

The Semangat and the Mantra in Java, Indonesia

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Abstract

The Javanese mantra is a communicative act, and a spiritual dialogue. During the mantra ritual, the shaman Orang Pinter and supplicant receiving the intervention select become equal agents, as they intervene for change in the cultural and spiritual disposition of the supplicant. But in this paper.

The presentation discusses ethnographic work over 10 years during which over 1500 mantras were documented throughout central to east Java, Indonesia. To effect the documentation process, I engaged with a range of communities and individuals throughout Java, that is, Yogyakarta, Solo, Surabaya, Alas Purwo, Salatiga, Bali, and other localities. Spiritual interventions were witnessed, and we suggest religious affiliation tells only part of the story. Drawing on frameworks of symbolic interactionism, and phenomenological nominalism, the synopsis discusses how a poetic discourse analysis of mantras can describe a system employed by these shamans and the supplicants to discursively facilitate the spiritual process, by altering the dissociative state of the supplicant.

The talk concludes by presenting a model for the mantra in Java, and possibly in other global regions. Within this model, several overlapping processes mediate the drawing on cultural symbolisms, and overlap in strategic designs, to effect change in the supplicant.

The paper draws on work by Rebecca Seligman, who has conducted similar ethnographic and theoretical work in the South American context.

Keywords: *Asia, Linguistic Cultural Anthropology, East, West, Symbolism*

Discussion

Most mantra parallelisms contain formula that are quite standard to the genre, yet are complex and specifically designed to obtain the required perlocutionary effects desired by both OP and supplicant, that is, to shift the semangat. A great majority of the mantras I encountered when speaking to OPs and when attending or participating in rituals were structured on a prescribed skeletal formula comprising the following:

- an opening statement (e.g., the phrase *Niyat ingsun amatek* ('I intend to permanently') referencing the speaker and the intention.
- accompanying content structured by a complex poetic design, patently signifying the initial statement (a).
- shifting (uneven) rhythms and prosodic intervals that alter the otherwise expected arrangement of the poetic forms and the placement of elements in the parallelism, to thus create fluctuating poetic tensions.
- alternatives to the above.

Central, then, is the dissociation and looping facet of the mantra and ritual. Seligman and Kirmaye (2008) articulate two approaches to understanding dissociation, the 'psychiatric-adaptive' and the 'anthropological-discursive,' the latter of which frames dissociation as a discursive (textual-symbolic) and social (interactive) phenomenon. Here, participants act to spatialize performance and to categorize experiences in relation to specific cultural contexts, where the stance and role of the agent are continuous and mutually reinforcing, yet not a dualism. Seligman and Kirmaye note that individuals associate satisfying or significant personal experiences with positive dissociation (c.f., Butler and Palesh 2004), but which may also assist in overcoming negative experiences, both of which may thus constitute a defense mechanism. Exemplifying this, one Balinese OP with whom I interacted, other than exhibiting great showmanship as an entertainer (and with a handful of English clichés under his belt), focused heavily on the dissociative experience. His clients would line up awaiting exorcisms, healings, or other changes to their spiritual environments, through touch, energy transfer, or the spoken mantra. After being convinced of their ailment, and the need for salvation through his spiritual work, usually through being brought to tears, the supplicants would repeat appropriate simple mantras until feeling a change in their

semangat. Most supplicants attending the intervention were either emotionally disturbed, physically ill, or had convinced themselves of some possession. In my visits to this OP, I documented the treatments of approximately 100 individuals. The OP will pinch (strongly) the supplicant, following which the supplicant will either cry or react in some other way. According to the OP, crying firmly evidences demonic possession. Significantly, the mantra did gradually appease the supplicants, which, by mediating a dissociative experience, altered both the perception by the supplicant and by others toward the supplicant.

Mantra – Niyate Adus Murih Tegur Ayuning Badan

The second mantra I present, Niyate Adus Murih Tegur Ayuning Badan, was given to me by an OP in Yogyakarta, in 2017, and which then appeared, in another form, amidst old scripts that I found in a back shelf in an old manuscript repository in Yogyakarta. The mantra is also common in rituals, and is applied to clear the body of negative spiritual presences, thus contributing to the exorcism process. The mantra is a 7-line piece, and as with the first mantra, is also structured with the following elements: poetic anticipation/prolongation and acceleration, ellipsis, inculcation, and parallelism.

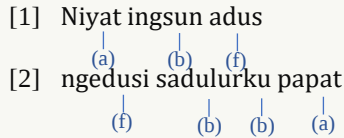
- [1] Niyat ingsun adus (I have an intention to shower)
- [2] ngedusi sadulurku papat (cleansing my 4th element)
- [3] kalima badan (5th (is the) physical body)
- [4] kanem oyawa (6th (is the) soul)
- [5] kapitu bumi (7th (is the) earth)
- [6] sali jaba mulya rejo teguh ayu dadi banyu (enhancing the dignity/prosperity/wellbeing to embrace beauty characteristics like water)
- [7] muliha rriaring aku (return to me)

This mantra also contains an odd number of lines, thus adding to the complexity of its poetics. The potency of this mantra appears to be in the strategic arrangement of parallelisms, through processes such as poetic anticipation and release.

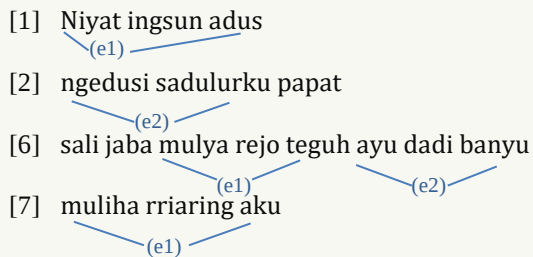
Phonetic Parallelism

Phonetic parallelism, as a formula, is scattered and highly multilayered throughout this mantra, producing a complex pattern. As in a large majority of the mantras documented, the first pattern begins with the first part of a phonetic couplet, and is interrupted by another phonetic couplet, thus prolonging the arrival of the second part of the phonetic couplet in a process of poetic delay. This occurs over only two lines, where line 1 contains (a)[at],

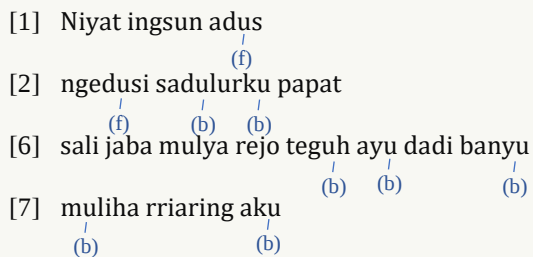
(b)[un], (f)[adus], and then line 2 contains (f)[edusi], (b)[u], (b)[u], (a)[at], as below (see figure 1 for key). Owing to the fact that the 'n' is easily absorbed by the 'u,' I equate 'ingsun' with both 'sadu' and 'lurku,' in terms of their coda syllables.



Through a separation of (a) 'niyat' in line 1 and (a) 'papat' in line 2, by (b) (ingsun) and (f) (adus) in line 1 and (b) (sadu) and (b) (lurku) in line 2, which are mutually adjacent, yet over two lines, and which thus develop expectations of this immediate adjacency, the phonetic reference to, and expectation of a couplet to, the first precedent [a], is prolonged and dragged. This effect creates a void over two lines, to again strengthen the semantic potential of the phonetic couple (a). This dragging effect continues throughout the mantra, as it does in most mantras documented. This effect is also produced with (e), which represents phonetic cluster, as follows:



and with [b] as follows



Here, again, the phonetic couplets begin with the precedent, consecutively in lines 1 and 2, to intensify the precedent, which is absent in lines 3, 4, 5, to create a void and thus the realization of this absence. The couple to the precedent then reemerges in lines 6 and 7 to effect the simultaneous signification of [b] components. This pattern produces a drag effect,

which is intensified by the emergence of other rhythms, which further intensifies the effect of the couplet, as in the following excerpt 6 with (e):

Excerpt 6

[3] kalima badan
|
(e)

[4] kanem oyawa
|
(e)

[5] kapitu bumi
|
(e)

These parallelisms are then satisfied in lines 6 and 7, at times repeatedly within one line (line 6), to thus invoke the delayed anticipation outcome.

[6] sali jaba mulya rejo teguh ayu dadi banyu
| | |
(b) (b) (b)

[7] muliha rriaring aku
|
(b)

This formula is repeated in various permutations throughout the mantra, such as in lines 6 and 7, as in the excerpt 8 below, where the formula is repeated at the end of line 6, in intensified fashion, and then again presented in line 7, to produce an accumulated complement to the precedent at the start of the mantra.

Excerpt 7

[6] sali jaba mulya rejo teguh ayu dadi banyu
| | | |
| | | |
[7] muliha rriaring aku
| | | |
(c) (c)

Here, the formula reiterates and extends on the pattern in lines 1 and 2. This is also the case with [g], which complements the [g] precedent at the start of the mantra. The presence of these formulae at the start, their absence in the middle, and the subsequent yet asymmetric intensification of these formulae at the end serve to create a strong awareness of the precedent of these formula at the start, that is, at the subject line.

To further intensify this anticipation, other ‘interrupting’ couplets are introduced throughout, as in lines 3 and 4, to delay the parallelism, as in excerpt 8 below:

Excerpt 8

- [3] kalima badan
- [4] kanem oyawa

Prosodic Parallelism

Throughout the mantra, various combinations appear at the suprasegmental level, so as to structure and convey the intentions of the mantra. To unpack notions of prosody in the Javanese mantra, I discuss word count, as the word count is quite significant in Javanese poetics and language, when considering prosody. The word count per line is as follows: 3, 3, 2, 2, 2, 8, 3. The first two lines construct an expectation of a three-word system. The word count in the third line then drops to a two-word system, breaking the three word per line congruence, thus interrupting the expected prosodic flow, and thus reflexively intensifying the anticipated three word per line rhythm. Line 6, however, houses eight words, immediately prior to line 7, which returns to three words. The void emerging throughout the mantra consequent to the originally inculcated three-word line, that is, after line 2, and before line 7, constructs the presence-absence-absence-presence macro-parallelism. The extended lexical count in line 8 suggests an over-intensification, a strategy which strengthens the expectation of the returning three-word line, that is, a circular effect. The presence of this formula well emphasizes the presence of the first line, the subject of the mantra. The reduction in word count, and hence the dropping prosody, again reminds of the OP's comment above, that lowering the number of words per line is "kanggo nanamke kesadaran pemohon pas ora ono utawa pas ilang iramane," thus increasing in the target an awareness of the significance of both local and macro syncopation. This strategy also complies with the comment by several other OPs that anane dadi saiki tanpa ana anane dadi saiki tanpa ana or anane dadi saiki ora ana, (presence [of parallelism] becomes present in absence). This decreasing syncopation strengthens the awareness in both supplicant and audiences of the significance of syncopation in the first (and second) line, a signification reiterated as the same word count re appears in the last line.

The presence-absence-absence-presence pattern is again intensified by the syllable pattern throughout the mantra. The coda pattern develops as 2, 2, 2, 3, 2, 2, 2, i.e., presence of two syllables, absence of two syllables, presence of two syllables, as in excerpt 9 below:

Excerpt 9

- ...a-dus (2)
- ...pa-pat (2)
- ...Ba-dan (2)
- ...o-ya-wa (3)
- ...bu-mi (2)

...ba-nyu (2)

...a-ku (2)

The suggestion by the OP again has relevance, in that the number of syllables in the final word is significant, as it impresses upon the target-suppliant the completion of a prosodic parallelism, and hence, a sense of finality.

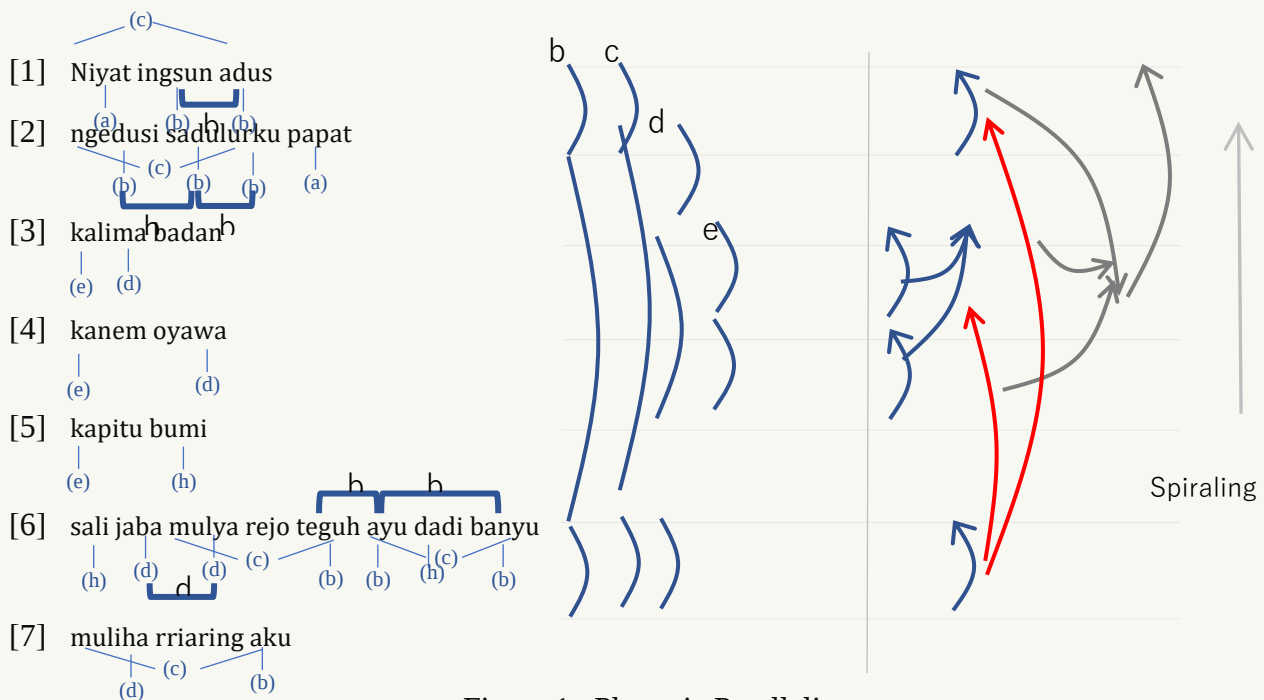
Semantic Parallelism

Semantic structure and parallelism is predicated on the semantic precedent in the first line, 'Niyat ingsun adus' (I want to shower/cleanse). The whole body of the mantra then becomes a semantic predicate to this first-line initial agent. This Mantra does not blatantly present a second semantic agent at the centre of the mantra, and hence avoids the additional level of semantic agent-predicate contained in other Mantras. All declaratives, nominal groupings, ergatives, and so forth, semantically complement the notion of the 'I' as needing to be cleansed, in semantic (and phonetic and suprasegmental) parallelism. Here, the speaker cultivates a perlocutionary strengthening of the semangat, and in the process, seeks to rid the semangat of all 'dirt,' that is, to remove all ill intention toward and within self and society. For example, lines 3, 4, and 5, deictically index the intention of cleaning the badan (physical body), the oyawa (soul), and the bumi (earth). However, these lines omit the subject of the intention, which is the ngedusi (showering), to firmly couple with line 2, which does contain ngedusi, and which then couples with the first line, semantically (cleanse) and phonetically.

In lines 3, 4, and 5, the exclusion of the agentified ngedusi (cleansing) semantically further shifts agency toward the first-person speaker as supplicant and as mediator of the change in the body, soul, and the earth. Line 6 then reveals a semantic strategy that couples with the buildup throughout lines 3, 4, and 5, and hence one which responds to the allusion in these lines, the motive for this ngedusi, which is *sali jaba mulya* (to enhance the righteousness of goodness of the person through cleansing). As such, the latter part of the mantra responds to the earlier part in semantic parallelism, where both the early and latter parts symbiotically index each other, that is, a simultaneous signification of all parts of the parallelism, to comply with the semantic intention of the mantra formulae.

The mantra evolves through a framework of complex semantic coupling; each line or segment (phonetically, prosodically, semantically) signifies other adjacent or nonadjacent precedents. This process is layered, where couplets emerge and semantically couple with or signify previous or overarching couplets. The couplets then combine as a quartet to signify compliance with larger structures, and then finally with line 1 as the mantra's leading agent. This is again a multilayered process of increasing and continuous reversion toward the

agent. For example, lines 3, 4 and 5 form a semantic parallelism across three lines, where each line deictically references the unmentioned process of cleansing, and mirrors each other, to construct a strong extended semantic parallelism. Here, all nodes appear in a process of simultaneous signification. The absence of the agent *ngedusi* (cleansing) is semantically not only identically absent in each line, but so is the predicate in ergative form also identical in each line. This intensified semantic parallelism then strengthens the signification of line 2, the precedent of the sequence describing the cleansing, the *papat* (siblinghood) and the actual agent, *ngedusi*. In turn, this four-line system summons attention to the intention of line 1, the subject of the mantra as a whole. On a broader scale, lines [3, 4, 5] act in concert to semantically address line 2 and hence 6, which then all collate to become a 5-line system [2, 3, 4, 5, 6] that operates as a prolonging device to delay the emergence of line 7, the couplet-successor to the first line, thus intensifying the line 1-line 7 parallelism. I present then that all lines within this mantra operate in concert to create an overall system of parallelism that ultimately points to line 1 as the subject.



- [1] Niyat ingsun adus
 (a) (b)
- [2] ngedusi sadulurku papat
 (b) (c) (d)
- [3] kalima badan
 (d) (c)
- [4] kanem oyawa
 (d) (c)
- [5] kapitu bumi
 (d) (c)
- [6] sali jaba mulya rejo teguh ayu dadi banyu
 (b) (c)
- [7] muliha rriaring aku
 (a)

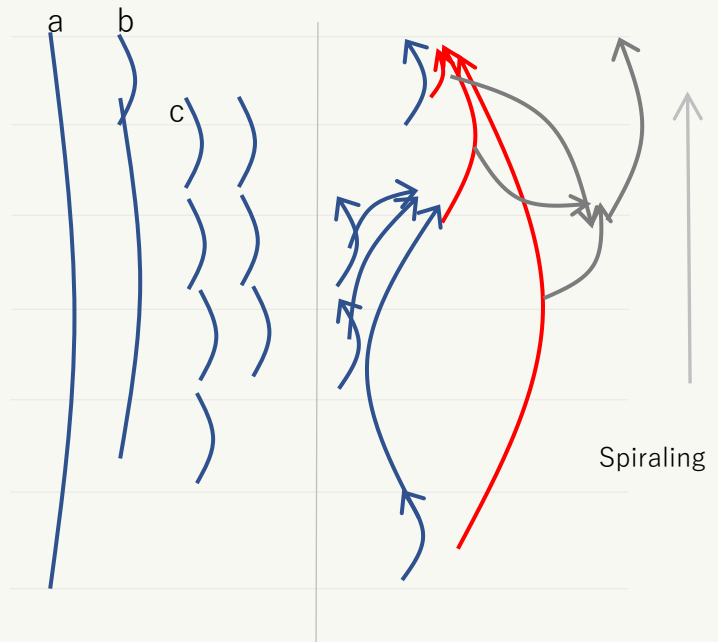


Figure 2 –Semantic Parallelism

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