

**WORD TABOO AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR LANGUAGE CHANGE IN THE MARKHAM
FAMILY OF LANGUAGES, PNG**

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1.0 Introduction

In this paper I look at the practice of word taboo and language avoidance among the speakers of the Markham family of languages, Papua New Guinea. Name taboo, word taboo and avoidance of uttering certain words in specific contexts exists in Western society, although in a milder form than in traditional Pacific societies. For example, we are usually forbidden, as children, to say the personal names of our parents and grandparents, although they can say our names. We find 'cover words' for the tabooed words to do with some bodily functions and sexual actions, for example 'go for a tinkle' instead of 'to urinate,' etc. We avoid saying certain words, particularly swear-words, in front of some, usually elder, kin or important people. These practice are now becoming weakened, but in many Pacific societies they are still strong, and affect the use of language.

The custom of tabooing certain words in a language, for social or religious reasons, is widespread in the Pacific area. It also occurs in Aboriginal Australian languages, and among some societies in Asia and South East Asia. Simons (1982), in his survey of Austronesian languages which are reported to practice word taboo, found that the practice is known from Madagascar, through all of South East Asia to the eastern Pacific islands. Reports of word taboo in the languages of Melanesia date back to least to Cordrington (1885:74), who wrote about the languages of the Banks' Islands of present-day Vanuatu:

"It has been remarked in many languages, in various parts of the world, that a word, becoming sacred perhaps by being a royal name, is forbidden in common use, and another one takes

its place. It has been supposed that a new word is coined for the occasion; but judging by the Melanesian practice, it is probable that a word still existing in the language, but obscure, has been revived and brought into conspicuous use. In the Banks Islands, to be more particular...there are certain words the use of which has a particular term to describe it, un in Mota. A man may not say a word which is contained in whole or in part in the name of his relations by marriage; he is said to un, to use one of the less common words which are perhaps kept in use in this way. For example, Pantuntun's father- or brother-in-law could never speak of a hand or arm as pane, he would un and say lima. Most of these un words are no doubt in common use in other Islands."

Keesing and Fifi?i (1969) have given a detailed description of very complex word tabooing in its social and linguistic context among the Kwaio of Malaita in the Solomon Islands, and suggest that the practice may have been "characteristic of some or all early Austronesian speakers in the Pacific" (Keesing and Fifi?i 1969:155). Simons' paper, which was based on a systematic study of languages in the Solomons as well as a review of existing accounts of other areas of the Pacific, also mentions the possibility that word tabooing was present in early Austronesian (Simons 1982:157).

Lithgow (1973) discussed word taboo in the Muyuw language of Milne Bay Province, Papua New Guinea. Hooley's paper on the complex naming system of the Buang language group discusses the use of taboo names (1972:503). The taboo operating among the Buang is very similar to that of their closely-related neighbours of the Markham family, which is the subject of this present paper. More recently, Chowning (1985) has discussed the complex system of word taboo still in use among the languages of the Pasismanua division of the Whiteman group, located in south-west New Britain.

Among speakers of Papuan languages in the New Guinea area, Kewa of the Southern Highlands (Franklin 1967; 1975) and Alamlak of the East Sepik Province of Papua New Guinea (Bruce 1977, quoted in Simons 1982) practice word taboo. Foley (1986:42) also refers to word taboo in Papuan languages, along with other restrictive linguistic practices common among these languages. Simons (1982) lists the following Papua New Guinea Papuan languages as having name taboo reported: Orokaiva, Buin, Yele, Kyaka, Huli, Siwai, Au,

and Samo. In all these languages of Papua New Guinea which have been discussed so far in the literature, the taboo is always on uttering the names of relatives, generally affines, both living and dead. In most cases name taboo extends to word taboo.

2.0 Name taboo and word taboo

Name taboo is the practice whereby members of a society are forbidden to utter the names of certain other people who are or were related to them in particular ways. The relatives whose names are taboo are usually affines, but the taboo can also be on saying the names of some consanguineal kin. Because the principle of classificatory kinship operates in these societies, all people in the category of 'affine' or whatever kin category is tabooed are also covered by the proscription on calling their names. Taboos on certain kinds of behaviour between these people also operate.

The general principle underlying name taboo is a strong association between a name and the person bearing the name and a strong belief in the power of words.¹ To say a tabooed name is to assault the owner of the name, and requires sanctions to be brought against the offender. Punishment for violation of a taboo can be in the form of religious propitiation of an offended spirit, payment of goods to an offended party, exchange of goods to restore harmony between the guilty and the injured. Breaking the taboo can lead to death by murder, or suicide due to shame. An old man in Waritsian village in the Amari dialect area of Adzera told me that his father had broken a very strong name taboo in front of his father-in-law. The shame caused him to run off into the mountains where enemy groups lived; he deliberately put himself in their way and was killed.

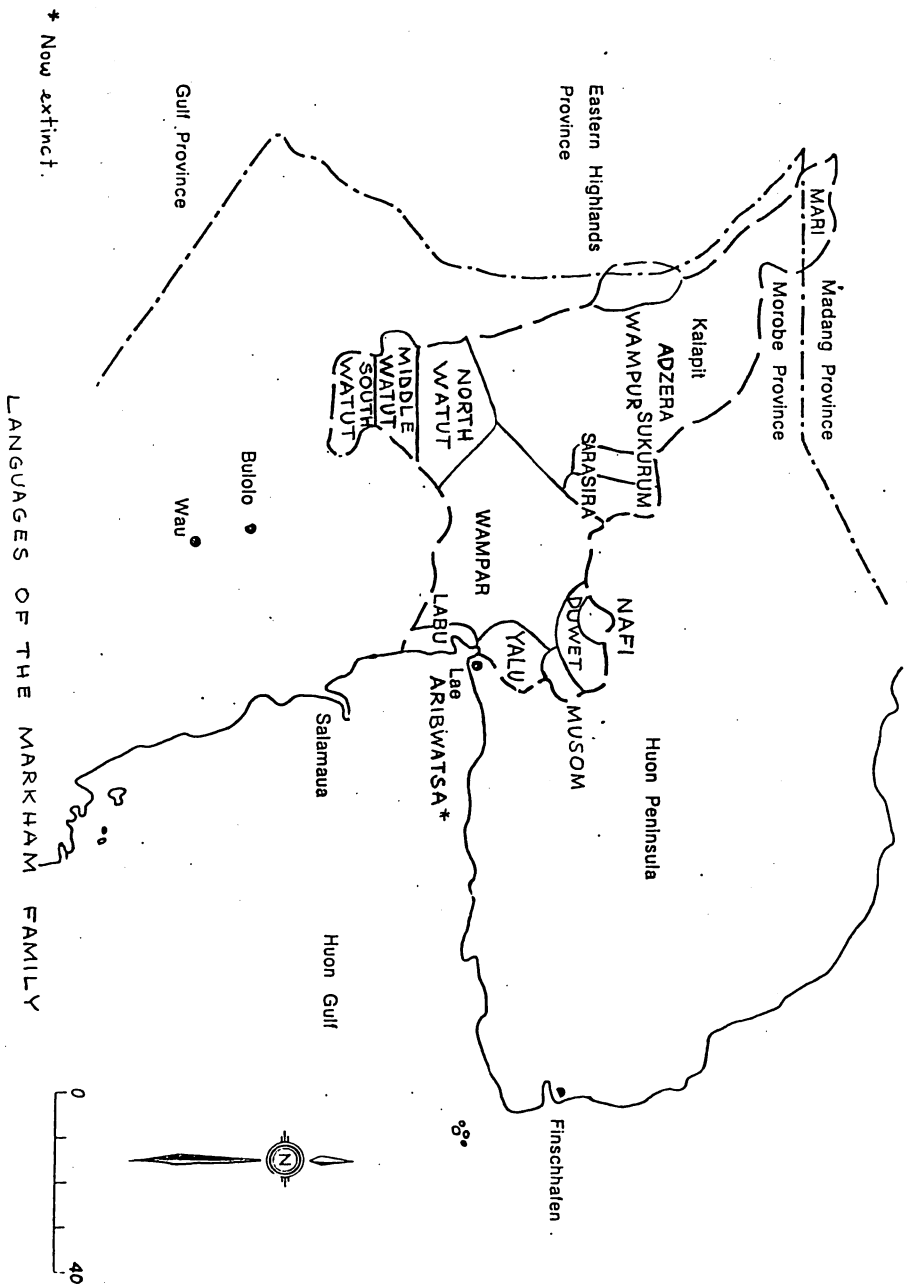
Notions of sacredness and profaneness also lead to the tabooing of ancestral names, for example among the Kwaio of Malaita, as described by Keesing and Fifi'i (1969). Names

associated with these ancestors, like place names, pig names and even taboo names also become taboo.

Certain principles of socio-political organisation lead, in some societies, to the elevation of individuals as 'chiefs' who acquire sacredness by virtue of their ascribed and achieved status, and the names of these individuals may also become taboo in life and after death. This type of name taboo has been described for several societies in Oceania, for example New Britain, the Solomons, Woodlark, Misima, Vanuatu, Fiji and Polynesia (Simons 1982: 179).

Linguistic forms associated with the names of the people in the categories discussed above, that is affinal and consanguineal kin, ancestors, and chiefs, also may become taboo. It is very common among the societies of Oceania that names are, or derive from, meaningful words in the language. When the name becomes taboo, the word becomes taboo too. Thus name taboo can be extended to become word taboo. When a word becomes taboo, another word must be found to take its place, and it is this process of substituting one word for another taboo form that is of such interest to linguists.

Another form of restrictive language practised in many societies is avoidance of some language forms which are not originally personal names. While not actually a taboo, this practice still restricts the language that people can use in particular social contexts. The linguistic forms that are restricted may have associations with dirt, disease, sorcery, the spirit world, or have sexual connotations which may not be mentioned in front of people related in a particular kin category. Keesing and Fifi'i (1969: 160) describe the avoidance among the Kwaio of mentioning the words for 'leprosy', 'tuberculosis', and the names of people who have died of these diseases, because of the danger of "contagion".



3.0 The Markham family of AN languages

3.1 Linguistic situation

In the rest of this paper I will discuss name taboo, word taboo and language avoidance in the 15 languages which belong in the Markham family of languages. These languages are spoken by groups of people living in the Markham valley of the Morobe Province, in the valleys of the tributaries of the Markham River - the Wanton, Mangiang, Yafats, Umi, Iroap, Leron, Watut, Wamped, and Busu River valleys - and on the coast south of Lae. (See Map). They are unusual for Austronesian speaking people, as they all, except for Labu, live inland away from the sea. However, linguistically they are clearly of Austronesian origin, but with a high proportion of lexical items with no known Oceanic or Austronesian antecedents. They are also characterised by regular sets of sound correspondences, for example the Proto Markham *t, which are difficult to explain as reflexes of Proto Oceanic².

The languages of the family can be divided into four sub-groups, on the basis of phonology and morphology. The four sub-groups and their member languages are as follows³.

1. Upper Markham network: Adzera, Mari, Wampur, Sukurum, Sarasira.
2. Watut sub-group: South Watut, Middle Watut, North Watut (after Fischer 1963 rather than Hooley 1971).
3. Lower Markham network: Wampar, Musom, Duwet, Nafi, Yalu, Aribwatsa (now almost extinct, with one living speaker).
4. Labu.

3.2 Socio-political organisation

Some generalisations can be made about the social and political organisations of these different language groups. These organisational principles are important for understanding the taboo systems which operate in these societies.

All the societies 'officially' recognise patrilineal descent as the ideal, but all show a strong personal bias towards affiliation with a mother's brother under certain circumstances, particularly in times of disaster, warfare in the past, etc. All societies have a special kinship term for 'cross-cousin of same sex'; that is, a special relationship exists between a male and his mother's brother's/father's sister's son(s), and between a female and her mother's brother's/father's sister's daughter(s). The Proto Markham reconstructed form for this category is *yara-. It is interesting also that this same kinship term is applied to the parents of one's children's spouse(s). That means that after a marriage has taken place between two people, their parents become related as a special category of 'cross-cousins of the bark-cloth mat', which overrides any previous kinship ties they may have had. One possible explanation for this is that in the past, the Markham people may have practised cross-cousin marriage. One group only, Sarasira, has preferential cross-cousin marriage. Among the other language communities this is considered to be incestuous.

The main principle underlying the kinship systems of all the Markham group is sister-exchange, where two men of different clans exchange their real or classificatory sisters in marriage. Under this system, there is exact equivalence in wealth exchanged between the two groups which are being linked by marriage, and there is no 'bride-price' as such. This exchange is reflected in the kinship terms in ego's own generation, in one ascending generation, and in one descending generation. For example, the terms for 'mother's brother's wife' and 'father's sister' are identical, and those for 'mother's brother' and 'father's sister's husband' are also identical, reflecting the exchange or potential exchange of women by two men in the ascending generation. The term used by a woman for her brother's wife, reconstructed as Proto Markham *fa-ts, is identical to that used for her husband's sister, reflecting the fact that those two women were, or could have been, exchanged for each other.

With the sister-exchange system in operation, it is common practice for a set of siblings to marry 'one way' for one generation. That is, most classificatory brothers and sisters of one lineage will marry into a group of brothers and sisters of a lineage of another clan. One consequence of this is that any individual will have fewer sets of affines, as his or her mother- and father-in-law are likely to be identical with those of his or her siblings and cousins.

Marriage is based on clan exogamy, with patrilocal residence after betrothal. On betrothal, a young woman is taken to join the household of her future in-laws, and she is expected to prove her worth as a daughter-in-law, sometimes for several years before she and her betrothed are allowed to marry and live in their own house. In the past, when groups were smaller, people had to look outside their own village or hamlet for a suitable marriage partner. So marriages were often contracted between groups which were not necessarily members of the same dialect or even the same language group. After European contact, when the population grew rapidly, people could find a suitable partner from a different clan within the same village more easily. Nowadays the young people look even further afield for marriage partners, and many intermarriages between Markham and non-Markham are occurring, particularly in the towns.

The process of naming a person, at different stages of his or her life, is important among the Markham people. One's 'true' name, or 'village' name, is usually given by a relative at birth, and this relative gives his or her own names to the child. This relative is then in a special kinship category of 'namesake', the term for which is reconstructed as *faranga-n for Proto-Markham. In some of the societies, especially those of the Watut sub-group and Wampar, a male was given another name on initiation by a mother's brother, and they became *faranga-n as well. On betrothal, when a woman goes to live with her future in-laws, she is given a new

`married' name by a future sister-in-law, and this is the only name by which she is known from then on within her future husband's group. At home, however, she is known by her old name. Names can reflect events important to the name-giver such as an earthquake, or a successful hunt; they can be names of dead but remembered and revered ancestors; they can be names of natural species like animals, insects or plants. Nowadays, since the advent of Christianity, many `village' names have biblical references. Old Testament names are frequently encountered, for example Hiskia (Ezekiel), or Dzekob (Jacob), and names which reflect Christian concepts are common, for example Idza? fagan `to kneel' or Warim dangki `give thanks'. On baptism into the Lutheran church, a new name is given. Until about 10 years ago, this name was frequently a Yabim name with Christian associations, but since the closure of the Yabim schools and the spread of English schools, more English names are being given, or taken, as baptismal names. It is also common for people to have nicknames, names by which they were known while in wage employment, or names reflecting a personal idiosyncrasy. One old man I knew was fondly known as `Bastad' because that was his favourite expletive. Another was often called `Muruk' because he always chased an imaginary cassowary (Tok Pisin Muruk) when he had had a few drinks. People also acquire nicknames through some official office, such as `Kaunsil' for a councillor, or `Sigin', which meant `second', because the man was the second Luluai, or government-appointed headman in pre-Independence times.

4.0 Principles of word taboo operating in the Markham languages

4.1 Name taboo

Among the language communities of the Markham, the names of affines of particular categories are always taboo. In Table 1 are set out the precise categories of affinal names which are taboo for each language. Every category is a classificatory category, i.e. that of

for example 'father-in-law' includes not only a person's actual father-in-law but all the males who call him 'brother' and 'cross-cousin' as well. The name which is taboo is always the 'village' name, but not the baptismal name or nickname, except in Middle Watut where all names are taboo. Baptismal names seem to have acquired a kind of immunity to the traditional taboo system which is unrelated to the traditional notions of sacred and profane, and so are not subject to the same restrictions as 'village' names⁴.

Table 1

Kinship categories whose names are taboo in Markham societies

Taboo name	MiL	FiL	SiL	DiL	WB	WZ	HB	HZ	BW	ZH	CSP
ADZ	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	+	+	+	+	+	+	<u>+</u>
MRI	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	+	+	+	+	+	+	<u>+</u>
WPU(a)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
SKM(b)	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	-	-	-	-	-	-	<u>+</u>
SRA(b)	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>
SWT	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>
MWT	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	-
NWT	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>
WPA	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	+	+	+	+	+	+	-
MSM(c)	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
DWT(d)	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	-	-	-	-	-	-	+
NFI	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	+
YLU(c)	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
ARB(e)
LAB	+	+	+	+	+	+	<u>+</u>	+	<u>+</u>	+	-

Abbreviations: + Taboo in operation on name
+ Strongest taboo
 - Taboo not in operation on name
 MiL Mother-in-law
 FiL Father-in-law

SiL	Son-in-law
DiL	Daughter-in-law
WB	Wife's brother
WZ	Wife's sister
HB	Husband's brother
HZ	Husband's sister
BW	Brother's wife (male speaking)
ZH	Sister's husband (female speaking)
CSP	Child's spouse's parents

Notes:

- (a) Wampur does not have any name or word taboo.
- (b) Name taboo does not extend to word taboo.
- (c) Name and word taboo operated in the past, but has been virtually abandoned.
- (d) Names of spouses of cross-cousins are strongly tabooed in Duwet, but not those of siblings and parallel cousins.
- (e) Don't know. Informant is very old and cannot remember whether taboo operated or not.

From Table 1 it can be seen that only one of the 15 languages, Wampur, does not have any form of taboo, and one, Aribwatsa, is uncertain, as the only living speaker does not remember whether some names were taboo or not. However, it appears, from the affinal kinship terms for Aribwatsa, that there was most likely a taboo on the names of mother-in-law, father-in-law, son-in-law, daughter-in-law and children's spouses' parents.

With the exceptions mentioned above, all the languages have taboos on saying the names of mother-in-law, father-in-law, son-in-law, and daughter-in-law. For 8 of the languages, these are the strongest taboo, carrying the severest penalties for violation. In Adzera, Mari, Sarasira all the Watuts, Wampar, Musom, Nafi, Yalu and Labu the taboo extends to all classes of brother-in-law and sister-in-law as well. Duwet has an unusual variation, in that the

names of spouses of one's cross-cousins are strongly tabooed, while the names of siblings' and parallel-cousins' spouses can be said. In Labu, the strongest taboo in terms of avoidance behaviour of all kinds is between people in the relationship of elder brother's wife/younger brother.

In all the languages which have name taboo except Middle Watut, Wampar and Labu there is a name taboo between people whose children have married each other. This is in spite of the new 'cross-cousin' relationship which is acquired by people in this category. In Middle Watut and Wampar, people in this category call each other 'brother' or 'sister', and personal names can be uttered.

In all the languages except Sukurum and Sarasira the name taboo extends to word taboo. Thus alternative forms must be found to replace tabooed items. The processes and strategies by which this is achieved are discussed in section 5.0.

As well as a taboo on saying the names of people in certain affinal kinship categories the Markham people in all groups must avoid saying certain words in front of, or when referring to, affines. Using these words is like striking the person a physical blow and his whole 'essence' is injured just as it is when his name is called. The words which must not be used are any which contain the form meaning 'excreta', references to male and female genitals, and certain food terms. For example, the word for 'meat' cannot be said in front of an in-law, and meat cannot be consumed in the presence of in-laws. Great shame ensues if restrictions are violated, and some reparation must be made, usually in the form of a gift to the injured party during a feast held to reconcile people, or stretim bel, literally 'straighten bellies', as it is expressed in Tok Pisin.

Substitute forms must be used for these terms which are avoided. For example, a cover word for 'meat' is 'the left hand', because meat is held in the left hand for eating. Thus, there is a

multiplicity of synonyms, or cover words, available for this purpose as well as for forms affected by name taboo.

4.3 Place name taboo

Among the Wampar, certain places acquire 'sacredness', whether through ancestors' blood having been spilt there, or ancestors' bones having been stored there. The true names of these places become taboo, and new names are given to them. Use of the tabooed name will incur the wrath of ancestral spirits in the form of disasters, failure of crops, sickness, or even death. Offerings of food are left in these places to propitiate the spirits which reside there (Stuerzenhofecker n.d.; Fischer 1978; Fischer n.d.).

5.0 Strategies used to avoid taboo forms

There are several standardised strategies used by the Markham people to avoid saying a taboo word which is the whole or part of the name of an in-law. Each language employs from one to four of these methods concurrently. I discuss each of these below in order of frequency of occurrence and with examples from the languages.

5.1 Availability of equivalent synonymous forms

In all of the languages there are many doublets and triplets for common and not-so-common lexical items. When a word is taboo, one of its alternatives is used. For example in Wampar, if dzif 'fire' is taboo for someone, he or she can say doot which also means 'fire'. The latter word is related to the Adzera word dugunt 'smoke of fire' and can be seen to have been derived by regular sound changes from it. Either Wampar or Adzera borrowed the form, one from another, but the direction of the borrowing is not known. Wampur, whose speakers now claim to have no name or word taboo, has many synonymous items in its lexicon, indicating that they most likely practised word taboo in the past.

5.2 Metonymy.

This is the use of another word which has a logical relationship with the taboo item. The cause of something, or result of an action, the method of production of an object, something with a descriptive relationship to the taboo word, or one attribute of it can all be the basis for the substitution. For example, Mari use pakap 'ashes, embers' instead of zah 'fire'. South Watut use kwardinggiang 'light' instead of sumwa 'fire'. North Watut can say ram mwa? dzu?iang 'thing which reddens the mouth' instead of huran 'betelnut'. Nafi say wason 'smoke' instead of sif 'fire'.

5.3 Synecdoche

Part of a whole, or the whole instead of a part, a generic instead of specific or specific for generic term can be used as substitutes for taboo items. For example Nafi can use tau 'inside a house' instead of wom 'house', Wampar use tabantib 'platform', or 'bed inside house' instead of tao 'house'. The apparently messy overlap between languages of words for 'house', 'inside house', 'garden house', 'temporary shelter' and 'village' indicates that this is a very common practice, and probably was so in the past.

5.4 General cover term used for all taboo items

In Middle Watut, benga saus 'bad name', is used for any taboo words and in North Watut the use of the neutral word ram 'thing' is common. In Duwet, siagin is used instead of any taboo word, but its original meaning is lost. In some of the languages, a phrase meaning 'my in-law's name' can be used instead of the taboo item, for example Mari say zi buang-gangk harangan-gan, 'my in-law's namesake', and North Watut who can say wa-ngg binga? 'my in-law's name', or Wampar who say edza bu-d monteng 'my in-law's name like that'.

5.5 Borrowing

An item borrowed from a neighbouring dialect or language may be used instead of the taboo item. After a time, this item is often 'nativised' and its origin forgotten. In Mari, there are many items which are clearly of Adzera origin, which exist as alternatives to words which are not obviously related to an Adzera form. These probably came into Mari as taboo substitutes. People quickly forget where words originate, and may attribute incorrect origins to them. For example, the Adzera of the Sangang area often use the word tati if dzaf 'fire' is taboo, and claim that it is borrowed from the Guruf dialect. In fact, it is from Sangang's neighbour, Tsumanggorun village, which includes descendants of speakers of another, probably Papuan, language. The word tati is from this old language called Taap.

5.6 Phonological modification of original item

This method of producing a new word from a taboo word is not common now, but may have been more widespread in the past judging by phonologically irregular sound correspondences and 'odd-looking' items in the vocabularies of all the Markham languages. For example, in the Ngariawang variety of the Guruf dialect of Adzera, the word for 'woman' is kasat, while in all other dialects it is sagat. Other words in Ngariawang indicate that metathesis of syllables was formerly a common phenomenon, so this may have been used to modify taboo words.

5.7 Borrowing of Tok Pisin items

This is a very common strategy used now to substitute for taboo words. This method dates back to before the advent of Tok Pisin, to German times, when the Wampar are reported as having used German swear-words where presumably they could not use their own words in avoidance situations. Fischer (n.d.: 188) lists the item saeskop kukuk naka mael, 'possibly German Scheisskopf, zum Kuckuck noch

einmal ' as an 'insult', said to be from an early missionary in the area⁵. The English and now Tok Pisin items sit 'shit' and pak 'fuck' are often used by Adzera in front of in-laws, when the Adzera items are strongly tabooed.

6.0 Word taboo and change in the Markham languages

Simons (1982:188) summarises three recurring mechanisms of change caused by language taboo:

- (1) Borrowing from neighbouring dialects/languages.
- (2) Deliberate phonological modification of the existing term.
- (3) Semantic innovation from within the language.

The Markham languages show evidence that there has been a certain amount of phonological modification, possibly due to word taboo operating in the past. But the main changes have occurred in the vocabularies of the languages, due to points (1) and (2) above. Below I look at phonological, morphological and lexical changes that have occurred which could have been caused at some time by word taboo.

6.1 Changes in phonologies

Phonological changes in the Markham languages are not entirely the result of word taboo. Contact with neighbouring languages, at different times and for various purposes has certainly been a major influence in phonological change. For example the Wantoat (Papuan) speaking neighbours of the Sukurum and Sarasira languages, with whom they intermarry and interact socially and politically, have backed velar stops. Sukurum and Sarasira speakers tend to produce all their velar stops as back velars, most likely under the influence of their neighbours' speech.

Among the languages phonological distortions, for example metathesis, have occurred most likely to accommodate word taboo. For example, Proto Markham *tunggis 'smell (transitive)' is reflected as Sarasira tukis, Wampur tu?is, but in Mari it is kuti. Proto

Markham had a form *(g)ufin, 'smell, aroma' which is reflected in Adzera as ufin, in Mari and Sarasira as gufin, in Musom as (nun)uhin and Yalu as (unu)fufin. But Wampur has huin, clearly a metathesised form. In the Ngariawang dialect of Adzera, kasat 'woman' is a metathesised form of Adzera sagat, tafagat, 'jaw' is a metathesised form of Adzera katafat, anting 'banana-peeler' a metathesised form of Adzera angit. There are many such examples in the lexicons of all the Markham languages. It is not verifiable now, but it is possible that metathesis was, in the past, a regular way of changing words to accomodate word taboo. And there is evidence that this strategy was continued after the languages which make up the Markham family split and moved away from each other.

Morphological change due to word taboo is less likely to occur than phonological change, as bound morphemes, being closely bound to roots, are more resistant to borrowing and replacement. Roots are more likely to be changed. But in the Markham languages, some forms are borrowed from neighbours with the morphemes firmly attached, and then undergo phonological or other changes. For example, the word for 'testicles' in the Nafi, Yalu and Aribwatsa languages, ngasits, appears to have been borrowed from a language which has the prefix nga- 'male' as a productive morpheme. The word in those three languages still has the nga- prefix attached, but this does not have the meaning 'male' in these languages. However, the three Watut languages all have a productive nga- prefix cognate with the word for 'man' nga-mar(o,u). It seems likely that the form was borrowed from one of these languages with the prefix, and incorporated into the receiving languages.

The word in Sukurum for 'sticky' is ninuknga, which has a very unusual consonant cluster, ng, which occurs in no other word in the language. Their neighbours, the Wantoat, have a productive adjective-forming suffix, -nga, often used after velar consonants k and g, and the Sukurum people have borrowed the form along with its suffix into an adjective class which does not take suffixes.

6.3 Changes in lexis

By far the most pervasive change in the Markham languages due to word taboos is in the lexicons. There are several types of lexical change which have occurred in the past, and are still occurring.

6.3.1 Multiplicity of synonyms

All the Markham languages, even those like Wampur which do not now practice word taboo, have many doublets and triplets in their vocabularies. With word taboo in operation people can choose a synonymous form. Some of the alternative forms are lost over time, either temporarily or permanently, and new forms can be introduced which have currency for a time, and then fall into disuse in their turn. For example, in the Adzera language, the word for 'big' is tsira?. This has no cognate in any of the other Markham languages now. But in a text, a story from a young man, I found the word faring for 'big' which I had never heard before. He explained: "It is an old word, not everyone can use it because my uncle's name is Fariang, and for some people it is taboo." This word is cognate with the word for 'big' in Wampar and North Watut. There is yet another Adzera word for 'big', gagaing, also not used any more, but cognate with the forms found in Sukurum and Sarasira, and with the Duwet form as well. As adjectives are frequently part of personal names, there is a lot of variation in the forms found in the different languages, and few cognates.

6.3.2 Rapid 'nativisation' of borrowed items

One problem with detecting borrowings in these languages is that items are very rapidly subjected to phonological 'nativisation' processes. These processes make the borrowed words appear as if they originate in the receiving language. But if one takes as an example the word for an item which must have been borrowed in recent times, the processes can be discerned. The word for 'steel axe' which would have entered the Markham with the object not

earlier than 1900, now appears to 'belong' in all the languages. However, by analysis of the phonemes and morphemes, it can be deduced which way it travelled into the valley, and where its starting point was. The forms are given in Table 2 for the 15 languages, and where there are 2 morphemes, I indicate them by literal translation in brackets beside the form. The word for 'traditional stone axe' is also given as this gives clues to the origin of the form, and direction of borrowing.

Table 2

Forms for 'steel axe' and 'stone axe' in Markham languages

<u>Language</u>	<u>Steel axe</u>	<u>Stone axe</u>
ADZ	dzantsun	gir
MRI	zazun	gir
WPU	sani?	gir
SKM	sansun	sem (Borr. from Wantoat)
SRA	tsantsun	gir
SWT	dzandzun	fakambu
MWT	tsantson	ge
NWT	aidz-antson ('axe' + 'hole')	dzi
WPA	aedz-antson ('axe' + 'hole')	ge
MSM	its	ki
NFI	kafi-nonggon ('woman' + 'object')	yes
DWT	afi-nanggon ('woman' + 'object')	ais
YLU	aits	aits
ARB	aidz	aidz
LAB	<u>e</u> namati ('axe' + 'hand' + ?)	<u>e</u>

The form for European axe, or steel axe, can be traced to the Yalu or Aribwatsa, who lived near the Huon Gulf coast, and whose word for 'stone axe' is aits or aidz. It is only in these two languages that the words for 'steel axe' and 'stone axe' are identical. This word was taken by their neighbours the Wampar and their word for 'hole' antson added on to it, resulting in aedz+antson. This is

because European axes have a vertical hole in them for hafting, whereas stone axes do not. As the item moved into the Watut and the Upper Markham the initial vowels were dropped and the form was taken in as one morpheme, a local variant of dzantson, and 'nativised' to fit the phonological systems of the receiving languages. The non-cognate forms for Duwet and Nafi must have originated in Nafi, where kafi means 'woman', becoming Duwet afi, and nonggon means 'thing, implement'. Stone axes belonged to men in the past, and apparently steel axes were considered to be women's tools by the people who saw them.

Through taboo processes, and consequent need for adoption of new words, it can be seen that processes are and were available in the languages to incorporate new items thoroughly into the receiving languages.

6.3.3 Scattering of cognate items

For many etyma, a form can be reconstructed in the proto language of one of the subgroups, but not for the others. However, a cognate item will appear in one language of another group, far away. For example the word for 'hot' can be reconstructed for Proto Lower Markham as *sakwasus, but for Proto Upper Markham as *kukwap, and for Proto Watut as a verb, *-rirun. The Adzera word for 'hot' is sasus, that for Sarasira is sakwasus and that for South Watut is sasu; these are cognate with the forms for the Lower Markham subgroup, but have no cognates within their own sub-groups. This is a very common phenomenon. It is most likely that a Proto Markham form could have been the common form, but due to word taboo and subsequent changing and borrowing, the reflexes have been lost in some of the daughter languages.

Another related phenomenon is the apparent 'cross-over' of items in neighbouring languages. (This is also related to 6.3.4 below). For example, the words for 'moon' and 'star' in Adzera are buramp and ngantam respectively. In Wampar they are ngantam 'moon'

and ngaromarets 'star'. It seems that Wampar borrowed ngantam from Adzera, and changed its referent, as the two forms ngantam and ngaromarets are derived from the same Proto Markham form which can be reconstructed as *ngaro-ndamarints 'star', the former by processes peculiar to Adzera phonological change, and the latter by regular phonological process of Wampar.

6.3.4 Overlap within semantic fields

Some semantic fields have words within them which are mixed up in a very complex way when compared across the Markham languages. For example, the semantic area of 'house, dwelling place' is very complex, as the words for 'house' are not cognate with each other across the languages, but when the words for 'inside house', 'garden hut', temporary shelter', and 'village' are also compared, it can be seen that a lot of interchange has gone on between the languages in the past. This is very likely due to borrowing, and to expansion and contraction of the meanings of words to provide alternative items when one is taboo.

6.3.5 Susceptibility of items to word taboo

Some classes of lexical items are more subject to being tabooed than others, due to the kinds of words used as personal names. A personal name consists of either a noun, a noun phrase consisting of a noun plus an attributive, or a verb phrase. Pronouns, kin terms, auxiliary verbs, and grammatical forms such as demonstratives, verbal particles etc. are never names or parts of names. Thus these latter classes are less likely to be borrowed between languages or dialects, or changed because of taboo. Those nouns which refer to cultural items and human beings, some body parts, common verbs and adjectives are much more likely to be names, and consequently to become tabooed at some time.

7.0 Implications of word taboo for comparative linguistics

The main problems for comparative linguists working in the Pacific, and certainly anyone working with the languages of the Markham family, which could have been caused by past and present customs of word taboo are discussed below.

7.1. Effects on cognate percentages are probably the most noticeable of the effects due to word taboo. Dyen (1963) was one of the first comparative Austronesian linguists to comment on the possible effects of word taboo on cognate percentages. Lithgow (1973) writing about Muyuw, an AN language of Milne Bay Province, also documents the effects of name taboo on basic vocabulary and consequently on cognate percentages. Simons' study of word taboo in the Solomons also highlights the problems encountered by the comparative linguist in assigning cognacy and calculating percentages (Simons 1982).

7.2 The apparent dissimilarity in lexis of many Oceanic languages, and particularly those of Western Melanesia leads the comparative linguist into problem areas, for example of assigning languages to specific classifications and sub-groups. Comparisons based on longer word-lists and particularly on morphological and syntactic data can help overcome this.

7.3 Problems caused by the existence of alternative lexical items in languages are also encountered. Which item is the linguist to choose for comparative or lexicostatistical purposes? Simons (1982; 163ff) has outlined a possible approach to this. His refinement of the traditional lexicostatistical method allows the linguist to take account of synonyms. He listed all available synonymous forms for his word list in the dialects he was studying, likening one dialect to a hearer and another to a listener. The resulting cognate percentages calculated from these lists, from a

synchronic perspective, show "a more accurate prediction of intelligibility" between dialects or languages (Simons 1982: 163). From a diachronic point of view, the increased cognate percentages which inevitably result from using this method will alter the linguist's interpretation of the degree of divergence separating the languages (Simons 1982:165). This has obvious problems for glottochronology if it is used in measuring absolute time depths of divergences in these areas.

7.4 Simons suggests that language taboo may, in some cases, retard rather than accelerate the rate of change, as many synonyms are available and lexical replacement is not necessary (Simons 1982:191). However, among the Markham languages there has been a great deal of lexical replacement rather than recycling of synonyms available in the languages themselves. This is clearly due to the interaction of word taboo with influence of intensive linguistic and social interaction with their many Papuan-speaking neighbours. Even a quick glance at a word list from, for example, the Wantoat language shows many lexical items shared with Adzera, Sukurum and Sarasira. In contrast with this is the situation in the South East Solomons, where there is quite complex word taboo in operation, but the languages are lexically quite conservative. Since there are no Papuan-speaking neighbours in this area, there is no Papuan input as there is among the Markham languages but available synonyms are recycled within the AN languages.

7.5 Unexplained but regular sets of sound correspondences may lead a comparative linguist to reconstruct too many phonemes for a proto language. Simons says that some of these anomalies can be explained as locally-generated spontaneous changes caused by word taboo. The sets of regular correspondences in the Markham languages which lead one to the reconstruction of proto forms with no apparent Proto

Oceanic or Proto Huon Gulf antecedents could be the results of such local changes.

8 Conclusion

Word taboo and avoidance has clearly affected, and is still affecting, many aspects of the Markham languages. However, as Chowning (1985:191) has cautioned, not all problems encountered by comparative linguists can be explained by word taboo. She points out that we cannot assume that the societies which now practise word taboo did so in the past, and even if they did, it was not necessarily in the same way. Until more investigation has been carried out, we can only be aware of the possible effects of word taboo and avoidance. We must take them into account along with other cultural and historical phenomena which affect languages like intermarriage between language groups, intermixing of populations from different languages due to migrations, warfare and natural disasters, and contact with populations in the past who are now gone from the area.

The present-day situation in the Markham languages I believe reflects that in many small-scale societies under pressure of change. The small social and political units, once closely-knit through consanguineal and affinal ties, political alliances and trading networks, are expanding rapidly and their populations are dispersing. Young people are marrying foreigners with different customs and taboos, and with unknown relations. There has been a massive breakdown in traditional practices, as young people go away from their homes for formal schooling. The languages and customs are no longer taught by the older people, and then reinforced by practice and traditional sanctions. One of these practices is name taboo, which is often disregarded nowadays, and even scorned by young Markhams together with the behaviour that goes with it. This practice along with many others, is dying out.

NOTES

1. In a recent issue of the ANU Report there was a short item about a modern Samoan tulafale or 'talking chief', who stressed the power of words in his society. In traditional Samoan society 'verbal insults against chiefs were considered to be heinous crimes' (ANU Reporter 1987:2).

2. Markham languages show regular PMK *r reflexes of Proto Oceanic *t, and the regular PMK *t does not descend from POC *t.

3. The following abbreviations are used for language names:

ADZ	Adzera	WPA	Wampar
MRI	Mari	MSM	Musom
WPU	Wampur	DWT	Duwet
SKM	Sukurum	NFI	Nafi
SRA	Sarasira	YLU	Yalu
SWT	South Watut	ARB	Aribwatsa
MWT	Middle Watut	LAB	Labu
NWT	North Watut		

4. This is interesting, as Tok Pisin also has this immunity. In social situations where people are likely to become angry with each other, where they might transgress the taboo rules and say something unacceptable in front of an in-law, Tok Pisin is often used. When people are arguing with each other, during football matches, and when men are drunk, they will speak to each other in Tok Pisin rather than their vernacular. In this context, Tok Pisin is neutral and the words have no power to harm anyone.

5. Fischer's transcription is not standard High German, but is possibly a Bavarian dialect form of this now old-fashioned swear-word. Many of the early Lutheran missionaries who worked in the Markham Valley came from this area.

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