

Craig Soderberg

craigggg@gmail.com

Seymour A. Ashley

seymour_ashley@sil.org

Kenneth S. Olson

ken_olson@sil.org

Tausug (ISO code *tsg*) is an Austronesian language spoken on the island of Jolo in the southwestern Philippines. It is also found on other nearby islands in the southwestern part of the Philippines and in parts of Sabah, Malaysia, where it is called Suluk. The population of the Tausug in the Philippines is estimated at 900,000 (Gordon 2005) and the year 2000 population estimate of the Suluk in Sabah, Malaysia, is 150,000.¹ The following description is based on the variety spoken on Jolo. ‘The North Wind and the Sun’ text was translated from English into Tausug by Irene Hassan. Previous studies of Tausug phonology include Asmah (1978, 1983) and Hassan, Ashley & Ashley (1994). David Lao, age 62 at the time of the recording, born in Jolo, Philippines, was the reader for the Tausug words in this article. Due to difficult access into the language area, all audio recordings were obtained by Skype transmission.

Consonants

	Bilabial	Dental	Alveolar	Post-alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Plosive & affricate	p b	t̪	d	(tʃ) ^a dʒ		k g	ʔ
Nasal	m		n		ɲ	ŋ	
Flap			(r) ^b				
Fricative			s (z) ^c				h
Approximant	w				j		
Lateral approximant			l				

^a The voiceless post-alveolar fricative [tʃ] occurs only in borrowed words such as the Malay word, [bi'tʃara] ‘to speak’. Some Tausug speakers say [bi'sara] instead.

^b The phoneme /r/ has marginal phonemic status and would not be included here as a phoneme except that it also occurs in a few Malay loan words (e.g. [ˈmurid] ‘pupil’, [ˈkapiɾ] ‘unbeliever’).

^c The voiced alveolar fricative [z] occurs only in borrowed words such as the Arabic word, [ˈzabur] ‘holy book of David’.

¹ This estimate is based on an unpublished language survey conducted by one of the authors, Soderberg. The Sabah Malaysia State Culture Board asked Soderberg and five other individuals to perform a language survey during 1998–2000. This population estimate was obtained during that survey.

p	'paʔis	'skin'
b	'babaw	'upper surface'
m	'malim	'guide'
w	'waj	'none'
t	'tabaŋ	'help, aid, assistance'
d	'daɣaŋ	'sea, ocean, ocean water'
n	'napas	'breath'
r	ra'juma	'rheumatism'
s	'sabab	'cause'
l	'lapal	'word, statement'
tʃ	bi'tʃara	'speak'
dʒ	'dʒanap	'a kind of working machete'
ɲ	'ɲawa	'soul, spirit'
j	'jakuŋ	'red gem'
k	'karuŋ	'sack'
g	'gaʔas	'milk'
ŋ	'ŋa:n	'name'
ʔ	'ʔaʔup	'roof'
h	'habul	'sarong'

Tausug has some examples of consonant gemination at syllable boundaries, e.g. *nagkukummus* [nagku'kum:us] 'to cover someone', and *mattan* ['maʔ:an] 'surely, truly'. Also, when the velar consonant becomes a geminate at syllable boundaries, there is free variation as follows: *pagga* ['pagga] ~ ['pagka] 'whereas'.

All plosives are unreleased in syllable-final position, e.g. *atup* ['aʔup] 'roof', *taub* ['ʔaʔub] 'high tide', *langit* ['laŋiʔ] 'sky', *ūd* [ʔu:d] 'maggot', *tuktuk* [ʔukʔuk] 'forehead', *balig* ['balig] 'crooked'. The voiceless plosives /p/, /t/, and /k/ are unaspirated. The voiced plosives /b/ and /g/ are sometimes realized as non-sibilant fricatives in intervocalic position, e.g. *abagah* [ʔaʔayah] ~ [ʔaʔagah] 'shoulder', and *tubu* [ʔubu] ~ [ʔuβu] 'sugarcane'. This is often the case between identical vowels. The non-sibilant fricatives were more noticeable with Tausug speakers from remote villages. The voiced plosives were more noticeable with Tausug speakers from urban areas.

The voiceless affricate [tʃ], as in [bi'tʃara] 'to speak', only occurs word medially. Depending on the speaker's isolect, some pronounce this sound as a lengthened sibilant [ss]. Others pronounce it as a stop followed by a sibilant [ts]. But it is most commonly pronounced as a voiceless affricate [tʃ].

The [r]-sound is realized as a flap when it occurs as an allophone of /d/. This phenomenon occurs in the intervocalic position both within single words and across word boundaries. For example, the word *ud* 'worm' becomes [ʔurun] 'to become infested with worms'. The word *dayaw* 'goodness' becomes [maʔayaw] 'to have the quality of goodness'. The phrase *duwa di duwa duun* 'two here two there' becomes [ʔuwa ri ʔuwa ʔun].

When [r] occurs as a phoneme, not as an allophone of /d/, it is manifested as a flap. There is also some free variation between the [r] and the alveolar lateral approximant [l] (e.g. *parman* ['parman] ~ ['palman] 'word', *sarta* ['sarʔaʔ] ~ ['saʔaʔ] 'simultaneously', *sarsila* [sar'sila] ~ [sal'sila] 'genealogy'). The alveolar flap [r] is more commonly used by urban speakers of Tausug. The alveolar lateral approximant [l] is more commonly used by the village speakers of Tausug. The phoneme /r/ has marginal phonemic status and would not be included here as a phoneme except that it also occurs in a few loan words from Malay (e.g. *murid* ['murid] 'pupil, follower', *kapir* ['kapir] 'infidel or unbeliever').

Vowels

Tausug has three vowel phonemes, /a/, /i/, and /u/. Like other Philippine languages with small vowel systems, /i/ and /u/ in Tausug demonstrate a range in vowel height, e.g. *bola* ['bola] ~ ['bula] 'ball'.

	Front	Central	Back
High	i		u
Mid			
Low		a	

i	'pihak'	'tribe, clan'
a	'pakaw	'thick covering'
u	'pukal	'richness (of food)'

Stress

Stress in Tausug is not phonemic and falls on the penultimate syllable of two syllable words as is shown below.

'tubu	'sugarcane'
'simud	'mouth'

In three-syllable words, stress again falls primarily on the penultimate syllable except in certain loan words, in which the stress pattern follows the stress pattern of the source language, as in ['saj.an.tis] 'scientist'.

There are other cases of exceptions to the penultimate stress rule due to certain affixation and word compounding as is indicated in the transcription of the recorded passage below.

Phonetic transcription of recorded passage

in 'pasal sin 'haŋin 'uttara? 'iβan sin 'suga
 man'dzari | ham'bu:k 'adlaw nag'tu:k in 'haŋin 'uttara? 'iβan 'suga | pag'kiŋa? 'nila sin
 ham'bu:k 'ta?u mia'manaw | nagku'kummus sin haβul ma'rakmul || nag'tu:k 'sila baŋ
 hi'sju in maku'sug ha'ruwa 'sila || 'la?uŋ ni'la | hi'sju-'sju in maka'lugus ha 'ta?u 'ja?un
 mag'i:g sin 'haβul ni'ja ma'rakmul | na | 'sja in maku'sug || sa'kali hi'mujup na
 maku'sug in 'haŋin 'uttara? || 'sagawa? 'wala? da i'ni:g sin 'ta?u'ja?un in 'haβul ni'ja
 ma'rakmul | 'gamma.jan | nag'kummus na 'tu?udsja | 'pagga 'magkuku,sug in 'haŋin
 'uttara? || 'pagga bi'hadtu | i'munduŋ na in 'haŋin 'uttara? || na | si'mubli na in 'suga ||
 pag'silak sin 'suya | pi'jasu? na in 'ta?u'ja?un | 'sarŋa? 'magtuj ni'ja i'ni:g in 'haβul ni'ja
 ma'rakmul || 'haŋkan na'ŋaku na in 'haŋin 'uttara? sin di'ja?ug sja | 'iβan 'maŋtan na sin
 in 'suga maku'sug dajn'kanija

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank Steve Parker, Pete Unseth, Scott Youngman and two anonymous reviewers for helpful comments and suggestions. All errors are our responsibility.

References

- Asmah Haji Omar. 1978. The Suluk language of Semporna. *Brunei Museum Journal* 4(2), 11–33.
- Asmah Haji Omar. 1983. *Suluk: The Malay peoples of Malaysia and their languages*, 407–436. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasadan Pustaka.
- Gordon, Raymond G., Jr. (ed.). 2005. *Ethnologue: Languages of the world*, 15th edn. Dallas, TX: SIL International. [Online version: <http://www.ethnologue.com/>]
- Hassan, Irene U., Seymour A. Ashley & Mary L. Ashley. 1994. *Tausug–English dictionary: Kabtangan Iban Maana*, 2nd edn. (Sulu Studies 6). Manila: Summer Institute of Linguistics.