

39

Exploring oral formulaic language: a five poet analysis

JAMES J. FOX

1 Introduction¹

It is both a pleasure and an honour to be able to offer this tribute to Andrew Pawley, a colleague and friend with whom I have shared many fruitful hours of discussion. The recollection of our many discussions has enormously enhanced my personal appreciation of the exceptional range of Andrew Pawley's interests. In a single conversation, Andrew is able to discuss topics as diverse as the coding of events in Kalam, the categorisation of proto-Oceanic sailing technology or the competence of commentators on cricket. From English across a world of Oceanic and Papuan languages, there is hardly a topic that he is unable to engage in and provide insights. As a consequence, for a Festschrift of this kind, there exists a range of topics on which one might write in tribute.

For this volume, I have chosen to consider a topic — the understanding of formulaic language — on which Andrew has written at some length beginning two decades ago and continuing to the present (Pawley 1985, 2007). This is a topic on which I am currently focusing much of my research and one on which I have benefited from continuing discussion with Andrew. It is therefore a topic on which I can try to offer an appropriate tribute.

2 Oral formulaic language: some illustrations by Rotinese poets

In a recent paper, 'Developments in the study of formulaic language since 1970: a personal view' (2007), Andrew has pointed to the remarkable prevalence of speech formulae in language and the pressing need to comprehend the variety of these formulae ranging from fixed words, traditional word pairs, conventional expressions, pragmatic phrases, idioms, collocations to collocates comprising lexical or phrasal units. In the paper, he also surveys some of the various 'research traditions' that have developed in relation to the study of particular forms of formulaic language.

¹The research for this paper is partially based on work carried out under an Australian Research Council Discovery Grant: *The semantics of canonical parallelism: oral composition among Rotinese poets, eastern Indonesia* (DP0663392).

Among these traditions, the study of the use of formulaic language in oral epic poetry, research begun by Milman Parry (1930) and continued by Alfred Lord (1960), has prompted perhaps the most extensive efforts across the widest spectrum of languages (see Foley 1985). With the enormous proliferation of this research, many different research directions have emerged. For some literary scholars, formulaic language has been used as evidence to argue for an oral tradition underlying the production of ancient literary texts; for others, dealing with living poetic traditions, formulaic language has been seen as a means of sustaining coherent performance, allowing poets both considerable oral fluency and a capacity for substantial recall.

As Alan Rumsey (2001) has noted in an important recent paper, Parry's original definition of a formula was 'a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea' (1930:80). This definition only fits certain forms of oral poetry. The variety of the world's oral poetry defies simple summary. Not all such poetry operates under strict 'metrical conditions'; other compositional constraints may apply. Hence, as research on 'oral formulaic language' has increased, the definition of what is 'formulaic' has become elusive and needs to be carefully set forth for particular traditions of oral composition. More generally there is the question as to what precisely is 'formulaic' for a particular poet, or for a particular speech community, or across related speech communities. In this brief paper, I would like to consider some of these issues by way of illustration.

Since 1965, I have been recording oral poets, known as *manahelo* 'those who chant', from the island of Roti in eastern Indonesia. These recordings have resulted in a substantial corpus of ritual texts. The island of Roti was once divided into seventeen small domains, each of which claimed to be socially and culturally distinctive. Reflecting this social divergence, the language of the island consists of a chain of dialects whose ends are not mutually intelligible. To date, I have recorded mainly in the dialect of the central domain of Termanu and the south-western dialect of the domain of Thie, though I am now engaged in recording dialects across the entire island.

The corpus of the texts which I have gathered deals with the origins of the cultural artefacts of the Rotinese: of fire and cooking, of rice and millet, of the house and its designs, of bridewealth including water buffalo, and of the tools for building, for weaving, for dyeing and for spinning. The corpus also includes a large number of mortuary chants as well as prayers, sermons and parts of a local Christian liturgy which is composed in a traditional mode. Over several decades, I have published a considerable number of papers on individual texts (see bibliography), but I have never published comparisons among these texts. It is only by way of such comparisons that one can appreciate the formulaic aspects of this oral poetry.

In 1965, I began recording a particular chant (*bini*) known as *Suti Solo do Bina Bane*. Over time, I have recorded this chant from numerous oral poets, particularly in the domain of Termanu where I have done much of my research. Besides recording in the dialect of Termanu, I have recorded this chant in several other dialects and have been particularly interested in recording the same poet reciting the same chant at different stages in his career. As a consequence, my collection of *Suti Solo do Bina Bane* texts is itself substantial and continues to grow with each new recording session.

In this paper, I wish to compare the use of oral formulaic language by five different poets, each reciting what may be regarded as the same passage in the chant *Suti Solo do Bina Bane*. For one of these poets, I provide recitations of this passage at an interval of

several years to illustrate continuity in personal composition. Four of these poets come from the domain of Termanu; one comes from the domain of Ringgou, whose dialect is substantially different from that of Termanu. This offers an illustration of the use of oral formulaic language across different speech communities.

3 *Suti Solo do Bina Bane* as an oral composition

Suti Solo do Bina Bane recounts the journey of two shells cast ashore by the sea. These shells, whose dual name is *Suti Solo//Bina Bane*, are taken up in the scoop-nets of women fishing along the coast. Once on land, these shells continually voice their feelings of displacement and appeal for permanent companionship. In response, the women urge the shells to shift from one symbolic location to another. Thus they are told, for example, to find their place with the 'Syrup Vat and the Rice Basket', then with the 'Millet's Grain and Ears of Maize', then with the 'Tree's Shade and Lontar's Shadow' or with the 'Forest Cuckoo and River Watercock'. As each of these sites is vulnerable to change and can only be a temporary resting place, the shells continue to plead for permanence. Their metaphoric journey is a quest for an enduring place of rest.

Originally, I suspect, this chant was recited to reveal the origins of two different kinds of shell: the one used for holding dyes (*Suti Solo*) and the other used as the base for the spinning whorl (*Bina Bane*). However, as these rituals for dyeing and weaving have ceased to be performed, the chant has been transformed into a mortuary chant for 'orphans' — a category that can be applied to all human beings in conditions of dependency (see Fox 1988c). Therefore, depending on the intention of the poet, the chant can be given various endings. The shells may either be fashioned into implements or they return to the sea.

All origin chants may once have formed part of a single narrative structure that recounted relations between the Sun and Moon and the Lords of the Ocean and Sea (Fox 1997). Key passages in most versions of *Suti Solo do Bina Bane* that I have recorded betray the connections to this larger epic structure by alluding to events in the realm of the sea that caused the shells to be cast forth on land.

The excerpts that I have selected from each of the poets' compositions vary in length from thirteen to nineteen lines. Each composition consists of a dialogue between the shells and the women who scooped them up from the sea. The women urge *Suti Solo//Bina Bane* to find a place with the Rice Basket and Syrup Vat. *Suti Solo//Bina Bane* reply that they will do so, but they worry that when the Rice Basket and Syrup Vat are emptied they will no longer have a place to remain.

Here it is important to note that the women who are named in this dialogue as well as the two shells are each conceived of as single dual-named beings. Hence the third person singular is generally used rather than any plural. Before presenting these compositions, it is essential to note the conventions of canonical parallelism that apply to them and the research tradition that has developed in the study of this form of poetic composition.

4 Canonical parallelism in relation to an oral formulaic

All compositions in Rotinese poetry (or 'ritual language' as I have termed these poetic compositions in many of my publications) are characterised by a strict lexical pairing. Apart from a small number of unpaired forms — pronouns, connectives, 'prepositional' and a few other invariant elements, all lexical terms have at least one pair. Thus, in formal terminology, each semantic element must form part of a 'dyadic set'. In composition

dyadic sets produce parallel lines whose overwhelmingly most common poetic form is the couplet, though other serial arrangements of lines are entirely acceptable and are often considered as evidence of a greater mastery of the language. The elements that compose any particular dyadic set should, in their parallel lines (or occasionally in the two halves of a single line), correspond exactly in position and as far as possible in morphological structure.

Parallelism is a pervasive feature of much of the world's oral literature. The linguist Roman Jakobson, who contributed greatly to the study of parallelism, described this study as opening 'the double door linking the fields of linguistics and anthropology' (see Fox 1977).

In Roman Jakobson's terminology, the required lexical pairing of semantic elements and the network of associations that underlie this pairing represents a canonical ordering of the paradigmatic or 'metaphoric pole' of language (Jakobson and Halle 1956:76-82), but Rotinese ritual language is also remarkably well ordered along the syntagmatic, or what Jakobson called the 'metonymic pole' of language. Phrases and lines in these oral compositions are frequently composed of recognisable formulae that, because of the strict requirements of parallelism, become redoubled in parallel formulae. Thus, a considerable portion of Rotinese ritual language consists of couplets and even longer sequences that are formulaic in both a paradigmatic and a syntagmatic sense.

The term 'parallelism' derives from the 18th century investigations of Bishop Robert Lowth on the fixed semantic correspondences (*parallelismus membrorum*) found in the Old Testament (Lowth 1753, 1758). Since Lowth's initial research, a large biblical literature has been devoted to parallelism. This research was later stimulated by the discovery of Canaanite (Ugaritic) texts that relied on a closely related corpus of parallel terms.

This 'canonical' coupling of words has been identified in oral compositions in numerous other languages of the world. The *Kalevala* is one of the most frequently cited examples of canonical parallelism. Various scholars have noted and discussed similar forms of parallelism for Ostyak and Vogul folk poetry, for Hungarian, for Mongolian, and for Turkic. Researchers have established parallelism as the first principle of Nahuatl and of Mayan poetry, including works such as the *Popul Vuh*. It is also found in the poetry of contemporary Maya groups, in Cuna folk literature and in Quechua poetry dating back to the time of the Incas.

Early on in the 19th century, scholars pointed to parallelism in Chinese poetry. Since then, parallelism has been noted in a variety of linguistic forms: in early written documents, in the rhyme-prose of the Han period, in 'parallel prose', in love songs, in proverbs and in popular poetry. Similar usages have been observed in Tibetan, as well as among the Thulung Rai of east Nepal, the Sadar of Jaspur and the Toda of South India. In Southeast Asia, the use of parallelism has been documented in compositions among the Kachin-, Kmhmu-, and Khmer-speakers, and in written and oral compositions in Vietnamese. Parallelism has also been observed in Australian languages (Strehlow 1971) as well as in the Highlands of New Guinea (Rumsey 1995, 2001).

A large textual literature on parallelism can also be found within the Austronesian-speaking world where extensive traditions of parallelism in poetry and ritual languages have been documented for the Rhade of Vietnam, the peoples of Nias, the Batak, a variety of Dayak groups throughout Kalimantan, among Bugis and Toraja groups in Sulawesi and for numerous populations in eastern Indonesia where vibrant traditions of oral composition in parallelism persist: Sumba, Flores, Savu, Rote and Timor. (See Fox (1977) for detailed

documentation on the variety of the world's traditions of parallelism, and Fox (1988a and 2005) for detailed summaries of the Austronesian traditions of parallelism.)

There has developed a considerable international focus of research on the social and linguistic use of parallelism in eastern Indonesia: Fox (1988b), Kuipers (1990, 1998), Giernaert-Martin (1992), Vischer (1992), Hoskins (1988), van Ooy (1994), Keane (1997), Florey (1998), Kaartinen (1998), Corte-Real (1999, 2000), McWilliam (2002), Therik (2004) and Rothe (2004).

Within a large corpus of textual materials the importance of these formulae becomes increasingly evident. While retaining the required pairing of words, poets add individual grammatical embellishments to distinguish their usage from that of other poets. Thus, individual poets develop their own personal 'style' in relation to certain 'standard' forms of their dialect area. The interaction of the formulaic features of ritual language with the rules of parallel composition creates further complexity. One question to be addressed is how these formulae and the pairs underlying them vary among the speech communities of different dialect areas, especially since a high proportion of synonymous dyadic sets are composed of a word from the local dialect and that of some neighbouring dialect.

5 *Suti Solo do Bina Bane*: the 1st poet: Stephanus Adulanu

This first excerpt — the Syrup Vat and Rice Basket sequence — consists of 19 lines from a poem of some 297 total lines. I recorded this poem from one of the senior poets of the domain of Termanu, Stephanus Adulanu, in 1966. Stephanus Adulanu was the head of the clan Meno. He was known as 'Old Meno' and held the ritual position of Head of the Earth (*Dae Langak*). His version of *Suti Solo do Bina Bane* is perhaps the finest and certainly the most extended version of this poem that I have gathered in Termanu.

Apart from personal names (*Pedu Hange*//*Nggeti Seti*) which themselves form sets, the poem is composed of ten dyadic sets: (1) *kokolak*//*dede'ak* 'to speak/to talk', (2) *inaki*//*fetok* 'woman/girl', (3) *eki*//*hika* 'to scream/to laugh', (4) *setele*//*mata-dale* 'shriekingly/gaily', (5) *tua bou*//*neka hade* 'syrup vat/rice basket', (6) *malole*//*mandak* 'good/proper', (7) *bou*//*soka* 'vat/sack', (8) *(lama-)**kako*//*(lama-)**lua* 'to overflow/to run over', (9) *fide*//*bafa* 'froth/mouth', (10) *totonol*//*lulunul* 'to overturn/to roll up' (partially reduplicated form of *tono*//*lumu*).

Of interest is the compound set, *tua bou*//*neka hade* 'syrup vat/rice basket'. The components of this compound can and do occur on their own in other sets. Here, however, they appear to form a 'personified' set. Thus, in a literary sense, they suggest a 'living entity' who can serve as a potential partner of the shells. (Hence, in my translation of the poems, I have capitalised them to suggest their implied personhood.)

Passage: Poem 1

Na Bina au o se
Ma Suti au o se
Po au kokolak o se
Ma au dede'ak o se?
Boc ma inak-ka Nggeti Seti
Ma fetok-ka Pedu Hange nae:
Te eki setele henin
Ma hika mata-dale henin na

'Then I, Bina, with whom will I be
And I, Suti, with whom will I be
With whom will I talk
And with whom will I speak?
The woman Nggeti Seti
And the girl Pedu Hange, says:
'(If) they scream with a shriek at losing you
And laugh gaily at losing you,

Suti mo Tua Bou
Ma Bina mo Neka Hade.
Boe ina nae:
'Oo malole-la so
Ma mandak-kala so.
Te leo bou lamakako fude
Ma soka lamalua bafa
Fo bou lo totonon
Ma soka no lulunun
Na Suti au o se
Ma Bina au o se?

This excerpt provides a basis to begin the consideration of a succession of other versions of this same passage composed by different oral poets.

6 *Suti Solo do Bina Bane*: the 2nd poet: Eli Pellondou

This second excerpt consists of 23 lines from a chant of a total of 210 lines. I recorded it from the poet, Eli Pellondou who was more commonly known by the nickname, Seu Ba'i. He was a proud, soft-spoken man of clan Dou Danga and was particularly close to Stephanus Adulanu. I first met him on a visit to Old Meno's home in Ola Lain and it appeared to me that he had informally apprenticed himself to Old Meno. His version of *Suti Solo do Bina Bane* reflects, I believe, this influence.

This excerpt relies on six of 10 the dyadic sets used in Old Meno's composition: (1) *kokolak//dede'ak*, (2) *tua bou//neka hade*, (3) *malole//mandak*, (4) *lulumu//totono*, (5) *(lama-)kako//(lama-)lua*, (6) *bafa//fude*, as well as two other dyadic sets not used in the Meno version: (7) *(nama-)tani//(nasa-)kedu* 'to cry//to sob', and (8) *sama//deta* 'like/as'.

In this passage, Seu Ba'i recites one line for which he fails to provide a complement. Were this line to exist, the appropriate complement for the verb (*masa-lai* 'to rest, lay down') would have been (*manga-tu* 'to sit').

Pedu Hange//Nggeti Seti is the name of the woman who scoops up the shells. As is clear in the context of the longer poem, she is the speaker in this passage who tells *Suti Solo//Bina Bane* to 'Go with the Syrup Vat//Go with the Rice Basket'. The woman, *Lole Holu//Lua Bafa*, is referred to as the ideal partner whom *Suti Solo//Bina Bane* longs to find.

Given that dyadic sets can either be treated as singulars or plurals, in any single poem, poets can move back and forth from singular to plural. In general, however, they tend to use singular verbs for dual chant characters. Thus, for the most part, *Pedu Hange//Nggeti Seti* or *Suti Solo//Bina Bane* are treated as single (singular) figures.

Passage: Poem II

Boe te Suti neu namatani
Ma Bina neu nasakedu,
Nasa-kedu Lole Holu
Ma nama-tani Lua Bafa.
Boe te ana dede'ak no Suti
Ma ana kokolak no Bina, lae:

Then Suti, go with Syrup Vat
And Bina, go with the Rice Basket.
Then she says:
'Oh, these things are good
And these things are proper.
But if the vats overflow with froth
And the sacks run over at the mouth
So that the vats must be overturned
And the sacks must be rolled up,
Then I, Suti, with whom will I be
And I, Bina, with whom will I be?'

'Mo tua bou
Ma mo neka hade
Fo masalai tua bou.
(Line missing)
Boe te Bina neu kokolak
Ma Suti neu dede'ak, nae:
'Au u o tua bou
Ma au [u] o neka hade.
De malole ndia so
Do mandak ndia so.
Te neka lamakako bafa
Fo soka lo lulunun
Ma tua lamalua fude
Fo bou lo totonon,
Au dede'ak o se
Ma au kokolak o se
Sama leo Lua Bafa
Ma deta leo Lole Holu?'

It is particularly interesting to note that despite the fact that Seu Ba'i's passage relies on many of the same dyadic sets as Old Meno's passage, only two lines in these passages are the same. It is thus instructive to compare the way in which each poet expresses what might be considered the same 'formulaic' lines.

Old Meno gives the following two lines:

'Oo malole-la so
Ma mandak-kala so.'

'Oh, these things are good
And these things are proper.'

Seu Ba'i, on the other hand, renders this same formula as follows:

'De malole ndia so
Do mandak ndia so.'

'This is good
Or this is proper.'

Old Meno then goes on to recite the following lines:

'Te leo bou lamakako fude
Ma soka lamalua bafa
Fo bou lo totonon
Ma soka no lulunun ...'

'But if the vat overflows with froth
And the sack runs over at the mouth
So that the vat must be overturned
And the sack must be rolled up ...'

In the last two of these four lines, Old Meno does what expert poets do frequently (to the maddening frustration of the translator): he creates a kind of contrastive dyadic set by coupling a plural form (*lo*) with a singular form (*no*).

Seu Ba'i renders these lines in a slightly different fashion. Where vat/sack (*bou//soka*) form a set in relation to the verbs (*lama-kako//lama-lua*) in Old Meno's composition, Seu Ba'i uses the set, basket/syrup (*neka//tua*) with these verbs. He does, however, maintain a plural agreement throughout.

'Te neka lamakako bafa
Fo soka lo lulunun
Ma tua lamalua fude
Fo bou lo totonon...'

'But if the basket overflows at the mouth
So that the sack must be rolled up
And the syrup runs over with froth
So that the vat must be overturned...'

Technically, *soka lo lulunun//bou lo totonon* are the only lines that both poets share yet even this seeming shared similarity has been altered by Old Meno's use of a singular and a plural form.

7 *Suti Solo do Bina Bane*: the 3rd poet: Mikael Pelondou

Some years later, in 1985, on a brief visit to Roti, I was told of the death of Seu Ba'i. Among the group who came to tell me of his death was a clan cousin of his from Dou Danga, Mikael Pelondou. As far as I have been able to determine, the two men had the same great-grandfather. They had lived in close proximity to one another and referred to each other as 'elder' and 'younger'. Mikael agreed to record for me his version of *Suti Solo do Bina Bane*. This passage is taken from that version.

It is an excerpt of 15 lines from a composition that runs to only 101 lines. Although shorter than the two previous excerpts, it contains many of the same sets. Mikael uses: (1) *kokolak//dede 'ak*, (2) *inak//fetok*, (3) *tua bou//neka hade*, and (4) *fude//bafo*, but instead of *(lama-)kako// (lama-)lua* he uses (5) *(lama-)kako// (lama-)solo* which has much the same meaning. The only new set is a commonly used set, (6) *(na-)tane// (na-)nosi* 'to ask//to request'. Also in Mikael Pelondou's composition, the name, *Pedu Hange//Nggeti Seti*, is given as *Pedu Hange//Suti Seti*. Although this may seem only a minor difference, it is over the names of chant characters that poets have their greatest arguments.

Passage: Poem III

Boe te natane ma nanosi.
'Bina dede'ak no se
Ma Suti kokolak no se?
Boe te inak leo Pedu Hange
Ma fetok leo Suti Seti, nae:
'Dede'ak mo neka hade
Ma kokolak mo tua bou.'
Boe te Suti natane
Ma Bina nanosi, de nae:
'Au dede'ak o tua bou
Ma au kokolak o neka hade
Te neka lamakako bafo,
Na au dede'ak o se
Ma tua lamasolo fude,
Na au kokolak o se?'

But he still asks and requests.
'With whom will Bina speak
And with whom will Suti talk?'
So the woman like Pedu Hange
And the girl like Suti Seti, says:
'Speak with the Rice Basket
And talk with the Syrup Vat.'
But Suti asks
And Bina requests, saying:
'I speak with the Syrup Vat
And I talk with the Rice Basket
But if the basket overflows at the mouth
Then with whom will I speak
And if the syrup runs over with froth
Then with whom will I speak?'

8 *Suti Solo do Bina Bane*: the 4th poet: Petrus (Pe'u) Malesi

Of all the poets of Termanu, I recorded the most material from Pe'u Malesi. He was a frequent visitor to my home at Ufa Len and probably the most willing of all poets in Termanu to seek to have his compositions recorded. (Malesi is the 'poet' in the film, *Water of Words* (1983), and appears as well in the film *Spear and Sword* (1988d). For a photograph of Malesi chanting at a ceremony in honour of Old Meno, see Fox (1989b:521).)

Like Seu Ba'i, Pe'u Malesi was a member of clan Dou Danga, but the two men were rivals. Seu Ba'i, in particular, would challenge Pe'u Malesi's knowledge of the names of chant characters, and in fact, as is evident in Malesi's telling of *Suti Solo do Bina Bane*, the names of the key women who scoop the shells from the sea are entirely different.

Due to the closeness of our relationship, I had the opportunity to record various versions of *Suti Solo do Bina Bane* as recited by Pe'u Malesi. Here I include two such versions, the one recorded in 1973 and the other in 1977. These short excerpts, which are remarkably similar, may be compared to one another and to the excerpts of the other poets of Termanu, Old Meno and Seu Ba'i.

Pe'u Malesi's first version of the Syrup Vat and Rice Basket passage consists of only 14 lines from a composition of some 222 lines.

One immediately obvious difference in Malesi's version is the name of the woman chant-character who carries on the dialogue with *Suti Solo do Bina Bane*. In place of *Pedu Hange//Nggeti Seti*, Malesi names this woman as *Sama Dai//Kuku Nou*. Another notable difference is that Malesi reverses the order of the compound phrase, *tua bou ma neka hade*. He recites this as *bou tua ma neka hade*. In terms of the ordering of dyadic sets, this would seem to be a preferable order: *bou* 'vat' thus forms a set with *neka* 'basket' and *tua* 'lontar syrup' with *hade* 'rice'. Whereas this would appear to make logical sense and would not be rejected in performance, Malesi may in fact be tampering with an established idiom in Termanu. Ande Ruy, from the relatively distant dialect region of Ringgou with no connection with poets from Termanu, uses the same form as Malesi: *bou tua ma neka hade*.² Malesi's passage shares several common dyadic sets with the version by Old Meno or Seu Ba'i: (1) *inak//fetok*, (2) *kokolak//dede 'ak*, (3) *malole//mandak*, (4) *tono//lunu*. He also uses the dyadic set (5) *(anga-)tu// (asa-)lai* 'sit//lay down', a set that Seu Ba'i left incomplete in his composition. Malesi also uses another common set, (6) *lole halan//selu dasin*, which is a frequently used expression meaning 'to speak, to reply' and embellishes this with the set, *lele//doko-doe*: 'encouragingly//coaxingly'.

Passage: Poem IV

Inak kia Sama Dai
Ma fetok kia Kuku Nou
Ana lole lele halan
Ma selu doko-doe dasin, nae:
'Mu no bou tua
Ma mu mo neka hade.'
Bina Bane kokolak
Ma Suti Solo dede'ak ma nae:

The woman, Sama Dai
And the girl, Kuku Nou
She lifts her words encouragingly
And raises her voice coaxingly, saying:
'Go with the Syrup Vat
And go with the Rice basket.'
Bina Bane speaks
And Suti Solo replies and says:

² In the domain of Landu, which historically has been a major producer of millet but not of rice, this set becomes 'syrup vat and millet basket': (*bou tua ma fati bete*).

'Malole la so
Ma mandak kala so.
Bou tua na tono
Ma neka hade lulunu
Na au asalai o se
Ma au angatu o se?'

'That would be good
And that would be proper.
[But if] the Syrup Vat is overturned
And the Rice Basket is rolled up
Then with whom will I rest
And with whom will I sit?'

This next excerpt, which consists of 16 lines, was recorded in 1977 roughly four years after the earlier passage but is remarkably similar to that passage. There are only a few differences. Thus, for example, the set *lele//doko-doe* is not used with *lole halan//selu dasin* and instead of the *tono//lunu* set, Malesi uses another set with a similar sense: *heok//keko* 'to turn//to shift'. He concludes with a refrain that uses the set, (*nama-*) *tani//nasa-keku*, 'to cry//to sob', which was used by Seu Ba'i in his composition. Malesi also pairs another verb for speaking (*na-fada*) with the term, *kokolak* which normally forms a set with *dedea*'k. In performance terms, this would be considered acceptable but nonetheless a flaw in composition

Passage: Poem V

Boe ma inaka Kuku No'u
Ma fetoka Sama Dai
Lole halana neu
Ma selu dasi na neu ma nae:
'Meq mo neka hade
Ma me'u mo bou tuana.'
Boe ma Suti Solo nafada
Ma Bina Bane kokolak ma nae:
'Ah, malole la so
Ma mandakala so.
[Te] bou tua la heok
Ma neka hade la keko
Na au asalai o se
Ma au angatu'u o se?'
Suti bei namatani,
Ma Bina bei nasakedu.

So the woman, Kuku No'u
And the girl, Sama Dai
Raises her voice
And lifts her speech and says:
'Go with the Rice Basket
And go with the Syrup Vat.'
Then Suti Solo talks
And Bina Bane speaks and says:
'Ah, that would be good
And that would be proper.
But if the Syrup Vats turn
And if the Rice Baskets shift
Then with whom shall I rest
And with whom shall I sit?'
Suti continues to cry,
Bina continues to sob.

9 Suti Solo do Bina Bane: the 5th poet: Ande Ruy from Ringgou

The final example in this series consists of a passage of 20 lines from a composition of 184 lines by the poet Ande Ruy, from the east Rotinese domain of Ringgou which has its own distinct dialect of Rotinese — a dialect that is different from that of Termanu but close enough to be intelligible. Some of the sound changes evident in this passage are:

Termanu		Ringgou
ng	>	k
medial k	>	—
l/nd	>	r

Despite these differences, it is possible to recognise the shared inheritance of common dyadic sets. Ande Ruy uses five sets that also occur in the passages of the poets from Termanu. These sets are: (1) *inak//fetok*, (2) *lole hara//selu dasi* as well as (3) *dasi//hala*, (4) *nea hade//bou tua*, and (5) *hade//tua*. Ande Ruy also uses a number of other sets that are common in the speech community of Termanu: (6) *fai//ledo*: 'day//sun', (7) *na//ria*: 'there//at that place', (8) *iku//leo*: 'land//clan', (9) *rui//sau*: 'to scoop//scrape', (10) *tama//tesa* 'to be together//to be one', (11) *te'i//dale* 'stomach//inside'. Although I have not recorded the set, *sasau//kokola* (reduplicated form of the verbs *sau//kola*), it would appear to be an acceptable variant of the more commonly used set, *ndui//sau* in Termanu (or *Ruy//sau* as it occurs in this excerpt). It also is worth noting that the compound form, *tesa te'i//tama dale* (lit. 'stomachs as one'/'hearts together') used by Ande Ruy, is not an expression that I have recorded in Termanu. However, although not common in Termanu, it was immediately recognisable by Termanu-speakers who heard Ande Ruy and was considered poetically attractive.

In short, all of the sets in this particular passage can be considered as forming part of a shared linguistic heritage with speakers of the Termanu dialect.

Passage: Poem VI

Boe ma ina Oli Masi
Ma fetoka Sama Dai
Nadasi neu Suti Solo
Ma nahara neu Bina Bane:
'Iku fo mo nea hade ma
Ma leo fo mo bou tua.'
Tehu Suti Solo lole haran
Ma Bina Bane selu dasin:
'Ami iku fo mo nea hade
Ma ami leo fo mo bou tua, tebe!
Tehu fai esa nai na
Ma ledo esa nai ria,
Nea sasau hade,
Sau heni nea hade
Ma rui kokola tuan
Rui heni bou tua.
Na ami iku fo mo be a
Ma ami leo fo mo be a.
Te [bei] ta tesa tei
Ma bei ta tama dale.'

Then the woman, Oli Masi
And the girl, Bina Oli
Spoke to Suti Solo
And said to Bina Bane:
'Your place is with the Rice basket
And your clan is with the Syrup Vat.'
But Suti Solo raised his words
And Bina Bane lifted his words:
'Our place is with the rice basket
And our clan is with the syrup vat, indeed!
But on some day
And at some time
They continually scrape out rice,
They will scrape the rice basket clean
And they continually scoop syrup
They will scoop the syrup vat clean.
Then with whom will our place be
And with whom will our clan be
This does not make us one
And not yet join us together.'

10 The dyadic resources of the five poets

Table 1 lists all the dyadic sets used by the five poets. The excerpts from the poets of Termanu are similar enough in composition to share many sets together; Ande Ruy's composition introduces seven sets not used by the Termanu poets. Yet all of these sets are of common occurrence in Termanu. Thus if a larger comparison were made, the seeming

differences in Ande Ruy's composition — at least in the use of these particular sets — would diminish, if not disappear.

In various publications (Fox 1974, for example), I have argued that Rotinese ritual language surmounts dialect differences and is broadly intelligible across the entire island of Roti. One way in which this is done is by the use of variant dialect terms to form synonymous sets. Certainly the comparison of this passage from Ande Ruy with the excerpts by other poets from Termanu would appear to support this argument. However, while accurate in showing similarities between these speech communities, Ande Ruy's excerpted passage is too short to illustrate some of the differences that do indeed occur. Providing a more precise indication of the differences in ritual language across dialect boundaries involves work that is currently in progress to record a reasonably large corpus of materials from these different dialects.

Table 1: Dyadic sets used in all poems

Dyadic Sets	Poems					
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
1. <i>kokolak//dede'ak</i>	x	x	x	x	x	
2. <i>inak//fetok</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x
3. <i>eki//hika</i>	x					
4. <i>setele//mata-dale</i>	x					
5. <i>tua bou//neka (nea) hade</i>	x	x	x			x
6. <i>bou tua//neka hade</i>				x	x	
7. <i>malole//mandak</i>	x	x	x	x	x	
8. <i>bou//soka</i>	x	x				
9. <i>lama-kako//lama-lua</i>	x	x				
10. <i>lama-kako//lama-solo</i>			x			
11. <i>fude//bafa (bafu)</i>	x	x				
12. <i>totoño//lulumu</i>	x	x				
13. <i>sama//deta</i>		x				
14. <i>nama-tani//nama-kesu</i>		x				
15. <i>nama-tani//na-nosi</i>			x			
16. <i>lele//doko-doe</i>				x		
17. <i>halan//dasin</i>				x	x	x
18. <i>nasa-lai//na-tu</i>		(x)		x	x	x
19. <i>lole//selu</i>				x	x	
20. <i>na-fada//kokolak</i>					x	
21. <i>heo//keko</i>				x	x	
22. <i>fai//ledo</i>				x		
23. <i>ria//na</i>						x
24. <i>iku//leo</i>						x
25. <i>lui//sau</i>						x
26. <i>sau//kola</i>						x
27. <i>tesa//tama</i>						x
28. <i>te'i//dale</i>						x

10 Conclusion

In his pioneering study, Milman Parry was able to identify a particular 'technique of oral verse-making'. His initial research has given rise, as Andrew Pawley has noted, to a distinct but particularly important research tradition. In this tradition, 'formulas may show a special word order, enabling a word sequence to be adapted to the metrical requirements of a half line of verse ...' (Pawley 2007:6). This kind of formulaic is, as Pawley has recognised, a 'substitution system'. He defines this substitution system as 'a group of formulas which show lexical substitutions expressing the same basic structure and idea, or which express the same basic idea with a varying number of syllables, enabling the poet to meet a range of different metric conditions' (Pawley 2007:6).

Strict canonical parallelism offers techniques of oral composition different from those based on regular metrical strictures. These techniques, strictly speaking, do not involve substitution as in Parry's epic tradition nor are they constrained by metric requirements. Instead any line of verse calls forth its complement. All lexical elements in one line should pair with partner elements in a complementary line. Such compositions are ideally suited for chorus performance, in which a poet announces an initial line and the complementary line is provided by collective response, a mode of ritual performance that was once common on Roti as elsewhere in eastern Indonesia. To be effective, the knowledge of paired terms — what I call 'dyadic sets' — must be widely shared within a speech community.

This paper provides an illustration of just how widely these dyadic sets are indeed shared, not just among poets within a particular speech community but across different speech communities. This illustration gives a sense of the stability and continuity of this ritual language as a distinctive cultural heritage among the Rotinese — and its potential effectiveness in maintaining continuing oral-based memory.

References

- Corte-Real, Benjamim de Araujo, 1999, Mambai and its verbal art genre: a cultural reflection of Suru-Ainaro, East Timor. PhD thesis, Macquarie University, Sydney.
- 2000, Social order and linguistic symmetry: the case of the Mambai, Suru-Ainaro. In *Studies in Languages and Cultures of East Timor* 3:31–56.
- Foley, Margaret J., 1998, Alune incantations: continuity or discontinuity in verbal art? *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 2(2):205–231.
- Foley, John M., 1985, *Oral-formulaic theory and research: an introduction and annotated bibliography*. New York: Garland Publishing.
- Fox, James J., 1971, Semantic parallelism in Rotinese ritual language. *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 127:215–55.
- 1974, Our ancestors spoke in pairs: Rotinese views of language, dialect and code. In R. Bauman and J. Sherzer, eds *Explorations in the ethnography of speaking*, 65–85. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 1975, On binary categories and primary symbols: some Rotinese perspectives. In R. Willis, ed. *The interpretation of symbolism*, 99–132. London: Malaby.

- 1977, Roman Jakobson and the comparative study of parallelism. In C.H. van Schooneveld and D. Armstrong, eds *Roman Jakobson: echoes of his scholarship*, 59–90. Lisse: Peter de Ridder Press.
- 1983, *Water of words: a cultural ecology of an eastern Indonesian island*. (With Timothy and Patsy Asch.) 16 mm colour. 30 minutes. Watertown, Mass: Documentary Educational Resources.
- 1988a, *To speak in pairs: essays on the ritual languages of eastern Indonesia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 1988b, Introduction. In J.J. Fox, ed. *To speak in pairs: essays on the ritual languages of eastern Indonesia*, 1–28. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 1988c, Manu Kama's road, Tepa Nilu's path: theme, narrative and formula in Rotinese ritual language. In J.J. Fox, ed. *To speak in pairs: essays on the ritual languages of eastern Indonesia*, 161–201. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 1988d, *Spear and sword: a payment of bridewealth*. (With Timothy and Patsy Asch.) 16 mm colour. 25 minutes. Watertown, Mass: Documentary Educational Resources.
- 1989a, Category and complement: binary ideologies and the organization of dualism in Eastern Indonesia. In D. Maybury-Lewis and U. Almagor, eds *The attraction of opposites: thought and society in a dualistic mode*, 33–56. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- 1989b, To the aroma of the name: the celebration of a Rotinese ritual of rock and tree. *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 145:520–538.
- 1992, Bound to the core, held locked in all our hearts: prayers and invocations among the Rotinese. *Canberra Anthropology* 14(2):30–48.
- 1997, Genealogies of the sun and moon: interpreting the canon of Rotinese ritual chants. In E.K.M. Masinambow, ed. *Koentjaraningrat dan Antropologi di Indonesia*, 321–330. Jakarta: Yayasan Obor.
- 2003, Admonitions of the ancestors: giving voice to the deceased in Rotinese mortuary rituals. In Peter J.M. Nas, Gerard Persoon and Rivke Jaffe, eds *Framing Indonesian realities*, 15–26. Leiden: KITLV Press.
- 2005, Ritual languages, special registers and speech decorum in Austronesian languages. In A. Adelaar and N.P. Himmelmann, eds *The Austronesian languages of Asia and Madagascar*, 87–109. London: Routledge.
- Giernaert-Martin, Danielle C., 1992, *The woven land of Lamboya: socio-cosmic ideas and values in West Sumba, eastern Indonesia*. Leiden: CNWS.
- Hoskins, Janet, 1988, Etiquette in Kodi spirit communication: the lips told to pronounce, the mouths told to speak. In J.J. Fox, ed. *To speak in pairs: essays on the ritual languages of eastern Indonesia*, 29–63. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jakobson, R., 1960, Concluding statement: linguistics and poetics. In T.A. Sebeok, ed. *Style in language*. Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press.
- 1966, Grammatical parallelism and its Russian facet. *Language* 42:398–429.
- 1968, Poetry of grammar and grammar of poetry. *Lingua* 21:597–609.

- 1969, The modular design of Chinese regulated verse. In I. Pouillon and P. Maranda, eds *Échanges et communications: mélanges offerts à Claude Lévi Strauss*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Jakobson, R. and M. Halle, 1956, *The fundamentals of language*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Kaartinen, Timo, 1998, Voices of the other: authenticity and consciousness of language in an eastern Indonesian song tradition. *Akademika* 53:87–112.
- Keane, W., 1997, *Signs of recognition*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Kuipers, Joel C., 1990, *Power in performance: the creation of textual authority in Weyewa ritual speech*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- 1998, *Language, identity and marginality in Indonesia: the changing nature of Ritual speech on the island of Sumba*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lord, Alfred, 1960, *The singer of tales*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Lowth, R., 1753, *De Sacra Poesia Hebraeorum Praelectiones Academicæ*. Translated as *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, 1829, Boston.
- 1758, *Isaiah X-XI*. Translated as *Isaiah*, 1834, Boston.
- McWilliam, Andrew, 2002, *Paths of origin, gates of life: a study of place and precedence in southwest Timor*. Leiden: KITLV Press.
- Parry, Milman, 1930, Studies in the epic technique of oral verse-making, vol 1: Homer and the Homeric Style. *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 41:73–147.
- Pawley, Andrew, 1985, On speech formulas and linguistic competence. In *Lenguas Modernas* 12:84–104.
- 2007, Developments in the study of formulaic language since 1970: a personal view. In Paul Skandera, ed. *Phraseology and culture in English*, 3–45. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Rothe, Elvira, 2004, Wulla Poddu: Bitterer Monat, Monat der Tabus, Monat des Heiligen, Monat des Neuen Jahres in Loli. PhD thesis, Ludwig-Maximilian Universität, München.
- Rumsey, Alan, 1995, Pairing and parallelism in the New Guinea Highlands. In P. Silberman and J. Loftin, eds *SALSA II: proceedings of the second annual symposium of language and society – Austin*, 108–118. Austin, TX: University of Texas.
- 2001, *Tom Yaya Kange: a metrical narrative genre from the New Guinea Highlands*. In *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 11(2):193–239.
- Sirehlow, T.G.H., 1971, *Songs of central Australia*. Sydney: Angus and Robertson.
- Therik, G. Tom, 2004, *Wehali, the female land: traditions of a Timorese ritual centre*. Canberra: RSPAS and Pandanus Books.
- van Ooy, F., 1994, Ritual language of Sawu Dimu, Eastern Indonesia. Paper presented at the 7th International Conference on Austronesian Linguistics, Leiden.
- Vischer, Michael, 1992, Children of the Black Patola Stone: origin structures in a domain on Palu'e Island. PhD thesis, The Australian National University, Canberra.