

Role Interaction as a Factor in Kinship Classification

DOWNNEY D. RAIBOURN, Indiana University

In any kinship system, when two individuals occupy two different kinship positions but are called by the same term, it implies that they have something in common. Ever since Morgan (6), it has been suspected that social organization was a basic factor as a determinant of kinship systems. Murdock (7) summarized and tested hypotheses of many researchers as they related to the determinants of kinship terminology. Kroeber (5), like others, emphasized social factors but he was more skeptical than most. Kroeber (4), stated in "Classificatory systems of relationship":

Terms of relationship reflect psychology, not sociology. They are determined primarily by language and can be utilized for sociological inferences only with extreme caution.

Kroeber's skepticism was well founded. Of the eight principles he utilized, only two totally reflect sociology. Two others reflect sociology to a certain extent. The remaining four reflect language almost exclusively. Kroeber was looking at kinship systems from an overall perspective. Raibourn (10) pointed out that several researchers had indicated, or their data showed, that kinship systems normally begin to change in the cousin generation. One would expect, therefore, to find that cousin terms would reflect sociology to a much greater extent than would terms in other generations. Terms for other generations prior to their change towards an equilibrium would be more likely to reflect language simply because the terms used are older. Gifford (3) found this to be so among societies in California.

While Kroeber's skepticism was well justified, it should also be pointed out that even though terms of relationship do reflect psychology, they can also at the same time reflect sociology. Sociology and psychology are not mutually exclusive. The aim of this paper is to point out that social forces align individuals in such a way that they become involved in role interaction. Role interaction involves individual behavior. The institutionalization of individual behavior manifests itself in the kinship system. The position of individual behavior in the sequence has been implicitly, if not explicitly, stated by most writers on the subject. Others, however, have inferred or stated that the effect of social determinants upon kinship terminology was direct. It is the writer's contention that basic kinship systems stem only indirectly from such factors as residence, descent, exogamy, etc. Such factors are important because they align individuals in specific ways so that they can play specific roles with respect to each other. The specific roles which will be defined later are universal roles played in all societies. Such roles involve both kinship and nonkinship behavior. Each role manifests itself not only in human behavior but is also characteristic of mammals and many other animal groups, particularly avian species. The number of roles or role relationships involved are limited. There are only four:

(1) the authority-subordinate roles, (2) the sponsor-recipient roles, (3) the sibling and peer roles, and (4) the roles played by distant relatives and strangers. The specific objective of this paper is to demonstrate that five of the six basic kinship systems can be developed as a result of the playing of these roles. This does not deny the fact that certain aspects of kinship terminology result only from language and/or history.

The kinship diagram appended to this paper represents the six basic kinship systems extended through four generations. Each kinship system has been simplified as follows:

1. Each system is represented as in perfect balance. It should be remembered that total equilibrium is actually extremely rare. The systems of specific societies normally possess remnants of older systems. Most Indo-European languages, for example, possess survivals of early Indo-European. Terms such as paternal, maternal, in the English language, make it possible to classify certain relatives in accordance with the early Indo-European system.
2. The term for each relative has been translated to English. This makes the relationship between systems more comprehensible to English speakers. Utilizing English terms also makes it possible to point out more emphatically the effect of role interaction upon the development of kinship systems.

The collateral or bifurcate collateral system is defined as a system in which each relative is called by a distinct term which is not used for any other relative. The presence of the collateral system is difficult to account for. Of all the systems it seems to be the least influenced by social structural forces. Murdock (7) could find only one determinant for the system. He found that it tended to be associated with non-sororal polygyny. His coefficients and indices of reliability were not high because the collateral tendency was operating in opposition to exogamous unilineal kin groups which favor bifurcate merging terminology. This indicates that collateral terminology should be more frequent in societies with patrilocal residence which have not yet developed patrilineal exogamous kin groups; i.e. in an incipient Patri system.

Driver (1) pointed out another possibility. He correlated collateral terms with many traits of social structure and found that collateral terms correlated positively with several Patri and Bi traits. The highest positive coefficient was with a Bi division of labor in subsistence. Traits which correlated negatively were Matri traits and one Patri trait which was a Patri division of labor in subsistence. Since both Murdock and Driver found that division of labor in subsistence is the first social structural trait to change, Driver's correlations point out that collateral terminology is most likely to occur in a decadent Patri system, i.e., in an early Bi system which has just made the change from Patri organization. Raibourn (8) made a comparison of terms among some of the central California languages. Results were inconclusive as some favored Murdock's interpretation of the determinants of collateral terminology while others favored Driver's.

At present the determinants of collateral terminology remain unknown. Some of the writer's speculations concerning the determinants of collateral terminology are as follows:

1. Being non-classificatory, role interaction is not involved. Social structural influence would therefore be greatly reduced.
2. Language, not social structure, may be a basic determinant particularly if the system is totally in balance or nearly so. Murdock (7) seems to infer this also. In pointing out the rarity of his Sudanese type (collateral cross-cousin terms) he states that the distribution through Central Africa may have resulted from ". . . some obscure historical or linguistic cause. . . ."
3. If only certain parts of the system have collateral terminology, this may indicate not a former collateral system but could indicate simply that a change in system had occurred. A society moving to or away from the lineal system could very easily shift into temporary collateral terminology. Also the shift to collateral terminology could be made as a temporary transition to or away from either Patri or Matri asymmetrical terminology.
4. The rarity of collateral cross-cousin terminology and the quite common occurrence of collateral parent terms could stem from the different rates of speed at which terms in different generations change. With cousin terms changing first, with few social determinants for collateral terminology, the rarity of collateral cousin terms could be explained by the rapid change into other systems. Likewise the higher frequency of collateral parent terms could perhaps be explained by the slower rate of change for relatives of this generation.

The generational system recognizes one basic principle which is generation. Individuals within a single generation are classified together but are differentiated from individuals in other generations. Sex is usually differentiated but this is incidental to the system. The determinants of the generation system stem directly from social structure. Murdock (7) found them to be bilocal residence and the presence of bilateral kindreds. Both determinants place Ego in association with other relatives and involve strong role interaction. With bilocal residence, Ego will spend his childhood in close association with either father's or mother's parents, or at different times with both. He also finds himself closely associated with father's and/or mother's siblings and their children. With bilateral kindred present, the family is made up out of combinations of these relatives. Ego's cousins in the family unit will tend to play sibling roles with respect to him. From his point of view, they are identical to brothers and sisters and he tends to consider them as siblings. Likewise, his parents' siblings within the family unit tend to play parent roles and to be considered as such.

In Bi organization, parents tend to play both authority and sponsor roles. Authority stems from the division of labor in subsistence. Those who are the providers and protectors for the family tend to be the authority figures and the disciplinarians of Ego. In a Bi oriented

society, division of labor in subsistence tends to be equalized between both sexes and both parents tend to play authority roles.

The sponsor role is played by the individual who acts as a sympathizer and helper of Ego. It is a counterbalance to authority. Since both parents tend to play authority roles in the Bi oriented society, both also tend to play sponsor roles.

The sibling role has certain similarities to the sponsor role in that sympathy or help may be given by a sibling or a peer. However, the relationship here is reciprocal. A demand is counteracted by an obligation. Sibling roles also frequently involve rivalry. Both rivalry and obligation are normally absent in the sponsor-recipient relationship.

The lineal system involves the recognition of two principles of classification. The generational principle is observed but added to it is the principle of lineation. Kroeber (4) defined this as a recognition of the difference between lineal and collateral relatives. Grandparents, parents, children, and grandchildren are relatives related to Ego in a direct line. These individuals are the lineal relatives. The remaining relatives such as uncles, aunts, cousins, nephews, nieces and siblings who are not related to Ego in a direct line are the collateral relatives. The lineal system lumps collateral relatives of the same generation together with the exception of siblings and cousins. Sex recognition is usually present though not always. English terminology is lineal and readily indicates the presence or absence of sex recognition. In English sex is ignored among cousins. For parent, sibling, and child terms, sex can be expressed or ignored. For uncle-aunt and nephew-niece terms sex must be expressed because there is no single collective term.

The determinants of lineal terminology as pointed out by Murdock (7) are neolocal residence and the independent nuclear family. These two determinants directly involve Ego in role situations which can explain the lineal classificatory system. The independent nuclear family and neolocal residence isolates Ego from close association with all relatives except parents, siblings, spouse, and children. Thus with the exception of siblings, the collateral relatives and the distant lineal relatives are outsiders. Only rarely can they play the roles of authority, sponsor, or sibling. Ego tends to view parents, siblings, and children as unique individuals who are different from all other relatives. He tends to consider collateral relatives, except siblings, as distant and to classify those of the same generation together. Relatives of the grandparent generation vary in their degree of distance. Grandparents normally are much closer to Ego than great uncles or great aunts. This latter would also serve as a factor for differentiating lineal from collateral relatives within this generation. While the degree of removal among distant relatives may vary, the role they tend to play when they have the opportunity is the role of sponsor. The authority role is generally absent, because the function of providing for the family rests exclusively within the nuclear family.

The lineal, like the generational system, develops within a Bi oriented society where both parents tend to be the providers of basic

subsistence. Thus in both systems each parent tends to play both authority and sponsor roles with respect to their children.

A term for the symmetrical system has not appeared in the literature. The term symmetrical which is used here has both advantages and disadvantages. Its advantages are as follows:

1. Being a unilineal system, it contrasts with the other unilineal systems which have been termed asymmetrical.
2. Part of the system has been termed bifurcate merging. However, that type of terminology is also characteristic of the asymmetrical systems, since only parallel and lineal relatives are merged in the definition of bifurcate merging terminology.
3. The classifying of cross-cousins together which are differentiated from parallel cousins and siblings has been termed Iroquois terminology. This definition, since it refers only to cousin terms, is too specific to represent a complete system.

There seems to be only one disadvantage in the use of the term. It is not the only symmetrical system. The lineal and the generational systems are also symmetrical.

The symmetrical system observes three principles of classification.

1. The recognition of generation.
2. The differentiation of collateral relatives into cross and parallel.
3. The merging of lineal and parallel relatives.

Murdock tested the bifurcate merging principle in many ways but he did not test directly the classifying together of cross relatives within each generation. Yet with respect to cousin terms he did demonstrate conclusively that Iroquois cousin terminology was brought into existence by either Matri or Patri forces. Matri and Patri determinants would include factors such as unilineal types of kin groups, descent, exogamy, residence, marriage, and division of labor in subsistence. Each of these factors tend to align relatives in certain ways so that they can play specific roles with respect to each other. Each of these determinants also tend to produce asymmetrical terminology. Since the asymmetrical systems represent the mature form of unilineal organization, as pointed out by White (11), the symmetrical system is a transitional one. As a transitional system there are at least two forms of symmetrical cousin terminology as pointed out by Raibourn (9); one type is relatively stable, the second unstable and so arranged that the shift to asymmetrical terminology can readily be made. With respect to role interaction, there is no difference between the determinants of symmetrical and asymmetrical terminology. Time and the specific symmetrical arrangements seem to be the only significant factors involved in the differentiation of asymmetrical from symmetrical terminology.

As an illustration of role interaction, only the Patri system will be utilized. Matri organization would produce an identical symmetrical system even though the forces are reciprocal.

The base of the Patri system is a Patri division of labor. This means that males are the providers of basic subsistence. Father tends to play the authority role. With patrilocal residence, Ego finds himself

associated with other authority figures such as father's brother, father's father and father's father's brother. Ego tends to identify each as a father. If sororal polygyny is present, mother's sister's husband may be father. With exogamous patrilineal kin groups, the chances are very good that mother's sister will live in Ego's community and will perhaps be married to an individual Ego tends to consider as a father.

When father plays the authority role, mother tends to be the sponsor. In the Patri family she is an outsider. The sponsor role is extended to father's brother's wife, and to mother's sister if she is in Ego's community because all are outsiders and each has much in common. The paternal parallel cousins always, and the maternal parallel cousins frequently, are in close association with Ego. Such closeness makes it possible to play sibling roles. When the above lineal and parallel relationships are institutionalized, the bifurcate merging part of the symmetrical system comes into existence so long as the generational principle is maintained.

The effect of role playing on the lumping of cross relatives is less direct. Cross relatives are normally distant relatives who rarely have an opportunity to play roles. With the exception of opposite sex siblings, they can never belong to Ego's kin group. As such they contrast sharply with parallel and lineal relatives. Unilineal organization tends to align cross relatives into role playing situations that tend to differentiate them and tend to produce asymmetrical terminology. Cross relatives would appear to have much more in common in an incipient unilineal system than in a mature form of unilineal organization.

Since cross relatives are normally distant relatives, historic and linguistic factors may also be of particular importance for the following reasons:

1. If the previous system was lineal, cross relatives would not have to be changed at all to shift to the symmetrical system. Only parallel and lineal would have to merge.
2. If the former system was asymmetrical, symmetrical terminology could develop as a means of moving out of the asymmetrical system. Raibourn (9) describes such a situation which occurred among the Wintu of central California.
3. If the former system was collateral or generational, the lumping of cross relatives would be based only on distant relatives. As such the lumping would seem to be less likely, but as mentioned previously, they would appear to have much more in common in an incipient than in a mature unilineal system.

The asymmetrical systems—the one Patri, the other Patri—ignore the generational principle of classification. Individuals so linked together in the kinship system have characteristics in common. In a Patri organized society, father, father's brother, father's father, and father's father's brother tend to play authority roles. If generation is ignored, they can be classed together as fathers. Likewise in a Patri society, mother, mother's sister, mother's mother and mother's mother's sister tend to be authority figures to Ego. Other asymmetrical alignments are more obscure. Murdock (7) tested and validated exogamous kin

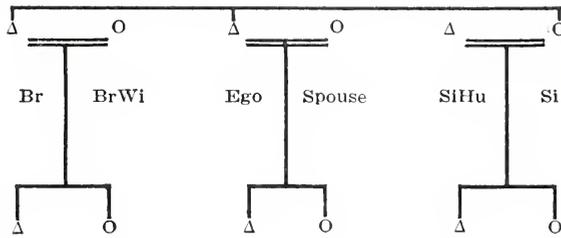
groups as a determinant. He further states (p. 168) that he suspects that amitate and avunculate relationships may be an important factor in the development of Matri asymmetrical terminology. The present writer tends to disagree and to view at least the avunculate relationship as destructive to the system for the following reasons:

1. In the Matri system, mother's brother tends to be considered a brother. He, Ego, and Ego's brother have much in common. They belong to the same kin groups and all of them move out at marriage. The roles normally played would be sibling or sponsor roles.
2. The avunculate changes the relationship to one of authority for mother's brother. The Hopi as illustrated by Eggan (2) classify mother's mother's brother with brother but have a different term for mother's brother. This alignment seems to imply that formerly all three individuals were called by the term for brother. The distinct term for mother's brother would have tended to develop as a result of the avunculate. Mother's brother as the disciplinarian of Ego could hardly be considered a brother.
3. The association of the avunculate with asymmetrical terminology, which Murdock pointed out, could stem from a historical situation. The asymmetrical system is a mature form of organization. As such it would be more likely to attempt to preserve itself under the influence of change than would an incipient system. The avunculate being a means of preserving Matri institutions which have come under the influence of basic Patri or Bi determinants would be more likely to be found associated with the mature asymmetrical system.

Specific sibling and sponsor role interactions which are factors in the Patri asymmetrical alignments are as follows:

1. Father's sister would have many of the characteristics of a sister. Both would have the same residence prior to marriage. Both would have to marry outside the kin group. If father's sister was approximately the same age as one of Ego's sisters, the similarity between them would be exceptionally strong. Likewise, father's sister's husband would tend to play the same role as sister's husband. Father's sister's children would tend to be called nephew or niece if Ego was male or son and daughter if Ego was female, providing the cross parallel distinction among siblings is observed.
2. Mother's brother's daughter would have the same characteristics as mother's sister and both would tend to have characteristics in common with mother. Mother's brother's daughter and mother's sister would frequently reside in Ego's residential community after marriage. Both might be married to father or or to a classificatory father. All three would belong to the same kin group and stem from the same residential community. From mother's brother's daughter's point of view, Ego's mother and mother's sisters appear to her as sisters. Ego's mother's brother is her father and Ego's mother and mother's sister are, to her,

CHART II. Classification of Relatives continued for Child-Nephew-Niece generation



C		BrDa	BrSo	So	Da	SiSo	SiDa
L		Ni	Ne	So	Da	Ne	Ni
G		Da	So	So	Da	So	Da
S,P,M	m sp	Da	So	So	Da	Ne	Ni
S,P,M	f sp	Ni	Ne	So	Da	So	Da

Symbols used: Vertical line is descent line. Horizontal line represents siblings, double line stands for marriage. Fa=father, Mo=mother, Br=brother, Si=sister, So=son, Da=daughter, Hu=husband, and Wi=wife. Other relatives can be described by combination; example, MoBrDa=mother's brother's daughter. Gt=great, Gd=grand, Un=uncle, Au=aunt, Co=cousin, sp=speaker, m=male, f=female, Δ=male relatives, and O=female relative.

C—Collateral, descriptive, Sudanese
 L—Lineal, Eskimo
 G—Generational, Hawaiian

S—Symmetrical, Iroquois
 P—Patri asymmetrical, Omaha
 M—Matri asymmetrical, Crow

* In Bilateral Societies there seems to be a tendency to call BrWi, Si and SiHu, Br—but this implies Br-Si marriage. Some may use Br or Si in law or equivalent. In Unilateral societies there is a tendency to call same sex Br or Si opposite sex Hu or Wi. But same difficulty applies. Most societies simply have a non-classificatory, non-distinctive, sometimes descriptive term for these relatives.

father's sisters; and as pointed out above, father's sister is a sister. Thus both she and Ego would tend to view the three as identical.

- The equating of mother's brother's son with mother's brother and mother's father involves less role interaction. All are Ego's distant relatives. From Ego's point of view, each of the three do have much in common. They form a direct line of lineal descendants in mother's Patri lineage. In their own lineage they form a direct line of Patri authority figures even though they do not play this role with respect to Ego.

The role interaction which results in the formation of the Matri asymmetrical system would be identical to the above with the exception that it would be reciprocal. For example, where father's sister tends to be called sister in the Patri system, she would tend to be called grandmother in the Matri. Each of the other relatives would be comparable for identical reasons.

The presentation above began with the grandparent generation, follows through the parent and then to the sibling generation. This presentation seems the most logical. Yet it implies that change normally begins in the more advanced generations. Murdock (7) seems to have considered this sequence the most likely for he states that when

. . . the term for mother is extended to mother's sister, father's sister, father's brother's wife and mother's brother's wife, the daughters of such classificatory mothers tend to be called by the same term as sister, on the analogy of the relationship between own mother and her daughter.

This sequence, however, is now known to occur in, for the most part, a reverse order. As stated it violates the principle that kinship systems normally begin to change among cousins of the sibling generation. That the actual situation appears to be working in opposition to logic can perhaps be explained as follows:

1. Prior to actual change, role interaction would be operating on all generational levels.
2. The tendency to express such relationship first on advanced generational levels is perhaps present but expression may be blocked. The blocking could occur as a result of a learning factor. The tendency to express feelings of relationship instead of the correct linguistic terms would be most pronounced among the uninhibited. The least inhibited members of a society are its children. Children using kinship terms incorrectly would be more likely to be corrected in the presence of adults than in their play with other children. Since cousins are frequently of about the same age, misuse of cousin terms would be less likely to be corrected than misuse of terms in other generations where age differences are generally greater. The new or misused terms would be psychologically reinforced by repetitive use with less correction and could be carried along most easily into adulthood.

Among brother's children, sister's children and Ego's children, no distinction is made in the classification between symmetrical and the Patri or Matri asymmetrical systems. However, it is usually necessary to distinguish the sex of the speaker. All three unilineal systems distinguish between cross and parallel relatives. If Ego is male, brother is a parallel and sister a cross relative. If Ego is female, then brother is a cross and sister a parallel relative. Unilineal system of classification normally distinguishes the sex of the speaker in these generations though they may frequently ignore sex of the speaker in other parts of the system. Recognition or the lack of it seems to reflect language or historical factors, not social situations.

The analysis of kinship presented in this paper has been intentionally over-simplified. There are numerous factors which affect kinship classification that have not been included simply because they tend to promote a state in which parts of the system are out of balance. Most of these also involve role interaction. One example which was presented was the effect of the authority role played by mother's brother. The aim

here has been to point out the effect of role interaction upon the basic rather than the idiosyncratic aspects of kinship.

Over-simplification has also occurred when the implication is made that both parents play both authority and sponsor roles in a Bi oriented society while father alone plays the authority role in a Patri or mother in a Matri society. Such roles played by individuals in any society are extremely variable. Such statements refer only to tendencies. In all societies there are individuals who vary in their ability to play their expected roles. This variability helps to account for the individual variability found in all societies. If all individuals in a society played their respective authority, sponsor, sibling, and distant relative roles identically, individual behavior within the society would be far more homogeneous.

In summary, it can be stated that role interaction involves authority, sponsor, peer, and distant relationships. Each are deeply rooted in mammalian behavior. In human societies this has led to the formulation of intricate kinship systems. The type of system depends upon the type of role interaction. The type of interaction depends ultimately upon the social situation.

Literature Cited

1. Driver, H. E., and W. C. Massey, 1957. Comparative Studies of North American Indians. Transaction of the American Philosophical Society, New Series, **47**, Part 2.
2. Eggan, F. 1950. Social Organization of the Western Pueblos. University of Chicago Press.
3. Gifford, E. W. 1922. California Kinship Terminologies. University of California Publication in American Archaeology and Ethnology.
4. Kroeber, A. L. 1909. Classificatory System of Relationship. Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute **39**. Republished ed. used. From Fried, M. H. 1959. Readings in Anthropology, **2**. Thomas Y. Crowell Co.
5. ———— 1917. Zuni Kin and Clan. Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History **18**.
6. Morgan, L. H. 1870. Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the human family. Smithsonian Contributions to Knowledge.
7. Murdock, G. P. 1949. Social Structure. The MacMillan Co.
8. Raibourn, D. D. 1955. The Direction of Social Change in Central California. Unpublished M.A. thesis, Indiana University.
9. ———— 1960. Two forms of Iroquois Cousin Terminology and Their Functions. Proceedings of the Indiana Academy of Science **69**.
10. ———— 1962. The Role of Diffusion in Changing Kinship Systems. Proceedings of the Indiana Academy of Science **71**.
11. White, L.A. 1939. A Problem in Kinship Terminology. American Anthropologist.