

Kakā'ōlelo

Traditions of Oratory and Speech Making

Malcolm Nāea Chun

Ka Wana Series



Pihana Nā Mamo

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Foreword

For more than fifteen years, Pihana Nā Mamo, a project funded by the U.S. Department of Education through the Native Hawaiian Education Act, has been actively involved with Hawai'i Department of Education schools in improving educational results for Hawaiian children and youth. We have witnessed the powerful role that our rich Hawaiian culture and heritage, and in particular the revival of interest in Native Hawaiian culture and the desire to practice Hawaiian customs appropriately, play in motivating our students to learn and excel.

A major step to ensure such outcomes is gaining a deeper understanding of the historical and cultural basis for the many Hawaiian customs and traditions. To this end, Malcolm Nāea Chun, a cultural specialist with the Curriculum Research & Development Group (CRDG) of the University of Hawai'i, has researched and compiled valuable information on several Hawaiian cultural traditions and practices.

Kākā'ōlelo is about traditional oratory and speech making, a topic about which very little has been written. The increasing number of Native Hawaiian speakers, especially among the young, raises the question, "Are today's speakers continuing traditional patterns of speech and oratory?" Sir Peter Buck (Te Rangi Hiroa), the former head of the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum, in an article on Polynesian oratory for a lecture series for the Kamehameha Schools, wrote, "The ancient procedure in Hawaii, where matter-of-fact customs of Western civilization have replaced it, offers an interesting line of study for some student" (167).



Ka Wana

Chun has researched this topic using comparative materials from other Pacific Island cultures where speech making is still highly regarded and, having lived in some of these areas, also provides some personal insight into traditions of speech and oratory. He reviewed much of our traditional literature in which translators used words like *counselors* and *scribes* (this was most unlikely for pre-contact Hawai'i since there was no written language) instead of orator. What he discovered is how important a role the *kākā'ōlelo*, or *orator*, had in traditional Hawaiian society and how important speech making can be for the continuance of Hawaiian language and culture today.

This booklet is part of the Ka Wana Series, a set of publications developed through Pihana Nā Mamo and designed to assist parents, teachers, students, and staff in their study and modern-day application of Hawaiian customs and traditions.

Pihana Nā Mamo is a joint project of CRDG and the Hawai'i Department of Education, and production of the Ka Wana series represents the work of many collaborators. Mahalo to the many who have assisted in the production of *Kākā'ōlelo*: Reviewers Stephen Boggs and Sidney Moko Mead for their reading and comments; Project Co-Directors Gloria S. Kishi and Hugh H. Dunn; the Pihana Nā Mamo 'ohana of the Hawai'i Department of Education and the Curriculum Research & Development Group, College of Education, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, and the U.S. Department of Education, which provided the funding for Pihana Nā Mamo.

Morris K. Lai, Principal Investigator
Pihana Nā Mamo

'Ōlelo Ha'i Mua

Preface

Do you believe I'm wearing a kukui lei?
It's Hawaiian in looks—it's plastic made in Hong Kong.
That's what became of a lot of our beliefs.
I wore this on purpose. I wanted you to know this is kukui nut.
It's not kukui nut, but it's Hawaiian, but it's Hawaiian made in
Hong Kong of plastic, and that's the way a lot of our beliefs
and customs have become.
—attributed to Mary Kawena Pukui



Cultural revival and identification have gone beyond academic and intellectual arguments to a reality in communities and families and are now part of the political landscape of the islands. In asking the question “Who are we?” people are really asking how they see the world differently from others and how this affects the way they make decisions. These are questions about a people's world view—how they see the world around them, and ultimately, how they see themselves.


In the 1960s, social workers at the Queen Lili'uokalani Children's Center, a trust created to benefit orphaned and destitute Native Hawaiian children, began to notice behaviors of their children and families that were quite different from the textbook cases they had studied in school. In response, the center initiated a project to identify Hawaiian cultural and social practices and behaviors, and to study them as they contrasted with their Western counterparts. The impact and influence of the resulting books, entitled *Nānā I Ke Kumu*, are still felt in Native

Hawaiian communities, where the books are now a standard reference.

By 1992 *Nānā I Ke Kumu* was considered historical information, and as the cultural specialist for the Queen Lili‘uokalani Children’s Center, I became involved in a project to update it. We were still seeing cases that involved Hawaiian cultural practices and behaviors foreign to both Hawaiian and non-Hawaiian workers that needed to be considered in any programs designed to help. We were having to re-adapt traditional healing practices like ho‘oponopono to accommodate changes such as family schedules, misunderstanding or not knowing Hawaiian language and concepts, and having non-Hawaiian family members. We realized that there was, once again, a great need for a series that would examine, in depth, key concepts and values for Native Hawaiians to understand and practice today.

This series is intended to fill that need. Each title is supported by historical and cultural examples taken from our oral and written literature, in most cases directly from primary sources that recorded how Hawaiians acted, reacted, responded, and behaved in different situations. Our goal is to make this knowledge more accessible to teachers, parents, and students.

Knowing how our ancestors behaved begs the question of whether we are doing the same. If we are practicing our culture in a way similar to how they did, then we know that Hawaiian culture is very much alive today. If we do things differently, we have to ask if those changes have been to our benefit and whether we can reclaim what has been forgotten, lost, or suppressed.



The composers of genealogical chants such as ko'ihonua, ha'ikupuna, and kamakua, were men learned in the art who knew the family lines and were skilled in oratory and state-craft.
Samuel Manaiakalani Kamakau, *Ruling Chiefs of Hawaii*

Those skilled in speaking and
crafts (hana maoli) were called no'eau and no'iau.
Davida Malo, *Ka Mo'olelo Hawaii'i*

'O ka po'e kālai'āina a me ka po'e kākā'ōlelo, ua nalowale
loa lākou, akā, he po'e akamai kaulana loa lākou
ma ka ho'oponopono loa'ana i ke aupuni.
Samuel Manaiakalani Kamakau, *Ke Kumu Aupuni*

To a Maori there is a feeling of disappointment with Honolulu.
One would like to stand up on a marae and make a speech but
this is the area of the Pakeha. There are plenty of Hawaiians here
as tram conductors, policemen and other positions.
Sir Peter Te Rangi Hiroa Buck to Sir Apirana Ngata,
27 August 1927



The Gospel according to John begins “In the beginning was the Word [. . .].” The missionary translators for this Gospel chose to use the original Greek *logos* instead of a Hawaiian word. Perhaps they thought the closest equivalent, 'ōlelo, did not express the depth of the word, although translators in Tahiti and Aotearoa (New Zealand) chose to use native terms. It could be that the missionaries here did not learn from their Hawaiian assistants of

the proverb “I ka ‘ōlelo ke ola, i ka ‘ōlelo ka make (In the word is life and in the word is death),” which emphasizes the care one needs to place upon what and how one says things and the reliance given to the spoken word.

In a society with no written language—with perhaps the exception of petroglyphs, images, and symbols carved onto lava rocks and beds—what one said, what one remembered, and what one passed on were survival itself. It is said that priests had to memorize all prayers and chants and had to recite them without flaw, else the invocation would not be answered. This might explain why there is a pause during the high ceremonies on the temples when the priest turns to the high chief and asks a very simple question, “How have the prayers been?” And the high chief answers whether everything had been done all right or not.

Speaking, or speech making, is still a very powerful, respected, and vital part of the Pacific Islands. In the Western Polynesian islands of Sāmoa, Tonga, and Fiji, orators are esteemed as messengers of wisdom, politics, and culture. In Aotearoa they captivate the attention of locals and visitors on the *marae*, or the traditional grounds, of Māori meeting houses.

In the Cook Islands the orator of the ariki (high chief) was termed the va’a-tuatua (speaking mouth). In Tahiti the office was termed orero (speech). [. . .] Specialization reached its highest in Samoa where a class of hereditary talking chiefs termed tulafale developed. (Buck 166)

In Hawaiian traditions, oratory has been nearly forgotten and hardly studied. Although the importance of Hawaiian language is demonstrated by the increasing number of immersion schools in the state, what and how one speaks have yet to be rediscovered.

The title *kākā'ōlelo* is commonly thought of in its biblical usage as a *scribe*, someone who records information. Today *kākā'ōlelo* is more commonly translated as secretary. However, *kākā'ōlelo* is the traditional title for an orator, and it is derived from the words *kākā* meaning to “strike, smite, dash, beat, chop [. . .]” and *‘ōlelo*, “to speak” (Pukui & Elbert, 117; 284). *Kākā'ōlelo* literally means “to fence [with] words” (119), which sounds more like what lawyers do in court rooms or politicians do during debates, and reveals how we still use oratory or public speaking today to persuade others. Furthermore, Buck adds that in Hawai‘i “the *kaka-olelo* seems to have had the additional function of relating historical stories for the entertainment of the chiefs” (166).

In his article on Polynesian oratory, Buck also noted that “The ancient procedure in Hawaii, where matter-of-fact customs of Western civilization have replaced it, offers an interesting line of study for some student” (167). However, since that time, it appears no one has pursued that challenge, perhaps because our primary Hawaiian resources like the writings of the nineteenth century scholars Malo, Kamakau, and ‘Ī‘ī have little to offer about *kākā'ōlelo*.

Oratory in Polynesia

The importance of the orator’s position and craft in Hawai‘i can be detected by looking carefully at other Pacific Island cultures where we may be able to identify elements similar to those seen in our traditional society.

Among the Māori, oratory “has always been a main avenue for the achievement and exercise of power,” and “oratory remains a key technique for persuasion and policy-making” (Salmond, 1975b, 45–46). This is emphasized in the criteria Māori use for those who are orators.

Whaikoorero is governed by an elaborate series of regulations, which vary from tribe to tribe and which stress its dignity as a style of speech. Speakers must qualify by age, seniority of birth (i.e., a younger brother or sons of a living father should not speak), and competence in the conventions of *whaikoorero*, before they may venture to stand upon the *marae*. Women are strictly prohibited to speak in most areas, and any infraction of this rule is summarily punished. (Salmond, 1975b, 47)

The function of orators in Sāmoa is similar where they “pride themselves on their cunning and cleverness. If he wishes to accrue fame, power, and goods, an orator must be continually ‘on the move,’ seeking arenas for political and oratorical encounters” (Shore 244). While oratory shares this sense of status throughout the Pacific, in traditional times orators had both rank and status.

It is hinted that there was a traditional class of orators in Māori society. “The *rangatira* was an executive chief, chosen for

his ability in warfare and oratory, and senior descent was not essential for this role” (Salmond, 1975a, 13). Orators (*orero*) in Tahiti were sometimes chiefs who spoke for themselves, while others had staff orators to present their ceremonial greetings, public announcements, parliamentary exhortations, and so forth, for them (Oliver 1031). Oliver gives this example dated 1799.

This afternoon the natives held a public meeting near the British house when the peace between Otoo, Pomerre, & this district was again ratified & confirmed. As all public business is transacted between persons called Taoraora or orators, the speakers for Otoo & Pomerre were seated on the ground, opposite to each other, about 15 yards asunder, each having a bunch of green leaves in his hand, (perhaps) as tokens of peace; and there harangued upon the subject of their meeting. The spectators kept at a proper distance. Otoo was present, but did not seem to take much notice of what was doing. (1031)

Oliver gives a description of the Tahitian orator which is consistent throughout the Pacific Islands as having “[a]n impressive presence, a sonorous and tireless voice, mental agility, a memory full of striking imagery, a knowledge of social etiquette and political realities—all of these were essential to effective oratory in the domain of tribal affairs” (1031). However, he adds that it is not “clear just who such staff orators were” (1031). He hints that they were probably not from the lower classes and more likely chiefly relatives. He also adds that it is not clear “how they were compensated for their labors, if indeed they were compensated directly in the form of deliberate payment for services” (1031).

The role of orators in Sāmoa is much more clearly defined. In Sāmoa they are “titled,” that is, they are of a class or rank of men among chiefs who hold a certain title or name. Buck visited American Sāmoa in 1927 and quickly came to understand the function and relationship of the chiefs and their talking chiefs.

He wrote to Ngata describing his observation.

If a chief's party went on a trip round the island (a malaga it is called), his party had to know the fa'alupega of each village. Under such conditions, it can be readily understood that the duty of attending to the ceremonial speeches, division of food etc, became entrusted to particular chiefs. They became the talking chiefs or tulafale and in time attended to all the business and ceremonial aspects of village life. The office also became hereditary and in time the tulafale added to the ceremonial and rendered himself absolutely indispensable to the social organisation. In fact the high chief became a figure head and the tulafale the counsellors and real rulers of the tribe. They are the scholars and keepers of the tribal lore. The tulafale apportioned the amount of food each family head, matai, had to contribute to the village feasts etc. He was in close absolute touch with the community and with the other tulafale in the village, he ruled the roost. The fines and penalties for infringement of law and custom were adjudicated upon by the tulafale. (Ngata 57)

What Buck observed continues today as another anthropologist, Bradd Shore, relates this particularly detailed account in which an orator (*tulāfale*) describes his role.

The *tulāfale* really suffers in his service to the *ali'i*. The *ali'i* just sits, and the only hardship he suffers is the giving of money and mats to the orator. But the orator—if he hears that guests have arrived, he is off in a flash to greet them.

Or is it He comes back with the *ālaga* [leg joint of pork reserved for senior orators]. [. . .] It's the hard work that wins the handout [*lafoga*]. That thing called an *ali'i*, we really have pity for him, for he gets only poverty. The *ali'i*—he gives away and gives away, but the orator gets everything for free. He gets his money, fine mats, tapa cloths. The *ali'i*, he just stays put, sits still, and suffers for giving everything to the orator. (244)

Given these clearly defined roles, one would think the relationship between the *ali'i* and the *tulāfale* would be formal and clear, but Shore points out it is far from that. “Within village affairs, the *fale'upolu* (body of orators) has interests that are remote from any specific tie with *ali'i*. The balance between the active, functional role of the orators and the more passive dignity of the *ali'i* is often unstable” (244).



A Samoan talking chief bearing the symbols of his office, the to'oto'o (staff) and fue (flywhisk), and wearing a tapa lavalava, delivers a speech to a village gathering. Image from Samoa, A Photographic Essay by Frederic Koehler Sutter, The University Press of Hawaii, 1971. Courtesy of Frederic Sutter.

Another informant of Shore's, described as "an elderly *ali'i* with a particularly acute analytical capacity," gave this description of the differences between *ali'i* and *tulāfale*.

The separation between the *tulāfale* and the *ali'i* happened like this. This is my opinion on the matter. There are two things within each person: the power to command [*fa'atonuga*] and the power to execute those commands [*fa'ataunu'uga*]. *Each person has both of these potential powers.* This is how that class, the *tulāfale*, became important. They were not, in the old days, called *tulāfale*. But that title began with the Tui Manu'a when he said to those bearers, "I shall call you *tulāfale* and I shall assign to you the job of realizing or executing my dignity [*la'u afio*]. So that the Tui Manu'a held on to the *pule* [authority/secular power], but the realization of that *pule* was given to these other men. [...] Today we have this group of people called *tulāfale* who are like slaves, because of what happened in Manu'a. We have the class of *tulāfale*. These men carried the dignity of the Tui Manu'a. Things have changed since those days, but that is how we have today people who give the orders, and people who carry them out. (242, emphasis in original)

It is apparent from Shore's work that Samoan orators wield great power and influence in their society, although he also states that the balance between the orator and the *ali'i* is occasionally upset. A possible solution to this problem for some villages has been the combination of both titles, a *tulāfale-ali'i*.

He [a *tulāfale-ali'i*] may speak on his behalf, holding flywhisk and staff as any senior orator would. He also has certain rights associated with *ali'i* status, such as a special kava name, a *taupou* title, the right to sit at the *matua tala* (front post) of the meeting house or to wear a *tuiga* (headdress). The *tulāfale-ali'i* may give away fine mats and money as an *ali'i*, but he may also receive them in his capacity as orator. The dual status enables the chief to keep tighter control over his political and economic affairs. (Shore 245)



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