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Rethinking ‘Status’ and ‘Role’
Toward a General Model of the Cultural Organization of Social Relationships

INTRODUCTORY COMMENT

This examination of the concepts ‘status’ and ‘role’ arises from my concern with a problem in ethnographic description. It is the problem of developing methods for processing the data of field observation and informant interview so as to enhance the rigor with which we arrive at statements of a society’s culture or system of norms such that they make social events within that society intelligible in the way that they are intelligible to its members. My thinking about this problem has been inspired largely by structural linguistics, a discipline that has achieved a high degree of rigor in formulating descriptive statements of the normative aspects of speech behavior. I have found it useful to look upon the cultural content of social relationships as containing (among other things) ‘vocabularies’ of different kinds of forms and a ‘syntax’ or set of rules for their composition into (and interpretation as) meaningful sequences of social events.

This orientation was explicit in my account of the social organization of Truk (Goodenough, 1951). Out of it developed my later work with ‘componential analysis’ in what might be called descriptive or structural semantics (Goodenough, 1956, 1957), representing an approach to constructing valid models of the categorical aspects of social norms. Here, I shall elaborate another analytical method that was first suggested in my Truk report, one aimed at a grammatical aspect of normative behavior. Hopefully it will enable us to make systematic and exhaustive descriptions of the cultural domain embraced by the expressions ‘status’ and ‘role’.

THE POINT OF DEPARTURE

Ralph Linton (1936, pp. 113-114) defined statuses as ‘the polar
positions ... in patterns of reciprocal behavior’. A polar position, he said, consists of ‘a collection of rights and duties’; and a role is the dynamic aspect of status, the putting into effect of its rights and duties.

Unfortunately, Linton went on to discuss statuses not as collections of rights and duties but as categories or kinds of person. All writers who do not treat status as synonymous with social rank do much the same thing,3 including Merton (1957, pp. 368-370) in his important refinement of Linton’s formulation. All alike treat a social category together with its attached rights and duties as an indivisible unit of analysis, which they label a ‘status’ or ‘position’ in a social relationship. This lumping together of independent phenomena, each with organizations of their own, accounts, I think, for our apparent inability to exploit the status-role concepts to our satisfaction in social and cultural analysis.4 For example, my brother is my brother, whether he honors his obligations as such or not. A policeman’s conduct in office may lead to social events that formally remove him from office, but it does not determine in any direct way whether he is a policeman or not. Other social transactions determine what his social category or identity actually is. Furthermore, there are legislative transactions that can serve to alter the rights and duties that attach to the category policeman in its dealings with other categories without the defining characteristics of the category being in any way altered. What makes him legally and formally a policeman need not have been affected.

These considerations have led me to break with established sociological practice. I shall consistently treat statuses as combinations of right and duty only. I shall emphasize their conceptual autonomy from social ‘positions’ in a categorical sense by referring to the latter as social identities. I would, for example, speak of ascribed and achieved identities where Linton (1936, p. 115) speaks of ‘ascribed’ and ‘achieved’ statuses. In accordance with Linton’s original definition, then, the formal properties of statuses involve (1) what legal theorists call rights, duties, privileges, powers, liabilities, and immunities (Hoebel, 1954, pp. 48-49) and (2) the ordered ways in which these are distributed in what I shall call identity relationships.

RIGHTS AND DUTIES

Rights and their duty counterparts serve to define boundaries within which the parties to social relationships are expected to confine their behavior. Privileges relate to the areas of option within these boundaries. For example, when I am invited out to dinner, it is my hostess’s right that I wear a necktie; to wear one is my duty. It is also her right that its decoration be within the bounds of decency. But she has no right as to how it shall be decorated otherwise; it is my privilege to decide this without reference to her wishes. For status analysis, the boundaries (the rights and duties) command our attention and not the domain of idiosyncratic freedom (privileges). As for powers, they and their liability counterparts stem from privileges, while immunities result from rights and the observance of duties. None of them needs to be treated as a feature of status relationships that requires analysis independent of the analysis of rights and duties.

As used in jurisprudence, rights and duties are two sides of the same coin. In any relationship A’s rights over B are the things he can demand of B; these same things are what B owes A, B’s duties in the relationship. Therefore, whenever we isolate either a right or a duty, we isolate its duty or right counterpart at the same time.5

A great deal of social learning in any society is learning one’s duties to others, both of commission and omission, and the situations in which they are owed. They are matters that informants can talk about readily; they have words and phrases for them. The methods of descriptive semantics (compositional analysis), referred to above, should provide a suitable means for describing the actual content of specific rights and duties with considerable rigor. But even without this, once we have established the existence of a duty for which our informants have a word or expression in their language, we can explore its distribution in identity relationships without our necessarily having its exact content clearly defined. The informant knows what he is talking about, if we as investigators do not.

SOCIAL IDENTITIES

A social identity is an aspect of self that makes a difference in how one’s rights and duties distribute to specific others. Any aspect
of self whose alteration entails no change in how people's rights and duties are mutually distributed, although it affects their emotional orientations to one another and the way they choose to exercise their privileges, has to do with personal identity but not with social identity. The utility of this distinction is clear when we consider the father-son relationship in our own society. The status of the social identity 'father' in this relationship is delimited by the duties he owes his son and the things he can demand of him. Within the boundaries set by his rights and duties it is his privilege to conduct himself as he will. How he does this is a matter of personal style. We assess the father as a person on the basis of how he consistently exercises his privileges and on the degree to which he oversteps his status boundaries with brutal behavior or economic neglect. But as long as he remains within the boundaries, his personal identity as a stern or indulgent parent has no effect on what are his rights and duties in this or any other relationship to which he may be party.

Every individual has a number of different social identities. What his rights and duties are varies according to the identities he may appropriately assume in a given interaction. If John Doe is both my employer and my subordinate in the National Guard, then the duties I owe him depend on whether I assume the identity of employee or of company commander in dealing with him. We tend to think of duties as things we owe to individual alters, but in reality we owe them to their social identities. In the army, what we owe a salute is 'the uniform and not the man'. Furthermore, what duties are owed depends on ego's and alter's identities taken together and not on the identity of either one alone, as Merton (1957, p. 369) has observed. In our society, for example, a physician's rights and duties differ considerably depending on whether he is dealing with another physician, a nurse, a patient, or the community and its official representatives. If a status is a collection of rights and duties, then the social identity we label 'physician' occupies a different status in each of these identity relationships. Failure to take account of the identities of alters and to speak in general terms of the status of a chief or employer has been responsible for much of the apparent lack of utility of the status-role concepts.

Another source of difficulty has been a tendency for many analysts to think of the parties to status relationships as individual human beings. This mistake invites us to overlook the identity of the alter in those relationships where the alter is a group and not an individual. Obviously, communities, tribes, and nations become parties to status relationships when they make treaties with one another and when they enter into contracts with individuals and subgroups within their memberships. Criminal law, as it is usually defined, concerns the duties that individuals and corporations owe the communities of which they are members. Animals, inanimate objects, and purely imaginary beings may also possess rights and/or owe duties.

IDENTITY SELECTION

As Linton (1936, p. 115) aptly observed, some identities are 'ascribed' and some 'achieved'. He was talking about how one comes to possess a particular social identity as a matter of social fact. How is it that one comes to be a professor or a married man, for example? Everyone has many more identities, however, than he can assume at one time in a given interaction. He must select from among his various identities those in which to present himself.

As regards some identities, of course, there is no choice. Having reached a certain age, I have a duty as a member of my society to present myself as an adult and as a man in all social interactions to which I may be party. However, I am under no obligation to present myself as a professor of anthropology in all interactions. Quite the contrary.

Several considerations govern the selection of identities.

An obvious consideration is an individual's (or group's) qualifications for selecting the identity.\(^6\) Does he in fact possess it? He may masquerade as a policeman, for example, donning the symbols that inform others of such an identity, and yet not be one. People often pretend to social identities for which they are not personally qualified, but such pretense is usually regarded as a serious breach of one's duties to fellow-members of one's peace group, duties that attach to one's identity as a member of a human community.

Another consideration is the occasion of an interaction. For
any society there is a limited number of culturally recognized types of activity. The legitimate purposes of any activity provide the culturally recognized reasons for interactions, and they in turn define occasions. The same individuals select different identities in which to deal with one another depending on the occasion. For example, I may call upon someone who is in fact both my physician and my personal friend because I wish to be treated for an illness or because I wish to invite him to dinner. The purpose that specifies the occasion for the interaction determines whether I assume the identity of ‘patient’ or ‘personal friend’ in approaching him.\textsuperscript{10}

The setting, as distinct from the occasion, might also seem to be an obvious consideration in identity selection. For example, the same individual may or may not assume the identity of chairman of a meeting depending on what other persons are present, but here we are really dealing with the factor of qualifications for assuming an identity, already mentioned. Or again, when I invite my physician friend to dinner, how I approach him depends on whether or not one of his patients is a witness to the transaction, but this is not so much a matter of identity selection as it is a matter of choosing among alternative ways of honoring one’s duties and exercising one’s privileges. I suspect that settings are more likely to affect how one conducts oneself in the same identity relationship than to govern the selection of identities, but this is a matter requiring empirical investigation.

An important consideration is that, for any identity assumed by one party, there are only a limited number of matching identities available to the other party. If two people enter an interaction each assuming an identity that does not match the one assumed by the other, they fail to establish a relationship. The result is ungrammatical, and there is social confusion analogous to the semantic confusion that results from story-completion games in which no one is allowed to know anything but the last word that his predecessor in the game has written down. We take care to employ various signs by which to communicate the identities we wish to assume, so that others may assume matching ones and we can interact with mutual understanding.\textsuperscript{11} Any pair of matching identities constitutes an identity relationship.

It is noteworthy that different identities vary as to the number of identity relationships that are grammatically possible for them within a culture. But in all cases the number appears to be quite limited. Thus in my culture the identity relationships ‘physician-physician’, ‘physician-nurse’, ‘physician-patient’ are grammatical, but there is no such thing as a ‘physician-wife’ relationship or a ‘physician-employer’ relationship. The physician must operate in the identity ‘husband’ with his wife and in the identity ‘employer’ with his employees.

Finally, we must consider that the parties to a social relationship do not ordinarily deal with one another in terms of only one identity-relationship at a time. The elderly male physician does not deal with a young female nurse in the same way that a young male physician does, and neither deals with her as a female physician does. In other words, identities such as old, adult, young adult, man, and woman are as relevant as are the identities physician and nurse. Some identities are relevant to all social interactions. In my culture, for example, I must always present myself to others as an adult and as a male. This means that I am ineligible for any identity that is incompatible with being adult and male. Among the various identities that I do possess and that are compatible with these two, not all are compatible with one another, nor are they always mutually exclusive as to the occasions for which they are appropriate. The result is that for any occasion I must select several identities at once, and they must be ones that can be brought together to make a grammatically possible composite identity. In order to avoid confusion I shall reserve the term identity for anything about the self that makes a difference in social relationships, as defined earlier. The composite of several identities selected as appropriate to a given interaction constitutes the selector’s social persona in the interaction.\textsuperscript{12}

The selection of identities in composing social relationships, then, is not unlike the selection of words in composing sentences in that it must conform to syntactic principles governing (1) the arrangement of social identities with one another in identity relationships, (2) the association of identities with occasions or activities, and (3) the compatibility of identities as features of a coherent social persona.
IDENTITY RELATIONSHIPS
AND STATUS RELATIONSHIPS

For each culturally possible identity relationship there is a specific allocation of rights and duties. The duties that ego’s identity owes alter’s identity define ego’s duty-status and alter’s right-status. Conversely, ego’s right-status and alter’s duty-status are defined by the duties that alter’s identity owes ego’s identity. As we shall see, one cannot deduce alter’s duties from a knowledge of only ego’s, except when both identities in a relationship are the same. In two separate identity relationships, ego may have the same duty-status and different right-statuses or the same right-status and different duty-statuses. When we examine the distributions of rights and duties among a society’s identity relationships, we must look at every relationship twice and observe how the rights and duties are allocated from the point of view of each participating identity independently.

Every pair of reciprocal duty-statuses (or corresponding right-statuses) constitutes a status relationship. As we shall see, the same status relationships may be found to obtain in quite different identity relationships. We have already observed that the same identity may be in different status relationships according to the different identity relationships into which it can enter. These observations demonstrate that the structure of a society’s status relationships must be analyzed and described in different terms from those that describe the structure of its identity relationships. A culturally ordered system of social relationships, then, is composed (among other things) of identity relationships, status relationships, and the ways in which they are mutually distributed.

THE ANALYSIS OF STATUSES

How duties distribute in the identity relationships in which people participate is a function of at least several independent considerations. For any identity relationship in which we participate in our society, for example, we must ask ourselves how much (if any) deference we owe? How much (if any) cordiality, reverence, and display of affection? How much sexual distance must we maintain? How much emotional independence?

These are only some of the considerations that are relevant for the allocation of rights and duties among us. Each one of them presumably represents a single dimension of status difference in our culture’s organization of status relationships. If this is so, then the several duties that in different combinations indicate socially significant differences along one such dimension will be mutually distributed in identity relationships according to the patterns of a ‘Guttman scale’ (Guttman, 1944, 1950; Goodenough, 1944).

For purposes of illustration here, I shall confine discussion to the simplest scale pattern. Suppose that the duties expressing lowest degree of deference are most widely distributed in identity relationships; suppose that the duties expressing the next higher degree of deference are next most widely distributed and only in relationships in which duties expressing the lowest degree are also owed; and suppose that duties expressing the highest degree of deference are distributed in the fewest relationships, and in all of them duties expressing lesser degrees of deference are also owed. With such successively inclusive distributions, both the social identities for every identity-relationship in which they occur and the duties expressive of deference can be ranked simultaneously against each other in a special type of matrix table known as a ‘scalogram’ (Guttman, 1950; Suchman, 1950). Our ability so to rank them is the empirical test that the duties in question are distributed in accordance with a scale pattern and that they are indeed functions of one consideration or status dimension.

We anticipate, therefore, that analysis of scales will provide a means whereby we can empirically determine what duties are functions of the same dimension and at the same time discover the minimum number of dimensions needed to account for the distribution of all culturally defined duties in a system of social relationships. As a result of such analysis, all the duties would be sorted into several distinct sets. The duties in each set would form a scale, but those in different sets would not.

Table 1 presents a hypothetical example of a scalogram such as one might obtain for one set of duties. Each distinctive combination of duties represents a different status on the status dimension represented. Identity relationships are grouped and ranked.
according to the combinations of duties owed by the ego-identity to the alter-identity in each, so that every identity relationship appears twice in the scalogram according to which of the two social identities in it is the ego-identity and which the alter-identity. Duties that have identical distributions and that do not, therefore, discriminate status differences on the scale are grouped into duty clusters.

The scale in Table 1 shows the distribution of duties for one person as ego in all the identity relationships in which he participates. Indeed, the procedure for gathering data for this kind of analysis requires that the informant be held constant, since there is no guarantee that different individuals have exactly the same conceptual organizations of status relationships. Data gathering and analysis must be done over again, independently, for each informant. The degree to which the resulting organizations of status relationships coincide indicates the degree of consensus among informants as to their expectations in social relationships.

Because status scales are worked out separately for each informant, they tend to be 'perfect' scales, in which no item is distributed in a way that is inconsistent at any point with the distributions of other items in the pattern of a scale. This makes the use of Guttman-scaling techniques much less complicated in the analysis of status relationships than is the case in attitude and opinion surveys, where many informants are asked the same set of questions relating to a single object and their different responses are plotted so as to rank the informants and the specific answers to the questions against each other simultaneously. Since different informants do not share the same cognitive organization of the subject under study in all respects, perfect scales cannot be obtained. Here, however, we are looking at how identity relationships and duties are simultaneously ranked against one another in the mind of one informant as revealed by the distribution of his answers. Under such circumstances almost perfect scales may reasonably be expected.

### Table 1

**Hypothetical Status Scale**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status (scale) type</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Specific alter</th>
<th>Duties and duty clusters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ego's Alter's identity identity</td>
<td></td>
<td>I (1) II (2) III (3) IV (4) V (5) VI (6) VII (7) VIII (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A X</td>
<td>a b</td>
<td>Y Y Y Y Y Y Y Y Y Y Y Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>B Y</td>
<td>c d</td>
<td>Y Y Y Y Y Y Y Y Y Y Y N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>D W</td>
<td>b f</td>
<td>Y Y Y Y Y Y N N N N N N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>D Z</td>
<td>g h</td>
<td>Y Y Y Y N N N N N N N N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>F R</td>
<td>j k l</td>
<td>Y Y N N N N N N N N N N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>H H</td>
<td>f m n o p</td>
<td>Y N N N N N N N N N N N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>K J</td>
<td>q r s t u v w m</td>
<td>N N N N N N N N N N N N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Key:** Under 'relationship' capital letters represent specific social identities. The small letters represent specific alters. In the duty columns, Y indicates that the duty is owed by ego's identity to alter's identity, and N indicates that it is not owed. Alters b, f, and m appear in more than one identity relationship with ego. The entire scale is from the point of view of a single informant as ego.

**AN EXAMPLE FROM TRUK**

A scale from an informant on Truk (Goodenough, 1951, p. 113), reproduced in Table 2, provides a concrete example of a series of duties whose distributions are functions of a single status dimension.13 The duties are:

(a) to use the greeting faâjiro when encountering alter;
(b) to avoid being physically higher than alter in alter's presence, and therefore to crouch or crawl if alter is seated;
to avoid initiating direct interaction with alter, to interact with him only at his pleasure;
(d) to honor any request that alter can make of ego, if alter insists;
(e) to avoid speaking harshly to alter or taking him personally to task for his actions;
(f) to avoid using ‘fight talk’ to alter or directly assaulting him regardless of provocation.

Each scale type in Table 2 corresponds to a status. Under scale type 7 are all those relationships in which none of these duties is owed (in which ego is in duty-status 7 to alter), and under scale type 1 are those relationships in which all the duties are owed (in which ego is in duty-status 1 to alter).

The reason ego owes the four duties that mark statuses 1-4 is because he is not supposed to ‘be above’ alter. The seven scale combinations of duty express the degree to which ego is or is not forbidden from being above alter. The dimension in question seems best characterized as one of deference.

This scale illustrates that knowledge of ego’s duty-status and alter’s corresponding right-status does not allow one to deduce ego’s right-status and alter’s duty-status in an identity relationship. In the relationships ‘brother’ – ‘sister’ (man to jeen and woman to mad) and husband – wife (man to Wi and woman to Hu), both brother and husband are in duty-status 7 on the scale and sister and wife are in right-status 7. But brother is in right-status and sister in duty-status 2, whereas husband is in right-status and wife in duty-status 7.

**COMPOSITE STATUSES**

Another dimension on which status distinctions are made in Truk is that of sexual distance. The duty scale for this dimension is shown in Table 3 as it pertains to male-female kin relationships (it has not been worked out exhaustively for all identity relationships). Obviously, whenever any Trukese man and woman interact, the identities in terms of which they compose their behavior call for mutual placement simultaneously on both the deference and sexual distance scales – in two different status systems at the same time. In any relationship, therefore, it
appears that the duties owed are functions not of one but of several status dimensions at once. Indeed, in every identity relationship in which a person participates he has a duty-status and a right-status on every status dimension in his culture's system of social relationships. The particular combination of duty-statuses occupied by an identity on all these dimensions at once in a given identity relationship is its composite duty-status (its Duty-Status with a capital D and S) in that relationship.

### Table 3

**Status Scale of Sexual Distance in Truk**  
(Adapted from Goodenough, 1951, p. 117)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status or scale type</th>
<th>Avoidance duties</th>
<th>Sleep in same house</th>
<th>Be seen in company</th>
<th>Have intercourse</th>
<th>Joke sexually in public</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Man with <em>feoñej</em> (except Da of Wi's <em>moñiñi</em>)</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Man with <em>feoñej</em> (except Da of Wi's <em>moñiñi</em>)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Man with Da of Wi's <em>moñiñi</em></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Man with consanguineous <em>jinej</em></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Man with affinal <em>jinej</em></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Man with Wi</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Man with <em>pogenwej</em> (other than Wi)</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: Abbreviations used are: A, allowed; D, disapproved; F, forbidden; Da daughter; Wi, wife. The Trukese terms designate categories of kin.

A complete analysis of a system of social relationships should permit us to construct a table in which every column (A, B, C, D… N) represents a status dimension and each number in a given column represents a status (scale combination of duties) on that dimension, as shown in Table 4. From such a table we could write the formula for every possible composite duty-status (e.g. A3-B1-C6-D7… N2). We could compile an inventory of all possible identity relationships and after each one give the formulae for the composite duty-statuses (or right-statuses) of each identity in the relationship. This would provide a corpus of materials on which further analysis of cultural structure could then be undertaken.

For one thing, we could see how identity relationships group into classes according to similarities of their reciprocal composite duty-statuses. We could do the same thing for each dimension separately and see the extent to which the same identity relationships bunch in the same classes from dimension to dimension. Cross-cultural differences in the organization of such syntactic classes could then be systematically explored.

### Table 4

**Hypothetical Table of all Status Dimensions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Numbered</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>statuses</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for each</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dimension</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
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<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For another thing, with the table in Table 4 in mind, we are in a position to anticipate what I am certain research will show to be an interesting feature of the cultural organization of behavior, one that is responsible for a great deal of its apparent complexity. This has to do with the compatibility of the duties on different status dimensions for ready synthesis in a composite duty-status. Suppose, for example, that in terms of the possibilities in Table 4, the composite duty-status of identity X in relation to identity Y is A4-B2-C1-D1… N4, and that the nature of one of the duties defining status B2 is such that honoring it precludes the possibility of honoring one of the duties in status C1. Some accommodation will have to be made in one of three possible ways: (1) one of the duties will have to be dropped in favor of the other; (2) one or both duties will have to be capable of being honored in more than one way, with allowance for the selection of compatible alternative modes of behavior; (3) both duties may be replaced by a distinctive third one that is simultaneously an alternative for both.
For example, it is my duty on certain occasions to rise when a lady enters the room. It often happens that I am for one reason or another unable to do so, in which case I have the alternative duty to ask pardon for not rising. Here are two distinctive ways of honoring the same duty with a clear order of preference (it is wrong for me to ask pardon for not rising if I am clearly able to rise).

It is obvious that problems of this kind must arise frequently in composing actual behavior, especially when we consider that interactions often involve not a single identity relationship but several at once, for on many occasions the social personae of the participant actors are likely to consist of more than one relevant identity. Interactions involving more than two actors create even further possibilities of conflict among duties. In any social system, therefore, we can anticipate that there will be orderly procedures for handling conflicts of this kind, procedures that can be stated in the form of rules not unlike the rules of *sandhi* and vowel harmony in some languages.\textsuperscript{14}

**ROLES**

From the combinations in Table 4, we can readily describe all the composite duty-statuses and right-statuses for a given identity in all the identity relationships that are grammatically possible for it. The aggregate of its composite statuses may be said to constitute the identity’s *role* in a sense a little less comprehensive than but otherwise close to Nadel’s (1957) use of the term. It would be equivalent to a comprehensive ‘role-set’ in Merton’s (1967, p. 369) terms.

When we compare identities according to their respective roles, as thus defined, some identities will obviously be found to net more privileges (fewer duties) and/or more rights in all their identity relationships taken together than others. That is, the roles of some identities will have greater possibilities for gratification than the roles of others; some roles will allow more freedom of choice in action generally than others; and some will be more and some less cramping to particular personal styles of operation. Thus, different identities may be said to have different functions in the social system as a whole and to enjoy different value accordingly. Just how they differ, and how these differences relate to informants’ evaluations of them, can be precisely described in relation to the sets of formulae that characterize the several composite statuses possible for each.

**FEASIBILITY OF THE METHOD**

To map out a social system in this way may be possible in theory, but is it not too time-consuming and tedious for investigator and informant alike? Certainly, collecting data of this kind is tedious. Nevertheless, Mahar (1959) was able to get a purity-pollution or ritual distance scale from eighteen different informants in Khalapur, India, with very satisfactory results, neatly solving the difficult problem of empirically determining local caste rankings and the degree of cross-caste agreement in these rankings.\textsuperscript{15} Her experience, added to my own from Truk, is encouraging.

But, we may ask, in any society we study, are there not so many duties, so many status dimensions, and so many identity relationships as to render the possibility of ever doing a complete analysis impracticable, however successful we may be in ferreting out a few scales? I do not think so. We are dealing with things that people manage to learn in the normal course of their lives without the benefit of systematic data collection and analysis. They are not likely, therefore, to be so complicated as to defy analysis.

On this point, findings in the psychology of cognition are highly suggestive. George Miller (1956) has called attention to impressive evidence that the human capacity to make judgements about where to class stimuli on unidimensional scales is severely limited. The greatest number of discriminations that can be made consistently on one dimension seems to be about seven (plus or minus two). In every interaction, on the basis of what he can observe of alter’s behavior, ego has to make a judgement about where alter is putting him on every status scale, a judgement, that is, about the composite right-status that alter is ascribing to him in the relationship as alter perceives it. Ego may make these judgements for each dimension separately, but for any one dimension, the number of statuses about which he can make accurate judgements presumably will not exceed about seven. We expect, therefore, that no matter how many duties may fit into the same scale,
the number of distinctive distribution combinations (scale types) they will show will be within this limit for any one status dimension. This means that when there are more than six duties in a set forming a scale, some will have identical distributions, producing duty clusters on the scale, as shown in Table 1. Seven is in fact the number of statuses I obtained for each of the two status scales from Truk (Tables 2 and 3). Mahar (1969), moreover, found that of the thirteen actions whose distributions were clearly a function of ritual distance, some had to be treated as equivalent, so that she could derive only seven scale types from them for the purpose of scoring status differences.

Proceeding from dimension to dimension, ego may make several successive judgements in assessing what composite status alter is ascribing to him. But even this procedure must become cognitively difficult and cumbersome if many status dimensions are involved.\(^{16}\)

Finally, as complicatedly variable as human behavior seems to be, we must remember that the analysis outlined here is concerned only with duties (or rights). Many specific acts, I have suggested, are no more than different expressions of the same duty, like allomorphs of a morpheme in language. In this event their selection reflects syntactic rules of composition that are themselves ordered according to a limited number of principles. Much other variation in behavior reflects differences in behavioral styles, differences in the ways actors choose to elect their free options and exercise their privileges. Such variations need not concern us in deriving the formal properties of status systems.

These reasons lead me confidently to predict that the number of status dimensions in any system of social relationships will prove to be severely limited and that the number of statuses that are culturally discriminated on each dimension will prove to be in the neighbourhood of seven or less.

**DUTY SCALES AS INSTRUMENTS OF SOCIAL ANALYSIS**

So far I have presented a method for constructing models of how specific cultures have organized social relationships. I have also considered the feasibility of the method. But crucial questions remain: What can we do with the models once we have constructed them? Are they just an intellectual game? Or do they enable us to understand things about behavior that eluded us before? Answer to these questions is provided by the duty scales from Truk.

Scaling duties allows us to see the circumstances under which a breach of duty will be regarded as more or less serious. We would assume from Table 2 that failure to honor a request would be least serious in Truk if alter were in right-status 4, the status in which this is the severest duty owed. It would be most serious if alter were in right-status 1, and there would be in-between degrees of seriousness if alter were in right-status 2 or 3. It is also possible that in those relationships in which a duty is the severest one owed, there is variation in the force of the obligation, its breach being forbidden in some instances and only disapproved in others. This is what we find in the second scale obtained from Truk (Table 3), one having to do with degrees of sexual distance (Goodenough, 1961, p. 117). If all four instances of ‘disapproved’ (D) in the scale were changed to ‘forbidden’ (F), eliminating this refinement, statuses 2 and 3 would merge, as would 4 and 5, and the total number of statuses discriminated on the dimension of sexual distance would be reduced from seven to five.

In every interaction, moreover, a Trukese ego has to decide to what extent he is forbidden from ‘being above’ alter and what is the appropriate cut-off point of his obligation on the duty scale shown in Table 2. If he wishes to flatter alter, he may act as if he were rendering one more duty than he feels is in fact required; and if he wishes to insult alter, he may render him one duty less. He must also decide what duties alter owes him and assess alter’s behavior as proper, flattering, or insulting. The number of scale positions by which alter’s behavior appears inappropriate measures the apparent degree of flattery or insult.

With this in mind, let us consider the occasion I encountered when an irate father struck his married daughter (right-status 2), to whom he owed all duties but the greeting fađiro. Informants explained that he was angry, or he would not have done such a thing. Indeed, the fact that he was six points down the seven-point scale was a measure of how very angry he was. His daughter, it happened, was a self-centered and disagreeable young woman,
whose petulant behavior had been getting on her kinsmen's nerves for some time. A good, hard jolt was just what she deserved. Being struck by her brother or husband, who were under no obligation not to strike her, would have had little dramatic impact. That her father struck her, however, the last man in the world who should, this was something she could not dismiss lightly. What provoked the incident was her indulgence in an early morning tirade against her husband whom she suspected of having just come from an amorous visit to her lineage sister next door. It is a Trukese man's privilege to sleep with his wife's lineage sisters (he is in duty-status 7 to them in Table 3), and men and women are not supposed to show any feelings of jealousy when this privilege is exercised. Her shrieking outburst against her husband, therefore, was another example of the 'spoiled child' behavior that made her unpleasant to live with. Witnesses seemed to relish her undoing as full of what we would call 'poetic justice'. I could not possibly have understood why they did so, if I had not already worked out the status scale of 'being above' another. Nor would I have been able to anticipate the feelings of shocked horror that people would have exhibited had the same act been performed in other circumstances. Indeed, relations between one informant and his older brother had been severely strained for about a year, because the former had violated his duties and told off his older brother (right-status 4) when the latter had exercised his privilege and struck their much older sister (right-status 7) in displeasure over some small thing she had done.

Methods that allow us objectively to measure such things as anger, insult, flattery, and the gravity of offenses, and that help us to appreciate the poetic justice of events in alien cultural contexts, such methods, I submit, are not exercises in sterile formalism. They promise to be powerful analytical tools. They encourage me to great optimism about the possibility of developing considerable precision in the science of social behavior.

NOTES
1. This is a revised and expanded version of a paper entitled 'Formal Properties of Status Relationships' read at the Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, 16 November 1961.
11. The display of such signs, along with those that serve as credentials implying or verifying our qualifications for assuming certain identities, corresponds to what Goffman (1959, p. 22) has termed the maintenance of 'front'. We try to assume ego-identities for which the culturally possible identity relationships accord us right-statuses and duty-statuses appropriate to the ends we wish to serve in the interaction (see the discussion of roles below).

12. I am here using the term 'persons' in much the same sense as Goffman (1959, p. 262) uses the term 'character' as distinct from 'performer'. Because of the many other connotations of Goffman's term in ordinary usage, it is unsuitable as a technical term.

13. The Trukese words in Tables 2 and 3 refer mostly to categories of kinamen (kinship identities), which need not be explicated for present purposes. The interested reader will find them discussed at length elsewhere (Goodenough, 1951, 1956).

14. For example, the phonology of Truk's language allows only for a limited number of consonant combinations in sequence without an intermediate pause. In composing phrases a speaker frequently puts together words such that one ends and the next begins with consonants that cannot occur in sequence. Either there must be a pause between them (as may happen in slow or deliberate speech), one of the consonants must undergo modification (e.g. jesep jefinu becomes jenof jefinu, mejior nujum becomes mejior nujum), or a vowel must be introduced according to rules of vowel harmony (e.g. gappy cek becomes gappy cek whereas jen cek becomes jec cek). Thus, for each word in Trukese there are several variant forms from among which selection is made according to the other words with which it is to be composed in an utterance.

15. I am grateful to Robert J. Smith for calling my attention to Mahar's paper.

16. Wallace (1961, p. 463) suggests 'the numerical value of 2$^n$ for maximum size of folk taxonomies', but whether or not this applies to systems of status relationships and, if so, how are matters that cannot be determined until we have a sample of these systems analyzed and described in the manner suggested here.

REFERENCES


David M. Schneider

Some Muddles in the Models:
Or, How the System really Works

PART ONE. ALLIANCE

I. The phrase 'alliance theory' and its opposition to what has been
called 'descent theory' was first suggested by Dumont (1961a).
Alliance theory, with roots clearly in Durkheim and Mauss, has
specifically arisen out of Lévi-Strauss's Structures élémentaires . . .
(1949) and has been developed by Lévi-Strauss, Dumont, Leach,
and Needham. Descent theory also has its roots in Durkheim and
Mauss, but its development has been through Radcliffe-Brown to
Fortes, Goody, Gough, Gluckman, and, in certain respects, Firth.

This is an oversimplified picture, of course, but one which pro-
vides a reasonable beginning. It would oversimplify matters, too,
but also be useful to point out, that where Durkheim tried to
bridge the gap between positivism and idealism and ended up as
an idealist in the remnants of some positivist clothing, Needham's
version of alliance theory is, if anything, squarely on the side of
the idealists. Lévi-Strauss and Dumont, on the other hand, go
with Hegel (Murphy, 1963). Descent theory has moved in the
direction of positivism; some of its misunderstandings stem from
its positivist premises; and the direction which the younger
descent theory people (Goody, Gough) have taken seems to me
to be consistent with this view.

The dilemma of positivism is exemplified by a statement of
Lévi-Strauss.Replying to Maybury-Lewis's criticisms, Lévi-
Strauss says:

' . . . Mr. M. L. remains, to some extent, the prisoner of the
naturalistic misconceptions which have so long pervaded the
British school . . . he is still a structuralist in Radcliffe-Brown's
terms, namely, he believes the structure to lie at the level of
empirical reality, and to be a part of it. Therefore, when he is
presented a structural model which departs from empirical
reality, he feels cheated in some devious way. To him, social
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