

## Re: Lack of vocabulary in English?

**Source:** <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.lang/2005-02/1640.html>

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**From:** Paul Wolff ([bounceme\\_at\\_two.wolff.co.uk](mailto:bounceme_at_two.wolff.co.uk))

**Date:** 02/18/05

Date: Fri, 18 Feb 2005 00:26:06 +0000

In message <cv39b4\$haj\$1@news.ox.ac.uk>, Neeraj Mathur  
<neemathur@hotmail.com> writes

>

><[de781@yahoo.com](mailto:de781@yahoo.com)> wrote in message

>[news:1108673024.095062.285650@o13g2000cwo.googlegroups.com...](mailto:news:1108673024.095062.285650@o13g2000cwo.googlegroups.com...)

>>> *And I would have been very surprised indeed if he had called me*

>> *"Cousin*

>>> *Once Removed Peter"!*

>>>

>>> *In English, "uncle" and "aunt" can be used loosely as well as*

>> *precisely.*

>>

I was certainly brung up to call intimate family friends "Uncle" or  
"Aunt". I am just getting used to calling my godfather, now well into  
his nineties, "John" rather than "Uncle John".

>>

>> *No one expects him to have called you "Cousin Once Removed Peter" or*

>> *anything that absurd! But, the fact of the matter remains that you*

>> *can't EXPECT your cousin to refer to you as an "uncle", when you're not*

>> *his uncle. My sisters' children will likely call me "uncle", but it'd*

>> *be absurd for my cousins' children to think of me as an uncle.*

>

>*It's not that absurd, it's just not the way that the English system appears*

>*to work (thanks to those above who approved my diagram interpretation).*

>

[Snip]

>

>*The different systems must reflect different social patterns. My grandmother*

>*(the 'sagi' one) tells me that when she was growing up the children of many*

>*of her father's siblings and cousins all lived in her father's house (he was*

>*wealthy enough, of course) and it would have been pointless to think of some*

>*people as siblings and some as not as far as daily life was concerned. Even*

>*today it is not uncommon for several siblings to live in the same ancestral*

>*house with all their families.*