

'AS TIME GOES BY...': CHANGES OBSERVED IN TROBRIAND ISLANDERS'  
CULTURE AND LANGUAGE, MILNE BAY PROVINCE, PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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The first experience can never be repeated. The first love, the first sunrise, the first South Sea Island, are memories apart and touched by a virginity of sense.  
(Stevenson 1987[1896]:6)

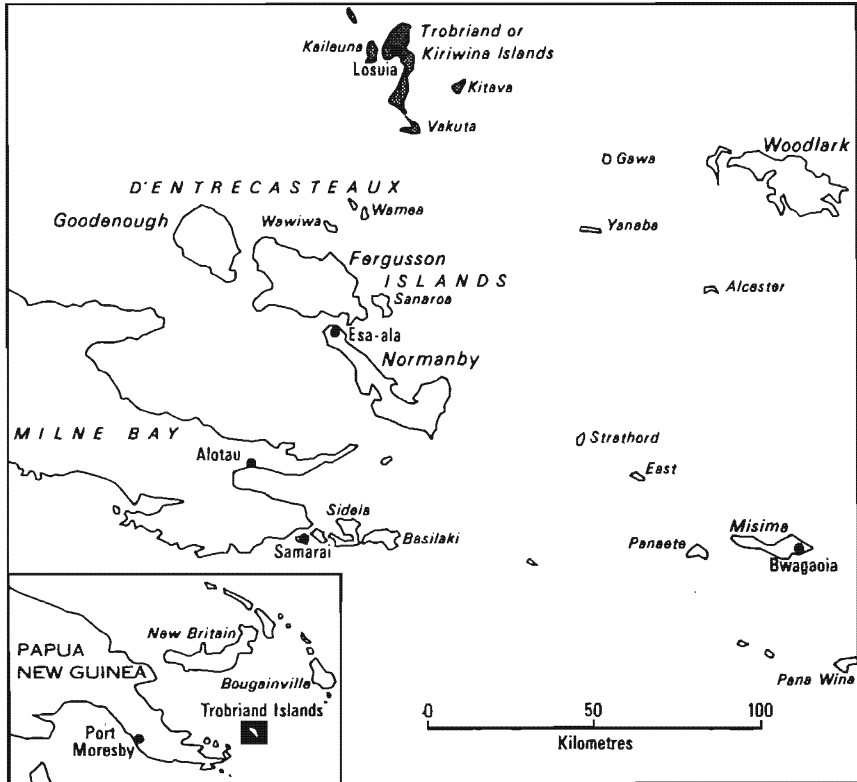
1. INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

In May 1989 I returned to the Trobriand Islands in the Milne Bay Province of Papua New Guinea to do linguistic field research for a period of four months. The main aim of this visit was to study the system of classificatory particles used in Kilivila, the language of the Trobriand Islanders (Senft 1986). Coming back to the field, coming back to 'our' village, Tauwema, on Kaile'una Island and to our friends and language helpers there after six years now evoked not only the old "feelings of intense interest and suspense" (Malinowski 1922:51) but also a rather strange mixture of emotions. From my various sources of personal and written information about the social situation of Papua New Guinea generally and the fundamental changes this country, its various ethnic groups, and its languages have been undergoing for years, I expected, somewhat grudgingly, that the Trobriand Islanders had also been affected by these changes. However, I had no idea at all about the degree with which these changes had affected the Trobriand Islanders. That the processes of change affect Trobriand Islands society rather fundamentally was something I immediately noticed

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upon setting foot on Trobriand Islands soil again. On our first visit in 1982, contrary to what was really happening,<sup>2</sup> I had the quite romantic feeling as I stepped out of the aircraft that brought us from Alotau, the provincial capital, to the Trobriand Islands that it was like stepping right into the picture so vividly presented in Malinowski's ethnographic masterpieces of the first quarter of this century. By the time of our second visit in 1989 the situation had completely changed.



THE TROBRIAND ISLANDS

This paper describes the changes I experienced and observed on the islands. It then discusses aspects of cultural and language change presented with respect to the questions concerning who and/or what is responsible for these changes and whether they have to be regarded as signs of cultural and linguistic decay and impoverishment or simply phenomena in which the natural course of events manifests itself. The essay ends with some suggestions as to what can be done given the Trobriand Islands situation as it is – or, to be more accurate, as I see it – to steer change in a direction beneficial to the people and the culture.

<sup>2</sup>See for example Austen (1945), May (1982) and Weiner (1982).

## 2. ASPECTS OF CULTURAL CHANGE AND LANGUAGE CHANGE OBSERVED

Every linguist interested in, and concerned with, the history of the philosophy of language must be familiar with the idea that language mirrors culture. As Herder (1978[1770]:149ff.) and Humboldt (1836) did before him, Schleiermacher (1977[1838]:78), for example emphasises that:

Rede ist nur zu verstehen aus der Totalität der Sprache...Ebenso ist Rede immer nur zu verstehen aus dem ganzen Leben, dem sie angehört, d.h., da jede Rede immer nur als Lebensmoment des Redenden in der Bedingtheit aller seiner Lebensmomente erkennbar ist, und dies nur aus der Gesamtheit seiner Umgebungen, wodurch seine Entwicklung und sein Fortbestehen bestimmt werden, so ist jeder Redende nur verstehbar durch seine Nationalität und sein Zeitalter.<sup>3</sup>

Given this insight, the inference that culture change must affect language and thus must itself be reflected in some way or other in the language of the speech community undergoing this change is just inevitable. In the following pages I will use these insights as a starting point for discussing the observations I made on the Trobriand Islands in 1989 with respect to aspects of culture and language change that have been taking place over the last six years. I group my observations as follows: I will first describe the changes that affect the Trobriand Islanders' concept of aesthetics; then I will discuss the observed changes in the social construction of Trobriand Islanders' profane reality; finally, I will present the changes that affect Trobriand Islanders' "magic, science and religion" (Malinowski 1974). In general, I always start with the cultural changes observed and then discuss their linguistic consequences.

### 2.1 CHANGES IN TROBRIAND ISLANDERS' CONCEPT OF AESTHETICS

In the past almost all objects of everyday use, be they things necessary for survival or things that make life easier, more pleasing, or happier, were made by the Trobriand Islanders out of material provided by their environment. These objects ranged from children's toys, balls, rattles, vessels, bowls, tools, combs, dresses and ornaments to houses, sheds, yam houses, and canoes.<sup>4</sup> In general, these objects were produced in such a way that their maker was giving a distinctive character and personal note to these things – either by a special arrangement of the components of the object, or by a personal decoration and ornamentation. Thus, the making of these things did not only require personal skills and some proficiency in manufacturing, it also always included a concept of aesthetics on the part of the manufacturer which he/she intended deliberately to be reflected in the appearance of the completed object or artefact. This concept of aesthetics was used as a means of expressing the manufacturer's personality and identity, his/her skills, of course, but also his/her pride and joy at being able to make the respective object. I would even go so far as to state that in 1982/83 a

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<sup>3</sup>"Speech can only be understood from the totality of language...Equally, speech is always to be understood from life as a whole, of which it is a part, i.e., because every speech is perceptible only as a moment of the speaker's life, in the conditionality of all his moments of life, and this only from the totality of his surroundings that determine his development and his continued existence, so every speaker is only understandable by his nationality and his era". (Schleiermacher 1977[1838]:71 – my translation, G.S.)

<sup>4</sup>See for example Malinowski (1922, 1929, 1935); Powell (1957); Scoditti (1985); Weiner (1976, 1988); Keesing (1981, especially pages 178, 208, 273).

considerable number of objects of everyday use represented works of art, albeit small and trivial. Even young adolescents were able to assign certain objects to their respective manufacturers on the basis of design alone.

In 1989 the majority of these self-made objects was replaced by things made out of plastic (e.g. combs), glass (e.g. tumblers), or metal (e.g. vessels, bowls), which the Trobriand Islanders bought in stores. Of the remaining self-made objects, those that still conveyed their manufacturer's personal aesthetic concept had greatly diminished in number. We no longer observed as many young boys and girls and adolescents trying to manufacture objects of everyday use and seeking help and advice from experts. When we asked these younger people why they no longer make these things themselves they told us very proudly that there was no need to do so any more because one could now buy these objects in trade stores. Our young informants were proud to point out to us the development that had taken place which was explicitly 'proved' to be positive. The days of old were gone and 'modern times' had finally made their entrance to the Trobriand Islands with all its 'blessings'. Consequently, almost all villagers assigned much more prestige and status to these modern goods than to their traditional self-made counterparts. I do not want to deny at all that some imported goods of so-called 'Western' culture (like the steel axe for example) improved the life of the peoples of Papua New Guinea greatly.<sup>5</sup> However, I want to note here that Western economics, a cash economy and expanded trade are obviously on their way to superseding the Trobriand Islanders' local production of a number of everyday goods. They repress especially the various personal concepts of aesthetics expressed in the form or decoration of these objects. Personal aesthetic input expressed not only the manufacturer's pride and joy in making these objects and artefacts, but the objects were also respected and admired by the villagers in general. With the introduction of store-bought goods the importance and impact of these expressions of aesthetic concepts has decreased dramatically.

Another related and obvious change that presented itself to us was the abandonment of traditional forms of dress. Almost no women wore traditional colourful skirts made out of banana leaves. During our entire stay on the Trobriand Islands we saw only two old women wearing these skirts during and after a skirt distribution ceremony, the most important women's mortuary ceremony (Weiner 1976). Skirts and dresses made out of cotton, and more often, plastic fibres have replaced the traditional ones. Moreover, the traditional dress of the men, the loincloth made out of the leaf sheath of a betel palm, has also been replaced by shorts and trousers. We saw only two old men wearing traditional loincloths. Shorts and trousers could also be seen much more often than the waistcloth, the so-called 'lap-lap' or 'sulu' made out of cotton, a form of introduced dress now rather common in Papua New Guinea and the South Pacific. As documented in some illustrations in Senft and Senft (1986) this change had already announced itself in 1983. However, that it has developed in the meantime to such a degree that not even young girls were wearing their traditional 'grass skirts' or *doba*, surprised us. While in 1982 the majority of Trobriand Islanders still proudly praised their traditional forms of dress for their beauty, comfort and adaptation to the tropical climate, and while then most parents proudly presented their children in their traditional clothes, the majority now, while sweating in their garments made out of plastic fibres, praise the replacements as being more modern and more 'decent' – especially according to the missionaries' and local village priests' (*misinan*) criteria. The 'modern' dresses are for sale in the stores on Kiriwina Island and in July a second-hand shop for clothing was opened on

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<sup>5</sup>See for example references in Mikloucho-Maclay (1871-1883) and Conolly and Anderson (1987).

the island. Together with the substitution of traditional clothes by 'Western' garments we noticed a profound change in the dyeing of the traditional skirts that continue to play their important role in connection with mortuary ceremonies. Chemical dyes that can be bought in the stores have superseded traditional natural dyes. However, this process was already becoming apparent in 1983.

Moreover, we observed a decrease in the manufacture of body decorations and adornments, especially those made out of shells (like the *doga*, *gine'uba* and *mwalikepwa*) and fibres (like the *kwasi* and the *kwepitapatila*).<sup>6</sup> This is not unexpected as modern clothing most often covers those parts of the body where these adornments are traditionally worn. Given that these adornments, but especially those made out of shells, were generally manufactured by expert craftsmen, it is little wonder that there is now almost no demand for their skills. However, it is not only these craftsmen who are affected by the cultural change taking place on the Trobriand Islands.

Thus plastic of different kinds is being used for making sails, plastic bags, baskets, nets, and other things. Owning such Western articles confers more social prestige on the possessors than possessing the same article manufactured by Trobriand Islands expert craftsmen. As a result these craftsmen can no longer sell their products or barter them for compensation in the form of betel nuts, yams, tobacco, or other natural products. Moreover, they have difficulties in finding young relatives to whom they can bequeath their skill and knowledge; most adolescents have lost their interest in becoming one of these obviously outmoded expert craftsmen and, in turn, these craftsmen just cease to manufacture traditional items. The original and characteristic Trobriand Islands product with the personal aesthetic touch of its maker is thus substituted by the standardised Western mass-produced article (which is, by the way, quite often made in China).

For similar reasons the Trobriand Islands art of carving is in decline (Silas 1924; Ranck 1979). Access to real carving knowledge that qualified the artist as a *tokabitam* 'master carver' had always been restricted for social and economic reasons (Campbell 1978; Scoditti 1982). Only a *tokabitam* could ask for a rather high price for his products. Moreover, being a *tokabitam* also meant being of high social status and influence (Campbell 1978:8ff.). A *tokabitam* generally had only one apprentice to whom he transmitted his skills, his knowledge and especially his carving magic. With the increase in tourism on the Trobriand Islands the elaborate carvings of the master carvers paradoxically lost their value. Most tourists just buy anything, without looking at the quality of the carved piece. Moreover, representatives of big souvenir shops in Port Moresby, the national capital, come to the islands and buy carvings by the hundredweight. Most of these purchasers are not able to judge the artists' craftsmanship, either. Thus, from the materialistic point of view it actually no longer pays the master carver to invest much time and his skill in carving his works of art: they make more or less the same profit as poorly carved pieces, anyhow. We saw only a few really excellent carvings in 1989. However, their prices were appropriately high and therefore did not sell readily. Again, mass production supplants the elaborately carved work of art. The master carver, however, faces the same problem as all the other expert draftsmen on the islands: he can hardly find an apprentice to whom he can, and wants to, bequeath his skill, knowledge and magic. In consequence the important role that carving played in rituals that accompanied the construction of houses, yam houses, and canoes on the one hand, and in the trading of

<sup>6</sup>See Senft (1986) and Weiner (1976:237ff.).

canoes on the other hand is in decline. The ritual impact of carved ornaments on houses and canoes gradually loses its social importance; it is no longer appreciated and respected, and people cease to believe in its magical power. With the death of the last master carvers this social, ritual, and economic aspect of carving is dying as well.

Now let us turn to the question of the consequences that these aspects of cultural change have for Kilivila, the language of the Trobriand Islanders.

First of all we have to note that with the decline of the importance and appreciation of craftsmen's work, with a repression of various personal concepts of aesthetics expressed in ornaments of manufactured objects of everyday use, and with the changing dress style on the Trobriand Islands a loss of certain areas of vocabulary is to be observed. Thus, the vocabulary of the wickerworker, of the net maker, of the manufacturer of adornments, and of the master carver is in great danger of being lost, so much so that it is likely that in a few years it will be rather difficult to find a Trobriand Islander who will be able to name all the various parts of a basket or fish trap (Senft 1986:436ff.), all the various names of special ornaments and designs to be found on traditional objects of everyday use, old canoes and canoe boards (Narubutal 1975; Scoditti 1985), or who is able to describe the manufacturing of a shell adornment or of a sail or of the various net types and who can still enumerate all the materials needed to make such objects.

That this danger is indeed critical is emphasised by the results of my research on processes of language change in progress that are affecting the system of Kilivila classifiers (Senft 1990). Here the data show (as will be discussed in the next section) that classifiers associated with technical language are among those formatives that are extremely rare or almost obsolete.

Another linguistic change is observed in connection with the manufacturing of so-called 'grass skirts'; it affects Kilivila colour terms which undergo important processes of language change. As noted elsewhere (Senft 1987a:318ff., 327ff., 338ff.) Western chemical dyes were easily available to Trobriand Islands women in 1983. These dyes have now completely replaced traditional natural dyes that were prepared from certain plants. This has resulted in the loss of the traditional knowledge of folk-botany with respect to the dyeing of skirts. In consequence, the folk-botany terms that were used to refer to the respective colours of these natural dyes are dying out now.

Similarly, with the substitution of the self-made objects of everyday use by 'Western' mass-produced articles a number of loan words from English make their entry into the Kilivila lexicon. Here we can roughly distinguish between two types of loan words that are incorporated into Kilivila. Firstly we find a number of words that had no equivalent at all in the Kilivila lexicon proper. Examples of these are: *keteli* 'kettle', *susipani* 'saucepan', *seya* 'chair', *sedi* 'shed (with corrugated iron roof)', *penta* 'paint', and *tara'utusi* 'trousers'.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, there are a number of loan words that have one or even more equivalent(s) in the Kilivila lexicon. However, loan words that are incorporated into the lexicon generally have a somewhat different range of connotation than their Kilivila counterparts. Examples of these loan words are: *boli* 'ball' (vs *moi* 'ball made out of pandanus fibres'), *belela* 'belt' (vs

<sup>7</sup>The traditional dress of male Trobriand Islanders is a loincloth. The Kilivila word for this loincloth made out of the leaf sheath of the betel palm is *mwaibua*; the Kilivila word for the 'lap-lap' type loincloth which was introduced to the Trobriand Islands years ago is *sulu* (this word may be borrowed from Fijian (Tom

*duliduli*, *pegala*, *segigi*, *vakala* 'different types of self-made belts',<sup>8</sup> *kara* 'colour' (vs *noku* '(natural) colour'), *peledi* 'plate' (vs *damavau*, *kaboma*, *kenuya*, *kevagi* 'different types of wooden plates'), *sipuni* '(metal) spoon' (vs *kaniku*, *keneva* 'different types of self-made spoons'), *uk* 'hook' (vs *bani* '(self-made) hook', and *dores* 'dress' (vs *dabe*-(PP IV) 'clothes, dress'), to name just a few. I have discussed these loan words elsewhere in more detail (Senft 1991a). However, in connection with the last-mentioned loan word *dores* and its Kilivila equivalent *dabe*-(PP IV) I would like to note the following: the abbreviation 'PP IV' represents one of a fourfold series of possessive pronouns found in Kilivila. This series indicates an intimate degree of possession. The fragment '*dabe*-' represents one of the nouns that cannot be used in actual speech production without possession-indicating pronominal affixes. With the entry of the loan word *dores* into the lexicon we have one example of a loan word that may in the long run substitute the morphologically rather complex Kilivila nominal equivalent. Moreover, with the loan word *dores* as well as with the loan word *uk* mentioned above we observe closed syllables with syllable-final /s/ and /k/. These closed syllable patterns do not agree with the indigenous Kilivila syllable patterns (Senft 1986:20ff.). It may well be that processes of language change induced by language contact like the cases just mentioned may have severe consequences for Kilivila morphology and phonology.

Finally, the changes noted also affect Kilivila pragmatics. In connection with the decline of the importance and estimation of the work of Trobriand Islands experts like wickerworkers and carvers it was noted that these experts have difficulties in finding apprentices to whom they can bequeath their skills and knowledge. This implies that fewer and fewer young Trobriand Islanders experience specific conversation situations which are characterised by status differences between the participants, namely prestigious experts and their young apprentices. The interaction between these persons was characterised by the use of elaborate strategies subsumeable under the label "politeness phenomena" (Brown & Levinson 1978). In the course of his/her apprenticeship a Trobriand Islander not only acquired the respective expert skill and knowledge; he/she also received an excellent and highly elaborate training in the culturally appropriate use of linguistic 'politeness' strategies. Thus the changes in the Trobriand Islanders' concept of aesthetics also imply for the young generation a loss in the range of language-use strategies. This loss itself most probably will cause further changes with respect to the Trobriand Islanders' construction of social reality, for up till now a person who mastered the whole range of Trobriand Islanders' rhetoric, versatility and erudition could exercise much political influence in Trobriand Islands society (Senft 1987b:185ff., 200ff., 209ff.; 1991b). A loss of such linguistic means of influencing political decision-making processes necessarily implies shifts in the sophisticated balance of political power in this society. In the following pages I discuss some actually observed changes in the social construction of the Trobriand Islanders' profane reality and their importance with respect to language change.

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Dutton, pers.comm.) as Fijians were among the first United Church missionaries). However, 'trousers' are certainly different from 'loincloths'.

<sup>8</sup>For the detailed explication and definition of the respective lexical entries quoted here see Senft (1986:185-437).

## 2.2 CHANGES IN THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF TROBRIAND ISLANDERS' PROFANE REALITY

Among the first impressions we had upon returning to the Trobriand Islands was that the population of the islands had increased substantially. Although we were informed that because of a severe drought the islands were hit by a famine in 1988, which affected the inland villages on Kiriwina Island in particular and which caused several deaths, our impression of population increase was rather strong. It is not possible to provide any exact information with respect to the situation on Kiriwina Island. However, as to the villages on Kaile'una Island the following picture emerges. Only in the villages of Giwa and Lebola had the population remained unchanged in 1989. All the other villages, Kaduwaga, Kesiga, Bulakwa, Koma, and Tauwema, have many more inhabitants now than six years ago. To give the exact figures for 'our' place of residence, Tauwema; in 1983 there were 239 inhabitants (58 women, 62 men, 52 girls, 67 boys); in 1989 we counted 277 inhabitants (69 women, 76 men, 62 girls, 70 boys). This means an increase in population of 16%! This number may not seem to be too alarming compared with the standard per annum figures of population growth in Papua New Guinea (3–3.5% in 1989), at first sight, at least. However, we must not forget that we are dealing with an island population! And here the spatial rearrangement of the village mirrors the dramatic increase in the number of its inhabitants. Instead of three there are now four village sectors with each having a headman of its own. The headman of the new village sector is the chief's eldest son Topiesi; the villagers' political decision, most probably manipulated by the chief's renowned rhetoric abilities (Senft 1987b:185-194, 202ff., 209, 213ff.), contributes much to the preservation of some political power in the chief's family – Chief Kilagola is now approximately 69 years old and he cannot leave his status of being the *guyau* of the village to one of his sons (see Malinowski 1929:10-14, 81ff.). That his son is now one of the men representing the villagers' political power is not only another sign of the old chief's clever political moves; it is a decision that first of all helps to guarantee continuity of the intact and independent social entity of Tauwema. The village is on the brink of structural breakdown: more population growth would imply population separation and the foundation of a new village, and with the restricted resources of available fresh water and gardenland such a development would cause a number of social conflicts. But Kilagola's politics in this case must also be seen in connection with processes of social change that affect the Trobriand Islands system of kin roles and relationships.

With the establishment of government and mission (M.S.C. and United Church) schools, and especially with the opening of the government Kiriwina High School in Losuia in the late seventies, Trobriand Islanders' children have had the opportunity of getting a good education. However, attending the Kiriwina High School requires the payment of school fees. These school fees are paid by the schoolchildrens' fathers. The Trobriand Islands' society is matrilineal, however, and therefore the childrens' fathers have no kin relationship with, and thus no direct control at all upon, their children. If they 'invest' in their children, they actually invest in their childrens' mothers' matrilineal line. Already in 1983 we had noticed that some schoolchildren claimed that their fathers' given names were their surnames. This phenomenon developed as far as we know independently of the school policy found in some other provinces of Papua New Guinea where the fathers' given names were assigned to schoolchildren as their surnames. In the meantime, all schoolchildren on the Trobriand Islands give as their surname their fathers' given name. In the Trobriand Islands as well as in the whole Massim area (Malinowski 1922:26, Map II) proper names are clan property.



Thus, any Trobriand Islander hearing the given name of another Trobriand Islander can immediately identify the clan membership of the respective individual. If the members of the younger generation with school education now give their proper name (the name they inherit from their mothers' matrilineal line) together with a surname which is actually their father's name (and thus the property of their fathers' mothers' matrilineal line) this may cause some confusion with respect to the identification of kin membership in the Massim area. Now suddenly the father's matrilineal line is mentioned and thus obviously obtains an equal status with the mother's, the 'real' kinfolks', matrilineal line. We are very much inclined to interpret this observation as a first step towards a fundamental change in the complex system of Trobriand Islands kin relationships and roles, and we suspect that the Trobriand Islands society is in the process of changing from a matrilineal to a patrilineal one – for changing economic reasons. That such a change will have fundamental consequences for the Trobriand Islands sophisticated construction of social reality, if it continues, is evident.

An observation of change which is not at all speculative concerns the loss of certain technologies like the construction of the *masawa*-type canoe and the making of the traditional pandanus sails for these canoes (Malinowski 1922; Powell 1950; Koch 1984, *Verzeichnis der Exponate*, 3ff.; Helfrich 1984:35, 47ff.). The construction of these impressive and beautiful canoes involved from the very beginning a number of different experts and required strict adherence to the rules of a number of various rituals. Although it was always an individual who initiated the construction of such a canoe, namely its future owner, the whole enterprise had important social implications (Malinowski 1922:113ff.). With the process of the canoe construction the security and stability of the social network of a village community was permanently tested and controlled. To initiate the construction of a canoe meant a communal effort which relied upon the support of expert magicians, expert carvers, and expert sailmakers. They all had to cooperate in good spirits to ensure the success of the canoe under construction, and they all had to be paid after certain stages in the construction process in the form of adequate food distribution ceremonies. These distribution ceremonies again were among the highlights of the Trobriand Islanders' year and automatically involved experts as well as the entire village community (or in bigger villages the whole village sector community). The former were more publicly honoured than paid during these ceremonies.<sup>9</sup> In 1983 inhabitants of Tauwema owned eight *masawa*-type canoes, excluding two new ones under construction. In 1989 Tomtava and Nusai were the owners of the last two *masawa* in Tauwema. Only five men in the village still know the correct rituals and ceremonies that accompany the construction of such a canoe, but they themselves are no longer able to initiate the construction of a *masawa*, and they have no one to whom they can bequeath their knowledge. The *masawa*-type canoe is superseded by the much less splendid *ligataya*-type canoe and the rather simpler and smaller *kemolu*-type canoe (Malinowski 1922: plates 21, 23; 1929: plates 68, 80, 81; Koch 1984:35). The construction of these canoe types can be carried out with a minimum of ritual knowledge, including knowledge of magical formulae. Moreover, as already noted, the traditional sails made out of pandanus leaves are also replaced by ugly plastic ones now. The skill and knowledge of how to make these pandanus sails is lost as well. Thus, we have to note not only a loss of technologies, but also a loss of the social events that were intertwined with these technologies. These social events had the important function of rituals as forms of social bonding (Eibl-Eibesfeldt & Senft 1987;

<sup>9</sup>Among the data I collected in 1983 is an impressive description of the process of constructing such a canoe. I hope to publish this description together with other transcribed recordings concerning Trobriand Islands canoes in due course.

Heeschen 1987; Senft 1987c, 1991b). The only possible social events we observed that may take over these important social functions of the rituals and ceremonies accompanying the construction of the *masawa* canoes are activities such as communal prayers and hymn singing outside the church in the centre of the village and meetings of missionaries from neighbouring villages or Christian Women's associations which are conducted by the local missionaries (*missinari*) and involve the whole village community. These get-togethers are generally also accompanied by communal meals, and sometimes there is even a kind of food distribution ceremony preceding these meals (Senft 1987b).

Another observation that must be mentioned here concerns the following: during certain distribution ceremonies that require the counting of the goods distributed, and especially during the important *dadodiga*, the festive filling of the yam houses with the newly harvested yam tubers, which requires the counting of the basketfuls of yams filled into the food-houses, the morphologically rather complex numerals constituting the traditional so-called "quinary vigesimal" Kilivila counting system (Senft 1986:76ff.) are more and more being superseded by English numerals. While all Trobriand Islanders are familiar with their traditional counting system, now only a few 'experts' claim that they can deal with the Western, the English, counting system. That the use of this new system is not without problems and difficulties is documented, for example in Senft (1987b:208). The use of the foreign counting system assigns status to the individuals that use it. However, whether this person actually deserves this status cannot be judged by other members of the group unfamiliar with this system. Here the Trobriand Islanders are confronted with a completely new experience: until recently the way in which a person acquired and maintained status, other than status inherited by being a member of a high ranking clan, was controlled by the village community. The various magicians in particular had to prove their expertise whenever they were asked to perform their skills. The change in the counting system used during socially important ceremonies creates a situation which is open to political manipulation and to shifts in the social power structure within the community. This situation may have fundamental political consequences for Trobriand Islanders' society, a society which is highly competitive (Malinowski 1935; Weiner 1976, 1988).

What further consequences do these aspects of change in the social construction of Trobriand Islanders' profane reality have for the Kilivila language?

It must be expected that changes affecting the Trobriand Islands system of kinship, kin roles and relationships will have their consequences for Kilivila kinship terminology. The semantics of kinship terminology will have to change and must be redefined to the same degree in which kin roles are redefined in the political process of social change. If the Trobriand Islands society is indeed changing from a matrilineal to a patrilineal society it can be expected that the terms referring to the father's relatives will be defined more precisely; this can even result in some neologisms. On the other hand, the sophisticated system of terms referring to the mother's relatives may gradually become less and less important – and it may be more and more difficult for future generations to find adequate kinship terms to refer to some of their mothers' relatives. So far, however, this remains mere speculation.

The consequences of the alphabetisation campaigns and of the establishment of schools on the islands, however, are already evident. The schools foster the processes of language change induced in Kilivila through contact with English. Although the number of English loan words does not seem to have increased much during the last six years the status that the speech community assigns to their use is rising continuously. Whereas six years ago only a

few individuals used English loan words now many Trobriand Islanders use them to express their views in public. It must be noted that English loan words are now used to indicate the speaker's degree of modern orientation and education, and are thus beginning to serve the function of sociolinguistic variables (Labov 1972:237ff.) in a changing society. Some of these loan words are beginning to replace Kilivila expressions. Probably the two most dramatic changes here are firstly, the substitution of the kinship terms *inagu* 'my mother' and *tamagu* 'my father' by the English words *mama* and *papa*, a fundamental change, indeed, and secondly, the substitution of Kilivila numerals by English numerals. If the latter continues it will affect the Kilivila classifier system as well: Kilivila is a numeral classifier language (Malinowski 1920; Senft 1985a, 1986, 1990) and if its numerals – in the word formation of which the classifiers are involved – are substituted by English numerals we may be left with a so-called 'numeral' classifier language that employs its classifiers only in deictic and anaphoric expressions and with some adjectives. However, as my research on classifiers and their use in actual language production shows, classifiers are most often used with demonstrative pronouns anyway; the use of classifiers with numerals can be observed at only a slightly higher degree than their use with adjectives. I did not observe that Kilivila speakers use English numerals instead of the respective Kilivila numerals in complex noun phrases that consisted not only of noun and numeral but of a noun, numeral, demonstrative pronoun, and adjective. Moreover, the system of classificatory particles seems to be so important for Kilivila that up to now no loan word whatsoever was incorporated completely or in (some morphological) part into this complex system of formatives. Thus, so far the linguistic *core* of this classifier system seems to be quite resistant to change. This general observation is not inconsistent with the above mentioned fact that the discussed processes of change affect classifiers associated with technical language. Obviously, these classifiers have always been rather rarely used within the speech community by only a few specialists. Malinowski had already foreseen this in 1920 as he differentiates the classifiers with respect to their "degree of obsolescence" (Malinowski 1920:55ff.). Thus, we can infer that this complex system of formatives has always been affected by processes of linguistic change. However, this change obviously resulted only in a re-ordering of the formatives and their status according to the frequency of their usage within the speech community. My studies of the classifier system (Senft 1990) show that we can divide the Kilivila classifier inventory into three groups, namely, a core group of classifier types, a group of classifiers that play an inferior role in actual speech production, and lastly a group of classifier types that are associated with technical language and that are extremely rarely used, and which are almost obsolete. It is the last two groups that are affected by language change, though this language change must not (necessarily) be induced from outside the language community (for example by language contact). The core group of the Kilivila classifiers, however, and the classifier morphology seem to be quite resistant to change, indeed! What should be mentioned in this discussion, however, is the fact that we observe a change in the pragmatic rules regulating who is permitted to use what classifier in serious (-and not joking-) public speech production. Within the inventory of Kilivila classifiers we find a number of formatives that serve the function of sociolinguistic variables (Labov 1972:237ff.). Until recently, a person not belonging to the highest ranking Malasi clan and using such a formative in public speech would have earned but scorn and derision. These classifiers are only to be used by the members of this highest ranking clan within the highly socially stratified Trobriand Islands society as a means of verbally marking their special status. Nowadays, the *misinari*, most of whom belong to the two lowest ranking clans on the Trobriand Islands, use these classifiers too – thus marking their recently gained social and political status. This is an important

aspect of linguistic-cum-pragmatic change. However, it also supports the argument that the system of classifiers is so important for Kilivila native speakers that its structure and morphology is quite resistant to change.

I would like to note here that up until now Tok Pisin, the main lingua franca of Papua New Guinea has had no effect on the Kilivila language at all. In contrast to Hiri Motu (formerly Police Motu), which a number of Trobriand Islanders speak and understand, Tok Pisin has never been a lingua franca on the Trobriand Islands. This situation may change, however, because a number of individuals working for the provincial government on the Trobriand Islands come from different parts of the Papua New Guinea highlands. Most of them came with their families to the islands and live in the vicinity of Losuia on Kiriwina Island where the government offices are located. These government employees speak Tok Pisin with one another. As a result a small Tok Pisin speech island is developing in and around Losuia. Moreover, some Trobriand Islanders having lived and worked in other parts of Papua New Guinea, especially in Madang, Lae and Port Moresby, now come back to the islands with some knowledge of Tok Pisin. The consequences this may have for Kilivila are not predictable at the moment.

The loss of certain technologies and skills like the construction of the *masawa*-type canoes, and the making of the traditional pandanus sails imply the loss of the respective expert vocabulary in the Kilivila lexicon. However, as indicated above, all of these experts rely in their work on the power of magical formulae which they inherited as apprentices from their expert teachers (who were generally their relatives). These experts are convinced that they can only carry out their work properly with the help of the power of their magic. The construction of a *masawa*-type canoe as well as the making of a traditional sail requires the use of a complex variety of magical formulae. With the *masawa* being superseded by the *ligataya*- and *kemolu*- type canoes this complex variety of magical formulae is being lost. We will discuss this loss of a complete Kilivila text category again in more detail below. In connection with our remarks here, however, another observation must be emphasised: we have already mentioned that the construction of the *masawa* is a social event that includes a number of ceremonies and rituals. All these ceremonies and rituals were accompanied by speeches that were clearly defined with respect to their adequateness to the stage of the construction process. From what my informants told me I infer that these speeches have their own pragmatics. The knowledge of these pragmatics is lost as well now. However, I mentioned that activities of the local missionaries may take over the social functions of these communal events, rituals and ceremonies. These church activities centred on Christian beliefs are completely different in structure from the traditional events, speeches and other forms of verbal communication within these social events that follow completely different rules.

Such are the changes that affect the social construction of Trobriand Islanders' profane reality. The changes observed with respect to Trobriand Islanders' magic, science and religion will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

### 2.3 CHANGES IN TROBRIAND ISLANDERS' MAGIC, SCIENCE AND RELIGION

In 1894 the Methodist Church commenced work on the Trobriand Islands. In 1935 Roman Catholic Missionaries (M.S.C.) began their work and in the late seventies the Church of the Seventh Day Adventists started to perform their missionary work in a few villages on

the Trobriand Islands. The church encompassing most believers is the Methodist Church. Today all priests and missionaries are Papua New Guineans, and every village with a Methodist church has at least one local village priest, the so-called *misinari*. Up to 1988 the Roman Catholic Church was represented by two Australian priests from the Mission of the Sacred Heart. The bishop of the Massim diocese allowed the Italian P.I.M.E. Mission to start their work on the Trobriand Islands, and moved the two highly respected M.S.C. missionaries to Alotau and to a small island in the Louisiade Archipelago. Now there are two Italian priests on the Trobriand Islands who started their work by first learning Kilivila. The Roman Catholic Church has fewer members than the Methodist Church. However, the Catholics took over the policy of the Methodists and established a network of local lay priests in the villages the inhabitants of which confess to the Catholic Church. These lay priests are also called *misinari*. The Church of the Seventh Day Adventists plays a marginal role only on the Trobriand Islands. However, Annette Weiner (1989, pers.comm.) notes that the rivalry between adherents to this new church and those of the two previously established religious missions on the islands causes some tension between different sectors of larger villages on Kiriwina Island.

As Robert Louis Stevenson had already noted in 1896, with respect to the South Seas, there "is but one source of power and the one ground of dignity – rank" (Stevenson 1987[1896]:282). This holds true for Trobriand Islands society, too. Ever since Malinowski (1929, 1935) we have known that Trobriand Islands society is highly stratified socially. The most important access to political power is membership to the highest ranking sub-clans. There are other avenues available to acquire status within the society, such as being a versatile rhetorician, a master carver or an expert magician. However, compared to the political significance of in-born rank these alternative avenues are of secondary importance. In former times individuals belonging to the two lowest ranking clans of the four main Trobriand clans had little chance of gaining status or of exercising any kind of political influence. With the growing influence of the Christian churches on the Trobriand Islands members of these two lowest ranking clans engaged themselves in these new institutions of political impact. With the increase of the churches' power, being a *misinari* implies being a woman or a man of rank. This political development was already obvious in 1983. Then official speeches were opened with a ritualised formula which first mentioned the chiefs, then the *misinari*, and then the rest of the villagers.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the *misinari* were already at the top of the hierarchy. The only thing they could not do was to reach and compete with the status of the members of the highest sub-clans. However, in 1983 they were competing with other villagers of political influence whose status was based on expertise of various sorts. All such skill implies knowledge of magic, however. Magicians represented, and still represent, the old traditional belief system (Malinowski 1974; Senft 1985b, 1985c; Weiner 1988). In 1983 Trobriand Islands Christians lived in an interesting form of syncretism that combined traditional belief in magic and Trobriand Islands eschatology (Malinowski 1974) with Christian ideas. In 1989 these syncretic features of Trobriand Islands Christianity had decreased dramatically. Belief in magic is not denounced directly as something heathenistic. Instead, the strategy pursued to fight these 'pagan' customs – according to the village priests' judgement – is much more subtle: the *misinari*

<sup>10</sup>This formula runs: *Agutoki kweguyau, agutoki misinari, agutoki tommota...* (name of the respective village) which translates as: Honourable chiefs, dear village priests, dear people from... The word *agutoki* is a loan word from the Dobu language. Besides its use in this ritualised formula it has the connotations 'my thanks, thanks' and 'please'.

argue that there are two ways to live one's life these days. One way is the old, traditional way, which includes magic and the eschatological belief in the immortal spirits of the dead living in the underground paradise on Tuma Island. The other way is the new Christian way of life with its specific Christian beliefs and its own eschatological ideas. Both ways are mutually exclusive, or, to say it in the local priests' words: "one can either walk on the way of the ancestors or on the Christian way together with *Jesu Keriso*, the Lord Jesus Christ". Women especially accept this more recent way of Christian preaching and self-presentation, and the clear and simple alternatives cause much tension in families where the husbands of pious wives are expert magicians. Magicians, both female and male, are increasingly losing influence in the society, and accordingly the estimation of their magical skills and their knowledge of magical formulae decreases. However, the Trobriand Islanders' belief in the magical power of words included their conviction in magic as a means of controlling nature as well as the incidents affecting their personal lives (Senft 1985c:68ff.; Frazer 1922). Once this conviction is lost a political and ritual power vacuum remains – and *misinari* and missionaries use this vacuum for their own means and ends. The magician's ritual and political power is substituted by the priest's ritual and political power in Trobriand society.<sup>11</sup> "So simply...the changes come" (Stevenson 1987[1896]:25, 239).

With increasing political influence the *misinari* also biases the moral standards of the society, which was always characterised by rather strict rules of moral behaviour anyhow (Malinowski 1929; Stevenson 1987[1896]:278, 280, 284). In the eyes of village priests modern clothing is more decent – especially for women – than the traditional Trobriand clothes. For a girl or a woman to walk bare-breasted and to wear the traditional skirt without a cotton skirt underneath and for children to walk naked has become a form of behaviour which is denounced and looked at as being indecent.

Moreover, the *misinari* try to suppress and to put an end to a number of games, play accompanying verses, and dances that topicalise the breaking of certain taboos and that 'play' with obscene language varieties. It is not taken into account at all that these games and the playful use of a certain vocabulary allow the – verbal – breaking of taboos in a clearly defined situation only. This situation serves as the forum that permits a specially marked way of communication about something 'one does not talk about' otherwise and thus serves the function of so-called 'safety valve customs'. These customs can be found in every society (Bornemann 1974; Rühmkorf 1967) because they actually help to secure the observance of important taboos within a society (Senft & Senft 1986; Senft 1987c, 1991b).

What consequences do these changes have for the Kilivila language?

The increasing influence of Christian belief and the growth of the local village priests' status and political power has been causing the loss of magical formulae for the last two years or so. This loss affects all kinds of magic – garden magic, weather magic, canoe magic, carving magic, 'black' magic, beauty magic, health magic, love magic, dance magic, and magic for protection against sharks and witches. In 1983 the chief of Tauwema, Kilagola, gave me parts of his canoe magic as a present, when he adopted me as one of his sons. His brother Weyei made me a similar present consisting of five formulae of his weather magic as a sign of his friendship. And Vaka'ila, one of the oldest men of the village, presented me with a number of formulae of his garden magic because I reminded him

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<sup>11</sup>For an excellent discussion of these problems see *Zeitschrift für Mission*, 12/4, 1986, especially the contributions by Volker Heesch and Meinhard Schuster.

of his late brother Keyalabwala. These three men were the only persons who offered me such personal and secret information – and I was rather proud of being honoured by these men in this way. In 1989, however, more than 12 women and men approached my wife and me and offered to sell magical formulae for money and tobacco. We felt as if we were in the middle of a big closing-down sale for magic. This is clear evidence of the fact that the magical formulae have lost their importance for the majority of Trobriand Islanders. This meant that they had also lost their value as personal property which a person hands down to his/her young relatives. If the formulae have lost their value there is actually no need any longer to bequeath them to one's younger relatives, and the members of the younger generation see no sense in learning these formulae in a number of long lessons their elder relatives used to teach them. This results in the loss of the text category 'magical formula'.

But the changes in the evaluation of the concepts 'magic' and 'religion' do not only affect a whole text category. They are also responsible for the loss of a complete 'situational-intentional' variety<sup>12</sup> of Kilivila, the speech 'register' the Trobriand Islanders call *biga tommwaya* (old people's language) or *biga baloma* (language of the spirits of the dead). In 1983 this archaic language variety was very rarely used as a kind of sociolinguistic variable indicating high social status in everyday discourse and conversation. In 1989 we could no longer observe or document any such utterance in the *biga baloma* variety in everyday language use. This situational-intentional variety is also used in magical formulae. We just stated that this text category will most probably be lost in the not too distant future. Moreover, songs that are sung during the harvest festival (*milamala*) and during a certain period of mourning (Senft 1985b) are also sung in the *biga baloma* variety. These songs have been passed on from generation to generation. Already in 1983 the majority of the people singing these songs no longer understood their meaning. In 1989 I found only four informants who could sing a variety of these songs and who could also translate the *biga baloma* variety into 'ordinary' everyday Kilivila. These songs serve (and still serve for those who sing them) two functions: on the one hand they welcome the spirits of the dead to the ceremonies and festivities of the harvest festival; on the other hand these songs are sung to make it easier for the spirit of a dead person to leave the community of his/her relatives just after his/her death, because the songs very poetically and quite erotically describe the life the spirits of the dead lead in their Tuma Island paradise. In the first case the immortal spirits of the dead are believed to leave their paradise on Tuma Island to visit their former villages of residence and see whether the villagers living there now still know how to garden, how to celebrate a good harvest, and how to behave even while celebrating exuberantly. In the second case the gradual substitution of the indigenous eschatology by Christian eschatology means that these songs lose their meaning and significance for the society. All my observations indicate that in the near future these songs may still be sung to preserve some part of the ritual aspect of the harvest festival and of the respective mourning ceremony, but then definitely the singers of these songs will no longer know what they are singing about. Thus, in addition to the loss of a whole text category there is the prospect of the loss of a

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<sup>12</sup>With 'situational-intentional' varieties of Kilivila I refer to language varieties or 'registers' that are used in a given, special situation and that are produced to pursue a certain intention or certain intentions. The Kilivila native speakers differentiate at least seven of these varieties. For detailed information see Senft (1986:124-129; 1991b).

complete language variety!<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the village priests' censoring of dances, games, and play accompanying verses may also affect parts of the situational-intentional variety called *biga sopa*, the 'joking or lying language' the 'indirect language' that among other things provides an important verbal safety valve for everyday social life on the Trobriand Islands.<sup>14</sup>

It must be emphasised that the losses, observed or suspected, affect indigenous forms of ritual language. In general we can regard ritual language as the recognised culmination of the learning of knowledge which is basic and fundamental for the social construction of the society's reality. This reality, in turn, fosters its stability with the help of the relative stability of ritual language (Fox 1975:127, 130). Changes that affect this language variety are induced by cultural change, of course. However, such a language change, once induced, will have severe consequences for the organisation and construction of the culture of the respective society in turn because it escalates the dynamics of change.

But before speculating on the future of Trobriand Islands language and society I would first like to summarise the facts presented thus far. Then I attempt to answer the question who and/or what is responsible for these processes of change. Finally I will discuss the question whether these changes observed in Trobriand Islands culture and language are signs of decay and impoverishment or should be interpreted as manifestations representing the natural course of events.

### 3. CULTURE AND LANGUAGE CHANGE: RESPONSIBILITY, DECAY, IMPOVERISHMENT, AND THE NATURAL COURSE OF EVENTS...

In the preceding pages I have described the changes that I have observed in the culture and language of the Trobriand Islanders. With respect to the culture these changes affect the Trobriand Islanders' concept of aesthetics as it is manifested in the Islanders' material and artistic culture; they affect the social construction of Trobriand Islanders' profane reality with respect to the islanders' complex system of kin roles and relationships and the profane aspects of ritual and ceremony. They also affect Trobriand Islanders' magic, morals, science and religion, especially indigenous eschatology. Moreover, the changes in religion change the society's immanent rank structure.

As for the Trobriand Islanders' language these changes affect the Kilivila lexicon with respect to experts' vocabulary, to colour terms, to loan words entering the lexicon, numerals (but not the core of the classifiers), and kinship terminology. They affect Trobriand Islands morphology with respect to loan words that may replace or are in the process of replacing Kilivila words which follow quite complex word formation rules – at least in simple phrases. They affect Kilivila semantics with the entering of loan words, and they affect Kilivila pragmatics with respect to the scope and the variety of rhetoric abilities Kilivila pragmatics provide for the native speaker in general and with respect to Kilivila politeness phenomena and forms of ritual and rank marking language in particular. On the Trobriand Islands cultural change seems to be more important than language change and precedes it.

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<sup>13</sup>Compare Stevenson (1987[1896]:32): "pleasures are neglected, the dance languishes, the songs are forgotten", and Stevenson (1987[1896]:238): "and yet in a sense these songs also are but a chatter; the words are ancient, obsolete and sacred; few comprehend them".

<sup>14</sup>By the way this kind of 'situational-intentional variety' is also to be found in other cultures of Papua New Guinea and probably all over Melanesia (see Strathern 1975; Parkin 1984).



But who and/or what is responsible for these changes? Although I did not ask this question explicitly in the previous section I have already answered it more or less implicitly.

A number of changes that affect the Trobriand Islanders are due to the changing political and economic situation of Papua New Guinea as a whole.

The peoples and cultures of Papua New Guinea must adapt to the economic prerequisites of a modern capitalistic economy. The substitution of barter and exchange by a cash economy is inevitable – at least in the long run. A cash economy needs and creates markets – and it is a fact that a free enterprise economy has rather specific and complex rules that do not care for (romantic?) attempts to preserve alternative but competing economic systems. Profit maximisation disregards such 'trifles' as cultural traditions, even if this implies the loss of (or characteristic features of) a peoples' cultural identity. This may be sad, but it has proved to be a fact. However, as recent developments in Papua New Guinea emphasise, a cash economy is a prerequisite for the survival of an independent Papua New Guinea.

Another prerequisite is the creation of a national identity and unity in the Papua New Guinea "parliament of a thousand tribes" (White 1972) with its 869 spoken languages (Dutton & Mühlhäusler 1991:1). One means of achieving this national identity is to establish a national language. The official national language of Papua New Guinea is English. It is thus inevitable that all the indigenous languages of Papua New Guinea will be influenced by contact with the national language in the long run. That language change induced by language contact does not imply the 'death' of the language should always be kept in mind. All natural languages of the world that are still spoken are constantly affected by processes of language change in progress. After all, a natural language is characterised by its dynamics – and it is this characteristic feature that makes languages so fascinating.

In addition to these political and economic factors we should mention the tourist and the missionary – and maybe also the scientist – as being responsible for changes which affect the Trobriand Islanders' culture and language.

Tourists, and also scientists, who come to Papua New Guinea and the Trobriand Islands in particular with the intention of staying there for a certain period of time – be it for some days only or for months – belong to a different culture – as manifested by the tourist's and scientist's behaviour, his/her outfit and equipment, his/her standards, and his/her language. Both the tourist and the scientist present certain images of their cultural background to the people they either visit or study. At the same time they also arouse wants and desires hitherto unknown to them. In this role the tourist as well as the scientist fosters economic change. Moreover, the tourist and the scientist are sources of cash: the tourist offers cash for items of Islanders' material culture and works of art,<sup>15</sup> and the scientist pays for information and for living in the Islanders' villages. The share of the tourist's and the scientist's responsibility for cultural and language change should not be underestimated.

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<sup>15</sup>It is here that I must mention the sad fact that we find much sex tourism of the worst kind on the Trobriand Islands. People who have never read Malinowski's masterpiece on Trobriand Islanders' sexuality (Malinowski 1929) come to the islands to experience the 'sexual life of savages', and there are many unscrupulous tourist agents who foster this kind of tourism. It is depressing to state that the *epitethon ornans* 'Islands of Love' has only negative effects for the Trobriand Islanders (see also Senft 1987b:192). With respect to the relation between tourism and anthropology see, for example, the interesting though provocative paper by Errington and Gewertz (1989), and the literature quoted therein.

And there is the missionary, of course – or should I say the institution of the ‘Christian Church’ (of sorts)?!<sup>16</sup> I am completely aware of the fact that “it is easy to blame the missionary” as Stevenson (1987[1896]:41) once noted. However, as Stevenson also noted at the same time “it is his business to make changes”. Moreover, “the missionary ... is something else besides a minister of mere religion ... he is condemned to be an organ of reform, he could scarce evade (even if he desired) a certain influence on political affairs” (Stevenson 1967[1892]:274). The influences which the missionary and his assistant, the local village priest, exert on Trobriand Islands culture and the Kilivila language are described in detail in the preceding section on changes in Trobriand Islanders’ magic, science and religion and need not be discussed again here. However, what has to be mentioned here is the possibility that the Christian Gospel may provide better answers to the peoples’ daily worries and fears (see Heesch 1986:207). Moreover, some missionaries in Papua New Guinea have developed excellent means and ways to combine the old, indigenous traditions and beliefs with the new testament, the new belief.<sup>17</sup>

What remains now is to give a final evaluation and estimation of these changes.

In 1922 Malinowski (p.xv) made the following statement with respect to the position of ethnology in a changing world:

Ethnology is in the sadly ludicrous, not to say tragic, position, that at the very moment when it begins to put its workshop in order, to forge its proper tools, to start ready for work on its appointed task, the material of its study melts away with hopeless rapidity. Just now, when the methods and aims of scientific field ethnology have taken shape, when men fully trained for the work have begun to travel into savage countries and study their inhabitants – these die away under our very eyes.

If we keep Hockett’s declaration in mind that “linguistics without anthropology is sterile; anthropology without linguistics is blind” (Hockett 1973:675),<sup>18</sup> and if we remember Malinowski’s pioneering examples for anthropological and linguistic interdisciplinary research, we can relate Malinowski’s statement on the situation of ethnology in a changing world to the situation of (field) linguistics in our time as well. However, with respect to the Trobriand Islands situation I can (so far) only accept his ‘melting’ metaphor but must reject the ‘death’ metaphor – at least in its fatal totality. Papua New Guinea in general has been undergoing periods of fundamental change over the last decades. During this process of change we certainly see and note many cases of cultural and linguistic ‘decay’ and impoverishment with respect to the power and influence of traditional custom, oral tradition, and the power of rhetoric in many of the indigenous societies within the country. This paper tried to describe and discuss some of these changes that have been affecting Trobriand Islands society. It goes without saying that some aspects of culture and language on the

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<sup>16</sup>There are more than 50 so-called ‘Christian Churches’, ‘Sects’ and ‘Congregations’ listed in the Papua New Guinea Telephone Directory for 1982 for the highlands areas of Papua New Guinea.

<sup>17</sup>See, for example, the video documentation of the Catholic mass celebrated by Philip Gibbs (SVD) in Par parish, diocese of Wabag, Enga Province, Papua New Guinea, in 1988. It was published in 1989 under the title *Misa Enga* (see references). See also footnote 11 above. Another example of an attempt to combine tradition and custom with the new belief is the effort of the Lutheran Church in Papua New Guinea to incorporate traditional songs and melodies into their services.

<sup>18</sup>I would like to thank Volker Heesch for drawing my attention to this quote and to Hockett’s book.

Trobriand Islands as well as in other Papua New Guinea cultures are really dying out.<sup>19</sup> However, most aspects and features of culture and language that are affected by the changes observed here are not just 'chopped off' from the body of a living speech community and society. On the contrary, change substitutes something new and foreign for something old and traditional. If we visit folklore museums in Europe (like, for example, the Skansen Museum in Stockholm, the Openlucht Museum in Arnhem, or the Freilichtmuseum des Bezirks Oberbayern an der Glentleiten between Murnau and Kochel) we realise how profoundly processes of change have been affecting European cultures in the last decades of our century. If we look at the publications of linguists like Nancy Dorian who is working on dying languages like Scottish Gaelic (Dorian 1981) and Lukas Tsitsipis who does research on Arvanitika, a variety of Tosk Albanian (Tsitsipis 1988, 1989) we also realise what fundamental processes of change have been affecting European languages. However, if we attempt to ignore changes in our own society or to see them as positive, while at the same time we notice and lament changes that affect foreign – and in our eyes more 'exotic' and 'original' – cultures and their languages, it is difficult for us to avoid traces of ethnocentrism and ideological romanticism left over from the 'noble savage' myths of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Stein 1984a, 1984b, 1984c; Theye 1984; Ritz 1983). But cultures as well as languages are dynamic phenomena – that's the way it is – and our primary task as scientists is to describe and document these dynamics. On a secondary level of our research we may more or less subjectively evaluate these dynamics and their results. It is on a completely different and much more political than scientific level, however, that we have the chance to influence the directions of these dynamics – on the basis of our scientific insights, of course. But as to the scientific level of our argumentation the facts force us to accept that in all cultures and in all languages we observe dynamic processes that result in cultural and linguistic change. These dynamic processes are something fundamental, and we all know that, as Hupfeld (1931) expressed it in his now rather famous song composed for the film 'Casablanca', "the fundamental things apply, as time goes by".

#### 4. "AND LASTLY, ONE WORD AS TO THE FUTURE..."<sup>20</sup>

Upon the whole, the problem seems to me to stand thus: –Where there have been fewest changes, important or unimportant, salutary or hurtful, there the race survives. Where there have been most, important or unimportant, salutary or hurtful, there it perishes. Each change, however small, augments the sum of new conditions to which the race has to become inured.

(Stevenson 1987[1896]:41)

With this quote I would like to start my final remarks. I understand these statements as political in the sense defined in the preceding paragraph. One of the main arguments I put forward in evaluating the changes that affect the Trobriand Islanders' language and culture

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<sup>19</sup>I would like to mention in this context that in 1983 I collected three versions of one of the Trobriand Islanders' most important myths: a rather old man, Mokopei from Kaduwaga village, who was in his late sixties then, told me the first version of this myth. It took him about ninety minutes. Coincidentally, his nephew Gerubara, a man in his thirties, told me a second, much shortened version of this myth. This took him about twenty minutes. The third version of the myth is just a song which was sung by the young men and adolescents of Tauwema village. This song consists of three stanzas which are partly in English and partly in Kilivila.

<sup>20</sup>See Stevenson (1967[1892]:319).

was that we must accept these changes as manifestations of the dynamics that are immanent in linguistic and social systems. However, I also argued that we may have chances to influence the direction of these changes. Here the scientist can only roughly outline what would be done; the action must be taken by the people and the politicians of countries like Papua New Guinea that are affected by these changes, of course.

If we take Stevenson's quote as seriously as it deserves to be taken, and if we remember that "it is a commonplace in the body of literature on ethnicity to find language identified as one of the chief markers of ethnic identity" (Dorian 1980:33) we must try to preserve those features of culture and language that are most characteristic and vital for a society and speech community affected by processes of change.

In this paper I have also tried to identify some of the causes of change on the Trobriand Islands. First and foremost among these is the changing economic situation in Papua New Guinea. However, from an economic (and capitalistic) point of view the characteristic features of the different Papua New Guinea societies in general and of the Trobriand Islanders in particular are attractive for tourism. Without tourist agents who have a deep understanding of the importance of cultural and linguistic features for the society, who represent the people's and not only their own personal interests, and who care for the welfare of the people, tourism can have a very negative cultural impact. With respect to the Trobriand Islands situation this would require a completely new organisation of the concept of tourism including guidelines for tourists' conduct – on the basis of my own experience with tourists on the Trobriand Islands I must say that most tourists there behave like bulls in a china shop. However, as far as I am informed, the responsible politicians in Port Moresby and Alotau are already preparing some action in this direction. If we draw another parallel to Europe, it was only in the frame of folklore that many features characteristic of various ethnic groups including linguistic ones had a chance to survive.

Other agents of change in addition to the economic situation mentioned above are tourists and scientists. In recent years the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies (IPNGS) did its best to monitor the reputation of scientists and the respectability and seriousness of the research they want to conduct in the country. Such efforts help to prevent too many so-called 'scientists' invading the country, misusing the hospitality of the peoples of Papua New Guinea, and exploiting their hosts.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, in cooperation with the provincial governments IPNGS takes care that the results of scientific research conducted in the country flow back to Papua New Guinea. I assume that it would also help to guide the behaviour of tourists in a similar way. Tourists should, and usually do, want to know from the very beginning of their visit to Papua New Guinea how they should act to give the peoples and cultures of the country due respect. To say it more extremely and polemically, it is only primitive people who misbehave in societies in which the developmental stages are different from those of their own, and these societies should refuse to host such visitors.

The Christian Churches in Papua New Guinea, probably the most important agents of change, should without exception strengthen their attempts to combine the new belief and the old customs and traditions. I have already mentioned excellent examples for such a synthesis

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<sup>21</sup>In Papua New Guinea I have heard incredible stories with respect to the behaviour of so-called 'scientists' who exploited their hosts not only with respect to information that was told to them confidentially; they even exploited their hosts financially. Some of them obviously behave more like traders than researchers. However, I do not want to spread myself on this disgusting subject in more detail here.

above. People whose cultural roots are destroyed and who have lost their identity cannot be transformed into members of a Christian community. In my understanding of Christianity, every community that claims to be Christian must consist of individuals who are deeply rooted in their culture because this is a prerequisite for being deeply rooted in the religion itself.

Teaching culture and the indigenous languages in schools and preschools is another means of securing the peoples' social and personal roots. I am sure that Papua New Guinea education politics will foster and support steps in this direction.

If the capitalist with his/her economic interests, the tourist and the tourist agent, the scientist, the missionary, the priest, the teacher, and the politician together respect the cultural and linguistic characteristics of the people with whom they are living or whom they represent, if they all accept that every society needs cultural diversity and distinction, and if they all put more emphasis on the individuality of their fellow men as human beings, not as possible customers, exotic foreigners, interesting informants, possible converts and voters, only then will people like the Trobriand Islanders have a chance to preserve their language and culture. Such a shift of perspective in all agents of cultural and linguistic change may help to control and channel these changes and contribute to the survival not only of the Massim people of the Trobriand Islands but of all the ethnic groups of Papua New Guinea in particular and of Melanesia in general.

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