

LANGUAGE SHIFT AS CULTURAL REPRODUCTION

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1. INTRODUCTION

Discussion about the relationship between culture change and language change in the Pacific can be found in three types of literature. First of all, there are accounts by linguists, who focus on specific languages and who document what they often refer to as contact induced grammatical “decay”. While these accounts, like similar ones produced by linguists working with obsolescent languages around the world, are of interest for the data they provide on structural change, they frequently suffer from a shallow understanding of culture. Several linguists, for example, have commented on the apparent loss, during the last fifty years, of the noun class system in the Murik language, of northern Papua New Guinea (Laycock 1973; Wurm 1986, 1987). Problems arise when they invoke culture to account for this change. Wurm (this volume, 146-147), for instance, explains the disappearance of the Murik noun class system by asserting:

In quite a few of the Papuan languages which have gender or class systems with nouns, it has been established that the classification systems of nouns have their conceptual base in the traditional culture of their speakers and reflect the categorisation of the concrete and spiritual world surrounding them into a number of distinct units, such as trees, animals and plants of significance to the traditional indigenous life, objects connected with food production such as gardening, fishing, the utilisation of water...[list continues]... With changes in the traditional cultures of [these] Papuan languages...through clashes with intrusive, as a rule metropolitan-based, cultures which eventually lead to the breakdown and disappearance of the indigenous cultures of the peoples concerned and the, mostly partial and rudimentary, adoption of the intrusive culture, the conceptual base for the assignment of certain classes to nouns tends to be forgotten, and the classes fall into disuse and eventually disappear from the language concerned.¹

Leaving aside the obvious difficulties with this account (such as questions concerning how this conceptual basis of noun classification has been “established” and by whom, the question of how this kind of argument applies to changes in those noun class systems in Papuan languages that are determined by the phonological shape of the noun and not the cultural status of its referent (Foley 1986:85-88), and the far from uncontroversial issue raised here concerning the conscious salience of abstract grammatical categories), the basic

¹See also Wurm (1987:40,45) for similar arguments.

problem is one of how culture articulates with language in such a way that changes in culture bring about specific changes in language.

Although on the face of it the kind of account provided by Wurm might seem apparent and simple, the difficulties begin piling up when one presses the point and asks: how exactly? Through what social processes does contact with an "intrusive culture" first lead to "the conceptual base for the assignment of certain classes to nouns" being "forgotten", and then to the noun classes themselves being disused and abandoned? Jane Hill (1990) has recently expressed the problem precisely. "No matter how powerful the agents of oppression", she observes dryly, "we have no evidence that they can enforce practices like 'freeze derivation in the fifth positions of verbal prefixation' or 'shift from ergative to nominative-accusative marking of arguments'" (p.1), or, in this case, one might add, 'drop all noun classes'.

Another place where language change and culture change in the Pacific has received detailed attention is in the work of non-anthropologists writing about the connection between language and political economy (e.g. Mühlhäusler 1989, 1991; Gilliam 1984; Dutton & Mühlhäusler 1991; Lynch 1979; Romaine, in press; Topping 1992; Hollyman 1962). Frequently drawing on implicit and modified versions of dependency theory, scholars writing in this vein stress the negative consequences that contact with white society has had on Pacific languages and cultures. In a recent paper, for example, Peter Mühlhäusler, who is perhaps the most ardent and prolific representative of this type of scholarship, has assessed the results of two hundred years of white presence in the Pacific as a "cultural and linguistic holocaust" (Mühlhäusler 1991:19; see also Stannard 1989; Moorehead 1966).

The importance of the work done within this framework cannot be overestimated, because it directs sharp critical attention to the nature and consequences of the political, economic, religious, cultural and linguistic subordination of Pacific peoples. But while the whole thrust of this work is on change, the precise nature of the relationship between cultural change and linguistic change tends to be painted in very rough strokes, and apart from frequent, nebulous recommendations that "catastrophe theory" (Mühlhäusler 1991:24, 1987:17, 1986:76, 249; Romaine, in press) or "quantum linguistics" (Mühlhäusler 1991:23) might provide insights into these processes, no coherent theory linking processes of culture change to language change has yet appeared.

A further problematic aspect of much of this literature is its strongly conservative (perhaps 'conservationalist' is the *mot propre*) stance on change. Virtually all aspects of modernisation are considered harmful to indigenous vernaculars, and are therefore condemned, in language which sometimes runs the risk of being interpreted as paternalistic. Thus, while questions like "what are the advantages of non-literacy and how can those advantages be maximized?" (Mühlhäusler 1987:21) might be theoretically interesting and fun to ponder from the depths of one's armchair, it is not difficult to imagine that many Pacific Islanders and Melanesians might see in that question a dubious throwback to elitist colonialism, where education and literacy were considered, by the ruling powers, to be 'needed' by only a tiny minority of the indigenous population (Gilliam 1984; Kulick & Stroud, in press).

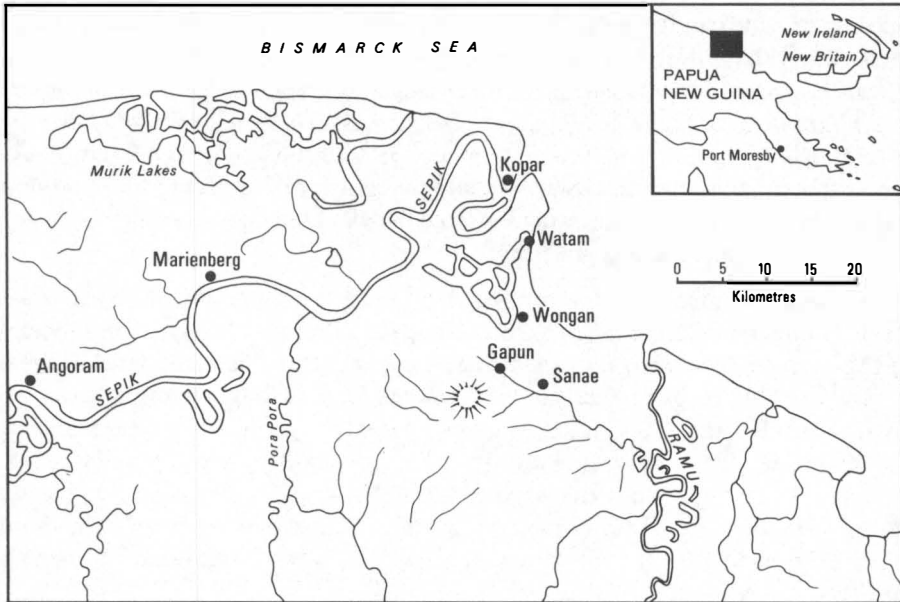
The third type of literature relevant to the problem of language change and culture change does not in fact tend to address the question of change. It is, however, extremely important in this context, because it examines with great sophistication the relationship between language and culture in the Pacific.

The kind of work I have in mind here is that carried out by linguistically trained anthropologists who study particular societies. In anthologies like *Dangerous words* (Brenneis & Myers 1984), *Language socialization across cultures* (Schieffelin & Ochs 1986), and the recent *Disentangling* (Watson-Gegeo & White 1990), and in monographs such as *Culture and language development* (Ochs 1988), *The give and take of everyday life* (Schieffelin 1990), *Talk never dies* (Goldman 1983) and *Ku Waru* (Merlan & Rumsey 1990), researchers working broadly within an ethnography of speaking tradition pay close attention to linguistic data in order to demonstrate the ways in which language both structures and is structured through cultural practices.

The one feature of much of this work which makes it less helpful than it otherwise might have been in understanding change is its concentration on synchrony. Only recently has change begun to be examined, and whenever it is, this tends to be at the level of the micro-event. Thus, in his recent paper on the Samoan *fono* as a disentangling, or conflict resolving, event, Duranti (1990) demonstrates how language during a *fono* is managed in ways that can result in delicate restructurings in the social hierarchy within villages. A paper by Hutchins (1990) in the same volume discusses how Trobriand villagers' understandings of land rights are shaped and transformed through the talk that gets produced at land litigation meetings. Both these papers explore in diachronic terms the insight that language shapes social reality.

What has thus far been addressed in this literature, however, are very limited changes, such as, to return to the above examples, the relative status of a Samoan chief or the usufructory land rights of eloquent Trobriand villagers. Presumably, the assumption is that these kinds of micro-changes that are continually being brought about through language can, over time, result in higher level changes in the social structure. The exact mechanisms of this change, and the selective processes which determine the direction and speed of change, are again, though, left unexamined. Also, this type of research does not tend to address the question of change in the other direction. That is, while it is demonstrated how certain culturally determined uses of language may result in social change, we are not told how social practices may bring about linguistic changes.

What I would like to do in this paper is attempt to cast a bridge of sorts between the kinds of studies I have just outlined. My goal here will be to articulate the relationship between language and culture in a diachronic framework which sees the two as changing together and influencing one another. The empirical material from which I will draw to make my point is my study, conducted between 1986 and 1987, of a group of people living in a small, rural Papua New Guinean village called Gapun.



THE LOWER SEPIK AND RAMU REGIONS

2. GAPUN

Gapun is a village with a population which in 1986-87, fluctuated between 90 and 110 people. It is located about ten kilometres from the northern coast of Papua New Guinea, roughly midway between the lower Sepik and Ramu rivers. It is an isolated village, surrounded on all sides by rainforest and sago swamps, connected to other villages (the nearest of which is about a two-hour journey away) and to the outside world only by narrow, choked waterways and slim bush paths subject to flooding.

The reason why Gapun is interesting in this context and provides me with a perspective from which to approach the issue of language change and culture change is that the community is in the midst of a language shift. The vernacular language of the villagers is a Papuan language which they call *Taiap mer* (Taiap language). The language exists only in Gapun, and is spoken actively and fluently by exactly eighty-nine people.² Even by the somewhat extreme standards of Papua New Guinea, this is a small language. And from having been something of an archetype of the kind of small multilingual community described by Sankoff (1977), Gapun is now moving towards a future where not only all multilingualism, but also the villagers' own vernacular language will be lost. As of 1987, no village child under ten actively used this village vernacular in verbal interactions. These children either speak, or, in the case of the one- to three-year-olds, are clearly on their way to acquiring, Tok Pisin, which is one of Papua New Guinea's national languages and certainly its most important in terms of number of speakers.

²The figure of eighty-nine represents the total number of Taiap speakers - even those fluent in the language who do not reside in Gapun have been counted here.

The reasons for this language shift from Taiap to Tok Pisin are, on the face of it, not at all clear. Gapun is difficult to reach and far away from any urban centre. Partly because of this geographic isolation, villagers are only very marginally involved in the market economy. Everyone in Gapun is self-supporting through a combination of swidden agriculture, hunting and sago-processing. Some villagers engage in cash-generating enterprises such as growing coffee or drying copra, but this is done on an ad hoc basis as a minor supplement to their subsistence activities. The amount of cash earned through such activities is not large, and it is quickly spent on store-bought items such as rice, sugar, batteries or articles of clothing.

Out-migration from the village is negligible, consisting in 1986-87 of four women and one man who lived in the villages of their spouses. A number of families from Gapun live in the nearby village of Wongan (a two-hour journey away by foot and canoe), where they feed and look after most of the schoolchildren from Gapun during the week. These families cannot, however, be considered to have left Gapun, since the close ties between the two villages and the relatively short distance between them allows the families to remain actively involved in most aspects of village life.

In-migration, too, is not yet significant. The only way for an outsider to establish him or herself in Gapun is through marriage to a villager. In recent years, there has been a growing tendency for young men and women to choose their partners from outside Gapun, particularly from Wongan. The majority of marriages between those villagers living in Gapun, however, is still between fellow villagers. In ten of the sixteen married couples living in the village in 1987, both spouses were speakers of Taiap who had been born and raised in Gapun.

A final puzzling aspect of the language shift is that no one ever expresses any negative evaluations of the vernacular language. All adult speakers of Taiap value it. Parents want their children to learn the vernacular and villagers do not understand why their children are no longer acquiring it. There has been no conscious decision on the part of anyone to stop transmitting the vernacular to children.

In Gapun, we thus are confronted with a rural, fairly isolated community with little out-migration and still insignificant in-migration; an economically self-supporting village far removed from processes of industrialisation or urbanisation; a village where market economy penetration is negligible, where the majority of village parents both speak the vernacular and where all adults value the vernacular. And yet the village is in the process of shift from this vernacular to Tok Pisin. The absence of material and demographic changes means that the macro-sociological factors, such as industrialisation, or urbanisation, or in- or out-migration, which habitually are invoked to account for language shift in other societies, have little relevance for Gapun. The usual explanations of language shift simply do not fit this situation.³

In explaining this language shift, I turn to anthropological theory, both in order to draw on it and at the same time to augment it to encompass language. The theory which I believe has the power, subtlety, and scope to account for why villagers in Gapun are abandoning

³The general thrust of these explanations is made explicit in Dorian's comparison between old-order Amish (who have retained their minority language) in the United States and the Scottish Gaelic fisher community which she studied (who have shifted to English). Formulating what she appears to take as a general tendency, Dorian states that "so long as people lived, worked, and married among themselves, maintenance of their home language followed" (1981:72). In Gapun, the maintenance of the home language has *not* followed from the variables listed by Dorian.

their vernacular is Marshall Sahlins' ideas about structure and event, in particular his notion of "structure of the conjuncture". The "structure of the conjuncture" is, according to Sahlins, "a set of historical relationships that at once reproduce the traditional cultural categories and give them new values out of the pragmatic context" (1987:125). Sahlins' concern in his recent work (1981, 1987) has been to explain how people transform culture in the act of reproducing it, and what he means by the idea of conjunctural structure is that by drawing upon presupposed cultural categories to interpret and act upon new situations and events, people can, under certain circumstances, come to transform and revalue those very cultural categories by which they interpret and act. This idea of change through reproduction is the perspective from which I will approach language shift in Gapun here. I will be arguing that the process of shift in the village is being brought about mainly because, in reproducing (through their day-to-day practices and their socialisation patterns) the cultural categories through which they understand themselves and their world, Gapuners are transforming those categories. And those transformations are precipitating decisive consequences for how the villagers think about and use their languages.

3. IDEAS OF SELF: HAVING *hed*

One of the most far-reaching cultural transformations that has occurred in Gapun since the arrival of white people in their country at the beginning of the twentieth century has been a change in how the villagers view and express the self.

The villagers' portrayal of self foregrounds two dimensions as central and shared by all people. The first of these is what the villagers call *hed* in Tok Pisin, or *kokir*⁴ in the vernacular. Both these words literally mean 'head'. They signify the side of an individual that villagers feel is individualistic, irascible, selfish, unbending, haughty, stubborn and proud. Every person is thought to have *hed*, and the display of *hed*, that is, the proclamation of personal autonomy, is considered necessary and uncontestable in certain social situations.

But *hed* has very definite associations in Gapun, many of them negative, which entwine it with the villagers' ideas about age, gender, sociability, morality, and, ultimately, with their ideas about language.

Babies in Gapun, first of all, embody *hed*. Pre-verbal infants are considered by villagers to be in a more or less continual state of dissatisfaction and anger. They are treated by caregivers as aggressive individualists, and are frequently shaken lightly by their mothers and chastised playfully that their *heds* are too 'strong' and 'big', and that they 'never listen to talk'. The first words that villagers attribute to children reflect their ideas about the nature of children. The first word a child is usually thought to utter is the Taiap word *ɔki* (go+Irrealis). This word, attributed to infants as young as two months of age, means, approximately, 'I'm getting out of here'; *ɔki* is believed to rapidly be followed by two other Taiap words: *mnda* (I'm sick of this), and *aiata* (Stop it). Nobody imagines that any one of these three words has been *learned* by children. They are all attributed to children long before they begin to repeat fragments of the speech of others or interact verbally with anybody. Instead of repetitions or invitations to interaction, Gapuners view these first three, fundamentally antisocial words as pure manifestations of a child's nature. The five-month-

⁴Words in the villagers' vernacular language are italicised and underlined. Italicised words without underlining are Tok Pisin words.

old baby who is held to declare 'I'm getting out of here', who is seen as ordering others to 'Stop it' and who is believed to obstinately announce 'I'm sick of this' is considered to be truly expressing his or her self. Note that this expressing is thought to be done with words in the Taiap language.

But if young children are always showing *hed* and acting belligerently, the same is true of women. Women in Gapun are collectively held by village men to be more *bikhed* (big-headed, wilful) than men, and in ways similar to most Papua New Guinean societies, women here are associated with individualism, atomicity and antisocial behaviour. In mythology, in oratories in the men's house and in everyday conversations between males, women tend to be represented as divisive troublemakers whose selfish actions constantly threaten the solid, manly group.

Individual women in Gapun do not share this view of themselves as destructive troublemakers. And yet, ironically, they continually reinforce this stereotype of women; in large part through their frequent use of a verbal genre known in the village as *kros* (Kulick 1992:104-117, Kulick n.d.). *Kroses* are public proclamations of conflict which announce that something reprehensible has happened and that someone is dissatisfied. They are explosions of anger which rip through the village in rhetorical blasts of insults, vulgarity, threats and curses. The common pattern is for the offended person to sit inside her house and scream a monologue of virulent abuse at the individual or group of people whom she feels have encroached upon her in some way. The person being abused is free to respond to the accusations rising from inside the *kros*'s house, but unless the respondent wants the conflict to develop into a full-scale fight, she must answer back in a parallel, overlapping monologue of her own delivered from inside, or in the near vicinity of *her* house.

I purposely use the feminine pronoun in this description because almost invariably, *kroses* in Gapun are conducted by women. All those villagers who have acquired a reputation for being perpetually prepared to break out into a *kros* at a moment's notice are women. And even on those occasions when men publicly *belhat* (get angry, shout), this anger is usually directed at that man's wife or his close female relatives. So public arguments almost inevitably involve women at some level.

Women who have *kroses* do not interpret their own behaviour in reference to the stereotype of women as destructive individualists. A woman who screams obscenities through the village at her husband or sister or neighbour does not consider that she is being divisive; she is legitimately defending her rights and autonomy from attack. Men, however, often do not see the matter in this light, and even women, when *other* women have *kroses*, are likely to condemn the woman screaming from her house as 'a woman who always gets cross for no reason' (*meri bilong kros nating nating*). Both men and women thus blame (other) women for being troublesome, aggressive, socially disruptive and 'showing *hed*'.

4. SHOWING *save*

The associations that the notion of *hed* has with children and women contribute to its being very negatively evaluated in village rhetoric. In anyone but small children, *hed* is officially condemned. The word is used to signify egoism, selfishness, and maverick individualism. It stands in stark contrast to another dimension of self that villagers continually elaborate in their actions and talk. This second aspect of self is called *save* in Tok Pisin, *numbwan* in the vernacular. These words mean knowledge. The concept covers

knowledge of facts and the knowledge which enables one to do things and learn from experience and doing. But *save* also means social knowledge: knowledge about appropriate behaviour and speech, awareness of social obligations and roles, cognisance of the consequences that one's own or someone else's actions or words can have. *Save* is a metaphor often used in Gapun to mean social sensitivity and solidarity. It is the knowledge that one must sometimes 'suppress *hed*' (*daunim hed*), compromise, fulfil social obligations and accommodate others even if one doesn't want to.

This idea of 'suppressing *hed*' is a basic expectation that all parents have of their children. Parents believe that as children mature, they will come to understand that they must 'suppress' their *hed*, their individualistic egoism, and continually show their *save*, their sociability and cooperativeness.

Save thus has connotations of maturity, as something adults have that children do not. But there is also an understanding among the villagers that some adults possess more *save* than others. *Save* is an idiom used in Gapun to mark differences. The concept, for example, has specific associations with gender. Although all adults are held to possess *save*, men are considered to have more than women. This is a stereotype, and there are individual village men in Gapun who sometimes get scoffed at as having no *save*, just as individual women who rarely have *kroses* and who are held to work hard and help their husband, are not usually said to lack *save*. But as a collective, women are stereotyped by men as having no *save*.

In practice, this stereotype finds reinforcement in the fact that women have *kroses*, and in the fact that the majority of ostentatious displays of social solidarity, such as funerary feasts, in which large amounts of store-bought and garden food, as well as a pig or two, will be given away and used to feed visitors, are always orchestrated by men.⁵ But even more important than these events in this context is the talk which is seen as leading to them and making them possible. This talk, which the villagers call 'men's house talk' (*ambagaina nam*) is *save* on parade.

'Men's house talk', or oratories, as I will call them here, are occasions on which the village men engage in speeches that downplay tension, smooth over disagreement, stress consensus and, in doing so, create contexts in which they and others may publicly demonstrate their *save*. As the vernacular name suggests, oratorical speeches have always taken place in the men's cult houses, and these days, they generally concern matters pertinent to the orchestration of the male group activities, such as clearing overgrown paths or repairing rotten footbridges, working out the arrangements which have to be made for funerary feasts, or arranging to help a village man and his wife in some task which requires a number of labourers, such as carrying house posts, roofing a house, or clearing the forest to plant a garden.

Because they are so strongly associated with the men's house, oratories, *par definition*, are male. Only men in Gapun are considered to orate. There is no rule or explicit consensus in the village that women cannot orate, and strong-willed women in the village do

⁵This is not always the case, and in Kulick (1992:47) I mention one funerary feast that a woman then in her late twenties-early thirties took the lead in organising for a dead relative. The feast was a success, and this woman was acclaimed the owner of all the land, betel palms, coconut trees and sago palms that had belonged to the dead man. Whenever villagers talk about this feast, they always comment approvingly on how 'like a man' this woman had acted.

occasionally speak during public gatherings which concern both men and women. Women's speeches contain many of the same rhetorical features, such as repetition, which are predominant in oratories, but they differ importantly in that they are much briefer than most men's speeches, and they never contain any of the particular formulaic tags which the men use to mark their speech as oratorical. Furthermore, women, who are not allowed inside the men's house, obviously cannot speak from there, and so their contributions to a discussion have a peripheral character that is underscored by their spatial placement. Because of factors like these, women who make short speeches at public gatherings are not considered to be orating; they are, rather, 'complaining'.

The most important thing to stress here is that village men who orate are given credit for drawing their listeners together into a consensus. Day-to-day life in Gapun is rife with all sorts of conflicts, and hardly a day goes by without some small scandal occurring or being remembered, and broadcast throughout the village in the form of a brash *kros* screamed from inside someone's house. It is this context in which one must understand oratories. Good orators manage to downplay the tensions which continually infect daily life in the village, and through their talk, they promote an illusion that everyone is in agreement and that there really are no conflicts at all. In creating this illusion and bringing the villagers together in this way, orators demonstrate their own *save*, their own social awareness and skills, even as they work to structure a context in which others can demonstrate their *save* by listening and contributing to the buildup of the consensus by repeating and agreeing.

Hed and *save* are the two dimensions of personhood which in Gapun are the objects of a tremendous amount of talk and elaboration. The one, *hed*, is stereotyped as bad, immature and feminine. The other, *save*, is associated with maturity, social goodwill and maleness. Having outlined these two concepts, I can now approach the two questions of interest to anthropologists and linguists concerned with change. The first question is: How is the village notion of self related to language?, and the second is: How is it related to change?

5. LANGUAGE AND SELF

Turning first to the issue of language and self, we can begin by giving a nod to the sociolinguistic commonplace that people use varieties of language to signal identification with or membership in some group, be it ethnic, class or gender-bound (Gumperz 1982; Labov 1972; Giles 1977; Philips, Steele & Tanz 1987). In addition, the work of conversational analysts and of students of code-switching has demonstrated the ways in which people use language varieties as rhetorical devices to convey hints about their desires, intentions, feelings and identities (Tannen 1984; Stroud 1992; articles in Heller 1988). Finally, recent work on discourse has rediscovered ideas of the Russian literary scholar Mikhail Bakhtin about the 'heteroglossic' nature of human communications, and it has employed these ideas to investigate how people, through language, construct 'voices', that is, ways of speaking that construct and foreground specific interested positions and identities (Hill & Hill 1986; Tannen 1989; Briggs 1989).

The central point to appreciate in order to understand the language shift that is occurring in Gapun is that the associations connected with the different languages spoken by the villagers have made those languages available for use as distinct 'voices', as distinct symbolic resources which can be drawn upon to foreground different dimensions of the village self.

What has happened is that *hed*, the negatively valued side of a person, has become tied to the vernacular language Taiap, whereas *save*, that dimension of self which all villagers value and wish to be associated with, has come to be linked to Tok Pisin. In order to see how this situation has come about, it is necessary to look briefly at the associative network into which Taiap and Tok Pisin are embedded.

One of the most salient connotations of the Taiap language is that it is the language of the land. Like other vernaculars, Taiap is understood by the people of Gapun to be inseparably bound up with the land (*graun/sumbwa*). Links between the land and vernacular languages find expression in several ways, for example in myths about how each village was founded at the beginning of time by a founding ancestor (*kuskus/engin*) who differed from the founding ancestors of other villages only in terms of the language he spoke, or in beliefs that the rainforest and swamps which make up a village's land are replete with a wide variety of supernatural beings who all speak the vernacular of the village that owns the land. That is, those supernatural beings inhabiting the land owned by the Gapun villagers speak Taiap; those living on the land of the neighbouring village of Sanae speak Adjora, the language of Sanae; those on Wongan's land speak Kopar, the Wongan vernacular, etc. In the Gestalt of these supernatural beings, villagers project their vernacular onto their physical world, defining it and bounding it off, as they define and bound off themselves from other groups, through language.

But if the villagers' vernacular is projected onto their land, the land, in turn, is closely associated with the generations of Taiap-speaking ancestors who have lived on the land throughout history, and with the matrilineal clans to which these ancestors have always belonged. Clans are important in several ways in Gapun (Kulick 1992:86-87), but their most significant value in this context is that they own the land. Each clan represented in a village has rights over specific areas of land, and on this land, clan members born or adopted into the village can hunt, fish, work sago, gather firewood, find food and plant gardens. Land rights are extremely salient for the villagers of Gapun, and every adult is acutely aware of what land is owned by which clan. The rights to use clan land are energetically upheld, and if a man or woman were discovered to have worked sago or killed a pig or cassowary on another clan's land without having first obtained permission from the land's owners, a conflict would arise and retribution would have to be paid to members of the disaffected clan. Associations between land and the clans are so strong that 'land' is often used in village discourse as a metaphor for 'clan'. To remark that 'the land [of clan x] is coming up big' (*graun i kamap bikpela*) is to observe that the clan is populous and expanding because many children are being born.

Clans in Gapun are matrilineal, and perhaps for this reason women are explicitly talked about as the 'foundation' of clan strength. Collectively called 'mothers' (*ol mama/mayangro*), women are often referred to as the 'base', or 'root' (*as/kadan*) of the clan, and in abstract discussions men maintain that women are of more value than men. When a village woman in her twenties died while giving birth to a stillborn baby, one of the village big men lamented the loss and privately chastised the villagers of the nearby village of Sanae (who, it was taken for granted, caused the death through sorcery) when he remarked, in conversation with a few village men in his men's house, that:

Women produce (*kamapim*) the clan. They're the root of the banana tree (*as bilong banana*). As long as the root of the banana tree remains, children will be born and grow. But you get rid of the root, how will children come to be? You

[people from Sanae] can be angry, but [in appeasing your anger] you have to kill a man or a boy, not a woman or a girl.

Another time, shortly after a particularly vicious village *kros* by a woman at an old man, another senior man recounted for a few men that the old man had cursed the woman during the *kros* using the word 'cunt' (*kan*). This man disapproved of this. He explained that:

You can't talk bad about the cunt. The cunt is the Ancestor. The cunt produced (*kamapim*) the land/clans. True you have to have a cock too, but this cock of ours can't produce anything at all.

This notion of women producing the clans is also the subject of an esoteric myth in the village which, although poorly known and not widely recounted, suggests that the Ur-being who originally 'divided' (*skelim*) people into different clans was a woman called Jenkeŋa Ojenata.

Myths like that of Jenkeŋa Ojenata, and comments like those above on the importance of women for the perpetuation of the clans are part of a discourse in Gapun which represents women as being very closely tied with the clans. Summing up the relations that villagers see between men, women, the land and the clans, one man once remarked that "men look after the ground/clan, but women are the foundation". In fact, in calling women the 'foundation' (*kandarj*), villagers are using the same word as they use for clan (*kandarj*). Women, the men are saying, *are* the clan.

There is thus a network of associations linking the vernacular to the land, the land to the ancestors and the clans represented in the village, and the clans to women. Within this network, women in Gapun come to be positioned in a special relationship to the Taiap language. Furthermore, the metaphorical associations between women and the village vernacular get reinforced through praxis. Although all but two village women are fluent in Tok Pisin, for a variety of reasons women in Gapun tend to speak more Taiap than men. In their informal conversations with one another, and, importantly, in their *kroses* screamed over the village, women tend generally not to code-switch into Tok Pisin as much as men do.⁶ Also, the only people in Gapun who are either not fluent speakers of Tok Pisin, or who simply prefer not to use it, are women. Villagers tend to accommodate these women by switching to the vernacular whenever they address them, and because of this they are frequently made aware of the fact that some women do not speak Tok Pisin. And finally, women in Gapun do not play leading or particularly prominent roles in those formal contexts in which a large public focuses its hearing on the display of Tok Pisin. Such focused hearings occur most commonly on those relatively rare occasions when the village is visited by carving buyers, government officials, policemen or missionaries. All such contacts are handled by men. Women are often present throughout much of the talk that occurs on these occasions, but they tend to remain at the periphery of interaction. If a woman has something she especially wishes to communicate to the buyers or officials, she often chooses to speak through her husband or older children. The non-assertive role that women assume in their contacts with these representatives of the modern world serves to distort public conceptions of their competence in Tok Pisin and permits the maintenance of a stereotype in which all women can be portrayed as more or less incompetent in Tok Pisin. At the same time, it

⁶Actually, the matter is somewhat more complex than this. Interested readers are encouraged to see the more detailed discussion of female speech patterns in Kulick (1992, n.d.).

underscores the stereotype that women are less modern, and therefore more traditional, and therefore more bound to the vernacular, than men are.

The semiotic bond linking women and Taiap is significant, because it brings into play the whole series of associations called up by the idea of 'woman', including immaturity, childishness, *kroæes*, antisocial behaviour and the notion of *hed*.

Tok Pisin has very different connotations. First, the language is tied to maleness. The reasons for this are partly historical. Tok Pisin first entered Gapun with two village men who had served as contracted labourers for three years on a plantation near Rabaul. These men returned to the village shortly after the beginning of World War I. Following the pattern common throughout Melanesia, Tok Pisin thereafter became incorporated into the linguistic repertoires of village men, who perfected their knowledge of the language as they followed the lead of the first two men and went away for a year or more, working as plantation labourers, shiphands or road-workers in far-off places like Lae or New Ireland. Women in Gapun only began learning Tok Pisin after World War II, in the late 1940s and 1950s. This means that Tok Pisin was being used by males for almost thirty years before females began learning it and using it widely.

Besides maleness, Tok Pisin in Gapun also has strong associations with white people. Like all Melanesians who learned the language early on in this century, Gapuners believed they were learning the vernacular of the white men. Unlike many groups which have long since abandoned that idea, however, the villagers of Gapun have never really ceased to believe this. Only during the late 1980s, and due primarily to my own presence in the village and my oft-repeated insistence that people in Europe and other parts of the world really do not know Tok Pisin, have some villagers come to suspect that Tok Pisin might not in fact be the vernacular that white men and women speak in 'the countries', which is the name given by the villagers to every other country in the world except Papua New Guinea. One of the main factors contributing to the perpetuation of the belief that Tok Pisin is the white man's vernacular has been the fact that the religion brought to Papua New Guinea by these white people has been spread and written through the medium of Tok Pisin.

Since the late 1940s, when a Catholic missionary began making semi-regular treks to the village to convert the villagers, the people of Gapun have been Catholic. The impact of Christianity on village life has been very profound, and trying to be good Christians is one of the most fundamental bases of village life and discourse. The village version of Christianity is quietly yet intensely millenarian, with emphasis placed on the second coming of Christ and on the changes that this event will bring to Papua New Guineans and their country. Villagers anticipate that one day, when everybody has finally 'suppressed' their *hed*, turned *wanbel* (united in Christian love), and, in doing so, therefore become a true *kristen komuniti* (Christian community), or, alternatively, one day when somebody succeeds in discovering the secret that the villagers think they need to know in order to bring on the millenium, they will be rewarded with waves of ships and cars and aeroplanes and tinned food and money, with the factories that produce these commodities, with the knowledge (*save*) required to keep the factories running, and perhaps most significantly, Gapuners believe that they will also receive new, white skin. The villagers consider that white skin is both a prerequisite for and a result of all other rewards. In all of this, Tok Pisin plays a major role as the language of Christian worship, the language in which the Bible is written and the language that villagers strongly suspect is spoken in Heaven.

Because of these links to Christianity, which in turn is bound to anticipation of the millenium and the ways and lifestyle of white people, Tok Pisin is also associated with the idea of modernisation. And most important of all, Tok Pisin has become associated with the villagers' concept of *save*. Those people in Gapun who claim to have acquired knowledge about and familiarity with Christianity, white people and (therefore) the modern world are regarded as having more *save* than those who have not managed to gain such knowledge and who therefore still 'follow the ways of the ancestors' (*bihainim ol we bilong ol tumbuna*).

The most common way for these claims to be made is through oratorical speech. Oratories in the men's house link intra-village relationships and local affairs to 'modern' processes and institutions which have their locus far beyond the scope of the village. Thus the need to repair rotten foodbridges will be justified by pointing out that villagers must have a way to get their coffee beans out of the village to the buyers, and discussion concerning the organisation of a funerary feast will centre on the ability of the dead person's relatives to dry enough copra to earn the money that must purchase the white rice, sugar, *tinpis* (tinned mackerel) and Nescafé that will be consumed during the feast. At some point during each village meeting, no matter what the original reason for the meeting happened to be, somebody will inevitably extoll Christian ideals, mention the value of education, devalue the ways of the ancestors and urge the villagers to show *save* so they all can 'come up'. The men's house has thus become an important arena in which individual men can publicly assert their familiarity with the modern world by reminding others that the Church, school, 'Papua New Guinea' and *bisnis* (work done to earn money) have altered the nature of village relationships and must be accorded a central role in village life. And in order to substantiate their claims to knowledge about the modern world, they overwhelmingly choose to orate in the language through which that world is understood to be constituted.

6. LANGUAGE AND CHANGE

In order to account for how the process of language shift begins and gains momentum, it is necessary to understand the reasons that adults have for incorporating the new language into their communicative repertoires in the first place. In the literature on shift, people are said to begin learning dominant languages of greater currency than their vernacular because they are forced to do so through occupation, large-scale in-migration of dominant-group members or incorporation into a political entity where that language is widely used, and/or because they choose to in order to be able to advance in a socioeconomic hierarchy that is controlled by members of the majority group.

There are elements of both coercion and strivings for socioeconomic advancement in the villager's incorporation of Tok Pisin into their linguistic repertoire. A focus on these concepts as such, however, would obscure the perspective from which the people of Gapun have acted. Certainly those Gapun men who went away to work on plantations were forced to learn Tok Pisin in order to be able to communicate with their fellow labourers and to follow the orders given by their overseers. And certainly those men understood this language to be linked to the white world which they believed had so much to give them. But the 'meaning' and the implications of Tok Pisin were far deeper and much more profound than simple communication or social mobility.

The reasons for the enthusiasm towards and the spread of Tok Pisin throughout the verbal repertoires of all villagers, eventually even those who rarely if ever left Gapun, were not so

much 'pragmatic' or 'socioeconomic', as those terms are commonly used in the sociolinguistic literature, as they were 'cosmological', in the broadest possible anthropological sense of that word. The sudden appearance of white men in New Guinea, and the new conditions of existence to which this fact gave rise was not, for the villagers, merely a 'social' or 'economic' fact. It was, as Sahlins has stressed in his analysis of the Hawaiian reaction to European contact (e.g. 1987:38), a Maussian "total" fact, "social" and "economic" at the same time that it was "political", "historical" and, above all, "religious". Villagers in Gapun believed, as they continue to believe, that the arrival of the white men was the harbinger of a new way of life. Their presence in New Guinea came to be understood in terms of an impending metamorphosis that would transform every aspect of the villagers' lives, including their physical beings. Although villagers could not achieve this transformation by themselves, they could attempt to hurry it along by heeding the admonitions of missionaries and colonial officials to change their lives, and by scrutinising white actions, words and lifestyles for clues about how to change that the missionaries and others might want to remain hidden from them.

In their eagerness for the metamorphosis to occur, villagers immediately seized upon language as a 'road', a way of making it happen. They considered that learning and speaking Tok Pisin, the language of the white men, would facilitate access to the secret underpinnings of white power and wealth. This attitude was grounded in the well-known traditional Melanesian understanding of language as a means by which powers could be coerced and desired results obtained (Meggitt 1968; Lawrence 1964; Burridge 1960; Kulick & Stroud 1990).

Brought back to the village by young men returning from the plantations, Tok Pisin became incorporated into the villagers' communicative repertoire first through the speech of men. Many studies of other groups in Papua New Guinea (e.g. Sankoff 1976, 1977; Laycock 1979; Mühlhäusler 1979; Reed 1943; Thurnwald 1936; Mead 1931) have observed that men returning to their villages after being away as plantation labourers immediately put the plantation Pidgin to work in their interactions with fellow villagers in order to bolster their reputation and display their knowledge of the outside world. Because of these ties to maleness, and because of the cosmological significance of Tok Pisin, it is likely that the language quickly began to be incorporated into that most male of village speech genres, oratorical speeches.

The use of Tok Pisin in oratorical speeches was the crucial point at which culture and language intersected in ways which changed them both. It was at this juncture that the village conception of *save* became available for linguistic marking in a way it had not been before.

The link between *save* and Tok Pisin had been available to be made by the villagers from the very beginning of their contact with white men, since the difference between Europeans and villagers was interpreted by Gapuners through their idiom of difference: their concept of 'knowledge'. Essentially, white people were understood to be different from black-skinned people like the villagers and as having access to superior material wealth because they had more *save*.

The application of the concept of *save* to make sense of the white man's presence in their land was a "structure of the conjuncture" in Marshall Sahlins' sense: it was the point at which an indigenous cultural category was called upon to give meaning to a novel historical happening. But the moment villagers applied their concept of *save* to understand and

interpret the presence and actions of white people, they changed the way in which *save* could be conceived. As soon as it became linked to the white man, the meaning of *save* came to be increasingly wrested away from the traditional contexts in which it had been previously articulated and understood; and eventually *save* came to be defined in opposition to those traditional contexts. Senior men and women, once considered to be exceptionally knowledgeable, and accorded the most *save* in the village, now came gradually to be seen as *longlong/babasak* (stupid) and as purveyors of a useless and ultimately damaging way of thinking: the villagers, for example, destroyed all that remained of their traditional sacra after World War II because they heard rumours that the millenarian cult leader 'Yaring' (also known as Yali; see Lawrence 1964) had said that these things were 'blocking' the return of the ancestors, who wanted to come back laden with cargo. As young men returned from the plantations with small boxes of cargo (axes, steels tools, cloth, tinned foods, money), a new language comprehended in esoteric terms, and first-hand knowledge of a profoundly different, and infinitely more attractive lifestyle (that of the whites), their *save* came to be seen as superseding that of the old people, precisely because the *save* of these young men was seen to be of the same nature (or at least seen as having the potential of being of the same nature) as that of the white men, that is: Christian, outward-oriented and non-traditional. This compatibility between the *save* of young men and that of whites was underscored and strengthened each time white men had contact with the villagers. Priests spoke Tok Pisin to those who knew it best, and the positions of village authority instituted by the colonial powers (*luluai* and *tutul*) were available only to Tok Pisin speakers. The first *luluai* of Gapun, for example, was one of the two men who first went away as plantation labourers.

As the village concept of *save* was undergoing a radical revaluation as a result of its being used to comprehend the presence of white people, the language of the white men was being meaningfully absorbed into the village context which most openly embodied and displayed *save*, that is, oratories in the men's house. This absorption not only strengthened and reinforced the changes that were occurring in the meaning of *save*; by injecting Tok Pisin into oratorical speech, villagers also began to alter the means through which *save* most effectively could be expressed. From having been linked to warfare, initiation, the organisation of funerary feasts, and verbal expression foremost through oratorical speech in Taiap, *save* now (while maintaining its associations with maleness and collectivism) became tied to Christianity, cash cropping, trying to become white, and verbal expression foremost through oratorical speech in increasing amounts of Tok Pisin.

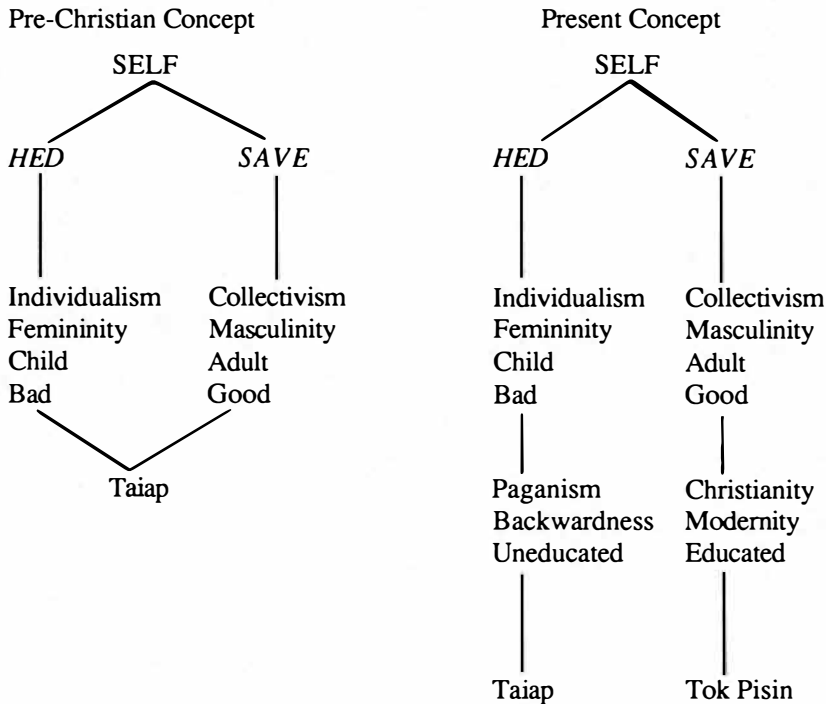
As the expression of *save* became increasingly tightly bound to Tok Pisin, the possibility arose of linguistically marking, in a similar manner, those aspects of the villagers' behaviour which were considered to *not* be displays of *save*.

Like the original associations between *save* and Tok Pisin, the link between *hed* and Taiap had been available to be foregrounded by the villagers from the very beginning of their encounter with white men and Tok Pisin. For the first two or three decades after the first village men returned from the plantations, Tok Pisin was the exclusive property of males. Females did not begin actively using the language until after World War II. This meant that the linguistic behaviour of males and females differed markedly for a large number of years. This difference gave rise to a situation in which gender-based linguistic difference could be focused upon and exploited as a symbol of, or metaphor for, the gender difference itself. Thus, as Tok Pisin came increasingly to be regarded as a symbol of maleness and *save*, a sociolinguistic space was created and eventually filled through an association of non-Tok

Pisin speech with women and the numerous associations that already surrounded them. In other words, the associations between women and *hed*, already salient in the traditional culture, were now strengthened and expressed by the fact that women did not know Tok Pisin and had *kroses* in Taiap.

Having marked both dimensions of the self linguistically, it now became possible for villagers to use Tok Pisin and Taiap as symbols of *save* and *hed* even in contexts other than those in which the links had originally developed. Thus, because *save* had come to be symbolised in important and salient ways by Tok Pisin, the use of that language even outside the context of oratory carried with it connotations of *save*. And the vernacular, in turn, now carried its association with *hed* to contexts which extended beyond talk by women.

What has happened, in other words, is that the village notions of ‘autonomy’ and ‘knowledge’, of *hed* and *save*, have, in effect, “changed their signs” (Sahlins 1987:107) due to the arrival of white men and the introduction of Tok Pisin and Christianity. These historical events threw up a dramatic new series of oppositions – such as Christian:Pagan and Modern:Backward – that have affected the way in which villagers view and express the self. What was once a dual concept of self subsumed under one language has become a duality split along linguistic lines. *Hed* has become linked to the vernacular, which in turn has associations with women, the ancestors and the past. *Save*, on the other hand, has come to be expressed through and by Tok Pisin, which in turn is strongly associated with men, the Catholic church and modernity. This split can be diagrammed roughly as follows:



Because Taiap has become associated with negatively charged values (relative to the dichotomies introduced through the white presence in Papua New Guinea), it is losing its ability to express positive aspects of self. At the same time, Tok Pisin, because it has

become connected with *save* and the chain of association bound up with that, has become a resource which villagers can draw upon in their interactions with one another, to poignantly underscore their commitment to those values which everyone agrees are important, namely Christianity, modernity, collectivism, etc. In using Tok Pisin villagers are thus expressing an important and highly valued aspect of self; they are displaying their knowledge and social awareness – their *save*. But in doing this they are also constituting a situation in which their vernacular is becoming less and less desirable and important. Thus in their day-to-day interactions, involving *kroses* and oratories, and in their language socialisation practices (Kulick 1992), villagers continue to reproduce and reaffirm their concept of what a person is. They project upon each other and on their children the ideas of *hed* and *save* and they rely upon these notions to explain behaviour and to understand one another. But the point is that in reproducing the self, Gapuners are changing the symbolic means through which the self can be reproduced. And it is this dynamic that is ultimately responsible for – quite without conscious effort or approval on the part of anyone – language shift in Gapun.

7. CONCLUSION

To conclude, I would like to return to the three types of literature that discuss culture change and language change in the Pacific, and briefly suggest some implications that the kind of culturally grounded perspective on change I have discussed here has for those different traditions.

First, when it comes to the linguistic literature that invokes culture as a way of accounting for structural change in language, although I have not specifically addressed that issue here, I have argued elsewhere (Kulick 1992:198, 252-257) that Gapuners' perceptions of self have played a decisive role in determining how quickly and how pervasively Tok Pisin was incorporated into the village verbal repertoire, in determining the attrition of specific semantic domains in Taiap, and also in determining the precise form that linguistic contact phenomena such as code-switching have taken in the village. When it comes to structural attrition in the language itself, what the perspective offered in this paper can offer is the insistence that *linguistic changes are not the results of 'changes in culture' so much as they are the results of changes in the signifying practices of the speakers of particular languages*. By deflecting in this way the focus of attention from 'culture' to practice, examination of the reasons for structural attrition can proceed by concentrating on what specific people do and how those practices articulate with language, thereby avoiding the *deus ex machina* of 'culture' which seems to pop up so irrepressibly in papers by linguists on language change.

The second type of literature on language change and cultural change can, I believe, be greatly enriched and nuanced by intensive studies of small communities like the one I have outlined here. The focus of the work done on language and political economy in the Pacific inclines towards the grand, towards the Big Picture, and analysis usually encompasses 'the Pacific', 'Melanesia' or 'Polynesia'. While there are valid theoretical reasons for treating this entire area as a linguistic ecosystem (Mühlhäusler 1989; Grace 1981), many of the generalisations made about the area, such as claims about the 'impact' of literacy (Kulick & Stroud, in press), or about the reasons behind language shift, are not well founded and are generated in the absence of detailed knowledge about how people in Pacific societies in fact think about and use language in their day-to-day lives. And while it may not be reasonable, as Mühlhäusler recently has asserted, "to concentrate on single languages and generalise findings thus made" (1991:12), it is hardly the case that we are overwhelmed with detailed

case studies of language change and culture change in specific Pacific societies – certainly when it comes to language shift there are only two: Annette Schmidt's (1985) monograph on young people's Dyirbal and my own recently completed work on Gapun. Because we simply lack knowledge, it seems to me, *contra* Mühlhäusler, that now might well just be the time “to concentrate on single languages” and see if the specific might not refine and expand our understanding of the general. This spirit of approaching the problem of language change and culture change would, moreover, resonate with general theoretical trends in both anthropology and sociolinguistics; away from attempts to construct grand, universalistic theories, towards finely-tuned, complex models that try to take full account of variation and difference within more restricted areas.

Finally, for anthropologists interested in language and culture, the kind of analysis I have outlined here shows one way in which the whole question of diachrony might be approached. In Gapun, language and culturally specific ideas about matters like gender, knowledge and personhood act upon and structure one another in ways which have led to the transformation of all these things. Recent anthropological theory, with its emphasis on practice and its concern with reproduction and change provides students of language and culture with the means to approach the dynamics of such transformation. This kind of theoretical charter, combined with the acute linguistic sophistication now appearing in the work of many anthropologists working in Pacific societies, should be able to result in work which will greatly add to our understanding of the ways language articulates with ideas about personhood, the ways linguistic practice shapes and is shaped by culture, and the ways in which something seemingly so dramatic as language shift and language death can in fact be understood to be patterns of cultural reproduction.

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