

A Comparative Study of Chinese and Igbo Relationship Names

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Abstract:

This paper is an attempt to comparatively analyze Chinese and Igbo (Nigeria) relationship names. Because of the differences in their historical cultures, this paper chose to discuss each one differently and then come to conclusion. This is to help readers get to understand the message better. It therefore discusses Chinese case first before that of the Igbo-Nigeria. The paper found that Chinese has more relationship names than Igbo. So, whereas Chinese has not less than 369 relationship names, the Igbo of Nigeria has not more than 69. The reason is not farfetched. The Chinese fought so many wars and were scattered. Therefore, they adopt all these kinship names to differentiate every kin. The Igbo, on the other hand, lived in villages and had no wars as Chinese had. Every village was autonomous and independent till the coming of the west. Therefore, everyone in the community knew one another. There was no need for them therefore, to have as many separate kin names as Chinese. However, it was observed that both cultures

recognize extended family system. In recognition of this, the paper therefore feels that there is need for mutual exchange of cultures between the two.

Introduction:

This paper aims to present the system of Chinese and Igbo relationship terminologies. The terminologies are treated as constituted by morphemes as basic units. The definitions as description of all constituent morphemes are provided in terms of their semantic functions. The semantic function of each specific morpheme is found to be related to its position in the terminological sequences. The final goal of this paper is to see how Chinese relationship in comparison to Igbo relationship universe is made and classified by the linguistic process of morphemic composition. In doing this, they are going to be discussed separately and at the end of all, there will be a kind of summary statement on the two distinct linguistic practices.

Chinese Relationship Names:

Chinese relationship terminology has remained in literature for more than two thousand years since the existence of *Erh-Ya* between 200BC and 300BC. Many other documents have subsequently been accumulated at different periods of time. It has been found that modern Chinese scholars have continued this addition by editing terms that have already existed (Chen and Shryock 1932, Feng, 1936:37, Chao 1956, Cheng 1976). Although the data are rich, no method of formal analysis, neither componential analysis (Goodenough 1956, 1965) nor extensionist analysis has been successfully applied to Chinese kin

terms. Most previous studies in Chinese kin terms were descriptive in nature.

Some of these studies deal with the problem of typology and evolution of the system (Feng 1937: 38-43; Ruey 1958, 1972). Some take on different types of terms and their functions (Fei 1936-37, Hsu 1942, Chao 1956) while some are studies on the effect of other socio-cultural institutions on the terminology (Chen and Shryock 1932; Feng 1937:32-63, 1941). Other studies are on the special phenomenon of teknonymy (Feng 1936; Ruey 1949, 1955; Chao 1956) yet, the structure of the system itself has drawn little attention. Although some scholars (Chen and Shryock 1932:643-651, Feng 1937: 8-11) have spoken of the elements of the system, they did not further explore the problems of how the system is constructed by such elements and how elements are related to one another within the system.

If one looks more closely, it becomes more vivid that lack of a successful formal analysis of Chinese kinship semantics is due to the neglect of the fact that terms are composed morphologically. Both Componential analysis and extensionist analysis are in the study of meaning. Such analysis was never on kin terms per se or into the internal structure of terms and relationship between terms. In other words, the morphological consideration of semantics has never been taken seriously. One can say that the failure of recognizing morphemes as constituent units in Chinese kin terms results from the less generality and less applicability of the traditional approaches to kinship semantics. The argument behind this criticism is that, the basic consumption underlying componential analysis and extensionist analysis that a kin term refers to more than one kin type, does not

hold for the Chinese case. It happens that in general, a Chinese kin term refers only to one kin type. This is the reason why Chinese kin terms are numerous. If one carefully examines the numerous Chinese kin terms, one would find out that they are, in fact, composed of a few morphemes selected from a small list. This paper is to describe the primary meanings of all morphemes that make up terms and show how they contribute to the meaning of terms.

Relationship Morphemes:

Each Chinese kin term is composed of one or more characters. Usually each character is a morpheme. But, some morphemes may contain more than one character. Except for a few terms containing only one morpheme, most Chinese kin terms are compound terms. They are composed of two or more (at most four) morphemes. All morphemes that appear in kin terms can be called kinship morphemes. There are only 34 kinship morphemes applied in all 355 kin terms. However, we are not going to be involved in characterization of the terms since most of our readers, may not understand Chinese characters. In its place, we chose to use pinyin which is a kind of anglicization of Chinese way of writing.

Among all 34 morphemes, free morphemes and bound morphemes can be distinguished. Free morphemes are independent in meaning, in other words, each can mean certain kinship relationship by itself. But not all free morphemes are kin terms. Some free morphemes need to combine with another one in formulating a term. Among all 23 free morphemes, only 14 can be used as one morpheme term. These are fu (father), tsu (son), mu (mother), nu (daughter),

hsiug (elder brother), ti (younger brother), chieh (elder sister), Mei (younger sister), fu (husband), ch'i (wife), sao (elder brother's wife), chih (brother's child), wai-sheng (sister's child), and sun (grandchild). Other free morphemes, including tsu (grand parent), po (father's elder brother), shu (father's younger brother), ku (father's sister), chiu (mother's brother), i (mother's sister), yo (wife's parent), hsu (daughter's husband), and fu (son's wife), cannot stand alone as kin terms in literary usage. They must accompany another morpheme or morphemes to form a term. In other words, these morphemes possess complete meaning as free morphemes, yet they are not complete terms by themselves.

Focal Morphemes:

Focal morpheme should be seen here as a root morpheme among all constituent morphemes of a term, from which the meaning of the term is derived. By this definition, one can find 21 focal morphemes existing in the set of 355 kin terms. These focal morphemes generate all terms through the addition of other morphemes. Each focal morpheme can generate a set of terms. The set of terms generated from a focal morpheme form a kinship category in which they share common semantic components. The meaning which is shared by all terms of the same set is called the categorical meaning. In the following, the primary meaning and the categorical meaning of each focal morpheme are described. The actual range of relationships in each kinship category generated from a focal morpheme is also presented.

***Tsu*:** grandparent: This focal morpheme generates all terms for ascending two or more generation above ego. The terms include those for the father's side and

the mother's side. On the father's side, the terms include ascending relatives up to the fourth generation. However, it only goes up to the third ascending generation on the mother's side. Also, while there are terms for the sibling of father's father's father, there are no terms for mother's father's father and of mother's mother's mother.

1. **Po**: father's elder brother: This focal morpheme generates all terms for male collateral members one generation above on the father's side who are older than one's father, as well as the wives of these male relatives.
2. **Shu**: father's younger brother: This focal morpheme generates all terms for male collateral members one generation above in the father's line who are younger than one's father, as well as the wives.
3. **Ku**: father's sister: This focal morpheme generates all terms for female collateral members one generation above in the father's line, as well as the husbands of these female relatives.
4. **Chiu**: mother's brother: This focal morpheme generates all terms for male collateral members one generation above in the mother's line, as well as their wives.
5. **I**: mother's sister :This focal morpheme generates all terms for female collateral members one generation above in the mother's line, as well as their husbands
6. **Yo**: wife's parents: This focal morpheme generates all terms for wife's relatives one generation above, including actually wife's parents, wife's parents' sibling and their spouses.
7. **Hsiung**: elder brother: This focal morpheme generates all terms for male relatives in ego's

- (wife's) generation who are older than ego (wife).
8. **Sao**: elder brother's wife: This focal morpheme generates all terms for wives of all relatives in the category generated by hsiung as described above.
 9. **Ti**: younger brother: This focal morpheme generates all terms for male relatives in ego's (wife's) generation who are younger than ego (wife), as well as their wives.
 10. **Chieh**: elder sister: This focal morpheme generates all terms for female relatives in ego's (wife's) generation who are older than ego (wife), as well as their husbands
 11. **Mei**: Younger sister: This focal morpheme generates all terms for female relatives in ego's (wife's) generation who are younger than ego (wife), as well as their husbands.
 12. **Tzu**: son : This focal morpheme generates only two terms one for son and one for son's wife.
 13. **Nu**: daughter: This focal morpheme generates only two terms, one for daughter and one for daughter's husband.
 14. **Chih**: brother's child: This focal morpheme generates all the terms for relatives in the first descending generation through the male's line.
 15. **Wai-sheng**: Sister's child: This focal morpheme generates all the terms for relatives in the first descending generation through the female's line.
 16. **Sun**: grandchild: This focal morpheme generates all terms for relatives two or more generations below ego..

In addition to the 16 focal morphemes described above, four local morphemes also exist. Yet, these four local morphemes generate no terms except for themselves. In other words, they do not have categorical meanings. Their primary meanings

are listed as follows:

17. Fu: father
18. Mu: mother
19. Fu: husband
20. Ch'i: wife

Igbo Kin Names:

The analysis of Igbo kin terms presents several complications, as they do not easily conform to a standard pattern. They partially exemplify an Omaha system insofar as they involve the application of a skewing rule that identifies members of a person's mother's patrilineage as a special category. However two other principles are at work: a strong emphasis on generational and seniority distinctions that reflects a Hawaiian system and a distinction between basic descent lines that is peculiar to the Igbo terminology. In spite of its complexity, the Igbo system provides an interesting basis for an understanding of how kin terms reflect and reveal basic principles of social organization.

The basic feature of the Igbo system (Ardener 1954) that is the most readily apparent is the Hawaiian generational pattern in which all of Ego's relatives of the same generation are placed into a single category. Referring to one's parent's generation, one uses essentially the same term *nna* for one's father, father's brother, and mother's brother, and similarly classifies one's mother, mother's sister and father's sister as *nne or oche* among Omabala Igbo. (The terms *nna/nne ukwu* are basically variants on the *nna/nne* theme and can be glossed as "big father/mother", thus implying seniority.) The seniority principle is also applied to younger siblings

of Ego's parents who are actually given brother/sister terms that tend to emphasize similarities and differences in chronological age. This reflects a basic emphasis in Igbo social organization that is incorporated into a formal system of age sets and age grades that needs to be investigated. The generational principle is also apparent in Ego's own generation where alternative forms of the basic sibling terms, **nwa nna/nwa nne** (father's child/mother's child) is applied to a wide range of relatives. Broad generational identification is further apparent in Ego's children's generation in the application of the **nwa** (child) term. Seniority is marked in the special terms for Ego's oldest son (**okpara**) and daughter (**ada**). These designation mark special age based statuses. The **okpara** is Ego's main heir, and both he and the **ada** perform leadership functions within the immediate family and the wider descent group. A second look at the terms applied in Ego's own generation indicates the significance of two other factors (polygamy and complementary filiations), which in combination create a delineation and contrast of three major descent groups:

1. The children born of a single mother, the **umunne**, literally mother's children;
2. Ego's patrilineage, his **umunna** (father's children); and
3. Ego's mother's patrilineage, his **umunne** (this term cannot be reduced to components).

Igbo Terms According to Patrilineal Descent

The **umunne** includes Ego and his full brothers and sisters (individually references as **nwa nne**), who,

as children of a single mother, form a special domestic and social subunit within the larger patrilineal family. They also comprised the core of an actual or potential patrilineal segment that will assume increasing importance over time as membership grows on the basis of patrilineal descent. (Note that inclusion in this unit is extended only to the children of its male members). The *umunna* includes Ego's half brothers and sisters (individually referenced as *nwa nna*) who are born to Ego's father's wives other than his mother. He is less close to them than to his full siblings, and interacts with them in terms of inclusion with a broader patrilineal group that also incorporates a large group of relatives descended from an ancestor several generations removed. The *umunne* comprises the relatives of Ego's mother's patrilineage, with whom, as this paper has noted in the previous unit, he has an extremely special relationship involving joking, indulgence, and even protection from punishment within his own patrilineage. This pattern is partially marked in the terminology by the extension of the more intimate *nwa nne* sibling term to cousins in this group. However, the group is also distinguished from Ego's more immediate maternal group, the *umunne*, in two ways. Firstly, in spite of the fact that Ego uses several terms to mark different relatives within his mother's patrilineage, they use only a single term for him, *okele*. (You can observe this usage in the application of this term to all of the children of the women in Ego's own patrilineage, i.e., his sisters' and daughters' children for whom he is an *umunne* member.) Secondly, the head of his mother's patrilineal receives a special term, *nna ochie*, which originally marks his mother's father, but which eventually passes on down the lineage to Ego's

mother's brother, and then mother's brother's son, after their deaths in much the same way as the *agya* (father) term is inherited the Crow based matrilineal Akan system.

Igbo Terms, Skewing Rule

Both the succession of the *nnā ochie* status and the corresponding use of the *okele* term reflect the application of the Omaha skewing rule to accomplish its main purpose, to identify the members of a person's mother's patrilineal group. A third relevant term, *nne ochie*, or 'oche' has a somewhat more complex dynamic. It is originally applied to Ego's mother's mother. It follows a succession rule from the original relative to the wives of subsequent *nnā ochie*, i.e. from mother-in-law to daughter -in-law, and not through patrilineally related women, the more usual pattern in an Omaha system. This peculiarity makes some sense in terms of the Igbo territorial system. Since the rule of village exogamy specifies that all the *umunne's* women must move to other villages upon marriage, the many block of women resident in the groups territory, and who are actually or potentially *nnā ochie*, have married in and are related within it as affine. Insofar as it is basically an Omaha system, the Igbo terms indicate similarities to Dani kin terms.

Terms Due To Marriage Relationships:

As it has also been the custom of the Igbo that a man of age should go outside their blood relation to choose a wife or wives for himself, this practice make extension of their relationship to a person or group of

persons or family that they have never related with. Among the Western culturists, there are different terms being realized as a result of extension due to addition of morphemes to the word in-law (ego) thus for the groom: father in-law, mother in-law, sister in-law, brother in-law, cousin in-law et cetera (representing his wife's father, mother, sisters, brothers, and cousins). On the side of the bride, her husband's father, mother, sisters, brothers, cousins are her father in-law, mother in-law, sister in law, brother in-law and cousin in-law respectively (Western way). To the Igbo, there generalization of all these terms is it from any side of the coin; every one is *oggo (in-law)*. But if all of them are together and any one of them from any side, wants to recognize a particular *oggo*, he or she simply adds *nwoke* (male) or *nwaanyi* (female) and as such there are *oggo m nwoke* (my male in-law) and *ogo m nwaanyi* (my female in-law) and sometimes, if there are many of the males and females, of course, the speaker has to indicate which one by pointing or collaborating with sign. However, it should be noted here, that the usage of the term *ogo* is not an explicit term of any age or gender. Another term worthy of note is seniority term among the Igbo. Among the Igbo, It is an exclusive duty of the younger age to respect and honour their elder ones. The younger ones therefore, do not call the elderly ones by their names. So, in that honour, a younger person has to call his or her elder person *Dee* or *deede* (elder brother) and *daa* or *daada* (elder sister). For more understanding where they are many, it is better to add the receiver's or respondent's name after the terms. On the other hand, to show closer relationship, probably blood relation, both old and young call each other *òmóó* meaning *nwanne m* (my blood relation).

But for the elder respondent who is not related as such to the caller, the caller who is younger, has to call him or her by his or her child's name such as *nne Obi* (Obi's mother) or *nna Ekene* (Ekene's father).

For further information, we may give equivalent names of Chinese kin terms in Igbo thus:

SN	CHINESE KIN NAME	IGBO KIN NAME	ENGLISH
1	Fu	Nna	Father
2	Tsu	okpala/okpara	Son
3	Mu	Nne	Mother
4	Nu	Ada	Daughter
5	Hsiug	de de	elder brother
6	Ti	Nwnne nwoke nta	younger brother
7	Chieh	Da da	elder sister
8	Mei	Nwancee nwaanyi nta	younger sister
9	Fu	Di	Husband
10	ch'i	Nwunye	Wife
11	Sao	Nwunye m	elder brother's wife
12	Chih	Nwa nna a	brother's child
13	wai-sheng	Nwa ada	sister's child
14	Sun	Nwa nwa	Grandchild
15	tsu	Nna ochie or oche	grand parent
16	po	Nna oche	father's elder brother

17	shu	Nwanne nna nwoke nke nta	father's younger brother
18	ku	Nwanne nne nwaanyi	father's sister
19	chiu	Nwanne nne nwoke	mother's brother
20	i	Nwanne nne nwaanyi	mother's sister
21	yo	ogo	wife's parent
22	Hsu	ogo	daughter's husband
23	fu	Nwunye nwa	son's wife

Conclusion:

Coming up with comparative analysis of kinship terminologies of two distinct cultures such as Chinese and Igbo is not quite easy. This is as a result of their different socio-cultural and historical backgrounds. Whereas Igbo, a people among West African Sub-region belonging to the ***Kwa*** group of languages, could not boast of having fought many wars such as China, could not move out of their immediate environs at the early stage of history, the ties at their fourth relationships and above are not all that strong despite their practice of extended family system. They therefore have fewer terms for their kins and most a times differ from one community to another. This is because every Igbo community was independent of another prior to the coming of the West. This is why their kinship terms are quite complicating. However, this paper managed to discuss the standard ones which are quite few in number.

On the other hand, to understand how the

Chinese people classify kinship relationships with hundreds of terms, this study provided an analysis of reducing terms to morphemes. The data was drawn from Feng's collection of 369 literary kin terms. Unlike traditional approaches to kinship semantics that emphasized the relationship between a term and its referents, this paper pinpoints the relationship between morphemes. The focal morpheme is found to be a generator of any terminology sequence. Terms generated from the same focal morpheme constitute a kinship category that is confined to within a certain range of relationships which shares common semantic components.

The morphemes added to focal morpheme include at most two prefixes and one suffix in sequence. The prefix functions to specify a certain type of relationship within the kinship category, and the suffix functions to specify the sex or the spouse. These semantic functions are expressed by extension rules.

In this paper, marking is used to explain the morphological expansion and semantic extension in Chinese kin terms. Six marking principles demonstrate how Chinese people conceptually categorize their kinship relationships and how the culture favours certain categories instead of others by means of language. The analysis of Chinese literary kin terms shows that relatives within two generations, patrilineal kin, siblings, and male descendants are the linguistically unmarked categories favoured by the culture.

In conclusion therefore, it was observed that Chinese kinship relation is more extensive than that of the Igbo hence, the greater number of kin terms among Chinese than among the Igbo. In our candid

opinion, we suggest that the two cultures despite their socio-cultural differences still have a lot to share as each of them recognizes extended family systems hence their kinship terms differing from the western type.

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