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## COMMENTS ON SICKNESS IN KEWA

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**Abstract:** In this article I address certain Kewa concepts of emotions and sickness and provide some specific instances related to each. Emotions are historically associated with feelings attributed to the liver (*pu*), although Tok Pisin ‘*bel*’ now has intruded with some expressions using stomach (*rombaa*) instead. Sickness (*yaina*) is active as an instrument in one’s body. The word is also found in expressions of “blessings” and “cures.”

### 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 initial task was to learn to speak and analyze Kewa (it turned out to be East Kewa, later we studied West 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 the Kewa we heard and guessing at the meanings. We would act and point to objects to elicit what we thought were new words and sentences. We were following what our former teacher and mentor, Professor Kenneth L. Pike, had taught us, using 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 demonstrations each subsequent summer to students at the Summer Institute of Linguistics at the University of Oklahoma. (We observed him doing so in 1956, 1957, 1963 and 1964.) Many SIL workers were like us and eventually lived in various cultures around the world and began learning languages monolingually. In doing so, we were trying to copy Pike’s method.

### The Liver in Kewa

When we began to treat sick people, we soon learned that the East Kewa (EK) people expressed various emotions about their illness using the body part “liver” (*pu*).<sup>1</sup> When someone felt good

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<sup>1</sup> We lived (intermittently) in the hamlet of Muli with the East Kewa people from 1958 to 1963, but then moved to the hamlet of Usa from 1967 to 1973 to study West Kewa (WK); we visited the WK area sporadically thereafter until 1989. Our last face-to-face contact with Kewa people was from 2002 to 2005. My comments and observations are from an historical perspective and are not meant to describe how present-day Kewa people describe sicknesses. Apoi Yaraepa,

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*), certain sicknesses (*pu rundu aaya*), and in many other expressions.

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.pr = I am upset); *pu oyala* (liver bad. 3<sup>rd</sup>.sg.pr = to have pity); *pu rekaa* (liver stand. 3<sup>rd</sup>.sg.pa = he was excited) *pu upatea* (liver sleep.lie.down. 3<sup>rd</sup>.sg.pf = to be lazy) and *pu undinaa* (liver extinguish. 3<sup>rd</sup>.sg.pa= [someone] has died).

We had expected that the emotional center in WK would be the same as in EK, simply the “liver.” However, we soon discovered instead that the “liver-heart” (*pu-imu*) or occasionally simply *imu* was used instead.<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-Pos liver-heart just shakes afraid it.is

“He is extremely afraid of something.”

The word for heart also occurred in at least one idiom, which involves hidden language: *Mena kandesapara 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.”<sup>3</sup>

The Kewa employ body part names according to their perception of functions. Their mental image of a body and its parts serve as the imaginative and creative springboard for understanding and naming, e.g., vehicle parts. Later, when vehicles came to the area, we also heard this metaphor:

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who has published a grammar of Kewapi [East Kewa] (Yarapea 2013) notes that: “Among contemporary Kewa (or Kewapi) speakers *pu* ‘liver’ *lo* ‘stomach’ *imu* ‘heart’, *kalu* ‘head’, *maa* ‘neck’, etc. are used to located specific body parts affected by sickness.”

<sup>2</sup> The only possible cognate that I have found in the area for *imu* comes from Fasu, where the word for heart is *himu*. Consult the SIL International PNG site for the web version of the Fasu dictionary: [https://www.reap.insitehome.org/bitstream/handle/9284745/31323/48460\\_FasuDict.pdf](https://www.reap.insitehome.org/bitstream/handle/9284745/31323/48460_FasuDict.pdf). The word for “liver”, which is *pu*. Kewa ‘liver’ has cognates in other Engan languages and I list several of them in the Appendix.

<sup>3</sup> I have written extensively on Kewa “hidden languages.” See, for example Franklin 1975a and 2012.

- (3) *Kara-na imu*  
 car-Pos heart  
 “The engine/gearbox of the car.”<sup>4</sup>

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*).

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).

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).

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

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, but 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.

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”

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<sup>4</sup> See “Some Kewa metaphors: body parts as automobile parts” in the SIL electronic Work Papers (silewp2003\_005.pdf).

- (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 used, most often in association with *pu* “liver,” or even *lo* “intestine.” Note, for example:

- (6) *Naa pu-rombaa-para*            *kone waru sa-to*  
 My    liver-stomach-in            mind    really    place-1sgPr

“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. On the other hand, the word *kone* refers to the way the Kewa think and feel and, as we shall mention later, is a cognate throughout Engan languages.<sup>5</sup>

The entries for the English word “heart” in the TP dictionary compiled by Volker (2008:230-231) has three different senses, namely: (1) the physical heart (actually *klok* “clock” in TP); (2) the liver; and (3) 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.”

<sup>5</sup> See Franklin 1975c for the first reference to Engan as a language family and the Appendix for cognates.

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

Mauwake is a language spoken in the Madang Province of PNG, and Kwan Poh San's study of 1989 illustrates the extensive use of "liver" in that language. 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); and (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.

## **Body-part Images**

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

In 1977, McElhanon also 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 referenced on the web.<sup>6</sup> He also recently published (in 2022) a book that deals with many metaphors found in the Bible.

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<sup>6</sup> See: [pnglanguages.sil.org/resources/archives/22745](http://pnglanguages.sil.org/resources/archives/22745).

### Examples from Wiru

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>7</sup> (p. 299, English to Wiru dictionary).

The Wiru word for liver (*kolotini*) does occur 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>8</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.

### Categorizing Diseases and Sickness in Kewa

Kewa diseases may be categorized as related to concepts such as: (1) general sickness (*yaina*); (2) sores (*rere*); and (3) pain (*nala* or *randa pea*). Sicknesses include: fever, headaches, colds, malaria, pneumonia, diarrhea, etc. Sores include yaws and boils and depending on the severity of the pain it may be internal (eating at the teeth, stomach, liver, etc.) or external simply 'hurt,' as with a splinter or external wound. Sickness can spread from individual to others, sores and pain do not.

In Kewa speech and culture the word *yaina* and its derivative expressions take on a world of their own. When Kewa speakers say they are sick, the most common expression is "*ni yaina-me oma-lo*" (I sickness die-I am=I am dying by [instrumental] sickness). It is the sickness that is causing me to be sick to the extent that I feel like I am dying. If the person gets well, the phrase *yaina ma-epe-a* (sickness cause-good-it has=the sickness has been made good), meaning that something unspecified has made the person well again.

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<sup>7</sup> From Kerr's on-line dictionary, English to Wiru, p. 299.

<sup>8</sup> From Kerr's on-line dictionary, Wiru to English, p.85.

An important cultural concept of *yaina* applies not only to a sickness in the human body, but to cures and spells as well. For example, *yai yaina pa* (rain sickness it.makes) is a spell to stop the rain, literally to make it “sick.” Such a spell might be necessary to ward off the storm. Indeed, I have seen men take branches with leaves on them and place them on fenceposts and other objects prior to the storm arriving. They were trying to spell the storm into submission. I have also seen shamans use “*yaina agaa*” (spell talk) to try and cure someone’s illness. The shaman I saw had a small pouch or small net bag filled with objects like tree bark, small polished stones, and other objects. He used a cassowary bone to rub on the objects while he performed his actions and talked (in Kewa, but not words that I could understand).

The word *yaina* is now also used in church services to pronounce a “blessing.” In such contexts, it does not indicate a curing “spell.” However, in both cases the words and expressions are performative so that their utterance is meant to cause something good to happen. In other words, whether the *yaina* is a “spell” or a “blessing” the shaman or priest utters a demand for something good to happen.

If the sickness is contagious, it is “spread about” or “spread out” like clothes or a blanket to dry. On the other hand, if the person becomes well again, as a result of some cure, the phrase *yaina etea* (sick it.bears), means that the cure has been successful (literally bearing fruit). This verb, when associated with *yaina*, generally refers to a tree or plant bearing fruit, nuts, flowers, or seeds. The noun *eta* alone means “food.”

Some illnesses “eat” at the person, so the verb *na* “to eat” occurs with various types of sicknesses. The phrase *yaina na* (sick eat) refers to any sickness that is extremely painful. Examples that follow refer to tooth aches, earaches and leprosy:

- (10) *agaa-me na-la* (tooth-instrument eat-it is=a tooth ache) would mean literally that the tooth is causing the pain, such that it is “eating” the person, and therefore severe
- (11) *aane ne yaina* (ear eating sickness=an ear ache)
- (12) *kindi-mi ne-a* (female.genitals-agent eat-it.is=the female genitals are eating (him) is the common expression for “leprosy.”



Dealing with sickness may be described in reference to objects or events:

- (13) *abu pi yaina* (yellow being sickness=hepatitis)
- (14) *yaina pi aa* (*sick being man*=a shaman or spell-maker)
- (15) *yaina pi kone* (sick being behavior=unusual behavior due to sickness)
- (16) *ee maapu yaina* (old garden sickness=garden magic)
- (17) *aana yaina* (*stone sickness*=casting a spell by using stones)
- (18) *oro yaina* (coughing sickness—pandanus allergy)
- (19) *yaki yaina* (sky.being sick=leprosy)
- (20) *yapi yaina* (blood.stool sick=dysentery)
- (21) *upa rigi yaina* (cold shiver sick=malaria)
- (22) *kagaa-ro yaina* (new-body sick=strange sickness)
- (23) *agora yaina* (throat sickness=mumps)
- (24) *yai yaina pa* (rain sick make=a spell to stop the rain)
- (25) *yaina kupa aa* (*sick blood man*=a sorcerer who uses blood)
- (26) *yaina perekea* (*sick turn.around*=to get well)
- (27) *yaina ta* (sick hit=sudden sickness, such as a severe headache)
- (28) *yaina ada* (sick house=medical aid post or hospital)
- (29) *yaina agaa* (sick talk=magic spells)
- (30) *yaina apula* (sick pay=payment for magical cure)
- (31) *yaina mudiaa* (sick carried=an epidemic)
- (32) *epe yaina agaa* (*good sick talk*=a blessing)
- (33) *nipu-na yaina-re lo na-la* (he/she/it-possessive sick-topic stomach eat-it is=he/she has a stomach pain.

### Healing and Cures for Sickness

In the Kewa culture, various “spirits” are agents of healing and cures. The names of a few are:<sup>9</sup>

- Adaalu Rimbu (“tall Rimbu”) consulted for various illnesses, especially when there was blood in the stool

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<sup>9</sup> See Franklin and Franklin (1973), pp. 256-257 for a fuller description.

- Aga-palaa Rimbu (“pandanus-branch Rimbu”): for a distended or swollen body and also for leprosy
- Ipa Kege Rimbu (“water mud Rimbu”): for some children’s illnesses, where shamans would put string bags on the backs of the patient
- Ipa-remo Rimbu (“water-spirit Rimbu”): especially for fevers
- Kele-kai (“bamboo-wild palm”): especially for stomach ailments
- Maapu-niniaa (“garden along”): especially for constipation
- Opayo (“leaves coming up”): pneumonia, pain to the ribs
- Rokele: for certain ailments of women
- Wapaga Remo (“grub spirit”): for blockages, in the ears, especially deafness

In January 1959, I was invited to witness the *ipa kumi* ceremony for an older man who was sick with pneumonia. I had been giving him penicillin shots and he was improving so he decided to kill a pig and thank his ancestral spirits. I went with several male relatives and the village leader to a place near one of the sick man’s gardens. A large pig was killed by clubbing it on the head and after the hair was singed, it was butchered. We then went nearby to two small spirit houses, where certain parts of the pig were skewered and roasted over a fire. They were then held over a small “spirit water” while a shaman talked to the ancestral spirits. At this stage in the village (three months) my grasp of the Kewa language was rudimentary, so I could not understand what he was saying. While he recited, he also spit ginger on the pig parts and before anyone could leave, we had to eat some of the meat. The remainder of the pig was cooked in an earth pit and some of it was put in the crotch of a tree for the ancestors. What was left was for other clan members.

By accident, I learned much later that the small pool was probably significant because it reflected (backwards) the burning of the pig parts to the ancestors, who lived in a universe where things ran backwards. I discovered this when I tried to show some super-eight movie remains that I had spliced together and ran backwards in the projector. I thought it would be funny for the people to see an airplane landing backwards, people backing into the plane, and so forth. However, no one laughed at the movie and one of the men asked me, “How did you know?” “How did I know what?” I replied. “How did you know that in our ancestral spirit-world things run (go) backwards?”

I had stumbled upon a worldview that I had been unaware of, but which helped me explore other cultural domains.<sup>10</sup>

I also witnessed ceremonies marking the entrance of a newly imported spirit called *Natome*. During a severe epidemic it was bought and imported from an area to the west of the Muli hamlet. New spirits were often sought when the usual practices of cures were deemed ineffective, as they were in this case and, when this happens, new word taboo was invoked and new ceremonies were used.

The cause of a Kewa illness, especially when severe, is most often attributed to sorcery.<sup>11</sup> The most common cure is to have the patient drink *upipi*, I do not know its ingredients, but it was the traditional emetic offered to the sick person. I witnessed a man very sick with hepatitis decline the drink because he was a church leader and was convinced that it was wrong.

### Summary

Although several body part terms are used to express emotions in Kewa, the historical sequence seems to be: (1) the liver; (2) liver-heart, and more recently (3) the stomach. Although the word for “heart” can be adjoined with the word for “liver” (as a compound), it does not occur separately to express an emotion.

Sicknesses of various kinds are attributed to the malevolent nature of certain spirits, some of which can also provide cures for sicknesses. Serious and violent sickness are most often attributed to sorcery.

### Abbreviations

1 <sup>st</sup>	First person
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Second person
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Third person
Sg/sg	Singular
Pl	Plural
Pr	Present
Pa	Past

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<sup>10</sup> For examples of how this helped me form culturally appropriate questions, see Franklin 1971.

<sup>11</sup> For comments on sorcery in areas of Papua New Guinea, see Franklin 2010.

Fu	Future
Pf	Perfect
Pos	Possessive

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

There are 11 languages of the Engan Family, located in several Provinces: Enga, East Sepik, Hela, Southern Highlands, Gulf. The following list includes (omitting Kewa) words I have found that refer to emotional centers in several of the languages:

Enga: *awíya, kípí, móna, yamá-li, yamá-pu* “seat of thought/emotion”<sup>12</sup>

Ipili: *kona-li* “lungs”

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

Lembena: *lipe* “heart”; *lipe-nge* “liver”<sup>13</sup>

Bisorio: *sili, sili-ga* “heart”, *ogo-ni* “thoughts”<sup>14</sup>

Mendi: *kone* translated throughout for “heart”<sup>15</sup>

Sau: *pu-ki* (“liver”); occasionally *home* “mind, thoughts”<sup>16</sup>

Kyaka: *mona* (“heart, intelligence, mind”)<sup>17</sup>

Pole (South Kewa): *pu* (“liver”) or *pu romba* (“liver stomach”)<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Lang 1973:152. Elsewhere the various words 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>13</sup> From an SIL wordlist from the village of Kopeupalu, taken in 1979.

<sup>14</sup> Noted in *Gode Bi*, the New Testament in Bisorio, New Tribes Mission, 1991.

<sup>15</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>16</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>17</sup> Draper and Draper 2002: 268; there is over a page of examples of *mona* in various contexts, all related to emotional experiences.

<sup>18</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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