

The Marking of Sex Distinctions in Polynesian Kinship Terminologies¹

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In Greenberg's cognitive-linguistic theory of kinship universals, it appears that sex, unlike generational distance and genealogical closeness, may not be marked on a consistent basis. This paper presents some systematic evidence on the subject. In Polynesian kinship terminologies, the male point of view predominates. The widespread unmarked status of terms for male child in particular may reflect an emphasis on patrilineal succession in Polynesian societies.

1. INTRODUCTION. In Greenberg's (1966) cognitive-linguistic theory of kinship universals, it appears that sex, unlike generational distance and genealogical closeness, is not marked on a consistent basis.² "In a number of instances the male term has zero expression where the corresponding female term has an additional morpheme, but the data on neutralizations give conflicting evidence. Further, Lounsbury (1968) in a pioneering contribution on the subject, describes the feminine as unmarked in Iroquois in consonance with purely linguistic facts" (Greenberg 1966:105). In the only cross-cultural study bearing on the problem, Nerlove and Romney (1967) found no conclusive evidence for male or female as the universally marked category in sibling terminologies. In a reanalysis of Nerlove and Romney's data, Kronenfeld (1996) suggested that the marking of male and female kin terms might be correlated with matrilineal and patrilineal descent, respectively, but no evidence was adduced for this hypothesis.

In this paper, we present some systematic evidence on the subject. In Polynesian kinship terminologies, the male point of view predominates. The widespread unmarked status of terms for male child in particular may reflect an emphasis on patrilineal succession in Polynesian societies.

1. This research was supported by a grant to the first author from the National Science Foundation (BCS-01073805).

2. Evidence for the marking of generational distance and genealogical closeness in kinship terminologies is given in Hage (1999a, b, 2001). On Greenberg's theory, see also Hage (1997).

2. MARKING HYPOTHESES. Marking refers to an asymmetric relation between two terms of an opposition. The concept applies to all aspects of language—phonological, grammatical and lexical-semantic. In general, the unmarked term is “simpler in form, more common in usage, and more elaborated in terms of subtypes” (Moravcsik and Wirth 1986:2). Three different hypotheses can be entertained regarding the marking of sex in PN kinship terminologies.

1. Male terms are unmarked. Greenberg (1990), in a later statement of his theory of kinship universals, and, earlier, Nerlove and Romney (1967) assume that male is usually unmarked. In Iroquois, an apparent counterexample, female is unmarked for grammatical, that is, nonsemantic reasons. In the Nerlove and Romney study, only five out of a cross-cultural sample of 245 sibling terminologies were marked one way or the other for sex. Other sets of kinship terms or the application of other marking criteria may give different results. Given an assumption of “universal asymmetry in cultural evaluation of the sexes” (Rosaldo 1974:17), kinship terminologies should reflect a male (unmarked) point of view.

2. The marking of male and female terms depends on context. According to Waugh (1982:310), “markedness values are always context sensitive where the context may be a given culture ... In our culture for example ... ‘female’ is marked when found in the context of a professor or doctor, but ‘male’ is marked when found in the context of a nurse or secretary.” Waugh’s argument, although it makes no reference to the domain of kinship, is intended to apply to semantic structures in general. In the present case, context might refer to different subdomains of PN terminologies, for example, uncle terms as opposed to child terms, or to entire terminologies, for example, historically conservative as opposed to more innovative PN terminologies.

3. Neither male nor female terms are marked. In a comparative analysis of gender relations in hierarchical societies, Ortner (1981) argues that women in Polynesian, as opposed to New Guinea societies, have a relatively high status. In Polynesia, the “encompassing” structure of descent rather than the opposing structure of marriage alliance generates rank and prestige. According to Ortner (1981:394), Polynesian women are thought of first of all as *kinswomen*—as daughters, sisters, and aunts rather than wives, lovers, and mothers. Polynesian societies are said to have a “relatively low elaboration of cultural conceptions (both formal ideology and general folklore) of female inferiority; Polynesians simply do not express, in word or deed, many notions of women as inherently less worthy sorts of persons than men.” If Ortner is right about words, neither male nor female kin terms should be marked in any socially significant way in PN terminologies.³

3. POLYNESIAN TERMINOLOGIES. The subgrouping of the PN languages (from Marck 1996) is shown in figure 1. All but two of the endnodes in this family tree designate individual languages. The Ellicean-Outlier (EO) subgroup includes, among

3. Previous authors agree on the relatively high status of women in Polynesian societies, but not necessarily on the interpretation of gender ideology. See Howard and Kirkpatrick (1989).

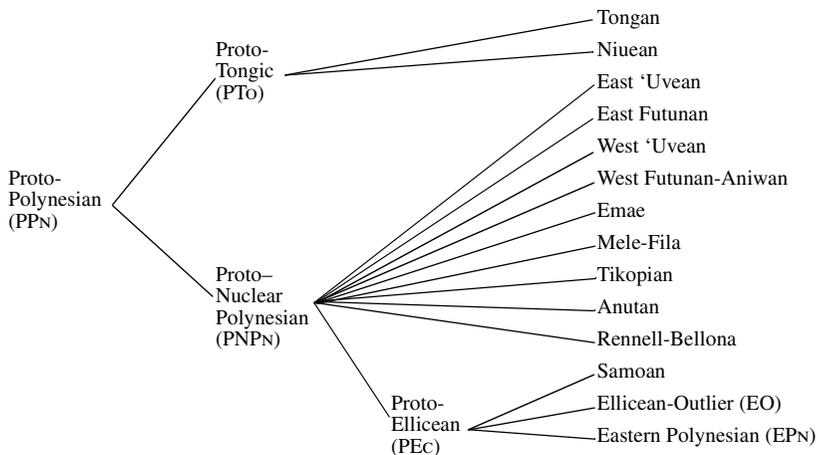
others, Kapingamarangi, Luangian (Ontong Java), and Tokelauan. The Eastern Polynesian (EPN) subgroup includes a large number of languages: Rapanui (Easter), Hawaiian, Mangarevan, Marquesan, Mangaian, Manihiki-Rakahanga, Māori, Rapan, Rarotongan (Southern Cooks), Tahitian, Tongarevan (Northern Cooks), Tuamotuan, and Tubuaian. Tongan, some other West Polynesian languages, and a few Outlier languages are more conservative in their kinship terminologies than EPN.

PPN kin terms, as reconstructed by Marck (1996, 1997, 1999) are shown in table 1. The terminology is bifurcate merging for males in the first ascending and descending generations: mother's brother *tu'a-tine is distinguished from father and father's brother *tama(na), and a man's sister's child *'ilamutu is distinguished from all other nephews, nieces, and children *tama. A separate term for father's sister *masakitanga is definitely reconstructable for Proto-Tongic (PTO), but only provisionally for PPN. Many terminologies in western Polynesia and in the Melanesian outliers have retained these distinctions, while most terminologies in eastern Polynesia have lost them, becoming purely generational in type, merging mother's brother with father and father's brother, and father's sister with mother and mother's sister. PPN cousin terminology is Hawaiian in type, with sibling terms extended to all cousins.

Three criteria of marking from Greenberg's theory of kinship universals are applicable to the dimension of sex in PN terminologies.

1. *Par excellence* expression. The unmarked term may represent the entire category or the opposite of the marked term. In the language of cognitive science, the unmarked term represents the prototype of a category (Lakoff 1987). A standard example in English is *man* = 'human being' and *man* = 'male human being' (unmarked) versus *woman* 'female human being' (marked). In a number of PN kinship terminologies, 'son' is the unmarked member of the child category. In

FIGURE 1. SUBGROUPING OF POLYNESIAN LANGUAGES*



* Source: Marck 1996.

TABLE 1. PROTO-POLYNESIAN KIN TERMS^a

*tupuna	grandparent
*matu'a	parent
*tama(na)	father, father's brother
*tina(na)	mother, mother's sister
*tu'a-tina	mother's brother
*masaki-tanga (?)	father's sister
*tuaka(na)	elder same sex sibling
*tahina	younger same sex sibling
*tua-nga'ane	woman's brother
*tua-fafine	man's sister
*tama	woman's child, esp. son, nephew/niece
*tama-'a-fine	woman's daughter
*'o-fafine	man's daughter
*'ilamutu	man's sister's child
*makupuna	grandchild

* Source: Marck 1996

Tikopian, *tama* means 'child' but also 'son' as against 'daughter' *tamafafine*. "The word [*tama*] covers both sexes, but is used freely without qualification to describe males as the equivalent of 'son', while for females the secondary form *tamafafine*, from *tama* + *fafine* 'woman, female', is commonly employed. The parallel form to the latter, *tama tangata* 'male child', is used only as a descriptive phrase in specific explanation, as in answer to a question 'What is the sex of that child?' This fusion of the particular and the general in Tikopia terms for son and child—a usage common elsewhere in Polynesia—smacks of a superiority of male status ..." (Firth 1936:252–253).

In Tokelauan, *tama* means 'child', 'son', and *tama fafine* or *afafine* means 'daughter' (Huntsman 1971; Marck 1997). In Tubuaian, the corresponding terms are *tama* and *tama hine* (Marck 1997). In Rarotongan, *tama* is 'child', but in respectful address it refers to 'son' (Marck 1997). In Hawaiian, *keiki* "means children in general ..., but in common parlance, *keiki* used of an individual means a male child *Kamahine* is Māori *tamahine* (daughter or girls in general). Evidently this is an old word that is widespread and hence there is no need for the derivation *keikiwahine*" (Handy and Pukui 1972:65–66).⁴

There is a rare case in which the term for mother is unmarked as against the term for father. In PPN, 'father' is *tama(na) and 'mother' is *tina(na). These terms are continued in many PN languages, but in some languages they are replaced by reflexes of the PPN term for parent *matua + male or female adjective. In Hawaiian, for example, *makua hine* is 'mother' and *makua kaane* is 'father.' In Tokelauan terminology, however, *tama(na)* continued as 'father' (marked) while *maatua* came to mean 'mother' and also 'parent' (unmarked) (Huntsman 1971:341).

4. There may be other instances of par excellence expression. Ethnographers do not always give the generic as well as the specific meaning of kin terms.

2. *Zero expression in the unmarked term.* Analogous to the presence of the mark in phonology, for example nasalized vowels as opposed to oral vowels, the marked term in lexicon is overtly indicated. In German *König* is 'king' and *Königin* is 'queen.' As Bonvillain (2000:229) observes in an analysis of images of gender in linguistic form, unmarked terms commonly symbolize men as "natural, generic, typical persons whereas women are derived, secondary, restricted." In Manihiki-Rakahanga and East Futunan, *tama* means 'son' while *tama-hine* and *ta'ine* mean daughter (Marck 1997). In East 'Uvean, the terms are *tama* and *ta'ahine*. (In neither case is it indicated that *tama* also means 'child'). In Māori, *tamaroa* is 'son' and *tamahine* is 'daughter', but *tama* can be used alone to mean 'son' (Marck 1997).

In PN kinship terminologies, the term for 'mother's brother' is marked as against the term for 'mother.' According to Marck (1996:215–216), PPN *tu'a-tine seems composed of *tina 'mother' and *tua*, a term derived from Proto-Oceanic (POC) *matuqa 'mother's brother.' The term "apparently survived in [PPN] as a distinct meaning by adding the 'mother' suffix." According to Clark (pers. comm.), *tu'a-tine is from *tuqa- 'sibling' + *tina-na* 'mother'. Reflexes of *tu'a-tine, as shown in table 2, are found in Tonga, East Futunan, East 'Uvean, Tokelauan, West Futunan, Tikopian, Anutan, Rennellese, Vaitupu (a dialect of Tuvaluan), and Nanumean (also dialect of Tuvaluan). In Tongan and East 'Uvean, there is an alternative term, also marked, for 'mother's brother': *fa'ē tangata* 'male mother'. In Tonga, "the more honorable term is *tuasina*" (Gifford 1929:28).

We note that, in Tokelauan, the paternal aunt, father's sister, *maatua-haa* 'sacred mother' or *maatua tauaitu* 'spirit-holding mother', is marked as against mother and mother's sister *maatua* (Huntsman 1971:350). In all other PN terminologies that distinguish father's sister, the term is a reflex of PTO or PPN *masaki-tanga 'sick' + nominalizer. The etymology alludes to the spiritual power of the father's sister over her brother's children, especially her power to curse these relatives with barrenness.

3. *Syncretization.* When two sets of categories intersect, distinctions that are present in the unmarked category are absent or neutralized in the marked category. In the English pronominal system, a gender distinction in the singular (he, she, it) is neutralized in the plural (they). Nerlove and Romney (1967) used the criterion of syncretization in their cross-cultural study of sibling terminologies. In three terminologies, a seniority distinction in the male category was neutralized in the female category as predicted, but in two terminologies the reverse was true.

In PPN kinship terminology, there is a separate term for a man's cross nephew/niece but not for a woman's cross nephew/niece: *ilamutu is 'man's sister's child,' and *tama is 'man's child, man's brother's child, woman's child, and woman's sibling's child'. This pattern is continued in a number of PN terminologies. Greater linguistic differentiation suggests greater social importance. As Firth observed with respect to the status of a man's sister's child, *iramutu*, in Tikopia "following the ruling principle, terminological distinction might be expected between the children of *taina* [same sex sibling] and *kave* [opposite sex sibling]. There is, however, only a partial one, since though a brother refers to sister's children as *iramutu*, she uses the

word *tama* for his as for her own. Both use the ordinary term of address to children. But in behavior the differentiation is clear; the separate linguistic category enters where the weight of social differentiation is greatest" (Firth 1936:253). By "weight of social differentiation," Firth refers to social obligations of assistance on the part of the mother's brother, and psychological relations of strong trust, intimacy, and solidarity between mother's brother and sister's child.

In Tongan, East Futunan, East 'Uvean, Tokelauan, and West Futunan, distinctions between cross-relations in the first ascending and descending generations are symmetric with separate terms for mother's brother and father's sister and for man's sister's child and woman's brother's child. Where symmetry is lacking, however, only male relations are distinguished (with the single exception of Samoan). As shown in table 2, Rennellese, Taumako, Luangiuan, Vaitupu, and Nanumean have a term for mother's brother but not for father's sister. All five of these terminologies plus Tikopian and Anutan have a term for man's sister's child but not for woman's brother's child. The one exception to this pattern is Samoan, which has a term for 'father's sister' *ilamutu* (< PPN *'ilamutu 'man's sister's child'), but not for mother's

TABLE 2. CROSS-UNCLE/CROSS-AUNT AND CROSS-NEPHEW/CROSS-NIECE IN POLYNESIAN TERMINOLOGIES*

TERMINOLOGY	MOTHER'S BROTHER	FATHER'S SISTER	MAN'S SISTER'S CHILD	WOMAN'S BROTHER'S CHILD
Tongan	tuasina	mehikitanga	'ilamutu	faka fotu
East Futunan	tu'a-tsinana	masakitanga	ilāmutu	faka fotu
East 'Uvean	tua-sina	mahiki-tanga	ilamutu	faka fotu
Tokelauan	tuaa-tina	maatua-haa	ilamutu	tama-haa
West Futunan	tojinana	jin'a-ha-vae	raimutu	fugona
Tikopian	tuatina	masikitanga	iramutu	
Anutan	tuatina	makitanga	iraamutu	
Rennellese	tua-tina		ingamutu	
Taumako	ingoa		ilamotu	
Luangiuan	lamoku		lamoku	
Vaitupu	tua-tina		ilamutu†	
Nanumean	tuaa-tina		ilaamutu	
Samoan		ilamutu	tama saa	
Marquesan	pahupahu	pahupahu	i'amutu	i'amutu

* Source: Marck 1997.

† Obsolete.

brother.⁵

In three terminologies, the child category is also marked by syncretization. In Tongan, there are separate terms for man's son, *foha*, and man's daughter, *ofefine*, (unmarked), and a single term for 'woman's child' *tama* (marked); in Tokelauan *ataliki* is 'man's son,' *afafine* is 'man's daughter,' but *tama* is 'woman's child'; in

Samoan *ata-li'i* is 'man's son,' *a-fafine* is 'man's daughter', and *tama* is 'woman's child' (Marck 1997).

3. SOCIAL CONDITIONS AND MARKING EFFECTS. PPN kinship terminology, as noted, is bifurcate merging (father = father's brother ≠ mother's brother), a type that is cross-culturally associated with a rule of unilineal descent (Hage 1998; Murdock 1949). Most Polynesian societies that have retained bifurcate merging terminologies have patrilineal descent groups or cognatic descent groups with a pronounced patrilineal bias. Anuta (Feinberg 1981), Tikopia (Firth 1936), Rennell (Elbert 1975), West Futuna-Aniwa (Dougherty 1983), and Tonga (Gifford 1929) all have patrilineal descent groups. East Uvea (Burrows 1937) and East Futuna (Burrows 1936) have cognatic descent groups with a decided emphasis on patrilineal descent, inheritance, and succession. Tokelau is a partial exception: descent groups are cognatic, and residence is uxorilocal (Huntsman and Hooper 1996). On Fakaofu Atoll, however, agnatic relationships were of "dominant political importance" (Anthony Hooper, pers. comm.).⁵ Goldman (1970) characterizes Polynesian societies in general as propatrilineal. "The common native explanation for patriliney, which I designate 'pro-patriliney' to distinguish it from exclusive patriliney, is simply that men and the male line carry more *mana* than women and the female line" (1970:15).

A rule, or former rule, of patrilineal descent is reflected in Polynesian sibling terminologies. As shown in table 1, PPN had four sibling terms: *tuaka(na) 'elder parallel sibling,' *tahina 'younger parallel sibling,' *tua-nga'ane 'woman's brother,' and *tua-fafine 'man's sister.' In the evolution of PN sibling terminologies, there is a pattern of semantic simplification in which the seniority distinction is lost first, then the sex distinction, and finally the parity distinction, leaving a single term for sibling (Clark 1975). For cognate terms, when the sex distinction is lost, the term for woman's brother replaces the term for man's sister and extends to the entire cross-sex category.⁷ Thus in East Futunan, 'cross-sibling' is *tuaga'ane*, in Nanumean it is *tua-gane*, and in Vaitupu it is *tua-gaane* (< PPN *tua-nga'ane). If merger is treated as the diachronic equivalent of neutralization, the unmarked term is male ('woman's brother'). As shown in Hage (1999c), in the Oceanic sibling terminologies generally,

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5. The marking reversal in Samoan calls for comment. Mead (1969:127) does not list *ilamutu* in her "Table 1, Kinship Terms." Elsewhere, she says that *ilamutu* means father's sister, but also "father's father's sister, or in families of rank, the oldest living sister of the holder of a title [who] reserves the right to preside over the distribution of *toga* when the dowry comes into the family" (Mead 1969:136). In Pukapukan, the term *mayakitanga* 'sacred maid' (< PPN *masakitanga 'father's sister') designates a social status that can be filled by a chief's "eldest daughter, eldest sister, or possibly even father's sister" (Hecht 1977:196).
 6. "The royal genealogy has an agnatic emphasis. In local court cases involving land disputes hinging upon genealogies, the proper authority in a descent group or category is *always* taken to be '*tama tane ma ulumatua*', i.e., the eldest in the male line of descent" (Anthony Hooper, pers. comm.).
 7. Another type of replacement that occurs is that both gendered terms are lost and the old PPN cross-sibling term *kawe is retained.

the neutralization of the term for man's sister or woman's brother is correlated with patrilineal and matrilineal descent, respectively.

Patrilineal succession and primogeniture are emphasized in most Polynesian societies and were probably features of Proto-Polynesian society. In Proto-Oceanic and PPN status terminology, male primogeniture is reflected in the gloss of *'ariki as 'chief,' head of a lineage; first born in the senior line, who succeeds to the chieftainship and has strong personal "*mana*" and "*tapu*" (Pawley 1979:20, cited in Kirch 1984:63). In PN kinship terminologies, male succession is suggested by the unmarked status of 'son' as against 'daughter', that is, of 'son' as the prototype of the 'child' category. In Tikopian, Tokelauan, Tubuaian, Rarotongan, and Hawaiian, the term for 'son' as opposed to 'daughter' has the generic meaning 'child'. In Manihiki-Rakahanga, East Futunan, East 'Uvean, and Māori, the term for 'son' as opposed to 'daughter' is primary, requiring no gender modifier. In Tongan, Samoan, and Tokelauan, a man distinguishes his son from his daughter, while a woman does not. In Tikopia, male primogeniture is reflected in terms for 'eldest son' as against 'eldest daughter': "In [Tikopian] kinship terminology there is a special word for eldest, *te urumatua*, shortened to *te uru*. The latter is an ordinary word for 'head', hence the eldest child may also be referred to as *te uru o fanau*, the head of the family. The terms *tangata* ['male'] or *fafine* ['female'] may be added to *urumatua* to indicate sex, but when used alone, it signifies the eldest son. This person, especially after he has reached adult years, has the deciding voice in family councils" (Firth 1936:178).

4. CONCLUSION. PN kin terms are marked for sex in three ways: by par excellence expression, zero expression, and syncretization. Male terms are unmarked more frequently and in more contexts than female terms. Son is unmarked as against daughter in Tikopian, Tokelauan, Tubuaian, Rarotongan, Manihiki-Rakahanga, East Futunan, East 'Uvean, Māori, and Hawaiian; man's child (son distinguished from daughter) is unmarked as against woman's child in Tongan, Samoan, and Tokelauan; mother's brother is unmarked as against father's sister in Rennellese, Taumako, Luangian, Vaitupu, and Nanumean; a man's first descending generation relations are unmarked (by syncretization) as against a woman's relations in Tikopian, Anutan, Rennellese, Taumako, Luangian, Vaitupu, and Nanumean, and, diachronically, male cross-sibling is unmarked as against female cross-sibling in East Futunan, Nanumean, and Vaitupu. Female terms are unmarked in two isolated contexts—father's sister as against mother's brother in Samoan (but see footnote 5) and mother as against father in Tokelauan; and, more generally, mother is unmarked as against mother's brother in all terminologies in which the term for mother's brother is a reflex of PPN *tu'a-tine—in Tongan, East Futunan, East 'Uvean, Tokelauan, West Futunan, Tikopian, Anutan, Rennellese, Vaitupu, and Nanumean. The PN evidence supports a weaker form of the first hypothesis: male kin terms are more commonly unmarked than female kin terms.

With regard to Waugh's argument, there may be more contextual variation in kin term usage than noted above. For example, in Tikopia, the term for man's sis-

ter's child is marked in ceremonial contexts in which he/she is referred to as *tama tapu* 'sacred child', as against *tama* 'child'. Few if any accounts of Polynesian kinship are as detailed as that of Firth. It would be interesting to know if there are universal contexts in which male or female kinship terms are unmarked. For example, are there terminologies in which only a woman's cross-nephew/niece is distinguished (a possibility not coded for in Murdock's [1970] cross-cultural tabulation of kin terms), and are there terminologies in which the term for daughter has the generic meaning 'child'?

The extent to which sex is marked varies in individual PN terminologies. In general, terminologies in western Polynesia that have retained the bifurcate merging distinctions of PPN are more marked with respect to sex than the terminologies of eastern Polynesia that have become generational in type. The marking of sex in the western Polynesian terminologies does not support Ortner's theory that gender is a symmetrical relation in Polynesian societies.⁸ The designation of 'son' as the prototype of the 'child' category, and the greater differentiation of male relatives and relatives of a male suggests that in some contexts, principally succession and social obligations, some Polynesians do, in fact, treat gender as an asymmetrical relation.

We hope that the analysis in this paper will be extended to other Oceanic kinship terminologies and to terminologies in other language families. We conclude with a small step in that direction. In *The History of Melanesian Society*, Rivers (1914) assembled a comparative table of relationships in Oceanic kinship systems. Table 3 shows the presence of cross-distinctions in the first ascending and descending generations as presented by Rivers for terminologies in the OC languages. The syncretic relation between the terms for father's sister and mother's brother, and woman's brother's child and man's sister's child in the PN terminologies (table 2) is part of a larger Oceanic pattern. It remains to be seen whether this pattern is peculiar to Oceanic or to certain language families, or is a universal feature of bifurcate merging kinship systems.

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8. Howard and Kirkpatrick (1989) believe that Ortner's theory applies mainly to western Polynesia.

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TABLE 3. CROSS-UNCLE/CROSS-AUNT AND CROSS-NEPHEW/CROSS-NIECE IN OCEANIC TERMINOLOGIES*

TERMINOLOGY	MOTHER'S BROTHER	FATHER'S SISTER	MAN'S SISTER'S CHILD	WOMAN'S BROTHER'S CHILD
Tanna (Weasisi)	un	uhun	ra'niauanien	nau'wein
Tanna (Kwamera)	merani	gusuii	kunkwanien	brasini
Lau (Malaita)	ko	aiya	ko	aiya
Namatanai (NI)	matua	hintama, rahat, tau	laua	tama, rahat, tau
Bau (Fiji)	vungo, ngandina	nganci, vungo	vasu, ngonnia	vungo
Tavua (Fiji)	ngwandi	ngwandi	ngguva	ngguva
Nadrau (Fiji)	momo	tukai	vasu	
Dhawanisa (Fiji)	momo	ngwanita	vasu	
Anejoñ	mata	resi	ngawani	
Pentecost	tarabe	ratahi, bilan, barai	aloa	
Rowa (Torres)	meru	veve wuswus rawe	van-ngu	
Ulawá	uweli	nike	uweli	
Sa'a (Malaita)	uweli	nike	uweli	
Bugotu (Ysabel)	tumbu	ido	tumbu	
Loh (Torres)	meru		meru	
Savo (Sol. Is)	kulaga		kulaga	
Rafurafu (San Crist.)	mamau		mamau	
Vella Lavella (Sol. Is)	papa			
Shortlands (Sol. Is)	manai			

* Source: Rivers 1914; the spelling of some language names has been updated.

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