

# 9. The Structure of Chanted Ipili *Tindi*

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## Introduction

The Ipili people of the Porgera and Paiyala valleys of Papua New Guinea have traditional tales, called *tindi*, which may be told either in ordinary spoken style or as long poetic chanted tales. Information about the Ipili people and *tindi* can be found in the chapter 8 of this volume.

Spoken versions of *tindi* are shorter and less elaborate than the chanted versions. Chanted *tindi* are not memorized poems, but are recreated from traditional elements in each performance. While anyone may tell a spoken version, only skilled tellers are capable of performing chanted versions. The fact that great skill is required for the performance was demonstrated by unsuccessful attempts of two men who were not traditional tellers. They were able to imitate the chant melody, but were excessively repetitive and could not produce the rich poetic language of a skilled chanter.

The chanters I recorded were all men and mostly middle-aged, three of whom performed more than once. The observations in this article are based on seven *tindi* chanted by four men from the Paiyala in 1964–65: Alua, Kaneanda, Pinyati (two tales), and Yandapake (three tales). As might be expected, there are minor differences in style among the chanters.<sup>1</sup>

The *tindi* were not performed in natural storytelling settings, but under field conditions specifically for the purpose of making a recording. The teller typically sat cross-legged on the ground inside a house and rocked back and forth during the performance without attempting to make eye contact with the listeners or accompanying the chanting with gestures. In order to make recordings that would be clear enough to transcribe later, the number of people present was limited, and they were instructed not to speak during the recording. The recordings, therefore, do not provide information as to what the normal interactions between the teller and the audience might be.

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<sup>1</sup> One chanted *tindi* was recorded in 2000 in the Porgera region. Although there are many similarities with the 1960s *tindi*, there are greater differences than among the 1960s versions. Since only one tale was collected in 2000, it is not possible to know to what extent the differences are due to the stylistic variation of a single chanter, regional differences, or developments in chanting style since the 1960s. The 2000 chanter learned to chant *tindi* from his father, who was also a chanter. His skill is recognized among the Ipili people by the fact that he has been able to charge admission to his performances.

*Tindi* have an internal structure which divides the long tale into segments and lines determined largely by the chant melody but also by a limited number of conventional phrases at the end of segments and lines. These structural elements will be described in the following sections.

## Segments

Segments are delineated by pauses and the chant melody of the line immediately preceding the pause, which differs from a normal line by having a slightly different melody at the end and a greater-than-normal lengthening of the final syllable. All the chanters ended the segment with a lengthened, semantically empty final *o* (as discussed in chapter 1 under the rubric of “vocables”). There is also usually a final phrase, meaning that the teller is repeating what has been passed down, which is added to an otherwise normal line. The most common such ending is *leai tupa ya-o* ‘this is what they said’.

The length of a segment is not fixed, with some chanters preferring shorter segments than others. There were segments as short as three lines and others well over a hundred. Segments do not necessarily coincide with episodes in the story. Although an episode may end before a pause, the pause may also be inserted at a suspenseful moment or elsewhere in the narration. Repetition sets of the sort described by Borchard and Gibbs in chapter 8 often occur before a pause and are never interrupted by a pause.

Pauses between segments also varied in length. Some chanters took the opportunity to relax for a moment, clear their throats, or engage in chitchat with listeners. At other times the pauses were only long enough to take a breath. In general, short pauses followed short segments, and longer pauses followed longer segments.

As the tale resumes following a pause, there is frequently an introductory phrase such as *de ote*, which corresponds to something like the English ‘well’, or *ondo atape* ‘wait’. Another common way to resume the narration is a brief recapitulation or reference to what has happened just before the pause. For example, the beginning of the second segment in the tale told by Pinyati is:<sup>2</sup>

74. uane peane-ko yalua andele-pa  
thus did.3sg-def seems you.see-?  
It seems he did that; do you see?

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2 The numbers in examples refer to lines in the *tindi*. The transcription used here is similar to the orthography developed by Terrance Borchard. Minor differences are the use of single vowels for all monosyllabic words (there is no vowel length distinction in Ipili) and word divisions. Abbreviations used in the interlinear translation are: 3sg (third-person singular); aux (auxiliary); def (definite marker); emph (emphatic); loc (locative); T (poetic word not used in ordinary speech); V (variety of); ? (interrogative marker). No attempt has been made in the translation to identify individual inflectional and derivational morphemes.

## Lines

Lines of a *tindi* are marked by the chant melody. There are usually slight pauses between lines, but occasionally two or more lines may be chanted without such a break. Lines may optionally be embellished with a final *o*, but it is not lengthened as much the *o* at the end of segments. Lines are variable in length with no rhyming, alliterative, or metrical structure. The principal poetic device is the parallelism described by Borchard and Gibbs in chapter 8. Some chanters subdivided lines by lengthening an internal part of the line, usually at a syntactic constituent boundary.

A line may equal a sentence, but a sentence may also be spread out over several lines. Although a line may consist of what could be a normal spoken utterance, it usually is more elaborate.

Lines usually contain words which have no relevance to the story line. Interpreters omit them in translation and when asked, say they have no meaning even though the words may have literal meanings elsewhere. For example, *mind* ‘one, a’ has no meaning in the line from Yandapake (1964c):

38. yawo yapu lo amo nana mindi pea ote  
 baking divide aux.-ing across down one went.3sg emph  
 Baking [food], he went around dividing it up.

Many lines end in formulaic expressions to indicate that the story comes from what someone else has said. Examples of this are *lea* ‘said’ and *lama epea* ‘came to say’. Another type of formulaic line ending is one that evokes involvement of the listener. Examples of such expressions are *yalua andele-pa* ‘it is, do you see/know?’<sup>3</sup> and *andoko* ‘see’.<sup>4</sup>

The passage below of some typical *tindi* lines comes from a tale performed by Alua in 1965 (an audio file of this example can be found in online item 12).<sup>5</sup>

Line 22 consists of a clause embedded in a locative phrase followed by a formulaic ending *lama epea* ‘he came to say’, indicating that this is not something that the teller knows from personal knowledge. The sentence is continued in line 23. Again there is a reference to this having been told by someone else: *lea* ‘he said’. It should be noted that in ordinary Ipili speech there is an affix *-pia* added to remote past inflections to indicate that the speaker does not know of the event from personal knowledge. This affix does not occur in the chanted *tindi*.

3 The verb *anda*, having the basic meaning ‘see’, also means ‘know’.

4 The word *andoko* also means ‘where’, but here seems just to be a means of involving the listener, like the colloquial English tag ‘see’.

5 Readers who listen to the online recording of these lines should note that there is a false start before line 32, in which the performer mistakenly repeats part of line 31.

22. wamba yale pua yandeane-sia lama epea  
 before like doing planted.3sg-loc to.say came.3sg  
 Where he planted as he had done before, it was said,
23. komba iyu kiya-laliya tupa yo peane lea  
 komba up komba plural putting did.3sg said.3sg  
 He planted *komba* [a cabbage-like edible leafy plant], it was said.
24. komba iyu kiyala tupa yo peane lea  
 komba up komba plural putting did.3sg said.3sg  
 He planted *komba*, it was said.
25. wamba yale pua yandeane-sia lama epea  
 before like doing planted.3sg-loc to.say came.3sg  
 Where he planted as he had done before, it was said,
26. tikili ulia mole mokea lama epea-o  
 Tsweet.potato sweet.potato Vsweet.potato Vsweet.potato to.say came.3sg-o  
*Mole* and *mokea* sweet potatoes, it was said,  
 [“T” indicates that this is poetic vocabulary not used in ordinary speech.  
 “V” indicates a variety of plant for which I do not know an English equivalent]
27. papo upapo lama epea-o  
 Tsweet.potato Vsweet.potato to.say came.3sg-o  
*Upapo* sweet potatoes, it was said,
28. utupane ote poli poko ne tete pima epeane ya lea  
 them emph Trat bush.rat tooth chew to.do came.3sg was said.3sg  
 bush rats came to chew them, it was said.
29. poloko ne tete pima epeane ya lea-o  
 house.rat tooth chew do came.3sg was said.3sg-o  
 House rats came to chew them, it was said.
30. de ote atu ote yoko yandauwa-ko o de lo  
 well emph enough emph cultivating I.planted-def o well saying  
 Saying, “Well, I have planted enough.”
31. kope yale anda mindi pukale piako o de lo  
 Tbig like house a I.will.do that o - saying  
 Saying, “I will build a big house.”
32. anda mindi pukale ondo atape lea  
 house a I.will.do wait be said.3sg  
 He said, “I will build a house, wait.”

Line 23 also illustrates another characteristic of *tindi* language: specialized vocabulary not used in ordinary speech. *Kiya-laliya* is used only in poetic language and has the same meaning as the normal word *komba*, an edible leafy plant in the cabbage family. Many of these poetic words are well known to everyone, but some are obscure, and Ipili speakers were sometimes unable to translate

lines because they did not understand them. At times, as in line 23, the use of the ordinary word in addition to the poetic vocabulary aids in understanding the meaning.

Although the use of words indicating location is common in ordinary Ipili speech, it is much more frequent in *tindi*. *Iyu* ‘up’ in line 23 would probably not be used this way in an ordinary sentence, but here provides an embellishment.

Line 24 illustrates the repetition discussed by Borchard and Gibbs (chapter 8). In this line, only a single word is changed from line 23: *kiyala*. In this instance the substituted word is derived from a word used in the previous line, *kiya*, by adding the syllable *la*.<sup>6</sup> It also bears some phonetic resemblance to *laliya*, one of the words in the two-word expression in the previous line for which it substitutes.

Lines 25–28 form another sentence. Line 25 is a repetition of line 22. Lines 26 and 27 again use poetic vocabulary and the formulaic *lama epea* of line 25, but this time embellished with a final *o*. Lines 28 and 29 form another pair of parallel lines with partial repetition. In line 28, *ote*, which ordinarily is an emphatic particle, seems to be here a simple embellishment.

Line 30 has embedded direct discourse, beginning with an introductory interjection *de* ‘well’ and ending with *o de*, which seems to be an expression to invite a response from the listener. Line 31, because it is continuing the thought in line 30, omits the introductory expression in 30. It should be noted that the *piako* of line 31, normally translated as ‘that’, has the function here of making the clause of line 30 the background for line 31 and could be translated ‘since’ or ‘and so’, giving the two lines the meaning ‘I have planted enough, and so I will build a big house’.

Line 32 contains the phrase *ondo atape*, which was translated ‘wait’, but occurs in *tindi* much more commonly than in ordinary speech. Its function is not clear.

## Chant

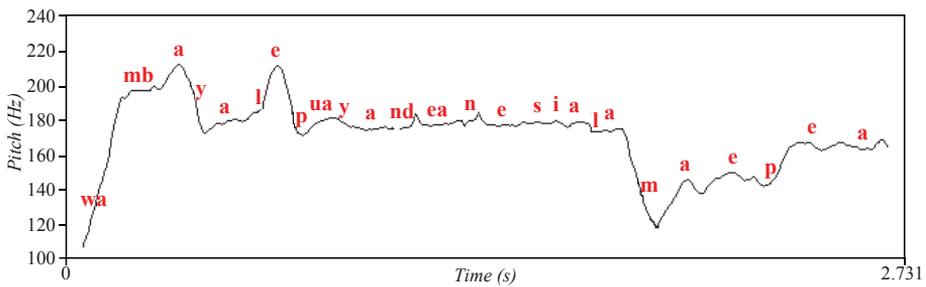
The chant melody is a general pitch contour for a line. The pitch range varies from one chanter to another and is within the chanter’s normal speaking range. The chant typically begins with a rising pitch on the first syllable. Within the line there are normally a series of syllables at more or less the same pitch, but there may also be rises and falls internally. Often lines are chanted in pairs with the

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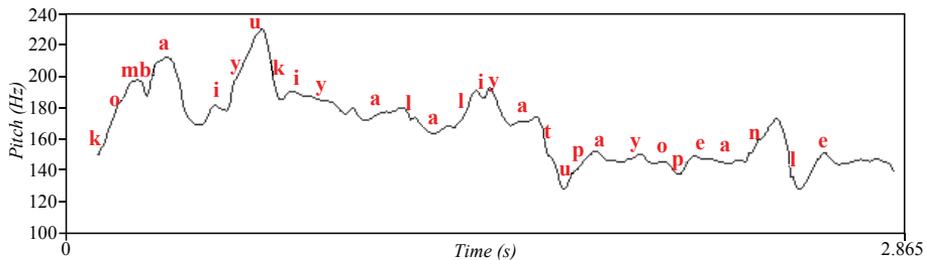
<sup>6</sup> Sets of such poetic words are also used in traditional songs. See Ingemann 1968 for further examples of sets of these words.

first of the lines rising at the end and the second falling. These pairs of chanted melodies do not necessarily coincide with the repeated parallel lines of the text. Figures 1 to 6 represent pitch movements in lines from three different chanters.<sup>7</sup>

Figures 1 and 2 represent the pitch change in the first two lines of the sample passage given above. Note that in the first line the pitch rises on the first syllable, drops in the middle portion to a sustained mid level, drops towards the end and then rises. At the beginning of the second line the pitch contour is similar but at the end has a high pitch followed by a low one.



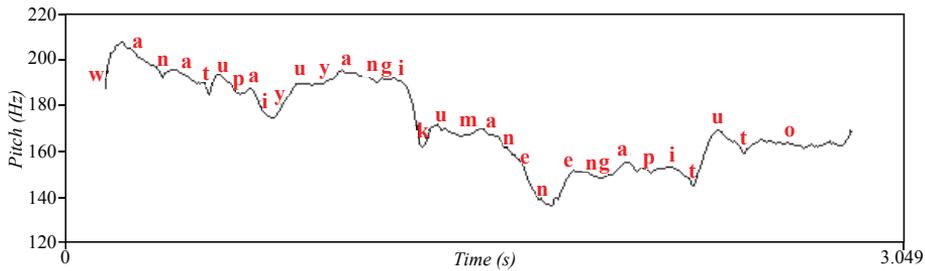
**Figure 1.** Alua (1965:line 22): *wamba yale pua yandea ne sia lama epea* ‘where he planted as he had done before, it was said’. An audio file of this example can be found in online item 12.



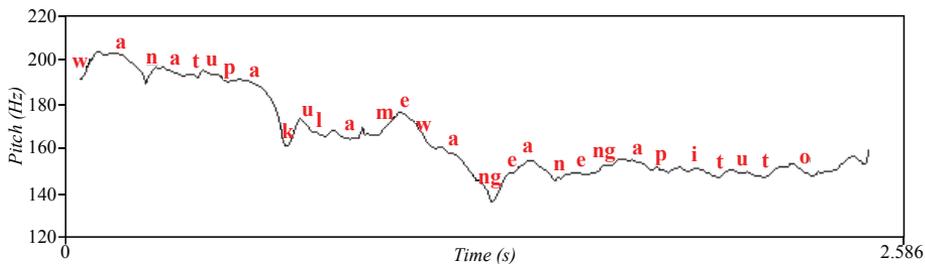
**Figure 2.** Alua (1965:line 23): *komba iyu kiya-laliya tupa yo peane lea* ‘he planted komba, it was said’. An audio file of this example can be found in online item 12.

<sup>7</sup> These figures were produced by the Praat acoustic analysis program. Minor fluctuations in pitch should be ignored since they represent influences of consonant and vowel articulations. There may also be other fluctuations attributable to lexical tone, which has not been fully analysed and is not marked in the transcription.

Figures 3 and 4 show the chant melody as produced by another *tindi* teller. These are the first two lines in Borchard and Gibbs's figure 11 in chapter 8. Like the contour in figure 1, figure 3 displays a rise to high pitch at the beginning, a gradual descent, and a rise to a higher level at the end. Figure 4 has a similar contour but the end does not have a rise.

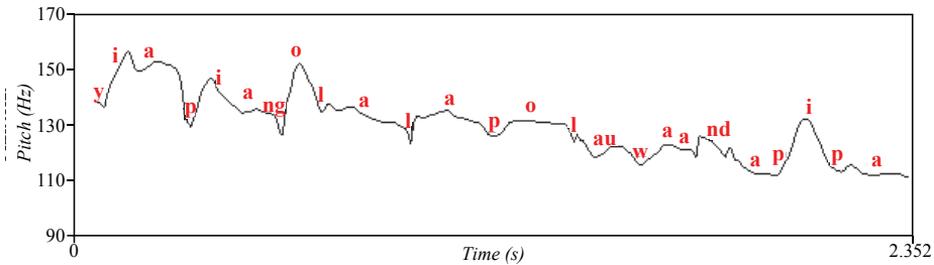


**Figure 3.** Kaneanda (1965:line 827): *wana tupa iyu yangi kuma nene-nga pitu-to* ‘girls sitting up on Mt. Kuma’. An audio file of this example can be found in online item 13.



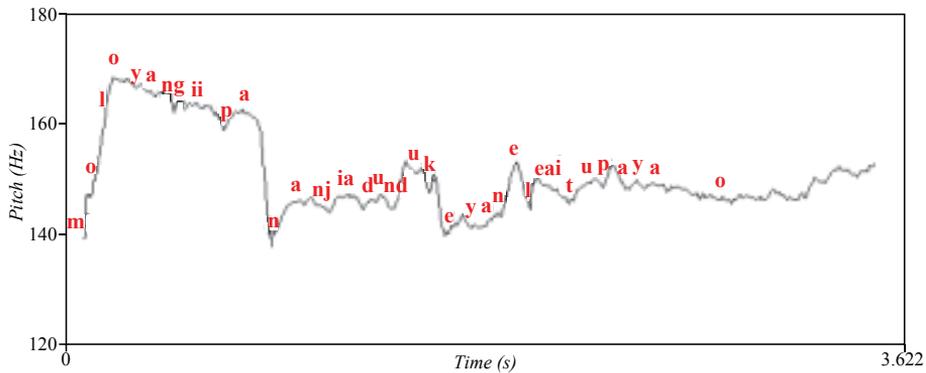
**Figure 4.** Kaneanda (1965:line 828): *wana tupa kulame wangeane-nga pitu-to* ‘girls sitting up on Mt. Kulame’. An audio file of this example can be found in online item 13.

Figure 5 represents the pitch contour of a third *tindi* chanter. The line is the first one in text 26 in Borchard and Gibbs (chapter 8). This chanter has a lower pitch range than the previous two, but the contour is much the same as in figure 2, with a rise and a fall at the end.



**Figure 5.** Yandapake (1964b:line 24): *yia piango-la lapo lauwa andapi-pa* ‘both previously mentioned pig and dog’. An audio file of this example can be found in online item 14.

Figure 6 represents a line at the end of a segment as chanted by the same man whose lines are shown in figures 3 and 4. The main part of the line is similar to non-final lines, but ends with the level final phrase *leai tupa ya* and a very long *o* with a rise at the very end.



**Figure 6.** Kaneanda (1965:line 68): *molo yangi ipa nanjia dundu keyane leai tupa ya-o* ‘he climbed up over along Nanjia River, they said’. An audio file of this example can be found in online item 15.

## Sets

Sets of lines based on repetitions have been discussed by Borchard and Gibbs (chapter 8). These sets are usually two or three lines in length, but there are some longer. There is one place within the line where one or more words differ, but the end of the lines normally remains the same. Such sets are illustrated by lines 23–24, 26–27, and 28–29 in the passage from Alua given above. The word that changes may be normal vocabulary or a poetic word used only in tales

and traditional songs. Often the portion that changes is the name of a place, clan, or person. Some of the specialized poetic vocabulary is well known and understood by all listeners. For example, *lanema* is frequently used in place of *yia* ‘pig’, and *gulupi* and *maiya* are used in repetition sets in place of *ana* ‘stone, moon’. Other words or phrases were not understood by Ipili speakers who helped translate the stories. At times the *tindi* teller helps the listener by adding a classifier word such as *sia* ‘tree’.

Frequently in the first two lines of a set, there is phonetic resemblance between the words that alter the line. The most common way of forming the second of these words is by adding a syllable. For example, *Kima*, the name of a main character in *tindi*, becomes *Kimape* in a repetition set.

## Content

Although *tindi* stories differ in detail, there are a number of events and descriptions which occur in more than one. The main story line usually recounts how a young man develops into an adult, gets a wife, and eventually disappears into the clouds, which those helping translate the *tindi* explained meant going to heaven. The young man is usually living alone in an isolated area, sometimes with a brother and occasionally an aging mother. Frequently, the young man is described as being scrawny and unattractive. At some point in the story, he meets a young woman up in the mountain forests. After spending some time with her, he turns into a strong, good-looking man and receives from her items of personal adornment so that he returns home a well-developed and well-outfitted man. This part of the story is a reference to the time when boys at puberty would leave inhabited areas to live in the mountain forests, undergo ritual cleansing, perform magic spells so that their hair would grow long enough to form the large traditional hair style, and return to the inhabited area as adults.

*Tindi* usually include passages about making a garden, going hunting, meeting a young woman, paying compensation to the bride’s family, and going to a dance. These events contain similar details and descriptions from one *tindi* to the next. The interweaving of these conventional elements and descriptions facilitates the recreation of the tale.

## Conclusion

Melodic lines, segmentation, conventional phrases (particularly at the end of lines and segments), repetition, and poetic vocabulary are all features of an Ipili *tindi*. *Tindi* tellers differ slightly in style, but they have enough in common to make the Ipili *tindi* a well-defined genre. The use of conventional themes, stock phrases, and repetition facilitate the recreation of a *tindi* each time it is performed.

## Acknowledgements

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