

Endangered oral literature genres in Punan Tubu (East Kalimantan)

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Abstract

Punan Tubu is the language of a community of former hunter gatherers spread in a number of villages in the District of Malinau in East Kalimantan.

Like many local languages in Indonesia it is gradually losing its domains of application for different reasons. Traditionally, the languages of hunter gatherers, probably more than other minority languages undergo an influence from the neighboring languages like Kayan and Kenyah and from the major languages like Indonesian. The cultural and linguistic influence of the neighboring agriculturalists like the Kayan, the Kenyah and the Abai-Berusu is remarkable.

This paper will focus on special genres found in the language spoken in the village of Respen Tubu, a resettlement village where a part of the Punan Tubu community has moved since the 70ies to live together with other ethnolinguistic groups and next to the capital town or Malinau.

Keledu', *Ketuya' ledun* and *kelolo kelovi'* are three genres described in this paper from the perspective of use, meaning and structure.

Keledu' is the chanted language the shaman (*andu'*) uses to communicate with the upperworld spirits. Due to change in religion and habits the role of the *andu'* has been restricted to that of collector of traditional plants for medical treatment and his role as a medium has practically disappeared. Due also to the old age of the only three *andu'* in the village, the language is now completely unintelligible to all but a handful of Punan Tubu speakers.

Ketuya' is a poetic version used to tell stories of ancestors and heroes of the Punan Tubu group. It is allegedly known only by people able to communicate with spirits and can take the form of long poems common people do not understand. In common tales like *mbui* bits and pieces of *ketuya'* are found here and there as metaphors to refer to the main characters like that of Unjung, a female hero found in many tales.

Ledun that refers to any kind of song of no ritual meaning also uses a special rhythm and a language non employed in the everyday communication.

Kelolo kelovi' are children songs and rhymes, lullabies and nursery rhymes. A brief analysis of old nursery rhymes hardly known by children today, gives a taste of this special genre in the Punan Tubu language.

This paper will report ongoing work on the relationship between the ritual *keledu'* and *ketuya'* and spoken Punan Tubu and try to understand why most of it has been lost as the ritual language has disappeared.

Introduction

This paper discusses in a preliminary way some genres of the oral literature of the Punan Tubu of East Kalimantan, mainly those living in the Respen Tubu in the town of Malinau (Malinau District).

The Punan Tubu-Malinau-Mentarang are the largest community of hunter-gatherers living in a one area, the Malinau Regency in East Kalimantan. They possibly number as many as 4000 speakers and include the Punan Tubu, Punan Malinau, Punan Mentarang and Punan Sekatak or Punan Berusu'. Most live in a resettlement camp (Respen Tubu), while some inhabit the upper part of the Tubu river in the Malinau Regency.

This community is part of diverse groups of people live mainly in 30 clusters and occupy (or used to occupy) the rainforest hills of the central part of Borneo at the headwaters of the main rivers in difficult interior terrain below 1000 m where they used to depend a sago palm from which their staple food is extracted. It is important to stress that certain elements are common to all these Bornean hunter-gatherer groups in that their subsistence economies are not only based on harvesting sago palm but that they also share an ideological core that is quite unlike that of farmers. Sellato (1993) argues that most of the Borneo nomad societies have an individualistic, opportunistic and secular ideology which allows them to easily adopt cultural, religious, linguistic, and technological elements from other groups. This arguably could have resulted in a culture with an inner ideological core and an outer borrowed layer of linguistic and technological elements. Nowadays most of the hunter-gatherers in Borneo have settled down except for few individuals in Sarawak. Nowadays there are probably no more than a few hundred "genuine" hunter-gatherers in Borneo (Sellato and Sercombe 2007:7) and most of the other former hunter-gatherers survive through swidden rice agriculture, cash crop cultivation, and wage labour. Nevertheless, they continue to hunt and gather. Although they farm in the same way as their agricultural neighbours, they are neither as committed nor as proficient. Moreover, their agricultural neighbours still see them as hunter-gatherers and they continue to perceive themselves as still directly connected with their hunting and gathering tradition. Thus their traditions continue and socially and culturally they are seen as distinct from their neighbours in terms of identity.

Sellato and Sercombe (2007: 3) point out that these communities display many similarities: they are based on egalitarian social organization, have autonomous nuclear families grouped in small-sized bands, and are usually scattered widely over areas far from large settlements. They have a basic technological kit that allowed them to exploit wild resources available in their natural environment so that they often attained self-sufficiency. in spite of their historical lack of metal. Finally, although they have lived in relative isolation, most eventually established trade relations with their settled neighbours.

Like many local languages in Indonesia also the language of the Punan Tubu is gradually loosing its domains of application for different reasons and with it an entire corpus of knowledge contained in its oral literature.

Oral literature is a very rich, sophisticated and complex product of a group of people whose cultural practices are the core of this literature. Once a local language is threatened and its use limited the first consequence is the disappearance of the oral traditions and with that a big amount of information carried in the oral traditions that disappears too. Local languages are replaced by languages of major communication and the village life is being replaced by new forms of entertainment and communication. From direct observation and from questioning village people, the impact of television and the development brought by the rise in the use of power in the remote village, traditionally known for their rich traditions, has been determinant for the destiny of oral literature. In the last ten years very few times the writer has been lucky to attend oral performances and the recordings obtained have always been provided out of context and upon 'request'.

Rituals of different kind were in the past associated to specific oral literature like midwifery rituals, proposal of marriage, payment of bride wealth, burial practices. Healing language, hunting and fishing language, mantra incantation, magical chants and spell used for curative purposes, malevolent purposes, success in hunting and fishing, protection of self property, appeasement of ancestral spirits, crop planting are mostly remembered only by the village elders.

In the last ten years the situation has worsened and these traditions are under threat of extinction because the use of the language in certain contexts relevant to the oral literature is shrinking and the tellers have become older and sometimes are irreplaceable.

Endangerment of Oral literature (and language) within the Punan Tubu community

The Punan Tubu language has slowly eroded and changed. In many families, preschool children are now spoken to in Indonesian allegedly because they can become prepared to enter school. Most of the young people have received a primary education and some a secondary education. Very few older people who still remember the oral literature that accompanied some ceremonies, can recite parts of this poetry. They can only partially describe the rituals and remember some of the old myths, legends and historical narratives. The oral literature in the Punan Tubu communities is threatened by a series of reasons. These communities tend to be relatively small and rarely have the possibility to gather except for weddings or deaths. The introduction of modern means of communication has reduced the possibilities that traditional oral literature is performed and chances that it can be revived remain very scarce.

Unfortunately very few are the situations where local people can formulate their cultural ideas and practices where oral traditions serve to maintain the collective memory. It is widely recognized the importance of oral traditions to recollect the past and the cultural heritage but in practice this hardly ever happens.

The few representations of traditional expression are used only when they are related to entertainment, when this is not the case, then they are practically ignored. Furthermore the religious practices do not leave space to accommodate traditional beliefs therefore these stories are only of interest to the few people

who still consider them to be a rich source of information on local customs that would eventually disappear once the language disappears.

Many changes have happened in the life of these people even in the most remote areas: marriages are not associated to ritual practices any more; the older members of the community who used to be the tellers of the stories have not been replaced as the younger generations tend to neglect the old values and prefer to become citizens of the world. Healing practices are hardly applied and even the mantras are neglected. Many genres are becoming obsolescent; television is replacing everywhere the traditional gatherings where elders would tell stories in the evening to entertain the other villagers. To this should be added a general lack of interest and reluctance to discuss pre-Christian practices.

Genres of Punan Tubu Oral literature

“Each sphere in which language is used develops its own relatively stable types of these utterances. These we may call speech genres ... They are typical forms of utterances ” (Bakhtin 1986).

“A speech genre is a constellation of systemically related, co-occurrent formal features and structures that serves as a conventionalized orienting framework for the production and reception of discourse.... When an utterance is assimilated to a given genre, the process by which it is produced and interpreted is mediated through its intertextual relationship to prior texts.” (Bauman 1992)

The oral literature expressed by the Punan Tubu is a corpus of stories, poems, legends, myths transmitted by generation to generation to depict the traditional life, the causes of human sufferings, the ways to cope with nature and its beings. The storytellers explain the relation between humans and spirits, why warfare happened, what is the meaning of love, friendship, courage, companionship. The oral literature of the Punan Tubu can be divided in a number of genres in prose (*Mbui* and *tandik*) and poetry, which are outlined below.

It is important to distinguish “open” genres from “closed” genres.

“Open” genres are transmitted freely, changing with differences of time, place, and individual speakers or performers like folktales and legends, epic oral poems recomposed by storytellers at each performance.

“Closed” genres: genres whose texts are fixed and undergo little, if any, variation when they are transmitted from mouth to ear.

Prose narrative comprise two kind of major ‘open’ genres, *mbui* and *tandik*, whereas poetry genres are more articulated.

mbui describes the stories, myths, legends of people and animals of ordinary and extraordinary kind, heroes, spirits behind which are found moral teachings.

tandik comprise historical narratives where the events are located in particular points in history, places that have seen the history of the Punan people.

Poetry, on the other side, being a 'closed' genre comprises all the corpus of oral language where versification, special lexicon, rhythm, rhymes and meter play a role. In this category we find:

Keledu' the chanted verses of the shaman (*andu'*)

Nirau the dirges that are performed after the death of somebody

Ira' includes any kind of proverbs and sayings.

Pihu'-ihu' are verses said or chanted in turn (like *pantun* in the Malay tradition).

Kokoi are merry and noisy singing used to raise enthusiasm in people after a disease or a misadventure.

Ketuya' narrates in verses and with a metaphorical language mythical and legendary facts and people, heroes and events.

Kelolo kelovi' describe any kind of children songs and rhymes.

The Punan Tubu have a body of oral literature represented by legends, animal stories and myths called *mbui*, histories (*tandik*) where the most common themes are the exploitation of the forest and the exchange of products. These are still remembered by a number of people whereas the most endangered of these genres are the 'closed' genres forms mainly those where versification is involved. The reasons for this endangerment have to be found in a general situation of language and oral traditions endangerment in Borneo but also in the particular situation of the hunter-gatherers.

Like it has occurred to other hunter gatherers in the world, the nomads of Borneo have shared a certain amount of traditions with the agriculturalists with whom they interact. In the case of the Punan Tubu the relations with the Kayan are clear. Other scholars have pointed out the contact points with the Kayan Busang (Boedihartono 2004). The many similarities with the Kayan might be the results of a common origin or maybe of borrowing due to long term contact. The nomads are known for their lack of material culture and deep historical knowledge and articulated rituals. Cesard (2003:18) says that the expressions of the ritual life of the nomads are generally negligible including the rituals connected to the death, birth and marriage so that no ritual is performed. Unlike the agriculturalists whose life is full of ritualized events marking the many rites of passage, the life of nomads is nearly lacking any kind of ritual except the cases where the lives of sedentarised nomads have been deeply influenced by those of their agriculturalist neighbors and are displayed in a more simplified way. As it has often claimed, among the others by Cesard (2009:18) the Punan Tubu have very few forms of expressions like prohibitions, forms of sorcery, omens or ceremonies related to the production of food like sago extractions, the game obtained after hunting in the forest and the activities linked to foraging. It seems that the Punan Tubu in particular and other nomads in general have a limited pantheon of divinities leading to think that they probably have a belief system different from that of the agriculturalists. It is for this reason that in contact with other groups, very easily they absorbed new features. This is the case of the Punan living next to the Berusu in Dulau who perform the same rituals in

burying their deads and some Punan who build tall altars for the second burial like the Merap.

This can be the reasons why some forms of oral literature are unintelligible and non transmitted. They are probably not part of their culture therefore easily replaceable by something else. In the case of the Punan Tubu they have been replaced by church related activities.

With the change of economic and social habits, the nomads have abandoned much of their traditional way of life to embrace that of the Kayan. As a matter of fact they now cultivate rice and when it is not enough they buy it, they have nearly everywhere abandoned the collection of sago replaced by cassava sago found in shops, they have stopped their wanderings in the forests and developed a number of village related activities including the attendance and practice of Christian rituals.

Culturally they have experienced what social anthropologists have called economic pragmatism for economic strategies preferring those of 'immediate revenue' (see Cesard 2009) where they can have short term advantage. The spatial mobility to which they used to be acquainted with had always allowed them to adapt very easily to the opportunities offered and for this reason gave them the capability to adapt to other kind of habits, such as in this case that of storytelling. Since they have traditionally been versatile in their behavior, the acceptance of Christian rituals has totally replaced the traditional cultural habits. It is for this reason we see Punan Tubu dancing like the Berusu in Dulau or like the Kenyah and the Kayan in Malinau. After all these groups of Punan have been separated only for 40 years and yet in such a time they have absorbed elements from other cultures.

As already pointed out by anthropologists who have noticed a great variety of subsistence systems where they mix in different way, according to the environment and the social conditions, foraging, horticulture, and cultivation. In other words they have not developed one single systems of subsistence and they transform and adapt in different ways and they are also able to live in total autarchy (Sellato 1993).

It is indeed true that the collective memory is something very difficult to define and difficult is to understand the processes of conservation and transmission of tradition.

In the case of the Punan Tubu at a very preliminary stage seems unlikely that traditional knowledge is fragmentary and incomplete. Therefore it is weak and subject to replacement.

Poetic versification

The main features of poetic organization of the Punan Tubu are among the others:

- Metrical organization through phonological, lexical, or grammatical parallelism such as number of syllables, counting accents, alternations of long and short syllables, rhyme, alliteration, tonal parallelism, etc.

- Splitting the text into parallel chunks (lines) and grouping them into fixed patterns (stanzas);

- Special grammar;

- Special lexicon;

- Special style;

This can be seen in the following examples of *ledun ketuya'*, *ledun, kelolo kelovi'* and *keledu ketuya'*.

Ledun ketuya'

Kasim

Ajo nganan an Kambo	Ajo lives in Kambo
Talu Lung Ilan Bawé an Muté	Talu Lung Ilan Bawé comes from Muté
tera' nunung pekou Kerawing arin Birung	no matter what, you are Kerawing the sister of Birung
Bulan arin Jan	Bulan is the sister of Jan
nyu'o iwo keman ak ketukung	the squirrel is full from eating ripe galingale
tuping beling keman bua' abung	the squirrel beling is eating buah abung

This *ledun* that tells the story of the aggression of enemies to the village of Ajo has the structure of three couplets where word structure and coupling of words (arin) gives the rhythm that reproduces the apparent calm of the village prior to the attack.

Ledun menganyuk (song to entertain)

Kasim

Sit luit luit	Sit luit luit
Mengadok akon lawit	I pull the long line
Seribu buluh dayang	plenty of bamboo dayang

Pédak agung bélang	the gong resonates repeatedly on the lizard
Petubu agung tatom	the gong Tadam has a hole

This entertaining song has the structure of four lines where final rhymes have the function to give the rhythm to the lines of 8 syllables and the rhymes create vowel assonance (it it ang ang).

Ledun pihu-ihu (song in turns)

Kasim

Wé nun inéh	what kind of rattan is that?
Wé ting	a rattan line
Ting nun?	which rattan line?
Ting aling	a rattan line cut with a sharp knife
Aling nun?	which knife?
Alin kujo'	a hand knife.
Kujo' nun?	which hand?
Kujo' juang	the hand that pulls the rattan (to chase birds away)
Juang nun?	pull what?
Juang Angang	pull Angang's rattan
Angang nun?	which Angang?
Angang Ketung	Angang Ketung
Ketung nun?	which Ketung?
Ketung ambung	Ketung who pulls the line
Ambung nun?	which line?
Ambung gah	the line of the beam
Gah nun?	which beam?
Gah patah lany	the beam of stacked wood floor.
ro	Done

This is a typical entertaining song to remember names and objects where the symmetric structure is represented by rhyme and repetition of the name in every other line.

Ledun menganyuk (song to entertain)

Amat

Bung ké-ké	we cut a fruit with a machete
Penalun Aduh' Inggéh	sago dregs of Grandma Inggéh
Bung kang-kang	we open a fruit with a foot
Penalun Adu' Bowan	sago dregs of Grandpa Bowan
Bung king-king	we cut a fruit and only skin is left
Penalun Adu' Uking	sago dregs of Grandpa Uking
Bung kong-kong	we cut a fruit while we hit it
Penalun Adu' Ukong	sago dregs of Grandpa Ukong
Bung kuk-kuk	we cut a fruit kuk-kuk
Penalun Adu' Beruk	sago dregs of Grandma the monkey
Bung kéu-kéu	we cut a fruit keu keu
Penalun Adu' écéu	sago dregs of Grandma the long tailed monkey

This *ledun* used to be sang during the tiring process of extracting sago from the pith of the palm tree to make the atmosphere more pleasant . The alliteration and the parallelism of terms and the alternation of vowels is repeated till the end.

Ledun menganyuk (entertaining song)/ kelolo kelovi'

Kasim

Kerawing unyit-unyit	The star/Kerawing is radiant
Da tén wang langit	The blood of the female period comes from the sky
Kerawing punya unya	the star/Kerawing is scintillating
Da tén wang ripa	the blood of the female period comes from across the river
Serapah puun bela Uré	the red betel container is Uré's
Belayén tadap tén	Belayen taps her female part

This entertaining song in couplets has a final rhyme. Some informants classified it as a *kelolo kelovi'* because it used to be sang between your boys and girls when the girls had the first period.

Kelolo' kelovi' Peja'a pejait' (game song to remember the name of fruits and plants)

Amat

toh peja'a pejé'it	the ghost orders to count in rapid succession one after the other
ujung nanga	leaves of the palm tree nanga
nanga penubun	the palm tree that stands up tall,
peje'it ujung karun	then jump on the leaves of the karun
karun apan nyamo'	the karun tree becomes bark
peje'it ujung umbo	then jump on the leaves of the umbo tree
umbo nji' pu'un	the umbo leave becomes one thing with the tree,
peje'it ujung betung	then jump on the leave of the betung bamboo
betung ji' lahan	one pole of bamboo betung
peje'it Unjung tuban	then jump on the leave of the sponger
tuban lun munin	the sponger where the polecat hides
pakén kelawén	oh I forgot the yellow durian
tién apan tau	the place covered by leaves became I lay down
alu apan bayang	the tree that is perfect to become a piece of cloth
merang apan céh	the tree erang is taken to become a torch
kendéh bayang lu'ung	the tamarind used for a shirt
tengung naré hak	the forest terap tree collapses 'bam'
tibak asa lenjou	the forest banana tree is carved with leopard motifs
buno télé buan	the mangosteen tree leaks with resin
nakan naré kup	I have been fooled by the empty kup fruit
kumut ruai belok	a big terap falls easily from the tree
legindok bukun	the legindok tree has many nodes
karun mila	the karun tree is slanting
lengeca batak	the lengeca fruit lies diagonally

bova celian	it leaks and its drops fall down along the tree
melan sepit	the melan fruit is empty
va'it ba'un	the va'it fruit is very big
abung bello	the abung is oval
ivou tolang	the ivou fruit is only pit
bawang bonot	the onion is round
lengot bilin	the langsung fruit has a trunk that has branches on the bottom part
mecalin ulih	the mecalin fruit (like camper) is half ripe, half unripe
peih peterbai	the forest rambai fruit has a long stem
ulai punyu	the forest terap fruit is black
keramu peké-ké	the keramu fruit has branches like flowers
seréh timén	the cereh fruit is very delicious
pakén ruai alai	the durian falls easily
riai pribu	the riai durian has sticky discharge
lebutuh iva	the lebutuh tree is very low
rah nyalin	the pandan tree is very sharp
uping cerou	the pelaju fruit has a white content
lalou mengan	the manggris fruit is red in its internal part
an kerit	the trunk of the an tree has spots everywhere
opit bulah luang	the opit fruit has a pale content
ka'ang ruai lak	the cempedak fruit easily falls from the tree

This *kelolo kelovi'* is a children game used to remember name of plants and fruits in the forest. It used to be sang when an old lady found a ghost in the forest. He challenged her that he would eat her if she wasn't able to remember all the names of plants and fruits in the forest in a short period. She succeeded in doing it therefore she remained unhurt. This song has very short lines that have to be repeated very fast.

Keledu' (formulaic songs)

These chanted poems were performed in order to seek help from the various gods and spirits and describe the nature of the spirits who could cause illness. In various forms these chants were also used to renew the vitality of the domestic family or that of the fertility of the village.

These poetic chants are formed in stanzas of four or five lines preceded by a couplet. The lines contain standard vocabulary, mixed with so called ritual lexicon and often parallelism occurs in the coupling of some words.

These melodies of the chants are also frequently played on the Punan Tubu nose flute.

The formulaic character of phrases and lines in oral literature is supposed to function as a mnemonic device for the Punan Tubu people. But this does not seem to be the case. An interesting aspect of the ritual lexicon is that it contains lexemes that are part of the standard lexicon of other languages spoken in Borneo, in this case of Kayan. This is not new as it has been studied in Rungus, (see Appell 2010) where many words appearing in the chanted verses are taken from the standard language of the Berusu, a related language spoken miles away.

Keledu' Ketuya'

Amat

Anying-anying kengeliung	friends, I can hear a humming voice
kePurung ungéi Lenung	it's Purung from the Lenung river
lit kengeliung	iit it is humming
Tenin ro biring	a bright light spreads everywhere
Ti'a lékawah abun tung	it is very clear below the sky, below the thick clouds
Kenak Purung Laring	it's the humming sound of Purung Laring
Tebo Ibung	ordered by Ibung
lit kengeliung ni Purung	iit I can hear the humming sound of Purung
nait lumé ni tape Pendung	he is packing the sand for the ghost Pendung
Kenak Purung Laring	it is Purung Laring
Tebo Ibung	ordered by Ibung
Anying-anying kengeliung	friends, I can hear a humming voice
Ni Purung lam Kambo	it's Purung's from Kambo
Purung alam Utung	Purung from the Utung river
mbo-mbo kou kayo abun angou	go high and high, you abun tree (so that the leopard is afraid to reach your top)
liba-liba kou kayo abun belah	go down and down you red abun tree

kenak Purung	it is Purung's
Purung Laring	Purung Laring
tebo Ibung	ordered by Ibung
anying-anying kou ngeliung	friends, I can hear a humming voice
kaing kujou kou ni	you are a male bird
kelemayan kengejuma' lung dah	don't look down, to the river
nelikun un	look up to the mountain
kenak ni Purung lam Kambou	it's Purung's from Kambou
lam Utung	from Utung
anying anying kou ngeliung	friends, I can hear a humming voice
lebi keturi ro birung	the day is turning dark like in the afternoon
ti'ah kelakawah kabun tung	but it will be clear again under the sky, under the thick clouds
kelaun ni Purung Ajo lam Utung	says Purung Ajo from the Utung river.

The structure of this *ketuya'* is that of a chanted story where in every line words from other languages are used (see the bold words). The singer and another informant was clear in his meaning of the stanzas but asked about the details they were unable to give a meaning explaining that the meaning is only in the sang song. In other cases other speakers were unable to explain it. The strategy to write down the words seemed to complicate the matter as the singer himself did not recognize any word. Apparently the song is memorized as a whole and breaking down the components is of no help. A fragment of *ketuya'* written down by another scholar (Budihartono 2004) was not recognized by informants in Respen allegedly because was recorded in another upriver village though a number of words were recognized. But again, since the words are not part of the Punan Tubu vocabulary are not recognized if taken out of context and not heard in a *ketuya'*. Budihartono consider the language of *ketuya'* a dead language and for this reason very few (if any at all) understand its meaning. According to other speakers the language used by the *wang langit*, the spirits and the mediums who are possessed by the spirits changes according to the shaman, as apparently every shaman uses his code. Unfortunately most of this statements could not be verified in the field as no ceremony was performed and the three shamans declared they were not able to understand everything that was said because the language can only be understood if somebody is possessed by the same spirit. Transmission and conservation of this language is yet to be ascertained though according to the informants only few specialized people can speak the language of the *wang langit*, a language that is not learnt in the community but only through interaction with spirits when possessed by them. Unlike other oral genres like *mbui* or *tandik* that are learnt through transmission from grandfather to the other members of the family, the language of *ketuya'* and of *keledu'* is still a mystery. Although the informants know about its existence and role in the community, and can also say that there exist two kind of *ketuya'*, *ketuya ayo'* (long) and *ketuya' icit* (small) now only known by one or two people in the upper part of the river. It is a clear case of a ritual language that probably was used in the past

when rituals were performed and now with the end of these rituals it has disappeared with the death of few people who used to know it. The other explanation is that this is the ritual language from other ethnic groups, borrowed by some Punan shamans who used to be bilingual in the other language. Unfortunately, given its restricted use it has never developed nor learnt by other people.

What is interesting is also the different interpretations local people give to the origin of this language leading to think that the information is very incomplete or vague. Informants seem to agree on the topic of the *ketuya*, that is stories related to heroes of the past who interact with other beings and plants and animals, each of them with a soul, but nobody is able to translate or understand it.

Boedihartono (2004) who was able to record a *ketuya* and transcribe it, explains that the language of *ketuya* is characterized by very poetic nuances and is very detailed in the description of people, objects and animals. What is questionable for a hunter-gatherers community is the fact that the stories relate to the time when there were already rice fields and the people were sedentarised village people. It is therefore legitimate to question the origin of the *ketuya* that is probably a product of sedentarised people like the Kayan despite the fact that the Punan Tubu claim that it is an original genre.

How to explain Oral literature (and language) endangerment?

In an attempt to explain the why and how this genre is endangered could be appropriate to apply an ethnography of speech approach to oral literature mixed to the language endangerment one.

If we are able to respond to the following questions and try to combine the answers to the variables of language endangerment we might find a clear definition of endangerment of oral and language endangerment in the Punan Tubu community.

- a. In which community does it circulate?
- b. Which are its genres and subgenres, and what are their distinctive features?
- c. Who creates which genres and subgenres, when and for whom?
- d. Who performs which genres and subgenres, when and for whom?
- e. Who listens to, looks at, or anyhow acts as an audience to which genres and subgenres, when and how?
- f. What kind of action is carried out by creating, performing or, anyhow, disseminating which genres and subgenres? That is: to what purpose is this done?

If we combine these answers to the established criteria to determine language endangerment, mainly, low number of speakers, no transmission to younger generations, proportion of speakers within the total population, trends in language domains, response to new domains and media, materials for language

education and governmental and institutional attitudes and status, community members attitudes towards the language, amount and quality of documentation, we can easily understand why these poetic genres are endangered.

The changes in society and the massive influence of Church in cultural issues and the pressure of State politics, has generated replacement in the old habits and in the original Religion whatever it was. Asked about the repertoire of their traditional stories and songs, most of the informants recollect some stories, *mbui* used to be told in the old times when television was not introduced yet in the houses to entertain young and adults but hardly any of them know *ketuya'* or *keledu'*. According to Punan Tubu elders, one of the major genres of oral literature had been the religious performance for illness, for success in agricultural activities and for the fecundity of the village and individual families. Whereas these performances had previously been performed by priests who were also spirit mediums, nowadays these ritual ceremonies are hardly held.

Among the Punan Tubu elders it is commonly taken for granted that the chanted form of poetry known as *keledu'* is not performed any longer. Most of the cases where these people are heard to sing is when they sing Church devotional hymns in Indonesian or other pop songs learnt through television. In the town of Malinau where the Punan Tubu live these devotional hymns have never translated in the vernacular.

What to do in the future?

In the framework of the principles proclaimed by the UNESCO universal declaration of cultural diversity, I believe that it would be useful to produce a publication of some of the recorded poems. This publication would have a multifold purpose considered fundamental in every documentation project:

produce tangible written material on languages otherwise only confined to the domain of orality;

provide preliminary material to be part of the 'local content' topic in obligatory schools (elementary and junior high school) needed to foster the study of the language in the formal education system;

raise language diversity awareness among the local community

foster the relevant speech communities' pride in their own language and culture as well as secure equal dignity to every language;

encourage the use in oral and written domains of the local languages otherwise endangered by the use of the lingua franca of the area;

attempt a renewal of traditional genres for local competition of cultural events.

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