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Beyond the Whorfs of Dover: A Study of Balinese Interpretive Practices

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Abstract: Scholars generally assume that current Euro-American theory is both necessary and sufficient to understand other societies. Analyzing the presuppositions of linguistic and anthropological models indicates however that they are fatally flawed. Examining Balinese practices of speaking and understanding others shows they work with a consistently pragmatic approach with coherent modes of interrogating situated utterances. Close study of examples highlights how far existing theories from truth-conditional semantics to speech act theory not only fail to appreciate what is said and done, but insulate themselves from realizing this. So the many studies of Balinese 'symbolism' are only possible by failing to listen to what people say. According to Balinese, speech is inseparable from other acts, so meaning can only be judged from its consequences. If other people have diverse ways of speaking, acting and understanding, should we not finally lay aside our comfortable hegemony and inquire critically what is going on?

How fully do we understand what other peoples say? We usually assume humans broadly share ways of perceiving and reasoning, so that translating and interpreting are about explaining the bits that fail to fit. On theoretical and ethnographic grounds I question whether matters are so straightforward. As a first step, I consider how people set about interpreting one another in Bali. As theoretical linguists claim that semantic theories work universally, I review how well they fare when confronted with ethnographic evidence. Their shortcomings are sufficient as to require an alternative, which I draw from Balinese categories and practices of evaluating utterances and actions. If Balinese have coherent, but quite different, ways of interpreting one another, why should this not be so for other societies?

There are good reasons for letting sleeping assumptions lie. Were understanding others to prove problematic, the implications would be grave, if not shattering. As J.K. Galbraith put it: 'Faced with the choice between changing one's mind and proving that there is no need to do so, almost everyone gets busy on the proof'. Also a certain comfortable arrogance still permeates parts of the human sciences. It is that the categories and procedures of European thought are both necessary and sufficient (or near enough) to understand all human thoughts and actions.[1]

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1 As my object of study is interpretive practices, I confine other issues to footnotes or references. Because my concern is Balinese usage, I draw on the Oxford English dictionary for three terms—interpret, understand and translate. These overlap. 'Interpret' is defined by reference to both 'translate' and 'understand'. I do not address different theories of translation, understanding and interpretation in detail, as my main concern is to examine what Balinese do. The adequacy of existing approaches to translation has been sufficiently problematized for my purposes by Quine 1960, Benjamin 1968 and Asad 1986; hermeneutics in general by Hirsch 1967; Palmer 1969; Ricoeur 1981; Foucault 1970, 1990; and hermeneutics in Bali by Hobart 2000. My argument relies on Deleuze's rejection of the philosophical habit of presupposing sameness rather than difference (1994). If we start from the probability of difference, life becomes more interesting and difficult.

Anthropology's role here has been at best to question the presuppositions that inform such closure, at worst conservatively to justify such claims and to patrol the boundaries of what is admissible. Arguments for or against the supremacy of European thinking depend however precisely on such thinking. Whether this is potentially circular when invoked to understand how others live, it is certainly hegemonic (Laclau & Mouffe 1985). Leaving aside the cultural, historical, epistemological, political and even moral case for rethinking presuppositions forged during the colonial—or even pre-colonial—era, the question arises of how to address double discursivity, which I take to be an inescapable issue for anthropology. By double discursivity I am referring to the co-existence of two assemblages of presuppositions—those of the analyst or current academic practice and those of the people under investigation—that are not only distinct but at the least partly incommensurate.[2]

The problem of understanding others is often phrased as how we may know or translate their cultural categories. The response is usually that either we must assume a significant measure of congruity between discourses or else we must place limits on the kind of cultural relativity allowable, because otherwise reasoned argument becomes impossible or, worse, others become unknowable. For a European-centred philosopher, such a stance might be defensible but only at the cost of circumscribing others' thoughts and actions to what fits your own preferred ways of working. If this sounds somewhat colonial or racist, perhaps it is because it is.

What however is so wrong with existing approaches? Considered as a question of primitive thought or rationality, as the so-called rationality debate made clear (Wilson 1970; Hollis & Lukes 1982a; Overing 1985), a host of diverse issues became sutured into a portmanteau problem. Furthermore proponents of universal reason disagree among themselves as to what it is, how it works and to what it applies.[3] Anthropologists have often preferred to phrase the issue as one of symbolism (Firth 1973; Geertz 1973; Sahlins 1999). The choice is curious because the notion has so many different but overlapping senses as to leave the notion obfuscatory and largely incoherent (Sperber 1975). It is also ethnocentric in its overwhelming reliance on a historically and culturally specific, but little acknowledged, German Romantic account (Todorov 1982). The move to the idea of 'text'—at least in the hands of English-speaking scholars—risks reification by conflating an actual work with textuality, the conditions of possibility of writing and evaluating works (Derrida 1976; Barthes 1977).

Perhaps we should ask on precisely what evidence are such broad claims about reason and symbolism based? Almost all focus on eye-catching epistemological problems that involve apparent breaches of the laws of thought or on ontological puzzles like twins being birds (Nuer) or a man being also a tiger (Temiar) or green cockatoo (Bororo). Few deal with how people set about understanding one another day-to-day. And fewer still inquire about what is presupposed in practice to make understanding possible—to the extent that in fact it is.[4] It is not self-evident how far such set piece propositional puzzles work in the

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2 The problems of different presuppositions with which Foucault wrestled using the notion of *discours* (1972; Deleuze 1994) are, I think, sufficiently cognate to those that Collingwood addressed as metaphysics (1940) as to be worth relating. In other words divergent discourses involve different metaphysics in action.

3 My thanks are due to the two anonymous reviewers of this piece: one for encouraging the radical steps that I am trying to take, the other for making it clear that I need to distinguish my approach from the ethnography of speaking.

4 Communication between interlocutors does not presuppose understanding, merely that they can locate each others' utterances in different equivalence structures (Wallace 1961). Under what circumstances do humans actually seek understanding, mutual or otherwise? And what exactly do we mean by understanding? I leave these issues to philosophers because what I need to establish is that it is viable to address understanding pragmatically.

> Try not to think of understanding as a 'mental process' at all.—For that is the expression which confuses you. But ask yourself: in what sort of case, in what kind of circumstances, do we say 'Now I know how to go on' (Wittgenstein 1958: #154).

> Hermeneutics is not 'another way of knowing'—'understanding' as opposed to (predictive) 'explanation'. It is better seen as another way of coping (Rorty 1980: 356).

multifarious contexts of use where claims about knowing are inevitable, because they involve rival representations of events, motivations, personal interests, past histories, circumstances and relationships.[5] Set against the diverse, complex, partly unknowable and undecidable maelstrom of quotidian life, attempts to extract ideal models look not just utopian and quaint, but verge on desperate acts of denial. At which point it becomes open to question whether interpretation is an unproblematic universal method rather than an assemblage of practices, which underwrite cultural, class, gender, religious or other modes of hegemony.

What would be required of a study of everyday interpretive practice? Prima facie we might ask: how do people go about appreciating the range of quotidian utterances and more formal statements? How do they judge whether an utterance needs interpretation or not? Are there recognized terms and procedures for such evaluation? Who commands these? And who is entitled to interpret? Is anyone? Or is interpretation deemed to require expert knowledge vested in a particular group such as priests, diviners, academics or bankers? How do such interpretive procedures differ from existing linguistic models? How does such an approach address the issue of double discursivity? Before addressing these questions, I consider some relevant linguistic approaches to interpretation and meaning. This is not intended as a contribution to theoretical linguistics debates, but as a reflection on how adequate these are at explicating Balinese situated utterances and their interpretation.

Some Problems

Meaning and interpretation are treacherous issues, because so many disciplines lay unique claim to expert knowledge. How far can you go though without considering how people talk and judge what one another say without reference to the social contexts of use? The conventional answer is that use is separate from, and dependent on, the formal conditions of intelligibility. To consider issues of meaning in Balinese society, we need therefore briefly to review what linguists mean by semantics, 'the study of meaning' (Lyons 1977: 1), which claims to be rigorous and systematic. An adequate theory of semantics is usually expected to embrace the nature of word and sentence meaning, predict ambiguities and explain the systematic relations between words and sentences as part of a general theory of language.[6] How the subject matter is defined is worth noting. Language is presumed to be systematic and to have identifiable, unambiguous properties—an interestingly essentialist starting point. The assumption that both words and sentences have 'meaning' postulates, as the essence of linguistic forms, unnecessary 'obscure intermediary entities' (Quine 1953: 22). It all depends on what you mean by meaning (Hobart 1982).

Arguably though anthropologists do not deal with semantics at all, but with pragmatics, or how speakers use sentences to convey messages whether directly linked to linguistic content or not.[7] Reddy has criticized the presupposition that language 'contains'

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5 Such formal armchair speculation is abetted by ignoring that, in daily life, much is about knowing how (Ryle 1971) or even when (Cohen 1993) rather than knowing that.

6 This is taken from Kempson's definition:

> to have any claims to adequacy, a semantic theory must fulfil at least three conditions: (i) it must capture for any language the nature of word meaning and sentence meaning, and explain the nature of the relation between them; (ii) it must be able to predict the ambiguities in the forms of a language, whether in words or sentences; (iii) it must characterize and explain the systematic relations between words and sentences of a language—i.e. it must give some explicit account of the relations of synonymy, logical inclusion, entailment, contradiction etc. Any theory which fails to capture these relations, either at all, or in particular cases making the wrong predictions, must be inadequate, either in principle or in some detail of the theory. There are also some general properties of language which any part of a general linguistic theory must take account of (1977: 4).

7 For convenience I follow Kempson again.

> The main aim of such a theory is expected to be the explanation of how it is that speakers of any language can use the sentences of that language to convey messages which do not bear any necessary relation to the linguistic content of the sentence used. This type of theory would also have to explain the relation between the use of a sentence and the linguistic act (illocutionary act) which that sentence is used to perform (1977: 68-9).

messages which it conveys as involving an unacknowledged and unnecessary 'conduit metaphor of language' (1979). Precisely how the distinction is couched depends, of course, on the theory in question (Lyons 1977: 115-17). If semantics 'has, until recently, been the Cinderella of linguistics' (Kempson 1977: 2), pragmatics becomes the *marmiton* of semantics, a scullery lad whose job is to deal with what semantics will not demean itself to—or cannot—touch.

The distinction between semantics and pragmatics hinges on the supposedly essentially 'systematic' nature of language. Assuming natural languages have general grammatical properties 'derives rather from the conceptual apparatus we impose upon these languages than from any remarkable affinities among them' (Goodman 1972: 70). How then is semantics distinguished from pragmatics, language as system (langue, or language-system) from speech (parole, or language-behaviour, de Saussure 1974: 9; and Lyons 1977: 239 respectively)? It is by separating 'what is essential from what is accessory and more or less accidental' (de Saussure 1974: 14). As so often with dichotomies, one category (language, semantics) is privileged and protected from incoherence by displacing whatever fails to fit into another category (speech, pragmatics). At a stroke language is defined so as to be systematic; and exceptions classified safely away. Dichotomy is a device whereby systematic and rationalist enterprises like theoretical linguistics achieve a closure that makes it seemingly immune to contrary evidence. There are parallels to the stance of philosophers in the rationality debate. In both, theory is deployed to predetermine possible avenues of inquiry and evidence. It is a neat way of shoring up the epistemological superiority of the Western academic machine.

The Shade of Whorf

My summary rejection of existing approaches requires justification. Anthropologists among others often find the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis intuitively attractive. Let me start with the charges against 'Whorfians', those unscrupulous ruffians to be found leaning against empty oil drums smoking. As Sapir put it:

> Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication and reflection. The fact of the matter is that the 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The world in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached (1949: 209).

Although often regarded as a manifesto for linguistic determinism, closer scrutiny suggests Sapir's ontology is more complicated. It involves overlapping classes (Collingwood 1933), the unconscious, contingency (incidental means), practice (adjusting to reality; solving problems; social habits) and *representing as* (Goodman 1968: 27-31). Reading this as crude determinism requires some effort.

The view that ideas are totally determined by language habits or covert classifications is as absurd as the view that language is merely a medium entirely transparent to reality or ideas. As both affirmation and denial of the hypothesis are implausible, presumably something is wrong with the terms of the debate. Both language and thinking can equally be construed as assemblages of practices, not unproblematic essences or systems (Vološinov 1973; Bakhtin 1986a). Short of proposing naïve realism (Collingwood 1940: 34-48), how do we define reality independent of some frame of reference (Goodman 1978)? And what would a language-free frame of reference look like? The debate is shot through with dichotomies, often Cartesian—between Mind or language versus the world, concepts or propositions versus reality, langue versus parole, ideal competence versus actual performance, semantics versus pragmatics—which serve to fend off the possibility that we are dealing with a world of changing practice.

At times, theory turns out to be impermeable to good sense. Max Black, reviewing the work of Whorf on Hopi distinctions between the manifest and unmanifest, accuses him of the 'linguist's fallacy' of

> imputing his own sophisticated attitudes to the speakers he is studying... How much of all this

would the average Hopi recognize? Perhaps it might leave him as dumbfounded as a Greek peasant reading Aristotle (1962: 247, 251).

While Whorf may have fallen short of contemporary standards of ethnography, the argument is permeated by a chilling sense of the superiority of the knower over the known. Do proponents of Euro-American epistemologies still have to defend themselves by invoking the myth of the stupid native?

Critics of rationalism and scientism also differ over alternative approaches to meaning. In *Against Method,* Feyerabend explicitly endorsed a modified Whorfian view of language as not merely the instrument of description, but as shaping events, because

> languages and the reaction patterns they involve are not merely instruments for *describing* events, but that they are also *shapers* of events, that their 'grammar' contains a cosmology, a comprehensive view of the world, of society, of the situation of man which influences thought, behaviour, perception (1975: 223, all emphases in the original, unless otherwise stated).

Feyerabend added that major scientific theories are sufficiently general, 'deep' and complex as to merit consideration like natural languages. Theory cannot determine the nature of language because theory is a language. By contrast, although Quine argued that scientific theories are total and so self-confirming, he specified the problem as best approached not by generalizations about undifferentiated language per se but by recognizing that alternative translations are always possible.[8] We need therefore to examine the presuppositions behind relevant semantic theories.

Two approaches require consideration here: one because of its grip upon linguists' and philosophers' imaginations, the other because it is a well worked out alternative pragmatic approach. The former is Truth-Conditional Semantics (Tarski 1956; Davidson 1967, 1969; Wiggins 1971); the latter is Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson 1982, 1986). Whereas Davidson grounds interpretation and translation in truth, Sperber and Wilson ground them ultimately in intention, a notoriously tricky notion.[9] As indicated, my concern is how adequate these are at addressing what Balinese actually say.

Davidson (drawing on the mathematician Tarski) defended a sophisticated version of Correspondence Theory, in which sentences have meaning by virtue of being underwritten by a theory of truth. So 'to know the meaning of a sentence is to know under what conditions that sentence would be true' (Kempson 1977: 23).[10] The role ascribed to anthropologists is interesting.

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8 Quine's position is as follows:

> One frequently hears it urged that deep differences in language carry with them ultimate differences in the way one thinks, or looks upon the world. I would urge that what is most generally involved is indeterminacy of correlation. There is less basis of comparison—less sense in saying what is good translation and what is bad—the farther we get away from sentences with visibly direct conditioning to non-verbal stimuli and the farther we get off home ground (1960: 77-8).

Quine's stress on visibly direct conditioning in turn needs modifying. Not least, as Gombrich (1960) pointed out, we *learn* to see. Developing Quine's argument that explanations resemble translation manuals, Hesse has questioned the status of prediction in science (1978) and whether literal language is possible at all (1984), both of which have implications for the theories of language and meaning discussed below.

9 Anthropologists sometimes underestimate the relevance of hermeneutics, which is curious granted the reliance of the doyen of interpretive anthropologists, Clifford Geertz, on the work of Ricoeur. My argument here follows the counter-argument exemplified by Foucault's critique of the implications for knowledge/power of the inevitable closure of European interpretive practices.

10 There are important differences between Truth-Conditional Semantics and Chomsky's theory of the deep structure of grammar such that, according to Hacking, both cannot be true (1975: 136-7). As I am not a philosopher of language, I draw here upon Rorty and Hacking whose conclusions provide a good starting point for a practice-oriented approach. Hacking has a delightful story about the limits of charity and humanity in translation.

> On their voyage of discovery to Australia, a group of Captain Cook's sailors captured a young kangaroo and brought the strange creature back on board their ship. No one knew what it was, so some men were sent ashore to ask the natives. When the sailors returned they told their mates. 'It's a kangaroo.' Many years later it was discovered that when the aborigines said 'kangaroo' they were not in fact naming the animal, but replying to their questioners, 'What did you say?' (1975: 150).

> The theory-builder must not be assumed to have direct insight into likely equivalences between his own tongue and the alien. What he must do is find out, however he can, what sentences the alien holds true in his own tongue (or better to what degree he holds them true). The linguist then will attempt to construct a characterization of truth-for-the-alien which yields, so far as possible, a mapping of sentences held true (or false) by the alien onto sentences held true (or false) by the linguist. Supposing no perfect fit is found, the residue of sentences held true translated by sentences held false (and vice versa) is the margin for error (foreign or domestic). Charity in interpreting the words and thoughts of others is unavoidable in another direction as well: just as we must maximize the agreement, or risk not making sense of what the alien is talking about, so we must maximize the self-consistency we attribute to him, on pain of not understanding him (Davidson 1971: 458).

Several points deserve comment. First, the argument presupposes homogeneity of a linguistic population summed up in the singular 'alien' (cf. 'the average Hopi'). Differences of class, ethnicity, gender, being relatively well or badly informed, knowing how things work etc. must all be declared irrelevant. Second, such a theory depends on the assumption that 'most of the time most people must be trying to tell the truth, and that communication must be the primary role of language' (Hacking, 1975: 145). As this is an ideal rather than a demonstrable universal reality (just think of academic politics), it has little use for analyzing actual, as against idealized, speech. Third, problems arise if notions of truth are not identical or commensurable cross-culturally. This assumption underlies Hollis' concept of the 'bridgehead' (1970). Were the aliens to have different and incommensurable criteria of truth-in-the-world, as I have argued do Balinese (1985), the minimal conditions for a Truth-Conditional Semantic approach may be absent. Fourth, the approach requires a principle of charity, or humanity (Grandy 1973). But whose charity? It is, of course, that of Europeans, naturalized and exnominated (Barthes 1973: 138-9) as a far-from-innocent 'we'. In other words we must presuppose 'the psychic unity of mankind' and a theory of human nature encapsulated in Strawson's phrase 'a massive central core of human thinking which has no history' (1959: 10; cited in Hollis 1982). The theory requires a universal account of beliefs and wants. If linguists must assume such unity,

they not only paint themselves into a corner, but also paint the rest of the world in the same colours. Certainly anthropologists might be unwise to do so, because arguments about human nature are germane to their analyses, as they are, at least in part, historically and culturally constituted (Collingwood 1946: 81-85; Wallace 1961: 29-44). Finally, note the curious use of the spatial metaphor of mapping sentences, which freezes the to-and-fro of people speaking in all sorts of different circumstances into an elegant tableau. Truth-Conditional Semantics may be less the guardian of translational law and order than a case of Tarski and crutch.

Are there alternatives? Sperber and Wilson outlined a pragmatic approach, which claims to address the kind of utterances encountered by anthropologists. They argued that apparently irrational statements can be explained by logical inference from what is said. In so doing, invoking such troublesome notions as context or mutual knowledge ('pre-text' or 'inter-text') becomes unnecessary. All you need is an assumption that speakers strive to be relevant. Let me take their own example.

> Flag-seller: Would you like to buy a flag for the Royal National Lifeboat Institution?
>
> Passer-by: No thanks, I always spend my holidays with my sister in Birmingham.

To understand this exchange, the hearer must supply (at least) the following premises.

a. Birmingham is inland.
b. The Royal National Lifeboat Institution is a charity.
c. Buying a flag is one way of subscribing to a charity.
d. Someone who spends his holidays inland has no need of the services of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution.
e. Someone who has no need of the services of a charity cannot be expected to subscribe to that charity (1982: 73).

Ostensible non-sequiturs make sense when you add the contextual implications that are necessary and sufficient to make sense of the exchange. 'A contextual implication of an utterance is a non-trivial logical implication derivable not from the content of the utterance

alone, nor from the context alone, but only from the context and content combined' (1982: 73). The example cited is important because of 'the intuitive connection it reveals between being able to derive the contextual implications of an utterance and being able to see its relevance... This suggests that having contextual implications in a given context is a necessary and sufficient condition for relevance, and can be used as the basis of a definition of relevance' (1982: 73).

The approach is also supposed to clarify how problematic kinds of interpretation like divination work. Put simply, anxious patients over-extend the context until they make sense of otherwise irrelevant remarks (1982: 84). Gellner (1970) had warned of this danger in Evans-Pritchard's use of contextual charity (1956). While it may be necessary for a theory of semantics to assume that humans always strive to tell the truth, Gellner made the telling point that, as language is often used to mislead, mystify, obscure issues and so on, we need to consider the workings of language in practice, not just in theory.

Interesting though Sperber and Wilson's approach may be, it suffers grave defects.[11] Evidently much mutual knowledge cannot be inferred, like what is a charity, nor even that Birmingham is inland.[12] It can cope with neither the plethora of ways people use utterances, nor the possible consequences of the utterances (their illocutionary and perlocutionary force respectively). In presuming that speakers intend to be relevant, the argument presupposes a universal definition of intention—which has proven recalcitrant—and that universal criteria of rationality and relevance may be established without circularity. And, as Hollis has argued, these must be defined *a priori* (1970, 1982). As Wolfram has pointed out, there is a gap between what people say and what may be inferred from their saying so. She notes that contradictory or false statements may be intentionally asserted without necessarily being irrational: 'someone may assert p, which is false, as a kindness, a courtesy, a joke, to avoid a quarrel, to win a vote, to get a proposal accepted, to insult, provoke, bewilder, mislead and so on' (1985: 76). Nor does it follow that because people consult a diviner they necessarily believe the unqualified efficacy of the diviner or of divination, or even in divination at all. There are many motives— like wanting to please someone else, doing what is expected—for engaging in what you might have doubts about. Nor does it follow that, because a diviner knows something, a diviner knows everything, such that one must extend context until all information makes sense. Put simply, there are too many functions of language for communication to be reducible to the message and its inferences (Jakobson 1960). Universal applicability is achievable only by disguising the authors' culturally specific presuppositions and by omitting all questions of how humans engage with one another in daily life.

Balinese Terms for Truth and Meaning

This lengthy preamble was necessary to clear the ground so we can examine how Balinese commonly address truth and interpretation. First I consider how their approaches to truth and meaning differ from the theories outlined. Then I explore how they set about interpreting different kinds of utterances in daily life.[13]

Balinese usually distinguish what is correct in discourse, *patut*, from what is true of the world, *wiakti*. The former is used when you are talking of a statement being accurately reported or coherent with other statements. It is closely

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11 Unfortunately Wilson ignominiously failed her own test. When presenting this piece as a seminar paper in Oxford, one of the participants, Peter Rivière, burst out laughing. He explained that at a seminar at University College London, Deirdre Wilson had professed herself bewildered by what she had just heard from a flag-seller on Tottenham Court Road and had to have the exchange explained to her.

12 It would be perfectly possible for Birmingham to be on the coast and the waters so calm that no vessel has ever required a lifeboat. A questionable cultural presupposition about human nature as invariably selfish— people never subscribe to charities from which they do not benefit—is smuggled in. Anyhow we need to know much more about charities, perceived self-advantage and so on than can conceivably be implied.

13 I follow Bakhtin's (e.g. 1986a) and Vološinov's (1973) rejection of language as a system in favour of an analysis based on unique utterances, which works particularly well for Bali given what seems their pragmatist inclination. In the late Sándor Hervey's view, on my account, Balinese have an entirely coherent, strong pragmatist theory of language use.

linked to *manut*, said of words or actions that are fitting or appropriate to a given situation. By contrast, *wiakti* is what is manifest or evident.[14] To understand how *wiakti* is used, we need to appreciate the distinction between *sakala*, what is visible or manifest, and *niskala*, what is invisible or non-manifest. These are equivalent neither to the dichotomy of present or absent, nor to true or false. The non-manifest may be present but invisible, even concealed in the visible. What is non-manifest may indeed not be the case, but it cannot be equated with untrue any more than not being *patut* is false. There seem to be interesting connections here between Balinese usage and Indian Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosophical ideas (Potter 1977; Hobart 1985). That other coherent epistemologies exist rarely features in truth-conditional semantics. Such ignorance or dismissal suggest more reliance on faith and hope than on charity.

Balinese have elaborate and widely shared ideas about reference and language. Briefly, words (*keruna*) refer or point (*nudingang* or *nujuang*) to what exists in *sakala*. As you cannot refer ostensively to what is not manifest, you can at best speak of the non-manifest by analogy (*ngimbayang*) with the visible world, using conventional designations (*parad*) rather than proper names. As an aside, the word for proper name, and class name, is *adan*.[15] Speech is made up of utterances, which typically take the form of sentences (*lengkara*). Balinese further distinguish between speech and writing.[16] Although respect is widely accorded to written

works, what they signify remains a potentiality until someone actually reads them to an audience on some occasion for some purpose.

To make a statement which is either incorrect or untrue is lying (*mogbog*). Interestingly this normally covers not just deliberate misleading (*nguluk-uluk*) but mistakes.[17] Leeway is common when joking with friends, but you should be cautious with strangers and enemies. Insult therefore tends to take highly structured forms, such as *masesimbing*, where the effect is achieved by displacing the subject. For example you can make an insulting remark in the presence of someone you dislike after deliberately bumping, say, into a dog or small child. However, ostensibly you swear at *it*, not at your intended target.

Language (*basa*) is used with care, especially in public life. Balinese has several ranked lexical registers, or 'language levels', use of which varies with the status of the person or group addressed.[18] Misuse is a potentially serious offence, which might even involve the costly repurification of the offended party. (The stereotypic case is using demeaning language to a person of high 'caste'; but I know of instances of village wards exacting punishment—usually death—if similarly abused, *kapisuh*.) Balinese consider language to be so efficacious that it can easily be used to mislead. If asked to rank senses, informants almost always listed sight as the most reliable; and usually speech or hearing the least.[19] A striking feature of Balinese speech is how carefully statements are often qualified.

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14 The Sanskrit and Kawi is *wyakti*, 'visible appearance, becoming evident or known… evidence, proof, clarification, explanation'; also related to *wahya* 'outwardly visible, pertaining to the senses'. These glosses are from Zoetmulder 1982, from whom I take subsequent translations in Sanskrit and Kawi.

15 Balinese sometimes argued that the etymology was from *ada*, to exist, the genitive suffix '-n', so making it 'the existing/existence of'. In that case to name something would be to affirm its existence. However this is a folk etymology with all its implications.

16 Spoken utterance, *raos*, always excludes what is written, *sané katulis*, cf. Kawi *tulis* 'painting, drawing, writing, letter', 'with the outward form of', also 'a model' in the sense of a particularly good or beautiful instance of something. For further discussion of naming and Balinese interpretive vocabulary respectively see Hobart 1984, 2000.

17 This is in keeping with a tendency to avoid assertions or judgements about human, let alone divine, intentions which, being *niskala* are difficult, if not impossible, to know. So they tend to stress what happened, or the 'truth' or 'falsity' of statements. For a more detailed discussion of the categories of *niskala* and *sakala* see Hobart 1985.

18 Most of the words and expressions introduced here are *singgih* (high) Balinese, because that was the register that people mostly used to talk about such matters. Several terms are drawn from Kawi (the textual language of Old Javanese), which is in effect another register used by older or more articulate speakers.

19 The resulting scepticism towards reported information creates a problem about written texts. The problem is partly overcome by the convention that authors are liable to serious retribution for inaccuracy by virtue of the inevitable consequences of action, *karma pala*.

Reported speech is almost always just that. It is surprising how frequently English people of all walks of life conflate reported speech with direct observation. So it is difficult to convey to a European audience how widely Balinese avoid this kind of confusion. Their precision is reminiscent of those apocryphal stories about English analytical philosophers.[20]

Two common ways of dealing with inexactitude are the use of modal-like terms and veiled speech. Roughly, the former are terms like *satmaka* 'as if', *sakadi* 'like', *menawi* 'apparently', *minab* or *mirib* 'probably' or 'possibly'.[21] Who is entitled to make assertions or compare (*masaih*) events, actions etc. on what occasion without qualification deserves further study. It seems to mark a claim to authority or expertise, such that officials, princes, priests or professionals were more likely to make unqualified statements. When speakers wished to appear more modest, but felt reasonably assured of what they were saying, they tended to use *satmaka*; and where it was open to some doubt *sakadi*. I was told that, used properly, *minab*, *menawi* and *mirib* indicated degrees of likelihood that a statement was evident or correct. However the first two terms were widely used to qualify the relationship of the predicate to its subject, or the degree of its appositeness; while the last three qualified the relative likelihood of the statement being true (*wiakti*). If the authority to enunciate is circumscribed, relative skill at evaluating what others say seems far more widely distributed. To avoid upsetting the powerful, it is often wise though to keep your judgements to yourself.

A problem of avoiding lying is that you may wish to be 'economical with the truth' so as not to reveal too much. There are various ways of achieving this: some approved, some frowned upon. Perhaps the most common is *ngèmpèlin*, to be ambiguous. The word comes from a duck putting its webbed foot down, thereby covering a great deal of ground! It may be a bad way of speaking, but it is your own fault if you are taken in—caveat auditor!

Balinese often referred to speech as on a continuum from *raos nguda*, raw or immature speech, where you reveal your thoughts (*ngèdèngang pamineh*), to *raos wayah*, mature or oblique speech where you do not. As the former suggests, it is typically used by the young or foolish. The latter, by contrast, is a virtual index of refinement or intelligence and is thought on the whole to come with age and experience. Skilled public speakers almost always used it. And on such occasions as marriage negotiations or visits to royal courts and Brahmana high priests it was effectively obligatory. *Raos wayah* might be described as a subtler form of Sperber and Wilson's contextual implication. It has a perfectly clear ostensible reference, but also has one or more concealed references, which a skilled listener can infer from what is said. As far as I can judge, the less that context is required to make sense of an utterance, the better the example of mature speech it is; because context introduces ambiguity (*ngèmpèlin*). Balinese regard *raos wayah* highly. Its use indicates the speaker appreciates that the interests and capabilities of their audiences are heterogeneous. And it suggests a thoughtful and mature person.

The most direct kind of speech, widely used among family and intimate friends, is the vulgar *raos babelakasan* from *belakas*, an all-purpose agricultural chopper, the flat of which may be used as a hammer—whence the analogy—when you speak freely or, in the Balinese idiom, show the contents of your stomach (*ngèdèngang isin basang*). The antithesis is *raos makulit*, from *kulit* skin, perhaps best glossed as 'veiled speech', cryptic utterances, songs and the like, which requires expertise to unravel. The categories of mature and veiled speech overlap, although people may disagree as to the exact difference. Speech seems to be treated as veiled if the reference is obscure and requires background knowledge; and as mature when the listener is able to infer beyond the ostensible reference from the statement itself. The contexts of use also tend to differ. More thoughtful and senior people use mature speech most of the time even

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20 The fieldwork on which this piece is based was conducted in 1979-80. By the time I rewrote this piece in 2014, the advent of the mass media and modernization with the widespread use of Indonesian had resulted in significant changes in many people's use of language.

21 These terms translate poorly as adverbs, because the initial 'm' normally indicates a verb form (insofar as these European grammatical categories apply at all). So *mirib* is often glossed as 'be like, resemble' etc. Similarly *minab* frequently takes the verb form *minabang tiang*, 'it seems to me'.

in informal situations. Veiled speech involves deliberate indirection, for example when criticizing those in power, and so is often used by shadow puppeteers and actors. However whether speech is considered *wayah* or not is less some intrinsic property of the utterances than is dependent upon the listeners.

Balinese have a developed vocabulary for evaluating speech and writing. So we do not necessarily have to import academic models. As most written works are in Kawi, reading these (*ngawacèn* and so *mabasan*, putting into speech) is a common practice. Someone must then explicate it (*ngartiang*) in Balinese.[22] Something similar happens in theatre when the servants elaborate in low Balinese what noble characters say cryptically in Kawi or refined Balinese. It would be tempting to gloss *ngartiang* as 'translate'. However, whether in textual readings or in theatre, readers or actors relatively rarely search for exact correspondences, but paraphrase, elaborate, expatiate, contextualize and generally explore the implications.[23] Skilled actors become famous island-wide for their ability to insinuate several potential interpretations in a single expression, ranging from moral argument to contemporary social and political commentary. So it is questionable how far correspondence or truth conditions are what matters in practice. Inferring contextual implications is far from straightforward, even to audiences who share so much mutual knowledge.

In straight speech (*raos nguda*) the reference is evident, or as villagers would put it, the *tetujon* of the utterance is clear. Now the word *tetujon* is used of direction, 'heading towards' and so the aim of speech—where it is heading.[24] It would though be wrong to translate straight speech as 'what someone has in mind'. When I asked what someone's *tetujon* was, I was corrected, sometimes quite sharply. You cannot know someone else's *tetujon*, because it implies you

know where their thinking is ultimately heading (*tetujon pikayun*). I should have asked the aim of their speech (*tetujon raos*) or actions (*tetujon laksana*).

So how do you know when you might need to reflect on what is said? Much depends on the circumstances and on the listeners. Rather obviously, in public meetings or when matters of importance are being discussed, Balinese are less inclined to accept what people say at face value. If someone chooses to speak in a village meeting for instance, they usually have a reason or motive for so doing, which may well go beyond the ostensible reference. Much depends on who is speaking. There were people whose words I was advised to mull over in any situation.

Well-formed mature speech may offer few contextual clues towards its unravelling. Deciding whether and how to interpret utterances often requires careful consideration of context, the circumstances of utterance and familiarity with the speaker. Now the extent to which Western semantic or pragmatic theories minimize the role of listener is striking. A truth-conditional approach pays the audience scant attention. Speech Act Theory fares better, but the notions of illocutionary and perlocutionary force, while treating speech as action, stress the agency of the speaker and leave the listener a patient who is acted upon. A strength of the Gricean approach adopted by Sperber and Wilson is its recognition at least notionally of the involvement—and need to work—of listeners. Unfortunately in this instance the role is conceived passively: the listener's response is effectively conditioned, if not determined, by the speaker's utterance. However 'in point of fact the word is a two-sided act. It is determined equally by whose word it is and for whom it is meant... A word is territory shared by both addresser and addressee, by the speaker and his interlocutor' (Vološinov 1973: 86).

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22 cf. Sanskrit *artha*: aim, purpose, advantage, utility; object of the senses; sense, meaning; Kawi *mayartha:* interpret.

23 A developed exegetical vocabulary includes, for example, describing or explaining (*nerangang*), exemplifying (*nyontohin*, from *conto* example) or drawing parallels (*ngimbayang*, from *pra(tiw)imba*, analogy; from Sanskrit 'image, model, shadow'). Actors and shadow-puppeteers have long been intellectuals and social critics, a potentially dangerous role for example during the Suharto era. As elsewhere under politically repressive régimes, actors use indirectness, allusion, allegory and so on, which the more sophisticated spectators understand, but such that the most obvious interpretation is innocent.

24 cf. Kawi *tuju:* to go straight to, head for, aim directly at; also to agree with, be in accord with.

As we are dealing with practices of interpreting, how I was taught to go about unravelling utterances is informative. To understand speech, you must first fathom (*nurah*) the speaker's *tetujon* in saying what they did, and also consider whether there is a *tetuwek*. *Tetuwek* is the noun form of the root *nuwek*, to stab or pierce, to reveal what lies behind. Loosely this is 'the point'; although 'what is revealed' might be better. If you decide that what has been said has some disguised purpose (*tetujon kaengkeb*), you need to sift the words (*nyaringin*) carefully to see if there is a *tetuwek*.

As Balinese tend to treat speech as an act, an account of 'meaning' involves the consequences of both speaking and listening. If you understand (*ngaresep*) where the speech is heading and what it reveals to the perceptive interlocutor, you have a *pikolih* (product, result, outcome) without which listening is fruitless (*gabeng*).[25] Finally, if you realize something from what is said, you have—or experience—*suksema* (see below).

Obviously few people go to all this trouble over most mundane utterances. It would be incorrect though to think of this work of unravelling (*melut*, used also of peeling a fruit) as the preserve of a small coterie of local pedants or academics manqué. I was frequently taken aback in Bali at how often women and men, whom their co-villagers dismissed as ignorant, used this evaluative vocabulary in daily life.

The litany of terms above makes heavy going, so let me flesh the argument out with two examples, which may make matters clearer. The first was a case of ambiguity (*ngèmpèlin*) about a potentially serious matter. The second was judged a fine instance of oblique speech.

Example 1:
An empty oath (or ambiguous speech, raos ngèmpèlin)

On various occasions Balinese may have to swear oaths, for instance when parties to a dispute present conflicting statements or public property is stolen. A famous oath includes, among various forms of sudden and unpleasant death, the threat of being eaten by a crocodile if you lie.[26] During a temple festival, when no one would admit to absconding with some baskets, the question arose of administering such an oath. One skilled public speaker remarked that a key clause was ambiguous (*ngèmpèlin*). Even were he guilty, he could quite happily swear to it, because its most obvious interpretation was that you were prepared to be attacked by a dead crocodile—a pretty benign fate.[27] The oath should have been phrased to state you were prepared to be savaged to death by a crocodile, had you lied. When I asked if this were its *tetujon*, it caused people some confusion because the words indicated no clear path of action. The purpose in the officials' minds (*tetujon pikayun*) was obviously the latter; but, as it stood, it was an empty (*gabeng*) oath.

Diagram: Ambiguous Speech		
	The Balinese and its gloss in English	Balinese terminology
The proposed oath was:	*Tiang apang sarap buaya mati.*	*Raos* (utterance)
This is ambiguous. The sentence can mean either:	*(a) Tiang apang sarap (antuk) buaya mati.* May I be savaged by a dead crocodile!	*Artin raos* (the meaning of the utterance)
Or:	*(b) Apang tiang mati sarap (antuk) buaya.* May I die (by being) savaged by a crocodile.	*Sané patut karaos* (What should have been said)

While we might think the example trivial, those present did not. There was fairly widespread resentment at the pretension of the

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25 The metaphors here are partly agricultural. *Pikolih* is used inter alia of harvest yield; and unpollinated *padi* is *gabeng*.

26 *Buaya* includes sharks and other large water-based animals. So it is a cultural category, which is part of shared knowledge and cannot be implied from the context of a conversation.

27 This fate is reminiscent of a famous remark delivered by the Labour politician Dennis Healey in the British House of Commons. He said that being attacked by the mild-manner Minister, Sir Geoffrey Howe, was like being savaged by a dead sheep.

village leaders, which was neatly punctured by these remarks. As by-standers explained to me the significance of what was said, perhaps more important than the subject matter to hand, is how familiar many people were with the analytical vocabulary of speech and its forensic use.

Example 2:
The behaviour of a priest

One day I visited an old Balinese friend accompanied by one of my main informants. In the course of conversation I mentioned that I was working with different groups of Balinese villagers to gain a sense of the diversity and range of local knowledge. I kept a local temple priest (pamangku, addressed as Jèro Mangku), separate from the others because his knowledge was so extensive that others felt shy of speaking and I was not sure how typical he was. My friend replied 'Be careful of the Jèro Mangku, his knowledge is of the level of a high priest'. We continued chatting for some time before I left.

On the way back, the remark came to mind and I asked my informant what had it been about. He gave me a curious look and said he had wondered whether I had understood (*ngaresep*). He seemed pleased that I had realized something was afoot and said that at last I was learning how to reflect on what people were telling me. It was, he added, a good example of *raos wayah* because it was very clear. He then explained how to set about unravelling the utterance. As it seemed complicated, I privately thought the informant might just be giving me a virtuoso exhibition of his hermeneutic skills. So I asked several other villagers separately what they thought only to be given almost exactly the same explication.

What my friend said was that the temple priest's knowledge was of the order of a Brahmana High Priest, the latter being the repositories of much erudite knowledge (1a; see diagram below). The unstated implication was that, although the man was only a village priest, his knowledge was sufficiently superior to other villagers' that I should beware of confusing his

account with theirs. However, if I reflected on what was said I could discern a purpose (*tetujon*) beyond the ostensible referent. To make matters simpler the speaker had even included the phrase *ingen-ingen*, 'be careful', 'pay attention' which invited his interlocutor to consider, and sift the speech (*nyaring raos*) to discover the purpose in saying it (2b). First I was being told to beware of the priest (3c); and further I was invited to reflect on possible parallels between the temple priest and High Priests (3d), to establish why caution was advocated. To do so, I had to sift through what was said again (4), focusing on 'beware' (4e) to compare what I knew about the priest with what I knew of High Priests. High Priests have the reputation

> To what extent does the easy confidence with which some anthropologists explain Balinese 'symbolism' stem from not really listening to what is being said?

of ingeniously, but unostentatiously, extracting large donations from their supplicants (4f), while making a show of selflessness. The temple priest, while very clever, was often accused locally of being greedy. The point (*tetuwek*) of the initial statement was now revealed, according to my informants. I should beware of the temple priest because his actions showed that he had a bad character behind his principled veneer. So I acquired (*mapikolih*) something useful from the exchange and with it *suksema*. *Suksema* defies translation. While it has become a popular term for 'Thank you', in Sanskrit it signifies what is subtle, intangible; and in Kawi what is not normally perceptible. So it connotes the antithesis of the coarse and material. *Suksema* seems to suggest an aspect of your being following a completed action, most usually if it was beneficial or productive.[28]

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28 Cf. Sanskrit *suksma:* minute, fine, intangible, acute, subtle, keen; Kawi: subtle, of subtle matter, ethereal, unsubstantial i.e. not accessible to the usual organs of perception, but perceptible to those gifted with supernatural powers, the invisible essence of what is sensually perceptible; the state of a deity not manifesting itself in material form.

Diagram: Mature Speech	
1. Utterance (*Raos*)	a. (Be) careful of the Jèro Mangku, his knowledge is of the level of a High Priest. (*Ingen-ingen ring Jèro Mangku, kawikanan dané tingkat Padanda.*)
2. If you sift the utterance… (*Yèning nyaring raos…*)	b. Beware ⇒ Inspect what has just been said. (*Ingen-ingen → maréksa sané karaos.*)
3. The aim of the utterance (*Tetujon raos*)	c. Beware ⇒ Jèro Mangku. (*Ingen-ingen → Jèro Mangku*) d. The utterance's purpose is that the listener should examine the priest's actions and consider what relationship they bear to ⇒ High Priests. (*Tetujon raos mangda sané mireng maréksa laksanan dané kantos mikayunin napi pasuwitran punika ring kawikanan → Padanda.*)
4. Sift again (*Nyaringin malih*)	e. Beware! Sift again to compare the circumstances. (*Ingen-ingen. Mangda nyaihang kawèntenan ring kawèntenan;*) f. High Priests are often clever (in the bad sense). They want money and ask for gifts but without it being obvious. (*Kawikanan Padanda sering kaon, makayun jinah jaga ngambil sesari sakéwanten 'ten ngenah.*)
5. The point, what is revealed (*Tetuwek*)	g. Beware of the Jèro Mangku because his character as exemplified in his behaviour is bad. (*Ingen-ingen ring Jèro Mangku santukan perah dané kaon.*)

The original exchange's full significance was lost on the naïve anthropologists, but my friend knew my informant well enough to guess that he would probably explain it to me. If the presentation seems tortuous, it is partly because I have tried to keep to how the statement was explained to me. It also suggests the sort of cultural learning needed to fathom what people from another society say to one another. To what extent does the easy confidence with which some anthropologists explain Balinese 'symbolism' stem from not really listening to what is being said? Is it coincidental that Clifford Geertz whose analyses of Balinese symbolism are the benchmarks for interpretive anthropology subsequently admitted that his research was undertaken in Indonesian (1991: 606)? The implications for scholarship are intriguing.[29]

The consensus was that the warning was a good example of oblique speech because it did not rely on context, which might have made it ambiguous. It was *melah waspadang*, beautifully clear, understandable and so likely to be

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29 It was left open whether the Jèro Mangku was bad because he was after money or for some other reason. If you understand (*ngaresep*) the *tetuwek*, you have an initial result (*pikolih*) and so may feel *suksema*. You may continue to establish in what way the man has a bad character and so have further *pikolih* and *suksema* because you are aware of a danger of which you were not before. Two word plays confirm that it is wise to reflect. First, *tingkat*, 'level' or 'standard', is Indonesian, but is virtual homonym of *tingkah* (both Indonesian and Balinese), moral behaviour. Second *kawikanan*, wisdom, knowledge, cleverness is ambivalent in Bali (as is 'clever' in English).

understood.[30] How Balinese villagers draw inferences differs from Sperber and Wilson's account. Unravelling utterances does not depend on otherwise obscure remarks or exchanges; and interpretation may eschew recourse to the context of utterance. Crucially, listeners play an active role in deciding what utterances are about. *Pace* Sperber and Wilson, it is hard to see how to unravel the remark without much shared knowledge, including learning how to use language and to listen to what is said.

In a hierarchical society like Bali, the point of veiled speech is precisely that such knowledge is differentially distributed and only partly shared. So are the egalitarian presuppositions on which Sperber and Wilson's argument rests as unproblematically cross-cultural as they assume? If we turn to indigenous literature, matters become more complicated still. How to interpret sources dealing with the past is not self-evident. There was a heated argument between Dutch scholars as to whether the dynastic chronicles (*babad*) of Java and Bali should be read as a quasi-factual historical record (Pigeaud 1960-63) or whether the presuppositions behind their writing differed so much that such a reading was fatally flawed (Berg 1965; Zoetmulder 1965).[31] The latter view, once derided, has subsequently been borne out by ethnographic accounts of how Indonesians use such works (Becker 1979; Errington 1979; Vickers 1991). Is it not slightly odd though to decree what written works are about prior to asking how they are used?

How though do most people encounter texts? Usually it is through theatre. In Java and Bali a play, which lasts for several hours or even nights, is extemporized around a few sentences from a literary work. Such performances are remarkable *tours de force* by an ensemble of actors working together in an unrepeatable event. Performers often spoke of such occasions as re-enacting or bringing to life what is written for a particular audience on a given occasion. How adequate is a theory of language if it cannot begin to address such popular usage?

Reviewing Balinese usage, even words for meaning imply action: *tetuwek* is about pointing,

tetujon is about moving towards a goal. The stress is on doing: explicating (*ngartiang*), exemplifying (*nyontohin*), sifting (*nyaringin*) or unravelling (*melut*). Ambiguity, *ngèmpèlin* is a verb ('ambiguate'); while to understand, *ngaresep*, is a 'two-sided word', 'entering, penetrating' and 'entered, penetrated' (Zoetmulder 1982: 1543). Rather than being about abstract objects like meaning, Balinese talk about what is involved in speaking, listening and interpreting as a situated practice.

Have I not overstated my case? After all, is not the most sophisticated theory vulnerable to ethnographic quibbles? Am I not demanding of theory a capacity to deal with the everyday that is unrealistic? Consider then this critique of the postulates of linguistics.

> The theory of the performative sphere, and the broader sphere of the illocutionary, has had three important and immediate consequences: (1) It has made it impossible to conceive of language as a code, since a code is the condition of possibility for all explanation. It has also made it impossible to conceive of speech as the communication of information: to order, question, promise, or affirm is not to inform someone about a command, doubt, engagement, or assertion but to effectuate these specific, immanent, and necessarily implicit acts. (2) It has made it impossible to define semantics, syntactics, or even phonematics as scientific zones of language independent of pragmatics. Pragmatics ceases to be a 'trash heap,' pragmatic determinations cease to be subject to the alternative: fall outside language, or answer to explicit conditions that syntacticize and semanticize pragmatic determinations. Instead, pragmatics becomes the presupposition behind all of the other dimensions and insinuates itself into everything. (3) It makes it impossible to maintain the distinction between language and speech because speech can no longer be defined simply as the extrinsic and individual use of a primary signification, or the variable application of a preexisting syntax. Quite the opposite, the meaning and syntax of language can no longer be defined independently of the speech acts they presuppose (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 77-78).

Balinese invite us to go still further. Speech is inseparable from other acts, because meaning can only be judged from its consequences. A fine-grained analysis of interpretation is not sub-theoretical or unphilosophical; it just starts

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30 *Waspada* is both understandable and likely to be understood.

31 The debate recently took a new twist when it transpired that most, if not all, Balinese *babad* were twentieth century retrojections (Adrian Vickers, personal communication).

from quite different presuppositions that are better suited to a study of practice.[32]

The Future of an Illusion?

What can we conclude from this initial inquiry into Balinese interpretive practices? How adequate are the linguistic models considered? After all, it is always possible to make sense of the ethnography using different interpretive schemes or translational manuals. What is the bearing of this inquiry on our understanding of Balinese society? What are the implications for the cross-cultural study of interpretation and meaning? And, insofar as an ethnography of semantic practice suggests new ways of approaching interpretation and meaning, how might this require us to rethink existing approaches to European societies?

As for Truth-Conditional semantics, Balinese expect intelligible speech to refer to the world; and they recognize a difference between the coherence of utterances and their truthfulness. The meaning of sentences can be read as being guaranteed if, and only if, they are true. They also worry about sentences where they cannot determine what is *wiakti* (cf. Hacking 1975: 153). However existing accounts of truth-conditions do not correspond to Balinese ideas of what is manifest.[33] Nor does the distinction between *sakala* and *niskala* fit the dichotomy of material and mental worlds. It also requires stretching the notion of meaning to the point of meaninglessness. To Balinese, stories and texts only become meaningful by virtue of being read, sung, paraphrased or performed; but without engaged listeners or spectators nothing significant can take place. So the efficacy of a speech act depends on it having an outcome for the audience, who are part-agents in the event.

At first sight a speech act approach copes better. The locutionary, or propositional, force of an utterance could be compared in straight speech to *daging raos*, the content of the speech; and, in oblique speech, to the point *tetuwek*. The *tetujon* would be the aim of saying something, its illocutionary force; and the *pikolih*, the perlocutionary force of the utterance (Austin 1975; Searle 1971). As Balinese distinguish between material and immaterial consequences of speech, *pikolih* would be the manifest or tangible, and *suksema* the non-manifest or intangible, outcome of the utterance. A problem for Relevance Theory is that it is impossible to infer relevant context without prior knowledge. Nor can you predict how Balinese argue without grasping their epistemology. Sperber and Wilson would never be alerted to oblique speech at all because statements do make ostensible sense. As it stands, for Bali Relevance Theory actually guarantees miscommunication. Even if theoretical linguists and philosophers are satisfied with the rigorous logical conditions of such arguments, they are of precious little use to anthropologists and other scholars who wish to study how Balinese and others set about interpreting and understanding one another.

Does this inquiry into their interpretive practices change how we might set about understanding Balinese society? Recourse to use is not a panacea, as it is contingent on circumstances. Also Balinese explain what they do by invoking concepts that are mutually defined, like *suksema*. So we seem to be dealing with a Quinean account of knowledge as 'a man-made fabric which impinges on experience only along the edges' (1953: 42). Does my approach then lose in explanatory scope what it might gain in analytical or descriptive power? But why should such situation-sensitive uses of communication in a broad sense admit of a single encompassing explanation, as in the human sciences the latter is often an intellectual Chimaera? Balinese quotidian interpretive practices differ sufficiently from both common

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32 Deleuze 'calls his kind of philosophy "pragmatics" because its goal is the invention of concepts that do not add up to a system of belief or an architecture of propositions that you either enter or you don't, but instead pack a potential in the way a crowbar in a willing hand envelops an energy of prying' (Massumi 1987: xv).

33 On a broader issue of truth, Hollis and Lukes have argued that anthropologists taking my tack 'must surely believe that they can succeed, at least in principle, in identifying what their subjects believe' (1982b: 10). I have no reason to hold that Balinese do have one true set of beliefs about meaning. In their own terms, such beliefs are *niskala* and therefore hard to pin down. Balinese are not somehow passively mirroring collective representations. They are asserting, pondering and discussing questions of how to interpret what is said and done in particular situations. How are we to determine the correct translation for what is not a transcendent set of ideas at all, but rather shared practices?

sense expectations and linguistic models that failing to take them properly into account looks at best lazy, at worst plain hegemonic. However such an analysis is not enough in itself.

> There exists a very strong … idea that in order better to understand a foreign culture, one must enter into it, forgetting one's own, and view the world through the eyes of this foreign culture. Of course, a certain entry as a living being into a foreign culture … is a necessary part of the process of understanding it; but if this were the only aspect it would merely be duplication and would not entail anything new or enriching. Creative understanding does not renounce itself, its own place in time, its own culture; and it forgets nothing. In order to understand, it is immensely important for the person who understands to be located outside the object of his or her creative understanding - in time, in space, in culture (Bakhtin 1986b: 6-7).

The choice is not between Balinese or Euro-American academic accounts, nor treating others as raw material for the Western mind to digest (Bateson & Mead 1942). Instead I prefer the idea of a creative dialogue in which indigenous usage and theoretical accounts are held in an irresolvable tension such that understanding addresses not only what Balinese do, but also reflexively turns a critical eye onto our own academic and quotidian usage.

Does not treating practice as the object of study threaten analytical coherence?[34] After all, what occurs in actuality is often contingent. This is not a problem unique to practice. Any approach that seeks system or structure has to select evidence and discount chance or awkward events. Here practice arguably fares better (for a definition, see Hobart 2010: 63). Under conditions of double discursivity, we need to distinguish the practices through which people organize the events, actions and activities that happen around them from the practices of scholars, which analyze the former. If carried out non-trivially, studying people's practices involves studying how they set about articulating their worlds. Linguistic (and indeed some anthropological) approaches worry me insofar as they fail to appreciate the constitutive role of local practices of encouraging, forbidding, disciplining, enunciating, demonstrating, representing, arguing and so on—in short, 'articulating' in its cultural studies sense.[35] To articulate successfully necessarily requires disarticulating rival accounts. So articulation provides a means of studying what other approaches find hard, namely how silences and absences come about and are maintained. There is nothing haphazard in studying practice. On the contrary, it enables us to analyze critically not only indigenous procedures for controlling, classifying, ordering and distributing what happens, but also how these relate to the procedures scholars use in their research and writing. If a new approach is to be taken seriously, presumably it must be able to account for what previous approaches could and also address what these latter could not either adequately or at all (cf. Kuhn 1970). On that score I think that practice succeeds well. No approach is, or should be, the final solution; and inevitably further work will highlight shortcomings. However, insofar as practice offers a more nuanced way of engaging with how Balinese articulate and argue over how they speak and what they do, it is useful.

Does my present inquiry change how we might set about interpreting Balinese society? I

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34 The difference between my approach and, say, that of Rosaldo (1982) should, I hope, be clear. To her, practice is reducible to the codes, rules and categories of an unproblematic universal academic framework. By contrast I am arguing not only that practice is not so reducible, but that such systems require rethinking as practices of claiming, questioning, denying and so forth in the circumstances in which people invoke them for different reasons. For a discussion of some of the philosophical issues, see Couldry & Hobart 2010.

35 Articulation is a powerful concept drawn from cultural studies (Laclau & Mouffe 1985; Slack 1996). My suggestion is hardly radical. Much of Foucault's later work was concerned with practices in this sense. Among these were 'internal procedures, since discourses themselves exercise their own control; procedures which function rather as principles of classification, of ordering, of distribution, as if this time another dimension of discourse had to be mastered: that of events and chance'. He noted three in particular. These are 'commentary', the procedures for organizing utterances, acts and events. 'Rarefaction' as 'a principle of grouping of discourses, conceived as the unity and origin of their meanings, as the focus of their coherence'. And 'discipline' which Foucault defined 'by a domain of objects, a set of methods, a corpus of propositions considered to be true: a play of rules and definitions, of techniques and instruments' (1981: 56, 58, 59). Here I have been concerned primarily with practices of commenting and disciplining.

think it does. It throws a question mark over the hegemony by which Euro-American categories of judgement replace, rather than are in dialogue with, Balinese. It is a warning against selecting material that fits pre-conceived frameworks by imposing a foreign discourse or metaphysics, which neatly disarticulates what people say and do in the name of academic authority. Let me be clear about what I am attempting. It is not simply a descriptive ethnography of speaking or communicating through a more fine-grained analysis of the differences in how people articulate the world according to race, class, gender, religion, generation or other possible distinctions that may matter in different societies. Instead I question the convenient assumption that others' practices of understanding may necessarily be adequately explained or understood using 'universal' or 'objective' criteria.[36] Such claims are power-laden. They exonerate (Barthes 1973: 139) and naturalize the class, ethnic and cultural backgrounds of the experts who enunciate. As Fiske put it succinctly: 'objectivity is the "unauthored" voice of the bourgeoisie' (1987: 289). By contrast I prefer a strong critical approach, which requires not just analyzing what others say and do, but simultaneously reflecting critically on our own working presuppositions in so doing. If the result is uncomfortable and unsettling, so be it.

In conclusion, perhaps it is hardly surprising that theoretical linguists have found structure so universally. Generations of schoolmasters and schoolmistresses have been beating—often literally—grammatical structure into unwilling pupils. So the history of practice may be at least as pertinent as postulated unconscious rules. However a residual linguistic imperialism holds 'that if the native does not share most of our beliefs and wants, he is just not engaged in human discourse, and is at best sub-human. (The native has heard that one before too)' (Hacking 1975: 149). The study of interpretive practice reveals a residual intellectual insularity. The English, who are its past masters, used to say that there is little worthwhile beyond the

wharves of Dover. It reminds me of the apocryphal newspaper headline:

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THICK FOG IN CHANNEL, EUROPE CUT OFF

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36 The familiar counter-argument is that I use this hegemonic language myself and so am trapped one way or another by its limitations. Apart from a buried metaphor of the prison house of language, such an argument implies that you cannot reflect on or criticize your own assumptions.

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