

**Addressing the Invisible World:
Indexicality, Iconicity, and the Cultural Concept
of Self in *Belian*,
a Petalangan Healing Ritual in Indonesia**

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This paper analyzes a performance of the Belian, a shamanic healing ritual practiced by the Petalangan people in Indonesia to discuss the tensions between situatedness (contingency) and transcendence (analogy) of ritual speech. I analyze the usage of address and referential terms and personal pronouns, by which a shaman mediates the present context and the supernatural world during the performance. My concerns focus on the interrelations between indexicality and iconicity of the Belian performance and the importance of the Petalangan concept of the 'relational' self, which mediates 'contextualization' and 'entextualization' processes of the ritual.

1. Introduction

This paper addresses the tensions between transcendence and situatedness of ritual performance to discuss issues of authority in ritual speech. By 'transcendence', I mean two different points: one is the ritual performance's mediation between the performers' bodily present context and the invisible supernatural world; the other is the ritual speech's authority as being recognized as a fixed or unchanging type

of genre despite its ever-changing immediate conditions of performances.

Many studies of ritual speech have pointed out that the authority of ritual speech performance is constituted through a process in which the ritual has been detached and objectified into somewhat fixed texts, rather than contingent to the present context in which the ritual takes place. This process is called 'entextualization.' According to Kuipers, entextualization is a process "in which a speech event is marked by increasing thoroughness of poetic and rhetorical patterning and growing levels of detachment from the immediate pragmatic context" (1990:4). He also adds, "the process of creating textual authority is rooted in a denial of the 'contextualized' characteristic of discourse" (7). As a result, the speech event becomes relatively detached from the 'here and now' and remains constant across ever-changing immediate contexts (Bauman & Briggs 1990; Keane 1997a, Kuipers 1990).¹

In relation to the issues of tensions between entextualization and contextualization processes, I analyze a *Belian* ritual, a shamanic healing ritual that is performed among the Petalangans of Sumatra, Indonesia.² In this paper, I will address the following three main questions.

First, I will describe and analyze the usage of the address and referential terms for the spiritual beings as well as the performers themselves in *Belian* ritual songs. I will show how the shaman's usage of

¹ The authority and efficacy of the ritual speech depends on the specific formal characteristics of ritual speech performance that increase the transcendental quality of the speech (cf. Keane 1997a/b). For example, Du Bois (1986:318-320) summarizes characteristics of ritual as follows: 1) ritual register, 2) archaistic elements, 3) borrowed elements, 4) euphemism and metaphor, 5) meaning opaqueness, 6) semantic-grammatical parallelism, 7) marked voice quality, 8) fluidity, 9) intonational restriction, 10) gestalt knowledge (speakers often learn texts as a whole and cannot recite them in parts), 11) personal volition disclaimer (disclaiming personal responsibility for what the speaker said; instead the speaker credits a traditional source for one's words), 12) shifter avoidance (avoidance of first and second person pronouns), 13) ancestral model, and 14) mediated speech (speech events are mediated through several speakers). All of these formal properties of the ritual speech are regarded as playing down the indexical grounding of utterances in the context of the specific speech event and increasing autonomous character of the speech as detached from the context.

² The empirical data that I draw on this paper is based on my 12-month ethnographic and linguistic field research among the Petalangan of the Riau province in Indonesia from 1998 to 1999.

address terms frames and organizes the relations among the participants, who exist in the supernatural world as well as in bodily present context, and how this, in turn, signalizes ‘cues’ and ‘keys’ in the text, by which the audience can understand and interpret the ritual performance in a given context.

Second, through an analysis of the *Belian* ritual songs, I will show how indexicality and iconicity³ of the *Belian* ritual are interrelated and combined. In explaining the authority of ritual speech, Kuipers argues that “the more indexical the discourse, the more ‘localized, ephemeral, and limited’ the framed discourse is likely to be. On the other hand, the more ‘iconic’ or ‘conventional’ the discourse, the more framed discourse is likely to be ritually authoritative” (1990:7). In this paper, however, I would like to critique the simplified dichotomy of indexicality versus iconicity. To explain the interplay between indexicality and iconicity, it is crucial to look at the Petalangan everyday language practice and its metapragmatic dimensions. In doing so, I will argue how the Petalangan culturally specific notion of ‘relational’ self operates underlying the *Belian* ritual performances as well as in their everyday language practice.

Third, given the co-presence of indexicality and iconicity found in the *Belian* ritual songs, I would like to argue that many linguistic features that ‘entextualize’ the ritual speech, such as avoidance of shifters, do not always make the ‘detachment’ of the ritual speech possible. Instead, I find the detached or transcendental quality of the *Belian* ritual rather in its process of ‘recontextualization’. The transcendence of the *Belian* ritual is enabled by two important processes that revolve around recontextualization: 1) the Petalangan’s cultural notion of ‘relational self’ and its associated belief in the supernatural world are recontextualized continuously across the contexts of the performances, and 2) the Petalangan person-referring expressions that presuppose the social roles of interlocutors over the participant roles

³ The concepts of ‘indexicality’ and ‘iconicity’ derive from Peirce’s semiotics. He categorizes signs as index, icon, and symbol in terms of their different relations with objects. An index is a sign that represents its object by its contiguity to the context and an icon represents its object mainly by its similarity. A symbol is a sign that is conventionally connected to the object (Peirce 1955). A sign can function as an index and as an icon at the same time, since it can be in several relations at once. For an overview of fundamental semiotic concepts, see Mertz (1985).

as a speaker and an addressee becomes one of the linguistic devices which allow the performers to recontextualize the *Belian* ritual performance over the changing conditions.

2. Ethnographic Background of Belian Rituals

2.1. Introduction to Belian

The Petalangan people are living in the forested Kampar hinterlands on the eastern part of Sumatra, Indonesia. Categorized by the Indonesian government as one of the ‘Isolated Tribes (*suku terasing*)’, the Petalangan people remain remote and isolated in their relationship with the neighboring urban Malays due to their lack of transportation and communication facilities. Under these circumstances, the Petalangan society seems to remain relatively unaffected by outside influences, and their activities are more dependent on strong reciprocal relations within the matrilineal kin groups.

Belian rituals are practiced through cooperation based on membership in the matrilineal lineage group (cf. Effendy 1997). The shaman who performs the *Belian* ritual is specifically called *Kemantan*. The patient-clients of the *Kemantan* usually belong to the same matrilineal community, since a matrilineal group typically has one *Kemantan* who takes charge of the members’ health and the well being of the community. In *Belian* rituals, thus, the patient-clients who are called *anak inang* (nursing children) provide financial support as well as the actual labors for the preparation of the rituals. As other main participants of the *Belian* performance, there are the *Bujang pebayu*, who assists the shaman through the ritual performance, the *Tuo longkap*, who makes ritual artifacts, the *Bujang nobat*, two drummers who play a ritual drum, and the audience of the performance (cf. Turner 1991).

Belian has two types of performance. The first is called *Belian biaso*, a ritual for healing the patient-client’s illness, and the second is called *Belian pole*, which typically takes place to initiate a shaman or to strengthen a shaman’s spiritual power. Petalangans believe that the *Kemantan* invites all of his guardian spirits, which are called *Oku-okuan*, and plays with them during the *Belian pole* ritual. The atmosphere of *Belian pole* is more likely a playful feast, rather than a serious healing ceremony. The data that I analyze in this paper is the recording of a performance of *Belian pole*, which took place in May 1999.

2.2. *Anak Iyang: Belian Ritual Song*

Belian ritual is symbolized as a journey within the spiritual world to find the patient's medicine. Each performance of *Belian* ritual consists of the shaman's recitation of magic spells and entering a trance, which is signaled with his singing *Anak iyang*, a specific genre of ritual songs, and dancing to the rhythm of drumming (cf. Turner 1991). The *Kemantan* is believed to be a mediator between the patient-clients and the spiritual beings, as he communicates with his guardian spirits through the genre of *Anak iyang*. This genre becomes a specific way of communication between the *Kemantan* and the guardian spirits. *Anak iyang* shows various types of topics in the lyrics according to the specific context of a performance, and a relatively fixed melody. This genre of songs is typically structured by parallelism, through repetition and replacement of words across the lines that show a syntactically identical structure. The usage of reported speech that quotes the patient-client's words as well as those of the spiritual beings is also frequently observed in the texts of *Anak iyang*.

2.3. *Petalangan everyday usage of address and referential terms*

Given that *Kemantan* is believed to interact with the invisible spiritual beings, his use of addressing and naming terms for the invisible interlocutors is rather creative or performative than referential.⁴ *Kemantan*'s naming and addressing act itself constitutes and constructs the structure of interactions with the invisible interlocutors (cf. Hanks 1996, 1990). I start with the person referring expressions used in Petalangan everyday speech before analyzing the address and referential terms of *Anak iyang*.

In Petalangan everyday language practice, proper person-referring forms are chosen according to social distance, which is based on difference in age and social status between the interlocutors (see Table (1)).

⁴ See Silverstein (1976) for the concept of 'creative index'.

(1) *Petalangan* everyday person-referring forms

Degree of deference	Speaker (1 st person)	Addressee (2 nd person)	Referent (3 rd person)
low	<i>aku</i> (1 st sing.) <i>awak</i> (1 st plu.)	<i>dikau, kau</i> ⁵ (2 nd sing.) personal name <i>awak</i> ⁶ (2 nd sing, 1 st plural)	<i>Inyo</i> (3 rd sing), name
high	<i>kami</i> (1 st person plural, exclusive) name kin term	<i>oje</i> ⁷ (2 nd sing.) kin term, avoidance of addressing	
high	<i>ambo</i> ⁸ (1 st sing.)	title, avoidance of addressing	title <i>bolau</i> ⁹ (3 rd sing.)

In actual Petalangan language practice, however, people tend to avoid the personal pronouns corresponding to the participant roles, that is, 'I' and 'you' as speaker and addressee. Instead, they are more likely to use the terms for their social roles or relations. The mutual usage of kin terms according to the interlocutor's kinship relationship is one example. The term *abang*, for example, which means 'elder brother', is used by the younger speaker as a second-person term and by the older speaker as a first-person term.

A Petalangan speaker usually avoids addressing him/herself as 'I' (*aku*). If the speaker uses 'I' frequently, he/she is judged as having 'high self' (*tinggi diri*),¹⁰ which means that he/she is very arrogant,

⁵ *Dikau/kau* (you) can be used to address a younger intimate or a subordinate.

⁶ *Awak* (we, inclusive) can be a second person pronoun in interrogative sentences. However, this pronoun is only used to refer to equal or younger intimates.

⁷ *Oje* (you) is used only to refer to an intimate older, and this is regarded as a more polite address term than other second person pronouns.

⁸ *Ambo* (I) is usually used in formal contexts.

⁹ *Bolau*(he/she) is used in formal contexts.

¹⁰ As an opposite character of the person, on the other hand, ?low-self? (*rendah diri*) is viewed as one of the virtues of personhood among Malays as well as Petalangans.

with high self-esteem. Instead, the speaker uses a kin term or a personal name according to his/her relationship to the addressee.¹¹ The speaker also avoids using the second person pronoun forms to call the addressee, especially when the addressee is older and higher in social status in relations to the speaker.

This everyday language practice of address and referential terms reflects the Petalangans' cultural emphasis on the concept of relational self. Self-addressing terms are selected from the perspective of the counterparts, based on the presupposition of a certain social relationship between the interlocutors. In this aspect, the self or the person is fully realized in social relations, not as autonomously isolated individuals. The cultural concept of relational self also represents the Petalangan concept of politeness, which operates in their language practice as a metapragmatic dimension. In Petalangan language practice, showing an appropriate degree of deference according to the interlocutors' relative positions is crucial in their interactions.

3. Analysis of Address and Referential Terms of Anak Iyang

3.1. Abang-Adik Relationship between Kemantan and the Guardian Spirits

Based on the sociolinguistic knowledge of everyday Petalangan language practice, the relationship between the *Kemantan* and the invisible participants can be examined in two ways; one is to examine the address and referential terms for the invisible spirits, and the other is to examine the shaman's self-referential forms.

One of the most frequently observed pair of mutual address terms is *abang - adik* (elder brother - younger sibling: usually younger sister), which is used between lovers in the real world. According to the Petalangan shamanic belief, a *Kemantan* has a *tunangan*, a fiancée whom he will marry after he dies. Petalangan people describe a *Belian* ritual performance as the shaman dating his fiancée. As shown in (2), the shaman's use of *adik* defines his relationship to a guardian spirit as that of lovers in ongoing interactions.

¹¹ Petalangans also use kin terms between non-kin. For example, a younger speaker uses 'abang' (elder brother) to an older addressee even though they are not siblings. To the elders, a speaker tends to address him/herself by using his/her own personal name or a kin term. This language practice is more frequently observed in women's speech than in men's speech.

(2) When the shaman is taking a rest (singing without the drum)

01. Aaaiii?	01. Aaaiii?
02. <i>Imbau talu-betalu adik ambo</i>	02. Calling over and over, my <i>adik</i>
03. <i>Ayi Bulan</i>	03. <i>Ayi Bulan</i> (Water on the Moon)
04. <i>Nan menunggu</i>	04. Who is waiting
05. <i>balai putih</i>	05. in a white house of
06. <i>Eno Bulan</i>	06. <i>Eno Bulan</i> (Moonlight)
07. <i>Putih sebagai kape(kapas) lom-pang</i>	07. White as coconut flakes
08. <i>Buluh mato memontuk taji</i>	08. Eyelashes are like a rooster's comb
09. <i>Aaa...ja'I sebagai selu lio</i>	09. Aaa...fingers are like <i>Selu Lio</i> ¹²
10. <i>Tumit sebagai telu bu'ung</i>	10. Heels are like birds' eggs
11. <i>Rentuk sebai padi abuan</i>	11. Knees are like <i>Padi Abuan</i> ¹³
12. <i>Ondak sebagai jagung mudo</i>	12. As short as a young corn plant
13. ?'Apo dibawa abang"	13. "What has been brought, <i>abang</i> "
14. <i>Kato inyo, Ayi Bulan</i>	14. That's what she said, <i>Ayi Bulan</i> .
→ audience's reaction : <i>telu</i> (laughing)	→ audience's reaction: eggs (testicles) (laughing)

The shaman addresses the guardian spirit as *adik*. He praises the guardian spirit as a pretty girl (lines 7-12) and locates himself as *abang* who is expected to bring a gift to his *adik* (line 13). The audience's reaction to the song, '*telu*' and laughing, following line 14, also shows that the audience understands the shaman is talking to his fiancée, because this word has a sexual connotation (testicles). The mutual address term of *abang-adik* in this song, therefore, is a creative index that construes the shaman's guardian spirit as his girlfriend in the invisible world. This is possible, however, only by using conventional address terms between lovers, by the analogy of romantic relationship between lovers.

This mutual address form of *abang-adik*, however, actually refers to the sibling relationship. The analogy between the lovers and the sibling relationship is based on their similar affection of mutual care, which is called *sayang* (love, pity, affection).¹⁴ In *Belian*, the love

¹² A plant's name.

¹³ Rice plants bearing the seeds.

¹⁴ *Sayang* is a type of love that is also found in the relationship between parent-children, or siblings. Petalangans think this is the highest form of love, to which the

between the shaman and the guardian spirit appears as an exchange between the shaman's performance and the guardian spirit's assistance in finding medicine for the patient-clients or for the shaman himself. This address form thus has an iconic property by evoking conventional social roles and expectations of a similar iconic relationship between siblings as the caregiver and care-receiver.

Given the Petalangans' usage of kin terms as the first person pronoun as well as the second person pronoun based on their metapragmatic awareness of 'politeness,' (see Table 1), the complementary address terms of *abang-adik* are among the most common indexical devices found in Petalangan society. The use of *abang-adik*, therefore, has indexical qualities over iconicity, which contextualize the ritual songs in a given pragmatic context.

3.2. *The guru (Teachers) and Kemantan Mudo (a Young Shaman) Relationship*

In addition to this *abang-adik* relationship, furthermore, a shaman also has another set of deities, who are called *guru*, that is, 'teachers', who have taught the shaman mystic knowledge and spiritual power. This set of deities sometimes includes the shaman's ancestors as well. These teachers and ancestors tend to appear collectively, rather than as individuals.¹⁵

(3) *Menyomba*: respectable salute

01. <i>Anjung ja'i sepuluh</i>	01. Holding ten fingers high
02. <i>Lentuh kulai nan kepalo</i>	02. Bending and drooping the head
03. <i>Kumkum bahu nan bidang</i>	03. Lowering the shoulder
04. <i>Susun lutut nan duo</i>	04. With two knees bending
05. <i>Tunduk kepalo satu</i>	05. Bowing one head
06. <i>Ambo lalu tunduk nyombah</i>	06. I am giving a salute by bending
07. <i>Nyombah gu'u nan sidi</i>	07. Salute wise teachers
08. <i>Nyombah gu'u nan sakti</i>	08. Salute sacred teachers

romantic-sexual relationship aspires. In analyzing the Karo Batak's use of kin terms for lovers, Kipp also suggests that "the metaphoric comparison here is not exactly that lovers are like siblings, but that the love between lovers resembles, in some fashion, the love between siblings" (Kipp 1986: 637).

¹⁵ Petalangans usually describe a set of 'teacher' deities as men and 'ancestors' as women (grandmothers).

09. <i>Jauh nenek ambo nyalang</i>	09. Grandmother who is living far I visit
10. <i>Dokat nenek ambo imbau</i>	10. Grandmother who is near I call
11. <i>Ambo tanyo</i>	11. I ask
12. <i>Nanyo anak inang asu ambo</i>	12. Ask about my nursing children
13. <i>pado gu'u nan sidi</i>	13. To wise teachers,
14. <i>gu'u nan sakti</i>	14. sacred teachers
15. <i>Mano salah mano silih</i>	15. Where is wrong, where is bad
16. <i>Mano eek gendingnyo</i>	16. Where is curved, where is twisted,
17. <i>Boi kobe nan be'ito</i>	17. Give an answer and a message
18. <i>badan jangan dibaui bo'at</i>	18. Don't let body(1) receive burdens
19. <i>badan jangan dibaui malu</i>	19. Don't let body(1) receive shame
20. <i>Tita nan solimnyo</i>	20. Words which are correct

Example (3) demonstrates a case in which the *Kemantan* addresses the guardian spirits as 'sacred teachers' and 'grandmother' and refers to himself as *ambo*. The term *ambo* is originally from the word of *hamba*, which means 'slave.' The use of *ambo*, therefore, displays the speaker's self-deference as well as the addressee's higher hierarchical position by evoking an iconic relationship between a subordinate and a superior. In this example (3), 'self' appears as a non-agent form, rather than as an agent. As shown in lines 18 and 19, the parallel couplet of the passive sentences is one of the most commonly found sentence structures in the text of *Anak iyang*, by which a shaman projected in the text appears as non-agentive, while the supernatural beings claim their agency.

In the following example (4), the shaman also addresses himself as the 'young shaman' while addressing the guardian spirits as 'those who are esteemed.'

(4) *Junjungan* (those who are esteemed)—*Kemantan muda* (young shaman)

01. <i>Malumlah junjungan</i>	01. Of course, those who are esteemed
02. <i>minta ampun</i>	02. (I) beg your pardon
03. <i>Minta ma'af kemantan muda</i>	03. Please forgive the young shaman (me)
04. <i>Kok ado kesalahan</i>	04. If there is wrong
05. <i>nimbang hutang</i>	05. in calculating the debt
06. <i>dibayi</i>	06. which should be paid
07. <i>Pado gu'u nan sidi</i>	07. To the wise teachers

08. <i>pado gu'u nan sakti</i>	08. To the sacred teachers
09. <i>Kalau salah</i>	09. If there is something wrong with
10. <i>inang mantan mudo</i>	10. the young shaman's (my) children

In (4), the shaman's self-address term, *Kemantan mudo*, is iconic, since it locates him in a subordinate position by analogizing their relationship to that between elders and juniors. It's also indexical, since it addresses the shaman himself according to his relationship with the invisible interlocutors in a given context. Furthermore, the address term *junjungan*, which literally means 'those who are esteemed,' itself contains a certain expected emotion towards the spiritual beings. This address term thus conveys an iconic relationship between the superior and the subordinator by evoking conventional emotional aspects between superior and subordinate.

(5) *Bolau* (he/she: the most respectful form of reference)

In the final example (5), on the other hand, we can see how the third person pronoun, such as 'he' or 'she' has a certain transcendental, or decontextualized meaning in itself. Given that the term *bolau* is used to convey the highest degree of deference between the speaker and the addressee, as shown in Table (1), this indexical code acquires iconicity by evoking the highest social distance between the interlocutors. In the context of the *Belian* ritual, the highest position of the third person implies God, who is located at the top of the various levels of deities. The use of *bolau*, therefore, is transcendental rather than contingent to the immediate pragmatic context.

01. <i>Mantan mudo ini</i>	01. This young shaman(I)
02. <i>Tontang suni banje awak</i>	02. In the village, within our fences
03. <i>Ampun sepuluh kali ampun ma'af</i>	03. Forgive (us) ten times, please forgive (us)
04. <i>Ampun sepuluh kali ampun ma'af</i>	04. Forgive (us) ten times, please forgive (us)
05. <i>Sepuluh kali kami jalang</i>	05. Ten times we visit (pay a respectful visit)
06. <i>Jangan botal</i>	06. Don't ignore
07. <i>segalo anak inang bolau</i>	07. All of 'His' children

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, many linguistic features and devices for the so-

called entextualization process, such as an avoidance of shifters and diminishing indexical grounds of the texts, (cf. Du Bois 1986; Kuipers 1990) are not always applicable to the case of the *Belian* performance. Based on the interplay of indexicality and iconicity in person-referring terms in the *Belian* ritual songs, I suggest that the ritual speech must be explored in a broader context of everyday language use.

What, then, makes the transcendence of the *Belian* ritual possible across the shifting conditions of performances? Given the Petalangan concept of the person as relational, and not autonomously isolated, the spiritual beings of the *Belian* ritual always appear in a certain social relationship to the shaman, rather than as individualized or isolated deities. As examined in the above sections, the shaman addresses himself and the guardian spirits by the analogy of lovers, junior-senior relationship, and so on. In the Petalangan case, the iconic relationship between the real world and the invisible world is drawn from the similarity of affect, such as love, pity, and deference. The Petalangan everyday practice of person-referring expressions indicating the social roles and expectations embedded in social relationships, rather than in the immediate participant roles as 'I' and 'you,' casts the figures of a ritual performance in typical relationships or based on the ancestral model (cf. Du Bois 1986) across ever-changing pragmatic contexts.

In this respect, I would like to argue that the transcendence of the *Belian* ritual is grounded on the conventional relationship between the shaman and the spiritual beings, which is emergent through the shaman's ongoing interactions with the invisible beings during the ritual performance. Indexical references of the person in the *Belian* ritual allow the various performers to appear as the same figure across immediate pragmatic conditions, by evoking a certain social relationship and expressing the appropriate emotion and degree of deference between the participants. Even though the shamans who perform the ritual change from generation to generation, the shaman would always call himself *abang*, a boyfriend to his girlfriend guardian spirit. Moreover, no matter how old the shaman is, he would address himself as a 'young shaman' in his interactions with his 'sacred teachers.'

In the *Belian* rituals, therefore, the indexicality of address terms always presupposes conventional analogical relationship. The entextualization (decontextualization) and recontextualization of the ritual

are two aspects of the same process (cf. Bauman & Briggs 1990:74-5). Compared to other shamanic rituals in Indonesian societies, where we find ritual authority in entextualization, the monologic repetition of ancestral words (cf. Atkins 1989; Keane 1997b; Kuipers 1990), the authority of the *Belian* ritual performance is located in the shaman's successful recontextualization through dialogic interactions with the spiritual beings. This recontextualization is achieved by the interplay between iconicity and indexicality in this particular performance.

Glossary

abang: elder brother, boyfriend, or husband

adik: younger sibling, girlfriend, or wife

anak inang: lit. nursing child, patient-client

Anak iyang: *Belian* ritual songs

Bujang nobat: drummers who play a ritual drum

Bujang pebayu: an assistant of the shaman during the *Belian* ritual

Belian: a shamanic healing ritual

Belian biaso: a ritual for healing the patient-client's illness

Belian pole: a ritual for healing the shaman himself or to initiate a shaman

Junjungan: lit. those who are esteemed—an address term for guardian spirits during the ritual

Kemantan: a shaman who performs *Belian* rituals

Kemantan mudo: lit. young shaman—one of self-addressing forms in *Belian* ritual

Oku-okuan: guardian spirits of a shaman

Tuo longkap: a person who makes ritual artifacts

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