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MEANING WITHOUT INTENTION: LESSONS FROM DIVINATION

JOHN W. DU BOIS

Introduction

In this chapter I wish to examine a certain way of using language, most dramatically evident in rituals of divination, which presents a serious challenge to the view that intention is a necessary criterion of meaningful language use. Certain ways of speaking actively subvert the expression of intention in the speech event, producing meaning without intention, and even without responsibility. Indeed the production of meaning independent of the intentions of a responsible speech actor is, I shall argue, the motivating goal of much of ritual procedure. Because these workings are revealed with particular clarity in divinatory rituals, it is the language of divination that will be the primary focus here. Ultimately, intentionless meaning extends well beyond divination to make its subtle presence felt in numerous domains of social life. Its implications for theories of meaning and language use are broad, and occasionally surprising.

Speech-act theory and ritual speech

To speak of responsibility necessarily brings out, if only indirectly and covertly, our conceptions of the nature of action and of actor – as well as of certain auxiliary notions, which for many will include intention. Thus an actor will be judged responsible or not responsible for an action; and this judgment will depend in part, perhaps, on his or her intention. In the domain of language, the theory which puts itself forward in this connection is that of speech acts, as developed in the well-known work of Austin (1962), Searle (1969), and others. From the outset many saw in this theory an opportunity to shift attention from language as an abstract system or descriptive device toward speaking as an action in the social world, an action for which an actor (the speaker) was responsible. Given commonplace conceptions of action and responsibility, it is not surprising that soon enough the notion of the actor's intention had taken up a prominent place in the theory. Intention, though it appears in Austin's work, first took on its critical role in speech-act theory through the work of Grice

(1957) as adapted and developed by Strawson (1964), Searle (1969, 1976, 1979), Bach and Harnish (1979), and others. Illocutionary intention continues to play a key role in theories of meaning, as evidenced in recent statements by Sperber and Wilson (1988), Grice (1989a, 1989b), Levelt (1989), Bach (1990), Jones (1990), Morgan (1990), Perrault (1990), and many others (see also Searle 1983, 1990).

Among the many who began to make immediate application of performative theory, students of ritual were especially keen. This is no accident, perhaps, given that the first two utterances which Austin selected to illustrate his theory were drawn from the rituals of marriage and ship-christening (Austin, 1962:5). Speech-act theory seemed expressly designed for ethnographers of ritual speaking, to judge by their ready adoption of it. Tambiah invoked Austin's categories to conclude that

> ritual acts and magical rites are of the "illocutionary" or "performative" sort, which simply by virtue of being enacted (under the appropriate conditions) achieve a change of state, or do something effective (e.g. an installation ceremony undergone by the candidate makes him a "chief").
>
> (Tambiah, 1973:221)

Studies of ritual speech (or of ritual in general) which were influenced by speech-act theory include those of Finnegan (1969), Ravenhill (1972), Ladrière (1973), Tambiah (1973, 1985), Foster (1974a), Rappaport (1974, 1976, 1979), Martinich (1975), Gill (1977, 1987), Witherspoon (1977:34), Ahern (1979), Isambert (1979), Wheelock (1982), and Aune (n.d.), among others.

But the extent to which the full dimensions of speech-act theory were drawn on, or even taken account of, varied considerably. Some scholars, in making use of the implicit license provided by the theory to elaborate lists or taxonomies of indigenously labeled (or unlabeled) speech acts, either left the rest of the standard Searlean speech-act theory implicit in their application of it, or perfunctorily repeated those elements which they saw no reason not to endorse. Among the foundational assumptions of Searle's theory which sometimes came into play by this route was that of intention, the intention which was supposed necessary to undergird the speech act – and now, the ritual act. For example, Wheelock concludes that ritual speech acts are "those speech acts whose intention is to create and allow the participation in a known and repeatable *situation*" (Wheelock, 1982:59). In this, as in many such cases of the invocation of speech-act theory, the use of the word "intention" seems almost incidental. Often enough it could easily have been factored out through a paraphrase (for example by substituting the word "function") without losing whatever real insights had been gained in the application of speech-act theory. Nevertheless, even when intention was not explicitly mentioned, it was often implicit in the reliance on the concept of the

responsible speech *actor*, a role which is naturally hard to avoid if one is using speech-act theory.

The speaker's volition, or something like it, has been around for a long time as an ingredient of linguistic meaning.[1] Sapir cited the involuntariness of inarticulate cries (as of pain or surprise) as grounds to exclude them from the domain of language, placing them on a par with clouds as portents of rain (Sapir, 1921:5). Intention took on its current central role for meaning in the theory of "meaning$_{NN}$" ("nonnatural meaning") put forward by Grice (1957) (see also Grice, 1968, 1969, 1989a; Wetterström, 1977; Cohen, Morgan and Pollack, 1990). If a speaker *A* produces an utterance *x*, according to Grice, "'*A* meant$_{NN}$ something by *x*' is (roughly) equivalent to '*A* intended the utterance of *x* to produce some effect in an audience by means of a recognition of this intention'" (1957:442). Even the meaning of expressions (as opposed to utterances of them) is thought to be grounded somehow in intentions, though here Grice evinces doubts: "'*x* meant something' is (roughly) equivalent to 'Somebody meant $_{NN}$ something by *x*'" (1957:442). Even in the case of a red traffic light indicating that traffic should stop, Grice says tentatively, "there seems to be *some* sort of reference to somebody's intentions" (1957:442).

Searle, though he made important modifications to Grice's theory of meaning$_{NN}$, continued to give central status to intentions (Searle 1983, 1990). Upon posing the question, "What is the difference between regarding an object as an instance of linguistic communication and not so regarding it?", Searle observed:

> When I take a noise or a mark on a piece of paper to be an instance of linguistic communication, as a message, one of the things I must assume is that the noise or mark was produced by a being or beings more or less like myself and produced with certain kinds of intentions. If I regard the noise or mark as a natural phenomenon like the wind in the trees or a stain on paper, I exclude it from the class of linguistic communication, even though the noise or mark may be indistinguishable from spoken or written words.
>
> (Searle, 1969:16–17)

It is instructive that Searle should select, as a challenging case, a disembodied and decontextualized mark or sound, cut off from any obvious connection with an intending actor. But even here, according to Searle, if no actor is immediately present we must postulate one, in order to be able to interpret the phenomenon as a linguistic communication at all. Austin, Grice, and Searle are all committed to the view that linguistic communication (effectively, linguistic meaning in use) is always part of an act. The disembodied word (or proposition) does not of itself constitute a meaningful message: it does not communicate.[2] Following Austin (1962:138), Searle states that "The unit of linguistic communication is

not, as has generally been supposed, the symbol, word, or sentence, but rather the production or issuance of the symbol or word or sentence in the performance of the speech act" (1969:16).

Grice does actually allow for a kind of meaning without intention, what he terms "natural" meaning. The English word "mean" can be used in sentences like "Those spots meant measles," where an interpreter observes that someone has spots, and draws significant conclusions. There is no question of involving intentionality here; the verb "mean" is predicable of subjects quite incapable of intending anything. Though Grice quickly enough set aside such uses of the English verb "to mean" as not constituting "meaning_{NN}," the word's polysemy – paralleled in other languages – may hint at some significant commonality.[3] That discriminable signals as "found" phenomena in nature (or in culture) should commonly be said to mean is not without significance.

Although speech-act theory was soon widely embraced, it was not long before some linguistic anthropologists began to question certain of its tenets – asking, for example, whether the posited framework of speech-act types and roles was intrinsic to human speech, and whether it was applicable to all cultures. Silverstein argued that even the role of "speaker," being indexically created by the instance of speaking (e.g. of the word "I"), partakes of a "theory of the types of roles in types of events socially recognized in a society" (1977:142), a theory necessarily belonging to social anthropology. Rosaldo, who aptly qualified speech-act theory as "at once my inspiration and my butt" (1982:203), emphasized that both the taxonomy of speech acts and the social principles underlying them must be subject to open-ended ethnographic inquiry in each new culture. Where Searle took the performative verbs of English to be guides to "something like a universal law" (Rosaldo, 1982:228), in fact a culture's assumptions about how language works are likely to reflect local folk theories of human agency and personhood (Rosaldo, 1982:203, Silverstein, 1979). Critics of personalist theories of action mounted persuasive ethnographic evidence to demonstrate the culture-boundness of the intentionality criterion (Rosaldo, 1982; Ochs, 1984; Duranti, this volume), showing that for certain non-Western societies intention is relatively unimportant to the social interpretive process of construing meaning (see also Irvine, 1979, 1982b; Streeck, 1980; Bourdieu 1975; Levinson, 1983; Bauman and Briggs, 1990:62ff). If intention operates as a factor of interpretive procedure more in some cultures (e.g. white middle-class Anglo-American) than in others (e.g. Ilongot, Samoan), this would seem to cast doubt on its status as a theoretical constant.

The question of intention often leads to that of responsibility. Though connected, the two are mutually independent. Searle points out that we "hold people responsible for many things they do not intend and we do

not hold them responsible for many things they do intend" (1983:103). While discourse in the Samoan *fono* downplays intention (as Duranti shows, this volume), speakers remain responsible – for the *consequences* of their words. But there exist ways for speakers to reduce even responsibility for their own utterances, as Goffman has argued (1974:512ff). As we shall see, a striking characteristic of divinatory language is that it is capable of going beyond suppression of intention to the actual elimination of speech-actor responsibility.

Intention in literature?

Intentions have been debated far longer in literary than in linguistic or speech-act theoretical circles, and a brief glance in this direction will be profitable at this point.[4] Some literary theorists have argued the need to determine what the author intended or "meant" in writing a particular poem or novel, while others have sharply challenged the usefulness of this line of inquiry to interpretation. In their famous thesis attacking the "intentional fallacy," Wimsatt and Beardsley argued that critical judgments of a literary work cannot properly be based on the author's intention, since "the meaning of a work resides within the work; no judgment of intention has relevancy unless corroborated by the work itself, in which case it is supererogatory" (Beardsley and Wimsatt, 1942[1953]:232; also Wimsatt and Beardsley, 1946). Stallman concurs, reiterating the objective character of the literary work: "Once the work is produced, it possesses objective status – it exists independently of the author and of his declared intention" (Stallman, 1974:399). But Hirsch challenges this position, insisting that "A text can represent only the *parole* of a speaker or author, which is another way of saying that meaning requires a meaner" (Hirsch, 1960 [1971]:193). Knapp and Michaels claim, in terms echoing Searle's, that, for a sentence to be recognizable as a sentence, "we must already have posited a speaker and hence an intention" (Knapp and Michaels, 1982:726). Language without intention is not really language at all, but only resembles it. Hirsch sets as a key task of literary interpretation "the imaginative reconstruction of the speaking subject" (Hirsch, 1960 [1971]:193) as implied in the literary work (Dowling, 1983:788; Foucault, 1977:125; Ricoeur, 1971:534). For Olson (1980:190) a match of literal meaning to authorial intention is supposed to guarantee constancy of meaning across contexts and hence authority.

Once speech-act theory began to be invoked in the study of literary discourse (e.g. Öhmann, 1971; Pratt, 1977, 1981; etc.), this naturally suggested a framing of the author's role as a speech actor. But Searle has rejected the view that a "writer of novels is not performing the illocutionary act of making an assertion but the illocutionary act of telling a

story or writing a novel" (1979:63), concluding rather that "the author of a work of fiction pretends to perform a series of illocutionary acts, normally of the assertive type" (Searle, 1979:65; see also Öhmann, 1971). On this view, meaning in literary works still derives from speech acts performed by speech actors, if only in a world of pretense.[5]

Protagonists in the intention debate have returned again and again, consciously or not, to the dictum formulated by Hirsch: "meaning requires a meaner." But the dichotomous terms of this debate have tended to obscure some fundamental questions. Can discourse genres (e.g. poetry and conversation) differ in their intentionality? If so, why two such contrasting types of meaning? Are some meanings "deliberately" intentionless? If so, what is the function of intentionless as opposed to intentional meaning? If the intention debate is to move forward it must ask not only whether intentionless meaning exists, but also what it can do.

Intention in ritual speech?

Is ritual speech intentional? Ironically, while ritual utterances of a certain type (marrying, christening) have been favorite performative examples among speech-act theorists, it is precisely in this domain that a few anthropologists and sociocultural linguists, even those most sympathetic to speech-act theory, have begun to question the speech-act theorist's reliance on intentionality. In "trance speaking," as Becker (1979:232f) has pointed out, the utterer of the shifter pronoun is "speaking involuntarily or nonintentionally" – and thus, paradoxically, in another sense is not "speaking," if we understand by this acting as a responsible speech actor. Tambiah (1985:127) maintains that in conventional rituals like marriage, the sacrament remains valid even if one is being forced to marry for having made one's partner pregnant, or if the ceremony is performed by a drunken and immoral priest – as long as appropriate conditions such as the ordaining of the priest have been met.[6] In formalized ritual, he says, convention will tend to outweigh intention. Yet, while Tambiah raises questions about applying the intentionality criterion to ritual, he nevertheless fundamentally accepts the philosophers' conception of the performative act. He even toys with the possibility of retaining intentionality, through attributing to the ritual actors a set of conventionalized and culturally defined intentions. But applying the word "intention" to such conventionalized attitudes would seem to beg the question.[7]

The divinatory mode of meaning production

Meaning without intention is most readily apprehended in the language of divination. It is especially clear in mechanical divination (as opposed to

"mental" divination, in which the diviner may speak in the role of an inspired or entranced medium).[8] Viewed literally, divination is a process for obtaining information which is (typically) unavailable by ordinary means, that is, which cannot be gotten by the usual techniques of indigenous practical epistemology, such as seeing, hearing, being told by another person – the commonplace categories of evidential coding systems (Chafe and Nichols, 1986). Viewed in its social aspect, however, divination is not so much a means of obtaining information as a means of establishing social facts, facts which command a consensus and can form the basis for legitimate, recognized social action. Nevertheless, the crisis which leads to divination typically presents itself in epistemological terms: an illness lingers inexplicably, game cannot be found, crops fail unaccountably, a venture is entertained whose outcome is uncertain. Ordinary evidence is unavailable to support propositions about the case, such as "So-and-so (or such-and-such) is responsible for this situation." In the absence of such evidence, help is sought in securing (or socially establishing) the facts of the situation at issue, as well as in determining what is to be done about it in the way of ritual or other act. In mechanical divination, the meanings arrived at are determined by something other than a volitional, human act. Admittedly, because the oracle cannot in a direct sense vocalize, it may be left to the diviner (or the petitioner) to carry out the uttering of the words. But which words are selected, and which meanings, are in principle outside the utterer's volitional control. To show this, I now examine three cases of the use of language in divination.

Sixteen Cowrie divination (Yoruba)

For the Sixteen Cowrie divination of the Yoruba of Nigeria, a diviner shakes a flat basket containing sixteen small cowrie shells (Bascom, 1980). The number of shells that come out facing mouth up (i.e. from zero to sixteen) defines a named figure, which has several divination verses associated with it. These verses are then recited by the diviner in sequence, until the client finds the one that is appropriate to his or her case (or additional cowrie throws can be used to select further among the verses). For example, if six of the sixteen cowries come face up, this defines the figure called Ọbara, for which the first divination verse would then be recited as follows (cited in Bascom's orthography):

K'á kó'lé kotó d'ajé;
K'á y'òdèdè'lè d'orò;
K'á r'aso tuntun'lè d'omo àmódún
Dá f'Ólòbàrà
Tí nl'oko àlorò odún.
Ọ̀sà w'pé on pé ire ajé;

On pé ire omo,
Níbi t'á gbé dá àgbãgbà méfà
L'órí àte.

"We should build a storehouse for money in advance;
"We should make a verandah for riches in advance;
"We should buy new clothes for next year's child in advance"

Cast for Obara
When he was going to his year-round farm.
Orisha says that he says, "A blessing of money;"
He says, "A blessing of children,"
Where we cast Six Elders
On the tray.

(Bascom, 1980:494–5)

The recitation continues for another 101 lines, and there are eighteen more verses corresponding to the divination result of six cowries. A different number of cowries facing up will select a different set of divination verses. For example, if five cowries come face up, the figure is called Ọ́ṣẹ́ and the first verse begins:

A ṣ'erin ja'ri agada;
A ṣ'agada ja'ri erin;
A ṣe'gi ọkọ ma wẹ́ ọkọ́
Dá f'Ọ́ṣẹ́
Ti ńlọ tọrọ'wà gbogbo l'ọ́wọ́ Olódùmarè.

"The iron that will spoil the sword;
"The sword that will cut the iron;
"The tree in the farm that can swim like a canoe"
Cast for Oshe
When he was going to ask for all destinies from Olodumare."

(Bascom, 1980:388–9)

The language employed for Yoruba divinatory utterances is distinctive. The texts are recited in short verses, and contain allegedly archaic words and formulas, whose meanings are in some cases unknown even to their reciter (in this case, a diviner knowledgeable enough to recite for Bascom more than 10,000 lines of divination verse). The verses are often highly figurative, appearing, to the outsider at least, as opaquely metaphorical in places: "the tree ... that can swim like a canoe." Some portions are parallelistic: "We should *x* a *y* for *z* in advance," iterated thrice; "the *p* that will/can *q*", thrice; etc. The verses incorporate a great deal of ostentatiously marked quotation: "Orisha says that he says ..." These quotations are generally ascribed to myth figures and deities, or to divinations performed for these individuals in myth times: "Cast for Oshe / When he was going to ask for all destinies from Olodumare." The mythical instance of divination acts as a "precedent" for the current divination, constituting a lamination of speech roles within a total

laminated speech event:[9] the role of the ancient diviner–speaker is laminated onto the current diviner, as the role of the ancient client–addressee is laminated onto the current client. All of these features are such as to locate the ultimate origins of the speech in a distant place and time, and to emphasize its separation not only from everyday life in the present moment, but from the diviner's own ordinary mode of speech, as expressed in the ordinary persona which he or she presents outside the divination context, in the role of neighbor, etc. (Du Bois, 1986).

Regarding intentionality, clearly these utterances are outside the control of their utterer in at least two respects. First, they are traditionally specified texts, memorized from the oral teachings of a senior diviner over the long years of study required to master such a large corpus of divination texts. Second, the verse that the diviner utters on a particular occasion is specified by the aleatory mechanism of the cowrie toss, whose result is quite outside the control of the diviner. Although the client selects among the several verses presented the one which he or she considers relevant to the case, what is relevant for our purposes is that the diviner's recitation is governed by an aleatory mechanism.

Similar features also characterize the other major Yoruba oracle, the Ifa divination (Bascom, 1969; see below), though its techniques are rather more complex.

Poison oracle (Azande)

Among the Azande of the Sudan, the most revered and authoritative of all oracles is *benge*, the poison oracle (Evans-Pritchard, 1937). The poison, derived from a certain creeper by ritually specified processes, is administered to chickens kept specifically for divination purposes. Great care is taken to ensure that the oracle is operating properly, which is to say, it is discriminating enough to kill some fowls and let others live. Evans-Pritchard assured himself, after much close observation and participation in actual divinations, that the outcome is not manipulated. After the chicken has been forced to swallow some of the poison, the questioner addresses the poison oracle inside the fowl for as long as five minutes, if the fowl lives so long, explaining the background of the matter he has come to consult about, and reiterating the question so as to be clearly understood. In this speech, presented in a style special to oracle-questioning, he will incorporate a specific proposition whose truth he links verbally to the death of the fowl, and an opposite proposition whose truth he links to the survival of the fowl. For example, a man who wished to marry a certain woman sought to find out if his project would go well, or if the woman would die should he marry her. Upon administering the oracle poison to the chicken he addressed the oracle as follows:[10]

Poison oracle, that woman, since I intend to marry her, she is my wife? We will make a homestead together? We shall count the years together? Poison oracle, listen, kill the fowl. It is not so, mine is the weariness of piercing boils – a man pierces a boil and can eat nothing – such is the affair of that woman. I must do without her and may not marry her, poison oracle, listen and spare the fowl.

The addresser continues, framing again the pair of opposed propositions, and again linking them to the death or survival of the fowl:

It is not so, poison oracle, refuse to be deceived: you are marrying her to me, she is truly my wife. I will praise this verdict of yours, poison oracle, about that affair of my wife. Straight be your utterance like Zakiri, like Moragböndi. Poison oracle, kill the fowl. It is not true, poison oracle, she is not my wife; although you are as fierce as Gbudwe if you see that that woman will not be my wife, poison oracle, spare the fowl.

(Evans-Pritchard, 1937:298)

(The questioner goes on in this vein.) Because of the way the questioner has linked propositions and oracular outcomes here, the fowl's death will be interpreted as meaning that the marriage will go well, while its survival will mean that the new wife will die. The speech employed to address the poison oracle must be adaptable in order to frame the question currently at hand, so that it cannot consist entirely of traditionally specified text. But it does have distinctive stylistic characteristics. The address to the oracle characteristically employs a "special phraseology" and incorporates "traditional refrains, pieces of imagery, compliments to the oracle, ways of formulating a question," etc., usually including many "analogies and circumlocutions" (Evans-Pritchard, 1937:297–9), such as "making a homestead together" and "counting the years" for marrying happily. Speakers from myth times (e.g. Zakiri and Moragböndi, ancient Zande kings) are invoked as models for the current divination.

The question arises as to how the fowl's "answer" attains the specific meaning[11] ascribed to it. Considered in illocutionary terms, the oracular response indeed presents a curious aspect. Clearly the petitioner, in uttering the divinatory propositions (whether expressed as questions, assertions or conditionals), has left open the question of their truth, and cannot be said to have provided the fowl's answer with any specific illocutionary force. The decision as to which of the uttered propositions is true is rendered by an event outside the petitioner's control: the death or survival of the fowl. Divination participants take the binary divinatory signal (life-or-death) as tantamount to a "yes-or-no" answer: in effect, "Yes, she is your wife" or "No, she is not your wife." But would speech-act theory impute speech-act status to a binary signal that counts as no more than a "yes" or "no"? Searle has long held that even a simple "yes-or-no" response can, in appropriate contexts (such as following a "yes-no" question), commit its speaker to a full-fledged speech act – one

that in another context might have been performed using a full sentence, such as the assertion "Yes, I am going to the movies" (Searle, 1969:19). The problem in applying speech-act theory here derives not from the simplicity of the binary divinatory signal, but from the manifest absence of personal intention and speech-actor responsibility. As with any "yes-or-no" answer, the divinatory signal accrues its *propositional* meaning by anaphorically incorporating the appropriate proposition as previously formulated by the diviner; but its *pragmatic* backing – backing of a sort usually thought to require an intending speech actor – here derives from a semiotic mechanism which is apersonal, mechanical, and aleatory.

Symbol-spinning (Sisala)

Among the Sisala of Northern Ghana, a divination session begins with the diviner opening a bag from which he takes out several ritual instruments (Mendonsa, 1982). He then utters an invocation of gods and ancestors in a distinctive tone of voice, while slowly shaking a ceremonial rattle:

> God! What have I called? Savai [an ancestor] is the god. Which gods should I call? I should call Jevaha and Forkorbawie. They should call Gominabaah and Navrije. They should call Salfuo and Jallo. Jallo should ask Janawia, the eldest river, and he should ask Dajare. Dajare is the eldest farm, and he should ask grandfather, who will ask God.
>
> (Mendonsa, 1982:121)

(The diviner continues.) For the divination proper the specialist removes, one by one, each of a set of symbolic figures contained in his divining bag, each of which has a specific meaning associated with it. The diviner suspends the symbolic figure by two strings that are attached to it, rubs the strings together in his palms to make the object spin round, and watches to see where it points. The two knots in the string are said to be "eyes," and if these end up pointing to the client, the symbol is indicated as potentially pertinent to his case. Symbols which "look" away from the client when spun are set aside as irrelevant. (Further divination using another technique may be used to select among the objects picked out by this procedure, as well as to choose between pairs of opposed propositions framed by the client, etc.) In one seance, among the symbols picked out by the spinning technique were the following:

(1) a notched piece of gourd with two protrusions, carrying the traditional signification, "You knew the truth but spoke in two different ways" (that is, "you lied");
(2) a dried black fruit from the *bubinga* tree, signifying "It will be a black (bad) thing if you continue";

(3) a single cowrie shell, signifying "You made a promise to a shrine and asked it for some things, but now you have forgotten your promise."

(Mendonsa, 1982:124)

These words are uttered by the diviner to the client, in accordance with whichever figures have pointed to the client. The diviner's statements are thus selected by the symbol-spinning, an aleatory process which puts the result – at least apparently – outside the control of the diviner.

Again, if we consider this speech event from an illocutionary standpoint, we must find ourselves reluctant to ascribe to the diviner the responsibility of a speech actor exerting volitional control over a series of assertions. Propositions are indeed being uttered, but apparently without support of, or dependence on, personal intention of the illocutionary sort.

A word on the issue of control is in order here, as some readers may remain skeptical even when ethnographers present evidence that a divinatory signal is outside the diviner's control (against this skepticism, see Boyer, 1990:61–3). The real issue, though, must be kept sight of: not actual control (as skeptically evaluated by an outsider), but the indigenous client's *belief* regarding control over the divinatory process. It is the client's beliefs rather than "the facts" as posited by a foreign skeptic that will enter into the actual meaning construal process. Divination clients commonly hold that a *legitimate* divination (as opposed to fraudulent or ineffectual ones, which are not to be trusted) has the capacity to produce a definite signal by means other than personal volitional control, and this may become a basis for imputing meaning. Divinatory devices are often selected precisely because they provide the appearance, at least, of such independence. The challenge to pragmatic theory comes when the divination client construes an utterance which he or she believes is *not* backed by a personal illocutionary intention to have the pragmatic backing needed for instantiated meaningfulness.

For the present, these three cases will be sufficient to illustrate the use of language in divination. I turn now to problems of interpretation.

Apersonality

> What matter who's speaking, someone said,
> what matter who's speaking.
>
> Samuel Beckett (1974:16)

Speech-act theory, confronted with the aleatory mechanism's apparent intention-suppression function, might hope to rescue the criterion of intentionality by recourse to an imagined intender behind the oracle. Surely, one must reason, if oracle users believe they have received

meaningful information about their present affairs from an oracle, *they* at least must assume that this information was communicated by someone, by some speaker or addresser – perhaps a deity, spirit, or other such anthropomorphic figure. This deeply ingrained reaction on our part, reflecting the strength of the personalist ideology of language use, was experienced already by Evans-Pritchard when he would try to present to his countrymen the Zande view of the poison oracle:

> I have described to many people in England the facts [about how the Azande employ oracles] and they have been, in the main, incredulous or contemptuous. In their questions to me they have sought to explain away Zande behaviour by rationalizing it, that is to say, by interpreting it in terms of our culture. They assume that Azande ... attribute a personality to the oracle, a mind that judges as men judge, but with higher prescience ...
>
> (1937:313)

If we could but believe that the Azande personify their poison oracle, perhaps we could then comprehend their faith in it: "Given a mind the Zande oracle is not much more difficult to understand than the Delphic Oracle."[12] But, Evans-Pritchard insists, "they do not personify it." While it might seem to us that they must take the oracles to be personal beings, since they do address them directly, this question appears absurd when framed within the Zande language. The poison oracle "is not alive, it does not breathe or move about. It is a thing. Azande have no theory about it; they do not know why it works, but only that it does work." Oracles work, now as always, simply because that is their nature (Evans-Pritchard, 1937:320).

The Azande are not alone in their reluctance to seek a personal or personified source for the meanings derived from divination. In his analysis of divination among the Tiv, Bohannan (1975) evinces some frustration in his attempt to apply a "communication model" (a Jakobsonian variant received from Sebeok, 1964) that assumes, along with message, code, referent, and channel, the existence of an addresser and an addressee. He calls divination "a sort of quasi-communication" (1975:151) at first, but has doubts:

> To call the "interaction" between the diviner and his oracle a "quasi-communication" because diviners like Koson cock their heads and "listen" may be to interpret the Tiv point of view a little too literally.
>
> (Bohannan, 1975:166)

Divination might be better compared, says, Bohannan, to the use of an artificial extension of the senses, like a Geiger counter. The "addresser" that the communication model asks for cannot be validated in native terms: "the Tiv do not and will not speculate about the nature of any thing, person, or force that 'sends' the message" (1975:166). As with the

Azande, the refusal to personify genuinely confounds our attempts to apply either a speech-act model or a standard Jakobsonian communication model, given their insistence on speech actors and addressers.

To be sure, some traditions do posit a more personal figure behind divination, associating its procedure in some way with a particular deity or set of deities, who may be more or less anthropomorphic. For example, the Quiché Maya diviner invokes a long list of deities and other powers in order to ensure that a seance goes well (Bunzel, 1952; cf. B. Tedlock, 1982), as do the Ixil Maya diviner (Colby and Colby, 1981:278ff.), the Sisala diviner (Mendonsa, 1982:121), and many others. But such figures often turn out to function simply as patrons or "supervisors" of the divinatory process. Often they are not specific to divination, and would be invoked in performing other kinds of ritual or magic as well, to serve as a generalized source of undifferentiated power or epistemological efficacy. In general there is no indication that any of the beings invoked is thought of as the actual speaker of the divinatory message.

But in the Ifa divination of the Yoruba, a closer relationship is indicated (Bascom, 1969). Ifa is the name not only of the divination process, and of a major Yoruba cult, but also of the deity "responsible" for divination. Before the first divination of the day, the diviner invokes Ifa "to make sure that Ifa supervises the divination and sees that the correct figure is selected" (1969:37). According to Bascom, the divinatory mechanism is designed to enable reception of a message "which Ifa wishes the client to receive" (1969:30). But supervising is not speaking. There remains some question whether the Yoruba ascribe the character of a speech actor responsible for intentions underlying the specific divination "message" to a deity speaker addressing the diviner and client – however much we might think such conclusions logically necessary. Certainly, many of the traditional Ifa divination texts explicitly present some statements as quotations from Ifa: for one example among many, in the fourth divination verse for the figure *Ọyẹ̀ku Ogbe* (corresponding to palm nut throws 2, 2, 2, 2; 1, 1, 1, 1), a demand for a sacrifice is attributed to Ifa: *Ifa ni ki ẹni-kan ru-(ẹ)bọ nitori oye ti a njẹ ni idile rẹ* "Ifa says someone should make a sacrifice because of a title that is to be taken in his lineage" (Bascom, 1969:232–3). But the appearance of a personal source is tempered by several considerations. First, because these are fixed traditional texts, the participants (including the client) know that this same text may have been uttered the day before to some else. Second, the directness of contact is mitigated by the fact that a significant portion of Ifa divination verses consists in a quotation of utterances made by some myth-time diviner – a hero or deity – to another myth-time personage. In such "protodialogic" speech event laminations (Du Bois, 1986:321; 1989), a prior (postulated) speech event is presented as precedent to the present

divination. In this context there is often ambiguity as to whether the attribution of saying refers to a present saying or to the original myth-time saying. This ambiguity is anything but accidental, of course, and is indeed actively cultivated. Third, ambiguity about who is speaking is again heightened when the words "Ifa says ..." are seen to alternate, seemingly interchangeably, with the indefinite attribution "they say ..." (e.g. Bascom, 1969:233).[13]

Even where speaking is indicated it may not be volitional speaking, that is, speech in which choice exists – for example, the choice between telling the truth or lying. Magic, in some views at least, *coerces* rather than entreats action from gods and powers; as Mauss observes, the demons invoked in a demoniacal rite "are not free agents" ([1950] 1972:105). Typical explanations offered for a failed divination would be that witchcraft interfered with its procedure, or that the correct question had not been made sufficiently clear to the oracle, but not that an oracular "speaker" chose to lie. Given Bascom's materials, Ifa must be recognized as a rare case where a relatively personified, if not necessarily free-willed, "speaker" is postulated for at least part of the fixed divination texts given by tradition. But in most divination traditions, any associated deities or powers are at most patrons or supervisors of the divination procedure.

To draw an analogy from a Western context, a scientist who supervises a medical laboratory might fulfill an important function in ensuring that all equipment works and that tests are appropriately carried out by laboratory personnel, but we would not as a result take him or her to be the author of the diagnostic "messages" derived from the chemical reactions in the tests.[14] Bohannan's apt comparison of Tiv divination to a Geiger counter – a mechanism which will supply useful information if used properly by trained personnel – points in the right direction for understanding the character of divinatory technique, and the role of a supervising deity therein.

Mauss, in his discussion of the place of "spirit beings" in a general theory of magic, concluded that such figures were never in themselves sufficient to account for the beliefs about magic (a category which, in Mauss' usage, would encompass divination). He emphasized that, even where such spirits were invoked by native theory, there was always something left over unexplained:

> The idea of spirit beings is not a sufficient representation of anonymous general forces which are the basis of a magician's power, the strength behind his words and actions, the power of his looks and intentions, spells and death ... the idea of spirits ... cannot explain either the existence of the ritual or its special features – sympathetic actions, magical substances, ritual prescriptions, private languages, etc.

Even in a demoniacal rite, Mauss says, "the idea of spirits is necessarily accompanied by an impersonal notion of efficacious power" (Mauss,

1950:105; Durkheim, 1915). It would not be too much to say that in divination, the apersonal is primary, and is present whether or not any secondary invocation of spirits is made.

Functions of intentionless meaning

The question of divinatory function can be raised on several levels, from the basic level of technique where we might speak of the aleatory generation of distinctive signals, to higher-order functions where we might speak of such things as social integration. While the highest levels cannot be attended to here, we do need to probe beyond the level of mechanical function if we are to understand *why* intentionless meaning should be so widely sought after, and so highly valued.

On one level, divination establishes "facts" without recourse to ordinary evidence, which may become the basis of a course of action undertaken by an individual or a group. Often a divinatory client faces several alternative courses of action whose relative merits cannot readily be determined (e.g. to build a house on this site or that, when either seems suitable; to go on a journey or stay home, etc.). What human source could provide assurance that ill fortune will not befall one in a house built on this site? In such circumstances, any well-defined course of action may serve as well as the next, even if determined aleatorily, so long as it can be confidently and resolutely followed. "Even tossing a coin can end indecision and lead to positive action" (Bascom, 1969:70). But this is likely to be effective only when it is possible to believe that the result is more significant than is mere "chance." To base a large undertaking on what one believes to be an accident would certainly require a curious cast of mind; and this is not the cast which is found among users of divination. Bascom points out that

> when decisions are left to divine guidance rather than chance, the individual has far greater assurance that he is following the correct course of action. He can proceed with greater confidence; and, accordingly, in some cases he probably has a greater chance of success.
>
> (Bascom, 1969:70)

From the perspective of the group, facts need to become not only "known" but socially legitimated. This is especially true for facts that bear on relations between individuals, or which involve concerted action by the group. But in the face of crisis the location of social responsibility for decision-making can become an embarrassment. Among the Tiv, for example, distrust of authoritarian roles makes it difficult for one person to impose a decision if that person has to be singled out as responsible for it:

Without the divining apparatus, the Tiv mode of group decision making could not be utilized so effectively – someone would have to take the authoritarian position of "dictating" the answer. Sometimes influential elders can and do merely "tell" their juniors what *akombo* [roughly, supernatural forces] are involved and occasionally even what relationships are to be "repaired." But such authoritarianism is both rare and distasteful to Tiv.

(Bohannan, 1975:166)

Divination means that no-one will have to be the personal source of decision. Rather than taking on the role of speech actor, one can defer to the apersonal divinatory source. And impersonally authoritative decisions can more readily attract consensus, by virtue of the fact that they cannot be attacked as proceeding from some interested person or faction (Bloch, 1975, 1989). As Park observes, "divinatory procedure, whether 'objective' in quality or merely inter-subjective, constitutes a technique for establishing an effective consensus upon a rather particular project" (Park, 1967:240; Fortes, 1966). It does this by the suppression of personal agency and hence responsibility:

it is the peculiar property of the diviner's role that he is able, in the public conscience, to remove the agency and responsibility for a decision from the actor himself, casting it upon the heavens where it lies beyond cavil and beyond reproach.

(Park, 1967:236)

Because divination "brings to light and so dispels the quarrels and grudges in the social group" (Turner, 1975:245), it may function, in concert with any ritual it prescribes, to resolve interpersonal conflicts (Beattie, 1967:231; Mendonsa, 1982:9).

The truth-discovering capacity of divination gives the diviner special access to otherwise private domains within the group. The Tiv diviner can ask his clients for any information he needs to carry out his work – about kin's health, grudges, political personages, etc. – including information that would ordinarily be closely guarded and might otherwise remain unaired. Petitioners readily answer these questions, saying "the oracle cannot tell you the truth if you lie to it" (Bohannan, 1975:152; see Herskovits, 1938, cited in Bascom, 1969:68).[15] Retel-Laurentin (1969) emphasizes that the Nzakara rubbing-board and poison oracles, with their vaunted infallibility, function as an effective "truth serum" in court cases. Discourse under compulsion to honesty can of itself serve important psychological and sociological functions, even where its participants treat it as merely ancillary to securing the divinatory response.

Divination addresses not only fact and action but emotion as well, fulfilling psychological functions beyond the more apparent epistemological and sociological ones. The client is often led to delve into thoughts and feelings of deep concern; and the structure of symbolic materials and

potential explanations which are offered up by the divinatory tradition is likely to point in directions linked with emotion.[16] This interpretive activity is carried out in a psychologically protected environment, since the consulter is not responsible for backing the various propositions with any particular illocutionary force: as in the Azande poison oracle, the propositions are entertained rather than asserted. In this respect the entertained propositions resemble the psychoanalyst's category of primary process language, characterized by Fenichel as (among other things) "lacking in any identification of linguistic mood (*i.e.* no identification of indicative, subjunctive, optative, etc.)" (Bateson, 1972:139) – and, we might add, of illocutionary force.

What remains constant through all of these functions is the thread of reliance on apersonal authoritative meaning. The aleatory process suppresses intention, but it does so within an interpretive matrix which allows attribution of significance to the resulting signals, constituted as authoritative but apersonal validations of instantiated meanings, which can be put to a wide variety of uses in social life.

Moore ([1957] 1979) proposed a different explanation of the function of the aleatory in divination, arguing that the introduction of randomness into human behavior through divination can, under certain circumstances, have a positive survival value, and that this is what is accomplished by randomness-generating mechanisms like Naskapi scapulimancy. But Park (1967) points out that an odd crack in the heated shoulder blade would not lead its users to set off in an obviously unproductive direction on its account; this oracle was not entirely random in actual interpretive consequences. Rather, the value of its chance mechanism lay in its impartiality and impersonality. While Moore is entirely correct in stressing the nonintentional aspect of divination, his conclusion that its function is to introduce randomness into human behavior seems at most partially correct. Randomness is needed to drive the intention-suppressing function of divinatory technique, but the consulter's consequent actions and interpretations need not be random.

To say that the language of divination lacks intention is not to say that it is without function. It is ironic, no doubt, that the very intentionlessness of a process should allow it to serve its characteristic function – that devices for generating random outcomes should figure in a process said to be useful. But in the end there is neither contradiction nor paradox in the intentional pursuit of intentionless meaning.

Intention and the speech act reconsidered

We are now in a position to assess the implications of divinatory language for speech-act theory. But first it will be useful to look back and see what

it was that speech-act theory initially had to offer, and where it went wrong. In its time, performative theory promised an escape from the prevailing idealist model of pure form, abstracted away from the living world of action. It moved in concert with the larger contemporaneous movement (e.g. Hymes, 1962) that sought to take language out of the Platonic world of ideal structure assumed by many structuralists (including generative structuralists) and place it in the world of social life, which encompasses notably social action. In departing from theories of "rules acting on forms" (of themselves, it seemed), the new focus on action and intention promised to align well with the re-emerging interest in the dynamics of function in language. In contrast to static structure-oriented theories that treated meaning and "the world" as belonging to separate spheres, correlated only by processes with names like "mapping" or "verification," the new theories placed meaning and language in the same world with persons, goals, intentions, and actions. Words now had consequences: something was said, and the facts of the world changed. To commit oneself to a view that meaning was necessarily linked to action was to make a place forcefully not only for actors but for their goals and contexts. For anyone whose primary frame of reference had been limited to the then prevailing idealist theories of language, speech-act theory pointed to the possibility of a theoretical understanding of language use. It can now be seen as part of a broader resurgence of action-oriented theories of language within pragmatics, sociocultural linguistics, and linguistic anthropology (Hymes, 1962; Bauman, 1977b; Silverstein, 1977; Becker, 1979; Friedrich, 1979), ultimately unfolding in the present dramatic efflorescence of dialogic approaches to discourse as culture (Friedrich, 1986; Holquist, 1983; Hill, forthcoming; McNeill, 1985; Hickmann, 1987; Haviland, 1988; Urban, 1989; Bauman and Briggs, 1990; Besnier, 1990a; etc.). Though many now rightly point to the early seminal work of rediscovered (or rehabilitated) ancestors like Bakhtin/Voloshinov (Voloshinov [1929–1930], 1973, Bakhtin, [1934] 1981, Vygotsky ([1934], 1986), and Malinowski ([1935] 1978), the view from linguistics cannot overlook the deglaciating role of Austin, Grice, and Searle.

The success of this movement cannot be doubted: no informed linguist or philosopher would now seriously propose returning to a theory of meaning which could not take into account context, including action in the social world. To know only the uttered linguistic form and its grammatically associated system-meaning is to have access to but a limited portion of the semantic process, which may involve reference, many would argue, to the speaker's manifest intention, on at least some occasions in some cultures.[17] But the apparent contribution of intention in one class of cases led to exaggerated estimations of its importance, and even reification within the speech-act model as a necessary component of all

language use. To the extent that this theory mirrored and reinforced the common-sense folk theory of action, the two conspired to obscure the full range of language uses.

The challenge to the centrality of intention offered here parallels that posed by the anti-personalist critique (as mounted by Rosaldo, Duranti, Ochs, and others), but it also contains an additional ingredient – or rather lacks one, that of speaker responsibility. However attenuated the role of intention in Samoan *fono* speech, for example, the speaker's *responsibility* clearly remains – with this difference, that the Samoan speaker is responsible for the consequences of words rather than the intention behind them (Duranti, this volume).[18] In contrast, divination represents speech for which there is in principle no speaker responsible – neither for personal intentions behind the words, nor for the selection of the words themselves, nor for their consequences. This is of course no accident, since what divination seeks is precisely the absence of human responsibility for either intentions or consequences.

Regarding an apparent case of limited speaker involvement, intention, and responsibility, Strawson observed:

> a speaker whose job it is to do so may offer information, instructions, or even advice, and yet be overtly indifferent as to whether or not his information is accepted as such, his instructions followed, or his advice taken. His wholly overt intention may amount to no more than that of making available – in a "take it or leave it" spirit – to his audience the information or instructions or opinion in question; though again, in some cases, he may be seen as the mouthpiece, merely, of another agency to which may be attributed at least general intentions of the kind that can scarcely be attributed, in the particular case, to him.
>
> (1964:614)

But an intention to "make available" in a "take it or leave it spirit" will not satisfy the needs of illocutionary theory. Obviously even diviners presumably act in accordance with *some* sort of intention, such as the intention to follow the correct ritual procedure, or the intention to pronounce the ritually prescribed words precisely. But these kinds of intentions, though perfectly valid, are largely beside the point (*pace* Nuyts, 1989:115f), since they are not the kind of intention that can provide the *pragmatic backing* for a specific oracular utterance: a backing specific enough to distinguish between "she will die" and "she will not die," when both propositions have been uttered with equal force by the diviner. Speech-act theory never made much of the intention to perform the utterance act, and for good reason; although it clearly exists, the real power to shape meaning in speech-act theory derives from a higher level, i.e. the illocutionary intention. (Nor will Strawson's move of attributing "general intentions" to some agency behind the mouthpiece succeed in the case of divination, as we have seen.) Diviners are responsible for many

things – integrity, correct procedure – but not for the one thing that matters most to the petitioner: the pragmatic backing of the oracular utterance.

Conclusions

Highlighting intention throws personality into relief; obscuring it lets individuality fade into the sociocultural background. Divination's achievement is to extract contingent, contextualized, applicable meanings from apersonal domains and in the process to imbue them with authority.

To interpret the indigenous process of producing meaning through divinatory procedure as just another speech act, with the implications of intending speech actors, would be to miss the lesson which divination offers. A truly encompassing theory of meaning-in-use must recognize that in social life there exist roles for several radically different kinds of meaning to play. Does divination refute the role of intention in language use? Not at all. There may well be good reason to recognize at least some ways of speaking in some cultures that demand for their interpretation a reference to the intentions of speech actors, which become fair game for theory to the extent that local interpretive practice actually *uses* them. But there exist also sharply contrasting language use types, not dependent on speech actors, which are yet equally consequential in the world of social action. In speaking of language use divorced from responsible actors, we are in no danger of reverting to the time when hypothesized language structure was a pure "object" of study divorced from action. But by now it is clear that not all phenomena in social and linguistic life need be actions, and not all meaningful use of language need be interpreted as engendered by speech actors.

Divination might at first seem like an exotic, obscure, or isolated case, a genre scarcely visible among many groups, such as the highly educated segments of industrial societies. But divination will prove to be far from unique as a representative of intentionless meaning. Though it presents the most visible challenge to existing assumptions, the same mechanisms of meaning construal can be witnessed, in subtler form, in phenomena ranging from calendrical ceremonials to ordinary proverbs to gaming and gambling. Nor is intentionless meaning restricted to "primitive" or "exotic" cultures; it is prominent in all cultures including our own, if not always in transparently recognizable form. Its hallmarks can be recognized not only in actual divinations like the flower petal-pulling that accompanies the child's refrain, "She loves me, she loves me not . . .," but also in secular forms of playful, aesthetic, and authoritative action, from a game of poker to the enjoyment of poetry or mystery narratives to the invoking of official rules or "the dictionary" in a dispute. Intentionless

meaning is interwoven throughout much of social life in all cultures; but that is a matter for another essay.

Speech-act theory erred in taking intentionality to be a constant, but it would equally be problematic to exclude all reference to it. Such a move would actually make it more difficult to understand divination, given its striving after the aleatory. Intentionality does in fact seem to be a central concern of many human beings – so much so that on occasion they pay it the high compliment of directing great resources to its suppression. Ironically, it is only within a theory that recognizes the role of speech actors that one can fully appreciate the significance of their effacement. This understanding puts us in a better position to assess what it is that intention genuinely does contribute, whenever it is verifiably present in the meaning process. The real lesson from divination is not that intention should automatically be disregarded as a factor in the process of construing meaning; rather, the dynamic of invocation and suppression of intention carries social meaning in itself.

NOTES

In addition to the original presentation as a paper at the session on "Responsibility and Evidence in Oral Discourse" at the 82nd Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association in 1983, earlier versions of this chapter were presented as papers in colloquia at UCLA and UC Santa Barbara in May 1986, and published in Du Bois (1987). (The present chapter represents a significantly revised version of that paper.) I thank the participants at all three meetings for their stimulating comments. For their comments on several issues addressed in the present chapter, I thank Alessandro Duranti, Charles Goodwin, Jane Hill, Judith Irvine, Joel Kuipers, Paul Schachter, Sandra Thompson, Elizabeth Weber, and the anonymous reviewers for this volume. The research as presented here was supported in part by a UCLA Career Development Award, and by a UCLA Academic Senate Research Grant, which I gratefully acknowledge.

1 In discussing the role of intention for meaning, it is important to distinguish two meanings of "meaning." For many traditional language scholars, meaning meant first and foremost dictionary meaning (plus, perhaps, propositional or system-sentence meaning), both of which pertain to the language as system, i.e. Saussurean *langue*. But more recently, growing awareness of pragmatic issues has focused attention on pragmatically grounded instances of language use, subsuming, among other things, what has been called speaker's meaning. Now obviously the traditional theories of system-meaning were never founded on intentions, since no-one supposed that dictionaries (or language systems) had them. Only in the domain of language *use* has intention been put forward as a key factor, and only here does the possibility of intentionless meaning become interesting.

2 However, in dealing with quotation, Searle allows for a special status for the quoted proposition, from which the speaker has distanced himself or herself in relevant ways, an issue which I treat elsewhere (Du Bois, forthcoming).

3 Grice has recently concluded that natural and nonnatural meaning do share "a single overarching idea" (1989b:349; cf. 1989a:291f), but his proposal, that "if x means y then y ... is a consequence of x" (1989b:350), is probably too broad to capture it. From the (manticist) *interpreter's* point of view, what natural and nonnatural meaning share is the seemingly inherent significance of the semiotic phenomenon, from which meaning can apparently be extracted.

4 For a fuller discussion of the literary debate on intention, see Du Bois (1987:87–90).

5 Postulation of a special illocutionary act of divination would naturally be heir to the weaknesses which Searle pinpointed in claims for special literary acts. Instead, the very applicability of the notion "speech act" to divination will be called into question below.

6 Compare Wierzbicka (1985:500).

7 The role of intention in divination has also been challenged by Boyer (1990:51ff), in remarks which in part parallel the views put forward in Du Bois (1986:330ff), and the present work.

8 For a distinction between mechanical and mental divination, see Reynolds (1963:118), Mendonsa (1982:119); also Rose (1928). Park classifies divination procedures as mechanical, ritual, or emotive (Park, 1967:244); but a separate category of ritual divination seems of doubtful value, since it appears that mechanical and emotive divination are also in general ritual (see also Zeusse, 1987:376). Trance divination, like mechanical divination, also incorporates intentionless meaning. But to demonstrate this would require a different line of argument, which limitations of space preclude my developing here.

9 I have described the phenomenon of speech-role lamination elsewhere in terms of the "duplex speech event" (Du Bois, 1986:321) and "protodialogue" (Du Bois, 1989). Similar conceptions of multiple voice and related ideas can be found in Voloshinov ([1930] 1973), Bakhtin ([1934] 1981), Goffman (1974), Irvine (1982b), Clark and Carlson (1982a), Hill (forthcoming), Haviland (1988), Urban (1989), and others.

10 Although Evans-Pritchard originally recorded this in the Zande language, he published it only in translation.

11 Here I am speaking of use-meaning as opposed to system-meaning. (A standard framing of this opposition would be as between system-meaning and "speaker-meaning," but the latter construct is of doubtful application to the present case, as will be seen.)

12 It is interesting to note that the *authentic* divinatory utterances of the famous Delphic oracle – those proved to be historically genuine – have more in common with the African oracles described by Evans-Pritchard and others than they do with the dramatically clairvoyant, but apparently fictionalized, prophecies of Delphi in Greek literature and legend (Fontenrose, 1978).

13 Commonplace usages in many languages (such as English "what your behavior says to me is ...," "the dictionary says," "those spots mean ...," "Scorpio

rising means . . .," etc.) urge caution in positing authors based on statements containing verbs of saying or meaning.

14 The aptness of the experimental analogy for divination was already recognized by Evans-Pritchard (1937; see also Zuesse, 1987).

15 In contrast, the Yoruba reject on principle the frank approach that characterizes the probing divinatory investigations of many other groups, preferring that the diviner not even know the nature of the client's problem, lest he "twist" Ifa in seeking to please (Bascom, 1969:68). As a result, little in the way of revealing dialogue is likely to take place during the selection of the traditional divinatory text. This may be linked to the prominence of the fixed text, particularly in the initial stage of the Ifa session, which is especially suitable for the essentially projective function which Ribeiro and Bascom have posited for the individual's process of text selection and interpretation. In contrast, divination systems which concentrate on securing specific new information via spontaneous propositions (e.g. about which neighbor's anger is causing one's child's sickness, etc.) may tend to correlate with a commitment to frank discussion.

16 Some divination procedures, while specifying a set of traditional texts, leave it to the individual to decide which is relevant to his or her case, creating a sort of projective technique like the Rorschach test, as Ribeiro observes regarding Ifa divination (Ribeiro, 1956:18–19, cited in Bascom, 1969:69).

17 To cite only one standard example, the satisfaction or non-satisfaction of context-based felicity conditions, including those grounded in illocutionary intentions, may shape utterance interpretation (Searle, 1969; Bach and Harnish, 1979; etc.).

18 Nuyts notes that even in Western culture there are times when responsibility takes precedence over intention, i.e. when individuals are held responsible for results they did not intend or even cause (1989:125). Conversely, Duranti acknowledges that, outside the *fono*, in certain kinds of everyday language use, intention may be taken into consideration even in Samoan culture (Duranti, this volume and [1984:17]).