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Anthropological Linguistics, Volume 61, Number 3, Fall 2019, pp. 364-388
(Article)

Published by University of Nebraska Press



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Scrambling Syllables in Sung Poetry of the Maldives

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Abstract. The most popular form of poetry in Dhivehi (an Indo-Aryan language of the Maldives) before the twentieth century, *raivaru*, utilizes the scrambling of syllables as a poetic device. Scrambling harnesses processes typically associated with language games. Yet, while players of language games transform words according to rigid processes, Maldivian poets scramble syllables in response to six poetic constraints. Two broad forms of scrambling may be distinguished: intraword vs. long-distance. One factor that may influence the poet's decision to scramble syllables in particular ways is the recitation melody.

1. Introduction. Before the twentieth century, the most popular form of poetry in Dhivehi, an Indo-Aryan language that is the official language of the Maldives, was known as *raivaru*. This form of poetry utilized a poetic device termed *bas olhuvun*, which literally means 'word scrambling', and refers to the scrambling of syllables.

Section 2 of this article introduces the phenomenon of syllable scrambling in Dhivehi sung poetry. (See the transcription note for an explanation of the Dhivehi romanization system in which examples are presented.) To historically contextualize this poetic phenomenon, a brief social history of *raivaru* is offered in section 3. Section 4 examines six formal features that function as the playground where syllable scrambling occurs. Section 5 explores *bas olhuvun* in more depth, comparing and contrasting Dhivehi syllable scrambling with language games and distinguishing intraword and long-distance scrambling. Section 6 offers two hypotheses as to why *raivaru* poets scrambled syllables in certain ways.

2. Introduction to syllable scrambling. Around 1737, the Maldivian poet Edhuru Umuru Maafaiykaleygefaanu began his influential long Dhivehi-language poem, *Boduthaaheedhu* 'The Great Oneness of God'¹ with the three-line stanza in (1).²

- (1) *aiki bismillaah fai*
gaimu hithu ley vathaa'in fa
shai thauheedhu gathi in fa

Over time, the *Boduthaaheedhu* circulated orally throughout the Maldives. When Maldivians listened to their elders recite this opening stanza, they likely recognized an intact word in the first line, *bismillaah*—an Arabic phrase commonly used in Dhivehi, meaning 'in the name of Allah'. Muslims, including Maldivians, sometimes employ this phrase at the beginning of an undertaking, such as Maafaiykaleygefaanu's undertaking to compose his new work of verse.

Listeners would have heard two additional terms in the first line of (1)—*aiki* and *fai*. There is no word *aiki* in Dhivehi. There is a Dhivehi word *fai* ‘foot, leg’, but here the function is different: *-fai* is a particle that attaches to the verbal stem to create a conjunctive verb (the so-called “successive particle”).

Why did Maafaiykaleygefaanu insert into the first line a meaningless term and one stand-alone successive particle? The reason is that the poetic genre in which Maafaiykaleygefaanu crafted his verses called for a type of syllable scrambling known as *bas olhuvun* (lit., ‘word scrambling’) in Dhivehi.³ This poetic device is a fundamental feature of a genre of Dhivehi-language sung poetry known as *raivaru*.

Those who listened to the recitation of this *raivaru* verse would thus have known to unscramble *aiki* and *fai* into an intact Dhivehi term. Figure 1 attempts to explain how the syllables were scrambled. (Syllables are indicated as σ ; numerals indicate the order of syllables in the scrambled word as found in the stanza and then in the normal word.) To unscramble the line, listeners moved the syllable *ki* before the syllable *ai* and attached the resulting *kiai* to the syllable *fai* at the end of the poetic line. This produced the word *kiaifai* ‘having said’. Syllables are indicated as *s*; numerals indicate the order of syllables in the scrambled word as found in the stanza and then in the normal word. The seven μ symbols represent the seven moras of the in-tact word *bismillah* found between *aiki* and *fai*.

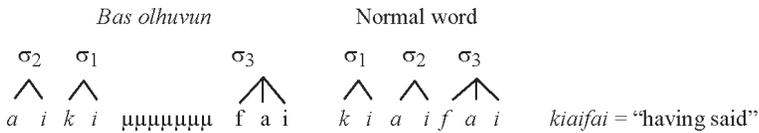


Figure 1. *Bas olhuvun* of *kiaifai* ‘having said’ in *Boduthaaheedhu* (stanza 1, line 1).

Having done this, listeners would realize in a flash that the poetic line *aiki bismillaah fai* was meant to express *bismillaah kiaifai* ‘having said “In the name of Allah”’.

Listeners may have found the second line of (1), *gaimu hithu ley vathaa in fa*, more difficult to decode. The first two units, to be sure, are intact words: *gaimu* meant ‘certainly’; *hithu* meant ‘heart’ or ‘mind’. But the rest of the syllables were scrambled: *ley vathaa in fa*. To unscramble these syllables, listeners would have moved the syllable *ley* forward to precede the syllable *fa*, as in figure 2, producing *leyfa*, the term for ‘love’ in the Southern dialect of Dhivehi (Ibrahim Hamad Salim p.c. 2017; see also Reynolds 2003:332).

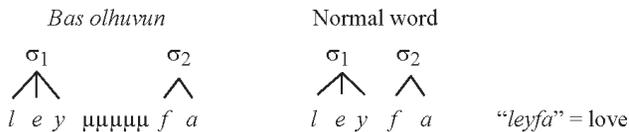


Figure 2. *Bas olhuvun* of *leyfa* ‘love’ in *Boduthaaheedhu* (stanza 1, line 2).

This leaves *vathaain*. Here, *vathaa* is an older version of modern Dhivehi *vethi*, a particle often added to *leyfa* to form the term *leyfavethi* ‘loving’.⁴ The listener would have mentally rearranged the words into the phrase *gaimu hithu layfa vathaain* ‘surely from the loving heart’. At this point, the audience would have realized that the first two lines of poetry meant ‘Having said “In the name of Allah,” surely from the loving heart . . .’.

When listeners heard the third line, *shai thauheedhu gathi infa*, they would have recognized an intact word, *thauheedhu*. Like *bismillaah*, this is derived from an Arabic term—*tawhīd* ‘the oneness of God’. In this verse, however, it also refers to the title of the poem the author was introducing to the public, *Bodu Thauheedhu* ‘The Great Oneness of God’.

In addition to *thauheedhu*, the third line contains scrambled units (bold): *shai thauheedhu gathi in fa*. To unscramble these syllables, listeners needed to take two steps, as shown in figure 3: first, to move the final syllable *fa* so that it precedes *shai*, and second, to group *fashai* together with *gathi* and *in* to produce the word *fashaigathiin* ‘I have started’.⁵

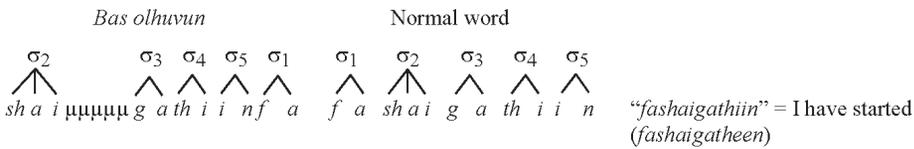


Figure 3. *Bas olhuvun* of *fashaigathiin* (*fashaigatheen*) ‘I have started’ in *Boduthaaheedhu* (stanza 1, line 3).

The resulting unscrambled version of the line, *thauheedhu fashaigathiin*, means ‘I started to write the *Thauheedhu*’.

All of this unscrambling would have happened simultaneously with the hearing of the stanza. Once all three lines were grasped, listeners instantly put them together to arrive at the full meaning, which is shown in (2).⁶

- (2) *aiki bismillaah fai*
gaimu hithu ley vathaa in fa
shai thauheedhu gathi infa

‘Having said “In the name of Allah”
surely with the heart of love
I started to write the *Thauheedhu*.’

The resulting unscrambled version of the line, *thauheedhu fashaigathiin*, means ‘I started to write the *Thauheedhu*’.

The following section offers a brief social history of *raivaru*.

3. “They used to recite *raivaru* as if they were talking.” In the Maldives before the twentieth century, *raivaru* was a widespread and popular form of

poetry. Dhivehi literary scholars have suggested that the origins of *raivaru* are unknown (Sidi 1989:10; Waheed 2005:70). It was a type of poetry that was part of the daily lives of Maldivians (Ibrahim Hamad Salim p.c. 2017); it is said that many could improvise *raivaru* almost as easily as they could speak. The literary scholar Bodufenvalhughey Sidi writes, for example: “[Maldivians] used to recite . . . *raivaru* simply as if they were talking” (1989:11).⁷ Zueshan Ali writes:

“Raivaru” was famous for its usage in communication, entertainment, teaching, advising, complimenting, and even for mockery. In the early days, it was common for the women to recite “Raivaru” in the woods while collecting coconuts and firewood. They used these exotic rhymes to keep track of one another while at work and it was used for small talk and gossip as well. “Raivaru” was also well reputed among teachers. They used it to not only give their pupils teachings of the books but about life in general. Mothers recited “Raivaru” to put their babies to sleep. Men used to tease ladies of their preference with verses of “Raivaru,” while ladies flirted back in a subtle manner. “Raivaru” was also a famous source of entertainment among men. They used to recite “Raivaru” while sitting on the benches (Holhu Ashi) under huge trees. These gatherings were also common ground for mocking each other on literary levels. [Ali 2012]

Around 1800, *raivaru* also found its way into the culture of the court of the Maldivian sultan. At this time the poet Ban’deyri Hasan Manikufaanu composed two literary works of *raivaru* for the Maldivian sultan Mohammad Mueenudeen I (Sidi 1992:16), who reigned between 1779 and 1835. The first was a historical poem of 171 stanzas entitled *Dhivehi Arumaadhu Raivaru* ‘Raivaru for the Maldivian Fleet of Ships’. The second poem, a fictional poem of 318 stanzas, was titled *Dhiyoage Raivaru* ‘The Raivaru of the Beautiful Woman (*Dhiyoya*)’.

By the turn of the twentieth century, *raivaru* had declined in popularity. According to Bodufenvalhughey Sidi (1989:12), Maldivians developed a distaste for *raivaru* because some people were using the poetic form to bully and tease others. Mohammad Jameel Didi (1986:47–48) suggests that *raivaru* declined in popularity for three reasons: first, because when Maldivians studied foreign languages (in this case, Arabic) they wanted to imitate the foreign (Arabic) poetic genres; second, because Maldivians began to use *raivaru* as a way to stir up sexual desires,⁸ so that members of the upper class wanted to distance themselves from the genre; and third, because it became difficult for twentieth-century Maldivians to comprehend the language of older *raivaru*. One of the chief reasons why the language of *raivaru* became difficult to comprehend was due to the poetic technique of *bas olhuvun* ‘syllable scrambling’.

In the mid-twentieth century, Maldivian scholars developed a renewed interest in *raivaru* and the phenomenon of syllable scrambling. They began to publish books that contained stanzas of *raivaru* side by side with the

unscrambled versions, and they arranged the words of the stanzas according to the syntax of prose to help the reader comprehend the poetry.⁹

For example, figure 4 is an image from a page from the literary scholar Yusuf Alifulhu’s commentary on Hasan Ban’deyri Manikufaanu’s *Dhivehi Arumaadhu Raivaru* ‘Raivaru for the Maldivian Fleet of Ships’. On the right is verse 26 from the poem. In parentheses on the left, Alifulhu unscrambles the syllables of each line and arranges the words in normal syntax. (He also summarizes the contents of the stanza in prose below the scrambled and unscrambled versions.)

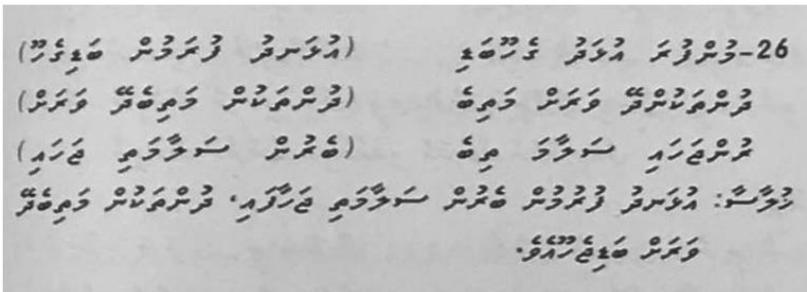


Figure 4. Yusuf Alifulhu’s reconstructed stanza and prose explanation of stanza 26 of Hasan Ban’deyri Manikufaanu’s *Dhivehi Arumaadhu Raivaru* (Alifulhu 2003:16; reproduced with the permission of the Dhivehi Language Academy).

4. The playground for scrambling. This section explores the formal features of *raivaru*, features that serve as the poetic context—the playground—within which syllable scrambling occurs. To introduce these features, I turn to a story narrated by Bodufenvalhugey Sidi in an article he published in 1949 in the national newspaper *Sarukaaruge Khabaru* ‘Government News’. The article was entitled “The Golden Scales of Craftsmanship in the Composition of Dhivehi Poetry” (Sidi 1949).¹⁰ One day, Alifulhukoi H’aajee and Ali Kudaranna Ban’deyri Kalegefaanu went to the house of the poet Dhonthuththu. H’aajee asked Dhonthuththu, “How is *raivaru* composed?” Dhonthuththu looked at H’aajee and recited the two stanzas, shown in transcription in (3) and, as they appeared in the original newspaper article, in figure 5 below.

- (3) *h’aajee kaleyfaanu odi*
h’aajegefaa kaleynu odi
h’aajeefaa kaleynu odi

- maafaiy thakurufaanu odi*
maafaiythakuge faanuru odi
maafaiy faa thakuru odi

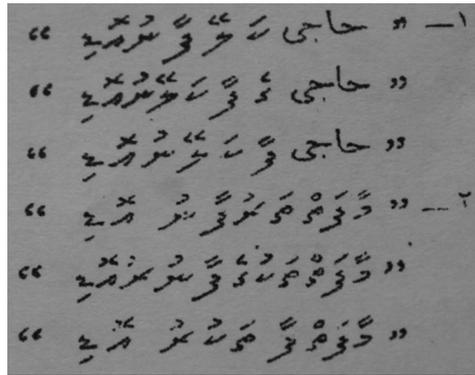


Figure 5. The two stanzas of (3) below as they appeared in Bodufenvalhugey Sidis's newspaper article (1949:6). Note that the word *h'aajee* is spelled in Arabic script, rather than in Thaana; synchronic digraphia in Dhivehi was very common at this time.

4.1. Line. The poet Dhonthuththu intended these two stanzas to teach his visitors formal features of *raivaru*. One can see from this example that *raivaru* was often created in three-line stanzas.¹¹ In Dhivehi, the term for a poetic line is *bas* 'word; language; poetic line'. There are also special terms for each line in three-line *raivaru*: line 1 is called *fashaabas* (lit., 'beginning line of poetry'), line 2, *gaiybas*, and line 3, *fahubas* (lit., 'final line of poetry').

Dhonthuththu removed from these pedagogical stanzas the issue of meaning. The three lines in the first stanza have exactly same meaning, 'H'aajee Kaleynu's boat'. Likewise, the three lines in the second stanza have the same meaning, 'Maafaiy Thakurufaanu's boat'. It seems that Dhonthuththu wanted to focus only on what he deemed to be the most salient formal features of *raivaru* divorced from semantics.

4.2. Syllable. The two pedagogical stanzas can also teach us about syllable requirements in *raivaru*. Syllables in Dhivehi are units of time that phonologists often describe in terms of moras (see Hyman 1985; Broselow 1995:188–203); Dhivehi can be characterized as a mora-timed or moraic language. Phonologists tend to agree that there are three types of syllables based upon their number of moras: light (monomoraic, i.e., one unit of moraic time), heavy (bimoraic, i.e., two units of moraic time), and superheavy (trimoraic, i.e., three units of moraic time).

A light syllable comprises a vowel (V) or consonant-vowel (CV). What constitutes a heavy syllable varies slightly from language to language (see Broselow 1995:188–203). In Dhivehi, it is a long vowel (VV), consonant-vowel-vowel (CVV), vowel-consonant (VC), or consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC). In Dhivehi, superheavy syllables are CVVC. (Superheavy syllables of the form CVCC appear in Dhivehi only in the unassimilated pronunciation of foreign words.)¹²

Discussions of the mora in Dhivehi inevitably lead to the Dhivehi-language term *fili*. The standard definition for *fili* is 'vowel sign' (see Dhivehi Basfoiy

2011:786; Reynolds 2003:222). Thaana, the Dhivehi script, distinguishes long vowel signs (*dhemey fili* ‘long vowel’) from short vowel signs (*kuru fili* ‘short vowel’); this is necessary because in the spoken language the presence of a long vs. short vowel distinguishes the meaning of words. (For example, *kafa* means ‘cotton’, but *ka**aa**fa* means ‘grandfather’; *furaana* means ‘vital breath’, but *furaana**aa*** means ‘old’.)

In the context of Dhivehi poetry, however, *fili* does not mean the vowel sign in the writing system, but rather means mora within a poetic meter. In this sense it is analogous to the Sanskrit-derived Sinhala-language concept of *mātra*, which in the context of Sinhala and Sanskrit poetry refers to the moras within a poetic meter. For example, the author of the following passage uses the word *fili* in its various morphological inflections (which I have put in bold type) in specifying the number of moras per line.¹³

Raivaruge vazanthah behifaivane, **filithakuge** a’dhadhu 4 minvarakasheve. E ee dhiy**afiyaa**, baar**afiyaa**, theyr**afiyaa**, egaar**afiyeeve**. [Alifulhu 2005:24]
 [It is into four quantities that the meters of *raivaru* are divided. Those are [meters with] ten moras, twelve moras, thirteen moras, and eleven moras.]

Likewise, when Maldivians discuss meter in the most popular form of Dhivehi poetry today, *lhen*,¹⁴ they sometimes describe the meter as, for example, *fansavees fileege vazaneh*, which literally means a ‘meter with twenty-five moras’ per line.

Let us return to one of Dhonthuththu’s pedagogical stanzas and ask how many *fili* (moras) he uses per line. If one considers the second three-line stanza in (3), it becomes clear that it has twelve moras in line 1, thirteen moras in line 2, and eleven moras in line 3, as in figure 6 (σ indicates syllables, and μ indicates moras).

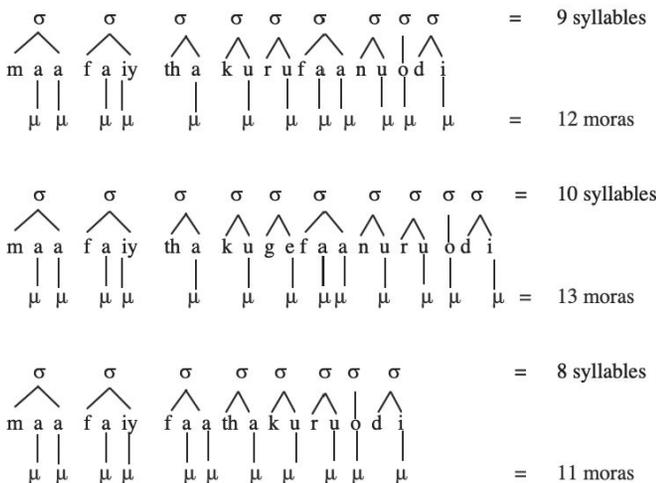


Figure 6. Syllables and moras in a verse of three-line *raivaru*.

This is the preferred moraic structure that Maldivian poets internalize to construct three-line *raivaru* in spontaneous oral production or in a composed work: twelve moras in line one, thirteen in line two, and eleven in line three. The word “preferred” is used because three-line *raivaru* allows the option of constructing line 3 with twelve moras instead of eleven.¹⁵ To teach the ideal structure to the readers of the 1949 newspaper, Bodufenvallhughey Sidi created a diagram, shown in figure 7 and transcribed in example (4), in which he assigned to each mora the vocables of *thi*, *ri*, or *e*.¹⁶

- (4) Line 1: *thi ri thi ri thi ri thi ri thi ri thi ri*
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
 Line 2: *thi ri thi ri thi ri thi ri thi ri e thi ri*
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13
 Line 3: *thi ri thi ri ri thi ri thi e thi ri*
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

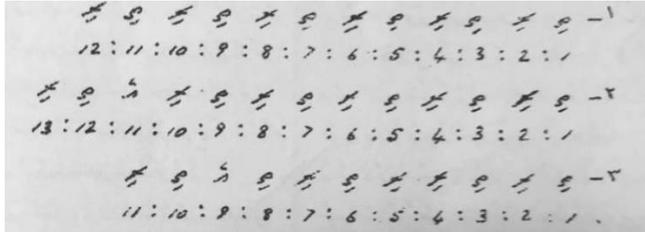


Figure 7. Bodufenvallhughey Sidis’s (1949:6) use of vocables and numbers to indicate the number of moras in a stanza of three-line *raivaru*.

4.3. Poetic meter. The next formal feature is the way in which Dhivehi poets group moras into a poetic meter. In the Dhivehi language today, the standard term for poetic meter is *vazan*, which is derived from an Arabic term for poetic meter, *wazn*. Yusuf Alifulhu (2005:26–27) makes two observations about the organization of poetic meter in *raivaru*. First, he suggests that poets often conceived each line as having two subgroups of moras. He terms these subgroups *vazan golhi*, a concept that could be rendered in English as “moraic slots.” Recall that three-line *raivaru* will always have the same numbers of moras per line: line one has twelve, line two has thirteen, and line 3 will be eleven or twelve. But Alifulhu adds that poets often divided each line in the following way: line 1, seven moras + five moras; line 2, seven moras + six moras, and line 3, six moras + five moras (seven moras + five moras is also permissible for line three). For example, the second stanza of (3) conceived according to Alifulhu’s concept of *vazan golhi* would be as shown in (5).

- (5) *maafaiy thakuru / faanu odi* (7 + 5)
maafaiythakuge / faanuru odi (7 + 6)
maafaiy faa / thakuru odi (6 + 5)

Second, Alifulhu (2005:26) contends that the moraic slots of *raivaru* also contained standard metrical patterns (*namoonaa*), which he calls the “skeleton” (*onigan’du*) and exemplifies (using vocables) as in (6).

- (6) *naa na na na ey / naa na ey* (7 + 5)
naa na naa ey / na naa naa e (7 + 6)
naa na na ey / na na naa e (6 + 5)

Although this pattern can be found in some verses, it appears to be one among many. For example, consider again the second stanza of (3), which follows the pattern shown in (7).

- (7) *maafaiy thakuru / faanu odi* (*naa naa na na na / naa na na e*)
maafaiythakuge / faanuru odi (*naa naa na na na / naa na na na e*)
maafaiy faa / thakuru odi (*naa naa naa / na na na na e*)

Or consider again stanza 1 of *Boduthaaheedhu* (cf. example (1) above), which follows the pattern in (8). Notice that line three has the permissible, though not ideal, quantity of twelve moras instead of eleven. Also note the trimoraic super-heavy (CVVC) syllable *laah*.

- (8) *aiki bismil / laah fai* (*naa na naa ey / naaa ey*)
gaimu hithu ley / vathaa in fa (*naa na na na naa / na naa naa e*)
shai thauhee / dhu gathi in fa (*naa na na naa / na na na naa e*)

4.4. Assonance. The third formal feature of *raivaru* is assonance (*filikoalhi*), when a poet repeats a vowel or diphthong in words nearby enough for the repetition to be perceived. *Filikoalhi* is achieved when the poet repeats the first vowel sound as well as the following vowel or consonant-plus-vowel in all three lines. The Dhivehi language has specific terms for these. The first vowel in a line of poetry is known as the *mula akuru* ‘first letter’ and the second linguistic sound (whether a vowel or consonant-vowel) is known as the *ban’duvah akuru*. This is seen in the first stanza of *Boduthaaheedhu*, shown in (9), with the assonance bolded (repeated from example (1)).

- (9) **ai**ki bismillaah fai
gaimu hithuley vathaa infa
shai thauheedhu gathi infa

Notice that the *filikoalhi* does not require initial consonants to match. The first vowel (*mula akuru*) in all the lines is *a*, and the immediately following sound (*ban’duvah akuru*) is *i*. (In Dhivehi, the combination of *a* and *i* produces the long near-low front unrounded vowel [æ:].) The assonance here is *ai*, (*g*)*ai*, and (*sh*)*ai*. Bodufenvalhugey Sidi (1989:29–36) has analyzed various manifestations of *filikoalhi*, focusing on stanzas that used *ee*, *au* (diphthong), *oo*, *oa*, *ai*, *un*, *asha*, *ugai*, and *ive*.

4.5. Rhyme. The next-to-last fundamental feature of *raivaru* is akin to what we call rhyme, which is known as *kaafiyaa* in Dhivehi. Like the word *vazan*, the term *kaafiyaa* is derived from an Arabic term (*qāfiya*). *Kaafiyaa* in Dhivehi poetry means that the final two syllables must be identical in certain lines. In three-line *raivaru*, rhyme is only supposed to appear at the end of the second and third lines—that is, the rhyme scheme is ABB. In stanza 1 of *Bodu-thaaheedhu*, Maafaiykaleygefaanu uses the rhyme *-infa*, as shown in bold type in (10).

- (10) *aiki bismillaahi fai*
gaimu hithu ley vathaa infa
shai thauheedhu gathi infa

4.6. Recitation melody. *Raivaru* was traditionally a form of sung poetry. In Sidi's story about Dhonthuththu's pedagogical *raivaru*, the reader is expected to assume that the poet recited the stanzas to a particular melody. The Dhivehi word for melody is *raagu*. Etymologically, the term has roots in the Sanskrit word *rāga*. However, *raagu* refers to a fixed tune, unlike the term *rāga*, which is used throughout India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka to denote complex modal entities used for improvisation in classical music. In the books I have collected about *raivaru*, Dhivehi literary scholars often mention that *raivaru* was sung to beautiful tunes. For example, Abdulla Sadiq writes in his introduction to the 2006 edition of the *Bodu Thaaheedhu*, "I remember seeing this book as a child. I also heard my mother and aunts reciting it to a beautiful tune" (2006:4).¹⁷

In the summer of 2017, Mr. Ashraf Ali, president of the Dhivehi Language Academy, demonstrated how one might sing the two pedagogical stanzas cited earlier. Figure 8 shows a transcription of the *raagu* Ashraf selected. The group of pitches is comparable to the *rāga* of North India known as *bhairavi*. One can clearly hear the intervals of a minor second, minor third, fourth, fifth, minor sixth, and minor seventh. Notice also that a natural second appears in the third line.

Free time

h'aa - jee ka - le - faa - nu o - di

h'aa jee - ge - faa ka - ley - nu o - di

h'aa - jee fa ka - ley - nu o - di

Figure 8. Transcription of a *raagu* (tune) for *raivaru* sung by Mr. Ashraf Ali.

Ashraf generously introduced me to his family members who live on the island of Nilandhoo in Northern Huvadhu atoll. When I asked if anyone was

known for singing *raivaru*, he introduced me to a man named Ahmed Yoosufu Ahammafuthaa. Ahammafuthaa sang his *raivaru* stanzas to a different *raagu*, which is transcribed in figure 9.

Free time

1 va - ru nu - dhey - - tha - - - go laa ka - nu -

2 ha - ru ku - re - vi o - di hey[in]³ [l]eh³ "yeh" dhe -

3 ma - ru mi fa - dha - - - thu - raa - leh - - - dhe

Figure 9. Transcription of a *raagu* (tune) for *raivaru* sung by Mr. Ahmed Yoosufu Ahammafuthaa.

The melody of this *raagu* is different because it employs the major second and major third, and sustains the major seventh on the final syllables of lines 1 and 3.¹⁸ In the summer of 2019 I had the opportunity to speak with and record two additional performers of *raivaru*—Ali Moosa of Alifushi and Qasim Mohammad. Both men used one *raagu* to sing *raivaru*. Mohammad stated that there are about three or four commonly used *raagu* tunes (Qasim Mohammad p.c. 2019). Mohammad sang a six-line *raivaru* to a *raagu* that is known as *iruvathoshi raagu*.

The constraints of line, syllable, poetic meter, rhyme, assonance, and recitation melody comprise the poetic field in which syllable scrambling occurs. It can be argued that there would be no need for syllable scrambling if these poetic constraints did not exist; section 6 returns to this idea. Before that, however, it is necessary to examine in more detail how syllable scrambling works.

5. How syllable scrambling works in *raivaru*.

5.1. Language games and syllable scrambling. As a preliminary to analyzing syllable scrambling in *raivaru*, it is instructive to consider its similarities and differences with processes that phonologists term “language games” or “ludlings” (Laycock 1972; Bagemihl 1988; Bagemihl 1989; Davis 1994; Bagemihl 1996; Vaux 2011). To play a language game, one must transform phonological structures with systematic processes. Such processes include rearrangement, insertion (also known as “infixing”), transposition and interchange, as well as combinations thereof.¹⁹

For example, rearrangement and insertion are combined in the English language game of Pig Latin. The speaker rearranges units in the word—moving the word-initial consonant to the end of the word—and then inserts the vowel [e], usually spelled *ay*, onto the word-initial consonant that was placed at the end (Davis 1994:1); *pig* is thus transformed into *ig-pay* and *Latin* into *atin-lay*.

Another type of rearrangement involves reversal; for instance, a language game in Tagalog requires participants to reverse the order of phonemes, so that *puti* ‘white’ becomes *itup* (Gil 1996). In Dhivehi syllable scrambling, one does not find these types of rearrangement, insertion, and reversal.

There happens to be a language game in Dhivehi, called *ha-sha bas* ‘the language of *ha* and *sha*’, that does involve insertion. To play, one must know the order of the Dhivehi alphabet, which is often recited as in (11).

- (11) *ha-sha-na-ra-ba-lha-ka-a*
va-ma-fa-dha-tha-la-ga-gna
sa-da-za-ta-ya-pa-ja-cha

For the purposes of *ha-sha bas*, the player pairs the letters in this way: *ha-sha* | *na-ra* | *ba-lha* | *ka-a* | *va-ma* | *fa-dha* | *tha-la* | *ga-gna* | *sa-da* | *za-ta* | *ya-pa* | *ja-cha*. To play this language game, the normal word is transformed by changing each letter into its paired letter; the vowel following the paired letter remains the same as the vowel in the real word. For example, the name *Aisaa Dheedhee* becomes *kakidaa feefee*: *a* becomes *ka*, *i* becomes *ki*, *saa* becomes *daa*, and *dhee* becomes *fee* (Mohamed Moosa and Ibrahim Hamad Salim p.c. 2017).

The language game mechanisms of syllable reversal and interchange are also familiar to Dhivehi speakers. Another Dhivehi language game involves syllable reversal, in which syllables at the beginning and end of a word are exchanged. This game is known as *ekolhukolhun vaahaka dhekkun* ‘talking upside down’; for example, *Dhivehi* is changed to *hivedhi* (Mohamed Moosa p.c. 2017, 2021). In contrast, in the process of interchange the speaker moves the word’s second syllable to the beginning (Bagemihl 1989:489); for example, in the analysis of Dhivehi syllable scrambling below, an instance of interchange occurs in which the word *hadhaigen* ‘having created’ is changed to *dhaihagen* (see figure 10 in section 5.3).

One key difference between Dhivehi syllable scrambling and language games is that language games are performed as ordinary speech, while syllable scrambling occurs within poetry. This article contributes to scholarship on language games by examining a practice that employs processes found in language games within the context of poetry rather than ordinary speech. This context shift is significant because in language games that occur in ordinary speech, the rules of the particular language game completely control how the speaker must transform the word. If the players play the language game properly, there are usually no alternative ways to transform the word. There is consequently no room for individual preferences.

In contrast, in Dhivehi syllable scrambling, it is the parameters of poetic meter, rhyme, assonance, and recitation melody (analyzed in sections 4.1–4.6) in combination with certain individual preferences (explored below) that largely determine how syllables are scrambled. In fact, one way to understand Dhivehi syllable scrambling (a point discussed further in section 6) is that *bas olhuvun*

becomes necessary to allow the poet to satisfy the poetic requirements of assonance, rhyme, syllable, and recitation melody.

The rest of this section identifies principles that *raivaru* poets internalized to help them quickly scramble syllables. The analysis draws upon a corpus of 102 lines of *raivaru*—the first thirty-four three-line stanzas of the long poem *Dhiyoage Raivaru* ‘The Raivaru of the Dhiyoha’ (ca. 1800), by Ban’deyri Hasan Manikufaanu. This poem has been printed and analyzed in three different sources (Sidi 1992; Salahuddin 1999; Sadiq 2007), all three of which I have consulted. These three sources draw upon a manuscript of the work edited by the influential Maldivian scholar Shaikh Mohamed Jamaluddin, who is affectionately referred to as Naibu Thuththu.

The term *Dhiyoha* in the poem’s title was a name commonly used by women of Maldivian nobility until the mid-eighteenth century. It could follow an Arabic name (e.g., *Aisha Dhiyoha*) or serve as a stand-alone name. It was used similarly to other Dhivehi names, such as *Kamana* or *Kan’buloa* (Ibrahim Hamad Salim p.c. 3 December 2018). As mentioned earlier, *Dhiyoage Raivaru* ‘The Raivaru of the Dhiyoha’ (*-ge* is the genitive case, i.e., ‘of’, in Dhivehi) was composed by Manikufaanu for Sultan Mohammad Mueenudeen I. Manikufaanu was one of the Sultan’s most trusted advisors. According to the influential Maldivian scholar Hussein Salahuddin, Manikufaanu wrote this fictional poem after the Sultan suggested that it was easier for a poet to write poetry based on lived experience. Manikufaanu disagreed, responding that it was easier to write poetry based on fiction. The Sultan then challenged him to create a work of poetic fiction in three months. This prompted Manikufaanu to compose *Dhiyoage Raivaru*. It is a story of two sisters of royalty, one living in South India and the other in Mozambique, who go to battle to become the next ruler of *siyaam* ‘Thailand’ (Sadiq 2007:15).

5.2. Intact vs. scrambled. The first and most general issue for scrambling is whether the word remains intact or is scrambled. For example, consider stanza 8 of *Dhiyoage Raivaru*, displayed in table 3. The meaning of the stanza is ‘The aforementioned Dhiyoha is staying, living happily without despair in a country of Africa’.

Table 3. Stanza 8 of *Dhiyoage Raivaru*

LINE	TEXT AND TRANSLATION	MORAS	RHYME	ASSONANCE
1	<i>mabuni mi dhiyoha inee gos</i> ‘the aforementioned Dhiyoha is staying’	12	N/A	- <i>abu</i>
2	<i>kabu rameh hitha nuvaa kugai</i> ‘living happily without despair’	13	- <i>kugai</i>	- <i>abu</i>
3	<i>baburu karaige rasha kugai</i> ‘in a country of Africa’	11	- <i>kugai</i>	- <i>abu</i>

Line 3 of this stanza has no syllable scrambling; Manikufaanu keeps all the words intact. (A word-by-word gloss of line 3 is as follows: *baburu kara* ‘Africa’, *-ge* genitive case [‘of’; when *-ge* attaches to *kara* the word undergoes a morphophonological process, becoming *karaige*], *rashaku* ‘a country’, *-gai* locative case [‘in’].) Perhaps Manikufaanu decided not to scramble syllables because he realized that he could satisfy the requirements of mora quantity, rhyme, and assonance with the words in normal syntax.

5.3. Intraword vs. long-distance. An important distinction can be made between concentration and dispersion of scrambled syllables. Intraword scrambling is scrambling that occurs within one word in the line. In dispersed scrambling, at least one syllable from a word is separated from the rest of the same word by syllables of other words.

Below, I analyze individual lines of *Dhiyoage Raivaru*, treating them in isolation from the stanzas to which they belong. The interaction of scrambling with assonance and rhyme between lines of a stanza is considered at the end of this section.

Consider stanza 2, line 1: *dhaihagen dhogu dhiyoa ah* ‘having created fiction/lies for the Dhiyoa’ (*dhogu* ‘lies; fiction’; *Dhiyoa* refers to the main character of the poem, with *-ah* marking dative case, meaning ‘for the Dhiyoa’). The term *dhaihagen* in this line involves concentrated syllable scrambling (figure 10) in which syllable 1 changes place with syllable 2. The normal word is *hadhaigen* ‘having told/created [lies]’.²⁰

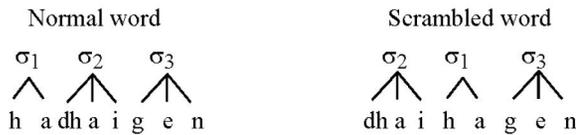


Figure 10. Intraword *bas olhuvun* in *Dhiyoage Raivaru* (stanza 2, line 1).

This particular scrambling is an instance of what Bagemihl calls “interchange” (1989:489), specifically one in which the speaker moves the word’s second syllable to the beginning.

Another instance of intraword scrambling appears in line 1 of stanza 4: *faibune dhiyoageah dhogu* ‘having created fiction for her’ (*-ah* in the term *dhiyoageah* is the dative case, so *dhiyoageah* means ‘to/for her’; *dhogu*, as mentioned above, means ‘lies’ or ‘fiction’). The scrambled term is *faibune* (figure 11). Here the syllables 1-2-3 of the normal word are scrambled to 3-1-2. (Note that in *raivaru*, Dhivehi *ai* counts as two moras.)

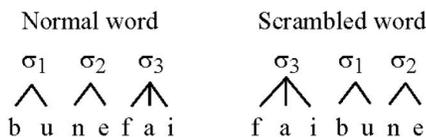


Figure 11. Intraword *bas olhuvun* in *Dhiyoage Raivaru* (stanza 4, line 1).

To create *faibune*, Manikufaanu places the Dhivehi successive particle *-fai* (see Gnanadesikan 2017:169–70) before the verbal stem *bune-* (*bunefai* means ‘having told’). In this poetic line, *dhiyoageah dhogu bunefai* literally means ‘having told fiction/lies for her’. This is another example in which all of the syllables involved in scrambling are in the same word. More specifically, the poet has moved the word’s final syllable to the beginning of the word: *bunefai* becomes *faibune*. Bagemihl terms this language game “transposition” (1988:296, 1989:492); Argentino and Mackenzie call it “edge-anchored movement” (2019:164).

In long-distance scrambling, a scrambled syllable is separated from the rest of the words of the same line it comes from by syllables of other words in the same line. To my knowledge, scholars of language games have yet to consider the type of long-distance scrambling found in Dhivehi *raivaru*. Consider what happens to the bolded term *dhorun* ‘from the door’ in line 2 of stanza 1 of *Dhiyoage Raivaru* (table 4). The entire line of poetry is *run ge vadhe lhen bahu ge ah dho* ‘having entered through the house of poetry’. (This stanza is discussed further, and its unscrambled form is shown in table 6 below.) In table 4, the first row shows mora numbers (recall that line two in three-line *raivaru* always must consist of thirteen moras), and the second row shows the text of this line.

Table 4. Dispersed Syllable Scrambling in *Dhiyoage Raivaru* (stanza 1, line 2)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
<i>ru</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>ge</i>	<i>va</i>	<i>dhe</i>	<i>lhe</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>ba</i>	<i>hu</i>	<i>ge</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>h</i>	<i>dho</i>

In this example, not only are the syllables rearranged from $\sigma_1 \sigma_2$ (*dho + run*) to $\sigma_2 \sigma_1$ (*run + dho*), but they are also separated by ten moras of poetic text.

Dhiyoage Raivaru is filled with this type of dispersed scrambling. Consider what happens to the bolded term *dhogun* ‘from lies/fiction’ in line 3 of stanza 1: *gun sanaa dhiyoa’ah dho* ‘to praise the Dhiyoa from lies/fiction’ (table 5; moras and text are indicated as in table 4). (Recall that line three in three-line *raivaru* can either be eleven or twelve moras.)

Table 5. Dispersed Syllable Scrambling in *Dhiyoage Raivaru* (stanza 1, line 3)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
<i>gu</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>sa</i>	<i>na-</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>dhi</i>	<i>o-</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>a-</i>	<i>h</i>	<i>dho</i>

Again, Manikufaanu did not simply rearrange the syllables *dho-gun* to *gun-dho*, but also separated the rearranged syllables by eight moras of poetic text.

It is asserted in section 5.1 that the rules of language games are rigid; there are no alternative ways to change words. In contrast, the poet of *bas olhuvun* makes choices according to individual preferences. One such preference involves the use of dispersed scrambling in lines two and three to create rhyme. Consider

stanza 1 again. Table 6 displays for this stanza the scrambled text of each line, the unscrambled text with the words in the order of the syntax of ordinary speech,²¹ and a translation; the table also shows the number of moras in each line and the rhyme and assonance of the stanza.

Table 6. Stanza 1 of *Dhiyoage Raivaru*

LINE	ORIGINAL SCRAMBLED TEXT, UNSCRAMBLED TEXT IN SPEECH SYNTAX, AND TRANSLATION	MORAS	RHYME	ASSONANCE
1	<i>kun mila fashai gathee fasu fasulakun mi fashaigathee</i> 'I have begun with a chapter'	12	N/A	-un
2	<i>runge vadhe lhen bahuge ah dho lhen bahuge geah dhorun vadhe</i> 'having entered through the house of poetry'	13	-ah dho	-un
3	<i>gun sanaa dhiyoa ah dho dhiyoa ah dhogun sanaa</i> 'to praise Dhiyoa with lies'	11	-ah dho	-un

The first syllable in line 2 (here, *dho*) performs two functions. First, it is the first syllable of the long-distance scrambled word at the beginning of line 2 (*dhorun*). Second, it also connects to the syllable that commences line 3, *gun*, thereby forming the word *dhogun*. One could describe this as "foreshadowing" the syllable scrambling that will occur in line 3. In this situation, however, *dho* must also appear at the end of line 3 (which it does) because in *raivaru* syllables scrambling always occurs within the line.

This effect is valued, but does not always occur. For example, consider stanza 22, displayed in table 7.

Table 7. Stanza 22 of *Dhiyoage Raivaru*

LINE	ORIGINAL SCRAMBLED TEXT, UNSCRAMBLED TEXT IN SPEECH SYNTAX, AND TRANSLATION	MORAS	RHYME	ASSONANCE
1	<i>laa thahvi furuvaan nau nau vilaathah furuvaan</i> 'to sail off to Europe'	12	N/A	-aa
2	<i>faagathive hen'dhu liyaa naai faagathive hen'dhunai liyaa</i> 'with agility in the early morning [they] put in [the boat]'	13	-naai	-aa
3	<i>kaathakethi dharu fenaai dharu fenaai kaathakethi</i> 'firewood, water, and food'	11	-naai	-aa

In line 2 of this stanza, the final syllable *naai* of *hen'dhunaai* ‘early morning’ undergoes moderately long-distance scrambling, being placed at the end of the line to rhyme with the intact word *fenaai* in line 3. However, *naai* at the end of line 2 does not combine with a scrambled syllable at the beginning of line 3 to produce the unscrambled form of a word of line 3. Thus, this *raivaru* would be considered not as aesthetically successful as verse 1 in table 6. Future analyses of language games that occur within poetry will need to address further this issue of stylistic convention.

5.4. More than one occurrence of scrambling in a line. The discussion above only presents a simplified version of syllable scrambling. In fact, Dhivehi syllable scrambling is often more complicated; in many lines, there is more than one instance of scrambling. In one strategy, syllables of one word are placed at the beginning and end of the line, but another scrambled word is nested within. For example, in line 2 of stanza 1, as discussed above, *dhorun* ‘from the door’ changes to *run . . . dho*, with the syllables separated by ten moras (table 8). But between these scrambled syllables, the word *geah* ‘to the house’ is nested, with its syllables separated by seven moras: *ge . . . ah* (table 9).

Table 8. First Instance of Long-distance Syllable Scrambling in *Dhiyoage Raivaru* (stanza 1, line 3)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
<i>ru</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>ge</i>	<i>va</i>	<i>dhe</i>	<i>lhe</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>ba</i>	<i>hu</i>	<i>ge</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>h</i>	<i>dho</i>

Table 9. Second Instance of Long-distance Syllable Scrambling in *Dhiyoage Raivaru* (stanza 1, line 3)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
<i>ru</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>ge</i>	<i>va</i>	<i>dhe</i>	<i>lhe</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>ba</i>	<i>hu</i>	<i>ge</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>h</i>	<i>dho</i>

Likewise, consider stanza 28 in table 10. Here, in line 2, the unscrambled term *lafailamun*, which literally means ‘while arriving’, appears scrambled as *failamun . . . la*, with its syllables separated by seven moras (table 11).

Table 10. Stanza 28 of *Dhiyoage Raivaru*

LINE	ORIGINAL SCRAMBLED TEXT, UNSCRAMBLED TEXT IN SPEECH SYNTAX, AND TRANSLATION	MORAS	RHYME	ASSONANCE
1	<i>faihigen gos dhiyoya faiy</i> <i>dhiyoya faiy hifaiyengos</i> ‘Carrying Dhiyoya’s letter’	12	N/A	-ai
2	<i>failamun dhe a kairi thah la</i> <i>dhe athah kairi lafailamun</i> ‘rocking back and forth [on the rough sea]’	13	-thahla	-ai

3	<i>faifigos vilaathah la gos vilaathah lafaifi</i>	11	<i>-thahla</i>	<i>-ai</i>
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‘[the ship] arrived to Europe’

Table 11. First Instance of Long-distance Syllable Scrambling in *Dhiyoage Raivaru* (stanza 1, line 3)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
<i>fa</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>la</i>	<i>mu</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>dhe</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>ka</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>ri</i>	<i>tha</i>	<i>h</i>	<i>la</i>

Between the parts of this scrambled word *failamun . . . la*, Manikufaanu also scrambled the term *dheathah* ‘to both sides’ as *dhea . . . thah* (table 12).

Table 12. Second Instance of Long-distance Syllable Scrambling in *Dhiyoage Raivaru* (stanza 1, line 3)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
<i>fa</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>la</i>	<i>mu</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>dhe</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>ka</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>ri</i>	<i>tha</i>	<i>h</i>	<i>la</i>

Note that in tables 8–12 the outer instance of scrambling reordered the syllables while the inner instance kept the syllables in the same order as the normal word, though separated by material from other words. This is not always the case. For example, consider line 3 of stanza 34 (table 13).

Table 13. Stanza 34 of *Dhiyoage Raivaru*

LINE	ORIGINAL SCRAMBLED TEXT, UNSCRAMBLED TEXT IN SPEECH SYNTAX, AND TRANSLATION	MORAS	RHYME	ASSONANCE
1	<i>gengane ru gennaan vaka ganegen vakaru gennaan</i> ‘To buy and bring palmwood’	12	N/A	<i>-gen</i>
2	<i>dehmanuve raahidhaku vai a madeh nuve vai araa hidhaku</i> ‘as the wind blew consistently’	13	<i>-thahla</i>	<i>-deh(n)[†]</i>
3	<i>nehnau loo furuvai a aneh nau furuvailoo</i> ‘they set sail another ship’	11	<i>-thahla</i>	<i>-neh(n)[†]</i>

[†]Here, *n* after *-deh* and *-neh* in the assonance column represents a morphophonological process. As noted by Manikufaanu, if the letters *m* or *n* come after *h*, the glottal stop (represented by *h*) becomes nasalized; hence, the suffixes *-deh* in *madeh* (line 2) and *-neh* in *aneh* (line 3) are pronounced [den] and [nen], respectively, producing the required assonance in all three lines.

In line 3, the term *aneh* ‘another’ appears as *neh... a* (table 13). Between the parts of this scrambled word, Manikufaanu created an intraword scramble with the term *furuvailoo* ‘they set sail’ by bringing the fourth syllable (*loo*) to the front of the word.

The analysis of *bas olhuvun* in this section can be summarized as follows. First, Dhivehi syllable scrambling contrasts with language games in two ways: language games occur in speech while Dhivehi syllable scrambling occurs within poetry; and Dhivehi syllable scrambling, unlike language games, involves individual preferences. Second, two principal parameters for scrambling of syllables can be identified in *raivaru*: intact vs. scrambled and intraword vs. long-distance. Third, an instance of individual preference can be seen in *raivaru* in which the final syllable in the second line of a stanza is both the first syllable of the long-distance word at the beginning of the second line and the first syllable of the long-distance word at the beginning of the third line. Fourth, there may be more than one occurrence of scrambling in a line.

6. Discussion. Why did *raivaru* poets scramble syllables in particular ways? The first answer is that a particular scrambling of syllables enables the poet to satisfy the requirements of either assonance (*filikoalhi*) or end-rhyme (*kaafiyaa*). Almost any stanza can illustrate this. Consider, once again, stanza 1 from *Dhiyoage Raivaru*, presented as (12a) below. In (12b), the syllables are unscrambled and the words are placed in regular syntax, followed by a translation.

(12a) *kun mila fashai gathee fasu*
runge vadhe lhen bahuge ah dho
gun sanaa dhiyoo ah dho

(12b) *fasulakun mi fashaigathee*
lhen bahuge geah dhorun vadhe
dhiyoo ah dhogun sanaa
 ‘I have begun with a chapter
 having entered through the house of poetry
 to praise Dhiyoo with lies.’

In line 2, why did the poet scramble *dhorun* in this way? The answer is that it enabled him to create assonance and end-rhyme. As to end-rhyme, the poet must have noticed that the syllable *dho* also appeared in the third line in the word *dhogun*, so that the *dho* of *dhorun* and the *dho* of *dhogun* could be matched at the end of their respective lines to produce the rhyme. The poet also realized that *-run* in *dhorun* had assonance with the *-gun* in *dhogun*. Thus, it made sense to scramble *dhorun* and *dhogun* in this way.

That said, there is another less obvious motivation for scrambling. Consider stanza 5, presented in (13a); in (13b) the syllables are unscrambled and the words are placed in regular syntax, accompanied by a translation.

(13a) *gaithanaku innavaa dhuru*
fai nu madhu saa hunna ge athu
vai khabaru diyoage athu

(13b) *dhuru thanakugai innavaa*
athuge faisaa numadhu hunna
dhiyoage khabaru athuvai
 ‘The Dhiyoa is staying in faraway place
 having much wealth.
 News came [from the royal court about this].’

In line 2 of this stanza, the poet has taken the words *numadhu faisaa* ‘much wealth’ and scrambled them as *fai numadhu saa*, with the term *numadhu* intervening between *fai* and *saa*. But instead of *fai numadhu saa*, Manikufaanu could have just written *faisaa numadhu* without breaking any poetic rules. Why did he select a more difficult option? In August 2017, I posed this question on a Facebook forum dedicated to the study of the Dhivehi language. A Maldivian who had been teaching me Dhivehi through Skype replied: “You cannot chant that [line] nicely if it is in that [other] order. It sounds very odd to chant it if it’s written in the way you have whereas if we chant it in its original form it goes seamlessly” (Mohamed Moosa p.c. 2017).

As an additional example, consider line 1 in stanza 32, presented in (14a); in (14b), the syllables are unscrambled and the words are placed in regular syntax, with a translation.

(14a) *jeen kure fa thu vilaa ran*

(14b) *vilaathu faranjeen kure*
 ‘from the Europeans’

Recall that line 1 in three-line *raivaru* stanzas does not require end-rhyme. Thus, the poet could have also written *jeen faran vilaathu kure* without breaking any rules. In February 2019, I again asked members of the Dhivehi language forum on Facebook why Manikufaanu favored this particular way of scrambling and I received a similar answer. One member of the group replied: “raivaru are sung . . . that could be the reason” (Mohamed Musthaq p.c. 2019).

Both responses suggest that the poet made specific scrambling choices due to the way in which the poetry was sung or chanted. One could hypothesize that the particular rhythms of the fixed recitation melodies influenced poets to make these choices. An investigation of the impact of the recitation melody on syllable scrambling would be a worthwhile topic for future research.

7. Conclusion. Examination of a form of syllable scrambling called *bas olhuvun* in the Maldivian genre of poetry known as *raivaru* reveals that poets of this genre scramble syllables within the confines of six poetic constraints. Processes common to language games, such as interchange and transposition, occur

in *bas olhuvun*. While rules of particular language games determine how to transform words, it is the poetic constraints as well as individual preferences that largely determine the particular ways in which syllables are scrambled. One may distinguish between two broad forms of scrambling: intraword vs. long-distance. An additional complication in *raivaru* is that often there may be more than one occurrence of scrambling in a line. Besides the requirements of rhyme and assonance, the recitation melody may have influenced poets' decisions to scramble syllables in particular ways.

Notes

Acknowledgments. The research conducted in the Maldives for this article was made possible by research startup funds awarded by the School of Interdisciplinary Arts at Ohio University. I wish to thank the former Director of the School of Interdisciplinary Arts, Charles Buchanan, as well as the former Dean of the College of Fine Arts, Margaret Kennedy-Dygas, for their support. Thank you to Ahmed Omar and Mohamed Haneef for painstakingly answering hundreds of questions at the Facebook group Bas Jagaha, a forum dedicated to the study of the Dhivehi language. Thank you to Ashraf Ali, President of the Dhivehi Language Academy, for teaching me Dhivehi, taking me to Nilandhoo, and allowing me to use the research library of the academy. Thank you to Abdulla Sadiq, the late Mohamed Waheed Nadhuvée, and Madulu Waheed for teaching me Dhivehi at the academy. Thank you to Ahmed Yoosufu Ahammafuthaa, Qasim Mohammad, and Ali Moosa for sharing *raivaru* with me. Thank you to Mohamed Moosa for teaching me Dhivehi via Skype for two academic years. Thank you to all the Bas Jagaha members who have answered my questions. Special thanks go to Dr. Abdul Ghafoor Abdul Raheem, Naajih Didi, Ibrahim Hamad Salim, Mohamed Abdulla, Iyaz J. Naseem, Adnan Mohamed, Ibrahim Sameer, Ishaq Ahmed, Sariira A. Shareef, Muhammadh Raaf Rushdhee, and Siraj Mohamed. Thank you also to Azeeza Afeef, Hussain Haleem, and former Dean of the Faculty of Arts at The Maldives National University, Abdul Rasheed Ali, for assistance in locating important primary sources. Thank you Joe Argentino for explaining how to analyze syllable scrambling through figures. Thank you to the anonymous reviewer and the editors at *Anthropological Linguistics* for significantly helping me to improve the quality of this article.

Transcription. Examples are presented in the official Dhivehi romanization system for transliterating the Dhivehi-language script Thaana (for Thaana, see De Silva 1969; Gnanadesikan 2012:94–98; Gippert 2013; Gnanadesikan 2017:29–31). Short vowels are *a*, *i*, *u*, *e*, and *o*, with their expected IPA values; long vowels (with their IPA values given in square brackets) are *aa* [a:], *ee* [i:], *oo* [u:], *ey* [e:], *oa* [o:]. (Christopher Reynolds, author of the most comprehensive Dhivehi-English dictionary, opted to indicate long vowels differently—by doubling the vowel, e.g., representing [i:] by *ii*; see Reynolds 2003:v.) Consonant spellings that require explanation are *d* [d̠] (retroflex), *dh* [d̪] (dental), *gn* [ɲ] (palatal nasal), *h* (when syllable-final or as first part of a geminate consonant) [ʔ] (glottal stop), *h'* [h] (voiceless pharyngeal fricative), *iy* [iʔ] (replaces dental [t̪] in syllable-final position), *kh* [x] (voiceless velar fricative), *lh* [l̠] (retroflex lateral approximant), *n'dh* [n̠d̪] (and in general, *n* plus apostrophe plus stop symbol represents prenasalized stops), *sh* [ʃ] (voiceless retroflex sibilant), *t* [t̠] (retroflex), *th* [t̪] (dental). (The Thaana alphabet includes symbols for the sounds of fourteen Arabic letters [Gnanadesikan 2017:33]; the romanizations *h*, *h'*, and *kh* represent three of these. For the complete Thaana alphabet and its romanization, see Gnanadesikan [2017:29–33].)

1. Quotations from this poem are taken from the 2016 edition printed by the National Centre for Linguistic and Historical Research, Malé (Dhivehibahaai Thaareekhah Khidmaiykuraa Qaume Marukazu).

2. Maldivian literary scholars have adopted different ways of spacing words in printed *raivaru* in the Thaana script. Some, such as Bodufenvahugey Sidi (1992), print *raivaru* in continuous script, without spacing between units in each line. Others, like Hussein Salahuddin (1999), Abdulla Sadiq (2007), and Yoosuf Alifulhu (2003), place spaces between units. In this article, I separate each scrambled unit in the line by a space as an aid to comprehension.

3. *Bas olhuvun* is also sometimes referred to as *bas furolhun* (lit., ‘word turning’).

4. See also entries for *vathai*, *vethi*, and *vethun* in *Dhivehi Basfoiy* (2011:565, 602) and the entries for *lobuveti* and *loobi* [sic] in Reynolds’s *A Maldivian Dictionary* (2003: 333, 334).

5. When Maafaiykaleygefaanu scrambled the term *fashaigatheen*, he divided up *theen* into two syllables: *thi* and *in*. That is why I have written the word *fashaigatheen* as *fashaigathiin*. More research into Maafaiykaleygefaanu’s poem is needed to determine if he often scrambled CVVC syllables in this fashion. Given the idiosyncratic nature of this scramble, one could suggest that the line could be unscrambled in a different way. However, based on my understanding of *raivaru* it was common to place metacommentary in the opening stanza to make the announcement, “I have started.”

6. This and all other translations in this article are based on conversations with members of the Bas Jagaha Facebook forum.

7. “E meehun miraivarey kiyaa ehcheh, hama vaahaka dhahkaahai faseyhain kiyai ulhuneve.”

8. Erotic *raivaru* is known as *bereki raivaru*.

9. For example, see Sidi (1992), Jameel Didi (1986:50–55), Alifulhu (2003), and Sadiq (2007). For a general introduction to *raivaru*, see Alifulhu (2005).

10. In 1989, the National Centre for Linguistic and Historical Research (Dhivehi Bahaai Thaareekhah H’idhumaiy Kuraa Qaume Marukazu) published this article as a book with the same title: *Dhivehi Lhenhedhumuge Masahkaiytherikamuge Rantharaadhu* ‘The Golden Scales of Craftsmanship in the Composition of Dhivehi Poetry’.

11. Before the mid-eighteenth century, Maldivians composed *raivaru* with stanzas having a wider range of numbers of lines; some stanzas had as many as fourteen, fifteen, or even sixteen lines (Sidi 1989:11; Alifulhu 2005:13). But around the mid-eighteenth century, Dhivehi poets standardized the number of lines in *raivaru* (Sidi 1989:11; Alifulhu 2005:13). This standardization was greatly influenced by Edhuru Umuru Maafaiykaleygefaanu’s eighteenth-century work of Islamic *raivaru*, *Boduthaaheedhu* ‘The Great Oneness of God’ (ca. 1737–38), which helped to codify *raivaru* stanzas as either three or six lines.

12. I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out. The superheavy syllable of the form CVVC—in individual words like *vaan* ‘to be’ or within words like *gennaan* ‘to bring’—is counted in different ways depending on whether the poetic genre is *raivaru* or the genre known as *lhen*. In *lhen*, CVVC is regarded as consisting of two moras because there is a rule to the effect that a coda consonant that follows a long vowel is not counted as a normal mora. However, *raivaru* does not follow this rule; in *raivaru*, a CVVC syllable is counted as three moras instead of two.

13. In *filitakuge* ‘of moras’, *-thakuge* is the genitive case *ge* added to the plural suffix *thah*; *fiyyaa* results from the combination of *fili* with the coordinating particle *-aa* ‘and’.

14. *Lhen* is the general term for poetry, but it also refers to a specific Arabic-influenced genre of poetry that came into existence at the turn of the twentieth century. It remains the most popular form of poetry today.

15. In six-line *raivaru*, the required number of *fili* per line is ten, twelve, twelve, twelve, thirteen, eleven (see Sidi 1989:7–9; Alifulhu 2005:24–26). The structure of three-line *raivaru* is derived from the final three lines of six-line *raivaru*.

16. There is no obvious reason why Bodufenvallhugey used the vocables *thi* vs. *ri* vs. *e* for particular moras in his diagram. I am also not sure why Sidi selected these particular vocables. In my experience, Maldivians tend to use other vocables (*hoa*, *dha*, *maa*, *shey*) to describe poetic meters.

17. “Mi foiy alhugan’du kudairu dhusheemeve. Manmamen dhahthamen varah reethiraagakah kiyaathee ehinveme eve.”

18. The figurative meaning of this *raivaru* is ‘Death is giving me uneasiness like the rough waves in *golaakanu* [a rough reef between Laamu, Hithadhoo, and Gaadhoo]’.

19. For a detailed analysis of insertion in a Tigrinya language game, see Bagemihl (1988:241–94). For an innovative comparison between language games and pitch patterns in serial music, see Argentino and Mackenzie (2019).

20. In *hadhaigen* ‘having told’, *hadhai* is the verbal stem and *-gen* is one of the successive particles in Dhivehi (see Gnanadesikan 2017:169–70). This construction is a linguistic feature that Colin Masica (1993:397–401) identified as typical of Indo-Aryan languages—a type of conjunctive verb, sometimes referred to as a converb, absolutive, or conjunctive participle. Saying ‘having told’ (*hadhai* plus *-gen*) makes explicit that the “action of the converb precedes that of the main verb” (Gnanadesikan 2017:291).

21. This example reveals that interpreting *raivaru* does not only involve unscrambling syllables but also placing the unscrambled words into syntax of ordinary speech. The word order found in lines of *raivaru* is arguably more flexible than in ordinary speech.

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