

# Who's who in Kensiw? Terms of reference and address in Kensiw

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## 1. Introduction

The Kensiw language is spoken by several small communities in southern Thailand and in northern Western Malaysia. It is a Northern Aslian language of the Aslian sub-branch of the Mon-Khmer family. The Kensiw speakers refer to themselves as the Maniq and will be referred to in this way throughout this paper.<sup>1</sup> The data used in the paper are the result of cumulative study of seven years of the Kensiw language as spoken in Bansakai in Yala Province, Thailand. This paper consists of four parts: introductory remarks regarding the social structure of the Maniq, a glossary of terms of reference and terms of address followed by a brief commentary on points of interest and then some questions for further research and investigation.

The Maniq community in Yala has fluctuated over the course of this research, but it has essentially consisted of two extended families living in permanent housing mostly provided by the Thai government. Each nuclear family resides in its own house, but the houses of an extended family typically are situated side by side within the village parameters. The village terrain lends itself to dividing the village into upper and lower sections. Each section is occupied by one extended family. The households in the lower section have intermarried with the Thai fairly extensively, while those of the upper section have not intermarried at all with non-Maniq. Village exogamy appears to be normal; there has been no intermarriage between the upper and lower sections.

Currently, the kinship relations of each extended family living in the village may be summarized using English terminology in the following way. The lower section consists of a man and his Thai wife, a son and his family and a daughter and her family, as well as three of his sister's children (two sons and a daughter) and their families. They occupy six houses. The upper section consists of a woman and her second husband, a daughter by her first marriage and her family, and a second daughter by her current husband and her family. In addition, there are two other nuclear families who are either a brother or close cousin of the eldest daughter's husband. There are six houses occupied in the upper section, with the mother and second husband each occupying separate houses. There is one

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<sup>1</sup> Most literature refers to them as Negritos or members of the Semang population.

additional house in the lower village which is occupied by an unmarried adolescent man. He is the brother of the younger daughter's husband of the upper section. Both of his parents are deceased. That brings the total household to thirteen, with a total population of forty-nine, twenty-two adults and twenty-seven children.

Traditionally, the Maniq have been hunters and gatherers, living a nomadic lifestyle. Each nuclear family lived in their own lean-to shelter situated adjacent to a small number of other nuclear families, commonly kin. The composition of this band of people is always quite fluid and unstable, with households relocating according to their economic and personal desires. As hunters and gatherers, their social structure is very egalitarian in nature, without much overt leadership structure. While a band typically has a headman, the degree of authority over the rest of the band is essentially one of persuasion and counsel which can be as easily ignored as it is adhered to. See Schebesta (1928), Williams-Hunt (1952), Carey (1976) and Evans (1937) for more extensive descriptions of the Semang.

In terms of residency rules and affinal relations, it has been noted by Benjamin (1985) that there has been a patrifocal bias due to the men within a given band or camp forming a loose economic work unit and the unmarried women of that band marrying outside their own camp. A number of scholars have written about the avoidance behavior exhibited between in-laws; see especially Evans (1937), Syed (1976) and Benjamin (1967). These avoidance relationships are reciprocal in nature and prohibit the parties involved from being in close physical proximity to one another, speaking directly to one another or even using each other's name when speaking to a third party.

Since the intended scope of the present paper is to briefly describe the terms of reference and address as currently used by the Maniq of Yala Province, no further background information will be provided here except to mention the increasingly sedentary lifestyle of this community. The Thai government settled the Maniq in their current village approximately forty years ago in an effort to combat the communist insurgency in the area. The Maniq were endangered by the military conflict between Thai forces and the communist insurgents. Over the past forty years, the Maniq have become increasingly sedentary, harvesting rubber as their primary industry. With this shift to a more permanent settlement, there has come a number of other changes.

Among those changes are the disuse of the lean-to as well as the blowpipe for hunting, the introduction of the Thai national culture and language, and formal schooling, to name some of the most obvious changes. There is a total reliance upon permanent housing rather than lean-tos at this time. Those who have been forced, due to a temporary housing crisis, to build and live in a lean-to have been reluctant to do so. The use of the blowpipe for hunting has fallen into disuse by the younger men, although an occasional miniature blowpipe is seen as a toy for a young child. Rather than changing residence when encountering conflict within the community, the Maniq are remaining in the settlement and learning to live with the conflict. The introduction of Thai government structure is evident in the official appointment of the Maniq's headman as an official position. The national language, religion and monetary system have all made inroads into the Maniq culture in Yala Province. A number of Maniq children are attending the local primary school on a fairly consistent basis. There is no doubt that many other significant changes are

taking place, but a number of them remain subtle in nature and difficult to detect in any explicit way.

The methodology for the collection of this data was twofold. First, various language assistants were asked who a given person in the village was, what their relationship to the assistant was and how they would address that person in conversation. This was later expanded to take in additional relationships for which there were no people currently living in the village representing that relationship. Second, several genealogies were collected which were used to verify the earlier data and to fill in gaps. At the same time, photographs of individuals were also utilized to expand the knowledge of various affinal relationships.

Kinship terms will be given in abbreviated form, using two letter symbols; see the kinship abbreviation key at the end of the paper. The two letter abbreviations, as used in Chart 1 below, when occurring as a string of relationships are read as the genitive case when to the left of the final abbreviation, e.g. ChChSp would be read as (ego's) child's child's spouse. The final abbreviation is the actual person in question; in the example above, spouse. There are a few cases where the gender of the speaker impacts the choice of the term of address. Rather than complicate the abbreviation system any further, the terms (same sex) or (opposite sex) will be added to indicate when the speaker's gender is of concern. The IPA alphabet, including some diacritics specific to Kensiw, is used for transliterating the Kensiw glosses.

## 2. Terms of reference and address

A term of reference is that word or phrase used to refer to or describe a given kinship relationship. In contrast, a term of address is a word or phrase used to address or speak to that person. For example, in English a person's male parent is referred to as one's *father*, but in addressing that parent, the terms *Father*, *Dad*, *Pop*, *Daddy*, *Papa*, etc. may be used, depending on the preference of the individual's family.

The kinship system of the Maniq most closely resembles the Hawaiian kinship system. A Hawaiian system classifies ego's cousins the same as one's siblings, differentiating between male and female members. The same term of reference would be used to refer to one's brothers and one's male cousins; likewise one term would refer to one's sisters and female cousins. Moving up one generation, G+1, one's father and uncles would share a common term while one's mother and aunts would share another term. However, the Kensiw terminology differs from the Hawaiian system considerably. Chart 1 below reflects a number of digressions from the Hawaiian system. First, cousins and siblings are differentiated in terms of relative age rather than sex, which is a common areal feature of Southeast Asia. For example, both Standard Thai and Malay mark siblings as either elder or younger, e.g. *phi* 'elder sibling' (Thai), *ນ້ອງ* 'younger sibling' (Thai), *abang* 'elder sibling' (Malay), *adik* 'younger sibling' (Malay). Second, the term for aunt and mother are the same term as expected for a Hawaiian system, but separate terms for father and uncle are used. After much checking and rechecking of the data, it was finally unearthed that an elder brother of father can be referred to as *?ɛj* 'father', but its use has never been observed during the course of

this research.<sup>2</sup> Third, in the second ascending generation, G+2, the terminology distinguishes lineal kinsmen (that is, grandparents) from collateral kinsmen (that is, siblings of grandparents). Moreover, the terms used to refer to the sisters of grandparents are asymmetrical, using *naʔ* for some designations and *jaŋ* for others. This will be discussed in a later section. Last, the first descending generation, G-1, differentiates between one's children and one's siblings' children by the use of elder and younger specifying whether the connecting parent is older or younger than ego. This distinction however is dropped in the terms of address.

The order in which the terms are listed in the chart below is approximately as follows: consanguineal relations beginning with G+2 proceeding down to G-2 which are followed by affinal relations from the G+2 generation down to the G-2 generation.

*Chart 1.* Kensiw terms of reference and address

Term of Reference	Term of Address	Relationship	Generation
taʔ	taʔ	PaFa	G+2
jaʔ	jaʔ	PaMo	G+2
tɔʔ kəba ʔɛj		FaPaSb(e)	G+2
pɛ kəba ʔɛj		FaPaSb(y)	G+2
tɔʔ kəba naʔ		MoPaSb(e)	G+2
pɛ kəba naʔ		MoPaSb(y)	G+2
tɔj	tɔj	PaPaBr, PaPaSiHu	G+2
jaŋ	jaŋ	PaFaSi, PaFaBrWi, MoMoBrWi	G+2
naʔ	naʔ	Mo, PaSi, PaMoSi, PaBrWi, FaMoBrWi	G+1, G+2
ʔɛj	ʔɛj	Fa, FaBr(e)	G+1
ʔɛj kamen	naʔ	MoHu	G+1
naʔ kamen	ʔɛj	FaWi	G+1
beh	beh	PaBr, PaSiHu	G+1
tɔʔ	ʔɔʔ	Sb(e), PaSbCh(e), PaSbCh(e)Sp	G0
pɛ	pɛ, ʔās	Sb(y), PaSbCh(y), PaSbCh(y)Sp	G0

<sup>2</sup> The Maniq community in Yala is generally never in excess of forty people, which restricts the sample size for any research.

Chart 1. Kensiw terms of reference and address (continued)

kaŋjɛh	hɛj, ʔɔh, ʔɛh	Wi	G0
kaɽwaj	hɛj, ʔɔh, ʔɛh	Hu	G0
mənɛkɛj	person's name	PaSpCh, PaSbCh, PaSbSpCh	G0
wɔg		Ch	G-1
wɔg tamkal	pag, gɔh	So	G-1
wɔg mabe	nɛ	Da	G-1
wɔg kamen	person's name	SpCh	G-1
wɔg tɔʔ	pag, gɔh (male) nɛ (female)	Sb(e)Ch	G-1
wɔg pɛ	pag, gɔh (male) nɛ (female)	Sb(y)Ch	G-1
juɽʔ	pag, gɔh (male) nɛ (female)	ChCh	G-2
jiɽʔ		SbChCh	G-2
kaɽʔat	gid	SpPa, SpPaPa	G+2
kanɔd		PaPaSbSp	G+2
kaɽʔat nɛʔ		SpPaSb	G+1
pised		ChSpPa	G0
lamɛj	ʔuj (same sex), gid	Sb(e)Sp	G0
wih (opposite sex)		SpSb, SpPaSbSp, SbSpChSp	G+1, G0, G-1
bahuʔ	ʔuj (same sex) gid	Sb(y)Sp	G0
wɔg bahuʔ	person's name	SpSb(y)Ch	G-1
pesaw	gid, ʔanek	ChSp, ChChSp	G-1, G-2
pesaw nɛʔ		SbChSp	G-1
kaɽʔat	ʔanek	ChChSp	G-2

### 3. Discussion of points of interest

This section of the paper will briefly discuss six different points of interest. The first point is the differences in the terms of address for one's siblings-in-law. The term *ʔuj* is used with same sex in-law affines with whom conversation is not forbidden. This would include one's own siblings' spouses of the same sex, one's spouse's niece or nephew's spouse of the same sex as ego and one's spouse's parent's sibling's spouse of the same sex as ego. For kinsmen of the opposite sex as ego, the term *wih* can be used in relationships in which in-law avoidance is not operative, e.g. one's spouse's younger sibling of the opposite sex. The term *gid* is reserved for those relationships with one's in-laws in which in-law avoidance is practiced. This includes children-in-law, niece/nephews-in-law, parents-in-law and grandparents-in-law. Grandchildren-in-law appear to be referred to as *ʔanek*, a Malay borrowing meaning 'child'. As already mentioned, in these cases the two parties may not speak to each other directly and the term *gid* is actually a third person form of address. Not only can the two parties not converse, they cannot even mention one another's name, thus the need for a third person term of reference as it were. Physical proximity is also to be avoided. In general, in-law avoidance is fairly regularly practiced in the Maniq community in Yala. However, several instances have occurred which raises the question of how strictly it is observed by the Maniq. Maniq people told me that if a child has known the parent of their spouse since childhood, then the need to observe this avoidance practice is greatly lessened. The reason given was that they know the person already. This remark would seem to indicate that the danger of conflict normally expected in these affinal relationships is lessened by long-term, continuous contact and familiarity between the respective parties prior to the establishment of an affinal relationship. Whether this is a relatively new practice due to the disruption of their traditional lifestyle, creating more stable communities resulting in marriages between young people in the community, is difficult to ascertain.

A second interesting point is the use of *kamen* in Kensiw. In Temiar and Lanoh, two Central Aslian languages of Western Malaysia, this term is used in reference to one's sibling's children. Evans (1937) reports that the Lanoh of Lenggong and Kuala Kenering used the terms *kun kemun* or *kemun* for both niece and nephew. Likewise, Benjamin (1967) gives as a Temiar term of reference for elder sibling's child *koman* and *kəmən*. The Kensiw of Yala have a similar usage of this term, but the meaning is much broader, encompassing the relationship between one's female siblings and one's own children (a traditional sense of the word in Mon-Khmer languages, as well as that of stepparent or child and of foster parent or child. In fact, the use most commonly made of the term as observed in Yala is that of a foster or step relationship.<sup>3</sup>

Continuing on with the stepparent relationships, the third point of interest is to note that the terms of address are the same as that for the remaining parent. That is, stepfather is called *naʔ* 'mother' while the stepmother is called *ʔej* 'father'. The importance of this seeming avoidance of a consanguineal term for the stepparent is still not understood.

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<sup>3</sup> It wasn't until Geoffrey Benjamin commented on this usage in personal communication that it was realized that the term also refers to ego's sister - ego's child relationship.

A fourth area of interest that follows somewhat on the tails of the stepparent terms of address is the absence of other relationships that are referred to as *ʔɛj* 'father'. As noted earlier, aunt as well as some relationships in the G+2 generation is the same term as that of mother, that is, *naʔ*. However, with the exception of some possible limited use of *ʔɛj* to refer to father's older brother, there appears to be only one relationship that qualifies as that of father. Carey (1976) notes in a description of Kensiw kinship terms that both *ei* and *nak* (his transcription) are used exclusively for the biological parents. To date, there has been nothing overtly demonstrated by the Maniq community in Yala Province that would explain why this relationship is especially marked, when compared to that of *naʔ* 'mother'. No behavior has been noted in which an elder brother of father has been referred to as *ʔɛj* by his nieces or nephews.

That brings up the fifth and sixth items of interest. The term *naʔ* refers to one's mother, one's parent's sisters, one's uncle's wife, and in three cases to one's great aunts. As a term of reference, *naʔ* is generally modified by the word *kamen* to show the relationship between ego's child and ego's sister, i.e. *naʔ kamen*. As a term of address, *naʔ* is modified by the woman's name when used to address any of the above kin except that of mother and stepfather. For example, one would call one's mother as simply *naʔ*, while one's aunt would be called *naʔ iwen* (mother + name).

The use of *naʔ* to refer to one's great aunts as compared to the use of *janj* seems to follow no expected pattern. There is no clear pattern of paternal versus maternal differentiation or of consanguineal versus affinal relations. *naʔ* is used to refer to the following three G+2 relations: ego's maternal grandmother's sister, ego's paternal grandmother's sister and ego's paternal grandmother's brother's wife. Meanwhile, *janj* is used to refer to ego's paternal grandfather's sister, ego's paternal grandfather's brother's wife and ego's maternal grandmother's brother's wife. Since parallel distinctions are not made at the G+1 level, it seems strange that there is any distinction made at this level of kinship. The fact that the Maniq have had relatively short lifespans, especially in the past, makes this phenomenon curious. Few people even remember their grandparents; their memory of collateral G+2 relatives is quite limited and those kin appear to serve no important function in the culture in relation to ego.

#### 4. Questions for future research

While description of linguistic phenomena is of interest, a more explanatory expose is much more satisfying. The above description leaves (at the least) the following questions for further research:

What is the role of *ʔɛj* 'father' that there is only one relationship, that of the biological male parent, that is so marked? In his absence, is there any other relationship which would fill this role? Other than some kind of a patrifocal bias, why is it important to mark the biological father uniquely, but not the biological mother? Benjamin (1967) notes that among the Temiar there is sexual access to one's spouse's same sex sibling. When questioned about this, the Maniq insisted that they do not have any such practice and that such behavior is unacceptable. Furthermore, no such practice has been observed as well. There simply does not

appear to be any indication that sexual relationships outside of one's marriage is a typical practice, so that the need to especially mark the role of the father more than that of the mother seems unnecessary. There could, of course, be other motivations for the uniqueness of this term, but they remain obscure.

What is the significance of the term *na?* in the G+2 generation and in the specific relationships in which it occurs? One might expect this type of terminology in a unilateral descent kinship system. However, there doesn't seem to be evidence of that for the Maniq, so that there would not be any reason to track one's maternal lineage. Even so, that does not explain the use of *na?* for FaMoBrWi or the use of *ja?* for MoMoBrWi. Is there an obligation to provide care for ego and ego's generation by these relationships or vice versa? There seems to be little emphasis placed upon remembering one's kinsmen in G+2, so that it seems unlikely that these roles are expected to be of any great importance in one's life. Is this usage of the term *na?* indicative of any sort of matrifocal system? There are no claims of a matrifocal social structure among the Maniq in the literature; on the contrary, there are claims of patrilineal and patrifocal patterns (Tan:1976, Syed:1976, Benjamin:1985) Is it the remnant of something which has since disappeared with the disruption of the Maniq's traditional lifestyle?

What is the significance of the terms of address for the stepparents? Why is there avoidance of the expected term of address for that parent's gender? Why is it important to indicate that this person is not a consanguineal relation? Since the question of inheritance or lineage is not relevant to the Maniq, why should the term of address for this relationship be especially marked to avoid the use of the missing biological parent's kin term?

## 5. Conclusion

The Kensiw kinship terms of reference and address reflect a Hawaiian kin system with some modifications basic to that system. There is a fairly clear distinction made between consanguineal and affinal kin, with terms of address suited to in-law avoidance. There are a number of future research questions yet to be pursued and explored, not the least of which is to try to evaluate the impact of the Thai national culture upon that of the Maniq.

## NOTES

Kinship Abbreviation Key

Fa	Father	Sb	Sibling
Mo	Mother	Pa	Parents
Hu	Husband	Ch	Child
Wi	Wife	Sp	Spouse
Br	Brother	[y]	younger
Si	Sister	[e]	elder
So	Son		
Da	Daughter		



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