# politics and grammar: agency in Samoan political discourse

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Over 50 years ago, Sapir (1938) suggested that anthropology needed the psychiatrist. Fifteen years ago Hymes (1974) suggested that linguistics needed the sociologist. In this article, I hope to show that anthropology needs the grammarian. This collaboration is necessary for an understanding of the role of language in framing relationships between social actors and events both in mundane interaction and in those political and legal processes that constitute the "system" social anthropologists eagerly try to understand.

Such an integration of linguistic and social perspectives is in fact at the very heart of contemporary linguistic anthropology, a discipline that has been challenging theoretical, methodological, and institutional boundaries between descriptive and formal linguistics, on the one side, and sociocultural anthropology, on the other, while trying to build what Sherzer (1987) has aptly called "a discourse-centered approach to language and culture." At a moment in which some of the basic methodologies of both linguistics and anthropology are being critically reconsidered, linguistic anthropology may provide some valuable suggestions and guidance to those interested in the empirical study of the emergence and reconstitution of social order and ideology in human interaction. Indeed, if, as some psychologists argue (cf. Cole 1985; Lave 1988; LCHC 1983; Leontyev 1981; Vygotsky 1978; Wertsch 1985), human cognition is a social process, it cannot be understood simply by looking at individuals isolated from their interaction with other humans in specific activities; we must instead look more closely at the microgenesis of political processes in order to understand how individual actors collectively and routinely build what we are used to calling the "political consciousness" or "worldview" of a given community. We are in a position now to continue, at a more sophisticated grammatical level, the work initiated by those ethnographers who in the last decade or so have been engaged in detailed description of the linguistic *work* (Rossi-Landi 1968) done by social actors to constitute juridico-political processes (cf. Bloch 1975; Brenneis 1988; Brenneis and Myers 1984; Watson-Gegeo and White 1990).

In this article, I will contribute to this research trend by providing a case study of the representation of "agency" meant as the causal relationship between participants' actions and certain states of affairs or processes. I will show that the particular ways in which agency is grammatically expressed in Samoan political discourse are connected not only to different points of view or frames (cf. Fillmore 1968, 1975, 1977), but, more fundamentally, to local political

*This article proposes that we integrate ethnographic with grammatical analysis in order to study the constitution of "agency" in legal and political discourse. Much of the political and juridical process of conflict management in a Samoan fono involves the definition of certain "facts" and the assignment of certain semantic roles to key participants. Morpho-syntactic elements of Samoan grammar hence become powerful tools in the political arena, where social actors compete by either constituting or resisting definitions of agency. [language, political and legal anthropology, discourse analysis, Samoa]*

praxis. Linguistic, or morpho-syntactic and lexical, encoding of agency is an important aspect of the politics of representation in any given community. In Foucault's (1980, 1989) terms, such resources are part of the local "technology of power": they constitute local authority and local hierarchies. Methodologically, I will suggest that by paying close attention to how speakers encode participants' roles and how they frame events, political and social anthropologists can enrich the ways in which they discriminate between nominal and actual power relations in any given community.

The thesis of this study is that much of the political and judiciary, hence ethical, process in conflict management contexts involves the creation of relatively short narrative passages in which certain "facts" are constructed and certain actors are assigned particular semantic roles, namely, as agents. While recreating the scenario where this happens, we have the opportunity to reconsider the rhetorical strategies that contribute to the definition of certain events as relevant or important and of certain political figures as "leaders" or "movers." Through this methodology, we can acquire a critical sensitivity to the threads of discourse that both sustain and challenge what Giddens (1979, 1984) has called "duality of structure"—namely, the dialogical relationship between local levels of action and larger socioeconomic structures. We thus become accustomed to the nuances of the creation of the social order from within the system.

## the setting: the Samoan *fono*

The setting for this study is a social event in Samoan society called the *fono* (cf. Duranti 1981a, 1981b, 1984; Holmes 1986; Larkin 1971; Mead 1930; Shore 1977, 1982). There are several types of *fono* in Samoa. The particular type of *fono* discussed here is a politico-judiciary meeting of titled individuals, or *matai*, who gather to remedy a crisis or, in their own words, "make the village beautiful again" *(teuteu le nu'u)* after some event, such as a conflict among the leaders or a crime, has disrupted the ideal "social harmony" *(fealofani)* among various components of the social system—title holders, families, subvillages, villages, districts.

In 1979, over a period of several months, I had the opportunity to participate in and audiotape a number of consecutive *fono* in the village of Falefā, on the island of Upolu in Western Samoa. All the meetings recorded centered around crises related to one major event, the election of the district Member of Parliament (cf. Duranti 1981a). During the same period, I also audio-recorded other social events where oratory was used as an integral part of the performed ritual (for example, exchanges of dowry and bridewealth, installations of chiefly titles) and everyday conversations among both titled and untitled people. All of the tapes were transcribed *in situ* with the help of competent native speakers-participants. In some cases, I conducted extensive interviews with *fono* participants to obtain background information for the interpretation of the speeches delivered during the meetings. This extensive corpus, combined with the household verbal interaction recorded and transcribed by Elinor Ochs and Martha Platt for their longitudinal study of child language acquisition and socialization (cf. Ochs 1988; Platt 1982), provides a reasonable range of occasions through which to analyze the form and function of political oratory in a traditional Samoan community. It is from this corpus that I have extracted the specific cases and examples I will discuss in this article.

**a note on transcription**  Samoan has two phonological registers: *tautala lelei*, or "Good Speech," used for writing and for speaking during Western-inspired activities such as schooling events; and *tautala leaga*, or "Bad Speech," used in both formal and informal traditional activities such as talk among intimates and ritual speeches (cf. Duranti 1981a; Duranti and Ochs 1986; Ochs 1985, 1988; Shore 1982). In "Bad Speech" the sounds /t/ and /n/ disappear and in their place /k/ and /ŋ/ (written "g") are used. This means that in "Bad Speech" a word like *talo* (taro) is pronounced /kalo/ and a name like Alesana is pronounced /Alesaŋa/ (written here

"Alesaga"). In this article, I have used "Good Speech" when I mention Samoan words out of context, but I have left the "Bad Speech" pronunciation any time it occurred in my transcripts of actual talk. To distinguish between the two, when discussing specific linguistic forms, I have used obliques to mark words or phrases taken from transcripts. The same word may thus be found in two different versions: for example, *le Atua* and /le Akua/ (the Lord or God) or *fono* and /fogo/ (meeting or council).[1]

**participants** As is well known, Samoan society is highly stratified (cf. Mead 1930; Sahlins 1958; Shore 1982). The *fono* as an institution is seen by Samoans themselves as representing the hierarchical social structure of the society as a whole—with its distinctions between titled *(matai)* and untitled *(taulele'a)* people, between chiefs *(ali'i)* and orators *(tulafale)*, between higher- and lower-ranking titles. These relationships are symbolized in different forms of public behavior and different codes of etiquette, including seating arrangements, rights to speak, and expected roles in the political arena. In the *fono* I recorded, only *matai* (both chiefs and orators) could participate. Although, according to Samoan custom, it is the right and duty of a title holder to participate in such gatherings, in fact, in my experience, only about 30 percent of the village title holders would attend *fono* at any given time; attendance was, indeed, one of the problems addressed at some of the meetings. With one exception (see the discussion of examples 14 and 17a, below), only men participated in the meetings I recorded. This is quite common in Samoa, where women can in principle hold titles but rarely do and even more rarely participate in a meeting of the kind I discuss in this article (they are, however, active in other kinds of political and administrative bodies). In Falefa, a meeting is called by one of the two senior orators *(Matua)* in the village, who instructs a lower-ranking orator to take the message *('ave le pagi)* to the relevant parties (namely, those who are being summoned for a particular case and must be present and those who are too far away—in another village, say—to hear about it). The rest of the village *matai* (who are likely to have heard by word of mouth earlier in the week) are summoned by the blowing of a shell along the main road on the morning of the meeting. After an opening kava ceremony, one of the senior orators usually brings the charge (in the case of an accusation) or introduces the issue (in the case of a political decision) to the assembly.[2] In the discussion that follows, only some of the participants take the floor (usually the orators sitting in the front part of the house). During that discussion, one of the senior orators acts as what we might call the "chairman" of the meeting, regulating the turns at talk, calling in witnesses and defendants, and declaring the meeting commenced or over. When a consensus is reached or no consensus seems possible, the highest-ranking chief present speaks on behalf of the village chiefs *('aiga)* and, after summarizing the main points of the debate, presents the chiefs' opinion *(afioga* or *finagalo)*, which is usually a binding decision. Usually talk continues after the chief's speech, during which time different participants have a chance to refine their positions, apologize, offer reconciliatory statements, and assign specific fines if necessary. The actual meeting usually lasts a couple of hours and closes, if kava is still available, with a kava ceremony (cf. Duranti 1981a, 1981b).

**goals of a *fono*** Samoans see a *fono* as a context for reconciliation through talk *(talanoa)*. Such a reconciliation, which aims at reestablishing a community's lost or threatened "mutual love" *(fealofani)*, is minimally based on an acceptable understanding of the reason for the meeting and on an assessment of responsibility for the current crisis (cf. Duranti 1990; Myers and Brenneis 1984). This may or may not involve questions about truth, such as, "Did so-and-so do this?" (On similar matters, cf. Gluckman 1972; Hill In press; Lindstrom In press.) In a *fono*, participants strive to reach a consensus on the best solution for the community as a whole— the consensus may be a fine, a plan for future action, a public policy, or a recognition of the fact that no agreement can be reached and a decision either to drop the matter or to discuss it further on some other occasion.

In order to achieve these goals, the participants must resolve a problem which is at least partly linguistic in nature: they must arrive at a verbal definition of the reason for the meeting (see next section). The articulation of "Why are we here now?" typically coincides with, on the one hand, an understanding of the circumstances and nature of the crisis they have been called to solve, and, on the other hand, an understanding of the role(s) to be attributed to each of the parties involved qua social agents—that is, qua participants capable of causing certain states of affairs or certain changes. At the same time, the need to clarify the reason clashes with the desire to avoid other problems participants might encounter from committing themselves to a particular version of the facts. As we shall see, assignment of agency is done in subtle but effective ways through the strategic use of particular grammatical forms that recurrently index participants' institutional roles and their perceived authority.

**the unfolding of the story**  That one should be able to read, as if on a map, the outline of the Samoan social system in the structure of the fono is certainly not news. Mead (1930) pointed out that the fono represents an ideal structure from which the basic scheme for understanding the architecture of other Samoan social subsystems can be easily derived. Shore (1982) has analyzed in detail the function of the fono vis-à-vis the systems of meanings and social relationships that reside both inside and outside it. I have discussed (Duranti 1981a) the relationship between fono discourse organization and the social organization of the polity it both presupposes and instantiates. In this article I investigate specific discourse resources (of a morpho-syntactic nature) used in fono to characterize events and assign agency to various participants or social actors.

**framing the issue: tellings and retellings of the agenda**  In a fono, the agenda and its background events are told and progressively reframed from one speaker to the next or from one speaker's turn to his subsequent turn. Over time, fuller accounts are presented and more specific claims made about individuals' and groups' responsibilities vis-à-vis a certain dispute or alleged crime. Throughout the proceedings, participants work to negotiate accountability for the crisis the council of chiefs and orators has been called to resolve. It is the thesis of this article that in an event such as the fono, which is defined largely by and through verbal activity (by professional speechmakers), the political struggle takes to a large extent the form of a linguistic problem. That is, much of the negotiation process is about how to tell or, in some cases, not to tell a story, how to mention or not to mention a certain event, how to define a certain participant's role. Thus, the struggle between prosecution and defense often centers on the ability to frame the "inciting event" (or "the reason for the meeting") as involving or not involving certain key social actors. A careful examination of the ways participants retell and work out the background knowledge that has brought them together suggests that the search for a solution to the crisis is often a search for an acceptable definition of the reason(s) for the meeting. For the participants, "Why are we here today?" is not a routine rhetorical question. It is the question of the event. The grammatical framing used to answer this question reflects the stance a speaker takes vis-à-vis the issues or accusations. In this context, there is no neutral reconstruction or reporting of past events. As argued by Lindstrom (In press), the construction of what counts as "true" in verbal disputes on Tanna Island, Vanuatu, is a significant locus for negotiating power, which must match appropriate domains of discourse with expected rights, duties, and responsibilities. In the Samoan fono, similarly, there is no storytelling for the sake of storytelling. There are accusations to be made or avoided, there is blame or mitigation, there are short narratives in which someone is made into either a willful agent or an ignorant victim. As we shall see, each grammatical choice made by a speaker becomes important. First, I will concentrate on how the agenda of the meeting is announced and negotiated.

**to tell or not to tell the story**  In a fono, a section of the first speech is dedicated to announcing the meeting's agenda (matā'upu o le fono). This section comes rather late in the speech,

right after the lengthy ceremonial greetings of all major families in the village *(fa'atūlouga)* and before the speech's final section, which is the wishing of good health to the chiefs and orators who are present *(fa'amatafi lagi)* (cf. Duranti 1981a, 1981b). Its embedding between those two highly complimentary parts, where the sacredness of the addressees is acknowledged and celebrated, already hints at the difficult character of the agenda. The announcement of the agenda is at once a report about some past events and a recognition of the troublesome nature of those events (Duranti 1990). In announcing the topics of the day, the first orator is also hinting at a public accusation. Since the *fono* deals only with conflicts or crimes involving titled individuals, the announcer is usually in the peculiar position of having to make or insinuate a possible accusation about a party whom he should honor or protect.[3] This conflict is typically dealt with through one basic strategy: "Say the least." In the meetings I recorded, this strategy took one of two forms: (1) "Be vague," or (2) "Don't say anything at all about the topic of discussion," with the former being preferred to the latter. Let us briefly look at each of the two "solutions."

*First solution: Be vague.* When the agenda is mentioned in the first speech, we typically find very general descriptions of the events that have precipitated the meeting. The vagueness itself is in fact negotiable, as in one of the meetings I recorded, where the senior orator Moe'ono repeatedly asked the first orator to reformulate the agenda until at last he began to produce more specific statements.

*Second solution: Don't say anything.* The most extreme case of the "say the least" strategy is silence—that is, the first orator skips the part of his speech which should be dedicated to announcing the topics of the meeting.

To the extent to which these two strategies appear to be violations of one of Grice's (1975) maxims of cooperative behavior, "be informative," they are but an example of polite behavior in face-threatening situations, as predicted by Brown and Levinson (1978). The speakers seem to be trying to save the public "face" of those being tried. But this interpretation is problematic or at least only partially accurate, as later in the meeting there will be occasions for plenty of face-threatening acts against key defendants (cf. Duranti 1981a, 1988, 1990). It is only at the beginning of the meeting that even the most powerful and outspoken speaker may be vague. This and other factors suggest that the vagueness of the first announcement of the agenda is conventional and not due to the fact that definition of the offenses or the crisis may be face-threatening to some specific party. Another possible interpretation is that the agenda is an "abstract"—in Labov's (1972) sense—of a narrative yet to come and that, therefore, the speaker should not or perhaps cannot "give out" the details of the story. Such a narrative does not yet exist in anyone's mind, at least in the shape it will take during the meeting; its form and content are negotiable and must be collaboratively constructed by the participants, bit by bit, speaker after speaker, turn by turn. As was strongly asserted by one of the senior orators in a meeting where he was scolding the title holders from a particular subvillage for not attending meetings, "It is the government by many that makes a village safe" ("'/'o le ko'akele o faipule e saogalēmū ai se gu'u"). This view implies a succession of speakers, each bringing the wisdom of his own experience and the weight of his title.

From this perspective, to be informative at the beginning of the meeting would be the opposite of being "collaborative." It would preempt what is in fact both the style and the goal of the *fono* as part of a social drama (cf. Turner 1984)—namely, the "slow disclosure" (cf. Ochs, Smith, and Taylor 1989; Sharff 1982) of the inciting events and their assessment vis-à-vis the normative order they challenge. A detailed narrative at the time of the announcement would imply that the issue had already been resolved. It would assume an agreement that should not be taken for granted. It is precisely the uncertainty of a final solution that gives meaning and value to the interaction (cf. Bourdieu 1977).

Thus, in a *fono*, it is rare to hear one person tell a long and detailed story about the event(s) that have brought about a present crisis. Usually, instead, bits and pieces of the events will be revealed through a variety of grammatical and discursive frames. The choices that a speaker

makes in referring to an event not only support a particular view of the event, they also constitute (that is, both entail and instantiate) a particular stance vis-à-vis the issue at hand. Indirectly, such choices may reinforce a certain image of the speaker's role and stature in the political arena. This means that the linguistic frames (cf. Fillmore 1975, 1977) for a particular event in the *fono* must be explained both as communicative strategies intended to insure an adequate "flow" of information (cf. Chafe 1980; Du Bois 1987) and as social acts that index political positions and particular claims to power. They have pragmatic and metapragmatic functions (cf. Silverstein 1985a, 1985b), in that they not only tell us about the events, they also say something about what the events mean to the speaker and what they should mean to the audience. The differences in the ways in which various social actors choose to tell or describe the facts are relevant for our understanding of the relation between discourse and social structure on the one hand and discourse and political process on the other. In the next section I will introduce some of the grammatical resources Samoan speakers use to frame events and participants' roles.

## grammatical structures as framing devices

Languages offer a variety of resources for describing events, states, properties, and relations in and with the world. Thus, for instance, in English the following three sentences may be seen as describing roughly "the same" event:

1. The message has been delivered.
2. The first orator has delivered his message.
3. We have received a message from the first orator.

Each of these three sentences presents a slightly different framing of the event (cf. Fillmore 1975, 1977). Furthermore, each of them commits the speaker to slightly different claims about what happened and about the participant structure of the reported event. The role of the orator, for example, varies from nonexistent in example 1 (it may or may not be known from the context), to directly involved and initiating the event in example 2, to presumably less directly involved in the action in example 3 (where the orator is depicted as the originator of the message but not necessarily the one who delivered it). Although such choices are always available and are routinely used in our daily verbal interaction, it is in the political and judiciary arenas that they acquire special salience for the dramatic and long-lasting consequences that they can have for the actors involved.

**the expression of agency in Samoan grammar** In Samoan grammar, a distinction is made between the subject of a transitive clause, which is marked by the preposition *e* (see 4a), and the subject of an intransitive clause, which is not marked by any preposition (see 4b):[4]

4a. 'ua fa'atau e le tama le suka
    TA buy ERG ART boy ART sugar
    the boy has bought the sugar

 b. 'ua alu le tama i le maketi
    TA go ART boy to ART market
    the boy has gone to the market

Samoan, in other words, distinguishes subjects that are agents from other kinds of subjects. This system of case marking makes Samoan quite different from languages like English, where the category "subject" can be fulfilled by a variety of semantic roles (cf. Keenan 1984), including agent (5a), actor (5b), experiencer (5c), instrument (5d), and patient or undergoer (5e).

5a. The boy chased the dog.          |agent|
 b. The dog ran away.               |actor|

c.   The woman saw the dog.                    |experiencer|
d.   The rock killed it.                        |instrument|
e.   The dog died.                              |patient/undergoer|

In Samoan, only the noun phrase corresponding to "The boy" in example 5a could be marked by the preposition e—as shown in 6a.[5] In all the other cases, the subject of the English sentence would be expressed either as a prepositionless noun phrase—cf. 6b, 6c, and 6e—or as an instrumental noun phrase, with the preposition 'i (with, by), as in 6d:

6a.   'Ua tuli e le tama le maile.
      PST chase ERG ART boy ART dog

  b.   'Ua alu 'ese le maile.
       PST go away ART dog

  c.   'Ua va 'ai le fafine i le maile.
       PST see ART woman PREP ART dog

  d.   'Ua tapē i le ma'a.
       PST kill INST ART rock

  e.   'Ua pē le maile.
       PST die ART dog

This system of case marking, in which the subject of a transitive clause is marked differently from the subject of an intransitive clause, is found in many other languages of the world and is called "ergative" or "ergative-absolutive" (cf. Chung 1978; Comrie 1978; Cook 1988; Dixon 1979; Fillmore 1968; Silverstein 1976). In this case, the preposition e is the "ergative marker," and I will thus refer to the subject of transitive clauses marked by the ergative e—for example, "e le tama" in 6a—as the "ergative agent" (in Samoan the absolutive case for the subject of intransitive clauses and the object of transitive clauses has no preposition). The scheme in 7 illustrates the general pattern of transitive clauses with full noun phrases:

7.   |Verb|,          |Agent Noun Phrase|,           |Object Noun Phrase|
                       |Ergative|                     |Absolutive|

The commas, a convention I am borrowing from Gazdar, Klein, and Pullum (1985), indicate that the order of elements in 7 is variable. Although there is a tendency in my data for the verb to appear before the other syntactic elements, other orders are also found—e.g., object-verb-agent or agent-verb-object (when the agent is before the verb it cannot be preceded by the preposition e).

**ergative agents in fono discourse**   The system I have just described offers its speakers the possibility of explicitly and unequivocally assigning to a particular referent the role of "agent," that is, of willful initiator of an event that has consequences for either an object or a human patient. It also offers observers and analysts of Samoan language use the possibility of monitoring the expression of agency in a particular speech event. Given what was said above about the participants' reluctance to define the background events and agency in the early part of a meeting, the appearance of utterances with ergative agents constitutes an important and noticeable departure and hence can be extremely informative for assessing the general political climate as well as specific political alliances in any given setting.

## human agents in the fono discussion

An analysis of the transcribed corpus of fono speeches shows that transitive clauses with ergative agents are not very frequent—a generalization that confirms independent findings by Du Bois (1987) based on other languages and discourse genres (for the Samoan data, cf. also Duranti 1981a; Duranti and Ochs In press; Ochs 1982, 1988). When ergative agents do occur, however, we find some interesting patterns: they often appear in speech acts where a party, be

it an individual, a group, or a deity, is being held or made accountable for some act or way of doing something. Transitive clauses with ergative agents are also commonly found in statements about what a certain person, group, or legislative body is expected (or not expected) to do. The pattern outlined in example 7, above, is often realized in utterances that recognize someone's accomplishment or power to do something. The party whose power and deeds are recognized or praised above those of everyone else is the Christian God, followed by the polity as a whole (/le gu'u/, "the village") or its components (for example, /'āiga/, "the chiefs," literally "families [of chiefs]"). Also common is the use of ergative agents in utterances that express negative assessments, complaints, or accusations. The recurrent pattern of agency, then, is an opposition between the eternal, unquestionable power of the deity and the ideal structure of the polity and its branches, on the one hand, and the social actors who behave and act within historical time, on the other. While the former are usually portrayed as working to maintain the social order or as doing what is expected of them, the latter are represented as challenging that order through their (hence improper) deeds. Example 8, from a speech by the high chief Salanoa, shows how the role of the Almighty is brought into the events of the day: he is the creator and the one to whom we owe happiness on this earth:

8. *Fono* of 7 April 1979.

[...]

1911 Salanoa:   *e fa'alava e le Akua mea 'uma.*
            TA CAUS + enough ERG ART Lord thing all
            The Lord has created all things.

1912          *le aso lā legei ma le mākou fa'alogo, . . .*
            this day and [given] what we heard, . . .

1913          *ia' e leai so mākou leo.*
            well, there are no words [literally, "voice"] of ours.

1914          *pau lea kākou si'i le vi'iga i le Akua*
            the only [thing] let us raise the praise to the Lord

1915          *'ua faia e le Akua mea kekele,*
            PST make + CIA ERG ART Lord thing many
            The Lord has done many things,

1916          *kākou ke fiafia ma kākou olioli ai!*
            for which we are all happy and we rejoice!

[...]

The Lord can also be made responsible for inspiring a "Christian solution" to a crisis—that is, one of reconciliation and forgivingness:

9. Same meeting, earlier on.

[...]

720   Salanoa:   *'o le aso fo'i 'ou ke lagoga,*
            Today I also feel [that],

721          *e iai ā le auala e amai e le Akua,*
            TA PRO EMP ART road TA give ERG ART Lord
            there really is a way brought [to us] by the Lord,

722          *e fa'afilemū a'i se makā 'upu,*
            with which to soften some item on the agenda,

[...]

Human actors as well can be responsible for good deeds, as shown in example 10, where the work done by the first speaker is recognized:

10. Same meeting.

[...]

424   Moe'ono:   *si'i e le kōfā i le Laukogia le vi'iga*
            raise ERG ART Highness from ART [title] the praise
            His Highness the Lautogia [has] given the praise

425   *ma le fa'afekai i lo Kākou Makai.*
    and ART thank to ART + IN Our-INC Lord
    and the thanksgiving to Our Lord.

[ . . . ]

But human actors are more likely to disrupt what God has done or not comply with what the polity expects of them. After the first ceremonial speech of the day, the reason for the current crisis starts emerging from more explicit statements, like the one in example 11, where the senior orator Moe'ono accuses the people from the nearby village of Lufilufi of having betrayed a promise during the campaign for the national elections:

11. *Fono of 25 January 1979.*

[ . . . ]

84 Moe'ono: *ia' (.5) ma e kaukala aku ai lava- (2.)*
      so, and to really talk about-

85     *ma 'o le 'ā fo'i ('ou koef-)*
      and I will-

86     *koe fola mālamalama aku fo'i le mafua'aga*
      again to really explain the reason

87     *'ua mafua ai oga kākou fa'apegei. (1.)*
      for which we have come to be like this.

[ . . . ]

94     *oga 'ua soli e Lufilufi le kākou māvaega*
      because PST betray ERG Lufilufi ART our-INC promise
      because Lufilufi has betrayed our [common] agreement

In example 12, from another meeting, the same speaker directly attacks the junior orator V. for something he claims V. did on the day of the elections. Again, we find the ergative agent (in this case the emphatic pronoun *'oe* [singular "you"]) while the accusation is being made explicit:

12. *Fono of 17 March 1979; transcript p. 36.*

Moe'ono: *le ā le mea*
    ART what ART thing
    for what reason

    *'ua 'ē faga mea leaga ai e 'oe le gu'u*
    TA you feed thing bad PRO ERG you ART village
    have you spread bad things [in] the village

    *ma isi iku'āiga 'upu makagā?*
    and other kind words ugly
    with other kinds [of] bad words?

Finally, in example 13, the other senior orator, Iuli, sums up a series of complaints about the orator Loa's behavior with a concluding statement in which Loa is presented as an ergative agent:

13. *Fono of 7 April 1979.*

[ . . . ]

3400 Iuli: *mea lea 'ua fai e Loa.*
     thing this PST do ERG Loa
     this is what Loa has done.

[ . . . ]

Examples of this sort are common among transitive clauses with ergative agents. The pattern is the same: the attribution of agency to a party typically coincides with an implicit or explicit assignment of responsibility. Depending on the nature of the referent—whether divine or mortal, for example—the meaning of the verb, and the discourse context, the attribution of agency can constitute an act of praise and positive recognition of authority or an act of condemnation for events that should not have occurred. In culture-specific terms, the use of transitive clauses

with explicit agents seems to contribute to the actualization of Polynesian *mana*, meant as an unstable and mobile potency that needs to be activated in concrete acts, speech acts included (cf. Shore 1989:142; Valeri 1985:99–101). The data presented in this study suggest that the transfer of *mana* from the gods to mortals, which has been analyzed as typically realized through ritual speech in ancient Hawaii (Valeri 1985:153–154), may also be seen as characteristic of political speech.

## mitigated agency

If the use of transitive clauses with ergative agents is strongly associated in Samoan political discourse with the assessment or assignment of responsibility, and if, as argued earlier in this article, part of the struggle in a *fono* is a linguistic one over the definition of the causes or reasons for a crisis, we should expect two opposite trends in *fono* discourse with respect to the expression of agency: while certain participants will try to assign agentive roles to certain other parties and, in so doing, to imply their accountability in either saving the polity or damaging it, other participants will try to resist those linguistic definitions and attributions. In the following three sections I will discuss linguistic strategies used to resist negative attributions. I will concentrate on three such strategies: mention of human agents via alternative case marking, self- or other-abasement formulas in transitive clauses, and reported speech.

**mention of potential agents via alternative case marking**  In Samoan discourse, agents can be identified through alternative case markings. These grammatical forms provide resources for mitigating responsibility. I briefly discuss here two such case marking strategies: the encoding of potential human agents as (1) oblique objects and (2) genitive modifiers. In the first strategy, a human participant in a described event is marked with the preposition *i* or *iā* (from) instead of the ergative marker *e*. With this other case marker, a human actor who could be seen as the initiator of an event or action is framed as a source of a transitive act rather than as an ergative agent. In such cases, the speaker lets the listener infer the potentially causative relationship between the referent of the source and the action described by the predicate.

In example 14, the orator Tafili frames her brother Savea's suit against the M.P., which is the cause of much worry and regret for some members of the village council, as originating "from Savea" *(iā Savea)* rather than as being brought "by Savea" *(e Savea)*:

14. *Fono* of 7 April 1979.

[...]

2827   Tafili:   *'o le makā'upu, 'o lea- 'ua-*
                 [as for] the topic, [that] now- has-

2828             *'ua lafo kāofi iai le kalosaga iā Savea*
                 PST state opinion PRO ART petition from Savea
                 the petition by [literally, "from"] Savea has already been filed

In example 15, toward the beginning of the same meeting, when the orator Fanua gives his first speech of the day and refuses to take a stand on the issue, he justifies his reluctance to speak up by hinting that he has not received instructions "from" the high chief of his subvillage, Lealaisalanoa (shortened title /Salagoa/):

15. *Fono* of 7 April 1979.

448   Fanua:   *e ui fo 'i ga 'o legā afio mai Lealaisalagoa,*
               although Lealaisalanoa has now arrived,

449            *e le'i aumaia se kōfā iā Salagoa ma-*
               TA NEG + PST give + CIA ART opinion [R] from Salanoa and
               no opinion has been given from Salanoa and

450            *... ua le lava mai fo'i luli i legei faleakua.*
               ... also luli is not present from our subvillage.

In the second strategy, the agent is marked as a genitive modifier, with the same marking as possessors (either o or a) (cf. Duranti 1981a; Duranti and Ochs In press; Ochs 1988). An example of this kind of case marking in informal conversation is given in example 16, where A. tells about his son Eti's (/Eki/) food preparation for our research group:

16. "Pastor & Deacon."

[ . . . ]

24  A.:  fai le umu kalo a Eki ma lu'au
         do ART oven taro of Eti and palusami
         Eti made baked taro and palusami [literally, "Eti's baked taro and palusami (was) made"]

25       e fa'akali mai ai.
         to wait DX PRO
         to welcome [them] with it.

[ . . . ]

This case marking has the effect of focusing on the object (or patient) rather than on the human initiator or cause of an event. As with oblique object marking, the speaker leaves the listener to infer agency. It could be argued that line 24 is about the making of the taro rather than about Eti making the taro. This case marking can be used in situations, like example 16, where the speaker wants to mention and at the same time to deemphasize someone's contribution to a given task or achievement; in this particular instance, since Eti is an untitled person and is A.'s own son, it would seem inappropriate for A. to boast about Eti's doings or to praise him. It should also be added that the genitive form /a Eki/ (of Eti) cannot be interpreted as a possessive, given that it would be culturally inappropriate to think of a young, untitled member of the family as owning the food offered to high-status guests.

Similar examples are found in the *fono* speeches. In example 17b, for instance, the chief Savea reframes an event mentioned earlier by his sister, using genitive marking instead of the ergative marking used by his sister. Example 17a presents the sister's initial utterance and 17b Savea's reframing. In 17b the verb is still /kokogi/ (pay), but the character Inu (/Igu/ in the transcript) has a less active relationship with the money and Savea is not in the syntactico-semantic role of patient:

17a. *Fono* of 7 April 1979; Tafili, Savea's sister, reveals the source of trouble, the rumor that has forced Savea to file a suit against the M.P. Inu.

[ . . . ]

2887  Tafili:  e (le)aga 'o 'upu gei ou ke kaukala iai,
               because these words I am going to talk about,

2888           " 'ua fa 'akau Savea e Igu i kupe." . . .
               PST buy Savea ERG Inu with monies
               "Savea has been bought by Inu with money." . . .

2889           ia 'ua kakau ai lā ga kulāfogo 'upu gā,
               so it has been necessary to try in court those words,

[ . . . ]

17b. Later in the same meeting.

[ . . . ]

3089  Savea:  e leai ā se kupe a Igu 'o maimau
              TA no EMP ART money of Inu PRED wasted
              there is no money of Inu's wasted

3090          e kokogi ai sa'u fāsefulu kālā . . .
              TA pay PRO my forty dollars
              to pay my forty dollars . . . [or "to pay forty dollars for me . . ."]

The use of the nonspecific article s- (in sa'u, "my") further reinforces the hedging quality of the statement, which should be translated as "to pay some forty dollars of mine" (cf. Mosel 1989).

Genitives are often found in defense statements such as the following, where the orator V. defends himself and the chief A. against the accusation of having directed offensive language at *fono* members on the day of the elections (see example 12 for the accusation):

18. *Fono* of 17 March 1979; transcript p. 46.

[ . . . ]

V.:   *'ou ke mälamalama fo 'i i a'u 'upu ga fai.*
       I TA clear also to my word PST say
       I also understand <u>my</u> words [that were] said. [literally, "I also understand my words (that) say."]

      *'a 'o le Akua lä e silasila mai.*
      but PRED ART Lord there TA see[R] DX
      but the Lord sees [that]

      *e augapiu ma sa'u 'upu ga fai.*
      TA absent with my word PST say
      there were no words of mine [that were] said.

[ . . . ]

(and later on, defending his chief, A.)

V.:   *e leai se 'upu a A. [name] ga faia.*
       TA NEG ART word of A. PST say
       there is no word <u>of A. [name]</u> [that was] said.

Compare the last defense line with the following one by another orator, who is pointing out in an accusatory manner the damage that the events have brought to the chief A. In this case, we find the chief A. mentioned in the role of ergative agent, precisely to highlight rather than downplay his accountability and the accountability of those who acted to damage his reputation:

19. *Fono* of 17 March 1979.

[ . . . ]

Fanua:   *e leai se mea lelei e maua e A. [name]*
          TA NEG ART thing good TA get ERG A.
          there is nothing good [that] <u>A. [name]</u> got [out of this]

[ . . . ]

The power struggle between different parties in the *fono* is in these examples reconstituted through the choice of specific case markings that reorient or frame the degree of agency by certain human participants. Powerful actors are more likely to define others as ergative agents when they want to accuse them of something. Less powerful actors can try to resist such accusations by suggesting alternative linguistic definitions of events and people's roles in them. The struggle between prosecution and defense is thus often played out as a linguistic exercise whereby those in power try to get clear and pointed definitions whereas those who want to resist them try to diffuse the tension and the accusations by undermining the framing of events as directly involving human agents.

**self- or other-abasement formulas in transitive clauses**   As discussed earlier, the use of ergative agents in political discourse implies a concern with the actions of the referent of the agent noun phrase. This is typically the case either with important social actors and social bodies or with defendants whose actions are portrayed as the source or cause of a current crisis. As shown in the last section, speakers may on the other hand downplay the importance of certain parties (themselves included) by using certain mitigating strategies. Yet another strategy is one in which the speaker uses a transitive clause with an ergative agent and at the same time mitigates the impact of his or her assertion by lowering the status of the agent referent. This is a complex act reminiscent of what Bateson (1972) has called the "double bind" situation, where a speaker sends two contradictory messages to the hearer. In the Samoan case, the speaker uses a type of clause and case marking that, according to our analysis, highlights the role of the referent of the agent noun phrase but at the same time defines the agent participant as a worthless being whose actions should not be taken too seriously or could not possibly seriously affect anyone. In this strategy, ability to initiate the action is implied but at the same

time responsibility is reduced. This kind of self- and other-abasement formula often occurs in replies to accusations or to face-threatening acts. An illustration is provided in example 20. The scene is the end of the same long *fono* (on 7 April 1979) from which I have taken several of the examples quoted above. The discussion is finally over, and the senior orator Moe'ono would like to have a closing kava ceremony, but he has been told that there is no more kava left. He then turns to the researcher (myself) and, using a fake and hilarious title ("Alexander the Great"), asks:

20. *Fono* of 7 April 1979.

[ . . . ]

3751　Moe'ono:　*ia Alesaga (le) Sili,*
　　　　　　　　So, Alexander (the) Great,

3752　　　　　　　*uã ua 'uma ga kusikusi?*
　　　　　　　　so PST finish COMP write-write
　　　　　　　　is all the [busy] writing over?

3753　　　　　　　*'o ã ea gã mea e kusikusi (e) 'oe?*
　　　　　　　　PRED what QU those thing TA write-write ERG you
　　　　　　　　what are those things that you keep writing all the time?

3754　Others:　　[laughter]

[ . . . ]

In the second question (line 3753), which is a reformulation of the first one, Moe'ono escalates the assignment of responsibility by changing from an agent-less question ("is all the [busy] writing over?") to a full transitive clause with an ergative agent (e 'oe, "[by] you"); the reduplicated form *(kusikusi)* of the verb *kusi* (write) conveys the sense of a frequent and repetitive action (as if I had been writing a lot, hence too much). Utterance 3753 is thus an example of one of the typical uses of transitive clauses with an explicit agent noun phrase, namely, for accusation. At this point, the chief Fuimaono comes to my rescue, and he does so in a remarkably skillful manner, which leaves Moe'ono momentarily unable to match Fuimaono's reply with the same wit and implicit scorn of his own original question. All he is left with is a meager overlapping "oh!" right after the first part of Fuimaono's response.

21. *Fono* of 7 April 1979.

[ . . . ]

3755　Fuimaono:　*'o a kou vagaga ã ma saugoaga lea*
　　　　　　　　PRED of you speech[R] EMP and speech[R] that
　　　　　　　　It's your honorable speech [of senior orators] and the honorable speech [of the chiefs] that

3756　　　　　　　[*ua- (.3) kusikusi uma lava e le kama.*
　　　　　　　　　TA write-write all EMP ERG ART boy
　　　　　　　　　the boy has been really writing.

3757　Moe'ono:　[*oh!*
　　　　　　　　　Oh!

3758　　　　　　　[voices of people leaving]

3759　　　　　　　[someone laughing]

The two respectful words *vagaga* (honorable speech [of a senior orator]) and *saugoaga* (honorable speech [of a chief]) do the first part of the job. The researcher, Fuimaono suggests, is just writing down the honorable, hence beautiful and important, speeches that Moe'ono and the chiefs have been giving. What could be more appropriate? Moe'ono is reminded of his power and high status. He should behave accordingly—that is, with dignity and restraint: he can be pleased or indifferent but should certainly not be too concerned, especially given the fact that the one who is writing is just a "boy" (see line 3756). In his reply, Fuimaono maintains the transitive clause format with the verb *kusikusi* and with the ergative agent, but changes the

description of the latter from a pronoun, 'oe (you), to a definite description, le kama (the boy), which clearly lowers my status. In so doing, he manages to accomplish several goals at the same time: he avoids contradicting Moe'ono's implicit assertion that I have been willfully and busily writing down something, he downplays my responsibility by describing me as a "boy," and he implies praise for the "boy" who has been writing down the important words of these important people. Similar examples are found in other parts of the proceedings—in, for instance, cases where the speaker presents what he thinks or feels (which can be expressed with a transitive verb such as lagoga, "feel") and uses the genitive expression lo 'u kãofi vaivai (my weak opinion) instead of the first person pronoun to identify the agent, as in example 22:

22. Fono of 17 March 1979; the orator Nu'u closes with a long speech that is partly an apology for his chief's misbehavior.

[ . . . ]

Nu'u:  'ua lagoga e lo'u kãofi vaivai
       TA feel ERG my opinion weak
       my weak opinion feels [that]

       'ua kali le Akua mo le aso legei.
       TA answer ART Lord for ART day this
       The Lord has replied today. [that is, a Christian solution has been found]

[ . . . ]

In this case, several strategies are used at once to create what could be called a "polyphony of stances." The speaker objectifies his own thinking through a third person referent (the opinion), and, while giving it prominence through the ergative marking, also suggests a less direct agency through genitive marking (the possessive lo'u, "my") and mitigates the importance of the act through the lexical choice of the adjective vaivai (weak) to modify the term "opinion" (/kãofi/).

What is important here in terms of the constitution of agency is that such uses of transitive clauses with "abased agency" co-occur with certain kinds of speech acts (such as apologies or diffusion of face-threatening acts) and are produced by speakers in certain kinds of contexts. In fact, we might say that such forms help define the speech act and the context as of a certain kind. Thus, for instance, when the high chief who speaks on behalf of all the village chiefs gives his opinion, he uses the same verb found in example 22 (/lagoga/), but instead of the self-abasement form /kãofi vaivai/ (weak opinion), he uses the first person (emphatic) pronoun: /a'u ke lagoga/ (me [I] feel) (Fono of 7 April 1979). The social hierarchy is linguistically sustained and activated by the ability of certain social actors to define themselves as willful and responsible agents whose actions matter for the rest of the community.

These last few examples have shown that the same linguistic strategies used to define a third party's involvement and responsibility with respect to a given event can also be used to define the speaker's responsibility. In fact, in any act of speaking, by assigning responsibility to others, speakers are also themselves implicitly assuming responsibility. By engaging in definitions of others' doings, speakers take stances that may have consequences for others' as well as their own well-being. It was the problematic nature of any kind of "definition" that guided us in our earlier discussion of the announcement of the agenda at the beginning of the fono. In the next section, I will briefly discuss a strategy for dealing with definitions that have already been given and need to be assessed. As we shall see, reported speech can offer a way of evading the perils of accepting someone else's definition of a given state of affairs.

**embedding a transitive clause in reported speech**   Reported speech has been shown to be a very powerful tool allowing an author (or speaker) to take distance from a particular statement or to infiltrate it so as to include his own view in a third party's quoted speech (cf. Besnier 1990; Brenneis 1984; Haviland 1977; Macaulay 1987; Vološinov 1973). These strategies are also used in the fono, where we find accusatory transitive clauses with fully expressed agents sometimes framed as reported speech. An example of the use of reported speech in a fono is

provided in 17a, above, where, after much discussion about a "problem" between one of the village chiefs (Savea) and the district M.P. (/Igu/), the chief's sister reveals the source of the problem to be the accusation her brother is trying to fight in the capital's courts.[8] The example is here reproduced as 23:

23. *Fono* of 7 April 1979; second topic in the agenda.

2887   Tafili:   *e (le)aga 'o 'upu gei ou ke kaukala iai,*
because these words I am going to talk about,

2888     *" 'ua fa'akau Savea e Igu i kupe."* . . .
PST buy Savea ERG Inu with monies
"Savea has been bought <u>by Inu</u> with money." . . .

2889     *ia 'ua kakau ai lā ga kulāfogo 'upu gā,*
so it has been necessary to try in court those words,

The statement in 2888 is a difficult one for the speaker to make. In reporting the accusation against her brother, she is also reporting one against the M.P. Putting the accusation in quotation marks mitigates the force of her speech act and allows her to reveal an important piece of information—to "tell the story"—without assuming full responsibility for it.

A similar case is provided during the discussion of another issue, in the same meeting. In this case, the orator Fa'aonu'u questions one of Iuli's accusations against Loa (see example 13). In his reply to Iuli's invective, instead of making the accusation his own or blatantly rejecting it, Fa'aonu'u repeats it, maintaining Iuli's authorship via reported speech but undermining the accusation by framing it as an indirect question and hence giving it a dubitative shade:

24. *Fono* of 7 April 1979.

[ . . . ]

3455   Fa'aonu'u:   *pei oga e:- . . . vagaga iai . . .*
as you say [R] . . .

3456     *po 'o Loa ua f- . . . ua:- fai se pepelo i lo kākou gu'u*
whether Loa s- . . . said some lie to our village

3457     *po 'o Loa ua fa'afefea.*
whether Loa did this or that.

[ . . . ]

(Free translation: "As you say, Loa would . . . have said some lie to our village; Loa would have done this or that.")

At times the reported speech strategy and the change of case marking can be combined, as in the following example, where the orator Fa'aonu'u once more reframes Iuli's words in asking for clarification:

25. *Fono* of 7 April 1979.

[ . . . ]

111   Fa'aonu'u:   *po 'o Loa- po 'o le ā ga (??)*
Loa- what is that (??)

112     *le mea a Loa ua fai?* . . .
ART thing of Loa PST do
Loa did? . . . [literally, "Loa's thing that (was) done?"]

113     *'o le koe fa'afesili aku lea i- i lau kōfā le Makua,*
this is what I am asking of- Your Highness, the Senior Orator,

[ . . . ]

In line 112, Fa'aonu'u changes Iuli's words from a transitive clause with an ergative agent (*e Loa*; see example 13) to a clause in which Loa is the genitive modifier (*a Loa*) of the noun *mea* (thing).

## agency and power

The more we learn about the ways in which linguistic codes and variables are used and integrated into ongoing social processes, the more we realize that language does not simply

reflect the world, it also shapes it, fashions it (cf. Duranti and Goodwin In press; Myers and Brenneis 1984; Silverstein 1977, 1979, 1985a, 1985b). Power exists, externally, with its weapons, armies, jails, and other such material agents and institutions, but the authority for specific acts must be achieved just like any other form of social action (cf. Cicourel 1968; Foucault 1980, 1989; Schegloff 1986). Thus, it is appropriate to say that the choice of specific linguistic framings for people's actions, beliefs, and feelings does not simply reflect existing power relations, it also constitutes them. The linguistic code seen as a process rather than as a structure is one of the "technologies" through which power and social structure can be sustained and renegotiated. In our discussion, this becomes particularly apparent when we realize that the linguistic forms used not only index a speaker's stance with respect to a given issue or accusation but also help constitute the "facts" under discussion and hence the grounds for the final resolution by the village council. Unless it involves the "safe" recognition of God's power or the sanctity of the official hierarchy within the polity, the process of either constituting or resisting agency can be a dangerous weapon that can place the speaker in a vulnerable position. Those who are being defined as "agents" and their allies may fire back and seek revenge. It is not by accident, then, that in the speeches I collected in 1979, the speaker who uses more ergative agents (for both positive and negative statements) than anyone else is Moe'ono, the holder of one of the two *Matua* (senior orator, elder) titles. He was perceived by many as the most powerful leader in the community; his actions and words were feared by most people; and it was also partly due to his political wisdom and energy that the village maintained its integrity throughout its most difficult crises. While sitting in the *fono* and then later listening to the speeches I had recorded, I often felt that if there had been no crises, Moe'ono would have created some. His role in the community was quite different from that of the other high-ranking title holders. The holder of the high chief title, Salanoa, for example, was more a symbol of power than an actual mover. Politically astute, Salanoa would always look for the best possible compromise, trying to avoid harsh words and direct confrontations. When we examine his speeches in one of the meetings (on 7 April 1979), we find a large number of ergative agents referring to God (seven such examples out of a total of 57 ergative agents produced by him and other speakers in the entire meeting), but only two referring to other parties, and neither of these couched in an accusatory or negative tone. These figures suggest that he was more concerned with reestablishing harmony than with scolding or accusing those who had violated the rules.

The frequency of ergative agents can thus be used to ascertain the political weight of various members of the local council. This gives us a powerful analytical tool for assessing the relation between nominal power and actual power, a classic theme in the discussion of Polynesian *mana* (see above). It is possible, for instance, to measure the frequency with which various titles mentioned in the ceremonial address *(fa'alupega)* of a given political body appear as ergative agents of transitive clauses and hence to make hypotheses about the extent to which their holders are recognized as active and important social agents. Furthermore, a sudden change in the frequency of reference to a given party as agent may coincide with either his rise or his fall within the power structure (see Duranti 1990).

### conclusions

Getting to the "facts" is a difficult process in Samoan political and judiciary arenas. The difficulty is related to the assignment of responsibility implied in tellings about people's actions. The expressing of agency is a delicate process that must be managed. In a *fono* there is nonetheless a need to uncover certain facts and expose certain individuals' actions so as to let the members of the assembly assess responsibility and agree upon some form of redressive action. How this is done and by whom is particularly important for the final decision. Those who have the knowledge and either the authority or the need (viz., if in danger) to make such knowledge public must carefully choose the right time and manner in which to do so.

The technique by which knowledge about the background facts is revealed in a *fono* is reminiscent of what film maker and critic Stefan Sharff (1982) has called "slow disclosure": crucial facts are revealed one bit at a time (cf. also Ochs, Smith, and Taylor 1989). In a *fono*, however, the delay in the reconstruction of certain events is not introduced so much to build suspense as to allow various voices to be heard. Powerful social actors assess one another's stands and decide when the right moment has come for revealing or using a certain piece of information. The mention of certain actions can become emblematic of the mood of a group or of a particularly powerful party. In a political arena, and perhaps even in more mundane contexts, there is never neutral recounting. Telling the facts, saying who did what to whom, is always potentially face-threatening and always entails political consequences. By using a transitive clause with an explicit agent, a speaker brings certain events and social actors into the foreground, singles out the events' initiators, and defines their actions as having consequences for a third party (or object). These are some of the properties that have been discussed in the linguistic literature as common or prototypical of transitive clauses or causative verbs like the English verbs *hit, buy, break, give, make,* and so on (cf. Hopper and Thompson 1980; Lakoff 1977). In this article, I have tried to extend the linguistic analysis to the political arena and to show how semantic and pragmatic properties of nominal arguments may be used to constitute different kinds of social actions. I have shown that the use of a verb that takes an ergative agent (the subject noun phrase marked by the ergative marker) and an object noun phrase (in the absolutive case) contributes to different kinds of actions: it constitutes important social agents (those whose actions must be talked about or reckoned with); it points an accusatory finger at someone by foregrounding or making public his or her inappropriate or blameful doings; and, finally, it indexes the speaker's power in making such accusations and hence his or her importance as a political force in the community.

The Samoan *fono* are dynamic, dramatic, and often unpredictable events. The struggle for power takes the form of a linguistic confrontation, with participants juggling different versions of past events and different images of certain people's involvement. The grammatical form of utterances becomes an integral part of the political process whereby the local hierarchy is either reconfirmed or challenged. Those who might want to resist a particular framing of the past and the associated responsibilities can try to subvert the ongoing characterizations or to suggest a less definite agency. This is accomplished through a series of grammatical strategies available to Samoan speakers for mitigating agency (for example, case marking, lexical choice, reported speech). Overall, such strategies demonstrate the power of words in shaping the political life of a community and negotiating actors' stances and responsibility for ongoing political and legal processes. For these reasons, anthropology needs the grammarian, though an ethnographically minded one.

Samoan chiefs and orators in a *fono* display a compelling ability to deal with problems and crises affecting their community. The subtleties of their strategies to suggest, convince, remind, scold, frighten, forgive, and ultimately make of any crisis an occasion for reassessing the very foundations of the social order are impressive. It is in this spirit that their actions and words have been evaluated here.

## notes

presented in this article. Any errors or omissions are of course only my own. The research on which this article is based was partially supported by a grant from the National Science Foundation (No. BNS-8608210).

[1]Some of the original (handwritten) Samoan transcripts have now been entered on computer disk using a program ("SCAN") written by John B. Haviland. Among other things, SCAN inserts line numbers, marks overlaps, and allows for interlinear glosses. The conventions used for transcribing are a variation on those originally developed by Gail Jefferson for conversation analysis. In this article, I have added the following notations: "[. . .]" means that a portion of the original transcript has been left out; ". . ." stands for an untimed pause; and numbers in parentheses indicate timed pauses, in seconds. Parentheses in the original Samoan text indicate a tentative transcription, and question marks in parentheses indicate that the transcribers were unable to hear what had been said.

[2]Kava is a pan-Pacific nonalcoholic beverage prepared by mixing water with the pounded dry roots of a pepper plant *(Piper methysticum)* (cf. Holmes 1961; Marshall 1987). In Samoa, kava drinking is traditionally restricted to titled individuals, although informal kava drinking by both titled and untitled individuals may take place during collective activities requiring hard physical labor.

[3]On the specific reasons for such a situation, see Duranti 1981a, where I discuss and make some hypotheses about the relation between the order of speakers and their relative rank.

[4]In the Samoan examples, interlinear glosses are given only for those utterances or turns for which grammatical analysis is relevant; in the other cases, I give only free translation. The examples with line numbers are taken from transcripts copied on computer disk; those without numbers are taken from handwritten transcripts. Examples 4 and 6 were created by the author for expository purposes.

The abbreviations used in interlinear word-by-word glosses are: ART = article (either specific or nonspecific); CAUS = causative prefix; CIA = verbal suffix (cf. Cook 1988); COMP = complementizer; DX = deictic particle; EMP = emphatic particle; ERG = ergative marker; IN = inalienable possession; INC = inclusive; INST = instrument; NEG = negation; PRED = predicate particle (also used for cleft sentences and topicalization); PREP = preposition; PRO = pronoun; PST = past tense, used for two types of past tense markers—'ua, which marks an event that happened in the past but is framed as being relevant to the present (as defined by the linguistic or extralinguistic context) (cf. Tuitele, Sāpolu, and Kneubuhl 1978), and na (/ŋa/), which marks an event that happened in the remote past; QU = question particle; [R] = respect vocabulary term, appropriate for either chiefs or orators (or both); TA = non-past tense/aspect marker.

[5]Ochs (1982, 1987) found that there were socially relevant factors in the distribution of the ergative marker e: among intimates in informal situations the ergative preposition e is left out more often than it is among nonintimates and in formal interactions. I should also mention here that in Samoan the agent role in a transitive clause can also be expressed by a nonemphatic preverbal clitic pronoun such as 'ou (I), 'ē (you), tā (we-dual-INC), lātou (they), and so on. In this article, I will only discuss cases in which the agent is expressed by full independent noun phrases.

[6]The pronoun 'oe (you) receives particular emphasis here when it doubles the information already conveyed by the preverbal clitic pronoun 'ē (you). Grammatically speaking, this is an example of what syntacticians call "right-dislocation," although in the case of Samoan, where the full subject noun phrase typically appears after the verb, that is, on the right, and the "copy" pronoun (in this case the clitic 'ē) must appear before the verb, the notion of dislocation seems inappropriate. It should be added that this is a rather complex construction which should be seen either as a case in which the preposition 'i (in) before /le gu'u/ (the village) is left out or as a case of noun-incorporation, in which /mea leaga/ (bad things) is the incorporated nominal and /le gu'u/ has become the object (in the absolutive case).

[7]I was in fact tape-recording, and I had been writing down information that would not be available on the audiotape (people's names, where they were sitting, who was arriving, who was leaving, and so on). Although the tape recorder was visible, Fuimaono was not in a position to know what I was writing down.

[8]The courts in the capital (Apia) are thought of as an "alternative" legal system, one that is strongly associated with the modern Samoan state and with Western principles, as opposed to the "tradition" *(aganu'u),* which favors village settlements. Curiously, the term *tulāfono* has come to acquire the double meaning of "laws (in general)," including the laws established by the village *fono,* and the modern state law and state bureaucracy, which must be avoided whenever the local "laws" can be invoked.

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