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THE TERMS 'UNCLE' AND 'AUNT' IN THEIR SEMANTIC FIELD

Kinship is one of the most primal and one of the most common classification principles in human society, regardless of differences in cultural environment. However, the semantic fields of the kinship terms are not similar in all languages, and there are differences between dialects of the same language. A partial reason for the different classifications of relatives is the differences in socio-cultural family systems. In many cases the conceptual distinctions are due to the different salience of the status of the family members. The classification principles of kinship are partly universal and partly limited in some cultures. The most common distinctions are made between consanguineal kinsmen (blood relatives) and affinal kinsmen (relatives by marriage), between generations and between the sexes. All these conceptual distinctions are relevant to kinship terminology in every language, at least to some degree, but not to every term. For example in most European languages there are two terms for first cousin depending on sex (as in French *cousin—cousine* or in Latvian *brālēns—māsīca*), but some terms lack the sex distinction: English *cousin*, Swedish *kusin*, Finnish *serkku*, Estonian *nõbu*, Hungarian *unokatestvér*. These languages (standard languages) even lack the grammatical distinction between the masculine and feminine gender. This state of affairs is perhaps in some way related to the lexical neutralization of sex distinction in 'cousin' terminology; there is, however, no regular relation between the semantic structure of lexicon and the lack of inflectional gender opposition masculinum/femininum (another term type in Estonian is *onupoeg* 'uncle's son', *onutütar* 'uncle's daughter'). — In some languages, especially outside of the sphere of European culture, kinship terminology can even reflect other kinds of conceptual distinctions.¹

In European languages (in a broad sense) the structure of the semantic field of kinship terms is based on a network of lineal dimension from ascendants to descendants and of collateral distinction between kinsmen of the same generation. The point of origin is called «ego», i. e. the person to whom all other kinsmen are related (e. g. in the sentence *He is my uncle* the speaker is «ego», and in the sentence *He is Jaak's uncle* Jaak is «ego»). The relation between a kinsman and «ego» is either direct (e. g. 'father') or related through one or more kinsmen (e. g. 'uncle', 'cousin').

The terms can be compiled into groups (subfields) according to different criteria. The direct relatives make up the nuclear family: father, mother, son, daughter, brother, sister (direct blood relatives), and if we include the affinal relatives, 'husband' and 'wife' (cf. Whitaker 1979 : 82—83). The terms denoting members of nuclear family make up the inner circle (first circle) of this lexical field. The second circle is made up to terms denoting linked relatives. It is possible to draw the

boundaries of this circle in different ways according to grouping principles. If we group kin types, the main basis is the genealogical and marriage-bounded distance from «ego» (see e.g. Burling 1970: 29). If we group terms of a lexical field, the distance from ego must be taken into consideration as a semantic factor, but we cannot neglect other, more linguistic factors, e.g. the morphological structure of terms, nor chiefly pragmatic factors. According to this point of view, I'll place the terms 'grandfather', 'grandmother', 'grandson', 'granddaughter', 'uncle', 'aunt', 'cousin', 'nephew', 'niece', 'father-in-law', 'mother-in-law', 'son-in-law', 'daughter-in-law'. The third circle contains the semantically complicated terms 'brother-in-law' and 'sister-in-law' and 'second cousin' etc.

The terms related by the sex distinction only (such as 'father' — 'mother', 'brother' — 'sister' or 'uncle' — 'aunt') are in pairs at the same point on both the collateral and the lineal dimension. Thus, for example, 'mother' and 'son' do not make a relation of sex distinction, regardless of the different sex components.

The terms denoting members of the nuclear family (first circle) are, as a rule, basic, monomorphemic lexemes (the sex distinction can be marked only by grammatical gender, e.g. Latin *filius*—*filia*, Spanish *hijo*—*hija* 'son' → 'daughter'). Some of the terms in the second circle are monomorphemic lexemes, but in these circles there are several derivatives and compounds (or reduced compounds). Some compounds, when they are completely transparent, are morphologically very similar to descriptive phrases which are formed from two single kinship terms, e.g. Estonian *isavend* (pronounced with the intonation appropriate for a single word) ~ *isa vend* (pronounced as two separate words) 'paternal uncle' (literally 'father's brother'). A free use of either a basic single term or an analytical expression is typical of these circles in common speech, especially when the analytical expression is more exact, e.g. *isa vend* (or dialectically *isavend*) instead of *onu* 'uncle' in Standard Estonian. A typical feature in Finnic and Nordic languages is the lack of the basic single terms 'nephew' and 'niece'; compounds of the type *vennapoeg* (Estonian), *veljenpoika* (Finnish), *brorson* (Swedish) are established as terms. There are a few single terms or opaque compound terms in the third circle, e.g. Estonian *käli* and Finnish *käly* 'sister of spouse' or 'wife of spouse' (or 'wife of spouse's brother'). Finnish *lanko* 'brother of spouse' or 'husband of sister' (or 'husband of spouse's sister'), Finnish *pikkuserkku* 'second cousin' and the *great-* terms in English.

The set of kinship terms extends to more distant relatives only in some cases and only in some languages. But there are almost unlimited possibilities to use analytical expressions when referring to distant relatives. The terms denoting members of the nuclear family (first circle) are, in European languages, fundamental in the sense that we can by combining them express all kin relations in other circles. As a rule, we can make this expression as exactly as our conceptual capacity on the whole allows us to distinguish kin relations.

The applicability of semantic componential analysis of kinship terms is based on the fundamental semantics of the terms of the nuclear family. If we confine our interest to standard European languages, we can describe the semantic structure of all real kinship terms by means of combinations of sense components based on the concepts of nuclear family. The components which have been regarded as universals are the sex components MALE and FEMALE (rather than +MALE/-MALE), the components of lineage PARENT and CHILD and collaterality SIBLING and affinity SPOUSE. The meanings of kinship terms cannot

be described as a mere sets of components, but it is important to note relations between components. Using a very simplified notation we can say that e. g. the semantic interpretation of the English *uncle*, as a term for blood relative, is 'male sibling of parent'.²

There are two kinds of ambiguity in the lexical field of kinship terms, so that a term covers two (or in some cases more) different nodes in the conceptual network of kin relations without any difference in status. One kind of ambiguity is based on the lack of sex distinction, as in the above mentioned terms denoting cousins (the referent itself is either male or female) or as in the English *uncle* and *aunt* (the linking person is either male or female). The exact kin relation of cousin is more complicated, because a cousin can be a child of male or female sibling of male or female parent of «ego», however the latter distinctions are not relevant to the 'cousin' terms in European languages. The other type of ambiguity, in some terms with an affinal link, is based on the different order of the components, such as the Finnish *lanko* 'male sibling of spouse' and 'male spouse of sibling'. Now it can be asked, whether there are two indeed different meanings of the English *uncle*, 'male sibling of male parent' and 'male sibling of female parent', especially because there are in some languages different terms used for these two interpretations, e. g. in Finnish *setä* and *eno*. Lyons (1977 : 238) says: «The meanings of words (their sense and denotation) are internal to the language to which they belong» and «— each language has its own semantic structure, just as it has its own grammatical and phonological structure.» Each lexical field divides and categorizes the corresponding part of the universe in a certain way, but not in the same way in each language. The fact that there is an absence of distinction, such as that of the sex distinction in kinship terms, suggests that the category is conceptualized in a broader way. But in terms like the Finnish *lanko* there is a deeper difference between the interpretations 'male sibling of spouse' and 'male spouse of sibling', and here can we say that the term has two meanings; it is not only a question of a lack of distinction, but moreover one of a different semantic structure.

A kinship term can, in addition to the primary meaning, also have a secondary meaning. For example, the English *uncle* also denotes 'aunt's husband' and *aunt* also 'uncle's wife' (relations by marriage); this is true in Norwegian (bokmål) and in Swedish (in Sweden), and even in Italian *zio* 'uncle' and 'aunt's husband'.

In addition to real kinship terms, there are what could be described as «quasi-terms» which do not actually belong to the system of referential kinship terms, but rather have a vocative or affective function. They are commonly used only in certain speech situations, especially in forms of address but not, e. g., in a matter-of-fact account of one's kin relation. Such colloquial words may have the same extension as a respective real kinship term (as in a Lappish dialect vocative *isä* and referential *ačče* 'father') or different extension as in the case of the words referring to elder brother when the real kinship term is 'brother', and the words referring to grandfather and father (see Nirvi 1952; Whitaker 1979). A category of quasi-terms are those words which actually denote a certain kind of person but which at least to some extent have been lexicalized to be used like kinship terms, e. g. in many languages the word denoting 'old man' is also used when referring to 'father' and 'husband' (as in Finnish *ukko* and in Estonian *vanamees*).

In spontaneous speech, the kinship terms are often used without clearly revealing the relation to «ego»; they relate to the immediate family, e. g. in Finnish (*meidän äiti* '(our) mother'). The use of the term

'father' is quite similar ((*meidän*) *isä*). Of the other subfields only the terms for uncle and aunt are commonly used in the same way (but not in Finnish with the plural pronoun, **meidän eno*), especially combined with their Christian name: in Finnish, e. g. *Matti-setä* 'paternal uncle Matti', *Kalle-eno* 'maternal uncle Kalle'.

As we have seen, languages with common distinction principles divide reality in different ways. However, a certain lexical field is partly equivalent and partly non-equivalent in different languages, as in the case of the field of kinship terms in European languages. The similarities and differences appear in subfields independently. But the differences in the structures of subfields are not only interlingual. They can be intralingual, too. The intralingual differences depend partly on dialectal variation, but there is often free variation inside the same dialect and inside the standard language. The changes in the structure of a semantic field follow some common tendencies which are not bound up with linguistic territories but rather with cultural spheres. A change can be actualized even partly in a certain linguistic unit, and so the coexistence of distinct lexical subfields is possible. It has been pointed that not all speakers of the same language use kinship terms exactly in the same way and, besides the ethnic and regional differences, there is certainly variation among families (Burling 1970: 279).

We can use as an example the different structure of the subfield of terms denoting 'sibling of parent' in Estonian.³ Firstly there are two morphologically different types of four-part fields (1—2), so that the sex distinction of the linking parent is made both for uncle and aunt. Type (1) consist of analytical compounds, literally 'father's brother', 'mother's brother', 'father's sister', 'mother's sister', and type (2) comprises single opaque terms:

(1)	uncle	aunt	(2)	uncle	aunt
paternal	<i>isavend</i>	<i>isaõde</i>	paternal	<i>lell</i>	<i>sõ(t)se</i>
maternal	<i>emavend</i>	<i>emaõde</i>	maternal	<i>onu</i>	<i>tädi</i>

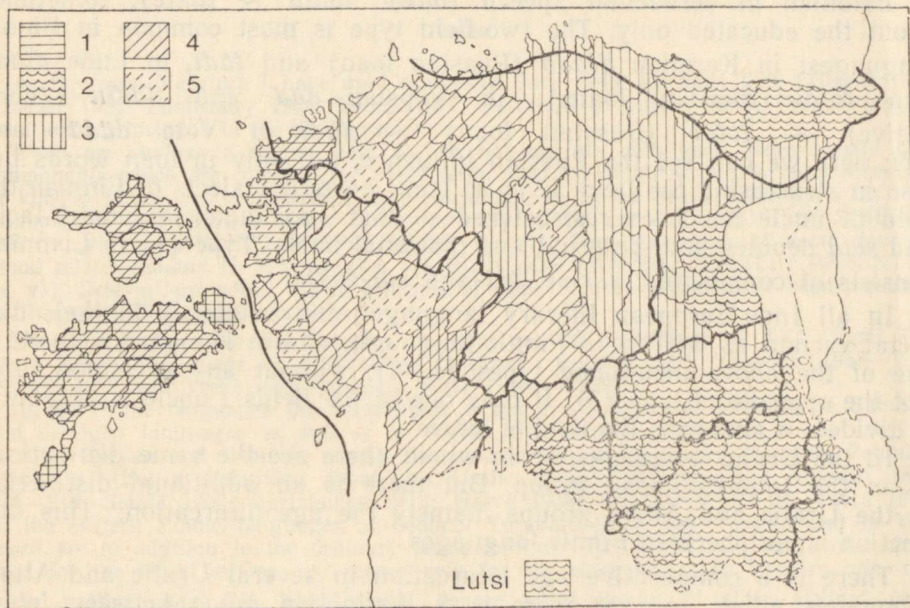
Type (1) is known mainly in the western dialects on the islands (Saaremaa and Hiiumaa) and in some areas of the western coastal region, sporadically even elsewhere. On Saaremaa the variants *isasõsar* 'paternal aunt' and *emasõsar* 'maternal aunt' (*sõsar* 'sister' in dialects) are mainly used. However, Type (1) appears in no dialect exclusively, but rather it is used in addition to another type (3 or 4). It is also possible in Standard Estonian. Type (2) is at least partly an obsolete feature. The term of 'paternal aunt' varies as follows: in northeastern coastal dialects *sõse* (VNg Lüg Jõh Vai; rarely *sõsar*), in eastern dialects *õde* (Trm Kod MMg). In Southern Estonian *tsõtse* (Hel Ran Võn Kam Ote Rõn San Kan Urv Krl Har Rõu Plv Vas Rõp Se Lut), *sõtse* (rarely, Kod MMg Pal Äks); all these lexemes denote also — partly in different dialects — 'sister', *sõtse* even 'sister-in-law', Gutsclaff 1648 «Vaterschwester, Zödzi» (The vocabulary of the Southern Estonian Tartu dialect; Saareste (1924) supposes that a similar entry in Göseken 1660 is taken from Gutsclaff). The other terms in type (2) are *tädi* 'maternal aunt', *lell* 'paternal uncle' and *onu* 'maternal uncle'. Type (2) does not occur in the modern Standard Estonian (regardless of «*sõtse isa õde*» in OS).

More widely spread in the Estonian dialects is Type (3) with three-part field (see the map). The terms of 'uncle' are similar to Type (2), but in this type there is only one lexeme for 'aunt', *tädi* without the sex distinction in the linking component 'parent':

	uncle	aunt				
(3)	paternal	<table style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="border-right: 1px solid black; padding: 2px 10px;"><i>lell</i></td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border-right: 1px solid black; padding: 2px 10px;"><i>onu</i></td> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;"><i>tädi</i></td> </tr> </table>	<i>lell</i>		<i>onu</i>	<i>tädi</i>
<i>lell</i>						
<i>onu</i>	<i>tädi</i>					
	maternal					

A common tendency in European languages is the simplification of the subfield 'sibling of parent' so that the sex distinction of linking component 'parent' disappears. Type (2), where it occurs has been restructured to type (3) so that the term of paternal aunt has disappeared and the former term of maternal aunt has become the neutral term of aunt. The lexeme *tädi* is a common term of 'aunt' in Finnic languages (except Livonian), and the Estonian terms of 'paternal aunt' have primarily the denotation 'sister' (SKES), i.e. the paternal aunt has formerly been called sister. The terms of 'paternal aunt', as well, are secondary in the Estonian dialects in which they have occurred, but we have no evidence of a possible former term 'paternal aunt' in the other Estonian dialects, not even in the other Finnic languages.

The division of paternal and maternal uncle in the Estonian kinship terminology is probably more primary. The term *onu* has an etymological and semantic correlative in Finnish (*eno*) and in Lappish (*eanu*). The term *lell* has maybe a correlative in Mordvinian, *lela*, *lala* 'elder brother', 'father's younger brother', cf. Estonian *sõtse* and its variants which even have referred to elder sister in some Finnic languages (Nirvi 1952 : 92—108). The term *lell* is especially known, in addition to the areas of type (2) in the eastern central dialect of Estonian, and probably has occurred all over in the Estonian mainland dialects; on the islands it is attested only in two parish (Jäm Muh).



1 — The four-field type (1), 2 — The four-field type (2), 3 — The three-field type (3), 4 — The two-field type (4), 5 — Regions where any single kinship term denoting 'sibling of parent' is attested but where at least type (4) obviously must occur.

Type (3) is replaced by a two-field type (4) where there is any distinction 'paternal/maternal':

(4)	uncle	aunt
	onu	tädi

This type extends overall in the Estonian language, partly besides the other types. It seems to be exclusive (with some exceptions) above all on the western areas of the central dialects and in the western dialects in the mainland. It is, moreover the standard type in Standard Estonian (but type (3) is possible, too).

The type (1) is structurally equal to the old Nordic type. It is represented in the modern Swedish as *farbror* 'paternal uncle', *morbror* 'maternal uncle', *faster* 'paternal aunt', *moster* 'maternal aunt'. The two latter terms have been borrowed even to one bilingual area in Estonia: in dialect of Reigi there are *vaaster*, *faaster* and, also in Harju Madise, *mooster* (see Ariste 1933). The type (2) is structurally equal to the old German subfield which was replaced by the modern two-field type of French loan words *Onkel—Tante* in the beginning of the 18th century; e. g. in MHG: paternal *vetere—base* and maternal *öheim—muome*.

The four-field type, either (1) or (2), is fundamental in Indo-European languages; it appears or has appeared e. g. in Sanskrit, Latin, Albanian, Turkish, in some western dialects of Rumanian, Irish, Old English, Old and Middle High German, Swedish, Danish, Icelandic, Norwegian (nynorsk), Latvian and in Votyak.

The three-field type (3) appears in Old Greek, Church Slavonic, Polish, Czech, Macedonian, Serbo-Croatian, Lithuanian and in Finnish.

The two-field type (4) appears in Modern Greek, Romanic languages, Russian, Hungarian, Cymric and Breton, and as French loans (from *oncle, tante*) in German, Dutch, Danish, Norwegian (bokmål), and even in Estonian in vernacular speech (*onkel, tanta ~ tante*), sometimes about the educated only. The two-field type is most common in Finnic languages: in Karelian *deädö* (Russian loan) and *tädi*, in Lude *diädö* and *totoi* (Russian loans), in Vepsian *dääd* and *däädin* (derivative) *~ totoi* (Russian loan) *~ tädi* in Vote *däädä* and *täci*; here we can see the Russian influence, not only in loan words but also in structuring the field. Even in some eastern dialects of Finnish the field of uncle has been restructured so that *eno* 'maternal uncle' lacks and *setä* denotes both paternal and maternal uncle. Type (4) in Livonian consists of compounds: *sür-ve'lkki* and *sür-sušša*.

In all Indo-European literary languages and obviously in their dialectal variant as well as in Finnic languages and in Hungarian, there is one of the above mentioned types (1—4), without any exception, e. g. not the opposite of type (3). If only one of the fields ('uncle' and 'aunt') is divided, it always is the field of 'uncle'.

In the Uralic languages, as in whole, there are the same distinctions as in the Indo-European group. But there is an additional distinction in the Uralic and Altaic groups, namely the age bifurcation. This distinction is peripheric in Finnic languages.

There is a comparative age bifurcation in several Uralic and Altaic languages either so that there is a distinction made between 'elder sibling' and 'younger sibling', or so that there is a neutral term for 'brother' and another term (or term of address) such as 'elder brother'. The same applies for sisters. In some languages the term denoting 'elder brother' also denotes 'father's younger brother' and the term denoting 'elder sister' denotes als 'father's (younger) sister or 'mother's sister'.⁴

The age bifurcation concerns also the terms 'uncle' and 'aunt'. The Lappish subfield is as follows:

		uncle	aunt
paternal	elder	<i>eahki</i>	<i>siessa</i>
	younger	<i>čeahci</i>	
maternal	elder	<i>eanu</i>	<i>goaski</i>
	younger		<i>muotta</i>

The term *eahki* denotes 'paternal uncle, older than father (the linking person)', the term *čeahci* denotes 'paternal uncle, younger than father', etc. In other Uralic languages there are different kinds of corresponding subfields, e. g. in Ostyak: eight terms as in Krasnojarsk dialect, or so that the elder male siblings of parents (respectively elder female siblings of parents) have a common term but the terms for the younger siblings include both the age distinction and the sex distinction of the linking parent (i. e. the term *iki* denotes 'paternal uncle, older than father' and 'maternal uncle, older than mother', and *vt'si* denotes 'paternal uncle, younger than father' and *oli* 'maternal uncle, younger than mother', in Vasjugan dialect. (See Karjalainen 1913.)

However, in the semantic subfield of 'sibling of parent' there is no age bifurcation in Estonian, in other Finnic languages and in modern Hungarian. Thus these languages follow, in this subfield, the European structures with no signs of particular Uralic features.

Notes

¹ As reference literature I have used especially Buck 1949, Burling 1970, Fritsche 1977, Kroeber 1952, Lounsbury 1964, Lyons 1977, Saltarelli & Durbin 1967. The dictionaries used are not included in the bibliography.

² When we analyse a lexical field we do not operate with such hierarchically high components which are common for every term, such as HUMAN in this case. Meanings of kinship terms can be described as predications, as Lyons does (1977: 319—321): for example the term 'brother-in-law' is semantically MALE (x) & (SPOUSE-OF-SIBLING-OF (x, y) ∨ SIBLING-OF-SPOUSE-OF (x, y)). The description of *uncle* denoting blood relative should be MALE (x) & ((SIBLING-OF (MALE ∨ FEMALE) PARENT-OF (x, y)). Descriptions which are in principle of same type have previously been presented by Bierwisch 1970 and Leech 1974.

³ The main sources for the Estonian material are the collections of KKI (Eesti Teaduste Akadeemia Keele ja Kirjanduse Instituut, Tallinn) and Saareste 1958—1963, Valmet 1952 and Väike murdesõnastik I—II (1982—1989).

⁴ In the Uralic languages this bifurcation of sex exists first and foremost in Samoyed and in Ugric languages as well as in Votyak, Cheremis and Mordvin, but it does not exist in Zyryan and Lappish, nor in the western Finnic languages (Finnish, Estonian, Livonian). (For a discussion about this Uralic system, see especially Ahlqvist 1875: 211—212; Setälä 1900; Karjalainen 1913; Harva 1938; Nirvi 1952: 5—16; Vávra 1976) In the eastern Finnic languages of Olonets Karelian, Lude and Vepsian and in Vote there are in addition to the ordinary terms 'brother' and 'sister' the terms of address used for the elder brother and respectively for the elder sister. In Vepsian *viik*, *veik* 'elder brother' and *čiža* 'elder sister' denote even 'spouse of elder sibling' (with respective sex) and 'elder cousin'. A semantic connection with the Uralic system can be seen in the Vote language *sōsō* 'elder sister' and the etymologically corresponding variations in Estonian dialects *sōts(e)* etc. 'paternal aunt' commonly, but also 'sister'; in Estonian even *ōde* 'sister' commonly, but also 'paternal aunt' in some dialects. According to Nirvi (1952: 92—108) the motivation for terms of address of elder siblings is, in Finnic languages, based on taboo: it was forbidden to call elder relatives by name. As a matter of fact the terms denoting elder brother and sister are in these

languages like formal variations of the primary terms 'brother' and 'sister' (regardless of the real etymological relations). The affective nature of such word variations is fit for this pragmatic purpose. — The change over to a new system can be seen in Hungarian: the terms *bátya* 'elder brother', *öcs* 'younger brother', *néne* 'elder sister', *húg* 'younger sister' represent the Altaic-Uralic system, and neologisms from 1839—1844 *fiwer* 'brother' and *nővér* 'sister' represent the European system (see Ullmann 1970: 247). — In the Balkan languages this bifurcation is known in Bulgarian, Macedonian, Serbo-Croatian, Albanian and Turkish and previously in Rumanian. The system of these languages is chiefly made up of the common terms 'brother' and 'sister' and special terms 'elder brother', 'elder sister' (Delbrück 1890: 87; Fritsche 1977: 138—161, 198—202).

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МАУНО КОСКИ (Турку)

ТЕРМИНЫ 'ДЯДЯ' И 'ТЕТЯ' В ИХ СЕМАНТИЧЕСКОМ ПОЛЕ

В статье рассматриваются структурные принципы семантического поля терминов родства. Общее поле делится в свою очередь на т. н. подполя, из которых в статье более обстоятельно рассматривается 'дядя'/тетя'. В европейских языках это поле может состоять как из четырех, трех, так и двух частей. В саамском и некоторых более восточных финно-угорских языках существует, кроме того, деление по возрастному признаку. Максимальное число частей поля — восемь.