

Dholuo Kincepts in Western Kenya

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The Luo are a Nilotic people living in western Kenya, north-eastern Tanzania and in western Uganda. Their language, Dholuo, forms part of the Western Nilotic group of languages. This article presents the traditional kincepts (kinship terminology) of the Luo people as described by elders living in Central Sakwa location, Siaya County, western part of Kenya. The kincepts for consanguine as well as affine relatives in up to three ascending and five descending generations are described. The paper applies a combined linguistic and anthropological approach. Linguistically, the terms are analysed in relation to current Dholuo vocabulary, grammar and modes of expression. Anthropologically, the Luo kinship rules of patrilineality and virilocality are considered. The domain of kincepts is a research field bringing together linguistics, anthropology and history. It contributes to the inquiry of diachronic linguistics, which can provide insights on the development and interaction of related languages as well as population groups' migratory patterns not least in parts of the world where written historical sources are scarce.

Keywords: Anthropology, Dholuo, History, Kenya, Kincepts, Kinship Terminology, Luo

1. Introduction

Dholuo is part of the Western Nilotic group of languages, and more specifically the Southern Lwoo group that also comprises of Acholi, Adhola, Lango and others that share morphological features of: 1) presence of derived locative nouns that are marked with a prefix *pa-*, 2) paired prefixed singular-plural genders on derived nouns, and 3) absence of two markers for general singulars (*-no*, *-do*) (Storch 2014: 3-8). Within the linguistic literature certain aspects of Dholuo have been investigated including existence of passive (Ochola 1999), downdrift and downstep (Tucker & Creider 1975), personal pronouns and object markers (Dalgish 1977), encoding of polar questions (Ojwang' 2008), codeswitching between Dholuo and English (Ochola 2006) and the role of the extended projection principle in Dholuo (Cable 2012).

Previous scholarly work has examined aspects of Dholuo kincepts (kinship terminology). Christie Jr. (1983) explored the use of possession and pressures to make it conform to use of possession in Dholuo in general, and Waligórski (1968) provided an overview of some key Dholuo kincepts in relation to Luo social life. Recently Storch (2014) published an extensive grammar of the related Luwo language (which is a member of the Northern Lwoo group of languages) including a section on Luwo kinship terminology.

According to Crazzolaro (1950), the Luo had their origin together with the Shilluk, Nuer, Dinka and many other Nilotic groups in the "cradle land" west of Bahr-el-Jebel in what is now the Republic of South Sudan. The historian, Bethwell Ogot (1967, 2009), is the main authority on Luo migration in Kenya. He described how since approximately the year 1500, independent groups of Luo people came from the North and gradually settled in various parts of the former Nyanza Province in western Kenya. The land was already inhabited and the newcomers usually took the land by force, whereby the peoples already in place were either assimilated or sent on new migration

themselves. Thus, many of the original “Nilo-Hamitic” (later termed “Para-Nilotic” (Whiteley 1974)) and Bantu peoples in Nyanza were assimilated by the Luo (Ogot 1967, 2009). Apart from Kenya, there are Luo people in north eastern Tanzania and western Uganda. Furthermore, the Jop’Adhola ethnic group in eastern Uganda is closely related to the Luo culturally and linguistically. Traditionally the Luo are patrilineal, virilocal and polygynous (Ocholla-Ayayo 1976, Nyambedha 2006).

Early anthropologists considered studying kinship terminology an essential part of cultural and social anthropology. As a result initial studies of kinship explored how various social practices evolved (Maine 1861, Morgan 1870, Rivers 1924, Radcliffe-Brown 1931, Allen 1989). Notable anthropological studies of kinship in Africa came from Fortes (1949), Radcliffe-Brown and Forde (1950) and Evans-Pritchard (1951, 1965). The study of kinship is also significant for later anthropology since theories of human behavior have been tested by kinship analysis (Schusky 1965).

The present article provides a comprehensive description of the system of Luo kincepts (kinship terminology), as conceptualized by the elders in the Nyang’oma area of Central Sakwa location in Siaya County in western Kenya, representing a ‘traditional’ ethnographic perspective on anthropological linguistics. The domain of kincepts is a rich research field bringing together linguistics, anthropology and history. It contributes to diachronic linguistic inquiries on the development and interaction of related Nilotic languages and past migratory patterns of ethnic groups.

2. Methodology

The fieldwork for this qualitative, empirical, descriptive study was conducted between 1996 and 2000 in the Nyang’oma area of Central Sakwa location in Siaya County in western Kenya. Data were generated by semi-structured interviews with 11 key informants aged 65 and above, 5 males and 6 females. The interviews were conducted in Dholuo of which the first author is a native speaker.

3. Luo Kinship Terminology

The consanguine Luo kinship terminology is outlined in Table 1 with reference to Figure 1a and 1b. The terms distinguish between the genders and generally also between generations. The exceptions are in generations -3, -4 and -5 where the terms are used for both genders:

- (1) a. dhokliunda/thukliunda
dhokliuunda /thukliuunda¹
great grandchild /great grandchild
‘great grandchild’
- b. mbieny
mbleeny
great great grandchild
‘great great grandchild’

¹ The data are presented according to the established orthographic system applied by Storch (2014), though tonal data and close phonetic transcription are not included.

- c. chIno/obuny
 chIno/obuuny
 great great great grandchild
 'great great great grandchild'

Seen from the position of EGO, the co-wives of the biological mother in generation +1 are referred to as:

- (2) mama matIn
 mama matIIIn
 mother small
 'step mother'

Hence, they are in the same category as the biological mother, but the addition of *matIn* 'small' indicates the difference. At the same level, the patrilineal structure of Luo kinship appears in the difference between the terms:

- (3) a. wuonwa
 wuoon-wa
 father-our
 'males on the father's side'
- b. nera
 nεεra
 maternal uncle
 'maternal uncle'/'males on the mother's side'

The suffix *-wa* (as shown in 3a) is a general indication of genitive first person plural (our). Seen from the EGO's position, all males and females in generation 0 are referred to as 'our brothers' or 'our sisters' respectively without distinguishing which of them is the child of the biological mother.

Min means 'mother', and is often used as a prefix to a name meaning 'the mother of so and so'. The prefix, *nya-* (plural *nyi-*), is a diminutive form (Omondi 1982:81-83), but can also indicate 'daughter of'.

- (4) nyaminwa
 nya-mIIIn-wa
 small-mother-our
 'daughter of our mother'

The term *mahie* (which can be translated as 'real') is added to some of the terms in order to indicate a direct blood relationship, e.g.:

- (5) a. mama mahie
 mama mahIIε
 mother real
 'biological mother' (as opposed to her sisters)

- b. kwaru mahie
- kwaaru mahIe
- grandfather real
- ‘biological father’s father’ (as opposed to his brothers)

Table 1: Terminology for consanguine relatives referring to Figure 1a and 1b.

Generation	Both male and female ego
+3	1, 3-4, 6-7, 9-10, 12: dani 2, 5, 8, 11: kwaru
+2	1, 5, 7,10, 12, 16, 18, 20: kwaru 2, 6, 8, 11: waya 13, 17, 19, 22: dani 4, 15: kwaru mahie 3, 14: dani matin 9, 21: dani mahie
+1	1: mama/minwa matin 2, 5: baba/wuonwa 3, 6: waya 4: baba/wuonwa mahie 7, 9: nera 8, 11: mama/minwa 10: mama/minwa mahie
0	1, 3: owadwa/omera 2, 4: nyaminwa/nyamera
-1	1, 5: wuoda 2, 6: nyara 3: wuoda mahie 4: nyara mahie
-2	1-4, 9-12: nyikwaya 5-8: nyikwaya mahie
-3	dhokliunda/thukliunda
-4	mbieny
-5	chino/obuny

Figure 1a: Consanguine.

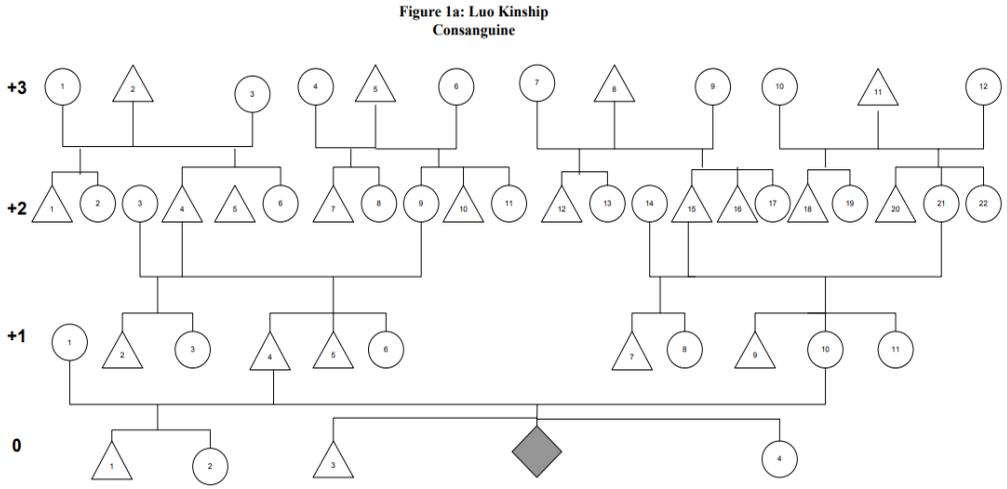
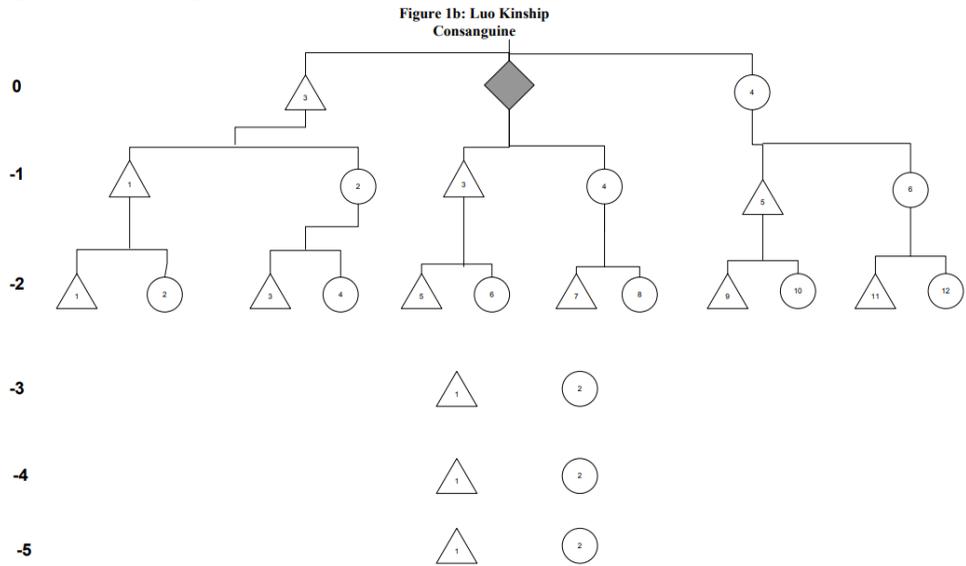


Figure 1b: Consanguine.



Below a series of Tables (2 - 8) and Figures (2a – 8b) visualising the Luo kinship terminology for the affinal kin (in-laws).

Table 2: Terminology for ego’s in-laws referring to Figures 2a and 2b.

Generation	Male ego	Female ego
+2	1, 3: kwaru 2, 4: dani	1, 3: kwaru 2, 4: dani
+1	1, 4, 6: jaduong’ 2: mara mahie 3, 5: mara 7: waya	1: nera 2: dani mahie (wuonodwa) 3: dani 4: kwaru mahie 5: dani matin 6: kwaru 7: waya
0	1: chiega (jaoda) 2: yuora 3: ori	1: chuora (jaoda) 2: waya 3: yuora
-1	1-4: nyathina	1-4: nyathina

Figure 2a: Ego’s In-laws, Male Ego.

Figure 2a: Luo Kinship Ego’s In-laws. Male Ego

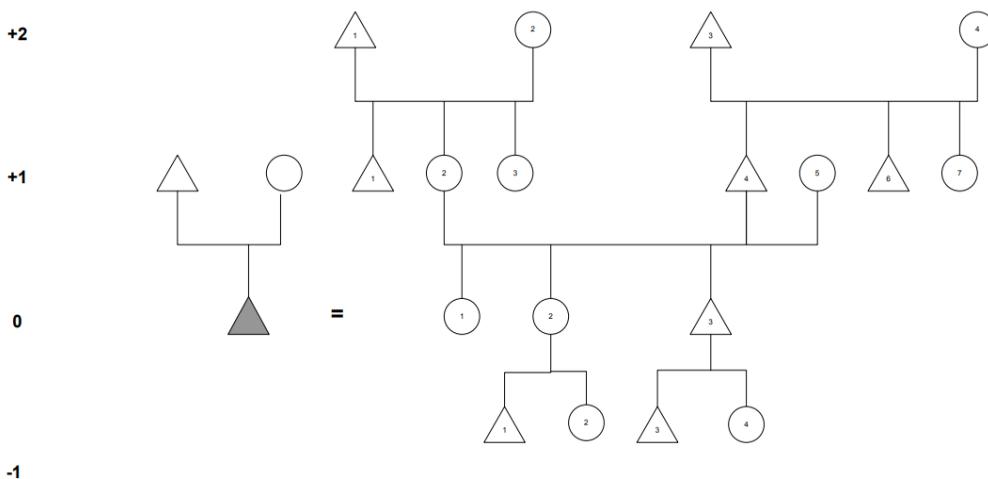


Figure 2b: Ego's In-laws, Female Ego.

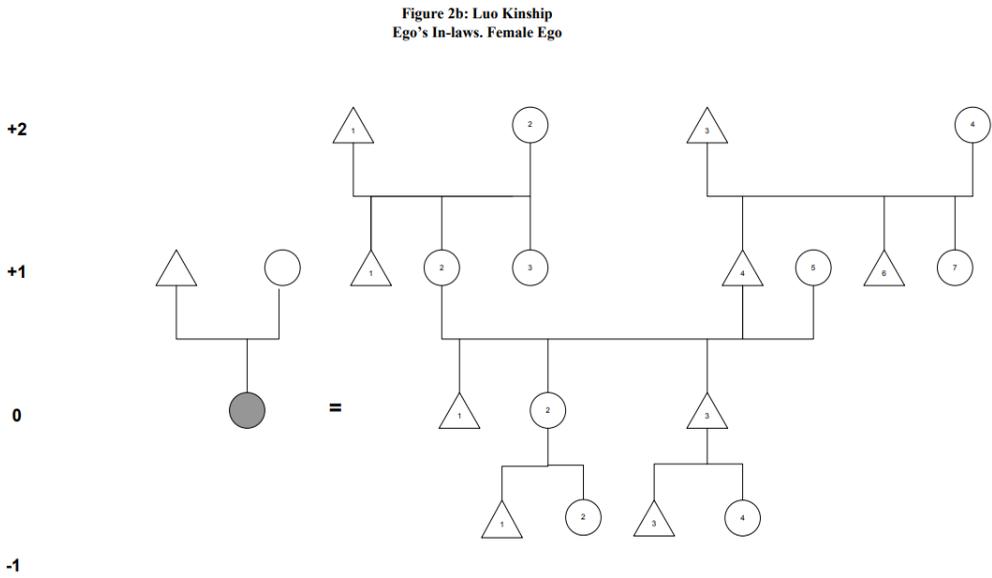


Table 3: Terminology for brother's in-laws referring to Figures 3a and 3b

Generation	Male ego	Female ego
+2	1, 3: kwaru 2, 4: dani	1, 3: kwaru 2, 4: dani
+1	1, 4, 6: jaduong' 2, 3, 5: mara 7: waya	1, 4, 6: jaduong' 2, 3, 5: mara 7: waya
0	1-2: yuora 3: ori	1-2: yuora 3: ori

Figure 3a: Brother's In-laws, Male Ego.

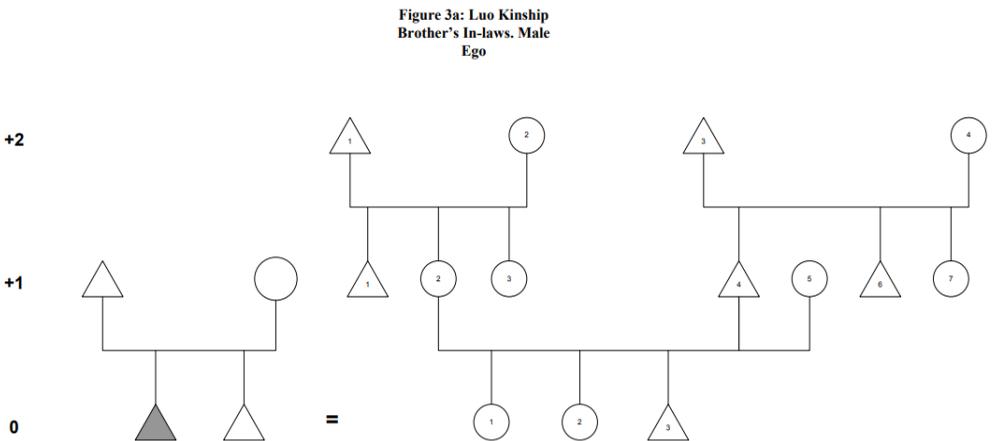


Figure 3b: Brother's In-laws, Female Ego.

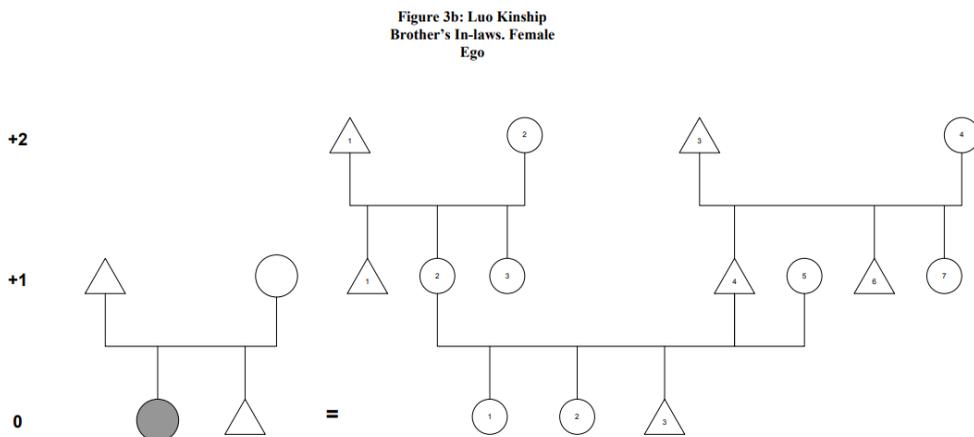


Table 4: Terminology for sister's in-laws referring to Figures 4a and 4b

Generation	Male ego	Female ego
+2	1, 3: kwaru 2, 4: dani	1, 3: kwaru 2, 4: dani
+1	1: nera 2, 3, 5: dani 4, 6: kwaru 7: waya	1: nera 2, 3, 5: dani 4, 6: kwaru 7: waya
0	1-3: ori	1-3: yuori

Figure 4a: Sister's In-laws, Male Ego.

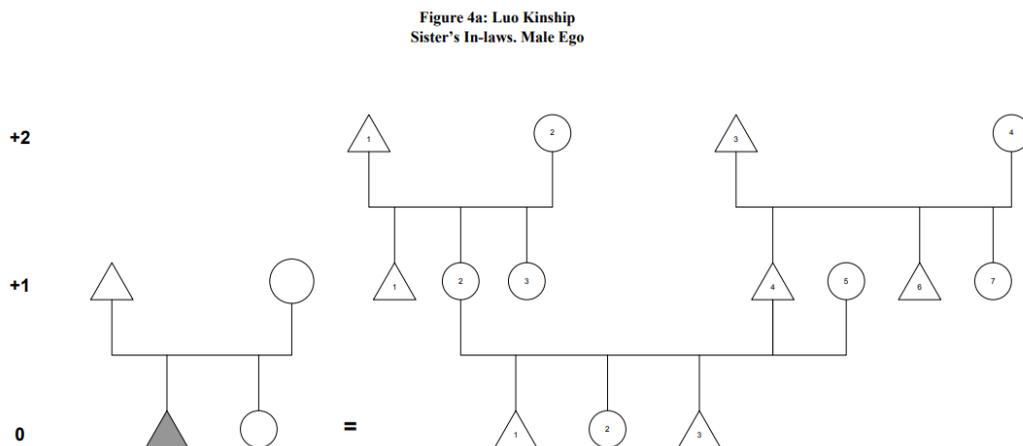


Figure 4b: Sister's In-laws, Female Ego.

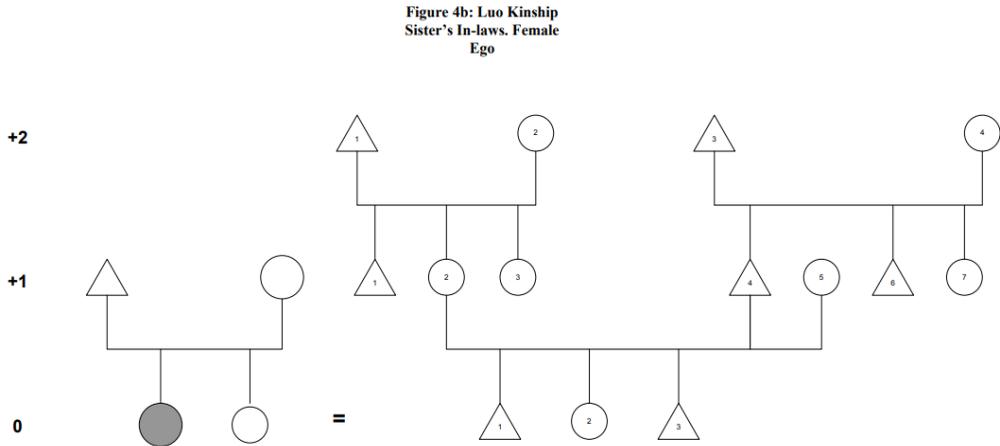


Table 5: Terminology for son's in-laws referring to Figures 5a and 5b.

Generation	Male ego	Female ego
+1	1, 3: wuonwa 2, 4: minwa	1, 3: wuonwa 2, 4: minwa
0	1,3, 5, 6,7: nyawanda 2, 4: nyawanda mahie	1, 3, 5, 6, 7: nyawanda 2, 4: nyawanda mahie
-1	1, 2: mara 3: ori	1, 2: nyara 3: ori

Figure 5a: Son's In-laws, Male Ego.

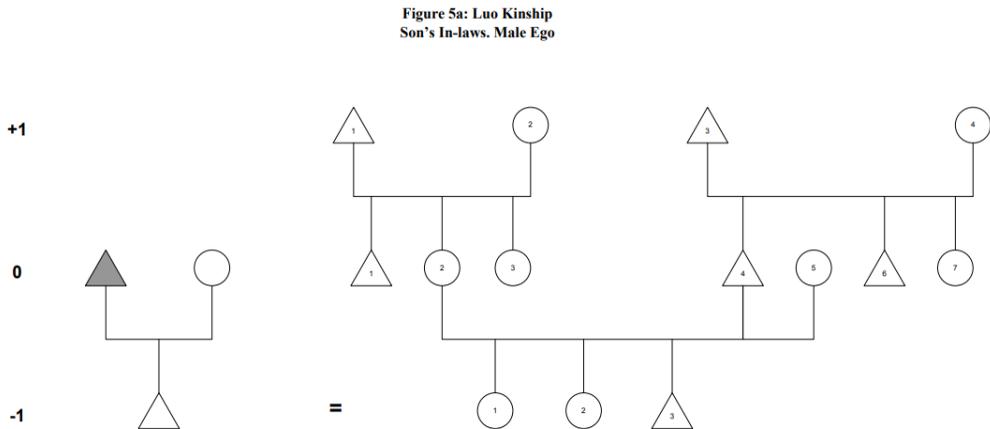


Figure 5b: Son's In-laws, Female Ego.

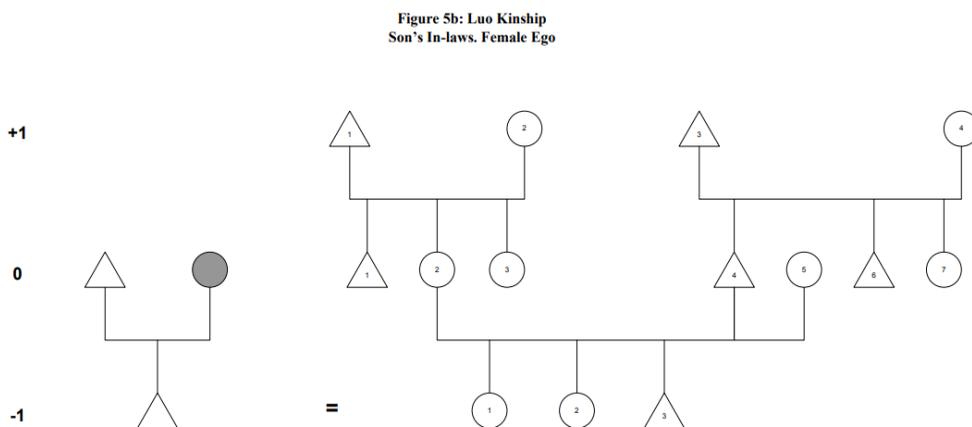


Table 6: Terminology for daughter's in-laws referring to Figures 6a and 6b.

Generation	Male ego	Female ego
+1	1, 3: wuonwa 2, 4: minwa	1, 3: wuonwa 2, 4: minwa
0	1, 3, 5, 6, 7: nyawanda 2, 4: nyawanda mahie	1, 3, 5, 6, 7: nyawanda 2, 4: nyawanda mahie
-1	1, 3: ori 2: nyara	1, 3: ori 2: nyara

Figure 6a: Daughter's In-laws, Male Ego.

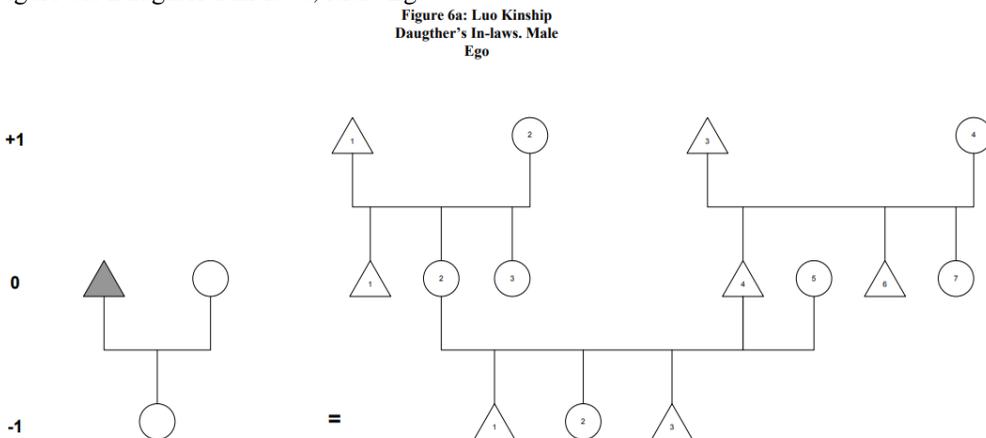


Figure 6b: Luo Kinship. Daughter's In-laws, Female Ego.

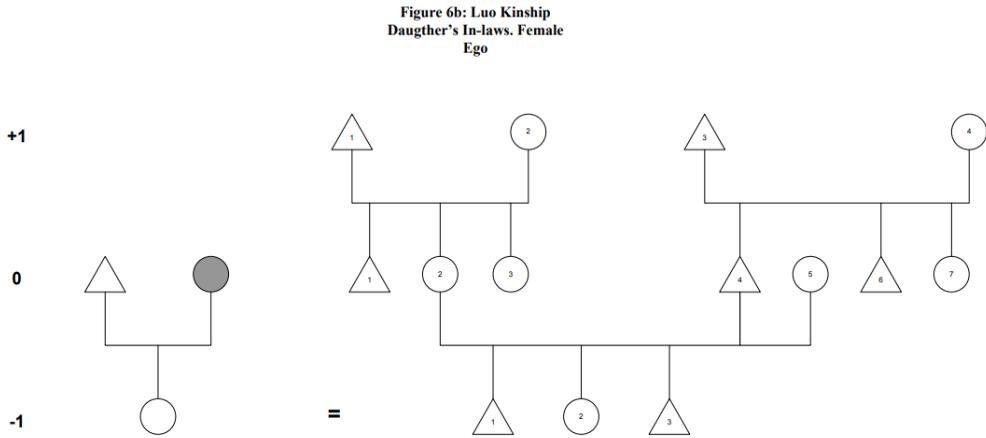


Table 7: Terminology for grandson's in-laws referring to Figures 7a and 7b.

Generation	Male ego	Female ego
0	1, 3: owadwa/nyawana 2, 4: nyaminwa/nyawana	1, 3: owadwa/nyawana 2, 4: nyaminwa/nyawana
-1	1, 4, 6: wuoda/nyawana 2, 3, 5, 7: nyara/nyawana	1, 4, 6: wuoda/nyawana 2, 3, 5, 7: nyara/nyawana
-2	1, 2, 3: nyakwara	1,2,3: nyakwara

Figure 7a: Grandson's In-laws, Male Ego.

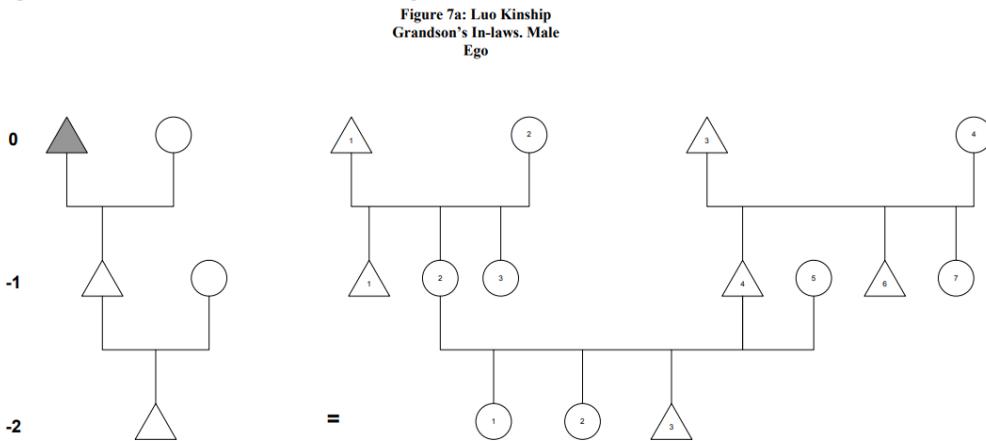


Figure 7b: Grandson's In-laws, Female Ego.

Figure 7b: Luo Kinship
Grandson's In-laws. Female
Ego

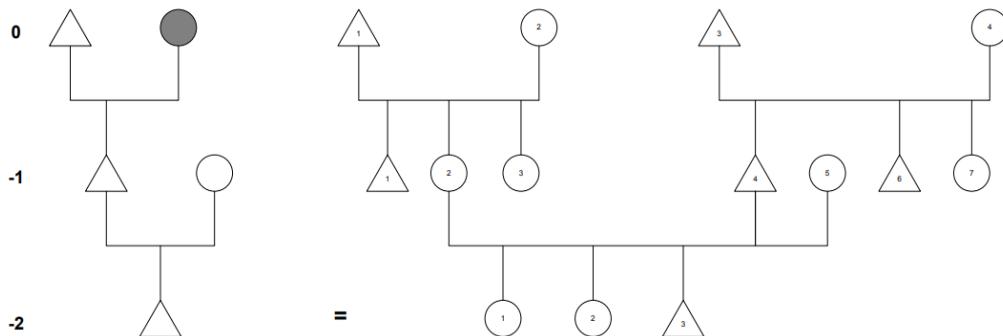


Table 8: Terminology for granddaughter's in-laws referring to Figures 8a and 8b.

Generation	Male ego	Female ego
0	1, 3: owadwa/nyawana 2, 4: nyaminwa/nyawana	1, 3: owadwa/nyawana 2, 4: nyaminwa/nyawana
-1	1, 4, 6: wuoda/nyawana 2, 3, 5, 7: nyara/nyawana	1, 4, 6: wuoda/nyawana 2, 3, 5, 7: nyara/nyawana
-2	1, 2, 3: nyakwara	1, 2, 3: nyakwara

Figure 8a: Granddaughter's In-laws, Male Ego.

Figure 8a: Luo Kinship
Granddaughter's In-laws.
Male Ego

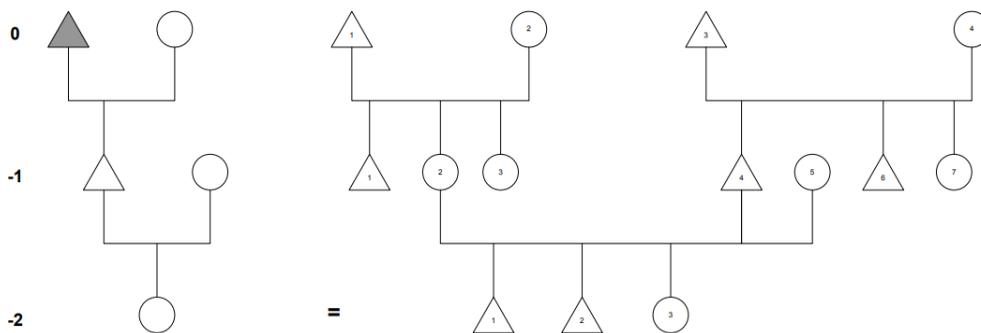
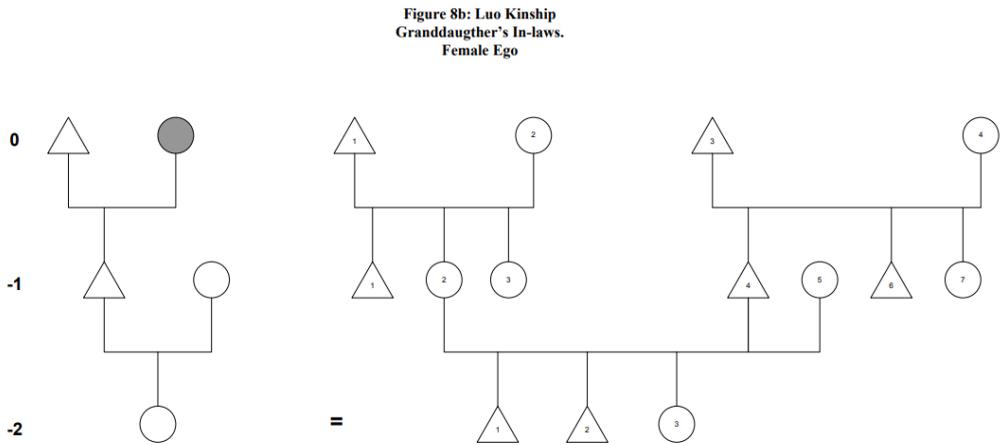


Figure 8b: Granddaughter's In-laws, Female Ego.



The prefix *ja-* (plural *jo-*) refers to a person in Table 3, whereas the adjective *duong'* (big) indicates a big person, not in the physical sense but in a honorific way (Omondi 1982:99), e.g.:

- (6) *jaduong'*
ja-duɔŋ
 person-big
 'big person/elder'

The consanguine terminology for 'our father' (8a) and 'our mother' (8b) below also apply to 'father'-in-law' and 'mother-in-law' within the affinal system.

- (7) a. *wuonwa*
wuɔŋ-wa
 father-our
 'our father'
- b. *minwa*
mɪn-wa
 mother-our
 'our mother'

The use of the morpheme, *nya-*, indicating 'small' (see example 4) is also used in the following examples:

- (8) a. *nyakwara* (Table 2)
nya-kwaar-a
 small-grandfather-mine
 'my grandchild' (- 2 generation)
- b. *nyathina* (Table 7)
nya-thɪn-a
 small-small-mine
 'my small one'/'my child' (-1 generation)

However, this rule does not apply in the case of:

- (9) a. nyawanda
nyawaand-a
in law-mine
'my in-law'
- b. nyawana
nyawaana
inlaw
'parents of child's spouse' (a special term for two adults whose children are married to each other)

Notably, many of the consanguine terms are used for the equivalent in-law positions. One would have expected a distinction due to the fact that the Luo are patrilineal. However, a marriage forms a bridge that connects two extended families, and the terminology used for the affines is framed based on the two individuals as the reference point on both sides.

None of the traditional ethnographic kinship frameworks apply precisely to the Dholuo terminology. The Dholuo system differs from the Hawaiian type because the former's kincepts are more differentiated at the levels from +2 to -2, both included. This is not surprising, as the Hawaiian type is not found in societies with unilateral descent groups such as the Luo. The Dravidian/Iroquois typology, which emphasizes a differentiation between 'parallel relatives' and 'cross relatives', and the Crow/Omaha typology, which refers to a line of matrilineally related men and patrilineally related women respectively are also very different from the Dholuo system (Keesing 1975).

4. Traditional Luo kincepts as a contribution to comparative anthropological linguistics

The present article has provided a comprehensive description of the system of Luo kincepts as they are perceived in the Nyang'oma area of Central Sakwa location, Siaya County in western Kenya. A number of fairly old informants have provided coherent data on kinship terms that are now shared with the linguistic and anthropological communities. This adds to the existing examples of scholarly work within this field (Waligórski 1968; Christie Jr. 1983). Waligórski's (1968) fieldwork was conducted in Alego, which is situated about 30 kilometers from Nyang'oma where the present study was conducted, and though many of the kincepts are identical, Waligórski does not display the data comprehensively according to generations. The work of Christie Jr. (1983) is based on a single informant, the origin of whom is not revealed. The paper focuses on singular and plural possessors in relation to kincepts and analyzes the trend of number neutralization in Dholuo as compared to related Western Nilotic languages as well as the adjacent Bantu languages in western Kenya.

The attempts to describe the phylogenetic development of the Nilotic languages alongside the migratory patterns of the peoples that are presently spread out over large areas of eastern Africa go back to the early work of various groups of Christian missionaries about a century ago (St. Joseph Society 1920; Crazzolara 1950). Subsequently, other contributions have been made. One of anthropology's founding fathers, Evans-Pritchard (1951, 1965), was a protagonist for the benefits of including historical perspectives in anthropology. He studied the inter-relations and origins of ethnic groups in southern Sudan as well as east Africa, which are the areas of origin and destination respectively of migrations of many Western Nilotic peoples. The comparison of the Mberidi and the Mbegumba is a case in point, including wordlists of Shilluk, Luo and Mberidi (1931).

Number marking and noun categorization constitute a language domain with large variation from absence to a high degree of complexity. Dimmendaal (2000:214) describes "formal and semantic properties of this system from synchronic and diachronic points of view and explains

its historical relative stability in Nilo-Saharan.” The linguistic historical perspective on number inflection systems in Western Nilotic languages is further emphasized in the work of Storch (2003:88), who demonstrates that the “history of language contact and the understanding of linguistic areas in the Western Nilotic zone are of crucial importance.” Thus, number marking and noun categorization is an important domain for comparative linguistics and diachronic analyses.

Kinship terminology has also been studied by prominent linguistic scholars. Allen (1989:178) suggests an evolutionary hypothesis for kinship terminologies where the general trend from prehistory till now is in the direction of zero-equation terminologies. Taking the American kinship system as a point of departure, Saltarelli and Durbin (1967) investigate the interaction of linguistic structures and kinship structures as a means of contributing to a comprehensive theory of semantics. Kuznecov (1974) provides a typology for comparison of the semantic field of consanguine relationships based on four languages (English, Danish, French and Spanish) and comprising the variables: ‘seniority by generations’, ‘the degree of collateral kinship’, ‘sex’ and ‘direction of kinship’.

Ardener (1954:85) provides a conspicuous case of kinship terminology among a group of Southern Ibo in Eastern Nigeria showing an “extreme degree of dialect variation” as well as “local variation in details of the kinship organization itself”. This serves as an important reminder that comparative analytical endeavors are not only *between* ‘monolithic’ and well-defined languages, though that is complicated enough in its own right especially in a historical perspective. It is further complicated by internal variations *within* the various languages.

Thus, we contend that the domain of kincepts is a rich research field bringing together linguistics, anthropology and history, and opening new angles of inquiry. Comparative studies on kincepts of related languages such as Acholi and Lango as well as more distantly related Western Nilotic languages would provide an interesting field of research. Such studies, along the lines of what Storch (2003) did on number inflection systems, would allow a diachronic linguistic perspective on the development and interaction of these languages. The work of Allen (1989), Saltarelli and Durbin (1967) and Kuznecov (1974) could serve as theoretical and methodological frameworks, but there is a need for empirical data from the relevant languages, such as the present description of Dholuo kincepts.

The present study has limitations. The data presented here were generated between 1996 and 2000. However, as the main point of this article is to describe traditional Luo kinship terminology, this does not decrease the validity and current relevance of the data. The fieldwork was conducted in one locality in northern Nyanza region and therefore it may not capture the variations among the Luo in different places in Kenya and not to mention Dholuo speaking people in Tanzania and Uganda. However, similar data from Waligórski (1968) in an area not too far away indicates a wider representativity. Future studies will show whether the kincepts in the present article represent Dholuo spoken elsewhere.

5 Conclusion

The present study has provided a comprehensive description of Dholuo kincepts in contemporary western Kenya. In addition, it contributes to the cross-disciplinary research field combining linguistics, anthropology and history in an effort to provide insights on the development and interaction of related languages and past migratory patterns especially in parts of the world where written historical sources are scarce. Furthermore, the data may find use outside academia especially

among the practitioners of Luo culture who are struggling with loss of cultural knowledge against a background of modernization, urbanization and globalization.

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