Language Shift and Language Socialization in Gapun. A Report on Fieldwork in Progress.

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Mbup, an 8 year old girl from Gapun is sitting in a canoe talking to Sopak, her mother.

Mbup:	Mbup:
Mamma, ol Wongan save kolim "pukpuk" olsem wanem?	Mamma, what do people from Wongan call "pukpuk" (crocodiles)?
Sopak:	Sopak:
oreio	oreio
Mbup:	Mbup:
Na long tok ples Gapun ol i save kolim "pukpuk" olsem wanem?	and what are "pukpuk" called in Gapun's "tok ples" (place talk; i.e. vernacular)?
Sopak:	Sopak:
Ol i save tok "orem"	They say "orem"
Mbup:	Mbup:
Na mipela save tok "pukpuk"	And we call them "pukpuk"
Sopak:	Sopak:
(laughs) Em nau. Long tok ples bilong yupela, yupela save kolim "pukpuk"	(laughs) That's right. In your (pl) tok ples you call them "pukpuk"

Introduction

The major social, economic and cultural changes that have affected the people of Papua New Guinea since WWII have a linguistic dimension that is becoming increasingly noted in the publications and anecdotes of linguists and Summer Institute of Linguistics workers active in the country. It appears as though groups throughout Papua New Guinea are currently in the process of abandoning their village Vernaculars in favor of Tok Pisin, the most widely spoken national language. Judging from the brief reports that have been presented to date, this process of language shift has progressed furthest in urban centers, the northern islands, and northern coastal areas (Colburn 1985, Nekitel 1985, Hooly n.d., Bradshaw 1978, Dutton 1978, Lithgow 1973, Mülhäusler 1979, Wurm 1983). Language shift may also be occurring among certain Highland groups (e.g. the Hua (Haiman 1979)), and it has even been noted among the Yimas, a group of 200 people living very far inland off the Karawari river (Foley 1978:28).

This paper will present some preliminary findings and hypotheses from a study on language shift which presently is underway in Gapun, a small village about 10 miles from northern coast of Papua New Guinea, situated quite close to the border that separates the East Sepik and Madang Provinces. The goal of the study as a whole is to delineate and understand the processes and interactional patterns which play significant roles in the sudden demise of a village vernacular in the face of a language of wider currency and support. In what follows, I shall begin by presenting some necessary othnographic and sociolinguistic data on Gapun, proceeding thereafter to an account of the methods of data gathering being used, and to a discussion of some of the data which have been collected so far. It must be stressed at the onset that this paper is the result of fieldwork in progress[1], and that the

ideas expressed here are necessarily rough-edged and subject to revision and/or abandonment as the fieldwork continues and new insights are gained. Despite their tentative character, however, I have considered that the data and ideas presented here may be useful in generating discussion, comparisons and a general heightened awareness of what very likely will be the not-too-distant fate of a large number of Papua New Guinea's fabled 760 indigenous vernaculars.

Background

Gapun (pronounced GaPOON) is a small village with a present population of 38 married or previously married adults, 46 children under 13, and 13 unmarried teenagers. It is an isolated village, surrounded on all sides by rain forest and mangrove swamps. Only slim bush paths subject fo flooding and small waterways connect Gapun with neighboring villages (the nearest of which, Wongan, is a 2 hour journey away) and with the outside world.

This lack of an adequate "rot" (road) to other villages and towns is continuously bemoaned by the villagers. Sporadic rumors that the government has begun work on a road that will connect the towns of Madang and Angoram, passing quite close to Gapun in the process, are always greeted with bursts of energetic talk about how the villagers will soon be wealthy enough to "troimwe ol saksak na ol narapela rabis kaikai" (throw away sago and other rubbish food) and subsist enterely on instant Nescafé, "tinpis" (tinned mackerel) and packaged white rice. The wealth to buy such items is expected to come from the sale of the cash crops - coffee, cocoa, coconuts - grown in the village. Gapun, as the villagers never tire of reminding each other, has "planti bisnis" (plenty business; i.e. cash crops), but no "rot". The difficulty and cost of transporting these crops out of Gapun results in most of them being left to rot in the gardens. In fact, despite the relative abundance of coffee

- woman's and a man's. Thus in the first person forms of all verbs (but not all tenses), and in the imperative forms of intransitive verbs, Taiap distinguishes men's speech from women's speech through a simple system of phonetic variation, e.g.:

Men's Forms		Women's Forms
ŋa mum akwankut	`I am eating sago´	ŋa mum akwankuk
ŋa ok-inet	`I will go´	ŋa ok-inak
ŋa tat	`I am sleeping´	ŋa tak
yu wetet!	`You come!´	yu wetak!
(said to a man)		(to a woman)
yu namtet!	`You talk!´	yu namtak!
(said to a man)		(to a woman)

This system, although quite regular and straightfoward, is invariably the reason invoked to explain Taiap's regional reputation as a particularly "hard" language. In fact, very few non-Gapuners speak Taiap, and those that do have either married into the village or lived in the village for long periods as children. The "two language" mystique surrounding Taiap is quite strong, and some residents of neighboring villages even insist that the language is really four languages: a man's, a woman's, a boy's and a girl's!

In the village, Taiap co-exists with Tok Pisin. Tok Pisin first entered Gapun shortly after WWI, when 2 village men returned from 3 years of contracted labor in Rabaul. These two villagers taught the version of Tok Pisin that they had acquired to the other village men. In the years that followed, a number of these men and their male children (who are now the village elders) spent 2 or more years away from Gapun working on plantations or as contracted laborers in Rabaul, Lae or Madang. The last of these laborers returned to the village in the early 1960s, and by this time Tok Pisin was probably firmly planted in Gapun.

Today, everyone in the village understands Tok Pisin, and only 2 old women and 2 women in their 30's do not speak it fluently. In village conversations, Tok Pisin and Taiap are used in constant interplay, in a seemingly arbitrary and unpredictable manner. Tok Pisin words or phrases are suddenly slotted into a stream of Taiap, and Taiap words or phrases will without warning be slipped into a conversation occurring predominantly in Tok Pisin. This can be illustrated by an extract from a conversation between Kokom (about 33 yrs.); her sister Mairum (about 18 yrs.) and Bit, their mother (about 58 yrs.). The three are sitting around a small fire, smoking and chewing betel nut, together with Mbup, an 8 year old niece.

TEXT I

Kokom:	Kokom:
Na yupela wokim wanpela tamwai long papa?	Have you(pl.) made a sago pancake for papa?
Bit: (angrily)	Bit: (angrily)
We paiwood?!	Where's the firewood?! (i.e. With
Ana kape paiwood?! Ana kape tarung?!	what firewood?) Where's the firewood?! Where's the firewood?!
Kokom:	Kokom:
Tarung angude (pointing towards the back of the house) I stap long hap.	Firewood over there. It's over there.
Mairum:	Mairum:
Kokom palu kukuwe. Mi laik kaikai muna kokir bilong mi. Mbup, ŋaŋan spun we?	Kokom bring the plate. I want to eat my roasted sago. Mbup where's my spoon?

Mbup:	Mbup:
Mi no save long spun bilong yu.	I don't know about your spoon.

(Utterances in Taiap and their translations are **Underlined**)

Code switching and this type of language mixing in Gapun varies somewhat with the speech genre (oratory in the men's house, gossip, argument, etc.), and it is affected by factors such as sotting, conversational participants and topic in ways which remain to be determined. What is clear, however, is that the variation in the type and amount of code switching and language mixing is always a variation in degree, not in kind. With the single significant exception of religion[3], no speech genre, domain or topic is impervious to code switching and the type of language mixing seen in Text 1. conversations which appeared to be conducted exclusively in Taiap have been found upon transcription to be studded with Tok Pisin words (usually verbs) declined according to Taiap patterns (e.g. **Grisim-mri-ndak** (flatter-you(pl.) - they(future); `they will flatter you'); **laitim-tu-kun** (light-imperative-her/it)). And Taiap words (usually nouns) are forever finding their way into the villagers' Tok Pisin.

Given such an extremely fluid bilingual situation, it is perhaps not too surprising that a language shift from Taiap to Tok Pisin is underway. At present, the shift is in its initial stages, and manifests itself in the fact that none of the 32 village children aged 1-8 actively uses the village vernacular in verbal interactions. The children either speak, or, in the case of the 1-3 year olds, are clearly on their way to acquiring, Tok Pisin as their first language. These children's passive command of the vernacular appears to be good: children 24 months and older can correctly carry out orders given in the vernacular, and they seem

to react in culturally appropriate ways to narratives told in Taiap. In interactions among themselves, however, these children speak Tok Pisin. And with the exception of occasional short formulaic phrases in Taiap, the children all use Tok Pisin when speaking to their parents and other adults.

The adult villagers are at a loss to explain why children no longer speak the village vernacular. Taiap is universally valued by them as a "sweet" language, essential to know as a villager. There has certainly been no conscious effort on anyone's behalf not to teach their children Taiap, and adults occasionally express great annoyance at the fact that children under 8 do not actively command the vernacular. Furthermore, the blame for this new development is placed squarely on the children. "These kids don't want to learn Taiap", several parents have told me, "They are too "bikhed" (big-headed; stubborn)".

So in Gapun, we are confronted with a rural, fairly isolated community with little out-migration and an as yet insignificant in-migration; a village with little market economy penetration and where the parents all value the vernacular. Yet the village is in the process of shift from the vernacular to Tok Pisin. The question which must ultimately be addressed is of course: why?

Method

Space and the need to gather further data preclude that any definitive answers to that question can be suggested here. What we can do though is examine several factors which seem important in determining **how** the children in Gapun currently are acquiring Tok Pisin as their first language. Before this is done, a word about method is necessary.

The single most important aspect of the method used in this study is that it is specifically designed to focus on the cultural dimensions of language shift. While not denying the importance of

economic and social variables such as market economy penetration or the influx of non-vernacular speakers into the village, it should be stressed that such variables inevitably come to bear on a specific cultural context, and must therefore be examined by taking into account the ways in which they affect, and are interpreted within, that context. This point was recently made by S. Gal in her analysis of language shift on the Austro-Hungarian border. Gal (1979:13) noted that despite their popularity among sociolinguists as explanatory devices, macro-sociological variables such as social or economic change cannot in themselves explain how such variables "enter into speakers' cognitive strategies, their linguistic choices during interaction". Nor can the invocation of such variables to explain language shift satisfactorily account for why groups affected by similar variables do not shift. It is thus necessary to seriously ponder why "there is nothing foreordained about the extinction of a local language in competition with a language of wider currency. For every seemingly "inevitable" element in the pattern there is a countercase to be taken into account" (Dorian 1981:111).

The second methodological caveat to be made here is that in Gapun, and, I would imagine, in most of Papua New Guinea, the language shift currently underway is in its incipient stages: the first generation of non-vernacular speakers is now being raised. This situation contrasts with those described in most of the literature on language shift, which is heavily weighted towards the end result of the shift, when the `death' of the weaker language is looming ominously large. Language shift, however, must begin at some point, and in many communities in contemporary Papua New Guinea researchers are provided with excellent opportunities to document the initial processes through which macro-sociological and historical changes are suffused into a people's perceptions and verbal behavior in such a way that for the first time children do not end up learning the native language of their parents.

With these two points in mind, it can now be stated that the methods used in this study of language shift are heavily weighted towards the recording and analysis of caregiver-child verbal interactions. The publications of the linguist-anthropologists S.B. Heath, E. Ochs and B. Schieffelin have all been especially influential on the shape and goals of this study, because in their works (see e.g. Heath 1983, Ochs and Schieffelin 1984), these three scholars elegantly demonstrate that language socialization processes are a priori processes in which cultural knowledge and perceptions are transmitted to children. Their ma'n point is that a group's beliefs and expectations surrounding behavior, language, children, etc. cannot be treated as mere `context' and overlooked by researchers studying the development of language in children, as has been the case until recently. They urge that linguists and anthropologists problematize the language learning `context' and examine the ways in which different cultural beliefs and expectations influence what sort of language is directed at and acquired by children. In a situation such as that in Gapun where language shift is occurring, we are particularly interested in exploring the ways in which specific cultural beliefs and expectations influence <u>what</u> language gets directed at and acquired by children.

Consequently, I have chosen to work intensively with 5 families in Gapun, each of which included a child between the ages of 18-31 months at the onset of this study. Each of the 5 families also includes older, and with one exception, younger children as well; so in addition to the 18-31 months olds, I am also able to observe and record verbal interactions between parents and their babies and older children. The following table presents a brief profile of the children in this study:

child's name	Sex	Birthdate	Mother's Native Lang.	Father's Native Lang.	Education Mother's	Father's
Bini	M	25.11.83	Kopar	Taiap	grade 6	grade 1
Sakoko	M	10.8.83	Taiap	Taiap	grade 6	grade 6
Basama	F	23.11.84	Taiap	Taiap	-	-
Aioma	F	2.8.83	Taiap	Taiap	-	grade 6
Masepo	F	31.4.84	Taiap	Aion	grade 6	grade 6

These children have been selected on the basis of their ages and on the basis of the linguistic and educational profiles of their parents. These profiles are representative of the present linguistic and educational makeup of Gapun, where a majority of the parents with small children are both native speakers of Taiap, and where a majority of these parents also are "grade 6 leavers".

At present, I spend 2-3 full days each week in the company of one of the above children and whoever happens to be around him or her during the course of the day. For the most part I sit as unobtrusively as possible in a corner of the child's house and observe, making notes about the child's routines and about his/her verbal and non-verbal behavior. During the course of the 2-3 days, I record and keep detailed contextual notes on extended verbal interactions in which the child features. The goal is to record from 1.5 - 3 hours of speech for each child per month. To date a total of 19 hours of speech have been recorded, and 13 hours of those 19 have been transcribed with the help of the child's mother and/or father. These recordings, and the observations made during my days spent with the children and their caregivers constitute the data base from which the following hypotheses about the language situation in Gapun have been generated.

Data and Discussion

To return now to how the children in Gapun are acquiring Tok Pisin as their first language, it appears as though 3 factors in particular are especially significant. These are:

1. The `unbounded' bilingualism of caregivers
2. the role that children play in the language acquisition of other children
3. tolerance of linguistic diversity in the village and in the home

1. `Unbounded' Bilingualism

The relatively free-flowing and loosely structured manner in which Taiap and Tok Pisin co-exist in Gapun has already been exemplified in Text I and briefly discussed. The continual intersplicing of these two languages is not checked when children speak or are spoken to; no effort is made to keep Tok Pisin and Taiap separate. As a result, children in the village are presented with a wide variety of linguistic forms which they must learn to sort out, interpret and respond to correctly. In the following example, Basama (18 months) is sitting near the hearth by Angara, her mother. A few minutes earlier, Angara had handed a plate of sago to Masambe, her husband, who is sitting nearby. Now Angara is sitting swishing water around in an empty sago pot.

TEXT II

1	Angara:	Angara:
	Sia. na ruru sene ia kir-	Sia (exclamataion). **These**
	aoumbri wakare. Endekare,	**2 kids** here I **just don't**
	endekare. (turns to Basama)	**know. Hungry, hungry.**
	Mm. Basama. Kisim spun i go	(turns to Basama) Mm.
	givim papa (handing B. a	Basama. Take this spoon
	spoon) Spun. (points spoon	and go give to Papa.

at Masambe) Papa. Kirap nau. (attempts to lift B. to her feet) Ap. Kirap. Kirap.

(handing B. a spoon) Spoon. (points spoon at Masambe) Papa. Get up now (attempts to lift B. to her feet) Up. Get up. Get up.

Masambe: **ndakukuwe**

Masambe: **Bring it now**

Angara: (lifting B. to her feet): Aop.

Angara: (lifting B. to her feet): Uup.

(Basama walks over to Masambe with the spoon and hands it to him)

Masambe: (taking spoon) Ta. (Basama goes back and stands near Angara) **Taa kukuwe** (said to B., who doesn't respond)

Masambe: (taking spoon) Thanks. (Basama goes back and stands near Angara) **Bring the knife** (said to B., who doesn't respond)

Angara: (looking at B.) **Taa**. Naip. Naip.

Angara: (looking at B.) **Knife**. Knife. Knife.

Masambe: (pointing to the floor near B.'s feet) Em ia.

Masambe: (pointing to the floor near B's feet) There it is.

Angara: Kisim **taa**

Angara: Take the **knife**

	Masambe:	Masambe:
	(pointing) Klostu long lek bilong yu. Em i stap. (B. looks at the knife, then at M.) Em. Kisim kam.	(pointing) close to your leg. There it is. (B looks at the knife, then at M) Yeah. Take it and come.
25	**Angide tarak kukuwe.**	**Take that and come.**
	Angara:	Angara:
	(picks up the knife, points at Masambe with it) Uh. Papanana. (pushes knife towards B) Taa, taa. Em	(picks up the knife, points at Masambe with it) Uh. **For** papa. (pushes knife towards B) **Knife, knife.**
30	ia, naip ia. **Angode, taa** angode. **Taa**. Kisim.	Here, knife here. **Here,** knife here. Knife. Take it.
	(Basama takes the knife from Angara, walks over to Masambe and hands it to him)	
	Masambe: eh. eh.	Masambe: eh. eh.

(Utterances in Taiap and their translations are underlined)

In this short interaction, we see that Taiap and Tok Pisin are indeed mixed in a manner reminiscent of Text I above. Both parents use both languages when speaking to Basama, and mixings such as "kisim taa" (take **the knife**) and "papanana" (**for** papa) are present in Angara's speech to the child.

Note however that both languages are used in slightly different proportions and manners. Angara switches from the vernacular to Tok Pisin when directly addressing Basama, employing an extemely common strategy that parents quite unconsciously use when speaking to young children and babies. Even the women in the

village who do not speak fluent Tok Pisin tend to switch to the language when talking to small children. In Gapun, the younger a child is, the more likely it is that s/he will be addressed in Tok Pisin. Teenagers and children over 8 are especially prone to switch to Tok Pisin when speaking to children younger than themselves.

In Text II, note also that the way in which Angara and Masambe use Tok Pisin suggests that they both consider that Basama commands that language better than Taiap. With the exception of Masambe's formulaic command "ndakukuwe" (bring it now), the first half of the interaction, concerning the spoon, is conducted by Angara entirely in Tok Pisin. In the second half of the interaction, the Taiap word taa is treated as a new word. Basama's failure to respond to Masambe's request for the knife is interpreted by Angara as a failure to comprehend what is being asked for, and she defines taa for the child by giving its Tok Pisin equivalent, in a curt, impatient tone which implies that Basama should know by now that taa is another word for "naip" (line 16). Talk about the knife, in this case its location, is also conducted in Tok Pisin.

The point here is that while the fluid manner with which adults use Taiap and Tok Pisin with each other is carried over to their speech to young children, there appear to be certain conventions underlying the ways in which the two languages are used with children. The fact that caregivers and older children very often switch from Taiap to predominantly Tok Pisin when addressing young children indicates that they regard Tok Pisin as being somehow more appropritate for children than the vernacular.

Although no villager has stated so explicitly, a reasonable guess is that Tok Pisin is viewed in Gapun as a simpler language than Taiap; one easier for children to learn and use. Recall that Taiap has a regional reputation as being an especially "hard" language. Villagers in Gapun, while not so adamant about that point as their neighbors are, nevertheless privately agree that Taiap's

"2 language" structure does make it "a little bit hard", at least compared to other languages with which they are familiar.

This perception of their vernacular as difficult is coupled with an adult appreciation of a child's limited processing and productive capabilities, and an occasional willingness on their part to modify their language when speaking to children. In Text II, Angara's abbreviated syntax ("Spun. Papa") and her repetition of key words ("Taa. Naip. Naip.") are features that adults sometimes use when speaking to small children and babies. Just how much and how frequently adults alter their speech to accomodate small children in this way is still not known, but Angara is certainly somewhat extreme in this regard[4]. Other village adults modify their speech much less extensively and frequently than she does, and no parent, not even Angara, makes any attempt to consistently modify their speech to children. There does however appear to be a consensus among adults that a child masters certain sounds and words before others, and that repetitions and simplifications in their own speech are sometimes desirable so that the child will understand what is being spoken about or asked for.

It would seem that the above two factors are currently working to reinforce one another, and that Tok Pisin, by virtue of its perceived relative simplicity, has assumed the role of a `baby-code' that adults effortlessly slip into when talking to small children. This interpretation is supported by the fact that even when adults do use Taiap when speaking to children, the Taiap utterances are very frequently immediately preceeded or followed by direct translations into Tok Pisin. This occurs several times in Text II (lines 16, 24-25, 29-30), and seems to be a way of making sure that the child understands what is being asked of her or him.

2. The role that children play in the language acquisition of other children

That parents use a great deal of Tok Pisin when speaking to their children cannot in itself sufficiently account for why the children are not acquiring Taiap. As we have seen above, the vernacular language is by no means absent in adult speech to children, and in the village, children constantly hear both languages spoken around them.

An additional factor which appears to be crucial in the village children's acquisition of Tok Pisin is the role that other children play in the language socialization process. What is beginning to emerge from my observations and data is that children in Gapun acquire and learn to use language principally through interactions with their older siblings and other children and not through interactions with their parents.

One reason for this is that adults in Gapun do not appear to regard small children as appropriate conversational partners. Fathers in the village say very little to babies until they are about 24 months old and talking. Mothers occasionally repeat an infant's babbling while engaging in face play with the child, but these interactions seldom last more than 30 seconds at a time. As children grow older and begin imitating the sounds they hear around them, mothers sometimes tell them to call out the name of a relative seen walking by the house, and they ask the child "what?" when s/he says something the mother doesn't understand. No particular effort is made to get the child to respond, however, and if the child doesn't call out to her relative or repeat her utterance in response to the mother's "what?", then the matter is invariably dropped. Thus while village parents talk to their children, they neither encourage nor necessarily expect their children to answer them. We saw evidence of this in Text II, where at no point is any verbal response from Basama requested or,

judging from the lack of anticipatory pauses, expected by either parent.

On the backs and in the laps of other children however, babies and small children are frequently the objects of extensive verbal play. Older siblings, especially girls, can amuse themselves and their infant charges for up to 20 minutes at a time with songs and word play. In the following example, Bao (6 years old) is sitting alone with her sister Mbwira (7 months) on the porch of their house.

Text III

Bao: (bounding Mbwira up and down on her lap)

...bús mangi bús mangi	...búsh kid búsh kid
bús mangi bús bús músh	búsh kid búsh búsh músh
músh búsh yu búsh	músh búsh you búsh
mangi búsh mangi yu	kid búsh kid you
búsh mangi músh músh	búsh kid músh músh
búsh mangi músh músh	búsh kid músh músh

(seeing their older sister Yapa emerging from the bush, Bao slaps Mbwira lightly on the face and points to Yapa)

Yapa ia Yapa ia em ia em ia	Yapa here Yapa here her here
em ia Yapa tata ia lukim tata	her here her here Yapa older
Yapa apa apa apa em ia Yapa	sibling here look older
Bapa ba pa pa pa pa	sibling Yapa apa apa apa her here Yapa Bapa ba pa pa pa pa

(Bao puts Mbwira belly down on the floor and spanks her bottom to the rythm of:)

yu sindaún sindaún sindaún sindaún	you sit down sit down sit down sit down

(Lays Mbwira across her lap)

Nau bai yu slip. Sip sip bebi. Bebi! Sip sip sip. Bebi! Bobi bobi bebu bubu wo wo wo wo wo wo...	Now you will sleep. Seep seep baby. Baby! Seep seep seep. Baby! Bobi bobi bebe bubu wo wo wo wo wo wo...

This particular interaction lasted for 15 minutes, and engaged Mbwira both physically and verbally in ways that I have not observed occurring between adults and children. Although Mbwira remained silent for most of this interaction, the babbling sounds of babies and young children are fequently incorporated into such play, providing new frameworks for the older child's rhymes and songs. As they grow older and begin talking, young children increasingly join in and initiate this kind of verbal play with their older and younger siblings and playmates.

The frequency and length of these types of interactions indicate that a greater part of the village childrens' direct verbal input and their opportunities to creatively use and develop language occurs when they are in the company of other children. As far as the consequences of this type of interactional pattern for the acquisition of Tok Pisin are concerned, it is of no small importance that a child's older sibling playmates use almost exclusively Tok Pisin in all their verbal interactions. Even in the company of adults these older siblings play an important role in the children's acquisition of Tok Pisin, in that they frequently

translate parental utterances in Taiap into Tok Pisin for the younger child.

3. Tolerance of linguistic diversity

A third major factor supporting the village children's acquisition of Tok Pisin as their first language is the extemely tolerant attitude that prevails in Gapun towards linguistic diversity in the village and in the home. In caregiver-child interactions, this tolerance manifests itself in a willingness to allow children to talk to caregivers in Tok Pisin, even when the latter have addressed the children in Taiap.

With the exception of rare, sudden, short-lived bursts of anger at a child's lack of response in the vernacular, no parent condemns their childrens' speech or makes any special effort to get them speaking Taiap. Instead, they generally accommodate children by switching predominantly to Tok Pisin themselves once the child spoken to has answered in that language. Only when a parent wishes to "hide talk" from a non-villager will s/he firmly continue speaking to the child in the vernacular. If the child fails to respond, the parent will in this case either drop the matter or turn to another child.

This type of toleration of linguistic diversity is almost certainly an ingredient in any language shift situation. The reasons behind such toleration will however vary for different groups. Why are Gapun parents so willing to accept linguistic diversity in their own households?

I suspect that two important cultural attitudes are working together here. The first of these is the villagers' conception of children as having very strong wills. The most commonly heard complaint about children in the village is that they have "heads" (hed- Tok Pisin/kok-ir-Taiap.) Exasperated mothers and fathers frequently decry the "heads" of their children, which are held to be "big" or "strong", and which are considered to be quite

disinclined to follow parental orders. A child's first word is generally thought to be ok-i (go-future; i.e. `I'm leaving now'). This word, which I have heard attributed to children as young as 4 months, reflects the adult notion that children will go where they want and do what they want, regardless of the wishes of their parents.

Because they have "heads", parents in Gapun do not consider that their children can be forced to obey them. Parents will nag and even threaten, but only rarely does a child's refusal to carry out a certain task (a refusal usually signalled by a growled "mi les!" (I'm tired; i.e. I don't want to), or by the child's running away) provoke the parent to pressing the child to obey. Almost always, the parent will turn to another child or available person to complete the task at hand, or he or she will do it him/herself. Non-obedient children (especially girls) are sometimes smacked hard by their mothers with tongs or a handy piece of firewood, but this is more an expression of anger on the mother's behalf than an effort to get the child to carry out an order, since the smacked child will inevitably run away screaming crying or sit down screaming crying, leaving the mother to carry out the task herself or enlist somebody else to do it.

As regards language, the point here is that given this particular conception of children, it would be culturally impossible for parents to suddenly decide to impose their own wills on the kids and `make' them speak Taiap. Children in Gapun do what they want, and parental pressure is at best only temporarily effective. Indeed, as was noted above, the "big" heads of the village children are cited by parents as the real reason behind the current demise of the vernacular.

The second factor contributing to the parental toleration of linguistic diversity is the fact that such diversity has always existed to some extent in the lives of the villagers. In-marrying men and women have always made up a small percentage of the village

population, and contacts with relatives and friends in nearby villages have always provided Gapuners with abundant opportunities to learn and use other languages. In the past, multilingualism in other vernacular languages was a necessity for the people of Gapun, since nobody else spoke their vernacular. Thus every villager over 30 understands at least one other vernacular language in addition to Taiap, and many of them speak 2 or 3 additional vernaculars reasonably well. In fact, the villagers prided themselves in knowing other people's languages - the village elders tell how their founding ancestor spoke the languages of the ancestors of other villages, and how they now must follow his lead and become multilingual. Since the consolidation of Tok Pisin in the area as a lingua franca, the need to know other vernaculars has dissipated, and few villagers under 25 actively command a second vernacular language. But again, in their dealings with in-marrying individuals and with people from other villages, the people of Gapun have become quite accustomed to dealing with a high degree of linguistic diversity. That their own children should now present them with a similar type of diversity does not strike parents as particularly strange or worthy of censure. Instead of pondering or condemning the diversity, parents simply adjust their own speech patterns to accommodate it, as they and their ancestors have done in similar situations in the past.

Conclusion

It thus appears that the toleration of linguistic diversity, the prominent role that children play in the language socialization of other children, and the fluid, `unbounded' bilingual nature of the villagers' speech are all combining to reinforce one another in Gapun, thereby paving the way for the further spread of Tok Pisin into the community's verbal repertoire, at the expense of the vernacular. We cannot know at present whether the current language shift will result in the rapid death of Taiap. It is not impossible

that the present generation of non-vernacular speakers will increasingly learn to activate their passive knowledge of the language, and that they will eventually succeed in speaking it and in transmitting it to their own children. What has in fact already occurred however is a shift in language acquisition patterns: for the first time ever, children born and raised in Gapun are not acquiring Taiap as their first language. This shift in acquisition is being accepted; indeed, facilitated by adults, despite their firmly stated wishes that their children speak the vernacular. But given the dominant cultural view of children as having "heads" resistent to parental pressure, and taking into account the bilingualism of the village adults and their willingness to adapt their speech to accommodate others, it seems unlikely that children will ever be confronted with serious, consistent demands to speak Taiap. As for the children, their relationship with their friends and relatives in the village are by the age of 8 firmly established in Tok Pisin. One can doubt whether these children will have any significant reason in the future to alter the linguistic basis of these relationships.

In addition to the above aspects of the present situation in Gapun, other factors also point to the imminent demise of the vernacular. My own preliminary surveys and the reports of others (Foley 1986:28) indicate that language shift to Tok Pisin is currently underway among groups throughout the entire lower Sepik area, affecting languages much larger than Taiap. Also, the present group of village children now speaking only Tok Pisin will soon be going to school, where English is the language used inside the classroom and Tok Pisin the language used outside. Demographic factors such as the extremely small size of Taiap, increasing numbers of exogamous marriages, and the villagers' wish for further incorporation into the market economy all point to a rather dark future for the Taiap language.

If the focus of this paper has turned away from social, economic and demographic variables such as those just listed, the intention, as stated earlier, has not been to deny their significance. Rather, the goal has been to highlight the cultural and sociolinguistic context in which those variables impinge and interact. The next step in the analysis must be to explore the interstices of these various facets of the language shift situation and account for why the shift is occurring now, and not 20 years ago or 20 years hence. The answer to that question is now being researched as this study continues.

NOTES

1. At the time of the writing of this paper, I have been in the field for a total of 4 months. Fieldwork is funded by grants from the Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation with Developing Countries (SAREG) and the Swedish Research Council for the Human and Social Science (HSFR). The author gratefully acknowledges the financial support of these institutions.
2. 1 Kina is worth slightly more than 1 US Dollar.
3. The Gapun villagers are Catholic and have been so, nominally at least, since before WWII. Everything having to do with Catholicism - mass, private prayer, talk about religion, etc. - is conducted exclusively in Tok Pisin.
4. Angara and her husband Masambe even supplied me with a `baby talk´ vocabulary consisting of the following items:

Normal Taiap	`Baby talk´ version	Meaning
yew-ir	pipi	`defecate´
atukun	maka	`eat´
mborsip	sisi	`pig meat´
min	mimi	`breast´

mambrag	mamak	`devil´
nok	soso	`pee´
gomar	mar	`fish´
yamingi	amei	`egg´

It is not at all certain that these words are actually used in the village. In her spontaneous speech to Basama, I have only heard Angara use one item in this list (pipi), and that only once. I have never heard any other adult using any of these reduced forms with their small children. As far as I am able to tell, the adult forms are always used. I have heard hundreds of "Min atukun" (suck; literally eat, the breast), but never one "Mimi maka" (eat the breast, reduced form). The same is true for the other items on the list.

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