

RIDDLES OF DEATH: THE STRUCTURE OF THE TANGKE-TANGKE RIDDLE GAME USED AT PENDAU MEMORIAL SERVICES

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Introduction

This paper describes the structure of the *tangke-tangke* riddle game that is commonly practised during memorial services in the Pendau community. Pendau is a Western Austronesian language in the Tomini-Tolitoli group in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia (see Himmelmann 2001 and Quick 2003).¹ This description is based mainly on eleven riddles recorded in 1997 in two different villages and a description of Pendau riddles by my main language helper Josep Piri (1997). Compare this with the 300 riddles elicited and collected by Stokhof (1982) for Woisika (a Papuan language in the Alor archipelago in Indonesia). However, the interest of this paper is the whole riddle game and not just the riddle and solution, and thus the process of recording and transcribing these eleven riddles has revealed invaluable information. This paper does not address the structure or formation of a riddle in Pendau², as this may be premature with only eleven riddles. This description does address a special morpho-syntactic construction rarely found outside of the riddle game genre and first discovered in this set of riddles. This highlights the importance of documenting various kinds of speech play and verbal art which often are not dealt with in reference grammars.

Riddles in Pendau are a specialized form of repartee (dialogue or conversation) which involves a series of exchanges similar to the game of ‘twenty questions.’ In fact Pendau riddles could be thought of as a highly specialized language game. Longacre (1983:73-74) discusses and analyzes normal repartee as a game, so to consider riddles as a kind of elaborate game with its own rules and moves fits rather well with his model of ‘repartee as a game’. The Pendau riddle game was vaguely familiar to me as a riddle game as it resembles the ‘I spy’ English language riddle game, or the version I played when I was a boy with my mother and four siblings that begins as, “fiddle-lee-dee, fiddle-lee-daa, I see something that you don’t see, and the color of it is...”.

Riddles have been an intimate part of Pendau culture as they have long been asso-

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1. Abbreviations used in the interlinearized example are listed here: 1SG first singular, 1PL first plural, 3SG third singular, AB absolute case, AV active voice, CN common noun, COM comitative case, COP copula, DE Denominal, DIR directional, DY dynamic, EQTV equative, EXIS existential, FA factive, GE genitive case, HSY hearsay, INC inclusive, IR irrealis, IV inverse voice, LOC locative, ONE numeral one prefix, NEG negative, NV non-volitional, RE realis, RED reduplication, RM relative marker, SF stem former, TWO numeral two prefix, TZ transitive.
 2. Other references have focused on the structure that riddles take, see for example E. Maranda 1971, Pepicello and Green 1984, and Stokhof 1982.

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ciated with funerals and memorial services (these are held the first day³ of a person's death, the third night and the fortieth night after a person's death). Riddles have a very ordered structure that is unique when compared to other genres in Pendau. At some time during the service (which may last all night long) there is often a time organized to tell riddles. The objective of telling riddles seems to be to provide the bereaving family with encouragement, sympathy and moral support from relatives, friends and the wider community. This idea of entertainment or providing a distraction coincides with extensive research carried out in the Philippines as noted by Eugenio (compiler and editor, 1994:xv): "At present, riddling in the Philippines is done mainly for entertainment." Both the *tangke-tangke* 'riddle' game and the ritualized *lelesan* 'string game' are only known to be performed at these post-burial wake-like services.⁴ Stokhof (1982:4) mentions that only adolescents actively participate in this in Woisika, and is an occasion for flirting and courtship. This may be similarly true for Pendau, as Piri (1997) mentions that many *unga-unga logas o randaa* 'young men and women' would gather together from dusk until dawn and would especially play the *lelesan* 'string games' and tell *tangke-tangke* 'riddles'. In the event that someone would fall asleep Piri states that they would mark their forehead with black charcoal. However in all of the riddle games that I have witnessed there were various ages that participated in the riddle games.

Stokhof (1982:4) mentions that the Bolaang Mongondow language in North Sulawesi, Indonesia restricts riddle-telling in a similar manner as practised by the Pendau:

(They) are allowed to play the riddle-game only during the night vigils over the dead before burial.

In a recent book Sherzer examines riddles (2002:61-63) as a kind of 'speech play'. Although he may be aware of the kind of riddle game I am about to discuss he doesn't mention it. He does mention one kind of riddle told on St. Vincent in the West Indies during 'all-night wakes' (2002:62). See also Eugenio (1994:xv) for the use of Philippino riddles also used at "wakes and death anniversaries".

1 *Tangke-tangke* Riddle Game Structure

Any person who has a riddle can tell a riddle, and is referred to as the *toponabu* 'the one who drops, the dropper'. The riddle is given and then a chance for guesses can be made by anyone participating (called *topelolo* 'searcher(s)'), and sometimes several people may be talking at once.

As with other genres the structure of the riddle exchange is composed of a beginning (opening), a middle (body), and the end (closure), as elaborated in (1).

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3. The 'first day' or actually 'first evening' after a person's death is contingent on what time of day the person died. The main point is that the funeral is held within 24 hours of the person's death, so if a person died in the evening of one day, the funeral would probably be held the next day.
 4. The string is obtained by removing it from the edge of the white burial cloth and forming a loop. These are not random string designs. This is a sequence of twelve different "string pictures", which apparently represents each month of the year. Each picture has its own name. After each picture, the partner is supposed to make the next month in the sequence by removing the string from the partner's hands and immediately making the next picture.

(1) Outline of riddle genre:

Opening: The riddle as a puzzle to be solved is stated.

Body: Guesses and clues are exchanged between the riddler and the guessers.

Closure: The answer to the riddle is given (either by a 'searcher' (guesser) or by the 'dropper' (riddler) in the event it is unsolved).

Sometimes the object of the riddle's puzzle is referred to metaphorically as *nabi* 'the prophet' or at least in one riddle *siina* 'mother' (Lewonu Riddle #4). In (2), Josep Piri gives a formulaic opening to his riddle, in which *nabi* is used as the parent of the object.

- (2) *Diang jea unga nunabi.* *Ono io*
diang jea unga nu=nabi *ono io*
 EXIS HSY child CN/GE=prophet if 3SG/AB
- mebura,* *sombura* *majari* *dusunang,*
M-pe-bura *so-ng-bura* *ma-jari* *dusunang*
 IR-SF/DY=speak ONE-LIG-word COP/IR-become village
- ono ruombura* *majari* *pakakas* *torapake.*
ono ruo-ng-bura *ma-jari* *pakakas* *to=ro-pake*
 if TWO-LIG-word COP/IR-become tool RM=IV/IR-use
- Uo toroboto* *sapa uo?*
'uo to=ro-boto *sapa 'uo*
 yonder RM=IV/IR-guess what yonder

'There was it's said a child of the prophet. If he/she spoke, one word would become a village, if there were two words then there would be a tool that could be used. That is what should be guessed, what is it?' [Answer: The capital of Central Sulawesi is *Palu*, the reduplicated form is *palu-palu* 'hammer'. This answer is complicated by the fact that *palu* is the Indonesian word for hammer, but in order to distinguish these two the reduplicated form is commonly used (although the capital *Palu* is probably an indigenous Kaili word for a tree species).] [jptext2.jdb 037-40]

As often as not the question or statement that outlines the puzzle is simply stated or asked without the formulaic preface. Example (3) is a typical riddle told as one sentence. Some riddles may need more than one sentence to explain them. Difficult riddles may be repeated on request by the guessers (usually early in the body after one or two guesses have been made).

- (3) *Noribu-ribu* *botonyo* *sura*
N-po₁-ribu-ribu *boto=nyo* *sura*
 RE-SF/DE-RED-thousand trunk=3SG/GE only

soung roongonyo.
soung roong=nyo
 one leaf=3SG/GE

‘It has thousands of trunks, but yet it only has one leaf.’
 [answer: the ocean (lit. *dagat* ‘ocean’) is the leaf, and the trunks are rivers
 (lit. *ogo* ‘fresh water’) [Lewonu Riddle #1]

Although the body of the riddle is conversation-like in nature, the give and take of the riddler and the guessers have a basic structure to how the questions can lead to the answers, and how the riddler responds to make it easier or more difficult to guess the answer. The body of the riddle usually begins with a binary question that helps the guessers delimit the domain to search in (see Quick 2003 for discussion of polar questions). This is done by asking if the object is typically found in *alam togoge* ‘big nature (outside a house)’ or if it is in *alam todeide* ‘little nature (inside a house)’, as in (4).

- (4) *Lingidimo, rialam togoge ape rialam todeide*
lingid-i=mo ri=alam togoge ape ri=alam todeide?
 hint-DIR=COMP LOC=nature large or LOC=nature little
 ‘Give us another hint, is it in big nature or in little nature?’
 [Sibayu Riddle #2]

In older times, in the event that someone fell asleep they would be marked with charcoal. If someone knew the answer right away they were not supposed to give the answer straight away. The riddler often camouflages the answer to his/her clues to the riddle by using metaphorical language. When an answer is close the riddler may say *ponopeong*, which means the guesser’s guess is closest to the riddle’s object. Note that *ponopeong* is built off of the word *tope* ‘name’ with the combination of a stem former prefix and the locative nominalizing suffix (*pong-tope-ong*).

Another interesting morphosyntactic feature that is used to provide hints is the special equative *gu-* prefix (for more about its morphosyntactic nature see §2). The *gu-* construction seems to be preserved and maintained almost solely within the riddle genre. Example (5) illustrates the use of *gu-*. The riddle’s answer is *nyava* ‘air’, and the riddler virtually gives away the answer within this response, and even uses the *nyava* ‘air, breathe’ four times in his response to the guessers. Even after this good hint the guessers were still stumped for quite a while.

- (5) *Ha’u batuanyo pakenyo*
a’u batua=nyo pake=nyo
 1SG/AB meaning=3SG/GE use=3SG/GE

nipogupakenyo, kedonyo
ni-po₁-gu-pake=nyo kedo=nyo
 IV/RE-SF-EQTV-use=3SG/GE move=3SG/GE

<i>nipogukedonyo,</i>		<i>nyavanyo</i>	
<i>ni-po₁-gu-kedo=nyo</i>		<i>nyava=nyo</i>	
IV/RE-SF-EQTV-move=3SG/GE		air=3SG/GE	
<i>nipogunyavanyo.</i>		<i>Ndau</i>	<i>diang</i>
<i>ni-po₁-gu-nyava=nyo</i>		<i>ndau</i>	<i>diang</i>
IV/RE-SF-EQTV-air=3SG/GE		NEG	EXIS
<i>batuanyo</i>		<i>toninyavai</i>	<i>nu'ito</i>
<i>batua=nyo</i>		<i>to=ni-nyava-i</i>	<i>nu='ito</i>
meaning=3SG/GE		RM=IV/RE-air-DIR	CN/GE=1PL.INC/AB
<i>manusia.</i>	<i>Io</i>	<i>batuanyo</i>	<i>nipogutu</i>
<i>manusia</i>	<i>io</i>	<i>batua=nyo</i>	<i>ni-po-gutu</i>
human	3SG/AB	meaning=3SG/GE	IV/RE-SF/FA-make
<i>nuSiopu</i>	<i>Alata'ala,</i>	<i>paey</i>	<i>nenyava. Alea'</i>
<i>nu=Siopu</i>	<i>Alata'ala</i>	<i>paey</i>	<i>N-pe-nyava alea'</i>
CN/GE=Lord	God	and.then	RE-SF/DY-air let
<i>batuanyo</i>		<i>unimpisa'</i>	<i>sono ito.</i>
<i>batua=nyo</i>		<i>'u-nimpis-a'</i>	<i>sono 'ito</i>
meaning=3SG/GE		1SG.IV/IR-thin-TZ	COM 1PL.INC/AB

'I mean, its use is its own use, its moves are its own moves, its breath is its own breath.
There is no meaning without us humans breathing it. The Lord God made it its meaning,
and then it breathed. There, I have made that meaning thin enough for you.'
[Riddle #2 Sibayu]

If the riddler deems the riddle to be easy, or the additional clues given have made it very easy to guess, then the riddler will usually say it is *menimpis* 'thin', and less frequently refer to it as *manggaang* 'light'. Riddles that are deemed difficult may be referred to as *moboat* 'heavy', *ma'apal* 'thick' or *malalo* 'deep'. If the guess is clearly not close, then the riddler may say *nagaar* 'far', *netegaar* 'not far', as in (6), or *tanasi* 'wrong answer' (the latter seems to only be used in the riddle genre).

- (6) *Netegaar seide.*
ne-te-gaar so-ide
 AV/RE-NV-far ONE-small
 'A little far.' (or: 'A bit cold.'; context: Riddler's response to a guess.) [tangke02.doc]

2 The Equative *gu-* Prefix

The verbal *gu-* prefix has a very specialized usage (possibly emphatic) in transitive constructions which can be viewed as establishing an equative function. This equative function is analyzed here as detransitivizing even though the morphosyntax used is transitive.

Examples of *gu-* in the active voice are much more like what is expected for reflex-

ives typologically, as shown in (7)-(8). Here the A and the P argument refer to the same person. Another interesting feature is that a ligature nasal (LIG) appears between the active voice affix combination and the root base.

- (7) *A'u* *noguntope* *siMesak.*
a'u *N-po₁-gu-n-tope* *si=Mesak*
 1SG/AB RE-SF-EQTV-LIG-name CN/AB=Mesak
 'I am named Mesak.' or: 'I call myself Mesak.'

- (8) *Io* *noguntope* *siMesak*
io *N-po₁-gu-n-tope* *si=Mesak*
 3SG/AB RE-SF-EQTV-LIG-name CN/AB=Mesak
 'His name is Mesak.'

Note that these reflexive-like constructions however cannot be conveyed in the inverse verb construction, as in (9).

- (9) **Si=Mesak* *ni-po₁-gu-tope=nyo.*
 =Mesak IV/RE-SF-EQTV-name=3SG/GE

Example (10) illustrates another example of *gu-* used in the active voice construction. The only known productive verb to use *gu-* in the active voice is *tope* 'name'. Examples of *gu-* in the active voice are quite rare in the corpus. However within the riddle genre, *gu-* in the inverse voice is common.

- (10) *Sampe manu' uo* *noguntope* *manu' senge.*
sampe manu' 'uo *N-po₁-gu-n-tope* *manu' senge*
 until bird yonder RE-SF- EQTV -LIG-name bird osprey
 'So that bird became known as the osprey.'
 [ceku03.jdb 090]

However, the main use of this affix is in riddles where it is always found in the inverse verb construction. The *gu* prefix is always preceded with the stem former *po* as in *nipogu-*. In over 50 narrative and folktale texts there are only two clause constructions which have the *gu-* prefix in them. And one of these two uses seems to be largely idiomatic. My language helpers both agreed that *gu-* is most commonly used in riddles, and this is borne out in my riddle corpus. This distribution supports the notion that *gu-* is a prefix used to convey a special kind of poetical sense. In riddles it is used to identify whether the object being guessed is one and the same object. That is, when *gu-* is used in the inverse voice construction the A (actor) and the P (undergoer) are in an equative relationship (as contrasted with for example partitive reflexives, see Geniušienė 1987:80). The equative prefix is normally only used on inherent noun bases. The exceptions seem to be largely idiomatic.

In example (11) the riddler uses this type of construction to provide a hint or clue to the identity of the riddle's solution. In this riddle the riddler says if humans are buried in the dirt, then what is the dirt buried with? After a few questions and answers are given

then the equative construction in (11) is given as a further clue.⁵

- (11) *Nao botonyo nipogubotonyo,*
nao boto=nyo ni-po_I-gu-boto=nyo
 that trunk=3SG/GE IV/RE-SF-EQTV-trunk=3SG/GE

roongonyo nipoguroongonyo.
roong=nyo ni-po_I-gu-roong=nyo
 leaf=3SG/GE IV/RE-SF-EQTV-leaf=3SG/GE
 ‘Its trunk is its own trunk, and its leaves are its own leaves.’
 [tangke01.doc riddle #3]

The construction is different from the active voice forms because the same root is used both in the verb and in the noun of the P argument. In addition to this the A argument must agree with the genitive possessor of the P argument. All of the examples with the *gu-* formed in this way are in the inverse construction. These clauses demonstrate that these clauses are syntactically transitive, but semantically intransitive since both the A and the P argument refer to the same entity.

Example (12) contrasts with (11) in that in the former the *gu-* prefix is absent and a different semantic effect occurs. The subscript letters in the free translation indicate that although there may be some ambiguity, in this construction there is a process or change from one entity to another (or from one part to another part of the same entity).⁶ So what makes these constructions without the *gu-* distinct from those with *gu-* are that the former are true transitives, i.e. those without the *gu-* formative have two syntactic arguments.

- (12) *Roongonyo niporoongonyo.*
roong=nyo ni-po_I-roong=nyo
 leaf=3SG/GE IV/RE-SF-leaf=3SG/GE
 ‘Their leaves_i become its leaves_j.’

Example (13) shows that removal of the *po* stem former creates an ungrammatical clause.

5. In essence the riddler is stating something pertinent about the entity (i.e. the solution) without saying what it is. After a few more questions and answers the riddler repeats the riddle, ‘if humans are buried in the earth, then what is the earth buried with?’. This process goes on for a while, until the audience gives up, although they know it has something to do with bones. The solution is given with an example. The brain is buried with the bones, but what does the brain become? It becomes dirt. So the solution to the riddle is: the dirt is buried in the bones. Now we can see that the equative construction in (11) is camouflaging the word *bu’u* ‘bones’ in both clauses.

6. The Indonesian translation of (11) and (12) are different (and note that the syntactic construction is not at all parallel between Indonesian and Pendau). The second clause in (11) is translated into Indonesian as *daunnya tetap daunnya* ‘its leaves remain its leaves’, and the similar clause without the *gu* prefix in (12) is translated as *daunnya jadi daunnya* ‘its leaves become its leaves’.

- (13) **Roong=onyo ni-roong=onyo.*
 leaf=3SG/GE IV/RE-leaf=3SG/GE

The clauses in (14)-(15) shows that the riddle object can also be referred to by extension in the first person. It is very common in Pendau riddles to refer to an inanimate object anthropomorphically.

- (14) *Roongo'u nipoguroongo'u.*
roong='u ni-po₁-gu-roong='u
 leaf=1SG/GE IV/R-SF-EQTV-leaf=1SG/GE
 'My leaf is my own leaf.'

- (15) *Baju'u upogubaju.*
baju='u 'u-po₁-gu-baju
 shirt=1SG/GE 1SG.IV/IR-SF-EQTV-shirt
 'The shirt I wear is my own shirt.'

Examples (16)-(17) are examples which contrast two similar clauses. (16) is a clause without the *gu-*, and (17) uses the *gu-* prefix. Both of these clauses occur in the same riddle. In (16) the entity of the riddle (i.e. something that can move) may be part of something else, such as a tree branch which can move, but the tree itself does not move, so the two parts/entities may be connected but have to be in a part-whole relationship. In contrast to this, in (17) the entities are entirely the same. Whatever the object is, if any one part moves the whole part moves, i.e. it is an inseparable whole. In this riddle the answer is *the air* (which of course can be used for either of these examples).⁷

- (16) *Kedonyo nipokedonyo.*
kedo=nyo ni-po₁-kedo=nyo
 move=3SG/GE IV/RE-SF-move=3SG/GE
 'Its movement can move by itself.'
 [Sibayu riddle #2; EN98.002.8]

- (17) *Kedonyo nipogukedonyo.*
kedo=nyo ni-po₁-gu-kedo=nyo
 move=3SG/GE IV/R-SF-EQTV-move=3SG/GE
 'Its movements are its own movements.'⁸
 [EN98-002.9]

7. The clauses which are parallel in structure to the clauses which have the verbal equative prefix *gu-* also appear to be equative-like. However, a proper analysis of these will have to await future research and more data than is currently available.

8. The Indonesian translation given for this was given as *geraknya dia punya gerak sendiri* literally 'its movements he/she has are its own movements.'

Examples (18)-(20) illustrate other idiosyncratic uses. These also seem to show that verbs with the *gu-* prefix have emphatic properties (notably there is no use of a P argument as in the previous examples).

- (18) *Upogumate!*
 'u-po_I-gu-mate
 1SG.IV/IR-SF-EQTV-die
 'I would rather die!'
 [king.pin 127]
- (19) *Ndau nipogusanang.*
 ndau ni-po_I-gu-sanang
 NEG IV/RE-SF-EQTV-happy
 'I myself am not happy.'
 [EN97.004.31]
- (20) *Nipogusanang.*
 ni-po_I-gu-sanang
 IV/RE-SF-EQTV-happy
 'I myself am happy.'

In my search for trying to find a similar *gu-* formative in other Western Austronesian languages, D. Barr (personal communication) informs me that there is a variation of a deictic set used in some informal situations which use a *gu* formative instead of the regular locative preposition *ri*. These are listed in figure 1 as Da'a set A and Da'a set B respectively. Da'a is a Kaili language in the Kaili-Pamona group adjacent and to the south of Pendau. In addition I have found one other possible candidate in the Tboli Philippine language, *gunu* 'this place that' (Porter 1977:21). My tentative hypothesis is that a deictic form similar to that found in Da'a preceded the innovation of the equative *gu-* verbal prefix in Pendau. This would also be the expected general grammaticization direction expected cross-linguistically as suggested in Heine and Kuteva (2002). Deictics have already been noted to be a source for copula formations (Heine and Kuteva 2002:108-109). The equative *gu-* could reasonably be seen to have copula-like manifestations in that the two elements are equated referentially in a similar manner as a copula construction. This is still rather tentative, but future research as suggested by work on grammaticization in which metaphor and/or metonymy (see Hopper and Traugott 1993:77-87 for example) play a role promises to hold good prospects for research on the development of *gu-* in the riddle game genre.

Gloss	Da'a Set A	Da'a Set B
'here'	ri se'i	gu se'i/go'i
'there'	ri sa'a	gu sa'a/go'a
'there'	ri setu	gu setu
'there'	guria	gu ria

Figure 1. *Da'a deictic paradigm with and without the gu- formative*
(data from D. Barr personal communication)

3 Conclusion

In conclusion it is striking that an infrequently occurring genre can be so rich in information. Riddles are an absorbing part of Pendau life and have provided linguistic and cultural insights. These riddle games also illustrate that important parts of grammar may be infrequent but productive, and illustrate that modern descriptivists need to also describe word play and verbal art whenever encountered in a language as part of the total description. They also provide linguistic clues for testing grammaticization theories that may prove helpful in comparative and historical reconstruction work as well as typological investigations.

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