

CHAPTER 12

ASPECTS OF AKAN AND EWE KINSHIP TERMINOLOGIES¹

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The compiling of kinship terms is not regarded in a good number of modern professional linguistic circles as the most fashionable of exercises. This is partially because until relatively recently, the linguist has tended to be more involved in the nature of language than in the use of language. Labelling terminologies of specific languages have been of interest mainly in so far as they shed light on the systematic structuring of the whole or part of the language.

Thus, for example, my own interest in Ewe kinship terms has been fostered through a study of Ewe grammar. In this language, the genitival relation or possession is usually expressed in the noun phrase thus: noun phrase plus fe plus noun phrase, e.g.

Kofi fe agble - 'Kofi's farm'

Ama fe awu - 'Ama's dress',

in which the morpheme fe is the formal item expounding possession, and the relationship of the first noun head (Kofi or Ama) to the second (agble or awu, respectively), is that of 'possessor' to 'possessed'.

When however, the noun head of the possessed noun phrase is expounded the sub-class of the noun word class, labelled as relational nouns (n_r), the morpheme fe does not occur in the structure and the two noun phrases are just juxtaposed, e.g.

Kofi nɔvi - 'Kofi's sibling'

Ama srɔ - 'Ama's husband'.¹

It so happens that this sub-class of relational nouns include what we call kinship terms in Ewe. From the grammatical point of view, they are interesting primarily because their occurrence in an utterance is of syntactic relevance (i.e. the delition of fe among

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1. This paper although comparative in content has been included in the section of Ewe papers since it was discussed at the seminar and afterwards in relation to the Ewe contributions.

other things). From this perspective, it is purely coincidental that these same sets of lexical items interest the social anthropologist.

However, the general linguist is also interested in the use of language to convey meaning and to designate significant elements in the natural and socio-cultural environment of its speakers. As a student of human behaviour, he is also obliged to relate the nature of language to its function in the behaviour pattern of the individual as well as of the group. The social scientist says that kinship relationships form a very vital element in the understanding of the individual and the society. Who is the linguist to neglect the linguistic mapping of these relationships in the languages we study?

This introductory outline attempts a simple parallel listing of Akan and Ewe kinship terms, sibling names and some special verbs used together with some of the kinship nouns. Wherever possible, etymological notes are furnished. These are, in fact, regarded as more significant indicators of the concepts, views and intentions which underlie the use of the terms than their equivalent English glosses. No attempt has been made to compare and contrast the terms beyond the parallel presentation and the etymological and literary translations. The more sophisticated studies of the roles which the individuals who bear these names and titles play, the relationships and attitudes they are expected to exhibit and those which they, in fact, exhibit, have all been left for the competent treatment of the specialist. What is undertaken here is simply the presentation to the social scientist of linguistic data in the form of lexical items which Akan and Ewe speech communities find necessary, and probably sufficient, for talking about their kinsmen and women. These are 'emic'² in the sense that they are terms for relationships that the society as an integrated unit finds significant enough to establish. Each language's listing is monocultural in the sense that items in it function within a single cultural structure: There are instances of borrowing. But each is vital in itself, being a reflection of the way in which that society has organised its human relationships. It is suggested however that together, the two lists can form the basis

of useful comparative work

For the purpose of focusing on the subject, it might be useful to ask: 'What are the basic terms of kinship in Akan and Ewe? What words or collection of words are used in distinguishing kinsmen and women from those who are not, and within the circle of kinship, what terms are available for distinguishing shades of relationship?

In Akan, my information is that abusua³, which is traced only through matrilineal descent is used for the wider kinship. Me ne no ye abusuafo or Ye ye abusuafo is the wider term of reference. If closer relationship is to be indicated, it is usual to say: Ye ye abusuafo dea ye ye tiri ho nam - 'We are close relatives - we are (comparable to) the skin of the head'. This may then be followed by a detailed explication of the relationship such as: Ye ye anuanom baanuu mma. 'We are children of two siblings'.

In Ewe, it would seem that the wider term of reference is hɔ 'section' or ka 'taboo'. Hɔ deka me tɔwo mienye - 'We are members of the same section'. Nearer home, we have fome, which seems a close equivalent of the Akan abusua, except that an individual belongs to both his maternal and paternal fome, but inherits office and property from only one, usually the paternal. To express still closer relationship within the fome, it is interesting to note that the Ewe and Akan expressions are identical: fometowo tututu mienye; ta nu la wonye - 'We are very close relatives, it is (a matter of) the skin of the head!' Then one might say further: Tasivi-nyruieviwo mienye, literally: 'We are paternal aunt - maternal uncle children'. Presumably, the tiri ho nam / ta nu la is an analogy to the closeness of the skin to the skull. There is supposed to be no intermediary between the two.

The closest of all relationships in the Ewe terminology is Tɔdeka-n eda-viwo 'same father-same mother children'.

Both Akan and Ewe use ofie and afeme respectively, 'household', to indicate kinship. But since residence is not limited to only very close kin, the significance of 'coming from the same household' must be looked for in other social situations.

Thus we would like to suggest that in discussing

Akan and Ewe kinship the classifying terms that might prove most helpful are:

<u>Akan</u>	<u>Ewe</u>
-	<u>hlɔ(kɔ)</u> (wider circle)
<u>abusua</u> (wider circle)	<u>fome</u> (intermediate circle)
<u>tiri ho nam</u> (closer circle)	<u>ta ŋu lā</u> (closer circle).
<u>ofie</u> (?)	<u>afeme</u> (?)

The charts which follow are synoptic and comparative representations of the Akan and Ewe kinship terms which the writer has so far compiled. It is very tentative and suggestions for a fuller one are welcome. Terms indicating identical relationship in both languages have been placed side by side. Gaps in the column indicate that identical technical terms have not been established as existing in that language, although it is certainly easy to describe the particular relationship or to extend another technical term to cover it e.g. ena in Akan for no, node and noḡā in Ewe. No attempt has been made to specify how the individual terms and their relationship as listed in the chart might fit into the suggested classes of relationship. This requires field work and certainly, a lot of acquaintance with social and not linguistic factors.

The first chart deals with kinship terms according to different generations. They are the names and titles that Ego uses for his kin. The second list consists of the names given to children of the same mother according to their order of birth. The third maps lexico-grammatical collocations exhibited between some kinship nouns and some verbs.

I KINSHIP TERMS IN EWE

A. Same Generation as Ego

1. Related by Birth:

<u>Term</u>	<u>Etymology</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
-	-	-
<u>nɔvi</u>	<u>nɔ</u> - mother <u>vi</u> - child	mother's child (m.f.)
<u>tɔvi</u>	<u>tɔ</u> - father <u>vi</u> - (as above)	father's child (m.f.)
<u>nɔviɔtsu</u>	<u>nɔvi</u> - (as above) <u>ɔtsu</u> - male	male sibling or relative of same generation
<u>nɔvinyɔnu</u>	<u>nɔvi</u> - (as above) <u>nyɔnu</u> - female	female sibling or relative of same generation
<u>fo</u>	?	older male sibling or relative of same generation
<u>da</u>	?	elder female sibling or relative of same generation
<u>tse</u>	?	younger male sibling or relative of same generation
<u>fe</u>		younger female sibling or relative of same generation
<u>tɔvi utsu</u>	<u>tɔ</u> - father <u>vi</u> - child <u>ɔtsu</u> - male	male ritual brother (cousin)

AKAN

<u>Term</u>	<u>Etymology</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
-	-	-
<u>sewaa ba</u>	<u>se</u> - father <u>waa</u> - female <u>ba</u> - child	'female father's child' (paternal aunt's child.) (m.f.)
-	-	-
-	-	-

EWE.

<u>Term</u>	<u>Etymology</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
<u>təvi nyənu</u>	<u>tə</u> - (as above) <u>vi</u> - (as above)	female ritual sister
<u>tasi vi-nyruie-vi</u>	<u>ta(tə)</u> - father <u>asi</u> - wife (female) <u>vi</u> - (as above) <u>nyruie</u> - maternal uncle <u>paternal</u> aunt's child- maternal uncle's child relationship	cousin
<u>təgā-təde-vi</u>	<u>təgā</u> - big father <u>təde</u> - younger father <u>vi</u> - (as above) elder paternal uncle child relationship	cousin
<u>nəga-nəde-vi</u>	<u>nəgā</u> - big mother <u>nəde</u> - younger aunt <u>vi</u> - (as above) elder maternal aunt's child younger maternal aunt's child relationship	cousin

AKAN

2. Related by Marriage:

<u>Term</u>	<u>Etymology</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
-	-	-
-	-	-
<u>Okunu</u>		husband
<u>overe</u>		wife
<u>okunu panyin</u>	okunu-husband panyin-elder 'elder husband'	husband's elder brother
<u>okunu kumaa</u>	okunu - (as above) kumaa - younger younger husband	husband's younger brother
<u>akumaa</u> (f.)	aku-f. okunu-husband maa - female 'female husband' (both younger and elder than ego).	sister-in-law
<u>akonta</u>	wife's brother or cousin 'younger or older)	brother-in-law
<u>kora</u>		'co-wife'.
-	-	-

EWE

2. Related by Marriage

<u>Term</u>	<u>Etymology</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
<u>savi</u>	little 'sa'	fiancé'
<u>srɔ̃</u>		spouse
atsū <u>(srɔ̃ nʉtsu)</u>	male spouse	husband
<u>asi</u>	female spouse	wife
<u>srɔ̃ga(m)</u>	<u>srɔ̃</u> - spouse <u>ga</u> - big (elder) 'big spouse'	husband's elder brother.
<u>srɔ̃qea (m)</u>	<u>srɔ̃</u> - a (as above) <u>qea</u> - 'the younger one' 'younger spouse'	husband's younger brother
<u>srɔ̃ nyɔ̃nuto</u>	<u>srɔ̃</u> - (as above) <u>nyɔ̃nuto</u> - female one 'female spouse' (both older and younger)	sister-in-law
<u>nyɔ̃ ('akonta')</u>	wife's brother or cousin (younger or elder)	brother-in-law
<u>atsusi</u>	<u>atsū</u> - husband <u>asi</u> - wife 'husband's wife'	co-wife
<u>asitsu</u>	'wife's husband'	(former) wife's husband or wife's former husband

AKAN

3. Extra-marital Relations:

<u>Term</u>	<u>Etymology</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
<u>adamfo</u> ,		friend
adamfowa (<u>Aki-As</u>)	adamfo - friend <u>wa</u> - female type	female friend
-	-	-
<u>npena</u>	-	concubine

B. First Generation Before Ego's

Related by Birth:

<u>agya</u> (<u>ose</u> , <u>papa</u>)	-	father. Also used for elder younger paternal uncle'
-	-	-
-	-	-
<u>sewaa</u> (<u>agyawa Kwawu</u>) <u>agyabea</u> E. Akan)	<u>se</u> - father <u>wa</u> - female female father	father's sister
<u>ena</u> (<u>mama</u>)		mother, also used for elder and elder and younger maternal aunt.
-	-	-
-	-	-
<u>wɔfa</u>	-	mother's brother or male cousin

3. Extra-marital Relations:

<u>Term</u>	<u>Etymology</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
<u>xɔ̃(ɔ̃)</u>	-	friend
<u>dzoduxɔ̃ɔ̃</u>	<u>dzo</u> - medicine (juju) <u>du</u> - eat. <u>xɔ̃ɔ̃</u> -(as above) 'medicine eating friend'	ritually sealed friendship
<u>ahiā (asike)</u>	-	concubine

B. First Generation before Ego's

Related by Birth:

<u>tɔ̃</u> (<u>tata</u> , <u>papa</u> , <u>fofo</u>)	?	father
<u>togā (tataga)</u>	<u>tɔ̃</u> -(as above) <u>ga</u> - big (big father)	father's elder brother, or cousin
<u>tɔ̃de</u>	<u>tɔ̃</u> -(as above) <u>de</u> - young 'young father'	father's younger brother also or cousin
<u>tasi</u>	<u>ta-tɔ̃</u> -(as above) <u>si</u> - female, wife	father's sister
<u>nɔ̃(nana, dada)</u>	?	mother
<u>nogā</u> (<u>nanagā</u> , <u>dagā</u>)	<u>nɔ̃</u> -(as above) <u>ga</u> - big 'big mother'	mother's elder sister or Female cousins.
<u>nɔ̃de</u>	<u>nɔ̃</u> -(as above) <u>de</u> -young 'younger mother'	mother's younger sister or female cousins.
<u>nyruie</u>	?	mother's brother or male cousin.

AKAN

Related by Marriage:

<u>Term</u>	<u>Etymology</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
<u>ase</u>	parent-in-law (m.f.)	

C. Second Generation Before Ego's

Related only by Birth

<u>nana</u>		grand-parent (m.f.)
		also all kinsmen and kinswomen of this generation.

D. Third Generation Before Ego's

<u>nanankanso</u>	<u>nana</u> -grand-parent <u>nka</u> - not touched <u>aso</u> - ear 'grand parent whose ear is not touched'	great grand-parent (m.f.) also relative of same generation
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E. Fourth Generation Before Ego's

<u>nana sum</u> (Fante after Hagan)	<u>nana</u> - as above <u>sum</u> - darkness? worship?
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EWE

Related by Marriage:

<u>Term</u>	<u>Etymology</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
<u>to</u>		father-in-law
<u>loxo</u>		mother-in-law

C. Second Generation Before Ego's

Related only by Birth

<u>togbui</u>	grand-father. also all kinsmen of this generation
<u>mama</u>	grand-mother also all kinswomen of this generation.

D. Third Generation Before Ego's

<u>asimakatoe</u>	<u>asi</u> - hand	great grand-parents (m.f.) also relative of same generation
	<u>ma</u> - not	
	<u>ka</u> - touch	
	<u>to</u> - ear.	
	'the hand does not touch his/her ear'	

E. Fourth Generation Before Ego's

II Sibling Names.

	Male	Female	Etymology
1st	<u>Piesie</u>	<u>Piese</u> (not used for naming)	
2nd	<u>Manu</u>	<u>Maanu</u>	
3rd	<u>Mensa</u>	<u>Mansa</u>	three successive males or females.
4th	<u>Anan</u> (Ak) <u>Anane</u> (As)	Same as male	<u>anan</u> - four 'fourth child'.
5th	<u>Anum</u>	" " "	<u>anum</u> -five
6th	<u>Nsia</u>	" " "	<u>nsia</u> - six
7th	<u>Ason</u> (Ak) <u>Nsowaa</u> (As)	" " " " " "	<u>ason</u> - seven
8th	<u>Botwe</u> (Ak) <u>Nwotwe</u> (As)	" " " " " "	<u>awotwe</u> <u>nwotwe</u> - eight
9th	<u>Nkruma</u>	" " "	<u>akron</u> - nine
10th	<u>Badu</u>	" " "	<u>ba</u> - child <u>du</u> - ten
11th	<u>Duko</u>	" " "	<u>du</u> - ten <u>ko</u> - one
12th	<u>Adunu</u>	" "	<u>du</u> , <u>nu</u> - ten, two

EWE
II Sibling Names

Male	Female	Etymology
1st <u>Foli</u> (P)	<u>Gogo</u> <u>Domekl</u>	<u>Fui</u> - monkey-like <u>do</u> (me) -female genital organ <u>kplɔ</u> - to sweep, clean.
2nd <u>Dzako</u>	<u>Gbo</u>	
3rd <u>Mensa</u> <u>Besa</u> (A)	<u>Mansa</u>	see Akan
4th <u>Anan</u> <u>Anani</u>	<u>Mana</u>	" "
5th <u>Anum</u> (not common)	Same as male	" "
6th <u>Nsia</u> (" ")	" " "	" "
7th <u>Ason</u>	" " "	" "
8th <u>Botwe</u>	" " "	" "
9th <u>Akunu</u> <u>Nkoma</u>	" " " " " "	" " " "
10th <u>Badu</u>	<u>Badua</u>	" "
11th <u>Duku</u>	Same as male	" "
12th		

AKAN

Sibling Name (contd.)

Male	Female	Etymology
13th <u>Adusa</u>	Same as male	<u>du sa</u> - ten, three
14th <u>Adunan</u>	" " "	<u>du (a) nan</u> - ten, four
15th <u>Adunum</u>	" " "	<u>du, (a) num</u> - ten, five
16th <u>Adusia</u>	" " "	<u>du, (a) sia</u> - ten, six
17th <u>Adusan</u>	" " "	<u>du, (a), son</u> - ten, seven.

EWE

Sibling Name (contd.)

Male	Female	Etymology
-	-	-
-	-	-
-	-	-
-	-	-
-	-	-

Note

1. The statement on possession in Ewe grammar has been simplified here for the non-specialist. For more accurate details see Ansre: The Grammatical Units of Ewe, Ph.D. Thesis. 1966.
2. Ref: Pike. K., Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behaviour, Glendale, S.I.L. 1954. 1955, 1960. Also, Capell, Studies in Socio-Linguistics, Mouton, The Hague.
3. The folk etymology of the system originating from Abu of Adanse is interesting, but can neither be confirmed nor refuted.



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