A Sociolinguistic Approach to Kinship Terminology

Jurković, Tin

Sveučilište u Zadru

Odjel za anglistiku

Preddiplomski sveučilišni studij engleskog jezika i književnosti (dvopredmetni)

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1. Introduction

This paper is going to focus on a number of different contemporary research in the field of kinship study. The term itself is often defined simply as a blood relationship between two or more individuals. Otherwise, it is used as a term denoting feelings of familiarity among relatives or friends, of belonging to a certain group. Since the 19th century, this universal human phenomenon has sparked an interest of many scientists, whose research was significantly different from the popular idea of what kinship meant. Gradually, kinship study became the main preoccupation of cultural anthropology, and there has been considerable research with the aim of providing a stable definition of the idea. During such attempts, the focus has been dispersed over many societies and cultures, and kinship was constantly addresed in many different forms and definitions as scope of research gradually increased. Despite such rich history of research, the goal of this particular paper is to present problems, theories and solutions encountered and developed by the researchers dating from the 1970s onward. However, it will also present the knowledge necessary for understanding essential ideas of early kinship study. It will focus on the work relevant in reshaping the study, and present both different and conflicting views on kinship. Another point of this paper is to elaborate as much as possible on the general development of the study throughout recent history, as well as its future heading, meanwhile taking notice of kinship's position in the wider context of social sciences. To achieve this, the paper will be divided into three main sections. The first section will provide an introduction to kinship research and the main ideas behind this particular field of study. The second will provide a historical overview of the study, and, finally, a presentation of the developmental possibilities of kinship will summarize the paper as a whole.

2. Defining kinship

Kinship is historically viewed as a category connected to one's genealogy. Those we consider kin are in most cases related to us by blood. The early notion of kinship was introduced by Lewis Henry Morgan, who claimed that all relationships growing out of the family could be attributed to those of blood, and those of affinity constituted by marriage (409) He, among other scholars of the time, believed that kinship was central when it comes to studying primitive societies. It was believed to be the source of social cohesion. Other scientists followed in this belief, such as J.W. Powell: „So far as is now known, tribal society is everywhere based on kinship“ (quoted in Schneider, 45). As a result, kinship was long considered a relationship that can be described and defined through use of genealogy. This approach developed into one that incorporates descriptive methods with the genealogical one. It is basically ethnographical research and qualitative methods combined with genealogy. However, there is a problem in the discrepancy that is left by such an approach. This stems from the fact that the genealogical view can often be considerably different from the cultural idea of kinship delivered by ethnographical method. How are we then supposed to define kinship? How do we find the balance between the two?

2.1 The Genealogical and the Cultural Approach

While the genealogical approach offers a precise, more rigid way of defining what is and what is not kin, it is also important to look at the ways in which people perceive kinship and the extent to which our own perception can define this category. By taking this perspective into account, the very definition of kinship comes into question.

There have been numerous theories advocating different approaches varying in the definition of kinship and in terms of the „looseness“ of its definition. Some theories are leaning towards a definition of kinship as a category defined by certain unchangeable parametres, which would favour genealogy and offer explanations for certain patterns that

form discrepancies between the scientific results and the cultural, folk definition. On the other hand, most modern research on kinship has favoured the idea of kinship as a construct that can only loosely be defined by quantitative scientific methods, and that has to be focused on qualitative and descriptive methods in order to better define certain kinship constituents of a given society. In this way, it can be said that kinship study has taken on a distinctively sociological dimension, one that delves into particular social and linguistic features of a community. These scientists traditionally claim that the Western bias has influenced kinship study and set a universal measure of social structure study. Instead, they argue for a less ethnocentric approach which would take cultural differences into account and offer new perspectives of kinship terminology and the category itself.

2.2 Disproving the biocentric position

A representative researcher when it comes to the idea of kinship as a construct is David Schneider. His „Critique of the Study of Kinship“ (1984) could easily be taken as a vanguard for a whole generation of researchers who concentrated on forming a different idea of kinship, while protesting that the earlier portrayal of social structure is based on the Western concept. Schneider claims that his book aims to explain what he considers to be „hardly news“, and that is the idea that „theory guides the inquiry of fieldwork“ (4). In other words, the research that was done up to the 70's and 80's was invariably based on the theories and methods of the times, and these were predominantly ethnocentric. Schneider makes a point of stating that he does not believe that the research done before his time was ethnocentric and erroneous on purpose. Instead, he proposes that he is very much in the same position as his predecessors, with the exception of him being able to claim their theories to be wrong:

To put it simply, my criticisms of Fortes, Leach, et al. is *not* that they used a theory to screen what the natives said and to convert it into what they reported. I do the same thing. Everyone does the same thing. No one can do anything different. My complaint is that their theory is wrong; their theory leads them into error. But I should not be interpreted to mean that *I* "tell it like it is" while *they* distort reality. All analysis and all interpretation constructs reality. (Schneider, 4, emphasis included)

2.3 The introduction to a major paradigm shift

Naturally, a paradigm shift produced a new generation of researchers who claimed that the old theories were wrong, making their predecessors' research questionable. Apart from criticizing the ethnocentrism of their predeccesors, the paradigm shift also emphasizes the existence of kinship as a symbolic system. This would mean that, instead of following the logic of genealogical tracing, kinship is now regarded as a social category as well. One of the more obvious points on which these two ideas differ is the existence of kinship as a notion separate from man. If kinship is a social category, then it can only exist within our own mind. However, even in the idea of kinship as a social category we are facing a number of approaches that appear to display similar, yet different ideas.

Schneider proposed the idea that the existence of kinship is something that depends strictly on the observer. On the other hand, in his *Rethinking kinship and marriage* (1971), Rodney Needham claimed that the existence of kinship is a strictly empirical matter – it either exists or it does not. Furthermore, he admits that the word 'kinship' is useful when refering to certain practices and institutions, and can be used to discuss issues such as transmission of property among generations (5). On the other hand, Schneider claims that this is simply a transposition of a problem. If we decide to treat kinship as simply a „useful word“ denominating other terms, we will be faced with a number of new terms that demand further

explanations. Even if these views seem to be essentially conflicting, Schneider goes on to offer a reconciliation of such differences by explaining how the scientific perspective is always obstructed by the researcher's own views and cultural background. Hence, there cannot be a clear idea of the truth, but only an aglomeration of different viewpoints, various scientific data that is currently considered valid. In this spirit, let us take a closer look at the importance of David Schneider's work.

Before the 60's and 70's, during a time when anthropologists such as Bronislaw Malinowski, A. R. Radcliffe or Meyer Fortes dominated the field, kinship was still considered a central issue. The reason behind this is that these anthropologists saw kinship as a key factor of societal organization in stateless societies. They believed that it is important to observe „kinship as a basis for a political system and an orderly, functioning society“ (Carsten, 10). As a result of this, there had been a divide in the study. A part of it dealt with an intimate, family-oriented circle, focusing on the household and the roles within it. On the other hand, there was the role of kinship as an element in the formation of wider social systems, including laws and various public affairs. Fortes offered the terms for these different domains, naming them „domestic“ and „politicojural“ (2).

Another important aspect of the research done during the era was the idea of a „nuclear“ and „extended“ household. The idea of kinship was very connected to this, and it was hardly examined outside the context of household. Different research, such as John Hajnal's 1965 paper, *European Marriage Patterns in Perspective*, insisted on the existence of distinctively different households in western and eastern Europe. Kinship was researched in terms of families being nuclear or extended, and this was judged on further criteria such as the average marital age, number of offspring, property ownership and inheritance, and so on. While kinship was observed through these various social institutions, its meaning was always connected to one of these factors. Since anthropologists focused on such aspects of kinship,

most studies emphasized the variety and differences among different societies' kinship systems. This left a whole other level of kinship study unexplored - the inner structure of familial relationships, i.e. the interpersonal level. As Carsten explains it: „...from early on, the comparative study of kinship was explicitly defined as *not* being about intimate domestic arrangements and the behavior and emotions associated with them. These were assumed to be to a large degree universally constant, or a matter for psychological rather than sociological study“ (11).

In such a scientific climate, David Schneider wrote *The Critique of Kinship* (1984). One of his main points was to acknowledge the existence of an implicit social and biological dichotomy within kinship study. Furthermore, he brought up the issue of the term „kinship“ itself. On the other hand, the degree to which he answered these questions is questionable. Schneider's work was based on setting a model of research where he actively argued that kinship theorists of the past had believed in unambiguous „natural facts“ to be the basis of the study, such as those mentioned in Fortes' *The Web of Kinship among the Tallensi* (1949): „The facts of sex, procreation, and the rearing of offspring constitute only the universal raw material of kinship systems" (345). In doing so, Schneider concentrated on what he termed the „two descriptions“ of Yapese kinship.

2.4 The reflexive anthropology of David Schneider

The first description included all the elements that can be considered social institutions. Schneider himself explains that this is supposed to be a description in accordance with the typical contemporary anthropological research:

„The purpose of the first description is to provide concrete materials in terms of which the conventional wisdom about the study of kinship can be both exemplified and examined. The first description is given in the shorthand and relatively summarizing style common in

contemporary ethnographic reports. There is talk of lineages, descent, residence, inheritance, succession, and so on.“ (6).

He goes on to imply that the problem about such research is that it „assumes kinship“ (6). In other words, Schneider believed that the theory of his time was lacking in concrete definitions when it comes to kinship. Instead, the existing theory was used to transform elements of a native culture, the subject, into elements of kinship as visualized by the scientist.

Another point that he makes is the importance of stating the obvious problem, since a proper research can hardly be done without clarifying abstract terms such as kinship. Namely, he observes that:

> „It converts native cultural constructs into those of kinship. It assumes a kin-based society, or something very close to it. It does not question what a kin-based society is or what assumptions are embedded in it or whether they apply to this particular culture. It makes a complex series of implicit assumptions about the "idiom of kinship" which, because they are unstated, are not open to easy review or evaluation or to any appraisal of their relevance or applicability.“ (Schneider, 6)

This approach follows in the footsteps of symbolic anthropology and its forerunner, Clifford Geertz. It means that different aspects of society have kinship as an underlying foundation. Therefore, when studying kinship, the scientists belonging to the symbolical anthropology movement actually focused on analyzing culture as a „web of meanings“, as Geertz would put it (5). In this case, that framework was established through kinship. Schneider somehow adds to this idea with what he calls „the web of kinship“ (61). This idea presumes that there is firm genealogical proof according to which we can recognize familial relationships, therefore allowing us to set it in the appropriate cultural category or role.

However, without giving a cultural meaning to a genealogical relationship, it cannot be culturally recognized. Schneider goes on to make an analogy between kinship and language:

> ...whatever the biologically putative relationship may be, the genealogical relationship can serve as a framework onto which any other meaning—relationship, activity, or function—can then be grafted. A father-son relationship can be one of fondness or distant respect, of... it can involve economic considerations or it need not... The genealogy, that is, serves as an independent system of signs with its own rules for construction, and to it any or almost any constellation of functions or activities or meanings can be attached. The genealogy has rules for the combination of the kin types of the system, and in this sense the genealogy or kinship constitutes a sort of grammar and syntax, while the different, specific genealogical relationships are the vocabulary. (61)

The second description is utilized in order to juxtapose a perspective considerably different from the first one. Its purpose is to focus on the theoretical faults of the first description. It does so at the expense of its own completeness, as it is restricted by the materials already present in the first description: „The reason that this second description cannot be regarded as either complete or ideal is that the aim of the book is a critique of the theory underlying the first description“ (Schneider, 6-7).

By emphasizing all the areas of ethnography where abstract terms are employed in order to explain a certain native cultural phenomenon, the theoretical basis of the first description is questioned, as the second description focuses on specific scientific ideas that form it. However, Schneider emphasizes that this is strictly a means of retrospective analysis, it is not an ideal description but a way of challenging the background theory. It is challenging

the credibility of the ideas that scientists apply in their work; in turn, highlighting the potential problems of the first description:

> The second description has a specific and limited purpose and should be judged only in terms of this purpose. The purpose of the second description is to take roughly the same data and restate it insofar as possible without most of the assumptions or presuppositions about kinship that are in the first description... The second description takes as its starting point the premise that the first problem of any ethnographic account is to comprehend the conceptions, ideas, beliefs, images, meanings of a culture, and that this is the material which must be the very substance of any statement of the "ethnographic facts." (Schneider, 6).

Finally, it is important to note that the second description is necessarily restrained by the thematic of the first description. Its critique cannot focus on areas that have not been featured previously in the first description, so even if there are broader issues, they will not be pointed out.

2.5 The consequences of reflexive anthropology

By displaying why the study of kinship cannot go on in such a way, Schneider not only disputed his predecessors, but also hinted at a new direction the study might take. In *After Kinship* (2003), Jane Carsten credits Schneider, together with Geertz, as part of a wave that rendered the validity of kinship study questionable. Despite the emerging new fields of enquiry, Carsten claims that the dichotomy between social and biological aspects has not yet been solved. She explains that this is the result of a Euro-American research model, which is applied not only in the domain of kinship:

> Schneider asserted that the analytic domain occupied by kinship was demonstrably unsound. Anthropologists had marked out this domain using folk models derived from their own Euro-American cultures. These models could be shown to be invalid crossculturally. The way forward was to dismantle the separate domains of kinship, politics, religion, and economics into which anthropology had been distributed. (Carsten, 19)

By following such logic, it could easily be concluded that the study of kinship had no future, but Schneider's work laid a track for new directions of scientific inquiry. Naturally, in a situation of a major paradigm shift, there are numerous competing theories that come into play. Since it has been proved that some of the basic pressupositions about the nature of kinship were not based on valid grounds, the issue had to be reviewed on a more fundamental level. The efforts of the likes of Schneider and Needham produced a reflexive critique of kinship, emphasizing its Western roots and the theoretical inconsistencies related to social and biological aspects. Carsten claims that Schneider has „curiously failed at resolving the contradiction he so neatly demonstrated“ (22). However, Schneider was not only troubled by a biologically-based formulation of kinship itself. He believed that such science reflected the general European tendency to form human behaviour and characteristics on a biological basis, which he concisely explains in the following way:

> A further point should be made in this connection. First, this assumption is but a particular instance of the more general characteristic of European culture toward what might be called "biologistic" ways of constituting and conceiving human character, human nature, and human behavior. Man's humanity tends to be formulated in terms of his place in nature, with a few caveats about his free will, intentionality, conscience, and his (self-

defined) extraordinary intelligence distinguishing him from other natural organisms. (175)

It can be concluded that research such as Schneider's signified a shift towards a more self-critical and reflexive approach, which can be recognizable in the embracing of a more hermeneutical model as opposed to an objectivist. This means that it was historically acceptable to uphold an ideal of anthropologic knowledge, which refers to numerous facts that granted scientific authority during research. Yet, this idea of objectivity was changing. For example, in Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography (1992), James Clifford writes:

Moreover, the maker (but why only one?) of ethnographic texts cannot avoid expressive tropes, figures, and allegories that select and impose meaning as they translate it. In this view, more Nietzschean than realist or hermeneutic, all constructed truths are made possible by powerful "lies" of exclusion and rhetoric. Even the best ethnographic texts—serious, true fictions—are systems, or economies, of truth. Power and history work through them, in ways their authors cannot fully control (7).

This gradual shift introduced the need for a reexamination of „natural“ facts, an approach that required a precise understanding of abstract terms. When it comes to this, Schneider was only expressing what was believed by many of his contemporaries.

According to Franklin and McKinnon, this sentiment had been present since the 1960s:

The critique of "natural facts" that had been a prominent feature of Schneider's critique of kinship was thus widely articulated across a range of anthropological debates from the 196os onward. Marilyn Strathern's synthetic account of this critique in 1980 cites numerous exponents of this view, including Marshall Sahlins (1976, 52, 101), Roy Wagner (1975, 1978), Jack Goody (1977, 64), and Jean-Marie Benoist (1978, 59) as well

> as Mathieu (1973). These critiques of the ethnocentrism of Western ideas of the natural and their codi fication as a nature-culture opposition by Claude Levi-Strauss as a central tenet within structuralist anthropology significantly reshaped the study of both kinship and gender. (4)

After a slow decline of scientific interest during the 70s, kinship later became important in terms of studying gender, power, and ethnicity. This eventually resulted in what Carsten calls „something of a renaissance“ (20). One of the key reasons behind this is the influx of knowledge from gender studies. Hence, it could be said that the study was redefined as part of broader cultural issues brought about by new reproductive technologies such as in vitro or artificial insemination, which brought the definition of motherhood or fatherhood into question (Carsten, 21). Furthermore, other new topics such as global capitalism, international adoption, and virtual life all present a challenge to the reformulation of kinship studies. However, Carsten explains that, while a lot of these study fields have cooperated, kinship has been divided on a number of points. Among the more obvious divides that have been left by Schneider's critique is the one between the traditionalists and revisionists. The first concentrate on lineage, descent, and the general social organization. The second are characteristically focused on approaches that have been welcomed from other disciplines such as gender and identity studies. This is foremostly a critical rethinking of implications made by the abstract ideas towards an interdisciplinary approach. Additionaly, there is the geographical divide:

> The divide between these two tendencies in the study of kinship is replicated and reinforced by a further separation in the geographic locus for these two kinds of study. While ethnographic studies that focus on recent technological developments, or new

forms of kinship, have often been based on the West... the more traditional kind of kinship study has tended to be located in non-Western cultures, and often in rural communities. (Carsten, 23)

3. The Contemporary Approach: A Feminist Perspective

In this part of the final paper, the focus will be shifted towards the more contemporary research and the innovations it introduced. As can be noted from earlier examples, the issue of kinship is very important as it engages scientists from different areas into discussion, and it is also connected to the major changes that have occurred within anthropology and social sciences in general. Since the area of study covered by more contemporary research is broad, we will discuss the ones that focus on gender and issues related to body and reproduction. Social scientists such as Carsten (2003), Collier or Yanagisako (1990) greatly extended Schneider's idea about the necessity of reformulating kinship in terms of natural facts. Their main idea is that family and gender are not universal, but are rather a matter of discourse. Namely, the politico-jural and domestic domain, a divide in the study of kinship that has been established by the traditionalists, is one of the first points that has been questioned by feminist anthropology. Collier and Yanagisako emphasize the importance of the dichotomy as a basis for research that was done since Morgan's time:

> At the heart of kinship theory lies an analytic dichotomy between "domestic" and "political-jural" domains . This dichotomy, used implicitly by kinship theorists since Morgan and elaborated by Fortes, remains influential in anthropology and related disciplines. Fortes developed the concept in order to challenge stern assumptions about the biological basis of kinship by claiming that kinship has ajural, political dimension. But, ironically, in carving out a politico-jural domain of kinship based on legal rules, Fortes left intact the assumption of a invariant domestic domain built upon the affective ties and moral sanctions of the mother-child bond. (4)

In other words, the assumptions about female and male roles in society have been taken for granted. It is believed that it is universal for women to participate more in the domestic section, while the men are granted with the authority of wielding power in legal terms. On the other hand, feminist anthropology argues that both gender and kinship are constructed. Firstly, both can be said to be constructed from the same „Western theory of biological reproduction“ (Carsten, 58). Furthermore, in *Gender and Kinship: Essays Towards a Unified Analysis*, Collier and Yanagisako emphasize the newfound connection between kinship and gender studies, explaining that they both rest on the same assumptions:

> Schneider's insight that kinship is by definition about sexual procreation leads us to realize that assumptions about gender lie at the core of kinship studies. Moreover, not only are ideas about gender central to analyses of kinship, but ideas about kinship are central to analyses of gender. Because both gender and kinship have been defined as topics of study by our conception of the same thing, namely, sexual procreation, we cannot think about one without thinking about the other. In short, these two fields of studies are mutually constituted. (31)

Secondly, feminist critique includes the point that these biological facts cannot hold value without passing through a wider structure of cultural meaning. This is a direct legacy of David Schneider. Therefore, it becomes clear that one of the essential requirements for studying either of these fields is to separate the „natural“ from the „cultural“, i.e. the meaning that is socially given. When focusing on kinship and gender, one of the first obvious correlations is the domestic domain, specifically household. As Carsten explains, topics such as „procreation or domestic economy“ have become „legitimate subjects for the study of gender rather than kinship, which signifies a more general shift away from kinship in the

1970s and 1980s“ (60-61) In addition, other topics such as household and family typology have also been revised, which further led gender study into the domain of kinship. Collier and Yanagisako took this shift to the extreme by suggesting that not only gender was a matter of social construct, but sex as well. They were strongly influenced by Schneider in their conclusion that both the study of gender and kinship were influenced by Western concepts of sexuality. However, they also believed that there are no independent biological facts which have not been assigned cultural meanings, but exclusively social constructs that have only been presented as material facts:

> Given our tendency to reinvent the analytic dichotomies that limit our ability to understand gender in our own and other societies, we need an explicit strategy for transcending them. The one we propose in this final section of the paper rests on the premise that there are no "facts," biological or material, that have social consequences and cultural meanings in and of themselves. Sexual intercourse, pregnancy, and parturition are cultural facts, whose form, consequences, and meanings are socially constructed in any society, as are mothering, fathering, judging, ruling, and talking with the gods. Similarly, there are no material "facts" that can be treated as precultural givens. (Collier, Yanagisako, 39)

One of their main premises in proving their point is that „social systems are systems of inequality“. Collier and Yanagisako claim that we should avoid the assumption that our biological traits are given cultural meaning which reflects them. Instead, in order to avoid the nature – culture dichotomy, we should expand our view and ask why, in a certain society, some traits are valued while others are not? In this way, analyzing a society should always begin with the questioning of its values (40).

3.1 The Divide of the Feminist Perspective

While the argument connecting culture and biology has been met with approval since Schneider's *Critique*, the outright rejection of any precultural, biological aspects of kinship (and other aspects such as gender, sex, reproduction) provoked a negative response. Scientists such as Shelly Errington pose the question: „...to what does gender refer if not to the physical body?“ (quoted in Carsten, 60) The clear argument is that the idea of social construct largely depends on something that exists „out there“, a matter of the material world which can then be (de)constructed. As Carsten explains, it appears that a part of their argument rests „on the very distinction it is seeking to demolish.“ (64). The argument put forward by Collier and Yanagisako was reformulated by others. Carsten emphasizes the influence of Shelly Errington's influence in developing a more moderate theory. Errington believed that “human bodies and the cultures in which they grow cannot be separated conceptually without seriously misconstruing the nature of each” (14). She noticed how Collier and Yanagisako's model confusingly combined sex as a set of physical traits with the idea of human body found in the Western world. Furthermore, she offered her own solution to the issue by developing three different terms to describe cultural meanings attributed to bodies more clearly: Sex, sex, and gender. The „Sex“ refers to what Collier and Yanagisako had in mind – the Western construct-developed idea of sex, the „sex“ represents the physical traits of a human being in the most straightforward way. Finally, „gender“ is what is perceived as sex among different cultures (Errington, 26).

While Collier and Yanagisako suggest that sex is necessarily constructed by cultural meaning, it is paradoxal that they are trying to disprove the existance of subject matter upon which the cultural meaning they advocate is based on. This is partly the reason why scholars such as Errington make a careful distinction to preserve the idea of the body as a „clean“, biological concept.

In any case, kinship study gradually veered towards the belief that all genealogical traits can be constructed socially. As Marshall Sahlins describes it: „It seems fair to say that the current anthropological orthodoxy in kinship studies can be summed up in the proposition that any relationship constituted in terms of procreation, filiation, or descent can also be made postnatally or performatively by culturally appropriate action“ (2). If we take an overview of kinship networks in various societies, it becomes clear that there are numerous examples of socially constructed relationships regarding parenthood, procreation, descent, and so on. Sahlins brings together a number of such examples in his 2013 publication, *What Kinship Is - And is not*. He claims that the definition of human reproduction varies culturally, and the question of parenthood varies with the values attributed to each of the parents: „Symbolically formulated and culturally variable, human reproduction involves a differential valuation of the contributions of the genitor and genetrix that ranges to some sort of parthenogenesis - the woman functioning as medium only or the man's role unacknowledged-and at the limit, to the exclusion of both“ (3). Sahlins supports this claim mainly by listing examples from non-European cultures such as the Trobriand islanders, who are known for their matrilineal parenting, whereby the father's role was diminished. An additional idea includes „necessary participation of third parties such as ancestors, gods, dreamtime spirits, or the potency acquired from captured enemies.“ (4).

Shari Thurer also points out the role of the divine in representing the dual nature of women in India: „...in contemporary India, for example, the widespread oppression of women exists alongside the worship of a female divinity, the Hindu Devi – in many civilizations where the Godess held sway, women did too, to a certain extent“ (10). This not only implies that in certain societies a metaphysical intervention is viewed as a necessary part of reproduction, but also emphasizes the importance of different substances in the process. Sahlins explains that „human begetters are connected to their offspring by a great variety of

transmitted substances - blood, semen, milk, bone, genes, flesh , soul, etc. with various effects on children's appearance and character.“ (4). This also leads us back to Schneider's famous statement in which he claims that „the single most important assumption on which the premise of the privileged nature of kinship and the presumed Genealogical Unity of Mankind rests is the assumption that Blood Is Thicker Than Water.“ (165)

While assigning different meanings to other cultures' kinship systems, Western scientists drew the basis for their analyses from their own kinship system. They treat all kinship bonds as originating from the same, innate, human nature. Hence, all bonds and feelings of kindred are said to stem from a biological relatedness. Schneider argues that this is a case of confusing „natural facts“ for „cultural ideas“: „But the ideas about kinship are distinct from the facts of blood relationship. The facts exist in the nature of things. The ideas are, or derive from, the intelligent observation of these facts. And it is ideas about facts that become part of culture“ (167).

In other words, the Western idea that „blood is thicker than water“, i.e. that kinship can be defined solely on the basis on blood relationships can be considered a myth in itself. This is why Sahlins says that „it is an axiom of our own native folklore that "blood" ties are "natural" and irrevocable“ (4). Another can be found in Shari Thurer's *Myths of Motherhood: How Culture Reinvents the Good Mother* (1995). She writes extensively to prove that the concept of motherhood has underwent tremendous change throughout history: „Good mothering, history reminds us, is a cultural invention – something that is man made, not a lawful force of nature. As such, it is subject to human intervention“ (300).

Even though Thurer delivers her arguments with fair treatment of women as one of her main goals, they are also relevant when speaking of kinship. By exposing the relative nature of the Western concepts of blood ties or motherhood, and while questioning other kinship aspects as well, it appears that the idea itself is subject to constant change.

4. A New Definition of Kinship?

Throughout the previous section, it was possible to observe that despite the variety of ethnographic research before, it was reflexive anthropology and a critical model adopted from gender studies that changed the study focus. The natural and cultural aspects of kinship were under close examination. Kinship was obviously thought of in two different ways. Firstly, it is the result of reproduction, which means it is given by birth. Secondly, it is considered a relationship established throughout one's life - it is made by social participation. The dichotomy has existed since Lewis H. Morgan's division of kinship into classificatory and descriptive systems. This duality has long been taken as a basis for proper scientific research. However, Schneider's critique marked a turning point by bringing this type of analysis into question, and the connection between culture and biology had gradually come under significant scrutiny. According to Carsten: „The effect of his work was simultaneously to shut down the field of kinship as a subject for exciting new studies and to put a whole new range of problems on the agenda. After Schneider, anthropologists could no longer simply put what is "biological" in kinship to one side as something that did not concern them" (187).

In recent years, it could be said that a new perspective has been present through research of assisted reproduction. Carsten claims that „developments in reproductive medicine – including sperm and egg donation, surrogacy, in vitro fertilization, and cloning – have assumed a common currency in popular renditions of science and the family" (163). It is logical that such technological advancements will have certain implications when it comes to the nature of kinship. The inevitable question is where does nature end and technology start? How do the new technologies affect our perception of kinship? One of the prevalent beliefs was that kinship is given through social intervention. But how does this idea stand ground

when confronted with what Carsten calls the „technologization“ of nature (163)? In *American Kinship* (1980), Schneider explains that kinship study is changing in compliance with the scientific progress of biogenetics: „In American cultural conception, kinship is defined as biogenetic. This definition says that kinship is whatever the biogenetic relationship is. If science discovers new facts about biogenetic relationship, then that is what kinship is and was all along, although it may not have been known at the time“ (23). In other words, kinship depended on natural facts, which were in turn identified and recognized as valid knowledge on kinship. As Schneider put it, „knowledge is discovered, not invented“, and it „comes when the “facts” of nature which are hidden from us mostly, are finally revealed“ (222). Meanwhile, Carsten explains that the introduction of assisted reproduction, combined with the legislation regarding parenthood led to a situation where the recognition of natural facts is difficult without social intervention:

> „Whereas kin relationships previously would have been seen to have their basis in nature, and could be socially recognized or not, the effects of assisted reproduction are that relations can be perceived either as socially constructed or as natural relations assisted by technology. The more nature requires technological assistance, and the more social parenthood demands legislation, “the harder it is to think of a domain of natural facts independent of social intervention” (167).

It becomes obvious that, due to the fundamental inquiry into the objectivity of scientific truth, the very relatedness of science and kinship has caused instability in modern day kinship.

5. Kinship Transformed

What are the consequences of the theoretical implications mentioned in the previous chapter? How do the new ideas of kinship connect to examples of kinship in real life? It is extremely difficult to distinguish between the different factors that conjure up our images of kinship. Good example of one such way that influences our image of kinship is found in the work of Martine Segalen, a French sociologist and anthropologist.

In a 1996 article, *Kinship in Western Societies: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, she claims that kinship in contemporary society has changed in a number of ways: Patriarchy is weakening, the „valorization of the individual"[1] has replaced what once was an ideologically desirable „solidarity", the rise in life expectancy has introduced the idea of senior age citizens, and so on. What is interesting is that our perceptions of these changes can be attributed to political and ideological factors. Segalen believes that production of knowledge in kinship study inevitably connects to ideology. If our knowledge is gathered through science, which is in turn connected to ideological pressure, it becomes clear that ideology has a role in creating the image of family in a certain society. For example, Segalen notices how the changing idea of family can be traced back to wider social change. She claims that the new relationships among generations, which enable demographic change, are more possible the more ideologies draw back. The family, rid of its authoritarianism and enforced forms of respect, is a hit among youth values (38). She further proposes that during the 60s there was an enormous and generous social care system that was supposed to rid the family of its traditional functions (38). On the other hand, a new trend of „rediscovering" familial relationships has recently emerged.

[1] As the article was available only in French and Croatian, the specific parts quoted from the article and presented in this part of the paper are translated from Croatian into English by the author of this paper.

Segalen interprets this as a result of the dissolution of the socialist state which now leaves the space for celebration and rediscovery of familial relationships.

Since the late 1980s, the idea of kinship is rediscovered in France; family is not simply a couple with children, it now includes a relationship to a group of relatives outside the marital union. The vocabulary used when describing families has also changed. According to Segalen, in the 70s there was a „defensive vocabulary“ which included words such as: bastion, bulwark, citadel (39). Today, family is spoken of in terms of an open, amiable and colorful surrounding. Another aspect of kinship that has underwent a process of „rediscovery“ is inheritance. Segalen claims that recent studies in Western society point to an increasing importance of kinship as related to inheritance and the new ways of its tranfer (Segalen, 40). In the past this process would take place at once, after the death of a parent. Now it has become gradual, it is dispersed throughout the life cycle of a family: parents help the children by financially supporting their long years of education, their marriage and subsequent establishment of a family. This flexibility allowed inheritance to play an important part in family life once more. According to Segalen, the concept of inheritance was frowned upon in the 70s and 80s, when society was dominated by firm marxist ideals. The prevalent belief was that societies of the time enabled individual freedom through personal income, and the idea of inheritance was connected to the upper class and a reproduction of social inequality, which were deeply negative connotations.

Today, however, fifty percent of French households are inheritance based and present in all social groups. It is important to note that these inherited goods fulfill the function of helping the young (and sometimes the middle-aged) person to obtain property ownership. However, it is important to note that inheritance today is not the same as in the past. It used to be about acquiring the means of production, or inheriting a family business with

which one can act as with financial capital on a market. Today, inheritance is seen as something both symbolic and financial. It comes with an implication that it will be accepted and kept through time as a central symbol of family life. The property carries meaning which encourages a sense of history and remembrance (Segalen, 41).

While this particular example could apply when it comes to France, Segalen points out that we should leave our ethnocentrism behind and realise that different countries have different ideas on family. For example, in Germany, distant relatives are often unknown. Since further kin is not seen as part of family, they become forgotten (38). It appears that kinship is largely defined by how it is conceived in society, and Segalen offered a seemingly appropriate definition. She claims that kinship involves a group of people connected by blood, marriage, or a pseudomarital relationship. These are recognized not by their common ancestors, myths or territory, but by their reciprocal rights and obligations which develop within the context of a familial relationship (42). However, what is important to note is that these rights and obligations are not firm laws, but rather a flexible frame shaped by cultural, social and economic factors.

Another question that needs to be asked is whether socially constructed kinship can hold the same weight as the moral strength of blood ties (Segalen, 43)? If we equate these types of relationships, we might observe certain emerging issues. For example, if a non-biological parent leaves the family upon its dissolution, does he still bear the parenting responsibility for the child? Even if that responsibility was socially constructed in the first place? Meanwhile, Segalen also emphasizes the effect of biological innovations in artificial reproduction on the field of kinship. The proponents of these new technologies build their case by insisting on the primacy of biology, thereby shaking up the very foundations of kinship. Such ideas emanating from biotechnological development certainly question our standardized image of family.

The effect of these changes is going to largely depend on how people react to them and articulate their opinions. Individuals and family groups have rights which should allow them to develop in the way they choose. As Segalen explains, one of the more significant changes is that the family no longer uses its members as part of its collective destiny. On the contrary, families are now in the service of individuals and the construction of their personal identities. (44)

6. Conclusion

Kinship study underwent considerable change from its 19th century beginnings. It was only in the second half of the 20th century that the general sentiment shifted. Until that point, kinship had became a circular study process focused on comparative analysis, based on the idea that social categories and roles are mere reflections of underlying natural facts. Schneider's *American Kinship* (1980) and *Critique of the Study of Kinship* (1984) marked a turning point, whereby kinship was no longer based on the ideas of genealogy and natural facts. Instead, these older beliefs gave way to what Carsten named „an accelerated process of scientific advance and a simultaneous process of deconstruction that has marked the disciplines of the social sciences“ (166).

Facts about kinship were no longer discovered, they were constructed. This idea reached its high point with the gradual involvement of gender studies, with authors such as Jane Collier or Judith Butler suggesting that we should re-examine our idea of human biology, as it itself was a product of Western culture. For example, Collier and Yanagisako claimed that „specific social and cultural processes cause men and women to appear different from each other“ (15), and Butler completely denies the distinctiveness of gender and sex, as she claims they are the result of continual societal reenactment of gender roles: „That gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender’s performative character...“ (180). Such an approach obviously denies the distinction of nature and culture. On the other hand, more moderate approaches, such as those by Laqueur or Errington (1990), kept the dichotomy of nature and culture in place. While very much agreeing with the constructionist position, they observe that such theories should still refer to a certain physical entity (Errington, 14). This is the unsolved paradox of the more

extreme constructionist theory - even though it questions the cultual meaning surrounding sex, it is eventually trapped by its abstract and static properties. However, gender studies contributed to kinship study by expanding its vision. While cultural factors influence the way we perceive our bodies and relationships, the same can easily be said vice versa. Ideas of kinship vary across different cultures, and it is not easy to tell the biological characteristics from the social attributes. As Carsten puts it: „When people are said to become kin through living and eating together, it is difficult to know whether this should be considered as a "social" or a "biological" process" (81).

However, the reflexive anthropology of the 80s and the inquiry from the perspective of gender studies have improved our understanding of kinship. Furthermore, it has never been easier than today to observe worldwide debates on the various issues surrounding gender, identity, or kinship. This is very important, since the way in which people view and negotiate the social and biological aspects that define their relationships and identities are key to our understanding of kinship. Therefore, instead of rejecting the link between the dichotomies of nature and culture, or denying the mutual influence of either biology or society, it should be embraced as a more complete attempt of kinship analysis. Finally, it can be said that kinship today has underwent significant change in its research focus and is now characterized by the rise of the individual. Kinship comes into practice through a reciprocal realisation of the rights and obligations possessed by individuals in the context of family life. In this manner, kinship becomes a process that requires constant affirmation in order to achieve continuity and stability. It is also important to note that our ideas of kinship obligations may well be influenced by political and ideological factors. Because of this, there are different perceptions of kinship relationships across different countries. Still, both families and its members are seen as active parts of society who can act and make their own decisions and strategies, while giving way to the priority of constructing a personal identity.

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8. Summary

This paper focuses on providing an overview of the theory surrounding kinship terminology. Due to a lack of space, the focus is placed on providing an overview of a number of selected contemporary kinship research. Its goal is to familiarize the reader with the research history and the complex processes that shaped the study itself. It does so by providing the reader with an insight into the early research of kinship, as well as gradually discussing the developments which led towards its contemporary form. In an attempt to present these issues with clarity, the paper has been divided into a number of sections. The introduction offers the essential knowledge on kinship study and its beginnings, with a focus on explaining the historically dominant paradigm. The following part focuses mostly on the important work of David M. Schneider and his contemporaries in what later became known as the time when kinship study underwent profound changes. This part also acts as an introduction to the more recent research, with an emphasis on the role of gender study in defining kinship. Lastly, the final part of the paper focuses on explaining the results of the recent research and its meaning for the future of kinship studies.

Keywords: kinship, paradigm, gender, identity, nature, culture, society, biology

Sociolingvistički pristup rodbinskom nazivlju

Sažetak

Ovaj rad pruža pregled suvremenih istraživanja na području srodstva. Cilj samoga rada je upoznati čitatelja s poviješću istraživanja srodstva i kompleksnim procesima koji su ga uvjetovali. Kako bi se to postiglo, pruža se uvid u ranija istraživanja, isto kao i u postupni razvoj koji je doveo do suvremenih definicija srodstva. Kako bi se ovi problemi predstavili sa što većom jasnoćom, rad je podijeljen na više dijelova. U uvodnom dijelu govori se o temeljnim saznanjima na području srodstva, kao i o njegovim početcima, s naglaskom na

objašnjenje povijesno prevladavajuće paradigme. U idućem dijelu se govori o važnosti rada Davida M. Schneidera i njegovih suvremenika u onome što je kasnije postalo poznato kao vrijeme temeljnih promjena na području srodstva. Ovaj dio će također poslužiti kao uvod u suvremenija istraživanja, s naglaskom na ulogu rodnih studija u određivanju definicije srodstva. Naposljetku, zadnji dio rada je posvećen rezultatima suvremenih istraživanja i njihovom značenju za budućnost istraživanja srodstva.

Ključne riječi: srodstvo, paradigma, rod, identitet, priroda, kultura, društvo, biologija