Where Dead Language Lives: The Case of the Balinese Shadow Theater
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This paper considers certain aspects of verbal art on the Indonesian island of Bali.[1] In particular I will be looking at the shadow theater, an extremely ancient dramatic form using flat, carved cowhide puppets whose shadows are silhouetted on a lamplit screen. The earliest written reference to wayang performance in Bali is dated AD 896,[2] though the origins of shadow theater in rituals of ancestor worship may go back much further. Today wayang enjoys undiminished popularity, with a performance repertoire based primarily on two (originally Indian) epics, the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa.

The linguistic puzzle presented by this theater is a configuration of the two different languages used by the puppet master, the dalang, who speaks the entire play (and also manipulates the puppets and directs the musical accompaniment). One, Balinese, is the modern language of the island; the other, called Old Javanese or Kawi, is a millenium-old literary language with a large borrowed Sanskrit lexicon.[3] Presumably, Kawi represents a variant of a language spoken in Java in the early centuries of our era. Like the Latin of medieval Europe which was increasingly supplanted by vernaculars after the 6th century, Kawi has been preserved in written form as the modern languages of Java and Bali developed alongside it. And like Latin, Kawi has often been assumed to be a "learnéd" or "dead" language, that is, one that has little role in modern spoken expression

It is, however, impossible to imagine the Balinese asserting Kawi to be a dead language. For them, Kawi is the vehicle of a complex cultural heritage which includes elements of the Hindu and Buddhist civilizations of India and Java along with indigenous patterns. While it certainly carries associations with things remote and archaic, Kawi is nevertheless a vital source of contemporary meaning, and one that shows no signs of disappearing from among the speech varieties widely and regularly heard on the island.

Each Balinese wayang performance, for example, is a combination of various styles of Kawi as well as Balinese. In trying to understand just how the two languages are combined, and the norms governing the use of each, we learn how Kawi "comes alive" in the experience of Balinese audiences. We are also brought face to face with the rules and constraints making up the discourse structure of the play itself.

Looking first at Kawi, we see that each of the major uses of this language in wayang establishes a distinct rhetorical context within the drama. These types of Kawi in wayang can be summarized as follows:

(1) Speech magic
(2) Dialogue
(3) Narration
(4) Embellishment

Beginning with the first of these categories, we find the dalang using Kawi to invoke and manipulate divine and demonic forces to obtain both protection for himself and inspirational enhancement for the performance. To do this he utters, for the most part silently, a series of fixed chant-like formulas loosely termed mantra. As used by the different ritual practitioners of Bali, mantra are examples of "speech magic": they are an arrangement of words and sounds the force of whose uttering is thought to alter the state of things in the world.

Example 1. Om, idep aku sang Kamajaya wahu prapta, ngéka kasaktin, ya nama swaha.
(sacred syllable--imagine--I--personal article --name of deity--just now--arrive--unite--power--Sanskrit incantation)
"Om, I imagine that the supreme god of love has just arrived, concentrating power, let there be homage."[4]

In this mantra (uttered when the dalang arrives at the site of the performance) some typical "speech magic" features are notable, such as the use of a sacred syllable in the beginning, and closure with a Sanskrit invocation. Whether he is repelling malevolent forces or compelling audience attention, the stated intent of many mantras is clearly within the realm of verbal art:

Example 2. ...Teka welas asih atiné wong kabéh angrungu sabda swaranku.
(come--affection--love--heart--person--all--listen--voice-my)
"May love and affection come to the hearts of everyone listening to the sound of my voice."

The verbal and vocal power of the dalang is repeatedly emphasized during the pre-performance mantra sequence. As he sets up his puppets before starting the play, the dalang utters a mantra whose aim is to condense all cosmic force into one essence, the "Pure All-Powerful Mind" (manah mahasakti mahening). From this entity then emerges the "Divine Kawi" (sang hyang kawi), an elevated and deified personification of language that can inspire and direct the course of the play. In this mantra,

Kawi becomes not only the name for a language, but also a state of enhanced aesthetic awareness such that

Example 3. ...Kawi kawikanan sakawuwus wuwus tingkaha ngaranya.
(kawi--knowledge--all-speaking--speech--act--name-its)
"Kawi is the skill of speaking all that can be expressed by words."

In protecting, magically endowing and inspiring the performer, then, the dalang's mantras aim at specifically verbal artistry. They are directed toward unseen forces and use unheard means---the ancient, formally invariable sounds of speech magic.

The second way the dalang uses Kawi is in the composition of dramatic dialogue for each of the puppet characters. Employing a wide range of phonetic technique, the performer must create voices appropriate to each, from roaring demon to stately sage to demure princess. Using no written script for his plays, and under contextual constraints that prohibit verbatim memorization,[5] the dalang is in effect creating utterances in Old Javanese---a surprising productive use of a supposed "learnéd" language.[6]

The factors which contribute to the dalang's ability to compose Kawi dialogue involve long exposure to the language of other dalang, as well as the study of written versions of the epics in both Old Javanese prose (parwa) and poetic (kakawin) forms. Although not all dalang engage in literary study to the same degree, certain features of Bali's manuscript tradition have important influences on the Kawi dialogue of wayang.

When the Balinese wish to read and enjoy a work of literary art, they do so by means of a group process called mabasan or pepaosan. Simply stated, group members take turns reading aloud a line or phrase of written text, and then translate or paraphrase it in colloquial Balinese, at which point questions or discussion may occur. The "reading" component of this process is more properly termed "singing," since each metrical type (and most Old Javanese literature is poetic) has a specific vocal musical realization. Even "prose" works are delivered in a distinctive style of tonal contours and rhythmic patterns. Since this oral/aural sharing of literature is by no means an uncommon occurrence, many Balinese instinctively associate certain acoustic patterns with the universe of discourse of the Kawi epics and related stories.[7]

The dalang's Kawi **dialogue** seems to echo the reading style used for the parwa, the Old Javanese prose retellings of the Sanskrit Mahābhārata. The diction and

syntax of the dialogue are close to the written Kawi, while the phrase-by-phrase intonation of the dialogue, punctuated by sharp raps of a foot-held hammer (cempala) parallels the sounding of parwa lines. Many dalang refer to the dialogue vocal technique as palawakya , a term also used among Balinese literati to designate the vocal style used to perform parwa and other non-metric texts.[8]

Example 4. [* = rapping of foot-hammer)

Lakia* pwa ta kita nanak* tan lén kaginucara dé ibunta* ri tatkala* angértiakena kunang jagat lamakané sida* amangguhakena kertaraharja*.
(exclamation* emphatic--emphatic--you--child* not--different--spoken of--by-- mother-your* at--time* strive/work-- connective--world--so that--able* achieve/establish--prosperity/well-being*)
"Ah, you children,it is none other your mother speaks of than a time of great striving in the world in order to establish peace and happiness."

Another point to be made is that the dalang's Kawi dialogue is extemporized under conditions of oral performance; he works with familiar patterns of substitutable elements in a manner reminiscent of the oral poets of other, less literate, societies. Example 4. shows a type of speech with generalized content, composed of a series of "stock" phrases, such as is typically heard in the opening court scene of a play before any plot-specific details have been introduced. In general, Kawi dialogue is valued for its formal pace and archaic tone; rather than emulating any everyday "natural" speech, it is supposed to sound remote, elevated and ancient, what the Balinese call wayah, 'old'. Yet, in contrast to the mantra-style of Kawi, the dialogue is formulaic rather than wholly a formula---it is composed to fit its context rather than exactly repeated.

The third use of Kawi is in narration, the dalang's descriptive commentary that links the various sections of the play. Typically, major temporal and locational episodes which are also shifts between characters are marked by the appearance on the screen of the kayon, the "world-tree" puppet which also indicates the beginning and end of the drama. When the kayon appears, the dalang narrates, using a distinctive vocal style, a passage which directly or only generally refers to the dramatic moment at hand.

Example 5. Ari wijil ata ri mangkat para natha kabéh.
(at--come forth--emphatic--at--depart--plural marker--king--all)

"Upon the departure of all the nobles..."

Such narrative interludes may be succinct or elaborated, depending on the dalang's inclination, the necessity of drawing out the narration while characters are shown to be traveling, or other contextual factors.

The dalang also uses narration to heighten the mood within a scene, or to emphasize the shift from one speaker to another, as in the following:

Example 6. Ari wawu karenga dé nirang natha Késawa.
(at--just now--be heard--by--he/she--king--Késawa)
"And just as this was heard by King Kresna..."

As the two examples above suggest, the Kawi narration is often fragmentary and peripheral in terms of its content; it is important because it allows the dalang to continue his vocal activity while he is busy putting down or taking up puppets, or when he needs to collect his thoughts before proceeding with the performance.

In rhetorical terms, the "narrator" of wayang is an anonymous figure commenting from outside the immediate dramatic action, and also quite apart from the point of view of the audience. This Kawi-speaking figure is considered to be the dalang's dramatic persona, under the influence and inspiration of the "Divine Kawi", and symbolized by the particularly strong, guttural voice used in narration, as well as by the kayon figure.

The fourth type of Kawi used in wayang, which might be termed "embellishments," is composed of "quotations" from literary works, from a few lines to several verses in length. These quotations fall into two groupings when defined according to musical criteria: one, the bebaturan, consists of poetry sung either according to its usual metric scheme or using a melody traditional to the dalang, independent of particular instrumental accompaniment;[9] the other, called tetandakan or seséndon ('songs') comprises verses sung in conjunction with special instrumental melodies. While the bebaturan poetry may usually be found in extant Old Javanese texts, particularly the kakawin, tetandakan often have more obscure sources, including manuscripts possessed only by dalang themselves.

Both tetandakan and bebaturan are considered necessary supplements to the other voices of wayang. Bebaturan occur at the beginning or end of scenes, as the preface to lengthy speeches, at serious moments of philosophical import, as illustrations of arguments, as weapons in verbal debate, or just as a general enhancement of the play's epic atmosphere. Tetandakan

singing, meanwhile, is grounded in mood-setting instrumental interludes, evoking sadness, nostalgia, romance, supernatural presence, and the entrance of favorite comic characters.

Example 7. Kunang prawara Pāṇḍawa anggelar i bajra tīkṣṇa alungid, Dhananjaya lawan Wrekodara tumūt Śikaṇḍi harep.
(connective--foremost--Pandawa--arrayed--in--thunderbolt--sharp--sharp--Arjuna--with--Bima--following--Sikandi--in front/facing)
"And thus the noble Pandawas were arrayed in the Sharp Thunderbolt formation; Arjuna and Bima, accompanied by Sikandi, were in the fore."[10]

There is a general constraint which operates on bebaturan use to the effect that the content of the literary fragment chosen be relevant to the dramatic moment being portrayed. Naturally the extent to which dalang adhere to this aesthetic ideal varies greatly. Some performers have a limited repertoire of bebaturan which are rather loosely applied to a range of dramatic situations; others prefer to regularly dip into the classical texts looking for specific excerpts which are then memorized. Example 7 illustrates a typical bebaturan, sung at the beginning of a verbal confrontation between some of the Pandawa characters and their arch-rivals the Korawa clan. This verse fragment from the kakawin Bhāratayuddha is appropriate both because it mentions the characters actually on the screen, and also because it echoes the antagonism, by means of its battlefield imagery, which always underlies stories based on the Mahābhārata.[11]

The dalang's quotations are considered essential to the aesthetic completeness of wayang performance. They form the crucial link between the play and its literary and inspirational source, the revered ancient texts themselves. They are the voice of textual authority, of the words of the actual past brought to life with each performance of the epics they signify. The Kawi embellishments contribute to the play an element of permanent material substance, deriving from their source in manuscript form, which contrasts with the more fleeting, unrecoverable speech of the shadow figures.

Thus far we have considered a number of ways in which the dalang uses Kawi, each constituting a different sort of "voice" within the wayang world. The four types of Kawi expression -- mantras, dialogue,

narration and embellishment-- contrast in terms of their form, function, rhetorical structure and vocal sound quality. There remains one final voice to be considered, which is also integral to each performance, and which "speaks" in modern Balinese.

While the Kawi voices can be seen to emanate from frames of reference not shared by the spectators-- the worlds of the gods, demons, epic heroes and ancient writings-- the Balinese voice of wayang speaks entirely within the "life-world"[12] of the audience. The use of Balinese constitutes an entirely separate realm from that of Kawi both linguistically and rhetorically, and is limited to four characters only.[13] These are court servants, in Balinese parekan, who combine the functions of the Greek chorus and Shakespearean fool in their roles as clownish yet wise attendants.

The crucial discourse-related function of the parekan (from Balinese parek, 'near', i.e. 'those nearer the king') is the translation into Balinese of each speech of the Kawi dialogue as it occurs. They must accurately convey the utterances of royal masters who, aloof and silent, wait for their words to be paraphrased. Like the heroes themselves, the Kawi dialogue is distant from the here and now, and the parekan serve to bridge the gulf between the cultural/linguistic past and present. This function requires one or another of the parekan always to be present on screen,[14] since the Kawi-speaking nobility cannot address each other without intermediaries.[15]

An important implication here is that if the Kawi dialogue were not paraphrased by the parekan, much of the play would be unintelligible to its audience. While many Balinese do understand some of the standard Kawi phrases used in the theater, it is nonetheless true that the details of the sometimes intricate lampahan ('plot') and its deeper philosophical or ethical meanings emerge through the Balinese-language component. Perhaps even more significantly, the Kawi-speech-with-Balinese-translation structure of each wayang utterance precisely parallels the mabasan reading-group process where each line of the literary text is paraphrased in contemporary language. Clearly, this dual-language pattern is a characteristic and highly valued strategy for bringing the values of the past to bear on the present, and allowing the present to "recontextualize" the past,[16] in Balinese theater.

When the meanings of the past are transformed into the language of the present, many things happen. The duty of translation is for the parekan also an opportunity for audacious, pungent, moralizing or critical commentary on the world and his noble masters'

exploits. Both during and at the end of episodes, the parekan discuss among themselves the content and implications of each scene as the plot unfolds. They thus carry out the function of recapitulation of meaning on two textual levels -- that of the utterance, the basic unit of discourse, and that of plot structure, the coherence of sequences of utterances.

The fact that the parekan share the universe of discourse of the Balinese audience is formally manifest in their language, which makes full use of Balinese lexical resources for the expression of intimacy versus social distance, of politeness, honorifics and deprecation. This deictically-based system,which obligatorily marks the relations between speech participants (speaker, hearer and other),has variously been termed "language levels," "speech registers," or "high" versus "low" language. [17] In the context of wayang, an utterance in Kawi, unmarked for this sort of pragmatic intent, when translated by the parekan explicitly outlines the dimensions of Balinese social space.

Example 8. [underlined words = honorifics, "high" speech]

Dẽwi Kunti (in Kawi): Kadiang apa rinasa dẽnta nanak?
(how--what--be felt--by-you--child)
"How do you feel about it, children?"

Twalẽn (in Balinese): Kẽnkẽn karasa baan cening; kẽnten ida betari ratu.
(how--felt/understood--by--child; thus--he/she--goddess--queen)
"'How d'ya feel, kids?'---that's what her divine majesty said."

In the above example the first part of the parekan Twalẽn's utterance is a direct quote, and all the words are in intimate, everyday, "low" Balinese, which is appropriate for a mother (Dẽwi Kunti) speaking with her children. In his aside in indirect speech, however, the parekan speaks respectfully, using honorifics, which befits his own status as a subject referring to a royal superior.

The deictic, person-related system of Balinese demands a great many selections from lexical sets of semantically equivalent but pragmatically-opposed terms. When Kawi dialogue is paraphrased in Balinese, then, this "speech register" information works to place the characters of the epic world, and the shifting relations between them, squarely within the bounds of Balinese social truth.

In considering the way languages are used in wayang, we can come to understand the (initially strange) fact that large audiences should be attracted to plays whose

dialogue is partially unintelligible. Yet the verbal patterning of Kawi and Balinese itself holds the key to the persistence of Kawi as a mode of expression.

In both dramatic and literary verbal art, the Balinese maintain linguistic multiplicity by interweaving the languages of the past and present. The important elements of this process are sounding (oral performance of the words of the cultural past) and interpretation (spontaneous recapitulation of meaning using the language of the present). Far from being a conservative "learned language" locked away in musty manuscripts, Old Javanese in the wayang tradition of Bali is a living channel of communication. While its forms continue to be preserved in manuscript shape, its meanings are a product of, and indeed only available through, the processes of sounding and interpretation.

While "oral" and "literate" expression are generally opposed as categories of verbal art, our perception of these distinctions must shift when looking at Balinese wayang. This is shown to us by the dalang's masterful fusion of of oral composition techniques and literate consciousness. This "noetic"[18] dimension of discourse, that is, the ways in which culturally-valued information is shaped, stored, recalled and communicated through time, here becomes a focal point for the cross-cultural contextualization of verbal art. The paradigm of "spoken" versus "written" language as divergent forms of linguistic behavior is also modified when we consider how a "literary" code such as Kawi, in the different rhetorical frames of wayang, is transformed into many voices. In reaching back through the past for the discourse of the present, and by blurring the boundaries of oral and literary verbal art in the service of "all that can be expressed by words," the dalang continually speaks the vitality of speaking in Kawi.

Notes

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[2]Goris (1954) remains the major, though incomplete, source for the texts of ancient Balinese inscriptions.

[3]Kawi includes a large body of charters and inscriptions, prose and poetry, tales and treatises, comprising a substantial attestation of perhaps the oldest forms of an Austronesian language.

[4]From the Dharma Pawayangan, a manual on the mystico-religious aspects of wayang; Hooykaas (1973) and Sugriwa (1963) give similar examples.

[5]Such constraints include the fitting of each performance to its local setting, the principle that one should not repeat a story for the same audience unless by special request, and the notion that the "Divine Kawi" in part selects the play and directs the course of its presentation.

[6]This is in contrast to Javanese wayang, in which the dalang speaks using various styles of modern Javanese, and where the use of Old Javanese is mainly limited to the singing of poetic fragments (suluk) which the dalang may or may not understand.

[7]The musical aspects of literary communication in Bali are extensively treated in Wallis (1979).

[8]The term is perhaps from Sanskrit phalavākya , 'a promise of reward', in which case the Balinese meaning is a reinterpretation of the two parts of the compound (phala 'fruit, result, reward' and vākya 'speech, saying, words'). Another possibility for the Sanskrit etymology might be palavākya , where pala has the meaning of 'a measure of time', thus, 'measured voice'.

[9]Bebaturan comes from batur, a term often translated as 'sacred, pure', and associated with offerings, temples, places of meditation, the chanting of prayers, and so forth.

[10]From the kakawin Bhāratayuddha X:11 (see Wirjosuparto 1963:75); the excerpt is one-half of a four-line verse (pada) in the meter Pṛthwītala.

[11]The allusive and symbolic connections between bebaturan and the play are a source of lively commentary from experienced literati in the audience, who may gauge the dalang's knowledge of Kawi by his use of literary quotations.

[12]That is, in terms of the familiar experiences and concerns of daily life known to everyone; see Ong (1977:106-107) for a discussion of how oral traditions depend on the human life-world for thematic coherence.

[13]In some plays there may be additional characters

who speak in Balinese, but these are also members of the "court attendant" class. Less frequently a dalang may use Balinese for a demon, or for the outspoken hero Bima, but this usage is generally not favored.

[14]Again a major contrast with the Javanese wayang, where the clown-servant characters do not always accompany their royal masters; instead, each type of character "speaks" for him/herself alone.

[15]Actually, in certain fast-moving scenes (i.e., battles) characters hurl threats and insults in Kawi without benefit of translation by the parekan, and audiences clearly follow the Kawi speech.

[16]For a discussion of the text-building functions of the languages of the past and present in Javanese wayang, see Becker (1979).

[17]A specific and detailed discussion of this aspect of Balinese would take us too far afield in this paper, but some analysis is forthcoming in my dissertation.

[18]Walter Ong (1977) points out the importance of of an understanding of noetics in such diverse settings as medieval European scholasticism and the drum-languages of African cultures.

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