

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 (พระพรหม กาลยานุ). 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).

SALUTATION	STAGE			BODY Megasections (1...n)	CONCLUSION	TERMINUS
	TOPIC ANNOUNCEMENT	GLOBAL CONFLICT SITUATION	APPEAL TO BUDDHISM			
Formulaic sentence(s) Obligatory blessing Optional audience specific phrase of address	Formulaic sentence or flow-in from salutation	Rhetorical questions often present	Buddha said.... Definition of Pali terms	Boundaries marked by Aw! Stories, commands (explicit and implicit), jokes, personal anecdotes, etc. Divisible into sections, subsections, paragraphs	Marked by Aw la! Explicit and implicit commands Reference to or summary of main theme(s)	Marked by Aw la! Formulaic Obligatory blessing Optional audience-specific reference Explicit and implicit commands

Figure 1. Surface structure of a typical Phra Phayom sermon.

2.1 Salutation

Phra Phayom's salutations are formulaic in structure and often contain blessings addressed directly to the audience:¹

(1) "Wealth" (§ 1)²

<i>k^hɔ̌</i>	<i>k^hwaam</i>	<i>càʔrəən</i>	<i>naj</i>	<i>t^ham</i>	<i>coŋ</i>	<i>mii</i>
request	nom.	progress	in	dhamma	please	have
<i>tæ̀</i>	<i>t^haan</i>	<i>ʔàʔt^hʔkaan</i>	<i>k^háʔnáacaan</i>	<i>læʔ</i>	<i>náksək̚sǎa</i>	<i>t^hʔi</i>
to	you	rector	faculty	and	students	that
<i>k^hwaam</i>	<i>soŋcaj</i>	<i>naj</i>	<i>t^ham</i>	<i>t^húk</i>	<i>t^haan</i>	
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)

<i>k^hɔ̌</i>	<i>k^hwaam</i>	<i>càʔrəən</i>	<i>naj</i>	<i>t^ham</i>	<i>coŋ</i>	
request	nom.	progress	in	dhamma	please	
<i>mii</i>	<i>tæ̀</i>	<i>t^húk</i>	<i>k^hon</i>	<i>t^hʔi</i>	<i>soŋcaj</i>	<i>naj</i>
have	to	every	person	that	interested	in
<i>maa</i>	<i>tráp</i>	<i>faŋ</i>	<i>t^ham</i>	<i>naj</i>	<i>wan</i>	<i>núi</i>
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.⁴

¹ A great deal of the material in this section is excerpted directly from my Payap thesis.

² Paragraph numbers in this paper refer to the English translations of the sermons as they appear in the appendix of my Payap thesis.

³ Nominalizer

⁴ These features are even more pronounced in the terminus.