# 1.1

# Anthropology and Linguistics

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Over the last few decades, the anthropological study of linguistic structures, genres, and activities in private and public settings has redefined the goals and boundaries of what 'linguistics' means for the social sciences and anthropology in particular. The 'linguists' in today's anthropology departments – or 'linguistic anthropologists' as they are known in the United States and Canada – are not only different from most of their colleagues in linguistics or language departments but also they are different from the linguistic anthropologists of two or three generations ago. One of the main differences is the theoretical and methodological shift from the study of linguistic structures as manifestations of a common code (or grammar) to the study of language as a socio-historically defined resource for the constitution of society and the reproduction of cultural meanings and practices. The current trend, then, could be seen as a continuation of what a little over two decades ago I called 'a linguistics of the human praxis' (Duranti 1988a). The term 'praxis' in this case was meant to recognize the interest within the Ethnography of Communication (Hymes 1964; Gumperz and Hymes 1972) for the use of language in the conduct of social life: that is, for what language does for, to, and through speakers. This focus has not changed and it is safe to say that an anthropologically informed linguistics is a linguistics that starts from the assumption that language plays a key role in how society is organized and reproduced. What has changed over the last few decades is that linguistic anthropologists have rendered more nuanced their use of some key notions taken from linguistics, philosophy, and social theory. In this chapter I will focus on three such notions: namely, performance, indexicality, and agency. I will show that their use in the analysis of speaking allows linguistic anthropologists to

clarify how the details of linguistic structure participate in the constitution of particular aspects of the social context, including events, acts, stances, and identities. Throughout the chapter, I show that the attention to linguistic structure and linguistic performance can provide us with important analytical tools for understanding how acts, persons, and activities are connected. This connection is crucial for the fabric of social life and for the managing of social action.

## PERFORMANCE

Noam Chomsky introduced performance in his ground-breaking monograph *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (Chomsky 1965), but only to dismiss it as theoretically less important than competence, the knowledge of language. Chomsky's arguments in favour of the study of what ideal speaker-hearers *know* (competence) as opposed to what they *say* in a given situation (performance) echoed Ferdinand de Saussure's distinction between *langue* and *parole* and influenced theoretical linguists. Indirectly, it contributed to the development of the separate field of sociolinguistics in the 1970s and the rebirth of linguistic anthropology in the 1980s (Duranti 2003). As linguistics became more and more focused on formal models based on native speakers' intuitions about what constitute well-formed sentences in their language,[1] a number of scholars advocated the importance of the study of language use across speech styles (e.g. Labov 1966, 1972) and social situations (e.g. Hymes 1964, 1972).

During the 1950s, performance had also been evoked in John Austin's Harvard lectures on how utterances manage to *do* things. The publication of

these lectures (Austin 1962, 1975) not only gave birth to what was later called Speech Act Theory (Searle 1969, but also helped establish the field of pragmatics, understood as the study of the relationship between language and the contexts of its use (Gazdar 1979; Levinson 1983). An important part of Austin's model was the notion of *performative verbs*. These are verbs like *declare, command, request*, etc. Used in the present tense and with a first-person singular subject – as in *I request that you leave the room* – they make explicit what a given utterance – e.g., *leave the room*! – is meant to accomplish (as we know, speakers very rarely make use of performative verbs in the first-person present tense form). Performance for Austin was thus identified with action or, in his terms, with the *force* that a given utterance has (see also Duranti 2009). In the 1970s, linguistic anthropologists adopted the term *performance* for examining genres like poetry, oratory, storytelling, or singing not only as texts but also as the products of interactions between speakers (or singers) and audiences. This shift of focus came with an appreciation of the creativity that is always at work in speaking and of the responsibility that speakers assume for the ways in which they deliver a given message (Bauman 1975; Hymes 1975).

Several years later, Judith Butler also adopted the notion of performance, renaming it *performativity* and changing its basic meaning from what a speaker does with language to the process whereby the speaker (or others) are constituted (in the phenomenological sense of the term) through language and other symbolic acts. More specifically, Butler argued that gender is not just the cultural interpretation or embodiment of a pre-established or pre-formed sex, but 'a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo. In its very character as performative resides the possibility of contesting its reified status' (1988: 520). As she made clear in the preface of the new edition of her 1990 book *Gender Trouble*, Butler was seeking to undo what she saw as normative presuppositions and interpretive practices in the feminism of the time: '*Gender Trouble* sought to uncover the ways in which the very thinking of what is possible in gendered life is foreclosed by certain habitual and violent presumptions' (Butler 1999: viii). Since such presumptions are contained, or, rather, indexed by language use (Butler 1993), it is not surprising that Butler's notion of performativity and some of its theoretical implications to rethink the role of language in the construction of social identity became part of the discussion of social identity and social identification among linguistic anthropologists (Bucholtz and Hall 2004; Hall 1999; Kulick 2000, 2009).

More recently, Richard Bauman's (1975) original definition of performance as responsibility for the ways in which a given message is delivered has been enriched by a number of studies that look at what performers actually do, think, and feel while performing. For example, Harris Berger and Giovanna Del Negro (2002), drawing from Berger's (1999) phenomenologically informed ethnography of musicians in three traditions (rock, metal, and jazz), argued that performers not only have different ways of organizing their own and their audience's attention but also different levels of awareness, which are activated by the specific historically defined cultural organization of the event in which they perform. Musicians can at times get lost in the flow of sound they (and sometimes their audience) produce, and other times – in order to solve a problem on stage – they become very attentive to their own and others' actions, achieving a high degree of reflexivity.

Based on Del Negro's fieldwork in a small Italian town, they also suggested that there are appropriate and inappropriate ways of performing being self-conscious in public. During the *passeggiata*, those who choose to dress up and walk in the middle of the main road show their will to be subject to public evaluation, but they must also do it with *disinvoltura*: that is, with ease – a quality of being that must be displayed through posture, movements, and graceful recognition of the attention that their dresses and actions attract.

These studies bring out aspects of verbal performance that had been previously overlooked. One of them is the recurring presence of improvisation in a number of speech genres (Caton 1990; Duranti 2008a; Pagliai 2002, 2010; Sawyer 2001; Tiezzi 2009) and in children's verbal play (Sawyer 1996; Duranti and Black 2011). Another aspect is the tension between creativity and social control. If speaking is a form of action – as emphasized by speech act theorists – and of interaction – as argued by conversation analysts – then speech performance cannot but be regulated – or 'regimented' (Kroskrity 1998, 2000) – while being both the target and the instrument of ideological assessment (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994; Schieffelin, Woolard and Kroskrity 1998). These and other studies show that through the study of verbal performance linguistic anthropologists have returned in new ways to the earlier connections between linguistics and aesthetics established by scholars like Edward Sapir and Roman Jakobson but later forgotten in the midst of the so-called 'Chomskian Revolution' (Newmeyer 1986).

The study of performance has also become associated with the role of the human body, tools, and the built environment in the constitution of

meaningful actions, speaking included. From the point of view of data collection, this confluence of interests was made possible by the adoption of audio-visual technologies for the documentation of human interaction. From a theoretical point of view, the body and its material surroundings became particularly important for social theorists who were influenced by phenomenology.

All stage actors know that the setting as well as their posture and movement on the stage play a key role in communicating to an audience what a given scene is about even before they open their mouth to deliver their lines. But it took some time for students of language use to find ways to even notice that the body and the material context of an interaction are key elements in the encoding of messages and their interpretations. Inspired by Charles S. Peirce's theoretical writings on the notion of sign, Erving Goffman's (1959, 1967) insightful observation of face-to-face interaction, and Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) discussion of *habitus* and bodily *hexis*, linguistic anthropologists have been refining a number of analytical concepts that are meant to capture how language, body, and material environment are integrated in human action. One important development has been the expansion of the linguistic notion of deixis to the more general notion of indexicality, which has been adopted, empirically grounded, and refined in the study of language socialization, language ideologies, and non-verbal communication.

## INDEXICALITY

One of the major areas of intersection between anthropology and linguistics over the last several decades has been the study of indexicality, understood as the property that linguistic expressions exhibit when they presuppose or help establish an existential – spatial or temporal – relation with their referents (Peirce 1955: 107; Hanks 1999). Linguists have tended to discuss indexicality under the more narrow sense of 'deixis' (Lyons 1982; Levinson 1983). In English, for example, deictic terms include personal pronouns like *I* and *you* as well as spatial and temporal particles or adverbs like *here, there, up, down, next, now, then, today, tomorrow,* etc. These lexical items all share one property: their referent shifts from one context to the next (hence the term 'shifters', originally introduced by Otto Jespersen and then adopted by Roman Jakobson).

An important contribution to an anthropological study of indexicality was made by Michael Silverstein (1976), who drawing from Peirce, distinguished between two different kinds of indexes (or indices): those that are context-dependent and those that are context-creating. To the first type belong deictic terms like 'there' in the utterance *the letter is there*, where the interpretation of the deictic adverb 'there' *presupposes* the possibility of identifying some location within the perceptually and/or conceptually available space to which 'there' would be applicable. From a truth-propositional point of view, we would say that the truth-value could not be assigned to *the letter is there* without having the contextual information necessary to know what 'there' refers to. Typical examples of the second type, namely, context-creating indexes, are personal pronouns like *you* in utterances such as *What do you think?* In this case, the pronoun *you* selects, out of the situation, one or more individuals to become addressee(s) and invites (or obliges) them to speak next. The pronoun *you*, in other words, establishes the speaking roles of the participants in the particular speech event.

The notion of indexicality has also been used by linguists and anthropologists to talk about the social implications of certain linguistic expressions, such as the choice between *tu* and *vous* in French or a particular 'speech level' in languages like Javanese or Korean. Linguists have used the term 'social deixis' (Fillmore 1975) to refer to the fact that these expressions either presuppose or entail (to use Silverstein's terms) particular social relations or social situations. Both address terms and referential descriptions index types of social relationships as well as different types of social occasions, in addition to a person's political stance and even ideology of citizenship and participation in public life. Being on a first name basis, for example, is not a condition for using the first name to refer to important political figures or other celebrities. In 1996, when I was documenting a campaign for the US Congress in a Californian electoral district, I had a chance to observe and document that Hillary Clinton – then the First Lady – and other political figures were at times being referred to and even addressed by first name even by new acquaintances and strangers. This is not uncommon with celebrities (people all over the world referred to the Princess of Wales as 'Diana' before and after her tragic death in an automobile accident). But the fact that the referential form could change within the same situation and in the speech by the same person showed that speakers were shifting referential expressions not because they were adapting to the context (CONTEXT → LANGUAGE) but because they were activating different perspectives on the same person and thus redefining the context through language (LANGUAGE → CONTEXT) (Duranti 1992).

As the discussion of 'context' became in the 1970s and 1980s a central concern for linguistic

anthropologists and discourse analysts (Duranti and Goodwin 1992; van Dijk 2008), so did the concept of indexicality, which has been used by an increasing number of scholars for discussing language as a cultural and social phenomenon. It should not, then, be surprising that some of the more recent attempts at theorizing language from an anthropological perspective have tended to examine linguistic expressions from the point of view of their indexical meaning. A key feature of these contributions is the concern with the ways in which indexicality plays a role in the constitution of cultural knowledge and institutional roles and identities. Looming large behind these contributions lies the problem of the so-called micro–macro link (e.g. Alexander et al. 1987): namely, the issue of how the details of everyday interaction, in which language can be easily shown to play an important role for its users, are connected with and relevant to larger societal entities (e.g. institutions) and processes (e.g. socio-economic and socio-political change), where the role of language is minimized or taken for granted by researchers (but see Drew and Heritage 1992; Heritage and Clayman 2010; also the essays collected in Browning and Duranti 2005, especially Levinson 2005 and Schegloff 2005).

Several contributions to the study of indexical meanings have addressed the relationship between individual linguistic expressions and the context in which they participate and which they simultaneously help constitute, including the roles or identities of speakers, addressees, and bystanders. I will here review four of these studies. As we shall see, the general trend among these authors is to posit that indexical values participate in analytically distinct and distinguishable 'levels,' 'orders,' or 'modalities,' which are often hierarchically organized through relationships of dependency, intertextuality, relevance, etc. Since each of the four studies is the culmination of a long-term commitment by the author to the relationship between language and context, I will occasionally draw from other articles by the same author without claiming to be exhaustive or even moderately adequate in my account of their respective life-projects. My aim is to focus on some of their main points and key concepts. I will review the articles according to the order in which they appeared in print.

### Silverstein's indexical orders

In an article that reads as the culmination of more than three decades of teaching and writing about indexicality, Michael Silverstein's (2004) '"Cultural" concepts and the language-culture nexus' provides a complex and detailed argumentation about why one should look for culture in the dynamics of verbal interaction. Silverstein argues that cultural conceptualization is not so much found in the *denotative* meanings that are being communicated – what is sometimes informally called the 'content' of speech – but in their indexical meanings, which he defines as the interactionally (and textually) activated associations between the expressions used and the stereotypical social roles, identities, and relationships invoked by such expressions (see also Silverstein 1997 on the improvisational quality of discourse in real time).

This approach makes a number of theoretical claims and showcases methods developed within linguistic anthropology (and related fields) to support those claims. The first assumption is that to speak of culture means to search for and deal with patterned behaviour such as (speech) events or their constituting 'genres' (e.g. lectures, interviews, greetings, casual conversation), which are recognizable (by an observer) within a particular socio-historical tradition. This implies that cultural analysis cannot be limited to meta-cognitive activities such as asking natives about their beliefs or to meta-linguistic activities such as asking speakers about their linguistic classifications of nature, society, and their bio-psychological life. The second theoretical assumption is that cultural knowledge is understood as changeable, negotiable, and adaptable to context-specific goals or needs. The use of language, e.g., speaking, is thus resource and occasion for the reproduction as well as for the testing of cultural knowledge. This is true of informal conversations and ritual contexts alike. Silverstein argues that even though there are differences between a casual conversation and an 'official ritual' like the service of the Eucharist, an analysis of the 'text-artefacts' produced in such speech events can show that they share a certain type or degree of conformity. In particular, they each display a textual configuration that exhibits a hidden but detectable 'conceptual' apparatus, a 'metrics' of a sort where such poetic phenomena as parallelism are at play together with the ritual-like performance of 'roles' and even 'role reversals' (see also Silverstein 1997). For example, specialized vocabulary such as that used during wine tasting events has the 'creative power to index consubstantial traits in the speaker.' (Silverstein 2004: 643). The description of certain attributes of the wine while we are in the process of tasting it (and 'testing it') has the power to make us 'the well-bred, characterologically interesting (subtle, understated, balanced, intriguing, wining, etc.) person iconically corresponding to the metaphorical "fashion of speaking" of the perceived register's figurations of the aesthetic object of connoisseurship, wine' (ibid).

These examples show Silverstein's conceptualization of culture as a dialectical process that is presupposed and interactionally achieved through the indexical values of denotational (i.e., descriptive) language. While we describe our past-life experiences or the content of a bottle of wine, we are also engaged in processes of evaluation that must take into consideration – and express our stance with respect to – the persons we are interacting with, what they say, and what they do not say.

### The deictic field and Hanks' notion of embedding

Silverstein's work has been adopted and extended in a number of directions. William Hanks, one of his former students, has taken on the challenge of providing a theoretical framework as well as empirical evidence for connecting the use of deictic terms to increasingly more complex contexts. Using detailed descriptions of the morphologically elaborate Maya deictic system, Hanks has theorized that language is a symbolic system that relies on embodied practices that are, in turn, embedded in culturally rich contexts of use (e.g. Hanks 1990). In one of his most recent theoretical efforts, 'Explorations in the Deictic Field' (Hanks 2005), he presents a model of linguistic reference that is based upon and further refines three conceptualizations of the term 'field.' The first comes from the linguistic study of semantic taxonomies (e.g. the field of colour terms or kin terms in a given language) that are familiar to social and cognitive anthropologists; the second, divided into symbolic field and demonstrative field, is inspired by the writings of psychologist Karl Bühler who, in the 1930s, built his 'organon theory' of language around the study of deixis (Bühler 1990); and the third comes from Bourdieu's practice theory, where the concept of field (French *champ*) reaches out to include communities such as the literary, the academic, the scientific, the bureaucratic, etc., each of which has its own socio-historically constituted differentiations and forms of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1991). In this article, Hanks is addressing a number of challenging issues including the question of how to account for the uses of deictic terms that do not conform to their status as spatial locators: that is, terms that cannot be simply explained as expressing proximal or non-proximal objects (see also Hanks 2006). His solution to this issue is to invoke 'the multidimensional structure of the local *Zeigfeld* [demonstrative field], which includes participation frameworks, perception, attention focus, memory, discourse, and anticipation, as well

as space' (Hanks 2005: 209). This is done by extending the spatialist view of deictics through a number of 'correspondences.' For example, tactual or visual immediacy is encoded in terms of spatial proximity, and objects that are neither close nor perceptible are understood in terms of memory connections, whereby what is spatially and perceptually unavailable is treated as a distal referent (Hanks 2005: 202). In addition to the demonstrative field, Hanks relies on two other analytical units or 'logically ordered layers': namely, Goffman's notion of *situation* and Harvey Sacks' notion of conversational *setting*. These three units are *emergent*, which means that they unfold in time (Hanks 2006) and that their actual configuration is meaningful to participants without being predetermined.

An important contribution of Hanks' work is the notion of 'embedding': that is, the principle that an analytical unit at a lower logical level, e.g. the deictic field of the kind described in the Maya examples provided in the 2005 article, is embedded in larger social fields, which for Maya speakers include the shamanic field, the agricultural field, and the domestic field, each with its relation to the market economy of the community. In contrast to the lower-level units mentioned above, the social field is not discourse-based, although there is discourse in it, is non-local – i.e. it draws from people and resources that are not co-present – and includes individuals as well as collectivities such as professional organizations and various other institutions (Hanks 2006). Like for Bourdieu, for Hanks the field is what provides authority to the individual acting in a particular role or position (e.g. doctor, teacher, cashier, policeman, bus driver).

### Ochs' Indexical Principle and the indexical construction of social acts and social identities

If indexicality plays such an important part in language use, we should expect it to also be a key element in human development. This is Elinor Ochs' starting point in her article entitled 'Linguistic Resources for Socializing Humanity,' where she proposes that socialization is 'in part a process of assigning situational, i.e., indexical meanings … to particular forms (e.g. interrogative forms, diminutive forms, diminutive affixes, raised pitch and the like)' (Ochs 1996: 410–411). The claim here is that becoming competent members of any community involves first noticing and then adopting, often in unconscious ways, a number of recurring associations between linguistic forms like those mentioned in the above quote

and features of situations such as properties of persons, objects, and events. This idea, which she calls the 'Indexical Principle', is meant to capture at least two generalizations. The first is that language carries traces of speakers' subjective attitudes as well as traces of intersubjectively constituted properties of contexts (e.g. the nature of the activity, the identities of those involved, their roles) across situations. The second is that such traces have an indexical value that plays an active role in constituting higher-order constructs such as social acts and social identities. To show how this works, Ochs provides an example – taken from her research on language socialization in (formerly Western) Samoa – in which a 19-month-old girl performs the act of begging by uttering the first-person singular pronoun *ita*, which conventionally indexes a stance of piety toward the speaker.

An important theoretical point here is that to understand the illocutionary force – i.e., what is meant to and able to accomplish for the speaker – of the expression containing the pronoun *ita* we do not need to invoke an implied but unrealized higher-order performative clause of the type such as *I request that …* – the so-called 'performative verbs' identified by Austin (1975) in his discussion of how speakers 'do' things with language (see above). Rather, it is the indexical meaning of *ita* within a particular sequence of turns that perform what Ochs calls the 'sympathetic affective stance,' which, in turn, constitutes the (speech) 'act' of begging (Ochs 1996: 421).[2]

Just like individual expressions can help constitute social (speech) acts, so can types of speech acts help constitute higher-order social identities within institutional settings. This is illustrated by Ochs and Taylor's (2001) analysis of storytelling around the dinner table, which shows that the role of 'Father' as a powerful figure in modern American family is constituted by verbal exchanges in which the father is set up as the recipient of stories told by the other family members. Whereas at the level of the speech act, an utterance such as 'Tell Daddy what happened at school today' said (most typically) by the mother to one of her children is simply a request for some news or a story, at the level of family dynamics, it is one of a series of routines that set up the father as the 'problematizer': i.e. as 'the co-narrator who renders an action, condition, thought, or feeling of a protagonist or a co-narrator problematic, or possibly so' (Ochs and Taylor 2001: 439). Being put in the position of problematizer, in turn, reinforces the ideology that 'Father knows best,' which, *inter alia*, supports the subordinate position of women within the family.

Another important contribution of Ochs' article is what she calls 'the Universal Culture

Principle': namely, the idea that 'there are certain commonalties across language communities in the linguistic means to constitute certain situational meanings' (Ochs 1996: 425). The theme of universality is not as explicitly addressed in the other three articles I discuss, but it is implicit, as all authors describe specific interactions that are meant to illustrate general semiotic processes and propose analytical tools that are meant to be of use across all kinds of socio-cultural contexts.

## Goodwin's analysis of action and embodiment

The authors mentioned so far have tended to focus on language as the only or main code. In their analysis, they always start from linguistic forms or linguistic acts. This focus changes with the work of Charles Goodwin, who, starting in the mid-1970s, paid close attention to what the body was communicating. This interest in a broader notion of communication has remained constant in Goodwin's writing. Thus, in his 'Action and Embodiment within Situated Human Interaction', Goodwin (2000) calls for the analysis of language as typically embedded within interactions where embodiment and material culture (e.g. tools) play a crucial rather than a secondary role as meaning-making resources. Like Hanks (see above), Goodwin is concerned with two main issues: (a) capturing the temporal unfolding of human social practices and (b) rescuing some of the elements that are usually assumed to be part of the generic and residual category of 'context.' Rather than being primarily concerned with 'language,' or 'speech', Goodwin takes 'social action' as the goal of his analysis and stresses the importance of understanding how the participants themselves – e.g. three young girls competitively engaged in a hopscotch game – manage to make relevant certain aspects of the immediate or the remote context. If the goal is to analyse coordinated social action, then the point of view cannot be what an individual speaker thinks, wants, or says but what is done and attended to by all those who are involved in the activity at hand. Given the potentially infinite bits of information that could be evoked or implied, one of the activities that language use requires is the selection of what should be attended to, which includes the prediction of what is coming next and who is going to be part of it. To account for how participants manage to accomplish coordinated social action, Goodwin uses the notion of *semiotic field*: 'The term *semiotic* is intended to note the way in which signs are being deployed, while *field* provides a rough term for pointing to the encompassing

medium within which specific signs are embedded' (2000: 1494). In this perspective, linguistic signs are embedded within other linguistic signs (e.g. a noun is embedded within a larger syntactic structure), accumulate further meaning from parallel systems of signification (e.g. the stress on certain key words), and the whole semiotic field constituted by language is further embedded within larger units or 'courses of action' like the game the children are playing. By being open to the potentially equal role played by different semiotic resources within sequentially linked acts, we come to appreciate that what might have been glossed as 'non-verbal' or 'redundant', e.g. a hand gesture signalling 'four,' can in fact be analysed as having its own spatio-temporal organization, which in turn makes possible different kinds of acts by the same speaker who is also using language. Together with posture and facial orientation, a gesture can constitute a type of act with its own 'force', which may amplify what is being said (Goodwin 2000: 1499).

By discussing interactions among archaeologists, Goodwin shows that the analysis of embedded semiotic fields can be applied to professional practices where participants have access to semiotic fields that are not available to novices or observers who are not part of the scientific community. To be part of a profession, thus, means to be able to access and process particular semiotic fields, which may have their own special semiotic resources, artefacts, and types of embodiments (see also Goodwin 1994, 1997).

Rather than privileging one field over another, Goodwin's notion of embedded semiotic fields leaves open the exact *contextual configuration* (i.e. the locally relevant combination) of the fields involved. The semiotic resources themselves, including the material resources (e.g. the grid painted on the playground for the game of hopscotch or the Munsell colour chart available to archaeologists) are thus involved in a double task: (i) projecting what is coming up, i.e. what a possible next move is, and (ii) eliminating what could be relevant but is not going to be. The combination of the locally relevant array of semiotic fields constitutes a *contextual configuration*. A researcher's goal is to identify emergent contextual configurations out of the complex activities humans get themselves involved in.

## AGENCY

In the 1980s, agency became a popular topic in the social sciences, especially thanks to the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens (see also Ahearn 2001; Archer 1996, 2000; Ortner 2006).

Agency has the advantage that does not necessarily imply intentions even though it does evoke such related concepts as control, effects, and responsibility, as often remarked by semanticists like Charles Fillmore (1968, 1977) and David Dowty (1991). Here is a slightly modified version of a working definition that I proposed (Duranti 2004):

> Entities are said to have agency, if they (a) have some degree of control over their own behavior, (b) engage in actions that affect other entities (including their own) and (c) are evaluated from a practical, aesthetic, and moral point of view for what they do and how they do it.

This definition assumes that a crucial quality of agentive entities is to have control over their actions. This quality, in turn, is associated with the exposure to the range of practical, aesthetic, and moral evaluations of which human beings are capable. The practical evaluation of what entities do as agents recognizes our practical engagement with all kinds of tasks, tools, and social beings. Practical here – in opposition to 'theoretical' – refers to our ordinary way of being involved in everyday tasks that we do not question. 'Practical' also suggests our interest in how a given action is problem-oriented. Finally, 'practical' refers to our *practical interest* in getting things accomplished and the fact that we are not neutral observers of a world that is independent of us. Language itself, as a medium for the representation of our world of experience, is not neutral either (Bakhtin 1981: 294; Duranti in press).

The whole history of linguistic anthropology can be understood as an attempt to study how human languages not only describe the world but also constitute it psychologically, interactionally, and institutionally. Languages have been used as socio-cognitive instruments to do things in the world, but they also come with a history of use that has a force of its own not always obvious to speakers (Whorf 1956; Lucy 1992a, 1992b). If utterances can have meanings that go beyond the intentions of their speakers, we must then accept that the agency of language is only partially controlled by its users – a reason for using the expression 'some degree of control' in the definition of agency provided above.

To illustrate this tension between language as an instrument of human will and language as a guide to or constraint on our thinking, feeling, and doing, there is no better example than indexicality (see above). To say that the expressions that we use are indexically tied to the contexts of their previous uses means that they carry with them: i.e. they are able to evoke, the beliefs, attitudes, and feelings associated with those contexts. In some

cases speakers may unwittingly participate in the reproduction of social injustice and social inequality through the use of expressions that imply a negative evaluation of their referents or of their recipients (Hill 1998, 2008) or make it difficult for some speakers to have access to social goods (Bourdieu 1991). It is not surprising, then, that linguistic anthropologists found Antonio Gramsci's (1971) notion of 'hegemony' attractive as a way of talking about an ideological dominance that is not necessarily overt and yet effective on members of subaltern classes. As documented by Franco Lo Piparo (1979), the notion of hegemony has linguistic origins. Gramsci first encountered it as a synonym for 'prestige' while a student of linguistics at the University of Turin in 1917–18. Later on, while writing in prison about the role of intellectuals in society, he extended what he had learned about the prestige of one dialect (the 'Standard') over the others to the prestige that the moral, religious, aesthetic, and political values of the dominant class have for the members of the other social classes.

## RETHINKING THE ROLE OF INTENTIONS IN MEANING-MAKING

One basic claim of the studies reviewed above is that the language we use is indexically rich: i.e. it evokes attitudes, feelings, and memories and connects our actions to real and imaginary contexts, which, in turn, help sustain, question, or revise established social identities and social institutions. This claim questions the standard theory of meaning-making in formal linguistics and analytical philosophy according to which meaning-making is based on imbuing utterances (or, more generally, acts) with intentions that must be intelligible to hearers/recipients through conventional associations between certain expressions and certain meanings.

The 'intentionalist view' is usually associated with H.P. Grice (1957), for whom it is the reliance on intentions that makes particular meanings 'non-natural':[3] i.e. conventional, and therefore specifically human. The view is also associated with John Austin's theory where intentions are part of the felicity conditions of speech acts (Austin 1975). John Searle further built on Grice, Austin, and early phenomenological accounts to make intentions the central component of his theory of meaning (Searle 1983).

Once we introduce indexical meaning, speakers' intentions can no longer be the sole or main source of linguistic interpretation. This is the case because it is doubtful that speakers can 'intend'

all the indexical meanings of their words and, in turn, that hearers can be sure of which meanings were intended by the speakers. This does not mean that we should give up on ever entertaining hypotheses about speakers' intentions or that we need to return to behaviourism and thus only talk in terms of stimulus and response. It does mean, however, that we need to be careful about founding our semantic and pragmatic theories mainly on reading other people's minds.

At least since the 1980s, a number of anthropologists have been critical of the intentionalist view, which has been defined as 'Western,' 'personalistic,' and far from universal. It has been argued that the intentionalist theory of meaning privileges an individualistic ideology of human society that does not explain a number of social phenomena where intentions do not seem to matter (e.g. Du Bois 1993; Duranti 1988b; Rosaldo 1982; Rosen 1995; Rumsey and Robbins 2008). Furthermore, drawing from their own observations in a variety of communities in Oceania and elsewhere, some ethnographers showed that not all people in the world share the view that one can have access to others' or even one's own internal states or thoughts. For example, in some cases, cross-cultural communication is made problematic by the fact that some communities see as animate and intentional entities that other communities consider incapable of having intentions (Povinelli 1995).

Although I was an early critic of 'the intentionalist stance' defended by Daniel Dennett (1987), over the years I have come to see some criticism of intentionalism as either empirically weak or theoretically questionable. From an empirical point of view, the fact that some people refuse to speculate about states of mind – what Rumsey and Robbins (2008) have called the local theory of the 'opacity of other minds' – does not mean that they do not engage in reading the minds of others and, in fact, when we look in some detail at the ethnographic evidence, it appears that even in those communities for which a claim of some kind of 'opacity of other minds' has been made there are contexts where people do guess what one was, is, or will be thinking or feeling (Duranti 2008b). Furthermore, over the years I have also come to see that it is vastly inaccurate to label the intentionalist theory as 'the Western' theory of interpretation, given that there are plenty of Euro-American philosophers who have a non-intentionalist view of meaning, including European existentialists and American pragmatists (Throop 2003); not to mention that Western neuroscientists have recently argued that empathetic reactions and non-reflexive, pre-conscious, pre-rational interpretations of others' actions are very common in both primates and humans (e.g., Iacoboni 2008).

This means that we need to continue to review and refine the concept of intention we use, which we can do with some help from early phenomenologists like Edmund Husserl and by engaging in a careful analysis of the sources of knowledge that people display or reveal during spontaneous interaction (Duranti 2006, 2008b). Even in those contexts where spontaneity is foregrounded and valued, people are busy reading others' and controlling their own intentional attention. For example, in a study mentioned earlier, Berger (1999) showed that in the middle of a performance, musicians may exhibit different levels of reflexivity about their own actions on stage depending on a variety of factors, including the type of music they are playing, their fellow musicians' behaviour, and their audience's reactions and expectations. This suggests that the notion of intention may be more effectively utilized together with other analytical notions such as attention, stance, and empathy.

The fact that the term 'intention' is not found in all languages is also suggestive and needs to be further explored. More generally, there is a need for a more systematic study of the lexical, morphological, and prosodic encoding of actions for which the notion of intentions may or may not be evoked. One starting point is an integration of the notions of performance, indexicality, and agency.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have reviewed the study of performance, indexicality, and agency, three important concepts that have inspired the empirical and theoretical work of linguistic anthropologists over the last few decades. Even though these concepts were originally introduced and elaborated by grammarians or philosophers of language, over time they have acquired meanings that reflect the fact that they are being used by scholars who share an interest not only in how language is organized but also in how language is used in the conduct of social life. The use of these notions and their corresponding units of analysis has helped to further broaden the scope of linguistic anthropology much beyond the original goal of documenting non-European languages and training ethnographers to learn and use them in the field. By further elaborating the notions of performance, indexicality, and agency, students of language as a cultural practice have been able to contribute to our understanding of identity formation, socialization, ideology, intentionality, and agency, all areas that are at the core of social anthropology as presently conceived and practiced. A few generations ago structural linguistics was a discipline that inspired

linguistic anthropologists as well as major figures in social and cultural anthropology (e.g., Claude Lévi-Strauss, Ward Goodenough, and Edmund Leach). The most recent research trends suggest that anthropologists working on language or discourse have broadened the range of disciplines, concepts, and methods they draw from. The overall goal, however, remains the same: to connect the details of grammar, discourse, and daily conversations with topics and issues that are at the core of the social sciences such as social inequality, cultural and social change, the relationship between people and their natural environment, the organization and distribution of knowledge and expertise, uses and abuses of science and technology, and physical and mental health across social groups. The challenge for the next generation of linguistic anthropologists is therefore not so much to find interesting topics to study but to cooperate with other anthropologists and social scientists in the development of a meta-language that can help to further uncover the key role played by communication in all domains of social life.

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## NOTES

1  I am using here 'language' in the singular because of Chomsky's distrust for judgements of grammaticality by bilingual speakers:

The language of the hypothesized speech community, apart from being uniform, is taken to be a 'pure' instance of U[niversal]G[rammar] … .We exclude, for example, a speech community of uniform speakers, each of whom speaks a mixture of Russian and French (say, an idealized version of the nineteenth-century Russian aristocracy). The language of such a speech community would not be 'pure' in the relevant sense, because it would not represent a single set of choices among the options permitted by U[niversal]G[rammar] but rather would include 'contradictory' choices for certain of the options. (Chomsky 1986: 17)

2  See Silverstein (1977) for a critique of Austin's focus on performative verbs as the conventional ways of expressing illocutionary force.

3   Here is Grice's definition of non-natural or conventional meaning: 'Perhaps we may sum up what is necessary for *A* to mean something by *x* as follows. *A* must intend to induce by *x* a belief in an audience, and he must also intend his utterance to be recognized as so intended.' (Grice [1957] 1971:441).

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