KINSHIP TERMS OF DALIT CASTE MAYILADUTHURAI DISTRICT IN TAMIL NADU

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Kinship system

Kinship refers to a personal relationship by blood and sometimes by marriage. Kinship is defined as the system of social relationships that connects people in a culture, who are related and define and regulate their reciprocal obligations (Ref. Webster's Third New International Dictionary).

Linguistics and anthropology deal with language and culture in different aspects of their fields. Their lexical structure of kinship vocabulary depends on the age, sex, clans, linguistic enculturation of the child or acculturation of others. (i.e. education, economic upliftment, status of jobs), etc. Ethnolinguistic studies focus on the observation of living languages and their local variations. These variations suggest that a language does not ordinarily divide clearly at the given moment, but gradually develops differences among its region as the result of innovations that appear in one region and spread in a wave-like fashion to the neighbouring ones, attaining sometimes wider and sometimes narrower extensions.

This study deals with kinship terms of Mayiladuthurai Dalit people. The kinship terms have always been understood to form an important semantic structure, because they not only reveal semantic categories of the relationship but also the dimensions of relationships of that particular language community, such as affinal relationships, fraternal or sororal relationships, etc. There are certain bound forms of certain kinship terms (Emeneau 1953). Kroeber's (1968) classificatory system of relationships is worth mentioning for its adequacy in ethnolinguistic investigation of the kinship system. There has been a good deal of controversy regarding the labels 'descriptive' and 'classificatory proposed by Morgan (1871). A classification system of kinship terminologies denotes that various kinship relations are assigned a kin status. In contrast, a descriptive type of kinship system has individual names that denote kinship relations more specifically. Kroeber rejects the classification of kinship systems into descriptive and classificatory and holds that all kinship systems have a mix or overlap of both types of kinship systems.

Although principles suggested by Kroeber, such as 1) generation, 2) blood or marriage, 3) lineal or collateral, 4) sex of relative, 5) sex of speaker, 6) sex of connecting relative, 7) age of the relativethey have not been maximally utilized. No speech community is known to have maximally exploited all the principles utilized and therefore the asymmetry in the system is not surprising.

According to IravathiKarvey (1953), when a kinship term is not reflected, the correct kinship usage becomes a significant social fact useful for the construction of the cultural history of a people. Mazumdar (1972) accounts for the polyandry system of various tribes in his books i.e..i) A polyandry system is one in which a single female marries more than one male at a time or in due course of time, all of them living. 2) Polygamy is one in which a single male marries more than one female at a time or in due course of time all of them living. According to Emeneau(1953), the fused construction involved in the kinship term is a proto-Dravidian feature. The kinship terminologies of Mayiladuthurai Dalit dialects can be considered as a classificatory kinship system.

Kroeber has listed eight kinds of differences between kinsmen which a kinship term may or may not recognize. First of all, there are differences of generation and in our system, the grandfather, father, son and grandson are clearly distinguished through a few more generations of ancestors. The kinship system presented here shows the tendency to acquire new labels under bilingual situations. Some of them are adopted and assimilated and the rest stick out and point towards borrowing. There are no separate words like "parent", "off-spring" and "spouse" in Mayiladuthurai Dalit dialect speech. The kinship system presented here shows the tendency to acquire new labels under monolingual situations.

A few alternate Tamil forms exist with the existing Mayiladuthurai Dalit terms. The enlargement or modification of the system through borrowing with further contact of the Mayiladuthurai Dalit dialect with the neighbouring Tamil-speaking population will certainly prove to be an interesting study. Besides the above, terms such as 'paaTTan' are used to call for grandfather kinship in Mayiladuthurai Dalit. The words 'ammey' and 'ammaa' are kinship terms for mother.

Some of the standard Tamil terms are alternatives to the existing Mayiladuthurai Dalit terms. The ascending gradient of the impact of this process of linguistics borrowing may be viewed as co-existence–replacement–modification of the system. Apart from the linguistic problems created by this borrowing, they can be viewed as a process of progressive Tamil-based Hindu community with their increasing contact with the neighbouring caste Hindu society. One of the assumptions underlying the motivation of linguistics borrowing is the imitation of the high-status model. The ratio of replacement of the Mayiladuthurai Dalit terms by the corresponding competing standard Tamil terms, when studied, may give a clue to the nature of monolingual contact and the relative speed of the impact of one culture on another culture.

Under the circumstance of constant usage, familiarity and status acquisition, the hypothesis, "borrowed terms drive away native terms from usage" may be put forward and tested in the context of this study of the ratio of replacement. It is interesting to note a parallel situation in standard Tamil. Those who consider the use of English words as a mark of education, refinement or elegance, use the English word "wife" instead of Mayiladuthurai Dalitterms 'uuTTukaari', 'poṉTaaTTi', and 'maṉaivi'. The term may be viewed in the progressive scale of native elements reflecting a change in attitudes and the outlook of the educated community.

The Mayiladuthurai Dalit dialect kinship terms, as presented here, illustrate some interesting points in the system. The terms of the address are distinct from the terms of appellation of mention and are available for only a few items. These few exclusively address forms are used for either youngsters or for elders having extremely close relationships. In any case, this shows that in this culture, address forms indicate relations having close familiarity and affection.

The word "maamaa" is complex and the system of cross-cousin marriage is also of some interest. It is pointed out in the lexicon that 'maamaa' is the ego's mother's brother. At present, the custom of the cross-cousin marriage is preferential and not obligatory. In addition, as a recognized pattern of relationship, 'maamaa' is a respected person, but is considered somewhat greedy and unwise in the ways of the contemporary world.

In a society in which every girl earns a price for her parents, the consideration of 'maamanaaru' as somewhat greedy is understandable. When a person with a marriageable daughter is addressed as 'maamanaaru' by an unrelated young man, it only expresses his intention to offer himself as well as

appellative for mention. This is often used as a substitute for 'maama' by a perfect monolingual. Sometimes, the use of this term reflects the mood and the temper of the man using it.

First of all, the motivation behind the general acquisition of words must be viewed as distinct from the usage of the particular term. Secondly, even in the use of a foreign term to express exasperation, annoyance or abuse, the underlying mental attitude is one of superiority. The strange foreign wordshave edges and give a kind of superior confidence, which is not obtained from the much-used indigenous term. Two sets of terms are available in this culture for 'brother' and 'sister'. The rationale for such a relationship among brothers may be sought in cross-cousin marriage.

Corpus of Mayiladuthurai Dalit dialectkinship terms

Abbreviation	Mayiladuthurai Dalit Dialect
Father	appen/appaa/takeppen
Mother	ammaa / aattaa / taayi
Son	moken / move
Daughter	mokeḷ
Elder brother	aṉṉeṉ
Younger brother	tampi
Elder sister	akkaa
Younger sister	tangaa
Father's mother	appata
Father's younger brother	ciṉṉappeṉ / cittuppaa
Aunt	atta
Brother-in-law	maccaaṉ
Brother's wife	oappuḍiyaa
Elder brother wife	aṉṉi
Father-in-law	maamenaaru
Father's father's father	tattan

Father's elder brother	periyappaa
Father's elder brother wife	periyamma
Father's younger brother wife	cinnatta
Granddaughter	poaTTi
Grandfather	ciayaan
Great grandmother	Eeyaa
Grandmother	paaTTi
Grandson	Pearen
Husband	aampuḍiyaan / manneven
Hus's Si	neetnaa
Mother-in –law	maami / maamiyaaru
Mother's mother	ammama
Mother's younger sister	aacci / cinnaayi
Sister-in-law	anni
Wife	manavi

Kinship-related terms

Mayiladuthurai Dalit Dialect	Meaning
pompḷe	'woman'
poṇṇe	'girl'
paya	'boy'
kuṭumpon	'family'
anaato	'orphan'

kuuṭṭaaḷi	'friend'
kannaalam	'marriage'
viruntaaṭi	'guest'
vetavo	'widow'
peṭṭoru	'parent'

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