

# Kinship in grammar

Östen Dahl  
Masja Koptjevskaja-Tamm  
Dept. of Linguistics  
Stockholm University

## 1. Introductory remarks

Kinship terminology has always been a central subject in anthropology, with the focus on the ways we classify our relatives and how they relate to social structure. In linguistic literature, kin terms are often mentioned as a group of lexical items with special properties. Most notably perhaps, they figure together with body part terms as the nouns that most often show up in inalienable possessive constructions. Due to their role in what is referred to as "possessor ascension", body part terms have been discussed quite extensively in recent grammatical literature (e.g. Chapell & McGregor 1996). In contrast, there seems to have been no general and systematic treatment of the grammatical properties of kin terms. This paper is an attempt to open a discussion on the topic.

## 2. Some important concepts and distinctions

### 2.1 Terminology: Anchors and referents

Kin terms are by definition relational. In the typical case, a kin term is used to refer to an individual by relating him/her kinshipwise to another individual. For instance, if I say *My father is sick*, I am referring to my father by relating him to myself. In such a case, my father is the **referent** and I am the **anchor**. If I say *Dad is sick*, no anchor is explicitly indicated, but the utterance is still understood to refer to my father (if there are no indications to the contrary). Thus, the anchor may be **explicit** or **implicit**. In anthropological literature, the anchor is often called the **ego** -- in a linguistic context, this term may be ambiguously understood to refer to the speaker, who has to be distinguished from the anchor, although (or precisely because of) being often identical to it.

The referent and the anchor may belong to the same or to different generations. In the latter case, we distinguish **ascending** kin terms -- where the generation of the referent precedes that of the ego (*father, mother, grandfather* etc.)-- and **descending** kin terms -- where the referent belongs to a later generation (*son, daughter, grandchild* etc.). When the referent and the anchor are of the same generation, we may talk of **horizontal** kin terms (*sister, brother, cousin* etc.). It may be noticed that ascending kin terms differ from the others by often having unique referents within a family.

Kin terms like *father* and *mother* are called **parental** kin terms for obvious reasons.

## 2.2 Proper and improper kin terms

Among words used for relatives we may further distinguish **proper** and **improper** kin terms. Proper kin terms are those where the kin use is clearly the basic one. In the case of improper kin terms, there is also a non-kin (typically non-relational) use which is at least as salient as the kin use. e.g. *barn* 'child', *pojke* 'boy', *flicka* 'girl', *man* 'man'.

Swedish examples of proper kin terms are *pappa* 'daddy', *mamma* 'mum', *mormor* 'MoMo'<sup>1</sup>, *farmor* 'FaMo', *syster* 'sister', *son* 'son'. Some improper kin terms are *barn* 'child', *pojke* 'boy' (commonly used in spoken language instead of 'son') and *man* 'man/husband'. It is hardly a coincidence that the improper terms are either descending or denote marital relations. In particular, we know of no language where the most common word for 'first generation descendant' is not the same as the most common word for 'person who has not reached puberty' (i.e. 'child').

## 2.3 Taxonomy of uses of kin terms

Kin terms are used in many different ways, and in many contexts. One important parameter in classifying uses of kin terms is the identity of the anchor. As we have already said, a common case is for the anchor to be identical to the speaker of the utterance. Of course, it may also be the addressee, or some set of persons including the speaker and/or the addressee. If the anchor includes one or more speech act participants, we say that the use is **egocentric** (following the definition of this term in Dahl 1997). A perhaps less obvious distinction also pertaining to the anchor is that between **in-family** and **out-of-family** uses. In an in-family use, the speech act participants belong to the same family as the anchor of the kin term. This is of course highly correlated to egocentricity but does not coincide with it. If I am speaking to a stranger about my father, it is an egocentric out-of-family use. Conversely, if a man says to his wife "Is Granny coming this weekend?", he may be referring to his children's grandmother rather than to his own or his wife's, in which case the use is in-family but non-egocentric. In-family and egocentric uses are together characterized by the backgrounded and/or highly predictable character of the anchor, making any indication of it communicatively redundant. If, in addition, the kin term has a unique referent in the context, as will normally be the case with a word like *mother*, its function comes close to that of a proper name. **Proper name-like** uses of kin terms will play a crucial role in the rest of this paper.

A further distinction concerns the function of the kin term in the utterance: it may have a **vocative** use, as in *Where are you, Daddy?* or a **referential** use, as in *Where is Daddy?*, and a **predicative** use, as in *He is my Daddy*. In this paper, we shall have little to say about the predicative use.

Vocative uses, by definition, must have second-person referents. Referential uses, on the other hand, may have first, second, and third person referents: in certain languages and certain social contexts, kin terms may be used in lieu of first and second person pronouns. Given that the anchor may also be any person, we would thus theoretically obtain nine combinations, but probably only five are relatively common, as shown in Table 1:

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<sup>1</sup> Whenever appropriate, we use the standard notation in which e.g. 'FaMo' stands for father's mother, 'MoBr' for mother's brother and so on.

**Table 1. Anchor-referent combinations**

	1 <sup>st</sup> person referent	2 <sup>nd</sup> person referent	3 <sup>rd</sup> person referent
1 <sup>st</sup> person anchor		✓	✓
2 <sup>nd</sup> person anchor	✓		✓
3 <sup>rd</sup> person anchor			✓

✓ = common combination

### 3. Kin terms in spoken Swedish

As a background to the discussion of the grammatical behaviour of kin terms, it may be a good idea to look at the distribution of kin terms in actual speech. To this end, we looked at the use of kin terms in a corpus of spoken Swedish, "Samtal i Göteborg" (for details, see Löffström 1988 and Dahl 1997), consisting of about half a million words of conversation between adults, some related to each other and some not.<sup>2</sup>

The first observation to be made is that kin terms are indeed very frequent in spoken discourse, and make up a sizeable proportion of all lexical NPs with animate reference. Thus, the two most frequent animate nouns in our material were *mamma* 'mother' and *barn* 'child' -- that is, one proper and one improper kin term. Totally, there were 728 occurrences of proper kin terms and 233 occurrences of improper kin terms in the corpus, which means about 0.2 per cent of the words in the corpus. A more meaningful way of counting may be the following. In the investigation reported in Dahl 1996, a syntactic analysis was made of about 10 000 finite clauses. Of these, 52 had lexical subjects containing a proper kin term as head or used as a title. This may not sound as a very large proportion, but it is in fact 23 per cent of all subjects with a lexical (non-proper name) head in the sub-corpus.

We may distinguish three main types<sup>3</sup> of kin-referring noun phrases in Swedish, depending on the presence of a possessor indicator or definite article, (i) bare nouns, (ii) possessive-marked NPs and (iii) definite NPs.

"Bare nouns" - i.e nouns used without a determiner or possessor: *pappa* 'dad'. This type is specific to kin terms and it is restricted to proper-name like uses. In the corpus, clear cases of bare noun uses are found of the following kin terms:

*far* 'father', *farfar* 'FaFa', *farmor* 'FaMo', *mamma*, *mor* 'mother', *morfar* 'MoFa', *mormor* 'MoMo', *moster* 'MoSi', *pappa* 'father', *svärmor* 'mother-in-law'

As can be seen, all these are ascending..

<sup>2</sup> The participants in the project within which the corpus was created were asked to record half an hour's conversation with a person they knew well. In many cases, this person was a member of the same family. The corpus thus represents both in-family and out-of-family kin reference but since we did not have access to precise information about the identity of the referents it was not possible to distinguish them systematically.

<sup>3</sup> In addition, a fourth type should be mentioned, title + noun, as in *farbror John* 'uncle John'. When counting, we did not distinguish it from the bare noun type, which may distort the figures slightly, but not too much, since this type seems to be relatively infrequent in Swedish. (It has its own prototype: ascending non-unique relationships such as 'uncle' and 'aunt'.)

The total number of occurrences of "bare nouns" was 318. Of these 243 (76%) were parental terms, referring to 'mother' (142) or 'father' (101).

*Possessive-marked NPs.* Within this type, one may distinguish NPs with pronominal and lexical possessors, respectively.

*NPs containing a possessive pronoun.* There were 332 kin terms used with a possessive pronoun, out of which 269 were proper kin terms and 63 improper ones. 118 (36%) of the 332 were parental terms. As for the possessive pronouns, 120 were first person, 85 second person and 124 third person.

*NPs containing a genitive phrase.* 41 kin terms were preceded by a genitive noun phrase with a lexical head. Of those 41 NPs, 18 were parental terms. The alternate construction with a prepositional phrase possessor was found in 7 cases, in 6 of which the kin term was indefinite.

*Definite NPs.* In the definite group, we found 74 proper kin terms and 134 improper ones used with a definite article without a possessor, out of which 32 (43 %!!!!) were parental terms.

The most notable tendencies revealed by this statistics are as follows. To start with, we may note the dominating role of parental terms, making up about 60 per cent or (419 tokens) of all the proper kin terms in the corpus. Although bare noun uses of kin terms do not constitute a majority of the total, their relatively high proportion is significant in view of the fact that they are normally egocentric. It can be concluded that the majority of all tokens of kin terms (and a qualified majority of the proper kin terms) in this corpus are used egocentrically.

**Table 2. Kin terms sorted by generations**

Generations	Proper kin terms	Improper kin terms	Sum	
-3	2		2	
-2	95		95	
-1	521		521	Ascending: 618
0	90	49	139	Same generation: 139
1	29	177	206	Descending: 206
Sum	737	226	963	

## 4. Grammatical and other peculiarities of kin terms

In many languages, some or all kin terms receive special treatment, setting them apart from other nouns. In particular, we find examples of the following phenomena:

### 4.1 Definiteness

Together with proper names, kin terms tend to be treated as inherently definite. This means for instance that they may be exempt from being obligatorily marked by definite articles or other determiners, leading to bare noun uses like the ones already mentioned. In some languages definite articles are simply excluded with kin terms, as in Ålvdalen Dalecarlian. In Standard Italian, kin terms are exceptions to the rule that possessive pronouns are usually combined with a definite article: *la mia casa* 'my house' vs. *mia madre* 'my mother'

Other reflexes of the treatment as definites is e.g. that 'naked' kin terms obey the same constraints as NPs with an overt article and proper names in syntactic contexts such as *there*-constructions (English, Scandinavian) or with respect to object marking, as in Hungarian, where they trigger definite object endings in verbs.

## 4.2 "Proprial" articles

Some languages have so-called "proprial" articles whose primary use is with proper names. Such articles are often extended to kin terms in proper name-like uses, that is, the same contexts where bare kin terms are used in other languages. Examples are found in Scandinavian dialects, e.g. Northern Swedish '*n Per* 'Per', '*n far* 'father'. Another case in point is Samoan (Austronesian), where proprial articles are used with proper names, personal pronouns and naked kin terms such as 'mother' and 'father'. In such cases the kin terms are used egocentrically, referring to the speaker's parents, e.g.

(1)

Sa	'ou	va'ai	i-a	tina
PAST	I	see to-	PROP	mother

'I saw my mother.'

It is not quite clear what other kin terms allow this usage - at least terms for 'brother' and 'sister' are excluded. Note that kin terms combining with possessive pronouns or articles do not take proprial articles - cf the example above with the following more or less synonymous sentence:

(2)

Sa	'ou	va'ai	i lou	tina
PAST	I	see to	SG.DOM.POSS	mother

'I saw my mother.' (Niklas Jonsson, personal communication)

## 4.3 Plural formation

Like proper names, kin terms may sometimes lack plural forms, or they may share special plural endings.

For instance, in Älvdalen Dalecarlian (Germanic), the following kin terms are said to lack plurals (Levander 1909, Steensland 1986):

*fadher* 'Fa'; *muna* 'Mo'; *fafar* 'FaFa'; *muäfar* 'MoFa'; *mumun* 'MoMo'; *famun* 'FaMo'; *hlunga* 'female cousin'; *tytta* 'aunt'

Other kin terms do have plurals, for instance:

*bruädher* 'Br'; *syster* 'Si'; *faster* 'FaSi'; *muäster* 'MoSi'; *duäter* 'Da'

In Polish, masculine animate nouns usually end in *-i* in the nominative plural, e.g. *student:studenci*. However, the ending *-owie* is used regularly with

- proper names: *Jan: Janowie*
- kin terms: *ojciec: ojcowie* 'father' except *wnuk* 'grandchild' and *kuzyn* 'cousin'
- titles such as *general~:general~owie*

#### 4.4 Associative (group) plurals

A large number of typologically different languages has a regular way of building constructions with the general meaning 'X + those surrounding X' - so-called "associative plurals. At least in some languages, these constructions are restricted to proper names and (certain) kin terms. For examples, this is true for Lezgian (NE Caucasian; Haspelmath 1993: 79), where this meaning is expressed through a combination of a reduced genitive ending and a nominalizing morpheme with the. This formation is only limited to proper names and some kinship terms, e.g.

(3)

Dide-d-bur	bazar.di-z	fe-na
mother-GEN-SBST.PL	market-DAT	go-AOR

'Mother and those with her went to the market'

(4)

Suna xala-d-bur.u-n	k'wal
Suna aunt-GEN-SBST.PL-GEN	house

'the house of Suna-xala and her family'

Similarly in Kpelle - and more generally in the Mande languages within Niger-Congo - the associative plural marker is used with proper names of persons and personified animals, the interrogative pronoun 'who' and certain kin terms (Bill Anderson p.c. via Edith Moravcsik p.c.).

#### 4.5 Possessors

When used to express "possessors" in possessive constructions, kin terms also sometimes go together with proper names. Thus, in Älvdalen Dalecarlian, only definites, proper names and kin terms can have a genitive in *-es*: *wardj-em-es* 'the wolf's', *Jerk-es* 'Eric's', *fadher-es* 'father's'. Similarly, in Standard German, only proper names and kin terms may be used as possessors before the head noun, e.g. *Peters Buch* 'Peter's book', *Vaters Auto* 'Father's car'. In Russian, so-called possessive adjectives, which were once the standard way of forming possessive NPs, are now basically restricted to proper names and kin terms in *-a*, e.g. *Mašina stat'ja* 'Masha's article', *papin stul* 'Father's chair'. In Faroese, proper names and bare kin terms have a special "possessive" form:

(5)

Jákup-sa(r) / mammu-sa(r)	bók
'Jákup-POSS/mother-POSS	book

(Lockwood 1955: 104, 106; Barnes & Weyhe 1994: 198 -199).

#### 4.6 Kin terms as heads of possessive constructions

The behavior of kin terms in the role of heads of possessive constructions is probably the most discussed aspect of kinship in grammar. It is a well-known fact that kin terms and body part terms (*head, foot, stomach* etc.) are the two semantic classes of nouns that are most often treated as "inalienable" whenever alienability distinctions are made.

Some comments on such distinctions are in place here. As we noted in an earlier paper (Dahl & Koptjevskaja Tamm forthcoming), the traditional labels give the impression that one is dealing with two kinds of possession: alienable and inalienable, variously characterized in the literature in terms of e.g. the permanence, inherentness or essentiality of the possessive relationship and/or the relationality of the head noun. The choice between inalienable and alienable constructions is seldom predictable from such general definitions, however; rather, what the alienability distinction means in most languages is that a set of relational nouns are singled out for special treatment, and that this set always includes members of one or both of the groups mentioned above. Equally important, however, is the phenomenon of obligatory possessor marking, which tends to occur with the same nouns as those that appear in inalienable constructions.

In our previous paper, we noted that although kin terms and body parts are alike in that they can be part of the core of an inalienable construction, they are also rather different in many ways. Thus, as we have already seen, **kin terms** are animate nouns which in their typical uses strongly resemble proper names, i.e., they are used of well-known individuals in the immediate situational context – syntactically, typically subjects. In the normal case, the “anchor” of a kin term is indeed the “I” of the speech act, i.e., the speaker, and the addition of a 1st person pronoun is thus communicatively redundant. Yet, grammaticalization processes may lead to a situation where the grammar obliges the speaker to do so.

By contrast, **body part terms** are inanimate nouns, and tend to show up in rather different syntactic contexts than kin terms – they are usually objects or adverbials. But here also, the “possessor” is highly predictable, strongly tending to be identical to the referent of the subject of the sentence, or alternatively, a referent of another NP, according to the particular syntactic construction used (e.g. the direct object in a sentence such as *I hit him in the head*). Body parts are also special in that their state and any changes in it have direct relevance for the “whole” organism. Thus, in most contexts, body part terms have a low discourse status: what really matters is not so much the body part as such but rather the affected person or animal. This motivates syntactic constructions such as possessor ascension/ external possession and body-part incorporation (Chappell & McGregor (1996) and Haspelmath & König (1998)). Generalizing, we might say that kin terms are **egocentric** and **pragmatically anchored**, while body parts are **syntactically anchored**.

#### 4.6.1 *Possessive constructions restricted to kin terms*

This is the type of situation that is normally described in terms of alienability distinctions. We argued in our previous paper that it is the result of a grammaticalization process by which a younger and expanding possessive constructions is encroaching on the territory of an older one, leaving it only with a few lexical items. Alternatively, the differentiation might arise by a phonetic reduction of possessive pronouns in certain contexts where they are highly predictable and thus prone to lose stress.

One important aspect of alienability distinctions noted in Nichols (1988) is that they are often highly lexically idiosyncratic, that is, that there is in fact no general semantic rule that determines whether an inalienable construction can be used or not. Thus, such a construction may be possible with one kin term and impossible with another. Such a situation commonly arises in the final stages of the expansion of a new construction, where only a few lexical items, usually high-frequency ones, are able to resist the process.

We shall use kin term constructions in Catalan as an illustrative example, without making any claims as to the exact ways in which the current situation has arisen. Catalan has two possessive constructions, as shown by the following examples:

- 'inalienable': *mon pare* 'my father'
- 'alienable': *a meva casa* 'my house'

We can see that in addition to utilizing two different sets of possessive pronouns, the constructions differ in the presence of a definite article only in the 'alienable' construction. This is analogous to the Italian situation referred to above. In Catalan, however, the 'inalienable' construction is possible only certain kin terms, with considerable variation between dialects. Table 3 shows the information given in Alcover & Moll (1956) with respect to the possible combinations of *mon* and different male kin terms in twelve different locations. (Regrettably, the corresponding female terms cannot be included, due to insufficient information in the source.)

**Table 3. Distribution of *mon* in different locations**

Noun	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
pare 'father'	x	x	x				x	x	x	x	x	x
germà 'brother'	x	x		x	x	x			x	x	x	x
tio/oncle 'uncle'			x			x	x	x	x	x	x	x
cosí 'cousin'				x		x	x	x	x	x		x
cunyat 'brother-in-law'						x	x	x			x	
nebot 'nephew'							x	x		x	x	
sogre 'father-in-law'					x							
padri 'godfather'									x			x
aví 'grandfather'												x

#### 4.6.2 Obligatory possessor marking

There are really two varieties of obligatory possessor marking. In the first, certain nouns obligatorily carry a possessive affix. An example is Navajo (Athabascan):

*shi-ma* 'my mother'

*a-ma* 'someone's mother, mother in general'

In the second variety, the possessor is obligatory but may be either pronominal or lexical. This is found in the Tupí-Guaraní language family, e.g. Sirionó *Juanito ru* 'Juanito's father', *nde-ru* 'your father' (own data). (Cf. Velazquez Castillo 1996, 62 for the corresponding facts in Guaraní.)

It may be noted that there is a parallel here to obligatory subject marking. In English or Swedish, every sentence must (in principle) have a subject, but it may be either pronominal or



lexical. By contrast, many languages have an obligatory subject marker in the form of a pronoun or an affix on the verb, irrespective of the presence of a lexical subject.

We may also compare with the obligatoriness of possessive pronouns with subject-controlled body part terms in English, e.g. *I hurt my foot* (not 'the foot' as in many other languages).

We see obligatory possessor marking as the result of a grammaticalization process by which possessive pronouns come to be used whenever possible, rather than when communicatively motivated. The frequent use of pronouns in communicatively redundant positions facilitates their reduction to affixes

## 5. Differences among kin terms: the parental prototype

As we have seen, kin terms as a lexical domain tend to behave in particular ways, due to their special referential properties in discourse. In many respects, kin terms go together with proper names. From the point of view of grammaticalization processes, this works in two ways. Sometimes proper names and kin terms form the core of the domain of a certain phenomenon, such as proprials articles or special suffixes such as the nominative plural morpheme *-owie* in Polish. In other cases, proper names and kin terms are alike in resisting some grammaticalization process, such as the spread of definite articles. (In the end, even proper names and kin terms take definite articles.) With respect to possessive constructions, kin terms go together with body part terms to form a residual domain, which is the last one to be conquered by a new, expanding construction. But it would be wrong to think of kin terms as a monolithic class. In actual practice, and as we saw above in several cases, the phenomena we have been talking about are often restricted to a subset of all the kin terms in a language. It can be noted that lexical idiosyncrasy seems to be a general property of residual phenomena in grammaticalization. But it is also clear that not all kin terms, and not all uses of kin terms, are alike with respect to the properties that motivate their special treatment. Thus, proper-name-like uses are much more frequent with certain kin terms, notably parental ones, such as *father* and *mother*. This is partly dependent on social conventions. In the English-speaking world, one would address one's father as *father* but one's son rather by his name. In China, expressions such as 'third sister' are regularly used for the younger members of a family. However, a system which is the inverse of the English one is not attested (to our knowledge), suggesting a universal partial ordering ('hierarchy' being too strong), based on what we would propose to call the **parental prototype**. Thus, we would claim that a kin term is more likely to be treated proper-name-like or as an "inalienable" if

- it denotes an ascending relation ('father' rather than 'son') *or*
- it has a unique referent within a family ('father' rather than 'uncle') *or*
- the distance is no more than one generation ('father' rather than 'grandfather')  
where the conditions are given in descending order with respect to their weight.

We shall give a couple of illustrations how these conditions can show up in systems of kin terms.

In Kera (Chadic; Ebert 1979, 171), possessive suffixes are in general obligatory with kin terms and body part terms. In many contexts, a definite marker -*ń* (often realized only as a change in tone, is also obligatory. What is relevant for our purposes is that the presence or absence of this definite marker may distinguish otherwise homophonous pairs of kin terms, where the definite marker is present on the descending member and absent on the ascending one:

*nəəndən* 'my MoBr' : *nəəndən* 'my SiSo'

*moomədù* 'his grandfather': *moomədùj* 'his grandson'

In Georgian (Kartvelian; Thomas Widmann and Nino Amiridze, p.c.), a number of kin terms use clitic possessive pronouns, e.g., *mamachemi* 'my father', *dedasheni* 'your (sg.) mother' opposed to preposed free pronouns as in *chemi da* 'my sister', *sheni saxli* 'your (sg.) house'. These kin terms are as can be seen from the following list all ascending:

*mama* 'father', *deda* 'mother', *bebia* 'grandmother' *babua* or *p'ap'a* 'grandfather', *deida* 'mother's sister', *mamida* 'father's sister', *bija* 'uncle', *bijola* 'aunt'

The examples given above from Dalecarlian, Polish, and Catalan also show a differentiated behaviour among kin terms, which does not fit the partial ordering defined by the conditions above but still gives support to the idea of a clustering around parental terms.

In addition to the grammatical parameters we have already talked about, it seems that the parental prototype also can be used to account for other distinctions within the kin domain. For instance, in many languages, there are kin terms that are formed by a reduplicative CVCV, CVC or VCV pattern, such as *mama*, *papa*, *ata* and the like. It appears that this is most common for parental terms, relatively common for other ascending kin terms and least common for descending ones. The list of Georgian kin terms just given illustrates this. Consider also the set of reduplicative kin terms in Russian:

*papa* 'father', *mama* 'mother', *bab(uška)* 'grandmother', *ded* 'grandfather', *djadja* 'uncle', *tetja* 'aunt'

Possessive NPs in the Polynesian languages are famous for the distinction between "dominant" possession (o-possession) and "subordinate possession" (a-possession), which has certain similarities with, but is not exactly the same as the traditional alienability split. The two categories correlate with the difference in the relation between a possessee and a possessor. For our purpose it is noteworthy that parental terms and other kin terms denoting ascending relations cluster together with typically inherently, inalienably possessed entities, such as body parts (o-possession). Other kin terms cluster with words which, for instance, denote more or less recently acquired personal possessions (a-possession) (Bauer 1993:209-216).

## 6. Kin term doublets

The differentiation among kin terms that we have discussed so far has been based on the semantics of the terms, that is, on the properties of the kinship relation they express -- for instance, ascending relations were distinguished from descending ones. There is another type of differentiation, however, that distinguishes kin terms that are denotationally synonymous, that is, express the same kinship relations. The existence of such **kin term doublets** in a language like English is of course something that most of its speakers are aware of: fathers are called *Daddy* and mothers *Mum* or the like. It appears that the frequency of such doublets is another phenomenon that is correlated with the parental prototype. The phenomenon is not restricted to European languages, as the following list shows:

- English: *dad:father; mum:mother*
- Swedish: *pappa:far* 'father'; *mamma:mor* 'mother'
- French: *papa: père* 'father'; *maman: mère* 'mother'
- Russian: *papa: otec* 'father'; *mama: mat'* 'mother'
- Siriono (Tupí-Guaraní): *paba:ru* 'father'; *tei:si* 'mother'
- Slave (Athabaskan; Rice 1989): *?abá:-ta* 'father'; *?amá:-ne* 'mother'

The members of kin term doublets usually differ with respect to their use. A common pattern is for one member to be more frequent in vocative and egocentric uses. Sometimes, this seems to be regularized to an extent where it is motivated to talk of suppletion within a single paradigm. Statements to this effect are not seldom found in grammars, but it is hard to know exactly what reality is behind them.

In Axininca Campa (Arawakan) the following suppletive pairs are found according to Payne 1981:

*nowaapati* 'my father'

*paapa* 'father'/vocative

*tomichi* 'my son'

*nochomi* 'son'/vocative

In Slave (Rice 1989: 227), the vocative of *-ne* 'mother', *?ene*, is said to be used "mostly in referring to an older or deceased woman" whereas the usual vocative form for 'mother' is *?amá*.

Merlan (1982, 138) reports that in certain Australian languages "reference in other than the egocentric referential mode requires the use of a set of terms which (for some relationships) differ from vocative and egocentric referential kin terms". Thus, in Jawoň a child calls her own mother *garaŋ* but when referring to another uses the term *-ŋakunñiraŋ?mi*.

Less drastically, the vocative function may require a special derivative form such as a diminutive, as in Polish: *babka* 'grandmother' would have the vocative *babko!* but instead the diminutive *babciu!* is used (F. Gladney, personal communication). In Klamath (Penutian; Scott Delancey, p.c.), kin terms used referentially take a special prefix, /b-/ (historically a 3rd person clitic pronoun). In vocative use, the some kin terms lack this prefix but instead take a special suffix not found anywhere else in the language.

*p-tis-ap* 'father (referential)'

*tis-i:p* 'father! (vocative)'

*p-k'is-ap* 'mother'

*k'is-i:p* 'mother!'

Corresponding to these differences in use one also frequently finds are directly relevant to our discussion in that the members of kin term doublets tend to behave differently with respect to such phenomena as obligatory possessive and definiteness marking. In French, only *papa* has a bare noun use in referential function, as is illustrated by the following example:

(6)??Père est venu/Mon père est venu/Papa est venu.

Similarly, although possessive prefixes are obligatory with kin terms in Slave according to Rice (1989:227), her examples show that there are kin term doublets where this only holds for the one of the members:

(7)

Mary **be-tá**            ʔeyá hili  
 M.     3SG-father        sick is  
 'Mary's father is sick' (1989:229)

(8)

ʔabá gok'eríʔée  
 father jacket  
 'father's jacket' (1989:231)

Likewise the obligatoriness of possessor markers in Sirionó holds only for the second members of the pairs listed above:

(9)

hue    sī     paba    u-chã  
 here   from   father   3SG-flee  
 '(my) father fled from here'

(10)

aba    nde-ru?  
 who    2SG-father  
 'who is your father?'

## 7. Renewal of kin terms

There seems to be a tendency to think of kin terms like *father*, *mother*, *brother* etc. as belonging to the most stable parts of vocabulary. Indeed, the English words just mentioned belong to the common Indo-European heritage, meaning that they have been around for a long time. In spite of this, renewal of kin terms does take place, sufficiently often<sup>4</sup> for there to be at least four different unrelated terms for 'father' in the Germanic languages:

- as in English *father* etc.
- as in Swedish *pappa* etc. (apparently from French; general spread in French-influenced area)
- as in English *daddy*

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<sup>4</sup> There is so far no reliable global statistics on the replacement rates of individual words. Dyen et al. (1997) give values for Indo-European languages that suggest that the words 'father' (0.67) and 'mother' (0.32) are relatively stable but that these words are still replaced more often than a maximally stable word like 'sun' (0.19). (A word has a replacement rate of 1 if it is replaced once on the average during a time period estimated at 2400 years.)

- as in Gothic *atta* (many parallels in the area, cf. Turkish *ata* and Russian *otec*)

Parental and parental-like kin terms may be renewed from several different sources:

- “nursery language” (“Motherese”)
- loans from other languages
- slang
- diminutives

While the influence of “Motherese” and child language on parental terminology has always been acknowledged and was stressed in Jakobson's classical paper (1966), the fact that parental kin terms are not seldom borrowed from one language to another has been less often appreciated. The forms 'Mama' and 'Papa', alluded to in the title of Jakobson's paper, are in fact the most obvious cases in point, in that they were borrowed into the Germanic and Slavic languages from French, apparently during the period when French upper class culture spread in Europe. In Swedish, they have become generally used among all groups in society only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They are thus not somehow an automatic extension of children's speech, as is sometimes thought. However, renewals such as the introduction of 'Mama' and 'Papa' seem to follow a certain pattern, which explains the typical distribution of the members of kin term doublets. More specifically, innovated kin terms like 'Mama' and 'Papa' tend to be restricted to vocative and/or egocentric and in-family uses, that is, the uses where the identity of the anchor is most predictable, and where the proper-name like character of the kin-referring NPs is most obvious. (The existence of vocative-referential suppletion and similar phenomena in kin terms suggests that the vocative function tends to be the original renewal site.) It is therefore not astonishing that innovated kin terms tend to show proper name-like behaviour with respect to possessive and definite marking. Not only are possessive and definite markers frequently non-obligatory with such terms, they may even be impossible. As time passes, however, these properties may change. As an example, we may consider the introduction of the words *pappa* and *mamma* into Swedish. (The account builds on information given in the Swedish Academy Dictionary.)

*Pappa* and *mamma* entered the Swedish language in the late 17th century, as loans from French. Until the 19th century, they do not seem to have been used in the plural or with definite articles. In the 20th century, such uses have become quite normal. The words *far* and *mor* (shortened forms of the lexemes *fader* and *moder*)<sup>5</sup> were common in in-family uses until fairly recently, but today, *pappa* and *mamma* are rapidly replacing them even in out-of-family uses.

The development during the last century is documented in Table x. It shows the frequencies of various forms of the lexemes *pappa*, *fader/far*, *mamma*, and *moder/mor* in two corpora from the Swedish Language Bank. Regrettably, some of the forms are homonymous<sup>6</sup> and the figures are therefore not totally reliable. In spite of this, the table gives clear evidence of two tendencies: the general shift from *fader/far* and *moder/mor* to *pappa* and *mamma*, and the increased use of the latter with definite and plural marking.

<sup>5</sup> The relationship between the long and short forms *fader:far* and *moder:mor* is a separate story which is also relevant to the issue of kin term renewal. The short forms cannot take any endings in Standard Swedish; the missing forms in the paradigm are supplied by the long forms. Conversely, the long forms *fader* and *moder* cannot be used as bare nouns in Modern Swedish (with the exception of vocative uses when addressing God or a Catholic priest).

\**Fader kommer* 'Father comes' is just ungrammatical while *far kommer* is OK in families where *far* is still used. The pairs of long and short forms can thus be said to constitute a special case of a kin term doublet.

<sup>6</sup> *Far* 'father' is also the present tense of *fara* 'go, travel' and *modern* may be an adjective with the same meaning as in English.

The story we have just told is not unique. For instance, the Aramaic word 'abba, which is morphologically definite, was originally used only with the speaker as anchor. It was borrowed into post-biblical Hebrew and in modern colloquial Hebrew is apparently used without the anchor restriction (Richard Steiner, personal communication).

It is also worth noting that kin terms show very different patterns of renewal depending on their semantics. Thus, it is obvious that words for more complex relationships (e.g. terms for in-laws and non-first generation kin terms) are often formed by derivation or compounding. But the synchronic skewing between proper and improper kin terms, mentioned above, is directly related to the diachronic tendency to renew descending kin terms and words denoting marital relations from primarily non-relational nouns such as *child, man, woman* etc.

**Table 4. The expansion of pappa and mamma: some corpus evidence**

	Older novels (19th and early 20th century)		Novels from 1980-81		Older novels (19th and early 20th century)		Novels from 1980-81		
pappa	476	10.4%	1092	32.8%	mamma	575	13.2%	1842	41.6%
pappas	49	1.1%	135	4.1%	mammas	39	0.9%	183	4.1%
pappan	4	0.1%	44	1.3%	mamman	10	0.2%	89	2.0%
pappans	1	0.0%	5	0.2%	mammans	1	0.0%	10	0.2%
pappor	2	0.0%	10	0.3%	mammor	3	0.1%	19	0.4%
papporna	0	0.0%	4	0.1%	mammorna	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
far*	3079	67.2%	1284	38.6%	mor	2840	65.2%	1461	33.0%
fader	379	8.3%	266	8.0%	moder	203	4.7%	155	3.5%
fadern	425	9.3%	343	10.3%	modern*	540	12.4%	589	13.3%
faderns	101	2.2%	87	2.6%	moders	80	1.8%	29	0.7%
fäder	40	0.9%	44	1.3%	mödrar	42	1.0%	30	0.7%
fäderna	15	0.3%	5	0.2%	mödrarna	11	0.3%	13	0.3%
fädernas	13	0.3%	11	0.3%	mödrarnas	2	0.0%	2	0.0%
fäders	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	mödrars	11	0.3%	2	0.0%
	4584		3330			4357		4424	

\*Homonymous forms

## 8. Lexical integration

The development of kin terms like Swedish *pappa* and *mamma* is of more general interest in that it can be seen as an example of what could be called **lexical integration**, a process by which new lexemes are gradually pulled into the grammatical system of the language. Lexical integration is

related to the more well-known process of grammaticalization, which it both resembles and interacts with.<sup>7</sup>

To start with the parallels, in both cases the starting-point is a renewal of the resources of a language, which may exploit different sources, but which tends to repeat itself in much the same way and in the same locations. Both lexical integration and grammaticalization are gradual and tend to involve expansion of domains of use, from concrete to more abstract uses of items, with the final parts of the process being characterized by lexical idiosyncrasy and fossilization.

But the discussion of kin terms above also illuminates the interaction between the two processes. As the use of a grammatical marking such as a definite article expands, more and more lexical items are pulled into its domain. In this process, a lexical item which is less well integrated into the system has a better chance of staying outside. But over time the probability that it will be treated in the same way as other lexemes increases.

The gradual integration of new lexical items is most obvious with loan words. But we have seen in the case of kin terms that semantic and pragmatic properties of a word also influence the ease which it is integrated into the language. A vivid illustration of this is provided by the two words *rektor* 'head-master' and *lektor* 'lecturer, senior teacher' in Scandinavian, discussed in Christiansen 1977. (Christiansen talks about Danish but exactly the same facts hold for Swedish.) The words in Scandinavian are borrowings from Latin *rector* and *lector*. In spite of their common origin, and their near-identical phonological make-up and closely related semantics, the two words differ with respect to their grammatical properties: the word *rektor* can be used as a bare noun, without a determiner; *lektor* cannot be used this way. As Christiansen notes, this clearly has to do with the fact that *rektor* but not *lektor* denotes a unique person in a school context -- in addition, a figure of authority. Thus, while *rektor* can be compared to *father*, *lektor* is more like *uncle*. It can therefore be claimed that *rektor* has resisted lexical integration better than *lektor* due to its semantics. However, it is clear that also other factors are at play here. A parallel case to *rektor* is found in the Swedish word for 'dean', which may be used with or without the Latin ending *-us*: *dekanus* or *dekan*. Only the longer form can be used without a definite article, which shows that the preserved Latin character of the word also helps it resist integration.

## 9. Conclusion

Among nouns, kin terms have specific semantic and pragmatic properties that explain why they often display deviant grammatical behaviour, in particular, their role in grammaticalization processes. As we have seen above, however, kin terms do not necessarily form a well-delimited natural class. Rather, the propensity to be singled out for special treatment depends on the closeness to the parental prototype, with ascendance and unique reference as most salient features. Moreover, a kin term may change its character over time, as it undergoes lexical integration, a process which is both similar to and interacting with grammaticalization. The study of kin terms is therefore relevant to the understanding of central processes in synchronic and diachronic grammar.

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<sup>7</sup> An alternative to 'lexical integration' is 'lexicalization' but it has been used in recent literature with slightly different interpretations and we therefore avoid it here.

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