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1. Introduction

Nungon is an umbrella term for the four southern, higher-elevation village-lects of a dialect continuum in the Uruwa River valley, Saruwaged Mountains, Papua New Guinea (Sarvasy 2013, 2014, 2015a,b, 2016, 2017a,b,c, 2018; Sarvasy and Ögate, forthcoming). In this oval-shaped continuum with the Uruwa River running through the center, each village community traditionally had its own dialect. The history of use of the term Nungon is unknown, but no language surveys by non-Papua New Guinean researchers through the 1960s (Hooley and McElhanon 1970: 1084-1085) include the term; in these, the village names serve as language names. It is likely that use of *nungon* 'what' as an exemplar of language and thence as an official language name is related to Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) work in the northern portion of the dialect continuum in 1987-1995; SIL used the form *yaö* 'what' in northern dialects to label the entire continuum. This is the source of the language

name Yau used by *Ethnologue* (<yuw>); more accurately, the continuum could be referred to with the name Uruwa. The grammar of Nungon (Sarvasy 2017a) focuses on the Towet village variety, with comparative notes on the Kotet, Worin and Yawan Nungon dialects, and on the more distant Sagain and Mup "Nuon" dialects (in which there is rampant consonant elision, hence *nuon* for 'what').

Secret language and linguistic taboos are part of Nungon discourse practices. That is, like most speech communities, Nungon speakers censor various aspects of language in particular contexts (Allan and Burridge 2006). Elements of these were observed by the author in the course of nine months of monolingual immersion fieldwork in the period 2011-2013. That fieldwork aimed at full grammatical analysis of Nungon. Secret language and linguistic taboos were not the primary focus, and, indeed, caution about appearing to pry kept me from investigating any aspect of these in depth. At the outset of my fieldwork, the local Councillor instructed the Towet community to share only *maa orog-o* 'speech good-ADJ,' 'good language,' with me, and not to share any *maa moin-no* 'speech bad-ADJ.' This made people somewhat nervous about recording for me; in the first months of my fieldwork, a neighbor might appear in the doorway of the hut as an elderly woman prepared to record a narrative and admonish her to 'only speak good language!' This atmosphere was not one in which I wanted to press people on less-public aspects of language. This chapter is an exhaustive report of my knowledge of these systems, to the extent to which local people have assented to their being shared.

The elements discussed here are: forest avoidance registers, young people's code-speak, and other linguistic taboos. Much of this is also mentioned briefly in Sarvasy (2017a: 45-50). Although none of these phenomena are unique to Nungon, there are new facets to all of them. One Nungon forest avoidance register seems to be a heretofore undescribed variety in its specificity to landholdings of a particular clan. Description of the Nungon forest avoidance registers also enables a new generalization about the functions of these registers in Papua New Guinea. The young people's code-speak is a very different type of concealed speech; probably faddish rather than traditional, and with the aims of circulating gossip and snide remarks rather than protecting against spirits. This description supports the observation by other fieldworkers that similar games can arise and decline swiftly in small communities. Finally, among the other linguistic taboos such as prohibitions on speaking the names of affines is a linguistic means for averting harm through ingestion.

2. Forest avoidance registers

Special avoidance registers used in the forest or mountains are well-attested in speech communities in the New Guinea Highlands. These include: Kalam (Bulmer 1967, Pawley 1992), Mt. Giluwe region (Franklin 1972), Imbongu (Franklin and Stefaniw 1992), Huli (Franklin 1972, Peter Dwyer, p.c. 2018, Michael Main, p.c. 2018, Goldman 1983), Duna (Franklin 1972), Telefol (Franklin 1972), Edolo (Peter Dwyer, p.c. 2018), Enga (Philip Gibbs, p.c. 2018), Kakoli (Michael Goddard, p.c. 2018), and Bosavi (Bambi Schieffelin p.c. 2018). Beyond the Highlands, accounts exist of a traditional 'mountain talk' register among the Awiakay (Hoenigman 2012). These may be the counter-

parts to avoidance ocean-fishing registers in Micronesia (Michael Lieber, p.c. 2018). Descriptions of forest avoidance registers for the Huon Peninsula region, where Nungon is spoken, are not known to me, but mention of them is likely found in grammar sketches or other materials.

The forest avoidance registers involve at least some lexical substitution: nouns and sometimes entire common clauses, and in some cases, altered grammatical morphemes (Franklin 1972). Most observers relate the registers to local beliefs about avoiding harm at the hands of forest- or mountain-dwelling spirits: this harm could be to themselves, or to the success of their activity.

Some descriptions of these registers depict them as used during particular activities in the forest or mountain region, such as hunting or certain types of gathering. For instance, according to Bambi Schieffelin (p.c. 2018), the Bosavi hunting register meant solely to keep animals from understanding the aims of hunters. But it is sometimes unclear from these accounts whether the avoidance register would also be used during other travel in the forest or mountains. This question remains, for instance, with Bulmer's account of the Kalam "pandanus language" (Bulmer 1967). According to Bulmer, the avoidance register known by local people as 'pandanus language' is used for both cassowary hunting and pandanus nut gathering in higher-elevation regions. Bulmer is silent on whether this avoidance register is used in casual travel in those regions.

Other observers imply that some avoidance registers are used in a certain place regardless of activity. Although, like Bulmer (1967), Franklin (1972) calls the avoidance register used around Mt. Giluwe by the Mbongu, Kewa and Mendi a "pandanus language," he describes the purpose of it as "to claim to control the magical properties associated with the mountain" (1972: 70). The implication is that the register is named for the pandanus nuts that people gather in the region where it applies, but that the register applies to all activity and travel in the region. Other observers similarly imply that the avoidance register might be obligatory when speakers traverse forest or higher-elevation uninhabited terrain, regardless of their activity (Hoenigman 2012, Peter Dwyer, p.c. 2018). According to Peter Dwyer, for instance, modern Kubo "seismic workers" working on Huli high forest lands in 2013-2014 were instructed by Huli speakers to replace certain terms with others (p.c. 2018). Either this shows that the register is used regardless of activity, or the new "seismic work" was judged by speakers to be close enough to a traditional activity to merit the register's use.

In every account I have read from mainland New Guinea, use of the forest avoidance register takes place in a region locally defined as 'forest' or 'mountain,' opposed in some way(s) to a lower-elevation or more settled area. For instance, Bulmer (1967) interprets the Kalam worldview as maintaining an "antithesis" between the terrain in which taro can be cultivated (up to 6,500 ft) and the lands too high in elevation for taro growing, where cassowary are hunted and the major seasonal crop is pandanus; the avoidance register is used in this latter region.

Franklin (1972: 70) further mentions a relationship, perhaps secondary, between land ownership and the Mt. Giluwe avoidance register: "The ritual language also serves to remind outsiders that certain areas of the mountain are marked off for the exclusive rights of the clans adjacent to the Pandanus area. Without a

knowledge of the ritual language, any outsider would not only be unwise, but also unwilling, to trespass in the area." This statement raises several questions: Is the register used only in the "certain areas" belonging to these clans, or also elsewhere on the mountain? Who are "outsiders" here: members of other clans resident in the Mt. Giluwe region, or just people from elsewhere? How would outsiders learn of the existence of the ritual language, to be "reminded" by it of land ownership? Do "exclusive rights" apply to travel or just to hunting and gathering? Would it be permissible for an outsider with knowledge of the ritual language to traverse the area? Since Franklin writes that the Mt. Giluwe avoidance register is used by three language groups, it would seem that many who do not belong to the clans adjacent to the area do know and use it? Although Franklin does not address these points, he does relate the language-as-warning-for-trespassers to physical markers around the border of the taboo area (1972: 70).

One traditional Nungon forest avoidance register, as I understand it, goes one step beyond Franklin's description in that *every* clan in the region could have historically had its own register for use in its own lands (each village may comprise three or more clans). This would have come about because the spirits who posed a danger to travelers were ancestor spirits who resided on their own clan's lands. This register, described to me for Kotet village, was no longer used in the strongly Seventh-Day Adventist Towet village where my research is based. Kotet village, in the highest reaches of the Uruwa River valley, is generally more socially conservative. This tendency to social conservatism seems to persist even though a number of Kotet villagers have converted to Seventh-Day Adventism. For instance, a Towet man married to a Kotet woman explained to me that he could not approach or touch his affines in Kotet; this is more extreme than the mere name avoidance practiced in Towet today (see §4, below). It is not clear when the Towet register ceased to be used, if one did exist. There is some evidence that traditional Towet hunting practices involved the avoidance of game animal names: this has been recounted to me and is encoded in the set of traditional hunting dog commands. I consider the Towet hunting avoidance register here first, separately from the more general Kotet forest avoidance register.

By 2011, all but three households in Towet village (which totaled about 130 people) had ceased regular hunting activities. Most people above the age of about twenty-eight, however, had strong memories of hunting expeditions; this was a preferred topic of narratives recorded for me in the course of grammatical research. There were several types of traditional hunting: trap-laying, camouflaged shooting of birds from elevated platforms in trees, group hunts of the *horut* type, and *hap omot*, hunting with dogs (Sarvasy 2017a: 40-42). *Hap omot* 'hunting with dogs' usually involved small parties of family members, often mixed-sex, in which men carried bows and arrows, but dogs were instrumental in running down quarry. This type of hunting targeted mammals of the canopy and the ground. Traditionally, Towet men prepared for hunts with special cleansing regimens, and on departing, were ritually blessed by someone chewing fresh ginger and spitting onto aromatic leaves (Sarvasy 2017a: 21-22).

When hunting, Towet people avoided uttering names of game animals, at least when

they were targeting those animals. As with Bosavi (Bambi Schieffelin, p.c. 2018), this was meant to keep animals from discovering that they were being hunted. This avoidance is encoded in the hunting commands for dogs, and also in certain beliefs about negative consequences if a name was uttered. For instance, if a hunter shot the marsupial called *hiyong* (Plush-coated ringtail, *Pseudochirops corinnae*) and then uttered its name, it would climb back up out of reach into the tree with its intestines dangling! Towet people readily recounted traditional hunting dog commands (a full list is in Sarvasy 2017a: 171). Some of these were specific to the type of game to be pursued, and in each, a term other than the Towet Nungon name of the animal occurs. When it is an echidna that is to be pursued, the term *hor-o-n!* (root-3SG.POSS-LOC, 'at its base') is used; echidnas are ground-dwellers. The command telling a dog to search for a Mountain cuscus (*Phalanger carmelitae*) uses the animal's name, *dumang*, from the Worin village dialect instead of its name in the Towet dialect, *degöm*. I was told that this was expressly done to mislead the animal (implying that the fauna on Towet's landholdings understood only the Towet dialect). For other animals, such as *hewam* 'Huon tree kangaroo' (*Dendrolagus matscheii*), the Towet dog commands use opaque terms like *ori!* that are not parsable in modern Nungon. The Towet village practice of avoiding the names of game animals while hunting belongs to the cohort of New Guinea forest avoidance registers that are specific to particular hunting or gathering activities in the forest. For instance, there would apparently be no negative consequences for a casual traveler to utter the name of the Plush-coated ringtail. This hunting avoidance register thus contrasts with the more general forest avoidance register of Kotet village.

The Kotet village forest avoidance register was explained to me by Manggirai of Kotet as background to an ancestor story he had recorded in Kotet Nungon. He framed the discussion around the name of his *bem* 'ancestor,' which he told me. I will not write or translate the name here, except to describe it as a very common noun referring to a common observable feature of the forest landscape. Manggirai explained that in his own ancestral forest holdings, his ancestor's spirit would be summoned by speaking this common noun (his name). This meant that Manggirai and his family (and, presumably, others in the know) would be able to travel safely through their own forest lands by replacing their ancestor's name with another noun or phrase (approximating the forbidden noun through mimesis) when they needed to describe this common feature of the forest. But it would have been, in effect, a verbal trap for others who trespassed on their lands; those people would be highly likely to unwittingly pronounce the ancestor's name, summoning him. To exemplify this using a different common feature of the landscape, this would be as if every time someone said the word for 'stone' they inadvertently summoned the eponymous ancestral guardian spirit of the land on which they walked.

Beyond the ancestor's name, the Kotet avoidance register seems to have involved further lexical replacements, again, often using mimesis, for other nouns besides ancestors' names. The rationale for these other avoidances is not fully known, nor do I yet know whether the Kotet register also involved replacement of particular verbs or extended phrases. Bulmer (1967) and Pawley (1992) depict the traditional

Kalam perception of the high mountains as being a spiritually dangerous place. The Kotet view of *dungin* 'forest' (the term is *boop* in Towet Nungon) must have been similar; Manggirai told me that in earlier times—and perhaps still for some families—adults tied a protective piece of *kamfang* bunchgrass around a child's pinky on the child's first excursion into the forest.

Manggirai's description of the Kotet Nungon forest avoidance register differs in three ways from many descriptions of similar forest avoidance registers elsewhere in PNG. First, use of the register is not limited to pursuit of a particular activity in the forest, as in the Towet or Bosavi hunting registers (Bambi Schieffelin, p.c. 2018), or the Kalam pandanus register, used for hunting cassowaries and gathering pandanus nuts (Bulmer 1967, Pawley 1992). Second, the terms avoided in the register are not just community-specific, but clan-specific. Related to this is the third special aspect: the land on which each register is used is apparently a patchwork of holdings belonging to a specific clan, rather than a broad swath of land with miscellaneous owners.

The Kotet forest avoidance register, with its apparent ties to clan-specific landholdings, can be considered at least in part a linguistic counterpart to physical markings of off-limit lands (Franklin's "taboo signs," 1972: 70). As I have related elsewhere (Sarvasy 2017a: 41), a taboo sign in the Nungon area may be enforced by hidden traps under the ground beyond the sign; in one instance during my time in the region in 2012, a young woman who had married into the Towet community from Yawan village disregarded the taboo sign along a shortcut to Towet. Shortly after turning onto the forbidden path, she stepped barefoot onto a hidden bamboo spike (*bung* 'spike'). When she fell, her thigh was gored by another hidden spike. In 2015, my adopted mother spent some nights sleeping in a forest hut close to a plot of land she was cultivating; this allowed her to avoid the steep climb down to the village and rest her knees, which were bothering her. Another elderly woman working a nearby plot slept in the same hut. My mother related how her adult son was afraid to visit her in the hut because he knew that the women planted hidden spikes around the hut at night. These would be covered by dry leaves or otherwise hidden, but were sure to be planted in the areas most likely to be tread on by trespassers.

In the case of the Kotet avoidance register, the ancestors' names would seem to be equivalents to such physical traps. Since the ancestors can be eponymous with common features of the landscape, trespassers would be likely to unwittingly speak their names, summoning them.

It is tacitly assumed in all descriptions of Papua New Guinea forest/mountain avoidance registers that they are traditional. Both the Kotet forest avoidance register and the Towet hunting avoidance register indeed seem to have been practiced for at least a few generations. These examples of veiled speech thus contrast with the type described in the following section, which may have only been practiced in the community for a few years. The reasons for the two types are also highly divergent; personal protection as a goal of the forest avoidance register contrasts with conveying gossip and snide remarks as a goal of this second secret speech type.

3. Young people's code-speak

In 2011-2012, I observed some young people aged approximately 11 through 25 occasionally using a phonological imposition-style (Botne and Davis 2000) game to keep their conversations private from others present. In general, they seemed to either be sharing gossip or relaying snide remarks relating to older family members who were present. The code-speak could be interpreted as thus subverting the usual hierarchical social structure in which people aged in their late twenties and older held most power and commanded most respect (a function anticipated by Storch 2017).

We spoke about this modified style as *oesit ketket ton maa* 'girl boy GEN speech,' 'girls' and boys' speech,' but this descriptor may have originated in my own description of the game to others, and it is possible that the code's users had a different term for it that wasn't shared with me. Older people claimed not to understand thus-coded speech, and further denied ever having used or heard of similar code-speak in their own youth in response to my questions about the age of the game and whether it was traditional.

The game involves the insertion of /b/ and a copied vowel after each CV in each word, as seen in (1a,b):

(1a) Standard Towet Nungon:

bög-in ongo-go-t.
house-LOC go-RP-1SG
I went home.

(1b) Girls' and boys' code-speak:

böbögibin obongobogobot.

In 2011, I observed Liwensi ("Lyn") daughter of Ögate, then the early-twenties mother of Stesi (about five years old) and my adopted sister and research assistant, using the game occasionally with peers, older preteens, and teenagers, including her niece Sirewen, then about 12. It seemed pointedly aimed at exchanging private, sometimes snide, asides. When Lyn offered to record a short traditional story for my Nungon texts corpus, I asked her to record it twice, once in regular Nungon, and once in altered Nungon using the insertion game. Immediately after telling the 1:44-long story 'Women picking *kugek* fruit and the man-eater,' she easily produced a fluid rendition of the story with /b/ insertion throughout. Unfortunately, Lyn and her mother later approached me and begged me to erase the rendition in code-speak. It had been decided that the girls' and boys' code-speak was 'bad language,' and they did not want to be responsible for its entering my corpus. I complied and erased the recording. I did not observe the girls' and boys' code-speak in use by Lyn or anyone else in 2015 or 2017.

In 2012, missionaries working in the Highlands told me that their son had learned the same /b/-imposition game in Tok Pisin from local children, who called it Long Pidgin. In 2018, Tok Pisin speaker Janet Raphael of Mogi, near Mt. Hagen, confirmed that she knew of Long Pidgin, but implied that the game was outdated and little-used nowadays in the Highlands, having been replaced by a new game in which vowels of Tok Pisin were altered (Jennifer Boer, p.c. 2018). Indeed, Francesca Merlan and Alan Rumsey related their impression of the rise and fall of a similar word game in Ku Waru in the early 1980s as being faddish: generating intense interest and

use for relatively short times, then vanishing (Alan Rumsey, p.c. 2018). It seems likely that the Nungon girls' and boys' code-speak was likewise a passing trend in the Uruwa area.

4. Further linguistic taboos

There are further linguistic taboos and avoidances practiced in Nungon society. These include personal name taboos, restrictions on sharing ancestor stories, and taboos on speaking about certain subjects; there are probably myriad other taboos not addressed here. And as with the Towet and Kotet forest registers, in at least one instance of potential harm through ingestion, harm can be averted by replacing the name of the item consumed with a more generic phrase.

Throughout the Nungon area, affines do not speak each others' names (Sarvasy 2017a: 45). Affines address each other using the appropriate kin term, e.g. *homu* 'same-sex, same-generation in-law of a woman.' In reference to an affine, a speaker can also use a kin term, or may use an epithet such as 'mother/father/wife/husband of X.' Indeed, the most neutral and widespread way to address and refer to parents of children is as 'mother/father of X,' where X is any of their children. This is not restricted by affinal relationships. Some people avoid speaking the names of deceased family members. Although my adopted mother in Towet village did not use a forest avoidance register, she expressed some surprise that Kotet elder Manggirai announced his ancestor's name in a recording for me. Indeed, Manggirai shared his ancestor's name pointedly; this was not done casually. After finishing a story throughout which he called the ancestor *bem-na* 'ancestor-1SG.POSS,' 'my ancestor,' Manggirai declared, at high volume, *bem-na maa-no X!* 'ancestor-1SG.POSS name-3SG.POSS X,' 'My ancestor's name is X!' (I have replaced the name with X.) On hearing this, my mother drily observed: 'He spoke his ancestor's name.'

All Uruwa clans seem to have proprietary *bem hat* 'ancestor story,' 'ancestor stories.' A story seems to belong to a particular clan if it describes adventures of one of their own ancestors and/or takes place on their own lands (of course, there are likely also additional factors to story ownership). Most Towet people recorded their clans' ancestor stories for me with full license for me to transcribe, translate and/or share the recordings elsewhere. (I never asked for ancestor stories in particular; people volunteered them.) But on one of my rare visits to southern Worin village, a Worin father of four young children told me an ancestor story with the stipulation that I not translate it into English. He was happy for me to transcribe it and print it on paper for circulation within the Uruwa area, but told me that the story was *onding-o-na* 'strength-ADJ-1SG.POSS,' 'my strength,' *gesu-na* 'power-1SG.POSS,' 'my power.' Incidentally, an elder in Towet had already recorded the same story for me as her own clan's ancestor story, without any such stipulation. I respected the Worin man's wish by not translating either rendition, and not using examples from them in any linguistic papers.

In every society, certain ideas should not be discussed in certain places or at certain times. An old taboo against speaking while planting taro and other crops is no longer observed in the region. Another of the apparently traditional such taboos in the Nungon sphere is discussing plans for the next day at night. When one of my adopted sisters began

to do so, our mother scolded her: 'They don't talk like that at night.' It was explained to me that this was because an *amna unom-ma* 'man bogey-SPEC,' 'bogeyman,' could be lurking outside the hut in the dark. If he overheard someone planning out loud for the next day, he might intercept them in the planned activity.

Finally, harm can befall someone through ingestion. Just as the forest avoidance registers presented in §2 use language to protect against potential harm to a traveler or failure of a hunt, there is at least one case where I was instructed in Towet village to avoid uttering the name of a particular food when eating it. The *usak* tree has edible leaves and nuts; the leaves are rough, but soften when cooked and are prized as accompaniment to the deep red, oily *omop* 'pandanus conoideus' sauce. The nuts are small, hard, dark spheres. These can also be boiled, and are known as nutritious food for pregnant women. People also eat them raw, but they may sting the mouth. It is said that if one utters their name, *usak kowur-o* '*usak* fruit-3SG.POSS,' when eating them, they will sting, but if one instead utters the generic *eep kowur-o* 'tree fruit-3SG.POSS,' one can consume them safely. Clearly, the potency of language persists in the village, as in the forest, and the power of names extends beyond animate beings.

5. Conclusion

The categories of secret speech varieties and linguistic taboos noted briefly here are not unique to Nungon (Storch 2017). Language serves as the means here, as elsewhere, for protecting oneself and promoting the success of one's pursuits, for elevating oneself and one's peers above those who otherwise wield more power, and for showing respect in fragile familial relationships.

The Nungon case enables fine-tuning of the typology of forest/mountain avoidance registers in Papua New Guinea. First, these registers can be divided into two major groups: those used only during certain hunting or gathering activities in the forest or mountains, and those used during all travel and activities in the forest or mountains. The Towet Nungon hunting register, as most evident today in traditional hunting commands, belongs to the first category. Within this second category, the Kotet Nungon avoidance register seems to represent a previously-undescribed subtype: according to my understanding of Manggirai's description, each register would be specific to a particular clan's landholdings within the forest. The Kotet avoidance register allows people to move safely in a terrain in which they otherwise would be subject to the linguistic equivalent of concealed spikes underfoot.

The 'imposition' language game used, possibly fleetingly, by young Nungon speakers to subvert social structures and get the better of their elders is another example of the widespread phenomenon of phonologically-altered code-speech (Laycock 1972, Storch 2017). It seems that the same /b/-imposition game was *au courant* in Tok Pisin in parts of the Highlands at approximately the same time period as in Nungon. It is possible that the Highlands fad spread across the Markham River valley to the Nungon area via Tok Pisin-speaking teachers at the Nungon area primary school or other outside connections. If this were the case, this would be evidence of the ability for a linguistic trend to spread across political, geological, and linguistic boundaries in eastern Papua New Guinea.

Finally, this case study of selected linguistic taboos and secret language in the Nungon speech community is a reminder that harm can occur through ingestion. Just as mammals are liable to react to the uttering of their Nungon names in the Towet Nungon hunting register, the seeds of the *usak* tree similarly will sting the mouth if their name is uttered at the time of ingestion. This could be emblematic of the close relationship between Nungon speakers and plant life in their environment: during an ethnobotanical project where the author and Nungon speakers gathered hundreds of plant tokens for identification, passersby sometimes admired the tokens and addressed them with markers of endearment: 'my dear *songgomon* leaf!'

Abbreviations

1, 2, 3	first, second, third person
ADJ	adjective
GEN	genitive
LOC	locative
POSS	possessive
RP	remote past
SG	singular
SPEC	specifiers

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