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# THE USAGE OF ENGLISH / IBIBIO KINSHIP TERMS: A STUDY OF PUPILS IN THREE PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN AKWA IBOM STATE

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By

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## **Abstract**

*This paper is a contribution to the argument that acquiring a second language after mastering the first language is bound by obstacles, interference of the first language of the speech community. This paper points out how, in apparently manner, this process results in major shift in the world view and life of children. It derives from the study of primary six pupils in three primary schools in Akwa Ibom State, that first language and language of the speech community have a way of influencing a child's usage of English kinship terms. This paper thus presents the contrast between English Kinship terms and Ibibio Kinship terms and shows the wider implication of imposing English kinship terms on non-native English speakers. It concludes that the proper usage of English and Ibibio Kinship terms by children can be achieved through proper orientation of the child both at home and in the schools.*

One interesting way in which people use language in their daily living is to refer to various kinds of kin. It is not surprising therefore, that there is a considerable literature on kinship terminology, describing how people in various parts of the world refer to relatives by blood, descent and marriage. Kinship terms are universal features of language because kinship is so important in social organization. One of the attractions that kinship terms have for investigators is that, these factors are fairly readily ascertainable. You therefore relate them with considerable confidence to the actual words that people use to describe a particular kin relationship.

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Kinship terms though universal, have certain differences in societies which make second language (English) learners misappropriate the English kinship terms. Due to the culture of Ibibio people and the use of various kinship terms in the mother tongue which they do not know how to relate in the second language situation, they tend to transfer the Ibibio kinship terms into English kinship terms. In Ibibio, the kinship term “father” is not necessarily one's biological father but it includes elderly people in the society who are old enough to be the father of the speaker. Because kinship terms vary in different societies, from as few as twelve to more than fifty terms, it becomes one of the most complex systems of culture.

Ewuruigwe (1994:84-85) saw kinship as a social construct which expresses the social relationship between a person, his parent and siblings. It is both biological and social product. Biological kinship expresses the relationship between individuals and the socially defined progenitors. Socially, kinship is a socially organized fact based on assumption of genealogical connection between a person and his fore-bear real or putative.

The complicated nature of kinship terms among societies therefore constitute a problem to Ibibio second language (English) learners due to their perceived kinship terms which do not tally with that of English, therefore posing problems to them. This paper is an additional voice to the argument that English kinship terms pose problems to its learners since it is a second language to Ibibio speakers and there are varied differences in the kinship terms of the two languages.

### **Methodology**

The method of data collection for this study was oral interview by the researcher of 15 primary six pupils from three primary schools used for the study. The interview was a kind of revision class on Social Studies and the topic was The Family which the respondents were taught. The schools used were: College of Education Staff Nursery and Primary School, Afaha Nsit, St. Lukes' RCM Primary School, Obiokpok and Central School, Ibiaku Ntok Okpo. Question and answer time was created and the respondents interacted freely with the researcher. A total of five (5) pupils per school were used which made a total of fifteen (15) pupils for the study which aided concentration and accurate result.

### **The English and Ibibio Kinship Terms: An Analysis**

The English society believe more on nuclear family and their kinship vocabulary is on single kinship terms like father, mother, cousin, sister, aunty, brother, etc. Therefore, the kinship terms are exact and direct. There are definite and different

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terms for blood relatives and other remote relatives and these reflect the English culture with regards to how relatives at different levels of relationship are differentiated, accepted and treated. However, the way the English classify their relationship reflect the way they view the world and the level at which their relationship is binding.

The Ibibio society on the other hand, believe in extended family, therefore their kinship vocabulary is not exact as that of the English society. Their kinship terms are extended due to the nature of their society. The Ibibios believe more on communal living which has a great influence on their kinship terms. The English “father” is one’s biological parent but in Ibibio, “father” is used to denote an elderly person in the society who is old enough to be the speaker’s father.

Akindele and Adegbite (1999:7-9) presented the following as the meaning of father, mother and sister in Yoruba:

- Father:** Father, uncle, male cousin of parent;  
**Mother:** Mother, aunt, female cousin of parent;  
**Brother:** Brother, uncle, nephew, male cousin of parent;  
**Sister:** Sister, aunt, niece, female cousin of parent.

The situation in Ibibio follows the Yoruba pattern to a great extent but departs from it in some aspects. The Ibibio expression “ayin eka mi” translates directly into English as “child of my mother”. The child may be a male or female, and may not necessarily share a mother or father or grandfather of the speaker, he or she may be somebody from the same clan of the speaker. This expression is what represents the English “brother”, “sister” or “cousin”. In Ibibio, unlike in Yoruba as earlier shown, one’s nephew or niece is subsumed under “ayaka”-relative. However, Akindele and Adegbite have stated that in Yoruba, there is also no distinction between brother and sister, so also in Ibibio. Uduk (2008) referred to Ibibio kinship terms as “non-classificatory”

Following the format provided by the two Yoruba speaking authors, the Ibibio meaning of kinship terms is presented thus:

- Father** (ete): father, uncle, male cousin of parent, age mate of father, any member of one’s community old enough to be the speaker’s father;  
**Mother** (eka): mother, aunt, female cousin of parent, age mate of mother, any member of one’s community old enough to be the speaker’s mother;  
**Brother** (ayaka): brother, male/female member of the community of the same age range as the speaker, male/female cousin;  
**Sister** (ayaka): sister, female/male cousin, any member of one’s community of the same age as the speaker;

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**Child** (ayin): daughter, son, nephew, niece, cousin young enough to be one's biological child, any member of one's community young enough to be one's biological child;

**Aunt** (ayaka eka/ayaka ete): mother/father's sister, any elderly woman the same age with one's mother or father's sister;

**Uncle** (ayaka eka/ayaka ete): mother/father's brother, any member of the society the same age with one's real uncle;

**Grandfather/mother:** (etebom/nkam) one's mother/father's parent, any member of the community of the same age range with one's biological grandparent.

From the analysis, the differences between English kinship terms and Ibibio kinship terms can be seen. These differences are very fundamental because the terms stand for the different ideologies of two different human societies. "Father" is the head of the family in Western nuclear family sense while the sense is different in Ibibio because of the communal nature of the society. In Ibibio society, especially in large compounds, "father" is subsumed under the eldest person in the compound who may not necessarily be one's father but regarded as such as every member of the compound regard the eldest man as "father", the same is applicable to mother. For more explanation on communalism in Ibibio and Africa as a whole, Mbiti (1975:102) "a person does not exist all by himself; he exists because of the existence of other people". Communalism therefore forms the basis for Ibibio kinship terms.

It is logical to say that Ibibio society begins at the extended family and ends in communalism with elastic meaning and application of kinship terms, so does the Western (English) society begin at the nuclear family and ends in individualism, which is a fertile ground for capitalism. It is therefore very common for an Ibibio child to transfer into English language the native kinship terms of his or her society because of the culture and world view of his or her society.

### **Analysis of Data / Results**

From fifteen (15) pupils in the three primary schools used for this study, it was discovered that, though the pupils were taught the English kinship terms (family) as a topic in Social Studies, they still transfer the concept of Ibibio kinship terms into English. In all the schools, all male teachers were referred to as uncles by the pupils while all the female teachers were aunties. These teachers are not blood relatives of the pupils but since aunties and uncles in Ibibio have extended meaning as seen earlier, they transfer them to English thereby misappropriating the English kinship terms.

The oral interview between the pupils is summarized thus:

**Researcher:** Who is an uncle?

**Pupils:** An uncle is either our father's brother or our mother's brother.

**Researcher:** Who is an aunty?

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- Pupils:** An aunty is our father's sister or our mother's sister.
- Researcher:** Who is a brother?
- Pupils:** They are many, our parent's children and every male child in our compound.
- Researcher:** But from your note, I see your brother is the male child of your parent.
- Pupils:** Yes aunty
- Researcher:** So why do you refer to all the people you mentioned as your brother?
- Pupils:** Because our parents refer to all the children in our compounds as their children and call them "ndito mi" my children.
- Researcher:** Why do you call your female teachers aunties and your male teachers uncle?
- Pupils:** Because they are the same age with our uncles at home.
- Researcher:** But is that what you were taught in Social Studies?
- Pupils:** No
- Researcher:** So why do you call them that?
- Pupils:** Because that is how it is done at home.
- Researcher:** But they are not related to you by blood.
- Pupils:** Yes aunty, but we cannot call them by their names since they are big people.
- Researcher:** You are even calling me aunty
- Pupils:** General laughter

### **Discussion**

From the data and result, it is seen that Ibibio children who use English and Ibibio kinship terms misappropriate usage. They transfer their knowledge of Ibibio kinship terms into the English terms and vice-versa. This is as a result of their perceiving the world through the "eye" of Ibibio culture though they were taught under family; they still view the world through the language of their community. The interaction between the researcher and the pupils shows that, though the children are taught the kinship terms (English), confusion still arise due to their mastery of the first language (Ibibio) and this type of misappropriation of kinship terms is very common among bilinguals and multilingual.

### **Conclusion**

The usage of English and Ibibio kinship terms by children as seen in this study is a concern for parents, teachers and caregivers. The misappropriation of these terms is rather unfortunate, because though they are taught the English kinship terms in schools and they were born into the Ibibio kinship terms, there is still confusion in their usage among children. Since English is the official language in our society, the people

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responsible for the training of children should help them distinguish between the two kinship terms. They should be taught how to use the English kinship terms properly likewise Ibibio since their education may take some of them out of our country to other countries outside Africa where the English kinship terms are used in any official setting. If this is checked, the proper understanding and usage of the English and Ibibio kinship terms will be achieved among children.

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