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Textbooks are like buses; you wait for ages for one to come along and then two come along together. Those of us who emphasise language as social action in our teaching have been waiting for a textbook to replace the sociolinguistics textbooks which emphasise language as form. Now we have two textbooks, both published in 1997, Alessandro Duranti’s *Linguistic anthropology* and Bill Foley’s *Anthropological linguistics: An introduction*. Any differences between the two terms ‘anthropological linguistics’ and ‘linguistic anthropology’ are not immediately apparent. Duranti suggests they have been used “in the past more or less interchangeably and any attempt to trace back semantic or practical distinctions risks rewriting history” (p. 1-2, fn. 1), while Foley ignores any difference by not mentioning linguistic anthropology. The authors’ respective backgrounds provide clues. Foley (anthropological linguistics) is a linguistic known for his work on Papuan linguistics, while Duranti (linguistic anthropology) is known for his anthropological work on Samoa. Their common experience in working in the Pacific gives them both a direct link back to the doyen of anthropological linguistics, Bronislaw Malinowski. Malinowski founded the discipline of anthropological linguistics, initially in his appendix to Ogden and Richards’ *The meaning of meaning*, entitled “The problem of meaning in primitive languages” (Malinowski, 1923). Later he developed it more fully in the second volume of *Coral gardens and their magic* in a section entitled “An ethnographic theory of language and some practical corollaries” (Malinowski, 1935).
Malinowski’s theory emphasises language as social action over form and therefore he rejects the Saussurean metaphor of language as a conduit transferring ideas from the head of the speaker to the head of the listener.

“The fact is that the main function of language is not to express thought, not to duplicate mental processes, but rather to play an active pragmatic part in human behaviour. Thus in its primary function it is one of the chief cultural forces and an adjunct to bodily activities. Indeed, it is an indispensable ingredient to all concerned human action. ... The view set forth here is not merely academic: it compels us ... to correlate the study of language with that of other activities, to interpret the meaning of each utterance within its actual context; and this means a new departure in the handling of linguistic evidence” (Malinowski, 1935: 7, 9).

These emphases on interpreting language in its context and on language as a cultural force are what distinguish anthropological linguistics from sociolinguistics. Duranti and Foley are in agreement on the difference. Duranti says quite simply that “the importance of the concept of culture ... alone makes linguistic anthropological methods and theoretical goals quite distinct from sociolinguistic research” (p. 14). Foley gives a longer, but still a clear, description of the differences.

“Anthropological linguistics views language through the prism of the core anthropological concept, culture, and, as such, seeks to uncover the meaning behind the use, misuse, or non-use of language, its different forms, registers and styles. It is an interpretive discipline peeling away at language to find cultural understandings. Sociolinguistics, on the other hand, views language as a social institution, one of those institutions within which individuals and groups carry out social interaction. It seeks to discover how linguistic behavior patterns with respect to social groupings and correlates differences in linguistic behavior with the variables defining social groups, such as age, sex, class, race, etc.” (Foley, p. 1; emphasis in original).

Given the fact that both books agree on the fundamentals of anthropological linguistics, how do they reflect their authors’ particular disciplinary biases? Foley is divided into six parts: Introduction, which looks at meaning and the nature of the linguistic sign; the evolution of language; universalism; relativism; the ethnography of speaking; and culture and language change. Linguistic forms dominate with culture brought in as an overarching explanation for differences. One example from many is his section on social deixis and honorifics (p. 318-326) where Foley contrasts the situation in Japanese society with that in Javanese society with in each case an extensive
set of linguistic examples. Culture is a temporally consistent given; feudal and modern Japan become one as an explanation for the differences with European societies (p. 321). Contrast this with Duranti where language becomes a much more active factor in the construction of culture. An example is his section on ethnographic studies of speech events (p. 290-294) where he invokes Bakhtin’s notion of heteroglossia to represent “the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past” (Bakhtin, 1981 p. 291 & 293).

Duranti is divided into ten chapters, but these form three distinct parts: Part I (chapters 1-3) consists of the theoretical aspects - The scope of linguistic anthropology; theories of culture; and linguistic diversity. Part II (chapters 4 and 5) consists of the methodologies - Ethnographic methods; and transcription. Part III (chapters 6-9) consists of the concerns that distinguish anthropological linguistics from sociolinguistics: performance, indexicality and participation, realised as meaning in linguistic forms; speaking as social action; conversational exchanges; and units of participation. The final chapter (chapter 10) is a concluding chapter. The anthropological bias is distinct with the foregrounding of culture near the beginning in chapter 2 and the emphasis on ethnographic methods in chapters 4 and 5. Moreover, for student linguists involved in discourse analysis Duranti provides ethnomethodological and social interaction examples, especially in chapter 8 (conversation analysis) and chapter 9 (Vygotskian notions and ethnographic studies of speech events). Duranti’s emphasis on ethnographic methods extends to a very useful appendix on “Practical tips on recording interaction” (p. 340-347) which provides all the details that either a linguist or an anthropologist needs to record interactions.

Sociolinguists who stray across the boundary into anthropological linguistics will find Foley to be much more familiar territory than Duranti, especially in its last two parts, ‘The ethnography of speaking’ and ‘Culture and language change’ (p. 247-434). Here they will find old friends, such as politeness (p. 270-275), language and gender (p. 286-306), social roles (p. 307-344), language socialisation (p. 345-358), genre (p. 359-378), linguistic engineering (p. 398-416) and literacy (p. 417-434). They will not find these in Duranti, but then neither will they find any methods on how to do anthropological linguistics in Foley nor such a clear exposition of performance, indexicality and participation as the fundamentals of anthropological linguistics that Duranti provides (p. 14-21).
Both these books agree on the difference between their discipline and sociolinguistics, and both underline the differences between anthropological linguistics and linguistic anthropology. Foley emphasises linguistic concerns, particularly with its two long sections on universalism and relativism (taking up 10 out of a total of 21 chapters (p. 79-245)). With these concerns, centrally located both in linguistics and in the book, and with its concern with concepts such as meaning (p. 3-18), space (p. 215-229), the evolution of language (p. 41-78) and ontological relativity (p. 230-245), Foley places a greater emphasis on the theoretical underpinnings of anthropological linguistics.

Duranti, on the other hand, gives only a passing mention to linguistic universalism (p. 35) and is otherwise concerned centrally with the anthropological notion of cultural relativity. This pervades the whole book, for example, “the study of linguistic practices” (p. 5-9); “theories of culture” (p. 23-50); pragmatics and indexicality (p. 199-213); and participation (p. 280-330). The extensive treatments of ethnographic methods (p. 84-121) and ethnomethodology as conversation analysis (p. 245-279) will be welcome to linguists, especially discourse analysts, confused by these two methodologies.

Which is the better textbook? Both are suitable for either undergraduate linguistics courses or taught postgraduate courses in linguistics and applied linguistics. Duranti provides a clear progression from theory to method to language as social action and his methodological sections are first-rate. Foley intermingles theory and practice in the same chapters throughout the book. This provides a local theoretical background for specific practices, but does not give the compact theoretical viewpoint that Duranti provides at the beginning of his book which is suitable both as a pre-reading entrée or post-fieldwork refreshment. Nevertheless, Foley provides familiar friends to those moving across from sociolinguistics. Both books have plenty of detailed examples which amply illustrate the theories and can provide ideas for student research topics. Whichever your preference, both books stress the interdisciplinary nature of the discipline and both provide a much needed overview of the state of the art in anthropological linguistics (or linguistic anthropology) from their respective viewpoints. They are refreshing alternatives to replace the pervasive sociolinguistic textbooks with their lack of actors.
References


