

The Kinship Terminology of the Bangru of Arunachal Pradesh

Tame Ramya, M.Phil.

Assistant Professor

Department of Anthropology

Dera Natung Government College, Itanagar

Papum Pare District – 791 113

Arunachal Pradesh, India

taramya@live.com

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Abstract

Introduction: Bangru is the Tibeto-Burman language speech community who confined to Sarli circle of Kurung Kumey districts of central Arunachal Pradesh. The present study was carried out in fifteen Bangru villages to explore the kinship terms in different lines of relationship and to establish the degree of relationship within the several kin groups of Bangru community. Bangru Kinship terminology depict the genealogical picture of a society and are used in address and reference as denotative of social position relevant to interpersonal conduct. The kinship terms based on consanguineous (lineal and collateral) and affinal relations are depicted and are analysed.

Materials and Methods: During the field study, the emphasis was laid on both participant and non-participant observation to examine their actual kinship terminology in use, kinship behaviours, etc. Extensive in-depth personal interviews and concrete case studies were taken to generate the desired mass of data. As a part of interview, the interview guide method was adopted to make the informants better understanding of the questions.

Results/Findings: The study reveals that in Bangru society, kinship terms do not have much distinction between terms of address and terms of reference. There are some terms like father– *Məbi*, mother– *Aneya*, grandfather– *Mukho* and grandmother– *Ase* which are used extensively both to address and reference.

Conclusion: The study assumes significance in the contemporary juncture as the use of kinship terms and behaviour are changing in the Bangru society. Most Bangru elders agree that the Bangru kinship system is the most important basic education for children. This understanding is a crucial part of the Bangru culture so as to gain a sense of who they are as Bangrus, and their relationships to their family members and relatives. Kinship is the Bangru heritage of relationships, respect, solidarity and mutual obligation in the family, clan and society.

Keywords: Bangru, Kinship, Kinship Terms, Affinal, Consanguineal, Social Structure.

1. Introduction

Kinship terminologies are system of consanguinity and affinity, concurring to a people's recognition of their genealogical relationships in an organized way (Morgan, 1871). In this way, Kinship terminology refers to the words used in a particular culture to describe a specific system of familial relationships. Kinship terminologies include the terms of address used in different languages or communities for different relatives and the terms of reference. Being one of the most complex systems of culture, Kinship forms the basis of social relationship which is actually or putatively traced through parent-child/sibling relations. The study of kinship terminology has become an interdisciplinary field which attracts the attention not only of linguists but also of ethnographers, anthropologists, sociologists, and social historians, among others (King, 2006, p. 101). Across all human societies, it happens to be the core principle in the regulation of behaviour between persons and in the formation of social grouping, members of which are bound to each another by elaborate inter-locking and ramifying ties (Sonowal, 2014, p. 8).

Every human society has a kinship terminology, a catalogue of terms of address and reference used to assign the relatives of various types. Kinship terminologies are category of words by means of which an individual is taught to recognize the significant groupings in the social structure into which he is born (Leach, 1958). Without exception, all kinship term systems use factors like sex, age, generation, blood and marriage in their society. Each culture defines its own set of kinship terms and the roles they serve in society. Kinsmen may extend to an indefinite number of relationship enclosing innumerable distant categories of genealogical connection (Doley, 2014, p. 2). To be called the kinship term *uncle* in one culture may hold a distinctively different set of expectations than that of *uncle* in another culture. These expectations may be influenced by the culture's power orientation, philosophical/religious assumptions, environment, or any number of factors.

Earlier studies on kinship terminology among tribes of India have been conducted by Das (1972) on Kabui Nagas, Nagaraja (1996) on Konyak Naga, and Bouchery and Gangmei (2008) on Rongmei Nagas, Swain (2010) on Saora, Dattamajumdar (2010) on Lepcha, Bouchery and Sangtam (2012) on Sangtam Nagas, etc. In this study, an attempt has been made to document the indigenous kinship terms of the Bangru, the lesser-known community with a population of around 2000 people mainly inhabits the Sarli circle in Kurung Kumey district in northern fringe of central Arunachal Pradesh adjacent to the Tibet Autonomous Region of China (Ramya, 2012, p. 1). They are seen spread in small town of Sarli and in adjoining 15 Bangru villages viz. Bala, Lee, Lower Lichila, Upper Lichila, Machane, Milli, Molo, Nade, Namju, Palo, Rerung, Sape, Sate, Wabia, and Walu (Devi and Ramya, 2017, p. 46). The major clans like Pisa, Milli, Sape, Mallo, Tagang and some minor clans existed within Bangru cluster. They belong to Mongoloid racial stock with well-built and medium stature body.

Bangru is one of the lesser-known indigenous tribal communities in Arunachal Pradesh which may be included in the Upper Assam language group of Tibeto-Burman language family, though no evidence is available on its language affiliation (Ramya, 2015, p. 7 & 8). They have their

own language, culture, tradition and a distinct life style. The word ‘Bangru’ refers to both the people and the language they speak. However, there is no available information and evidences to show the accurate sense of the word. It is different from languages of Nyishi and Puroik. But the three groups have socially and culturally very close affinity among each other. However, it is worth noting that the Bangru language has been largely influenced by Nyishi and as a result changes have occurred in the internal reconstruction of Bangru speech forms.

Due to intermingle of Nyishi, Bangru and Puroik languages there reflects some affinities in their verbal communication. There is no evidence as to put the Bangru language into some linguistic diverse group and sub-groups since no specific study on linguistic affiliation of the Bangru language is done, so far. They hold different perception about their societies, different notions of living and maintaining livelihood, different sets of ideas akin to their customs and tradition. However, recently work done by Bodt and Lieberherr (2015, p. 66), identified the Bangru as belong to Tibeto-Burman linguistic family with as its closest genetic relatives Miji and Hrusso, spoken further to the southwest in East and West Kameng districts.

2. Study Area and Methodology

2.1. Study Area

The fieldwork was conducted on the Bangru; a numerically weak and lesser-known community of Kurung Kumey district who inhabited the geographical belt that shares a ‘hard international border’ with Tibet (China) in the northern part of central Arunachal Pradesh (Figure 1). The area of present study was 15 villages of Sarli circle where most of the Bangru population are concentrated. The socio-economic status of the Bangrus of these villages varies greatly due to a number of factors, e.g. transportation and communication facilities, agricultural practice, availability of resources exposure to the modern development, culture contact with other communities, etc.

As a language, Bangru is spoken by approximately 2,000 people. It may belong to a sub-grouping of the Tibeto-Burman language family which, besides Bangru, also includes neighbouring *Nyasang* (Nyishi) and Puroik. The geographical extension of this group covers the northern region of Sarli circle in Kurung Kumey district of Arunachal Pradesh and adjacent areas of Tibet, stretching northward alongside Kurung river in the area.

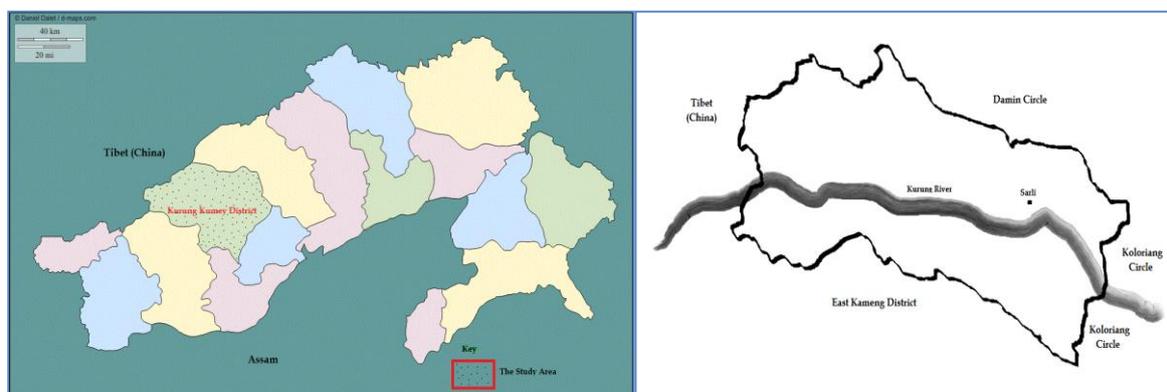


Figure 1: Map Showing the Study Area (Bangru Inhabited Region).

2.2. Methodology

The qualitative data for this study was randomly collected from 15 Bangru villages irrespective of age and status of the respondents. During the fieldwork, the stress was put on both participant and non-participant observations to investigate the actual usage of kinship terminology, kinship behaviours, etc. Extensive in-depth personal interviews and tangible case studies were accomplished to accumulate the required data. The kinship terms are arranged according to consanguineous relations (lineal and collateral) and affinal relations (Table 1).

3. Kinship Terms in Different Lines of Relationship

The kinship terminologies commonly used in different levels of Bangru kin groups are depicted in the following tables.

Table 1: Bangru Kinship Terms - Lineal Relations

Relatives Classed	Terms of Address	Terms of Reference	English Terms
Father's Father	Awo/mukho	Awo/mukho	Grandfather
Mother's Father			
Father's Mother	Asse	Asse	Grandmother
Mother's Mother			
Father	Miibi	Miibi	Father
Mother	Aneya	Aneya	Mother
1 st Elder Brother	Akho+name	Akho+name	Brother
2 nd Elder Brother			
3 rd Elder Brother			
Younger Brother(s)	By name	Mere	Brother
1 st Elder Sister	Momoa+name	Momoa+name	Sister
2 nd Elder Sister			
3 rd Elder Sister			
Younger Sister(s)	By name	Mere	Sister
Son	By name	Muju-Nyiibi	Son
Daughter	By name	Muju-Nyiibai	Daughter
Son's Son	By name	Mechemya-Nyiibi	Grandson
Daughter's Son			
Son's Daughter	By name	Mechemya-Nyiibai	Granddaughter
Daughter's Daughter			

Table 2: Bangru Kinship Terms - Collateral Relations

Relatives Classed	Terms of Address	Terms of Reference	English Terms
Father's Brother(s)			Uncle
Father's Elder Brother			

Father's Younger Brother	Akho+name	Akho	(Paternal)
Mother's Brother(s)	Kinyi+name	Kinyi	Uncle (Maternal)
Mother's Elder Brother			
Mother's Younger Brother			
Father's Sister(s)	Mesebya+name	Mesebya	Aunt (Paternal)
Father's Elder Sister			
Father's Younger Sister			
Mother's Sister(s)	Achowa+name	Achowa	Aunt (Maternal)
Mother's Elder Sister			
Mother's Younger Sister			
Father's Brother's Son	By name	Mere	Cousin Brother
Mother's Sister's Son	By name	Achowa nyiibi	
Brother's Son	By name	Mere	Nephew
Sister's Son	Juchobii+name	Juchobii	
Brother's Daughter	By name	Mere	Niece
Sister's Daughter	Juchobya+name	Juchobya	

Table 3: Bangru Kinship Terms - Affinal Relations

Relatives Classed	Terms of Address	Terms of Reference	English Terms
Wife's/Husband's Father	Alo	Alo	Father-in-law
Wife's/Husband's Mother	Asse	Asse	Mother-in-law
Father's Sister's Husband	Miibo	Miibo	Uncle
Mother's Sister's Husband	Miibo	Miibo	
Father's Brother's Wife	Minyi	Minyi	Aunt
Mother's Brother's Wife	Asse	Asse	
Husband	Technonym/By name	Melgya	Husband
Wife	Technonym/By name	Mii	Wife
Elder Sister's Husband	Miibo	Miibo	Brother-in-law
Younger Sister's Husband			
Husband's Brother (Elder/Younger)	By name or By name+Malawe	Malawe	
Wife's Brother (Elder/Younger)			
Husband's Sister (Elder/Younger)	By name or By name+Malabya	Malabya	Sister-in-law
Wife's Sister (Elder/Younger)			

Elder Brother's Wife	Minyi	Minyi	Sister-in-law
Younger Brother's Wife	Minyi	Minyi	
Son's Wife	By name	Minyi	Daughter-in-law
Daughter's Husband	By name	Miibo	Son-in-law

Source: Fieldwork

4. Results and Discussion

Among the Bangrus Kinship is considered through the male line. They use the term *Guii-Koro* meaning kinship in their native language. The parents taught their children at an early age to learn and use appropriate kinship terms as words of relationship and respect to address their consanguine relatives in their clan and affinal kin's from other different clans, including friends of their parents, elderly strangers, neighbours and acquaintances.

On analysis of the kinship terms it is revealed that there are some terms which are used extensively both to address and reference. The terms for father– *Məbi*, mother– *Aneya*, grandfather– *Alo* and grandmother– *Ase* are used both for address and reference. The common term used to address and refer the 1st, 2nd and 3rd elder brother is *Akho*.

While younger brother, younger sister, son, daughter, grand children are addressed more commonly by their personal names. In referring younger brother(s) and sister(s) the term used is *Mere*. The term of reference for husband and wife is *Melgya* and *Mii* respectively, whereas the both husband and wife are addressed either by some technonyms or by their respective names. The term of reference of own children is *Muju*. The gender can be known if the speaker will say whether the child one is *Muju-Nyibii* (son) or *Muju-Nyiibai* (daughter). In the first descending generation son's wife and daughter's husband are referred by the same distinct term *Minyi*. They are addressed by their personal names; however, nowadays some Nyishi kinship terms like *Nyaahang* (daughter-in-law), *Makte* or *Makpa* (son-in-law), etc. are used to address them. This is due to their living in close proximity with the Nyishis of the area.

In the Bangru Kinship system, it is seen that full recognition to sex, affinity and age are given. It is noted that distinct kinship terms are used in some relations to differentiate the age as in the case of brothers, sisters, fathers' brothers, fathers' sisters, mothers' brothers and mothers' sisters. It is also observed that there are some terms which are used to refer certain relationships irrespective of sex. The term *Mere* is used to refer both the younger brothers and sisters. To refer one's son and daughter the same term *Muju* is used. The term *Mere* is also used to refer both the sexes of brothers' children and the terms *Juchobii* and *Juchobya* are used to refer respectively the male and female children of the sisters. Some kinship terms are found to be used for more than one relationship. The term *Alo* is used to refer and address son's wife's father and daughter's husband's father. The Bangrus use the term *Miibo* to refer and address father's sister's husband (both elder & younger) and mother's sister's husband (both elder & younger). To refer and address mother's sisters and father's sisters the terms *Achowa* and *Mesebya* are used respectively. The term of address and the term of reference for husband's father and wife's father is *Alo*. Similarly, the term *Asse* is used to refer and

address husband's mother and wife's mother. The term *Mechemya* is used to refer father's sister's son or daughter, mother's sister's son or daughter and also to mother's brother's son or daughter.

When the child addresses his/her consanguine relative and affinal kin with the appropriate kinship terms, it indicates that the child not only understands his/her kinship position, relationship, code of behaviour and mutual responsibility to those specific relatives, but also to their kinship positions, relationships, codes of behaviour and their mutual responsibilities to him or her. However, when a child applies these kinship terms to strangers of older ages, it simply conveys a cultural sign of respect and politeness. The Bangru kinship system also is the basic social structure that organizes the Bangru society into 4 major clans viz. Pisa (*Phujoju*), Milli (*Milliju*), Sape, Mallo (*Malloju*), and Tagang (*Tagangju*) and provides life-time memberships and ongoing support (both material and spiritual) to their consanguine members. As a patrilineal, patri-local tradition all the clans trace their unilineal descents from common ancestor through oral tradition. The rule of tribal endogamy and clan exogamy exist among the Bangrus.

5. Conclusion

This paper analysed the Bangru kinship terms and the rules of kinship system, and on the basis of this analysis, it can be understand the formation of Bangru kinship groups and the development of kinship ideology. Kinship terms are used in address and reference as denotative of social position relevant to interpersonal conduct.

It is also observed that kinship terms do not have much distinction between terms of address and terms of reference in Bangru society. The terms of reference are more specific in their application and complete than terms of address. The semantic and cultural description method of componential analysis helps to know the logical background of the Bangru kinship terminology. The analysis of Bangru kinship system reveals that there is terminological merging of collateral kinsfolk with the lineal ones and also of second ascending with third ascending, and of second descending with third descending generations. There are no distinct terms to differentiate between grandson and granddaughter as only one term "*Mechemya*" is used for both. Hence, the cognitive anthropology methods need to be combined with the traditional methods of data collection of kinship in order to hold the components of the kin terms.

Large number of Bangru elders agrees that the Bangru kinship system is the most important basic education for all Bangru children. This knowledge is an essential part of the Bangru culture as to gain a sense of who they are as Bangrus, and their relationships to their family members and relatives (both consanguine and affinal). Kinship is the Bangru heritage of relationships, respect, solidarity and mutual obligation in the family, clan and society.

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Tame Ramya, M.Phil.
 Assistant Professor
 Department of Anthropology
 Dera Natung Government College, Itanagar
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