An Elaborate Focus on Kinship Terms

S. Ruby Ebenezar M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D., M.Ed., M.B.A., M.Phil. (HR)
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Human Interests in Various Fields

Human beings have varied needs, interests and attractions. Their interest and knowledge spread out to all fields like literature, music, painting, science, technology, economics, history, philosophy, astrology, geology, mathematic, computer and its various communicative technologies. In the modern world, human beings are not content with their intense knowledge in a single field. They try to gain the same depth of knowledge in other fields too. This is mainly due to the dependent nature of human life. Their present life is a bundle of knowledge, collected by their forefathers crossing the barriers of colour, caste, creed, country and so on. Human beings’ nature is to adapt themselves to all that is beautiful, potential, powerful and profitable. This is made possible through translation. Translation helps in the over-all growth of human life.
Translation is Creative Work

Translation is a creative work of art. It transforms one form of art into another. It has always been an adjunct of creative writing itself and an important discipline as it is very much in use in every sphere of activity. Translations are the best intermediaries between two different literatures. It is a very useful literary exercise, as a work written in one language is brought into another language. Translation is a matter of continuous sub-conscious interaction with the original, a matter of meditation and mediation. It is an art and is in like manner timeless, persistently reappearing as an inevitable response to stimuli felt by succeeding generations. It is the fact that fresh translations of any work of literary merit are welcome because the existing translation sounds antiquated, or are obsolescent as is the case with the Iliad and the Odyssey, which have been repeatedly translated by many into English. It will definitely lead to a better understanding. Translation enables one to see literature in simultaneity of time and space. However, we come to know that there are fashions in literature and changes in literary taste.

An Integrating Link

Translation serves as an integrating link between national and international aspects and a link between cultures. The qualitative importance of Translation activity throughout the world far outweighs its financial significance, and it is a subject of interest not only to linguists, professional and amateur translators and language teachers, but also to electronic engineers and mathematicians. There cannot be any dissemination of information among nations without translation, and it is solely responsible for transmission of ideas across language barriers.
Vocabulary in Language

Languages exhibit different concentrations of vocabulary depending upon the cultural focus of the society in question. Within any speech community, there are always specialists who have highly developed vocabularies for their areas of interest. For example: medicine, witchcraft and theology. Both in vocabulary and in the nature of segmentation the language specialists represent a highly specialized development.\(^1\) The interaction between languages will enrich the literature and culture of a land. This is possible only through Translation. Subramaniya Bharathi, a modern Tamil poet who was a radical freedom fighter, says,

‘Go in all directions and bring the treasures of knowledge’ and he also sings, the classics of the great masters of the world must be translated into Tamil and vice versa’.\(^2\)

Absence of Cultural Features

There is a difference between life in the past times, and life in the country now where we live. There are differences of geography and culture. When the people of the area know an idea then, choosing the right word or expression to refer to that idea is possible. But when the idea is unknown to the people, then the task is harder i.e., we have to find a way to communicate a completely new idea or we have to help people understand something that were previously outside their experience.


Cultural Distance

In translation whether structural or dynamic, one must always bear in mind three different types of relatedness as determined by the cultural distance between the codes (S. L. and T. L.) used to convey the messages. For example

✓ A translation may involve comparatively close related languages and cultures, that is, Frisian into English.

✓ In translation, the language may not be related even though the cultures are closely parallel. Here, the translator is called upon to make a good many formal shifts in the translation. The cultural similarities provide series of parallelism of content that make the text less difficult. For example, German into Hungarian.

✓ There are also certain rare situations in which the languages are related but are from highly diverse cultures. If languages are too closely related one is likely to be badly deceived by the superficial similarities with the result that translations done are often quite poor. For example, in the case of Hindi and English; Tamil and English. Though Hindi and English are from the same language family, their cultures in question are very different.

When the cultural distance between source and receptor codes is least, one should expect to encounter the least number of problems. In fact, differences between cultures cause many more severe complications for the translator than do differences in language structure.³
In order to communicate the meaning of the source text accurately and effectively in the receptor language, it is necessary to study carefully the culture of the area where the receptor language is spoken. Also keep alert to find ideas, customs and terms that could serve as a bridge to help people understand. In particular, study the meaning of words and expressions that refer to traditional beliefs and to the supernatural world.

**Anthropological Training**

Anthropology is the study of the whole life of any people, and of all people and cultural Anthropology is the study of the social or cultural life as contrasted with the biological. Cultural anthropology includes the study of cultural traits and complexes: what people eat, wear and build; how they organize themselves consciously and unconsciously into a working society; what they think about supernatural phenomena etc.. All these universal features are the proper study of cultural anthropology. In a more significant way than this, however, cultural anthropology is important for the perspective it gives, namely, the awareness of the factors, which have molded man in space and time.  

**Ethnology**

Ethnology is that branch of cultural anthropology which deals with the description of any one society. Ethnological analysis specializes in the description of one society at a time, while cultural anthropology might be considered as the pigeon-hole cabinet into which this material is catalogued and the relationships made apparent. Both types of studies, which of course are supplementary to each other, are necessary for the translator. He must be able to analyze accurately the behaviour patterns of the society in which he is working, but in order to do so he
must understand the functional significance of any phase of culture so that he may compare the culture item with the functional equivalence of the aboriginal society. The first requirement is a general understanding of the various phases of culture and some knowledge of the local content of these phases in the various cultures of the world.

The most important type of study in cultural anthropology, which the translator should undertake, concerns the problems of acculturation (adapting to a different culture). There are three lines of study, which he must follow:

- The problems of acculturation in the language community to which he goes.
- The adaptations, which he himself as a foreigner must make to the culture which he is entering,
- The adaptations, which the people are to make in accordance.

Without an understanding of these three problems and a decision as to policy, much of the translator’s energies will be spent beating the air.

**Role of Religious Knowledge**

The translator must have an adequate background study in every phase of culture especially in the study of religion. He must be instantly able to recognize such factors as magic, animism, fetishism, totemism, polytheism, idolatry, ancestor worship etc. The accuracy of the translation will be dependent upon the translator’s understanding of these factors in the indigenous culture. One must distinguish clearly between the folkways (the customs) and the morale of a people.
Almost every sentence of a translation will bear the mark of the translator’s anthropological training, for every sentence is a set of symbols for the behaviour and thought patterns of one culture translated into another set of symbols representing different behaviour and thought patterns.\(^5\)

**Analysis of the Ethnology**

One may learn many customs and beliefs of a people through constant association, without any special methodological approach. With such a casual or ‘amateur’ methodology, however, large areas of culture will not almost inevitably be overlooked; nor will one be able to analyze correctly the relationship of one feature of culture to another without some training and without carefully planned observation.

There are four methods which the translator may use to good advantage in a practical analysis of the ethnology of the people. They are: (i) the field observation, (ii) a diary notebook, (iii) ethnological traits check lists and (iv) analysis of texts containing ethnologically significant data.

The translator must learn to be all ears and eyes in every situation which he meets, for the translation covers almost every phase of human behaviour. For example, the instant the translator discovers that the people of his particular language group use a *dibble stick* for all planting of grain he should realize the difficulty which he will encounter in translating. A dibble stick is a long pointed stick used for making a hole in the ground into which seeds of corn or some other grains are dropped. People who use the *dibble stick* for planting will find it almost impossible to
conceive of the flagrant wastefulness of the sower in the famous parable who scattered the seed in an apparently profligate and senseless manner.

Many features of culture are spread out over many days and times, and in casual observation of people, no apparent set of relationships will appear. For example, certain days of the lunar month may be taboo in certain cultures. No one is likely to tell the translator about it, perhaps because it is more or less a secret which the people do not want to tell the translator; and even the informant may refuse or fail to do certain habitual things on particular days; so, all these facts should be noted.

The texts which have been taken by the translator are of inestimable value in analyzing the ethnology of a people. Almost every text has some significance. No detail is so insignificant as to justify its being overlooked if one is to understand thoroughly the life of a people.

As known to all, no language can exist unless it is steeped in the context of culture; no culture can exist which does not have the structure of natural language. Cultural problems arise due to the absence of Source Language (SL), or culture in the Target Language (TL). A particular cultural term in the SL may be completely absent in the TL, leading to the cultural problem. The words that commonly pose difficulties for literary translators are many. Here the focus is mainly upon the Cultural word especially on *Kinship Terms*.

**Kinship Terms**

Kinship terminologies include the terms of address used in different languages or communities for different relatives and the terms of reference used to identify the relationship of
these relatives to self, or to each other. The meaning of a lexical unit is an analysable whole. It could be decomposed into its minimal distinctive features or components which contrast with other components. For example: the senses of the words *man*, *woman*, *boy* and *girl* might be expressed in terms of the presence or absence of certain features characterizing them. These features can be written in a form of formula as given below

**Certain Features of Kinship Terms**

+ human = human + male = male

- human = animal. - male = female.

So the senses of the above words could be expressed in the following way

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<td>girl</td>
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**Figure 1**

The method of analysis called componential analysis has been mainly used for the purpose of describing sets of semantically related words. It was evolved by anthropological linguists for the study of relationships in the kinship terminology. The relationships in kinship have been analysed in terms of various features, like the following which account for their distinction.
(1) Sex of the relative – male or female. e.g. father and mother.

(2) Generation of the relative with Ego ( ) = Ego’s generation; + 1 = Ego’s parents’ generation; - 1 = Ego’s children’s generation.

(3) Consanguineal or blood relation vs Affinal relation or related by marriage.

(4) Lineal or non-lineal in a consanguineal relationship (father and son are lineal, uncle and nephew are not).

(5) Degree of collaterality among non-lineal relations based on the number of generations separating kinsmen from their common ancestors (Southworth and Daswani 1974, 203 – 204)

These features are language and culture specific and may be more or less in number in different languages depending on the nature of the organization of the kinship relationship in that language. Now we shall see in detail the Componential Analysis, foreseen from the book of Eugene A. Nida.

**Componential Analysis**

A technique, componential analysis may be employed to analyse the meaning of related series of words, provided that the relationships between terms are based on certain shared and contrastive features. Some of the more important and illustrative treatment of componential analysis of meaning are given in: Jakobson (1936); Lotz (1947); Wonderly (1952b); Lounsbury (1956); Mckaughan (1959); Austerlitz (1959); Wallace and Atkins (1960); Conklin (1962a).
Effective componential analysis depends upon two major features: (i) a well-defined corpus of related terms, e.g. a kinship system, a set of case endings and a pronominal series and (ii) the possibility of finding in non-linguistic behaviour (i.e. the distribution of these terms in the practical world) certain features which are determinate as to the basic contrasts between symbols in question. For example, *father* and *mother* in English share the component of generation older than ego (the person central to the kinship structure in question) but they differ as to sex.

The two components of generation and sex help us, therefore, to define the relationship of *ego* to *father* and *mother*. We can extend the number of kinship terms to include *grandmother, grandfather, grandson, granddaughter, son, daughter, uncle, aunt, nephew, niece, cousin* and so on. As we do so, it becomes evident that there are other important elements, e.g. descending generation in *son* and *daughter* (in contrast to ascending generation in father and mother) and linearity for uncles and aunts are obviously not in the same relationship to ego as are his own parents. These components of meaning are of course testable in the non-linguistic world, for we can confirm their validity in terms of biological relationships and marriage contracts. In making a componential analysis of any group of related words there are five basic steps. In this section the methodology worked out by Wallace and Atkins (1960) is primarily followed.

- Determining the limits of a ‘closed corpus’ of data, i.e. limiting the study to a well-defined set of words which have multi-dimensional relationships consisting of certain shared and contrastive features.

- Defining the terms as precisely as possible, on the basis of the objects involved. For example, for the English kinship term *uncle* we would specify *father’s brother, mother’s*
brother, father's father's brother and mother's father's brother and so on. For the sake of simplicity uncles and aunts by marriage are excluded.

✓ Identifying the distinctive features which define the various contrasts in meaning, e.g. differences of generation, of sex, of lineality and so on.

✓ Defining each term by means of the distinctive features. For example, father may be defined as the first ascending generation; male and lineal (i.e. direct line)

✓ Making an overall statement of the relationship between the distinctive features and the total number of symbols classified. This is often done by means of some ‘plotting’ or ‘mapping’ of the semantic space.

By applying these five steps to a limited set of English kinship terms in which all the persons are in some measure biologically related (including those relationships defined only by marriage), we may illustrate clearly what is involved in a componential analysis, as follows

- The English terms chosen are grandmother, grandfather, grandson, granddaughter, son, daughter, husband, wife, father-in-law, mother-in-law, brother-in-law, sister-in-law, son-in-law, daughter-in-law, uncle, aunt, nephew, niece and cousin.

- The Tamil terms chosen are grandmother (Pāṭṭi), grandfather (tāṭṭā), grandson (Pēṟaṉ), granddaughter (Pēṭṭi), son (maṇar), daughter (maṇal), husband (kaṇavaṉ), wife (maṇaivi), father-in-law (māmaṅār), mother-in-law (māmiyār), brother-in-law (koḻuntanār), sister-in-law (nārtanār, aṇṇi), son-in-law (marumakaṉ), daughter-in-law (nārtanār, aṇṇi), son-in-law (marumakaṉ), daughter-in-law
(marumakal), uncle (māmā), aunt (attai, citti), nephew, niece and cousin. There are no specific terms for nephew, niece and cousin in Tamil. These terms are on the basis of the interrelationships involved (using in the following list the standard abbreviations of Fa for father, Mo for mother, Br for brother, Si for sister, Hu for husband, Wi for wife, So for son, Da for daughter)

**Standard Abbreviations of the Kinship Terms**

- **grandfather**: FaFa, MoFa
- **uncle**: FaBr, MoBr, FaFaBr, MoFaBr, ...
- **grandmother**: FaMo, MoMo
- **aunt**: FaSi, MoSi, FaFaSi, MoFaSi, ...
- **Father**: Fa
- **cousin**: FaBrSo, FaBrDa, MoBrSo, MoBrDa,
- **Mother**: Mo
- **FaSiSo, FaSiDa, MoSiSo, MoSiDa,**
- **father-in-law**: HuFa, WiFa
- **nephew**: BrSo, SiSo, BrSoSo, SiSoSo,...
- **mother-in-law**: HuMo, WiMo
- **daughter-in-law**: MoBrDa, SoWi
- **niece**: BrDa, SiDa, BrDaDa, SiDaDa,...
- **son-in-law**: MoBrSo, DaHu
- **brother-in-law**: HuBr, WiBr
- **sister-in-law**: HuSi, WiSi

**Figure 2**

Such abbreviations are to be read as “father’s father” and “mother’s father”. All but the last element in such series is a so-called “genitive” or “possessive” form.
To determine the distinctive features of this set of words, we look for certain elements of meaning which are (a) shared by certain terms and (b) not shared by others. For example, we find that sex distinctions exist for all terms except cousin. A component of sex may then serve to divide all the other terms into two classes (male and female) and at the same time separate all these terms from cousin. On the other hand, a number of words differ primarily on the basis of generation. For example, grandfather, son, son-in-law, brother-in-law and grandson are all of the same sex, but differ essentially on the basis of being of different generations. On the other hand, cousin shows no such distinction.

If we test all the possible interrelationships for a minimal number of distinctive features which will serve to define all these kinship terms, we end with the following three classes of components

a. Sex (S): male (s 1) and female (s 2).

b. Generation (G): two generations above ego (g 1), one generation above ego (g 2), ego’s own generation (g 3), one generation below ego (g 4), two generation below ego (g 5).

c. Lineality may be described in three degrees: (L 1), in which persons involved are direct ancestors or descendants of ego, and (L 2) (Co-lineals) and (L 3) (Ab-lineals), representing two successive degrees of less direct lineality.

If we define the meanings of kinship terms on the basis of these componential features of sex, generation, and lineality, we obtain the following type of description.
Kinship Terms on the Basis of Componential Features

\[
\text{grandfather} : \ s 1 \ g 1 \ L 1 \\
\text{grandmother} : \ s 2 \ g 1 \ L 1 \\
\text{father} : \ s 1 \ g 2 \ L 1 \quad \text{father-in-law} : \ s 1 \ g 2 \ L 3 \\
\text{mother} : \ s 2 \ g 2 \ L 1 \quad \text{mother-in-law} : \ s 2 \ g 2 \ L 3 \\
\text{brother} : \ s 1 \ g 3 \ L 2 \quad \text{brother-in-law} : \ s 1 \ g 3 \ L 3 \\
\text{sister} : \ s 2 \ g 3 \ L 2 \quad \text{sister-in-law} : \ s 2 \ g 3 \ L 3 \\
\text{son} : \ s 1 \ g 4 \ L 1 \quad \text{son-in-law} : \ s 1 \ g 4-5 \ L 3 \\
\text{daughter} : \ s 2 \ g 4 \ L 1 \quad \text{daughter-in-law} : \ s 2 \ g 4-5 \ L 3 \\
\text{grandson} : \ s 1 \ g 5 \ L 1 \\
\text{granddaughter} : \ s 2 \ g 5 \ L 1 \\
\text{uncle} : \ s 1 \ g 1-2 \ L 2 \\
\text{aunt} : \ s 2 \ g 1-2 \ L 2 \\
\text{cousin} : \ s \ g \ L 3 \\
\text{nephew} : \ s 1 \ g 4 – 5 \ L 2 \\
\text{niece} : \ s 2 \ g 4 – 5 \ L 2
\]

Figure 3
It should be noted that in the above definition of terms by componential features it is necessary to list only three features for each ‘definition’. At times, of course, a feature, e.g. $s$ and $g$ in the definition of cousin, has no accompanying numeral, for there is no subdivision of sexual or generational distinctiveness. In some instances, a feature includes two different grades, as for example, $g$ 1-2 in uncle and aunt. The interrelationships of the various componential features may be conveniently described in two different ways: (i) by plotting the occurrences or non-occurrences of such features and (ii) by mapping such differences in a kind of paradigmatic framework. The first type of description is illustrated in Figure (a) (p. 85). Even a brief glance at Figure (a) indicates that there are certain systematic differences between the kinship terms. Both differences and similarities are more clearly shown by mapping semantic relationships as in Figure (b).
Systematic Differences between the Kinship Terms

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Table 1

gf – grandfather  so – son;  gs – grandson  u – uncle

gm – grandmother  d – daughter  gd – granddaughter  a – aunt
f – father

m – mother

b – brother

si – sister

**Semantic Relationships – Both Differences and Similarities between The Kinship Terms**

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**Table 2**
Important advantages of such a componential analysis of meanings are as follows

- Attention is drawn to the distinctive features, which underlie the contrasts, without the distraction of many additional features, which are not so basic to the functioning of the system.

- Unsuspected features or distinctions in meaning are often discovered in the process of a thorough application of such a system.

- By componential analysis the functioning of a system is revealed in its simplest form.

Componential structuring and mapping may of course take on various forms, depending upon the types of defining features and their multi-dimensional relationships. For example, Tamil has been made a componential analysis of the pronominal structure.

Though componential analysis of meaning has many important advantages over a number of other techniques, one must recognize that such a procedure has a number of significant built-in limitations

- It is only applicable to restricted series of terms, which have certain shared and contrastic features.

- By analyzing only the minimal features of distinctiveness, many supplementary and connotative elements of meaning are disregarded, e.g. the emotive meaning in mother in contrast with cousin.
Componential analysis tends to define more what a term does not mean that what it does mean, for the distinctive features are really ways by which territories of meaning are ‘separated off’ from one another, not means by which one ‘fills’ such areas with meaning.

Though the componential features are fundamental to the functioning of a system; they are often not the focal elements in the consciousness of speakers. In other words, native speakers of a language will usually recognize the validity of componential features. However, they tend rather to think about areas of meaning and the classes of items, which fit into such areas, rather than about the componential features, which define the contrasts.

As we all know, we do not find one-on-one corresponding terms between the kinship terms of any two languages. Some of the kinship terms of a language may not have equivalents in another language, or a single word of one language may have many equivalents in another language. Further, we observe that every language has a set of kinship terms that are ambiguous. But this set differs from language to language. Because of this, a term, which is ambiguous in one language, may not have an equivalent that is also ambiguous in another language. Problems are therefore, bound to arise in translation because of all these differences. For instance, Tamil does not have equivalents for ‘divorcee’, ‘widower’, ‘fiance’ and fiancee’. On the other hand, English does not have equivalents for akkā (elder sister), appag (elder brother), tampi (younger brother), and tanukai (younger sister) and many other kinship terms in Tamil.
The term ‘uncle’ has three equivalents in Tamil. These are cittaPPā (father’s younger brother or mother’s younger sister’s husband), PeriyaPPā (father’s elder brother or mother’s elder sister’s husband) and māmā (father’s sister’s husband; mother’s elder or younger brother). Likewise, the word ‘aunt’ has three equivalents in Tamil. These are Periyammā (mother’s elder sister or father’s elder brother’s wife), citti (mother’s younger sister or father’s younger brother’s wife) and ‘attai’ (father’s sister or mother’s brother’s wife). Similarly, the words attai and māmā have two equivalents each in English. These are ‘aunt’ and ‘mother-in-law’ and ‘uncle’ and ‘father-in-law’ respectively. The words like ‘aunt’, ‘uncle’, ‘brother-in-law’ and ‘sister-in-law’ are ambiguous in English. In Tamil, the ambiguous kinship terms are attai, māmā; Periyammā, PeriyaPPā and citti, cittaPPā. In English, the words, ‘parent’ and ‘cousin’ are neutral as far as sex of the person is concerned.

For example, if the S. L. author has used kinship terms like grandmother [Pāṭṭi], grandson [Peŗan], mother [Periyammā], aunt [citti, māmi – brahmin dialect], daughter-in-law [māṭṭu Peņ – brahmin dialect], sister-in-law [nārtanār, aņņi, mathini, maņņi - brahmin dialect], mother-in-law [māmiyār], father-in-law [māmaṇār], son, child - [Piḷḷai].

Nida in his book, GWML gives a valuable suggestion to gather information for cultural terms. He says that translation helpers are indispensable; they have mastered the rich resources of the native language and the culture. Once they understand what is meant by the receptor
language phrase, they can usually give a satisfactory equivalent, for languages are not as barren and poverty-stricken as some have imagined. However, one must make certain that these helpers do understand fully.\(^1\) For this problem, the translator has to transfer the SL term into the TL term leaving its contextual meaning to emerge from the co-text or to explain it in the footnote.

There are situations, however, in which culturally strange objects must be retained because of their symbolic values. In such a condition, it may be necessary to provide some fuller explanation in a glossary or marginal note.

Thus, every word in a language is embedded in its socio-cultural particularity. It may be possible to find a TL equivalent for a term in the SL but it cannot be said that this word has the same social and cultural values as the SL word. Even in a single language for that matter, synonyms do not create the same kind of response in the reader. The theory of language universals is on this hypothesis that there is no area of meaning encompassed by one language that cannot be conveyed by using another language. Yet, it cannot be maintained that perfect translation is always possible.
End Notes

1 Nida’s *Toward A Science of Translating*, (The Netherlands, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1964) p. 51
5 Ibid., p. 58 – 62.
6 Ibid, p. 67 - 69
8 Ibid., p. 73 - 74.
10 Ibid., p. 84.
11 Ibid., p. 85.
12 Ibid., p. 85.

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S. Ruby Ebenezar, M.A.,M.Phil.,Ph.D.,M.Ed., M.B.A., M.Phil. (HR)
Assistant Professor of English
Quaid - E - Millath College for Women
Anna Salai
Chennai - 600 002.
Tamil Nadu, India rubybenezel@yahoo.co.in, rubybenezars@gmail.com
Language in India www.languageinindia.com
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S. Ruby Ebenezar M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D., M.Ed., M.B.A., M. Phil. (HR)
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