Social Intelligence and the Emergence of Roles and Rules

ESTHER GOODY

University of Cambridge

I. Introduction[1]

THE INVITATION TO PRESENT THE 1997 Radcliffe-Brown Memorial Lecture has been a welcome opportunity to think again about some of the work of Professor A. R. Radcliffe-Brown. The questions which originally brought me to Cambridge to work with Meyer Fortes were, in those days, seen as in the domain of 'personality and culture'. However it was neither personality nor culture *per se* that interested me, but rather the ways in which social structure and culture together shaped individual behaviour in patterned ways. Radcliffe-Brown's ideas were among those I found most exciting. His various papers on 'joking relations' address such issues directly: there is something about living in strongly patrilineal societies which is associated with patterns of joking and disrespect towards men of the mother's lineage.[2]

---

[1] I wish to acknowledge the contributions of most helpful discussions with those who read earlier drafts of this paper, particularly Susan Drucker Brown, Paul Sant Cassia, and Rachel Goody. Robert Hinde's thoughtful comments on a draft of an earlier paper have led me to rethink certain issues and hopefully to be more explicit about these (E. N. Goody forthcoming).

[2] When I proposed this title for the Radcliffe-Brown Memorial Lecture I had forgotten that Meyer Fortes' last publication, appearing shortly after his death, was entitled *Rules and the emergence of society* (1983). In this work he sees the central importance of rules for human societies as anchored in the emergence of the role of 'father', which he suggests was the first truly social role. While Fortes directs attention to different proximate mechanisms than those explored in the present paper, he firmly links the emergence of human society to the creation of roles and rules. Although I read this monograph when it first appeared, it was his ideas about fatherhood which then absorbed me. When working out the themes for this lecture I

In the paper 'On Joking Relationships' Radcliffe-Brown wrote 'The joking relationship is a particular combination of friendliness and antagonism.' And 'The show of hostility, the perpetual disrespect, is a continual expression of that social disjunction which is an essential part of the whole structural situation [exogamous patrilineages], but over which, without destroying or even weakening it, there is provided the social conjunction of friendliness and mutual aid' (1952*b*: 90, 95). What sort of processes underlie this association? What is it about living in a patrilineal society that shapes aggression and joking towards matrikin?

One sort of intellectual history of social anthropology would chart the debates which developed from these papers on joking relations (Homans and Schneider's *Marriage, authority and final causes* (1955); Needham's *Structure and Sentiment* (1962); Jack Goody's paper on 'Mother's Brother and Sister's son in West Africa' (1969). Indeed some critics have doubted the very 'reality' of patrilineages as significant features of African societies. The issues involved are too complex to pursue here. In this paper I shall be concerned with societies in which the actors themselves describe their behaviour in terms of patrilineal descent; for present purposes we can set aside discussions among anthropologists about their own analytic categories. While it is vital to pre-serve the important distinction between actors' concepts and analytic concepts, the relation between them may need to be understood differently in the context of roles and rules as emergent forms. It is to this dynamic that my main remarks are addressed.[3]

Here I want rather to keep to the underlying questions Radcliffe-Brown raises about the nature of the links between the patterning of individual interactions and society-level forms like patrilineages. The interesting puzzles are: *How* are such peculiarly individual behaviours as aggression and joking—expressions of subjective feelings—shaped by sociocultural forms? *How* does it happen that certain sociocultural forms seem to very often shape individual subjective feelings in such similar, strongly patterned ways in different socie-ties? And *what* have these puzzles to do with 'social intelligence'?

We may initially define social intelligence as the cognitive modelling of the contingencies of social interaction. To partially anticipate the argument, such cognitive modelling goes on in each individual head—but perforce makes use of sociocultural schemata, representations of 'how the world is'

---

had forgotten his identification of the dynamic relationship between roles and rules in the emergence of 'society'. Thus it is that we absorb ideas from our teachers and make them so integral to our thinking that we forget their origin! This paper, then, is a tribute to Meyer Fortes as well as to Radcliffe-Brown.

[3] This is a subject for a different paper.

in a particular society. This shifts our problem from the level of 'social structure' and 'learned routines' for privileged aggression and joking, down to the level of how the reciprocal cognitive modelling of certain sorts of interaction might come to be (i) patterned and (ii) shared within a society. This is a theoretical approach that works 'from the bottom up'—begins with individual behaviour and seeks to identify how this shapes higher-level processes and forms.

Overview

There are three elements to the account presented in this paper; taken together they offer a way of seeing certain structures—roles and rules which characterise all known societies—as emergent from social interaction.

The first element is what has come to be called 'social intelligence', both primate social intelligence and its elaboration in human social intelligence. The most robust difference between sub-human primates and *Homo sapiens sapiens* is our use of spoken language. Clearly human social intelligence today is profoundly shaped by language. Given the long period during which spoken language may well have emerged, it is likely that the transition to hominid social intelligence would have been powerfully driven by increasing language skills.

The next element to look at is the nature of spoken language. There has recently been a shift from the analysis of language as formal structures, to studying how language is actually used in conversation. This is forcing us to see spoken language as the dynamic continual negotiation of conversational meanings between speakers. Monkeys and apes apparently do not make use of *joint attention* to construct external shared signs.[4] During the slow emergence of spoken language, humans must have become skilled at jointly establishing shared meanings. It may indeed have been this skill which made possible a lexicon of 'words', and gradually led to the emergence of grammar and syntax, and conventions for pragmatic meaning. Using spoken language—languaging—is a joint activity between speakers: conversation, dialogue, is the basic form of spoken language—not lexicon, grammar, or syntax.

The third element is the powerful interaction between the dialogic use of spoken language and the dyadic nature of social roles. In dialogue speakers reciprocally interpret and shape closure on intentions and meanings. They are able to do this largely through sharing knowledge and expectations about what the other is likely to mean. Dyadic roles are sociocultural frames for beha-

---

[4] Dorothy Cheney's 1997 Tanner Lectures *The evolution of mind and language* and discussion during the following seminar, 10–12 March 1997, University of Cambridge.

viour, and partly defined by expectations of mutual rights and obligations. Role partners hold each other accountable for role-specified behaviour. When role behaviour matches expectations, this enacts—and recreates—the roles themselves. When role behaviour does not fit expectations, deviations are sanctioned in an attempt to restore the balance. In both dialogue and role behaviour very similar procedures seem to be used to reciprocally shape joint closure on meanings and intentions. In learning how to use language we learn both how to make meaning in conversation, and how to use language procedures to construct and enact dyadic roles. The joking relations between mother's brother and sister's son so brilliantly described by Radcliffe-Brown are an example of this dynamic between role dyads and spoken dialogue.

This can be seen as a 'possible scenario' for the relationship between human social intelligence and the emergence of institutionally patterned forms like joking relations.

II. Primate Social Intelligence

Nicholas Humphrey's seminal observation was that the vaunted intelligence of higher primates cannot have been a response to challenges of technical mastery of the ecological environment or of tool use, but rather is a new sort of 'social intelligence' through which primates manage their social interdependence *with other primates* (1976). Primates are challenged by the increasing demands of cognitively modelling the possible contingent responses of others to their own goal-directed actions.[5] Humphrey uses the analogy of two people playing chess. As primates become more skilled at cognitively modelling others' possible alternative responses, they develop related skills for using this modelling of others' actions to manage social relations themselves.[6] Some of the most striking ethology concerns the modelling by monkeys and apes of others' responses in order to act deceptively—outwitting competitors for food for instance. The classic work here has been Byrne and Whiten's edited book

[5] Humphrey's original paper (1976) has been subject to many readings, scholars focusing on different aspects as these relate to their own theoretical concerns. This is hardly surprising with such a rich new vein to explore. It is too early for a useful debate about which lines are more productive; indeed it is to be hoped that these several themes will turn out to be linked in significant ways.

[6] In a theoretical discussion of primate social intelligence I termed this cognitive modelling **anticipatory interactive planning (AIP)** (Introduction to E. N. Goody (ed.), *Social intelligence and interaction* (1995)). Perhaps beguiled by the appropriateness of the initials, I failed to realise that this would, incorrectly, be taken to mean that such cognitive modelling was intentional and conscious (see for instance paper by Drew in *Social intelligence and interaction*). However the implications of the initials of the more appropriate alternative **anticipatory interactive modelling (AIM)** are not much better.

Machiavellian Intelligence in which contributors document field observations of social interactions reflecting the capacity for cognitively modelling of other individuals' responses (1988).

Ever since reading Humphrey's paper I have been fascinated by the implications of such a social intelligence for better understanding human social life. For it is clear that social intelligence is about how we attribute intentions and beliefs to others in order to better anticipate their responses. Indeed, there is a large literature documenting such attributions and resulting behaviour.[7]

But while recent work increasingly shows higher primates to be skilled at social intelligence, there remains the dramatic gap between such primates and our own hominid line. The sharing of some 98% of DNA with the higher apes suggests that a great genetic disjunction is unlikely; gradual adaptation of some emergent feature is more likely. Then how did this 'hominid transition' occur?

The editors of *Machiavellian Intelligence* consider both improved adaptations to ecological challenge and the gradual increase in tool-related skills, suggesting that they no doubt contributed to advances in hominid species. However they conclude that the most significant ratchet was almost certainly progressively augmented social/Machiavellian intelligence itself. As apes become more skilled at anticipating other apes' intentions, it was the most socially intelligent creatures who survived to reproduce. Their more socially intelligent offspring would have been even more difficult to deceive and anticipate, thus the next generation would have to be even *more* socially intelligent to succeed. The selective advantage of deception became a ratchet leading to continuously higher elaboration of social intelligence.

While such a dynamic is indeed persuasive, there is for those studying human societies a curious 'dark hole'. In neither the first volume of *Machiavellian Intelligence* (1988) nor its successor (Whiten and Byrne (eds.), forthcoming) is there a direct consideration of the role of spoken language for hominid social intelligence (apart from my own paper). Yet spoken language remains the single robust difference between apes and modern *Homo sapiens*. The argument seems to be that developed spoken language was relatively late in Hominid evolution (Paul Mellars (1996), cites the date of around 40,000 BP) and with 'culture' this is taken to mark the effective arrival of *Homo sapiens sapiens*. Thus spoken language is seen as the consequence of becoming fully human, and cannot have played any significant role in the emergence of hominids themselves.

---

[7] The 'attribution theory' of social psychology is an elaborate and systematic exploration of the role of attributing goals and intentions to social actors in determining patterns of interaction: Heider (1958), Thibault and Kelley (1959), Kelley (1979), etc., and more recently most of the papers in Fletcher and Fitness (eds.), *Knowledge structures in close relationships* (1996). See also E. N. Goody (1978a).

III. The 'Origin' of Spoken Language

From the 1860s there was a long period during which considering possibilities for the origin of human language was thought dangerously speculative and in any case of little scholarly interest.[8] Very much as with the edited volumes of Whiten and Byrne, and Michael Carrither's *Why humans have culture* (1992), language was treated as something that 'just happened', proved useful, and is certainly definitively human. However, in the past few years a number of important works have appeared that address the question of what form hominid proto-language might have taken.[9] This is not the place to discuss hypothetical early language, and related debates. What is important for an evolutionary perspective on hominid social intelligence is that with this recent work we may, indeed we must, begin to consider how hominid social intelligence would have been altered by this new tool for thinking—and acting with.

Any such project must be at least roughly anchored in time, although there is probably no dating scheme which will be undisputed. If one adopts the gradualist stance, then we can follow that of William Foley's discussion of the emergence of language in the hominid line in *Anthropological Linguistics* (1997). While these particular estimates may well be modified, there is clearly a real possibility that the emergence of spoken language was a slow process extending over many millennia.

IV. Using Language

The use of language has been studied in two broad traditions: the *product tradition* and the *action tradition* (Clark, 1996). The product tradition developed from the linguistic study of sentences, words, and speech sounds—the 'products' of language use. It has been strongly influenced by the work of Noam Chomsky on generative grammars (e.g., 1957). Sentences have a syntactic structure; words have a phonological and morphemic structure; segments have a phonetic structure; and words have lexical meanings; language use is determined by rules. However theories of language structure cannot be extended to actual discourse because they deliberately exclude any systematic treatment of speakers, listeners, time and circumstances of speaking. They also exclude all communicative acts not included in formal spoken language. In the *product* tradition each speaker is treated as an isolated

---

[8] The parallel constraints from archaeology and linguistics are briefly discussed in E. N. Goody 'Social intelligence and language: another Rubicon?' (forthcoming).
[9] See for instance: Bickerton (1990), Donald (1991), Lieberman (1991), Dunbar (1993). See also discussion in E. N. Goody (forthcoming).

Table 1. Emergence of spoken language: rough dates.

Homo habilis	Established early proto-language	from 2 million years
Homo erectus	Developing language	from 1.5 million years
Archaic *Homo sapiens*	Complex language	from 0.3 million years
Fully modern humans	Fully developed languages	from 0.05 million years

Based on: W. Foley, *Anthropological Linguistics*

individual seeking to communicate by following rules of grammar, which are 'hard-wired' in our brains. The product tradition studies language as if it were a complex 'physical' artefact—as immobile as a stone axe.

The *action tradition* joins two lines of thinking—the philosophies of Austin, Grice, and Searle, with the related fields of sociolinguistics (Sacks, Schegloff, Brown, and Levinson) and ethnomethodology (Goffman, Garfinkel, Heritage). In this tradition the concern has been not with frozen products of speech, but with understanding how people use language to construct meaning. It would be difficult to exaggerate the implications of this new concern with how meanings are constructed in use, both for linguistics itself, and for our understanding of social intelligence and social processes and forms. Here it is only possible to indicate a few central themes. For this I draw heavily on Herb Clark's recent incisive theoretical overview of the principles and dyadic procedures for *using* language, although it builds on a growing corpus of empirical and theoretical work by other scholars.[10]

Early work in the action tradition sought to widen definitions of using language, as in Austin's definition of 'speech acts' as 'what is actually accomplished by speaking in certain ways'. This led to efforts to open out the notion of 'context' since this clearly plays a central role in 'meaning'. And this in turn required new methods of studying language use through transcripts of natural conversation. Once the object of study was natural conversation it became clear that the major 'context' for each speaker is the other speaker's words. Dialogue, not formal text, was the actual mode of using language. Using language is a *joint activity* between speakers. Indeed Clark argues that it is the 'jointness of activity' which is prior, with discourse being the special case in which joint activity employs spoken language.[11]

---

[10] There are too many to list, but central works have been Austin (1962), Grice (e.g., 1957), Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974), Brown and Levinson (1978/1987), Garfinkel (1967), Heritage (1990/91). Several chapters especially those by Drew, Good, Streeck, Brown, and Levinson on *Social intelligence and interaction*, ed. E. Goody (1995) either describe or imply these same themes.

[11] One of the implications of the material analysed in the present paper is that the emergence of spoken language may have both depended on and substantially enhanced the hominid capacity for joint attention and joint activity. Thus while for modern humans dialogue may be a 'special case' of joint activity, it may be that the 'work' of achieving joint closure on lexical meanings and the 'rules' of proto-grammar progressively enhanced hominid abilities for joint activity.

Joint activities have quite different properties from individual activities. Like playing chess or playing a piano duet, participants each act individually; but in order to 'do' chess or 'do' a duet, they must intricately *coordinate* their actions. Conversations are 'open-ended'. They are rarely scripted, and neither person knows at the start how the conversation will proceed or end. However joint actions still embody individual actions, but these are *participatory* actions in that they are coordinated. But how is this coordination achieved in conversation?

In formal terms the criterion for participatory joint actions is that each participant must *both* **intend** to do her own part and **believe** that the other intends to do his.

This still leaves both participants with what Schelling calls a *coordination problem* (1960, cited in Clark (1996), and also Levinson (1995)). 'Two people have a coordination problem whenever they have common interests, or goals, and each person's actions depend on the action of the other' (Clark 1996: 62). Schelling's ingenious experimental work was based on presenting separately to two people unknown to each other a coordination problem in the form of a game, and told that 'to win' both must select the same 'solution'. For instance: you are each told to meet the other somewhere in New York on Wednesday. Where will you meet and at what time? A majority picked the Information Booth at Grand Central Station and almost everyone picked 12 noon.

Schelling's work showed that people are quite successful at solving coordination problems by coordinating their predictions of what they would do with predictions of what the other would probably do in order to identify the one course of action that their expectations of each other can converge on. This coordination of expectations is achieved by using clues from knowledge about the background information the participants share. Clark following Lewis (1969) calls such a clue a *coordination device*. For instance, in one of Schelling's games when two people were asked to independently choose the same face of a coin 86% chose heads—here the coordination device was probably the mutual knowledge of the phrase 'heads or tails' where 'heads' comes first.

Clark follows Lewis in arguing that language use is really people solving coordination problems in jointly arriving at shared meanings. Much of his book is devoted to showing how the tool of spoken language, together with non-verbal communication, is used by alternately speaking participants in discourse to coordinate shared meanings. He writes: 'Utterances have traditionally been treated as autonomous acts by speakers, but that isn't right. Although speakers may assume the major responsibility, they cannot present utterances without the coordination of their addressees. . . . Getting what we say attended to and identified is just as much a joint action as getting them understood.' (Ibid. 253).

Table 2a. Levels of coordinating meaning between two speakers.

Speaker A's actions	Speaker B's actions
1 A is executing *behaviour t* for B	B is attending to *behaviour t* from A
2 A is presenting *signal s* to B	B is identifying *signal s* from A
3 A is signalling the proposition *that p* for B	B is recognising the proposition *that p* from A
4 A is proposing joint project *w* to B	B is considering A's proposal of *w*

The following invented example (after Clark 1996: 151–3) indicates the nesting reciprocality of the joint negotiation of meaning in dialogue.

To give the formal model content we can add the actions and speech from an example which Clark uses elsewhere: Speaker A gestures towards a chair and says to Speaker B 'sit down'. Action and speech are represented in bold letters in the second version of the table.

Table 2b. Levels of coordinating action and speech between two speakers.

Speaker A's actions	Speaker B's actions
1 A is executing a *behaviour* for B **A gestures towards chair**	B is attending to the *behaviour* from A **B looks at chair**
2 A is presenting *signal* to B **A says 'sit down' to B**	B is identifying *signal* from A **B hears and understands A say 'sit down'**
3 A is signalling a proposition for B **A signals a polite request to B**	B is recognising the proposition from A **B recognises A's polite request**
4 A is proposing joint project to B **A is proposing that B sit and be comfortable**	B is considering A's proposal **B is considering A's proposal that she sit and be comfortable**

Note we must start with A's initiating act of gaining B's attention (1). Each level is a prerequisite for the next. Joint attention of both speakers to the chair is a prerequisite for B to understand the 'topic' of the dialogue. The spoken signal 'sit down' confirms that the chair is where she should sit and describes the action; B must understand the words if she is to participate jointly with A in the dialogue. The third stage is the 'translation' of the words 'sit down' into the speech act—a polite request, not an order or a question. If the speech act had been recognised as an order or a question, B would be considering a very different proposed joint project with A at stage 4.

One of the most interesting sections of Clark's book concerns the ways in which language is used at each of these stages to confirm the correctness of the exchange. This is 'working on the coordination problem'. 'It is a fundamental principle of intentional action that people look for evidence that they have done what they intended to do.' (Ibid. 222). 'The participants in a joint action try to establish the mutual belief that they have succeeded well enough' for

example, 'in reaching closure on the joint act of signaling and recognizing.' (Ibid. 226–7).

Thus dialogue involves two 'tracks'. Track 1 concerns talk about the topic of conversation; these are locutionary acts conveying lexical meaning: [A] 'It was, uh, it was a lovely day'. Track 2 uses language to comment on this; it is a metacommunicative act. When a speaker presents a signal on Track 1 she is also tacitly asking 'Do you understand me?' on Track 2. Thus if [B] responds 'yes' it operates on both Track 1, ratifying the assertion that it was a lovely day; and on Track 2, answering the tacit question—'Do you understand me?' Where there are problems with joint closure on meaning there are several different types of procedures for clarification, expansion, and repairing mistaken signals or recognition. A surprising amount of natural conversation is devoted to seeking and securing joint closure—to identifying the cues which permit solutions to the never-ending 'coordination problems' of dialogue.

In short, using language is not only about conveying lexical information, but in order to achieve this between *two* speakers a great deal of talk is about confirming that signals have been correctly identified and recognised, that both speakers have the same understanding of their joint conversational project. And as conversation unfolds through time, coordination problems continue, as do procedures for achieving joint closure on intended meanings.

V. Using Language and Social Intelligence

What does this *action view* of using language contribute to an understanding of the significance of human social intelligence for the emergence of roles and rules?

Contrast between ape and human social intelligence

Ape social intelligence has been characterised as driven by competitive individual attempts to deceive other apes. This view certainly ignores apes' use of the ability to model each other's contingent responses to achieve joint goals—cooperation. However the emphasis on such a Machiavellian social intelligence does reflect the essentially ego-centered nature of non-verbal communication. Primate 'mind reading' is 'all in the mind'. Each creature must cognitively model what she supposes to be the intentions of others. There are of course many cues—of hesitation, facial expression, gesture—indeed it must be the reading of these cues, combined with past experience, which underlies ape social intelligence.

Two new things happen with the emergence of spoken language. First,

language is a 'tool' for doing cognitive modelling with *learned and shared* meanings and language structures. The number of shared meanings in contemporary lexicons is vast. Foley suggests that as proto-language developed there would have been recurrent cognitive overload as lexicon, then proto-grammar and then full grammar became increasingly complex (1997, chapter X). New cognitive structures and the external artifacts of grammatical structures must have evolved to manage such overloads. When we include the language-based schemata, scripts and communicative genre like politeness and narrative, it is clear that human languages are extremely powerful tools for cognitive modelling.

In addition, when we speak we hear what we say, at the same time that it is heard by our addressee. Because both speak the same language—we use a common lexicon, grammar and syntax—each speaker/hearer is using the same languaging tools to communicate intentions; both speak and hear the same signals. The cognitive modelling in each head uses similar signs, schemata, cognitive strategies for the process of jointly constructing meanings. Thus these are also tools for managing the coordination of meanings. There appears to be no evidence that apes devote joint attention to communicating *about* communication—metacommunication. It may well be that if there was a long period during which hominid proto-language emerged, the main cognitive 'work' during this phase was the joining of primate intersubjectivity to cognitive and social procedures for the sharing of links between referent and sign. Some time during the hominid trajectory, probably gradually, vocal communication became the object—and the product—of *jointly coordinated* activity. The contrast with ape ego-centric communicative acts is marked and profound.

VI. Dialogue

A simple but powerful corollary of this view is that it is conversation that is the fundamental basis of spoken language, not the formal properties of language, nor yet text (or even narrative). The paradigmatic form of conversation is dialogue—the speaking together of two people. In terms of social intelligence, dialogue mediates the processes of conveying and attributing intentions between actors. And as we have seen the meanings in conversation are jointly created in dialogue.

Structural coupling and the negotiation of conversational meaning

There is a generic mode of mutually interdependent interaction between organism and environment which Maturana and Verela (1987) have termed

'structural coupling'. The environment may be physical, chemical, or another organism. In this mode the behaviour of each shapes that of the other through extended reciprocal interdependence. It is impossible to understand the behaviour of either member without studying them in interaction through time. A particularly clear example would be that of mother–infant interactions in which the infant's close attention is responded to by subtle maternal cues which further shape infant attention and behaviour. (See Trevarthen 1979; Bruner 1978.) The body of literature deriving from Bowlby's (1969) work on attachment behaviour can also be seen in these terms.

We have seen that conversation is a joint activity in which shared meanings are shaped in interaction; it would seem that conversational dialogue is a peculiarly human mode of structural coupling. The speech of neither party alone constitutes the conversation; it is their joint, reciprocally unfolding speech through which meaning emerges. Where two individuals interact closely over time the dynamic of structural coupling can be seen as shaping their relationship. Each partner anticipates certain patterns of behaviour from the other, and adapts to these; thus behaviour of each is shaped by adaptations of and to the other. The role of dialogue in this co-adaptation is complex; it operates at the level of lexical meanings, speech acts, and coordination of meanings, as well as at the level of coordinating joint actions. Through dialogue partners develop a more-or-less explicit objectification of their relationship.

Dyadic roles

Clark has been particularly concerned to specify what it is that permits participants in conversation to understand each other and gain closure on joint meanings. He uses the term 'grounding' to cover the several kinds of shared information and experience that permit meaningful conversation. A large component of 'grounding' is shared experience and shared 'culture' that make it possible for participants to roughly predict what the other is likely to mean by what s/he says. While natural conversations among acquaintances tend to have a potentially very open form, certain kinds of dialogue such as greetings, politeness forms, and questions are highly predictable, with precisely specified scripts. However probably most conversations fall somewhere between these two extremes of openness and closure. These are often embedded in ongoing relationships which tend to be socioculturally framed—by family ties, work settings, friends, professional encounters with doctors, teachers, shop assistants, and so on. These are often 'role relationships' in the sense that they are instrumentally defined (at least in part), with the behaviour of each member of the role dyad seen by actors as reciprocally symbiotic in relation to the other.

At the time when anthropologists enter a community to study it, they find certain role dyads that are culturally specified, enduring dyadic relations. As such they are socioculturally constructed 'artefacts'—'things in the world'. Like spoken language itself, while roles are 'things in the world', they must be learned by each individual member of a community. Though certain roles can be formally taught (occupational roles for instance), many, such as kin roles and friendship roles, are learned through observation and informal practice.

Where do roles 'come from'?

Ethologists recognise a few roles in primate societies: dominant/subordinate males, mother/son and mother/daughter roles, males who act as lookouts for the group (see de Waal 1982; Hinde (ed.) 1983). These roles are based on patterned reciprocal behaviour—the consequence of structural coupling. Individuals move into and out of such roles. They can be said to exist independently of particular individuals who may fill them at a given time. Dominance hierarchies are a clear case. Again, to the extent that within a band all mothers and daughters respond to ecological, biological, and social constraints (like maternal rank) in much the same ways, the 'mother–daughter' roles will be similar.

What might be the effect of spoken language on primate role dynamics? At the level of structural coupling, dialogue mediates interpersonal behaviour. Dialogue is itself a powerful mode of structural coupling, requiring the continual negotiation of joint meanings. At the same time, intentions, beliefs, wishes, and control are explicitly expressed verbally. These new kinds of information must make the cognitive modelling of own and other's social interdependence more effective. And since languaging is a mode of acting as well as speaking, languaging becomes a mode for securing *joint action* as well as for negotiating meanings.

Names and roles

Spoken languages, however, are not dyadic creations. Creating a shared lexicon, establishing conventions for linking words, distinguishing between names and actions, embedding clauses—these likely stages in the emergence of proto-language involve communities of speakers all 'doing languaging' with each other (see Hutchins and Hazlehurst 1995). This also means finding ways of referring to others. Names and kin terms (often used as names) are found in all human societies thus far studied. Indeed Robin Fox has suggested

that kin terms are among the very few human universals (1980). The everyday use of kin terms has two powerful effects on social life. Because kin terms are inherently dyadic, their use locates members of the community with respect to other members. But even with a very simple kin terminology, dyads are linked to other dyads. Mothers link to sons and to daughters; daughters link to sons, and to other daughters; mothers link to husband/fathers; mother's mothers link to daughter's daughters, and so on.

Further, once there is a term 'mother' or 'father' then these become names of roles as well as for individual mothers and fathers. Rights and obligations may then be recognised as applying not only to separate individual members of structurally coupled dyads, but may become similar for all who hold these roles. When spoken language permitted the naming of roles, expectations generated in dyadic relations could be applied to all community members acting in these roles. And of course in many small-scale societies kin terms are used for categories of relative, what anthropologists call a classificatory terminology; in many patrilineal societies all of the men in a patrilineage of the father's generation are 'fathers'.

Three mechanisms may have led to such generalising of roles within a community. First, whatever sociocognitive procedure had emerged for the creation of shared lexical items would presumably also give rise to shared meanings for role terms (Hutchins and Hazlehurst 1995). Second, individuals move through kin roles occupying sequentially, and later simultaneously, child roles, sibling roles, parent roles, spouse roles, parent's sibling roles, and parent's parent roles. Thus nearly all members of the community come to share experience of all the kin roles. Eventually virtually everyone has acted as child to parent, sibling to sibling, mother/father to child, husband/wife to wife/husband, child to parent's sibling, parent's sibling to sibling's child, parent's parent to child's child. Finally, the use of kin terms for reference and address within the community places individuals within a network of kin roles vis-à-vis other members of the community. This requires individual members of role dyads to place themselves in relation to other dyads: brother to a sister who is also mother of a child, that is a mother's brother; mother of a daughter who is wife to a husband, that is a mother-in-law, etc. G. H. Mead (1967) pointed out that hearing ourselves speaking permits us to take the roles of others vis-à-vis ourselves, and see ourselves through others' eyes. This is very close to what psychologists call 'decentering'—being able to understand a problem not just from our own position, 'in the centre', but also from the point of view of another actor. Thus sons gain an understanding of what it is to be a father; and fathers' treatment of their sons draws on their own experience as sons. This capacity for decentering must be critical for the cognitive modelling of other people's role-contingent responses to our actions.

In a community built of overlapping kin roles, then, individuals live in a

socioculturally structured world. We need not invoke some abstract thing called 'society', or even 'social structure' that is independent of individuals. Nor fall back on a generic 'learning of roles'. Individuals' experience of dyadic role interactions recreates these roles for all participants. And living in a sociocultural world of overlapping roles brought to life in everyday conversations and interactions knits together the experiences of each individual occupying several roles, and the sharing of these experiences with others in same and complementary roles.

Expectations, routines, 'rules', and accountability

The ethnomethodologist Howard Garfinkel (1967) was a cunning genius at using quasi-natural experiments to defamiliarise the familiar.[12] In one key study he asked his students to pick a time when they were doing ordinary things with a friend and simply respond to all of the friend's utterances with 'What do you mean?' [We can recognise this as Clark's Track 2 request for joint closure on meaning.] At first the friend would respond with an explanation, but as the question continued to be asked, responses became angry, and the conversation was often abruptly broken off with exclamations like 'What's wrong with you? You must be mad!' What is happening here? Garfinkel shows that everyday interactions generate implicit expectations of patterned reciprocities. Actors hold each other accountable for honouring these implicit expectations. When one actor violates these the other seeks to restore the familiar pattern, using progressively more focused and eventually antagonistic procedures. Garfinkel argues that it is the predictability of everyday interchanges that makes social interaction possible, and by continuing to conform to reciprocal expectations actors mutually construct a shared social world.

These responses to violation of implicit expectations are not necessarily on a conscious level. Heritage (1990/1) and Drew (1995) speak of 'routinized cognitive strategies'; they are also *shared* cognitive strategies, since the other's response tends to restore the expected pattern of behaviour. In a sense they are 'knowledge structures' in individual heads (see papers in Fletcher and Fitness (eds.) 1996). But they are also sociocultural artefacts since they are shaped by expectations linked to social roles.

Roles and 'rules'

In small-scale societies where role behaviour is publicly observable and roles replicated and shared, accountability for expected role behaviour takes more

---

[12] I am indebted to Paul Sant Cassia for this penetrating characterisation of Garfinkel's project.

explicit forms. In Gonja (northern Ghana) for instance, a woman whose husband fails to provide food may complain loudly, thus rendering him accountable to others—their children, her mother-in-law. Shaming him in this way may send him off to the farm, with no further sanction. If not, the mother-in-law may send food from her own fire, or rebuke her son directly (E. N. Goody, fieldnotes). Such actions may well make good the shortage of food. But they also serve to make explicit the norm that husbands are accountable for providing food for their families. John Haviland's (1977) ethnography of the Zinacantan Maya shows the power of gossip to assert norms and indeed he suggests that here gossip serves to select among implicit norms those appropriate for sanctioning behaviour in particular instances. In these examples we see 'rules' emerging from behaviour. Of course most societies also have formal institutions for holding actors accountable for rights and duties associated with roles: in Gonja these include the power of the head of a kin group over those under his authority, and the chief's court; and today of course local government courts. Radcliffe-Brown's paper on 'Social sanctions' (1952*d*) deals deftly with the domains of informal and formal sanctions.

VII. Emergent Roles and Rules:
Mother's Brothers and Sister's Sons in
African Patrilineal Societies

Starting from the view of social intelligence as the primate capacity to cognitively model others' contingent responses to goal-directed acts, I have explored some implications of the gradual attainment of spoken language for the emergence of roles and rules. It may be useful to see the structural coupling of role dyads as a basic mechanism through which speech-in-dialogue patterns interaction. And it must be axiomatic that the patterning of role dyadic interaction makes contingent responses more predictable, and thus the cognitive modelling of interaction, social intelligence, more efficient.

How can such a view contribute to an understanding of 'joking relations' between mother's brothers and sister's sons in patrilineal African societies?

First, what are the role dyads involved? Here we must consider the actors' view of the kin relationship in relation to lineage membership, siblingship, etc. Resources and affective ties are indicated in brackets.

There are two sorts of questions to be asked about the joking relationships between mother's brothers and sister's sons that have been reported for many African patrilineal societies: first, why are they characterised by snatching of property and 'privileged aggression'? And second, how is it that behaviour which seems so particularly personal has come to be patterned in similar ways,
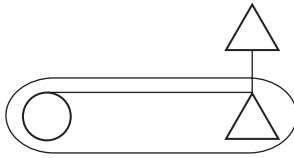
Father/son [same patrilineage → jural authority; property;
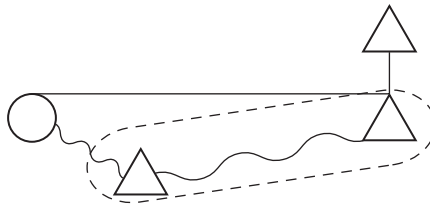socialisation affect, reciprocities of rearing]

mother/son (different patrilineage → nurturance; socialisation
affect; reciprocities of rearing)
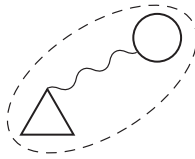
mother/mother's brother (same patrilineage → jural authority;
property rights; co-socialisation affect)

Mother's brother/sister's son (different patrilineage → No jural
authority; residual property rights; socialisation affect)
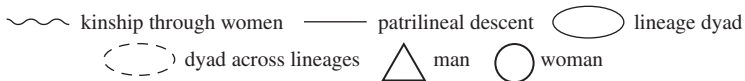
Note: → Stands for 'entails, leads to'

∿∿∿ kinship through women ——— patrilineal descent ⬭ lineage dyad
⬭ dyad across lineages △ man ◯ woman

Figure 1.   Role dyads influencing mother's brother–sister's son joking relationship.

Lineage A   *Lineage B*

Father/son (same patrilineage → jural authority; property;
socialisation affect, reciprocities of rearing)

Mother/son (different patrilineage → nurturance; socialisation
affect; reciprocities of rearing)

Mother/mother's brother (same patrilineage → jural authority;
property rights; co-socialisation affect)

Mother's brother/sister's son (different patrilineage → No jural authority;
residual property rights; socialisation affect)
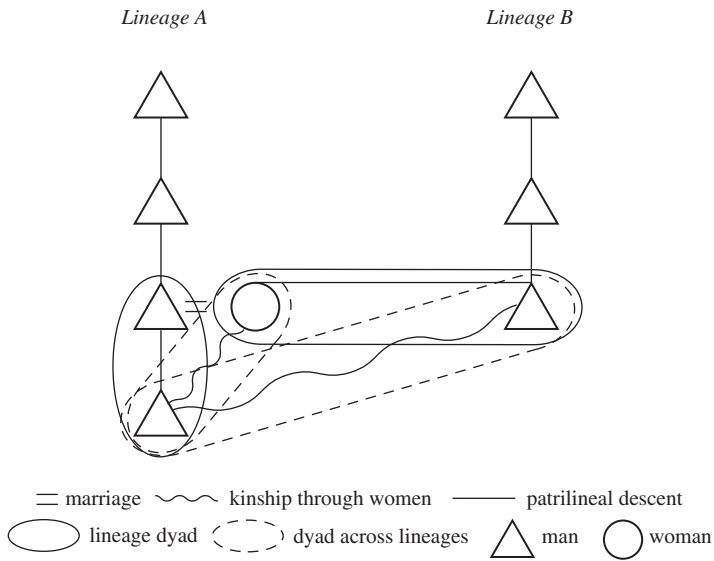
* → stands for 'entails, leads to'

Figure 2. Superimposed dyadic roles involved in mother's brother–sister's son relationship.

both within a single society and in many unrelated patrilineal societies? Both
kinds of question require us to look at the whole complex of role dyads as a
single network.

Why are these joking relationships characterised by snatching of the mother's brother's property?

Here we can follow the view developed by Jack Goody (1969) that in patri-
lineal societies, snatching property from the mother's brother is an assertion of

the rights which a youth would have had to his mother's lineage property *if she had been a man*. Due to the accident of birth which made his mother a woman, he is denied full rights to her lineage property which passes only through sons, not through daughters. But he is still a 'sister's child' and has other ritual and customary rights and duties with respect to her lineage kin. The fact that his mother's agnates *may not* refuse him the items he takes acknowledges, admits publicly, that he does have residual rights in their estate. In matrilineal societies where men do have rights to property through their mothers, youths do not 'snatch' property from their mother's brothers; they have direct jural rights to this property.

Why are these joking relationships characterised by 'joking' and privileged aggresion?

Radcliffe-Brown (1952*a,b,c*) refers to sister's sons' snatching of property and freedom to use verbal insults as 'privileged disrespect'/'hostility' and to the role dyad as a 'joking relationship'. Why should the joking and privileged aggression be so intimately linked?

There are two issues here. Why is it joking and aggression that are so closely related rather than some other behaviour? And why should such joking relationships be found between maternal uncle and nephew in patrilineal societies?

Joking and aggression

In northern Ghana Birifor boys often engage in play-fighting; not infrequently this switches into angry fighting which adults ignore unless weapons become involved. Birifor youths and men *need* to be skilled fighters. In the gangs of boys who spent their days looking after cattle, wrestling was used to establish an internal hierarchy, with the boy who could best all the others recognised as the 'chief'; this is striking in an 'egalitarian' society in which no chiefs were recognised (E. N. Goody 1993). Men are quick to take offence, and a man who is not ready to defend himself and others is generally despised. At large gatherings such as funerals and festivals adult men from the same patrilineage sit together by the path leading to their home village, their bows over their shoulders, ready in case a fight breaks out. An important elder of Baale village was killed in such a funeral fight last year. Fighting is real and dangerous.

The striking thing about formal joking relations is that neither partner is *permitted* to become angry. Usually the joking is relished, and joking partners and observers enter wholeheartedly into the spirit of the game. But in Gonja I

have seen two joking partners shift suddenly from playful to angry fighting. At this point the bystanders quickly intervened. Some shouted even more out-rageous insults, thus exaggerating the joking element; while several strong young men pulled the two apart, remonstrating—'Didn't they know they were joking partners?' 'What did they mean by allowing themselves to fight?' Significantly, a fight can easily polarise the men in a large gathering into opposing camps. What begins as a fight between two individuals can become a real battle. Institutionalisation of the joking relationship provides a manda-tory mechanism for intervention in such a situation, and of switching back from an angry mode to the joking mode.

This dynamic was acted out one morning as I sat with some Gonja women. An old woman began teasing her granddaughter (of about five years) by pinching her. Finally the little girl began to cry, at which her mother and the other women shouted with laughter. A look of complete confusion came over the girl's face. But the women continued to laugh—gently, not in a taunting way. So the girl herself started to laugh. When I asked why the woman had pinched her own granddaughter, she explained that they were joking partners, and the girl had to be taught not to be angry, but to laugh instead. And indeed the women did not *allow* her to take offence; they laughed *with* her (not *at* her), and she soon joined in.

It would seem that there are potentially indistinct boundaries between play, playful aggression, and aggressive fighting. Where people are interdependent economically, politically, and ritually, and must live closely together, quarrels are inevitable. Were open fighting to result this could drastically disrupt social life. Joking relationships do not, of course, either prevent or ultimately settle quarrels. But they do provide a mechanism for redefining aggression as 'play-ful' and 'not serious'. Further, individuals in dyadic joking relations, joking partners, come to expect to relate to each other in playful, non-aggressive ways. And every joking episode recreates the joking idiom for actors and observers.

Why in patrilineal societies should the dyad 'mother's brother' and 'sister's son' be defined as a joking relationship?

Here it is useful to consider again the interaction among the full set of role dyads concerned in the mother's brother–sister's son joking relationship.

In patrilineal societies a youth and his father are members of the same jural group. Neither aggression nor joking are permitted, thinkable, from a son to his fathers. Bakhtin (1984) has argued that laughter is not allowed in authority relations; laughter here is subversive. There is little ambiguity about patterns of authority between generations within the patrilineage. However a youth and his mother's brothers do not belong to the same jural group. In terms of
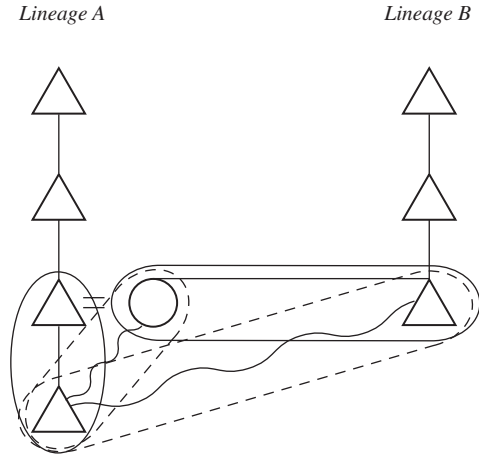
For key see Fig. 2.

Figure 3.   Superimposed dyadic roles involved in mother's brother–sister's son relationship.

generation difference, the mother's brother has authority over his sister's son. But he has no *formal*, *jural* authority over a member of a different patrilineage. Here there is ample room for ambiguity, as Radcliffe-Brown makes explicit. If we add to this the ambiguity inherent in the youth's submerged claims to the mother's brother's lineage property, then this dyad is one with a high level of potential friction. The contested claims of the sister's son to property, and of the mother's brother to authority, might easily lead to confrontation and an aggressive response, to a fight between the two which might quickly extend to the men of the two lineages. In Radcliffe-Brown's terms these are 'disjunctive' forces operating on the role dyad. He also writes eloquently of the expressions of 'conjunction' in friendliness and mutual aid. In the southern African patrilineal societies discussed in his papers conjunction is expressed through the mother's brother's assistance with the provision of a cow for bridewealth or for a sacrifice necessitated by sickness or misfortune. For the sister's son is still a 'child' of his mother's patrilineal ancestors, for whom he has to perform important ritual services, and on whom he depends in part for health and protection. Maternal patriclansfolk need their sisters' sons, and young men need their mother's male agnates. It is in this role dyad that behaviour is pre-emptively defined as a joking relation, within which the participants are simply not permitted, and do not permit themselves, to fight.

Roles and rules as emergent forms

The next question, of course, is how does friction between one set of individuals in a particular role dyad come to be managed in the same way by others

in the same roles? In a way this is an impossible question to answer, since we cannot observe the process of institutionalisation as it happens. Perhaps the fundamental element is the efficacy of joking as a way of managing conflict. Here individual personality differences may well be critical. Some individuals are skilled at managing social relations and may use joking in an *ad hoc* way to handle conflict. However, joking is not a solitary form—it is pre-eminently dialogic; it takes two to joke. The response is as necessary as the initial remark. Indeed elaborate joking may extend through many exchanges of challenge and response. In Zincantan Maya society verbal humour includes both 'banter' (teasing, punning, playing with word meanings) and 'joking': 'Just crazy talk: both people answer each other in the same way' [translation of interview]. . . . 'Both parties to the exchange are consciously funny and/or insulting as they talk' (Haviland 1977: 189). Banter and joking occur in conversations, and are prominent in gossip. However with apparently one exception they are dyadic only in the sense that dialogue is. Joking associated with institutionalised roles appears to be limited to ritual entertainers in Cargo ceremonies. Haviland comments that some Zinecantans are known as unable to sustain a joking exchange—they just sit embarrassed, saying nothing. Others are proud of their skill at joining in joking with the Cargo ceremony musicians. It seems that where joking relations are not formally linked to role dyads individual differences in skill at joking are needed for participation.

However, where joking relations are formalised they often become a communicative genre with scripts for joking. There are slots for openings and retorts into which participants may put either standard forms or invented variations. Joking dialogue is a basic mode of dyadic interaction. In Gonja cross-cousins[13] (*kitcherpo*) are the most prominent of the prescriptively defined joking partners. They are expected to joke, often take great delight in doing so, and of course may not fight. Just *what* is considered funny is highly socioculturally constrained. In Gonja cross-sex joking tends to play with gender role incompetence (E. Goody 1978*b*). Here there is ample scope for veiled aggression, but it must be taken as hugely funny. A critical component then is the labelling of the role dynamic as 'joking'.

Once there are named joking relations in a given society they can be adapted to newly appearing problematic relations. This is a likely pattern underlying the emergence of joking in the textile industry of Daboya (Gonja). Here the counterpoised vectors of conjunction/disjunction operate in the role dyad of trader and weaver (who are usually of different ethnic origin). The

---

[13] 'Cross-cousin' is an anthropological term for the children of opposite sex siblings, children of a brother and sister. Children of same-sex siblings are termed 'parallel cousins'. In Gonja, as in many societies, the term is applied to classificatory relatives as well as to direct children of full siblings.

weavers depend on itinerant traders to buy their cloth, while the high quality of this cloth brings traders into this remote centre. Both weavers and traders seek a profitable deal. The joking dialogue genre is often used to manage these conflicting interests. The roles of traders and weavers are named, but not typified as a joking relationship; joking is not prescriptive. Rather, both partners appear to draw on the 'rules' of prescriptive joking relationships to contain their quite aggressive bargaining without jeopardising the long-term trading ties on which both depend. This is a *de facto* joking relationship. It is quite different from the prescriptive joking which is often found between members of neighbouring ethnic groups. Here close proximity (often with intermarriage) requires cooperation and engenders pressures for conjunction; competition— for land, grazing and water, and marriageable women—fuels disjunctive forces (Radcliffe-Brown 1952*b*, 1952*c*). Joking is not left to individual initiative, but enjoined on all members of each group. Existing prescriptive joking relations within the society would be readily adapted to manage the inevitable interpersonal tensions between groups in such a situation.

The emergence of a joking relationship

This ethnography and analysis can be seen as sketching a possible trajectory for the emergence of a dyadic joking role relationship, with a progression from individual behaviour to institutionalised roles and rules. Individual joking may (or may not) lead to idiosyncratic dyadic joking; this may (or may not) lead to systematic *de facto* dyadic joking in roles characterised by both conjunction and disjunction; systematic dyadic joking may (or may not) lead to the 'typification' and labelling of the roles as a 'joking relationship'; this typification of the joking relationship may (or may not) lead to the emergence of a rule which requires joking and forbids fighting between members of the role dyad. It is almost certainly misleading to place the emergence of a rule last, since the emergence of rules is also a gradual process. Even with the appearance of patterned joking in a single dyad the partners would implicitly hold each other accountable for responding in the expected joking fashion. The explicitness of the rule and the mode of managing accountability (informal and formal sanctions) move from the private to the public sphere along the trajectory.

VIII. Conclusions: Languaging, Accountability, Dyadic Roles and Social Intelligence

Haviland (1977) gives a brilliant account of the emergence of rules in the activity of Zinacantec gossip about the behaviour of absent individuals. In
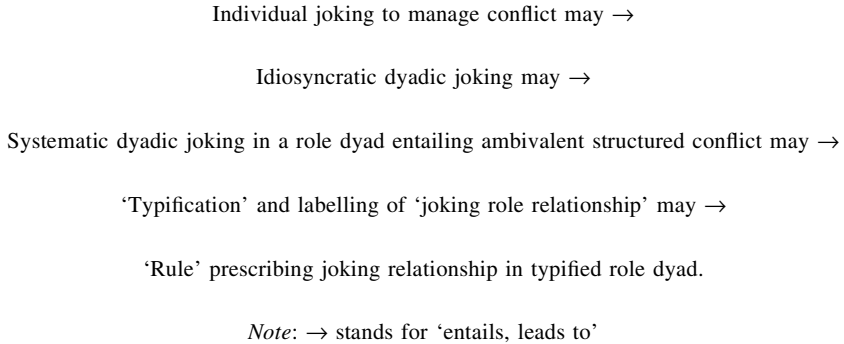
Individual joking to manage conflict may →

Idiosyncratic dyadic joking may →

Systematic dyadic joking in a role dyad entailing ambivalent structured conflict may →

'Typification' and labelling of 'joking role relationship' may →

'Rule' prescribing joking relationship in typified role dyad.

Note: → stands for 'entails, leads to'

Figure 4.   Emergence of avunculate joking relations in patrilineal African societies

talking, gossiping, about others' behaviour it is described, typified, and evaluated. Haviland insists that gossip is 'all about rules'—but that these rules are shared but malleable, morally loaded and yet manipulated in terms of relations between gossip and audience (especially ibid. 148–70). He speaks of the 'dialogue' between gossip and interlocutor. The latter's responses are integral to the emergence of a gossip account: to identification of the object, to description of the events concerned, and to the evaluation of the object's actions. In gossip rules emerge as explicit in particular contexts. The wide participation in the gossip which makes behaviour accountable to these morally weighted rules must shape people's own future choices of how to act. It is striking that in Haviland's gossip texts the rules are virtually always framed in terms of social roles: 'old men', holders of Cargo offices, wives and husbands, fathers and sons, suitors and the girls they court. Thus it is pre-eminently rules concerning role behaviour which are affirmed and shaped by gossip.

In both gossip and joking relations humans *use* language to employ lexical meanings and socioculturally constructed language genre in the management of social interaction. Like monkeys and apes, humans seek to understand the intentions of those they live closely with, and to predict the likely interpretations of their actions by others. We might term this basic social intelligence. But only humans have the tool of spoken language with which to communicate shared meanings and to negotiate these in dialogue. This new tool, as I have tried to show, fundamentally changes the nature of human social intelligence because the components of cognitive modelling of others' intentions are both in individual heads and shared among members of the language community. Human intelligence has become social in an entirely new sense; the components for cognitive modelling are social products—lexicon, grammar, communicative genre, roles, and rules.

The language tool would seem to have been gradually constructed over the millennia in communities of speakers *through the use of the language tool*

itself (Foley 1997). How was this possible? There are some clues. First, there is a striking contrast between the capacities of monkeys and apes for joint attention to communicative meaning[14] and the central role of joint attention in both the child's learning to talk and the use of language in dialogue. Joint attention appears to be necessary to establish shared lexical meanings (e.g. Hutchins and Hazlehurst 1995) which was probably the basis of early proto-language (Foley 1997). It would seem that a major change in mechanisms for joint attention occurred early in the emergence of spoken language. Perhaps this was mediated by cooperation in the production and use of tools. Perhaps the 'work' of establishing the shared meanings of early proto-language enhanced mechanisms for joint attention, which were also used for cooperation in tool use and production. Perhaps the joint attention involved in skills of early language and tool use supported each other.

Next, Foley's model of possible stages in the development of spoken language notes the likely recurrence of cognitive overload as vocabularies expanded, strings of words in an utterance became longer, modifiers were attached to nouns and to verbs, and so on (Foley 1997, ch. 2). Cognitive overload could have led both to increasing brain size and complexity, and to the emergence of *de facto* shared rules for word order and hierarchical structures of grammar. Note, however, that such increasing complexity would make even greater demands on joint attention to the using of language.

Finally, analysis of how meaning is constructed in everyday conversation shows this to be a continuously emergent joint process between speakers. Meaning is not simply coded in the lexical content of words. It is shaped, negotiated, and redefined through the dialogue they make together. Clark's analysis emphasises the primacy of joint closure by speakers on what each means and intends to mean. Levinson's (1995) view is very similar. Both Clark and Levinson stress that arriving at joint closure is far more difficult than it seems, since typically a great many possible alternative meanings exist. The importance of joint closure on conversational meaning is expressed in Grice's insistence that a speaker's meaning is only accomplished when what he intends to communicate is recognised by the addressee. '*Signaling and recognizing in communicative acts are participatory acts*' [in Clark's sense that participatory acts are individual contributions which together constitute the whole act]. 'The

---

[14] Dorothy Cheney in her Tanner Lectures on *The evolution of mind and language* and participants in the following seminar agreed that neither monkeys or apes are good at *joint* attention (Clare Hall, Cambridge, March 1997). Monkeys can follow another's gaze but have difficulty in pointing to the object of gaze. Chimpanzees have been observed to both follow another's gaze and point at object of joint gaze. But these are language-trained chimps living with humans. Some participants raised the question of how much of this kind of skill is taught by humans. There appears to be no evidence at all that in the wild monkeys or apes focus attention jointly on determining the meaning of signs.

joint act of one person signaling another and the second recognizing what the first meant is what I will call a *communicative act*' (italics in the original, Clark 1996: 130). But it is the speaker's intention, as well as the lexical meaning which must be recognised. The difficulty for the speaker of making sure that his intention is recognised is expressed in the continual Track 2 messages 'Do you understand?' (see above). Simple everyday conversation requires constant work at joint closure on understanding of each others' intentions. Again close joint attention is the prerequisite for using spoken language. This mutual attention is a prerequisite of the communicative act, itself only possible through the joint contribution of the participatory acts of both speakers.

Such a view of the emergence of spoken language entails a paradox. While early proto-language may have consisted simply of 'words', as it developed proto-grammar would have emerged, and finally complex grammar and phonemes. As language developed it became increasingly complex, increasingly rule-bound. The new resources of grammar etc. should have made it much easier to express meaning clearly in conversation, particularly as they became routinised and cognitively expressed. Yet even with these resources, today the making and understanding of meaning in conversation is extremely complicated. It still requires close joint attention and synchronisation of the individual participatory communicative acts which permit joint closure on the understanding of mutual intentions. It is as if the sociocognitive procedures for securing mutual closure on intentions in dialogue have become increasinlgy finely tuned to exploit the additional information made available by larger vocabularies and more complex grammar. Spoken language, roles and rules are sociocultural products, used as tools for thinking and acting with. First writing, and now computers have stretched the domain of dialogue far beyond face-to-face interaction. But we still have 'conversations' in letters and e-mail with kin, friends and colleagues—and with our computers.

IX. Coda

Although Radcliffe-Brown's papers on Joking Relations were written between 1924 and 1949, they are full of insights which still invite exploration through recent theoretical perspectives. His identification of the power of formal joking as a means to constrain relationships raises questions concerning the dyadic nature of humour. This fits well into the action perspective of language as the joint product of dialogue between speakers. For language is used in dyads and social roles are enacted in dyads. Other questions posed by Radcliffe-Brown's ideas include:

How is the cognitive ability to model alternative roles related to the human capacity for ‘pretending’ and for pretend role play?

The ‘decentering’ of individual perspectives in dyadic roles is mediated by spoken language. Recent work on autism suggests that there is a particularly human capacity to ‘pretend’ that things are other than they are; to imagine counter-factual situations (Leslie 1987). Whatever the cognitive deficit of autistic children is, it is associated with difficulty with pretending. Empirically, children in Ghana as well as in the West learn adult roles through pretend play (E. N. Goody 1993). It is as though when the playing of a variety of social roles is combined with the capacity to mentally model others’ contingent actions, a cognitive schema is created for ‘pretending’. It would be interesting to know whether autistic children also have problems with role play, and how their use of language is related to decentering.

Are joking relations still being created in modern ‘global’ society?

‘Telling a joke’ to a western audience is very different from the taunting challenge questions exchanged between Gonja joking partners. Under what conditions does humour reside in the ‘story’ and when in playing on the expectations of dyadic roles? For ironically, it could be argued that dyadic relationships are increasingly coming to characterise our own societies. The institutions of industry and of the state have become massive and remote from individual experience. We are each left mainly with dyadic roles—of family, neighbours, service relationships, and work. Mediating structures such as the patrilineages and age grades of traditional small-scale societies are largely absent. Will the dialogue skills which enabled us to evolve early language—and early society—still be able to help us adapt dyadic roles to a global world?

References

Austin, J. L. (1962), *How to do things with words* (Oxford).

Bakhtin, M. M. (1984), *Rabelais and his world* (Indiana UP).

Bickerton, D. (1990), *Language and species* (Chicago, Ill.).

Bowlby, J. (1969), *Attachment and Loss: Vol 1. Attachment* (Harmondsworth, England).

Brown, P. (1995), ‘Politeness strategies and the attribution of intentions: the case of Tzeltal irony’, in E. N. Goody (ed.), *Social intelligence and interaction* (Cambridge).

Brown, P. and Levinson, S. C. (1987 [1978]), *Politeness: some universals in language usage* (Cambridge).

Bruner, J. S. (1978), 'From communication to language: a psychological perspective', in I. Markova (ed.), *The social context of language* (Chichester).

Byrne, R. and Whiten, A. (1988) (eds.), *Machiavellian intelligence: Social expertise and the evolution of intellect in monkeys, apes and humans* (Oxford).

Carrithers, M. (1992), *Why humans have cultures: Explaining anthropology and social diversity* (Oxford).

Cheney, D. (1997) *The evolution of mind and language*, Tanner Lectures, Clare Hall, University of Cambridge. Forthcoming.

Chomsky, N. (1957), *Syntactic structures* (The Hague).

Clark, H. H. (1996), *Using language* (Cambridge).

Donald, M. (1991), *The origins of modern mind: three stages in the evolution of culture and cognition* (Cambridge, Mass.).

Drew, P. (1995), 'Interaction sequences and anticipatory interactive planning', in E. N. Goody (ed.), *Social intelligence and interaction* (Cambridge).

Dunbar, R. I. M. (1993), 'Coevolution of neocortical size, group size and language in humans', *Behavioural and Brain Sciences*, 16: 681–735.

Fletcher, G. O. and Fitness, J. (1996) (eds.), *Knowledge structures in close relationships* (Mahwah, NJ).

Foley, W. (1997), *Anthropological linguistics* (Oxford).

Fortes, M. (1983), *Rules and the emergence of society*, Occasional paper No. 39 (Royal Anthropological Institute, London).

Fox, R. (1980), *The red lamp of incest* (London).

Garfinkel, H. (1967), *Studies in ethnomethodology* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ).

Goffman, E. (1959), *The presentation of self in everyday life* (New York).

Good, D. (1995), 'Where does foresight end and hindsight begin?' in E. N. Goody (ed.), *Social intelligence and interaction* (Cambridge).

Goody, E. N. (1978*a*), 'Introduction', in E. N. Goody (ed.), *Questions and politeness: strategies in social interaction* (Cambridge).

—— (1978*b*) 'Towards a theory of questions', in E. N. Goody (ed.), *Questions and politeness: strategies in social interaction* (Cambridge).

—— (1993), 'Informal learning of adult roles in Baale', in M. Fieloux and J. Lombard with J-M. Kambou-Ferrands (eds.), *Images d'Afrique et Sciences sociales: Les pays lobi, birifor et dagara.* (Paris).

—— (ed.) (1995), *Social intelligence and interaction: Expressions and implications of the social bias in human intelligence* (Cambridge).

—— (forthcoming), 'Social intelligence and language: another Rubicon?' in A. Whiten and R. Byrne (eds.), *Machiavellian intelligence II* (Cambridge).

Goody, J. (1969), 'The mother's brother and the sister's son in West Africa', in *Comparative studies in kinship* (Stanford, Calif.).

Grice, H. P. (1957), 'Meaning', *Philosophical Review*, 66: 377–88.

Haviland, J. B. (1977), *Gossip, reputation, and knowledge in Zinacantan* (Chicago).

Heider, F. (1958), *The psychology of interpersonal relations* (New York).

Heritage, J. (1984), *Garfinkel and ethnomethodology* (Cambridge).

—— (1990/91), 'Intention, meaning and strategy: observations on constraints in interactional analysis', *Research in language and Social Interaction*, 24: 311–22.

Hinde, R. A. (1983) (ed.), *Primate social relationships* (Oxford).

Homans, G. C. and Schneider, D. M. (1955), *Marriage, authority and final causes* (Glencoe, Ill.).

Humphrey, N. K. (1976), 'The social function of intellect', in P. P. G. Bateson and R. A. Hine (eds.), *Growing points in ethology* (Cambridge).

Hutchins, E. and Hazlehurst, B (1995), 'How to invent a shared lexicon: the emergence of shared form-meaning mappings in interaction', in E. N. Goody (ed.), *Social intelligence and interaction* (Cambridge).

Kelley, H. H. (1979), *Interpersonal relationships: their structure and process* (Hillsdale, NJ).

Lieberman, P. (1991), *Uniquely human: the evolution of speech, thought and selfless behaviour* (Cambridge, Mass.).

Leslie, A. M. (1987), 'Pretence and representation in infancy: the origins of ''theory of mind''', *Psychological Review*, 94: 412–26.

Levinson, S. C. (1995), 'Interactional biases in human thinking', in E. N. Goody (ed.), *Social intelligence and interaction* (Cambridge).

Lewis, D. K. (1969), *Convention: a philosophical study* (Cambridge, Mass.).

Maturana, H. and Varela, F. J. (1987), *The tree of knowledge: the biological roots of human understanding* (Boston).

Mead, G. H. (1967 [1934]), *Mind, self and society* (Chicago).

Mellars, P. (1996), 'Symbolism, language and the Neanderthal mind', in P. Mellars and K. Gibsom (eds.), *Modelling the early human mind* (Exeter).

Needham, R. (1962), *Structure and sentiment* (Chicago).

Thibault, J. W. and Kelley, H. H. (1959), *The social psychology of groups* (New York).

Radcliffe-Brown, A. R. (1952*a*), 'The mother's brother in South Africa', in *Structure and function in primitive society*, pp. 15–31 (London).

Radcliffe-Brown, A. R. (1952*b*), 'On joking relationships', in *Structure and function in primitive society*, pp. 90–104 (London).

Radcliffe-Brown, A. R. (1952*c*), 'A further note on joking relationships', in *Structure and function in primitive society*, pp. 105–16 (London).

Radcliffe-Brown, A. R. (1952*d*), 'Social sanctions', in *Structure and function in primitive society*, pp. 203–11 (London).

Sacks, H., Schegloff, E. A., and Jefferson, G. (1974), 'A simplest systematics for the organization of turn-taking in conversation', *Language*, 50: 696–735.

Schelling, T. (1960), *The strategy of conflict* (Cambridge, Mass.).

Steeck, J. (1995) 'On projection', in E. N. Goody (ed.), *Social intelligence and interaction* (Cambridge).

Trevarthen, C. B. (1979), 'Communication and cooperation in early infancy: a description of primary intersubjectivity', in M. von Cronach, K. Foppa, W. Lepinies and D. Ploog (eds.), *Human ethology: claims and limits of a new discipline* (Cambridge).

de Waal, F. (1982), *Chimpanzee politics* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins).

Whiten, A. and Byrne, R. (eds.), (forthcoming), *Machiavelliann intelligence II* (Cambridge).