

Speaking like a Ghost: Registers of Intimacy and Incompatibility in the Forests of Northern Laos

Nathan Badenoch

Villanova University, Pennsylvania

ABSTRACT—The Ksingmul people of the northern Laos-Vietnam border area have been known within local Tai social systems as Puak, a derogatory term that evokes images of forest-eating termites. Occupying the lowest rung in the Tai social hierarchy, what is known of the Ksingmul has been dominated by the idea of Tai-ization — a process of cultural loss and assimilation. But overt markers of physical culture and economic status mask the persistence of traditional beliefs, moral entanglements and alternative historical perspectives that can be accessed only through the Ksingmul language. In this article, I analyze a story called “Person and Nya Wai Become Friends”, which tells of a competition of trickery between a human and a wild spirit. In the telling of this story, the narrator marks the words of the spirit with a prefix that marks the “abnormal speech” of a non-human. He uses the marking to index the moral stance of the person and the wild spirit, as they first become friends, and the human subsequently betrays the special bond of friendship. The wild spirit Nya Wai “speaks like a human” when he is trying to gain mercy from Person when he is caught stealing from Person’s bird traps, while Person starts to “speak like a ghost” as he hatches his plot to get revenge on Nya Wai by tricking him into castrating himself. This is one of the linguistic devices used by the narrator to perform human-spirit relations in the telling of the story. Such performances are firmly located within the multiethnic landscape of the uplands, where power structures are negotiated, constructed and subverted through language use.

Introduction

The Ksingmul people of northeastern Laos attribute the diversity of languages found in the world to an unfortunate event of food poisoning that made people crazy (*tuh wlit*) and run around wildly. In one telling of the story, in the old days everyone lived together in one place, living their lives as one family in the forest and speaking the same language. Sharing the language, everyone understood the difference between *ʔaa-baa* and *ʔan-mih*. These oppositional pairs are the first and second person pronouns, the former used as part of a special relationship of intimacy, the latter for general use. It was also understood by everyone if one said *caa pah* ‘to eat’ or *bii hree* ‘to farm the mountains’ because they were ‘people of the same house.’ The story continues: one day, a man was wandering in the forest and came across mushroom. He didn’t know if it was poisonous

or safe to eat, but he took it back and made soup out of that mushroom anyway. In those days they didn't know how to spice the food, but the soup was eaten and everyone got violently sick. Vomiting all over the forest, the people were scattered in all directions, sleeping and then sitting by themselves until the poisoning passed. When they felt better, people started coming back to their home, only to find that the common language they had spoken was gone. They didn't understand each other anymore, since they had gone crazy and started speaking in their own way. Because of that mushroom, now everyone had their own language (*khwaam nɔh khwaam ʔin* 'language-who-language-he') and they could not live together. That is why there are different ethnic groups, languages and countries all over the world.

This account of the diversity of languages and peoples of the uplands of Southeast Asian Zomia is just one of many that explain why people speak differently. The more common myth shared across the region has to do with differentiated people emerging from a gourd (Proschan 2001). This is part of a shared oral tradition that reflects historical relationships between ethnic groups. However, the Ksingmul story of the poisonous mushroom (*ptih kambool* 'mushroom-to.be.poisoned'), as told here by Somsai (58-year-old man) during my first fieldwork on the Ksingmul language in 2012, establishes a different framework for analyzing the linguistic ideologies of this upland, multilingual people living on both sides of the Laos-Vietnam border. The notion of language differentiation because of people "going crazy" shines a light on the social bonds that are reflected in sharing a language, as well as the perception of speaking differently as reflecting different values, histories and identifications. It is also a story that needs to be considered within the multilingual setting of the uplands of the Lao-Vietnam border area, where linguistic and cultural contact have long contributed to the local social fabric.

Working off of this basic narrative of abnormal speech types (Sapir 1958), in this article I analyze a lengthier story about the relationship between a person and an evil spirit called Nya Wai (Ksingmul: *ɲaa wáay*), in which the speech of the spirit is marked with a special prefix *bar-*. I argue that this rhetorical device indexes the moral difference between people and spirits. Interestingly, a parallel theme in this story is the nature of the special relationship that is reflected by the use of the *ɲaa-baa* pronoun set introduced above. These two performative practices highlight the linguistic marking of tensions between intimacy and incompatibility in the negotiation of social relations within an animate world that includes non-humans. It is also likely that the opposition of the person (*ksiiŋ*) and spirit (*skil*) and the enregisterment (Agha 2015) of intimacy is part of the complex representations of the historical relationship between autochthonous speakers of Austroasiatic languages and the more recently arrived Tai people. I contend that this story is part of a larger areal narrative of the morality of exchange relations, indicated by the social pragmatics of interlocutor reference (Fleming and Sidnell 2020).

Expressivity in abnormal speech, social stereotypes and moral propositions

Abnormal types of speech have been observed in Native American languages and the discussion has shed important light on the ways in which grammar reflects ideologies

about social differentiation and distance. As suggested by Sapir, reference to physical and other characteristics that are deemed strange within a culture can be marked through the use of morphological and phonetic devices in Nootka. Generally speaking, the types of “person-implication” that can be encoded here may include sex and social status, but for Nootka the range of differentiation indexed is much broader. The nuances are specific: children, body size and type, as well as “defective” speech. In this last category, there is nasal speech, lisp and others, and the forms used to represent these types of speech are described as “mocking-forms”. The speech of foreigners is also a reference that can be augmented through markers of abnormal language, as well as mythological and cultural heroes (Frachtenberg 1920). However, the manipulation of consonant and vowel sounds that are used to achieve this effect are not arbitrary, but related to the Nootka speaker’s semiotic maps of the indexicality and iconicity for specific segments and sequences.

Most relevant to the Ksingmul abnormal speech marking under consideration here are the forms of speech used by myth-characters in Native American linguistic culture. In many cases, this entails representing the speech of different animals through these tools of “sound play”. Langdon (1978) proposed that “animal talk” represents speech of animals as imagined by humans, as well as speech in which animals are addressed by humans. As a register of speech, animal talk is a mode of linguistic performance that is open to interactions that can be experienced dialogically. When a speaker of Takelma “talks like a bear”, they are using grammatical means of marking the speech in a way that both enhances the experience of Bear’s characteristics, while at the same time indicating the appropriateness of that usage to a specific actor or situation within a narrative (Hymes 2004). Sapir had proposed that the marker of Bear’s speech *L-* was characteristic, but intrinsically meaningfully morpheme that could be called a “grizzly bear prefix”. The sounds used to mark different animals were thus meaningless in and of themselves, but indexical of the nature, character or behavior that is stereotypical of that animal. Hymes’ reanalysis of the texts revealed that the use of this and other prefixes was a much more nuanced part of Takelma narrative poetics. It turns out that just as the personality of a person is not defined by one single characteristic; in practice animal speech can take a number of prefixes to foreground certain traits, and their stereotypicality may be linked to a different animal.

An important element of this sound play is the sound itself. In the Takelma case, prefix *L-* is not part of the prosaic Takelma phonological inventory. Although this sound does exist as a phoneme in neighboring languages, for the Takelma speaker this prefix is uneuphonious (Sapir, referenced in Hymes 2004). In other words, the effect of abnormal speech is achieved through use of abnormal sounds. These uneuphonious sounds are part of the aesthetic grammar (Williams 2014) of the language that use them. It is noteworthy that Hymes terms these “expressive prefixes”, drawing a link to the affective intention of the speaker, evoking shared norms of social value and judgement (Hymes 2004). Recent research on expressives (also known as ideophones and mimetics) has demonstrated how ideal social types are evoked (Choksi 2019) and moral propositions (Badenoch et al. 2020) are given voice as part of a performative ideology that places high value on marked sound-meaning mappings.

In mainland Southeast Asia, folk classification of people groups by speech practices is found. For example, the Khmu, a different Austroasiatic speaking people of northern Laos, identify subgroups through the word *tmooy* [tmɔɔy] ‘guest’ and a range of qualifying terms that are salient in their perceptions of intimacy, proximity and difference (Evrard 2007). For example, the negative marker is used as a shibboleth: adding the various words for ‘not’ in the regional varieties, we find Khmu people referred to as *tmooy pe*, *tmooy khat*, *tmooy ʔam*, *tmooy ʔal*. Thus with the term *tmooy*, the Khmu recognize people with whom they can communicate in the same language, despite variations in various aspects of speech, subordinate to the larger classification of *kmhmuʔ* ‘person’ (Proschan 1997). There are other ways of differentiating internally with *tmooy*, and the boundaries of *tmooy* are not rigidly fixed. Some groups that are not native speakers of Khmu, but live close to the Khmu and speak Khmu as a second language are also sometimes considered to be *tmooy*.

The Ksingmul “ghost prefix” *bar-* marks the abnormal speech of a wild spirit, and the literature on Native American languages provides a fertile theoretical backdrop upon which this phenomenon can be analyzed. As will be discussed in more detail, the Ksingmul language uses prefixes and infixes in a wide range of grammatical functions. This special *bar-* prefix, which is composed of a sequence of sounds that is not grammatically irregular in Ksingmul but is nonetheless rare in the language, gives a feeling of mimetic strangeness to the speech, emblematic of both a crazed mode of talking and the immoral behavior associated with it. Mimesis depends upon the recognition and manipulation of alterity; as such it is a moment of knowing rather than a process of loss (Taussig 1993). While at first this prefix seems to delineate clearly the worlds of humans and evil spirits, the narrative shows that human speech and behavior is subject to the same marking when the lines of social appropriateness are crossed. I argue that this register of linguistic performance can shed light not only on the Ksingmul imaginations of human/non-human relations, but can be extended further to provide insights on social history more broadly.

Recognizing that this is but one story from the Ksingmul oral tradition, the analysis presented here is meant to suggest ways to open up alternative avenues for considering upland society and the many types of relationships we find there. As with all oral literature, the telling and the meaning of stories are deeply rooted in the social history and cultural traditions of the people who tell them. In order to “read” the telling of “Person and Nya Wai Become Friends” we need to explore the place of the Ksingmul within the ethnic and political landscape of northeastern Laos.

Ksingmul in the political landscape of upland forests

The Ksingmul people have long been known locally as “Puak”, a term that is considered to be derogatory because it means “termite” in Lao and the local Tai languages. The Ksingmul are an Austroasiatic forest people who have combined hunting and gathering with upland agriculture for as long as they can remember. They currently number approximately 10,000 people in Laos (Houaphan province) and 21,000 in Vietnam (Son La and Lai Chau provinces), where they are known as Xinh

Mun. The autonym they use on both sides of the border is *ksiiŋ muul*, and the common explanation is that this means hill (*muul*) people (*ksiiŋ*). When discussing the origin of this name, however, some Ksingmul elders have commented that this received wisdom, while feasible in terms of the meaning, is in fact not linguistically correct. In Ksingmul the word for ‘hill’ *múul* is pronounced with a marked high tone, while the word used in the ethnonym is a low, unmarked tone. This was not, however, presented as a problem, because they do live in the mountains and in any case, regardless of the etymology, it is preferred to *puak*. In official usage, the Lao-ified form Singmoon, is used. Nonetheless, locally one may still hear the term *puak* used, both outside and within the community.

In the Ksingmul narrative of their social history, they refer to two axes to explain the internal diversity of their population. The first can be considered to be a geographic distinction, the Nget (*ksiiŋ muul ɲéet*) and the Ya (*ksiiŋ muul yáa*). The Nget people previously lived at the headwaters of the Nget river (*lóɲ ɲéet*), which is a tributary of the Ma (*lóɲ harmaa*) and form the majority of the Ksingmul in Laos. It was explained that in previous times all Ksingmul were Ya, but the group that fled to the area of the Ma river then become known as Nget. Elders also refer to the Ya people as *kyaa*, which is probably the original name that was reworked into the *ksiiŋ muul yáa* term that is now used, a form that may reflect the current official style of subclassifying groups with a general noun and modifier. The fieldwork that informs this article was carried out among Nget villages in the Harma (*harmaa*) area. In accounts of their migration from Vietnam, elders mention *luəŋ kéew* ‘the Vietnam side’ and *luəŋ harmaa* ‘the Lao side’ as the basic geographical orientation of the group. Interestingly, the word *laaw* does not come into their historical narrative until we reach the period of revolutionary struggle in the 1940 and 1950s. Differences in speech are described as being minor pronunciation points and some lexical variation, but they are mutually intelligible.

Another distinction made is between *ksiiŋ muul kəh* and *ksiiŋ muul laay*. This axis groups people into those communities living in the older forest (*kəh*) and those living in areas that are dominated by regenerated fallow forest (*laay*). The implications of this landscape-based criteria is one of *ksiiŋ muul laay* proximity to lowland society, where the *ksiiŋ muul kəh* live in more remote areas. Comparing the speech of these two groups, *ksiiŋ muul laay* is undergoing phonological changes that may be the result of more intense contact with Tai languages. Ksingmul is a typical Austroasiatic sesquisyllabic language, where the main syllable is preceded by a minor syllable.¹

Another phonological change is final /r/ > /l/, as seen in ‘rib’, above. When such phonological changes occur in tandem, it can intensify the impression of differentiation; for example, ‘ear’ is *hantoor* in *kəh*, but *khtool* in *laay*. It should be noted that similar changes are underway in *kəh* as well, but they are still in a transitional stage. In the Ya variety recorded in the Soviet “linguistic expedition” in Vietnam in the 1970s, this final /r/ > /l/ change had already been completed (Материалы советско-вьетнамской лингвистической экспедиции 1979 года 1990). The implication of these changes is that the structure of Ksingmul words is being simplified to resemble that of Lao and

¹ In the *laay*-type speech, minor syllables are reduced; for example, taking common terms for body parts, we find reductions such as *kaldah* ‘palm of the hand’ > *kdah*, *hanhriəŋ* ‘tooth’ > *hliəŋ*, and *canniər* ‘rib’ > *cniəl*.

Vietnamese. However, when discussing the distinction with village elders, they stress that the distinction between *kɔh* and *laay* is a fluid one, because small groups of people change their residence. The terms should not be taken as having any ethnic connotation or fixed sociopolitical nuance. Rather, the use of these terms shows a Ksingmul notion of type of forest and implications for contact with others, backed up by the reality of linguistic change of which people are aware.

The general greater distance from the lowlands does not mean, however, that the *ksiɪŋ muul kɔh* are isolated from contact with Tai-speaking people. Indeed, the culture and language of the *ksiɪŋ muul kɔh* have been heavily influenced by Tai. Evans (1999) has proposed a process of Tai-ization of the Ksingmul through contact with the Tai Dam, where material culture is virtually indistinguishable from that of their Tai Dam neighbors. His conclusion is that the Ksingmul are on a course of inevitable cultural merger with the Tai Dam, although the persistence of the Ksingmul language may be the only form of resistance to the more sophisticated Tai culture. Central to Evans' argument is a Tai Dam discourse of Ksingmul laziness, something that he describes from the Tai Dam point of view but does not elaborate from the Ksingmul perspective. The primarily economic framework utilized by Evans hid the more complex sociohistorical and cultural dynamics that underpin Ksingmul representations of their position within the complex ethnic mosaics of the mountains. As this article asserts, passing over language as simply one factor that might slow the pace of assimilation, the language itself offers myriad insights into the Ksingmul view on their relationship with the Tai.

The Ksingmul believe that they were the original lords of Muang Muak Muang Mooy in Vietnam, "living together" with the Thai Ay, who had their own political territory in Muang Ay. Their name for the area they controlled is Muang Phu Puak, and they are clear that the Tai with whom they are historically most familiar are the Thai Ay, not the more numerous and well-known Tai Dam, Tai Daeng or Tai Vat.² Eventually, there was conflict and the Thai Ay drove the Ksingmul out. The group now living in Laos fled to the top of the Nget stream and then crossed the border into what would become Lao territory. Their claim to control of a *muang* offers another view on the question of the social dynamics of this "Tai" form of sociopolitical organization.

The Ksingmul were part of the political structures of the Tai *muang* of the Sip Song Chu Thai (Condominas 1990). As we currently understand it, the social hierarchy of the Tai system consisted of a basic distinction between Tai and non-Tai, where the latter were Austroasiatic-speaking peoples who were incorporated at the bottom of society. The *saa* category of non-Tai (*sa* ' in Condominas' notation, *saa* is cognate with the Lao *kha* and often translated simplistically as "slave," although the power relationships were something more accurately described as "vassal" or "bonded subject") included both culturally Austroasiatic groups, as well as those who had assimilated to Tai culture. There was also a sector of Tai people, known as *kuong ñōk*, who had fallen into a bonded relationship to those higher up in the hierarchy. The Austroasiatic groups such

² It is not always easy to identify which Tai language is the source of borrowings. This is an important question to ask, but for the purposes of this article, I use Tai to refer to those Southwestern Tai languages spoken in the area, unless it is possible and necessary to differentiate. For the Ksingmul, the primary language of contact is Thai Ay. For more on the importance of this issue, see Tappe and Badenoch 2021.

as the Ksingmul, occupying the lowest rung of the hierarchy, were known as *pua'pai* /*puəʔ paay*/. This category is a socioeconomic one, located within a larger notion of ethnicity as an opposition between Tai and non-Tai. *Pua'pai* people were excluded from collective decision-making of the *muang*, provided manpower to the Tai rulers, and had their ethnogenesis in the gourd myth. The term is cognate with the proto-Tai word **buak*, which is a pluralizing particle (contemporary Lao *phuak*, “group”), which may have had pejorative connotations in history. It seems that this word has a history of becoming an ethnonym in the area of Chinese adjacent to the Vietnam border (Chamberlain 2016). Thus the name *puak* /*puək ~ puəʔ*/ has a complicated history of being a general social category, as well as a racial grouping and specific ethnic reference.

The Ksingmul continued to live within the sociopolitical framework of the Tai *muang*, where they adopted (and adapted) the patronymics of Tai lineages: *caw lɔɔ*, *caw wii*, *caw ɲmɔɔŋ* and *caw yaa*. These patronymics in fact mix Tai *siŋ* ‘lineages’ (*lɔɔ* and *wii*), Austroasiatic taboo groups (*ɲmɔɔŋ* is a type of civet, so this group avoids eating that animal) and something that seems to be the remnant of an older ethnonym (*yaa* from *kyaa*, where *k-* may be a prefix indicating ‘group of people’). A full-blown analysis of the Ksingmul system is beyond the scope of this article, but it should be stressed that this is an example of a non-Tai group (*saa*) from the bottom of the hierarchy (*puak*) adopting the patronymics of the Tai group at the top. At times the Ksingmul performed the role of legitimizing Tai occupation of the land by conducting buffalo sacrifice as mediators between the Tai and the local spirits (Petit 2020), and it is possible that the Tai patronymics were given in exchange for this type of service (Sprenger 2010).

When the pressure to pay head tax and corvée labor to the French became too onerous in the late 1800s, one group of Ksingmul dispersed across the upper Nget valley area and hid themselves in the forest. The leaders had made a decision to not live in villages, as a matter of survival. They describe this as *blat karhrai* ‘scatter into the forest’, and the type of forest that could hide them from the French was the *kɔh* forest introduced above. This was crucial for the reorientation of the discourse about Ksingmul in the upland landscape. It is at this time that the Ksingmul say they temporarily “became” *saa tɔɔŋ liəŋ*, “Slaves of the Yellow Leaves”. This term is well known in Southeast Asian ethnography as Phi Tong Luang (*phii tɔɔŋ liəŋ*, “Spirits of the Yellow Leaves”), an exonym of the Mlabri of the Thai-Laos border area, one of the last hunter-gatherer groups in this part of the mainland Southeast Asian mountains. However, *khaa/saa tɔɔŋ liəŋ* is in fact the more common term, found as a reference to the hunter-gatherer groups of the Central Laos-Vietnam border. The term appears in a 1930s census cited by Grossin listing Kha Tong Luang hunter-gatherers in the Nam Gnouang-Khamkeut area. The transformation of *khaa/saa* > *phii* may be a development that happened within the Mlabri-Tai encounter (also possibly including the Khmu (Proschan 2001)) on the Thailand-Laos border (Jim Chamberlain pers. comm.). Returning to the Ksingmul myth, the distinction between *saa* and *phii* is important because it is the Nya Wai that is the *phii* (*skil*), not the person (*ksiing*) living in the forest.

According to the Ksingmul explanations, at this time small groups of people moved their simple forest lean-tos whenever the tubers were exhausted. Thus the only evidence they left of their presence was the banana leaves from the lean-tos that had turned

yellow. Village elders describe this period of their history as *kuyh tuup ʔlaa* ‘living in banana leaf huts,’ endorsing the notion of Yellow Leaves. According to the narrative, they abandoned agriculture for hunting and gathering, led mostly by the availability of tubers, only cooking at night to avoid giving their location away. It is interesting to note that the term for the ‘house’ of the *ṭṭṭṭ liəŋ* lifestyle is not a single lexeme, and includes the Tai borrowing *tuup* ‘thatched hut’. The “normal” word for house in Ksingmul is *jiəŋ*, with cognates in several other languages in the area that mean house (in a village). This linguistic evidence—the lack of a specific word for temporary forest huts as opposed to more permanent houses—supports the idea that the *ṭṭṭṭ liəŋ* lifestyle was something that they adopted from a more sedentary livelihood. This is also when the old *puak* term was re-interpreted to mean ‘termite’, as they now lived like *puak doŋ* (Tai: ‘forest termites’), hidden from view and consuming the trees from the inside, little by little.



Figure 1. Monument to the 25 Heroes, signifying the importance of the Ksingmul area to the early days of the Revolution, and the transformation of Ksingmul from Puak to Lao May.

The Ksingmul thus speak of their social mobility up and down as a function of their own agency within the larger political hierarchy. The Lao Communist revolution would provide an interesting twist in this narrative of local politico-ethnic structures in the multiethnic landscapes of this area. (Tappe forthcoming). In the early days of the Communist/nationalist insurgency against the French, which was based in Houaphan province, the revolutionary leader Kaysone Phomvihane fled to the area inhabited by the Ksingmul in the mountains of Xiengkho district, adjacent to the Vietnam border (Figure 1). According to the local memory, the Ksingmul people then hid him in the forest to avoid capture by the French between 1954-1960. The area was later given the revolutionary name Khet Lao Hung (“Zone of Law Dawn”); the Ksingmul had

made Kaysone a *puak doṇ* in order to save the revolutionary movement, for which the Ksingmul were made Lao May “new Lao” (Lao *laaw may*, or *laaw məə* in Ksingmul³ and the local Tai language), moving them up in the hierarchy of ethnopolitics in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic. Because of this episode, when speaking in “official register” (Badenoch 2017), the Ksingmul are still sometimes referred to as Lao Mai. While they appreciate the sentiment, they are quick to note that they are actually part of the original people (*khon phréem* ‘old people’) in the local Tai world.

From this position within the changing Tai/Lao political systems, it is not surprising that bilingualism has been a central part of their cultural life. From the view of the periphery, multilingualism is a key element of the *muang* (Badenoch and Tomita 2013) as a social ontology (Baumann 2020). Although we speak of the Ksingmul within the local Tai political structures, which we know best from the Tai Dam perspective, the Ksingmul have typically spoken Thai Ay, which is different from Tai Dam and Tai Vat. There are many borrowings from Tai languages in Ksingmul. This influence is present in the lexicon of daily life, as well as ritual practice, which has been deeply influenced through their interactions. The Ksingmul of the Harma area have, however, not spoken Khmu, and consider themselves to be socially distant from that group of Austroasiatic people who are typically more numerous in the uplands of this area. That said, the Ksingmul do know the Khmu, calling them *kláw*, a curious and historically important ethnonym that is shared in different forms by various people of the region (Chamberlain 2019).

Despite influence from surrounding Tai languages the Ksingmul language maintains its social integrity as the first and primary language of life in Ksingmul villages. This suggests that their relationship with the Tai should be characterized as one of multifaceted cultural exchange and social intimacy. As Evans suggests, intermarriage between Ksingmul and Tai is not common, but Tai people almost never learn to speak Ksingmul. Another factor providing insight on the social world of the Ksingmul is their relationship with the Hmong in the Harma area. When the Ksingmul first arrived in the area, there were already Hmong present, living in small villages. The local leaders, those who interfaced with the surrounding Tai *muang* held the titles *ciəṇ* and *ʔnaa*, but were mostly Hmong and paid taxes to the French in opium. Both groups planted upland rice and maize, but the Hmong produced opium and the Ksingmul gathered forest products to trade. The Ksingmul tell that they have never worked for the Hmong, as has been reported in other places, and explain further that the Hmong were quick to learn Ksingmul language. When government policies of sedentarization were implemented, Ksingmul groups started to form villages, which brought them together administratively with the Hmong. As the Hmong population grew, mixed Hmong-Ksingmul villages appeared, and Hmong is now spoken together with Ksingmul and Lao (or Tai Dam) in daily life. In the nine villages located in the upper areas of the valley, four are *kɔɔl ksiin muul nēc-nēc* (“only Ksingmul villages”) and five are mixed Hmong-Ksingmul.

³ This word is a useful historical diagnostic. The Ksingmul form with the /əə/ vowel does not reflect the Tai Dam word, which has /ai/. In discussions about local history, Ksingmul of the *harmaa* area stress the importance of this fact.

Because this area is directly adjacent to the Vietnam border, the Vietnamese language is commonly used as well, together with the Vietnamese currency.

This short look at local historical narratives shines light on the dynamism with which the Ksingmul have interacted with their neighbors within the socioecological context of upland forests. The multiple meanings of the forest that are encoded in Ksingmul memory and imagination reflect notions about their position within the local political structures that have been in flux, featuring periods of more and less strong social agency (Figure 2). The overarching political structures, together with the local landscape of daily life, form a framework of morality through which they imagine their history as a part of larger regional cosmology.



Figure 2. In the Ksingmul village at the top of the Hama watershed. Across the valley to the left are more Ksingmul villages, Hmong villages and then the Vietnamese border.

Bilingualism, relics of cultural contact and degrees of otherness

The Ksingmul, occupying the lowest status within the Tai *muang*, have used Tai languages as a point of contact within the local multiethnic landscape. Influence of Tai languages on Ksingmul are significant, historically and presently, yet the Ksingmul language is itself the most resilient and salient emblem of Ksingmul cultural identity. As a matter of course, the Ksingmul have adopted terminology from Tai languages as they made technological, socioeconomic, political and ritual accommodations to local cultural dynamism in their larger world. One indication of a major social shift within the social structure of Ksingmul is a reorientation to a more rigid patriarchal social system, under the influence of the Tai Dam (Figure 3), in which lineage names (*siin*) were adapted, together with a large number of kinship terms. As already mentioned, the

social relationship that is core to this narrative *síiw* is a borrowing from Tai. Other areal linguistic adaptations (Vittrant and Watkins 2019) found in Ksingmul include replacing native numerals above three, borrowing of discourse markers and simplification of canonical syllable structure. For example, the borrowing of Tai discourse markers is evident in the current text; forms found in the text of this story, such as *lee*, *laa*, *laa meen*, *thiíwaa*, *hay la?* and *hay kwaa* are borrowed from Tai, as well as mixed Ksingmul-Tai constructions such as *miə nēew kəh* ‘after that’ (Tai *miə* ‘when’, Tai *nēew* ‘way’ and Ksingmul *kəh* ‘that’). Elaborate expressions are often semantically redundant, as they pair up equivalent Ksingmul and Tai forms to enhance the poetic effect; for example, describing a flood *hóot nǎə hóot kdip* ‘water-big-water-big’, where *nǎə* is a Tai borrowing, and now the more commonly used word, and *kdip* is a native word that is still used but in more marked expressive, performative situations. Such multilingual devices are used frequently in this type of narrative to establish a certain rhetorical feel, locating the narrative firmly in the shared poetic ecosystem of oral culture.

A layer of old Tai influence in the Ksingmul lexicon points to a long history of contact with languages of the political elite. Two characteristics stand out here. First, many Tai borrowings in Ksingmul preserve an old /r/ sound that remains today only in Thai (Siamese). The fossilization of old Tai forms in Khmu was discussed by Downer (1992), and Ksingmul provides further evidence of contact between speakers of Tai and Austroasiatic languages before some of the key sound changes swept through Tai. Ksingmul preserves old Tai /r/ in words such as *hráp* ‘to receive’ Lao hap Thai rap, *hrúa* ‘fence’ Lao huə Thai ruə and *hróot* ‘to arrive’ Lao hōot Thai rōot. Modern Lao words with initial h- are borrowed as /h/, yet these old Tai /r/ forms have not shifted to converge with the modern languages that Ksingmul speakers hear on a daily basis. The preservation of this old pronunciation remains as a marker of an older relationship, an older voice of the Other in the Ksingmul language.⁴ In Khmu, which also preserves this sound, the /r/ is sometimes considered by local people to be a symbol of Khmu as “ancient” in the Lao cultural area (Badenoch 2018).

Another interesting feature that remains to be explained in terms of the history of the language is the existence of a two-way tone contrast on many word pairs in Ksingmul – a mid- to low-pitch tone that is more prominent, and a high-rising-pitch tone that is more marked. Contrasting pairs include: *hrep* ‘intestine’ and *hrén* ‘bamboo grub’, *tal* ‘downstream’ and *tál* ‘to touch, to disturb’, *kaw* ‘raw’ and *káw* ‘unpounded rice’ and *ruu* ‘to burn’ and *rúu* ‘to hurry’. Some borrowed Tai words have a high rising pitch, providing lexical contrast with a native word⁵ – for example, *kii* ‘moon’ and *kii* ‘loom’ (T), *bóo* ‘cow’, *bóo* ‘well (water)’ (T) and *kaa* ‘fish’ and *káa* ‘to dare to do’ (T). Many other common Tai borrowings⁶ have a high rising tone in Ksingmul, such as *nóok*

⁴ A few other residuals from old Tai, preserving a medial /l/ include *bliən* ‘moon’ (Lao diən), *mlit* ‘seed’ (Lao met), *mleeŋ* ‘insect’ (Lao meen) and *mlóo* ‘to divine’ (Lao mǎo).

⁵ Interestingly, there is a pitch contrast between *pua* ‘to heal, to treat’ and *púa* ‘king’, the latter being a borrowing from Tai Dam and the former a common Tai word. This is puzzling because both have the same tone in Tai languages.

⁶ The letter-number combination provided indicates the tone class of the word in the system shared by Tai languages. The phonetic realization of each tone class varies by language. They are included to demonstrate



Figure 3. Ksingmul women wear a turban (loop khat ?luu) that shows influence from the Tai Dam.

‘outside’ (nɔk DL4), *náaŋ* ‘daughter-in-law’ (naaŋ A4), *bét* ‘fishing hook’ (bet DS3), *mii* ‘jackfruit’ (mii C4), *síəŋ* ‘things, belongings’ (khriəŋ B4) and *sóɔ* ‘to ask for, to beg’ (khɔɔ A1). The pitch cannot be explained by the tone of the source word in Lao or Tai Dam.

In other words, it seems feasible that because old features of Tai borrowings survive in Ksingmul, speakers may be aware of another layer of difference with the contemporary Tai languages that surround them; while Ksingmul speakers will not be aware of the historical phonology of borrowed words, they will be aware of these sounds as being markers of identity within their multilingual society. In other words, the persistence of these historically conservative forms in the face of ongoing and increasingly intensive contact with modern Tai languages serves to not only bolster the Ksingmul imagination of their own internal history, but at the same time points to a time of cultural intimacy in the local history of interethnic relations. While the linguistic details are beyond the scope of this article, the assertion here is that Tai linguistic influence can be seen as both likeness and differentiation, and therefore must be considered in full detail when arguments about Tai-ization are being formulated. In the historical interaction between the Brou (kha) and Phou Tay (tai) of Central Thai (Chamberlain 2012), the structural embedding of Tai language in the ritual language of the Brou of Vietnam (Vargyas 1994), an areas where Phou Tay is not spoken regularly, is seen not as a hegemonic imposition, but rather an appropriation of sacred power within a complementary, symbiotic relationship. The Ksingmul-Tai relationship is deeply rooted within the more rigid social Tai political hierarchy but suggests that the substance of cultural interactions may have been more fluid than is normally suggested by structural analysis that looks from the Tai perspective. Indeed, the old and regional layers of Tai borrowing in the Ksingmul lexicon – which most certainly were a part of ritual exchange as well as political imbalance – signal a different history from the narratives of the contemporary Lao nation state, as well, where Ksingmul are classified into a group of fifty officially recognized ethnolinguistic groups that have been given equal status in the political discourse of a multiethnic Laos, regardless of local and regional histories. These local identifications span a temporal and spatial landscape in which their own iterations of cultural similarity still retain specific markers of difference. In contrast to this mode of cultural expression, the *bar-* prefix starkly contrasts a gap in that cultural intimacy and point to an incompatibility produced through certain modes of cultural interaction.

“Person and Nya Wai become friends”: Performing self and other in Ksingmul oral literature

The story analyzed in this article is part of a Ksingmul genre of oral literature called *nɔ̃tɨc*, myths that usually have a moral message illustrated through relationships – concerning appropriate ways of acting, modes of exchange, explanations of power imbalances and implications of how relationships influence structures of social agency

that the high pitch in the Ksingmul form does not map to patterns within the original Tai system of tones. This problem needs to be investigated more deeply.

– between humans and others in their forest landscapes. “Others” can include people *ksiin*, animals *hrəy*, spirits *skil* and celestial beings such as gods *théen* and Naga/ngeuak *bruəŋ*. Another type of traditional story is the *myuəŋ*, which tell tales of supposedly real people and places *miə yuəŋ* “in times before”. The term *nɔ̌ic* is a reduced form of *nɛɛ* ‘time’ and *ɔ̌ic* ‘before’, which makes it lexically equivalent to *mɔ̌yuəŋ*. However, the moral weight of the *nɔ̌ic* came to differentiate the genre, as it is generally held that there is no direct knowledge of the people and events in these myths. In terms of performance, the two are indistinguishable, but the content holds a different position in the local tradition of knowledge transmission. In any case, the distinction between the two should not be overstated, but the possibility of two differing modes of oral performance is interesting in the context of the story presented here.

The proposition of a moral order of the forest is used here to provide a framework for analyzing the linguistic ideologies that are intertwined in the marking of intimacy and abnormal speech developed below. First, I will provide a synopsis of the story that is included in its full transcribed, parsed and translated form in the appendix. This story was narrated to me as one of three stories by Somsī – teacher, village elder, craftsman and ritual performer who has been my primary instructor in the Ksingmul language in the village – told to me during my early study of the language. He and two other villagers traveled from Xiengkho district in Houaphan province to Vientiane to work with me and Khamsoné Thongmixay, at that time professor and Head of the Department of Vietnamese Language at the National University of Laos. Khamsoné is also a native speaker of Ksingmul who studied in Vietnam and Japan, specializing in analysis of Lao literature, as well as Vietnamese-Lao translation and lexicography. Later, I spent time with them in their village and traveling throughout the upper Baw catchment recording *nɔ̌ic* and *myuəŋ* and surveying language use practices. During this fieldwork, a small team of researchers from the National University of Laos gathered data and had discussions about oral literature among the Ksingmul with storytellers in three villages. Technical work on this oral text – transcription, translation and interpretation – was done together with Khamsoné.

In this story, a man traps wild chicken in the forest, but notices that someone, or something, is stealing them from the traps. When he hides to see the identity of the thief, he sees that it is a *jaa wáay*, a dangerous and evil spirit that eats people. He goes home and plans to kill the Nya Wai, but the next day when Person confronts him, Nya Wai begs for mercy. Nya Wai promises to change his ways, and offers to “make friends” with the person, thereby entering into a special relationship of social equality. Person agrees to this, as a way to distract the Nya Wai and kill him in revenge. He invites Nya Wai to his house, and hatches his plan to pretend that he has cut off his testicles to offer them to his “friend” Nya Wai. This will require Nya Wai to reciprocate. Person cuts off the testicles of a pig and asks his wife to help offer them to Nya Wai in a way that looks like he has cut off his own testicles. Nya Wai comes to his house, and Person pretends to cut off his testicles and serves them to Nya Wai, who eats them greedily. Nya Wai responds to Person’s pain with encouragement to endure the pain for the sake of their relationship. After eating, Nya Wai gets up to leave and invites the person to his house in three days, but warns him that he will not have any delicious food to offer him. Person

tells his friend not to worry, but then suggests as he leaves that Nya Wai can serve his own testicles if necessary. Arriving home, Nya Wai is excited, but worried about putting on a proper reception for his friend. Nya Wai's wife reminds him that his friend cut off his own testicles, and so he should do the same. Nya Wai is pleased with this plan. When Person arrives, Nya Wai apologizes for not having good food and proceeds to cut off his testicles. When he complains about the pain, Person encourages him, reminding Nya Wai of his own "sacrifice". After the testicles are cut off, Person offers to treat Nya Wai's wounds to relieve the pain, but actually applies a mixture of pepper and chili, increasing the suffering of Nya Wai. Soon, Nya Wai dies his painful and humiliating death, and Person hurries off to his home.

In the following sections, I discuss the intertwined metapragmatic discourses of intimacy and incompatibility that is entangled through the use of a marked set of pronouns and a prefix indicating abnormal speech. The intersection of these two registers of speech is indicative of a social history in which similarity and differentiation coexist in a multilingual moral landscape.⁷

Intimacy in the Ksingmul pronoun system

In the Ksingmul personal pronoun system, information about intimacy is encoded in the selection of terms available to a speaker in the first and second person singular. Previously I described the non-intimate form as "respectful", but it seems more appropriate to focus on the markedness of the intimate *ʔaa-baa* forms, which leaves the *ʔan-mih* forms as the 'socially unmarked' set. Dual pronouns can be derived through the use of *biər* 'two' and the intimate form.

	singular		plural	
	unmarked	intimate	unmarked	intimate
1	ʔan	ʔaa	ʔεε [inclusive] yii [exclusive]	dáa
2	mih	baa	bεε	
3	ʔin		nεε	

Ksingmul social interactions are structured in terms of age, with basic reference for interactions being the kinship system and the terms used to address those above and below Self in the hierarchy of relationships.

The oppositional pronominal pairings *ʔan-mih* 'I-you' in the non-intimate and *ʔaa-*

⁷ See "Tales of the Clever Man - Plàaŋ Thóy" in Lindell et al. (1998) for a tale of trickery, testicles and a tiger in the Khmu tradition. Many thanks to Rosalie Stolz for bringing this to my attention and suggesting that this may be part of a larger cultural motif in the region.

baa, in the intimate, play an important role in indexing the relationship and expected behaviors of the characters. In the story presented here, Person and Nya Wai strike an agreement to *bii sīiw* ‘become friends’; the conclusion of this agreement is shown in the shift from *ʔaŋ-mih* to *ʔaa-baa*. The primary social significance of this relationship is that it is normally restricted to people who are of the same age. The closer the birthdates to each other, the stronger the perception of the bond. This relationship is part of a regional phenomenon, known in Tai culture as *siaw* (the source of the Ksingmul word *sīiw*), in which two people can interact with each other outside of the extended hierarchical structure of kinship. This is critical to the reading of the story, because a kinship relationship would have entailed a clear, unbalanced relationship. People commonly refer to each other with the kinship terms that reflect the age relations of the interlocutors. Thus Ksingmul speakers of the same age will use *ʔaa-baa* instead of *ʔaŋ-mih* once they have established that they are eligible. In order to use the intimate form, they must also be of the same sex. Another situation in which *ʔaa-baa* can be used is between parents of an engaged or married couple. In the negotiation of bride-price and other wedding arrangements, the fathers of the couple asking to be engaged used *ʔaa-baa* forms in order to appeal to their emotional support and social commitment to supporting the new family as parents. The implications of the use of the *ʔaa-baa* pairing in Ksingmul is more apparent when considered within the context of the Person-Nya Wai relationship here.

In the story, it is Nya Wai that proposes that the two *bii sīiw* ‘become friends’ in response to the tense start that their relationship has taken. Nya Wai proposes assuming the special *sīiw* relationship as a part of a solution to the fact that he has been caught stealing from Person’s traps in the forest. In his anger, Person pledges to kill Nya Wai for disturbing his trapping, but the narrator’s choice of words points to the moral dilemma that lies at the center of this story. Begging for his life, he quickly promises to change his ways, but Person is not convinced so asks for a larger commitment. Nya Wai knew that Person was ready to kill him, but if he could get Person to agree to become his *sīiw*, they would be bound by the special non-kin relationship of sharing and equality. Person agrees to this, but only because it will help his plan to kill Nya Wai. After they decide to *bii sīiw* ‘to.do-friend’, Person’s plan to “kill” Nya Wai *daa p-siən* ‘intend.to -to.kill’, becomes a plan to find a way to “make Nya Wai die” using some special secret means.

In the first, *p-siən* makes use of *p-* causative prefix with *siən* ‘to die’ to form the unmarked word “to kill”, while in the second he is searching for a way to *mah ʔaa wáay ʔii siən* ‘to make this Nya Wai die’ (using the more indirect *mah siən* ‘to cause to die’) through some *tuum sraw* ‘deep road,’ or secret way. Having armed himself for a tough fight with a newly sharpened sword (and skewers), now that he is bound by the *sīiw* relationship, he cannot kill Nya Wai outright and must think of another way to exact revenge. The two types of causative here reflect this moral dilemma, as Khamson explained the *p-* form is more direct and intentional, while the *mah* form is trying make the planned death more ambiguous.

In this way the switch from *ʔaŋ-mih* to *ʔaa-baa* becomes a constraint on Person’s desire for revenge. Even as he curses Nya Wai upon finding out that it was he who had been stealing the chicken, Person uses the unmarked second person *mih* in the

bilingual construction *sii mɛɛ mih ʔii* ‘You bastard!’, the very loose translation of a partial calque from the Lao, literally “fuck-mother-you-this”. Hence, the opposition is not of politeness or respect, but rather of a special marked intimacy. Moreover, when speaking with his wife, Person uses the unmarked *ʔaŋ-mih* pair, reinforcing the notion of a special intimacy inscribed narrowly in the social relationship.

The word *siiw* can also mean ‘to make a pledge to a spirit’ as part of a request. The ritual of making this pledge is *bii mansiiw*. The use of the nominalizing prefix *man-* indicates that this is not simply a matter of making friends, but rather a binding pact that is confirmed through the ritual exchange. Normally, a person would request the assistance or mercy of a *skil* through this ritual, but in this case it is the *skil* that is begging for his life with the proposal that they *bii siiw*. The narrator uses the words in the expected way, in that that one party is proposing that they become special friends, yet the fact that a *skil* is doing the requesting is another foreshadowing of the way the linguistic performance will illustrate this abnormality. Bridging the divide from the human to *skil* world is thus a serious matter that requires ritualized formalization.

Abnormal speech types and morality in the non-human world

From the outset, Person is concerned about the identity of the troublesome being that appears in the forest walking in a strange way, who has been stealing from his traps:

ʔin	laʔ	soŋsay	ksiiŋ	bɔɔ	liiwaa	nɛɛw	məh
3SG	then	to.doubt	person	Q	or	way	which

...he wondered “was it a person, or what was it?”

In this way, the fundamental conflict of the story is set up in terms of an opposition between *ksiiŋ* ‘person’ and *skil*, which is equivalent to the Lao term *phii* and can be translated variously as ‘spirit, ghost, demon’. In this story, the antagonist is *skil naa wáay*, a local spirit known also to the local Tai people. In their first encounter, the *skil* is introduced as approaching Person in an abnormal way, walking unstably with a walking stick, depicted with the expressive of movement *caan-cuʔ caan-ciʔ*. Use of expressives – marked words that depict vivid sensory perception (Dingemanse 2014) – appeal to the metapragmatic use of grammar to perform aesthetics, while also denoting certain idealized social types (Choksi 2019) and associated moral stereotypes (Badenoch et al 2019). The shape of expressive words in Ksingmul can be iconic of a “type” of motion, appearance or quality, enhanced through parallelism in reduplication; in this case the form is ABAC. The walking is depicted as awkward through the long vowel/nasal contrast (A and C) with the short vowel/glottal stop (B and C), evoking jerking, jolting stride mixed with a smoother, longer stride. In the morphology of Ksingmul expressives, alternation of the vowel across B and C is also iconic of spatial dispersal, that is an action occurring in more than one place or occupying a larger space than “normal”.⁸ In

⁸ See Badenoch (2021) on the indexical and iconic implications of vowel manipulation in Bit, a related Austroasiatic language spoken in northern Laos.

their next encounter, Nya Wai's walking is depicted with the expressive *jaan-juun jaan-juun*; the movement of this type of walking is less of a jerking motion, and more of a back-and-forth swaying motion, with a heavier stride evoked through the use of voiced /j/. With Nya Wai's entrance, Somsai stood up to enhance the description and depiction with embodiment of the walking, in a multimodal expressive performance that is typical



Figure 4. Ritual offering to the household spirits (*skil jian*) in a Ksingmul house, maintaining reciprocal relations between *skil* and *ksiiŋ* within the domestic sphere.

of these words. Here, we decode the expressive depiction as indexical of Nya Wai's abnormality, as part of the larger abnormality-immorality trope performed through the narrator's repertoire of poetic devices.

Despite the difference and incompatibility of the *ksiiŋ-skil* opposition (Figure 4) that has been evoked here by using expressives of motion, Person and Nya Wai establish their *siiw* relationship and shift to the marked intimate *ʔaa-baa* pronouns. From Nya Wai's point of view, he has avoided being killed by Person, while Person has created a relationship in which Nya Wai will be off his guard. The next rhetorical development is when Nya Wai, behaving according to the human code of the *siiw* relationship, sees that Person has apparently endured the great pain of cutting off his own testicles and sees the blood on the knife. Seeing the testicles on the plate,

Nya Wai is consumed with the desire to eat human flesh, and begins to revert to his *skil* identity. When Person taunts him to deny that he has really gone through this ordeal for his *siiw* because he had no food to offer him, Nya Wai responds

ʔoo bar-maat bar-dee, baa kɔʔ bar-coo ʔoo
 Oh ABN-really ABN-REFL 2SG NEG ABN-to.hurt way
 “Oh, it is really true! Doesn't it hurt?”

Nya Wai's reversion to *skil* is marked by the *bar-* prefix. This morphological marking indicates an abnormal speech type that is indexical of the non-human personality of Nya Wai, which until that point had been suppressed by the *siiw*-pronouns. From this point on, Nya Wai is speaking like a *skil* because he is acting like a *skil*. The *bar-* prefix can be used on any class of Ksingmul word. In the first occurrence of its use, it is applied to the adverb *maat* ‘really, truly’, the reflexive particle *dee* and the verb *coo* ‘to hurt’.

Nya Wai's use of *bar-* is related to his emotional state; when he is excited and more *skil*-like, he uses it with high frequency. The first occurrence of *bar-* is after Person shows Nya Wai the blood to assure him that he had cut off his testicles. Person begins to use *bar-* from that point as well, in response to Nya Wai's language use. As Person's scheme progresses, Nya Wai reverts to his true identity, which Person mimics through the adaptation of *bar-*.

After eating Person's (pig) testicles, Nya Wai returns home to tell his wife about the great sacrifice Person made for him, and has a discussion with his wife about what to do when Person comes for a visit and they do not have any food to offer him.

[Nya Wai]

<i>bar-mee</i>	<i>tanmee</i>	<i>ʔaaa</i>	<i>bar-daa</i>	<i>bii</i>	<i>nɛɛw</i>	<i>məh</i>
old woman	wife	oh	ABN-IRR	to.do	way	which

“Wife, what am I going to do?”

<i>síiw</i>	<i>ʔoom</i>	<i>yaam</i>	<i>bar-kəʔ</i>	<i>kuyh</i>	<i>hməh</i>	<i>bar-caa</i>	<i>dee naa</i>
friend	to.come	to.vist	ABN-NEG	to.have	what	ABN-to.eat	EMPH

My friend is coming to visit but we don't have anything to eat.”

[Wife of Nya Wai]

<i>bar-síiw</i>	<i>ʔin</i>	<i>bar-kɛet</i>	<i>bar-klaa</i>	<i>ʔin</i>	<i>ʔoo</i>
ABN-friend	3SG	ABN-to.cut	ABN-testicle	3SG	EMPH

“Your friend cut off his own balls,

<i>mih</i>	<i>bar-kɛet</i>	<i>bar-klaa</i>	<i>mih</i>	<i>kəh</i>	<i>kwáa</i>
2SG	ABN-to.cut	ABN-testicles	2SG	that	EMPH

so you should cut off your balls, too!”

[Nya Wai]

<i>bar-nɛɛw</i>	<i>bar-kəh</i>	<i>bar-maat</i>
ABN-way	ABN-that	ABN-really

“That's what I'll do!”

Nya Wai is in his own environment at home now, and the speech of his wife is also marked as *skil* with *bar-*. However, they use *ʔan-mih* in their conversation. He is upset because he doesn't know how to make the reciprocal offering required for his *síiw*, while his wife argues that the solution is simple – he must return the favor and endure the pain. The above shows the syntactical versatility of *bar-*, attaching to the negative particle *kəʔ*, as well as the key verbs and nouns in the exchange. At the end of the story, *bar-* is even prefixed to the onomatopoetic expressions of pain as Nya Wai dies; *bar-ʔeʔ* ‘whimpering from pain’, *bar-ʔooy bar-ʔoooooooooy* ‘moaning and groaning in agony’.

That the phenomenon of speaking like a *skil* is indexical of a specific frame of speech-behavior-morality mapping is made clear when Person's speech gets marked with *bar-*, as he responds to Nya Wai's return to *skil*-like behavior. When Person sees

that Nya Wai is falling for his trick with the pig's testicles, he responds to Nya Wai's question about whether or not the cutting hurt, Person responds:

<i>bar-coo</i>	maat,	ʔaa	ʔot	hay	nee
ABN-to.hurt	really	1SG	to.endure	EMPH	EMPH

“Yes, it really hurts, but I will endure the pain!”

He prefixes *bar-* to *coo* ‘to hurt’, indicating that he has started to feel his plan of causing Nya Wai’s death will come to fruition. Given the horrible death that he has planned for Nya Wai, the narrator marks Person’s words with the abnormal speech of *skil* that is indexical of immoral ways of behaving – not only is he planning a cruel and painful revenge, he is betraying the *siiw* pact that they have been performing through the *ʔaa-baa* pronoun usage. After Nya Wai is tricked into cutting his testicles off and is suffering – *bar-coo bar-hréŋ naa* ‘it hurts so badly’ – Person ratchets up the cruelty by telling him that he will help treat the wound:

ʔoooy	ʔaa	daa	<i>bar-p-suək</i>	baa	<i>bar-siiw</i>
Ohhh	1SG	IRR	ABN-CAUS-medicine	2SG	ABN-friend

“Oooh, I’ll treat your wound, my friend!”

and

ʔaa	daa	p-suək	<i>bar-baa</i>	ʔii
1SG	IRR	CAUS-medicine	ABN-2SG	this

“I’m going to treat you now.”

Person uses *bar-* with *p-suək* ‘to treat’, *siiw* ‘friend’ and *baa* ‘you’. In contrast to Nya Wai’s usage, which tends to focus on the unbearable act of cutting off one’s testicles and then eating them, *bar-* used by Person here foregrounds the moral transgression he is making through use of words that would otherwise be indexical of the morality involved in their *siiw* relationship. In other words, the abnormality is performed on what should be the non-marked part of the interaction, thereby intensifying the frame of speech-behavior that is enregistered in the use of the *bar-* prefix.

The story ends with Person fleeing the scene, running home even as the sound of Nya Wai’s final moments reach his ears. The final moaning of Nya Wai,

thriiŋ	<i>bar-ʔəəy</i>
to.moan.in.pain	ABN-EXP:moaning

the sound of Nya Wai’s last moans

leaves the listener with a final instance of *skil* abnormal speech. Nya Wai dies alone, depicted with the expressive *khok-ŋok*, which evokes the sight of someone curled up and unmoving, as well as a feeling of loneliness. Person escapes *suŋ-duŋ*, running quickly and nimbly. We get no further speech from Person, and having achieved his mission,

as cruel and inhuman as it was, he returns to an unmarked style of speech. The use of expressives is generally considered to be a marked style representing a specific ideology of verbal aesthetics within a frame of political relations (Bermudez 2020; Choksi 2019). As the story ends, the narrator reverts to the use of expressives as a more “normal” mode that evokes the shared conventions of depictive sound-meaning mapping that enhance the vividness of the oral imagery.

Native speakers explain that the frequent occurrence of *bar-* creates an uneuphonic effect for the listener. While minor syllables with /r/ in the coda position are not at all rare, the combination with /b/ is. The use of *bar-* also increases the frequency of sesquisyllabic words in an utterance, creating a heavy feel to the speech. Given that Ksingmul is presently undergoing a process of simplifying word syllable structure, the intentional addition of a heavy minor syllable with two voiced consonants and a short, but fully articulated /a/ makes the speech abnormal on several accounts. Somsī’s performance of this register is also characterized by low voice pitch, accompanied by frequent use of breathy voice triggered phonetically by the voicing of the *bar-* segmental sequence, but iconic of a non-human style of speech.

Register as social history

Speaking “crazy” after being poisoned by a mushroom is also one of the many explanations that the Khmu have for why different groups of people speak different languages, and it was recorded from the Son La Khmu, locating the myth in the same area where the Ksingmul live. A common trope in these myths explaining linguistic complexity is that before the different languages were created, the people didn’t know how to speak (Proschan 2001). In the Khmu version of the mushroom, which explicitly includes the Ksingmul (*jeʔpuak*), it was not until they ate the mushroom that they started speaking at all, while the Ksingmul version has them living together harmoniously as one household and speaking the same language.⁹ Marking Other’s speech morphologically fits into this motif of abnormal speech in the liminal space between cultural worlds where difference and similarity are produced as a matter of daily interactions.

The register phenomenon does not help us understand one other set of oppositional relationships that must surely be relevant to this story. There is a triad of “life” in this story, as mentioned above, consisting of *ksiin-skil-hrəy* (person-spirit-animal). The *hrəy* category is represented here by the pig and the chicken, both of which have wild and domesticated versions. The chicken appears in the wild form, while the pig is the domesticated type. In this iteration of the wild-domesticated trope, the person controls both the wild (*kharhray* ‘forest’) and the domestic (*jiəŋ* ‘house’) animal, suggesting a transition across the Ksingmul *kəh* (‘old forest’) - *laay* (‘fallow field’) divide (Figure 5). Nya Wai is ultimately killed through the use of the domesticated pig, after he is unsuccessful in appropriating the wild chicken. Nya Wai speech should thus be

⁹ A poisonous mushroom trope is not a common explanation of ethnogenesis in Tai oral culture, but at the beginning of the Tai Dam account of the creation of the Earth, we hear ... *kəʔ pen din pen naa, kəʔ pen faa thəʔ duay het*... ‘there was the earth and the grass, there was the sky, like a mushroom’ (Chamberlain 1992: 35).



Figure 5. Villagers propitiate *skil* at the forest-fallow edge, where animals and spirits are encountered in an ambiguous domestic-wild space.

considered the wild register, even if his crimes do not place him within the anticipated “wild” world.

The narrator provided no framing commentary for this story, but the use of Nya Wai’s register in the narrative provides a window on the frameworks of behavioral and linguistic norms in the history of Ksingmul-Other relations. The metapragmatic activities distinguish criterial behaviors as different (Agha 2015), and in this case abnormal. The *ksiiŋ-skil* confrontation is puzzling, because the moral performances are the opposite of what might be expected. The person outsmarts the evil spirit, but the method through which he exacts his merciless revenge seems excessively harsh. Who do the *ksiiŋ* and *skil* represent in this story? In the narration, the first mention of the person is in the term *ksiiŋ muul*, which creates the expectation of a Ksingmul confrontation with a spirit within the Ksingmul forest cosmology. But after that initial reference, the person is simply *ksiiŋ* or *ʔin too ksiiŋ* literally ‘he-body-person’, a general life-form reference made in opposition to the evil spirit *ʔin too ɲaa wáay* ‘he-body-Nya Wai’. If the *ksiiŋ* is indeed Ksingmul, then the story is one of repelling the encroachment of Others on their forests. Feasibly this would put the Nya Wai in the role of the Tai, and the betrayal of the special friendship a rejection of the Tai social order, in this case represented by the *slíw* relationship. Nya Wai is portrayed as feeble (poetic marking of manner of walking with the expressive), slow witted (tricked by Person, gullibly taking the wife’s advice to copy Person) and defeated (death by self-castration).

It should be remembered that the Tai political system in which the Ksingmul have been living is not Buddhist, so this cannot be construed as a struggle between *phut* and *phii*, or Buddhism and animism. The theft of the *ksiiŋ* chicken may be an indirect reference to extraction of taxes by the rulers of the Tai *muang*, who take the form of

evil spirits in a flipping of the dominant discourse of social hierarchy. Moreover, the *naa wáay* is a common spirit in the regional cultural landscape. Local Tai groups also have stories about Nya Wai, and it is possible that this character was borrowed from the Tai.¹⁰ It is interesting to note that the Tai Vat of the adjacent district of Muang Aet have a story in which the Tai killed an evil spirit when they migrated to the area, and in order to remain in the area they have to make offerings to the wife of the spirit who fled to the upper forest areas (Petit 2019). The wives in the current story are peripheral to the main plot, but play an important role nonetheless. If it weren't for the wife of Nya Wai, Person's plan may not have succeeded. In Petit's discussion of the Tai Vat story of killing the *phii*, the identity of the *phii* is not elaborated but it is mentioned that the *phii* ate people at night.¹¹ This fits with the common understanding of the "personality" of the *naa wáay*. Another important theme of this story is the *síiw-siaw* relationship, which contrasts with the many permutations of the more common hierarchical brother relationship that is associated with major events such as village founding, migration and ethnogenesis.

The special intimacy involved in this relationship suggests that the violent conflict arose out of a more complicated history of relations that were not entirely antagonistic. However, the phenomenon of "wild spirits" in the mountains of mainland Southeast Asia reminds us that some spirits cannot be placated, and when the household is threatened, violence – premeditated and cruel – is an acceptable measure for protecting the family (Jonsson 2014). The proposition of a *síiw* relationship with a "wild spirit" is by definition impossible, a fact understood by Person, who plays along in order to deceive Nya Wai. Person knew that a normal offering to the spirits would not be effective, thus the offering of the pig (testicles) was only part of a larger scheme. Wild spirits can represent historical events experienced by the group, such as conflict induced migration (Jonsson 2005), so any interpretation of the story – as a human-spirit conflict, a wild-domestic conflict, or a Kha-Tai conflict – seems feasible. In the Chiang Mai valley, Kraisri (1967, 1965) documents how the Chiang Mai king was made the guardian of the upland Lawa, their chiefs and the Tai. In this case, the relationship was formalized in a document and included a resort to violence in the event that the Lawa were poorly treated – "If he [the chief] causes disaster to the Lawa, let him be destroyed as easily as a clump of banana trees; let him be annihilated like clumps of grass (Kraisri 1965: 236). The regional reconfiguration of exchange can be seen in the Ksingmul tale, in which equal (*síiw*) and unequal (*ksiiŋ-skił*) relationships are malleable and subject to local agency. The assertion here is that the linguistic forms discussed are situated in – for the region more generally, indexical of – a morality of exchange, in which the *ʔaa-baa* relationship is extended and accepted, and then betrayed as the *bar-* register is initiated and adopted.

¹⁰ Other shared evil or dangerous spirits have different names in Ksingmul, even if they draw on the common characteristics: for example, the *koŋklóoc* is another Ksingmul spirit that is known in Tai languages as *phii kɔŋkɔɔy*.

¹¹ In the Tai Daeng tradition, the Nya Wai has long, red hair that is wrapped around the head so that the face cannot be seen. If one walks alone in the deep forest, there is a danger of being taken by a Nya Wai. The Nya Wai eats people, but only after the sun has gone down.

Conclusion

The register described here as “speaking like a ghost” provides a window on the performative of abnormal types of speech, complementing the previous literature from linguistic anthropologists of North America. In contrast to abnormal speech that mimics other peoples’ physical or psychological traits, or animals that interact with humans, the Ksingmul *bar-* prefix in this story foregrounded the stereotypical immorality of the evil spirit. However, the indexing of unacceptable behavior can jump the human/non-human divide to highlight the unexpected, abnormal behavior of the person. This register is thus formulated as a model of (mis)conduct (Agha 2015) within a Ksingmul semiotic ideology that draws on the sound-meaning mappings of a typologically rare morpheme. The immoral abnormality of the *bar-* speech is directly contrasted with the *síiw* relationship and the marked pronouns of intimacy.

The enregisterment of ghost-speak was part of a specific sociohistorical and multilinguistic milieu (Agha 2015). Even though we are not sure of the ethnohistorical references, because the Nya Wai is a shared character in the region the interethnic entanglements of history are at the core of the metapragmatic framing of Self and Other. The agency available to speakers in reworking the moral code that is indexed by the semiotic register of speaking like a ghost draws on the linguistic resources that map sound to meaning in Ksingmul. The behavior-type that is supposed to lie at the core of this linguistic practice is itself turned around, making the evil spirit the victim and the human the transgressor. The basic “personality” of Nya Wai seems to be common between Ksingmul and Tai oral literature, but this story and its peculiar twist is unknown to the surrounding Tai groups. Connection to the Tai Vat story of the killing of the *phii* is likely, but it has been appropriated and reconfigured to meet Ksingmul social history. We know the importance of this role reversal because of the modeled behavior type performed through the employment of Nya Wai’s register by Person. We may consider this an excellent example of the way in which language serves as a crucial frame of mimesis through which relationships are negotiated in the inter-ethnic systems of upland Laos (Tappe 2018, Jonsson 2010), the mimetic signification performed by an iconic depiction of moral incompatibility within a larger framework of cultural intimacy at one of the many frontiers of the Tai-Kha encounter.

As an enregistered emblem of abnormal, un-human speech, *bar-* is not as deeply institutionalized in the performative culture of the Ksingmul as Nootka and other Native American languages. Other Ksingmul stories in which an evil or dangerous spirit appears do not necessarily use this register, suggesting that the negotiation of identities and ideologies proposed here is contested, and ongoing. Interestingly, however, there is evidence of a semiotic ideology of marking abnormal speech with a Cr-¹² prefix from other Austroasiatic languages spoken in the area. Here too, the link between expected speech types and stereotyped behavior plays out in terms of a moral order in flux. For example, in the Bit language spoken in several villages stretching across northern Laos, a *kr-* prefix is found attached to text in which unnatural phenomena are being narrated.

¹² /Cr-/ means a sequence including a consonant and r at the beginning of the word.

In a story about a girl who was abandoned by her parents, when her pregnancy resulting from an interdicted relationship produces not children but dogs, the narrator of the story says *kr-koo kr-kɛɛn kr-kuəŋ*

kr-koo	kr-kɛɛn	kr-kuəŋ
ABN-3SG.f	ABN-cursed	ABN-inauspicious

She was cursed (for bringing forth this inauspicious event).

In the Bit lexicon, a substantial number of adjectives with negative qualities have a *kr-* minor syllable. When I asked my main Bit informant about this text, he said that it was not grammar, but gave the feeling that his talking was not regular. I have heard this type of construction in other similar narrative situations, and understand this to be an expressive device, related to a larger system of expressivity that is a core part of Bit linguistic ideology (Badenoch 2021). Similarly, the Phong Laan language, also Austroasiatic and spoken in Houaphan in relative proximity to Ksingmul, has a *bar-* minor syllable on some words that describe undesirable traits: for example, *barwaa* ‘crazy’ and *barbic* ‘feeling of nausea with over-production of saliva before vomiting’. It is worth noting that in Houaphan province, the Khmu pick up on some of the distinguishing linguistic characteristics of the Phong people, using the general category of *ʃɛʔ* ‘stranger’: *ʃɛʔ trʔaŋ* ‘those who say ʔaŋ’ (ʔaŋ is their word for “I”) and *ʃɛʔ trʔiʔ* ‘those who are not all together’ (Tappe and Badenoch 2021). Here a *tr-* prefix seems to be marking some perceived strangeness. The iconic mapping of /Cr/ in *kr-*, *br-* and *tr-* suggests evidence of grammatical marking in the local Austroasiatic languages – where these sounds prefixed to “normal” words just do not sound “right” – that is reminiscent of the Native American data that brought the abnormal speech phenomenon to our attention (Frachtenberg 1920).

For Person in this story, the use of *bar-* is an act of mimesis through which he protects himself from Nya Wai; the marked performance of similarity being a strategy for overcoming the threat from a powerful other (Taussig 1993). Adjusting one’s speech to another’s is a frequently seen type of iconism, but here we experience the use of an inverse icon as “aspirations to persona and personhood” (Agha 2007: 175) play out in a historical context of cultural contestation across the forest-field, or upland-lowland divide. The forest, as the main setting for Ksingmul life, is a moral space, where the interactions between human, animals and other non-human beings are performed in oral literature. These “social” relations are given shape through linguistic practices that draw on stereotypes, but are applied flexibly in recognition of the fluidity of identity and multidirectionality of communication. Speech practices that utilize expressive devices to encode similarity and difference can provide insights on how notions of Self and Other are constructed amidst social boundaries in flux (Rudge 2021). Pronoun use is situated within a metapragmatic contextualization in which human-spirit is delineated dynamically through the abnormal space marker. Linguistic performances like these, especially when they involve social relations, give cues to local notions of appropriateness and expression of social values (Suwilai 2002). The multilingual setting of upland Laos is a space of poetic exchange (Badenoch 2020, Badenoch 2019), where

syntax, lexicon as well as morphology are manipulated to highlight the socially salient details of daily life. Considering the social agency and cultural dynamism that is imbued in these *puak* linguistic practices, the rigid hierarchy of the upland Tai *muang* looks more like a dialogic heterarchy (Crumley 1995). The narrative recasts the ethnic lines from *puak* to *ksiiŋ*, asserting their place in the social landscape; the “forest termite” has turned the tables and dispatched the immoral other. Yet, tropes of intimacy and incompatibility are not mutually exclusive in this space, reflecting the reality of not only human/non-human, but also Ksingmul/Other and Tai/non-Tai exchanges over time.

Abbreviations used in the glossed text

ABN	abnormal speech marker
CAUS	causative
DEF	definite prefix
EMPH	emphasis
EXPR	expressive
IRR	irrealis
LOC	location prefix
NEG	negator
PERF	perfective
Q	question
RECP	reciprocal
REDUP	reduplicated form
1DU	first person dual
1PL	first person plural
1SG	first person singular
2SG	second person singular
3SG	third person singular

ksiin kap skil naa wáay bii síiw lay pharnuu
 Person and Nya Wai become friends

liəŋ ʔii daa cíən ksiin kap skil naa wáay
 story this IRR to.tell person and spirit Nya Way

In this story I will tell how Person and the Nya Wai spirit,

bii síiw lay pharnuu
 to.do friend RECP each.other
became friends.

téewaa kón daa bii síiw nii
 but before IRR to.do friend this
But before they were friends, now,

tuh saŋmoh na? khreə bii síiw
 to.be what then to.be.able to.do friend
how was it that they became friends?

laa mæn nəw kəh
 so.then way that
So, it was like that.

ʔin too ksiin muul juu dak deh cók ʔéer karhrai
 3PS body Ksingmul to.go to.set.trap bird.trap to.put.in chicken forest
That Ksingmul guy went to set a trap for wild chicken.

ʔin juu təŋ téelaa mi
 3PS to.go to.look.at each day
He went to check the trap every day,

kí diə kuyh nəh ʔom yuəŋ ʔin, suə təŋ yuəŋ ʔin
 only to.see to.have who to.come before 3PS to.steal to.look.at before 3PS
but he just saw that someone had come to check the trap before him.

miə tuh nəw kəh ʔin la? soŋsay ksiin bó liiwaa nəw məh
 when to.be way that 3SG then to.doubt person Q or way what
Then he wondered, was it a person, or what was it?

mi kəh ʔin juu té sáw
 when that 3SG to.go from early.morning
So, he went early in the morning.

juu tham lɛɛ mɛɛ
to.go to.wait.in.ambush PERF EMPH

He went to hide and watch.

juu kuyh khéem bóon kəh, tham khree
to.go to.be.at edge place that to.wait.in.ambush to.be.able

He went and hid at the edge of the place where he set the trap.

təŋ laʔ mɛɛn diə skil ɲaa wáay kəh ʔɔɔm hay laʔ
to.look.at then to.be to.see spirit Nya Wai that to.come just.like.that

When he looked, he saw that Nya Way was coming, just as he had suspected

bii tharcii caaŋ-cuʔ caaŋ-ciʔ ʔɔɔm
to.do walking.cane EXPR: unstable walking EXPR: REDUP to.come

coming closer, walking around unstably with a cane.

ʔɔɔm téelaa thii kɔʔ diə kuyh ʔéer ʔleh
to.come each time NEG to.see to.have chicken to.be.caught

Each time he came, if he saw that there was no wild chicken caught in the trap

ʔin lɛɛ klaay juu
3PS then to.pass.by to.go

he would pass by and keep going.

kanmoh ʔéer ʔleh ʔin loo yak
which.one chicken to.be.caught 3SG then to.take

Whichever one had caught a wild chicken, he would take it.

miə yak nɛɛw kəh lɛɛw ʔin juə lɛɛw
when to.take way that PERF 3SG to.know PERF

When Nya Wai took the chicken, the Person knew that

skil ɲaa wáay ʔii suər təŋ
ghost Nya Wai this to.steal to.look.at

this Nya Wai had been sneaking around checking the traps.

miə suər təŋ nɛɛw kəh ʔin kiəm lɛɛw day withii
when to.steal to.look.at way that 3SG to.prepare PERF EMPH method

When he spied Nya Wai doing this, he began to prepare a good way to deal with him.

ʔin kiəm daa p-siən ɲaa wáay
3SG to.prepare IRR CAUS-to.kill Nya Wai

He got himself ready to kill Nya Wai.

tɔɔn saw mii hrim ʔin kaʔ kiəm
 period.of.day morning day tomorrow 3SG to.prepare to.prepare

In the morning of the next day, he made his preparations.

yak sarkaap cók thoŋ lɛɛ khráy khartaaw
 to.take barbeque.skewer to.put.into bag then knife sword

He took skewers and put them into a bag, together with a sword.

ʔin handéc láp lɛɛw
 3SG to.sharpen sharp.edge PERF

After sharpening the blade,

téew ba-kandeh ʔii hay laʔ
 to.fasten.onto.waist LOC-lower.back this just.like.that

he tied it onto his waist.

miə téew ʔɔɔ kəh mii kəh
 when to.fasten.onto.waist way that day that

Having tied it onto his waist like that,

ʔin ʔɔɔm téé sáw dal bóɔn phréem kəh
 3SG to.come from morning to.hide.and.wait place old that

he left early in the morning to go hide and wait in the same place as before.

naa wáay jaan-juuŋ jaan-juuŋ ʔɔɔm hay laʔ
 Nya Wai EXPR: walking unsteadily EXPR: REDUP to.come just.like.that

Nya Wai came walking unsteadily up to him

miə nɛɛw kəh ʔin laʔ kiəm lɛɛw day
 when way that 3SG just to.prepare PERF EMPH

He was all ready,

khráy laak ŋɔh daa tíɕ naa wáay
 knife to.pull to.go.out IRR to.slash Nya Wai

and pulled his sword out to slash Nya Wai.

síi mɛɛ mih ʔii nee
 fuck mother you this EMPH

“You bastard!

tɔŋ dəh ʔaŋ suu mii naa
 to.look.at trap 1SG every day right?

It was you that was checking my traps every day, wasn’t it?!”

nāa wáay wóo
 Nya Wai to.say
Nya Wai said,

ʔoooo sóo dɛɛ, sóo dɛɛ
 oh to.beg EMPH to.beg EMPH
“Oh please, I beg of you! I beg of you!”

pee bii nɛɛw kəh
 NEG to.do way that
Don’t do that!”

[Person says]

khan sóo laa bii nɛɛw mɔh
 if to.beg then to.do way which
“So what then, if you are begging like that?”

[Nya Wai says]

nɪŋ mɛɛn daa piən tɔɔ ʔii juu
 one to.be IRR to.change to.continue this to.go
“First, I will change! From now on.

thiɪwaa kɔʔ dik bii lɛɛw suər tɔŋ ʔii naa
 to.mean.that NEG (not).anymore to.do PERF to.steal to.look this right
I mean that I will not do that anymore, sneaking around checking on your traps.”

[Person says]

khan nɛɛw kəh laa bii nɛɛw mɔh
 if way that then to.do way which
“And then, what?”

[Nya Wai says]

ʔii ʔɛɛ bii síiw
 yeah 2PL to.do friend
“We will be friends!”

nāa wáay kap ksiɪŋ bii síiw laa ɲón kanʔiʔ
 Nya Wai and person to.do friend then because.of this.one
This was how Nya Wai and Person became friends.

ʔin too ksiɪŋ daa p-siən nāa wáay laʔ bɔɔ
 3SG body person IRR CAUS-to.kill Nya Wai then right
Person was going to kill Nya Wai, you see.

lɛɛw naa wáay sóɔ kɔʔ mah p-siən
 PERF Nya Wai to.beg NEG to.give CAUS-to.kill

And Nya Wai begged Person not to kill him.

miə kɔʔ mah p-siən lɛɛ sóɔ bii síiw lay
 when NEG to.give CAUS-to.kill then to.beg to.do friend RECP

When it seemed that he wouldn't be killed, Nya Wai asked to be friends.

[The Person says]

daa bii síiw loo bii
 IRR to.do friend then to.do

"If we are to become friends, then so be it.

miɪ hrim baa juu yaam ʔaa nəə síiw
 day tomorrow 2SG to.go to.vist 1PL.INC EMPH friend

Tomorrow, come visit me, Friend."

too ksiɪŋ kəh naa wóɔ nəɛw kəh cók too naa wáay kəh
 body person that then to.say way that to.put.in body Nya Wai that

Person said this to the Nya Wai.

[Nya Wai says]

ʔiɪ ʔaa daa juu téɛ sáw
 yeah 1PL IRR to.go from morning

"Yeah, I will go early in the morning."

miə nəɛw kəh ʔin too ksiɪŋ haa withii
 when way that 3SG body person to.search.for method

And then Person started to search for a way,

daa bii nəɛw mɔh
 IRR to.do way which

some way he could

mah naa wáay ʔiɪ siən duəy tuum sraw kɔʔ mah siə lap
 to.give Nya Wai this to.die to.follow road deep NEG to.give to.lose secret
make this Nya Wai die, using some special, secret means.

ʔin too ksiɪŋ kəh loo daw ʔiəŋ, daw ba-ʔiəŋ
 3SG body person that then to.return house to.return LOC-house

Person then went into his house. He went into the house

maay ləyɰ ʔin tíə
to.hurry to.tell 3SG wife

and hurried to tell his wife,

mee kharhraa juu pat yak cɨn ba-khəək ʔəəm hɛən ʔap
mother old to.go to.grab to.take pig LOC-pen to.come to.give 1SG
“Old Lady, go get a pig from the pen and bring it to me.

ʔap daa kɛət yak klaa cɨn kəh ʔuən
1SG IRR to.cut to.take testicle pig that to.set.aside

I am going to cut off the balls of that pig.

mii hrim sɿiw ɲaa wáay daa ʔəəm day
day tomorrow friend Nya Wai IRR to.come EMPH

Tomorrow my friend Nya Wai is coming, you know.

ʔəəm mii hrim ʔap daa yak klaa cɨn kəh
to.come day tomorrow 1SG IRR to.take testicle pig that

Tomorrow when he comes, I am going to take out the pig’s balls

ŋəh suu ʔin caa
to.go.out for 3SG to.eat

and offer them to him to eat.

lɛɛ daa wóɔ ʔap kɛət klaa ʔap ʔii
and IRR to.say 1SG to.cut testicle 1SG this

Then I’ll say that I cut off my own balls.”

khwaam cɨɲ kəʔ ʔiik, ʔin kɛət klaa cɨn ʔəə
word true NEG to.(not).be.so 3SG to.cut testicle pig EMPH

But that’s not what really happened, it was the pig’s testicles he cut off.

too ɲaa wáay lék juu lɛɛw day
body Nya Wai then to.go PERF EMPH

Then Nya Wai was on his way.

ʔin lɛɛ kiəm lɛɛw day
3SG then to.prepare PERF EMPH

He got ready.

kɛət klaa cɨn cók ba-dóɔy lɛɛ tih
to.cut testicle pig to.put.in LOC-plate to.put.out

He cut off the pig’s balls, put them on a plate.

tih ba-kəh lɛw dɔɔy lɛ kəh
to.lay.out LOC-that PERF platel that

He placed them there, on that plate.

klaa cɨn kəh ʔin tih ba-kəh
testicle pig that 3SG to.place LOC-that

He placed the pig's balls there

lɛw ʔin tih ba-sneen ʔɔɔ ʔii luəŋ dúut ʔii
PERF 3SG to.place LOC-bed way this side back this

and then he placed it all on the bed like this, behind him.

yəək baat ʔin kdiən ʔɔɔ ʔii nɨi
now.listen when 3SG to.sit way this EMPH

So now he was sitting like this,

ʔin thardiŋ dɔɔy lɛ luəŋ dúut ʔii naa klaa cɨn
3SG to.hide.behind plate side back this EMPH testicle pig

and he hid the plate with the pig's balls behind him.

khráy kəh ʔin mah ʔin tíə súk ba-mok ʔoo ʔuən lɛw
knife that 3SG to.give 3SG wife to.hide LOC-inside over.there to.place PERF

He gave the knife to his wife to hide away inside over there.

klaa cɨn tih ba-dúut kəh
testicle pig to.place LOC-back that

The pig's balls were behind him there.

ɲaa wáay ʔɔɔm lɛw day
Nya Wai to.come PERF EMPH

Nya Wai arrived.

diə ʔin too ksiŋ kdiən ba-sneen ʔɔɔ ʔii hantɔək ɲaa wáay
to.see 3SG body person to.sit LOC-bed way this to.wait.for Nya Wai

He saw Person sitting there on the bed like that waiting for the Nya Wai.

ʔəə han ʔɛɛ, baa kɔʔ tuh məh ʔɔɔ
hey to.be.energetic here 2SG NEG to.be which Q

“Hello there, how are you doing?”

ʔiʔ ʔaa kdiə kɔʔ tuh məh síiw
no 2PL NEG NEG to.be which friend

“I’m doing fine, friend!”

nɛɛw kəh sam too tuh too ləɔ la?
 way that like body to.be body good PERF

“Well, that’s good then.”

hantak hantam lɛɛw kdiən
 to.greet to.greet PERF to.sit

After their greetings, he sat down.

naa wáay kap ksiinj kdiən lom pharnuu
 Nya Wai and person to.sit to.talk each.other

Nya Wai and Person sat together and talked.

mɪə lom pharnuu nɛɛw kəh lɛɛw
 when to.talk each.other way that PERF

After they talked together like that

ʔin too ksiinj ləɔ wóɔ ʔee bar-ʔɛɛ dǎa
 3SG body person then to.say hey ABN-1DU 1DU

Person said “Hey, the two of us...”

wóɔ suu ʔin tíə
 to.say to 3SG wife

He said to his wife,

ʔɛɛ daa yak hməh suu síiw caa nah
 1PL IRR to.take what for friend to.eat EMPH

“What do we have to offer to my friend to eat?”

síiw ʔəɔm yaam nah
 friend to.come to.visit EMPH

My friend has come for a visit.”

ʔin tíə la? wóɔ
 3SG wife then to.say

Then his wife said,

ʔeee khóon khriəŋ hməh nah
 oh to.worry to.worry what EMPH

“Hey, what are you worried about?”

ləɔ kɛɛt yak klaa mih kəh dee naa
 just to.cut to.take testicle 2SG there self EMPH

Just cut off your own balls.”

[Person says]

ʔee kəʔ bɛɛl bii naa
oh NEG to.want to.do EMPH

“Oh, I don’t want to do that!”

klaa ʔaŋ coo lɛɛ bəʊ
testicles 1SG to.hurt EMPH

That would be too painful for my balls!

ʔə campen hay nii, nɛɛw kəh ləʊ nɛɛw
yeah necessary EMPH EMPH way that then way

Yeah, but if that’s the way it is then so be it.”

naa wáay kdiən ba-kəh
Nya Wai to.sit LOC-that

Nya Wai was sitting there.

mee kharhraa mih yak khráy ba-suəm ʔəʊm hɛɛn ʔaŋ hih
mother old 2SG to.take knife LOC-bedroom to.come to.give 1SG EMPH

“Old Woman, bring me the knife from the bedroom.

ʔaŋ daa kɛɛt klaa ʔaŋ nii kəʔ kuyh hməh suu síiw caa
1SG IRR to.cut testicle 1SG here NEG to.have what to friend to.eat

I will cut my own balls off because I don’t have anything to offer you to eat.”

ʔin tíə yak khráy lɛɛw day, ʔuən ba-suəm téɛ ʔək
3SG wife to.take knife PERF EMPH to.place LOC-bedroom from just.now

His wife got the knife from the bedroom, where she had hidden it just before.

yak ʔəʊm luər mah ʔin ʔlii
to.take to.come to.hand.to to.give 3SG husband

She brought it over and handed it to her husband.

ʔin ʔlii hrap yak khráy kəh ʔəʊm
3SG husband to.receive to.take knife that to.come

Her husband took the knife from her,

ʔooó síiw bii nɛɛw məh
Oh frid to.do way which

“Oh, what are we going to do, my friend?

ʔaa kəʔ kuyh nɛɛw məh suu baa caa dee naa
1PL NEG to.have way which to 2SG to.eat REFL EMPH

I don’t have anything to offer you to eat!

khanay ʔii ʔaa daa kɛt klaa ʔaa ʔii suu baa caa nəə
 now this 1PL IRR to.cut testicle 1PL this to 2SG to.eat EMPH

So, I now I will cut off my balls for you to eat, okay?

baa daa caa ʔee ʔəə
 2SG IRR to.eat here Q

You will eat them, right?"

[Nya Wai answers]

caa maat
 to.eat true

"Of course, I will!"

təp ʔəə kəh
 to.answer way that

He answered like that.

caa maat
 to.eat true

"Of course, I will!"

ʔin ɲaa wáay təp ʔəə kəh
 3SG Nyway to.answer way that

Nya Wai answered like that.

ʔin ləə yak khráy kəh ʔəəm ba-snɛn ba-dúut
 3SG then to.take knife that to.come LOC-bed LOC-back

Then he took the knife from the bed behind him,

ʔin bii ʔəə hraŋ soŋ
 3SG to.do way to.grab pants

and pretended like he was grabbing his pants.

kɛt kɛt met ʔnɛn
 to.cut to.cut one a.little

He made a few little cuts.

ʔeʔ ʔeʔ cáa síiw daa bii nəew məh naa
 EXP: sharp pain oh friend IRR to.do way which EMPH

"Ow, ow! Oh, what should I do, friend?

ʔaa ʔal coo dee naa
 1SG to.feel to.hurt REFL EMPH

It hurts!"

[Nya Wai says]

coo mak mɛɛ, yɪən mɛɛ baa naa
to.hurt to.ignore EMPH to.endure EMPH 2SG EMPH

“Don’t pay attention to the pain, just endure it!”

kɔʔ kuyh hmɔh caa plɔk ʔaa laa bɔɔ
NEG to.have what to.eat lunch 2PL EMPH INTERR

We don’t have anything to eat for lunch, right?”

naa wáay wɔɔ nɛɛw kəh
Nya Wai to.say way that

Nya Wai said that,

naʔ hrúu ʔin bɛɛl caa laa bɔɔ
just then to.hurry 3SG to.want to.eat EMPH Q

as if he was eager to eat [his balls].

yak khráy kəh ʔɔɔm ʃaat-ʃaat ʔeʔ-ʔeʔ-ʔeʔ
to.take knife that to.come EXP: slicing sound EXP: expression of pain

He took out the knife and starting cutting. “Ow! Ow!”

coo hrɛŋ day síiw
to.hurt very.much EMPH friend

“Oh, it hurts terribly, my friend!”

bii ʔɔɔ ʔɔɔm tih luəŋ dúut
to.do way to.come to.place side back

He pretended to put them behind him.

kha mɔh klaa cɪŋ ʔɔk hay dɔ́ɔk
when which testicle pig just.now EMPH EMPH

But actually, it was the pig’s balls from a moment ago.

ʔɔɔ kəh lɛɛw ʔin laʔ kdiən ʔɔɔ ʔii
way that PERF 3SG then to.sit way this

And then he sat like this.

[Says to his wife]

hih khráy nah
here! knife EMPH

“Here, take the knife!”

ʔin tíə yak khráy kəh juu ʔuən
 3SG wife to.take knife that to.go to.put.away

His wife took the knife to put it away.

khráy kəh khaʔeet maat ʔin ʔoom cuup-cuup klaa cɪn
 knife that red really 3SG to.come to.dip-REDUPL testicle pig

The knife was all red because he had wiped it on the pig's testicles

luəŋ dúut ʔii laa bəə
 side back this EMPH EMPH

behind him here.

yak ŋoh ʔoom mah síiw naa wáay diə
 to.take to.go.out to.come to.give friend Nya Wai to.see

He brought it out for his friend Nya Wai to see.

nih síiw kanpæŋ ʔii nee síiw
 here friend to.look this here friend

“Look at this here, friend!

ʔaa kæt klaa miəm cap khráy ʔii
 1SG to.cut testicle blood to.stick.to knife this

There is blood on the knife from cutting off my testicles

ʔaa kəʔ siə nah
 1SG NEG to.believe EMPH

if you don't believe it.”

[Nya Wai responds]

ʔoo bar-maat bardee, baa kəʔ bar-coo ʔəə
 Oh ABN-really ABN-REFL 2SG NEG ABN-to.hurt that

“Oh, it is really true! Doesn't it hurt?”

[Person says]

bar-coo maat, ʔaa ʔot hay nee
 ABN-to.hurt really 1SG to.endur EMPH EMPH

“Yes, it really hurts, but I will endure the pain!”

[Nya Wai says]

ʔoo nəw kəh
 Oh way that

“That's the way!”

laak yak dóy kan-klaa cɨn ʔin kɛt ʔuən té ʔək ʔoo
to.pull to.take plate DEF-testicle pig 3SG to.cut to.set.aside from just.now that

He pulled over the plate with the pig's testicles that he had just cut before

ʔoom luər ʔin tíə
to.come to.hand.to 3SG wife

and handed it to his wife.

həə klaa ʔaa yak juu téɛn pharjín
there testicle 1SG to.take to.go to.make to.cook

“Here, take my testicles and cook them up

suu síiw ʔii caa jii
for friend 1PL to.eat EMPH

For my friend to eat.”

ʔin tíə yak dóy, yak juu téɛn skaap
3SG wife to.take bowl to.take to.go to.make skewer

His wife took the bowl and went to cook them on skewers.

téɛn plək téɛn phiən khak nə
to.make lunch to.make dining.table definite certain

She prepared the lunch and set the table nicely.

[Wife says]

yə yəɛn síiw ɲaa wáay kəh ɲoom caa
hey to.lead friend Nya Wai that to.enter to.eat

“Now invite your friend Nya Wai to start eating.”

[Person says]

caa síiw, kɔʔ kuyh hməh yəɛn caa
to.eat friend NEG to.have what to.lead to.eat

“Eat, my friend! There is nothing good to offer you,

ʔaa kɛt klaa ʔaa mah mee síiw baa
1PL to.cut testicle 1PL to.give mother friend 2SG

so I cut off my balls and got my wife

kəh téɛn yəɛn caa
that to.make to.lead to.eat

to cook them for you to eat.

bar-caa bar-maat
 ABN-to.eat ABN-really
Go ahead, eat up!”

?in wóo nɛɛw kəh, ?in ɲaa wáay khip ?oom caa
 3SG to.say way that 3SG Nya Wai to.grab to.come to.eat
When he said that the Nya Wai came quickly to the table to eat.

?uk ksah ?uk ?əy
 to.drink alcohol to.drink what
“Drink up! Have some alcohol.

suu ksah síiw khooŋ síiw nee
 for alcohol friend to.consider friend EMPH
Friends drink together!”

miə kəh lɛɛw ?in too síiw kəh,
 time that PERF 3SG body friend that
Then he and his friend

ɲaa wáay kap ?in hlɛɛŋ caa
 Nya Wai with 3SG to.do.together to.eat
Nya Wai ate together.

caa maat khooŋ ?ək klaa ?in, klaa cɪŋ hay lɛɛ bɔɔ
 to.eat really to.consider NEG testicle 3SG testicle pig EMPH EMPH
They really ate, since it wasn’t really his testicles. It was the pig testicles, right!

khan kɛet klaa ?in maat, ?in hoon caa, ?in too ksiɪŋ
 if to.cut testicles 3SG really 3SG not.inclined to.eat 3SG body person
If he really cut his testicles, Person wouldn’t have been able to eat them.

caa ?iim lɛɛw kəh ŋəh
 to.eat to.be.sated PERF that to.go.out
When they had eaten their fill, they went outside.

?in ɲaa wáay ciim kheew peew khaaŋ tharbéc hanhriəŋ cet peh
 3SG Nya Wai to.poke teeth to.clean jaw to.poke teeth to.stab wood
The Nya Wai was picking at his teeth with a toothpick.

ɲaa wáay sáŋ
 Nya Wai to.say.farewell
Nya Wai bid him farewell.

ʔəə daa daw lɛɛw
 yeah IRR to.return PERF

“Yeah, I’m going to go home now.”

daa daw lɛɛw nəə sɿiw nəə
 IRR to.return PERF EMPH friend EMPH

I’m going home now, my friend!”

ɲaa wáay wóɔ
 Nya Wai to.say

Nya Wai said,

bar-mii bar-hmoh naa, baa daa juu yaam bar-ʔaa nah
 ABN-day ABN-what EMPH 2SG IRR to.go to.visit ABD-1SG EMPH

“When are you going to come visit me?”

[Person says]

bar-mii phoo biər ʔih ʔaa daa juu
 ABN-day future.day two EMPH 1SG IRR to.go

“I will go the day after tomorrow.”

[Nya Wai says]

baa bar-juu bar-maat day
 1SG ABN-to.go ABN-really EMPH

“You really have to come!”

wóɔ nɛɛw kəh ʔin too ksiɪŋ kəh phlɛh mii kəh
 to.say way that 3SG body person that to.arrive when that

Just at that time, after Nya Wai had said that, Person said,

ʔaa bar-juu kɔʔ kuyh hmoh caa, baa bar-keet klaa baa day
 1SG ABN-to.go NEG to.have what to.eat 2SG ABN-to.cut testicle 2SG EMPH

“When I go visit, if you don’t have anything to eat, you just cut off your balls, okay?”

bar-ʔəh bar-ʔəə
 ABN-uhm ABN-yeah

“Yeah, okay!”

wóɔ ʔɔɔ kəh lɛɛw
 to.say way that PERF

That’s what they said.

lit daw, ɲaa wáay kəh ʔin phlɛh ɲiəŋ lɛɛ nɔɔ
 enthusiastically to.go Nya Wai that 3SG to.arrive house EMPH
Nya Wai went on his way and arrived at home.

ʔin sɪiw kəh lit juu yaam miɪ phoo biər
 3SG friend that enthusiastically to.go to.visit day future two
His friend set out to go visit him two days later.

ɲaa wáay kəh lɛɛ ʔɔɔm cáa wóɔ suu ʔin tíə
 Nya Wai that then to.come so to.say to 3SG wife
Then Nya Wai came home and said to his wife,

bar-mee tanmee ʔaaa bar-daa bii nɛɛw mɔh
 ABN-old woman wife oh ABN-IRR to.do way which
“Wife, what am I going to do?

sɪiw ʔɔɔm yaam bar-kɔʔ kuyh hmɔh bar-caa dee naa
 friend to.come to.vist ABN-NEG to.have what ABN-to.eat EMPH
My friend is coming to visit but we don’t have anything to eat.”

[Wife of Nya Wai says]

bar-sɪiw ʔin bar-kɛɛt bar-klaa ʔin ʔoo
 ABN-friend 3SG ABN-to.cut ABN-testicle 3SG EMPH
“Your friend cut off his own balls,

mih bar-kɛɛt bar-klaa mih kəh kwáa
 2SG ABN-to.cut ABN-testicles 2SG that EMPH
so you should cut off your balls, too!”

[Nya Wai says]

bar-nɛɛw bar-kəh bar-maat
 ABN-way ABN-that ABN-really
“That’s what I’ll do!”

ʔəə ʔin sɪiw phallɛh laa nɔɔ hantak hantam kdiən
 well 3SG friend to.arrive EMPH to.greet to.call.out to.sit
Well, his friend arrived, and they sat down after they greeted each other.

ɲaa wáay kəh
 Nya Wai that
Nya Wai [said]

ʔíí bar-yak bar-khráy kəh ʔɔɔm nih
 yeah ABN-to.take ABN-knife that to.come here

“Bring me that knife!

ʔaŋ bar-kɛt bar-klaa ʔii suu síiw caa
 1SG ABN-to.cut ABN-testicles 1PL for friend to.eat

I’m going to cut off my balls for my friend to eat

kɔʔ kuyh hmoh bar-suu bar-caa
 NEG to.have what ABN-together ABN-to.eat

because we don’t have anything to eat.”

tíə ɲaa wáay kəh khip yak khráy ʔɔɔm maat nəə
 wife Nya Wai that to.grab to.take knife to.come really EMPH

Nya Wai’s wife grabbed the knife and brought it

mah ʔin ʔlii
 to.give 3PM husband

to her husband.

ʔin ʔlii kɛt klaa ʔin maat nəə
 3SG husband to.cut testicles 3SG really EMPH

Her husband really cut off his balls.

ʔin síiw klaa cij haa ʔin naa
 3SG friend testicle pig just 3SG EMPH

But the friend, it was just pig’s balls.

bar-nɛɛm klaa ɲaa wáay
 to.pinch testicles Nya Wai

“Grab your balls, Nya Wai!”

ʃaat-ʃaat-ʃaat ʔeʔ-ʔeʔ-ʔeʔ
 EXPR: slicing EXPR: calling out in pain

[Calling out in pain as he cut his testicles]

baa pee barʔeʔ mɛɛ barsíiw
 2SG NEG ABN-EXP: calling out in pain COMD ABN-friend

“Don’t cry out, friend!”

ʔin ksiin wóɔ nɛɛw kəh
 3SG person to.say way that

said Person.

cáa ʔaa bar-coo naa
well 1SG ABN-to.hurt EMPH

“Oh, but it hurts!”

kɔʔ bar-liək naa, ʔaa daa bar-p-suək hay naa
NEG ABN-to.fear EMPH 1SG IRR ABN-CAUS-medicine EMPH EMPH

“There is nothing to be afraid of, I will treat your wound.”

ʔin ceew ʔiət tée ba-jiəŋ
3SG to.pound.paste chili since LOC-house

He had made some chili paste when he was still at home

ceew ʔiət ʔoom cók khɛɛn cók dæ,
to.pound.paste chili to.come to.put.in pepper to.put.in which

He made the chili paste with pepper and some other things

cók thoŋ ʔoom
to.put.in bag to.come

and brought it in his bag.

baa bar-hrúu bar-kɛet læw,
2SG ABN-to.hurry ABN-to.cut PERF

“Hurry up and cut them!”

pee bar-ʔe-ʔ bar-ʔiʔ mɛɛ
NEG ABN-EXP:calling.out EXP:REDP EMPH

Don’t whimper and cry about it!

ʔaa kɔʔ kuyh bar-hmɔh bar-caa ʔaa bar-suu caa nee
2SG NEG to.have ABN-what ABN-to.eat 2SB ABN-together to.eat EMPH

We don’t have anything to eat together!”

ʃaat-ʃaat bar-ʔeʔ
EXP: cutting ABN-EXP:crying.out

[Nya Wai crying out in pain as he cuts]

ʃaat-ʃaat bar-ʔeʔ
EXP: cutting ABN-EXP:crying.out

[Nya Wai crying out in pain as he cuts]

ʃaat-ʃaat bar-ʔeʔ
EXP: cutting ABN-EXP:crying.out

[Nya Wai crying out in pain as he cuts]

bar-coo bar-hréŋ naa
 ABN-to.hurt ABN-intense EMP

“It hurts so badly!”

baa bar-hrúu khře jih lɛɛw
 2SG ABN-to.hurry to.get to.take.off PERF

“Hurry up! You can take off your pants,

ʔaa daa bar-p-suək hay ʔaa
 1SG IRR ABN-CAUS-medicine EMPH

I will treat your wound for you!”

kʃaaat yak kéen ŋəh maat nəə tih ba-kəh
 EXP: cutting to.take core to.go.out really EMP to.place LOC-that

With a final slice he took out his testicles and placed them there.

ʔoooy ʔaa daa bar-p-suək baa bar-síiw
 Ohhh 1SG IRR ABN-CAUS-medicine 2SG ABN-friend

“Oooh, I’ll treat your wound, my friend!”

duəh bóŋ khɛen ʔiət ʔəm té ʔii duəh
 to.open container pepper chili to.come from here to.open

He opened the container with the chili and pepper paste that he had brought.

ʔaa daa p-suək bar-baa ʔii
 1SG IRR CAUS-medicine ABN-2SG this

“I’m going to treat you now.”

yak ʔiət cók sam coo hréŋ naa
 to.take chili to.put.in even.more to.hurt intense EMPH

He applied the chili paste, which made it hurt even worse!

bar-ʔoooy bar-ʔoooooy
 ABN-EXP: moaning ABN-EXP:moaning

[Nya Wai voice moaning in pain]

ʔin too ksiŋ suŋ-tuŋ lit daw
 3SG body person EXP:running enthusiastically to.return

Person got up quickly and ran home.

ʔin tiə naa wáay kəh kɛt klaa ʔin lɛɛw
 3SG to.trick Nya Wai that to.cut testicles 3SG PERF

He tricked Nya Wai to cut his own testicles off.

ʔin daw ba-jiəŋ ʔik
 3SG to.return LOC-house first

He just left and went back home.

yəək naa wáay ʔin coo hrén nəə
 well Nyhaway 3SG to.hurt intense EMPH

Well, now Nya Wai was in serious pain.

ʔəəy bar-ʔəəy
 EXP:moaning EBN-EXP:moaning

[Nya Wai voice moaning in pain]

too ksiin daw suŋ-tuŋ daw, kii ʔal naa wáay kəh
 body person to.return EXP:running to.return just to.hear Nya Wai that

Person just went home, not paying attention to

thriin barʔ-əəy
 to.moan.in.pain ABN-EXP:moaning

the sound of Nya Wai's last moans.

ʔin siən hay naa, too kɛt klaa too
 3SG to.die EMPH body to.cut testicles body

He died. The one who cut off his own balls.

ʔin ksiin daw waap
 3SG person to.return EXP:quickly.disappearing

Person went home and wasn't seen again,

naa wáay kəh siən khok-ŋok
 Nya Wai that to.die EXP: curled.up

leaving the Nya Wai to die curled up alone.

phləh ba-ʔii ləə tác kancíən nʔíic ʔii naa
 to.arrive LOC-this then to.be.gone story.telling story this EMPH

That is all, this is the end of this story.

sut

to.end

The end.

References

- Agha, Asif. 2007. *Language and Social Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Agha, Asif. 2015. "Enregisterment and Communication in Social History", in Agha and Frog (eds), *Registers of Communication in Social History*. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvggx2qk.6>
- Badenoch, Nathan. (in press). "The Uplands of Northern Thailand: Language and Social Relations beyond the Muang", in Heneise and Wouters (eds) *Routledge Handbook of Highland Asia*. London: Routledge.
- Badenoch, Nathan. 2021. "Silence, Cessation and Stasis: The Ethnopoetics of "Absence" in Bit Expressives", *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jola.12314>
- Badenoch, Nathan. 2020. "Fire in the Forest: Morality and Human-Animal Relations in a Phong Laan Myth from Northeastern Laos", *The Journal of Lao Languages* 2: 29-41.
- Badenoch, Nathan. 2019. "Elaborate Expressions in the Bit Language: Parallelism and Performance in a Multilingual Context", *The Journal of Lao Languages* 1: 75-87.
- Badenoch, Nathan. 2018. "Translating the State: Ethnic Language Radio in the Lao PDR", *Journal of Contemporary Asia*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2018.1462888>
- Badenoch, Nathan and Tomita Shinsuke. 2013. "Mountain People in the Muang: Creation and Governance of a Tai Polity", *Southeast Asian Studies* (2)1: 29-67.
- Badenoch, Nathan, Madhu Purti and Nishaant Choksi. 2019. "Expressives as Moral Propositions in Mundari", *Indian Linguistics* 80(1-2): 1-17.
- Baumann, Benjamin. 2020. "Reconceptualizing the Cosmic Polity: The Tai mueang as a Social Ontology", in Baumann and Rehbein (eds) *Social Ontology, Sociocultures, and Inequality in the Global South*. New York: Routledge.
- Bermudez, Natalia. 2020. "Ideophone Humor: The Enregisterment of a Stereotype and Its Inversion", *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 30(20):258-272. <https://doi-org/10.1111/jola.12275>
- Chamberlain, James. 2016. "Kra-Dai and the Proto-History of South China and Vietnam", *Journal of the Siam Society* 104: 27-77.
- Chamberlain, James. 2012. "Phou Thay and Brou Symbiosis", paper presented at International Workshop: Peoples and Cultures of the Central Annamite Cordillera: Ethnographic and Ethno-Historical Contributions – Towards a Comparative and Inter-Disciplinary Dialogue. Institute of Anthropology and Religion (Laos) and University of Gothenburg (Sweden), Vientiane, Lao PDR.
- Chamberlain, James. 1992. "The Black Tai Chronicle of Muang Mouay", *Journal of Mon-Khmer Studies* 21: 19-55.
- Choksi, Nishaant. 2019. "Expressives and the Multimodal Depiction of Social Types in Mundari", *Language in Society* 49(3): 379-398.
- Crumley, Carole. 1995. "Heterarchy and the Analysis of Complex Societies", *Archeological Papers of the American Anthropological Association* 6(1)1-5.
- Dingemanse, Mark. 2014. "Advances in the Cross-Linguistic Study of Ideophones", *Language and Linguistics Compass* 6(10): 654-672. <https://doi.org/10.1002/lnc3.361>
- Downer, Gordon. 1992. "The Tai Element in Khmu?", *Mon-Khmer Studies* 18-19:44-51.
- Evans, Grant. 1999. "Ethnic Change in the Northern Highlands of Laos", in Evans (ed.) *Laos: Culture and Society*. Chiang Mai: Silkworm.
- Fleming, Luke and Jack Sidnell. 2020. "The Typology and Social Pragmatics of Interlocutor Reference in Southeast Asia", *Asian Linguistic Anthropology* 2(3): 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.47298/jala.v1-i1-a1>
- Frachtenberg, Leo J. 1920. "Abnormal Types of Speech in Quileute", *International Journal of American Linguistics* 1(4): 295-299.

- Hymes, Dell. 1981. "How to Talk Like a Bear in Takelma", in Hymes *"In Vain I Tried to Tell You": Essays in Native American Ethnopoetics*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Jonsson, Hjorleifur. 2014. *Slow Anthropology: Negotiating Difference With the Iu Mien*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Jonsson, Hjorleifur. 2010. "Mimetic Minorities: National Identity and Desire on Thailand's Fringe", *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 17:2-3, 108-130. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10702891003733559>
- Jonsson, Hjorleifur. 2005. *Mien Relations: Mountain People and State Control in Thailand*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Langdon, Margaret. 1978. "Animal Talk in Cocopa", *International Journal of American Linguistics* 44(1): 10-16.
- Материалы советско-вьетнамской лингвистической экспедиции 1979 года. 1990. *Язык Ксингмул*. М.: Наука. Главная редакция восточной литературы.
- Kraisri Nimmanhaeminda. 1967. The Lawa Guardian Spirits of Chiangmai. *Journal of the Siam Society* 55(2): 185-225.
- Kraisri Nimmanhaeminda. 1965. "An Inscribed Silver-plate Grant to the Lawa of Boh Luang". In *Felicitations Volumes of Southeast Asian Studies Presented to His Highness Prince Dhani Nivat*, vol. 2: 233-38. Bangkok: The Siam Society.
- Lindell, Kristina, Jan-Öjvind Swahn and Damrong Tayanin. 1998. *Folk Tales from Kammu VI: a teller's last tales*. London and Malmö: Curzon Press.
- Petit, Pierre. 2019. *History, Memory and Territorial Cults in the Highlands of Laos: The Past Inside the Present*. London: Routledge.
- Proschan, Frank. 2001. "Peoples of the Gourd: Imagined Ethnicities in Highland Southeast Asia", *The Journal of Asian Studies* 60(4): 999-1032.
- Proschan, Frank. 1997. "'We are All Kmhmu, Just the Same': Ethnonyms, Ethnic Identities, and Ethnic Groups", *American Ethnologist* 24(1): 91-113.
- Rudge, Alice. 2021. "Hidden Likeness: Avoidance and Iconicity in Batek", *Linguistic Anthropology* 31(1): 4-24. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jola.12294>
- Sapir, Edward. 1958. "Abnormal Types of Speech in Nootka", in Mandelbaum (ed) *Selected Writings of Edward Sapir*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Sprenger, Guido. 2010. "From Power to Value: Ranked Titles in an Egalitarian Society, Laos", *Journal of Asian Studies* 69: 403-425. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911810000069>
- Suwilai Premsrirat. 2002. "Appropriateness in Khmu Culture", *Mon-Khmer Studies* 32:117-129.
- Tappe, Oliver. forthcoming. Houaphan - revolutionary heritage and social transformations in the "birthplace of Lao PDR", in Goudineau and Bouté (eds) *From Tribalism to Nationalism: The Anthropological Turn in Laos: A Tribute to Grant Evans*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press.
- Tappe, Oliver. 2018. "Variants of Frontier Mimesis: Colonial Encounter and Intercultural Interaction in the Lao-Vietnamese Uplands", *Social Analysis* 62(2): 51-75. <https://doi.org/10.3167/sa.2018.620203>
- Tappe, Oliver and Nathan Badenoch. 2021. "Neither Tai, Lao nor Kha: Language, Myth, Histories and the Position of the Phong in Huaphan". Japan-ASEAN Transdisciplinary Studies Working Paper Series (TDWPS) 12. Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University.
- Taussig, Michael. 1993. *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*. New York: Routledge.
- Vargyas, Gábor. 1994. "Paroles de chamanes, paroles d'esprits". in Vargyas (ed) *Cahiers de Littérature Orale, No. 35. Publication Langues*: 123-176.
- Vittrant, Alice and Justin Watkins. (eds.) 2019. *The Mainland Southeast Asia Linguistic Area*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110401981>