**3. Zooming out to a broader sample**

So far we have focussed in some detail on just four Papuan systems. While this allows us to get a feel for their overall logic, it has the obvious disadvantage of being just a tiny subsample. In this section we do the opposite: we draw on our database of Papuan languages in Kinbank, with its XX languages from YY maximal clades [Wolfgang do you have that data?], in order to make more broadly-based statements about patterns in Papuan systems. This database, available at [insert url], contains *terms* for around 100 kin *types*. No language distinguishes all kin types (typical numbers of kin terms range from 20-30 per language), so that each language of necessity syncretises – uses the same term for – a large number of kin types. The crucial point is that since languages syncretise terms in different ways (e.g. one will use the same term for meB=feZ≠R (‘older same-sex sibling’; we use R to mean ‘rest of the kin types’, so ≠R means ‘and no other kin type’)), one for meB=myB=feB=fyB≠R (English *brother*), one for meB=feB=myB=fyB≠R (Nen *nne* ‘older sibling’), one for meB=feB≠R, ‘older male sibling’ (Nagovisi *tata* meB=feB≠R). This is just a minute sample of the syncretisms in the database, centred around some common syncretisms taking in meB. The total number of possible syncretisms for just the sibling terms is XX, and for our full data base it is YY. This gives a huge possibility space, mostly unpopulated, but allowing us to characterise kinship systems on many dimensions. Examining all such dimensions is a vast enterprise, beyond what can be done here, so instead we focus in on a small number of syncretisms of prima facie interest to the characterisation of Papuan systems. Note that we often prune down the number of kintypes for which we seek equivalences, using the best proxies (e.g. mFZeS from among many types of cross-cousin) because many languages in our data base don’t have all relevant terms so this gives a more saturated harvest on queries.

1. Parent/nuncle set. We interrogate:

F=FB=MB (‘Hawaiian’ – all relatives in parents’ generation known by the same term)  
F≠FB=MB. (‘Eskimo’, like English distinguishing father from uncles on both sides)  
F=FB≠MB (‘Iroquois/Dravidian/bifurcate merging’, merging father and paternal uncle but distinguishing maternal uncle)  
F≠FB≠MB (‘Sudanese’, with each term distinct)

1. Cousins

mFBeS=meB≠mFZeS (parallel cousins = sibs ≠ (patrilateral) cross-cousins)  
B≠FBS=MBS (Eskimo style cousins)

mMB=mMBS  (Omaha skewing)

1. Sibling set. We interrogate the following (ignoring sex of ego, which is of marginal importance in Papuan languages)  
   meB=meZ≠myB=myZ  (older vs younger sib binary)  
   meB=feZ≠meZ=feB  (same sex vs opposite sex sib)
2. Self-reciprocity of cross-nuncles/cross-niblings –rather common in Papuan systems)
3. Affines[[1]](#footnote-1)

mDH = mWF   (self-reciprocal parent/child-in-law terms)  
mWF = mWB  (generation collapse in male affines)  
FZ = WM   (Dravidian-style collapsing of consanguineal vs affine)

1. Grandparents   
   FF=SS=MM=DS   (generalised 'grandkin' term)

We present our data in two forms.

Firstly, we give bar-charts showing the proportion of languages exhibiting this syncretism in a range of Papuan languages (those with enough data points, by family or area, to make comparisons useful) and for several other reference groups: Tangkic and Pama-Nyungan as two Australian groups, Austronesian, Dravidian, Indo-European, and our global sample. This gives an idea, one syncretism at a time, of what is distinctive, or not, about Papuan systems (as a whole, or of particular families), and what (if any) other language families they resemble.

Secondly, we use a different visualisation – ‘starbursts’ – which, for each relevant syncretism, show what proportion of languages in a family exhibit it (by the length of that ray of the star), assembling a number of features together. This allows a clear snapshot of how different language families differ across a number of dimensions at once.

First to the bar-charts.

1. Another interesting pattern, which for reasons of space we do not pursue further here, concerns self-reciprocal opposite-sex sibling-in-law terms (e.g. mWZ=wHB), such as Ekari *ani geeka*. These are found in a handful of languages in our sample (Abui [TAP], Berik [Tor-Orya], Kuot [isolate], Meyah and Sougb [East Bird’s Head]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)