

# KINSHIP TERMS OF THE BLACK TAI PEOPLE

by

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## 0. Introduction.

The Black Tai people are native to North Vietnam and Laos<sup>1)</sup>, but at the time of the 1954 armistice, refugees emigrated to the South and to Laos.

In a previous study, the following was reported: "From the viewpoint of structure manifest in terminology, the Black Tai kinship system appears bilateral. Descent, however, is patrilineal..."<sup>2)</sup> The results of this current investigation, while showing parallel patterns in development of terms, nevertheless show a large degree of contrast between patrilateral terms and matrilateral ones.

We will begin our study at the first ascending generation, proceed upward, return to Ego's generation, and then proceed down-

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1) Frank M. Lebar, Gerald C. Hickey, and John K. Musgrave, *Ethnic Groups of Mainland Southeast Asia*, New Haven, Human Relations Area Files Press (1964), pp. 221-222.

2) *Ibid.* p. 222.

ward. Lastly, we will look at the terms Ego uses for his spouse's family.<sup>3)</sup>

## 1. Ascending Generations.

### 1.1 First Ascending Generation.

(See Diagram 1)

*Aay*<sup>3</sup> 'father' and *em*<sup>4</sup> 'mother' are the base terms for all others in the ascending generations. To these terms are added others to denote relationship. The patrilineal and matrilineal terms are the same for parents' older siblings: *aay*<sup>3</sup> *luy*<sup>4</sup> can refer to 'father's elder brother, mother's elder brother, father's elder sister's husband, or mother's elder sister's husband'; while *em*<sup>4</sup> *paa*<sup>3</sup> refers to 'father's elder sister, mother's elder sister, father's elder brother's wife, or mother's elder brother's wife'.<sup>4)</sup> However, there is not this parallel development in the terms for their younger siblings, where each has a distinct term:

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- 3) The research for this paper was done in Nhatrang, South Vietnam, between May, 1969, and March, 1970. The principle Black Tai informant was a 72 year old woman, Bac Thi Pieng, formerly from Muong Sai, North Vietnam, now residing in Tung Nghia, South Vietnam. Other help was received from 1) her husband, Bac Cam Quyen, aged 68, formerly from Thuan Chau district, Son La province, North Vietnam, now residing in Tung Nghia, South Vietnam; 2) their daughter, Bac Thi Hoa, now residing in Nhatrang, South Vietnam; 3) her husband, Cam Duc Hanh, aged 33, formerly from Muong Muok, North Vietnam, now residing in Nhatrang; and 4) Lo Van Muon, aged 37, formerly from Muong Sop Cop, North Vietnam, now residing in Nhatrang.

I also wish to acknowledge the help of Marilyn Bergman Gregerson and Dorothy M. Thomas in the writing of this paper.

The symbols used here to represent Black Tai speech are the phonemic symbols used by the author and her husband in their "Black Tai Phonemes, with Reference to White Tai". (*Anthropological Linguistics*, March, 1970) These are the voiceless stops /p, t, c, k, kw,<sup>?</sup>/, voiced stops /b, d/, aspirated stop /th/, fricatives /f, s, x, xw, h/, nasals /m, n, ñ, ŋ, ŋw/, liquids /v, w, y, l/, simple vowels /a, aa, i, e, ε, f, ə, u, o, ə/, and vowel glides /iə, fə, uə/. Since there is no contrast between initial glottal and zero, the initial glottal has been omitted here for simplification.

- 4) *em*<sup>4</sup> *o*<sup>6</sup> has also been offered for PaEIBrWi (parent's elder brother's wife) as a geographic variant representing Muong Pieng and Muong Muoy.

younger brother :	Patri : aay <sup>3</sup> aaw <sup>1</sup>	Matri : aay <sup>3</sup> naa <sup>6</sup>
younger sister's husband :	aaw <sup>1</sup> xīəy <sup>1</sup>	naa <sup>6</sup> xīəy <sup>1</sup>
younger sister :	em <sup>4</sup> aa <sup>1</sup>	em <sup>4</sup> naa <sup>6</sup>
younger brother's wife :	em <sup>4</sup> luə <sup>4</sup>	naa <sup>6</sup> pəw <sup>6</sup>

In each of the parental sibling terms, *aay*<sup>3</sup> and *em*<sup>4</sup> may be used for both reference and address. Alternate forms which may be used for reference only are *pə*<sup>5</sup> 'male' and *me*<sup>5</sup> 'female' respectively. They, however, cannot be used as alternates for 'father' and 'mother'.<sup>5)</sup>

The terms for stepmother *em*<sup>4</sup> *naa*<sup>6</sup> and stepfather *aay*<sup>3</sup> *naa*<sup>6</sup> are identical with those for mother's younger sister and mother's younger brother respectively. However, the referential alternates may not be used for step-parents.

### 1.2 Second Ascending Generation.

(See Diagram 2)

Here there is more difference between the patrilineal and matrilineal sides as there is no carry-over from father's parent's terms to mother's parent's terms.<sup>6)</sup> On each side the grandparent term also refers to the siblings of the same sex. The third word in each sibling term is optional, denoting the specific relationship. Note that these optional terms are identical with the second word of the sibling terms in the first ascending generation.

The grandmothers each have two terms, use of which is governed by geographic dialect. The sister terms are shown in Diagram 2 with only *yaa*<sup>5</sup> and *thaw*<sup>3</sup>, but in the areas where grandmother is called *u*<sup>3</sup> or *naay*<sup>4</sup>, the sisters would also be called *u*<sup>3</sup> or *naay*<sup>4</sup>. Both terms for paternal grandmother are also used for husband's mother (sec. 4.2); whereas, only *em*<sup>4</sup> *naay*<sup>4</sup> is used for wife's mother (sec. 4.1).

### 1.3 Third Ascending Generation.

(See Diagram 3)

5) *pə*<sup>5</sup> *aay*<sup>3</sup> and *me*<sup>5</sup> *em*<sup>4</sup> may be used for 'father' and 'mother' respectively only when mourning the death of the parent and crying for his return.

6) In contrast with this, Hickey states "Terminologically, there is no bifurcation of kin in the third and second ascending generation", but no examples are given. Lebar, Hickey, and Musgrave, p. 222.

This generation shows outstanding evidence of patrilineal influence.<sup>7)</sup> Here father's father's father (FaFaFa) is given a term very distinct from father's father (FaFa) while the other seven great-grandparental terms are formed from the grandparental terms. Each adds *ciə*<sup>6</sup> to the grandparent term, matching sex and pattern of ascent. Thus, father's mother's father (FaMaFa) is *aay*<sup>3</sup> *pu*<sup>2</sup> 'paternal grandfather' plus *ciə*<sup>6</sup>, and both father's father's mother (FaFaMo) and father's mother's mother (FaMoMo) are *em*<sup>4</sup> *yaa*<sup>5</sup> 'paternal grandmother' plus *ciə*<sup>6</sup>.<sup>8)</sup> The two sets of matrilineal great-grandparents have identical terms.

#### 1.4 Fourth Ascending Generation.

(See Diagram 4)

Only the term for father's father's father's father (FaFaFaFa) was given firmly for this generation. The term for his wife was given with hesitation, once with *yaa*<sup>5</sup> (by Hanh) and once without (by Hoa). To date, no other terms have been found on this generation level.

#### 2.0 Ego's Generation.

##### 2.1 Nuclear Family.

(See Diagram 5)

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7) See footnote number 6.

8) Two variants were given for FaFaMo (father's father's mother): *em*<sup>4</sup> *paw*<sup>3</sup> by Hoa, and *em*<sup>4</sup> *yaa*<sup>5</sup> *paw*<sup>3</sup> by Hanh.

Here we note that Ego divides his siblings first by age in regard to himself and then by sex. In general conversation, one frequently hears only the first part, *pi*<sup>5</sup> 'older sibling' or *nɔy*<sup>6</sup> 'younger sibling' without the sex modifier. The four sex/relational modifiers are of particular interest because they will be used with other base terms on this and descending generations. The definitions here can be applied to all other uses: *caay*<sup>4</sup> 'consanguineal male', *niŋ*<sup>4</sup> 'consanguineal female', *xiɔy*<sup>1</sup> 'affinal male', and *pəw*<sup>6</sup> 'affinal female'. The latter two were also used in the first ascending generation.

Both of the older siblings have alternate terms. The older brother may also be called *aay*<sup>4</sup> or *aay*<sup>3</sup> *luəŋ*<sup>1</sup>, and the older sister *i*<sup>2</sup> or *pi*<sup>5</sup> *iəy*<sup>3</sup>. The first of each pair is used only when addressing or calling the person so named. According to Hoa, the second of each pair is used in Muong Pieng and Muong Muoy in place of the terms shown on Diagram 5.

## 2.2 Cousins.

(See Diagram 6)

The children, and their spouses, of Ego's parent's siblings are all called *laan*<sup>1</sup>. To this base term may be added the four sex/relational modifiers described above in section 2.1: *caay*<sup>4</sup>, *niŋ*<sup>4</sup>, *xiɔy*<sup>1</sup> and *pəw*<sup>6</sup>. Thus, mother's sister's son (MoSiSo) is *laan*<sup>1</sup> *caay*<sup>4</sup> and his wife is *laan*<sup>1</sup> *pəw*<sup>6</sup>. These *laan*<sup>1</sup> may also be divided into the children of father's siblings, *laan*<sup>1</sup> *pu*<sup>2</sup> or *laan*<sup>1</sup> *yaa*<sup>5</sup>, and the children of mother's siblings, *laan*<sup>1</sup> *taa*<sup>1</sup> or *laan*<sup>1</sup> *naay*<sup>4</sup>.

## 3.0 Descending Generations.

(See Diagram 7)

### 3.1 First Descending Generation.

There are three base terms used for the first descending generation. *Lu*<sup>5</sup> is Ego's child; *laan*<sup>1</sup> is Ego's sibling's child; and *len*<sup>1</sup> is Ego's parent's sibling's child's child (that is, a child of the *laan*<sup>1</sup>

presented in Ego's generation). All three are used for both consanguineal relatives and their spouses. Each of these terms may be modified by one of the four sex/relational modifiers: *caay*<sup>4</sup>, *ñiñ*<sup>4</sup>, *xiey*<sup>1</sup>, or *pəw*<sup>6</sup>. Ego's daughter is *lu*<sup>25</sup> *ñiñ*<sup>4</sup>; his nephew is *laan*<sup>1</sup> *caay*<sup>4</sup>; his father's brother's daughter's son (FaBrDaSo) is *len*<sup>1</sup> *caay*<sup>4</sup>; and his nephew's wife *laan*<sup>1</sup> *pəw*<sup>6</sup>.

### 3.2 Second Descending Generation.

There are again three base terms for the second descending generation (see Diagram 7). *Laan*<sup>1</sup> is Ego's grandchild; *len*<sup>1</sup> is his nephew or niece's child; and *lon*<sup>3</sup> is his parent's sibling's child's child's child (PaSibChChCh). The four modifying terms (section 2.1) are again used on this level with at least the *laan*<sup>1</sup>. It is possible to divide the *laan*<sup>1</sup> on this level into two groups: son's children, *laan*<sup>1</sup> *pu*<sup>2</sup> or *laan*<sup>1</sup> *yaa*<sup>5</sup>, and daughter's children, *laan*<sup>1</sup> *taa*<sup>1</sup> or *laan*<sup>1</sup> *naay*<sup>4</sup>.

### 3.3 Third Descending Generation.

On the third descending generation there are only two base terms: *len*<sup>1</sup> Ego's great-grandchild, and *lon*<sup>3</sup> his nephew or niece's grandchild.

### 3.4 Fourth Descending Generation.

For the fourth descending generation we find only one base term: *lon*<sup>3</sup> Ego's great, great-grandchild.

### 3.5 Fifth Descending Generation.

On the fifth descending generation, there is again only one term: *lo*<sup>25</sup> (or *lo*<sup>22</sup>) Ego's great, great, greatgrandchild.

### 3.6 Reoccurring Terms.

Thus we have noticed, three base terms, *laan*<sup>1</sup>, *len*<sup>1</sup>, and *lon*<sup>3</sup>, reoccur on three different generation levels. The glosses for the term *laan*<sup>1</sup> vary from 'grandchild' to 'nephew, niece (including the child of spouse's sibling)', to 'cousin'. Perhaps this could be summarized as a child of any close relative (with the exception of Ego's parents): i.e., the child of his child, his sibling (or spouse's sibling), or his parent's sibling.

The child of anyone called *laan*<sup>1</sup> would be called *len*<sup>1</sup>, also occurring on three generations. The child of anyone called *len*<sup>1</sup> (that is, the grandchild of anyone called *laan*<sup>1</sup>) would be *ln*<sup>3</sup>.

The three levels of *laan*<sup>1</sup> and of *len*<sup>1</sup> can each be modified by *pu*<sup>2</sup> or *yaa*<sup>5</sup> to show that the relationship is traced through a male. Thus, *laan*<sup>1</sup> *pu*<sup>2</sup> might be son's child, brother's child, or father's sibling's child. *Taa*<sup>1</sup> or *naay*<sup>4</sup> are used to show the relationship traced through a female; *laan*<sup>1</sup> *naay*<sup>4</sup> would be daughter's child, sister's child, or mother's sibling's child.

#### 4.0 Spouse's Kin.

Now we will turn from Ego's own relatives to his spouse's relatives. First we will look at a male ego's terms for his wife and her family, then at a female ego's terms for her husband and his family.

#### 4.1 Wife's Family.

(See Diagram 8)

*Mia*<sup>4</sup> 'wife' does not occur as part of any other term in the Black Tai kinship system. As was mentioned in section 1.2 *em*<sup>4</sup> *naay*<sup>4</sup> 'wife's mother' is an alternate for 'maternal grandmother'. *Aay*<sup>3</sup> *taa*<sup>1</sup> is the general term of reference and address for 'wife's father' although *po*<sup>5</sup> *taa*<sup>1</sup> is an alternate term of reference. Both sets of wife's grandparents have the same terms as Ego's maternal grandparents, *aay*<sup>3</sup> *thaw*<sup>3</sup> and *em*<sup>4</sup> *thaw*<sup>3</sup>. Wife's siblings' terms are formed from a combination of Ego's siblings' base terms *pi*<sup>5</sup> and *noŋ*<sup>6</sup> plus mother's siblings' modifying terms. The children of wife's siblings have the same terms as the children of Ego's own siblings: *laan*<sup>1</sup> modified by the four sex/relational terms discussed in section 2.1.

#### 4.2 Husband's Family.

(See Diagram 9)

Whereas the terms of wife's family reflect the maternal line, the terms of a female ego for her husband's family reflect her paternal line. Husband's parents' terms are similar to paternal grandparent terms. Here, the *pə<sup>5</sup>* and *mə<sup>5</sup>* terms of reference can substitute for *aay<sup>3</sup>* and *em<sup>4</sup>* respectively; whereas, they cannot be used of the grandparents. Husband's mother has only one of the two terms available for paternal grandmother.<sup>9)</sup>

Like wife's siblings, the husband's siblings' terms are a composite with the base terms being those of Ego's own siblings. However, the modifying terms here are those of father's siblings as seen in section 1.1. As the terms for father's elder siblings are identical with those for mother's elder siblings, so the terms for husband's elder siblings are identical with those for wife's elder siblings. Likewise, the differences in the parents' younger siblings' terms are reflected in those for the younger siblings of husband and wife.

### 5.0 Glossary.

<i>aa<sup>1</sup></i>	younger sister of father, grandfather, or husband
<i>aaw<sup>1</sup></i>	younger brother of father, grandfather, or husband
<i>aay<sup>3</sup></i>	male of any ascending generation
<i>aay<sup>4</sup></i>	older brother (term of address)
<i>caay<sup>4</sup></i>	consanguineal male in Ego's or lower generation
<i>ciə<sup>6</sup></i>	great-grandparent excepting FaFaFa
<i>em<sup>4</sup></i>	female of any ascending generation
<i>fuə<sup>1</sup></i>	husband
<i>i<sup>2</sup></i>	older sister (term of address)
<i>ïəy<sup>3</sup></i>	older sister
<i>laan<sup>1</sup></i>	cousin, nephew, niece, grandchild
<i>len<sup>1</sup></i>	child of <i>laan<sup>1</sup></i>
<i>lon<sup>3</sup></i>	child of any <i>len<sup>1</sup></i>
<i>lo<sup>25</sup></i>	(or <i>lo<sup>22</sup></i> ) great, great, great-grandchild
<i>luə<sup>4</sup></i>	wife of father's younger brother or of husband's younger brother

9) However, there has been geographic variance reported by Hoa saying that Muong La uses *em<sup>4</sup> u<sup>3</sup>* while Muong Pieng and Muong Muoy use *em<sup>4</sup> yaa<sup>5</sup>*.



- lueŋ<sup>1</sup> older brother  
 luŋ<sup>4</sup> older brother of parent, grandparent, or spouse  
 lu<sup>25</sup> child  
 me<sup>5</sup> term of reference for female of first ascending  
     generation  
 miə<sup>4</sup> wife  
 naa<sup>6</sup> younger sibling of mother, grandmother, or wife  
 naay<sup>4</sup> maternal grandmother, wife's mother  
 nəŋ<sup>6</sup> younger sibling, spouse's younger sibling  
 n̄iŋ<sup>4</sup> consanguineal female in Ego's or lower generation  
 o<sup>6</sup> parent's older brother's wife  
 paa<sup>3</sup> older sister of parent, grandparent, or spouse  
 paw<sup>3</sup> father's father's father, or husband's father's father  
 pəw<sup>6</sup> affinal female  
 pi<sup>5</sup> older sibling  
 pɔ<sup>5</sup> term of reference for male of first ascending generation  
 pu<sup>2</sup> paternal grandfather, paternal grandfather's brother,  
     father's mother's father, husband's father  
 pən<sup>2</sup> FaFaFaFa (father's father's father's father)  
 taa<sup>1</sup> wife's father  
 thaw<sup>3</sup> maternal grandparent, maternal grandparent's sibling,  
     maternal great-grandparent, wife's grandparent  
 u<sup>3</sup> paternal grandmother, husband's mother  
 xiəy<sup>1</sup> affinal male  
 yaa<sup>5</sup> paternal grandmother, paternal great-grandmother,  
     paternal grandparent's sister

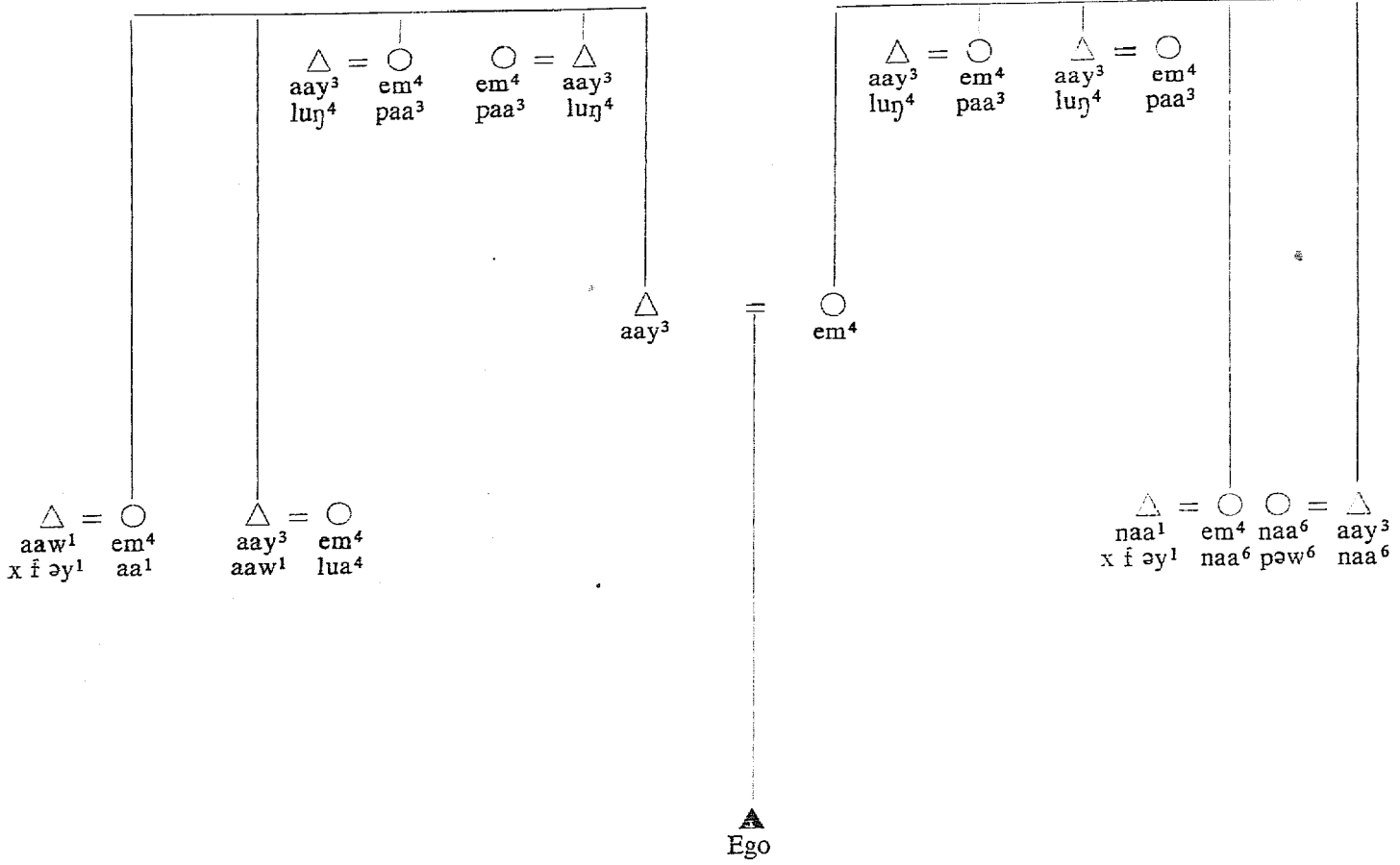


Diagram 1. First Ascending Generation.



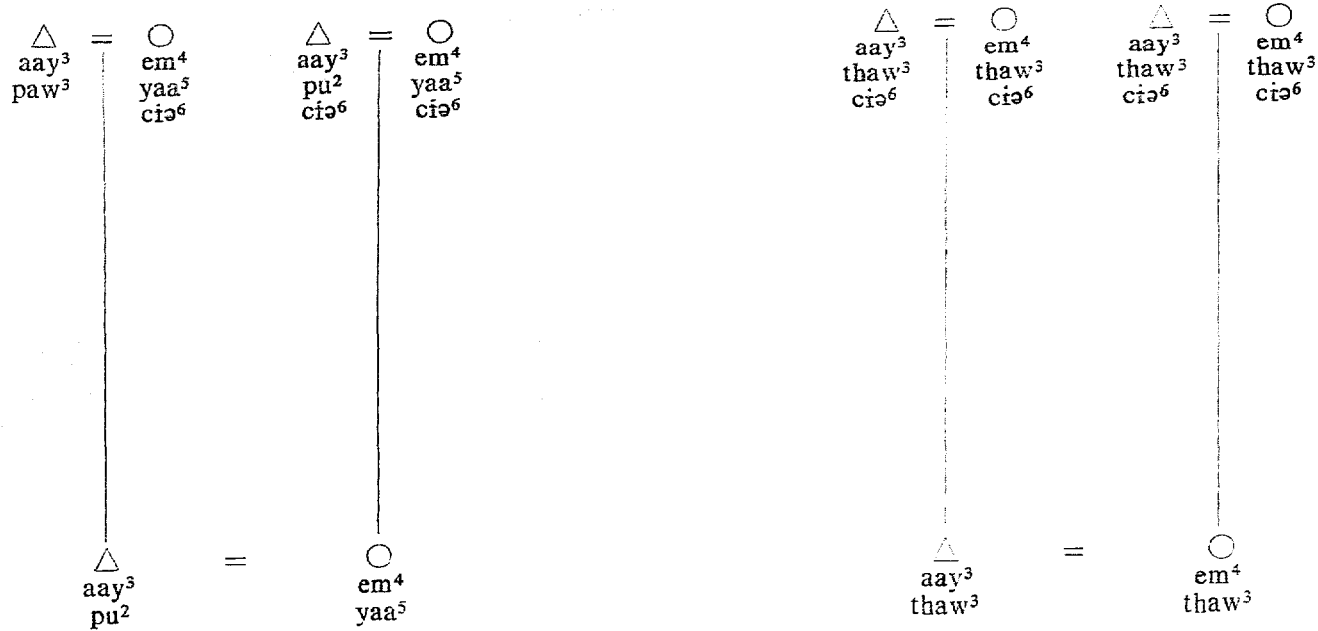


Diagram 3. Third Ascending Generation.

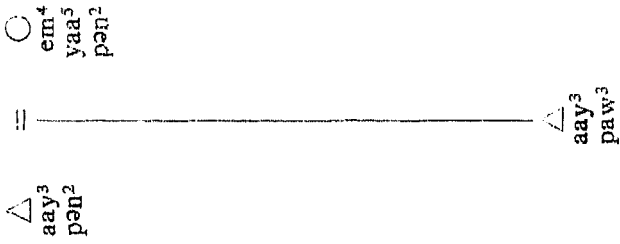


Diagram 4. Fourth Ascending Generation.

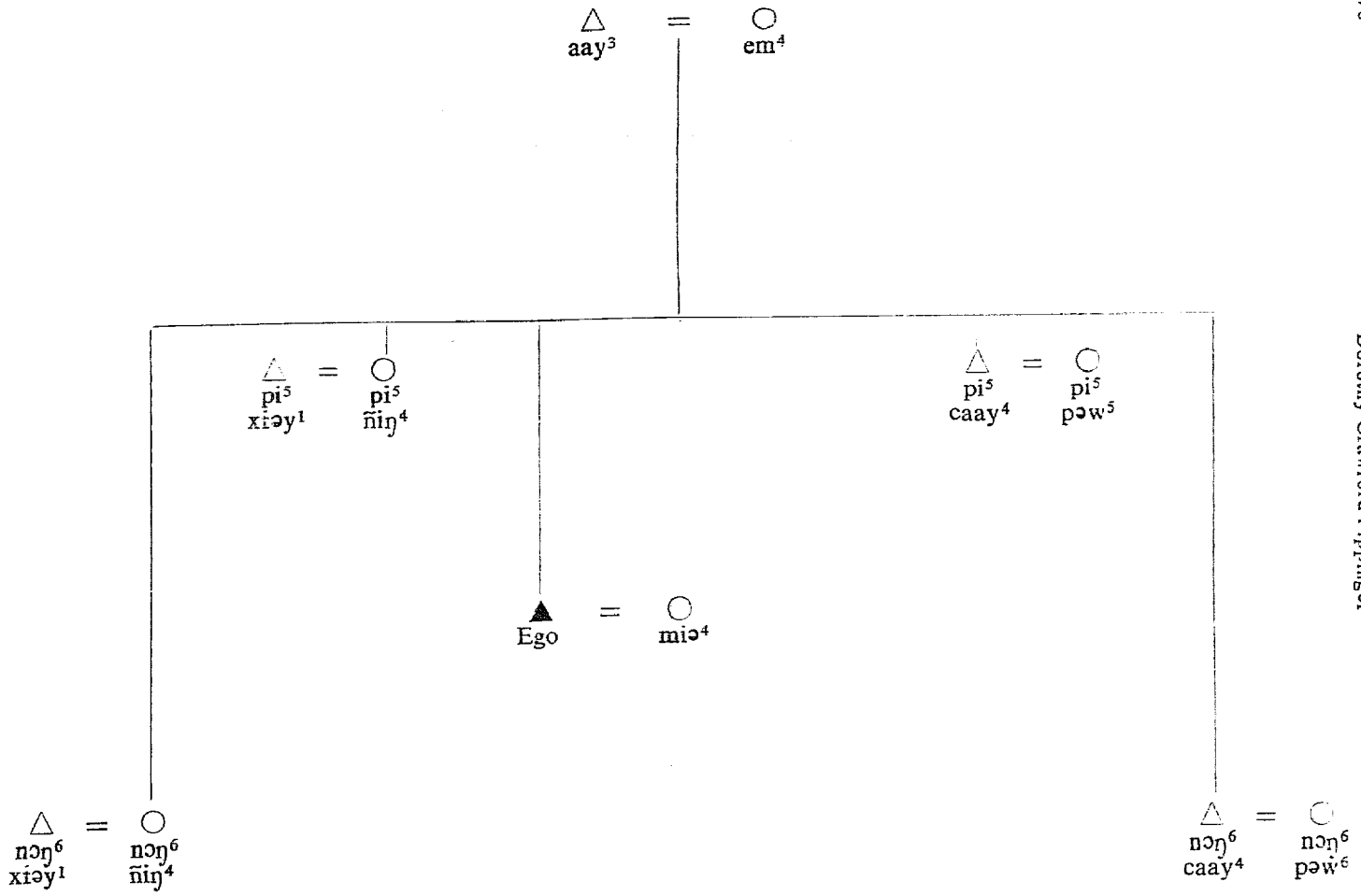


Diagram 5. Ego's Generation: Nuclear Family.

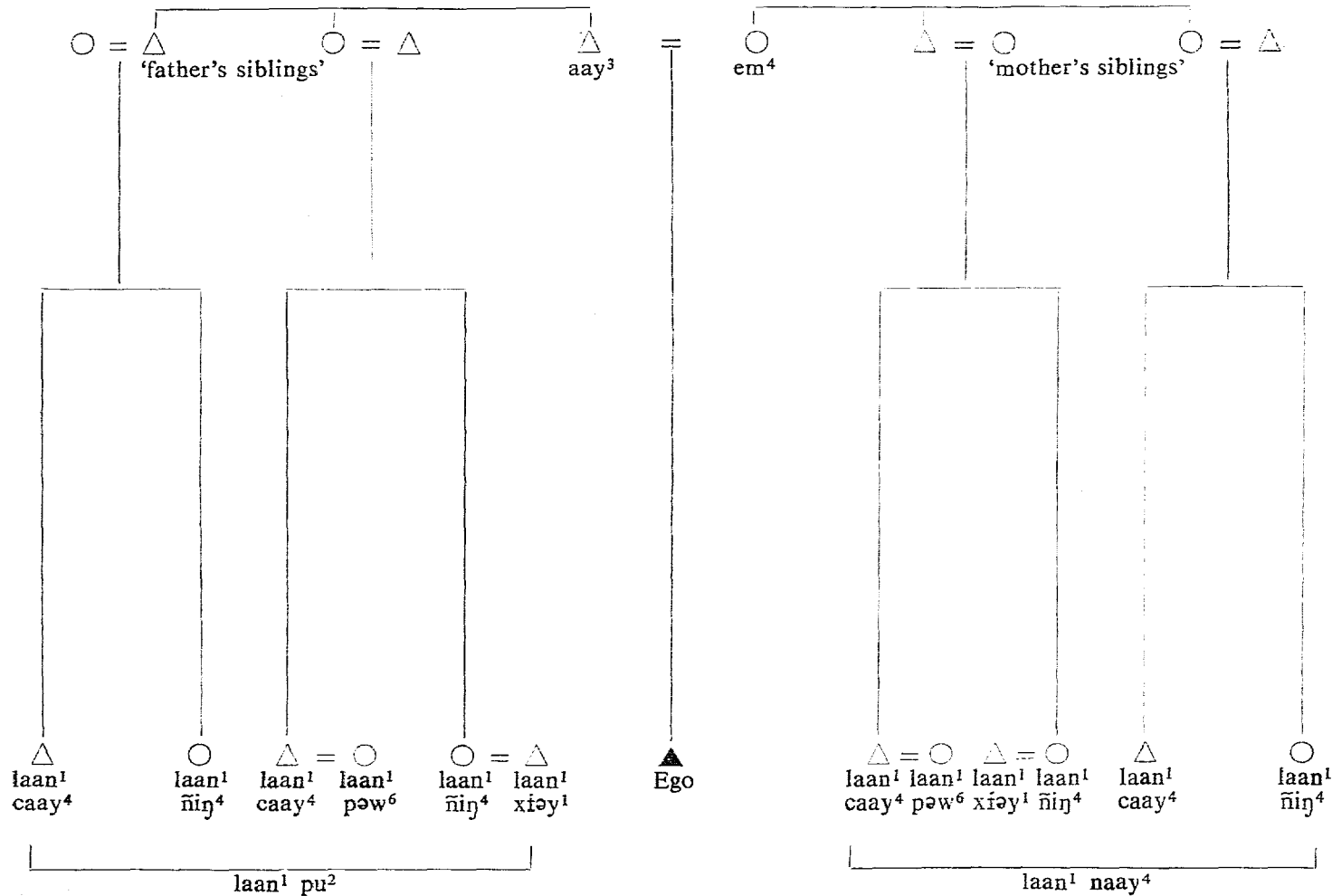


Diagram 6. Ego's Generation: Cousins.

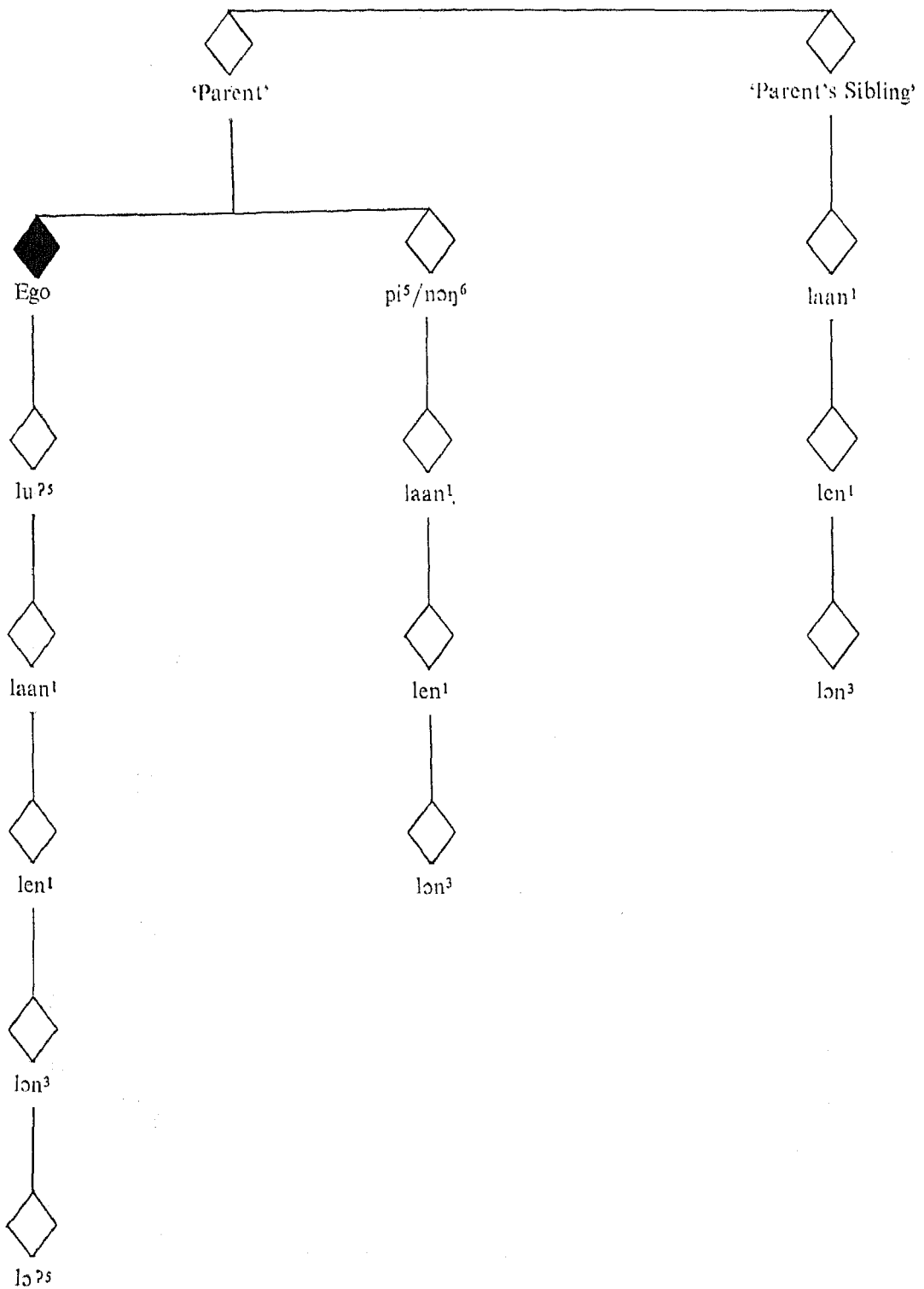


Diagram 7. Ego's Generation and 5 Descending Generations, Simplified.



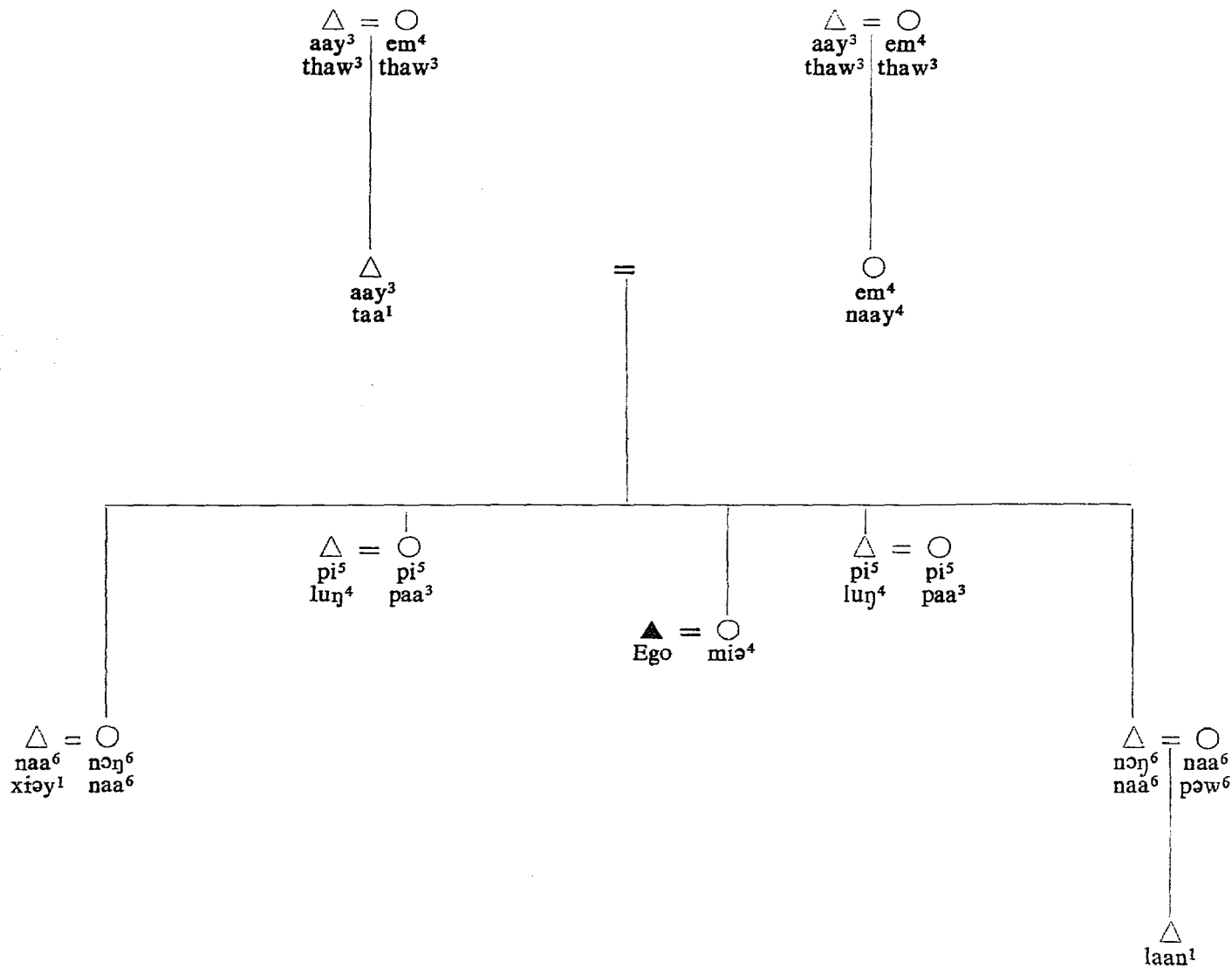


Diagram 8. Wife's family.

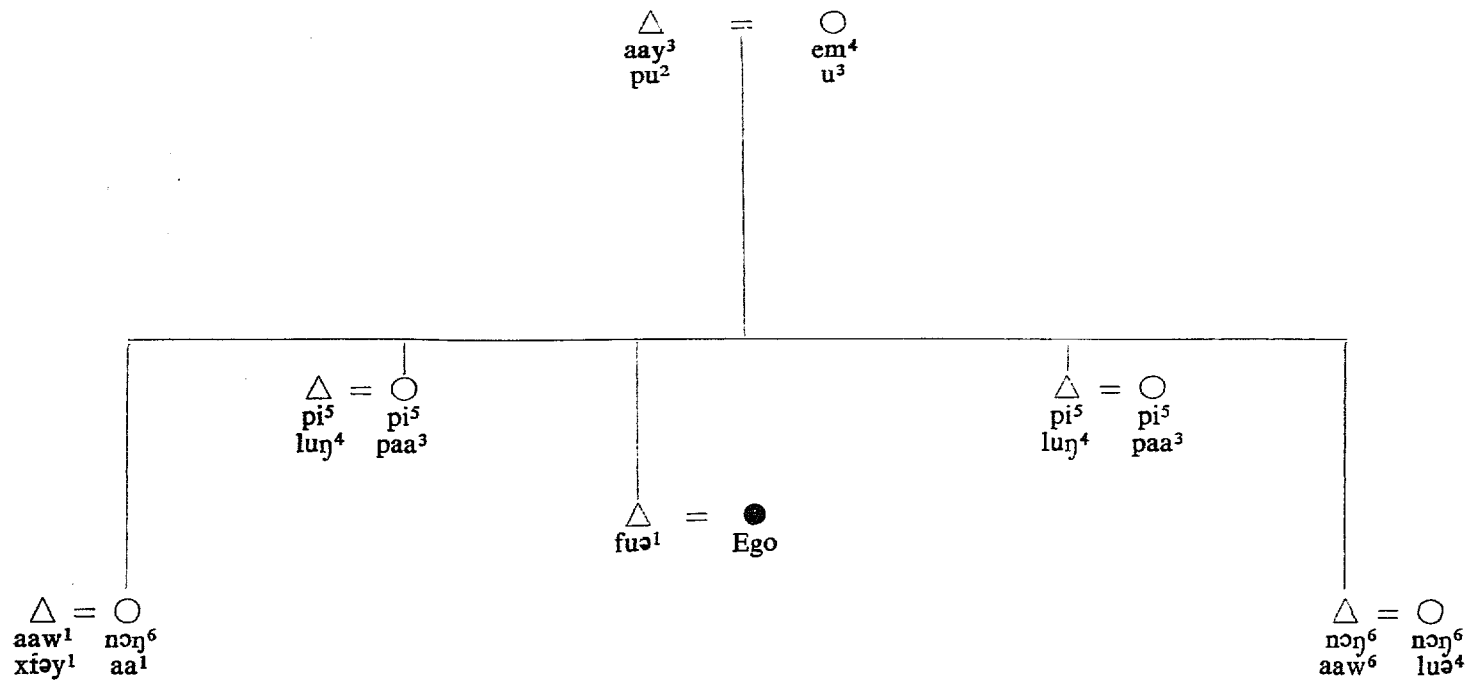


Diagram 9. Husband's Family.