# Food and Language:
# An Ethno-linguistic Study in Tawala

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Outline of Paper

0 INTRODUCTION

The peoples of Oceania have traditionally lived directly off the resources of the land and adjacent waters, and in most cases each family has been virtually self-sufficient in producing its daily requirements. The bulk of the diet came from one or more of the staple foods: sweet potato, taro, yams, bananas or sago. Pigs and chickens have in most places supplemented this diet. The expenditure of time and energy in food production varied from group to group depending on the type of foods consumed. Swamp-dwelling peoples who rely almost exclusively on sago need only work one or two days a month to satisfy their dietary needs. At the other end of the scale are the coastal and island people who produce all the main staples, supplementing them with a wide variety of foods collected from the bush, streams and sea. For these latter people, food production is a way of life and requires a considerable expenditure of time and energy; in fact, most days are given to the pursuit of food. It is interesting to note that in his autobiography Ongka (1979) devotes a whole chapter to "Special Foods". Somehow, such a chapter comes as no surprise from a Papua New Guinean politician; one recognises that for the Melanesian food is one of the important social features of life.

Not only is food grown and collected, but it must be prepared and cooked; it is exchanged and traded; it assumes

an important role at feasts, particularly those associated with the 'rites of passage': birth, marriage and death. In addition societies have rules of cultural behaviour in the consumption of food, which often give insight into the important social groupings and relationships of the society.

It is a truism that the importance attributed to food by a society will be reflected in the language of that society. Every food type must have a sufficient vocabulary to enable the members of the society to communicate with each other in catching, producing, exchanging, cooking and eating each variety. In addition there will doubtless be stories to explain the origin of important foods and methods, magic to ensure its successful production, and taboos related to its consumption. However, the outworking of this fact has, as far as I am aware, never been examined in detail.

It is the purpose of this paper to investigate some of the ways in which food has a bearing on language. The paper is necessarily exploratory, seeking to find insight into the language of food rather than to prove any particular point, unless it be that it is important in the study of a culture to examine the part played by food and that this must inevitably involve a rigorous examination of the language of food.

The paper suffers from the lack of any specific field work on the topic. The data presented for the Yamalele and

Tawala peoples is the result of extended residences among them during the late '60s and the '70s, however I have done little systematic investigation of the subject of food and the details presented in this paper are largely the fortuitous result of investigations in other areas.

## 1.0 The Importance of Food

Broadly speaking, food has three main uses in the cultures of the world: subsistence, trade and prestige (Bascom 1970). Many anthropological works have been written on each of these areas and a thorough study of the literature would doubtless add many examples to this present paper. Here we refer only to a few major works, chiefly about the Milne Bay area. Life in the island world of Milne Bay is exceedingly rich and diverse. Inevitably this richness of culture is reflected in the languages of the people.

## 1.1 Subsistence economy

The fundamental use of food is to ensure the biological continuation of a group. In Oceania, food is generally produced by the household that consumes it. (Bascom 1970:85, Freedman 1970:165). At every level of production and consumption activities are culturally determined. The Tawala people speak of foods 'balancing' (omteiwa) each

other. For a meal to be properly balanced, meats or greens need to be added to the staples. Similarly the Semai people of Malaya consider a 'real meal' must include meat, fish, fowl or fungus with the staples. If a man has only staples to eat, he will claim in all seriousness, "I haven't eaten for days". (Dentan 1968)

Not only are there rules on what ought to be eaten, but food restrictions are also widespread:

> In no society are people permitted to eat everything, everywhere, with everyone, and in all situations. Instead, the consumption of food is governed by rules and usages which cut across each other at different levels of symbolisation.(Cohen 1968)

The area of food taboos is particularly productive in revealing a relation between food and language. The Tawala people have many food taboos, but one that is relevant at this point is the taboo on eating one's totem bird. An understanding of this restriction gives insight into the world view, religious beliefs and social structure of the Tawala culture.

> Particularly common is the practise of classifying foods and prohibiting certain combinations. (Scrimshaw 1968)

Scrimshaw goes on to give an example from peru in which the componential analysis of foods into "hot, cold, heavy or light" gives the clue for understanding to whom a class of food can be fed.

Dentan (1968) found it necessary to understand the classificatory system of Semai zoology in order to understand their system of food taboos. Foods from different categories (e.g. fungus and meat) should not be eaten together, otherwise the "natural order" of things is violated. Similarly, animals from mixed habitats (e.g. bats, which have fur and yet fly) are "unnatural" and therefore dangerous.

## 1.2 Trade in Papua New Guinea

> In many parts of the country trade in foodstuffs between neighbouring areas adds variety to the diet but has little if any effect on nutritive values... However, in a few areas, appreciable supplies of the staple food are obtained by trade. (McArthur 1972)

The waterways of the Milne Bay Province have offered an unparalleled opportunity for trade for the more seafaring of its peoples. The Kula trade (Malinowski 1922) was primarily concerned with the exchange of *bagi* (necklaces) and *mwali* (arm bands) but much secondary exchange of food accompanied these and other trading expeditions.

Much of the trade of Milne Bay had necessity at its base. People who lived on the smaller islands (Amphletts, Tubetube, Wagifa etc.) were forced to trade for their livelihood. They made pots, caught fish and in other

ways produced items which they could trade for the necessities of life - canoe logs, roofing, and most important of all, food.

I have been present at an exchange between an expedition from Wagifa and the Yamalele people (where the latter gave sago in exchange for magic). The excitement and solemnity of the occasion were contagious and I could well understand why the Kula became an all consuming passion in those lucky enough to participate in it. Even those involved in lesser trade found it one of the highlights of their round of life.

One of the results of trade is the effect it has on languages. Not only are there the trade languages: the trade Dobu of Milne Bay (Fortune 1932), the pidgin Siassi of the Vitiaz Strait (Harding 1970), the Hiri Motu of the Papuan coast (Barton 1910), but also individual languages show the marked effects of trade (for documentation see Ezard 1977). While it may seem that we have wandered from our purpose of showing the relationship between food and language, this is not so. Rather the brief excursion into the world of trading reminds us just how all embracing a comprehensive study of food and language would have to be.

## 1.3 The Prestige value of Food

Under this heading are included the uses of food to gain social approval and social status.

> The production of food to satisfy daily needs is not the sole or even the main objective. Without a supplus there can be no feasts or ceremonies and all the pleasures these make possible. Few things excite people more than the sight of large quantities of food arranged to satisfy local aesthetic standards...An abundance of food is tangible evidence of success and a fit subject for boasting. Conversely, a shortage is considered disgraceful and humiliating, where possible to be concealed from others, especially enemies. Little wonder then that hardship resulting from a shortage of food is usually expressed in terms of a restricted social and emotional life. Compared to these, the pain of hunger is unpleasant, but bearable. (McArthur 1972)

The most fundamental distinction between Western and Melanesian wealth is that we consider wealth something to be amassed. The Melanesians consider wealth something to be given away. The 'rich man' (wasawasa), 'the chief man' (guyau) appears just an ordinary villager to those outside the Tawala culture. His power and influence lie in his extraordinary ability to produce food and give it away, so that others are not able to fully repay their debt to him and must ever respect him as a 'big man' (bada baneina).

Young (1971) is a major contributor to the literature of the social value of food. He comments:

> Melanesian peoples in general value food in ways which transcend its intrinsic value for them as a necessity of life. Its valuation is such that it appears to be used everywhere to create, maintain and manipulate social relationships.

Young's book 'Fighting with Food' is a monumental study of the social value of food for one Melanesian group. (Cf Fortune 1932:94-132, 189-200, Malinowski 1935 Vol. 1, Rappaport 1968) Young shows that the social value of food is so great that the Goodenough people continually deny themselves in order to have food left over. Lokona 'food conservation by abstention' is achieved by magic formula (sisikwana). Food left rotting until the next harvest is one of the marks of greatness and is partially achieved through an ascetic denial of oneself. A man has to bear no greater hardship in life than to have a wife who wastes food. However, the denial does not extend to those outside the family for another mark of greatness is generosity to those in need and at times of feasting.

The major thesis of Young's book is to set out one of the more unusual features of Melanesian culture, the concept of 'fighting with food'. (Cf Freedman 1970, Kaberry 1941) The Goodenough people have a system of 'competitive food exchange' (abutu). The idea is for a clan to give a gift to their enemies which is so large

that their enemies will not be able to reciprocate, and thus will have to acknowledge their inferior status and the superior status of those making the gift. This cultural trait is, in fact, an outworking of the 'big man' concept of gift giving, though this time at the clan level. Young's book, though not linguistic in its approach is a treasury of linguistic words relating to the social values of food. Without a knowledge of the language of food these cultural traits of the Goodenough people would be a closed book.

It is not clear whether the whole concept of contractual alliances relating to land, marriage, treaties and ritual are best regarded as trade or prestige. Maybe we sould add a separate category involveing all that is implied by gift giving (Cf. Mauss 1969). However, even though food is central to Oceanic giving and also is involved in an understanding of language, we are again in danger of turning aside from the main theme of the paper.

## 2.0 FOOD CLASSIFICATION

> The list of terminologies, the pairs of opposites or mutually exclusive concepts...obviously correspond to realities of native culture and behaviour. (Malinowski 1935:II7)

It is relatively easy to learn a language to the point where one can control a conversation, talking about events in semantic domains which are part of the basic vocabulary. However it is another matter to live with the people and follow their conversations day after day as they range from topic to topic. In order to follow the ramifications of such conversations it is necessary to control a large vocabulary and also to know the folk taxonomies of the people, to know at what level a word is being used and what relationship this word has to other relevant words in a given semantic domain. Even in studying a particular controlled area of a people's culture it is often necessary to understand other related areas. In studying the Subanun social structure, Frake found it necessary to first master the terminologies of some related fields, notably folk botany and folk medicine. He states:

> Effective use of Subanun botanical and medical terminologies required more knowledge of verbal behaviour than linguistics typically include in their conception of a structural destription...descriptive linguistics provides no methods for deriving rules that generate statements which are semantically as well as grammatically acceptable. (Frake 1964:193)

A knowledge of the level of abstration of a word is essential to an understanding and correct use of the word.

To understand a detailed hunting report, one must know the relevant geography, magic terminology, hunting methods, fauna and flora terminology, bodily movement terminology, animal anatomy etc.

My interest in'food and language' stems from a six week period in 1968 which I spent living alone with the Yamalele people of Fergusson Island. I had previously spent 5 months there and so knew the basics of the language. One goal I set for the 6 week period was to spend at least 8 hours a day listening to normal conversation in which I would participate minimally. There were many beneficial results to this experiment, the one relevant to this present paper being that I discovered that food was a highly relevant topic of conversation for the Yamalele people. I discovered that in order to understand basic Yamalele conversation I needed a wide-ranging knowledge of food terms, food collecting terms and an understanding of preparation methods. I have since discovered that the situation is similar for the Tawala people and probably all the peoples of Milne Bay. The data presented below (2.1 and 2.2) are from the Tawala

language and my thanks are due to Sam Andrew for his willingness to help me check a number of weak points in my understanding of the system. Nothing approaching a complete classification could be given in a paper of this size for the terminology runs into many hundreds, and perhaps thousands, of words.

## 2.1 Some Tawala Distinctions

The first distinction that needs to be drawn is the distinctions between food items and non-food items; there is a vast difference between the way they are encoded in the language Food items have specific names and terminology to distinguish their various parts. Non-food items have only general names, unless they are important for some other reason (such as being dangerous).

There are many beautiful moths and butterflies in Milne Bay, but Tawala has only two words: kapeu 'large moths and butterflies' and kapekapeu 'small moths and butterflies'. Birds, on the other hand, even though they are more elusive and usually less obvious in the environment, have distinctive names for almost every species. Those which do not have separate names can often be easily distinguished: giwegiwewe includes the brilliant 'sun bird and the rather tawdy 'brown honey eater'. These birds are too small to be eaten and so are not distinguished in the

Tawala classification. Similarly the 'sea-horse' has no use in Tawala culture and I discovered that only a small portion of the population know that its name is mogamogaya. By far the majority of the people say they do not know the name or else that there is no Tawala word for it. On the other hand I was given 74 fish names by one man who has no more than an average interest in fishing.

The second distinction that needs to be focussed on is between the two words for 'food' or 'eating'. Both aniani and am can function as nouns or verbs:

| | |
|---|---|
| Puwaka hai am.<br>pig their food | 'It is the pig's food.' |
| Naka ita aniani.<br>that our food | 'That is our food.' |
| Ta am.<br>we(inc)eat | 'Let's eat.' |
| Una ani.<br>you(sing) eat | 'You eat it.' |

The distinction seems to be between food (aniani) and a meal (am) in the nouns, and a parallel distinction between 'eating a meal' (am - intransitive) and 'eating or biting' a particular piece of food (ani - transitive) for the verbs. However, there are complications not answered by this simple division.

## 2.2 Tawala Food Taxonomy

> In a taxonomy we expect that some terms will be more general than others, and that there will be several levels of specificity. At the most general level a single term may cover an entire domain of meaning. Beneath the most general term will be several more specific terms each labelling a subdivision of the total domain and contrasting with one another on that level. Then each of these terms may in turn be subdivided into smaller and smaller divisions, until the most specific level is finally reached. (Burling 1970: 41)

### 2.2.1 Tawala food charts.

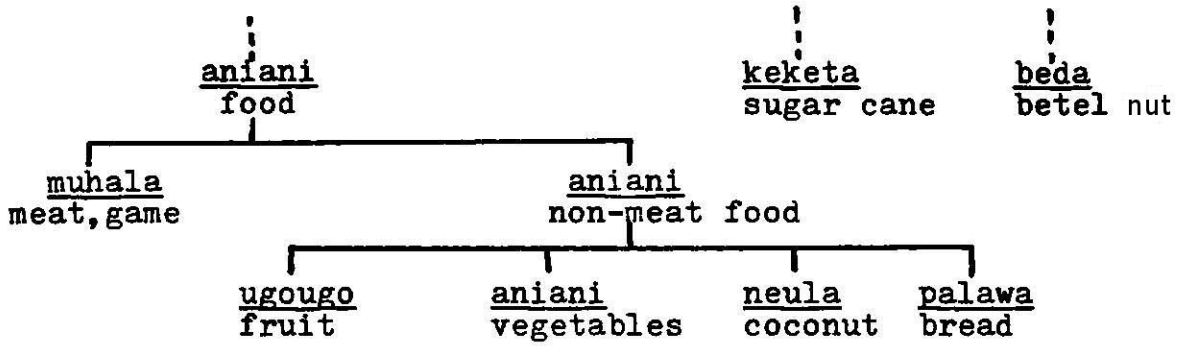


Chart 1 - Major 'food' divisions

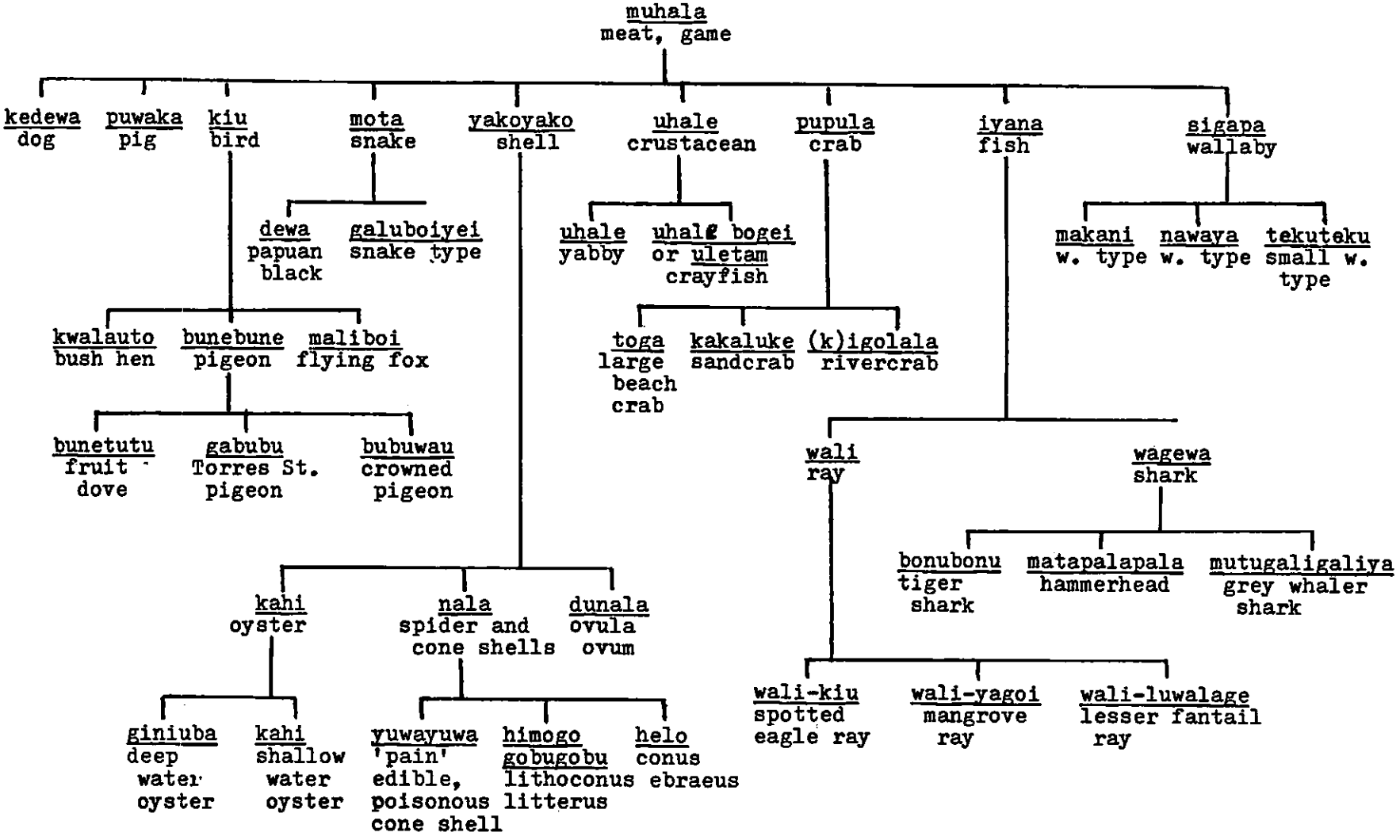


Chart 2 - Representative 'meat' types

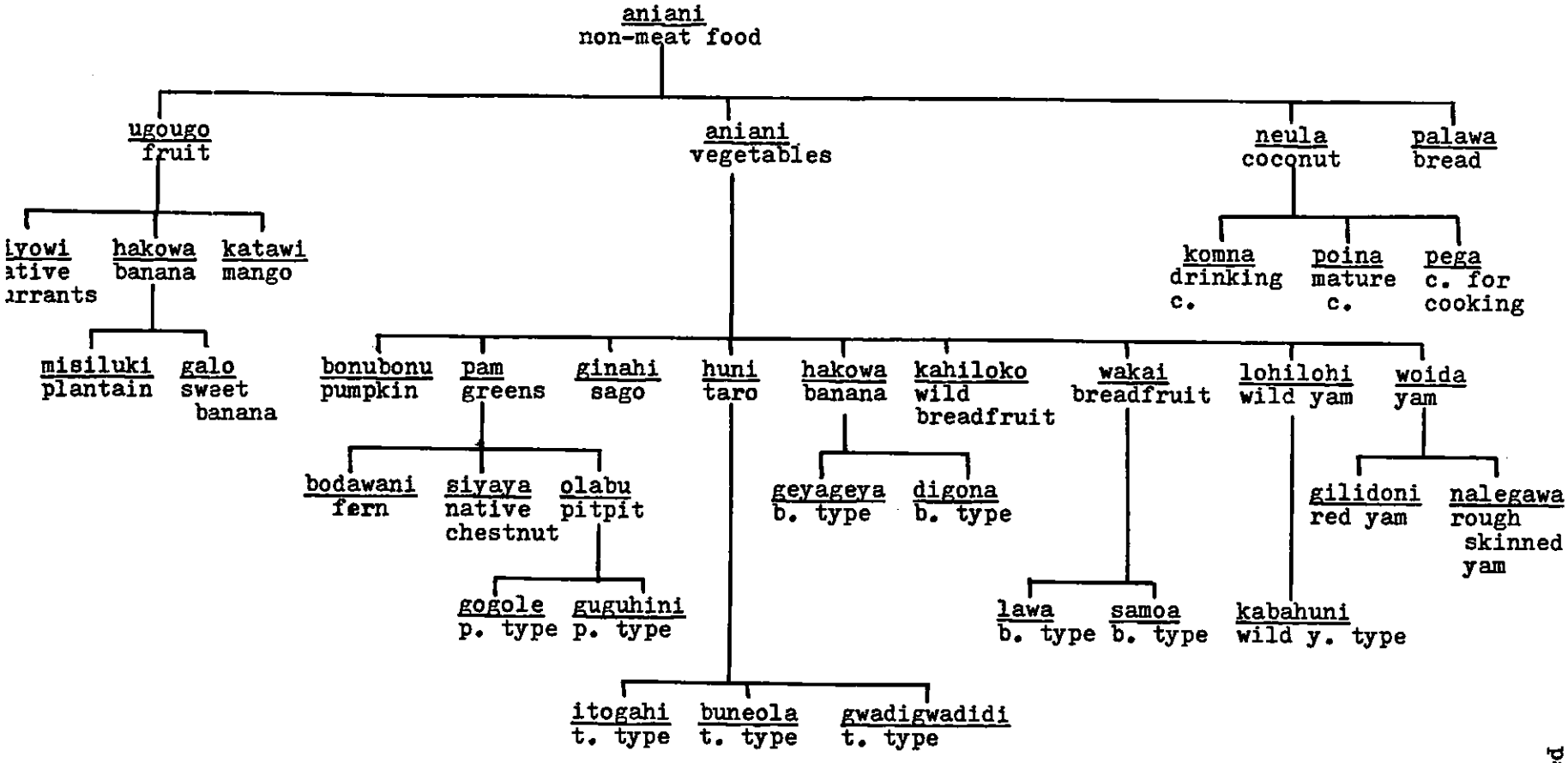


Chart 3 - Representative non-meat types

2.2.2 Comments on Tawala food taxonomy

1. Terminology employed in a taxonomy may well appear at more than one level of the hierarchy. For example, the Tawala term aniani is employed at three levels: (1) all things edible (2) all non-meat food (3) the main carbohydrate vegetables. The precise area of meaning for these uses is seen by examining the chart above (Chart 3). The following are examples of aniani used at each level of abstraction.

(1) Yaubada ita aniani ma ita ani mae i dewaya.
God our food and our thing stay he ma
'God made our food and our dwellings.'

(2) I ani wi-meiha naka aniani ma muhala.
our(exc) thing payment that vegetables and meat
'The things we use to payback (these gifts) are meat and vegetables.'

(3) Aniani teiwana naka muhala ma pam.
vegetables balancer that meat or greens
'Carbohydrates need to be accompanied by meat or greens.'

2. Although not shown on the above chart, taxonomies overlap at various points. The Tawala word gamogamo has two uses: (1) animal (a wide class including butterflies, birds etc.) (2) domesticated animal (roughly equivalent to 'pet'. Thus a pig which is kept as a pet is gamogamo in both senses, but it is also classed as muhala in that it will be eaten. On the other hand a cat will be classed as

gamogamo in both senses, but not as muhala except in joking. A butterfly is gamogamo only in the 1st sense, and is not muhala.

3. Sugar-cane and betel are not classed as food. In neither case do the people talk about 'eating' them. Sugar-cane is 'chewed' (kwaitu) and betel is 'chewed' (luhaba).

4. From our English viewpoint the classification of eggs with 'meat', and pitpit and native chestnut with 'greens' is somewhat strange. However, one distinctive feature of 'meat' and 'greens' involves foods which balances (omteiwa) the staple carbohydrates, i.e. things that accompany the main vegetable. We do not classify stingrays as fish, but it is reasonable to do so if we consider environment as the overriding distinctive feature, rather than shape (cf Dentan 1968). Similarly it is reasonable to classify flying foxes with birds, in that they both fly through the air even though they differ a good deal in appearance.

5. The distinctive feature of fruit (ugougo) is things which get ripe. Thus tomatoes are classed as fruit, but coconuts are not, because a coconut becomes fit for cooking or copra if left on the palm to 'ripen'. Only young, green coconuts, picked while the flesh is jelly-like are considered fit for human consumption.

Not all bananas are fruit. Those banana types which do not ripen are used for cooking and thus are classed with the carbohydrates.

In two cases (breadfruit and yam) the wild varieties are classified under a separate class from the introduced varieties even though there is a generic name to cover the varieties of the latter. In the case of wild breadfruit, only the nuts are eaten, and in the case of the wild yam the skin is very hairy and not particularly yam-like in appearance.

## 3.0 MYTHS AND MAGIC

With myth and magic, language and culture fuse together. Without an understanding of the myths and magic of a people we are missing one of the main clues to unlock their culture. Since learning some of the Tawala myths I have often found my informants answer a question with, "You know our story about such-and-such; that is how we think." Stories are told to explain the origin of things and why people behave as they do. Magic is part of that correct behaviour. The extraordinary powers possessed by the mythical ancestors is due to their knowledge of magic.

> Often the main function of myth is to serve as a foundation for a system of magic, and, wherever magic forms the backbone of an institution, a myth is also to be found at the base of it. (Malinowski 1922:303)

Even though myth and magic are inextricably intertwined, it serves our present purpose to examine them separately in relation to food.

## 3.1 Food Myths

It is not the purpose of this section to attempt some deep analysis of myths, as has Levi-Strauss (1970), and show how the symbols of mythology all relate to food. Rather I will limit myself to those stories whose surface meaning is specifically and obviously about food.

There are two types of myth in the minds of Milne Bay people: the true and the made-up story. Firstly there are the true accounts of supernatural events which explain the origins of customs and artifacts. Secondly there are the stories based on the observation of animals, which present prototypes and examples worthy of imitation. I present a story from each genre.

The first story is from Fergusson Island and explains the origin of the taro garden and associated cultural traits. As evidence of the alleged truth of this story, I have in my possession an iron adze blade which is claimed to be one of the axes actually sent down from heaven. The story was told to me in about 1970 by Manoah Vivian (20 years old). The adze blade was given to me by his father who vouched for the complete truthfulness of the legend.

The Origin of Taro Gardening

Long ago there lived a man who used to spend all his time hunting. He did not have a garden and his wife got very tired of eating meat all the time with no vegetables to give a change of diet. One day when the man had gone off hunting, his wife got up, collected all her husband's belongings, cooked them in a large pot and ran off to live with her brothers. When the man returned from his hunt and saw all his belongings were ruined he was furious.

That night God sent the man a small bundle of axes from heaven. When the man woke in the morning he saw the axes and took one and went into the forest. He said garden magic and started to clear a garden ...but in fact only cut down one tree.

The next night one of God's men came down and finished clearing the garden, making it very big and long. The man woke and called out, "That's enough!" and that is why one variety of taro is called "enough". Later the man prepared the garden for planting.

Then one night God dropped a bundle of taro shoots from heaven. The man took the shoots and after saying what little magic he knew, planted them. That night God's angel came and continued the planting. The man however, was only sleèping lightly and upon waking he saw the angel at work; he thus learned the correct way to plant taro and the correct magic to use. When the taro was ripe the man went and fetched his wife back. Everybody now knows that the Taro Man is really God.

The second story was the first in a series of animal stories told to me in 1975 by Yailo Lobasi (40 years old). This story is not considered true. I have found this set of stories invaluable in understanding many facets of Tawala culture.

The Origin of Sago Making

This is the first story. There were two men whose work was making sago. This story is about that work. Their names were Wagaloke (Possum) and Popopo (Lizard). They lived and made plans together.

> Wagaloke said to Popopo, "Friend, what say you come over later and we will chop sago." Popopo replied, "Good idea."
>
> So one day Popopo came over the hill to Wagaloke's place. He was at Bou Stone. Then Popopo came and said, "Friend, let's go up and cut sago." They went up and Wagaloke broke a hole into the sago. When the hole was finished Wagaloke processed the sago. They took the sago and went down and made sago pudding. Wagaloke's friend said to him, "Friend, we have nothing to stir the sago pudding with!" Wagaloke replied, "Yes, we have stirrers." Wagaloke stood up and stirred the pudding with his tail. When it was stirred they carried it down from the fire. Popopo said, "Friend, we have no cup." "Yes, we've got cups," said Wagaloke, scooping out the sago with his ear.
>
> They ate it and then made more plans. Wagaloke said, "Not tomorrow, but the next day you come over." Popopo replied, "Okay."
>
> This is why we now see Wagaloke with a white tail, because he used it to stir sago, and also why he has white ears, because he used them to scoop out the sago. This is also why Wagaloke's work is to always break holes in things....

Summarising Goodenough food myths, Young (1971:188) concludes that their most general lesson is to show "the absolute dependence of community and culture on food resources." Language thus reinforces the reality.

## 3.2 Food Magic

At every phase of the gardening cycle, as with all other important events in life, magic is a prerequisite to success. In his monumental two volume work, "Coral Gardens and their Magic" Malinowski has shown the close relationship between language and gardening. The second volume is devoted to an analysis of the language of magic

and contains many insights relevant to this paper.

With magic ritual we enter the realm of the performative use of language. Austin (1975:12) demonstrates performative use of language, "in which, to <u>say</u> something is to <u>do</u> something." When a Trobriand islander says the following formula he is using language in this performative sense.

> "I cut thee - my garden site; I make thy belly blossom with my charmed axe, my garden site. It lifts and stands there."

After quoting this formula Malinowski goes on to say:

> ...to the native himself a magical formula is not a piece of folk-lore...It is a verbal act by which a specific force is let loose - an act which in native belief exercises the most powerful influence on the course of nature and on human behaviour. Magic, moreover,...acts as a powerful social organising force. The utterance of a magical formula, which forms the very core of every magical rite, is to the native a very momentous and sacred act. (op. cit. p9)

In Milne Bay the role of magic is of central importance to daily life, and nowhere is this more evident than in the various activities involved in food production and collection. Thus, we are again driven to the conclusion that for a thorough understanding of these cultures, a thorough knowledge of the language associated with food is of prime importance.

## 4.0 LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

One of the insights of modern linguistics is that languages unconsciously express ethnographic data. The extent of this interrelation is disputed but seldom denied out of hand. (Hymes 1964:115-120)

> Boas...stressed description of each language according to its own genius and considered linguistic analysis essential to study the deeper problems of ethnology... Mauss speaks to the fascination and theoretical importance of linguistic categories and the need to explain them. (Hymes 1964:118)

Sapir (1964:129) speaks:

> of the tyrannical hold that linguistic form has upon our orientation in the world.

Whorf (1964:129) states:

> ...the problem of thought and thinking in the native community is not purely and simply a psychological problem. It is quite largely cultural.

There is by no means a one-to-one relationship between linguistic forms and culture, but rather the type of categories encoded by a language give a clue to the world view of that people. This is particularly true in the realm of time which is largely a mental construct. However, there are other cultural items encoded in the languages of the world. E.g. noun classes give clues to the interests of the people. The following sections deal with grammatical categories that encode interest in food.

## 4.1 Oceanic Possessives

The Austronesian languages of the Pacific have at least two possession classes and more typically three or more. (For a more detailed treatment c.f. Ezard 1980) In many of these a food item is distinguished from a non-food item by the possessive pronouns used with the noun. Thus in Yamalele the following distinction is drawn:

| | |
|---|---|
| yaku bawe<br>my pig | 'my pig' (animal) |
| ʾaku bawe<br>my pig | 'my pig' (meat) |
| yaku ʾuvi<br>my yam | 'my yam' (for planting) |
| aku ʾuvi<br>my yam | 'my yam' (for eating) |

In Mota there are six possession classes with food and drink as two of these classes.

| | |
|---|---|
| Yak o vetal<br>my art banana | 'my banana' (to eat) |
| mak o pei<br>my art. water | 'my water' (to drink) |

In Milne Bay languages this process of marking food with a special possession class has developed a stage further with the generic word for food being replaced by a repetition of the food pronouns. In Yamalele, for instance, we get the following examples; the system is carried through for all possessive pronouns, singular and plural.

| | |
|---|---|
| ʔaku ʔaku | 'my food' |
| ʔamu ʔamu | 'your (sg.) food' |
| ʔana ʔana | 'his food' |

In Kurada[1] the repetition of the pronoun is dropped, with the pronoun meaning 'food' when used by itself, or a possessive pronoun when used with a noun.

| | |
|---|---|
| ʔagu<br>my | 'my food' |
| ʔam<br>your | 'your (sg.) food' |
| ʔana<br>his | 'his food' |

In Misima[2] the system has been taken one step further again, in that the words for food are marked for person and number, but these forms are no longer the same as the possessive pronouns used with food, but are rather a combination of a- 'food' and the possessive pronouns used with parts of the body.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| o niu<br>my coconut (food) | a-u<br>food-my | 'my food' |
| am niu<br>your coconut | a - m<br>food-your | 'your (sg) food' |
| ali niu<br>their coconut | a - liya<br>food-their | 'their food' |

[1] Data supplied by Hagita High School students, Catherine Nido and Margaret Luke in 1979.

[2] Data supplied by Napitolai Mesitau in collaboration with my colleague Bill Callister in 1979.

With the details of these and similar data available it is difficult not to draw the conclusion that we have here linguistic evidence of the important role attributed to food by the cultures of Oceania.

## 4.2 Tawala Wealth Pronouns

In Tawala speech there is a special set of pronouns used to refer to a person's valuables such as necklaces, armbands and to his possessions in general. These pronouns use the metaphor of a garden and are thus connected at least indirectly with food. If someone owns a particular item it is said to be 'from his fence'. The singular forms are as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| gali - u - gei<br>fence-my-from | 'my belongings' |
| gali - m - gei<br>fence-your-from | 'your (sg) belongings' |
| gali - n - ei<br>fence-his-from | 'his belongings' |

## 4.3 Nimowa Food Metaphors[1]

Nimowa, another language from Milne Bay, has two metaphorical uses of food in common use. The first example uses food as a metaphor of function:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| A! | tosahe | naha-ne. | 'What good is that?' |
| excl | what | food-its | |

The second metaphor is used at the time of a man's death. The dead man has produced food and other forms of wealth and the man who inherits the fruit of his labour is said to:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| I | hau | hino-ne. |
| he | eats | contents |

'He inherits his wealth.'

## 4.4 A Goodenough Is. Metaphor

On Goodenough Island (Young 1971) the verb 'to deceive' is yakayakaina and is derived from the verb yakaina 'to dig up yams'. In order to avoid the arrogance of boasting and lifting oneself above one's peers it is conventional to hide the true extent of one's harvest. Young (1971:157) comments:

> A man is delighted when he comes to harvest his yams and finds a few big ones among them. Informants agree there is no joy like that of excavating a large yam; but it is a joy they cannot communicate. Even to their wives and kinsmen they will mark their elation with glum faces and mutter their yams are 'small, too small'.

Thus the Goodenough Islanders' cultural practice has become verbalised, giving the astute ethnographer a key to cultural understanding.

[1] Data supplied by Fr Tony Young

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