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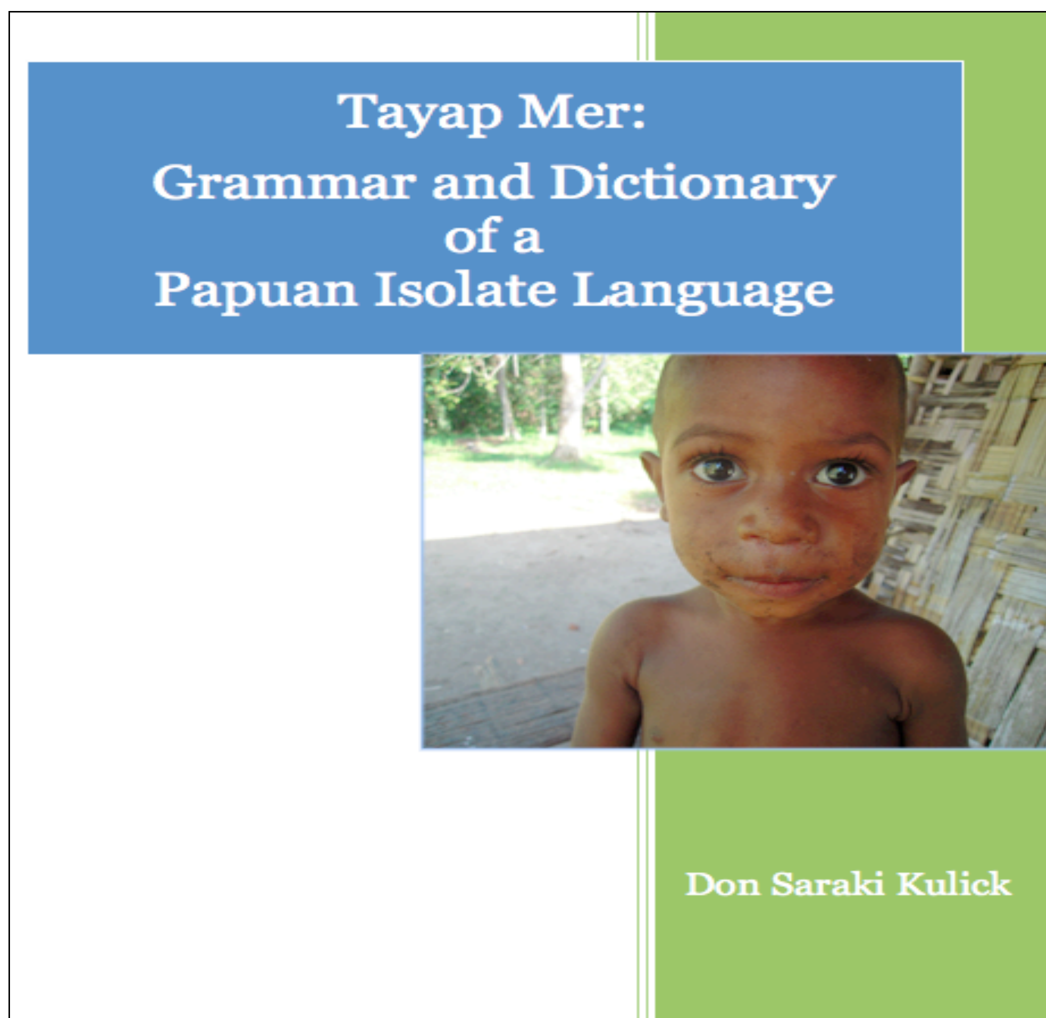
The text is the first chapter of my forthcoming grammar and dictionary of Tayap.

It is not a finished draft and parts of it will certainly be revised.



1

The Tayap language and its speakers

1.1 General overview of Tayap and the linguistic situation in Gapun

Tayap mer means "Tayap language" and refers to a Papuan language spoken by a dwindling number of people, most of whom live in a small village called Gapun. Gapun is located on the Papua New Guinea mainland, between the Sepik and Ramu rivers, about 30

kilometers inland from the northern coast. The village is far from roads of any kind and is difficult to reach. It lies in a mosquito-infested swamp in the middle of the rainforest.

The Tayap language is tiny, even by the extreme standards of Papua New Guinea, where one linguist estimated that 35% of the languages have fewer than 500 speakers (Sankoff 1980: 96). As far as anyone in Gapun has been able to remember, Tayap has never had more than, at most, about 150 speakers. That small number seems to have remained stable for a very long time. By the 1980s, however, children were no longer learning Tayap as their first language. Instead, they were learning Tok Pisin, the most important and widely-spoken national language of Papua New Guinea.

I began my work in Gapun in 1986. At that time, the number of people who actively commanded Tayap – in the sense that they spoke it with other villagers and were able to narrate stories in it – was about 90, out of a population of about 130 (most but not all of whom lived in Gapun). Twenty-three years later, in 2009, the population of Gapun had grown to 208 people. In addition, 17 people who had been born and raised in Gapun had left the village (mostly because of conflicts over land rights and sorcery accusations) and moved to the village of Wongan, which is a 1½ hour trip from Gapun, by foot and then dugout canoe across a wide mangrove lake. If we were to include those people in a count of Gapuners the total population would be 225. And if their children, most of whom were born and raised in Wongan, were to be included, the number of people who could reasonably claim to be a Gapuner would be close to 300.

Any way Gapuners are counted, it is clear that their numbers have doubled over the past twenty years. However, during that same time, old people have died and children have continued to learn Tok Pisin as their first language. By 2009, fewer than 20 people still living in Gapun had grown up with Tayap as their first language. Furthermore, the population of Gapun village is overwhelmingly young: 90% of the total population is under 40, and only 3 people in the village are over 60. Today only about 60 people actively command Tayap and only about 45 use the language to any extent in their day to day lives.

This grammar and dictionary is an attempt to document and preserve a small part of the linguistic heritage of the Gapun people. Its publication will without doubt have little or no impact on Tayap's impending demise. Gapuners of today have little need for their vernacular. They also have little desire for it – even though no villager ever openly acknowledges this.

Many instances of language death around the world start when adults more or less consciously neglect to teach their home language to their children because they want the children to succeed in school or because the home language is socially stigmatized. This is not the situation in Gapun. No one in Gapun has ever explicitly rejected Tayap, and no one disparages it or suggests that it should be forgotten. On the contrary, Gapuners all express positive sentiments towards their vernacular language. They all say they like it. Older adults occasionally flare up and berate young people and children for not knowing it.

But despite positive sentiments toward Tayap, day to day village life is now overwhelmingly conducted in Tok Pisin. Village-wide meetings are in Tok Pisin, church services are in Tok Pisin, gatherings in the men's house is in Tok Pisin, chatter on the field during soccer matches is in Tok Pisin, talk among women visiting new mothers in maternity houses is in Tok Pisin. Informal conversations involving villagers over 35 often involve code-switching between Tayap and Tok Pisin, depending on who is present. But most conversations in Gapun, between most people, take place mostly in Tok Pisin. Even private, intimate conversations occur overwhelmingly in Tok Pisin: young men who go off together in groups to engage in secret rituals that make them feel lighter and more attractive speak Tok Pisin to one another. Husbands and wives under 30, when they are alone together, speak Tok Pisin – a fact I know because when I asked a husband or a wife to give me their opinion on their spouse's competence in Tayap, they usually answered that they couldn't, because they

almost never heard their spouse speak Tayap. When villagers panic – for example when a drunken young man hurls himself through the village swinging a machete at anyone he sees, or when a child is bitten by a death adder in the middle of the village and no one knows where it went – on occasions like those, the overwhelming bulk of everyone's alarmed screams to one another, tellingly, is in Tok Pisin, not Tayap. And equally tellingly, even senior villagers' admonitions to younger people to speak Tayap tend to be shouted in Tok Pisin. There is never any consistent effort to teach children Tayap; indeed, whenever young people do occasionally attempt to say something in it, any adult who hears them will often dismiss them with a chuckle or a sneer, and loudly bemoan how poorly they speak the vernacular language.

Language loss is inevitably linked to cultural change, and during the past few decades, Gapun has changed dramatically. The changes have not been economic: Gapun villagers of today are not materially much better off than their great-grandparents. Nor are villagers radically different from their post-war predecessors in terms of their understandings of their place in the world: like their grandparents, today's villagers still believe that Papua New Guineans are "the last country" and that one day, hopefully soon, Jesus will return to Earth and bestow upon them all the goods and riches that they believe He has already rewarded white people with, everywhere else in the world.

What makes villagers of today very different from the generation born in the 1940s and earlier is that the overwhelming majority of the social, cultural and ritual practices that link them to their history have vanished. The men's house cult, which for generations was the backbone of Gapun culture, is broken. Previously important social bonds, such as relations between joking kin, which are inherited relations to certain members of the clans into which one may marry, (*njakum* in Tayap, 'wanpilai' in Tok Pisin) are dissolved. Traditional healing rites, which depended on knowing, respecting, flattering and sometimes threatening the spirits of ancestors and the powers of the rainforest, are now all regarded as suspicious at best and Satanic at worst. Funerary rituals, which once engaged entire villages and were occasions for important social gatherings, great feasts and the momentous playing of the sacred flutes in the men's house – these are all moribund. For the past fifty years, villagers have been much more interested in trying to be good Catholics, trying to get their children educated, and trying to discover a way to make money so that they can "develop" than they have been in talking about or preserving their traditions. Like perhaps most people around the world, Gapuners care much more about their future than they do about their past. And a price they seem destined to pay for their enthusiastic orientation towards the future is not only the loss of their traditions and history, but also the loss of their ancestral language.

The death of languages is a phenomenon that linguists, anthropologists and activists for indigenous and ethnic rights have long been aware of, and concerned about. Much early linguistic and anthropological work was devoted to "salvaging" what could be documented of traditions and languages that were fading to extinction in the early decades of the 20th century. During the past 20 years, however, awareness of language death has turned from concern to alarm. Linguists have realized that languages are becoming extinct at a rate seemingly unprecedented in history. It is sobering to realize, for example, that 90% of the indigenous languages spoken upon Cook's arrival in Australia are either dead or on the verge of dying. One overview has called the United States "a graveyard for hundreds of languages" (Nettle and Romaine 2000:5), noting that 80% of the indigenous languages that still even exist there are no longer being learned by children. 30% of the languages spoken in South America are thought to be "no longer viable". And so on. The most widely cited estimate of language death is the ominous prediction that 90% of the world's approximately 6,000 languages are endangered (Krauss 1992). This figure, which at first glance seems hyperbolic and unbelievable, becomes more comprehensible the moment it is realized that most people in the world speak one or more of 100 largest languages. Those big languages, linguists claim, are

spoken by 96% of the world's population. This means that 4% of the world's population speaks the overwhelming majority of the world's languages. And those languages – thousands of them, many of them undocumented – are believed to be in danger of vanishing within the next 100 years.

Tayap is one of those languages. And in the literature on language death that began burgeoning in the 1990s, it has sometimes been featured as a poignant example. It is discussed, for example, in Daniel Nettle and Susanne Romaine's comprehensive overview of language extinction around the world. Those linguists cite my earlier work on Gapun (using the spelling of 'Tayap' that I used previously; Kulick 1992) to make the point that:

> Taiap is an amazingly rich language in terms of its structural diversity and particularly distinctive vocabulary, unlike any other in the Sepik. It is not clearly related to any other language in the area or indeed to any other language in Papua New Guinea as far as we can tell (2000:13).

This celebration of Tayap's uniqueness and complexity is a buildup that leads to a somber punchline: "While further research might provide clues about the precise genetic relationship between Taiap and other languages, this is unlikely to happen. Taiap is dying", write Nettle and Romaine, employing a baleful tone that is characteristic of all work on language death around the world.

No one could dispute that the disappearance of a human language is a cause for lamentation and mourning. And it would be insensitive and beside the point to critique linguists' attempts to inform a wider public about the widespread language extinction that appears to be occurring across the globe today. But even as we acknowledge and appreciate this, it is still possible to be skeptical of what has emerged as the dominant way in which linguists discuss language death – the likening of endangered languages to endangered animals and endangered plants. Nettle and Romaine, for example, liken Tayap to a great bird. They write, "if Taiap were a rare species of bird or Ubykh [another endangered language they discuss] a dying coral reef, maybe more people would know of their plight and be concerned". And they continue, asking dramatically, "Should we be any less concerned about Taiap than we are about the passing of the California condor?" (2000: 13-14).

A question like that is difficult to answer, not least because it is far from obvious what 'our' concern that Tayap is dying might actually materialize in practice, and what consequences those material expressions of 'our' concern might have for anyone living in Gapun. There is also a problem with likening Tayap to a condor because exquisite as languages may be, they really are not like condors or coral reefs. Condor chicks are not sent to schools where they are taught in a cosmopolitan language they've barely ever heard, and where they learn to devalue their traditional condor ways. Coral reefs are not converted to Christianity.

To be fair, none of these things happen to languages either. But they do happen to speakers of many of the languages that linguists are so concerned about. Linguists like Nettle and Romaine who use species metaphors understand this, of course. But in the current cultural climate that exhorts people to develop concern for the environment and sustainability, many linguists seem to believe that they can elicit some kind of sympathy and support for dying languages if they talk about them in terms of biodiversity and species loss. This way of thinking about language death is specious, however, because it directs our attention to the natural world. By encouraging us to think in terms of ecosystems rather than political systems, ecological or species metaphors elide, or at least defer, the simple realization that *language death is anything but a natural phenomenon*. On the contrary, it is a profoundly social phenomenon. Languages die because people stop speaking them, not because they

exhaust themselves in the fullness of time or are killed off by predatory languages of greater phonological scope or syntactic richness.

A better metaphor for language death, instead of seeing languages as animals or organisms, would be to think of them like political movements, philosophies, or religions – that is, to consider them as social phenomena that cannot be comprehended apart from history, beliefs, economics, desire, structure and power. And that necessarily change and sometimes even disappear as the material, economic, social and cultural conditions that sustain them shift and transform.

With that in mind, and given the current state and tenor of Gapun village life, I wish to make it clear that this grammar and dictionary of Tayap is not an effort to influence the future. It is, instead, a record that documents what I believe soon will be the irrevocable past. Gapun villagers are ceasing to speak their language and if present trends persist, in thirty of forty years, Tayap will be gone forever. While this is inconsolably sad, it is the villagers' choice. It is a choice I have no doubt that their descendants will castigate them for, as always eventually happens with languages that die. But I do not write this book with the fantasy that its appearance will somehow change villagers' lives and make them revive their dying language. Indeed, I recognize that the opposite may – and at this point probably will – happen. The appearance of Tayap words printed in a book may foster resignation and complacency: a sense that, 'Well now our language is all there in a book, so we don't really have to worry about it anymore, our children can learn it from the book when they're grown up'. Tayap in a book may also solidify a view that the language is an august tongue of the ancestors far too majestic and esoteric for young people to ever even attempt to master.

So why write a book about Tayap? Partly to preserve some small part of the proverbial treasure chest of human knowledge, certainly. But mostly, I have written this grammar and dictionary primarily in the hope that a curious young Gapuner, sometime in the probably distant future, will discover it somewhere and value the fact that the obsolete language of his or her ancestors did not disappear without a trace.

The dictionary that accompanies this grammar is trilingual: Tayap, English and Tok Pisin. A few of the villagers in Gapun have had as many as ten years of schooling, most of it in English. Despite that, though (or, really, *because of that*) none of them currently possesses anything but the most rudimentary command of that language.[1] No villager today will be able to make much sense of this grammar of Tayap, but the dictionary part of this work that may be entertaining and useful to them now, as opposed to some distant future. And to facilitate that usefulness, I have included definitions in the language that is replacing Tayap and in which all villagers are fluent: Tok Pisin. I have also provided many examples of how the words in the dictionary are used in Tayap, and I have purposely included a large number of vulgarities. Gapun villagers are no different from anyone else who has ever scoured a dictionary to see if it dared to list the most obscene terms that one and one's sniggering friends could dream up. I hope that the shock of seeing some of their most vulgar words and insults immortalized in a book will provide the villagers with a great deal of guilty pleasure.

[1] In Kulick 1992: 175-80, I discuss the kind of schooling the villagers receive and argue that its sole outcome, aside from teaching some villagers a few rudimentary literacy skills, is to induce dissatisfaction with village life. Since 2009, no villager has received even this dismal minimal education. The teachers in the government-run primary school in the neighboring village of Wongan stopped teaching in early 2009. As of December 2010, the school was still closed and there was no prospect of it opening again in any forseeable future.

Despite the deliberate avoidance of certain kinds of linguistic terminology and presentational conventions, and also despite the absence here of a discussion of comparative data from other Sepik and Ramu languages, I do also hope that this grammar and dictionary might be of interest to linguists who study the genealogical relationships of Papuan languages, and to archeologists and historians who study the peopling and linguistic diversity of the Sepik region of Papua New Guinea. Tayap is relevant to both these areas of research, first because the language appears to be an isolate with no known relatives, and second, because the ancestral territory of the villagers includes the highest points in the lower Sepik basin. This territory was an island 6,000 years ago, before the sea had receded and the Sepik Basin formed. These geographical and linguistic facts suggest that Tayap may be a particularly ancient, autochthonous language that was already in place before the various waves of migration from the inland to the coast began occurring thousands of years ago (Ross 2005: 46).

1.2 Past research on Tayap

The history of linguistic research on Tayap is very short. In 1937, Gapun was visited by one of the few white men ever to make it there. This was Georg Höltker, a German S.V.D. (*Societas Verbi Divini*) missionary and anthropologist. Höltker went to Gapun in the company of another missionary based in the coastal village of Watam and he spent three hours in the village. He took two photographs and collected a word list. A year later, he published the list of 125 words, together with the weary remark that “it will be awhile before any other researcher ‘stumbles across’ Gapun, if only because of the small chances of worthwhile academic yields in this tiny village community, and also because of the inconvenient and arduous route leading to this linguistic island” (1938: 280. A translation of Höltker’s short article is included here in Appendix 1, along with the two photographs he took).

Höltker’s brief squib remained all that was known about Tayap until the early 1970s, when the Australian linguist Don Laycock travelled around the lower Sepik to collect basic vocabulary lists that allowed him to identify and propose classifications of the many languages spoken there. Laycock never visited Gapun, but he did get as far as neighboring Wongan, and he interviewed two Gapun villagers who were staying there at the time, Kawi Waiki and Konjab Akumbi (Laycock 1973: 35).

On the basis of the word list and a few verb paradigms that he gathered from Kawi and Konjab, Laycock classified Tayap (which he called “Gapun”) as a sub-phylum of the Sepik-Ramu language phylum. In the classification terminology used by Laycock and his linguistic colleagues in the 1970s, this meant that Tayap shared less than 12% of its basic vocabulary with other members of the phylum, and also that it exhibited marked differences from other members of the phylum – in Tayap’s case, gender pronouns and other differences related to gender marking were mentioned. (The wordlist used by Laycock appears as an appendix to his 1973 article. A discussion of the classifying criteria used to sort out Papuan languages is in Wurm 1982: 65-72).

Laycock included one other language in what he called the “Gapun sub-phylum level family”. This was a language of over 2,000 speakers, called Bungain. Bungain is geographically distant from Gapun, and Gapuners have no social, cultural or economic ties or affinities with – or even knowledge of – Bungain speakers. The relationship that Laycock postulated between Tayap and Bungain was not based on any solid data or analysis – it was based on the basic vocabulary list he used, as well as some rudimentary grammatical information, such as ‘Give me tobacco’, ‘I cannot give you any, I have none’, ‘If I had some I would give it to you’. Laycock himself noted that all his classifications of Sepik languages

were “tentative” and “impressionistic” (1973: 2). His description of the supposed similarities between Bungain and Tayap, in its entirety, consists of the following:

> The languages show complex verb morphology, after the manner of Nor-Pondo languages (subject marking by prefix in Bungain, and suffix in Gapun); but there is apparently no noun classification, and no indication of number in nouns. Gapun has a third-feminine pronoun; Bungain appears to lack this, but there is apparent gender concordance in verbs.
>
> (Laycock 1973:35)

Aside from the remark about complex verb morphology – which is a feature shared by most Papuan languages – this description makes Bungain and Tayap sound more *dissimilar* than similar (it also turns out that Tayap, in fact, does mark number on a restricted class of nouns; see Section 3.1.3). In an attempt to assess the feasibility of Laycock’s classification of Tayap and Bungain, I looked through the field data on which he based the classification, namely his field notebooks D7, D26 and D27, which are deposited in the Linguistics Department at the Australian National University, where Laycock worked.[2] Unfortunately, the notebooks turned out to be of quite limited use, because Laycock often did not translate the vernacular words he noted down in his field notebooks. He numbered the words, but his numbering does not correspond to the list he provides in his published article on how he classified them (Laycock 1973: 70-71). For example, in his Bungain fieldnotes, a word Laycock does translate, as ‘snake’ (*atop’*), is numbered 172. But in the published list, ‘snake’ is word number 152. Eight untranslated words follow *atop’*, but the ninth, *kwulémbe*, Laycock translates as ‘mosquito’. The problem is that in the wordlist published in his article, ‘mosquito’ comes 11 words after ‘snake’. These kinds of discrepancies make it impossible to use the wordlist Laycock provided in his article to identify the vernacular words he noted down in his field notebooks. This is not a problem with Laycock’s Tayap material, because I know the meaning of all the words he noted down. But since I know no Bungain, much of his list for that language is unrevealing.

As far as I am able to tell, there are no lexical similarities between Bungain and Tayap, beyond a couple of words that are common throughout the Sepik, such as the word for water (Bungain: wi; Tayap *awin*). Grammatically and morphologically, I could discern no similarities between Tayap and Bungain, and after examining the fieldnotes I was at a loss to understand the basis for his statement that “their relationship with each other is clear but not close” (Laycock and Z’graggen 1975: 757).

My own suspicion is that Laycock couldn’t easily fit either Tayap or Bungain into the language families he had developed for the Sepik region, and so he simply guessed that they might be related to one another. Later researchers have suggested that Bungain may be a Torricelli phylum language, but to my knowledge, no linguistic research has been carried out on it (Sanders and Sanders 1980:188). Whatever Bungain may be, the data on the language gathered by Laycock do not support his hypothesis that it is related to Tayap.

To illustrate how different Tayap is from neighboring languages, I have added it to the “Lower Sepik family basic word-list” that appears in William Foley’s 1986 book, *The Papuan Languages of New Guinea*. To enable the table to appear on a single page, I have omitted one of the languages in the original table (Karawari). The (K) after words in the Murik column indicates forms in the Kopar language.

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[2] I am very grateful to the collective efforts of Melissa Crowther, Mark Donohue, Nicholas Evans, Ewan Maidment, Doug Marmion, Malcom Ross and Nick Thiberger in helping me track down and obtain scanned copies of these notebooks.

Lower Sepik family: basic word-list (adapted from Foley 1986:215)

		Yimas	Angoram	Chambri	Murik	**Tayap**
1	'one'	*mba-*	*mbia*	*mbwia-*	*abe*	***nambar***
2	'two'	*-rpal*	*-(lɨ)par*	*-ri*	*kompari* (K)	***sene***
3	'three'	*-ramnaw*	*-elɨm*	*-ram*	*kerongo*	***manaw***
4	'person'	*narmaŋ*		*noranan*	*nor*	----
5	'male'	*panmal*	*pondo*		*puin*	***munje***
6	'female'/ 'mother'	*ŋay*	*nuŋor*	*kave*	*ŋai*	***noŋor/ama***
7	'father'	*apwi*	*apa/ano*	*kanu*	*apa*	***omo***
8	'water'	*arɨm*	*alɨm*	*arɨm*	*arɨm*	***awin***
9	'fire'	*awt*	*aluŋ*	*ayɨr*	*awr*	***otar***
10	'sun'	*tɨmal*	*mbwino*	*sɨmari*	*akɨn*	***arawer***
11	'moon'	*mɨla*	*mɨle*	*mwɨl*	*karewan*	***karep***
12	'star'	*awak*	*arenjo*	*suŋkwi*	*moai*	***ŋgudum***
13	´canoe'	*kay*	*ke*	*ke*	*gain*	***yimbar***
14	'louse'	*nam*	*nam*	*kurɨr*	*iran*	***pakɨnd***
15	'village'	*num*	*num*	*num*	*nomot*	***num***
16	'breast'	*nɨŋay*	*ŋge*	*nɨŋke*	*niŋgen*	***min***
17	'tooth'	*tɨrɨŋ*	*sisiŋ*	*sraŋk*	*asarap*	***rewi***
18	'blood'	*yat*	*ayakone*	*yari*	*yaran*	***and***
19	'bone'	*tanɨm*	*salɨŋ*	*anamp*	*sariŋib*	***nɨŋg***
20	'tongue'	*mɨnyɨŋ*	*mɨnɨŋ*	*tɨbulanɨŋk*	*menɨŋ*	***malit***
21	'eye'	*tuŋgurɨŋ*	*tambli*	*sɨsiŋk*	*nabrin*	***ŋgino***
22	'nose'	*tɨkay*	*naŋɨm*	*wambusu*	*daur*	***raw***
23	'hair'	*wapwi*	*mbwikmaley*	*yawi*	*dwar*	***pupur/ kokɨrŋgrɨd***
24	'ear'	*kwandumɨŋ*	*kwandum*	*kukunam*	*karekep*	***neke***
25	'egg'	*awŋ*	*awŋ*	*awŋk*	*gaug*	***naŋa***
26	'leaf'	*nɨmbrɨm*	*(nam)blum*	*nɨmpramp*	*nabirɨk*	***mayar***
27	'tree'	*yan*	*lor*	*yuwan*	*yarar*	***nɨm***
28 /	'yesterday' 'tomorrow'	*narɨŋ*	*nakɨmɨn*	*namasɨnɨŋ*	*ŋarɨŋ*	***ewar/ epi***
29	'oar'	*muraŋ*	*inap*	*naŋk*	*inaŋ*	***inyaŋ***
30	'betelnut'	*patn*	*parɨŋ*	*muntɨkɨn*	*porog*	***minjike***
31	'lime'	*awi*	*awer*	*ayɨr*	*ayr*	***air***
32	'pig'	*numbran*	*imbar*	*numpran*	*(nim)bren*	***mbor***
33	'crocodile'	*manba*	*walami*	*ayi*	*oramen*	***orem***

34	’snake’	*wakɨn*	*paruŋ*	*wan*	*wakɨn*	***aram***
35	’mosquito’	*naŋgun*	*wawarɨn*	*naŋgun*	*nauk/naŋgɨt* (K)	***at***
36	’chicken’	*nakwan*	*kɨlɨkala*	*nakwan*	*goabar*	***kokok***
37	’sago grub’	*wun*	*wurɨn*	*wun*	*kamur*	***kimɨrik***
38	’sago palm’	*tɨnum*	*(t)uli(no)*	*tɨnum*	*dun*	***yam***
39	’sago refuse’	*tɨki*	*tɨkɨr*			***tawar***
40	’pound sago’	*pan-*	*pan-*	*pun-*	*pon-*	***mindi-***
41	’wash sago’	*tuku-*	*tuku-*	*tuku-*	*tokun-*	***eiw-***
42	’hear’	*andɨ-*	*andɨ-*	*andɨ-*	*dɨn-*	***tar-***
43	’hit’	*tupul-*	*ti-*	*dii-*	*di-*	***o-***
44	’eat’	*am-*	*am-*	*am-*	*mɨn-*	***a-***
45	’go’	*wa-*	*kal-*	*wa-*	*on-*	***o-***
46	’faeces’	*mɨlɨm*	*mɨndi*	*munjar*	*mɨndɨn*	***yewir***
47	’spine of leaf’	*kɨnɨŋ*	*kɨnɨŋ*	*kɨnɨŋk*	*kɨnɨŋ*	***mbwag***
48	’leg’	*pamuŋ*	*namuŋ*	*namaŋk*	*namoŋ* (K)	***ndow***
49	’big’	*kɨpa-*	*kupa-*	*wupa-*	*apo-*	***suman***
50	’cold’	*tarɨk*	*popant*	*saruk*	*serɨpatin* (K)	***pokemb***

There are a few clear cognates between Tayap and some of the other languages listed in this table, such as the words for ‘village’, ‘water’, ‘lime’ and ‘eat’. The Tayap verb meaning ‘go’ is realized as *wak-* in the habitual progressive status and the conterfactual status (see Sections 5.3.2.3 and 5.3.3.4), thus probably making it cognate with Yimas, Chambri and Murik. The Tayap word for ‘woman’ is cognate with Angoram’s ‘female’, and the words for ‘fire’, ‘pig’, ‘one’, ‘egg’, perhaps ‘three’ and a few others are similar to some of the words in one or more of the other languages. A few words, such as those for ‘canoe’ and ‘oar’ are borrowings – Gapuners only learned to paddle canoes after WWII, when they moved their village from its former site up on a mountain down closer to mangrove sea. They did this so that it would be easier for them to transport the cash crops they heard they should grow – at the time, those were rice and peanuts – out of the village and to waiting buyers (who never materialized). All words related to canoes, paddles and fishing in the mangrove sea are borrowings from the Kopar language.

But despite the cognates that do exist – something that one would expect given that people in the lower Sepik have had various forms of contact with one another for a very long time – it is striking that Tayap is so different from other Lower Sepik languages. Of the 50 words listed, at least 35 of them, or 70%, are unique. While this lack of cognates, in itself, does not necessarily prove that Tayap is an isolate, in the absence of any other evidence that it is related to other languages, it seems reasonable to classify it as a language isolate at this time.

1.3 Material on which this book is based

I first went to Gapun in the mid-1980s, at the suggestion of Don Laycock. I was interested in studying language shift in a place where the explanations usually offered to explain it – urbanization, social class mobility, educational aspirations – might not apply. I wanted to work on language shift in Papua New Guinea because I assumed that the tiny languages spoken there might be undergoing change. Nothing was known about the situation for Tayap, but Don had always remained curious about the language, and he reasoned cheerfully that "it's so small that something has to be happening to it". So off I went.

After a one month reconnaissance trip to Gapun in 1985, I returned a year later and spent 15 months in the village, gathering data on the language and on language use. During that period, I worked a great deal with senior men, especially Reya Ayarpa and his older brother, Kruni Ayarpa. Both brothers had been born in the late 1920s. They had been initiated in the traditional men's house cult of the Tambaran, they were regarded as experts on traditional knowledge and history, and they were fluent and eloquent speakers of Tayap. They were members of the last generation to have had direct contact with the pre-colonial customs of their ancestors, either through their own experiences or through the stories of their fathers, grandfathers and other kinfolk.

I left Gapun in 1987 and wrote my PhD thesis on the social and cultural underpinnings of the language shift that was occurring there (published as Kulick 1992). I returned in 1991 to systematize my linguistic data with the goal of writing a grammar and dictionary. But that fieldtrip was cut short by a tragedy that occurred two months into the work: late one night, a group of armed bandits (called *ol raskol*, 'rascals', throughout Papua New Guinea) snuck into the village and attacked me in my house. They had been drawn to Gapun by a rumor that I was keeping $40,000 in a metal patrol box. In the tumult that occurred during the attack, the raskols shot a man – one of old Kruni Ayarpa's adult sons, Kawri Kruni – and he died shortly afterwards in the arms of the horrified villagers.

After murdering Kawri, the raskols fled Gapun. I left too, partly out of concern for my own safety, but also feeling that my presence in the village had come to be a dangerous liability for the villagers. My own trauma and sorrow regarding the incident led me to abandon my work on Gapun and the Tayap language.

I did not return to Gapun again until 15 years later, in 2006. During a short trip, I determined that the general law and order situation in that part of Papua New Guinea had improved, and also that the villagers were eager for me to come back. I applied for and received several research grants, and in 2009, I returned to Gapun and spent eight months in the village. By this time, all the senior men with whom I had worked in the 1980s were long dead, and in fact, as I noted above, there remained only a few villagers who were over 60 years old. I began working on the language with one of them, Mone Mbanaŋ, a perceptive and gentle man in his mid-60s with whom I had done a great deal of transcription work in the 1980s. Unfortunately, two months after I arrived in Gapun, Mone grew gravely ill with what to looked to me like cerebral malaria, and he died several weeks later.

Mone's death turned out to be a devastating blow to Gapun. Everyone in the village mourned the loss of their last "big man", as they all called Mone. But that mourning was riddled with conflict. Mone's adult children openly accused their maternal cousins of having paid a sorcerer to kill their father. Those accusations reignited long-smoldering hostilities. They led to village-wide brawls between different kin groups, and to uncontrolled drinking by young men, who a few years previously had been taught by men from the Sepik river village of Bien how to ferment and distill alcohol from coconut water or rotten bananas. The village was riven with threats of revenge sorcery, and by almost daily recurring uproar and violence that set everyone on edge. Social control collapsed and villagers' sense of cohesion frayed. In

the months following Mone's death, there was a powder keg atmosphere in the village, and many villagers came to grow tired of hiding inside their houses while drunken young men strode though the village brandishing machetes, screaming obscenities in Tok Pisin and challenging others to come and fight with them. People began talking of "running away" from Gapun, and some families did actually abandon their houses and leave the village to build small homesteads for themselves in the jungle. By the end of 2009, when I left Gapun, the village was in the process of fissuring.

During this unsettling time, I collected material on Tayap by working with two other speakers. My chief language informant was Samek Wanjo, a pensive and quiet man who, in 2009, was about 60 years old. After Mone's death, Samek assumed Mone's place as the village's 'biggest' man, and everyone agreed that he was one of the few remaining villagers who possessed any significant knowledge of traditions, land rights and village history. The other person with whom I worked on Tayap was Ŋgero Sair, a 35-year old woman who is the oldest daughter of two Tayap-dominant parents. Ŋgero is one of the youngest speakers in Gapun to habitually use Tayap in her everyday conversations, and I was eager to work with her, to try to gauge any differences which might exist between her competence in Tayap, and that of older speakers. Samek and Ŋgero both turned out to be knowledgeable and nimble language informants. With Samek I worked on vocabulary and grammar. With Ŋgero, I transcribed most of the recordings I made of naturally occurring speech.

In 1993, my linguist colleague Christopher Stroud and I published a 30-page sketch grammar of Tayap in a volume honoring Don Laycock, who died suddenly in 1988, and whose passing was a profound loss for Papuan linguistics. Much of the analysis in that short sketch grammar is reasonable, as a first attempt to come to terms with the basic structure of the language (Kulick and Stroud 1993). But re-reading the paper, I realized that it is an unhappily difficult text to process. Christopher and I wrote the sketch for linguists, and we were interested in facilitating the identification of underlying forms of the grammatical structures we discussed. It strikes me now that this goal – or at least the way we tried to achieve it – obscures more about the language than it illuminates. For that reason, I have completely overhauled the analysis of Tayap presented in that paper, and I have not concerned myself with any attempt to identify or derive underlying forms. Anyone who might be interested in analyzing those forms – for example to determine Tayap's genetic relationships with other languages – should find sufficient material in this grammar and dictionary to do so.

The data on which this grammar and dictionary are based consists of material elicited during my fieldwork in 1986-87, during eight months of fieldwork in 2009, and during three weeks of fieldwork, going through the manuscript of this book with Samek Wanjo and other Tayap speakers, in late 2010.[3] The book is also based on transcripts of naturally occurring talk

[3] Gapun in late-2010 was in much the same state as it was when I left it in late-2009. The disruptive binge drinking has continued, and during the course of 2010, it resulted in two major village fights. The latest fight, in November 2010, left one young man severely wounded – half his forearm was cut away by another village man wielding a machete. The wounded man has publicly pledged revenge. Fights like those, and the festering resentments that both fuel them and result from them, have hardened the atmosphere of apprehension that has marked the village since July 2009, when Mone Mbanaŋ died. Gapun remains a lively village and has by no means been abandoned, but many villagers spend as much time as they can away living away in the rainforest in their bush houses. Social cohesion remains tenuous and tension is high. The general feeling among villagers is that the only way the current, ever-increasing and ever-more intricate tangle of conflicts will be resolved is if someone is actually killed during a drunken fight. Only then, many people reason, will the drinking and the fighting stop, or at least be reduced to a manageable level. This idea strikes me as more of a delusion borne of desperation and exhaustion than it does a reasonable assessment: a murder in Gapun would not end the drinking and the social strife; it would doubtless only intensify them both, in ever-more destructive spirals of conflict. I am

that I made during all those periods of fieldwork. Those transcripts represent over 100 hours of audio-taped talk in all kinds of situations – interactions between caregivers and children, oratories in the men's house, domestic arguments, harangues, narratives, village meetings and tuneful weeping over corpses.

All transcribed talk was written down with the help of village informants. I could never have transcribed the language by myself. At its apogee, my passive command of Tayap was respectable, and after about five months in the village in 2009, for example, I was able to follow most of what was said in the vernacular. But like village children and young adults, I never needed to actively speak Tayap – except, that is, when people from other villages came to Gapun to visit. Then, inevitably and to my great exasperation, Gapuners would ignore my protestations and insist on exhibiting me like a trained parrot. They took enormous pleasure in showing off their resident white man, and they delighted in the fact that I was able to awe their easily impressed guests with my ability to respond to commands in Tayap and mouth a few simple phrases.

1.4 Young people's Tayap

In addition to language recorded through formal elicitation sessions and transcriptions of naturally occurring speech, this grammar and dictionary is also informed by 56 narratives from 45 young people aged 14-30 that I collected and transcribed between July-November 2009. I elicited these narratives primarily to see whether villagers younger than about 30 had any active command of Tayap at all. By mid-2009, after having lived in Gapun twenty-four hours a day for more than three months, I found that I was still unable to accurately judge this. The reason I had trouble assessing younger villagers' active competence in Tayap during this time was because whenever I asked young people if they "*save toktok long tok ples*" (spoke Tayap), they all told me sure they did. The problem was, I never heard any of them doing so. Once in a while I would hear a young person utter a few formulaic phrases in Tayap, but this was usually done to mark a situation as funny, and it was usually accompanied and followed by laughter. It also seemed to me that whenever villagers under 25 mouthed even a short formulaic phrase in Tayap, their tone of voice shifted to suggest that they were quoting someone else, usually to mock them (a big man's Voice of Authority, for example). Much the same happened whenever I pressed the young people who told me that they spoke Tayap, and asked them to tell me exactly what kind of things they said in the vernacular. In response, they would list a few words like *mum* and *tamwai* (sago jelly and sago pancake, respectively) and a few rudimentary formulaic phrases, such as the command to hand over some betel nut or tobacco.

At the same time, however, Tayap does continue to be heard throughout Gapun. Women and men over fifty use it habitually (even if they continually code-switch between Tayap and Tok Pisin), and a few men and women in their mid-30s and older also use Tayap very frequently, even when speaking to their children. Even small children in the village understand the commands to go and fetch things, hit dogs, get out of the way, stop crying, etc. that adults are continually hollering at them. Given that it was clear that Tayap was still used throughout Gapun, for a long time I thought that perhaps the young people really were quite

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at a loss to imagine how the cycle of drinking and violence might be brought to an end, and I predict that Gapun will soon break-up into small isolated homesteads separated by expanses of rainforest (the neighboring village of Wongan has already undergone just such a breakup). The eventual dispersion of Gapun village will reduce interpersonal contact between different villagers and will inevitably impact on the vernacular language, probably speeding up its demise.

competent in the vernacular, as they claimed to be. I fretted that I just never seemed to be in the right place at the right time to hear them when they actually spoke it.

I began to wonder whether the reason I wasn't hearing young people telling each other stories or asking each other questions in Tayap was because maybe they spoke it mostly out of the earshot of older, more fluent speakers. Maybe they felt ashamed that they weren't speaking it completely flawlessly, I conjectured. Or perhaps the vernacular, for them, had become tied to particular social events like same-sex gossip or hanging out in the rainforest – speech situations that only happened when young people were alone in groups and away from nosy and critical parents and elders.

To see whether any of this was in fact the case, I ended up spending a great deal of time with young people of both sexes between the ages of 14-25. I accompanied young men into the rainforest on frequent occasions, to go looking for birds to shoot with arrows or sling-shots, and also when they went off together in groups to perform a variety of secret rituals that they believe refresh their bodies and make them stronger and more attractive.

I also spent a lot of time hanging out with young women. One place I made a point of doing this was inside maternity huts. Maternity huts are small, flimsy, hurriedly-constructed little houses on stilts, set on the periphery of the village, often near areas that villagers use as toilets. Women ready to give birth walk to special places in the rainforest, have their baby, then return to these maternity huts, where they are supposed to stay for up to three months (even though most young women these days find excuses to go back into their usual houses after only a few perfunctory weeks). During the entire period a woman is in a maternity hut, no man is supposed to visit her or even set eyes upon her and her newborn baby. Female visitors, though, drop by throughout the day, usually accompanied by their younger child siblings and their own babies, if they have any. They bring food, water and gossip about the goings-on in the village from which the new mother is temporarily excluded.

It was not gender-appropriate for me, as a man, to sit in the maternity huts with new mothers and other young women, but the villagers regarded my enthusiasm for doing so as just a puzzling, white eccentricity. Everyone in Gapun was convinced that I was going to get a fatal case of asthma from allowing myself to come in such close contact with the 'heat' of women. When they give birth, women disgorge what to the villagers' sensibilities are unspeakable amounts of blood and uterine fluids. The women and their newborns throb with so much 'heat' as a result of this gush of blood that that they are a danger even to themselves, and to protect themselves from harm, new mothers cannot touch the food they eat – they have to use small tongs or a spoon. With this kind of danger in mind, whenever I wondered aloud in Gapun whether I might be coming down with a cold or a fever, a villager was always on hand to ruefully shake his or her head and remind me how foolish I was to put myself at risk of bronchial collapse by sitting next to a woman who had recently given birth. Sure, I might take special white-people's medicine to protect against the ravages of vaginal heat, they told me (this is how they assumed I could survive the blasts at all), but sooner or later, they just knew, I would start spewing blood.

Despite their expectation that I would soon be coughing out my own lungs, both women and men seemed to enjoy my visits in the maternity huts. Men enjoyed them because I took digital photos of the new babies and willingly showed them to them. Before I began doing this, no adult man had ever seen a newborn, so they were all deeply curious. Women always welcomed me because I brought gossip and stories. They also liked looking at the photos I took of them and their babies. I usually also brought along some kerosene that could be put into a tin lamp, thus sparing the new mother and her baby pitch black nights in a lonely, wind-rattled hut.

Because I spent so many hours in the company of young women in places like maternity huts, and of young men in places like the rainforest when they performed intimate and lengthy

ministrations together, I came to see, over the months, that none of these young people ever used Tayap at all. All conversations between young people under 25, in all situations, were in Tok Pisin. Young people use Tayap words that are common in the villagers' speech, and that often don't have Tok Pisin equivalents (for example, words for various birds and plants in the forest). And they do sometimes use short formulaic phrases, to provoke humor or to "hide talk" from any non-villager who might be in their company or within earshot. But that is all. Young people do not converse, narrate, gossip, argue, tell jokes, discuss erotics, or do anything else at all in Tayap.

Once I understood this, I became better able to make sense of the mutual recrimination that arises whenever the topic of language shift comes up in villagers' conversations. Parents blame their children for not speaking Tayap. They saying in voices dripping with irony that their children have all turned white and therefore they only speak the language of white people – Tok Pisin. Young people, when mocked in this way, snap back that it's the parents' own fault their children don't speak Tayap: if they had taught them Tayap, they would be able to speak it. Young men and women also told me that they don't speak Tayap because they are ashamed. "They laugh at us", said one 21-year-old man, referring to villagers in their forties and older. "They'll say 'Oh, he's someone raised in some other village'. Or, 'Oh! A whiteman child who doesn't know the village language'. They'll make fun of us. So it's hard to answer in the vernacular and we get mixed up" (*Ol i save lap long mipela, ol bai kirap tok, 'Em wanpela mangi bilong narapela hap ia'. O 'Ye, waitman pikinini i no save long tok ples'. Na bai ol i wokim pani gen. Em nau, hat long bekim long tok ples bai mipela paul ia*).

I became curious to know if the young people's lack of Tayap, and their shame about speaking it, was due to the fact that they simply didn't command it. So to try to assess this, I began asking groups of friends, two to three at a time, to come into my house at night to narrate stories in Tayap. Because I knew by that time that young people didn't speak Tayap to one another or anyone else, I expected this task to be like pulling teeth. Instead, to my great surprise, it was like slicing butter. Not only were young villagers eager to narrate; all but the very youngest of them were also *able* to narrate in Tayap. Many of the narratives were short, and most of them were scaffolded by the narrator's same-sex friends, who sat on the floor with them and helped the teller remember what things were called and figure out how verbs were inflected. But what emerged in the narrative sessions was that all young people in the village have some active competence in the vernacular, and some of them have excellent active competence – even though they *never* use it.

Those young people who exhibited the highest-level proficiency in their Tayap narratives (defined as speakers who spoke relatively unhesitatingly, used a variety of pronouns, verbal statuses and verbs of motion, and who had a broad vocabulary) constitute a kind of speaker that has not been discussed in the literature on language death. They are not exactly "passive bilinguals", because they are capable of active production – in a few cases, of relatively advanced active production (Tayap Text 3, narrated by a 25-year-old woman, is an example of just how advanced). Nor are these young women and men quite the same as what the linguist Nancy Dorian, in her work on language death in Scottish Gaelic communities, once labeled "semi-speakers" (Dorian 1981). The young people of Gapun *are* like the Gaelic semi-speakers that Dorian described in that they have perfect passive competence and perfect communicative competence in the vernacular: they understand everything said to them and they respond in culturally appropriate ways. But unlike Dorian's semi-speakers (and also unlike the Australian Dyirbal semi-speakers discussed in Schmidt 1985), young people in Gapun do not use the vernacular in conversations with fluent speakers. On the contrary, with the exception of lexical items and a few formulaic phrases like those mentioned above, they never use it at all. The narratives I collected in 2009 are the only times in their lives that the young people I recorded have ever told an entire story in Tayap, and unless I return to Gapun

and record some more, or unless some miracle happens and the vernacular experiences a sudden renaissance, those sessions in my house are likely the last time that anyone under 25 will ever even attempt to narrate an entire story in Tayap.

Rather than calling them 'passive bilinguals' or 'semi-speakers', a more accurate name for this category of speaker might be 'passive-active bilingual'. That is, a speaker who possesses sufficient grammatical and communicative competence in a second language to use that language, but who never actually does use it, because social and cultural factors make it unnecessary or undesirable to do so.

Of particular relevance for this grammar is that there is a steady and stage-bound grammatical erosion from passive-active bilinguals to increasingly less competent passive bilinguals. Some of this erosion includes the following:

- the five transitive verb classes become collapsed into the morphologically simplest class, class 5;
- verbs of motion (all of which have irregular conjugations) are avoided and reduced to 'go' and 'come';
- status and tense are reduced to the imperfective and the present progressive, which is over-extended, because it is the morphologically simplest and most regular of all the statuses. All other statuses and tenses, such as the future, are avoided;
- 2PL, 3PL and dual subjects are avoided, because the endings on verbs that encode have specific forms that differ from the subject endings for 1SG, 1PL, 2SG and 3SG – all of which are also specific, but which are similar to one another;
- gender concordance on verbs and with ergative case marking is often confused;
- relative clauses and subordinate clause morphology disappear, morphemes that co-ordinate clauses clauses become reduced to a single morpheme, which is over-generalized on the pattern of Tok Pisin;
- semantic differences between different Tayap verbs are collapsed on the pattern of Tok Pisin. For example, Tayap has two verbs for 'turn': *urek-(p)-e-* 'turn over' (in the sense of turning an object around or over) and *waruk-(p)-e-* 'turn around', 'turn back' (in the sense of going somewhere and then turning back to return from the place from which one came). Tok Pisin uses one verb, tainim, 'turn', for both senses. Young speakers follow Tok Pisin semantics and use only one verb, *urek-(p)-e-* , for both senses of 'turn'.

These tendencies are discussed in the appropriate sections of the grammar and in the commentaries to the Tayap texts that appear at the end of the grammar.