

Cultural Value and Linguistic Specificities of *juk*, *nuê*, *adam dei*, *knai* and *jiăng* in Ê-đê Language

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Abstract: The Ê-đê people constitute the second-largest ethnic group in Tây Nguyên, also known as the Central Highlands. This community is remarkably unified in terms of ethnic consciousness, language, and culture. Alongside the Gia-rai, Ra-glai, Chu-ru, and Chăm ethnic groups, the Ê-đê people utilize languages that belong to the western branch of the Austronesian language family, falling under the classification of Cham subgroup languages. Within the Ê-đê culture, a variety of address words are employed for daily communication, resulting in a diversified range of usage. Notably, aside from the specialized class of address words, a non-specialized class is also utilized temporarily for addressing purposes. In this article, the author elucidates the structural, semantic, and pragmatic characteristics of certain distinctive address words utilized by the Ê-đê people in their communication. Through an analysis of dialogues present in the epic *Đăm Săn*, the study of these unique address words reveals their functional capabilities and habitual usage, thereby presenting key insights into the characteristics of Ê-đê ethnic culture, which is notably characterized by its typical matrilineal family-based societal structure.

Keywords: Ê-đê language, matrilineal culture, *Đăm Săn* epic, address words, Central Highlands.

Subject classification: Linguistics.

1. Introduction

According to a Vietnamese dictionary, addressing is “how a person calls him/herself and calls others when talking to each other to indicate the nature of the relationship with each other” (Hoàng Phê, 2011: 1475).

Within the Ê-đê system of address words, apart from employing specialized pronouns, this language also incorporates non-specialized words for addressing various aspects such

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as kinship relations, social connections, and more. Particularly noteworthy are the special address words present in the Ê-đê language, which are employed in distinct ways but lack corresponding counterparts in Vietnamese. This article delves into several characteristics related to the structure and usage of these special pronouns, while also shedding light on their cultural implications. These distinctive pronouns are examined through the lens of the epic *Đăm Săn* authored by Nguyễn Hữu Thấu (2003a, 2003b), as well as *Khan Đăm Săn and Khan Đăm Kteh Mlan*. The article provides insights into the cultural traits encapsulated within these pronouns, highlighting their significance within the Ê-đê cultural context.

Contents of the Epic of Đăm Săn: According to the ancient marriage custom of the Ê-đê people, the practice of “*c\ue nuê*” (leviratation), Đăm Săn must marry the two wives of his grandfather, Hơ Nhị and Hơ Bhi, even though he already had a lover named H’ Bia Điet Klut. Đăm Săn is a talented and courageous young man; he defeated the chiefs Mtao Grư and Mtao Mxây, who had conspired to abduct Đăm Săn’s wife and tarnish his reputation. He seized countless wealth, livestock, and slaves from them, thus becoming the most powerful chief in the region. Nonetheless, Đăm Săn also aspired to amass more wealth and strength, aiming to be unequalled in the world. He felled the magic tree, embarked on his horse towards the sky, and aimed to take the Sun Goddess as his wife. However, due to this deed, both Đăm Săn and his horse plunged into the marshy forest of Sun Yrit, submerging into an obsidian woodland. His soul was reborn into his biological sister, Hơ Ng, leading to the birth of Đăm Săn’s grandson, who eventually became the husband of the Hơ Nhị family, thereby continuing his legacy. This phenomenon has been discussed elsewhere; it is referred to as levirate marriage and is depicted in the Bible through the narrative of Judah’s sons marrying a woman consecutively (Olanisebe & Oladosu, 2014).

The rationale behind selecting the Đăm Săn Epic for data collection is its comprehensive use of pronouns, encompassing numerous specialized forms. Furthermore, it stands as the most renowned epic among the Ê-đê people.

2. Features of special pronouns in Ê-đê language

In terms of their structure, the special pronouns within the Ê-đê language serve as both standalone words and compound phrases. These include: *juk*, *nuê*, *adam dei*, *knai* and *jiăng*. These designations as “special words” arise from their dual function of introduction and address, characterized by their lack of direct equivalents in the Vietnamese language. Additionally, these exceptional address terms can be categorized within either the kinship-related word system or the system governing social relationships. Regarding their quantity,

the special pronouns that emerge in the conversations we have tallied throughout the Đăm Săn Epic are not numerous, amounting to just five words with a total of 101 instances. Despite their limited number, they are employed with distinct styles and underlying principles. Their utilization in communication imparts various shades of expression, thus revealing the distinctive cultural attributes intrinsic to the Ê-đê people.

Juk

Juk is a specialized kinship term utilized by women from two distinct *djuê* (surnames) to address each other. Typically, this word denotes a sister-in-law relationship between them. However, in accordance with the Ê-đê cultural practice of *c\uê nuê* – levirate marriage (known as “*nói nôi*” in Vietnamese), their relationship can also encompass that of a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. For instance, within the context of the Epic of Đăm Săn, Hơ Ng holds the role of an elder sister to Đăm Săn, who in turn is the husband of Hơ Nhị. The connection between Hơ Ng and Hơ Nhị thus originally assumes the form of a sister-in-law relation. Yet, after Đăm Săn’s passing, Hơ Ng gives birth to Đăm Săn’s grandson. Per the customs of *c\uê nuê*, the grandson, Đăm Săn, assumes the position of a *nuê* husband to Hơ Nhị, effectively replacing his grandfather. Consequently, the relationship between Hơ Ng and Hơ Nhị, which was initially categorized as sister-in-law, now transitions into a new dynamic of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. Curiously, despite this alteration in roles, the pronouns they employ to address each other remain unchanged, still being *juk*.

The following dialogue is between Hơ Nhị and Hơ Áng (Nguyễn Hữu Thấu, 2003a: 25; Nguyễn Hữu Thấu, 2003b: 22):

H’~I - *Ojuk, ơjuk, [uh mdeh adei ih to anei?*

HỒ NHỊ - Hey *juk*, eh *juk*, do you see *juk* anywhere?

H’O\NG: - *Ti `u nao koh, juk ah! ~u dôk ðih hla\m adu\ `u hã\p.*

HO ÁNG - Where else is he going, *juk*? Lying in his room.

H’~I - *Ya mnơ\ng klei mneh msao koh, juk ah?*

HỒ NHỊ - What’s the point of arguing, *juk*!

The above dialogue takes place between Hơ Ng and Hơ Nhị, who share a sister-in-law relationship. They affectionately refer to each other as *juk*. However, depending on the specific communication context, they may opt to use *ih* (second person, singular) or *di ih* (second person, plural) instead of *juk*. This practice aligns with the addressing norms of the Ê-đê people. During conversations, they often begin with words indicating their kinship relations before transitioning to personal pronouns. Most personal pronouns are commonly employed regardless of factors such as age, gender, or occupation. However, the Ê-đê

avoid using personal pronouns in isolation. Instead, they combine words denoting kinship relations with personal pronouns to enable listeners to discern the roles and interpersonal dynamics between the participants in the conversation.

H'O|NG - O'êkei, o'êdam, rông mô| bi m'ak, rông anak bi yâo, aguah nao kơ hma, êla kơ ku, thu êa nguôm kơ hrôk kđuôn. Đăm nga\ aguah sang ama, êla sang ami\. Đăm lui he\ mô\ anak ôh. *O'juk, o'juk, hđeh ih Jung ba, khua ih Jung guôn* (Nguyễn Hữu Thấu, 2003a: 70).

HỒ ÂNG - Oh son, oh son, take care of your wife and children to be happy. You have to go to the fields in the morning, take a look at the trap at noon, when the morning dew was dry, you go fishing. Don't stay at father's house in the morning nor stay at mother's at noon. Don't leave your wife and children alone. Oh *juk*, eh *juk*, you're still young, so *juk* please guide, *juk* wait until *nuê* grow up (Nguyễn Hữu Thấu, 2003b: 79).

This dialogue is between Hơ Âng and Hơ Nhị. Although the relationship between them at that time was the relationship between a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law (H'Nhị married Đăm Săn the grandson, who is Hơ Âng's son), they still call each other *juk*.

Hence, it becomes evident that *juk* holds a distinct place as a term of address. The Ê-đê community employs *juk* in accordance with established conventions. Its applicability is twofold, extending to both familial and societal contexts, with a neutral and expressive undertone.

Nuê

In the Ê-đê language, the term *nuê* originally referred to a bud that emerges from a dried tree trunk, eventually taking its place. Similarly, *bi Juê* signifies the action of rejoining a broken rope. Consequently, *Juê nuê* symbolizes the act of "leviration", essentially reconnecting a bond. Within the custom of *Juê nuê*, if a spouse passes away, the surviving partner is united with an individual of the same lineage (*nuê*) as the deceased. This tradition is explicitly outlined in Ê-đê customary law. According to Article 97, the prescribed sequence for succession, when the husband passes away, to marry the widow is as follows: *Joh adrunng lo\ hrua, ti\ tria lo\ hrô, djiê pô anei lo\ cuê ho\ng pô ana\.* (If the beam of the house is broken, it must be replaced; if the floor is ruined, it must be fixed. If one dies, he or she must be "levirated"). Article 98 of the Ê-đê customary law also states: *Djiê amiêt lo\ Juê ho\ng amuôn, djiê aduôn Juê ho\ng Jô* (If an uncle dies, he should be "levirated" by his nephew; when the grandmother dies, she should be so by a granddaughter) (Ngô Đức Thịnh et al., 2001, p.294).

In the Đăm Săn Epic, *nuê* was used quite a lot by levirate couples. It is possible to illustrate the relationship *Juê nuê* in the Đăm Săn Epic as follows: Mtao Klu was the husband of Hbia Klu. Hbia Klu served as the *aduôn* (maternal grandmother) of Hơ Nhị and

Hơ Bhi. Following the passing of Hbia Klu, Hơ Nhi, representing Hbia Klu, engaged in a levirate marriage with Mtao Kla, becoming his *nuê* wife. Subsequently, upon the demise of Mtao Kla, Đăm Săn (the son of Mtao Kla's sister) participated in the levirate marriage tradition with Hơ Nhi. Upon Đăm Săn's death, he metamorphosed into a fly that entered the mouth of Hơ Ng (Đăm Săn's sister). As a result, Hơ Ng became pregnant and eventually gave birth to Đăm Săn, the grandson. Đăm Săn then continued the levirate practice by becoming the *nuê* husband of his aunt, Hơ Nhi.

In the Ê-đê language, *nuê* is a special kinship word used to refer to levirate wives and husbands. For example, when Hơ Nhi calls Đăm Săn *nuê*, they could go home together (Nguyễn Hữu Thấu, 2003a: 25; Nguyễn Hữu Thấu, 2003b: 22):

H'~I - *O nuê, o nuê, bơ be\ drei đue# wi\ t kơ sang drei. Leh di\ng bi hma\ng, leh bua\l bi hma\ng.*

HỒ NHI - Hey *nuê*, let's go home! People in the house are waiting for you.

ĐĂM SĂN - *Ya klei kâo wi\ t? Nga\ di ih Jia\ng deh, kâo wi\ t? {o\k di ih amâo Jia\ng, ya kâo mwi\ t!.*

ĐĂM SĂN - What do I do when I come back? You don't need me, so why should I come back? You guys didn't need me, why am I back!

Hơ Nhi and Đăm Săn are a levirate couple, so Hơ Nhi calls Đăm Săn *nuê*. However, Đăm Săn calls Hơ Nhi and Hơ Bhi by their proper names, and then replaced the proper names with the personal pronoun *di ih* (they – third person, plural). Đăm Săn did not call his two wives *nuê* because at first, he would rather not marry Hơ Nhi and Hơ Bhi.

Clearly, *nuê* holds a distinctive significance as a unique pronoun within the familial and societal context, serving as a means of addressing levirate spouses according to the Ê-đê people's customary practice of *Juê nuê*. This term finds its application not only in everyday interactions but also within regulations, encompassing courteous, amicable, and intimate expressions.

Adam dei

In Ê-đê language, *adam dei* is used to refer to, and call, people who are uncles, specifically brothers of a woman. It can be said that *adam dei* is the only special term among the special pronouns mentioned in this article that is not used to address, only to call. In practice, *adam dei* comes in various iterations like *adam adei*, *dam adei*, or *dam dei*. Currently, the Ê-đê people still call it *dam dei*, but in fact *dam adei* is the clearest word because *dam* means male and *adei* means younger brother. The book *Khan Đăm Săn and Khan Đăm Kteh Mlan* uses *adam dei*. Broadly speaking, *adam dei* is a term used to denote a brother. However, within the context of kinship relations involving a woman, it is

important to recognize that *amiêt* (uncle) is not a biological brother. Nevertheless, owing to the practice of levirate marriage, if an *amiêt* passes away, his nephew (the son of his sisters) may step in to marry the widow. As a result, they are also regarded as each other's brothers due to these intricate kinship connections.

Example (Nguyễn Hữu Thấu, 2003a: 25; Nguyễn Hữu Thấu, 2003b: 22):

Y DHING - *Ana\ n lah, adei ah, ti atiê ih a, êwa ih khăp? Ti lei anăp ih mi\ n, ti lei anăp ih u?*

Y DHING - Oh dear, who do you fall in love with?

H'~I| - *Thào be\ kào dê, ayo\ ng ah! Ti ih khăp, hmei tui khăp tơ thuôn. Ti ih Jiăng, hmei tui Jiăng tơ thuôn. Hmei HỒ NHỊ amâo lăng săp adam dei ôh.*

HỒ NHỊ - I don't know! Whatever you like, we will agree, if you love someone, we will love them. We dare not disobey you.

Hơ Nhị called his brothers *adam dei*. However, sometimes the Ê-đê people also use *dam* and *adei* instead of *adam dei*:

H'~I| - *Kào iêu brua\ anei klei đăm amâo, kào iêu brua\ adih klei đăm mào. Hing kơ yang, ang kơ cu\, hmu\ yu\ ngo\ arăng la] H'~i\, H'Bhì\ kyâo lu êguh, djuh lu êdram, dam lu adei lu. Bơ anei si be\ hmei gơ\ dôk mting mtung si put m[roh, aseï dôk soh, ung yua amâo mào.*

HỒ NHỊ - I call you not because of work. Fame is known to the gods, the name is renowned all over the mountains, everywhere from the east to the west. If you listen to, you will say Hơ Nhị, Hơ Bhi are like a tree with many branches, with many brothers, many relatives. So why are we still alone, standing there like a *put ải* tree, without managing to have a husband.

Knai

Knai is a special kinship word used to refer to “men of two *djuê* (surnames) who can get married to a member of the other side, and to refer to each other. They are often aunts and uncles and can become each other's brother-in-law” (Vũ Quốc Khánh, 2010: 85). *Knai* is used for people of equal status and neutral in expressive nuances. For example: (Nguyễn Hữu Thấu, 2003a: 24; Nguyễn Hữu Thấu, 2003b: 21):

DĂM SĂN - *Ơ knai, ơ knai, hriê drei bi tru\ t!*

ĐĂM SĂN - Hey guys! Come on, let's play push each other!

Y DHING - *Bơ ung adei ah, hmei ti\ ng kơ êdu\ k, ih ti\ ng kơ phu\ n!*

Y DHING - Oh, our sister's husband! Let us stand on the top of the tree, you stand at the root.

In the above dialogue, Y Đhing is Hơ Nhị's brother. Đăm Săn called his wife's brothers *knai* (roughly translated as "friends"). And they call Đăm Săn *ung adei* (husband of our younger sister). The Ê-đê kinship system does not have a word for the concept of the brother-in-law who marries one's sister. Therefore, the Ê-đê people use the "interpretation" style and use the method of grafting *ung adei* (sister's husband).

Most kinship words used to address the family in the Đăm Săn Epic, such as *ami* (mother), *amuôn* (grandson), *amiêt* (uncle), *êkei* (man, son), *iê* (brother-in-law, sister-in-law) have neutral or intimate expressions. In particular, these kinship words are only used to address within member within the family, while *knai* is also used to address someone in society.

Jia\ng

Jia\ng is a word to refer to sworn brothers, and used to address without age discrimination. The wives of these sworn brothers may also call their husbands *jia\ng*. Example: (Nguyễn Hữu Thấu, 2003a: 35; Nguyễn Hữu Thấu, 2003b: 36).

ĐĂM SĂN - *O jia\ng, ơ jia\ng, tru\ n tơ lă n! Drei bi mbul.*

ĐĂM SĂN - Oh ***Jia\ng***, O ***Jia\ng***, come down here! We fight each other!

MTAO GRU\ - *O jia\ng, ơ jia\ng, đi\ kơ dlông! kâo kpih o\ng ho\ng kbao.*

MTAO GRU\ - O ***Jia\ng***, O ***Jia\ng***, cordially invite ***Jia\ng*** to visit the house, I want to offer you a buffalo as a blessing ceremony.

ĐĂM SĂN - *Ya o\ng kpih kâo ho\ng kbao? Mô\ kâo leh o\ng sua, pha kâo leh o\ng koh, leh o\ng doh tian tiê kâo? O hêh, ơ hêh, ma\ adring blah mgan, ma\ ê`an ua\ pui, k'ui lăng sang ara\ng anei!.*

ĐĂM SĂN - ***Jia\ng*** still wants to offer a buffalo to pray for us! Wasn't it you that robbed my wife, cut off my thighs, pulled my guts out? (To the servant) Persecute you, take this floor of the yard and cut it in half for me, take the stairs of this house and split it to the fire, burn this house for me!

In the above dialogue, Đăm Săn and Mtao Grư both call each other *jiăng*, and listeners cannot distinguish who is older or younger. But then *jiăng* was replaced by the personal pronoun *o\ng* (you – second person, singular). In a social or intimate situation, Ê-đê people also use the personal pronoun *ih* (you, brother/sister – second person, singular) to replace *jia\ng*. But as Đăm Săn and Mtao Grư are preparing to fight and are treating each other as enemies, they use *o\ng* (you – second person, singular) to show disdain and hostility, not *ih* (which is a neutral or respectful expression).

See the excerpt (Nguyễn Hữu Thấu, 2003a: 33; Nguyễn Hữu Thấu, 2003b: 33):

H'~I| - *Ya mnơ\ng ih Jia\ng hiu koh, ơ jia\ng?*

HỒ NHỊ - Oh ***jia\ng***, what's your intention to come here?

MTAO GRU\ - *Káo hriê]hurn kơ jia\ng káo Dăm Săn, mô/ jia\ng ah. Ti jia\ng nao ara\ anei?*

MTAO GRU' – Hi wife of *jia\ng*, I came to visit *Dăm Săn*. Where does my *jia\ng* go?

HỒ NHỊ - *Jia\ng ih dok tuo (jia\ng of you (jia\ng) is playing swing.*

In this conversation, Hơ Nhị also called Mtao Grư *jia\ng*, and Mtao Grư called Hơ Nhị *mô/ jia\ng* (wife of a sworn brother). The Ê-đê language does not have a word for wife of a sworn brother, but only “descriptive words” as a *mô/ jia\ng* for *jia\ng* to address the wives of their sworn brothers. Example (Nguyễn Hữu Thấu, 2003a: 34; Nguyễn Hữu Thấu, 2003b: 33):

MTAO GRU\ : *Ơ mô/ jia\ng, ba brei đi\ng ha\ t káo.* (MTAO GRU\ : Hey wife of *jia\ng*, pass me the pipe).

H'~I| : *Ơ hđeh, ơ hđeh, nao ba brei đi\ng hất jia\ng!* (HỒ NHỊ : Oh children, oh you bring the pipe to the *jia\ng*).

MTAO GRU\ : *Ơ ơh, mô/ jia\ng ah, amáo káo kha\p ôh pô mka\ n ba. Ih ba hriê aseih pô kơh, káo tu.* (MTAO GRU\ : Oh no, wife of *jia\ng*, I don't like anyone else to bring it to me. I would like the wife of *jia\ng* to bring it to me.

The chieftains of the Ê-đê usually are sworn brothers and help each other. Nevertheless, it's important to acknowledge that not all *jia\ng* are virtuous. Among them, there exist malevolent *jia\ng* who exploit the absence of their brothers to seize the latter's wives. Individuals like Mtao Grư and Mtao Mxây fall into this category. The provided passage serves as an illustrative instance, portraying the scene wherein Mtao Grư devises a scheme to wrongfully claim Hơ Nhị while Dăm Săn is absent.

Evidently, the Ê-đê language comprises a modest assortment of distinctive pronouns. Despite their limited number, these pronouns hold considerable prominence within traditional society as exemplified in the Dăm Săn epic. Broadly speaking, these terms adhere to Ê-đê linguistic conventions and find application both within familial contexts and broader society. They facilitate communication with a blend of politeness, neutrality, and intimacy, accommodating various levels of emotional proximity.

Nowadays, the utilization of this system of special pronouns within Ê-đê communication has markedly dwindled. The once prominent special pronouns *juk* and *nuê* have become scarcely employed as forms of direct address, even though the practice of *c\ uê nuê* (levirate marriage) persists, albeit infrequently. Presently, the Ê-đê people have transitioned towards a trend of addressing individuals by their names, subsequently interchanging them with the more conventional pair of personal pronouns *káo* (I – first person, singular) and *ih* (he/she – third person, singular). This shift has become commonplace in contemporary usage.

3. Discussion

3.1. Cultural characteristics of the Ê-đê people through special pronouns: A reflection of the characteristics of matriarchal culture

The Ê-đê are a representative matrilineal ethnic group in the Central Highlands. The features of their matriarchal culture are evident in the terminology they use to address kinship relations, as well as in special words present in the Ê-đê language. The count of kinship words pertaining to the mother's side is greater than those for the father's side. Please refer to the table provided below:

Table 1: Glossary of Kinship Words Originated from Mother Branch and Father Branch

Mother's Side	Father's Side
<i>amiêt</i> (younger brother of mother)	<i>mneh</i> (younger brother of father)
<i>awa</i> (elder brother of mother)	
<i>apro\ng</i> (elder sister of mother)	<i>apro\ng</i> (elder sister/brother of father)
<i>amiêt awa</i> (all brothers of mother)	
<i>aneh</i> (younger sister of mother)	<i>aneh</i> (younger sister of father)
<i>ami\ pro\ng</i> (elder sister of mother)	
<i>ama pro\ng</i> (husbands of elder sister of mother)	
<i>ama aneh</i> (husbands of younger sister of mother)	
<i>adam dei</i> (uncle, brothers of mother)	
<i>juk</i> (sisters of husband of mother)	<i>knai</i> (brothers, sisters of wife of father)

The investigation also revealed a noteworthy trend: the prevalence of words denoting kinship relations employed in addressing individuals in the Ê-đê language primarily adheres to the maternal lineage (*ami\, awa, amiêt, amiêt awa, adam dei, juk, ung dei*), whereas the word *knai* (father's brother-in-law) is the only unique one on the father's side. In addition, the role and appearance of *ama* (father) in the epic *Đăm Săn* is very limited.

After analyzing the use of kinship words in addressing, it became evident that the traditional Ê-đê society placed a significant emphasis on the roles of female family members. This phenomenon is mirrored in real life, where cultural customs have elevated the status of Ê-đê women to be above that of men. This distinction is manifested through the utilization of paired pronouns, such as *aduôn aê* (grandmother-grandfather), *ami\ ama*

(mother-father), and *amai ayo\ng* (sister-brother). Furthermore, within the Ê-đê community, during crucial events, the roles of mothers, uncles, and brothers (referred to as *adam dei*) hold paramount importance, irreplaceable by anyone else. For instance, in matters of marriage, it is women who actively seek potential partners. Upon finding someone they fancy, they enlist the help of their *adam dei* to initiate discussions with the groom's family. Similarly, within the groom's family, the responsibility of discussing his marriage lies with his mother and sisters. This dynamic is exemplified in the epic tale of Đăm Săn, where Hơ Nhị's family dispatched their *adam dei* to negotiate with Đăm Săn's family for their marriage. On the other side, the Đăm Săn family's sisters (Hơ Ng) and younger sister (Hơ Lị) directly engaged in marriage discussions with Hơ Nhị's family.

See the following excerpt (Nguyễn Hữu Thấu, 2003a: 11; Nguyễn Hữu Thấu, 2003b: 5):

H'~I - *O Y Dhing woi, o Y Ling woi, o Y Dhang woi, o Y Lang woi, êgao êgao [ăng jang koh anak tuê kăi kăn mào! O Y Suh woi, o Y Sah woi, hriê tơ anei!.* (Oh Y Dhing! Oh Y Ling! Oh Y Dhang! Oh Y Lang!! Outside the village gate, no strangers are executed! Oh Y Suh! Oh Y Sah! Come in here!).

Y DHING – *Ya klei ih iêu hmei koh, o adei? Ya klei ih kru hmei koh, o adei?.* (Oh dear, is there something that you keep calling, is there something that you keep calling us, baby?) [Repetition was kept as in original text].

H'~I - Kâo iêu brua\ anei klei đăm amào, kâo iêu brua\ adih klei đăm mào. Hing kơ yang, ang kơ cu\, hmu\ yu\ ngo\ arăng la] H'~i\, H'Bhi\ kyâo lu êguh, djuh lu êdram, dam lu adei lu.

HỒ NHỊ: I call you not for this work, nor for that. Fame to the gods, renowned throughout the mountains, everywhere you listen to the east and west, people say Hơ Nhị, Hơ Bhi are like a root of a tree with many branches, like a tree with many branches, many brothers, many relatives.

Below is the dialogue between Đăm Săn's sisters and Hơ Nhị's *adam dei* (Nguyễn Hữu Thấu, 2003a:13; Nguyễn Hữu Thấu, 2003b: 8):

H'LI - Hey *ayo\ng adei*, *jap jing H'LI* - *O ayo\ng adei, jap jing Jing đĩ\ pra, khua êmua đĩ\ sang asào, đĩ\ sang kâo sa [ăng dluh anei?*

HỒ LỊ - Brothers, what happened to the gong climbing the kitchen truss, the nobles came to this humble dog's house? All of a sudden, you guys are condescending to come to my house this time?

Y DHING - *{oih, amai adei ah! Đăm rua\t prah êjam pram êruê!*

Y DHING - Oh, please do not rush to fill in the forest to block the way.

In the preceding dialogue, Hơ Nhị summons her *adam dei* (elder and younger brothers) to Đăm Săn's residence to request his hand in marriage. Moving to the subsequent

exchange, it was Hơ Ng and Hơ Lị (the older and younger sisters) of Đăm Săn who received Hơ Nhị's *adam dei*. This illustrates the significant role played by women; even their brothers hold significance when they align themselves with the women's intentions. Within the Ê-đê family structure, the *adam dei* occupies an exceptionally vital position, second only to the woman who holds the role of the host (*ana go*). Besides their responsibility for proposing suitable males as husbands for their sisters and nieces (sisters' children), the *adam dei* also represents their maternal family line in various matters like funerals, land transactions, legal matters, and more. In situations of childbirth among Ê-đê women, it is the *adam dei* who arranges for midwives.

A close bond is also established between uncles and their nephews (the sons of the sisters). They share common interests in matters involving women and grandchildren. Following a customary pattern, when an uncle passes away, his nephew assumes the responsibility of marrying the deceased's widow on the uncle's behalf. Similarly, in the event of a grandson's demise, the uncle takes on the role of marrying the grandson's widow, representing the grandson and attending to the welfare of the widow. This practice results in uncles using the term "wife" freely to refer to the wives of any nephews who address them as uncle. This awareness often takes root early in a child's life, as Anne De Hautecloque-Howe points out: "This awareness can manifest very early in the child's life" (2004: 171).

Hence, within the context of kinship relationships, it can be asserted that "The relationship between brother/sister and brother/sister is perhaps the most important, the most diverse, and also the most complex of all the relationships that exist in the family that an individual can have with his fellow human beings" (Anne De Hautecloque-Howe, 2004: 161).

The Ê-đê women also held responsibility for their *adam dei*. If the *adam dei* already had families of their own and committed any transgressions resulting in conviction by the customary court, it was their mothers and sisters who were held accountable for paying the fines, not their wives. The mothers and sisters acted as custodians of their brothers' possessions. According to Ê-đê customary law, if an unmarried son possessed wealth, he was required to entrust it to his parents or sisters for safekeeping. Conversely, a married man was prohibited from appropriating the property of his wife and daughter and transferring it to his nieces. Of utmost importance, he was absolutely forbidden from pilfering the belongings of his sisters and nieces to benefit his wife and children. This transgression was regarded as a severe offense by the Ê-đê community, demanding legal intervention (Ngô Đức Thịnh et al., 2001, articles 182 and 183).

When an Ê-đê woman passes away, if the woman's family lacks someone to take on the role of providing for the family, the husband will be required to leave his wife's household and return to his mother's residence. If he chooses to marry another wife, it is acceptable;

however, if he does not enter into another marriage, his mother and sisters will assume the responsibility of caring for him, specifically tending to his *adam dei*. Upon the passing of *adam dei*'s mother and sisters, the nieces step in to fulfill the caretaking role for the family's *adam dei* in their place.

The Ê-đê community adheres to a matrilineal system, which implies that besides inheriting possessions and wealth, and taking the lead in marriage arrangements, a woman, after becoming a man's spouse, consequently obliges the husband to align with the practices of her family. Children are also mandated to carry their mother's surname. This framework consequently prohibits unions between cousins from the same maternal lineage, while it permits marriages between cousins originating from maternal and paternal sides. Historically, the Ê-đê culture consistently promoted unions between the offspring of sisters and brothers.

The Ê-đê people possess a distinct manner of addressing family members, particularly within the context of spouses and children. In instances where a family welcomes the birth of a baby boy, the wife may refer to her husband as *ama êkei ðiêt* (the father of the boy). This appellation typically ceases once the child attains school-age status. During the formative years of their children, parents frequently employ endearing and affectionate monikers, such as *mniê ðiêt* or *bu* (for daughters), *êkei ðiêt*, *dam* (for young boys), *edam* (for adolescent boys).

In contrast to the Vietnamese language, the Ê-đê kinship vocabulary employed for addressing family members is relatively concise, and its application is more limited. Nonetheless, this restricted usage carries a remarkable specificity and considerable diversity. These distinctive modes of address to a great extent mirror the cultural attributes of the Ê-đê ethnic community, which is characterized by its matriarchal societal structure.

3.2. *Protecting the custom of Juê nuê marriage*

The Ê-đê customary law consists of 236 articles, with eight of them directly pertaining to the practice of *Juê nuê*. This custom is referred to as *klei Juê nuê* or *bi Juê*, which metaphorically signifies the act of mending a frayed rope. The term *nuê* specifically alludes to the sprout emerging at the base of a withered tree, taking the place of the former trunk that has deteriorated and perished (Ngô Đức Thịnh, 2001: 228).

With this provision, when a wife or husband passes away, the surviving partner will be allowed to remarry with an individual of the same ethnicity as the deceased. In the Ê-đê culture, once a husband and wife are united, they refer to each other as *ayo\ng - adei*. However, if they are a levirate couple, they must address each other as *nuê*. Initially, this

practice was confined to marriage relationships involving sisters-in-law and brothers-in-law. In this context, if the elder sister passed away, the younger sister would marry her late sister's husband. Similarly, when a husband passed away, it was customary for the deceased's brother to marry the widow, or vice versa. Over time, the practice of levirate marriage extended beyond the confines of relationships between sisters-in-law and brothers-in-law. Consequently, if a grandmother passed away, her granddaughter could also marry the deceased grandmother's husband. Likewise, if a grandfather passed away, his grandson, or the son of his sister, could step in and take the place of the dead. Article 98 of the Ê-đê customary law stipulates: *Djiê amiêt lo\ Juê ho\ng amuôn, djiê aduôn Juê ho\ng Jô* (If the uncle passes away, his nephew will marry his wife; if a grandmother passes away, her granddaughter will marry the deceased's husband). This concept is also illustrated in the epic *Đăm Săn* (Nguyễn Hữu Thầu, 2003a: 69; Nguyễn Hữu Thầu, 2003b: 77) in the following manner:

Y Suh - If an uncle passes away, his nephew is obligated to practice levirate marriage with the wife of the deceased. Similarly, if a grandmother passes away, her grandchild will engage in levirate marriage with the husband of the deceased. In the event of an individual's demise, the next in line of succession is responsible for participating in levirate marriage with the spouse of the deceased. I will purchase the older sister, seek the companionship of the younger sister, and engage the offspring of affluent chiefs. We gather here like bees drawn to water, wasps to flowers, akin to young boys and girls approaching betel nut and medicine.

In the *Đăm Săn* Epic, Mtao Kla and Hbia Klu are a married couple. Hbia Klu serves as the *aduôn* (grandmother) of Hơ Nhị and Hơ Bhi. Consequently, upon the passing of Hbia Klu, Hơ Nhị, acting on behalf of Hbia Klu, participates in levirate marriage with her grandfather, Mtao Kla. *Đăm Săn* is the son of Mtao Kla's sister, and he addresses Mtao Kla as "uncle". Subsequently, when Mr. Mtao Kla passes away, *Đăm Săn* practices levirate marriage with Hơ Nhị.

The traditional Ê-đê society distinctly delineated the rights of those involved in levirate marriages, which were predominantly centered around women's rights. As an illustration, in cases where Hơ ng lacked a successor for Hơ Nhị, she was required to acquire a *nuê* through purchase, borrowing, or renting. This not only entailed a financial obligation for the acquisition or rental but also resulted in her being excluded from receiving wedding provisions from the bride's family. Consequently, Hơ ng counseled *Đăm Săn*, the grandson, to assume the role of a *nuê*. Given *Đăm Săn*'s young age during this time, Hơ ng instructed Hơ Nhị to provide guidance and await *Đăm Săn*'s maturity. She conveyed to Hơ Nhị (Nguyễn Hữu Thầu, 2003a: 70; Nguyễn Hữu Thầu, 2003b: 79):

H'O\NG - Oh juk, oh juk, hđeh ih H'O\NG - O **juk**, o **juk**, hđeh ih Jung ba, khua ih Jung guôn.

Hơ Âng - Oh juk, oh juk, nuê is still young, juk, please guide, juk wait for the day nuê grow up!

Thus, the way of addressing by special pronouns reflects clearly the custom of *Juê nuê* in marriage, a typical cultural feature of the Ê-đê people.

3.3. Clarifying roles in communication

In the account of Đăm Săn's journey to capture the Sun Goddess, where he eventually perished in the Black Wax Land, four women – Hơ Nhị (wife), Hơ Bhi (sister-in-law), Hơ Ng (sister), and Hơ Lị (sister) – mourned for him as recounted below (Nguyễn Hữu Thấu, 2003a: 66-67; Nguyễn Hữu Thấu, 2003b: 74-75):

HỒ NHỊ - Oh nuê, the banyan tree is no more, the klong tree has fallen! Across the Bih region and the Mnông region, the once wealthy and mighty chief, donning a turban upon his head and bearing a bouquet of flowers on his shoulders like you, nuê, has vanished. Nuê, your affluence led to an abundance of elephants and gongs, with hopes that you would draw your final breath embraced by kin, your resting place visited daily. I never envisioned nuê's descent into the treacherous Black Wax Land!

H'O\NG - O **adei**, o **adei**, knuê **ih** sah pro\ng mdro\ng ana đua kurn kdu\ng. Tơ **ih** jing mna\ Bih, kâo amâo brei ih kđông... Bi anei amâo tuôm [o# so# ala\, djiê adei amâo lo\ tuôm amai.

HỒ ÂNG - Oh my dear, my dear, in the past, when you held the position of a prosperous and influential chief, with a turban gracing your head and flowers adorning your shoulders, if ever you were held captive by the Bih, I would have allowed you to remain detained; if you were imprisoned by the Mnông, I would have let you be chained. But now, you and I no longer cross paths, and you departed without casting a final glance my way!

H'LI - O **ayo\ng**, o **ayo\ng**, ami\ la] amâo gô, ama mtô gut, **ih** dja\ đĩ\ng wut tol djiê aseï. **Kâo** ble\ êa adu\ng bo\ Jhiên mnga, luh êa mta bo\ Jhiên kdrua\, luh êa ala\ bo\ aseï mlei yoh, **ayo\ng** ah.

HỒ LỊ - Hey brother, your mother taught you, but now you do not listen; your father orders, but you do not obey. You throw the flute – poor you! I cry for you; my tears fill porcelain cups. I cry for you; my body overflows with tears, my dear.

In the given discourse, Hơ Nhị addresses Đăm Săn as *nuê*. Subsequently, Hơ Nhị employs the pair of personal pronouns *kâo-ih* for addressing. Here, *kâo* is interpreted as

“me”, and *ih* is taken to mean *nuê* or you. *Hơ ng* refers to Đăm Săn as *adei*, refers to herself as *kao*, and employs *ih* in place of *adei*. Thus, *ko* signifies “older sister”, and *ih* signifies “younger brother”. On the other hand, *Hơ Lị* addresses Đăm Săn as *ayo\ng* (older brother), denotes herself as *kao*, and substitutes *ih* for *ayo\ng*. In this context, *kâo* is understood as “younger brother”, and *ih* denotes “elder brother”.

Furthermore, apart from the aforementioned usage, the Ê-đê language also employs proper names for addressing, followed by the substitution of personal pronouns. This mode of address serves to differentiate the roles and relationships among the participants engaged in communication.

The manner of addressing in communication distinctly mirrors the traits of ethnic culture. While Vietnamese individuals often conscientiously employ kinship terms in lieu of personal pronouns during addresses, reserving personal pronouns for situations falling under formal communication contexts (such as rituals, gatherings, and educational settings), the Ê-đê people within the context of the Đăm Săn Epic consistently utilize personal pronouns to denote their roles. The pervasive use of personal pronouns in the Ê-đê language, both in general and within the fabric of the Epic of Đăm Săn, arises from its capacity to mitigate expressive subtleties. The Ê-đê people’s practice of combining distinctive kinship words with personal pronouns during addresses serves to delineate communication dynamics sharply in a unique manner. This practice also serves as a testament to the cultural distinctiveness inherent to the Ê-đê ethnic community.

4. Conclusion

The special pronouns in the Ê-đê language mostly pertain to terms related to kinship relations. From a pragmatic perspective, they are used not only to address family and kinship relationships but also in social interactions. These words serve not only as a means of addressing but also as a way to convey interpersonal relationships, attitudes, and emotional nuances. Much like other pronouns in the Ê-đê language system, special pronouns are also used with specific words (personal pronouns) during communication. This is because those special words fundamentally denote kinship or temporary social relations for addressing purposes. This usage not only clearly demonstrates the expressive nuances in speech and the relationship between the speaker and the listener (or the subject in question), but also partially showcases the cultural traits of the Ê-đê people. The special category of pronouns reflects the characteristics of a matriarchal society, a community that consistently bands together to uphold the customs of marriage.

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