Kinship Domain for 'Space in Thinking' Subproject

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- **Motivation**
  To see whether people think about kinship relations in spatial terms – compare our locutions 'distant cousin', 'close kin', 'higher generations', 'descendants', etc.
- **Priority**
  LOW – this is a pilot project. HOWEVER you ought to understand your local kinship system anyway, as doing so will open many conceptual doors.

1. Background and Motivation

Kinship is the core of any society – without a structured family or set of relations, there can be no reproduction of society. But in traditional societies kinship also structures politics, economics and all other spheres of life. Even in modern industrial societies, the political and business elite is composed of a small number of families interconnected by kinship ties.

Kinship relations are binary predicates (x is father of y, etc.), except in some exotic cases where they are ternary. These binary predicates can show relations of entailment (if x is father of y, x is parent of y), converseness (if x is father of y, y is child of x), and incompatibility (if x is father of y, y is not parent of x), and sometimes other logical relations (e.g. transitivity: if x is father of y, and y is (full) sister of z, then x is father of z) . The full set of terms plus their internal relations makes a highly structured semantic field of considerable mathematical complexity. Kinship relations conceived thus are analytically independent of – but usually map directly onto – kinship terms.

Kin term systems have a certain independence from the underlying social system. It is essential to distinguish terms of address, like 'mummy', from terms of reference, like 'mother'; it is often the case that non-kin are addressed with kin terms like 'uncle' or 'grandfather' – the literature on kin-terms is totally preoccupied with terms of reference, not those of address. A major distinction is between 'classificatory terms' and 'non-classificatory' terms – in English, *father* is a non-classificatory term, but *cousin* is a classificatory term, which subsumes indefinitely many individuals of different genealogical distance. Many traditional kin term systems consist entirely of classificatory terms – 'father' covers father's brother (FB), father's father's brother's son (FFBS), etc., perhaps with an additional term for address for the 'real' father, like 'daddy'. Note here the use of kin-type strings (where F is a kin-type) to specify the extensions of kin-terms (the full set of kin-types is: F, M(mother) B, Z(sister), S, D(daughter), W(wife), H(husband).

Kinship systems (not kin term systems) are categorized in various ways. One set of distinctions concerns marriage. 'Elementary' systems specify obligatory marriage to someone in a specific kinship relation, usually some kind of cousin – for example a classificatory FZD or MBD (called a cross cousin – since they are offspring of an opposite sex sibling of the parent). 'Complex' systems merely specify who you cannot marry, e.g. your close kin or members of your lineage. Kinship systems are said to be unilineal or cognatic in terms of descent. Unilineal kinship is reckoned through one sex, e.g. through F to FFFF and on to some apical ancestor: all the descendants of that apical ancestor are said to be in uniquely one lineage, which has precise borders – where people can't trace the genealogical connections, we say they are members of a clan. Unilineal kinship is called matrilineal when traced through the mother, and patrilineal when traced through the father. Cognatic kinship systems are like the European systems – we trace both through mother and father, and this does not yield any set of well-defined groups of kin, since cognatic groups (unlike lineages) overlap in membership. There is a huge literature on kinship theory, but one very good introduction by Robin Fox 1967 *Kinship*, which is a bit outdated, but still the best thing (R. Parkin, 1997, *Kinship* can complement it bibliographically).

Kinterm systems usually consist of 20-50 terms with quite complex semantics. Historically, there have been three main approaches – structural-functional, componential analysis, and reductionist rule analysis. The structural-functional approach tries to explain the extension of terms in terms of the similarity of social relations: so if classificatory 'father' includes F, FB, FFBS, that is because all these guys have similar responsibilities and rights over the child (as in a patrilineal system). This has produced lots of insights, but never a full account, and is sort of passé. The componential analysis gives an account in terms of semantic features, so that *father* = +male, +parent, or classificatory 'father' = +1 generation (one generation up), + male, +member of ego's patrilineage (see Goodenough 1967 for an elegant introduction). The reduction rule analysis assumes that a term like 'classificatory father' has its indefinite extension of kin-types (like F, FB, FFBS, etc.) through a set of reduction rules of the sort FB→ F, FS→B: then FFBS can be reduced to FFS, and then to FB, and then to F, by successive application of the rules (see Lounsbury, in S. Tyler, *Cognitive Anthropology*, pp. 212-55 for a full scale account). This last kind of analysis proves a very useful typological tool – slightly different reduction rules yield the main types of kinterm systems – and can now be said to be dominant (see Godelier, M., Trautmann, T. R. & Tjon Sie Fat, F. E. (eds.) 1998. *Transformations of kinship*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press). This modern work suggests that there are just a handful of kinterm systems in the world, of the indefinitely many possible, with major implications for universals and diffusion in prehistoric time.

1. Pre-requisite task: collecting a genealogy

To find out what kind of terms you have got you need to do the following. Capture a late middle-aged male informant, who will be the EGO of your genealogical chart (the system from the female point of view may look quite different – so you want to do that too later, but the comparative material is all male-oriented!). Ask him for all his brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, in birth order, and draw a family tree. Go on and get his father, mother, father's father etc., and son's daughter, daughter's son, etc., till you have at least two generations up and two generations down. As you collect all these people, ask him how he would *refer to them* (not, or not primarily, how he would address them).[5] Note he may be able to do it two ways: 'he's my grandson, my son's son' – using both classificatory terms and kin-type strings – you want the classificatory terms primarily. Be sure also to ask for spouses of all these fellows. Make sure you have FZ, FB, MZ, MB and their children, as the typing of kinship systems depends critically on e.g. the classification of FZD, MBD and so forth.

Now get a related female – e.g. the sister of your prior consultant – and do the same for her (if she's a close relative like a sister most of the genealogy will be the same, and you can just write in all the details in e.g. green ink.

From such a chart you can later work out what type of system you have, using handbooks like Fox or Lounsbury *op. cit.* For more on the method, see Conklin, *The ethnogenealogical method* in Tyler, *Cognitive anthropology*, pp. 93-122.; E. L. Schusky, 1965, *Manual for kinship analysis*, Holt.

2. The task

We want to know how people *think* about their field of kin, on the supposition that it is quasi-spatial. To get some insights here, we need to video a discussion about kinship reckoning, the kinship system, marriage rules and so on – with a view to looking at both the linguistic expressions involved, and the gestures people use to indicate kinship groups and relations. Although participants will be happy to explain things to you – and this will be interesting data – it

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[5] Note that getting this distinction between address and reference clear to your informants may not be easy. You may need to set up a scenario: "Suppose someone points to X, standing at a distance over there, and asks "Who's that?", what would you say – "She's my _____".

would be better data if you can get them to talk to one another, so you need at least two consultants. Since adults will not find the details newsworthy conversation, I suggest having a child, who can be instructed: most pre-pubescent children are likely to be a bit confused by the local kinship system. You can then prompt discussion from behind the camera. You will need to do some homework: (a) try to find out how various prominent persons are addressed and referred to with kin terms by e.g. your hosts, so you can ask the participants 'why does he use that term?' (b) If there are notorious cases of 'mismarriage', 'incest', these may be good topics: you can ask 'What was wrong with that?'(c) Find out about local kinship groups, like clans, their names and functions.

Set up
Try to film in the preferred manner for gesture studies, i.e. with two native speakers at right angles with the camera pointing down the diagonal between them, zoomed out just sufficiently to capture gestures. Have a stick handy if sitting on earth, or chalk if on concrete (for diagrams).
For participants, try and get men in the first instance (for the reasons explained above) who are distantly related, and perhaps a boy of about 12 years old. (Distant relations will share genealogical knowledge, but still have some interest in working out the details.) You may get an interestingly different picture if you repeat the whole thing with women.

Task
Try and get the participants to talk about kinship relations. For example:

(1) if you have noted participant A talking about the headman as 'uncle', ask A to explain to the boy why he refers to him in that way, and conversely, how the boy should address and refer to the headman. This will be of course natural to explain to you too, but try to get them talking between each other. Some of these kinship relations will be trivial and give rise to little conversation – but for distant kin there will often be different ways to reckon to them, and thus two or more potential terms, and you can ask 'Why this one and not that one?'

(2) Ask the boy, why he calls the co-present men the way he does – this may provoke corrections and elucidations; one can then go on and ask about other people to whom the boy is related. Then graduate on to harder questions: Ask the boy what his sister would call all these people, or how his mother would call them.

(3) Ask the men to explain to the boy who he can and can't marry, and why. Get them to explain how things will change for the boy when he marries (e.g. he has a whole bunch of in-laws or affines, previously unrelated or otherwise related; also his kin terms to others may change).

(4) If the society has named kinship groups – clans, lineages, or the like – get the men to explain to the boy how many there are locally, and how they are related to one another, and who can marry who. Provide a stick, so that diagrams can be drawn in the dirt, as this may well be a natural mode of explanation (cf. Conklin on the Hanunóo in Tyler, Cognitive Anthropology, p. 113.)

(5) Ask about inheritance: how is land passed on? If father to son, what happens if there are no sons, or no children at all? Ask about political and religious office – how is it passed on? Ask about how villages are founded – do they maintain kinship relations to the source village? Can the two villages intermarry? Ask what happens in cases of adoption or foster parentage – is the original genealogical connection remembered, and how does it affect how the adopted child can marry?

3. Features of interest
This is a pilot task, and one of the amazing things about the kinship literature is that – despite the piles of tomes and PhDs – there is scarcely anything on how people actually reckon kinship

relations in conversation (see Levinson 1977, *Social deixis in a Tamil village*, UCB PhD, and D. Zeitlyn, in press, *Talking Mambila Kinship*). Still, what we may expect is:

(a) there will be spatial metaphors for ascending and descending generations, close vs. distant classificatory kin, and so forth;

(b) there will be corresponding gestures;

(c) kin groups will be conceived of as places in space, connected by kinship 'paths' of marriage and ancestral connection – in particular marriage will be seen as a coming together or joining of kin groups; and gestures will follow suit.

(d) if people diagram kin relations, there will be a spatial relation between the diagram and the gestures accompanying description. To record the diagrams, use a still camera so you don't stop videotaping the interaction. You may need to ask them later to remake the diagrams – then you can fill the grooves with flour and get a very clear shot.

Publication

Given the poverty of available information, an article on how people actually calculate and talk about kinship relations would be very publishable in anthropology and linguistic anthropology journals. It may be especially interesting to compare two groups, and do a collaborative paper with a colleague.