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. 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. 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 /bahi/, 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 its rice, the frog answered (and this was the punch line) that the rice was bought at 'Dog Face Market' (talat mukʰɔ həŋtınŋ). 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 of 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.

\[\text{?adɔ satu⁴ ?ɔɣi⁴ miskin⁵, duwo laki bini⁶. exist one person poor, two husband wife.}\]

\[\text{dîyo⁷ tupi⁷ umɔh nihaŋ⁸ na⁹, umɔh ?ɔɣi⁴. bkah¹⁰ 3per. stay house tycoon part., house people. place}\]

child hire a long time, father 3per. die, father

nihaŋ diyo mati. ?ano? diyo hama? ta?
ycoon 3per. die. child 3per. chase away not

byi15 do?. diyo do?, diyo to? pigi16 lah. bo17 let stay. 3per. stay, 3per. not go part. when

hama? diyo ta? thu no? gi kano ni18. chase away 3per. not know fut. go whither part.

hama? banʔɔ?-banʔɔ19 kali ta? gi, diyo baka20. chase away many time not go, 3per. set fire.

baka ktɔ21, baka umoh diyo. ʔɔyiʔ baka set fire hut, set fire house 3per. people set fire
do? duwɔsc22 bsa. bo baka haŋuh habih, gi be sin big. when set fire burn finish, go

smoh gaj. diyo mitɔ?: 'tʰuwiŋ̂ ku23!' -'woʔpɔ24 greet king. 3per. ask: 'lord 1sg.!' -'why
de, to?25?' -'?ano? nihaŋ suyoh baka umoh, part. hon.?'-child tycoon order burn house,

haŋuh habih doh.26' -'?ado ?apo gate?27 umoh burn finish perf.' -'have what also house
to? chɛ28? daliŋ̂ umoh ?ado po?' -'?ado ticiŋ29 hon. grandfather? inside house be what?' -'be ring

matɔ hitiŋ duwɔ bute, tika byatay30, bata jewel diamond two clas., mat golden, pillow
bliku, piŋiŋ nagyi ?aceh, mako? nagyi rom. curved(?), plate country Aceh, bowl country Turkey.

tu ho? diyɔ gɔya?, gajɔ ta? do?. gajɔ that which 3per. tell, king not have. king

mŋiŋiŋ, tanɔ ?ɔyiŋ kayɔ: -woŋpɔ mu baka shake head, ask person rich: -why 2sg. set fire
umɔh’ -bchi, suyoh wa? po malah’. house -hate, order do something lazy’.

-mu cʰayi ho? baya lah! mu ?ado kdo? -2sg. search thing pay part.! 2sg. have part.: ticin mato hitiŋ duwɔ bute, tika byatay, ring jewel diamond two clas., mat golden,

bata bliku, piŋiŋ nagyi ?aceh, mako? pillow curved(?), plate country Aceh, bowl


bini. 'suyoh buwa? umɔh sbuwah, buleh do? wa? wife. 'order make house cl.-one, can live do