A SOCIO-SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF KINSHIP TERMS IN ENGLISH, IGBO AND YORUBA LANGUAGES

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&

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Abstract

This study carries out a socio-semantic analysis of kinship terms in English, Igbo and Yoruba. The English language is an Indo-European language of West Germanic language family (Comrie 1987, p.68). Igbo and Yoruba languages belong to Kwa language sub-family, under Niger-Kordofanian language family (Ibid: 961-970). It is erroneously believed that English language is richer in kinship terms than Igbo and Yoruba languages. This paper argues on the contrary that though English is widely spoken among the Igbo and the Yoruba, their languages also have equivalents of English kinship terms, but the cultural and social milieu did not permit the usages of the kinship terms. This study is descriptive. The paper adopts a comparative approach in the analysis of the data for the study in order to find out the areas of convergence and divergence in kinship terms in English, Igbo and Yoruba languages. The methods of data collection include the English kinship terms discovered from available reading materials, radio, television and oral interviews conducted with the elderly native speakers of Yoruba and personal observations of the researchers as native speakers of Igbo, one of the languages under study. The result of the study shows that none of the languages is proficient than the other in the use of kinship terms. This paper concludes that kinship terms in English are hardly synonymous with those of Igbo and Yoruba because of differences in the cultural and family systems among Igbo, Yoruba and English.

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Introduction

Kinship terms encompass the relatedness of people in a family as result of having a similar origin. Languages just like people of common background particularly share affinity with one another in terms of structures or features as well as in language use, whereas the reverse is the case with languages or people from different origin. For instance, there is a bit more of close affinity between Italian and Spanish, between British and America and between Yoruba and Igbo in terms of feature or structure and in the area of language use because of their relatedness to each other respectively. Part of variation that exits between languages or speakers of languages arises as a result of differences in their subjective, psychological, social and cosmological orientations.

The world comprises of different people with diverse tribes and tongues. All these people share the same human characteristics, but do not behave the same way. Hence they differ in their approach to life. One of the several ways by which these differences manifest is in their respective cultural heritage such as kinship terms.

Culture, an aspect of behaviour peculiar to Homosapiens, together with material objects is used as an integral part of this behavior. Specifically, culture consists of language, ideas, beliefs, customs, codes, institution, tools, techniques, works of arts, rituals, ceremonies etc. (The Encyclopedia Britannica, 2010 p. 874). Similarly, Webster (1983, p.444) says "culture is the concepts, habits, skills, arts, instruments, institutions etc, of a given people in a given period.

Avruch (1998, p.6) , quoting Tyler (1870, p.1), states that "culture… is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society".

In the same vein, Adler (1997, p.14), citing Kroeber & Kluckhohn (1952, p.181), informs that culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiment in artifacts, the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture system may on the one hand be considered as products of action, on the other, as conditional elements of

future action. According to Avruch 1998, p. 17), culture consists of the derivatives of experience, more or less organized, learned or created by the individuals of a population, including those images or encodements and their interpretations (meanings) transmitted from past generations, from contemporaries, or formed by individuals themselves.

Hotstede (1994, p.5) opines that culture is the collective programming of the word which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another.

Spencer-Oatey (2008, p.3) also says that culture is a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientated life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people and that influence (but do not determine) each member's behaviour and his/her interpretations of the 'meaning' of other people's behaviour.

Matsumoto (1996, p.16) intones that culture is a set of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviour shared by a group of people, but different for each individual, communicated from one generation to the next. Emeana (2001, p.43), as cited in Nigeria Cultural Policy, also defined culture as the totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempt to meet the challenges of living in their environment which gives order and meaning to their social, political, economic, aesthetic and religious norms and modes of organization, thus, distinguishing them from their neighbours. A kinship term is one of such aspects of human endeavours that depict similarities and differences in the languages and cultures of the English, Igbo and Yoruba people. The connection between people and the way they use language and express their culture cannot be separated, and such goes a long way to inform the characteristics of such language users. This paper attempts to give account of what a kinship term is to English, Igbo and Yoruba people. It also points out their areas of convergence and divergence. The methodology used for this study includes reading materials that discussed an aspect of kinship especially in English, observation and interview.

Semantics and Semantic Field

Several scholars appear to agree that semantics is the study of meaning. Such scholars include Ogden and Richards (1923), Fodor and

Katz (1964), Lyons (1968, 1977, 1981), Ullman (1975), Palmer (1976), Kampson (1979), Oluikpe (1979), Cruse (1990), Yule (1996), etc.

Semantics indicates how most words have many meanings. Palmer (1976, p.1) sees "semantics as the technical term used to refer to the study of meaning". In the same vein, Hornby (1972, p.789) argues that semantics is the branch of linguistics which is concerned with studying the meaning of words or sentences. Lyons (1977) adds that semantics is generally defined as the study of meaning. Semantics is central to the study of communication and since communication becomes more and more a crucial factor in social organization, the need to understand it comes more and more pressing. Semantics is also at the centre of the study of the human mind, thought process, cognition and conceptualization (Leech 1989, p.9).

Katz (1972, p.1) goes further to explain that the theory of semantics is concerned with the semantic structure of natural language in general. It is not just a theory about the semantic structure of a particular language, neither is it about individual meaning. Leech (1969, p.5) maintains that semantics aims to explain and describe the meaning in natural language generally.

Agbedo (2000, p.149) explains that semantics explicates the ways in which words, and sentences of various grammatical constructions are used and understood by nature and fluent speakers of a given language.

Some words in a given language combine to share common meanings and such combination of words results or culminate to what is known as 'semantic field'

A semantic field according to Agbedo (2000, p. 158), is a structured group of words with related meanings that perhaps has some sort of distinctive life of its own.

Anagbogu, Mba and Eme (2001, p.143), calling it "lexical word", say that they are concrete words which have inherent denotative meanings.

A semantic theory otherwise called lexical field theory, refers to words in a given language, which are grouped into fields, comprising a set of lexical items whose meanings have something in common. According to this theory, a given set of lexical items whose meanings share appreciable similarities constitute semantic field. For instance, "building", "boat", "colour" and kinship terms constitute different semantic fields, "story building", "bungalow", "villa", "chalet" etc., all constitute a semantic field, considering similar lexical import that refers to building terms.. Another of such includes "ferry", "canoe", "ship", etc. and boat terms which constitute a semantic terms. The theory recognizes the fact that lexical fields are constituted according to the structure of any given language. This perhaps explains the preponderance of building, boat and kinship terms in English language, against what obtains in Igbo and Yoruba languages.

The development of the lexical field theory was influenced by Saussurean structuralism. According to de Saussure's structuralist principle, a language system consists, at every level, of sets of paradigmatic choices arranged along the syntagmatic axis according to definite principles of combination. This principle reflects Meillet's dictum that a language is a relational structure in which everything hangs together with everything else. For de Saussure, linguistic units do not possess inherent significance in isolation but acquire their value only by virtue of their relationships, paradigmatic and syntagmatic, with other units in the system.

Every language, noted Saussure, is in principle a unique system, different from all others and should be analyzed in its own terms. The uniqueness of language has relevance for lexical semantics in the sense that there is lack of congruence between any two languages. The fact that each language packages its meaning differently both syntagmatically and paradigmatically explains lexical incongruence between two languages i.e. the lack of 'semantic fit' between words from two different languages. While it is possible to translate "green", "black", "red", "yellow", white into Igbo as "akwukwo", "ndu", "akwukwo ndu", "oji", "obara obara", "edo edo", 'ocha', the same cannot be said of such other terms such as "violet", "burgundy", "Almond", "Ash grey", "pink".

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts the comparative approach. Comparative method was developed over the 19th century. The pioneer scholars of comparative paradigm include Rasmus Rask and Karl Vemer and the

German scholar Jacob Grimm. Comparative method encompasses a technique for studying the development of languages, by carrying out a feature-by-feature comparison of two or more languages either with common or varied ancestors. Ordinarily, this method is used to reconstruct prehistoric phases of languages to fill in the gaps in the historical record of a language, and other linguistic systems and confirm or refute hypothesized relationships between languages.

Comparative sociolinguistics research developed from issues surrounding the African America Vernacular English (AAVE). This longstanding debate provides a conundrum for the comparative sociolinguistic endeavor as researchers from all areas of the field attempt to reconstruct likely characteristics of the ancestor of AAVE. Comparative sociolinguistics, in particular, is concerned with the relationship of linguistic variation in one body of material to another. This requires a two-fold approach. First, is a methodology that enables the many different influences on linguistic variation to be disentangled through systematic examination of its patterns. Second, is an approach that situates and explains linguistic variation through comparison of like features in related forms.

The comparative method in historical linguistics is based on shared correspondences of linguistic features or comparative reconstruction. The application of this method to sociolinguistics, however, began with Weinreich et. al's (1968) introduction of the notion of structured heterogeneity in the speech community, which was later developed by Labov (1982). A comparative approach had been adopted for tracking historical connections between related varieties and subsequently it has been implicitly or explicitly adopted by numerous scholars in a wide range of applications: for making transatlantic connections, for contrasting real data set in apparent time, for finding out areas of convergence and divergence between two or more languages. This paper adopts comparative method to enable us do feature by feature comparison of English, Igbo and Yoruba kinship terms to reveal their areas of convergence and divergence.

Kinship Terms in the Three Languages

1.   <u>Kinship Terms in English</u>
         Father
         Mother
         Grandmother
         Grandfather
         Husband
         Wife
         Brother
         Sister
         Uncle
         Aunt
         Daughter
         Son
         Cousin
         Nephew
         Niece
         Mother-in-law
         Father-in-law
         Brother-in-law
         Sister-in-law
         Son-in-law
         Daughter-in-law
         Step mother
         Step father
         Step sister
         Step brother
         Grand child

2. Kinship Terms in Igbo

	Nna	-	'Father'
	Nne	-	'Mother'
Nneochie {	Nne nne	-	'Grandmother (from the maternal side)'
	Nne nna	-	'Grandmother (from the paternal side)'
Nnaochie {	Nna nne	-	'Grandfather (from the maternal side)'
	Nna nna	-	'Grandfather (from the paternal side)'
	Di	-	'Husband'
	Nwunye	-	'Wife'
	Nwanne nwoke	-	'Brother'
	Nwanne nwaanyi	-	'Sister'
Nneochie {	Nwanne nne nke nwaanyi	-	'Aunt'
	Nwanne nna nke nwaanyi	-	'Aunt'
Nnaochie {	Nwanne nne nke nwoke	-	'Uncle'
	Nwanne nna nke nwoke	-	'Uncle'

Nwa nwaanyi	-	'Daughter'
Nwa nwoke	-	'Son'
Nwanne nne nke nwaanyi	-	'Aunt (Female sibling of one's mother)'
Nwanne nna nke nwaanyi	-	'Aunt (Female sibling of one's father)'
Nwanne nna nke nwoke	-	'Uncle (Male sibling of one's father)'
Nwanne nne nke nwoke	-	'Uncle (Male sibling of one's mother)'
Nwa nwanne nke nwoke	-	'Nephew'
Nwa nwanne nke nwaanyi	-	'Niece'
Nwa nwanna	-	'Cousin'

Nwunye nna	-	'Step mother'
Nne di	-	'Mother-in-law'
Nna di	-	'Father –in-law'
Nwanne di nke nwoke	-	'Brother -in-law'
Nwanne di nke nwaanyi	-	'Sister-in-law'
Di nwa	-	'Son-in-law'
Nwunye nwa	-	'Daughter-in-law'
Nwa nwa	-	Grandchild

3. Kinship Terms in Yorùbà

Bàbá	-	'Father'
Ìyá	-	'Mother'
Ìyá àgbà	-	'Grandmother'
Bàbá àgbà	-	'Grandfather'
Oko	-	'Husband'
Ìyàwó	-	'Wife'
Ègbón okùnrin	-	'Elder brother'
Àbúrò okùnrin	-	Younger brother
Omokùnrin	-	'Son'
Omobìnrin	-	'Daughter'
Ìyá Oko	-	'Mother-in-law'
Bàbá Oko	-	'Father-in-law'
Ègbón obìnrin	-	'Elder sister'
Àbúrò obìnrin	-	'Younger sister'
Ègbón bàbá mi obìnrin	-	'Aunt (senior) (paternal)'
Àbúrò bàbá mi obìnrin	-	'Aunt (paternal) (junior)'
Ègbón bàbá mi okùnrin	-	'Uncle (paternal) (senior)'
Àbúrò bàbá mi okùnrin	-	'Uncle (paternal) (junior)'
Ègbón màmá mi obìnrin	-	'Aunt (maternal) (senior)'
Ègbón màmá mi okùnrin	-	'Uncle (maternal) (senior)'
Ègbón màmá mi okùnrin	-	'Uncle (maternal) junior)'
oko mama	-	'Step-father'
Iyale mama	-	'Step –mother(senior)'
Iyawo mama	-	'Step-mother (junior)'
Omokunrin iyale	-	'Step –son(from senior wife)'
Omokunrin iyawo	-	'Step-son (from junior wife)'
Omobinrin iyale	-	'Step-daughter (from senior wife)'
Omobinrin iyawo	-	'Step-daughter (from junior wife)'
Omobinrin baba	-	'Step-sister'
Omokunrin baba	-	'Step-brother'
Omo omo mi	-	'Grandchild'

Table 1: Comparison of Kinship Terms among the three Languages

English	Yorùbá	Igbo
Father	Bàbá	Nna
Mother	Ìyá	Nne
Husband	Oko	Di
Wife	Ìyàwó	Nwunye
Sister (elder)	Ègbón obìnrin	Nwanne m nwaanyi nke nnukwu
Brother (elder)	Ègbón okùnrin	Nwanne m nwoke nke nnukwu
Sister (junior)	Àbúrò obìnrin	Nwanne m nwaanyi nke obere
Brother (Junior)	Àbúrò okùnrin	Nwanne m nwoke nke obere
Daughter	Omobìnrin	Nwa nwaanyi
Son	Omokùnrin	Nwa nwoke
Father-in-law	Bàbá-oko	Nna di
Mother-in-law	Ìyá-oko	Nne di
Aunt (paternal) senior	Ègbón bàbá mi obìnrin	Nneochie
Nephew (from the maternal) senior sibling	Omokùnrin ègbón mi okùnrin	Nwadiala
Cousins (1st and 2nd)	Omobinrin / Omokunrin egbon baba Omobinrin / Omokunrin aburo baba Omobinrin / Omokunrin egbon mama Omobinrin/ Omokunrin aburo mama	Nwa nwanne nna nke nwoke or Nwa nwanne nna nke nwannyi. Nwa nwanne nne nke nwoke or Nwa nwanne nne nke nwananyi.
Grandmother	Ìyá-àgbà	Nneochie

(paternal)		
Grandfather (paternal)	Bàbá-àgbà	Nnaochie
Grandmother (maternal)	Iyá-àgbà	Nneochie
Grandfather (maternal)	Bàbá-àgbà	Nnaochie
Uncle (father's sibling)	Àbúrò bàbá mi okùnrin	Nwanne nne nke woke / Nwanne nna nke nwoke.
Aunt (father's sibling) (senior)	Ègbón bàbá mi obìnrin	Nwanne nne nke nwaanyi / Nwanne nna nke nwaanyi
Son-in-law	Oko omo	Ogo nwoke
Daughter-in-law	Ìyàwó omo bàbá mi	Nwunye
Uncle paternal (senior)	Ègbón bàbá mi	Nwanne nwoke nna nke nnukwo
Uncle (maternal) senior	Ègbón màmá baba màmá mi	Nnwanne nwoke nne nke nnuke
Nephew (from the senior female sibling)	Omokùnrin àbúrò mi obìnrin	Nwa nwoke nwanne nke nwoke
Nephew (from the junior female sibling)	Omokùnrin àbúrò mi okùnrin	Nwa nwaanyi nwanne nke nwoke nke obere
Nephew (from the junior male sibling)		Nwadiala
Aunt maternal (senior)	Ègbón obìnrin màmá màmá mi	Nwanne nne nke nwaanyi nke nnukwu
Aunt maternal (junior)	Àbúrò obìn rin màmá màmá mi	Nwanne nne nke nwannyi obere
Uncle (mother's sibling (senior seniors)	Ègbón màmá mi àbúrò obìnrin màmá mi	Nwanne nne nke nwoke nke nnukwu
Niece (from senior	Omobìnrin	Nwanne nne nke nwoke

brother)	ègbón mi okùnrin	nke obere or Nwadiala
Niece (from junior brother)	Omobìnrin àbúrò mi okùnrin	Nwa nwaanyi nwanne nwoke nke nnukwu or Nwadiala
Niece (from senior sibling)	Omobìnrin ègbón mo obìnrin	Nwa nwaanyi nwanne nwaanyi nke nnukwu
Niece (from junior sibling)	Omobìnrin àbúrò mi obìnrin	Nwa nwaanyi nwanne nwaanyi, nke obere
Cousins (1st and 2nd)	Omokùnrin ègbón bàbá	Nwa nwanne nna nke nwoke
Cousins (paternal junior)	Omokùnrin àbúrò bàbá mi	Nwa nwanne nna nke nwoke
Cousins (maternal senior female)	Omobìnrin ègbón màmá mi	Nwa nwanne nne nke nwaanyi
Cousins (maternal junior male)	Omobìnrin àbúrò màmá mi	Nwa nwanne nne nke nwoke
Step-mother (senior)	Ìyálé màmá mi	Nwunye di nne nke nnukwu
Step-mother (junior)	Ìyàwó màmá mi	Nwunye di nne nke obere
Step son (from senior wife)	Omokùnrin Ìyálé	Nwa nwoke nwuye di nn enke nnukwu
Step son (junior wife)	Omokùnrin Ìyàwó	Nwa nwoke nwunye di nne nke obere
Step daughter (senior wife)	Omobìnrin Ìyálé	Nwa nwaanyi nwunye di nne nke nnukwu
Step daughter (junior wife)	Omobìnrin Ìyàwó	Nwa nwaanyi nwunye di nne nkeobere
Step father	Oko màmá	Di nne
Step sister	Omobìnrin bàbá	Nwa nwaanyi nwunye di nne
Step brother	Omokùnrin bàbá	Nwa nwoke nwunye di nne

As shown in table (1), it can be observed that kinship terms exist in English, Igbo and Yorùbà languages. However, Igbo and Yorùbà kinship terms are more elaborate than those of English. In spite of the numerous ways Igbo and Yoruba languages express their kinship terms, it is important to mention that some of the kinship terms in Igbo and Yorùbà are hardly applicable as a result of cultural constraints binding on the native speakers of Igbo and Yorùbà. This means to say that the cultural affiliation that binds the Yoruba and Igbo people respectively made it almost impossible for them to regard anyone born in the same family with them as a separate entity, They see each other as one, and this explains why a Yoruba or an Igbo child for example, refers to his or her step-father as his or her father instead of otherwise. As a result, even though kinship terms exist in the languages (Igbo and Yorùbà), they are not actually used in real life situation. In essence, those terms are substituted for, by some approximate terms in the languages as exemplified in table 2.

Table 2: Substitution Table

English	Approximate Igbo and Yorùbà Terms		
	Yorùbá	Igbó	Gloss
Father-in-law Step father	Bàbá	Nna	Father
Step mother Mother-in-law	Ìyá	Nne	Mother
Uncle (paternal) (maternal)	Bàbá	Nnaochie	father/ grandfather
Aunt (paternal) (maternal)	Ìyá	Nneochie	father/ grandmother
Uncle (one's mother's sibling)	Ègbón momo okùnrin	Nnwanne nwoke	Brother male
Aunt (one's mother's and female Sister sibling)	Ègbón mi obìnrin	Nwanne nwaanyi	Sister sibling

Cousin (1st & 2nd male) Nephew	Ègbón / àbúrò okùnrin	Nnwanne nwoke	Brother
Cousin (female) (Niece) Step son	Ègbón / Àbúrò obìnrin Omokùnrin	Nwanne nwaanyi Nwa nwoke	Sister Son
Step-daughter	Omobìnrin	Nwa nwaanyi	Daughter
Step sister	Ègbón/àbúrò Obìnrin	Nwanne nwaanyi	Sister
Step-brother	Ègbón/Àbúrò Okùnrin	Nwanne nwoke	Brother
Grandchild	Omo mi	Nwa	My child

Based on the foregoing on table 2, Igbo and Yorùbà people substitute the foregoing terms not because they do not have terms for them as shown in table 1, but as a result of the nature of their family orientation system i.e. Igbo and Yorùbà run extended family system. As culture demands, there is unbreakable and inseparable relationship that exists between both blood-related and marriage-related members of a household. As a result of 'we-feeling'' relationship that exists between the family members, what belongs to one, belongs to another, and what good or bad that happens to one indirectly happens to another. No wonder in Igbo and Yorùbà family, both mother, father, children, grandchildren, great grandchildren etc. live together as one big and happy family. Even when a family member has the privilege to build a house outside the main family house, he/she still finds it difficult to break the affinity, because it is either the person does not build far away from the main house, or the person visits often (in the ease where the land is far away from the main house), or some of his extended members visits at will or even live with him without him complaining.

Findings of the Study

In the process of the analysis of the kinship terms in English, Igbo and Yoruba it was found out that:

i.   The three languages under investigation have kinship terms.

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ii.   The three languages have a name for every kinship term. This means that none of the languages is less or greater in the acquisition of kinship terms.

iii.   English language is more specific in their kinship terms whereas Igbo and Yoruba kinship terms are opaque though more generalized.

iv.   As a result of the culture and family systems of the Igbo and the Yoruba, some of their kinship terms are approximated. For instance, cousin, male nephew, step brother and approximated for 'brother' in Yoruba and Igbo. This portrays that there is no distance in the family relationship in Igbo and Yoruba unlike in English where the nuclear immediate family is the basic concern.

Conclusion

This paper looks at the existence of kinship terms in English, Igbo and Yoruba. It is discovered that though English kinship terms are more popular and indeed overshadowed those of Igbo and Yoruba, it has been proved in the paper that the Igbo and Yoruba languages also have unlimited kinship terms but their culture prohibits their usages, therefore threatens their existence.

This study shows that every language has its system, which is unique to it. Looking at kinship terms in the three languages, each of them has names for every kinship terms in the language. However, the culture of the Igbo and Yoruba native speakers play a significant role in determining what obtains in the communicative pattern of the two languages as far as kinship terms is concerned. There exist similarities among the kinship terms of English, Igbo and Yoruba. Nevertheless, unlike in English the family orientation system in Igbo and Yoruba demands indispensable bend in the way certain kinship terms operate in the two languages (Igbo and Yoruba).

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