

# Ethnopoetic Analysis as a Resource for Endangered-Language Linguistics: The Social Production of an Arapesh Text

LISE M. DOBRIN

*University of Virginia*

**Abstract.** The focus of this article is a short narrative text that was recorded during the author's fieldwork on the endangered Papuan language Arapesh. An explication of the text following the principles of Hymesian verse analysis provides a rich source of evidence about the speaker's experience of cultural transformation as refracted in the research encounter. This comes across explicitly, through the text's remarkable content, and indexically through aspects of its form. The analysis helps reveal the subtle and sometimes problematic ways in which fieldworkers as cross-cultural interlocutors shape the encounters that are reified in the documentary objects they produce.

*Ethnographers, like linguists, have a strong bias toward the referential function of language—we tend to believe what we are told and expect straight answers to our questions—but we are all susceptible to being performed to, and we must be able to understand when the forces of performance take precedence over straightforward referentiality. A sensitivity to performance is thus a necessary part of critical reflexive ethnography, not only in the study of oral poetics but in fact in all instances of data gathering through verbal interaction with native sources.*

—Richard Bauman (2004:125)

*Ethnographers . . . are caught in the same kinds of subtle collusions with their interlocutors as take place in non-ethnographic settings. A key difference is that ethnographers will not understand many of the routinized interactional cues used by their interlocutors, who themselves will have similar problems. Many interactions take on the rough, asynchronous character of failed encounters.*

—Bruce Mannheim and Dennis Tedlock (1995:14)

## **1. Introduction: the social production of endangered-language texts.**

Scholars documenting languages today often see themselves as following in the footsteps of their Boasian scholar-ancestors, salvaging the fragments of past cultural diversity that are about to slip into oblivion along with the world's thousands of endangered languages. One of the ways they are doing this is by retheorizing oral texts, annotated recordings of actual speech events, as intellectual products central to their enterprise (Woodbury 2011). In part, this revaluation of texts follows from a new focus on "observable linguistic behavior" (Himmelman

2006:7), raw primary data, which, when properly collected, annotated, and stored, it is hoped will be useful to posterity in a number of imaginable (and as yet unimaginable) ways. Among the anticipated audiences for these materials are not only scholars of various stripes, but members of language communities themselves. For communities, texts—especially narrative texts—are among the most accessible and welcome forms of documentation, full of compelling content, redolent with significance for their sense of who they are, and embodying rhetorical and stylistic qualities that allow them to be apprehended aesthetically (Dorian 2002).

So, documentary linguists have begun to discuss what kinds of cultural information texts encode and how capturing and even creating new genres of oral discourse through the documentation process can contribute to the richness of the resulting record (Mosel 2004; Franchetto 2006). Yet, on the whole, the role that texts play in this revived disciplinary project still tends to be guided by a structuralist view of languages as collections of grammatical features, with texts serving to support the more highly valued documentary products, grammars, and even lexica, whose substantive generalizations the texts illustrate or “contain”.<sup>1</sup> It is only from this perspective that it makes sense to argue, as Paul Newman did in his plenary address to the First International Conference on Language Documentation and Conservation in 2009, that transcribing texts can be a dubious use of a linguist’s time, since the returns in terms of the new lexical items and structures one encounters quickly diminish as one transcribes (Newman 2009; for the low lexical density of natural oral discourse, see also Foley 2003). Likewise, there is a lot of excitement at present about developments in digital technology that make it possible to link texts directly to grammatical descriptions, so that the generalizations proposed can be more easily be illustrated and checked (see, e.g., Thieberger 2006). Digital encoding leads naturally to concerns about what metadata will best enable the information to be located and accessed; hence, language archivists have proposed standardized labeling systems or “ontologies” for tagging texts according to their communicative genre (Dwyer and Mosel 2001).

In this article, I advocate an approach to endangered-language texts that recognizes them as bearing meaning in ways not considered by the traditional structuralist model described above, yet shares with the structuralist position a commitment to maintaining an analytical stance. In so doing, I take advantage of the opening the agenda of documentation provides to bring linguistics back into conversation with the field of folklore studies, with its abiding focus on performance and the “philology” of vernacular speech (Bauman 2008). In particular, I want to apply the method of ethnopoetic analysis known as “verse analysis” developed beginning in the early 1980s, largely through the work of Dell and Virginia Hymes (D. Hymes 1981, 2003), in an effort to reveal what kinds of valuable information can be “purified out” when we record and annotate endangered-language texts—that is, when we take some kind of actual social

encounter and transform it into a preservable documentary object (Agha 2007; Blommaert 2008). Textual corpora typically exist at least partly in written form because linguists take it for granted that annotations like translations and interlinear glossing are written (Nathan 2009:105–6, 2010; Moore 2006).<sup>2</sup> But transcription necessarily involves filtering and shaping the material in all sorts of ways that follow from cultural convention, limitations of the medium, power relations, the goals of the transcriber, and other factors; a speech event is never straightforwardly replicated or directly represented when it is rendered as an object detached from its original context (Ochs 1979; Haviland 1996; Urban 1996). Ironically, there is information in texts that may be obscured in the process of transcription, despite the fact that we usually understand this as an activity we undertake in order to add value to oral recordings.

Now is a good time to reflect on text production as a social process and the goals we wish to guide our thinking about how to present oral texts in written form. Documentary linguists are increasingly attentive to the social context of the linguistic salvage work they have been carrying out with enthusiasm and intensity in recent years (Dobrin and Berson 2011; for a fascinating illustration, see Becquelin, de Vienne, and Guiradello-Damian 2008). And to the extent that language documentation is motivated by a desire to respect and give voice to marginalized speakers, it is incumbent upon those doing the research to try to determine what those speakers' interests really are. This is not something that can always be done by explicit negotiation, as contemporary models of collaborative research tend to advocate (e.g., Czaykowska-Higgins 2009; Leonard and Haynes 2010). It requires reflexivity, creativity, and analytical effort; after all, the cultural basis for our inclinations is not necessarily something any of us can report. Moreover, participants' interests, like the documentary products themselves, emerge dialogically over the course of the research encounter (Mannheim and Tedlock 1995; Messineo 2008). It might be thought that the dialogical complexities of the research situation can be avoided by leaving speakers to do their own recording, but this only moves those complexities around to another part of the research process, since "the more insulated an event is from the kind of conversational process that might reach out and encompass the would-be observer, the more that observer will be in need of help when it comes to interpreting the meaning that event held for the participants" (Tedlock 1983:300). In any case, text elicitation often takes place in interview-like settings, where, despite the feeling we may have that the interactional goals and participant roles are straightforward given the ubiquity of the interview as an event type in Western society, nothing could be further from the truth. Interviews are discursively negotiated social events in which strategic, meta-communicative work is done throughout by all involved (Briggs 1986; De Fina and Perrino 2011). The obstacles to successful interviewing are only compounded when the event takes place across cultures. Striving to understand the emergent and dialogical process of text production is especially important when we are collecting endangered-

language texts, a context in which outside fieldworkers cannot help but take on the morally charged role of interlocutor in a cross-cultural encounter that distills one of the central issues implicated in language shift: the perception of self vis-à-vis cultural others. We do not want to be contributing to the very problem our work is supposed to help solve.

In what follows, I explore the textual residue of the documentary encounter through an ethnopoetic analysis of a short narrative text I call “Bethlehem,” which was told to me during fieldwork on endangered Arapesh languages in Papua New Guinea in the late 1990s. I first became interested in analyzing Arapesh texts this way several years ago when, as I toiled away cataloging and archiving my field recordings, I began to appreciate that the documentary products I was then manipulating in the name of language preservation had in one sense been collected, but in another sense were painstakingly being made. My decisions about how to title, transcribe, and describe each recording would all in some way affect how the participants in those speech events would be heard (or read). Furthermore, as I went back over the recordings I began to recognize how much even the most seemingly monologic of texts in fact embedded signs of its social production. Here, too, it was evident that I as a researcher had unconsciously given shape to documents that were ultimately intended to represent the language and culture of others. Moreover, the texts embedded signs of how the situation of recording was being culturally interpreted by participants, giving voice to their perception of who they were in light of the activity we were undertaking together. What is so interesting is that these perceptions were in no way incidental to the fact that the language we were recording was endangered. They reflected the same ideological orientations toward the use of linguistic codes that were guiding the community toward language shift.

Ethnopoetic analysis elucidates the culturally particular aesthetic and rhetorical structure of speech. Its guiding premise is that oral narratives are no more organized into sentences and paragraphs according to the conceptual logic of writing than they are arranged according to the technical logic of string selections in the widely used linguistic transcription and annotation tool ELAN (<http://www.lat-mpi.eu/tools/elan/>). They are organized rhythmically, in structures that are more akin to poetry than prose (Boas 1925; Jakobson 1960). Narrative lines are successively grouped into verses, stanzas, scenes, and acts, with each line typically representing a main predicate or turn at talk. Equivalencies among structural units may be marked by repetition and parallelism of a wide range of linguistic markers, such as particles, time words, intonational contours, pauses, and formulaic expressions. As Dell Hymes was always at pains to point out, the identification of such features is not algorithmic:

To be sure, lines usually contain, or consist of, a verb, and segmentation of narratives in accordance with the principle of one verb, one line, would go far toward approximating the true pattern. Not lines, but what are here called “verses,” however, appear to be the pivotal unit, and verses are recognized, not

by counting parts, but by recognizing repetition within a frame, the relation of putative units to each other within a whole. Covariation between form and meaning, between units and a recurrent (culturally established) pattern of narrative organization, is the key. [1981:318]

In other words, the poetic status of any given element or stretch of text can only be evaluated in light of the overall structure of the particular narrative under analysis, while taking into consideration the patterning of narratives in the relevant speech community as a whole. Verses are grouped by convention into characteristic rhythmic patterns or arcs: within a community, we tend to find groupings of threes and fives, or else twos and fours. Listeners have culturally inculcated expectations about the patterns they will encounter in the talk they hear around them, and skilled narrators work, typically unconsciously, to arouse and satisfy those expectations. Representing narrative texts in a way that reveals their rhetorical architecture thus facilitates recognition of the speaker's cultural voice, while "expanding and deepening our understanding of what it can mean to be possessed of a language" (Hymes 1981:341). This makes ethnopoetic analysis a useful tool for students of verbal art and endangered languages alike.

"Bethlehem" is an especially instructive text through which to listen for the narrator's cultural voice, because, as will be described below, it was offered by its speaker as an intentional move in a cross-cultural transaction. In this respect, it is not unlike "Celilo," the haunting narrative of social transformation that a Warm Springs Sahaptin man named Larry George recorded and sent to Dell and Virginia Hymes some years ago with a note telling them to "do what you do with this" (V. Hymes 2004:195).<sup>3</sup> Although Larry George spoke Sahaptin, he told his story in English. As Virginia Hymes wrote in her introduction to the versified transcript, "evidently he wanted to reach as many people as possible, both Indian and non-Indian" (2004:196). Celilo is a falls along the Columbia River where Indians of the region would gather seasonally to trade and fish. Depicting elements of nature like mountains and salmon as protagonists alongside Indian people, the text "Celilo" describes the enormous changes brought about over the years by "the other men," the builders of "factories, cities, giant highways, and dams," (2004:204) from a distinctively Sahaptin point of view. In its lonely conclusion, George portrays the relationships that revolved around Celilo as continuing to live only in the memory of a few: "To you I am dead and gone" (2004:207).

This phenomenon, in which the speaker does not simply offer a coherent stretch of talk for the documentary record, but has something of profound cultural importance to say and constructs the researcher as a vehicle who can carry his or her message to a wider world audience, may not be uncommon. Another example can be found in Manuel Andrade's *Quileute Texts* (1931). The collection includes a text entitled "Do Not Spoil the Country" (pp. 8–12), of

which Andrade says, “This earnest speech to all the Whites was spontaneously offered by my informant, Jack Ward, when he found out that the texts which he was dictating would be published” (1931:11 n. 1). In it, Jack Ward admonishes his audience not to act “without sympathy or appreciation” for the natural order by setting unnecessary fires or overhunting the rivers and forests, lest the spirits be alienated and suffering result for the Indians and white people alike (Powell and Hymes 1990:274).

In systematically opposing the time of speaking (“Most of the people are gone now. They have moved away” [V. Hymes 2004:207]) to a precontact past (“when you, the Whites, indeed had not yet come” [Powell and Hymes 1990:286]), and in opposing a second- or third-person other (“you Whites” [Powell and Hymes 1990:283]) to the speaker’s group whose ways the text is meant to document (“we Indians” [Powell and Hymes 1990:283]), these narratives overlap with another category of texts that are undoubtedly represented in many fieldworkers’ collections. We might call them “how we were” narratives: statements about cultural practices or ways of being that have been lost or modified, or are, in some other way, explicitly contrasted with contemporary life. The Kalapuya text “Our People after the Whites Came,” told to Melville Jacobs by John B. Hudson and later reanalyzed by Dell Hymes (1992), is an example. Hudson speaks of a time of cultural contentment “long ago” when “we just gathered our wood” and “took care of our hearts” by entering into intimate relationships according to proper protocol; this the speaker contrasts with life “now that the white people have come,” an era of moral and material deficiency in which Indians make unreturned claims upon one another “like you Americans” and find themselves so “extremely poor” that “even our foods have vanished” (1992:289–95). In exploring how cultural ideas about time and change are connected to ideologies of language, Judith Irvine points out that the “notion of ‘modernity’ . . . no matter how it is modulated and evaluated, entails a narrative: the story of a break with the past, a story that contrasts ‘then’ with ‘now’ and accounts for the difference” (Irvine 2004:104–5; see also Schieffelin 2002). Such “how we were” narratives are especially likely to reflect local concepts of self in relation to language when the context of their production is endangered-language research, where the status of the language and the changes described form part of a frame shared by both the speaker and the researcher (though these may be understood differently by each).<sup>4</sup>

Dell Hymes was drawn to work on “how we were” narratives in Northwest Coast languages (see also D. Hymes 1994) for the same reason I was drawn to look more closely at the Bethlehem story: because in addition to objectively documenting significant aspects of a lost or endangered language and culture, narratives like these represent that loss emically, from the speaker’s own cultural perspective. And as we see below, a poetic analysis of the Bethlehem text following the principles of measured verse analysis provides a rich source of evidence about the speaker’s experience of change and modernity as refracted

through the research encounter. This comes across both explicitly, through the text's content, and indexically, through aspects of its form. By walking the reader through this remarkable little text, my aim is to draw attention to the multiple, subtle, and sometimes problematic ways in which fieldworkers as cross-cultural interlocutors shape the encounters that end up reified in the documentary objects they produce. To that extent, I am applying verse analysis in one of the ways it was originally intended: as a tool to help us recover the original culturally-informed, but ultimately personal, perspective of the speaker from the textual object that we hold in our hands or view on our screens.

**2. The Bethlehem text.** The Bethlehem story, presented as text 1, was told to me in November 1998 by an Arapesh villager then in his sixties named Arnold Watiem. By the time we made the recording, Watiem and I had known each other and worked together closely for nearly a year. As we approached the end of a long work session in which Watiem related the events leading to the village's founding in a way that filled in details he felt were missing from a previous telling I had recorded, I noted aloud that only a few minutes remained on the cassette tape we were using. Watiem said that was good, because he had something he wanted to record on that last segment of tape. This turned out to be the Bethlehem story.

Scene divisions in the text (after the prefatory remarks in lines 1-3) are indicated by capital roman numerals I, II, III, stanzas by lowercase roman numerals i, ii, etc., and verses by letters a, b, etc.; verses marked with a dash (-) instead of a letter are outside the stanza structure. Verses in turn are divided into lines, continuously numbered in the left margin. My interruptions (marked by "LMD") and Watiem's direct replies to these (marked "AW") are given an extra-deep indent; all of the text other than these interruptions is uttered by Watiem. The organization of the text and the ways in which my interruptions are incorporated into it are discussed in more depth in section 4.

Like most other narratives I recorded during my fieldwork, this one was told mostly in the Cemaun dialect of Arapesh. Underlined words in the edited transcript (including the English translation) are in Tok Pisin, the creole lingua franca of Papua New Guinea and the primary language now spoken by all Cemaun villagers.<sup>5</sup> Note that in addition to the full shift into Tok Pisin that occurs at line 51, Watiem makes liberal use of Tok Pisin words and particles throughout the entire text. This kind of pervasive code-switching is a common feature of endangered-language speech (for discussion, see Dobrin and Berson 2011:191-94).

Watiem was a dear friend, and among the last generation of traditionally knowledgeable and fully fluent Arapesh speakers in his village. He, like nearly everyone else that I worked with in that generation, has since passed away.<sup>6</sup>

## Text 1. Bethlehem (by Arnold Watiem)

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1 (-) Long ago we were here  
2 and then this white woman came  
3 from some place near Bethlehem.

*Seiwɔ nimbo əpə mapwe  
okudə kwah<sup>w</sup>i kwonaki gani  
hilikum Bethlehem.*

### Scene I

(i)

4 (a) Long ago all we saw were these books—  
5 Bibles.  
6 (b) The Bibles they said—we saw what it said and we wondered:  
7 This place Bethlehem  
8 is it up above in heaven or  
9 above in the clouds perhaps?

*Seiwɔ əpə mati owudə bumeb—  
Baibel.  
Baibel wokana—kwakəri əpə mati maka  
əburədə wabur Bethlehem  
betem gairuh heven aka?  
utəg gairuh aka?*

10 (-) LMD: Are you remembering Bethlehem or Jerusalem?  
11 (-) AW: Jerusalem.  
12 Jerusalem, Bethlehem.

*LMD: Yu tingim Bethlehem o Yerushalem?  
AW: Yerushalem.  
Yerushalem, Bethlehem.*

13 (c) Long ago we thought Bethlehem was up in the clouds  
14 or maybe up above in heaven.  
15 (d) We didn't know.

*Seiwɔ maka Bethlehem gairuh utəg  
o bapwe gairuh heven.  
Əpə ino mudəkemec.*

(ii)

16 (a) For all we saw was the Bible.  
17 (b) That's what the Bible said.  
18 (c) And so we thought: is this village where they killed Jesus  
19 above or here on earth?  
20 (d) We just didn't know.

*Na əpə mati Baibel.  
Baibel kwakəri namində.  
Əriə əpə maka: əburədə wabur Jisas nimbo can  
gairuh aka atap?  
Əpə ino mudəkemec.*

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**Text 1. Bethlehem (continued)**

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Scene II

- (i)
- 21 (a) Later on, *Bihain nau,*  
22 now, *dou,*  
23 this white woman came with her husband from somewhere *okudə kwah<sup>w</sup>i konaki kwani araminen cenaki gani*  
24 near Bethlehem. *hilikim Bethlehem.*
- 25 (b) And we saw them now, and *Na dou matiric, əriə*  
26 they saw us, and we each thought: no, we're all just people. *ecec capune: wa, əpə arəpec ətic.*
- 27 (c) And we saw them and thought that, *Na əpa mati ecec namində*  
28 or they, she, the two of them saw us and thought it too. *o ecec okwok kwati ecec bieci cati apə copu namo.*  
29 (d) We are all just people. *Əpə arəpec ətic.*
- (ii)
- 30 (a) But long ago, that's not what we thought. *Na seiwə maka wa.*  
31 (b) Are they angels, or where do they live? *Ecidə enjel o capwe momam?*  
32 Is their skin white? *Cah<sup>w</sup> aka?*  
33 Are they like white people, or *Capwe abo tuagomi morim aka*  
34 are they like us, with the same skin as us? *abo apak ənəh<sup>w</sup> —ətuh agepih<sup>w</sup>?*
- 35 (c) We didn't know. *Ino mudəkemec.*  
36 (d) We just didn't know. *Əpə ino mudəkemec nau.*
- (iii)
- 37 (a) LMD: Until I came you weren't sure? *LMD: Inap mi kam yu no klia?*  
38 (b) AW: We didn't know anything about your kind. *AW: Əpə ino mudəkemum ipə.*
- 39 (c) We didn't know that you people had that kind of skin in *Əpə ino mudəkem olsem ipə namindəkih<sup>w</sup> agepih<sup>w</sup> gani*  
40 Bethlehem, or . . . *Bethlehem, o . . .*  
41 (d) We didn't know. *Ino mudəkemec.*
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**Text 1. Bethlehem (continued)**

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42 (-) LMD: And now?

LMD: *Dou?*

(iv)

43 (a) We didn't know things like that.

*Ino mudakemec namindak.*

44 (b) We were just here.

*Mapwe.*

45 (c) All we saw was what the Bible book said—  
46 and so we thought Bethlehem was above,  
47 up in the clouds.

*Mati buk Baibel mayoh wakari—  
arid maka Bethlehem napwe gairuh,  
gairuh utag.*

48 (d) Or we were just here and didn't know.

*O mapwe ino mudakemec.*

49 (-) LMD: And now do you understand?

LMD: *Nau yu klia?*

50 (-) AW: Now?

AW: *Nau?*

Scene III

(i)

51 (a) Now we understand.

*Nau mipela klia.*

52 (b) The two of you came from near this place  
53 where Jesus came down and died on the cross.

*Olsem yutupela kam klostu long dispela hap  
Jisas ikam daun bifo na idai long diwai kros.*

54 (c) And so we know.

*Olsem na mipela save.*

55 (d) We know and we say: oh, it's just the earth,  
56 it's just a place on earth.

*Mipela save na mipela tok: ah, em graun tasol,  
em ples tasol.*

(ii)

57 (a) And later William Nindim, or

*Na bihain William Nindim, o*

58 (-) LMD: Speak in the vernacular! [whispered]

LMD: *Tok ples!* [whispered]

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**Text 1. Bethlehem (continued)**

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- 59        then William Nindim and Bernard Narokobi  
60        went and visited Bethlehem,  
61        Michael Somare knew Bethlehem.  
62 (b) They saw where Jesus carried the wooden cross,  
63        where he fell and his knee-prints remain in the cement—  
64        stone.  
65 (c) They saw the Jordan River,  
66        they saw all those places.  
67        They saw what they were like,  
68        they saw the Mount of Olives.  
69 (d) They saw it all and then came back.

(iii)

- 70 (a) They showed us pictures and we thought: it's true.  
71 (b) Those are things of this earth.  
72 (c) But before we didn't know.  
73 (d) We thought those places were up in the clouds.

- bihain William Nindim nana nani Bernard Narokobi  
cena capwe Bethlehem,  
Michael Somare isave Bethlehem.  
Cati seiwɔ nimbo Jisas ənən nəsaḥ diwai kros,  
nana natu na ohurib bapwe simen—  
utom.  
Cati Wara Jordan,  
cati əribudə warib olgeta.  
Catirəb cati namin,  
cati Maunten Olive.  
Cati ihic enecenec dou cenaki.*

- Ceyabikəp aboriguh matiriguh əriə maka: tru.  
Ecec əbudə əmənəb.  
Əpə seiwək ino mudəkemec.  
Əpə maka bapwe gairuh utəg.*
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**3. How Watiem and those like him were transformed.** The Bethlehem narrative is an unambiguous instance of a “how we were” story. In it, Watiem relates how he and others like him had been unable to fully grasp the nature and location of the lands, characters, and events of the Christian Bible until they had acquired proper evidence about them through direct contact with my husband and me, who were known to them to be Jews and hence presumed to hail from those lands. Watiem thus saw himself as speaking not only to a white person or an American, but to a member of Jesus’s kin group.<sup>7</sup> This explains why he quickly reverted to Bethlehem, Jesus’s birthplace, as the defining location, despite my suggestion in line 10 that he really meant to say Jerusalem, the site of Jesus’s death and resurrection: *Yu tingim Bethlehem o Yerushalem?* ‘Are you remembering Bethlehem or Jerusalem?’ Watiem knew that Jesus was Jewish, so, according to an Arapesh logic of belonging, his village of origin must therefore be seated, as must mine, upon Jewish lands. Note that Watiem is attributing this transformative encounter not to himself as an individual, but to himself as part of a group, presumably the group whose ways he thought I meant to document. It is later implied that this group includes a pair of village men who were respected for their success in business and politics (William Nindim and Bernard Narokobi in lines 57–59), and a political leader who hails from elsewhere in the Sepik region of Papua New Guinea (Michael Somare, the country’s first prime minister, in line 61). But regardless of who exactly he meant to include (himself and his fellow villagers, Arapesh people, people from the Sepik, or all Papua New Guineans), at no point does Watiem adopt the voice of a first person singular *ei(k)* ‘I, me’.<sup>8</sup> The protagonist is the collectivity indexed by *əpə(k)* ‘we, us’, and the main event that transpires in the story is a change in this collectivity’s understanding of its place in the global order.

Melanesian narratives differ in style from Western ones in a number of ways, and knowing something about these differences can help us make sense of what Watiem chooses to focus on (Scaglione 2007). As elsewhere in Melanesia, Arapesh epistemology puts special emphasis on knowledge gained through immediate experience—information is only trustworthy when one has acquired it firsthand (see also Bashkow 2000; Dobrin and Bashkow 2010). Though their language has no grammaticized evidentials, Arapesh speakers do have discursive ways of indicating that events they relate are known to them firsthand. Among these are the citation of proper names of places, such as the Jordan River and the Mount of Olives in lines 65 and 68, and indications of the speaker’s ability to interpret features of the landscape like the stones bearing imprints of Jesus’ knees in lines 62–64. To a Western reader, the narrative may have an air of incompleteness due to Watiem’s failure to offer any overt commentary on the meaning of the story’s main events (though such commentary is clearly implicit in the narrative’s structure, to be discussed further below). He has determined, after a lifetime of misapprehension, that Biblical events occurred at an earthly

location, but what makes him so eager to report this change in his state of knowledge is never mentioned. There are two things to say about this. One is that Melanesian audiences do not generally expect the implications of narrated events to be laid out for them. As William Labov (1972) has shown, expression of evaluative stance is a key component of Western narrative structure, conveying to the audience why a story of personal experience is being told. But Melanesians subscribe to what has sometimes been called a “listener-centered” model of communication that puts considerably more onus on listeners to draw inferences from the speech they hear (Kulick and Stroud 1990; Silverstein 1998; Robbins 2001). The other point to note is that knowledge of other social groups, especially their esoteric or religious knowledge—myths, magic, rituals, and so on, is frequently construed as a precious resource in Melanesia, one whose circulation is carefully guarded for its value as a source of power (Harrison 2006: 16–26). So from that perspective Watiem’s story of acquired insight into the nature of Biblical events is inherently of interest, just as a story relating how the narrator found a hundred-dollar bill would inherently be of interest to a Western audience.

The temporal ordering of events in Watiem’s story also requires some comment. Although no indication of this is given in the text, the visits to the Holy Land by respected local leaders described in scene III actually took place long before my arrival in the village. From the speaker’s point of view, then, the story has a nonlinear temporal profile, moving backwards in time from scene II, when my husband and I arrive, to scene III, when the travelers share with him their reports and photographs of what they saw on their visits to the Holy Land. This would appear to contradict the “no flashback” observation made by Labov (1997) that narrators do not generally shift out of sequence to provide information about prior events, but instead present information in the order that it became known to them. Once we recognize the cultural importance of firsthand experience for creating reliable knowledge, however, we can see that the proper evaluation (and hence authoritative ownership) of the information did in fact come later. The photos Watiem saw and the reports he heard may have been suggestive, but they could not provide a reliable basis for knowledge until they had been confirmed by his own personal contact with actual Jewish people at a later point in time. Here again, then, we find information about epistemological source embedded in the structure of Arapesh narrative discourse.<sup>9</sup>

As with the photos and reports of the Holy Land, the Bible—a mere book—constitutes only the most tenuous source of evidence for Watiem. This makes it difficult for him to interpret its assertions; as he says, *Seiwɔ əpə mati owudə bumeb—/Baibel* ‘Long ago all we saw were these books—the Bible’ (lines 4–5; also 16–17, 45). Even though the Bible is revered by many Christians as an authoritative text, the written word can be an awkward source of spiritual knowledge for those not steeped in a literate culture. Webb Keane has described

how the ambiguous authority of the written word is a concern for people negotiating Christianity on the Indonesian island of Sumba, where the traditional Marapu religion rests upon very different ideas of how language serves to mediate between human action and the spiritual world. In contrast to Protestant Christianity, which takes the Bible to be a critical vehicle for the transmission of religious knowledge, Marapu religion links the present actions of the priests to the power of ancestors through the use of ritual speech. In expressing his skepticism, one Marapu priest put it this way: “those Christians, all they have is a book. This book can be destroyed, or again its handiwork can fade” (Keane 2007:192). Similar sentiments are expressed by members of a Zimbabwean apostolic church, who reject the Bible as a mere object, a “physical obstacle” to the “live and direct faith” they seek (Engelke 2007:7). In other traditionally oral societies, the incorporation of written texts into people’s daily lives has resulted in the development of new communicative practices. As Bambi Schieffelin has shown, the introduction of literacy through Christian activities and schooling has led Bosavi people in Papua New Guinea to depart from their traditional cultural epistemology and not only accept written texts of various sorts as authoritative knowledge sources, but even to embed this acceptance in their linguistic system through the use of innovated evidential markers specifically indexing “information that is new, true and only known through the written word” (1996:447–48). The Bosavi case represents a different resolution to the same fundamental problem that Watiem and the Sumbanese Marapu faced: how to assess and communicate their confidence in the words of an object in a society where the power of speech was until recently held only by people.

As he tells in his story, Watiem formerly believed Biblical sites to be located not on earth, but somewhere “above” in heaven, the sky, or the clouds: *Seiwo maka Bethlehem gairuh utag* ‘Long ago we thought Bethlehem was up in the clouds’ (line 13). While at one level this might be taken to indicate that Watiem had a confused map of the cosmos, his confusion cannot be dismissed as merely a personal idiosyncrasy; as Jerry Jacka (2005) and Joel Robbins (2009) have observed, other Papua New Guineans are also inclined to locate sacred places associated with Christianity in a transcendent, rather than an earthly, realm. What makes this belief sensible and appealing to those who hold it? And why does it feature so centrally in Watiem’s narrative? The inclination to etherealize Biblical locations undoubtedly follows in part from the highly positive meaning Papua New Guineans attribute to movement across distance, coupled with their cultural assumptions about the nature of the historical process that construct social change as dramatic and total (see, e.g., Errington 1974; Kulick 1992). These ideas shape and are, of course, in turn shaped by people’s experiences of globalization, which so often leaves them feeling poor and powerless despite the possibilities for betterment (economic development, education, medical care, and so on) that their new global interconnectedness would seem to present. Rural

Papua New Guineans “have come to recognize some version of a global hierarchy of places” in which “the places where work is plentiful and food and shelter and medicine are easy to acquire . . . are far away and maximally different from home. And just as their [own local] social maps . . . put the highest value on those places most distant from where they live, so too do the [Christian] cosmological maps they have adopted devalue their earthly dwelling places” as backward, focusing their desires for improvement on an alternate plane that is far away, purely positive in moral valence, and identified with the future (Robbins 2009:63). But whereas the protagonists of Robbins’s and Jacka’s stories are deeply disappointed to learn that Jerusalem is just an ordinary earthly place because they feel this consigns them to a condition of immobility and stasis, Watiem seems to be quite comfortable—even pleased—with his realization that Bethlehem is *ples tasol* ‘just a place (on earth)’ (line 56). It is as if the knowledge he gained through our encounter symbolically metamorphosed him out of his subordinate position in the global order, allowing him to speak about that order from its apex with a new authority as a modern subject. As we see below, this interpretation of Watiem’s transformation finds support in formal features of the story, the topic to which we now turn.

**4. The rhetorical architecture of Watiem’s narrative.** Like other Arapesh oral narratives, the Bethlehem text is organized poetically into verses, stanzas, and scenes. After an initial abstract anticipating the story’s main events (lines 1–3), the story presents three scenes. Each is introduced formally with a temporal marker: Arapesh *seiwo* ‘long ago’ (line 1), Tok Pisin *bihain nau* ‘later on’ (line 21), and Tok Pisin *nau* ‘now’ (line 51). These represent three distinct eras in the narrator’s understanding, the development of which is the action driving the story. Each scene is composed in turn of two or three stanzas “measuring out” or grouping verses into sets of four.<sup>10</sup> The stanzas represent the significant “chunks” or units into which Arapesh speakers package their narration of events in the course of telling a story.

I have found the four-verse stanza to be a recurrent pattern in Arapesh oral narrative. However, its internal organization rarely follows the “this, then that” pattern that Hymes finds for groupings of twos and fours in Native American languages (D. Hymes 2003; for an especially clear illustration of this pattern in a Wishram text, see D. Hymes 1981:98). Instead, many Arapesh groupings of four could better be described as “three plus one”—the stanza-final verse does not move the narrative forward, but reasserts what was said in a previous verse or sums up the state at the end of the events related, indicating where things stand at that point in the story. This gives many stanzas a rhythm of “one, two, three, so it was.” In the Bethlehem story, the first verse typically sets the stage for further narrative progression by placing the events in time or space, or by describing an initial state or situation as background for the immediately

ensuing actions. Until the story's third scene, the point at which Watiem has his insight and everything changes, this initial state is repeatedly one of limited and unreliable experience, e.g., *na apə mati Baibel* 'For all we saw was the Bible' (line 16), and *ino mudəkemec namindək* 'we didn't know things like that' (line 43). The refrain *ino mudəkemec* 'we didn't know', with its implied negative moral self-evaluation, is repeated no less than eight times in the course of the short text, prominently positioned in over half those instances in a stanza-final verse (lines 15, 20, 36, 41, 48). The presence of such a summation is generally an indicator that we are at or near the end of a stanza.

For another example, consider text 2, a segment from a videotaped interview extracted from the documentary film *Cannibal Tours* (O'Rourke 1987).<sup>11</sup> The segment exhibits a rhythmic structure remarkably similar to that just described for Arapesh, though the speaker in this case is from the middle Sepik River region where the vernaculars belong to the genetically distinct Sepik family of languages, and he is using Tok Pisin. The segment lends itself readily to the same analysis as an Arapesh stanza with its summary refrain.

**Text 2. Excerpt from *Cannibal Tours* (O'Rourke 1987)**

---

- 1 (a) So with regard to our situation  
 2 with regard to the way we live  
 3 they read all about it in books,  
 4 and that's why I think the tourists come.  
 5 (b) Is our way of life like in olden times,  
 6 like that of our fathers and ancestors?  
 7 Are we civilized or not?  
 8 (c) They want to find out so they come.  
 9 (d) That's what I think.
- 1 (a) *Orait na, nau istap bilong mi*  
 2 *wanem sindaun bilong mi*  
 3 *na ol ifainim fainim long buk igo igo igo nau*  
 4 *ating ol lain turis ikam.*  
 5 (b) *Na sindaun bilong mi tu bilong bipo yet*  
 6 *long papa na tumbuna?*  
 7 *Na mi sindaun gutpela o mi sindaun nogut?*  
 8 (c) *Ol ilaik fainim olsem na ikam.*  
 9 (d) *Mi ting olsem.*
- 

Compare the organization of this stretch of speech to Watiem's second stanza in scene II of text 1 (lines 30–36). Both set out the initial state in the first verse, follow it with a series of questions in the second verse, and provide a conclusion in the third verse. In both cases the final slot in the rhythmic structure is filled with material that wraps up the stanza and gives it a feeling of completeness without contributing new information. In both examples, the last verse also carries an intonational fall.<sup>12</sup>



Recognizing that Watiem is actively shaping his talk using the rhetorical building blocks of stanzas provides us with a powerful resource for recognizing how my interruptions during his storytelling affect the resulting text. Remarkably, my questions are assimilated into the four-verse stanza structure, so that the narrative organization cannot be accurately comprehended apart from my contributions as listener.<sup>13</sup> This is true even though these interruptions give the interaction what Mannheim and Tedlock would call “the rough, asynchronous character” of a “failed encounter” (1995:14). Watiem assimilates my talk into his narrative in several different ways. In line 10 in scene I, I interrupt him in the middle of his second stanza. He responds, getting my question out of the way, and then finishes off the stanza by providing it with two more verses. In line 37, by contrast, my query comes at the end of a stanza. Watiem adopts it as the start of a new stanza, responds in lieu of a second verse, and then offers two more verses—again, actively shaping his response and ensuing talk to get the narration back on track from the point of view of his rhetorical goals. These examples show how researchers as interlocutors spark “the coalescence of a variety of phenomena related to identity negotiation and language use,” making them “impossible to ignore in the data analysis” (De Fina 2011:29). Simply in their role as listeners, researchers are social actors who can powerfully affect the form of texts they elicit as these emerge over interactional time.

The entirety of scene III seems to stand as the answer to the query I make in line 49. This is where Watiem shifts away from saying what he did not know in the past to saying what he does know now. As one often finds at or near a narrative climax, this segment of text is highly elaborated. The penultimate stanza is especially drawn out; it is certainly the longest stanza in the text in terms of number of lines, with its final verse in line 69, *cati ihic enecenec dou cenaki* ‘they saw it all and then they came back’, summing up the series of confirmatory ‘knowing’ and ‘seeing’ events enumerated in lines 59–68 and providing a conclusive restatement of the phrase *cati/catir*– ‘they saw’ in the preceding lines. The beginning of scene III is also the point at which Watiem shifts into Tok Pisin, the modern language that befits the story’s valued end state—having acquired powerful knowledge that has its provenance in distant others. In his ethnography of language shift in the Sepik village of Gapun, Don Kulick (1992) analyzes the assimilation of Tok Pisin into the villagers’ linguistic repertoire as reflecting a radical reconceptualization of their sense of personhood, with Tok Pisin and the local vernacular language mapped onto a series of new social oppositions that developed in the wake of colonial encompassment—modern vs. jungle savages, Christian vs. pagan, educated vs. ignorant. The root opposition Kulick posits is between the indigenous moral notions of *hed*, a selfish insistence on personal autonomy, and *save*, social awareness and cooperation. While I never heard Arapesh villagers elaborate a *hed-save* opposition in quite the way Gapun villagers do, there is no doubt about the general correctness of Kulick’s

overall analysis for the Arapesh language shift situation. Contemporary Arapesh villagers, too, are using Tok Pisin to symbolically associate themselves with powerful others. For Watiem, those others are white Europeans. Watiem once commented to me that he and his fellow villagers now mostly speak a European language, the language of Germany—a reference to Tok Pisin. When I suggested that no, the language they speak in Germany is quite different from Tok Pisin, he was taken aback; as someone who purported to be a student of languages, he said, I really should be better informed! I decided at the time that it was best to let the matter drop, but this revelation about Watiem's linguistic self-understanding has implications for language shift. His use of Tok Pisin was no mere practical matter, enabling him to communicate with people whose languages he did not command. It was a symbolic appropriation of what he believed to be a distinctively Western form of cultural capital.

In line with this, returning to the text, we can dismiss the suggestion that Watiem's shift to Tok Pisin at the start of scene III was prompted by my own use of Tok Pisin in the question to which he was responding, *Nau yu klia?* 'And now do you understand?' in line 49, as it does not adequately capture the psychosocial motive for his code selection. For one thing, my utterances were in Tok Pisin throughout the entire text (as indeed they were throughout the longer interaction that framed our collaboration on this recording). That would make this the only point in the narration at which Watiem took my code choice as a prompt for his own, something that would in turn call for explanation. It was normal and natural for villagers of Watiem's generation to be addressed in Tok Pisin by their juniors regardless of what language they were speaking at the moment; it was also common for older speakers like Watiem to respond in the vernacular to me in particular in acknowledgment of the effort I was investing in learning their language. Finally, the prompting analysis fails to account for the fact that throughout the text, whenever Watiem speaks of not knowing he always does so in Arapesh (using Arapesh *-dəkem* 'know' as opposed to Tok Pisin *save* 'know' or *kliā* 'understand, be clear'); this is in contrast to statements of knowing, which he makes in Tok Pisin. This is the case not only in the Tok Pisin stanza at the beginning of scene III, but in the stanzas that follow, despite the fact that by that stage in the narration he had again returned to using Arapesh as the matrix language: *Michael Somare isave Bethlehem* 'Michael Somare knew Bethlehem' in line 61, as well as the interjection *tru* 'it's true' in line 70.<sup>14</sup>

From one point of view, we can analyze the narrative moment at the start of scene III as kind of a breakthrough into performance happening in reverse—that is, a situation in which the speaker reverts from or lapses out of a performative mode and speaks instead in relation only to the scaled-down context of the immediate interaction. In order to make clear what I mean by this, it will help to review the canonical example of emergent performance I take from the

literature for comparison. In his effort to develop a framework for analyzing “the subtle relation between traditional material and its contemporary use” (1981: 80), Dell Hymes carefully considers a range of ways in which an instance of cultural behavior could transition from a simple act of “just doing something” to an act of performance in which the speaker not only reveals his or her cultural knowledge, but in an act of identity assumes responsibility to an audience for that body of cultural knowledge (1981:80). During a summer working on Chinookan language and culture with Philip Kahclamet of the Warm Springs Indian community in Oregon, Kahclamet told Hymes a traditional myth. This was an unusual event, as Kahclamet had internalized a view of his own narration skills as deficient relative to those of his forebears. Hymes identifies the trajectory of this narration, which began in English and ended in Wishram, as Kahclamet being moved to adopt the voice of a “speaker of Wishram.” Breaking through into performance, Kahclamet momentarily threw aside the immediate context—working with Hymes on grammar and lexicon—and fully inhabited his role as a traditional speaker, taking responsibility for his speech as a Wishram speaker and storyteller in a way he was previously unwilling or unable to do.

Fortunately for my purposes, the role of vernacular speaker was one that Watiem and other fluent villagers inhabited without much difficulty. In his narration of the Bethlehem story, Watiem’s willingness to adopt the voice of a speaker of Arapesh was motivated by our joint decision to make the recording in line with his abilities, our friendship, and my interest in the language. From my perspective, his reversion to Tok Pisin, the language in which he conducted most of his daily affairs, implied a momentary confusion, a casual slip out of an authentic performance of Arapesh speech. But although I had only the vaguest awareness of it at the time, Watiem was making a declaration of profound personal importance: that as a result of our encounter he had achieved an intimate familiarity with Christianity and modernity that had changed him.<sup>15</sup> And when he spoke about this with the greatest level of emotional involvement he did so not in the voice of an Arapesh villager, but in the voice of a modern person, one who speaks the “European language” Tok Pisin. In other words, from Watiem’s point of view, the shift to Tok Pisin was a breakthrough into performance, not a breakaway from it. It was the point in the narration at which content and form merged in a presentation of a modern self who commanded knowledge of things far away. But Arnold Watiem’s authentic speaking voice did not form part of my narrative; I understood our joint task as to produce information about a particular linguistic code. So in line 58, I whispered to him to *tok ples* ‘speak in the vernacular’. And to the best of his ability, for the remainder of his narration he did.

In returning to my field recordings now for purposes of analysis, this feature of the recorded interactions stands out painfully clearly: my regular urging to narrators who had reflexively switched to Tok Pisin to go back to speaking

Arapesh. People were always cheerful in accommodating these requests; they even came to anticipate them, at times catching themselves (or one another) and self-correcting as they shifted to Tok Pisin. But in fostering this kind of meta-linguistic awareness, I was asking speakers to adjust their approach to using linguistic resources to culturally foreign ideas about the proper distribution of languages as codes, keeping them separate in ways they did not always feel necessary, and even though doing so was in conflict with their goals as aspiring citizens of the world. In this way, our friendly research interactions discursively embodied the same relationship of moral encompassment that has characterized Arapesh relations with Europeans in one form or another since the days of first contact, a pattern that current conservation and development activities—including language documentation projects—often replicate, if in subtler and less intentional ways (LiPuma 2001; Dobrin 2008).<sup>16</sup>

There are yet other ways in which my interventions unconsciously shaped the experience of the speakers whose narratives I recorded. Many of the texts I collected start with a preface that I have only recently come to understand, much less even hear. Representative examples from three different speakers, each excerpted from a separate recording, are shown in (1)–(3).

- (1) *Lise ko kudakemecum mare origeh hatagirumei.*

‘Lise wants to know about how I got sick.’

- (2) *Lise kwakəri asidə—əpində—əpidə sap, ino sap, olsem, adir, ei yaka ine storiumok.*

‘Lise wants [to hear] these—this—this tale, well not exactly tale, I mean, it’s true, and so I am going to tell it for her.’

- (3) *Əpə mapwe, Lise ku ətə kwapwe.*

‘We were sitting here, where Lise lives now.’

In each case, the speaker introduces his or her text with a third person reference to me. Given that in some of these recording sessions I was the only other person present, the references to me in the third person require some explanation. If I am third person, who is the addressee? Was there some other presumed audience on the other side of the recorder? Indeed there was. These seemingly odd prefaces follow naturally when we wind the tape back a little further and consider the kinds of things you hear me say before offering the speaker the floor.

OK here we are on Christmas Eve, December 24, 1998. And I have been with this group of people now for a year [aside to speaker: I’ve been with you all for a year!]. OK Scola is going to tell a story about something that happened in the past, when Timothy was still a baby and he fell into the latrine. All right, so you tell your story.<sup>17</sup>

This introductory remark is the so-called “lead” that researchers are sometimes urged to record at the beginning of each session with the intention of helping focus the narrator’s thoughts on the session’s goals (see, e.g., Oral History Association 2009). Of course, this sets up the interaction as a three-way affair, explicitly invoking what is always implicit when one speaks for a recorder—an imagined audience at some other place and time (Bauman 1986). Given that “identity construction is a dialogic and reciprocal process in which . . . the kinds of identities that people present crucially depend on who they understand their interlocutors to be” (De Fina 2011:30), we must ask ourselves then: Who is this imagined audience comprised of? Where are they? What are they imagined to be listening for? And what, above all, is their relation to the power and resources that communities symbolically mobilize when they take up other languages and allow their vernaculars to languish?

**5. Conclusion.** One aim of this article has been to illustrate the utility of ethnopoetic analysis for enriching our understanding of the ways in which narrative texts are not simply collected but actively (if not consciously) produced over the course of the documentation process. By showing how this is so and what the consequences are for the textual objects that result, the analysis extends into the domain of language documentation and endangered-language linguistics the compelling arguments for attending to rhetorical structure made by Anthony Woodbury (1985) from the point of view of traditional language description. As readers who listen to the audio recording of the Bethlehem story will find, the text’s rhetorical architecture cannot be apprehended from the recording alone; the patterns I have identified cannot be “read” directly off the sound stream any more than the morphemes can. Stanza structure is also obscured by a visual representation of the transcript that takes the form of a standard line-by-line interlinear glossing as prose—as well as by an idealized written form that attempts to “clean up” or “improve” the text by editing out the interruptions or embedding within it additional information (see discussion of the Ehiwac text below). Only a transcription that draws out the text’s rhetorical structure as it unfolded can reveal the strategies by which Watiem manages his self-expression in light of my requests for clarification and other interruptions. And it provides a window into an enduring document’s historical source in a transitory, though as we have seen quite consequential, interaction. So ethnopoetic “annotations” have the potential to add value to recorded speech in particularly helpful ways. In order to make this point somewhat more general, I include in the appendix an Arapesh text I call “*Ehiwac*,” along with a few words of commentary. Besides providing another illustration by another speaker of Arapesh narrative built upon the four-verse stanza, the analysis shows how later “corrections” that arose out of consultation with the speaker disrupt the original

narrative flow. This is discernable even though this text was originally dictated rather than audiorecorded.

My other aim has been to highlight the implicitly dialogic nature of even monologic speech forms. The texts we collect when we document a language represent more than the speaker's knowledge of particular grammatical systems and the stable cultural content they can convey; they are always also forms of interaction that carry along with them contexts, messages, aspirations for contact, and addressees. For this reason, it seems that speaker's "voice" ought to be an important concept for documentary researchers to incorporate into their analytic repertoires—at least as important as the concept of endangered "voices" that is so frequently appealed to today. Speakers are never just talking; they are always also representing themselves to someone (Joseph 2004). This is something we all do in culturally particular ways, using rhetorical resources acquired in our speech communities and reflecting concerns that are at once cultural and personal. So we cannot assume we know what people are doing when they choose to perform for our recorders. We have to ask, not through interviews, but by means of analysis: what are the narrators of the endangered-language texts we collect really trying to say?

### Appendix

The text in this appendix, which I call "*Ehiwac*," was volunteered by the late Matthew Rahiria. It was dictated by Rahiria and transcribed on paper by myself as he spoke. The text describes how the *ehiwac* spirits that expressed their displeasure with human actions by making people sick could be enjoined to relent through offerings by ritual specialists (some general discussion of these and similar spirits, called *masalai* in Tok Pisin, is provided by Mead [1933, 1940:341–43, 391–94] and Slone [2001:xxv–xxvi]). Scenes and verses are indicated in the same format as in text 1; stanzas do not need to be indicated, since no scene contains more than one stanza. Line 30 is marked with a dash to indicate that it is outside the scene structure. (The bracketed asterisk in line 14 marks the place where additional material was inserted in a later editing of the text; see the discussion below.)

As does Watiem's Bethlehem text, Rahiria's "*Ehiwac*" thematizes the divergence between the modern present and traditional past. The text's final stanza explains how the cultural practices surrounding *ehiwac* have now ceased due to the intervention of missionaries and Western medicine. At the time of the dictation, Rahiria had just retired from a career as a teacher and school principal. The proficiency in English ways of speaking he had gained through a life spent in and around Papua New Guinea's English-only community schools was evident in his ability to speak an unusually pure form of his own vernacular. The few Tok Pisin terms he uses are all borrowed nouns for which no Arapesh equivalent exists. Rahiria's text is also informationally very dense, making frequent use of syntactic embedding (in contrast to the Bethlehem text, which uses very

little). These special qualities made him a superior linguistic informant, someone ideally positioned to transmit his linguistic knowledge to an outsider.

The characteristic Arapesh stanza structure is readily detected in Rahiria's short text. The text is comprised of three scenes plus a final coda, with each scene consisting of a single four-verse stanza. (Indeed we might interpret "*Ehiwac*" as a kind of minimal story, a minimal projection of the characteristically Arapesh three-plus-one stanza at the higher rhetorical level of scenes.) The first and third scenes are initiated by temporal particles: *seiwok* 'long ago' in line 1, and *dou* 'today' in line 21. In scene III, *dou(k)* is repeated no less than five times, lending dramatic prominence to the temporal dimension of the contrast that is described. Scene II emerges as a unit by parallelism to the others (it, too, consists of four verses), and by its coherent expansion of the narrative from the point of view of the ritual specialist's actions in the masalai place. In general, each verse corresponds to a sentence. In the one case where this does not hold, the verse comprises a single turn at talk—Rahiria's depiction of what the missionaries said in lines 24–28.

Most interesting in the context of the discussion here is the fact that later emendations that Rahiria and I made in order to clarify the logic behind the narrated events caused a distortion in the rhythm of the original oral narration. This is so even though the text was dictated rather than audiorecorded. As Dell Hymes saw it, the power verse analysis provides to detect such "improvements" is one of its great benefits, because it allows us to restore for the historical record some of the implicit organizational and aesthetic qualities of a text that contribute to its cultural meaning (see also Blommaert 2006:8–10). At the bracketed asterisk in line 14, Rahiria and I agreed to insert some additional text (not shown in the text as it appears below) in order to answer an anticipated question: why did the ritual specialist get up after seeing a flying creature alight on the gifts? (The answer, we decided, was that he would now know "that the *ehiwac* have accepted the stuff. And so he would say okay.") While this additional information might be helpful to readers unfamiliar with Arapesh ritual practices, editing the text this way (as opposed to, say, indicating the additional information in the associated commentary) would also have the effect of creating an extra verse ex nihilo, disrupting the culturally expected flow of narration by causing the stanza structure to splice and fray. (The edited version of the text can be viewed at [www.arapesh.org/sample\\_texts\\_ehiwac.php](http://www.arapesh.org/sample_texts_ehiwac.php). Scene II corresponds to lines 36–79 in that version.) However, this effect is completely invisible until we realize that the narrator was actually being guided by a rhetorical model as he spoke. For this reason, "showing the bones of the narrative" (D. Hymes 2003:321) through ethnopoetic analysis enables us to see a kind of value in texts that goes beyond the evidence they provide for grammatical structure and beyond the information content they convey.

## Ehiwac (by Matthew Rahiria)

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### Scene I

- 1 (a) Long ago our grandfathers said  
2 in some parts of the jungles and rivers  
3 there were masalai.  
4 (b) Masalai are like spirits that made people sick.  
5 (c) Now when a person or child was sick,  
6 they would go tell this person  
7 who knew how to hang things up.  
8 (d) And this person would get up and take some money  
9 or some shell rings or a few ornaments  
10 and go to where the masalai lived.

*Seiwok babenomi hakəri  
ənombi urah hani woribis  
ehiwac capwe.  
Ehiwac cakəri səgəbehem həkec ərigehi.  
Dou ənəp ərəpən aka batowip nerauborum,  
ətə cina cikirip epinde arəpən  
nadikemecum nicaurumec.  
Ədiə epində arəpən nikita nihir ənəbər utəbər  
aka ənec yuwahəes aka atuh<sup>w</sup>-atuh<sup>w</sup> siruh<sup>w</sup>  
ətə nina gani ehiwac capweum.*

### Scene II

- 11 (a) Then he would hang up this stuff and sit down and watch.  
12 (b) Should he sit and see a bird, dragonfly, or butterfly come,  
13 appear and rest upon this stuff,  
14 then this person who knows the supplicating magic [\*]  
15 would get up, take down the stuff,  
16 and carry it back to the village.  
17 (c) Then he'd go and tell them: alright,  
18 the masalai have taken the stuff,  
19 they took the stuff I hung up for them.  
20 (d) And the man, woman, or child who was sick would get well.

*Ədiə nuwaur əhidə jah ədiə nipe nitik.  
nipe niti ənər arəmır, coburon, aka ih<sup>w</sup> autebir cinaki,  
cikihi citem iruh<sup>w</sup>ihəm jah,  
ədiə epində arəpən nene piripirəsi [\*]  
nikitak nibure jah nисуwəh  
əriə nina wabir.  
Ətə nina nikəripec nakana: wosik,  
ehiwac igə cəhir jah,  
gə cəhir yahaurumeci jah.  
Ətə ənən okwok aka batowip neraubori ətə sourep.*

### Scene III

- 21 (a) Today in this time we no longer do these things.  
22 (b) If a person is sick today  
23 they will go get medicine at the health center.

*Dou əbidə nitəb mundai mone ecide enecenec uwe.  
Arəpən nerauborum douk  
ətə nina nirau marasin gani hausik.*

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***Ehiwac (continued)***

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24 (c) Now missionaries have come and said:  
25 these things are not true.

26 Now you should believe in one god.

27 These bad things are false  
28 and so you should not do them.

29 (d) And so now we do not do them.

*Douk misinari cenaki cakana:*

*ecide enecenec mundai adiric uwe.*

*Douk ətə pine urukumum ətin got nape.*

*Ecide enecenec yoweici giagikic*

*ətə mare pinekec.*

*Əriə douk mundai monekec uwe.*

30 (-) This is the end of my talk about masalai spirits.

*Ehiwaciŋ borəŋ eŋidək ətiŋ.*

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### Notes

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*Transcription.* The transcription used here for Cemaun Arapesh speech is roughly phonemic, and follows the conventions described at [www.arapesh.org/grammar\\_phonology.php](http://www.arapesh.org/grammar_phonology.php). The only substantial departure from typical IPA values for the symbols are *c* and *j*, which are used to indicate the voiceless and voiced palate-alveolar affricates (IPA [tʃ] and [dʒ]). Tok Pisin elements are underlined.

1. The structuralist orientation of linguistics creates challenges for endangered-language research in a number of ways; see Himmelmann (2008) for discussion.

2. Documentary linguists are only just beginning to discuss methods for annotating oral speech in a fully oral medium; see, e.g., Boerger (2011).

3. Tedlock (1983:302–22) discusses another instance in which a speaker insists on the researcher recording his performance, though the speaker’s motives seem to be of a rather different kind from the ones described here.

4. An analogous argument has been made for interviewing, which calls upon respondents to do the “accounting work” of presenting themselves in a morally appropriate light relative to the interview’s participant frame and topic (see Rapley 2001).

5. Tok Pisin forms are not underlined when they are proper names or when they are incorporated into the Arapesh morphologically. Hesitations and false starts are not transcribed, except when they introduce new material or affect the translation (e.g., *simen—utom* ‘cement—stone’ in lines 63–64, or *Baibel wokana—kwakəri* ‘Bible they . . . it said’ in line 6).

6. The recording can be listened to online at [www.arapesh.org/sample\\_texts\\_bethlehem.php](http://www.arapesh.org/sample_texts_bethlehem.php). I am indebted to Douglas Ross of the University of Virginia’s Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities for his careful formatting of the text for online presentation.

7. As is discussed by Engelke (2007:254 n.10), an “interest in Hebrew and Judaism is . . . evident in the African Christian imagination” as well.

8. This is despite the fact that my responses to him consistently employ the second person singular pronoun *yu*, constructing his narrative as about him as an individual.

9. Western Apache grammar has a dedicated evidential particle for precisely this situation, where “a post factum inference is made on the basis of something that the speaker had previously witnessed but could only have made all the right inferences about later” (Aikhenvald 2003:12). As de Reuse (2003:87–88) explains, contemporary Apache narrators now regularly substitute this ‘past deferred realization’ particle for the quotative marker that was historically used to indicate that the tale or myth being told had been acquired firsthand from a particular (unnamed) individual. Why? Again the

explanation follows from considerations of speaker authority. Stories are now often learned at school, from written documents, or from multiple partial sources; they may also be invented. Without the authorizing power of the traditional process of transmission, speakers can only establish their authority performatively, by virtue of their own storytelling. Hence, the realization of speaker authority is deferred.

10. The logic of the text's stanza structure is central to my analysis, and for this reason I discuss the identification and grouping of verses in some detail here. Nothing in my argument hinges the internal organization of verses, however, and their division into numbered lines on the page reflects expediency (e.g., accommodating the space available in the column) at least as much as it does principle. In some cases line breaks are made at the location of pauses for want of a more compelling location (such as *gani / hilikum Bethlehem* in lines 2–3, or *owudə bumb— / Baibel* in lines 4–5), though a number of these pauses are speaker hesitations not grounded in any principled way in the rhetorical architecture of the text. The stretches of speech I identify with stanzas are frequently (though not always) accompanied by an intonational fall at the end. But pause, while on occasion helpful, does not turn out to be a reliable guide to Arapesh textual structure. See D. Hymes (1981:337–41) for discussion of the limits of paralinguistic cues as a resource for apprehending poetic organization.

11. The segment can be viewed online at [www.arapesh.org/sample\\_texts\\_video.php](http://www.arapesh.org/sample_texts_video.php).

12. The “one, two, three, so it was” pattern may well be a Sepik-wide phenomenon. It would be worth studying its intersection with other areal discourse properties, such as tail-head linkage, where the final verb of a clause is recapitulated in some form at the start of the following clause as a way of marking thematic continuity (see, e.g., de Vries 2005).

13. Woodbury similarly describes a cooperative dialogue between Central Alaskan Yupik speakers as an “interaction between the narrator and the audience . . . regulated by rhetorical structure” (1985:178). Scollon and Scollon (1979:66–72) also discuss audience influence on narrative structure, drawing out the implications of the phenomenon for researchers collecting texts.

14. I am indebted to Paul Kroeber (p.c. 2011) for this observation.

15. In its personal revelatory function, Watiem's Bethlehem narrative bears a certain similarity to the Wishram “Winter Bathing” text analyzed by Silverstein (1996). Edward Sapir (1909) had categorized the text as a straightforward documentary account of past customs. Instead, Silverstein argues, it is an effort on the part of the speaker, Pete McGuff, to do something culturally particular yet also deeply personal: to explain why he lacks spirit power, an observation that was a source of curiosity and perhaps anxiety for him in self-conceptualization as Indian.

16. It is sometimes observed that positive, sustained attention by a researcher can in itself raise a language's estimation in the eyes of the community. While this might be cause for celebration if it leads to the revitalization of an endangered language, it nevertheless represents another way in which linguistic behavior acquires political value according to the terms set by outsiders; see Thurston (1987:62–64) for discussion of this phenomenon.

17. The excerpt is translated from the Tok Pisin original.

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