

# A new look at Bashiic



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**Prepared for ICAL XIII  
Taipei 18-23 July, 2015  
Academia Sinica**

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This printout: Lanyu, July 19, 2015

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**ACRONYMS**

BP	Before present
PMP	Proto-Malayopolynesian

**ABSTRACT**

The Bashiic [=Batanic] group of languages includes Tao [=Yami], Itbayat and the dialects of Ivatan, and is spoken on islands in the strait between Southern Taiwan and the Philippines (Ross 2005). Bashiic presents a paradox; although the languages are very close together, it is apparently a primary branch of Western Malayopolynesian and Ross (2005) suggests that the nuclear language was isolated from developments in the remainder of the Philippines. The Tao language shares too much with Ivatan to question the existence of a Bashiic group and is also clearly PMP. Yet some cultural and economic vocabulary is both exotic, different from Ivatan and not obviously Austronesian. The paper tabulates vocabulary which appears to be confined to Bashiic and glosses where Tao has a distinct lexemes. There has clearly been interaction with the languages of Luzon, since Bashiic shares lexical items with them which are not attested in wider Austronesian.

How can this be explained? The Batanes islands have been occupied for a long time, and it seems likely that they were first settled from Taiwan some 4000 years ago (see Tsang 2005 for Lanyu, Mijares et al. 2003 for Itbayat, Bellwood & Dizon (2014) for the Batanes). We do not know how long Lanyu (and Green Island) have been settled, but given the crossing of the Taiwan Strait and the navigational capacities of the early speakers of PMP languages, it seems likely this would also have been in the Neolithic at the very least. As Lanyu oral traditions record, only one village actually acknowledges a link with the Batanes. However, this link was probably important, as settlers from the Batanes, probably Itbayat, may have crossed to Lanyu relatively recently. They seem to have established cultural dominance over the existing residents, to the extent that their language disappeared and was replaced by Tao.

Keywords; Yami; Bashiic; Austronesian; Lanyu; archaeology; linguistics

## 1. Introduction

The Bashiic [also Batanic] group of languages spoken on islands in the strait between Southern Taiwan and the Philippines, includes Tao [=Yami], Itbayat and the dialects of Ivatan, (Ross 2005). Bashiic is something of a mystery, since in general its members are very close to one another, and yet it is apparently a primary branch of Western Malayopolynesian. Ross (2005) suggests that the proto-language was isolated from developments in the remainder of the Philippines. How this came about is somewhat uncertain, but it suggests that there has been population replacement in the Luzon Strait. Bashiic languages have a range of idiosyncratic lexicon for plants and animals, which may reflect substrates of quite different languages. This paper reviews the current state of research on these languages, and also considers how the prehistory of the region can be interpreted in this light.

Table 1 sets out basic information about the location and speakers of Bashiic languages and Map 1 shows the islands they inhabit;

**Table 1. The Bashiic languages**

Reference name	ISO	Other	Location	Speakers
Tao	tao	Yami	Pongso nu Tao, Lanyu, Orchid Island, Botel Tobago	ca. 3000
Itbayat	ivv		Itbayat	3500
Basco Ivatan, Southern Ivatan	ivv		Ivatan	35,000
Ibatan	ivb	Babuyan	Ibatan	1240

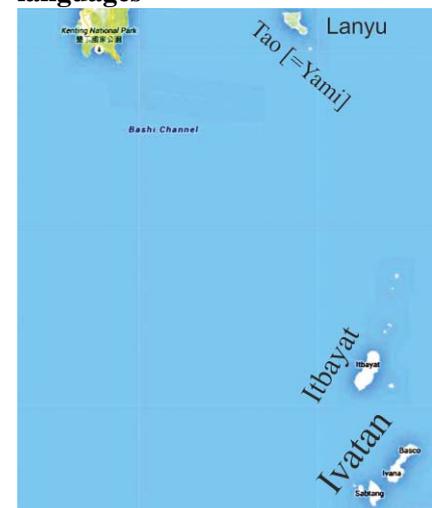
The status of all these languages is threatened. The Tao or Yami language is rapidly being overwhelmed by migration and mass tourism from the Taiwan mainland. Although the main Ivatan language is said to be ‘vigorous’, a switch to Ilocano among youth is widely attested, and monolingual speakers are said to be rare.

Since the paper by Ross (2005) there has been a significant expansion of data on Bashiic and the languages of the Tao, Itbayat and Ivatan are by now quite well documented. Tao has been the subject of two grammars, texts and a dictionary (Asai 1936; Rau 2006; Rau et al. 2012). An online cultural dictionary of Tao is in progress. Itbayat has been studied by Yamada (2002) and Ivatan has several grammars and dictionaries (Reid 1966; Maree 2007; Hidalgo 1998; Maree & Tomas 2012). Tsuchida et al. (1987) typed up a comparative Bashiic wordlist which provides a list of basic and cultural vocabulary. We have no reconstruction of proto-Bashiic (although see Yang 2002). Yamada & Zayas (1997) have compiled a bibliography of the languages and peoples up to the date of publication. There is a great deal of further literature in Japanese and Chinese not read by the present author. Fieldwork on Pongso no Tao [Lanyu] was carried out in September 2014<sup>1</sup>.

## 2. Prehistory

From the point of view of reconstructing the prehistory of the region, the situation is somewhat variable archaeologically speaking. There have been no in-depth excavations of Lanyu, but Leach (1938) reports on stone tools and jar burials similar to the SE Asian mainland. Tsang (2005) records Neolithic pottery, and the general suggestion is that the island has been long inhabited, but that the present population only migrated there from the Batanes in some hundreds of years ago, either displacing or replacing a resident population. Interestingly, the nearby Green Island further north was also formerly inhabited, but was empty when the

**Map 1. Location of Bashiic languages**



<sup>1</sup> I would like to acknowledge the assistance of Siama Lamuran and his family in rechecking the lexical material in the Rau et al. (2012) dictionary and discussing the terms given in the commentary to Kano & Segawa (1956).

first European navigators reached it. The assumption is that both Lanyu and Green Island's former inhabitants were Austronesians from the mainland, although there is no way of demonstrating this.

Oral traditions on Lanyu seem to confirm a wave of late settlement from the Batanes. There are six villages on Lanyu and their traditions of origin vary considerably. Only one, Ivarinu, has a direct link with the Batanes. Three claim to have come down from the central mountain, and two to descend from two sisters who came from the sea. In the light of this, the uniformity of Tao culture is somewhat surprising, and suggests that the migration from the Batanes was followed by a wave of language levelling. Many aspects of Tao culture are quite unique in the Austronesian world, including much of their maritime culture and the highly distinctive boats. This points a long period of separation from other fishing cultures in the region.

The Batanes have been the subject of a recently published monograph which shows that the islands have been settled for nearly four thousand years, i.e. the period when the first Austronesians were setting out from southern Taiwan (Bellwood & Dizon 2014). In contrast to the Tao, the Ivatan have been the subject of waves of contact and at present retains few traces of a distinctive material culture, and little in the realm of specialised marine vocabulary. Only with the excavation of stratified sites on Lanyu and Green Island will it be possible to clarify prehistoric relations between these places.

### **3. Biological and cultural lexicon of Bashiic compared to Austronesian**

The coherence of Bashiic is not generally doubted. A glance at the pronoun paradigms in Tsuchida et al. (1987) shows that all languages are almost identical and the languages share much other common lexicon. Bashiic languages also have in common some exotic lexemes for common items, such as the words for 'fish', 'turtle' and 'shark'. Reid (1971) provides a comparative wordlist of Philippines Minor languages which provides a good basis to compare at least the more common lexical items with the wider lexical arena.

The subsistence patterns of the Bashiic peoples combine a high dependence on fishing and sea produce with a rich agricultural economy, based around both irrigated and dryland taro. We know a great deal about the ethnography of the Tao, since during the Japanese era they were the subject of an intensive programme of documentation (Kano & Segawa 1956). The origin of both of these is somewhat of a mystery, as their boats and fishing culture are quite unlike any neighbouring populations, and intensive taro cultivation is in contrast to the characteristic rice farming of Luzon. In view of this, a more detailed exploration of the biological and cultural lexicon is given in this section. Bashiic terms are compared with other Austronesian languages to determine possible etymologies and classified on this basis. Broadly speaking, these seem to divide into five categories;

- a) terms of no clear origin
- b) glosses where Tao is distinct from other Bashiic languages
- c) terms with possible Kavalan cognates
- d) terms which have cognates only in regional Philippines languages and not beyond
- e) terms which are transparent reflexes of PMP

The origin of some of these must be recent such as 'cow', borrowed from Spanish. However, the period at which many developed is very unclear, but points to a complex layering of innovation and borrowing in establishing the subsistence of the Bashiic peoples.

The tables below separate plants and animals, and I have occasionally added other items of cultural interest. Table 2 shows biological vocabulary shared between Bashiic languages, but not with common Austronesian. Some terms, such as 'sugar-cane' are shared with other Philippines languages but are not usually reconstructed to PMP.

**Table 2. Exotic biological vocabulary in Bashiic**

Gloss	Tao	Itbayat	Ivatan	Comments
Job's tears	agegey	axogay	agagay	No obvious cognates cf. PMP <i>*zelay</i>
eggplant	vosa <sup>2</sup>	vagusa?	vahosa?	No obvious cognates
taro, dry	keytan		ketketan	No obvious cognates, but see water taro below
breadfruit	cipoho	atipoxo	cipoho	Distinct from WMP <i>*kuluR</i> which only occurs much further south. Breadfruit is not indigenous and may be a European introduction.
sweet potato	wakai	wakai	wakai	A root unique to Bashiic. Sweet potato is a New World species, which crossed to Eastern Polynesia in pre-Columbian times, but was probably only introduced into this region with the Spanish.
grain, seed	avyas	vilyas	botoh	Itbayat patterns with Tao. Neither root has obvious external cognates
<i>Imperata cylindrica</i>	vocid	vocid	bocid	Unrelated to Proto-Austronesian <i>*Riaq</i>
<i>Pometia pinnata</i>	cai	cawi	cai	No obvious cognates. PMP <i>*tawan</i>
field	takey	takey	takey	No obvious cognates
to farm	hakaw	xakaw	hakaw	No obvious cognates. PMP <i>*quma</i>
cow	baka	baaka	baaka	< Spanish <i>vaca</i> . Also in Formosan e.g. Kavalan <i>baka</i> .
sow	koraj	koraj	koraj	A root unique to Bashiic. Austronesian typically has no marking of female animals.
rat	karam	karam	karam	No obvious cognates. cf. Proto-Austronesian <i>*labaw</i>
fish, generic	amoj	amoj	amoj	Reid (1971) transcribes with an initial (? non-phonemic) glottal stop. Not attested outside Bashiic
triggerfish	soŋo	soŋo	soŋo	A root unique to Bashiic.
needlefish	ahay	xa'xay	haahay	A root unique to Bashiic. POc <i>*panapa</i>
dolphinfish	arayo	arayo	arayo	A root unique to Bashiic. PMP <i>*lajih</i>
turtle	iraŋ	iraŋ	iraŋ	A root unique to Bashiic.
owl	totoho	jitoxooh	totoho	A root unique to Bashiic. cf. Proto-Austronesian <i>*qekuŋ</i> . Lanyu has an endemic subspecies of owl, the Lanyu scops owl, <i>Otus elegans botelensis</i> (Photo 2).
Taiwan green pigeon <sup>3</sup>	voyit	voyit	voyit	Proto-Austronesian <i>*punapunay</i> . Lanyu has its own endemic subspecies (Photo 1).
wind	pagpag, sazawsaw	sarawsaw	salawsaw	A root unique to Bashiic. The <i>pagpag</i> root in Tao is also unique.
typhoon	aŋin	hanyin	anyin	Babuyan has <i>bagyo</i> which is a borrowing from Luzon languages.
forest	kahasan	kaaxasan	kahasan	This resembles some Formosan terms for 'tree' e.g. Amis <i>kasoy</i> , but is not definitely cognate.
river	ayo	axsoŋ, oyog	aksoŋ, ayo [=dirty water]	A root unique to Bashiic.
sea	wawa	hawa	taawo, kanayan	None of these resemble Austronesian reconstructions, Formosan <i>*tenem</i> , PMP <i>*tasik</i> , POc <i>*puaq</i>
current	aryis	ries	amteŋ, ayos	A root unique to Bashiic. PWMP <i>*bulus</i> .

<sup>2</sup> *Solanum sisymbriifolium* in Rau et al. (2012)

<sup>3</sup> *Treron formosae*

Gloss	Tao	Itbayat	Ivatan	Comments
waves I	abkas	abkas	abkas	A root unique to Bashiic. cf. Proto-Austronesian * <i>ɲabek</i> , PWMP * <i>bakat</i>
waves II	pawoŋ	paxoŋ	pahoŋ	A root unique to Bashiic.
island	poŋso	poŋso	poŋso	A root unique to Bashiic. cf. PMP * <i>nusa</i>

Photo 1. Green pigeon, *Treron formosae*



Photo 2. Lanyu scops owl, *Otus elegans botelensis*



Tao also has some unique terms which do not seem to be related either to other Bashiic or other Austronesian languages.

Table 3. Exotic biological vocabulary in Tao compared with other Bashiic

Gloss	Tao	Itbayat	Ivatan	Comments
millet	kadai	ra(w)ot	ra(w)ot	Neither name resembles Formosan terms or other Austronesian proto-forms
calabash, pumpkin	pinyaw <sup>4</sup>	tabayay, kondol	tabayay	No Austronesian proto-forms are reconstructed although some of the cultivated cucurbits are ancient in East Asia.
rice	mogis	paray	paray	cf. Proto-Austronesian * <i>pajay</i> for Ivatan
cucumber	vizaoz	?	tabooŋaw	Reconstructed Austronesian forms seem to be transferred from the sea-cucumber, proto-Philippines * <i>balat</i> and not related
ginger	manongit	ahnaxa	anaha	Neither root has obvious cognates in the Philippines or Taiwan
<i>Alocasia macrorrhiza</i>	raon	xaypaw	birabira	Ivatan is cognate with Proto-Austronesian * <i>biRaq</i>
lime	mabʃik	(?)amid	(?)amid	Proto-Austronesian * <i>qapur</i>
dog	ino <sup>5</sup>	tito	cito	The other Bashiic languages can be related to common Philippines forms (PMP * <i>titu</i> ) with an initial glottal stop, but the origin of the Tao word is a mystery.
goat	kagiling	kadiŋ	kalden	Is Tao related to scattered Philippines forms, e.g. Bikol <i>kaldiŋ</i> .
pig	kois	kois	bago	No obvious cognates.

<sup>4</sup> Also recorded is the supposedly archaic *tazabaso*. However, this is likely to be a Tao version of the Spanish loanword *kalabaasa*, recorded in Babuyan

<sup>5</sup> Tsuchida et al. (1987) give *agsa*, *citow* but Rau et al. (2012) give *ino* and this was confirmed by my informants. *agsa* is the word for 'deer' in Itbayat and this may be the source of confusion or a forgotten semantic switch. There were no deer on Lanyu.

Gloss	Tao	Itbayat	Ivatan	Comments
male pig	miwənəy	maroko	loko, bola	No obvious cognates. Some Luzon languages have butakál, but this looks like it applies to the wild boar.
bird	miasasalap	kaŋkaŋ	manoma nok	The Tao form seems to mean ‘flying one’, whereas Ivatan is reduplicated PMP <i>manok</i>
shark	zokang, yoyo	laanyid	iiyo	Proto-Austronesian * <i>qiSu</i>
stingray	apyap	?	napapici	Proto-Austronesian * <i>paRiS</i> , Philippines <i>pagi</i>
whale	amomobo	royoŋ	royoŋ	Neither term has obvious external cognates
frog	tozatoza	palaka	tokak	The Ivatan form is common Luzon <i>tukák</i> and is possible a loan from Ilocano.
cloud	cinalab	remdem	demdem	The reduplicated -dem element reflects Proto-Austronesian * <i>kudem</i>
seashore, coast	pasalan	vovoŋ, vaya’ha	kanayan	For a maritime people, Austronesian languages have poorly attested words for ‘shore, coast’

A few lexical items suggest a connection with the Formosan mainland, pointing to contact at some period is with Kavalan, a language originally spoken on the northeast coast. These are shown in Table 4;

**Table 4. Vocabulary in Bashiic with possible Kavalan cognates**

Gloss	Tao	Itbayat	Ivatan	Comments
fruit	asi	ʔaʔsiʔ	ʔasiʔ	cf. Kavalan <i>ʔsi</i> but otherwise not Austronesian
mountain	tokon	tukun	tokon	? cf. Kavalan <i>taʔəR</i>
cow	baka	baaka	baaka	< Spanish <i>vaca</i> . Also in Formosan e.g. Kavalan <i>baka</i> .

Although the Batanes were historically on the through route in the earlier periods of Austronesian migration, in more recent times, they have been quite isolated. Nonetheless, there has been some interchange of subsistence items, especially with the Ivatan and Bashiic shares some cognates with regional Philippines items which are not PMP proper. These are shown in Table 5;

**Table 5. Biological vocabulary in Bashiic with regional Philippines cognates**

Gloss	Tao	Itbayat	Ivatan	Comments
sugar-cane	onas	onas	onas	A regional lexeme attested in Northern Philippines languages, co-existing with the more usual Austronesian <i>təbuS</i> .
betel pepper	gaod	gawed	yoboy	A common form for ‘betel leaf’ in Philippines languages
sweet potato	wakai	wakai	wakai	A root unique to Bashiic. Sweet potato is a New World species, which crossed to Eastern Polynesia in pre-Columbian times, but was probably only introduced into this region with the Spanish.
dog	ino	tito	cito	The non-Tao Bashiic languages can be related to common Philippines forms (PMP: * <i>titu</i> ) with an initial glottal stop.
<i>Solanum nigrum</i>	ʔomci	homti	omci	cf. proto-Philippines * <i>amti</i> , but with Formosan cognates, e.g. Paiwan <i>sametsi</i> . Also Iwasay <i>nateŋ</i> .
goat	kagiling	kadiŋ	kaldenŋ	Resembles scattered Philippines forms, e.g. Bikol <i>kaldiŋ</i> . The antiquity of goats in the region is unclear.

Table 6 shows terms in Tao which are both common Bashiic and are relatable to standard reconstructions from PMP or PAN.

**Table 6. Mainstream Austronesian economic vocabulary in Bashiic**

Gloss	Tao	Itbayat	Ivatan	Comments
<b>Plants</b>				
<i>Palaquium formosanum</i>	natoa			PMP * <i>natuq</i> . tree sp. used to obtain wood for canoe planks
<i>Diospyros discolor</i>	kamala	kamaya	kamaya	Appears in an identical form in both Formosan and Luzon languages, suggesting a regional loanword
<i>Donax cannaeformis</i>	nini			PMP * <i>niniq</i> (plant used to make <i>karapal</i> , a flat basket) (Kano and Segawa:386)
moss, seaweed	omot	xomot	homot	Presumably PMP * <i>lumut</i> but the correspondence is unusual to say the least. PAN * <i>taNiud</i>
mulberry tree and fruit	tanyod ( <i>Imorod</i> )			
<i>Planchonella obovata</i> , tree sp.	vanisa			PPH * <i>banisah</i>
<i>Zanthoxylum integrifolium</i> Merrill.	barok	varuk		A cotton-like fibre from the root is used to caulk boats, and as tinder in starting fires (Kano and Segawa 1956). Blust relates this to PMP * <i>baruk</i> which is supported by Philippines cognates.
tree	baroka			
taro, wet	solli	solli	sodi	Not directly cognate with Austronesian words for taro, but words for ‘shoot, seedling’
yam, <i>Dioscorea alata</i>	ovi	ovi	obi	PMP: * <i>qubi</i>
coconut	anyoy	niyoy	niyoy	cf. PMP * <i>niuR</i>
banana	vinəvəh	vinivex	binibeh	Related for pan-Formosan forms such as Bunun <i>bunbun</i> , Puyuma <i>belbel</i>
spiny bamboo, <i>Bambusa spinosa</i>	kawalan	kawayan	kawayan	cf. Proto-Austronesian * <i>kawayan</i> . However, said to introduced from South China ‘at an early date’ so may be a widespread loan.
hen	oppa	opa	opa	PMP * <i>qupa</i> though neighbouring Luzon languages all have <i>opa</i> etc.
squirrelfish spp.	talan	tayaan	taayan	PMP * <i>taRaqa</i> n. However, probably not evidence for a proto-PMP form, since it is otherwise unattested, except for Palauan <i>desá?el</i> ‘spiny squirrelfish: <i>Holocentrus spinifer</i> ’. The Tao is thus probably a loan from Oceanic.
mullet sp.	aknasay		aknasay	Blust relates this to PMP * <i>kanasay</i> which however, is not attested in any Philippines languages, but only in Mentawai, the Aru islands and Oceanic
Spanish mackerel <sup>6</sup>	tanigi	taniji	taniji	cf. PMP * <i>taŋiRi</i>
eel	tona	tona?	tona?	This is PAN but not otherwise attested in the Philippines
octopus	koyta			cf. PMP * <i>kuRita</i>
chicken	manok	manok	manok	This root is Proto-Austronesian for ‘bird’ but applied to ‘chicken’ in PMP. However, a conspicuous lack of chickens in the archaeological record makes it likely this is a much later semantic shift.
head louse	koto			cf. PMP * <i>kutu</i> .
stern of a boat	ma-udi			PMP * <i>ma-udehi</i>
earthquake	kanini	ninih	nini	cf. POc * <i>nunu</i> . However Blust (ACD) notes the

<sup>6</sup> *Scomberomorus* spp.

Gloss	Tao	Itbayat	Ivatan	Comments
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Bashiic forms as possible cognates.

An intriguing piece of additional evidence for the replacement of population in Itbayat are the so-called ‘ancestors’ numerals. Apart fairly standard Austronesian numerals, Itbayat has multiple alternative counting systems. Table 7 shows these numerals compared with Proto-Austronesian. Especially in the higher numerals, they seem highly distinctive and may represent the counting systems in the languages overwhelmed by Bashiic.

**Table 7. Itbayat ancestor numerals compared with PAN**

No.	Itbayat	PAN
1	itti	-sa(q)
2	doyyi	*duSa
3	illo	*telu
4	ippa	*Sepat
5	malana	*lima
6	iddam	*enem
7	virigo	*pitu
8	salago	*walu
9	omayam	no form
10	kaloyi	*sa-puluq

#### 4. Conclusions

How can this be explained? Bashiic languages are remarkably close to one another, yet they have apparently been splitting from PMP for a long time and contain many roots which are not standard Austronesian. The Batanes islands have been occupied for a long time, and it seems likely that they were first settled from Taiwan some 4000 years ago. We do not know how long Lanyu (and Green Island) have been settled, but given the crossing of the Taiwan Strait and the navigational capacities of the early speakers of PMP languages, it seems likely this would also have been Neolithic at the very least. We can conclude;

- a) The Batanes, Lanyu and Green Islands were probably settled from Taiwan as much as 4000 years ago, but the identity of those populations is unknown
- b) They may have practised some form of agriculture, to judge by the idiosyncratic vocabulary for crops
- c) They were probably replaced by an expanding population from (perhaps) Luzon in the last millennium, although some words are retained as substrate lexicon in modern languages.

Only one Tao village actually acknowledges a link with the Batanes in its oral traditions. Settlers from the Batanes, probably Itbayat, crossed to Lanyu relatively recently and established cultural dominance over the existing residents, to the extent that their language disappeared and was replaced by Tao. However, the Tao language retained terms from the prior language, especially for such items as the pig, which seems to be a distinctive subspecies.

Can we make any guesses as to the relationship of pre-Tao language to those on the Taiwanese mainland? None of the exotic terms identified in the tables seem to have any cognates with the languages of the mainland, even including those, such as the Rukai, who include Tao in their oral traditions. Either the first settlers of Lanyu were from the Chinese mainland and settled directly or they represent a now-disappeared language of Taiwan. The relationship between Bashiic and the languages of the Northern Philippines is still problematic but can be unravelled with reference to the extended lexical materials now available.

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