

Malinowski's Formative Contribution to American Folklore Studies



Malinowski in njegov formativni prispevek
k ameriški folkloristiki

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ABSTRACT

Bronisław Malinowski (1884–1942) was a foundational force in the development of functionalist theory in the discipline of anthropology. Based on intensive fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands, his pragmatic theory stimulated much discussion and debate in anthropological circles. Lesser known, however, is the influence that Malinowski had on the development of modern performance studies in the United States among folklore scholars. This research note focuses on Malinowski's writings concerning the language of myth and magic, since these were the aspects of his work that appealed most to American scholars of performance in the 1970s.

KEYWORDS: context, ethnography, folkloristics, language philosophy, magic, myth, performance. sociolinguistics, text

IZVLEČEK

Bronisław Malinowski (1884–1942) je bil osrednjega pomena pri razvoju teorije funkcionalizma v antropologiji. Njegova pragmatična teorija, ki je nastala na podlagi intenzivnega terenskega dela na Trobriandskih otokih, je v antropoloških krogih spodbudila mnogo razprav. Manj znan pa je vpliv, ki ga je Malinowski imel na razvoj sodobnih študij performativne umetnosti v Združenih državah med folkloristi. Ta raziskovalni zapis se osredotoča na njegovo pisanje o jeziku mita in magije, vidikih njegovega dela, ki so v sedemdesetih letih prejšnjega stoletja najbolj pritegnili ameriške raziskovalce performansa.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: kontekst, folkloristika, filozofija jezika, magija, mit, performans, sociolingvistika, besedilo

INTRODUCTION

Bronisław Malinowski (1884-1942) was a formative force in the development of functionalist theory in the discipline of anthropology. Based on intensive fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands, his pragmatic theory stimulated much discussion and debate in anthropological circles, as is well known.¹ Lesser known is the influence that Malinowski had on the development of modern folklore studies in the United States.² This brief essay focuses on Malinowski's writings concerning the language of myth and magic because these two genres of his work appealed most to American folklorists in the 1970s. It was during the seventies that the academic study of folklore was being reconfigured, since it moved away from purely textual studies and adopted a more contextual and ethnographic approach that took oral performances as the primary data of analysis. I argue that Malinowski directly influenced the then so-called "young Turks" of folklore studies in the seventies.³ His philosophy of language and his emphasis on situational meaning were especially influential in the construction of a new form of folklore studies that became widely known as "folkloristics."⁴ Malinowski's oft-quoted dictum to "listen to the natives" became a key rallying point around which the contemporary discipline of folkloristics developed.

The essay is divided into three sections. Section one briefly surveys the works of Malinowski that are most relevant to the formulation of modern folkloristics. The second section explores the development of folkloristics in the 1970s, focusing on those ideas that were influenced centrally by Malinowski. The final section synthesizes the information presented in the first two sections to suggest that while most scholars have moved beyond Malinowski's functionalism, many of his seminal ideas are still very much a part of the folkloristic canon. What folklorists do when they conduct ethnographic fieldwork, as well as when they analyze the results of their research after returning from the field, is indebted to Malinowski's emphasis on grasping the "native's point of view, his relation to life, to realise *his* vision of *his* world" (Malinowski 1922: 25).

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On his general contribution to anthropology, see, for example, Firth (1957) and more recently Young (2002). For an extended meditation on his philosophy of language, see Gellner (1998). However, Langendoen's 1968 study of his anthropological linguistics remains the standard and definitive analysis, and it is his work that primarily informs the first section here.

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It was the Africanist William Bascom (1912-1981) who had first pointed out Malinowski's relevance to contemporary American folkloristics in a posthumous essay published in 1983 that he delivered in 1980 during the inauguration of a new undergraduate major in folklore studies at The Ohio State University. However, he focused solely on one monograph published by Malinowski titled *Myth in Primitive Psychology* (1926), which was reprinted in 1948 in a more accessible anthology titled *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays by Bronislaw Malinowski*. See Redfield (1948). Bascom is best known for introducing the term "verbal art" in 1955, which forecasted the future direction American folklore studies would take by emphasizing the performance of oral tradition. See Bascom (1955).

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The term was coined in 1972 by the doyen of American folklore studies Richard M. Dorson (1916-1981) to refer to a breakaway group of scholars who emphasized the context of folklore over the folkloric text. For the background, see Ben-Amos (1989) and Gabbert (1999). A good, general overview of the early development of the study of folklore in the United States is, for example, Darnell (1973) and Zumwalt (1988) provides a more comprehensive analysis.

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On the debate over the term, see Jackson (1985) and Hansen (1987).

Malinowski's grand task of seriously listening to the people being studied is to be accomplished through ethnographic fieldwork based on three principles. First, the fieldworker must document the organization of the community and the anatomy of its culture. Second, within this framework, the ethnographer must fill in what he called the *imponderabilia* of actual life and document behavior on the ground. Finally, "a collection of ethnographic statements, characteristic narratives, typical utterances, items of folk-lore and magical formulae has to be given as a *corpus inscriptioinum*, as documents of native mentality" (Malinowski 1922: 24). It is the last point that is most relevant to the development of modern folkloristics, and I should like to return to it shortly, but first, let us turn our attention to Malinowski's work on language.

MALINOWSKI'S LANGUAGE WORK

We know from Malinowski's diary (1967) that he was initially not competent in any of the relevant, local languages when he arrived at Port Moresby in British New Guinea during his first expedition in 1914. This notwithstanding, he did take a keen interest in linguistics and studied no less than four Melanesian languages during his Pacific sojourns. Eventually he even came to influence what is known as the London School of Linguistics through its founder John Rupert Firth (1890-1960).⁵ Indeed, an early paper written by Malinowski, published in 1921, was devoted to the study of Kiriwinian classificatory particles.⁶ In it, he stressed the need for a general semantic theory of language that would delve deeper into structure than past studies had. Delving deeper, according to Malinowski, required the linguist to bring ethnographic data and theory to bear on language use. Without understanding language in action, the early Malinowski felt that it would be impossible to describe formally the grammar of any given language or even to classify words into parts of speech behavior (Malinowski 1921: 78; Langendoen 1968: 7-8). Hence, he felt it necessary for the linguist to engage in what he termed "excursions into ethnography." Malinowski writes, "When defining the meaning and function of several of the formatives, we had to make excursions into ethnography, describe customs, and state social conditions" (Malinowski 1921: 78).

Terence Langendoen has isolated twelve excursions made by Malinowski in the article under consideration here. He concludes his extensive study by suggesting that this early article relies on "explanation after the fact" (Langendoen 1968: 11). In other words, using ethnography to explain linguistic facts is simply "anecdotal" at best from a formalist's point of view. From a formalist perspective, then, no theoretical assertion can be made to suggest that cultural facts explain the existence of specific rules of grammar (*ibid*). This may very well be the case from a structuralist's viewpoint, but as we shall see, Malinowski's emphasis

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Firth participated in seminars conducted by Malinowski at the University of London in the 1930s. See Robins (1961). For Firth's own opinion on Malinowski's contribution to linguistics, see Firth (1957).

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This was, in fact, his first linguistic publication. See Langendoen (1968): 10.

on the “context of situation” had an impact on the sociolinguistic turn taken by American folklorists in the 1970s.⁷ In terms of anthropological linguistics, Malinowski’s context of situation implies that grammatical and semantic description must be done within the broader framework of a complete ethnographic description of the culture in question. Before getting into that terrain, let us further explore the development of Malinowski’s theories of language.

In his *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, published in 1922, Malinowski pays less attention to language use, but does dedicate a chapter of thirty-four pages to the magical power of words. Langendoen has pointed out that because he understands the order of words in sentences to reflect the order of ideas in the mind Malinowski is taking a rather traditional position on discursive meaning (Langendoen 1968: 14). In the chapter on magic Malinowski argues that incantations uttered in the performance of magical acts are exceptions to linguistic rules.⁸ In his essay *The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages* (2023) however, the paper he published just a year after *Argonauts* was released, Malinowski presents a radically different point of view on language. In a complete reversal of his position in *Argonauts*, magical language now exemplifies the basic and primary use of language.⁹ Any utterance is a mode of action; hence, meaning is utterly dependent on situational context. As he writes, “Exactly as in the reality of spoken or written languages, 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). In other words, Malinowski’s logic is that because magical texts do not translate well, one must look at what people are doing while the text is being recited. Meaning is thus constituted by the correlation of utterance and action. Language is therefore performance oriented. Although the concept in and of itself is interesting, Malinowski was never able to prove that the meaning of utterances is definitively related to the contexts of situation.¹⁰

The problem is this: Malinowski’s theory in 1923 was based on experience. So, since one cannot know the correlation between utterance and action until it is experienced, communication can break down even within the same culture. For example, if a culture’s language has a trade jargon used by masons, does that mean that other occupational groups within the same community would not be able to communicate with masons? Or, to place it back in Malinowski’s field context, a Trobriander who has never fished before would not be able to understand Trobriand fishermen speaking, if we follow Malinowski’s linguistic lead to the letter of the law. This is the problem that formalists have pointed out regarding Malinowski’s theory of language, for he pushes the context of situation argument too far.

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Relying heavily on sociolinguistics, it is often referred to as the “ethnography of speaking.” For an early usage of the phrase and its explication, see Hymes (1962).

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Also of interest to folklorists is his use of interlinear transcription and translation *in tandem*, as well as free translation and his focus on the aesthetics of performance.

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Langendoen (1968): 16, however, suggests that the shift was already anticipated in *Argonauts*.

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See Langendoen (1968): 17-25 again for a trenchant critique.

Malinowski's last major work on language was the second volume of *Coral Gardens and Their Magic*, which was titled *The Language of Magic and Gardening* (1935). Not much has changed in his views from 1923 to 1935, but he is now more convinced than ever that the context of situation is essential to linguistic theory. As in *Argonauts*, he is once again concerned with translation. His goal now is to devise a method of linguistic analysis that interprets foreign language texts as accurately as possible in the language of the analyst or ethnographer. To this end, he puts forth three essential ideas relating to the context of situation:

1. Isolated words are only linguistic figments, and even sentences cannot be regarded as a "full linguistic datum." He writes, "To us, the real linguistic fact is the full utterance within its context of situation" (Malinowski 1935: 11).
2. Any word can have a "range of meanings." According to this principle, a sound used in two different contexts is only homophonous and cannot be considered one word. He writes: "Meaning is not something which abides within a sound; it exists in the sound's relation to the context. Hence if a word is used in a different context, it cannot have the same meaning; it ceases to be one word and becomes two or more semantically distinguishable units" (Malinowski 1935: 31).
3. A rejection of his earlier claim that there is a deep underlying connection between mental categories and the categorical structure of the language's vocabulary. Hence, he rejects much of his earlier arguments, but continues to adhere to the contextual position.

The second point is the one that concerns me here the most because it touches on the concept of "emergence."¹¹ This notion is built on the premise that because context constantly shifts and changes, no two performances are ever the same, since the dialogical interaction between the performers and their audiences vary each time a performance event occurs. Thus, meaning must be constantly negotiated among the participants engaged in the expressive act, thereby changing to suit the specific context in which the act is being negotiated.¹² Emergence theory plays a key role in Malinowski's analysis of coral garden magical language and in the new folkloristics to which I will return shortly. But it is not difficult to see the problem inherent in the argument when taken to an extreme. Langendoen notes the implications of Malinowski's late view in the following quote: "... every time a particular word is uttered it occurs in a novel verbal context, therefore no two utterance tokens of the same word ever have the same meaning, and conversely, it often happens that two different words occur as utterance tokens in the same context, therefore they must be considered synonymous in those contexts" (Langendoen 1968: 31). Langendoen concludes his study of Malinowski's ideas concerning language by pointing out a flaw; namely, that Malinowski considered the relationship between lived experience and derived concepts to be a direct one (Langendoen 1968: 34). Langendoen's conclusions may remain open to debate, but my concern here in outlining Malinowski's changing theories of language is simply to point out some of his insights that would later be incorporated into folkloristic theory and method. To do this thoroughly, we must also mention Malinowski's own interest in folklore.

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On the concept of emergence, see Georges (1969).

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For a good example of this, see Schieffelin (1985).

I noted earlier that Malinowski considered it essential to collect and analyze “characteristic narratives, typical utterances, items of folk-lore and magical formulae,” the constituents of what he termed the *corpus inscriptionum* of a culture, before we are even able to approximate the “native’s point of view.”¹³ In virtually all of Malinowski’s book-length works, he uses genres of folklore effectively in his ethnographic portraits. In *Argonauts*, for example, chapter XII is devoted to the mythology of the Kula, chapter XVII is devoted to their magical practices, and as already mentioned above, chapter XVIII is devoted to the power of words in magical acts. In his 1927 monograph *The Father in Primitive Psychology* (1927a), he uses “words and deeds in testimony” to make his point, while in his *Foundations of Faith and Morals* (1936) he states that “when I first went there [i.e., Trobriand Islands] I knew that every good ethnographer must collect ‘folk-lore’” (Malinowski 1936: 10).¹⁴ Here again he emphasizes the importance of context. He continues by writing the following:

I was eagerly writing down any story which was told to me by a native. I collected tales about ogres and flying canoes, about malicious stepmothers and daring sailors, about the beginnings of magic and the queer pranks of an avaricious harlot. Gradually, however, it dawned on me that the natives themselves were aware of points in the performance which I was constantly missing; for I was collecting texts but disregarding contexts. In the course of time, I realized that the manner of telling a story and the way in which it was received, the circumstances under which the story was told and its immediate and also indirect influence, were quite as important as the text itself. (ibid)

Even in his earlier work *Sex and Repression in Savage Society*, published in 1927, he discusses folklore “in relation to the typical sentiments of the matrilineal family” (Malinowski 1927b: 104) as a way of bridging psychoanalysis and anthropology. But nowhere did Malinowski state his reliance on folklore more specifically than in his 1926 Frazer Lecture titled *Myth in Primitive Psychology*.¹⁵ Here he states very plainly his contextually dependent theory of performance: “The stories live in a native life and not on paper, and when a scholar jots them down without being able to evoke the atmosphere in which they flourish he has given us but a mutilated bit of reality” (Redfield 1948: 104). This statement has been quoted often by the seventies’ folklorists as a kind of rallying cry for context sensitive studies in folklore as a viable strategy for transcending the limitations of analyzing items of folklore frozen in printed form, so it is worth quoting at greater length:

We are not so much concentrating our attention on the text of the narrative, as on their sociological reference. The text, of course, is extremely important, but without the context it remains lifeless. As we have seen, the interest of the story is vastly enhanced, and it is given its proper character by the manner in which it is told. The whole nature of the performance, the voice and the mimicry,

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A term made famous by the late Clifford Geertz (1926-2006). See his 1974 essay titled *From a Native’s Point of View: On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding*.

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The Trobriand Islands is a 170 square mile archipelago off the east coast of Papua New Guinea belonging to Milne Bay Province. The main island is Kiriwina, where most of the indigenous population of approximately 12,000 people lives.

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Reprinted in Redfield (1948): 93-148. Citations in this paper are from the reprint.

the stimulus and response of the audience mean as much to the natives as the texts; and the sociologist should take his cue from the natives. The performance, again, has to be placed in its proper time setting—the hour of the day, the season, with the background of the sprouting gardens awaiting future work, and slightly influenced by the magic of the fairy tales. We must also bear in mind the sociological context of private ownership, the sociable function and the cultural role of amusing fiction. All these elements are equally relevant; all must be studied as well as the text. (ibid)

It is immediately after the above passage that his oft-quoted sentence concerning a “mutilated bit of reality” occurs.

To make his point about context sensitivity, Malinowski engaged in genre analysis, delimiting indigenous categories of narrative before concluding that *lili’u* was the closest thing to the western concept of myth because it was regarded as true, venerable and sacred, and often associated with ritual. The emic (insider) point of view is, of course, always a valid and appropriate place at which to begin. However, as Lauri Honko (1968: 57-59) has indicated, Malinowski’s exhaustive classification of Trobriand stories transcends the indigenous nomenclature that he wishes to describe by shifting from native terminology to a western, anthropological nominal system before adequately dealing with the ethnic genres themselves, such as in the extended quote above, where he uses the English term “fairy tale” without adequate explanation.¹⁶ Such shortcomings notwithstanding, Malinowski paved the way for more refined studies of genres in future years.¹⁷ Moreover, his emphasis on oral performance has profoundly influenced not only folklorists but also notable anthropologists such as, for example, Stanley Tambiah, Pierre Bourdieu, and Mary Douglas. Let us move on, then, to explore some of the developments in folklore studies that occurred during the late sixties and seventies.

NEW PERSPECTIVES IN FOLKLORISTICS

The history of the development of folklore studies in North America can generally be characterized by a dichotomy of interests. Early anthropological folklorists, such as Franz Boas (1858-1942) and those working for the Bureau of American Ethnology, emphasized the social context and function of folkloric items, while literary scholars such as Francis Child (1825-1896) stressed the textual and aesthetic content. Moreover, the anthropological camp was mostly concerned with indigenous culture, while the literary camp remained primarily focused on the folklore of European immigrant groups and the diffusion of folkloric items from Europe to the New World. By the 1960s, when an interdisciplinary approach incorporating both the social sciences and the humanities started emerging, a fusion of interests took place in folkloristic circles.

The fusion was already incipient in Albert Lord’s classic study *The Singer of Tales* (1960), in which he hinted at the emergent quality of *guslar* performances that resulted

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For a discussion, see Claus and Korom (1991): 168-172.

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See, for example, the groundbreaking volume edited by the recently departed Dan Ben-Amos titled simply *Folklore Genres* (1976).

from performer/audience interaction and argued that no two performances are ever the same. Lord's emphasis on variation in performance made a new generation of folklorists aware that no *Ur*type can ever serve as the authentic original from which all future variants stem. Richard Bauman, one of the leaders of the contextual study of folklore, stated in his *Verbal Art as Performance* (1977: 38), that Lord's work was one of the first to conceptualize oral literature as emergent. But the folkloristic fusion really took place in the seventies, when a combined interest in text and context began taking shape.¹⁸

Credit is due, in part, to Dell Hymes (1927-2009), whose ethnography of speaking model emphasized culturally defined ways of speaking. Hymes sought to place language in a sociocultural context through ethnographic investigation. Hymes' method was appropriately labeled the "ethnography of speaking" because it sought to fill a void between linguistic grammars and descriptive ethnographies, something Malinowski was never able to do himself. The ethnography of speaking—influenced as it was by the Prague School's emphasis on synchronicity, functionalism, structuralism, contextualization and the aesthetic factor—contributed to modern folkloristics in at least three tangible ways. First, Hymes stressed performative language as an aesthetic mode of communication. Second, he viewed it as integrally related to a particular event. Third, he saw such verbal performances as culturally specific and cross-culturally variable.

Like the late Malinowski, Hymes was sensitive to the cross-cultural differences in language use, even while recognizing that some structural similarities do exist. In an early programmatic article, Hymes wrote that, "while it is important to know the ways in which the functions of speaking are the same in every group and for every personality, our concern here is with the ways in which they differ" (Hymes 1962: 29). Hymes also refined Malinowski's idea that a linguistic utterance can have multiple meanings depending on the context in which it is uttered. He writes:

For understanding and predicting behavior, contexts have a cognitive significance that can be summarized in this way. The use of a linguistic form identifies a range of meanings. A context can support a range of meanings. When a form is used in a context, it eliminates the meanings possible to that context other than those that form can signal; the context eliminates from consideration the meanings possible to the form other than those that context can support. The effective meaning depends upon the interaction of the two (Hymes 1962: 19).

But unlike the late Malinowski, Hymes felt that the speech economy of a group had to be delimited. He therefore proposed three ethnographic components of a speech economy: the speech event, the constituent factors of a speech event, and the functions of speech (1962: 24). By refining some of Malinowski's seminal ideas and reinserting ethnographic

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It must be mentioned, however, that Lord's mentor Milman Parry (1902-1935) was very much influenced by the writings of the Slovenian scholar Matija Murko (1861-1952), whose work on southern Slavic epic poetry (e.g., Murko 1908 and especially Murko 1929) influenced Parry while he was studying for his doctoral degree at the Sorbonne. See Dalby (2006): 186-187 and Lord (1960): 11-12; 280, n. 1; 281, n. 2.

fieldwork into anthropological linguistics, Hymes and his colleagues paved the way for the folkloristic revolution of the 1970s.

The folkloristic fusion of the seventies, inspired by an interdisciplinary climate and the development of the ethnography of speaking in the sixties, encouraged synchronic, contextual and performance orientations in the study of “verbal art,” as folklore was by that time being called, thanks to William Bascom (1955). Hence, it signaled the coming together of literary and anthropological folklorists. Key to the fusion was a common interest in the communicative processes involved in the production of folklore. Thus, folklore communicates something through being performed. But what it communicates can vary considerably, since the folklore fusionists acknowledged that a particular speech act could have multiple functions. Hymes had already indicated that any speech act can function to be, among other things, expressive (emotive), directive (by, which he means conative, pragmatic, rhetorical, persuasive), poetic, metalinguistic, referential and situational (Hymes 1962: 35). These multiple functions had to be understood in the emergent context of a verbal performance.

Robert Georges’ influential article *Toward an Understanding of Storytelling Events*, published in 1969, is indicative of the trend followed shortly thereafter in the seventies. Like Malinowski, he emphasized fieldwork to collect stories in context, emphasized storytelling as a complex communicative event and pointed out the emergent quality of such a communicative event.¹⁹ An influential 1972 volume titled *Toward New Perspectives in Folklore* is representative of the overall shift that occurred in the seventies. Richard Bauman, one of the editors, wrote in the introduction that “there is an emphasis upon performance as an organizing principle that comprehends within a single framework artistic act, expressive form, and esthetic response, and that does so in terms of locally defined, culture-specific categories and contexts” (Bauman 1972: vi).²⁰

All the sentiments above echo many of Malinowski’s concerns that I have already discussed. Indeed, Malinowski is often cited in the folkloristic literature of this period as an inspiration. This is attested by an opening comment authored by Dan Ben-Amos and Kenneth Goldstein, editors of another influential volume of the period. In *Folklore: Performance and Communication* (1975: 2-3), they write the following: “The use of the notion context, in this case, takes its point of departure from and does not duplicate Malinowski’s concepts of context of culture and context of situation.” The above two points, it can be said, have remained central to the development of folkloristic theory and methodology ever since in the United States.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, let me state a few things. Malinowski was one of the earliest proponents to advocate supplementing ethnolinguistic texts with contextual information. In this regard,

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I cannot provide a complete genealogy of sources here but see Limón and Young (1986).

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See also the reflections of another one of the young Turks in Abrahams (1993).

he had a great influence on performance-oriented folklorists. As Elizabeth Fine has stated, “Looking back from our vantage point today, some of [Malinowski’s] theoretical statements about context seem almost indistinguishable from those of performance theorists (Fine 1984: 26). But there are differences as well. For the late Malinowski, as represented in his study of coral garden language, the meaning of a language in a society rested in the human actions it stimulated. So, the main function of language is not to express thought or to duplicate mental processes. Instead, language plays an active and pragmatic part in human behavior (Malinowski 1935: 7-8). Because he insisted that an utterance could only be understood in context, he was very concerned about translation, which led him to experiment with various techniques of transcription and translation. Because he felt that all kinetic gestures made while speaking were integral to the utterance, he recognized that such paralinguistic features needed to be incorporated into the transcription of a speech act itself. Hence, he sometimes included deictic gestures into his interlinear transcriptions as essential contextual data for properly translating the text. There are, of course, limits to getting enmeshed in such minute detail, since only the most patient reader could derive any pleasure out of reading such a laborious transcription.”²¹

Malinowski opined that “if only” he had the appropriate technology, he could devise a more accurate system of translation. But as a pragmatist, he realized that this was not possible. However, his advocacy for a full physiological study of speech behavior once again anticipated later trends in proxemics and kinesiology, not to mention folkloristics.²² Realizing his inability to provide a perfect translation, Malinowski demarcated five areas of context in the coral garden study: the sociological, the ritual, the structural, the dogmatic (i.e., beliefs) and the mode of recitation. For his plea to contextualize language use, folkloristics is indebted. But by focusing predominantly on the function of folklore in society as validating culture, Malinowski and his students following him focused most exclusively on those aspects of context that demonstrated a clear functional relationship between the text and the society from which it was excised. Therefore, functionalism never really developed an integral view of text and context that accounted for the phenomenological effect of any given verbal performance. In other words, Malinowski most often missed the immediacy of the performance event, which hindered his attempts to demonstrate how folklore was, in fact, an exemplary vehicle for enacting a society’s collective representation of itself. But what Malinowski did do was draw attention to the context of situation, the importance of studying paralinguistic features of speech events and the notion of emergence. These three ideas, as well as his attempts to create more accurate methods of translation, have had the greatest impact on the way American folklorists work today. Folklorists, of course, have moved far beyond Malinowski’s simplistic functionalism, but they are indebted to his attempt to bridge the chasm between text and context.

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Tedlock (1983) would be one such example.

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For example, see Birdwhistell (1952, 1970). Raymond Birdwhistell (1918-1994) was the founder of anthropological kinesics and mentor of Erving Goffman (1922-1982) at the University of Toronto, both of whom would later collaborate with Hymes in Philadelphia to advocate for a more holistic and multidisciplinary approach to human communication as performance.

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POVZETEK

Bronisław Malinowski (1884–1942) je bil osrednjega pomena pri razvoju teorije funkcionalizma v antropologiji. Dobro je znano, da je njegova pragmatična teorija, ki je nastala na podlagi intenzivnega terenskega dela na Trobriandskih otokih, v antropoloških krogih spodbudila mnogo razprav. Manj znan pa je vpliv, ki ga je Malinowski imel na razvoj sodobne folkloristike v ZDA. Ta kratek esej se osredotoča na njegovo pisanje o jeziku mita in magije, saj sta ta dva vidika njegovega dela najbolj nagovorila ameriške folkloriste v sedemdesetih letih prejšnjega stoletja. Takrat je prišlo do preoblikovanja akademskega študija folklore, ki se je odmaknil od ukvarjanja zgolj z besedili ter ubral bolj kontekstualen in etnografski pristop, ki primarno temelji na analizi ustnega nastopanja. Zagovarjam tezo, da je Malinowski neposredno vplival na tedanje tako imenovane mlade Turke folkloristike sedemdesetih let. Njegova filozofija jezika in poudarek na situacijskem pomenu sta še posebej vplivala na oblikovanje novega pristopa k proučevanju folklore, ki je postalo splošno znano kot »folkloristika«. Za razvoj folkloristike kot sodobne discipline predstavlja pogosto citirani izrek Malinowskega o »poslušanju domorodcev« ključno stično točko.

Esej je razdeljen na tri dele. Prvi del na kratko povzema tista dela Malinowskega, ki so bila najpomembnejša pri formiranju sodobne folkloristike. Drugi del obravnava razvoj folkloristike v sedemdesetih letih prejšnjega stoletja in se osredotoča na tiste ideje, na katere je imel Malinowski največji vpliv. Zadnji del na podlagi informacij, podanih v prvih dveh sklopih, kaže, da čeprav je večina strokovnjakov že preseгла njegov funkcionalizem, številne temeljne ideje Malinowskega še vedno predstavljajo del kanona folkloristike. To, kar počnejo folkloristi, ko opravljajo etnografsko terensko delo, pa tudi ko analizirajo rezultate svojih raziskav po vrnitvi s terena, izhaja iz njegovega poudarka na razumevanju »stališča domačinov, njihovega odnosa do življenja in *njihove lastne* vizije sveta« (Malinowski 1922: 25).