Meaning, Context and Text— Fifty Years after Malinowski

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Perhaps a more accurate title for this paper would have been *Malinowski Forty Years after Himself,* for in fact, I am not concerned here with reviewing developments in the study of meaning, context and text since his time; rather, my primary concern is a review of the traditional reviews of Malinowski. Any comparison of his position with that of some of the famous modern authorities in these areas is largely incidental upon this primary concern. The time seems ripe—both historically and academically—for such an enterprise. Historically, we are close to the first centenary of Malinowski's birth, and we are just four decades away from his last writings. But more important is the change in the academic scene: the recent revolution against the so-called Chomskian revolution in linguistics cannot but draw attention to Malinowski. There has grown a practice, in the past decade, among linguists, anthropologists, AI specialists—in fact just about anyone interested in language—to begin their own discussion of some linguistic problem by first drawing attention to the inadequacies of the present day linguistic models. As an example let me quote Schank and Abelson, AI specialists, who claim that "linguistics has managed to miss the central problems", because linguists have concerned themselves with

> . . . considerations of semantics at the level of 'can one say this? Will it mean something?'. People already know what they want to say and that it is meaningful. (Schank & Abelson 1977:7)

They also criticize linguists for having failed to understand understanding. For this failure they offer the following reasons:

> . . . semantic features are considerably more important than linguists had generally been willing to acknowledge . . . there has been increasing recognition that context is of overwhelming importance in the interpretation of text. Implicit real world knowledge is very often applied by the understander, and this knowledge can be very highly structured. The appropriate ingredients for extracting the meaning of a sentence, therefore, are often nowhere to be found within the sentence. (Schank & Abelson 1977:9)

To Malinowski, writing in 1923, approximately half a century before Schank & Abelson, none of this would have sounded particularly revolutionary or even original. In this early essay he claimed that:

> . . . utterance and situation are bound up inextricably with each other and the context of situation is indispensable for the understanding of the words. Exactly as in the reality of spoken or written language, a word without *linguistic context* is a mere figment and stands for nothing by itself, so in the reality of a spoken living tongue, the utterance has no meaning except in the *context of situation.* (Malinowski 1923:307)

I must admit I find Malinowski's formulation preferable to that of Schank & Abelson's, for, in him, there is not the hidden assumption that the knowledge of the world is sharply distinct from the knowledge of language. For Malinowski there was a continuity between words and action, between social knowledge and social semiotic, the recognition of which is only just beginning to become fashionable amongst those dealing with language. But in making these comments I am anticipating myself, so let me begin again—and this time with a personal anecdote.

I was asked a few months ago if I could name a small book on Malinowski, such as perhaps Culler's *Saussure*. True to the Malinowski-Firth prediction, my text was affected by the properties of its linguistic context; so I asked: "How about Fontana Modern Masters?". I was told that they do not have one. I have checked personally since, and surely enough, Malinowski is no modern master. This state of affairs seems to me quite typical; and it is typical both of Malinowski and of intellectual fashions in the academic world. Let me develop this comment.

First, it is typical of Malinowski to miss the Modern Masters series. After all, Raymond Firth's *Man and Culture: An Evaluation of the Work of Bronislaw Malinowski* opens as follows:

> This book has been written because some of us have thought for a long while that too little attention has been paid to the work of Bronislaw Malinowski. (R. Firth 1957:1)

With very minor adjustments, I too could have begun my paper with these same words without violating any truth conditions! Of course, Raymond Firth was concerned mainly with Malinowski the anthropologist, about whom Edmund Leach comments:

> . . . Malinowski transformed ethnography from the museum study of items of custom into the sociological study of systems of action. (Leach 1957:119)

Coming from Edmund Leach, this is high praise indeed, for he is not entirely uncritical of Malinowski's contributions to his chosen field. However, insofar as boundaries in the realm of knowledge have any reality, I shall not be concerned in this paper with Malinowski as an anthropologist. By taking this position, I wish to claim a neutral stance about his hypotheses regarding the origins of cultural institutions. Though quite obviously the same teleological stance is carried over into his thinking about language, the situation appears somewhat different, as I hope will emerge later. An early appraisal of Malinowski's contribution to linguistics comes from a close contemporary, J. R. Firth:

> The most outstanding anthropological contribution to linguistics in recent years is Malinowski's Supplement to Ogden & Richards' *Meaning of Meaning*. (J. R. Firth 1930:150)

And, again writing in *Man and Culture,* he declared:

> We can be proud to include him as one of the makers of linguistics as we now understand it in this country. (J. R. Firth 1957:94)

Though not as caustic in his criticism as Edmund Leach, J. R. Firth could hardly be described as an unquestioning admirer of Malinowski's views on language. I mention this to emphasize the fact that the appraisals presented above are taken from discerning readers. They are, thus, doubly interesting as they highlight the fact that despite being a scholar of appreciable stature, Malinowski typically did not attract as much attention as might have been expected. The question naturally arises: why has his work been so undervalued? Malinowski's main contribution to linguistics—as Firth was quick to recognize—was his enunciation of the relationship between language and the context of situation. Today most literature in linguistics, whether concerned with models for the description of language as system, or for text production, text comprehension or for translation, recognizes the centrality of similar ideas under such impressive labels as *knowledge of the world, belief system, logic of conversation,* and so on. I doubt if these high-sounding concepts are better reasoned out today, made more objective, theoretically more viable or even more explicit than Malinowski's own description of context of situation or of culture. Why has the modern terminology caught on, bringing such prestige to the creators? and why is reference to Malinowski still an occasion for his denigration? I suggest that these questions can bear serious investigation, providing useful insight into the convention-bound behaviour of the academic community.

I shall myself make a modest beginning in this direction by saying a few words about intellectual fashions, which far from being seen as mere fashions, are regarded by the pundits as totally self-evident, logically sound truths. Note the good company Malinowski keeps in being ignored by Fontana Modern Masters. The series includes neither Boas, nor Sapir nor Firth—and of course, to think of Whorf in this connection would be total anathema. To turn Bolinger's phrase around (Bolinger 1968), our minds are so in the grip of scholarly misrepresentations (Alford 1980, Hasan 1975, Hasan 1978) that I despair of Whorf ever getting a fair hearing. But one may ask: what have Boas, Sapir, Firth and Whorf in common with Malinowski? I would suggest that what they have in common is their commitment to the essentially social foundation for one's ability to function as an individual. Despite crucial differences, each one thought of language as inextricably bound up with culture, of culture as a force essential to the shaping of the individual, while for each the essence of linguistics is, to use Whorf's expression, "the quest of meaning" (Whorf 1956:73). In other words, these linguists can be grouped together by virtue of the fact that they attach importance to precisely the two factors for the neglect of which Schank & Abelson criticize today's linguists—namely, commitment to statements of meaning (Firth 1957*a*) and an acceptance of the centrality of social context both in the creation and the interpretation of the text.

I suggest that in the consistent neglect of a group of the above type lies the second aspect of what is typical in Malinowski missing the Modern Masters series.

By tacit common consent it is typical of our time to either ignore such scholars of language, or if they are noticed, it is equally typical for them to be misrepresented. Note for example that when Schank and Abelson criticize modern linguistics for underplaying semantics and for ignoring context, they do not seem to be at all aware of the existence of any of these scholars: for them—as for many—linguistics is largely synonymous with the Chomskian revolution, one of whose main contributions to the field is precisely to accentuate this questionable dissociation of language from the life of the speech community. It is hard to choose between this neglect and such misrepresentation of, for example, Malinowski's position as can be found in the writings of F. R. Palmer or Geoffrey Leech, to mention but two. In this respect, Whorf is probably the most misrepresented of all. A galaxy of impressive names springs to mind immediately—Black (1959), Bolinger (1968), Brown (1976), Cole and Scribner (1974), Greenberg (1954), Hockett (1954), Berlin & Kay (1969) and Lenneberg (1971)—each claims to have proved that the Whorfian hypothesis is untenable; ironically, it remains to be demonstrated that what they have refuted is actually the Whorfian hypothesis!

There is a danger that these comments might be read as an effort to politicize academic evaluation—worst still, they may be attributed to paranoia. So let me add at once that in drawing attention to the neglect and the misrepresentation of sociologically oriented linguistics, I do not imply any conscious academic conspiracy. However, there remains the fact that all ideology, including academic ideology, thrives by keeping the other point of view out of view. One may not set out consciously to achieve this aim, but vast differences in ideology inevitably lead to a failure in sharing the assumptions and following the motivation behind an enterprise. Notwithstanding the Gricean maxims (Grice 1975), at least in academic pronouncements it is not automatically and unquestionably evident what constitutes sufficient evidence for saying what one does say—much less, what it means to be truthful, or relevant. Inevitably, if the structure of beliefs, aims and attitudes is at variance, failures in textual interpretations are bound to occur. Instead of finding metaphors, such a reader arrives at a metamorphosis of the message. The five scholars I have named have all—except perhaps Boas—suffered in this respect. They are assigned views which they can be shown not really to hold; their position is exaggerated beyond recognition, rendering their views so untenable as to be suitable only for a merciful oblivion.

I think it is useful to enquire further into the reasons for failure in communication in this specific case. It seems to me that, in the first place, culture as the main driving force in the life of the individual is not a theme that is readily favoured—least of all in linguistics. We insist on seeing the individual as a free agent in a free society, the sole architect of his own destiny, himself the shaper of his own personality. And more relevant to the discussion here, we see him as the most significant element in the production of his parole, if not in the creation of his langue. To be sure, the immediate source of behaviour lies in the individual—and I mean not simply Saussure's executive side of language (Saussure 1916:13) but also, in an important sense, the motivational and intentional elements of behaviour must be

traced, at least in the first instance, to the individual. But this does not seem to me to be the end of the enquiry into behaviour. If 'individual-ness' is at the core of behaviour, it also seems important to point out that the belief in the autonomy of the human organism turning itself into an individual is neither intuitively obvious nor empirically substantiated. Individuality and inter-subjectivity are mutually dependent notions and that argues for a social base for the construction of individuality. If we dissociate the individual from his cultural context, so that most of what is significant to the construction of his individuality is by definition a-social, then, logically the final mainsprings of intention, motivation and execution have to be sought not so much in the social environment as within the organism. And this, in the last resort, leads to a biologism whose popular name in linguistics is the 'innateness hypothesis'. This popular stance on the individual appears all the more reasonable to us, since in the literature there is no outright rejection of the possibility of cultural differences. However, while we recognize cultural differences, we also render them harmless by relegating them to surface phenomena which have only secondary importance in human affairs. The deepest stratum, it is argued, consists of the innate species-specific attributes which are ipso facto universal; culture-specific facts—if there are any—are simply surface phenomena. These attitudes are implicit in the ways in which we talk about meanings, understanding, perception and cognition. So we say that the semantic space for mankind is the same; or we insist on the centrality of 'the knowledge of the world' rather than of 'acculturation' to understanding; and so far as perception and cognition are concerned, they are basically the same across the human race. According to this philosophy, the physical is far more fundamental, far more 'real' than the social. Metaphorically speaking we overplay Freud and underplay Durkheim.

This preoccupation of modern linguistics with innateness—this insistence on the primacy of intra-organic approach to language (Halliday 1974)—is not a breakaway, revolutionary movement. Chomsky has rightly implied, by referring to distant authorities (1965), that this is a dominant stance on the Western intellectual scene, which takes different shapes to suit the current dominant ideology. Today's concern with a clear distinction between deep and surface phenomena is simply a new version of an old academic fashion. Given the intellectual convention of glorifying the innate properties of the human brain, it appears superfluous to ask: what are the factors—if any—which affect the actual development of the potential of this marvellously designed instrument? Those who suggest, like Mead (1934), that unlike the human brain, the human mind is a social phenomenon, remain on the periphery of our deliberations about language. This is not because there is a necessary conflict between accepting the universal innate properties of the human brain and acknowledging that the actualization of this potential is subject to social environment (Halliday 1974, 1977*a*). Rather it is because academic conventions dictate that the individual be seen as the fulcrum of the social universe. We see then that there is a considerable ideological gulf between those committed to this latter convention and those for whom the essential foundation for individuality is social in nature. Failure in communication between these two groups is not surprising once

we see clearly the differences between their basic assumptions. Malinowski, without doubt, belonged to the sociologically oriented group of scholars—as did Boas, Sapir and Whorf and Firth. The misrepresentation and obscurity from which they have suffered might be described as 'an ideologically induced low academic visibility'.

I intend to argue that, whatever his shortcomings as an anthropologist might have been, Malinowski's contribution to linguistics deserves less perfunctory, less pejorative and a more serious treatment than it has so far received. I will argue this by focussing mainly on issues relating to meaning, context and text, since in my opinion it is in these domains that Malinowski made his main contributions to the study of language. I will begin by enquiring into Malinowski's views on the relationship between meaning and context; here it would be important to describe the nature of the central problem that Malinowski attempted to solve. This will take us into a consideration of the Saussurean notion of sign. I will argue that to see the relationship between meaning and context in the way that Malinowski saw it implies a recognition of the centrality of text to the study of language. Since the three concepts are closely linked, a consideration of one naturally merges into that of the other(s) and the boundaries may not be as clear as my programmatic assertion suggests.

Let me begin then with meaning and Malinowski. Most semanticists would agree with Palmer that:

> The problem of semantics is not the search for an elusive entity called 'meaning'. It is rather an attempt to understand how it is that words and sentences can mean at all. . . . (Palmer 1981:29)

Despite the risk of some oversimplification, it would be essentially correct to claim that the pre-occupations in modern semantics fall under two distinct areas. First there is the concern with questions relating to how a linguistic unit, of whatever size, comes to have the meaning that it does have. To quote Searle:

> How does it happen that when people say, "Jones went home" they almost always mean Jones went home and not, say, Brown went to the party or Green got drunk. (Searle 1969:3)

Secondly there is the concern with devising techniques following which an explicit representation can be made of the meanings that the linguistic units are perceived to have. It seems to me that important as the second concern is, the first constitutes the substance of our theory of linguistic meaning. And, notwithstanding linguists' disdainful attitude to Malinowski, I would claim that he made his major contribution in this central area of semantics.

It is a commonplace of linguistics that the basic problem—namely, "how it is that words and sentences can mean at all"—arises from the principle which Saussure described as 'the arbitrariness of the sign' (Saussure 1916:67). This principle according to Saussure lies at the centre of language; it

> . . . dominates all linguistics . . . its consequences are numberless . . . (and) not all of them are equally obvious at first glance. . . (Saussure 1916:68)

A detailed discussion of arbitrariness would be out of place here; nonetheless it seems appropriate to provide a brief account of what Saussure meant by arbitrariness of the linguistic sign and to draw attention to some of its immediate implications. This would help to define sharply the problem to which Malinowski addressed himself. I believe that *The Course* contains sufficient evidence to support the view that Saussure thought of the sign's arbitrariness from two points of view, only one of which is invariably recognized by modern linguists of all persuasions. This widely recognized aspect of the sign's arbitrariness is described by Culler in the following words:

> There is no natural or inevitable link between the signifier and the signified. . . . There is no intrinsic reason why one signifier rather than another should be linked with the concept 'dog'. (Culler 1976:19)

The signifier is un-motivated in the sense that it "actually has no natural connection with the signified" (Saussure 1916:69). Seen from this point of view, the line of arbitrariness between the signifier and the signified coincides with the line which divides the level of phonology from the rest of the language system (Halliday 1977*b*). This, as I pointed out before, is the aspect of the sign's arbitrariness which is recognized everywhere in linguistics; however, the second aspect is not so well publicized, but I believe it is equally important.

Whereas the first aspect of the sign's arbitrariness is concerned with the relation between the signifier and the signified, the second is concerned with the relation between the signified and extra-linguistic reality. In *The Course* (or at least in its English translation) the term 'signified' is often inter-changeable with 'idea', 'concept' and even 'thought'. Saussure was concerned with arguing that the signified does not pre-date the signifier—that language is not a simple naming system.

> Psychologically our thought—apart from its expression in words—is only a shapeless and indistinct mass. Philosophers and linguists have always agreed in recognizing that without the help of signs we would be unable to make a clear-cut, consistent distinction between two ideas. Without language, thought is a vague, uncharted nebula. There are no pre-existing ideas, and nothing is distinct before the appearance of language. . . . The characteristic role of language with respect to thought is not to create a material phonic means for expressing ideas but to serve as a link between thought and sound, under conditions that of necessity bring about the reciprocal delimitation of units. (Saussure 1916:111–112)

The context of the discussion, the repeated assertions and the nature of the examples (pp 111–122) strongly support the interpretation that in Saussure's view the relationship of the signified to the extralinguistic universe was not a strictly rational one. Concepts—or signifieds—are not in a one to one relation with extra-linguistic things. Had this been the case then one could have argued, quite reasonably, for the pre-existence of the signifieds. And had it been possible to hold this latter claim, then it would have been reasonable to think of the signifier simply as a means of expression for the signified.

> If words stood for the pre-existing concepts, they would all have exact equivalents in meaning from one language to the next; but this is not true. (Saussure 1916:116)

The physical properties of the phenomena around us do not contain within them any principle whereby they themselves might be segmented into 'referent' units. The fact that a certain domain of physical experience is referred to, in one language, by *mutton* and *sheep*, while in another, the same sense data is referred to only by *mouton*, could not possibly be governed by a rational, non-arbitrary principle. Thus the relationship between the signified and the bits of the extra-linguistic reality to which it relates (by signification) is itself arbitrary—and this is the second, less widely recognized, aspect of the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign. To accept these views about the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign is tantamount to the rejection of the existence of any rational principle(s) for predicting what aspect of extra-linguistic reality any sign might be applicable to. And yet, this is just a conservative interpretation. A more radical view is to hold with Hjelmslev (1953) that reality itself is relative, that it is given a shape—aspects of it are imbued with salience for the speakers of a language—largely because of the operation of the linguistic signs themselves.

These two aspects of the sign's arbitrariness give rise to most of the productive problems in the study of language. Of these the most relevant to my topic is the question of the identity, the value and the signification of the linguistic sign. I suggest that Saussure was able to provide a clearer indication of how he saw a sign's identity and value to be established, but that about signification he had relatively less to say. It is at least a theoretical commonplace of linguistics today that the identity and the value of a sign are determined by treating both the signifier and the signified as "purely relational entities". Thus the value of the plural in a three-term system—eg in Sanskrit—is different from its value in a two-term system—eg in French (Saussure 1916:116). If the nature of language is systemic, as Firth maintained (Firth 1957*a*), this systemic quality is entailed by the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign. In the last resort, the value and identity of the linguistic sign is the function of its systemic nature.

Saussure maintained a clear distinction between value and signification. 'Value' is the function of relations between entities of the same order—between, say, the dime and the dollar; the value of a dime resides in its relation to a quarter, a nickel, a penny etc. Its signification, by contrast, resides in "what it can be exchanged for" (Saussure 1916:115); ie. in its relation to entities of a different order. In the case of the dime, for example, one might ask what fixed quantity of bread or milk one might be able to buy with it. The contrast between value and signification is quite clear from this Saussurian example. Value is system-internal, being defined by the relation of one sign to another in the system. This as is well recognized, brings it closest to the 'sense' of a sign (Lyons 1968, 1977). Signification, on the other hand, is not a system-internal relation; it is concerned with the relation between the sign and what the sign is a sign for. This brings the term 'signification' quite close to at least one interpretation of the term 'reference'.

Clear as the distinction is, I believe, it would go against Saussure's intentions to give the impression that the two concepts are independent of each other. Saussure made signification sub-servient to value. He claimed that without the systemic relations (which determine the value of the sign), "signification would not exist" (Saussure 1916:117); if the signification of French *mouton* and English *mutton* is not entirely identical, this is because their value is not identical; indeed it could not be, given that they participate in two distinct systems. When the relationship is expressed this way, it would appear logical to suppose that so long as the value of the sign can be established without dependence upon its signification, one should be home and dry; the theory would be free of problems and both aspects of the meaning of a sign would have a clear status. Unfortunately, this does not happen, and before long we find ourselves kneedeep in muddy waters.

If we ask: what kind of relations are essential to the determination of the value of a sign, the standard answer will invoke the concepts of 'syntagm' and 'paradigm'. But I an not convinced that Saussure's "associative bonds" are entirely interchangeable with "paradigm", especially if by paradigm is meant a set of items capable of acting as fillers in a slot. This conception of paradigm is more in tune with, for example, Zellig Harris' 'distributional sets' and carries the implication that paradigms can be constructed without awareness of the signification of signs (Harris 1951). It seems obvious that Saussure did not intend his associative bonds to be based entirely on structural relations at the level of grammar. Consider, for example, his treatment of the French word *enseignement* (teaching). I would draw attention, here, particularly to the bond that, according to Saussure, holds between *enseignement* and *apprentissage, education*. It is quite obvious that the quality of the bond between the items here is such that neither, say, *finissage* nor *imploration* could be included in the set. If *enseignement, apprentissage* and *education* constitute members of a paradigm, then this paradigm can be characterized only as a set 'belonging to the same general area of signification'—what we would describe today, perhaps, as the same semantic field.

If this reading is accepted, there is an unavoidable, and I believe an intentional, circularity in Saussure's treatment of value and signification. To the question: How is signification of a sign determined?, we have the answer: By its value. To the question: How is the value of a sign determined?, we have the answer: By its associative bonds, one of which is the bond of similar signification. We arrive, then, at an impasse; no signification without value, but equally, value is unknowable without signification. This provokes the observation that despite a long and resolute tradition, the ultimate basis for sense relation does not—indeed, could not—lie entirely in the value of the signs; the various conventionally recognized sense relations must rely equally strongly on the referential potential—the signification—of the signs. Seen from this point of view, what began apparently as the subservience of signification to value, resolves itself into a mutually defining relation. At the same time, it could be maintained that in another sense Saussure saw signification as primary—after all, the raison d'etre of the language sign is not so that it can enter into system(s) of relations; if there is any reason for its existence it is

so that it can signify something. Despite this, *The Course* fails to solve the problem of how the relation of signification is to be thought of. The question hangs in the air: given that linguistic sign is arbitrary, how do we know that a sign, say, *dog* applies to this or that class of phenomena, how do we know that people mean Jones went home when they produce the sentence *Jones went home?*

Of course, I am not suggesting that there are no answers in *The Course* at all; only that the answers themselves are problematics. Thus one of the answers, as I have pointed out at some length, is: by knowing the value of the signs. Another answer to be found in the discussion is: by knowing the conventions of the speech community. I have drawn attention to a serious problem in the first answer: it gives with one hand what it takes away with the other. Let me now point to another problem which is inherent in both these answers—this is the problem of the novice trying to learn the language. How, for example, would an infant break into a system of this kind? Obviously not by first constructing the total network of relations into which the signs enter. This would be impossible, both theoretically, because of the interdependence of value and signification, and biologically, in view of the baby's cognitive capacities at this stage. And, if we say that the child learns both value and signification concurrently by being exposed to the conventions of his speech community, the question still remains: how are the conventions of a language made accessible to an immature novice? It is my belief that Malinowski's main contributions to semantics lay in his attempts to provide an answer to this basic question. Interpreted thus, his work does not run counter to Saussure's; rather, it complements it—it developes suggestions that were no more than hints in Saussure's own writing.

It was for a good reason that Malinowski raised the question of the infant learning how to mean. Palmer has recently rejected the relevance of this question to the study of meaning. He believes that:

> We shall not solve problems of semantics by looking at a child learning language, for an understanding of what he does raises precisely the same problems as those of understanding what adults do in their normal speech. (Palmer 1981:23)

Obviously not all problems in semantics are solved by looking at the child's learning of language. However, Palmer seems to have overstated his case, for there are undeniable differences between the adult and the child. It is only in the case of the adult that the question of an appeal to the notion of semantic competence can be at all entertained, as, for example, by Geoffrey Leech when he concludes his discussion of the ambiguous phrasal verb *put on* as follows:

> It is part of our COMPETENCE (the rules, categories etc that we know by virtue of being speakers of the English language) to know that *put . . . on* has at least the three dictionary meanings. (Leech 1974:80)

And, a few lines later, he goes on to add:

> We have a justification for ignoring as far as possible the study of context where it interferes with the study of competence. At least we see that the study of meaning-

in-context is logically subsequent to the study of semantic competence. . . . (Leech 1974:80)

Whatever the position for the adult, these claims cannot be made with regard to the infant; even an extreme nativist approach would baulk at the idea of innate semantic competence whereby the value and signification of each linguistic sign is already present within the folds of the baby's brain.

This debate is central to a clarification of Malinowski's position. His main interest was not the search for a methodology for the description of the contents of an adult's already existing semantic competence; rather, the question he sought to answer was: how is such semantic competence created? Two important things follow from this starting point. First, unlike Leech, for Malinowski, the meaning of linguistic units—the value and the signification of the sign—is not a given fact. The question of how this meaning should be described is logically subsequent to the question of how the semantic content of a sign is determined in the first place—in Palmer's words "how it is that words and sentences mean at all". Secondly, this preoccupation of Malinowski's provides a rational explanation for the putting together of certain varieties of language, which grouping at first sight appears ill-assorted. What is in common to "the infantile uses of words, of primitive forms of significance and of prescientific language among ourselves", (Malinowski 1923:318) is the fact that in each of these, language has:

> . . . . an essentially pragmatic character; . . . . it is a mode of behaviour, an indispensable element of concerted human action. (Malinowski 1923:316)

I am tempted to suggest that Malinowski saw the pragmatic function of language as the primary one, precisely because of its centrality to the problem of signification. If a sign system is as pervasively arbitrary as the system of language is, then the only way the signification of signs can begin to be learnt—semantic competence begin to be created—is through the regularity of the correspondence between the sign and what the sign stands as the sign of. From this point of view, those contexts are more important in which such correspondence is immediately observable. And in the nature of things, these contexts happen to be the ones where language has a pragmatic function:

> The pragmatic relevance of words is greatest when these words are uttered within the situation to which they belong and uttered so that they achieve an immediate practical effect. For it is in such situations that words acquire their meaning. (Malinowski 1935:52)

It is in the environment of such a discussion that Malinowski makes a claim for 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. (Malinowski 1923:312)

Interestingly, it is also in this type of textual environment that the widely misrepresented, and by now infamous, sentences of Malinowski occur.

> *In its primitive uses*, language functions as a link in concerted human activity, as a piece of human behaviour. *It is a mode of action, not an instrument of reflection.* (italics mine) (Malinowski 1923:312)

Much has been written about these views of Malinowski's. Often a reader might come across comments which leave the impression that Malinowski only discussed primitive situations, or that Malinowski's view on the relationship of context to language were made only with reference to primitive languages; often, through a juxtaposition of their names, a reader might be lead to believe that there is no appreciable difference between Bloomfield and Malinowski so far as their views on meaning are concerned; often the impression will be given that language as "a mode of action, not an instrument of reflection" is a characterization which Malinowski applied indiscriminately to all uses of language. Not one scholar appears to have noticed that there is something peculiar about Malinowski's use of the words 'pragmatic' and 'action'—that the domain of their signification in his writings is much wider than it is in our normal usage. This latter point will be discussed below, but here are a couple of quotations to substantiate my claim that Malinowski's position has been misrepresented in the above ways.

> It is noticeable that the situations to which Malinowski, Bloomfield and Morris naturally turn when they want to illustrate the contextualist thesis are all 'primitive' in one sense or another. In fact, contextualism in its crudest form . . . is incapable of dealing with any but the most unsophisticated circumstances in which linguistic communication occurs (say, telling a story, giving a lecture, gossiping about the neighbours, reading a news bulletin) observing the situation in which speaker and listener find themselves will tell little, if anything, about the meaning of the message. (Leech 1974:74)

The 'contextualist thesis' of Malinowski is about as different from that of Bloomfield's as Saussure's structuralism is different from that of Harris'; and perhaps both differ appreciably from Morris. Granting the limitations of a short introductory book, the fact should still not be overlooked that these are the ways in which academic profiles are constructed: the view that Malinowski's 'situation' is the same as Bloomfield's is widespread. No matter how practical the reasons for juxtaposing the two names, the result in my opinion is mis-information. Further, not all situations which Malinowski discusses could possibly be said to be 'primitive', even if we grant that the only sophisticated uses are those involving displaced language and/or abstract notions; the situations he discussed in some detail included displaced language as in the telling of story, gossip, boast, magical and religious rituals and decision making. Although Malinowski's account of how context of situation operated in the interpretation of, say, a story is far from satisfactory, it is incorrect to suggest that he avoided all but the most simplistic situations such as perhaps those for the use of direct directives. Finally, the reason Malinowski insisted on the primacy of 'pragmatic' contexts, in the sense in which he used the word, is well stated in Leech's words. It brings home the point that the relationship between words and context of situation is variable. As Malinowski put it

"the pragmatic relevance of words is greatest when these words are uttered within the situation in which they belong. . ." (Malinowski 1935:52); this did not preclude the recognition on his part—rather it implied it—that there exist contexts of situation with a qualitatively different relationship to language (see for example his discussion of stories and rituals in *Coral Gardens and Their Magic* 1935). To give the impression, even if inadvertently, that there is any disagreement on this point between Leech's position and that of Malinowski's would be erroneous. Let me add also, that to Malinowski we owe the insight—which, incidentally, will always elude atomistic theories of meaning—that the actual environment in which one encounters a text is never irrelevant to its full interpretation; this is quite evident if we compare the interpretations of Shakespeare across the centuries.

Consider now another opinion:

> Malinowski's remarks about language as a mode of action are useful in reminding us that language is not simply a matter of stating information. But there are two reasons why we cannot wholly accept his arguments. First, he believed that the 'mode of action' aspect of language was most clearly seen in the 'basic' needs of man as illustrated in the languages of the child or of primitive man. He assumed that the language he was considering was more primitive than our own and thus more closely associated with the practical needs of the primitive society. (Palmer 1981:52)

It is true that in his earlier work Malinowski (1923) expressed the belief that word and action were so closely related only in primitive languages—ie languages of the primitive communities. But in his later publications, he revised this view.

> I want to make it quite clear that I am not speaking here only of the Trobriand language, still less of native speech in agriculture. I am trying to indicate the character of human speech in general and the necessary methodological approach to it. Every one of us could convince himself from his own experience that language in our own culture often returns to its profoundly pragmatic character. Whether engaged in a technical manipulation, purusing some sporting activity, or conducting a scientific experiment in a laboratory or assisting each other by word and deed in a simple manual task—words which cross from one actor to another do not serve primarily to communicate thought: they connect work and correlate manual and bodily movements. Words are part of action and they are equivalents to action. (Malinowski 1935:8–9)

Now, one may react violently against Malinowski's views on language and thought, on the basis of this extract; however, so far as Palmer's criticism is concerned it loses a good deal of its force. As we see, the mode of action aspect applies universally to human languages, not simply to infantile and primitive ones, though in the latter, it is more marked as also in 'unscientific language among ourselves' (Malinowski 1923:318). Leaving the infant aside for the moment, I would read this as a claim about register. That the register repertoir of non-literate communities does differ from that of the literate ones is now a recognized fact (Goody 1968, 1977); that the role of language as instrument, as a mode of action, is variable across context types is also undeniable. Although Malinowski remarked on the

structural peculiarities of primitive languages, in his writings on the context of situation it is the diatypic aspect of their 'primitiveness' which he drew attention to most frequently:

> . . . written statements are set down with the purpose of being self-contained and self-explanatory. A mortuary inscription . . . a chapter or statement in a sacred book . . . a passage from a Greek or Latin philosopher . . . one and all of these were composed with the purpose of bringing their message to posterity unaided, and they had to contain this message within their own bounds.
>
> To take . . . a modern scientific book, the writer of it sets out to address every individual reader who will peruse the book and has the necessary scientific training . . . we might be tempted to say metaphorically that the meaning is wholly contained in or carried by the book.
>
> But when we pass from a modern civilized language, . . . to a primitive tongue, never used in writing . . . there it should be clear at once that the conception of meaning as *contained* in an utterance is false and futile. (Malinowski 1923:306–7)

It appears, then, that although Palmer is right in criticising Malinowski for thinking in terms of primitive and civilized languages, he is wrong in attributing to him the view that the action mode of language is applicable only to infantile and primitive languages; obviously, Malinowski thought of these simply as two of the environments which function as the domain, par excellence, for the operation of language in its action mode. That words as "equivalents to action" are more likely to be found in extempore spoken use of language in the course of "concerted human activities" seems to me quite undeniable; and that 'primitive' communities characteristically lack a written mode of expression also appears obvious. But what about the infant? Is Malinowski justified in thinking that language as a mode of action is a primary stage in the ontogeny of language? Does a consideration of the child learning language help us to solve any problems in semantics, or is it a fruitless pursuit as Palmer suggests?

Recent studies—not only the functionally oriented ones (Halliday 1975, 1979, Bullowa 1979, Wells 1981), but any others which consider meaning as central to human language (Brown 1973, Bruner 1972, Clark 1973, Dore 1974, Greenfield & Smith 1976, Karmiloff-Smith 1979 and others) provide more than just a sufficient hint that Malinowski's views on the development of language in the young child were surprisingly near the mark. Definitely the action mode of language is one of the very few which comes to the fore in the earliest proto-linguistic and linguistic systems of communication employed by the child.

> The child acts by sound at this stage and acts in a manner which is both adapted to the outer situations, to the child's mental state and which is also intelligible to the surrounding adults. (Malinowski 1923:319)

For the young child, his vocal symbols are 'equivalents of action', and they are of value because they are capable of producing action on the part of others. If it is true that in learning language, the child is learning how to mean, then certainly the

child's earliest experiences in (proto-)linguistic communication are of interest. At birth the baby has no access to the verbal signs of the mother tongue—he recognizes neither the signifier nor the signified—but in a few years' time he has constructed a system of relations whereby most of the signs he uses will be imbued with the meanings conventional to his speech community. To study this process cannot but increase our understanding of how a linguistic unit comes to have a meaning in the life of an individual; and this is certainly an important question in semantics. In his discussion of language development, Malinowski argued that:

> In all the child's experience, words *mean* in so far as they act and not in so far as they make the child understand and apperceive. (Malinowski 1923:321)

According to Malinowski, the function of language as an instrument of reflection arises at a later stage; he seems to argue that both in the history of the human race and of the individual, the use of language as a mode of action is primary; its use as a mode of reflection is historically later. Hence it is often described as 'secondary' or 'derived'. The suggestion that ontogeny is a replication of phylogeny is beyond proof, but so far as the individual infant is concerned, recent research supports the hypothesis of the primacy of the pragmatic function for the young child. But what does this say about the learning of meaning?

It would be misleading to imply that Malinowski provided a detailed answer to this question, but certainly his argument is coherent and clear. In the first place one has to remember the characteristic quality of the pragmatic environment; it is here that there is 'the dependence of the meaning of each word upon practical experience'; language acts upon the environment.

> . . . a small child acts upon its surroundings by the emission of sound which is the expression of its bodily needs and is, at the same time, significant to the surrounding adult. The meaning of this utterance consists in the fact that it defines the child's wants and sets going a series of actions in his social environment. . . . As inarticulate sounds pass into simple articulations, these at first refer to significant people, or else are vague indications of surrounding objects, above all of food, water, and favoured toys or animals. . . . As soon as words form . . . they are also used for the expression of pleasure or excitement . . . (but) it is when they are used in earnest that they mobilize the child's surroundings. Then the uttered word becomes a significant reaction adjusted to the situation, expressive of the inner state and intelligible to the human *milieu*. (Malinowski 1935:6)

The child learns the meanings of the signs of his mother tongue because for the most part the words he is concerned with occur in conjunction with the surrounding social reality. His case then runs parallel to the so-called savage:

> The meaning of a word arises out of familiarity, out of ability to use, out of the faculty of direct clamouring as with the infant, or practically directing as with primitive man. A word is used always in direct active conjunction with the reality it means. (Malinowski 1923:322–3)

The determination of the domain of signification is not a sudden thing—it occurs largely because of the regularity of correlation between the sign and what the sign is a

sign of. Equally, the value of a sign is not determined in one fell swoop for a baby; the regular patterns of use in the child's social milieu must play a role in this process and this could be effective only where there is a good deal of 'referential transparency'. This referential transparency is ensured for the greater portion of the signs in those environments where language acts as instrument. Recent studies—especially those in the child's learning of the lexicon—have drawn attention to the phenomena of 'over-extension' and 'narrowing'. The evidence appears strong that the approximate mastery of the acoustic shape of the sign—ie, the signifier—cannot be confused with the mastery of the signified. The child appears to go through a stage where both the value and the signification of the mother tongue signs are in the process of being internalized. Both the sense and reference—the value and the signification—relations have to grow side by side, before the child can reach the stage of approximation to the adult system. In the interim, the child's use—and understanding—of a mother-tongue-like-sign is not the same as in the adult's usage—in other words, the sign does not have the meaning for the child which the adult's dictionary credits the sign with. To study the processes whereby the child's meaning of a sign approximates the adult's meaning of that sign is to study—at least partially—how a linguistic unit comes to have meaning at all. Malinowski was well aware of these implications of the study of 'infantile' utterances:

> . . . I believe this problem will have to be studied in infantile speech if we are to arrive at the most important foundations for the science of semantics: I mean the problem of how far and through what mechanisms speech becomes to the child an active and effective force which leads him inevitably to the belief that words have a mystical hold on reality. (Malinowski 1935:65)

I am suggesting that Malinowski's answer to Saussure's problem of signification was to introduce the concept of context of situation and of culture. This latter, he some times described as the 'context of reference' (1935:51). The question how a linguistic sign such as 'dog' comes to signify extralinguistic phenomena belonging to the class DOG is answered by saying that the process involves an active experience of the word in conjunction with reality within a culturally recognizable context of situation. This is the primary means of entry into the language system. Note that ultimately, the appeal is to convention; but, unlike Saussure, Malinowski provides a clearer indication of what is essential—or at least one aspect of what is essential—to the learning of conventions. The view that the pragmatic context provides the most hospitable environment for the learning of conventions is interestingly in agreement with Lewis' view that conventions arise and are ratified in co-operative problem solving (Lewis 1968). Essentially, then, for Malinowski, meanings are social. He rejected the strong Western tradition of treating meaning as mental entities—concepts and the like.

There is indeed a danger in thinking of meaning as a concept. As Austin complains, there is a tendency to treat concept—perhaps because the word is a noun—as "an article of property, a pretty straightforward piece of goods" (Austin 1979:41), which can be part of the 'furniture' of man's mind. Once this step is taken, we may find ourselves recognizing a simple "commonsense reality" with

Leech—namely that, "meaning is a mental phenomenon and it is useless to pretend otherwise" (Leech 1974). But claims about the 'mental-ness' of phenomena can mean such different things; one needs to be clear how the expression is used. There is a very obvious sense in which every piece of knowledge is mental. Whatever the child's or adult's understanding of the linguistic sign *dog*, this understanding is surely stored in the brain; further, it is only because of the structure of the brain that it is possible for humans to arrive at understandings of this sort. But in a rather important sense it does not make the meaning of the sign *dog* a mental phenomenon; the dictionary may be located in the brain but the specific details relating to each entry in the dictionary originate not in the brain but in the social human milieu. Meaning and mind are created in a social environment, through social agencies as Luria (1976) has argued on a basis stronger than that of sheer speculation. By placing an emphasis on the role of cultural contexts in the learning of meaning, Malinowski provides support for Saussure's claim that the discipline of linguistics is an important part of the science of semiology.

This is part of what I was drawing attention to by an earlier comment that Malinowski is not in opposition to Saussure. Not only does he agree with Saussure in believing that, as a sign system, language is embedded in the social life of a community, but also he seems to take into account the existence of the language internal relations—its systematicity—which were emphasized by Saussure. Whatever his reservations might have been against the Durkheimian principle of 'conscience collective', he does not deny the most crucial characteristic of language—namely its coherent inner structure, and the centrality of this to the 'meaningfulness' of a sign. This is obvious from his treatment of a part of the semantic field of 'garden site' in Kiriwinian. In dealing with the relations between such signs of the language as *buyagu, odila, yosewo, baleko, bagula* etc, he shows that he has a fairly sophisticated notion of the linguistic sign. The discussion is concluded as follows:

> The definition of the word consists partly in placing it within its cultural context, partly in illustrating its usage in the context of opposites and of cognate expressions. (Malinowski 1935:16)

Nor is it possible to maintain the view that Malinowski was so simpleminded as to advocate the naming theory of meaning. Consider:

> It is obvious that words do not live as labels attached to pieces of cultural reality. Our Trobriand garden is not a sort of botanical show with tags tied on to every bush, implement or activity. (Malinowski 1935:21)

His terminology surely differs from ours, but I doubt if his understanding of the relations into which signs enter is any less advanced. Consider, for example, the following passage:

> . . . words do not exist in isolation . . . words are always used in utterances. . . . A one-word sentence, such as a command . . . may . . . be significant through its context of situation only. Usually a one-word sentence will have to be explained by connecting it with utterances which preceded it or which follow. To start with single words . . . is the wrong procedure. But this I do not need to elaborate; for it is now a commonplace of linguistics that the lowest unit in language is the sentence, not the word . . . even the sentence is not self-contained, self-sufficient unit of speech. Exactly as a single word is . . . meaningless and receives its significance through the context of other words, so a sentence usually appears in the context of other sentences and has meaning only as a part of a larger significant whole. (Malinowski 1935:22)

In these words of Malinowski, we have a precursor to J. R. Firth's view of meaning as a "complex of contextual relations" (Firth 1957*a*:19).

Malinowski was ahead of his time in drawing attention to the relevance of context of situation to the study of language as he was also in predicting the importance of functional approaches to dvelopmental linguistics. At the same time he was, without doubt, one of the few scholars first to point out the need for treating the text as central to the interpretation of the linguistic units of all sizes. For him, unlike Lyons, the language system was not a set of sentences (Lyons 1977:585); it was a resource for the living of communal life in culturally created contexts, which implies, from the very beginning, the recognition of text as a significant unit of linguistic analysis. That these intuitive insights were not developed by him into a well articulated coherent theory is certainly true (Palmer 1981:53); but this does not throw into doubt the acuteness of his insight, especially when we realize that today, even half a century after him, such a theory cannot be found in the currently valued reflections of the often-cited authorities in the areas of pragmatics, developmental linguistics, semantics and discourse analysis. To focus here simply on the connection between meaning and text, far from treating sentence as "the lowest unit in language" as Malinowski suggested, the main preoccupation of semantic experts till very recently has been with isolated words. Progress—thanks to logic and philosophy—has meant a shift of interest from words to sentences. But these too now receive attention each in isolation from its textual environment. In fact, since most examples are conjured up by linguists trying to prove a point, these can have no textual environment—they arise out of nothing, lead into nothing and themselves are nothing compared to the naturally functioning sentences of a 'live tongue' used in the service of everyday activity.

What is most remarkable about Malinowski's hypotheses regarding meaning, context and text is the fact that his approach spans rather than exaggerates the distance between langue and parole. With his view of the social context as playing a crucial role in the transmission of language to the next generation, and with text—by implication—functioning as a bridge between the context and the system, it is easier to see the dialectic between parole and langue whereby the system is shaped by the process while the process itself is an instantiation of the system. That the hypothesis of some such dialectic between langue and parole is essential to the theory of linguistics has been argued convincingly by sociolinguists (Labov 1972, Weinreich, Labov & Herzog 1968); that it is also essential to the solution of at least some of the problems in the study of meaning is rarely recognized (Halliday 1973, 1978). To set

up a dissociation between system and process—between langue and parole—of the type that Lyons appears to recommend (1977:622 ff.) leaves us in the midst of many problems. His sharp distinction between system-sentence and text-sentence appears to be motivated by a desire to maintain a clear boundary between competence and performance; and there is more than a hint in Lyons that 'linguistics proper' is concerned with competence, while performance is the domain of stylistics and sociolinguistics (Lyons 1977:585). It is clear that such a view runs counter to Malinowski's position; for him context is not something to which one appeals simply in order to find the appropriate interpretation of some multivalent lexeme such as *plant* (Lyons 1977:582) or *put on* (Leech 1974:80); nor is it a device for simply sorting out the local situational referents of deixis or ellipsis. Malinowski's view of how context functions in the creation and use of the verbal symbolic system would do all this, but more. For him it constitutes the ever-present series of semiotic frames in conjunction with which the signification of the linguistic signs is defined. It is the wider matrix within which the sign operates so that it acquires a value in the system and a signification in the world of active experience.

It is difficult to accept Lyons' contention that a set of system-sentences constitutes the 'language system' (Lyons 1977:586). There is no advantage in thinking of language as a set of sentences, even if we add the qualification of infinity to the set. Rather, language is a network of systemic relations, the systematicity of which permits the generation of any number of sentences—language is not a product; it is a principle. There is sufficient evidence in our ignorance of how to account for comprehension and production of ordinary day-to-day discourse to permit the claim that this undue emphasis on sentence as the central concern of linguistics has been unfortunate for the development of the field. It is now widely recognized that no matter how rich our description of the sentence might be, it can never hope to throw light on the real unit of human interaction—namely the text (van Dijk 1977, Petofi 1978, Hasan 1979). Even more importantly, no framework for the description of the sentence can be complete, without the means of relating it to its environment—both linguistic and extra-linguistic. This naturally implies that there has to be some kind of systematic relationship between a system sentence and its analogous text-sentence. If this relationship is one of abstraction whereby system sentences are "derived from utterances by the elimination of all the context-dependent features of utterances" (Lyons 1977:588), it is difficult to see why system-sentences must be regarded as central to 'linguistics proper', while text-sentences are not. After all, it seems reasonable to suggest that the latter would subsume the properties of the former—not the other way round. In the Malinowskian conception of the relation between sign and context, there is no aspect of the meaning of a sign—its value or signification—that is, as it were, constructed by the speech community in isolation from the context. For example, according to this view, the interpretation of the so-called 'de-contextualized' declarative sentence type as STATEMENT is based simply on the fact that in a wide range of actual contexts, this sentence type most frequently has the function of STATEMENT. In other words, it is how this type functions as a text-sentence that gives its analogous system-sentence a particular value. In my opinion a

more powerful—because more comprehensive—model of semantics is one which could provide a systematic account of how classes of text-sentences are interpreted by normal speakers; this must of necessity subsume their interpretation as system-sentences.

The concept 'decontextualization' is intriguing. Lyons (1977:589) defines it, at least implicitly, as "the elmination of all the context-dependent features of utterances" (p. 588), and later in the discussion of the interpretation of an elliptical sentence it is said to "consist in supplying some element or elements from the preceding co-text" (p. 589). In other words, the de-contextualization of a text-sentence consists in the explicitization of all implicit encoding devices whether endophoric or exophoric (Halliday & Hasan 1976, 1980, Hasan 1984a, 1979). But surely this explicitization is subject to as regular rules as any other set of rules. More accurately, while the most specific interpretation of, say, the pronoun *he* would vary from one context of situation to the other, there is no doubt that *he* has a general meaning, which transcends instantial details (Hasan 1975). This general meaning may be stated as ONE (CO-)TEXTUALLY IDENTIFIED (QUA SI) HUMAN MALE, where (co-)textual identification would equal co-reference to the nearest explicitly mentioned one human male, unless there is good reason to reject this equation. The good reasons for the rejection of the equation, if any, will be found within the sentence under focus or in the accompanying text. Thus de-contextualization is not merely local and random; a large part of de-contextualization—which in everyday contact with language is simply 'interpretation' after all—is entirely systematic even if the details of the system may not be wholly obvious to us at this point in the development of linguistics. From whatever point of view one looks at the distinction between system-sentence and text-sentence, the theoretical value of this distinction appears questionable, unless one were to trivialize the notion text-sentence to mean sentences which contain errors of performance a la Chomsky. Sentence, after all, is just sign—though one of an order different from other orders of signs; it seems more viable to think of language as a set of concurrent systems of options, where the selection of some path(s) is actualized as a particular sentence, this actualization itself being motivated by the context of situation in which the speaker happens to find himself. Whatever Malinowski's shortcomings as a theoretician, for him context of situation was not simply a cure for ambiguity, nor a search-light for picking out the specifics; for him, it was integral to the study of language since in his view the creation of semantic competence depends entirely on the systematic operation of language in social context—and, more basic than that, it provides a viable hypothesis of how the signification of signs is established for the members of a speech community. At least at the moment we have no better theory of signification, even though I might concur with Palmer (1981) that Malinowski's pronouncements lacked theoretical coherence.

I hope I have demonstrated both Malinowski's contribution to the Saussurian theory of meaning and his far from naive view of the nature of the linguistic sign system. It seems amazing, then, that instead of getting acclaim and recognition, he has more often earned criticism. Consider, for example, E. Leach who upbraids him

for the shallowness of his pragmatism. Tracing the origin of the movement of pragmatism to C. S. Peirce, Leach comments highly favourably on the quality of Peirce's work, which, according to him, is:

> . . . now recognized as one of the major influences leading to the development of mid-twentieth-century logical positivism. William James was a friend and colleague of Peirce. . . . Where Pierce was austere, retiring, philosophic, James was a public figure, a missionary propagandist with a wide popular appeal. James' pragmatism is a creed rather than a philosophy. . . . Malinowksi's pragmatism is that of James' rather than Peirce'. (Leach 1957:121–122)

Regretfully, I was not able to consult Gallie (1952) whom Leach quotes as an authority on this issue, but my reading of Ayer (1968), Moore (1961) and of Smith (1978) does not agree with Leach's reading of Gallie to the extent that James should appear shallow by comparison with Peirce. These scholars draw attention to the difference between the two; Peirce is more arcane and possibly more abstract but there seems to be no suggestion that James is to be regarded as no philosopher. So if Malinowski's pragmatism is shallow it seems to me the blame cannot be laid at James's door. But is Malinowski's pragmatism shallow?

Ignoring his application of pragmatism to his theory of needs and to culture and cultural institutions in general, if I ask the above question simply with regard to language, my answer would be: 'no'. And the best I can do to prove the validity of this answer is to compare Peirce's ideas with those of Malinowski's on the child's 'acquisition of semantic competence'. Further, a comparison of Malinowski's pragmatism with that of modern pragmatists—ie. the speech act theorists, should be of interest. So first, here is Moore's view of Peirce's position on the child just learning to speak his mother tongue:

> Suppose some fine autumn day that his (ie. the child's) father takes him out for a walk. They climb a hill and at the top of the hill, the child encounters an object which he touches and finds to occasion an experience of roughness. He says to his father, "what's that?". His father replies, "That is a tree." Thus the word "tree" now means to the child something such that if he touches it he will have an experience of roughness. The child leans against the tree to rest and finds that the tree supports him. He now adds to the meaning of the tree the idea that a tree is an object such that if he leans against it he will have the experience of being supported. Suppose his father now cuts the tree down and takes part of it home and puts it in the fireplace from which there presently comes warmth. The child's meaning of tree now grows to include the idea that a tree is an object such that if he cuts it down and puts it in the fireplace he will experience warmth. The next summer he learns that objects called trees are green in summer, that if one sits under them in summer he will feel cooler etc. etc. Thus what the child means by a tree continues to grow as his experiences grow. When he gets to the point where he has had all of the commoner experiences of a tree, his meaning of "tree" will coincide with that held by most people, and he will have no difficulty knowing what they mean by "tree". (Moore 1961:50)

Comparing this with the earlier citations from Malinowski, at least on this issue, there seems to be no serious difference between the austere philosopher Peirce and the shallow pragmatist Malinowski, except that Malinowski's pragmatic contexts, having their origin in the wider context of culture, appear far more natural than Peirce's imaginary situations which have a certain degree of artificiality, common to events conceived of a-socially. This is not to claim that Malinowski is a better semiotician or a deeper philosopher, but simply to demonstrate that on the question of how the linguistic conventions are learnt by a child there is not much to choose between the two—definitely Malinowski is no shallower than Peirce. When we turn to a comparison of Malinowski with the speech act theorists, not surprisingly, we find passages in the former which could easily have occurred in the writing of, say, Austin. This is perhaps to be expected, for after all *How to Do Things with Words* is a collection of Austin's William James Lectures. Austin would have no hesitation in accepting that

> Words are parts of action and they are equivalents to action (Malinowski 1935:9)

or that

> . . . in all communities, certain words are accepted as potentially creative of acts. You utter a vow, or you forge a signature and you may find yourself bound for life to a monastery, a woman or a prison. (Malinowski 1935:53)

It would be quite wrong to give the impression that there is no difference between Malinowski and speech act theorists, who are normally philosophers. The speech act theorists have been much concerned with enquiry into the linguistic realizations of classes of speech acts (Austin 1962, Cole & Morgan 1975, Sadock 1974, Searle 1969, 1979, etc.); Malinowski never worked at that level of detail, but on the other hand, it should be added that his main aim in writing about language was not to present a detailed description of any part of the form. The second main difference that springs to mind in comparing Malinowski with philosophers of language is that he does not share their distrust of ordinary language. He would agree with Austin when the latter claims that "words are our tools" (Austin 1961:181). But there they would part company for Austin goes on to add:

> . . . and as a minimum, we should use clean tools . . . and we must forearm ourselves against the traps that language sets us. (Austin (1961:181)

Such logophobia is entirely absent from Malinowski. Perhaps, at the risk of stereotyping, there is a generalization to be made here. Just as philosophers characteristically display a distrust of ordinary language (Halliday 1977*a*), find it inadequate, full of traps and prone to falsity, so sociologists and anthropologists treat the ordinary language as an institution largely above question. One consequence of this difference is manifested in their respective views of reality. The philosopher's reality is given by nature; and is made up largely of physical phenomena. It makes contact with man through individual minds, while each individual mind is in many ways simply an echo of the other individual minds. Not so with the anthropologist. For him the world is largely made up of and through the symbolic systems for communication. So reality is largely inter-subjectively defined. In this respect, Malinowski and the speech act theorists are true to type. Austin, who is perhaps one of the few socially aware philosophers, maintains that

Words are not . . . facts or things: we need therefore to prise them off the world, to hold them apart from and against it, so that we can realize their inadequacies and arbitrariness and can re-look at the world without blinkers. (Austin 1961:182)

This is the type of orientation that is responsible for the creation of the gap between 'the knowledge of the world' and 'the knowledge of language'. Malinowski's position is radically different. Astonishing as this claim may sound to those whose acquaintance with Malinowski is second-hand, for him the world was made of language—at least those parts of the world which are crucial to the living of life. I am aware this reading goes against the popular view voiced by Leech who claims that for Malinowski "meaning is reducible to observable context" (Leech 1974:74) but a reading of section V of the *Ethnographic Theory of Language* leaves me no option but to reject Leech's view. Let me present a few segments from this section:

Let us first consider the power of words in their creative supernatural effects. Obviously we have to accept here the intent and the mental attitude of those who use such words. If we want to understand the verbal usage of the Melanesian we must . . . stop doubting or criticizing his belief in magic, exactly as, when we want to understand the nature of Christian prayer and its moral force, or of Christian sacramental miracles, we must abandon the attitude of a confirmed rationalist or sceptic. *Meaning is the effect of words on human minds and bodies and, through these, on the environmental reality as created or conceived in a given culture.* (my italics) (Malinowski 1935:53)

Having attempted to show how tenuous the distinction between the imaginary and the real is, Malinowski goes on to conclude:

. . . in every community—among the Trobrianders quite as definitely as among ourselves—there exists a belief that a word uttered in certain circumstances has a creative, binding force.

This creative function of words in magical or in sacramental speech, their binding force in legal utterances . . . in my opinion constitutes their real meaning.

Take again the verbal act of repentance in the Roman Catholic confession of sins, or again the sacramental act of Absolution administered verbally by the Father Confessor: here words produce an actual change in the universe which, though mystical and imaginary to us agnostics, is none the less real for the believer. (Malinowski 1935:54–55)

With these statements so clearly speaking for Malinowski, I find it difficult to imagine how he could be accused of "crude contextualism".

One explanation for misreadings of Malinowski might lie in the way he used certain favourite words. For example the discussion of the creative power of words from which the above quotations were taken is prefaced as follows:

. . . to arrive at an understanding of meaning we have to study the dynamic rather than the purely intellectual function of words. (Malinowski 1935:52)

This might appear an astonishing claim to us since today knowledge structure and a world created out of beliefs would be regarded as 'mental phenomena'. Most

pragmatists would agree with Malinowski when he declares that "language is primarily an instrument of action." But I doubt if they would accept the examples he provides of the "two peaks of this pragmatic power of words." The first of these is "to be found in certain sacred uses", for example in

. . . magical formulae, sacramental utterances, exorcisms, curses and blessings and most prayers. All sacred words have a creative effect, usually indirect, by setting in motion some supernatural power, or, when the sacramental becomes quasi legal, in summoning social sanctions.

The other peak is to be found in environments where characteristically one may find a high frequency of directives. Examples would be:

An order given in battle, an instruction issued by the master of a sailing ship, a cry for help, are as powerful in modifying the course of events as any other bodily act. (Malinowski 1935:52–53)

Passages such as these lead one to suggest that it is probably not Malinowski's view of verbal meaning which is problematic; the real problem might lie in his use of such words as 'intellectual', 'reflection' and 'abstract contemplation', as it might do in his insistence that the function of language as the creator of reality is simply an instance of language operating as a mode of action. Malinowski's usage of the words 'pragmatic' and 'action' is at least as idiosyncratic as Peirce's use of the expression 'practical consequences' in the definition of meaning. Such a wide domain of signification for the word 'pragmatic' is definitely at variance from the practices of most modern pragmatists, as a brief glance at their handling of meaning in literature will easily demonstrate (Levin 1976, van Dijk 1976, Searle 1979).

One of the most outstanding differences between Malinowski and the present day speech act theorists lies in Malinowski's idea that an isolated sentence is a fiction, since the natural unit of interaction is a text. This implies that sentences are neither comprehended nor produced apart from their context where the word 'context' subsumes both verbal and extra-verbal environment. Such an orientation to sentences would have been useful to the speech act theorists, since the speech act status of utterances cannot be determined entirely by examining the sentence-internal properties (Hasan 1982). This much is quite obvious from the current discussions of the indirect directives (Searle 1979; Sadock 1974). Although most descriptions of indirect speech acts must make a reference to the co-text, such reference remains a-theoretical and ad hoc.

These same remarks can be made with regard to the speech act theorist's view of social context. From its very inception (Austin 1962), it has been obvious that the notion 'context of situation' is absolutely crucial to any reasoned description of speech acts; nonetheless there is an ad hoc quality to their invocations of this concept. If one accepts with Palmer that Malinowski's context is 'pre-theoretical', then one would have to grant that the speech act theorist's concept of context is definitely no better. For them too context is a 'bit' of real situation; there is, of course, the difference that for Malinowski situation was fundamentally a social entity, for the speech act theorist it is more physical than social, but this is to be

expected from their orientation. These comparative remarks are not intended to suggest that the work in speech act theory is less worthy of our attention or that as a semiotician Peirce is not an important figure. The aim has been simply to argue that when it comes to a comparison of Malinowski with these scholars in respect of their treatment of context of situation they have no edge on Malinowski. In fact Malinowski's conception of the role of context in the determination of the signification of a linguistic sign is much closer to that of Peirce's. To ask the question: how is it that a hearer knows that a promise is a promise? and to answer that he does so because he knows the set of conditions that must be satisfied by an utterance before it can be taken as a promise, is only half the story. Malinowski tried to demonstrate how it is that a listener gets to know the set of condition whose satisfaction counts as a promise. Naturally the question is important only if you believe that the rules for promising are not universal, but culturally variable and that their knowledge is not innate.

I have argued so far that Malinowski has been misrepresented; that his contribution to linguistics has been undervalued; that his concept of context of situation is much richer, and his views on its place in the theory of language description is far more viable than he has been given credit for. I have suggested that the reason behind this misrepresentation is his unfashionable adherence to 'anti-mentalism', and that this anti-mentalistic stance appears to be exaggerated by his rather idiosyncratic usage of a certain class of words. With a certain degree of good-will, such as we exercise in the reading of many modern favourites, his writings would not appear as unreasonable, as mindless as they do through the standard short quotes and the traditional comments included in most writings dealing with his work. Certainly, once his orientation, and the aim of his endeavour are taken into account, Malinowski's achievement does not appear mean. He was, after all, no linguist; his aim was not to produce viable descriptions of specific classes of linguistic units. More sobering, the entire debate on the centrality of context of situation to the theory of meaning was activated simply by his desire to show that the translation of ethnographic data consists in the difficult task of encapsulating a series of cultural contexts which may be quite foreign to the language in which they are being translated. To my knowledge no one has yet presented a better definition of an adequate translation and much work in the processing of information by AI specialists would imply that comprehension could be defined simply as the degree of success in the reconstitution of the verbally encapsulated context. That Malinowski arrived at important theoretical conclusions from the consideration of a purely practical problem is of interest to those of us who prefer to think of the relation between theory and practice as a constant dialogue, each improving the other by the continued interaction. In this view, linguistics is not an intellectual game concerned with superbly organized form without content; it is a field of knowledge eminently useful to mankind. In the words of Whorf:

> . . . the forces studied by linguistics are powerful and important . . . its principles control every sort of agreement among human beings, and, . . . sooner or later it will have to sit as judge while the other sciences bring their results to enquire into what they mean. (Whorf 1956:232)

I grant that these pronouncements sound incurably romantic; but that might be because, at heart, we remain such confirmed rationalists. Certainly, there is no hope of developing linguistics in the ways that Whorf had in mind, unless we are willing to assign as great an importance to meaning as we have done to form, until we are willing to see language not simply as a species-specific phenomenon, but also as one which is equally importantly culture-specific—until we can think of language not simply as a mental organ, ours despite our unique selves, but also as a social institution shaped according to our cultural identity—in short until we are willing to recognize the implications of linguistics being a branch of semiology. I suppose that anthropologists, whose main stock in trade is culture, are more willing to grant that the variable across cultures is as significant as the universal; Malinowski was no exception.

The flaws in Malinowski's programmatic design for the description of language to which I now turn, arise precisely because he is first an anthropologist, and only secondarily a linguist. That his notion of the context of situation was not abstract enough to be used as a general framework was first pointed out by J. R. Firth (1957*a*), who commented that Malinowski's context was only a bit of the social process, an actual set of events in rebus. It is certainly true that Malinowski never focussed on extra-linguistic situation with a view to systematically abstract from it just those factors which were relevant to the functioning of language. Thus a systematization of the type we find in Firth (1957), Halliday (1957, 1959), Halliday et al. (1964) and Hymes (1964)—and following them, others—is not to be encountered in Malinowski's writings; while he was fully alive to the elements of the context of situation which interact with language, he simply failed to create a 'schematic construct'. Critical remarks, such as these, are sometimes understood—as, for example, by Leech and Palmer—to imply that for Malinowski context equalled actual observable situation. This is certainly a misrepresentation since observations such as the following cannot be reconciled with a 'crude contextualist' position; (the comments below are with reference to the interpretation of the term *buyagu*):

> First we had to remind the reader of the general context of situation . . . ; that is, to indicate the social, legal and technical arrangements by which a portion of cultivable soil is ear-marked for next year's gardens. . . . Then I give the . . . approximate. . . . English label 'garden site'. . . . But this . . . term has to be redefined by fuller English circumlocutions. . . . These circumlocutions obviously derive their meaning from the reader's knowledge of how land is cultivated in the Trobriands. . . . Throughout its analysis . . . the word is progressively defined by reference to the ethnographic description, supplemented by additional information concerning linguistic usage. . . . Thus the definition of a word consists partly in placing it within its cultural context, partly in illustrating its usage in the context of opposites and of cognate expressions. (Malinowski 1935:15–16)

Again the power of the words to create reality as in magical incantations and religious rituals to which Malinowski draws attention (1935, Div. V), can hardly be reconciled with a 'crude contextualist' position, in which the linguistic sign and the physical thing named by the sign are held to be in a one-to-one (observable)

correlation. I would suggest that such a misinterpretation of Malinowski's position arises from his failure to draw a clear distinction between context as a schematic construct and the material situational setting within which an interactive event takes place. It is obvious that such a distinction is essential not only in the description of displaced language but also in throwing light on the ancillary function of language which is characteristically associated with predominantly pragmatic environments (Halliday 1977, Ure 1971, Hasan 1973, 1980, 1981).

Perhaps the problems inherent in Malinowski's account of how a narrative—whether historical chronicle, fiction or myth—comes to be understood by the listener, arises partly from the above failure. While he is to be commended for pointing out the necessity for the recognition of more than one contextual frame in the description of the narrative, his treatment leaves much to be desired. Malinowski separated the context of narration—the outer context—from the context which is encapsulated within and is reconstitutable from the language of the narrative—the inner context, referring to the former as primary and to the latter as secondary.

> When incidents are told or discussed among a group of listeners there is, first, the situation of that moment made up of the respective social, intellectual and emotional attitudes of those present. Within this situation, the narrative creates new bonds and sentiments by the emotional appeal of the words. (Malinowski 1923:312–3)

This outer context, to which Malinowski refers as primary or direct, encloses another—a secondary or indirect context:

> A narrative is associated also indirectly with one situation to which it refers . . . the words of a tale are significant because of previous experiences of listeners; . . . narrative speech is derived in its function, and it refers to action only indirectly, but the way in which it acquires its meaning can only be understood from the direct function of speech in action . . . the referential function of a narrative is subordinate to its social and emotive function. (Malinowski 1923:313)

The above extracts present all the essentials of the Malinowskian view of how a narrative is comprehended. There appears to be no advance on this position though it is, perhaps, more lucidly expressed a decade later in *Coral Gardens*. Much can be said in criticism of this stance; in fact, much has already been said though sometimes the basis for the criticism is itself not justified. Let me quote Palmer as an example:

> . . . he discusses narrative, the telling of stories; but here surely, the context is the same at all times—the story-teller and his audience, whatever the story. If context is to be taken as an indication of meaning, all stories will have the same meaning. Malinowski's solution was to invoke 'secondary context', the context within the narrative; but that has no immediately observable status and can no more be objectively defined than the concepts or thoughts that he was so eager to banish from discussion. (Palmer 1981:53)

In this extract, Palmer is making three claims. In the first place he assumes that the outer, primary context for story telling is invariable; secondly he claims that Malinowski's secondary context is created to repair the 'deficiency' arising from the invariable quality of the primary one. And, finally, he discounts the secondary context on the ground that for Malinowski, context always had to be 'immediately observable', which quite obviously would not be the case with the secondary context. So the entire framework is faulty. I think Palmer can be refuted on all counts, without necessarily having to accept that Malinowski's account of story-telling is above criticism.

Palmer's assumption that Malinowski's primary context would be invariable is open to question. True that the role-relation of story-teller and audience is invariable. But this does not argue that everything else in the primary context would be always invariable, quite apart from the fact that differences in the nature of the carriers of these roles would itself create variation. Malinowski does allow for this by recognizing the importance of the 'social, intellectual and emotional attitudes of those present'; but apart from this, he also draws attention to the variety of purposes for which stories may be told and the difference that this variation would make to how the words of the story are understood by the listeners (1935:46 ff.). These are perceptive remarks on Malinowski's part as can be shown if we take an example from the familiar Western culture: Hamlet in the bush (Bohannan 1971) is different from Hamlet on the Elizabethan stage; and Hamlet in the modern classroom is different from both—it is a moot point how far the 'story' remains the same for these audiences. Malinowski's informal framework for the primary context takes into account many of the sources of such differences. But not having a schematic construct, he is unable to clarify how despite the identity of the contextual variables relevant to story-telling, there are likely to exist significant differences of the actual contextual configuration (Hasan 1964, 1978, 1980, 1984b) from one occasion to another. For this he can certainly be criticized, but it is wrong to suggest that his account of primary context presupposes uniformity of meaning.

Malinowski does not appear to be aware of the implications of his own comments. Although in *The Problem of Meaning* he was concerned mainly with pre-literate communities, the later work often makes comparative statements involving literate communities as well. He never seems to have recognized that at least in literate communities—and possibly also in the pre-literate ones—two outer contexts rather than one would have to be postulated: one, the context of story-creation, including two separable strands—the biographic and the artistic, and secondly the context of story-narration (Hasan 1964, 1979, 1984b). All else being equal, the greater the distance between these two outer frames the greater the difficulty in comprehension; and if this is the case, it does support Malinowski's hypothesis of the relevance of the outer context(s) to understanding the meanings of the story. Thus Palmer's contention that the postulate of an outer context implies invariance is quite without any basis; the criticism that Malinowski failed to follow his own lead is far more justified. And since the problem of invariance does not exist, the notion of secondary context could not be seen as a solution to it! Rather, the postulate of secondary context is needed in

order to account for a relationship between language and situation which is different from the primary pragmatic type of relationship. As Malinowski commented:

> In a narrative words are used with what might be called a borrowed or indirect meaning. The real context of reference has to be reconstructed by the hearers even as it is being evoked by the speaker. (Malinowski 1935:46)

It is true that, as Palmer claims, 'the context within the narrative . . . has no immediately observable status' and cannot be 'objectively defined'. So what is Malinowski's own account of this relationship?

> . . . the real meaning of words, the real capacity for visualising the contents of a narrative, are *always* derived from a personal experience, physiological, intellectual and emotional . . . *such experience is invariably connected with verbal acts.* A narrative type of utterance is, therefore, comprehensible *by the reference of the statements to past personal experiences in which words were directly embedded within the context of situation.* (italics mine) (Malinowski 1935:46)

I have claimed above that Malinowski is not a crude contextualist for whom context has to be always observable. The above extract argues that the 'invoked context' can be reconstructed *only if* the hearers have had a direct experience of the words of the story within a pragmatic context prior to encountering them in the story. The acceptance of this position does not commit one to meaning as 'concept or thought'; it simply commits one to a memory for the meaning of signs previously encountered and understood through the mediation of a pragmatic context of situation. Thus once again Palmer's criticism is not to the point. This does not mean that Malinowski's position is unassailable. There are at least two very serious objections.

It is not at all obvious to what extent the reconstructed context has to be a replica of some directly experienced context. If a close degree of resemblance is a necessary condition for the ability to comprehend the meanings of the 'narrative utterances', then the more fantastic the tale, the more problematic the Malinowskian solution. How could one account for the hearer's comprehension of Dylan Thomas' *Adventures in Skin Trade* or for Kafka's *Metamorphosis?* And we would definitely have to write off James Joyce as sheer nonsense, unless we turned our backs to Malinowski at this point. If resemblance between the reconstructed context and directly experienced context is not necessary, Malinowski's account has offered no hypothesis how the words of the narrative can be used to reconstruct a context in which they were never experienced.

Secondly, if it is true that the meanings of the narrative utterances are derived from a primary pragmatic context, it follows that stories could not be used for the learning of new meanings. In fact, Malinowski acknowledges this to be the case; having described a variety of pragmatic contexts, he goes on to add:

> . . . in such situations we have speech used in a primary, direct manner. It is from such situations that we are most likely to learn the meaning of words, *rather than from a study of derived uses of speech.* (my italics) (Malinowski 1935:46–47)

Anyone who has ever taught a foreign language knows very well that this claim is untenable. Stories can be used and are used for the teaching of new words, which, in the last resort, means for the teaching of the meanings of these words.

It is at this point that I would like to make my major criticism of Malinowski. His main fault lies in the fact that he was never able to visualize the implications of language being a system. This is, of course, not to say that he did not see language as a system—he certainly did as I have tried to argue earlier with reference to his treatment of the semantic field of garden site. He, however, did not seem to realize that the very inter-relatedness of the terms within the linguistic system acts as an advantage, once an effective entry into the system has been made. To give a very simple example, if the sign system of Urdu is a closed book to you, it does not help if I say that /tʃhori/ is synonymous with /leRki/ while /tʃora/ is an antonym to both. But if I were to add that the value and signification of /tʃhora/ covers approximately the same area as the sign *lad* does in English, the rest would be clear. Although my example assumes a foreign language learning situation, this does not affect the main point I am making here. It is this systematicity of language which also permits its use as a meta-language, permitting paraphrase, explication etc. And these too are ways of learning meaning, even though these means of learning how to mean cannot be used with the infant. It may be that having defined for himself a position which was indeed novel in linguistics—for let us not forget that *The Problem of Meaning* was first published in 1923, when Saussure was not a familiar name to even linguists—Malinowski felt impelled to single it out as the 'important unrecognized'. Further, as I pointed out earlier, Malinowski was, after all, not a linguist by training; it was only through his practice that he entered the field. Be it as it may, this failure to recognize the full implications of the systematicity of language constantly mars his statements about the relation of language to context. It is this fact, rather than his insistence on the primacy of the pragmatic function that acts as a hurdle to our complete acceptance of the Malinowskian position.

It is in keeping with this underestimation of the importance of systematicity that Malinowski never raised the question: what aspects of the context can always be reconstituted by the language of a narrative utterance—ie. a displaced text? Little wonder then that his context is not a schematic construct. Further, there is no occasion for raising the subsequent question which modern systemicists following Halliday (1970) ask: why is it that the language of a displaced text invariably permits the reconstitution of these and no other contextual phenomena? In a sense, to ask these two questions is to complete the circle of interdependence—or better still, the dialectic—between text, meaning and context.

In his introduction to *Man and Culture: an evaluation of the work of Bronislaw Malinowski,* Raymond Firth makes the following comments:

> . . . the main task Malinowski had set himself (was)—a dynamic interpretation of human behaviour in the widest range of cultural circumstances, in terms which were at once more theoretically sophisticated, and more realistic, than any then current. At that time, the tradition was that an anthropologist was primarily either a

> theoretician or an ethnographer, and that the theory should be kept separate from the facts. It was part of Malinowski's contribution, not only to combine them, but to show how fact was meaningless without theory and how each could gain in significance by being consciously brought into relation. The main theoretical apparatus which he constructed over a decade and a half has proved unable, in the end, to bear the systematic weight he wished to put upon it. But much of it is still usable, and it has given many ideas to others, often unacknowledged by them.
>
> The Malinowski legend sometimes takes an extreme form—as expressed in this student's examination answer: 'Because of his views Malinowski did not make abstractions and was at best a misguided theorist.' Such a distortion of his theoretical position ignores his keen preoccupation with methodology—and indeed his general interest in philosophical issues. (R. Firth 1957:2)

These remarks are made about Malinowski the anthropologist; but with very few alterations, they would express the position regarding Malinowski the linguist. I have attempted to show in this essay how the 'legend has taken an extreme form' in linguistics, and how 'too little attention has been paid to the work of Bronislaw Malinowski'. Unlike the authors of *Man and Culture,* I have no personal allegiance to Malinowski, but in the light of revived interest in the so-called pragmatics, it seems appropriate to point out that we gain nothing by either ignoring him or by keeping alive legends which take extreme form. The handling of the concept of context in present day speech act theory, which appears to me in no way better articulated than Malinowski's, should give us a pause if nothing else does. Even if we are willing to ignore his achievements—and these were considerable as I have argued—let us at least not ignore the real shortcomings of his position, for retracing an erroneous path with great aplomb is far less excusable than making mistakes in the very first exploration.

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