

Communicative Practices in an American Gamelan Orchestra

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ABSTRAK

Gamelan adalah tradisi musik yang berakar di Indonesia, dipertunjukkan di kepulauan Jawa, Madura, dan Bali dalam upacara-upacara adat dan ritual-ritual agama. Kendati secara tradisional gamelan dimainkan oleh warga pribumi, dengan meningkatnya popularitas budaya etnis Indonesia dalam lingkup internasional, gamelan baru-baru ini dimainkan pula oleh orang-orang asing. Studi berikut ini merupakan etnografi dari proses komunikasi dalam sebuah Orkestra Gamelan Amerika yang mengidentifikasi dua pertanyaan kunci: (1) Bagaimana gamelan dipelajari di luar konteks sosiokultural orisinalnya? (2) Bagaimana pengetahuan tersebar di antara komunitas yang spesifik ini? Melibatkan kurang lebih 30 anggota (pemusik dan penari) dari sebuah kelompok Gamelan Bali, dengan beragam latar belakang etnis, kebangsaan dan latar belakang musik, penelitian ini menyimpulkan adanya empat praktik komunikasi dalam mempelajari gamelan: (1) Vokalisasi (sebagai metode utama instruktur dalam mengajarkan cara memainkan gamelan); (2) Percakapan informal (sebagai bentuk praktik komunikasi yang memungkinkan anggota kelompok berinteraksi dalam percakapan bebas); (3) Metawacana (suatu proses di mana anggota-anggota senior mencapai keputusan manajemen pertunjukan); dan (4) Blessings, semacam upacara keagamaan memohon restu dari Yang Mahakuasa untuk kesuksesan acara. Keempat praktik komunikasi ini tidak sekadar membantu anggota mempelajari musik tradisional, tetapi juga memungkinkan para musisi tersebut menjadi anggota aktif dalam komunitas yang dikerangka oleh batas-batas kultural. Pada akhirnya, praktik komunikasi semacam ini membantu proses penyebaran pengetahuan di antara anggota-anggota kelompok.

Kebyar¹

One of the cornerstones to the ethnography of communication is for a researcher to determine the communicative repertoire of a particular community. In other words, what are the communicative habits of a group of people, and how are they used within the context of the community itself? With these fundamental notions Hymes (1962, 1964, 1972) was able to lay the groundwork for an analytical approach to the analysis of language from an anthropological perspective. Together with the descriptive units of speech act, speech event and speech community among others (Hymes 1972)

researchers have since constructed what Hymes originally called for: a corpus of research on comparative speaking (Bauman & Sherzer 1974).

The theoretical and analytical approaches to creating ethnographic texts have changed considerably since anthropology's early beginnings. With the advent of practice theory and its precursors (Berger & Luckmann 1967, Firth 1975, Sahlins 1976, Bourdieu 1977 & 1990, Ortner 1984, Wenger 1993), researchers analytically problematized the role of the individual as an agent within a community. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) define a community of practice as "an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an

endeavor” (page 464). A study of communicative practice not only involves observing the forms of communication used within a community, but also considers that each individual, as an agent, has access to different forms of communication (Hanks 1996). Wenger (1993) emphasizes the notion of communities of practice as analytical framework for the study of learning. In terms of this study, I have found a community of practice approach insightful in the sense that it adds to Hymes’ (1962, 1964, 1972) and Gumperz’s (1968) original distinction of a speech community – the shared understanding of the use of a linguistic code within a community. The definition of community of practice allows a broader analytical approach to communication. The communicative practices that I have identified are specific to this group, and as I will emphasize in this paper, cannot be generalized to include all gamelan groups the world over – including other American gamelan groups.

The present study is an ethnography of communication of an American gamelan orchestra. I will address the following questions: how is gamelan learned outside of its original socio-cultural context? How is knowledge shared amongst this specific community? The answers to these questions illustrate the relationship between communicative practices, learning music, and how communicative practices enable one to be an active member of a community. What makes one a member of the group is not only the ability to play the music, but to manipulate the communicative practices as well. These communicative practices are sometimes manipulated by alternating participant roles in conversation. The use of communicative practices and the shift in participant roles have a dialogical nature. Such participation shifts draw attention to the fact that the communicative practices used to learn and teach gamelan not only enable knowledge to be shared, but also enable individuals to be active members of this community of practice.

Background

Gamelan is a musical tradition that has its roots

in what is now the Republic of Indonesia (Titon 1992). Gamelan is a percussion orchestra containing instruments, called gongs, made of wood, brass, or bronze. Gongs played in a gamelan orchestra are similar to xylophones but usually have mythic artwork carved on them. Traditionally gamelan was, and still is, performed on the islands of Java, Madura and Bali during court ceremonies as well as during religious rituals in Hindu/Buddhist temples. Interestingly, there are hundreds of gamelan groups outside of Indonesia in the United States and Europe. The groups themselves may consist of anywhere between four and thirty members. Traditionally each village has its own gamelan in Bali. The group that I studied was made up of approximately thirty members (musicians and dancers) with various musical and ethnic backgrounds.

How is Gamelan Learned?

The corpus of literature on gamelan music is limited in terms of my own interests in looking at the communicative practices of how this musical tradition is learned. The literature on American gamelan emphasizes the musicological differences between performance in the States and in Indonesia. There have been no studies on American gamelan groups that compare how gamelan is taught in the States and Indonesia. Bakan (1999) provides an excellent foray into how an ethnographer with western musical training learns gamelan. Bakan and others (McPhee 1954, Herbst 1997) illustrate that Balinese gamelan is taught in a holistic style which emphasizes the playing of gamelan as opposed to the verbalization of what is to be played. This is in contrast to western instruction in a conservatory, where an emphasis is not only placed upon playing, but on theoretical concepts in music theory (Kingsbury 1988, Nettl 1995). This holistic style of instruction illustrates the fact that the Balinese instructor acts as a modeler, not just a teacher, of how the music should be played by the students. Pak, the instructor of the group that I studied, behaved in the same manner during instruction. He would play and vocalize by singing what he expected the members of the group to

perform. Asking specific questions about how to play the music proved to be difficult within this context. The answers to questions about music are often in the form of more playing.

Merriam (1964) provides an interesting perspective on learning music that suggests that learning music can be perceived as a process of enculturation. Learning a musical tradition with the ability to understand how music is played within a cultural context involves the process of enculturation. In the West learning and literacy are perceived as being in a dialectical relationship. Merriam highlights the fact that just because a culture may be dubbed “illiterate” does not mean that it does not have a system of learning. So in many ways, American gamelan musicians are not only learning a musical tradition, but a cultural tradition as well.

Pak’s instruction is mostly through vocalizations that are sung. In fact, Balinese instructors are said to not teach at all (Bakan 1999). Pak also uses gestures similar to Western style instruction pointing to specific players to keep them in sync with the rest of the gamelan. In considering the problems that members of the group seem to have with the instructor’s English, I found the problem to be more a matter of instructional style as opposed to communicative competence. The reason for this came from reading Bakan (1999) where I learned that the Balinese instructor in Bali does not verbalize how the music is to be played; rather, he instructs by examples of playing.

Vocalizations, Side Conversations, Meta-Discourse, & Blessings

Most of the members of the group are Anglo and more accustomed to a western style of musical instruction, where the music is not only played but talked about as well. Western style instruction also focuses heavily on the text, the written music. Because this musical tradition does not focus on texts, members of the gamelan have constructed their own communicative repertoire in order to learn the music in an efficient manner. There are three major communicative practices that the group

uses during rehearsals: the instructor’s vocalizations, side-conversations between various members of the group, meta-discourse about the music, and blessings. The blessing is important to this discussion, for it emphasizes a form of communicative practice outside of teaching the music that illustrates the relationship between gamelan music and religious worship. These forms of communication will be explained with some examples, and later in this section I will discuss where more than one of these communicative practices is occurring at the same time. Tannen’s notion of involvement (1986) provides an understanding of how members of the gamelan manipulate these communicative practices to better their understanding of the music. The notion of involvement enables us to consider how meaning is constructed during interaction.

Vocalizations are very important in terms of instruction and learning, for they are the instructor’s primary way of communicating how he wants members of the group to play a particular piece of music. The sound and singing of the vocalization are meant to represent, iconically, the notes and tempo that the instructor wants played. I noticed that throughout the evolution of introducing a new song Pak’s vocalizations will become less frequent. The reason for this is that the instructor does not use vocalizations during performance. By limiting his use of vocalizations as the members of the group learn a piece, he sets the atmosphere for what the performance will be like. In addition, by performance time some of his vocalizations will have changed, semiotically, to non-verbal signs. Part of the complexity of being a gamelan musician lays not only in learning the part for the instrument you are playing, but also in knowing the nonverbal cues which initiate change within a song.

Below is an example of a vocalization used during rehearsal. Pak is the instructor and Len is the member being instructed. Notice how Len reacts to Pak’s vocalization in this instance.

1. **Pak:** ka paka paka dut.²
2. **Len:** oh OK

(pause)

3. Len: so how many kapop's is it?

4. Pak: ka paka paka dut dut dut

5. Len: OK

From this brief transcript of a vocalization during rehearsal we see Pak interacting with Len to illustrate how this part is played. It is interesting to note that Len responds to Pak's vocalization not by asking what physical note – in the western sense – Pak wants played. Rather Len asks *how many kapop's is it?* Len's attempt at repeating back of the exact vocalization illustrates that he understands what Pak's vocalization refers to. Tannen emphasizes that repetition is one of many involvement strategies. Len's *so how many kapop's is it?* is a sign of involvement because Len is acknowledging that *kapop* refers to a note to be played. Pak's response is also interesting because he does not answer Len's question of how many with a specific number, instead Pak sings the vocalization again. This is a good example of how vocalizations are meant to be iconic of the music to be played. Therefore, I feel that by not responding to Len's question specifically, Pak is emphasizing the sound and playing of the music as opposed to talking about the music. Len's *OK* serves also as an index of his involvement in this brief instruction.

Len's question about *kapop's* indexes another aspect about the music, how the music is referred to. There are different parts to gamelan songs similar to different movements in western music. Members of the group do not know the names to the different parts of the songs (which have Indonesian names). Instead one will hear someone say "lets pick it up from the nanyong ying yong" or someone will refer to a part by a particular instrument's importance in it, as opposed to the beginning of a measure or from the start of a movement as in western music. In this way the vocalizations that are used by Pak become lexicalized by members of the group in order for them to refer to the songs. One can see that vocalizations have not only an instructional importance, but a dialogical one as well. By lexicalizing Pak's vocaliza-

tions, members are creating a dialogical relationship between how these signs are used by Pak and their understanding by members of the gamelan. Vocalizations are instructional and when other members of the group use them to instruct other members, they become dialogical.

Side conversations are also very important to the instruction of gamelan music. They are a form of communicative practice where members of the group engage in talk ranging from personal aspects of their daily lives to discussing the music they are playing. The reason that I find these side conversations so integral to instruction is that Pak's teaching may only last a few minutes and then he may go and do something else, usually play. While playing he still directs the group pointing out flaws through vocalizations and gestures as we are playing. Side conversations occur during breaks in the music between members of the group. This is where members who are more knowledgeable about the music are able to help other members understand a particular piece or part of it. Side conversations usually occur in English but on occasion occur in Indonesian as well. I feel that the importance of side conversations is that they act as a forum for members of the group to share knowledge. What is more, through these side conversations instruction is also taking place and it is a form of instruction that is supplementing Pak's teaching.

The following is an example of a side conversation where Jason is instructing Gwyn on how to play a particular part of a song. This side conversation occurs after a song was rehearsed. Side conversations often occur after a song was rehearsed because the musicians and Pak identify problems they had in playing the song. Gwyn's problem in this side conversation is that she is watching Pak, who is playing the drum, when she should be looking at Jason for her cue to change tempo. Gwyn and Jason are both supposed to be in sync with one another. It should be noted that Jason and Gwyn are playing the two most important instruments. Gwyn is playing a time keeping instrument similar to a snare drum in Western pop music, *ketuk*, and Jason is playing the lead gong,

ugal.

1. **Jason:** Gwyn when you come out of the slow section I want you to watch me because Pak doesn't do anything so it doesn't
2. **Gwyn:** I feel as if you are trying to slow down so I am trying to slow down with you. Am I slowing it down and you don't want it slowed down?
3. **Jason:** No, it's just that you gotta watch me. That's the only thing. Cause its more its not a matter of how slow or how fast it's a matter of the two of us playing at exactly the same time. The tempo isn't as critical. I mean I usually I usually speed it up a little bit faster. They begin playing the part that Jason is referring to.
4. **Jason:** ok start... (*he plays the part*)
5. **Jason:** it's not a matter of how fast or how slow it's just whenever we come out of that you not looking at me and that's the most critical thing. When you look at Pak he's not doing anything.
6. **Gwyn:** OK
7. **Jason:** and he can't help you unless he hits the drum and that's all you need to do that.
8. **Gwyn:** It was just after that I thought that you were slowing it down a bit and I could not tell if you wanted me to keep going forward.
9. **Jason:** OH, the rest of it was fine. Its just that one thing you have no other way of knowing what to do
10. **Gwyn:** than looking at you.
11. **Jason:** and actually tomorrow you will probably be sitting next to me.

The instructor gives out a lot of nonverbal cues with his hands, but Jason is emphasizing that during this part of the song the cue in question is not coming from Pak. Therefore, Jason is trying to get Gwyn on the same page as him. By verbalizing what he needs Gwyn to do, he is supplementing the instruction that the Pak has given them. What is more in line 10 Gwyn is trying to show that she knows what Jason is referring to. Yet throughout this side conversation Jason is emphasizing the fact that Gwyn must look at him to pick up the

nonverbal cue that will change a the tempo/part of the song. Like most side conversations that involve knowing the cues, Jason starts playing the part with Gwyn so that Gwyn knows exactly what he is referring to. By having Gwyn play the part with him, Jason is not only sharing his knowledge about the music, but he is instructing her as well. As mentioned above Pak emphasizes the playing of the music as opposed to discourse about it. In this sense, we see that Pak's instructional style, which places an emphasis on playing, has rubbed off on Jason.

Irvine's (1996) analysis of participant roles in "shadow conversations" which builds on Goffman's Frame Analysis (1974) and Levinson's (1988) discussion on participant roles, provides another way of considering how side conversations can be interpreted. Irvine discusses Wolof insult poems, *xaxaar*, and the fact that these poems would not be able to surface by what Goffman (1974) called the principal (originator of the utterance), insult poems only surface through an animator (transmitters of the utterance). During a side conversation someone may occupy what I will call the primary participant role of instructor, while in a later side conversation that same person may shift his or her participant role to the secondary role of recipient of the instruction. In terms of considering how Pak's instructional style affects other members of the group, one can see that different members are able to occupy different participant roles during side conversations. Goffman's (1974) distinctions of principal and animator add to our understanding of side conversations that involve musical instruction, for the principal of the music is the instructor, Pak. Yet, the animators of his ideas will shift during side conversations. This illustrates not only the effect of Pak's instructional technique upon his students, but how through the ever-changing role of animator, knowledge is shared amongst members of the group. The use of side conversations and vocalizations by various members of the gamelan emphasizes how Pak's teaching is dialogical. The vocalizations that he uses are most certainly derived from his education in gamelan when he was a boy in Bali.

Another example of how the side conversation is used to share knowledge is below. In this excerpt Ed begins the side conversation by joking with Karen that she punishes herself when she plays the *ceng-ceng* (a cymbal-like instrument played with cymbals attached to each wrist beating against another set of cymbals). Jorge plays *ceng-ceng* during another song.

1. **Ed** (to Karen rubbing her forearms): Are you going to punish yourself today since you can't punish yourself tomorrow?
2. **Jorge**: It tiring
3. **Karen**: (rubbing her forearms) Well uh Have you got any Do you have any tricks as to how to ...
4. **Jorge**: No (laughter)
Just try to as much with the wrists, without tightening up your forearms (gestures his movements to Karen).

We see in the above dialogue that Jorge first reacts to Ed's humorous remark about Karen's playing of the *ceng-ceng*. Jorge brings himself into the conversation knowing what Karen is going through (Jorge plays *ceng-ceng* in another song). Meanwhile while Karen is rubbing her forearms from playing the *ceng-ceng*, she sees this as an opportunity to get a pointer from Jorge as to how to best play the instrument. She knows that Jorge has played this instrument before and she is somewhat of a novice playing it. Brief little discussions like this where members change their participant role is the nature of side conversations. While in the above excerpt a full-blown instruction did not occur, Jorge shared his knowledge about the playing of the instrument with Karen. Jorge's remark in line 2 ... *It gets tiring after awhile*, is meant to show to Karen that he knows what she is going through. Karen's taking the opportunity to ask the question also illustrates her knowledge of the communicative practices of this particular gamelan orchestra.

A last comment about side conversations that illustrates how a practice approach to the group's verbal behavior can be valuable is that in looking at the two side conversation transcripts above,

we see that both Gwyn and Karen can manipulate side conversations in a different manner. Both Gwyn and Karen are in need of some knowledge in order to play the music efficiently. In the first instance Gwyn's instruction is initiated by someone else, whereas in the second instance it is Karen who initiates a request for knowledge. I feel that these two instances illustrate how two members of the group not only have access to different forms of knowledge, they also manipulate the group's communicative practices differently. Yet, by engaging in side conversations, as I hope the above examples have shown, Gwyn and Karen have added to their knowledge about gamelan music as well as added to their communicative repertoire.

The third form of communicative practice that I have observed during rehearsals is meta-discourse about the music. As a form of communicative practice, meta-discourse is interesting in that members state before the whole group either their concerns about a piece or a particular question about it. Meta-discourse may occur simultaneously with side conversations but there is always some form of meta-discourse before the group begins to rehearse a piece. Through meta-discourse higher-ranking members of the group make decisions about who plays what instrument, as well as what song, or part thereof, needs to be worked on more. Meta-discourse acts also as a place where members can ask about specific non-verbal cues which are used to initiate changes in tempo within a particular piece. So, meta-discourse enables all members of the group to have a voice of some sort. In many ways, meta-discourse also triggers other communicative practices, like side conversations, to take place.

The following is an example of meta-discourse occurring after a piece was rehearsed ([is used to indicate overlap). The piece in question, *kakan-kakan*, is a token piece of the group, yet there were some problems when this song was rehearsed. This meta-discourse is an illustration of how the group as a whole is trying verbalize what the problem was and how to correct it.

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1. **Carol:** (inaudible) ... I couldn't hear you
 2. **Martin:** You guys started slowing down
 3. **Len:** Off! you guys slowed down.
 4. **Pak:** Be careful (laughs)
 5. **Carol:** somebody slowed down
(laughter)
 6. **Pak:** This one's ceng-ceng (to ceng-ceng player Jorge) jang jinga jang jing jang
 7. **Jorge:** jang jinga jang
 8. **Pak:** Jang! Jang!
 9. **Carol:** (to Martin & Len) I don't feel like I am pushing it, so I don't know how I can slow it down
 10. **Gwyn:** I think its being pushed
 11. **Carol:** you think so? I am trying to watch Jason.
 12. **Martin:** I don't know who's pushing it. I don't know who's pushing it but it sounds to me like you guys are faster than we are (referring to Carol and Gwyn's section) you're pushing it faster than the tempo we are playing.
 13. **Carol:** why don't you try to play it slower 'cause I mean I don't realize the transition
 14. **Jason:** let's start from the transition (they play the part of the song they are referring to play approximately 1.5 minutes)
 15. **Martin:** Um well
 16. **Carol:** 'cause I thought when we (first) played it it was really fast
 17. **Pak:** it was much too loud
 18. **Chris:** there was too much commotion
 19. **Gwyn:** so they didn't hear any of the changes
 20. **Martin:** the tempo was OK it just got faster and faster, I thought you guys were pushing it. Can we do the transition into the slow section?
 21. **Jason:** The middle section?
 22. **Martin:** yeah
 23. **Jason:** (to Jorge playing ceng-ceng) One good way to do that is to like not only will you start in after the gong anyway gong chang gong chang gong chang start that way and then you are like set and if you mess up and if you get like out of rhythm what I do is I'll start for just a split second and find my place and so I can start it fresh in your head again.

This transcript represents several elements of meta-discourse that are important to this community of practice where one can see several (8) members of the group engaging in a stretch of discourse. While some of the communication, as in lines 7-9, is instruction through side conversation, several members of the group voicing their opinion about what went wrong during the playing of *kakan-kakan*. Lines 17-19 are interesting for they illustrate involvement by topic. Pak says in *it was much too loud* line 17 and Chris responds *there was too much commotion* in line 18. Line 19 is interesting because Gwyn finishes off those two comments *so they didn't hear any of the changes*. These three lines are an example of involvement through interaction and comprehension. Karen's comment is implicitly stating that she understands what they are talking about. But notice how in line 20 Martin completely disagrees with Pak, Chris, and Gwyn, *the tempo was OK it just got faster and faster; I thought you guys were pushing it*. Line 20 and this whole excerpt illustrates that within this group the comprehension of the music and problems that arise within it is very dynamic. If you know the communicative practices of the group you are able to have a voice within it.

While the discourse in line 24 appears anomalous at first glance, for Jason is pointing out to Jorge what to do if he gets off beat. It appears that Jorge's getting offbeat has been what caused the rest of the gamelan to get off tempo in the first place. The culmination of this meta-discourse was being able to identify where the problem was. In this case the *ceng-ceng* player appears to have slowed down, disrupting half of the gamelan. When several members voiced the problem and then played that part of the song again, the members of the gamelan were able to identify where the problem was. Notice also that side conversations and vocalizations were used within this stretch of discourse.

In terms of participant roles, it is also interesting to note that within this stretch of discourse we see members shifting their roles in the conversation. For instance, in line 4 Pak is shifting from a

general commentator to an instructor. He says, *Be careful!* While this statement appears to address the whole gamelan, he goes on to immediately give Jorge some additional instruction on how to play his part. In lines 15 and 23 Jason is engaged in the meta-discourse and then moves on to instructing Jorge in line 24 as an animator of Pak's teaching. One can also see that not only are the participant roles shifting in these instances, but also the utterance events within the stretch of talk (Irvine 1996) are marked enough to highlight the shift in participant roles that Pak and Jason engage in. Therefore, it is not just the ability to manipulate the three forms of communication that I have identified that make up a member's pragmatic awareness, but also the ability to know how and when to change participant role between being a teacher, being a student, or just adding to the meta-discourse about the music.

Taken together these three communicative practices encompass the communicative repertoire of the group that is used to instruct the music. Learning how to use them at the right moment enables a member to navigate through the instructional process. In addition, while Pak sets up how the piece is to be played and is the last word on how it will be performed, side-conversations and meta-discourse illustrate how members of the group are a part of the learning process for each other. Bakhtin's notions of heteroglossia, dialogicality and polyvocality provide a further perspective to these forms of communicative practice (1980). Heteroglossia and polyvocality refer to the many tongues and voices that are present within the novel. During the construction of a particular piece there are numerous voices that go into forming a text, verbal or nonverbal, through which gamelan is instructed. From the excerpts of discourse that I have highlighted so far, one can see that often more than one of these forms of communication is being used at the same time. In addition, when I recorded rehearsals often conversations were drowned out by either other conversations and/or the gamelan would start to play.³ Yet, it is not only the forms of communication themselves that can be said to represent a voice, but the members of

the gamelan who are using the communicative practices and changing their participant roles. Many voices not only make up the musical text, but illustrate the dialogical nature of the communicative practices with the group as well. Once you learn an instrument, you are able to act as an animator of Pak's instruction to other members of the gamelan. This instruction is dialogical in the sense that it was passed on from Pak who learned the music while he was a boy in Bali.

The next excerpt illustrates the many voices which can be heard within a side conversation. Additionally, the three forms of communicative practice discussed above are occurring within the same stretch of discourse. Karen, who is playing *ceng-ceng*, is having difficulty understanding what the cue is for a particular part of a song, and as a result she finds playing this part problematic. During this song Pak is performing an improvisational dance where the tempo changes and song transitions are initiated by his body movements.

1. **Karen:** You, you're playing that pattern at the speed at the time that um that I'm playing the. I am playing the pattern he does and the speed that he does after he does it? Is that I am just saying that right?
2. **Jason:** stop where the gongsa stops
3. **Martin:** No, we should um, actually I'm not doing that just uh just you.
- [
4. **Karen:** Oh you're just doing that for me
5. **Pak:** just the speed.
6. **Karen:** so right after he (Pak as he is dancing) does it I am supposed to (get the speed)
7. **Martin:** NO as he (Pak) does it.
8. **Karen:** Oh, god (laughs)
9. **Pak:** yeah (laughs) you're too late (laughs). Lang long ling ling, chika chika chika chika chak
10. **Karen:** OK so I have to figure out what I need to listen to?
11. **Pak:** lang long ling ling
12. **Jason:** You have to watch him
13. **Karen:** so what are you going to do to let me know that
14. **Martin:** it really depends on how it sounds,

-
- you just have to watch
- 15. Karen:** so what's your signal going to be something in your hand?
- 16. Jason:** He walks
- 17. Pak:** I don't know
- 18. Jason:** he just walks
- 19. Pak:** just walks lang long ling ling chika chika chika chika chak
- 20. Karen:** 1,2,3,4 dut dut dut dut dut
- 21. Pak:** chika chika chika chika chak
- 22. Karen:** ok
- 23. Jason:** if you see him, usually after the short cue he'll just either stand in one place or maybe he'll take just one little side step
- 24. Pak:** Yeah
- 25. Jason:** Its just hardly any movement at all, but he like deliberately walks with his hands and his feet then you know
- 26. Pak:** lang long ling ling chika chika chika chika chak
- 27. Jason:** You see him make very obvious stepping motions
- 28. Martin:** He sort of walks
- 29. Karen:** ok
- 30. Martin:** it'll be a little more obvious when there is more room for him to move around cause
- 31. Christa:** for now he'll just kick somebody in the head.
- 32. Jason:** do you want to try it
- 33. Karen:** yeah (they start playing)
- 34. Martin:** let's do it again
- 35. Jason:** its supposed to be lang chlang ching?
- 36. Pak:** Lang long ling ling chika chika chika chika chak

This stretch of discourse begins with Karen initiating some meta-discourse about the song they just played, for she vocalizes her difficulty discerning exactly which cue initiates a particular transition. In line 8 Karen is surprised to learn that she has to follow the dancer's (Pak's) movements precisely, *Oh, god*. Pak's reaction in line 9 is interesting not because he laughs, but because he responds to her problem with a vocalization of the music she is playing during the part, *Lang long ling ling, chika chika chika chika chak*. In line

10 Karen addresses her question to Jason and Martin, yet still Pak responds in line 11 by vocalizing the part she is playing (*lang long ling ling*). Eventually, Karen gets it out of Jason that she is to watch a particular dance step for her cue. Pak is also not able to verbalize the cue for Karen until Jason is able to identify it. So, in line 19 Pak says *just walks* and then repeats once again the vocalization of the part that Karen is playing. In line 20 Karen repeats back the vocalization upon realizing the cue she is to be looking for, *1,2,3,4 dut dut dut dut dut*. Karen's repetition of the vocalization emphasizes that she understands the part she is to play, and the cue she is to watch for. Jason then goes on to describe the various ways that the cue may come. We also see in the above transcript how repetition is used in involvement. Karen illustrates her involvement with Pak's instruction by trying to repeat back as best as she can his vocalizations. This repetition represents not only her interactional abilities as a member of the community, but her comprehension of the instruction that Pak is giving her.

In above transcript members of the gamelan are utilizing different forms of communication in order to share their knowledge with Karen. Pak sticks primarily to his vocalizations – which are exactly the same each time he repeats them. In contrast, Jason and Martin are able to describe verbally the specific detail that Karen needs. Throughout this exchange Pak is still able to maintain his role as instructor. Yet, Jason changes his role from participant in meta-discourse in line 2 to full blown instructor (animator) in lines 16, 18, and 23. Martin adds to Jason's instructions throughout giving assurances of the knowledge that they (Pak, Jason & Martin) are in the process of passing on to Karen. As a result, this is a lengthy side conversation that utilizes meta-discourse, instructional side conversation, as well as vocalizations. One should be able to see the polyvocalic nature of musical instruction within this gamelan orchestra.

In my discussions with members of the group about the communication that they use

during rehearsal, they emphasized the fact that the forms of communication that I have identified here are unique to the group. You would not find groups in Bali using this same communicative repertoire, and you would be hard pressed to find another group in the United States with similar forms of communicative practice. The way that the group has constructed a community of practice, or reality (Berger & Luckmann 1967), has enabled them to maintain their unique instructional dynamic. Merriam (1964) illustrates how cultural systems are perpetuating through the learning process.

In other words, it is through learning, enculturation, that the culture gains its stability, for members of one generation teach to members of succeeding generations what the culture is and does. (Merriam 1964:162).

Therefore the fact that some members of the gamelan are able to share knowledge and teach other members enables not only the musical tradition to be passed on, but the communicative practices of the group to be passed on as well.

A blessing is done before every performance, an important part of the event. While I do not find blessings to be a communicative practice associated with learning, they are an important discursive element of performance. Before every performance Pak does a blessing over the stage where he sprinkles holy water. This is so that everyone will be safe and the blessing also praises the gods who come to life when the music is played. Apparently at one performance a male dancer asked Pak not to do the blessing for fear of the stage getting wet and one of the dancers slipping and getting hurt. So, Pak did not do the blessing and during the performance the dancer in question slipped while dancing and got hurt. Pak apparently attributed this to the fact that the blessing was not done. At the performance I played in with the group Pak forgot to do the blessing, and on the way back home the bus broke down. Eventually the bus was moving again (it was just the radiator), but not before numerous members of the group chastised him for not doing the blessing. I helped fill up the radiator with water, and as I was getting back on the bus I could see that Pak was really worried and

bothered by this. The blessing shows the importance of discursivity in performance, for apparently there are consequences for not saying the blessing. The blessing also gives Anglo members of the group a taste of the animistic religion that gamelan is associated with in Bali. Attributing problems that arise, a dancer slipping or the bus breaking down, to Pak not doing the blessing is an example of causality which is a characteristic of animistic religious systems. On Bali gamelan would not be performed in a theatre as it is in the United States, and aside from gamelan competitions, the playing of gamelan is tied to both the community and religious events. The blessing acknowledges that there is another voice, albeit implicit, to add to the polyvocalic instruction of music, the Gods. They are present in the gongs whenever we play. One does not ever step over the gongs out of respect for the Gods.

East versus West: Notation and Language

One way that members of the group are able to bypass complete memorization of the music is to use one of two forms of transcription. One form is traditional western standard musical notation, which is used by members of the group who have a strong background in music. Most members use what I call a cipher form of notation. These are not notes written down, but instead the numbers of the gongs (gamelan utilizes seven tones) to be played during a song are displayed. Both forms of notation are problematic, for the ultimate goal of some members of the group is to memorize the song as memorization is the primary form of learning on Bali. Some members are better at memorization than others, illustrating that this style of learning is very individualized. People approach it from different perspectives and past experiences – musicians come from very divergent musical backgrounds. The following amusing narrative illustrates the problem of notation:

Leslie: Well Len when he drums uses notation, well one time during a performance when Pak was doing a Topeng (dance) piece and during

the piece Pak stepped on the notation and it flew like the paper flew three or four feet from Len into the middle of the stage. And Len was lost because he didn't have his notation and we didn't know this at the time but we were all watching the video and saw that this had happened. And so this is what happens when you rely on notation. What was to happen if the dancer comes over and kicks it across the stage?

Carol: Didn't he kick it a second time?

Leslie: So we were all laughing because Len was looking like how is he going to get the notation back.

Carol: and he's like trying to reach with his drumstick to like pull it closer and his foot ya' know.

Leslie: see, so be careful when you are relying on notation, because you don't know what is going to happen.

This narrative reveals the conflict between western and eastern musical traditions. The way that westerners try to overcome this is by using musical notation. Bakan (1999) relates an interesting anecdote when he was learning Beleganjur drumming in Bali. He was able to transcribe musically a piece that his teacher was constructing. As a result he was able to play the song back on command right away, when other Balinese drummers learning the song by memorization were not. Bakan illustrates that this backfired to a certain extent, because as the piece was being constructed he had way too many sheets of music to sift through. His instructor later forced him to memorize the music and eventually Bakan's memory skills outperformed his notational reading skills.

One other way that I see the conflict between cultural practices is how members of the gamelan refer to the songs. Each song has a Balinese name, but interestingly the members of the group do not refer to the songs or parts of the songs by these names. Instead, funny names are attributed to some songs, like "nasty bird" which refers to a song, *Bangau Raja*, about a mythical bird. Interestingly, "nasty bird" not only indexes what the song is about, but the difficult rhythms and tempo changes

which occur during the song. Some members of the group, like Pak, wish to get beyond using these names in lieu of the Indonesian names. The conflict here is that some musicians, including myself, only know the English name for the song, not the Indonesian name. When the names are referred to by Indonesian names, some members will respond "what song is that?" There is also a song *Oleg*, which was dubbed "leggo my oleg" by Pak, so it is not just the musicians who use these funny names.⁴

Conflicts arise because musicians do not know the names for various parts of the songs. These parts are given titles similar to titled movements in western classical music. For instance, some parts are titled *kebyar*, *reong*, *ugal*, and even just "transition". *Kebyar* is like an introduction and means literally to burst forth, but *reong* and *ugal* refer to names of instruments. So these parts of the song refer to how that instrument is played. The following excerpt reveals how not knowing the names to parts can lead to confusion on part of the musicians.

1. Pak: The first one is even

2. Ed: What? I am not even. I am trying to figure out where you are starting at that point.

3. Pak: Uh, the one, just just number one is even sixteen beats. just that one different. It's not eight after that is eight. This one is sixteen beat.

4. Ed: I'm still, I just don't know where you're starting. I don't have so I am spending the first 15 seconds figuring out where you started

5. Pak: where started?

6. Ed: Where are you starting?

7. Jason: It's the first, the first transition in the very after the slow introduction. It's at the very end of that where we are going into the middle part.

(pause 3 seconds)

8. Ed: Yeah, listen I mean aurally that's not making any sense to me. that's ok

9. Pak: Start at the beginning.

Ed is playing the bass gong which is very important, for it lays down the bassline beat for

the song. His playing is off, for he does not know where they are starting from. Notice how Pak is able to talk about the music in terms of beats and notation, as opposed to his normal vocalizations, but he does not seem to be able to get his point across when he does so. Jason eventually tries to get Ed on the same page as everyone else, but his effort seems to be in vain, because in line 9 Ed reveals that *aurally that's not making any sense to me*. Were the musicians to know the names of the parts of the songs, this type of confusion would not be as problematic or frustrating.

While in last few paragraphs I showed some examples where I find there to be cultural conflict, this does not prevent the music from being learned or played. Sometimes the conflict, as the above transcript shows, can be frustrating, but most of the time these cultural conflicts are endured in a joking manner. More to the point the musicians just like to play and when all else fails, as Pak verbalizes in line 10 above, we start from the beginning. The above transcript is also a good example of the inter-cultural communication which takes place during gamelan rehearsal. I wonder if Pak were to have used vocalizations during this conversation with Ed would Ed have understood where Pak wanted to start from in the song? The musicians are more accustomed to hearing Pak's vocalizations, not to hearing him discuss the music in a Western style as he tries to in the above example.

Nonverbal Issues

While this gamelan has constructed a communicative repertoire for passing on knowledge about the music, there are still some problems with performance in terms of learning nonverbal cues. As mentioned above, and in the excerpt with Karen, nonverbal cues are often hard to distinguish and learn. Part of the learning process is being able to learn these nonverbal cues. The nonverbal signs are indices, for they point to and initiate change within a song. During a dance piece the non-verbal cues will come from dancers in the form of winks, neck cranes, finger movements, side-steps,

and many other gestures. In an instrumental song, the cues often come from the drummer, usually Pak, and will involve the drummer playing a particular rhythm or raising his arm emphatically. As in the case of Karen trying to figure out what cue to look for, members of the gamelan do not always know what the specific cues within a song are, and must use one of the communicative practices to obtain this knowledge – as Karen did.

There seems to be a lapse in learning between Pak's initial vocalizations when he introduces a song, and learning the nonverbal cues by the time of performance. The reason for this lays in another element of nonverbal communication, space. The rehearsal space does not enable dancers to be present because of its small size. When dancers are present their backs are turned to the gamelan preventing gamelan members from seeing the dancers faces as well as their full body movements. At performance the gamelan is set up differently than it is in the rehearsal space and often the presence of dancers is a surprise to the musicians. One of the future goals of the group is to move to a larger rehearsal space that will enable the musicians and dancers to understand more fully their relationship to one another. Instructors like Pak – who was trained at KOKAR the Conservatory of the Performing Arts in Denpasar, Bali – are able to teach both the dancers (as he does) and the musicians. Perhaps the instruction of dance and music in a larger space will forge different communicative practices within the group in order to pass on knowledge in this new context.

Conclusion

In this paper I gave some examples of a few forms of communicative practice that I observed during three months of fieldwork in an American gamelan group that plays Balinese music. I argued through examples of discourse that these forms of communicative practice are an integral part of learning gamelan music within this group. Members of the group were shown to illustrate their learning through Tannen's notion of involvement through repetition. What is more, being a member

of this group requires a musician to be capable of manipulating these communicative practices, and participant roles (principal to animator), in order to obtain and pass on knowledge. While these communicative practices enable a musical tradition to be learned, they also enable the musicians to be active members in this community. The practice approach is helpful to understanding these communicative practices in that one is able to consider how this gamelan orchestra is unique in terms of its process of teaching and learning. Sharing knowledge is a core component in any learning process in any form of music. Yet, communicative practices will differ not only culturally, but between forms of music as well. Therefore, differences in communication may arise between communities of practice even when the communication is used in instructing similar things. **M**

Endnotes:

¹ Kebyar is the opening part of some gamelan songs. Its literal translation means to burst open/forth.

² The reader will have to forgive me for not knowing how to transcribe vocalizations to musical notation. I say this to emphasize the fact that the vocalizations are sung as if it were a gong playing. This is why I refer to this communicative practice as iconic in the Peircean sense, since vocalizations are meant to represent something in the physical world.

³ As a result of this I lost some really good or potentially good data. Eventually I shifted equipment to a mini-disc digital recorder which not only got rid of the obnoxious background “buzz”, but recorded the music clearly as well as the discourse.

⁴ Pak also likes to give people nicknames using TV actors, he refers to me as Andy Garcia.

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