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Ceremonial Dialogues in South America

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Source: *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol. 88, No. 2 (Jun., 1986), pp. 371-386

Published by: Blackwell Publishing on behalf of the American Anthropological Association

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/677567>

Accessed: 18/07/2010 22:53

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Ceremonial Dialogues in South America

In native South America, ceremonial dialogue is a widespread and prominent, yet simultaneously enigmatic, form of ritualized language use. This paper examines the ceremonial dialogic complex through the interpretive lens of a semiotic hypothesis, namely, that ritualized dialogic form is a sign vehicle, a “model of and for” linguistic and more generally social solidarity. A comparative correlational study confirms this semiotic interpretation, showing that the ceremonial dialogue is used in situations of potential conflict—the maximally distant social relations within a given society. This paper also raises a broader theoretical issue concerning the role of metacommunicative devices in social action, suggesting that it is the “meta-signal” itself that enables actors to formulate an image of action—thereby regulating it—simultaneously as it occurs.

Dialogic Form as Sign Vehicle

IN NATIVE SOUTH AMERICA, THERE IS A widely distributed ritualized form of linguistic interaction known as the ceremonial dialogue (Fock 1963:219–230). The present paper explores this dialogic form from the point of view of a specific hypothesis about its semiotic functioning, namely, that ritualized dialogue is a sign vehicle constructed from characteristics of everyday conversational dialogue, and is therefore an icon or “model of” that dialogue. At the same time, because ceremonial dialogues select only certain features, they are also “models for” ordinary conversation, and, indeed, social interaction more generally. In particular, they convey a message about solidary linguistic and social interaction.

If ceremonial dialogues are models for solidary interaction throughout native South America, the dialogues within a given culture convey as well a culture-specific message about solidarity, i.e., a message about how cohesion is and should be achieved in that society. This culture-specific message is communicated by means of an indexical connection between the ceremonial dialogic form, as sign vehicle, and the type of linguistic interaction for which it is employed—negotiation, myth-telling, greeting, and so forth—as meaning, as well as by a culture-specific iconicity. Ceremonial dialogue, as highly salient linguistic behavior, draws attention to itself and to the linguistic interaction for which it is employed. Simultaneously, because it embodies a cross-linguistic ideal of sociability, it suggests that that linguistic interaction is itself an instance of social solidarity.

From an analytical point of view, a distinction can be made between “semantic” and “pragmatic” dialogues. The concept of a semantic dialogue corresponds with ordinary notions of dialogue, wherein there are “turns” at speaking (cf. Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974). A “turn” implies a semantic contribution on the part of a speaker, and specifically excludes what are sometimes called “back channel responses,” i.e., hearer responses that punctuate the main speaker’s “turn,” such as “uh-huh” in English, keeping the linguistic interaction going, but not contributing to the overall semantic meaning. Not all native South American ceremonial dialogues are semantic dialogues of this sort. However, they are all “pragmatic dialogues,” i.e., they are dialogic in the special sense of counting “back channel response” as a turn at speaking. By virtue of a palpable

rhythm of alternation, all South American ceremonial dialogues foreground such pragmatic turn-taking.

In what follows, I demonstrate the utility of this hypothesis by investigating the formal characteristics of ceremonial dialogues, showing what image of ordinary conversation they embody, and how, as sign vehicles, they achieve salience. I then show that the dialogues in fact occur in social situations where solidarity is at issue, namely, interactions involving maximal social distance between participants and consequently an ever-present possibility of conflict.¹ Finally, I examine the type of linguistic interaction for which ceremonial dialogue is employed, together with the social context in which it is used, to show that dialogues are in fact drawing attention to culturally specific mechanisms for the production and maintenance of solidarity, suggesting thereby how social cohesion can be achieved.

The Ethnographic Cases

This paper considers five ethnographic cases: (1) the classic Carib style of ceremonial dialogue as found among the Waiwai of Guiana and the Trio of the Brazil-Surinam border, (2) ceremonial dialogues of the Yanomamö Indians of the Brazil-Venezuela border region, (3) ritualized dialogic "greetings" of the Jivaroan Shuar and Achuar of eastern Ecuador, (4) dialogic gathering house chanting of the Kuna Indians of the San Blas islands in Panama, and (5) dyadic origin-myth telling style or *wāñēklèn* of the Gê-speaking Shokleng Indians of southern Brazil.

Fock (1963:219ff.) reports the possible occurrence of ceremonial dialogue in 42 South American Indian societies. These are concentrated primarily to the north of the Amazon basin. However, for many of these societies data are simply too fragmentary to allow determination of whether the phenomena at all resemble those discussed here. I prefer to focus on cases where good ethnographic description is available, with transcribed texts and/or tape recordings of actual dialogues.

The classic Carib pattern was known originally through the descriptions of Fock (1963:216–230 and 303–316), who himself observed the phenomenon known as *oho-karī* (yes-saying) among the Waiwai. The materials available include detailed descriptions of the formal linguistic and contextual features, as well as of social purposes, and translations of two actual dialogues. Waiwai ceremonial dialogues involve two typically elder men, who sit on stools opposite one another. One man takes the lead, speaking in short sentences, which among the Waiwai are uttered in a "special chant-tone . . . with rising pitch at the end" (Fock 1963:216). After each sentence, or sentence fragment, the respondent utters *oho* (yes).

A variant of the Carib pattern has been described for the Trio by Rivière (1969:235–238, passim and 1971:293–311), who distinguishes three types of dialogue, all of which show certain common characteristics. In the most formal type (*nokato*), two men sit on stools, as among the Waiwai. The lead man speaks in short sentences, each containing at the end a rhyming word (*kara* or *lame*). The second man responds with a "low murmuring grunt" (Rivière 1971:299). In the least formal type, known as *tesamiken*, no rhyming word is used and the respondent utters the word *irara* (that's it). In addition, the speakers need not sit on stools, and, indeed, women sometimes participate in this kind of dialogue. The intermediate type of dialogue, known as *sipasipaman*, is also formally intermediate, lacking the rhyming word but using either the grunt or *irara* in responses.

Regarding Yanomamö ceremonial dialogues, we have a reasonably extended account by Cocco (1972:326–330) and one by Migliazza (1978), a description by Shapiro (1972:149–151), and numerous brief references in other ethnographic accounts. In addition, one such dialogue can be observed in the Chagnon and Asch film, *The Feast*. There we see two men facing in the same direction, one squatting in front of the other, engaging in a rapid back and forth dialogue, in which the speaker behind leads with a 1–3 syllable utterance, the speaker in front responds at regular intervals with another 1–3 syllables.

Shapiro (1972:150) mentions a more "intense form of ritualized conversation" (*yaimu*) in which partners are "seated together on the ground locked in a tight embrace, sometimes even groin to groin and with legs intertwined." The speech alternation is "so rapid that the two are often exchanging monosyllabic utterances." A photograph in Cocco (1972:327) shows the interlocutors in squatting position facing one another, but a note (1972:326, n. 16) indicates that "la costumbre más común ha sido la de celebrar el *way-amou* estando de pie las dos partes."

The Jivaroan Shuar and Achuar ceremonial dialogues have recently been described in detail by Gnerre (1984), although they were reported earlier by various observers, notably Karsten (1935), and, indeed, Harner's (1972b) record of Shuar music includes an example of the ceremonial greeting. Janet Hendricks, who has recently returned from two years among the Shuar, has also made available a tape of Shuar war dialogues (personal communication). At least two types of ceremonial dialogue must be distinguished for Shuar and Achuar, a "greeting" used in visits between settlements, and a "war dialogue" used when warriors arrive in the house of a leader who takes them into battle. Both types occur inside the house. In greetings, the interlocutors are seated across from one another. The lead speaker utters a short sentence to which the respondent replies with a monosyllabic word, e.g., "yes," "wow," "true." War dialogues take place from a standing position, with each speaker moving back and forth in time with his speech.

For Kuna, Sherzer (1983) supplies detailed descriptions of "gathering house chanting" performed by chiefs, although there are also older accounts of this *onmakket* (gathering house) style (e.g., Wassén 1949:46–54 and Holmer 1951:16–21). Sherzer has also made available tapes and transcriptions of actual instances of this ceremonial dialogue. In Kuna ceremonial dialogues, two interlocutors—the chief and his respondent—lie in hammocks slung next to one another in the communal gathering house. The chief chants a line characterized by a distinctive, generally falling intonation contour (Sherzer 1983:52–53). As he protracts the final vowel of this line, the respondent enters in with a harmonized *teki* (indeed), the final vowel here in turn being protracted, at which point the lead speaker begins another line. The entire Kuna performance is distinctly musical sounding.

For data on the Shokleng dyadic origin-myth telling style, known as *wāñēklén*, I draw upon my own field research (see Urban 1984 and 1985 for analyses of this style), which involved the tape recording and transcription of actual instances of origin-myth telling. A brief description had been given earlier by J. Henry (1941:126). In the *wāñēklén*, two men sit opposite one another in the middle of the plaza, their legs entwined in a manner reminiscent of the Yanomamö. One interlocutor leads, uttering the first syllable of the origin myth. The respondent repeats that syllable, after which the first speaker utters the second syllable, and so forth, in rapid-fire succession. Speakers move their heads and upper torsos rhythmically in time with the syllables, which are shouted with extreme laryngeal and pharyngeal constriction.

Formal Characteristics of the Ceremonial Dialogues

Cycles and Pragmatic Turns

All ceremonial dialogues analyzed here involve the taking of "pragmatic turns." One speaker utters a stretch of speech—a syllable, word, line, or sentence—and this constitutes his pragmatic turn at speaking. The respondent replies with another stretch of speech—a syllable, word, line, or sentence—and this constitutes his turn. Initial turn and response taken as a unit I call a "cycle." Within a given type of ceremonial dialogue, the cycle is organized in a characteristic way. However, in each case the cycle achieves an acoustic prominence through its temporal regularity, making a veritable "beat" discernible.

The extreme cases in this regard are the Shokleng and the Kuna. Among Kuna, cycles are so long that it becomes difficult to speak of a cycle "beat," although, because of the musical character of these dialogues, an actual beat can be tapped out during a given

pragmatic turn. Measurements of two instances show that Kuna cycles are in fact remarkably regular. The cycle may be represented graphically (Figure 1). Sp_1 represents the lead speaker, and Sp_2 the respondent. The cycle begins at time t_1 . Typically, the voice of the respondent can be detected at the outset, as he completes a response to the previous utterance. However, his voice trails off with declining pitch and intensity, making it difficult to determine precisely where his response ends. The onset of the lead speaker, however, is unmistakable. He proceeds to chant a line of narrative, consisting of on average 25 syllables. At t_2 , the respondent begins to utter the word *teki* (indeed), the onset of this word overlapping the drawing out of the final vowel by the lead speaker. At t_3 , the lead speaker completes his line, while the respondent protracts the final vowel of *teki* until beyond t_4 , when the lead speaker begins the next line. One complete cycle lasts from t_1 until t_4 .

Measurements of elapsed times involved in Kuna cycles reveal a regularity. A study of one text, containing 11 lines, yielded the results shown in Table 1. (Example A) An entire cycle typically lasts about 16.5 seconds.

Further study shows that there is variation between different occurrences of this style as regards the average times, but that the differences are not great. Moreover, within a given telling there is consistency despite the divergence between tellings. For example, in the results from a second instance of Kuna chanting (Table 1, Example B), the length of lead speaker-respondent overlap is systematically greater than in the first instance.

It is important to recognize that overlaps between turns form an integral part of Kuna ceremonial dialogues. Because the two speakers are actually chanting, their voices may be described in terms of "musical," as opposed to "speech," pitch. At the t_2 - t_3 overlap especially, the two voices harmonize, giving hearers the impression of a totality of discourse created by cooperation. This harmonizing contrasts markedly with the aggressive-sounding overlap between speakers found in Shuar war dialogues.

If Kuna provide a limiting case in the direction of extremely long cycles, the Shokleng provide a limit in the direction of short cycles. Here a "turn" consists in uttering only a single syllable. Normally, there is no overlap between turns. One can imitate the *wāñēklèn* style by oneself doubling each syllable one utters, while maintaining a fluid, uninterrupted flow of sound, stressing each syllable and articulating it with a constricted phar-

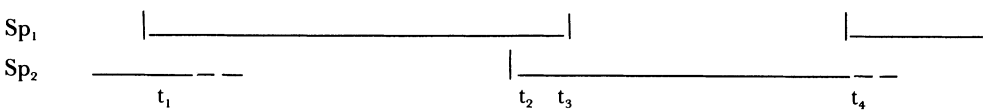


Figure 1
Temporal structure of the Kuna Pragmatic Cycle.

Table 1
Data on the Kuna Pragmatic Cycle.

	Average	Standard deviation	Maximum range
<i>Example A</i>			
t_1-t_2	11.08	1.03	10.2-13.5
t_2-t_3	0.59	0.40	0.2-1.4
t_3-t_4	4.82	0.40	4.4-5.4
<i>Example B</i>			
t_1-t_2	11.54	0.61	10.7-12.2
t_2-t_3	2.68	0.43	2.2-3.1
t_3-t_4	6.64	0.67	6.1-7.4

ynx and larynx. Measurements show an average cycle length of some 0.58 seconds, as contrasted with 16–21-second cycles among Kuna. The rhythm of cyclicity in Shokleng is simultaneously signaled by head and body movements. To illustrate the nature of the *wāñēklèn*, a brief excerpt is given below. The lead and response speakers are indicated as “A” and “B,” respectively, and each full cycle is given a number:

	A	B		A	B		A	B		A	B
1.	kɔñ	kɔñ	5.	ẽ	ẽ	9.	tẽ	tẽ	13.	yɛ	yɛ
2.	ŋəŋ	ŋəŋ	6.	tõ	tõ	10.	tɔŋ	tɔŋ	14.	ka	ka
3.	ũ	ũ	7.	nɛ	nɛ	11.	nã	nã	15.	ku	ku
4.	yɛ	yɛ	8.	wɛŋ	wɛŋ	12.	we	we	16.	tã	tã

Put into linear narrative form, the transcription and translation are as follows:

kɔñŋəŋ	ũ	yɛ	ẽ	tõ	nɛ	wɛŋ	tẽ	tõ	nã
man	who	purposive	he	ergative	something	see	definite	ergative	
we	yɛ		kakutã						
see	purposive		emerge out						

“Who will emerge to see what it is the man has seen?”

This passage requires approximately 9.3 seconds for narration in the *wāñēklèn* style.

The other cases of South American ceremonial dialogue range between these extremes. In the absence of tapes, I have been unable to do measurements on the Waiwai and Trio ceremonial dialogues. Nevertheless, the existence of a palpable rhythm of cyclicity is borne out by Rivière (1971:298), who refers to even the least formal variety of Trio ceremonial dialogue as “readily distinguishable from everyday speech both by the speed at which it is carried on and by the continual and formalized response of *irara*, which gives the conversation a slightly staccato effect.” He adds (Rivière 1971:309, n. 10): “After I had been among the Trio a few days only and while busy writing in my hammock, my attention was drawn to it by the change in rhythm of the conversation going on around me.” Some idea of cyclicity can be had from the brief transcription he supplies (Rivière 1971:309, n. 14). The lead speaker’s turns involve the uttering of between 5 and 10 syllables, as contrasted with an average of 25 syllables among the Kuna and 1 syllable among the Shokleng.

Among Shuar-Achuar, in samples measured, the lead speaker’s turn lasts typically only 1.37 seconds, during which time he utters on average 7.4 syllables. Average syllable length here is thus 0.19 seconds, and the overall average including response is just 0.21. This contrasts with the Shokleng case, where syllables take nearly 0.29 seconds to produce, and Kuna, where the average syllable length is 0.64 seconds.

In Shuar-Achuar cycles there is generally no overlap between lead and response turns. Indeed, there may be a slight (0.20–0.30 second) pause. However, there is often overlap at the other end. The lead speaker frequently begins his utterance as the respondent’s trails off. This does not produce a musical effect, as among the Kuna. Rather, one senses an aggressive penetration of the respondent’s speaking time by the lead speaker.

Judging from the descriptions, Yanomamö dialogues seem to vary in cycle length. Analysis of the Chagnon and Asch filmed example suggests that lead speaker and respondent utter between one and three syllables per pragmatic turn, average cycle length being equal to that of the Shokleng *wāñēklèn* (0.58 seconds). Cocco (1972:330 *passim*) refers to repeated occurrence of *trisilabos*, while Shapiro (1972:150) mentions an especially rapid form in which the pragmatic turn is reduced to a monosyllable, as among the Shokleng. The rhythmical nature of the Yanomamö cycle can be sensed in any case. Acoustically, this dialogue is most reminiscent of Shuar-Achuar ceremonial greetings, though it sounds not unlike the Shokleng *wāñēklèn*.

For each tribe considered here, there is a distinctive cycle associated with the ceremonial dialogues (see Table 2). The Kuna cycle is long, syllables are uttered slowly and in a chanted voice, and there is an emphasis on harmonic overlap between turns. Among Shokleng, the cycle is short, syllables are uttered rapidly in a shouted voice, and there is no overlap between turns. The other types of ceremonial dialogue would seem to range between these extremes. However, Shuar-Achuar dialogues are noteworthy as well for their aggressive character, manifested in the penetration of the respondent's speaking time by the lead speaker.

Despite the diversity, an important similarity underlies all of these dialogues. In each case, alternation between speakers is regularized. Simultaneously, the alternating character itself is foregrounded. This regularization draws attention to the entire linguistic interaction, suggesting that the interaction is something of note, something distinct from the ordinary run of events.

At the same time, a regularized pragmatic cycle is a way of making a metapragmatic comment on the linguistic interaction in which it occurs. It labels the interaction as "dialogic," as involving the coordinated efforts of two speakers. Importantly, performance of these dialogues requires skill and practice on the part of performers, who must pay attention to the other person and coordinate their own behavior with the behavior of the other in mind. In this sense, ceremonial dialogues become a model of and for coordination more generally, this coordination in turn representing a fundamental building block of social solidarity.

Finally, by regularizing the pragmatic cycle, ceremonial dialogues remove timing of response from the sphere of possible actor manipulation. In ordinary conversation, interlocutors can manipulate this timing, e.g., in American English increasing the rate of pragmatic response signals that one is about to take over the semantic turn. In ceremonial dialogues, such manipulation is not possible, and there is consequently introduced a norm of "politeness," in the sense of hearing the other speaker out without interfering (cf. Brown and Levinson 1978, who have developed a different notion of "politeness"). This is another component of the cross-linguistic model of solidarity built into ceremonial dialogic process.

The Pragmatic Response

A striking characteristic of South American dialogues concerns the limitations placed upon possible pragmatic responses. These are positive or affirmative responses designed to keep the dialogue going, in keeping with their "back channel" nature. They are not semantic responses to the lead speaker's statement.

Table 2
Data on pragmatic cycles.

	Kuna	Shokleng	Waiwai	Trio	Yanomamö	Shuar
1. Lead-turn length ^a	11-12	.30	—	—	.31	1.37
2. Response-turn length ^a	5-7	.30	—	—	.27	.42
3. Cycle length ^a	16-21	.60	—	—	.58	1.79
4. Syllables per lead turn	25	1	(7.1)	7.5	1-3	7.40
5. Syllables per response turn	2	1	2	1-3	1-3	1.2
6. Average syllable length ^a	.64	.30	—	—	.15	.21
7. Overlap between lead and response turns (t_2-t_3)	yes	no	—	—	no	no
8. Overlap between response and lead turns (t_4-t_1)	yes	no	—	—	no	some

^aMeasured in seconds

The classic case is the Waiwai ceremonial dialogue, which is literally called “yes saying” (*oho-kari*). According to Fock (1963:216), “after each sentence the opponent answers with a hardly audible ‘oho’, that is, ‘yes’.” Judging from two dialogues (Fock 1963:303–316), this “yes” is never a semantic response to a previously formulated yes/no question. Instead, the response indicates that the interlocutor is comprehending what the lead speaker has to say. It is a form of acknowledgment, as in the following excerpt (Fock 1963:217):

I want your hair-tube	oho
so I came	oho
you live here	oho
have lots of beads	oho
you can make another one	oho

A similar pattern is found among the Trio. Rivière (1971:298–299) reports that for the least formal type of dialogue, the response is *irara* (that’s it), and for the most formal “a low murmuring grunt,” which we must presume indicates acknowledgment or comprehension. Judging from the one excerpt of a marriage negotiation dialogue (Rivière 1971:309, n. 14), the lead speaker again merely states his case:

I have come
 I am good
 things I am wanting
 your daughter I want
 my wife, I want
 my woman, her being, I want

The desire is formulated in declarative terms, with the respondent replying affirmatively. The affirmative reply, however, only acknowledges that the lead speaker has that desire. It does not indicate that the respondent will in fact help to fulfill it by making available to the speaker his daughter.

Waiwai and Trio ceremonial dialogues suggest a delicacy in language use, in which the speaker is allowed to state a desire, but in which he does not press for an immediate yes/no response. The respondent in turn acknowledges the desire but does not thereby agree to do anything about it. Positive initiative is still left with him. Simultaneously, however, interlocutors are kept in the dialogue by the foregrounded pragmatic turn-taking, which constitutes one overt social purpose of the interaction, and which both interlocutors strive to maintain.

Among Kuna, response is again systematically affirmative, the lead utterance being followed by a *teki* (indeed), or occasionally, apparently, an affirmative realized phonetically as [ayie]. Since Kuna dialogue is used for narration, the lead speaker’s semantic turn is typically an actual monologue. Here the respondent’s affirmation acknowledges the lead statement, and simultaneously makes the semantic monologue appear as a pragmatic dialogue. This is of importance in connection with the culture-specific notion of solidarity embodied to be discussed subsequently.

The Shokleng *wāñēklèn* seems anomalous in this context, since the respondent utters the exact same syllable he has just heard from the lead speaker. However, Shokleng repetition response is actually a signal of comprehension as well. The model for the *wāñēklèn* style is the “teaching” style (Urban 1985). The Shokleng method of teaching is to have a learner repeat verbatim, syllable by syllable, what he has just heard. If the imitation is judged incorrect, the teacher repeats the syllable until the learner has pronounced it correctly. This is the method, indeed, used in teaching the origin myth itself to initiates. Repetition is an affirmation and, in particular, a sign of comprehension, just as *teki* indicates affirmation and comprehension among Kuna.

In Shuar-Achuar dialogues, the respondent has available various possible responses. In one text (Gnerre 1984), seven distinct response types occur, including *chua* (wow), *nekása* (true), and even *tsaa* (no), which occurs in 2 out of 50 turns, although here it is probably used in an affirmative sense vis-à-vis a negative statement. There are also cases where the respondent actually repeats the line uttered by the lead speaker, something that is an echo of the Shokleng pattern. Finally, at certain points, typically at changeovers of semantic turn, the two interlocutors are both uttering sentences. While the Shuar-Achuar pattern is distinctive, it fits squarely into the general pattern of pragmatic acknowledgment found in other South American ceremonial dialogues.

For Yanomamö, Cocco (1972:326) indicates that the respondent "no hace sino repetir, aun remedando, lo que aquel dice o pide; para ello existe multitud de sinónimos afirmativos y negativos." Response is again an expression of comprehension, functioning to keep the two interlocutors interacting. Moreover, the respondent can make alternative but pragmatically equivalent responses, and these include repetition of the last syllable of what has just been uttered (Migliazza 1978:574), once again echoing the Shokleng pattern.

From translated texts, it appears that Yanomamö are more overt than the Waiwai and Trio in pressing their demands through dialogue, as in the following excerpt (Cocco 1972:326), for which, unfortunately, the pragmatic responses are not indicated:

Give me, give me, nephew. Give me, give me an axe. They have told me that you have axes.

However, despite the pressing character of the statements, participation in the ceremonial dialogue keeps interlocutors interacting for some time, each making his case, until the entire issue has been thoroughly talked out. In this regard, Yanomamö dialogues are analogous to those discussed previously. They establish a norm of linguistic interaction in which each side is heard out at length.

In all cases, ceremonial dialogues foreground pragmatic dialogicality with the pragmatic response signaling comprehension, simultaneously as it cues the lead speaker to continue. It does not commit the respondent in any way to what has been semantically said. Because of its saliency, the pragmatic response cycle simultaneously itself becomes a sign vehicle. While it imitates ordinary conversation, in which back channel responses play a constant part, it also becomes a "model for" how conversation—and, in particular, the conversation at hand—ought to proceed.

If solidarity consists, on the one hand, of the coordination of one's actions with actions of another, as imaged in the pragmatic cycle, it also consists, on the other hand, of a positive acknowledgment of the other, a due sign that one has taken cognizance of the actions of the other and has comprehended their "meaning." Through regularization of pragmatic response, ceremonial dialogues embody an icon of the general semiotic character of a solidary relationship. Simultaneously, these dialogues suggest indexically that solidarity is present in the specific linguistic interaction in which it is employed, i.e., they are also "models for" solidarity.

Because pragmatic response is formally constrained—it must be a signal of comprehension—what is again a variable in ordinary conversation is fixed in ceremonial dialogue. The pragmatic response may not be used to convey an opinion about the lead speaker's utterance or to take over the semantic turn, as is common in everyday conversation. The respondent may only signal his acknowledgment, and this aids in the establishment of a norm of hearing the other out.

Other Pragmatic Variables

All utterances in South American ceremonial dialogues are also stylistically marked (Urban 1985) by their limitation as regards other pragmatic variables available in ordinary discourse, e.g., intonation contour, stress, volume, rate of syllable metering, and use

of pharyngeal and laryngeal constriction. The dialogues range between the fully musical “chanting” of the Kuna and the laryngealized and exploded “shouting” of the Shokleng.

Sherzer (1983:52) has diagrammed intonation contours for two lines of Kuna ceremonial dialogue. The lead speaker’s lines descend gradually from high to low for the first part, then from mid to low for the second. All of the instances examined thus far conform to this two-part pattern. The respondent’s utterance, as diagrammed by Sherzer, follows a level pitch, although pitch may taper off during the phase of overlap. In any case, the Kuna style involves musical, rather than speech, pitch, with pitch exhibiting in all cases a sustained quality.

Waiwai dialogues as well are described in terms of “chanting.” Fock (1963:216) notes that speakers employ a “special chant-tone” in which the short sentences exhibit a “rising in pitch at the end.” The Trio dialogues appear similar in this regard, though Rivière does not provide a detailed linguistic description.

In contrast to Waiwai and Kuna, Shokleng syllables are “shouted,” in a voice that makes use of extreme laryngeal and pharyngeal constriction. Moreover, intonation contour remains level throughout the dialogue, each speaker uttering the syllables at the same pitch. Because syllables are metered at regular intervals, if pitch were varied, the effect would be decidedly musical in nature.

The Shuar and Yanomamö dialogues are intermediate. The Shuar greeting and war dialogues clearly involve some laryngealization, and many syllables are virtually shouted. However, some are protracted, exhibiting a falling intonation contour that is marginally chant-like. Judging from the Chagnon and Asch film, *The Feast*, Yanomamö ceremonial dialogues involve a voice different from ordinary speech, perhaps somewhat more constricted and exploded. Shapiro (1972:150) describes the more intense form of Yanomamö dialogue as “shouting,” a characterization that may place it more in line with the Shokleng *wāñēklèn*. On the other hand, Cocco (1972:330) and Migliazza (1978:573–574) describe the dialogues in terms of musical pitch. They also indicate the regularization of stress in this special discourse style.

The different voices and intonation patterns used are probably distinct sign vehicles, with their own characteristic meanings. The Shokleng “shout,” for example, is aggressive sounding, and, indeed, is modeled on a style of speech used in encounters between groups where manifestation of manliness is at issue. Shuar war dialogues are certainly aggressive sounding, and this is true as well, though possibly in lesser measure, for Yanomamö. In contrast, Kuna dialogic chanting is more controlled, perhaps even serene, and would seem to suggest as valuable in ordinary conversation a high degree of control over one’s language.

Despite this diversity in voice quality, all dialogues share in common the fact that they limit the range of variation in pragmatic expressive devices. They are in this sense “marked speech styles,” the restrictions serving to highlight the ceremonial dialogue as sign vehicle and also the associated linguistic interaction itself. The limitations thus contribute to the indexical function already discussed in connection with the pragmatic cycle.

Significantly, pragmatic variables, that are here fixed, in ordinary conversation form part of the resources available for accomplishing individual ends. During ceremonial dialogues, the resources are removed from individual control and made part of a culturally imposed regime, to which participants in the dialogue are subject. The purposes of linguistic interaction must be accomplished, therefore, using highly restricted means, once again constraining interlocutors to hear the other out. Simultaneously, insofar as ceremonial dialogues are also models for linguistic and social interaction more generally, these limitations contribute to the modeling of solidary interaction.

Contexts of Use

To establish the “natural” or cross-cultural function of ceremonial dialogues as models of and for solidary interaction, it is not sufficient to demonstrate that we can interpret the

formal regularities, isolated by comparative means, in this way. It is necessary to show, as well, that the dialogues are actually employed in contexts where solidarity is an issue. In this regard, there is a range of possible contexts in which solidarity may be called into question, and these can vary from culture to culture. From a comparative point of view, however, solidarity is always called into question when the relationship between actors is in social terms maximally distant. I wish to demonstrate that, in each of the societies discussed, ceremonial dialogues are in fact employed in the maximally distant relationships. The proposition is an implicational one. The dialogues may be employed in other, less-distant relationships, but if they are, they are also employed in the more distant ones.

Rivière (1971:301) sums this up for the Trio by saying that the “ceremonial dialogue is used between strangers or kin and acquaintances between whom the relationship has temporarily lapsed.” Trio society is organized into villages, which are in turn arranged in “agglomerations,” which are in turn ordered in terms of “groups.” According to Rivière (1971:304) the “ceremonial dialogue is not used within the boundaries of the agglomeration.” It is used when individuals visit between villages of different agglomerations or groups, i.e., when the relationship is maximally distant.

It is difficult to obtain a clear picture of Waiwai society in this regard. *Oho-karī* can be used within the village, e.g., in the chief’s appeal to communal work or in connection with a death (Fock 1963:217–218). However, it is also used between villages in negotiating trade and marriage, and in making invitations to feasts. Fock (1963:219) argues that in general it occurs in social situations where conflicts might otherwise erupt. His ethnographic generalization is in keeping with the proposition put forth here.

Among Yanomamö, ceremonial dialogue is exclusively associated with “the feast,” which occurs during visits between two villages. Yanomamö society is organized into villages that are largely autonomous and that are in frequent conflict with one another. Feasts are the principal mechanism for establishing intervillage alliances, which in turn ensure peace, allow for trade and marriage exchange, and furnish military allies. However, according to Chagnon’s descriptions, intervillage alliances are always fragile and feasts frequently erupt in violent intervillage confrontations. Migliazza (1978:573) also notes that ceremonial dialogic style is “most practiced” and idiomatic usages are most common in “areas where warfare is more intense.” It is safe to infer that ceremonial dialogues in fact occur in contexts where conflict is close to the surface.

Kuna social structure is of a different, more hierarchical, nature. Ceremonial dialogues take place within the “gathering house” located in each village, and may be performed by “chiefs” exclusively for members of the village (Sherzer 1983:73–76). However, chanting also occurs during chiefly visits between villages of a given island (1983:91–95) and on the occasion of the more formal interisland visits (1983:95–98). While ceremonial dialogues operate within the village, therefore, perhaps even there helping to create solidarity—indeed, Sherzer (1983:89) himself has remarked that the purpose of Kuna gatherings is the maintenance of “social control and social cohesion”—they also function in more distant relationships where social solidarity is definitely at issue.

The same may be said for the Shuar-Achuar, though here the fundamental residential unit was traditionally the “household” (Harner 1972a:41, 77–80), there having been no multihousehold villages analogous to those found in the other tribes under consideration. Ceremonial dialogues took place on the occasion of interhousehold visiting (Gnerre 1984), which, as with intervillage feasting among Yanomamö, was a situation fraught with danger, owing to the general condition of feuding that prevailed. A variant form of dialogue also took place when men assembled for a war party. In addition to establishing solidarity within the war party, these dialogues, with their aggressive sounding display, probably also functioned to key up the participants for battle.

Among Shokleng, the *wāneklen* is performed during the communal ceremonies associated with death. Significantly, the Shokleng have no peaceful intervillage relations, villages being traditionally the highest level of social integration. Moreover, death ceremonies typically took place during reunions of different trekking groups, in the days be-

fore the Shokleng were permanently settled. The relationships involved were of maximal social distance within the limits established by this tribe. Moreover, when village fissioning did occur, it typically did so along trekking group lines. The Shokleng pattern thus conforms to the general proposition.

Ceremonial dialogues are everywhere used in interactions where the participants are maximally distant in social terms. In four of the six groups sampled here—Shokleng, Shuar-Achuar, Trio, and Yanomamö—ceremonial dialogues occur only in contexts of maximal social distance. In the other two, they occur in the maximally distant relationships but also in closer ones. Evidently, a “natural” linkage exists between these contexts of potential conflict and the ceremonial dialogue itself. The semiotic arguments put forth above make sense of this linkage. Ceremonial dialogue, as a cross-culturally definable form of linguistic interaction, is a model of and for social solidarity.

Types of Linguistic Interaction and Solidarity

Thus far no attention has been given to the overt communicative purposes of the linguistic interaction involved in South American ceremonial dialogues. In fact, this is the one aspect of the phenomenon that varies most widely. I propose that the purpose or type of linguistic interaction correlates with the culture-specific model of solidarity operative in the given society. Here three typological poles may be distinguished: (1) societies wherein the basis of solidarity is seen as exchange of material items and/or women, (2) societies wherein solidarity is seen to emerge from the sharing of a common culture and common traditions, (3) societies wherein solidarity is portrayed as the result of a “balance of power.” The Yanomamö, Waiwai, and Trio—tribes clustered in the northern South American area—fall closer to the first type. The Kuna and Shokleng, very distant from one another geographically—the Kuna being located in Panama and the Shokleng in southern Brazil—can nevertheless be typologically grouped under the second. Finally, the Shuar-Achuar, of the western Amazonian region, conform more closely to the third.

The Kuna and Shokleng are tribes wherein the overt communicative purpose of the dialogues is semantically monologic. Among Shokleng, ceremonial dialogic form is used exclusively in connection with narration of the origin myth, which can also be told in narrative style by a single narrator. Among the Kuna, dialogic form is used by chiefs for narrating myths, histories, reports of personal experience, “metacommunicative descriptions” of the gathering itself, and counseling (Sherzer 1983:76–89).

From the point of view of the present hypothesis, ceremonial dialogic form functions to define these communicative situations as “dialogic,” despite the underlying semantic monologicity of the discourse. Ceremonial dialogicality suggests that, for monologic communication to be successful, it is necessary that there be present a listener who is actually comprehending what has been said. Of course, in the Shokleng and Kuna cases, the pragmatic respondent is only one among many listeners. His pragmatic response signals comprehension to the narrator, but it simultaneously communicates to the audience the importance of comprehension. The audience hears the lead speaker, but it also hears the respondent, and the interaction between speaker and pragmatic respondent comes to the fore as a model of (and for) the communicative process itself, suggesting the necessity that the audience play an active role in listening if communication is to be successful.

This suggests that among Kuna and Shokleng the basis of solidarity is the sharing of a common culture, and, especially, of common linguistically transmitted traditions. The transmission process, which is at the heart of sharing, comes to the fore as the principal type of linguistic interaction for which ceremonial dialogic form is employed. What makes two individuals cohere in these societies is their shared knowledge of the world. In effect, like is seen as attracting like.

Among Waiwai, there is a different conception operative, one reflected in the semantically dialogic nature of ceremonial discourse. In some cases, considerable stretches of semantic monologue appear within this overarching semantic dialogue. In one dialogue

translated by Fock (1963:303–312), the longest single semantic turn is 468 lines, the line here being defined by the *oho* response. This is comparable in length to an entire myth narration. However, among the Waiwai, there is always a semantic response. In the dialogue mentioned above, the first turn lasts two lines, following which is the 468-line turn mentioned. This is followed by a 219-line response. The other dialogue reported by Fock (1963:312–316) consists of two semantic turns, the first consisting of 255 lines and the second consisting of 52 lines.

The Waiwai ceremonial dialogue is apparently used exclusively for what are semantic dialogues. Fock (1963:216) reports that there is actually a pragmatic cue for indicating change of semantic turn; the lead speaker “terminates the first phase of the *oho* by a sentence falling in pitch or by a humming sound.” Semantic turn-taking is built into the very structure of the Waiwai *oho*.

Implicitly, semantic dialogue means that each participant makes a distinctive contribution to the single totality of ongoing discourse. Neither individual alone could produce the desired effect. This stands in sharp contrast with the Kuna and Shokleng system, in which only one individual is necessary for production of the semantic content, and in which, if two individuals do produce semantic content, that content is the same. Among Waiwai, the contribution of each individual must be distinct. If there is a culture-specific model of solidarity built into the Waiwai ceremonial dialogue, it is one in which solidarity is produced through the distinctive contributions of two individuals to a single whole. In effect, different attracts different.

The Waiwai dialogues are associated with situations of actual exchange of material goods and with marriage (Fock 1963:217). Underlying the model of solidarity embodied in the notion of semantic dialogue, therefore, is a material counterpart.

A similar pattern is found among the Trio and Yanomamö. Rivière does not describe the semantically dialogic character of Trio ceremonial dialogues, but his discussion leaves no doubt that they are of this nature, each participant making a distinctive contribution. He describes the dialogue as a form of “verbal duel which is won by the man who can go on arguing the longest” (1971:299), and also as resembling the “institutionalized haggling of the marketplace” (1971:302). Simultaneously, as among the Waiwai, dialogues are used in situations of actual exchange. Indeed, in contrast with Waiwai, ceremonial dialogues function virtually exclusively in this connection. Rivière (1971:301) remarks that they have “three main purposes: to receive visitors or announce one’s arrival in a village, to trade, and to obtain a wife.” He goes on to remark further that most visits “are made for one of two reasons, trade or marriage” (1971:301). The overall pattern conforms to that found among the Waiwai, and reflects a model of solidarity grounded in exchange.

The Yanomamö dialogues translated by Cocco (1972:328ff.) are all semantically dialogic in character, with semantic turns being comparatively short, the equivalent of at most a few Waiwai lines. Again, the dialogues are used primarily in connection with exchange transactions. Cocco (1972:326) confirms Shapiro’s observations in this regard, claiming that the dialogues are used to “hacer trueques económicos, invitar a visitas o a fiestas, proyectar matrimonios, comunicar noticias generales o particulares.” Evidently, as among Waiwai, these dialogues embody a model in which solidarity is produced through the distinctive contributions of two individuals, rather than through the sharing of common traditions.

Trio, Waiwai, and Yanomamö ceremonial dialogues are never used in the narration of myths and legends; Kuna and Shokleng dialogues are never used in negotiations surrounding trade and marriage. This does not mean, however, that a perfectly sharp distinction exists between these groups as regards the dialogic versus monologic character of discourse on the semantic plane. In fact, as Sherzer (1983:91) describes, when Kuna chiefs visit between villages, they take turns addressing the gathering: “first the visiting ‘chief’ chants and his host serves as responder . . . ; then they switch; and finally they switch once again.” Moreover, the extended monologic passages in Waiwai dialogues

have already been mentioned, and some of the overt purposes of these dialogues, e.g., the “appeals to communal work” (Fock 1963:217), could presumably be accomplished through an actual monologue. Nevertheless, there is an obvious distinction to be made here. Trio, Waiwai, and Yanomamö clearly tend toward semantic dialogicality and toward a model of solidarity based upon differential contribution. Kuna and Shokleng tend toward semantic monologicality and toward a model of solidarity based upon the sharing of common traditions.

In relation to these patterns, the Shua-Achuar dialogues appear as divergent. There is a reference to their use in connection with trade (Karsten 1935:249), but it is clear that their primary use is in connection with “greetings” in the context of interhousehold visiting (Gnerre 1984). The dialogues involve semantic turn-taking—in the dialogue presented by Gnerre, there are three turns of 18, 38, and 19 lines—but the “semantic turn” contains largely formulaic content, as one would expect for a greeting. There is really no totality of ongoing discourse.

This may be contrasted with the classic semantic dialogue of northern Amazonia.² There the turn appears as much more of a contribution to a semantic totality, with unification arising out of the different but complementary contributions of two individuals—a kind of jigsaw puzzle approach to solidarity. Among Shuar-Achuar, considerably more emphasis is placed on individual display, on “manifestation of supernatural powers,” as Gnerre (1984) has suggested, and as well on skill and aggressivity. It is as if the mutual display of power and aggressivity is what maintains solidarity, in a kind of intracultural “balance of power” theory of social relations.

However, the general limits, as in the other cases, are laid down by ceremonial dialogue as a model for cohesion. There is a delicate balance between aggressive display, through penetration of speaking time, and maintenance of coordination. Ever present is the possibility that too much aggressive penetration will throw off the pragmatic cycle, and hence destroy the coordination that ceremonial dialogues model. The trick among Shuar-Achuar is to appear as aggressive as possible while simultaneously paying attention to how this display is affecting the other, endeavoring to achieve a balance that results in coordination.

The model for social integration embodied in the Shuar-Achuar dialogues is one that differs in important ways from the shared culture and exchange models. There is the same underlying notion of mutual coordination and recognition. However, the shared culture model posits that there should be in addition a commonality—the tradition—while the exchange model posits that there should be complementarity—giving and getting what one needs or wants from a different other. In the balance of power model, solidarity is created through a kind of mutual respect—through the manifestation of a capability to coerce the other and through the recognition, simultaneously, of the capability of the other to coerce oneself.

It should be emphasized that these three models are ideal types, and that the ceremonial dialogue complex in a given society is really a unique blend of the three. The balance of power model is clearly also present, in some measure, among the Waiwai and Trio, where there is frequent reference to ceremonial dialogue as “verbal dueling.” The participants there are also expressing their individual skills and capabilities. Nevertheless, a decided tendency exists for the ceremonial dialogues in a society to cluster around one of the three poles. The differing models of solidarity embodied in these dialogues seem to correlate with the broader social mechanisms by means of which cohesion is produced in each case.

Conclusion

In much of the foregoing analysis, little emphasis has been placed, in establishing the semiotic functioning of native South American ceremonial dialogues, on the “semantic content” of the discourse for which they are used. Instead, ceremonial dialogue is seen as

a form of linguistic interaction, and that form itself functions as a sign vehicle. That is, the ceremonial dialogue is a meaningful form of linguistic interaction quite apart from whatever meaning derives from "what has been said." If we are to understand the role that ceremonial dialogues play in native South America—their significance for ongoing social action—we need examine the former type of meaningfulness in minute detail.

I have suggested that the general function of ceremonial dialogues everywhere throughout native South America is to direct attention to the process of social coordination and to the solidarity that is consequently achieved. This coordination is something that is present in the dialogue itself. Each dialogic performance is an instance of solidarity achieved through the mutual paying of attention to another and through the overt acknowledgment or signaling of comprehension of the other. Simultaneously, each dialogic performance suggests how that solidarity can be achieved in other social interactions, e.g., in ordinary conversation. In this sense, ceremonial dialogue is capable of acting as a "model for" conduct, as a blueprint for how solidarity is to be achieved.

If all South American ceremonial dialogues are models for a general kind of solidarity, based upon coordination, each tribe discussed here has developed its own unique model of solidarity, which is reflected in the specific formal characteristics of the dialogic interaction. I have been concerned especially with two formal parameters in this regard: (1) the extent to which the discourse in the dialogue is semantically monologic or dialogic, and (2) the extent to which it is formulaic or substantive. These two parameters give rise to three ideal types of solidarity, which I have distinguished accordingly as they are based upon "shared tradition" (semantically monologic), "exchange" (semantically dialogic), and "balance of power" (formulaic).

The analysis proposed here is not merely interpretive. It is grounded in correlational hypotheses that grow out of a limited comparative study and that can be tested by further comparative research. Specifically, first, I have tried to show—supporting the interpretation that all native South American ceremonial dialogues model general solidarity—that the ceremonial dialogues of the societies studied here are actually used in situations where social cohesion is at issue, namely, in interactions involving participants who are maximally distant in social terms. Second, I have tried to show that the distinct types of ceremonial dialogue in fact occur in social situations that are appropriate to them. Semantically dialogic ceremonial dialogues in fact occur in situations of negotiation, e.g., trade and marriage, and the actual topics of discourse in these dialogues have to do with exchange. Semantically monologic ceremonial dialogues in fact occur in situations where the transmission of culture is at issue, and, indeed, the topics of discourse in these dialogues tend to revolve around myth and tradition. Finally, the largely formulaic dialogues tend to occur where we know from other ethnographic information that mutual sizing up as regards power is constantly at work. These are testable hypotheses and serve to ground an otherwise interpretive semiotic analysis.

The broader issue raised by this research concerns the role of metacommunicative devices in social action generally. It may be proposed that, for individuals to regulate their own conduct, they must be able to apprehend that conduct through signs. This does not mean that they must necessarily bring the conduct into consciousness through encoding in the semantic portion of language. I have suggested that the formal characteristics of a sign vehicle, which has itself achieved some kind of perceptual salience or foregrounding, may be adequate in this regard, directing attention, at some level, to the "regulated" aspects of reality. Native South American ceremonial dialogues appear to be "metacommunicative" in this sense. They model the communicative situation in which they are actually being employed. They allow one to form an image of what the process is simultaneously as it is occurring. However, they are also a kind of distorting lens (a "model for") shaping perception after their own image, and suggesting, consequently, the way in which that process ought to continue.

If the present interpretation is correct, the core ritualized communicative, and especially linguistic, events ought to assume a special significance relative to culture as a

whole. They are the generative core of regulation, being themselves self-regulating, through their metacommunicative character, and also regulative relative to other non-ritualized behavior by virtue of their status as sign vehicles. If this is so, we should be able to demonstrate their semiotic functioning through interpretive analyses, coupled with correlational hypotheses, such as those discussed above, that can be tested by means of comparative research. The present paper represents an initial contribution to this broader research effort.

Notes

Acknowledgments. I am grateful to Joel Sherzer and Richard Bauman for their valuable comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

¹The germ of this hypothesis is contained in Rivière (1971), who demonstrates a correlation between social distance and the ceremonial dialogue for the Trio. Before him, Fock (1963:219) had suggested the connection between the dialogues and situations of potential social conflict. The present analysis builds upon these earlier correlational hypotheses.

²This is again a matter of degree. The formulaic or display character of native South American ceremonial dialogues requires further research. Rivière (1971:299), for example, remarks that the "words and phrases used in [Trio] dialogues are said to be archaic," and we may wonder whether some are also formulaic. Migliazza (1978:568) reports that Yanomamö ceremonial dialogues are carried out in "an archaic form of the Yanomama language." Among the Shokleng, the origin myth is something that young men learn verbatim, and in which, consequently, semantic content tends to be backgrounded relative to the performance aspects. The language as well has archaic aspects. Nevertheless, the Shuar-Achuar greetings, on the basis of present data, do seem noteworthy for their formulaic character.

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