

AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF HALĀNG RHYMES¹

James S. Cooper

One approach to meaning in linguistic analysis and theory has been in terms of *context of situation*. This paper investigates a number of Halāng² rhymes using the method set forth in Hymes 1962.

Usually the rhymes consist of two parts which are similar both grammatically and semantically. The last words of the first part rhyme with the first words of the second part. The words which rhyme carry the main stress of the utterance.

*Tomoay dah taao, laao dah dang.*³

'stranger also seek, Laotian also look-for'
'Everyone wants to be his friend.'

Mi?saang kra?, ba?sang geh.

'mother already old, father already old'
'My parents are already old (and here I am not married yet.)'

The rhymes are not oral poetry in the usual sense, but are idiomatic formulas used by different speakers in different contexts. They must be entered in the dictionary as single lexical items. An understanding of the rhymes will be important in the comparative study of cultures in the area since rhymes of this type are used in Bahnar, Rengao, Sedang, Jeh, Chrau, which are Mon-Khmer languages, and Jarai, a Malayo-Polynesian language. A diachronic study would also be interesting, ascertaining when the rhymes were borrowed, or when they passed from the active creation stage into the set form in which they are now found.

Hymes sets forth three interrelated aspects of the speech economy: the *speech events*, the *constituent factors* of speech events, and the *functions* of speech. Under *speech events* we are interested in (1) the instances of speech events, (2) the classes of speech events, and (3) the distinctive features which differentiate them. The ?moan 'legend' is one of the few Halāng speech events in which rhymes are found.

Under *constituent factors* Hymes lists seven points. Of these, two are already determined by our choice of considering Halāng texts. The *channel* is speaking, and the *code* is the Halāng language. The other factors are addresser, addressee, message form, topic, and setting. Concerning the

addressee we will be interested in his likely response. Concerning both the addresser and the addressee we will be interested in his identity (age, sex, social class, etc.), motive, attitude, and personality.

The *functions* of speech are: expressive, directive, poetic, contact, metalinguistic, referential, contextual. In each case the Halāng rhymes may be considered as partly poetic in function, besides being referential, expressive, etc. The directive function includes conative, pragmatic, rhetorical, persuasive.

The method followed here allows us to get at the raw data, and from there we make relevant observations concerning rhymes in the Halāng structure of speaking. The rhymes which are considered in this paper have been chosen from a total of about one hundred rhymes as being representative of the whole. The above aspects are presented below in the order factors, event, functions.

1. *Koan chaw naw oh.*

Factors:

1. Topic (meaning): 'child, grandchild, older sister, younger sibling.'
2. Addresser: the rich man of the village or his slave.
3. Message form: a normal rhyme, A B¹ B² C.

Event:

1. Instances: All six instances are by the same speaker, five of which were in legends, one in a historical account.
2. Class: There are many rhymes similar to this one. *Oh moan, koan chau* 'younger sibling, cousin, child, grandchild' is very close in form and meaning and is used in identical contexts. Another similar rhyme is one of the longer ones found, actually three rhymes in one. *Koan potaw, chaw hōnha, gōdra bōdrong, ong laao.* 'child of rich man, grandchild of rich man, rich in-laws, son-in-law from Laos.'
3. Distinctive features: This is one of the few rhymes found outside of the legends or the sacrifices to the spirits. In the legends this rhyme had to do with preparation for a wedding. In the historical account the request was made to two armies fighting near the village that they not destroy his *koan chaw naw oh*, here meaning 'village.'

Functions:

1. Directive: Usually embedded in a command to the village to make preparation for a wedding.

2. Referential: Specifically it refers to the relatives in the village, but this usually includes all the village. One of the notable characteristics of the rhyme is the use of specifics to denote a generic. Other rhymes which have this characteristic are:

Kopua rok dok aseh 'water buffalo, cow, monkey, horse';
i.e. 'animals in general'

mau phe tre dien 'paddy, hulled rice, squash, squash';
i.e. 'vegetables in general'

mang ngay khay hlong 'night, day, month (moon), star';
i.e. 'all the time'

monuih monan klan ala 'people (reduplicated), python, snake (a Jarai word)'; i.e. 'living creatures'

3. Contact: There is no formal political organization within the village but the close kinship relationships make a political organization unnecessary.

2. *Paay poar mang, dɔ̄bang mar.*

Factors:

1. Topic (meaning): 'cook rice (at) night viand (in the morning' with the general meaning 'get up early and prepare my food.'
2. Addresser: the rich man and a courageous young man named Bloy.
3. Addressee: the one in charge of preparing food.
4. Message form: normal rhyme, A B C¹, C² D.
5. Setting: at home, in the evening.

Event:

1. Instances: Occurs twelve times in three different legends.
2. Class, Distinctive Features: A number of other rhymes have to do with food. *poar cha, ka chong* 'cooked-rice eat, fish eat' is interesting because it violates the normal semantic collocations in favor of the rhyme. Normally *chong* is used only with rice, *cha* with food other than rice.

Functions:

1. Directive: telling the women to prepare food.
2. Persuasive: The speaker is announcing plans to do something which is difficult or contrary to the wishes of the hearer. The statement seems to be made to convince the hearer as well as reinforcing the decision of

the speaker.

3. *Plèh plieu ?ngieu ?ma.*

Factors:

1. Topic: 'fall aside left right.'
2. Addresser: an adult male who is responsible for making a field.
3. Addressee: the spirits. *Ya? Hopòom, Bò? Gòdre,* and *Bòr Hmeang,* are usually among the spirits mentioned.
4. Message form: normal rhyme, A B¹ B² C.
5. Setting: in the jungle at the edge of the rice field. Usually they build a lean-to and live there for three months during the planting season and harvest time.

Event:

1. Instances: This rhyme is found in the sacrifice to the spirits during the beginning of the rice field preparation. The sacrifice *mònuan ier* 'pouring out (the blood) of a chicken' takes place at the beginning of cutting the large trees. The blood of a chicken is poured from a bowl into a shallow hole as the prayer is said. "Take this, I am cutting trees. I am sacrificing with a chicken. Make my ax sturdy. Don't let it get dull. I hope the trees will be hollow and full of holes. I hope they will break easily. Let them *fall to the left and right of me.* (this rhyme) Don't let them break and fall on me. Spirit, take care of me. Later on I am going to perform the sacrifice *dah ?loang* here. I will sacrifice to you (plural) here." Then the cutting of the large trees begins.
2. Class: The *mònuan ier* is contrasted with the *soai*, a sacrifice in which rice wine is used and part of the liver of the animal is rubbed on the rim of a wine bottle when the prayer is made.
3. Distinctive features: This is the first of about eleven offerings to the spirits during the planting season. All of these offerings are performed on behalf of a household by the male responsible for making the field, except for the *phau* offering, which is a village function just before the rice ripens.

Functions:

1. Directive: The prayers consist mainly of requests, but sometimes a promise is made of another sacrifice if their prayers are answered.
2. Expressive: Prayers to the spirits have a very high percentage of rhymes in them. Perhaps this is done in order to win the favor of the spirits by using this type

of speech.

4. *Bùh ?maang pòhaang giaw?*

Factors:

1. Topic: 'pound beat roast cook-on-a-stick' meaning 'to treat badly.'⁴
2. Addresser: boy who was raised by an elephant in the jungle. The elephant had made him very rich by bringing him food and clothes.
3. Addressee: the rich man of the village and his slave Grandfather *Rògaap*.
4. Message form: normal rhyme, A B¹ B² C.

Events:

1. Instance: The rich man is trying to arrange a marriage for his daughter. He sends his slave to persuade the boy, but he is afraid that the rich man will *buh ?maang pòhaang giaw?* 'mistreat' him. The slave goes back to the rich man for reassurance and then returns to the boy with the message that he will not be mistreated.
2. Distinctive Features: Mediation of a marriage is called *troang* (a homonym of the word meaning 'road'). The bride and groom each have a representative who goes to the parents and relatives of the other in order to obtain permission for the marriage and to make arrangements for the ceremony. The actual questioning in which this rhyme occurs is called *bògàw aak*.

Functions:

1. Contextual: In the arrangement of the marriage it is expected of both the bride and groom that they ask for assurances from the in-laws and from their marriage partner that they will be well treated. Usually they ask "When we are married will you divorce me if I get leprosy or go crazy or become drunk on mushrooms?" In all of the stories the couple get married and live happily after.
2. Directive: This is partly persuasive and partly rhetorical, since divorce seems to be a relatively simple though infrequent matter. Usually payment of a pig and about \$10 releases one from the marriage contract if there are no children.

5. *Daak mòy? kòtoh, boh mòy? lep.*

Factors:

1. Topic: 'water one drop, salt one taste' which means

'after I drink one more drop of water and take one more taste of salt', or 'in a very short time.'

2. Addresser: Always the strong aggressive, but not very smart, person in the story.
3. Addressee: always the wise one in the story.
4. Message form: normal rhyme, A B C¹, C² B D.

Event:

1. Instances: In every instance the addresser has suffered pain, loss of property, or an insult.
2. Distinctive Features: The rhyme is immediately preceded by "look out" and followed by "I am going to attack you."

Functions:

1. Expressive: this is a means of expressing the speaker's anger.
2. Directive: the speaker is giving a last chance for them to make amends.
3. Contextual: the one who uses this rhyme always loses his life at the end of the story, perhaps teaching that bravery does not pay.

6. *Sraay gar ?yaa, chaa kolan ik àih,
Sraay gar rôngoang, khoang kolan ik àih,
Sraay gar hõbii, susii kolan ik àih.*

Factors:

1. Topic: 'sow seed tobacco, eat anus, sow seed beetle, burn anus, sow seed cabbage, rub anus.
2. Addresser: Each rhyme begins with 'I', the speaker being someone who is in charge of making a rice field, the head of either a family or a household.
3. Addressee: Each rhyme ends with *àih* 'you-singular', the common or derogatory form. The rhymes are directed to Grandfather Tólùm, a common character in their legends. He is depicted as being naive or stupid. He can't count higher than two, he hangs his clothes in a tree and then dives into the water after them because he sees their reflection in the water, and he climbs down the tree head first because he sees the ants doing it that way. His speech is nasalized; another evidence of stupidity. He and his wife are always kindhearted toward others, and others often take advantage of them.
4. Message form: a triple rhyme, A B C¹, C² D E F
A B G¹, G² D E F
A B H¹, H² D E F
5. Setting: At the village following the sacrifices *soay* and *hùar* which terminate the burning of the fields. This 'prayer' takes place in the evening when they call

all their relatives to come and eat and drink wine with them.

Event:

1. Instances: This is the last act of the phase of making the rice fields called *chùh muuih* 'setting the field on fire.'
2. Distinctive features: This is the only 'prayer' made to the spirits in which there is nothing offered as a gift, and such derogatory statements are made.

Function:

1. Directive: The rhyme is a threat which goes "O Grandfather Tolùm, don't trample down my field which is by the stream Jɔ̄la. If you trample my field I will sow tobacco seed which will eat your anus, sow bettle seed (a lexical adjustment in favor of the rhyme) which will burn your anus, sow cabbage seed which will rub your anus."
2. Referential: This is done in order to keep the weeds from growing in the field. If a field is overgrown with weeds it is evidence that Grandfather Tolùm has been there.

FOOTNOTES

1. This paper is based on tape-recorded texts, some of which are included in a concordance of 57,000 words of text in Halăng made on the IBM 1410 computer at the University of Oklahoma by the Linguistic Information Retrieval Project of the Summer Institute of Linguistics and the University of Oklahoma Research Institute, and sponsored by Grant GS-270 of the National Science Foundation. This concordance was extensively consulted during the writing of this paper. The first draft of the paper was written at the University of Texas, 1966.
2. Halăng is a Mon-Khmer language spoken in Kontum Province of the Republic of Viet Nam. There are an estimated 10,000 Halăng people. The language data for this paper was gathered over a period of three years, beginning in March 1963. Six months were spent living in the village of Plêi Khôk Honar, a 'new life' hamlet 15 kilometers west of Kontum City.
3. For a description of the Halăng sound system see James & Nancy Cooper "Halăng Phonemes" in *Mon-Khmer Studies II* (Saigon 1965). Non-conventional orthography used in this paper is ˘ for breathy voice quality, double vowel for long vowel, a following a vowel for neutral off-glide, nh for ñ, and ờ for schwa.
4. Prior to the realization that these verbs formed a rhyme they were considered as separate lexical items and used as evidence for the complex coordinate relationship in the verb phrase.

References

- Conklin, Harold C., "Lexicographic treatment of Folk Taxonomies", in *Problems of Lexicography*, eds. Fred W. Householder and Sol Saporta, pp. 119-141. (Bloomington, 1962)
- Cooper, James S., "Halǎng Verb Phrase", in "Papers on Four Vietnamese Languages", ed. David D. Thomas, *Te Reo* Reprints no. 2, pp. 28-34 (Linguistic Society of New Zealand, Auckland, 1966)
- Cooper, James S. & Nancy C., "Halǎng Phonemes", in *Mon-Khmer Studies II*, pp. 87-98. (Saigon, 1966)
- Firth, John R., *Papers in Linguistics 1934-1951* (London, 1957)
- Frake, Charles O., "The Ethnographic Study of Cognitive Systems", in *Anthropology and Human Behavior*. (Washington, D.C., 1962)
- Hymes, Dell H., "The Ethnography of Speaking" in *Anthropology and Human Behavior*. (Washington, D.C., 1962)
- Stankiewicz, Edward, "Linguistics and the Study of Poetic Language", in *Style in Language*, Thomas A. Sebeok ed. (New York, 1960)
- Voegelin, C. F., "Casual and Noncasual Utterances within Unified Structure", in *Style in Language*, Thomas A. Sebeok ed. (New York, 1960)