“A subject too large and complex”

the CULTURAL EVOLUTION of KINSHIP TERMINOLOGY

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University of BRISTOL
1871
but Mr. Morgan is convinced that this view is by no means sufficient.

The terms of relationship used in different parts of the world may be divided, according to the author just quoted, into two great classes, the classificatory and descriptive,—the latter being employed by us. It is the classificatory system which so strongly leads to the belief, that communal and other extremely loose forms of marriage were originally universal. But as far as I can

The indirect evidence in favour of the belief of the former prevalence of communal marriages is strong, and rests chiefly on the terms of relationship which are employed between the members of the same tribe, implying a connection with the tribe, and not with either parent. But the subject is too large and complex for even an abstract to be here given, and I will confine myself to a few remarks. It is evident in the case of such
Kinship and marriage are about the basic facts of life. They are about ‘birth, and copulation, and death’, the eternal round that seemed to depress the poet but which excites, amongst others, the anthropologist.
Yet kinship systems show restricted variation.

KINSHIP TERMINOLOGY

We classify our social worlds with language in ways that map variably over biological relatedness.
UNTHINKABLE FAMILIES?

COUSIN SYSTEMS
HAWAIIAN
ESKIMO
CROW
OMAHA
IROQUOIS/DRAVIDIAN
THE CULTURAL EVOLUTION OF KINSHIP DIVERSITY
variation in language, cognition, and social norms regarding family
historical relatedness between societies
spatial diffusion and cultural contact
adaptive sociocultural relationships
cognitive and linguistic constraints
group identity processes & language usage

kinds of constraints

Racz, Passmore & Jordan 2019 Topics in Cognitive Science
CULTURAL EVOLUTION OF KINSHIP DIVERSITY

**Usage**
How do we use kinship language?

**Development**
How do children learn and use kinship concepts?

**Evolution**
How, when, and why do kinship systems change over time?

Tinbergen 1963
DEVELOPMENTAL CONSTRAINTS

Usage

Evolution

Alice Mitchell
VARIKIN-Development: How do children learn kinship?

Kinship socialisation across cultures: how and when children learn and talk about kinship and family

learning ecology

Elicitation of children’s understanding of kinship across cultures and ages

developmental trajectories
Fieldwork by Dr Alice Mitchell

9 months participant observation
Video corpus of children’s interactions with kin

Elicitation of kinship knowledge

Listing, definition, photo naming, drawings, dolls, kinship “interviews”
VariKin-Development Field Kit

Contributors: Alice Mitchell, Fiona Jordan, Joe Blythe, Jo Hickey-Hall

Date created: 2018-04-24 08:43 PM | Last Updated: 2018-06-26 08:39 PM

Category: Project

Description:
Fieldwork materials for investigating children’s acquisition of kinship concepts

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The VariKin Project

Why do human societies differ in who they class as family? How do children learn about kinship? Why do some societies classify cousins with siblings, and other groups distinguish cousins through your mum or your dad? When and how do people talk about family? Although these questions have intrigued anthropologists for over a century, they remain basically unsolved.

VariKin is fu...

Read More

Components

- General tools for the study of kinship
  Mitchell
- Kinship interviews and questionnaires
  Mitchell
- Photo-based tasks
  Mitchell
What do Datooga kids know about kinship?

- Q1: Whose house is this? [A: name of father]
- Q2: Who is the father of [A to Q1]? [A: name of grandfather]
- Q3: Who is the father of [A to Q2]? [A: name of great-grandfather]
- Q4: Which clan does [A to Q3] belong to? [A: name of patrilineal clan]
- Q5: Who lives in this house? [A: list of names]
- Q5a–n: Who is X to you?
- Q6: Who is M to F?
- Q7: How many siblings do you have? What are their names?
- Q8: Who is F to Sib?
- Q9: Who are you to mother?
- Q10: Who is the father of your father?
- Q11: How many siblings does Sib have?
- Q12: Are you an aunt/uncle?
- Q13: Show me your right hand
- Q14: Show me my right hand

Mitchell, Passmore & Jordan in prep
when is **egocentric kinship reckoning** acquired?

"Who is X to you?"

Mitchell, Passmore & Jordan in prep
the developmental trajectory for kinship concepts
When Datooga children talk, how often do they use **kin terms**?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focal child</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Words</th>
<th>Utterances</th>
<th>MLU</th>
<th>Kin term tokens</th>
<th>KT freq per 1000</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Madootay (M)</td>
<td>3;4–3;11</td>
<td>1,623</td>
<td>1076</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>4.95</td>
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<td>Udahasiin (F)</td>
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<td>2,465</td>
<td>713</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9.74</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Alice Mitchell recorded 45 hours of video recordings of spontaneous interaction in Datooga families in 2017. 53,000 words so far transcribed and coded. Excludes categorical uses e.g. ‘daughter’ to mean ‘girl’.
(1) Mother: àbà gidéabà gáydéaqár midáqádèedá gwéanù
PREP CONJ FUT.1SG.boil porridge.POSS father.2SG.POSS
“because I’m going to cook your father’s porridge”

"Where’s Auntie?"

Child-anchored kinship terms in child-directed speech in Datooga
Person-referring expressions in CDS

Names are the most common (49%)

34% are kin terms

70% take the child’s perspective

“Where’s Auntie?”

Child-anchored kinship terms in child-directed speech in Datooga
Is Datooga representative?

What about WEIRD languages?
When people talk about other people to children, how often do they use **kin terms**?

CHILDES: [https://childes.talkbank.org/](https://childes.talkbank.org/). Data coded by: Jasmine Calladine (English); Isobel Clifford (French, Spanish, Italian); Ewan Thomas Colquhoun (German, Russian). Alice Mitchell collected and coded Datooga.
Is speech child-anchoring?

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<th>Language</th>
<th>Child</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Other</th>
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<td>25%</td>
<td>75%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Portuguese</td>
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<td>75%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<td>Datooga</td>
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<tr>
<td>German</td>
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<td>25%</td>
<td>75%</td>
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</table>

Mitchell & Jordan to appear
Testing mechanisms underlying change: Does frequency of use predict kin-term change?

Frequency of word-use predicts rates of lexical evolution throughout Indo-European history

Mark Pagel\textsuperscript{1,2}, Quentin D. Atkinson\textsuperscript{1} & Andrew Meade\textsuperscript{1}

Corpus work by Dr Peter Racz
How often do speakers of these 21 languages talk about these relatives?

Usage is related to genealogical distance

Patterns are highly correlated across languages

Racz, Passmore, Sheard & Jordan 2019 RSOS
**KINBANK**
10+ language families
1000+ languages
115 words for relatives
21 data collectors (with Parabank, ANU)

Paraskevi Argyriou
Wolfgang Barth
Joshua Birchall
Jasmine Calladine
Isobel Clifton
Angarika Deb
Anouk Diederren
Nicholas Evans
Lucy Harries
Lieke Hoenselaar
Maarten van den Heuvel
Jo Hickey-Hall
Luis Henrique Oliveira
Kyla Quinn
Peter Racz
Sean Roberts
Rob Ross
Ewan Thomas-Colquhoun

https://excd.org/research-activities/kinbank/
We estimated the mean frequency of use for each kin category in each language. Inferred the evolutionary rate of change of each kin category.

Racz, Passmore, Sheard & Jordan 2019 RSOS
Frequently-used kin terms change slowly
The relationship is exaggerated compared to other vocabulary

Racz, Passmore, Sheard & Jordan 2019 RSOS
Grandparental Kinship: Nanny, Glammy or Grandmama

Interviews about negotiation/decisions

Regional Variation in Mother’s Mother terms

Kinship Terms in Blended Families

Online survey as ‘agony aunt’

It’s all about the kids
HISTORICAL & FUNCTIONAL CONSTRAINTS

Usage
How do we use kinship language?

Development
How do children learn and use kinship concepts?

Sam Passmore
Terhi Honkola
Catherine Sheard
CULTURAL MACROEVOLUTION

Ethnolinguistic groups as historically-related populations

Phylogenetic comparative methods as a toolkit for investigating cultural change
Do kinship systems co-vary with norms of marriage/residence/descent?

Predictions from the literature: What social norms do kinship systems co-vary with?

Sam Passmore

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crow</th>
<th>Iroquois</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High polygyny</td>
<td>Cross-cousin marriage permitted</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matri-avunculocal residence</td>
<td>Cross-cousin marriage preferred</td>
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<td>Matrilineal descent</td>
<td>Exogamy + unilineal descent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matrilocal residence</td>
<td>High polygyny</td>
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<td>Bilineal descent</td>
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<td>Monogamy</td>
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<td>Neolocal residence</td>
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<td>Nuclear families</td>
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</table>

Passmore & Jordan 2020 Evolutionary Human Sciences
Bayesian posterior of 1000 language phylogenies; 79 taxa (Gray et al 2009)

Cultural data from D-PLACE (Kirby et al 2016)

BayesTraits Discrete test (RJMCMC) for coevolution (Pagel & Meade 2017)
Phylogenetic control is critical in cross-cultural studies

<table>
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</table>

**No universals in the cultural evolution of kinship terminology**

Sam Passmore* and Fiona M. Jordan

Passmore & Jordan 2020 *Evolutionary Human Sciences*
CULTURAL EVOLUTION OF KINSHIP DIVERSITY

Usage
How do we use kinship language?

Development
How do children learn and use kinship concepts?

Evolution
How, when, and why do kinship systems change over time?

(How robust are traditional typologies of kinship?)
Characterising the kinship space
Obtaining a “kinship morphospace”

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<th>Z = FBD</th>
<th>FBD = MZD</th>
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MDS of kinship typology

- Eskimo
- Hawaiian
- Iroquois
- Omaha / Crow
- Sudanese

Passmore et al submitted Biological Theory
Relatively Speaking
**Co-researchers**

@ Bristol
Peter Racz
Alice Mitchell
Sam Passmore
Terhi Honkola
Jo Hickey-Hall
Catherine Sheard
Paraskevi Argyriou, Jasmine Calladine, Isobel Clifford, Angarika Deb, Lucy Harries, Sean Roberts, Rob Ross, Ewan Thomas-Colquhoun

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