8. Exploring oral formulaic language

Introduction

The study of the use of formulaic language in oral epic poetry—research begun by Milman Parry (1930) and continued by Alfred Lord (1960)—has prompted extensive investigations across a wide spectrum of languages (see Foley 1985). With the enormous proliferation of this research, many different research directions have emerged. For some literary scholars, formulaic language has been used as evidence to argue for an oral tradition underlying the production of ancient literary texts; for others, dealing with living poetic traditions, formulaic language has been seen as a means of sustaining coherent performance, allowing poets considerable oral fluency and a capacity for substantial recall.

As Alan Rumsey (2001) noted in an important recent paper, Parry’s original definition of a formula was ‘a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea’ (Parry 1930:80). This definition fits only certain forms of oral poetry. The variety of the world’s oral poetry defies such simple summary. Not all oral poetry operates under strict ‘metrical conditions’, but may be subject to other compositional constraints. Hence, as research on ‘oral formulaic language’ has increased, the definition of what is ‘formulaic’ has become elusive and needs to be set forth carefully for particular traditions of oral composition. More generally, there is the question as to what precisely is formulaic for a particular poet, or for a particular speech community, or across related speech communities. In this brief chapter, I would like to consider some of these issues by way of illustration.

Since 1965, I have been recording oral poets, known as manahelo (‘those who chant’), from the island of Rote in eastern Indonesia. These recordings have resulted in a substantial corpus of ritual texts. The island of Rote was once divided into 18 small domains, each of which claimed to be socially and culturally distinctive. Reflecting this social divergence, the language of the island consists of a chain of dialects whose ends are not mutually intelligible. To date, I have recorded mainly

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1 This paper was originally written for inclusion in a Festschrift for Andrew Pawley, a colleague and friend. It appeared in the volume edited by John Bowden and Nikolas P. Himmelman entitled A Journey through Austronesian and Papuan Linguistics and Cultural Space (Canberra: Pacific Linguistics, 2010, pp. 573–87). My original introduction began with a tribute to Andrew Pawley. I have omitted that peroration to be able to accommodate this paper more appropriately in this volume. Here, however, I wish to reiterate my respect for Pawley’s work as a linguist and to thank him for his longstanding commitment to comparative Austronesian research and his support of our mutual friendship.
in the dialect of the central domain of Termanu and the south-western dialect of
the domain of Thie, though I am now engaged in recording from dialects across
the entire island.

The corpus of the texts I have gathered deals with the origins of the cultural
artefacts of the Rotenese: of fire and of cooking, of rice and millet, of the house
and its designs, of bride-wealth including water buffalo, and of the tools for
building, for weaving, for dyeing and for spinning. The corpus also includes
a large number of mortuary chants as well as prayers, sermons and parts of a
local Christian liturgy, which is composed in a traditional mode. Over several
decades, I have published a considerable number of papers on individual texts,
but I have never published comparisons among these compositions. It is only
by way of such comparisons that one can appreciate the formulaic aspects of
this oral poetry.

In 1965, I began recording a particular chant (bini) known as Suti Solo do
Bina Bane. Over time, I have recorded this chant from numerous oral poets,
particularly in the domain of Termanu, where I have done much of my research.
Besides recording in the dialect of Termanu, I have recorded this chant in other
dialects. I have also been particularly interested in recording the same poet
reciting the same chant at different stages in his career. As a consequence, my
collection of Suti Solo do Bina Bane texts is itself substantial and continues to
grow with each new recording session.

In this chapter, I wish to compare the use of oral formulaic language by five
different poets, each reciting what can be regarded as the same passage in the
chant Suti Solo do Bina Bane. For one of these poets, I provide recitations of
this passage at an interval of several years to illustrate continuity in personal
composition. Four of these poets come from the domain of Termanu; one comes
from the domain of Ringgou, whose dialect is substantially different from that of
Termanu. This offers an illustration of the use of oral formulaic language across
different speech communities.

**Suti Solo do Bina Bane** as an oral composition

*Suti Solo do Bina Bane* recounts the journey of two shells cast ashore by the
sea. These shells, whose dual name is Suti Solo//Bina Bane, are taken up in the
scoop-nets of women fishing along the coast. Once on land, these shells repeatedly
voice their feelings of displacement and appeal for permanent companionship.
In response, the women urge the shells to shift from one symbolic location to
another. They are told, for example, to find their place with the ‘Syrup Vat and
the Rice Basket’, then with the ‘Millet’s Grain and Ears of Maize’, then with
the ‘Tree’s Shade and Lontar’s Shadow’ or with the ‘Forest Cuckoo and River
Watercock’. As each of these sites is vulnerable to change and can only be a temporary resting place, the shells continue to plead for permanence. Their metaphoric journey is a quest for an enduring place of rest.

Originally this chant was recited to reveal and recount the origins of two different kinds of shell: the one used for holding dyes (suti) and the other used as the base for the spinning whorl (bina). As these rituals for dyeing and weaving have ceased to be performed, however, the chant has been transformed into a mortuary chant for ‘orphans and widows’—a category that can be applied to all human beings in conditions of dependency (see Fox 1988). Depending on the intention of the poet, the chant can be given various endings. In Termanu, the shells either are fashioned into implements or return to the sea.

All origin chants may once have formed part of a single narrative structure that recounted relations between the Sun and Moon and the Lords of the Ocean and Sea. Key passages in most versions of Suti Solo do Bina Bane that I have recorded betray the connections to this larger epic structure by alluding to events in the realm of the sea that caused the shells to be cast forth on land.

The excerpts that I have selected from each of the poet’s compositions vary in length from 13 to 19 lines. Each composition consists of a dialogue between the shells and the women who scooped them up from the sea. The women urge Suti Solo//Bina Bane to find a place with the Rice Basket and Syrup Vat. The pair replies that they will do so, but they worry that when the Rice Basket and Syrup Vat are emptied, they will no longer have a place to remain.

Here, it is important to note that the women who are named in this dialogue as well as the two shells are each conceived of as single dual-named beings. The third-person singular is more generally used than any plural, but third-person plural forms can and do occur in these compositions. Before presenting these various compositions, it is essential to note the conventions of canonical parallelism that apply to them and the research tradition that has developed in the study of this form of poetic composition.

**Canonical parallelism in relation to an oral formula**

All compositions in Rotenese poetry (or ‘ritual language’, as I have termed these poetic compositions in many of my publications) are characterised by a strict lexical pairing. Apart from a small number of unpaired forms—pronouns, connectives, ‘prepositional’ and a few other invariant elements—all lexical terms have at least one pair. Thus, in formal terminology, each semantic element must form part of a ‘dyadic set’. In composition, dyadic sets produce parallel lines
whose overwhelmingly most common poetic form is the couplet, though other serial arrangements of lines are entirely acceptable and are often considered as evidence of a greater mastery of the language. The elements that compose any particular dyadic set should, in their parallel lines (or occasionally in the two halves of a single line), correspond exactly in position and as far as possible in morphological structure.

The canonical parallelism that occurs in Rotenese is a pervasive feature of much of the world’s oral literature. The linguist Roman Jakobson, who contributed greatly to the study of parallelism, described the study of parallelism as opening ‘the double door linking the fields of linguistics and anthropology’.

In Jakobson’s terminology, the required lexical pairing of semantic elements and the network of associations that underlies this pairing represent a canonical ordering of the paradigmatic or ‘metaphoric pole’ of language (Jakobson and Halle 1956:76–82). Rotenese ritual language is also remarkably well ordered along the syntagmatic or what Jakobson called the ‘metonymic pole’ of language. Phrases and lines in these oral compositions are frequently composed of recognisable formulae that, because of the strict requirements of parallelism, become redoubled in parallel formulae. Thus, a considerable portion of Rotenese ritual language consists of couplets and even longer sequences that are formulaic in a paradigmatic and a syntagmatic sense.

Within a large corpus of textual materials, the importance of these formulae becomes increasingly evident. While retaining the required pairing of words, poets add individual grammatical embellishments to distinguish their usage from that of other poets. Individual poets thus develop their own personal ‘style’ in relation to certain ‘standard’ forms of their dialect area. The interaction of the formulaic features of ritual language with the rules of parallel composition creates further complexity. One question to be addressed is how these formulae and the pairs underlying them vary among the speech communities of different dialect areas, especially since a high proportion of synonymous dyadic sets are composed of a word from the local dialect and that of some neighbouring dialect.

**Suti Solo do Bina Bane: The first poet, Stefanus Adulanu**

This first excerpt—the Syrup Vat and Rice Basket sequence—consists of 19 lines from a poem of 297 lines. I recorded this poem from one of the senior poets of the domain of Termanu, Stefanus Adulanu, in 1966. Adulanu was the head of the Meno clan. He was known as ‘Old Meno’ and held the ritual position of
Head of the Earth (*Dae Langak*). His version of *Suti Solo do Bina Bane* is perhaps the finest and certainly the most extended version of this poem that I have gathered in Termanu.

Apart from personal names (Pedu Hange//Nggeti Seti), which themselves form sets, the poem is composed of 10 dyadic sets: 1) *kokolak*/dede’ak (‘to speak’///’to talk’); 2) *inak*/fetok (‘woman’///’girl’); 3) *eki*/hika (‘to scream’///’to laugh’); 4) *setele*/mata-dale (‘shrieking’///’gaily’); 5) tua bou//neka hade (‘syrup vat’///’rice basket’); 6) malole//mandak (‘good’///’proper’); 7) bou//soka (‘vat’///’sack’); 8) (lama-)kako//(lama-)lua (‘to overflow’///’to run over’); 9) fude//bafa (‘froth’///’mouth’); 10) *totono*/lulunu (partially reduplicated form of *tono*/lunu) (‘to overturn’///’to roll up’).

Of interest is the compound set *tua bou*/neka hade (‘syrup vat’///’rice basket’). The components of this compound can and do occur on their own in other sets. Here, however, they appear to form a ‘personified’ set. In a literary sense, they suggest a ‘living entity’, who can serve as a potential partner of the shells. (Hence, in my translation of the poems, I have capitalised them to suggest their implied personhood.)

**Passage: Poem I**

‘Na Bina au o se
Ma Suti au o se
Fo au kokolak o se
Ma au dede’ak o se?’
Boe ma inak-ka Nggeti Seti
Ma fetok-ka Pedu Hange nae:
‘Te eki setele henin
Ma hika mata-dale henin na,
Suti mo Tua Bou
Ma Bina mo Neka Hade.’
Boe ma nae:
‘Oo malole-la so
Ma mandak-kala so.
Te leo bou lama-kako fude
Ma soka lama-lua bafa
Fo bou lo totonon
Ma soka no lulunu,
Na Suti au o se
Ma Bina au o se?’

‘Then I, Bina, with whom will I be
And I, Suti, with whom will I be
With whom will I talk
And with whom will I speak?
The woman Nggeti Seti
And the girl Pedu Hange says:
[If] they scream with a shriek at losing you
And laugh gaily at losing you,
Then Suti, go with Syrup Vat
Then Bina, go with the Rice Basket.’
Then he says:
‘Oh, these things are good
And these things are proper.
But if the vats overflow with froth
And the sacks run over at the mouth
So that the vats must be overturned
And the sacks must be rolled up,
Then I, Suti, with whom will I be
And I, Bina, with whom will I be?’
This excerpt provides a basis on which to begin the consideration of a succession of other versions of this same passage composed by different oral poets.

**Suti Solo do Bina Bane**: The second poet, Eli Pellondou

This second excerpt consists of 23 lines from a chant of 210 lines. I recorded it from the poet Eli Pelondou, who was more commonly known by the nickname Seu Ba’i. He was a proud, soft-spoken man of clan Dou Danga and was particularly close to ‘Old Meno’, Stefanus Adulanu. I first met him on a visit to Old Meno’s home in Ola Lain and it appeared to me that he had informally apprenticed himself to the old man. His version of *Suti Solo do Bina Bane* reflects, I believe, this influence.

This excerpt relies on six of the 10 dyadic sets used in Old Meno’s composition: 1) kokolak//dede’ak; 2) toa bou//neka hade; 3) malole//mandak; 4) lulunu//totono; 5) (lama-)kako//(lama-)lua; 6) bafa//fude; as well as two other dyadic sets not used in the Meno version: 7) (nama-)tani//(nasa-)kedu (‘to cry’//‘to sob’); and 8) sama//deta (‘like’//‘as’).

In this passage, Seu Ba’i recites one line for which he fails to provide a complement. Were this line to exist, the appropriate complement for the verb *(masa-)lai* (‘to rest, lie down’) would have been *(manga-)tu* (‘to sit’).

Pedu Hange//Nggeti Seti is the name of the woman who scoops up the shells. As is clear in the context of the longer poem, she is the speaker in this passage who tells Suti Solo//Bina Bane to ‘Go with the Syrup Vat//Go with the Rice Basket’. The woman Lole Holu//Lua Bafa is referred to as the ideal partner, whom Suti Solo//Bina Bane longs to find.

Given that dyadic sets can be treated either as singulars or as plurals, in any single poem, poets can move back and forth from singular to plural. In general, however, they tend to use singular verbs for dual chant characters. For the most part, Pedu Hange//Nggiti Seti or Suti Solo//Bina Bane are treated as single (singular) figures.

**Passage: Poem II**

*Boe te Suti neu nama-tani*  
*Ma Bina neu nasa-kedu,*  
*Nasa-kedu Lole Holu*  
*Ma nama-tani Lua Bafa.*  
*Boe te ana dede’ak no Suti*  

But Suti begins to cry
And Bina begins to sob,
Sobs for Lole Holu
And cries for Lua Bafa.
So she speaks with Suti
Ma ana kokolak no Bina, lae: And she talks with Bina, saying:
‘Mo tua bou ‘Go with the Syrup Vat
Ma mo neka hade And go with the Rice Basket
Fo masa-lai tua bou. That you may rest in the Syrup Vat.
[Line missing] [And that you may sit in the Rice Basket.]’
Boe te Bina neu kokolak But Bina begins to talk
Ma Suti neu dede’ak, nae: And Suti begins to speak, saying:
‘Au u o tua bou ‘I will go with the Syrup Vat
Ma au [u] o neka hade: And I will go with the Rice Basket.
De malole ndia so This is good
Do mandak ndia so. Or this is proper.
Te neka lamakako bafa But if the baskets overflow at the mouth
Fo soka lo lulunun So that the sacks must be rolled up
Ma tua lamaluua fude And the syrup runs over with froth
Fo bou lo totonon, So that the vats must be overturned,
Au dede’ak o se With whom can I speak
Ma au kokolak o se? And with whom can I talk?
Sama leo Lua Bafa Just as with Lua Bafa
Ma deta leo Lole Holu?’ And exactly as with Lole Holu?’

It is particularly interesting to note that despite the fact that Seu Ba’i’s passage relies on many of the same dyadic sets as Old Meno’s passage, only two lines in these passages are the same. It is instructive to compare the way in which each poet expresses what might be considered the same ‘formulaic’ lines.

Old Meno gives the following two lines:

‘Oo malole-la so ‘Oh, these things are good
Ma mandak-kala so.’ And these things are proper.’

Seu Ba’i, on the other hand, renders this same formula as follows:

De malole ndia so’ ‘This is good
Do mandak ndia so.’ Or this is proper.’

Old Meno then goes on to recite the following lines:

‘Te leo bou lamakako fude ‘But if the vat overflows with froth
Ma soka lamaluua bafa And the sack runs over at the mouth
Fo bou lo totonon So that the vat must be overturned
Ma soka no lulunun…’ And the sack must be rolled up…’

In the last two of these four lines, Old Meno does what expert poets do frequently (to the maddening frustration of the translator): he creates a kind of contrastive dyadic set by coupling a plural form (lo) with a singular form (no).
Seu Ba’i renders these lines in a slightly different fashion. Where vat//sack (bou//soka) form a set in relation to the verbs (lama-kako//lama-lua) in Old Meno’s composition, Seu Ba’i uses the set basket//syrup (neka//tua) with these verbs. He does, however, maintain a plural agreement throughout.

‘Te neka lama-kako bafa
Fo soka lo lulunun
Ma tua lama-lua fude
Fo bou lo totonon…’

‘But if the basket overflows at the mouth
So that the sack must be rolled up
And the syrup runs over with froth
So that the vat must be overturned…’

Technically, soka lo lulunun//bou lo totonon are the only lines that both poets share, yet even this seemingly shared similarity has been altered by Old Meno’s use of a singular and a plural form.

Suti Solo do Bina Bane: The third poet, Mikael Pellondou

In 1985, on a brief trip to Rote, I was told of the death of Seu Ba’i. Among the group who came to tell me of his death was a clan cousin of his from Dou Danga, Mikael Pellondou. As far as I have been able to determine, the two men had the same great-grandfather. They had lived in close proximity to one another and referred to each other as ‘elder’ and ‘younger’. On hearing of Seu Ba’i’s death, I expressed my sadness and praised him for his abilities as a master poet. In response, others in the group quickly informed me that Mikael was also an able poet, and to demonstrate his ability, Mikael agreed to record for me his version of Suti Solo do Bina Bane. This passage is taken from that version.

This is an excerpt of 15 lines from a composition that runs to only 101 lines. Although shorter than the two previous excerpts, it contains many of the same sets. Mikael Pellondou uses: 1) kokolak//dede’ak; 2) inak//fetok; 3) toa bou//neka hade; and 4) fude//bafo; but instead of (lama-) kako//((lama-) lua, he uses: 5) (lama-)kako//((lama-)solo, which has much the same meaning. The only new set is a commonly used set: 6) (na-)tane//((na-)nosi (‘to ask’//’to request’). Also in Mikael’s composition, the name Pedu Hange//Nggeti Seti is given as Pedu Hange//Suti Seti. Although this seems only a minor difference, it is over the names of chant characters that poets have their greatest arguments.

Passage: Poem III

Boe te na-tane ma na-nosi.
‘Bina dede’ak no se
Ma Suti kokolak no se?’

But he still asks and requests.
‘With whom will Bina speak
And with whom will Suti talk?’
Exploring oral formulaic language

Boe te inak le Pedu Hange
Ma fetok le Suti Seti, nae:
‘Dede’ak mo neka hade
Ma kokolak mo tua bou.’
Boe te Suti na-tane
Ma Bina na-nosi, de nae:
‘Au dede’ak o tua bou
Ma au kokolak o neka hade
Te neka lama-kako bafo,
Na au dede’ak o se
Ma tua lama-solo fude,
Na au kokolak o se?’

Suti Solo do Bina Bane: The fourth poet,
Petrus (Pe’u) Malesi

Of all the poets of Termanu, Pe’u Malesi was the one from whom I recorded the most material. He was a frequent visitor to my home at Ufa Len and probably the most willing of all poets in Termanu to seek to have his compositions recorded.²

Like Seu Ba’i, Malesi was a member of clan Dou Danga, but the two men were rivals. Seu Ba’i, in particular, would challenge Malesi’s knowledge of the names of chant characters and, in fact, as is evident in Malesi’s telling of Suti Solo do Bina Bane, the names of the key women who scoop the shells from the sea are entirely different.

Due to the closeness of our relationship, I had the opportunity to record various versions of Suti Solo do Bina Bane as recited by Malesi. Here, I include two such versions, one recorded in 1973 and the other in 1977. These short excerpts, which are remarkably similar, can be compared with one another and with the excerpts of the other poets of Termanu, Old Meno and Seu Ba’i.

Malesi’s first version of the Syrup Vat and Rice Basket passage consists of only 14 lines from a composition of 222 lines.

One immediately obvious difference in Malesi’s version is the name of the woman chant character who carries on the dialogue with Suti Solo//Bina Bane. In place of Pedu Hange//Nggeti Seti, Malesi names this woman Sama Dai//Kuku Nou. Another notable difference is that Malesi reverses the order of the

² Malesi is the ‘poet’ in the film The Water of Words (Fox et al. 1983) and appears as well in the film Spear and Sword (Fox et al. 1988).
compound phrase *Tua Bou ma Neka Hade*. He recites this as *Bou Tua ma Neka Hade*. In terms of the ordering of dyadic sets, this would seem to be a preferable order: *bou* (vat) thus forms a set with *neka* (basket) and *tua* (lontar syrup) with *hade* (rice). Whereas this would appear to make logical sense and would not be rejected in performance, Malesi may in fact be tampering with an established idiom. The evidence for this is the final passage I quote from the poet Ande Ruy, from the relatively distant dialect region of Ringgou. Ande Ruy uses both forms—that used by Old Meno and Seu Ba’i and the form used by Malesi.

Malesi’s passage shares several common dyadic sets with the versions by Old Meno or Seu Ba’i: 1) *inak*/*fetok*; 2) *kokolak*/*dedea’ak*; 3) *malole*/*mandak*; 4) *tono*/*lunu*. He also uses the dyadic set: 5) *anga-ju*/*(asa-)lai* (‘sit’//’lie down’), a set that Seu Ba’i left incomplete in his composition. Malesi also uses another common set: 6) *lole halan*/*selu dasin*, which is a frequently used expression meaning ‘to speak, to reply’, and embellishes this with the set *lele*/*doko-doe* (‘encouragingly’//’coaxingly’).

**Passage: Poem IV**

*Inak kia Sama Dai*  
The woman Sama Dai

*Ma fetok kia Kuku Nou*  
And the girl Kuku Nou

*Ana lole lele halan*  
She lifts her words encouragingly

*Ma selu doko-doe dasin, nae:*  
And raises her voice coaxingly, saying:

‘*Mu no bou tua*’  
‘Go with the Syrup Vat’

*Ma mu mo neka hade.’*  
And go with the Rice Basket.’

*Bina Bane kokolak*  
Bina Bane speaks

*Ma Suti Solo dede’ak ma nae:*  
And Suti Solo replies and says:

‘*Malole la so*’  
‘That would be good

*Ma mandak kala so.*  
And that would be proper.

*Bou tua na tono*  
[But if] the Syrup Vat is overturned

*Ma neka hade lulunu*  
And the Rice Basket is rolled up

*Na au asa-lai o se*  
Then with whom will I rest

*Ma au anga-tu o se?’*  
And with whom will I sit?’

This next excerpt, which consists of 16 lines, was recorded in 1977—roughly four years after the earlier passage—but is remarkably similar to that passage. There are only a few differences. For example, the set *lele*/*doko-doe* is not used with *lole halan*/*selu dasin* and instead of the *tono*/*lunu* set, Malesi uses another set with a similar sense: *heok*/*keko* (‘to turn’//’to shift’). He concludes with a refrain that uses the set *nama-tani*/*(nasa-)kedu* (‘to cry’//’to sob’), which was used by Seu Ba’i in his composition. Malesi also pairs another verb for speaking, *na-fada*, with the term *kokolak*, which normally forms a set with *dede’ak*. In performance terms, this would be considered acceptable but nonetheless a flaw in composition.
Figure 8.1: The poet, Eli Pellondou, known as Seu Ba’i, prepares to recite by first partaking of the ‘water of words’
In short, all of the sets in this particular passage can be considered to form part of a shared linguistic heritage with speakers of the Termanu dialect.

**Suti Solo do Bina Bane: The fifth poet, Ande Ruy from Ringgou**

The final example in this series consists of a passage of 20 lines from a composition of 184 lines by the poet Ande Ruy from the eastern Rotenese domain of Ringgou, which has its own distinct dialect of Rotenese—a dialect that is different from that of Termanu but close enough to be intelligible. Some of the sound changes evident in this passage are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Termanu</th>
<th>Ringgou</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ng</td>
<td>k</td>
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<tr>
<td>medial k</td>
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<td>l/nd</td>
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Despite these differences, it is possible to recognise the shared inheritance of common dyadic sets. Ruy uses five sets that also occur in the passages of the poets from Termanu. These sets are: 1) inak/[fetok]; 2) lole hara/[selu dasi]; 3) dasi/[hala]; 4) nea hade/[bou tua or nea hade/[tua bou]; and 5) hade/[tua]. Ruy also uses a number of other sets that are common in the speech community.
of Termanu: 6) fai//ledo (‘day’/‘sun’); 7) na//ria (‘there’/‘at that place’); 8) iku//leo (‘land’/‘clan’); 9) rui//sau (‘to scoop’/‘scrape’); 10) tama//tesa (‘to be together’/‘to be one’); 11) tei//dale (‘stomach’/‘inside’). Although I have not recorded the set sasau//kokola (the reduplicated form of the verbs sau//kola), it would appear to be an acceptable variant of the more commonly used set ndui//sau in Termanu (or rui//sau, as it occurs in this excerpt). It also is worth noting that the compound form tesa tei//tama dale (literally, ‘stomachs as one’/‘hearts together’), as used by Ruy, is not an expression that I have recorded in Termanu. Although not common in Termanu, however, it was immediately recognisable by Termanu speakers who heard Ruy, and was considered poetically attractive.

**Passage: Poem VI**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Line</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boe ma ina Oli Masi</td>
<td>Then the woman Oli Masi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ma feto a Bisa Oli</td>
<td>And the girl Bisa Oli</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nadasi neu Suti Solo</td>
<td>Spoke to Suti Solo</td>
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<td>Ma nahara neu Bina Bane:</td>
<td>And said to Bina Bane:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Iku fo mo nea hade ma</td>
<td>‘Your place is with the Rice Basket</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma leo fo mo bou tua.’</td>
<td>And your clan is with the Syrup Vat.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tehu Suti Solo lole haran</td>
<td>But Suti Solo raised his words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma Bina Bane selu dasin:</td>
<td>And Bina Bane lifted his words:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Ami iku fo mo nea hade</td>
<td>‘Our place is with the Rice Basket</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma ami leo fo mo tua bou, tebe!</td>
<td>And our clan is with the Syrup Vat, indeed!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tehu fai esa nai na</td>
<td>But on some day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma ledo esa nai ria,</td>
<td>And at some time,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nea sasau hade,</td>
<td>They continually scrape out rice,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sau heni nea hade</td>
<td>They will scrape the Rice Basket clean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma rui kokola tuan</td>
<td>And they continually scoop syrup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rui heni bou tua.</td>
<td>They will scoop the Syrup Vat clean.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Na ami iku fo mo be a</td>
<td>Then with whom will our place be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma ami leo fo mo be a?</td>
<td>And with whom will our clan be?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Te [beir] ta tesa tei</td>
<td>This does not make us one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma bei ta tama dale.’</td>
<td>And not yet join us together.’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The dyadic resources of the five poets**

Table 8.1 lists all the dyadic sets used by the five poets. The excerpts from the poets of Termanu are similar enough in composition to share many sets together; Ruy’s composition introduces seven sets not used by the Termanu poets. All of these sets are, however, of common occurrence in Termanu. If a larger comparison were made, the seeming differences in Ruy’s composition—at least in the use of these particular sets—would diminish, if not disappear.
In earlier publications, I have argued that Rotenese ritual language surmounts dialect differences and is broadly intelligible across the entire island of Rote. One way in which this is done is by the use of variant dialect terms to form synonymous sets. Certainly, the comparison of this passage from Ruy with the excerpts by other poets from Termanu would appear to support this argument. While accurate in showing similarities between these speech communities, however, Ruy’s excerpted passage is too short to illustrate some of the differences that do indeed occur. Providing a more precise indication of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dyadic sets</th>
<th>Poems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 kokola//dede’ak</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 ina//feto</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 eki//hika</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 setele//mata-dale</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 tua bou//neka hade</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 bou tua//neka hade</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 malole//manda</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 bou//soka</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 lama-kako//lama-lua</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 lama-kako//lama-solo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 fude//bafa (bafo)</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 totono//lulunu</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 sama//deta</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 nama-tani//nama-keso</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 nama-tani//na-nosi</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 lole-lele//doko-doe</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 hala//dasi</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 nasa-la//ma-tu</td>
<td>(x)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 lole//selu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 na-fada//kokolak</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 heo//keko</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 fai//ledo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 ria//na</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 iku//leo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 lui//sau</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 sau//kola</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 tesa//tama</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 te’i//dale</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the differences in ritual language across dialect boundaries involves work that is currently in progress to record a reasonably large corpus of materials from these different dialects.

Conclusion

In his pioneering study, Parry was able to identify a particular ‘technique of oral verse-making’. His initial research has given rise, as Pawley has noted, to a distinct but particularly important research tradition. In this tradition, ‘formulas may show special word order, enabling a word sequence to be adapted to the metrical requirements of a half line of verse’ (Pawley 2007:6). This kind of formula is, as Pawley has recognised, a ‘substitution system’. He defines this substitution system as ‘a group of formulas which show lexical substitutions expressing the same basic structure and idea, or which express the same basic idea with a varying number of syllables, enabling the poet to meet a range of different metric conditions’ (Pawley 2007:6).

Strict canonical parallelism offers techniques of oral composition different from those based on regular metrical strictures. These techniques, strictly speaking, do not involve substitution as in Parry’s epic tradition nor are they constrained by metric requirements. Instead, any line of verse calls forth its complement. All lexical elements in one line should pair with partner elements in a complementary line. Such compositions are ideally suited for chorus performance, in which a poet annunciates an initial line and the complementary line is provided by collective response—a mode of ritual performance that was once common on Rote, as elsewhere in eastern Indonesia. To be effective, the knowledge of paired terms—what I call dyadic sets—must be shared widely within a speech community.

This chapter provides an illustration of just how widely these dyadic sets are shared, not just among poets within a particular speech community but also across different speech communities. This illustration gives a sense of the stability and continuity of this ritual language as a distinctive cultural heritage among the Rotenese—and its potential effectiveness in maintaining continuing oral-based memory.