**Culture| Johnson**

**文化|约翰逊语言专栏**

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Some languages **pay closer attention to** **family ties** than others.

有些语言更注重家庭亲属关系

Spanish, for example, has a term for your spouse’s sibling’s husband

例如，西班牙语对配偶的兄弟姐妹的丈夫都有专门的称呼

“Merry Christmas from the Family”, a country song by Robert Earl Keenreleased in 1994, tells the tale of a sprawling **festive get-together**, replete with champagne punch, carol-singing and turkey. Many listeners will recognise the chaos the narrator describes; even more than that, they may identify with his struggle to recall how he is related to the various guests. “Fred and Rita drove from Harlingen,” Mr Keen croons. “Can’t remember how I’m kin to them.”

1994年，罗伯特·厄尔·基恩（Robert Earl Keen）发行了一首乡村音乐作品《全家共度圣诞节》（“Merry Christmas from the Family”），歌词描述了一场乱哄哄的节日聚会：人们痛饮香槟，高唱颂歌，享用火鸡。许多听众都能感受到歌里唱的那种混乱无序的氛围，也可能会对他绞尽脑汁想要厘清与各位宾客之间的关系这件事情产生共鸣。基恩低声吟唱道：“佛瑞德（Fred）和丽塔（Rita）从哈灵根驾车而来，可我记不起跟他们是什么关系。”

That may **have something to do with** the English language. It is often joked that anyone around your age is a “cousin”, regardless of actual relation, and anyone older is an “uncle” or “aunt”. English is rather bare in its terms for family members. Other languages pay far more attention to the details.

这种搞不清亲戚关系的现象可能与英语本身有关。人们常开玩笑说，不管到底是啥关系，只要与你年龄相仿的人都是“cousin”，而比你长一辈的一律都叫 “uncle” 或者 “aunt”。英语对家庭成员的称谓寥寥，其他语言则更加注重具体的亲属关系和相对应的称谓。

Take “brother” and “sister”. Societies that **value age-order highly** often have different terms for older brother, older sister, younger brother and younger sister. These are ge, jie, di and mei in Mandarin (usually doubled in speech, as in didi), or ani, ane, ototo, imoto in Japanese. Though **generic alternatives** exist for certain situations (like the abstract concept of “siblings”), not specifying a specific person’s seniority in these languages would be odd.

我们可以先来看看“兄弟（brother）” 和 “姐妹（sister）”。在高度重视长幼顺序的社会，“年长的兄弟（older brother）”“年长的姐妹（older sister）”“年幼的兄弟（younger brother）”“年幼的姐妹（younger sister）”常常分别对应不同的称呼：在中文里，以上四种情况分别对应“哥、姐、弟、妹”（口语中常采用叠词形式，如弟弟），在日语里则对应ani、ane、ototo和imoto。尽管有些情况下会使用统称（例如 “兄弟姊妹”这个笼统的称呼），但在这些语言当中，不明确表示一个人的长幼尊卑会显得不合规矩。

Then take marriage relations. English just adds the rather cold -in-law to **refer to** a relationship through a spouse. French has the rather warmer beau- or belle- (belle-mère for mother-in-law, beau-frère for brother-in-law, and so on), but at least it means “beautiful” rather than implying a bureaucratic shackle.

接下来以婚姻关系为例。英语只用一个冷冰冰的后缀“-in-law”来指代通过配偶获得的亲属关系。相较而言，法语的称谓则更有温度，会在称呼前加上前缀“beau-”或者“belle-”，例如belle-mère指的是mother-in-law（配偶的母亲），beau-frère指brother-in-law（配偶的兄弟）等等。但这个前缀至少有“美丽”的意思，而并未（像英文那样）透着官腔官调，给人一种束缚感。

Other European languages have **distinct words** for the many different relatives by marriage. A Spanish-learner must memorise cuñado/cuñada, yerno, nuera, and suegro/suegra for brother-/sister-, son-, daughter- and father-/mother-in-law (the terms are similar in Portuguese). Spanish even distinguishes cuñado (brother-in-law by blood relation to your spouse) from concuñado, your spouse’s sibling’s husband—something like “co-brother-in-law”. It also has the term cuñadismo, brother-in-law-ism, or talking about things you know little about as though you were an authority—the phrase is akin to “mansplaining” in English.

其它欧洲语言则有特定的称呼来表示数量众多的姻亲亲属。学西班牙语一定要记住配偶的兄弟/姐妹是cuñado/cuñada、女婿/儿媳是yerno/nuera、配偶的父亲/母亲是suegro/suegra，而葡萄牙语的表达和西班牙语差不多。西班牙语甚至会将与配偶有血缘关系的兄弟（cuñado）与配偶的兄弟姐妹的丈夫（concuñado）相互区分，后者相当于“连襟（co-brother-in-law）”。西语中还有一个词“cuñadismo”，直译为“姻亲兄弟主义”，含义是不懂装懂；这个表达近似于英文中的“男人式说教（mansplaining）”。

Things get much more complicated from there. Arabic accounts for which side of the family the speaker’s uncles and aunts come from: an amm or amma is an uncle or aunt on your father’s side, while a khal or khala is on your mother’s. But those who marry into the family **do not marry into** those titles. Your amm’s wife does not become your amma, but is called a zawjat al-amm, “uncle’s wife”, lest you should forget which of the pair is your father’s sibling. **The same goes for** cousins, who have no distinct term, but are the son or daughter (ibnor ibna) of your amm, amma, khal or khala, as the case may be.

还有更加复杂的情况。阿拉伯语会区分父系亲属和母系亲属，比如父亲的兄弟姐妹叫做“amm（叔伯）”或者“amma（姑）”，而母亲的兄弟姐妹叫做“khal（舅）”或者“khala（姨）”；不过，这些亲属的配偶又不能直接照搬这些称呼：“amm（叔伯）”的妻子不能叫“amma（姑）”，要叫“zawjat al-amm（叔伯的妻子）”，这样你就记得住这对夫妇的哪一方是你父亲的兄弟姐妹了。表/堂兄弟姐妹的称呼方式也是一样的道理，阿拉伯语对这些人并没有特定的称呼，而是看情况分为“amm”、 “amma”、“khal”或“khala”的“ibnor/ibna”（儿子/女儿）。

Chinese makes many of the same distinctions. But its system is even more complex, as in many cases it requires the speaker to remember whether a relative is older or younger than they are, whether relatives of their parents are older or younger than they, and so forth. There are many armchair theories about the relationship between language and culture that **do not hold up to** scrutiny. The East Asian languages’ focus on seniority, however, is quite plausibly related to the importance **Confucianism** **places on** the virtue of r**especting your elders and forebears.**

汉语对称呼的区分和阿拉伯语有相似之处，不过区分的体系更加复杂。要叫出正确的称呼，还需要记住这个亲戚是否比自己年长、这个亲戚的父母辈又是否比自己的父母年长等等。很多关于语言与文化之间关系的研究都是纸上谈兵，经不起推敲。不过，东亚地区的语言都很重视长幼尊卑，很可能与儒家思想强调尊敬长辈、敬奉先祖有关。

Finally, it is a curious fact that English lacks a word to describe the crucial relationship between the parents of a married couple. Hebrew and Yiddish, though, have mehutanimand machatunim, and Spanish offers consuegrosfor this critical relationship. Anglophones, meanwhile, are forced to say something awkward like “my son’s wife’s parents”.

最后，还有一个奇葩的事情：英语没有可以用来称呼婚姻双方父母之间关系的词汇。“亲家”是很重要的关系，这在希伯来语、意第绪语和西班牙语当中分别对应“mehutanim”“machatunim”和“consuegros”；而同样的关系用英语讲就非常拗口，例如“我儿子老婆的父母”。

The focus that some cultures put on labelling every possible relation with a distinct term does not mean that those who lack those terms do not **pay heed to** familial networks. Every English-speaking family seems to have at least one armchair genealogist who can tell you that Henry Ford was a great-great-great uncle or fourth cousin five times removed. But each family also has members who couldn’t care less, waving a hand and saying “uncle” or “cousin”.

强调亲属关系的文化对每一层可能的关系都有确切的称呼，但这并不是说没有这些称呼的文化就不重视家庭关系。在英语国家，几乎每个家庭都至少有一位“家史通”，告诉你亨利·福特是你的高叔祖父或者是隔了五辈四房的远亲。但每个家庭也都会有压根不在乎这些具体关系的人，他们挥手打招呼时通通叫“叔叔”或“老表”。

All languages permit you to describe relationships in any amount of detail your listener would like. But those that require highly specific labels for kinfolk, forcing you to recall the details every time you speak, surely etch those facts deep in the mind. That makes an Arabic singer much less likely to croon “can’t remember how I’m kin to them” than an American one.

所有语言都可以根据听众的需求程度来描述人与人之间的关系。但是那些对亲属关系叫法精准、迫使人们每说一遍都要仔细思考亲属关系的语言无疑让人将具体的关系铭记在心。因此，跟美国歌手相比，阿拉伯语歌手不大可能哼唱“可我记不起跟他们是什么关系”。

拓展：

萨皮尔是沃尔夫的导师，萨皮尔认为语言决定人们的思维和感受，人其实在很大程度上生活在某种特定的语言中，因为我们可以这样理解，“现实世界”在很大程度上建立在该社会的语言规范之中的。作为学生，沃尔夫进一步充实了萨皮尔的观点并发展成为了一门系统的理论形态，沃尔夫提出了三个假说，第一，语言会影响人对客观世界的感知；第二，语言会影响人的世界观；第三，语言会影响人的思维方式。