

Gunter Senft
Max-Planck-Institute for Psycholinguistics, Nijmegen

BRONISLAW MALINOWSKI AND LINGUISTIC PRAGMATICS¹

Abstract

In 1923 Bronislaw Malinowski repeated his claim for an “Ethnolinguistic theory” which he enforced 1920 in his first linguistic paper and which became the guideline for his “ethnographic theory of language.” In 1997 the linguist William Foley published his monograph “Anthropological Linguistics—An Introduction”; and in the same year the anthropologist Alessandro Duranti published his monograph “Linguistic Anthropology.” It seems that with the publication of these two standard textbooks the interdisciplinary field of “ethnolinguistics” has finally gained its due importance within the disciplines of anthropology and linguistics. Bill Foley states in his textbook that “the boundary between pragmatics and anthropological linguistics or sociolinguistics is impossible to draw at present.” So if we recognize Bronislaw Malinowski not only as one of the founders of modern social anthropology but also as one of the founding fathers of anthropological linguistics, we should have a closer look at Malinowski’s importance for pragmatics in general. This paper presents Malinowski’s contributions to the ethnographic theory of language, assesses his role as an apologist of anthropological linguistics, and discusses his influence (not only) on (new) developments in linguistic pragmatics.

Keywords

Bronislaw Malinowski, ethnographic theory of language, anthropological linguistics, sociolinguistics, language–culture–cognition, fieldwork, theory and practice.

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1. Introduction

The following three quotes highlight basic ideas and essential features that characterize the interdisciplinary field of anthropological linguistics (or linguistic anthropology or ethnolinguistics²):

(1) ... the meaning of any single word is to a very high degree dependent on its context. ... the conception of context must burst the bonds of mere linguistics and be carried over into the analysis of the general conditions under which a language is spoken ... the study of any language, spoken by a people who live under conditions different from our own and possess a different culture, must be carried out in conjunction with the study of their culture and their environment. ...

(2) Anthropological linguistics is that sub-field of linguistics which is concerned with the place of language in its wider social and cultural context, its role in forging and sustaining cultural practices and social structures.... Anthropological linguistics views language through the prism of the core anthropological concept, culture, and, as such, seeks to uncover the meaning behind the use, misuse or non-use of language, its different forms, registers and styles. It is an interpretative discipline, peeling away at language to find cultural understandings.

(3) ... linguistic anthropology [is] *the study of language as a cultural resource and as a cultural practice*... it relies on and expands existing methods in other disciplines, linguistics and anthropology in particular, with the general goal of providing an understanding of the multifarious aspects of language as a set of cultural practices, that is, as a system of communication that allows for interpsychological (between individuals) and intrapsychological (in the same individual) representations of the social order and helps people use such representations for constitutive social acts... linguistic anthropologists work at producing ethnographically grounded accounts of linguistic structures as used by real people in real time and real space.

The understanding of the discipline expressed in these quotes is strikingly similar, although the first definition (1) was given more than 70 years earlier than the other two definitions. In 1923 Bronislaw Malinowski (1923: 306) repeated his claim for an “Ethno-linguistic theory” which he enforced in his first linguistic paper (Malinowski 1920: 74) and which became the guideline for his “ethnographic theory of language” (Malinowski 1935, Vol. II: 3-74). In 1997 the

² I use and understand the term “anthropological linguistics” as synonymous with the terms “ethnolinguistics” and “linguistic anthropology.” It goes without saying, however, that these terms can be used to signal different starting points for approaching the interdiscipline and for indexing the status of both disciplines within the interdisciplinary enterprise. See Foley (1997) and Duranti (1997).

linguist William Foley published his monograph “Anthropological Linguistics—An Introduction”—the second quote (2) presented above comes from him (Foley 1997: 3); and in the same year the anthropologist Alessandro Duranti published his monograph “Linguistic Anthropology” in which we find the third definition (3) quoted above (Duranti 1997: 2f.). It seems that with the publication of these two standard textbooks the interdisciplinary field of “anthropological linguistics” has finally gained its due importance within the disciplines of anthropology and linguistics, an importance Malinowski so rightly emphasized in his *œuvre*.

Bill Foley (1997: 29) states in his textbook that “...the boundary between pragmatics and anthropological linguistics or sociolinguistics is impossible to draw at present...”. So if we recognize Bronislaw Malinowski not only as one of the founders of modern social anthropology but also as one of the founding fathers of anthropological linguistics, we should have a closer look at Malinowski’s importance for pragmatics in general. In this paper I will present Malinowski’s contributions to the ethnographic theory of language, I will try to assess his role as an apologist of anthropological linguistics, and I will discuss his influence (not only) on (new) developments in linguistic pragmatics.

2. Bronislaw Malinowski’s “pragmasemantics”

There is no doubt that Bronislaw Malinowski—born in Cracow on the 7th of April 1884 as the only child of Jozefa (née Lacka) and Lucjan Malinowski—was one of the most important anthropologists of the 20th century.³ He is generally recognized as one of the founders of social anthropology, transforming 19th century speculative anthropology into a field-oriented science that is based on empirical research. Malinowski is principally associated with his field research of the Mailu and especially of the Trobriand Islanders in what is now Papua New Guinea, and his masterpieces on Trobriand ethnography continue “to enthral each generation of anthropologists through its intensity, rich detail, and penetrating revelations” (Weiner 1987: xiv).

In the introduction of “Argonauts of the Western Pacific,” his first monograph on the Trobriand Islanders that made his reputation, Malinowski (1922: 24f.) clearly formulates the basic lines of his approach to anthropological research—which means for him field work—and the final goal of an ethnographer:

³ For further biographical information and literature on Malinowski see Senft (1999), especially Wayne (1985; 1995), R. Firth (1957b), Metraux (1968), and Young (1984; 1987). The authorized biography of Malinowski by Young is in press. For the reception of Malinowski’s work in Poland and for information with respect to his Polish background see Ellen et al. (1988), Paluch (1981), and Pisarkowa (2000).

...the goal of ethnographic field-work must be approached through three avenues:

1. *The organisation of the tribe, and the anatomy of its culture* must be recorded in firm clear outline. The method of *concrete statistical* documentation is the means through which such an outline has to be given.

2. Within this frame, the *imponderabilia of actual life*, and the *type of behaviour* have to be filled in. They have to be collected through minute, detailed observations, in the form of some sort of ethnographic diary, made possible by close contact with native life.

3. A collection of ethnographic statements, characteristic narratives, typical utterances, items of folk-lore and magical formulae has to be given as a *corpus inscriptionum*, as documents of native mentality.

These three lines of approach lead to the final goal, of which an Ethnographer should never lose sight. This goal is, briefly, to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realise *his* vision of *his* world.

Here Malinowski introduces the concept and the method of "participant observation" into anthropology, being convinced that "alien cultures had to be explored 'from the inside' to make most sense" (Young 1987: 131).⁴ Moreover, besides the anthropologist's role as a "participant observer," the ethnographer's linguistic competence in, and competent use of, the native language is for Malinowski an equally important basic requirement to fulfil the anthropologist's task "to give a full description of language as an aspect and ingredient of culture" and "to translate the native point of view to the European" (Malinowski 1935, vol. II: xxf.).

Malinowski became very much interested in linguistics when he found that he could not realize his project of writing a grammar of Kilivila because he had no linguistic training and because he was—rightly—convinced that the grammatical categories offered by the linguistic theories of his time did not fit for the description of a language like Kilivila: "If one approaches a new language, which has to be recorded, with fixed and rigid grammatical views and definitions, it is easy to tear asunder the natural grouping of facts and squeeze them into an artificial scheme" (Malinowski 1920: 72, see also p. 74; Senft 1986, 1994). In the same article, his first linguistic paper, he explicitly stated the following (Malinowski 1920: 69):

...there is an urgent need for an Ethno-linguistic theory, a theory for the guidance of linguistic research to be done among natives and in connexion with ethnographic study... A theory which, moreover, aims not at hypothetical constructions—"origins," "historical developments," "cultural transferences," and similar speculations—but a

⁴ That this ambitious concept necessarily puts field researchers in a position where they have to face the strains of field research (see Senft 1995: 599f.) is very explicitly and incredibly frankly documented in Malinowski's posthumously published "Diary" (Malinowski 1967); for an evaluation of this diary see R. Firth (1989).

theory concerned with the intrinsic relation of facts. A theory which in linguistics would show us what is essential in language and what therefore must remain the same throughout the whole range of linguistic varieties; how linguistic forms are influenced by physiological, mental, social, and other cultural elements; what is the real nature of Meaning and Form, and how they correspond; a theory which, in fine, would give us a set of well-founded plastic definitions of grammatical concepts.

Besides coining the term “ethnolinguistics,” Malinowski emphasizes here in his first explicitly “linguistic” paper on “Classificatory Particles in the Language of Kiriwina” (Malinowski 1920, see also Senft 1996b: 200f.) that “grammar can be studied only in conjunction with meaning, and meaning only in the context of situation” (Nerlich and Clarke 1996: 320). Three years later he discusses “The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages” in the first supplement to C. K. Ogden’s and I. A. Richards’ book “The Meaning of Meaning—A Study of The Influence of Language upon Thought and of The Science of Symbolism.” And another 12 years later he published the second volume of his book “Coral Gardens and their Magic” (Malinowski 1935), where he presents his “Ethnographic Theory of Language.” However, from the very beginning of his anthropological field research the master of Trobriand ethnography emphasized the importance of linguistics for anthropology in general and for ethnography in particular (see also, e.g., Malinowski 1915: 501; 1922: 1-25). In general, Malinowski’s linguistic interests “centered on language as a mode of behavior and on problems of culturally determined meaning” (Métraux 1968: 524).⁵ He explicitly states that “the main function of language is not to express thought, not to duplicate mental processes, but rather to play an active part in human behaviour” (Malinowski 1935, vol. II: 7). This does not mean, however, that he denies that language “is an instrument of thought and of the communication of thought” (Malinowski 1923: 297). On the contrary, he even states that the “mental states [of members of a given community] receive a certain stamp, become stereotyped by the institutions in which they live, by the influence of tradition and folk-lore, *by the very vehicle of thought, that is by language*” (Malinowski 1922: 23, [my emphasis, G. S.]—a

⁵ Malinowski was influenced by the work of the German linguist Philipp Wegener (Wegener 1885, see also Nerlich and Clarke 1996: 318) and familiar with the works of Humboldt, Lazarus, Meinhof, Müller, Jespersen, Paul, Steinthal, Tregear, Wundt, Oertl, Temple, and Tucker (see Malinowski 1920: 71f., 74f.). His theoretical thinking was very much influenced by Westermarck and Seligman, but also by Bücher, Frazer, Haddon, Rivers and Marrett, by the French sociological school, especially by Durkheim and Mauss (though he did not like their abstract notions of society), by Thurnwald, Gregory, Ellis, Gardiner, Julian Huxley, Ogden, Burt, Myers, Flugel, Powys Mathers, Pitt-Rivers, and Oldham (see R. Firth 1957a), and he reacted strongly against the speculations of evolutionists and diffusionists like Morgan, Spencer, Taylor, Graebner, Schmidt and other representatives of the “Kulturhistorische Schule” and their “Kulturkreislehre,” against Lévy-Bruhl’s theory of primitive mentality, and, of course, against Freud’s theory of psychoanalysis.

statement which seems to anticipate Sapir's and Whorf's ideas with respect to the principle of linguistic relativity⁶—and he insists that in ethnographic research the “study of the linguistic aspect is indispensable, especially if we want to grasp the social psychology of a tribe, i.e. their manner of thinking, in so far as it is conditioned by the peculiarities of their culture” (1920: 33). But for him this use of language does not represent the main function, but “developed and scientific functions,” of language (Malinowski 1923: 297).

Malinowski developed his ethnographic theory of language mainly in connection with his attempts to translate the Trobriand Islanders' magical formulae (Malinowski 1935, vol. II; see also Senft 1985; 1996a; 1997; 2001). He realized that the Trobriand Islanders believed in the power of words in the magical formulae. All formulae pursue certain aims which they will reach either by ordering and commanding their addressees to do or change something, or by fortelling changes, processes, and developments that are necessary for reaching these aims, or by just describing the conditions and effects at which the formulae aim. The Trobriand Islanders use these magical formulae with the firm conviction that they can influence and control nature and the course of, and events in, their lives. Malinowski (1974: 74) characterized this aspect of magic as follows: “... it is the use of words which invoke, state, or command the desired aim.” As an aside I would like to point out here that Tambiah (1985: 60, 78) connected this observation with Austin's speech act theory (Austin 1962) and rightly called these verbal acts “illocutionary” or “performative” acts. Thus, in the domain of magic language is doing something, it has certain effects, it has power and force. Malinowski (1922: 432) summarized this observation as follows: “Magic is ... an instrument serving special purposes, intended for the exercise of man's specific power over things, and *its meaning*, giving this word a wider sense, can be understood only in correlation to this aim.” As Nerlich and Clarke (1996: 321) rightly infer, Malinowski explicitly equates here meaning with pragmatic function; for him “meaning resides in the pragmatic function of an utterance” (Baumann 1992: 147)—and this is typical of his way of looking at language functionally and contextually with semantics as the starting point for linguistic analyses. For Malinowski (as well as for Wittgenstein) the meaning of a word lies in its use. Thus, to study meaning one cannot examine isolated words but sentences or utterances in their situative context: “... the real understanding of words is always ultimately derived from active experience of those aspects of reality to which the words belong” (Malinowski 1935: 58).

Malinowski (1923: 296, 309ff) illustrates how the meaning of utterances can be determined in what he calls “the essential primitive uses of speech: speech in action, ritual handling of words, the narrative, ‘phatic communion’ (speech in

⁶ Malinowski (1923: 309) actually speaks of “Symbolic Relativity”; for parallels in the work of Malinowski and Whorf see Schmidt (1984: 56ff.).

social intercourse).” The last of these four types of language use that are fundamental for Malinowski (see also Malinowski 1937) needs some brief comments (see Senft 1996a). Discussing language used in what he calls “free, aimless social intercourse,” mentioning “a mere phrase of politeness ... inquiries about health, comments on weather, affirmations of some supremely obvious state of things” (Malinowski 1923: 313f.), and greeting formulae, Malinowski (1923: 314-316) points out the following:

... to a natural man another man’s silence is not a reassuring factor, but on the contrary, something alarming and dangerous...The breaking of silence, the communion of words is the first act to establish links of fellowship, which is consummated only by the breaking of bread the communion of food. The modern English expression, “Nice day to-day” or the Melanesian phrase “Whence comest thou?” are needed to get over the strange unpleasant tension which men feel when facing each other in silence.

After the first formula, there comes a flow of language, purpose-less expressions of preference or aversion, accounts of irrelevant happenings, comments on what is perfectly obvious...

There can be no doubt that we have a new type of linguistic use—*phatic communion* I am tempted to call it ...—a type of speech in which ties of union are created by a mere exchange of words... Are words in Phatic Communion used primarily to convey meaning, the meaning which is symbolically theirs? Certainly not! They fulfil a social function and that is their principal aim, they are neither the result of intellectual reflection, nor do they necessarily arouse reflection in the listener... Each utterance is an act serving the direct aim of binding hearer to speaker by a tie of some social sentiment or other. Once more, language appears to us not as an instrument of reflection but as a mode of action...

... “phatic communion” serves to establish bonds of personal union between people brought together by the mere need of companionship and does not serve any purpose of communicating ideas.

After this definition of the concept “phatic communion” he emphasizes again his main position with respect to language: “... language in its primitive function and original form has an essentially pragmatic character; ... it is a mode of behaviour, an indispensable element of concerted human action ... to regard it as a means for the embodiment or expression of thought is to take a one-sided view of one of its most derivate and specialized functions” (Malinowski 1923: 316; see also J. R. Firth 1957: 94; Langendoen 1968: 21ff, Senft 1996a).⁷ He is convinced that language serves for definite purposes, that it functions as an instrument used for and adapted to a definite aim.

Malinowski then exemplifies the essentially pragmatic character of language by referring to two situations from his Trobriand experience—a fishing expedition

⁷ Note that Malinowski himself uses the term “pragmatic”; see also Malinowski (1935: 45).

(Malinowski 1923: 310–312) and the verbal guiding of a boat into a reef channel in complete darkness (Malinowski 1935: 58f.)—in which he noted that “words have to be uttered with impeccable correctness and understood in absolutely adequate manner in ... situations where speech is an indispensable adjunct to action” (Malinowski 1935: 58). Malinowski (1923: 311f.) sums up his analysis of the linguistic actions he observed during the fishing expedition as follows:

All the language used during such a pursuit is full of technical terms, short references to surroundings, rapid indications of change—all based on customary types of behaviour, well-known to the participants from personal experience. Each utterance is essentially bound up with the context of situation and with the aim of the pursuit, whether it be the short indications about the movements of the quarry, or references to statements about the surroundings, or the expression of feeling and passion inexorably bound up with behaviour, or words of command, or correlation of action. The structure of all this linguistic material is inextricably mixed up with, and dependent upon, the course of the activity in which the utterances are embedded. The vocabulary, the meaning of the particular words used in their characteristic technicality is no less subordinate to action.

For technical language, in matters of practical pursuit, acquires its meaning only through personal participation in this type of pursuit. It has to be learned, not through reflection but through action.

... The study of any form of speech in connection with vital work would reveal the same grammatical and lexical peculiarities: the dependence of the meaning of each word upon practical experience, and of the structure of each utterance upon the momentary situation in which it is spoken. Thus the consideration of linguistic uses associated with any practical pursuit, leads us to the conclusion that language in its primitive forms ought to be regarded and studied against the background of human activities and as a mode of behaviour in practical matters.

It is obvious that Malinowski here emphasizes and stresses “action at the expense of structure and system” (Nerlich and Clarke 1996: 333). He even argues further that this “adaptation, this correlation between language and the uses to which it is put, has left its traces in linguistic structure.” (Malinowski 1923: 327) Therefore, for Malinowski “the categories of universal grammar are reflections of universal human attitudes toward life and are brought out by the universally found conditions under which children grow up in the world” (Langendoen 1968: 27). Thus, these “categories of universal grammar must underlie categorizations implicit in nonlinguistic human behavior” (Langendoen 1968: 36). In the second volume of “Coral gardens and their magic” Malinowski developed the central idea of his theory, namely “that the meaning of utterances is provided by the context of concurrent human activity” (Langendoen 1968: 30). He points out that “the real linguistic fact is the full utterance within its context of situation” (Malinowski 1935: 11). And he emphasizes “that the context of situation may enable one to ‘disambiguate’ sentences that are semantically ambiguous” (Langendoen 1968: 32;

see Malinowski 1935: 32). This “context theory” of meaning is based on a rather broad definition of the concept of context: Malinowski points out “that it is very profitable in linguistics to widen the concept of context so that it embraces not only spoken words but facial expression, gesture, bodily activities, the whole group of people present during an exchange of utterances and the part of the environment on which these people are engaged” (Malinowski 1935 vol. II: 22; see also pp. 26, 30, 40). He characterized his–pragmatic–theory of meaning as a theory that insists on the “linking up of ethnographic descriptions with linguistic analysis which provides language with its cultural context and culture with its linguistic interpretation. Within this latter ... [Malinowski has] ... continually striven to link up grammar with the context of situation and with the context of culture” (Malinowski 1935: 73).

In 1984 Bernd Schmidt referred to Malinowski’s pragmatic theory of meaning which I have briefly summarized and outlined above with the nicely fitting term “pragmasemantics” (Pragmasemantik). In the final section of this paper I attempt to briefly discuss the influence of Malinowski’s “pragmasemantics”–his pragmatic theory of meaning–on developments in linguistics, in anthropological linguistics and thus especially in linguistic pragmatics.

3. Bronislaw Malinowski and linguistic pragmatics

With the exception of what has been called “Firthian linguistics” (Mitchell 1957; 1975; J. R. Firth 1957, Schmidt 1984) and M. A. K. Halliday’s work (see Schmidt 1984: 209ff), Malinowski’s functionalist pragmatic ideas about language first had little influence in Europe as a whole. However, Schmidt (1984: 219) rightly points out that Malinowski’s ideas can be regarded as the anticipation of the late Wittgenstein’s “Philosophical Investigations” (Wittgenstein 1958). Schmidt also considers Malinowski as a precursor of Austin and Searle’s “Ordinary Language Philosophy” (Schmidt 1984: 224) and of what he calls “Pragmalinguistik [pragmalinguistics]” in general (Schmidt 1984: 18f.). Halliday (1976: 8) even states that “Malinowski’s ideas were somewhat ahead of his time.” Moreover, Robins (1971: 45) emphasizes that “the theory of context of situation, as developed successively by Malinowski and by Firth, made linguists aware of the need for a careful study of the relationships involved in meaning (hitherto this topic had been rather left to the philosophers).” This is important, if we keep in mind that in Bloomfield’s (1935) monograph “Language” there is no room at all for the field of semantics–this field is delegated to psychology and “science”!

With respect to the USA, Noam Chomsky’s student Terence Langendoen presented in 1968 a critical assessment of Malinowski’s linguistic theory (Langendoen 1968: 25). However, Langendoen clearly underestimates, among

other things, the importance of what J. R. Firth (1957: 118) referred to as Malinowski's "outstanding contribution to linguistics," namely "his approach in terms of his general theory of speech functions in contexts of situation, to the problem of meaning in exotic languages and even in our own."⁸ Nevertheless, Malinowski's ideas about speech as action certainly had much influence in the USA—and after their reception there also worldwide—on the "ethnography of speaking" paradigm, on sociolinguistics, on discourse and conversation analysis as well as on anthropological linguistics and (thus!) on pragmatics.

It goes without saying, however, that this reception of Malinowski's ethnographic theory of language was critical throughout. Dell Hymes for example, one of the leading figures of the "ethnography of speaking" approach, severely criticized Malinowski's concept of "phatic communion." Defining the concept Malinowski claimed that his theory is "throwing some light on human language in general" (Malinowski 1936: 310). This only slightly hedged claim that concepts of his theory of language are universal, is explicitly refuted by Dell Hymes (1967; 1972: 40; 1974; see also Crystal 1987). Malinowski's claims with respect to the universality of the concept of phatic communion as well as the universality of the conversational topics he referred to as being characteristic of this type of language use—like, e.g., politeness, a claim, by the way, also made by the founders of "politeness" theory (Brown and Levinson 1978)—are not tenable.⁹ However, despite this criticism Hymes was certainly influenced by Malinowski's ideas. In the introduction of his 1964 collection he argues that language must be studied in "contexts of situation," and Duranti (2003: 327) points out that he borrowed this term for the title of his jointly edited anthology "*Rethinking context*" from Malinowski's 1923 paper. Duranti's characterization and definition of the "ethnography of speaking" paradigm resembles many of Malinowski's ideas of an ethnographic theory of language outlined above. Duranti (1988: 210) states the following:

The ethnography of speaking... studies language use as displayed in the daily life of particular speech communities. Its method is ethnography, supplemented by techniques developed in other areas of study such as developmental pragmatics, conversation analysis, poetics, and history. Its theoretical contributions are centred around the study of *situated discourse*, that is, linguistic performance as the locus of the relationship between language and the socio-cultural order.

⁸ For an excellent criticism of Langendoen see Schmidt (1984: 77 and elsewhere). For criticism and discussion of Malinowski's work in general and his theory of language and culture in particular see also Firth (1957b), Schmidt (1984), Weiner (1987), Kohl (1987), Agar (1994), and Nerlich and Clarke (1996: 317-335).

⁹ For a critical discussion of the concept see Senft (1996a), also Coulmas (1981), Laver (1975; 1981); see also Senft (1987; 1991), and Eibl-Eibesfeldt, Senft (1987).

And the factors Hymes (1972: 65) summarizes in his famous acronym SPEAKING—“settings, participants, ends, act sequences, keys, instrumentalities, norms,” and “genres”—are not only constitutive for the “ethnography of speaking” paradigm but also for Malinowski’s “context of situation,” the necessary prerequisite for ethnolinguistic description and analysis. In general, Malinowski’s insight that “language is used to convey more than the propositional content of what is said” (Levinson 1983: 42)—proved so unequivocally by Labov and Fanshel’s (1977) book on “Therapeutic Discourse”—and his fundamental idea that “the real linguistic fact is the full utterance within its context of situation” (Malinowski 1920: 11) has been extremely important for all subdisciplines of linguistics that research spoken language, that are interested in variation in language, in “languages in contact” phenomena, and in language use in general.

Malinowski’s claim that “linguistics without ethnography would fare as badly as ethnography without the light thrown in it by language” (Malinowski 1920: 78) was echoed 50 years later by Hockett in his statement “Linguistics without anthropology is sterile; anthropology without linguistics is blind” (Hockett 1973: 675)—another strong and engaged plea for the field of anthropological linguistics. And indeed, with the rise of American sociolinguistics and its efforts to understand, describe and analyse variation in language—with William Labov as probably its most important representative—and with the research within the “ethnography of speaking” paradigm mentioned above anthropological linguistics gradually won recognition—not only within American but also within European linguistics. In Europe, with the rise of sociolinguistics, dialectology—a linguistic subdiscipline traditionally rather open for anthropological linguistic ideas—regained importance by concentrating much more on researching spoken language in everyday contexts and use than on developing, e.g., language atlases and finding isoglosses. Finally, the reception of Austin’s and Searle’s ideas with respect to speech act theory resulted in the strengthening of “pragmatics” as the subdiscipline of linguistics that researches rules and regulations which determine the choice of specific, situation-adequate varieties or registers in the social interaction of speakers. In 1975 Michael Silverstein pointed out that researching the function of speech behavior is one of the central aims of anthropological linguistics. In sharp contrast to the Chomskyan “mainstream”-linguistics of that time Silverstein (1975: 167) states

that the study of grammar cannot in principle be carried on in any serious way until we tackle the ethnographic description of the canons of use of the messages corresponding to sentences. Reformulating this result, we may say that grammar is open-ended, not closed, and a part of the statement of the total meaning of a sentence is a statement of the rules of use that are involved in proper indexicality of elements of the message. This means, again, that if we call the “function” of a sentence the way in which the corresponding message depends on the context of

situation, then the determination of the function of the sentence, independent of its propositional value, is a necessary step in any linguistic analysis. Thus a theory of rules of use, in terms of social variables of the speech situation and dependent message form, is an integral part of a grammatical description of the abstract sentences underlying them. Rules of use depend on ethnographic description, that is, on analysis of cultural behavior of people in a society. Thus, at one level we can analyze sentences as the embodiment of propositions, or of linguistic meanings more generally; at another level, which is always implied in any grammatical description, we must analyze messages as linguistic behavior which is part of culture. ... a valid description of a language by grammar demands description of the rules of use in speech situations that are structured by, and index, the variables of cultures.

The close relationship between anthropological linguistics and pragmatics is obvious. Again, I want to point out here that Silverstein's understanding of (anthropological) linguistics reminds the reader of Malinowski's ethnographic theory of language, especially of his "context theory" of meaning.

With explicit reference to Malinowski as "an ethnographic precursor" (Duranti and Goodwin 1992: 14), social scientists, linguistic anthropologists and conversation analysts started in the 90's of the last century "rethinking context" (Duranti and Goodwin 1992). This rethinking of context has among other things also resulted in a renaissance of (anthropological linguistic) field work—a renaissance that also owes much to the fact that more and more linguists have been realizing that the "most important task in linguistics today ... is to get out in the field and describe languages, while this can still be done" (Dixon 1977: 144). And organizations and foundations that finance language documentation projects like, e.g., the Volkswagen-foundation, insist on anthropological-linguistic documentations of endangered languages: projects should document how these languages are used in various social contexts!¹⁰ Moreover, "rethinking context" in Malinowski's broad definition (quoted above)¹¹ has shown to be important in studies within the field of Conversation Analysis, in Cognitive Anthropology, in more recent studies within the gradually rising field of gesture studies, and in new lines of research that aim at studying human interaction from both a multimodal and a multidisciplinary field of research.¹²

¹⁰ See, e.g.: <http://www.volkswagen-stiftung.de/>; <http://www.mpi.nl/DOBES/>.

¹¹ I repeat Malinowski's understanding of context here for the sake of convenience: Malinowski (1935 vol.II: 22; see also pp. 26, 30, 40) pointed out that "it is very profitable in linguistics to widen the concept of context so that it embraces not only spoken words but facial expression, gesture, bodily activities, the whole group of people present during an exchange of utterances and the part of the environment on which these people are engaged."

¹² This development is nicely documented, by the way, in the annual reports of the institute where I have been working for the last 13 years, the MPI for Psycholinguistics. See, for example, research on cognitive anthropology, on gesture and on multimodal interaction reported in Brown et al. (1993), Pederson, Roelofs (1995), Bohnermeyer et al. (2002).

4. Concluding remarks

To conclude this paper I want to give a (quite personal) assessment and appraisal of Bronislaw Malinowski on the basis of my own field research on the Trobriand Islands. I cannot but completely agree with Michael Young (1987: 138) that Malinowski “was an incomparable fieldworker and master ethnographer.” Moreover, the only reliable linguistic data I found in the literature preparing for my first 15 months of field research on the Trobriands in 1982/83 came from Malinowski’s linguistic publications and from his anthropological linguistic remarks in his ethnographic masterpieces on the Trobriand Islanders. Bits and pieces of Kilivila linguistics that I found in Capell, Lithgow, and Greenberg turned out to be either utterly wrong or extremely speculative (see Senft 1991: 27, 46). Moreover, I had the quite romantic feeling when I first set foot on the Trobriands in 1982 that it was like stepping right into the picture so vividly presented in Malinowski’s Trobriand ethnography (Senft 1992: 68). I could easily verify major aspects of his exceptionally thorough ethnographic description of Trobriand culture in my own experience as a participant observer and anthropological linguist.

I think that Malinowski rightly deserves to be mentioned as one of the apologists, pioneers and founding fathers of anthropological linguistics as a discipline in its own right, and I agree with Jef Verschueren that Malinowski’s observation that an “utterance has no meaning except in the context of situation” (Malinowski 1923: 307) has to be seen as “one of the necessary pillars of any theory of pragmatics” (Verschueren 1999: 75).

Finally, I want to mention one more point: According to Mrs. Seligman Malinowski once said proudly “Rivers is the Rider Haggard of anthropology; I shall be the Conrad” (R. Firth 1957a: 6). I must confess that I read the books of the Polish ethnographer with the same suspense as the books of his fellow Polish novelist.

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About the author

Professor Gunter Senft is a Senior Research Fellow at the Max-Planck-Institute for Psycholinguistics in Nijmegen, the Netherlands. He is a specialist in Austronesian languages, especially Kilivila, the language of the Trobriand Islanders. His research interests are also in

the Papuan languages, nominal classifications, conceptualization of space, semantics and pragmatics, typology, anthropological linguistics, language/culture/cognition and endangered languages. He has authored and edited several books, including *Kilivila – The Language of the Trobriand Islanders* (Berlin/Mouton de Gruyter). He is Editor-in-Chief of *Pragmatics: Quarterly Publication of the International Pragmatics Association (IPrA)*.