

Strategies in the Negotiation of Conflicts in a Marathi Wedding Ritual

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Abstract

This paper reports on an ethnographic study of a Marathi speech community participating in a wedding ritual in India. The data was videotaped and analysed against the background of Rossi-Landi's (Rossi-Landi, 1992) theory where everything is produced, exchanged and consumed within parallel levels of material and linguistic production, with moments of communication occurring whenever exchange takes place. The analysis clearly shows how the major participants in this event actively labored to reproduce the wedding and contributed, either knowingly or unknowingly, to the wedding process as it moves through time and space. Within this parallel process of production are identifiable conflict situations that arise, and are resolved, between the major participants. It is these conflict situations that ultimately form an integral and necessary part of the wedding ritual. Indeed, it is expected by the participants that during the wedding ritual, such conflicts will occur and will be resolved to the satisfaction of both the groom's side and the bride's side so that the wedding ritual will continue to completion. The paper demonstrates how these conflicts are resolved, and which strategies (Pruitt and Carnevale, 1993) are used by the participants to negotiate the conflicts, thus finally contributing to the completion of the wedding ritual.

Keywords: speech community, linguistic production, material production, conflict situations, negotiation strategies.

Introduction

This ethnographic study was carried out in the state of Maharashtra, India. The focus of this study was a group of people who speak a particular dialect of Marathi (a modern Indo-Aryan language of India) called Desi, or standard Marathi. The wedding, which took place in the city of Gargoli, (Kolhapur district, Maharashtra, India) was approximately six hours in length and was videotaped for research

purposes. The researcher functioned as participant-observer and the wedding was recorded as the event unfolded. The tapescript was transcribed with the aid of a native Desi speaker. The data was analyzed to identify conflict situations using Rossi-Landi's (Rossi-Landi, 1992) theory of production, exchange and consumption within parallel levels of material and linguistic production, where moments of communication occur whenever exchange takes place. This paper clearly demonstrates how conflict was successfully resolved during the moments of communication of linguistic production, according to Pruitt and Carnevale's negotiation strategies.

In order to simplify the analysis, the marriage ceremony is divided into three stages. The first stage is the Preliminary Rites stage, which consists of a series of eight ceremonies. The second stage is the Mangalashtaka, which is the singing of the sacred verses. The third stage is the Core Rites stage. The conflict situations analyzed in this paper are the *Sakhar Pudha* ceremony and the *Haldi Kunku* ceremony (Groom's side only), both from the Preliminary Rites stage. In addition, from the second ceremony in the Core Rites stage, an excerpt from the *Ukhana* ceremony is analyzed, in which the bride and groom utter each other's names. The Mangalashtaka (second stage), which is a highly ritualistic stage of the wedding was not analyzed and if conflict had arisen at this stage of the wedding, then the wedding would have ground to a complete halt with very little chance of continuation. Only the Preliminary Rites stage and the Core Rites stage were analyzed for conflict situations, as in the completion of these ceremonies, conflicts arose and were resolved. Thus the focus of this paper is the analysis of the production, consumption and exchange of the three linguistic extracts included below which elucidates the negotiation strategies used to successfully resolve the conflict. Material production is included as necessary in the understanding of the Homology of Production table (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: Homology of Production

(Adapted from Rossi-Landi, F. (1992).: *Between Signs and Non-Signs*. page 221)

Levels of Progressive Complexity	Material Production	Linguistic Production
First level: Global production	All objectual sign systems of a "productive	All verbal sign systems of a "productive unit"

	unit"	
Second level: Nonrepeatable production	Special constructions, unique prototypes	"original" literary and scientific production
Third level: Total mechanism/automation	Automated machines	Subcodes and lexicons (postlinguistic)
Fourth level: Complex and self- sufficient mechanisms	Self-sufficient mechanisms	Lectures, speeches, essays, books
Fifth level: Mechanism	Machines of a simple type, i.e. material syllogisms	Syllogisms, organized groupings of interconnected sentences: i.e. linguistic mechanisms
Sixth level: Aggregates of utensils	Compound utensils	Compound sentences
Seventh level: Utensils and sentences	Simple utensils, i.e. material sentences	Simple sentences, i.e. Linguistic utensils
Eighth level: "completed pieces:	"finished pieces"of utensils; syntagms,	Words, Syntagms, expressions, parts of speech, phrases

	expressions, parts of speech, phrases in the “language of things”	
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The above table indicates that linguistic production and material production develop according to parallel levels of complexity. For each linguistic level of production there is a corresponding level of nonverbal linguistic work, which in turn has a corresponding level of nonsound material.

Methodology

The method of analysis used to analyze the social reproduction of the wedding is borrowed from Rossi-Landi’s approach to social reproduction. According to Rossi-Landi, “institutions are social practices seen as systems or structures” (Rossi-Landi 1992: 186). Thus the wedding is identified as an institution and is analyzed linguistically according to its social practices. It is important to keep in mind that social reproduction is a dynamic process and this is reflected in the reciprocity of the levels, whereby certain levels tend to blend into other levels. Secondly, I will use what Rossi-Landi has identified as a homology of production (See Table 1) to analyze social reproduction in terms of linguistic/material production, exchange and consumption within the three ceremonies (*Haldi Kunku, Sakhar Pudha and Ukhana*), thus focusing on the moment of exchange and the ensuing conflict.

Finally, Pruitt and Carnevale’s five strategies in two-party negotiation (Pruitt and Carnevale 1993, 3, 4) were used to show how the conflict situations are resolved and the wedding is successfully completed. The first three strategies are considered to be coping strategies which move both parties towards agreement. The two parties in this case, are the Groom’s side and the Bride’s side. According to Pruitt and Carnevale, the first ‘Concession making’ strategy involves reducing one’s goals, demands, or offers. The second ‘Contending’ strategy occurs when one party persuades the other party to yield or attempts to resist similar efforts by the other party. Some of the tactics include ‘threats’, which are messages indicating punishment for a lack of conformity and ‘positional commitments’, messages indicating that a move from a particular position is not possible. At the third strategy of ‘Problem Solving’, there is an attempt to identify options which satisfy both parties. Tactics

include active listening and providing information about one's own priorities. The fourth 'Inaction' strategy involves doing nothing or as little as possible, such as talking around the issues. The fifth and final 'Withdrawal' strategy involves dropping out of the negotiation (Pruitt and Carnevale, 1993). Also, the following terms are defined according to Pruitt and Carnevale and are used as follows: 'negotiation' is viewed as a discussion between two or more parties with the goal of resolving any social conflict which may arise. A 'divergence of interest' occurs when the parties have incompatible preferences among the possible options available. Thus, the aim of this work is to identify the linguistic strategies used to resolve the arising social conflict.

According to Rossi-Landi, at any given instance of social reproduction there will always be production, exchange and consumption. The terminology used here is also adapted from Rossi-Landi's work (Rossi-Landi 1992:190) and is as follows. 'Speech community' is the product of the communicative activities engaged in by a given group of people. 'Linguistic production' is defined as the verbal sign system. 'Production' is used in relation to social reproduction and concerns material objects, sign systems and all institutions. 'Social reproduction' is the widest possible totality of reality by which any given society proceeds in time from generation to generation, preserving its internal structure yet changing at the same time. It can be spoken about and exists external to man. 'Productive unit' can refer to a man, a social group, or a whole culture.

In fact, production, exchange and consumption are inseparable and whenever one of the three is operable then it is ultimately in relation to the other two. This means that in the act of consumption, production and exchange are promoted. In the act of exchange, production and consumption are promoted and in the act of production, consumption and exchange are promoted. Indeed, communication lies in the moment of exchange and it is in the moment of exchange that conflict may arise. Also, these three moments pertain not only to material goods but also to cultural and spiritual goods such as language and social institutions. The special homological character of Rossi-Landi's theoretical framework is emphasized as it enables us to view a speaker as a linguistic worker, much like any material worker.

The following is an abbreviated version of the speaker key which identifies the speakers who participated in the linguistic production of the social conflict.

Speaker Key

Key	Description of the Speaker	Key	Description of the Speaker
B	Bride	GM	Groom's mother
BA	Bride's Aunt	Gmu1	Groom's maternal first uncle
BM	Bride's Mother	P	Priest

Data Analysis

The Sakhar Pudha Ceremony (Bridal Adornment/sugar feeding ceremony)

At a global level, the majority of the language used by this speech community identifies the community as belonging to the Desi speaking community in India and this is supported by the recorded data. The recorded data starts at the end of the *Sakhar Pudha* ceremony titled the Bridal Adornment and Sugar Feeding, which is the third ceremony in the preliminary rites stage. In this wedding the *Sakhar Pudha* ceremony has been brought forward to the actual wedding day, thus supporting Carter's (1982) findings that there is variation as to when the preliminary rites ceremonies are reproduced. A short segment of linguistic production is included below.

- (A1) GS1: Fix your *padar* over the head!---The sacred rice?
(A2) GM: After (I) put the bangles (in the bride's hands).
(A3) GS1: (This is) the girl's (bride's) mother!
(A4) P: (You) should touch the bangles!
(A5) BM: OK, that is enough!
(A6) P: What enough? When told, (you) should just quickly touch the hand!
(A7) BM: (inaudible)
(A8) P: Then (meaning: so) hand is in the hand only! Hold like this! Hold!

In this short extract of linguistic production, the groom's sister, mother, priest and the bride's mother are actively involved in reproducing the *Sakhar Pudha* ceremony. This extract is an example of a small productive unit reproducing an essential element of the wedding and the delicate balance which must be maintained by the participants as they cooperate and conflict to complete the process. The material production

involve the bride's (B) bangles which are at the eighth level of material production in Table 1.

The language produced in this extract is exemplary of the fifth through the eighth levels of Rossi-Landi's Homology of Production table. The priest is directing the participants by giving instructions that must be carried out to successfully reproduce the *Sakhar Pudha* ceremony. The successful reproduction of this ceremony is so important to the continuation of the wedding that the priest does not hesitate to contradict BM as to how much touching of the bangles is sufficient. Thus, the escalating conflict is visible in the linguistic exchange from lines A4 to A7 with the moment of exchange occurring when the priest says "Then (meaning:so) hand is in the hand only! Hold like this! Hold!". It is obvious from the above linguistic extract in line A6 that the priest is using Pruitt and Carnevale's 'Contending' strategy as he repeats his instructions ("...just quickly touch the hand!") to BM to indicate that he will not change his mind about touching the bangles. Clearly, in line A7, BM is using a conceding strategy, although the exact linguistic production is inaudible, which also indicates at least partial if not complete concession. In line A8, the word "Then" indicates that the priest has accepted BM's concession and the arising conflict is resolved. At the same time, in line A8 the priest is using Pruitt and Carnevale's 'Problem solving strategy by providing a demonstration (more information) "Hold like this! Hold!" so that BM clearly understands what the priest wants BM to do. Thus the conflict is resolved. This also supports Pruitt and Carnevale's position that if conditions reduce the possibility of using one of the coping strategies, then the other two become more likely.

Haldi Kunku (Groom's side)

The aim of this ceremony is to cover the groom in as much *haldi* (turmeric mixture) as possible. The mixture consists of ground turmeric powder and water. Traditionally, this mixture is applied to the head, shoulders and knees of the bride and groom by five *suvani* or married women who have never been widowed. However, the groom's side had control of making the turmeric mixture. Also, so that waste was minimized, the groom's side handed over the remaining portion of the *haldi* mixture to be used by the bride's side. The atmosphere during this ceremony is light-hearted and jovial.

(B14) GM: Now take it (turmeric) there, and then put however much you want.
There!

(B15) BA: This turmeric (ceremony) of yours was finished quickly.

(B16) GM: Now take it to your side.

(B17) BA: OK. I will take it there.

These sentences are typical of words, phrases and all it is possible to produce at the seventh and eighth levels in the Homology of Production table. In line B14 the GM is 'commanding' BA to take the container of turmeric paste to the bride's side to be used. This is supported by the presence of the imperative form of 'take' However, instead of immediately agreeing, BA responds by declaring that the Haldi Kunku ceremony was finished quickly, thus hinting that perhaps the ceremony carried out by the groom's side was inadequate in some way. This is a very serious accusation for one party to make about the other and could have resulted in halting the wedding if social conflict had escalated. The moment of 'Exchange' occurs between lines B16 and B17. Instead of allowing the conflict to escalate, the GM negotiates the conflict by using Pruitt and Carnevale's Contending strategy to resolve the conflict. Clearly, the linguistic production supports the positional commitment of the GM to having the container of turmeric paste removed to the bride's side. In line B16, the imperative form of the verb is used (take) and the adverb of time 'now' is also repeated to indicate the expected time of the action. Also, GM's utterance is much shorter and direct in line B16 than in line B14, thus indicating that the negotiation is at an end. This is supported by BA's response in line B17 when she immediately agrees without hesitation. In this example, the material production involves the turmeric paste and the utensil which holds the paste.

The Ukhana (name-taking ceremony)

The *Ukhana* ceremony is an example of another event which clearly functions at different levels. An *ukhana* is a poetic 2-line rhyming puzzle uttered by the bride (B) and groom (G) at their wedding (dissertation glossary). The *Ukhana* ceremony is an example of level two which is supported in the Homology of Production table by levels four, five, six, seven and eight. The material production involves the couplet (or *ukhana*) which the bride (B) and groom (G) are expected to orally create according to the linguistic extract below. This ceremony is the second ceremony in the core rites stage which involves the bride and groom uttering each others names in public. In daily life, the bride and groom do not usually utter each others names and the wife refers to the husband using the plural form. However, the husband refers to the wife using the singular form. An extract of the name-taking ceremony is reproduced below.

- (Y11) Gmu1 Now they will take the names (of each other).
- (Y12) Listen up a bit.
- (Y13) BM Both of you take them!(the names of the bride and groom).
- (Y14) Gmu1 Tell (them)! (to BM)
- (Y15) You tell them some couplet, whichever one you know.
- (Y16) B Utters an English couplet with the Groom's name in it (inaudible)

The above linguistic production is an example of the last two strategies of 'Inaction' and 'Withdrawal' in Pruitt and Carnevale's list of strategies. Gmu1 begins in line Y11 by telling the group to listen to the name-taking by the bride and groom. This is supported by the use of the imperative form 'Listen' in line Y12. Also, line Y12 is an indirect way of telling the group to be quiet. In line Y13, the BM instructs both the bride and groom to take each other's names using the imperative form (take), thus supporting the event. The moment of Exchange occurs between lines 14, 15 and 16 when Gmu1 commands BM to provide an example of a couplet. Again, the imperative form (tell) is used. At this point in the conversation, conflict could have escalated. However, BM uses Pruitt and Carnevale's 'Inaction' strategy and says nothing. In fact, there is no linguistic production from BM throughout the remainder of the Ukhana ceremony (not included in this paper). Thus, indicating that this is an example of the last 'withdrawal' strategy as BM completely dropped out of the negotiation. Line Y16 above, which is uttered by the bride (B), is an example of continued support for the Ukhana ceremony and also covers BM's withdrawal from the negotiation.

In uttering an *Ukhana*, both the bride and groom have each reproduced *Ukhanas* which are to be found in *Ukhana* books accessible to the public. Within the Marathi culture, it is common to find books of *Ukhanas* which are memorized and practised at events such as this wedding. An example is the book titled *Manoranjak Ukhane and Mhanee* (1996:17-18) which lists *Ukhanas* for certain occasions, such as weddings, thread ceremonies and Haldi Kunku ceremonies (i.e. a female-only party). Males as well as females are expected to participate in a complimentary *Ukhana* reproduction and this book contains seventy-one *Ukhanas* for females and twelve *Ukhanas* for males. Obviously, the females are expected to use and know more *Ukhanas* than the males. In this *Ukhana* event, the bride reproduces a Marathi and an English couplet, whereas the groom reproduces only one English couplet. Also, the pressure to reproduce a satisfactory *Ukhana* is directed mainly at the bride not at the groom. Thus, the reproduction of the entire *Ukhana* event also belongs to level four of the Homology of Production table.

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that the major participants of the wedding event collaborated, either knowingly or unknowingly, in completing all three stages of the wedding process, to reproduce a wedding event. Furthermore, what is reproduced is a series of events, which are very different from each other. Each event is a fluid and not a fixed entity, the formation of which takes place during its reproduction. During the process of collaborating, a delicate balance is maintained between the cooperation and conflict of the participants which was visible in the linguistic production of each social event. It was possible to identify Pruitt and Carnevale's five strategies of negotiation from the linguistic production of the participants. Thus, a balance was successfully achieved as participants used Pruitt and Carnevale's strategies to negotiate the conflict. In general, it is noted that the more important the participant is in terms of power and influence, for example, the priest or GM (groom's mother), the greater that participant's impact on the successful reproduction of the process by making more demands which were adhered to by other less powerful participants. In conclusion, this study demonstrates an application of the Rossi-Landi approach to analysis of social systems, and its results clearly show how linguistic production (observed during the wedding) is indeed vital for the resolution of conflicts, which must necessarily be resolved for successful completion of the wedding. At the same time, it is noteworthy that Pruitt and Carnevale's paradigm for conflict resolution was workable in a non-English speaking environment despite the apparent cultural and linguistic differences.

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