

## MALINOWSKI'S LAST WORD ON THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACH TO LANGUAGE

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### Abstract

This article reproduces an archived and previously unpublished paper by Bronislaw Malinowski entitled "The anthropological approach to language" which he delivered to a meeting of the elite Monday Night Group in the Institute of Human Relations at Yale University in November 1941. The social "context of situation" of Malinowski's seminar presentation is reconstructed together with a brief consideration of his contribution to linguistic theory. A commentary on his paper refers to Malinowski's relationship with several of his peers, including discussion of the critical reception given to the second volume of his last monograph on the Trobriand Islands, *Coral Gardens and their Magic*. Finally, the "biographical context of situation" describes Malinowski's lethally busy schedule six months before his death, referring to his other public presentations during the months of October and November 1941.

**Keywords:** Malinowski; Clark Hull; Behaviourism; Pragmatic function; Context of situation; Trobriand Islands; *Coral Gardens and their Magic*; Anthropological linguistics; Monday Night Group seminar; Institute of Human Relations; Yale.

### 1. Introduction

**1.1.** The centrepiece of this article is a previously unpublished statement by Bronislaw Malinowski on his anthropological approach to language. Delivered to a seminar at Yale University six months before he died, it appears to have been his last recorded word of any substance on the topic.<sup>1</sup> The seminar paper was neatly typed on ten numbered pages (presumably by Malinowski's private secretary as he never learned to type). Closer inspection revealed the typescript to be incomplete, so technically speaking it is a fragment - a mere 2,500 words in length, representing perhaps half of the statement its author intended. Nevertheless, it seemed worthwhile to rescue Malinowski's short and incomplete paper from the obscurity of an archive, and the reader will judge whether the text is of historical interest as the last known statement of a founding father of pragmatics.

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<sup>1</sup> The document was found among Malinowski's recently re-organized and re-catalogued papers in the Archives of the British Library of Social and Political Sciences at the London School of Economics (henceforth MPLSE) in a folder clearly labelled in Malinowski's hand: "'Semantical,' Institute of Human Relations, November 1941." The folder also contained several discussion papers by Clark L. Hull and a number of seminar schedules and related items. MPLSE 14/16.

**1.2.** Celebrated for his Trobriand monographs, his functionalist credo, and his prominence as a public intellectual, by the late 1930s Malinowski was one of the most famous anthropologists in the world. In October 1938 he had taken Sabbatical leave from the London School of Economics (LSE) where he had occupied the Chair of Social Anthropology since 1927, and sailed to America in search of a cure for his chronic rheumatism, failing eyesight, and other ailments. After being medically examined by the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, he spent several months basking in the sunshine of Tucson, Arizona, working on the book that would be posthumously published as *A Scientific Theory of Culture*. He also taught briefly at the University of Arizona and at Smith College in Massachusetts. The outbreak of war in Europe in September 1939 persuaded him to remain in the United States, and with the encouragement of the University of London he obtained a position at Yale as Bishop Museum Visiting Professor in Anthropology. He forthwith sent for his three daughters from his marriage to Elsie Masson, who had died in 1935. After prolonged agonizing, in June 1940 Malinowski married his mistress, the English painter Valetta Swann, who had joined him in America the previous year. They spent the summers of 1940 and 1941 in Mexico where Malinowski, assisted by his wife and the Mexican anthropologist Julio de la Fuente, conducted fieldwork on the market system of the Oaxaca Valley. During these two years Malinowski also travelled widely throughout the eastern states of America and the Midwest, lecturing on the menaces of nationalism, totalitarianism and war. At Yale's Graduate School, using the Socratic method he had perfected at London University, he taught courses on his theory of culture, primitive law and 'practical' anthropology. He was appointed to a permanent professorship at Yale in April 1942, a month before his death.

**1.3.** Malinowski's pioneering contributions to anthropological linguistics (specifically to ethnolinguistics, pragmatics, and the ethnography of speaking) have been absorbed into the discipline.<sup>2</sup> They were promulgated in his articles of 1920 and 1923 and elaborated at length in the second volume of his last great work on the Trobriand Islands, *Coral Gardens and their Magic* (1935). For a succinct summary of his views on language, a quotation will serve from his last *published* programmatic statement, a review of *Infant Speech* by M.M. Lewis:

If the earliest and most fundamental function of speech is pragmatic – to direct, to control and to correlate human activities – then obviously no study of speech except within the “context of situation” is legitimate. The distinction between *language* and *speech*....will have to be dropped. Language cannot remain an independent and self-contained subject of study, once we recognize that it is only the general norm of human speech activities (Malinowski 1937: 172).

It has often been said that Malinowski was more interested in speech than in language, although as this quotation indicates, it was a distinction he was disinclined to make. For him, the proper study of language was the study of speech events in their context of situation. He challenged the semantic priority of the word, believing that the

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<sup>2</sup> For appreciative accounts of Malinowski's pragmatic theory of language see Senft (1997 and 2005). J.R. Firth (1957), Langendoen (1968: Chapter 1), Robins (1971) and Szymura (1988) provide critical assessments.

most reliable unit of meaning is the sentence. In “phatic communion” words are not used to convey meaning, but rather, by their mere exchange, to fulfil the social function of “binding hearer to speaker by a tie of some social sentiment or other” (1923: 478-79). Human speech should be conceived of “as a mode of action, rather than as a counter-sign of thought” (1923: 494).<sup>3</sup> Meaning is abstracted or distilled from language use, and each occasion of use augments meaning. In short, words are as words do; and with this view he pre-empted Ludwig Wittgenstein (“ask not the meaning, ask the use”) and the Oxford philosophers of colloquial speech.<sup>4</sup> Malinowski was an arch-pragmatist – in Edmund Leach’s (1957) phrase an “obsessional empiricist,” in Jack Berry’s (1966) “an extreme contextualist” – whose concept of “context of situation” was appropriated and developed by J.R. Firth and the London School of Linguistics (e.g. J.R. Firth 1957) and fruitfully elaborated by Firth’s pupil, Michael Halliday (e.g. 1978, 1989). Until recently, however, anthropologists had found little use for this illuminating yet elusive concept (Whiteley 1966: 144).

**1.4.** In presenting Malinowski’s paper I have attempted to answer the apparently simple question: what was the context of situation in which it was delivered? Although I am unable to follow Malinowski’s own prescription to deepen that context to include “not only spoken words, but facial expression, gesture, bodily activities, the whole group of people present” (1935[2]: 22), it is possible to widen the context of situation in an historical sense. As Malinowski’s biographer, I am also concerned to situate the paper within the context of his life.

Raymond Firth, Malinowski’s first pupil and successor to his L.S.E. chair, has suggested some biographical factors in explanation of Malinowski’s approach to language. Not only was he able to converse effectively in half-a-dozen languages:

he was very conscious of the power of words as instruments, as stimuli to action as well as communicators of information. Questions of translation were often before him. To him, use of language – even when writing with the help of an amanuensis – was an active involvement in a social situation, not just a mental exercise. Hence his theory of meaning focused upon contextualization (R. Firth 1981: 131).

To this might be added the fact that his father was a distinguished folklorist, philologist and palaeographer – the “founder of Polish dialectology” no less. The son seems to have deliberately erased any memory of his influence, however, and as if in reaction to his father, Malinowski persistently chastised philologists for their preoccupation with the “pickled speech” of dead languages.<sup>5</sup> Yet his favourite boyhood tutor, Kazimierz Nitsch, was a protégé of his father at the Jagiellonian University, so

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<sup>3</sup> Another late dictum: “Social science is still burdened with the superstition that words contain their meanings” (Malinowski 1947: 86).

<sup>4</sup> Ernest Gellner asked “why the philosophers had to wait for Wittgenstein, when it was there, ready, in Malinowski? The answer must be that Wittgenstein invented his tribes while Malinowski studied them...” (1998: 149).

<sup>5</sup> “Worst of all, the typical philologist, with his firm belief that a language becomes really beautiful and instructive...when it is dead, has vitiated linguistic studies in a manner so profound that no one of us has ever completely lived down the birth trauma of his grammatical categories” (Malinowski 1935[2]: xx). His earlier invidious comparison of the Philologist’s with the Ethnographer’s point of view is just as forthright (1923: 467-68).

Malinowski's early exposure to philology and linguistics was assured (Young 2004: 13). Later he would claim that "in no other branch of Anthropology has my reading been as extensive as in Linguistics. Up to the war [i.e. 1914], I read and digested a great many theoretical books on the psychology of language and the philosophy of grammar, and I was also acquainted with the main results of comparative Indo-European linguistics" (1935[2]: xxiii).

The seminar paper we are concerned with here can be considered a narrative. "Narratives always entertain and at times instruct, but they also fulfil a more important function.... The function of speech in them is an important cultural contribution to the social order" (Malinowski 1935[2]: 47). Whether he would have regarded his oral presentation as functioning in this manner is a moot point, although he would have been alert to his audience's responses. And although we are dealing with the extra-linguistic context of situation, it is impossible to read this "last word" of Malinowski without reacting (whether with delight or scorn) to his colourful style, his bantering tone, and his calculated wit. Before presenting his paper, however, we must look closely at the circumstances of its delivery, including the "whole group of people present".

## 2. Context of situation: Time, place and personnel

**2.1.** At 6 p.m. on 10 November 1941, Bronislaw Malinowski delivered his paper to a select audience of the Rockefeller-funded Institute of Human Relations (IHR) at Yale University. The occasion was a meeting of the so-called Monday Night Group, a weekly seminar inaugurated in 1936 by psychoanalytical social psychologist John Dollard and behaviourist psychologist Clark L. Hull. The venue was the Blue Room in the large neo-Georgian building on New Haven's Cedar Street which housed the IHR – an address, incidentally, which invited mischievous comparison with Sinclair Lewis's dysfunctional medical institute on Manhattan's Cedar Street in his satirical novel *Martin Arrowsmith* (1925).

The Monday Night Group included most of the leading lights of the IHR under Mark May, its Director. May hoped that Hull's behaviourist psychology would enable the kind of interdisciplinary integration of the human sciences envisaged by the Rockefeller Foundation. Dollard, however, was a "difficult personality," anti-Semitic and highly ambitious, who "considered himself the mastermind behind May and the integrated program of the IHR" (Darnell 1990: 394). In addition to Malinowski, Hull, Dollard and May, the regular Monday evening seminar included learning psychologist Neal Miller (who had recently co-authored a book with Dollard), child psychologist Arnold Gesell, primatologist Robert Yerkes (who was said to keep a chimpanzee on the top floor of the building), psychoanalyst Earl Zinn, sociologist C.S. Ford, and anthropologists George P. Murdock, Geoffrey Gorer, and John Whiting. It is likely that these men constituted Malinowski's principal audience; others too probably attended the meeting but there is no record of their names, and there is no evidence that any linguists were present.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Most of the talented young linguists Sapir gathered around him at Yale following his appointment in 1931 had already moved on. They included Stanley Newman, Morris Swadesh, Mary Hass, Carl Voegelin, Zellig Harris, George Trager, Charles Hockett and Benjamin Whorf. After Sapir's death in 1938, a "Second School of Yale Linguistics" awaited the advent of Leonard Bloomfield. See Darnell (1990: 365f).

Perhaps on account of the broad range of social science disciplines its members represented (anthropology, sociology, and psychology in their several contemporary guises), Malinowski did not hold the Monday Night Group in very high regard. While some intellectual cross-fertilization doubtless occurred during the weekly meeting of brilliant minds, the sheer variety of viewpoints would have tended to confuse and stultify. Malinowski spoke in his letters to Valetta Swann of being frustrated and misunderstood by the Group. After an earlier seminar he had given on Monday 26 February 1940 – a performance he had felt to be “quite good” – he complained: “I did not enjoy the discussion. Most of them didn’t understand what I was driving at, and the Anthropology-Sociology group who did, failed to join in.”<sup>7</sup>

He disparaged the Group in other respects too. Some of the personal distaste he felt for Yale more generally – its stuffy conservatism, its prudery, its anti-Semitism, its colour prejudice – could be attributed to its predominantly White Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture. As an Anglicized Pole he could never fully belong to this milieu, nor would he have wanted to – mindful that Edward Sapir had been blackballed as a Jew from membership of the Graduate School and had avoided consorting altogether with the Monday Night Group. Behaviourism was anathema to Sapir.

‘Pete’ Murdock, who had replaced Sapir as chairman of the Anthropology Department, cherished a more benign view. An active member of the IHR, which financially supported his Cross-Cultural Survey, Murdock would write warmly of the profound influence upon him of the Monday Night Group: “Constant interaction with such men as John Dollard, Leonard Doob, C.S. Ford, Clark Hull, Bronislaw Malinowski, Mark May, Neal Miller, Robert Sears, John Whiting, and Earl Zinn created an intellectual environment of mutual stimulation and osmosis unparalleled at any other period of my life. As a result I came to regard myself first and foremost a behavioural scientist, though one with a speciality in anthropology” (1965: 2).<sup>8</sup>

**2.2.** Despite Malinowski’s misgivings concerning the Group, he accepted Clark Hull’s invitation to present his views on language in a seminar series arranged for that fateful autumn of 1941 – which ended so dramatically on 8 December with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour. The series focussed on “Language and Meaning” from the perspective of behaviourism, and its scope was outlined in a one-page typescript by Hull found among Malinowski’s papers. Readings recommended to the Group included Malinowski’s *Coral Gardens*, Dewey’s *Experience and Nature*, De Laguna’s *Speech: Its Function and Development*, and Willem Graff’s *Language and Languages*. Hull also listed the ‘Methods of Treatment of Subjects’ he proposed that the Group address: “(1) Psychological stress. Discussion of symbolism, bringing in language more or less directly and following Graff, Ogden & Richards; (2) General sociological approach. Talk to be based mainly on De Laguna, supplemented by Malinowski and Dewey. (3) Emphasis on fieldwork. Discussion of treatment by Malinowski.” Such was the plan of the seminar series as conceived by Clark Hull (MPLSE 14/16).

Whatever Hull’s influence on Malinowski it should be clear that it post-dated the writing of *Coral Gardens*, in which Malinowski claimed that the substance of his theory

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<sup>7</sup> Malinowski to Valetta Swann, 26 February 1940. Transcript made by Helena (Malinowska) Wayne and given to the author.

<sup>8</sup> Murdock would become best known for his creation of the Human Relations Area Files, a global ethnographic archive that grew out of the Cross-Cultural Survey he began in the mid-1930s.

of culture (as sketched in his seminal article on “Culture” for the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* in 1931) “consists in reducing Durkheimian theory to terms of Behaviouristic psychology” (1935[2]: 236). In any case, informed by his reading of the American pragmatists William James, John Dewey and George Herbert Mead, Malinowski was only ever a moderate behaviourist; he scoffed at the extreme behaviourism of J.B. Watson who promoted a science of human behaviour that purported to bypass the contents of consciousness altogether, thereby miring itself in self-contradiction.

Malinowski’s relations with Clark Hull were collegial but not particularly close – despite their being almost exactly the same age – and it is possible that he was secretly jealous of Hull’s local authority and prestige. Advising F. Creedy, a psychologist who fancied applying for an IHR fellowship, Malinowski wrote: “Professor Hull has an enormous influence in the Institute, where his work is now the dominant interest. I, on the other hand, have hardly yet obtained more than a precarious foothold, and my recommendation...carries extremely little weight.”<sup>9</sup>

Hull did not read Malinowski on language until September 1941. In that month, Geoffrey Gorer happened to recommend to him “The problem of meaning in primitive languages,” Malinowski’s Supplement to Ogden and Richards’s influential *The Meaning of Meaning*. (If Malinowski had written nothing else about language, this essay alone would have earned him a place in the history of linguistic anthropology.) From his own perspective as a dedicated behavioural psychologist, Clark Hull was greatly impressed. He wrote immediately to Malinowski:

Very rarely in my life have I obtained such a thrill, satisfaction, and genuine illumination as was given on the reading of your “supplement”. I am convinced that material of that nature has immediate and profound implications for the approach which the Institute of Human Relations is now pursuing. I was also particularly struck by the completeness of the harmony existing between this statement of your position and that which had been arrived at more or less independently by the Institute group. I say more or less because it is more than likely that the influence of your work has reached people like myself in numerous ways so indirect in nature that the original source of the influence is not clearly evident.<sup>10</sup>

Malinowski’s response to this remarkable tribute is not on record, but it entailed the rapid despatch to Hull of a complementary copy of *Coral Gardens and their Magic*.

Malinowski’s contribution to the seminar, “The anthropological approach to language,” was not especially technical and he did not engage directly with Hull’s Stimulus-Response learning theory – at least not in the surviving part of the paper reproduced here. In theoretical and methodological terms the paper does not say anything which he had not said in one form or another before, notably in “The problem of meaning in primitive languages” and in the second volume of *Coral Gardens*. But Malinowski does say it in a fresh, invigorating and entertaining manner, and befitting an oral presentation the fragment contains some witty allusions to persons present or to well-known contemporaries. Malinowski always sought to entertain as well as to instruct.

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<sup>9</sup> Malinowski to F. Creedy, 27 October 1941. MPLSE 13/14. A couple of years earlier Malinowski had written a “Foreword” to a semi-popular book by Creedy (1939: i-ii).

<sup>10</sup> Hull to Malinowski, 11 October 1941. MPLSE 14/16.

### 3. "The Anthropological Approach to Language," by Bronislaw Malinowski.<sup>11</sup>

#### 3.1. *The problem of meaning for the ethnographer*

*At our last meeting John Dollard, quoting John the Evangelist, told us with some misgivings that "in the beginning was the word". Johann von Goethe, one of the earlier behaviorists, spent some time and took some pains to show that "in the beginning was the deed".<sup>12</sup> As a matter of fact an even earlier behaviorist, the anonymous writer of the Genesis, proved beyond doubt and cavil that deeds preceded words and that the earliest activity was only symbolic in so far as it was creative. You may remember the picture of the primeval chaos with the spirit of God floating over the soup. God did not start talking, or, taking the chronicler at his word, even mumbling into his whiskers. He rolled up his sleeves and created the world. This obviously was not achieved by idle chatter or gossip, but was as neat a piece of behavior as any white rat in a cage has ever achieved. Professor Clark Hull's best-made robot or Professor Yerkes' chimpanzee could not have behaved more behavioristically than did the Great Spirit floating for such an infinity of pre-behavioristic eons over the strictly entropic waters of chaos.*

*Having thus proved from the theological point of view that the approach to language has to be strictly behavioristic, I shall now turn to that near approach to godliness, the anthropologist. I am taking him in his active, that is, behavioristic role, in his role of ethnographic field-worker.*

*To the field-worker the native language on which he works and through which he accomplishes his research is a tool and source of indispensable documentation, and also an aspect of culture which has to be studied in its own right.<sup>13</sup> It has to be studied, recorded, and presented to the readers who have never used that primitive language and never lived in its culture. Taking language as an ethnographic instrument, it is first necessary to point out that it must be an instrument of precision. The ethnographer has to ask questions, and he has to ask them not merely intelligently, but also competently. Unless and until he speaks the language with the same fluency and the same fine feeling for the shades of meaning which obtain among his informants, he will destroy all his linguistic data in the very act of procuring them. In short, he must be able to crack jokes and laugh with the natives at their witticisms and wisecracks.<sup>14</sup> He must be able to swear in the native tongue, to appreciate and even competently to tell an obscene story; to express friendly feelings as well as annoyance and reproof [sic], and to know the mot juste in any type of native conversation with the same certainty of touch as was*

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<sup>11</sup> The American spelling of the original TS has been retained.

<sup>12</sup> Goethe's Faust debated with himself:

'Tis writ, "In the beginning was the Word."

I pause, to wonder what is here inferred.

The Word I cannot set supremely high:

I new translation I will try.

[.....]

The spirit comes to guide me in my need,

I write, "In the beginning was the Deed" (1949: 71).

<sup>13</sup> Malinowski (1935[2]: 4).

<sup>14</sup> On telling "coarse jokes" in the Trobriands, see Malinowski (1967: 272), and Senft (1985).

necessary to a brilliant conversationalist in a Parisian salon, or as is being ever accomplished in Mid-Western sociological writings (I don't think).<sup>15</sup> It will be implicit throughout the whole argument of this paper that both fluency and precision can be obtained not by reading the grammars, dictionaries, and texts of the native language, which incidentally are not forthcoming, but by living native life and using the vernacular in this existence. The ethnographer learning a pre-literate language becomes aware through his own toils how much living speech is a matter of synchronizing action and symbolism rather than pouring the introspective contents of consciousness out of one vessel into another.

Language is also an indispensable ethnographic document.<sup>16</sup> The field-worker, competent enough to learn the language fluently, and patient enough to collect such texts as magical formulae, myth, folk tales, narratives and conversations, can throw invaluable side lights on primitive behavior and on certain fundamental bearings in this behavior. It has also been the practice of ethnography, ancient and modern, to collect what are usually called the crucial concepts of a native language and to present them as ethnographic data, giving us the picture of "native ideas," "native concepts," and "native belief".<sup>17</sup> I may mention, for instance, the enormous amount of painstaking if not always accurate research made into the kinship terminologies of pre-literate people.<sup>18</sup> The so-called classificatory terms of kinship have been used in ethnography to reconstruct primitive forms of marriage and the family, and to indicate certain sociological characteristics of domestic and clan organization the world over. Here, however, the main semantic problem has seldom been clearly perceived, hence competently observed and correctly recorded. The ethnographer notes that the term roughly corresponding to the English word "mother" is applied not to one person but to an extensive group defined by their relations to the woman who gave birth to the speaker. The crucial linguistic and sociological problem would be to a behaviorist, I suggest, as it has been to me personally: Is the term "mother" applied to all these people with the same meaning? And directly out of this arises the question: What do we mean by meaning? As soon we shall hear, meaning must be defined not in terms of what happens in a native's mind. Obviously we cannot observe the native's mind except as a construct from his behavior. Hence our problem of meaning could be phrased: Are there any characteristics of human behavior which allow us to distinguish between the differential uses of the word "mother" to implement our distinctions into well-documented observations and to record those observations so that they give objective and palpable distinctions of fact?

Another type of word which has played an enormous part in the ethnographic practice of observation and theory, of hypothesis-mongering and guesswork, is the word referring to crucial concepts of belief and ritual. I mean such words as *mana*, *atua*, *tapu*, *manitu*, *nagual*, *totem* and a host of others referring to all sorts of spirits, souls, demons, devil-devils, magical substances or entities, or what-not. The word "mana", for instance, had been originally reported as a term harboring so many meanings and shades that it lent itself to a beautiful theory about primitive Melanesians, who have almost anticipated the latest discoveries of the electro-magnetic field in an all-

<sup>15</sup> This sarcastic aside seems to have been directed against the verbosity of the Chicago School.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Malinowski (1935[2]: 6).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Malinowski (1935[2]: 20).

<sup>18</sup> The "kinship algebra" of Rivers and his followers was Malinowski's particular *bête noire*; see, for example, Malinowski (1930) and (1935[2]: 65).



*pervading ether and principles of a highly developed electro-magnetic relativity. What happened here, however, was that good old Bishop Codrington noted down some twenty-seven distinct homonymous and metaphorical uses of the same term, not distinguishing by context, social settings, type of occasion, and character of narrative.<sup>19</sup> He thus introduced a considerable amount of confusion into his data and launched a bevy of social psychologists, philosophers, theologians, and psychoanalysts into the wild goose-chase of primitive pre-animalistic metaphysics.*

*In order to make this point clear, let me invoke that useful control figment, the ethnographer from Mars who would come here and study the anthropology of the natives of Anglo-Saxonry with linguistic documentation.<sup>20</sup> He might, for instance, note that the word God is used to denote a mythological being all-powerful, omniscient and ubiquitous, who is worshipped by the natives. "This word is also used as an expletive with powerful evil connotations, especially by people drunk, infuriated, or otherwise physiologically disturbed. It is an important economic concept for one branch of the Anglo-Saxon tribe, the English, always speak about the dollar being the American God. I was not able to ascertain whether the words 'God' and 'dollar' are interchangeable, but they are certainly identified in the native psychology. The word expresses astonishment as in 'good God,' fury in 'God damn you,' affection and devotion, 'God be with you'. It is thus a very vague and indistinct term covering all human emotions, all principles of good and evil, and all situations from those of most serious worship to most ribald revelry." We see thus how the word "God" in Martian anthropology could be perfectly well used to construct a pre-animistic psychology among our own tribe, even as the word "mana" was the basis of similar speculations among primitive Melanesians.*

*When an ethnographer finds three words corresponding roughly to the English word for "soul" he delights in establishing fundamental distinctions and endows a primitive tribe with three definite souls. Our Martian studying ourselves might report no less than seven souls, or many more if he were using Roget's Thesaurus. "The natives of the Anglo-Saxon tribe distinguish between spirit, soul, ghost, spook, and conscience. A new mystical sect with a highly developed ritual and a new revolutionary belief have tried to abolish all this, indeed to kill it by magical rites which in this tribe are called scientific discussion, and have introduced instead two new entities called 'the subconscious' and 'libido'.<sup>21</sup> Another segment of the tribe, however, reject all soul-stuff contemptuously and replace it by a new word, 'robot,' which seems to correspond to some primitive concepts of a being animated by magical incantations. The head magician of this subsection is, according to my observations, a man called Clark Hull, and he has been enthroned in a little temple, surrounded by esoteric rites of initiation and transition, known as the Blue Room. The Blue Room is mystically connected with two totemic animals, the white rat and the chimpanzee, and with a plant totem of the cedar tree; while an extensive totemic mythology is being elaborated to establish the essential totemic affinity between certain human groups on the one hand and white rats,*

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<sup>19</sup> Robert Henry Codrington was an Oxford-trained Anglican missionary whose pioneering ethnography of Melanesia (1891) was immensely influential among armchair anthropologists of the era (Stocking 1995: 34-46).

<sup>20</sup> Malinowski previously used the trope of "the ethnographer from Mars" in *The Sexual Life of Savages*, his satirical target there being the sexual morality of the English middle-classes (1932: 426-27).

<sup>21</sup> He is referring, of course, to the psychoanalytical dogmas of Freud and his disciples.

*chimpanzees, and guinea pigs on the other.*<sup>22</sup> *Those who subscribe to this mythology describe themselves as behaviorists, although various other terms have been applied to them by those who do not belong to the sect.” These brief examples might put us on our guard against readily taking the testimony of isolated lexicographical units in predicating about what happens in the native mind, in the native conscience, or native libido.*

*And this brings us to the third point: language as an aspect of culture.*<sup>23</sup> *I shall try to show that language is an integral factor of human behavior, that meaning is nothing else but the stimulus function of sounds and other symbols in concerted human behavior. The function of language as narrative can only be understood if we relate the narrative to the occurrences which are narrated. The ethnographer who studies language outside of the context of active behavior will always bring home fictitious irrelevancies. Primitive languages do not live on paper. Indeed our own language though recorded on paper acquires significance only when referred to the context of experience from which the pages of a book derive their definition of the terms and the significance of their phrases. A textbook of physics has its real context in the laboratory. The avid reader of a detective story is made to follow his Sherlock Holmes, his Poirot, or his Lord Peter into scenes and situations largely familiar, and then is thrilled into attention by events not known perhaps from personal experience but readily reconstructed from elements of ordinary experience.*<sup>24</sup> *The ethnographer who wishes to give his readers a real life-size picture of a native language cannot do it merely by a dictionary, a grammar, and a collection of texts. He must guide the intelligent reader first through the activities to which the texts and the grammatical incidents refer. Only from such data of vicarious but faithfully reproduced experience can the reader then understand the pragmatic meaning of linguistic elements. Even so does the physicist acquire the meaning of certain new concepts and new terms when he follows the description of those experiments which have revealed new phenomena, and better still does he understand them, of course, if he can re-enact the experiments in his own laboratory.*

*No doubt you will ask how it is that we have many vocabularies of native tongues prepared by missionary, administrator, or traveler. What is the value of the grammars, Melanesian, Australian, Papuan, American Indian? My answer to this is that in matter of principle all linguistic work which treats language as a self-contained universe must suffer and does suffer from a fundamental semantic deficiency. Unless each and every language has a very clear-cut common measure of significance in lexicographic units, that is words; in grammatical instruments or categories; and in the manner in which the context of situation is related to speech – unless this be the case, no language different from our own can be translated or brought home, or made real by affixing signs of equation to its elements and tacking our own words or grammatical categories to them. The rough and ready vocabularies and grammars which we know from literature are very useful to those white people who want a rough and ready*

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<sup>22</sup> The totemic animals attributed to Clark Hull and his laboratory co-workers were experimental creatures whose behaviour the scientists were trying to understand. The cedar tree totem presumably alludes to the Institute’s address on Cedar Street.

<sup>23</sup> See Malinowski (1935[2]: ix; 21).

<sup>24</sup> Malinowski was indeed an “avid reader” of British detective fiction, though it is arguable whether his American audience would have been such fans of the three named protagonists of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie and Dorothy Sayers.

*knowledge of the vernacular in order to impose European ideas on the natives. The missionary, for instance, aims primarily at the suppression of native belief and the establishment of a new type of worship, mythology, and ethics. Sometimes he prefers to embody English, French, or German words directly into native speech. Expressions like *godo, godi, goda, godu; like satana, satani etc.; sacramento, or sacramenta; and many others are current in native languages. Mexican Indians, whether they speak Yaqui or Zapotec, Nahuan or Huitzil, use exclusively Spanish expressions for all theological concepts, all sacraments, and most moral ideas. The ethnographer's approach to language is diametrically opposed to that of the practical preacher, administrator, or trader.*<sup>25</sup> He does not try to get across his own ideas to the natives. Instead, his main interest is to understand and to describe native modes of behavior, of which linguistic activity is as important as any other.*

### **3.2. The Berlitz School in the Bush**

*From all this it is clear that in my attempt to show how the ethnographer acquires an effective control over the vernacular, I shall principally deal with the central problem. This problem in my opinion is the establishment of meaning not by short-cuts which necessarily must be false and misleading, but by relating language as a symbolic activity to its pragmatic contexts. Short-cuts which are essentially false are, first and foremost, the use of native interpreters in translating their own words into English, Pidgin or otherwise garbled. An equally false short-cut is any attempt to find Latin cases, Greek tenses or moods, or the syntactic devices of Sanskrit in a language which is not culturally akin to these tongues. As long as the linguistically interested ethnographer tries to solve his problems on paper and on paper alone, he will at the end of his toils be always faced with the problem: How do you know that a native sound is even roughly equivalent to your English word? The answer can only be found by implementing the fundamental principle, "a word is as a word does," into a systematic attempt to master the language practically and to define it theoretically.*

## **4. Commentary**

**4.1.** Unfortunately Malinowski's typescript ends at this point, palpably incomplete. We can only speculate what he might have written under the heading "The Berlitz School in the Bush," but it is likely that he would have extolled the "look, listen and learn" contextual method of language-learning. He might even have reprised an account given to the Psychological Society in London on 24 November 1935, of which the following is an extract from his lecture notes:

In learning my Trobriand language I found that I acquired it rather as a child does; I learnt a few words and then these began to multiply. I did not use the academic approach which is summed up by "Language expresses mental processes". I was unable to get inside the mental processes of the natives. I had to learn to behave like the native in personal and social intercourse. Through this I learned how they think, day-dream. I

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<sup>25</sup> "The needs of the Anthropologist are entirely different, and so must be his methods" (Malinowski 1935[2]: xx).

learned the language by a pragmatic approach to being rather than by merely getting the contents. But this is not the usual anthropological approach.<sup>26</sup>

What he said above concerning “how the ethnographer acquires an effective control over the vernacular” and the need to avoid “short-cuts” had been dealt with in an entirely different manner by Margaret Mead in “Native languages as field-work tools,” published in *American Anthropologist* two years earlier (Mead 1939). She had even advocated the use of interpreters and other short-cuts (“half learning is a time saving device” when it came to memorizing special vocabularies). The main thread of her argument was that there were differing degrees of linguistic proficiency appropriate to different ethnographic tasks. Minimum speaking demands for an ethnographer were (1) the need to ask questions correctly and idiomatically; (2) the need to establish rapport; (3) the need to give instructions (1939: 203). These fell far short of Malinowski’s prescriptions, and he would have been particularly irked by her contention that “using the native language” need not imply a fluent command of the vernacular, and that for many ethnographic purposes “linguistic virtuosity” was unnecessary. Mead even deprecated “an undue premium on virtuosity;” anthropologists should accept that “language is a tool, not a feather in one’s cap” (1939: 196).

It would be surprising if Malinowski had not taken this opportunity to rebuke Mead for her advocacy of relaxed standards of linguistic competence for ethnographers. He would have been aware that his old friend Robert Lowie of Berkeley had published an indignant response to Mead’s pejorative use of “virtuosity” by vigorously defending the “Horse-and-Buggy Ethnographers” who strived for “virtuosity” on principle against the “Stream-Lined Ethnographers” who renounced “virtuosity” as superfluous (Lowie 1940). It is enough to note that the issue was still in contention in 1941.

**4.2.** “When incidents are told or discussed among a group of listeners,” Malinowski wrote, “there is, first, the situation of the 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” (1923: 475). His practice was somewhat at variance with his theory, however, and he is unlikely to have believed that the most important function of his seminar narrative was “integrative” rather than to convey his ruminations on the anthropological approach to language.

A noteworthy feature Malinowski’s paper is the indirect way in which he satirizes various “sects” or “cults” of the Anglo-Saxon tribe – Christianity, Psychoanalysis and Behaviourism – by putting observations into the mouth of a Martian anthropologist. Although he was born into the Roman Catholic faith of his Polish homeland, Malinowski had publically declared his agnosticism throughout his career and he took a mischievous delight in poking fun at believers. Given the prevailing Christian milieu of Yale University and its predominantly WASP ethos, lampooning orthodox religion would have seemed deliberately provocative.<sup>27</sup> In this light his

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<sup>26</sup> TS entitled “Speech and Mental Processes” in MPLSE 5/23.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. President Charles Seymour’s exhortation in his Inaugural Address of 16 October 1937 : “I call on all members of the faculty, as members of a thinking body, freely to recognize the tremendous validity and power of the teachings of Christ in our life-and-death struggle against the forces of selfish materialism.” (Cited by Buckley 1951).

satirical use of the Martian ethnographer when exploring the semantic fields of the English lexemes “God” and “Soul” appears to have been subversive in intention rather than “integrative” in creating “new bonds”.

We do not know how members of the Monday Night Group responded to “the emotional appeal of the words” of Malinowski’s paper (nor for that matter how they responded, at an earlier meeting, to seeing Neal Miller’s trained rat respond to his shouted command to “JUMP!”). We do know, however, that on the Monday following Malinowski’s presentation John Whiting delivered a paper to the Group, making “further use of the idea of context”; and we do know that Clark Hull’s paper to the Group on 24 November was unappetizingly titled “Words and their contexts as stimulus aggregates in action evocation”. He referred to Malinowski’s address in his opening remarks, noting “the importance of the physical context in the action evoked by spoken words,” before going on to cite the doyen of Chicago linguists Leonard Bloomfield (MPLSE 14/16).

All of which indicates that *some* of Malinowski’s spoken words had *some* pragmatic effect by eliciting *some* action on the part of at least *some* members of the Monday Group.

**4.3.** It is curious that for all his advocacy of a behaviourist approach to language, in none of Malinowski’s published writings did he refer to his contemporary Bloomfield – a compliment the latter returned by omitting any reference to Malinowski in the several editions of his influential textbook *Language*. Perhaps it was not so curious, given that Bloomfield was ushering American linguists towards an independent discipline of descriptive-structural grammatical and phonological studies – a discipline that shunned semantics and the study of language in its cultural context. Bloomfield delegated semantics to psychology, and in his impoverished, scientific view of linguistics ethnography was the loser (see Senft 2009: 8).

This touches the issue of the disparagement of Malinowski’s theory by American linguists until the re-discovery, a generation later, of ethnolinguistics and the ethnography of speaking. The general consensus was that Malinowski lacked adequate linguistic training. His own claims for *Coral Gardens and their Magic* were modest enough: “the book is mainly descriptive and not theoretical...[not] even a descriptive work dealing with the language of the Trobriand Islands, but only a linguistic commentary to an ethnographic work on agriculture” (1935[2]: xxiii). He was not interested in phonology, nor in historical grammar, only in semantics. Although his reputation among professional linguists has largely rested upon their reading of this monumental work, there were earlier critics of his ethnographically focussed approach.

One such critic was Jaime de Angulo (Sapir’s maverick pupil and Kroeber’s bohemian *bête noire*), with whom Malinowski had enjoyed obscene swearing contests during his visit to Berkeley in 1926.<sup>28</sup> De Angulo was offended by Malinowski’s impatience with “formal” linguistics. “Language, to me, is a problem of form, of nothing but form,” he told him in 1929. He agreed that Malinowski’s application of linguistics to ethnology was valuable, an approach “requiring a technique especially adapted to its own problem, a technique, for instance, like the one you have developed.

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<sup>28</sup> See Brightman (2004).

But essentially a different department from that of linguistics proper.”<sup>29</sup> In a later undated letter to “you dear foul-mouthed son-of-a-bitch,” Jaime warned Malinowski off linguistics altogether: “You never will understand anything about linguistics. You are an anthropologist. You can’t help it....You are interested in culture. And you are damned good at it, too!” Malinowski rudely pencilled on the bottom of the letter “*Hijo de puta*”.<sup>30</sup>

## 5. The fate of *Coral Gardens*

**5.1.** It is difficult to assess how well known Malinowski’s last great work on the Trobriands had become by October 1941, six years after its publication. Although it had been widely and quite favourably reviewed, it had sold few copies – a “failure” which Malinowski attributed to his publisher’s poor marketing performance, notwithstanding its charming title. In truth, at two guineas (42 shillings) it was relatively expensive, and many anthropologists would have thought twice about investing in a two-volume work they would probably never read from cover to cover. Audrey Richards, Malinowski’s most cherished pupil, would write, not unfairly:

*Coral Gardens and their Magic*, a book which is often decried, but evidently not often read, had gone to the furthest limit of institutional study by means of correlating one set of activities, in this case agricultural institutions, with the whole.... It was a *tour de force* but it was not practical politics to repeat such an experiment (Richards 1957: 27).

Although something of an orphan, therefore, of all his books it was Malinowski’s personal favourite, having cost him the most time, effort and expense in research assistance. Despite the almost insuperable difficulties he had to overcome, not only in writing it and compiling its many intricate parts, but also in having it typeset, proofread, indexed, printed and published. When the photographs were mislaid by the publisher, Malinowski became convinced that there was “a sort of diabolic conspiracy of fate against the book”.<sup>31</sup> Although he dedicated it to his wife Elsie, another malign stroke of fate brought about her death just weeks before he could present it to her.<sup>32</sup>

**5.2.** *Coral Gardens* was reviewed worldwide by a score of newspapers, mostly in a positive if cursory fashion. An anonymous reviewer for *The Listener* of London, while admiring the “meticulous exactness,” “scientific honesty,” and “astonishing skill” of the author in weaving together the factual material of Trobriand ethnography, seemed puzzled whether it was necessary to go to such lengths to prove that language is “useful” and believed that the second volume was “hardly to be recommended to the general reader”.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> De Angulo to Malinowski, 24 April 1929. MPY I/21.

<sup>30</sup> De Angulo to Malinowski, n.d. MPY I/21. Malinowski’s theory of swearing (which he likened to the utterance of magical spells) is worthy of a paper in itself.

<sup>31</sup> Malinowski to Furth of Allen & Unwin, 16 March 1935. MPLSE 36/7.

<sup>32</sup> See Wayne (1996: 231).

<sup>33</sup> *The Listener*, 11 March 1936.

Of the academic reviewers, émigré sociologist Karl Mannheim was one of the few to give serious consideration to the second volume sufficient to grasp Malinowski's analytical intention: "...the idea of context is nothing but the linguistic application of the functional method...speech reveals its full meaning only if we grasp its function in the actual circumstances of its utterance". From his own perspective of the sociology of knowledge, Mannheim found the idea of context fruitful: "the nature of knowledge is nearly always determined by the nature of the social situation".<sup>34</sup>

Anthropologist A.M. Hocart delivered a more hostile review in *Nature* (the prestigious British science journal that had published so many of Malinowski's own articles and reviews during the previous decades). Hocart declared that Malinowski was "a linguist by nature, not by duty alone," and after bestowing some bland praise for having tackled a neglected subject, he complained: "Unfortunately, our impatience to get to grips with these momentous facts [of Trobriand agriculture] is continually delayed by long sermons on method and on language in general." Conciseness "is the very last art to be practiced by Professor Malinowski. He is too anxious to get every one of his ideas across to the reader. After very properly denouncing 'the false conception of language as a means of transferring ideas from the head of the speaker to that of the listener' [1935(2): 9] he struggles through two volumes (not to mention earlier ones) to transfuse into the reader every thought and experience he has had in the Trobriands and since...." Hocart concluded sourly: "We are overwhelmed as in the drawing-room of a brilliant but masterful hostess, who has invited us to meet a most interesting set of people, but who so monopolizes the conversation that we can scarcely get a word with the guests."<sup>35</sup>

In February 1940 Malinowski was gratified to hear from an old LSE colleague, the polymath Lancelot Hogben, who had become Regis Professor of Natural History at Aberdeen University. The best-selling author of *Mathematics for the Million* (1936) and *Science for the Citizen* (1938) was currently editing another popular sequel to be called *The Loom of Language*. Although not a linguist, Hogben believed himself qualified to pronounce on the subject and warmly commended Malinowski for his essay on Kiriwina particles (1920) and his supplement to *The Meaning of Meaning* (1923). On reading them he "felt as though a cool clean breeze had blown over the whole subject". He added: "Seriously I think what you say about the overflow of morphological units, syntactical categories, phatic communion...is the most damned intelligent contribution to linguistics of our time."<sup>36</sup> In reply Malinowski confirmed that his linguistic contribution was "so to speak, my favourite spiritual offspring and one which has been least appreciated by linguists and philologists". He directed Hogben to the second volume of *Coral Gardens*, "the place where I have said most clearly and fully what I have to say about semantics, and I think you would find it even more to the point than some of my previous attempts". As for Sapir (about whom Hogben had enquired), he was "a really intelligent man, both as an anthropologist and as a linguist," though his approach to semantics was "as formalistic and, in my opinion, sterile as anything which has been written by the philologists". The only "intelligent efforts" besides those of de Laguna, Dewey, and G.H. Mead, he maintained, were "contained in some of the

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<sup>34</sup> *Man*, vol.36, November 1936, pp.195-6.

<sup>35</sup> *Nature* 11 January 1936, pp.46-8.

<sup>36</sup> Hogben to Malinowski, 4 February 1940. MPLSE 36.

behaviouristic approaches, which, however, are mostly written in unintelligible American".<sup>37</sup>

**5.3.** As far as I am aware *Coral Gardens* was never reviewed by any contemporary professional linguists. A notable omission in the list of anthropology journals that reviewed it was *American Anthropologist*. Scandalously, the review copy languished for five years in the possession of at least three different potential reviewers before Carl Voegelin expressed an interest in reviewing it. Like the others, however, he ultimately failed to deliver. Initially he was flushed with enthusiasm, telling Malinowski that if his review proved to be too long for *American Anthropologist* he would submit it to *Language*.<sup>38</sup> Voegelin had followed Sapir to Yale, but by 1940 he was at DePauw University and it was from there that he wrote to Malinowski to say that he would also like to work on some of his Trobriand texts "and try to state your semantic theory in my own words".<sup>39</sup> Malinowski duly replied, sending Voegelin a set of unpublished Trobriand texts with interlinear translations, and saying he welcomed the prospect of an article on his semantic theory, though he would prefer to see it published in *American Anthropologist*. He encouraged Voegelin, twenty-two years his junior, by flattering him in turn:

I have a shrewd idea that you would not only be rendering me a substantial service in interpreting what I personally regard, perhaps, as my most important contribution to the study of culture, but that also it might be of some importance for the establishment of yourself as perhaps the only competent American semanticist. I am using this last word not in the philosophical sense, but as a legitimate specialization in linguistics.<sup>40</sup>

Voegelin responded with even more enthusiasm: "Your lexical and text material overwhelm me." He was transferring the lexical material onto index cards ("without which Americanists cannot think") and would copy the texts before returning the material. He proposed to use it in a seminar at the Linguistic Institute's summer school at Ann Arbor, and he had decided to wait until the seminar was over before writing the paper for *American Anthropologist*. The title he had in mind was "Form, content, and Malinowski: a semantic theory"; presumably he intended this to serve in lieu of the promised review of *Coral Gardens*.<sup>41</sup> Another letter informed Malinowski that lexical entries from the Trobriand texts had been compiled on a total of 1500 index cards – an unambiguous indication of Voegelin's commitment to the project. The research appeared to falter, however, when Voegelin amplified his ambition and his article threatened to expand into a book. He nevertheless assured Malinowski: "I am still making notes for an eventual paper on your method of merging translation and ethnography until the boundaries between the two evaporate."<sup>42</sup>

In mid-August, when Malinowski was immersed in his Mexican fieldwork, Voegelin wrote from Ann Arbor to tell him that others wanted to continue work on the

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<sup>37</sup> Malinowski to Hogben, 13 March 1940. MPLSE 36.

<sup>38</sup> Voegelin to Malinowski, 3 February 1940. MPLSE 13/5.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. Malinowski published 98 texts and 44 magical formulae in *Coral Gardens*; his archive was estimated by Pisarkowa to contain about 200 unpublished ones (2000: 317).

<sup>40</sup> Malinowski to Voegelin, 4 March 1940. MPLSE 13/5.

<sup>41</sup> Voegelin to Malinowski, 29 March 1940. MPLSE 13/5.

<sup>42</sup> Voegelin to Malinowski, 12 April 1940. MPLSE 13/5.



unpublished Trobriand texts while he, Voegelin, engaged in a spell of fieldwork among the Ojibwa. The results of the recent seminar were "too extensive to describe in a letter" and he would report to Malinowski in person in December when he hoped they would meet at the annual American Anthropological Association meeting in Philadelphia. He hoped also to present a paper there on his work.<sup>43</sup>

Voegelin failed to deliver on this promise, too, as neither he nor Malinowski seem to have attended that meeting. Having spent several months studying the Trobriand texts and Malinowski's "semantic theory," Voegelin appears to have exhausted his interest in them. That same August, when Murdock was soliciting testimonials for Malinowski with a view to his permanent appointment at Yale, he wrote to Voegelin for his considered views on Malinowski's linguistic work. Voegelin's confidential reply damned him with faint praise: "As a contributor to cultural anthropology," he told Murdock, "I feel Malinowski belongs to the history rather than to the future of the subject."<sup>44</sup>

Of course, Malinowski would have been blissfully unaware of this dismissive statement. A right of reply was also denied him, when, six years after his death, Voegelin and Zellig Harris published 'The scope of linguistics' in the *American Anthropologist*. In a footnote extending over three pages they comprehensively criticized his methodology. Although *Coral Gardens and their Magic* "exhibits a programmatic interest in ethno-linguistics which is on the whole good and in part brilliant," they judged, Malinowski "makes a futile attempt to integrate non-verbal and verbal aspects of Trobriand Islands culture: futile, perhaps, because the integration is attempted without knowledge of Trobriand linguistic structure" (Voegelin & Harris 1947).<sup>45</sup> That Malinowski was deficient in technical expertise in descriptive linguistics was well-known in the profession, at least in America, and he received little credit for being the only British anthropologist of the interwar period who contributed significantly to linguistic theory. Yet his work continues to inspire linguists in the present generation, as the Trobriand studies of Gunter Senft and Krystyna Pisarkowa amply testify.

## **6. Biographical context of situation**

Widening the temporal context of Malinowski's seminar paper, his correspondence of the weeks before and after he delivered it reveals a typically hectic professional and social regime. He and Valetta had returned to New Haven from their fieldtrip to Oaxaca on 7 October after a particularly harrowing journey. Having barely recovered from a spell of sickness in Mexico City, Valetta was obliged to drive their Ford to Laredo through thick mountain mists over muddy roads churned by heavy rain. Malinowski could not drive, but that did not prevent him giving generous advice to hapless drivers. Arriving in New Haven several days late for the beginning of the Yale teaching session, Malinowski commenced his weekly seminars on Wednesday 8 October. He soon fell into the routine of teaching at Yale mid-week followed by regular visits to New York to conduct evening classes at the New School of Social Research, to spend time with his

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<sup>43</sup> Voegelin to Malinowski, 14 August 1940. MPLSE 13/5.

<sup>44</sup> Voegelin to Murdock, 30 August 1940. DAPYU.

<sup>45</sup> Two years earlier Voegelin and Harris had published a general article on linguistics and ethnology (1945) in which they omitted all mention of Malinowski.

best friend, Tracy Kittredge of the Rockefeller Foundation, and to see one or more of his three daughters: Józefa was at Vassar College, Wanda at a school of dress design, and Hetty at the Dalton School. He would return to New Haven late on Friday evening or early Monday morning.

The pace picked up in November, despite frequent complaints of feeling “under the weather” since his return from Mexico. On Thursday 6 November he attended a “supper meeting” of the New Haven Chapter of the Committee to Defend America. Malinowski had expended much time and energy during the previous two years – ever since Hitler’s army invaded his Polish homeland in September 1939 – lecturing and ‘propagandizing’ on behalf of the European allies fighting Nazi Germany. At last he was beginning to see the weakening of isolationism and a shift in popular opinion towards intervention in favour of the allies. He was also gathering material and drafting parts of the book that he would assemble during the first months of 1942 – his posthumously published *Freedom and Civilization*. Malinowski’s letter to the Secretary of the local Chapter of the Committee to Defend America summarizes the view he had been presenting in his public lectures. He told her:

As a British subject, born and brought up in Poland, I obviously am as keenly interested in the fullest participation of the U.S.A. in the war. I also believe firmly that it is in the fullest interest of American civilization, U.S.A. democracy, and the human interest of all individuals that this country should not follow the isolationist course which seems based either on faulty facts or on faulty arguments.<sup>46</sup>

He was becoming well known for his advocacy of this position, having put it forcefully in an interview with Eleanor Kittredge (Tracy’s journalist wife) that was published prominently in the Sunday Magazine of *The New York Times* on 12 October. In October, too, Malinowski had begun to involve himself in organizations of Polish émigrés and refugees who were increasing their cultural and political profiles in America. His pupil from Cracow, Feliks Gross, whom he had helped to enter the country, was based in New York and becoming a prominent participant in such movements.

On Friday 7 November, the day after the meeting of the Committee to Defend America, Malinowski addressed an open meeting of the Yale Sociology Club which had been convened to discuss the role of propaganda in education; he differentiated sharply between the propaganda of Nazi Germany and those of the Western democracies.<sup>47</sup> That weekend, 8-9 November, he presumably managed to draft and dictate his paper for the imminent Monday Night Group on the 10th, though he also found time to play host to visiting émigré anthropologists, Julius and Eva Lips from Leipzig. Clearly, anthropological linguistics was not a subject uppermost in his mind at this moment.

In addition to his schedule of teaching at Yale, other engagements, some of them involving trips to New York on what he called “matters of crude business,” occupied the following weeks. Most notably, on Sunday 23 November he read a paper to a day-long centenary symposium on William James convened by the Conference on Methods in Philosophy and Science of the New School of Social Research in New York City.

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<sup>46</sup> Malinowski to Mrs P. LeCompte, Secretary, 20 October 1941. MPLSE 13/10. Of Malinowski’s four publications this year, two were concerned with war (1941a; 1941b).

<sup>47</sup> “Propaganda, education and their relation.” Program of the Yale Sociology Club, 7 November 1941. MPLSE 14/14.

The subject chosen for the symposium was James's essay "The Moral Equivalent of War," and the handwritten draft of Malinowski's contribution indicates that he had amassed a sheaf of relevant extracts and quotations (MPLSE 22/14).

The day after this event, Malinowski returned to Yale in time for Clark Hull's presentation to the Monday Night Group. The following afternoon, Tuesday 25 November, Valetta drove Malinowski to Hartford, Connecticut, where he delivered a lecture entitled "The Democratic Principle in Human Evolution" at Hartford Junior College. He had lectured there once before and become friendly with the Dean, Grace Frick. Valetta had earlier befriended Grace's companion, the French novelist Marguerite Yourcenar, and they dined together as a foursome before Malinowski gave his evening lecture. Grace was moved to write to Valetta afterwards, enclosing a clipping from *The Hartford Times* concerning Malinowski's lecture and announcing her own "discovery" that he was such a remarkable teacher: "What struck both Marguerite and me was that he could address an audience of dubious level of comprehension with just the right degree of authority, not once stooping to the more obvious and time-consuming methods of approach."<sup>48</sup>

To round off Malinowski's public presentations during this month, he accepted an invitation from his old friend Ralph Linton at Columbia University to address the anthropology faculty and graduate students on the afternoon of 27 November. Linton had succeeded to Franz Boas's chair two years before, but the department Boas founded remained stocked with his own pupils such as Ruth Benedict and Gene Weltfish. A graduate student named Victor Barnouw, who subsequently made his name as a psychological anthropologist, remembered Malinowski's visit to Columbia: "Although he was a great man, he was a nervous chain-smoker, who made some poor jokes on this occasion and kept referring in his lecture to Linton and Benedict as Ralph and Ruth, as if he were trying to be very American" (Barnouw 1980).

This inconsequential anecdote presents Malinowski as a rather pathetic figure, but it is suggestive of the stress and strain he lived with at this time, testing his delicate health to the limit and inviting the heart attack that would kill him six months later.

## **Acknowledgments**

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<sup>48</sup> Grace Frick to Valetta Malinowska, 27 November 1941. MPLSE 40/5. *The Hartford Times* reporter was sufficiently awed by Malinowski to describe him as "one of the four foremost minds in the world" (25 November 1940).

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