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SPEAK MELANAU MUKAH

**An English – Melanau Mukah
Word and Phrase List**

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Introduction

The following Mukah Melanau word and phrase list was begun early in 2000, shortly after I arrived in Mukah, Sarawak, to begin fieldwork for my PhD in anthropology. Since Melanau is the lingua franca of the region acquiring some familiarity with the language was an immediate priority. There was no Melanau dictionary, and the only resources I had prior to arriving in Mukah were the brief glossaries in Stephen Morris' two books which relate to his fieldwork with the Melanau communities on the Oya River in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Morris's glossaries are based on the Medong dialect.

For the first four months I lived in Kg. Tellian Tengah, a Melanau village on the Tellian River and a short drive from Mukah town centre. During this time I stayed at *Lamin Dana*, a Melanau longhouse that was purpose built to be a "living museum" of traditional culture and in addition to provide accommodation where visitors might stay overnight and experience Melanau culture for themselves. Christina Bera Bukus (Vera), a young Melanau woman who lived in the village agreed to become my teacher and for the next four months, until I moved to my own house in Kg. Kuala Lama, "language lessons with Vera" became part of my routine most days. We met in the late afternoon, after Vera returned from work in nearby Mukah town. Each lesson was recorded so that it could be replayed to assist with pronunciation, and at the same time I began this word and phrase list. Over the following two years, the list was added to and updated, with some further assistance from Yusuf Mersal of Kg Kuala Lama. I have continued to make additions and revisions in the years since then.

It should be noted that this word and phrase list conforms to Melanau as it is spoken in the kampongs in and around Mukah town, hence "Mukah Melanau" in the title. However, a number of different Melanau dialects exist and are used throughout the wider Melanau coastal region, a reflection of the fact that historically, each Melanau community - living in relative isolation from the others, was characterized by distinct linguistic, cultural and political differences (Morris 1991:2). These differences were particularly apparent between communities situated on the different rivers of the region (ibid).

Among the Melanau themselves, language persists as a marker of differentiation today, not only in the different dialects existing between the different river systems but, for example, in the particular "tune" of speaking by which a "Kg. Petanak man" can be differentiated from a "Kg. Tellian man," although both villages are situated on the outskirts of Mukah town. Nevertheless, Mukah Melanau is widely understood throughout the region. It seems likely that Mukah's position