

Negotiating Genres in Managalase (PNG) Political Discourse

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Recent developments in Cognitive Linguistics have extended the scope of analysis from the unobservable cognitive processing of language by individuals to studies of social, publically observable interaction (Hougaard 2008), and an appreciation of the social context of interaction in “communities of practice” (Croft 2009). Within cultural traditions, genres - the recurrent social use of language, frame the productive and receptive assumptions of speakers and their audiences (Miller 1984; Sinding 2002; Sinding 2005). Cognitive Linguistic approaches to interaction (Hougaard 2005; Hougaard 2008; Hougaard and Oakley 2008; Oakley and Hougaard 2008) assume that participants establish a shared cognitive representation expressed as mutual or shared knowledge or distributed cognition (Hutchins 2006) to account for the understandings of the participants. While this assumption may be true for many forms of discourse, shared understandings are the product, rather than the starting point in one genre – negotiation.

In this paper, based on recordings and transcriptions of conversational interaction in negotiations among Managalase speakers (Papua New Guinea) using the allegorical genre “ha’a”, I will examine the roles of speakers and audiences in establishing intention in discourse. In interchanges using ha’a, identification and acceptance of the genre of the speech is negotiated as part of the political negotiation. Speakers use the indirect route of allegory to avoid making their intentions explicit thereby avoiding the possibility of a public rejection of their positions. Listeners must decide, based on their interpretation of the potential allegory, if they will engage in the negotiations or reject the hidden intentions of the speaker and deny that the story was allegorical.

This paper will examine the limitations placed on “mindreading” and shared knowledge by local Managalase language ideology and cultural assumptions about personhood and agency. In the context of analyzing Managalase negotiations, this paper will also consider the culturally and theoretically significant differences between intersubjectivity and shared knowledge (Duranti 2006; Duranti 2010), which are at the foundation of cognitive linguistic representations of social interaction.

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