

THE ROTINESE CHOTBAH AS A LINGUISTIC PERFORMANCE

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The chotbah or sermon is a form of elevated speech that occurs in a well-defined context for an audience who, though largely silent, are attentive to the stylistic nuances of the performance. It is supposed to be provocative, persuasive and exhortatory. It invariably derives its inspiration from a scriptural theme that serves as its source, and it is thus frequently interspersed with references to other exemplary linguistic forms that require commentary and explanation.

In an Austronesian context — as its name implies — the chotbah is a derived, rather than a traditional, speech form. Yet in both Islamic and Christian regions of Indonesia, the chotbah has now become a highly valued form of speaking worthy of careful comparative examination.

In this paper I wish to examine briefly the Rotinese chotbah as a linguistic performance. Because of the variety of linguistic resources upon which it draws, the chotbah can be considered the most complex form of speaking among Rotinese today. For this reason, and because there is considerable variation in their performance, chotbah cannot be described simply or briefly. Furthermore, a chotbah is merely the high point of a religious service and to be fully comprehended must be considered in this wider context. For the purposes of this paper I shall therefore concentrate my analysis and draw my examples from a single performance. This is a performance that was filmed and recorded in its entirety during a period of ethnographic film research on the island of Roti in 1978. Although I shall be focussing on the verbal aspects of this performance, a fuller analysis will eventually include examination of crucial nonverbal aspects as well.

The linguistic situation: resources for the performance

Most Rotinese are conversant in two languages: Rotinese and Malay. This, in itself, is not of great significance. What is of significance are the various registers of these two languages that are utilised in speaking. In both languages there are 'high' and 'low' registers, and their use parallels one another.

Rotinese: The Rotinese language refers not to a single undifferentiated language but to a number of related dialects. The Dutch linguist Jonker, in his dictionary (1908:ix-x), distinguished nine dialects of Rotinese but failed to take account

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of the dialect of Delha on which he had no information. A list of ten dialects, however, would not do justice to the sociolinguistic reality on the island, for the Rotinese themselves invariably insist that each of the eighteen former political domains (nusak) possesses its own dialect (dedeä nusak). The evidence cited for this claim derives from a conglomeration of phonological, grammatical and semantic differences between neighbouring domains, yet it is clear that since the mid-seventeenth century genuine speakers of Rotinese dialects have attempted to distinguish themselves further from one another to justify political recognition and autonomy (Fox 1971:70-73; 1977:81-83). Thus, even today every Rotinese speaks a specific dialect that serves as a sign of local identity or origin. This is equally true of Rotinese who live in villages on Timor that have been settled for over a hundred years. Although somewhat attenuated, Rotinese dialects on Timor still reflect nusak origins on Roti.

In addition to a local dialect which is the register for everyday speech, most Rotinese understand a high register of Rotinese. This is a poetic form of speech or, as I have referred to it in previous publications, a ritual language. Although there are phonological as well as minor syntactical differences in its use, ritual language is broadly intelligible throughout the island. This is partially due to the fact that ritual language incorporates and exploits semantic differences among dialects to create its special code.¹ This code is highly structured and based on principles of semantic parallelism that require the strict pairing of elements to produce formulaic phrases and verses. As the vehicle for proverbs, poetry, songs and chants, ritual language is used in situations of formal interaction whenever an elevated form of Rotinese is deemed necessary.

Malay: Like Rotinese, Malay has high and low registers. In the Timor area the lowest of these registers is Basa Kupang, a dialect of Malay that has been developing in Kupang since the mid-seventeenth century. Basa Kupang is related to other eastern Indonesian dialects of Malay (Larantuka, Ambon, Minahasa) but includes a considerable number of Rotinese loanwords, since the Rotinese have long been the dominant population of the Kupang area. The following sentence is a simple illustration:

- (1) Beta su pi ma lu sonde ada.
 Saya sudah pergi tapi kamu tidak ada.

The pronouns, beta and lu, are typical of Malay dialects in eastern Indonesia, as is the tendency to drop final syllables in the case of su from sudah (and in contrast with Jakarté where initial syllables are dropped); whereas ma is a possible conflation of the Rotinese conjunction, ma, with an abridged form of the Dutch conjunction, maar and sonde is the curious negative that is distinctive of Basa Kupang. This register is the everyday language of the market, of intimate interaction among members of distant nusak, and among school friends and acquaintances from other islands.

Another register of Malay is standard Indonesian. This is of increasing importance because it is taught in all schools and used in all official and public situations. It is important to note that Rotinese pride themselves on speaking a proper Indonesian and on not mixing the registers of Basa Kupang and standard Indonesian.

Yet another register — the highest of all — is 'Biblical Malay', a form of Malay based originally on the early translations of the Bible. Since Roti has a tradition of local schools dating from the 1730s, and since one of the principal

goals of these schools was to teach the language of the Malay Bible, this register is deeply embedded in Rotinese culture and its forms of speaking. Although in recent years a more modern translation of the Bible has been promoted and used in Protestant churches throughout the island, it is still common to hear quotations from the 'old' translation (much as in the English-speaking world, recourse is still made, on formal occasions, to the King James translation).

In this there occurs a significant cross-cultural coincidence of linguistic forms. The highest Rotinese register coincides with the highest Malay register in its reliance on parallelism. In particular, the Book of Job, the Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Songs, the Book of Isaiah and much of Jeremiah are expressed in a parallelism that is hardly mistakable in the Malay Bible. A simple juxtaposition of a few lines from the Song of Songs in the *Alkitab* used on Roti (Sjiru'l-Asjar Solaiman 2:1-3) with English translation from the King James version and a few lines from a popular Rotinese poem give a clear idea of the similar, traditional use of parallelism.

(2) Malay:

Akulah bunga air-mawar dari Sjaron	<i>I am the rose of Shar'on</i>
Dan bunga bakung dari lembah.	<i>And the lily of the valleys.</i>
Seperti bunga bakung diantara duri-duri,	<i>As the lily among thorns</i>
Demikianlah adinda diantara segala anak-dara	<i>So is my love among the daughters</i>
Seperti pokok djeruk diantara segala pohon kaju hutan	<i>As the apple tree among the trees of the wood</i>
Demikianlah kekasihku diantara segala anak-teruna.	<i>So is my beloved among the sons.²</i>

(3) Rotinese:

Te leo mafo ai-la hiluk	<i>But if the Trees' Shade moves</i>
Ma sao tua-la keko	<i>And the Lontars' Shadow shifts</i>
Na, Suti, au o se	<i>Then I, Suti, with whom will I be</i>
Ma, Bina, au o se	<i>And I, Bina, with whom will I be</i>
Fo au kokolak o se	<i>With whom will I talk</i>
Ma au dedeäk o se	<i>And with whom will I speak</i>
Tao neu nakabanik	<i>To be my hope</i>
Ma tao neu namahenak?	<i>And my reliance?</i>

Coincidence is, however, not identity and there are also differences between these two 'high' registers. Rotinese ritual language can only be used for the production of parallel utterances, whereas Biblical Malay, though used to express similar parallel verses, has many other uses as well. (It is only the medium for translating an original Hebrew that, like Rotinese, distinguished between poetic and ordinary discourses.) Thus the use of these two registers does not result in the expression of parallel statements in one and then the other medium, but rather encourages the rendering of Biblical statements in canonical Rotinese forms.

This has far-reaching implications for understanding the processes of linguistic creativity. To render Biblical ideas into Rotinese ritual language, equivalent parallel terms must be created. Some of these are understood and accepted throughout the island; others seem to be idiosyncratic to specific preachers. Some commonly recognised terms are as follows:

- (4) (a) Heaven: Nusa Sodak // Ingu Temak *Domain of Well-Being // Land of Fullness*
- (b) The Holy Spirit: Dula Dalek // Leü Teik *Patterner of the Heart // Marker of the Inner Self*
- (c) To Repent: Sale Dalek // Tuka Teik *To turn the heart // To change the Inner Self*
- (d) Golgotha: Lete Langaduk // Puku *Hill of the Skull //*
Pakulimak *Mount of the Nailed Hands*
- (e) To Redeem: Soi // Tefa [Tifa] *To free // To pay*
- (f) The Redeemer: Mana-soi // Mana-tefa *The One who freed //*
The One who paid

These terms are relatively simple compared to the majority that are highly metaphoric and often theologically dense and difficult to translate. Christ, for example, is referred to as Maleo Lain Puana // Masafali Poin Tuana, which implies that Christ is the transformer of God's mercy (Maleo Lain // Masafali Poin indicating this heavenly transformation).

As in so much of ritual language, many metaphors are based on a botanic idiom. Tale // Fia taro // yam are botanic icons for the (male-) person. Christ's crucifixion is thus referred to as lona fia // male tale, which implies a withering or temporary death of these plants. Similarly, using an entirely traditional ritual expression, Christ can be referred to as:

- (5) Huni ma-lapa litik // Tefu ma-nggona lilok:
The banana with copper blossom // The sugarcane with golden sheath

This metaphorical elaboration can be carried to great lengths. Some sermons by older preachers (who are themselves oral poets) include long passages of barely modified traditional poetry. Indeed, there is a tendency for some Rotinese to see in their traditional poetry – not simply in its form but in its content as well – another version of Biblical wisdom. For the majority of Rotinese, however, the Bible sets the standard on which Rotinese forms are a commentary.

This accounts for another – perhaps the most important – rhetorical feature of Rotinese sermons. Since Rotinese and Malay are both intelligible, there is seemingly no need for both languages to be used in a sermon. But the chief rhetorical feature of sermons is that both languages are used in a complex way. This duality is explicable not as a translation of one language into another, but as another form of parallelism in which similar statements are expressed, in elevated form, as pairs. The rest of this paper will be devoted to an examination of this kind of linguistic performance.

A Rotinese chotbah: the performance

A preacher, like an oral poet, is expected to warm up and become 'hot' during the course of his sermon. Thus sermons begin slowly using a combination of ordinary Rotinese and Malay, work up to a crescendo and then gradually taper off. Ideally, the crescendo is marked by the use of Rotinese ritual language. The sermon which I wish to analyse here follows precisely this format. The theme of the sermon as announced at the very beginning is taken from the Gospel reading: Luke 19:1-10. (As Jesus enters Jericho, a rich tax collector, Zacchaeus, climbs a tree to see him. Jesus looks up and tells him to come down quickly from the

tree because he intends to spend the night at his house.) The preacher, E.M. Pono of Termanu, gives particular emphasis to Christ's order to Zacchaeus to come down immediately from the tree. This becomes a major metaphor that he develops at length.

The sermon begins slowly in Rotinese with a simple restatement of the gospel story. The medium is ordinary Rotinese marked by numerous parallel phrases. The gospel for example is:

- (6) (a) Lamatuaka dedea-kokolan fo nan'detak do nan'sulak
The Lord's speech // talk that is marked or written
 (b) Tunga faik ma tunga ledok ita basa tamanene
Each day and each sun we all listen
 (c) Ita basa-basa tala pasak ita dii-don, buka ita dalen
We all open our ears, open our hearts

Only once in the initial part of the sermon is Malay used and this single sentence is also marked by a parallel phrase:

- (7) Dengarlah firman Allah hari ini, apa artinya dan tujuannya buat hidup kita.

The next time Malay occurs it is used in parallel with the same statement in Rotinese.

- (8) (R) Kona lai-lai te faik ia boe o au menumpang nai o uman dale.

(M) Segera turun karena aku menumpang didalam rumahmu hari ini.

This 'double language parallelism' once begun continues throughout the sermon. In fact, once introduced, each new rhetorical device becomes part of an ever more complex repertoire. Simple repetition is another such feature.

- (9) Lai esuk seluk afada ...

Once again I say ...

Zakeos! Segera turun karena hari ini aku menumpang didalam rumahmu

Zakeos! lai-lai kona faik ia au menumpang nai o uman dale.

Yet another subtle form of parallelism is to make a statement in one language but to use a single word or expression from the other language — particularly at the beginning or end — for the purposes of emphasis. This cross-language parallelism can work either way.

- (10) (a) Malay with the emphasis on a single Rotinese word:

Bukan begitu banyak Tuhan panggil, tapi satu kali, kona [descend]!

- (b) Rotinese with the emphasis on a single Malay word (in this case the Malay terms themselves form a pair):

Bukan ana sanga hataholi ndos *Not that he seeks a man who is true*
Tapi ana sanga hataholi manamopok *But rather he seeks a man who is lost*

When all of these rhetorical devices — Rotinese parallelism, double-language parallelism, cross-language parallelism and simple repetition — are being used, the preacher is truly 'hot'. A further indication of this is this invocation of quotations of the old translation of the Malay Bible:

- (11) Kalau menurut terjemahan lama:

'Berbahagialah segala orang yang rendah hatinya,
 karena mereka itu yang empunya keradjaan sorga.'

It is at this stage, the crescendo, that the preacher switches to an extended use of Rotinese ritual language with only an occasional word or phrase in Malay.

(12) Maleo Lain puana,

Ana moli pengo naleon
Ma Masafali Poin tuana
An' dadi hilu nasafalin
Sehingga an' dadi neu huni malapa litik

Ma an' dadi neu tefu manggona lilok

De lapa litin fifiu
Ma nggona lilon ngganggape
De ana ngape Ieli Hela Dulu
Ma fiu feo Kosi Kona,
Fo ana-ma Hela Dulu
Boe o nanasuluka la boe-ma
Falu-ina Kosi Kona
Lo nanahapak,
Sesuai no kokoa-kiok

Neme ita tolano kor-museik.
Ana-ma Binga Lete la
Ala lamatani
Ma falu-ina Kade Sali la
Ala lasakedu
Lasakedu bedopo
Ma lamatani balu-balu
Ala doko-doe se?
Ala doko-doe hanya
Touk Dali Asa Koli
Do Taëk Lolo Mata Sina,
Tou manaso sidak
Ma Taëk manaseu saik.
Inilah Zakeos!
Ana doko-doe se?
Ana doko-doe kada Kristus mesakana
Adalah Tou manaso sidak

Ma Taë manaseu saik.

The Heavenly Lord's son
[lit. *areca palm*]
He underwent a change
And High God's son [lit. *lontar palm*]
He was transformed
So that He became the banana tree
with copper blossom.
And he became the sugarcane with
golden sheath.
The copper blossom sways.
And the golden sheath waves
He waves toward Hela Dulu
And sways toward Kosi Kona
The orphan, Hela Dulu
As it is written so
The widow, Kosi Kona
As is mentioned
In the praise-song
[lit. *crowing-peeping*]
From our choir.
The orphans, Binga Lete
They cry
And the widows, Kade Sali
They sob
They sob sadly
And they cry pathetically
Whom do they request
They request only
The man, Dali Asa Koli [Christ]
Or the Boy, Lolo Mata Sina [Christ]
The man who sews what is ripped
And the boy who stitches what is torn.
This, then, is Zacchaeus!
Whom does he request?
He requests only Christ alone
Here is the man who sews what is
ripped.
And the boy who stitches what is torn.

Here in the heat of the sermon, the preacher calls forth an array of powerful images and metaphors. All of these are essentially traditional. The comparison of Christ to the 'Banana tree with copper blossom//Sugarcane with golden sheath' involves the extension of traditional botanic icons to a new context (for the use of these same icons in a traditional context, cf. Fox 1971:242-244). The Rotinese recognise a large corpus of canonical chants, each of which is identified by the name of the chief chant-character. To invoke the name of this character is to recall the appropriate chant and the message it conveys. This brief passage contains several of these oral literary allusions. Hela Dulu//Kosi Kona and Binga Lete//Kade, for example, are separate chant-character names that call to mind specific chants. (Hela Dulu//Kosi Kona are also evoked in a ritual language song sung by the choir earlier in the service.) What these characters have in common is that they are 'widows and orphans'. This then forms the underlying

metaphor for the passage. In the Rotinese view, man's dependence in an imperfect world is likened to being an orphan and widow. This is also Zacchaeus' condition. What all these 'orphans and widows' have in common is their need for Christ who, in this passage, is referred to in three different ways: (1) as Banana tree // Sugar cane; (2) by the chant name, Touk Dali Asa Koli // Taëk Lolo Mata Sina; and (3) as the Man who sews what is torn // the Boy who stitches what is ripped.

Of linguistic significance is the fact that several lines that should be paired are, in fact, incomplete. This is the case in particular with the lines that contain the verb, *doko-doe to request*. *Doko-doe*, however, is a word that occurs almost exclusively in ritual language and its normal pair, *tai-boni*, is well known and unequivocal. A network analysis of the verbs for speaking (Fox 1974:78-79) shows clearly and graphically the position of *doko-doe* // *tai-boni* in this semantic field. Hence it can be argued that the more specific the terms of a set parallel phrase are, the more likely that its counterpart phrase can be left unstated but understood in an actual performance.

The passage I have just analysed is one of three in this particular sermon. Each is marked by a brief statement or statements in a mix of Malay and ordinary Rotinese. Thus the crescendo of the sermon consists of peaks and troughs, after which there is a return to the rhetorical style that preceded these high points. It is in this style that the sermon ends.

Conclusion

For anyone who understands the registers of the languages involved, a sermon is an exhilarating experience. A good preacher can always draw an audience from beyond his local parish. As a performance a sermon is, however, unlike a traditional chanting ceremony. Sermons are relatively short and consist of a series of dramatic bursts, whereas a traditional chanting ceremony is a steady rhythmic continuum that can occupy an entire evening. The goal of traditional chanting is to preserve a continuity with the ancestral wisdom of the past. In sermons, by the use of involved and sometimes convoluted metaphors, preachers push ritual language in new directions for their own spiritual purposes.

It should not be imagined that sermons of the kind I have discussed are a recent phenomenon. Hints in the mission literature indicate that the use of traditional parallelism in sermons was already established in the nineteenth century and certainly these usages flourished in the pre-war period of the twentieth century. Ironically, 'traditional' sermons may be in more danger of disappearing than the older forms of chanting. The Protestant Church of Timor (GMIT) has trained a new generation of young Rotinese pendeta in theological schools in Kupang and Jakarta, and these pendeta are not as well attuned to local forms of speaking as the old *utusan injil*. What the next generation holds for the development of speaking on Roti remains to be seen.³

NOTES

1. The term 'code' is appropriate in this context because ritual language is not another register like that of ordinary language. More is necessary than the ability to produce or comprehend a grammatical Rotinese utterance. What is necessary is the ability to pair utterances in an acceptable manner. Code here refers to the associate principles which underlie the pairing of semantic elements and thus form the basis for the realisation of culturally acceptable utterances (Fox 1975:110ff).
2. Note the difference in translation of the same Hebrew passage in the Malay *Alkitab* and the King James version as for example *djeruk* versus *apple*.
3. The research on which this paper is based has been conducted on various trips to the island of Roti since 1965. It has been supported by grants from the U.S. Public Health Service (NIMH), the National Science Foundation, and the Australian National University. This research has been done under the auspices of the *Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia* and with the sponsorship of the Universities of Nusa Cendana in Kupang and Satya Wecana in Sala Tiga. I express my thanks to all of these institutions, and to Mr Timothy Asch who accompanied me to Roti in 1977 and 1978 to film the performance of sermons as one aspect of a program for the ethnographic film documentation of Rotinese culture.

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