

Lexical Variations in the Batanic Language Group: Male and Female Urination¹

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*This paper discusses the peculiar opposition between **opis** ‘female urination’ and **peteg** or **otod** ‘male urination’ among the Ivatan people in the Philippines. It examines the social and linguistic backgrounds for such lexical variation.*

1. How is Male and Female Urination Expressed in the Ivatan Language?

In the dialects of the Ivatan language, i.e. Ivasayen and Isamorongen,² female urination and male urination are expressed by different words. Female urination is expressed by the form *opis*, whereas male urination is expressed by either the form *peteg* or the form *otod*. When the actor (of urination) is male, *peteg* or *otod* is selected for expressing urination; when the actor (of urination) is female, the form *opis* is selected. The form *otod* is heard only in the Sabtang subdialect of Isamorongen, but the form *peteg* is observed in all the dialects of the Ivatan language. In the dialects where the generic term for urination is NOT observed, special attention is paid to the actor of urination. In other words, the use of these forms does NOT reflect the speaker’s gender, NOR does it reflect the gender of the object of the sentence. Both male and female speakers can use these forms. This suggests that the use of such forms does NOT reflect the difference between male and female speech, but the gender of the actor (of urination).

In Ivatan, when parents command their daughter(s) to urinate, the form *opis* must be used, as in (1a). The use of *peteg* is unacceptable, as in (1b).

- (1a) Maka**opis** ka do sivog a paka**opisan**.
urinate you at right.place LNK urination

‘You must urinate at the right place (for urination).’

- (1b) *Maka**peteg** ka do sivog a pakap**et(e)gan**.
urinate you at right.place LNK urination

‘You must urinate at the right place (for urination).’

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² The prefix *i-* indicates ‘location’; the suffix *-en* indicates ‘language’.

When a female actor expresses that she wants to urinate, the form *opis* must be used, as in (2a). The use of *peteg* is unacceptable, as in (2b).

- (2a) Maka**opis** ako.
urinate I
'I urinate.'
- (2b) *Maka**peteg** ako.
urinate I
'I urinate.'

On the contrary, when a male actor expresses that he wants to urinate, the form *peteg* or *otod* must be used, as in (3a). The use of *opis* is unacceptable, as in (3b).

- (3a) Maka**peteg** ako.
Maka**otod** ako.
urinate I
'I urinate.'
- (3b) *Maka**opis** ako.
urinate I
'I urinate.'

When the actor of the verb is a female, the form *opis* must be employed, as in (4a). The use of *peteg* is unacceptable, as in (4b).

- (4a) Naka**opis** si Linda do dichod no vahay nila.
urinated Linda at back of house their
'Linda urinated at the back of their house.'
- (4b) *Naka**peteg** si Linda do dichod no vahay nila.
urinated Linda at back of house their
'Linda urinated at the back of their house.'

2. Distribution of Male and Female Urination Opposition in the Batanic or Vasayic Languages

The Ivatan language belongs to the Batanic or Vasayic subgroup in the Philippine group of the Austronesian language family.³ The language subgroup is composed of Yami in Taiwan and Itbayaten, Ivatan, and Ibatan/Babuyan-Claro in the Philippines. The Ivatan language is again divided into two dialects, i.e., Ivasayen and Isamorongen. The languages and dialects are spoken on the islands between Taiwan and the Philippines. Although the phonological correspondence among the group is very systematic, many discrepancies are observed in the vocabularies. The discrepancies are conspicuous especially between Yami and other Batanic or Vasayic languages.

The Yamis, who are said to be fishermen who had migrated from Batanes in the Philippines to the island of Lan-yu in Taiwan, have two sets of vocabularies: one of

³ Ivatan belongs to the Bashiic or Bashic group in Yamada's (1974) classification, or the Vasayic Group in Moriguchi's (1983) classification.

which is for songs and oral histories and the other is for the ordinary daily life. As fishermen, the Yamis are afraid of spirits and devils in the sea and the mountains. Consequently, they change their vocabularies for the ordinary register into the special register upon boarding a ship. Similar kind of changes in vocabulary to suit the environment is also observed in the Bununs, who are hunters in central Taiwan. However, the lexical difference between male and female urination is not observed in either the Yamis or the Bununs. Such opposition is only observed in Ivasayen and Isamorongen, and is not detected in other languages (such as Yami, Itbayaten, and Ibatan/Babuyan Claro) in the Vasayic group. Even the Yamis, who code-switch between the vocabulary on land and the vocabulary in the sea, do not share these rules.

3. Vocabularies for Male and Female Urination in the Batanic or Vasayic Languages

The variations of vocabularies for urination in the Batanic/Vasayic language group are shown in table 1.

Table 1. Vocabularies for urination in Batanic languages

Taiwan	Philippines				
Yami	Itbayaten	Ivatan			Ibatan/ Babuyan-Claro ⁴
		Ivasayen	Isamorongen ⁵		
			Isamorongen	Sabtang Isamorongen ⁶	
tachi					
	opis	opis (f) ⁷	opis (f)	opis (f)	peteg
		peteg(m) ⁸	peteg (m)	peteg (m)/ otod (m)	

Table 1 shows the distribution of the words for urination in the Batanic/Vasayic language group.

The form *tachi, which means 'excretions', has cognates all over the Philippines: *tachi*, *tak(k)i*, or *ta?i*. In Yami, the form *tachi* is used for 'urination' (rather than for 'excretions'). As for 'excretions', the form *obot* is used. The form *obot* originally means 'to go out to the seashore' or 'to go out to the seashore to get seawater for cooking'. The seashore is the water closet or bathroom for the Yamis. When expressing 'going to the beach for excretions', the Yamis will use the word *makaobot*, which means 'to go out to beach (to fetch seawater)'. The meaning of the

4 Languages
5 Dialects
6 Subdialects
7 f: female
8 m: male

form *tachi* is changed from its original meaning 'excretions' to 'urination' as a result of the prohibition from uttering taboo words.⁹

In the Itbayat language, no lexical variation between male and female urination is made, and there is only one generic term, *opis*, for urination. As for Ibatan/Babuyan Claro, it is also indifferent to such a distinction; however, it uses the form *peteg* (rather than *opis*) as a generic term for urination. What interests us is that the form *opis*, which denotes female urination in Ivatan, is used as a generic term for urination in Itbayat, whereas the form *peteg*, which denotes male urination in Ivatan, is used as a generic term for urination in Ibatan/Babuyan Claro.

The Ivatan language can be divided into two dialects, Ivasayen and Isamorongen. The dialect Isamorongen can be further divided into two groups: Isamorongen Proper and Sabtang Isamorongen. All the dialects and subdialects of Ivatan keep the male/female distinction for urination. In Sabtang Isamorongen, in addition to *peteg*, some people also use the form *otod* for 'male urination'.

4. Languages and Dialects of the Batanic or Vasayic Languages

Phonological comparisons and oral histories reveal that the Yamis, the Itbayats, and the Ibatans are NOT original inhabitants of the islands where they live now. They are said to have come from some parts of the Ivatan-speaking area of Batanes.

Nobody knows exactly where the people who keep the Ivasay dialect have come from. The term *Vasay*, which was an old name from some time before the invasion of the Spaniards, is the only place name whose original meaning cannot be deciphered in the Batanic or Vasayic languages. The Ivatans still use this name, although the Spaniards named the town Basco or Sto. Domingo de Basco. After the settlement of the migrants in Vasay from outside the Bashiic area a long time before the arrival of the Spaniards, the Itbayats seemed to have left Vasay for the Itbayat island first, and then the Isamorongs left the central town and went to the other side of the island, spreading along the seacoast and crossed the sea to the island called Sabtang now. After the dispersion of the Ivatan people in the Batanes area, some people living in the Isamorongen-speaking area left for the north and arrived in a small island abounding in water and foods called Lan-Yu now, and became the Yamis. After the migration of the Yamis to the north, some fishermen in Sabtang headed their boats south arriving in an island called Babuyan Claro now.

The linguistic comparisons and oral histories vividly clarify the dispersion of the Ivatan people in this area. The following is a diagram of the migrations of the Ivatans and the linguistic evidence that supports the proposed movements.

⁹ The form *opis* (e.g., *miopiopis*) is observed in Yami songs. However, it means 'to get wet' rather than 'to urinate'.

[Movements of Ivatans]¹⁰

Ivasayen

Ivasayen

Isamorongen

Sabtang Isamorongen

()

Ibatan/Babuyan Claro

()

Yami

Itbayaten

Table 2. Comparative list

	Ivasayen	Itbayaten	Isamorongen	Sabtang	Yami	Babuyan Claro
'water'	danom	ranom	ranom	ranom	ranom	ranom
'dog'	tito	chito	chito	chito	chito	chito
'rain'	timoy	timoy	chimoy	chimoy	chimoy	chimoy
'beautiful'	mavid	mavij	mavid	mavid/ maganay	avig 'beautiful box'	maganay
'delicious'	masdep	maslep	masdep	masdep/ maganay	maganinam/ maginam	maganay
'good'	mapiya	mapiya	mapiya	mapiya/ maganay	mapiya	mapiya/ maganay

5. Land Register and Fishermen's Register

In modern Sabtang Isamorongen, the word *mavid* is used for 'beautiful', *masdep* for 'delicious', and *mapiya* for 'good'. However, it is said that when the Sabtang Isamorongs went out for fishing in the ocean, they were prohibited from speaking the land register or the ordinary register. Instead, they usually had conversations in the fisherman's special register on the boats. The word *maganay*, which denotes 'delicious', 'beautiful', and 'good' at the same time, is such a word.

According to the old people in Babuyan Claro, most of their ancestors were fishermen who came from Ivatan. They got accustomed to chatting in the fishermen's register in the sea and on the remoter islands. This particular language style is preserved in Yami, Sabtang Isamorongen, and Isamorongen Proper.

In Isamorongen Proper, a very queer usage of the negative marker *ji* is observed. In (5a), (6a), and (7a), the form *oyod* 'really' is an adverb modifying the adjective *makohat*

¹⁰ cf. Moriguchi (1983)

'hot', *mavoyok* 'smelly', or *makoris* 'dirty', and it puts some emphasis on these adjectives. The emphatic adverb *oyod* 'really' can be replaced by the negative marker *ji*. As shown in (5b), (6b) and (7b), the form *ji* is used as an emphatic marker of the adjectives *makohat* 'hot', *mavoyok* 'smelly', or *makoris* 'dirty'.

- (5a) *oyod* a *makohat*
 really linker hot
 'really hot'
- (5b) *ji* a *kohat*.
 negative linker hot
 'really hot'
- (6a) *oyod* a *mavoyok*
 really linker smelly
 'very smelly'
- (6b) *ji* a *voyok*
 negative linker smelly
 'very smelly'
- (7a) *oyod* a *makoris*
 really linker dirty
 'very dirty'
- (7b) *ji* a *koris*
 negative linker dirty
 'very dirty'

According to some old speakers, the negative marker *ji* is observed only in these types of phrases. Aside from this usage, the negative marker is no longer active in the contemporary Ivatan language.

The negative *ji* can be traced back to the old Philippine negative marker **di*. The emphatic usage of the negative marker is only observed in the Batanic or Vasayic language group and in Bunun, but not in any other Formosan or Philippine language.

The literal meaning of *ji a kohat* is 'not hot', but its actual meaning is 'very hot' or 'how hot!'. The Isamorongs do not know why they have this kind of expression in their language. This might be one of the expressions uttered by the fishermen on the sea. Because they do not like their real feeling to be perceived by the evil spirits or devils, they prefer to use the opposite/counter or negative expressions.

This type of expression is only observed in Sabtang, Ibatan/Babuyan Claro, and Yami. It is not detected in other languages and dialects in the Batanic or Vasayic group.

Another expression that often struck linguists' ears during their stay in Batanes is the use of the word *kateng* to mean 'I do not know'. The word *kateng* 'I do not know' seems to be derivationally related to the word *tuneng* or *teneng*, which means 'to know'.

The use of the form *kateng* for 'I do not know' is often heard as answers to questions that the addressee has no idea at all.

kateng 'I do not know':

Isamorongen, Ibatan, Yami, Itbayaten, Ivasayen

toneng, teneng, teng 'know':

Isamorongen: *toneng* 'know'

Yami: *katengan* 'understand', *tenngi* 'know', *teneng* 'understand', *mateneng* 'eldest, the one who knows well', *makatenngan* 'understand'

Ibatan/Babuyan Claro: *toneng* 'know, eldest'

The words *toneng*, *teneng*, and *tenngen* seem to be derived from the root word *teng*. The infixation of the root word *teng* with *-en-/-in-* derives the form *toneng*.

In the Batanic or Vasayic languages, the word *teng* is used with contradictory meanings; that is, it means both 'know' and 'do not know'. This can be considered as another strong piece of evidence for the existence of the fishermen's register. In reality, fishermen 'do not know'; however, their expression in answering questions while they were in the sea must be 'know'. They would like to avoid being entrapped into disaster by the spirits following them and straining their ears in the sea. When the evil spirits listened to the words they uttered, they might take advantage of their innocence. Thus, the fishermen would prefer to use the opposite or counter expressions.

The discussion in section 4 and this section makes it clear that Yami, Isamorongen, and Ibatan/Babuyan Claro DO have vocabularies invented for the fishermen's register. In other words, the Yamis, Isamorongs, and the Ibatans/Babuyan Claros have been using two types of vocabularies depending on whether they are in the sea or not. However, such a system of counter expressions has been gradually lost. The negative emphasis and the counter expressions are two strong pieces of evidence that supports the existence of the fishermen's register.¹¹

6. Urination and 'knee' and 'navel'

The variation of the words for 'urination' is based on the cultural or ethnological background, rather than originating from biological or genital differences.

The lexical variation is observed only in Ivatan. Moreover, the word *opis* is used in Itbayaten as the generic term for 'urination', whereas in Ibatan/Babuyan Claro, it is *peteg* that serves this function.

As discussed in section 5, most of the people on Babuyan Claro island came from Sabtang and most of them were fishermen. Thus, it was concluded that people in the Isamorong area, including Sabtang, have maintained the two styles of register — Land Register and Fishermen's Register. Even after the fishermen and their family have migrated to the south and settled there, they still kept the fishermen's register *peteg* for the generic term for 'urination'. Consequently, lexical variations reveal that *opis* belongs to the land register, whereas *peteg* belongs to the fisherman's register, which is still retained in Ibatan/Babuyan Claro.

The origin of the word *peteg* seems to be very old. In Sabtang Isamorongen, in addition to *peteg* or *makapeteg*, the form *otod* or *maka-otod* is also used for 'male urination'. The root word for *maka-otod* is *otod*, which seems to have the meaning of 'knee'. However, in Sabtang Isamorongen, the contemporary word for 'knee' is *to:od*

¹¹ As of today, no syntactic differences have been reported between these two styles of register. The switching between the two systems can only be detected through the use of vocabularies.

(Yami: *otod*, *attod*, Itbayaten: *tohod*, Ivatan: *to:od*). Only in Yami, the form *otod* or *attod* is attested for ‘knee’.

In Yami, the genital parts were compared to knee. When the Yamis bear a baby, usually the word *mianak* (*mi-* + *anak* ‘child’) is employed. However, they have another term for it: *miatod/miotod* (*mi-* + *atod /otod* ‘knee’). The fishermen in Sabtang still use *maka-otod* for ‘urination in the sea’ or ‘male urination’.

Table 3. The term ‘knee’ in contemporary Batanic languages

	Yami	Itbayaten	Ivasayen	Isamorongen	Sabtang	Babuyan Claro
‘knee’	otod/attod	tohod	to:od	to:od	to:od	to:od

The term for ‘male urination’ in the Sabtang Isamorongen dialect is *peteg* (*maka-peteg*) or *otod* (*maka-otod*). However, as shown above, the root word *otod* is only observed in Yami, which suggests that this language keeps the old Ivatan vocabulary for special meaning.

7. The Origin of Male and Female Urination in the History of the Batanic or Vasayic Languages

There arises a problem concerning the etymology of ‘knee’.

In northern Philippines, the distribution of ‘knee’ can be grouped into four types: *tu:hod*, *pu:wog*, *tu:meng*, and *?utud*.

[knee]

1. **Northern Luzon**
 Isneg: *?utud*
 Itawis: *?atud*
 Ibanag: *?atug*
2. **Central-northern Luzon**
 Ilocano: *tu:meng*
 Manabo: *pu:wog*
 Pangasinan: *pweg*
 Isinai: *puwog*
3. **Southern Luzon and South**
 Sambal: *tu:?ur*
 Kapampangan: *tud*
 Tagalog: *tu:hod*
 Cebuano: *tu:hud*

The Proto-Philippine form for ‘knee’ is generally thought to be *[t]uhud, which is very similar to *tohod* in Itbayaten and *to:od* in Ivatan. This suggests that the old form for ‘knee’ might have been *tohod*, and that it is the Yamis and the Sabtangs who have invented a new word for ‘knee’ through metathesis. However, the languages in the northern part of Luzon exhibit cognates of *atud* or *otud*, which brings forth a counterargument. Among the northern Luzon languages, Ivatan is the only language that has *tohod* or *to:od*. The word *tohod* or *to:od* is sporadically observed in the Ivatan-speaking area.

The word *otod* or *attod* has a close relationship to the forms found in the languages in the north. Hence, it might be suggested that the word *otod*, which is found in Ivatan, is NOT directly derived from the word *tohod* in Yami and Sabtang Isamorongen because the word *tohod* is not found in most of the northern Luzon languages. In northern Luzon, only *otod* is observed. The derivation of *otod* can be traced geographically.

Central		Cordillera		North
<i>tu:hud</i>		<i>tu:ud</i>		<i>atug/atud/utud</i>

It can be concluded that *otod* is an old Ivatan word, whereas the word *tohod* or *to:od* sporadically arrived in the Batanes afterwards. This means that *tohod* or *to:od* is a borrowing from the southern area, as it is only observed in the languages of the southern part of Luzon (such as Tagalog).

Now, let us turn to the origin of the word *peteg*. Where does the word *peteg* come from? Except the meaning of male urination, this word is not found in the contemporary Batanic languages. In Sabtang Isamorongen, in addition to *peteg*, the word *otod* 'knee' is also employed to denote 'male urination'. If the word belongs to a fisherman's term for urination, the term is much related to the body part that is very close to the genital organs. Formally, this word seems to be very similar to 'navel'.

In the contemporary Batanic languages, the word for 'navel' is *posed* or *pesed*, as shown in table 4.

Table 4. The term 'navel' in contemporary Batanic languages

	Yami	Itbayaten	Ivasayen	Isamorongen	Sabantang	Babuyan Claro
'navel'	pesed	posed	posed	posed/pesed	posed/pesed	posed

However, other northern Philippine languages, such as Ilocano, Ibanag, etc., show the following distribution for the word for 'navel':

[navel]

Northern Luzon and Cordillera

Ibanag: *fu:teg*
 Isneg: *pu:seg*
 Ilocano: *pu:seg*
 Gaddang: *fu:teg*
 Kankanaey: *pu:sig*
 Isinai: *pu:tog*

Language of Central and Southern Luzon and south, on the other hand, show cognates of *pu:sod*.

Sambal: *pu:sul*
 Kapampangan: *pu:sad*
 Botolan: *pu:hil*
 Tagalog: *pu:sod*
 Cebuano: *pu:sud*

The derivation of *peteg* is very systematic geographically.

Central		Cordillera		North
pu:sod		pu:seg/pu:sog		pu:teg/fu:teg/pu:tog

The word *pu:sod* is also found in regions that are very far from Batanes. The area from Manila and southward is the place where the word *pu:sod* is prevailing. Hence, the word *pu:sod*, too, is also a borrowing from the southern Luzon languages.

This reveals that just like the old Ivatan word for ‘knee’ is *otod/attod*, the word *peteg* is also an old form for ‘navel’ in the northern part of Luzon. And just like *otod*, the meaning of *peteg* was frozen as ‘male urination’. The word *pu:sod* or *po:sed* was first borrowed from the southern Luzon languages, and then it replaced *peteg* and became the general term for ‘navel’. On the other hand, the form *peteg* was retained only for ‘male urination in the sea’.

According to McFarland (1977), the distribution of *pu:sod* and *tohod* is very limited: they are found from Sambal or places near the Tagalog-speaking area down to the south. These places are very remote from the Batanic language speaking area. If the words were spread geographically, they should have looked like Ilocano: *pu:seg* and *tu:meng*; Itneg: *pewig* and *pu:seg*; or Ibanag: *fu:teg* and *atug*.

The Ivatan language is the only language that has *po:sed* and *tohod/to:od* in the north, and it is not a direct descendant of Tagalog or other central and southern Luzon languages. The distribution of these words indicates that the Batanic area is like an isolated patch on ‘navel’ and ‘knee’. If the isolated patch is taken into consideration, the possibility of borrowing must be postulated.

In the Batanic languages, it is reasonable to consider that *pu:sed* vs. *peteg* and *tohod* vs. *otod* are acquired as follows:¹²

*pusej	<i>pu:sod</i>	<i>puseg</i>	<i>puteg</i>	<i>peteg</i>	(Natural Change)
				<i>pu:sed</i>	(Borrowing)
*tohod	<i>tu:hod</i>	<i>to:od</i>	<i>atod/otod</i>	<i>otod</i>	(Natural Change)
				<i>to:hod</i>	(Borrowing)

In Dempwolff (1938), the reconstructed PAN form for ‘navel’ is *putʔegʔ, but Dyen and McFarland (1971) proposes that *pusej is the proto form for ‘navel’. Moreover, both references suggest that ‘knee’ is *[t]uʔud. However, other scholars, such as Lopez (1978), did not mention any proto form for ‘navel’. It is not certain whether Dempwolff’s reconstructed form *puʔteg is correct or not.

The changes above are natural ones. The Ivatans kept these words and knew how to use them properly: original meanings are used on land, but ‘male urination’ in the sea. However, because the number of fishermen decreased and also they became less dependent on the sea for their livelihood, they became unaware of the differences. As time went by, they forgot the original meanings and the fishermen’ register started to

¹² There might be another way to interpret the same fact; that is, the fishermen’s vocabularies are borrowings whereas the land register forms are original Ivatan. However, both interpretations presuppose that neither one is directly derived from the other.

denote 'male urination' only because the fishermen were all males. Because people in Batanes have often commuted between Vasay and Manila for quite some time and had direct contacts with the metropolis,¹³ they borrowed, instead, the Tagalog words *pu:sod* and *tu:hod* for 'navel' and 'knee' respectively. As for the form *opis*, which had the meaning for urination in the land register, started to have the meaning of 'female urination' in opposition to *peteg* 'male urination'.

8. Conclusion

In the old days, there were two styles of register in Batanes: the land register and the fishermen's register. Counter expressions, metaphors, and other linguistic devices were used in order to avoid the malicious spirits from understanding what they thought. And as one of the metaphorical expressions, instead of directly pointing the genital organs, the vocabularies in the vicinities were chosen. Thus, *peteg*, which meant 'navel', or *otod*, which meant 'knee', were used for 'urination'. If fishermen wanted to urinate in the sea, they uttered either 'to do navel or to navel' or 'to do knee or to knee'. However, when they landed, they switched back to *opis*. Later, because the number of fishermen became less and less and also because they became remote from the life depending on the sea, they became unaware of the differences. Consequently, the word *peteg* or *otod*, which used to denote only 'urination in the sea', became to denote 'male urination' because all fishermen were men. Moreover, the land register *opis* became to denote 'female urination'.

At the beginning, they used both words in their original meanings. Gradually, the original meanings disappeared. After a while, the borrowed words *pu:sod* and *tohod* were introduced to replace the old words for these.

¹³ In relation to the two different styles of register, the word for 'house' shows very interesting distribution.

[house]

Yami: *va?ay*, Itbayaten: *vaxay*, Ivatan: *vahay*, Ibatan/Babuyan Claro: *bahay*

['house' in songs]

Yami: *valay* (in other languages except Itbayaten: *valay*, and in Itbayaten *varay* means 'do/make').

[house only with a roof and poles; shanty]

Yami: *valag*, Itbayaten: *valag*, (*kavalag* 'kite'), Ivatan: *vadag* (*kavadag* 'kite')

Land Register			Fishermen's Register		
<i>opis</i>	<i>peteg</i>	<i>otod</i>	<i>peteg</i>	<i>otod</i>	'urination'
'urination'	'navel'	'knee'	('navel')	('knee')	
	borrowing	borrowing			
<i>opis</i>	<i>po:sed/ pesed</i>	<i>tohod</i>	<i>peteg</i>	<i>otod</i>	
(female urination)	(navel)	(knee)	(male urination)	(male urination)	
			[Ivatan]	[Sabtang]	
		<i>otod/attod:</i>			
		[Yami]			

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