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978-0-521-10711-2 - Verbal Art in San Blas: Kuna Culture through its Discourse

Joel Sherzer

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Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture 21

VERBAL ART IN SAN BLAS

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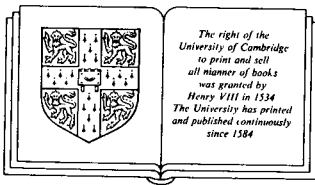
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JOEL SHERZER

University of Texas at Austin



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Preface

My fieldwork among the Kuna began in 1968 and has involved repeated visits to San Blas, some longer, some shorter, since then. Almost all of the time I have spent in San Blas has been on the island of Sasartii-Mulatuppu, near the Panama-Colombia border. The people of Sasartii-Mulatuppu have always been helpful to me and supportive of my work. I am most grateful to them for this.

The individuals whose verbal performances are presented here were eager to participate in the recording and preservation of their traditional knowledge and verbal art. It gives me great pleasure to be able to bring their desires to fruition. They are Chief (previously Chief's Spokesman) Armando González, Chief Mastayans, Chief Olowitinappi, Chief's Spokesman Olowitinappi (now deceased), Chief Muristo Pérez, and Pranki Pilos. Hortenciano Martínez and Anselmo Urrutia aided me in the delicate process of transcription, translation, and interpretation.

My research among the Kuna was supported by a National Science Foundation grant to the University of Texas, a National Institute of Mental Health small grant, summer grants from the University of Texas Institute of Latin American Studies, and a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation fellowship. The government of Panama, through Patrimonio Histórico, granted me permission to carry out research in Panama.

I would like to thank my closest colleagues in the study of Kuna language, culture, and society, Mac Chapin and James Howe, for comments on previous versions of the chapters of this book, including questions of textual presentation and translation. Charles Briggs, William Bright, and Dennis Tedlock were official readers for Cambridge University Press and provided most thought-provoking, sensitive, and sensible suggestions. Ruth Finnegan and Dina Sherzer were unofficial readers whose comments were also most helpful.

An earlier version of chapter five appeared in Joel Sherzer and Greg Urban (eds.), *Native South American discourse* (1986). An earlier version of chapter six, without the presentation of the Kuna text, appeared in the *Journal of American Folklore* 92 (1979) and, with the Kuna text, in Brian Swann and Arnold Krupat (eds.), *Recovering the word: Essays on Native American literature* (1987). An earlier version of chapter eight, without the presentation of the Kuna text, appeared in Deborah Tannen (ed.), *Analyzing discourse: Text and talk* (1981).

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Guide to pronunciation and notational conventions

The following symbols are used in the representation of the Kuna language:

Vowels

- i high front open
- e middle front open
- a low front open
- u high back rounded
- o middle back rounded

Consonants

- p voiced bilabial stop
- pp voiceless bilabial stop
- t voiced dental stop
- tt voiceless dental stop
- k voiced velar stop
- kk voiceless velar stop
- kw voiced labiovelar stop
- kkw voiceless labiovelar stop
- s voiceless dental spirant
- c voiceless palatal affricate
- m voiced bilabial nasal
- n voiced dental nasal
- l voiced lateral
- r voiced flap
- w voiced bilabial semivowel
- y voiced palatal semivowel

Stress is usually on the penultimate syllable.

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Expressive features of pronunciation in performance are represented in the texts as follows:

Lengthening of vowels and nasals, indicated by doubling of letters, tripling for extra lengthening:

waaalking along

Loud speech, indicated by capital letters:

YOU HAVE HEARD, up to here.

Decreasing volume, indicated by > placed before the stretch of speech affected:

> scarred scarred

Stretched-out, syllabic pronunciation, indicated by dashes between syllables:

who-of-the-two-of-us-in-deed-might-be-a-bet-ter-per-son?

Vibrating voice, indicated by dashes between letters:

o-n-l-y t-h-e i-m-p-o-r-t-a-n-t p-e-o-p-l-e

Slowing of tempo, indicated by stretching out of letters and words, without dashes:

But we are not now like that we are true golden people see

Faster tempo, indicated by a dotted underline under the words which are spoken faster:

“Did I not now buy a plate”? you would say.

Rising pitch, indicated by ´ placed before the stretch of speech affected:

´ you will sit saying

Falling pitch, indicated by ` placed before the stretch of speech affected:

` he says

Whole line is higher in pitch, indicated by ^ placed before the line:

^ This chief standing speaking where is he from?

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Part of line is higher in pitch, indicated by raising the words of higher pitch:

“Did I not now buy a plate?” you would say.

Line-ending pause, indicated by . at the end of line:

Little by little I was catching on.

Short interlinear pause, indicated by , :

Well, you know it all.

Long interlinear pause, without falling pitch, indicated by extra long space:

“Well it is to frighten the devil” he says.