

LINGUISTIC DEVICES IN A MALAY FOLKTALE FROM CENTRAL THAILAND

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Introduction

The Malays of Nonthaburi, a province of central Thailand, form a closely knit community which comprises more than a dozen villages.¹ They are descended from a group of war captives who were carried away from the northern Malay sultanate of Patani in the late eighteenth century. The captives originally settled in the village of Tha It, north of Bangkok, from where they gradually spread out to establish new villages. While members of the younger generation now speak Thai as their mother tongue, some older members of the community are bilingual in Thai and Malay. The local Malay dialect is a descendant of Patani Malay, though it developed independently and shows much stronger signs of interference from Thai.

The Malays of Nonthaburi have preserved precious little of their literature. Literacy in *Jawi* (Malay written in an Arabic-derived alphabet) is very low, and *Rumi* (Romanized Malay) is practically unknown. Oral literature has almost completely vanished as well. From the accounts of older villages, it appears that oral literature traditions were maintained until World War II, when political and economic hardships caused their rapid demise.

Another factor which hastened the decline of Nonthaburi Malay oral literature was the advent of mass media, such the press, radio, and television. Listening to the radio and, later, watching television have become the principal sources of entertainment for Malay villagers. These media use the Thai language.² In addition, Malay is no longer seen as the proper medium for telling stories and jokes; Thai is now used for that domain.

The folk tale--only one of several literary genres previously current in the Malay villages of Nonthaburi--is called /bayi/ (or /bahyi/, as pronounced by the oldest villagers). This word occurs in Patani Malay as /bayi/ or /buhayi/, and is defined by Wilding (1979:20) as 'a fable, an entertaining story'. The Standard Malay cognate, *bahari*, means 'ancient'. Older villagers often reminisced about their childhood, before the advent of radio and television, when they used to listen to folktales:

My grandfather was very good at telling folktales. Every night he would tell us folktales. Two hours, three hours, [or even] all night long. He was very skillful. He would tell [folktales] each and every night (HR65M 3-6-92).

The topics of the stories were poor people, kings, fools, and various animals--especially frogs and rabbits (or mousedeer; the two are sometimes confused in Nonthaburi Malay). Apparently, many tales were constructed around puns or other linguistic devices, which are no longer understood by speakers of the Nonthaburi Malay dialect. I quote from my field journal:

After pleading with HR64M to try to recall one of his grandfather's tales, he came up with bits and pieces of a story about a frog which always had delicious rice to eat. When asked where it got his rice, the frog answered (and this was the punch line) that the rice was bought at 'Dog Face Market' (/talat muk^h hapin/). Much as he tried, HR64M could not explain why this was funny, although he did recall that people used to find it hilarious. Obviously this was some kind of play on words, whose meaning had been lost (Field Journal 4-12-92).

The Tale

Below is a phonemic transcription (with interlinear translation) of one the most complete and cohesive folk tales I have been able to collect. It is particularly interesting because of the various linguistic devices employed. It was recited by AWL93M³.

ʔadɔ	satu ⁴	ʔɔyiʔ	miskin ⁵ ,	duwɔ	laki	bini ⁶ .
exist	one	person	poor,	two	husband	wife.

diyɔ ⁷	tupiʔ	umɔh	nihan ⁸	na ⁹ ,	umɔh	ʔɔyiʔ.	bkah ¹⁰
3per.	stay	house	tycoon	part.,	house	people.	place

dudoʔ	taʔ	dɔʔ ¹¹ ,	doʔ	umɔh	ʔɔyiʔ	kayɔ ¹² .	jadi
live	no	have,	live	house	person	rich.	be

ʔanoʔ ʔupoh¹³ lamə-lamə¹⁴, pəʔ diyə mati, pəʔ
 child hire a long time, father 3per. die, father

nihanʔ diyə mati. ʔanoʔ diyə hamaʔ taʔ
 tycoon 3per. die. child 3per. chase away not

byi¹⁵ doʔ. diyə doʔ, diyə toʔ pigi¹⁶ lah. bo¹⁷
 let stay. 3per. stay, 3per. not go part. when

hamaʔ diyə taʔ thu nəʔ gi kanə ni¹⁸.
 chase away 3per. not know fut. go whither part.

hamaʔ baŋəʔ-baŋəʔ¹⁹ kali taʔ gi, diyə baka²⁰.
 chase away many time not go, 3per. set fire.

baka ktəʔ²¹, baka uməh diyə. ʔəyiʔ baka
 set fire hut, set fire house 3per. people set fire

doʔ duwəso²² bsa. bo baka haŋuh habih, gi
 be sin big. when set fire burn finish, go

sməh gajo. diyə mitəʔ: 'tʰuwiʔ ku²³!' -'wəʔpə²⁴
 greet king. 3per. ask: 'lord 1sg.!' -'why

də, toʔ²⁵? -'ʔanoʔ nihanʔ suyoh baka uməh,
 part. hon.?' -'child tycoon order burn house,

haŋuh habih dəh.²⁶ -'ʔado ʔapo gateʔ²⁷ uməh
 burn finish perf.'. -'have what also house

toʔ cʰe²⁸? daliʔ uməh ʔado pəʔ? -'ʔado ticiŋ²⁹
 hon. grandfather? inside house be what? -'be ring

matə hitiʔ duwə bute, tika byatay³⁰, bata
 jewel diamond two clas., mat golden, pillow

bliku³¹, piŋi^Λŋ nagyi ʔaceh³², makoʔ nagyi rom³³.
 curved(?), plate country Aceh, bowl country Turkey'.

tu hoʔ diyɔ goyaʔ, gajo taʔ doʔ. gajo
 that which 3per. tell, king not have. king

mŋiliŋ³⁴, tapɔ ʔɔyi^Λŋ kayɔ: -'woʔpɔ mu³⁵ baka
 shake head, ask person rich: -'why 2sg. set fire

umɔh?' -'bc^hi, suyoh waʔ pɔ malah'.
 house' -'hate, order do something lazy'.

-'mu c^hayi hoʔ baya lah! mu ʔado kdoʔ³⁶:
 -'2sg. search thing pay part.! 2sg. have part.:

ticiŋ matɔ hiti^Λŋ duwɔ bute, tika byatay,
 ring jewel diamond two clas., mat golden,

bata bliku, piŋi^Λŋ nagyi ʔaceh, makoʔ
 pillow curved(?), plate country Aceh, bowl

nagyi rom?' -'taʔ doʔ'. -'waʔ genɔ³⁷ lah, mu
 country Turkey? -'not have'. -'do how part., 2sg.

salɔh doh?' -'mitɔʔ ʔapon'. -'taʔ doʔ hargɔ. waʔ
 wrong perf.? -'ask pardon'. -'not have price. do

genɔʔ toʔ noʔ baŋɔʔ manɔʔ' tapɔ duwɔ laki
 how? hon. want much inter.?' ask two husband

bini. 'suyoh buwaʔ umɔh sbuwah³⁸, boleh doʔ waʔ
 wife. 'order make house cl.-one, can live do