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Triadic Kinship Terms in Mẽbêngôkre:
A Linguistic and Anthropological Analysis[1]

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Abstract

This article compounds the effort of a social anthropologist and a linguist to understand and to analyze what is known about the triadic terms of the Mẽbêngôkre, a Northern Jê people from Central Brazil. Triadic terms are kinship terms that refer to a single individual but encode at least two kin relations simultaneously: that between the addressee and the referent, and that be-

tween the speaker and the referent; their meaning can be represented schematically as "your X = [who is also] my Y." The only other region where this phenomenon has been identified so far is among the First Peoples of Northern Australia. Our aim is to describe the logic of this system of terminology, and to examine the social variables governing its use.

Introduction

The Northern branch of the Jê language family encompasses somewhere between 4 and 9 closely related languages spoken in northern Central Brazil by societies that share various basic traits.[2] For an overview of Northern Jê languages and their classification, see Nikulin and Salanova (2019). For shared cultural traits, see Maybury-Lewis (1979); Urban (1992); Melatti (2020).

The ethnographic literature on various Northern Jê peoples has identified certain kinship terms that are subtly different in usage from the basic (vocative or referential) terms. Translated into the logic of English, for instance, when a sister addresses her brother concerning her child, she uses a triadic term that could be glossed as "your-nephew-who-is-my-son." The first mention that we know of for such terms is in an appendix to Turner (1966). When writing about the Mẽbêngôkre-Kayapó, he characterizes what he refers to as "indirect terms" as follows:

> When Ego speaks to Alter about a kinsman of Alter, it is considered bad form to use that kinsman's name, and "familiar" to refer directly to the relationship between either the kinsman and Alter or the kinsman and Ego if such exists. In many contexts such familiarity is taken for granted and an ordinary reference term is used. If the context calls for a certain degree of formality and punctilio, however, the terminology of indirect reference is used. (Turner 1966, Appendix 2: XXI-XXII)

Four terms in all are mentioned by Turner. When a WB[3] asks his ZH about his ZC, *a-tukà* is used to refer to the child.[4] Turner notes the similarity between this term and the term *a-tukà-iyê*, used by a husband talking to his wife about his WF. His final examples are the terms used by a man addressing his sister concerning his ZC, using *a-pari* if male or *a-pari djwòytch* if female.

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[2] The languages are Mẽbêngôkre, with its two dialects Kayapó and Xikrin, Goronã (Tapayúna), Kĩsêdjê (these two often considered dialects of the same language), Apinajé, and the Timbíra varieties, dialects of a single language for some, distinct languages for others: Parkatêjê, Krĩkatí, Pykobjê, Canela and Krahô. The diversity of this group of languages approximately resembles that of Romance languages and could be hypothesized to have a similar temporal depth (see Nikulin and Salanova 2019).

[3] The standard genealogical abbreviations are used in this article: M = mother; F = father; Z = sister; B = brother; D = daughter; C = child; S = son; W = wife; H = husband; and compounds such as WB = wife's brother *et cetera*.

[4] Note that Turner's denotation of *atukà* differs from our own (see 17 in Table 2). Our transcription of two of the other terms also differ from Turner's.

As far as we know, Turner did not return to the topic of indirect reference terms in any of his later work.

Seeger (1981:134-135), describing the kin terms of Suyá (Kĩsêdjê), cites *a-tukà-yi* and four other terms as "[i]ndirect affinal reference terms," supposedly following Turner's lead. Seeger (1981:132) states that the Suyá consider these terms to be associated with the notion of shame, being used when referring to a relative of the person to whom one is speaking as circumlocutions for direct terms of reference. Vidal (1977:58-59), when studying the Mẽbêngôkre-Xikrin, maintained the expression "indirect terms," but her more extensive list opened the way for their later redefinition as *triadic reference terms* by Lea (1986, 2004, 2012), who describes them as terms that encode more than one kinship relation simultaneously. The only other researcher in Brazil to have taken up triadic terms in recent times is Coelho de Souza (2020). Enigmatically, Coelho de Souza, who conducted fieldwork with the Kĩsêdjê, does not cite Seeger, seemingly overlooking the connection between triadic terms and the latter's "indirect terms."

In Canela (Timbira), Crocker (1990:236) lists several terms that are cognate with the triadic terms of other Northern Jê languages but considers them to be alternative forms of the reference terms when the propositus[5] is the second person, without giving them any further attention. We are unaware of any discussion of these terms in the other Northern Jê languages.

Our use of the term *triadic* should be contrasted with certain other terms to avoid confusion. In the existing literature (see, e.g., Evans et al 2010 on Mapudungun), the term *dyadic* has been used for kin terms whose referent is a dyad: "husband and wife," "father and son," etc. The triadic terms that are the subject of this article, do not refer to a group of three people; rather, their referent is a single individual, as with basic reference terms. They differ from basic reference terms in that they allude to a further kin relationship, that between the referent and the speaker, in addition to the kin relationship between the referent and the addressee who serves as propositus.[6] We prefer the term *triadic* over alternatives such as *triangular* or *trirelational*, as these have other undesired associations.[7]

Triadic terms contain a semantic component that is non-existent in languages like English, even though the logic involved is discernible by speakers of English once it is explained. In English and related languages, if, for example, I (♀/♂) address my brother concerning his child (♀/♂), then I will usually refer to the child by his/her name rather than focusing on either the relationship between the addressee and his/her child, or on the fact that the child is my niece/nephew. In Mẽbêngôkre, it is the relationship between these three people that is placed in the foreground

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[5] Whoever's relation to the referent is encoded most directly in an expression is often called *propositus*. In Mẽbêngôkre, where kin terms inflect like other inalienably possessed nouns (parts of the body, properties, etc.), the propositus is formally marked by means of a person index, prefixed directly to the kin term; e.g., *a-bãm* 'your-father', like *a-jamak* 'your-ear', but differently from alienably possessed *a-nhõ puru* 'your-thing garden'.

[6] The three participants are the *speaker*, the *addressee*, and the *referent*, a third person.

[7] Garde (2013:104) uses the term *dicentric* (a term borrowed from genetics) to refer to terms that encode the perspectives of speaker and addressee, each taken separately, versus *nostrocentric* terms where both are taken together.

by using a term that encodes both the speaker's and the addressee's relationship with the referent, additionally highlighting the kin relationship that exists between speaker and addressee.

Triadic terms are not rare in daily Mẽbêngôkre discourse and are understood by most adults. They are locally construed as examples of *proper speech* – speech that outsiders rarely master, and that is often used for rhetorical effect during speeches or more specialized discourse. Take the following Mẽbêngôkre example from Lea and Txukarramãe (2007). This is an excerpt from a lesson on the proper way to keen for a kinsman after an absence or death of a relative, recorded in the late 1970s with Beriberi, a knowledgeable female elder.[8]

> Gê dja ga djan mũm bôx ne **a-mjên**, **a-rikràmre** ari 'õ 'ỳrỳ bôx ne amỳrỳ tẽ, gê dja ga "aa **i-kjêrêkunõ**" otẽ

> "When you return home to **your husband**, a **husband of yours who is my niece's H [BDH]**, then keen 'oh **my husband**'!"

In this example, the husband is referred to in three different ways. First by the term *mjên*, with a second person prefix, which is a general reference term that most plainly translates as "husband." It is followed by the triadic term *rikràmre* with the same prefix, which in addition to encoding the H's relation to the addressee encodes the fact that, to the speaker, the referent is the husband of her brother's classificatory daughter. Finally, the term *kjêrêkunõ* with a first person prefix is, like *mjên*, not triadic, but simply a special form of the basic reference term used during keening.

A second example comes from the narration of the myth on the origin of non-indigenous people by the same narrator (full text in Lea 1984a). The following extract describes the attempt to discover the identity of a woman's paramour:

> Nhỹm we kam udjwỳ ja: "jê, ba gop on **a-kôtkjê** me mẽ'õ pumũ, gê dja me'õ mry bĩn, menh nhõpok gê **a-kôtkjê** kukrẽ."

> "Then the brother-in-law (ZH) says: 'I'm going to see **your sister who's my djupãnh** and the one who is with her, maybe he will kill game and get honey for **your sister who's my djupãnh** to eat'."

After the death of the protagonist (the woman who was made pregnant by the caterpillar-man), her mother tells one of her other daughters to join the others on a hunt, saying:

> Ba arek a-bãm mẽ ari amim **a-õx** krã mỳrỳri arek nhỹ.

> "I'll stay behind with your father at the grave of **your sister who's my daughter**."

In the famous myth of the origin of fire[9] as narrated by the male leader Krômare to Lea, when the jaguar tells his wife to give food to the boy whom he had rescued from a tree, he uses the term *a-kamrere* – "your son who's my son," rather than using the basic term *i-kra* "my child" or *a-kra* "your child." It is noteworthy that in this myth the wife resists adopting the child and

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[8] The ethnographic present to which Lea's research primarily refers is the early 1980s, with the Mẽtyktire subgroup.

[9] See Lévi-Strauss (1964); various versions in Wilbert and Simoneau (1978); Turner (2017).

refuses to feed him. The use of the triadic term can be interpreted here as the jaguar's attempt to impose on his reluctant wife the view that the child is also her (adoptive) son.

Another example of a triadic term is found in the myth of origin of beautiful names. When a man says to his brother: "You are the one who named our nephew (ZS)" he uses the term *a-paxê*, meaning "your ZS (*tàbdjwỳ*) who is my ZS (*tàbdjwỳ*)." Despite the two brothers sharing the same consanguineal relation with their sister, the name-giver is told to throw himself into the fire that burnt their ZS because he is the one most closely identified with his nephew, due to them sharing the same name (full text in Lea 1984b).

We are not aware of triadic terms occurring outside of the Northern Jê in South America. Terms with similar structure have been identified in some of the languages of the First Peoples of Northern Australia (Blythe 2018). According to McConvell (1982:100), one of the first brief references to "triangular terms" was made by Mervyn Meggitt, in relation to the Warlpiri, in his book *Desert People* (Meggit 1962). Since then, the terms have been referred to in various different ways: Merlan (1989:227-8) analyzed what she designated as 'multirelational terms'; Laughren (1982:73) discussed a similar type of terms that she denominated 'trirelational', remarking that "[i]f two of the relations are known, then the third can be deduced."

In Brazil neither linguists nor anthropologists have taken much interest in kinship systems in recent decades. Anthropologists of Lowland South America have turned their attention instead to the performance of kinship. Furthermore, the international success of perspectivism as developed by Lima (1996), and Viveiros de Castro (1998), focusing on relations among humans, animals, and spirits, has attracted attention to cosmopolitical issues, via Stengers (2005), with kinship relegated to the sidelines.

The aim of the present article is to present as exhaustive an analysis as is possible of Mẽbêngôkre triadic terms with the currently available data. The most complete set of triadic terms in the literature on the Northern Jê is that given in Lea (1986, 2012:195-202), and these form the basis of our analysis, supplemented by more recent interviews with speakers. The ultimate objective of the article is to consider the terms' role in the performance of kinship. In a later paper we hope to address these terms comparatively in the Northern Jê language family, but the data needed to undertake that task is presently incomplete.

Mẽbêngôkre Kinship Terminology

Before proceeding to the analysis of triadic terms, we first discuss the kinship categories denoted by the basic reference terms in Mẽbêngôkre. The triadic terms are built from these reference terms.

Among the Northern Jê, one finds both Omaha and Crow-like kinship calculations and even a mixture of both types (Ladeira 1982). Crow-Omaha terminologies are classified as bifurcate merging, characterized by the distinction between cross and parallel kin in generations 0 and ±1, a distinction that is neutralized in generations ±2.[10] One of the defining features of Crow-Omaha terminologies is that kinship terms are skewed, being applied to kin types in more than

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[10] An anonymous reviewer stated that this is not so in Aboriginal Australian variants, where the cross and parallel distinction is maintained in generations ±2. The same reviewer considered that Crow-Omaha terms are used in adjacent generations. In the Mẽbêngôkre case the term for the matrilateral male cross-cousin is used also for MB, MF and FF.

one generation. Omaha terminologies classify the matrilateral cross-cousins with terms from a higher generation (M and MB in the Mẽbêngôkre case), and patrilateral cross-cousins with terms from a lower generation ("children" for female ego; "ZC" for male ego in the Mẽbêngôkre case). Crow terminologies provide a mirror image. This was summed up by Héritier (1981:20) in a diagram that we adapt here as follows for the Mẽbêngôkre terminology (in a Crow terminology the position of patrilateral and matrilateral cross-cousins is reversed):

↗   Matrilateral X cousins

Siblings   =   Parallel-cousins   ≠

↘   Patrilateral X cousins
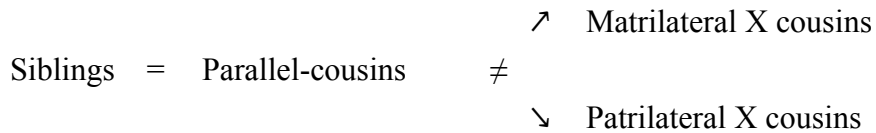
No necessary relation is posited here between the Crow-Omaha features of a terminology and the presence of triadic terms. In Australia, triadic terms have been found among First Peoples with Kariera and Aranda terminologies; these have been compared to Dravidian terminologies (Dumont 1975); i.e., those that characterize many Amazonian Amerindian peoples.[11]

Lea has characterized the Mẽbêngôkre as a house-based society in emic terms. Until recently she wrote of this in terms of uterine (rather than matrilineal) descent in the attempt to avoid the vexed question of clans versus lineages. However, this option also proved problematic because "uterine" is generally understood as the antonym of "agnatic," thereby failing to communicate adequately the inter-generation depth of Mẽbêngôkre matrihouses, with origins rooted in the mythological past. In the existing literature Omaha is synonymous with patrilineality and Crow with matrilineality with one exception, the matrilineal Yuchi in North America (Speck 1909), with an Omaha terminology, but this exception was not dealt with in much detail. The Omaha type calculations of the Mẽbêngôkre make sense in terms of the onomastic system, commanded by the perspective of female ego (Lea 1986, 1992).[12] Ego (♀ & ♂) classify their female matrilateral cross-cousin as a mother because she is the ideal recipient of ego's mother's name (that a woman transmits to her BD); the male matrilateral cross-cousin is thus a MB. Correspondingly, for female ego, her patrilateral cross-cousins are "children," and for male ego they are ZC.

Basic Kin Terms

Table 1 gives the basic reference terms used in Mẽbêngôkre. In many cases, more than one distinct term exists for a listed kin type. We have limited ourselves to the simplest term for reasons

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[11] In response to a reviewer who questioned whether Amazonia is not Iroquois we quote Wendy James (2012: 137): "[T]he Dravidian or Type A variant of crossness, associated as it often is with the potential marriage of (classificatory) bilateral cross-cousins (see chapter 1; see Hage 2006). This is currently distinguished from the Iroquois or Type B variant, where the gendered pathways of reproduction go on diverging over several generations and are banned from recombining at an early stage – that is, there is a ban on the marriage of bilateral cross-cousins (Trautmann and Barnes 1998:30–31)."

[12] We cannot adequately deal with the quagmire of conflicting interpretations in the space of this article; for more details on the Crow and Omaha question see Trautmann and Whiteley (2012); Coelho de Souza (2012); Dziebel (2021); Lea (2021).

of space, as what matters for our purposes is defining the kin categories that are relevant for describing triadic terms.[13]

Something must be said here about formal friendship, as it is a non-kin category that is nevertheless reflected in triadic terms. In the literature on the Northern Jê much has been written about the institution that has been translated into English as *formal friendship* (see, for example, Carneiro da Cunha 1978; Maybury-Lewis ed. 1979). The details vary from one Northern Jê people to another, but what was emphasized prior to Lea (1995) were the roles played by formal friends in ceremonies. It was only later that Lea discovered that in the case of the Mẽbêngôkre this institution also has matrimonial implications. Her hypothesis is that, given the ideal of village endogamy (at least until recent decades), and the imperative to marry a non-relative in a context where the entire community is addressed by relationship terms, formal friendship resolves the apparent contradiction by being superimposed onto pre-existing ties of consanguinity and affinity, supplanting them to clear the way for further marital ties.

Table 1: Basic Reference Terms

Nº	term	extension[a]	ego
1	*kwatyj*	MM, FM, FZ, MBW…	♀/♂
2	*nhingêt*	MF, FF, MB, FZH, MBS…	♀/♂
3	*tàmdjwỳ*	CC	♀/♂
		BC, HZC…	♀
		ZC, FZC, MZDC, FBDC, WBC…	♂
4	*nã*	M, MZ, FBW, MBD…	♀/♂
5	*bãm*	F, FB, MZH…	♀/♂
6	*kra*	C…	♀/♂
		ZC, FZC, FBDC, HBC…	♀
		BC, WZC, FBSC…	♂
7	*kanikwỳnh*	Z, MZD, FBD, MBDD…	♀/♂
8	*kamy*	B, MZS, FBS, MBDS…	♀/♂
9	*kràmdjwỳ*	formal friends (discussed below)	♀/♂
10	*prõ*	wife	♂
11	*mjên*	husband	♀
12	*djwỳj*	BW, SW, DSW, SSW…(SWM?)	♀

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[13] Mẽbêngôkre forms are always given here in the *de facto* standard orthography, as reflected in Various Authors (1996) unless citing specific sources. These tables are based on the lists in Lea (1986).

Nº	term	extension[a]	ego
13	*djupãnh*	BW, SW, BWZ, WZ, SSW, DSW…	♂
14	*djudjwỳ*	ZH, ZHB, DH, DDH, SDH, FZDH, DHB…	♀ / ♂
		HB, ZHB…	♀
15	*djumre*	HZ, DHZ…	♀
		WB, BWB…	♂
16	*djumrengêj*	HM (SWM?)	♀
17	*djupãnhdjwỳ*	WM, BWM, BWMZ…	♂
18	*djumrengêt*	HF, ZHF, DHF…	♀
		WF, ZHF, DHF…	♂

[a] Three dots are used in a term's extension to indicate that the list of kin types does not preclude use of additional kin types with the kin term.

Mẽbêngôkre formal friendship is inherited vicariously via one's father. In other words, one shares the same formal friends as one's father. This institution is linked to the ideal of a woman marrying her daughter to one of her (the mother's) formal friends of the daughter's generation. As in other Northern Jê societies, Mẽbêngôkre formal friends play an important role in public naming rituals and at funerals. There is avoidance between cross-sex formal friends, and male formal friends engage in joking relations with each other's close consanguineal relatives. Mothers also discipline disobedient children by summoning a formal friend to come and deal with the issue, something that provokes shrieks of terror on the part of the child in question.

Triadic Terms

Lea (2004) proposes describing the meaning of triadic terms (see Table 2) by means of an equation whereby the speaker's and the addressee's relationship with the referent are calculated simultaneously, resulting in the use of a specific term. This is what we assume as being the basic meaning of the term. Further description is provided in the last column, where some contexts of use are given without the pretense of being exhaustive.

A series of triadic terms exists for the kin of the addressee who are the speaker's formal friends (*kràmdjwỳ*). Table 3 summarizes these. Seventeen distinct kinship categories occur here. All the basic kin relationships above are represented, except when the referent who is the speaker's *kràmdjwỳ* is simultaneously the addressee's *djupãnh*, *djupãnhngêx* or *djupãnhdjwỳ* (i.e., female in-law). We suspect that this is due to an accidental gap in the data.

Table 2: Triadic Terms for Individuals Related as Kin to Both Speaker and Addressee

Nº	Termª	Equation	Contexts of Useᵇ
1	*aparijê, aparire*	your *tàmdjwỳ* = my *tàmdjwỳ* (♀ ego)	Woman speaking to her husband about her HZC Woman speaking to her husband about her brother's child Woman speaking to her daughter about the latter's HZC ….
2	*apaxê, apajte*	your *tàmdjwỳ* = my *tàmdjwỳ* (♂ ego)	Man speaking to his wife about his WBC Man speaking to his wife about his sister's child Man speaking to his wife about their grandchild Man speaking to his brother about their sister's child …
3	*aparidjwỳj, aparidjwỳjte*	your *tàmdjwỳ* = my ♀ *kra*	* Woman speaking to her brother about her daughter Woman speaking to her kwatỳj about the former's daughter * Man speaking to his sister about his daughter Man speaking to his nhênget about the former's daughter …
4	*apari, aparire*	your *tàmdjwỳ* = my ♂ *kra*	* Woman speaking to her brother about her son Woman speaking to her husband's sister about the former's son * Man speaking to his sister about his son Man speaking to his wife's brother about the former's son …
5	*gàtẽk, gàtẽkre*	your *kra* = my *tàmdjwỳ*	* Man or woman talking to their son or daughter about one of the former's grandchild * Woman talking to her brother about his child * Man talking to his sister about her child Man talking to his sister's husband about the latter's child …
6	*akadjwỳj, akadjwỳjte*	your ♀ *kra* = my *kra*	* Woman talking to her sister about either one's daughter Woman talking to her husband about her HBD * Man talking to his brother about either one's daughter Man talking to his wife about his WZD Man talking to his wife's sister about his daughter …
7	*akamrere, akamrerere*	your ♂ *kra* = my *kra*	* Woman talking to her sister about either one's son Woman talking to her husband about her HBS * Man talking to his brother about either one's son Man talking to his wife about their own son Man talking to his wife about his WZS Man talking to his wife's sister about his own son …

17

Nº	Termᵃ	Equation	Contexts of Useᵇ
8	*nginhĩ, nginhĩre*	your *prõ* = my *djwỳj* (BW, SW, SSW, DSW…)	* Woman talking to her brother about his wife * Woman talking to her son about his wife …
9	*arikrãmdjwỳxê, arikrãmdjwỳjte*	your *prõ* = my *djupãnh* (BW, SW, SSW, DSW…)	Man talking to his brother about the latter's wife …
10	*arikrãm, arikrãmre*	your *mjên* = my *djudjwỳ* (DH, ZH, DDH, SDH…)	* Man or woman talking to a daughter about the latter's husband Man or woman talking to a sister about the latter's husband kwatỳj talking to her tabdjwỳ about the latter's husband …
11	*adjyjê, adjyre*	your *djudjwỳ* = my *djudjwỳ* (HB, ZH, DH, ZHB…)	* Man or woman talking to a daughter about the latter's HB * Man or woman talking to a son about the latter's ZH Man or woman talking to their mother or father about the speaker's sister's husband * Woman talking to her husband about their daughter's husband …
12	*amrengêj, amrengête*	your *djumrengêj* = my *djumrengêj* (HM, DHM?)	* Woman talking to her daughter about the latter's HM …
13	*amrengêt, amrengête*	your *djumrengêt* = my *bãm*	* Woman talking to her husband about her father Man talking to his wife about his father …
14	*atukàjê, atukàjre*	your *bãm* = my *djumrengêt*	** Man talking to his wife about his father-in-law Woman talking to her husband about her father-in-law …
15	*apãnhngêj, apãnhngête*	your *djupãnhdjwỳ* = my *nã*	* Woman talking to her husband about her mother …
16	*amàdjwỳxê, amàdjwỳjte*	your *kwatỳj* = my *djupãnhdjwỳ*	* Man talking to his children about his wife's mother Man talking to his children about his wife's mother's sister …
17	*atukà, atukàre*	your *bãm* = my *djudjwỳ* (DH, ZH, HB…)	Man or woman talking to their daughter's children about the latter's father * Woman talking to her children about her husband's brother * Man talking to his sister's children about his sister's husband …
18	*abãmrejê, abãmrere*	your *djumre* = my *djumre* (WB)	Man talking to his WZH about the former's wife's brother …

Nº	Termᵃ	Equation	Contexts of Useᵇ
19	*amàjngêxê,* *amàjngête*	1) your *nhingêt* = my *djumre* (WB…) 2) your *nhingêt* = my *djudjwỳ* (DH…)	* Man talking to his children about his wife's brother * Woman talking to her son's children about her DH …

Note: The definition of a number of additional terms remains uncertain. Among these are (20) *gàtĕkjê* (your *kra* = my *djumre*), (21) *amre* (your *djumre* = my *kamy, kanikwỳnh, kra,* …), (22) *gàdjwỳxê* (your *nã* = my *djupãnh* or *djupãnhdjwỳ*), (23) *apãnh* (your *djupãnh* = my *kanikwỳnh, ♀ kra, prõ*), (24) *akôtkjê* (your *kamy* or *kanikwỳnh* = my *djupãnh* or *djumre; your prõ = my kanikwỳnh*). Furthermore, the terms (25) *atõ* (your *kamy*) and (26) *aõj* (your *kanikwỳnh*) are possibly triadic, restricted as they are to being used by individuals who have a close consanguineal tie with the referent, though for some speakers they can inflect for more than just second person, thereby excluding them from our definition.

ᵃ The form used with the last-born child (*kutapure*) is listed as the second variant of each term. The distinction between primogeniture, those born between the first and the last child, and the last-born, may also be made when employing basic reference terms, but distinct *kutapure* forms do not exist for all basic reference terms. Incidentally, consideration of the *kutapure* terms allows one to show that the ending *-xê* is a variant of the formative *-jê* (see below) that occurs in *j-* or *t*-final words. The stressed syllable is underlined in all these forms, as it cannot be predicted from the spelling.

ᵇ The terms and explanations mentioned by Vidal (1977, 58-59) are preceded by an asterisk. The cognate for a term cited by Seeger (1981,134) as a circumlocution of affinity is preceded by **.

Contrary to other triadic terms, those for the speaker's formal friends (*kràmdjwỳ*) have a more transparent structure, with the formatives *ngêj* (for females) and *ngêt* (for males) being attached to a stem which is often recognizable as another triadic or basic reference term. For example, the term *anãngêj*, meaning "your mother is my formal friend" is distinguished from the basic reference term *anã* (your mother) by adding *ngêj* at the end. We have put the stem in boldface to help identify it.

Description and Analysis of Triadic Terms

We have found the following descriptive statements to be true regarding triadic terms and assume them henceforth:

(1) Triadic terms are invariable. Although, as we will see shortly, they contain a person prefix, they cannot be freely inflected for persons other than the one with which they appear in the forms listed above. This criterion might exclude *atõ* and *aõx* from our list.

(2) The only variables that fix the meaning of a triadic term are the kinship ties linking speaker, addressee, and referent. Other variables might determine when it is preferable to use a triadic term over other strategies (a term of endearment, a proper name, a basic term, etc.), but the triadic term will always be an option given a particular combination of kinship ties.

(3) The meaning of triadic terms is built upon the meaning of basic terms, save for the fact that triadic terms sometimes specify gender when basic terms do not. That is to say, the triadic terms never refer to anything more specific than a combination of two basic

Table 3: Triadic Terms for Speaker's Kràmdjwỳ (Formal Friends)

Nº	Term	Addressee's … is speaker's *kràmdjwỳ* (formal friend)
26	a**kwatyj**ngêj, a**kwatyj**ngête	kwatyj
27	a**ngêt**i, a**ngêt**ire	nhingêt
28	a**nã**ngêj, a**nã**ngête	nã
29	a**bãm**ngêt, a**bãm**ngête	bãm
30	a**pi**ngêj, a**pi**ngête	kanikwỳnh
31	a**à**ngêt, a**à**ngête	kamy
32	a**kadjwỳj**ngêj, a**kadjwỳj**ngête	kra (♀)
33	a**kamrere**ngêt, a**kamrere**ngête	kra (♂)
34	a**paridjwỳj**ngêj, a**paridjwỳj**ngête	tàmdjwỳ (♀)
35	a**pari**ngêt, a**pari**ngête	tàmdjwỳ (♂)
36	ng**i**ngêj, ng**i**ngête	prõ
37	a**mjên**ngêt, a**mjên**ngête	mjên
38	a**kadjwỳj**ngêxê, a**kadjwỳj**ngêtê	djwỳnh
39	a**bianhõ**ngêt, a**bianhõ**ngête	djudjwỳ
40	a**mre**ngêxê	djumre (♀), djumrengêj
41	a**mre**ngêt, a**mre**re	djumre (♂), djumrengêt
42	ba**krà**ngêt, ba**krà**ngête	kràmdjwỳ

kin relationships plus gender. The converse is not necessarily true, however: some triadic terms are "polysemic," denoting several distinct combinations of basic kin relationships.

(4) We take it to be the case that the meanings given for triadic terms exhaust their denotation possibilities, though nothing crucial hinges on this. Confirmation of this assumption must await further research.

In Table 4, the triadic terms are tabulated so that the horizontal dimension corresponds to the addressee's relation with the referent and the vertical dimension to that of the speaker. In the table, the various kin categories of Mẽbêngôkre are merged into nine broad categories, as follows: A – *kwatyj* + *nhingêt*, B – *bãm* + *nã*, C – *kamy* + *kanikwỳnh*, D – *kra*, E – *tàmdjwỳ*, F – *prõ* + *mjên*, G – *djupãnhdjwỳ* + *djumrengêt* + *djumrengêj* (affines of a higher generation than ego), H – *djupãnh* + *djumre* + *djudjwỳ* + *djwỳnh* (affines of the same or of a lower generation than ego), I – *kràmdjwỳ*. Most of the merged categories are parallel categories that differ only in the gender of the referent. In the categories for affines, merged terms differ in the gender of the referent and

Table 4: Distribution of Triadic Terms According to Speaker's and Addressee's Kin Tie with Referent

Speaker's Relationship to Referent	Addressee's Relationship to Referent								
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
A									
B							13, 15		
C								*21, 23*	
D			*25, 26*	6, 7	3, 4			*21, 23*	
E			*25, 26*	5	1, 2				
F								*23*	
G	16	14, 22					12		
H	19	17, 22	*24*	*20*		8, 9, 10		11, 18	
I	26, 27	28, 29	30, 31	32, 33	34, 35	36, 37	38, 39, 40, 41	40, 41	42

also in that of the addressee, as well as in whether the affine is kin's spouse or spouse's kin, a distinction that is made in the basic reference terms. The numbers given in the cells are those of the triadic terms in Tables 2 and 3. The occurrence of more than one triadic term in a cell is due, except for 11 and 18 and 21 and 23 in column H and 38-41 in column G, to gender distinctions (including gender of ego in the case of 8, 9, 10 in column F). The two exceptional cases in columns H and G merge a distinction in the affinal kin's generation, or a distinction between spouse's kin and kin's spouse. The distinctions (save that of gender in generations −1 and −2) are also made in the basic reference terms on which the meaning of these triadic terms is built. We will have the occasion to address these distinctions below. The dubious cases are in italic.

There are several things to note, which are highlighted in the table with thicker cell borders:

(1) there are no triadic terms for individuals who are the addressee's *kràmdjwỳ* (formal friend) and something other than a *kràmdjwỳ* to the speaker;

(2) there are terms for all cases where the referent is the speaker's *kràmdjwỳ*;

(3) there are no triadic terms involving the speaker's spouse, except for the term *apãnh*, which has other uses and whose exact reference is somewhat uncertain;

(4) there are no triadic terms for the speaker's *kwatyj* or *nhingêt*

What terms are employed in these combinations is an interesting question that we cannot fully answer in this article, but to which we return later. While it is certainly true that the denotation of triadic terms cannot be properly described without reference to at least two relationships, something that is encoded through equations of the form *my X = your Y*, the gaps in the table suggest that the two dimensions do not have equal weight: more distinctions are made along the horizontal dimension than along the vertical dimension. Furthermore, there is a formal asymmetry in how the relationships are encoded that gives greater weight to the horizontal dimension. In this section we consider these asymmetries to achieve an economical representation of the semantics of triadic terms.

The Formal Primacy of the Second Person

The first important observation to make is that all but one of the triadic terms in the lists above are, formally speaking at least, inflected for the second person. It is of course true that since these terms never appear with other persons, it is not entirely accurate to speak of the *a-*prefix as second person inflection. There is, nevertheless, striking evidence that the terms are at least etymologically second person in the fact that the terms *nginhĩ* and *gatẽk*, seemingly unanalyzable, have been shown to retain a *g- ~ ng-* variant of the second person which occurs in other Jê languages but is otherwise absent in Mẽbêngôkre (see Nikulin 2020:217-218). The only case where a different prefix is used is in *bakràngêt(e)*, where first person inclusive *ba-* is used.

Further evidence for the primacy of the addressee's relationship with the referent in triadic terms comes from comparing certain triadic terms with basic reference terms which are assumed to encode only one relationship.[14] This argument has several parts. We begin by considering the terms for the speaker's formal friends.

Triadic terms for formal friends are the most transparent: most of them have an easily identifiable formative chosen from either *-ngêj* (for females) or *-ngêt* (for males). The only exceptions to this are two terms for the addressee's in-laws where the suffix takes the form *-ngêxê*, easily decomposable into *-ngêj* and a deferential suffix *-jê*, and *angêti* "your *nhingêt* is my formal friend," where the expected form would be either *angêtngêt* or *anhingêtngêt*. For *ngêti*, what we

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[14] Coelho de Souza (2020:201, 206) proposes that all terms should be considered triadic, since in the presence of alternatives, a choice on the part of the speaker would always encode some further relationship. The use of a basic reference term, for instance, would encode that the speaker *does not have* the specific relationships with the referent that would require the use of a triadic term, and hence indirectly encodes the speaker's relationship with the referent. Though we acknowledge this to be true, we differ from Coelho de Souza's position that such "negative encoding" of relationships should be accorded the same status as their explicit marking by means of a specific term.

believe happens is that, to avoid the repetition of two identical formatives, the second one is simply replaced by the augmentative *-ti*. With this minor exception explained, we can safely conclude that to form a triadic term for someone who is the speaker's formal friend, an element is added to a more basic formative, which we refer to here as the stem.[15] In other words, for these triadic terms, their triadicity is assembled in a formally overt compositional way out of two simpler relationships.

It is interesting to consider what the stem is to which the element *-ngêt/-ngêj* is attached. There are essentially four cases.[16]

(1) The stem can be a basic reference term, as in the following: ***akwatyj***ngêj "your *kwatyj* is my formal friend;" ***anã***ngêj "your *nã* is my formal friend;" ***abãm***ngêt "your *bãm* is my formal friend;" ***amjên***ngêt "your *mjên* is my formal friend;" ***abianhõ***ngêt "your *djudjwỳ* (also called *bianhõ*) is my formal friend."

(2) In several cases, the stem is shared by both triadic and basic reference terms, such as ***amre***ngêt "your *djumre* is my formal friend." These do not bear upon our argument as their derivation is ambiguous.

(3) The stem can itself be a triadic term: ***aparidjwỳj***ngêj "your female *tàbdjwỳ* is my formal friend;" ***apari***ngêt "your male *tàbdjwỳ* is my formal friend;" ***akadjwỳj***ngêj "your female *kra* is my formal friend;" ***akamrere***ngêt "your male *kra* is my formal friend;" ***ngi***ngêj "your *prõ* is my formal friend."

(4) Finally, in a few cases the stem is used exclusively in triadic terms for the speaker's formal friends: ***api***ngêj "your *kanikwỳnh* is my formal friend," and ***aà***ngêt "your *kamy* is my formal friend." Like the second case, these do not bear upon our argument.

What is relevant for our argument is the parallelism between cases 1 and 3: there are just as many terms where the stem is a triadic term as there are where it is a basic reference term. When the former are used, what is preserved of their original triadic meaning is only the part regarding the addressee's relationship to the referent; the part regarding the speaker's relationship to the referent is obliterated in favor of a new relationship, that of formal friendship, encoded directly

Table 5: Substitution of the Second Kin Relationship in Triadic Terms for Ego's Formal Friends

	First relationship	Second relationship
apari	your *tàbdjwỳ*	my *kra*
+ *ngêt*		my formal friend
= *aparingêt*	your *tàbdjwỳ*	my formal friend

[15] Coelho de Souza (2020:200n) implicitly proposes a similar principle (i.e., a more basic term plus some sort of formative to indicate the speaker's deference) for all triadic terms, something which does not work for other regions of the triadic term space, at least in Mẽbêngôkre.

[16] In this list, boldface is used once again to identify the stem.

by means of the formatives *-ngêj* and *-ngêt*. This points to the addressee's relationship with the referent as being foremost in triadic terms.

For clarity, let us examine one example, that of *aparingêt*. This is formed from *apari*, which means "your male *tàbdjwỳ* is my *kra*" plus *-ngêt*, which here means "the referent is the speaker's (male) formal friend." To get from *apari* "your male *tàbdjwỳ* is my *kra*" to *aparingêt* "your male *tàbdjwỳ* is my formal friend," there is a transformation that we could represent as an addition (see Table 5). As can be seen, the second relationship encoded by *apari* is not retained in *aparingêt*. (It cannot be: one's son cannot be one's formal friend).

A similar argument for the primacy of the addressee's relationship with the referent comes from the examination of those terms that involve an affine of the addressee. These are as follows: *amrengêj* (your *djumrengêj* = my *djumrengêt*), *amrengêt* (your *djumrengêt* = my *bãm*), *apãnhgêj* (your *djupãnhdjwỳ* = my *nã*), *amre* (your *djumre* = my *kamy*, etc.), *apãnh* (your *djupãnh* = my *kanikwỳnh*, etc.).[17] All of these terms have a striking parallel with one of the basic reference terms from which their meaning is built, namely the term that describes the addressee's relationship with the referent: the basic reference term differs from the triadic terms in having the prefix *dju-* attached to the root that is seen in the triadic term. The function of this prefix in a kinship terminology is not clear.[18] What is clear is that the triadic term is built from the term that describes the *addressee's* relationship with the referent.

A final argument for the preeminence of the addressee's relationship with the referent has to do with the degree of specification of the various relationships in all triadic terms. We will show that the encoding of the addressee's relationship with the referent is always at least as specific as it would be in a basic reference term with a second person propositus, while the relationship of the speaker with the referent and that between the speaker and the addressee are, in comparison, quite underspecified in most, if not all, cases.

To illustrate this point, first as it pertains to the relationship between speaker and addressee, take the term *aparidjwỳnh* "your *tàmdjwỳ* = my *tàmdjwỳ* (♀)." If we keep to the generations 0, −1, and −2, the term *tàmdjwỳ* can denote ZC (♂ ego); BC (♀ ego); CC; FZC (♂ ego). Suppose first that the referent is CC for both speaker and addressee. This means that the speaker can be the addressee's spouse, or they could be DHF, DHM, SWF, SWM. The referent could also be ZC to the speaker and BC to the addressee, and in that case the relationship between speaker and addressee would be ZHZ; or the referent could be ZC to the speaker and CC to the addressee, in which case the addressee is the speaker's F or M, and so on. In sum, though the various kin relations that describe the speaker and the addressee's relationships with the referent are subsumed under the meaning of a basic reference term (i.e., *tàmdjwỳ*), the various possible relationships between speaker and addressee do not form a named kinship category, and conflate consanguineal and affinal kin, which are never merged in the Mẽbêngôkre terminology (see Figure 1).

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[17] One could perhaps add *adjyjê* and *amàjngêxê* to this list, as these can also be shown to be derived from basic reference terms once one deals with some morphological complications, but the argument is the same if we examine only the morphologically unproblematic cases.

[18] In the basic kinship terminology, it alternates with *po-* to form vocatives of these affinal terms: *pomre*, *popãnh*, etc.

We conclude that *the relationship between speaker and addressee is unspecified in triadic terms*. Space limitations preclude us from showing this for every single triadic term, but the point should be clear.

A similar argument can be constructed to show that the relationship between the addressee and the referent is more fully specified than the relationship between the speaker and the referent, though only in some cases. Several terms exist in which the relationship between the speaker and the referent is underdetermined. Examples are the terms *amre* (your *djumre* = my *kamy* / *kanikwỳnh* / *kra*, ...), *gàdjwỳxê* (your *nã* = my *djupãnh* / *djupãnhdjwỳ*), *apãnh* (your *djupãnh* = my *kanikwỳnh* / ♀ *kra* / *prõ*), *amàjngêxê* (your *nhingêt* = my *djumre* / *djudjwỳ*). Conversely, however, no term exists whose meaning is "your *X* / *Y* = my *Z*" (i.e., in which the addressee's relationship with the referent can be described in one of two or more basic terms, while that with the speaker is described by a single term).[19]

Given these arguments, we feel justified in attempting a simplified representation of the
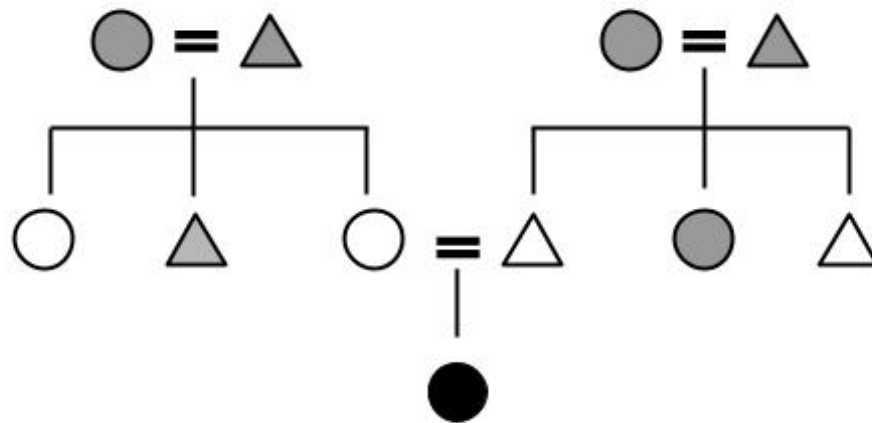

Figure 1: The individual in black is *tàmdjwỳ* to any of the individuals in gray. To each other, however, the individuals in gray are spouses, same-sex siblings (not represented), parent and child, or in-laws.

form and distribution of triadic terms where the addressee's kin relation with the referent is primary. This representation is laid out in Tables 6 and 7, where the columns represent the addressee's kin relation with the referent, and rows organize the speaker's relation to the referent: unspecified — i.e., the basic reference term —, formal friend, consanguineal kin, or affine. Though the choice of the categories in the vertical axis might seem arbitrary, it is justified by its good fit with the distribution of terms.

Up to four distinct stems may be used for naming the addressee's kin, which we designate in Tables 6 and 7 with letters from A through D (in cases in which two stems are possibly related, we use the same letter with a prime). The letters designate unique terms within each column;

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[19] Except in the case of merging genders: *akôtkjê* means "your *kanikwỳnh* (Z, ...) = ... or your *kamy* (B, ...) = ..."

Table 6: Distribution of Terms for Addressee's Consanguineal Kin Plus Spouse

	FZ	MB	M	F	Z	B	D	S	CD	CS	W	H
ref.	A	A	A	A	A	A	A			A	A	A
f.f.	**A**	A	**A**	**A**	**C**	**C**	**B**	**B**	**B**	**B**	**B**	**A**
cons.					B	B	B	B	B	B		
								C	<u>B</u>	<u>B</u>		
aff.	<u>B</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>B</u>	D			<u>C</u>			B	
				B							<u>C</u>	C

there is generally no identity across columns: other than one somewhat ambiguous exceptional case (that of *akadjwỳj*, which is used both for a female *kra* and for a *djwỳj* that is also a *kràbd-jwỳ*), a given stem is never associated with more than one kinship category in the horizontal dimension.

Several formatives appear frequently together with the stems. Of the various formatives that we have identified, we consider that four are used in a sufficiently consistent manner to merit analysis: *-ngêj*, *-ngêt*, *-jê*, and *dju-*. The first two have constant meaning associations (the first is associated with female referents, the second with males); we identify both in the tables by boldfacing the letter corresponding to a stem. The presence of the formative *-jê* is identified by underlining, while the presence of the formative *dju-* is identified by italics. As mentioned earlier, additional basic reference terms exist, meaning that there might be more stems for a given kinship category; these stems are not represented in the tables if they are not used in the triadic terminology (e.g., the vocatives for mother and father *nhirwa* and *djũnwa*). Finally, two anom-

Table 7: Distribution of Terms for Addressee's Affinal Kin and Formal Friends

	W M	HM	HF/ WF	XW (♂)	ZH HB (♀)	XW (♀)	HZ (♀)	WB (♂)	f.f.
ref.	*A′*	**A**	**A**	*A*	*A,* B	A		*A*	A
f.f.			**B**		**B**	<u>A′</u>	<u>A</u>	A	A
cons.	**A**		**B**	A					
aff.		**A**			<u>A′</u>			<u>A′</u>	

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alies, namely that two terms for consanguineal kin refer to the gender of ego rather than that of the referent, and that the term *kadjwỳj* – usually a ♀ *kra* – is also used for *djwỳj*, are indicated by gray shading.

That we have compressed the vertical dimension (the speaker's relationship with referent) here does not mean that it is irrelevant, or, in other words, that the triadic terms can be used freely for, e.g., all affinal or all consanguinal relationships between speaker and referent. This stands to reason, given that there is sometimes more than one triadic term per cell, with the choice being governed by such relationships. The vertical compression should be interpreted as meaning that some independent principle can be invoked to give the exact meaning of the term. For instance, if a term means (hypothetically) "your father-in-law = my father" and we have reduced it to "your father-in-law = my consanguineal kin," this does not mean that the term can be used regardless of the precise kin relation between speaker and referent; rather, the relation can be deduced through some plausible principle such as "generational identity" or "most common context of use." A detailed investigation of such principles is beyond the scope of this article.

What one observes here may be summarized as follows:

(1) as stated above, at most four distinct stems are used for the addressee's kin (this maximum number occurs when referring to the addressee's siblings);

(2) only in the case of siblings does the choice of stems align neatly with whether the referent is the speaker's formal friend, consanguineal kin, or affinal kin;

(3) as we have already seen, the *-ngêj/ngêt* formative is used consistently for addressee's kin that are the speaker's formal friends, and the choice of stem in these cases may be shared with the basic reference term, be shared with the simplest triadic term, or can be independent; the same formatives are used to indicate senior in-laws in basic reference terms;

(4) the element *-jê* is associated with greater deference or distance, but we are unable to identify a simple principle to explain its distribution: in one case it makes the difference between being the speaker's affinal versus consanguineal kin, while in other cases it expresses a generational difference within these broad kinship categories, and is often obligatory; i.e., it does not instantiate an opposition with an unmarked stem.

In sum, given this reduction, one might be tempted to make a comparison with the table of kin terms in Canela in Crocker (1990:236), where many cognates of the Mẽbêngôkre triadic terms appear as alternative forms of the basic reference terms when a non-first-person propositus

is used, without any reference to triadicity.[20] However, it is clear that despite the formal asymmetry between encoding of the addressee's and speaker's kin ties observed in the triadic terms, the terms are not used or seen by speakers of Mẽbêngôkre as equivalent to basic reference terms, or even as primarily oriented to a second person propositus.[21] A typical rendition of a triadic term's meaning by a native speaker highlights the relation between the speaker and the addressee as much as that between the addressee or the speaker and the referent, as the following rather typical description, given to one author in 2022, attests:

> dja ba ajo ikamy, dja ba amã aparidjwỳnh, aprõ mã aparidjwỳnh, gu badjupãnh mã aparidjwỳnh, gu batàmdjwỳ 'ã dja ba aparidjwỳnh, ...

> "If I've made you my brother, I'll say *aparidjwỳnh* to you, to your wife, to our sister-in-law, to refer to our common *tàmdjwỳ*, …."

We thus need to reconcile the formal asymmetry in these terms in favor of the addressee's relationship with the referent with the native speaker presentation – which we could call their relational aspect – that starkly highlights the relationship between speaker and addressee. This leaves us with two questions: (1) What is the role of triadic terms in the performance of kinship? and (2) Why, having the role that they have, do they take the particular form that they do?

The Role of Triadic Terms in the Performance of Kinship

Though the complexity of the Mẽbêngôkre system of triadic terms might seem bewildering, the rationale for their use can be readily related to a common circumstance which we mentioned briefly at the beginning of the article: if a referent is related to both speaker and addressee, it creates a certain discomfort to employ a kin term that encodes solely the addressee's, or the speaker's relation with the referent, as is reflected in the social media clipping in Figure 2.[22]

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[20] An excerpt from Crocker's table will clarify what we mean:

	1st	2nd	3rd	vocative
grandchild	*tàmtswè*	*tàmtswè*	*tàmtswè*	*itàmtswè*
GD	N/A	*yapaltswèy*	*yapaltswèy*	*iyapaltswèy*
GS	N/A	*yapal*	*yapal*	*iyapal*

That is, the terms that are cognates of triadic terms in Mẽbêngôkre (*apari, aparidjwỳj*) are presented as plain reference terms that are restricted to being used with a non-first person propositus, side-by-side with terms that are cognate with basic reference terms in Mẽbêngôkre (*tàmdjwỳ*), usable with all persons. Crocker does not comment on the factors governing the choice between the two terms available in the second and third person and in the vocative.

[21] Note also that, even though we have shown that many triadic terms are formally built on basic reference terms, this is by no means true for all of them. In terms such as *atukà(jê), gàtẽk(jê), arikrãm(jê),* and others which are excluded from most of the arguments above, the only mark of asymmetry is the presence of second-person inflection.

[22] Thanks to Andrey Nikulin for this clipping. It translates as follows: "When you're talking to your brothers and sisters, do you refer to your parents as: my mother/father, our mother/father or Mum/Dad? I say Mum & Dad, but I only use these terms in this situation. With other people I say my mother/father, and when talking directly to them I say Mummy & Daddy."
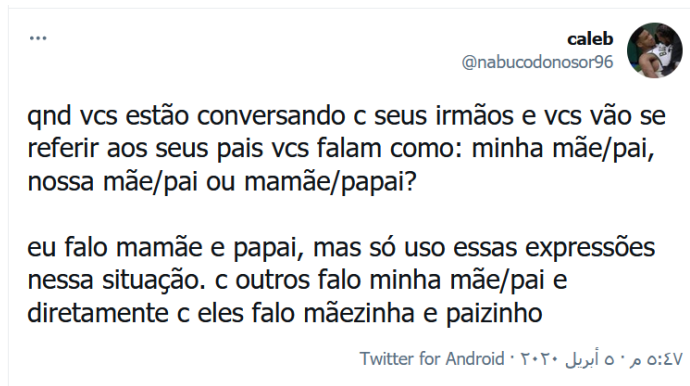
Figure 2: .A speaker of Portuguese seeks an appropriate "triadic" term.

From this observation we shall extract a principle whose applicability we will explore shortly: acknowledgement of kin relationships when they exist. First, however, we wish to consider what a speaker of Standard Average European (SAE; for this notion, see Whorf 1956:138; the notion is now current in typological studies in linguistics; see, e.g., Haspelmath 2001) might do in such circumstances and discuss whether a similar solution is ever employed in Mẽbêngôkre. We suggest that two strategies are commonly employed in SAE: (1) a proper name is used (e.g., when a woman talks to her sister-in-law about a man who is husband to the first and sister to the second), or (2) a form without a possessor, typically a vocative, is used in an intimate register (e.g., mummy, daddy). We will show why the first is rarely an option in Mẽbêngôkre, while the second, which suggests a reduction of triadicity to register differences, cannot fully explain the complex system of triadic terms found in the language.

The question of Mẽbêngôkre onomastics is too complex to be considered in detail here. It has been written about extensively by Lea (1986, 1992, 1997, 2005, 2008), as well as by Bamberger (1974); Verswijver (1983); Fisher (2003). We offer here only a few remarks to show why names cannot be readily used in a "triadic function."

Among the Mẽbêngôkre, personal names are an important part of the immaterial assets of exogamous matrihouses. As such, they are not bandied about because, at least as far as the most valued ones are concerned, they relate to the ancestors who are their eponyms in myths, and because overhearing names may give rise to accusations of theft between matrihouses. Furthermore, every individual has various personal names and may be called by different names according to who the speaker is.

The Mẽbêngôkre, like individuals from other Amerindian groups, used to find it embarrassing to be asked their own name. Traditionally one had to ask a third person to discover the answer, though this situation is gradually changing due to interaction with kubẽ (non-Indigenous people) and the experience of school. A non-Mẽbêngôkre living in a village for any extended period of time, including teachers and anthropologists, is allocated classificatory parents and receives a name, again highlighting the importance of categorizing people as relatives. Among kin one should always use kin terms unless complementing this by a person's name in contexts where ambiguity arises. This is analogous with Australia, where Merlan (1989:229) states that the relationship terms of Australian First Peoples are likewise society-wide, and Blythe (2018) goes as far as associating the evolution of trirelational terms with widespread naming taboos.

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Other restrictions on names exist. For instance, personal names are never mentioned during wailing, while epithets and teknonyms are used in the dialogue that ensues after wailing has ceased (Lea 2012:168). Hence, the use of names is too charged to represent a ready means to avoid referring to an individual with a kinship term that omits either the speaker's or the addressee's kin relation.

We now move to the question of whether triadic terms in Mẽbêngôkre could be seen as special register variants of basic reference terms or vocatives. The distribution of terms in Tables 6 and 7 allows us to discuss this with a certain concreteness: reference terms would perhaps have distinct register variants that are used with consanguineal kin, with affinal kin, and so on. These are categories that we found relevant to the formal description of the terms. Independent evidence for there being special registers ("intimate register," "avoidance register," etc.) for speaking with these classes of people would of course be necessary, but irrespective of this, such a proposal runs into a clear difficulty: in triadic terms the relationship between speaker and addressee is, as we saw above, at best very loosely determined. What is most directly specified are the relationships of each of these individuals with the referent. The same term could be used by a brother talking to his sister and, though an unlikely occurrence, by a father-in-law talking to his daughter-in-law. We conclude that triadic terms cannot be reduced to variants of reference terms that are used in connection with specific addressees.

Before we put forward our proposal regarding the relational role of triadic terms, let us briefly consider one further idea to describe their rationale: that triadic terms would serve primarily to resolve ambiguity in relation to the referent.[23] There is no doubt that triadic terms could resolve ambiguity in some cases: if a man says *apari* to his father, he would be referring to his own or his brothers' male children, which is only a subset of his father's male *tàmdjwỳ* (which also include the father's sisters' children, who are *tàmdjwỳ* to male ego). We have not observed this to be a common use of triadic terms, however. The reduction in the reference set effected by a triadic term is never such that it distinguishes among several of the most obvious possibilities, and in many (perhaps most) cases triadicity does not reduce the reference set at all. For instance, *akamrere* is used by a woman talking to her sister about one of either one's sons, and the fact that the speaker acknowledges herself to be related to the referent does not clarify which one she is alluding to in any specific instance.

Finally, triadic terms are often used without a specific referent in sermon-like speeches given by elders in the village plaza; in those cases, their eloquence is put to the service of enabling each person to think about his/her own relatives, as well as signalling the speaker's own putative relationship with them. We conclude that resolving ambiguity is a possible use for triadic terms but cannot be invoked as a general principle for interpreting them.

Above, we hinted at a principle of acknowledging additional kin relationships as the rationale of triadic terms. This is what differentiates these terms from regular reference terms, regardless of their specific form. That is, reference to two kin relationships is inherent to triadic terms, whether they are constructed or not from a basic reference term plus a further formative (as is the case; e.g., with terms for your kin who are my formal friends). This acknowledgement is used performatively in various ways. Though the topic goes beyond the limits of this article and of our

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[23] We thank Nick Evans (personal communication, 24/08/2021) for suggesting this.

present knowledge, we can offer a few suggestions to aid in developing this general idea into an explanatory principle.

Research on matrimonial alliance (Lea 2020) has shown that each person tends to be linked to another by various paths simultaneously: via the mother, father, spouse, etc. A speaker often has a choice of terms to refer to somebody else, to select certain links and downplay others. We call this stance-taking: it applies to choices among various possible regular reference terms, but particularly to the choice between a regular reference term and a triadic term. When a triadic term is chosen, multiple relations are foregrounded.

Returning once more to the example concerning keening quoted earlier, the triadic term reinforces the speaker's intimacy with the hearer in that it refers to someone classified as close to both of them. On the other hand, when someone demands something of me via my hypothetical husband using the term *arikrãm* (triadic term) rather than amjên (ordinary reference term), this person communicates an obligation on my part (the addressee) towards a person who classifies my husband as the husband of her tàmdjwỳ (BDH), thereby legitimizing the request made without necessarily ever having met the man in question.

This idea also gives us some mileage in attempting to explain why certain specific pairings of kin relationships are graced with a triadic term and why others are not. Such usage seems to occur in relationships that imply formal obligations towards the speaker (i.e., exchange, name-giving, etc.). This might explain some striking lacunae in the chart, such as the absence of triadic terms for children to refer to their parents (or parallel aunts and uncles), a relationship where obligations are less formalized.[24] Note however that cross aunts and uncles (and grandparents) are name-givers, and there are still no triadic terms in such circumstances, despite that formal obligation.

Now that we have addressed the question of why triadic terms exist (and how their meaning is used in the performance of kinship), we will briefly address the logically independent question of why they have the particular form that they have. More specifically, we may ask why they nearly all have – etymologically at least – a second person propositus, and so many of them are related to the basic reference term that would express the addressee's kinship tie to the referent. The answer that we can offer is that this aspect of their form follows from a principle of deference, whereby stressing the addressee's kin tie is more polite than stressing one's own. This answer is speculative, but in offering it we wish to counter the suggestion that the form of triadic terms is dictated by any sort of avoidance or shame, as is suggested in the quotations from Turner and Seeger above. If "avoidance" in this case is intended to evoke anything like the in-law avoidance that is expected of young married men, then the association is entirely misleading as triadic terms are used among individuals that are on intimate terms. But even in a looser sense,

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[24] Coelho de Souza (2020:214-5) suggests the principle that triadic terms are used to express fondness or appreciation of the speaker towards the referent, a proposal similar in spirit to what we propose. If taken literally, however, Coelho de Souza's principle would not lead us to expect the lacunae that we just mentioned. The strategy that replaces triadics in these cases is the use of vocatives, as long as the addressee is also close to the referent. Siblings might refer to their parents as *djũnwa* "dad" and *nhirwa* "mom" when speaking with each other, and so on. It is beyond the scope of the present article to describe the contexts in which it is appropriate to use such vocatives and other non-triadic strategies.

there is nothing being avoided when triadic terms are used other than the impoliteness of over-looking the addressee's kin bond with the referent. A speaker will use reference terms with her-self/himself as propositus quite freely when speaking with individuals who likewise lack a kin bond with the referent.

Conclusions

We hope to have shown that the triadic terms attempt to reconcile the contrast between speaker's and addressee's perspectives by taking both perspectives into account simultaneously, whilst de-ferring to the addressee thanks to the presence of the second person prefix. While showing the formal importance of the addressee, we have nevertheless demonstrated that the terms are ir-reducible to anything simpler than a pair of kin relations. The link between the speaker and the addressee was shown to be dispensable for the formal analysis but is perceived clearly by speak-ers and seems essential to the performative use of the terms.

One could of course question whether our point of departure is excessively ethnocentric, focusing on individuals and individual kinship ties, and considering that there is a conundrum to be resolved when two such ties exist simultaneously. A point much emphasized by social anthro-pologists is that the Euro-American notion of the individual is not universal, hence the insistence on relationality to widen our perspective concerning how persons are constituted. Strathern (1995) insisted that in Papua New Guinea a child is seen as the product of relations: a newly born baby is not viewed as an individual who must gradually forge relations with others; on the con-trary, it is only recognized as a person insofar as it is the product of relationships with others. The same point can be made mutatis mutandis to subvert the implicit precedence that we give to basic reference terms expressing one relationship over triadic terms expressing two relationships si-multaneously. These are important considerations. Our goal here is to describe the system and understand its logic formally, however, and we believe it is equally possible to do this departing from standard assumptions about kinship.

The Mẽbêngôkre triadic terms do not have a common designation that opposes them to reference terms, contrary to what was found by Garde (2013) analyzing triadic terms among the Bininj Gunwok in Australia. Mẽbêngôkre triadic terms are classed alongside other ways of ad-dressing people, including basic reference terms, subsumed by the expression mẽ te abẽn djê "people's ties with each other". Garde notes that it may take until adulthood to fully master the use of such terms among the Bininj Gunwok. The Mẽbêngôkre complain that the younger gener-ation do not want to use the triadic terms; nevertheless, we have seen that some such terms are extremely common. Regardless of this, triadic terms are a sophisticated subdomain of the Mẽbêngôkre lexicon that deserves attention both as an intricate scholarly puzzle and as one of the many remarkable features of the immaterial cultural heritage of Northern Jê peoples.

To our knowledge, triadic terms have only been described elsewhere in the world in Aus-tralia. This is striking given the commonplace problems that the triadic terms solve in the per-formance of kinship, suggesting that there are important lacunae in our knowledge of kinship systems in, e.g., other parts of the South American lowlands.

After expounding so vehemently on the complexity of the triadic terms, let us close with a reference to some limits to this complexity. Read (2018) has argued that calculations of related-ness among individuals in a society need not be done genealogically, but can be done through a

product of preexisting kinship terms. If, for example, I meet an individual who is distantly related to me, I do not need to construct a genealogical path to her or him to know the proper terms to employ. Rather, I seek a third individual for whom both of us have a kinship term and determine the proper form of address as a product of the two known kinship ties. Thus, if I address the intermediate individual with a term that denotes MZ and my addressee calls the intermediate individual M, I will designate my addressee with the term used for MZS or MZD (i.e., a parallel cousin). This product of kinship relations involves only two terms, and in this sense shows a striking parallel with how triadic terms are built. Both in the case of a kin term product and in the case of triadic terms, two distinct paths to a third individual are highlighted to establish the link between the speaker and the addressee. We suggest that this triad of speaker, addressee and referent is both essential to kinship calculations and at the same time provides an upper limit for the complexity of such calculations.

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