

Some Tok Pisin Idioms

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Abstract

Tok Pisin (TP) is a lingua franca and language of wider communication in Papua New Guinea. In this article we¹ introduce and examine a number of TP idioms that use body parts, numbers, descriptors, verb phrases, compounds and other elements. Our presentation is intended to supplement resources on TP that have previously described a similar category (idioms) using a variety of strategies.²

1. Idioms, Figures of Speech, or What?

Linguistic dictionaries such as Crystal (1991) define idioms and in the process they assume the readers have some background knowledge of linguistics. For example, in his definition of an *idiom*, Crystal introduces the terms *grammar*, *lexicology*, *semantics*, *utterance*, and *collocation*, among others. He follows the traditional viewpoint that “the MEANINGS of the individual words cannot be summed to produce the meaning of the ‘idiomatic’ expression as a whole.” He also says that from a syntactic viewpoint there is not the usual variability, so “it’s raining cats and dogs” does not allow, syntactically, “it’s raining a cat and a dog” (1991:170).

Richards et al. (1985) use the sentence “He washed his hands of the matter” as an idiom for, “He refused to have anything more to do with the matter.” For Richards, an idiom is “an expression which functions as a single unit and whose meaning cannot be worked out from its separate parts” (1985:134).

Standard dictionaries follow much the same line in defining an idiom. *Webster’s New World College Dictionary* (Fourth Edition, 1999:708) outlines five senses of the term. The third sense is “a phrase, construction, or expression that is recognized as a unit in syntactic patterns or has a meaning that differs from the literal meaning of its parts taken together.” The example that follows is “She heard it straight from the horse’s mouth.”

The Random House Unabridged Dictionary, Second Edition, (1983:951) also gives five senses of *idiom*, with one sense defined as “a construction or expression of one language whose parts correspond to elements of one language but whose total structure or meaning is not matched the same way in the second language.”

These are not simple definitions. Even a dictionary in the *Collins Cobuild* series (1988), which is designed to help learners with “real English,” says that an idiom is “a group of words which have

¹Karl Franklin lived and worked in Papua New Guinea (PNG) for over thirty years and learned Tok Pisin (TP) as an adult. He is responsible for the analysis and presentation. Author Steven Thomas is a native from the Enga Province and has spoken TP since childhood. He is responsible for collecting many of the idioms and for commenting on the analysis and presentation. We have also appreciated the comments of many other individuals, especially Robert Yomo, Wopa Eka, and Dave Scorza.

²Valuable information on TP and its idioms is scattered over a wide variety of sources. Standard references include Wurm and Mühlhäusler (1985), Dutton and Thomas (1985) and Verhaar (1995). McElhanon and Barok (1975) and McElhanon (1977, 1978) provide an extensive list of Selepet idioms (among others), as represented in TP counterparts. Smith (1990, 2002) also provides many TP idioms. Our presentation is not exhaustive by any means. See my on-line article on Tok Pisin as well (Franklin 1998).

a different meaning when used together from the one they would have if you took the meaning of each word individually.” The example given is “The idiom ‘ladies’ man’ is untranslatable into Japanese”.³

One way around the problem is to simply list the idiomatic expressions, their meanings, and their usual contexts. This is what Dictionary of Idioms (1982) does, and although it is based on British English (you won’t find “He laid an egg,” to mean “He failed badly”), it does provide some interesting etymology.

There are also many words or phrases that are often used interchangeably with *idiom*, such as *figure of speech*, *figurative expression*, or from the second of two senses in *The new Collins dictionary and thesaurus in one volume* (1987): *jargon*, *language*, *mode of expression*, *parlance*, *style*, *talk*, *usage*, and *vernacular*.

Recently, Grant and Bauer (2004) attempted to redefine one type of idiom that they call Multi-Word Units (MWUs) by testing them to see if they are “core idioms,” “figuratives,” or “ONCES.”⁴ The majority of idioms fall into the “figuratives” category. They specifically exclude phrasal verbs, compound nouns, adjectives, and verbs. However, and as we note in section 8, compounds are particularly productive with TP idioms. Grant and Bauer list the various classifications of idioms, such as semantic, syntactic, and functional, concluding that a “re-examination of the criteria for idiomatic status may provide us with a better classification,” and, in keeping with the applied nature of their study, “make the teaching task more manageable” (2004:44).

Webster’s New World College Dictionary (Fourth Edition, 2001:528) defines *figure of speech* as “an expression, as a metaphor or simile, using words in a nonliteral sense or unusual manner to add vividness, beauty, etc. to what is said or written.” This definition introduces the additional problem of explaining “metaphor” and “simile.” Therefore, although the term *figure of speech* may be a more neutral term allowing proverbs and secret sayings, which are deducible mainly from social context, we have used the well-known term *idiom* in this paper.

These preliminary statements indicate that it is not a simple matter to explain to a person what an idiom may be in his or her language. In this study we began by assuming that there were certain expressions that would not be interpreted literally, and we then tried them out. Of course we used idioms that we know as well. Body parts of humans or animals, seemed like a good place to start because we could note how literally they were interpreted.

2. Body Parts

There is ample evidence that the reference to body parts plays largely in constructing idioms in Tok Pisin (McElhanon 1977, 1978). We confirm this observation by dealing first with idioms that reflect one’s personal appearance.

³Collins has also published other volumes on idioms. See, for example, Sinclair and Moon, eds., (1989, 1995). On English idioms, there is a detailed study by Healey (1968).

⁴ONCES means that a word/item occurs only once, a kind of stand-alone idiom, perhaps constructed for the occasion.

In TP the literal meaning of *bun*, as in examples (1)–(4) is equivalent to “bone” in English, i.e., the referent is part of the human body. The idioms that arise from *bun* refer to one’s physical appearance, capturing the image of the long, thin shape of certain human bones, as illustrated in examples (1)–(3), or the stereotypical scrawny village chicken,⁵ as illustrated in example (4):

1. *bun nating* (bone nothing) “a very thin person”
2. *bun baik* (bone bicycle) “a very thin person”
3. *longpela bun man* (long bone man) “a very tall person”
4. *bun kakaruk* (bone chicken) “a very thin or malnourished person”

In TP *ai* literally refers to the “eye” or “eyes” of a person or animal.⁶ In example (5), the focal part of the idiom is *gumi*, generally “rubber,” which alludes to the stretching of someone who has comparably “big eyes.” In example (6), the operative part of the idiom is *pas* “fastened or closed,” referring to someone who cannot understand (“see”) or comprehend something. Finally in example (7), *ai* is the object of the verb *westim* ‘to waste’, that is to use one’s eyes by looking around needlessly. This phrase is often said in a jocular manner.

5. *ai gumi* or *gumi ai* (eye rubber) “big eyes”
6. *ai pas* (eye fastened) “imperceptive,” literally, one who is “blind”
7. *westim ai* (to.waste eye) “to look without accomplishing anything”

The lexeme *lewa*, as in examples (8)–(11), refers primarily to the “liver,” which is often considered to be the seat of emotions in Papua New Guinean languages. So it can be associated with various degrees of affection.⁷ In examples (9)–(11), the verbs *katim* ‘to cut something’, *brukim* ‘to break open’,⁸ and *kaikaim* ‘to eat something’ refer to penetration into the emotional center, while in example (12) the strong feelings for the particular person (for his/her own liver) demonstrate the extent of the relationship.

8. *katim lewa* (cut the liver) “very attractive”
9. *brukim lewa* (break the liver) “very sorry”
10. *kaikaim lewa bilong yu* (eat liver of yours) “show extreme attraction/devotion to someone”
11. *lewa bilong mi* (liver of mine) “my true love”

A best friend can be referred to directly as one’s *lewa*, which can also be used as a reciprocal term, such as between a father and his favorite son. A mother or someone who is frustrated or heartbroken will refer to this state as in example (12a):

⁵Mihalic (1971:79) also contrasts *bun* (bone) and *pat* (fat) as, figuratively, ‘far’ and ‘near’.

⁶There are also secondary senses for *ai* in TP, such as the ‘lid’, ‘tip’ or ‘opening’ of something. We do not include expressions for ‘sleepy’ (*ai hevi*) or ‘dizzy’ (*ai raun*) as these seem quite literal. *Ai ret* (eye red) is more problematic because it can refer literally to conjunctivitis or someone who has cried a lot, on the one hand, or figuratively to someone who is angry.

⁷See, for example, the many figurative meanings of ‘liver’ in Mauwake (Poh San 1989).

⁸Here again we see the difficulty of distinguishing between senses of a lexeme and a figurative use of the lexeme. The verb *katim* occurs also in expressions such as *katim marit* ‘divorce’ and *katim tok* ‘cease talking’. Likewise, *brukim* occurs in *brukim wara* ‘to cross a body of water’ and in *brukim marit/ring* ‘divorce’.

12a. *lewa pen* (liver pains) “brokenhearted”⁹

In some cases an ellipsis of the body part lexeme occurs—indicated in the examples that follow with square brackets. Note example (12), where *windua* ‘window’ indicates the space left from losing a tooth. In example (13), the rounded fuselage of the helicopter corresponds to the rounded belly of a person, and in example (14), the malleable *saksak* ‘sago’ stands for the jostling movement of a pregnant woman’s belly.

12. [*tit i gat*] *windua bilong em* ([teeth have] window belong him/her) “broken off tooth”
 13. [*bel i olsem*] *helikopta* ([stomach is like] helicopter) “pot-bellied”
 14. [*meri i*] *karamap saksak* ([the woman] cover-up sago) “pregnant”

In many instances the body part is portrayed by a verbal phrase that describes some characteristic of the person. In example, (15), the *pawpaw* is considered “soft,” hence it refers to a woman’s breast that is not firm. In example (16), the person’s head of hair (the *kunai*) has been burned off, indicating that the person is bald. A common pattern is to introduce a particular body part, then comment about it. In such cases *i* is used as a copula, joining the body part with its characteristic or description, as in (15 = soft, 16 = burned off, 17 = contaminated, 18 = dead, and 19 = with a number).

15. *popo i mau* (pawpaw it.is soft) “woman’s breast”
 16. *kunai i paia* (sword.grass it.has burned.off) “bald-headed person”
 17. *kru i paul* (brain it.is contaminated) “drunk” or “crazy”¹⁰
 18. *skin i dai* (skin it.is dead) “lazy/weak person”
 19. *man i gat namba* (man who has number) “important person”

3. Iconicity in Numerals

The use of numerals in TP idioms iconically denotes the shape of the referent, as in example (20) *ten*, oval-shaped, (21) *foa*, with only one vertical line, hence one-legged, or example (22) *ileven*, where both nostrils have vertical lines of mucus. In example (23), *namba seven* is the brand name for an axe, which of course can be used for sinister purpose. In example (24), the addressee is confronted with a particular question, *i askim yu* ‘it asks you’, presumably whether the person should be axed for something. In example (25) *sikstin* refers to a young unmarried girl, sixteen being the age at which a girl is definitely eligible for marriage. In example (26), a man with two wives has *sikispela* legs, those of his spouses and his own. On the other hand, an unmarried person, as in example (27), is worth only *ten toea*, while a married person, as in example (28), is worth double that amount—*twenti toea*, his own worth and that of his spouse. A prostitute, as in example (29), is referred to by the apparent cost of her services at one time.

20. *namba ten* (number ten) “pregnant”
 21. *namba foa* (number four) “one-legged” (also sometimes called “*wansait*” [one side])
 22. *namba ileven* (number eleven) “running nose, both nostrils”

⁹To interpret this literally as a pain in that particular organ, one would have to say, *Lewa i gat pen*.

¹⁰This is similar to ‘lame-brained’ in English, but *kruhet* is probably a more direct equivalent. Mihalic (1971:116) gives the primary sense of *kru* as ‘a sprout, a bud, young shoot, seedling’.

23. *namba seven* (number seven) “an axe”
24. *namba seven i askim yu* (number seven it asks you) “to make trouble”
25. *namba sikstin* (number sixteen) “a young woman”
26. *sikispela lek* (six legs) “man with two wives”
27. *ten toea* (ten coins/shells) “unmarried person”
28. *twenti toea* (twenty coins/shells) “married person”
29. *tu kina meri/bus* (two kina woman/bush) “a prostitute”

The PNG currency (kina[k] and toea[t]) denominations have idiomatic names representing the objects on the bill or change:

30. 50t is called *lip* (leaf)
31. K1 *hul mani* (hole money)
32. K2 *grin lip* (green leaf)
33. K10 *bul* (bull)
34. K20 *het bilong pik* (head of a pig)
35. K50 has a number of terms: *het bilong Somare* (head of Somare),¹¹ (35a), *het bilong lapun* (head of an old man), or (35b) *het bilong Maik* (head of Mike).

Bingo games provide examples of creativity in specifying numbers, such as:

36. *yu wantaim meri bilong yu* “you and your wife”=two
37. *tanim, tanim* “6 or 9”
38. *wanpela pato i slip long kiau* “a duck sleeping on an egg”=20
39. *ai glas* “eye glasses”=8
40. *tripela meri i gat bel* “three women who are pregnant”=30
41. *kus mambu* (snot bamboo=11) or (41a) *wari bilong mama* “mother’s worry”¹²

4. Descriptive Adjectives

In many TP idioms the syntax is Adj + N, where the N is often *man* ‘man’, or *meri* ‘woman’, although the N may be omitted. In example (42), the would-be sophisticate is referred to as one who wears shoes and socks. If the process of urbanization is complete, the person may be referred to as *susok man*. While example (43) is transparent in terms of its source, *hap* from “half,” the term *gailiks* is of unknown origin, but perhaps includes men who are “gay.” It includes men who dress in style, with earrings, bracelets, perfume, and so on. Both examples (44) and (45) and their synonyms refer to the strength of a man—‘iron’ on the one hand and ‘muscle’ or ‘firm skin’ on the other hand—that is men without fat. In example (46), a *lipti* (leaf.tea) person is one who probably should be drinking coffee or beer instead of tea in order to demonstrate his strength. Examples (47)–(47c) illustrate several common idioms for a prostitute. In example (48), the adjective *sotpela* ‘short’ plus *meri* stands for “beer,” based on their perception of women as short and stubby on the one hand and the shape of some beer bottles on the other hand.

¹¹Sir Michael Somare, the first (and later) Prime Minister of PNG.

¹²In (41) the mucus running from the two nostrils symbolically represent the number 11 and (41a) refers to a child with a runny nose as clearly the responsibility of the mother.

42. *susok man* (shoe.sock man) “urbanite”; Also (43a) *taun man* (town man) or even, in a very derogative sense, (43b) *strit dok* (street dog)
43. *hap man* (half man) “stylish person”; Also (43a) *stail man* (style man) or (43b) *gailiks man*
44. *ain man* (iron man) “strong person”; Also (44a) *raba man* (rubber man) or (44b) *taf man* (tough man)
45. *skin tait man* (skin tight man) “physically fit”; Also *masel man* (muscle man)
46. *lipti man* (leaf.tea man) “physically weak man”; Also (46a) *slek man* (unmotivated man), (46b) *skin dai man* (man whose body is dead) and (46c) *malumalu man* (spongy or soft man). Also perhaps in the same category is (46d) *sikis man* “sickly man”
47. *pamuk meri* “a prostitute”; Also (47a) *raun (raun) meri* (woman who travels around), (47b) *foa kofi meri* (four coffee woman), and (47c) *paia rais meri* (fire rice woman)
48. *sotpela meri* (short woman) “SP beer” (beer variety with a short necked bottle)

The combination of an Adjective + N is productive in TP idioms. Example (49) demonstrates the adjective *nupela* ‘new’ plus *bilum*, a metonymical form for an “unused woman.” Beer is colored, so *kala kala* ‘color’ plus *wara*, as in example (50), again stands for beer. In example (51) and (52), the ideas of a little *toea* “change” or *samting* ‘something’ both represent, by metonymy, items of little worth.

49. *nupela bilum* (new net.bag) “young woman”
50. *kala kala wara* (color color water) “SP beer”
51. *liklik toea* (little shell) “little money/fortnight pay”¹³
52. *liklik samting* (little something) “of little worth”

5. Transitive Verbs

Transitive verbs are generally marked by *-im* (Verhaar 1995:303), although this is by no means always the case. The combination of *V-im* + Object is very productive in TP idioms, although it is often not necessary to specify the object. Example (53) is one of the more common TP idioms, used in situations where one is not at all sure of the outcome, but willing to try, such as asking for a loan or a gift. The motivation of showing off is found in the idiom of putting one’s self (the skin) forward to be noticed, as in example (54). The picture of a stick in example (55) represents a cane to help someone who is old get about. At times the meanings can be somewhat forceful or violent, such as in examples (56)–(58). However, in example (59) the meaning of *paitim* changes from fighting someone to forcefully demanding a gift. In example (60), the purpose stated in *brukim* is not to mechanically mistreat the bus, but rather to make it go so fast that it could break. The more common idiom for driving fast is *givim siksti*, as in example (61). The use of *painim* (look.for) in examples (62) and (62a) implies a certain degree of enticement which is revealed only by the social relationships and sexes involved. Example (63) demonstrates that people can like something so much that they would not share it with their closest relative, which would

¹³When pay comes on alternate weekends, the one without pay is also *rabis fotnait* (rubbish fortnight) “fortnight without pay”.

normally be expected. Finally, example (64) is another example of *bun* used figuratively. Here it occurs with *taitim* “to tighten something.”¹⁴

53. *traim tasol* (to.try + just) “to try one’s luck”
54. *putim skin* (put + *-im* skin) “show off”
55. *holim stik nau* (hold + *-im* stick now) “to be very old”
56. *nekim* (neck + *-im*) “to beat up someone”
57. *plorim* (to.floor + *-im*) “to knock someone down”
58. *wilwilim* (to.pulverize + *-im*) “to twist someone’s ear or nose”
59. *paitim mi* (to.give + *-im* me) “give me something” (such as betel nut)
60. *brukim bas* (to.break + *-im* bus) “encourage one to drive fast”
61. *givim siksti* (to.give + *-im* sixty) “to go as fast as possible”
62. *painim mi* (to.find + *-im* me) “to flirt” or (62a) *yu painim wok?* (you find + *-im* work) “Do you have something in mind?”
63. *givim baksait long tambu* (to.give + *-im* back to a particular relative) “delicious or tasty”
64. *taitim bun* (tighten + *-im* bone) “to renew one’s efforts”

Other examples of idioms that have transitive verbs with objects include utterances to the addressee, as in example (65), where the relationship has temporarily “broken off.” Note also example (66), where the driver ‘cuts’ the ‘corner’ of the road; and note example (67) where ‘water’ is a euphemism for “urine.” If one ‘sends’ a ‘letter’ as in example (68), it may be euphemistic for “excreting feces.” Example (69) is a direct translation of a rather shopworn English idiom into TP.

65. *brukim yu* (break you) “farewell expression”
66. *katim kona* (cut the corner) “to speed”
67. *rausim/tromoim wara* (throw.out water) “urinate”
68. *salim pas* (send a letter) “excrete”
69. *lukim yu bihain pukpuk* “see you later alligator”

6. Intransitive Use of *kaikai*

The word *kaikai* is generally a noun that refers to ‘food’, and therefore also figuratively to one’s ‘fruit’, as in *karim kaikai* “to be fruitful.” However, in this section we illustrate *kaikai* as an intransitive verb in examples (70)–(77). Although examples (70) and (71) are similar in structure and meaning, the latter has a meaning that is a bit more violent in nature. The object in example (72) is reflexive, where the subject is “biting” his own teeth, with a meaning similar to the idiom in English “to bite one’s tongue.” In example (73), biting of the *lewa* shows extreme anger, with the add-on phrase indicating that the anger is incomplete. Example (74) is elliptical, with the “wooden spoon” being the instrument and the object left unspecified. The final three examples, (75)–(77) are similar in pragmatics, each serving as admonitions. The point is that either ‘rice’ or ‘brown rice’ stand for jail; hence the particular danger is implied.

¹⁴Mihalic (1971:190) gives *taitim pul* (tighten oar) “to row hard” and *taitim rot* (tighten road) “to walk fast” as additional examples of *taitim*.

70. *kaikai das* (to.eat dust) “to be beaten up”
71. *kaikai blut* (to.eat blood) “to be beaten up”
72. *kaikai tit* (to.eat teeth) “to be angry”
73. *kaikai lewa i no tan* (to.eat liver it not done) “anger is not finished”
74. *kaikai long spun diwai* (to.eat with spoon wooden) “to follow the old customs”
75. *nogut mipela kaikai rais long yu* (don’t we-[exclusive] eat rice) “Don’t get killed (or we will eat rice alone for you in sorrow).”
76. *nogut yu kaikai braun rais* (don’t you eat brown rice) “Don’t end up in jail.”
77. *nogut yu kaikai rais blong tumora long nau* (don’t you eat rice of tomorrow now) “Don’t get yourself killed.”

7. Other Intransitive Verbs

Additional examples of intransitive verbs in TP idioms include verbs such as ‘go’, as in example (78), and ‘become’ as in example (79) and (80). Sometimes verbs that imply an object and do not have the so-called transitive marker may optionally take the transitive markers, as in examples (81a), 82a), and (83a).

78. *yu go spin* (you go spin) “take a leisurely walk or journey”
79. *yu kamap raskol* (you appear criminal) “you have become a criminal”
80. *yu kamap* (you appear) “comment to attractive person”
81. *sikirap* (scrape.something) “anxious to do something” or (81a) *sikirapim pait* (start a fight)
82. *das kirap* (dust comes.up) “leave quickly” or (82a) *kirapim das* (arouse the dust)
83. *tromoi anka* (throw anchor) “to go steady” or (83a) *tromoim huk* (throw.out a hook)

8. Nominal Compounds

Compound nouns represent a frequent and highly productive method of lexicalizing TP idioms. The following examples (84)–(95) represent the semantic pattern of X + Y, where X is generally a kind or quality of Y:

84. *bus kanaka* (bush native) “unsophisticated person”
85. *frok-bel* (frog belly) “obese person”
86. *pato-lek* (duck legs) “waddling person”
87. *tel lait* (tail light) “person with face pimples”
88. *blulang* (blow.fly) “a policeman”
89. *sik dok* (sick dog) “a weak person”
90. *emti tin* (empty tin) “person who speaks nonsense”
91. *flat taia* (flat tire) “exhausted person”
92. *smok balus* (smoke bird) “jet airplane”
93. *pos opis* (post office) “toilet”
94. *kensa bokis* (cancer box) “addicted smoker”
95. *lus lain* (lost clan) “one without friends/a loser”

On the other hand, there are nominal compounds with the pattern of X + Y, where Y is a kind or quality of X:

96. *waia lus* (wire loose) “crazy or with loose morals”
97. *maus wara* (mouth water) “prattle on/a braggard/unreliable”
98. *bel kaskas* (stomach sores) “to be angry”
99. *poket bruk* (pocket broken) “out of money”

In some compounds the conjoined nouns seem equal in their semantic value:

100. *kus mambu* (head-cold bamboo-container) “runny nose”
101. *kunai gras* (sword grass) “bushy beard or hair”
102. *nus gras* (nose grass) “funny or nonsense”¹⁵
103. *maus gras* (mouth grass) “mustache”
104. *grasrut* (grass.root) “ordinary person”

The general meaning of *gras* (as in examples, (101)–(104) may be ‘grass’, ‘hair’, or even ‘feathers’. In example (101), the unusual characteristics of one’s beard is brought into focus by comparing it to *kunai* or ‘sword grass’.

Although the normal or unmarked meaning of *gras* is the plant category of ‘grass’, compounds built upon the form are common:

105. *gras nating* (grass nothing) “weeds”
106. *gras bilong solwara* (grass from the ocean) “seaweed”
107. *gras bilong bulmakau* (grass for cows) “hay”

The construction *gras bilong X* generally indicates a body part:

108. *gras bilong pisin* (grass of birds) “bird’s feathers”
109. *gras bilong sipsip* (grass of sheep) “wool”
110. *gras bilong kakaruk/paul* (grass of chickens) “chicken feathers”

9. Verbal Compounds

Verb-*im* + N is the normal pattern for compounds that are built on transitive verbs. Some examples now follow:

111. *karim sik* (carry sick) “to be sick”
112. *karim pen* (carry pain) “to bear pain”
113. *karim blut* (carry blood) “to menstruate”
114. *tanim bel* (turn stomach) “to change one’s mind”
115. *tanim tok* (turn talk) “to interpret”
116. *stretim sik* (straighten sick) “to heal”
117. *stretim bet* (straighten bed) “to make a bed”
118. *stongim bel* (strengthen stomach) “to get up courage”

¹⁵We consider this an idiom, on a par with *ai glas* (eye glass), which means ‘spectacles’, not a glass eye. Likewise *maus gras* is not a ‘grassy mouth’. Both examples (102) and (103) have the structure of body part + *gras*, but the former seems more figurative than the latter.

119. *pilim pen* or (120a) *karim pen* (feel/carry pain) “to sympathize”
 120. *rausim bel* or (121a) *brukim bel* (throw out/break stomach) “abort”

10. Contrastive Elements

Nouns may occur with the disjunctive form *o*, which calls attention to one element of the phrase in contrast to the other. In example (122), *balun* ‘balloon’ is used to call attention to the size of the man’s stomach. In example (123), the element of contrast is *woksop* ‘workshop’ and in example (124), the form *kemis* ‘chemist’ serves the same purpose.

122. *balun o man* (balloon or man) “fat” or “big stomach”
 123. *man o woksop* (man or workshop) “man with dirty clothes”
 124. *meri o kemis* (woman or chemist) “woman with lots of perfume, lipstick”

11. Phrases Using *bilong*

We have already shown how the possessive marker *bilong* is commonly used to conjoin elements in idioms. Here are a few additional examples:

125. *samting bilong maus ret* (something of mouth red) “betel nut”
 126. *taul bilong rot* (towel of the road) “prostitute”
 127. *meri bilong rot* (woman of the road) “prostitute”
 128. *samting bilong graun* (something of the ground) “temporary”
 129. *bilum bilong yu i gat hul* (woven.bag of you it has a hole) “unfaithful spouse”
 130. *em isi we bilong en* (it easy way of his) “someone who is uncoordinated”

12. Emphatic Particles

The particle *ya* and the aspectual *i* are also commonly employed in idiom and depict a story exclamatory intonation:

131. *yu nogut ya!* (you no.good ya) “smart looking person” (as a semantic opposite)
 132. *kumul ya!* (bird.of.paradise ya) “beautiful woman”
 133. *em bai hat ya!* (he will be hard ya) “an undecided person”
 134. *mi nogut ya!* (*i* no.good ya) “Am I not suitable?” (as an enticement)
 135. *yu kakaruk ya* (you chicken ya) “You are afraid.” (English influence)
 136. *lus pinis* (lost finish) “dead”
 137. *bensin/petrol pinis* (fuel finished) “worn out or tired”

The use of *kakaruk* in (135) seems to be a back translation from the use of “chicken” in English to indicate someone who is cowardly.

13. Miscellaneous Constructions

Many other creative idioms are found regularly in TP,¹⁶ which are often understood only pragmatically. Note examples (142–143) for descriptions of a loser.

138. *kam sindaun long sauspən* (come sit by my saucepan) “invitation to eat”
139. *tok tru i stap yet* (talk true it waits yet) “unbelief” or “waiting for the truth”
140. *i gat spes?* (it has space) “asking for a relationship with opposite sex”; Also (140a) *nogat spes* (don’t have space) “full [of food]”
141. *giamin tu i orait* (lying too is fine) “comment that someone is deceptive”
142. *soldia nating* (soldier nothing) “a nobody” or “of no rank or position”; Also (142a) *kanaka nating* (unsophisticated nothing) “unsophisticated person”
143. *nogat kago* (doesn’t have cargo) “poor person”; Also (143a) *tarangau man* or (143b) *sori man*
144. *darling poro* (darling special friend) “sweetheart”
145. *pulim taitim* (pull tight) “to argue”
146. *painim sikis-o* (to find six nothings), referring to the game of Snooker where the ball does not go in any of the six pockets.

14. Conclusion

In this paper we have outlined various methods that TP speakers use to creatively construct and employ idioms. Further research will undoubtedly add many idioms to our list.

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¹⁶See also Laycock (1977) for examples of creative writing in TP.

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