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Responsibility and Evidence in Oral Discourse. JANE H. HILL and JUDITH T. IRVINE, eds. *Studies in the Social and Cultural Foundations of Language series, 15.* KEITH H. BASSO et al., series eds. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993. vii + 316 pp., figures, tables, notes, references, indexes.

GREG URBAN
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Agency has been a buzzword in social anthropology for some time. But precisely what is it? According to the authors of this fascinating book, agency has to do with responsibility—for example, responsibility for the words you utter. This may seem straightforward: of course you are responsible for the words you utter.

Well, perhaps you should read these case studies. In Samoan political oratory, as discussed by Alessandro Duranti, orators announce something on behalf of higher-ranking individuals, who themselves do not formally address the assembly. Who is responsible for the announcement? Is responsibility diffused or socialized by means of oratorical mediation? And what about insults hurled at a bride in marriage ceremonies among the Senegalese Wolof discussed by Judith Irvine? The insults are actually uttered by members of the bardic griot caste. However, these bards have been hired by someone else. Who is responsible for the words?

An especially intriguing case is that of divination, discussed in an elegant essay by Jack DuBois. The divinatory response—for example, whether a chicken dies when given poison after it has been asked a question—is an utterance of sorts within a kind of dialogue. No individual, however, takes responsibility for it. The response is a product of chance, or, in any case, of forces beyond individual control.

The problem of responsibility is linked to that of authority, which, in the Weberian framework, involved individuals issuing commands. But among the Weyewa of Indonesia discussed by Kuipers, as among the Seneca of western New York State discussed by Wallace Chafe, the most authoritative discourse is that which is the most traditional, the least individually created. Who has the authority in these cases?

A number of essays (those by Irvine, Shuman, Besnier, Hill and Zepeda, and Bauman) deal with reported speech, a discourse phenomenon whose implications for authority were grasped at an early date by Voloshinov and Bakhtin. When you utter someone else's words or report those words to a third party, who is responsible: the reporter or the original utterer? Precisely because the answer is ambiguous, empirical studies of reported speech have much to tell us about the negotiation of authority.

At first blush the question of evidence seems unrelated to that of responsibility, and one wonders how well the volume holds together, especially toward the end. Turning to the essay by Susan Philips, however, the connection becomes apparent. Philips focuses on evidentiary standards in trials, where what counts as evidence is crucial for the

assignment of responsibility. Evidence is also the theme in Edward Bendix's essay, which, however, focuses on the grammatical category of "evidentials" in the Newari language of Nepal. This work represents a departure from the book's main lines of argument, though Bendix makes a valiant effort at linkage.

The concluding essay is a wonderful and entertaining piece by Tulio Maranhão on the significance of his fieldwork conversations among a group of fishermen in Northeastern Brazil. Like Bendix's paper, it reaches out to more far-flung areas, in this case, reflexive anthropology and deconstructionism, and it is less centrally bound to the opening themes. The essay addresses the question of responsibility "to" rather than "for"—responsibility to the community of anthropologists (Maranhão) versus the traditions of the community (the fishermen). It nevertheless shows the relevance of the book's central themes to a range of contemporary issues.

Congratulations are due to Hill and Irvine, as well as to the authors. They have produced a first-rate volume, one that suggests a new approach to the classic problem of agency and that stimulates dialogue between disparate lines of research from descriptive linguistics to deconstructionism.

Anthropology, Art and Aesthetics. JEREMY COOTE and ANTHONY SHELTON, eds. *Oxford Studies in the Anthropology of Cultural Forms.* HOWARD MORPHY and FRED MYERS, gen. eds. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992. xiii + 281 pp., maps, figures, plates, notes, references, index.

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This excellent collection will surely take its place among the most important edited collections on art and culture. The intentions, which are wholly anthropological, address the possibilities of art as a cultural system and as a subdiscipline (part 1). Parts 2 and 3 focus on ethnographic case studies in which social organization, local history, and social change are marshaled in interpretation of specific art forms. Part 4 concerns aesthetics in cross-cultural perspective, with each author taking a somewhat different approach to defining aesthetics in terms of the salient features of a particular case study. The volume would be especially useful for an advanced undergraduate or graduate seminar, although the price (\$95.00) may be prohibitive.

In the first two essays, Firth and Gell discuss the study of art in the discipline of anthropology. Firth provides a condensed discussion of the "history of anthropological interest in art" (p. 20), including the problem of identifying "art" in cultural settings where indigenous categories seldom correspond to Western ones. Two examples from Tikopia and Maori art suggest interesting complexities in the relationship of art styles and objects to complex cultural systems of meaning and foreground the changing relationship of art to other cultural institutions.