

## **Words of Truth: Authority and Agency in Ritual and Legal Speeches in the Himalayas**

**Marie Lecomte-Tilouine and Anne de Sales**

This issue of *Oral Tradition* presents a collection of anthropological studies on the sources of authority for ritual and legal speech in the Himalayan region. Its goal is twofold: first, to shed new light on a region whose diversity of oral traditions has so far resisted comparative studies; and second, to reconsider two major theories of language communication that confront linguistics and sociology. Pierre Bourdieu's essays on the symbolic power of language have the advantage of presenting strong views on the subject and provide a stimulating point of departure for a collective work exploring authoritative speech from a comparative perspective. Written between 1975 and 1982, Bourdieu's essays (1982 and 2001) were motivated by the then overwhelming position of linguistics in social sciences and the need he felt to reintroduce social relations in the analysis of linguistic communication. His criticisms also targeted anthropology, which assumed the neutrality of the observer and ignored relations of power. Thirty years on, while these criticisms have lost some of their relevance in other contexts, the social and political rooting of oral traditions in the Himalayas have remain little explored. This collection of articles aims at encouraging such a perspective and at developing comparative studies in the Himalayan region. Indeed, the latter forms a unique context where "archaic" ritual contexts meet modernity. All the essays address contemporary situations that are embedded in inherited social and political relations that now face social transformations.

Himalayan communities are characterized by rich oral traditions that remain extremely lively in rural and urban contexts, although the studies of the latter are scarce. The oral compositions remain a fundamental part of religious and even economic activity. These traditions, which are highly diverse and yet belong to the same cultural area, have not yet been reconsidered along common theoretical guidelines. The originality of the present collection of essays lies in its presentation of oral speech belonging to different fields: bardic tradition (Leavitt; Lecomte-Tilouine), shamanic tradition (Gaenszle; de Sales), judicial speech (Berti; Berardi; Jahoda), musical language (Bernède), and ordinary language (Ghimire). All these registers claim a certain authority and even to tell the truth. Indeed these case studies highlight that the issue of truth is central to ritual and legal speech in the Himalaya. The bard, the shaman, and the judge all claim, in one way or another, to speak the truth. The issue of truth is, thus, central, and appears as the common denominator of the main genres of oral tradition explored in this volume.

This introduction presents the theoretical issues at the origin of this collective work, recalling a few points of Bourdieu's theory, as well as the linguistic theory he criticizes. We then try to identify the limits of his seemingly universal socio-linguistic approach when it is confronted with a socio-cultural context very different from that in which it was elaborated. Next, we present an overview of the essays gathered here as well as a few comparative questions that the contributors were asked to consider. Finally, a brief presentation of a few selected works on oral texts in the Himalaya for further readings is offered.

## Theoretical Issues

### *"Saussure's Coup" and "Austin's Error"*

For Bourdieu, the inaugural coup ("le coup de force inaugural") of Ferdinand de Saussure, who excluded from linguistics the relationships between society and language, determined the fate of modern linguistics (Bourdieu and Boltanski 1975:14). Moreover, it turned language into an abstract and artificially unified product based on transparent and egalitarian interactions. Bourdieu's criticism focused thereafter on the theories developed by John L. Austin and John Searle, and centered on the pragmatics of language.

This major school of thought argues that when we speak we do not just describe the world but we act on it; we perform speech acts; the acting dimension of utterances is a structural property of language; semantics cannot be separated from pragmatics. Following Austin's seminal work *How to Do Things With Words* (1962), Searle (1965:222) defined a speech act or illocutionary act as "the minimal unit of linguistic communication . . . produced by a being with certain intentions." Searle continued: "to perform illocutionary acts is to engage in a rule-governed form of behavior." He, however, distinguished between two sorts of rules (223):

Some regulate antecedently existing forms of behavior; for example, the rules of etiquette regulate interpersonal relationships, but these relationships exist independently of the rules of etiquette. Some rules on the other hand do not merely regulate but create or define new forms of behavior. The rules of football, for example, do not merely regulate the game of football but as it were create the possibility of or define that activity...; football has no existence apart from these rules. I call the latter kind of rules constitutive rules and the former kind regulative rules.

According to Searle, speech acts are "acts performed in accordance with . . . sets of constitutive rules" (224). He emphasized the tautological character of rules that define what they regulate. He also remarked that the speakers are able to "play the game" of communication without explicitly knowing the rules since these are not generally formulated as such. In order to find out what these rules are, Searle suggested identifying first the necessary and sufficient conditions for the performance of one speech act in particular (a promise). In other words, the linguist examined the logic of enunciation for the power of words on reality.

By contrast, Pierre Bourdieu saw language not only as a means of communication but also as a medium of power. He stressed the fact that a linguistic community is the outcome of

political processes; consequently any position within a given community is bound to involve power relations that are embedded in the linguistic interactions of its members. From this perspective, speech acts can be understood as signs of authority intended to be believed or even obeyed. These power relationships are most clearly revealed in the case of performative statements, whose efficacy depends almost entirely, according to Bourdieu, on the speaker's social function, which must match his or her speech act. Indeed, it is always the *function* of the spokesperson of a group that is invested with authority, rather than the individual who fulfills that function. The power of spoken words comes from the "symbolic capital" that the group confers on its spokesperson. Acts of authority are "authorized" by the group, and through this process of "social magic" the spokesperson produces the group as much as the group produces its spokesperson.

In order to investigate further this idea of "social magic," Bourdieu took the example of the designer's label or the artist's signature, which magically gives a great surplus value to the object, "transmutes" it or even "trans-substantifies" it. Bourdieu (1975:21-22) showed how this magic occurs upstream by the rules of the "field"—that is to say, the social space within which the social actors compete for control of the symbolic goods—that create the scarcity of the producer and hence that of the product. In other words, "the principle of the effectiveness of the ritual operation should not be sought in the magical formalism, that is to say in the ritual itself, but in the conditions that produce faith in the ritual (of which formalism is only a minor aspect)" (23). For Bourdieu the effectiveness of speech results rather from a "system of production that produces, among the producers themselves, the ignorance of the mechanisms of production" (26). The "faith" or "collective belief" is transformed into a "collective ignorance" through what can be seen as a kind of (negative) Durkheimian movement. This theory, developed in an article co-authored with Yvette Delsaut (1975), announced Bourdieu's criticism of Austin's theory of performativity: the word has no intrinsic power; it is the pre-existing authority of the speaker that endows his speech with authority. Both articles were published in the first volume of *Les Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, giving the thesis of "Austin's error" particular weight in Bourdieu's work.

### *Problems with Bourdieu's Theory*

In an article on the symbolism of political rituals, the anthropologist Marc Abélès (1991:245, our translation) rightly pointed out that Bourdieu's reasoning presented "the risk of infinite regression in this search for a foundation that is naturally induced by the idea of recognition." Indeed, if the authority of speech acts is based on the socially recognized position of the speaker, one wonders what has authorized the speaker in the first place. Abélès recognized that Bourdieu (1982:101) partially answered this question by showing the circularity by which "the representative makes the group that made him or her." Abélès (1991:249), however, refuted the idea that the group could not have access to these mechanisms. By focusing on how symbolic representations manipulate social reality for the purpose of domination, Bourdieu rejected the possibility that ritual might be a process that generates meaning—a process that anthropologists strive to understand in all its complexity: representations do not just *signify* an assumed social reality; they have their own power and can, under certain conditions, be reality itself as we live it

every day. In other words, there are no grounds for privileging the signified (“social reality” for Bourdieu) over the signifier (the symbolic representations) if one is to understand the meaning of social interactions.

The problems we encounter with Bourdieu’s theory are also related to the specific nature of the type of society that he studied: late twentieth-century Western society is radically different from rural societies in the Himalayan region. These present a highly codified hierarchy of partitioned groups. A more or less egalitarian social organization is supposed to characterize indigenous peoples of Tibetan culture, however these societies present their own hierarchy: between older and younger brothers, men and women and, among followers of Buddhism, clergy, and laity. This configuration puts to the test a sociology that was initially concerned with a more homogeneous and centralized society possessing an old democratic tradition.

In Nepal, and adjacent regions, we presently observe a great linguistic diversity and the resilient traditions of a hierarchical caste society alongside processes of centralization, nation building, and the emergence of a class society. The existence of a single language of legitimacy is therefore unlikely. Within this complex society, various spokespersons are recognized, either as especially competent speakers or as specialists in particular oral traditions; their social status, however, varies greatly and their speech is not always addressed to their own group. Shamans, for example, officiate for all, regardless of ethnicity; the Damai bards or the Gaine minstrels, located at the bottom of the caste hierarchy, perform for their high-caste patrons. On what sources does the authority of speech rest when the spokesperson for a group does not belong to that group? What do their narrative practices tell us about the relationships between groups—when the notion of group includes humans on the one hand and divinities or spiritual entities on the other hand?

Because of its ahistorical nature, Bourdieu’s theory (1975:26) does not help us to grasp social changes. His approach does not ignore conflicts, but stresses how these strengthen and structure society, rather than how they deconstruct or weaken it. For Bourdieu, society presents a structural “harmony” among its various “fields” that contributes to the opacity of the mechanisms of domination and, therefore, to their reproduction. In Himalayan societies, in contrast, social organization is ritually exhibited, and codified practices in all domains of daily life (such as food, matrimonial rules, ritual practices, occupations, and speech) are ritually assigned to individuals by birth. There is no opacity in the sense that Bourdieu suggested. Also, with the recent “demonization” of the castes at the top of the hierarchy, the strategies of most social actors currently aim at reinterpreting the attributes and behaviors associated with social status.

### *“Fellowship of Discourse” and the Question of Truth*

Partly because of a very low rate of schooling until the 1960s, Himalayan societies have by no means eradicated oral traditions. Moreover, even nowadays, orality is highly valued in Hinduism, the dominant religion of the region.<sup>1</sup> The Himalayan area is still characterized by numerous specialists in oral texts who act as the guardians of an exclusive knowledge, and form

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<sup>1</sup>On the negativity of writing in Ancient India, and its power of deception, see Malamoud (1997).

groups that are akin to what Michel Foucault termed a “fellowship of discourse” (“sociétés de discours”) (Foucault 1972:225, translation):

An archaic model of this would be those groups of Rhapsodists, possessing knowledge of poems to recite or, even, upon which to work variations and transformations. But though the ultimate object of this knowledge was ritual recitation, it was protected and preserved within a determinate group, by the, often extremely complex, exercises of memory implied by such a process.

We may recognize in these bards the figures whom Marcel Detienne (1994 [1967]:55) called “masters of truth” in Ancient Greece, at a time when the Greek civilization was characterized by orality and “memory that was regarded as sacred [was] the privilege of certain groups of men organized into brotherhoods.” Indeed, truth, *aletheia*, is inseparable from divine memory but divine memory is not the power to memorize or remember things, nor does it intend to reconstruct the past in a time perspective. Like mantic knowledge, it is defined by Hesiod’s formula “what is, what will be, what was” (55). Like the oracle, the poet of Ancient Greece was supposed to be in direct contact with the other world through his memory, which was conceived of as a religious power. Similarly, the truth of justice appealed to the divine, which was expressed by the practice of ordeal. These three types of discourses: poetic praise, prophecy, and judgment were set apart from the quotidian not only because of their common divine origin, but also because of their power over the human world, as words that “realize” things, in the sense of making them real (103). However, the truth of these magico-religious words was not without ambiguity: both the words of the Muses and mantic speech could mislead humans, for whom the masters of truth could become “masters of deception” (127).

In attempting to reconstruct the historical evolution of the idea of truth in Greece, Detienne showed how this truth/deception ambiguity was gradually replaced by the requirement of non-contradiction. He retraces the process of secularization of magico-religious speech and the development of its dialogic form that took place in the classical period in connection with the transformation of the socio-political organization. The warrior group, occupying a central place in this organization, established new institutions such as assemblies in which speech was “a common good” (131): each member of the group spoke in turn in these egalitarian meetings. In this Detienne saw the ancestors of the future political assemblies of classical Greece (144). “Dialogue-speech” (*la parole-dialogue*) was also a lay phenomenon embedded in human time; it no longer coincided with action in a world of divine powers, but preceded human action (131; 145-47; 203-04).

Ancient Greece remains a laboratory for the study of the transition from a world in which speech is animated by divine forces to a world that obeys the laws established by humans themselves. This transition has, however, known several modalities, and it does not always invalidate the ancient words of truth that coexist with new forms of truth and authority in various contexts. Such is the case on the Indian sub-continent and its northern margin, the Himalayan range. It seems that in Ancient India truth was invested with “a power which a person with the right qualification [could] invoke to accomplish wonders or miracles” (Brown 1972:252). This was done through a ritual practice called *satyakriyâ*, or “Truth-Act.” The Vedic scholar George Thompson tried to define it in modern linguistic terms as a specific kind of speech-act.

According to Thompson (1998:125), a “Truth-Act” in the Vedic context “is fundamentally an act of personal authority, a verbal performance designed specifically for the creation, the perpetuation, and the public recognition of the priestly persona, i.e. the figure of the authoritative ritual specialist, in particular the Brahmin.” The index of truth, *satya*, is widely used in all the languages akin to Sanskrit, notably in the Pahari language group spoken in the Himalayan range. It is detached, however, from an established group of individuals, such as the caste of Brahmin priests; *syata* qualifies only the speech of exceptional individuals, whose statements are true, it is believed, by creating what they depict as they are depicting it, hence their appellation of “Truth-Act,” *satya kura*, or *satya bacha*, “Words of Truth.”

The studies collected here show that the central Himalayan region sets up words of truth and authority in a wide range of specific configurations. In this region, mantic speech and, to a lesser extent, the words of the poet, are still socially recognized as words of truth. The shaman of an indigenous Nepalese group studied by Anne de Sales claims the truth of his word and ends his ritual chants with an oath that is reminiscent of a Truth-Act. “Truth-Act” is precisely the expression used by Gregory Maskarinec to denote the magic spells or mantras of a similar oral tradition among the caste of Blacksmiths that he studied in a neighboring region in Western Nepal.<sup>2</sup> An interesting contrast in this respect is brought by Martin Gaenzle’s article concerning an indigenous group in Eastern Nepal, where the shaman’s truth is not just stated or claimed as in the two previous examples, but seems to result from a confrontation between several possible interpretations; as if magico-religious speech were being put to the test, imitating a judicial procedure.

While shamans never directly intervene in the political domain, bards and mediums do play a formal role in social and political regulation and in the administration of justice. This is especially the case in the western Indian Himalayas and western Nepal, where oracular religions prevail over other religious forms. Mantic speech is entangled with the speech of justice, and the gods are believed to embody themselves in order to settle human conflicts. Here, as in Archaic Greece, poetry has a dual character: the words of the poet celebrate both the stories of the gods and the accomplishments of the men of the past (Detienne 1994 [1967]:56-57). Poetry in Kumaon illustrates the first form of poetry. The bards, in John Leavitt’s study, induce the presence of the divine figures that are mentioned in their recitations and who are supposed to come and listen to their story. It is still believed that they enter the bodies of men and act out the story themselves, before holding a consultation, and revealing the origin of evil and how to remedy it. In the adjacent region of far western Nepal, a similar tradition—involving a bard, the same musical instrument (the *hudko* hourglass-drum), and a chorus—illustrates the second form of poetry, which recounts men’s accomplishments. Now, the gods are invited as the mere audience of the “historical truth” that is made of genealogies and high deeds of warriors of the past. Marie Lecomte-Tilouine shows how such epic recitation “grows the reputation of the ‘warrior’” who sponsors the performance. In far western Nepal, the recitation of heroic epics does not trigger spirit possession: the two practices are kept separate. In this region, the gods themselves, incarnate in mediums, recite their own story ahead of the consultations that address conflicts and restore justice among men.

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<sup>2</sup> See the Nepali index of the ritual chants that are transcribed and translated in Maskarinec (2008:753).

The institution of mediumship and of divine justice, whether it is included in epic recitation or not, continues to co-exist with human justice in the Himalayas.<sup>3</sup> The recent development of the second form of poetry which recounts men's accomplishments, led to the development of new words of truth, using the power of the law to legitimize counter-discourse as a "discourse of truth."<sup>4</sup>

### **Comparative Questions and the Essays**

The eight essays of this volume explore various skills and linguistic forms of orality as practiced in the Himalaya, their social dimensions, their sources of legitimacy, and various techniques by which their ends are achieved. These studies seek to answer the following six questions: Should we consider the ritual specialists, their specific language, ritual knowledge, practices and interactions as forming Bourdieusian "fields" or, rather, as sets obeying Searle's "constitutive rules"? In a context where the line separating regulative from constitutive rules is less clear than in modern Western societies, are such fields or sets adequate analytical categories? Are all linguistic interactions encapsulated in or oriented by hierarchical relationships? If we answer in the affirmative, should we, following Bourdieu, choose to focus solely on expressions of coercive power, and not consider illocutionary acts that presuppose upward relationships, such as prayers or pleas for mercy? Should we understand these upward relationships as merely contrary to and complementary with coercive relationships? Or are more complex mechanisms involved?

If we adopt Bourdieu's position that the conditions of enunciation (where and when do performances take place, and what events trigger performances?) must be explored together with the roles of the speakers in their respective groups and in the wider society, is there, nevertheless, some intrinsic power of speech? What are the oral techniques that are used to mobilize people, convince them, and make them obey or believe the speaker? What are the language registers, specific vocabularies and temporalities, poetic meters, gestures, narrative motifs, and various representations of reality that the oral specialists invoke? To what extent do such techniques move an audience, generating emotions, fascination, emotional transport, or humor, farce, and derision? Finally, how do performances convey values such as authenticity, heroism, antiquity, or scientific authority, which must be explained in relation to the power relations that structure society? These questions are especially pertinent at a time when Himalayan societies in general, and Nepalese society in particular, is engaged in a historic reorganization.

Each essay explores original material, and is formulated in the light of these questions. The essays by Leavitt and Lecomte-Tilouine focus on an epic tradition in Kumaon, western Nepal, and are followed by two more concerning shamanic traditions in western and eastern Nepal (de Sales and Gaenszle). Bernède's essay deals with how master musicians teach musical language to a group of young initiated men in the Kathmandu Valley. The next three essays address the judicial dimension of language: in a Tibetan context (Jahoda), then in Nepal

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<sup>3</sup> Daniela Berti has studied this question; see, for instance, Berti (2009).

<sup>4</sup> See the essays by Berti and Berardi-Tadie within this issue.

(Berardi-Tadie), and, finally, in India (Berti). The essay, by Ghimire, focuses on ordinary language and changes in contemporary expressions of authority among the elites in rural Nepal.

John Leavitt criticizes the sociological approach to the power of language that is based on the question of a speaker who is in full control of what he says. This approach fails to take into account the fact that most powerful utterances come from speakers, poets, and mediums who are expected to exercise control over what they say—at least this is how they generally present themselves. The author notes, however, that, in instances of possession he observed in Kumaon, the truth and authoritative power of discourse depend on the exact identification of the invisible entities believed to express themselves through the speech of the medium.

Leavitt distinguishes two modes of expression in divine discourse: evocation and injunction. Evocation primarily concerns the bard, who invites the god to speak through him as the medium. The bard draws on a stock of formulas similar to those that he uses in the narration of epics for identifying deities. Injunction, the second mode, mainly concerns the medium, and provides new information about his situation in response to questions from the audience. Here, Leavitt coincides with Bourdieu that the authority of divine discourse rests on the social function of the speakers, the medium or the bard, rather than on language itself. But he reformulates the argument and suggests the speaking-god is best regarded as a floating “pure social function” since he can have different incarnations.

Marie Lecomte-Tilouine studies the relationship between the untouchable bards and their royal patrons in western Nepal, and questions the validity of Bourdieu’s model in that context. She examines whether the ritual language used in this interaction follows the same rules as ordinary linguistic exchanges, and whether it reflects a social reality. At first glance, it seems to indicate a reversal of social roles. How are we to understand a social reality in which untouchable bards are charged by royal princes with the task of enhancing their fame, representing them as their spokespersons? Does the reversal arise from the bards’ exclusive knowledge of epic oral texts or is it the sign of the secure social distance between the protagonists? The bard is invested with the authority to “tell the truth” about his patrons by his patrons: it is an assignment. This social constraint is so strong that it allows great freedom in the relationships it regulates; to the point that bards are seen as the “authors” of their patrons, in the sense that Émile Benveniste gave this term, etymologically associated with the idea of growth or increase. Analyzed through ethnographic observations, what is at stake here is, precisely, to increase the prestige of the patron as well as that of the bard in a transfer mechanism of mutual prestige.

She suggests that the disruptive and oxymoronic nature of the bardic performance contributes to its power of subjugation. Recent Maoist versions of the epics, she notes, make use of the intrinsic power of the text, hitherto at the service of the patron, in slightly different ways that emancipate the bard with a correlated change of status.

This case confirms Bourdieu’s assumption that the more a practice constitutes an autonomous “field,” the more it tends to suspend or reverse the hierarchical order of the principles commanding this field seems to hold true. Bards, and their texts, compose one such field, but without suspending the principles of hierarchical order: the bards remain bound by the laws of society in which they are embedded, especially the rules of caste.



Anne de Sales engages the Bourdieu-linguists debate and confronts the notion of “social magic,” which the sociologist sees as the source of all authority, with the analysis of “discourse of magic” proposed by Tzvetan Todorov. Both Bourdieu and Todorov see the power of speech as based fundamentally on a certain kind of deception. However, shamanic rituals of the Kham-Magar, an indigenous population in western Nepal, require revisions of Bourdieu’s assumption that rituals would only reinforce the dominant order. Anne de Sales analyzes how the practice of staging sources of shamanic authority during the ritual consecration of a new shaman creates a multiplicity of spaces for contestation.

Following the analysis of Alfred Gell, who saw the poetic verbal art as “the most fundamental of all technologies” (Gell 1992:60), she studies the ritual language of the shaman for the sources of his or her authority, showing how shamanic speech establishes its own universe of truth and makes a transcendent presence possible. Whether this transcendent presence is or is not the community itself, once it is present, it is interpreted by each and every participant differently and acquires a certain autonomy. If deception is, indeed, at the root of all authoritative speech, this deception is not controlled by a mastermind, and what it produces through the technical competence of the spokesperson remains unpredictable.

Martin Gaenszle emphasizes that the concept commonly proposed by linguists—that the meaning of a discourse depends solely on the intention of the speaker (what it means)—is not helpful for the analysis of shamanic divinations, because several spiritual entities are believed to express themselves through the ritual specialist. Dialogue between participants in divination session and the deities embodied by the shaman shows that the invisible entities’ multiple intentions are precisely the subject of speculation by the spectators. Participants submit the shaman to cross-checks (recalling the situation discussed by Berti) in order to assess the truth of the gods’ discourse. Pushing Gaenszle’s argument further, it could be said that truth is collectively built by all participants. The audience attributes to the gods the speech which it alone actually authors. Martin Gaenszle concludes by contrasting the authorities of the shamanic word, based on a multiplicity of voices—multiplicity being itself the guarantor of the truth—and the monotheisms in which the voice of God alone can be a source of authority and truth.

Franck Bernède describes and analyses the teaching of the *dhimay* drum in the Kathmandu Valley to a group of young Newari men belonging to the peasant caste of Jyapus. The *dhimay* drum is known for its powerful sound and is central in the processions that constitute one of the major forms of the religious life of the Newars. It is intimately linked to the god of music, Nasadyah, of which it is the sound form. The teaching by the master musicians, who have an exclusive and secret knowledge, takes place every 12 years and is presented as an age-class initiation ritual. It includes learning how to play the instrument, as well as virtuoso handling of a high bamboo pole and acrobatic practices. The pole itself is reminiscent of a victory banner and physical practices require skill and endurance that evoke the art of war. The very clear territorial inscription of this tradition—each of the 19 districts of the city of Kathmandu has its own group of musicians and its exclusive rhythms—feeds the hypothesis that a warlike function was formerly attached to this practice.

The acquisition of the *dhimay* drum repertoire involves complex memorization techniques that first isolate syllables with which the musical phrase will then be reconstructed. Franck Bernède offers a musical analysis of this “language of the gods” and its rhythmic

structure, suggesting a relationship between the musical syllabary of this Newar tradition and the “science of letters” of the tantric tradition. Teaching *dhimay* drums would be similar to teaching a ritual language or powerful religious formulas (mantra) by masters of an esoteric knowledge reminding us of the archaic model of the “fellowships of discourse.” The conclusion reviews the fundamental transformation of a once exclusively oral tradition controlled by a particular social group into easily accessible written handbooks that relegate master musicians to the rank of repeaters.

Christian Jahoda brings together political and religious registers of authoritative speech. Examples from the eleventh century to today taken from a region of Tibetan culture in the western Himalayas, Purang, Spiti, and Kinnaur) show these speeches are qualified by the same term, *molla* (“formal speech”), and are characterized by the power to establish or confirm the order of the world. The author considers the status of the speaker to be the primary source of authority for what is enunciated. This speaker can be a royal figure at a dynastic assembly or a schoolmaster who acts as the village spokesman during a celebration, or a medium. A second crucial consideration is the context in which these discourses are performed. At the level of the ancient kingdoms and of the villages, such meetings display a visible order (comparable to a set scene) that reinforces the status of the speaker. From Bourdieu’s perspective, these meetings would represent the group that ensures the authority of the spokesman. According to Jahoda, the content of the speech is unimportant; it often comes from a written text and is nearly inaudible. By contrast, shamanic discourse the author recorded in 2000 makes clear the relevance of the dialogue between the divinity/medium and the participants: words are characterized by being divinely rooted in the context of enunciation and by their reflexive nature, in a way very similar to shamanic discourse. Jahoda’s essay provides two contrasting examples of words of authority: the first is based on the status of the speaker, the second, it seems, is derived much more from its relevance to the situation.

Daniela Berti’s essay shows how judicial procedures in India may be more powerful than the authority of the judge, who nevertheless remains the guarantor of the judicial procedure. The questioning techniques, the transformation of a system of questions and answers conducted orally but transcribed in a narrative form and in the first person, and finally the English translation of that narrative, which is incomprehensible to the complainant, forge a legal truth that is far removed from the truth of the complainant at the time of the charge. The police, the prosecutor, the judge, the lawyers, and the parties involved are in turn players and pawns in this judicial drama: the procedure itself stands out as the only player who holds real power over the final verdict. The example analyzed by Berti gives full weight to the linguistic interactions, and clearly contrasts the authority of the judge—the spokesman for the judiciary—with the power of the procedure that guides the final verdict and states the truth that will be retained.

Barbara Berardi studies mechanisms of legal authority in speech, but in Nepal, a country engaged in a redefinition of society and its component groups since the 1990s. The author shows how a special legal procedure, Public Interest Litigation, was used to create a new minority of individuals of non-heteronormative sexualities, namely gay, transgender, and intersex people. The author analyzes the text that ratifies the rights of LGBTI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Inter-sexual people) through Bourdieu’s three stages—codification, institutionalization, and naturalization—showing how “the force of law” can generate new social

groups. The creation of this new social group needs to be set against the perspective of Nepalese history since the promulgation in 1854 of the first National Code. That code was organized around the rights of groups rather than of individuals, and resulted in the formation of new castes seeking a better position in Hindu hierarchical society. In order to be recognized as a group, and therefore to enjoy certain rights, individuals living in modern globalized world need to comply with new principles of organization imposed by international organizations. This process alters individual's perception of themselves, that is to say, their "discourse of truth." Berardi underlines the paradoxical basis of group rights politics, by which political emancipation involves transforming the perception of self.

Pustak Ghimire analyzes the expression of authority among notables in an eastern Nepalese village. In the wake of recent socio-political turmoil and economic innovations, language reflects these ongoing changes. Universal suffrage and challenges to permanent positions of authority has brought about changes in the leaders' language. It now expresses the need to convince and please people rather than to coerce. Pustak Ghimire studies how schoolteachers now compete with traditional leaders in the political arena, and how this competition has boosted standard Nepali and the proper way of speaking it. But this trend has been quickly challenged by the prestige of the new elite emerging from international out-migration, an elite whose members usually lack advanced formal education but can speak English. Ubiquitous access to the Internet will only increase the current instability of codes of civility that are conveyed by language in rural areas.

### **Further Readings on the Two Major Genres of Oral Texts Found in the Central Himalayas**

Oral texts of the Central Himalaya (Nepal and Uttarakhand) include two major genres: epic oral poetry and shamanic ritual chants. These two genres developed in distinct areas and among different populations along the Himalayan range. If we consider only the central Himalayas (Uttarakhand and Nepal), the first genre is found in Uttarakhand and Far Western Nepal, among the Hindu castes, whose bards sing epics that narrate the deeds of past kings and heroes. The second is found further to the east, in Western, Central and Eastern Nepal, among a number of Tibeto-Burman speaking groups, and, to a lesser degree, among lower caste Hindus. Shamanic recitations deal with the theme of origin: creation of the world, of humans, and of various crafts; the relationships between men and women, between humans and non-humans, the first shaman, and the migrations of clans.

Concerning the epic, the volume published by Oakley and Goirala in 1935, *Himalayan Folklore*, represents the first publication in a Western language dealing with the oral traditions of Kumaon and Garhwal, or present-day Uttarakhand (Oakley and Goirala 1977 [1935]). The volume presents a corpus of heroic epic narratives, in abbreviated versions. On the occasion of the republication of this book in 1977, Marc Gaborieau wrote an important preface that offers a synthesis of his own work on the subject, published in French, and based on his fieldwork on oral epics in western Nepal in 1969 (Gaborieau 1974a and 1974b). Gaborieau proposed a classification of these stories and compared the forms of epic traditions in Uttarakhand and Nepal. He highlighted the fact that in Nepal only low-caste bards sing the hero's high deeds,

while the actions of the gods are not their prerogative. In Uttarakhand, by contrast, epic recitation induces trance and has a more religious tone. Four dissertations (Fanger 1980; Quayle 1981; Leavitt 1985 on linguistics aspects; Bernède 2004 on musical aspects) and several articles (Gaborieau 1975a; Fanger 1990; Kregel 1999) address domestic possession ceremonies led by bards in Kumaon. On collective bardic séances of possession outside the domestic sphere, see Atkinson 1882, Quayle 1981, and Lecomte-Tilouine 2009. Atkinson describes a ceremony during which an epic is sung over 22 consecutive nights. The ceremony in the Katyur valley described by Quayle is shorter, but involves a whole village. In Askot, the ceremony is based both on lineage and micro-territory (Lecomte-Tilouine 2009a). Konrad Meissner (1985) published the full text of one of these trance-inducing séances (Malusahi) with English translation and annotations.

On the epic tradition of western Nepal, apart from the publications in Nepali by Nepal Yatri, 1978 (2035 V.S.) and 1984 (2041 V.S.), and by Pant 1985 (2042 V.S.), after M. Gaborieau's pioneering work, no material or analyses were published before the 2000s. Marie Lecomte-Tilouine (2004) has suggested that the epic tradition of the Central Himalayas underwent a particular development during the Malla empire (twelfth to fourteenth century), which would explain the range of its current distribution. She has shown that the bardic session played a vital role in maintaining the status and identity of higher-caste men who patronized them (Lecomte-Tilouine 2007 and 2009b). In an unpublished thesis in French, Rémi Bordes (2005) addressed epics that he recorded in West Nepal (Doti district). He analyzed four texts from a literary perspective (themes, style), and provides his main results in English (Bordes 2009). Finally, the epics collected by Marc Gaborieau and Mireille Hellfer have been transcribed and translated within the program ANR "Corpus": "Epopée Népal" coordinated by Boyd Michailovsky, and are available at: [http://cocoon.huma-num.fr/exist/crdo/meta/crdo-COLLECTION\\_EPIC\\_NEPAL](http://cocoon.huma-num.fr/exist/crdo/meta/crdo-COLLECTION_EPIC_NEPAL).

The second group of sung narratives concerns oral shamanic traditions belonging mainly to so-called indigenous groups or minorities who speak Tibeto-Burman languages. The early works of Nicholas Allen on the Thulung Rai, and in particular his recently-published thesis (2011 [1976]), were followed in 1980-1990 by several in-depth studies of "oral texts" recited or sung as part of shamanic sessions. While Allen developed a comparative perspective on the Himalayan mythology, Andras Höfer adopted a philological approach to the oral texts that he collected from the Tamang. Following a brief description of the ethnographic context of these texts, Höfer presents a thoroughly annotated translation that enables the reader to penetrate the shamanic universe of the Tamang in the terms used by the shamans themselves, with their multilayered meanings (1981, 1994, and 1997). In line with the work of these two authors, Simon Strickland worked on a corpus of shamanic songs collected among the Gurung, with special attention to ritual language and various forms of parallelism, as well as examining the comparative potential of recurrent narrative motifs. Strickland's thesis (1982) is unpublished, but part of his research is available in two published articles (1983 and 1987). Also determined to let the texts speak for themselves, Gregory Maskarinec (1990, 1998, and 2008) has published whole shamanic versions of songs in Nepali collected among shamans of the Blacksmith caste and of the Magar minority in central Nepal. Working in a neighboring region, Anne de Sales (1991) has dedicated a significant part of her monograph on shamanic practices of the Kham Magar to the analysis of chants and to the role of ritual language in anchoring the mythical world in healing sessions. Martin Gaenszle (2002) has published a book on the Mewahang Rai of eastern Nepal, in which



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