DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 197 589 FL 011 865

AUTHOR Brenneis, Donald
TITLE Straight Talk and Sweet Talk: Political Discourse in a Community of Equals. Working Papers in Sociolinguistics, No. 71.
INSTITUTION Southwest Educational Development Lab., Austin, Tex.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE Apr 80
NOTE 19p.
AVAILABLE FROM Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 211 East 7th Street, Austin, TX 78701.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adults; *Ambiguity; Change Strategies; Communication Research; *Discourse Analysis; Group Discussion; Interaction Process Analysis; *Political Influences; Politics; *Pragmatics; *Social Psychology; Sociolinguistics; *Speech Communication; Speeches
IDENTIFIERS Egalitarianism; *Indirect Speech

ABSTRACT

Anthropologists have indicated that the need to act politically and to avoid the appearance of such action is marked in egalitarian societies. The perils of confrontation in such societies often foster indirect and highly allusive speech. This paper investigates the relationship between direct and indirect speech in an Indo-Fijian community which presents a case of the association of oblique oratory with an egalitarian social order. Two varieties of public performance are analyzed: (1) the "parbachan" or religious speeches which ostensibly deal with sacred topics but which carry a second, political message as well; and (2) the "panchayat," an ad hoc arbitration session organized to deal with a specific conflict in the community. Here issues, events, and individuals are discussed openly. While there is a range of political performances in this community, the dominant mode of conflict - communication is indirection. Public political messages are deeply buried in religious speeches, and individual speakers cannot be held responsible for the secondary meanings. This accords with the notion that oblique reference is characteristic of political talk among equals. (AMH)

STRAIGHT TALK AND SWEET TALK:
POLITICAL DISCOURSE IN A COMMUNITY OF EQUALS

Donald Brenneis
Pitzer College

Sociolinguistic Working Paper

NUMBER 71

April, 1980

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory
211 East Seventh Street
Austin, Texas

STRAIGHT TALK AND SWEET TALK:
POLITICAL DISCOURSE IN A COMMUNITY OF EQUALS

Donald Brenneis
Pitzer College

Anthropologists concerned with political discourse have become increasingly interested in the distribution, characteristics and effects of indirection as a speech strategy. When does a speaker say exactly what he means, and must he resort to metaphor, irony, double entendre or other subtle devices to signify that he means more than he has said? In what types of societies is oblique reference the predominant mode of political speaking, and where is candor possible? Indirection is clearly a strategy for critical junctures, that is, for situations in which overt comment or criticism would be improvident or improper but which demand some action on the speaker's part (See, for example, Fisher 1976; Gossen 1974: 111-115; Atkinson 1980). In any community such critical junctures often occur in private encounters. In some societies, however, public occasions recurrently pose the same dilemma; one must both act politically and avoid the appearance of such action. This dilemma is most marked in societies characterized by anthropologists as egalitarian and acephalous, in which clearcut leadership does not exist and decision making is consensual.[1] The perils of direct leadership and confrontation in such societies often foster indirect, metaphoric and highly allusive speech. Understanding political discourse requires both the interpretation of texts in themselves and the unravelling of well-veiled intentions (See, for example, Rosaldo 1973; Strathern 1975).

Bhatgaon, the Indo-Fijian community which I have studied, presents in most respects a clear case of the association of oblique oratory with an amorphous, flexible and egalitarian social order.[2] Village men share a public belief in their social equality; there are no formal offices or leaders within the community. In times of conflict, direct confrontation is avoided, and speeches which can be understood as political seem to have little to do with the conflicts which engender them.

On the other hand, there are certain situations in which direct speech is not only allowed but required. My purpose in this paper is to investigate the relationship between direct and indirect speech in Bhatgaon with particular concern for the public occasions of their use. When must one speak directly, and how does one get away with it, given the general precariousness of such a strategy? Such occasions of direct speech are not aberrant but are closely intertwined with the far more frequent use of indirect performances.

This paper presents an analysis of two varieties of public performance in Bhatgaon. The first--parbachan ("religious speeches")--occurs at the weekly meeting of local religious groups.[3] All parbachan deal ostensibly with sacred topics, but speakers often convey a second, political message as well. These political meanings are quite opaque, and not all members of the audience will understand them. The second type of performance is the panchayat, an ad hoc arbitration session organized to deal with a specific conflict in the community. Issues, events and individuals which would be buried deep within a parbachan are discussed openly in the panchayat; sweet talk becomes straight talk.

These two types of events by no means encompass the full range of public politics. Both focus on interpersonal contention, and neither is used in dealing with questions of community policy. In Bhatgaon, however, the effective management or containment of personal conflicts is necessary for the success of any larger venture. These events are clearly important to the immediately involved parties but have important implications for the larger community as well.

Parbachan and the panchayat share in a symbiotic relationship with less public communicative events, and particularly with talanoa or "idle talk,"[4] a principal adhesive in the web of social life in Bhatgaon. While one's general status as an equal derives from sex, age and residence in the community, specific standing vis-a-vis others is not based on such fixed criteria but comes, in part, from individual accomplishment and, in larger part, from talk. Here I use "talk" to refer both to the fact of talking with someone and to the contents of conversation. Through conversation one provides accounts of and evaluates

individuals and incidents; by the act of talking one maintains relationships.[5] These are private and individual versions and interpretations and are unlikely to be accepted by everyone concerned.

Disputes between villagers usually lead to the suspension of talk; such disruptions in accustomed interaction signal to others that something is amiss. In addition, during a dispute partisan versions of conflict-related incidents proliferate in talanoa sessions. Parbachan provide important opportunities for the public expression, however oblique, of these positions. The panchayat, on the other hand, forces the public construction of an official account against which the later behavior and talk of disputants can be measured.

After a brief ethnographic description of Bhatgaon, I will discuss parbachan and panchayat in some detail. In these discussions I will be concerned not only with the texts, textures and contexts characteristic of these events, but also with the question of how they are politically effective. I hope to demonstrate that successful performance is compelling for sociological reasons specific to Bhatgaon as a community and because of features inherent in the organization of the events themselves. Finally, this analysis should show the necessity of considering the interdependence of varieties of political performance within a community. At one level, the characterization of political speech among equals as indirect is a powerful and suggestive insight. A full understanding of this association, however, requires the consideration of oblique discourse within the context of available genres.

Bhatgaon: an Indo-Fijian community

Bhatgaon is a rural village of 671 Hindi-speaking Indo-Fijians located on the northern side of Vanua Levu, the second largest island in the Dominion of Fiji.[6] The villagers are the descendants of north Indians who came to Fiji between 1879 and 1919 as indentured plantation workers. Bhatgaon was established in the early 1900s and now includes 90 households; there has been little migration to or from the village for the past twenty years. Most families lease rice land from the Government of Fiji, and, although they may work as seasonal cane cutters or in other outside jobs, most men consider themselves rice

farmers. Rice and dry-season vegetables are raised primarily for family use, although surplus produce may be sold to middlemen. Leaseholds are generally small, and rice farming does not offer Bhatgaon villagers the same opportunities for wealth available in sugar cane raising areas.

The political activities of men and women are often directed to the same ends but usually take place in different fora. Parbachan are male performances; women may participate in the panchayat, but the sessions are organized and run by men. This paper is concerned with male politics. Women's political participation generally occurs in less public settings,[7] as does much male politicking through such genres as talanoa.

Among males an overt egalitarian ideology prevails. Although ancestral caste appears to influence marriage choice (Brenneis 1974: 25), it has few daily consequences in Bhatgaon. As one villager said, gaon me sab barabba hei ("In the village all are equal"); this overt ideology is symbolically expressed by such practices as sitting together on the floor during religious events and equal opportunity to speak. The roots of this egalitarian outlook lie in the conditions of immigration and indenture;[8] the belief is reinforced by the relative similarity in wealth throughout Bhatgaon.

As in Animal Farm, however, some are more equal than others. Adolescent boys are accorded less respect than older, married men. As there are no formal criteria or ceremonies to mark the transition to social adulthood, disagreements about how one should be treated are common and often lead to serious conflict.[9] A number of men are recognized as bada admi ("big men") because of their past participation in village affairs, religious leadership, education or other personal success. They also gain respect through the successful management of the disputes of others. This is not an indelible status, however, as obtrusive attempts to assert authority or intervene in others' problems may be seen as socially presumptuous. Successful "big men" do not exercise their informal power ostentatiously. Continued effectiveness as a respected advisor depends upon an overt reluctance to assume leadership. Even when requested to intervene in a dispute, "big men" are often unwilling; they fear both being identified with one party's interests and being considered overeager to display power. The willing exercise of authority leads to its decline.

Individual reputation (nam="name") is central to one's actual social position. A man's nam is subject to constant renegotiation through his own words and deeds, and through those of others. Villagers are quite sensitive to perceived attempts by others to lower their reputations. They are also attuned to the successes of others; too much success is seen by many as both a personal affront and a violation of egalitarian sentiment. Jhaln ("envy") is often cited by villagers as a source of constant conflict in the community, especially between men of roughly equivalent standing (cf. Foster 1972). In disputes reputation management is a constant concern, for conflict often arises from apparent insult, and the remedy lies in the public rebalancing of one's reputation with his opponent's.

There is a police station three miles away, but there are no formal social control agencies in Bhatgaon itself. The village has a representative to the district advisory council, but he is not empowered to regulate affairs within the village. With the decline of caste as an organizational feature of Indo-Fijian life, such bodies as caste councils are no longer available for conflict management. Conflict in Bhatgaon remains largely dyadic, the concern of the contending parties alone, yet as long as disputes are dyadic, the chances of settlement are slim. The face-to-face negotiation of a serious dispute is usually impossible, as open accusation or criticism of another is taken as grievous insult. The offended party may well express his displeasure through vandalism, for example, cutting down his opponent's banana trees. While such mischief would not be positively evaluated, other villagers would see it as the natural consequence of direct confrontation and would not intervene. Only a kara admi ("hard man") would risk such revenge through direct discussion; most villagers resort to more indirect strategies.[10] It is difficult to enlist third parties in the management of a conflict, but such triadic participation is crucial. A major goal of dispute discourse in Bhatgaon, therefore, is to attract and maintain the interest and involvement of others.[11]

The most salient organizations in Bhatgaon are religious associations. Two Hindu sects are represented, the orthodox Sanatan Dharam and the reformist Arya Samaj. Their local-level organizations are called mandalis, a term referring both to the groups and to the weekly prayer

and fellowship meetings which they hold. The mandalis are run by committees of officers elected yearly. There is one mandali for the 29 reform households, and there are three for the 50 orthodox families. The seven Muslim households belong to a mosque association, but they gather only for special events such as festivals and weddings.

Conflicts in Bhatgaon may involve the members of different religious groups, or they may be restricted to coreligionists. Interreligious disputes frequently lead to long-term avoidance, although they may occasionally result in public events such as insult song sessions (see Brenneis and Padarath 1975). In this paper I will deal with disputes between men who are members, not only of the same religion, but of the same mandali. Such shared membership implies a particular range of constraints on and opportunities for public politicking.

Matters of common knowledge

Before proceeding to specific discussions of parbachan and panchayat, a brief digression on knowledge in Bhatgaon is necessary. In those north Indian communities from which Bhatgaon villagers' ancestors emigrated, various types of knowledge were differentially distributed along lines determined by the caste system, just as were more tangible resources. Brahmins, for example, had a virtual monopoly on sacred and ritual knowledge, while blacksmiths controlled a range of technical information forbidden to Brahmins. A great deal of knowledge, both sacred and secular, was status-specific. Who one was determined what one knew; what one knew demonstrated who one was.

The radical levelling of Indian immigrant society in Fiji had obvious implications for the allocation of knowledge. While in north India the differential distribution of knowledge had both reflected and helped maintain a system of ranked but interdependent groups; in Fiji the groups were at best ill-defined, and the division of labor in part responsible for the division of knowledge no longer existed. Secular knowledge became, in effect, open to all.

In Bhatgaon at least, there was a corresponding democratization of sacred knowledge as well. The reformist Arya Samaj sect has as a central tenet the notion of shikcha, "instruction." Members are expected to educate both themselves and others in religious practice and understanding.

Although samajis are a minority in Bhatgaon, they have had a considerable effect on orthodox villagers as well.

The sacred has become common knowledge in Bhatgaon. It is no longer, in most cases, the property of a particular group. The generally egalitarian nature of social life in Bhatgaon has a counterpart in the relatively equal opportunity of all villagers to pursue knowledge, both sacred and secular. It is important to note, however, that, where egalitarian ideals are stressed, continuing symbolic expressions of one's membership in a community of peers are necessary; apparent exclusion is taken very seriously.

A crucial way of demonstrating one's membership is through sharing in what is "common knowledge" in the community - what "everyone" knows. Although sacred and technical knowledge can be included in this, they are relatively static. The real action lies in the dynamics of everyday life; familiarity with local individuals and recent events is necessary. No one, however, knows everything, and some villagers are considerably better acquainted with particular incidents than are others. This differential participation in common knowledge is, as I will argue below, an important political fact and a resource for disputants.

Parbachan

Parbachan are speeches with ostensibly religious content given at weekly mandali meetings. Although members of other religions are welcome, the participants in a mandali are almost all members of the same Hindu sect. Parbachan are part of a program which follows a ritual butter sacrifice or readings from the Ramayana epic; programs also include religious songs. The program is set by the chairman of the mandali. Anyone in the congregation may be called upon for a speech, but those who want to speak may ask before-hand to be included. Not all parbachan have a political intent; many are spontaneous speeches on purely religious subjects. Parbachan do, however, offer an important medium for political performance, and I will focus on those speeches which are designed for such purposes.

In considering the contexts for parbachan, a distinction between primary and secondary audience is helpful. The primary audience is composed of the individuals or group at whom the performance is chiefly aimed, that is, those whom the performer hopes to influence directly. The

secondary audience includes others who are present. It is not merely a residual category, however, as the secondary audience provides both evaluation and an element of control. The spectators limit and shape the performance.

The primary audience for parbachan, when they are being used politically, comprises those members of the mandali not directly involved in the conflict. Spectators sit quietly on the floor while the orator speaks from a standing position. The speaker's goal is to provoke their interest and to gain their support for the future. Parbachan are an important means of recruiting third-parties to intervene in and bring an end to one's dispute. The secondary audience is one's opponent or his supporters; if the enemy is not present, one can be sure that word of what is said will reach him rapidly. This secondary audience constrains by intimidation. The fear of revenge for overt accusation makes speakers wary; parbachan are quite indirect in conveying their political messages.

Bhatgaon villagers recognize two general varieties of Hindi. One, shudh ("sweet") Hindi, is characterized by such features as gender, carefully inflected verbs and a heavily Sanskritic lexicon. The other code in the village is the local dialect, referred to as jangli bat ("jungle talk"); jangli vocabulary includes many English and Fijian items, and it is much less complexly inflected. Jangli bat is the mother tongue for villagers, while sweet Hindi is learned through school, reading and listening to the radio and to formal speeches.[12] Parbachan are given in sweet Hindi, or at least in as elegant a code as the speaker can manage. Villagers' competence in sweet Hindi is quite variable, but limited knowledge of the code does not limit the speaker's effectiveness. Audiences consider the attempt to speak properly to be more important than the results.

The apparent content of parbachan deals with religious themes. Sometimes speakers celebrate a particular epic hero or cult leader; more frequently a speech focusses on a moral quality considered essential to a good Hindu. There is a great disparity between overt content and intention in politically motivated parbachan, however. Although I understood Hindi well and was on the lookout for conflict, during my first few months of fieldwork I saw no reason not to interpret parbachan as purely religious discourse. A friend's comment on the successful political attack

a speaker had made in an apparent homily on the virtues of mandali attendance suggested that I was missing the point. The contents of parbachan are not ambiguous in themselves. It is easy for the Hindi-speaking outsider to follow an analysis of, for example, the fidelity of Sita, the wife of the epic hero Ram. The relationship between text and intended function, however, remains quite opaque;[13] the audience knows that some speakers have no hidden agenda while others are using parbachan for political ends.

A crucial question, then, is how speakers key their audiences to these secondary meanings. When does the audience understand that it is not to take a speech at face value, and what features guide it to this understanding? Parbachan are not metaphoric. They contain few tropes, that is, figures of speech which by their stylistic features or conventional associations suggest hidden meanings. Speakers rely instead upon the mention of particular topics such as anger, jealousy and contention and upon several types of syntactic devices. Chief among these is what I have labelled the "coy reference." Coy references employ the indefinite pronouns koi ("some(one)") and kya ("some(thing)") and, occasionally, relative pronouns such as jo ("who"). They are used to provide vague antecedents for the later use of third person pronouns, as in "There are some people who do not go to mandali . . . . They are not good samajis."[14] One can be as derogatory as desired about an unidentified malefactor.

Even when the entire audience understands that a quite secular motive underlies a sacred text, some members will recognize only the fact that something is up, while others will be aware of the specific facts of the dispute. It is here that the differential participation in matters of common knowledge discussed above becomes important. Individuals in the audience are concerned about their acceptance as members of the mandali; the mandali is an important and relatively stable reference group in the fluid social structure of Bhatgaon. The audience feels that it should be able to uncover speakers' motives, to unravel their allusions and to interpret the social as well as the literal meanings of their parbachan. Audience members have an investment in the interpretation of intramandali events; the failure to understand suggests less than full participation. They therefore work, often quite subtly, to investigate and comprehend the hidden meanings.

Speakers have mixed motives in these parbachan. In part they hope to recruit supporters or at least to promote some sympathy for their positions. The successful association, however oblique, of their opponents with the absence or distortion of important virtues can be effective in giving the enemy a bad name and lowering their reputation. A more important goal is bringing a private conflict, previously discussed only in talanoa sessions, to public notice through acceptably indirect means. Speakers hope both to alert fellow mandali members to an ongoing dispute and to convince them that it is serious enough to demand their assistance as third parties. A successful speech not only rouses interest but also catalyzes community involvement, often through the convening of a panchayat.

The panchayat[15]

A panchayat is an ad hoc arbitration session,usually convened by the elected officers of a mandali after considerable albeit indirect prodding from disputing members of the association. Panchayat sessions, in marked contrast to parbachan, involve quite direct talk about specific events and personalities. Allegations which in most contexts would lead to revenge are discussed at length and without repercussions. Given the egalitarian character of life in Bhatgaon and villagers' consequent avoidance of overt confrontation, the panchayat poses several interesting questions: what contextual and internal features make such direct performances possible, and what are their implications for the future relationships of the involved parties? In this section I will attempt to answer these questions by outlining the process by which panchayats are arranged, their participants and audiences, the formal organization of the panchayat as a communicative event, the content of testimony and the effects of the sessions.

Panchayats are planned and convened by the elected officers of the disputants' mandali. These officers meet as antarang samiti ("confidential committee") and very deliberately discuss the case, choose appropriate witnesses to summon and otherwise prepare for the session. Often committee members will interview witnesses clandestinely before the panchayat is held. They are concerned that factual evidence will be presented; they also, however, want to manage the evidence in such a way that neither party will lose totally. Reinstating the good reputations of both disputants

is a central goal. Committee members are also concerned with the public perception of their own roles in the panchayat. The successful management of others' conflicts requires at least the appearance of reluctance; the organizers prefer to keep their activities as far backstage as possible.

The panchayat itself is held on neutral ground. Both parties attend along with their supporters, the witnesses and the committee members. The panchayat is often the first occasion since the beginning of the dispute which is attended by both disputants; such joint participation is important in itself.

The audience for a panchayat presents a complex picture. Panchayat discourse chiefly takes the form of testimony under oath, and various deities comprise an important secondary audience insuring the truthfulness of witnesses' accounts. The committee members also play an important role in asking questions and maintaining fairly close control over the issues which witnesses can pursue. The primary audience for the entire event, however, is not present at the panchayat. This audience includes other mandali members and the village as a whole, and it is from this audience that the panchayat derives a great deal of its effectiveness. Before the session is held, an individual villager's knowledge of the case comes through private and frequently partisan lines. Such knowledge can only be shared in discussions with close and trusted friends for fear of being drawn into the conflict or at the least being labelled a supporter of one side or the other. Through panchayat testimony an official and definitive account of events crucial to the development of the dispute is publicly constructed. It becomes a basis for later discussion and a new baseline against which the subsequent behavior of the disputants can be evaluated. It also lets everyone in the community know what happened between the parties and answers those critical questions raised obliquely in mandali speeches.

The interrogative form of panchayat proceedings is another important factor in the success of such sessions. Members of the committee interview a series of witnesses, each of whom has sworn to give truthful testimony. In marked contrast to the American courtroom, there is no adversarial questioning; only the committee may ask questions, and they ask only

those questions to which they already know the answers. Women, who rarely figure in other public events, are called as frequently as men. The question-answer format has two features of critical importance for the success of the panchayat. First, questions compel answers (Cf. Goody 1978).[16] An unanswered question is an interactional vacuum; a response is necessary, especially in public contexts. Furthermore, it is likely that the style and degree of directness of an answer are patterned on those features of the question (See Conley et al. 1978 for some suggestive findings in this area). The direct questions put by committee members draw forth terse but equally direct answers. A second important feature of the question-answer format is suggested by the work of Keenan, Schieffelin and Platt (1978). In interpreting the extensive use of questions by mothers in speaking to very young children, they suggest that the question-answer pair be considered a single propositional unit. By answering the question--whether verbally or nonverbally--the infant completes the idea begun by its mother. If this notion is applied to the panchayat, one effect of the interrogative format can be seen as the reduction of third party responsibility for the emerging account. The public narrative is constructed through the propositions collaboratively stated by questioner and witness together. The committee is not presenting an account but is contributing to its composition.

The orchestration of the panchayat as an event is a delicate job. The appropriate witnesses must be located and their accounts checked and compared. The planning involved, however, cannot be overly evident to the disputants or the neutrality of the committee might be challenged. The witnesses also must be closely controlled. In contrast to arbitration sessions in many small-scale communities, the panchayat by no means involves a full airing of the issues involved in a dispute (Cf. Gibbs 1967; Nader 1969; Cohn 1967). Testimony is confined to a particular incident from which the dispute is considered to stem. The committee has a clear prospective interest in the future relationships between the disputants, but a limited and retrospective focus is the most effective way of insuring a successful outcome.

A final crucial feature of the panchayat is the manner in which it ends. After the last witness there is no summing up, no discussion and

no decision by the committee. The disputants usually shake hands without much conversation. This serves both as a ritual and public statement of the resumption of amicable relations between them and as a signal that the session is over. The participants may linger, but they talk about other subjects. It is important to understand that no consensus is reached or even attempted; a decision is not made. A cooperative and binding account of a contested incident is accomplished, and interested villagers are left to draw their own conclusions and interpretations.

Conclusions

In this paper I have argued for the interdependence of a range of political performances in an egalitarian Indo-Fijian community. The dominant mode of conflict communication is indirection. Public political messages are deeply buried in religious speeches, and individual speakers cannot be held responsible for such secondary meanings. This accords well with the notion that oblique reference is characteristic of political talk among equals (see Irvine 1979; Rosaldo 1973). In contrast, the panchayat provides a forum in which contentious issues can be overtly raised. Such sessions are carefully managed to guide and control the information presented and to protect the interests of all the parties involved. Although the talk is open, its subject matter is restricted. No one bears sole responsibility for the public discussion; instead, a cooperative account is created through interrogation. Reference is direct, but the event itself is oblique, providing a legitimate and public version of a case, yet one for which no individual can be held accountable. Furthermore, the fact that the panchayat itself is held and that both parties participate in it is an important signal to the rest of the community. The disputants meet again as equals, and they publicly resume their disrupted patterns of communication. Talk is restored and with it appropriate relations between villagers.

Footnotes

*This paper was presented in the symposium, "Language and politics in the Pacific: the social ecology of speech events," at the 1980 annual meetings, Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania, Galveston, Texas. Wynne Furth, Fred Myers, Ronald Macaulay and Roger Abrahams provided valuable criticisms and suggestions for which I am grateful.

[1]This dilemma may actually be common to any relationships among equals, whether in an egalitarian society or within a particular stratum within a hierarchical society (Cf. Albert's (1972), discussion of Burundi oratory).

[2]Research in Bhatgaon and subsequent analyses were supported by NIMH, the Comparative International Program (Harvard), the Center for the Study of Law and Society, Pitzer College, the Haynes Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

[3]A detailed discussion of parbachan can be found in Brenneis (1978).

[4]Talanoa is a Fijian word. In Fijian it means conversation; in Hindi it refers to talk around the yaqona bowl and carries the connotation of idle chatter and gossip.

[5]For a fuller discussion of this point see Arno 1976.

[6]These data represent the situation in early 1972.

[7]Wynne Furth, who also conducted research in Bhatgaon, has noted that women carry out considerable public politicking through discussions with other women at weddings and similar events; men are not privy to such performances, as they sit separately.

[8]A fuller discussion of the development of egalitarianism in Bhatgaon may be found in Brenneis (1979).

[9]A fuller discussion of this problem and its implications for conflict in the village may be found in Brenneis (forthcoming).

[10]In speaking of the verbal characteristics associated with direct and indirect conflict strategies, villagers often use the term sidha bat ("straight talk") and shudh bat ("sweet talk"), respectively. Shudh bat is polysemic; it also refers to a prestige variety of Hindi discussed on page 14.

[11]The problem of third party recruitment is discussed in detail in Brenneis (1979).

[12]The situation of "sweet Hindi" and "jungle talk" is quite close to diglossia, albeit, in its specifics, of quite recent origin (See Ferguson 1959).

[13]The indirectness of the relationship between text and situated meaning is by no means restricted to Indo-Fijian politics but is a constant feature of human communication. The recently burgeoning field of linguistic pragmatics is concerned with mapping out patterned associations between intent and the form of utterances in a range of societies, particularly our own.

[14]A more detailed explication and analysis of the coy reference is in Brenneis (1978: 165).

[15]It is important to remember that a parbachan is a particular genre located in the larger context of the mandali as speech event; the panchayat is an event in itself.

[16]Bloch (1975) has proposed that "formality" is the crucial coercive feature of political language. The effectiveness of public interrogation in Bhatgaon suggests that different forms of political discourse compel in quite different ways.

References Cited

Albert, E. M. (1972). "Cultural patterning of speech behavior in Burundi," in J. J. Gumperz and D. Hymes (eds.), Directions in Sociolinguistics: the Ethnography of Communications. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 72-105.

Arno, Andrew (1976). "Joking, avoidance and authority: Verbal performance as an object of exchange in Fiji," Journal of the Polynesian Society 85 (1): 71-86.

Atkinson, Jane M. (1980). "Wrapped words: Poetry and politics among the Wana of central Sulawesi," Paper presented in the symposium, "Language & Politics in the Pacific," annual meetings, Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania.

Bloch, Maurice (2975). "Introduction," in M. Bloch (ed.), Political Language and Oratory in Traditional Society. New York: Academic Press, 1-28.

Brenneis, Donald (1974). Conflict and Communication in a Fiji Indian Community. (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University).

Brenneis, Donald (1978). "The matter of talk: political performances in Bhatgaon," Language in Society 7: 159-170.

Brenneis, Donald (1979). "Conflict in Bhatgaon: the search for a third party," in Subramani (ed.), The Indo-Fijian Experience. St. Lucia: Queensland University Press, 41-56.

Brenneis, Donald (forthcoming). "Strategies of offense choice: malice and mischief in Bhatgaon," to appear in Canberra Anthropology.

Brenneis, Donald and Pandarath, Ram (1975). "'About those scoundrels I'll let everyone know:' challenge singing in a Fiji Indian community," Journal of American Folklore 88 (349): 283-291.

Cohn, Bernard S. (1967) "Some notes on law and change in north India," in P. Bohannan (ed.), Law and Warfare. Austin: University of Texas Press, 139-159.

Conley, John M.; O'Barr, William M.; and Lind, E. Allan (1978). "The power of language: presentational style in the courtroom." Duke Law Journal 1978 (6): 1375-1399.

Ferguson, C. A. (1959). "Diglossia," Word 15: 325-240.

Fisher, Lawrence E. (1976). "Dropping remarks and the Barbadian audience," American Ethnologist 3 (2): 227-242.

Foster, George M. (1972). "The anatomy of envy: a study in symbolic behavior," Current Anthropology 13 (2): 165-186.

Gibbs, James L. (1967) "The Kpelle moot," in P. Bohannan (ed.), Law and Warfare. Austin: University of Texas Press, 277-289.

Goody, Esther N. (1978). "Towards a theory of questions," in E. Goody (ed.), Questions and Politeness: Strategies in Social Interaction. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 17-43.

Gossen, Gary H. (1974). Chamulas in the World of the Sun: Time and Space in a Maya Oral Tradition. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Irvine, Judith T. (1979). "Formality and informality in communicative events," American Anthropolgist 81 (4): 773-790.

Keenan, Elinor O.; Shieffelin, Bambi B.; and Platt, Martha (1978). "Questions of immediate concern," in E. Goody (ed.), Questions and Politeness: Strategies in Social Interaction. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 44-55.

Nader, Laura (1969). "Styles of court procedure: to make the balance," in L. Nader (ed.), Law in Culture and Society. Chicago: Aldine, 69-91.

Rosaldo, Michelle A. (1973) "I have nothing to hide: the language of Illongot oratory," Language in Society 2: 192-223.

Strathern, Andrew (1975). "Veiled speech in Mount Hagen," in M. Bloch (ed.), Political Language and Oratory in Traditional Society. New York: Academic Press, 185-203.

19