

# Comparatives Study of Kinship Terms in Thai, Vietnamese and Indonesian Language

Norma Pawestri<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Language Center, International Relations Department, Faculty of Humanities, Bina Nusantara University, Jakarta, Indonesia 11480

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**Abstract:** In social interaction, addressing someone is crucial as it show several social functions such as: recognition of the social identity, the social position, the role of the addressee and of the interrelations between the addresser and the addressee. A linguistic area that pays attention a lot in these social functions is “addressing terms”. In order to use addressing terms, some factors such as the social status or rank of the other, sex, age, family relationship, occupational hierarchy, transactional status, race or degree of intimacy are to be considered. What to be done in this research were comparing the addressing terms specifically Kinship terms, in Thai, Vietnamese and Indonesian. The data of kinship terms words were obtained from a native speaker of each language. Each terms used in the 3 main areas of kinship terms namely main family kinship terms, extended family kinship terms, marital relations or in law kinship terms were compared. By using descriptive qualitative method, the phenomena of differences between kinship terms among the languages is later to be explained. It was found that generally speaking, Thai and Vietnamese society seem to be more hierarchical than Indonesia. In Thailand and Vietnam, family members have different names depending on their gender, seniority, age or maternal or paternal side, and even relationship to the male line. There are however many similarities and differences between these languages in some aspects such as: age and seniority, paternal and maternal side, matrimony status, gender and politeness.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In order to communicate with others, addressing someone is crucial and it reflects several social functions such as: the recognition of the social identity, the social position, the role of the addressee and of the interrelations between the addresser and the addressee (Liu, X., Zhang, L., & Zhang, 2010). There are several things we have to take into account in using addressing terms, such as: the social status or rank of the other, sex, age, family relationship, occupational hierarchy, transactional status, race or degree of intimacy.

The modern system of addressing terms in many Asian countries are developed on the basis of ancient or traditional system, inherited the tradition of honorific titles and self-depreciatory titles, and discarded many address terms which designated class relations in feudal society. Compared with Asian Countries, English-speaking countries have less complicated address terms. In the system of address terms, kinship term is the most important one that has

the closest relation with people, as it describes how people refer to relatives by direct or indirect blood and marriage and generally fall into four groups: main family kinship terms, extended family kinship terms, marital relations or in law kinship terms. Later, kinship terms in the 3 languages of ASEAN countries namely Thai, Indonesian, and Vietnamese were studied due several reasons.

First, not only Thai plays the important role as the official language of the Kingdom of Thailand, this language is also spoken by 69.5 million people across Indochina sub-region from India, southern China, northern Myanmar, Laos, Thai, Cambodia, to North Vietnam. Second, as for Indonesian Language, it is chosen for the fact that Indonesia is the fourth most populous nation in the world, and one of the most linguistically complex one. Its ethnic groups speak more than 500 languages and of this Malay, renamed Bahasa, was chosen to be the sole national and official language. Third, Vietnamese is chosen as it is spoken around by 59 million people, not only those who live in Vietnam and the neighbouring countries

such as Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand, but also in the United States (600,000) France (10,000), and to a lesser extent in Canada, Australia, Senegal, and Cote d'Ivoire.

In this paper, we mainly discuss kinship terms, as they are classified using differences in genealogical referents of kin terms. Kinship terms in different speech communities are worth study. They are likely to be different because different languages have different linguistic resources to express what is culturally permissible and meaningful. Kinship systems convey important social information, but the problem of the cultural meanings and correct translations of kinship terminology has proved to be intractable. To a great extent, this is because kinship terms represent the competing realms of social and genetic relatedness; thus, it cannot be assumed that two or more persons for whom ego uses a single term are socially indistinguishable. One method used by anthropologists to avoid bias is the development of a precise descriptive language. For example, when a father and his brother are referred to by the same term within a kinship system, the anthropologist may express the position of father's brother as "a male agnatic relative of the ascending generation."

Though many investigations have been conducted to study kinship terms in different languages, South East Asian languages has received tertiary attention for rigorous studies. As a result, the present study is an attempt to investigate the choice of address terms by Thai, Indonesian and Vietnamese speakers. General aim of the present research is to study and analyse Kinship terms in the 3 ASEAN countries. To be more specific, this study aims to answer the following questions: 1. What are the different in the terms used in the kinship terms of the 3 languages? 2. How these terms reflect social values of the people in the 3 countries.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

What to be done in this research were comparing the addressing terms specifically Kinship terms, in Thai, Vietnamese and Indonesian, hence we can describe the "phenomena" of differences between the three languages. The data of kinship terms words were obtained from a native speaker of each language. I then tried to compare each terms used in the 3 main areas of kinship terms namely main family kinship terms, extended family kinship terms, marital relations or in law kinship terms. By using descriptive qualitative method, the phenomena of differences

between kinship terms among the languages is later to be explained.

## 3 BASIC CONCEPT OF ADDRESSING TERMS AND KINSHIP TERMS

The concept of address terms has long been an issue of interest in linguistic studies, especially in sociolinguistics. Many linguists have provided the terminology and definitions to decipher phenomena involved in addressing or naming other persons. To Afful (Afful, 2006), addressing terms refer to the linguistic expression by which a speaker designates an addressee in a face-to-face encounter. Dickey's (Dickey, 1996) defines addressing terms as a speaker's linguistic reference to his/her interlocutor(s) is clearly a very broad one so he made further divisions. He gives an obvious linguistic classification of addressing terms by their parts of speech, into nouns, pronouns, and verbs which are further classified in to 'bound' and 'free' forms. Bound morphemes are those integrated into the syntax of a sentence and free forms are those not integrated in this way.

Proper use of address terms allows people to identify themselves as part of a social group while an inappropriate choice of address ceases good interaction. They function as an indicator of interlocutors' social status as well as their social distance, showing their emotions to the other side and a means of saving one's face (Akindele, 2008). Apart from the linguistic definition of addressing terms, it is just as important to elucidate on the social function and meaning of addressing terms. As Murphy (Murphy, 1988) has elegantly put it, addressing terms are socially driven phenomena.

Studies of addressing terms generally focus on eliciting and comparing the systems of classification or taxonomies of address systems in each language. They also attempt to relate address terms to the socio-cultural context or situations in which address terms may occur. In other words, the study of addressing terms is based on the sociolinguistic perspective "addressing behaviour". The main idea of this view is that the way in which an addresser correctly uses and selects address variants suitable for the addressee in a given context, and variations in forms and uses of address terms, reflects the relationship between the addresser and the addressee, depending on the differences in age, sex and social status.

Previous research carried out by linguists supports the idea that addressing behaviour is normally

influenced by social factors and linguistic backgrounds. The classic and most influential study of the differences in second-pronoun usage in several European languages, which has become a model of address term study is by Brown and Gilman (Brown, R., & Gilman, 1960). They found that the use of “familiar second pronoun T” and “polite second pronoun V” was governed by two social features: “power semantics” and “solidarity semantics”. Many linguists who have studied address form systems have also found that the use of address forms was based on other social factors and linguistic background such as demographic characteristics, age, sex, social class, religious prohibition, economic status.

Ugorgi (Ugorgi, 2009) investigated politeness strategies of address forms in Igbo, a national language in Nigeria. The result showed some different degrees of politeness between family and social communication. He also concluded that age is the most dominant social variable in Igbo families. Mühleisen (Mühleisen, 2011) studied the forms of address in Caribbean English-lexicon Creoles. She stated that forms of address in the Caribbean are part of a complex politeness system developed as a result of the socio-historical conditions of the cultivation system, transferred and continued from the West African and European cultural and linguistic traditions, as well as new innovations. The study indicated that the plural form is used either to express the plural addressees or positive and negative face addressing. In any situations, the plural form is used as a politeness device for instance to express vagueness or indirectness when a speech act could be otherwise interpreted as face-threatening. Hosseini (Hosseini, 2009) focused on the way power distribution is realized verbally by the two opposing sides in the thesis defence sessions regarding politeness principles. Nanbakhsh (Nanbakhsh, 2012) examined the correlation between language use (particularly address terms and pronouns), politeness norms and social structure in contemporary Iranian society.

Aliakbari and Toni (Aliakbari, M., & Toni, 2008) categorized different types of address terms different contexts, as (1) personal names, (2) general titles, (3) occupation titles, (4) kinship related terms, (5) religious oriented expressions, (6) honorifics, (7) terms of intimacy, (8) personal pronouns, (9) descriptive phrases and (10) zero-address terms.

## 4 KINSHIP TERMS IN THAI, INDONESIAN AND VIETNAMESE

### 4.1 Main Family Members (Blood Related)

Main family members usually consist of father, mother, brother, and sister. For the words father and mother, there are no difference concept between Thai, Vietnamese and Indonesian Language. For siblings relationship, Indonesian Language only has 2 words “kakak” means elder siblings (brother or sister) and “adik” means younger siblings (brother or sister) but Thai and Vietnamese has different words for siblings relationship which is depend on the gender of the siblings, and whether the siblings are elder or younger than us. Thai use the word, “Phi” refers to older sister or brother, and it again specified with “chai” to refer to the male sibling and “sao” to refer to the female sibling. Meanwhile, in Vietnamese to refer to older sibling, it is more specific with the use of “ahn” for older brother, and “chi for other sister and the word “em” used to refer younger sibling. The gender of the addressee then specified again with the use of “trai” to refer male sibling, and “gai” to refer to female sibling. It can be concluded that Indonesian addressing terms referring to sibling relationship take concern only on age gap from the speaker, while in Thai and Vietnamese both age gap and gender play important role in the society.

Meaning of kinship terms	Thai	Indonesian	Vietnamese
Father	<i>pʰiː</i> (พี่) <i>phai</i>	<i>ajah</i>	Ba/ cha/ thay, tia, bo
Mother	<i>mɛː</i> (แม่) <i>mai</i>	<i>ibu</i>	Ma/ me/ u/
elder brother	<i>phi chai</i> <i>pʰiː</i> (พี่ชาย) <i>phai chhai</i>		<i>anh trai</i> <i>anh</i>
younger brother	<i>nong chai</i> <i>nɔːŋ</i> (น้องชาย) <i>noŋ chhai</i>		<i>em trai</i> <i>em</i>
elder sister	<i>phi sao</i>		<i>chi gai</i> <i>chi</i>
younger sister	<i>nong sao</i>		<i>em gai</i> <i>em</i>
elder brother & sister		<i>kakak</i>	<i>Anh chi</i>
younger brother & sister		<i>adik</i>	<i>Em</i>
son	<i>lɛːk</i> (ลูก) <i>lek</i>	<i>anak</i>	Con trai
daughter			Con gái

Figure 1: Kinship terms (main family members).

### 4.2 Wider Main Family Members (Blood Related)

In wider family members, there are usually our parent’s parents (grandmother and grandfather), our

parent’s siblings (aunt and uncle) and their children (cousin), our sibling’s children (niece and nephew). For parent’s parents and Indonesian Language has only the word “kakek” to refer parent’s father (grandfather) and “nenek” to refer parents mother (grandmother) whether it is from maternal or paternal side. In contrary, Thai and Vietnamese differentiate both grandmother and grandfather whether they are from maternal or paternal side. For parent’s siblings, Indonesian Language has the word “paman” to refer our parent’s brother (uncle) whether it is from maternal or paternal side and whether it is elder or younger than our parents and Indonesian Language has the word “bibi” to refer our parent’s sister (aunt) whether it is from maternal or paternal side and whether it is elder or younger than our parents. While Indonesian language consider only the gender of parent’s sibling like in English, Thai and Vietnamese seems to be more complicated. Not only considering the gender, to address parent’s siblings, Thai also consider whether they are older or younger from our parents. Vietnamese, being more detailed than Thai, even also consider whether they are from maternal or paternal side.

Meaning of kinship terms	Thai	Indonesian	Vietnamese
Father’s Mother	<i>jā:</i> (ป้า)	<i>nenek</i>	Ba noi Ba ngoai
Mother’s Mother	<i>jā:</i> j (ยาย)		
Father’s Father	<i>pā:</i> (ปู่)	<i>kakek</i>	Ong noi
Mother’s Father	<i>tā:</i> (ตา)		Ong ngoai
Father’s elder Brother	<i>lūy</i> (ลุง)	<i>paman</i>	Bác trai
Father’s Younger Brother	<i>?ā:</i> (อา)		Chú
Mother’s elder Brother	<i>lūy</i> (ลุง)		Cau
Mother’s younger Brother	<i>nā:</i> (น้า)		Câu
Father’s elder sister	<i>pā:</i> (ป้า)	<i>bibi</i>	Co
Father’s younger sister	<i>?ā:</i> (อา)		Cố
Mother’s elder sister	<i>pā:</i> (ป้า)		Di
Mother’s younger sister	<i>nā:</i> (น้า)		Di
Younger cousin Male	<i>luk phi</i>	<i>sepupu</i>	Em ho Em trai ho
Younger cousin Female			Em gái ho
Older cousin Male	<i>luk nong</i>		Anh chi ho
Older cousin Female			Anh ho/ Chi ho
Nephew	<i>lā:n</i> (หลาน)	<i>Keponakan</i>	chau trai
Niece			Chau gái
son’s son	<i>lā:n</i> (หลาน)	<i>Cucu</i>	Chau noi
son’s daughter	<i>lā:n</i> (หลาน)		Chau noi
Daughter’s son	<i>lā:n</i> (หลาน)		Chau ngoai
Daughter’s daughter	<i>lā:n</i> (หลาน)		Chau ngoai

Figure 2: Kinship terms (wider main family members).

### 4.3 In Law Relationship

Indonesian seems to be less complex when it comes to “in law relationship”. Indonesian Language has the term “mertua” to refer our spouse parents (our parents in law). Vietnamese use the word “bo vo” to refer to father in law and the word me vo to refer to mother in

law. Indonesian language use only the terms “ipar” which means siblings in law to be added to the word “kakak” (elder siblings) and “adik” (younger siblings) to explain “in law” siblings relationship without specify in the gender, whether we are the wife or the husband or whether they are older or younger siblings of our spouse. Vietnamese is a bit more complex, since here they differentiate “in law” sibling relationship based on the gender, and whether they are older or younger than our spouse. Thai meanwhile seems to be the most complex one since they divided the “in law” sibling relationship based on the gender, whether we are the wife or the husband or whether they are older or younger siblings of our spouse, and whether we are the wife or the husband in our relationship. Here, we can see how gender and age status play important role in Thailand, and play less role in Indonesia.

Meaning of kinship terms	Thai	Indonesian	Vietnamese
Father in law (if speaker is women)	<i>phaaw saa mee</i> <i>พ่อสามี</i> (พ่อ)	<i>ayah mertua</i>	Bo chong Bo vo
Father in law (if speaker is men)	<i>po poo</i> (me)		
Mother in law (if speaker is women)	<i>mae va/</i> <i>maae saa mee</i> mother-in-law <i>แม่สามี</i>	<i>ibu mertua</i>	Me chong Me vo
Mother in law (if speaker is men)	<i>Maae vaai</i> <i>แม่ยาย</i> (wife’s mother)		
Elder Brother in law (if speaker is women)	<i>phi khej</i> <i>พี่เขย</i>	<i>kakak ipar</i>	<i>anh re</i>
Elder Brother in law (if speaker is men)	<i>phi sa pai</i> <i>พี่สะใภ้</i>		
Elder sister in Law (if speaker is women)	<i>phi khej</i>		<i>chi dau</i>
Elder sister in law (if speaker is men)	<i>phi sa pai</i>		
Younger sister in Law (if speaker is women)	<i>nong khej</i> <i>น้องเขย</i>	<i>adik ipar</i>	<i>em dau</i>
Younger sister in law (if speaker is men)	<i>nong sa pai</i> <i>น้องสะใภ้</i>		
Younger brother in law (if speaker is women)	<i>nong khej</i>		<i>em re</i>
Younger brother in law (if speaker is men)	<i>nong sa pai</i>		

Figure 3: In law relationship.

## 5 CONCLUSION

Addressing terms are a key to social concepts and human relationship in a society. Different degrees of status difference or intimacy need the choosing of different forms of address. The connotations of Thai, Indonesian and Vietnamese addressing terms are all different and each gets different stylistic or emotional

implications, and rules for their usage are quite complex and they are also affected by a series of social factors. In general Thai and Vietnamese society is more hierarchical than Indonesia. This may not be obvious to people new to Asian or Thai Culture but it is shown both in terms of how people are addressed and in terms of how people interact. In Thailand and Vietnam, unlike in the West, family members have different names depending on their gender, seniority, age or maternal or paternal side, and even relationship to the male line.

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