

IV. Introduction to Petalangan religious language¹

Outline of Petalangan magic

Categories of magic spells

Magical practices are part of nearly every activity and pursuit in Petalangan society, as is also found in other Indonesian societies (cf. Keeler 1987; Atkinson 1989; Tsing 1993; Chou 1994). The word for magic, *ilmu* in Malay as well as in Indonesian, literally refers to ‘science’ or ‘knowledge’ that includes mystic knowledge of magic (cf. Endicott 1970: 13; Chou 1994: 58).² *Lomu*, the Petalangan dialect for *ilmu* also implies esoteric knowledge handed down from the ancestors. Many of my Malay informants in Pekanbaru say that the reason for the tribes’ affinity for magic is that they are ‘authentic’ (*asli*) and ‘close to nature’ (*masih alami*) due to their remoteness from the impacts of the modernization process.³ The more isolated an indigenous ethnic group is, the more powerful is the magic they are assumed to have.

Remoteness from the center is typically thought to cause the tribe people to be separated from nationally recognized religions, such as Islam, Protestantism,

¹ By ‘religious language,’ I refer to language practices that are supernaturally charged, including individual recitations of various genres of prayers or spells, as well as the public performances of ritual speech in religious contexts.

² The word, *ilmu* originates from an Arabic word for “knowledge” that refers to “learning [based on divine revelation], science, magic, any branch of knowledge or magic” (Chou 1994: 58).

³ Even within the Petalangan society, members perceive people’s differentiated competence in knowledge of magic according to their different degree of interactions with others. Villagers of Betung, for example, used to describe people who live in more inaccessible parts of the village and who rarely interact with other villagers have more magical power. They refer to the fringes or the peripheries of the village as interior (*dalam*) that usually means ‘center’ in English. Many informants told me to go “further inside” (*dalam*) of the village so that I could collect more magic spells. In terms of competence in magic and magical power, therefore, marginality rather operates as one of enhancing factors of power.

Catholicism, Buddhism and Hinduism. Malay Muslims tend to view the isolated tribes as pagan peoples, whose religion is “not apparent” (*tidak jelas*). Urban Malays even stereotype the isolated tribes as having powerful black magic (*ilmu hitam*), and they are reluctant to interact with the isolated people for fear of black magic that they might have. Petalangers are one of the remote tribes viewed as having powerful magic in the eyes of the neighboring Riau Malays.

Petalangers classify their magic and magic spells largely into two categories: ‘social magic’ (*ilmu masyarakat* : magic for society), and ‘personal magic’ (*ilmu privadi* : magic for individuals). ‘Social magic’ (*ilmu masyarakat*) is the magic for communal activities, including economic activities, such as farming, hunting and collecting honey,⁴ and those for medical purposes such as healing and child-birth. This category of magic requires specialists, each of whom has a special title, such as *dukun padi* (rice shaman), *dukun rebah* or *juagan* (bee shaman), *kemantan* (medical specialist) and *bidan* (midwife).

‘Personal magic’ (*ilmu privadi*), on the other hand, is used for personal well-being. This category involves a set of magic spells for enhancing health, physical strength, self-protection, beauty and sexual satisfaction,⁵ including ‘cleaning magic’ (*ilmu membersihkan diri*),⁶ ‘thickening magic’ (*ilmu kebal*),⁷ ‘beauty magic’ (*ilmu pemani*),

⁴ Even though many Petalangan males occasionally engage fishing, spells for fishing are not as elaborate as those in other economic activities. According to my Betung informants, success in fishing mostly depends on knowledge and personal experience, not on magic, since they regard ‘fishing’ as an activity of ‘using reason’ (*pakai akal*) to determine the best spot for fishing. This reflects the Petalangan perceptions that ‘using magic’ is the opposite of ‘logical reasoning’.

⁵ Atkinson (1989) reports the wide usage of magic for beauty, courtship, and contraception in the Wana society of Indonesia. Wana people regard health and life as depending on the power of magic, “as do strength, courage, oratory, and economic success” (1989: 58).

⁶ This is used to clean a person’s body, for instance, when bathing.

‘voice magic’ (*ilmu suara*),⁸ and abortion magic (*ilmu tamanang*).⁹ All of them are common in that they are directed at the performer’s own body, not to others’ bodies. Due to its self-orientedness, this category of magic is viewed as less harmful and dangerous than the forms of magic directed towards others’ bodies and minds.

Another set of personal magic spells are used to control others’ emotions and to manage interpersonal social relationships. This set includes ‘love magic’ (*ilmu pengashi*), ‘hate magic’ (*ilmu pembenci*), and ‘defeating magic’ (*ilmu penunduk*). This genre of magic is often regarded as dangerous, because its purpose is to gain control over others’ will and intentions for one’s own advantage, potentially harming others.

‘Love magic’ (*ilmu pengashi*) is to make a targeted person fall in love with a performer of the magic, while “hate magic” is to make people hate one another. Strictly speaking, ‘hate magic’ (*ilmu pembenci*) belongs to one of ‘love magic,’ because a main purpose of ‘hate magic’ is to make a target person hate others who might compete with the performer of the spell for the target person’s love.

‘Defeating magic’ (*ilmu penunduk*) literally means a category of magic “to make others bend their own heads.” This type of magic is used to defeat an opponent, so it will be referred to here as ‘defeating magic.’ This magic is always used among those who are in unequal social positions, whereas other types of personal magic can be used on one’s social equals. People report that they use the defeating magic when they meet with “big people”(o’ang bose) who are “highly positioned” (*bepangkat tinggi*) in social hierarchies. Within Petalangan society, relationships between parents and children, teachers and

⁷ This is believed to make a person’s skin thick so as to be impenetrable by outside attacks.

⁸ This is used to enhance a person’s voice quality.

⁹ This is to prevent a woman from undesirable pregnancy.

students, and between spouses are typical social relations in which the various types of defeating magic are frequently applied.

The defeating magic is primarily used to prevent a superior from expressing fury or outrage against an inferior. This practice reflects the fear and anxiety that is felt about any possibility of offending higher positioned people. No matter how furious the superior is, once the defeating magic penetrates into the mind, he or she will not become angry again. Rather, the superior will tend to have pity (*sayang*) or to accept what the inferiors request. Many Petalangan informants have reported stories about the ways in which they have been able to use defeating magic in order to avoid confrontation with highly positioned people.¹⁰

In explaining the uses of defeating magic, furthermore, people indicate two different categories; one is ‘warriors’ magic’ (*ilmu dubalang*) and the other is ‘children’s magic’ (*ilmu kakanak*). As implied by the names of magic genres, ‘warriors’ magic’ is to make a magic practitioner brave and strong enough to defeat an opponent like a warrior in battle. ‘Children’s magic’ implies that a performer of the magic projects him/herself as a child who is very weak and needy. These two categories of magic correspond respectively to ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ ways of confronting opponents.

The emphasis on affect is common to all genres of Petalangan magic. As love magic and hate magic are believed to control a target person’s feelings and emotions, defeating magic is also used to evoke certain emotional states in both opponents and performers. Warrior’s magic evokes anger (*ma’ah*) in a performer’s mind in order to

¹⁰ Pak Arum’s (74 years old) story exemplifies the Petalangan perspectives of defeating magic. Around 20 years ago, a policeman arrested Pak Arum when he was caught in the middle of fight between two other villagers on the street near a market in Sorek (the market town near Desa Betung). He told me that he was able to avoid a big trouble at that time, because he cast a defeating magic spell to the policeman immediately, while two other villagers were badly treated, even stripped and beaten by the policeman.

make him/her brave and furious when fighting against other people. Children's magic is to solicit pity (*sayang*) or nurturance from opponents, as a "soft" way of defeating others. This magic is believed to "soften" (*melemahkan*) the opponents' mind, in hopes that the opponent will treat the performer of the magic as a child who is very helpless and needy. Viewed from this perspective, love magic and beauty magic are a type of defeating magic as well, since these categories of magic are meant to make superiors treat the performer of the magic in a favorable way. Once the defeating magic penetrates into a target person's mind, whatever the performer says becomes acceptable to the target person.

Petalangan magic usually combines verbal utterances with the manipulation of objects, but the verbal components are more essential to the magical performance.¹¹ Specifically, 'personal magic' is practiced mainly by reciting spells, although it may sometimes require another medium to transfer the words to a target person. In beauty magic, spells are recited to the water with which one will take a bath. If a person practices beauty magic for another person, it often uses a medium such as oil, lemon, and *pinang* (areca nuts) to transfer the magical power to a target person's body.¹² In the case

¹¹ Not only Petalangers but also Malays in general are well known for their emphasis on verbal aspects of magic (cf. Skeat 1900, Endicott 1970). For example, Javanese put magical 'golden needles' (*suntuk*) into their faces to look pretty, but Malays chant beauty spells to their own bodies. Malay notions of the performative power of word seem to be influenced by the Islamic tradition of prayer and chants (cf. Gade 2000).

¹² For example, a wedding ceremony requires a magician called *tukang andam* (a magician for bridal make-up). The ceremony of shaving the bride's and the groom's foreheads constitutes an important part of the wedding, making a *tukang andam*'s role of casting beauty spells to the bride and the groom indispensable. The magician recites a beauty spell to some areca nuts which the bride and the groom chew before and after shaving their hair for the wedding.

of love magic (*pengasih*), people recite magic spells to the foods and drinks that a target person will eat or drink, resulting in infatuation.¹³

Table 4 presents a schematized summary of the categories of Petalangan magic. Recitation of magic spells is the dominant form of magical practice in Petalangan society, so the categories of magic are presented in this table with corresponding forms of magic spells.

	Sub-categories	Performer	Recipient	Purpose
Ilmu Masyarakat (Magic for society)	<i>Ilmu padi</i> (Rice magic)	<i>Dukun padi</i> (Rice shaman)	Rice	Abundant harvest
	<i>Ilmu rebah</i> (Bee magic)	<i>Dukun rebah</i> (Bee shaman)	Bees	Collecting honey
	<i>Ilmu Pengobatan</i> (Medication)	<i>Kemantan</i> (Medicine specialist)	Patients	Healing patients
	<i>Ilmu bidan</i> (Midwife magic)	<i>Bidan</i> (Midwife)	Women who are in delivery	Delivery of a baby
Ilmu Privadi (Magic for individuals)	<i>Ilmu pemani</i> (beauty magic) <i>ilmu suara</i> (voice magic) <i>ilmu membersihkan diri</i> (cleaning body) <i>ilmu kebal</i> (thick magic) <i>ilmu tamanang</i> (“family planning magic”)	Individuals	Performers’ own bodies	Personal well-being and self-protection: Improving body conditions, health and beauty
	<i>ilmu pengashi</i> (love magic), <i>ilmu pembenci</i> (hate magic), <i>ilmu penunduk</i> (defeating magic)	Individuals	Others’ minds	Control others’ feelings, will and intentions to the performer’s own advantage

Table 4. Categories of Petalangan magic/magic spells

¹³ For this reason, people are afraid of foods or drinks given by strangers. When I stayed in Betung, for example, many villagers warned me not to take any suspicious foods from strangers, since those foods could contain malicious magical powers.

Performers of magic

Petalangan social magic requires specialists to practice the magic for communal activities, while personal magic can be practiced by any individual who wants to practice the magic for his or her own purpose. Magic specialists for the communal activities are usually part time practitioners. Specialists engage in diverse economic activities for their living, and will offer rituals if requested by other community members. The *kemantan* (medicine specialist)¹⁴ performs a specific healing ritual when a patient's family requests it. The *bidan* (midwife) also serves a part-time profession, providing several ceremonies, and helping a client deliver a baby. *Dukun padi* (rice shaman) and *juagan* (bee shaman), on the other hand, use spells for their own subsistence, activities of rice cultivation and collecting honey. Magic used in economic activity is viewed as being one of the actual skills needed for economic production. Juagans are honey collectors who gather honey from bee-hived trees, and dukun padi are farmers who cultivate rice.

Most magic specialists claim to acquire mystic knowledge by inheritance, usually following a matrilineal line. The esoteric knowledge and skills required to become a midwife or a rice shaman are thought to follow a mother-daughter line, while those for a kemantan (medicine specialist) and a bee shaman are inherited through a maternal uncle-cousin line.¹⁵ Petalangans call the process of acquiring magic or supernatural power by inheritance “*terun-temurun*,” that is, “passing on from the ancestors to grandchildren.”

¹⁴ In Petalangan society, there are two titles for medicine specialists; one is *dukun* (shaman) and the other is *kemantan*. As ordinary practitioners, dukuns rely on recitation of spells and use of special plants and materials to treat a sick person, while kemantans cure patients by means of a spirit-raising séance called *belian*. The power of kemantan is considered to be superior to that of dukun. Typically one clan has only one kemantan.

Terun-temurun does not imply a determined, one-directional process of transmission. A required and formal training process means that the inheritance of magical knowledge only occurs when the member of the younger generation wants to go through the training. A daughter of a midwife does not necessarily become a midwife, because the inheritance of the esoteric knowledge is possible only when the daughter wants to (*kalo mau*) be a midwife. A prospective bee-shaman has to ask for the magic lesson from his maternal uncle by preparing required items as a gift (*hadiah*) in exchange for each specific lesson.

In contrast, the knowledge and skills required to be a kemantan are not obtained through a training process. The mystic power of a kemantan is transmitted through the “blood” (*da’a*) to someone who shares the ancestry of the previous kemantan. Revelation comes in a dream or temporary illness bestowed upon the candidates on the occasion of the death of the kemantan, who is usually the maternal uncle of the prospective kemantan. A genre of ritual songs employed in healing rituals are also said to “come by themselves” (*datang sendiri*).

The hereditary knowledge of social magic is often viewed as being so powerful that it is dangerous to ordinary people. Those who do not have a hereditary right to the magic cannot ‘endure’ (*tahan*) its power.¹⁵ A prospective kemantan sometimes experiences a temporary illness or madness before his initiation. Becoming a midwife is

¹⁵ This is partly because of the gender differences in each specialist in Petalangan society. Petalangan midwives and rice shamans are usually women, while kemantan and juagan are men.

¹⁶ This type of magical knowledge is also called *ilmu batin*, implying a strong recourse to spirit or mystic power. The specialists are often viewed as having a spirit helper to increase their supernatural power, while other personal magic only utilizes verbal formulae or material, not relying on spirits. As the types of *ilmu batin*, kemantan (medicine specialists), bidan (midwife), and juagan (bee-shaman) are considered to be siblings.

also regarded as dangerous. Midwives believe that a woman's body is 'locked' (*dikunci*) in a way that prevents her from giving birth to her own baby, while she helps other women's child-birth. Most midwives in the village are over fifty years old and they are reluctant to pass the knowledge to their own daughters until the daughters have their own children. If someone wants to become a midwife, she is required to be married, and already have children. Otherwise, she will face many 'trials' (*cobaan*) from spiritual beings, such as difficulty of her own pregnancy. The hereditary attribute of the social magic limits other people's right to access the magic. Social magic is characterized by a high degree of secrecy.¹⁷

Unlike social magic, Petalangan personal magic does not require that one become a specialist. Anybody who has learned a magic spell can practice the magic. Individuals seek a teacher who is 'good at' (*pandai*) a specific magic and receive a magic lesson from the teacher. Compared to the high degree of secrecy in social magic, the mystic knowledge needed for personal magic in daily life is more accessible and achievable, if one is 'diligent' (*rajin*) in seeking the magic spells.

Another way to obtain magical knowledge is through 'god's guidance' (*hidayat*). Some informants in the village told me that they had dreams in which a person, who is thought to be one of the dreamer's ancestors, appeared and taught "words" (*kato*). For personal magic, the learning of spells is more important than individual spiritual potency. Everybody can be a practitioner of personal magic, once one has spells and practices them properly. With no need of spiritual power for its practice, the efficacy of Petalangan personal magic is located in its verbal aspects, the words from the ancestors.

¹⁷ To discuss a problem of secrecy in Malay magic in general, see Endicott (1970: 19-20).

How do the words work? : Power of magical words

Invoking supernatural power

Petalangan magic spells are believed to come from the deceased ancestors.¹⁸ The ancestors' words, furthermore, originated from God¹⁹; God's messages were transmitted to the ancestors through diverse medium of communication. According to Petalangan belief, animals, especially birds, used to be messengers who brought God's messages to the ancestors, since all animals were able to speak human languages when the world was created. God's messages contained esoteric knowledge of this world and provided access to the hidden realms. As the ancestors articulated God's messages into verbal formulas, God's messages became verbalized. Spells themselves have become a communicative tool through which people can communicate with the supernatural beings as well as connect to exogenous sources of power in a hidden realm. According to their belief, reciting the 'words' or 'formulas' from the ancestors can invoke the same spiritual power as did the ancestors in the past.

Each spell has a specific title, which often indicates the name of the first owner of the spell, compounded with the word 'words' (*kato*), or with 'prayer' (*doa*).²⁰ For example, 'Pak Ande's words' (*kato Pak Ande*) refers to a magic spell that was made by

¹⁸ People frequently refer to the magic spells as *kato o'ang tuo-tuo dulu* (the words from old generations in the past).

¹⁹ By *God*, I refer to the immortal supernatural power conceived of as a creator of the universe by the Petalangans. Petalangans use the Muslim names for god, such as *Allah* or *Tuhan* (the Lord) to refer to this supernatural power.

²⁰ Some people distinguish *kato* (words) and *doa* (prayer); while 'words' usually refer to a spell that is practiced temporarily for a short term purpose, 'prayer' is that which requires a long-term practice of magic spells. Many people, however, use these two terms interchangeably.

an ancestor whose name was Pak Ande. Given that this spell is for rice cultivation, Pak Ande is assumed to be an ancestor who received a God's message containing esoteric knowledge on rice cultivation.

Mere utterances of spells' titles are also believed to have magical effects. A speaker can assert his/her own speaking ability in the recitation of a specific magic spell by referring to its title. For instance, uttering 'PakAnde's words' is supposed to transmit the ancestor's magical power to the current speaker. Another example is provided by the most powerful spell, one that addresses God's name within its text. 'Allah's words' (*Kato Allah*) is regarded as one of the most powerful spells among the diverse Petalangan defeating spells, since the magic spell contains the name of God, Allah. The following spell is a defeating spell, which shows that a speaker's utterances of the spell's title "King *Empodu* (spleen)'s words"²¹ and 'God's words' are believed to evoke powerful magical effects.

" <i>Kum</i> " <i>kato sodu</i>	" <i>Kum</i> " <i>sodu's</i> words
" <i>Sokalikum</i> " <i>kato ajo Empodu</i>	" <i>Kum</i> once again" King <i>Empodu's</i> words
" <i>Hukum umat Allah</i> " <i>kato tuhan</i>	"Allah's punishment" God's words

Example IV-1. *Kato Empodu* (Spleen's words)

Recitation of a specific magic spell is powerful enough to activate a range of agents in this world such as birds, plants and even spiritual beings of the outer world, including deceased ancestors. All of these agents of the magic spells belong to the category of 'God's creatures' (*perciptaan Allah*). Officially claiming to be Muslims, on

²¹ *Empodu* (spleen) is one of the most frequently found words among the Petalangan defeating charms. Spleen is used as a metaphor for the revenge, because of its bitter taste. To tear apart someone's spleen often symbolizes the very activity of revenge in Petalangan expression.

the other hand, Petalangans also justify their invoking other spiritual beings such as ghosts, *jin* and *satan* by pointing that these are also God's creatures. From the Petalangans' subjective viewpoint, their practice of magic spells does not conflict with their official religion, Islam. They justify their use of magic spells as sanctioned by God, since the magic spells only utilize the spiritual beings that God has created for some intentions and purposes.

The use of spells is also compared with 'mobility.' Spells' power of invoking spiritual agents gives mobility to the Petalangans. Petalangan women, in particular, explain their use of magic spells through a comparison to men's mobility, the freedom to go everywhere. Women's magic spells are believed to allow women a power of movement similar to that of men, since they utilize spiritual agents that can be moved anywhere. Given that mobility is regarded as one of the most important sources of power in Petalangan society, magic spells' capability of moving spiritual agents entails another source of power.

Interestingly, the power of magic spells has nothing to do with the individual's potency. It does not belong to a specific position or person. Rather magic or magic spells exist as a source of power by themselves detached from people. Invisible energy can be claimed by anybody who aspires to power, depending on whether or not he or she has a chance to learn the mystical knowledge and magic.

Reciting magic spells, therefore, is a very sacred ritual act through which the performer invokes the divine power embedded in the spell. As it is believed that God creates the world through speech, ancestors' words that originated from God are thought to entail deeds in the utterance itself. In Goffman's terms (1979), Petalangan practice of

magic spells comprises three different levels of speakers; God as a principal speaker of the magic spell, the ancestors as authors, and the current speakers as animators. Despite the change of the speakers, the spells are still effective since the words themselves retain magical power. Even repeating the words in the present context carries the same creative force as when uttered by the ancestors. By the utterance of the same ‘words’ of the ancestors, the current speakers render magical power in the present contexts. The following figure shows the basic Petalangan notion of magic spells as having creative force.

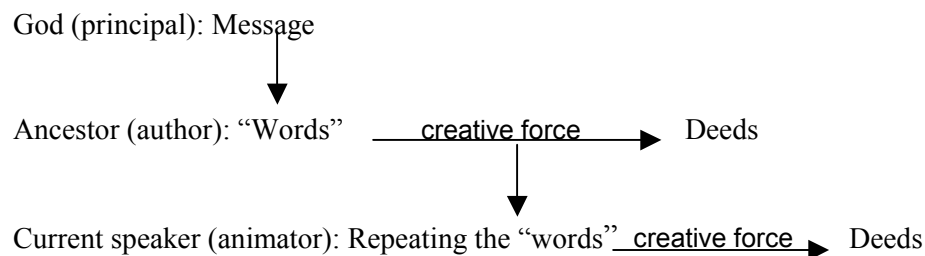


Figure 5. Petalangan conceptions of magic spells: creative forces of the “words”

Embodied words and enacted magic

In contrast to those invoking superior power from the spirits, other genres of magic spells do not require one to solicit help from the spiritual agents. Recitation of spells can absorb the specific attributes of objects that are addressed in the magic spells and transmit them to the recipients of the magic. This view of language as agent is most apparent in Petalangan personal magic spells, especially in beauty spells that are directed at their own bodies (*badan*). Given that ‘brightness’ (*seri*) is a main imagery of beauty in Petalangan society, beauty spells accordingly quote the names of specific objects that are characterized as having ‘shiny’ attributes. They recite names of the sun, the moon, and

the stars, in the hope to transmit brightness to the performer's or the recipient's body. The following spell shows a typical beauty spell that quotes the names of objects that are supposed to have desirable qualities that can be transmitted to the body.

*Allah humakama Billhaili
 Sekali ke umah
 Sekali ke tanah
 Aku mangambil cahaya mataha'i,
 Bulan dengan bintang
 Sa'o melilup di pinggang aku
 Bintang temabu di dado aku
 Bulan mengambang di muka aku
 Matahai terbit ubun-ubun aku
 Sengajo aku memamkai
 Cahayo bulan bintang mataha'i
 Dalam batang tubuh badan ku ini
 Kabul Allah, Kabul Muhammad,
 Kabul Bagindo Rasullullah*

*Allah humakama Billhaili
 Once to the house,
 once to the yard.
 I am taking the sun's light,
 the moon and the stars.
 A snake is winding up my waist.
 A rising star is on my chest.
 The moon is blooming on my face.
 The sun is arising around my neck.
 Intentionally I use
 the light from the moon, stars, and the sun
 in this my body.
 Bless [me] Allah, Bless me Muhammad,
 His Majesty, the Messenger of God.*

Example IV-2. Beauty spell: *Cahaya Matahai* (Sun's light)

Other studies of magic spells have showed that most spells describe the ideal outcome of a specific purpose of the magic. Most of them are characterized by the recitation of objects that have some similarities with the desirable result of the magic. In Trobriand magic, for example, the utterance of the word spider is believed to bring on a web-like growth of the plants (Malinowski 1965 [1935]). According to Tambiah, “magical acts, usually compounded of verbal utterance and object manipulation, constitute ‘performative’ acts by which a property is imperatively transferred to a recipient object or person on an analogical basis” (Tambiah 1985: 60). The performative force of magic spells thus is based on their analogical thoughts. The analogy used in the magic spells is not based on similarities, but rather on the ‘expansion’ or ‘transferring’ of

the meaning (ibid). Weiner (1984) also indicates the “transference of attributes” (1984: 182) and the “impregnation of the words into objects” (182) in the Kiriwina magic spells.

In addition to the view of language as a medium, Petalangans view language as object or matter, a generating force to influence the world. Beauty spells are treated as ornaments for the bodies. Practicing magic spells is viewed as decorating the bodies. Petalangan magic spells are also supposed to have autonomous agency external to a speaker. While it is important to effectively evoke supernatural power in social magic, the genres of personal magic do not require other superior agency. This is one of the reasons why social magic demands specialists, whereas it is not necessary to have specialists for personal magic. No matter who performs the spells, the spells are believed to be effective, as long as a performer follows exact phrases of the original version.

Finally, Petalangan notions of materiality of magic spells are effective, only based on other metapragmatic discourses about the relations between language and the body. Repeated recitation of spells is supposed to embody the magic recipients’ bodies into the desirable ones. This Petalangan notion of magic and the body illustrates their idea of the embodiment of words—“ Words become bones and flash” (*Kato jadi daging tulang*).

Learning process of magic spells

Petalangan magic spells are mostly used to control others’ feelings—including those of personified nature in the form of supernatural beings. For example, communal rituals consist of praise to express people’s emotional bonds with supernatural beings. For abundant rice harvests, harvest rituals require performers to praise or flatter rice

spirits into producing more rice. Most genres of personal magic, except those that target the performers' own bodies, are to control others' feeling and emotions. Love spells make others love the performer, while defeating spells prevent others from becoming angry. The purposes behind Petalangan magic spells reveal the importance of affectivity in magic spells as well in daily life.²²

Petalangan emotions/sentiments are situated social practices embedded in social relationships (cf. Lutz & Abu-Lughod 1990) that make the demand for people to show concern about others' feelings and emotions (see Chapter III). In this respect, having knowledge of magic spells is especially important in dealing with others and managing social relationships. People believe that magic spells have the power to control other people's wills or feelings by penetrating into their inner selves.²³

From the Petalangan point of view, the boundary of the person is not fixed but flexible and is even exposed to outside influence. The *mayo* (life force) of a person is considered so weak and volatile that it can be easily moved around; it can even cross outside of the boundary of the self. As one of the spiritual components, closely related to the body and emotion, *mayo* is conceptually located between the body and the mind. If someone's *mayo* is interfered with from outside, he/she experiences changes in his/her bodily conditions or emotional states.

The idea of *mayo* helps to explain people's belief in the power of magic spells to control others' feelings. Fear that others will use malicious magic to control an individual

²² By affectivity of magic spells, however, I do not refer to expressive meanings in the spells. Rather I focus on how discourses of magic, emotion, and sentiment converge in the Petalangan linguistic practices employed in magic spells.

²³ This view on magic spells is also reported in other societies. Weiner (1984) shows that the Kiriwina people in New Guinea are afraid of others' ability to influence them by magic, because they view magic as a tool to penetrate one's personal space.

is one of the most prevalent anxieties found among Petalangan people. Accordingly, Petalangans interact with one another under constant suspicion of what others may do to them through the use of spells. A person's allusion to the knowledge of magic is a way that he or she displays having the potential to influence others to his/her advantage, which triggers fear in other people. This, in turn, motivates people to learn spells in order to protect themselves from the willfulness of others. Most Petalangan adults, therefore, claim some knowledge of spells. Typically, men learn magic spells from male elders and women from female elders.

In Petalangan society, magic lessons always take place under very private and secret circumstances and they have been strictly formalized and ritualized. The learning process itself appears to be a rite through which people acquire esoteric knowledge embedded in specific magic formulas. Strict regulations and rules for learning magic enhance the "transcendental" quality of magic spells. "Transcendence" refers to the spells' conventionality, the appearance of the spells as a fixed and invariant genre across ever-changing pragmatic contexts (cf. Tambiah 1985, Webb 1997a).²⁴ The ritualized learning process renders magic spells into powerful and authoritative texts that are believed to be invariant from the ancestors' words in the past.

If someone wants to learn a specific magic spell, he/she should find a right teacher for his/her specific purposes.²⁵ Usually people look for senior members to be

24 According to Tambiah (1985), the transcendental quality of ritual may include "formality (conventionality), stereotypy (rigidity), condensation (fusion), and redundancy (repetition)" (Ibid: 128), through which spells appear as invariant and fixed "ancestors' words," not contingent on the current pragmatic contexts. See Webb (1997a) for a definition of the transcendence of ritual speech.

25 According to Skeat (1900), procedures for obtaining magic in a Malay society include 'sitting on the grave of a murdered man; paddling with a palm leaf midrib as if paddling a canoe; requesting the dead man to assist in a journey to the God (quoted in Endicott 1970: 15).

experts in the relevant issues and genres of the magic spells. Sometimes this procedure is portrayed as a long journey that is similar to heroic journeys depicted in the Petalangan epic songs. The further one travels out of the village, the more chances one has to obtain powerful magic spells.

Searching for a proper teacher constitutes a part of secret procedures in order to reach a successful acquisition of esoteric knowledge. A spell-seeker is very cautious not to reveal him/herself as searching for specific magic and magic spells, which may arouse others' fear or suspicion. People will suspect that the person is looking for a specific magic to his/her own advantage, while doing harm to others. Magic spells are often portrayed as analogous to 'arms' (*senjata*) with which people fight against one another to acquire desirable goals. Talking about magic spells to others, therefore, is often explained as dangerous, since it allows enemies to know about what kinds of 'arms' one is going to use for battles.

To learn magic for daily purposes, people are most likely to look for a teacher among their own sub-matrilineal ethnic group members. For other purposes, they tend to find a teacher who is living in another village.²⁶ While people are willing to trade magic spells with people from outside of their resident villages, they hesitate to teach their fellow villagers who belong to different matrilineal groups. They are more afraid of people from their own village than outsiders, since people interact mainly with their neighbors rather than outsiders. This is one of the reasons why people travel out of the village in order to obtain more chances to learn magic spells.

²⁶ In the study of Malay magic, Endicott also indicates that a student of magic prefers to be taught by someone from outside the area (1970: 15).

In learning magic spells, custom requires the student to provide the teacher with material goods such as gold, clothes, chickens, and other items, depending on what the student has requested to learn.²⁷ Magic spell lessons are always accompanied by material rewards, so one must find someone who needs the rewards more than they need the spell. People say that it is relatively easy to learn magic spells from old people rather than young people. People think that old people do not need spells—especially beauty spells and love spells for lovers—for their own purposes. Rather, they are willing to sell the spells in exchange for other material goods. Some old women, for example, are able to make a living by trading spells for other goods, even though they are too weak to do physical work.

In the exchange of magic spells, it was at one time taboo to pay cash to acquire magic spells or in exchange for services by spiritual specialists. However, as cash economy has started to influence Petalangan communities, material rewards for ritual services have also started to change. Cash payment has been recognized to be a convenient way to acquire magic spells and ritual services. However, traditional ways of payment continue to be used as a standard by which the equivalent amount of money can be calculated. For example, a teacher of beauty spells used to be paid with about two meters of white cloth (*kain putih*), usable as a funeral shroud when he/she died. In these days, students can pay for a spell in cash, which is about Rp. 20,000. This is the approximate amount of money necessary to buy two meters of the white cloth. People call this type of payment *ganti* (exchange, or alternative).

²⁷ For example, obtaining beauty spells generally requires a student to provide a teacher with clothes. In case of public magic spells, usually ‘white cloth’ (*kain putih* : cloth which is used for a funeral, symbolizing a religious feature of the magic spell). Not only learning magic spells, but also acquiring ritual services from ritual specialists requires people to pay for the service. Ritual services require the same array of payments that are offered for magic lessons.

According to Petalangan beliefs, material rewards are the only way to make the owner of the spell retain the value or efficacy of magic when the spell is transmitted to another person. The exchange between a teacher and a student symbolizes their continuing connections. When they take magic spell lessons, the lesson begins with a student's surrender of the material goods to a teacher, while saying that "I would like to learn ____ magic with the pure heart (*Saya mau menuntut ilmu ____ dengan hati murni*)." Then, the lesson ends by exchanging handshakes between the teacher and the student, which symbolizes the legitimate transmission of value of magic spells to a new owner. People say that the material goods given to a teacher symbolize a continuing link between the teacher and the students, the older generation and the younger generation, even though the lessons are already finished. This link between the generations comprises one of the components for ever-lasting efficacy of magic spells.

While the invisible link across the generations is made visible by delivery of material payments, the spells traditionally have been handed down as a form of oral tradition from generation to generation, and have no written texts. Aside from the fact that most Petalangans were illiterate in the past, there is another reason why the spells should not be written. Petalangans believe in the corporeality of spells as an important part of the efficacy of spells. The spells must be absorbed into a performer's body. The spells are thought to work only if they are memorized. If a student learns the magic spells by taking notes, the notes should be burned and the ashes should be eaten so that the words become part of the body.

As indicated by the emphasis on "words become flesh and bones" (*kato jadi daging tulang*), the idea of oneness between words and the body is prevalent in

Petalangan beliefs about magic spells. The idea of embodied words serves as a basis for the efficacy of magic spells. Reciting magic spells, for instance, gives a performer magical power, because words and the performer become ‘one breath’ (*satu nyawa*)²⁸ when the words are uttered through the performer’s voice. The embodiment of words is one of the prerequisites for their efficacy. The process of learning magic spells illustrates the Petalangan notion of the embodiment of words.

Practice of magic spells

Applying magic spells: secrecy and privacy of the practice

Once learned and memorized, a personal magic spell can be practiced based on a performer’s personal need, while social magic can be employed upon requests from clients. Although there is no fixed time for personal magic practice, most personal magic tends to be recited almost every day. Given that most personal magic spells have to do with the body, the spells are to be recited to the performers’ bodies every day so that “the words become the body.” According to this belief, once the magic is applied to the body through daily practice of the magic, the effects last indefinitely, even though the spell is not chanted every day after the learning period. The individual and solitary practice of magic spells is often compared to that of daily performance of Islamic prayers.²⁹

Most magic spells are required to be “read” (*baca*) secretly, and should not be overheard. If others hear the spells, the spells are believed to go to others and will not

²⁸ *Satu* means ‘one’ and *nyawa* refers to ‘soul’ or ‘spirit’ that is realized and embodied by ‘breath.’

²⁹ Petalangans often compare the ways of reciting magic to Islamic practice of daily prayer. Muslims do not need to go to mosques, except men’s obligation of the Friday midday prayer at the mosques. Everyone prays and chants Koranic verses at any place where he or she is located.

effective any longer. In the case of beauty spells, the performer should be alone to recite, as is also true of the spells that are aimed at others' feelings and emotions, such as love spells, hatred spells, and defeating spells. Social magic is recited quietly to the magic recipients, except for the case of public performance.³⁰

Like the self-cleaning process before the Islamic prayers, the practitioners are required to clean and purify themselves before they carry out the performance. Usually a practitioner washes one's whole body, or parts of the body, including one's face, neck, ears, hands, arms and feet before the recitation. If the practitioner becomes polluted by any chance, he or she should repeat the self-purifying procedure again. Pollution is caused by physiological phenomena such as flatulence, urination, and contact with objects believed to be polluted, such as menstruating women. If a person experiences flatulence during the recitation of spells, for example, he or she should repeat the procedure again from the beginning. Given that most personal magic is directed at one's own body, a performer usually recites the spells after taking baths. Since people customarily take baths twice a day – 'morning bath' (*mandi pagi*), and 'afternoon bath' (*mandi sore*), their bath times are considered the best timing for reciting magic spells.

Magic spells are sometimes recited over some medium, which is brought into contact with a targeted person or an object. People mumble the spells over a cup of water, which is then sprinkled onto the magic recipients for purifying or beautifying. Although it is not necessary to use the medium for beauty magic directed at oneself, one may treat oneself in the same way by using a medium. Before taking a bath, one may utter the spell over the water, which is used to wash one's own body. For healing magic, roots of

³⁰ In Wana society, magic spells should not be pronounced intelligibly lest others might learn and know the words even in a public performance (Atkinson 1989: 70).

turmeric (*kunit*), areca nuts (*pinang*), and limes (*jeruk*) are commonly used as the vehicle of the magic. A healer utters spells over the medium, which is chewed and spit over the patients or rubbed onto the affected area of the body.

Regulations for the magic practice: the self and the community

There are several taboos for a practitioner throughout the entire period of using a specific magic spell. For example, when a person starts to “put on” (*pasang*) a beauty spell, he or she is forbidden several activities, including passing under the clothes that are hung on a rope for drying, erecting a house, stepping on husks of rice, and others. Otherwise, the person will have headache (*pusing*), or blackheads (*biji itam*) on the face. After learning and practicing a specific magic spell, the person should not teach the spell to another person for three years, otherwise, the magic will not be effective any more.

The privacy and secrecy of the practice of magic lead people to draw a boundary between ‘us’ and ‘them’ or the self and the others. Petalangan believe that spells are “arms” (*senjata*) to fight with others—the opposite sex for love spells, evil spirits for social magic. The teachers of love spells, for example, are even reluctant to teach students of the opposite sex in fear of exposing “secret arms to the enemy.” For social magic, the fearful others are evil spirits who might interrupt the performer and the recipients of the magic.

Although most people claim a certain extent of esoteric knowledge, they also recognize differential distribution of the knowledge among the villagers. A reputation for having magical knowledge often signals one’s social prominence in a village. The magical knowledge is often viewed as a sort of ‘limited goods’ for which one competes

with others. This is one of the reasons why people are reluctant to teach magic spells to neighbors. The boundary of sharing magic spells draws a line between self and others.

There are other regulations to prevent possible disturbing effects that could be caused by using personal magic. First, there are age-regulations for the courtship-related magic called ‘Youth Magic’ (*ilmu mudo*), permitting only the youth to practice this magic. This genre includes beauty and love spells to attract others’ attention in general. The youngsters of the village can practice this genre of spells until they find spouses. Strictly speaking, the married are also allowed to use beauty and love spells, only if the spells are aimed to improve the relationships with their own spouses.³¹

Another category of magic, the ‘Noisy Village Magic’ (*ouk sekampung*) has a very strict restriction for the number of people who “put on” the spell in a village at the same time. As one type of ‘Youth Magic,’ this magic is believed to attract others’ attention so powerfully as to bring about boisterous competitions among the villagers. Simultaneous practices of the magic by several people are believed to make the villagers fight or even kill one another to acquire the loved ones. Only one person is thus allowed to use this magic in a village during a certain period of time. Given that people do not know who uses which magic spells, the use of the ‘Noisy Village Magic’ requires great caution for fear for breaking village unity and harmony. Regulations for the practice of magic reveal that the Petalangan people have notions of intertwined relationships between the self and the community.

³¹ In Betung, there are many versions of stories about old women who use beauty charms to seduce men. The stories describe the danger of old women’s improper uses of “Youth Magic” to lure men away from their wives.

Marginality, magic and construction of Petalangan identity

Just as different distribution of magical knowledge reveals differences in people's social standings within the village, so the practice of magic spells creates the boundaries between communities. Within the village, those who are high-positioned are assumed to have more powerful knowledge of magic than other villagers. Between communities, the members of marginal communities are presumed to have more powerful magic, especially black magic (*ilmu hitam*) than other communities. Although Petalangan people recognize their reputation as having rich knowledge of magic, they tend to distinguish themselves as having good magic (*ilmu baik*), which is different from bad magic (*ilmu jahat*) that other isolated groups have performed to bring bad effects to others.

In interactions with outsiders, Petalangers point out that they use magic spells because of their 'lack of self-confidence' (*ku'ang percayo di'i*). They say that they easily become ashamed when engaged in social interactions with others. The 'shyness' (*malu*) and 'unrefined social manner' (*kaku*) due to their lack of confidence constitute outsiders' stereotypes for 'interior people' (*pedalaman*) including Petalangers. In other words, isolated people's lack of chances to interact with outsiders has led people to be deficient in social skills, which in turn make themselves feel less confident, afraid (*takut*) and shy (*malu*) towards the outsiders.³²

³² Their fear and shyness are most frequently observed when they talk about their experiences of the city. In their subjective views and experiences, Pekanbaru, a capital city of Riau province, is frequently described as a fearful and dangerous place. Staying in the city is also perceived and described as causing unusual bodily and emotional experiences; they feel scared (*takut*), sad (*ibo ati*), lonely (*sopi*), and longing (*indu*) when they are in the city. They also do not feel willing to talk (*diam*), and experience lack of appetite, deprivation of sleep, weight loss, and other maladies.

The sentiment of social inferiority is one of the ways in which they interpret their lack of agency in social relationships. Practicing magic is the best way to overcome this sentiment of inferiority, because the magic is believed to protect people from the dangerous outsiders. By evoking magical power from the extraneous sources, magic spells allow people to be positioned in an equal or higher positions in their relationships to the powerful others, which gives them self-confidence. In practice, most of the Betung informants report that they practice magic spells (*monto*) to overcome their sentiment of subordination in their social encounters.

Their cultural focus on the emotional components of social relations makes magic spells one of the most important resources with which people can deal with their marginal relations to the powerful; in their relationship with nature, or supernatural beings, and with other people. Petalangans' notions on the embodiment of words allow the efficacy of the magic spells; words become bodies and control the emotions. The Petalangan notions of language that mediate the forms and use of language in practices of magic spells draw attentions to affective dimensions of language ideologies.