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the spoken house: text, act, and object in eastern Indonesia

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Although it is part of the everyday work of anthropologists to share in local conversations about cultural things, they may listen to such reflexive discourse with some ambivalence. After all, much of what we know about our world remains tacit—it can go unsaid and often is difficult to put into words. Yet amidst the everyday flow of work and talk, moments occur in which people reflect on and even objectify their world. In particular, when they talk about their own culture, people often privilege descriptions and interpretations that have an almost textlike quality, as if simply awaiting the writer's pen. For Malinowski, such moments provide an unproblematic boon:

> [T]he frequent, tedious repetitions and enumerations of customary sequences of events, interesting as data of folk-lore, are not less valuable as ethnographic documents, and as illustrations of the natives' attitude towards custom. Incidently, this feature of native mythology shows that the task of serving as ethnographic informant is not so foreign and difficult as might at first appear. He is quite used to recite one after the other the various stages of customary proceedings in his own narratives, and he does it with an almost pedantic accuracy and completeness, and it is an easy task for him to transfer these qualities to the accounts which he is called upon to make in the service of ethnography. [1961(1922):318]

Indeed, the virtuosity in self-description that Malinowski describes seems to characterize entire societies. Barth (1990), for example, contrasts the high value Balinese place on decontextual explanation with the resistance to verbalization posed by the more taciturn Baktaman. Many observers have been struck by the way that regional patterns seem to have given rise to the "highly word-oriented approach to cultural analysis [that] has been advanced by ethnographers of Island Southeast Asia . . . where ritual discourse and oratory abound and people engage one another in speculative exegesis, with or without the prodding of anthropologists" (Atkinson 1989:332, n.2). By this account, it is distinctive local ways of talking that shape the resulting ethnography.

Sumbanese descriptions of the "traditional house" as a microcosm and emblem of local identity are neither unproblematic expressions of a cultural totality nor simply objectifications imposed by ethnography or modernity. One way the house is able to serve as a discursive object reflects, in part, specifically Sumbanese models of action and beliefs about language as refracted in changing historical circumstances. In ritual, speakers seek to engage and elicit responses from powerful others, whereas current religious and political developments reframe ritual words as means of describing a cultural world. Both sets of practices draw on the authority of "entextualized" language but interpret it in different ways. Emerging representations of cultural meaning are shaped by long-standing speech genres and by recent social and cultural transformations, mediated by shifting language ideologies. [culture theory, representation, discourse, ritual speech, language ideology, house, Indonesia]

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On the other hand, skeptics are reluctant to take for granted the reflexive ease, schematic distance, and verbal adroitness that these writers report. Boas (1966[1911]) sounds an early note of epistemological caution, admonishing the anthropologist against the operations of "secondary rationalization." More recently, Asad asserts that "[d]iscourse involved in practice is not the same as that involved in speaking about practice" (1983:243)—words must not be conflated with their purported objects. For Bourdieu (1977[1972]), talk about practice, rules, and meanings tends to arise in speech directed to outsiders. Such talk can obscure or discredit tacit knowledge, helping produce a picture of culture as a totalizable object that is cut off from action. Historicizing the epistemological question, Foucault (1972[1969]:44) observes that the very existence of something as an object of discourse only arises as a function of specific conditions, for "one cannot speak of anything at any time." When the object of talk is "local culture," add critics of colonial knowledge, it may be in order to serve external powers that seek a position from which to see and yet not be seen, so that local worlds may become "picture-like and legible . . . readable like a book" (Mitchell 1988:33; see Heidegger 1977).

Thus situated, even local ways of talking about culture, especially the more formulaic "tedious repetitions and enumerations," must be questioned: if something looks like a book, we may be prompted to ask who the implied reader is. Nonetheless, I argue that the skeptics must still contend with Malinowski's "almost pedantic" interlocutor. Such expansive self-consciousness, abundant in some places and rare in others, should neither be taken for granted as a straightforward expression of autonomous cultural meanings nor dismissed out of hand as merely the product of "officializing strategies" (Bourdieu 1977[1972]) or ethnographic reification.

That reflexive discourse can provide powerful interpretive insights or deceptive normative claims is indisputable. Both the accepting and the skeptical view, however, if taken as fully sufficient accounts of the discourse in question, tend to reduce it to the service of a single function, usually that of talking *about* the world. But language serves multiple functions, and even in face-to-face interaction is liable to exceed any given context, purpose, and intention.[1] Reflexive talk can draw on verbal resources that are shaped *not only* by, say, an inherent need to interpret one's world or to satisfy an ethnographer but by other aspects of speech altogether. The relationship between discourse and action is not given a priori. The extent to which talk is "in" or "about" practice is, in part, a function of specific language ideologies—that is, speakers' assumptions about "the nature of language in the world" (Rumsey 1990:346).[2] Language ideologies articulate in turn with social institutions, modes of action, and beliefs about the world, all of which are subject to historical transformation. In this article I look at the shifting status of talk as people reflect on what they know and do, and suggest that there is more than one position from which to view a "picture-like" world.[3]

In Anakalang, one exemplary focus of reflexive talk is the "traditional house," which people commonly treat as an interpretive key to local culture and identity. My interest here is not in reinterpreting the house itself but rather in seeking to account for its ready availability for *talk* about cultural meanings. I do so by looking at how it is constructed as a verbal object in ritual. Although I do not claim that this *fully* explains the ways people talk about the house, I will argue that such talk is influenced by the demands imposed by ritual action, which are shaped by social institutions and cosmological beliefs and by the semiotic problems they pose. When institutions and cosmologies change, so do the practices, problems, and language ideologies they entail. At the same time, as people draw on available symbolic resources, such as the words of ritual, they often recontextualize them. In Anakalang, I describe one resulting tendency, that many people easily treat the verbalized house as a cultural entity that exists independently of speakers and contexts, potentially able to totalize an entire social universe whose essence can be summarized in so many words. Such representations work in part by appeal to the authority and apparent concreteness of both the words and the things to which they refer. They select and take advantage of *already existing* features of ritual speech that make it susceptible to treatment as a source of stable texts.

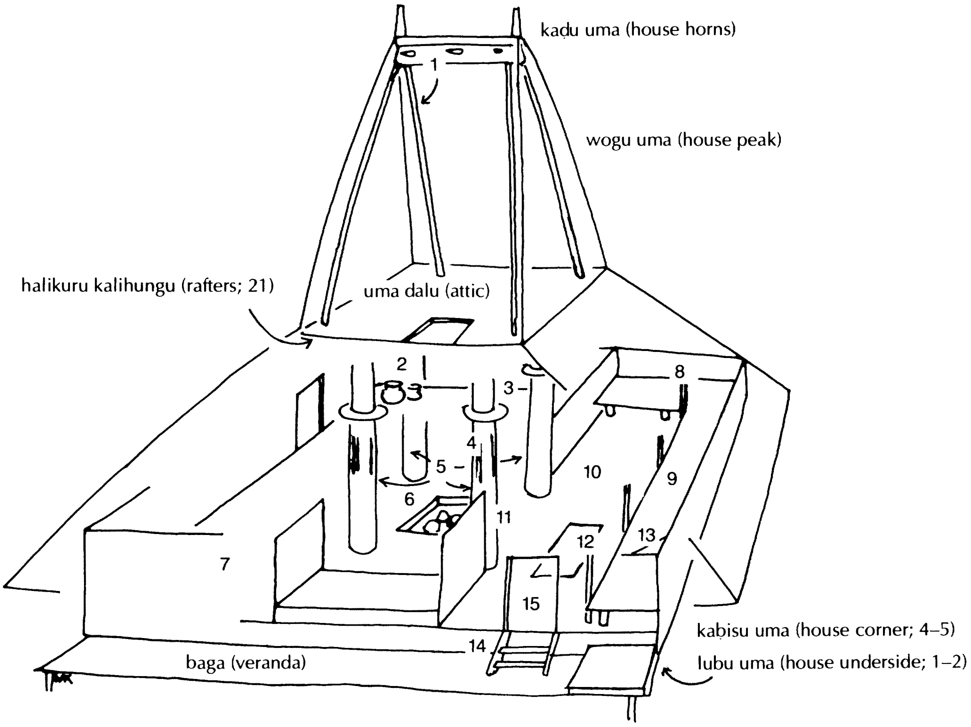
The resulting accounts of the traditional house and its meanings, I suggest, can be misleading in two respects. Because they draw on genres of speech that Anakalangese associate with the past, they can appear to be timeless artifacts that express a fully readable culture that lies apart from their own actions. Conversely, because representations of the house have many of the schematizing and abstract features of talk addressed to outsiders, a skeptical anthropologist might assume that they are nothing more than "invented traditions" (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) or the effect of Western or academic sorts of knowledge. To pose the matter in terms of such simple alternatives threatens to restrict our view of people's verbal resources to an unrealistically narrow range of possibilities. By hinting at the rich variety of ways that people can form objects of discourse, I hope to shed light on the sources and development of one sort of cultural representation and its role in ongoing local efforts at self-definition.

house structure as a paradigm of cultural order

A common object of cultural representation in eastern Indonesia is the house, rendered in detailed homologies among architecture, society, and cosmos (Barnes 1974; Cunningham 1964; Ellen 1986; Forth 1991; Kana 1980; cf. Fox 1993; Waterson 1990). Nonetheless, when I started research in Anakalang, an ethnolinguistic domain on the island of Sumba, I was surprised at how quickly I found myself the recipient of similar accounts.[4] This began during my first week on the island, when I, as a "student of culture," was presented with a remarkable nine-page typescript account of "Sumbanese culture" in Indonesian (Wohangara 1985). The author was a Christian and a retired civil servant who lived in the largest town on the island—a market and administrative center and home to a mix of ethnicities uncharacteristic of most of Sumba, all of which may help explain the cosmopolitan nature of the document. Clearly embodying the serious reflections of a speculative intellect, the typescript covers many of the topics favored by other Indonesian-language synoptic treatments of culture and tradition, such as the ancestral treks and rules for marriage and for burial.[5] One striking feature of this work is the prominence it gives to the house, to which, after an initial half page defining the word *marapu* (ancestor spirit), the author turns: "[The] 4 central pillars (kambaniru-lundungu) [are] named according to their respective functions as the Four Principles of the Sumbanese people (PATU KALARATU TURA PARAINGU) that form a basis for ordering the way of life of the Sumbanese people throughout life."[6]

These pillars are identified with "Godliness," "Marriage" (prescriptive marriage rules), "Prosperity," and "Life and Death" (rites of passage), with the four compass points, and with the entranceways to the ancestor village. Here in a nutshell are the basic treatments: parts of the house are metonymically linked to cultural principles (see note 16), and the whole is a diagram of village structure and larger world. Through such alignments the author portrays the house as a schematic structure and microcosm, both a practical ground and conceptual outline for an entire moral and cultural order.

Examples of this treatment of the house could be multiplied. In many casual conversations, people told me about the meaning of the house in precisely the sort of "speculative exegesis" that Atkinson describes. The simplest version divides the distinctive bamboo, wood, and thatch house (*uma;* see Figure 1) into three levels, corresponding to the worlds of spirits (the attic under the high-peaked roof or "house's hump" [*wogu uma*]), humans (the living platform raised on posts), and animals (corral and stock pen beneath the floor, the "house's underside" [*lubu uma*]). Finer discriminations produce five levels—which, some tell me, parallel the five-point state ideology (*Pancasila*)—or more, in some cases corresponding to the number of clan ancestors,


kaḍu uma (house horns)
1
wogu uma (house peak)
halikuru kalihungu (rafters; 21)
uma dalu (attic)
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
kaḅisu uma (house corner; 4–5)
lubu uma (house underside; 1–2)
baga (veranda)

1. tolaku maneni (peak frame; 17–18)
2. kerijialu (water jar base)
3. leli (pillar disk; 23–24)
4. walu toku (pillar carvings; 26–29)
5. kabaringu paḍua (central pillars)
6. karaḅuku (hearth)
7. korungu marapu (spirit chamber; 12–15)
8. kabaringu padaku (short pillars; 19)
9. halema (bench)
10. pena ḅakul (main room)
11. kabaringu uratu (divination pillar)
12. tapu papalekaru (meeting mat; 9–10)
13. hedi marapu (spirit shelf)
14. panuangu (steps)
15. pidu (door)

Figure 1. Peaked house. (Numbers in parentheses refer to lines of Umbu Sebu's recitation.)

with additional homologies such as the parts of the human body (cf. Barraud 1979:57; Forth 1981:29–30, 32).

That Anakalangese, at least in speaking with outsiders, may take this model as a key to an entire culture is suggested by two anecdotes with which, as a searcher after such knowledge myself, I was often entertained (and, perhaps, admonished). The first concerns a Sumbanese boy who, people say, was such a genius that he was sent to Java to study. There he was interviewed by the authorities, who asked, "What does your father do?" "He's a herdsman." "What do you eat?" "Maize and tubers." Basic matters of production and consumption disposed of, the clincher was his ability to schematize the house: "Where do you live?" "In a three-leveled house: the top contains our food, the middle the humans, and underneath, the cattle."[7] A second anecdote concerns a Dutch student who had undertaken fieldwork in Anakalang several years before I did, but who had never completed his dissertation. One version of his fate is that he failed his exam back in Holland, being unable to describe the house levels when asked to do so by his professors.

The house, as a structure that embodies publicly known, wide-ranging categories, forms one paradigmatic referent for cultural discourse in Sumba. Like talk about gong tunes, stone tombs, marriage exchange, and stopping places on the ancestral trek, this discourse often takes schematic forms like the list making described by Malinowski. In focusing on speech, I do *not* mean to discount the importance and complexity of the house as a social concept, as a ritual space, or as a critical site at which these two aspects articulate with everyday practice—a different and longer project (see discussions in Adams 1974; Forth 1991; Kuipers 1990). Rather, my interest is provoked by the Sumbanese facility with talk about cultural things and its links to speech practices and language ideologies. For *all* societies produce dwellings, doubtless laden with meaning—but not everyone makes *talk* about the house as central and as schematic as do Anakalangese. For example, Bourdieu's (1979[1970]) account of the Kabyle house draws not on explicit verbal mapping but on activities, collated with proverbs and expressions that speakers are not themselves given to assembling into a synoptic account (cf. Oliver 1987:153). Furthermore, discourse is selective: it does not capture everything of interest or importance about the house.[8]

This is to suggest that the treatment of the house as an object of discourse is not simply an expression of its referent but arises in part from its place within speech practices. Indeed, to focus exclusively on the referent can be misleading: the house and its meanings may not be sufficient to determine the way they are spoken of. And conversely, I argue, even a fully "traditional" architectural structure is not sufficient to provide one with a cosmological house, in the absence of the ritual practices, including speech. Thus, current accounts of the house build upon foundations that are laid in speech performances that *verbally* lay out the house as a formal structure, decomposed and displayed part by part. In Anakalang, these practices are shaped by certain communicative and pragmatic challenges. As these challenges become less important (with the decline, for example, of clan identity, spirit ritual, and the interlocutors and agencies they involve), the speech practices increasingly lend themselves to treatment as sources of texts that refer to objects independent of actions.

ritual speech as cultural text

Sumbanese ritual speech is a highly marked register that contrasts with everyday speech. It is the principal verbal medium of ancestral rites (for example, in prayer, oratory, and song) and of important interactions among humans, notably the negotiation of marriage exchanges. Anakalangese ritual speech, "patterned words of negotiation, aligned words of speech" (*pata li kajiála, lola li panewi*), comprises a large but fixed set of canonical couplets in semantic and syntactic parallelism, along with principles for their combination into larger units and conventions for their appropriate and efficacious use, all of which are said to have been created by the ancestors.[9] As in many parts of Indonesia, people in contemporary Anakalang often treat the couplets of ritual speech both as treasured cultural artifacts in their own right and as descriptors of traditional culture. This double role is implicit in the statement by the Sumbanese compiler of a recent lexicon of ritual couplets that his book could be called a "Dictionary of Culture" (*Kamus Kebudayaan*) (Kapita 1987:9).[10]

Full performance (Hymes 1981[1975]) of Anakalangese ritual speech addresses an other, human or spirit, across some sort of social or ontological difference. This difference can be defined, for example, in kinship terms as the distance permitting marriage, or in political terms as the alienation between feuding lineage segments, or, when the living address ancestral spirits, as the ontological separation between the living and the dead. The gap between interlocutors poses difficulties that require, yet permit, special communicative efforts to overcome them. Two characteristics of this gap mark the ritual speech that aims to bridge it. One is the *reflexivity* that makes ritual speech a way of naming the things, agents, and types of action involved in the actual event in which it occurs. The other is the *formality* of performance, poetic structure, and canonical language that provides this speech with aesthetic power, textlike qualities, and ancestral character.[11]

The first characteristic arises from the need for talk about social identities and cultural objects. This need, often apparent when speakers address each other *across* cultures, opens up *within* society—even in face-to-face interaction—at points of critical difference and distance, motivating the abstraction that characterizes discourse directed at "outsiders" (Bourdieu 1977[1972]:17). In Anakalang, ritual speech often mediates between groups who, through the very forms of discourse they use, define themselves as outsiders to one another and treat their mutual communication as uncertain. Their speech thus has many of the properties of talk between strangers, dealing with communicative uncertainty through redundancy and constant reference to the relevant actors, events, and goals.

In addition, the forms of Anakalangese ritual speech help speakers identify themselves to ancestors and claim some of their authority.[12] Event structure and performance style all help mute the particularities of time and person, partially denying the situatedness of speech acts (Keane 1991; Kuipers 1990). These forms work in tandem with ritual poetics that support "entextualization," making salient formal features of the speech that allow it to be treated as an object that appears to transcend particular circumstances or speakers.[13] In doing so, it stresses those properties of language that are *least* dialogic, linked to context, or to speakers' intentions. Entextualization is of particular interest here because it allows highly contextual speech *events* to create the effect of *texts,* building on those aspects of language that contribute to what have been treated, for quite different theoretical ends, as the "said" (Ricoeur 1971), the "already uttered" (Bakhtin 1981), or the writing that "supplements" speech (Derrida 1973[1967]). It thus articulates in practice aspects of language often considered analytically to be in mutual opposition.

These two characteristics underwrite the use of ritual speech as a source of cultural representation. The reflexive dimension of ritual speech provides it with forms suitable for talk about cultural objects, and its formality supports its treatment as a text that exists independently of, and is highly portable among, particular events, persons, contexts, or practices. These properties, however, derive from functions that are quite distinct from their use as denotational texts. Contemporary Anakalangese use ritual speech in a range of contexts and purposes that bear contrasting sets of implications about the nature of language and its effects. The different uses of ritual speech imply differences in language ideology, emphasizing the role of language in problematic and consequential *interaction* on the one hand, and its function in *denotation* on the other. Although in practice the two aspects are often intertwined, they may pull in different directions: ritual speech that provides a way of speaking *to* powerful interlocutors and inducing *responses* can also be read as text *about* a separate and self-contained world.

These two emphases can be seen in speech practices respectively associated with relatively conservative and self-consciously modernist parts of Anakalangese society. Although both kinds of practice coexisted in the 1980s, they may provide evidence of historical shifts (for which the written record is scanty) in the language ideology that informs them. For ancestral ritual is becoming increasingly marginalized, while Christianity, involvement with the nation-state, and the forms of cultural display and reflection associated with them, are clearly ascendant. At issue here are speech practices, since the actual *words* in question need not differ: rather, the crucial differences concern the *contexts* in which they occur, their presuppositions, and their implications.

To exemplify the contrast, the following section presents a brief canonical text depicting the "traditional house." It was offered to me, as a student of culture, in the descriptive mode (and as a display of knowledge). Its source, however, lies in ritual performances addressed to invisible spirits. Although these two discursive practices presuppose distinct social fields of action, we cannot understand the former without taking into account the social and cosmological conditions that shape the words in the latter. Their textual character is in part a function of the perceived challenges of communicating with distant interlocutors, such as the dead, and of obtaining from them recognition and responses.[14] The character of ritual words in turn facilitates their use in new contexts, supplying an emergent folkloric discourse with materials that are primarily of interest for what they denote, or as a code awaiting exegesis. It should be no surprise to find that those speech performances that most lend themselves to entextualization are favored as lasting cultural objects.

the house in words

I spent many afternoons sitting with an elderly ritual specialist, whom I will call Umbu Sebu, engaged in rather meandering conversations. An member of a powerful and ambivalently modernist family, he had recently converted to Christianity, but he enjoyed displaying his rich historical memory and facility with poetic speech. Like many people, he could easily launch into long recitations, itemizing exchange valuables or the stopping places on the ancestral trek. Once, for example, he asked whether I knew about the house, and presented it to me as follows:[15]

yili pakowa	dug out site
yili pataukaru	excavated site
pakaḅuangu kamumu	discarded remnants
pabongu wai ḅaha	thrown out bath water
ḍeta ta	goes up to
kaḅisu uma	house corner
katiku penang	head of the main floor
tomaja ta	arrives at
tapu papalekaru	unrolled mat
yeka ḍa nula pakahorungu	and the offered pillow
liya ta	stops by there at
koru mamutu	warm chamber
na bola mamutu	the warm basket
katiku oli nula	head's companion pillow
karasa oli tapu	flank's companion mat
lisa	stops by
ḍa tolaku maneni	the attic uprights
aharu lagapa	crossbeam of *lagapa*
lisaka nau ḍeta ta	stop by up there at
kabaringu padaku	short pillars
halikuru kalihungu	encircling rafters
purungu	descend
ta leli mangu isi	to the full disk
ta kajanga ma wua	to the fruited branch
liya	stops by there
na walu toku	the eight pokings
na walu lara	the eight flutings
na ḍakut nibu	the sharp spear
na koḅa wai	the water cup

As Umbu Sebu spoke, he gestured, as if to map out a series of points leading the spirit addressee upward and into the house from the village plaza (although the house in which we sat lacked the "traditional" peak, altars, central hearth, and pillars). The first couplet, referring to the foundation holes in which the house pillars are placed, denotes the house site within the village, a permanent possession of the clan and independent of any physical structure that may momentarily stand there. The succeeding couplets name the pen housing pigs and horses beneath the living platform (lines 3–4); the front corner (lines 6–7); the benches in the most public room of the house, metonymically indicated through images of hospitality (lines 9–10); the interior space in which the senior couple sleep (lines 12–15); the roof beams (lines 17–18); the posts and beams that reinforce the central structure (lines 20–21); the disk-shaped shelves attached to the four central pillars (lines 23–24); and the pillar carvings along which communications with the spirits are said to travel (lines 26–29). By the time of this conversation, I was no longer surprised at such displays of schematic knowledge, for people had strong ideas about what I was—and should be—seeking. But was this nothing more than a product of the ethnographic encounter? I will argue that matters are not that simple.

ways of looking at a house

Texts such as the preceding one do not come from nowhere—nor, if summoned up and refitted for my benefit, were they merely invented for "the service of ethnography," in Malinowski's phrase. Neither every society nor every speaker readily provides such texts—nor do they provide texts on any possible topic. If the parts of the house are common, everyday knowledge, what social conditions favor their codification as schematic objects of verbal communication? Neither explicit pedagogy (largely absent in traditional Anakalang) nor interlopers (such as ethnographers) provide the only occasions for formulaic self-presentation. This fragment was familiar to me, as I had heard individual couplets quoted many times and had recorded longer versions, often extending the enumerations to parts of the village, in several kinds of ritual events. Visitors who come to negotiate marriage exchanges are verbally led up into the house to the mats on which they will sit and face their hosts—even when the encounter takes place in a temporary shelter. When mortuary prayers direct the deceased to the village of the dead, these words lead them into houses that lie along the way. Other rites lay out the progression in an effort to draw the good fortune of the deceased back into the house to bless the bereaved.[16] After a burned village has been rebuilt, a similar enumeration of points summons the spirits back from the forests where they have fled. The order of the parts can be reversed. When a priest (*ratu*) sits on the floor, at the base of the divination pillar, with offerings in front of him (speaking priests are normally men), the attention of the spirits in the attic must be directed step by step downward to receive them. Ritual purification (*heku*) after incest expels the wrong by a further listing of parts (cf. Kuipers 1988:106).

The current prominence of the house is doubtless due in part to its nationwide rhetorical importance, for the state has found in architectural differences an exemplary token of safe ethnic difference. This is most evident in Taman Mini Indonesian, the national theme park outside Jakarta, where each province is represented by an oversized "traditional" house (see Anderson 1990[1973]). As with well-known instances in Sumatra and Sulawesi, the house provides a visual emblem of cultural distinctiveness; for instance, the first local publications on Sumbanese culture feature a picture of the house on their covers (Kapita 1976a, 1976b, the latter devoting two chapters to listing its parts), and the shoulder patches of some local officials in East Sumba portray a roof peak.

But in Sumba this contemporary role intersects with and takes advantage of preexisting significances. In addition to the three levels noted above, the house's interior spaces, physically indicated only by low partitions, benches, or mats, are in practice associated with distinctions of gender and clan affiliation. The veranda (*ḅaga*) should face the central part of the village, location of the ceremonial plazas and the tombs that serve as foci of clan identity. This is the outermost part of the house and the freest of access, for entrance through the front door requires invitation and recognized purpose. A place for casual interaction, it is where people exchange their first betel chew before further or more formal talk, and watch the everyday and ceremonial events in the plaza; when large parties stay during marriage negotiations and funerals, it can also serve as a sleeping place. Behind and above it is a low wall on which many houses display the buffalo horns remaining from former sacrifices or feasts. To the right, as one faces this wall, up a step or two is a low door into the main room (*pena ḅakul*), the main indoor stage for formal events.[17] In such events, the visitors sit along the outer benches facing inward, while those associated with the house sit across from them, their backs to the hearth area. This inner quadrant is framed by the sturdiest elements of the structure, four central pillars (*kabaringu paḍua*). Divination (*uratu*) and prayers (*nyába*) usually take place at the foot of the divination pillar (*kabaringu uratu*), which is closest to the door.[18] Only intimates of the inhabitants normally venture further inward. There, at the center of the house, the hearth (*karaḅuku*) contains three stones (*tularu*), one identified as male and two as female, of which only the latter may be moved when adjusting a cooking pot. The hearth rests in a slightly recessed sand box and forms both literally and figuratively the warm center of the household, a comfortable place to lounge while chatting and poking at the fire. Around it sleep the younger members of the household, while the couple who head the household take a separate chamber (*korung*), which may also hold inalienable valuables, the "ancestors' portion" (*tagu marapu*). Overnight guests remain on the benches of the front room or the veranda. Diametrically across from the front door is an informal entrance and the "base of the water jar" (*kerijialu*), the area reserved for the washing and food preparation activities of women and young men.

In fact, however, only some existing houses actually approach the canonical description. Today, increasing numbers of people live in cement or stone houses with corrugated zinc roofs. Moreover, even in the past many people lived not in "traditional" houses but in simpler dwellings, lacking the peaked roof and sometimes even the central pillars or elevated platform.[19] Whether a house took the fully canonical form was a function of the wealth and authority of the owners, of its ritual status within the clan, and of whether it was located in an ancestral village (*paraingu*) or in a garden hamlet (*kalebu gálu*).[20] Even in the ancestral village, houses often fall short of the ideal—in many cases, all that is to be found is a vacant house site (*yili uma*). Conceptually, however, these sites, which remain the inalienable property of the clan, continue to be identified with houses, and in practice, a full-fledged "traditional" structure is not always required for the rites. Given the performative nature of ritual, a temporary shelter can serve, if the proper offerings and other performance conditions are met. Conversely, many otherwise "modern" houses, churches, and government buildings are given high-peaked zinc roofs. Somewhere between these extremes lie villages of basically "traditional" peaked houses where the hearth has been removed to a cook shed and the altars lie in disuse because the owners have converted to Christianity.

social action and semiotic difficulty

In Anakalang, as in other "house societies" (Lévi-Strauss 1982; Macdonald 1987), the heavy load of significance attached to the physical house is yet further overdetermined, for it is closely identified with the sociological "house" (uma), the basic constituent of the clan. In Anakalang, house and clan identity, membership, and possessions must be continually nourished in rituals for ancestral spirits.[21] These rituals bring together dispersed members to the villages where their houses and house sites are located to manifest their identification with the ancestors as active collectivities. Ritual speech is pivotal to political and affinal ties among the living as well as their relations with the spirit world, the latter still considered by many people to be crucial to the social and political efficacy and standing of the group.

The living periodically gather to face their ancestors, speaking through the medium of ritual speakers. By means of speech performances, they seek to compel the spirits to recognize their ancestrally grounded social identity and to acknowledge the obligations between them, creating, fulfilling, or renewing debts. They attempt to induce the ancestors to grant them health and safety, fertility, good crops, and success in exchange. Clans may vary greatly in their success in staging rituals, which can be logistically and politically complex and expensive, and demand the cooperation of often rivalrous kin, affines, and skillful—and at times highly recalcitrant—ritualists. Success and failure both manifest and compound the strengthening or weakening state of their perceived charisma, their social honor, and their economic and physical well-being.

People know that good rites demand strategy and economic calculation, but they often see these as manifesting deeper sources, found in the quality of their relations to ancestors. Effective communication with spirits is never assured. For one thing, the very *presence* of invisible beings is not certain, and, once they are in attendance, it is not guaranteed that they will recognize the speakers as their proper descendants. Even if all that is given, ritual actions are inherently difficult and their outcomes uncertain. Three aspects of this problematic character are the semantic ambiguities and opacities of ritual speech, the restrictions that constrain its performance, and the social construction of the interaction itself. Ambiguity, allusiveness, and opacity are common features of ritual speech and contribute to the general perception that it is difficult. All couplets are supposed to have been transmitted from the ancestors through house-based links to the present. Many are semantically obscure because of esoteric vocabulary and allusive metaphors, the latter known in east Sumba as "disguised reference" (*hangindingu ngara*) (see Adams 1974:331; cf. Forth 1988:135), and these features are often exacerbated by truncated syntax. The specific import of an expression in any given instance can be ambiguous, and people are very concerned with the possibilities of misconstrued intentions.

These possibilities are underlined by the restrictions that constrain actual performance, reminding participants of the ever-present risk of failure and of the wrath of offended addresses. Some restrictions concern the actual choice of couplets, for conventions restrict some couplets to specific types of event, lest one "wrongly lift a sharpened stake, wrongly take up a stone" (*kahala teba horaku, kahala deki watu*) and thereby invite sanctions. Performance style demands highly formal body posture and prosody. Restrictions limit who may speak and where. Most important communications to ancestors should occur only in the ritual "cool" (*maringu*) of night. When people face the spirits, minor offenses, such as forgetting to mention a certain ancestor or omitting a stage in a sequence of prayers, may draw serious consequences, such as theft, disease, accidents, conflagrations, infertility, drought, and, if certain clans are involved, lightning strikes.[22] Indeed, priests have been known to tremble or faint from anxiety. One ritual I witnessed came to a halt because a priest lost his nerve and refused to perform. The sudden death of another priest's daughter in 1993 is commonly attributed to mistakes he had made in ritual speech only a few days before.

The formal and performative characteristics of ritual speech in Anakalang ultimately take shape in reference to the social actions that they mediate. Whether used by contemporary marapu ritualists or between groups of living people, as in marriage negotiation, ritual speech is preeminently a way of addressing a listener across a significant and power-laden social divide. The kind of ritual dialogue in which formal speech occurs presupposes—and helps make imaginable—difference and a distinct sort of interlocutor. The separation between participants in the speech event is represented as physical. Thus, for instance, to pray to the spirits is to be "face to face" (*pahagangu*) with them, requiring passage across a gap. Prayers direct the spirits to "descend" (*purung*) to the offerings (or, for large sacrifices, to tokens, which sit in front of the priest). In other situations, words are directed upwards and outwards. For example, oratory (*taungu li*) in the village plaza must be conveyed to the spirits by a singer whose voice must "go along the gong rack, go along the drum bridge" (*li ta lada tala, li ta ledi ḅedu*).[23] In either case, discourse is achieved across a space that is felt to make communication hard to achieve, and which it is the function of the elaborate listing of places to define. One is never sure that the spirits are present, that they are listening, and that they recognize their descendants. The invisible listeners must attend and be prepared to engage:

ḅaku ḅangu ta ma ngadu	when I awaken the sleeper
abu ḍa kabataku halawaḍa	let them not be startled
ḅaku kokiḍa ta ma jiuḍa	when I arouse the dozers
abu ḍa kaḍadangu rangu rajiaku	let them not mishear

They must also understand what is being asked of them:

abu mu urung ḅamu rangu	don't hear poorly
abu mu yabaru ḅamu elu	don't see unclearly

Having summoned the spirits, the priest might then call out, referring to both spatial and temporal presence: "There! Are you horses now complete?" (*Na! Jara ganakukaḍimika nutu*?) Prayers are accompanied by careful attention to any sign indicating whether they have arrived in the appointed place and have heard what was said, although the clinching evidence may occur only long after, when subsequent misfortunes are attributed retrospectively to past ritual errors.[24]

Ritual encounters thus exhibit two features crucial for the discursive relationship to culture. One is that they require that people speak to others across a sociological, physical, and even ontological divide. The second feature is that this communication is displayed as difficult and subject to failure. This combination of semiotic and pragmatic uncertainty is evoked in the way one man interpreted for me the couplet, "Sound of the hawk, rustle of the duck" (*li hangula kuala, li hamowi radi*). The hawk is too high overhead for us to see, but it always gives a warning before snatching a chick. In the dark of the night, we can hear the wings of otherwise invisible ducks passing overhead. This, he explained, refers to the obscurity of the knowledge that the living have received from the ancestors. What little we know of the correct rites involves us with powers that we sense are there, but that remain elusive. Although they are out of sight, they bear the threat of danger as well. On the one hand, this is clearly a way of talking about the problematic relations between the living and the dead, and the cryptic nature of the media that link them. But it may also be one way of acknowledging that interaction ultimately escapes the intentions of any given participant.

speaking to ancestors like ancestors

The words that Umbu Sebu uses to denote a cultural artifact have their source in actions directed to ends other than description. Their purpose, when used, for example, to summon a spirit into the house, explains the order in which the parts are named, from outside to inside, bottom to top, iconically reproducing the relevant action. The role of predication here is a function of the task, of the sense that it could fail, and of the delicacy of the etiquette of directing a deceased elder. The desired movements of the spirit are spelled out in step-by-step detail, for only a minimal degree of shared information about the action being undertaken can be presupposed, and no agreement on intentions can be taken for granted. Only the one-line directives (lines 5, 8, 11, 16, 19, 22, 25), such as "goes up to," indicate the highly performative nature of this citation. Strikingly, these directives do not form couplets, and so are not embodied in fully canonical form. Thus, when people cite couplets in conversation, quote them in subsequent ritual speech, or offer them as cultural texts to the ethnographer, they often omit the unpaired lines—here, the directives—as well as other contextualizing markers (Kuipers

1990:60). That is, they foreground as more essential those parts of the text that are least contextual.

A significant verbal difference between Umbu Sebu's performance and that which addresses spirits is that the former omits the words of the ritual respondent who sits facing the speaker. A characteristic of full Anakalangese ritual speech performance, the respondent's role structures the performance as a stylized dialogue. Every few couplets, the speaker cries out the ritual address name (*kaḍehang*) of this house, to which a second person replies with the cry "Go ahead!" (*Málo!*). This omission in the cited text is part of a general deemphasizing of the interactive—and problematic—character of ritual speech. It also affects its practical authority and efficacy. When the living address the dead, they speak as their legitimate descendants. Knowledge of couplets provides indexical evidence of the speakers' relationship to ancestral powers, something also denoted by the *kaḍehang,* the ritual avoidance names of the ancestors. These structure speech as a dialogue in which verbal recognition of the speaker in terms of the ancestor is continually asserted, and, with it, the legitimacy of their claims on the ancestors.

In addition, the gap across which speech is transmitted intervenes not only between groups but also within them. For example, a preliminary speaker makes an offering speech (*palaikungu*) to identify the offerings, their recipients, and their beneficiaries for the priest who will then reformulate this information in prayers (for examples from other genres, see Hoskins 1988; Keane 1991). In most cases given as instructions to intermediaries ("You will say 'such-and-such' "), they situate the moment of speaking amid both of a chain of speakers and a temporal sequence of interdependent speech events. Given the delegated structure of performances, principals cannot assume that even their own speakers know what is going on—any relevant actions, agents, instruments, and goals must be put into words.

words and consequences

The social structure of speech events helps explain why much of the referential content of ritual speech consists of metalanguage that announces the purpose, context, and participants in the event. Prayer, for example, insists on its purposefulness and indicates the spirit couple that it addresses, invisible but still forming a distinct spatially localized other to be faced:

kana peku kolungu kana peku rangu	in order that he hear well
ubu na ma rara na matana	red-eyed lord
jiaya ḍuku tauya ta haga jara	that's why I put it before the horse
kana peku paḍang kana ita	in order that she hear feelingly
i rabu na ma miang na kuruna	blushing chested lady
jiaya ḍuku tauya ta ora ahu	that's why I put it at dog's snout

These lines refer to the message, but the offerings must also be specified, and the ancestral warrant for the action noted in terms of foundational promises now being fulfilled:

na kawaḍaku hawála	the one metal sliver
na manu hangiwu	the one chicken
kapawolu tu kawungaya	as established by the first people
kaparawi tu madainguya	as created by the ancient people

Physically placed in front of the speaker, they are directed at the invisible interlocutor, with an explicit demand for a response:

kana kayi wena lima	in order to receive with the hand
kana hima wena áḅa	in order to respond with the mouth

The structure of performance, its uncertainties, and its consequential nature underwrite and mobilize its powers of reference.

As a result, the construction of ritual encounter supports a certain discursive objectification. First, it presupposes a sociological and even ontological divide across which people must speak about who they and the interlocutor are and how they are to act. In contrast to everyday, face-to-face interaction, ritual speakers cannot assume that their interlocutors are aware of the relevant elements of the context, can interpret the messages being conveyed, or are even able to *hear* one another. Second, their communication is displayed as difficult, highly consequential, and subject to failure. Third, the medium through which they communicate is best fitted to this purpose by virtue of its ability to transcend particular contexts through the formal properties of entextualization: it is ancestral speech. The *presence* of ancestors, embodied in the actions of speakers, is evoked by foregrounding the *absence* of those speakers from their identities as speakers of the colloquial. Fourth, participants understand the *semiotic* problem in terms of *pragmatic* outcomes. Any given performance is authorized by the commitments that link it to previous and future performances (for instance, to give thanks or to make up for the shortcomings of the present rite) and looks toward outcome (the fame, wealth, and health that should follow good performances, or the misfortunes that may motivate or result from errors).

Reference and prediction in marapu ritual, then, are functions of how speakers understand their words to act and have effects, and of the kinds of relations between speakers and addresses they can presuppose. Central to the strategic and interpretive discussions that surround the event is the bearing any given stretch of speech may have on the situation at hand and its consequences for the listeners (cf. Rosaldo 1982). The words and structure of performance aim at engaging an interlocutor in order to impose or respond to obligations. The risks are misfire, practical incapacity, and procedural error.

speech without obligation

I have argued that the referential character of ritual speech operates in relation both to the distance that is assumed to lie between interlocutors and to speakers' beliefs about the words that can most effectively cross that distance. In contrast, a quite different relationship was enacted when Umbu Sebu produced a formal description of the house, offering a nugget of cultural knowledge and displaying his own authority.[25] In the context of our conversation, his words were to be understood primarily as referential in function, serving to point out and name the parts of the house. I was not the spirit addressee, nor was this part of a speech event responding to an obligation or demanding recognition and action. In fact, he spoke "out of context" in a breach of performance restrictions that a non-Christian would consider dangerous. As elsewhere in Indonesia (Fox 1988:20), performance restrictions are loosened if one's speech is thought to concern "culture" (Indonesian *kebudayaan*) rather than "religion" (Indonesian *agama*).

To use ritual speech without risk is made feasible by changes in the nature of practical power under increasingly coercive state rule and the ontological transfigurations brought about by Christianity.[26] Church and state intervene in local institutions and practices in interlocking ways. For one, both challenge the authority of ritual speech, or at least resituate it, as the language of government, trade, and, to a large extent, the church, is Indonesian. The state, having already superseded the main powers of clans, continues to downplay their identities and discourage their actions.[27] Through regulations, pedagogy, exhortations, and events such as interdistrict sports events, it seeks to supplant them with allegiances situated within a nested hierarchy of administrative-territorial units. Although not fully successful, governmental efforts have begun to undermine the clan as an effective political protagonist and ancestral ties as a presumed source of well-being and, in the process, have obliterated the context in which much of ritual speech operates, the differences it mediates, and the consequences it entails.

Protestantism also influences speech practice and linguistic ideology. Contemporary *marapu* ritualists distinguish themselves from Christians by calling themselves "people of prayer" (*tau nyába*). When ritual speech is directed to marapu it is doubly situated in temporal relations of cause and effect. The consequentiality of performance is protected by strong taboos that prohibit performance out of context. In contrast, praying Christians, as members of a global institution, should not aim to create or fulfill specific obligations with individuated, potentially responsive ancestral agents. Nor do they aim to speak like ancestors. Ministers exhort their congregations to pray directly from the heart or "liver" (*ati*). Telling them to shut their eyes (a sign of introspection and—in contrast to Catholic practice—the lack of prayer books), they explicitly oppose two core features of marapu ritual: the use of poetically structured speech, which they see as not spontaneous; and the delegation of speaking roles, which they see as irresponsible.

Enjoined to heartfelt speech in religious functions, Christians are left to see ritual speech as something different. Church members are sometimes ambivalent about "tradition" (Indonesian *tradisi*). Christianity is identified with modernity and the West, and church services closely follow European forms. Yet government policy, though demanding adherence to one of the five legally recognized world religions, also encourages the preservation of local culture.[28] As elsewhere in Indonesia, the crucial issue in Anakalang has become that of how to separate pagan practices (which are to be eschewed) from culture (which is to be promoted as furnishing emblems of local identity) (Kipp and Rodgers 1987; Volkman 1990).

Non-marapu appropriations of marapu ritual speech can arise in at least two basic forms: as display or as a cultural text in citation or exegesis. Common contexts for display include induction ceremonies for local officials, cultural shows held during interdistrict events or for parties of tourists, and oratory during the raising of stone tombs. The first two contexts are part of efforts to link cultural display with territorial identities and often presume a nonlocal audience. The last of these contexts involves competitive status claims: although sharing many features of speech directed to spirits, it does not usually presuppose the same kind of efficacy. This is evident in the fact that Christians are expressly forbidden to make or even to consume offerings, a restriction to which marapu ritualists object as an evasion of the chains of obligation in which the event is situated (Keane 1994, 1995; cf. Volkman 1990). When Christians speak but omit the material sign, this suggests, like other alterations of speech events (performances in daylight, inappropriate participants, and other overt breaches of ritual propriety), either that they do not face and address an invisible interlocutor or that they do so without any commitment to, and fear of, the results.

If performance without danger reveals a shift in linguistic ideology, the second use of ritual speech, as cultural text, brings out the focus on the denoted object. This can be seen in Wohangara's typescript and is also evident in a conversation I had in 1993 with Ama ni Delu, a middle-aged elementary school teacher. Proud of his evangelical efforts, he showed me how he used the textual house to very persuasive effect:

> Who *is* at the "house corner, head of the main floor"? Why is it called that? What's there? I'll tell you, it's Satan [Indonesian *iblis*], the tempter who caused humanity to fall. Because if you pray to *marapu,* look at where you go. When you "stop by the head of the main floor," it never mentions the *door*—it goes straight up from the plaza into the room. Now who travels secretly like that, without going by the front door? It must be the tempter. And that's why he's *below* Nuku [a term for the spirit in the house peak], below "the creator of humans" [*ma wolu tau*]. Now, if we're to believe in Jesus, we've got to go in by the door. The door is Jesus: "I am the door of truth."[29]

Ama ni Delu went on to tell me that once after he made this argument, a whole valley converted to Christianity. (Not long afterward, I overheard him using it again with a marapu priest.) As in Wohangara's exegesis quoted above, he builds an analysis on the physical house as a site and source of broader meanings. Like Umbu Sebu, he does this by drawing on the ritual text, treating its pragmatic sequencing in terms of a spatial logic: the absence of a door in the text expresses something about the world it denotes. In this treatment, the effects of speaking the text are subordinate to the objects that it denotes, which exist independently of the performance and its effects.[30]

referentiality and what counts as culture

I have mentioned a number of ways Anakalangese talk about the house, from ritual directives to written cultural synopses and casual conversations (with ethnographers, with representatives of the nation and state, and with one another). I have emphasized Umbu Sebu's speech, in part because of the way in which it straddles the difference between ritual action and cultural text. When Umbu Sebu spoke, he still could assume the authority of one who is used to facing and engaging the spirits.[31] In contrast to Wohangara's typescript, this recitation exhibits a lack of contextual specificity and performative force that cannot simply be attributed to the operations of, say, literacy in opposition to orality. Like the typescript, however, Umbu Sebu's words were directed not at an *addressee* from whom he demands countering actions, but at an *audience.* Such an audience potentially includes a world beyond Anakalang, introducing listeners who are not able—or, at least, lack the authority—to speak by ancestral means and respond to ancestral obligations.

Umbu Sebu's recitation was clearly distinct from an address to a spirit: his words were not embedded in the other speech performances with which it should be linked, they were not predicated in earlier promises, he did not cry out the ritual name of an interlocutor, and we did not have the appropriate offering in front of us. Each of these absences was sufficient evidence that no *response* was expected. Whatever authority he might have invoked as one who *knows* the texts, he was not for the moment claiming to speak either *as* or *to* an ancestor. For his audience, this use of couplets posed problems less of response and outcome than of interpretation and translation. In this context, his recitation is to be evaluated primarily by its truth and completeness of reference rather than its consequences—and it is to such an evaluation that Ama ni Delu appeals in identifying the door altar with Satan.

In the context of his recitation, the text that Umbu Sebu offered me bore two implications. As an informative text, it denotes a referent, the symbolically laden traditional house, something existing independently of the performance or of the demand for response. As a display and transmittal of knowledge to a note-taking student of culture, it offers that referent as an exemplary cultural artifact. In both respects, however similar the words might be, it departs from speech that is addressed to a spirit—speech in which the critical issue is whether communication has been achieved, the spirit induced to move, and its blessings secured. In such speech, reference to the parts of the house is a function of its role in directing and defining a place for actions: like other formalized lists, it emerges from efficacious performances, as traces of the moves in which laying out those moves in speech plays a crucial part. The elaboration of this part-by-part account reflects the need for precision in the face of the problems posed by the encounter, the cautious etiquette, and the consequentiality that these entail.

I suspect that as the powers that Anakalangese ritual speech was meant to mobilize lose purchase, the emphasis on denotation may grow. When the presupposed interlocutor and the difficulty are both lost, what is left remains that much more available for treatment as text. Furthermore, where the denotative function becomes central, new aspects of its object may come to the fore. One is the altered temporal dimension: because there is no event, there is no before and no after. The step-by-step description of the house (like other ritual lists, such as stopping points on the ancestral trek or components of exchange) does not construct a motion across space in time but rather indicates a structure that potentially is fully present. The second follows from the first: as a picture, it neither evokes nor responds to possible failure. With uncertainty and danger less at issue, the picture might be incomplete, but the action will not be infelicitous. At most, the description might simply lack a target for ostensive reference—the house in question might be absent. The fact that Umbu Sebu did not speak to me in a "traditional" house would *not* have affected the efficacy of the words had they been spoken in the right frame, with appropriate speakers, antecedents, and offerings. It *did,* however, affect the *referential* felicity of the text: like the words of a book, it did not denote the place where we spoke, but some hypothetical, ideal house. With such a shift in emphasis, this house becomes less a site for encounters of consequence than an object of talk and of potentially totalizing interpretation.

conclusion

I began this article by arraying against Malinowski's "almost pedantic" speaker a series of skeptics to suggest that what makes it *possible* to talk about something is in part a function of what makes it *necessary* to do so. In the example of the spoken house, I have focused on ritual speech because of the way it foregrounds and responds to that necessity. The *forms* of ritual speech are affected by the actions it mediates and the assumptions about language, and the beings that inhabit the world, that underlie them. At the same time, the very textual dimension of ritual speech leaves it open to appropriation in new contexts and to new purposes. In some contexts, it can give rise to apparently objectifying or totalizing cultural representations. Yet this is only one part of the story, for ritual encounters demand not only entextualized speech but also interactive, consequential performance. By suggesting what can happen when one of these dimensions comes to be emphasized over another, I have attempted to trace a few of the links among ways people think about their words, their capacities to act, and how they portray themselves. A speaker in Anakalang might emphasize that ritual speech is a powerful means of interacting with powerful others across social and communicative distance, or that it is the bearer of timeless texts and codes. In practice, these treatments intertwine or oscillate: indeed, fully performative ritual speech requires both possibilities to operate, for the power of ritual speech is not that it works, in Bakhtin's terms (1986:74), as *either* utterance *or* text, but that it is *both.*

To ask what makes certain kinds of talk plausible, or even necessary, is to place epistemology in social and historical context. As Rosaldo (1973) points out, language ideologies often change as functions of transformations in institutions, ontologies, and the sources of power. Even when the words, such as Umbu Sebu's text, are not new, these transformations can support new understandings of what it means to speak them. Neither the words nor the objects that are "already" there fully determine what will be made of them. In dwelling on formal genres of speech, I have emphasized their contribution to self-representations that play an important role in the interactions of the "local" and "outside," where "traditional" practices are reconfigured and cultural identity debated. Cultural metalanguages may give strength to ongoing local self-definition or struggle (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991:212). Alternatively, they may add to the perception that culture is something that exists primarily as a self-contained, stable object of discourse (Handler 1984) or as an expressive art existing in a sphere separate from economic or political affairs (Bowen 1991:127; Rodgers Siregar 1979). They can provide people with new sources of self-description and recognition—or tell them that the heart of their identity lies out of reach in the past, perhaps in another land, or in the hands of those few people who are "best" able to represent it.[32] To follow these developments is another task. I have tried to suggest here that, in listening to reflexive or objectifying discourses, we should consider the range of their sources and possibilities, and their mediation by speakers' understandings of their circumstances and of what their words can do as they respond to the shifting terms of engagement.

notes

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1. Bakhtin 1986 and/or Voloshinov 1973[1930] emphasize(s) the interactive and dialogic nature of speech as an activity. The field of pragmatics draws particular attention to the role of context (for example, Duranti and Goodwin 1992; Hanks 1990). At the same time, as I discuss below, an emphasis on situated speech can be complemented by attention to the role of decontextualizing features of language in actual use (Bauman and Briggs 1990). Although some ritual forms, such as divination, "actively subvert the expression of intention" (Du Bois 1993:48), even the performatives that inspired speech act theory depend on conventional codes that cannot be fully grounded in the context of use and the intentions of speakers (Derrida 1982).

2. Differences in language (or linguistic) ideology, such as privileging reference and predication over performativity, can affect the ways people actually use language (Silverstein 1979) and embody historical and cultural differences in concepts of person and agency (Rosaldo 1973, 1982; see the useful review in Woolard 1992). Even people who speak "the same" language may operate from different assumptions about its functions, and these assumptions may produce important distortions of cross-cultural conversations (Briggs 1984).

3. Speech "about" practice is itself "in" a form of practice. This means also that any instance of metalanguage is itself a form of language and thus, potentially, the object of further reflexivity (Lucy 1993; Silverstein 1979; Urban 1991). Bateson (1972[1955]) argues that the problems of framing, recursiveness, and vulnerability to reinterpretation are not just linguistic issues but a fundamental aspect of sociality more generally.

4. Anakalang (population 16,000) is a one of the dozen or so related societies of Sumba. As in east Sumba (Adams 1974; Forth 1981; Kapita 1976a, 1976b; Onvlee 1973, 1977), to which it is linguistically closest, asymmetric marriage alliance, mediated by multigenerational exchanges of valuables, continues to structure a large part of social interaction. But Anakalang also resembles its geographically nearest neighbors to the west (Geirnaert-Martin 1992; Hoskins 1988, 1993; Kuipers 1990), for until the 1920s, although cooperating in large rituals, "clans" (*kaḅisu*) did not acknowledge a central authority, and their mutual relations were realized as much through warfare and competitive feasting as through marriage.

5. D. H. Wohangara was introduced to me during my initial week-long visit to the eastern part of the island in 1985, when he gave me this document. While the paper was typed for me and also addressed to me, the care with which it was thought out suggests that the basic text had been prepared beforehand, though for what audience I cannot say; he apparently also wrote a paper on marriage rules (Wohangara 1963), probably for a conference on customary law convened by the Regency government. I therefore offer this as no more than a particularly apposite illustration of how easily one encounters schematic descriptions of Sumbanese culture, and how central the house is in them. On several other occasions people offered me similar texts, some produced for themselves, others for cultural affairs officials.

6. The expression "Four Principles" (*Catur Sila*) is formal, possibly meant to invoke the "Five Principles" (*Pancasila*) of the official Indonesian state ideology. "Sumbanese People" (*Suku Sumba*) is rendered with a term usually denoting an ethnic group. Although this degree of generality is common in colonial and Indonesian language writing, Sumbanese rarely identify themselves in terms of the entire island. The capitalized words in parentheses are a couplet from east Sumbanese ritual speech that might be rendered "four rules, establish village" (Onvlee 1980).

7. The attic serves as storage bin for staple grains (rice and maize), including small portions set aside as offerings to the spirits who watch over them. Whether the speaker emphasizes one function or the other may well reflect the extent of the listener's perceived sympathy to "paganism."

8. Formal descriptions do not, for example, tell you how to build a house, nor how to live in one, and may even neglect visually prominent features such as the "house horns" (for a criticism of totalizing models of the house, see Ellen 1986). In one colloquial discussion about rebuilding a long missing clan house, I heard a man say, "If we didn't have a house, where would we gather? Where would we speak? Where would we confer? Where would we dwell, huh?" Note his emphasis on the house as a site for certain socially

marked actions. But this is not simply a logistical matter; after all, the speakers were not prevented by lack of a "traditional house" from conferring. It was their public identity and status as a clan that were at stake. In contrast, talk about cultural preservation, usually by people identified with development, tends to emphasize architectural form over practices, for example, proposing that pockets of tradition be required to retain thatched rather than zinc roofs. When the Department of Education and Culture sponsored rebuilding in Lai Tarung, a nearly abandoned ritual center expected to attract tourists, it was done without rites.

9. A rough idea of the size of the corpus is given by the 3,200 East Sumba couplets published by Kapita (1987). For more on Anakalangese ritual speech, see Keane 1991; for other Sumbanese societies, see Forth 1988, Hoskins 1988, and Kuipers 1990. Parallelism and ritual speech are discussed more generally in Fox 1971, 1988; Jakobson 1960.

10. By Indonesian religious policy, possession of a sacred book is an important part of the definition of a legally recognized religion (Kipp and Rodgers 1987). Sumbanese marapu followers, however, have not sought to gain state recognition by producing a sacred book based on ritual speech. Many Anakalangese claim that the ancestors once possessed a full book of ritual procedures. Some insist that the ancestors had their own book but left it behind in Bali during their trek to Sumba. This, they say, explains the phenomenal success of the Balinese in achieving legitimacy in the national scene. The privileged status of sacred writing surely also contributes to a linguistic ideology that privileges fixed texts and denotation.

11. In addition, fully authoritative performance of ritual speech must be accompanied by either prestations or offerings, which make words binding and contribute to the temporal dimensions of ritual. Usually a dish containing betel and either the prestation or some token to represent it lie in front of the speaker, which helps define the space of speech performance. Prestations to the living and tokens left from sacrifices to the dead remain as evidence of former speech acts. The current willingness of some Christians to perform without such materials both transforms the political economy of speech practices and indicates important changes in language ideology (Keane 1994).

12. Ritual speech is usually performed in public, and most Anakalangese adults have some knowledge of it, as they often show by citing couplets in everyday conversation. Performances usually do not consist of fixed texts, but are improvised. Because speakers must draw on the canonical set of couplets, follow performance conventions, and are sometimes restricted by ancestral prerogatives, they are subject to challenge by listeners and disapproval by spirits. This, combined with the difficulties created by esoteric vocabulary and indirection, means that few people have the skill or self-confidence to perform. Most important negotiations and rituals are delegated to specialists, normally men. Their skills are respected but do not contribute much to their own social standing.

13. Bauman and Briggs (1990) show how a wide range of linguistic and performance properties, such as reduced deixis, highly stylized prosody, and increased focus on poetic structure, contribute to "entextualization." For a thorough analysis of the full range of linguistic resources that promote entextualization in the ritual speech of a West Sumbanese society, see Kuipers 1990. Kuipers (1990:175–178) points out that formalized speech has many of the features that supposedly distinguish "literacy" from "orality." The salience of such features is especially marked in places such as Anakalang, where the indigenous language is rarely written, and literacy in the national language, Indonesian, is largely restricted to the young.

14. Marapu, a term for the most distant and powerful ancestors, is commonly used in Anakalang as a cover term for ancestral ritual and its adherents. By "Christians" I mean the dominant Calvinists. Although Christians and non-Christians do not form distinct sociological or economic groups, Christianity is associated with education and participation in the cash economy, and is virtually a legal requirement for civil service employment. In the 1986 census, greater Anakalang was 42.4 percent Protestant, 6.48 percent Catholic, 50.6 percent *marapu* (Kantor Statistik 1987).

15. This is transcribed from dictation. Canonical parallel couplets are indicated by adjacency or parallel indentations. Consonants marked [.] are implosive.

16. There is great interclan variety in mortuary ritual, but in general the deceased is told the way to the village of the dead at the time of burial. Three days later, a rite "receives the spirit" (*kayi dewa*) back into the house. After three years, wealthy families can "place in the shelter of the shade" (*pahangerang ta mawu*) to secure further the presence of the deceased's good fortune (*kanyuru*) for the survivors. The relations among these events hinge in part on distinctions among different aspects of spirit (*dewa* and *hamangu* or *hamawu*), which are rather esoteric; as Forth observes: "*ndewa* . . . is probably the most elusive term in the eastern Sumbanese metaphysical vocabulary" (1981:77; cf. 439).

17. Formal speech at these events, such as marriage negotiations, divination, and mortuary and other rituals, is—with the exception of keening for the dead—dominated by men. In some houses, this room is forbidden to in-marrying women, who must enter the house by the back door. Just inside the front door, in the corner where the roof meets the wall, is the "spirit shelf" (*hedi marapu*), a small, rough-hewn platform. Betel offerings are placed there for a guardian spirit, sometimes denoted by its location, "house corner." Betel is also placed on the disk (*leli*) of the divination pillar, and, in some houses, at an altar above the door spirit shelf ("egg spirit, chicken spirit," *marapu tilu, marapu manu*) and at the rear of the main room ("horse spirit, dog fate," *dewa jara, ura ahu*).

18. Much house-building ritual centers on obtaining and erecting the central pillars, especially the "divination pillar." The pillars bear a variety of names, not all of which are common knowledge. One version, given to me by a Christian minister whose father and brother were marapu priests, is coordinate with Wohangara's four principles above. The terms derive from activities associated with the quadrants of the

house. Moving counterclockwise from the divination pillar, they are the pillars of "the way of life and death" (*li luri, li mati*), "rice and corn" (*uhu, watar*), "way of marriage" (*li lalawi, li mangoma*), from the place for the corpse during a wake, the food preparation area, and the main sleeping chamber.

19. The peaked ("able, good") house (*uma piaku*) is distinguished from huts (*kawarung*) or minor buildings (*uma ari*) along various crosscutting, but similarly hierarchical, dimensions. Nonpeaked houses can be categorized by roof shape—four eaves ("square," *uma kabalolu*) or two eaves (long like a "ship," *uma tena*)—or by whether they are elevated (*uma deta*) or stand on the ground (*uma tana*). Indonesian tax categories look at materials and structure: in 1984, Umbu Pabal township (Indonesian *desa*) reported two stone houses, 27 impermanent or rough houses (Indonesian *rumah darurat*), and 136 platform houses; Anakalang township listed 27 partly stone, 47 permanent stone, 115 board, and 121 bamboo. As many platform and bamboo houses do not have peaks, fully "traditional" houses form a subset of the last category of each list; thus, well under half of the houses in Anakalang township are "traditional" (even if the question of roofing material, noted above, is disregarded).

20. Ritual, politics, and economics all tend to support the exemplary status of the peaked house. To build one requires the ability to mobilize and feed workers. Although labor and most materials may be contributed, they flow more readily to possessors of position or wealth. Of particular importance is access to large trees for the central pillars; on this largely deforested island, sources of wood may be distant and require payments to other clans. In contrast to garden houses, the building of those in the ancestral village, which serve as ritual centers, is the responsibility of larger social units, often consisting of one or more clans. Residence and status are therefore not isomorphic: people of low rank may occupy large peaked houses that manifest the status claims of clans whose more powerful members dwell elsewhere.

21. Houses are usually spoken of as offspring of the shared clan ancestor or in terms of their special contributions to clanwide rituals. As the boundaries between house and clan are not always clear in actual practice, and since the basic principles discussed in this article remain the same for both, I will not distinguish between them here. For the complex intersection of marriage strategies, exchange, ritual, gender, and rank in other eastern Indonesian "house societies," see Barraud 1979; Fox, ed. 1980; Lewis 1988; McKinnon 1991; and Traube 1986.

22. In one ritual to summon the village spirits back after a fire, a priest arose in the middle of the night and went out alone. The next day he told me he had forgotten a step and had gone to make an offering and prayer. He feared that the success of the rite would be jeopardized and that he himself was at risk. The presence of the interlocutor poses temporal problems that parallel the spatial ones. A great deal of effort goes toward telling the spirits not just where to show up, but when. Many large rituals are preceded by smaller rites to announce the forthcoming event.

23. For reasons of space, I mention only lexicalized examples of the space constructed by ritual speech. It is important to bear in mind, however, that other elements contribute to this sense of facing an other, such as performance structure and linguistic features such as deixis (Duranti and Goodwin 1992; Hanks 1990). Thus, the directives in the quotation above point to parts of the house as in *some* sense present to *both* speaker and addressee (cf. Kuipers 1990).

24. Speech to ancestors is normally accompanied by a sacrifice, which provides entrails or a liver for divinatory reading (Hoskins 1993; Kuipers 1990:99–105). In addition, however, people are alert to all possible indicators: I have been present at worried discussions concerning how to interpret a stumble, a coughing fit, and a spilled cup of coffee.

25. Presumably, this performance, like other ways of displaying knowledge, can arise from many motivations at once, including pleasure, and it may, in this rivalrous social world, make an implicit claim to a superior command of tradition. Our interaction is also pedagogic, but I should note that ritual speech is not normally taught. Most specialists claim that they never learned ritual speech but that it just comes to them—which is a common way of experiencing the process of acquiring practical knowledge (Lave and Wenger 1991). They usually attribute their abilities to intervention by spirits. Some will also acknowledge having acquired it through long experience on the sidelines. The point here is that explanation and purposeful memorization play a very small role.

26. Under colonial rule, beginning early in this century, the chief mission on Sumba was Calvinist (van den End 1987; see Keane 1995). By the time the church came under local control in 1946, missionary efforts in Anakalang had resulted in only 180 baptisms in a regional population of over 22,000 (Luijendijk 1946). Large-scale conversion began after the violent end of the Sukarno regime in 1965–66, when nonadherence to a monotheistic religion was taken by many to be synonymous with communism. Government pressure on nonconverts through regulation of identity cards, requirements for civil service positions, classes in the schools, and direct exhortation has gradually increased. By the late 1980s, it was clear that Christians would soon be in the majority in Anakalang (Keane, in press).

27. In the first two decades of the century, the Dutch consolidated a loose system of indirect rule through petty kings of their own creation. One of the chief consequences was the removal of most legitimate force from local hands. Nonetheless, until several administrative restructurings during the 1950s and 1960s gradually implemented Indonesian state control and produced the present hierarchy of territorially defined units, clans continued to hold much of the access to farmland, forests, water, and other resources. This clan control has now been abolished by state decree, and the clans' ritual powers over the fertility of land and women have been eroded by religious conversion. Clan elders still retain considerable control over the valuables necessary for marriage and, within the township structure, adjudicate legal matters such as theft,

boundary disputes, and other quarrels. Their authority is implicated, albeit to a diminished extent, in the continued coherence of clan identity.

28. In fact, a major sponsor of the publication of cultural materials in Sumba is the church (Kapita 1976a, 1976b, 1987, n.d.).

29. Presumably an allusion to John 10:1, 9.

30. Of course, he does indeed speak to achieve specific effect, as he points out himself. But this is the *persuasive* effect of an *argument* constructed around the object portrayed in the ritual text—it does not draw on indexical links to ancestral addressees, on conventional performativity, or on poetic structure.

31. People in Umbu Sebu's position can play self-consciously with these different roles, each with its distinctive forms of authority. See Hymes' (1981) account of a man who is willing to tell a myth but resists the ethnographer's desire to have him "perform" it, preferring the role of linguist to that of "native." For the role of citation and displaced agency in "traditionalization," see Bauman 1992.

32. A brief note on the large topic of emerging hierarchies is called for here. The reader may already have observed that my examples of authoritative words are all spoken by men—although not all men speak with authority, and the ability to speak formally does not map directly onto social standing (Keane 1991; cf. Lederman 1980). In addition, today it is sometimes people who are distant from ritual practices and can draw on new sources of status, such as formal education, who seem most articulate about "tradition." They may undermine the authority of those who in fact act but cannot explain (for unintended consequences of "traditionalism," see Hill 1985). Related to this is the experience of nostalgia and inauthenticity: when people focus on denotation, they may find a mismatch between the referent and the text; for example, actual houses frequently lack many of the features mentioned in the text. As noted above, to the extent that the text is performative, this may not *necessarily* be surprising or significant. When the text is treated as meaningful *chiefly* as evidence of a world to which it refers, however, the mismatch between text and objective correlative may support a common perception that "authentic culture" either is imperfectly realized in the given instance or has been perfectly realized once, but only in the past. This may help explain my experience that many of the people most committed to what they see as modernity are also the most vocal about the loss of tradition: they measure their vision of tradition against the imperfections of existing houses and the apparent inarticulateness of actual practitioners.

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