

# A Preliminary Study on the Use of Epithets in Kenyah Long Wat

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## Abstract

Social status has long been a point of reference in addressing the individual. As observed in the Kenyah Long Wat community, members of a family are given epithets upon life events such as birth and death to signify their new status. Although the creation and use of epithets in indexing life events may be customary in many communities, the types and variety of linguistic forms used in different speech communities may well provide a lens through which the social practices of an indigenous community can be appreciated. This article describes the epithets found in the Kenyah Long Wat language, which will ground further sociolinguistic study of the language. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with speakers of the language to obtain information on epithets and the socio-cultural events, beliefs and linguistic resources that surround the creation and conferment of epithets.

**Keywords:** *Kenyah Long Wat; epithets; endangered language; Sarawak indigenous language; naming practices*

## Introduction

The indigenous epithet is fast disappearing among the younger members of the Long Wat speech community, as the younger generation who are residing in the city prefer using mainstream Malay or English terms of address. This is more pronounced among the current generation where terms such as 'uncle' or 'aunty' are used instead of *inak jiek* or *amak jiek* meaning the youngest aunt or youngest uncle in the family. Living in the city as well as intermarriages has brought changes to language preference among community members. When the number of elders who are particular about using the traditional epithets decreases, holding on to the practice is no longer a concern among the younger generations.

When children no longer learn the language of their forefathers as their first language, such language is considered as endangered (Austin & Sallabank, 2011). As suggested by Michael Krauss (1992), without intergenerational transmission, languages face greater risk of extinction and become moribund. Following language loss or change, the death of a language is inevitable, as evident in the case of Sarawak, where several languages have become extinct. These include Seru in the 19th century and Dali, Bekatan, and Lelak in the 20th century (Blust & Smith, 2014). With time, these languages which are least spoken, particularly the languages of minority communities, face an increasing risk of becoming endangered. Sarawak is home to a multi-ethnic population and has been said to house more than forty ethnic groups. Census from the Department of Statistics Malaysia in 2020 showed the population of Sarawak to be at 2,907,500 (Population Distribution and Basic Demographic Characteristics, 2020). The Iban, Bidayuh, Chinese, and Malay are among the majority, while the Melanau, Orang Ulu, and Indian contribute to the rest of the population (Population by Age Group, Sex and Ethnic Group, Sarawak, 2021).

In their work describing the complex patterns of multilingualism on the island of Borneo, McLellan and Jones (2015) note that the shift towards dominant languages such as the Malay language, known as Bahasa Malaysia in Sarawak and Sabah in East Malaysia, Bahasa Melayu in Brunei, and Bahasa Indonesia in Kalimantan, have skewed indigenous minority languages towards extinction. Since the Malay language as the national language of Malaysia is spoken by the majority of people in Malaysia, it is no surprise that in many Bidayuh households in Sarawak, for example, Malay has predominantly replaced Bidayuh as the dominant language. Ting and Rose (2014) conclude that factors such as the number of speakers of a language, existence of language varieties, and the process of assimilation, have influenced language use among natives of Sarawak. Often, in a Sarawakian mixed marriage household where the parents are from different ethnic groups, the transfer of the parents' mother tongues to the next generation may have a reduced rate of success, at a rate smaller than that of English or Malay as the dominant languages.

Continued interest in documenting Sarawakian languages among linguists has resulted in the publication of dictionaries, books, and writings on these languages. These works have been

accomplished by anthropologists, missionaries, government officials, and even travellers to the Borneo state over the past hundred years. However, Kroeger (1998) lamented the lack of systematicity in language documentation practices. Despite initiatives implemented by those involved in the documentation of languages in Sarawak, many languages spoken by indigenous people in the state are still largely under-explored. Chia (2014) reports that there are 44 living languages in Sarawak; yet, the figure may be larger considering that there are undocumented minority languages that have merged with other dominant languages through societal assimilation.

The languages spoken by the larger ethnic groups in Sarawak, such as Iban and Bidayuh, have received significant attention. Such favoured attention could be due to the bigger number of speakers of the languages, which also means these speech communities are generally more powerful politically, socially, and economically. Hence, Iban and Bidayuh have been able to maintain their dominance and vitality. However, as with any living language, these dominant languages are not in a 'safe zone' as regards their survival. This is observed in the difference in language choice between the older generation and the younger people, especially among the millennials. Other languages with fewer speakers continue to be threatened, and risk becoming moribund if no effort is made to preserve them.

The focus of this study was on one of the minority languages of a Sarawakian ethnic group, the Kenyah Long Wat, which, with an estimated number of speakers of 600, is regarded as an endangered language. The study set out to describe the use of epithets as a linguistic practice within the Kenyah Long Wat community. Situated within the broader sociocultural practice of naming, the use of epithets reflects social structure and relationships, and can provide insight into how language use intersects with social relationships in particular ways, especially if research is anchored in the emic perspective of community members.

The following section presents past studies related to this study. It is vital to discuss the naming practices from different languages which dispense further contextual ground for this present study.

## Naming Conventions and Practices

Anthroponymic studies in the past have presented findings of naming practices of different cultural communities globally. There is no single naming convention that is applicable to every community, as naming practices are culture specific. Naming practices act as a symbolic system of cultural identification (Abd-El-Jawad 1986) and their eventual shifts from traditional bases in different communities have been documented by past researchers. Among the Batonu people in Nigeria, embracing Islam presented a shift in the traditional naming practices where names were assigned to babies predicated on "order of birth, gentility, circumstance of birth, parents' occupation, natural phenomena, and so forth" (Fakuade, Williams, Nnaji & Odeigah 2018).

Since the 16th century, the coming of Arab traders and Islamic missionaries have had lasting impressions on the Batonu people to this day. Among the Akans in Ghana, names are formulated from social and cultural constructs (Agyekum 2006). These “sociocultural tags” are more prominent where different categories of names are presented. The Akan names can be classified into birth names, family names, circumstantial names, flora and fauna and physical structure names, theophoric names, honorifics and title names, insinuating, proverbial, insulting names, and nicknames (Agyekum, 2006). The diverse categories mirror the rich sociocultural influence of the Akans’ background on their names. As the biggest ethnic group that makes up the total population in Ghana, the decline in the traditional naming practice has been obvious.

For the Yoruba people in Nigeria, sociological factors influence their given, ascribed, and pet names (Ogunwale 2012), as they do in the nomenclature of societies in general. However, most names are now modernised, creating concern for the loss of traditional cultural practice, as emergence of non-traditional name forms are viewed as downgrading the use of traditional names and hence cultural practices. The shift in naming practices is unavoidable, as described by Ogunwale (2012):

Changing societal perspectives, coupled with impoverished knowledge of the indigenous language, foreign religions that cast aspersions on native culture, and the emerging new interests about naming practices among the Yorùbá, can be said to be accountable. (p. 33).

Al-Qawasmi and Al-Haq (2016) describe changes in the naming practices of newborn babies in Jordan from 1970 to 2015, showing that as time progresses, the naming process is no longer influenced by culture, religion, or social elements as it traditionally was. Following the turn of the millennium, modernisation has affected the names given to newborn Jordanians, as the use of names previously foreign to them have become predominant.

In China, Blum (1997) investigated names indexing social and kin relationships by looking at a three-party exchange dimension between a speaker, hearer, and addressee. Kinship terms are not only descriptive; they have a substantial impact on human hierarchical relationships (Blum, 1997). Furthermore, the face value which is deemed critical should not be ignored. Based on structures of meaning and status, Blum (1997) addressed how individuals refer to the structures to create or enforce relationships.

Looking at the literature on some of the naming practices on the Borneo Island, there are significant similarities among communities due to the geographical landscape. Using teknonyms is a common practice especially among the smaller communities in Southeast Asia. In Sillander’s (2010) study, the Bentian people in East Kalimantan who are one of the many Dayak tribes in Indonesia have, other than the ‘usual’ teknonym, unique “teknonym-like nicknames that derive, not from descendants’ names but from various habits, attributes, or events associated with the

name bearer” (p. 101). Among the Bentian adults, teknonymy is used predominantly as a form of reference, while kinship terms are used as a form of address. The practice is seen as a respectful way to address someone without using their birth names.

Other than names given during one’s birth and additional names obtained throughout a person’s life, other significant events such as the death of a family member can be seen in the practice of conferring death related names found among native communities residing on the Borneo Island. Needham (1954) pioneered studies on death-names or mourning terms of the Penan people in Sarawak. In the event of a death in the family, relatives of the deceased receive a death-name. As explained by Needham (1954):

At the birth of a child to him a Penan assumes a teknonym, and at the death of what a Penan calls a "true" kinsman or kinswoman he assumes one of a number of terms — which I have called "deathnames" —according to his relationship to the deceased. (p. 58)

Among others, Brosius (1995) and Katsumi (2012) who studied death-names (*ngaran lumu*) between different Penan communities in Borneo found that the theme of death is eminent in the communities’ social discourses. The epithets serve as a new addition to the names of the relatives of the deceased. Brosius (1995) found that the Penan Geng employs death-names in order “to show affection, to verify statements, and as curses” (p. 197). He observed that using appropriate death-names signifies a person’s respect for those who are grieving. The practice focussed more on the bereaved families than the deceased as it serves “like insignia on the shoulders of helicopter pilots” (Brosius, 1995, p. 202). Thus, using the right death-name is vital to accomplish its intended social purpose.

The literature reviewed shows evidence that naming practices as a fundamental practice in all human social groupings are varied and are infused with social meanings that underlie how members of a society relate to each other, and particularly their interpretation of the human conditions of birth (naming of newborns) and death (giving of death-names). Names are created and conferred following the norms and values that societies adhere to and live by. What is also clear from the literature is that traditional naming practices among ethnic groups are unique and can be traced to elements in the physical and cultural environments; however, as the environment changes, so do these practices. The value of embarking on a project describing these sociolinguistic practices is in the understanding of human societies and their use of linguistic tools in meaning-making. As a language becomes endangered and moves towards possible extinction, it is likely that the sociocultural practices associated with the linguistic practice will be forgotten unless effort is made to document and describe them.

This paper presents the preliminary findings of a project to document and describe the types of epithets and their use in the naming practices of the Kenyah Long Wat community. Epithets

used by Kenyah Long Wat speakers are identified and where relevant, the sociocultural practices of the community that are crucial for understanding the linguistic practice of epithet-giving are described from the perspective of members of the community. The death-name epithet, as a unique sociolinguistic practice, is given particular attention as it is found to exist in the traditional custom of the Kenyah Long Wat community. Although similar practice is found in other Kenyah varieties, the paper focuses specifically on the Kenyah Long Wat speech community.

## The Kenyah Long Wat: A Brief Introduction to the Speech Community

In this section, the Kenyah Long Wat community, the people of interest to this study, and the context of their current and past histories is described. Some of the information presented here was provided by elderly members of the community who recalled past events affecting the community.

The Kenyah Long Wat speech community represents an indigenous community living along the Apoh River, a tributary of the Tutoh River in Baram. 'Long' meaning outfall is used by some Kenyah villages apart from 'uma' or 'lepo' which means village. According to an elder from the Long Wat village, more than a century ago, the villagers migrated from Belaga (Long Wat, Belaga), Kapit, to Baram (Long Wat, Apoh), Miri. The reason for the migration was not known as no official documentation was ever recorded. However, as swidden farmers, the search for fertile land was believed to be the motivation behind the move.

Two community elders, named Pang and Ding, were said to be responsible for the migration. Before settling at the current location, the Long Wat community lived in a village that was located within a 15 minutes' boat ride down river. Much later, the Kayan joined the Kenyah population in Long Wat and made up about half of the population. There are 38 'doors' or units in the longhouse that belonged to Kenyah families in the village which make up the population of 285 (Senarai Ketua Kaum Daerah Marudi, 2014). One household unit is often shared among family members from the same kinship line.

In the past, the Kenyah Long Wat people were socially stratified, and the people were divided according to their castes, namely *ketau* (aristocrat), *panyin* (commoner), and *lipen* (slave). Endogamy was observed strictly. Everyone had to adhere to the system, and it influenced decision making in the village. Marriage among people from different castes was not allowed as this would affect the social stratification of the community. Today, this custom is loosely practiced, and marriages are becoming less strict with inter-ethnic marriages being a common occurrence. Despite that, awareness of the lineage of families based on caste persists to some extent. This influence can be seen during some traditional ceremonies, weddings, or funerals.

Documenting a language constitutes a sizable task, the completion of which sometimes requires several years. Despite efforts by both the governmental and non-governmental bodies,



many languages in Sarawak such as the language spoken by the Kenyah people in Kampung Long Wat (Long Wat village) remain undocumented. The documentation of a language, whether it is widely spoken or endangered, does not merely aim to preserve the language. It is a process significant for collecting valuable sociolinguistic information about the speech community's linguistic and metalinguistic knowledge (Himmelman, 1998, as cited in Austin, 2010). Studying the sociolinguistic practices of a community can provide not only a better understanding of the linguistic forms and symbolisms of a minority language but also provides insight into the social practices of the community.

Wurm and Hattori (1981) reported the number of speakers in Kenyah Long Wat as 600. At present, the exact number of speakers of Kenyah Long Wat is not known. However, based on informal conversations with speakers of the language, the number is estimated to be not more than 2000. At present, the sole documented record of the Kenyah Long Wat is based on Blust's fieldwork in 1971, which largely entails phonological work on the language as part of his larger work on the indigenous languages in Borneo (as cited in Blust & Smith, 2014).

As younger members of the community migrate to cities or other places, some speakers adopt or shift to other dominant languages and do not pass the language to their children. This is more pronounced in inter-ethnic marriages. Furthermore, in national schools, Bahasa Melayu (Malay language) and English are used as the medium of instruction, resulting in a tendency by parents to use both of these languages at home, thus further impeding the transfer of their mother tongues to their children. These factors place the native language at significant risk of endangerment.

Ethnologue (2020) categorises the number of Kenyah Long Wat speakers as small with a population of less than 10,000 users and endangered (EGIDS 6b-9) as few children are learning and using the language. However, the number in a population does not necessarily correlate with the number of speakers. Therefore, the actual number of Kenyah Long Wat speakers may be fewer than reported. According to the participants, till today, there is no standardised orthographic system for the language. Literate speakers have developed their orthography that is understood by most other speakers.

## Methodology

Apart from providing a data repository for scientific study, language documentation is aimed at establishing lasting multipurpose records of languages (Himmelman, 2006). Cataloguing serves as an important resource to support the maintenance of the respective languages. In this study, collecting the few remaining epithets used by the Kenyah Long Wat people today is believed to be a step towards preserving one aspect of the language. The declining use of the epithets today is a strong reason to focus on it.

Some language documentation projects involve a large amount of data; however, when investigating an endangered language with a dwindling number of speakers, it is unlikely that one can obtain a lot of linguistic data that are associated with a fading practice. Such data, while limited, are important as a record of linguistic and cultural practices of a small speech community. Other than identifying the different epithets used, this study also sought to describe practices related to epithet creation and conferment in the Kenyah Long Wat community, thus contributing to the documenting of the language, for scholarly and historical reference, and educational and revitalisation purposes.

Using a qualitative approach, we describe the epithets found in Kenyah Long Wat. Data gathering employed semi-structured interviews that allow participants to speak freely about their cultural and linguistic practices, as well as any historical information about the migration and settlement of the community.

Initially, the participants were asked whether they were willing to be interviewed and to participate in the study. The participants who were positive about participating were then provided information about the research and the consent form which was in the Malay language. The elderly participants who did not read written Malay were accompanied by their adult children, and most of the time, the children ended up joining the interviews as well. The children also served as the intermediary for the appointments with the researcher.

Before each interview began, an ice breaking session was conducted, and the purpose of the study and the interview were explained in detail. The participants were encouraged to ask questions about the study. A video camera was used to record the sessions. The interviews were conducted in a casual manner to create an informal conversational atmosphere.

To facilitate the communication between the interviewer and the participants, a language consultant from the community assisted in the interviews. The language consultant also assisted in the pre-interview stage where she helped to identify the elders who were in Miri, the nearest city to the village. Since the interviewer did not speak the Kenyah Long Wat language fluently, the language consultant served as an interpreter in the interviews. The language consultant was a suitable candidate for the role as she spoke the language fluently and had lived her entire childhood in the Long Wat community. Although she was in her mid-thirties and was younger than most of the participants, she understood the Long Wat culture well as she was brought up in the village before being sent to study in the city.

The participants in the study were middle-age and elderly people in their eighties. A total of 9 participants (7 females, 2 males) were interviewed. There were more women participants as they were more frequently available for the interviews. There were no strict criteria for the selection of the respondents, other than that they were to be speakers of Kenyah Long Wat and used the language for primary discourse. The conversations with the participants ranged from exchanges of personal information, and discussions about epithets and their meanings, oral



history, traditions, taboos, and childhood memories. Throughout the sessions, the interviewees were free to talk about what they wished to share about their community.

All the interview sessions were conducted at the homes of the participants in Miri, Sarawak, in 2019. No trips were made to Long Wat village, as a number of elderly community members live in the city with their adult children, and middle-age Kenyah Long Wat speakers, too, could be found in the town area. In total, three group interviews were conducted and each one lasted an average of two hours per session. The number of participants in each interview session was between one and three, arranged at the convenience and availability of the participants.

During the interviews, the epithets were gathered with the discourses surrounding them. Member checking was an important part of the whole interview process. The language consultant, who was a member of the speech community, was referred to in order to ensure the accuracy of the data obtained. Other than that, upon the completion of the whole interview process, two participants were asked to verify the description of the epithets discussed in this study. The data collected were sufficient for this study as repetition of examples of epithets were obtained, indicating that saturation point might have been reached.

### *Epithet Identification*

The primary data were obtained from interviews with the participants who were members of the Kenyah Long Wat speech community. Discourses surrounding the epithets provided the contextual background for the identification of the epithets. Understanding the discourse surrounding the epithets and how the epithets were given and used was crucial for the analysis. Notes on epithets were taken and participants were asked to elaborate on the epithets as linguistic practice and the socio-cultural practices related to them. Then, participants were asked to review the epithets and their descriptions towards the end of each interview. In this paper, epithets identified are described and categorised according to their general functions or social purposes. Exemplifications of the epithets are drawn from participants' descriptions and the contexts of use of epithets are illustrated.

### Findings

Epithets in the Kenyah Long Wat community are given on occasions of life events, particularly those that mark the beginning and end of life. Two categories of the epithets that emerged from the data are broadly described as those that are conferred in relation to birth events, particularly the birth of a firstborn, and those which are given after a death event, called death-names (Needham, 1965). Despite the continuance of the practice, some of the epithets identified have all but disappeared. Interviews with participants revealed that only the elders could remember some of the epithets that were once commonly used by the community. We present evidence of this decline in the discussion below.

## Kenyah Long Wat Epithets of Birth Events

In the Kenyah Long Wat community, parents are given a new term of address based on their eldest child's name alongside a kinship term. Parents' own given names become obscured, and they are referred to as 'Father/Mother of' followed by the first child's name, for example, tamen Lian 'Father of Lian', Lian being the child's given name. Later, once they become grandparents, they will be addressed based on their eldest grandchild's name. Parents or grandparents may then be addressed as tinen/tamen Lian 'Mother/Father of Lian' or ukun Saging 'Grandfather/Grandmother of Saging', Saging being the given name of the first grandchild. However, it is emphasised that people outside the community may not use these terms of address; instead, members of the outside community should address Kenyah Long Wat people by their birth names unless they are aware of the epithets.

Also, during joyous occasions such as the birth of a child, the parents are given 'special' names or celebratory-names based on the gender of the newborn baby. When the first-born is a boy, the father will be addressed as muket while the mother will be called nuket. For a girl, her father will be known as miteng and her mother niteng. These terms are added before the first-born child's name. For instance, if the first-born child is named Balan, his father will be addressed as muket Balan 'Father of Balan his male first-born'. These terms of address are different from the kinship term for mother 'tinen' and father 'tamen' which do not indicate the gender of the child.

These birth event epithets provide a glimpse into the significance attached to the birth of a first-born. The birth of a first child is regarded a huge blessing deserving of an epithet to be conferred to the parents and grandparents, to the extent that the given names of the parents and grandparents become backgrounded. The new terms of address gained by the parents and grandparents upon safely producing a firstborn offspring is a mark of respect, a social recognition extended to the parents by the society. Further, the gender of the child is also viewed as significant for societal acknowledgement. Hence, gender marking in the epithet given to the parents is a way to celebrate the gender of the first-born child. Whether there is any preference for a particular gender in the community is not known, as interviews with participants did not bring forth any nuances of stratification based on the gender of a child. Today, names such as muket, nuket, miteng, and niteng are not widely used and most members of the community are no longer aware of them. Tamen or tinen is more commonly used to address parental figures.

## Kenyah Long Wat Death-names

Among the Kenyah Long Wat people, other than teknonyms, use of mourning-terms or death-names is a common practice which exists to this day. To put it into perspective, death-names are titles given upon the passing of a close relative (Brosius, 1995). Death-names are given to family members as a form of respect to the deceased person and to address a person's social standing within the community. In the community, when a person is addressed as balu or aban, she or he

will immediately be recognised as a widow or widower. Addressing a person using a socially sanctioned term of address could reduce social tension and misunderstanding among the community, as the epithets serve to remind people around the bereaved to be sensitive towards their feelings. People experiencing bereavement do not feel offended over the proper address given to them, but would appreciate the thoughtfulness of the person addressing them.

In Kenyah Long Wat, the kinship term for grandfather is *akei*. However, when a grandfather loses his wife, his children will address him as *po* while his grandchildren will call him *ukun aban* (*ukun* is equivalent to grandparent). On the other hand, others in the community will simply call him *aban*, followed by his name (e.g. *aban Jau*). Death-names are also given to a grandmother when she loses her husband. Her children will call her *alu*, while her grandchildren will use the name *ukun alu* to address her. The children and grandchildren are not allowed to call their elders by their personal names. In addition, others in the community will greet her as *balu* with or without her birth name, for example, *balu Laleng* (*Laleng* is a female Kenyah name)

Children who are orphans will also receive their own death-names. In the event when a man passes away, his sons will be known as *uyau* while his daughters will be referred to as *utan*. Not only are the children called *utan* or *uyau* by their immediate family members; others in the community will do so, too. For the death of a mother, these terms change to *ilun* for both sons and daughters. These death-names will be followed by the person's birth/given name, for example *uyau Saging* or *ilun Nyipa*, where *Saging* and *Nyipa* are the birth names of children who have lost their mothers. Unlike the case of gendered death-names for children whose father has died, gender differentiation does not exist in the creation of the death-names for children when their mother passes away.

In one of the interviews, one respondent remembered that death-names used to be given for the passing of one's sibling. When someone loses his sister, he will receive a death-name. However, the participant could not recall the specific death-name. What she could remember was the term *bieng*, which was used to address the deceased sibling's spouse, that is, a brother/sister-in-law (e.g., *bieng Laleng*). The participant who remembered this was someone in her eighties, which means that younger community members are not likely to be aware of such names. The death-name given for the death of a sibling no longer in the memory of elderly community members is evidence of the gradual loss of linguistic practices of the community. On epithets given to parents in relation to their children's death, parents also receive death-names upon the death of their first, second, and third children. The death-names for the parents are *uyung* (death of the first child), *sade* (death of the second child), and *mawa* (death of the third child). The epithet used would be the most recent epithet conferred, that is, the epithet associated with the most recent death of a child in the family. For instance, if the most recent death in the family involves the second child, the parents will be known as *sade* even if their first child had passed away. In other words, the selection of the death-names for this category applies to the most recent event. The death-names precede the parents' birth or given name. For

example, the parents will be known as uying Lawai or uying Urai, if their birth names are Lawai or Urai. In the study of Penan death-names, Needham (1965) was able to list the death-names of parents up to the ninth child's death. However, for the current study, the participants could not remember the death-names associated with the children's death any further than the third child. Table 1 provides a summary of the celebratory-name and death-names of the Kenyah Long Wat.

Role	Translation	Celebratory names	Death-names
grandfather	akei	-	<p>Children - po'</p> <p>Grandchildren - ukun aban</p> <p>People - aban</p> <p>A widower will be called po' by his children while his grandchildren will call him ukun aban. The children and grandchildren are not allowed to call their elders by their personal names. Others will address him as aban followed by his name. For example, a neighbour will address the widow as aban Ngang.</p>
grandmother	doe	-	<p>Children - aleu</p> <p>Grandchildren - ukun aleu</p> <p>People - baleu</p> <p>A widow will be called alu by her children while her grandchildren will address her as ukun aleu. Others will refer to her as baleu (e.g., baleu Tarang)</p>
father	amak	<p>First born (boy) - muket</p> <p>First born (girl) - miteng</p> <p>The father will be called muket or nuket (e.g., muket Ngang)</p>	<p>Children - po'</p> <p>People - aban (e.g., aban Ngang)</p> <p>Death of first born - uyung (e.g., uyung Ngang)</p> <p>Death of second born - sadi (e.g., sadi Ngang)</p> <p>Death of third born - mawa' (e.g., mawa' Ngang)</p>
mother	inak	<p>First born (boy) - nuket</p> <p>First born (girl) - niteng</p> <p>The mother will be called nuket (e.g., nuket Ngang)</p>	<p>Children - aleu</p> <p>People - baleu (e.g, baleu Tarang)</p> <p>Death of first born - uyung (e.g., uyung Tarang)</p> <p>Death of second born - sadi (e.g., sadi Tarang)</p> <p>Death of third born - mawa' (e.g., mawa' Tarang)</p>
Child	anak	-	<p>Utan (daughter), uyau (son)</p>

			An orphan who loss his or her father will be called utan (daughter) and uyau (son). However, when they loss their mother, both daughter and son will be called ilun (ilun Ngang/ilun Tarang).
Brother	pade' lakei	-	(Existed but forgotten)
Sister	pade' ledo	-	(Existed but forgotten)
Elder sibling	tuken  tukam - used by others to address the elder sibling  E.g. Temah tukam?  (Where is your older brother/sister?)		- In laws will call dead sibling's spouse bieng (e.g., bieng Tarang)
Younger sibling	adin  tadim - used by others to address the younger sibling.  E.g., Temah tadim?  (Where is your younger brother/sister?)		- In laws will call dead sibling's spouse bieng (e.g. bieng Tarang)
Second born	-	-	-
Third born	-	-	-
Grandchild	ayam	-	-
Husband	sa'et	-	(Similar to grandfather)
Wife	sa'et	-	(Similar to grandmother)
Father-in-law	kivan lakei	-	-
Mother-in-law	kivan ledo	-	-
Brother-in-law	sabai	-	-
Sister-in-law	sabai	-	-
Cousin-in-law	sabai	-	-
Uncle	vae'/amak	-	-
Uncle (older than your mother or father)	yuk	-	-



Uncle (younger than your mother or father)	amak	-	-
Aunty	vae'/inak	-	-
Aunty (older than your mother or father)	yuk	-	-
Aunty (younger than your mother or father)	inak/inak e'ik (derived from Ji'ek / small)	-	-
Cousin	pade pasig'et/pade sa'k	-	-
Nephew	a'ong	-	-
Niece	a'ong	-	-

Table 1: Summary of Kenyah Long Wat Epithets

As shown in Table 1, some of the epithets found are similar to those found by Needham (1965) and Brosius (1995). The Penan and Kenyah Long Wat languages share some similar words including the death-names. Compared to Needham's informative findings on the Penan death-names, the current study found fewer death-names remembered by the Kenyah Long Wat community. Needham (1965) noted that the extent of use of death-names is dependent on the location of the settlements, as groups that have less contact with outsiders and who retain their traditional practices use more death-name epithets. This could be the reason that accounts for the fewer number of epithets found among Kenyah Long Wat speakers today. Since the community is exposed to other communities such as the Kayan and other groups in adjacent communities, the use of death-names among the Kenyah Long Wat is likely to have declined. Furthermore, historically, the Kenyah Long Wat community had moved from their earlier settlement in Belaga, Kapit to Baram, Miri. The unknown events that had led to the migration may have exerted pressure on the cultural and linguistic practices of the community.

The elderly members of the community interviewed conceded that they did not remember many of the epithets. The use of the epithets had decreased even during their younger days. The middle-aged participants could not identify most of the epithets once used by their grandparents in the past. When asked to reflect upon this matter, one of the participants recalled a time when someone passed away in the village, and the husband of the deceased refused to be referred to as *aban* or *widow* that signifies bereavement. The reason given was that using death-names was considered an old practice, described as not 'Christian like', and did not adhere to his religious beliefs. As the community embraced Christianity, they started to let go of old practices including naming practices. As explained by one of the participants, there might have been some confusion in the past about embracing cultural practices while being a 'good' Christian. Since their religious conversion, most of the 'old' practices believed to be linked to paganism are no longer being practiced. Nowadays, their lifestyle has changed to accommodate their new religious beliefs.

## Discussion

Few studies have delved into epithet-giving as a naming practice. Indeed, there is no singular naming convention that applies to all societies and cultures in the world. There are multiple meanings underlying naming practices either through self-identification, self-description, or community-defined practices (Kostanski & Puzey, 2016). Within these layers, the practice serves a purpose for the speaker and the addressee. Here, the Kenyah Long Wat had developed a system epithet that manages the relationship and communicative domains among them.

In considering naming practices, it is observed that epithet use is distinct from the many and varied other forms of name-giving. While the giving of personal names is largely self-determined by the individual, epithet giving operates at the societal level. One cannot claim an epithet to one's name unless it is society sanctioned, in compliance with the social rules of the community.

On the other hand, one cannot reject an epithet given because it is a form of reference used by society to identify the life status of a community member in accordance with the value placed on life events. Since the giving of epithet among the Kenyah Long Wat is anchored on motives of respect, caring, empathy and affirmation, it is appropriate to describe the giving of epithet as a 'conferment', which brings forth positive connotations and does not represent a burden or stigma cast on the individual.

Replacing personal names with teknonyms, celebratory-names, and death-names signify the many conventions surrounding Kenyah Long Wat sociocultural practices. The functional reason of giving new names when a person's life status changes mark their new identity. This influences the way he or she is recognised among the community. Communicatively, the new identity governs the language choice of the speaker and addressee. Burt (2009) presented a somewhat similar finding based on Hmong Americans who are given new names based on the changes in their life's status. This shows how a person's name could evolve over one's lifetime. Names have cultural and social meanings that define the bearer in every society (Agyekum, 2006). Studies done on African and Middle Eastern names by Abd-El-Jawad (1986), Doyle (2008), Fakuade et al. (2018), Agyekum (2006), Ogunwale (2012), and Al-Qawasmi and Al-Haq (2016) have shown that life events weigh heavily in the naming practices of communities. Epithets in the Kenyah Long Wat community serve as an identification mark for the individual within the community that they belong to, as outsiders may not be aware of these 'new' or additional names. Long Wat community members will be known only by their birth names to people of the outside world.

Gender classification proves to be important in the giving of epithets among the Kenyah Long Wat. Parents and grandparents are given different names depending on the sex of the firstborn baby. Despite this differentiation, there is no evidence of a preference for babies of a particular sex among community members.

Caring for the feelings of others proves to be crucial in the use of death-names. In a small community such as the Kenyah Long Wat, news of someone's passing is always a noticeable event. The close connection between community members creates a strong sense of solidarity during trying times. Every event has its significance and must be addressed conforming to the community's beliefs and practices. Labels determine how a person behaves and engages in social activities as naming conforms to both performance and participation (Agyekum, 2006). Epithets serve as indices of one's life. Referring to or addressing a person based on his or her social condition is a way for society to affirm the existence and experiences of its members, and stand in solidarity with them. Death-names among the Kenyah Long Wat community act to notify others about bereavement in a family unit. The interaction between a bereaved person and other members of the community will be constrained as members are reminded of the social obligations created through the epithet. When approaching a bereaved person, other members are reminded to reduce their social distance while keeping a certain degree of respect (Sillander, 2010). Here, epithets have a role in maintaining harmony and the social fabric of the community.

Over time, languages undergo changes; entire languages or particular aspects of languages may disappear entirely when speakers stop using them. Both internal and external factors can affect the survival of a language. As fewer elderly members of the community use or remember the practice of epithet-giving, the practice will slowly disappear together with the surface linguistic structures that signal the practice, and the cultural ideology that underlies it. While the older people are influenced by their specific beliefs about maintenance of social cohesiveness through sociolinguistic labelling and acknowledgement of social status, the same cannot be said of the younger members who are no longer fluent in their native language. The practice of epithet-giving is slowly becoming a relic of the past.

Religion has a strong influence on overall communal practices as evident in the naming practices of the Kenyah Long Wat, where names based on biblical stories have started to become common. A shift in ideology brought about by religion has been impactful in replacing some of the traditional practices. Also, as the younger generation migrates to the city for a better life, the language and culture of the Kenyah Long Wat will continue to be threatened.

## Conclusion

The current study contributes to the explication of sociolinguistic practices of indigenous languages in Sarawak, specifically the Kenyah language spoken in Long Wat. It represents part of the continuing efforts in language documentation and description of the vast number of Sarawakian minority languages.

Epithets in Kenyah Long Wat are not fixed linguistic terms of reference and address, but evolve across one's lifespan in tandem with one's life events. They are social labels that maintain roles and relationships within the community. Epithet-giving is a way through which the community shows care, reaffirmation and consideration to its members, sharing the joys and sorrows of life's events, while maintaining social order.

The study highlights the importance of language maintenance in a society. It is believed that if the study had been conducted a decade ago, more epithets would have been found and preserved. Needham (1954) who studied the death-names of the Penan people in the 1950s was able to list a sizeable number of terms, which today, may not exist in the memory of the Penan community. Future research could draw together epithets as linguistic structures, and epithet-giving as a sociolinguistic practice used in other indigenous communities in Borneo to delve deeper into the procedure of epithet creation and use as an important heritage record of the people of Borneo.

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