Kinship terms in Konyak Naga

K.S. NAGARAJA
Deccan College Post-graduate & Research Institute, Pune

The Konyak language is spoken in the Mon[1] district situated in the north-east of Nagaland state, India, by more than 70,000 speakers. It belongs to the Naga sub-branch of the Tibeto-Burman language family. Not much work has been done on this language. Probably the first anthropological work was by Fürer Haimendorf (1939, 1969). But no exclusively linguistic work was undertaken by anyone, except by the present author. The present author worked on this language between 1976-1980. During this time he collected data on the Konyak language mainly from a place called Wakching. Wakching is around 20 kms south-east of Mon, the headquarters of Mon district. On the basis of his data so far a tri-lingual dictionary (Konyak-Hindi-English) and a collection of folklore have been published, and a grammar is in press. All these are publications of the Central Institute of Indian Languages, in Mysore. Incidentally, from Wakching itself Fürer Haimendorf had conducted field-work for his anthropological studies a few decades earlier. Except for a few biblical translations, and a few school primers, not much is available in this language, even now. As this language did not have its own writing system, it (along with other languages of the region) has adopted the roman script for writing. As these languages are tonal, some modifications in the roman script have become necessary. In the state of Nagaland there are sixteen major tribes and some (around eight) minor tribes. All speak different languages which are almost mutually unintelligible; but all of them belong to the Naga sub-branch (Grierson, Marrison). So English is recognized as the official language. However a form of pidgin known as "Nagamese" or "Naga Pidgin" has become unofficially the *lingua-franca* of the state. All languages have many dialects. Similary Konyak also has many dialects. Some of them are the following: Angphang, Angwanku or Tableng, Aopao, Changaya, Chen, Chingkso, Chinglang, Choka, Elekidoria, Takphang, Kongon, Longching, Longkhai, Longmein, Longwa, Mohung, Mon, Mulung, Ngangching, Sang, Shanlang, Shanyuo, Tolamleinyuo and Totak. The variety spoken around Wakching (= Angwanku/Tableng) is considered as the standard form of Konyak, and so that variety is usually used in writing.

The Konyak kinship system is interesting for its complexity in certain domains as well as simplicity in other domains. Fürer-Haimendorf (1969) while listing Konyak kinship terminology in his Appendix section comments on the simplicity of this system (pp. 107-9). Here he has listed them without going into linguistic discussions. Also, the number of kinship terms is small in his list as compared to the present author's. For instance, the terms such as: *hu, hi, sela,*

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[1]This is, of course, merely a geographical name and almost certainly has nothing to do with the 'Mon' of the Mon-Khmer language family.

suon, li-sepa, li-yanu, liyamɔi, etc. (see below for details). Fürer-Haimendorf seems to have adopted the method of representing terms in ordinary English or German spelling, while the present author has employed phonemic transcription. Therefore, there are many differences between the two studies in this aspect. This language has both an *ï* (barred i) phoneme, and an *ɔ* (shwa) phoneme. as the roman script does not have graphemes corresponding to these sounds, Fürer-Haimendorf uses instead *e* or some other letter. Similarly instead of a special symbol for the palatal nasal phoneme *ni* is used. So *ñu, ña,* and *ñei* are for him respectively *niu, nia,* and *nie.*

The kinship system is predominantly paternal and generational in that it has different terms for different generations, even for the third generation on both ascending as well as descending scales. But it just does not have terms to refer to the various relations beyond a single generation in the kin related by blood; and it has very few distinctions in the area of kin related by marriage. In the following, an attempt has been made to provide a first approximation of this system. The basic terms as found in the data will be listed and discussed.[2]

Often with the kin-forms either a prefix *u-* or *a-* is used. These mark respectively the addressive or referential functions of the terms.

1. Kin related by blood

A. Own generation:

(1)   brother: *cɔiʔna:u*

This is an interesting word as it is made up of two free forms. The free forms refer to 'younger' and 'older' varieties of the same kinsman.

elder: *cɔiʔ* ;   younger: *na:u* (refers to 'young one, m/f')
elder brother: *u-cɔiʔ-yong* (*yong* 'big')

As Fürer-Haimendorf states (1939:107), if a person has three elder brothers, they are addressed as follows. (The forms in brackets are those given by Fürer-Haimendorf).

u-cɔiʔ-yong [u-chei-yong]   'great elder brother'
u-cɔiʔ-owo [u-chei-owo]   'middle elder brother'
u-cɔiʔ-coi [u-chei-dzui]   'small elder brother'
u-na:u   'younger brother'

The kinship terms are used by the speaker in relation to others provided they are older than the speaker. If they are younger than the speaker, personal names are used to address them. Further, it is birth order and not genealogical

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[2]The phonemic inventory of this language is as follows: Vowels: *i, e, ï, ɔ, a, o* and *u*; Consonants: *p, ph, t, c, k, kh, ʔ, m, ñ, ŋ, s* (predominently palatal), *h, l, w* and *y*; Tonemes: level, falling and rising. Though this language has three tonemes, in this article they are not marked, as there are no minimal pairs based on tonal distinctions alone in the above data.

position which is decisive. No older man will address a person younger in years with a kinship term, even if he or she belongs to a generation genealogically senior to his own.

(2)   sister: ña?na:u

One could have expected a similar situation to that found in (1) above here as well. However it is not so. The first syllable of the word refers to the basic form as such while an adjective is added to it to obtain younger/older forms.

> elder: ña?-yong (ña? 'sister', yong 'big')
> younger: ña?-joi (joi ~ coi 'young')

B. First ascending generation:

(3)   father: pa
        mother: ñu
        parents: ñuəpa (ñu 'mother', pa 'father')

The combination contains the terms for mother and father in that order. (Is this the universal order?). They are joined by an element -ə-, which functions more like a simple connective than a meaning-bearing element.

(4)   father's brother:
          elder: a-pa-yong
        others: a-pa-joi/coi

(5)   father's sister: u-ñei

(6)   mother's brother: keu
          elder: u-keu-yong
        younger: u-keu-joi/coi

(7)   mother's sister:
          elder: ñu-yong
        younger: ñu-joi/coi

C. Second ascending generation:

(8)   grandfather (father's father, mother's father): a-pu

(9)   grandmother (father's mother, mother's mother): a-pi

(10)   ancestors: *puəpa* (pu 'grandfather', pa 'father'). Here the emphasis is on the 'male' progeny. So the form is obtained by combining *pu* and *pa* which refer to males only.

D. Third ascending generation:

The third generation is obtained by suffixing *-suon* to the second generation terms *pu* and *pi*.

(11)   great grandfather
        (father's father's father, father's mother's father): pu-suon

(12)   great grandmother
        (father's father's mother, father's mother's mother): pi-suon

E. First descending generation:

(13)   son   :   ha-si   daughter : ha-ya

(14)   baby   :   na:u   infant   : na:u-tak
        boy   :   na:u-si   girl   : na:u-ya
        child :   naha

F. Second descending generation:

(15)   son's son: hu-si, hu-suməy
        daughter's son (grandson)

(16)   son's daughter: hu-ya
        daughter's daughter (granddaughter)

(17)   descendants: hu-ə-ha (hu 'grandson', ha 'child' [probably a contracted form])

G. Third descending generation:

Here as well *-suon* is added to the second descending generation forms to obtain the third descending generation forms:

(18)   great grandchild (either male or female): hu-suon

H. Other relatives: No specific terms.

I Some of the other kinterms in the descending generation:

(19)   Br-So :   li-sie
        Si-So :   li-sie

        Br-Da :   li-ya
        Si-Da :   li-ya

II Kin by partial blood: no distinctions made.

III Kin by marriage

(20)   wife   :   mi?-ñu, sïko-ñu 'wife' (lit. female-big)
        co-wife   :   ang-ñu, pai-ñu
        (restricted to chiefs' co-wives)

(21)   husband   :   nïtanan-pa (nïtan 'man', pa 'father')

(22)   Fa-Si-Hu,: a-kau
        Mo-Si-Hu.

(23)   Mo-Br-Wi,: a-ñei
        Fa-Br-Wi.

(24)   Si (elder)-Hu,: matapa
        Wi-Br.(elder)

(25)   Wi-Fa.: u-keu (A), yoikeu

(26)   Wi-Mo.: ñei

(27)   Wi-Br.(younger): cei

(28)   Wi-Si.: sïko-ñu-ə-ña

(29)   So-Wi.: ti-ya-ñu

(30)   So-Wi-Mo.: u-ñəi

IV Kin by adoption

(31)   Step Fa.: pa-ma-pa

(32)   Step Mo.: ñu-ma, ñu-ma-ñu

(33)   Step So.: ñu-ma-ha

(34)   Step Da.: ñu-ma-ha

(35)   Step child: ha-ma-ha

V Kin by fostering: no particular terms

From the above listing, the contention that generational aspect is more important in this system than kin-related terms will have been quite clearly borne out. Further, the following morphological analysis can be made which will mark those forms which are free and those which are bound and those which are compound. This will clearly show some of the interesting features of this system.

(a) Monomorphemic free basic forms are the following:

pa	'father',	ñu	'mother', (or equivalent to)
hu	'grandson',	hi	'granddaughter'
pu	'grandfather',	pi	'grandmother'
keu	'Mo-Br, etc.'	ñei	'mother-in-law, etc.'
sela	'boy, bridegroom',	na:u	'baby'
cəiʔ	'elder brother'		

(b) Bound forms used in combinations:

-suon	'third generation marker'
-si-	'male marker', -ya- 'female marker'
coi/joi	'young/small', ha 'small', yong 'big'
nitan	'male/man', siko 'female/woman'

(c) All the combinations listed taking common elements into account.

cəiʔnau	'brother':
na-ha	'child', nau-si 'boy, bachelor'
nau-ya	'girl' (child- female)
ha-si	'son', ha-ya 'daughter'
hu-suon	'great grandsibling' (daughter/son)
pu-suon	'great grandfather'
pi-suon	'great grandmother'
keu	'mother's brother, father-in-law, paternal aunt's husband'
sïko-ñu	'wife'
sïko-ñu əña	'wife's sister'
sïko-naha	'girl'
nïtan-pa	'husband', nïtan-naha 'boy/son'
hu-ya/yaməi	'granddaughter'
hu-sïməi/si	'grandson'
hu-suon-sïməi	'great grandson'
hu-suon-yaməi	'great granddaughter'
hu-suon-hupeəng	'great grandsibling'
li-sepa	'son-in-law, nephew'
li-yañu	'daughter-in-law'
li-yaməi	'niece'
ñu-ma-ñu	'stepmother', ñu-ma-ha 'stepdaughter'
pa-ma-pa	'stepfather'
ñu-yong	'maternal elder aunt, elderly woman'
ñei	'mother-in-law, daughter-in-law's mother', Fa-Si
nok-sa	'family'
pa-coi	'father's brother' (younger)
pa-yong	'father's elder brother/paternal uncle'
pu-ə-pa	'ancestor'
pu-yong	'Mo Elder Br.'
pu-suon	'great grand-Fa.'
pu-suon-pilai	'great-great grand Fa.'
ma-ta-pa	'wife's Br.'

yamǝi	'daughter', yala 'girl, bride'
sela	'boy, bridegroom'
ha-ma-ha	'step child'
naha	'child' (< naːu 'baby' + ha 'small')

Conclusion

The above is the first linguistic study of the kinship system of the Konyak language (as Fürer-Haimendorf's is more of an anthropological study). As such it cannot be claimed to be exhaustive. In fact the data was collected long ago. Though the author did not have occasion to expand the scope of this paper, it is made available to scholars so that more interest will be generated by the paper. If it does that, its purpose will have been achieved.

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