē? [pělēk]		
to put on	jěrát [jěròt]		
quick			bangat [bunghut]
rain		rěbéh	
rat	langsä [langsè]	hěñchă [hñchê ⁿ t]	
rattan	sîau		
red	nyělang		
resin	langkin		
rhinoceros	těkhó [těk'hó]		
rice	chahái		
rice, boiled	chěrás		
rice in husk		lumat	
river	yau	ayěr	
to roast		chârong	
roof	pělias		
root	jělár		
salt	sěmsam	chahâm	
sand	rěboi		
sandfly	těngět [těngé ⁿ t]		
sea	rantau		
see			pănöng [pannung]
seed	bûlat		
shoulder	châpék		

English	Kena. I.	Kena. II.	Kena. Stev.
silver		těmāgá [těmāgak]	
sister [older]	těmai	těmai	
sister [younger]	môjong	môjong	
skin	sělompot		
sky	lengseng		
to slap	tâpâ		
to sleep	sîlap		
small	chêmet	'mmăăt [mmè ⁿ t]	
snake	lîlîh		
to sneeze	champul		
to snore	těrôk	sěndó	
soil [earth]	teng		
sole [of foot]	pak		
spear	tôchoh	tohôk	
star	kělip		
step	tâlén		
stone	bungkal		
stop	lantók		
stream	yau		
to strike	bâeng		
strong	pěnchong		
sugar-cane	sau		
sun	nyantang		
sweat	rětéh		
sweet potato	chokéh	[jâyak]	
to take up	sâyit		
tapioca	těgák		
that	hong		
they		ěntoi	
thigh	săpăt [săpèt]		
this	īho' [īhok]	nin	
thou		yei ong ge-êk	ong-ti

English	Kena. I.	Kena. II.	Kena. Stev.
three	bé? [bék]		
thunder	âbû	kěřěntah	
tiger	măjă [mèjè]	kohón	
tiger-cat	sědét		
tiger, royal	râmas		
tin		bijih	
tired	kěńóng		
tomorrow	bengsák [bengsòk]		
tongue	jelil		
tooth	chěráh	rěmogñ	
tree	sěnjéh	pohón	
twenty		ng	
two	sar		
uncle	ūha' [ūhak]	ūha' [ūhak]	
valley	dâlik		
waistcloth	uwel [?], uwat	uwat	
water	par	rěbéh	
wax	lanchur		
weak	lâyûh		
wet	těkhă [těk'hò]	s'ek	
white	mambu	bělehăk [bělehèk]	
who	sigun	ya apa apa	
wife	oi	āwa' [āwak]	
wind	pohói	běrŭa'? [běrŭak]	
woman		kâsil	
wood	pohól		
yam	yot		
yawn	ūhai		
yesterday	sĭă [sĭò]		
you	ké		

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School of Languages
University of Melbourne
Parkville VIC 3052
Australia