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3 Language in context and language as context: the Samoan respect vocabulary

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Editors' introduction

Alessandro Duranti is Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of California, Los Angeles. Originally trained in typological linguistics and discourse analysis, Duranti became interested in integrating grammatical analysis with ethnography during his first fieldwork experience in Western Samoa, in 1978–9. Since then, he has been involved in several projects centered around the documentation of communicative competence in a traditional Samoan village. In his research, Duranti has often focused on political discourse, which he sees as embedded in and at the same time constitutive of specific social activities. In this chapter, he examines one of the lexical features of oratory, respect vocabulary, across a number of settings. Like Philips (this volume), Duranti is concerned with recurrent patterns as used by the same speakers across contexts. Like Cicourel (this volume), he relied on ethnography for making hypotheses about what is relevant for the participants themselves.

Linguistic taxonomies have been used by ethnographers all over the world as a window on the universe of social and psychological relations that make human action meaningful and hence unique. Through the study of the words dedicated to a particular domain, e.g. colors, or to particular kinds of human relationships, e.g. kinship, researchers have the opportunity to test hypotheses about both the universality and the specificity of perceptually and socially salient distinctions. Among the various linguistic taxonomies found in the world languages, honorific lexical systems, e.g. the Javanese speech levels (Geertz 1960) and the "in-laws" languages of Australia (cf. Dixon 1972; Haviland 1979a, 1979b), have captured not only anthropologists' but also linguists' interest. One of the linguists' concerns has been how to formally characterize the linguistic and contextual features that "trigger" the use of a particular lexical or morphological choice. Several types of analytical distinctions have been proposed to describe the different kinds of relationships indexed by lexical choices in honorific registers. In each case, one or more components of the speech event are said to be relevant to the choice of honorific terms. Distinctions among systems and choices have been made in terms of referent honorifics, speaker's honorifics, addressee's honorifics, and bystander's honorifics (cf. Comrie 1976, Levinson 1983).

In this chapter, after examining the use of a special set of Samoan words (nouns and verbs) describing actions, feelings, possessions, and relations involving high status individuals, Duranti concludes that, based on transcripts of spontaneous interactions both in casual and formal encounters, the use of respectful terms cannot be simply predicted on the basis of referent or addressee, but must be related to the kind of activity and the kinds of social relationships and social personae that the lexical items are used to activate. In other words, linguistic choices are shown to be both context-defined and context-defining, while the status and rank distinctions they presuppose are constituted in the constant struggle to reassert or challenge the existing social order. Duranti shows that these characteristics make the Samoan honorific terms perfect candidates for the pragmatic uses of speech that Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) have labeled "politeness." Respectful words recognize the addressee's high status and hence suggest virtual immunity from imposition. By providing "deference" to the addressee (or to a third party), they can be employed to diffuse potentially face-threatenings acts such as requests and denials. Duranti, however, also proposes another, if not alternative, parallel function of these honorifics – a function that is shown to be frequent in the recorded interactions and consistent with Samoan beliefs. The notion of "respect" (*fa'aaloalo*), for Samoans, is not only linked to what we might call "politeness," but also to "tradition" and hence to culturally specific obligations such as the dignified, controlled behavior expected from high-status individuals. In this view, respectful words are activated not only to defer to another's authority but also to coerce, or to oblige the recipient(s) or target(s) of the speech act to behave according to the expectations dictated, through tradition, to the social persona indexed by the honorific term. As shown by some of the studies of similar phenomena cited by Duranti, such use of "polite" language is perhaps quite common around the world. The evoking of a particular context through lexical choice can thus be seen not only as a politeness strategy but also as an instrument of power which sets the tone for what can be said, done, and understood by the participants (on these themes, see also the chapter by Lindstrom in this volume).

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Language in context and language as context: the Samoan respect vocabulary

1 Introduction

As shown by the chapters in this collection, scholars from different disciplines concerned with human interaction and human communication are faced with the problem of defining a theory and methodology able to capture the inherently dynamic character of human action and human understanding. While linguists have been productively experimenting with analytical tools for the description of structural properties of linguistic codes, anthropologists, sociologists, and other social scientists have been stressing the need to understand human interaction as a set of practices that cannot be completely defined prior to the emergent semiotic activities in which they are embodied. Those working on language have been moving to larger and larger units of analysis – namely from the word to the sentence, from the sentence to discourse – and across qualitatively different domains – namely from linguistic texts to social events. As suggested by hermeneutics some time ago (see Gadamer 1976), the challenge is to reproduce in our accounts the sometimes harmonious sometimes conflicting links between the parts and the whole, which, for linguistic anthropologists, consist respectively of linguistic structures and the psycho-social systems giving them content.

In this chapter, I engage in this enterprise and select a linguistic subsystem – a special set of words, or lexical register – as a window on a universe of forms that are both defined by and are used to shape social activities and human understanding of such activities. By combining ethnographic and structural methods of description, I propose a characterization of the Samoan Respect Vocabulary which assumes and goes beyond an instrumental model of the relationship between language and context (see Bühler 1934, Malinowski 1923, Vygotsky 1978). I will demonstrate that a feature analysis of a particular classificatory system can be a useful tool in a first description of the phenomenon, but is too crude for an understanding of the sociocultural implications and assumptions related to the use of such a subsystem in daily interaction. Feature analysis of the kind used to describe selectional restrictions on lexical items – e.g. the generalization that the English verb *eat* needs an animate being as the referent of its subject – assumes a causal relation between context and language, with the former "explaining" the latter. When we look at the

actual use of specific lexical items within everyday discourse, however, we find that the relation between words and the context of their use is a much more complex and dynamic one. In particular, we realize that words do not simply reflect a taken-for-granted world "out there," they also help constitute such a world by defining relations between speaker, hearer, referents, and social activities. Furthermore, if we are truly interested in the meaning that such linguistic forms have in people's daily lives, we must take into consideration local theories of their use as instantiated through linguistic and other communicative practices. Within the context of this chapter, it is such a local perspective which forces us to reconsider the notion of respect as used by Brown and Levinson (1978) in their study of politeness phenomena. In particular, rather than paying back the addressee for potential loss of face, respect can be used as an emergent pragmatic force that constrains human behavior and makes recipients do what they might not otherwise do. In this sense, the offer of "respect" does not stand for "freedom of action," – as suggested by Brown and Levinson's model – but, on the contrary, for control and imposition.

2 A structural description of the phenomenon

In Samoan, as in many languages of the world (cf. Geertz 1960, Dixon 1972, Haviland 1979, etc.) one finds that certain words are considered to be part of a "special" set, to be distinguished from other, more ordinary or "common" words. These words in Samoa are called *'upu fa'aaloalo* "respectful words" (RWs) and are said to be associated with a particular class of people, namely, titled individuals (*matai*), including chiefs (*ali'i*) and orators (*tulaafale*).

RWs are nouns and verbs that describe individuals, groups, relations, as well as a certain range of their actions, attributes, and possessions. Figure 3.1 contrasts some RWs with common words. I should mention here that there is no Samoan term for "common word" to be contrasted with "respectful word." However, the pairing of the two sets of Samoan words in Figure 3.1 (and Figure 3.2) represents common native metalinguistic strategies to explain or paraphrase the meaning of RWs; some of these pairings are also found in the poetic parallelism typical of oratorical speeches (see Duranti 1981, 1984a), whereby both an RW and a common word are found within the same sentence.[1]

Figure 3.1 shows a number of characteristics that the Samoan RWs share with special lexicons in other languages. Thus, for instance, as in the "in-law" languages of Australia (Dixon 1972; Havilland 1979a, 1979b), in several cases, the Samoan Respect Vocabulary conflates in one word what in ordinary lexicon is represented by several distinct lexemes: e.g. both *vae* "leg, foot" and *lima* "hand, arm" are expressed by one term, *'a'ao* "limb"; while three different parts of the human face – mouth, nose, and eyes – are

Figure 3.1 *Examples of respectful words (spelled in "bad speech") with English translation and with Samoan paraphrases in common words*

Common words	English translation	Respectful words
lima	arm, hand	*a'ao*
vae	leg, foot	
ma'i	sick	*gasegase*
iloa	know	*silafia*
va'ai	see, look	*silasila*
maga'o	want, need	*figagalo*
ola	live	*soifua*
olaga	life	*soifuaga*
'ai	eat	*kaumafa*
guku	mouth	*fofoga*
isu	nose	
maka	eye	

Figure 3.2 *Examples of respectful words (spelled in "bad speech") which show further distinctions in terms of status and rank*

Common	Translation	Chiefs	Orators	High orator
fale	house	*maoka*	*laoa*	
ko'alua	spouse	*falekua*	*kausi*	
aavaa	wife			
kaukala	speak	*saugoa*	*fekalai*	*vagaga*
sau	come	*afio mai*	*maliu mai*	
alu	go	*afio aku*	*maliu aku*	

all conveyed by one RW, i.e. *fofoga*. However, as shown in Figure 3.2, the opposite situation is also quite common, namely, cases in which the Respect Vocabulary makes more subtle distinctions than the common lexicon. Thus, for some terms, a single common word can be "translated" into different RWs depending on the specific status or rank of the referent, e.g. instead of the common word *fale* "house," a distinction must be made between *laoa* and *maoka* when talking about an orator's house or a chief's house respectively.

In the course of gathering material for his Samoan dictionary, G. B. Milner collected some 450 RWs and provided a description of their use (Milner 1961). Both Milner's description and the way in which Samoans tend to gloss RWs for outsiders encourage accounts of RWs in terms of lexical choice associated with particular referent types. The rules for the use of

such lexical items are also defined in terms of features of the referent, with some additional considerations about the relationship between the speaker and the referent:

> when there is a polite equivalent or equivalents for a given ordinary word, the use of a common word is almost ruled out when a speaker addresses (and usually when he refers to) chiefs [a term which includes here titled chiefs, orators, and certain high status individuals, A. D.]. If he is referring to himself, his kinsmen, or his possessions, then no matter how high his own rank may be, the use of ordinary words is, conversely, obligatory.
>
> (p. 297)

Although both referent and addressee are mentioned in Milner's account as important factors, Samoan RWs are described as examples of what Comrie (1976) and Levinson (1983) call **referent honorifics**, namely, lexical items that show respect by referring to the "target" of the respect. This informal description can be easily translated into a formal account based on semantic features. We can thus classify Samoan nouns and verbs according to the features [+titled], which characterizes *matai* in general (both chief and orators), and [-titled] which characterizes untitled people (*taulele'a*). Further distinctions could be made between [+chief] and [−chief], with the latter covering the orator set (the lexically most marked group), and with the standard implication that if [+chief] then [+titled]. For a few items, the feature [+high] will be needed, in those cases where certain RWs are restricted to either very high chiefs or very high orators (e.g. the term *vagaga* in Figure 3.2).

Here are a few examples of RWs as defined by this small set of features:

iloa	"know"	Nom Arg_1 [−titled]
silafia	"know"	Nom Arg_1 [+titled]
sau	"come"	Nom Arg_1 [−titled]
afio mai	"come"	Nom Arg_1 [+chief]
maliu mai	"come"	Nom Arg_1 [+titled, −chief]
vagaga	"speak"	Nom Arg_1 [+titled, −chief, +high]
fale	"house"	[__ *o*("of") −titled]
maoka	"house"	[__ *o*("of") +chief]
laoa	"house"	[__ *o*("of") +titled, −chief]

(Nom Arg_1 for transitive verbs = Agent NP; for intransitive verbs = Absolutive NP.)

All of the RWs will have the conventional implicatures that they could not refer to either the speaker or a close kin, given that, according to Samoans and as reported by Milner, it is considered inappropriate to use an RW in talking about oneself or one's close relatives (but see below for an apparent violation of such a constraint).

Typically, feature analysis is not intended to provide predictions on performance. It simply describes certain kinds of regularities in people's knowledge of lexical items. However, if we took the nature of the referent to the crucial factor in selecting RWs, feature analysis could be used as a predictor of performance. Thus, for instance, we could predict that, given a certain referent *A* with the feature [+chief], and given the existence of a lexical item *I* with the feature [+titled], speakers would select the item *I* over an item *J* which had the same semantic specification but the feature [−titled].

This characterization of RWs is nothing more than a simple formalization of Milner's description and it has the advantage of being easy to test. At the same time, it also employs a particular conception of the relationship between language and context, i.e. one in which language is seen as acting within an independently established social world and as mirroring some of its characteristics – this is what Silverstein (1977, 1979) has characterized as the "reflectionist point of view." In this case, the choice of certain lexical items, namely, RWs, is seen as causally defined by certain (language-independent) properties of the context such as the referent's social status and/or rank. This view is schematically represented in Figure 3.3.

Figure 3.3 *Context determines language*

Note: The arrow should be interpreted as "triggers."

Can this view of the relationship between language and context, with the latter determining the former, account for how RWs are actually used in everyday verbal interaction? That is, can a causally interpreted feature analysis (with status/rank features constituting the independently established "context") be adequately used for (1) making predictions on **when** speakers are going to use RWs; (2) explaining **how** they are used, i.e. with which communicative/social functions?

3 Looking at language use

When we test the accuracy of status/rank features alone to account for the actual use of RWs in everyday interaction, we realize that such features of the context are good predictors of performance **only in some contexts.**

Thus, for instance, in a *fono*, a judiciary-political event attended only by titled people (Duranti 1981, Shore 1982), RWs are used quite consistently in talking about titled people. In example (1), the orator Fanua expresses his unwillingness to give an opinion on the first agenda of the meeting, given that the highest chief of his subvillage, Lealaisalanoa – shortened form: Salanoa – has not expressed his opinion. We find here the RWs *afio mai* "arrive, come" and *koofaa* "opinion" when the chief is understood as the referent about which the description is given or predication made:

(1) (*Fono* April 7, 1979)

Fanua: *e ui fo'i ga 'o legaa e* ***afio mai*** *Lealaisalagoa*
although Lealaisalanoa **has arrived** [+chief]

e le 'i 'aumaia se ***koofaa*** *iaa Salagoa ma-*
no **opinion** [+chief] has been given from (Lealai)salanoa and–

The same can be seen in (2), where, in turn, the high chief Lealaisalanoa acknowledges the arrival of one of the senior orators and the term *maliu mai* "come" (see Figure 3.2) is used:

(2) (*Fono* April 7, 1979)

Salanoa: *ia 'o le* ***maliu mai*** *laa o le Makua,*
So the senior orator has **arrived** [+titled, −chief].

On other social occasions such as informal meetings or visits, however, the use of RWs is much less "consistent" and the referent condition is often violated. In the following conversation, for instance, in talking about the same chiefly title (Salanoa), one speaker, A, uses the RW *afio mai* [+chief] "come, arrive" but the other speaker, F, paraphrases with the common word *'o'o aku*, literally "reach (there)":

(3) (Pastor and deacon)

147 A: *ia 'o le* ***afio aku*** *legaa o Salagoa.*
So then there **arrives** [+chief] Salanoa.

148 *kau fa 'amakala 'ae ua leaga maakou ua-*
(I/we?) try to explain but we are bad-

149 F: *ga- ga* ***o'o aku*** *laa Salagoa?=*
did- did Salanoa himself **get there** [−titled]?

It should be pointed out that F is not related to the chief Salanoa and in fact later on in the conversation, in quoting his own direct speech to the chief, he uses the RWs *figagalo* "want" and *lau afioga* "your highness (said of/to a chief)." However, even in this discourse context, F refers to Salanoa as *si koiga* (short for *si koea'iga* "dear/poor old man"), which, without being disrespectful – it does convey some positive affect toward him – is not a respectful term:

(4) (Pastor and deacon)

160 F: *'ou fai aku i si koiga o Salagoa. "ia'."=*
I said to the dear old man Salanoa. "Well."

161 A: *=faiuiga lelei mEa.*
Interpret things well.

162 F: ***"Figagalo*** *maalie ia." (.3)*
"(If your) **wish** [+chief] agrees (with this)." (.3)

163 A: (?)

164: *"lau* ***afioga*** *ma- (...)"*
"Your **Highness** [+chief] (...)"

These apparent "inconsistencies" are not restricted to casual conversational settings. Even when title holders are gathered to have a *fono*, there are cases in which the same individual is identified by a common word at one time and by an RW at another (Duranti 1984a: 226):

(5) (*Fono*, April 7, 1979. Before the meeting starts, the chairman Moe'ono asks about the people who are likely to attend. Mata'afa is an orator from the Falelua subvillage.)

Moe'ono: *Ga'o Maka'afa a le Falelua ga sau?*
Only Mata'afa has **come** from Falelua?

(. . .)

(Later on during the meeting)

Moe'ono: *(. . .) ia. 'o lea 'ua lua* ***afio*** *mai Kevaseu* ***maliu*** *mai fo'i Maka'afa*
. . . So, now you Tevaseu have **come** [+chief] (and) Mata'afa has also **come** [+title, −chief]

Finally, there are also cases in which a party uses an RW when the referent condition would predict a common word. In the following example, Tafili, an orator, talks about her brother Savea, a chief, using the RW *figagalo* "want," (but also "mind, opinion"). This instance violates the constraint against the use of RWs for kin.

(6) (*Fono*, April 7, 1979. Tafili speaks up in defence of her brother Savea.)

Tafili: *'a 'o legei kaimi, lelei aa le maalamalama uaa 'o le makaa'upu, 'o le makaa'upu o lea 'ua- 'ua lafo kaaofi iai le kalosaga iaa Savea iga ia kakala loga- . . .* ***figagalo*** *i laga kagi.*

> But at this point, it is better to clarify because the agenda, the agenda of this- it is- (since) Savea has already filed the suit could he change his . . . **mind** [+chief] about the suit.

Given that the unexpected absence of RWs in examples (3) and (5) is not perceived as "lack" of respect, and the presence of an RW term in (6) is not interpreted as ostentatious (or ludicrous), these examples show that **the referent's status/rank alone cannot be used to predict the lexical choice made.**

One option we have in trying to explain these apparent inconsistencies in language use is to expand our notion of "context" beyond the nature of the referent and think in terms of speech events (Hymes 1972), activity types (Levinson 1979), or levels of interactions. This is in fact what Shore suggested several years ago:

> In Samoa, despite the use of the term "chiefly language" to refer to the polite lexical forms, common or polite forms are appropriate more clearly to levels of discourses and interaction than to levels of persons. With the exception of young children, polite forms can be employed by and with anyone when the intention is to signal or support a formal interaction. Conversely, the use of everyday vocabulary signals intimacy and commonness in encounters and not so much in persons.
>
> (Shore 1977: 457)

As I will show next, by improving our notion of what constitutes context, and in particular by reconsidering the relationship between context and language, we will in fact be able to improve our understanding of these phenomena at least in terms of the accuracy with which we can predict or justify the actual use of RWs.

3 Respectful words as markers of public, positional identities

In analyzing the *fono* interactions, we are reminded of Goffman's work on behavior in public places and the notion of **back stage** behavior (Goffman 1959). For instance, common words tend to occur in conversation **before** the *fono* starts, or in the breaks of the *fono* proceedings – Goffman's (1974) "time-outs" from a given frame – as in example (5). There is indeed a tendency for RWs to be more consistently used in the more public or "formal" parts of such events, when participants are "on stage" and when cooccurrence restrictions are stricter (Ervin-Tripp 1972, Irvine 1979). A more refined notion of context, one for instance in which we make crucial use of such notions as **temporal** and **spatial boundaries** (Duranti 1981, 1985; Goffman 1974), might indeed allow us to make more precise predictions on the use of RWs.

However, we still need to explain cases such as (6) above, where a speaker uses an RW in talking about her brother, and cases such as those in examples (3) and (4), where, during the same conversation, only a few seconds apart, speakers switch from one set of terms to another in referring to the same individual.

4 Language defines context

In trying to understand these phenomena we may be guided by Samoan ideology, which stresses the high level of context-sensitivity in social interaction and communication. We thus know from previous accounts (Mead 1937; Shore 1982; Duranti 1984b, 1988) that the notion of Self as conceived in the Western analytical tradition is not shared by Samoans, who are not as committed as most Westerners are to the ideology of permanency of individual characteristics and social values across social contexts. In Samoan society, the individual is defined as a composite persona with several "sides" (*ituu*), which are – often consciously so – foregrounded or backgrounded according to the situation, the use of RWs being no exception to this theory and practice. Indeed, a given social actor deserves respect according to his or her role/status in a given context. In (6), for instance, we could say that Tafili is referring to Savea **as a chief** and not **as her brother** (something similar was at work when Robert Kennedy in his public speeches used to refer to John Kennedy as "President Kennedy"). The lexical choice made by the speaker helps define which "side" of the referent's social persona or which particular relationship is relevant in the ongoing interaction. In other words, the linguistic choice partly defines some aspects of the "context" to be presupposed or entailed in the interaction (cf. Silverstein 1985a, 1985b). That is, once we start saying that RWs can be used to evoke particular "sides," we are moving toward a different characterization of the relationship between context and language. It is no longer context alone (be it the referent's status/rank or the speech event) that determines the language used. It is also the language, namely RWs, that helps define what the context is. In some cases, in fact, **language is the context**. The consistency of RW uses in a *fono* during the discussion could thus be explained as a common strategy for defining, over an extended period of time, a context in which certain particular social personae (those of certain titles, with their associated rights and duties) must count and must be evoked. The role of language as defining context is schematically represented in Figure 3.4.

The most obvious cases covered by this scheme are those in which RWs are used with individuals who do not hold a title but are, on some particular occasion, asked to act **as if** they did.

5 Language and context: a reflexive relationship

In fact, both Figures 3.3 and 3.4 are oversimplifications of an ongoing dialogical process in which language and context mutually feed into one

Figure 3.4 *Language defines context*

another. To better explain this point, we will have to go beyond the question of the distribution of the RWs and consider more specifically the question of their social meaning. Rather than talking about specific referents or speech events determining the use of RWs or about RWs defining the nature of the referents, it might be helpful to consider RWs as indices (Peirce 1955, Silverstein 1976) of particular roles and relationships among participants in the speech event that could or should be activated at a given point in the interaction. RWs can thus function as keys (Hymes 1972) or contextualization cues (Gumperz 1977, this volume) that trigger a certain set of expectations, attitudes, and inferential processes associated to the kind of referent or activity they index. They can be used (or interpreted) as mediating devices that define the relationship between a referent and an activity, between the speaker and the referent, or between the speaker and the activity – the activity itself can of course be further analyzed into several components.

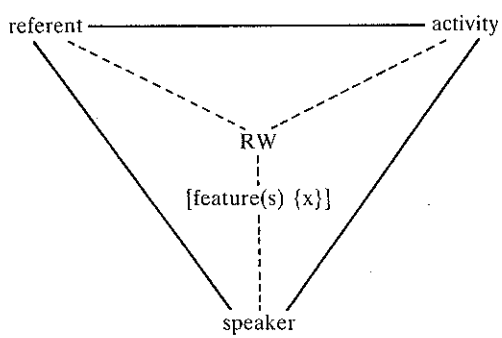

Figure 3.5 *Mediating role of RWs*

As illustrated in Figure 3.5, the feature set {x} of the RW triggers a particular set of expectations and attitudes *vis-à-vis* the relationship among the three corners of the triangle (dotted lines). In some cases, the features in {x} may override the preexisting (e.g. language-independent) relationship among speaker, referent, and activity (marked by solid lines). The term "activity" in Figure 3.5 includes addressee(s) and any other members

in the so-called "participant structure" of the event (Goodwin 1986, Haviland 1986, Philips 1983).

The apparent **inconsistency** of lexical choice in referring to titled persons (as well as to their belongings, actions, and properties) can thus be partly explained by taking into consideration the potentially **reflexive relationship** between words and social reality. If we conceive of words not only as labels for an already existing reality but also as ideologically loaded tools for defining the situations in which speakers *qua* social actors co-construct their context, we can better appreciate the social (hence pragmatic) function of linguistic subsystems such as the Samoan RWs.

Within this framework, the intermittent use of RWs in examples (3), (4), and (5) will have to be understood over against the background of the speaker's relationship with both the referent and his addressee (feature of the ongoing activity) and by making hypotheses on what his – conscious? unconscious? – goals may be in redefining such relationships in the course of the interaction (e.g. he pays tribute/honor to the chief when the situation calls for it – e.g. face-to-face – but can also informally afford to speak of him as "the dear old man," and by so doing distinguish himself from A, who does not do so, etc.). In such cases, only a very fine ethnographically grounded analysis will allow us to come up with hypotheses that might go beyond the realm of hazardous, albeit suggestive, speculations.

As an example of the kind of phenomena and analysis I am thinking of, I will briefly reconsider the use of RWs in cooccurence with so-called **face-threatening acts** (FTAs).

6 RWs and face-threatening acts

In Brown and Levinson's (1978) cross-linguistic research on politeness, giving deference is described as one of the strategies for compensating for FTAs. (I will assume hereafter that "deference" and "respect" are synonymous in their theory.)

> There are two sides to the coin in the realization of deferences: one in which S[peaker] humbles and abases himself, and another where S raises H[earer] (pays him positive face of a particular kind, namely that which satisfies H's want to be treated as superior). In both cases what is conveyed is that H is of higher social status than S. By conveying directly the perception of a high P[ower] differential, deference serves to defuse potential face-threatening acts by indicating that the addressee's rights to relative immunity from imposition are recognized – and moreover that S is certainly not in a position to coerce H's compliance in any way.
>
> (Brown and Levinson 1978: 183)

This notion of deference/respect as a way of recognizing relative immunity from imposition seems at first confirmed by our Samoan data. We do find

several cases where RWs are used in what seem to be attempts to mitigate some FTA.

For example, in (7), taken from a transcript of a conversation recorded during our first month in the village, A, the elderly deacon, has come to the pastor in whose compound we were living to cancel an invitation to our research group (Alesana and the "family") to go over for dinner at his house. In listing the people to whom, with the help of the pastor, he wants to explain the reason for not being able to keep his invitation, speaker A uses the RW *falekua* ("wife" [+chief]) in referring to my wife (Elinor Ochs). The common term *to'alua* could have also been used.

(7) (Pastor and Deacon. Participants: F, the pastor, A, the deacon, Alesana, the researcher.)

347 A: *-hh e iai le mea ga 'ou afe mai ai.*
-hh there is a thing I came for.

348 (.5)

349 F: *ia'. lelei.*
Okay. good (go ahead).

350 A: *go'u afe mai iaa ke 'oe e fa'amaalie aku.*
I came to you to apologize.

351 *ia' e fa'amaalamalama lelei iaa- (.3)*
to explain carefully to- (.3)

352 *Alesana ma le 'aaiga.*
Alesana and (his) family.

353 (1.)

354 *i fo'i lele- i le* ***falekua*** *o le ali'i.*
also to the- to **wife** [+chief] of the gentleman.

355 (1.)

356 *uaa o le maakou kalagoaga o gagei*
because of our talk about later today

357 *e oo aku- koe kaafafao.*
(when) they were going to visit (us) again.

358 F: *mm.*
mm.

(. . .)

This use of the RW *falekua* (see Figure 3.2) can indeed be seen as a way of giving deference to both of us and can therefore be analyzed as a mitigating device before an FTA. At the same time, this exchange brings out the problematic nature of the categories Speaker and Hearer in the analysis of strategic verbal interaction and shows that in fact there might be simultaneous "targets" (Brenneis 1978, Haviland 1986) of the RW. In this, as well as in many other instances that have been discussed in the literature (Hymes 1972, Duranti 1985, Levinson 1986), a more sophisticated notion of **participant** is needed. Although I was sitting next to A and F, I was at the time (a few weeks after arriving in the village) unable to follow their conversation. I was then both a **hearer** and one of the **recipients** of the message but not a fully fledged participant. One could say that the apology was intended for me but the message was directed to the pastor, who later on had to translate it for me, first in Samoan foreigner talk and then in English. We might then say that the expressed respect was also indirectly addressed to the pastor, who was not only part of the audience but the locally alleged head of our extended family and our mentor in the eyes of the villagers.

With this in mind, let's move to another example. In this case as well, RWs seem to be used to reassure a hearer that his actions or wishes are not being coerced by someone else's actions (in this case, mine). The scene here is a *fono*. The meeting is over and Moe'ono, the senior orator who also acts as the chairman of the meeting, has just been told that there is no more *kava*[2] left for a closing ceremony. He then turns to me and says:

(8) (*Fono*, April 7, 1978 [p. 103, ms.])

Moe'ono: *ia Alesaga (le) Sili, uaa ua 'uma ga kusikusi?*
So, Alexander the Great, well, is all the writing done?
'o aa ea ga mea e kusikusi (e) 'oe?
what is that you keep writing down?

Others: (laughter) *hehehehe.*

Fuimaono: *'o a kou* ***vagaga*** *aa ma* ***saugoaga*** *lea*
it's your **speech** [+high orator] (see Figure 3.2) and the **speech** [+chief] that

ua- (.3) kusikusi uma lava e le kama.
the (.3) boy has been writing down word by word

[

Moe'ono: *oh.*
Oh!

We find here two RWs: *vagaga* and *saugoaga* (a nominalization from *saugoa*) (see Figure 3.2), both of which mean "speech," with the first one being restricted to the highest ranking orators (Moe'ono being one of the two in the village) and the second being appropriate for chiefs. The utterance freely translates as "it is the speech of you holy senior orators and honorable chiefs that the boy has been writing." On the other hand, the use of the word *kama* "boy" in talking about me can be seen as an example of **other-abasement**. This way of characterizing my person is quite a contrast with the respect I was shown on other occasions, see for example segment (7) above. What is happening then? In a very Samoan fashion, what we find here is the attempt by a third party (the chief Fuimaono) to both downplay my role and diffuse Moe'ono's potentially antagonistic remark (notice Moe'ono's use of the locution "Alexander the Great", which is a way of indexing my lack of chiefly status – that is, the only title he can think of is a blatantly fake one, which invites laughter). The chief Fuimaono successfully gets me off the hook (and probably saves my dissertation) by reassuring Moe'ono of Moe'ono's superiority as against my (contextually defined) low status. What could a "boy" do to such a powerful man? He (that is, I) could only take notes and learn from the old man's high eloquence.

This interpretation is based on Brown and Levinson's concept of respect as a way of reassuring the addressee that someone else (the speaker or a third party) is not coercing them. However, the principle on which this interpretation is based might be very context-specific. That higher status is something that anyone would want or prefer is not always apparent across sociocultural contexts. Studies of the strategic behavior centered around greeting exchanges in highly stratified African societies, for example, have stressed the coercive effect of verbal formulae that both foreground status differential and imply financial obligations among members of a given community (Goody 1972, Irvine 1974). Thus, in her study of Wolof greetings, Irvine points out:

> It should not be assumed that a person, whatever his or her caste, will necessarily wish to take the position of higher status. Although high status implies prestige, respect, and political power, it also implies the obligation to contribute to the support of low-status persons. Thus high rank means a financial burden, while low rank has its financial compensations.
>
> (Irvine 1974: 175)

Similar considerations could be made about the use of Samoan RWs. Samoan speakers as well often worry when they are addressed with RWs and may try to avoid being put in a higher-ranking position.

By linking these observations with the function of RWs as context-creating devices, it might be argued that in fact **one of the functions of RWs is not to recognize the recipients' immunity from imposition, but, on the contrary, to coerce, to oblige them to behave in a certain way** (e.g. with generosity, with a controlling demeanour), as appropriate to the social status (and rank) entailed by the RWs.

As I will show next, the potentially coercive and obliging nature of the act of giving "respect" is frequently recognized in people's conversations and seems to be part of the local theory of emotions and social action.

7 The Samoan notion of respect

I will show now that Samoans see respect as something that, once evoked, can force people to do things they would not otherwise do. I will start by examining two examples from the same conversation between a pastor and a deacon mentioned above. In this segment, the elderly deacon is recounting to the village's young pastor the visit of our research group to his house the night before. He lists all the good foods that had been prepared for us and then expresses satisfaction about the event (line 33). At this point, the pastor challenges that statement by asking whether in fact we had eaten. By so doing, he displays access to privileged information, namely, the fact that we had already eaten at his house before going to visit the deacon's family. The deacon's response clarifies that we were forced to eat some of the food because of the respect (*fa'aaloalo*).

(9) (Pastor and deacon)

33 A: *fiaFIia lava agapoo. -hh 'ai maa'Ona.*
Very happy last night. -hh (we/they) ate a lot!

34 (?)

35 F: *ga 'a 'ai laa le vaaega?=*
Did the gang eat?

36 A: *=Ioe. (.3) maakou 'a 'ai.*
Yes. (.3) we (all) ate.

37 (.5)

38 F: *hh.*

39 A: *'a e le 'i lava- le 'i kele laga le mea-*
but not much– not much because the thin-

40 F: *le 'i kele laga-*
not much because–

41 F: *laga 'ua 'uma oga ('a 'ai).*
because (they) already (ate).

42 A: *'ae lee mafai laa leaga 'ou faku-*
But (they) couldn't (refuse) because I say=

43 = *'o le fa'aaloalo. (.3) fa'aaloalo.*
it's (for) the respect. (.3) respect.

44 F: *'o le fa'aaloalo,*
(it's) the respect

45 A *fa'aaloalo*
respect.

The second example is taken from a point in the conversation where the deacon recounts an incident in which some members of the church congregation were being hosted at someone's house but were not sure whether they should be there or somewhere else. When they tried to leave, the story says, they couldn't because they were "caught by the respect":

(10) (Pastor and deacon)

107 A: *ia'. 'ae 'o le uma aku legaa o Vaekolu*
So, when Vaetolu had finished eating,

108 *faimai ga lavea la 'ua ma Salagoa i le fa'aaloalo.*
(she) said (that) she and Salanoa were caught by the respect.

These two examples are representative of attitudes and beliefs that we recurrently encountered during our fieldwork: "respect" (*fa'aaloalo*) is not just something that people "have" in their minds or their hearts (e.g. in the US one might "have respect" for another person without ever telling or showing him or her) but rather a set of behaviors and constraints on behaviors (see also Gerber 1985). Respect is something that is done to people, like forcing them to eat when they are not hungry – see example (9) – or stopping them from leaving too soon – see example (10).

Like other such systems or special terms (cf. the Kaluli kin term *ade* discussed by Schieffelin 1984), Samoan RWs can be a powerful means to evoke feelings and attitudes that trap recipients into behavioral patterns that they might not otherwise endorse or sustain. Thus, for instance, in (8) above, the chief Fuimaono was able to diffuse Moe'ono's attempt to question the legitimacy of my work by defining his status as disproportionately high *vis-à-vis* such a young untitled person like myself.

Furthermore, we should also seriously consider the connection established in Samoan ideology between "respect" and "tradition" (*aganu'u*) – a link which is absent in contemporary synchronically oriented models of politeness. In this perspective, the Samoan notion of respect ties individuals, situations, the here and now, as it were, to the past, and its projection into the present, hence defining the way the world **should** be, namely the accepted and acceptable social order. The occurrence of "respectful" behavior (words being one example) is talked about by

Samoans as something that can make people do things they might not do otherwise as a way of complying with a system of relations and social obligations that can maintain and help reproduce the social system – with its hierarchies, mutual obligations, and worldview – intact and unaffected by the continuous threat of change. This link with tradition may suggest that the use of RWs described in this chapter supports Bloch's (1975) characterization of traditional oratory as an ideological tool that forces individuals to accept the status quo – especially in light of the fact that the most pervasive use of RWs in Samoa is found in speechmaking. RWs can certainly be used to impose traditional solutions and support and traditional political apparatus. On the other hand, as examples such as (8) show, it is also possible to use RWs to get around the system and introduce new elements in the political arena, e.g. a foreign observer who writes down and tape-records what is being said.[3] The weakness in Bloch's argument is to assume that homage to tradition necessarily implies a conservative stand. In reality, this is often but not always the case.

8 Conclusions

To capture the uses and functions of lexical choices we must conceive of context and language as a dynamic and evolving relation in which words mediate between different versions of the world and often let more than one version coexist in the act of speaking. The Samoan respect vocabulary offers a potentially perfect match between language and the social world. The Samoan hierarchical system, with its distinctions between untitled and titled individuals, chiefs and orators, ordinary and high-ranking title holders, is reified by lexical distinctions that faithfully and routinely remind everyone of who-is-who in the sociopolitical arena. At the same time, the availability of such a taxonomy makes such a simple task as lexical choice into an art, unconscious at times, cunning on some occasions, merciless on others.

A feature analysis of the kind illustrated at the beginning of this chapter can be a useful tool in a first description of the phenomenon at hand. At the same time, it needs to be integrated with more sophisticated notions of "context" to capture a fuller range of variation in the social meaning of the use of RWs across and within social activities.

I have suggested that at least in some cases, the use of RWs in cooccurrence with FTAs should not be interpreted only as a way of paying back the addressee for what the addressee may be losing, i.e. face. What the Samoan case (as well as the Wolof, Gonja, Kaluli, etc.) demonstrates is that speakers use certain respectful lexical items and descriptions to make sure that addressees will comply with what they are expected to do. Thus, respect is not only given **in exchange** for something (e.g. request, impositions of various kinds), it is also a **pragmatic force** that coerces certain

behaviors or actions upon people and thus indexes speakers' control over addressees rather than addressees' "freedom" of action. As any Samoan knows, RWs are not just means to say "sorry, but I must ask you x"; they are strategically powerful tools that can force others to assume particular social personae, to wear social masks from behind which it will be very hard to refuse what is requested.

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Notes

1 To make things easier for the reader, in the following figures I have used the same phonological register found in the examples used in the text (e.g. *figagalo* instead of *finagalo* or *kausi* instead of *tausi*). This is an unconventional choice, given that this register, called by Samoans "bad speech" (Duranti 1981, Duranti and Ochs 1986, Shore 1982), is not found in literacy activities (such as school instruction or writing), but is very common in most of daily speech, in both formal and informal interactions. It should be also noted that I have here used traditional Samoan orthography (e.g. *g* stands for a velar nasal and the inverted apostrophe [ʻ] for a glottal stop), with the exception of vowel length, which I have marked phonemically, namely, with two identical vowels. For the computerized version of my transcripts, I have used a program for personal computer prepared by John B. Haviland and mostly based on the conventions introduced in Conversation Analysis by Gail Jefferson. The hyphen "-" indicates the cut-off point; an equals sign indicates that there is no break between turns; a square bracket connecting the talk of different speakers shows where overlap begins; numbers in parentheses indicate length of pause in minutes (3.) in tens of seconds (.3).

2 *Kava* is a pan-Pacific nonalcoholic beverage prepared by mixing water with the pounded or pulverized dry roots of a pepper plant (*Piper methysticum*). In Samoa, ceremonial kava drinking is traditionally restricted to titled individuals, although I observed informal kava drinking by both titled and untitled men during collective projects requiring hard physical labour.

3 The potential effects of such technological innovations were well understood by an emerging young leader who asked me to use my audio-tapes of the meetings as evidence in a court case against more powerful parties. But that's another story.

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