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The political function of reported speech: a Belauan example

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Introduction

In the course of his discussion of discourse in the novel, Bakhtin (1981) points out that the social-historical fact of the "internal stratification" of language into dialects, jargons, and speech genres is the prerequisite for the stylistic "heteroglossia" of the modern polyphonic novel, in which authorial speech, narrator's speech, and the speech of characters enter into complex "interanimation." Many of Bakhtin's specific analyses of literary techniques found in novelistic heteroglossia can be transferred to the anthropological study of language in its social context. In particular, in the novel as in social life, speech constantly takes as an object of reference or representation previous speech, as in direct and indirect quotation of the actual utterances of others. As Bakhtin notes,

> The topic of a speaking person has enormous importance in everyday life. In real life we hear speech about speakers and their discourse at every step. We can go so far as to say that in real life people talk most of all about what others talk about – they transmit, recall, weigh and pass judgment on other people's words, opinions, assertions, information; people are upset by others' words, or agree with them, contest them, refer to them and so forth. (Bakhtin 1981: 338)

But in addition, as Jakobson (1980), Sanches (1975), and Silverstein (1976, 1981, 1985, this volume) have argued, metalingual activity goes beyond reporting token utterances, since language also has the potential for becoming a comprehensive metalanguage with respect to higher-level semiotic phenomena such as semantic and pragmatic meaning (as in glossing), conventional rules of speaking (as in performatives), and the parameters of the contexts of speaking (as in deixis). In this broader sense Silverstein (1976) has distinguished the realm of "metasemantics," that is, language about the relatively decontextualized meaning of forms, and the more encompassing realm of "metapragmatics," that is, language about the indexical or pragmatic relationship between linguistic signals and their contexts of use. Rather than being highly unusual

aspects of language use, these two types of metalinguistic representation are more accurately seen as statistically widespread and structurally crucial in language. In other words, it is not merely a social fact that dialogicality characterizes linguistic utterances but it is also the case that linguistic structure and use depend essentially on language's ability to refer to itself along many dimensions.

Although it was not his primary focus of interest, Bakhtin recognized the importance of examining what he called the "rhetorical genres" such as political oratory, journalism, religious language, and legal discourse for developing a comprehensive picture of the dialogical transmission of another's speech. For Bakhtin, fictional discourse as well as conversational and rhetorical speech are characterized by a complex interplay between reporting and reported speech, between an outer authorial frame and an inner represented image of another's speech. The basic difference between novelistic discourse and the rhetorical genres is that in the former the stronger vector of influence is the "penetration" or "incursion" of the author's ideological perspective into the speech being reported, while in the latter the fixity, objectivity, and authority of the reported speech enable it to resist this manipulation and to assert its own independent power upon the outer frame. As Bakhtin explains,

> Political rhetoric presents an analogous case [to judicial language]. It is important to determine the specific gravity of rhetorical speech, judicial or political, in the linguistic consciousness of the given social group at a given time. Moreover, the position that a specimen of speech to be reported occupies on the social hierarchy of values must also be taken into account. The stronger the feeling of hierarchical eminence in another's utterance, the more sharply defined will its boundaries be, and the less accessible will it be to penetration by reporting and commenting tendencies from outside. (Vološinov [Bakhtin] 1973: 123)

In another passage Bakhtin describes in more detail the qualities of authoritative discourse, that is, speech whose "internal persuasiveness" not only makes it block any modification or "analysis" by an authorial intention but also projects its own worldview upon the reporting voice.

> The authoritative word demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power it might have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority already fused to it. The authoritative word is located in a distanced zone, organically connected with a past that is felt to be hierarchically higher. It is, so to speak, the word of the fathers. Its authority was already *acknowledged* in the past. It is a *prior* discourse. It is therefore not a question of choosing it from among other possible discourses that are its equal. It is given (it sounds) in lofty spheres, not those of familiar contact. Its language is a special (as it were, hieratic) language. It can be profaned. It is akin to taboo, i.e., a name that must not be taken in vain. (Bakhtin 1981: 342)

This opposition between the transforming effect of fictional representation in novelistic discourse and the ideological determination of authoritative speech harnessed in various rhetorical genres suggests, then, a sharp distinction between the two genres in the hierarchical ranking of reporting and reported speech. The Russian novelist's authorial voice dominates the reported speech of the novel's characters as

surely as the priest's report during the Mass of Christ's words at the Last Supper is dominated by that divinely endowed discourse. An obvious implication of this analysis is that there is a link between the presupposed authority of a segment of speech and the tendency for reports to retain its linguistic shape or canonical form, that is, for it to be reported in direct discourse rather than in indirect discourse. Or to put the argument the other way around, in the rhetorical genres the power of ideological determination of reported speech is proportional to the degree of iconicity of the relationship between the original utterance and its subsequent linguistic representation.

Now, although I feel that Bakhtin's general distinction between these two genres is basically sound, there is danger in underestimating the creative role the political speaker can play in reporting authoritative discourse. First, in contrast to the highly prescribed genres such as ritual language and judicial formulae, political oratory as it has been described for many societies quotes authoritative speech – gems from traditional wisdom, historically memorable utterances, proverbial expressions, legitimizing statutes – for creative, contextually specific rhetorical effect (for comparative ethnographic data, see the papers collected in Bloch 1975, Brenneis and Myers 1984, and Paine 1981). The politician's aim is to harness these "words of another" for the purposes of the moment, and this is frequently accomplished by submitting instances of quoted speech to the regimenting organization imposed by the unfolding of the reporting or framing speech. In a sense, then, the quotation of authoritative discourse surrenders only momentarily to the hierarchical rank inherent in this reported discourse, for these official or traditional words are in fact put to uses unintended by their original authors or not implied in their initial contexts. Second, the use of direct rather than indirect quotation, while certainly demonstrating appropriately reverential obeisance, can also be a mechanism for transferring the aura of historical objectivity and representational naturalness from the inner to the outer frame of discourse. Here it is precisely the presumed "distancing" (Sherzer 1983: 213) of the reported utterance that allows the speaker to harness the authority attaching to the quotation without calling attention to the creative, rhetorical purpose of doing so. In other words, speakers can induce legitimacy upon their own speech through the juxtaposition of iconically represented authoritative speech.

In this chapter I explore these issues through an analysis of the political function of reported speech in a specific ethnographic example of oratory I witnessed during fieldwork in Belau, Micronesia (Parmentier 1987). While I realize the limitations of using a single speech event as the sole datum for analysis, the speech and events surrounding it are such an important signal of political transformation that I feel justified in treating it as privileged "diagnostic event" that, as Moore (1987: 730) puts it, "reveals ongoing contests and conflicts and competitions" and "display[s] multiple meanings in combination" (735). The analysis will consider the relationship among three levels of linguistic phenomena: (1) formally explicit devices for metapragmatic representation belonging to paradigmatic sets of the code, (2) text-internal pragmatics generated by the syntagmatic unfolding of the rhetorical architecture of the speech as performed, and (3) the encompassing cultural principles and norms about the linkage

between the use of language and chiefly authority. My goal is, on the one hand, to illustrate the creative avenues open to the orator in manipulating and framing authoritative speech and, on the other hand, to demonstrate that the performative effectiveness of speech is constrained by norms of language presupposed in actual events of speaking.

An example of political oratory

Ethnographic context

Belau, also known in ethnographic literature as Pelew and Palau, is an Austronesian culture occupying a group of islands in the western corner of the Pacific Ocean, approximately 550 miles east of the Philippines and 600 miles north of New Guinea. After several millennia of relative isolation, Belau became the locus of successive colonial regimes, starting with the British in the late eighteenth century and followed by Spain, Germany, Japan, and the United States. As a Trust Territory formally under the jurisdiction of the United Nations, Belau has been dominated by United States' political and military interests for the past forty years, although in the last decade the people have made great strides toward independent self-government. The islands are divided into political districts (also called municipalities and states), some occupying separate islands and some located on Babeldaob, the largest island in the archipelago. Districts, in turn, are made up of spatially distinct villages, though Belauans refer to both political units by a single term, *beluu*. The most populous village is Oreor, actually a small island just south of Babeldaob, which for centuries has been the point of contact with foreign commercial, cultural, and political forces and which functioned as the District Center under the Trusteeship.

During the summer of 1979 the district of Ngeremlengui, like many other districts in Belau, was involved in a bitter political struggle prompted by the recently drafted national constitution. The original document, approved by the constitutional convention which met for four months in Oreor, was scheduled for final ratification in a public referendum on July 9. The draft constitution proudly proclaimed the political independence and territorial integrity of Belau and carefully balanced democratic principles with respect for traditional leaders and customs. Several provisions of the document, however, were directly inconsistent with the terms of the so-called Hilo Principles, previously adopted by the Political Status Commission negotiators, which defined the relationship of Free Association between Belau and the United States. But the delegates to the convention refused to modify their draft and, confident that the public would overwhelming approve this historic declaration of Belauaness (*klbelau*), undertook a massive and costly effort in political education at the village level.

Trying to avoid jeopardizing the ongoing negotiations over Belau's Free Association status, members of the national legislature effectively voted to undercut the new constitution by repealing the enabling legislation of the already adjourned convention, arguing that the delegates had failed to draft a document consistent with the established principles of Free Association. The legislature's bill would effectively

cancel the scheduled referendum and turn the constitution over to a specially appointed legislative redrafting committee. And so as July 9 approached two political factions were operative: the pro-constitution forces, led in Ngeremlengui by the two men who had been delegates to the convention, and the pro-Free Association (or pro-status) forces, led by the district's traditionally sanctioned chief, Ngirturong, and the district's elected representative to the legislature.

On the morning of July 7 people from Ngeremlengui assembled in Ngeremetengel village to meet with the United Nations Visiting Mission, a group of international observers sent to Belau to insure that the electorate was informed and uncoerced and that there would be no irregularities in the election process. While waiting for the party to arrive by boat, villagers talked informally with their two convention delegates. An elder complimented them, saying that, having chosen two "children of Ngeremlengui" to represent the village in this important task, the people of Ngeremlengui would surely continue their support for the document they had "given birth to." The official meeting which finally got under way in the early afternoon was conducted in the normally polite style, with respect shown especially toward the foreign visitors. After a rather formal exchange of questions, the head of the Visiting Mission asked for a show of hands to see how many of those registered to vote had actually read the proposed constitution; only a few people raised their hands. As this meeting was drawing to a close, a second boat arrived carrying the district's high chief Ngirturong and its legislative representative, two individuals whose anti-constitution opinions were at variance with the general sentiment of the local people, who had recently become uncharacteristically vocal in their criticism of these two leaders.

Moments after the speedboat carrying the United Nations group disappeared down the mangrove channel, chief Ngirturong began to address the assembly, but the second-ranking chief, whose title is Ngiraklang, waved him off with the words: "Not enough ears," meaning that a third important titleholder, Ngirutelchii, had yet to join the meeting. He soon did, and so Ngirturong began again, but this time three villagers interrupted him with a series of critical statements to the effect that Ngirturong and the legislative representative were trying to "kill" the very constitution which these delegates, "the children of Ngeremlengui," had given birth to, and that they had remained for too long in Oreor without returning to the villages to inform local people what was transpiring there. At one point a man actually shouted at the chief: "At every meeting I am sitting right here in the meeting house, but where are you?" Stung by this highly inappropriate attack from an untitled kinsman, the chief replied: "Are you daring to challenge my leadership? If so, let me remind you that *I* am Ngirturong, while you are the child of [a former] Ngirturong." Since titles normatively pass matrilineally, to be the "child of a chief" is to be removed from the direct line of power.

At this point I was totally shocked, for I had never seen such overt and pointed challenges to the authority of the chief, although I knew that there was widespread opposition to his political position. But what happened next made the preceding look tame. A middle-aged woman sitting at the end of the meeting house began to scream and stomp her feet violently on the floor. I barely managed to decipher what she kept

repeating: "Ngirturong and Ngiraklang are not at Imiungs! Imiungs, Imiungs, Imiungs! I hate it, I hate it, I hate it!" This woman, I later learned, was completely unaware of her behavior and spoke the words of Uchererak (Foremost of the Year), the traditional god of Ngeremlengui. The import of these words was this: Ngirturong and Ngiraklang are the legitimate leaders at Imiunga (the poetic name for Imeiong), the capital of Ngeremlengui district, and yet the present titleholders are living and meeting in Ngeremetengel, a lower-ranking village in the district (see Parmentier 1986). Also, there is no sense talking about constitutions and treaties, for the government of Belau is not subject to democratic election but rather to the rule of traditional chiefs.

No one moved to restrain the possessed woman as she continued to scream and stomp for several minutes. Finally a lower-ranking titleholder from Imeiong shouted at Ngirturong: "Listen to her words, since they are indeed true." Ironically, the words of Uchererak were taken to be supportive of the local challenge to the chief, who was in favor of increasing Belau's dependence on Western forms of political leadership and economic assistance. At this point the three ranking titleholders all slipped out of the meeting house, Ngirturong to his own house across the path, Ngiraklang to his nearby canoe shed, and Ngirutelchii to another house in the village.

In the absence of his political ally Ngirturong, the legislator was now on his own, and the same vocal villagers started to bombard him with angry questions about his efforts to "kill" the draft constitution. His response was to claim meekly: "I did not write it, but now we legislators have to deal with it *and* with the Free Association agreement." Ngirturong returned shortly to his prescribed corner seat, where he sat quietly with his eyes staring blankly at the floor. During a lull in the political debate, he addressed a rhetorical question to the gathering, "What is the reason for this misbehavior?" The phrasing of this question and the chief's impatient tone of voice indicated to all that he did not consider the incident to be a valid communication from the god Uchererak (an impression confirmed by my subsequent discussions with him).

When Ngiraklang returned to the meeting house he said, "We should plead with the god to seek an appropriate person through whom to speak his words and beg him not to send his message through this woman or anyone else not in the proper role to receive these important words." He instructed the villagers that Imeiong's ninth-ranking house, Ngerungelang, held the title Chelid (God) and that the man holding this title is the proper spokesman (*kerong*) of the god (this house and the corresponding title have been vacant for some time). Then Ngirturong spoke directly to Ngiraklang, "Odisang [Japanese honorific], why don't *you* appoint a person yourself?" But Ngiraklang replied sharply, "No one can select the person to speak the words of the god; only *he* can seek out the proper person."

After about an hour, when many had had a chance to speak, various mechanisms of personal reconciliation began to operate. First, the women who had been possessed by the god went over to ask Ngirturong for some betelnut, and they exchanged a few words in private. Ngirturong and the legislator then purchased two cases of soft drinks from the local store and distributed them as peace offerings (*tngakireng*) to the people still in the meeting house. Taking his cue from this gesture, the man who had been

most vocal in his criticism of the chief thanked him for the drinks and said that everyone was once again "of one spirit" (*tarrengud*). He also tried to blunt the directness of his early criticism by putting it at a metalevel, saying that his real complaint had been the lack of communication between chief and village. The legislator, too, promised to keep in better touch with the villages.

Just as the meeting was about to end on this relatively peaceful note, one of the convention delegates (perhaps embrazened by the obvious support of the assembled villagers) put a blunt question to Ngirturong: "Before you return to Oreor, we would like to hear you publicly state your opinion concerning the upcoming election." The chief hesitated and then repeated the question for Ngiraklang, who had not heard the original query. Quickly, Ngiraklang came to the aid of his fellow chief by asking: "Who was it that asked Ngirturong this? I cannot approve of this *boy* asking Ngirturong to reveal his thoughts." Ngirturong added that he would vote according to his personal opinion, but that he would never try to manipulate the village by using the weight of his title to back his position. Ngiraklang concluded this discussion by stating that it was silly to try to find out what the village would do before the election, since after the election is over everyone will know, and the chiefs and all the people will follow that decision.

These events of July 7, though obviously prompted by the current political crisis over the draft constitution, were also related to several long-standing sources of tension within the district. First, the district has long been a center of support for Modekngei (Let Us Go Forward Together), an indigenous yet syncretistic religious movement which preaches the self-sufficiency of Belau's natural environment and whose members worship certain gods from the traditional pantheon (Aoyagi 1987). When this movement first developed during the Japanese colonial period, its leaders in the district decided to ignore Uchererak, the established god of Imeiong, in favor of other pan-Belauan deities. The religious tensions between followers of Modekngei and members of various Christian groups (Protestant, Catholic, and Seventh Day Adventist) paralleled to some degree the district's political factions, since Modekngei people generally supported the original draft constitution and opposed those legislators who argued for closer political ties with the United States at the expense of local self-determination. Not ironically – given the well-established tendency for younger brothers and "offspring of men" (*ulechell*) to seek non-chiefly avenues of power and reputation – in Ngeremlengui the Modekngei faction is led by individuals who are patrilaterally related to chief Ngirturong, who is not only Protestant but also an advocate of the pro-status position.

Second, the turmoil in the meeting house touched on the sensitive issue of relative village rank within the district. This problem has its roots in the fact that, while Imeiong is regarded as the capital of the district, the four highest ranking or "cornerpost" titleholders of Imeiong (and thus the leaders of Ngeremlengui as a whole) moved to low-ranking Ngeremetengel shortly after World War II. Ngarai-meiong, the council of titleholders which is the traditional governing body of the district, now meets in a Japanese-style meeting house in Ngeremetengel, while the central square of Imeiong is overgrown with weeds; its two meeting houses were

destroyed by typhoons decades ago and were never rebuilt. People still living in Imeiong, many of them related to the highest-ranking house owning the title Ngirturong, feel that their leaders have abandoned the legitimate locus of their rank. Finally, there is an institutional as well as personal tension between Ngirturong and Ngiraklang, the two leaders of the district. For many centuries the Ngiraklang title was first in rank, but in the late nineteenth century a Ngirturong titleholder had Ngiraklang assassinated and then usurped the leadership of Imeiong. Today, the incumbent Ngiraklang is considerably older and much more skilled in the "ways of politics" (*kelulau*) than Ngirturong, although he holds his title by virtue of weaker patrilateral ties (*ulechell*); Ngirturong, younger and far more involved in a Western life-style, is nonetheless a legitimate matrilineal (*ochell*) holder of the title. All three of these lines of tension, Modekngei/Christian, Imeiong/Ngeremetengel, and Ngirturong/Ngiraklang, became implicated in the political struggles of July 1979.

Ngiraklang's speech to the municipal council

Toward the close of a lengthy meeting of the democratically elected Ngeremlengui municipal council a week later, Ngiraklang made several unsuccessful attempts to get the floor, but each time Ngirturong put him off, knowing that this second-ranking chief was likely to bring up the events of the previous week. Finally, Ngiraklang left his prescribed seat in the corner of the meeting house and moved closer to the center of the floor. From this vantage point he repeated his request, but this time to the elected magistrate, saying: "I have already asked Ngirturong for an opportunity to speak and it has not been granted, so now I am asking the magistrate for an opportunity to speak before the public." The magistrate had no option but to acknowledge this request from his social superior, and so Ngiraklang began an impassioned, stylistically brilliant speech directed primarily at those present who had been involved in the previous week's verbal fireworks. Ngiraklang had alerted me the night before that he intended to make a speech, so I was ready with my taperecorder.

This speech focused not so much on what might appear to be the most important words spoken the week before, namely, the dramatic message of Uchererak delivered through the medium of the possessed woman, but rather on the highly irregular challenges from younger, untitled, and lower-ranking men made immediately prior to and after the possession incident. And in order to communicate what he felt to be the danger of these challenges to village leadership, Ngiraklang began by establishing a pointed analogy to events which took place in Ngeremlengui in 1966, when the local men's club (*cheldebechel*) temporarily usurped the role of the chiefly council (*klobak*) by imposing a monetary fine on a young man and when the high chief (in fact, the mother's brother of the present titleholder) subsequently left the village in anger. This historical allusion clearly established Ngiraklang's reading of the danger of the present situation: that these public insults directed toward Ngirturong might cause a result parallel to the events of 1966, namely, the departure of the high chief from the village.

Later in the speech, events from 1934 are also referred to as marking the point at which the village god began a period of uninterrupted silence, broken only in 1979.

There are, then, three relevant temporal contexts referred to in the speech: the time of the speech itself (July 14), the previous week's meeting with its embedded possession utterances (July 7), and certain parallel events and words from 1934 and 1966. As will be seen, part of the rhetorical force of the speech depends on the construction of a parallelism of "meaning" or "import" (*belkul*) among these various contexts and on the use of proverbial and normative expressions, which establishes an overall authoritative, traditional aura.

My translation of Ngiraklang's July 14 speech to the municipal council follows. Numbered line divisions are based on pauses rather than on syntactic regularities; lettered divisions mark the thematic and formal segments to be analyzed below. In order to facilitate discussion I have italicized all segmentable metapragmatic portions of the speech, including verbs of speaking, quotative complementizers (some represented by *that* and others by :), direct and indirect quoted speech, references to verbal behavior, citations of proverbs, quasi-performative formulae, first- and second-person personal pronouns, and linguistically relevant deictical references to the parameters of the present moment (excluding personal names and spatial deixis). Explanatory interpolations are enclosed in square brackets.

A

[1] *My speech* is *like this:* when *I start speaking now*, *I* am going to *talk* of *affairs* from about 1966 up until the *present day*

When *I speak like this*, those who want to *listen* should *listen*, and those who want to reflect should reflect, and after *you* have reflected *I* want *you* to *ask questions*; if some dislike what comes out, that is all right too

Because *I* am going to *say* many *proverbs* concerning the village of Ngeremlengui, not about the [municipal] council and not about Ngaraimeiong [chiefly council]

B

Ngeremlengui is like a canoe, and *I* have watched this canoe for almost seventy years

[5] And as *I* observe *us* people living in Ngeremlengui, when this canoe capsizes, there is not one of *us* who could right it, since no one is skilled in the technique of bringing a canoe back to the surface

When *you* were building the school, *you*, Ngiraikelau, and *you*, Okerdeu, were working and Tebelak *over there* and Ngirturong *here*

I was at my house, and when *you* assembled as Ngaratebelik [club] to build the school there was a coconut tree log which was brought up to be used as the launching log; then Ngirturong departed and Ngiraklang departed

You know *this*

I am not *decorating my speech in saying that: I* watched this situation grow worse

[10] How many trips did *I* make to that quonset hut *to speak* in order to bring *you* all together, in place of the absent Ngirturong?

What served as a sign of this for *me* is that when *you* were setting up the launching log, *you* acted like Ngaraimeiong and fined people like Tebelak and Ngiralulk and took a kldait-type valuable

That was a sign to *me that:* Ngaraimeiong had vanished, that Ngaratebelik had become the new Ngaraimeiong, but that was all right because Oingerang, the child of Ngirturong, was there, as well as Rechediterong, the one from Chol [village], who was the offspring of a woman from Klang [house]

Ngirturong ignored all this and remained patient, *knowing that:* Oingerang and Otaor were there

And *I* also rested easy *knowing that:* Remarii was there

[15] But then *I* watched the situation turn even worse

And when *you* fined Ngiralulk, then Ngirutelchii, the father of Maidesil, should have paid the fine, right?

He *said*, "*I am not going to pay the fine*"

The *meaning* was *like this*:

He did not pay the fine on behalf of Ngiralulk, for *you* members of Ngaratebelik [club] had become Ngaraimeiong [council]

[20] If those of Ngaraimeiong had fined Ngiralulk, then it would have been a simple matter for Ngirutelchii Rechuld to pay his [son's] fine

I observed this situation become worse, and so *I* spent a kldait-type valuable to pay the fine of Ngiralulk and to quiet down the *situation*

Perhaps it did not exactly remedy the *situation*, but at least it smoothed it over for a while, so that at least it enabled *you* to return to work and *you* finished the school and took payment for it, and *you* were of one spirit as *you* began to pave the road from Umad [channel] to Imeiong

What happened when *you* went to Imeiong? *You* were very unified and had even decided to clear the mangrove channel. What happened there?

Ngirturong departed and went to Oreor, and *you* members of Ngaratebelik disbanded

[25] *These things I am listing*, *I* do not *list* them so *that:* they will necessarily *become true*

First *we* need to understand what happened from that time up, up, up, up until the *present day*

Well, *if we* do not know these things, then Ngeremlengui will detour from the path, and there is not one among *us* who is able to put it back on course

Absolutely not, and *I think that:* the canoe is overturned and *I think that* the canoe is sunk and not one of us inside this meeting house is able to bring it back to the surface

This is one thing

C

[30] The day before *yesterday*, what happened then was the launching log for *something* concerning the god, right?

Be forewarned, *I* am going to *say words* which *you* will perhaps dislike

The day before *yesterday*, the eighth [sic] day of the month, what occurred in this very meeting house?

I believe that if it was really Uchererak who came down and *spoke his words* and that if *we* just remained with *closed mouths*, then *I know that:* Ngeremlengui has not detoured from the path

But when Uchererak came down and *spoke*, people *said*, "*Go ahead and speak your words! Go ahead and speak your words!*"

[35] What was the *meaning* of *this*?

Maybe *my tone of voice* is a bit severe concerning this *affair*; *I* am merely *clarifying*

When they all *said*, "*Go ahead and speak*"

What was the *meaning* of this *expression* for *we* people of Ngeremlengui or else for the people of Imeiong?

I think *that* the *meaning* is not at all good, since it is capable of pushing the village of Ngeremlengui off the path because no village can have two leaders in it

[40] And if *we invite* the god to come in, the god cannot be *interrogated* and cannot be subject to fining; rather, *we* can be fined or else be subject to *questioning*

D

I am trying to *explain this expression clearly*, and this does not have any *significance for me* personally, but it is extremely *significant for me* if *you* cause the village of Ngeremlengui to detour and take a different course, for this would be to ignore the *words* which came down here, which they *said* were the *words* of Uchererak

It would be ignoring them, just like taking up stones and throwing them at the village

This at least was *my* perception of what happened, Shiro; these are not *bad things to say*

I am just *reminding*, since should Ngeremlengui take a detour, then its spirit also detours, and if the spirit of Ngirturong detours, then Ngeremlengui detours and no one can bring it back

[45] And so *I ask you* who are here, is there one of *you* who can patch up the relationship between the god and Ngaraimeiong? (No) All right, then, and if the god comes down, *we* people are to be in charge of him

I also *remind you*, Chedelngod, and *you* people of Imeiong *that:* who in Imeiong is capable of *commanding* Uchererak?

Don't dislike what *I* am *saying*

Who in Imeiong *today* is capable of *commanding* Uchererak*:* "*Go ahead and speak your words to someone*"?

I really think there is no one

[50] No one at all

Uchererak is a god and is not to be *commanded*

Although in ancient times Ngaraimeiong could *claim* that Ngaraimeiong *commands* him, or else they could *ask* him for his *words*

And yet *today all of us here* have become *like this*, and *I speak these words* because *I* am worried about the village, about the spirit of the village

These things we are *talking* about *these days* [i.e., the constitutional debate] and in the future are certainly good things, and yet concerning these *affairs* which recently took place *I* strongly *remind you that:* when the spirit of Ngirturong detours, then *I* detour and the chiefs of Ngaraimeiong detour

[55] It is not the case that, should Ngirturong's thoughts be upset, *we* can steady the *affairs* of the village

Keep calm and think about the old people who still know these *affairs*

E

And so *I* am just *reminding*

I am *reminding you today*

If *I* had just *kept silent* and walked by, come the next meeting, then what?

[60] These *words* which *I* am *saying*, their *meaning* is this*: I* am not *scolding* and *I* am not angry; *my tone of voice* is severe toward *you* because *I* am *reminding* the village of Ngeremlengui

F

When *you* went to Imeiong to build the road this last time, Ngirturong fled and went to Oreor and stayed there for many months

Which man in Imeiong brought him back by means of an chelebucheb-type valuable, so that he came back carrying this chelebucheb?

This is a very difficult *thing* to accomplish

We do not know for sure: what was it that brought Ngirturong back to the village?

[65] Perhaps this was *just talk*

Whoever the person was who was skilled in these *techniques* brought Ngirturong back to the village, as if he had been playing around in Oreor, and one of the elders *complained, saying*, "*This person is coming here without having paid his entry money*"

Just *listen* to *these things I am saying* and discard them if *you* wish, since the world is growing different; but *I* really hate to be alive at almost eighty years old and *hear these strange words* which threaten to detour Ngeremlengui

If it detours after *I* am dead, then *I* would feel good because *I know that:* there is no one left in Ngeremlengui who is skilled at bringing a large canoe back to the surface, and no one is skilled at bringing a sailing canoe back to the surface, and no one is skilled at bringing a swift canoe back to the surface, and a war canoe is the most difficult of all to bring back to the surface, and Ngeremlengui is even more difficult to bring back to the surface than a war canoe

Let *us* remain calm in our spirit, for Belau has need of *us*, *knowing that:* Ngeremlengui still stands prepared

[70] But if *we* are going to *talk* about the "*poker and tongs*" of Ngeremlengui, then no one will have need of Ngeremlengui

Agreed

G

I know ... the one *I* have just *mentioned* ... *I* have known two deaths of Ngeremlengui, *like we say*, "*the death of the canoe which races with the goatfish*"

I know two [deaths]

And a person also caused them, not money

[75] And they didn't *think:* this person will take care of it so that it will work out fine and be all right

And now *you* are just *talking*, but *I* know what is wrong; and as *we say*, "*you are talking, so why don't you go do it?*"

And then *you* raise up *your* hands

I know, *I* really do not not know *this*

And it is a good thing to think about it

[80] And if the likes of Uchererak comes again, *we* will all *keep silent*. No one knows *his words*

And whoever knows *his words* has become himself a god who carries Ngeremlengui and pushes it under the water

I do not not know the *meaning* of the departure of Uchererak from the village, so that he has been *silent* up until *today*

I know

In 1934 he became *silent*, and there was an opportunity for Ngirturong Sulial and for Kodeb from Chol

[85] And Ngirturong tricked his daughter Dibech into marrying Kodeb, and he brought her to Ngerungelang [house], where they lived for many months

And there he spread this *message* of Modekngei and made Uchererak so that he was not necessarily evil, but just sleeping

It remained this way up, up, up until the eighth day of the month, although there may have been a few other times which *I* do not know about; but *I* did find out on the eighth of the month *that:* he was awaking and looking out, looking out at the village of Ngeremlengui to see if it was destroyed or not destroyed

At the very instant [the names] "*Ngiraklang and Ngirturong*" were *mentioned I* headed for the canoe shed and left the meeting house

[90] *I* did not see her pace up and down and *I* did not see her pound on the floor

From *that moment these words* have weighed upon *my* heart because *I* know who the people were who *spoke*

They are like the "council" of Uchererak and *speak the words* of Uchererak toward the village of Ngeremlengui and to Ngaraimeiong

H

This is just a personal thought and not necessarily the *truth; I* am just speculating

When they *opened their mouths to speak* on the eighth of the month, was the *purpose to declare that:* they are the *messengers* of Uchererak and now are *speaking*?

[95] If so, then it was just their opinion

But if it was their opinion, never think that again, because Ngeremlengui is not "*a snake with two tongues*" from ancient times up until *today*, and neither is it a green snake

Now I am *talking* to *you* in order to *remind you:* never do that again, because "*cold on the way out, hot on the way back*," or else, "*words which go out uncrowded cannot fit back into our mouths*"

Those who *spoke* will *learn this: their words* were uncrowded going out, but when Ngirturong and *I* turn them around, they will not be able to eat them

Just like taking the ashes from a cigarette or from a fire and stuffing them into the mouth of a person

[100] Let *us* remain calm and reflect *that:* the village still exists and so do the titleholders

And *this* is the *significance of saying that:* respect is vanishing from Ngeremlengui

And yet *you* know, Shiro, that respect is the foundation of the law of Belau, nothing else

It is not a material object, it is just *our* respect for titleholders and for any old person with a bald head

This foundation [Japanese term] is like the foundation [Belauan term] of the law of Belau

[105] And *today* as much as *we* try, respect almost vanished at that time and this is the reason that *I spoke up* so quickly

I

This is what has been on *my* mind from this morning up to now and what *I have spoken you* can throw away and that would be fine, for *I* have become happy once more, now that *I have spoken* the bad thoughts in *my* heart about the village

My physical body has no *importance; I* am now eighty years old and *I* am nearing *my* final journey, or else *I* will soon just sit as a senile old man

I am just reminding you young people and *you* people with bright minds, and those who should *speak the words of the village*, *we* should think a bit

The words of the village which we speak also have a limit; *we* do not go around *saying things without thinking*

[110] *Now* perhaps Ngirturong is happy because the people who *spoke* to Ngirturong are younger patrilateral relatives of Ngirturong, and so he is happy, but *I* am a man of the public and *I* really hated *hearing this*

Now, Ngiraikelau, *my tone of voice in this speech* has been very severe, as *I proclaim:* never *speak* like that again to Ngirturong

Whether among the elders or with senior women, but never in a public meeting, *we* always go home to *say these bad words and make decisions together*

If *this* happens when *we* are assembled together, then *I* am very sorry for the public of Ngeremlengui and for the Ngirturong title and the Ngirutelchii title and the Ngiraklang title, all of which are about to vanish

The respect for these things is about to vanish and they stand *today* like aging men who can no longer accomplish anything for Ngeremlengui, and *you* should *now* be prepared to steady the village of Ngeremlengui and the taro patches of Ngeremlengui, and to show honor toward old people

[115] Don't just stay away at school and then come back no longer caring for the village

J

I think that now my words are coming to a close

I just *say again that: I think* Ngirturong was shocked at *hearing* these *words* which *I* hate so much that they were *spoken*

And if *I* were to go to *speak* to Ngaraimeiong, "*Together we know who spoke, so let us summon them and ask them about it, and then fine them*," then *you* would just take *us* to court

I think so

[120] Yet what *I* have *said* are *just words*, and maybe it will not turn out to be like *this*

Ngirturong is no longer so unhappy about the *words* which were *spoken*, and *I* feel *like:* "*biting the bitter fig fruit*" from the eighth day of the month up until *today*

And *now* what *I* had to *say has been said*, and *my* bad thought concerning the public of Ngeremlengui has gone, and *I* will forget it

They do not remain any longer, since the public of Ngeremlengui is not *my* possession; it is the possession of the village of Ngeremlengui, and *you* young people own it

And so, thank *you* very much

Ngiraikelau, one of the men involved in the vocal attack on the chief, then took the floor and in muted, contrite tones thanked Ngiraklang for teaching the village lessons (*llach*) which they had never heard so clearly articulated before. He assured him that, knowing these principles, they would never speak this way in public again. All the people assembled in the meeting house should be grateful, he continued, for what Ngiraklang had said and should be careful to avoid the same errors in speaking. Ngiraklang then took the floor to add a brief coda to his speech, suggesting that the people of Imeiong village should investigate the reason for Uchererak's sudden return to life. Since the god does not speak for no reason, it should be possible to discover some specific problem in one of the houses which was the cause of the god's anger. If the problem is not uncovered and rectified, there is no chance that Uchererak would not return to the village. Ngiraklang concluded this coda with his usual self-deprecating good humor, saying that his speech sounded like a "personal ghost" (*deleb*) talking.

The conversation continued for a few more minutes with mild laughter and other expressions of renewed solidarity. One man confessed that he was startled when the possessed woman started to speak because she was not exactly a stranger – that is, he is related to her! The tension generated by the speech was thus diffused and the municipal council meeting proceeded as if nothing had happened. What had happened?

Analysis of metapragmatic elements in the oratory

Use of explicit metapragmatic forms

This speech provides an excellent confirmation of Bakhtin's observation, noted above, that much of our talk involves speaking about the words of others or about language more generally. This dialogic apprehension of others' speech is certainly to be expected in this ethnographic case, since Ngiraklang is addressing a political crisis essentially involving language, both speech events and norms for speaking. The initial meeting of July 7 focused on various interpretations of the written draft constitution, itself the final bilingual codification of months of verbal debate among elected delegates to the constitutional convention held in Oreor. The strictly political character of this meeting's discourse was interrupted by the message of Uchererak delivered by a woman through whom the god spoke; the god's utterance was taken to be a partisan critique of the speech (or absence of speech) of the district's chief. The immediate reactions to the possession incident focused more generally on problems of communication between leaders and villagers, with the chief claiming immunity from the verbal assaults of his lower-ranking relatives and with the second-ranking titleholder, Ngiraklang, defending the chief's right to ignore demands for the public expression of his opinion. And then the July 14 speech by Ngiraklang attacks the problem of divided leadership from a largely linguistic angle, arguing that the words of the god can only be useful if delivered through an appropriate spokesperson selected

by the god but in accordance with traditional privileges of the village's ninth-ranking house, Ngerungelang. Also, he insists that younger relatives of a titleholder must refrain from airing domestic strife in a public context, since such public scolding (*ngeroel*) not only undermines the stature of the chief but also repudiates, by implication, the authority of all other titleholders.

This linguistic complexity of the surrounding situation is matched by the richness of reference to different contexts of language use in the speech itself. Ngiraklang makes reference not only to the various utterances and interactions from the previous week's meeting but also brings in instructive parallel words and deeds from 1966, as well as comments on timeless cultural rules of speaking. There are, thus, three classes of linguistic contexts involved here: (1) deictical or indexical self-reference to the language and contextual parameters of the ongoing speech itself, (2) reports of and reference to tokens of speech uttered in other contexts (e.g., 1966, 1934, and the previous week), and (3) reference to semantic and pragmatic types (proverbs, cultural routines, pragmatic rules, etc.), that is, speech forms which are normative or "traditional." A tabulation of references to these three classes is given below:

I *References to ongoing speech event*

[1] My speech is like this
[1] When I start speaking now
[1] I am going to talk of affairs
[2] When I speak like this
[2] to ask questions
[3] I am going to say many proverbs
[9] I am not decorating my speech in saying that
[25] These things I am listing, I do not list them
[36] Maybe my tone of voice is a bit severe
[36] I am merely clarifying
[41] I am trying to explain
[43] these are not bad things to say
[44] I am just reminding
[45] And so I ask you
[47] Don't dislike what I am saying
[53] and I speak these words
[54] I strongly remind you
[57] And so I am just reminding
[58] I am reminding you today
[60] These words which I am saying, their meaning is this
[60] I am not scolding
[60] my tone of voice is severe
[60] I am reminding the village
[67] these things I am saying
[72] the one I have just mentioned
[97] Now I am talking to you in order to remind you
[105] the reason that I spoke up so quickly
[106] what I have spoken
[108] I am just reminding you

[111] my tone of voice in this speech has been very severe
[111] as I proclaim
[116] now my words are coming to a close
[117] I just say again
[120] what I have said are just words
[122] what I had to say has been said

2 *Reference to other speech events*

[1] affairs from about 1966
[10] to speak in order to bring you all together
[17] He said, "I am not going to pay the fine"
[33] and spoke his words
[33] we just remained with closed mouths
[34] Uchererak came down and spoke
[34] people said, "Go ahead and speak your words!"
[37] When they said, "Go ahead and speak!"
[38] What was the meaning of this expression
[39] I think that the meaning is not at all good
[41] the words which came down here
[41] which they said were the words of Uchererak
[48] "Go ahead and speak your words to someone"
[54] These things we are talking about these days
[59] If I had just kept silent
[65] Perhaps this was just talk
[66] none of the elders complained
[66] saying, "This person is coming here without having paid his entry money"
[67] these strange words
[84] In 1934 he became silent
[86] he spread this message of Modekngei
[89] [the names] "Ngiraklang and Ngirturong" were mentioned
[91] these words have weighed upon my heart
[94] When they opened their mouths to speak
[94] was the purpose to declare that
[98] Those who spoke
[117] these words which I hate so much that they were spoken
[118] to go to speak to Ngaraimeiong, "Together we know who spoke, so let us summon them and ask them about it, and then fine them"

3 *Reference to speech types*

[3] many proverbs concerning the village
[40] if we invite the god to come in
[40] the god cannot be interrogated
[40] we can be fined or else subject to questioning
[46] who in Imeiong is capable of commanding Uchererak?
[48] Who in Imeiong today is capable of commanding Uchererak
[51] not to be commanded
[52] Ngaraimeiong could claim
[52] Ngaraimeiong commands him
[52] or else they could ask him for his words

[70] if we are going to talk about the "poker and tongs" of Ngeremlengui
[72] like we say, "the death of the canoe which races with the goatfish"
[76] as we say, "you are talking, so why don't you do it?"
[80] we will all keep silent
[80] No one knows his words
[81] whoever knows his words
[82] he has been silent up until today
[84] he became silent
[92] speak the words of Uchererak
[94] the messengers of Uchererak
[96] Ngeremlengui is not "a snake with two tongues"
[97] "cold on the way out, hot on the way back"
[97] "words which go out uncrowded cannot fit back into our mouths"
[101] the significance of saying that: respect is vanishing
[108] speak the words of the village
[109] words of the village
[109] saying things without thinking
[111] never speak like that again to Ngirturong
[112] go home to say these bad words and make decisions together
[121] "biting the bitter fig fruit"

Throughout the speech, the orator's strategy is to draw close attention to the unfolding meaning of the discourse and to the attributed parallelism between contemporary political events and events of 1966, so that the listeners will analogously attribute similar objectivity to the basically timeless or normative references to rules of speaking. The speaker builds up his rhetorical authority to pass judgment on contemporary violations of rules of speaking by demonstrating his ability to impose a coherent interpretation on historically distinct events. Historical omniscience, then, creates an aura of decontextualized wisdom, which is formally supported by the numerous switches in temporal references within the speech itself.

Beyond these multiple references to various contexts of speaking, the speech contains many examples of lexicalized reference to what Silverstein (this volume) calls "explicit metapragmatics," that is, specific formal machinery for referring to the relationship between signals and their contexts of use. The most frequent metapragmatic form is *tekoi*, the unmarked noun for 'word' or 'talk' (as in lines 53, 60, 92, 98, 116, 117, 121). Much like the Latin *res*, *tekoi* can also combine language and action in the sense of 'affair,' 'accomplished deed,' or 'situation' (as in lines 1, 21, 54, 55). Finally, *tekoi* can enter into more complex constructions, such as *di tekoi* 'just talk' (65), in contrast to real accomplishment; *mo tekoi* 'became true' (25, 93); *belkul a tekoi* 'proverb' (3, literally the joint or elbow of speech); *tekoi el beluu* 'words of the village' (108); and *mekngit el tekoi* 'bad words' (112).

In the twenty-seven instances of use, Ngiraklang takes advantage of the unmarked quality of *tekoi* in order to contrast this word with a variety of semantically restricted metapragmatic verbs labeling types of speech acts, such as *dmung* 'say,' *kallach* 'make decisions together,' *lmuk* 'keep silent,' *mededaes* 'explain,' *melekoi* 'speak,' *mellach* 'admonish,' *mengedecheduch* 'speak formally,' *mengerodel* 'complain,' *moilikoik* 'talk

carelessly,' *oker* 'ask questions,' *oldurech* 'command,' *oleker* 'summon,' *omasech* 'enumerate,' *omeketakl* 'clarify,' *omeklatk* 'remind,' *ongeroel* 'scold,' *orrenges* 'hear.' The explicit labeling of speech acts allows the speaker to impose his own "analysis" on his own and others' language by categorizing both before ("I am going to say words which you will perhaps dislike"), during ("Now I am talking to you in order to remind you"), and after ("I am not scolding") the discourse referred to.

An even more powerful way for the speaker to impose an interpretation on the ongoing discourse is the use of the metapragmatic term *belkul* 'meaning.' A Belauan equivalent to Peirce's semiotic concept of "interpretant," *belkul* can refer to the significance, implication, intended purpose, and accomplished effect of both speech and action. The text contains eleven instances of this direct form of metapragmatic glossing:

4 *Metapragmatic glosses*

[18] The meaning was like this:
[35] What was the meaning of this?
[38] What was the meaning of this expression
[39] I think that the meaning is not at all good
[41] this does not have any significance for me personally
[41] but it is extremely significant for me
[60] These words which I am saying, their meaning is this:
[82] I do not not know the meaning of the departure of Uchererak
[94] was the purpose to declare that:
[101] And this is the significance of saying that:
[107] My physical body has no importance

The interaction of all these classes of metapragmatic forms can be observed in the speech's eleven instances of direct quotation, including five reports which represent contextually specific utterance tokens and six reports of culturally typified proverbial expressions (*belkul a tekoi*).

5 *Reports of utterance tokens*

[17] He said, "I am not going to pay the fine"
[34] people said, "Go ahead and speak your words! Go ahead and speak your words!"
[37] When they all said, "Go ahead and speak"
[66] none of the elders complained, saying, "This person is coming here without having paid his entry money"
[118] if I were to go to speak to Ngaraimeiong, "Together we know who spoke, so let us summon them and ask them about it, and then fine them"

6 *Reports of proverbs*

[72] like we say, "the death of the canoe which races with the goatfish"
[76] and as we say, "you are talking, so why don't you go do it?"
[96] because Ngeremlengui is not "a snake with two tongues"
[97] because "cold on the way out, hot on the way back"
[97] or else, "words which go out uncrowded cannot fit back into our mouths"
[121] I feel like: "biting the bitter fig fruit"

Additionally, the multiple embeddedness of these passages is evident in the fact that

three of the token reports (34, 37, 118) contain speech about speech; similarly, four of the cited proverbs (76, 96, 97, 97) are concerned with norms of speaking. Also, the importance of the speaker's constant monitoring of interpretation is seen in the fact that the first three token reports (17, 34, 37) are all followed immediately by explicit discussion of their "meaning" (*belkul*). In contrast, the import of proverbs is in each case entirely presupposed. This pattern suggests that the rhetorical risk of directly reporting specific utterances is that the speaker surrenders the role of "analysis" in favor of the role of "translation" (in Bakhtin's sense of these terms) whereas, in indirect quotation, gains in analysis are countered by loss of authoritative discourse. In Ngiraklang's speech, however, this danger is somewhat attenuated, since analysis of the speech tokens follows immediately in many cases.

But more is involved here than monitoring of interpretation, for each case of token report is actually an example of what I want to label "typifying reported speech," that is, reported speech that has the surface linguistic form of direct quotation but which does not in fact report discourse which ever occurred in the past. I was not present in the village in 1966, but it would be highly uncharacteristic for a titleholder to make the statement reported in [17], for these kinds of financial dealings are generally handled privately and silently. I was present in the context reported in [34] and [37] and no such words were spoken. The discourse represented in [66] is explicitly stated *not* to have occurred, and the speech reported in [118] is expressed in the future conditional.

Pragmatically, Ngiraklang is using his authority as a high-ranking titleholder and as an accepted expert on Belauan tradition and village history to typify rather than to merely report discourse, and to do so under the guise of transparent or iconic quotation forms. Rather than simply presupposing the existence of previous utterances, the linguistic form of which is represented, these examples of reported speech entirely create the utterances through the convention that direct quotation naturally mirrors some original event of speaking. As a result, what appears formally as the extreme case of "translation," that is, the accurate reproduction of a previous utterance, emerges as the most powerful mode of "analysis," since the speaker creates the utterance as well as imposes upon it a definitive interpretation (see Larson 1978: 59). It is interesting to note, by contrast, that at no point in his speech does Ngiraklang dignify the words of Uchererak, which he claims not to have heard (or more accurately, which he intentionally avoided hearing by leaving the meeting house), with the historicizing mantle of his reporting discourse.

The function of citing traditional proverbs can be understood, finally, in terms of the speaker's need to legitimize his own position as an authoritative voice. The proverbs not only contribute explicitly toward fixing the global metapragmatic theme of the speech (see Seitel 1977: 91) but also convey their presupposed naturalness (i.e., they are quoted exactly as prescribed) over to the other creative examples of quoted speech. In other words, a speaker who can perfectly recite proverbs is judged to be likely to report other utterances with the same transparent objectivity.

Textual pragmatics

Our analysis of the rhetorical devices of the speech is not exhausted by typologizing various instances of explicitly metapragmatic signals, with no concern for the temporal order and contextual linkages of the discourse. There is an important sense in which the linear or syntagmatic architecture of the text, that is, its "textuality," contributes an additional metapragmatic dimension to the speech's social effectiveness – and, in this case, to its ineffectiveness as well. In order to show how the text as performed constitutes what Peircean terminology calls an "indexical icon," that is, a contextually anchored diagrammatic sign, by means of which the speaker intends to effect a change in the village's political situation, I have divided the speech into ten component segments (labeled A–J) on the basis of thematic and formal coherence and parallelism. Segments A and J bracket the entire speech event: the prefatory remarks in A indicate what the hearers can look forward to ("many proverbs concerning the village of Ngeremlengui"), and the concluding remarks in J express the speaker's changed personal feelings having uttered these words ("my bad thought concerning the village of Ngeremlengui has gone"). Within these framing brackets the speech consists of two parallel groups of segments, depicted in Figure 10.1.

In the first group, segments B and C narrate the history of events from 1966 and 1979 respectively; these two segments are clearly separated from each other by the textual marker in [29]: "This is one thing." Segments B and C have parallel internal organization, with an instance of reported speech (17, 34) followed by discussion of the "meaning" of the quotation (18–20, 35), and a summary of the points made in each segment (25–8, 38–40). Following this extended historical narrative, segment D provides a more focused commentary on the significance of events described in C. The climax of D is [45], which is clearly an example of "chiefly admonition" (*mellach*) about rules of speaking: if a god descends to the village, authorized persons are in charge of prompting and interpreting the god's utterance. The next section E changes referential levels and monitors the meaning of the ongoing discourse thus far, by insisting that Ngiraklang's own speech is to be taken as "reminding" rather than as "scolding."

Exactly half-way through the speech (at line 61) Ngiraklang returns to the events of 1966 in segment F and to 1979 in segment G, but this time from the new perspective of discussing the agents of solution to each crisis. In F, Ngiraklang reminds everyone – indirectly, to be sure – that *he* was the one who manipulated the situation by means of a chelebucheb-type valuable. And segment G, marked off from the preceding segment by [71], "Agreed" (parallel to line 29 in the first group), returns to the events of the previous week. And this is then followed by segment H, which (parallel to segment D) concerns the "meaning" of the events described in G. Just as in D, in segment H a "chiefly admonition" is pronounced: that respect is vanishing from the village. Segment I (parallel to E) takes the whole of the present discourse as its object and announces the central metapragmatic theme of the oratory: don't ever scold the chief in public (111–13).

The apparent symmetry of the text's organization conceals an essential asymmetry,

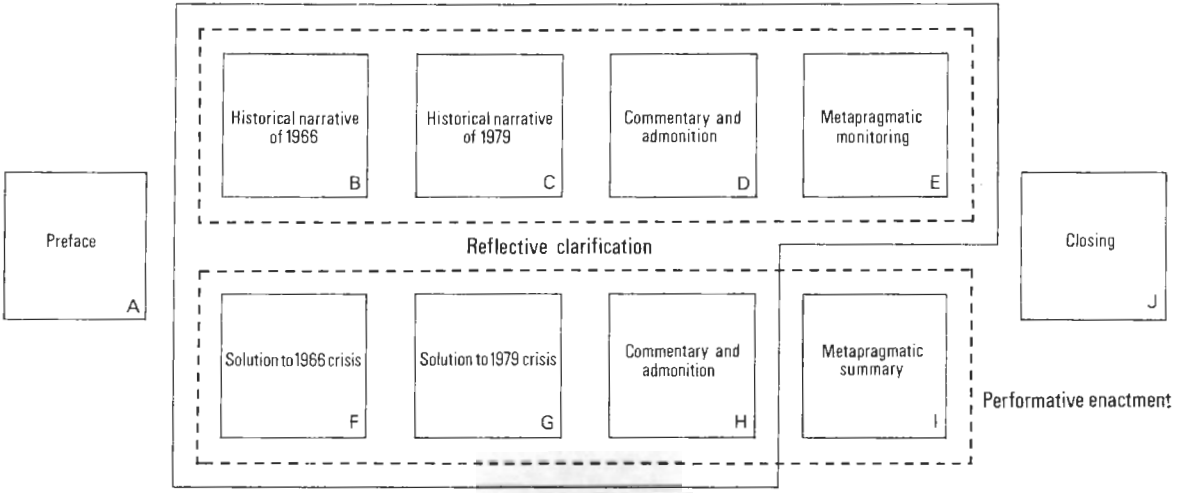


Figure 10.1 Parallelism of segments

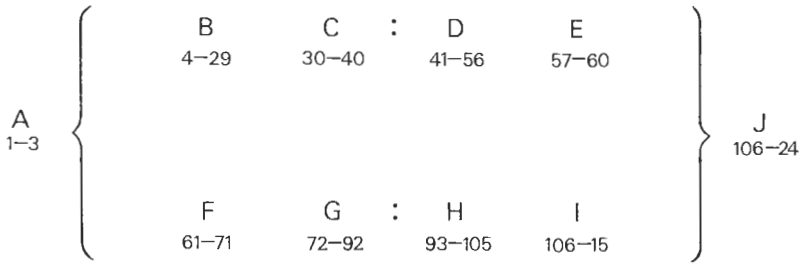


Figure 10.2 Thematic movement

the clue to which is the presence of the string of proverbs in segment H. My analysis is that the quotation of proverbs in place of the quotation of token utterances (as in B and D) is intended to focus the aura of chiefly authority (discussed above) at this exact moment, that is, at the turning point (*belkul*) when the speech shifts from being a reflective clarification to being a performative political enactment. How this works out can be easily seen by looking once more at the overall thematic movement of the oratory, as represented in Figure 10.2.

Ngiraklang's speech is an effort by a high-ranking titleholder to solve a particular political crisis in the village by means of a verbal performance which, under the guise of being a gentle reminder ("I am merely reminding") or clarification ("I am just clarifying") of past events parallel to the present situation, actually intends to effect the solution through its utterance. The basis for this "pseudo-performative" force (Silverstein 1981) is the syntagmatic construction of a proportion between, on the one hand, two events which seriously disturbed the political stability of the village and, on the other hand, two agents of resolution to these crises. The parallel events, what the speaker calls the "two deaths of Ngeremlengui," both have to do with devastating challenges to chiefly authority involving the temporary usurpation of the power of chiefly speech.

In 1966 untitled members of the local men's club, Ngaratebelik, imposed a fine on one of their members, a right reserved to sacred titled members of Ngaraimeiong chiefly council. The young man's father refused to pay the fine, the legitimate chiefs departed from the village, and the men's club disbanded – three events which left the village in a shambles. In 1979, just one week prior to the time of the speech, the words of the god Uchererak, silent since 1934, were enthusiastically received by younger relatives of chief Ngirturong, whose pro-status political position was being challenged by lower-ranking villagers. Both of these events, according to Ngiraklang's explication, illustrate that the principal danger of a village with two voices of authority (i.e., the "snake with two tongues"), either two councils (Ngaratebelik and Ngaraimeiong) or two leaders (Uchererak and Ngirturong), is the potential departure of the legitimate titleholders. And, as he repeats, if the titleholders "detour," then the village itself "detours."

The speech completes the analogy by constructing, in the second half of the text, a parallel argument concerning the agents responsible for the solution to these crises.

Without identifying himself by name, Ngiraklang draws upon the common historical knowledge of all present that it was his own skillful negotiation which made it possible for Ngirturong to return to the village in 1966. And it is the diagrammatic organization of the speech itself which supplies the missing fourth part of the proportion: as Ngiraklang cleverly repaired the political damage created by split authority in 1966, so his same skill, as abundantly evidenced in the rhetorical brilliance and traditional knowledge displayed in the proverbial citations contained in the speech itself (especially in H), will bring the present situation to a resolution. This resolution is not, however, merely referred to in the speech, but it is intended to be accomplished *by its very performance*. What appears at first to be a static diagram turns out to be a syntactically generated indexical icon with pseudo-performative force designed to be the solution.

In attempting to remind the village of certain traditional norms of language use and to perform a resolution of political tensions exacerbated by recent violations of these rules, Ngiraklang obviously places great store not only in his own political weight but also in the power of speech in general to effect the goals sought. For some people in the village, however, the speech accomplished an unintended purpose – that of standing as a "historical marker" (*olangch*) (Parmentier 1987: 12) of the demise of chiefly authority and respect. Part of this reaction stems from the fact that, despite its "traditional" orientation, themes, and references, the speech itself constitutes a highly modern, idiosyncratic event. First of all, the speech followed no established genre for the chiefly use of language. Traditionally, meetings of assembled titleholders were carried out according to a system of relayed whispering (*kelulau*), in which messages passed silently from lower-ranking men to the four high-ranking titleholders, who communicated among themselves through two messengers. The titleholders remained seated while the messengers, heads bent low, passed up and down the floor of the meeting house. High-ranking chiefs had little need to persuade others of their views through public oratory, since their final decisions (*telbiil*) were not subject to questioning or even debate (cf. Comaroff 1975: 145). In fact, passive silence was one of the hallmarks of presupposed chiefly authority; as one proverb puts it: "the dugong [sea cow] sleeps in deep water," that is, a chief hides himself from easy public scrutiny. So Ngiraklang's highly persuasive speech about the relevance of traditional rules of speaking belies its own message; or to put the point the other way around, to the degree that the speech was perceived as persuasive, it was so judged according to non-traditional criteria.

Second, the context of the speech contributed to a lessening of its political effectiveness. Ngiraklang was forced to ask permission from a democratically elected magistrate to get the floor, and his speech was basically an extended interruption of the meeting of the elected municipal council, a body representing exactly the sort of dual authority Ngiraklang criticizes so strongly. This second point relates to the analysis presented above, according to which the speech as performed is an indexical icon, since part of the meaning of any indexical or pragmatic signal is determined by the presupposed elements in the context in which the signal appears. In this case the negative contribution from the context was strong to the degree that the speech anchored itself, both spatially and temporally, in that context.

Acknowledgments

The ethnographic research on which this chapter is based was carried out in Ngeremlengui district (now State) of the Republic of Belau from 1978 to 1980. I am grateful for financial support from the Center for Psychosocial Studies, Chicago, and for the warm hospitality and patient instruction of the people of Ngeremlengui. It is always a pleasure to express my indebtedness to my teacher, Malsol Ngiraklang, who asked me to bring my taperecorder to the meeting house on July 14. During a postdoctoral appointment at the Center in 1982 I was able to polish my translation of the speech under analysis here with the help of Anita Skang Jordan. An earlier version of this chapter was presented at the Conference on Metapragmatics and Reported Speech, Center for Psychosocial Studies (June 27–9, 1985). I wish to thank all conference participants for their helpful criticisms and suggestions and especially Michael Silverstein, both for his extensive commentary on my paper and for his insistence on the importance of text-internal pragmatics. The final version owes much to the critical editorial eye of John Lucy, to whom I offer my thanks.

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