



## Contrastive of Kinship Terms in Japanese and Arabic: Sociolinguistic Perspective

**Abdur Rahman Hafiz**

Universitas Islam Negeri Imam Bonjol Padang

[hafizabdurrahman115@gmail.com](mailto:hafizabdurrahman115@gmail.com)

### Abstract:

This study examined the differences in kinship terminology between Japanese and Arabic from a sociolinguistic perspective. The analysis revealed that Japanese kinship terms are influenced by the 内・外 “*uchi-soto*” (in-out) concept. For example, Japanese distinguishes between *oji* (叔父), one’s own uncle, and *ojisan* (おじさん), another person’s uncle. Conversely, Arabic kinship terminology reflects lineage-based differentiation, emphasizing *nasab* (genealogy) and the strength of blood relations. This can be seen in the clear distinction between *amm* (عم), meaning paternal uncle, and *khāl* (خال), meaning maternal uncle. The findings contribute to the understanding of how sociolinguistic structures shape kinship terminology across different linguistic systems. This research expands the contrastive study of Japanese and Arabic by linking linguistic forms to social orientation, group harmony in Japanese and genealogical hierarchy in Arabic. It also highlights the intersection of language, culture, and social behavior as a fundamental area in sociolinguistic inquiry. Future studies could explore kinship terminology in other languages with distinct social frameworks to deepen the cross-cultural contrastive analysis.

Keywords: *kinship terminology, sociolinguistics, Japanese language, Arabic language, cultural values*

### Abstract

مستخلص  
البحث

### Keywords

كلمات

**INTRODUCTION (مقدمة)**

Among the many linguistic domains influenced by social and cultural contexts, kinship terminology occupies a unique position because it reveals not only biological relationships but also social hierarchies, levels of politeness, and value systems within a community. In this regard, the Japanese and Arabic languages offer rich grounds for contrastive due to their distinct sociolinguistic and cultural orientations (Takao, 1976).

Japanese kinship terms are deeply embedded in the cultural framework of 内・外 “*uchi-soto*” (in-group vs. out-group), a social dichotomy that governs politeness and relational distance. For example, *haha* (母) is used when referring to one’s own mother, whereas *okāsan* (お母さん) is used to refer to another person’s mother or in formal situations. Such lexical distinctions go beyond mere semantics and reflect Japan’s hierarchical and harmony-oriented social structure (Ide, 1989).

Conversely, the Arabic kinship system emphasizes *نصب* “*nasab*” (lineage) and genealogical ties as the foundation of family and social identity. Arabic differentiates kinship terms according to paternal and maternal lines, such as *‘amm* (عم, paternal uncle) and *khāl* (خال, maternal uncle) (Joseph, 2020; Shimizu, 1919). Although Arabic does not employ a system analogous to 内・外 “*uchi-soto*”, its lexicon mirrors a culture that values ancestry, family honor, and patriarchal lineage.

Given globalization and the increasing interaction between cultures, studying such kinship systems not only enhances linguistic competence but also deepens intercultural understanding. This research thus situates itself within the broader study of sociolinguistics, where language is analyzed as a mirror of social structure and cultural behavior (Holmes, 2017; Wardhaugh, R. Fuller, 2021).

This study aims to analyze the sociolinguistic differences in kinship terminology between the Japanese and Arabic languages. The specific objectives are as follows:

1. To describe the forms, meanings, and usage patterns of kinship terms in Japanese and Arabic.

2. To contrast how sociocultural values, such as social hierarchy in Japanese and lineage in Arabic, shape kinship terminology.
3. To identify the underlying sociolinguistic principles that govern the use of kinship terms in both languages and how they reflect each society's worldview.

Through these objectives, the study endeavors to enrich contrastive linguistics by illustrating how language encapsulates cultural norms, social organization, and identity construction (دمياطى, 2018).

This research is grounded in the sociolinguistic theory which views language as a social phenomenon that reflects and constructs the structures and values of society. According to (Wardhaugh, R. Fuller, 2021), sociolinguistics examines how language varies and functions within its social context, emphasizing that linguistic forms are closely tied to social identity and cultural norms. In the context of kinship terminology, this theory becomes essential because kinship terms not only represent biological relationships but also encode social distance, hierarchy, and politeness norms.

Furthermore, Brown and Levinson's *Politeness Theory* provides a pragmatic framework for analyzing the ways in which speakers manage face and social relations through linguistic choices. This is particularly relevant to Japanese, where kinship terms are used in accordance with hierarchical and harmony-oriented values, shaping patterns of linguistic politeness and social interaction (Ide, 1989). Meanwhile, the Ethnolinguistic Theory, as proposed by (Sapir, 2016; Whorf, 1956), supports the idea that linguistic structures are shaped by cultural perceptions and worldview. This perspective is particularly relevant in Arabic, where kinship terminology reflects the central role of genealogy *نصب* (*nasab*) and family honor in social organization (Shimizu, 1919).

Together, these frameworks establish the theoretical foundation for examining how linguistic choices in Japanese and Arabic kinship systems function as mirrors of social values and cultural identity (Duranti, 2009).

Several previous studies have investigated kinship terminology from sociolinguistic and cultural perspectives. Mori explored the 内・外 “*uchi-soto*” (in-group vs. out-group) distinction in Japanese society and its influence on kinship terms, finding that linguistic

politeness is deeply tied to the maintenance of group harmony and hierarchical relationships (Ivie, 2024; Matsumoto, 2023). Similarly, (Ide, 1989) emphasized that Japanese honorifics and kinship lexicon serve as linguistic strategies for expressing social distance and respect. These studies, however, focus primarily on the internal system of Japanese without cross-linguistic comparison.

In contrast, Arabic linguistic studies have largely centered on lineage and familial structure. Al-Qahtani analyzed the semantic nuances of kinship terms in Arabic and highlighted how they reinforce patriarchal lineage and social cohesion. (Dhayef & Alhussaini, 2019) further demonstrated that kinship vocabulary in Arabic functions as a cultural system preserving family hierarchy and heritage. However, these works often approach kinship terminology as a lexical-semantic issue, with limited attention to the sociopragmatic context in daily communication.

Cross-linguistic comparisons on kinship terminology are relatively rare. For instance, compared Indonesian and Javanese kinship systems but did not extend the analysis to languages of differing typologies and cultural foundations. Consequently, there remains limited research that integrates both Japanese relational politeness and Arabic genealogical categorization under one sociolinguistic framework.

Building upon previous works, this study fills the gap by conducting a contrastive sociolinguistic analysis of kinship terminology in Japanese and Arabic. Unlike prior research that focused on single-language systems, this study aims to bridge the cultural and linguistic divide between two distinct civilizations. Japanese, which emphasizes social harmony and hierarchy, and Arabic, which prioritizes lineage and ancestry (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

By integrating politeness theory and ethnolinguistic perspectives, this research seeks to demonstrate how each linguistic system encodes cultural identity through kinship expression. The comparative nature of this study not only contributes to the field of sociolinguistics but also enhances intercultural understanding in the study of language and culture. It is hoped that the findings will provide new insights for cross-cultural communication, language pedagogy, and comparative linguistics, particularly in understanding how kinship terminology reflects broader social structures and worldviews.

## THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK (نظريات)

### A. Definition of Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics is a branch of linguistics that studies the relationship between language and society, focusing on how social factors such as class, gender, age, ethnicity, and cultural norms influence language use. Etymologically, the term *sociolinguistics* derives from the Latin *socius* (“companion” or “society”) and *lingua* (“language”), indicating the inseparable connection between language and social interaction.

Sociolinguistics examines how language functions within a social context and how linguistic choices reflect social identity and cultural values (Wardhaugh, R. Fuller, 2021). Language is not merely a neutral communication tool but a social practice shaped by power relations, hierarchy, and communal norms. (Holmes, 2017) further emphasizes that sociolinguistics explores how speakers select linguistic forms to express social relationships, politeness, solidarity, and distance.

In this regard, kinship terminology constitutes a crucial sociolinguistic domain because it directly reflects how societies conceptualize family, hierarchy, respect, and social obligations. Kinship terms often extend beyond biological reference to encode social roles and expectations within a community.

### B. Definition of Kinship Terms

Kinship terms refer to lexical items used to denote family relationships based on blood (consanguinity), marriage (affinity), or social convention. Linguistically, kinship terminology functions as a semantic system that categorizes social relationships and encodes cultural values embedded within a society.

From an anthropological-linguistic perspective, kinship terms are not universal in meaning or usage. As noted by (Shimizu, 1919), kinship systems vary significantly across cultures, reflecting different social structures and worldviews. In Arabic, kinship terminology is highly elaborate, particularly in distinguishing paternal and maternal relations, such as *عم* (paternal uncle) and *جال* (maternal uncle). This distinction reflects the cultural importance of lineage *نصب* (nasab) and genealogical clarity.

In Japanese, kinship terms function not only as referential expressions but also as markers of social position and politeness. Terms such as *haha* (母) and *okāsan* (お母さん) differ in usage depending on whether the speaker refers to their own family

or someone else's, reflecting the cultural principle of 内・外 “*uchi-soto*” (inside vs. outside group) (Ide, 1989).

Thus, kinship terminology operates at the intersection of semantics, pragmatics, and sociocultural norms, making it an essential object of sociolinguistic analysis.

### C. Contrastive Sociolinguistic Analysis

Contrastive analysis in sociolinguistics involves comparing two or more languages to identify similarities and differences in linguistic structure and social function. Unlike purely structural contrastive studies, sociolinguistic contrastive analysis emphasizes cultural meaning, social norms, and pragmatic usage.

In this study, Japanese and Arabic are contrasted as representatives of two distinct sociocultural systems. Japanese kinship terminology emphasizes relational hierarchy and contextual politeness, while Arabic kinship terminology prioritizes genealogical clarity and lineage-based identity. By comparing these systems, the study highlights how language functions as a mirror of social organization and cultural values.

This theoretical framework provides the foundation for analyzing kinship terminology as a sociolinguistic phenomenon, enabling a deeper understanding of how language encodes social hierarchy, cultural norms, and identity construction across different linguistic communities.

## METHOD (طريقة \ منهج البحث)

### A. Type of Research

This research is a library research. All data used in this research were obtained from written sources, such as books, academic journals, dictionaries, and other relevant library materials. The focus of this study is not on field observation or questionnaires, but on the analysis of linguistic data found in written texts.

This study applies a qualitative descriptive method. The qualitative approach was chosen because the object of the research is language, particularly kinship terms, which require interpretation and explanation rather than numerical calculation. The descriptive method allows the researcher to explain the forms, meanings, and sociocultural functions of kinship terms in Japanese and Arabic.

### B. Data Sources

The data sources in this research are divided into primary data sources and secondary data sources.

### 1. Primary Data Sources

Primary data sources are the main linguistic materials that were directly analyzed by the researcher. These include:

- a. Japanese and Arabic grammar books discussing kinship terms.
- b. Linguistic and sociolinguistic reference books focusing on family relations and social hierarchy.
- c. Dictionaries of Japanese and Arabic that explain kinship terminology and their semantic nuances.

These sources provide the fundamental data on the forms, meanings, and usage patterns of kinship terms in both languages.

### 2. Secondary Data Sources

Secondary data sources consist of supporting materials that help interpret and contextualize the primary data. These include:

- a. Academic journal articles on sociolinguistics, politeness theory, and ethnolinguistics.
- b. Previous studies on Japanese 内・外 “*uchi-soto*” relations and Arabic lineage (*nasab*).
- c. Scholarly works discussing language, culture, and social structure.

Secondary sources were used to strengthen the theoretical foundation and support the analysis.

## C. Data Collection Techniques

The data were collected using library research and textual analysis techniques. The procedures of data collection are as follows:

1. The researcher collected books, journals, dictionaries, and academic works related to sociolinguistics, kinship terminology, Japanese language, and Arabic language.

2. The researcher identified kinship terms found in Japanese and Arabic linguistic sources.
3. The researcher read and examined texts containing kinship terms in various social and cultural contexts.
4. The researcher understood and interpreted the sociocultural meanings of the kinship terms based on their usage.
5. The researcher classified the kinship terms according to their social functions, such as hierarchy, politeness, lineage, and family roles.

These steps ensured that the data were systematically collected and relevant to the objectives of the study.

#### **D. Data Analysis Techniques**

The data analysis was conducted using two complementary methods: descriptive analysis and contrastive analysis.

##### **1. Descriptive Analysis Method**

The descriptive method was used to explain kinship terms in each language independently. Through this method, the researcher:

- a. Identified kinship terms in Japanese and Arabic texts.
- b. Analyzed the semantic meanings and sociocultural functions of each term.
- c. Described how kinship terms are used in different social contexts within each language community.

This method helped provide a clear and detailed picture of each kinship system before comparison.

##### **2. Contrastive Analytical Method**

The contrastive analysis method was applied to compare Japanese and Arabic kinship terminology. In this stage, the researcher:

- a. Compared kinship terms from both languages based on form, meaning, and social function.

- b. Identified similarities and differences related to social hierarchy, politeness, and lineage.
- c. Interpreted the sociolinguistic implications of these differences in relation to cultural values.
- d. Drew conclusions regarding how each language encodes social structure and cultural worldview through kinship terminology.

This analytical framework ensures that the research remains systematic, objective, and theoretically grounded, while effectively revealing the sociolinguistic contrasts between Japanese and Arabic kinship systems.

## FINDINGS & DISCUSSION (بحث ومناقشة)

The results of this study indicate that kinship vocabulary in Japanese and Arabic reflects not only biological relations but also social hierarchy, politeness, and cultural systems. In Japanese, lexical choices serve as a mechanism for maintaining interpersonal harmony and demonstrating respect according to age and status. In contrast, Arabic kinship terminology emphasizes genealogy and lineage rather than relational hierarchy in communication (Aria et al., 2021).

In Japanese, there is a clear distinction between terms used for one's own family and those used when referring to someone else's family. For instance, 家族 (*kazoku*) specifically refers to one's own family, while ご家族 (*gokazoku*) is used politely when referring to another person's family. Similarly, the term 母 (*haha*) is used to refer to one's own mother, while お母さん (*okāsan*) is used to address or refer respectfully to another person's mother.

The use of prefixes such as "o-" or "go-" and the suffix "-san" indicates 尊敬語 (*sonkeigo*), or respectful language that elevates the interlocutor while humbling oneself (Aria et al., 2021).

*Table 1. Contrastive of Kinship Vocabulary in Japanese and Arabic*

No.	Jepang (In)	Japanese (Out)	Arabic	Mean
-----	-------------	----------------	--------	------

1.	家族 (kazoku)	ご家族 (gokazoku)	العائلة (al-'ā'ilah)	Family
2.	父 (chichi)	お父さん (otōsan)	أب (abun)	Father
3.	母 (haha)	お母さん (okāsan)	أم (ummun)	Mother
4.	兄 (ani)	お兄さん (oniisan)	أخ كبير (akhun kabīrun)	Older Brother
5.	姉 (ane)	お姉さん (oneesan)	أخت كبيرة (ukhtun kabīratun)	Older Sister
6.	弟 (otōto)	弟さん (otōtosan)	أخ صغير (akhun ṣaghīrun)	Younger Brother
7.	妹 (imouto)	妹さん (imoutosan)	أخت صغيرة (ukhtun ṣaghīratun)	Younger Sister
8.	叔母 (oba)	おばさん (obasan)	عمّة ('ammatun) / خالة (khālatun)	Aunt
9.	叔父 (oji)	おじさん (ojisan)	عم ('ammun) / خال (khālan)	Uncle
10.	孫 (mago)	孫さん (magosan)	حفيد (ḥafīdun) / حفيدة (ḥafīdatun)	Grandchild
11.	兄弟 (kyoudai)	ご兄弟 (gokyoudai)	إخوة (ikhwatun)	Siblings (masculine)

In Arabic, the distinction between paternal and maternal relatives is explicit. The term *عمّة* ('ammatun) refers to an aunt from the father's side, while *خالة* (khālatun) refers to an aunt from the mother's side. Likewise, *عم* ('ammun) refers to a paternal uncle, and *خال* (khālan) to a maternal uncle. These distinctions emphasize the importance of lineage *نصب* (nasab) in Arabic culture, where genealogical ties determine inheritance rights, social responsibilities, and familial identity.

Another difference is found in the term for "grandchild." Japanese uses *孫* (mago) universally without gender distinction, but Arabic distinguishes between *حفيد* (ḥafīdun, male grandchild) and *حفيدة* (ḥafīdatun, female grandchild). This differentiation reflects gendered

linguistic categorization and the patriarchal structure of Arab society, which privileges male lineage as the bearer of family honor and continuation.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, Japanese kinship terminology is shaped by the 内・外 (uchi-soto) concept, which separates in-group from out-group relations. A speaker chooses different kinship terms depending on whether the interlocutor belongs to their social group or not. This distinction not only governs lexical selection but also influences the politeness level and grammatical structure of sentences.

For instance:

1. これは私の母です。 (*Kore wa watashi no haha desu.*) : “This is my mother.” (used humbly about one’s own mother)
2. お母さんは元気ですか。 (*Okāsan wa genki desu ka?*) : “How is your mother?” (used respectfully when addressing others)

In Arabic, lexical forms remain constant, but meaning depends on pronoun changes rather than social hierarchy:

1. هذا أبي (*hādhā abī*) : “This is my father.”
2. كيف حال عمك؟ (*kayfa ḥāl ‘ammika?*) : “How is your uncle?”

Japanese language demonstrates pragmatic flexibility where kinship terms such as お母さん (*okāsan*) may also be used toward elderly women as a polite form of address. In contrast, Arabic shows semantic expansion of kinship terms in a symbolic way; for example, أخي (*akhī*, my brother) is commonly used among Muslims to express fraternity and solidarity. Thus, the Japanese extension of meaning emphasizes respect and relational hierarchy, while Arabic focuses on emotional closeness and social unity.

**Table 2. Cultural Contrasts Reflected in Kinship Terms**

Culture aspect	Japanese	Arabic
Relation Focus	Uchi-soto, social status	<i>Nasab</i> (lineage), descent
Function of Terminology	Indicates politeness and social position	Indicates genealogical origin and family identity

Common Address	Hierarchical and formal	Affiliational and religious
Family Structure	Relatively egalitarian but formal	Patriarchal and genealogy-based

These findings demonstrate that Japanese kinship vocabulary functions as a pragmatic tool for maintaining politeness and social balance, while Arabic terms preserve family lineage and social hierarchy based on blood relations.

The results, 内・外 (uchi-soto) principle shapes Japanese linguistic behavior, particularly in honorific usage. The current study reinforces this claim by illustrating how kinship terminology also serves as a social boundary marker. Moreover, this research supports Abdillah et al. (2021), who identified the relationship between politeness levels 敬語 (*keigo*) and family terms as central to Japanese social harmony (Jamie Louise Goekler, 2010).

In contrast, the findings complement, Arabic kinship vocabulary maintains social order through genealogical classification. However, this study goes beyond prior research by contrasting Arabic and Japanese systems within a unified sociolinguistic framework, highlighting how both encode social values differently, Japan through relational hierarchy and Arab culture through lineage identity (Khalilia et al., 2023).

Farhaeni and Martini (2024) further noted the patriarchal tendency of Arabic kinship terms, especially in gendered word forms. The present study confirms this observation while revealing that the Japanese system, though less patriarchal, similarly embeds respect-based asymmetry in its linguistic structure. Thus, both languages reflect gender and hierarchy, but through distinct sociocultural lenses.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY (قائمة المراجع)

Aria, A., Suryadi, Y., & Kurniawan, E. (2021). *39857-128625-1-Pb*. 5(2), 187–198.

Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge University Press. <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=OG7W8yA2XjcC>

Dhayef, Q. A., & Alhussaini, H. (2019). *Kinship Terms in English and Arabic: A Contrastive*

- Study*, June 2018, 709–726.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325779914\\_KINSHIP\\_TERMS\\_IN\\_ENGLISH\\_AND\\_ARABIC\\_A\\_CONTRASTIVE\\_STUDY?enrichId=rgreq-d1ea7cf8fe81ee869d1785e2de54ef4e-XXX&enrichSource=Y292ZXJQYWdlOzMjYNTc3OTkxNDtBUzo3Nzc2NjY3NzcwNTkzMjhAMTU2MjQyMTYxNjAzMQ%3D%3D&el=1\\_x](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325779914_KINSHIP_TERMS_IN_ENGLISH_AND_ARABIC_A_CONTRASTIVE_STUDY?enrichId=rgreq-d1ea7cf8fe81ee869d1785e2de54ef4e-XXX&enrichSource=Y292ZXJQYWdlOzMjYNTc3OTkxNDtBUzo3Nzc2NjY3NzcwNTkzMjhAMTU2MjQyMTYxNjAzMQ%3D%3D&el=1_x)
- Duranti, A. (2009). *Linguistic Anthropology: A Reader Second Edition*.
- Holmes, J. (2017). *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (5th ed.). Routledge.
- Ide, S. (1989). Formal forms and discernment: Two neglected aspects of universals of linguistic politeness. *Multilingua*, 8(2–3), 223–248.  
<https://doi.org/10.1515/mult.1989.8.2-3.223>
- Ivie, C. (2024). Uchi / Soto : The Linguistic, Social, and Societal Impacts of Ingroup and Outgroup in Japanese. *JAPN 3100: Readings in Contemporary Japanese Culture, September*. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/384243348>
- Jamie Louise Goekler. (2010). *Uchi-Soto (Inside-Outside): Language And Culture In Context For The Japanese As A Foreign Language (Jfl) Learner*. California State University.
- Joseph, J. E. (2020). Language and Identity. In *Palgrave Macmillan London* (1st ed.). Palgrave Macmillan London. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203095195-17>
- Khalilia, H., Bella, G., Freihat, A. A., Darma, S., & Giunchiglia, F. (2023). Lexical diversity in kinship across languages and dialects. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, 1229697.  
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1229697>
- Matsumoto, Y. (2023). *Pragmatics of Japanese*.
- Sapir, E. (2016). *The Status of Linguistics as a Science*. 5(4), 207–214.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/409588>
- Shimizu, Y. (1919). アラブ・ムスリムにおける親族名称の呼びかけ用法. *Japanese Society of Cultural Anthropology*, 244(3), 1–3.

Takao, K. (1976). 日本語親族名称語源考. 民族学研究, 41(1), 57-74.  
[https://doi.org/10.14890/minkennewsseries.41.1\\_57](https://doi.org/10.14890/minkennewsseries.41.1_57)

Wardhaugh, R. Fuller, J. M. (2021). An Introduction to Sociolinguistics. In *Wiley-Blackwell* (8th ed.).

Whorf, B. L. (1956). Language, Thought, and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf. In *MIT Press*. (Vol. 1, Issue 1).  
[http://www.biblioteca.pucminas.br/teses/Educacao\\_PereiraAS\\_1.pdf](http://www.biblioteca.pucminas.br/teses/Educacao_PereiraAS_1.pdf)  
[http://www.anpocs.org.br/portal/publicacoes/rbcs\\_00\\_11/rbcs11\\_01.htm](http://www.anpocs.org.br/portal/publicacoes/rbcs_00_11/rbcs11_01.htm)  
[http://repositorio.ipea.gov.br/bitstream/11058/7845/1/td\\_2306.pdf](http://repositorio.ipea.gov.br/bitstream/11058/7845/1/td_2306.pdf)  
<https://direitofma2010.files.wordpress.com/2010/>

دمياطي, م. ع. ا. (2018). مدخل إلى علم اللغة الاجتماعي. lisan arabi.