

The Iban *Pantun* - Poetry and Song

Patricia Matusky

Michigan, USA

Introduction

Iban oral literature encompasses genres that are chanted or sung whenever they are performed. These genres include entertainment songs, chants (*timbang* or *pengap*) for high ritual festivals, dirges for the deceased (*sabak*) and courtship songs (*pelandai*) for the young at heart. The *renong* and *sugi* secular tales are also sung as is the *jawang* repartee form by a male and a female singer. The poetry called *pantun*, the legends (*ensera*), the *pelian* healing chants and the *naku* songs to encourage warriors are also genres that are sung in the vast body of Iban oral literature.¹

The central concern of this paper is the musical aspects of the genre known as the *pantun* as created and performed by the Iban people of Sarawak.² In the Iban language the poetic form called 'pantun' is usually translated as 'song'. One of the main aims of this paper is to identify the musical traits of the *pantun* through an examination of transcribed text and music of selected *pantuns* as sung by different performers.

The *pantuns* discussed here are from the collection entitled *Pantun Iban*, which comprises transcriptions of texts edited by Robert Menua Salleh and published by the Tun Jugah Foundation

in 1997. Tun Jugah Foundation recorded this collection of pantuns over several years as part of its on-going effort to document traditional oral literature, vocal and instrumental music and other aspects of traditional Dayak life. The published collection contains transcriptions of the texts (but no musical transcriptions) of 39 pantuns, performed by over 20 different singers from the Kapit region along the Rejang River of Sarawak. Native speakers of the Iban language transcribed the texts from the taped field recordings.

The Iban pantun is sung aloud and would not be performed without the familiar melodic lines normally associated with this form. It is the melody that serves as the vehicle through which the actual words are uttered. Like the Malay pantun, the Iban texts are improvised at the time of the performance, and they are created and sung for specific occasions or events. Both Malay and Iban pantuns maintain a certain rhyme and rhythmic scheme as the singer creates and performs a given piece, but the schemes are different in the Malay and Iban forms. A brief discussion below of the rhyming scheme and other important poetical conventions of the Iban pantun sets the background for an explanation of the musical aspects of this genre.

In the Iban tradition, the pantun is not a high ritual form. It is performed at festive gatherings to welcome visitors to the longhouse or to pay honor to special guests or well-known personalities. It may also be sung purely for entertainment purposes when, at a large social gathering for instance, the singer may improvise lyrics to request that the guests partake of the offered rice wine (*tuak*). The pantun is also sung at small gatherings when rice wine is served, in which case the poetic song is called *sanggai* (a type of pantun). For example, a woman might sing the *sanggai* pantun to address a male visitor as he drinks the wine at a gathering of intimate friends, and in this case the lyrics often have a hidden meaning (possibly relating to the visitor) known by only one or two persons in the group.

Types of Iban Pantun

In the collection of transcribed Iban pantun studied for this paper (*Pantun Iban*, 1997), the songs are of several different types, based on the purpose or occasion for which they are performed. All of the pantuns in this published collection, then, are titled or labeled according to their intent or purpose.

The verses or stanzas sung to praise or honor someone — such as an individual in the community or even a famous personality—are called *pantun puji* [poetry/song to praise, flatter, compliment]. If the text of the sung poetry is intended to offer encouragement for something, it is referred to as *pantun peransang* [poetry/song for encouragement or incitement]. A mournful or plaintive poetic text is found in the *pantun sebana* [poetry/song for mourning or complaint], while a sad or melancholy text offering sympathy or regret is referred to as *pantun sayau* [poetry/song to express sympathy]. A poetic text that recalls personalities or past events and situations, with sympathy or regret is the *pantun kenang* or *sinu' ngenang* [poetry/song to fondly remember (someone or something)].

Eagerness about something or someone may be expressed in the pantun referred to as *keran* [eager, keen], while lyrics of a didactic nature instructing the listener about a particular subject or topic is called a *pantun ajar* [poetry/song for teaching or learning]. In the published collection noted here, the singer of the *pantun ajar* vocalizes about travels to many faraway lands and the lessons learned therein.

Finally, although not frequently found, a pantun sometimes relates a story or an episode involving culture heroes in the local tradition of Iban legends and mythology. For example, in

the 1997 published collection, the final selection is entitled *pantun Keling betemu enggau Ribai* (poetry/song about the culture heroes Keling and Ribai).

The Poetic Structure of the Iban Pantun

The verse or stanza. The Iban pantun is structured in verses or stanzas, but the number of lines in a single verse is not set or fixed. Also, there is no set number of verses in a complete pantun, therefore, a given pantun may be short or very long, depending upon the ideas expressed by the singer. There are, however, certain poetical and musical conventions, which govern the way a singer generates the lines of text and the melodies. The poetical conventions are briefly summarized below.

The term stanza, as used in this discussion of the Iban pantun, means a group of lines that express a given idea, the first line of which usually begins with a meaningless syllable such as 'eeh', 'aih', 'enti', 'ga' or other vocable. It is sung in a humming-like fashion for an indeterminate period of time while the singer prepares to start the first line of the text in a given stanza. The vocable is sung using a short, rising melodic phrase that introduces many of the important pitches that are used later in the pantun.

The length of the lines in a stanza may be long or short, and the number of lines in the individual stanzas of a given pantun may vary greatly, depending upon the skill, knowledge, and creativity of the singer. For example, in the *Pantun Persansang* sung by Enyong anak Aji (*Pantun Iban*, 1997, pp. 4-5) the total number of stanzas is 12, and the number of lines in the individual stanzas vary in length from the opening of 2 lines to later stanzas of 7 or more lines as seen in Example 1.

Example 1. *Pantun Persansang*, stanzas 1, 3 and 7, sung by Enyong anak Aji (from *Pantun Iban*, 1997: pp. 4-5)

Opening stanza (2 lines)

1/ *Eeh..... enda' lembau rung se...rung, nadai enda' ngemadas nya' sabak anak nya' raja remaung.*

2/ *Sayau ke tugung nya' sangat kena' sengkilung tedung ular kendawang.*

Stanza 3 (10 lines)

1/ *Eeh.....ga'anang sekakai enggai meh kita' pengiran jurai, ditantai ke kami orang indu' bejenggai pakai sedindam tu' ai' beram tepung.*

2/ *Kebata tu' ai' cheriring riri' tu' wai menyadi' sua' ke Segeni' bunsu Juyung.*

3/ *Ai' beganja bisa tu' remaung sana disua' Petara tu' manang Lambung.*

4/ *Kebata' tu' ai' beram apit tu' Ranggau Tindit ulih aku ngelilit di bukit, lapan beranggung.*

5/ *Uji sepi' de' tu' legi' wai menyadi' enggau ngeli' tangkup dabung.*

6/ *Sambut de' enggau perut puting gelung.*

7/ *Kebata' tu' dikumbai kami orang indu' ditantai Jawai, enda ringa de' menyadi' wai, sakai rita Lulung sambung menua.*

8/ *Ditandi indu' Riti tu' tali sabit, tandan tu' pisang berakit.*

9/ *Jawai sambai langit anak Anchung Selung Bebelit, bunsu apai Sabit Bekait.*

10/ *Nya' orang mangkang ke langit rapat baka kepit bingkai tanggi.*

Stanza 7 (4 lines)

1/ *Eeh.....dia' lempang tubuh lemi' enggi' aku menyadi' ada minta' pangi' ke iya di ai', telaga pengung, minta' selam ke iya di dulang intan lapanbelas bekilung.*

2/ *Ada ngedengkang Kumang nunggang ke aku bata arang.*

3/ *Engkanjung Lulung nyurung ke aku puchung batu tekuyung.*

4/ *Pengaruh ulih iya nyamah di lepung segang mansang.*

Internal rhyme. Once the first line of text is begun, the singer must be aware of (i) the internal rhyme scheme, (ii) the internal rhythmic pattern, and (iii) the end-rhyme pattern for each stanza. These aspects of the poetry—that is, the internal rhyme, the internal rhythm and the end-rhyme—are important conventions governing the poetic structure of the Iban pantun.³

The internal rhyme refers to the use of the same sound in the final syllable of words. Within a given line the rhyme scheme is constant, but in a given stanza the internal rhyme may change from line to line (or it may remain the same). For example, in the first and second lines of the third stanza in Example 1 noted above, the internal rhyme focuses on the sound 'ai' as the singer chooses the words *sekakai*, *enggai*, *jurai*, *ditantai*, *bejenggai*, *pakai*, *ai*, and *wai*. In another pantun, the *Pantun Puji* also sung by Enyong (*Pantun Iban*, 1997, pp. 33-35), the first stanza consists of only 2 lines while the second stanza has 5 lines, as shown in Example 2.

Example 2. *Pantun Puji*, stanzas 1 and 2, sung by Enyong (*Pantun Iban*, 1997: pp. 33-35)

Stanza 1 (Note: the internal rhyming syllables are shown in bold type, the line by line end-rhymes are underlined, and the stanza end-rhymes are in upper case letters.)

1/ Eeh...ga'empai tubuh [sung: **tubu-ah**] jempulun [sung: **jempulu-an**] kami orang indu' nyebut [sung: **nyebu-at**] ke kita' orang laki pantun [sung: **pantu-an**], kemaya dia enda' baka-baka.

2/ Dulu' aku meri' ampun [sung: **ampu-an**] seretai enggau tabi' basa, ngagai kita' bala semua iya, nyengkaum orang ke di lebuah [sung: **lebu-ah**]...PADANG.

Stanza 2

- 1/ *Eeh... ga' anang guai memunyi meh kita' orang laki ke beterundi mayuh [sung: mayu-ah] betekapa.*
- 2/ *Anang guai bejaku' meh kita' ke indu' semua, kita' ke dara-dara.*
- 3/ *Uji mending ke tubuh [sung: tubu-ah] ramping meh kita' mijum Jawing, ka' neranting ke kita' orang laki suling ruding temaga.*
- 4/ *Ka' nebah ke kita' sanggah dilah enggi' aku sura nya' dabung nyawa.*
- 5/ *Kada iya ka' nyaris begerancha munyi pengangkat bilun helicopter enggi' kepala' kitai Temenggung Jugah nya' suba' asi menyadi', aya' Siah apai Linggi, aki' Melia, pulai nyeraun simpang nya' suba' sulu lungang bukit...TIBANG.*

In this pantun the internal rhyme in stanza 1, line 1 focuses on the 2-syllable sound 'uu-a' as sung in the words *tubu-ah*, *jempulu-an*, *nyebu-at*, and *pantu-an*. This 2-syllable rhyme scheme is also carried in the second line in the sung words *ampu-an*, *semu-a* and *lebu-ah*, and through the first and third lines of the second stanza with the words *mayu-ah* and *tubu-ah*. Other internal rhyming words occur as well in these lines.

It is interesting to note that the singer consistently modifies words to make them stand out more strongly as rhyming words within the given lines of text. These rhyming words are apparent in a phonetic or musical transcription, but less apparent in a written transcription such as in the published collection of 1997 noted above. For example, the similarity and rhyming of sound in the final-position syllable of the words 'tubuh' and 'jempulun' becomes strikingly evident in the sung rendition in which the words become pronounced 'tubu-ah' and 'jempulu-an' (here the final consonant sound, 'n', is omitted).

Internal rhythm. The internal rhythm refers specifically to the use of 2-syllable words throughout a line, but may also include the use of a 'short-long' stress pattern on many of the 2- (or even the 4-) syllable words. Using the *Pantun Puji* sung by Enyong anak Aji in Example 2, the internal rhythm of 2-syllable words is not strictly followed. However, there is extensive use of the 'short-long' (or 'weak-strong') stress pattern in the musical rendition throughout this pantun, a phenomenon that will be discussed below.

End rhyme. The end rhyme is the use of the same or similar sound in the final syllable of the final word in the individual lines of a given stanza. In addition, the end-rhyme scheme also applies to the final word of each stanza so that the sound of the final syllable of the final word in each stanza is the same or nearly so.

The *Pantun Puji* by Enyong in Example 2 uses the poetic convention of end rhyme. In this example the second stanza, consisting of 5 lines of text, shows consistent use of end-rhyme, with lines 1 through 4 ending with the sound 'a' in the final syllable of the words *betekapa*, *dara*, *temaga* and *nyawa*.

Furthermore, the end-rhyme scheme is maintained in the final word from one stanza to the next stanza. In Example 2, the final word of each stanza ends with the sound 'ang'. In fact, in the 14 stanzas of this pantun we find that the final words of the successive stanzas are, in order: *padang*, *tibang*, *nyerang*, *orang*, *ranggang*, *pampang*, *mansang*, *magang*, *ngarang*, *kurang*, *nyalang*, *Kumang*, *ranggang* and *mansang*.

With this understanding of some of the main poetic conventions of an Iban pantun, it is now possible to examine the musical conventions of the Iban pantun tradition.

The Musical Rendition of a Pantun

The important musical aspects of the Iban pantun are clearly evident in the recorded, sung performances of three typical pantuns used as the basis of this paper. Two stanzas of the musical transcription of the *Pantun Puji* sung by Enyong anak Aji are given in the Appendix. This singer, from an Iban longhouse in the Kapit region along the Rejang River of Sarawak, was about 40 years old at the time of the performance in 1977 (recorded by the Tun Jugah Foundation). In addition, transcribed excerpts from two other pantuns by other singers, also from the Kapit region, are noted in the musical examples to support and illustrate the following discussion about the music.

In order to better understand the Iban pantun from a musical point of view, we will follow a performance of the *Pantun Puji* by Enyong anak Aji, as illustrated in the Appendix. The musical texture is monophonic, with a single melodic line performed by a soloist with no accompaniment. In general, the dynamics and volume of sung pantuns are moderate, with a single voice, often a female voice that is firm, without a harsh or strained quality, and easily audible in an intimate setting.

Introduction/opening of the pantun

As seen in the transcription in the Appendix, the singer Enyong begins the pantun by humming a vocable, that is, the meaningless syllable 'eeh'. As the introduction to this pantun, this syllable is sung on a sustained note followed by two rising notes of short duration. These three notes make up an ascending melodic line that function as a standard opener by the singer. Every subsequent stanza in Enyong's pantun opens with the same ascending melodic line in a similar rhythmic pattern (that is, a long note followed by two shorter notes).

Other singers of pantuns may use different notes in the introduction but still maintain a long, sustained note followed by short note values within a rising melodic contour, and some singers even sing only a simple upward slide (or portamento) from an indefinite pitch to a high pitch. The transcribed music in Example 3 illustrates the introduction to a stanza by two different singers (and the introductory rising melodic line by Enyong in the *Pantun Puji* may be seen in the Appendix).

Main body/lyrics of the pantun

After the introductory vocable is sung, the performer then proceeds with the first and subsequent lines of the stanza. Here, the singer is concerned not only with the content and meaning of the lyrics, but also with the choice of words, the internal rhyme and rhythm, the end-rhyme scheme and the composition of the melodic lines. As happens with many singers of tales throughout the world, to vocalize the main text of the poem the Iban singer uses a set of melodic motives appropriate for pantun singing, which are dictated by his or her tradition. These motives that are formulaic in nature are learned from the time the singer is very young. As he or she performs pantuns over a long period of time, the melodic motives are used over and over, modified and created anew. Eventually they are learned by other young singers as they listen to the older singers in the longhouse or in their homes in present-day urban or suburban settings.

Melodic lines. Once the singer has begun the lyrics of the pantun, he or she tends to focus on one or two different pitches that are repeated to carry much of the text in each successive line. These pitches may be termed 'intoning pitches'. Sometimes an intoning pitch is actually the starting pitch heard in the introduction, or, if a short ascending melodic line is used as the introduction (as in Example 3a), then the highest pitch of that ascending melodic line often becomes the first of the intoning pitches to be used by the singer.

In the early part of the stanza the singer uses a high intoning pitch (suitable for her vocal range), and as the stanza progresses the intoning pitch becomes lower and lower with each successive line of text, usually ending four notes (or a Perfect 4th) below the starting note. A sample of the use of an intoning pitch is shown in Example 4 and in the excerpt of a transcribed pantun in the Appendix.

In the individual textual lines of the pantun the highly repetitive intoning pitch is interspersed with short melodic motives. These short motives are usually 3, 4 or 5 notes long and rarely exceed 3 beats in duration. The motives generally move by step often ending on the intoning pitch itself. They lend contrast, variety and shape to the overall melodic lines in the stanza. Examples of the kinds of melodic motives used by three different singers are shown in Example 5a-c.


The motives, as shown in Example 5, incorporate several kinds of melodic ornaments, including the slide (or portamento) from one note to another (Examples 5b and c), a trill-like alternation of two different notes (Example 5b), a turn (Example 5c), triplet notes (Example 5b) and fast-running notes (Example 5b). These motives and the melodic ornaments are imbedded in the vocal line as the singer strives to create a text and melody that holds the interest of the audience and is pleasing to the ear. The motives often appear in various combinations, and they are repeated and interspersed with the repeated intoning pitches as the singer generates the melodic lines in stanza after stanza in a given pantun.

The melodic lines generally flow smoothly because of the predominance of stepwise (or conjunct) motion from pitch to pitch. Disjunct melodic motion occurs only occasionally at or near the beginning of a line. The melodic lines may take shape in rising or falling contours, or a combination of these. The rising contour is usually prevalent in the introduction as noted above.

Example 3. The typical rising musical line as the introduction to a stanza in an Iban pantun (3 examples by different singers)

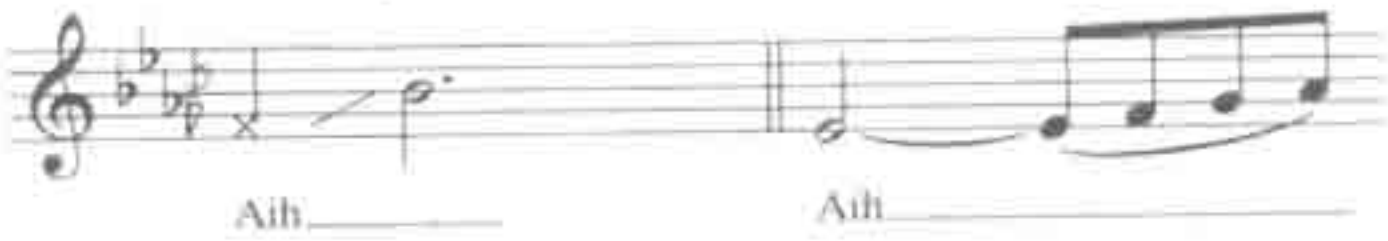
a) by Enyong anak Aji, *Pantun Puji (Pantun Iban, 1997, pp. 33-35)*

(A rising melodic line)

Voice (Enyong ak Aji) 


b) by Lum anak Usang, *Pantun Puji (Pantun Iban, 1997, pp. 1-3)*

(A slow, rising glide from an indefinite pitch to a definite pitch) (a rising melodic line)

Voice (Lum ak. Usang) 

c) by Burai anak Sebau, *Pantun Perangsang (Pantun Iban, 1997, pp. 6-8)*

(A slow, rising glide from an indefinite pitch to a definite pitch)

Voice (Burai ak. Sebau) 

Example 4. Use of an intoning pitch in the main text of *Pantun Perangsang* by Burai anak Sebau (*Pantun Iban, 1997: pp. 6-8*).

(Introduction) (Use of

Voice (Burai ak. Sebau) 

intoning pitch)



de lu - nang sim - gai - i ta - nda - i ke a - ku bejeng - ga - i se — di - nam tu si - dan (and so on)

Scales. The melodic lines heard in the Iban pantuns are based on 5-tone (pentatonic) and 6-tone (hexatonic) scales. The scale from each of three different pantuns is shown in Example 6 (all scales have been transposed to begin on a common pitch for comparative purposes). It is common to find a semitone interval between the first and second scale tones, and some scales have a gap of a 3rd in the middle. The semitone interval between the first two scale notes is important in the closing cadence pattern and is usually heard in the melismatic passage typically sung at the end of each stanza as a closing cadence (discussed below).

Another important point evident in these three scale structures is that the distance between the main intoning pitch and the final note (or pitch center) of the pantun is a Perfect 4th. Hence, we consistently hear, from one pantun to another, a progressive descent of the Perfect 4th interval from the intoning pitches sung early in a stanza to the final concluding pitch at the end of the stanza. The gradual descent of the intoning pitches through the interval of a Perfect 4th is repeated in each stanza and becomes a familiar sound to the ear of the listener as he hears each successive stanza in a performance of a pantun, which is usually rather long.

Rhythm. The rhythm in the Iban pantun usually does not adhere to regular musical meter with steady, recurring beats. Yet, there is attention paid to the internal rhythm within each individual line. The internal rhythm appears to be dictated not only by the choice of words, but also by the stress pattern inherent in the Iban language itself. The choice of words often focuses on 2-syllable words, and the emerging stress pattern, especially in the 2- or (4-) syllable words, is a weak stress followed by a strong stress.⁴

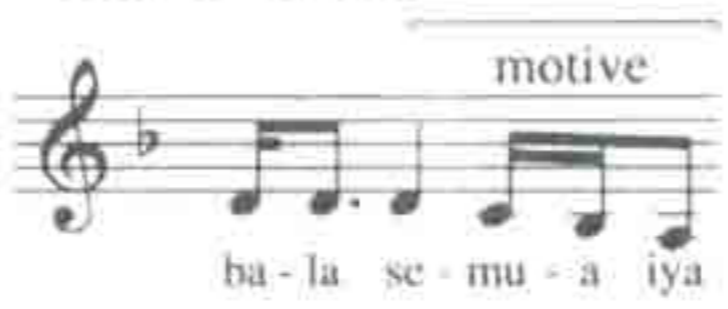
The 'weak-strong' stress pattern in the Iban pantun is musically manifested as a dotted rhythm as shown in Example 7. In this dotted rhythm the first part of the beat has short duration and carries the weak stress, while the second part is longer in duration providing the strong stress. As shown in Example 7, beats 5, 7-9, 11, 14, 16, and 18-20, the singer Lum, in her rendition of a *Pantun Puji*, uses the dotted rhythm extensively along with 2-syllable words.

Example 5. Typical melodic motives in a pantun (3 examples by different singers)

a) by Enyong anak Aji in the rendition of a *Pantun Puji* (*Pantun Iban*, 1997, pp. 33-35).

Stanza 1, line 2

Voice (Enyong anak Aji)



ba - la se - mu - a iya

b) by Burai anak Sebau in the rendition of a *Pantun Peransang* (*Pantun Iban*, 1997, pp.6-8)


Stanza 1: -- line 1

Motive 6

-- line 2

Motive 3

Voice (Burai anak Sebau)



Ka - rang - an nya ta - di u u ya

-- line 2

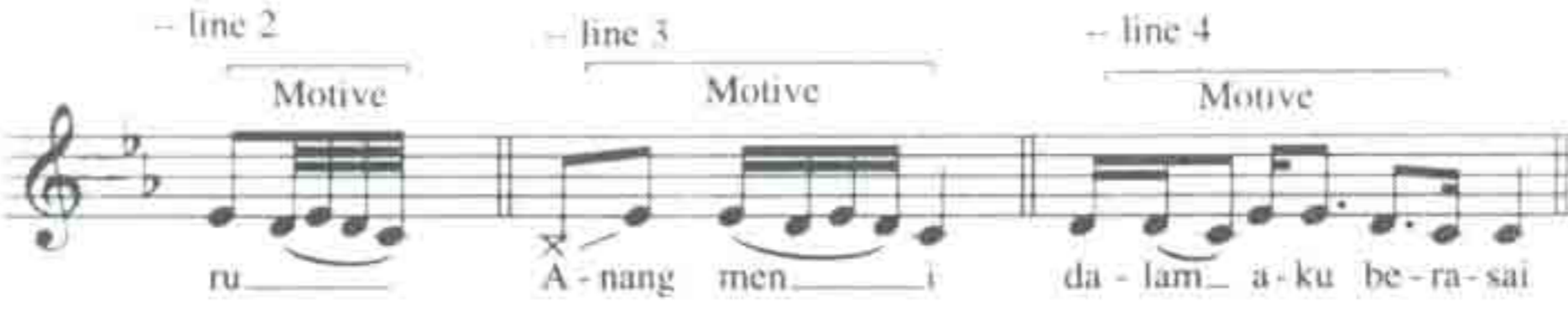
Motive

-- line 3

Motive

-- line 4

Motive



ru A - nang men da - lam a - ku be - ra - sai

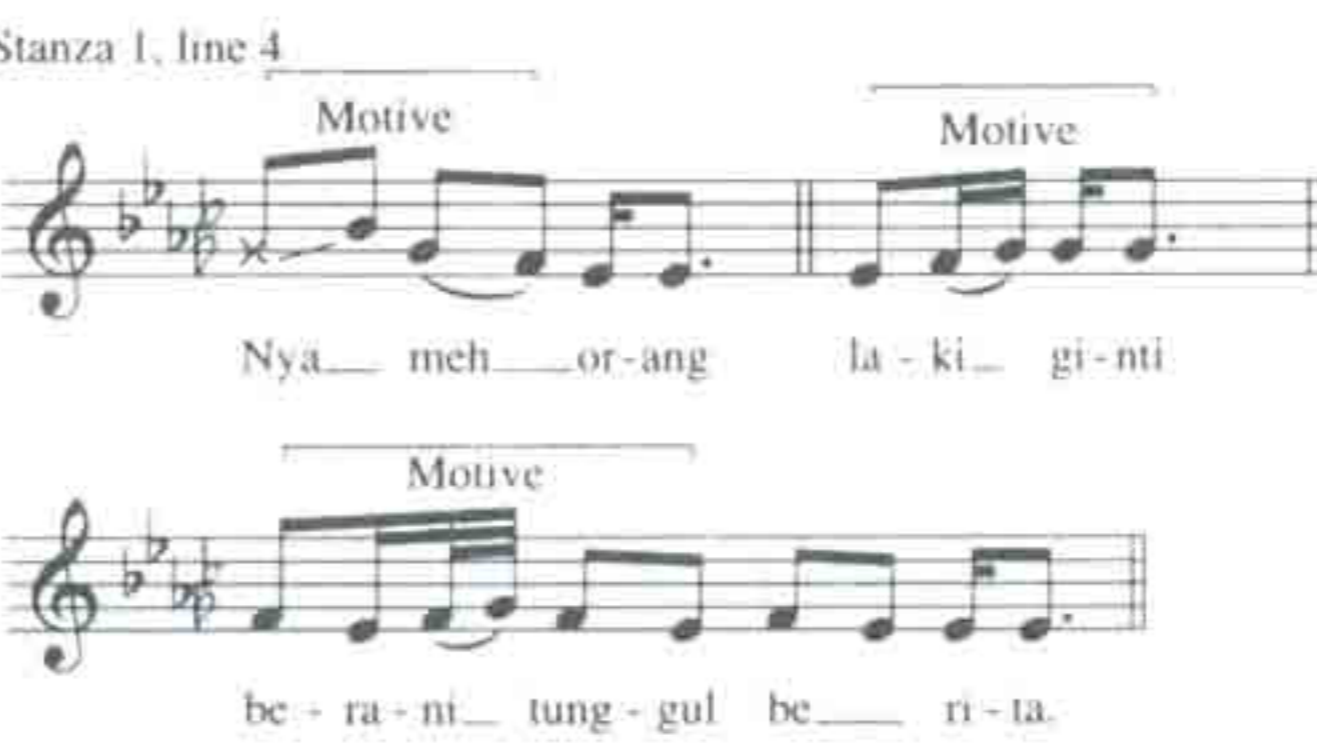
c) by Lum anak Usang in the rendition of a *Pantun Puji* (*Pantun Iban*, 1997, pp. 1-3)

Stanza 1, line 4

Motive

Motive

Voice (Lum anak Usang)



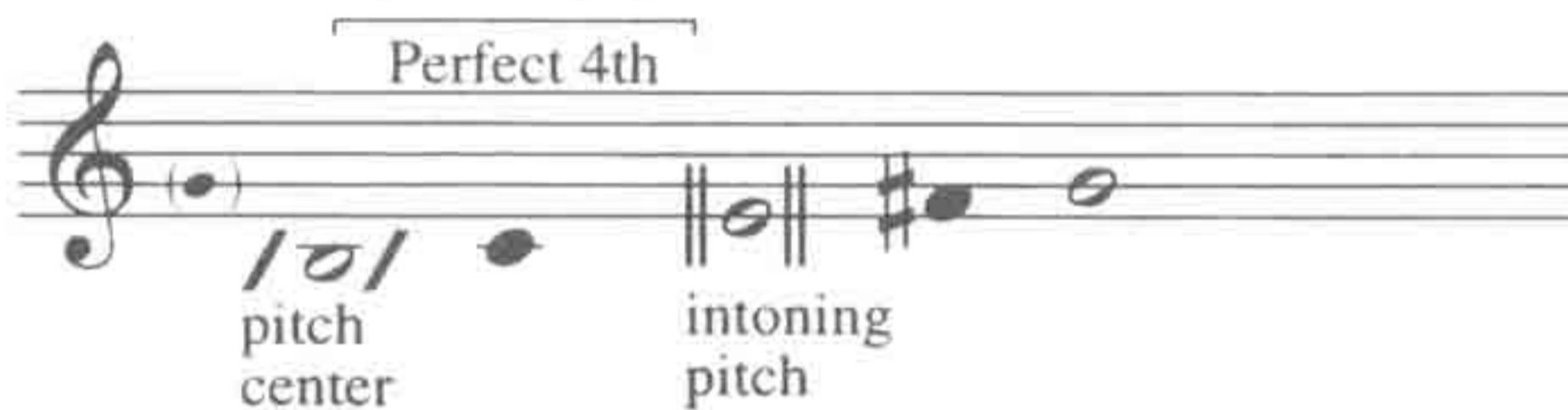
Nya meh or - ang la - ki gi - nti

be - ra - ni tung - gul be ri - ta

Example 6. Scales used in singing Iban pantun.

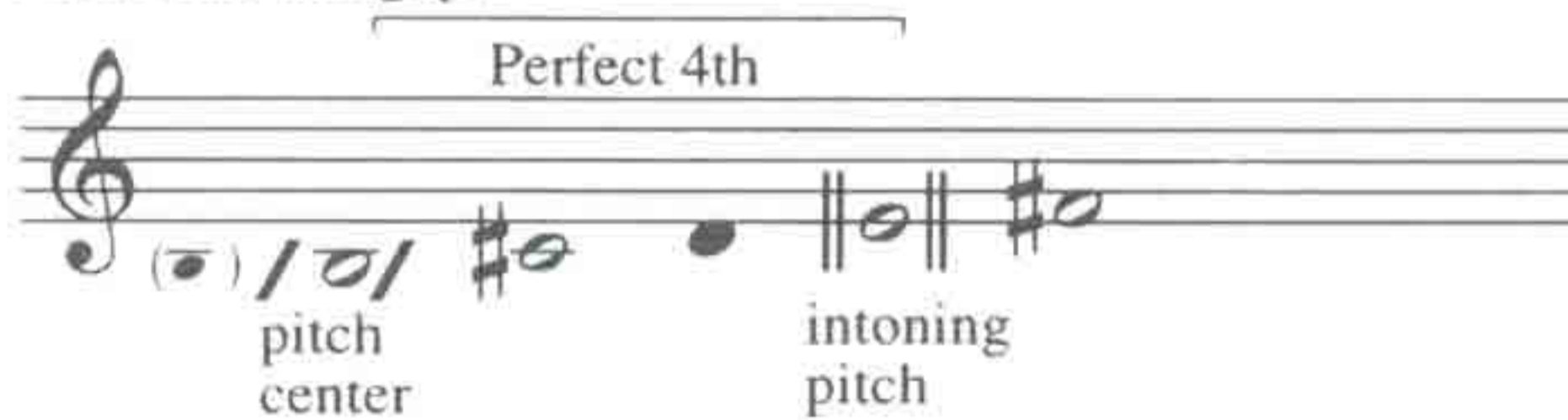
a) from Burai anak Sebau, *Pantun Peransang (Pantun Iban, 1977)*, pp. 6-8)

Pentatonic (major 3rd gap)



b) from Nyawan anak Dana, *Pantun Puji (Pantun Iban, 1997)*, pp. 19-21)

Pentatonic (no gap)



c) from Enyong anak Aji, *Pantun Puji (Pantun Iban, 1997)*, pp. 33-35)

Hexatonic (no gap)



The final, end-rhyming word in a stanza is, also, frequently sung using the dotted rhythm with the 'weak-strong' stress pattern. In this case, the final syllable of the final word in the stanza carries the strong stress and long duration, as shown in stanzas 1 and 2 in the Appendix.

The closing cadence in a pantun

As the singer nears the end of an idea and the end of a stanza in a pantun, he or she uses a characteristic concluding melody (or closing cadence) to finish off the stanza. At the end of the final line of text, the lowest intoning note in the singer's tonal vocabulary will have already been reached. The lowest note is usually four notes (or a Perfect 4th) lower than the singer's main intoning pitch for the stanza. On the penultimate word of the stanza, or sometimes on the final word itself, the performer sings a melisma, that is, several notes sung on a single syllable of text. In this way the singer draws out the penultimate word for several beats duration before singing the final word that must rhyme with the final word of the previous stanza.

By using the melisma, which is sometimes several beats long, the singer allows herself more time to think of an appropriate end-rhyming final word. In addition, the long melisma gives emphasis to the final word, the final syllable of which is usually firmly sung on a sustained pitch (the lowest of the intoning pitches for the stanza and the pantun). A typical closing pattern for a stanza, then, consists of the penultimate word sung on a melisma followed by the final syllable of the end-rhyming word sung on a sustained note (that is, the pitch center of the melody). Examples of closing cadences are shown in Example 8 and in the Appendix.

Conclusions

In this brief survey of events in actual performances of pantuns by Iban singers, it is clear that a pantun consists of a number of stanzas, and within each stanza at least three poetic and musical sections may be distinguished. These are (A) the introduction, (B) the main body or text of the poem, and (C) the closing cadence. This 3-part structure is summarized in Table 1, noting the poetic and musical characteristics commonly found in the stanzas of a pantun.

Table 1. Three-part overall structure of a stanza.

Sections of the Stanza and Poetic Conventions	Musical Characteristics/Conventions
<p>A Introduction/Opening of a stanza</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use of a meaningless syllable (vocable). 	<p>A Introduction/Opening of a stanza</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use of a rising melodic line of 2 or 3 notes, • upward slide (portamento) from an indefinite pitch to a definite starting pitch.
<p>B Main Body/Text of the stanzalines of lyrics governed by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • internal rhyme, • rhythm emphasizing use of 2-syllable words with a 2-level stress pattern of weak-strong stress, • end-rhyme. 	<p>B</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use of intoning pitches with progressive descent to the lowest intoning note a Perfect 4th below the starting pitch, • melodic motives interspersed with intoning pitches to make up complete melodic lines, • use of a 2-level stress pattern of weak-strong stress, manifested as dotted rhythm
<p>C Closing cadence of a stanza</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • emphasis on penultimate word of the stanza, • the final word rhymes with final word of previous stanza. 	<p>C</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use of melisma on penultimate word of the stanza, • use of lowest intoning pitch (and pitch center) on the final syllable of the final word.

Example 7. The internal rhythm in a pantun, excerpt from Lum anak Usang, *Pantun Puji* (*Pantun Iban*, 1997: pp. 1-3)

Stanza 1, lines 1-2 (excerpt)
 (the horizontal bracket points out the weak-strong stress pattern/dotted rhythm)

— = weak-strong stress pattern/dotted rhythm

Voice (Lum ak. Usang)

Beats: 1 2 3 4

... nyi-a tu-chu-ang sam-bu-ang me-

5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

nu - a. Ke ma - ta pung - gang nya ba - das ke ki - lang

13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 (and so on)

di - lan-tak te-ka-ng in-tan ge-ma-la... Te-ngan ta-ta' u-jan ...

Example 8. Closing cadence pattern in the *Pantun Puji* by Lum anak Usang (*Pantun Iban*, 1997: pp. 1-3)

Stanza 1

Voice (Lum ak. Usang)

melisma

be - ng eh _____ pe - men - sang

In an attempt to define the Iban pantun as a musical genre, several characteristics begin to emerge from the analysis of the performances used in this study. Many of these characteristics may be seen as musical conventions that are used especially in the singing of pantuns in the Kapit region of the state.

First, an overall 3-part musical structure governs the singing of a stanza, comprising a standard introduction, the main body of melodic lines, and a closing cadence or passage.

The standard introduction to a stanza consists of a sung meaningless syllable using a rising melodic line of two or three notes (typically a note of long duration followed by two or three notes of shorter duration), or a rising portamento (slide) to a definite starting pitch.

Pentatonic or hexatonic scale structures are used to generate melodies. These scales are characterized by the interval of a minor 2nd between the first two scale tones and the interval of a Perfect 4th between the main intoning pitch and the pitch center (that is, between the two most important scale tones). Although a good deal of the text is sung on certain intoning pitches, the singer also makes use of melodic motives and embellishments to generate melodic lines that are well defined and developed with distinct rising and falling contours. Within each stanza the characteristic gradual descent through the interval of a Perfect 4th from the early intoning pitches to the final pitch is important. This descending melodic line is a familiar sound associated with Iban pantun singing. The melismatic passage that usually closes the stanza as a standard closing cadence is also a familiar passage associated with the Iban pantun.

Other musical characteristics heard in the singing of pantun include the use of unmetered rhythm, but the internal rhythm focuses on the use of a 2-level stress pattern (weak-strong stress), and usually the use of 2-syllable words predominates, using dotted rhythm in the music. The pace and tempo are usually constant throughout a performance, and as pointed out earlier, while these characteristics of rhythm are usually found in the pantun, they are also

commonly heard in the *pelian*, *timbang* and *pengap* chants of the Iban. Finally, the singer may use rests or pauses of 2 or 3 beats between each stanza, thus distinguishing the contextual ideas and the musical structure; this characteristic may also be found in the chant literature.

While the pantun genre shares rhythmic characteristics with other types of Iban genres, it appears to be the melody that distinctly defines the pantun from a musical point of view. The characteristic melodic contours, the opening phrases and vocal embellishments and the melismatic closing cadences give the pantun a lyrical quality not typically heard in the other genres of Iban oral literature. Hence, the translation of the term 'pantun' from the Iban language to the term 'song', especially in the sense of lyrical song, is most apt.

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NOTES

¹ It is interesting and significant that most, if not all, these genres are sung or musically vocalized in some way. Although scholars have meticulously transcribed and documented the verbalized, oral texts of many of these genres, they have, with little exception, paid scant attention to the musical nature of the vocalization.

² In the domain of Malay-Indonesian language and literature, the ubiquitous *pantun* is structured as a quatrain, with each line containing 8 or 12 syllables, and with a usual rhyme scheme of *abab* (a scheme of alternate end-rhymes). The quatrain is in two parts: the first couplet (called *pembayang*) is the preparation or introduction that may contain a riddle alluding to the true meaning of the poem, while the second couplet (called *maksud*) contains the real intent and meaning. See further Mohd. Taib Osman, *Bunga Pampai, Aspects of Malay Culture* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1984), and A. W. Hamilton, *Malay Pantuns* (Kuala Lumpur: Eastern Universities Press Sdn. Bhd., 1982).

³ These same conventions are noted in the *timang* or *pengap* chants in James Masing, *The Coming of the Gods*, Vol. I, pg. 72. Similar conventions are also found in the *sabak dirge* for a deceased person.

⁴ This same rhythmic pattern is heard in Iban chants, see further Patricia Matusky, 'The Musical Rendition of *Pelian Anchau Bidai*' in Clifford Sather, *Seeds of Play, Words of Power, An Ethnographic Study of Iban Shamanic Chants* (Kuching: The Tun Jugah Foundation, 2001). A 2-level stress pattern of weak stress followed by strong stress is found in many traditional music genres found throughout Southeast Asia. See further, Judith Becker, "Percussive Patterns in the Music of Mainland Southeast Asia", *Ethnomusicology*, 12, 2 (1968): 173-91, and Patricia Matusky, *Music in the Malay Shadow Puppet Theatre* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1993 and Penang: The Asian Centre, 1997).

Appendix. Musical Transcription of *Pantun Puji* by Embong anak Aji (excerpt)

(Stanza 1)

Voice

Ech ga em-pai tu-buh jem-pu-lu-an ka-mi

o-rang it-du nye buai ke ki-ta or-ang la-ki pan-tu-ab

ke ma-ya en-da ba-ka ba-ka Du-lu a-ku

meri am-pu-an se-re-tai nggaa ta-bi ba-sa nyu

ga-l ki-ta' ba-lu se-mu-a nya nyeng-ka-um o-rang

ke-di le-ha a-uh pa-dang eh'

(Stanza 2)

15

Ech ga anang kuat me-mu-nyi meli ki-ta'

Appendix. Musical Transcription of *Pantun Puji* by Embong anak Aji (excerpt)

18

o - rang la - ki ke betor - un - di ma - yu - ah

20

he - re - ka - pa - Anang guai be - ja - ku - meh ki - ta - ke

22

in - du se - mu - a ki - ta - ke da - ra da - ra U - ji

24

me - nd - ang ke tu - buh ram - pi - ang meh ki - ta mi - jum Ja - wi - ang,

26

ka ne - ran - ti - ang - ke ki - ta o - rang la - ki su - li - ang ru - di - ang

28

te - ma - ga Ka ne - bah ke ki - ta sang - gah

30

di - lah ak - ku su - ra nya da - bu - ang nya - wa Ka - da

Appendix. Musical Transcription of *Pantun Puji* by Embong anak Aji (excerpt)

32

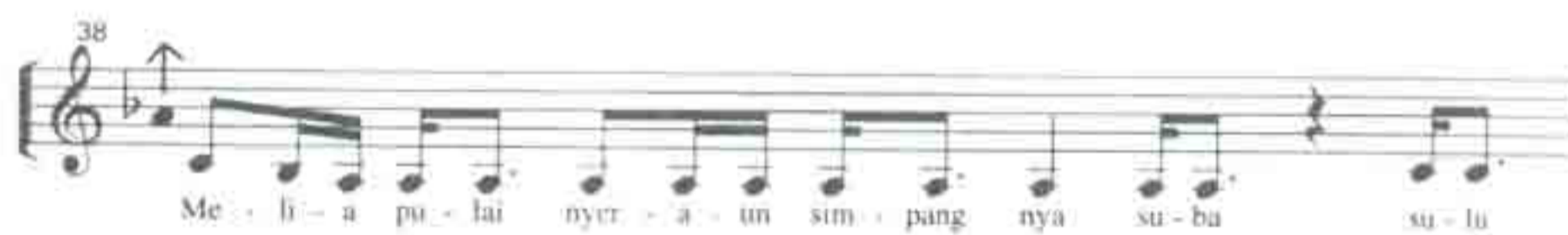
 iya ka nya - ris be - ge - ran - cha mu - nyi peng - ang - kat bi - lu - an he - li

34

 kop - ter eng - gi ke - pa - la ki - tai Te - meng - gung Ju - gu - ah nya

36

 su - ba a - si me - nya - di a - ya Si - ah a - pa - ling - gi a - ki

38

 Me - li - a pu - tai nyer - a - un sim - pang nya su - ba su - lu

40

 lu - nang bu - kit ti - bang ch

(Stanza 3)

43

 Eeh ga anang se - ka - kai eng - ga

45

 meh ki - ta peng - ir - an tu - tai di - tan - tai ke - lem - pang tu - buh