

# Variation and change in Taa kinship terminologies: Methodological approaches and diachronic interpretations

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1. Introduction
2. How to identify and interpret diachronic change in kinship terminologies ?
3. How to identify synchronic or ongoing change in kinship terminologies ?
4. Conclusions

## Research Context

EUROCORES: **E**uropean  
**C**ollaborative **R**esearch

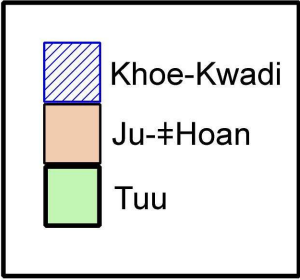
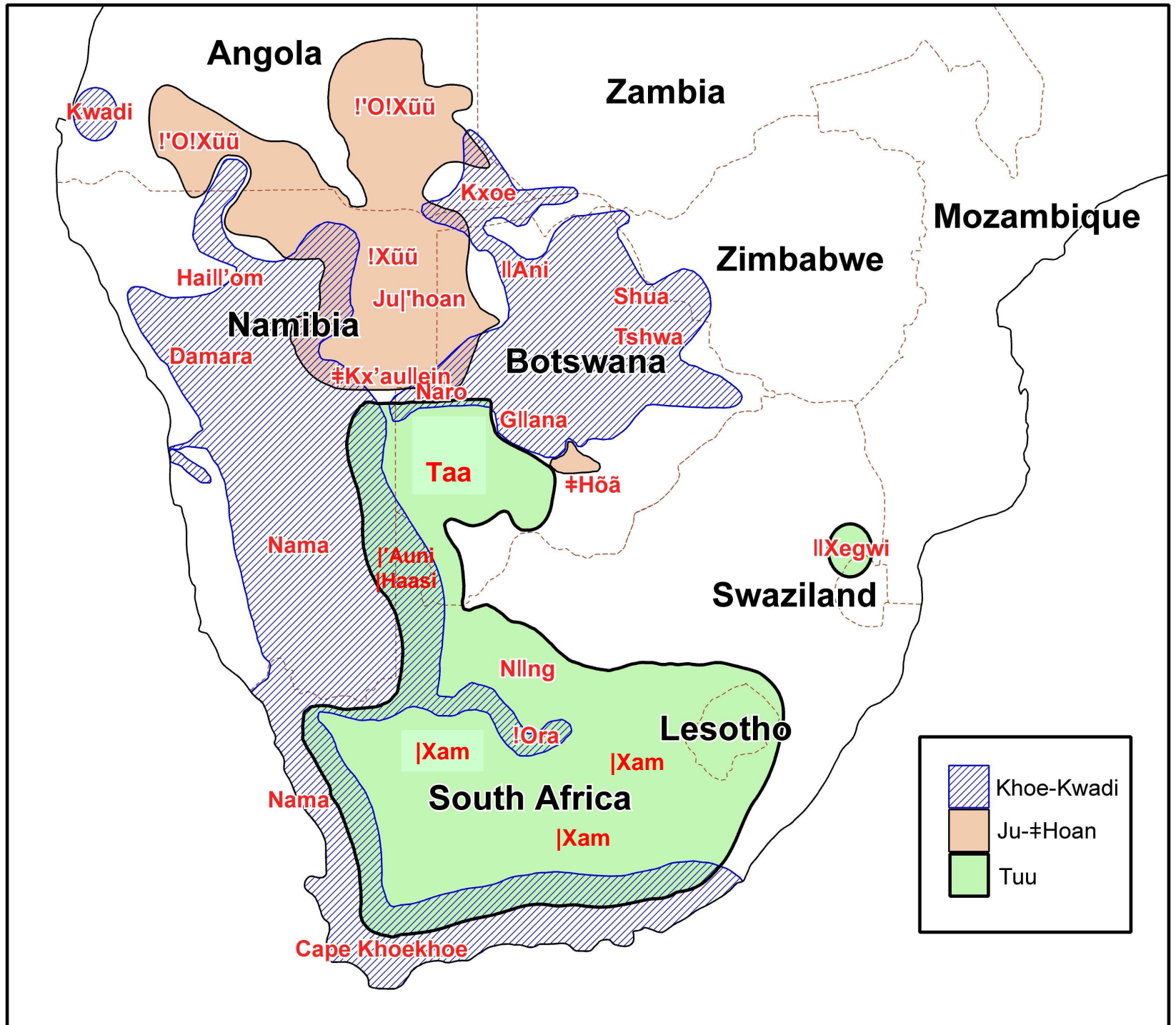
EuroBABEL: **B**etter **A**nalyses  
**B**ased on **E**ndangered  
**L**anguages

KBA: The **K**alahari **B**asin  
**A**rea: A *Sprachbund* on the  
verge of extinction  
Project Leader: Professor Tom  
Güldemann, Humboldt University,  
Berlin



- IP 1: A documentation of Shua (Kalahari East Khoe)  
PI: Professor William McGregor, Aarhus University, Denmark
- IP 2: Salvage documentation of South African Khoekhoe and !Ui languages  
PI: Professor Maarten Mous, University of Leiden, Netherlands
- IP 3: Inheritance and contact in a language complex: the case of Taa varieties (Tuu family)  
PI: Professor Tom Güldemann, Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany
- IP 4: The Central Kalahari area with a focus on ≠Hoan (Ju-≠Hoan family):  
language contact, social networks, and population genetics  
PI: Dr. Brigitte Pakendorf, MPI for Evolutionary Anthropology, Leipzig,  
Germany
- IP 5: Kinship systems in southern African non-Bantu languages:  
documentation, comparison, and historical analysis**  
**PI: Professor Alan Barnard, University of Edinburgh, Scotland**
- AP: The southwestern Kalahari Khoe languages of the Naro and G||ana  
PI: Professor Hiroshi Nakagawa, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies,  
Japan

(IP = Individual Project, AP = Associated Project, PI = Principal Investigator)



- Kinship systems are made up of kinship terms, terminological structures, norms and rules of behaviour, social practice and senses of relatedness.
- Structural principles of kinship terminologies or the categorizations of relatives are assumed to reflect social norms (e.g. rules of marriage, residence, descent, joking/avoidance).
- Changes in the terminological structure are assumed to be the result of socio-economic change. Cultural change „produces“ change in the linguistic domain (Murdock 1949, Barnard 1992).
- While relationships are believed to be in constant flux and individual terms can easily be borrowed, terminological structures are assumed to be conservative and difficult to change (Trautmann 2008).
- So far little research has been conducted on how terminologies are transformed through everyday social practice in poly-ethnic multilingual contact settings.

## How to identify and interpret diachronic change?

- Regional comparison as a synchro-diachronic approach:

*The underlying assumption in a synchro-diachronic approach is that systems described by individual ethnographic studies [...] can be treated as regular transformations of each other. The aim is to order them chronologically and derive at a model which will represent the shared basis of all the variants. (Kuper 1987:8f.)*

- Formal indicators of change: structural inconsistencies, lexical variation, marking devices, loanwords, different terms of reference and address, etc. (Greenberg 1990, Kryukov 1998)

### ➤ **Pan-dialectal survey of Taa kinship terminologies**

# Classification of Tuu (after Güldemann 2008)

TUU

-----!Ui

-----||Xegwi †

-----|Xam (Dialect cluster) †

-----#Ungkue †

-----N||ng (Dialect cluster incl. N|uu, #Khomani, etc.): nine speakers

-----Taa-Lower Nossob

-----**Taa (Dialect cluster)**

-----**West**

-----N|u||'en †

-----**West !Xoon**

-----**East**

-----N|amani †

-----'N|oha

-----**East !Xoon**

-----**Tshaasi\***

-----**Seroa (#Huan)\***

-----**Kakia †**

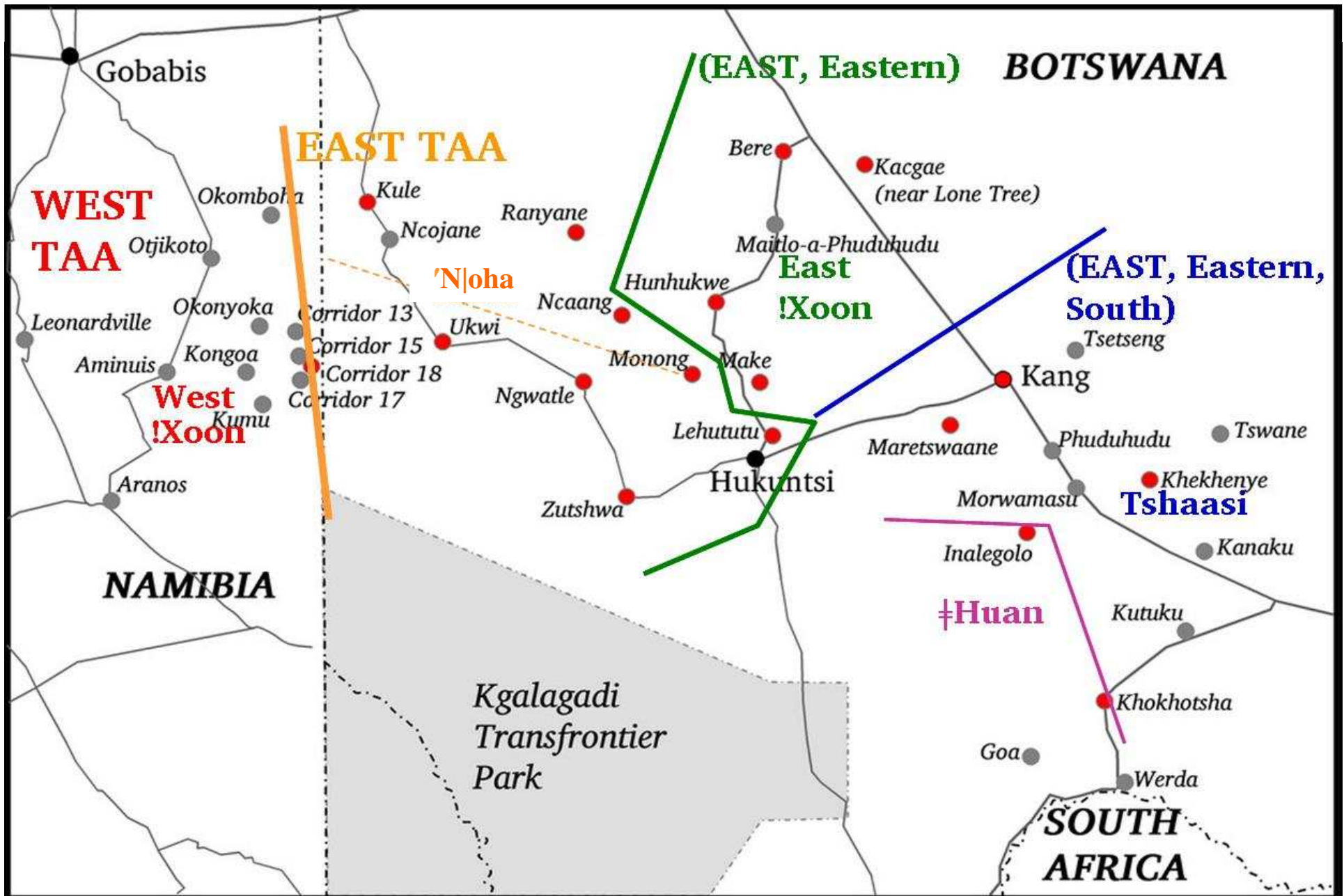
-----Lower Nossob (Dialect cluster ?)

-----|Auni †

-----|Haasi †

\* (added by GB)





Dialect boundaries in Taa (Source: Naumann 2011, IP3)

## Taa kinship terminologies: Sources and data

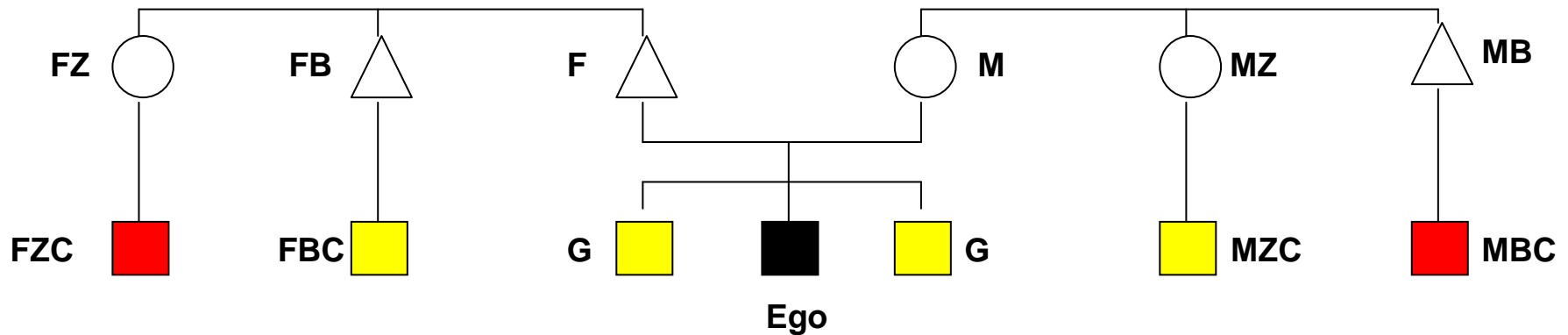
- N|u||en (S6), Namibia (Bleek 1927, 1956)
- Masarwa (Kakia) (S5), Khakea (Bleek 1927, 1956)
- East !Xoon, Bere (Heinz 1994 [1966])
- East !Xoon, Taketshwane area (Traill 1994)
- West !Xoon, Namibia (Fieldwork GB 2004-2010)
- 'N|joha, Namibia (Fieldwork GB 2004-2010)
- East !Xoon, Kagcae, Bere (Fieldwork GB 2010)
- Tsasi, Kang, Kanaku (Fieldwork GB 2010)
- Seroa, Inalegolo (Fieldwork GB 2010)

## Findings of the pan-dialectal survey:

- a) Different terms for cross cousins, i.e. mother's brother's child (MBC) and father's sister's child (FZC).
- b) Different terminological structure in terms for parents' siblings (PG) and siblings' children (GC).

Cross cousins: PosGC (MBC + FZC)

Parallel cousins: PssGC (MZC + FBC), often = G



M = Mother, F = Father, P = Parent

B = Brother, Z = Sister, G = Sibling

C = child

os = opposite sex, ss = same sex

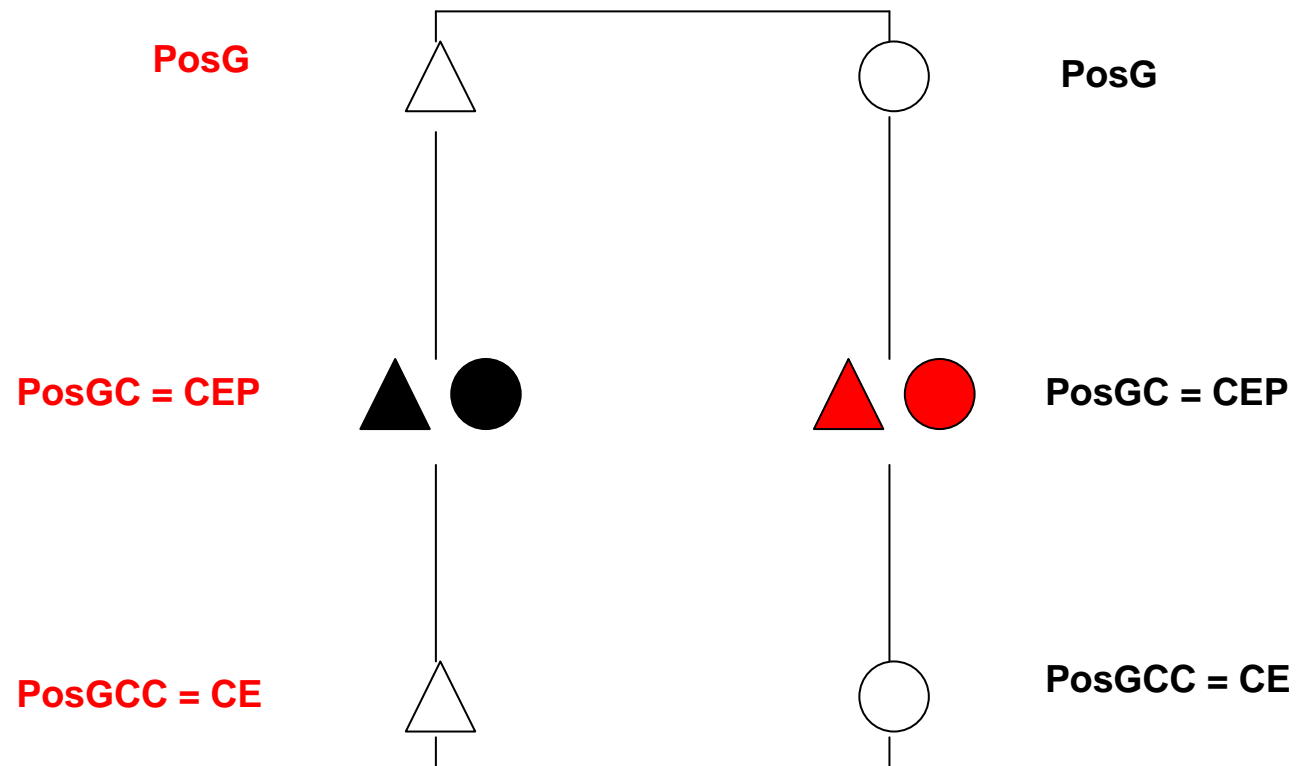
Same colour indicates use of same term

Table 2: Terms for cross cousins

Source	Term	Equivalents/Explanations
N u  en (Bleek 1929)	---	
Masarwa at Kakia (Bleek 1929)	---	
East !Xoon (Heinz 1994 [1966]:153-7)	᠒a lau	A person with whom Ego cannot joke BC (ms), WZC, HBC
East !Xoon (Traill 1994)	᠒àa !gāho	MBC, FZC, avoidance category
West !Xoon (GB)	oqn	MBC, FZC, joking relative
East !Xoon (GB)	x'ue	MBC, FZC, joking relative
'N oha (GB)	x'ue	MBC, FZC, joking relative
Tsasi (GB)	x'ue	MBC, FZC, joking relative
#Huan (GB)	e zale	MBC, FZC, joking relative loanword from Kgalagadi
Taa speakers on Namibian farms (GB)	oqn or  x'ue	PGC

- Different terms for cross cousins seem to correspond to dispersal scenario.
- Structural uniformity: PosGC  $\neq$  PssGC = G (except for farm workers).
- Four different terms for cross cousins. (All other terms are the same throughout the dialect cluster.)
- |e zale: Kgalagadi loan term; alienable genitive construction anomalous for Taa kin terms.
- ⓪aa g!aho: most probably result of misunderstanding.
- |x'ue: Traill (1994:60,241) gives meaning of |kx'ōe as 'sharing partner, friend, joking relative'. Term cognate with term for 'friend' in other Tuu languages (|Xam: |kε:)?
- ||oqn: term for parents of a married couple in all Taa varieties, expected to be on friendly terms.
- |x'ue and ||oqn share a part of their semantics: friendly relationship

Equivalence of cross cousins (PosGC) and parents of a married couple (CEP) in West !Xoon as a result of marriage between 2nd degree cross cousins (PosGCC) ?



(P = Parent, G = Sibling, C = Child, E = Spouse, os = opposite Sex)

## Marriage rules and patterns:

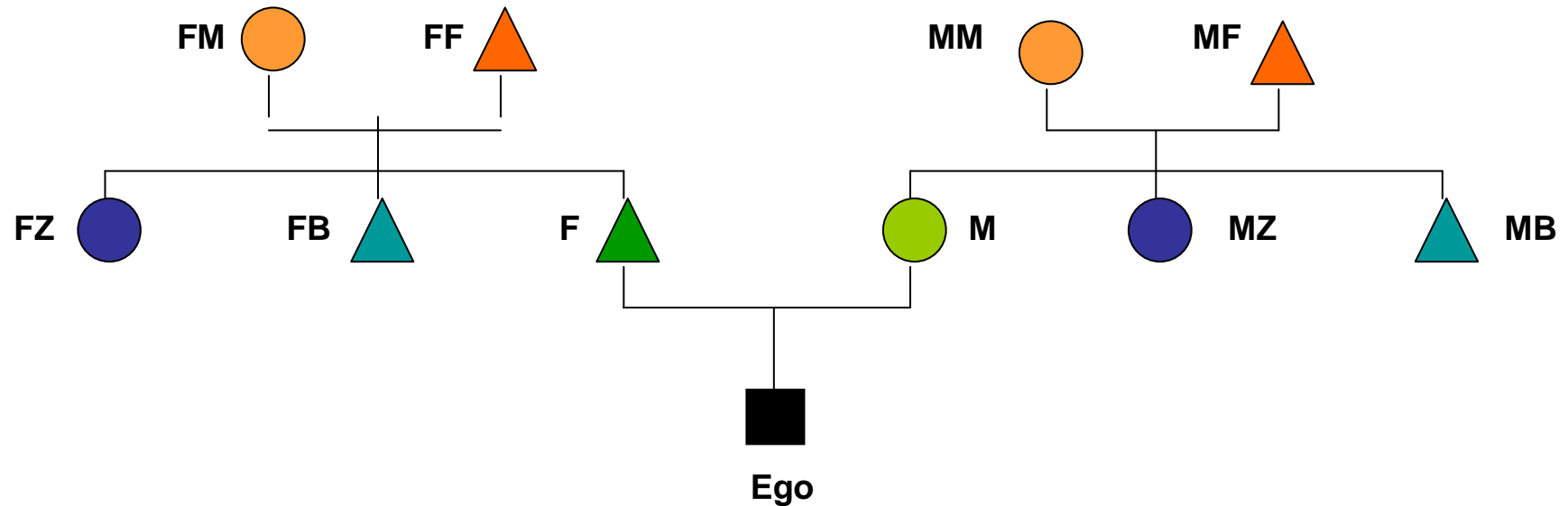
- Extremely inconsistent statements on former and current marriage rules and practices.
  - Genealogical data do not support any of the claimed rules of preferred marriage partners.
  - Children of cross cousins are classificatory children for ego and classificatory siblings for one another (unmarriageable category).
- Did proto-Taa have a term for cross cousin or did speakers of different Taa varieties recruit different terms to denote cross cousins when the need arose?



# Three different structures in terms for PG (and GC)

- a) Lineal/collateral
- b) Cross/parallel with PP equivalence
- c) „Split nuncle“ (Ono 2011)

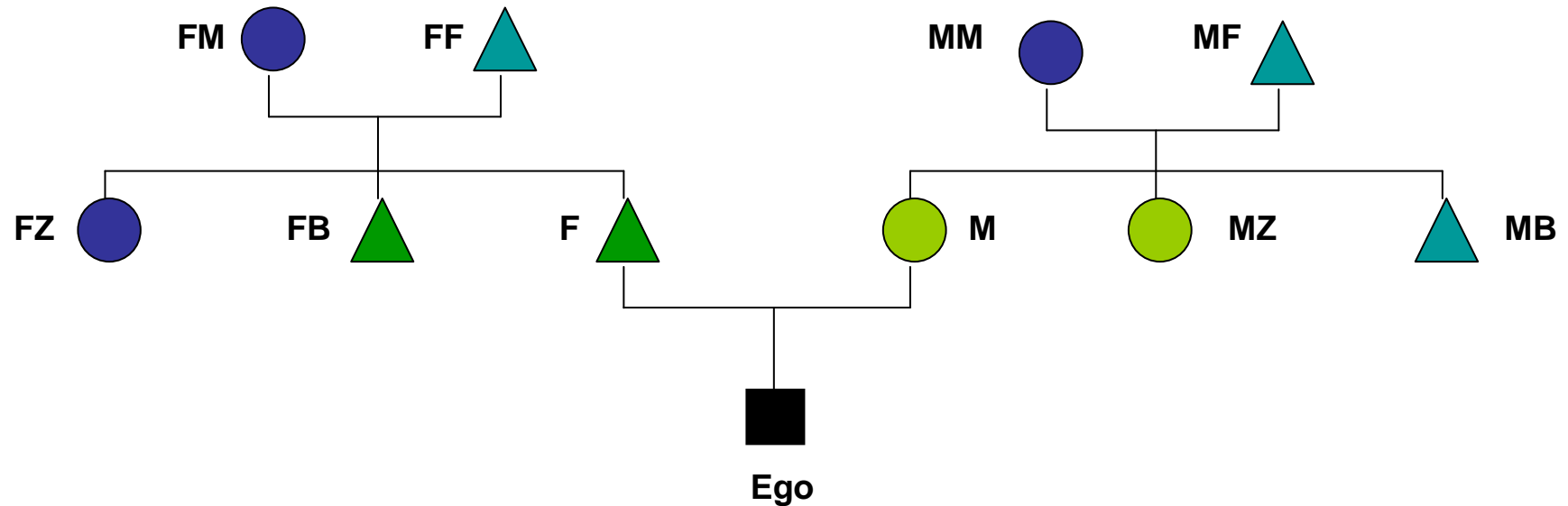
Lineal/collateral: PosG = PssG ≠ P



M = Mother, F = Father, P = Parent  
B = Brother, Z = Sister, G = Sibling  
os = opposite sex, ss = same sex

Same colour indicates use of same term

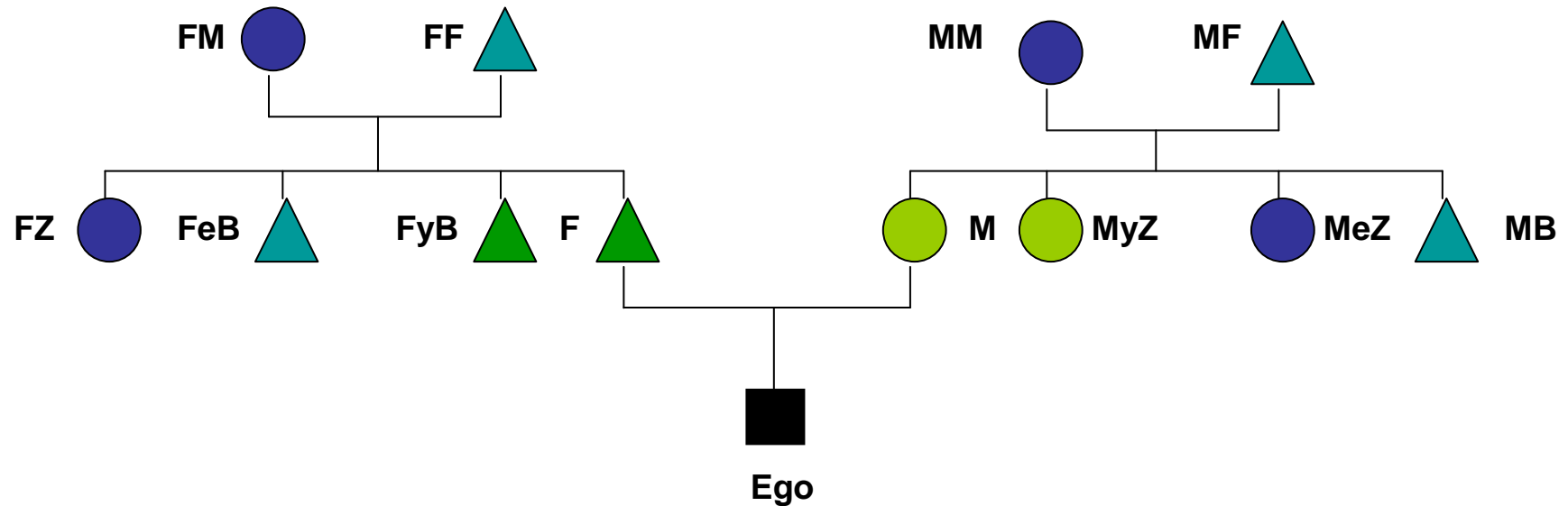
Cross/parallel: PosG = PP ≠ PssG = P(marker)



M = Mother, F = Father, P = Parent  
B = Brother, Z = Sister, G = Sibling  
os = opposite sex, ss = same sex

Same colour indicates use of same term

„Split nuncle“:  $PosG = PessG = PP \neq PyssG = P(\text{marker})$



M = Mother, F = Father, P = Parent  
 B = Brother, Z = Sister, G = Sibling  
 e = elder, y = younger  
 os = opposite sex, ss = same sex

Same colour indicates use of same term

Table 2: Terms for parents' siblings and siblings' children

Group of speakers	Terminological structure in Generations +1/-1	Main contact languages
West !Xoon	PssG = P(marker), PosG = PP ssGC = C(marker), osGC = CC	Naro, Nama, Herero, Tswana, Afrikaans
East !Xoon	PssG = P(marker), PosG = PP ssGC = C(marker), osGC = CC	Naro, G wi, Kgalagadi, Tswana
<b>Naro</b> (Barnard 1996)	PssG = P(marker), PosG = PP ssGC = C(marker), osGC = CC	
'N oha	PyssG = P(marker), PessG = PosG = PP essGC = C(marker), yssGC = osGC = CC	Kgalagadi, Tswana
#Huan	PyssG = P(marker), PessG = PosG = PP essGC = C(marker), yssGC = osGC = CC	G wi, #Hoan, <b>Kgalagadi</b> , Tswana
Tshaasi	PyssG = P(marker), PessG = PosG = PP essGC = C(marker), yssGC = osGC = CC	<b>G wi</b> , #Hoan, <b>Kgalagadi</b> , Tswana
<b>G wi</b> (Ono 2011)	PyssG = P(marker), PessG = PosG = PP essGC = C(marker), yssGC = osGC = CC	
<b>#Hoan</b> (Gruber 1973)	PyssG = P(marker), PessG = PosG = PP essGC = C(marker), yssGC = osGC = CC	
<b>Kgalagadi</b>	PyssG = P_marker ≠ PessG = PP ≠ PosG	
Taa on Namibian farms	P ≠ PssG = PosG = PP	<b>Afrikaans</b>
<b>Afrikaans</b>	P ≠ PssG = PosG ≠ PP	

- Fault lines of difference cut across those for cross cousin terms and correspond, instead, to contact settings.
- „Split nuncle“ = areal feature shared across language family boundaries by G|wi, ≠Hoan (Ono 2011) and some groups of Taa speakers.
- „Split nuncle“ otherwise anomalous for all three language families: Khoe, Ju-≠Hoan and Tuu.
- Part of the „split nuncle“ also shared with Kgalagadi.
- Part of the lineal/collateral type shared with Afrikaans by Taa on commercial farms.

## Pan-dialectal survey: Summary

- Distribution of different terms for cross cousins conforms with dispersal scenario for Taa by Naumann 2011 (IP3).
- Both Taa terms for cross cousins, |x'ue (friend, sharing partner) and ||oqn (co-parent of married couple) derived from terms with wider semantics of friendly relationship.
- Weak support for both terms as candidates for proto-Taa term for cross cousin.
- Doubts that proto-Taa distinguished cross cousins. (Adding to these doubts is the fact that historic data on other Tuu kinship terminologies suggest a lineal/collateral structure.)

## Pan-dialectal survey: Summary

- Variation in terminological structure of terms for parents' siblings and siblings' children seems to reflect contact history.
- Taa kinship structure flexibly adapts to structural principles of different contact languages.
- Socio-economic change can possibly account for different use of kinship terms by farm workers but not for others.
- Flexibility doesn't allow to reconstruct proto-Taa kinship structure. At best it allows to reconstruct a chronological sequence in terms of contact history.
- The study of dialectal variation has proven to be a valuable method to explore diachronic change.



## How to identify and interpret synchronic change?

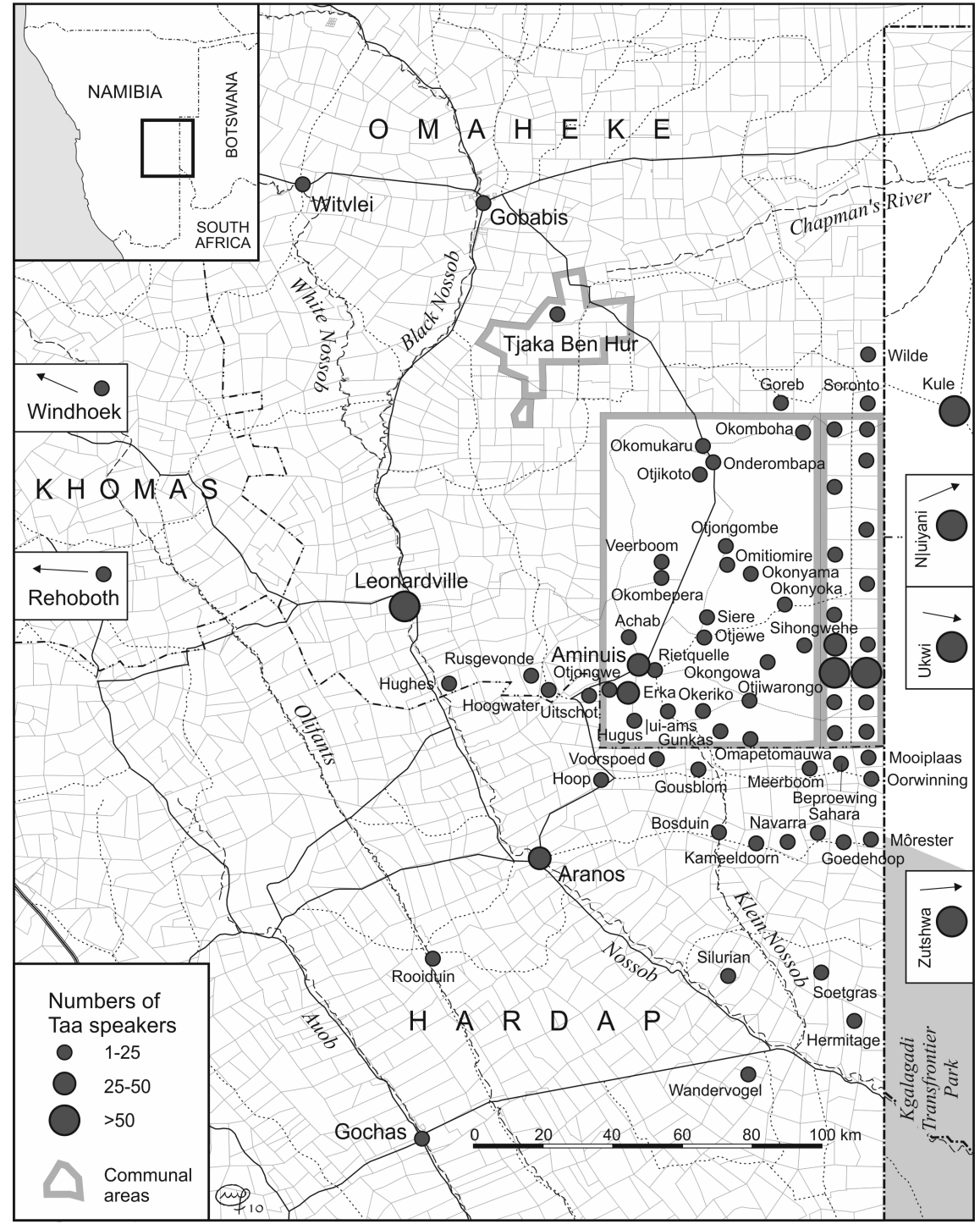
- Comparing use of kinship terms by representatives of different social categories (different age/generation, different socio-economic settings)
- Elicitation of kinship terms with the genealogical method.
- Questionnaire concerning use of kinship terms in personal poly-ethnic networks (social occasions like funerals, co-workers, fosterage, support networks, gift exchange).

Taa speakers in  
Namibia:  
ca. 450-500

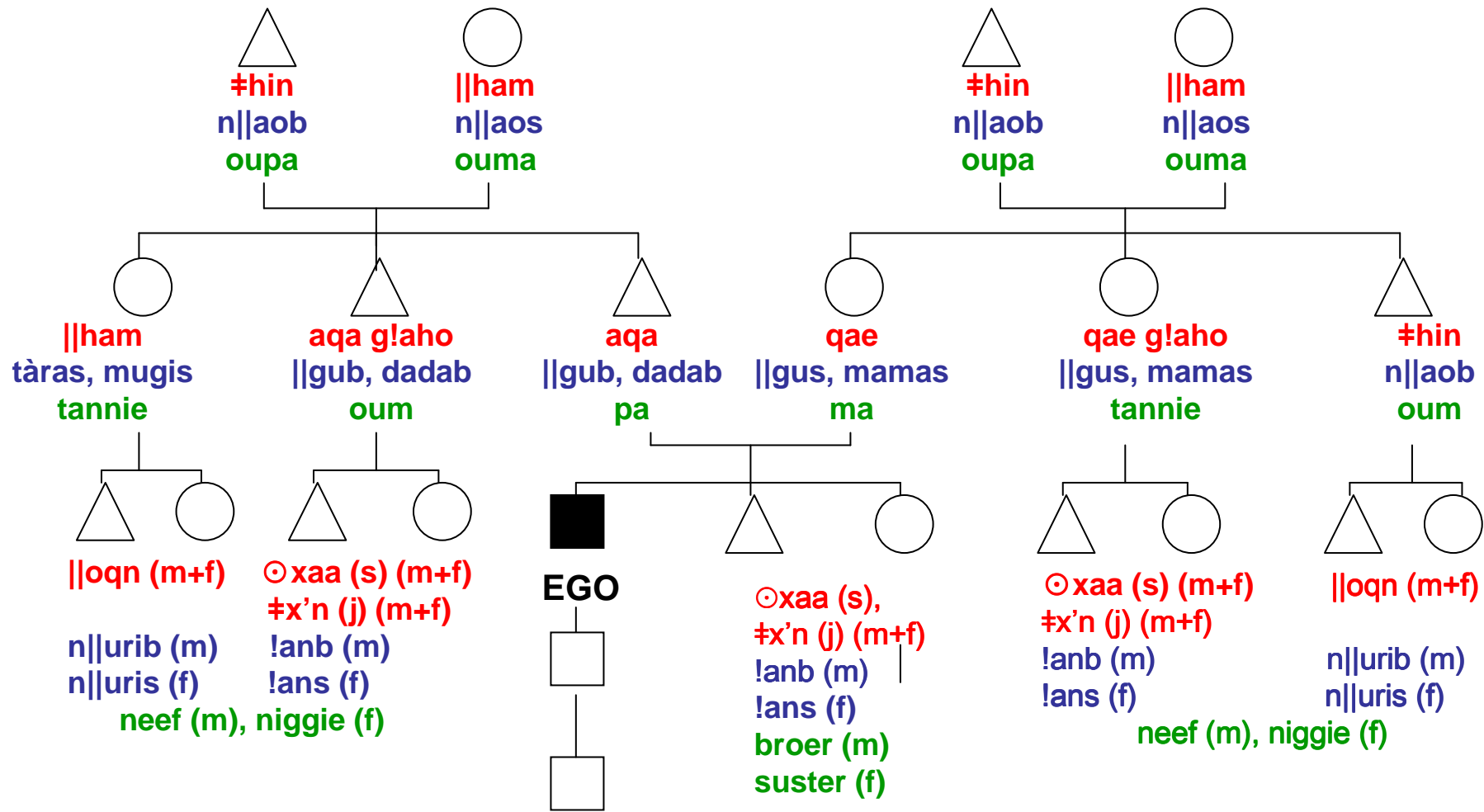
formerly:  
hunter/gatherers  
(‘Bushmen’, San)

today:  
either farm workers or  
rural proletariat  
living on subsidies  
from the government  
and piece work  
in communal areas

Source:  
Boden in press

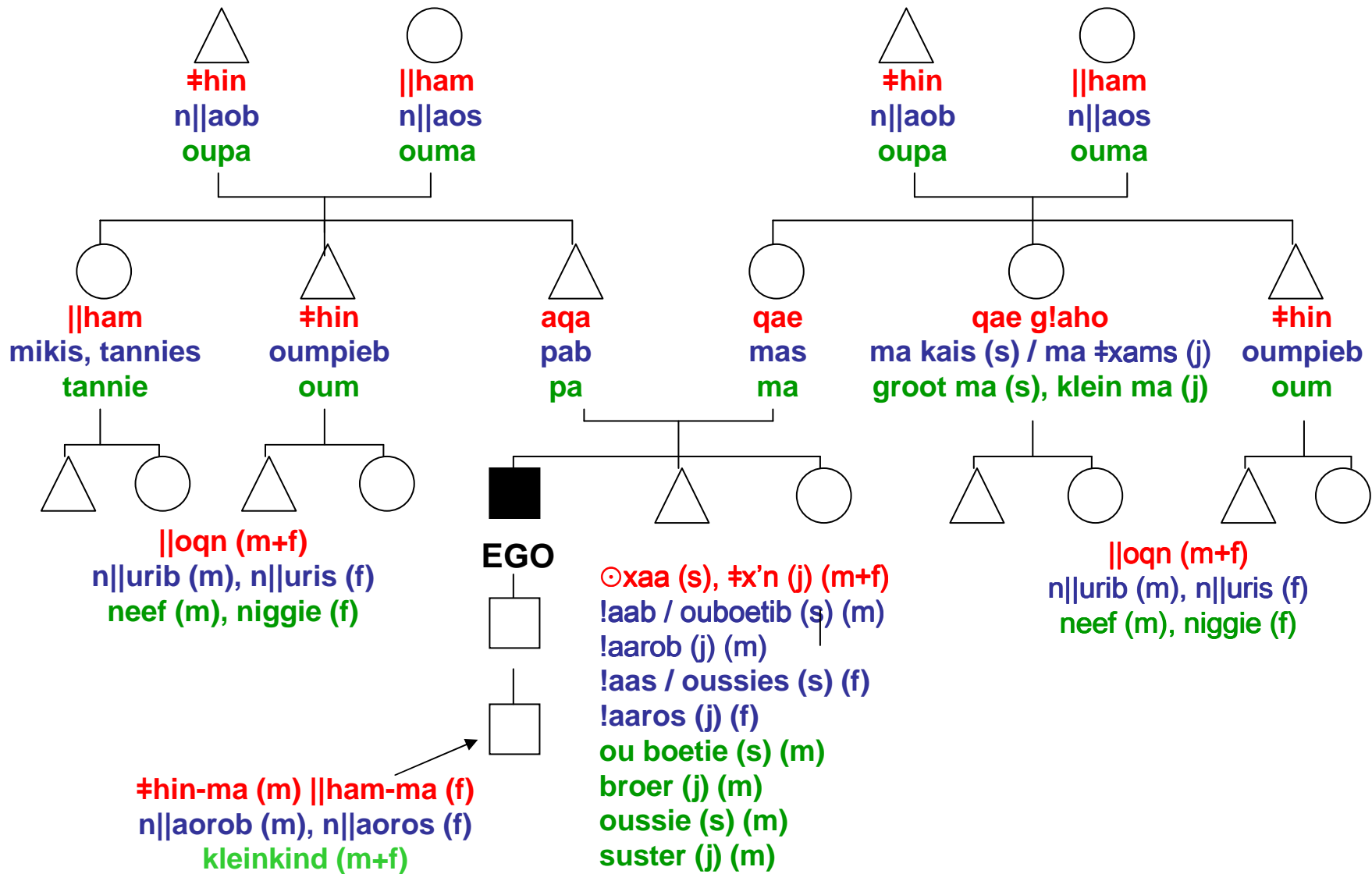


Kin terms in **West !Xoon (GB 2004)**, Nama (Klocke-Daffa 2001), Afrikaans (Trümpelmann & Erbe 1983)



||ham (ws), #hin (ms)  
 n||urib (m), n||uris (f)  
 kleinkind (m+f)

Kin terms used by female farm-worker born in 1971: **West !Xoon, Nama, Afrikaans**



From cross/parallel to lineal/collateral on commercial farms:

- In parental generation only on father's side.
- Complete in Ego's generation.

Mutual adaptations between Taa, Nama and Afrikaans:

- Afrikaans loanwords in Nama.
  - Differentiation in terms for MZ according to relative age in Nama and Afrikaans.
  - Relative age distinction in sibling terms in Nama and Afrikaans.
  - N||aorob/s instead of n||urib/s in Nama.
- „Impossible“ and „false“ translations are a valuable resource for understanding misfits in categorization and processes of change.

Increasing need to express sex of referent:

Former Taa kinship terminology:

- Sex of referent specific terms in generations above Ego (grandparents, parents, parents' siblings)
- Same terms for male and female representatives in Ego's generation (siblings and cousins)
- In generations below Ego use of kinship term depends on sex of speaker, i.e. reciprocal terms between (classificatory) grandparents and grandchildren.

Shift to:

- Use of sex of referent specific terms for (classificatory) grandchildren.
- Use of term for elder sibling for brother and of term for younger sibling for Z.

# Shift to sex of referent distinctions in sibling terms

West !Xoon terms for siblings:

eG ɔxaa

yG ʔx'n

Modifiers:

g||ai, qae = female

||oa ʔi, si||xai = male

!xaV = big, elder (V = vowel of agreement class)

|ama, -ma, qora = small, younger

Synchronic variety of structure in sibling terms:

eZ: ɔxaa, ɔxaa !xai, ɔxaa g||ai, qae ɔxaa, ɔxaa g||ai !xa, ʔx'n g||ai !xa, ʔx'n

eB: ɔxaa, ɔxaa !xai

yZ: ʔx'n, ʔx'n qora, ʔx'n-ma, ɔxaa |ama

yB: ʔx'n, ʔx'n qora, ɔxaa |ama, ɔxaa

Formalized change:

Stage 1 > Stage 2

ɔxaa = eG > ɔxaa = eB, ɔxaa g||ai (g||ai = female) = eZ > ɔxaa = B

ʔx'n = yG > ʔx'n = yZ, ʔx'n si||xai (si||xai = male) = yB, > ʔx'n = Z

## 'Universal' kinship categorization ?

- Universal kin categorization is one of the common features and part of the deep structure of all Bushmen societies (Barnard 1981, 1992).
- Universal kin categorization means that every member of one's social field is identified as belonging to one or another kin category, including people from different speech communities (Barnard 1978, 1981, 1992:4).
- Strategies for including foreigners: name-equivalence, inclusion of whole ethnic groups into a kin class, common residence, etc.



- The Taa extend their kin categorization to „non-kin“.
- Kin categorization is more extensive for terms of address than for terms of reference. The use of a kinship term in address is expressing respect. In reference the same people can be identified as “non-kin”.
- Extension of kin categories in reference depends on shared life experience which also has effects on behavior, e.g. marriageability.
- 'Universal' kinship categorization is non-genealogical.
- 'Universal' kinship categorization has only two rules: relative age/generation and sex of referent.
- Terms for parents, children are used only rarely, the terms for cross cousins and parents-/children-in-law almost never.
- 'Universal' kin categorization works across ethnic boundaries.
- 'Universal' kin categorization has character of an areal kin pidgin.

## Conclusions:

- Kinship terminological structures can be as flexible as relationships and individual terms.
- Socio-economic change is no prerequisite for changes in kinship terminological structures.
- Multilingual communication can cause changes in kinship terminological structure.
- The study of synchronic variation in the use of kinship terms is essential.
- Descriptions of closed and unambiguous kin terminologies are dubious especially for small speech communities with highly endangered languages.

## Topics for discussion:

What can current observations on processes of change tell us about past transformations?

- How can we identify a hypothetical historical kin pidgin? Should areal features be interpreted as indications for earlier kin pidgin?
- How to identify direction of change if multidirectionality is the rule?
- What exactly do „false“ translations reveal and how can they help to identify former terminological shifts?

Are the methods appropriate?

- Low number of speakers don't allow for representative survey to substantiate the findings of the explorative study. However, also in the distant past contact situations might have involved small speech communities have been accompanied by language loss/shift.
- How to account for potential variation in contact languages? Studying and evaluating kinship terminology of each contact language would be very time consuming.

## Acknowledgements:

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## Abbreviations and symbols:

M = Mother

F = Father

P = Parent

Z = Sister

B = Brother

G = Sibling

D = Daughter

S = Son

C = Child

W = Wife

H = Husband

E = Spouse

e = elder

y = younger

ss = same sex

os = opposite sex

(ws) = woman speaking

(ms) = man speaking



= Female



= Male



= Unspecified Sex



= Sibling relationship



= Couple



= Filiation