THE SEMANTICS OF KINSHIP IN SOUTHW INDIA AND CEYLON

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I

It is now commonplace in modern philosophy to say that metaphysics follows closely the contours of our language. A corollary of this, rarely examined by philosophers, must be that the metaphysics of different cultures must be as different as their different languages. And not only this, but if patterns of thought are related to languages and culture, it then becomes sensible to think of the structure of customary thought as being different among different peoples. However, even though the theory may develop in this direction, it is also clear that, in practice, for most purposes, the differences between the metaphysics of other cultures and the metaphysics of the West are too subtle and too difficult for the task of analysis to be lightly undertaken. Superficially a cow is a cow, and a tree is a tree; and though the semantic fields may differ between English cow and Sinhalese eladena, it is generally agreed that they refer to the same object 'out there'.

It is in the area of kinship that this question becomes particularly susceptible to examination. In this field, customary patterns of nomenclature and categorization retain great strength in different cultures, and it is obvious that they differ from culture to culture.

But what is it precisely that differs? The organization of the family is different, there may be lineages variously patterned, differences in the structure of households, in the behavior of kinsmen, and so on. In other words, the empirical facts 'out there' are different. Hence, it is only natural to suppose that nomenclature and categorization should be homologous to empirical group organization. This raises no problems in

1 I had the privilege of reading an earlier version of this paper at the École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris, upon the invitation of Professor Louis Dumont. I wish to record my gratitude to Dumont for having brought a wealth of brilliant insights into South Indian Studies through his work and for having rigorously insisted on the highest standards of scholarship. I have greatly benefited from the comments of him and his colleagues at the Centre d'Études Indiennes, Paris, but I remain acutely aware of the many weaknesses in the present work which could not be eliminated. Aspects of this work were also discussed with my colleague Dr. S. J. Tambiah at Cambridge: I am grateful to him for many new and fruitful ideas. The faults still remain.
metaphysics since the observed 'reality' is the same for them as for us: had we been placed in the same compounds and faced with the same configurations, we would have spoken of them in the same manner.

But what if there are no configurations of the above kind, if the nomenclature and categorization is unrelated to group organization, and if the world out there is categorized and shaped by words only. If the pattern of these words is obviously different from ours then we are seriously faced with a totally different ordering of the world out there by cognitive categories.

Hence Benjamin in his delightful letter to Leach concerning the biological classifications of the Temiar can write of 'species that cause convulsions if eaten, species that one must not tame, species that one must share around as meat, species that must not be laughed at ...', species that only particular categories of people may eat, which it appears are 'relatable to the central creation myth ...'2

We seem to be able to accept this point of view without severe reactions in the area of folk-taxonomies, where it does not appear to affect human relations; but when it is suggested that certain marriage regulations are similar, as I shall argue, resistance stiffens perceptibly. An example of this from Ceylon will be discussed below. It needs merely to be added that the power of words to structure the behavior of kinsmen, rather than utilitarian or materialist aspects of kinship behaviour structuring language, is a proposition which fills many anthropologists with a dark horror as if an indecent suggestion had been made. If words have such autonomy then it is to be feared that Pandora's box will certainly be opened; and who knows what else may come out. Our comfortable assumptions may be further challenged.

The subject is at the heart of semantics. Ullmann3 refers to Richards and Ogden's triangle and says that the essential problem for the linguist is to examine the relationship between the 'name' (or sign) and the 'sense' (that is, the 'sense' it conjures up in the mind). The third corner of the triangle, that is the way both the 'name' and the 'sense' are related to the phenomena in the 'outside world', is not examined. That 'outside' phenomena take primacy, like the 'cow', seems to be assumed.

For anthropologists this problem of the relation between the categories in the mind, their verbal (or other) symbols, and the 'outside world', is a matter of key importance. We cannot take the patterning of 'the outside world' for granted since its very foundations starting from concepts of time and space down to the categories of edible and inedible plants and animals have been found to differ in their fundamentals. The way in which our cognitive constructs shape 'the outside' must be examined.

It is because Ullmann does not consider the relation of the 'name' and the 'sense' to the 'outside world' that his remarks on names and naming, for instance, also fall short of the mark.4 As a result of Lévi-Strauss' work, it is now clear that principles of folk-nomenclature are among the most powerful devices of categorization.

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3 Ullmann, (see fn. 3) 71ff.
Customary and ‘unconscious’ methods, such as the semantics of personal names, are particularly expressive of the schemes of classification being used by the particular culture concerned.6

II

Most anthropologists who have worked on South India and Ceylon, from Morgan to present fieldworkers, are agreed that the kinship terminologies of this region have some important general characteristics in common. Gough has expressed this most recently by stating that some form of cross-cousin marriage is common to the region.6 Dumont has been arguing for a long time that there are underlying similarities in South Indian kinship systems and that these terminologies should be regarded as Dravidian systems. We can express this unity in more abstract language by saying that they represent ‘bifurcate merging’ terminologies in which in every generation a binary distinction of those who may and may not have sexual relations is made, and in the next generation these are ‘merged’ by cross-cousin marriage. The terminology, in general, makes the following equation: Spouse = MBD or FZD. It follows then that these other equations can be made:

(Male speaking)
1st ascending generation: FB = F; FZ = MBW = MinL;
MZ = M; MB = FZH = FinL;
Ego’s generation: Wife = BW = FZD = MBD; ZH = FZS = MBS;
1st descending generation: SW = ZD; DH = ZS; BS = S; BD = D, etc.

It is easy to see that the terminology is formally structured as if all marriages were between cross-cousins. Much of the rest of this essay concerns the semantic implications of this state of affairs.7

Dumont in an important recent article observes that North Indian terminologies do not exhibit any structures homologous to the neat systematic South Indian con-

6 For an examination of the classificatory properties of Kandyan Sinhalese personal names, see Nur Yalman, Under the Bo Tree: studies in caste, kinship and marriage in the interior of Ceylon 91 (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967).
7 I refrain from presenting the actual kinship terms and variant forms on which this essay is based. There is agreement on the bifurcate-merging form of Dravidian terminologies. What is in question is whether and how marriage preferences and prohibitions relate to this terminology; and also whether the similarity of terminology indicates more profound similarities in kinship structure between these apparently diverse patrilineal, matrilineal, hypergamous, polygamous, and polyandrous groups in South India and Ceylon. Karve and Gough, as well as the authors cited below, provide much data on terms: Irawati Karve, Kinship organization in India (Poona, 1953); Gough, “Brahmin kinship in a Tamil village”, AmA 58:5.826-853 (1956). Also D. M. Schneider and Gough, eds., Matrilineal kinship (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1961).
figurations. He writes, almost with regret, that although there are various other elements common to the kinship customs of North and South India, the terminologies are fluid and unstructured in the North as compared to the South. He indeed raises the question as to the significance of these important differences by outlining a very difficult hypothesis which bears close examination.

I will return to Dumont’s hypothesis. In the meanwhile further questions may be asked: Of what does this fundamental unity consist exactly? Is it merely a formal ordering of terms, or does it go beyond that to the kinship customs in general? What is it which renders these terminologies ‘systematic’ in the sense which North Indian terminologies are not? And how are their semantics relevant?

Numerous careful ethnographers, Rivers, Srinivas, Gough, Emeneau, Leach, and Tambiah, who have worked in this region and were interested in kinship, have tended to look upon the association of the terminology with cross-cousin marriage as a merely formal feature of interest perhaps for the general classification of kinship terminologies and have, I think, evaded the issue of the exact relationship between the semantic implications of these terms and the practical institutions of marriage or day-to-day kinship behavior. That the terms on the one hand and the incest and marriage rules on the other are somehow related is obvious. In most of the Dravidian-speaking groups in South India and the Sinhalese speakers in Ceylon, marriage and sexual relations are forbidden between persons classified as ‘siblings’ (always parallel cousins), and there are preferences of varying degrees of intensity for marriage between the children of a brother and a sister who are classified as ‘cross-cousins’ by special non-sibling terms.

However, it is one thing to observe that the terminology, formally speaking, contains the rule of cross-cousin marriage and quite another to examine what this means in practice. On the latter question one could take the following positions:

a) One could say that the terminology turns around the Spouse = cross-cousin formula but that its formal features are irrelevant for kinship behaviour. So verbal usage merely follows social context. In other words, the terminology is completely flexible and can be applied, ex post facto, to any marriage arrangement and the resulting configuration of kin. And if so, sociological explanations for the incest/marriage rules and cross-cousin preferences other than the semantics of the terminology must be found.

b) Or one could argue that these formal aspects of terminology merely reflect in a symbolic fashion the general preference for the marriage of cross-cousins and affinity.

c) One could claim that they result from the actual rate of cross-cousin marriage

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9 Such as massina (m.)—nana (f.) Sinhalese; machang (m.)—machi (f.) Tamil, etc.

10 This appears to be S. J. Tambiah’s argument in “Kinship fact and fiction in relation to the Kandyan Sinhalese”, JRAI 95:2.131-173 (1965).

11 This may fit in with Dumont’s views, further discussed below.
even though this is generally admitted to be relatively low, in which case one would have to argue from structured kinship behavior to cognitive categories but also provide other explanations as to why behavior is so structured.

d) And finally, one could claim that the terminology is not related to the incidence or preferences of actual cross-cousin marriages at all but is a structural arrangement of kinsmen per se which orders and channels marital and sexual relations in a bilateral kinship network. So cognitive and verbal usage shapes social context.

If the last argument is excluded then some difficult issues remain to be reconciled in all other cases. The prohibition on parallel cousins applies to both the maternal and the paternal side. In order to explain the rules in the usual anthropological fashion, one would have to argue that we have here 'exogamous' lines, but only patri-lines or matri-lines would not be sufficient. We would have to show the existence of both patri- and matri-lines at the same time in all these castes and tribes in South India and Ceylon. Needless to say, this has not been found, and the only people for whom such an explanation has been put forward has been the Toda, a tiny community in the Nilgiri Hills. And even in this case, though the argument is ingenious, the material is not free of question.

In all the other communities, ethnographers have had to turn to piecemeal arguments: Srinivas in his classic work on the Coorgs has suggested that the reason for the maternal parallel cousin prohibitions is to 'balance' the importance given to paternal parallel cousins. Gough in writing of Tanjore Tamils has said that paternal parallel cousins are prohibited by patrilineal 'exogamy' whereas maternal parallel cousins are prohibited because sisters feel close to each other and frequently visit each other. Tambiah has suggested that the rules can be regarded as if there are two patrilineal descent groups intermarrying with each other, even though, in the case of the Kandyan Sinhalese no such evidence was reported. Leach, in writing about the question in the North Central Province of Ceylon, has merely stated that cross-cousin marriage is a 'caste rule' and has been on the whole unconcerned with the relationship between the form of the terminology, its semantics, and the behavior of kinsmen. It would be correct to say that the matter has remained one of those puzzles often associated with incest rules. Can we maintain argument d), which puts the burden on semantics alone, and where would this argument take us?

20 Gough, "Brahmin kinship" (see fn. 7) 846 (1956).
The semantic explanation would be particularly convenient among the Kandyan Sinhalese villagers where no unilineal descent lines of any kind have been found and the marriage rules can not be related to any simple sociological feature like lineal, or local, or household exogamy, and the like. Cross-cousins may marry and distant siblings may not, even if the former have lived all their lives in the same household and the latter have never seen each other.

Let us first consider incest, exogamy, and marriage rules in a more general sense. These regulations in some form are as universal as language in human societies. They often take the form of prohibitions: certain categories of relatives are to be avoided. For a male the mother and the sisters seem always included, but the further extensions of these prohibitions vary very widely. One of the most usual of prohibitions has been for members of the same clan or lineage. The feeling here is that the group, in this case a clan, is really an extension of the domestic family, that all the descendants of an ancestor are like the children of the family, and, therefore, sexual unions are prohibited among them.

It is appropriate to refer to this type of rule as a negative rule: that is, prohibitions are defined but the choice outside those prohibitions remains open. Exogamy, which is a particular case of a negative rule, merely states that the people of group X must marry out. Exogamy is an ethnographers' term. It connotes a 'group' with such a degree of solidarity that it regards itself as a single family.

This argument based on the sentiment that members of the same family, except for the parents, do not engage in sexual relations, evidently has some deep roots in Western thought since it has been used without question as an 'explanation' of sexual rules in the most diverse contexts. When exogamy is advanced, no further questions are usually asked. Both in the Middle East and in India the sentiment that close kinsmen do not have sex cannot be accepted at its face value. In South India at least, there are quite other considerations at work: it is a region where in-marriage among relatives, i.e. endogamy, assumes predominant significance.

As an alternative to 'exogamy' we must underline the presence of 'positive marriage rules' in this region. These rules state that a person in the category of P can only marry a person in the category of Q and no other. For purposes of the rules no distinction needs to be made between sexual intercourse or marriage.

The structural requirements for negative and positive rules are different. The negative rule requires that the boundaries of groups must permit clear definition — hence, lineages or local groups may fulfill this function or specific kin categories may be singled out for prohibitions. The positive rule requires that the rules whereby a person is classified in Category P and another in Category Q be consistent and unambiguous. Australian marriage classes are sometimes said to function this way, but Meggitt suggests that the significant feature in the Australian system is the pre-

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18 Sweden is now an interesting exception since there have been reports that a move has been made to legitimize brother-sister marriage in that country by parliamentary action.
These are kinship categories which can operate as marriage classes. The South Indian and Ceylonese patterns based on the Dravidian terminology are to my mind of this nature.

Thus, for instance, a female cross-cousin is not only a MBD but also the sister of a B-in-law, a M-in-law’s ZD, a FZ husband’s brother’s wife’s ZD. But, on the other hand, a FZ husband’s ZD is a sister, etc. These lateral extensions which are entirely dependent on the logic of the terminology alone seem much more important than the lineal ones. They have been specifically mentioned for the Toda and Tanjore castes.

Emeneau writes:

... even when the lines of a pedigree have been lost to memory the correct terminology based on the lost pedigree is maintained ...²⁰

and Gough notes:

Moreover incest prohibitions are extended to all those who, in this wide lateral extension of terms, fall into the same terminological category as do members of Ego’s immediate patrilineal group ...²¹

Lévi-Strauss²² has expressed an important facet of the differences between positive and negative rules by noting that cross-cousin marriage systems fit in with the requirements of small in-marrying groups, and that the system of prohibited degrees is appropriate for the larger and more fluid groups.²³

What I have argued so far is that the Dravidian terminology is a device which allocates all the kinsmen of Ego to certain pigeon-holes and prescribes the categories P and Q who may have sexual commerce. Observe that P and Q need not, by any means, be the children of a brother and a sister. Nor are the relations between them defined in lineage terms. What then of the customary preferences for the marriage of cross-cousins? Or, as I would prefer to express it, the claims of brothers and sisters on each other’s children?

Let us now consider positive rules in South India and Ceylon in further detail.

III

I find myself in such consistent agreement with Dumont that the disagreements interest me. There is one such in his remark, ‘... cross-cousin marriage, preferred and we might even say prescribed in the South, is forbidden in the North ...’,²⁴ a comment

²¹ Emeneau, "Language and social forms" (see fn. 13) 165 (1941).
²² Gough, "Brahmin kinship" (see fn. 7) 846 (1956).
²⁴ For a transition from a positive and closed to a negative but open system in Ceylon, see Yalman, (see fn. 5) 221-222.
²⁵ Dumont (see fn. 8) 90 (1966).
that is all the more revealing since it is somewhat casual. Looking back into Dumont's other extraordinary contributions, it is the implications of this, the merging of preference and prescription which, I now understand, has given rise to difficulties. The point is controversial.

Lévi-Strauss to whom my debt needs no acknowledgement has recently come out unambiguously against the preferential/prescriptive distinction. Having found the distinction essential in my work, I will pause briefly to examine the issue.

Lévi-Strauss writes, 'What then of the difference between "prescriptive" and "preferential"? It ... becomes a mere difference of degree ... whether in a given society everybody marries according to rule or not. But what is meant by everybody?'

And he goes on to encapsulate the matter in one of his characteristic epigrams:

... a preferential system is prescriptive at the level of the model, while even a prescriptive system cannot but be preferential at the level of reality.

The symmetry and wit is admirable, but the sense may be disputed. He sums up the position:

... the difference between "prescriptive" and "preferential" does not appertain to the systems themselves, but to the way in which these systems are conceptualized.

and relates it to his famous mechanical/statistical distinction.

The problem is that there are systems which have clear preferences but which are not prescriptive (in the sense that they do not have 'positive' marriage rules), and there are systems which are prescriptive where for analytic purposes it is vital to distinguish the prescriptive element from the preferential element. I will take the Kurdish system to represent the former case and the Kandyan-Sinhalese to represent the latter.

A preference relates among the Kurds to the advisability, on a variety of grounds, of a marriage between persons standing to each other as patrilateral parallel cousins. This certainly does not mean that other persons are prohibited. On the contrary many are possible, but A has special rights on the person of his cousin B. It is, indeed, a system of preference expressed with extraordinary if not murderous vehemence and vigour in these cultures. Sometimes when the claim is not met there may even be recourse to desperate means to redress the right. Their difference from Ceylon is crucial: in the Kurdish preferences there is no associated positive marriage rule which states that all marriages must be between categories of parallel cousins. On the contrary, the system depends essentially on prohibitions.

In Ceylon the preference for the marriage of actual cross-cousins is never expressed in as insistent terms as parallel-cousin claims among Kurds, and murder on this score would be out of the question. Indeed, in many cases this preference is quite weak. It is expressed among the Kandyan Sinhalese by such customs as the handing

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28 Lévi-Strauss, (see fn. 22) 17.
29 Ibid.
of 100 betel leaves to any male cross-cousin at the marriage of a young bride. If she did not take 'permission' from her actual cross-cousin, reprisals would be light and easily dismissed — a matter unthinkable in the Kurdish case. Or at her puberty ceremony her MB may say, 'I would like her for my son', which would be a claim not too difficult to circumvent. On the other hand, unlike the Kurdish case, the rule of marriage among rural Sinhalese is expressed in unequivocal terms: a proper marriage is only a union between persons in the category of cross-cousins. All other unions are sinful (dos). The critical feature here is that the preferences (and claims) concern only actually related 'real' cross-cousins with the pressure for the marriage coming from parents or siblings, whereas all other cross-cousin marriages must be between correct categories of kin. They need not be closely related, but the rules must be kept. It is understood that there can be no claims on such people.

The differences here are not merely a matter of confusing mechanical and statistical models. The nature of the models is different: there is no intention in the Kurdish case that all marriages be parallel cousin unions, whereas this is indeed the Kandyan Sinhalese model for cross-cousin marriage.

To sum up, the Kurdish case is one of negative rules with strong preferences concerning the children of siblings, whereas the Sinhalese case is one of positive rules with weak preferences about the children of siblings.

In the Sinhalese case these preferences can be so weak as to make it possible to imagine prescriptive systems in which preferences are entirely absent. So we should be able to speak of systems which are prescriptive, but where actual cross-cousin marriages are few and far between. In the limiting case, there could be no actual cross-cousin marriages, but the system could still remain one of prescriptive cross-cousin marriage. Thus, in a specific hamlet there may be no actual cross-cousin unions at all, and yet the system may still be one of prescriptive cross-cousin marriage with all marital unions conforming to the rule.

The problem is central. The preferences or claims concern 'own' cross-cousins (actual MBD/FZD) with whom there may be material and sentimental as well as customary reasons to establish a connection. The rule, however, simply relates to a category which happens to include real cross-cousins as well, but applies to many others more distantly connected on whom there can be no claims. We can also not speak of preferences in the latter case since as between right and wrong marriages no choice is given. Only one type of union is correct.

I have stressed the difference between the prescriptive rule and the preference, since, at least in the Kandyan Sinhalese case, the distinction leads in a fruitful direction. Moreover, the Kandyan Sinhalese themselves distinguish the claims (urumaya) on 'own' (avassa) cross-cousins from the relation of cross-cousins in general.

To return to Dumont's casual remark, it will be seen that the differences in handling this issue have certain consequences for theory.
Let us return now to the question of the relationship between kinship terms and kinship behavior. Some time ago I published a study of the connections between Sinhalese terminology and kinship behavior. This drew a brief but very perceptive comment from Dumont and a monographic cannon-ball from Tambiah. Dumont said in effect that I was guilty of trying to derive the terminology (cognitive categories) from the structure of the kindred (behavior) and that this was unacceptable, as other attempts to derive the terminology from lineal groups had also been unacceptable. I will return to his remarks, which bear on the relationship between cognitive categories and behavior.

Let us briefly follow Tambiah's thinking on the question of terminology and behavior: It is not central to his intricate and interesting argument, I think, but is useful to elucidate the questions arising from the terminology:

Now, if we are merely discussing the formal structure of the terminological system, there is no need for further argument. The terminology implies cross-cousin marriage; it indicates automatically with what categories of kin sex relations and marriage are required or prohibited in terms of kinship and generation status. In this sense the terminology contains built-in "rules" regarding sex and marriage. All this is apparently accepted:

But Yalman is asserting something more than this: because his basic proposition demands it he makes the transition from terminological rules to the way in which they are applied on the ground ... as if these two levels were congruent.

Here the horns of the dilemma appear. Either Tambiah does not take his own words in the first paragraph seriously, or he has not sufficiently considered the implications of the second paragraph. If it is the case that 'the terminology contains built-in "rules" regarding sex and marriage', why is it unacceptable for the anthropologist to examine 'the way in which they (terminological rules) are applied on the ground'. If terminology 'requires' or 'prohibits' 'sex' and 'marriage', then clearly this terminology is at the very least related to kinship 'behavior on the ground', and if it is not, then what is said about 'the terminology' earlier is a mystery.

When I speak of this terminology "as a closed system", I do not mean that it is not capable of being extended very widely, but that it contains an assumption that only kinsmen already related are marriageable, a point which does fit in patently well with caste ideology. I do not see how a "terminology" and a "kindred" can be "homologous"; I can see how the principles of structure of a kinship terminology can be used with greater or lesser success in the formation of particular kindreds.
But this criticism coming from such a perceptive an observer as Tambiah makes me wonder whether the grounds for disagreement are not more deep-seated. And indeed they are. There is, for instance, a difference of conception regarding what positive marriage rules and prescriptive terminologies are. The example provided from Tikopia cannot be interpreted in any other way. Tambiah also writes:

... clearly if linguistic usage follows the social situation, we cannot argue that the logic of the kin term system determines who shall marry whom as Yalman ... seems to be arguing.

The next paragraph is more explicit:

The words “prescriptive, bilateral, cross-cousin marriage rule” (if admissible at all as a characterization) are applicable only to Dravidian terminology ... a prescriptive marriage rule refers to systematic exchange of women between lineages or local descent groups at a group level; the cross-cousin in question is not a genealogically defined person but one who belongs to a classificatory kinship category ... The Sinhalese situation is very far removed from the contexts in which prescriptive marriage systems work. When it comes to ordering behavior the villager superimposes the terminology on a genealogical framework. He is perfectly aware that first cross-cousins ... are different from second cross-cousins ...

Are there any societies where the speakers are unaware of such genealogical distance? This passage in fact denies that the Kandyan Sinhalese have this type of terminology at all.

It is curious, moreover, that although Tambiah speaks of the ‘superimposition’ of the terminology on kinsmen (he writes ‘genealogical framework’), he refrains from putting his finger on the semantic prohibitions and requirements inherent in the terminology (i.e. parallel cousin taboo/cross-cousin marriage) which are thus imposed on kinship relations. In any case, he does not make clear the reasons, in his theories, why the Sinhalese should use this systematic terminology rather than any other.

However, since we are discussing the application of a set of systematic intellectual categories to the reality of kinship relations in a specific context, we are dangerously near the metaphysical problems of the relationship between the rules of mathematics and actual apples on apple trees, which is familiar to philosophers. It may be that analyzing this issue may prove more intractable than we might suppose.

Another problem which makes for difficulties in this part of Tambiah’s analysis is the relative unimportance given to the rules per se. It is exemplified by the statement:

anthropologists ... divide into those who think of kinship as a “thing in itself”, which can be “explained” only by reference to other kinship phenomena, and those who think of kinship as a kind of epiphenomenon of the hard practical facts of land use and property allocation.

Tambiah quotes Firth criticizing Rivers on Tikopia: is the marriage system regulated by kinship or not? But the question is, is Tikopia a prescriptive system at all? Tambiah goes on to deny that the Sinhalese one is prescriptive either (Tambiah, see fn. 10, pp. 136-137).

p. 136, my italics.

p. 136.

p. 133.
I think that at least in this passage Tambiah leaves himself open to the criticism which Dumont had previously directed towards me, in that he, too, is attempting to derive the 'rules' and/or the 'terminology' as mere epiphenomena from 'hard practical facts'. This is certainly an important issue, to which we must return.

I am also taken to task for not facing the logical consequences of my statements. How do I reconcile the low rate of 'actual cross-cousin marriage, with my claim that we are dealing with prescriptive cross-cousin marriage. The answer is simple enough: by a prescriptive marriage system, I do not mean that one and only one partner (a 'full' cross-cousin) as specified by the classificatory system and that Ego is obliged to marry this very person. For instance the Walbiri, who certainly have a 'prescriptive system' (with 91% of marriages said to be in the 'correct' category), explicitly forbid 'actual' MMBDD marriages on the grounds that they are 'too close' though correct.

Of course given that the terminology has sorted out the marriageable from the non-marriageable kin in the family circle, then the actual choice of a specific lady for marriage can be a long and complicated process.

The primary sorting out process must not be taken for granted but examined in its own right. For members of the culture concerned, the elements of the categories seem so deeply embedded in their language that they can be totally unaware of what this language is doing to the world around them.

Further, if the terminology does function in this way, sorting out marriageable and unmarriageable kin for a group of siblings 'automatically' (to use Tambiah's word), then it is legitimate and important to ask how far afield among Ego's circle of kinsmen this curious 'automatic' process goes and exactly where the interest in keeping the categories orderly arises. For it is obvious they must be kept orderly, that is retain the formula Spouse = cross-cousin, to function at all. If one does look into this question one will find, as I suggested earlier, that the categories are indeed kept orderly up to the 'boundaries' of the kin groups. The precise nature of these 'boundaries' around kin groups is another thorny problem. I am not concerned with them here.

I had also raised another question: Why are the terms in this 'bifurcate merging' pattern at all? Here Dumont's precise criticism must be accepted.

V

In the paper in question, I did attempt to relate the terminology to the nature of the social group in which it is found without giving sufficient emphasis to the systematic nature of the terminological scheme per se for which Morgan had allowed himself the adjective, 'stupendous'. But La pensée sauvage had not been published yet.

Meggitt (see fn. 19) 65-66.

A point which had received attention in an earlier paper, "The flexibility of caste principles in a Kandyan community" in E. R. Leach (ed.) Aspects of caste in South India, Ceylon, and North West Pakistan (Cambridge, 1960) as well as in other works.
After consideration of the symmetry and order in cognitive categories, I am all the more impressed by their channelling effect on kinship behaviour. The question is how precisely do the categories accomplish this unusual task?

Dumont, who has provided the most imaginative and rigorous but most complex thoughts on this subject, has drawn us resolutely into the most important arena. He has even made Dr. Gough reconsider some of her field material. I am in agreement with him that 'descent' has received far too much emphasis in South India and Ceylon where the great interest is patently and obviously with marriage. Dumont writes, 'What looks very strange ... is the fascination exerted on most anthropologists' minds by the idea of “descent”'. In fact, Dumont is so correct in this diagnosis that he is open to the contrary charge that he has not pursued the matter far enough. Even he has been listening to the siren song. Dumont has opposed lineal descent with affinity; I think the matter must be dissolved even more. If we do that, then even the binary kin/affine distinction on which Dumont has insisted may have to be abandoned, at least in its present form. I observe that in the recent discussion of Hierarchy and marriage alliance, it was this aspect of Dumont's theory with which writers with South Indian experience like Gough, Tyler, McCormack, and even Aiyappan have had difficulty.

Where is the trouble? Dumont's argument has been that in this region affinity is transferred from generation to generation. In other words his model is that of intermarrying lines whose permanent association is passed on to the next generations through time. This is the basis for preferential cross-cousin marriage; in a nut-shell: 'The distinctive feature is that not only consanguineal links ... but also affinal links are transmitted from one generation to the next'.

To my mind even this model has a lineal bias. It sees affinity as the filling between vertical girders; it is merely claimed that the filling is a special glue quite as strong as the vertical girders themselves. Hence, for Dumont, cross-cousin marriage is only derivative. 'What is called analytically, but queerly cross-cousin marriage, is simply ... (a) repetition of ... marriage alliance(s)'. Furthermore, with a conception such as this a preference to continue the alliance is crucial; and the rate of actual cross-cousin marriage has a bearing as to whether we are to accept the facts as a prescriptive system or not. Note further that for this Dumont model the kin/alliance dichotomy is also crucial.

I would like to stand all this on its head if Dumont will allow me. Prescriptive cross-cousin marriage is the primary data, preferences are secondary features, and the alliance is derivative from the type of marriage. In doing this I am placing the

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82 Contributions in CAnthr (June 1966).
83 Dumont, CAnthr 328 (1966).
84 p. 328.
85 p. 344.
emphasis primarily on the ‘categories’ which structure the social space. It is crucial that this remarkable terminological system categorizes genealogical space quite far afield from Ego, where marriage preferences or claims (or alliances) do not necessarily operate but where Ego may find a spouse.

That the kin/affine distinction runs into trouble concerning the placement of key kinsmen such as the F/M/FZ/MB is to me quite clear with the bilateral Sinhalese background. Where there is no recognition of exclusive patrilineal or matrilineal descent, it is impossible to say whether the F or the MB is a kin or an affine. On this point I accept Gough’s strictures. I do not understand on the terminological level why the terminology must be seen to hinge on one main distinction. Dumont, of course, recognized all others such as the geneological, and sexual, and hierarchical principles. The reason he gives primacy to the kin/affine division is because he appears to think, and I would agree with him, that the question of the regulation of marital and sexual relations is an important, indeed vital, aspect of the scheme. But then why not use the more abstract categories ‘cross’ and ‘parallel’: after all, only the categories of cross-cousin are obviously ‘affines’. The parental generation become in-laws: it seems to me that in the parental generation as elsewhere there is precisely the merging of kinship and affinity which this system so effectively accomplishes. It merges so well that they cannot be told apart. The point is precisely that the MB Mama is both a kinsman and an affine.

As far as the formal features of the terminology are concerned, we have consistent classification of all the genealogical space on one grid. The grid itself has no lineal features except incidentally. Actually in Ceylon (but also in parts of South India) its lateral extension seems much more in evidence than its lineal dimension. It seems like those coloured balls connected by aluminum rods which chemists use to model their molecules.43

The grid idea is logically (but perhaps as Dumont notes not historically) prior to lineages. This may appear a minor point because the measure of agreement between myself and Dumont is very great; but it does shift the emphasis away from lineality and in so doing undermines the idea that it is ‘affinity’ which is transferred from one generation to the next. Something else seems to be at work. I think it is the internal structure of the Dravidian sibling group.

Here Tambiah seems to me to have sensed a crucial, almost overlooked, matter.44 He observes that the ‘alliance’ theory underplays the position of the sister. I agree with him that particularly in India and Ceylon, which have given the world its only two women Prime Ministers (surely difficult to imagine in most parts of the world), we forget the sisters at our peril.

I think the basic kinship structure in this region to which Dumont has so brilliantly

43 See the remarks of Gough in “Brahmin kinship” (see fn. 7) 846 and Emeneau in “Language and social forms” (see fn. 13) 165, on the lateral extensions of the terminological grid quoted above. 44 Tambiah (see fn. 10) 162.
drawn our attention as 'alliance' is better understood as variations in the organization of brother-sister relations.\textsuperscript{45}

VI

Since I come to this conclusion after studying five different cultural groups in Ceylon, let me pursue the matter through some examples. I should note at the outset that all these peoples use the general Dravidian structure: terminology and marriage rules.

(1) **MATRILocal.** The Tamil Muslims of Wellassa, Ceylon, have a kinship structure similar to the Mapilla in South India. The man goes to live in the house of his wife. His sons will leave the house; sons-in-law will come in to settle with daughters. The father is spoken of as a 'stranger'. The real relative is the MB (in accordance, in this case, with Dumont's views). There are special ritualized food exchanges and obligations between D and F, a la Dumont. The B have the right to return to their Z house and demand food. 'It is their own home.' But they cannot visit other B in their wives' houses: their B's are living with 'strangers'. Names, however go from F to S. There is little idea of lineages. Dravidian terminology and cross-cousin marriage are basic underpinnings of the system. Property remains undivided between brothers and sisters: but brothers give up their claims as dowry gifts for the better marriage of their sisters. This 'giving up' seems to me an institution of central importance. It is at the root of dowry.

(2) **MATRILocal-MATRILINEAL HYPERGAMY.** Hindu Tamils on the East Coast of Ceylon have an identical structure to these Muslim Tamils of Wellassa with some further lineal developments. There are ranked named matrilineages organized and run by men. They have lively ideas of hypergamy. Women must be protected and married to equal or higher matriline. The B may marry below their rank. It becomes difficult to distinguish caste divisions since Vellallar men have relations with Mukkuvar and Karayyar women. Dravidian terminology and cross-cousin marriage are general.

(3) **BILocal-NONLINEAL.** Ordinary Kandyan Sinhalese and Kandyan Low Castes (Washermen, Potters, Tom-tom Beaters) have formally an identical terminology and marriage rules to the above. Both matrilocal and patrilocal marriage is practised. There are no lineages or exogamy concepts. Both polyandry and polygamy is accepted. Ritual attention is given both to F (especially at birth) but also to MB. Cross-cousin marriage with correct categories is particularly emphasized. All siblings have rights in property: they may remain undivided for some generations, and brothers and sisters on the spot 'eat' from the property. In other words, sibling rights can always be reclaimed by either sex. The significant difference from the matrilocal Tamil case (the first one) is that while among matrilocal Tamils the brothers seem to give up their

\textsuperscript{45} For a detailed discussion of this point see Yalman (fn. 5).
rights to their sisters, in the bilateral Sinhalese case both brothers and sisters may leave the house and relinquish their rights which they may claim later.

(4) PATRILOCAL-PATRILINEAL(?). There are High Caste Kandyans especially with aristocratic claims who still have the identical terminology and marriage rules. Patrilineal marriages are preferred. Patrilineal pedigrees are valued and even maintained. That M property should go to daughters and F to sons is considered an ideal and desirable system, but in fact behind the great complexity of legal developments, the principle of brothers and sisters having equal rights (later modified by their marriages) is maintained. Indeed, brothers often claim that it is best for the men to 'give up' their rights as dowry gifts to their sisters.

(5) PATRILOCAL-PATRILINEAL HYPERGAMY. As above, but both patrilineal descent and hypergamy are greatly stressed in the Low Country Sinhalese districts. Dowry, more appropriately 'gifts' devedde, which is given to sisters reaches great developments. Brothers think that it is best to give dowry gifts to their sisters so that they can get superior husbands.

(6) SINHALESE-TAMIL LINKAGE. The link between the Tamil and Sinhalese is provided by certain communities on the East Coast of Ceylon. In this shatter-zone between two great cultures there are numerous mixed communities which were both Sinhalese and Tamil. In 1955 Dravidian terminology and marriage rules were maintained. Household arrangements were a modified form of matrilocal Tamil and ordinary bilocal Kandyan Sinhalese. All marriages were matrilocal to begin with and usually neo-local later. Tamil features — F being a stranger and the food taboos of brothers in each other's homes — were not observed.

I believe that this is a most interesting state of affairs. There is an underlying pattern: the Dravidian terminology and the cross-cousin marriage rules form the base. Above this base we have all the transformations and permutations from hypergamous patrilineal, to merely patrilocal, to bilateral, to matrilocal, and to hypergamous matrilineal; in fact most of the structural possibilities (but by no means all) are discovered and actually utilized.

Here in Ceylon Lévi-Strauss' views on logical coherence, the development of structural potentialities and progressive discovery of obscure symmetries inherent in the system, are neatly vindicated.

In an extensive examination of the South Indian material, I have come to the conclusion that the same, and more, can be said for the structural transformations in that region. I had come to this conclusion some years ago, and I now find that Gough in a dramatic statement has reinterpreted all her material in this form. She makes this admission almost incidentally in claiming that the groups she is concerned with in Kerala, Coorg, and Tanjore are groups 'all having cross-cousin marriage.'

44 Tamils have similar ideas, see the detailed discussion of legal points in H. W. Tambiah, The laws and customs of the Tamils of Jaffna (Colombo, 1956).
45 Yalman (see fn. 5) Ch. 16.
46 Gough (see fn. 6) 332.
It is remarkable to have this statement coming so many years after the fieldwork, but I welcome it and do not find it difficult to accept in connection with the Nayar and especially the North Nayar.

The second conclusion is that Dumont’s observation concerning ritual prestations between kinsmen who are not lineally or locally stressed is also clearly vindicated. In Ceylon the matrilocal Tamils give ritual recognition to the father and the husband whereas the patrilocal Kandyans place the emphasis on the MB. The differences, though matters of emphasis, are important. Locality seems to be primary and the kinsmen with the weaker links seem to be buttressed by ceremonial gift exchange of a prominent customary nature. I think this confirmation of Dumont’s pioneering work is very pleasing.

What I do not find is relations of affinity being maintained through generations to any significant extent.

What does this mean?

Observe the way the sibling group behaves with the matrilocal Tamils. Brothers and sisters have equal rights. The brothers give up theirs to their sisters, thereby getting them desirable husbands. This gift of their shares (a very widespread idea in Ceylon) to their sisters sets up powerful claims between brother and sister. Even though the brother is living elsewhere, it is felt that he is the real relative of the children and that he has strong rights over them.

But ideally nothing has been divided between brothers and sisters. Sisters too retain claims on the children of the brother.

Except that the brother does not necessarily leave the household, almost all these observations could be maintained in the relations between Sinhalese brothers and sisters. With them it is the sisters who go out upon marriage and who permit their brothers to utilize their rights. Thus what we see as claims passing from generation to generation are not really claims between affines at all. That is an optical illusion. It is the bonds between brother and sisters symbolized by the undivided property being expressed as claims on each other and their children.

The particular structural form chosen, matriliny, patriliny, matri- or patri-locality, hypergamy, etc. naturally modifies the operations of this principle. Examples could be provided of such modifications in connection with patrilineal hypergamy, which to my mind, reaches its highest logical elaboration in ZD marriage, or with matrilineal hypergamy which leads in the direction of continuous status gradations as among the Nayar or apparently among the matrilineal Tamils of the East Coast of Ceylon.

The idea of a gift at marriage with the bride is even stronger in North India. While

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See Yalman (see fn. 5) 351, 369; this Tamil Brahman system is a mirror image of Leach’s Kachin system: both are matrilateral cross-cousin marriage systems; the Tamil Brahman system is patrilineal but hypergamous. The Kachin system is patrilineal but hypogamous. The net structural effect of the Kachin system is the same as that of a matrilineal hypergamous system, i.e. continuous status gradation, whereas the net result of the patrilineal hypergamous system is one of narrower and narrower marriage circles. See E. R. Leach, “The structural implications of matrilateral cross-cousin marriage”, JRAI 81.23-55 (1951).
the differences between North and South Indian kinship systems are profound, we must note that certain important similarities continue to exist. The single most important difference is the prohibition (by the sapinda rule) in the North of quick return marriages in small circles which are characteristic of the South. On the other hand, the gifts of large dowries, the general obligations these set up, the ideas surrounding the purity of women, and the preference of hypergamy all provide connecting links between the North and the South. In this context the analysis of Maharashtrian systems would prove valuable.

Dumont in an important recent work has contrasted South Indian and North Indian patterns directly. He notes that the most striking difference in North India is the lack of a systematic kinship terminology on the Dravidian model. He professes to see underneath the North Indian patterns an aspect of affinity being continued again from generation to generation, this time among larger groups.

To this we can add that the whole complex of dowry is present in both regions and works in an identical direction. That is, dowry sets up powerful claims between brothers and sisters and thereby provides a most vital lateral spread to kinship relations.

On the question of the terminology, however, Dumont remains somewhat ambiguous:

The simple crystal clear Dravidian scheme can be said to be the core of the kinship system in the sense that it embodies its conceptual chart ... hypothesis: the center of gravity of a kinship system lies in the terminology only when it is simple and quite systematic ... (an) expression of the non-conscious construction of the mind. Dumont (see fn. 8) 103.

Core, conceptual chart, and center of gravity, these are less than precise. Dumont again senses a problem but does not grasp it directly. What is simply the case is that in the South the terminology is systematic since it structures kinship relations for marriage and sex. It carries no such burdens in the North where it apparently merely reflects or follows the social structure which is dependent on other rules.

VII

If the brother-sister tie is so crucial to the understanding of the structural rights and obligations in these systems from Ceylon and South India, then why are Dravidian structures not found everywhere that brothers and sisters have claims on each other?

This question brings me back to the problems of metaphysics with which I started. I have been describing sibling claims channelled in accordance with a terminological-matrimonial system which is fundamental in structuring genealogical space. It is in essence a system of categories. When applied as Lévi-Strauss’ potato chopper, it leaves certain possibilities open and closes the door to others. Its fundamental nature

Dumont (see fn. 8) 103.
in these kinship systems is shown by the generality of the Dravidian terminology and the almost surreptitious way it carries powerful incest connotations in its semantics.

Thus even my perspicacious critic Tambiah, who has little faith in das Ding an sich, must recoil: '... a marriage with a true parallel cousin would be unthinkable ...' when it is obvious that it is perfectly 'thinkable' among Turks and Kurds, and the difference is obviously not a difference of 'the hard practical facts of land use and property allocation'. The reason why the cognitive and behavioral role of this system of categories has so often been underestimated is because it is so deeply embedded in the semantics of the most ordinary words.

I do not think my claim that the cognitive categories are primary and shape the behaviour of men to fit them is really an obvious one. On the contrary, it will take much persuasion to wean most gifted ethnographers from their behaviorist modes of thought and expression. Consider for instance Gough:

It is true that the same ... basic pattern of terms for immediate relatives of ego ... is widely found in Dravidian systems. It results one supposes from the wide distribution of near-symmetrical cross-cousin marriage.

In fact the rate of 'actual' cross-cousin marriage in any of these groups does not appear to be very high at all. Other marriages with all kinds of distant kin are 'prescriptive cross-cousin marriages' only because the categories were there and have been used in contracting these unions. I do not see how the terms could be derived from behavior even with a high incidence of actual cross-cousin marriage. I agree with Lévi-Strauss that the cognitive symmetry is too strong to suggest anything but a series of brilliant theoretical attempts in the past to order sexual and marital relations by this method. Today since the two are integrated it seems difficult to distinguish marriage behavior from cognitive categories, and some may speak of a chicken-and-egg situation. But this too is an illusion. Marriage behavior is given form and pattern by these categories, not vice-versa. In fact, divergent behavior is constantly threatening to break down the symmetry and order of terminological usage. And hence all the efforts made to keep the terms orderly within the kin group which I have described elsewhere. Hence, the suggestion that it is a sin (dos) to refer to a kinsman by an inappropriate term. Hence, the dislike of conflicting situations.

In Ceylon at least it is also clear that the resistance of the systematic terminology to destruction is not infinite. In fact, the categories are breaking down in urban areas.

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81 Tambiah (see fn. 10) 137.
82 S. A. Tyler, for instance, appears to deny the relevance of the Dravidian forms so meticulously outlined by Dumont. He seems to think that because of the great variation in many diverse contexts of the actual usage in address of the kinship terms, there is no unitary structure to the terminology as such. All that can be done, it appears, is a meticulous analysis of all these contexts which determine the expressions. This is an extreme behaviorist position. It entirely overlooks the semantic power of the terms and what this means for the structure of the cognitive pattern, sexual prohibitions, and positive marriage rules which are connected precisely with the 'form' of the terminology itself. "Context and variation in Koya kinship terminology", AmA 68:3.693-707 (1966).
83 Gough (see fn. 6) 334 (my italics).
I was impressed by informants in Negombo and Colombo who were completely unaware of the cross and parallel distinctions, for instance, for female cross-cousin (nana) and daughter-in-law (leli). The idea of cross-cousin marriage was thought to be some uncouth country custom. Indeed the breakdown of the positive rules and the concomitant rise of negative rules is to be observed in the work of the Commission on Marriage and Divorce. Their work is directed to define 'prohibited degrees of relationships'. They are naturally unaware of positive rules. On the terms, they write, Ego 'may marry his Leli (daughter-in-law), his Nana (cross-cousin), and his Loku amma (big mother), or Kuda amma (small mother) i.e. MZ's except when these terms are applied to his full aunt or full niece'.

It is a statement too ridiculous to utter in a traditional village, but in Colombo among legal experts whose entire training has been in Anglo-Saxon law (and who may indeed have rarely spoken Sinhalese) it is not to be wondered at. In any case, the transition fits in entirely with our expectations of a move from closed to open systems.

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64 In Tamil these categories would be machchi and maru mahal respectively.