

## POc \*mata: MANY WORDS, HOW MANY MEANINGS?

ANN CHOWNING

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In 1977 R.H. Barnes published an article<sup>1</sup> that, although inspired by his research into Kédang of eastern Indonesia, dealt with precisely the problem I am discussing here. If I read it, however, I had forgotten it. The immediate inspiration for this paper came from other sources. One was the assembling of lexical materials for three languages spoken in West New Britain (Papua New Guinea): Lakalai (Bileki, West Nakanai), Sengseng and Kove. Most of these materials, apart from basic vocabulary collected for comparative purposes, resulted from my attempts to acquire a speaking knowledge of each language in order to carry out anthropological research. In Lakalai, however, Ward Goodenough and I have also been trying to assemble a publishable dictionary of the language. I was struck by the fact that in all three languages, a term which I wrote as *mata* encompassed a notably wide and diverse range of meanings compared with most other lexical items, even though sets of apparent homonyms are abundant in all three languages. (Incidentally, in this respect they differed from the other Oceanic (Oc) language I had worked with, Molima of Milne Bay Province – a problem I shall return to below.)

Secondly, when I was working on a paper on Lakalai counting classifiers (Chowning 1991a), the comparative data in other Austronesian (An) languages pointed to the frequency with which *mata* forms had this function. Indeed, Pawley (1972) reconstructed one for Proto Eastern Oceanic (PEO) (see discussion below). I had not recorded this meaning for Lakalai *mata*, but did check during a return trip, and added the counting classifier to the range of meanings of *mata* in that language. Finally, I was also interested in Pawley's (1991) discussion of Proto Oceanic (POc) 'complex lexemes', including those involving \**mata*. Pawley's list showed that Lakalai, among the languages that he had examined, had a relatively high number of these last. Unfortunately when I was back in Lakalai I failed to ask whether some of the specific complex lexemes he reconstructed for POc were reflected in Lakalai, but my further attempts to define Lakalai *mata* have profited from some of the reconstructions in his handout.

#### 1.1 RECONSTRUCTED FORMS

To return to the three languages with which I began, I should note that although they are spoken within a very small geographical area, they are not closely related to each other (Chowning 1976). Pairs of them, and occasionally all three, share a handful of lexical items

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to James Urry for calling this source to my attention.

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that cannot be attributed to POc and that may be limited to New Britain and its vicinity. The vast majority of shared cognates, however, can be derived from POc. In view of the stability of the Proto Austronesian (PAN) word for 'eye' (see Grace 1967:292-294), little of interest would be forthcoming if all the *mata* forms seem to derive from this meaning. I doubt that such is the case, however. An examination of *\*mata*-like forms reconstructed for POc, Proto Polynesian (PPn) and PAN pointed to solutions for some of my problems but still left many questions unanswered. The linguists who have postulated the reconstructions differ among themselves regarding the number of separate forms involved. The pertinent reconstructions known to me are the following:

Grace (1969) – POc:<sup>2</sup>

<i>*mata</i>	eye
<i>*mwata</i>	snake, worm
<i>*mwata</i>	point, cutting edge, sharp projection, end
Also <i>*mata(q)</i>	raw, new

## Grace and Lincoln (1976) – POc:

<i>*mata</i>	association of people, community
<i>*mata</i>	eye
<i>*mata</i>	snake
<i>*mata</i>	point, sharp (but including cases such as Motu where the term means 'the top of anything')
<i>*mata</i>	raw, new
Also <i>*mataka</i>	edge (however, the full form is attested only in Motu, where it means 'sharp, sharp-pointed')

## Cashmore (1969) – PEO:

<i>*mata<sub>1</sub></i>	face, eye
<i>*mata<sub>2</sub>, *imata</i>	in front of

## Biggs, Walsh and Waqa (1970) – PPn:

<i>*mata<sub>1</sub></i>	eye, face
<i>*mata<sub>1a</sub></i>	blade, cutting edge, point
<i>*mata<sub>1b</sub></i>	mesh of net
<i>*mata<sub>2</sub></i>	raw, green, unripe
<i>*mata<sub>3</sub></i>	association or grouping of people

Before turning to Pawley's complex lexemes, I need to comment on these reconstructions. Firstly, I shall not be concerned with the adjectival form translated 'raw, new, unripe'. Grace seems to have been correct in initially suggesting that it ended with *\*q* (Ross 1988), but even in those languages in which it has lost the final consonant, it does not seem to have influenced the meanings of the nouns which are my principal concern. In what follows, I shall ignore this particular form (which, as it happens, is not reflected in any of the languages I have worked with).

Secondly, I can readily understand why Milke, Grace's source for the 1969 forms, suggested that the words for 'snake' and 'point, etc.' were both *\*mwata*. I suspect that he thought they had a common derivation. Since then, and contra Grace and Lincoln (1976), it

<sup>2</sup> I have changed Grace's original spelling of *\*ŋm* to *\*mw* to conform with current usage.

has become clear that the protoform for 'snake' should indeed be \*mwata (Ross 1988), but I know of no evidence to suggest that the same protoform produced the 'point' terms, which seems to reflect only \*mata. See, for example, Kove *mota* 'snake', *mata* 'tip, point, etc.' I think it quite likely that, especially in western Oceania where snakes abound, and particularly in languages where \*mwata is reflected as *mata*, the speakers might well associate the sharpness of the serpent's tooth with that of a spear or arrow, but I shall assume, for the present, that the terms derive from different protoforms.

The case for a \*mata form meaning 'association or grouping of people' is somewhat unclear, partly because it usually if not always seems to appear in compounds. I shall reconsider it below.

We are then left with a limited number of forms. In view of my own difficulties, I was interested to see how different linguists subgrouped or separated particular meanings. For example, I should have taken it for granted that the meaning 'in front of' derives from the 'face, eye' meaning given separately by Cashmore (but perhaps she did this only because of the variant \*imata). By contrast, I was even more surprised that the numbering system used by Biggs, Walsh and Waqa indicates that they consider the 'blade, point' meaning a subcategory of 'face, eye' (as the others cited clearly have not) while also including 'mesh of a net' as another subcategory. I shall indicate below why I think this grouping is unlikely.

The final set of reconstructions to cite are Pawley's complex lexemes, composed of \*mata plus another noun, which may or may not be linked to it by a possessive marker. Here I am not concerned with the special meanings of the compounds, as a point to be considered later, but with any clues these reconstructions may give us to the semantic range of *mata* forms alone.

Pawley (1991) – POc:

*mata ni aŋin	direction of the wind
*mata ni ika	painful sore on sole or palm
*mata ni kubəŋa	mesh of net
*mata ni qaso	sun
*mata ni Ruma	doorway
*mata ni susu	nipple
*mata ni waiR	spring, source of water
*matasawa	landing place, passage through reef

Plus Proto Central Pacific (PCP):

*matadravu	portable fireplace used on large canoes
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## 1.2 FORMS IN THREE WEST NEW BRITAIN LANGUAGES

We may compare these lists with the meanings attributed to *mata* forms in present-day languages. The following show the range in the three West New Britain languages listed above. Almost certainly every one of these is incomplete, since they were simply acquired from usages I (and others, in the case of Lakalai) happened to record. As regards complex lexemes, it should be noted that only Lakalai has the postposed genitive construction attributed by Pawley and most others to POc; in Sengseng and Kove the possessor precedes the object possessed, though in Kove the third person singular possessive pronoun *ai* precedes the possessor. In all of these languages, however, possessives dealing with parts of

the body (or parts of other things) are suffixed to the noun. I have listed *mata* forms here as if they occur without these suffixes.

LAKALAI *mata*

## A. noun:

1. eye
2. point
3. top or cover
4. hole; gap; channel, passage; doorway, door, gate
5. source, origin
6. date or time of an event; message setting a date
7. scoop net for birds; noose of snare
8. insect bite
9. kind, variety

## B. adjective: sharp

C. verb: to look at, look for, to turn the eyes towards; to have a particular appearance

D. counting classifier: for holes (notably those in which megapodes lay), nooses and circles

## E. complex lexemes:

<i>la-mata-la-bolo</i>	a long-lived pig, known to everyone ( <i>bolo</i> 'pig') <sup>3</sup>
<i>la-mata-la-buu-la-havi</i>	top of the fireplace: title for important man
<i>la-mata-la-haro</i>	sun; watch, clock
<i>la-mata-la-havi</i>	shelf above the fireplace
<i>la-mata-la-humu</i>	place where firewood is stored, above the oven
<i>la-mata-la-uve</i>	cut end of taro 'stick' incorporating the top of the corm
<i>la-mata-la-valua</i>	an unmarried woman whom men keep looking at admiringly ( <i>valua</i> 'men')
<i>la-mata-le-latu-la</i>	afterbirth ( <i>latu</i> 'offspring')

See also *matahe* 'anus', possibly derived from *mata* + *tahē* ('excrement'). Haplology is common in Lakalai.

I have not treated as complex lexemes two that appear on Pawley's list, *la-mata-la-luma* 'door, doorway' and *la-mata-la-sakalu* 'passage through the reef', because the meanings can clearly be derived from no. 4. Our team recorded the words for 'nipple' and 'breast' as being the same (*susu*), as was also the case in Kove. I did not ask about 'mesh of net', but see *la-matariki*<sup>4</sup> 'a fine-mesh net' (the only example in Lakalai of a reflex of POc \**diki* 'small').

SENSENG *mata*

## A. noun:

1. eye; face

<sup>3</sup> In Lakalai, all nouns take a marker *la-* or *e-*. The genitive marker is assimilated to the former but appears as *l-* before the latter. Very probably the genitive marker is derived from \**ni*.

<sup>4</sup> I am aware that, particularly in Polynesia, this is the term for the Pleiades and often for the season associated with its first appearance. See, however, Marshallese *mejeriki* 'small seine' (Abo et al. 1976).

2. point
3. head (of drum)
4. focus of infection, as eye of a boil
5. kidney
6. sprout, bud

- B. preposition: in front of, in the presence of
- C. adjective: *matan* – ‘barely sprouted?’
- D. complex lexemes: in addition to a number in which *mata* is followed by modifiers to indicate sharpness or dullness of a point or edge, there are at least the following:

*mata-kupkup* – ‘holes in stones in which white clay (*kupkup*) is found’

*mata-mlek* – ‘blaze of fire’ (*mlek* ‘to light’; note that in Sengseng the distinction between nouns and verbs is often problematic)

See also *mata-yau*, defined only in Tok Pisin (TP) as *ai bilong paia*.

There also exist a number of adjectives beginning with *mata* in which the term seems to indicate ‘surface’ (e.g. words for ‘smooth’ and ‘soft’).

#### KOVE *mata*

- A. noun:
1. eye; face, appearance
  2. point, tip, edge; sharpness
  3. pool (TP *raunwara*) in bush or sea (abode of ghosts)
  4. hole in leaf (only)
  5. ends or sections of islet
  6. date of event
  7. net gauge
  8. person characterised by a particular kind of behaviour (TP *man bilong*)
  9. kind

With suffixed ‘prepositions’: *mata-iyā* ‘in front of’, *mata-iai* ‘at the edge of’.

- B. verb: to see
- C. complex lexemes:
- iha-mata* lit. ‘fish eye’: swelling of extremity that ends in development of ‘eye’ with pus
- waro(ai)mata* sun

This range may be compared with the very limited use of *mata* in Molima, where I recorded only ‘eye’, ‘top (of beer bottle)’, *susu mata-na* ‘areola’, and *mata-na-ya* ‘in front of’, together with *matana* ‘net gauge’. This point is of interest only because Molima seems to contain much more vocabulary derived from POc than does Sengseng.

### 1.3 AIMS AND METHODS

Before proceeding further, I need to clarify my own attitude towards the apparent plethora of meanings. It is possible to assume that originally there existed only one \**mata* term, which



if correctly defined would enable us to understand the apparent multiplicity of referents in daughter languages. Barnes attempted this approach in 1977 as regards the PAN form. He quotes Holmer (1966, cited in Barnes 1977:304), whom I have not been able to consult, as saying with specific reference to this term that "there is no reason to doubt, on the mere grounds that these ideas now constitute fundamentally different notions among us, that they are, or have at one time been felt to be, identical concepts". Even with this encouragement, however, Barnes was unable to come up with a satisfactory cover definition, though he makes some interesting suggestions to which I shall refer below. At the same time, he points out that "speakers of any given language do not think that *mata* and its derivatives correspond to a single concept, and we had best regard it as effectively polysemous". He adds (1977:301), however, that "the diverse applications...seem to affect each other in use, sometimes giving rise to conscious metaphor". I agree with both these points, while lacking the data to confirm the suggestion about metaphor. At present, working only from contemporary languages, I think it is only possible to postulate at least two quite separate meanings. These are 'eye' and '(sharp) point or edge'. The question is then how many more separate forms/meanings need to be postulated, and how many can be derived from others.

In writing this paper, I have several aims. One is to decide which of the 'meanings' I originally assigned to *mata* forms in the New Britain languages form a logically coherent group, in terms of plausible extensions of a putatively original meaning, so that they can be presented under a single heading in a dictionary. (Here I have to be aware of the possibility that the links may not be apparent to present speakers of the languages concerned.) In deciding plausibility, I have made use of data from languages that are not Austronesian, as have others, notably Barnes. Secondly, I have tried to see which of the 'meanings' recorded for the New Britain languages are found in other Oc languages. Here I am particularly interested in those that are not easily derived from the meanings already ascribed to the protoforms. Along the way, I pay some attention to meanings recorded for other languages that do not appear in my New Britain data. The ultimate aim of these comparisons is to ask whether more than two POc (and perhaps PAN) protoforms need to be reconstructed.

#### 1.4 THE COMPARATIVE EVIDENCE

I examined all the dictionaries that I could find of Oc languages, plus those of one non-Oceanic An language, Malay. I am also indebted to Niko Besnier and Paul Geraghty for relevant data from their unpublished dictionaries of Tuvalu and Fijian. My procedure was, first, to look for a term that resembled *mata*, and then, if that failed, to seek the word for 'eye' and expand the search from there. I ignored vowel length in Polynesian languages.<sup>5</sup> On the whole I also ignored compounds that seemed to begin with *mata* if the second component was not defined elsewhere in the dictionary. I included reduplicated forms, notably *matamata*.

The available data tended to be of three sorts. First were the cases in which the languages seemed to contain no forms derivable from *mata*. Only two of these languages, to be discussed below, received further consideration. By far the largest number of cases were languages in which the only meanings given for *mata* forms duplicated the meanings reconstructed for POc. I suspect that some of these languages had other meanings for *mata* that had not been recorded, but usually have no evidence to support my assumption.

<sup>5</sup> Winifred Bauer tells me that it varies between dialects in Maori.

However, Malinowski, (as Barnes (1977:306-307) makes clear), recorded a variety of meanings for the term in Kiriwinan (Kilivila), whereas Senft's Kilivila dictionary (1986) definitely falls into my second category. Finally, a handful of dictionaries, dealing with languages as far apart as Jabêm and Niue (and including the well-known examples of Maori and Fijian, also discussed by Barnes), had a considerable range of entries under the *mata* forms. Sometimes I was uncertain as to whether they all belonged together, especially in the case of a South-East Solomons language like Kwaio (see Keesing 1975), where the form had been reduced to *maa* and might have fallen together with terms derived from a different protoform, like the protoform meaning 'shame'. Nevertheless, I compared all the apparent *mata* forms with those recorded for other languages, in the hope of getting a good idea of the range of possible meanings as well as to ascertain which ones occurred frequently. As I indicated above, I have here ignored forms translated as 'raw, unripe' and 'snake', on the assumption that they derived from protoforms other than \**mata*.

## 2. POSSIBLE EXTENSIONS

### 2.1 'EYE'

The apparent extension of the eye term to designate the whole face is so widespread that it is tempting to attribute the double meaning not only to POc but to PAN. There are two reasons to abstain. Firstly, Grace reconstructed another 'face' term, \**nakɔ(n)*, for POc. Codrington (1885:66), who surprisingly included 'face' but not 'eye' in his comparative vocabulary, said that what he called *nago* forms are distributed from "Sesake in the New Hebrides to Alite in the Solomon Islands". (He also noted the use of *mata* for both 'eye' and 'face' in other languages.) Ray (1907:408) thought that *nao* forms in several Central Papua Languages were also cognate. I am not sure about these, but despite the difference in the final vowel, am inclined to derive Lakalai *lagu* 'face' from the same protoform. It seems that the reflexes of \**nakɔ(n)* were widespread in Melanesia. Furthermore, the extension of the word for 'eye' to mean 'face' is said to occur in many parts of the world. Brown and Witkowski (1983:72,82) say that the same term is used for 'eye' and 'face' in "approximately 40 per cent of the world's languages" and that "[1]anguages typically expand unmarked terms for highly salient eye to face".<sup>6</sup> Whether the extension from eye to face occurred independently in many Oc languages or should indeed be attributed to POc is impossible for me to resolve. If the latter, perhaps the \**nakɔ(n)* term belongs to a somewhat later stage, and may have been invented for a language in which *mata* terms had an increasing and confusing range of meaning. In some languages, possibly including Sengseng (and certainly Maori and Tuvalu), *mata* also means 'surface'. This seems to be a 'natural' extension from 'face', and was a meaning attributed to 'face' in Middle English (Little et al. 1959:666).

As I mentioned above, I assume that 'front, in front of' derive from the 'eye/face' meaning, just as all the verbs referring to sight clearly derive from the 'eye' meaning. (In Lakalai, *-lagu* is a locative meaning 'in front of'.) In both Sengseng and Kove, apologies and reproaches (to children) for walking in front of someone take the form "Your eyes" and "My eyes!" Something similar is recorded for Tuvalu (Besnier 1993) and Tikopia (Firth 1985). Bowden (1992), in a recent discussion of Oc locatives, points out that the 'front' meaning for *mata* forms appears in many languages but is not nearly so common as 'eye/face'. He concludes (p.32) that: "The only hypothesis that adequately accounts for this is the one that

<sup>6</sup> I am indebted to Ross Clark for calling this reference to my attention.

proposes that \**mata* meant 'eye/face' in Proto Oceanic and that various daughter languages somehow extended the use of the word to talk not only about a body part which is inherently at the front of the human body, but also to talk about other things that were at the front, or in front of something else". I agree, while noting that *mata* forms, according to his own data, can mean both 'eye' and 'front' without also meaning 'face'. It is especially common in Polynesian languages for *mata* forms to mean 'beginning' or 'to precede', or both. These may be extensions from 'front', though for the former, 'source' is also a possibility, and for the latter, 'tip' (see below).

Another common meaning that may well derive from 'eye' is 'opening' (especially one through which light shows?) and 'hole' more generally. Obviously this possibility would occur to any English speaker; as the definition in Middle English (Little et al. 1959:664) indicates, the eye of a needle is only the most common of several such presumed extensions. As with the 'doorway' case (noted in Lakalai and by Pawley), however, there seem to have been two possibilities available to speakers of Oc languages who derived a word for 'aperture/hole' from a body part: eye or mouth. Lakalai chose the former, Sengseng and Kove the latter. Both strike me as 'natural' extensions, the latter perhaps more so for large holes and those that do not admit light. I also tend to believe that if *mata* acquired the 'hole' meaning, the language would be unlikely also to have a homonym meaning 'tip/point'. This was why I was bothered by the subcategories for PPN. Unfortunately I did not think to ask how *la-mata-la-salu* (*salu* 'needle') would be interpreted in Lakalai. This might be the only case in which context would not make it clear which meaning was intended. Incidentally, Barnes (1977:306) seems to be concerned by the use of *mata* forms for openings that are not round, such as the meshes of a net or, in Malay, the space between the rungs of a ladder. I do not find this a problem; doorways are also not usually round. But as regards roundness, it is possible to compare the use of *mata* in Lakalai for a snare with the English terms for certain loops and rings, including the 'eye' in a hook-and-eye.

The fact that in Lakalai and other languages, *mata* designates not only 'doorway' but the door that closes it may, as Winifred Bauer suggested to me, have something to do with the fact that eyes open and shut; I do not, however, know any language in which *mata* includes the eyelid. Nevertheless it seems possible that the use of *mata* for lids, caps, a drumhead, etc., is an extension from 'door'. This extension might also explain the use of *mata* in Lakalai for 'afterbirth'. Note that these are words not for a tip or top that is an intrinsic part of an object (and therefore probably not derived from the 'tip' meaning), but for something that caps it or closes it off. I assume that the Tok Pisin *ai bilong sospen* 'lid of saucepan' reflects this usage. It may be that the Lakalai terms for the rafters above fireplaces also extend this idea. (These are the places in which goods are stored so that smoke will keep them dry and free from insects.)

There are other extensions clearly based on resemblance to eyes, as in Sengseng (and Kwaio) 'kidneys'. This is a possibility for the term for 'nipple' and probably for Molima 'areola'; in that language 'nipple' is *susu mata-gabu-na* (*gabu* 'nose'), but see below. When I first read Blust (1974:87) on the fish-eye term for a particular kind of sore, my experience in treating such sores in Kove made me think it was only a descriptive term, easily thought up independently. The comparative evidence, showing how narrowly it tends to be limited to sores on the hand or foot, has changed my mind; I agree with Pawley that this is a complex lexeme, though I suspect that the obvious resemblance helps explain its adoption or retention in Kove despite the shift in the structure of the genitive. (I doubt Blust's assumption that the original primary referent was a corn rather than a sore that is depressed.)



A hole filled with liquid, like one that shows light, is of course more eye-like than an empty one. It may be an easy step from using a *mata* term for a spring of water to using it as a general term for a source (compare French). This general 'source' meaning is attested in a number of languages, including Hawaiian (Pukui & Elbert 1957), and I suggest that it also accounts for the term translated as 'direction of the wind', since 'direction' indicates where the wind is coming from, not where it is going. It is tempting to assume that the *mata* in \**mata ni qaso* is also depicting the sun as the source of the day (light), but comparing the sun directly to an eye seems equally plausible. Blust (1974:9), however, in discussing this term also mentions the other meanings that he attributes to PAn \**maCa*: "center, most important part (of the day)". Again, the distribution of this term throughout the An-speaking world indicates that Pawley is right to call it a complex lexeme. I would assume that for most speakers a dead metaphor is involved, but again I am interested in the fact that Kove retained the terms while reversing their order. Blust (p.5), however, points out that this is also the case in different parts of Indonesia.

Two of the complex terms in Lakalai, the ones referring to pigs and men, may perhaps have some connection to 'cynosure', and so directly to eyes, but might also be related to the 'source' meaning.

I think it likely, incidentally, that both Kove *mata* and Molima *matana* 'net gauge' are derived from the 'mesh of a net' usage. This possibility raises the question of whether I was right (Chowning 1991b) to attribute the term for the implement to POc.

I have assumed that *mata* 'eye' is likely to extend its meaning in two directions. One, as noted above, is towards verbs having to do with sight – 'look', etc. The other, perhaps but not necessarily via the 'face' extension, has to do with appearance, and this may be correlated with a verb meaning 'to look like'. In Fijian, as well as appearance, *mata* refers to the pattern on barkcloth and similar objects, and this is also true of Malay and other languages. The question then is whether one of these extensions or compounds indicating that one is manifesting a particular emotion by, for example, looking suspicious or greedy, could have led to the Kove meaning of a person with certain characteristics, whether or not these are reflected in appearance. For Tuvalu Besnier (1993) speaks of "many compounds [beginning with *mata*] that designate... psychological traits, or personal habits or quirks", as well as personal appearance and emotions. The same range is found in Niue (McEwen 1970:201), where terms beginning with *mata-* are translated 'mischievous', 'unscrupulous', etc. In Fijian, Geraghty (pers.comm.) translates the *mata(mata)* prefix used in similar terms 'addict' or 'fanatic', and gives numerous examples, including *matamatawai* 'compulsive bather'. Although it might be that the 'source' meaning is relevant, this is not a meaning given for *mata* in either Tuvalu or Niue. Another possibility is that the eyes are the seat of desire, as is reportedly the case in the Trobriands (Barnes 1977, citing Malinowski). My Kove examples could be interpreted as indicating that the characteristic is tied to desire, but I do not know of a connection between the eyes and desire for Kove, Tuvalu or Niue.<sup>7</sup> Geraghty (pers.comm.) notes that in some Fijian communalects *mata* is "a preverbal particle... meaning 'want to'".

<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, John Lynch (pers.comm.) reports that in Papua New Guinea, a person fond of a particular thing may be called "beer face" or "money face".

## 2.2 'TIP, POINT'

By contrast with 'eye' and its possible derivatives, the 'tip' meaning seems always to have had an adjectival connotation of sharpness. In addition, it is commonly used for sharp edges, as of an adze (and nowadays a metal knife). Extensions seems to have been made in two directions: one to edges and boundaries, whether or not they are sharp, and one to projections of all sorts. 'Nipple' seems as likely to derive from 'point' as from 'eye'.<sup>8</sup> At one extreme the projections include pimples and, as in Lakalai, insect bites; at the other, particularly in Polynesia, headlands. (In Melanesian languages I know, headlands are more likely to be called 'noses'.)

The question of which assumed primary meaning of *mata* is paramount also arises in the case of its use for 'bud, sprout', at least in those instances in which the sprout emerges from something perceived as eye-like, as in the case of yams and, less conspicuously, coconuts. (Compare the 'eye' of the potato.) My own inclination is nevertheless to assume that the salient features are sharpness and protuberance. In Kiriwina, *mata* designates not only the blunt end of the yam from which the sprout emerges but also the end of the tendrill (Malinowski 1935:140-141).

## 2.3 OTHER MEANINGS

### 2.3.1 'DATE'

Though in both Lakalai and Kove dates were set by tying knots in a leaf, I do not think this practice is relevant, nor is it likely that a reference to the term for 'sun' is involved, since counting is done by days (or nights), not by 'suns'. Barnes (1977:305, citing Brandstetter) says that *mata* is used in some Indonesian languages for 'segments of time', but I am not sure (from the example given) how close the connection is.

Nevertheless *mata* for 'time or date of an event' is found in several Oc languages. One meaning of the Lau term is 'time, season', and *mata* forms appear in a number of Kwaio compounds as a time designation. In Kapingamarangi (Lieber & Dikepa 1974) the term can mean 'occasion when, a period of time', precisely as in Lakalai. In Kusaiean (Lee 1976) it designates 'beginning period of', and in Gedaged (Mager 1952) 'the initial point of time or space'. These last two definitions suggest links to the 'beginning' meaning, though *mata* does not indicate beginning in Lakalai or Kove. (See below Pawley's suggestion about the use of *mata* for counting days.) Although the evidence is scanty and scattered, I am willing to suggest that one of the meanings that should be reconstructed for POc \**mata* is 'the date of an event'.

### 2.3.2 COUNTING CLASSIFIERS

These are found in many Austronesian languages, and similar ways of classifying apply to possessives in much of Micronesia and to most adjectives in Kiriwina. Lakalai makes limited use of them, with only about 30 recorded so far, including several pairs of synonyms. As regards *mata*, Lakalai also has a simple system in that all the objects so counted are visibly alike. More commonly, the classifier lumps together everything called by

<sup>8</sup> It has also been suggested to me that the nipple is primarily viewed as the source of milk, which is of course called by the same word as 'breast' in most Oc languages.

*mata* terms, however disparate they might be. In Trukese (Goodenough and Sugita 1990:155), for example, it includes objects worn on the eyes, such as goggles, as well as spear points. A conspicuous case is that of Arosi (Fox 1970), in which the objects range from needles and stakes to slings and armllets. On the other hand, in Fijian and a number of Polynesian languages *mata* is particularly used for counting fish, often by tens. (It may be relevant that at least in Tokelau, *mata* is also the term for a spear and the verb used for spearing fish.) In Tuvalu the classifier is used to count, by tens, not only fish but taro corms and gardenias – all roundish, perhaps, but not much alike otherwise. Wrestling with the problem as regards PEO, Pawley (1972:35-36) suggests that “it is likely that \**mataqi* was selected by nouns denoting fish and certain other compact or unitary objects, or groups composed of a number of individual elements or smaller parts (e.g. villages, clans) and possibly terms for objects which are parts of a whole or of a sequence (e.g. words, days)”.<sup>9</sup>

Although they are not used in counting, *mata* forms in many other languages have some of the range that Pawley was referring to, which is also relevant to the reconstruction of the PPn term for ‘grouping of people’. There are languages in which *mata* can refer to any round object or, according to Churchill (1911:382), “globular objects as large as the eye or as small as the bud on a tree or a drop of rain”. For him, the connection with ‘eye’ is obvious. But the objects can be much smaller – in Fijian, a grain of sand or salt. Geraghty (1993) gives one definition of *mata* as ‘grain, unit, dot’. One might wonder whether the ‘point’ meaning is relevant in these cases. In Jabêm, the term designates not only heaps, as of taro, but groups of people, and the same applies to Gedaged.<sup>10</sup> While it is possible to postulate some connection with heaps as being globular like eyes or projecting from a surface, I feel reluctant to suggest that this is a case of extension (though Streicher (1982:352) derives both meanings from ‘eye’). It seems that on the one hand, *mata* terms might be used to designate units of an aggregate, and on the other, the aggregate itself. Fijian is a case in which both processes operate. Particularly but not exclusively in Central Pacific languages, the aggregate is likely to be a group of people. The remoteness of this use, if not that of ‘unit’, from ‘eye’ makes it seem reasonable to attribute Biggs, Walsh and Waqa’s *mata*<sub>3</sub> ‘grouping of people’, to POc as well as PPn.

### 2.3.3 ‘KIND’

In addition to Lakalai and Kove, I have found one other language spoken in Melanesia in which what looks like a *mata* form means ‘kind’. This is Lavongai of New Ireland, as originally described by Father Stamm (Beaumont 1988:121). Here *mata* is ‘eye, face’, *matag* is ‘before’, and *matan* is ‘kind, time’ (as in ‘how many times?’). Although Lakalai and Kove use different words for ‘time’ in this sense, the ‘kind’ definition is intriguing. Lavongai is not closely related to Lakalai, though both are classified by Ross as Meso-Melanesian.

In at least one Micronesian language, Woleaian, a meaning given for *mata* is ‘kind’. Examples given include ‘a kind of work’ and ‘kinds of stones’, and the authors (Sohn and Tawerilmang 1976:95) suggest that the kinds of things so classified are usually inorganic. It

<sup>9</sup> This last possibility is of course intriguing as regards the ‘date’ meaning, although at least in Lakalai the term can also be used to encompass more than a day, as in *la-mata-la-marisa* ‘time when whitebait (*marisa*) appear’.

<sup>10</sup> John Lynch (pers.comm.) tells me that “in Bislama *hip* not only refers to heaps or piles of things, but also groups of people”. Compare TP *bung*, *bungim* as regards the ‘naturalness’ of such a range of meanings.

seems at least a possibility that the use of *mata* forms for 'kind' was a further step from a system in which the range of objects counted by derivatives of \**mata*/\**mataqi* was extremely diverse.

### 2.3.4 UNCERTAIN CASES

I shall not deal with those that do not appear in the New Britain languages, but just note that the data presented so far leave unexplained the Lakalai complex lexeme for a leader, and the Sengeng ones for terms relating to fire. For the latter case, Barnes's translation of *mata* as 'focus', and Blust's as 'center, core, most important part' may be relevant. I have no explanation for the Lakalai term, nor have I found pertinent data from other languages.

## 3. CONCLUSION

Barnes argues vehemently that, even though he cannot relate all his Kédang *mata* terms to each other, for An languages in general at least the 'eye' and 'point' terms are related, and reproaches Malinowski for sometimes treating them as homonyms (with reference to yams). He bolsters his argument in two ways, first by arguing (p.308) that: "The human or animal eye occupies a leading, projecting, prominent location in the organism; and we may readily discern a similarity of idea...between eye and tip". If we except Pekinese and pugs, I find his suggestion that eyes project bizarre; this is the characteristic of the nose, as many languages, including Molima, indicate. He also suggests (p.308) that because it is applied to the face, "*mata* falls into the series including...headland, top, summit". But I would argue that it does not. Except when it is pointed, the top or tip of something is not normally called by a *mata* term.<sup>11</sup> Sympathetic though I am to Barnes's attempts to derive all the meanings ascribed to *mata* from one, I do not think it can be done. One piece of evidence might, however, support Barnes. This is that in at least two languages, Cheke Holo of the Solomons (White et al. 1988) and Kwamera of Vanuatu (Lindstrom 1986), the same word meant both 'eye' and 'point, tip' but was not cognate with *mata*.<sup>12</sup> Unless a *mata* form was replaced in these languages because of word taboo, it may indeed be that the speakers of these languages saw a relation between the concepts involved, and if so, speakers of POc or PAN may have done the same. In any case, I agree with Firth (1985:246) that the 'tip' meaning may "merge" with those derived from 'eye' in references to 'front, forepart', just as the 'sprout' meaning is likely to include both 'hole, source' and 'tip'; and see the discussion of 'nipple' above.

At present, but increasingly tentatively for the later forms, I suggest the following reconstructions for POc:

- |                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| <i>mata</i> <sub>1</sub> | eye, face (= surface?); opening, aperture; focus, place from which a sprout emerges, core of boil; circular or globular object; source, origin, beginning; door, lid, cover; front, in front of |
| <i>mata</i> <sub>2</sub> | sharp; point, tip, edge, end; protuberance; sprout  |
| <i>mata</i> <sub>3</sub> | group, collection, association of people; unit in a collection  |

<sup>11</sup> In an early dictionary of TP, however, Murphy (1954:68) gives as one of the meanings for *hai* (his spelling) 'the very summit or top'.

<sup>12</sup> Kwamera has one term that apparently is cognate but a synonym that apparently is not (John Lynch, pers.comm.)

*mata*<sub>4</sub> kind of object; person with certain characteristics

*mata*<sub>5</sub> date of an event; point in time

I should, however, be delighted with suggestions to collapse some of these. As regards Pawley's complex lexemes, I would accept all except 'doorway', which seems to me transparent in meaning, and would add one more:

\**mata ni qupi* / \**mata ni talo* cut-off portion of yam or taro from which new plant regenerates

Note that, with appropriate alterations in spelling, all of the complex lexemes can probably be assigned to PAN, but so far as I know at present, this is true only of \**mata*<sub>1</sub> and \**mata*<sub>2</sub> among the simple forms.

A final point to consider is why some languages, of which Molima is an example, did not share the proliferation of *mata* terms so characteristic of others. I can only suggest that perhaps speakers of different languages are not equally tolerant of the confusion that can result when what sounds like one word can be interpreted in so many different ways. Molima notably lacks homonyms by comparison with the three West New Britain languages.

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