

## A Riddles' Structure of Iranun in Sabah

Asmiaty Amat<sup>1</sup>, PhD & Lokman Abdul Samad<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Centre for the Promotion of Knowledge and Language Learning, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Jalan UMS, 88400 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. E-mail: [adajiwa@gmail.com](mailto:adajiwa@gmail.com).

<sup>2</sup> School of Arts, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Jalan UMS, 88400 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. E-mail: [lokns@yahoo.com](mailto:lokns@yahoo.com).

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**Abstract.** Riddles are very popular in Malaysian oral literature. Amongst Sabah's many ethnic groups, riddles have their own names. The KadazanDusuns call them *sudait*, the Iranuns call theirs *antuka*'. Riddles are put forth as questions to be guessed, as well as to create a feeling of togetherness through entertainment in the community, particularly so in rural and village communities. *Antuka*' flourished among the Iranuns in Kota Belud, on the West coast of Sabah. There are Iranuns in Lahad Datu, on Sabah's South-eastern coast, however this study is a collection of 555 *Antukas*. The present study documented, translated, and classified the *Antukas* by their structure. The *Antukas* are used as entertainment and have simple structures, using various objects as subjects to elucidate the riddles. The riddles collectively showcase the mindset of the community that created them.

### 1. Introduction

A riddle is "a description of objects in terms intended to suggest something entirely different (Taylor, A. 1959:1). It is given as a vague question, the answer is usually difficult for the listener to guess. It is usually employed to test someone's cognitive abilities. In Malay, *teka-teki* is derived from Sanskrit, *terka*, which means to try and to find. Despite its function, our study showed that riddles are oral traditions which depict the surroundings of the communities they flourished in; the answers are still to be guessed by the listeners. Riddles contain descriptive **objects** which act as metaphors or allegory for a different subject.

Empirical data on the origins of riddles are scarce because they are oral literature, passed on from one generation to another. In earlier times, it was believed that the true meaning of speech has to be concealed so bad spirits would not know about it. Such speech need only be conducted at certain times only. This belief and its practice have been found among the Western Toraja and the Toaraja Bara'e in the upper interiors of Sulawesi, Indonesia. This demonstrates an intimate relationship between riddles and animism, for example, riddles used by mediums in ritual worship of the rice spirit. However, on their own, riddles do not demonstrate any religious characteristics.

### 2. The Iranun Community in Sabah

The Iranun is one ethnic group among many ethnic groups in Sabah. Most Iranuns live in Kota Kinabalu, Kota Belud and Lahad Datu. Their large presence in Kota Belud caused them to be sometimes grouped together with the Bajaus and categorised as the West Coast Bajau. It might also be due to the fact that the Iranuns and the Bajaus have similarities in their culture. Inter-marriages

between members of these two groups also contributed to this mixing of cultures. Differences are observable in their language and dialects. The Iranuns are also known by other names, such as Iranon, Irranun, Illanun, Ilanun, Iranon-Meranao and Meranao (Datu Bandira Datu Alang, 1992:1).

The Iranuns are infamous seafarers. Their earliest mention in Sabah was recorded as seafarers and fishermen. Today they are also involved in agriculture, as well as urban migration.

The Iranuns have several poems, for example, *bayuk*, *digwani*, *iringak* and *pantun*, making their presence in certain functions, but never part of any formal proceedings in such functions. Antuka' or riddles are also popular. Like Iranun poems which serves to entertain, Antukas have their own social functions.

### 3. Function of Antuka'

In earlier times, Antukas are uttered when a group of Iranuns are doing communal work, for example, harvesting paddy and cleaning graves. Similar to riddles in other communities, Antukas entertain and keep boredom at bay during work, or lend hilarity to a group of people. Use of short phrases with double meanings lends enjoyment and happiness to their communities. It becomes humorous when jokes are woven into riddles, particularly jokes with sexual connotations.

Although Antukas are created spontaneously; they have a hidden agenda, which is to test the maturity of thought of someone. The Iranuns in earlier times did not have high formal education because schools were not available to produce intellectuals. Therefore Antukas were employed to test the cognitive abilities. When children were asked Antukas, they were trained to be smart and mature.

### 4. Structure of riddles

Riddles have structure, based on their content and form, for example, (1) metaphorical riddles, (2) pornographic riddles, (3) acronymic riddles, (4) havoc riddles (Sukatman, 2009) divided riddles by theme: (1) plant humour, (2) animal humour, (3) pornographic humour, (4) senseless humour, and (5) unique object humour. Inon Shahrudin (1976) structured riddles according to their allegory and answer. Inon Shahrudin's study on several Malay riddles divided them by number of allegoric lines and words used. Lokman Abdul Samad (2004) divided Kadazan Dusun riddles, the *sundait*, by theme and form, for example flora and fauna theme, household equipment, and sex.

### 5. Structure of Antuka'

The Antukas were collected from Kampung Merabau and Kampung Peladok in the district of Kota Belud. Based on the structuring used by Sukatman, Inon Shahrudin and Lokman Abdul Samad, the Antukas were first categorised according to their allegories and answers, then thematically by their answers.

All Antukas have a general theme; they use daily human surroundings as their subject. The structure of Antukas can be categorised as such: (1) metaphoric riddles (plant – animal personification, plant – animal personification, animal – human personification, object – human personification), (2) metaphoric phrase and words (one metaphoric phrase and one worded answer, two metaphoric phrases and one worded answer, one metaphoric phrase and two worded answer), (3) pornographic riddles, (4) worldly matters.

### 6. Metaphoric riddles

Metaphoric riddles are based on their semantics. They are divided into **four** groups which is animal –human metaphor, object – human metaphor, plant-animal, and plant – human metaphor. These riddles use a question structure with metaphors as symbolic comparisons to the objects to be guessed. These comparisons are all unique.

**a. Plant – animal metaphor (personification)**

Riddles use animals as metaphors to give suggestion using human personifications.

Riddle: Iranun: *Antuk angka, sarampang makaukai, makakua sa utus.*  
 Malay: Cuba teka, penjakar mengait, mendapat tali.  
 English: Guess what, rake scrapes, finds string.

Answer: Iranun: *Manuk a pangukai*  
 Malay: Ayam sedang mengais  
 English: Chicken scratching (ground)

For this animal classification, animals include all wild animals on land and sea. Antukas use many birds, primarily the chicken. Chicken is a domesticated animal that is often seen and kept by human beings. The entire chicken, its body parts, its actions and the chicken egg are often the popular choice.

**b. Plant – human metaphor (personification)**

Riddles use plants as metaphors to give suggestion using human personifications. The metaphors are given human characteristics.

Riddle: Iranun: *Antuk angka, unga antua makaid-aid sa bulauan.*  
 Malay: Cuba teka, bunga apa membawa permata.  
 English: Guess what, what flower brings gems?

Answer: Iranun: *Ilau*  
 Malay: Padi  
 English: Paddy

For this flora classification, there is evidence that paddy is the staple food of the Iranuns, similar to other ethnic groups in Sabah. Food items like paddy, corn, sweet potato, and yam are popular subjects in riddles. Other plants often eaten or utilised like banana, papaya, coconut and its trunks are also important subject choices. Popular vegetables in antukas are pumpkin, bird's eye chilly, and mushroom. Common local fruits chosen are rambutan, pineapple, papaya, jackfruits and sugarcane. All objects in this community's daily lives easily find their way into the riddles. Other plants which also found their way into riddles as answers are wild grass (*lalang*) and tree stumps, roots, grass and, as a result of globalisation, rubber trees.

**c. Animal – human metaphor (personification)**

Riddles use animals as metaphors to give suggestion using human personification.

(a) Riddle: Iranun: *Antuk angka, makalilud makaraya, makaid-aid sa keris.*  
 Malay: Cuba teka, ke hulu ke hilir membawa keris.  
 English: Guess what, go upstream and go downstream carrying a dagger.

Answer: Iranun: *Udang*  
 Malay: Udang  
 English: Prawn

(b) Riddle: Iranun: *Antuk angka, pa'at pembayu-bayu, dua pangukap-ukap, isa mbugau sa langau.*

Malay: Cuba teka, empat menumbuk-numbuk, dua mengayak-ngayak, satu menghalau lalat.

English: Guess what, four exchanging punches, two sieving, one shoos flies.

Answer: Iranun: *Karabau*

Malay: Kerbau

English: Buffalo

(c) Riddle: Iranun: *Antuk angka, sumagensing sa raya makaid sa dapuran, sumunsung sa lilud, makaid sa badas.*

Malay: Cuba teka, mudik ke hulu membawa dapur, mudik ke hilir membawa sebat.

English: Guess what, go upstream carrying a kitchen, go downstream carrying a whip.

Answer: Iranun: *Buaya*

Malay: Buaya

English: Crocodile

(d) Riddle: Iranun: *Antuk angka, langun a manusia aden a bangkala' yan, sekayan aya da bangkala yan, melelekas,tapi pagunut-unut ngka yan.*

Malay: Cuba teka, semua memakai baju, lain pula dengan dia, tiada baju, bertelanjang bulat, di mana jua anda pergi ia tetap mengikuti.

English: Guess what, all wears clothes, different from him, he wears no clothes, stark naked, wherever you go, he follows.

Answer: Iranun: *Asu*

Malay: Anjing

English: Dog

Animals which are subjects in antukas are animals which usually seen in daily life, i.e., domesticated animals or pets, for example, cat, dog, and goat. There are other antukas using ants, gecko, *teke*, mouse, rhinoceros, monkey, centipede, otter, moth, cricket, bat, wasp, spider web, flies and mosquito. Animals in water which are usually used are fish, for example, snakehead fish (*haruan*), ray, mackerel, salted fish (a processed food item), sardine. Other animals in the water used are squid, frog, crab, tortoise, turtle, shellfish, and crocodile.

Birds other than chicken who made it into antukas are woodpecker, swan, and sparrow, goose, and duck. The most popular land animal in antukas is the buffalo. The buffalo's anatomy and actions also made it into antukas. This is not surprising as Kota Belud is famous for its buffaloes.

#### **d. Object – human metaphor**

Riddles use objects as metaphors to give suggestions using human personification.

Riddle: Iranun: *Antuk angka, kurikud I ama' ka nyiagag.*

Malay: Cuba teka, tulang belakang si ayah dijemur.

English: Guess what, backbone of father is baked in the sun.

Answer: Iranun: *Bu'ungan a walai*

Malay: Atap rumah

English: Roof tiles (usually made of woven plant material)

Household objects which usually become subjects in antkas are pots, coconut grater, needle, nail, lamp, candle, matches, mattress, pillow, mosquito net, clothes, *sarong*, trousers, *sireh* (chewable leaves) receptacle, betel nut clipper, earthen jar and mirror. Most of the objects mentioned in antukas are household objects that are often used by the Iranuns in their daily lives.

(a) Riddle: Iranun: *Antuna benda, pun magabi tid'pu', mapita, panik?*

Malay: Apa benda waktu malam dia turun, waktu siang dia naik?

English: What object goes down at night, goes up during the day?

Answer: Iranun: *Kulambu*

Malay: Kelambu

English: Mosquito net

(b) Riddle: Iranun: *Antuk angka, sisinga ngka ban yan*

Malay: Cuba teka, tersenyum setiap masa

English: Guess what, smiling at all times

Answer: Iranun: *Lesa*

Malay: Lantai bocor

English: Broken floor

(c) Riddle: Iranun: *Bpagumanan sumala agu'makaitu'*

Malay: Ditambah yang besar, supaya menjadi kecil

English: Add a big one, so it becomes smaller.

Answer: Iranun: *Pinto*

Malay: Pintu

English: Door

## 7. Riddles with allegoric lines and words

These riddles are categorised by their structural arrangement – the number of words in each line. The answers may consist of one or two words. In the case of Bajau Antukas, the allegoric may be presented in four lines, much like the *pantun* riddles of the Malays.

**(a) Antukas with one allegoric line and one word answer.**

This type of Antuka is the most numerous in the collection. Each line is short and has two descriptive elements. Total syllables are between eight to twelve.

Riddle: Iranun: *Antuk angka, tai' yang sapuru a ulu*

Malay: Cuba teka, tahinya di atas kepala

English: Guess what, its poop is on its head.

Answer: Iranun: *Udang*

Malay: Udang

English: Prawn

**(b) Antukas with two allegoric lines and one word answer.**

This type of Antuka has two allegoric lines. The purpose is to give more descriptive elements or to make the allegory easier and clearer for the people guessing.

Riddle: Iranun: *Gajah maputi sa luk a walai*

*Layag kumimbang waktu magabi*

Malay: Gajah putih di tengah malam

Layar terkembang di waktu malam

English: White elephant at midnight

Sail hoisted at night

Answer: Iranun: *kulambu*

Malay: kelambu

English: mosquito net

**(c) Antukas with one allegoric line and two word answer.**

This type of Antuka is similar to the first type, i.e., it has one allegoric line. However it does not give a clue that its answers are two different things.

(a) Riddle: Iranun: *Antuk angka, benga en kiang en, lalakau a Patima*

Malay: Cuba teka, dikangkang dan dikopek, laluan Patima

English: Guess what, pried and peeled, Patima

Answer: Iranun: *Bama'an agu kalakati*

Malay: Pinang dengan pengacipnya

English: Betel nut and its clipper

**(c) Pornographic riddles**

Many pornographic riddles are found in the Iranun community, and they are explicit. Despite the allegories employing human or object personifications, the answers are genitals. Human

personifications include ‘a person’, ‘two people’, ‘there are people’, ‘there are humans’, ‘haji’, and ‘girls’. Object personifications include objects, animals and trees, e.g., ‘torch light’, ‘canon’, ‘mountain’, and ‘crowing chicken’.

Such riddles categorised as pornographic riddles are rarely studied by academics because they treat these riddles as taboo and impolite. The Iranun community created riddles to entertain themselves. People who use riddles will usually derive their content from their everyday lives.

There are two ways the riddles are pornographic. There are allegories that are not pornographic but their answers are male or female genitals. There are allegories that are pornographic but their answers are not. The former outnumbers the latter.

Examples of allegories that are not pornographic but their answers are.

(a) Riddle: Iranun: *Antuk angka, mariam a tatapuken*

Malay: Cuba teka, meriam tersembunyi.

English: Guess what, hidden cannon.

Answer: Iranun: *Utin*

Malay: Zakar

English: Penis

(b) Riddle: Iranun: *Antuk angka, dua katau a kamar, sasagit sa paras.*

Malay: Cuba teka, dua orang kembar seiras.

English: Guess what, identical twins.

Answer: Iranun: *Uruk*

Malay: Testis

English: Testes

Examples of allegories that are pornographic but their answers are not.

(a) Riddle: Iranun: *Antu angka, beti ka nyakariga-riga*

Malay: Cuba teka, faraj kemerah-merahan

English: Guess what, pinkish vagina

Answer: Iranun: *mbama*

Malay: Bibir orang makan sireh.

English: Lips of someone chewing *sireh*.

(b) Riddle: Iranun: *Antuk angka, makauma ka, ya ka duduen beti I inakka.*

Malay: Cuba teka, sampai sahaja di rumah, terus mencelup puki emak.

English: Guess what, just arrived home, straight to dipping into mother’s cunt.

Answer: Iranun: *mantaya*

Malay: tempayan

English: earthen jar

(c) Riddle: Iranun: *Antuk angka, utin e amaka nyapenu' a kalugu*

Malay: Cuba teka, zakar si ayah dipenuhi kematu

English: Guess what, father's penis is full of hardened skin.

Answer: Iranun: *jagung*

Malay: jagung

English: corn

Despite some scholars considering this subject a taboo, such Antukas relate to the function of Antukas in the Iranun community, which are to entertain. They like to use such subjects as jokes and create hilarity amongst themselves.

The whole theme used in an Antuka is seen through its answer. Hence human anatomy is also used in the allegoric line. Objects, animals and plants are given personification, i.e. they are given human characteristics.

Human physiological functions and actions are also used as subjects, such as, people defecating, farting, having sexual intercourse, chewing *sireh*, eating sugarcane, sleeping (usually under a mosquito net), smoking, human endeavors such as agriculture (plowing, drying rice in the sun, fishing), getting married, playing musical instruments, performing traditional dances, and swimming. Riddles in the human category also include diseases such as toothache, gout, ringworm (a fungal skin infection) and stomachache.

(a) Riddle: Iranun: *Antuk angka, mula-mula bpu' un sa'aig, madtai-madtai mbalui a sakatau*

Malay: Cuba teka, mulanya dari air, akhirnya menjadi satu.

English: Guess what, start from water, end us as one.

Answer: Iranun: *Ta'au*

Malay: Kejadian manusia

English: Creation of human beings.

(b) Riddle: Iranun: *Antuk angka, pa'at katau sumeneb, sakatau tagak.*

Malay: Cuba teka, empat orang menyelam, seorang tinggal di luar.

English: Guess what, four people dived in, one person left outside.

Answer: Iranun: *Mbama'*

Malay: Makan sirih

English: Chewing *sireh*.

It can be seen that all these are closely related to human activity and society within the Iranun community. Their activities become subjects in their Antuka creations and the objects used as themes are also closely related to the tools they own and are easily available.

#### **d. Worldy matters**

Another popular theme in Antukas is observations of the world. The more popular subjects are



water, fire, rain and waves. Other subjects are soil, rainbow, moon and stars, hill, wind, tornado and thunder. These often come up as answers to Antukas because such observations in nature are common in the community.

For example:

Riddle: Iranun: *Antuk angka, dua katau pelalanga', di pedsu suruta'*.

Malay: Cuba teka, dua orang berkawan karib, tapi tidak sependapat.

English: Guess what, two good friends, but they don't agree.

Answer: Iranun: *Ulan agu ulungan*

Malay: Bulan dan matahari

English: Moon and sun

The choice of subjects in Antukas, looking at the allegories and answers, show that the Iranun Antukas are influenced by ordinary events. These events occur in their everyday lives. If a rare subject was used, outside of the community's everyday experience, it could diminish the Antuka inventor's intention to amuse his listeners. Antukas with concrete objects rarely have abstract characteristics.

The Iranun inventors of Antukas are not concerned with the beauty of the language unlike other poems. The language used is very simple and spontaneous. A common characteristic in the Antukas collected is the direct questioning style, "*antuk angka*", which means "guess what". There are several Antukas without this questioning style of "*antuk angka*", but they are rarely encountered.

For example:

Riddle: Iranun: *Antuk angka, mula-mula marata, madtai-madtai makapia*

Malay: Cuba teka, tidak boleh diangkat, tetapi boleh dialihkan.

English: Guess what, cannot be lifted, but can be shifted.

Answer: Iranun: *Lalan*

Malay: Jalan raya

English: Road

There are Antukas with longer allegoric lines, but still maintain their one or two descriptive elements.

For example:

Riddle: Iranun: *E lebad ka kauyang, kapetan ka matai.*

Malay: Dilempar ia hidup, dipegang ia mati.

English: Thrown and it lives, held and it dies.

Answer: Iranun: *Bedtig*

Malay: Gasing

English: Spinning top

#### **d. Other characteristics of Antukas**

Other than allegories and answers, there is a characteristic found in some Iranun Antukas. It is the situation that is presented as the subjects's actions in the allegory has no meaning whatsoever. The latter is common in pornographic Antukas, which are usually uttered for purely entertainment

purposes.

**i. Situation that is presented as the subject's actions.**

Usually the situation portrayed is very different from the actual action. This is usually perceived as humorous by the listeners. The allegories in such riddles usually have sexual connotations.

For example:

- (a) Riddle: Iranun: *Antuk angka makauma ka, ya ka duduen beti I inakka*  
Malay: Cuba teka, sampai sahaja di rumah, terus mencelup puki emak  
English: Guess what, just arrived home, straight to dipping into mother's cunt.

Answer: Iranun: *mantaya'*

Malay: tempayan

English: earthen jar

- (b) Riddle: Iranun: *Antuk angka sapuru' katanaman, sakababana'an kasakitan*  
Malay: Cuba teka, di atas berasa seronok, di bawah merasa kesakitan  
English: Guess what, the one on top in ecstasy, the one below in pain.

Answer: Iranun: *Pamingit*

Malay: Memancing

English: Angling (fishing)

- (c) Riddle: Iranun: *Antuk angka, utin e amaka nyapenu' a kalugu*  
Malay: Cuba teka, zakar si ayah dipenuhi kematu  
English: Guess what, father's penis is full of hardened skin.

Answer: Iranun: kamais

Malay: jagung

English: corn

**8. Conclusion**

Studies on folk literature in Sabah, particularly those of ethnic minorities are still very rare. The present study is a documentation of oral literature to preserve literary tradition. It is hoped that this input would enrich literature of the Southeast Asian archipelago. On the whole, Antukas are similar to the riddles of other communities; riddles focused on the environment surrounding the communities, and human anatomy and everything to do with it are used as subjects. In their simplicity, the Iranun Antukas are unique and special in that they portray the culture and lives of their creators.

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2. Haji Datu Itam Bin Datu Subah. Kota Peladok, Jalan Tamau. Age: 68 years. Farmer.
3. Datu Sarem Bin Datu O.T Raya, Kampung Kota Peladok. Age: 67 years. Farmer.
4. Lindungan Bte Ahmad, Kampung Merabau, Kota Belud. Age: 64 years. Farmer.
5. Ismail bin Sidik Kampung Merabau Kota Belud, Age: 60 years.
6. Rogayah binti Jali, Kampung Merabau, Age: 45 years.