

NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON

Verbal Art: Exploring the Ethnography of Speaking Strategies

organised by:

the Department of Cultural and Creative Studies,
North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong
Meghalaya, India

in collaboration with
North Eastern Council, Government of India, Shillong

CALL FOR PAPERS

National Conference on Verbal art: Exploring the Ethnography of Speaking Strategies

23-24, February, 2017

Proposals are invited for stand-alone papers dealing with the theme and sub-themes of the conference. The language of the conference is English.

Papers

Time: Each paper will be allocated 25 minutes, which will include general floor discussion, and remarks from the chair.

Interested individuals are asked to submit an abstract not exceeding 500 words along with a one-page CV.

Submissions have to be emailed to the Conference Assistant at vaconference2017dccs@gmail.com by 14th January 2017. Participants will be notified about the acceptance of their papers by 18th January 2017.

The submissions will be evaluated by the Conference Organising Committee and its decision will be final.

The final paper should be emailed to the Conference Secretary by 18th February 2017.

Registration

All participants, including session chairs will be required to register to attend the conference. Registration can be done on arrival at NEHU Shillong. Participants are expected to make their own arrangements for travel and should they require a letter to obtain travel funds to attend the conference they may write to the Conference Secretariat. Local hospitality, which includes accommodation, food and local transport from noon of the 22nd February to noon of the 25th, February, 2017 will be provided by the organisers.

The structure of registration fees is as follows:

Professionals	INR 1000
Research Scholars	INR 750

Dates to remember

1. Submission deadline for abstracts and panels: 14th January 2017
2. Notification of paper acceptance: 18th January 2017
3. Final papers due: 18th February 2017
4. Conference dates: 23-24 February 2017.

Conference Organiser:

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And

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Concept Note:

Verbal Art: Exploring the Ethnography of Speaking Strategies

‘Verbal art’, as introduced in William R. Bascom’s classic article, refers to the study of human communication, or, to be more precise, of that aspect of it which involves the performance of songs, myths, stories, folktales, and similar forms of verbal artistry. It is a flexible term that encapsulates ‘a convenient and appropriate term for folktales, myths, legends, proverbs, riddles, and other “literary forms” including songs and poems, together with verbal processes like naming, rhetoric or tongue twisters. Verbal artists take ordinary language and craft it, manipulate it, and transform it to create extraordinary language that appeals to the senses and to the emotions. This transformed language in turn has the potential to effect a change, a transformation that can take a variety of forms. A great deal of work has been carried out under this label by folklorists and anthropologists.

Franz Boas – the German-American pioneer of modern Anthropology – was intrigued and challenged by much of the verbal art that he encountered in his extensive fieldwork among the indigenous people of the Pacific Northwest, and in his introduction to the 1917 *International Journal of American Linguistics*, advocated for the inclusion of the literary forms of native production among the problems treated in a linguistic journal and declared that:

“The most promising material for the study of certain aspects of artistic expression are the formal elements that appear with great frequency in the tales of the tribes”.

Boas emphasized the study of the literary forms of traditional verbal expressions, lamenting that the translated material collected often reduced much of the content to stereotypes and generalizations, losing much of the artistic value inherent in the original versions.

Dell Hymes, the American Folklorist and Sociolinguist and one of the champions of the field of Ethnopoetics, objected to the marginalization of performance from the center of linguistic inquiry and proposed the notion of communicative competence, or knowledge necessary to use language in social context, as an object of linguistic inquiry. Since

appropriate language use is conventionally defined, and varies across different communities, much of Hymes early work frames a project for ethnographic investigation into contrasting patterns of language use across speech communities. He termed this approach "the ethnography of speaking.", and later refined it to "The ethnography of communication". Hymes was of the opinion that:

"...the study of language must concern itself with describing and analyzing the ability of the native speakers to use language for communication in real situations (communicative competence) rather than limiting itself to describing the potential ability of the ideal speaker/listener to produce grammatically correct sentences (linguistic competence)."

While the term 'oral literature' is preferable to some, this nomenclature can be limiting and drive focus to more explicitly longer textually articulated forms. The terms "unwritten literature," "popular literature," "folk literature," "primitive literature," and "oral literature" emphasize the relations of these forms to literature, but all are premised upon the irreconcilable contradiction that literature is based upon letters and writing, whereas folklore is not. UnwrittenThe concept of verbal art avoids all of these difficulties, and has the further advantage of emphasizing the essential features which distinguish the folktale, myth, proverb, and related forms. It places them squarely alongside the graphic and plastic arts, music and the dance, and literature, as forms of aesthetic expression, while at the same time emphasizing that they differ from the other arts in that their medium of expression is the spoken word.

In verbal art it is only necessary to compare myths, folktales, proverbs, and riddles with the direct statements of ordinary speech to see a similar concern with the form of expression, over and above the needs of communication. Among these distinctive features may be the form of statement, the choice of vocabulary and idiom, the use of obsolete words, the imagery of metaphor or simile, the set number of repetitions, the formalized openings and closings, the incorporation of cultural details, conventionalized greetings, or directional orientations, and other stylistic features which are absent in ordinary conversation.

Richard Bauman led a departure from text-centered perspectives on verbal art and developed an approach to verbal art as performance, derived from folklore, the ethnography of speaking, sociolinguistics, and literary stylistics. This widely-adapted framework for a

performance-centered approach to verbal art incorporates concepts and ideas from a wide range of disciplines, including folkloristics, anthropology, linguistics, and literary criticism.

Sub-Themes:

1. Ethnopoetics
2. Tradition-oriented Communication
3. Idiolect in Tale Telling
4. Gender and Narratology
5. Verbalization and Performance
6. Vernacular Poetics
7. Ethnopaleography and Narrative Construction
8. Critiquing Bascom's Paradigm of Verbal Art
9. Verbal Art and Construction of Religious Discourse
10. Verbal Art in Public and Urban Spheres