

On the Classification of Bifurcate Merging Systems¹

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RÉSUMÉ

On croit généralement qu'en terminologie de parenté les trois types reconnus (exprimés dans l'équation: $FZD = MBD = ZD$) sont déterminés selon des critères analogues. L'Auteur s'en prend à cette assumption générale, lui opposant une équation terminologique pourtant assez connue, mais à laquelle on a prêté que très peu d'attention. L'A. conclut à la nécessité d'introduire dans l'équation courante quelques nouveaux termes.

It is generally assumed by students of kinship terminologies that the three recognized types of bifurcate merging nomenclature — Iroquois, Crow, and Omaha² — are “on the same level of abstraction,” i.e., that they are based upon analogous criteria. In this paper, I shall take issue with this assumption, bringing to bear upon it a fairly common terminological equation which has heretofore received virtually no theoretical attention. From the conclusions thus reached, I shall suggest the adoption of some new terms.

The equation in question is: $FZD = MBD = ZD$, where the single term applied to these kin-types is used for no other

¹ This paper has grown out of a larger comparative study of avuncular marriage. I should like to express my thanks to those who have read and commented upon this study in its various manuscript forms: Ann Chowning, Melvin Ember, Robert F. Murphy, and W.E.H. Stanner.

² “Bifurcate merging is here used not in its more limited sense as referring to a kind of avuncular terminology, but in the broader sense of pertaining to a certain consistent pattern throughout Ego's and the adjacent generations. For a definition of this pattern, see Murdock (1949:141-142). “Iroquois,” “Crow,” and “Omaha,” though usually thought of as applying to cousin terminology, are at this point used rather freely; this usage will be refined shortly.

consanguineal kin-type which is not in the relation of "brother" to one or more of these. It occurs in the kinship systems of at least the following societies: the Barama River Caribs of British Guiana (Gillin 1936), the Bhumia and some Gond groups in central India (Fuchs 1960; Karve 1953:240-247), the Gururumba of the New Guinea highlands (Newman 1965), the Kanarese of South India (Beals 1962, Karve 1953:231-235; McCormack 1958), the Nama of Southwest Africa (Hoernlé 1925; Schapera 1930), the Tukuna of northwestern Brazil (Nimuendajú 1952), and the now-extinct Tupinambá of Brazil's Atlantic Coast (Fernandes 1963). As might be expected, it is generally associated with a kind of marriage system in which cross-cousins and the sister's daughter are possible mates and unions between close parallel relatives are prohibited. (The sources mentioned are silent on the relation between kinship and marriage among the Gururumba and Tukuna; for the Bhumia, cross-cousin marriage is reported but there is no mention of avuncular marriage. The Nama allow parallel (as well as cross-) cousins to marry, though this seems to be a rather recent development).

The cousin terminologies of the above-mentioned societies are of the Iroquois type, according to Murdock's definition: "FaSiDa and MoBrDa called by the same terms but terminologically differentiated from parallel cousins as well as from sisters ..." (1949:223). In so classifying them, it should be noted, we are considering the terminological pattern for a single (Ego's) generation in isolation; we are ignoring the equations and inequations that relate the kin-types of this generation to those of other generations. This is, of course, conceptually legitimate: if we have two kinship systems — one equating FZD with MBD but separating these kin-types from all others, the other merging these two with ZD — we may apply the rubric "Iroquois" to both of these systems on the basis of certain common characteristics, though for other purposes we may want to distinguish the two as being instances of different "Iroquois subtypes." To do this, however, we must go beyond the terminological pattern for a single generation.

Now suppose we have a system in which FZD is not equated with MBD but is equated instead with ZD, while MBD is terminologically merged with M or MZ. To such systems we con-

ventionally apply the term "Omaha." But here, in defining our isolate, we are considering more than the terminological pattern for Ego's generation; we are "on a level of abstraction" different from the one which is used to define "Iroquois." The concepts denoted by the labels "Omaha" and "Crow" are analogous, not to that denoted by "Iroquois," but to, say, the "Iroquois subtype" in which ZD is equated with cross-cousins.

New terms should be coined to represent newly-recognized concepts. To this "Iroquois subtype" we may apply the label "Amazonian," on the basis of its occurrence in at least three societies in tropical South America. The Amazonian pattern of kinship terminology is thus one in which a single term is used for FZD, MBD, and ZD, but for no other kin-type which is not in the relation of "brother" to one or more of these.

Similarly, if we accept "Iroquois" for the more inclusive category defined by Murdock, another term is required for the more common subtype characterized by: $FZD = MBD = ZD$. I would suggest "Australian," since the conceptual separation of ZD from cross-cousins is — so to speak — "guaranteed" in most Australian systems by the so-called "section" and "subsection" arrangements (cf. Radcliffe-Brown 1930:53-58).³ The Australian pattern of kinship terminology is thus one in which a single term is used for FZD and MBD, but for no other kin-type which is not in the relation of "brother" to one of both of these.

Still another term is needed to denote the kind of cousin terminology of which Crow and Omaha are variants. This term would be taxonomically homogeneous with "Iroquois," and it would refer simply to a pattern of own-generation terminology in which patrilineal and matrilineal cross-cousins are separated from siblings, parallel cousins, and each other. The common label "Crow-Omaha" is inappropriate, since there are many systems which fit this definition but do not conform to either the Crow

³ "Karia," since it pertains to the classic Australian section system, is also appropriate, but this term is frequently used to refer to the general four-section pattern of terminology, wherever found. "Australian" was used in the same way by Radcliffe-Brown (1927:344), but this usage has not gained general acceptance.

or the Omaha pattern.⁴ I would propose instead the adoption of the term "Pomo" for this purpose, since both Crow and Omaha terminologies are found in the kinship systems of the various Pomo groups of California (Gifford 1922:104-115). The Pomo pattern of kinship terminology is thus one in which FZD and MBD are separated from siblings, parallel cousins, and each other, though they may or may not be equated with aunts, nieces, etc. It occurs in such diverse systems as Cherokee (classic Crow), Kalmuk (classic Omaha), Mundurucú, and Murngin (Aberle 1953; Gilbert 1937; Murphy 1960; Warner 1937).

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⁴ Hence Murdock's negatively-defined rubrics, "Sudanese" and "Murngin" (Murdock 1957:673; Murdock et al 1962:121).

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VEUILLEZ NOTER -- PLEASE NOTE

CORRECTION: Anthropologica Vol. 8, no. 1 (1966)

Page 147, 7^e ligne

Au lieu de FZD = MBD = ZD

veuillez lire FZD = MBD \neq ZD

Page 147, line 7

Instead of FZD = MBD = ZD

please read FZD = MBD \neq ZD

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THANK YOU