LETTERS TO MACT

ON G. BENNARDO AND D. READ'S
'THE TONGAN KINSHIP TERMINOLOGY' (MACT 2005):
ON ASSOCIATIVITY

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Just as the paper on the formal analysis of Tongan kin terminology by Bennardo and Read was going to press, Dr. Richard Greechie (of our Board of Editors), writing to our Editor-in-Chief, Paul Ballonoff, pointed out a fact that the authors do not even take note of, namely, that whilst the set of terms themselves is not systematically associative, the KTS algebra ('Read algebra') *is* associative. This is true and is a potential curiosity needing a proper explanation. Greechie and Martin Ottenheimer in fact first noticed this sort of situation in their paper of 1974.

The fill explanation is far from clear, but because Read and I are working on related general matters regarding formal kin category theory (see now the Read-Lehman letters in MACT earlier this very year and my papers (Chit Hlaing 1993 2001), I am going to try and suggest something that will at least open the question up in a useful way and suggest a line of possible solution.

The phenomenon is related to the fact that, as I showed in Lehman and Witz (1974, the same volume that has the Greechie and Ottenheimer paper) and Witz and Lehman 19?? Primary Genealogical Space (PGS) is a semi-group/associative, whilst the terminology is not; this says something curious about the connection between Read Algebras (for KTSs) and PGS (where it is now clear that KTS algebras are not generated from PGS, and yet in some sense live on the basic structure of PGS — a problem he and I are working on currently —see references above). The examples are hard to find in English, but consider that my wife's F-in-law's Son, is Ego[W[F-in-law]], where brackets indicate successive affinal connections, such that the string of terms is indeed associative, is, none the less, ME and not my affine's affine! So, having regard to the *persons* onto which an abstract associative space of the category system is mapped, associativity vanishes!

Whatever else this shows, it shows clearly that (a) one must keep separately in mind the universe (real or putative) of persons being genalogically linked and the formal category space. And (b), that a proper theory of the domain cannot, as used to be thought, e.g., by Lounsbury (see treatment in Chit Hlaing 1993), be reduced to the left-to-right concatenation algebra of the kin-type analysis. For, of course, the latter, in the final analysis at least, has to do with knowing what to call someone genealogically related to one, and, as in the example above, I certainly do not call my WHFS, any kinterm at all; I call him *me*. In fact, PGS is a structure of lines of 'ascent' and 'descent', the genealogical

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terms being defined not as primitives but as 'nodes' in this space. And it is this space that is in fact a semi-group, and hence associative.

However, as said, it is now provable that a proper algebra of any kin-term space (KTS) is not a product of a map (say a Category Theoretic morphism) from PGS, although the KTS is in fact closed under such as morphism, non-trivially. But given even just this last statement, it seems to be clear, that we ought to expect the Read algebra itself to be, as it turns out to be, associative. Note also that the choicer, in a Read Algebra, of a 'starting point' such as 'self' for English kin terminology, but a sibling term for Tongan does not constitute a counter example to what I have just asserted. This is because, e.g., 'self', as Read and I will show in work in progress, is *not* really equivalent to the traditional 'Ego', which is really, of course, what one may call a 'dummy' person — say a fixed arbitrary person onto which the starting-point of a KTS is 'pinned' in such a way as to avoid what has been called the 'matrix translation problem, namely, the problem of even defining a structure of terms from a person-centred perspective if one does not fix the centrepoint.

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