Thailand's "Straight-Talking" Monk:  
A Discourse Analysis of the Hortatory Speech of  
Phra Phayom Kalayano

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1. Introduction

Few figures on the contemporary Thai religious scene stand out more prominently than Phra Phayom Kalayano (ภราภยม กาละยานะ). Possessing only a fourth grade education, this monk has risen to become a highly popular public speaker, attracting the attention of both the upper class and the urban/rural poor. He is unique among Thai Buddhist clergy in that he was among the first monks to preach in Thai (rather than the sacred language of Pali). His discourses are so inviting and entertaining, that tapes of his sermons frequently outsell those of famous rock stars.

The purpose of this paper is to examine Phra Phayom's oratorical style. How does he package his message? What sort of linguistic devices have been employed in engineering his public speaking successes? What can be learned from his sermons about his audience's thought processes? A twelve year old novice at a temple in Trang Province once told me, "Some monks preach well, but Phra Phayom preaches better." Why is this?

The research for this paper was conducted in Thailand between 1992 and 1993. This paper represents a condensation and refinement of my MA thesis at Payap University, Chiang Mai. I am greatly indebted to Dr. Fran Woods and Dr. Amnuay Tapingkae of Payap University, and Dr. Nirund Jivasantikarn of Yonok College for their support and assistance in this project. I am also indebted to Phra Phayom himself for taking time out of his incredibly busy schedule to speak with a farang (foreigner) like me.

All five of the Phra Phayom sermons studied here represent transcriptions of "live" sermons recorded on tape cassettes. These were purchased from Phra Phayom's temple, as well as from various record stores throughout the Kingdom. These tapes were transcribed into standard Thai script by native speakers. The transcripts were then checked by other Thai speakers (including myself) to ensure accurate texts—especially important where non-standard speech was concerned. Translations into English were then made with the assistance of Rujirat Chaisang of Yonok College. During the analysis phase of the project, charts were made of
sentence topic, paragraph type, thematic progression, rhetorical questions, and a number of other phenomenon.

2. Surface Features

A communicative act, such as a sermon, cannot be understood merely in terms of the words employed. Rather, it is in the complex interaction of language, thought, and culture that communication takes places. The words are often only a dim reflection of what is really going on. For this reason, the paper will first examine the surface structure of Phra Phayom’s orations, then proceed to some deeper matters of text organization and hortatory intent.

The sermons studied here all have certain surface features in common, and can be divided into several basic segments: Salutation, Stage, Body, and Conclusion/Terminus (figure 1).
Figure 1. Surface structure of a typical Praise-Play sermon.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Conclusion Body</th>
<th>Message Sections (1-3)</th>
<th>Appeal to Brides</th>
<th>Announcement</th>
<th>Salutation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commands Marked by &quot;Aw Le!&quot;</td>
<td>Main Theme(s)</td>
<td>Sections, Paraphrases, etc.</td>
<td>Reference to Scripture, Etc.</td>
<td>Brides’ Salutation</td>
<td>Salutation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optional Audience°</td>
<td>Explicit or Implicit</td>
<td>Divisible into Sections, Sub-sections, Etc.</td>
<td>Personal anecdotes, Etc.</td>
<td>Personal anecdotes, Etc.</td>
<td>Personal anecdotes, Etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Explicit and Implicit Formulae Blessing</td>
<td>Marked by &quot;Aw Le!&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Buddha said...&quot;</td>
<td>Other Pre-Session Questions</td>
<td>References</td>
<td>References</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Address phrase of event specific. Optional note. Blessing of occasion or how-in from Formulaic sentence.
2.1 Salutation

Phra Phayom's salutations are formulaic in structure and often contain blessings addressed directly to the audience:

(1) "Wealth" (¶ 1)

kʰjọ  kʰwaaṃ  cāʔrəən  naj  tʰam  cəŋ  mii
request  nom.  progress  in  dhamma  please have

təə  tʰān  ?əʔtʰʔkaan  kʰāʔnáacaan  ləʔ  náksəksəa  tʰʔi  mii
to  you  rector  faculty  and  students  that  have

kʰwaaṃ  sə́ʔcaj  naj  tʰam  tʰʔık  tʰān
nom.  interest  in  dhamma  every  you

May progress in the dhamma be to you—rector, faculty, and students—all of you who are interested in the dhamma.

(2) "Greed" (¶ 1)

kʰjọ  kʰwaam  cāʔrəən  naj  tʰam  cəŋ
request  nom.  progress  in  dhamma  please

mii  təə  tʰʔık  kʰon  tʰʔi  sə́ʔcaj  naj  kaan  tʰʔi
have to  every  person that  interested  in  nom.  that

maa  tráp  faŋ  tʰam  naj  wən  mii
come  hear  listen  dhamma  in  day  this

May progress in the dhamma be to every person who is interested in coming to listen and hearken to the dhamma today.

These formulaic salutations are the type of statements that one would expect to hear from virtually any monk or other highly respected person. Phra Phayom's repetition of near synonyms such as tráp faŋ 'hear,' 'listen' is typical of Thai blessing formulae, as is the rather rapid rate of speech.

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¹A great deal of the material in this section is excerpted directly from my Payap thesis.
²Paragraph numbers in this paper refer to the English translations of the sermons as they appear in the appendix of my Payap thesis.
³Nominalizer
⁴These features are even more pronounced in the terminus.