

Kinship Terms, Address and References in Karbi

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Abstract

The Karbi language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman sub-group of the Sino-Tibetan language family. Ethnically, the Karbi people belong to the Indo-Mongoloid race. The centre of the Karbi-speaking area is Karbi Anglong district of Assam. The Karbis also inhabit some other districts of the state, parts of Northeast and also outside India. Besides documentary work on grammar and language description, works on kinship terms are equally significant in the study of the Karbi language. The paper intends to discuss the kinship terminologies, and get a brief idea of address and references in Karbi. For collection of data, a pilot study was conducted in Teteliguri, a Karbi village of Sonapur area of Kamrup Metropolitan district, Assam. The analyses show that kinship terms in Karbi can be grouped under various categories, namely, core and ancestral kinship terms, paternal and maternal kinship terms, affinal kinship terms and kinship terms based on social status. Lexical gender suffixes, along with and male and female, and elder and younger counterparts are seen within the kinship terms. Karbi has address terms related to hierarchy, politeness and gender. Karbi kinship terminology exhibits a mixed or transitional system with both descriptive and classificatory characteristics. Borrowed or influenced terms from Assamese can also be seen.

Keywords: Karbi, Tibeto-Burman, Kinship Terms, Address, References

10.0 Introduction

Karbi is one of the communities of Assam who live majorly in Karbi Anglong district. They also inhabit other districts such as Kamrup, Morigaon and Biswanath. Other than that, they are found in West Khasi Hills, Ri Bhoi and Jaintia hills district of Meghalaya; in the foothills

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around Dimapur in Nagaland and in Papumpare district of Arunachal Pradesh. They are also to be found in Bangladesh and Myanmar. According to Census of India 2011, there are 8,13,311 Karbi speakers. Karbi is the third-largest minority language in the state of Assam in terms of number of speakers, following Bodo and Mishing. It can be considered as vulnerable looking at UNESCO's level of language endangerment (Moseley (2010)). By looking at EGIDS level, Karbi can be levelled as 6b, as well as threatened. The Karbis use both Roman and Assamese scripts. The folklore materials of this indigenous tribe of Assam are still preserved and performed orally by folk singers called *lunse* and *ochepi* (Dutta et al., 1994). Karbis are divided into three groups, namely, Chinthong, Ronghang and Amri based on their habitation. Those who live in the plains are referred to as Dumuralis. The Karbis call themselves as *arleng* meaning 'man', and call their language as *arleng alam*, meaning the language of *arleng*.

10.1 Historical Background

According to Barua (1951:6), Karbis are one of the earliest groups of Tibeto-Burman speakers inhabiting Assam and were originated from western China. Medhi (1974:17) states that the hilly region between Nagaon and Sibsagar (present Jorhat) districts was their early habitat. Stack and Lyall (1997:4) state that the traditions of the race point to the eastern portion of the Khasi-Jayanti hills as their original abode. Gogoi (1999:118) views that the Nongpilar hill, situated in the north-eastern part of Assam, was their earliest settlement from where they came down and settled in the Lumbajong hill. Phangcho (2008:3) says that they were the earliest settlers on the banks of the rivers Kolong and Kopili and within the entire Kaziranga area. The cultural and ecological heritage of Kaziranga National Park can be explored through the oral traditions of the Karbi people, centring the mythical figure of Kajir Ronghangpi (Teron, D & D, V., 2025). There is no written history within the Karbi community. It is through oral traditions that they trace their origin.

10.2 Socio-Cultural Background

The Karbis have separate dresses for men and women. The unmarried men wear a V-neck navy blue shirt called *choi hongthor*, and the married men wear the white variant of it. *Poho* is wrapped around the head, white for bachelors, and red for married or old men. Women and girls wear *pini-pekok*, *pini* is wrapped around the waist and *pekok* is used to cover the upper part of the body. They also wear a waist band called *vamkok*. Karbis wear their traditional bag called *jarong*. Karbi cuisine is divided into three categories- *kangmoi* or alkaline, *kalangdang* or boiled and *hantbor* or sour/acidic preparation. The culinary styles include- *kemung* (cooked in bamboo tube), *kangthu* (wrapped with banana leaves and shoved into hot charcoal- ashes), *kephi* (roasting), *karnu pakreng* (frying without oil) and *ke-ur* (smoking). Rice is their staple food and they prepare a rice beer called *horlang*. Some of the festivals are- *chomangkan*, *rongker*, *chojun* and *hacha-kekan*. Karbi society is exogamous and patrilineal in nature, and their marriage system is known as *adam asar*. The Karbis follow Hinduism, Christianity, and their traditional religion. Chants are orally transmitted from generation to generation. There are five major clans or *kurs*- Lijang, Hanjang, Ejang, Kronjang and Tungjang.

10.2.1 Dialects

There are two major dialects distinguished as the hill's variety and the plains variety. The hills variety, with the ISO code 'mjw' and treated as Standard Karbi, is spoken in the eastern and

western parts of the Karbi Anglong district of Assam and the plains variety with the ISO 693-3 code ‘ajz’, referred to as Dumra, Kamrup or Amri Karbi, is spoken in the Assam plains and the Assam-Meghalaya border area. However, Karbi speakers identify themselves simply as Karbis.

10.2.2 Language Classification

The earliest classification of Karbi is by Grierson (1903) and the recent classification is of Burling (2003). Grierson (1903) considered it as a member of the Naga-Bodo sub-groups of the Tibeto-Burman group. Lyall (1908) states that the Karbi language belongs to the Indo-Chinese speech called Tibeto-Burman under the Sino-Tibetan family of languages. Grierson considered it as a member of the Naga-Bodo sub-groups of the Tibeto-Burman group. Shafer (1974) and Bradley (1997) have classified it as Kukish. It is often classified as close to Meithei (DeLancey, 1987). Burling (2003) following Shafer prefers to consider Karbi in a separate category in spite of its resemblance with Mizo-Kuki.

10.3 Previous Works

Some of the works on Karbi include *Arleng Alam, die Sprache der Mikir: Grammatik und Texte* by Grüssner, K.H. (1978) that includes selected texts in Arleng Alam with accompanying German translation, and *The Mikirs* by Lyall, C. (1908) which gives an ethnographic detail on the Karbis. Works on Sociolinguistics include *A Sociolinguistic Study of Amri Karbi in Northeast India* by Abraham, B. and Daimary, P. (2021) which shows that the Amri Karbi people have a positive attitude towards their own speech variety and consider themselves to be linguistically different from the larger Karbi group, and *Inculturation and Dialogue as the Mission of the Catholic Church among the Karbis in the Diphu Diocese, Assam* by Kuriako, J. P. (2022) which states that Christianity and modern education, apart from many positive contributions to the Karbi society, have affected the traditional and cultural life of the Karbis.

Some of the works on kinship terminologies in languages other than Karbi include *Kinship Terminology in Meiteilon: A Sociolinguistic Study* by N. Pramodini (1989) which examines how social changes like Hinduism and merging with Indian Union have affected Meitei kinship terms, *Thangmi kinship terminology in comparative perspective* by M. Turin (2004) which concludes that kinship terms are employed to address and refer to consanguineal and affinal relatives in Thangmi, *Kinship terms in Hruso* by L. Dey (2015) which says that Hruso kinship terms distinguish between elder and younger relatives, is patrilineal and has specific terms for in-laws, *The kinship terminology of the Dimasa* by P. Bouchery, & M. Longmailai (2018) which is an anthropological study showing how Dimasa kinship links alternate generations, *Nocte kinship system, terminologies and its affinity to PTB roots* by T. Wangno & M. Barbora (2021) which observes that Noctes use kinship terms not just to address the kinsmen and relatives but it also provides information to them about who they can or cannot marry, *Kinship Terminology of Rabha and Bodo Language: A Comparative Study* by A. Rabha and A. Easmin (2024) which argues that kinship terms in Rabha and Bodo has similarities more than dissimilarities, and *Kinship Terms of the Bodo Language* by S. Boro (2025) which analyses the sociolinguistic and semantic aspects of Bodo kinship words showing how they reflect the social structure and worldview of the society.

Since work in Karbi kinship terminologies is rarely seen, the study attempts to discuss the kinship terms, along with a brief idea of address and reference terms in Karbi.

10.4 Objectives and Methodology

The objectives of the study are to look into the kinship terminologies in Karbi, and also to have a brief idea of how address and reference forms are used by its speakers.

As a pilot study, few elderly respondents from Teteliguri village of Sonapur area of Kamrup Metropolitan district of Assam were interviewed, including male and female. The interview was for five days, i.e., 21 to 25 May, 2025. Both primary and secondary sources of data were used. It also included transcription and observation methods of data collection, keeping in view some ethical considerations, like informed consent and transparency of data.

10.5 Kinship Terms

Every language has its own kinship terms or terms that indicate some relation (Nadainpalli et al., 2014). Kinship terms reflect both biological relationships, and social and cultural structure of society. In addition, these often serve to convey respect and familiarity (Basumatary, 2024). Kinship terms are defined as the expressions of language which are used to categorise and to identify the people in any family and social circle, based on their relations to one another (Fortes, 2017). The kin terms can be categorised according to their social responsibilities (Gill, 2018). These terms represent the social relationships and how they are given importance and furthermore how they are defined throughout the generations to bind the people in a society. The purpose of the use of kinship terms is to expose the cultural recognition as well as social ties (Arif et al., 2025).

There are basically two types of kinship relations within a family. These are affinal and consanguineal kinship. Affinal kinship is based on marriage. Primary affinal relationship is the one between a husband and a wife which in its extended form includes spouse's parents and spouse's siblings on both sides. Consanguineal kinship is based on descent, commonly known as blood relation. For example, the relation between a child and his/her parents, between uncles and nephews or nieces. Both types of kinships have various kinship terms. (Majumder & Lahiri, 2020).

10.5.1 Kinship Terms in Karbi

Kinship in Karbi can be studied based on social organisation, honorificity and politeness, language contact and borrowing, and gendered linguistic structure. The kinship terms differ based on the uses by male and female speakers. Kinship terms also differ regionally, as in, these terms can vary across regions within and outside of the district. The paper studies kinship terms based on how a female Karbi speaker uses these terms. Kinship terms in Karbi can be categorised into core and ancestral kinship terms, paternal and maternal kinship terms, affinal kinship terms, and kinship terms based on social status.

10.5.2 Core and Ancestral Kinship Terms

There are six core and four ancestral kinship terms seen in Karbi. The core kinship terms are- father, mother, elder and younger brother, and elder and younger sister. The ancestral kinship terms are- great grandfather and grandmother, and grandfather and grandmother. Table 10.1 shows

that there are different Karbi terms used for the core and ancestral kinship terms. Here, *adzu aita* ‘great grandmother’ seems to have been borrowed from Assamese.

Table10. 1: Core and ancestral kinship terms

Karbi	Gloss
<i>pa</i> (pa)	‘father’
<i>ai</i> (ai)	‘mother’
<i>kaka</i> (kaka)	‘elder brother’
<i>abai</i> (abai)	‘elder sister’
<i>muso</i> (muso)	‘younger brother’
<i>sar</i> (sar)	‘great grandfather’
<i>adzu aita</i> (aju aita)	‘great grandmother’
<i>ata</i> (ata)	‘grandfather’
<i>abu</i> (abu)	‘grandmother’

Source: Field data

10.5.3 Paternal and Maternal Kinship Terms

In Karbi, there are thirteen paternal kinship terms seen- father’s elder and younger brother, father’s elder/younger sister, father’s elder and younger brother’s wife, father’s elder/younger sister’s husband, father’s elder and younger brother’s son and daughter, and father’s elder/younger sister’s son and daughter. There are ten maternal kinship terms- mother’s elder/younger brother, mother’s elder and younger sister, mother’s elder/younger brother’s wife, mother’s elder and younger sister’s husband, mother’s elder and younger brother’s son and daughter, and mother’s elder/younger sister’s son and daughter. Table 10.2 shows paternal and maternal kinship terms in Karbi.

Table10. 2: Paternal and maternal kinship terms

Karbi	Gloss
<i>sar</i> (sar)	‘father’s elder brother’
<i>dada</i> (dada)	‘father’s younger brother’
<i>ni</i> (ni)	‘father’s elder/younger sister’
<i>sar</i> (sar)	‘father’s elder brother’s wife’
<i>nu</i> (nu)	‘father’s younger brother’s wife’
<i>pa</i> (pa)	‘father’s elder/younger sister’s husband’
<i>kaka</i> (elder)/ <i>muso</i> (younger) (kaka/muso)	‘father’s elder brother’s son’
<i>bai/mai</i> (bai/mai)	‘father’s elder brother’s daughter’
<i>kaka/muso</i> (kaka/muso)	‘father’s younger brother’s son’
<i>abai/musope</i> (abai/musope)	‘father’s younger brother’s daughter’
<i>tepo</i> (tepo)	‘father’s elder/younger sister’s son’
<i>neη</i> (neng)	‘father’s elder/younger sister’s daughter’
<i>mama</i> (mama)	‘mother’s elder/younger brother’

Karbi	Gloss
<i>sar</i> (sar)	‘mother’s elder sister’
<i>nu</i> (nu)	‘mother’s younger sister’
<i>ni</i> (ni)	‘mother’s elder/younger brother’s wife’
<i>sar</i> (sar)	‘mother’s elder sister’s husband’
<i>nu dada</i> (nu dada)	‘mother’s younger sister’s husband’
<i>mama</i> (mama)	‘mother’s elder/younger brother’s son’
<i>neη</i> (neng)	‘mother’s elder/younger brother’s daughter’
<i>ka/musɔ</i> (ka/muso)	‘mother’s elder/younger sister’s son’
<i>abai/musɔpe</i> (abai/musope)	‘mother’s elder/younger sister’s daughter’

Source: Field data

Table 10.2 shows that *sar* is used for more than one paternal and maternal kinship terms, namely, father’s elder brother and his wife, and mother’s elder sister and her husband. The terms *ni*, *nu*, *neη*, *mama*, *musɔ* and *musɔpe* are also used for different paternal and maternal kinship terms. It is seen that *-pe* works as a lexical feminine gender suffix, as in, *musɔ* ‘father’s younger brother’s son’ and *musɔpe* ‘father’s younger brother’s daughter’. Also, *mama* ‘mother’s elder/younger brother’ shows Assamese influence.

10.5.4 Affinal Kinship Terms

There are thirty-four affinal kinship terms seen in Karbi. These are shown below in table 10.3.

Table 10.3: Affinal kinship terms

Karbi	Gloss
<i>pinhan</i> (pinhan)	‘husband’
<i>pisɔ</i> (piso)	‘wife’
<i>pa</i> (pa)	‘father-in-law’
<i>ai</i> (ai)	‘mother-in-law’
<i>pa</i> (pa)	‘elder brother-in-law’
<i>kɔrpɔ</i> (korpo)	‘younger brother-in-law’
<i>neηpe</i> (nengpe)	‘elder sister-in-law’
<i>neηsɔ</i> (nengso)	‘younger sister-in-law’
<i>bai</i> (bai)	‘elder brother-in-law’s wife’
<i>mai</i> (mai)	‘younger brother-in-law’s wife’
<i>kalihel</i> (kalihel)	‘elder/younger sister-in-law’s husband’
<i>pa</i> (pa)	‘elder/younger brother-in-law’s son’
<i>ai</i> (ai)	‘elder/younger brother-in-law’s daughter’
<i>pa</i> (pa)	‘elder/younger sister-in-law’s son’
<i>ai</i> (ai)	‘elder/younger sister-in-law’s daughter’
<i>pa</i> (pa)	‘son’

Karbi	Gloss
<i>ai</i> (ai)	‘daughter’
<i>ɔsɔpuli</i> (osopuli)	‘son-in-law’
<i>munpili</i> (munpili)	‘daughter-in-law’
<i>armo</i> (armo)	‘son/daughter-in-law’s father’
<i>nej</i> (neng)	‘son/daughter-in-law’s mother’
<i>asu</i> (asu)	‘grandson’
<i>asupe</i> (asupe)	‘granddaughter’
<i>sar</i> (sar)	‘grandson’s son’
<i>sar</i> (sar)	‘grandson’s daughter’
<i>pa</i> (pa)	‘granddaughter’s son’
<i>mai</i> (mai)	‘granddaughter’s daughter’
<i>nej</i> (neng)	‘elder/younger brother’s wife’
<i>tepo</i> (tepo)	‘elder sister’s husband’
<i>akɔrpɔ</i> (akorpo)	‘younger sister’s husband’
<i>pa</i> (pa)	‘elder/younger brother’s son’
<i>mai</i> (mai)	‘elder/younger brother’s daughter’
<i>pa</i> (pa)	‘elder/younger sister’s son’
<i>mai</i> (mai)	‘elder/younger sister’s daughter’

Source: Field data

Table 10.3 shows that *pa*, *ai*, *mai* and *sar* are used in different affinal kinship terms, as in, *pa* can mean both father-in-law and elder or younger brother-in-law’s son. Lexical feminine gender suffix *-pe* can also be seen.

10.5.5 Kinship Terms based on Social Status

In Karbi, twenty-six kinship terms based on social status are seen, which are shown below in table 10.4.

Table 10.4: Kinship terms based on social status

Karbi	Gloss
<i>dʒɔndʒa</i> (jonja)	‘twins’
<i>himepe</i> (himepe)	‘widow’
<i>himɛpɔ</i> (himɛpo)	‘widower’
<i>hemban</i> (hembang)	‘lineage’
<i>sarpe-sarp^hu</i> (sarpe-sarphu)	‘ancestors’
<i>aban</i> (abang)	‘generation’
<i>sɔ-su</i> (so-su)	‘descendants’
<i>hemɔʒak</i> (hemjak)	‘family’
<i>risɔ akisar</i> (riso akisar)	‘bachelor’

Karbi	Gloss
<i>mensɔ akisar</i> (menso akisar)	‘spinster’
<i>hunsi</i> (hunsi)	‘neighbour’
<i>nɛlok</i> (nelok)	‘friend’
<i>dʒarlok</i> (jarlok)	‘male friend’
<i>niso</i> (niso)	‘female friend’
<i>kasinine arlɛŋ</i> (kasinine arleng)	‘stranger’
<i>kasinine ɔsɔ</i> (kasinine oso)	‘younger stranger’
<i>opo</i> (opo)	‘male stranger’
<i>ope</i> (ope)	‘female stranger’
<i>bɔndʒal</i> (bonjal)	‘transgender’
<i>akisar aban</i> (akisar abang)	‘older generation’
<i>idun aban</i> (idun abang)	‘younger generation’
<i>dʒarpo</i> (jarpo)	‘male working person’
<i>dʒarpe</i> (jarpe)	‘female working person’
<i>banth^hɛ</i> (bangthe)	‘village headman’
<i>banth^hepe</i> (bangthepe)	‘village headman’s wife’
<i>risɔ banth^hɛ</i> (riso bangthe)	‘young village headman’

Source: Field data

Table 10.4 shows that there are different kinship terms in Karbi based on social status. The lexical gender suffixes *-po* and *-pe* are also seen, as in, *himɛpo* ‘widower’ and *himɛpe* ‘widow’, for masculine and feminine genders, respectively. In addition, it can also be seen that *risɔ* and *mensɔ* are used with *akisar* to mean bachelor and spinster, respectively. Again, with *aban*, *akisar* and *idun* are used to mean older and younger generations, respectively. Both *risɔ* and *ɔsɔ* mean younger in different contexts, i.e., *risɔ* in case of village headman and *ɔsɔ* in case of stranger. Both ancestors and descendants consist of two words, i.e., *sarpe-sarp^hu* and *sɔ-su*. The term *dʒɔndʒa* ‘twins’ seems to have been borrowed from Assamese *ɔɔndʒa*.

10.6 Address and References

Karbis have address and reference systems in the form of pronouns. Table 10.5 below shows address and references in Karbi.

Table 10.5: Address and references in Karbi

Adress				Reference	
1 st Person		2 nd Person		3 rd Person	
Karbi	Gloss	Karbi	Gloss	Karbi	Gloss
<i>nɛ</i>	my	<i>nan</i>	your	<i>anan</i>	his/her

Source: Field data

The table of reference shows the Karbi address and reference systems as 1st, 2nd and 3rd person pronouns. The 3rd person pronoun references for kinship for both male and female are same.

10.6.1 Examples of address and reference

Address:

i. *nɛ* *ata*
1PS.POSS grandfather
'My grandfather'

ii. *naŋ* *ata*
2PS.POSS grandfather
'Your grandfather'

Reference:

iii. *anaŋ* *ata*
3PS.POSS grandfather
'His/her grandfather'

Above examples show that in Karbi, *nɛ* (my) and *naŋ* (your) pronouns are used as address forms for kinship, and *anaŋ* (his/her) pronoun is used as reference form for kinship.

10.6.2 Honorific address form

The honorific address form in Karbi is *nali*, meaning 'you (honorific)'.

For example:

<i>naŋ</i>	<i>waŋ</i>	<i>nali</i>	<i>waŋ</i>
2PS	come	2PS.HON	come
'You come'		'You (honorific) come'	

Examples in 10.6.2 show that *nali* is the honorific counterpart of *naŋ*, i.e., 'you'. Here, *naŋ* is used to address a second person and *nali* is the honorific form of it. This might be an influence of Assamese, which has *apuni* (2PS.HON) as an honorific form of *tumi* (2PS).

10.6.3 Honorific reference term

The honorific reference term in Karbi which is used to refer to an honoured person is 'akihai'.

For example,

<i>akihai sri</i>	<i>sart^hɛ</i>	<i>kat^har-ajok</i>	<i>kardɔm</i>	<i>paŋ-dʒirlɔ</i>
HON sri	sarthe	kathar-ACC	greet	give-PRS
'Greetings to honourable Sri Sarthe Kathar'				

Here, in the example, it can be seen that the honorific term *akihai* is used to refer to a person who is honoured.

Some address terms in Karbi can be said to be based on sociolinguistic functions, which has been illustrated below in Table 10.6.

Table 10.6: Address terms related to hierarchy, politeness & gender

Karbi Term	Meaning	Sociolinguistic Function
<i>nali</i>	‘you’ (honorific)	politeness/respect
<i>naŋ</i>	informal ‘you’	non-honorific address
<i>akihai</i>	honorific reference	respectful reference
<i>baŋtʰɛ</i>	village headman	social hierarchy
<i>risɔ baŋtʰɛ</i>	young village headman	age + status
<i>baŋtʰɛpe</i>	headman’s wife	gendered social role
<i>himɛpɔ</i>	widower	male gender marking
<i>himɛpe</i>	widow	female gender marking
<i>ɟarɔ</i>	male worker	masculine role
<i>ɟarpe</i>	female worker	feminine role

Source: Field data

From the table 10.6, it can be said that certain Karbi address terms show that hierarchy is linguistically encoded, respect is marked grammatically and social roles are gender-specific.

10.7 Discussion

The above analyses show that kinship terminology in Karbi is not merely lexical; it encodes social relations, age hierarchy, gender distinctions, marital ties, lineage, and honorification. The study demonstrates how language reflects and maintains Karbi social structure. The kinship system reflects the patrilineal and exogamous nature of Karbi society. Terms may vary according to paternal vs. maternal relations, affinal vs. consanguineous ties, age hierarchy, gender and social status. Address forms such as *nali* (‘you-HON’) and honorific reference term *akihai* indicate politeness distinctions and respect hierarchy. Assamese influence appears in terms like- *aɟu aita* (‘great grandmother’), *mama* (‘maternal uncle’) and *ɟɔndɟa* (‘twins’), and honorific parallels are seen between Assamese *apuni* and Karbi *nali*. Lexical gender suffixes (-pe, -pɔ) distinguish masculine and feminine forms.

The paper connects with several anthropological and sociolinguistic theories. Morgan (1877) with his Theory of Kinship, argued that kinship terminology reflects marriage systems and biological relations. The Karbi system supports this because each kin relation has a distinct term, distinctions are made between elder/younger relatives, and affinal and consanguineal relations are carefully differentiated. The paper references Lévi-Strauss’ (1969) Alliance Theory, especially regarding marriage-based relations, as in Karbi, affinal kinship terms are highly elaborated, marriage creates social alliances and cross-relational terminology reflects social exchange networks. The use of honorifics (*nali*, *akihai*) demonstrates respect indexing, status marking and socially conditioned language choice. This relates to Brown & Gilman’s concept of power,

politeness and solidarity (Brown & Levinson, 1987 and Brown & Gilman, 1960) in address systems.

The Karbi kinship system can be said to be primarily descriptive, as it gives specific labels to particular relations rather than grouping many relatives under one category. For example, *sar* = father's elder brother, *dada* = father's younger brother (borrowing), *mama* = mother's brother (borrowing) and *nu* (mother's younger sister). The system distinguishes paternal vs. maternal, elder vs. younger and consanguineal vs. affinal relations. A descriptive kinship system normally has one unique term for one specific relation. But in the Karbi data, for example, *sar* refers to great grandfather, father's elder brother, father's elder brother's wife, mother's elder sister, mother's elder sister's husband and grandson's son/daughter; *pa* refers to father, father's sister's husband, father-in-law, elder brother-in-law, brother/sister's son, brother/sister-in-law's son, son, granddaughter's son; and *neɲ* refers to father's sister's daughter, mother's brother's daughter, brother's wife and son/daughter-in-law's mother. This indicates that the Karbi linguistic system also has classificatory tendencies, because several relatives are grouped under the same lexical category.

The reasons for reuse of terms across relations might be because of social proximity, as relations occupying similar social positions are grouped linguistically; generational equivalence, as people of similar generational status may share terms; kinship solidarity, as reuse reflects interconnected family structures and communal identity; and alliance-based relations, as affinal and consanguineal roles may overlap socially. This may reveal i) social hierarchy- the system reflects a strongly hierarchical society: elders are differentiated from younger relatives, honorifics indicate rank and respect, and village leadership has specific terminology. Age and authority are linguistically important; and ii) kinship ideology- the kinship terminology reveals strong family integration, importance of lineage, emphasis on marriage alliances and collective social identity. The reuse of terms suggests kinship is viewed relationally rather than strictly biologically.

The paper clearly shows Assamese influence on Karbi. There are Karbi forms which have possible Assamese source. For example, *aɟu aita* from Assamese *aɟu aita*, *mama* from Assamese *mama*, *ɟɔɔɟa* from Assamese *ɟɔɟa*, and *nali* honorific system parallel to Assamese *apuni*. This indicates language contact, i.e., long-term interaction with Assamese speakers; cultural assimilation- borrowing occurs in socially important domains like kinship and politeness; language change, i.e., contact-induced lexical expansion is occurring; and bilingualism.

10.8 Conclusion

The study focuses on kinship terminologies in Karbi. Along with that, it tries to briefly look into the address and reference terms used by the Karbis. For a pilot study, Teteliguri village of Sonapur area of Kamrup Metropolitan District of Assam was chosen. Due to the constraints of time, only a single Karbi-speaking was taken into consideration. Also, the kinship terms were looked at only from a perspective of a female speaker. However, further research needs to be done in other Karbi-speaking areas as well, along with a male perspective, to have a better understanding of the kinship terms in Karbi language. The Karbi kinship system demonstrates both descriptive and classificatory features. While certain kin relations are distinguished through specific terms based on generation, age and lineage, the repeated use of the same kinship terms across multiple

relations suggests classificatory tendencies within the system. It has numerous kinship terminologies including core and ancestral kinship terms, paternal and maternal kinship terms, affinal kinship terms, and kinship terms related to one's social status. Lexical gender suffixes, male-female and elder-younger counterparts are seen within the terms. Karbi has address and reference systems including their honorific forms. Moreover, there are also signs of borrowing from Assamese. Thus, through the field study carried on in the concerned area, it can be said that the Karbi speakers have been maintaining their language and culture, and in that process, the familial and social relationships by using the Karbi kinship terms in their day-to-day lives. This gives a hope that the Karbi traditions will be protected and preserved for the future generations.

Declaration of AI Use

I hereby declare that I have not used any AI tool while preparing the MSS of the present work. No AI-generated or plagiarised content is used in this work. This is my original work based on field study.

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