

# **The Evolution of Orality in Samoa**

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## **Abstract**

Orality and literacy are two very different yet permanently related aspects of human language. All languages have their origins in primary orality, and only a fraction of all existing languages have actually ever been written down. This research focuses on the adoption of literacy by the Pacific island nation of Samoa<sup>1</sup> and the active response taken by Samoan citizens in the face of this tremendous cultural shift. Samoa was colonized by British missionaries in the 1830s, and within decades they had established literacy in the local language. It was not until after the turn of the twentieth century that the English language gained priority in Samoa, and this fact has allowed for a strong sense of ‘Samoan-ness’ to persist beneath an evolving Samoan society. Though many Samoan oral traditions have undergone transformations at the hands of literacy and westernization, these changes have not necessarily entailed a loss of the Samoan culture. On the contrary, Samoans have used the tools of the colonizers to ensure a proliferation of Samoan identity and a redistribution of orality, finely exemplified through the literary works of Albert Wendt and Sia Figiel. These Samoan writers have indigenized the arena of creative literature, through an innovative use of the English language and unique styles of writing that serve to emphasize native orality and secure an enduring sense of Samoan self. Through resilience and creativity, Samoans have refused to simply let literacy transform their traditions, but rather they have actively perpetuated Samoan culture through adapted outlets of expression, and an adopted world language.

### **i. Literature Review**

This research paper was largely inspired by a four-month study abroad trip to Samoa that I completed during the fall of my senior year, 2006. While in Samoa, I was struck by an overwhelming sense of Samoan identity that could be detected within many domains of language, even those areas conducted in English. Though it was clear that

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<sup>1</sup> This study refers only to the Independent nation of Samoa (formerly Western Samoa), and does not encompass the territory of American Samoa. Though many of the issues and cultural traditions examined may apply to both regions, a directly continuing American influence also creates a very different cultural situation in American Samoa.

westernization had infiltrated Samoan society and that oral traditions had been absorbing foreign influences, it was also clear that Samoan culture was still thriving, and that many of these changes were occurring not necessarily at the will of outsiders, but more under the guidance of Samoans themselves. Through the native literature that I studied, ceremonies that I was fortunate enough to witness, and an everyday exposure to television, radio, and Samoan people, I was able to experience a powerful Samoan-ness that resonates within all aspects of culture, both traditional and modern. Through careful observation of Samoan language dynamics, conducting interviews with Samoan language experts, and extensive evaluation of Samoan literature written in English, I perceived an unwavering nationalism that left little doubt in my mind about the sustainability of Samoan culture.

As the topic of orality and literacy in Samoa has not been extensively researched, the scope of this study is inevitably limited to my own experience in the field, as well as a handful of books, articles, and works of literature that mold and support my own perceptions. I first begin with an examination of the division between orality and literacy as aspects of human language, and then proceed to evaluate the adoption of literacy by the nation of Samoa specifically. My focus is centered on the effects of literacy and westernization on Samoan oral traditions, as well as the redistribution of native orality within newly established forums of expression, especially creative literature. While I am aware that foreign contact has also accounted for several changes to the Samoan language itself, I have chosen not to examine these occurrences as a result of the unavailability of conclusive information. Furthermore, for the purposes of this study, I am more concerned with the continued evolution of Samoan orality, as well as the demonstrated

ability by Samoans to renew native orality and maintain a persistent Samoan identity, even through the use of English within adopted domains of literacy. I have therefore chosen to focus primarily on oral traditions and their resonance within creative literature, as writing is fueled by literacy and provides a sharp contrast to oral tradition.

When conducting a study that at all relates to oral and literate societies, one must inevitably consult Walter Ong's (1982) book *Orality and Literacy*. Though the work may be dated, Ong explores fundamental human changes that can occur within a society shifting from primary orality to literacy. Ong comments heavily on the basic orality of language, and offers interesting (though outdated) statistics regarding the estimated number of languages that actually employ a writing system. Furthermore, Ong claims that of all the world's languages, by 1982 "only around 106 have ever been committed to writing to a degree sufficient to have produced literature", and of the 3,000 languages that were estimated to have existed in 1982, only 78 possessed a current literature (Ong 1982:7). This is relevant to Samoa as native literature has only begun to surface within the past half century, and even much of that is written in the English language.

While Ong must certainly be recognized for his work regarding the spoken and written word, Jack Goody is also a prominent figure within the literacy discussion. In *Literacy in Traditional Societies* (1968), Goody and Ian Watt debate the consequences of literacy as a whole. They discuss literacy as an influence on the social lives of mankind, yet still cite oral transmission as the primary mode of human communication. Goody and Watt identify the differences in experiencing cultural tradition from a literate versus oral perspective, and treat writing as a clear addition to, not replacement for, orality. These

studies are especially relevant to a society like Samoa, where the fundamental power of spoken words is widely recognized and revered.

In their book *Saving Languages: an Introduction to Language Revitalization*, Lenore Grenoble and Lindsay J. Whaley (2006) contrast three options for the creation of a newly literate society. A transitioning community can either establish literacy in the local language, literacy in a language of wider communication, or a diglossia where each language plays an important role in its own cultural contexts. This distribution is especially applicable to Samoa, as the region first adopted literacy in the local language, and then decades later experienced a shift towards literacy in English. Today, Samoa exists more as a literately hybrid society, where the Samoan and English languages are each preferred for specific communicative domains.

While Samoa first experienced literacy in the local language, many other regions of the Pacific were colonized through a second, outside language. In fact, Niko Besnier's work, including the book *Literacy, Emotion, and Authority: Reading and Writing on a Polynesian Atoll* (1995), extensively evaluates the adoption of literacy by the people of Nukulaelae, part of the Polynesian island chain of Tuvalu. While this book does not directly address literacy issues within Samoa, the process of achieving literacy in Nukulaelae occurred shortly after that in Samoa, and was directly related to the Samoan language. Since missionaries had already established themselves in Samoa by the time they arrived in Nukulaelae, they brought with them a strong language background, and quickly established Samoan as the language of literacy production on the atoll. For decades, Samoan was the language of school, church, law, and government in Nukulaelae, and only well into the twentieth century was it slowly replaced by

Nukulaelae Tuvaluan (Besnier 1995:54). This choice by missionaries to use Samoan as a language of literacy on the neighboring island of Nukulaelae, only shortly after Samoa itself achieved literacy, offers a valuable perspective of Samoan as a language of wider communication. This occurrence holds Samoan as an important language from the beginning of colonization, and supports its continued value on through the missionary spread of literacy throughout the Pacific, as well as into modern domains of language.

When any primary oral society adopts literacy, an inevitable threat to native orality arises. Chapter five of K. David Harrison's (2007) *When Languages Die* discusses the diminishing value and existence of oral tradition among the introduction of writing and the onset of globalization. Harrison points out the fundamental differences between an oral tradition in its natural habitat of performance and an oral tradition that has merely been preserved through documentation. He talks about writing as a human novelty that is by no means the language norm and as a tool that binds a story, taking the freedom of interpretation and creativity out of it. In Samoa, many oral art forms are still practiced today, but as the masters of such traditions grow older and the younger generations show less interest in learning verbal arts, Samoan oral tradition is undoubtedly undergoing a transformation. Amid these changes, Harrison reminds us that writing will forever be an injustice to true oral art.

In Samoa, a rich and diverse oral tradition has been evolving around a nucleus of formal oration. This valued practice of delivering speeches is documented almost to entirety by Lowell D. Holmes (1969) in his article "Samoan Oratory." Holmes traces the art of giving speeches step by step, and compares and contrasts different speeches for different occasions. He stresses the importance of knowing the local history and having a

sense for the audience, as outstanding oratory is an art form that is highly esteemed in Samoa. Holmes also details the intricacies of speechmaking, and asserts that since the poetry, proverbs, and mythical allusions fail to capture the interest of younger generations, the era of classic Samoaan oratory is inevitably fading.

In addition to formal oration, Samoaan oral tradition is also rich in storytelling, poetry, and chanting. John Charlot (1988) examines some of these other oral art forms in his article “Some Uses of Chant in Samoaan Prose”, where he specifically evaluates the role of chants in the context of a larger written narrative. Charlot determines that chants and prose can either supplement each other as separate summaries of a story, or can each act as essential parts of the storytelling itself. Charlot discusses how chants and prose with similar themes can be merged to create a unique version of a myth, and he cites Oskar Stuebel’s version of the story of Sina and the eel as an example of this. In this story, Stuebel bases his work on a previously created prose rendition of the tale, as well as a separate chant about the two main characters. Stuebel integrates his two sources smoothly, sometimes basing his prose on certain chant contents that emphasize his particular theme, which in this case happens to be the erotic relationship between Sina and the eel. Stuebel’s story also contains elements that hold parallels within other, non-cited chants regarding Sina and the eel, as well as other purely prose versions of the story. Furthermore, Stuebel inserts into his conclusion an original song about Sina and the eel, which is recited as chant and serves to reemphasize the relationship between the characters. Stuebel’s version of this famous myth thus exemplifies the dynamic relationship between Samoaan chants and prose, and the assertion by Charlot that the two together contribute to the development of a modern oral tradition.

One of the premier works that has been done on the Samoan language is the book *From Grammar to Politics*, written by Alessandro Duranti (1994). While the book in its entirety exhausts the topic of linguistic anthropology, Duranti also examines many of the complexities of speaking in Samoa, and in chapter four he explores the relationship between Samoan politics and verbal art. He discusses the nuances of delivering a formal speech within a village meeting, and how the speechmaker must have an acute awareness about when to deliver such traditional lore as genealogies, proverbs, metaphors, and terms of respect. Duranti cites oratory language as a powerful tool in Samoa, with an ability to both adapt to and shape any social situation. He offers essential insights into understanding the concept of hierarchy and realizing distributions of power and respect within Samoan governing bodies, and implies that a diminishing oral tradition could hold substantial consequences for the future of Samoan politics.

While Samoa was first exposed to literacy in the 1800s, the nation did not produce its own works of creative literature until the 1960s. In fact, the entire region of the Pacific did not produce native works until this time<sup>2</sup>, and an evaluation of this occurrence can be found in the book *South Pacific Literature*, written by native Fijian Subramani (1985). This work traces the growth of South Pacific literature from its beginnings as a means of recording myths and legends, into what is a more popular modern style of creative fiction. Subramani talks about Pacific writers who use local oral tradition as sources of inspiration, not instruction, and who refuse to be weighted down

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<sup>2</sup> The first instance of a published literary work produced by a native Pacific Islander actually arose in 1948 in the form of *Miss Ulysses of Puka Puka*, written by Florence “Johnny” Frisbie of the Cook Islands. This work often gets overlooked, however, perhaps because of its autobiographical nature and seemingly ‘juvenile’ writing style. For a complete analysis of *Miss Ulysses*, please refer to Paul Sharrad’s “Making Beginnings: Johnny Frisbie and Pacific Literature” (1994).

by an established literary tradition. He also comments on the choice by many Pacific writers (Samoan Albert Wendt; Rotuman Vilsoni Hereniko; Tongan Epeli Hau'ofa) to compose their works in English rather than their local language, and he discusses the reasons for and consequences of this decision. Subramani perceives this new emergence of literature with enthusiasm, and asserts that the shift from the oral to the written in the Pacific is one of growth and proliferation, as artists use their surroundings and experiences to navigate a new realm of literary possibilities.

Perhaps the most renowned author to emerge out of the South Pacific is Albert Wendt (1974, 1979), whose works are written primarily in English. Wendt's work began as a way of speaking out against colonialism, and he soon evolved into a powerful spokesman for the proliferation of native island literature. In his article entitled "Towards a New Oceania", Wendt (1983) speaks about the lack of art and artists out of the Pacific, but proposes that there is infinite potential for native islanders to become increasingly artistically creative. As for the literature itself, an extensive review of Albert Wendt's work can be found in the book *Circling the Void: Albert Wendt and Pacific Literature*, authored by Paul Sharrad (2003). While a complete examination of everything ever produced by Wendt is not necessary for the purposes of this study, the book also outlines Wendt's Samoan background, and gives an introduction to Pacific Literature as a whole, placing Albert Wendt at the forefront of this young genre. By chronologically tracing Albert Wendt's works, Sharrad depicts the evolution of Wendt as an artist among varying cultural and historical contexts, and as a Samoan who is constantly influenced by his home and his surroundings. Sharrad comments on the synthesis of generations evidenced through many of Wendt's characters, depicted at a



crossroads between Samoan tradition and global development. A prime example of such a character can be found in Wendt's second work, the novella entitled *Flying Fox in a Freedom Tree* (1974). Within this work, Wendt employs a narrator who chronicles much of his life story, beginning with the following passage:

Like all the Tauloapepe men before me, I was born in Sapepe, and my aiga<sup>3</sup> [family] is one of the main branches of the Sapepe Family who founded the village and district of Sapepe in long ago times. Sapepe is a long way from Apia [the capital], towards the west end, so legend tells, only a short way from the edge of the world. It is one of the biggest villages in Samoa, and it is cut off from other districts by low mountains to the east and west and the main mountain range behind it. Because of these mountains, Sapepe was separated from the rest of Samoa for hundreds of years, and so Sapepe had its own history and titles and customs different in many ways from the other districts. Things did not change very much. Life was slow until the papalagi [foreigners, outsiders] came and changed many things, including later people like my father... (Wendt 1974:106).

This passage is indeed indicative of a historical transition, as it alludes to Samoan legend while simultaneously sighing at the inevitable changes brought on by foreign contact. The narrator exudes a clear sense of passion for his home, which is a trait that exemplifies many of Wendt's characters, and is thoroughly analyzed by Sharrad. Furthermore, Wendt's narrative-within-a-narrative is constructed neither as elegant Samoan oration nor as polished colonial writing, but rather as an intentionally hybridized medium between Samoan and English, traditional and modern.

The recent outpouring of creative writing by Pacific Islanders is a phenomenon that certainly affects native orality. Fijian poet, scholar, and storyteller Pio Manoa (1995) recognizes this relationship in his article "From Orality to Literacy and to Orality

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<sup>3</sup> Note on Samoan pronunciation: /g/ is never hard, never pronounced as in *girl* or *good*. The /g/ sound is always pronounced as the /ŋ/ sound, as in *ring*, or *song*. All other Samoan phonemes are pronounced phonetically.

Again: A Story of Story.” This work calls for a resurrection of native orality by Pacific artists who exist among routine technologizing of the word. As oral traditions continue to transition from the mind onto paper, Manoa pleads for native Pacific artists to create a literacy that connects to orality through both its language and context, and a literacy that uses technology as a catalyst for such a process, not a hindrance upon it. Manoa speaks of a secondary orality zone that must be achieved throughout the Pacific, in which creative works ‘bear the burden of orality’, and circularize the existence of Pacific oral tradition.

Almost immediately after Pio Manoa’s (1995) call for a resurrection of native orality, Samoan author Sia Figiel (1996, 1996, 1999) emerged onto the Pacific literary scene. Examination of Figiel’s work is absolutely essential to the study of the evolution of Pacific literature, as her innovations of language, style, and theme offer invaluable insights not only into a changing Samoa, but also relate to an entire region. Figiel’s first two novels, *Where We Once Belonged* (1996) and *The Girl in the Moon Circle* (1996) were both written primarily in English, but have each been described as very oral in nature, almost to the point of confusion for those English readers unfamiliar with the Samoan language. Consider, for example, the following passage from *Girl in the Moon Circle*, taken from a page entitled “We All Know When Our Mother is Angry”, and told from the perspective of a ten year old girl named Samoana:

And she tells one of us in her loudloud voice. To break the lala auke. A hibiscus branch. And bring it to her. And don’t say a word. Not one word. Now get over here! She says. Yanking Ivoga by the ponytails and starts hitting her skinny legs. The branch hitting the sores too. The new

mosquito bites. And the swollen centipede bite she got the night before. Hitting and hitting Lafi does. Wiping the sweat off her forehead. Aua le fasi aku ae fia malo mai ua e iloa? While Ivoga screams in both pain and surprised confusion. Yelling out to our aunts and uncles and the faifeau [pastor] to help her. And God because she wants to live. (Figiel 1996:15)

This passage reveals an author who is uninhibited, constrained neither by language nor content. Figiel's work is compelling, and offers insight into parts of Samoan life that had never before been formally exposed. In addition to its provocative style and content, *The Girl in the Moon Circle* also includes an interview with the author, conducted by Subramani (1985) of *South Pacific Literature*. In this interview, Figiel offers insights into the decisions that went into composing this piece of 'performance prose', and discusses her portrayal of a native vernacular through the use of Samoan phrases and intentionally misspelled English words. In regards to her language use, Figiel states that,

I was in awe of how permanent things are. Permanent in the sense that even though time continues, and language changes along with it, the experience remains the same. There's a certain beauty in that. One that facilitated the writing of the book to a large extent. Indeed, I already had the language in my mind. And I was certain that I wanted to use the vernacular. I did not want to be confined to the conventionalities of formal language. That is utterly dull and completely uninteresting. Nothing new comes out of it. And the more we perpetuate it, the more the cycle continues. *The Girl* is an attempt to break from that tradition or from that cycle. (Figiel 1996:125)

Here, Figiel supports her decision to write in a way that mimics authentic Samoan speech, and she recognizes that regardless of style, the writing should reflect true Samoan experience as it exists in the present, despite established language or cultural norms. Also in the interview, Figiel speaks of her conscious effort to link her writings to Samoan oral tradition, and cites Albert Wendt as a great inspiration in this endeavor. Overall,

Figiel stresses the importance of authenticity in her writing, which is a theme that clearly resonates throughout the body of her text.

It is a curious decision when a Pacific author opts to write in English over a local language, and this occurrence has been debated by several native scholars. Notably among these scholars is Samoan educator Dr. Emma Kruse-Va'ai (1998), whose doctoral dissertation *Producing the Text of Culture* is a commentary on the appropriation of English by contemporary Samoan society. Throughout her exploration of what she deems a 'linguistic hybridization', Kruse-Va'ai scrutinizes many works of Samoan literature that are written in English. She begins with the evaluation of the works of Albert Wendt, and then goes on to dedicate an entire chapter to the styles and techniques of author Sia Figiel. Kruse-Va'ai recognizes much of Figiel's work as *performance prose* that ties together Samoan oral tradition within a context of modern writing, and she establishes a very positive view of English within Samoan literature. Kruse-Va'ai believes that Samoans have an ability to use the tools of their colonizers in a way that reflects their creativity and innovation, and thus proves the resilience of Samoan culture.

### **1. Introduction: Orality vs. Literacy**

Nearly 7,000 languages exist in the world today, and most of these languages do not employ a writing system. In fact, only about one third of the world's languages have as of yet been committed to writing (36), and speakers of these dominant languages are constantly working to spread the written word. Writing is by no means a language norm, however, and it can not exist without having been derived from an oral basis. Orality and

speech are the primary foundations of language, and choosing to adopt writing and begin a transition into literacy is a change that deeply affects many facets of a language community. Literacy is an entirely new realm of communication that can both greatly enhance and potentially encroach upon a society's traditional customs, and its effects must be considered carefully when a primary oral society adopts a writing system.

While speech and written forms of speech are forever entangled in the development and advancement of language, they are also deceptively different from one another. In the past, primary orality had not been studied by scholars as a separate entity from writing, as any examination of orality had been derived from the context of a literate society. Only in the past half century has the scholarly world 'reawakened' to the oral character of language, and recognized the basic orality of language as permanent, and writing as unable to exist without speech (Ong 1982:6-8). Writing and orality are fundamentally different in terms of structure, context, and delivery, and only recently has writing been recognized as a complement to, not a replacement for, the spoken word. Writing can serve to structuralize and preserve the very characteristics of speech that occur naturally within the spoken word, but if and only if oral traditions are accorded the proper respect can writing act as a tool for the enhancement and preservation of orality. Through writing, literacy has the potential to facilitate lasting merges of the spoken and written word, but if accepted in haste, the effects of writing can be damaging to traditions that had once defined an oral community (Grenoble and Whaley 2006:119-120).

As global technology increases, the infiltration of writing and outside languages on purely oral communities becomes more and more imminent. From a literate perspective, it is impossible to imagine what speech is like for those living in an entirely

oral community, as commitment of the word to writing changes a language and conceivably restructures thought so much that an inescapable literacy bias will emerge. Although speech is indeed the foundation of language, it is likely that orality will quickly become overshadowed by a sense of visualization that accompanies literacy (Ong 1982:12). As a society transitions, oral traditions can easily be overlooked or forever altered beneath the shadow of the written word. It is therefore important that decisions regarding how and when to adopt literacy are considered carefully by members of the transitioning oral society themselves, and once literacy is established, a conscious effort remains to preserve any native orality. These efforts are far from simple, however, as literacy is often a foreign concept introduced by outsiders, and it must be adapted to a culture under the guidance of strangers. More often than not, these outsiders are missionaries seeking to spread and solidify their beliefs through the written word. Such was the case in Samoa, as they encountered literacy nearly two centuries ago and have since experienced a series of considerable cultural changes.

## **2. Literacy Contact in Samoa**

Historically, the Samoaan language has maintained relative homogeneity, with the first European contact arriving in the 1700s but not intensifying until the arrival of English missionaries in the 1830s (32). Missionaries brought with them a new language and a foreign concept of formal education, and they wasted no time in implementing their ideals in Samoaan society. In order to facilitate the spread of their beliefs, the missionaries worked diligently to learn and transcribe the Samoaan language, and for this reason their ideas were received with enthusiasm by native Samoaans. The creation of

formal schools to train local pastors, or *faiifeau*, caught on rapidly, and within a few years of arrival the missionaries had established daily religion classes in almost every village. Typical classroom activities included Bible studies, and students were required to be capable of just enough reading and writing in the Samoan language to partake in said studies. Although the English language was present in Samoa at the time, only a few selected pupils in upper elementary levels actually studied the language formally, and Samoan remained the dominant language of early education (Thomas 1974:50). The missionaries even translated hymnals and other religious documents into the native language, and by 1855 they had successfully translated the Bible into Samoan (27). For decades, formal education remained in Samoan, and it is reported that by 1900, nearly one hundred percent of Samoans of reading age were literate in their own language (Keesing 1934, as in Kruse-Va'ai 1998:71)<sup>4</sup>.

### **2.1 Causes for Concern: Threat to Native Orality**

As a once primary oral society, Samoa embarked on a dramatic cultural shift following the adoption of literacy beginning in the 1830s. Missionaries instilled a new priority of education through literacy, which “bears a complex relation to other features of a culture, and so it usually involves reshaping a non-literate culture to some degree, and it inevitably poses a challenge to the place of oral tradition” (Grenoble and Whaley 2006:102). The effects on oral tradition are perhaps the most dramatic influences, as Samoan orality embodies much of the character of Samoan culture. Local histories and community knowledge have traditionally been passed orally between generations, and village chiefs continue to be highly revered for their oratory skills. Samoan traditions,

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<sup>4</sup> It must be recognized that this statistic can be interpreted loosely, as one hundred percent literacy may refer to a highly specified test of competence in religious educational documents and Bible studies, as those were the only written texts in Samoa at the time.

like many oral traditions, are saturated with metaphors, proverbs, and highly developed wordplay that manifests itself through verbal repertoires, sometimes used to invoke deep connections between the spoken and spiritual worlds (Grenoble and Whaley 2006:119). With the onset of literacy in Samoa, these unique attributes of the spoken word have become challenged by the onset of writing and westernization. The dynamics of storytelling have been deeply transformed, as writing can undermine the natural power that is held within the imagination of a storyteller. Elders and orators have begun to slowly see their authority slip away, not only because knowledge has become redistributable, but more significantly because interest in oral tradition has waned. Before writing, oral histories, myths, and legends were highly coveted in Samoa, and chiefs were sometimes reluctant to share this knowledge, as it signified prestige and respect. As oral tradition must now compete with night clubs, television, and radio, however, chiefs have begun to recognize the value of documentation, and their oral knowledge has since been increasingly written down (Mayer 10-15-2006). As a result, the positions of power in Samoa have been dramatically modified, as social hierarchies and political figureheads must redefine themselves in light of literacy.

### **3. Samoan Oral Tradition**

Oral tradition in Samoa is very rich, with every extended family employing a chief, or *matai*, who routinely engages in various oratory acts at Samoan social and familial events. These speeches, depending on the event and persons present, are always laced to some degree with extremely flowery respect language, honorific addresses, and reverent acknowledgments of those present. A Samoan chief typically falls into one of



two categories: an *ali'i*, high chief, or a *tulafale*, talking chief. In the past, the relationship between the two chiefs was rigid, with the talking chiefs serving a much more administrative role and representing their *ali'i* in the making of treaties and negotiations. The high chiefs merely acted as figureheads, while only the talking chiefs engaged in elaborate speechmaking. This traditional relationship was so defined, in fact, that, "In any formal ceremony, being spoken for by a *tulafale* became the prerequisite of dignity" (Mageo 1989:413). This delegation of duty has since evolved, however, as now the relationship between *ali'i* and *tulafale* varies from village to village. Sometimes the two chiefs function together, while other times the expert orating chiefs are held in reserve for special occasions of high ceremony. Additionally, while some villages still maintain strong obligatory relationships between the two chief groups, others utilize high chiefs who speak on their own behalf, known as *tulafale ali'i* (Holmes 1969:342-343). Although the roles of the speakers have been transforming and interest in learning the art of masterful speechmaking has been on the decline for Samoan youth, the importance and high regard with which each speech occasion is held still remains unchanged.

### **3.1 Decision-Making Speech**

One of the main cultural domains of traditional oratory is the process of decision-making in Samoa. Within each Samoan village is an arranged hierarchy based upon the traditional status of titled individuals, and the highest ranking chiefs are known as the *ali'i sili*, or highest chief, and the *to'oto'o*, or highest talking chief. Below the highest chiefs are the rest of the village chiefs and orators, and these heads of families convene regularly to form the local political body at the village council, or *fono*. Each meeting addresses a specific issue, and contains considerable speechmaking in an effort to

persuade public opinion one way or the other. During a *fono*, it is difficult for outsiders to distinguish *tulafale* from *ali'i*, as every titled person present is allowed the opportunity to voice an opinion through persuasive and profound argumentation. The only two specified oratory functions are the introduction of topic, proposed by the presiding talking chief, and the final speech, performed by the presiding high chief as he/she closes the debate with an announcement of the final group decision (Holmes 1969:343). In fact, the format of the *fono* is typically one chief speaking at a time for an extended period, with a preallocated order of chiefs establishing the sequence of speeches. This arrangement is not unlike those found within western political debates and juridicial settings, and sometimes overrides status and seniority as even high chiefs have to wait until speakers of lower status have finished their turns (Duranti 1994:78-79). It is therefore imperative that all titled persons possess highly developed oratory skills, as rank takes a backseat to wily wordplay in the effort to achieve persuasive argumentation.

### **3.2 Ceremonial Speech**

While complex oration is very much a part of the decision-making process in Samoa, decisions are made so frequently that such oration becomes commonplace. The true magic of Samoan oratory lies within ceremonial speech, and this occurs for such events as the arrival and departure of visitors, elaborate acts of apology, and intravillage visits to the ill, among others. Orators are also expected to be adept in Samoan poetry, or *solo*, as ceremonial speeches are treated much more like displays of verbal ability than practiced forms of communication. For an orator in Samoa, the ability to speak well means prestige for oneself, one's family, and one's village, and it is a great source of pride throughout the country. In fact, "The most renowned, powerful, and wealthy

persons in Samoa are orators, whose eloquent rhetoric commands the respect of all” (Mageo 1989:389). These orators exercise speech as an absolute art form, and “the oratory that is most enjoyed, brings the most prestige, and attracts the most attention is the verbal pyrotechnics occurring in connection with various phases of Samoaan ceremonial life” (Holmes 1969:343).

### **3.2.1 The Welcome Speech – *lauga o le feiloaiga***

Many occasions in Samoa call for a welcoming speech, as visitors routinely travel in large parties from one village to another for a wide range of ceremonial celebrations. This group of visitors, known as the *malaga*, is typically comprised of titled individuals, one of whom is a talking chief and serves as liaison for the entire group. The specific occasions that call for *malaga* stem from a wide variety of events, some of which include marriage, the birth of a child, sporting competitions, the exchange of raw materials and food, or the building of a chief’s house. No matter what the occasion, however, the *malaga* is always greeted enthusiastically by the hosting village, and orator chiefs “may demonstrate their skill at weaving verbal garlands of flowery words and phrases and throwing out extravagant compliments to the honored guests” (Holmes 1969:344).

The welcome speech is the most important of Samoaan ceremonial speeches, and when performed properly the speech is comprised of five major parts. The opening section, or *tuvaoga*, is an introduction consisting of proverbial phrases that foreshadow the main body of the speech. After the introduction, a speaker gives thanks to God for the safe arrival of visitors, and this is called the *fa’afetai i le Atua*. This religious aspect of the speech is a regular feature within modern Samoaan oratory, and it is a practice that is thought to have been around even before the arrival of the missionaries. Before

Christianity, Samoans honored many personal, natural gods, and demonstrated a respect for the land and environment around them. The citing of older mythologies and folklores within modern oration indicates a traditional respect that was held for individual gods in pre-Christian Samoa, and a respect that has continued through Christianity. These utterances not only serve to put the weight of religious sanction on what is being said, but also act as a reminder of Samoan past. (Keesing 1956:141, as in Holmes 1969).

The third section of the welcome speech, or the *'ava* portion, is defined by the presentation of dried up *kava* roots to the talking chief of the visiting party. Each titled man from the host village is required to present his own *kava* root as a symbol of village hospitality, and regardless of the roots, the host talking chief always apologizes for their quality, expressing his wishes that they be bigger and of better quality for the guests.

The most intricate aspect of a welcome speech follows the presentation of the *kava* roots, and is known as the *tapui le nu'u* (Holmes 1969: 344). Here, the orator must recite the elaborate status hierarchy of the visitors by recalling the names, in proper status order, of all of the chiefs, special titles, and descent groups from the visiting village. Known as the *fa'alupega*, this organizational structure is different for each village, and takes the shape of a list that can be inserted into a variety of oratory contexts. The *fa'alupega* provides a basic outline of each village's hierarchy, and the memorization and recollection of such information not only earns tremendous respect for the speaker, but also acts as validation of the hierarchy being recited (Duranti 1994:32). Recitation of a *fa'alupega* corresponds to individuals, villages, and situations alike, and its prestige has been around since the beginning of oration, as "The *tulafale* ensured the dignity of the occasion by knowing the *fa'alupega* (village-specific titles) and genealogy of all those

who were to participate in the ceremony and by addressing each with appropriate courtesy and homage” (Mageo 1989:413). Furthermore, in addition to the village *fa’alupega*, each chiefly title also has its own ceremonial address, known as the *fa’alagiga*. This address can be invoked when the addressee is either being greeted or is being spoken of, and the use of these more detailed ceremonial phrases not only indicates a speaker’s expertise, but also shows appreciation for the title and its holder (Duranti 1994:36).

Following the elaborate recitation of the *fa’alupega*, a welcome speech concludes with remarks from the host party, in a closing statement known as the *fa’aiuga*. Here, the talking chief typically expresses joy in hosting such distinguished guests, and closes out the welcome by once again asking for God’s blessing on the entire party, and stating that the speech is finally finished (Holmes 1969: 345).

### **3.2.2 The Reply Speech – *lauga tali***

While the welcome speech is indeed the most important Samoan oration, the reply to the welcome speech poses an even bigger challenge to an orator. The reply speech is delivered by the *malaga* orator, and is structured very similarly to the welcome speech. What intensifies the reply speech, however, is the addition of what is called the *lauga le seu*, in which the host village orator attempts to interrupt the reply speech during the fourth section of the delivery. This traditional custom adds an element of intrigue to the ceremony, and is an effort by the host village to proclaim that there is no need for the visitors to trouble themselves with the recital of the host village hierarchy, as the host chiefs are more than satisfied and do not need to be honored any further (Holmes 1969:345). This interruption is also a way of shortening the reply speech to further the

ceremony, and it opens up the floor for a match of wits between the talking chiefs, who engage in a battle of proverbial and metaphorical exchanges in order to outshine the opponent's abilities and persuade him to forfeit his oration. The stakes remain high as the interruption develops into a specialized competition between skillful speakers, both of whom hope to outwit and out-respect his opponent, while simultaneously garnering the respect of fellow villagers. This verbal combat continues until one of the speakers, usually the visitor, concedes to shorten his speech, and the event concludes as the opposing orator expresses many thanks for honoring his request (Duranti 1994:98).

Within the *lauga le seu*, many factors indicate a well-prepared speaker. Chiefs must be able to conjure relevant proverbs, and they must have the ability to recognize obscure allegorical and legendary references. Consider, for instance, the proverb *Ua le o savaliga a'o le va i savaliga*.<sup>5</sup> This proverb refers to the spines of a sea urchin, even though the actual word for spines is *tu'e* and does not appear in the phrase. The spinal reference actually comes from the word *savaliga*, which means "used for walking" and alludes to a legend about a sea urchin that walked on his long spines. Furthermore, the phrase *va i savaliga* refers to shorter spines that are found "among the walking ones", and therefore allows the statement to encompass both important (long) and unimportant (short) matters (Holmes 1969:346). In order to grasp the entire meaning of this proverb, however, a speaker must not only be familiar with the legendary reference, but must also be able to apply its significance to the present context.

In addition to proverbial knowledge, a speaker must also pay careful attention to the timing of the *lauga le seu* interruption. An early interruption by a host may indicate

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<sup>5</sup> Because of the nature of Samoan oratorical language, many proverbs are not directly translatable into English, including this one. Loosely, however, this proverb means something along the lines of "Those used for walking while among the walking ones."

an overzealous speaker, and reflects poorly on his sense of judgment. A most appropriate interruption typically occurs just before the preparation of kava (*'ava*), which is the ceremonial beverage, derived from the root and served at the conclusion of the reply speech. The simultaneous preparation of the kava and delivery of the reply speech puts an additional element of pressure on the orators, who must now be wary of synchronizing their speech with the readiness of the beverage. On the whole, the dynamics of the reply speech have been described as “institutionalized heckling” (Holmes 1969:346), complete with distraction tactics, referential stumbers, and wisecracking wordplays that if performed to perfection, are staged in such a way that elicits just enough respect and concedes just enough ground that village pride and speaking prestige are adequately maintained for both parties.

### **3.2.3 Additional Samoan Ceremonial Speech**

#### **Farewell Speech – *lauga tali malo***

While the ceremony surrounding the arrival of a visiting party is of the utmost importance to a village, many other occasions call for formal oration in Samoa. For instance, when that same visiting party is preparing to leave a village, they are typically presented with a food gift approximately one day prior to departure. The giving of the gift must also be accompanied by a well-wishing speech, known as the *lauga tali malo*, which is then once again responded to with a speech of the same name, given by the visitors expressing their many thanks and gratitude for the endless hospitality they undoubtedly received (Holmes 1969:346).

#### **Apology Speech – *lauga o le ifoga***

One of the more functional Samoan speech events surrounds the apology speech, or literally the “bowing down” speech. This occasion occurs after a Samoan wrongs a fellow Samoan, and the wrongdoer’s entire family and village put forth an effort to obtain forgiveness. The effort is organized in the shape of a *malaga* to the offended’s village, where the offender and company then seat themselves in front of the offended party’s house, with their heads bowed and draped in finemats. This symbol of shame is a plea for forgiveness that must be acknowledged by the offended party’s family, who only after some time will send an orator out to announce in a short speech that the wrongdoer has been forgiven. The talking chief of the guilty party must then reply with a formal apology speech that once again includes many proverbial and metaphorical phrases. The orator may utter such phrases as “This burden is hard to bear”, or “The trade wind comes and blows to carry a message. The trade wind tells the lady ‘I am mistaken’.” These phrases are meant to humbly beg for forgiveness, and if the speech is deemed acceptable by the offended party, the guilty party is then allowed to enter the household, where the finemats are presented as gifts and the two groups share a closing meal and kava ceremony (Holmes 1969:347).

While in Samoa, I was informed by a host student of one particular instance of this forgiveness ritual, which occurred after the tragic death of a little girl. It was reported that this little girl was playing alongside the road one afternoon when she was struck and killed by a vehicle. I was then told that the driver, along with nearly every member of his village, gathered in front of the house of the little girl’s family to participate in the *ifoga* ritual. This particular instance is said to have lasted many days,



and symbolized the deep sorrow and regret that fell not just upon the driver, but also upon his family, extended family, and village (Fa'afetai 9-17-2006).

**Speech for the sick – *lauga i le ma'i o le ali'i***

When a Samoan chief falls critically ill, it is customary for the local family heads to pay a visit to his home. This occurrence often spans villages, and is a ceremonial occasion that calls for formal oratory containing four parts, all delivered by a visiting talking chief. The first part of the speech consists of proverbial allusions to the status of the ill, or the sickness itself, and is immediately followed by the second part of the speech, where the talking chief says many “words to make the patient feel better.” Samoans believe strongly in the healing power and gravity of words, a fact which becomes even more apparent in the third section of the speech in which the speaker repeats six phrases over and over again. The repetition of these phrases mimics the *fa'alupega* (village hierarchy) style, and they roughly translate into

Hail to the house;  
Hail to the bed;  
Hail to the wind;  
Hail to the sickness;  
Hail to the mats;  
Hail to the medicine.

The above objects and agents are called upon to help cure the illness, before the speech concludes with additional proverbial phrases and a final plea to God (Holmes 1969:347).

**Speech for those who have died – *lauga i maliu***

In the event of death within a Samoan village, a village choir pays a ceremonial visit to the family of the deceased. This occasion, known as the *leo*, occurs on the eve of the funeral, and is accompanied by the delivery of a formal speech for the departed. This particular speech contains a unique condition as the orator is not necessarily a chief from

within the village: instead the speaker must be of equal status as the deceased. Thus, if the deceased held a chiefly title then the speech must be delivered by a titled person of equal stature, but if the deceased was untitled then the orator must also be an untitled person. This specially chosen orator then composes a speech that consists of words of comfort and solace for the bereaved, combined with proverbial phrases alluding to admirable attributes of the deceased. As in other occasions of ceremonial speech, the speech for the departed is received with a reply speech, delivered by a chief of the family expressing thanks to the choir for their efforts of consolation. In Samoa, mourners must keep constant vigil over a dead body on the night before a funeral, so the choir visit and accompanying speech not only offer words of consolation, but also serve as a physical act of keeping company in a time of great sorrow (Holmes 1969:347-348).

### 3.3 The Intricacies of Oration

Although Samoan orators are free to exercise their own oratory styles and techniques, an acceptable pattern of rhetorical behavior does exist and serves to guide speakers. If the speech is given inside a house (*fale*), the orator usually delivers it from a sitting down, cross-legged position. The speaker carries a fly whisk (*fue*), and he may emphasize a point by swishing the whisk in a dramatic way. A sitting orator will occasionally engage in slight rocking or minimal hand gesturing, though the overall position of delivery allows for a very limited range of motion. In fact, these rules of limited motion also apply to speeches given outdoors, which are a bit more dramatic and are often delivered on the village green (*malae*) in a standing position. Outdoor speakers, in addition to a fly whisk, also possess an orator staff (*to'oto'o*) that is about six feet tall, and rests between the first and second toe of the right foot. The staff, which has evolved

from its origins as a spear, may be moved slightly during the speech, but lifting or excessively gesturing with the staff is considered aggressive and often invited danger in earlier days. The position of the fly whisk, on the other hand, is routinely shifted during an outdoor speech, and each movement of the whisk holds significance for the situation. Unique to each orator, the whisk typically rests upon the speaker's shoulder, and a calculated set of whisk movements is used to indicate the start of a speech. For instance, if the whisk is simply moved from the left to right shoulder, the speech will be short and informal, but if the chief merely touches the whisk to his right shoulder and then returns it to his left, the speech will be a lengthier and more formal address. Additionally, if the chief touches the whisk first to his right shoulder, then his left, and finally brings it to rest upon his right, this is an indication that the chief intends to "exercise his maximum rhetorical powers", and the audience must prepare for a session of long and elaborate formal oration. It is especially important for a visiting orator to recognize the motions of the fly whisk, as his reply speech must match the style and length of the welcome (Holmes 1969:348-349).

The volume of a Samoan speech typically starts out very quiet, but grows continually louder as the speech progresses. Specific points and special statements are generally emphasized by the raising of an orator's voice at the end of a thought, and by the end of a speech an orator is often near shouting. In addition to these volume adjustments, orators also have many other tricks that help to capture an audience's attention, including the insertion of a humorous or sarcastic quip, or a reference to a familiar proverb that serves to unite the assembly. Consider, for instance, the proverb *E molimoli atu se vai malu i puega*, which loosely translates to mean "Now I would like to

give you the coolest cup of coconut water.” This proverb is often used by chiefs as a soothing expression to set a relaxed atmosphere, just as cold coconut milk spreads and soothes throughout one’s body (Fiti/Jackson 10-11-2006). Since “Samoans have a strong faith in the magical power of words to charm, soothe, persuade, or arbitrate” (Holmes 1969:349), a wise and discerning orator always takes careful notice of his audience, and executes his style and responses accordingly. In order to assure that an orator is properly equipped to present to a specific audience, Samoans even hold competitions between talking chiefs prior to the delivery of speeches. This traditional competition, known as the *fa’atau*, is an engagement to determine who is going to deliver a speech, and occurs at nearly every ceremonial tradition. More often than not, the *fa’atau* is a staged display with a predetermined winner, but is an exciting exposition of rhetorical skills nonetheless (Fiti/Jackson 10-11-2006). For certain occasions, particularly during *malaga* ceremonies, a live competition does occur, and participating talking chiefs must duel using clever references and witty phraseology. The winner is successful only after he has convinced those present that he is the most able to distinctly represent his village in an oratorical exchange, which sometimes requires a special talent or particular style. The *fa’atau* is a tradition that on important occasions can take up to two to three hours to complete, and has been cited as a source of annoyance for outsiders. Native Samoans, however, thoroughly enjoy the friendly competition, as the audience is entertained by the clever argumentation, and the visitors are greatly flattered by the effort put forth to determine the most appropriate orator (Holmes 1969:350-351).

### **3.4 Additional Oral Traditions**

While some of the more prominent oral art of Samoa is embodied within the formal rhetoric, other notable forms of oral tradition also exist. Samoan *solo*, or poetry, for instance, plays an important role both in everyday oratorical contexts as well as formal oration. The *fagogo* ('night tale'), and the *faleaitu* ('house of spirits', theater), on the other hand, may be more narrative than the *solo*, but all three weave together in the definition of Samoan oral tradition.

In addition to the many intricacies involved in formal oration, talking chiefs are also expected to memorize and sometimes produce Samoan poetry. These *solo* may be used in all purpose occasions, or may be *solo 'ava*, which are specific to kava ceremonies. The content of the poems are often filled with well-known cultural heroes, mythical allusions, and may also even feature rhyming couplets (Holmes 1969:349-350). For instance, the following excerpt is taken from a poem that alludes to the aforementioned legend of Sina and the eel:

<i>Toli au pua ma lafo i le vai</i>	Twisted off your <i>pua</i> fruit and threw them in the water
<i>Sa e tufi auau ai</i>	You gathered, swimming in the water
<i>Faiaiga e le apeoai</i>	Mated by the tail [of the eel] (Charlot 1988:304-305)

Although more obscure than the legend itself, the above poem does contain embedded references to the legendary Sina and the eel, and these allusions must be recognized and reproduced by Samoan orating chiefs. Though the structure of the *solo* may loosely outline a story, they are typically not as detailed as the contents of the *fagogo* or *faleaitu*, and are instead often used in adjunct to these genres.

Within the *fagogo* and *faleaitu*, Samoan *solo* often take the shape of authoritative chants that either supplement the storyline or act as an essential part of the tale. Since the

introduction of writing to Samoa, a clearer distinction has formed between chants and narration, as chants are typically leftover from a strict oral tradition and are delivered in a memorized, fixed form, while the narrative prose changes with each storyteller and functions uniquely in relation to each chant. Within a Samoan narrative, prose can either tell a story until a chant serves to tell the rest, narrate a story between chants that are part of the story, or summarize a story that is then retold poetically through chant. As writing further invades oral tradition, the gap between older chants and newer prose widens and creates discrepancies of content and style. As a result, chants and prose have been established as two separate genres, and together with their varying degrees of agreement and difference, “the chant and the prose can represent two stages in the development of a single tradition” (Charlot 1988:302).

#### **4. Effects of Literacy on Samoan Oral Traditions**

Writing and westernization have inevitably influenced many features of Samoan oral tradition. In this section, I evaluate some of these effects, both as a direct result of writing, and as a more indirect product of developments within a transforming culture.

Spoken words are of the utmost importance in Samoa. Words are believed to be magical, and they are relied upon to settle differences, arbitrate disputes, heal sickness, and relay various senses of deep emotion. The ability to discern a situation and articulate a proper response is no small task in Samoa, and to do so with a manner of flair and wit is an even more impressive feat that earns tremendous respect for a speaker. A successful Samoan oral performer is trained through exposure and experience, and he is familiar with the country and people of Samoa in ways that can not be taught through books. For

this reason, the onset of literacy in Samoa has acted as a catalyst for transformation of orality, and an increasing sense of western ideals has posed a threat to the sustainability of true oral tradition.

The introduction of writing to an oral language undoubtedly affects the art of traditional storytelling. In Samoa, the *fagogo* genre specifically has undergone documentation, as the past thirty years have seen many published recordings of local histories, myths, and legends (Mayer 10-15-2006). The problem with preserving a story through text, however, is that commitment of an oral story to writing forever changes its character. Although writing is certainly a useful tool in the effort to preserve oral art, a transcript of an oral performance should never be perceived as the art in its entirety. It must be recognized that literature does not only exist on paper, and writing is a supplement to, not replacement for, orality. Writing preserves a story in a lasting text, but it takes the freedom of improvisation and spontaneity out of a storytelling experience. By fixing a story on paper, writing essentially transforms a living tradition into a solidified one, and although writing does allow these traditions to persist, text is unable to compare to the original tradition. As Harrison states,

Written stories are only a very impoverished form of spoken ones. Nowhere in a written text can you discern the tone of voice, loudness, excitement, gestures, facial expression, or tempo...all those things that make a story come alive (Harrison 2007:145).

Harrison implies that the beauty and freedom of oral art reside within delivery, and this is a testament to the power and durability of oral speech. There is little mystery and much restraint involved in written word, while orality favors fervor over formality. It is somewhat paradoxical, therefore, that the tools necessary to ensure the preservation of

oral tradition are the very same tools that effectively diminish the environment in which these traditions thrive.

Although writing directly transforms oral tradition, the bigger threat lies within a modernizing society that continues to adopt western ideals. As Samoa becomes increasingly influenced by westernization, younger generations demonstrate a dramatic decrease of interest in traditional customs. It is difficult to generate enthusiasm for an oral tradition when television, radio, cars, and nightclubs are just as accessible, and generally more exciting, to Samoan youth. The prestige that surrounds being a skilled orator in Samoa still exists, but “for the young, the distinction of being an orator of ability runs a poor second to the prestige of being a good auto mechanic, taxi driver, or government office clerk (Holmes 1969:351).” Due to the tremendous importance placed upon Samoan oratory skills, this diversification of interest has held many implications for Samoan political and authoritative proceedings, and has resulted in traditions that do still exist, but in an adapted form.

Within Samoa, a higher register of language is utilized for the domain of formal oratory, and it is used both to deliberate at village council, and to deliver a formal speech. This so-called ‘chiefly language’, or *gagana fa’afailauga* is the umbrella under which the many proverbial sayings, metaphorical references, and woven local histories, myths and legends exist, and competence in this arena must be cultivated. While a formal and structured educational atmosphere is useful as a supplement to learning the chiefly language, a greater familiarity with the chiefly language is gained through exposure and experience. In fact, Samoan chief Va’asili Fiti (2006) remembers being exposed to the chiefly language as a child, as she was allowed to sit in on council, and was often called



upon to deliver messages for her grandfather. Va'asili also recalls that she was more willing to learn from the elder chiefs than her peers, and this allowed her to more substantially absorb various phrases and actions. She claims that there is indeed a noticeable difference between chiefs who have learned the chiefly language through exposure and those who have simply memorized it, as speakers are marked by a demonstrated level of familiarity. Regarding this discrepancy, Va'asili remarks that there is a "loosening rope" within the standards of teaching the chiefly language, as elders must cater to a rising need for able chiefs, coupled with a simultaneous decrease in interest shown by youth (Fiti/Jackson 10-11-2006). In fact, it can be assessed that the era of classic Samoan oratory is unfortunately passing, as the legends, proverbs, and poetries do fail to capture the interest of younger generations, and only the elderly today hold this complete set of Samoan knowledge.

The consequences of a fading quality of oratorical knowledge in Samoa not only affect the richness of ceremony but also extend to the realms of politics and authority as well. In his book *From Grammar to Politics*, Alessandro Duranti (1994) documents, in detail, the many intricacies of participating in a Samoan speaking event, and he focuses especially on the political implications that these intricacies hold within a *fono*, or village council. Duranti comments on the social structures and hierarchies that are maintained through speechmaking in a *fono*, and he highlights the strong identification that Samoan politics have with verbal skills. Spoken repertoires are used to celebrate the past, make a point, win an argument, blame, apologize, accuse, invoke sentiments, and redefine rights and duties (Duranti 1994:1), and each spoken phrase carries its own weight regarding a speaker's status and authority within a village. Chiefs and orators time and again display

a compelling ability to navigate problems and crises within the village, and their subtle strategies rely heavily upon linguistic performance, through which they ultimately reassess the very foundations of social order. Without the ability to discern a necessary course of spoken action in a given situation, Samoaan speakers forfeit their authority within the social structure, and effectively work towards the deconstruction of village hierarchies. With a transforming realm of communication, Samoaan authority and political powers are inevitably shifting as well, and as Duranti states, “it is then to language that we must also pay attention if we want to understand the past and make predictions about the political future of Samoaan culture (Duranti 1994:176).”

While Samoaan oral traditions are not necessarily disappearing, they have undoubtedly been penetrated by the inevitable forces of literacy and westernization. The documentation of personal tales, myths, legends, and genealogies has solidified local histories, rendering them permanent and relatively inadaptable to future generations. While this act of preservation is necessary and important to the maintenance of Samoaan heritage, it must also be recognized that writing inherently undermines the power and authority of a speaker. Samoaan history had once been contained exclusively within the minds of storytellers, but writing has allowed for a redistribution of knowledge. Though Samoaan chiefs had at one time been reluctant to share and record their tokens of wisdom, they have quickly come to realize that the younger generations can not be relied upon to naturally engage in oral tradition (Mayer 10-15-2006). This sentiment applies to the art of speechmaking as well, where a standard of excellence in learning the techniques of oration has been lowered in order to meet the needs of new generations. Though Samoaan oratory still exists and thrives today, it does not hold the same captivation as it once did,

and it persists in an adapted form that must compete with more glamorous, lucrative endeavors. In fact, the domain of oral tradition has had to compete with many aspects of foreign contact, and as a result Samoans have effectively redistributed native orality into other outlets of expression.

## **5. From Literacy to Literature**

In this section, I discuss the recent emergence of a new genre of South Pacific literature written by native islanders. I focus primarily on two Samoan authors, Albert Wendt and Sia Figiel, and their ability to blend elements of Samoan oral tradition into a modern context of literary fiction. Wendt and Figiel choose to compose their works primarily in English, and I evaluate this decision based upon the effectiveness of the authors in still depicting an authentic native identity. I maintain that even through their English writings, Wendt and Figiel still manage to exude an indisputable Samoan foundation through innovations of language, style, and content.

### **5.1 The Rise of English**

While initial missionary work in Samoa was conducted almost exclusively in Samoan, it was only a matter of time before the English language infiltrated the region's newly formed literacy sphere. After New Zealand gained control over the territory of Western Samoa in 1914 (32), the language focus within formal education did begin to shift from Samoan to English, though a gap in the literature leaves question marks surrounding the exact course that English took within Samoan education. Though concrete facts are only available from recent decades and interviews can only offer speculation about past language dynamics, it does seem that as time progressed, not only the usage but even the tolerance of Samoan within schools decreased. Ministry of

Education Language Specialist Ainslie So'o (2006) recalls instances of disciplinary action taken for speaking Samoan inside the classroom (So'o 11-20-2006), which eventually provoked concern among Samoan parents. So'o points out that "Samoan was never considered to be that important in the curriculum, but then we noticed that the children were losing competency in their own language and heritage" (11-20-2006).

In response to this growing concern for the maintenance of Samoan culture, the Samoan language was finally introduced as a subject into the general school system in the late 1960s (Mayer 2001:81). This implementation was essentially an effort to reemphasize the Samoan language as a necessary foundation, and incidentally occurred alongside the emergence of the first instances of South Pacific literature written by native islanders, also in the late 1960s (Subramani 1992:ix). Inspired largely by anti-colonial sentiment, these works were written almost exclusively in English, and began as ways of "writing back" to the colonizers. This genre of South Pacific literature has since grown to incorporate vast amounts of imaginative fiction, and has produced several renowned Pacific authors who write in English. Perhaps most notable among these authors are native Samoans Albert Wendt and Sia Figiel, whose works indicate an undeniable Samoan core, despite their use of an adopted world language.

Wendt, Figiel, and several other Pacific artists have cited a host of reasons for using English as their preferred medium of expression. These motives are evidenced not only within the literary works themselves, but also within transcribed interviews, articles written by the authors, and scholarly reviews of specific works. Wendt and Figiel are among a group of Pacific artists who have developed innovative uses of language such that their writings not only offer an indigenous perspective, but also demonstrate an

inspired ability to depict their native culture through the way that they write in English (for examples see sections 5.5, 5.6).

## **5.2 The Beginnings of a new South Pacific Literature**

Up until fifty years ago, nearly all written literature produced about the South Pacific was actually authored by *papalagi*, or white foreigners, outsiders (Wendt 1983:82). It wasn't until the 1960s that native Pacific Islanders began penning their own works, beginning with the recording of local histories and quickly evolving into new forums of creative expression that do not simply record oral traditions, but instead mirror the magic of orality. Fijian scholar Subramani (1992:xiv) cites three major factors in the creation of a new South Pacific literature: a rich oral culture, colonial exploitation, and the English language. Many of the early works out of the Pacific were indeed composed as anti-colonial outbursts, a charge led primarily by Albert Wendt. Wendt spoke out against colonialism not only through the content of his pieces, but also through his style, where he incorporated many elements of Samoan oral tradition into his work. Wendt forged a new path of creative expression that served as a great inspiration for many other young artists, not in spite of, but rather because of his use of the English language.

## **5.3 On Choosing English**

Writing in English is a conscious decision that allows Pacific artists to dramatically increase their audience and potential readership, both locally and overseas. English means that an islander's work is evaluated on an international level, which can be both a positive and negative experience. Such scrutiny by an already established standard of literary criticism can serve to put a nation on a literary map, or it may unfairly assess a piece of writing by an only marginally applicable Anglo-centric yardstick. If treated

purely as a tool, however, English is tremendously important. English allows Pacific Islanders to be heard on such topics as colonial oppression, social and political injustices, corruption, social and cultural change, as well as personal and national attempts at gaining independence. Rotuman artist Vili Hereniko comments on the importance of an islander's ability to communicate, and asserts that

The Pacific writer, more often than not, takes his or her role as the voice of the oppressed seriously. The message is therefore often more important than the medium. If the oppressor gets the message clearly and forcefully, so much the better (Hereniko 1993:48).

Here, Hereniko implies that as long as it is effective, the English language is deemed more than acceptable by native islanders. As artists operating in a global language, Pacific writers must simply take it upon themselves to serve as a bridge between two colliding cultures, and through an "innovative use of the English language" (Hereniko 1993:47-48), islanders have the opportunity to both speak out while simultaneously maintaining a sense of native identity.

#### **5.4 Concern for Native Orality**

Before literacy reached the South Pacific, the maintenance of ideas, laws, genealogies, and histories was all very fluid, and every group of islanders had "expert orators, spokesmen, and other liars to tell" (Hau'ofa 1985:104). Regions relied on oral traditions to justify the order of society, and each village had numerous oral archives for which a demonstrated ability was highly valued. As an emerging genre of written literature crept through the South Pacific, however, a concern for the status of native orality naturally began to surface. Fijian poet, storyteller, and scholar Pio Manoa highlights this concern in his paper from the fourth annual South Pacific Conference on Reading in 1995. Here, Manoa focuses on the dynamic relationship between orality and

literacy, and expresses a fear that Pacific orality is fading in light of literacy, leaving Pacific writing as an incomplete misrepresentation of native islanders. Manoa stresses that Pacific artists must “bear the burden of orality”, and he asserts that “literacy must be configured by a creative orality” (Manoa 1995:19). He recognizes that while the oral word educates more profoundly, literacy and technology are effectively threatening the proliferation of oral tradition, and Pacific artists therefore have an obligation to create “a literacy that engages oral energies in its linguistic and cultural contexts while using available electronic technology to enhance the process, not diminish it (Manoa 1995:4).” Though the role of oral literature has been arrested and weakened to some degree by literacy and westernization, Manoa essentially calls for a resurrection of orality through literature, and the answers to his call originate out of Samoa, beginning with the works of Albert Wendt and resonating through the voice of Sia Figiel.

### **5.5 Albert Wendt as a Pioneer**

Growing up, Albert Wendt was constantly exposed to Samoan oral tradition, as his grandmother never ceased to amaze him with nightly fables, myths, and legends. As a writer, Wendt led Pacific writers in incorporating elements of oral tradition into his formal writings, as others had not yet flirted with such a self-conscious stage of literature (Subramani 1992:33). Wendt’s ability to recreate oral stories in support of his own literary themes set him apart from his literary counterparts, and this talent “can be read as a continuous experiment in generating a modern aesthetic for the Pacific derived appropriately from indigenous traditions” (Sharrad 2003:7).

Though he writes in English, Wendt still manages to display a strong sense of Samoan-ness. Through his style, structure, and word choice, he suggests a native

Samoan foundation within an English text, as “his use of this language conveys a knowledge and competence in his own mother tongue” (Va’ai 1998:23). By writing English in a style that suggests an ‘other’ native language, Wendt effectively employs the literary tool of *relexification* (Va’ai 1998:8). To ‘relexify’ literally means “to replace the vocabulary of a language with words drawn from another language, without changing the grammatical structure [of the initial language].”<sup>6</sup> Many of the words that Wendt introduces are common Samoan nouns, as in the passage

The night before, Tauilo pepe had summoned about half the Sapepe matai [chiefs] to his fale [house], and after a heavy meal had told them of his plans for clearing his new land. Toasa had immediately offered to allow the men of his aiga [family] to work for Tauilo pepe. Most of the other aiga heads offered also (Wendt 1979:59).

The above literary device serves as an effective reflection of the way Samoans actually speak, and demonstrates an innovative means for Pacific artists to gain a native voice even through a medium of English expression.

In addition to being a renowned author, poet, and playwright, Albert Wendt is also a teacher. After earning educational degrees abroad in New Zealand, Wendt began his career in 1965 as an instructor at the prestigious Samoa College (equivalent to high school). After only three years of teaching, Wendt was appointed headmaster of the school, and he began to implement a revised curriculum that coincided with his passion for creative expression. As an emerging artist who had just begun to compose his first major works of literature, Wendt initially served his country by promoting expression through artwork, creative writing, and drama (Sharrad 2003:12). Even as his work

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<sup>6</sup> While the exact definition of *relexify* was derived from an online dictionary source ([www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com)), discussion of and reference to this linguistic phenomenon can be found in such articles as George L. Huttar’s “Sources of Creole Semantic Structures” (1975), and Tim Knab’s “When is a Language Really Dead: The Case of Pochutec” (1980), among others.



gained notoriety, Wendt continued to teach and was promoted to various positions of educational influence throughout the Pacific. In fact, as his work gained more and more recognition, Wendt's passion only grew, and he constantly spoke of the need to fill the perceived void of art and artists in the Pacific. He maintains that Pacific Islanders possess an infinite potential to redefine themselves, as they exist in "a fabulous treasure house of motifs, themes, styles, material which we can use in contemporary forms to express our uniqueness, identity, pain, joy, and our own visions of Oceania and earth" (Wendt 1983:81). Wendt holds strongly to the conviction that self-expression is a prerequisite of self-respect, and he truly believes that artistic diversity in the Pacific is "our most worthwhile contribution to humankind" (Wendt 1983:81). From the classroom, through his works, and within academia, Albert Wendt has always maintained a strong passion for the cultivation of native Pacific literature, and though his voice has projected to the far reaches of Oceania, his message fell first upon the local ears of Sia Figiel.

### **5.6 Sia Figiel as an Innovative Icon**

Known as the first female novelist out of Samoa, Sia Figiel is famous for her provocative poetry and prose that not only tighten the gap between orality and literature, but also touch upon sensitive cultural issues in a way that no other Samoan writer has ever done before. Author of four innovative works to date, Sia Figiel grew up like Albert Wendt under heavy exposure to Samoan storytelling and poetry. These mediums of oral tradition served important roles of inspiration throughout Figiel's childhood, and certainly reflect in the way she writes today (Figiel 1996:133). Figiel cites Albert Wendt's ability to weave legends into his work as the biggest influence on her own structural intentions (Figiel 1996:129), and goes on to claim that "The imagery and music

of the *fagogo* [legends] and the *solo* [poetry] continue(s) to shape and form the way I write in English” (Figiel 1996:122). Figiel’s works go far beyond code-switching and relexification, as she extends the idea into the structural body of written literature, with an aim to energize Samoan oral traditions through her English words.

Sia Figiel’s conscious effort to maintain Samoan orality throughout her literature is certainly evident within her works. In her novella *The Girl in the Moon Circle*, for instance, Figiel utilizes a double narrator as well as various instances of personified natural elements. Both of these literary devices are indeed products of Figiel’s *fagogo* influence, and she maintains that such tools are employed to give meaning and value to indigenous expression and composition (Figiel 1996:129). Furthermore, Figiel’s use of language exhibits a unique blend of English and Samoan, which serves to capture the essence of native Samoan conversation. Examples of this language hybridization can be found in the following passages, from Figiel’s novels *Where We Once Belonged* (1996) and *The Girl in the Moon Circle* (1996), respectively:

A newspaper boy makes the rounds, ‘Faakau gusipepa! [selling newspaper!] *Samoa Weekly!* The continuing story of Taki ma Lisa! Faakau gusi!’ His voice fades into the steam, rising from the tar, rising from the moa of Samoa – the mid, the centre. (Figiel 1996:75)

After his hair was cut and presented to Gagau. Food was brought to our house. Pisupo [corned beef]. Baked kalo [taro]. Fish. Eels in coconut milk. And one large ie koga [fine mat]. Which didn’t interest us as much as the food did. (Figiel 1996:95).

Through the character selling newspapers and a ten year-old narrator, Figiel portrays a vivid image of Samoan vernacular as a mixture of both English and Samoan, enhanced by the additional effect of relexified nouns. Figiel also rejects the norm of formal writing through her ‘vulgar’ use of the Samoan vernacular ‘k’ language, which demonstrates a

loyalty to spoken conversation and elicits an air of orality within the work. The alternative to using this spoken ‘k’ language is the more formal ‘t’ language of Samoa<sup>7</sup>, which is typically used within “domains of language usage which were not traditionally found in Samoa” (Mayer 2001:114). So although literature was indeed introduced as a foreign domain, Sia Figiel appropriates that domain by breaking through the ‘utterly dull and completely uninteresting’ confined conventionalities of formal language (Figiel 1996:125).

In addition to her linguistic style, Sia Figiel also pays close attention to the words that she chooses, the structure of her sentences, and the actual physical appearance of the text. Figiel may spend hours writing and rewriting a paragraph until it looks absolutely perfect, and only then can she begin to hear the work as a piece of complete literature (Figiel 1996:121-122). In her efforts to perfectly portray Samoan speakers, Figiel purposefully misspells English words and emphasizes ‘incorrect’ syllables, all with the intention of accurately representing the phonetics of Samoan language. A prime example of these literary devices can be found in the beginning of *The Girl in the Moon Circle* (1996), as Figiel introduces one of her two narrators, ten year old Samoana:

#### English Homework –My Sefl

My name is Samoana Pili. I tan yaer old. I living at Malaefou. I has a dog. My dog name is Uisiki [Whiskey]. I has abig too. I have thre anilmas. Dog. Big. And cat. My cat name is Kili. She have tow little cat. My big name is Piki laikiki [little pig]. My big mather name is Aumakua. My mather name is Lafitaga. Everyone calling her Lafi. My father name is Malaefouapili Pili. Everyone calling him Pili. I have one siste. I have tow brathe. He Faakaoko and Isaia. Oko going at Malaefou Hai Schol. Ivoga and Isaia and me going to Malaefou Primayr Schol. My taeche name Mis

<sup>7</sup> In the vernacular ‘k’ language, the phonemes /t/, /n/, and /r/ are replaced by the phonemes /k/, /ŋ/, and /l/, respectively. These ‘k’ language phonemes are articulated further back in the mouth, and are thus considered a ‘less refined’ brand of speech in Samoa.

Gren. She coming from Amerika. She has pisikoa [peace corps]. I taking  
flowr and mago for she.

TI ANT (Figiel 1996:2)

The above paragraph creates a Samoan voice for the story, through misplaced letters, incorrect grammar, and Samoan spellings. Though the current voice is that of a ten-year-old, many of these devices continue throughout the book, and serve to propel a reader into native Samoan conversation. As seen above, Figiel also utilizes such techniques as enacting syntactic fusions of Samoan and English styles, sharpening the tone of her sentences, and inserting appropriate Samoan words into the text, all within an effort to expose Samoan orality through her literary voice.

Sia Figiel is a firm believer that oral and written traditions exist on pluralistic planes. While the written word is not necessarily a natural progression of the oral, Figiel does make a concerted effort to bring the two forms of expression together (Figiel 1996:123). She is firmly entrenched within the overlap of the oral and written realms, and expresses the importance of a reader's perception when she claims that "Oral and written aesthetics are highly important. I want the reader to be able to experience the music of the oral tradition in the way I write in English" (Figiel 1996:122). Figiel is constantly aware not only of her language and how it reflects Samoan past traditions, but also on the present, and the deeper themes that resonate throughout the nation.

In addition to her strong visual language, Sia Figiel also deals with serious human issues. She broaches such topics as incest, child abuse, suicide, rape, and alcoholism within Samoa. These topics had never before been exposed to such an extent by a Samoan artist, and Figiel is aware that her unearthing of such issues is perceived as a negative reflection on Samoa as a whole. Figiel is not concerned with judgment,

however, as her objective is to write, and to write well (Figiel 1996:131-132). Her efforts to link Samoan tradition with written text do not go unnoticed, as her exposure of taboo subjects makes her words all the more powerful. In effect, Sia Figiel's works of literature are written with the intention of performance, complete with provocative themes that, through the author's language, are meant to be experienced not only with the eyes and mind, but with the ears and soul as well.

As important as language is to Sia Figiel's works of literature, it is even more important to her as a performer. She pays careful attention to the audience, and her language use depends on the respective receptions and reactions to English versus Samoan. Although a mixture is often employed by Figiel, her careful attention to switching demonstrates a mastery and understanding of both languages and their appropriate contexts (Figiel 1996:123-124). Though she may deliver one line in Samoan and the next in English, an undoubtedly Samoan sphere encircles Figiel's words, which explode out of her mouth, through the audience, and eventually onto paper.

Sia Figiel has perfected the art of performance prose, crafting her English works in such a way that a reader can not help but be overcome by a sense of Samoa. Reaching this level of self-consciousness, however, was no simple task for Figiel. In order to truly know one's homeland, she stresses, a writer must first travel the world and gain exposure to *other* people, experience *other* cultures. Such foreign exposure inevitably includes observations on global uses of language, and specifically, Figiel cites African and Caribbean artists' use of the English language as great sources of inspiration for her own works (Figiel 1996:132). Their style, their voice, their *indigenization* are all things that Sia Figiel mimics, but in her own, Samoan, way.

Though she may write primarily in English, little doubt exists about the authenticity of Sia Figiel's work. She herself recalls several instances of young Samoans approaching her, exclaiming how real her characters are, how much they are like *them* (Figiel 1996:124). Emma Kruse-Va'ai also asserts that Sia Figiel's language "hit it dead on" in terms of her variety of English and Samoan use. Kruse-Va'ai believes that the use of language is extremely important in literature, and remembers the vital role that English literature played in her own research study on the appropriation of English in Samoa (Kruse-Va'ai 11-22-2006). As an example of language use in literature, Kruse-Va'ai examined Figiel's works, including *The Girl in the Moon Circle*. Commenting on the novella, she claims that "Figiel's language use becomes the expression of not just the author, but of a society which is defiantly self-defining with a modern context of technological innovations and Eurocentric notions of being" (Kruse-Va'ai 1998:206). And it is this act of defiant self-definition that makes Samoa so unique, and an enduring quality that Sia Figiel takes meticulous care to portray through her language. It is surprising, therefore, that Sia Figiel had such a hard time publishing *The Girl in the Moon Circle* (1996), her second piece of fiction. Many establishments actually deemed the work *too* Samoan in style, structure, themes, narration, and essentially everything (Figiel 1996:iv), which is ironic, since the book is written almost entirely in English.

Beginning with orality, Sia Figiel manages to weave innumerable elements of Samoan language into her work, despite its acquired-language reality. Through her language, she also finds an ability to effectively express her own perceptions and impressions from a native Samoan viewpoint. Therefore, although her works are written in English, Sia Figiel has unmistakably stemmed from another language, another place.

It is evident that she has accepted the impending changes facing her country, and has in effect used them to her advantage in portraying a Samoa that is genuine, tangible, and compelling.

By not being afraid to articulate a voice that is purely her own, Sia Figiel was able to creatively express herself as a Samoan, and in doing so gained rapid success on the literary circuit. As an icon of influence, Figiel turns right back around and encourages young artists everywhere to follow their imaginative instinct and take that leap into creative expression. Samoa in particular is encouraged to heed such advice, as the call for Samoan literature is far from satisfied. Emma Kruse-Va'ai recognizes the scarcity of Samoan books, and acknowledges the need to push Samoan literary emphasis in schools. She sees literature as an opportunity for Samoa to "write back", using English and education as indigenized tools of the colonizers (Kruse-Va'ai 1998:184). She calls for teachers who "love reading, love language, speaking, and expressing oneself" (Kruse-Va'ai 11-22-2006), and knows that the root of possibility invariably begins with education, where Samoa is currently experiencing a shift in power from the oral to the literate. Despite this shift, however, literature is and will forever remain a creative outlet for the resurrection of Samoaan orality, as well as a forum for artists to exhibit a sense of Samoaan self. Such cultural preservation can be seen within the examples of native artists thus far, who through their literature have mastered the art of "conveying cultural messages and contributing to the maintenance of a Samoaan cultural identity" (Kruse-Va'ai 1998:181). Beginning with Albert Wendt's mythical synthesis and resonating in Sia Figiel's ethno-rhythmic performance prose, a reader of modern Samoaan literature is essentially propelled from an English text into Samoaan (oral) tradition.

## 6. Language and Literacy in Contemporary Samoa

In Samoa today, both the Samoaan and English languages maintain status as official languages of the country, and each language plays a role within various spheres of expression. While the Samoaan language has maintained relative exclusivity within the domain of oral tradition, English has gained a strong presence through and within formal education, as well as within mass media.<sup>8</sup> Despite the overwhelming presence of English, however, the Samoaan language does still hold a place within these adopted domains, and as Samoaan society continues to adapt to foreign influence, many educational changes are being instilled in order to ensure the proliferation of an authentic Samoaan core. The past ten years specifically have seen an increase in the standard of Samoaan language emphasis within higher learning, both through amendments made to the bilingual National University of Samoa, as well as the introduction of an Indigenous Samoaan University, opening in 1999 and operating entirely in the Samoaan language.

Founded in 1984 by an act of Parliament, the National University of Samoa seeks to create an “establishment of a centre of excellence in the study of Samoa, the Samoaan language, and culture” (HDR 2006:90). In light of this claim, the Samoaan Studies Department at NUS has recently undergone several revisions. Most notably, Samoaan Language is now offered as a major, which effectively recognizes language as a separate entity from the previous option of only Language *and* Culture. Within this new major,

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<sup>8</sup> Casual conversations between Samoaans typically occur in Samoaan, often with the sporadic inclusion of English words and phrases. The amount of mixture depends largely on the setting, as Samoaans are considered to be living in a linguistically hybrid society that delegates different language emphasis for different domains. While this study does not evaluate Samoaan conversation specifically, it should be noted that many of the innovations of language within other realms are inspired and derived from everyday conversation. For a comprehensive analysis of the place of English within all aspects of Samoaan society, please see Dr. Emma Kruse-Va'ai's doctoral dissertation, *Producing the Text of Culture: The Appropriation of English in Contemporary Samoa* (1998).



students are required to take eight Samoan Language classes, ranging from focus in Syntax, Semantics, and Translation, to Samoan Oratory and Language Change. A course on Oral and Written Literature also encourages students to analyze the role of language within Samoan literary arts, as well as examine their own creative use of language (So'o, As. 11-20-2006). Additionally, the National University of Samoa also offers classes that teach Samoan as a second language. While this is primarily an effort to reach non-native speakers of the Samoan language, such classes are also a tool to improve competency among students who are native Samoan speakers, but may possess sub-standard language skills. These students, more often than not, are children of mixed-blood parents, or simply come from Samoan families that for whatever reason, choose to speak English rather than Samoan within their homes (Temese 11-20-2006)<sup>9</sup>. Thus, as a bilingual institution that pays special regard to language skills upon entrance, NUS is ultimately geared towards equipping young Samoans to “ideally be competent in both [languages], but still maintain ‘Samoan-ness’” (So'o, As. 11-20-2006).

Further emphasizing the presence of the Samoan language within schools is *Le Iunivesite o le Aмоса o Savavau*, or the Indigenous Samoan University. Founded in 1997, *Le Iunivesite o Savavau* enrolls nearly 300 native students. The institution was established by Samoa's first local Director of Education, Aiono Fanaafi Le Tagaloa, and reflects an attempt to revive the vitality of the Samoan language within education. When asked about admission into the institution, Le Tagaloa explained only a couple of easy requirements: an applicant must be at least 18 years of age, and must have a strong desire

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<sup>9</sup> The desire to use English in the homes may stem from the perception that the level of English is directly proportional to intelligence or success (Le Tagaloa 11-27-2006), and parents should therefore encourage its use at home. This notion is oversimplified, however, as many Samoans continue to live happy and healthy lives without speaking a word of English (Kruse-Va'ai 11-22-2006).

to be educated, speak, read, and write in the Samoan language. Though the courses vary only slightly from traditional university courses, they are all conducted exclusively in Samoan. Le Tagaloa stresses that the purpose of this institution is to establish a foundation, and to encourage creative thinking and active learning first in the native language, with the intention of then serving as a bridge to new languages (Le Tagaloa 11-27-2006). In fact, this is a popular sentiment in Samoa, as many educators have expressed a passion for ‘Samoan first’. The consensus is that while English is indeed there for the taking, the native language must first be ingrained into the minds of Samoan youth. With a strong Samoan foundation, students can better use what they have learned to improve their native land. Ultimately, this is the ideal goal for western education in Samoa: to take it, to realize its use, and then to *come back and contribute to the development of Samoa*. (Kruse-Va’ai 11-22-2006).

After receiving a ‘Samoanized’ version of western education, young Samoans are equipped to step foot into a world of colliding cultures. With an increasing threat of westernization engrossing the minds of youth, it is important that such a strong sense of identity is ingrained into young Samoans, enabling them to manifest Samoan culture through adopted outlets of expression. With education as a foundation, Samoans are not only able to navigate the realm of creative literature, but they are also able to maintain a place for Samoan tradition even within modern social spheres. Some of the more influential outlets of expression are of course those of the media, as radio and television especially capture the eyes and ears of Samoan citizens. Even within a foreign domain and a wide variety of English use, however, Samoans have still managed to appropriate

these foreign arenas, once again through creative innovations as well as a demonstrated resilience of traditional customs.

When listening to the radio in Samoa, it is difficult not to hear snatches of both English and Samoan, sometimes within a single song. Regardless of the amount of English residue, however, an even stronger element of Samoan culture is exposed either through the tune or the lyrics. Many Samoan artists adapt Samoan lyrics to a foreign tune, or put already existing English songs to a reggae background. (Kruse-Va'ai 1998:169) A prime example of this musical appropriation can be heard in December, as familiar Christmas Carols ring out of radios, with the English lyrics jingle-belling along to a Samoan-reggae beat. Furthermore, new waves of hip-hop and rap music are also emerging onto the Samoan music scene. Similar to the original style of remixing, Samoan rap songs may include a bit of English lyric with an otherwise Samoan tune and tone, or they may be entirely Samoan to a hip-hop background beat. This new brand of music has an enormous influence on the young people of Samoa, and serves as an outlet of creative expression. Samoan rap and hip-hop are yet again products of Samoans using language as they want it, this time by cleverly mixing the domains of music and language, and effectively bringing a foreign genre "into their own variety." Thus, within the oral domain of modern music, it does not matter *which* language artists choose to employ, because a link to Samoa can always be felt through the *way* in which such language is used (Kruse-Va'ai 11-22-2006).

After examining the dynamics of language on the radio, one can not help but naturally progress to television in Samoa. Television has perhaps an even greater influence on the Samoan public than radio does, and the role of language must therefore

be carefully evaluated. As TV3 reporter Hased Ieremia points out, “language is very vital, very influential” within his work, as he is in the business of reporting the news to the entire nation of Samoa. Ieremia stresses the immense competency that he must have in both English and Samoan, as he highlights a typical day complete with interviews, write-ups, and voice-overs, all done in both languages for each story. Ieremia also points out the difficulties in translating stories from one language to another, and discusses the importance of remaining loyal to Samoan language tradition by adhering to the rules of respect as he compiles his news presentations. He notes that while English allows for many more linguistic liberties when trying to directly report a story, Ieremia must on the flipside convey respect during his Samoan portion by using euphemisms, recognizing any and all chiefly titles, and utilizing other linguistic nuances to guarantee that viewers are not offended by a broadcast. Ieremia sighs at the complexities of his linguistically diverse job, and shakes his head as he claims that “No reporter could survive without being a native [Samoan] speaker” (Ieremia 11-15-2006).

Hased Ieremia points out the complexities involved in generating current media in Samoa, and these issues apply to radio, television, and newspaper alike. The fact that intricacies exist, however, is merely a testament to the resilience of Samoan culture even within a foreign sphere of communicative technology. Instead of simply adopting media practices as they exist in the English language and tradition, Samoa has instead adapted many of its own customs of language and culture into the spheres of music, television, and printing. Both the English and Samoan languages hold respective places in the media, and whether it is through a musical mixture or a hybridized newscast, a strong sense of Samoan identity powerfully persists once again within a foreign influence.

## 7 **Conclusion: Implications for the Present and Future of Samoa**

As a nation that first experienced literacy in the local language, Samoa has employed a strong proliferation of culture even amid influences of literacy that continue to transform traditions. While the Samoan language has consistently maintained a place within Samoan society, the rise of English and increased emphasis on western ideals has inevitably posed a threat to the sustainability of native orality, classically steeped in such traditions as speechmaking, storytelling, poetry, and chanting. Grippled by a potential loss of heritage as well as unfaltering pride and loyalty, however, Samoans have been able to extract elements of these traditions and instill them into adopted outlets of expression, even those in English. Through an emerging genre of native literature, Samoan language revival within schools, and a conscious effort to Samoanize music, television, and print, Samoans have effectively indigenized western language and literacy, thus ensuring the positive evolution of Samoan orality.

One of the more overpowering examples of Samoan appropriation of language and literacy resides within Samoan modern literature written in English. Not only do many of the works accurately reflect a native Samoan society, but they also serve to resurrect a shifting oral tradition. Beginning with author Albert Wendt and booming onwards through the voice of Sia Figiel, the Samoan language and culture never fail to overshadow the use of English within literature. Wendt weaves his words from the wonders of Samoan oral tradition, while Figiel achieves authenticity by stampeding her way through language norms. In addition, Figiel exposes provocative issues that serve to enhance her linguistic innovations, and thus elicit an air of performance within her works.

This effort to bridge the gap between Samoan orality and foreign-introduced literacy is a source of inspiration for young artists, as they too try their hand at procuring an everlasting Samoan center beneath a craftily composed English disguise.

Albert Wendt and Sia Figiel are simply two of many artists to have emerged out of the Pacific, all of whom continue to petition for the proliferation of native literature. This sentiment is widespread, and is a common theme within Samoan schools, rallying behind such prominent artists in their call for native expression. Since the sphere of formal education is saturated with the use of English, many creative works are composed in this adopted language, which is deemed perfectly acceptable as long as the artists retain an effective voice. On the other hand, however, the Samoan language is gaining strength within curriculums, both through current innovations at the National University of Samoa, as well as the establishment of an indigenous Samoan University. These efforts are an attempt to redefine the importance of mother tongue mastery, as a Samoan language basis is vital when trying to navigate through a literately hybrid society. The English language holds a commanding presence in Samoa, and its existence, along with other aspects of westernization, cannot be denied. With modern education as a foundation, however, the use of English is continually overpowered by a Samoan appropriation. Through the indigenization of creative literature, the integration of traditional and modern musical elements, and a designated role for Samoan traditional language within an adopted arena of media, Samoan expression rarely surrenders to English or its norms.

The adoption of literacy in Samoa held a potential to permanently alter native Samoan traditions, rendering them a distant memory from pre-Christian times. Rather

than allowing the onset of literacy to dictate a new society, however, Samoans have instead adapted several domains of literacy in a way that maintains native culture, yet still allows Samoa to move forward within global development. While it is inevitable that transformations occur and culture shifts along with foreign influence, the Samoan appropriation of things such as creative writing, radio, and television exudes an undeniable character and reflects a society that was and is geared for change (Kruse-Va'ai 1998:219). By recognizing that culture is fluid, Samoans have been able to revive native traditions within a modern context, effectively traversing a circle of orality that echoes around colliding cultures. As literacy and globalization continue to spread across the world, a nation like Samoa serves as a role model, with a demonstrated ability to simultaneously accept foreign influence and actively evolve under a native discretion. While I have applied this ability exclusively to the status of Samoan orality and literacy, it stems from an attitude that undoubtedly applies to all aspects of westernization, and an attitude that is energized by Albert Wendt as he claims, "The present is all that we have and we should live it out as creatively as possible" (Wendt 1983:76).

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