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## POLITE PLURALS AND KINSHIP IN LOTE, PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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### Abstract

Culture is the stage where language is expressed. The two are inseparable. This reality permeates Lote society where a person must understand kinship relationships before he/she can politely address or refer to another individual. In Lote, an Oceanic language of Papua New Guinea, the pronominal system richly demonstrates this language/culture link.

Cultural politeness, a universal feature of society, is one way culture and language display their indisputable bond. Politeness can be referenced by socially appropriate behavior as well as socially appropriate speech. A demonstration of the pronominal system in Lote provides clear evidence of how intimately language and culture entwine. Lote has widespread use of polite plurals used both for address and reference that are linked to a matrilineal system in which certain relationships are subject to various behavioral and linguistic constraints. It is the aim of this paper to describe the kinship framework of Lote society and demonstrate through examples that culture influences language - born out in the daily, common speech and actions throughout the Lote community. A person must know their relationship to another person in order to use appropriately polite speech that bestows proper esteem.

**Key words:** kinship, clan, moiety, polite plurals, alienable (indirect) possession, inalienable (direct) possession, dyad, honorific, reciprocal.

### Introduction

If you walked into a Lote village today you might observe a common practice: a woman approaches a group of people and a few select men swiftly get up and walk away—a polite response based on kinship constraints which also affect speech. (See page 80 for more on this relationship.) This paper explores the connection between the grammatical features of the Lote language and the socio-cultural contexts where changes from singular to plural occur. Brown and Levinson have explored politeness in culture and speech for decades. They delve deeply into positive-negative politeness strategies based on desired goals. (Brown and Levinson 1988). In Lote polite plurals are strictly attached to kinship roles as you will see demonstrated throughout this paper. This is in contrast to the rank or negotiation strategies presented in Brown and Levinson's seminal work but fits precisely with their premise that, "plurality signifies respect throughout the pronominal paradigm of reference," (1988:180). This paper describes how the Lote use pronominal plurality to signify respect.

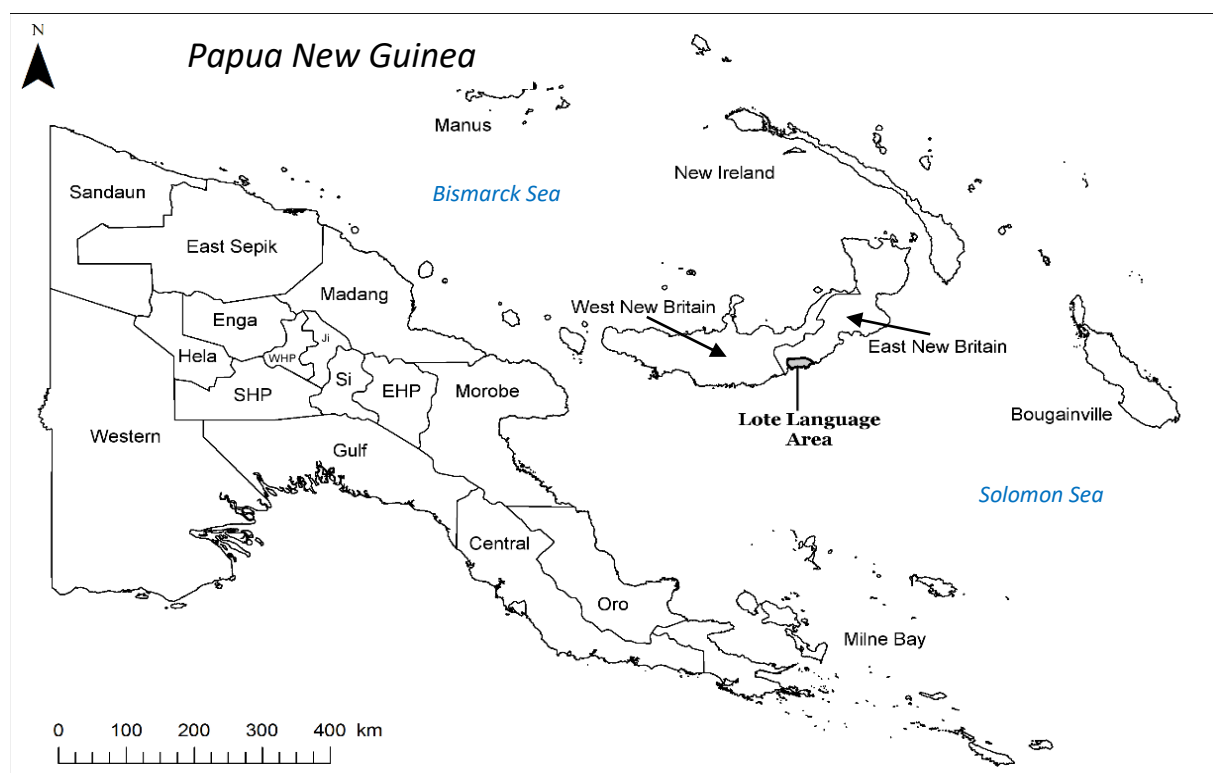
The first section provides background about Lote-speaking people including their location, community, language classification, and the Lote moiety system with kinship charts and terminology defined. In the heart of the paper the grammatical feature of polite plurals is presented and illustrated with examples. Interestingly, polite plural examples are found only in verbal exchanges in daily life, i.e., in speech events directly to or in reference to living persons in the current context. In other words, the phenomena of switching to plural forms could not be found in collected traditional stories where plural forms would be expected based on the context. The examples in this paper were gathered over 30+ years of personal interaction with Lote people. The polite plural switches were gathered from everyday speech while some other examples were collected from texts. For the purpose of this paper, and to clarify the processes of polite pronominal construction, additional examples were constructed by changing the plurality of the originals in order to show how kinship determines plurality in speech. Finally, two significant dyads in Lote society are described near the end of the paper,

including the taboo practices of the only avoidance relationship. These special relationships both require the use of polite plurals described throughout this paper.

## Location

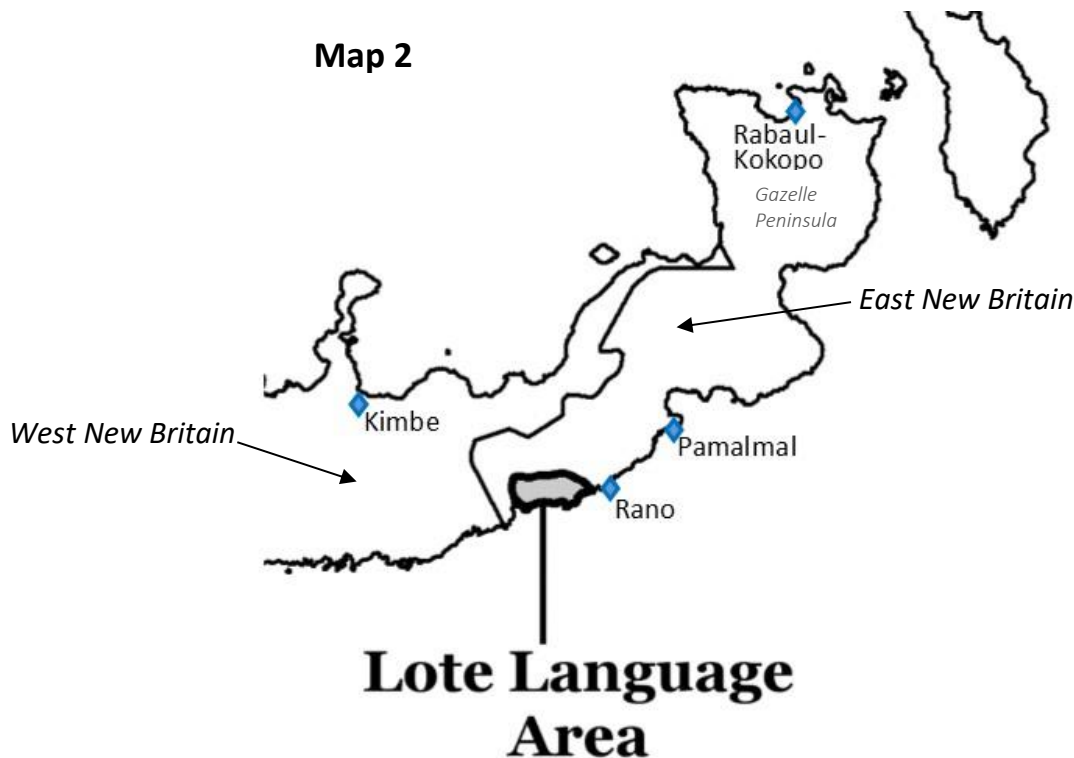
The Lote language community consists of 6,000-7,000 people who live primarily on the south coast of East New Britain, Papua New Guinea. Some Lote speakers live in cities, with a few residing outside of the country. The Lote belong to the South Pomio district of East New Britain Province. Lote geography covers approximately 25 km (15 miles) along the coast and 12 km (7 miles) inland including some low mountains. The terrain consists of miles of beach and dense tropical forests with rivers and gardens scattered throughout the region. The language area is relatively isolated with no commercial airlines presently serving the Lote people at the time of writing. Lote territory is accessible by sea on small ships traveling eastward from Rabaul/Kokopo (the provincial capital), around the Gazelle Peninsula and then south, eventually docking at a central wharf. There is a road beyond the west end of the area that connects the north and south side of East and West New Britain Provinces. The town of Kimbe on the north side of the island is reachable only through a combination of hiking, motor boat and truck transport over rough roads often impassable due to seasonal rains. Rano airstrip is about an hour east of Uvol by dinghy. It is possible to travel further east of Rano to the town of Pamalmal with a combination of foot, boat, and truck travel, depending on the depth of rivers that tend to flood by aforementioned seasonal rains. Some people use a motor boat to travel from Uvol area to Pamalmal, or all the way around the tip of New Britain to Rabaul/Kokopo.

Map 1



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Borders shown on this map represent language data. They do not reflect nor should they be used to make land claims.



## Background

The information in this study was gathered from interviews with Lote speakers and from collected texts. The author lived primarily in Lote villages between 1986 and 2006, residing three to eight months each year. Between 2006 and 2017 she lived mostly outside of Lote territory, making occasional visits into the region. The author served as a literacy worker and facilitator to promote vernacular education, designing Lote curriculum for vernacular schools and training Lote people to become vernacular teachers. Lote was the primary language used in data collection.

Lote people are predominantly subsistence farmers. They cook using fire or heated stone roasting ovens covered with large leaves and sacks. Staples are sweet potatoes and a roasted ‘cake’ made from grated cassava and coconut cream. In addition to the numerous varieties of sweet potatoes, they live on yams, taro, leafy greens and a variety of fruits. Seafood, grub worms, and wild game supplement the basic diet. Chickens commonly roam the villages, often saved for special family meals like school advancement or other milestones. Pigs are commonplace; usually reserved for significant occasions like weddings, mortuary feasts, festivals and holidays. Homes have no electricity or running water though some people own generators. Solar lights are becoming more prevalent. Previously rare, large holding tanks used to collect rain from corrugated metal rooftops are becoming more common. Those without this convenience retrieve their water from local springs. Most Lote families have at least one person who has been educated sufficiently to be employed in town, to teach locally, serve as clergy, agricultural specialists or other roles that provide income shared with the extended family.

## Language Name

According to Pearson and van den Berg, “In some writings the Lote is referred to as Uvol. Uvol is the name of one of the main rivers that run through the language area and the name given to the airstrip, built before World War II. When asked what their language name is, the people preferred the name Lote (LO-tay) (or *Lohote*), which literally means ‘to hang out to dry’ suggesting ‘to be created’.” (Pearson and van den Berg 2008:1) The ISO 639-3 language code for Lote is uvl.

## Linguistic Classification and Dialects

“Lote is an Oceanic Austronesian language, classified by Chowning (1976) as belonging to the Mengen family, a small subgroup of Oceanic spoken in New Britain. Ross (1988) classifies Lote (Uvol) as Western Oceanic, North New Guinea, Ngero-Vitiaz, Mengen. Other languages of the Mengen family listed in Lynch, Ross and Crowley (2002) are Mamusi, Kakuna, Poeng (Mengen) and Maeng (Orford). Very little information is available on any of these languages.” (Pearson and van den Berg 2008:2).

“There are three dialects of Lote. The most prevalent dialect is spoken by people in major villages along the central coast. A second dialect lies inland amongst people living in the mountains, and a third occurs along the beach villages on the eastern end of the language area. The differences occur generally in intonation and a number of vocabulary items. The inland dialect speakers add consonants in certain words, particularly the phonemes /x/ (written as <ch>) and /h/. For example, the coastal dialect word for ‘sun’ is /xaia/, whereas the speakers of the inland dialect say /xaixa/. Similarly, *aka* means both ‘ascend’ and ‘canoe’ on the coast, but in the inland dialect ‘canoe’ is *aka*, while ‘ascend’ is *haka*. Similar variation is found in the pair *ot* and *hot* ‘go out’.” (Pearson and van den Berg 2008:2)

## Kinship

Matrilineal descent groups or clans are a central feature of Lote society. The kinship system is made up of two halves, or moieties reckoned through the mother’s lineage. Clan membership is a primary factor in molding identity and role in society, shaping the economics of trade and reciprocity. Every Lote person knows which moiety they belong to, whether *Sipa* or *Paele*. The two intertwined moieties are a facet of what Sahlins calls, “mutuality of being.” (Sahlins 2011:2) He points out that kinship is much more than a genealogical chart. Kinship relations are organic, spiritual, “*mutuality of being* with people who are intrinsic to one another’s existence. Kinsmen are persons who belong to one another, who are members of one another, who are co-present in each other, whose lives are joined and interdependent.” (Sahlins 2011:2). There is no translation or definition for the moiety names *Sipa* or *Paele*. Marriage across moiety boundaries through generations creates a world of relationships played out in ceremonies, obligations, taboos, and reciprocity, effectively weaving the clans together to form a whole society. An intricate system of sub-clans/lineages exist within each moiety that will not be explored in the scope of this paper. For the duration of this writing, ‘moiety’ and ‘clan’ will be used interchangeably where ‘clan’ refers to *Sipa* or *Paele* that make up the physical and spiritual world of souls in the Lote community. *Sipa* and *Paele* clans each have totems represented throughout nature:

TABLE 1: CLAN TOTEMS

Totem	<i>Sipa</i> Clan	Translation	<i>Paele</i> Clan	Translation
Butterfly <i>popo</i>	<i>popo sipa</i>	male birdwing butterfly	<i>popo paele</i>	female birdwing butterfly
Tree <i>ae</i>	<i>ae sipa</i>	Alstonia Scholaris	<i>ae paele</i>	Homalium Foetidum
Fish <i>ruo</i>	<i>ruo ullong</i>	shark	<i>ruo meeli</i>	tuna
Animal totem	<i>neko</i>	tree kangaroo	<i>tapo</i>	cassowary
Bird <i>ngie</i>	<i>ngie chochoang</i>	crow	<i>ngie ile</i>	cockatoo

Each organism listed above is identified as *ara soke* ‘our boss’ or ‘head’ in reference to their clan membership/headship. The *Sipa* clan identifies the shark and the tree kangaroo as ‘the boss’ of their clan.

A *Sipa* person would say to another clan member,

- (1) *Ita neko.*  
 1PL.INCL tree.kangaroo  
 We are of tree kangaroo.

- (2) *A-ra soke, laka, neko.*  
 1-PL.INCL.PCLFF boss, head AFF tree.kangaroo  
 Our boss, as a matter of fact, is the tree kangaroo.

The *Paele* clan identifies tuna and cassowary as heads of the clan. Clan members should not eat their clan totem. Therefore, the *Sipa* shall not eat shark while the *Paele* shall not eat tuna. The birds in each case are referred to with the kinship term *le-k te* ‘my ancestor/my grandparent,’ so that the *Sipa* clan would call the crow *le-k te* ‘my ancestor’ while the *Paele* clan would call the cockatoo *le-k te* ‘my ancestor.’ (Refer to chart of kinship terms.)

Clan membership is the primary identity for both men and women and prescribes how a member interacts and addresses every other person in Lote society. Marriage establishes another layer of relations expanding the network. Together they form definitive sets of relationships that have either ‘typical’ or ‘honorific’ status.

Those related to ego through the same clan membership are *alona*, literally ‘seedling.’

- (3) *Te-alo-ite i la luluch nge alo-na mur.*  
 3PL-bury-cover 3SG ALL along.with LOC seed-3SG PLUR  
 They buried him along with (near) his other relatives.

Lote marriage rules are moiety exogamous, across the *Sipa/Paele* clan lines. There have been a few exceptions, but disregarding this norm is strongly frowned upon. In one case a couple was ex-communicated from their village. After a few years of isolation they returned unobtrusively to set up house a fair distance from the main village.

Lote has a classificatory kinship system (White 1958). Clan membership is determined through the mother of ego. Female siblings of ego’s mother are classed as ‘real’ mothers. Male siblings of ego’s father are classed as ‘real’ fathers. Relatives in the same generation to ego are also classed based on matrilineal relations. If they descend from sisters of ego’s mother, they are classed as siblings (in the same clan). If they descend from brothers of ego’s mother, they class as cousins (members of the complementary clan). In other words, first cousins of the same clan are termed siblings; first cousins in the complementary clan are termed cousins. One generation down, children of parallel siblings are classed as ego’s children if they descend from classificatory mothers. The pattern repeats itself throughout the kinship system (refer to Tables 5 and 6). Although age distinctions are not required, fathers and mothers may optionally be addressed with ‘big’ and ‘little’ based on age differences between ego’s classificatory parents.

- (4) (a) *teme-k palau*  
 father-1SG big  
 my big father (classificatory older brother of biological father)
- (b) *teme-k kino*  
 father-1SG little/small  
 my small father (classificatory younger brother of biological father)

- (5) (a) *heta-k palau*  
 mother-1SG big  
 my big mother (classificatory older sister of biological mother)
- (b) *heta-k kino*  
 mother-1SG little/small  
 my small mother (classificatory younger sister of biological mother)

Clan membership is so central to society that the author and her husband were incorporated into the kinship system without being born into it, each assigned a specific kinship slot. Based on that relationship, an identity and role were formed defining their relationships with every other person in Lote society. When meeting someone new the appropriate question became, “How are we related?” or “What kin term do I call you?”

- (6) *Utar u-k ia iong?*  
 what source-1SG OBL 2SG  
 How are we related? (lit. What am I to you?)

Once the relationship was defined, the conversation continued with plural or singular forms as appropriate. At times there would be some negotiation to define the relationship. A discussion about the author’s kinship to a well-known person of significance ensued. Based on that information, the new acquaintance defined the relationship between them. It is unclear whether Lote people would employ this process or if they already know their relational sets with no need for investigation. In order to know how a person in your own generation is related to you, you only need to know whether or not their classificatory mother is a sibling of your mother and this may be something they simply absorb growing up. It gets more complicated with inter-generational relationships. Sometimes they go back to the grandmothers’ kin ties. The fact that the Lote host felt compelled to assign kinship slots to outsiders shows the strength of the system. His action reveals that distinct moiety sets are necessary in order to be fully human and fit into Lote society. This parallels the previously mentioned concept of *mutuality of being* (Sahlins 2011); the worldview that all persons are connected not only through relational attachment, but also in a mystical, spiritual realm. The physical and spiritual worlds are not separate. His action also indicates that kinship is negotiable in that people from outside the community can be ascribed kin terms though genealogically not connected.

### **Polite Plurals, Reference, Address and Kin Disclose Esteem through Linguistic Features**

Lote people use plural pronominals to communicate politeness when speaking to or about others with whom they have an honorific relationship. This is not an uncommon practice. “Many pronominal systems express, in addition to person and number, information about the social relationship that exists between the speaker, the hearer, and those spoken about,” (Bean 1970:562). As Bean found in her data, the author found in Lote that pronouns “change to plural forms as a mechanism to create social distance in relationships and to express deference between people in particular relationships,” (Bean 1970:562). When two individuals in typical relationship talk to or refer to one another, constructions take standard, singular form. However, when people address or refer to those in honorific relationship, things change. Plural forms are obligatory, compelling the speaker to switch from singular to plural. This politeness mechanism is not situational but based on kinship. Brown and Levinson mention one motive for polite plurals is, “...to treat persons as representatives of a group rather than as relatively powerless individuals...” (Brown and Levinson 1988:199) This concept reinforces the idea that for Lote the entire social world is put together by two halves (moiety). The plural forms represent, “their social standing and the backing that they derive from their group.” (199) A Lote person must first consider the relationship of the participants/referents to know what form to use. Any speech event between honorific

relationships requires plural forms. The honorific restrictions fall mostly across moiety boundaries but marriage bonds also play a key role. Marriage links outweigh moiety boundaries. Both the male's mother-in-law and father-in-law are honorific relationships even though a male's father-in-law would be of the same clan (following exogamous marriage rules). The use of polite plurals is always present and lasts until one of the individuals dies. The taboo restrictions end with a special ritual described later. Charts 5 and 6 at the end of this paper provide a complete list of kinship terms.

**TABLE 2: HONORIFIC RELATIONSHIPS**

Lote term 1SG possessive	English Equivalent	Used for
<i>ie-k</i> (reciprocal)	male's brother-in-law	WB, ZH
<i>e-k tana</i>	male's sister-in-law	WZ, BW
<i>e-k palau</i>	female's brother-in-law	HB, ZH
<i>le-k melei</i> (reciprocal)	female's sister-in-law	HZ, BW
<i>ue-k</i> (reciprocal)	male's mother-in-law male's father-in-law male's son-in-law female's son-in-law	WM WF DH DH
<i>le-k uol</i> (reciprocal)	wife's maternal uncle male's sister's daughter's husband	WMB ZDH
<i>sipu-k</i> (reciprocal)	female's maternal uncle male's sister's daughter	MB ZD
<i>le-k achung</i> (reciprocal)	male's maternal uncle male's sister's son	MB ZS
<i>le-k paen*</i> or <i>paen</i> (reciprocal)	cross-cousin, (first cousin) of other clan	FZD, FZS
<i>lek paen poreke ngana*</i> (reciprocal)	cross-cousin, other clan, once removed	not enough information

\*This relationship needs more research. Early research suggests it is used for cousins based on generational differences, depending on how the cousin descends from the matrilineal relationships.

## The polite plural forms used in these relationships play out in five elements of Lote

### 1. USE OF PLURAL MARKER *MUR*.

The quantifier *mur* follows many common nouns to indicate plurality.

- (7) *Te mene kaone mur.*  
 3PL get/gather dog PLUR  
 They gathered the dogs.

*Mur*, when used in reference to people, gives the meaning 'the group of' or 'the group associated with' (Pearson and van den Berg 2008:34). *Mur* follows nouns such as child, teacher, clergy or woman to indicate a group of them. For example, child + *mur* = group of child or children.

- (8) *Aina nei mur le-k popo ol?*  
 child this PLUR PCLF-1SG butterfly now  
 Children, where is my butterfly? (You kids, what have you done with my butterfly?)

In a simple greeting, typical relations address each other directly and refer to another in the first person singular. A kinship term is not necessarily required in a time of day greeting. A simple, "Good morning," is acceptable:



- (9) *Uach.*  
morning  
Good morning.

In contrast, when someone addresses a person in honorific status, they add the plural marker *mur*.

- (10) *Uach mur.*  
morning PLUR  
Good morning to you (or to all). (lit. 'group of people')

The use of the plural indicator *mur* with a single individual is determined by the relationship shared between the speaker and the one spoken to. *Mur* is used when speaking to a single person in honorific relationship, or any group of people regardless of the relationship(s).

Below is the same simple greeting with the addition of a kin term. The greeting is appropriate regardless of age differences between siblings or other kin. The sibling reference is also used between classificatory siblings (same moiety). Here is a greeting from one sibling to another:

- (11) *Uach ti-k.*  
morning same.sex.sibling-1SG  
Morning to you sister/brother.

In contrast, here is a greeting from one brother-in-law to another:

- (12) *Uach toto ie-k mur.*  
morning very brother.in.law-1SG PLUR  
Good morning to you my brother-in-law. (lit. 'group of my brother-in-law')

*Mur* is also used to indicate the honorific plural when addressing an individual by name, nickname, or kin term: *Leo mur*, *Martina mur*, *ie-k mur*. (Some honorifics allow names, others do not.)

- (13) *Uach toto Leo mur.*  
morning very Leo PLUR  
Good morning, Leo. (lit. 'group of Leo')

In order to understand the changes from singular to plural in the next three features, refer to the table below showing the pronominal sets for Lote.

TABLE 3: PRONOMINAL SETS

		Independent	Subject prefix	Possessive suffix
singular	1	<i>iau</i>	<i>e-</i>	<i>-k</i>
	2	<i>iong</i>	<i>o-</i>	<i>-m</i>
	3	<i>i</i>	∅	<i>-na</i>
plural	1 ex	<i>imem</i>	<i>mo-</i>	<i>-mem</i>
	1 in	<i>ita</i>	<i>ta-</i>	<i>-ra</i>
	2	<i>imo</i>	<i>a-</i>	<i>-mo</i>
	3	<i>iri</i>	<i>te-</i>	<i>-ria</i>

(Pearson and van den Berg 2008:24) arrows added

The following examples will demonstrate how singular forms switch to plural forms indicated above in conversations between honorific relationships.

**2. SUBJECT PREFIX.** Plural forms among honorific relationships must be used in the subject prefix slot.

Second person singular (*o-*):

- (14) *Ti-k*                                      *o-ngau*    *ol.*  
 same.sex.sibling-1SG    2SG-eat    now  
 Brother/sister, time to eat.

Second person honorific plural (*a-*):

- (15) *Ie-k*                                      *mur*    *a-ngau*    *ol.*  
 brother.in.law-1SG    PLUR    2PL-eat    now  
 Brother-in-law, time to eat. (lit. ‘group of my brothers-in-law’)

Third person singular ( $\emptyset$ ):

- (16) *Naka*    *la*    *nge*    *ngae?*  
 Naka    go    LOC    where  
 Where did Naka go?

Third person honorific plural (*te-*):

- (17) *Te-*    *la*    *nge*    *Kapu.*  
 3PL    go    LOC    Kapu  
 He went to Kapu.

The determining factor as to whether the singular or plural form is used is how the speaker is related to the subject.

**3. POSSESSIVE SUFFIXES ON INALIENABLE NOUNS (DIRECT POSSESSION).**

“There are two main types of possession in Lote: direct and indirect. Direct possession is used for inalienable nouns. The possessed noun takes the possessive suffixes directly.” (Pearson and van den Berg 2008:37). Here are singular and plural examples using direct possession:

Second person singular (*-m*):

- (18) *Ti-k,*                                      *rama-m*                      *inin?*  
 same.sex.sibling-1SG    forehead-2SG    pain  
 Brother, do you have a headache?

Second person honorific plural (*-mo*):

- (19) *Ie-k*                                      *mur,*    *rama-mo*                      *inin?*  
 brother.in.law-1SG    PLUR    forehead-2PL    pain  
 Brother-in-law, do you have a headache?

Third person singular (*-na*):

- (20) *Ti-k*                                      *rama-na*                      *inin?*  
 same.sex.sibling-1SG    forehead-3SG    pain  
 Does my brother have a headache?

Third person honorific plural (-*ria*):

- (21) *Ie-k*                      *mur*              *rama-ria*              *inin?*  
 brother.in.law-1SG    PLUR              forehead-3PL    pain  
 Does my brother-in-law have a headache?

#### 4. POSSESSIVE SUFFIXES ON ALIENABLE NOUNS (INDIRECT POSSESSION).

“In indirect possession the possessive suffix is attached to one of two possessive classifiers instead of the possessed noun itself.” (Pearson and van den Berg 2008:43). The possessive suffixes that appear on inalienable nouns (above) are the same suffixes used on possessive classifiers for alienable nouns (Table 4). Like the previous chart, the arrows demonstrate the singular forms that switch to plural forms in conversation between (or in reference to) honorific relationships. The examples following the chart use only the PC forms.

**TABLE 4: POSSESSIVE CLASSIFIERS**

		<i>a-</i>	<i>le-</i>
		PCLFF	PCLF
singular	1	<i>a-k</i>	<i>le-k</i>
	2	<i>a-m</i>	<i>le-m</i>
	3	<i>a-na</i>	<i>ne-na (na)</i>
plural	1 EXCL	<i>a-mem</i>	<i>le-mem</i>
	1 INCL	<i>a-ra</i>	<i>re-ra (ra)</i>
	2	<i>a-mo</i>	<i>le-mo</i>
	3	<i>a-ria</i>	<i>re-ria (ria)</i>

Variants which are common in spoken language are shown in brackets.  
 (Pearson and van den Berg 2008:43) arrows added

Second person singular (-*m*):

- (22) *Ti-k*                      *le-m*              *pele*              *ma?*  
 same.sex.sibling-1SG    PCLF-2SG    house              or  
 Brother, is this your house (or not)?

Second person honorific plural (-*mo*):

- (23) *Ie-k*                      *mur*              *le-mo*              *pele*              *ma?*  
 brother.in.law-1SG    PLUR    PCLF-2PL              house              or  
 Brother-in-law, is this your house (or not)?

Third person singular (-*na*):

- (24) *Ti-k*                      *ne-na*              *pele*              *ma?*  
 same.sex.sibling-1SG    PCLF-3SG    house              or  
 Is this my brother's house (or not)?

Third person honorific plural (-*ria*):

- (25) *Ie-k*                      *mur*              *re-ria*              *pele*              *ma?*  
 brother.in.law-1SG    PLUR              PCLF-3PL    house              or  
 Is this my brother-in-law's house (or not)?

Note that the plural marker *mur* continues to be applied in honorific exchanges.

## 5. INDEPENDENT PRONOUNS.

Like other speech events discussed, independent pronouns switch from singular to plural forms between honorific relationships.

Second person singular in typical relationships (*iong*):

- (26) *Ti-k, iong o-ngau ol.*  
 same.sex.sibling-1SG 2SG 2SG-eat now  
 Brother, your turn to eat.

Switch to second person plural in honorific relationships (*imo*):

- (27) *Ie-k mur, imo a-ngau ol.*  
 brother.in.law-1SG PLUR 2PL 2PL-eat now  
 Brother-in-law, your turn to eat.

Third person singular ( $\emptyset$ ):

- (28) *Maria  $\emptyset$  ngau lo.*  
 Maria 3SG 3SG.eat COMPL  
 Maria already ate.

Third person singular honorific plural (*iri*):

- (29) *Iri te-ngau lo.*  
 3PL 3PL-eat COMPL  
 She already ate.

Examples 28 and 29 convey the same thing about the subject, Maria. Changes occur based strictly on how the speaker is related to the subject.

Polite plurals are employed in all pertinent grammatical slots to portray honorific status:

Second person plural honorific (alienable possession):

- (30) *Ie-k mur, imo a-la nga le-mo pele ol?*  
 brother.in.law-1SG PLUR 2PL 2PL-go LOC PCLF-2PL house now  
 Brother-in-law, are you going home now?

Third person plural honorific (alienable possession):

- (31) *Ie-k mur iri te-la nga ria pele lo?*  
 brother.in.law-1SG PLUR 3PL 3PL-go LOC PCLF.3PL house COMP  
 Did my brother-in-law already go home?

The plural switches above occur with the use of *mur*, the independent pronoun, the subject prefix and the possessive suffix slots.

### Significant Dyads

Lote society is built upon relationships, kinship roles, favors, obligations, and reciprocity between families inside and outside of one's clan. Two distinctive dyads are the mother-in-law/son-in-law and the maternal uncle/niece-nephew relationships.

### **Mother-in-law/Son-in-law**

The mother-in-law/son-in-law relationship (*ue-k* 1SG) is a restricted relationship with the key attribute being complete physical avoidance. Goldenweiser mentioned that this avoidance dyad was so widespread, that it could be considered a typical avoidance set up. (Goldenweiser 1914). In Lote custom, they may not speak to one another face-to-face and are forbidden to be in each other's physical proximity. Lote society places an extremely high emphasis on lineal descent assigning each person to the *Paele* or *Sipa* moiety. According to Sweester (1966), strong lines of descent is an indicator for avoidance, which manifests respect for authority and family unity.

The root *ue-* (*ue-k* 1SG) is a derivative from the verb *ua* 'get out,' 'get away,' or 'flee,' (according to Lote speakers). The term *ue-k* is reciprocal between son-in-law and his mother-in-law or father-in-law. The avoidance practice only applies to a female's son-in-law, or conversely, a male's mother-in-law. The avoidance set up includes not only the wife's mother, but also all of her moiety sisters, both in the direct family line, and extended family.

If a mother-in-law/son-in-law meet unexpectedly on a footpath, the mother-in-law will step off the path, retreat into the woods, and may take a cloth or large leaf to hide her face. If the son-in-law inadvertently comes too close or sees his mother-in-law close up then compensation is paid. This could be a food gift or local currency of two *kina* (K2). They may converse from a distance across the village or within hearing distance separated by a wall. They never say each other's name whether Christian, traditional, or any nickname. Sometimes a person will replace a nickname with a Melanesia Pidgin term. For example, instead of referring to a son-in-law nicknamed *Hal Muna* 'mouth that is dark,' his mother-in-law instead used Pidgin *Maus Bilak* 'a black/dark mouth.' It is important that they do not refuse requests for favors or food, never disagree, argue, or fight. They have a reciprocal relationship in sharing with one another whatever is in hand, whether fresh garden produce, hunted meat, fish, etc. This interchange supports the notion that there is correlation between an avoidance relationship and economic interaction. (Pans 1998).

When the author attended community events, she followed the avoidance practice by calling out to a group before coming near, "Hey everyone! I would like to come and take a photo of what you are doing. Are any of my sons-in-law present?" Typically, a few men would get up and walk away, sometimes with chuckles that the expatriate partook in this custom. It is common for someone in a group, whether male or female, to see a taboo person headed their way and call out a warning to give an in-law a chance to abscond:

- (32) *Ue-m*                    *la.*  
 taboo.in.law-2SG    ALL.there  
 Here comes your taboo. (Implied: watch out, better skedaddle)

In some cases, there may be alternative ways that a woman is related to a man. In such a case, marriage overrides clan membership. This taboo relationship lasts from the time of marriage until death. A rite is performed to remove the taboo. The restricted kin enters the mourning shelter before burial of the dead. They pay compensation in the form of local currency of two *kina*, gifts of food, or other gifts. They then step over the corpse severing the taboo. The living person is now allowed to say the name of the departed, but continues to use the plural forms to show respect. This high-respect relationship requires polite plurals.

### **Maternal Uncle/nephew-niece *lek achung* for male and *sipuk* for female**

The maternal uncle in Lote society plays an important role. This is a close-knit relationship within the same clan that employs the honorific plural form. The maternal uncle is of the same clan as ego's mother and he is the keeper of clan secrets, magic, songs, traditions, etc. He is the one responsible for organizing rites such as circumcision and marriage exchanges (along with the parents). The maternal uncle/nephew reciprocal term is *achung* addressed as *le-k achung* (PCLF-1SG uncle) The word *achunga* is the noun 'magic' thus the linguistic relationship to *le-k achung* shows the association of the maternal uncle as the ritual specialist for the clan. The

maternal uncle/niece is likewise an important relationship with a different kin term of *sipu-k* (uncle-1SG), also reciprocal. A modern day function of this important person on behalf of nieces and nephews is to help pay for school fees.

### **Maternal Uncle and use of Direct and Indirect Possessive Forms**

It is worth noting that this relationship employs direct possession for the niece (*sipu-k*), and indirect possession for the nephew (*le-k achung*). Could there be a cultural explanation for this linguistic difference, and if so, what is the significance? Kinship terms are more than a simple list of relations. They are part of a language made up of lexical items that form a cognitive reality, inseparable from culture. Lamb wrote, “But as a kinship terminology is a terminology, it must be part of a language; so these elements must be linguistic elements, and these relationships must be linguistic relationships.” (Lamb 1965:37). Through birth in the matrilineal system, women sustain the clan vitality and future. As life gives they hold the promise and potential for coming generations. Without women there is no clan. Examining the maternal uncle vocabulary as part of a larger system of relational elements, one might then surmise that the relationship between niece and maternal uncle is more intimately connected for the survival and legacy of the clan (she gives life, he maintains traditions). Therefore the inalienable construction befits this connection. Her children will preserve the clan lineage and be of the same clan as the maternal uncle whereas the nephew’s children will be members of the complementary clan in what could be considered an “unbound” relationship. The unbound relationship may be reflected in the alienable linguistic form.

### **Summary**

Culture and language are intimately intertwined. As Jiang said, “Language simultaneously reflects culture, and is influenced and shaped by it.” (Jiang 1999:328). He goes on to say, “Between language and culture there is always an interactive influence: the two cannot exist without each other. They combine to form a living organism.” (1999:332)

In Lote society the pronominal system illustrates this reality. Matrilineal descent ascribes kinship. Marriage creates additional sets of specific relationships. These ties remain strong and shape everyday speech. A person needs to know how they are related to another in order to determine which pronominal forms are appropriate to speak politely to or about another person. Conspicuous linguistic examples in Lote demonstrate the unbreakable link between culture and speech patterns. Depending on each kinship tie, an individual knows whether a singular reference can be used or whether polite plurals are required for any speech event.

Pronominal forms, found in five elements of spoken Lote, switch from singular to plural in order to indicate a higher level of respect between certain relationships. Parsons (1916) reminds us that, “familiarity breeds contempt.” She suggests that formality helps maintain important relationships and that appropriate speech protects status. “...as natives themselves say, (it) is a matter of respect, an up keeping of family dignity,” (Parsons 1916:289). In the words of a Lote person, “It is a way of showing due respect, putting someone at ease, and opening better communication in case of a dispute and reconciliation effort.” (Cosmos Langelupo, via Messenger text, August 28, 2019).

## LOTE KINSHIP TERMS (TABLE 5 &amp; TABLE 6)

TABLE 5: KINSHIP TERMS DIRECTLY POSSESSED

English Equivalent	Used for	1SG	2SG	3SG	1PL EXCL	1PL INCL	2PL	3PL
mother	M, MZ, FBW	<i>he-ta-k (ata)</i>	<i>ta-m</i>	<i>ta-na</i>	<i>ta-mem</i>	<i>ta-ra</i>	<i>ta-mo</i>	<i>ta-ria</i>
father	F, FB	<i>teme-k (apa)</i>	<i>teme-m</i>	<i>teme-ne</i>	<i>teme-mem</i>	<i>teme-re</i>	<i>teme-mo</i>	<i>teme-ria</i>
mother from other clan (more information needed)	FZ, MBW	<i>he-ta-k poreke ngana</i>	~	~	~	~	~	~
parent-in-law (reciprocal)	DH, WM, WF	<i>ue-k</i>	<i>ue-m</i>	<i>ue-ne</i>	<i>ue-mem</i>	<i>ue-re</i>	<i>ue-mo</i>	<i>ue-ria</i>
sibling, same gender	MS, MD, MZS, MZD	<i>ti-k</i>	<i>ti-m</i>	<i>ti-na</i>	<i>ti-mem</i>	<i>ti-ra</i>	<i>ti-mo</i>	<i>ti-ria</i>
sibling, opposite gender	MS, MD, MZS, MZD	<i>liu-k</i>	<i>liu-m</i>	<i>liu-na</i>	<i>liu-mem</i>	<i>liu-ra</i>	<i>liu-mo</i>	<i>liu-ria</i>
son or daughter (offspring)	S, D	<i>tu-k</i>	<i>tu-m</i>	<i>tu-na</i>	<i>tu-mem</i>	<i>tu-ra</i>	<i>tu-mo</i>	<i>tu-ria</i>
husband lit. 'name'	H	<i>e-k</i>	<i>e-m</i>	<i>en-e</i>	<i>e-mem</i>	<i>e-re</i>	<i>e-mo</i>	<i>e-ria</i>
male's brother-in-law (reciprocal)	WB, ZH	<i>ie-k</i>	<i>ie-m</i>	<i>ie-ne</i>	<i>ie-mem</i>	<i>ie-re</i>	<i>ie-mo</i>	<i>ie-ria</i>
female's maternal uncle (reciprocal)	MB	<i>sipu-k</i>	<i>sipu-m</i>	<i>sipu-na</i>	<i>sipu-mem</i>	<i>sipu-ra</i>	<i>sipu-mo</i>	<i>sipu-ria</i>
male's niece of same clan	ZD							

Common forms are shown in parenthesis.

TABLE 6: KINSHIP TERMS INDIRECTLY POSSESSED

English Equivalent	Used for	1SG	2SG	3SG*	1PL EX	1PL INCL*	2PL	3PL*
wife	W	<i>le-k hei</i>	<i>le-m hei</i>	<i>na hei</i>	<i>le-mem hei</i>	<i>ra hei</i>	<i>le-mo hei</i>	<i>ria hei</i>
female's sister-in-law (reciprocal)	HZ, HBW	<i>le-k melei</i>	<i>le-m melei</i>	<i>na melei</i>	<i>le-mem melei</i>	<i>ra melei</i>	<i>le-mo melei</i>	<i>ria melei</i>
female's brother-in-law	HB, ZH	<i>e-k palau</i>	<i>e-m palau</i>	<i>e-ne palau</i>	<i>e-mem palau</i>	<i>e-re palau</i>	<i>e-mo palau</i>	<i>eria palau</i>
grandparent-grandchild or ancestor and female's parents in-law (reciprocal)	MM, MF, FF, FM, HF, HM, SW	<i>le-k te (tete)</i>	<i>le-m te</i>	<i>na te</i>	<i>le-mem te</i>	<i>re te</i>	<i>le-mo te</i>	<i>ria te</i>
male's sister-in-law	BW, WZ	<i>e-k tana</i>	<i>e-m tana</i>	<i>e-ne tana</i>	<i>e-mem tana</i>	<i>ra tana</i>	<i>e-mo tana</i>	<i>e-ria tana</i>
male's maternal uncle; (reciprocal)	MB, FZH	<i>le-k achung</i>	<i>le-m achung</i>	<i>na achung</i>	<i>le-mem achung</i>	<i>ra chung</i>	<i>le-mo achung</i>	<i>ria achung</i>
male's nephew of same clan	ZS							
male's maternal niece's husband	WMB	<i>le-k uol</i>	<i>le-m uol</i>	<i>na uol</i>	<i>le-mem uol</i>	<i>ra uol</i>	<i>le-mo uol</i>	<i>ria uol</i>
wife's maternal uncle	ZDH							
classificatory cousins of other clan (children of hetak poreke ngana)	FZS, FZD, MBS, MBD	<i>le-k paen</i>	<i>le-m paen</i>	<i>na paen</i>	<i>le-mem paen</i>	<i>ra paen</i>	<i>le-mo paen</i>	<i>ria paen</i>
more research needed		<i>le-k paen poreke ngana</i>	~	~	~	~	~	~

\*An abbreviated form of *ne-na* and *re-ria* are commonly used as shown in the table. Rather than *ne-na hei* or *re-ria te*, simpler forms of *na hei* and *ria te* are used.

## ABBREVIATIONS

1	first person
2	second person
3	third person
AFF	affirmation ( <i>laka</i> )
ALL	allative (movement toward a location) ( <i>la</i> )
COMPL	completive ( <i>lo</i> )
EXCL	exclusive
INCL	inclusive
LOC	locative ( <i>nga, nge</i> )
OBL	oblique preposition ( <i>ia</i> )
PCLF	possessive classifier ( <i>le-</i> )
PCLFF	possessive classifier for food items ( <i>a-</i> )
PL	plural
PLUR	plural marker ( <i>mur</i> )
SG	singular

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