Degree Thesis

English (61-90) credits

Keeping Mum: An Exploration of Contemporary Kinship Terminology in British, American and Swedish Cultures

Linguistics, 15 credits

Halmstad 2021-06-21

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Abstract

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The aim of this paper is to briefly clarify the categorization and usage of kinship terms in American and British English in comparison with the Swedish kinship terms, both considering the vocative use and the referential function. There will also be a comparison with previous studies. The Swedish language contains considerably more detailed definitions for kinship. By choosing mostly informants with experience of both language cultures, this paper will investigate and explore whether English speakers themselves experience this as a lack of kinship vocabulary, and in what circumstances supplementary explanation is needed to clarify the identities of referents and addressees. It will further be established how and when the use of such terms can give rise to misunderstandings or confusion. Kinship terms will also be considered in connection with the present social and cultural environment. Seemingly, the use of kin terms has changed over recent decades and there appears to be etymological, lexicological and semantic causes for such misunderstandings. This essay research was conducted using interviews in which informants relate their experiences of language changes as well as regional variations with respect to how family members and relatives are addressed or referred to. Kinship terms are insightful and important within the field of genealogy and have implications for diverse disciplines such as law, church history, genetics, anthropology and popular custom. Interestingly, kinship terms can be found to be used where there is no existing kinship at all. They also have a great impact on daily communication in terms of respect and relations, and as expressions of empathy, responsibility and solidarity.

Key words: American English, anthropology, British English, communication, culture, etymology, genealogy, kinship terms, referential, relations, respect, social control, Swedish, vocatives

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Kinship Terms, Definition and Use

Kinship terms are lexicalized words used for referring to near relatives. These nouns fall into the subdiscipline of sociolinguistics as they concern communication and social behaviour. They can be categorized and classified in many ways as they can be either vocatives, used when addressing relatives in direct speech, or referential terms, used when referring to relatives. They can be descriptive, denoting lineal relatives related by a line of descent, or classificatory, used for collateral relatives related by blood but not directly in a line of descent. Affinal terms are used for spouses of kin, also called *in-law*. Kinship terms can be used socially for people that are not actually kin. Furthermore, kinship terms are often used for inheritance, law and forensic purposes, for historians, and their use may be matters of interest to genealogists in search of ancestral links.

1.2 Previous Studies and Aim

The American anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan may be regarded as the pioneer for investigating kinship terms as there is little evidence of earlier scholarly interest in this matter. His study of six kinship systems was further elaborated by Schwimmer (2001), and both the U.S. and Western Europe were classified within the Eskimo kinship system. George P. Murdoch, another American anthropologist, studied family and kinship structures cross-culturally in the 19th century. Several scholars, mainly anthropologists and linguists, have contributed to the knowledge of kinship terms; this includes Kroeber and Lowie in the early 20th century, and post-structuralist Claude Lévy Strauss. Sapir and Whorf, best known for their work on linguistic determinism and linguistic relativity, also expressed an interest in this aspect in the early and middle twentieth century, while Schneider and Homans (1955) made a comprehensive study of American kinship terms; Lagervall (1999) studied Swedish kinship terms and Hentschel (2012) studied kinship terms for non-kin. The linguistic structure of kinship terminology was thoroughly delineated by Lamb (1965). Carsten (1998) summarizes some of those findings. Jurkovic (2016) develops a new sociolinguistic approach, suggesting a development in society towards individualism instead of the ideal nuclear family. Thus, kinship terms might possibly become less important in future. A more detailed account of the work of these scholars will be outlined in the next chapter.

The aim of this paper is to identify and examine trends in the use of kinship terms in British English, American English and Swedish. The focus will be on whether and, if so, how, kinship vocatives/referring expressions and their use, and expressions that have a similar function, have changed over time and what, if any, general cultural changes or differences that might give rise to ambiguity or otherwise cause misunderstandings in relation to these terms. The differences will be briefly studied both in general and regarding their use and meaning from a semantic and lexicological perspective; the phenomenon of the decrease of formality in language over time and how these can be explained by family roles and social changes in modern western nations.

This paper aims to ascertain the following:

A. What, if any, significant changes have occurred in living memory in relation to the use of kinship terms in western culture?

B. What similarities and differences can be identified in the use of these terms between English and Swedish societies and how have these changed in recent decades?

C. In what ways are these attributable to sociological factors?

Chapter 2 will comprise an explanation of research and scholarly writing to date on the subject of kinship terms. Chapter 3 will describe the methods used for collecting primary data from language users for the purpose of this study. Chapter 4 will present the results of the survey and an analysis of primary data. Chapter 5 will discuss the findings as they relate to previous research. Chapter 6 consists of a conclusion, giving a brief account of how the study was done, what was found out, and the implications of the findings; this chapter ends with recommendations for further research.

Chapter 2 – Background

2.1 Kinship Terms

Kinship terms may be viewed as necessary and important and are frequently used in intimate and non-intimate human communication. Schwimmer (2001) states: “Since kin terms are fundamentally arbitrary categories, different cultures can potentially group their relatives into a widely varying, indefinite number of classifications”. British social anthropologists have examined the functions of various social rules, while American cultural anthropologists explored the idea that behaviour is ordered by social categories (Carsten, 2005). The use of certain terms might be determined by the prevailing culture or society, depending on who possesses power at any point in history.

2.1.1 Vocative or Referential Use

Kinship terms can be used as vocatives, when addressing people directly, or they can be used as clause components when referring to people. These functions are socially controlled in terms of the power, prestige and respect they imply. However, as this essay will demonstrate, there is a risk of cultural misunderstandings when kinship terms are used or misapplied, as the connotations recovered by a hearer might be different from those intended and polite words may be interpreted as insults (Hentschel, 2012), described below in 2.2.3.

2.1.2 Registers and Terms of Respect

Terms for kinship are used both officially and in domestic situations, thus there is a variation in register. Sometimes the terms are more formal while, at other times, they convey familiarity or even intimacy. What will be a respectful manner in one situation or family can be considered too formal in another. One word that is especially much discussed is the difference between *father* and *dad.* In Sweden, this distinction has been a question of significant interest for centuries. The importance, according to Lind Palicki (2019) is to discover “who says *far* and who says *pappa*” There are considerations which one would be most respectful and whether there are cultural or geographical differences. Hamburg (2017) states that the words for parents depends on the age of speaker and the social circumstances, sociolects, as *dad/daddy* is middle class speech, *papa* in aristocracy, *mommy/daddy* is children´s speech while adults say *dad/mum*.

2.1.3 Other Purposes for Using Kinship Terms

Besides kinship terms being useful for the daily communication between people, there are other significant reasons as to why people define who does, and does not, count as kindred to them. These include inheritance laws, the forensic issues that arise when searching for relatives of someone who has died among others (Shown Mills, 2005). The common interest for genealogy has increased due in large part to developments in forensic science and computing, making it possible through DNA-tests to discover a person´s genetic origin [ibid]. There are also communities online, such as Anbytarforum (2010), which hosts discussions of kinship. Many adopted children want to find their biological relatives later in life, and there are also popular TV-programmes about such research with those seeking to find family members using kinship terms liberally to express their emotional attachment to an unknown "dad" or "grandma". Therefore, it is considered insightful to study the current use of kinship terms, as many previous studies can be considered dated.

2.1.4 First Survey of Kinship Was Performed by Morgan

As stated in Chapter 1.2 above, the American anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan was perhaps the first scholar to investigate the use of kinship terms. This was in the 19th century and he began the process of systemizing them, presenting a fundamental work and this offered an important starting point (Schwimmer 2001; Carsten 1998). He investigated among others native American tribes. However, some of his statements were subsequently challenged by scholars and his work may now be regarded as particular to its time and currently obsolete [ibid]. Schwimmer (2001) continues describing and commenting the categorization of those systems. Another American anthropologist, George P. Murdock, studied family and kinship structures in the 20th century and is known for his cross-cultural studies and endeavored to construct a typology of relationship terminologies (Carsten 1998). Other anthropologists such as Alfred L. Kroeber and Robert H. Lowie also published material on this in the early 20th century [ibid]. Scholars have made attempts to construct a typology of relationship terminologies during the 20th century, beginning with the anthropological view [ibid]. Linguists have made classifications on the basis of different component distinction within a semantic domain in order to understand kin terminology as an aspect of language [ibid].

2.1.5 Six Kinship Systems

There are six kinship classification systems according to Morgan (Schwimmer, 2001) that are applicable in different cultures, and they are named after the languages used by speakers. Those systems are: Sudanese, Hawaiian, Eskimo, Iroquis, Omaha and Crow [ibid].

2.1.6 Eskimo Kinship System for Western Europe and the U.S.A.

Both the Swedish (Schwimmer, 2001) and the English (Schneider and Homans, 1955), languages are classified within the Eskimo system of kinship terms. “Fa is terminologically distinguished from FaBr, Mo from MoSi, while parents´ siblings are grouped in categories distinguished from one another by sex but not collaterality. Cross and parallel cousins are grouped together and distinguished from siblings…”, according to Schneider and Homans (1955). Kinship terms are lexicalized for mother, father, sister, brother and cousin. There are some differences, though, where the Swedish language is far more detailed, with specific lexicalized words for on which side of the family a nephew *brorson, systerson* or a niece *brorsdotter*, *systerdotter* belongs (Lagervall, 1999). Grandparents are also specified as father´s mother, *farmor*, or mother´s mother, *mormor*. An uncle can be father´s brother, *farbror*, or mother´s brother, *morbror* [ibid].

An aunt can be father´s sister, *faster,* or mother´s sister, *moster* Their spouses are called *farbror/morbror* and *faster/moster* with no other specification. Thus, the language has no lexicalized difference between consanguine and affinal aunts [ibid]. However, the affinal terms are often defined as *ingift* in Sweden, for example *ingift moster*, thus exactly specifying them, comparable with the English expression *in-law*. It is generally supposed that this system belongs to societies in which the population largely live in nuclear families (Schwimmer, 2001). In the past, the church held great influence in defining familial status and roles and, to some extent, the law has replaced the authority of the church in this regard. In modern times, marriage is regulated under the law and familial relationships tend to be legally defined and this influences both how spouses and family members perceive themselves, and the terms they use when referring to or addressing, others. (Shown Mills, 2005). For example, marriages are monogamous and are forbidden for close relatives [ibid].

2.1.7 Descriptive or Classificatory Terms

According to Schwimmer (2001), English terms are in accordance with the principles of Eskimo terminology because

- The system is bilateral (no distinction between father´s and mother´s relatives).
- Distinctions mark differences in sex, generation, and collateral kinship distance.
- Each nuclear family relationship receives a distinct term; more distant relatives are grouped into general categories.

Schwimmer (2001) adds: "Note that nuclear family terms – mother, father, brother, sister, son and daughter apply to only one kin type – but that terms applied to extended kin – uncle, aunt and cousin – are used to form more comprehensive categories in a process called collateral merging." The kinship terms can either be classificatory or descriptive. In addition to sex and generation, it also distinguishes between lineal relatives (those related directly by a line of descent) and collateral relatives (those related by blood, but not directly in the line of a descent). Lineal relatives have highly descriptive terms; collateral relatives have highly classificatory terms. Thus, siblings are distinguished from cousins, while all types of cousins are grouped together [ibid].

2.1.8 Sudanese Kinship System for Old English

The Sudanese kinship systems is the most sophisticated one, and it is relevant to consider that Old English belonged to that system (Schwimmer 2001). That might explain the similarities with Swedish, where there are far more lexicalized kin terms. It is well known that here have been major language changes in England and there was a considerable influence from the Vikings´ invasions (Crystal, 2019). That Nordic influence was later overshadowed by the French influence. The French court in the 16th century was also influent in Sweden. This indicates that kinship terms usage depends on power and status. Modern English has fewer lexicalized kin terms than Old English [ibid]. Conversely, the least detailed system is the Hawaiian kinship system, where the biological father or his brothers can be called "father", and mother´s sisters can also be called "mother". Morgan suggested that in a polygamous society there would be difficulties in defining an exact relationship (Schwimmer, 2001). However, later findings contradict his view, arguing that those tribes and populations were generally well able to determine the identity of the biological father [ibid].

2.1.9 From Anthropology to Linguistics

As the earlier studies were concerned with tribes and native populations, more recent studies abandoned these findings as they were considered of less interest in an urban society. According to Carsten (1998) "As anthropologists no longer assume an intrinsic connection between terminology and practice, the relative importance of the formal study of kin classification in Britain and the United States has declined." Aside from the anthropological studies that have striven to systemize kinship terms, scholars from the field of psycholinguistics have also explored this aspect. In the middle of the 20th Century, the well-known advocates of linguistic determinism and linguistic relativity, Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, attempted to find a system to explain kinship terms using smaller linguistic elements that included syllables and phonemes as markers (Carsten, 1998). However, scholarly opinion is divided and there is no consensus regarding a single system for classifying kinship terms. According to Lamb (1965) linguists were unable to find a certain mode to define all relations between relatives. Lamb (1965) states that Chomsky in 1957 hypothesized "transformational grammar", comparing three different "models for the structure of language"; Lamb (1965) states that he himself posited an alternative "stratificational" theory and made advances in the field of neurocognitive linguistics. This paper will not evaluate that in detail, but merely point at the complexity of these studies. In Swedish, there are more lexicalized word for kinship than there are in English (Wray and Bloomer, 2012), but still the kinship relations are complex and complicated to define properly. Lamb (1965: p. 37) describes the "absence of agreement" among scholars and claims that even if scrutinizing the words into their smallest parts; still there is no way to find a linguistic system with clear definitions. Phonetics and semantics are concerned with substance and other strata with relationships, he states, and thus, the challenge is to distinguish form from substance [ibid]. One can in fact describe anything, according to Lamb (1965: p. 52), for example the relation between "even such a subtle distinction as that between a male's patrilateral parallel cousin's wife's paternal grandfather and a male's patrilateral* parallel cousin's wife's maternal grandfather". "But these expressions, it might be objected, are several lexemes long", he adds.

(*related by the father)

2.1.10 Practice of Kinship Terms in Reality

A comprehensive study into kinship terms in the U.S.A. was conducted in 1955 by Schneider and Homans. The findings of that study are compared with the new survey in this paper. More recent studies include Lagervall (1999) for Swedish kinship terms and Hentschel (2012) about kinship terms for non-relatives, as described below in 2.2.3. With regard to kinship terms used for cultural control, there is a study by Jurkovic (2016) suggesting that everything regarding kinship relations actually is about constructed social structures, and that the society now has new definitions for gender, parenthood and family structure. Jurkovic (2016: p. 27) states: "Finally, it can be said that kinship today has undergone significant change in its research focus and is now characterized by the rise of the individual." Shown Mills (2005) describes the importance of defining kinship and declares that it might be difficult to navigate the kinship maze; however, it is necessary to attempt this for reasons she enumerates. There are hundreds of kinship terms, among those many imaginative ones, not at least for cousins, as described by Shown Mills (2005) and Holmberg (2018). In British and American English, there is a collateral merging, as many relatives are just called "cousin", as described below in 2.2.1. The exact kinship relation might be important to define, not only for genealogists.

2.2 Major Cultural Influence

The use of kinship terms over the last centuries has been hugely influenced by culture and customs. As an example, members of the Royal Families throughout Europe have had a major impact of how people are addressed, and their power in turn influenced cultural expressions. Owing to family circumstances, some members of the Swedish Royal Family were of French heritage and so French was afforded prestige both in the Swedish Court and within its culture in the 16th Century (Lagervall, 1999). Bellman, a famous Swedish composer and writer with connections to the Swedish court, included many French kin terms in his popular songs, according to Hassler (1989) and this was culturally significant. It is reported that the words *mamma* and *pappa* in Sweden were introduced in the end of 15th Century by the aristocracy (Lind Palicki, 2019). The king Karl XII wrote 1689 as a seven-year-old child a letter to his *pappa.* When people in the lower social classes started to use the word, the aristocracy changed back to say *father* [ibid]. Royal courts in Europe, as well as the established churches have had a major impact on customs and language for centuries. In previous eras, only children born within a marriage were legal heirs to property, titles and money, thus heirs were

important to define. A society needs a control of kin as too close relatives must not marry (Shown Mills, 2005). It is common knowledge in Sweden that the priests often made personal comments in church books such as *oäkting* for non-legal heirs. Thus, the church surveyed and controlled the population and kinship. However, nowadays that control is performed by computerized registration. Both kin relationship and kinship terms are important to master (Shown Mills, 2005).

2.2.1 French Loan Words

The French language and culture had a huge influence in Northern Europe, especially in the 16th century, and the word *cousin* was introduced as a loan word in most languages in Northern and Western Europe, according to Lagervall (1999). She states that *kusin* has been found in the Swedish language since the 1690´s. A sibling´s children then were called *nevö* for a boy and *niece* for a girl, not relating whether it was a sister´s or a brother´s child. Respectively the words *tant* and *onkel* were used instead of the old specified terms *faster*, *moster*, *farbror* and *morbror*. This still puzzles genealogists at the time of writing who may be trying to determine relationships that existed centuries earlier. (Anbytarforum 2010). The French loan words are still used in both American and British English, *nephew* and *niece*. Crystal (2012: p. 230) states that the only gendered lexicalized word in the English language is the difference between fiancé and fiancée. For Swedish speakers, *cousin* and *cousine*, now has merely one Swedish form, *kusin*, having lost the gendered specification. However, *kusin* is someone where one of the parents is sibling with a *kusin´s* parent, and is valid for that generation only. In English, the cousin´s child is also called a *cousin*, while in Swedish it is called *kusinbarn.*

2.2.2 Swedish as a Strong and Stable Language

Many citizens in Sweden argue that the English influence is threatening the Swedish language. However, there are findings that contradict that statement. Swedish is a relatively strong language, both in grammar and syntax according to Josephson (2004: p. 50) and, when a loan word is introduced into Swedish, there is the possibility of some temporary confusion. In due course, the word will be adopted and absorbed into the Swedish lexicon. Josephson (2004: p. 62) states that words relating to new technology, such as *printer* were used for a short time, but the term was eventually replaced by the Swedish word *skrivare*, meaning *printer*.

The Swedish language structure is stable, so eventually *onkel* and *tant* began referring to people in a more general sense, taking back the original Swedish words for their proper kin terms which are now used, *farbror, morbror, faster* and *moster*. Josephson (2004: p. 50) asserts that in Sweden "this stability is due to that there is an ability to read for generations, social and regional language differences are few, and vocabulary and grammar are well analyzed and well described in dictionaries and grammar books".

2.2.3 Kinship Terms for People Not Being Kin

As mentioned, for example *tant* is used politely about any older woman, especially when referring to her in front of a child. However, the connotation for *tant* has tended to change, marking the age, thus not considered that polite anymore, as middle-aged women seek to be portrayed as young, which is also confirmed in this study. The word *farbror* is used in a similar way, so it has a multiple meaning, either father´s brother, the spouse of father´s sister or any older man or unspecified adult male. The word for father, *fader*, a symbol of authority, traditionally can be a priest or a bishop. A sister, *syster*, can be a sibling, but that is also the vocative for a nun or a nurse. As nurse is a title indicating professional education, male nurses in the UK also occasionally can be addressed with *sister.* Prominent people and men of influence in Swedish society used to start a letter with *Bäste Broder!* Brotherhoods and sisterships are commonly referred to between members of the same organization or class. Hentschel (2012) states "All men become brothers." The composer Bellman, previously mentioned, according to Hassler (1989) wrote his "Fredmans epistlar" famous Swedish songs containing some French kinship terms, such as *mon frère* and *cousine,* but also the Swedish word *fader,* though addressing friends which were not relatives. Hentschel (2012) states: "These terms, however cannot only be used in order to describe more or less complicated degrees of relationship within an extended family. They can, apart from that, be found in unexpected circumstances, being used in order to either address (vocative use) or speak about (referential use) non-related human beings." She also states that "These terms can be very polite, and in many languages this is the only meaning and function they have. However, in some languages terms with the same meaning can be very impolite". This indicates the impact of socio-cultural control, as she continues that "these differences can be explained by the nature of the underlying cultural concepts" (Hentschel 2012). As an example, she mentions the Serbian colloquial tradition of using their word which approximates as *granny* when referring to any person who is not kin. "Granny needs money" could mean "I need money" and "stupid granny" could be used towards a person as an insult

Chapter 3 – Method

The primary research for this paper will consist of collating qualitative data by interviewing individuals in a survey in order to establish if and how they use kinship terms traditional to their culture and how others within their close circle of family and friends use them. The chapter that follows will outline the scope of the survey, the sampling methods and the rationale behind them, the ethical considerations and, lastly, its limitations.

3.1 Interrogating Couples with Mixed Language Experiences

Informants chosen for this study are acquaintances of the author who are American, English or Swedish citizens in various ages; these individuals were selected in order to ensure a mix that approximated a representative sample of the research population. Mostly, these individuals are couples with experience of more than one culture, and therefore their insights are likely to provide answers which show knowledge and experience of the kinship terms used, and an awareness of cultural and linguistic differences. It is believed, for example, that a British man with a Swedish wife, living in Sweden, or a Swedish man living in the U.S.A. with his American wife, might add insights into the exploration of kinship terms and their use. By contrast, other informants in this research would be expected to have first-hand knowledge only with regard to the culture of their native tongue.

This paper will compare and investigate how, and in what ways, the traditions and norms concerning the use of kinship terms have changed over time and whether the informants themselves have noted any significant new trends or changes. To facilitate this investigation, interviewees are asked if they have encountered any particular linguistic difficulties or anomalies when referring to or addressing family members and relatives, among others aunts, uncles, grandparents and cousins, when there are no specific or lexicalized terms for each one. As the selected informants in most cases have knowledge of both English and Swedish kinship terms, it is hoped that potential conflicts, uncertainties and misunderstandings may come to light that can be explained through societal and sociolinguistic developments.

3.2 Conducting the Survey

The process of collecting answers is systematized through a questionnaire, provided all the informants have considered the same questions. Their answers have been given in written format, via the internet (such as e-mail, by *Messenger* or by *Zoom* meetings) or sometimes by

telephone. Those interviews that were not recorded at the time on paper were recorded on an audio device to be later transcribed. In total, there are 15 participants in ages from 31 to 83 years. Six interviewees are male while nine are female and the average age is 52. Among these, five consisted of *Zoom* interviews plus questionnaire via e-mail, four interviews were conducted using *Messenger* combined with questionnaire via e-mail and six were telephone interviews combined with a completed questionnaire in a letterbox. Of the male interviewees one is American, three are British and two are Swedish. Two of the British males live in Sweden, one of the Swedish males lives in the United States. Of the female interviewees, five are American and four are Swedish. Three of the Swedish females have lived in England for many years before moving back to Sweden and the fourth one lives in England with a British male partner. There are only four participants that have no cross-cultural experience; all of them are American, one being male and three female.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

All informants are non-vulnerable adults over the age of 18. They willingly agreed to participate and were assured that the material relating to their identities will be kept confidential and not subject to publication or disclosure to third parties.

3.4 Limitations

In spite of the variety in participants, there were some obstacles and limitations. Many had no experience of having certain relatives like a stepmother or a grandfather, for example, thus some questions were not applicable regarding the use of vocatives. There were some anomalies which came to light with regard to the relationship of certain interviewees with relatives, while others had extended families with their own, idiosyncratic linguistic practices relating to their use of kinship terms. Still, it might be considered that they provide a significant and relevant sample of typical English and Swedish speakers in the early 21st Century, as the traditional nuclear family has arguably ceased to be the default model for all families. Furthermore, not all participants have internet access and, due to the Covid-19 pandemic which was occurring at the time, they did not want to meet people face-to-face. Those interviews were conducted by telephone and the questionnaire was delivered to them via their letterbox to be completed and returned in due course. For practical reasons, the spoken answers and kinship terms were transcribed onto the survey sheets.

Chapter 4 - Results and Analysis

The most important finding is that none of the informants, not even the oldest ones, had experienced language change over time regarding kinship terms. The language changes so slowly it might take a century to notice it, although there is an attitude change towards less formality, especially in the Swedish language (Josephson 89), and there are trends, but not an actual language change. However, an exception exists for step-parents, as stated below. The changes are mostly within the person´s own language use, from child to adulthood. That corresponds with the findings of Schneider and Homans (1955) and Hamburg (2017). The American informant A as a small child addressed her mother with *Mommy*, and when she was around ten years old she started to say *Mom*. There was also a change from *Daddy* to *Dad*. Referring to her parents she says *my mother* or *my father*. The old findings from Schneider and Homans (1955) about a rule "you should not argue with your father" and thus the word *father* was avoided in situations of conflict, seem not be valid. People address their father with *father* even when they disagree. Normally the informants say *Dad, Daddy, Pop or Pa.* The mother is usually addressed *Mom* or *Mum*. Informant M in England says it depends on which part of country one comes from. She states that: "They say different." In England, there are also different sociolects which relate to a speaker´s social class. There is also a difference in Sweden. *Far* and *mor* are the original words for *father* and *mother*. In Skåne, the Southern part of Sweden, they are the natural words to use. In Halland, a neighboring county to Skåne, people mostly say *pappa* and *mamma*. Informant O states: "There it is the most natural, friendly but respectful way of addressing one´s parents, and *far* and *mor* seem to be too formal and distanced". For people in Skåne *pappa* and *mamma* would be considered a childish speech according to Lind Palicki (2019). There are individual differences between families as well. Informant G states: "Those who have had old parents tend to say *far* and *mor*, while their children say *pappa* and *mamma*." When asking for a favour, informant B addresses his father with *pappaa*, and mother with *mammaa*, and his wife informant A says *Daddy* instead of just *Dad* as usual. That especial, more informal "begging tone" in vocative is also sometimes used towards siblings, as reported by informant B saying *brorsan* and informant O saying *brorsan* or *syrran*. However, when arguing, they use the sibling´s name.

The resistance towards calling a stepmother *Mum*, reported by Schneider and Homans (1955) still is present, but not strongly so. Three informants, A, D and E answered that "Yes", they

might say *Mother* to a step-mother. Three informants, B, F, N and O answered “Maybe”. Five informants, C, G, I, J and K answered “Only as adopted” and the others did not know. Informant F stated “No idea”. The question is not so remarkable as children can have more than one stepmother when their parents establish new relationships. They address a stepmother or a stepfather mostly by the name, and informant A even addresses her stepfather with his nickname. By way of contrast, in Spain, the word *madastra* for stepmother is now avoided, as the suffix *-astra* has a connotation of inferiority (Waldenström et al., 2014: p. 38). The Swedish word *styvmor* has a similar negative connotation due to popular literature such as the folk tales, fairytales of Grimm and Disney films, depicting stepmothers as malign. The Swedish word for evil, *stygg*, together with *styvmor*, generates a negative combination. The word *låtsasmamma* (meaning fake mother) was often used in earlier times, informant O states, and now the words *bonusmamma* or *extramamma* are used instead as even friendlier alternatives. The new words *bonusmamma* and *bonuspappa* are in fact lexicalized, (“expressed in a single word”, Yule (2014: p 301) in Sweden.

Grandparents are never addressed with their first names as this would be deemed disrespectful. This is clearly stated in the interviews and also in Schneider and Homan´s (1955) study. *Grandpa, Grandma, Granddad* and *Papa* function both as vocatives and referring terms, and in Swedish *farfar*, *morfar, farmor* and *mormor*. Siblings are called *sister* or *sis*, *syster* or *syrran*, *brother*, *bror* or *brorsan*, or just their name or nickname. It is noted that all informants do not have for example a brother or a sister, or some special other relative, and that is the reason it was decided to increase the number of informants and obtain a greater quantity of data by extending the questions and probing further. The informants usually just say *cousin* or *cousin (+name)* when referring to a cousin, and the name as vocative. Sometimes they explain to others whether they mean a cousin on their father´s side or on their mother´s side; however, mostly they do not. The Swedish informants B and O reported being irritated that all relatives were called cousins, even the following generations. In English, a cousin´s child is also a cousin; in Swedish the term encompasses a cousin´s child, *kusinbarn*. English speakers usually say *uncle* and *aunt* or *auntie* to both consanguineals and affinal relatives. In Swedish, there are more specified definitions *moster, faster, morbror, farbror*, and the spouses are called the same with the addition *ingift*. That corresponds to the term *in-law*. When one says *ingift moster,* this refers to mother´s brother´s spouse. They are addressed with their name or sometimes a combination, such as *moster Eva*. Informant D reports that she always says *aunt/uncle and their name.* Informant M in Britain says she is called *auntie*

because she is so young. Informant F usually says *uncle* and *auntie*. Informant O also states that "the Swedish word *tant,* that used to be said politely to any older woman, is no longer considered polite as every middle-aged woman wants to be regarded as *tjej*, with the connotation of *girl* and has thus retained her youthfulness. The polite *Ni* instead of *du* in direct speech has also become regarded as impolite, indicating the age of people." Informant O also states that she experienced that middle-aged people actually dislike being addressed with *ni.* One might add that titles are also mostly avoided in Swedish, except for military use. Answering *"ja, mamma"* or *"yes, doctor"* would be slightly sarcastic. In Sweden, the most polite answer to a closed question may, in many instances, be simply *yes* or *no*, thus avoiding a vocative altogether.

Most of informants did not experience any difficulties at all regarding kinship terms, and especially those who only had experience from one language seem not to care much about it. Sometimes they explain, when asked, to which side of the family a relative belongs. Informant N sometimes states *father´s side* or *mother´s side*. Informant K says for example *my uncle, who is my mother´s sister´s husband.* Informant J always explains on which side her cousins are related, for example *my mother´s sister´s daughter.* The informants generally do not know what relatives are called beyond cousins, and they do not seem to care. Those with cross-cultural experience tend to be cognizant of difficulties defining kin. According to informant A, it would be immensely helpful having terms that are distinctive like the Swedish ones, and she states that there is: "not confusion, but just longer explanations of who you are talking about and what side of the family they are from. For example I would say *Grandma,* but that could mean my grandma on my mom´s or dad´s side. So then I have to specify which grandma I am talking about. It would definitely make it easier having different names to specify!" The specification could consist of a kinship term followed by the name. Some of the informants report there might be problems for genealogists because of the vagueness of the kinship terms. A *grandmother* could be both a father´s mother and a mother´s mother, and "Great-Grannies could be anyone", according to informant B. In Sweden a mother´s mother is designated as *mormor* and a father´s mother as *farmor.* They are lexicalized ("expressed in a single word", Yule p, 300). The proper terms, *maternal grandmother/grandfather* and *paternal grandmother/grandfather* are not used in daily speech. English informants, for example informants F and L, say *gran/granny* and *grandad*, often with an addition *on my mother´s side* or *on my father´s side*. Informant M states that all say it differently, e.g. *gran/granny* or *nan/nanny*, and her stepsons say "*granadad"*. Furthermore, there are among

Swedish speakers also specified terms such as *morfars mor, farfars far, farmors morfar* and all combinations for previous generations, making it much easier for genealogists to determine who is who.

Chapter 5 – Discussion

The main aim of this study is to establish how kinship terms are used by English and American speakers compared with Swedish speakers, to identify similarities, differences and trends – and to explore possible reasons for these. Researching this, the study focused on the following three research questions.

A. What, if any, significant changes have occurred in living memory in relation to the use of kinship terms in western culture?

B. What similarities and differences can be identified in the use of these terms between English and Swedish societies and how have these changed in recent decades?

C. In what ways are these attributable to sociological factors?

5.1 Language Changes over Time

Regarding the research question A, it can be stated that, while language changes at all levels, the topic of this study focuses on a certain aspect of lexicology. New words arise, existing words are modified, alter their meaning or become defunct, as can be seen when comparing a modern dictionary to an older one (Josephson, 2004). However, language changes slowly over time and not even the oldest informants in the study reported any specific awareness of such changes occurring regarding kinship terms with the notable exceptions of *bonusmamma* and *bonuspappa*. The answer to this question thus must be that there are hardly any significant changes in living memory for lexicalized kinship terms. However, there is overall a tendency towards less formality, above all in social situations in Sweden (Josephson, 2004). The experienced language change rather is individual. For English speakers, for example, there is a change from *Daddy* to *Dad* or from *Momma* to *Mom*, when interviewees were about 10

years old. In England, the corresponding words are *Mummy/Mum* or *Mommy/Mom*. The more infantile mode of address will then be abandoned. This confirms the findings in the study of Schneider and Homans (1955: p.1198) as people tend to be more formal towards their parents when they grow older; however, the "formal and the friendly roles overlap" [ibid]. It can be noted that Swedish speakers do not report a similar change, as they either use the word *far* or *pappa.* As some words have a changed connotation, they might be avoided and replaced with other, more respectful words, as for example stepmothers could be called *bonus mother, extra mother* or simply *my father´s wife*.

Language change is a well-understood phenomenon and this applies to kinship terms as much as to any other aspect of lexicology. One example of this is that it was common in previous centuries to use familial nouns like "brother" and "cousin" as modes of address to people who are not related by blood or marriage (Hentschel, 2012; Hassler, 1989).
Many informants show ignorance about what different relatives actually are called. There appears to be a lack of awareness as to what qualifies someone as a *second cousin* (the respective grandparents are cousins). An example in Swedish can be found with regard to the meaning of *syssling* which was used to denote a originally cousin on mother´s side and *brylling* was a cousin on father´s side, according to Lagervall (1999). As stated above, the meanings have now changed to refer to further generations. The cross-cultural informants tend to be aware that genealogists studying old church books and letters could easily make mistakes. When asked about this, the informants in this study expressed an awareness that there could be some confusion for genealogists. It may be the case that kinship terms have less relevance for people in the early 21th century, but it is a possible indicator of cultural changes within society and, as such, it is of some interest from a sociolinguistic perspective. The regional variations and customs changes in combination with several different local kinship terms not at least for cousins as stated by Holmberg (2018) and Shown Mills (2005) make it somewhat difficult to navigate the kinship maze, according to Shown Mills (2005), who also states that the richness of this common vocabulary is its strength, and when people learn it they will be able to communicate with precision.

5.2 Similarities and Differences between Cultures

Regarding the question B about differences between cultures, the answer is that there are differences; however, awareness of these may vary considerably between speakers, as demonstrated in this study. For native informants only speaking English, there are few

experiences of problems or lack of words, and reportedly they explain sometimes, or only if they are asked. Put simply, they do not care about vocabulary or have no knowledge. However, some English-speaking informants that can compare English with Swedish report that they need to explain kinship relations much more often in English, so they find the Swedish system with detailed kinship terms more helpful. In contrast, Swedes experience the English vocabulary as more unspecific, causing uncertainty as to which relative is being referred to. A great-grandmother could be father´s mother or mother´s mother, while the Swedish distinction between *farmor* and *mormor* makes a clear distinction (Lagervall, 1999). In Swedish, there is only one word for first cousin, and that is *kusin*. In English, the following generation is also referred to as cousin, and often further generations, too. English speakers in this survey report that they overcome this by explaining the exact familial relationship, if necessary, thus alleviating the risk of misunderstanding. However, for Swedish speakers it is slightly confusing, as a cousin´s child is called *kusinbarn.* Swedes use the words *syssling* to define *second cousin* (the respective grandparents are cousins) and *brylling* to define *third cousin,* (the following generation). There are several expressions both in English and Swedish to define these relatives, but it seems that they are becoming less frequently used. That could suggest that the "extended family" is becoming less relevant in the modern age. The question B thus must be answered with that there are differences between the use of kinship terms, although they are mostly of interest for genealogists and linguists, and that lay people rarely think of this issue, or else they choose to disregard it, or explain kin relationships only when necessary.

5.3 Respect for Parents, Sociological Factors and Cultural Control

The question C, which relates to the degree to which the similarities and differences in the use of kinship terms between English and Swedish societies are attributable to sociological factors, seems to be of great importance, as there are cultural customs in each society. This is of importance for the word choice within each language´s vocabulary, what is correct to say and what would be considered polite. The traditional cultural taboo of arguing with one´s father, thus avoiding the word *father* when there is a conflict, which was described in the American study by Schneider and Homans (1955), seems no longer to be valid for the American informants, and it seems not to be relevant for other informants, either. Nevertheless, most informants state that they use respectful terms when addressing their fathers, whether they say *father, pop, dad, far, farsan* or *pappa*. These are both referring terms and vocatives. The informal *farsan* in Swedish can also be used in formal situations. The

father figure seems to have an implied authority, no matter which kinship term is used. In a few cases, when a father is addressed only by his name, there will occur some sort of authority loss, implying less recognition of family hierarchy and greater equality [ibid]. Sometimes this situation might, however, arise due to some strains within the family relations, as was stated by two interviewees. It might also occur due to a more widespread cultural trend whereby older traditions and expectations of formality have been diminishing. A step-mother´s position could be less authoritative than a mother because she is often addressed by her name only. The informants who had experience of step-parents regarded them as they would regard any relative. However, some of them could even consider saying *mother* to a stepmother, and this is something that was unthinkable in the mid 20th century, according to Schneider and Homans (1955). As the nuclear family is no longer the only option at the time of writing, and divorces are common, a stepmother does not necessarily replace the mother. The popular culture with the connotation *evil stepmother* in fairy tales brings new words of respect with friendly connotations, such as *bonusmamma* or *extra mamma,* m*y father´s wife,* or just her first name. This is confirmed by those informants in this study who have stepmothers. More recent findings from (Jurkovic 2016) appear to confirm the findings of this study, namely that kinship terms may not be considered as important as before due to the changes in society and culture. As stated, the nuclear family is no longer automatically regarded as the default model and there is a tendency towards individuality [ibid]. Even parenthood is discussed, as surrogate mothers and cloning open new possibilities. There is also a consideration what parental responsibility, if any, a stepmother or stepfather should have in case of divorce or separation. Many children have multiple step-parents. The extended families bring more new relatives, and it might be simple and practical just calling them all *cousin.* Jurkovic (2016) also suggests that the gendered differences in attitudes, behaviour and family structures might be cultural constructions, as people learn from childhood how a girl or a boy should be and behave. The individual freedom now even includes to choose one´s own gender, which is also a new development. Kinship terms do concern everybody, whether one is aware of it or not, and as there are so many of them (Lagervall, 1999; Holmberg 2018), they have their significance, at least in a sociocultural way and with all its implications that has for how language is used.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

6.1 Summary of this Study

English, compared with other languages, has relatively few kinship terms (Wray & Bloomer, 2012). The motivation for the essay was to establish a socio-cultural trend from a linguistic perspective and chart the changes that have occurred within living memory, how different words are used and in what context, what feelings and connotations they bring, if there are any patterns across families, and whether the language has changed over time regarding kinship terms. The main sources/theorists used were books and articles by different scholars chosen from a variety of anthropologists and linguists who have examined different systems of kinship terms as well as how these terms are used regarding daily communication and respect. The conducted survey aimed to show results from participants chosen as a sample of average population whereof most of them had cross-cultural experiences of both English and Swedish. The data were obtained via interviews based on a questionnaire. The results were then compiled and the different answers were compared.

6.2 Summary of Findings and What They Mean

The findings of the interviews in this study were then compared with the background sources. about English, American and Swedish kin terms, as well as with different kinship studies made by other European scholars. Previous research of kinship terms started with an anthropological view, then there was a linguistic view and it all developed into a sociocultural focus on how people actually interact. The answers to all these questions are complex, as there are regional, cultural and individual differences in the use of kinship terms and also different sociolects regarding class and origin. There were only a few reported changes in the language regarding kinship terms over time, and those were especially for step-parents. However, a development towards informality in families and societies is clearly manifest. The attitudes towards kinship terms are relaxed, as the extended families bring many new relatives, who could be called *cousin* for English speakers, or just be called by their name. Linguists and genealogists may be interested in such developments, but lay people are likely to be unaware of it. The study shows that there are family patterns regarding which kinship terms are used. When referring to aunts, uncles and cousins, sometimes it is necessary to indicate explicitly to which side of the family an individual belongs, and the study shows this is what speakers do from time-to-time.

There also is a sociocultural development towards more tolerance for individual choices and diversity regarding family construction. Respectively, kinship terms have evolved in ways that reflect less formal and more relaxed attitudes in terms of relationships and relative status of family members, both nuclear and extended. The connotations of using *aunt / tant* offers an example whereby, in order to express the relationship and confer the respect, but without creating unnecessary formality and distance, or implying elderliness, while British-English speakers are likely to use the hypocorism *auntie*. Similarly, among Swedish speakers, using the former polite word *tant* to a woman that is non-kin is mostly avoided, as it carries connotations about the addressee´s or referent´s age that she might prefer not to hear. However, some older people may deplore such changes as the formal kinship expressions can confer respect towards older relatives.

6.3 Suggested Further Research

Though the English lexicalized kinship terms might be few in number, there are many informal kin terms, such as for cousins, and it is a vast field beyond the scope of this essay. Researching sociocultural factors regarding kin terms could be a topic worthy of further investigation. It might be useful to use developments and changes in language use as a means of examining broader sociocultural changes such as the decline of extended families, new family relationships being established due to divorce and the diminishing of the authority which used to be associated with age. Further studies may also include a greater number and more diverse range than this study, more in-depth interviews, and attempt to establish other trends including across different age groups, genders, social classes etc, and then extending this out to languages other than English and Swedish, perhaps contrasting varieties of English more (e.g. American, Scots, Canadian, Australian) and Germanic languages, (e.g. Danish, German, Dutch) and then extending further to include the Romance languages like French, Spanish and Italian.

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Appendix - Questionnaire

Kinship Terminology in British and American English in Comparison with Swedish

The topic for this research is to compare British English, American English and Swedish kin terms and how they are used. The aim is also to establish an understanding of the differences and identify possible problems or misunderstandings between people from different cultures when talking about our nearest relatives.

How do you address your relatives, and how do you refer to them when speaking with others? The survey is a part of a research paper I am preparing in cooperation with Högskolan i Halmstad. Your reply would be of most value for my research, and your confidentiality will be fully respected. That is, the summary of the answers will be anonymized.

For some questions, there might be more than one answer required. Please feel free to add your comments and to write more specific answers between the lines. You can write in this questionnaire and simply email it back to me. If your relative is no longer alive or is not relevant, please state your usual words in your native language - Swedish, English or American.

1. Which words do you use referring to a father/your father? (*Father, dad, pappa, farsan* etc.)
…..
With what word do you usually address your father? …..
…when you want to ask him for a favour? …..
…when you argue with him? …..
Other answer: …..

2. Which words do you use referring to a/your mother? …..
With what word do you usually address your mother? …..
…when you want to ask her for a favour? …..
…when you argue with her? …..
Other answer: …..

3. If you have step-parents, how do you refer to them? (*styvmor, styvmamma, step-mother, the wife of my father etc.)*? …..

How do you address them (*Name, dad, step-dad etc.)*? …..

Is there any word for step-parents you try to avoid? …..

Other answer: ….

4. Can you imagine saying mother to a woman who has not actually born you, as if you were brought up with some other relative or a step-mother?

☐ Yes ☐ Maybe ☐ Only as adopted ☐ No, that is quite impossible

Other answer: …..

5. Which words do you use referring to a/your brother? …..

How do you usually address your brother? …..

…when you want to ask him for a favour? …..

…when you argue with him? …..

Other answer: …..

6. Which words do you use referring to a/your sister? ……

How do you usually address your sister? (*syrran, syster, her name*)…..

…when you want to ask her for a favour? …..

…when you argue with her? …..

Other answer: …..

7. If you have step-siblings, how do you refer to them (my brother, step-brother, George etc.)? …..

Do you address them with their names only?

☐ Yes, always ☐ Sometimes ☐ No

8. What do you call a brother´s child?

if it is a boy …..

if it is a girl …..

9. What do you call a sister´s child?

if it is a boy …..

if it is a girl …..

10. What do you call a father´s brother? …..

And his spouse? …..

11. What do you call a father´s sister? …..

And her spouse? …..

12. What do you call a mother´s brother? …..

And his spouse? …..

13. What do you call a mother´s sister? …..

And her spouse? …..

14. If they all are called aunt or uncle, do you explain in what way you are relatives?

☐ No ☐ Sometimes ☐ Yes, always

I usually say: *(aunt in-law, my mother´s sister´s husband, on my father´s side, etc)* …..

Do you refer to them differently regarding to your strength of emotions towards them (for instance if you do not know your uncle very much you say uncle John, and if you dislike him or admire him, you just call him "John")? …..

Do you experience that there is a confusion not having a specific term for each one of those relationships with uncle and aunts, then how? …..

15. Are the children of your aunts and uncles specified, or are they merely called cousins?.....

How do you refer to your mother´s sister´s son? ……

How do you address him? ……

English: How do you specify first cousin? …..

English: How do you specify first cousin once removed? …..

English: What is a second cousin? …..

Swedish: Vad är en syssling? ……

Swedish: Vad är en brylling? ……

Do you think you have to explain in what way, or on which family´s side you are cousins?

☐ No ☐ Sometimes ☐ Yes, always

How do you express that? ……

16. What do you call a cousin`s children? …

17. Do you think there might be a problem for genealogists, reading old letters or church books, to clarify the relationships? ……

18. What do you call a father´s father?

How do you address him? …….

Could you imagine just addressing him by his name?

☐ No, never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Yes, always

19. How do you refer to your father´s father´s mother? ……

How do you describe your relationship? ……

Do you think it is hard to define old ancestors? …….

20. Do you experience a change over time compared with earlier, regarding how to refer to your relatives or addressing them?

☐ Yes, the language is more modern.

☐ Yes, we feel more free to use slang expressions.

☐ Yes, kinship terms have changed.

☐ No, I cannot see any difference.

☐ I am not entirely sure.

Other answer: . . . . . .

21. What is your

Native tongue: . . . . . Birth country : . . . . . .

22. For how long have you lived in

Sweden …..

Great Britain …..

USA ……..

Other ……

23. Where do you live now? Town, country ……

Confidential questions:

My name . . . . . ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Age: . . . . . .

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