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A Fat Sow Named Skulfi: 'Expensive' Words in Dobu Island Society

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Introduction

In this chapter, I argue that words for valuable objects and practices are a useful starting point to study the dynamics of change at the grassroots level. Innovative and creative strategies of dealing with globalisation do not seem to fit into categories like gift and commodity, old and new, individualistic and communal. I propose to focus here on the realisation of contemporary economic behaviour and the dilemmas that are confronted by strategic choices of vocabulary. My example explores a case of not-giving in order to demonstrate how Dobu Islanders assign value to certain words and the interactions that are associated with them.¹ Knowledge of old exchange principles remains valuable when it is adaptable to new demands, and new demands are continuously emerging from the ever-intensifying contact with the global economy. Language needs frequent

¹ Fieldwork on Dobu Island was carried out from 1992–94 and in 1997. This text greatly profited from a presentation at the 2008 European Society for Oceanists (ESfO) conference in the session on 'Expensive words', organised by me. I am grateful for the participants' inspiring contributions and the discussion. I also want to thank Michael Young, Gediminas Lankauskas, and the reviewers for their 'expensive' comments.

updating in terminology and as words are assigned more or less value, they reflect dynamics of moral and economic aspects of life that help us understand the ‘Tides of Innovation’.

David Graeber, in *Towards an Anthropology of Value*, notes that the word ‘value’ has been used in three ways in social theory: as appropriate moral standards (values); as the measure of an object’s worth; and as a linguistic category that refers to meaningful difference (2001: 2). In this chapter, I will further explore the meaning of value in an ethnographic case study from Dobu Island, Papua New Guinea. In Dobu’s ‘gift economy’, the three types of ‘value’ overlap and blend: moral standards (goodness, *bobo‘ana*), economic value (heaviness, *mwau*) and linguistic categories of distinction (big versus small) are all used as strategies to deal with valuables.

In Dobu, the term *mwau* first of all refers to any kind of heaviness, weight, burden, difficulty, including pregnancy. ‘Hard work’ (*paisewa mwauna*) is the key to wealth, prestige and, ultimately, fame. The concept of ‘work’ (*paisewa*) includes notions of good moral conduct, of self-discipline, generosity and obedience (Kuehling 2005). The term ‘heaviness’ (*mwau*) has been further explored by Nancy Munn on Gawa Island. There, *mwaw* (a cognate of *mwau*) refers to a body that is heavy from excessive eating (1986: 75) or weakened due to a lack of food (86); it carries the undertone of grief (170), slow motion, illness, sleep (75–76) and food that cannot be eaten but must be shared (96). This strong connotation of hardship is evident on Dobu too; for example, in the concept that the mind/inside, *nua*, can be heavy (*nuamwau* means sadness, see Kuehling 2005: 288). In regard to value, this association seems surprising, but I believe that people imagine a person responsible for exchanging valuable objects is weighted down by the burden, slowed down in the attempt to take the right steps, needing to work hard in spite of feeling unwell, and constantly worried about the envy and criticism of others.

Value, as expressed in terms of heaviness, is an activity (working hard), an emotion (a ‘heavy heart’, as English speakers would say), as well as an unhealthy and endangered condition of the physical body. Objects that can create such a state are valuable, ambiguously desired and feared. A pregnant woman fears complications but values the baby that she is growing in a similar way as a lineage elder may fear sorcery attacks but

nevertheless works hard to receive a precious *kula*² valuable. Large yams are the most valuable exchange item for women, yet space allows only a brief examination of this complex topic. For a similar reason, I will not engage in the complex debate on the value of *kula* shells here but focus instead on pigs, the other component of the category of *une*, valuables that are ‘worth dying for’, as people say. The value of a pig is quite easily judged as its height is measured on one’s body (‘up to here’, pointing at the knee or thigh) and its age according to the shape of its canines (‘the teeth came out that far’).

By reflecting on moral dilemmas in the reality of producing, distributing and consuming a pig in the Dobu region, I will show that people creatively blend old and new principles, mostly constructing their actions around forms of give-and-take that are morally accepted. The use of certain words appears as a prominent strategy to this end that I will explore here in some detail.

The social and economic value of ‘expensive’ words, as such vocabulary is referred to in Milne Bay English, has been described as closely linked to notions of secrecy, of magical formulas, occult names and powerful chants. Recent studies have pointed out the special role of powerful vocabulary for a number of non-Austronesian language groups (e.g. Crook 2007; Evans 2009; Goldman 1983; Keen 1994; Robbins 2012; Weiner 2001; Whitehouse 1994). I will here add an Austronesian perspective to this ongoing discussion. Annette Weiner has argued that in the Trobriand Islands:

Words have their own power; in terms of conflict, words are more ominous and therefore ultimately more powerful than objects. Words, unlike objects, directly and immediately challenge the balance between control and personal autonomy’ (Weiner 1976: 214).

Here, Weiner refers to spoken words of magic in the Trobriand Islands, but not only magical words are effective. In fact, words can be seen as more powerful than objects, especially when words alone are likely to be too emotional and potentially socially damaging. In such cases, it is more appropriate to veil feelings and words of anger in a gift. Weiner tells us that in Kiriwina, ‘anger can always be expressed in yams’ (1984: 172). In Dobu, likewise, there is a proverb, ‘Who gives something of high value

2 *Kula* is a complex, ongoing gift exchange system that encompasses more than 30 islands and six distinct languages.

may speak out', referring to occasions of exchange where aggression and anger may be expressed while the donor literally throws a valuable towards the receiver. Typically, these gifts are combinations of precious shell ornaments (*bagi* and *mwali*), large yam tubers (*bebai*), and pork (*bawe*), and the terms for these valuable objects and the gifts they constitute together are 'expensive',³ like 'pearl' would be an expensive word to most people in Milne Bay Province.

In my earlier work on ethics of exchange (Kuehling 2005), I argued that names for gifts are a useful starting point for social analysis because they provide a local charter for exchange behaviour. An approach to this complex subject through language seems appropriate in the light of local constructions of words as 'powerful, strong' (*waiwai-*), 'difficult to understand' (*mwau-*), 'big or long' (*sinabwa-*) or, in the islanders' use of Milne Bay English, 'expensive'. Some words for special objects receive their value from the object, like 'pearl', and these words adjust quickly to the needs and desires of the time. Another category of 'expensive' words refers to larger, more abstract concepts, like 'Amen' to prayer or 'degree' to education. These words need not be deeply understood but they are necessary to claim membership or display competence. The secret knowledge of names, objects and places, passed on as an honour, a repayment of services or as a sign of love are apt examples for this category. Other words are regarded as 'expensive' because they are long and only partially understood, clustered as modern formulas of power, replacing spells and memorised genealogies. These are political buzz words like 'development', 'infrastructure', 'sustainability' and 'global warming', 'shareholder' or 'capacity building'. Greek-based words like 'sophisticated', and Latin-based terms like 'descendants' are equally 'expensive' and seen as evidence for higher education (which is, quite literally, expensive, due to school fees and related costs). A third kind of term is 'expensive' because of its semantic link to 'hard work'. On Dobu Island, the villagers' local names for gifts are conceptualised in this way; such words are 'expensive' because they constitute exclusive knowledge that takes 'hard work' (social investment) to acquire.

In this chapter, I restrict myself to pigs and objects of the global economy as examples for this category. Focusing on words without their syntagmatic context may appear old-fashioned, but space does not permit such

3 In order to clarify that the word 'expensive' refers to the Milne Bay English expression, it will appear in italics.

analysis. The power of words ultimately hinges upon broader concepts of language use (see Brenneis and Myers 1984; Brison 1992; Watson-Gegeo and White 1990; Weiner 1984). Clearly, negotiations of value and the rhetorical skills employed deserve more attention, but I am not concerned with speech acts here and I focus on terms that carry value because they are constructed as part of the signified ('the same' in the Maussian sense, see Weiner 1976: 173). I will argue that such words have the capacity to exemplify local strategies of adjustment to new values that are washed ashore by the tides of change.

By telling the story of a pig that I bought for a feast in 1993, I will first demonstrate how today's economic needs can successfully build on principles from pre-capitalist days, providing both social profit and economic benefit. Elaborating on this case, I will move to a more general discussion of the economic, linguistic and social value of terms for gifts on Dobu Island. In contemporary Dobu, morals, gifts and obligations are challenged by family demands and the islanders' personal needs for modern goods and services. Strategies of value generation, from social capital to financial profit, provide a wider halo of context of local economies and they affect the handling of money and pigs on Dobu. Such strategies, encoded in language and audibly presented in face-to-face discourse, suggest more continuity in moral terms than my informants would have admitted to when they complained to me about 'money becoming too big'. While the growing importance of monetary exchanges is undeniable and obvious in my story, the happy ending shows how global and local valuables cannot be conceptualised as 'different' when they are ultimately used for the same purposes.

Vignette: The story of Skulfi, my fat sow

Pigs are an indispensable element of affinal exchanges. Most households raise one or two of them, which live in small pigsties and are fed by all family members with coconut, food scraps and leftovers. A pig has an individual owner and responds to its name; it is treated well until it is time to become an item of exchange. At that time, a senior member of the owner's matrilineage will request it to be returned in the form of pork when the opportunity arrives. Pigs are raised for the sole purpose of exchange because, as a rule, people do not eat their own pigs. 'It would be like eating a relative', people say. And yet, when pigs are killed the meat is

redistributed so that all can eat the delicacy, causing my teenage ‘brother’ to sigh ‘people shall die so that we can eat pork!’ when he was tired of little bony fish and canned Spam.

Preparing for a feast involves searching for pigs—a difficult task if one’s network of exchange partners is too loosely woven, as I learned in 1993 while trying to buy one as a contribution to my family’s large mortuary (*sagali*) feast. In preparation for the feast, all adults were told to contribute a pig. Some families had raised piglets in anticipation of the event but others had to get them through their exchange networks. Of course, lacking the skills, networks and means for other forms of exchange, I was expected to pay money and I had not expected that it would be difficult to purchase a pig in a region where cash is always short. To my surprise, though, people were not willing to sell their pigs, explaining apologetically that their pig was raised for a specific purpose, such as a feast, or as a return gift. The term for such an exchange is *utua bawena*—to exchange a pig for a pig. Many times I was informed that so-and-so’s pig was only for *utuwa bawena*. ‘This pig is for my “fathers”’; ‘This pig is already promised to my uncle for his *kula* partner’; ‘This pig will be given to my in-laws’.

As time was running short it was with great relief that I learned about Skulfi, the fat sow, earmarked to raise school fees for the children of her owner. My Dobuan family was happy to have that pig and after I had purchased enough fuel we went by boat to meet the woman who had raised Skulfi. I was curious about the name and she told me that the name of the sow had prevented her from being exchanged in the old, non-profit, reciprocal ways in spite of the high demand for pigs. Now, she said, she was very pleased to sell the pig to me, in fact, she expressed her relief that she did not have to continue ‘building a fence around’ Skulfi by denying her relatives their right to use this pig in affinal exchanges. Not that she sold Skulfi to a stranger, though, because I was a ‘child’ of my ‘mother’s’ husband Thomas and, as my classificatory ‘fathers’, the family was inclined to assist in the preparations for the feast and entitled to receive a share of the distributed food.

Skulfi, the woman proudly told me, had escaped numerous obligations of *utua bawena* (swapping pigs in a delayed manner) because she was classified by her name as reserved for *mani bawena* (to exchange a pig for money), a new term built on old principles. This pig was not under the authority of the elders, it was not used for affinal relationship-building but it was

reconstructed as a valuable of individual ownership by using methods of the gift exchange practice. Skulfi, as I realised, was an investment to support the next generation to learn the skills needed to thrive in a global economy. Her owner was showing outstanding managerial skills and advertising strategies by using old principles for new contexts, waiting patiently for someone who had money and needed a pig.

At the *sagali* feast, after my brother had butchered Skulfi for me, I had to give pieces of meat and yam tubers to a large number of people. Since I was not familiar with the finer details of distribution (e.g. it was impolite to use most people's names), I had prepared a list of appropriate shouts, e.g. 'namesake, here is your gift—namesake from Mwemweyala!' but my voice did not carry far enough and while my 'mothers' helped me, their brother helped himself to some of the meat that I was clearly unable to distribute fast enough. Later, my 'mothers' joked about that incident and their brother's greed. The previous owner of Skulfi received a large gift from her brother's wife and a smaller gift from me. She could not eat Skulfi but it was easy to swap the pieces of meat and on that night many people had a sumptuous dinner with pork. I shared Skulfi's filet mignon (which is classified as 'intestines' and therefore not part of the distribution) with Patrick Glass, a British colleague who visited from the neighbouring island.

An economic dilemma, elegantly solved by naming a pig after a gift

Skulfi is an example for the creative adaptation of old principles of exchange. Naming an object classifies it as a gift for a certain purpose, for example in mortuary ritual and *kula* (see Kuehling 2005). The name Skulfi, in this sense, politely explained why this pig could only be sold for cash that would be given to the school's headmaster. It is a path (*eda*), a charter for the object that its owner has set up—a clever strategy for the typical situation of senior people's need for pigs for affinal exchanges. By making it well known that this pig was a school fee, the substance of the animal was metaphorically changed into cash, as names are felt to be deeply connected to their owners (Fortune 1963 [1932]: 100).

The case of Skulfi illustrates, I believe, how the islanders have merged the opposing forces of reciprocity and profit, of *kastom* and market, thereby creating new forms of exchange based on old principles. The desire for expensive objects and services, the need for cash and the conflicting pressures of sharing, keeping, investing and hiding have resulted in a series of rising and declining ‘expensive’ words. As schooling became free of fees for public schools in 2013, the word school fee (*skulfi*) will likely be evaluated differently in the near future. This leads us to the dynamics of value. I will next provide a wider context of ‘expensive’ words in Dobu, providing a historical frame that shows dynamics of inflation and revaluation. It is from this pool of knowledge that the owner of Skulfi had drawn the inspiration to try the strategy of naming the pig after its purpose (or imaginary substance).

Since pre-capitalist terms for gifts have clearly defined meanings that appear everlasting, they are valuable in their function as charter, a form of legal evidence. Terms for specific exchanges provide a clear definition of the correct return gift. When presenting their gift, people never fail to inform the audience of the term for it. Until today, the knowledge of a good number of these terms is a requisite for successful exchange, for a reliable network of exchange partners and, ultimately, for a ‘big name’—for the right to speak out in public. In the past, affinal exchanges were the ‘social glue’ of the island, requiring complex ritual with various kinds of gifts (See Table 1). From the time a couple began to have sex until the year after the second partner had died, gifts were important markers of the relations between the two matrilineages that are connected by these affinal bonds. Today, only burial rites are deemed essential and even these are increasingly reduced to a ‘small *kaikai*’ (*masula gidalina*) (see Schram 2007 for such changes in a nearby Normanby Island community). Due to a lack of practise, some of the terms are losing significance and the repertoire of economic strategies shrinks.

The name of a gift clearly states the role of the giver in the exchange ritual and thereby defines the appropriate counter-gift, expressing the ongoing cooperation between groups. Typically spoken by old men who are the senior members of their matrilineage, terms like *utua bawena* (to swap pigs) stand for significant exchanges, synonymous with ‘hard work’ (*paisewa*), which may, for example, confer gardening rights and allow the giver a moment of superiority: the right to speak out. ‘Expensive’ words are

powerful—they gain their special value by being restricted knowledge—available only to those who have earned it. The words change as new values and valuables appear and others fade.

In the past, ‘expensive’ words usually belonged to senior individuals’ portfolios of myths and magic spells. The meaning of such words was partly orally transmitted and not ‘understood’, or further enriched and contextualised by the lived experiences of complex exchange events in various roles. These senior people worked hard to spread word of their capability, trying to achieve fame through complex exchange sequences that were continued over decades and embraced the wider region. The names of spirits, persons, places and *kula* valuables were not available for everybody to know. Being competent in local exchanges entailed the knowledge of ritual, including the order of gifts and the etiquette of reciprocity. Fame, social profit, as well as material benefits were the perks of ‘expensive’ knowledge; after all, who would dare to challenge you if it was widely known that you practise sorcery?

Personal names can be compared to names of gifts, especially those that explain land rights, like the names of ancestors and plots of garden land. In his analysis of Trobriand land litigation, Edwin Hutchins reports that ‘a defense of rights in land is accomplished by presenting an account of the history of the land: a digest of its movement through social space. This movement is marked by events: exchanges of valuables, lifelong gardening relationship, deathbed proclamations, and the like’ (1990: 413). Knowing the story of a piece of land gives land claims more plausibility and such ‘expensive knowledge’ may be kept by a lineage elder until the last moment of life as insurance for loving care by the relatives.

Unlike public names, nicknames, and terms for mundane, ‘small’ (*gidali*-) concepts and objects that are known and used by everybody, some personal names can only be used within the matrilineage and not at all during the time between death and the final mortuary feast for a person of that name (Kuehling 2005: 268). The secret names of spirits, plants and formulas are only passed on when the potential heir has demonstrated his or her eagerness, intelligence and subservience over many years by being helpful in all kinds of matters. Such names for gifts, land, spirits or ancestors are ‘expensive’ because they are clearly defined and closely linked to hard work, but value can also come from the unknown, exotic, desirable. In such cases, ‘expensive’ words do not need to have a meaning or to make sense. Magical formulas are an exchange item in this multilingual region, and there are many spells and special words that a Dobu speaker

cannot understand. Magic seemingly ‘works’ on a phonetic rather than semantic level, as in ‘Abracadabra’—an ‘expensive’ word to the audience of a circus magician who utters it as he produces the bunny from his top hat (Malinowski 1935: 213). Since such words are still regarded as a secret today, they will not be discussed here.⁴

The owner of Skulfi adjusted local strategies of respect and generosity to match the needs of today’s requirements of the global economy.⁵ In the early nineteenth century, change was marked by new ‘expensive’ objects that made life easier, especially for men, who were mostly in charge of dealing with Westerners (*dimdim*). Household articles, clothing, tools, beads and consumable goods began to trickle into the region, brought by *dimdim*, the term for westerners that may be a loan word from Tubetube and quickly became charged with notions of maleness, dominance, affluence, and emotions such as desire, fear and curiosity. Visiting ships exchanged goods such as iron tools for local resources such as yams; a number of traders tried to make a living in the area, a Marist mission came and left, and blackbirders abducted islanders as indentured labourers for mines and plantations (Lepowsky 1991; Macintyre 1983; Young 1983a, 1983b, 1983c). The latter learned Pidgin English and were introduced to objects of western wealth that they shared with their relatives at home—if they had the chance to see them again. Working hard to gain access to these new treasures that gave them a good head start in spite of their relative youth and lowly status, ‘boys’ from the D’Entrecasteaux Islands were praised as ‘the best workmen in Papua’ (Young 1983c). Captain John Moresby mentioned the use of Pidgin in the D’Entrecasteaux as early as 1876 (Mühlhäusler 1978: 1389); the first missionary used a Pidgin-speaking Ware Islander to explain his plans to the Dobu Islanders in 1891 (Bromilow 1929: 73–75, 116; Young 1977, 1980). The power of modern weapons, new diseases and new moral values was reflected in new words that must have been very ‘expensive’ to the islanders.

The British colonial administration did not attempt to overthrow old values. In the 1920s, government anthropologist F.E. Williams believed that for Papuans, ‘ceremony had not only a social value, but also a psychological one directly related to depopulation: “Leave the native

4 Discourse about *kula* (*ona ‘une*) contains many ‘expensive’ words that are unintelligible without deeper knowledge of certain names (of partners, valuables, types of gifts and places).

5 For more detailed analyses of changes in village economics see also Foster (1995); Liep (2009); Thomas (1991); Schram (2007, 2011).

something worth living for, and he will live” (Williams 1976 [1923]: 380, see also Young and Clark 2001: 16). In Williams’ view, the mission schools, while not notably academic, assisted in the endeavour to bring the benefits of civilisation to Papuans (Young and Clark 2001: 26).

Governor Murray phrased the desired process of change as ‘dovetailing existing customs into the new civilisation which we are introducing’ (Murray 1924: ii; see also Young and Clark 2001: 23–24). Education became an ‘expensive’ word in the early years of the twentieth century, when the first generation of indigenous students was sent out into the wider world to work and the benefits of a paid job became more visible. Schooling, basic as it was and still is in many classrooms, was advertised as an alternative path to fame, a different kind of ‘work’ (*paisewa*). Acquiring some English and the principles of *dimdim* time was likely the greatest benefit of missionary schooling, and for over 100 years now, the vocabulary of Dobu has been incorporating English loan words (see Table 1).⁶

Table 1. Examples of Pidgin influence on Dobuan

<i>baketi</i> (bucket)	<i>masta</i> (white man)
<i>butu</i> (boots)	<i>naiji</i> (knife)
<i>bwela</i> (to boil)	<i>pelaipani</i> (frying pan, to fry)
<i>foki</i> (fork)	<i>peleti</i> (plate)
<i>konin</i> (quinine)	<i>sipun</i> (spoon)
<i>kaikai</i> (food)	<i>sopu</i> (soap)
<i>kaliko</i> (clothes)	<i>sosopani</i> (saucepan)
<i>ketele</i> (kettle)	<i>taim</i> (watch)
<i>laplap</i> (loincloth)	<i>talausisi</i> (trousers)
<i>masisi</i> (matches)	<i>tapwae</i> (tobacco)

Source. Compiled by Susanne Kuehling from word lists created during research on Dobu Island, July 1992 – January 1994, September 1997

While grammatical structures were scarcely affected, English terms for new objects, concepts of time and numbering, as well as for the new forms of governance were disseminated. Peter Mühlhäusler (1978) believes that a form of pidgin, Papuan Pidgin English (PPE), developed that dominated communication between Europeans and locals. Words like *gelasi* (glass), *masisi* (matches), *sospen* (pot), *sipun* (spoon), *tosi* (torch) are

6 Perhaps Dobu is particularly open to new words. As the lingua franca of *kula* exchange, it might have been spiced with more external influences than most other languages in the area. Bronisław Malinowski wrote: ‘It is characteristic of the international position of the Dobuans that their language is spoken as a lingua franca all over the D’Entrecasteaux Archipelago, in the Amphletts and as far north as the Trobriands’ (1922: 39).

likely to be of PPE origin (see Mühlhäusler 1978: 1426). Typically, such PPE nouns are in singular form without the English plural marker ‘s’ but often combined with qualifying words (1405). At that period, numerals must have been introduced, although there is reference to the use of a knotted cord that indicated the length of any period of indentured labour (1433). The former use of specific terms for units or categories (like ‘person’ (*tomota*) = 20, yams counted in baskets, other objects being in bundles) was not abandoned but included into the numerical system (see also Thune 1978). Today’s pronunciation of numerals on Dobu is consistent with PPE data (Mühlhäusler 1978: 1409) and it is likely that these terms were ‘expensive’ in the early days, even though the benefits of mathematics were still unknown to the islanders.

These changes did not destroy or even diminish the old principles of value, exemplified in the terms below that are based on an ethic of reciprocity (food for work, debts to be repaid) and of a clear definition of who gives which type of gift. This clarity is needed because people are multiply related and often have considerable choice of role during a feast (as a landowner, a ‘father’, a child of a man, an affine, etc.). By contributing to a *pegita* gift, for example, I identify myself as the child of a male member of the mourning matrilineage. I also know that I will receive a relatively small counter gift from my father’s sisters (called *seudana*) while the largest part is given as an acknowledgement of all the love and care that my father has given me, a free gift (*esio daita*) to compensate his free gifts to me when I was small. In such decisions, emotions materialise in objects, and some of the terms below show how gifts can deal with love and friendship, fear and respect, envy and anger. These emotions coalesce in gifts (see Table 2).

Table 2. A selection of old words of value

<i>'uma</i>	yams cultivars, over 50 types are distinguished by taste, texture, scent, colour, and value
<i>'une</i>	the most valuable things: <i>kula</i> shells and pigs
<i>aga / ula'ula</i>	general: word for debit
<i>asepara</i>	general: to share received gifts from feasts
<i>awabusayo</i>	general: (mouth-shit-you) or <i>sinetaeyo</i> (mother-shit-you) or <i>nimasipwa</i> (hand-tied) All three used to be not insults but great compliments that required <i>tele'uwai</i>
<i>bagi</i>	<i>kula</i> valuable, a string of fine red shell disks cut from <i>Chama</i>
<i>bawe</i>	pig
<i>bebai</i>	the most valuable thing for a woman: large yams that constitute a major gift almost every exchange. Different cultivars (<i>'uma</i>)

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<i>deba'ose</i>	general: used as a derogatory term for stingy people who do not share food
<i>eguyai</i>	general: to share, to give away food or things
<i>emaisa</i>	general: verb for finishing a debt
<i>giyepweula</i>	general: used as a derogatory term for someone who is 'too much asking', also ' <i>sida alena</i> ', mainly behind someone's back
<i>gomana saune</i>	general: share for owner of fishing net for its use
<i>kitomwa</i>	<i>kula</i> : personally owned <i>bagi</i> or <i>mwali</i> that are not promised as a counter-gift
<i>lagwa</i>	general: payment for a pig with a <i>kula</i> shell
<i>lotau</i>	general: return gift of equal size
<i>mwali</i>	<i>kula</i> valuable, a white slice of a <i>Conus</i> shell that roughly fits onto the arm of a man with a decoration of shells and beads
<i>ni'aula</i>	general: cooked food given to workers
<i>oboboma</i>	general: gift ' <i>une</i> and food out of gratitude for help
<i>paisewa</i>	general: hard work, to be compensated, e.g. with cooked food (<i>ni'aula</i> , <i>loepa'ala</i>)
<i>ta'onona</i>	general: return/apology for mistake or humiliation
<i>tele'uwai</i>	general: return gift for a great compliment
<i>bwabwale</i>	mortuary ritual sequence from death to the cleansing of the mourners
<i>basa</i>	<i>bwabwale</i> : first gift after death – yams in bowl
<i>e'e'ila</i>	<i>bwabwale</i> : departure gifts for widow/er
<i>ege'egelu</i>	<i>bwabwale</i> : first gift after death – yams in hands
<i>esio daita</i>	<i>bwabwale</i> : part of <i>pegita</i> that is not repaid
<i>e'talai</i>	<i>bwabwale</i> : voluntary gift of ' <i>une</i>
<i>loeyawasina</i>	<i>bwabwale</i> : cooked food for people who bring gifts
<i>matabora</i>	<i>bwabwale</i> : gift of pig and food as apology for absence
<i>mwagula'ubu</i>	<i>bwabwale</i> : cooked food given by widow/er before leaving
<i>mwaie</i>	<i>bwabwale</i> : exchange of yams to 'clean' a man's yam seeds (' <i>uma</i>) after his death
<i>nimaloepala</i>	<i>bwabwale</i> : cooked food for people who bring gifts
<i>pegita</i>	<i>bwabwale</i> : large gift to the mourning matrilineage by the children of its men
<i>seudana</i>	<i>bwabwale</i> : part of <i>pegita</i> that is repaid later
<i>talo</i>	<i>bwabwale</i> : first gift after death – yams in bowl, at <i>basa</i>
<i>talo</i>	<i>bwabwale</i> : payment of ' <i>une</i> to undertakers for their work
<i>yolova</i>	<i>bwabwale</i> : gift for undertakers
<i>sagali</i>	large mortuary feast, held every 10 years or so, to 'finish off' all deaths
<i>ari'ari</i>	<i>sagali</i> : gift to clan fellows who help in burials

<i>dagula lasa</i>	<i>sagali</i> : gift to big men in <i>kula</i> by heir of big man
<i>etogelasa</i>	<i>sagali</i> : direct exchange of pigs between families before <i>sagali</i> distribution
<i>etouyosa</i>	<i>sagali</i> : repayment to those who gave a pig as <i>losusu</i>
<i>e'une</i> <i>sebwagibwagilina</i>	<i>sagali</i> : extra large basket of yams plus pork to shame a spouse (<i>bubuna to'umalina manuna</i>); or for spouse to thank for help and work (<i>oboboma manuna</i>); or for namesake of the deceased to free the name (<i>waliesa manuna</i>)
<i>lema / bwaga</i>	<i>sagali</i> : raw food given as a help to relatives
<i>losusu</i>	<i>sagali</i> : gift of food as a contribution by relatives of in-laws
<i>talaboi</i>	<i>sagali</i> : repayment of those who gave no pig as <i>losusu</i>
<i>utua bawena</i>	<i>sagali</i> : exchange of pigs with delayed repayment

Source. Kuehling 2005: Appendix 1, 287–89

PPE was used in early church services on Dobu (Bromilow 1929: 73), in Samarai and Port Moresby; it also emerged as prison/court language (Mühlhäusler 1978: 1384–386). The word *kalabus* (*calaboise*) for jail, still in use, is an example from 1891 (Bromilow 1929: 75), also the verb *lokapu-* (to lock up). As Dobu became the interisland language of Christianity within a large part of the Massim, and English the language of instruction at school, PPE was increasingly restricted to non-official contexts (see also Mühlhäusler 1978: 1383). Some 'expensive' words of old converted their value to adjust to the changes in spiritual life, and to the superficial decline of local myth and magic.

Terms for the classification of yam cultivars, for example, have clearly been devalued as there are now alternative means to feed a family (e.g. with purchased rice) and to fulfil exchange obligations (by purchasing any kind of large yams). Yam, in precolonial times, was owned by individuals in a more complex manner than today. The various cultivars (*'uma*) could only be planted and consumed by specific persons, but with the introduction of markets, these taboos lost their authority and, nowadays, people say that they plant their yams 'anyhow' in a 'careless' or 'unruly' fashion (*besobeso*).

The Wesleyans on Dobu appropriated (and re-interpreted) local words of value for their bible translation: the Last Supper was translated as *sagali*, the final, and largest mortuary feast that is supposed to 'finish it all', to stop the mourning and get on with life. The missionaries intervened directly in local exchanges by demanding valuable objects as church offerings and by engaging in exchanges on their own terms. Disregarding local ethics and introducing new needs, such as for clothing and smoking, they

established new principles of value. Wesleyan hymns and prayers, names and time schedules clearly took hold as ‘expensive’ words, but not all practices were accepted and the islanders provided their own explanations that did not always accord with missionary doctrine. The annual offering called *ebwaea daita*, literally, to give for no reason, could well be seen as a compensatory gift (*pwaoli*) to God because he gave his son for our sins (see Kuehling 2005: 150).

Bronwen Douglas has argued that Christianity is not very individualistic in Vanuatu but rather it has been forced to ‘negotiate the nexus of individual and community in locally appropriate ways’ (1998: 6). My data from Dobu confirms Douglas’s view that ‘the essentialist conflation of modernity, individualism, consumption, and “the west,” in opposition to tradition, communalism, antimaterialism, and “nonwest,” is both ethically dubious and logically specious’ (2002: 9). Given such complexity, the ‘expensive words’ of Christianity cannot be adequately discussed here (Table 3) (but see also Douglas 2001; Errington 2006; Syme 1985; Young 1977, 1980, 1989, 1997).

Table 3. Some ‘expensive’ words with a Christian interpretation

<i>Buki tabu</i>	Bible in Dobu language (Bromilow 1926)
<i>Buki wali</i>	United Church hymn book (Buki 1963)
<i>Eaubada</i>	God
<i>ebwaea daita</i>	annual, competitive collection of money
<i>iine idi 5 Kina</i>	annual collection of money for women’s groups
<i>Litigo ina bible</i>	New Testament in Dobu language (Lithgow 1985)
<i>sagali</i>	the Last Supper
Sunday <i>tapwalolo</i>	weekly gift of 5–20 Toea at service (secret)
<i>tapwalolo</i>	Church service, to pray, Sunday (Bardsley 1892: 36)
Women’s fellowship	weekly gift of 5–20 Toea at service (public and recorded)

Source. Compiled by Susanne Kuehling from word lists created during research on Dobu Island, July 1992 – January 1994, September 1997

Over the generations, the complex economic practice of gift exchange was enriched by new concepts of value. The names for gifts, the key objects of exchange and the rules that define their use retained their value, and my list of over 100 terms for gift categories, collected in the 1990s, is certainly incomplete. Skulfi is the result of the economic dilemma that grew during the 150 years of contact but was definitely not absent before, as sharing is always in danger of being corrupted by the desire to hide and to keep in ‘the bittersweet life of intense sociality’ (Young 1971: ix). Terms for greedy

or stingy persons are not new, although some of the motivations for both characteristics have changed. Naming the pig, changing its 'substance' from gift to commodity by declaring it part of the cash economy was a successful strategy for insulating it from the various demands that arise with every death in the extended family and beyond. Skulfi's owner used a phrase that I have heard during *kula* negotiations: 'I built a fence around it' (*ali ya sa'una*), demonstrating that she must indeed have found the right words from a very 'expensive' context of old, to maintain her position that this pig was not *'une* but cash. The woman elegantly solved the economic dilemma of village solidarity versus individualistic needs and desires.

A moral dilemma, elegantly solved

Parents of young children are particularly vulnerable to requests from their own parents and uncles. When faced with the obligation to obey as a prime strategy for being granted secret knowledge later in life, middle-aged people are often compromised by conflicting needs. Denying a request in a respectful manner is essential to maintain social standing, and in the case of Skulfi, this was achieved by naming the pig after its utilitarian purpose.

Schooling is ambiguously constructed, as selfish and lazy, as a benefit or a sacrifice. Sending children to school means that they cannot help with chores around the house and garden, or taking care of younger siblings. The money needed for their fees, lunch boxes, clothing and so on usually tears a large hole into the fluctuating family budget. In the light of these sacrifices it is astonishing that parents sent their children to school during the first half of the last century, when the benefits of schooling must have been obscure to them. Students usually did not enjoy school and feared the corporal punishment (like brutally cleaning dirty fingernails with a broomstick and frequent lashings with a stick). Once they dropped out of school, most old people I met told me that they quickly forgot the painfully acquired literary and numeracy skills that they could not use for anything that mattered. Only a few went into further training off-island, and those *togelu* often did not come back. Even today, reading and writing are regarded as a waste of time, and in the evening, when I sat on my veranda with a book or fieldnotes, neighbours would often come and attempt to save me from the sorry state of being lonely and idle (see also Liep 1999).

During World War II, when the islanders hosted some American troops, the soldiers' incredible material wealth amazed the locals. To their understanding, these *dimdim* (black as well as white Americans) had infinitive access to canned food and hard biscuits, powerful weapons and means of transport. Globalising forces had finally reached the backwaters of Papua and prepared the grounds for a greater desire for new goods and more willingness to experiment with formal education and with cargo cults (fieldnotes, 12 December 1993; see also Lepowsky 1990). In the 1960s, I was told, changes in language accelerated, and items and practices of the global economy became available to villagers on a more regular basis. More children were induced to pursue secondary education, the first generation of university graduates emerged and a wider network of services, trade stores, schools and air and boat services were set up by the Australian administration.

As before, new 'expensive', exciting and desirable objects and their names were adapted to local usage and grammatically treated as Dobu words. Although in many cases there are also Dobu words that could be used (e.g. cash loan: either *buki* or *lowaga*), the 'expensive' market-economy context is more clearly expressed by using the terms derived directly from English (e.g. stock: *sitoki* and not *losa'uyamwana*, to put something on hold). English language skills increased and the first generation of bilingual children was raised while I conducted fieldwork.

The benefits of school education became more visible as remittances began to support single families, for example by sending supplies for a small trade store (*kentin*) that, if it worked out, could provide some food and maybe even a modest cash income. In spite of the best intentions, such plans routinely shatter on the cliffs of reciprocity, of demand sharing and the need to pay respect to senior relatives and affines. Stores run dry, store keepers feel threatened by witchcraft and sorcery, supplies are delayed and every exchange ritual in the larger community is likely to drain the small stock and cause financial ruin. Eventually, perhaps, a relative with an income will refill the *kentin*. While economically unsound, the effects of these ventures in capitalism are quite egalitarian. So far, there is no painful difference between those with money and those without.

Table 4 shows the new terms for household objects like curtains, locks and corrugated iron roofs with water tanks that found their way into the region after the war. New purchasing vocabulary has been developed, including the notorious *lowaga*, or *buki* (credit), which is probably based

on the old practice of ‘making a new payment’ (*lo’aga*) but modified to a mere promise of repayment. The terms for ordering, making profit and for keeping supplies in stock, as well as those for writing a testament and sending mail, indicate that these concepts of the global economy were accommodated linguistically but such ‘expensive’ things were, and still are, luxuries.

Table 4. Examples of terms of new value

Nouns:	
bank notes: <i>notis</i>	letter: <i>leta</i>
biscuit: <i>biskit</i>	market (goods and place): <i>maketi</i>
block of land: <i>bloki, bwa’a</i>	order: <i>oda, bwau</i>
canned fish: <i>mekelel</i> and <i>samoni</i>	parcel: <i>pasolo</i>
cargo: <i>kago</i>	price: <i>maisa</i>
carton (of goods, beer): <i>katon</i>	profit: <i>polofiti/mani</i>
coins: <i>siliba</i> [i.e. silver]	rice: <i>laisi</i>
corrugated iron: <i>eion</i>	stamp: <i>sitempi</i>
credit: <i>buki, lowaga</i>	stock: <i>sitocki</i>
curtain: <i>keteni</i>	testament: <i>wilwil</i>
exchange of pig against money: <i>mani bawena</i>	boat ticket: <i>tiketi</i>
grease, cooking oil: <i>gilisi</i>	trade store: <i>kentin</i>
key: <i>ki</i>	water tank: <i>tenki</i>
Verbs:	
to be upset: <i>solagu i</i> out, my inside is out	
to buy: <i>gimwane</i>	
to bribe/grease/bargain: <i>geligelisi</i>	
to collect money: <i>loegogona</i>	
to mail s.th.(with pers. pron. infix): <i>posti-ya</i>	
to ring (telephone): <i>rinrin</i>	
to sell s.th.: <i>maketi</i>	
to sign: <i>saini</i>	

Source. Compiled by Susanne Kuehling from word lists created during research on Dobu Island, July 1992 – January 1994, September 1997

New practices, from bulk shopping at trade stores and chartering a boat to discreet nightly sprees to a trade store (in the hope that the neighbours will not notice) led to new forms of exchange that were based on established terminology. Selling pigs for cash, *mani bawena*, as we have seen in Skulfi’s case, is a good example for such new constructions, but many

things can be sold off one's veranda as *maketi*: pieces of meat, fish, second-hand clothing, pineapples, watermelons, sweet varieties of mangos, hair pins from town, photographs (like the ones that my messenger purloined and sold as his *maketi* to the Miadeba people whom I had intended to be the receivers of a free gift). Even the usually informal reciprocal sharing of betel nuts has been affected, as people have started to sell the desired drug to each other. Apologetically raising their eyebrows, shoulders and hands, people would say, 'Sorry, these betel nuts are my *maketi*'—and people would accept it (not without complaining behind their backs, however).

There are limits to such entrepreneurship, however, and being excluded when elders are looking for a pig may cause jealousy, open comments, less enthusiastic assistance, perhaps even magical retribution. Naming the pig Skulfi, and declaring it as *mani bawena* helped the woman to avoid being called selfish or greedy by her relatives and neighbours, integrating the deal in the overall principles of gift-giving in spite of the different outcome (investing in one's children rather than one's elders). The name Skulfi morally positioned its owner as a good woman who looks after her children, exercising positively valued self-discipline (*alamai'ita*) by securing funds for their benefit.

By integrating the cash transaction in the overall scheme of gift-giving, Skulfi's case illustrates a creative way of merging old and new, and one could ask if *mani bawena* is a local version of globalisation or rather a globalising of local principles. Is the pig raised to produce cash needed for school fees a product of western or of Dobuan ideologies of exchange? In short, is Ms Skulfi, the pig, a gift or a commodity, does she produce surplus or social relations? Could her value be expressed in purely economic terms or is it so deeply embedded in the local epistemology that one cannot comprehend it without taking into account the larger socioeconomic context? The case indicates, I believe, that our economic dichotomies do not apply universally, as *mani* can become a term of local value, just like *maketi* (for business).

Money is 'expensive' because chartering a boat to visit exchange partners, supporting school children, buying food, tobacco and kerosene to entertain guests, or paying for votes at elections are all accepted paths towards fame—after all, money can be used to buy pigs, shell valuables and large yam tubers; even land rights are not out of bounds for people with money. Old wealth is meant to be in flux, as pigs and yams travel between matrilineages, are distributed at *sagali* feasts and eventually

returned at the next occasion. Western wealth is meant to remain with an individual—unfortunately for its owners, this principle does not work well in Dobu, where objects are neither gifts nor commodities and will constantly be redefined in multiple and sometimes contradictory ways. I cannot count the times when someone ‘borrowed’ my fuel to run an important errand by speed boat—I never even saw the container again. Marilyn Strathern has reported that the Highlanders of Mount Hagen remark on the ‘speed’ of money (1999), but I never heard this expression while on Dobu.

Don Kulick has pointed out that the new wealth can be a burden as it strains social relations (1992: 48), and indeed, junior people, store keepers, boat owners, receivers of remittances as well as those few islanders with an income as teachers, nurses or church staff are under pressure from all sides. Being praised for one’s generosity is sometimes less satisfying than being filled to the brim with cookies and other store food, but the ethics of exchange promote scrupulous sharing. Beneath the surface of the principle of generosity (*oboboma*) there are elaborate strategies of hiding, of saving for later, of pretending to have nothing left. Handbags, for example, often have side pockets where tobacco and betel ingredients can be hidden. Of course, everybody knows about these devices but it is too intrusive to check another person’s bag and the performance of asking and dissimulation is often elaborately played.

The tensions that arise from new ‘expensive’ things and practices indicate imperfect blending, when money is hidden in a bank account or in shares and effectively pulled out of local circulation, when store keepers feel threatened by witchcraft because they have refused ‘the old lady’ her sugar on credit, and when inflating mortuary feasts are draining cash resources so much that families decide to drop the *bwabwale* ritual and have a small dinner instead (Schram 2007). These difficulties in blending the global with the local are, of course, a widespread phenomenon (for other places in Melanesia see, for example, Akin and Robbins 1999).

Young, educated people, in particular high school drop-outs who return to the village, have difficulty accepting their junior status and, as they miss the relative luxury of their school dormitory and the relative freedom of high school life, they reject the system of authority and disappoint their elders who call them worthless, selfish and lazy. Caught between the requirements of a subsistence economy and the desire for global products, these younger people (mostly men) use their English language skills to

indicate their worthiness, talking about ‘education’, ‘infrastructure’, ‘development’, ‘reggae music’, and ‘regional members’—pretending a deep understanding of such new ‘expensive’ words that, sadly, appear as mere wrappings without content (see Kulick 1992: 250).

Older people also note and criticise an increased desire for fashion items (*stailo*) among teenagers. Such ‘expensive’ objects and practices are brought home to Dobu by visitors from urban areas. Teenage girls decorate their hair with fancy pins (*herpin*) and use deodorant (*spre, pefum*), boys like soccer boots (*sokabuti*), organise disco nights (*disko*), listen to string band music on tapes (*tepi*) and smoke pre-rolled cigarettes or ‘Winfields’. The money for these ‘expensive’ prestige objects is mostly provided by their relatives in town, to whom they write requesting letters. I received many such letters, partly written in English and partly in the Dobu language. Usually, the request (*sida*) is phrased in Dobu while the greeting and closing formulas were in English. ‘Expensive’ words of the cryptic kind characteristic of magic are also reinvented and used by teenagers who have learned English to construct code words to ‘talk dirty’ without being reprimanded by their parents, for example, by writing the word SWIMMING (Sleep While I Move My Inter National Gear) on a wall, or tattooing ITALY (I Truly Always Love You) on their arm. This practice is consistent with the old value of keeping cross-sex relationships secret and it continues the genre of veiled talk, but now such words are used by people of low status who do not yet deserve, in terms of the egalitarian gerontocracy, to ‘own’ such words.

A dietary dilemma, elegantly solved by keeping, selling and eating

I have so far argued that the moral dilemma of dealing with money and other items that represent the global economy brings out new strategies of hiding, of keeping and of limited sharing that are derived from well-known exchange principles of pre-cash times. I have shown that these strategies can be successful while admitting that there are problematic zones of problematic overlap. I have also argued that tensions are not a new phenomenon in Massim exchanges and that elaborate strategies of hiding and keeping are a normal element of a gift economy. Conflicts about land rights were a reality before commodities were imported to the region; fights and hard words are not a result of the global economy

and the state. Clearly, people try to make the best of their situation and it would be nice to have the pig, share the pig, and eat it as well. This is how Skulfi's owner excelled and inspired me to write about our encounter.

Reflecting on the deal, I realised that I was the perfect customer for Skulfi, because I was classified as an affine. Since it is impolite to refuse anything to a needy in-law, the woman could always explain to the senior members of her matrilineage that she had to show me due respect (*amayaba*) and help me to find a pig. Selling Skulfi to me could be interpreted as a gift to support affines (*losusu*) that, in the context of *sagali*, would require a counter gift called *etouyosa*, consisting of a large piece of pork and a basket of yams. Since I had paid, I did not give her *etouyosa*, but she nevertheless received a good portion of meat from me, which she could not eat herself but which she quickly swapped and, in the end, we all ate pork.

Skulfi had another 'expensive' effect: as I distributed her meat at a *sagali* feast, I became a landowner of my village and to this day I can go to Losina and ask for land to settle and make a garden. *Sagali* is one of the most 'expensive' terms in Dobu, as this large feast accumulates hundreds of pigs and tons of yams. Among all the pork there was Skulfi, the pig that was bought with cash, in a transaction named in line with ancient principles, and passed through affinal networks in order to be butchered and distributed in a mortuary ritual to a crowd who redistributed the pieces until almost everyone ate pork. Skulfi and the other pigs, according to pre-Christian beliefs, floated over to the mountain Bwebweso on Normanby Island, where the spirits of the dead live in their spirit villages and consume the spirit aspect of *sagali* gifts. So, in the end, Skulfi made everybody happy by feeding us all now and in the future, by providing a school fee and giving me land rights. The woman who raised Skulfi got the best possible deal.

'Expensive' words: A fruitful field of study

After more than 100 years of strong and direct influence of English, 'expensive' words from the realm of origin myths, ancestor stories and folk-tales are in decline. To my knowledge, storytelling evenings take place very rarely in Dobu. With the loss of such lore, verbal expressions and mythological connections between the landscape and its inhabitants are lost. Modern myths are passed on without the formalities of a storytelling night, although they seem to build on old motifs (as the mythical link

between snakes and wealth is adduced in relation to a real bank robbery). So far, terms for exchange have persisted and I expect them to remain significant—at least among the senior people who represent and manage big gifts in the name of their matrilineage.

While young people are interested in urban life, its adventures and luxuries, most adults are more concerned with their fishing and gardening, exchange obligations and other activities that enable everyday subsistence and the achievement of higher status within the community. *Kula* exchanges and mortuary feasts are still significant and continue to maintain local relationships. These are the realms of magic and of truly ‘expensive’ words, of clever rhetoric and the avoidance of ‘hard words’ (see Weiner 1984). It seems as if the repertoire in this genre is shrinking, but this may also be due to senior people’s pet peeve that ‘in the past, everything was better’.

New words, like ‘development’, ‘agriculture’, ‘infrastructure’, ‘profit’, ‘loan’ or ‘shares’ are highly visible as they are deployed in government propaganda and appear on T-shirts and posters. But they are semantically blurry. A loan (*lowaga*), for example, is rarely paid back; ‘profit’ is seen as mutual benefit; ‘shares’ have been explained to me as ‘we share’. These words are the repertoire of people with low status in the village who gain additional prestige through their networks with the outside world. They are used by politicians, and appear as magic formulae rather than as clearly defined exchange terms—they are supposed to attain a goal but they do not specify the details. Like magical formulae, they seem to lose their power when they become part of everyday usage. When they are employed in speeches they obscure rather than clarify an argument. Such words like *mani bawena* (to buy pigs) describe a transaction between individuals and refer to a singular event. Typically, younger people with higher education use them as strategic tools to further their personal interests, in spite of their inferior position in society. New ‘expensive’ words are powerful insofar as they represent the outside world. While socially less efficient on the village level, they can nevertheless open paths to land rights and wealth, and with money people can buy higher status. The entanglement of these old and new ‘expensive’ words, therefore, has a profound impact on power relations, emotions of anger and shame, local politics and globalisation.

Skulfi is a good example for the strategic use of ‘expensive’ words to facilitate profitable deals. The pig’s name made clear that she was different from other pigs named Northwind or Fluffy, who were also loved and

pampered until their time came to die, turning them into nameless pieces of meat. Those other pigs left behind a debt, a personal relationship and a story about family solidarity, but Skulfi left behind 200 Kina when she became my pig, and while she was also butchered and distributed, her death supported higher education and the deal was over once the sow was purchased. While I remember the name of the pig, and its price, I forgot the name of her owner. In this light, Skulfi was a very expensive name! She became a story or two.

We have so far concentrated on the rise of new ‘expensive’ words, but the demise of such terms, the devaluation of concepts, practices and objects, would be equally instructive. It seems that ‘expensive’ words become ordinary once they are used by everybody, especially people of low status. Their currency becomes worn. School activities, for example, are usually described with loanwords from English, the dominant language of the curriculum: *disdisturbi-* (v., with personal suffix, to disturb), *bailo* (ballpen), *buki* (book), *lain* (v., to fall in line), *netibol* (v., to play netball), *sekand* (v., to shake hands), *sokasoka* (v., to play soccer), *winwin* (v., to win), *woliwoli* (v., to play volleyball).

These words nevertheless provide an interesting field of research, as they point to changes in lifestyle. It appears, for example, that the children’s games of old have lost their appeal. Instead of playing games like *enokonoki* (throwing spears against a rolling banana stem), or making cat cradles (*abi*), today’s village kids play with marbles (*mabolo*) or, a favourite, with rubber bands (*rabaraba*, *figa* 8, and other games) (Table 5).

Table 5. Examples of English loan words in everyday use and in devaluation

ball: <i>bola</i>	to kiss: <i>kisi</i>
bleach: <i>sinowait</i>	to make a party: <i>patipati</i>
elastic: <i>rababen</i>	to make a picnic: <i>pikiniki</i>
friend: <i>peleni</i>	to scold: <i>kotukotu</i> (going to court)
marbles: <i>mabolo</i>	tombstone: <i>sementi</i>
slippers/flip-flops: <i>silipas</i>	towel: <i>towelo</i>
to be drunk: <i>sipak</i>	water tank: <i>tenki</i>
to be naughty: <i>bikhed</i>	Christmas: <i>kerisimasi</i>

Source. Compiled by Susanne Kuehling from word lists created during research on Dobu Island, July 1992 – January 1994, September 1997

I have heard many old men complain about the ‘pidginisation’ of Dobuan, although they also use the ordinary household words. These words are fully integrated into Dobuan grammar and accordingly linked with particles of various kinds; syllables are repeated in verbs and adjectives, and tenses are formed in the way typical for Austronesian languages (see Lithgow 1992: 46). Although there are usually alternatives of Dobuan origin, these words are part of the basic vocabulary of the islanders of today: ‘Some people blamed the children and youth, but in most places they said, “We all do it”, and I believe that is generally true’ (47).

The dynamics of change are visible in terminology, especially in the rise and fall of ‘expensive’ words. I did consider including here a list of terms for affinal exchanges from courtship to death, but I decided against it as most of them are not performed any longer and the terms are not only devalued but doomed to die. Changes are negotiated by adjusting notions of value in everyday life, visible in language use, where structural principles are conservative. Often, as we have seen in the Skulfi example, older ideas are recycled and adjusted when new realities require new words, much like grammatical structures that persist more stubbornly than the lexemes of a language. New words are valued for the larger world they stand for, and not understanding their meaning renders them exotic and ‘expensive’. Skulfi is the product of a ‘structure of conjuncture’ in Marshall Sahlins’s sense, an example of how people transform culture in the act of reproducing it (see Kulick 1992: 19; Sahlins 1981: 14).

Today, a large exchange network may be replaced by a fat bank account—one accumulated by children who have been sent to secondary school in spite of the onerous fees. In this regard, Skulfi the sow was trotting on the path of market economy and individual profit but, in the long run, that path joined the larger road of reciprocity and mutual benefits. After a short stint of individualism, so to say, Skulfi returned to the realm of village solidarity. But I wonder whether she really ever left it. The opposition between gifts and goods is blurred when remittances provide future land rights, when pigs and yams can be bought with money and used for rituals. Remittances from, and visits by, urban relatives have a strong impact on exchanges on Dobu today, and they are a real challenge to the elasticity of the kinship system of mutual assistance. The power of new ‘expensive’ terms for exchanges is an indicator for this tendency, as it reflects on a shift of power relations away from respecting elders

toward school graduates with cash incomes. People say that ‘we cannot eat money’—but some have realised that, yes indeed, money feeds a family just fine if it is available.

Skulfi, the fat sow, created relations based on *mani*. One might hope that by now the children whose school fees were paid by me through the medium of Skulfi have found jobs and help to sustain their mother. *Mani* bought me land rights in Dobu, too, because I had killed Skulfi for a *sagali* feast. It is but a small step from *utua bawena* (swapping pigs) to *mani bawena*, from sharing (*oboboma*) to selling (*maketi*), from naming a spirit in a healing chant to naming a pig according to its purpose. The example confirms Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry’s statement that money ‘may mean different things within the same culture’ (1989: 22).

As I have shown, it makes sense to compare ‘old’ and ‘new’ ‘expensive’ words with regard to their meaning. While most ‘expensive’ words of old were restricted to senior people who were in charge of organising exchanges, executing magic and telling mythological stories, the new ‘expensive’ words are far more often used by younger, usually male individuals with formal education and experience of the western world. These are words with blurry meanings—their value stemming from being long and complicated, for example, ‘100 per cent’ (instead of ‘totally’), and ‘requesting’ (instead of ‘asking’). A sentence can be transformed from colloquial into ‘expensive’ English by simply using the thesaurus in MS Word. ‘I see a red house’, for example, can become ‘I perceive a crimson domicile’. Very ‘expensive’, indeed a genre commonly found in official letters, instructions of products, political propaganda, bank and business correspondence, creating a world divided into those who can understand (or at least pretend to) and those who cannot.

The distinction between ‘old’ and ‘new’ does not paint a picture of polarity, however, as individuals creatively develop new ideas based on old and new ‘expensive’ words and principles. Ethnographic publications may disclose ‘expensive’ words to the uninitiated in the communities that we study (see e.g. Akin and Creely 2002: 92), or help to revalue such terms by giving them a prestigious place in a book. Morality and exchange are interwoven in a multilayered cloth that consists of threads of old and new materials. Some parts are threadbare and require darning, others have become brittle from disuse, but since this cloth is essential to everyday life, it is ‘expensive’. Local understandings of value in semantic, moral and economic aspects are in flux as ‘expensive’ words need frequent updates to

accommodate changes brought by global forces or by clever individuals, like the owner of Skulfi. Some patterns appear to be more persistent, supporting my argument that the cloth of value is woven with moral and economic principles of ‘goodness’ (*bobo’ana*) and ‘hard work’ (*paisewa*).

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