Words on the lips and meanings in the stomach: Ideologies of unintelligibility and theories of metaphor in Toraja ritual speech*

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Abstract

Previous studies have shown how forms of speech endowed with different types of unintelligibility have multiple consequences on social life. Semantic ambiguity and indirectness have been variously interpreted as means to promote social cohesion and avoid political conflict (Atkinson 1984; Brenneis 1984); essential technologies for the reproduction of hierarchical conceptions of knowledge and social stratification (Bloch 1975); or important devices for gender differentiation (Keenan [Ochs] 1974).

This paper argues for the coexistence within the Toraja community of upland Sulawesi (Indonesia) of multiple ideologies of unintelligibility concerning the local ancestral language. Increasing involvement in global flows of money and people and exposure to new languages such as Indonesian and English trigger the production of new orders of unintelligibility, which can be used for different purposes by different social groups. While the traditional cultural elite attempts to preserve its privileged position by appealing to an ideology of intelligibility grounded on highly conventional metaphors, the nonexperts react through several counterdiscourses of marginality. They highlight their exclusion from the cultural elite through a negatively charged notion of unintelligibility as insincerity, or they craft new forms of inclusion through an ideology of ethnic pride grounded on a positive representation of unintelligibility as semantic richness.

Keywords: *ritual speech; unintelligibility; language ideologies; metaphor; Indonesia; translation.*

'Midway between the unintelligible and the common-place, it is a metaphor which most produces knowledge' (Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, III: 14106b)

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1. Introduction

Among the Toraja people dwelling in the mountainous interior of the island of Sulawesi, a geographically and politically peripheral region located on the eastern side of the Indonesian archipelago, ritual and formal occasions are characterized by the usage of a highly elaborate register that stands in marked contrast to everyday ways of talking. This ritual register is variously called *kada kada to dolo* ('words of the ancestors') or *basa tominaa* ('language of the *tominaa*'), after the name of the ritual specialist—the *tominaa*—a word that means 'the one who is wise and knowledgeable'.

Toraja ancestral language presents many features common to other ritual registers found in eastern Indonesia and elsewhere; it is endowed with a characteristic formal structure (parallelism), it is rich in metaphors, it is believed to have been handed down by the ancestors, and it is socially prestigious. Traditionally, *basa tominaa* was used in ritual events to communicate with spirits. Besides this, in pre-colonial and early colonial times (beginning of the 20th century), this high register was widely employed in political oratory. Nowadays, it contends for prominence with the national language (*Bahasa Indonesia*), which has been gaining hegemony since independence from Dutch colonial rule. Despite the widespread trend toward abandoning the local system of ritual practices (*alukta*) as people convert to Christianity, *basa tominaa* register still enjoys great importance and is widely employed on both Christian and secular formal occasions.

Toraja language ideologies are marked by a widespread emphasis on ritual speech unintelligibility.[1] This is not new. Ethnographers have often noted the unintelligible nature widely attributed to ritual speech in eastern Indonesia (cf. Fox 1974, 1988). Previous studies of Toraja ritual speech highlighted how local people generally claim that they are not able to understand the meanings conveyed by expert spokesmen speaking in the ritual register (among others Coville 1988, 2004: 1; Sandarupa 1989: 9, 2004: 233; Volkman and Zerner 1988: 284). Yet a more careful inquiry into the local understanding of ritual speech as unintelligible is still to be done.

My aim in the following pages is to illustrate the existence within the Toraja-speaking community of multiple notions of unintelligibility and to describe how individuals and social groups use these different notions for different purposes. Who actually thinks that *basa tominaa* is unintelligible? What are the actual definitions and evaluations of unintelligibility provided by the specialists and the laymen? How is unintelligibility semantically and ideologically produced both within and outside actual

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performances? What is the role played by the current processes of sociocultural and linguistic transformation in the local epistemologies of unintelligibility?

While confirming previous scholars' indication of the saliency of the notion of unintelligibility and secrecy in the Toraja language ideologies, in my analysis I want to point out internal disagreements among the members of the Toraja-speaking community. In order to do so, it is essential to distinguish between experts' and nonexperts' points of view.

On the one hand, ritual speech specialists assert that *basa tominaa* exhibits an absolutely transparent relation between words and their referents. In their view, ritual couplets and metaphors have always had the same meaning. If the laymen fail to understand them it is not due to their unintelligible nature but rather to the commoners' lack of competence.

On the other hand, the nonexperts react to their exclusion from the cultural and linguistic elite through several 'counter-discourses of marginality'. By this I mean that they perform a series of discursive moves aimed either at self-marginalization or at seeking new strategies of inclusion. For example, by saying that ritual speechmakers say a thing while they mean another, the nonexperts explain their 'inability to understand' by claiming that ritual speech is both marked by denotational indirectness and moral insincerity. Thus, by appealing to a negatively charged notion of unintelligibility, the nonexperts reframe their exclusion from the language of the elite as a form of self-segregation from insincere speech (and from the hypocritical community of its speakers).

At the same time, as Toraja become increasingly exposed to the global market economy and to language ideologies that emphasize the prestige of national and international languages such as Indonesian and English, the nonexperts devise other ideologies of unintelligibility and reformulate their critical stance on ritual speech as morally and epistemologically opaque to produce alternative forms of inclusion in the cultural elite. Far from being monolithic, the negative evaluation of ritual speech's (supposedly) cryptic mode of signification can be reversed into a positive notion of semantic richness and be deployed by members of the new middle class to affirm an ideology of ethnic identity and local pride. Transformed into a positive form of semantic complexity (and wealth) and extended from a property of the ritual register to a general characteristic of the Toraja language at large, unintelligibility can become an ideological tool to discharge the local language from its connotation of provincialism and backwardness and its presumed inferiority to languages such as Indonesian or English, which are associated with modern metropoles and lifestyles.

Hence, by situating ideologies of unintelligibility within a complex network of power relations at both the local and the supra-local and national

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level, my analysis will show how unintelligibility is not just an ideology and a technology for the reproduction of a cultural elite, but it also constitutes an idiom for the articulation of multiple counterhegemonic discourses of marginality.

As we will see, the interplay of these different notions of unintelligibility is grounded in different opinions on the forms of denotation engendered by the two building blocks of *basa tominaa*: metaphors and couplets. Ritual speech spokesmen (and the members of the cultural elite who share their expertise) argue that metaphors are tied to their referents in an absolutely unambiguous and clear way. Laymen counter-argue that the use of metaphors and couplets result in obfuscating both the referent and the intention of the speaker. This contradiction can be explained by means of a social distribution of metaphoric knowledge. Peripheral participation in ritual speech heightens the perception of metaphors for the common people, while constant exposure results in naturalizing metaphors for the cultural elite, who perceive them as invisible and 'dead'. As we will see, the different metasemantic sensitivities regarding ritual speech emerge both in overt and explicit metadiscourse and in more tacit practices and ideas of translation.[2] But before analyzing how metaphors and couplets are used and discussed, let me provide some further detail on the ethnographic and sociolinguistic context of my study.

2. Ethnographic and sociolinguistic context

Toraja is a small-scale, mostly agrarian and deeply hierarchical society that is undergoing a considerable process of sociocultural change due to its increasing involvement in global flows of money, people, and knowledge. Several ethnographers have described how the progressive conversion to Christianity, the shift to a market economy, and the participation into the new forms of citizenship crafted by the postcolonial republic of Indonesia resulted in profound material and symbolic transformations (cf. Adams 2006; Bigalke 2005; Volkman 1985). However, little attention has so far been paid to the linguistic implications of these processes and even less work has been devoted to analyzing how the language ideologies and the communicative practices of contemporary Toraja speakers partake in sustaining or challenging these economic and sociocultural processes.

During the last three or four decades, conspicuous temporary migration of the local population to other Indonesian urban areas and successful participation in the tourist market produced new capital and with it a new bourgeoisie, which drew greatly on an ideology of local customs and

traditions in order to construct forms of symbolic capital that could sustain its increasing political and economic weight against the old ruling class of noble land-owners. Toraja social structure is marked by an interesting combination of a remarkably fluid kinship system (in which descent is traced bilaterally) and a notably rigid stratification in ranked descent groups. While the members of the old aristocratic ruling class tend to emphasize the rigidity of the structure claiming that one's position is determined by birth, the *nouveau riches* contend that ability to organize fastuous funerals and wedding ceremonies and to build sumptuous *tongkonan* ('ancestral houses') is what really matters in determining one's social position. The increasing participation of the new middle and upper-middle class in the local ritual life has resulted in a sort of 'ritual inflation' (Volkman 1985), enhancing the visibility and the symbolic value of local customs and traditions.

These sociocultural transformations engendered important shifts in the local sociolinguistic environment. Participation in the tourism industry and in the Indonesian nation also meant a heightened exposition to new languages (such as Indonesian and English) and new ideas on what is linguistically prestigious. Nowadays, the great majority of the population dwelling in Toraja can speak both Indonesian and Toraja.[3] Similarly to what has happened in many areas of the Indonesian archipelago, in Toraja the post-independence diffusion of the national language (*Bahasa Indonesia*) resulted in adding a new layer to the pre-existing linguistic order marked by a rigid division between a daily and an official/ritual register (*basa tominaa*). Hence, on formal and ritual occasions speakers have the alternative of choosing between *basa tominaa* and formal bureaucratic Indonesian. The former is generally used for religious or secular events, which take place in villages or are perceived as related to the local culture; the latter is employed in contexts associated with the nation-state and with more urban settings.

Like in most of rural and semi-rural areas throughout Indonesia, Toraja children learn the local language first at home and acquire Indonesian only as a second language through formal school education (Keane 2003: 505). In Toraja, as elsewhere in most of Indonesia, Indonesian retains its distinctive sense of 'un-nativeness' (Errington 1998) and its capability of functioning as a 'transcendent metalanguage' (Keane 1997b). In other words, it constitutes a language stripped of culture/local-specific referential meanings and of social indexes, and it is associated with semantico-referential universality, as well as with a powerful egalitarian ideology (Keane 2003). On the contrary, Toraja language embodies the intimacies of the immediate community. While I was doing fieldwork, for example, my Toraja acquaintances would often praise my use of the

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local language in my dealings with people, saying that it showed that I had really become a 'true Toraja'. At other times, strangers hearing me speaking in Toraja would whisper among themselves comments such as 'na tandai basata' ('she knows our language'), or alternatively 'tae' na bisa di pokada boko'' ('we cannot speak behind her/his back anymore'), revealing a clear awareness that Toraja is habitually used in order to exclude non-Toraja participants from the communicative event and indicating the widespread perception of Toraja language as an *in-group* code.

However, speakers' ideas on the relation between Indonesian and Toraja are pervaded by tensions and contradictions and so are their actual communicative practices. On the one hand, Toraja is associated with a positive image of local culture and conveys a sense of belonging to a *communitas*. On the other hand, its prestige is challenged by state-sponsored language policies and ideologies, which present Indonesian as modern and cosmopolitan and portray the local languages as provincial and backward. As I showed elsewhere (Donzelli 2006), this ambivalence is reflected in speakers' communicative practices, in which the choice of Toraja in contexts where Indonesian would be the unmarked choice instead of conveying an emblematic display of ethnic identity, can sometimes be used in a parodic key to step out from the imagined margins of the local community and to present the local language from the pejorative perspective of outsiders.

Therefore, the prestige of Toraja ritual register is paradoxically at the same time undermined and corroborated by the contrast with Indonesian. Indonesian is represented as modern, socially egalitarian, orthographically consistent, grammatically rational, and referentially unambiguous. While *basa tominaa* draws its prestige from its strong association with the ancestors and the local cultural elite who holds the privilege of understanding its figurative and parallelistic style.

3. Metaphors and couplets

As previously mentioned, Toraja ritual language is marked by several formal features, the most distinctive being the use of metaphoric expressions and parallel constructions.[4] In Toraja, like in Sumba, 'poetic style consists of conventional couplets in which the first line parallels the second line in both rhythm and meaning. The specialist spokesman draws from a stock of thousands of these traditional couplets, and links them together according to the appropriate genre conventions in particular situations' (Kuipers 1993: 90).[5] Parallelistic structure is thus articulated at multiple

levels: semantic, syntactic, and prosodic. Toraja aesthetic notions emphasize this sense of 'dyadic language' (Fox 1988: 1). As once for example my friend Roby pointed out to me:

> Toraja language is artistic; it is always coupled like the two halves of a split bamboo [*dipasimuane tallang*]: [when] bamboo is cut in two [pieces], [...] [the two halves/the couplets] are complementary [lit. they reciprocally close one another].[6]

According to the local aesthetics, lines and words have to be arranged in paired elements (*dipasibali*), which '[...] are usually morphologically identical and grammatically equivalent, and appear in corresponding positions within parallel lines' (Forth 1988: 129). This parallelistic structure operates not only on the syntagmatic but also on the paradigmatic axis. Thus every element is understood as being the actual expression of a fixed set of potential alternatives. Words (and the entire lines constituting the couplets) stand in paradigmatic relations with a fixed ensemble of alternative possibilities. Although in the local descriptions the syntagmatic level of relations is foregrounded (as in Roby's account), an awareness of the paradigmatic axis of the parallelistic structure is reflected in the widespread idea that each word has numerous (up to twelve) synonyms and is thus related to a set of semantic equivalents.

Metaphor is the other outstanding feature of Toraja ritual language. As parallelism, to which it is strictly tied, the structure of metaphor in *basa tominaa* is marked by a high degree of formulaicity and conventionality. The general definition of metaphor as a figure of speech (trope) that involves a semantic process of transference applies to the Toraja version of the notion very well.[7] The Toraja term for metaphor *pa'pasusian* derives from the root *susi*, a word equivalent, both in function and meaning, to the English 'like' ('similar, akin to'), which clearly indicates the process of semantic transference and equivalence between separate but similar domains triggered by metaphors. What is instead distinctive is the fact that the processes of semantic transference at play in Toraja figurative language are marked by a high degree of formalization. In other words, Toraja metaphors are endowed with a highly conventional meaning. A few examples will make my point clearer. Let's take for instance a popular ritual couplet such as:[8]

(1)	*Simbolong*	*manik*	
	(Hair-)Bun	Necklace	
	Lokkon	*loi*	*rara'*
	(Hair-)Bun	Long	Necklace

These paired lines form a conventional metaphor used for addressing or referring to noble women.[9] Their referential and pragmatic meaning is

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firmly established and does not depend from the context in which they are employed. This is also the case with another honorific epithet such as:

(2) *To* *ka-barre-an* *allo*
Person NOM-Sun disk with rays Sun
To *ka-lindo* *bula(a)n*
Person NOM-Face Moon/Gold

This honorific couplet literally means 'people [who are like the] radiant sun, people [whose] faces [are like the] moon/gold', but is conventionally used as a term of address (and reference) for the highest-ranking nobility. Similarly to what has been observed by Mitchell (1988: 76) in Sumba (Wanukaka), these examples show that the semantic meaning of Toraja metaphors is 'irrevocably fixed'. And so is their pragmatic metaphoric value, which appears to be established independently from the context of usage.

4. Notions of truth and the nonexperts' description of unintelligibility as deception

The conventional and highly formulaic structure of metaphor and parallelism outlined above plays an ambiguous double role in the local theories on the (un)intelligibility of ritual speech. From when I first arrived in Toraja and set off to study *basa tominaa*, I was confronted with apparently contradictory ideologies and aesthetics of the relation between words, meanings, and referents. Whenever I would declare my intention of studying the Toraja ritual language, people would voice their own different perspectives regarding the denotational opacity (or transparency) of *basa tominaa*. As I soon understood, these different ideas of semantic (in)directness and (un)intelligibility relied on contrasting ideologies of truth, sincerity, and hypocrisy.

Once I was chatting with one villager who owned a small kiosk near the house where I lived and who knew that I was studying *basa tominaa* with several ritual speech specialists in the village. Inquiring on my improvements, Ambe' Rerung observed that my research was undoubtedly very challenging, its difficulty deriving from the fact that when ritual speech specialists speak in couplets *senga' dipokada senga' battoananna* ('one thing is said, another one is meant').

As time went by, I found echoes of Ambe' Rerung's comment in several informal conversations I had with my Toraja acquaintances who were mostly villagers without special expertise in the ritual register and displayed a consistent tendency to portray ritual speech as obscure and

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unintelligible due to a presumed lack of correspondence between 'words' and 'meanings'. The high register—I was often told by the nonexperts—is hard to understand because of a hiatus between 'what is on the lips' (*puduk*) and 'what is in the stomach' (*tambuk*), which is considered to be the site of both emotions and knowledge.[10]

The expression *diong tambukna na laen do pudukna* ('what is in the stomach is different from what is on the lips'), which inspired the title of this article, was recurrently used both as a derogatory way of referring to hypocritical talk (and people) and as an account of ritual speech's indirect mode of signification (and its resulting unintelligibility). Indeed, the expression can either imply the idea of lack of correspondence between speakers' intentions and their expression in words or acts (hence being associated with moral hypocrisy), or it can convey the idea of oblique denotational relations and refers to a sort of twisted, mediated process of signification (that results in semantic opacity).

The blurred distinction between the two different forms of obliqueness (i.e., the moral and the linguistico-referential) is subtle and slippery and constitutes a potential subtext through which the nonexperts can play to express their discontent toward their exclusion from the semantic control of ritual speech couplets. By appealing to a negative notion of unintelligibility and describing ritual couplets as semantically ambiguous and morally hypocritical, the nonexperts subtly imply their voluntary distance from a negatively charged form of speech (and from those who speak it).

The association between ritual speech and insincerity is a key point of Keane's analysis of the project of religious conversion undertaken by the Dutch Calvinists in Sumba. Keane (2002: 68) argues that the missionaries' attitudes toward language and religion were marked by 'a normative idea of sincerity in speech' and reports (1997a: 3) how they framed their negative evaluation of the traditional ancestral language by portraying it as 'insincere, as words that are not spoken from the heart'. Although I cannot rule out the possibility that the covered charge of hypocrisy underlying Toraja descriptions of ritual speech as marked by disalignment between words and intentions, or between 'expression and interior state' (Keane 2002: 75) may be connected to an ideology of sincerity imported to Toraja by Dutch missionaries,[11] I am more inclined to link it to an indigenous belief in the value of true (*tongan*) speech, which frequently appeared in several accounts I collected during my fieldwork.[12] As for example when I was told by a well-known ritual specialist that speechmakers should stick to the truth and avoid rudeness:

> The one who speaks like a male cock does not need to be rude, he usually [speaks] slowly/gently. [. . .] Even though the people just scream at us, or speak to us in a rude way, if [their words] do not contain the truth [*katonganan*], we will not follow

their orders [. . .] It is better [if] we slow down the speech [. . .] [so that our words will be] accompanied by a stream of truth [*salu katonganan*] [and] people will accept them. (Conversation with Tato' Dena', 19 September 2004)

A similar belief in the rhetorical effectiveness and in the persuasive power of truth was displayed in the advice given during a family meeting by an influential relative to a candidate wishing to become the village chief:

So the people [the many] consider the one who acts rightly, and this will be the one we [the people] elect as the village chief [. . .] Therefore I say: you [have to] speak truly [*ma'kada tongan*] [. . .] Yes, yes, yes it is the truth [*katonganan*] that you [have to] speak [. . .] it is only the truth that is seen/valued by the community! (Village meeting, 23 December 2002)

The general suspicion toward oblique and allusive speech also appeared in more unpredictable occasions. For example, during the period that I lived in a village in the southern area of Toraja, I was often told that the inhabitants of the northern district of Sa'dan are known for their allusive way of speaking. My southern friends would often portray the northerners in a mildly derogatory way claiming that, unlike themselves who speak in a straightforward and clear (*maleso*) way, the Sa'danese are experts in the genre of *massimba'* (mocking or teasing someone by making allusive and indirect criticism).

5. Experts' ideologies of coded intelligibility

Given the distrust of deceitful, indirect, and artful speech and the value assigned to 'true words' (*kada kada tongan*) (cf. Forth 1988: 134 for a similar remark for Rindi), what is the reaction of the ritual experts toward the laymen's opinion that *basa tominaa* lacks clarity, sincerity, and intelligibility? When I confronted the authoritative *tominaa* Tato' Dena' with the general opinion that the meaning of ritual speech couplets is not clear, he replied:

It is not the language that is non-straightforward [*kurang lurus*]! It is just that it is not understood by the new people [*oknum-oknum baru*].[13] (Conversation with Tato' Dena', 8 February 2003)

Tato' Dena' then articulated his point using as an example the honorific metaphoric epithet for noble people I discussed above:

If we say: 'Excuse me to ''those people [who are like the] radiant sun and [whose] faces [are like the] moon/gold'' ' [*eh tabe' lako kabarrean allo sia ma kalindo bulan*], what is meant there is 'those who have the title of *puang*' [highest ranking nobility in the southern areas]. So it is the same thing as [saying] 'excuse me *puang!*' [*tabe' puang!*]. So they already know that those words are addressed to the *puangs*.

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As Tato' Dena' notes, only nonspecialists who do not possess the key of the coded metaphoric language of the *tominaa* misunderstand the relation between words and meanings and confuse codedness with unintelligibility. In a similar way, another well-known orator described ritual speech as characterized by 'many metaphors that are understood only by certain people who *really understand*' (conversation with Dahlan Bangnga Padang, 8 February 2003).

In this perspective, metaphors are not so much the product of the ingenuity and creativity of the speaker, but should rather be conceived as a *corpus* of pre-existing formulae, a repertoire of fixed correspondences and allusions, which has to be memorized. The performer's talent, thus, consists in finding the right metaphor at the right time, and not in inventing new metaphors. The interpretative work on the part of the hearer does not rely on his or her intuitions, given that, in this formulaic conception of metaphor, interpretations should be *known*, not *found*.

From the experts' standpoint, the nonexperts' claim that ritual speech is marked by a mismatch between words and intentions does not make sense simply because in the mode of signification produced by ritual metaphors intentions are not an issue. For the exclusive group of ritual speech specialists, the denotational meaning of *pa'pasusian* (metaphors) is so conventional and fixed to appear perfectly transparent and unambiguous. Far from 'saying one thing while meaning another', metaphors produce 'meaning without intention' (Du Bois 1993).

Toraja figurative ritual speech can be understood as constituted by 'entextualized metaphors',[14] which do not rely for their interpretation on pragmatic and context-specific elements. While students of pragmatics argue that the (implicit) meaning of metaphoric utterances depends on their pragmatic context,[15] these ritual specialists' accounts hint at a semantic form of entextualization, which, rather than suppressing personal, spatial, and temporal deixis, results in a crystallization of the interpretation of the semantic structure of metaphors. The 'unintelligible' nature of Toraja ritual speech is thus quite similar to that of a ciphered language: one has to know the correct interpretative key in order to disentangle the hidden (yet transparent) meaning lying beneath the surface.

6. Metaphors lost in translation

Some of the statements I quoted in the previous section clearly conveyed the experts' explicit point of view on the metaphorical functioning of *basa tominaa*. However, the experts' notion of metaphor tacitly sustains their actual ways of dealing with the meaning of ritual couplets through

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different practices of translation. In this section, I will juxtapose two very different occasions in which I observed ritual spokesmen engaged in attempts of translating metaphorical couplets. The first example is drawn from an exegetical context triggered by the production of a documentary, while the second example is drawn from an actual performance. Although different, the two occasions show two speechmakers engaged in dubbing their own performance for a wider audience. The two examples, I believe, may shed light on the way in which the two experts interpret and use metaphors.

6.1. *Dealing with metaphors in an exegetical setting*

In the summer of 2004, I was invited by an Italian director to collaborate in the making of a documentary on Toraja. The director wanted to use the footage from a series of funeral ceremonies he had shot the previous year, most of which contained the verbal performances of a young and talented ritual spokesman, Sam Barumbung, who has recently become very popular in the area of Rantepao. The director's intention was to accompany the images of Sam's performance with subtitles either in English or in Indonesian. Sam and I were thus hired to jointly work on the translation, which had to convey the parallelistic and figurative structure of the original, while being at the same time understandable to a foreign audience. Given that the director envisaged the possibility of making an Indonesian version of the movie, Sam and I agreed to work first on the Indonesian translation before moving to the English version (however, the documentary was never finished and we never got to the English version).

Unlike the more 'traditional' speechmakers with whom I was used to work,[16] Sam had an excellent knowledge of both Indonesian and English, and had seen many movies with subtitles. Moreover, he had perfectly understood that the request to maintain the poetic aura of the original in the translation was motivated not only by aesthetic concerns but also by the need of preserving a sort of synchrony between the audible Toraja words and the Indonesian visible headings. However, in the course of the sessions, he consistently proposed Indonesian translations in which the metaphors were unpacked and stripped to their denotational and semantic content.

An example of this attitude is conveyed by Sam's treatment of the excerpt reproduced below, which is drawn from a *mebala kollong* ('the fencing of the neck') invocation he had performed at a funeral held in Nanggala in August 2003. The director was particularly interested in a fragment in which Sam was invoking the divine blessing to be bestowed on the descendants of the deceased, wishing them to achieve concord

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and harmony in the complicated decision-making processes occurring before and after funerals. This part of the invocation corresponds to the three sets of couplets transcribed below (lines 71–76):

(3)

71	*kumua*	*denno*	*upa'*	*na po*	*upa'*
	So that	There be	Hope	And	Hope
72	*paraya*	*na po*	*paraya*		
	Luck/Blessing	And	Luck/Blessing		
73	*anna*	*langan*	*ma'tallo'*	*tang-poka*	
	So that	Up	INTR Egg	NEG-Broken	
74	*kendek*	*ma'umburang*	*tang-ti-seno*		
	Climb	INTR- School of Fish	NEG-NON VOL-Shaken		
75	*unn-angkar-an*	*kada*	*si-turu'*		
	ACT F-Rise-BEN	Word	REC-Follow		
76	*unn-endek-an*	*bisara*	*misa'*	*bungan-na*	
	ACT F-Climb-BEN	Speech	One	First-3SG	

Sam proposed a first translation in which the six parallel lines of the Toraja original were reduced to two Indonesian lines:

(4) *Semoga berkat melimpah senantiasa atas diri mereka,*
'May blessings always overflow on them'
selalu seia sekata mengangkat dan menghasilkan satu keputusan
'[may] the agreement always promote and produce one [harmonious] decision'

By checking the Indonesian translation against the word-by-word interlinear gloss provided for the Toraja original, we can clearly see that something is missing: metaphors and couplets have disappeared. In the original text, for example, the harmonious concord invoked and wished on the deceased's descendants was metaphorically represented (lines 73 and 74) as: *ma'tallo' tangkpoka* ('being [like] an unbroken egg') and *ma'umburang tangtiseno* ('being [like] a compact/not shaken school of small fish').

Only after my insistent requests did Sam produce an alternative Indonesian version of the Toraja metaphors, which he transformed into similes by adding the term *seperti* ('like'):

(5) *seperti telur yang tidak pecah*
'Like an egg that is unbroken'
seperti rombongan ikan kecil yang tidak terpisah-pisah
'Like a school of small fish that is not fragmented'

Sam's tendency of turning the Toraja original into a condensed Indonesian version,[17] which, although maintaining a certain degree of solemnity

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through the choice of a formal register, bypassed the metaphoric and parallelistic elaboration, persisted throughout a month of work and appeared in other sessions I conducted with a few other *basa tominaa* experts who were involved in the documentary. This general tendency was in sharp contrast with the great value given to couplets in the local aesthetics of parallelism, according to which:

> Words that are not paired, that do not match up with their partners are called 'unbounded words' [*kada kada sondo'*]. So a *tominaa* who utters uncoupled words is not pleasant to hear. Unpaired words are like a man who is crippled [*pincan*]. (Conversation with Tato' Dena', 19 September 2004)

6.2. *Dealing with metaphors in a context of performance*

Although this particular mode of translation may have been triggered by the specificity of the exegetical context, I observed a somewhat similar pattern during actual performances, in which speakers engaged in a sort of self-dubbing and translated their own words from the Toraja ritual register to formal Indonesian. The excerpt below is drawn from a speech recorded at the funeral of an old couple held in the village where I lived between 2002 and 2003. On this occasion the orator, a very noble man known for his very good knowledge of *basa tominaa*, began his speech by juxtaposing two separate and almost absolutely consistent openings.[18] The first half of the speech (lines 1–37) is delivered in *basa tominaa*, while the second half (lines 38–44) is conveyed in standard official Indonesian (funeral speech, 28 December 2002).

The first opening lines (lines 1–10) state the purpose of the ceremony:

(6)

1 *Eh kurre sumanga', tanniara ma' kurre sumanga'na'*
'Eh I thank, not that I express my thanks

2 *belanna na unnoloiki' batang rabuk*
for the fact that we are facing a rotten trunk [we are facing death]

3 tapi *ma' kurre sumanga'na' belanna*
but I thank because

4 *na bengki'* kesempatan *totumompata*
we have been given the *chance* by the one who created us
[. . .]

6 *la umpalumpunni tu diona batang rabukna*
to bury those rotten trunks [mortal remains]

7 *te tomatuanta te neneta*
of those who had been our parents, our grandparents'
[. . .]

Hence the speaker begins the 'honorific apologies' (*mekatabe'*) through the use of conventional honorific metaphoric epithets to address the religious and political leaders present in the audience (lines 11–23):

(7)

11 *Kukua metabe', mekatabe'na'*
'I apolo . . . , I express my apologies

12 *lako mintu' todiporannu lante tondok*
to all those on whom we hang our good hopes in the village [the chiefs]

[. . .]

17 *la bu'tunna lammai kombongan sallo'na Puang Matua*
[I express my apologies to those who] come from the holy council of God [the parish]'

[. . .]

At line 24, the speaker starts describing the sad death of the old couple through a long series of metaphors. Lines 25 to 29 figuratively allude to the fact that the husband and the wife whose funeral is being celebrated died together in an accident. Their simultaneous death is evoked by images such as the overlapping stones of a fence (line 25) or of a house (line 27), rows of aligned pillars, or the growing process of betel nuts (lines 28 and 29):

(8)

24 *pasiruanna mendadi si todon tampoi dikka'*
'They [the deceased couple] became like a stratified dyke, oh poor them!

25 *sio'ton bala batui*
Overlapping [like] a fence [made of overlapping] stones

26 *maleia situru' lentong*
[they] went [passed away] together [like] a row of pillars

27 *si panglola batu banua,*
Overlapping [like the] bricks of a house

28 *solongna dolo rokko*
First fell the husk [containing the betel nuts]

29 *undi sarumena na' tiko'ka'*
Then opened the rib of the leaf

[. . .]

36 *apa la dipatumbari duka la diduang diapari*
but what can be done, there is nothing to do

37 *iya nasang toda tau ke Nasanda simisa'ki.*
Yes [it] really [happens] to everybody, when God [decides our fates] one by one'

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The elaborate series of metaphorical couplets is then followed by a sudden shift to Indonesian (line 38) in which the speaker performs a new opening:

(9)
38 *Bapak, ibu hadirin sekalian sidang perkabungan,*
'Gentleman and ladies who are here present at the burial meeting
39 *utamanya kepada anak-anak dan cucu-cucu*
above all to the children and to the grandchildren
40 *yang ditinggalkan oleh orang tua*
who have been abandoned by their parents
41 *Saya hanya ingin menitipkan pesan kepada keluarga,*
I only wish to deliver a message to the family
42 *kepada anak-anak, kepada cucu-cucu yang ditinggalkan,*
to the children and to the grandchildren who have been abandoned
43 *bahwa hari ini kita boleh bersedih*
that today we are allowed to be sad
44 *tetapi yakinlah bahwa orang tua ini akan dikenang,*
but rest assured that these parents/these elders [of ours] will be remembered'
[...]

The contrast between the two parts of the speech could not be sharper. The first half (lines 1–37), organized in a loosely parallel structure and dotted with metaphors, is followed by a much simpler and more straightforward speech in formal (but plain) Indonesian (lines 38–44). When I made inquiries with the actual performer on the reasons for delivering such a bilingual speech, he justified his choice with the fact that the family of the deceased couple was primarily composed of *perantau keturunan kaunan* ('people of slave descent who went abroad in search for money') who did not understand *basa tominaa*. I understood that the Indonesian half of the speech was addressed to the family members of the deceased who, as a result of their low status or of their residential situation, were supposedly not able to decode the meaning of the metaphors.

Here, the appeal to Indonesian (and to an ideology of intelligibility) clearly produces a double form of marginalization for the lower-ranking part of the audience. As descendants of former slaves, they lack competence in the high register, which is reaffirmed as a restricted prerogative of the sociocultural elite. As *perantau* (migrants), who left the Toraja homeland to make money, they have become peripheral participants in the local village community.[19] The juxtaposition of two parallel and self-contained openings draws a line between two different 'audiencehoods', creating 'a palpable sense of disjuncture' (Errington 1998: 77) between

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a speech addressed to the common people for whom the hidden references of the high Toraja words are hidden and obscure, and a speech for those who can see the meanings of these ciphered references perfectly well.

6.3. *Toward an explanation of metaphoric invisibility*

As mentioned before, these occasions in which orators self-translate their words from *basa tominaa* to formal Indonesian are different (one, for instance, happens as a consequence of a request, the second is spontaneous), and yet share important commonalities. Both instances of translation suggest a sort of incommensurability between *basa tominaa* and *Bahasa Indonesia*. But they also shed light on the experts' ways of dealing and understanding ritual metaphors.

During his fieldwork in Anakalang (Sumba), Keane (1997b) noted a similar dismissal of literal translations of the ritual couplets, which he interpreted as deriving from a local language ideology that gives the primacy to the performative dimension of ritual speech. By being conceived as the words of the ancestors, ritual speech in Sumba refers to an authority which, lying beyond the context of performance, cannot be 'captured by translation' (1997b: 42). As it seems to me, the dissolution of the metaphors in the translations of the Toraja examples discussed above could also be explained as a result of a process of social differentiation of the metasemantic understanding of metaphors. In other words, it is possible to assume that the high degree of formulaicity and the iterative usage in a long history of performances resulted in attenuating the ritual speech specialists' perception of metaphors. While for the nonexperts metaphors remain metaphors, for the ritual speechmakers they may have undergone a process of naturalization.[20]

The 'inability to translate' cannot be explained as due to a lack of control of the semantic content of the words. Unlike Cuban santeros (Wirtz 2005) and Samoan orators (Alessandro Duranti, personal communication on 1 February 2006), who sometimes simply memorize strings of ceremonial speech without being able to segment the line into single recognizable words, Toraja speechmakers are generally perfectly able to provide a word-by-word gloss of the metaphoric expressions under analysis. The tendency to undo and simplify *basa tominaa* metaphoric and parallelistic articulation displayed by the ritual speech specialists engaged in two different attempts of translating their own words may suggest that they do not necessarily always 'feel' ritual metaphors as tropes and hint at the possibility that Toraja metasemantic awareness of metaphors may be socially distributed.

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7. Ethnolinguistic marginality and bourgeois redefinitions of unintelligibility as ethnic pride

The unequal social distribution of metaphorical knowledge and the interplay of different ideologies of (un)intelligibility seem to reflect and reproduce forms of socioeconomic antagonism between the traditional cultural elite and the commoners. But the ideology of unintelligibility can be also used by members of the new bourgeoisie to transcend these tensions and to bypass their symbolic exclusion from the ritual register, as they attempt at molding new forms of inclusion. In this light, the emphasis on *basa to-minaa* unintelligibility becomes a way to reaffirm the prestige of the Toraja language against the growing hegemony of national and international languages.

Post-independence linguistic policies in Indonesia have been marked by a powerful narrative that presents the national language both as a symbol of modernity and as a means to promote it. *Bahasa Indonesia* hegemony is often constructed in contrast to local languages, which are portrayed as entrapped in a marginal and traditional dimension (Kuipers 1998); the straightforwardness and denotational transparency of Indonesian is emphasized as being opposed to the provincial, chaotic, and backward nature of the local languages (Errington 2000). The post-colonial Indonesian state has endorsed linguistic and cultural policies aimed at celebrating the higher level of grammatical rationality and effectiveness of the national language often to the detriment of the local and peripheral languages like Toraja, Weyewa (Kuipers 1998), or Anakalang (Keane 1997a, 1997b), which are represented as lacking a proper grammatical and writing system.

During my linguistic work in Toraja, my assistants often argued that I would do better to avoid spending so much time trying to make sense of the utterances I was collecting through eliciting sessions or audio-recordings of spontaneous interactions, since the truth was that there were no grammatical rules to be found. In my interlocutors' view, this claimed grammatical deficiency was related to the absence of an original writing system predating the Dutch arrival. I initially considered my assistants' accounts as the sign of their assimilation to the state-promoted ideology of linguistic development, which often equates the lack of an original writing system to a presumed absence of grammatical rules. In this perspective, the absence of local historical systems of graphical conventions for representing local languages' sounds is often essentialized and represented as an intrinsic form of disorder and irrationality inherent in these local codes (Errington 1998). Illiteracy becomes an essential and natural feature of the local language and can also be transferred onto its

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speakers who, regardless of their actual capacity to write and read, can be stigmatized as illiterate.

However, as I later discovered, within this negative representation of the Toraja language as illiterate and grammatically irrational, it is possible to identify the elaboration of a 'counter-hegemonic discourse of semantics'. Indeed, in the nonexperts' accounts, the unintelligibility of *basa tominaa* was not only equated with insincerity and moral or semantic ambiguity but could be also reversed into a discourse of ethnolinguistic pride, in which the sophisticated semantic system of the ritual language was extended to become a property of the local language as a whole.

Once, for instance, while I was traveling in a public vehicle to the town of Rantepao, a man hearing that I was living in a village to study the local language, expressed his approval of my research by saying: 'Toraja language is very allusive/metaphoric/allegoric [*luas kiasannya*], while English is not!' On another occasion, a woman inquiring into my improvements in the study of the Toraja language explained to me that the difficulty of learning Toraja derives from its semantic richness as explicitly opposed to English 'poorness':

> Toraja language is quite difficult [because] it has many synonyms [*synonim*], we ourselves Toraja people find it difficult to differentiate the meanings. [. . .] Toraja language is rich [*kaya*]! English is poor [*miskin*]!

Interestingly, in these accounts the allusiveness and obliqueness of Toraja ritual speech are portrayed as general characteristics of the local language and are then evoked in contrast to English. According to the woman, English straightforwardness (epitomized by the lack of the allusive and oblique style that characterizes Toraja) is what makes it lexically and semantically poor. As she then explained to me, English is hard to learn because of its odd phonology and its lack of correspondence between sounds and their graphical representation. But as for Toraja, the difficulties derive from its incredible semantic richness.

The two examples reveal how nonexperts may redefine their critical view of semantic redundancy and opacity in order to confer to the local language an aura of prestige, which makes it worthy of being compared to English, a language whose importance and prestige exceed even that of Indonesian. By implicitly opposing the semantic opacity and denotational indirectness of *basa tominaa* to the straightforwardness and the referential transparency of English (and Indonesian), the limited intelligibility of the ritual register here becomes a crucial element to articulate a self-reflexive counterhegemonic discourse of marginality and to allude to alternative linguistic hierarchies.

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These appeals to a positive notion of unintelligibility resound with the endeavors of linguistic documentations recently undertaken by a series of Toraja intellectuals strongly connected to the local Church (*Gereja Toraja*) and the emerging bourgeoisie. Starting from 1980s, the national Department of Education and Culture and the local Toraja Church have sponsored the publication of several books aimed at collecting different genres of Toraja ritual speech, thus contributing to spreading the idea that *basa tominaa* is a form of 'regional oral literature' (*sastra lisan daerah*) whose 'conservation' (*kelestarihan*) is finalized to the 'development of the national literature' (*pengembangan sastra nasional*) (Sande' 1986: i). By framing unintelligibility as semantic richness, the nonexperts express their alignment with these wider projects of the popularization of *basa tominaa*, and attempt to recast their sense of exclusion by crafting new forms of ethnolinguistic membership in the Indonesian nation-state and in the world.

8. Conclusions

This paper aimed at showing how the interplay of ideologies of intelligibility and unintelligibility structures the Toraja 'speech economy' (Abrahams and Bauman 1971). The analysis highlighted the coexistence and the social distribution of multiple notions and practices of unintelligibility. If, on the one hand, the religious and political elite reproduces its power through practices of communicative exclusion based on highly coded metaphors supposedly incomprehensible to the common people; on the other hand, the nonexperts engage in several attempts to redefine their marginal position by constructing multiple representations of the imagined community who participate in the ritual language. The analysis showed how in Toraja, as in other cultural and geographic contexts (Briggs 1995; Severi 2001; Tambiah 1968; Wirtz 2005), unintelligibility contributes to the construction of hierarchical conceptions of linguistic and cultural knowledge, and, with this, to the reproduction of political power, as well as of social order and stratification (Bloch 1975). But it also highlighted how ideologies of unintelligibility can be used by nonexperts to question the hierarchical organization of knowledge or to challenge state-fostered language ideologies, which put forth semantic transparency and stigmatize the opacity of the Toraja ancestral language or the grammatical irrationality of the Toraja language in general.

By equating indirectness with hypocrisy, the nonexpert can convey a negative representation of the ritual, social, and political elite that holds

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privileged access to ritual speech. Or they can use the discourse of unintelligibility 'as ways to back-talk' (Samuels 2004: 300) Indonesian hegemonic ideologies of semantic transparency and grammatical rationality. The symbolic transformation by which a ritual register generally associated with the cultural and social elite is turned into an emblem of local identity resembles similar processes occurring at other levels of the local public culture. As Adams (2006) showed, certain objects of the Toraja material culture (such as mortuary effigies, menhirs, and ancestral houses) once associated with the Toraja aristocracy are increasingly being exploited as symbols of ethnic identity. My analysis highlighted how, as the Toraja community becomes immersed in wider linguistic and 'representational economies' (Keane 2002), average speakers with a very limited competence of *basa to minaa* can turn the elitist ritual register into a powerful marker of the local popular culture.

Notes

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1. The term 'language ideologies' refers to speakers' theories on the role and nature of language and communication, as well as to their ideas regarding specific varieties of their repertoire.
2. I use the term 'metasemantic' to refer to speakers' conceptions concerning meaning and the relation between words and referents.
3. Although they are both Austronesian languages, the difference between Indonesian (*Bahasa Indonesia*) and Toraja (*basa toraya*) is remarkable and could be perhaps roughly compared to the difference between English and Portuguese. Toraja language belongs to the South Sulawesi language family, which constitutes one of the nine main language subgroups spoken in Sulawesi (cf. Noorduyn 1991).
4. Metaphor and couplets are common to many ritual registers in eastern Indonesia, such as those found in Anakalang (Keane 1997a, 1997b), Rindi (Forth 1988), Roti (Fox 1988), Wana (Atkinson 1984), Weyewa (Kuipers 1993, 1998).
5. In another forthcoming article (Donzelli forthcoming), I describe the contemporary tensions between this fixed repertoire and the personal styles of individual spokesmen.
6. Sandarupa (2004: 71–73) provides similar accounts. For a more detailed description of Toraja parallelistic structure, see the work by Sandarupa (1989, 2004), who (2004: 71–73) argues that the expression 'to speak in pairs' (Fox 1988) should be rephrased as 'to speak in pairs of complements'.

7. Etymologically, the term comes from the Greek *metaphora*, a word composed by the preposition *meta* meaning 'over' and the verb *pherein*, 'to carry'. As the etymology suggests, the notion 'refers to a particular set of linguistic processes whereby aspects of one object are carried over or transferred to another object, so that the second object is spoken as if it were the first' (Hawkes 1972: 1).
8. Abbreviations in interlinear glosses: ACT F (actor focus); BEN (benefactive); INTR (intransitive); NEG (negative); NOM (nominalizer); NON VOL (non-volitional); REC (reciprocal); SG (singular).

   Orthography: In the absence of a standardized orthography, I opted for applying current Indonesian conventions when transcribing Toraja speeches. The apostrophe /'/ represents the glottal stop.
9. Although here it would be more appropriate to speak of metonym or synecdoche (since it is contiguity that plays a dominant role), rather than metaphor.
10. Volkman and Zerner (1988: 284) also refer to the local idea that knowledge of ancestral words is stored in the stomach ('tambuk').
11. Although both in Sumba and in Toraja the leading role in earlier attempts to Christianize the local population was played by Orthodox Calvinist missionaries, their attitudes toward the indigenous ritual registers seem to have greatly differed. Since the arrival of the Dutch Calvinist missionaries in 1913 in Toraja, there has been a pervasive appropriation of ritual speech by the Church. *Basa tominaa*, after being properly purged of its 'pagan' elements, is nowadays employed in Christian ceremonies and is taught at the local theology schools. This stands in marked contrast to the negative stance adopted by the Church toward ritual speech in Sumba (Keane 1997a, 2002; Kuipers 1993, 1998).
12. It may be that the missionaries appealed to a pre-existing local ideology of truth and to the nonexperts' counterdiscourse of ritual speech as insincere to enforce their own ideology of sincerity.
13. Forth (1988: 132) reports of a strikingly similar way of describing oratorical speech in Rindi as: '[...] "speech, language that is unknown to most (or the majority of) people" and [...], "language that is unknown to the young persons"'.
14. The term 'entextualization' has been employed by students of ritual and formal speech (cf. Bauman and Briggs 1990, among others) to refer to a series of formal features (such as shifter avoidance and suppression of deictic elements), which, by stripping ritual speech from semiotic elements that refer to the immediate pragmatic context, confer to it a textual dimension.
15. For example, depending on the pragmatic context, the sentence 'New York City is a pressure cooker' can be variously interpreted as meaning that life in NYC is very stressful or that 'in New York City artistic activity is more intense than in other places' (Vicente 1992: 55–56).
16. I had always worked with older ritual speech specialists who, instead of translating from *basa tominaa* to Indonesian, would explain to me the meaning of the couplets through other couplets.
17. For example, the abundance of luck and blessing iconically conveyed in Toraja by the repetition of the words (*paraya* and *upa'*) in the Indonesian translation undergoes a process of formal simplification and is lexicalized through the verb *melimpah* ('overflow').
18. The only two occurrences of Indonesian words in the Toraja first half of the speech are marked in roman type.
19. By using Indonesian, the noble orator is also highlighting the risk for the migrants of becoming foreigners in their own village, suggesting a sort of aristocratic contempt

toward former slaves' attempts at climbing the social ladder. Had he translated the first half of the speech in the Toraja low register, not only would the orator have missed the opportunity of conveying his subtle reprimand but he would have also seriously violated the local sociolinguistic norms, which prescribe on formal occasions the use of a formal register (be it Indonesian or Toraja).

20. Ben Amos (2001: 148) provides a good example of a how metaphors can become naturalized: 'the pressure on the chest that felt like a mare riding on top of a person generated the literal description of "nightmare" that went through a metaphoric stage before becoming a word for "bad dream"'.

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