

I

INTENTIONS, SELF, AND RESPONSIBILITY: AN ESSAY IN SAMOAN ETHNOPRAGMATICS

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Introduction

In this chapter I criticize theories of meaning that are predominantly based on the reconstruction of the speaker's intentions, and argue for the importance of the role of responsibility in the interpretation of speech in social interaction. On the basis of an ethnography of communication of a particular Samoan speech event called *fono* (see below) and a number of ethnographic accounts of other aspects of Samoan social life and ethos, I shall suggest that Samoans typically see talk and interpretation as activities for the assignment of responsibility rather than as exercises in reading "other minds." Thus, for instance, Samoans rarely engage in discussions about speakers' motives or their inner psychological conflicts. More typically, they publicly engage in interpretation as an overt attempt to assign responsibility to someone for his words. In such activities, participants provide interpretations of words as deeds on the basis of a variety of socially available criteria which often start from the consequences, rather than the premises, of one's words, and include an attention to public identities and *dramatis personae* as well as to social relations between speaker and referent(s) or between speaker and audience. In this sense, the Samoan local theory and practice of interpretation are very akin to the sociology of C. Wright Mills for whom "rather than fixed elements 'in' an individual, motives are the terms with which interpretation of conduct by social actors proceeds" (1940:904). Overall, the main concern for a Samoan interpreter is not the speaker's psychological state of awareness of certain contextual conditions, but rather the responsibility speakers must assume (or be forced to assume) for the state of affairs created by their own words. Another of Mills' definitions well captures Samoan interpretive practice: "Motives are names for consequential situations, and surrogates for actions leading to them" (1940:905).

Although mainly drawing from my fieldwork experience in one community, a traditional village in Western Samoa, my discussion will be comparative in nature. The case-study presented in this paper is offered as a contribution to a general theory of ethnopragsmatics. It is here assumed

that, to the extent to which pragmatics is concerned with the meanings implied or instantiated through relationships between signs and the context of their use, it must study the local theories and the local practices of particular speakers as heirs of specific cultural traditions. In this perspective, ethnography becomes an essential element of the analytical process. Furthermore, once we start thinking about speakers as social actors and carriers of cultural traditions, we are compelled to relate the meaning of their individual utterances to the larger contexts those utterances help sustain (or challenge). In our case, the words said by titled individuals in a village council meeting must be continuously projected against the background of village politics and the management of local hierarchies. Through ethnography, we can easily show that speakers' daily dealings with one another's opinions, promises, stances, and complaints are always embedded within a logic of social relations and social order that is in turn challenged and reproduced throughout acts of speaking as social deeds.

The role of intentions in current theories of meaning

The view of communication as an exchange of individual intentions through a particular code is still very common in the Western tradition of linguistic studies. In speech-act theory, for instance, meaning is often identified with the speaker's intentions to express certain beliefs or bring about certain changes in the world (see Searle 1983). In this perspective, meanings as intentions coincide with certain psychological states and it is implied that the meaning of an utterance is fully defined in the speaker's mind *before* the act of speaking. Despite the many cases in which words achieve (or don't achieve) certain ends because of the audience's work at making a given context possible (or impossible), many speech-act theorists have chosen to concentrate on the speaker's intentions as their main object of inquiry (see Clark & Carlson, 1982b:4). In this framework, other elements of the speech event are largely ignored. Thus the addressee is usually seen as a passive spectator whose only job is to guess what the speaker has in mind. The larger social activity in which language is used is taken into consideration only when the analysts' intuitions suggest that conflicting interpretations may be possible.

This view is clearly at odds with any kind of interactively oriented approach to the study of language and social interaction (see C. Goodwin, 1981; Gumperz, 1982; Griffin & Mehan, 1981; Psathas, 1979; Schenkein, 1978; Schegloff, 1982; Streeck, 1980). It also appears too limited or overtly ethnocentric to anthropologists and linguists who have been looking at non-Western or (within the US) non-mainstream modes of communication (e.g. Caton, 1985; Kochman, 1983; Morgan, 1991; Ochs,

1982; Ochs, 1984; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984; Paine, 1981; Rosaldo, 1982; Silverstein, 1977; 1979; Verscheuren, 1983). The work of these researchers suggests that the relevance assigned to the speaker's intentions in the interpretation of speech may vary across societies and social contexts. On many occasions, what speech-act theorists might call "perlocutionary effects" and hence classify as not conventional (see Austin, 1962) can be shown to be an acceptable criterion for the assignment of responsibility to a speaker. This is possible because the conventionality of certain interpretations is partly defined by the kind of norms and social world that the participants in the interaction are able to evoke at a given time and place. There are many cases in daily life in which the meaning of a given act is not defined until the recipient of that act has replied. Gift exchanges (Bourdieu, 1977) and ritual insults or indirectness among African-Americans are well-known examples of such cases (Kochman, 1983; Mitchell-Kernan, 1972; Morgan, 1991).

In this paper, I shall continue within the ethnographically-oriented tradition by presenting a Samoan case-study that should help make the following points: (i) the personalist view of meaning (i.e. meaning as defined by the speaker's intentions or reconstructed psychological state at the time of act of speaking) fails to explain certain apparently successful uses of speech among adult Samoan speakers; (ii) the relative reliance upon the individual *vis-à-vis* the participants in the speech event for determining the force of a given speech act is closely related to local theories of self (or person) and task accomplishment; (iii) the role of the audience in shaping utterances and (re)defining meanings must be an integral part of any model of verbal communication.

To make these points, I shall illustrate how Samoan speakers view meaning and practice interpretation as a collective affair, in which the individual's ability to convey certain meanings is manifestly dependent on his addressees' response and social behavior.

By discussing several examples from transcripts of audio-recordings of politico-judiciary meetings, I shall argue that the Samoan ideology and practice of doing things with words cannot be explained on the basis of the notion of "intentional meaning." The Samoan local theory of interpretation in fact mirrors the Samoan theory of task as a co-operative, albeit hierarchically structured, enterprise. Rather than taking words as representations of privately owned meanings, Samoans practice interpretation as a way of understanding and controlling social relationships, not as a way of figuring out what a given person "meant to say." Once uttered in a given context, words are interpreted with respect rather to some new reality they help fashion than to the supposedly intended subjective content. This is related to two facts: (i) the assessment of the consequences of a given act are often more important to Samoans than the understanding of its original circumstances; (ii) given the emphasis on social relations

in Samoan society in general, it is often *dramatis personae* rather than individuals who are seen as producing meaningful speech acts. As a consequence, the individual actor is much less in control of the possible interpretation of his words.

After suggesting that the Samoan theory of meaning and interpretation is grounded in local theories of knowledge, self, and task which are different from mainstream Western epistemologies and theories of social action, I shall suggest that the Samoan and "Western" theory represented by the notion of intentional meaning can perhaps be reconciled within the larger theoretical context of sociohistorically oriented approaches to cognitive processes and within dialogically oriented approaches to meaning.

To illustrate these points, I have chosen to discuss the ways in which the speaker's responsibility is contextually and co-operatively defined in politico-judiciary meetings in a traditional Samoan village. Although my analysis is based on one particular type of event, the Samoan theory of interpretation presented here is consistent with other accounts of Samoan language, culture, and society based on participant-observation and extensive recordings of Samoan daily interaction across a number of contexts. In particular, my description and understanding of Samoan interpretive procedures is consistent with Shore's (1982) ethnography and with the work on Samoan language acquisition and socialization carried out by Ochs (1982; 1984; 1988).

The *fono*

All the examples of Samoan speech acts in this paper are taken from transcripts of the verbal interaction in speech events called *fono*, which I studied in one village, Falefā (Upolu), during my first fieldwork in 1978-9 (see Duranti, 1981a; 1981b; 1983a; 1990). There are many different kinds of *fono* or formal meetings in Samoan society (see Larkin, 1971). The kind I shall be discussing in this paper is the special convocation of a deliberative assembly of title-holders or *matai* - chiefs and orators - which, as typical of similar events in other "traditional" societies (see Comaroff & Roberts, 1981), acts both as a high court - concerned only with crimes involving *matai* - and as a legislative body. *Matai* gathered in a *fono* can thus make, ratify, and abrogate laws (at the village level) as well as discuss the policy to adopt with respect to a new problem or potential conflict.

Although the particular discourse organization typical of a *fono* discussion is, in many ways, unique (see Duranti, 1981a, b, 1983a), the speech genres used, the social relations among participants, and the modes of strategic interaction found in a *fono* are also found in other speech events that characterize the daily life of a traditional Samoan village. In fact, given the emphasis on political modes of interaction in

Samoan communities, the *fono* is emblematic of much of Samoan adult life. Although participation in it is restricted to *matai*, a *fono* is a rather "public" context in the sense that people can be held accountable for their words and political stands at some later time. A *fono* is always embedded in a larger "social drama" – in the specific sense given to this term by Turner (1974). This means that a *fono* is a highly antagonistic arena in which different powerful groups and individuals try to control one another's political actions. Hence it is hard for participants to predict what the final outcome of a meeting will be. In such a context, it is often convenient to be cautious, humble, and vague. At the same time, there might be reasons for a speaker to be forceful and direct, as when his role in the proceedings prescribes that he be the one to make certain announcements or accusations, or when he might want to try to gain in prestige or material goods.¹

Although I recorded a total of seven meetings in 1978–9 and several others in my two subsequent field trips (1983, 1988), most of the examples discussed in this paper are taken from one meeting. I hope in this way to help the readers orient themselves in the midst of the fairly complex events and issues that characterize any debate within a *fono*.

Announcing the agenda: sharing responsibility for changing the world with words

The first point I want to make here is that Samoans are quite aware of the power of words, especially in public settings. By this I mean that in public events a great deal of energy and skill is spent to find the most appropriate way to present someone's view or to report on someone's actions. In Samoa, as in other places in Polynesia, a special class of people, the *tulāfale* – variously translated as "orators," "talking chiefs," etc. – has the right and duty not only to represent others ceremonially and verbally in public events such as rites of passage and gift exchanges, but also to act as spokespersons and mediators in political conflicts and crises. The position that a given orator takes on a given issue is likely to be remembered. If things turn out differently from what an orator implied or suggested on a given occasion, he might get in trouble. This system protects the dignity of chiefs and other high status parties by allowing them to withhold their views or wait to make a decision until many of the issues are either solved or at least sufficiently debated to give participants a sense of whether a consensus might be reached and in which direction. The chiefs, in turn, are expected to reward an orator who has worked and spoken on their behalf in public arenas. Things are made more complicated by the fact that the same orator may have allegiances to different chiefs or different descent groups in the village or by the fact that the chief who should

protect him may not be very active or forceful. All of these factors make it difficult to predict at any given moment what the preferred strategy is going to be. Whereas it might be fruitful in some cases to be outspoken, in other circumstances it is wiser to be indirect. Thus, when we look at actual talk, we find that Samoan orators adopt a variety of strategies for dealing with the potentially dangerous power of words, with their performative, context-creating force. In a *fono*, one way of protecting oneself against retaliation, punishment, or blame is that of avoiding public commitment to a given cause either by avoiding saying anything compromising or by being very vague (Duranti, 1990). An orator may simply avoid talking in any detail about what he considers a dangerous topic or a delicate issue. There are cases, however, when the speaker's role in the proceedings or his positional identity in the village may force him to mention names and events. An example of this sort is discussed below.

At the beginning of a *fono*, after the opening *kava* ceremony, an orator from a particular section of a village delivers a formal speech, called *lāuga* (Duranti, 1983). In this speech, there is a part, toward the end, dedicated to the announcement of the agenda of the meeting (*matā'upu o le fono*). The same orator who might "show off" his knowledge of oratorical formulas and ancient metaphors in other parts of his speech tends to be very brief and vague in the announcement of the agenda. In some cases, the first orator might even leave out one (or all) of the topics of the day, in which case the senior orator Moe'ono (M), who acts as chairman of the meeting, might remind him, as shown in excerpt (1) below:

(1) (*Fono*, 7 April 1979. The orator Loa has just concluded the introductory speech leaving out the mention of the agenda)

- 359 Loa; *maguia le aofia ma le fogo!*²
Good luck to the assembly and the *fono*!
- 360 ? *mālō!*
Well done!
- [
- 361 M; *'o ā makā'upu o le fogo?*
What are the topics of the *fono*?
- 362 (1.)
- 363 *fai mai makā'upu o le fogo.*
Tell (us) the topics of the *fono*.
- 364 Loa; [*o makā'upu o le aofia ma le fogo*
The agenda of the assembly and *fono*
- 365 Moe; *fai mai (?)*
Tell us (?)
- [
- 366 Loa; *ia e fa'akakau kogu lava i lo kākou Falelua*³,
Well it's really about the two subvillages,
- 367 (CLEARS THROAT)
- 368 *oga pau gā 'o makā'upu,*
those are the only topics,

- 369 (1.5)
 370 M; *oi!*
 Oh!
 371 (1.)
 372 Loa; *e ā?*
 What?
 373 M; *'o le isi makā'upu o Savea*
 The other topic of Savea
 374 Loa; *ia 'o le isi fo'i makā'upu e uiga i le –*
 Well the other topic is about the –
 375 (.5) *le afioga iā Savea ogo'o: –*
 the honorable Savea 'cause –'
 376 M; (*Fa'amakuā'igu,*
(Fa'amatuā'inu))
 377 Loa; *'o le lā- (3.) mea fo'i ma Fa'amakuā'igu,*
 The – thing also with Fa'amatuā'inu,
 378 *go 'ua kukulu Savea i – (1.) i le mālō,*
 given that Savea has complained to – the Government,
 379 (.5) *ia'*
 well
 380 *go 'ua ka'ua gi fa'akosiga Fa'amakuā'igu i le paloka,*
 given that some illegal campaigning of Fa'amatuā'inu
 during the elections has been said (to occur)
 381 (1.)
 382 *ia 'oga pau gā 'o- 'o makā'upu o le aofia ma le fogo,*
 Well, those are the only – topics of the assembly and the *fono*,
 383 *-hh iai fo'i gisi makā'upu*
 -hh (if) there are other topics,
 384 *o lo'o lē maua,*
 I am not getting to,
 385 (.5) *ia la'a maua i luma!*
 Well they will be brought to the front!
 386 (1.5)
 387 ?; *mālō!*
 Well done!
 388 Moe; *mālō fekalai.*
 Well done, the (honorable) speaking.
 389 ?; *mālō fekalai.*
 Well done, the (honorable) speaking.
 390 (...)
 391 Moe; *ia fa'afekai aku Kafiloa. (...)*
 Well, thank you Ka(o)fi(ua)iloa ...
 392 *'ua 'e fa'amaga le fogo*
 for starting the *fono*
 [...]

The fact that a vague reminder such as “the other topic about Savea” is sufficient for the first orator Loa to remember Savea’s case, suggests that he might have known but did not want to be the one to initiate the announcement.⁴ His reluctance can be better understood once we interpret

pret the announcement of the agenda not simply as a statement *describing a fact* about the world, but also, in Austin’s (1962) terms, a *performative*, that is, a *conventional verbal act through which the world is changed*. The new reality is defined as one in which the ideal social harmony or “mutual love” (*fealofani*) of the village is in danger or already disrupted. The announcement of the agenda puts the orator in the different position of having to define the actions of a higher-ranking chief as causing such a state of affairs. The orator’s way of handling this difficult task is to involve someone more powerful, the senior orator who acts as chairman of the meeting, in jointly performing the act. No-one would then be able to scold him for having announced the wrong agenda or having reported unfounded accusations. This strategy is particularly effective in light of other potential outcomes. Thus, for instance, as we shall see below, it is possible for an orator to be reprimanded for being too direct or for expressing an opinion that can be defined as “wrong” or “inappropriate” in the light of later developments.

Getting reprimanded for speaking one’s mind

Later on in the same meeting (7 April), as announced in example (1), there was a debate about whether the young chief Savea should or should not pursue his court case against the district MP, Inu. Most members of the village council felt that to confront the MP directly in the central court would have seriously damaged the already precarious relationship with the nearby village of Lufilufi where the MP lived. However, the orator Fa’aonu’u, the highest ranking orator from Savea’s subvillage, spoke in favor of Savea’s decision. Here is the crucial passage from his speech:

(2) (*Fono*, 7 April, speaker: orator Fa’aonu’u)

- 2332 F; *'o lea lā 'ou ke fa'a – (...) malulū aku ai*
 Now I would like to ex-...cuse (myself)
 2333 *i lau kōfā le Makua Moe'ogo (...)*
 with your highness the Senior Orator Moe'ono ...
 2334 *ia e fa'apea fo'i 'Aiga gei ma kagaka o le kuiākua, (...)*
 as well as the families (of chiefs) and the
 people of the King of Atua (= the orators) ...
 2335 *ka'akia ia le makā'upu a Savea ma – (...) le kōfā iā Igu*
 do drop this issue of Savea and ... the honorable Inu
 2336 *lā ke ō i le Malō (...)*
 let them go to court ...

Later on in the meeting, however, the chief Savea, under pressure from important members of the assembly, agreed to reconsider his decision to go to court. In his concluding speech, at the end of the meeting, the senior

orator Moe'ono, who had been the primary advocate of a "traditional" (i.e. out of court) settlement, takes the opportunity to scold Fa'aonu'u for not having shown moderation and for having hastily expressed an opinion which was eventually contradicted by the chief's later decision. Moe'ono's opening remarks about Fa'aonu'u's rare participation in village affairs – due to his job in the capital – reveal an ethic of public speaking in which one may speak his mind on an issue only if he is a full-time member of the village assembly and not just an occasional one.

(3) (7 April, speaker: Moe'ono)

- 3541 M; *ma: – (. . .) ou ke kaukala aku fo'i Fa'aogu'u iā ke 'oe'oe (. . .)*
And – . . . I am also talking, Fa'aonu'u, to you
- 3542 *mea lea e leaga ai le – le alualu i galuega*
this going away (from the village) to work
- 3543 *sau fo'i ua- (. . .)*
coming back to – (speak up) is bad
- 3544 *pei o agaleilā o le ā koe aga'i kua lo'u kāofi. (. . .)*
as for before, my opinion is going to reach back
(i.e. to what you said before)
- 3545 *'o le – o le makā'upu ua fikoikogu i loukou faleakua (. . .)*
as for the – the topic that concerns your subvillage,
- 3546 *kaofiofi le i'u maea. (. . .)*
moderate yourself . . .
- 3547 *ae aua le luaiga lālā mai fa'amaka o Avi'i lou kāo –*
and don't show off your op(inion) like the crab that
has eyes that stick out
- 3548 *a'o lea ua aliali gei,*
now it looks like
[. . .]
- 3550 *ua fausia e Savea le – le figagalo lea e fai aku iai*
Savea has agreed to say that
- 3551 *iga ia kākou feiloa'i ma Lufilufi. (. . .)*
we should meet with Lufilufi . . .
- 3552 *KO'A! le fa'aukaga. (. . .)*
HOLD (IT)! the advice . . .
- 3553 *ko'a le fa'aukaga. (. . .)*
hold the advice . . .
- 3554 *e leai fo'i se isi Fa'aogu'u 'o oe*
there is no other Fa'aonu'u but you
- 3555 *ga'o 'o oe ā 'o Fa'aogu'u. (. . .)*
only you, you are the Fa'aonu'u . . .

The orator is here reprimanded for having said something that was *at a later point* contradicted by the chief Savea. This incident also illustrates the above mentioned hypothesis that one of the reasons for having orators speak first or on behalf of a chief, a fairly common practice in Polynesia (Firth, 1975), is that of allowing the chief to change his opinion

without loss of face. The chiefs' "wrongs" are assumed, in the public arena, by the orators who spoke on their behalf. The source of authority and wisdom represented by the chief is protected by having the lower-ranking orator expose himself to potential retaliation and loss of face. The complementary relationship between chiefs and orators (Shore, 1982), however, allows the orator to "get back" at his chief in other contexts, given that it is the chief who is responsible for materially supporting his orators and any payment or retaliation suffered by the orators will call for the chief's contribution.

The next case will show that in defending or simply presenting a chief's (or for that matter anyone's) position, an orator makes himself vulnerable to the subsequent doings of the party he represents. In these cases, then, the speaker's beliefs or intentions at the time in which he produced his speech acts are not relevant.

The role of personal intentions in the assessment of responsibility

As shown in the previous example, a Samoan orator may get in trouble and risk retaliation if things turn out differently from what he had assumed or let others believe. Thus an orator can be held responsible for having announced something on behalf of a higher-ranking *matai*. Retaliation may take place against him if people cannot have direct access to the original "addressor" of the message. In such cases, the grounds on which an accusation is made may be the practical consequences of his words as well as the relationship between the orator and the party he is seen as representing. The orator's beliefs or personal motives may well be irrelevant. As shown in this case, under these circumstances Samoans do not evoke "good will." Without openly rebelling, they must accept the responsibility of having taken part in a particular social act which was not fulfilled, e.g. a public commitment to doing something, or which had an unfortunate outcome, e.g. a political defeat or a loss of face. This attention for the consequences of actions is repeatedly stressed in Shore's lucid ethnography: "... when I questioned informants about the relative seriousness of different misdeeds, their tendency was to base their evaluations on the results for the actor of the action rather than on any intrinsic quality of the act" (Shore 1982:182).

This means that in Samoa a speaker must usually deal directly with the circumstances created by his words and cannot hide behind his alleged original intentions. As in the African-American speech communities discussed by Morgan (1991), in Samoa, a speaker cannot rely on excuses such as "I didn't mean it." In fact, such a phrase is literally impossible in the Samoan language. The need to deal with the reality created by speech means that the distinction between the sender and the

addressor sometimes is not as sharp as expected in those Western contexts where it is assumed that a messenger should not be held responsible for what he says.

An example of the way in which Samoans act in these circumstances is provided below in an excerpt from a meeting in which one of the two highest-ranking orators in the village, Iuli, proposes to fine the orator Loa for having announced, a few weeks earlier, that the newly re-elected district MP, Fa'amatuā'inu (shortened to "Inu" in example (4) below), was going to present some goods to the village assembly. Iuli argues that, since the MP did not come to share food and goods with the village, Loa should be considered responsible and heavily fined, perhaps even expelled from the village:

(4) (Fono 7 April, speaker: Iuli (Iu))

- 3362 'o le makā'upu gei e uiga iā Loa. (...) This topic now is about Loa ...
- 3363 Loa; (mālie)
Well said.
[
- 3364 Iu; kusa o le aso ga – pokopoko ā lo kākou gu'u About the day our village gathered together
- 3365 e fa'akali le faipule. (...) to wait for the M.P. ...
- 3366 'o mea fa'apea 'o se luma o se gu'u. Things like that are a humiliation for a village.
- 3367 (...)
- 3368 Loa; mālie!
Well said!
[
- 3369 Iu; ula e – ua ka'uvalea lo kākou gu'u. (...) Bad to – our village is ridiculed ...
- 3370 'ua fiu le kākou gu'u e kakali. (...) Our village was tired of waiting ...
- 3371 leai se faipule e sau. (...) There is no M.P. who comes
- 3372 'a e se'i gofogofo Loa but Loa just sits there
- 3373 alu amai se mea e kaumafa ma le gu'u. (instead of) going to get some nourishment for the village
- 3374 (...)
- 3375 Loa; mālie!
Well said!
- 3376 (...)
- 3377 Iu; 'o lo'u lea kalikoguga, (...) This is what I believe, ...
- 3378 (ka)kau ga sala Loa. (...) Loa should be fined ...

- 3379 'o le makuā ma makagā le mea The thing is extremely ugly
[...]
- 3388 'ae kakau oga fai maukigoa and (he) should have made sure
- 3389 auā e 'āiga Loa ma – ma Igu, (...) because Loa and – and Inu are related, ...
- 3390 āfai ua fai age iā ia, if he said that to you,
- 3391 sa kakau oga makuā ma'oki (...) one should have been very clear about it ...
- 3392 gi mea e fa'akaumafa ai le gu'u something to feed the village
- 3393 ga – ga amai lā'ea (Loa) should have brought
- 3394 pe'ā lē sau le faipule (...) when the M.P. doesn't come ...
[...]
- 3400 mea lea ua fai e Loa. (...) this is what Loa did. ...
- 3401 'a le povi, (...) whether a cow, ...
- 3402 uā e kokogi fo'i e le mākou pikogu'u o le s – 'o Sagou our village of Sanonu will assign the fine.
- 3403 (SOFT LAUGHTER)
- 3404 ?; mālie!
Well said!
- 3405 Iu; 'a le povi, Whether a cow,
- 3406 ia(a) Loa ma le selau kālā, from Loa and 100 dollars,
- 3407 alu 'ese ma le gu'u! get out of the village!
- 3408 Loa; mālie!
Well said!
[...]

Iuli's arguments for holding Loa responsible are the following: he created a situation that ridiculed the village *matai*; when he saw that the M.P. was not coming, he should have done something to remedy the village's loss of face; finally, he is related to the MP Loa's conventional agreements *mālie*! "Well said" throughout Iuli's speech are not ironic. They rhythmically exemplify Loa's preoccupation with the potential seriousness of the accusation.

The orator Fa'aonu'u, who was not present when the events recounted by Iuli took place, asks for more information about the case. Is Iuli saying that Loa lied to the village? Or what else did Loa do? (See Duranti, 1990, on the use of reported speech in this particular case.) Iuli reconstructs the events more clearly:

- (5)
- 3467 'o *Loa ua sau kala'i le kākou gu'u*
Loa had come to summon our village
- 3468 *e fono – ma pokopoko*
to have a *fono* and gather together
- 3469 *la'a sau le faipule – e amai oga momoli (...)*
the M.P. was going to come – (and) bring his gifts ...
- 3470 *ia' oga – pokopoko lea o le kākou falefiku,*
Well then – our seven subvillages get together,
- 3471 *leai se isi e o'o iā Fagaloa ma Falevao*
there is no one who doesn't come from Fagaloa or Falevao
- 3472 *ma kagaka uma o le kākou – gofoala (...)*
and all the people of our – four subvillages ...
- 3473 *pokopoko ua fū ua alu legā aso o kakali*
get together (we/they) are tired of waiting the whole day
- 3474 *leai se faipule o sau ma se mea (...)*
there is no M.P. who comes with anything ...
- 3475 *ae se'i gofogofo*
and (we) just sit and sit
- 3476 *fu'e mai fo'i le suāvai a kaulele'a (...)*
The untitled men prepare the food ...
- 3477 *ia' savalivalia'i fealu –*
there he walks wand –
- 3478 *fealualua'i Loa pei e lē – e le popole i le mea lea.*
Loa wanders around as if he didn't – worry about this.

After this clarification, Fa'aonu'u speaks again asking Iuli to forgive Loa. In his words, Loa's behavior is 'ese, that is, "unusual, strange, wrong" (Milner, 1966) given that he and the MP are relatives. In this case, as in other ones that I witnessed, the relationship between social actors is foregrounded and used as a means for assessing responsibility.

The discussion of the case is eventually tabled by the chairman, Moe'ono. The reasons adduced for temporarily suspending the case, however, are procedural (*viz.* the case had not been properly announced at the beginning of the meeting) and pragmatic (the village is about to meet with the MP and this matter may then be solved along with other problems). No-one challenges Iuli's accusation by introducing the issue of Loa's motivations or his possible intentions. Only the chairman Moe'ono, who often took issue with Iuli's positions (see Duranti 1981a and below on their antagonism), rejects the relevance of Loa's family ties with the MP. He does agree, however, that Loa made a mistake by making the announcement to the assembly. The meeting ends with the prospect of a meeting at the MP's village where the members of the *fono* will have a chance to ask him whether in fact he did tell Loa to announce his gift to the *fono* members. Given the ranking differential between Loa and Inu, no-one questions the implied procedure: the words of the higher-ranking

matai, Inu, will be taken as the "truth." If they contradict Loa's statements, he will be punished.

If we broaden our perspective to include some background events to this exchange, we may gain some insights into the role that such a discussion has in playing out various important themes in the community. We can then appreciate how speech acts are indeed "deeds" as Austin taught us, but of a much more complex nature than any ordinary language philosopher ever suggested.

It is relevant here to know that, at the time of the meeting in which Iuli brings out the accusation against Loa, the village has just come out of a controversial political campaign during which three important members of the assembly (Iuli, Moe'ono, and the chief Savea) have competed with one another in trying to gain support against the incumbent MP, Inu, from the nearby village of Lufilufi. Inu's victory has left the village in a serious crisis. Not only have Falefā's leaders fought against, rather than supported, one another; not only have they lost the election; they also broke an earlier agreement with the *matai* from Lufilufi to vote for the incumbent Inu. Furthermore, by accepting the "Western way" (*fa'apālagi*), that is, the secret ballot, they have damaged their relationship with Inu and his village – a serious breach of the relationship with the village of Lufilufi, which, according to the history recorded in their genealogy and ceremonial phrases of polite address and *kava* announcements, they should protect. People belonging to the different factions in the village are still resentful of one another and looking for ways to air some of their anger. In this context, it is not unreasonable to think of Loa as a scapegoat. By getting Loa in trouble, Iuli can get back at Inu (Loa and Inu are related and Inu might have to take care of Loa if the latter gets in trouble) and at Moe'ono (there are rumors that Loa helped Moe'ono in the campaign). Furthermore, by keeping the relationship with Inu problematic, Iuli can also upset Moe'ono's plans to end quickly the crisis caused by the elections and bring back harmony (*fealofani*) in the district. Maintaining the tension might be advantageous to Iuli if he intends to run again against Inu, or if he decides in the future to ally himself to the younger chief Savea (the third contender).

If these speculations are legitimate, we should expect Loa's fate to be contingent on the relationship between the *matai* in Falefā and Inu. The ensuing events confirm this hypothesis. The next week, when the *matai* from Falefā, led by Moe'ono and Iuli, go to meet with Inu and the other *matai* from Lufilufi, their conflict is, at least momentarily, ended. After a long exchange of speeches, some of which review the history of the crisis, Inu generously presents his traditional donation of food to the Falefā *matai*. At this point, Loa's case ceases to exist. Inu's later actions have

once more redefined prior acts. Since Inu has presented his contribution to the village, Loa's words become "true" and the case against him is dropped.

Group identity, individuals and dramatis personae

In a *fono*, opinions are often framed as delivered on behalf of a group. Thus we often find speakers shifting between the first-person singular "I" ('ou or a'u) and the first-person plural exclusive "we" mākou. The use of mākou defines the speaker as the representative of a contextually defined group, e.g. his subvillage, his family, the orators (as opposed to the chiefs). Here are a few examples:

(6) (7 April, II, p. 22)

... mea fo'i lea mākou ke - ... 'avaku ai fo'i se vaimālū.
 thing also that we - EXCL TA give+DX Pro also ART soothing water
 ... [as for] that thing we are ... [trying to] soothe (you).

Or

... [as for] that matter we are ... advising you not to be hasty.

(7) (25 Jan., I, p. 80)

Tui: a'o legei fo'i 'ua mākou fa'alologologo aku
 butthis also TA we-EXCL listen DX
 But now we have just listened

i lau vagaga Moe'ogo.
 to your speech Moe'ono
 to your (honorable) speech, Moe'ono.

The plural form is used more often at the beginning of the discussion, when each orator, in his first speech, is seen as speaking on behalf of his high chief and his subvillage, than later on in the meeting, when alliances may shift and the referent of "we" might be problematic. "We" is also used more often by lower-ranking orators than by higher-ranking ones. These facts suggest that the use of (exclusive) "we" is a potentially useful strategy for sharing responsibility or presenting one's own opinion not as an individual's stand but as a group's stand. There are cases, however, in which the speaker cannot or does not want to speak on behalf of a group. Thus, for instance, in the village of Falefā, the two highest-ranking orators, Moe'ono and Iuli, usually speak in the first-person singular: they are clearly the leading forces of the local polity and people are concerned with what *each of them* thinks.

As in the case of a personal accusation, there are also situations in which a speaker may not be allowed to speak on behalf of a group. An example of this is provided in (8) below, where the orator Vave (a

pseudonym) tries to defend himself from the accusation of using offensive language toward the village council:

(8) (*Fono*, 17 March, 1979, pp. 46-7)

Vave: 'Ou ke fefe ma 'ou maka'u.

I am afraid and I fear

'O le ā le agasala a le gu'u iā ke a'u?

What is the sin by the village because of me?

'O lea 'ou gofo ai fua ma fa'aleaga le gu'u,

Now I would just sit and give a bad name to the village,

'ou ke iloa a'u mea ga fai ...

I know what I did ...

'O lea 'ou ke kalosaga aku ai ma le agaga vaivai,

I hereby implore (you) with a humble spirit,

e mamā Vave e le ai saga 'upu fai fa'apegā

Vave is clean. There are no words of that sort that he said

pei oga silafia ...

as it is known (to you)

The line before the last provides an example of a third-person referent used for referring to oneself. This is not uncommon in the *fono* speeches, but not found in ordinary conversation. Another example of this is provided in (9) below:

(9) (25 Jan., I, p. 28. In explaining his role in the present crisis, the senior orator Moe'ono tries to convince the rest of the assembly of his trustworthiness)

Moe'ono: 'Auā 'o 'upu a Moe'ogo e lē alo,

Because Moe'ono's words do not dodge.

Given that all speakers in a *fono* are *matai*, the name they use coincides with their *matai* title. The speaker's reference to himself through his own title frames his words as originating from his positional role. Given that a title can be held by more than one person at the same time and is defined as deriving from a mythico-historical figure and his descendants, the use of the title in talking about oneself can be seen as a strategy to recreate a relationship, a groupness when the circumstances would seem to call for an individual commitment. In fact, the tendency to obscure the individual in favor of the public and positional role a person is embodying is quite common in Samoa across all kinds of situations. As noted by Mead:

This separation between the individual and his role is exceedingly important in the understanding of Samoan society. The whole conception is of a group plan which has come down from ancestral times, a ground plan which is explicit in titles and remembered phrases, and which has a firm base in the land of the villages and

districts. The individual is important only in terms of the position which he occupies in this universal scheme – of himself he is nothing. Their eyes are always on the play, never on the players, while each individual's task is to fit his role.

(Mead, 1937:286)

Such a separation between the individual and his *dramatis personae* is of course not restricted to Samoa. Thus, for instance, in discussing the notion of self in Bali, Geertz (1983:62) writes:

... there is in Bali a persistent and systematic attempt to stylize all aspects of personal expression to the point where anything idiosyncratic, anything characteristic of the individual merely because he is who he is physically, psychologically, or biographically, is muted in favor of his assigned place in the continuing and, so it is thought, never-changing pageant that is Balinese life. It is *dramatis personae*, not actors, that endure; indeed, it is *dramatis personae*, not actors that in the proper sense really exist.

In the Samoan case, one way of explicitly evoking the contextually appropriate dramatic persona is to use one's title in talking about oneself.

Toward an anti-personalist view of meaning

The ethnopragmatic approach implemented in this study shares with much contemporary cultural anthropology the assumption that local theories of meaning should be described and analyzed in the context of local theories of person and social action (Geertz, 1983; Myers & Brenneis, 1984; Rosaldo, 1982; Shore, 1982). This means that how people think about themselves and how they do things together has consequences for the model of communication to be used in analyzing their talk. Thus the speech-act theory distinction between sender and addressor is tied to a particular socioeconomic model whereby people should be held responsible only for those acts (and words) that can be clearly seen as reflecting their own individual intentions. The latter perspective is explicitly adopted by those speech-act theorists who, as pointed out by Rosaldo (1982:204), "think of 'doing things with words' as the achievement of autonomous selves, whose deeds are not significantly constrained by the relationships and expectations that define their local world" (Rosaldo, 1982:204). This view corresponds to what Holquist (1983) calls the "personalist" theory of meaning: "This view holds that 'I own meaning.' A close bond is felt between the sense I have of myself as a unique being and the being of my language. Such a view, with its heavy investment in the personhood of individuals, is deeply implicated in the Western Humanist tradition" (Holquist, 1983:2). This "heavy investment in the personhood of individuals," however, is not shared by Polynesian cultures. Thus, for instance, in discussing the Hawaiian concept of self, Ito (1985:301) writes:

The Hawaiian concept of self is grounded in affective social relations [...] This conceptualization of self is a highly interpersonal one. It is based on the reflexive relationship of Self and Other and on the dynamic bonds of emotional exchange and reciprocity. For Hawaiian, Self and Other, person and group, people and environment, are inseparable. They all interactively create, affect and even destroy each other.

In similar fashion, Shore (1982) describes the Samoan theory of person in the following way:

Not only are there in Samoan no terms corresponding to the English "personality," "self," or "character," but there is also an absence of the corresponding assumptions about the relation of person to social action. A clue to the Samoan notion of person is found in the popular Samoan saying *teu le vā* (take care of the relationship). Contrasted with the Greek dicta "Know thyself" or "To thine own self be true," this saying suggests something of the difference between Occidental and Samoan orientations. Lacking any epistemological bias that would lead them to focus on "things in themselves" or the essential quality of experience, Samoans instead focus on things in their relationships, and the contextual grounding of experience.

... When speaking of themselves or others, Samoans often characterize people in terms of specific "sides" (*itū*) or "parts" (*pito*) ... By parts or sides, Samoans usually mean specific connections that people bear to villages, descent groups, or titles.

(Shore, 1982:136-7)

Given such a contextual and relational theory of person and social action, it should not be surprising that in Samoa meaning is *not* conceived of as owned by the individual; rather, it is closer to what Holquist (1983) characterizes, following Bakhtin (Voloshinov, 1973), as a "we relationship," that is, as a co-operative achievement. For Samoans, *meaning is seen as the product of an interaction (words included) and not necessarily as something that is contained in someone's mind*. In engaging in interpretation, Samoans are not so much concerned with knowing someone else's intentions as with the implications of the speaker's actions/words for the web of relationships in which his life is woven.

Samoans thus do not share what Michael Silverstein (1979) typifies as the "reflectionist point of view," that is, the idea that language is mainly used for classifying and describing some pre-existing reality (either "out there" or "inside of someone's head"). It is not accidental that the Samoan word *fai* means both "say, tell" and "do, make," and that the word *uiga* means "meaning" and "behavior" (Milner, 1966:297). The examples I have discussed so far should have shown that, for Samoans, words are indeed actions. Such actions, however, do not belong to a single actor. Meaning is a mosaic that no-one can compose by himself.

In this sociocultural context, the distinction between the illocutionary and the perlocutionary force may be problematic at times, if not

irrelevant. Such a distinction implies several beliefs about human nature and social action which are not shared by Samoans. In particular, the idea that one can always distinguish between the intended meaning and the effect of someone's words implies that speakers/actors have control over their actions/words *independently* of other people's recognition of those actions/words as having a particular, conventionally defined goal. After offending someone, an American can say "I didn't mean it." This cannot be done by Samoans, given that part of what one meant *is* what the other person understands as meant. In Samoan, one does not say "you mean x?" but "is the meaning of your words x?" The latter phrase de-emphasizes the view of meaning as defined by the speaker's state of mind and accentuates instead a view of meaning as a conventional load carried by words in a given context.

Correspondingly, from the point of view of Samoan ethics, people cannot really know whether they have done wrong until someone else says so – viz. the Samoan saying *e lē iloa se tagata lona sesē* "a person does not know his own error" (see Shore, 1982:176). It is the community, others recognized and organized as institutions (*viz.* particular kinship relationships, committees, local courts, ceremonial settings) that provide social control, not the individual. More generally, this view of ethics relates to the Samoan notion of task. Samoans do not see task accomplishment as an individual achievement; instead, they see it as a joint, collective product. This point can be illustrated by the important Samoan notion of *tāpua* 'i "supporter, sympathizer." As discussed in Duranti & Ochs (1986), Samoans always see people as needing someone else to sympathize with them, to give them some support or feedback on their accomplishment. The role of the supporter is in fact institutionalized and routinely symbolized by what we call the "*mālō* exchange." When someone does something, his supporter recognizes that doing as an accomplishment by saying *mālō*. The person who performed the action or accomplished the task answers back with another *mālō*. The relationship between the actor and the supporter must thus be understood as reciprocal. The first *mālō* acknowledges the doing and the second *mālō* acknowledges the acknowledgment. This exchange implies that something is an accomplishment because of and through the recognition that others are willing to give it. In Samoan society, if a performance went well it is to the supporters' merit as much as the performers'. Thus, for instance, if the performer receives a prize or some previously established compensation, he will have to share it with his supporters.

All of these facts imply a belief in interpretation as a practical activity to be prototypically performed in the public rather than in the private sphere of self-evident rational thought. Such a belief comprehends the cognitive, the social, as well as the moral realm. "Knowledge of one's

actions must be public to some extent for one to be responsible" (Shore, 1982:175). Thus, for instance, in Samoan there is no precise translation for the English term *promise*. Milner, in his thorough Samoan dictionary, translates the English *promise* with the Samoan *fōlafōla* (1966:416). When we look at the English translation of *fōlafōla*, we find that it means; (i) announce (publicly); (ii) acknowledge (a gift) by public announcement; (iii) promise (Milner, 1966:68). The act of promising is thus characterized as a public commitment associated with particular social settings, in front of witnesses. The speaker's commitment to some future act is constituted in and by the presence of others and not simply by the speaker's intentions as represented by his words. Similarly, the noun *māvaega* which is also at times translated as "promise" – or "parting promise" in Milner's dictionary (1966:142) – refers to words said by a party before leaving and in some cases in a solemn moment. Thus it is typically used in referring to the last words pronounced by a chief before dying ("the chief's will") or to an agreement made by two parties. In the latter case, *māvaega* would be characterized as an act performed by both parties, hence a reciprocal commitment rather than a promise from one to the other. Once again, as in the *mālō* exchange mentioned above, the underlying ethos is one of joint venture and reciprocal recognition rather than unilateral, individual intentionality.

Conclusions

One obvious issue at this point is the extent to which what I have discussed about Samoan verbal interaction is restricted to political arenas or instead is pervasive across social situations. This is an important question because recent work on political language has stressed the *constitutive* or context-creating nature of political language (Myers & Brenneis, 1984; Paine, 1981). What I discussed in this chapter might then be a potentially universal yet context-specific type of relationship between words and deeds rather than a more general range of phenomena indexing the fundamentally social nature of speech. However, the local theory of meaning I have presented on the basis of political speech seems consistent with other accounts of Samoan society and culture. In particular, as demonstrated by my extensive quotes from Shore (1982), my description and understanding of Samoan interpretive procedures are consistent with Shore's ethnography and with the work on language acquisition and socialization carried out by Ochs (1982; 1984; 1988). Thus, for instance, Ochs (1982) has shown that Samoan caregivers do not engage in the kind of interaction typically observed in middle-class Anglo households. Samoan caregivers do not assign intentions to the infants' acts or vocalizations, which are instead "treated more as natural reflexes

or physiological states (e.g. hunger, discomfort, pleasure)." Furthermore, more generally, Ochs (1984) argues that across a variety of social situations, *Samoans display a dispreference for explicit guessing*. At the same time, the highly stratified nature of Samoan social life forces lower-ranking individuals to be more attentive to higher-ranking individuals' goals. To put it in our own epistemological jargon, we could say that, in Samoan society, the higher their rank the more individualistic people are allowed to be. Thus, for instance, whereas most Samoans have no exclusive access to any of the goods available within the household, a high chief can "own" certain clothes or commodities. Similarly, he can also "own," as it were, the meaning of his own words and expect others to comply with his own interpretation. While no time is usually spent to reformulate a child's possible motivations outside of the most obvious and conventional ones, people may be forced to try to guess what is going through a chief's mind. In fact, in the political arena, the act of engaging in guessing about someone else's wishes or decisions is of itself an admission of that person's authority.

Let me stress at this point that my main goal in this paper is not to argue that for Samoans the recognition of the speaker's intentions is not a legitimate route to understanding. I imagine that it could be demonstrated that there are contexts in which it is. My point is that it is not the *only* route and furthermore in some contexts the dispreferred one. Instead, Samoan social actors seem more eager to act upon conventions, consequences, actions, public image, rather than upon individual intentions. Given that human action, and speech as one aspect of it, is goal-oriented, Samoans, like any other people in the world, must interpret one another's doings as having certain ends with respect to which those doings should be evaluated and dealt with. The problem – for us, and, I would like to suggest, for them as well – lies in the extent to which, in interpreting one another's behavior, Samoans display a concern for the actors' alleged subjective reality. The fact that a society can carry on a great deal of complex social interaction without much apparent concern with people's subjective states, and with a much more obvious concern for the public, displayed, performative aspect of language is, in my opinion, an important fact which any theoretical framework concerned with the process of interpretation should take into account.

The almost exclusive concern for a subjectively defined meaning typical of some speech-act theorists and the Samoan emphasis on an intersubjective and context-minded notion of verbal communication can be reconciled only in a theoretical framework in which both the subjective and the intersubjective, the cognitive and the social aspects of communication and interpretation of reality are acknowledged, represented, and integrated. In particular, we need a theory of pragmatics that would recognize not

only the speaker's knowledge, needs and wants but also the praxis-producing co-operative work between speaker and hearer in making utterances relevant and meaningful. The notion of "recipient design" in conversation analysis, for instance, comes close to the kind of analytic tool we need in discussing these phenomena (see Goodwin 1981). Some more recent contributions highlight the work that the "audience" performs in redirecting and influencing the speaker's decisions, sometimes helping an idea or story to come out but in other moments undermining a possible narrative frame (cf. C. Goodwin 1986). Furthermore, as shown by Haviland (1986), not only do we speak *to* others and *for* others, we also speak *through* others. In some cases, certain "secondary" or "indirect" meanings of a given utterance or speech can exist only through the work that an audience would do to elaborate, report, or speculate about such implicit meanings (see Brenneis, 1986).

Such compelling phenomena and interpretations call for a theory of mind that systematically links intrapsychological processes to interpsychological ones; a theory in which language is seen as both representing and changing reality; a theory in which the individual and the social context can be seen as two sides of the same coin. The sociohistorical approach to cognition, as originally developed by the Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky and his colleagues Luria and Leontyev, seems to be a good candidate for such an enterprise. One of the basic tenets of this approach is that higher psychological processes in the individual have their origin in social interaction (see Vygotsky, 1986; 1978; Leontyev, 1981; Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition, 1983; Wertsch, 1985). Also relevant, from the point of view of our discussion, is Vygotsky's definition of language as a psychological tool: that is, an object that mediates either interpsychologically (between social actors) or intrapsychologically (within the same person). A sign, e.g. a word, a sentence, etc., is used by people to affect behavior (Vygotsky, 1978:54): "... speech not only accompanies practical activity but also plays a specific role in carrying it out" (1978:25). In this approach, speech is seen as a mediating activity that organizes experience (Vygotsky, 1986:125) rather than as a symbol of an already constituted world (whether out there or in the speakers' minds). This idea is consistent with (and probably inspired by) Marx's definition of language and consciousness as arising "from the need, the necessity, of intercourse with other men" (*The German Ideology* [1845–6] 1978:158).

Within philosophy, the Samoan theory and practice of communication has striking similarities with what is known as "hermeneutic philosophy": that is, with the view that any form of understanding is an activity which cannot consist simply in the reconstruction of the sender's original intentions and his cultural milieu, but must also consist in a constant

negotiation between past and present, sender and receiver, history and consciousness (see Gadamer, 1976). Indeed, I can't think of anything more appropriate for characterizing the Samoan view of words and social action than Gadamer's statement that "understanding is an adventure and, like any adventure, is dangerous" (1981:109-10). If you have doubts, just ask a Samoan orator, next time you meet one.

NOTES

Acknowledgements: this chapter is a revised version of a paper published with the title "Intentions, language, and social action in a Samoan context" in the *Journal of Pragmatics*, vol. 12, pp. 13-33. I would like to thank the four anonymous reviewers and the two editors of this collection for their suggestions and encouragement to revise or expand several parts of the earlier text.

The research on which this paper is based was conducted between June 1978 and June 1979 and between March and May 1981 in the village of Falefā, on the island of Upolu, in Western Samoa. Without the kindness and co-operation of the people of Falefā, my research on Samoan language and culture would have been impossible. Special thanks go to Rev. Fa'atua'olua Mauala and his wife Sau'i-luma for having accepted our research group as part of their extended family and to the many people in the village who worked with us transcribing and interpreting all kinds of potentially unintelligible utterances. From them I learned that interpretation is a joint adventure and one always goes home with more than one started with. With Elinor Ochs and Martha Platt I shared, in the field and after, funny combinations of Samoan, Italian, and American cuisine, and long hours of discussion about many of the ideas I present in this paper.

The following agencies and institutions gave financial support to my fieldwork and research on Samoan language and culture: the National Science Foundation (grants no. 53-482-2480 and BNS-8608210), the Australian National University (Research School of Pacific Studies, Department of Anthropology), and the Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche (Rome, Italy). While working on the first draft of this paper (1983-4), I was supported by a postdoctoral fellowship from the Center for Human Information Processing, at the University of California, San Diego. Invaluable comments on earlier drafts came from my colleagues at UCSD and later on at Pitzer College. In particular, I would like to thank Don Brenneis, Michael Cole, and Peg Griffin for their efforts to educate me on a number of subjects including political anthropology and Soviet activity theory.

1 Although some *matai* (hence *fono* participants) are female, the large majority are male.

2 *Transcription conventions:* I have used traditional Samoan orthography to transcribe actual speech: the letter "g" stands for a velar nasal and corresponds to what in other Polynesian languages is transcribed as "ng." The inverted apostrophe (') stands for a glottal stop. Three dots (...) indicate untimed pause, three dots between brackets ([. . .]) indicate that some material was left out, and

material between parentheses should be taken as additional information provided to ease interpretation of the text. Further information not directly available in the text is added between brackets ([]). The examples with line numbers are taken from computerized transcripts produced with a program ("SCAN") for personal computer written and kindly made available by John B. Haviland. In examples (6) and (7) I have used the following *abbreviations*: TA = tense/aspect marker; ART = article; DX = deictic particle; EXCL = exclusive; pro = pronoun.

- 3 The phrase "the two subvillages" refers to two nearby villages in the Fagaloa Bay, whose *matai* are being accused of *not* having maintained their original commitment to one of the Falefā candidates.
- 4 Further, more systematic evidence can be found in other transcripts where subsequent speakers all avoid repeating the agenda of the meeting in the introductory speeches (see Duranti, 1990).