CORAL GARDENS AND THEIR MAGIC

A Study of the Methods of Tilling the Soil and of Agricultural Rites in the Trobriand Islands

by

BRONISŁAW MALINOWSKI

With 3 Maps, 116 Illustrations and 24 Figures

VOLUME TWO

THE LANGUAGE OF MAGIC AND GARDENING

AMERICAN BOOK COMPANY

NEW YORK CINCINNATI CHICAG

R.H

The same applies to invocations of spirits, to legal utterances, such as are made at the *kayaku*; to the harangues of the magician, which are among the most powerful organising elements in native gardening; to the cries and traditional banter exchanged at a communal competitive enterprise; to expressions which accompany exchanges of gifts or of obligations. All these verbal acts are as important types of human behaviour as any manual rite.

I have tried to make clear that language is a cultural aspect in its own right, a type of human behaviour which fulfils not some sort of subsidiary function but which plays a part of its own, unique and irreplaceable. The descriptions of linguistic reality must therefore be given as fully, as minutely and accurately as those of any other fact. They have to be given, of course, as they really happen, that is, in the vernacular. With this there enters an additional difficulty into the treatment of linguistic data. In language, as has been already insisted in the Introduction, the purely conventional element is very much more pronounced than in any other human activity. Human beings have to eat, to sleep, to sharpen the point of a stick, to dig the soil and to paddle a canoe, if not on exactly the same pattern, at least in ways which are roughly comparable and have a conspicuous common denominator. But the words which they use to describe the act of sleeping and of eating, of digging or sharpening, are based on a specific convention which must be learned for every culture. The phonetic reproduction of sounds heard in native language does not give the same direct picture to the English reader as does an account in English of what the natives are doing at a ceremony or when they carry out a piece of work in the garden.

To put it even more cogently: if we had a sound-film taken of a Trobriand gardening activity, the visual part of it would be self-explanatory or could be made so by a brief ethnographic commentary. But the accompanying sounds would remain completely incomprehensible and would have to be explained by a long and laborious linguistic analysis. This is the reason why we were able to condense several aspects of gardening, technological, economic, magical and sociological, into the relatively very short account of Volume I. On the other hand one aspect, that of language, is going to demand a disproportionate amount of space and attention.

We shall have in the first place to produce the texts, phrases, terminologies and formulae in native. Then we shall have to face the task of translating them. A word for word rendering is necessary to give a certain direct feeling for the language, which a free translation in no way can replace. But the literal translation is not sufficient because—as you will convince yourself easily by glancing

at any of the ninety or so prose texts and forty-five magical formulae which follow—such a translation simply never makes sense. The wading through the unwieldy jumble of words carries its own reward, but without an additional commentary on the part of the ethnographer, it does not lead to a clear understanding of the text.

As we shall see, commentaries—and extensive commentaries at that—are necessary. But it is easy to become redundant in commentaries and by no means obvious where to draw the line between going too much into detail on the one hand and giving an insufficient and altogether too dry indication to the reader. It will be necessary, therefore, to enter more fully into the details of the task which faces us: how to achieve a full portraiture of a native language.

Div. II. THE TRANSLATION OF UNTRANSLATABLE WORDS

It might seem that the simplest task in any linguistic enquiry would be the translation of individual terms. In reality the problem of defining the meaning of a single word and of proceeding correctly in the translating of terms is as difficult as any which will face us. It is, moreover, in methodological order not the first to be tackled. It will be obvious to anyone who has so far followed my argument that isolated words are in fact only linguistic figments, the products of an advanced linguistic analysis. The sentence is at times a self-contained linguistic unit, but not even a sentence can be regarded as a full linguistic datum. To us, the real linguistic fact is the full utterance within its context of situation.

But still, as in all work of analysis, it does not matter very much where we begin. Since in the translation of texts we have to proceed by giving a word for word rendering, let us discuss this first. It will soon enough lead us into the apparently more complicated, but in reality more elementary, question of how to treat native texts and contexts.

Let me start with the apparently paradoxical and yet perfectly plain and absolutely true proposition that the words of one language are never translatable into another. This holds of two civilised languages as well as of a 'native' and a 'civilised' one, though the greater the difference between two cultures the greater the difficulty of finding equivalents.

Turning for a moment to more familiar European languages—anyone who has faced the difficulties of translating a novel or scientific book from Russian or Polish into English, or vice versa, will know that strict verbal equivalents are never to be found. Translation must always be the re-creation of the original into

something profoundly different. On the other hand, it is never a substitution of word for word but invariably the translation of whole contexts.

It would be easy to skim the surface of any language for completely untranslatable terms. Such German words as *Sehnsucht*, or *Sauerkraut*, *Weltschmerz* or *Schlachtfest*, *Blutwurst* or *Grobheit*, *Gemüt* or *Gemeinheit* are not to be equated to any word in English, or, for that matter, in any other European language. Such English words as 'sport', 'gentleman', 'fair-play', 'kindness', 'quaint', 'forlorn'—to mention only a few from a legion—are never translated in a foreign tongue; they are simply reproduced. International currency has been achieved by many Italian words: *bel canto*, *basta*, *maccaroni*, *diva*, *salami*, as well as terms from music and painting. If we were to enquire why these, with certain French words referring to technicalities of love-making such as *liaison*, *maîtresse*, *au mieux*, *complaisance;* or to culinary compositions and details of menu; to fashion or to niceties of literary craft, such as *belles-lettres*, *mot juste*, *connaisseur* are untranslatable—the answer would be easy. In each culture certain aspects are more openly, minutely or pedantically cultivated: sport in England, good cooking and love-making in France; sentimentality and metaphysical profundities in Germany; music, noodles and painting in Italy.

Words referring to moral or personal values change their meaning deeply even if the form is similar: compare French *honneur*, Spanish *honra*, English 'honour', and German *Ehre*; or 'faith', *foi*, *Glaube* and *fe*; or *patrie*, *Vaterland*, 'home', and *la peninsula*. English changes east of Suez; it becomes a different language in India, Malaya and South Africa. The question whether American is English is very fruitful from the present point of view: you cannot swear in English in the U.S.A. and *vice versa*. You cannot order your food in an 'eat-house' nor 'get outside your drinks' by the same verbal symbols in a 'saloon' as in a 'pub'; while Prohibition has introduced words corresponding to the change of institutions and values surrounding drink. In brief, every language has words which are not translatable, because they fit into its culture and into that only; into the physical setting, the institutions, the material apparatus and the manners and values of a people.

With all this, it might appear that such words, however frequent, are but freaks or peculiarities. Surely, it will be contended, numerals, parts of the body, terms of relationship, conjunctions, adverbs, prepositions, words as ordinary as bread and butter, milk and meat, are simply, plainly, adequately and completely translated between any two languages of the Western cultures. A brief consideration

convinces us that this is not so. Were we to aim merely at achieving some approximate indication of correspondence between two words, sufficient to order a meal, to bargain over the price of an umbrella or ask our way in the street, then even the linguistic instruction supplied on a few pages of our Baedecker, certainly a cheap pocket dictionary or an Ollendorf, will give adequate translations. But if in our scientific analysis we define words as devices used in a number of verbal and situational contexts, then translation must be defined as the supplying of equivalent devices and rules. This makes our point clearer: there is no simple equivalence between two languages ever to be found which could be used right through, replacing the German word by the English, or vice versa.

Let us take the simplest example, the numeral 'one', *un*, *ein*. They correspond closely in counting. But *un homme*, *ein Mann* is not 'one man' but 'a man'. 'One man one vote' could not be translated by *un homme un vote*, nor is *ein Mann ein Wort* translatable into 'one man one word'. Nor is *c'est un homme honnête* equivalent to 'this is one honest man'. As soon as we come to derived uses, to subsidiary meanings, to idiomatic handling of words, the equivalence breaks down. Translation as an act of putting 'one'=*un* appears to us at once as a matter of rough, preliminary, makeshift arrangement which has to be supplemented by a long series of additional data.

Or take the parts of the human body: we have at once to face up to the fact that the conventional restrictions, euphemisms, and twists obfuscate the meaning in English to a much larger degree than in French or in German. For instance 'belly' is not equivalent to *Bauch* or *ventre*; 'stomach' reaches almost to the knees, legs are curtailed in their upper reaches. Such words as 'breast', *gorge*, *sein*, *Brust*, *Busen* become untranslatable. And in English again the word 'navel', associated in a daring anatomical metaphor with an orange, shocks many a continental damsel who thinks herself absolutely protected by English prudery on this side of the Channel. 'Eye', 'hand', 'foot', and 'arm', 'mouth' and 'ears' seem so well defined and precise that here a simple = might be enough. But even here some European languages, for instance Slavonic, use the term 'hand' often to embrace the 'arm', as in Polish and Russian, where instead of having 'feet' and 'legs' we have only lower extremities. Moreover, in every European language the derived and metaphorical and idiomatic uses of 'eye', 'hand' and 'foot' are so little co-ordinated that they cannot be equated. 'My two legs' could not be set = *meine zwei Beine*; it would have to be *meine beiden Beine*. We neither eat nor sleep linguistically in the same manner: while the Englishman 'sleeps with', the Frenchman *couche avec*. As to eating, a Frenchman's

bien manger becomes in German *gut speisen*, while the Englishman 'dines well'. As regards adverbs and conjunctions, no one brought up in a continental language will ever live down the absence of *déjà, schon, już, uże, già* or *ya*. Such German adverbs or particles as *doch, nanu, also*, the French *mais non, mais oui*—not equivalent to the German *aber nein, aber ja*—can neither be equated nor reproduced in English.

We have now whittled down our paradox to the platitude that words from one language are never translatable into another; that is, we cannot equate one word to another. If by translation we mean the supplying of the full range of equivalent devices, metaphorical extensions and idiomatic sayings—such a process is of course possible. But even then it must be remembered that something more than mere juggling with words and expressions is needed. When we pass even from one European country to another we find that cultural arrangements, institutions, interests and systems of values change greatly. Translation in the correct sense must refer therefore not merely to different linguistic uses but often to the different cultural realities behind the words. All the new systems of teaching modern languages—whether it be Toussain-Langenscheidt, Pelman or Berlitz—have in practice fully adopted this contextual theory of language and realised the untranslatability of words. In the case of words which have to be international, e.g. scientific terms, congresses have to deal with their unification; and it can only be achieved because the apparatus of science is uniform, because such arrangements as the metric system have been widely adopted and because the institutional side of scientific training, laboratory organisation and academic life is sufficiently similar.

In diplomatic documents and international treaties, which must not contain any linguistic ambiguity, we are again faced with the difficulty of finding a safe and unequivocal common denominator to untranslatable words. Whether this is mainly due to the fact that diplomatic language is used to conceal thought—according to the definition of one of the most famous diplomats of history—or whether it honestly attempts to serve its purpose, need not be discussed here.

The translatability of words or texts between two languages is not a matter of mere readjustment of verbal symbols. It must always be based on a unification of cultural context. Even when two cultures have much in common, real understanding and the establishment of a community of linguistic implements is always a matter of difficult, laborious and delicate readjustment.

When two cultures differ as deeply as that of the Trobrianders and the English; when the beliefs, scientific views, social organisation, morality and material outfit are completely different, most of the words in one language cannot be even remotely paralleled in the other.

Let us turn at once to our own special case, that of Trobriand agricultural terminology. The simplest word to be considered is 'garden'. But obviously the English term may suggest anything from a suburban plot to a park, from an allotment to a market-garden, and in none of these senses, nor yet in any of the metaphorical extensions to which this word is liable, could it be translated into Trobriand. So that at once we are faced with a serious 'gap' in the vocabulary of our Melanesian friends. For they really have no word corresponding to our general term 'garden'.

Instead they have a series of words: *bagula, buyagu, tapopu, kaymata, kaymugwa, baleko*, each of which describes a certain type or kind, aspect or phase of 'garden'. But to 'translate' any of these native terms by equating it to an English word would not merely be wrong, but impossible; or rather it would be impossible to find an English word exactly corresponding to any one of the native ones. Furthermore, to label the native term by even a combination of English words is at least misleading.

What then is the correct procedure? Let me exemplify it on one of the words just mentioned—the native term *buyagu*—by making a methodological reinterpretation of the technique adopted in Division I (§§ 16-26) of Part V. First we had to remind the reader of the general context of situation within which the word *buyagu* could be used: that is, to indicate the social, legal and technical arrangements by which a portion of cultivable soil is ear-marked for next year's gardens and recognised as 'the future gardens'.

Then I give the merely approximate but useful English label 'garden-site', which I have used throughout the descriptive chapters in order to avoid repeating the native term constantly. But this compound term has to be immediately redefined by fuller English circumlocutions, such as 'land under cultivation at a given season', 'the land intended for cultivation', 'all the land within the common enclosure'. These circumlocutions obviously derive their meaning from the reader's knowledge of how land is cultivated in the Trobriands; that is, tracts of land consisting of one or two fields (*kwabila*) are put under cultivation and a common enclosure is made round them, which converts the area into one communal garden. This meaning is illustrated in Text 3, where 'garden-site' and 'the garden as a whole' is defined by its economic as well as by its technical characteristics. In the definition of the term *buyagu* the reader has then to be reminded of the manner in which a garden-site is physically

delimited for the natives, first by the boundary belt and later by the fence (§ 17).

Throughout its analysis we see that the word is progressively defined by reference to the ethnographic description, supplemented by additional information concerning linguistic usage. In paragraph 17 this parallelism of verbal use and real situation shows clearly: "as soon as this (i.e. the bush) is cut *buyagu*, 'garden-site' becomes opposed to *odila*, 'bush', 'all the land outside', also called *yosewo*, 'uncut bush outside the garden-site' ". It is through the opposition of the word *buyagu* to the two words *odila* and *yosewo* and, in the sentence following the one just quoted, to the words *kapopu* and *kaulaka* that the term *buyagu* is more closely defined. The relation of this term to the cognate terms, *bagula* and *baleko* (§ 20), is equally important; as well as the negative fact that one of the terms for division of land, the term *kwabila*, is never used to describe a garden in process of cultivation. Thus the definition of a word consists partly in placing it within its cultural context, partly in illustrating its usage in the context of opposites and of cognate expressions.

Turning to paragraphs 20–25 we see how the words *buyagu*, *bagula*, *baleko* are defined by placing them within a series of terms with mutually exclusive uses. It is clear that in all this the definition is partly based on the long descriptions of the main ethnographic account, but also largely on the contrast between the terms to be defined and their opposites, and also on the comparison between the respective area of each of the three terms.

It is interesting to note that, in his definition, the native informant himself reproduces the context of situation first: "When we clear the bush there remains the uncut scrub, there comes into being the garden-site" (Text 2). Here we have an indication that the term *buyagu* in its most characteristic form can be used at the clearing; that it marks the opposition between the uncut scrub and the land which is being prepared for cultivation. In the second part of this definition text: "When we stand on the boundary belt, on one side (we have) the uncut bush, on the other the garden-site," the native further defines the two terms by putting before us the concrete situation in which we can have one of the opposites on each hand. He then attaches the verbal labels to either side of the picture respectively.

The need of a clear context of situation for certain words is even more obvious in Text 3, where my informant reproduces the sociological as well as the physical context. We have an indication that strangers arriving at a garden would first enquire about the 'garden as a whole' (*buyagu*) and then about the 'individually owned portions' (*bagula*). In this text we find also the interesting grammatical feature that one word, and one word only, of the three expressions which we have roughly translated by the English 'garden' can be used verbally, and that this word *bagula* in its nominal form corresponds to the dynamic conception 'garden as actually cultivated'. In a full commentary on these texts a number of other grammatical points would have to be considered. For instance, the use of the possessive pronoun 'his' in Text 4 correlates a semi-economic, semi-legal claim to the whole garden site on the part of the magician with the meaning of the term *buyagu*, 'garden as a whole'; while the possessive 'his', referring to the individual owner, has a definite economic meaning and is connected with the synonymous use of the terms *bagula* and *baleko*.

We see then that it is impossible to define a word by mere equation. Translation in the sense of *exact and exhaustive definition of meaning* cannot be done by affixing an English label. Our paradoxical heading 'Translation of Untranslatable Words' is obviously based on a two-fold use of the term 'translate'. If we understand by 'translate' the finding of verbal equivalents in two different languages, this task is impossible, and the Italian adage *traduttore, traditore* holds good. Translation in the sense of *defining a term by ethnographic analysis*, that is, by placing it within its context of culture, by putting it within the set of kindred and cognate expressions, by contrasting it with its opposites, by grammatical analysis and above all by a number of well-chosen examples—such translation is feasible and is the only correct way of defining the linguistic and cultural character of a word.

Thus, while for practical reasons we have to adopt a certain rough and ready English equivalent for each native term—an equivalent which functions as an *aide-mémoire* or rough label, but lays no claims whatever to *translate* the native term—the real translation is contained in the combined ethnographic and linguistic description, which we have exemplified on the one term *buyagu*, but which will be found illustrated in the few hundred words cited in the course of Part V.

Take, for instance, the apparently simple case of a technical implement. What do we achieve in the rendering: *dayma* = 'digging-stick'? A digging-stick is not an implement familiar to an English curate or clerk, even if he happens to be an amateur gardener; he has never seen one, never heard of one, certainly never used one; and even if he knows that peoples exist who break their soil and plant their seed by means of a pointed stick, he still does not understand the term unless he also realises that the use, the type and the institutional

setting of a digging-stick are not the same in every primitive culture. But to the reader the meaning of *dayma* has become real in that he knows something about its material, shape and size; the technical uses and economic associations, even the values and sentiments which the digging-stick derives from its daily employment and from the part it plays in magic and ceremonial. He is able to place it within the gardening scheme of the Trobriands. All he now needs is a general linguistic description of this word, of its various uses outside gardening, of the set of terms to which it belongs, and of its grammatical characteristics. All this the reader will find in Division VI (§ 5).

When we translate *kema* by 'axe' we have to be even more on our guard, because here we are dealing with an object which also exists and functions in our culture and it is very important not to assimilate the uses, the form and the material of the native implement with those of our own. In so far as the axe is used in gardening, I have described most of its technical functions and also its magical rôle. And the meaning of the term *kema* is in the last instance to be derived, not from the substitution of 'axe' for the native word, but from our knowledge of the rôle which it plays within native culture, here more specifically within native gardening.

All this refers also to such words as *kaylepa*, 'magical wand', *kaytukwa*, 'staff', *kali*, 'fence', *tula*, 'boundary pole'. In every case the English words merely supply a mnemonic counter, while the meaning of the native terms is given in the descriptions and through linguistic analysis. The word *kamkokola* I have only occasionally translated as 'magical prism', so far is the native word removed from anything which could be rendered by an English equivalent.

Thus it is only because we know the world of ideas, the various activities, the economic rules of Trobriand gardening that we can grasp the linguistic side of Trobriand agriculture. It is what we might call their *context of culture* which supplies us with the relevant elements whereby we can translate these words. Translation then becomes rather the placing of linguistic symbols against the cultural background of a society, than the rendering of words by their equivalents in another language.

At times it is necessary in ethnographic description resolutely to go beyond the verbal and even, as we shall see, beyond the conceptual outfit of the natives. The term 'garden', used throughout my descriptive chapters is, as we know, an example of this, for it does not correspond to any native word. At the same time I did not use this word in its English meaning, and I trust that, especially towards the end of Volume I, the word 'garden' did not conjure up

to the reader a cabbage patch with a border of geraniums or pansies, but that he saw the fence enclosing yam vines, taro, some bananas and a patch of sugar-cane.

In the same way, in speaking about 'agriculture' and 'gardening', about 'labour' or the 'organisation of garden work', about 'leadership' and 'economic dependence', I was using abstract scientific terms which have no counterpart whatever in native speech, and yet have their meaning defined by facts belonging to Trobriand culture. The ethnographer has constantly to go beyond the native outlook and introduce certain categories which are not native. At the same time, in building up his concepts the ethnographer must never go beyond native facts. The question as to how far certain terminological lacunae, such as the absence of words for 'garden', 'work', *mana* (magical force), 'crops', and so on, signify the absence of native concepts, or even the absence of sociological realities, is still to be examined (cf. Div. VII of this Part).

Returning now to the mechanism of translating words, the truth of the principle that only full ethnographic description can serve as a basis for linguistic analysis becomes very evident when we deal with sociological terms.

Kayaku, whether in its more general meaning of 'sociable reunion' or in its narrower sense 'garden council'—the German words *gesellschaftliches Beisammensein* approach perhaps the native idea more closely—is obviously not at all *translated* by either English equivalent. What really supplies us with the meaning of this native term is an account of the place which the *kayaku* occupies in the scheme of gardening: the character of the deliberations, the nature of the business transacted, the legal consequences of the typical harangues, and its ceremonial and magical framework. And this applies to all magical activities, all legal acts and all the other sociological and ceremonial phenomena which we have met with in our descriptions. *Kayasa*, *yowota*, *gabu*, and so on—such meaning as these words have acquired has come from the description, not from the English label which we affixed to them for the sake of convenience.

We have found that the word *kayaku* has two different meanings: 'sociable reunion' and 'garden council'. We find a similar phenomenon in the word *towosi*, which signifies 'garden magician' and 'garden magic' (cf. Part V, Div. VII, §§ 10–14). With the term *towosi* a formal analysis of its structure will help us to decide which meaning is primary. Such a formal analysis, which by showing certain affinities between the word discussed and others indicates probable derivations, further demonstrates the necessity of giving a

special place to the linguistics of gardening over and above mere descriptions of gardening.

Multiplicity of meanings will be found a characteristic of most native words, even of such simple terms as *pwaypwaya*, 'earth', 'land', 'soil', cultivable soil', 'economically appropriated soil'; *valu*, 'village', 'place of human habitation', 'spot', 'home'; *dakuna*, 'stone', 'coral rock', 'stony soil'; *bagula*, 'area under cultivation', 'individual garden'; or, in a verbal form, 'to garden', 'to cultivate', or, in a compound adjectival form 'cultivated'; *buyagu*, 'garden enclosure', 'garden-site', 'cultivated land' as opposed to the bush. The detailed analysis of each will convince us beyond doubt that the natives do distinguish between these various meanings. If we were to index the sound we would find that the meaning of *pwaypwaya* (1) is very definitely laid down by the context in which this word occurs, and distinguished from *pwaypwaya* (2), *pwaypwaya* (3), and so on. The meaning is differentiated also by grammatical indices, by the possibility of substituting a synonymous word, by emotional tone and by circumlocutory phrases. In no case have I found any confusion in the mind of the speaker as to which of the several distinct realities he wished to indicate by the use of one homonym or another. The differentiation of meanings can be seen if we take the word, not in isolation, but in conjunction with other words, sometimes with synonyms, sometimes with opposites. Thus, as we shall see the word *odila* can be synonymous in certain uses with the word *yosewo* (Div. I, § 17) and then it can again be interchangeable with the word *baleko* (Div. I, § 15). In the first sense it is antonymous to *buyagu*, in the second sense to the body of words describing land not put under regular cultivation, words such as *dumya*, *rayboag*, *kaboma*, *weyka*, *valu*.

The contention that homonyms—that is, words which have the same sound but different meanings—should not be lumped, should not be represented as one word with a vague confused meaning, but rather as a series of distinguishable linguistic units, will be proved abundantly throughout the following pages. The extreme theoretical importance of doing this cannot be exaggerated. Carelessness in dealing with this problem, or probably a wrong theoretical attitude, has been responsible for a great deal of misleading information, sometimes on such extremely important and crucial native words as, for instance, the Melanesian word *mana* (magical force), kinship terminologies, dogmatic terms relating to such concepts as 'soul', 'spirit', 'God', and sociological appellations. To this question we shall still have to return in the course of our theoretical analysis.

We can now lay down a number of points, some theoretical and some practical, which it will be necessary to bear in mind throughout the following analysis:—

(1) The mere lexical equation of an English and a native word is necessary for practical convenience but theoretically inadequate. For practical convenience it is necessary because if we used a native term wherever possible an ethnographic book would become an unreadable jumble of native and English, of native technical expressions and sociological concepts sticking out of the grammatical framework of the English language.

(2) At times it becomes necessary to use an English term with Trobriand implications, that is, a word from our own language in a native sense. For an ethnographic description must not merely reproduce the native outlook, still less confine itself to the native linguistic compass, but must operate with general sociological concepts.

(3) The correct translation of each native term, besides its rough and ready labelling, is indispensable. This is achieved by reference to ethnographic descriptions and by the placing of the word in its context of culture, in the context of cognate words and opposites and in the context of appropriate utterances.

(4) The various meanings of a homonym must be kept apart. We have to consider the use of the same sound with several distinct meanings, not as a linguistic vagueness or lumping together or confusion, but as what it really is—a series of distinct uses.

All these considerations simply mean that language is a part, and an essential part at that, of other cultural realities. The language of agriculture enters deeply into the Trobrianders' gardening activities. Unless we know how they make their gardens we can give no sense to their terms, nor meaning to their magical formulae, nor yet develop any interest in their gardening phraseology. Without this cultural foundation linguistics must remain always a house of cards. Equally true is it that without the language the knowledge of any aspect of culture is incomplete.

This is really tantamount to saying, as we did above, that language is a cultural force in its own right. It enters into manual and bodily activities and plays a significant part in them, a part *sui generis* which cannot be replaced, even as it does not replace anything else.

What this part is, however, and in what consists the placing of a word against the context of culture, we still have not defined with any precision. It is obvious that words do not live as labels attached to pieces of cultural reality. Our Trobriand garden is not a sort of botanical show with tags tied on to every bush, implement or activity.

It will be our business to reconstruct what speech achieves in a primitive culture, or, for that matter, in a highly developed one.

But first it is necessary to realise that words do not exist in isolation. The figment of a dictionary is as dangerous theoretically as it is useful practically. Words are always used in utterances, and though a significant utterance may sometimes shrink to a single word, this is a limiting case. A one-word sentence, such as a command, 'come', 'go', 'rise', a 'yes' or a 'no', may under exceptional circumstances be significant through its context of situation only. Usually a one-word sentence will have to be explained by connecting it with utterances which preceded it or which follow. To start with single words—even if such words might occasionally be uttered in isolation—is the wrong procedure. But this I do not need to elaborate; for it is now a commonplace of linguistics that the lowest unit of language is the sentence, not the word. Our task is rather to show that even the sentence is not a self-contained, self-sufficient unit of speech. Exactly as a single word is—save in exceptional circumstances—meaningless, and receives its significance only through the context of other words, so a sentence usually appears in the context of other sentences and has meaning only as a part of a larger significant whole. I think that it is very profitable in linguistics to widen the concept of context so that it embraces not only spoken words but facial expression, gesture, bodily activities, the whole group of people present during an exchange of utterances and the part of the environment on which these people are engaged.

I have spoken several times of the *context of cultural reality*. By that I mean the material equipment, the activities, interests, moral and aesthetic values with which the words are correlated. I shall now try to show that this context of cultural reality is strictly analogous to the context of speech. Words do not live in a sort of super-dictionary, nor in the ethnographer's notebook. They are used in free speech, they are linked into utterances and these utterances are linked up with the other human activities and the social and material environment. The whole manner which I have adopted for the presentation of my linguistic and ethnographic material brings the concept of context to the fore. Not only have I tried in the definition of technical terms to show how these terms form groups of kindred entities, not only have I tried, by placing the linguistic account against an outline of real activities, to give them life and body; but the division of the linguistic material under headings which closely correspond to the chapters of the descriptive account keeps every word, every phrase and every text within its proper context of culture.

Div. III. THE CONTEXT OF WORDS AND THE CONTEXT OF FACTS

We started the last division on a paradoxical quest: how to translate untranslatable phrases and words. Our argument, which incidentally enabled us to solve the riddle of the paradox, landed us in another apparent antinomy: words are the elements of speech, but words do not exist. Having once recognised that words have no independent existence in the actual reality of speech, and having thus been drawn towards the concept of context, our next step is clear: we must devote our attention to the intermediate link between word and context, I mean to the linguistic text.

From among the fourscore or so native utterances recorded and printed I shall choose one which, through the scope of its subject matter, the variety of its linguistic features, its grammatical interest and also through its length, is specially suitable for analysis. The free translation of this text has already been quoted in Section 1 of Chapter V, and I advise the reader first to refresh his memory by perusing it and the descriptive context in which it occurs. The tale tells us about the all-important subject of famine. The fear of famine and the hope of prosperity form, as we know, the emotional background of the whole economic life of the Trobriander. In this text, besides one or two dramatic highlights thrown upon the happenings during famine, we find an interesting account of gardening (vv. 10–12), information about economic transactions (vv. 8–9), reference to magic (vv. 6–7), legal discussion upon vendetta (v. 15) placed in the setting of the precarious existence led by inland natives on the lagoon shore (vv. 13, 14, 16). Finally, the belief, so very important in the political and tribal life of the natives, as to the causes of famine and prosperity (vv. 17–19).

The first sentence arose out of my conversation with a group of informants, in the course of which I enquired whether any one of them had himself experienced a bad famine. Tokulubakiki answered me (for abbreviations, see Introductory Note, Part V):

T. 24

1.	*Molubabeba*	*o gwadi-la*	*i-gise.*
	(informant's father)	in child his	he see

Immediately after this he enlarged upon the bodily ailments associated with famine:—

2.	*Iga'u*	*i-kugwo*	*sipsipsipwapunu*	*i-katoula-si.*
	later on	he first	(a skin rash)	they sicken