



# A SYSTEMS APPROACH TO VOCABULARY STUDY: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYZING KINSHIP TERMS IN ENGLISH

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## **Annotation:**

The article examines English kinship terms within the systems approach in modern lexicology. Using lexicographic analysis of major English dictionaries, it identifies systematic semantic relations among kinship words. Three main groups are distinguished: biological, legal (affinal), and generalized (inclusive) kinship terms. Each group is described through common semantic features and generalized definition formulas. The study shows that kinship vocabulary forms a structured lexical-semantic field, reflecting both linguistic organization and cultural patterns. The results are relevant for lexicology, translation, and English language teaching.

**Key words:** lexicology; lexical-semantic field; kinship terms; systems approach; lexicographic analysis; semantic structure; dictionary definitions.

The study of the lexical system of language is one of the central areas of linguistic research. Modern lexicology relies on a number of methodological approaches, each of which allows for a specific perspective on vocabulary. One such approach is the systems approach, which views vocabulary as an ordered, hierarchically organized system whose elements are paradigmatically and syntagmatically related (1, 1974; 2, 1995).

According to the systems approach, the meaning of a word does not exist in isolation: it is determined by its place within the system and its relationships with other units. This systematicity is particularly evident in thematic or conceptual fields, such as, for example, kinship terms - a lexical-semantic group reflecting socially and culturally significant relationships between people.

One effective tool for analyzing the meanings of lexemes within the systems approach is the use of lexicographic definitions. Explanatory dictionaries, especially descriptive ones, not only contain word meanings but also indicate their semantic relationships with other units, reflecting the structure of the language's lexical system (3, 2000). Furthermore, lexicographic definitions allow us to identify the cultural and cognitive characteristics inherent in particular lexemes. This is particularly important when studying kinship terms, as they often possess not only linguistic but also ethnocultural specificity (4, 1997). Thus, a systems approach combined with an analysis of lexicographic definitions provides a productive methodological basis for studying kinship terms in English.

The vocabulary of a language is not a chaotic set of units, but an organized system in which words are related to one another according to various features: semantic, grammatical, and functional. One approach to studying such a system is a systems approach, which allows us to identify internal relationships in the lexicon based on objective criteria. A systems approach can utilize various methods, including lexicographic analysis—that is, the analysis of dictionary definitions, which allows for the identification of recurring semantic components and the classification of vocabulary by semantic features.



This approach is particularly productive when studying closed lexical-semantic fields, such as the field of kinship terms. This article proposes a classification of single-word English kinship terms based on an analysis of definitions in authoritative English-language dictionaries (5, 6, 7, etc.). Unlike the arbitrary divisions often encountered in practical lexicography, we base our analysis on objective differences in dictionary definitions, allowing us to identify stable semantic groups. Below, we propose a classification based on the type of kinship stated in the definition, which allows us to identify three main groups.

First of all, these are biological kinship terms. They record consanguinity (by birth). Examples of this group include mother, father, sister, brother, daughter, son, grandmother, grandfather. Examples of definitions of lexical units in this group include: “mother = a female parent” (Cambridge Dictionary); “a woman in relation to her child or children” (Oxford English Dictionary); a female person who has given birth to a child (Merriam-Webster); brother = a man or boy with the same parents as another person (Cambridge Dictionary); a male sibling (Oxford Learner's Dictionary); a male who has the same parents as another or one parent in common (Merriam-Webster); daughter = your female child (Longman Dictionary); a female offspring (Merriam-Webster); Biological kinship terms identify a person who is related by blood by descent, birth, or common ancestor. Key semantic features: gender (male/female); biological origin (birth, offspring, parent); direct connection through blood (blood relation). Other examples: grandson, niece, nephew, forefather. Generalized lexicographic formula: [a person who is connected to somebody by birth, defined by gender and generation].

Another group that emerged from the analysis of dictionary definitions was identified as legal or affinal kinship terms. It consists of the following list of units: mother-in-law, brother-in-law, son-in-law, daughter-in-law, stepmother, stepson. Examples of definitions typical for this group are the following: mother-in-law = the mother of your husband or wife (Cambridge Dictionary); your spouse's mother (Oxford Learner's Dictionary); the mother of one's spouse (Merriam-Webster); stepson = the son of your husband or wife from a previous marriage (Cambridge Dictionary); a son of your spouse by a former partner (Oxford); a son of one's spouse by a previous union (Merriam-Webster); stepsister (Cambridge Dictionary); a man who is your wife's or husband's brother, or your sister's husband (Longman Dictionary) Kinship terms in this group denote a person related to the subject through marriage or other legal grounds, and not through blood relationship. Their semantics include such features as: connection through marriage (husband, wife, spouse), lack of biological relationship; the presence of modifiers (in-law, step-). Additional examples include the following: stepdaughter, stepsister, father-in-law. A generalized formula for interpreting units in this group can be summarized as: [a person who is related to someone through the marriage of a family member]. The next, third group, that was called 'Generalized and Inclusive Kinship Terms', has another type of definition characteristic only of it: cousin = a child of your uncle or aunt (Cambridge Dictionary); a child of one's uncle or aunt (Merriam-Webster); sibling = a brother or sister (Cambridge Dictionary); one of two or more children of the same parents (Oxford); a person's brother or sister (Merriam-Webster); relative = a person who is connected with you by blood or marriage (Cambridge Dictionary); a member of your family (Oxford); "a person related to you by blood or marriage" (Merriam-Webster).

Inclusive kinship terms encompass a broad range of family ties without specifying gender, degree of relationship, or the nature of the relationship (biological or legal). Key features:



generalized meaning (brother/sister, relative, descendant); neutrality by gender and age; inclusion of both blood and marital ties.

Additional examples include the following: forebear, progeny, household, family. The generalized formula is [a person who is related to somebody by blood or marriage, without specifying role, gender, or generation].

To conclude, a systemic analysis of kinship vocabulary in English suggests that dictionary definitions not only capture meanings but also reflect the structural logic of the lexical-semantic field. The identification of three substantiated groups - biological, legal, and inclusive terms - is based on the identified differences in definitions: by the nature of the relationship (blood/social), degree of specificity, indication of gender and generation. Each group demonstrates its own generalized definition formula, confirming the presence of an internal systemic organization within the lexical category of kinship. The obtained results can be useful in both theoretical lexicology and applied linguistics, especially in intercultural communication, translation, and teaching English as a foreign language. 100

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