

Kinship Terms in Telugu and English

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ABSTRACT: Kinship system denotes relationships between group and individual based on the biological relationship between children and parents, between marital partners and between siblings. Though the relations, be it blood or marital, are universally the same, all languages do not uniformly employ terms to address all these relations. Depending on the culture and the way of life of a linguistic community, terms of relations emerge which again may become distinct from those of other linguistic society. The present paper is concerned with the terms of kinship available in Telugu and English and the differences that surface due to the cultural and linguistic diversity between the two groups.

KEY WORDS: Kinship terms, blood and marital relations, Telugu

I. INTRODUCTION

Kinship terminology has been an interesting phenomenon for both linguists and anthropologists. While this terminology is one of the means for linguists to know the nature of that language or languages, it is a part of culture and society of the linguistic community for anthropologists. Every language has its own kinship terms or terms of address that indicate some relation. All these terms are purely based on relation. While terms of address are used to address someone who can be a relative, kinship terms are those which have reference. For instance, we use *mummy* while speaking to mother and a term like *mother* when to speak about her. The kinship terms are based on the biological connection and there is a distinction made between relatives of descent and relatives of marriage. Since Telugu community, which is a pure Dravidian race in South India, practiced the joint family system till 20th century, there needed particular terms for each relation to address someone in the same home without using a roundabout term. In the northern part of India too, where indo Aryan languages are spoken, there are particular terms for each relation because of being close to one another physically. On the other hand, English employs less terms to refer to relations.

II. KINSHIP TERMS

Roger Brown in his book ‘Words & Things’, referring to kinship, states that the discrepancy which is of utmost interest to Whorf is the case in which one language has a single category and a single name while another language has more than one category and more than one name. Murdock worked on kinship terminology in 250 societies and pointed out that the English word *aunt* is used to refer to four distinct biological relationships. In English there are no separate words for these four relationships whereas in other languages there are (for example, Telugu has four equivalents for *aunt*: *mēnatta* ‘ego’s father’s sister’, *pinni/cinnamma* ‘ego’s mother’s sister’, *kannamma/peddamma* ‘ego’s father’s elder brother’s wife or ego’s mother’s elder sister’, *atta* ‘ego’s mother’s brother’s wife or mother-in-law’.)

Morgan (1871) carried out an extensive research on kinship terminology and contributed various other systems. Morgan found that people in the Pacific regard all their cousins as brothers and sisters since they do not have a corresponding kinship term for ‘cousin’. On the other hand, he also learnt that in some parts of Africa, there are separate terms for each of the cousins and for each of the siblings of the parents.

To make an account of cultural differences, Morgan grouped the terminology into two:

- a. Descriptive systems of kinship terminology
- b. Classificatory system of kinship terminology

Descriptive system contains terms that refer to lineal relatives such as ‘great grandfather’, ‘grandfather’ and ‘father’ which are different from ‘uncle’ and ‘great uncle’. Coming to classificatory system of kinship

terminology, it contains collateral relatives such as ‘aunt’ or ‘cousin’. English maintains a distinction between lineal and collateral relatives just like Dravidian languages.’

The kinship relation includes not only the members of a family but also others outside the family. The kinship can be classified into the following three types.

- a. Primary kinship
- b. Secondary kinship
- c. Tertiary kinship

The direct relationship between two persons with no one at the intermediate level is called primary kinship. The terms that belong to this type are 1. The ego, 2. Mother, 3. Father, 4) Younger brother, 5) Elder brother, 6) Younger sister, 7) Elder sister 8) Husband/wife 9) son/daughter.

If there is another person involved at the intermediate level in the kinship term used, then the type is called secondary kinship. Terms such as daughter-in-law, son-in-law come under this type. When there are two persons at the intermediate level who are involved then such a type is called tertiary kinship.

III. KINSHIP TERMS IN TELUGU

Telugu, which is the most widespread Dravidian language, is well known for the joint families of its speakers. Because of this long practice for so many centuries, Telugu has a lot of kinship terms which refer to all relations without any ambiguity. The Telugu kinship terminology can be linguistically divided into two types: simple and compound. The terms such as *amma* ‘mother’ *nānna* ‘father’ and *annayya* ‘elder brother’ are simple terms. The terms such as *cinnānna* ‘uncle’, *pedanānna* ‘uncle’, *pinni/cinnamma* ‘aunty’, and *kannamma/peddamma* ‘aunty’ are compound terms. On the basis of the use they can be divided as terms of reference and terms of address. *talli* ‘mother’ *tandri* ‘father’ are terms of reference, whereas *amma* ‘mother’ and *nānna* ‘father’ are terms of address. It is, however, not possible to have corresponding terms of address for all terms of reference. For instance, *tammuḍu* ‘younger brother’ is actually a term of reference for which there is no corresponding term of address. Then, the same term is used to address.

<i>Term of reference</i>	<i>Term of address</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
<i>Annayya</i>	<i>Annā/annayya</i>	<i>Elder brother</i>
<i>tandri</i>	<i>Nānnā</i>	<i>Father</i>
<i>Talli</i>	<i>Ammā</i>	<i>Mother</i>
<i>Māmagāru</i>	<i>Māvayyā</i>	<i>Father-in-law</i>
<i>Attagāru</i>	<i>Attayyā</i>	<i>Mother-in-law</i>
<i>tammuḍu</i>	-	<i>Younger brother</i>
<i>Maradalu</i>	-	<i>Wife’s younger sister</i>
<i>Bāvamaridi</i>	-	<i>Wife’s younger brother</i>
<i>Vadina</i>	-	<i>Wife’s elder sister or elder brother’s wife.</i>

Now let us take up the terms ‘father’ and ‘mother’ and see how many terms are in use for each of them in Telugu and English and the context in which they are preferred.

Relationship: Ego’s father

Terms in English: Father, Daddy, Dad.

‘Father’ is a marker of formality and respect. It has also got semantic extension and thus is being used to mean ‘A Christian father’ as well. While ‘Daddy’ is a bit informal word for ‘father’ which also has got some semantic extension, ‘Dad’ is totally an informal expression.

Terms in Telugu: *nānnaḡāru*, *nāyanagāru*, *ayya*, *nāyana*, *nānna*, *tandrigāru*.

nānnaḡāru is a very formal expression often heard in dramatic setting and in the upper Hindu caste. The term *nāyanagāru* belongs to old Telugu which has a less usage now. *ayya* is more associated with lower caste society and it is also used as a honorific term to address someone who is superior. *nāyana* is used as a term of address by the lower caste and this expression has also come to mean sarcasm. The term *nānna* is the widely used

expression by all sections of the linguistic community. *tandrigāru* is more a term of reference than address. In literary and written Telugu, this term is the first choice to be made. *gāru* in Telugu is a marker of formality and respect which is used with all terms of kinship.

Relationship: Ego's mother

Terms in English: Mother, mummy, mom

While the term mother is a formal expression used as a term of reference, *mummy* is a widely used term of address. *mom* is quite informal.

Terms in Telugu: talligāru, ammagāru, amma.

While *talligāru* is more a term of reference than address and is a highly formal expression, *ammagāru* is both a term of address and a term of reference which is also a formal expression. *amma* is the term used most frequently to address ego's mother.

IV. CONCLUSION

Kinship terminology has been an interesting phenomenon in the area of sociolinguistics. The data taken and the analysis made in this paper are by no means exhaustive. There needs a good amount of research to be done on this terminology which in turn helps us to understand the nature of language. Kinship terms also play a vital role as cognates in reconstructing proto-language and thus a family of languages. This terminology is also helpful in knowing the culture and customs of a linguistic community which is called linguistic paleontology.

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