INTENTIONS, LANGUAGE, AND SOCIAL ACTION IN A SAMOAN CONTEXT

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The universal validity of the personalist view of meaning as owned by the individual speaker and exclusively defined by his intentions is here questioned on the basis of an analysis of spontaneous verbal interaction in a politico-judiciary arena in a traditional village in Western Samoa. After relating the Samoan practice of language understanding to the Samoan notions of self and task, it is suggested that the Samoans' use of language in social interaction is more easily understood on the basis of a dialogical, interpretive, and socio-historically oriented theory of meaning than on the basis of a 'rationalistic' view in which the individual is the sole originator of knowledge and evidence.

1. Introduction

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 (cf. Searle (1983)). In this perspective, meanings (inten-

tions) 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 (cf. Clark and Carlson (1982: 54)). In this framework, other elements of the speech event are largely ignored. Thus, the addressee is usually seen as a passive spectator who can either guess it right or wrong. 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 (cf. Goodwin (1981), Gumperz (1982), Griffin and Mehan (1981), Psathas (1979), Schenkein (1978), Schegloff (1982), Streek (1980)). It also appears too limited or overtly ethnocentric to those anthropologists and linguists who have stressed the culture-specificity of such a theory of interpretation (cf. Caton (1985), Kochman (1983), Ochs (1982, 1984), Ochs and Schieffelin (1984), Paine (1981), Rosaldo (1982), Silverstein (1977, 1979), Verschueren (1983)). The work of these researchers suggests that the role 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' – which are, by definition, not conventional (cf. Austin (1962)) – could be explained in terms of local norms concerning human nature and human society. The conventionality of certain acts and their interpretations is thus 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. Furthermore, 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 (cf. Bourdieu (1977)) and ritual insults among Blacks (cf. Kochman (1983)) are well-known examples of such cases.

In this paper, I will continue within this 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 psychological state) 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 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 will 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 will 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 mirrors the Samoan theory of task as a cooperative, albeit hierarchically structured, enterprise. Rather than taking words as representations of privately owned meanings, Samoans practice interpretation as a way of publicly controlling social relationships rather than as a way of figuring out what a given person 'meant to say'. Once uttered in a given context, words are interpreted with respect to some new reality they help to fashion rather than with respect to the supposedly intended subjective content. This is related to the fact that the consequences of a given act are often more important to Samoans than its original circumstances. Furthermore, in many social contexts, it is not the individual actor but his dramatis persona that is to be considered as the reference point. As a whole, the Samoan theory of how to do things with words is much more dialogical than usually accepted by contemporary speech act theorists. As is to be expected, the Samoan theory of meaning and interpretation is grounded in local theories of knowledge, self and task which are different from commonly assumed Western epistemologies and theories of social action. At the end of the paper, I will suggest that the Samoan and the 'Western' theory represented by the notion of intentional meaning can perhaps be reconciled within the larger theoretical context of a socio-historically oriented approach 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 identity and accountability are contextually and cooperatively 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. In particular, my description and understanding of Samoan interpretive procedure is consistent with Shore's (1982) ethnography and with the work on Samoan language acquisition and socialization carried out by Ochs (1982, 1984).

The analysis presented here assumes Geertz's (1973) idea of *culture as a semiotic system*, that is, a system of symbols that communicates (to its own members) a theory of reality and, at the same time, provides the intellectual and material tools for dealing with social life.

2. The fono

All the examples of oratory in this paper are taken from transcripts of a particular kind of social event called *fono* (cf. Duranti (1981a, 1981b)). There are many different kinds of fono or meetings in Samoan society (cf. Larkin

(1971)). The kind I will be discussing in this paper is the special convocation of a deliberative assembly of title holders or *matai* – chiefs and oratores – which, as typical of similar events in other 'traditional' societies (cf. Comaroff and Roberts (1981), acts both as a high court – which deals only with crimes involving *matai* – and as a legislative body, which can make, ratify, and abrogate laws, or 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 (cf. Duranti (1981a,b, 1983)), 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 the political over other realms or modes of interaction in Samoan communities, the fono is emblematic of much of Samoan adult life (cf. Mead (1930)).

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). A fono is a highly antagonistic arena in which different powerful groups and individuals try to control one another's political actions. It is thus hard for participants to predict what the final outcome of a meeting will be. In such a context, it may be convenient to be cautious, humble and vague. At the same time, there might also 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.

3. The role of personal intentions in the assessment of responsibility

A Samoan orator can gain prestige and material gratification in speaking for a powerful and wealthy party or in his support, but he may also get in trouble and risk retaliation if something 'goes wrong' in the transaction. 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 can be made are the relationship between the orator and the party he is seen as representing as well as the practical consequences of his words. The orator's own understanding of the events or his personal motivations may well be irrelevant. Generally, Samoans do not evoke 'good will'. They accept instead the consequences of having partaken 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 ethnography of Samoa:

"... 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 directly deal with the circumstances created by his words and cannot hide behind his alleged original intentions. In Samoan, one cannot say "I didn't mean it". The need to deal with the reality created by speech sometimes means that the distinction between the sender and the addressor is not as sharp as in our (Western) culture, where a 'messenger' should not be held responsible for what he says.

An example of the way in which Samoans operate is provided below, in an excerpt from a meeting in which one of the two highest ranking orators, Iuli, propose to fine the orator Loa for having announced, a few weeks earlier, that the newly re-elected district M.P., Fa'amatuaainu (shortened to 'Inu' in example (3) below), was going to present some goods to the village assembly. Since the M.P. 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.

(1) (Fono April 7, 1979, III, p. 81)[1]
    Iuli: 'O le makaa'upu gei e uiga iaa Loa. ...
        'This topic is about Loa. ...'

        Kusa 'o le aso ga- pokopoko ai lo kaakou gu'u
        'About the day our village got together'

        e fa'akali le faipule. ...
        'to wait for the M.P. ...'

        'o mea fa'apea 'o se luma o se gu'u.
        'Things like that are a humiliation for a village.'

    Loa: Maalie!
        'Well said!'

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[1] *Transcription conventions:* I have used traditional Samoan orthography with the exception of long vowels which I have transcribed phonemically as two identical vowels. The letter 'g' stands for a velar nasal and corresponds to what in other Polynesian languages is transcribed as 'ng'. The apostrophe (') stands for a glottal stop. Three dots (...) indicate untimed pause, three dots between square 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 square brackets ([]). In examples (6) and (7) I have used the following abbreviations: TA = tense/aspect marker; ART = article; DX = deictic particle; EXCL = exclusive.

Iuli: Ma e:- 'ua ka'uvalea lo kaakou gu'u. ...
'And our village is ridiculed. ...'

'Ua fiu le kaakou gu'u e kakali. ...
'Our village was tired of waiting. ...'

Le ai se faipule e sau. ...
'the M.P. did not come. ...'

'Ae se'i gofogofo Loa alu amai se mea e kaumafa
'But Loa just sits there (instead of) bringing some food'

ma le gu'u.
'for the village.'

Loa: Maalie!
'Well said!'

Iuli: 'O lo'u lea kalikoguga ...
'This is what I believe ...'

(ka)kau ga sala Loa.
'Loa should be fined.'

[...]

'Ae kakau oga fai maukigoa
'(He) should have made sure'

auaa e 'aaiga Loa ma- ma Igu.
'Because Loa and- and Inu [= the M.P.] are related.'

[Talking to Loa] 'Afai 'ua fai age ia,
'If he said that to you,'

Ia. Sa kakau oga makuaa ma'oki ...
'Well, one must be very clear about it. ...'

gi mea e fa'akaumafa ai le gu'u ga- ga amai la 'ea,
'bring something for the village to eat then (Loa),'

pe 'aa lee sau le faipule. ...
'if the M.P. doesn't come....

[...]

Mea lea 'ua fai e Loa. ...
'This is what Loa did. ...

'A le povi, iaa Loa ma le selau kalaa.
'Perhaps a cow, from Loa and 100 dollars.' [A heavy fine]

Alu 'ese ma le gu'u!
'Get out of the village!'

Loa: Maalie!
      'Well said!'

Iuli's arguments for holding Loa responsible are the following: He created a situation that ridiculed the village matai; he is related to the M.P.; when he saw that the M.P. was not coming, he should have done something to remedy the village loss of face.

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? Iuli then reconstructs the events:

(2) (Fono April 7, 1979, III, p. 85)
    Iuli: [...] 'o loa 'ua sau kala'i le kaakou gu'u
           '[...] Loa came (to) summon our village'

           e fogo- ma pokopoko. La'a sau le faipule.
           'to have a meeting and gather together. The M.P. was going to come.'

           e amai loga momoli ...
           'to bring his contribution ...'

           Ia. Oga pokopoko lea 'o le kaakou falefiku.
           'So our seven subvillages get together.'

           Leai se isi e o'o iaa Fagaloa ma Falevao
           'Nobody stays behind from Fagaloa and Falevao.'

           ma kagaka uma o le kaakou gofoaala ...
           'and all the people from our subvillages ...'

           pokopoko. 'Ua fiu 'ua alu legaa aso 'o kakali
           'get together. (We are) tired of waiting the whole day'

           leai se faipule 'o sau ma se mea ...
           'the M.P. does not come (and) nothing (is given to us) ...'

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' (cf. Milner (1966)) given that he and the M.P. are relatives. In this case, as in other ones that I witnessed, the relationship between social actors is seen as crucial for evaluating responsibilities.

The discussion of the case is eventually suspended 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 M.P. and this matter may be then solved along with other problems). No one challenges Iuli's accusations by introducing the issue of Loa's motivations or

his possible intentions. The consequences of the orator's words are instead discussed, more specifically, the fact that his words are seen as having caused the inconvenience of important people and contributed to their public loss of face. Furthermore, Loa is said to be responsible because of his family relationship with the M.P. Loa's conventional agreements *maalie!* 'well said' throughout Iuli's speech rythmically indicate Loa's preoccupation with the seriousness of the accusation.

4. Getting reprimanded for being too direct

Orators can also get reprimanded for being too direct or for expressing an opinion that can be defined as 'wrong' or 'inappropriate' in the light of later developments.

For instance, in one of the fono I recorded, there was some discussion about whether the young chief Savea should or should not pursue his court case against the district M.P. Inu. Most members of the village council felt that to confront the M.P. directly in the central court could seriously damage the already precarious relationship with the nearby village of Lufilufi where the M.P. 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:

(3) (Fono April 7, book III, p. 21)
　　Fa'aonu'u: [...] 'o lea laa 'ou ke fa'amaluuluu aku ai
　　　　　　　　'Now I would like to excuse myself for this'

　　　　　　　　i lau koofaa le makua Moe'ogo ...
　　　　　　　　'with your Highness the senior orator Moe'ono ...'

　　　　　　　　Ia e fa'apea fo'i 'Aaiga gei ma kagaka o le Kuiaakua,
　　　　　　　　'as well as with the chiefs and the orators,'

　　　　　　　　... ka'akia ia le makaa'upu a Savea ma- ...
　　　　　　　　'... drop this issue of Savea and- ...'

　　　　　　　　le koofaa iaa Igu.
　　　　　　　　'His Highness Inu.' [= the M.P.]

　　　　　　　　Laa ke oo i le Maaloo ...
　　　　　　　　'Let them go to court ...

Later on in the meeting, however, the chief Savea, under pressure from some important members of the council, agrees 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:

(4) (Fono April 7, 1979, book III, p. 90)

Moe'ono; [...] 'ou ke kaukala aku fo'i Fa'aogu'u iaa ke 'oe, ...
'I am also talking to you Fa'aonu'u, ...'

mea lea e leaga ai le- le alualu i galuega sau fo'i
'this thing is bad of going away to work and then coming back' [you do not fully participate in village affairs]

ua- ... pei 'o agaleilaa
'... as for before'

'o le 'a koe aga'i kua lo'u kaofi ...
'my opinion is going to reach back' [to what you said before]

'o le- 'o le makaa'upu 'ua fikoikogu i lou kou falekua
'the- the topic that concerns your subvillage,' [the chief Savea's courtcase against the M.P. from Lufilufi]

kaofiofi le i'u maea ...
'moderate yourself ...'

'ae 'aua le luaiga laalaa mai fa'amaka o Avi'i lou ka-
'and don't show off your op(inion) like the crab that has eyes sticking out'

A'o lea 'ua aliali gei
'Now it seems (that)'

[...]

'ua fausia e Savea le- le figagalo
'Savea has agreed' [i.e. he has changed his mind]

e fai aku iai iga ia kaakou feiloa'i ma Lufilufi. ...
'to say that we should meet with Lufilufi [Where the M.P. lives]. ...'

Ko'a le fa'aukaga. ...
'Hold the advice. ...

Ko'a le fa'aukaga. ...
'Hold the advice. ...'

E leai fo'i se isi Fa'aonu'u
'There is no other Fa'aonu'u'

'o 'oe ga'o 'oe aa 'o Fa'aonu'u.
'You only 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 suggests that one of the reasons for having orators speak first or on behalf of a chief, a fairly common practice in Polynesia (cf. 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 thus protected by having the lower ranking orator to expose himself to potential retaliation and loss of face. The complementary relationship between chiefs and orators (cf. Shore (1982)), however, allows the orator to 'get back' at his chief in a more private context, 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.

5. Announcing the agenda of the meeting: Sharing responsibility for changing the world with words

The kind of interaction discussed above implies a strong belief in the power of words. Words do not simply describe the world or someone's (good or bad) intentions. Words bring about changes in people's lives and actions. They can make enemies, and friends, they can give or take away prestige and material wealth. There are several verbal strategies adopted by Samoan orators for dealing with the potentially dangerous power of words.

One way of protecting oneself against retaliation, punishment or blame is that of avoiding public commitment to a given cause. The simplest strategy is, of course, silence. An orator may simply avoid talking in any detail about what he considers a dangerous topic or a delicate issue. In some cases, however, the speaker may be forced to speak because of his role in the proceedings or his positional identity in the village. 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 the village delivers a formal speech, called *laauga* (cf. Duranti (1983)). In this speech, there is a part, toward the end, dedicated to the announcement of the agenda of the meeting (*mataa'upu o le fono*). The same orator who might 'show off' his knowledge of oratorial formulas and ancient metaphors in other parts of his speech tends to be very succinct 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 chairman of the meeting might remind him, as shown below:

(5) (Fono April 7, 1979, book II, p. 11) (Context: the first orator has just concluded the introductory speech leaving out the mention of the agenda)

    First   [Ending his speech] Maguia le aofia ma le fogo!
    Orator: 'Good luck to the assembly and the fono!'

?:   ( )kai / / fekalai.
      'thank you / / (for your honorable) speech.'

Chairman: 'O aa makaa'upu o le fogo?
          'What are the topics of the fono?'

          Fai mai makaa'upu / / o le fogo.
          'Tell us the topics / / of the fono.'

First   'O le makaa'upu
Orator: 'The topic'

          o le aofia ma le fogo, ... Ia e fa'akakau kogu lava
          'of the assembly and the fono ... really centers around'

          i lo kaakou Falelua ... oga pau ga 'o makaa'upu.
          'the two subvillages[2] ... That's it for the topics.'

Chairman: Oi! [Conventional marker of repair initiation]
          'Oh!'

First   [Softly] E aa?
Orator: 'What?'

Chairman: [Softly] 'O le isi makaa'upu o Savea.
          'Thé other topic about Savea.'

First   Ia. 'o le isi fo'i makaa'upu e uiga i le- ...
Orator: 'Right. There is also another topic about ...'

          le Afioga iaa Savea 'ogo 'o – 'o le laa: ...
          'His Highness Savea 'cause- the::-'

          mea fo'i ma Fa'amakuaaigu.
          'thing there with Fa'amatuaainu.'

          Go 'ua kukulu Savea i- ... i le Maaloo ...
          ''Cause Savea has complained ... to the Government ...'

          Ia (iga) 'ua ka'ua gi fa'akosiga
          'Given that some (illegal) campaigning has been said (to occur)'

          (a) Fa'amakuaa'igu i le paloka, ...
          'of Fa'amatuaa'inu for the elections ...'

          iai fo'i gisi makaa'upu o lo'o lee maua ...
          '(if) there are some other topics (I) didn't get ...'

          Ia. La'a maua i luma.
          'Well, they will be brought to the floor.'

[2] The phrase "the two subvillages" refers to two nearby villages, whose matai are being accused of not having maintained their original commitment to one of the candidates in the political elections.

> *?:*   Maaloo!
>   'Well done!'
>
> *Chairman:* Ia. Fa'afekai aku [NAME] ... 'ua 'ee fa'amaga le fogo
>   'So. Thank you [NAME] ... for starting the fono'
>
>   [...]

The fact that a simple reminder such as 'the other topic about Savea' is sufficient for the first orator to remember Savea's case suggests that he might have known but did not want to be the one to initiate the announcement.[3] His reluctance can be better understood once we interpret the announcement of the agenda not simply as a statement DESCRIBING A FACT about the world, but also, in Austin's (1962) terms, as a PERFORMATIVE, that is, as *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 difficult 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 chairman of the meeting, in jointly performing the act.

6. Group identity, individuals and dramatis personae

In a fono, opinions are often framed as delivered on behalf of a group. We thus often find speakers shifting between the first person singular 'I' (*'ou* or *a'u*) and the first person plural exclusive 'we' *maakou*. The use of *maakou* 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) (April 7, II, p. 22)
>   ... mca fo/i lea maakou   ke- ... 'avaku   ai fo'i se   vaimaaluu.
>   thing also that we-EXCL TA   give+DX Pro also ART soothingwater
>   '... (as for) that thing we are ... (trying to) soothe (you).'
>   Or
>   '... (as for) that matter we are ... advising you not to be hasty.'

(7) (Jan. 25, I, p. 80)
>   *Tui:* a'o legei fo'i 'ua maakou   fa'alogologo aku
>   but this also TA we-EXCL listen   DX
>   'But now we have just listened'

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[3] 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.

    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 Falefaa (Upolu, Western Samoa), where I recorded the meetings, 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 March 17, 1979, pp. 46-7)
    Vave: 'Ou ke fefe ma 'ou maka'u.
        'I am afraid and I fear.'

        'O le aa le agasala a le gu'u iaa 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 mamaa Vave e le ai sagâ'upu fai fa'apegaa
        '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) (Jan. 25, 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: 'Auaa 'o 'upu a Moe'ogo e lee 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 groupness
relationship 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 persona is of
course not restricted to Samoa. Thus, for instance, in discussing the notion of
self in Bali, Geertz 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." (Geertz (1983: 62))

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

7. Intentions, self and meaning

Contemporary cultural anthropologists have often suggested that local theories
of meaning should be described and analyzed in the context of local theories of
self and social action (cf. Geertz (1983), Myers and Brenneis (1984), Rosaldo
(1982), Shore (1982)). Thus, the distinction we often draw between sender and
addressor might be related to the belief that people should be held responsible
only for those acts (and words) that can be clearly seen as reflecting their own

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". 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 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." (Ito (1985: 301))

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 vaa* (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' (*ituu*) or 'parts' (*pito*) [...]. By parts or sides, Samoans usually mean specific connections that people bear to villages, descent groups, or titles." (Shore (1982: 136–137))

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 (cf. Voloshinov (1973)), as a 'we relationship', that is, as a cooperative 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 much 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' (cf. 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 the speaker/actor has control over his 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 thus 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 intentions 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 lee iloa se tagata lona sesee* 'a person does not know his own error' (cf. 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 *taapua'i* 'supporter, sympathizer'. As discussed in Duranti and 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 '*maaloo* exchange'. When someone does something, his supporter recognizes that doing as an accomplishment by saying *maaloo*. The person who performed the action or accomplished the task answers back with another *maaloo*. The relationship between the actor and the supporter must thus be understood as reciprocal. The first *maaloo* acknowledges the doing and the second *maaloo* acknowledges the acknowledgment. This exchange implies that something is an accomplish-

ment 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 (1972: 175)). Thus, for instance, in Samoan there is no special term for 'promise'. Milner, in his thorough Samoan dictionary, translates the English *promise* with the Samoan *foolafola* (1966: 416). When we look at the English translation of *foolafola*, 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. 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.

8. 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 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 (cf. Myers and Brenneis (1984), Paine (1981)). What I discussed in this paper 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.

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 is consistent with Shore's ethnography and with the work on language acquisition and socialization carried out by Ochs (1982, 1984). Thus, for instance, Ochs (1982) has shown that Samoan caregivers do not engage in the kind of interaction typically observed in White Middle Class Anglo households. Samoan caregivers do not assign intentions to the infants' acts or vocalizations, which are instead "treated more as natural reflexes of 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. In general, it seems that 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.

My main point 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 that participants 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 each other'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 each other's behavior, Samoans display a concern for the actor's 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 cooperative work between speaker and hearer in making utterances relevant and meaningful (cf. the papers in Duranti and Brenneis (1986)).

Such a perspective calls 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 *socio-historical approach* to cognition, as originally developed by the Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky and his colleagues Luria and Leont'ev, 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 (cf. Vygotsky (1962, 1978), LCHC (1981), Wertsch

(1986)). 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 actors) or intrapsychologically (within the same person). A sign, e.g. a word, a sentence, is used by people to affect behavior (cf. Vygotsky (1978: 54)). "... speech not only accompanies practical activity but also plays a specific role in carrying it out" (Vygotsky (1978: 25)).

In this approach, speech is seen as a mediating activity that organizes experience (cf. Vygotsky (1962: 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" (Marx and Engels (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 simply consist in the reconstruction of the sender's original intentions and his cultural milieu, but also consists in a constant negotiation between past and present, sender and receiver, history and consciousness (cf. 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: 109–110). If you have doubts, just ask a Samoan orator, next time you meet one.

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