

21A.801J: CROSS-CULTURAL INVESTIGATIONS GENEALOGY ASSIGNMENT

This exercise asks you to “take” a genealogy, a basic tool of field research in cultural anthropology.

Since you are to collect a genealogy from an “informant,” the first task is to find one. Find someone whose native language is other than your own — and other than English. If possible, try to make the interview situation as realistic as possible by avoiding choosing among your close friends. Try to find an **older** person; such persons are likely to be more informed about their genealogies and to have relatives in the kinship categories belonging to descending generations.

Data collection

Having found a willing interviewee, you will systematically collect three levels of data:

1) Elicit the **personal names of all the kin** known to him or her (whether they’ve met or not), along with **how these people are related** to your informant. If the informant is married, collect the names of his/her spouse's kin, so far as they are known. We will go over methods for collecting this information in class.

2) Collect certain kinds of standardized information about each relative named by your informant. You can do this as you obtain each name, or after obtaining all the names, or you can save these questions for a second interview. If you set up a second interview, you can review your notes from the first to discover and correct omissions and errors.

Collect the following for **each name**, to the extent possible:

- a. Age and whether alive today
- b. Gender
- c. Occupation
- d. Marital status (including widowed or divorced or cohabitating)
- e. Spouse's name, if applicable
- f. Residence location
- g. When (approximately) informant last saw him/her, and on what occasion
- h. By what **kin term** the informant **refers** to him/her *and* **addresses** him/her - these may be different, viz. English *father* vs. *daddy*

3) Collect **all additional kin terms** in the informant's language, even though the informant may not have or know the name of a kinsperson related in that manner (e.g., in English, second-cousins or first-cousins-once-removed) [don’t forget to do this!].

Write-up

Present the complement of kin terms in a kinship terminology chart, or in a list, with descriptions of what each term covers using the following notation:

Mo Mother	Fa Father
So Son	Da Daughter
Si Sister	Br Brother
Hu Husband	Wi Wife

Do not use ambiguous English terms, such as *uncle* or *cousin*, or translate words like “in-law” (e.g., “brother-in-law” can mean wi br, hu br, si hu br, or br wi br).

Since this is not a course in phonology, you should not worry about difficulties in transcribing the sounds of the language your informant speaks. You may devise your own notation using letters and/or other symbols to approximate what you are hearing. If your informant is upset by this or tries to tell you how to write the language, take field notes on this interesting interaction and continue to transcribe in a notation that best helps *you* record the sounds you’re hearing. The goal is consistency.

It is useful, if you have time, to talk about relatives and kinship in general. On what occasions and for what purposes do kinspersons get together? Who are the kinspersons your informant feels closest to, the most obligations toward, the friendliest with, etc., etc.?

To complete the assignment, hand in:

1. Your raw fieldnotes (even though these may be utterly messy and illegible except to you).
2. A brief introduction, giving the interviewee’s background and other general information you collected. Also describe the circumstances of the interview (where, when, how you met the informant, etc.)
3. A clean, clear copy of the interviewee’s genealogy. You may include a genealogical diagram of the informant’s relatives, or just a list – it’s up to you.
4. A skeleton diagram of the kinship system, i.e., map the kinship relations between all kin terms in the informant’s language (so far as they are known).
5. A **discussion** of which kin relations seem to you, on the basis of this case study, to be of most and least significance in the culture of your informant. **Explain your reasoning.**
6. A **discussion** of the problems you encountered while taking the genealogy, transcribing the sounds, figuring out how to diagram the kin terms, etc. Also discuss possible uses for the information you have recorded and what other information you didn’t collect that might have been useful. How might you go about this task differently were you to do it again?

Due Session 6

The Introduction and Discussion sections of your report must total at least 3 double-spaced³ typewritten pages.

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