



UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF
MELANAU AND MALAY KINSHIP TERMINOLOGIES

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MUKAH

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

All societies have a classificatory system of determining kinship terminology. Our history, as human beings, lies on our lineage and ancestry through combinations of marriage and parentage ties. This research is a study of mankind's history in term of kinship. The study analyzed the **Melanau and Malay kinship terminologies** from the semantics' perspective of componential analysis. The study **compared** the kinship terms used in these languages by breaking down the **lexemes** into different components (semantic features) as to investigate the way they represent the meaning of those terminologies.

It is interesting to highlight here that each culture has defined its own kinship terms and the roles they serve in the society. Kinship is therefore universal although it may differ from one society to another. It is important to understand why we assign names to our relatives the way we do. For instance, there must be reasons why we refer to our father's sister and mother's sister as 'tēbusou' in Melanau, and 'makcik' in Malay. Different relationships are sometimes described by the same term. Kim (1996) wrote:

"What may sound perfectly fine in your dialect may take on a different hue or meaning in another dialect or language".

1.4 Limitations

- i. The depth of the subject's knowledge and background for the research could not be monitored specifically. This is simply because the subject might have knowledge of more than their first languages as they are living in a multicultural country.
- ii. Social structures that are beyond the norm (for example of illegitimate children, single parents, divorced cases, polygamous relations etc.) are not taken into consideration.
- iii. Based on library research that the researcher had done, there are quite a number of Melanau dialects.

Aloysius (1998, as cited in Aidan 1998) states

“Language or dialect can be considered a problem area for the Melanau community because there are at least five or six different dialects within the community.”

Therefore, it was decided that this particular study could only emphasize on one dialect – The Mukah Dialect.

2.0 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Morris (1991) claims that kinship organisation is based on the fact that an individual divides the people in his world into those who are relatives, that is people connected to him by birth and marriage, and those who are strangers. Further, Morris (1991) also states that the Melanau system of reckoning kinship is a bilateral or cognatic one in which the connections with blood relatives through the father and the mother are more or less equally stressed in regulating social relations.

As far as the system of terminology is concerned, Morris (1991), who conducted research on the Oya Melanau dialect, says that the Oya Melanau is simple in which an individual's kin is only divided into a few categories:

- i. It is classed by generation: grandparents and collaterals of their generation (*tipou*); parents' siblings and all collaterals of their generation (*tua'*); cousins (*jipou*); children of siblings and cousins (*naken*); own grand children and children of *naken* (*sou*).
- ii. The terminology is of the type called lineal in which the speaker's nuclear family is set apart by special terms: father (*tama*); mother (*tina*); sibling (*janek*); child (*anek*).
- iii. An individual's kindred, consisting of close and distant relatives, has no special name in the Melanau language. It is negatively defined by names for people who are not kindred or affines, but are strangers (*a-ki'*) or villagers (*a-kapong*).

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This research adopted the qualitative content analysis approach which aimed at analyzing internal features of texts or responses. The subjects provided information on kinship terms of their respective languages for comparison and contrast for analysis of the semantic domain of words with regards to their relations..

3.2 Method

The study employed a basic qualitative content analysis method to obtain data in identifying Melanau and Malay kinship terminologies.

3.3 Instrument (Please refer to Appendix 1)

The tables of kinship terminologies were completed by subjects to indicate the terms used in both languages. Subjects were asked to provide appropriate terms that they knew and they had managed to provide all required details despite the spelling challenges they had gone through in the first stage. This had enabled the researcher to find out and analyze the similarities and differences found in both languages.