Language and Culture (Kinship)

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- The basis of all kinship systems is the nuclear family, consisting of mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters. Within this unit the relationship of mother to child is the centre. The role of the father is more socially constructed than biologically given, because in some cases the father is not known and another man may act as father, one mother may have children by more than one father or no father or other man need not be present when the child is reared by the mother. The relationship of parents to children is a genealogical one which lays out who one's ancestors are. Husbands and wives enter a mating relationship which is different in kind (not a blood relationship), hence languages have different words for these than for fathers and mothers. By and large languages further differntiate between relationships between generations, as with parents and

- Languages furthermore distinguish between neutral and familiar terms for relatives. In German, *Großvater* is 'grandfather' as is the familiar term *Opa*, *Großmutter* is 'grandmother' as is *Oma*. Sometimes the familiar terms are restricted to parents, e.g. *mum/mom/ma* and *dad/da/pa* in English and by extension are used for grandparents as well, e.g. *grandma, grandpa*. English is unusual in having a scientific or academic level of usage where the term 'sibling' is used. This is not normally found in colloquial usage, one says instead 'my brothers and sisters'.

- A further axis of distinctions in kinship systems is the side on which relations are located. All relations can be identified as either paternal or maternal. Language will always have a way of indicating this. English uses a special adjective before the kinship term in question. But some languages have lexicalised terms, i.e. single words, for paternal and maternal relations respectively. Swedish, for instance, uses single-word combinations of 'mother' and 'father' to indicate the side on which grandparents are located, e.g. *morfar* 'mother-father', i.e. maternal grandfather

Kinship terminology not a universal

- (Seneca) Iroquoian languages (Quebec, Ontario, and New York)
- My Grandmother and her sister (s): **one word**
- My Grandfather and his brother (s): one word
- My Mother and her sister (s): one word
- My Father and hiss brother (s): one word

Seneca Kinship Terminology

- Different terms for for **older and younger siblings**
- My mother's sister's daughter –sister
- My mother's sister's son = brother
- My Father's brother's daughter = sister
- My father's brother's son – brother