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The Case: The Trobriand Islanders vs H. P. Grice

Kilivila and the Gricean Maxims of Quality and Manner

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Abstract. - The Gricean maxim of Quality "Try to make your contribution one that is true" and his maxim of Manner "Be perspicuous" are not observed in Kilivila. the Austronesian language of the Trobriand Islanders of Papua New Guinea. Speakers of Kilivila metalinguistically differentiate registers of their language. One of these varieties is called *biga sopa.* This label can be glossed as "joking or lying speech, indirect speech, speech which is not vouched for." The *biga sopa* constitutes the default register of Trobriand discourse. This article describes the concept of *sopa.* presents its features, and discusses and illustrates its functions and use within Trobriand society. The article ends with a discussion of the relevance of Gricean maxims for the research of everyday verbal interaction in Kilivila and a general criticism of these maxims, especially from an anthropological linguistic perspective. *[Trobriand Islanders. Gricean maxims, varieties of Kilivila. Kilivila* sopa *un-plain speaking]*

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1 Introduction

In the acknowledgements of his impressive monograph "Presumptive Meanings. The Theory of Generalized Conversational Implicature" Stephen Levinson (2000: xxi) notes that he "found Paul Grice's ideas about the derivative nature of conventional meaning quite revolutionary." He was not the only one who had this impression: For many linguists interested in pragmatics, semantics, and the philosophy of language Grice's publications, especially his William James lecture delivered at Harvard University in 1967 on "Logic and Conversation" (Grice 1967; 1975), provided new insights that were taken up and adopted by them quite enthusiastically. I remember that in my early days as a PhD student in 1978 the "Gricean Maxims" had already acquired a kind of "cult" status; and I confess that I was (and still am) also very much intrigued by the idea that "what is conversationally implicated is not coded but rather inferred on the basis of some basic assumptions about the rational nature of conversational activity, as stated in the Cooperative Principle and its constituent maxims of conversation" (Levinson 2000: 14). However, I also remember that some linguists strongly argued against Grice's conversational maxims. Ferenc Kiefer (1979: 57). for example, noted that

> [in] recent linguistic literature we encounter ample reference to conversational maxims as an alleged basis on which nonliteral meaning of utterances can be figured out. These conversational maxims are often used quite uncritically, i.e.. without paying much attention to their theoretical value ... In his famous paper Grice puts forward a set of conversational maxims which are conceived of as general rules of conversation. These conversational maxims are. however, extremely vague so "that almost anything can be worked out on the basis of almost any meaning" (Sadock 1978: 285). This means

that the theory is unfalsifiable, vacuous and therefore of no explanatory value.

After I had finished my PhD, I started my research project on "Ritual Communication on the Trobriand Islands," left Europe, and did my first 15 months of field research on the Trobriands in Papua New Guinea. Having managed to master Kilivila, the Austronesian language of the Trobrianders, I realized that - generally speaking - the Gricean conversational maxims of Quality and of Manner, which Grice "presented as universal in application" (Keenan 1976: 67), were more or less irrelevant for the speakers of this language. In what follows I will first describe why this is so. Then I discuss - on the basis of the arguments presented - the relevance of the Gricean maxims of Quality and Manner for the research of everyday verbal interaction in Kilivila and provide a general criticism of the Gricean maxims from a basically anthropological linguistic perspective that is not only interested in plain referential speech but also in what Haiman (1998: 190 f.) has called "un-plain" speaking.

2 Situational-Intentional Varieties in Kilivila and the Concept of *biga sopa*

The Trobriand Islanders distinguish not only local varieties - or dialects - of Kilivila[1] (see Senft 1986: 6 ff.), but also varieties that I have called "situational-intentional varieties." As I have pointed out elsewhere (Senft 1986: 124 ff.; 1991b) I refer with this label to registers or varieties of Kilivila that are used in a given special situation and produced to pursue (a) certain intention(s). To my knowledge, Kilivila native speakers differentiate and metalinguistically label eight of these varieties, two general and six specific ones. In what follows I will briefly present these registers or varieties and mention the genres that constitute them.

Biga bwena - "good language" - is the general name for a language variety a speaker produces, adequately matching both in style and lexicon the respective speech situation in which the interactants with their individual status are involved. With the exception to its antagonistic variety ***biga gaga*** - "bad language" - it applies to all other Kilivila speech varieties. The basically aesthetic label ***biga bwena*** is used to qualify speakers' utterances with respect to a given standard norm of appropriate speech behavior. Someone who is famous for using ***biga bwena*** enjoys a good reputation and much social prestige.

Biga gaga - "bad language" - is just the opposite of the ***biga bwena*** variety. With the exception of its antagonistic variety ***biga bwena,*** but also with the exception of (almost all aspects and constitutive genres of) the ***biga sopa*** variety (see below), this second general situational-intentional variety applies to all other Kilivila speech varieties, emphasizing the inadequate use of language in a given communicative context. The basically aesthetic label is also used to qualify speakers' utterances with respect to a given standard norm of speech behavior. The use of this variety generally implies the distancing of speakers from their addressees. It is aggressive and insulting. Its use is - at least officially - not approved by the speech community and quite often sanctions are imposed against someone who produces such "bad speech." This second kind of superordinate register is also coconstituted by the specific genre ***matua*** which subsumes all kinds of - seriously meant and produced - insults, swearwords, obscene speech, and the verbal breaking of taboos.

Biga tommwaya /biga baloma - "old people's language / language of the spirits of the dead" - is an archaic language variety that is very rarely used in everyday discourse and conversation. If words or phrases that are characteristic for this register are used in everyday interaction, they serve the function of sociolinguistic variables, indicating high status of the speaker. This situational-intentional variety is used in highly ritualized contexts. The register is constituted by specific songs sung during the harvest festivals and during a certain period of mourning; these songs are summarized under the specific genre label ***wosi milamala*** - "songs of the harvest rituals." The majority of these songs describe the carefree "life" of the spirits of the dead in their "underworld paradise" on Tuma Island.

Biga megwa - "language of magic" - is a variety that is very similar to the ***biga tommwaya/ biga baloma*** variety. However, the variety not only encompasses archaic Kilivila words, syntactic constructions, and shades of meaning but also so-called magical words and loanwords from other Austronesian languages (see Malinowski 1935/II; Senft 1997). This variety is highly situation-dependent, of course, and very onomatopoetic and metaphoric. Trobrianders differentiate between various forms of magic, all of which have specific names. However, they are all subsumed

1 Kilivila words and phrases are printed in bold-italic type.

under the genre label ***megwa.*** And it is this genre that constitutes the ***biga megwa*** variety.

The Trobrianders use the label ***biga tapwaroro*** - "language of the church" - to refer to the variety represented in Christian rituals and texts that are associated with the church service. Two genres are constitutive for this register: ***tapwaroro*** refers to all forms of speech produced during various forms of church services, and ***wosi tapwaroro*** - "church song" - is the label for the genre "Christian hymns."

The label ***biga taloi*** - "greeting and parting speech" - refers to the variety that encompasses all Kilivila forms of greeting and parting as well as to the formulae for politely opening and closing public speeches. These relatively few forms and formulae are subsumed under the genre label ***taloi,*** and this genre constitutes the ***biga taloi*** register.

The ***biga pe'ula / biga mokwita*** - the "heavy speech / hard words / true (direct) speech" - variety is rather rarely used; but when it is used in conversation or in public speeches, the directness of the speakers indicate that they are completely aware of the fact that they have to take all risks of stripping away ambiguity and vagueness with which speakers normally can disguise their own thoughts - a feature characteristic for the ***biga sopa*** variety (see below) - and that they can stand to argue publicly in terms of the heavy ***(pe'ula)*** dimension of truth ***(mokwita).*** Thus, the use of this variety implies an important personal and social impact of what is said! If listeners may be insulted by what speakers say while speaking in the ***biga mokwita*** variety, they may even kill the respective speaker, for example, by hiring a ***bwagau,*** an expert on black magic who will poison or bewitch and thus kill this speaker. Therefore, speakers must explicitly mark their use of the ***biga mokwita,*** declaring that what they are going to say now or what they have said is not ***sopa*** but ***biga pe'ula*** or ***biga mokwita*** (see also Weiner 1983). The speakers' commitment in the marked sense finds its expressions in ritualized formulae, like, for example,

Besatuta balivala biga mokwita!

besatuta	***ba-livala***	***biga***	***mokwita***
now	1.Fut-speak	language	true[2]

"Now I will speak true language!"

The following four genres coconstitute this register: ***yakala*** - "litigations," ***kalava*** - "counting baskets full of yams (during the harvest festival)," ***kasolukuva*** - "mourning formulae," and ***liliu*** - "myths." It is culturally presupposed that the ***biga mokwita*** is used in utterances that constitute these four genres.[3]

The ***biga sopa*** - the "joking or lying speech / indirect speech" - variety is absolutely characteristic for the Trobriand way of speaking - it constitutes the default register of Trobriand discourse and communication, so to speak. It is based on the fact that Kilivila, like any other natural language, is marked by features that include "vagueness" and "ambiguity." Both these features are used by its speakers as stylistic means to avoid possible distress, confrontation, or too much and - for a Trobriand Islander at least - too aggressive directness of certain speech situations. If hearers signal that they may be insulted by a certain speech act, speakers can always recede from what they have said by labeling it as *sopa,* as something they did not really mean to say. The ***biga*** *sopa* variety is constituted by the following genres: ***sopa*** - "joke, lie, trick," ***kukwanebu sopa*** - "story, joke in form of a story," ***kasilam*** - "gossip," ***wosi*** - "songs," with a number of separately named subvarieties, ***butula*** - "personal mocking songs," *vinavina* - "ditties," with a number of named subvarieties, and ***sawili*** - "harvest shouts."

The concept of ***biga sopa*** plays an important part in everyday social life on the Trobriand Islands, and in what follows I will discuss it in some more detail, because it is obviously crucial for the argument of the present article.

I have just pointed out that the ***biga sopa***

- is the default speech variety for the Trobriand Islanders,
- plays with the features "vagueness" and "ambiguity" inherent to all natural languages,
- can be understood as representing the speaker's "unmarked non-commitment to truth" (Bill Hanks, pers. comm.) and thus characterizes speech which is not vouched for.

Speakers of Kilivila use the ***biga sopa*** variety strategically in everyday discourse and conversation, in gossip, in small talk, in flirtation, in public debates, in admonitory speeches, and in songs

2 The following abbreviations are used:
CP = Classificatory particle, classifier
Dem = Demonstrative
Emph = Emphasis
Fut = Future
Redup = Reduplication.

3 People who do not tell the truth in litigations will lose their case, and it is impossible to cheat in counting basketfuls of yams because of ubiquitous social control on the Trobriand Islands. People who feign mourning are believed to be punished by the *kosi* spirit of the deceased, and traditional myths are believed to be true.

and stories as a means of rhetoric not only to relax the atmosphere of the speech situation but also to avoid or de-escalate situations of possible confrontation and conflict. As mentioned above, speakers can always recede from what they have said by labeling it as ***sopa,*** as something they did not really mean to say, if their addressees signal that they may be insulted by a specific utterance. And Trobriand etiquette then prescribes that addressees must not be offended at all by utterances labeled as ***sopa*** - otherwise they lose their "face."

Therefore, speakers can also use the ***biga sopa*** variety to put forward and test out possibly risky arguments, the variety allows speakers to disguise their thoughts and to disagree with interactants in a playful way without the danger of too much personal exposure,[4] and it can be (and often is) used for mocking people. Moreover, as a means of irony and parody it can be used to criticize certain forms of sociologically deviant behavior, relatively mildly asking for immediate correction. Finally, the ***biga sopa*** variety offers the only license for the verbal breaking of almost all taboos and thus for the licensed use of ***biga gaga*** (including some - but not the worst - insults and swearwords) - not only for adults but also for children.

Thus, one can argue that the ***biga sopa*** also serves the function of what human ethologists have called a "safety valve custom" (Eibl-Eibesfeldt 1984:492 ff.). Let me briefly explain this ethological concept: Every society puts some of its realms, domains, and spheres under certain specific taboos. However, the stricter the society is in regard to its observance of these taboos, the more these taboos are ignored. But a society can secure its members' observance of certain taboos, especially of taboos that are important for its social construction of reality, by allowing the discussion of its taboos - especially of the sociologically less important ones - as topics of discourse. It may even allow its members to imagine the ignorance of taboos - in a fictitious way, of course. And this is exactly how and why "safety valve customs" develop.

Genres of the ***biga sopa*** - even if they clearly show features of ***biga gaga*** - are first of all classified as ***sopa*** - as a (verbal) game, as something fictitious in Trobriand society. The ***biga sopa*** thus generates a forum where the breaking of taboos is allowed if it is done verbally! This forum permits a specially marked way of communication about something "one does not talk about" otherwise.

4 How this is done is illustrated in Senft (1987a, 1991a).

In sum, the ***biga sopa*** variety channels emotions, keeps aggression under control, and it keeps possibilities of contact open. This concept with its tension-releasing functions secures harmony in the Trobriand society and contributes to maintaining the Trobriand Islanders' "social construction of reality" (Berger and Luckmann 1966; see also Senft 1991b: 237 ff.).[5]

3 *Biga Sopa* and the Gricean Maxims of Quality and Manner

The concept of ***biga sopa*** described above is obviously in diametrical opposition not only to the Gricean maxim of Quality *"Try to make your contribution one that is true"* but also to his maxim of Manner *Be perspicuous,"* specifically *"Avoid obscurity of expression"* and *"Avoid ambiguity."*

If the culturally defined and conventionalized default way of speaking is understood to be non-committed to truth, to have the quality of joking and even lying, then speakers simply do not care whether their and their interactants' contributions to a conversation are true or not. Of course these contributions may be true (and most probably they are true in the majority of the cases), but they need not be, because for the Trobriand Islanders "truth" is in general an irrelevant quality or feature of an utterance in everyday conversation and discourse.

However, if Trobriand Islanders want to find out whether an utterance produced in a conversation is true or not, they can strategically play with the dynamics of face-to-face interactions to reach this aim, they can try to find evidence to verify or falsify a speaker's utterance from third parties, or they simply can challenge the speaker by explicitly qualifying his utterance as ***sopa*** - with the remarks ***Sopa!*** - "A joke, a lie" or ***Tosasopa*** - "Liar,

5 Similar varieties can also be found in other cultures of Papua New Guinea and probably all over Melanesia; see, e.g., Merlan and Rumsey (1991: 88 f.); Parkin (1984); Strathern (1975); Watson-Gegeo (1986). Eric Venbrux (pers. comm.) points out that Sansom (1980) describes the same phenomenon for the Aboriginal English of Aboriginal fringe dwellers in Darwin; the expression they use for this variety is "gammon"; the Tiwi use "gammon" in this way, too. Louise Baird (pers. comm.) also reports the practise of "tinaak" in Klon, a Papuan language spoken in the Alor Archipelago in southeast Indonesia. "Tinaak" can be translated as "to lie, to trick" - and this language use is also characterized by the fact that speakers knowingly and willingly tell someone something that does not reflect social or physical reality. See also Haiman (1998: 83 f.) and Brown (2002); for more general remarks see also Arndt and Janney (1987:201).

trickster" or with the phrase *Kusasopa!* - "You are joking, you are lying, you are not serious." The interactant thus challenged may either not react or just laugh - this is taken as a confirmation of the challenge -, or negate the challenge with a simple ***Gala!*** or ***Galawala!*** - "No! / Not at all!," or explicitly state that what he said is true, like, for example, ***Mokwita! / (Mokwita) o matala yaubada!*** - "(This is) true! / (This is) true by god!"[6]

Moreover, if Kilivila native speakers really want to obey the maxim of Quality they must explicitly mark their intention to speak in the ***biga mokwita*** variety with the standardized utterance initiating formulaic expression ***Besatuta balivala biga mokwita!*** - "Now I will talk true language!" and, as mentioned above, this is something that - for good reasons - rather rarely occurs.

To sum up, in everyday Kilivila conversations the Gricean maxim of Quality is irrelevant. However, if the Trobriand Islanders want to obey this maxim they have to fall back upon the marked ***biga mokwita*** variety. With respect to present trends in the Gricean-based philosophy of language, especially with respect to the theory of general conversational implicature (GCI) this might be an observation that is only of secondary importance, because, as Levinson (2000: 74) points out, the "maxim of Quality … plays only a background role in the generation of GCI."

Let us turn now to the maxim of Manner and its relevance for Kilivila conversations. Again the concept of the ***biga sopa*** variety is just the antithesis of this maxim. Speakers who have learned and are used to play - sometimes very artistically - with ambiguity and vagueness in everyday interaction will neither be "perspicuous" nor "avoid obscurity and ambiguity of expression." They are not specific, not because they are not in a position to be specific (see Levinson 2000:17), but because this is something they just have learned and want to avoid to be in general and often even need to avoid to be in specific contexts of speech. And they even seem to enjoy being ambiguous, making playful use of the linguists' and the language philosophers' insight that "the simplest sentences tend towards multiple ambiguities" (Levinson 2000: 135). Note that the Trobriand Islanders' convention to regard the ***biga sopa*** variety that is based on the features "vagueness" and "ambiguity" as the default variety for everyday verbal interaction has its culture specific functions, as pointed out in detail above. And obviously these functions somehow override or at least modify what Levinson describes as the Gricean perspective on communication: He states that from "a Gricean perspective, communication involves the inferential recovery of speakers' intentions" (Levinson 2000: 29) and elaborates that "it is the recognition by the addressee of the speaker's intention to get the addressee to think such-and-such that essentially constitutes communication." With respect to the Trobriand Islanders one could say that from their perspective communication ALLOWS for the inferential recovery of speakers' intentions, but - if not explicitly marked otherwise - speakers can always controvert the degree of truth of the addressees' inferences with respect to their intentions - and addressees make their inferences with respect to the speakers' intentions with this cultural communicative convention in mind. Thus it is the ASSUMPTIONS by the addressee of the speaker's intention to get the addressee to SUPPOSE such-and-such that essentially constitutes communication on the Trobriand Islands. This kind of communication is not committed to whatever degree of truth of the utterances; however, if commitment to truth becomes a serious issue in communication, it can be addressed and topicalized in the speaker-addressee-interaction. Knowledge of this specific Trobriand perspective on communication is essential for the appropriate and adequate use of Kilivila in everyday interaction - and it goes without saying that the acquisition of this knowledge about Kilivila pragmatics by every nonnative speaker goes hand in hand with a lot of misunderstandings, miscommunications, and misconceptions (see Senft 1995). And here the anthropological linguist and the philosopher of language interested in Grice and the "Theory of General Conversational Implicature" suddenly seem to meet again, because, as Levinson (2000:371) points out,

> GCI theory does suppose that there is a body of knowledge and practice concerned with the *use* of language. This knowledge crucially involves metalinguistic knowledge about the structure of the lexicon - specifically, knowledge about the structuring of semantic fields, the availability of alternate expressions, subjective assessments of frequency and markedness of specific expressions, knowledge about the stereotypical associations of linguistic concepts in the speech community, mutual assumptions of principles for resolving conflicts between inferences, and so on.

However, if GCI theoreticians would concede that this "body of knowledge and practice concerned with the *use* of language" may vary across

6 In the appendix I exemplarily illustrate such challenges with respect to the truth of utterances.

languages - as demonstrated with the Kilivila case presented here -, then they need to modify or reformulate the strong universalist claim that the proclaimed "major pragmatic principles … apply crosslinguistically across the board" (Levinson 2000: 365).[7]

4 The Case: The Trobriand Islanders - and Others - versus H. Paul Grice

In his monograph "Talk Is Cheap" John Haiman also puts aside the questions of truth and falsehood with respect to language, emphasizing "the insincerity and the inconsequentiality of language" (1998: 7). Basing his arguments mainly on examples from everyday verbal interaction in America, he shows that what is said is frequently quite different from what is meant, and he examines the mechanisms speakers use to distance themselves from their social roles and from what they or others say or have said before. He emphasizes that forms of "veiled speech" like hints and especially ritual language with its formulaic utterances conceal or submerge the speaker's "true core self in order to speak the culture" (1998: 87). And referring to Wheelock (1982) he points out that the Gricean maxims "clearly do not apply to ritual language" (1998:99).

The question of ritual language and ritual communication was a central aspect, which I pursued during my first five-year period of research on Kilivila. Among other things I tried to find out why the Trobriand Islanders differentiate between the eight situational-intentional varieties of Kilivila. In what follows I would like to briefly repeat once more my argument with respect to the general function of these varieties that are obviously so important for the Kilivila speech community (see Senft 1987b; 1991b: 245 f.; also Eibl-Eibesfeldt und Senft 1987).

This argument starts with the following general observations: All speakers of a natural language must learn the rules of the nonverbal and the verbal communicative behavior that are valid for their speech community. In the course of this learning process one of the most important objectives is to understand and to duplicate the construction of the speech community's common social reality. During this learning process, verbal and nonverbal patterns and modes of behavior must be coordinated and harmonized, too.

The thus duplicated social construction of reality must be safeguarded and secured especially with respect to possible sites of fracture like cooperation, conflict, and competition within the community. The safeguarding of the duplicated social construction of reality is warranted by the ritualization of verbal and nonverbal communication. The ritualization of communication relieves the tension in critical social situations and regulates social differences and dissensions

- by increasing the harmonizing functions of speech,
- by the creation and stabilization of social relations, and
- by the distancing of emotions, impulses, and intentions.

Thus, the ritualization of communication increases the predictability of human behavior; moreover, it also opens up room and space where behavior can be tried out - playfully - without any fear of possible social sanctions.

Therefore, we can define "ritual communication" as a type of strategic action, that serves the functions of social bonding and of blocking aggression, and that can ban elements of danger which may affect the community's social harmony within the verbal domain just by verbalizing these elements of danger and by bringing them up for discussion.

The situational-intentional varieties of Kilivila - and first and foremost the ***biga sopa*** variety - clearly serve the functions expressed in this concept of ritual communication. If we agree with Haiman (1998: 99) and Wheelock (1982) that the Gricean maxims do not apply to ritual language, then this is additional evidence for the fact that the Gricean maxims are irrelevant for the Trobriand Islanders' concept of ***biga sopa*** - the default speech variety used in everyday communication!

However, there are still two other points of criticism that strengthen the Trobriand Islanders' case against Grice. First, Haiman points out that for many linguists and certainly for philosophers of language inspired by Grice the "bedrock of conversation is plain referential speaking" (1998: 99). However, in the postscript of his book Haiman (1998: 190) justifies his choice for dealing with

7 Obviously GCI theoreticians are aware of this problem. Thus, Levinson tries to refute Ochs's criticism (Keenan 1976) with respect to the universality of conversational postulates in a footnote (!) as follows: "… exceptional practices will be found in specific discourse genres. In these cases, Gricean principles are not even in limited suspension - the practices take their semiotic value from the departures from Gricean expectations!" (Levinson 2000:423, fn 96). To me this argument is not very convincing, and I cannot see at all that this argument (or any argument along the same lines) can deal with the ***biga sopa*** concept and its relation to the Gricean principles of Quality and Manner.

un-plain speaking and summarizes the arguments he put forward as follows:

> I concluded with the claim that the ritualization or emancipation process, which transforms sincere spontaneous acts and utterances into autonomous and meaningless formal codes, not only is responsible for apparent excrescences such as sarcasm, formal politeness, phatic communion, ritual speech, and affectation but also is a significant part of human nature and therefore the very essence of culture itself and may have played a necessarily undocumented role in the origin of human language.

This implies that Gricean maxims are based on a rather unidimensional understanding of language and conversation. Of course, there is plain conversation, but how do Gricean maxims deal with all the cases of "un-plain speaking" that - as Haiman claims - may be much more important for both linguists and philosophers of language in their search for finding "the essence of language" (1998: 191)? If the Gricean maxims can neither cope with forms of ritual communication nor with "un-plain" forms of speech and communication, they neglect an incredibly broad spectrum of language use. And if they only refer to "plain referential speaking," then they have to cope with criticism in the vein of Kiefer (see section 1 above) that challenges them because of their one-dimensionality, their vagueness, and their unfalsifiability.

Another point of criticism was made by Ochs (Keenan 1976: 79). She pointed out that "Grice tantalizes the ethnographer with the possibility of an etic grid for conversation... The conversational maxims are not presented as working hypotheses but as social facts." All anthropological linguists agree that every etic approach to an ethnolinguistic problem is sooner or later doomed to fail grasping the essential facts in the researched language and culture. Therefore, an etic grid, such as the one provided by the Gricean maxims, can only be of secondary importance for linguistic anthropologists.[8] Nevertheless, Ochs sketched a way in which the Gricean framework could be used for anthropological linguistic research: She states that "[w]e can … take any one maxim and note when it does and does not hold. The motivation for its use or abuse may reveal values and orientations that separate one society from another and that separate social groups … within a single society" and she evaluates Grice's proposals as providing "a point of departure for ethnographers who wish to integrate their observations, and to propose stronger hypotheses related to general principles of conversation" (Keenan 1976:79).

In this article I have tried to take up the relatively old discussion with respect to the universality of the Gricean maxims. I have tried to show that the Gricean maxims of Quality and Manner do not hold for Kilivila, the language of the Trobriand Islanders, and I tried to explain why this is so. This explanation resulted in a specific and in a more general criticism of the maxims especially with respect to their use and validity for anthropological linguistics. Ochs's proposal - made almost 30 years ago now - may indeed lead to a better understanding of the principles of conversation and their crosslinguistic and cross-cultural generality. However, I am afraid that so far we have not even started to properly follow this proposal.

Appendix

The following excerpt - from a conversation of young boys (6-9 years of age) who fought a ritualized fight at the beach (out of sight of their parents!) and then talked about this fight - illustrates challenges with respect to the truth of utterances (the challenges are underlined):

Galabagula:

Dauya aseki beya wa(la) ivavagi ivalam.

Dauya	***a-seki***	***wa(la)***	***i-va-vagi***	***i-valam***
Dauya	l.-give	only	3.-Redup-start	3.-cry

"To Dauya I just gave (it and) he started to cry."

Dauja:

Ka beya aseki beyaka, ivalam, <u>gala avalam.</u>

ka	***beya***	***aseki***	***beya-ka***	***i-valam***	***gala***	***a-valam***
Well	here	l.-give	here-Emph	3.-cry	not	l.-cry

"Well, here I gave (it to him) here indeed (and) he cried, I did not cry."

Towesei:

Beya Towesei aseki wa(la) yakai inagu gidageda.

beya	***Towesei***	***a-seki***	***wa(la)***	***yakai***	***ina-gu***	***gidageda***
here	Towesei	l.-give	only	ouch	mother-my	pain

"It is me, Towesei, I just gave it (to him) ouch, mother, it hurts."

8 I use and understand the term "anthropological linguistics" as synonymous with the terms "ethnolinguistics" and "linguistic anthropology." It goes without saying, however, that these terms can be used to signal different starting points for approaching the interdiscipline and for indexing the status of both disciplines within the interdisciplinary enterprise. See Foley (1997) and Duranti (1997).

Tosuelebu:

Kauveyova beaka aveya ivalam.

Kauveyova	***bea-ka***	*a-veya*	***i-valam***
Kauveyova	here-Emph	l.-hit	3.-cry

"Kauveyova here indeed I hit (him and) he cried."

Towesei:

Mtona isasopa beya ka ake! Bivokwa atovila aseki Kauveyova ivalam.

m-to-na	***isasopa***	***beya***	***ka***	***ake***
Dem-CP.male-Dem	3.-Redup-lie	here	well	right

bi-vokwa	***a-tovila***	***aseki***	***Kauveyova***	***i-valam***
3.Fut-finished	l.tum.round	l.-give	Kauveyova	3.-cry

"This guy is lying here, well, right! (After this) will be finished I turn around and give (it to) Kauveyova (and) he (will) cry."

Tosuelebu:

Galawala kusopa!

Galawala	***ku-sasopa***
Not.at.all	2.-lie

"Not **at** all, you lie!"

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