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## KINSHIP TERMINOLOGY: COMPARISONS IN ENGLISH AND CROATIAN KINSHIP SYSTEMS

### Abstract

Kinship terminology refers to the words used in a specific culture to describe a specific system of familial relationships. It includes 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 the speaker, listener or to each other. The idea of kinship is therefore understood as universal to all of humankind. Societies in different parts of the world and using different languages may share the same basic terminology patterns; in such cases, one can very easily translate the kinship terms of one language into another, although connotations may vary. Using limited examples of kinship terminology corpora, the aim of this paper is to analyze and compare the various differences and similarities of such kinship terminology in both English and Croatian language, specifically concerning the historical and regional area of West Herzegovina.

*Key words:* anthropology, Croatian, English, family, kinship, kinship terms, sociolinguistics

### Introduction

All societies have terms that are used to address and to refer to one's kin. Collectively, such terms of references used by societal members form what most anthropologists refer to as *kinship terminology*. By kinship terminology is therefore meant the terms used to refer to, or express, the corpus of culturally recognized kinship relations a particular individual can have to another individual in a particular society.

Societies in different parts of the world and using different languages may share the same basic terminology patterns; in such cases, one can very easily translate the kinship terms of one language into another, although connotations

may vary. In this paper, using examples from both English and Croatian language, we will analyze and compare differences and similarities of kinship terminology as well as the kinship system in both languages. For the purposes of this paper, we limited the corpora of comparison to general English terms of kinship with the historical and regional area of West Herzegovina where Croatian language is used.

## **A Comparative Approach to the English and Croatian Kinship Systems**

Within a kinship terminology, there is a single term corresponding to each culturally recognized kinship relationship, though two individuals may have more than a single kinship relationship between them. The corpus of kinship terminology is typically divided into two parts: cosanguineal kin terms based on the assumption that the primary kinship relations are determined through biological procreation (kin relations are therefore usually said to be blood relations) and affinal kin terms which designate kinship relations determined through marriage. It must be noted, however, that in many societies, kin relations can be, and usually are, established by such criteria other than procreation and marriage, such as adoption, godparent relationship, co-residence etc, forming therefore another category of fictive kinship. The aforementioned division is therefore not completely satisfactory.

The systematic study of kinship terminology can be traced back to the seminal works of H. Lewis Morgan, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and G. Peter Murdock in the mid-50s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Morgan made the first distinction to refer to terminologies which systematically included collateral with lineal genealogical relations as *classificatory terminologies* while all others which distinguished such relations, as we will see in the paper, were labeled as *descriptive terminologies* (Morgan, p.105-111). Murdock's extensive, comparative work led him to develop a six part typology still used today, named after a society whose terminology is an example of that given type; these are Eskimo, Hawaiian, Sudanese, Iroquois, Crow and Omaha, respectively (Murdock, p.81).

Coincidentally, the typology most frequently encountered in Western societies, and to which both English and Croatian belong to, is the aforementioned Eskimo typology. It places no distinction between patrilineal and matrilineal relatives, instead focusing on differences in kinship distance (the closer the relative, the more distinguished). The system also emphasizes the *nuclear* family (or immediate family), identifying directly only the mother, father, brother, and sister (*lineal relatives*). All other relatives are grouped together into categories. It uses both classificatory and descriptive terms, differentiating between

gender, generation, *lineal relatives* (kin relatives in the direct line of descent), and *collateral relatives* (kin relatives not in the direct line of descent).

The comparison of English and Croatian descriptive kinship terms as used in the nuclear family is as follows: for the English term *mother* we have equivalent terms such as *majka, majčica, majkica, mama, mamica, manja, mater, mati, nana, ama, hama*; for the English term *father* we have equivalent terms such as *otac, tata, tajo, oco, očo, ćaća, ćačko, dadan, dadica, dado, dakica, dako, apa, babo, baban, babuka, babuša, pape*; for the English term *son* we have equivalent terms such as *sin, sinan, sinčić*; for the English term *daughter* we have equivalent terms such as *bika, ćer, ćerca, kćer, kćerca, kći*; for the English term *brother* we have equivalent terms such as *baća, bačo, bajica, bajić, bracan, braco, bracuka, brajan, brajen, brato, brajo, brajko, bralan, brale, bralo, brat, bratac, burazer*; and lastly for the English term *sister* we have equivalent terms such as *seja, seka, sekana, sekica, sela, sestra, neca, nena, nene, nenica, nenka* and *nenkica* (Zovko, p. 123-37). If we include grandparents as a somewhat extended part of the nuclear family the list then expands: for the English term *grandfather* we have equivalent terms such as *bakac, dedo, deduška, djed, djedak, djedica, djedo, djekan, did, didan, dido, didušk, đedo, đeko*, while for the English term *grandmother* we have equivalent terms such as *baba, babikaća, baka, bakica, dedimica, heba, mala baba, velika baba, nena*.

It should be noted that not all of the aforementioned terms are strictly used interchangeably given the difference in dialect throughout the area we cover in this paper; for example, the term *pape* for *father* is almost exclusively used toward the southern-southwestern end of the region, more closely associated with the coastal areas of Dalmatia; which is not surprising given the etymology of the word, coming from Italian *pappa*. Moving into the interior, one can expect Turkish loanwords to become more prevalent, as in use of *babo* for *father*, derived from Turkish *baba*, or colloquial terms *buraz* / *burazer* used for the term *brother*, also derived from Turkish *birader* (Dupanović, p.597). Likewise, some of the terms might fall out of use due to their perceived 'age' or 'prestige'; the term *mater* for *mother* can be considered either appropriate or pejorative, depending on various factors.

It is particularly notable to point out the numerical quantity for certain terms; the term *father* has eighteen equivalent terms, the term *brother* has seventeen while the term *grandfather* has fifteen. We can attribute that to the fact that fatherhood and brotherhood, essentially male-to-male kinship relationships, were, or still are, an expected important norms in a highly patriarchal and arguably homosocial society, hence the many names for these relationships. Notably, the term *velika baba* (lit. 'great [in physical sense] grandmother)

denotes the father's mother while the term *mala baba* denotes the mother's mother. (Zovko, p. 123-37).

Both English and Croatian use specific descriptive terms if a particular child shares a lineal relationship with only a single parent in their nuclear family. Generally, when a woman has children with more than one man or a man has children with more than one woman, the aforementioned kinship system refers to such children who share only one parent with another sibling as *half-brothers* or *half-sisters*. For children who do not share biological or adoptive parents, English uses the term *stepbrother* or *stepsister* to refer to their new relationship with each other when one of their biological parents marries one of the other child's biological parents. Compared to Croatian, one may use the terms *polubrat* or *polusestra* in the former case, while the latter usually makes no difference in everyday speech, although historical terms such as *inobrat* or *inosestra* do occur (Zovko, p. 123-137). Albeit not fully equivalent, the terms *pobratim* or *posestra* may also be used.

Any person (other than the biological parent of a child) who marries the parent of that child becomes the *stepparent* of the child, either the *stepmother* or *stepfather*. The same terms generally apply to children adopted into a family as to children born into the family. Croatian terms can be *maćeha*, *maćiha*, *maćija*, *maćuha*, *pomajka*, *polumajka*, and *polumajkica* or *očuh*, *očuh*, *poočim*, respectively (Zovko, p. 123-137).

Typically, societies with conjugal families also favor neolocal residence; thus upon marriage a person separates from the nuclear family of their childhood (*family of orientation*) and forms a new nuclear family (*family of procreation*). This practice means that members of one's own nuclear family once functioned as members of another nuclear family, or may one day become members of another nuclear family. Members of the nuclear families of members of one's own (former) nuclear family may be classed either as *lineal* or as *collateral*. Kin who regard them as lineal refer to them in terms that build on the terms used within the nuclear family, such as *grandfather*, *grandmother*, *grandson* or *granddaughter*. As we have already listed the equivalents of the terms *grandfather* and *grandmother*, we will not list them again; however, equivalent terms for grandson and granddaughter are usually *unuče*, *unuk* and *unuć*, *unuka*, respectively.

Regarding collateral relatives, more classificatory terms appear, usually terms that do not build on terms used within the nuclear family. These collateral relatives can actually encompass relatively large categories; for example, the English term *uncle* can refer to a father's brother, a mother's brother, a husband of a father's sister or a husband of a mother's sister. On the other hand, Croatian uses a variety of classificatory terms. Respectively, the equivalents for a father's

brother are *adže*, *amidža*, *stric*, *strijo*, *strikan*, *strike*, *strinan*; for a mother's brother are *daidža*, *dajidža*, *dajo*, *ujac*, *ujak*, *ujko*, *ujo*; for both father's sister's husband and mother's sister's husband the usual term is *tetak* (Zovko, p.123-137). The situation is similar in regards to the English term *aunt*; the equivalents are *tetka*, *balduza* and *hala* for either a father's sister or a mother's sister; while for the wife of either a father's or a mother's brother the terms are *amidž-inica*, *dajinica*, *strina* and *uja*, *ujna*, *una*, respectively. The English term *nephew* has general equivalents of *nećak*, *nećo*, *pećak* but for a sister's son the diminutive *sestrić* may be used, similarly to the brother's son in the term *sinovac*, while the wife's sister's son or wife's brother's son would be either *tetić* or *daidžić*. On the other hand, husband's brother's son and husband's sister's son both use the general term *nećak*. The terms for the English term *niece* also follow a similar pattern: the general term in Croatian might be *neća*, *nećaka*, *nećakinja*, *nećica* but a sister's daughter is *sestrična*, *sestrička*, *sestrana*, while a brother's daughter is *bratana*, *bratička*, *bratična*, *bratućeda*; the daughter of a wife's sister may be called *tetična*, while daughter of a husband's sister may be called *zaovična* or *zaovka*. Again, the daughter of husband's brother uses the general term.

If additional generations need to be mentioned, or more simply, when an individual's collateral relatives belong to the same generation as grandparents or grandchildren, English uses the prefix *grand-* to modify these terms; although in casual usage in American English a *grandaunt* may be referred to as a *great-aunt*. Similarly to the terms grandparent or grandchildren, if more generations are involved, the prefix becomes *greatgrand-*, adding an additional *great-* for each additional generation. In Croatian the prefix *pra-* is used similarly although for every two such prefixes an expression *šukun* or *čukun* (cf. Latin *secundus*) can also be used (Anić; Goldstein, p.563). Therefore, an English term *greatgrandfather* would therefore be translated as the term *pradjed*, while *greatgreatgrandfather* would be *prapradjed* as well as *šukundjed*.

The term *cousin* seems to be the most classificatory term both in English and Croatian; it generally refers to the children of aunts and uncles. The equivalent terms would be *rođak* for male cousins and *rođica*, *rođakinja* for female cousins, with the literal meaning of '(person) being related to' (Anić, p.492). However, many of the already used terms can be used, namely *amidžić*, *bratić*, *stričević*, *tetić*, *daidžić* for male cousins and *sestrična*, *sestrička*, *sestrana*, *amidžić-ka*, *bratana*, *bratička*, *bratična*, *bratućeda*, *daidžićka*, *tetična*, *zaovična*, *zaovka*, respectively, depending on the actual kinship with the cousin's parents (Zovko, p.123-37). Cousins can furthermore be distinguished by the actual degree of collaterality and by generation. For example, two persons of the same generation who share a grandparent count as *first cousins* (one degree of collaterality); if they share a greatgrandparent they count as second cousins (two degrees of

collaterality) and so on. The equivalent in Croatian is somewhat different; one degree of collaterality, expressed as 'koljeno' applies to siblings because they are one step below their parents but they obviously cannot be cousins, therefore you can only be third, fourth, fifth etc. cousins depending on how far both cousins are related to the person that is their common ancestor.

There are some differences regarding kinship terminology of higher generation in relation to the individual. In English, if two persons share an ancestor, one as a grandchild and the other as a great-grandchild of that same individual, then the two descendants are classified as *first cousins once removed* (that is, removed by one generation); if the shared ancestor figures as the grandfather of one individual while being the great-great-grandfather of the other at the same time, then the individuals class as *first cousins twice removed* (again, removed by two generations), and so on. There is nothing similar to this in the Croatian terminology where cousins of an older generation, one's parent's first cousins, though equivalent to the term first cousins once removed, often get classified with terms *pratetka* and *pratetak*, for example.

Likewise, a person may refer to close friends of one's parents as *aunt* or *uncle*, or may refer to close friends as *brother* or *sister*, using the practice of *fictive kinship*. The same is applied to the term *kum*, which encompasses both English words *best man* and *godfather*, and can also describe just a close male friendship along with actual kinship terms. Similarly, one may call any young woman *snaha* or *nevista*, meaning bride in English, although there may be no kinship between the persons mentioned.

Although Old English had extensive descriptive terms, Modern English is also different from Croatian in marking kinship relationship by marriage, except for the *wife / husband* dynamic, with the tag *-in-law*, in general meaning 'related by marriage' (Dupanović, p.594). The mother and father of one's spouse thus become one's mother-in-law or father-in-law, which has equivalent terms *punica*, *svekrva* and *punac*, *svekar*, respectively; the female spouse of one's child becomes one's daughter-in-law or *snaha*, *nevjest*, *neva*, *nevica*, *nevka*; finally, the male spouse of one's child becomes one's son-in-law or *zet*, *zetazet*, *domazet*; the latter term specifically describes a son-in-law who becomes part of the spouse's nuclear family. The English term *sister-in-law*, somewhat economically refers to three essentially different relationships, either the wife of one's sibling or the sister of one's spouse or the wife of one's spouse's sibling. Croatian, however, retains specific affinal terms for each of these, including *deveruša*, *djeveruša*, *jetrva*, *svaja*, *svastika*, *zaova*, *zaovke*, *zava*, depending on actual relation to the individual. The term *brother-in-law* expresses a similar ambiguity and so the equivalents may be *dever*, *djever*, *šura*, *šurjak*, *šurnjak*,

šurnjo. (Zovko, p.123-37) No special affinal terms exist for the rest of one's spouse's family.

## Conclusion

Both English and Croatian belong to the same, Indo-European language family, which makes not only their languages but likewise their kinship systems similar to each other. The main difference seems to be how, through its development and history, English has lost many descriptive kinship terms for affinal kin, while Croatian has not just retained many but still uses many and various descriptive kinship terms for affinal kin. The reason for this could be simply the exposure to various other languages through history; English in its development of kinship terminology mostly took influences from Romance languages, namely French, while Croatian, being at the focal point of Western culture border, was exposed to many more languages such as Italian, German, Hungarian and Turkish. Such richness of descriptive kinship terms served its sociolinguistic purpose in maintaining a more cohesive and precise understanding of kinship relations, especially among males, and paradoxically in spite of external influences. Notably, even though the phenomenon of kinship is universal to all of humanity, and two languages may share common kinship systems, equivalent kinship terms may end up denoting different classes of relatives.

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# TERMINOLOGIJA SRODSTVA: USPOREDBA ENGLESKOG I HRVATSKOG SUSTAVA SRODSTVA

## Sažetak

Terminologija srodstva odnosi se na riječi koje se koriste u određenoj kulturi kako bi se opisao specifičan sustav rodbinskih veza. Obuhvaća nazive koji se u različitim jezicima ili zajednicama koriste za različite srodnike kao i izraze koji opisuju odnos srodnika s govornikom, slušateljem ili jednih s drugima. Ideja srodstva se stoga smatra univerzalnom cijelom čovječanstvu. Društva u različitim dijelovima svijeta koja govore različitim jezicima povremeno dijele iste terminološke obrasce; u takvim slučajevima, moguće je lako prevesti izraze srodstva s jednog jezika u drugi, iako konotacije mogu varirati. Koristeći ograničen broj izraza koji opisuju srodstvo, cilj ovog rada je analizirati i usporediti različitosti i sličnosti takvih izraza u engleskom i hrvatskom jeziku, s posebnim osvrtom na povijesno i regionalno područje zapadne Hercegovine.

*Ključne riječi:* antropologija, hrvatski, engleski, obitelj, srodstvo, izrazi koji opisuju srodstvo, sociolingvistika