

105th American Anthropological Association Meetings,  
San Jose, CA, November 15-19, 2006

German V. Dziel  
(Stanford University)

Kinship Systems, Linguistic Classification, and Language Typology:  
Contributing to the Modern Human Origins Debate

Abstract

On the basis of a kinship terminological database representing 2500 languages, I propose a historical typology of the evolution of kinship terminologies and construct global phylogenetic trees. Following in the footsteps of the global research into human kinship structures by Lewis H. Morgan, Claude Levi-Strauss, Gertrude Dole, George P. Murdock, Nick Allen, Mikhail Kryukov, Per Hage, among others, I organize patterns of sibling classification, cross-generational equations, and affinal-consanguineal equations into a coherent framework representing a plausible historical sequence. I outline the distribution of these parameters across language families, with special reference to the Americas, Siberia, Oceania, and Africa. Linguistic features of kin terminologies (self-reciprocity, reduplication, lexical morphology, and pragmatic suppletion) are described and linked to the worldwide distribution of the features of language typology. I argue for the existence of a close correspondence between the worldwide distribution of semantic and morphosyntactic aspects of kin terminologies, on the one hand, and the typological features of language structure, on the other. I project the results of the global analysis of kin terminological patterns into the burgeoning debate about human origins and ancient human dispersals. I conclude by outlining the ways of integrating kinship studies with historical linguistics, population genetics, and archaeology.