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## Heart and Liver in Kewa

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*Abstract:* The metaphorical use of heart for the emotional center is common in languages, but liver and stomach are also used in many languages of Papua New Guinea (PNG). In this article I explore the use of heart-liver in Kewa, a language spoken in the Southern Highlands of PNG, and make additional references and comments to the use of heart, liver and stomach in other languages of PNG as well.

### Introduction

When my wife and I first lived in the hamlet of Muli, in the Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea (then the Territories of New Guinea and Papua), our task was to learn to speak and analyze Kewa (actually, it turned out to be East Kewa). In 1958 there were no speakers of English or Tok Pisin in the area, so we began learning the language monolingually, that is by using only what Kewa we knew. At first, of course, we relied on guess work, but our former teacher and mentor, Professor Kenneth L. Pike, had taught his students the “monolingual approach.” He had used this approach to learn the Mixtec language of Mexico in 1935, and from that experience came his first monolingual demonstration in 1936. He gave the demonstrations each subsequent summer to students at the Summer Institute of Linguistics (we attended in 1956 and 1957), then located at the University of Oklahoma, the University of North Dakota, and other locations. SIL students, and eventually varied audiences around the world, observed Pike’s techniques and later Adam Makkai wrote an article summarizing what happens in a monolingual demonstration. (Makkai was the “informant” in the demonstration he describes.)<sup>1</sup>

### The Liver in Kewa

We soon found that the East Kewa (EK) people expressed various emotions using the body part “liver” (*pu*). When someone felt good about something, his/her liver was “happy” (*raana pia*) or “sweet” (*rende pia*); if they were excited, their liver “stood up” (*rekaa*) and if they were annoyed their liver was “bitter” (*rero pia*); when someone died, the liver was “extinguished” (*kundinaa*); the liver was also involved in shame (*pu yala pia*), sickness (*pu rundu aaya*), and in many other expressions.

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<sup>1</sup> For details see: <https://www.sil.org/about/klp/influence/nature-field-work-monolingual-setting>.

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We studied and lived (intermittently) with the East Kewa people from 1958-1963, but then moved to another area to study West Kewa (WK) from 1967-1973 and sporadically thereafter for a number of years.

There were idioms in WK similar to those in EK that used liver, such as: *ni pu nala* (1<sup>st</sup>.sg liver eat. 3<sup>rd</sup>.sg.pres = I am upset); *pu oyala* (liver bad. 3<sup>rd</sup>.sg.pres = to have pity); *pu rekaa* (liver stand. 3<sup>rd</sup>.sg.past = he was excited) *pu upatea* (liver sleep.lie.down. 3<sup>rd</sup>.sg.perf = to be lazy) and *pu undinaa* (liver extinguish. 3<sup>rd</sup>.sg.past = [someone] has died).

We therefore expected that the emotional center in WK would be the same as in EK, simply the “liver,” but discovered instead that the “liver-heart” (*pu-imu*) or occasionally simply *imu* was used.<sup>2</sup> We heard expressions like:

- (1) *Nipu madaa pu-imu rasu sape*  
 3rdSg concerning liver-heart distended put  
 “He has an intense attraction for her.”
- (2) *Nipu-na pu-imu pa eto paala pia*  
 3rdSg-poss liver-heart just shakes afraid it.is  
 “He is extremely afraid of something.”

We also recorded the word for heart in an idiom: *Mena kandesa-para imu eta pia* “an arrow in the trunk of a pig—that is, in its heart,” means “to be surrounded by enemies with no way of escape.”

Later, when vehicles came to the area, we also heard this metaphor:

- (3) *Kara-na imu*  
 car-poss heart  
 “The engine/gearbox of the car.”<sup>3</sup>

The Kewa employ body part names according to their perception of their functions. Their mental image of a body and its parts serve as the imaginative and creative springboard for understanding and naming, i.e., in the above example, vehicle parts. Parts of houses and flora have metaphors based on the human body as well. For example: *peraani* “ribs” (roof rafters); *masa* “back” (back area of a house); *maa* “neck” (top of tree); *kimbu* “shin” (ridge of mountains); *aane* “ear” (edge of something); *yogaane* “skin” (bark of tree); *paala* “thigh” (branch of tree).

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<sup>2</sup> The possible cognate that I have found for *imu* comes from Fasu, where the word for heart is *himu*. See the SIL International PNG site for the web version of the Fasu dictionary. The word for “liver”, which is *pu* in Kewa, has cognates in other Engan languages, for example, *pu-ŋgi* in Enga and Kyaka..

<sup>3</sup> See “Some Kewa metaphors: body parts as automobile parts” in the SIL electronic Work Papers (silewp2003\_005.pdf).

The way the Kewa name the parts of a vehicle and other items provides some justification that “the cognitive paradigm sees metaphor as a means whereby ever more abstract and intangible areas of experience can be conceptualized in terms of the familiar and concrete. Metaphor is thus motivated by a search for understanding” (Taylor 1995:132).

The metaphor of “liver” (*pu*) for the car is its battery and, with *pu-imu*, associates this power of the car to function with its gearbox/engine (*imu*).

The influence of Tok Pisin (TP) throughout the nation had begun well before we arrived in the Kewa area and had been used by prospectors, missionaries and government officers. However, TP was not used among the EK to any extent while we lived there. However, by 1967, when we took up residence in the area called Usa in the WK, missionaries and government officers were conducting their business in TP.

### **Tok Pisin (TP) Influence**

The seat of emotions as expressed in TP is the “stomach” or “belly” (*bel*). It occurs in expressions like:

- (4) *Ol i belhat*  
 they ligature stomach.hot  
 “They are angry”
- (5) *Bel bilong mi i hevi*  
 Stomach of mine ligature heavy  
 “I am very worried.”

The TP New Testament was first published by the Bible Society in 1969 and the complete Bible in 1989. It has therefore been in print for decades and uses stomach, not heart, to refer to the emotional center of a person. Because most Highland pastors are fluent in TP and use the TP Bible in their preaching, the translation of *bel* as the emotional center is now common among languages like Kewa, where the word *rombaa* (“stomach”) is now used, but most often in association with *pu* “liver,” or even *lo* “intestine.” Note, for example:

- (6) *Naa pu-rombaa-para kone waru sa-a-to*  
 My liver-stomach-in mind really place-Ben-1sgPres  
 “I really hold on to that firmly with my inner thoughts.”

Although the liver (*pu*) was once adequate, now because of TP influence, the stomach (*rombaa*) is often added for emphasis. The word *kone* refers to the way the Kewa think and feel and, as we shall mention later, is a cognate throughout Engan languages.

The entries for the English word “heart” in the TP dictionary compiled by Volker (2008:230-231) has three different senses, namely: the physical heart (actually *klok* “clock” in TP), the liver and the stomach:

- (7) *Klok/hat*      *i*                      *mekais*  
 clock/heart    ligature              make.nice  
 “The heart is beating.”
- (8) *Lewa bilong mi*      *i*                      *bruk*  
 liver belong 1sg    ligature              broke  
 “My heart is broken.”
- (9) *Mi sori tru tru long bel*              *bilong mi*  
 1sg sorry really really in      stomach              belong 1sg  
 “I feel remorse in the bottom of my heart.”

### **Liver as the emotional center in Mauwake**

Mauwake is a language spoken in the Madang Province of PNG and illustrates the extensive use of “liver” in a PNG language. In Kwan Poh San’s study of 1989 she notes that the Mauwake “speakers use body parts to express psychological realities and certain abstract concepts.” In Mauwake the word for “liver” generates “terms that express emotion, physical condition, mental activity, opinion and will” (1989:48). Poh San’s article outlines 60 such representations in the language, more than any other body part. The Mauwake word for liver appears in expressions involving 1) physical state: “I will rest” (liver sleep), “I burp” (liver snap), “I gasp for breath” (liver throw); 2) mental activities: “I forgot” (liver fill up), “effort to recall” (liver fold), “to think”, “thinking” (liver push), “understand” (liver split), “confusion” (liver stuck); 3) opinion, intention or will: “indecision” (liver two), “anger” (liver anger go up), “relief” liver break), “temptation” (liver eat); 4) intensity: “enthusiasm” (liver go up); 5) antonyms: “liver light” (strong urge), “no desire” (liver heavy), “afraid” (liver shiver).

Although Poh San gives some 60 expressions using the word “liver,” she declares that the list is by no means exhaustive and speakers may create new metaphors using it.

### **K. A. McElhanon**

Kenneth McElhanon has published two main articles that deal with body part image idioms in PNG, including observations on idioms in TP. He concluded that TP idioms were drawn from vernacular and expatriate sources and that the former contributed largely to “the source and vitality found in the Tok Pisin idioms” (1978:20). He provides examples of several different body terms to express emotional concepts.

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In 1977 McElhanon published a seminal article on the use of body part idioms in Irian (now the Indonesian Province of Papua) and Papua New Guinea languages. At the time the journal was not easily accessible, but his materials are now referred to on the web.<sup>4</sup>

### **Harland Kerr**

Kerr's extensive website (<https://witumowituda.files.wordpress.com/2013>) provides wide-ranging material on Wiru, a language adjacent to Kewa but only distantly related (Kerr 1975). Kerr comments on the word for heart (*mugili*) in Wiru, noting that "the term is now used to express conscience but is almost certainly mission influence...the intestines are the seat of the conscience"<sup>5</sup> (p. 299, English to Wiru dictionary).

On the other hand, the word for liver (*kolotini*) occurs in emotional expressions, such as "angry" (the liver is bad); to be "barely alive" (the liver is just moving); to be "happy/glad" (the liver pulls up), or to "express one's feelings frankly" (the liver lies on the surface).<sup>6</sup>

Other Wiru body terms are also used to express emotion: for example, *timini nako* means literally "the nose burns," figuratively that one is angry; and *lene kako* "the eyes stand," meaning that one is alive.

### **Summary**

Although several body parts are used to express emotions in Kewa, it is historically the liver, and more recently the stomach, that signal them. The word for "heart" can be adjoined with the word for "liver" (as a compound) but does not occur separately to express emotions.

### **Appendix: Emotional center words in the Engan Family of languages**

There are 11 languages that make up what I have analyzed as the Engan Family. The languages are located in several Provinces: Enga, East Sepik, Hula, Southern Highlands, Gulf. The following list includes (omitting Kewa) what I have been able to find referring to emotional centers in the languages:

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<sup>4</sup> See: [pnglanguages.sil.org/resources/archives/22745](http://pnglanguages.sil.org/resources/archives/22745).

<sup>5</sup> From Kerr's on-line dictionary, English to Wiru, p. 299.

<sup>6</sup> From Kerr's on-line dictionary, Wiru to English, p.85.

Enga: *awíya, kípí, móna, yamá-li, yamá-pu* “seat of thought/emotion”<sup>7</sup>

Ipili: *kona-li* “lungs”

Huli: *lili-ni* “heart”; *pu-ni, nu-ni, aju-ni* “heart/liver”

Lembena: *lipe* “heart”; *lipe-nge* “liver”<sup>8</sup>

Bisorio: *sili, sili-ga* “heart”, *ogo-ni* “thoughts”<sup>9</sup>

Mendi: *kone* translated throughout for “heart”<sup>10</sup>

Sau: *pu-ki* (“liver”); occasionally *home* “mind, thoughts”<sup>11</sup>

Kyaka: *mona* (“heart, intelligence, mind”)<sup>12</sup>

Pole (South Kewa): *pu* (“liver”) or *pu romba* (“liver stomach”)<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Lang 1973:152. Elsewhere the forms are glossed individually as “heart”. In the Enga New Testament (Enja Nutesamene Baipolo, The Bible Society of Papua New Guinea, 1988) *mona* is used to translate “heart”.

<sup>8</sup> From an SIL wordlist from the village of Kopeupalu, taken in 1979.

<sup>9</sup> Noted in *Gode Bi*, the New Testament in Bisorio, New Tribes Mission, 1991.

<sup>10</sup> Noted in *Ngaron Angal Bib Hobao Sao* (The New Testament in Angal Heneng, a dialect of Mendi, published by the Bible Society of Papua New Guinea, 1978).

<sup>11</sup> Noted in *Panake Pi La: Ula: Buka pita: Kini Pieke Buka yaapoe* (The New Testament and Genesis in the Samberigi language, The Bible Society of Papua New Guinea, 1993).

<sup>12</sup> Draper and Draper 2002: 268; there follows over a full page of examples of *mona* in various contexts, all relating to emotional experiences.

<sup>13</sup> Noted throughout *Godena Epe Angele: Pena Ia wi angele* (The New Testament in Pole, The Bible Society of New Guinea, 1993.) Pole is what I call South Kewa (Franklin 1968).

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