

CREATING AMAZONIAN SOCIALITY – SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE PATTERNS OF JOKING INTERACTIONS AMONG THE ARABELA OF PERUVIAN AMAZONIA

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This article presents a description and analysis of some typical patterns of joking interactions among the Arabela people of Peruvian Amazonia in the context of a particular attitude towards the Other typical to the Arabela cosmology. The paper deals with a particular kind of “phatic” joking that occurs when people change their mutual relations in the everyday practice (join or leave a group or a collective activity, establish visual contact, etc.). It is shown that these interactions are based on four participant roles. The active side of the interaction is composed of the positions of prompter and speaker, one who invents a jibe and one who pronounces it. The passive side is split into a first and a second butt of joke. The article claims that in these patterns an expression of a more general pattern of relations towards the Other can be seen, that combines two contrastive relations of aggressive opposition and mutual complicity.

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Artykuł zawiera opis i analizę pewnych wzorów interakcji żartobliwych wśród Indian Arabela z Amazonii peruwiańskiej w kontekście właściwego dla ich kosmologii stosunku wobec Innego. Artykuł dotyczy szczególnego rodzaju „fatycznych” interakcji żartobliwych, które wywiązują się w sytuacjach zmiany relacji między ludźmi (osobami dołączającymi lub opuszczającymi grupę, nawiązującymi kontakt wzrokowy, etc.). Okazuje się, że interakcje te opierają się na czterech typowych rolach uczestnictwa. Aktywna strona interakcji składa się z ról suflera i mówiącego: pierwszy wymyśla docinek, drugi wypowiada go. Strona pasywna interakcji jest rozszczępiona na role pierwszego i drugiego celu żartu. W artykule proponuję, aby w tych wzorach widzieć wyraz ogólnej relacji wobec Innego, która opiera się na połączeniu relacji agresywnej opozycji z relacją wzajemnego porozumienia.

K e y w o r d s: Amazonian Indians, everyday life, joking interactions.

INTRODUCTION

One of the current issues in contemporary ethnology of the indigenous peoples of the Amazonia is social morphology – the composition and principles of formation of local groups and social units encompassing them¹. Reflection on these issues has been

¹ This paper is a new version of an unpublished short note based upon my paper presented at the SALSA (Society for the Anthropology of the Lowland South America) conference in Oxford, in 2008. I would

one of the main springboards for the incredible development of Amazonian ethnology during the last 40 years. In the 1970's Amazonianists realized that the existing theoretical models were of little usefulness in making sense of Amazonian sociality, because the societies of this region generally lacked corporate groups, a central notion of the anthropology of that time. One of the main predicaments was that local groups gave the impression of anarchic fluidity, whilst at the same time sharing many cultural features with other, often enemy, groups spread over vast geographic areas. After identifying this situation, anthropologists found the notion of the body a useful tool for the analysis of Amazonian societies (see for instance Erikson 1993). They noticed that it was in the practices of production and destruction of bodies that the fundamental categories of social organization became visible (Seeger *et al.* 1979). As the body (and person) finally gave anthropologists access to the social logics of groups, interesting features of Amazonian societies became visible.

One of the most surprising findings was Amazonian Indians' particular attitude towards otherness. Many studies showed that in the social organization, the notion of the Other played a central role. Amazonian Indians were shown to take fundamental elements of their personal and collective identity from the social exterior. These included personal names, songs, immaterial principles of fecundity, and generative power. Furthermore, their most important rituals were those focused on absorption and transformation of these elements. This attitude towards otherness – defined by Erikson as “constituent alterity” (*altérité constituante* – 1986, 191) – was shown to permeate different areas of social life, starting from social morphology and trophy hunting (Taylor 1985), through body ornamentation (Erikson 1996), to historical processes of ethnogenesis and cultural change (Gow 2002) and cosmology (Viveiros de Castro 1998). From these reflexions a new synthetic view of Amazonian societies emerged – instead of placing stress on the preservation of an unchanged ethnic essence, Amazonian peoples were shown in their striving to absorb elements from the social exterior.

Although contemporary Amazonian studies show that the logic of constituent alterity is present in a wide range of domains of social practice, one area seems as yet unexplored – that of patterns of everyday interaction. From the lessons learnt through contemporary studies of Amazonian cultures, the following questions arise: If the Other is the fundamental category of social life, is there any particular Amazonian way of engaging in interaction with the “everyday” other (kin, neighbour, ethnographer). Are there any particular patterns of interaction related to the “constituent alterity”?

like to thank many readers of the previous version of this paper for their comments. I especially thank Carlo Severi, Philippe Erikson, Sophie Abiven, Cédric Yvinec and Pierre Déléage. Joking interactions were one of the subjects of my 15 month fieldwork among the Arabela, between 2005–2006 and 2008–2009. Fieldwork was funded mostly by Legs Bernard Lelong (CNRS, France) and a subvention from Laboratoire d'Anthropologie Sociale, Collège de France. I'm grateful for both institutions for their support.

Can this large-scale social logic of incorporating the Other be detected in a study of everyday interactions?

In this article I would like to offer a small contribution in this direction. I propose to look at some characteristic patterns of Arabela joking interactions as an expression of general principles of Other-oriented sociality. I will suggest that – in the case of the Arabela – a particular attitude towards otherness can indeed be detected at the level of everyday interactions – specifically, in patterns of joking interactions. I will argue that Arabela joking interactions – those taking place in the context of communal working (*minga*) and manioc beer (*masato*) drinking parties – amount to a process of establishing relations that conform to a local social logic based on approaching the Other through a figure of intermediary, shaped by a combination of contrastive relations of aggressive opposition and complicity.



An Arabela woman prepares manioc beer with a help of her daughters. The beer will be served to her relatives and neighbors at a communal work project (*minga*). Flor de Coco, photo by F. Rogalski, 2008.

The subject of joking is well established in general anthropology, starting with Radcliffe-Brown's structural-functional theory of joking relations (1952) and going through the cognitive approach of Douglas (1975) to frame-analysis (Bateson 1972a; Handelman and Kapferer 1972), to cite but a few approaches and names. Joking has also received its treatment within the study of indigenous Amazonian, with a list of

works covering many aspects and functions of joking and laughter. Those works explore humour in myths and other narratives (Clastres 1967; Surrallés 2003), ritual humour, play and mimesis (Lagrou 2006), its cosmological meaning and function (Lévi-Strauss 1964; Overing 2000) and role of humour in creating conviviality (Rosengren 2010).

In my paper I will address aspects of joking activity that have hitherto received little attention in regional studies². I will consider Arabela jokes as a device that serves to establish a particular kind of relationships between people, which mirror general cosmological conceptions about the Other. For that reason my reflection is more related to works on Amazonian everyday dialogues (see for instance Basso 2000; Erikson 2000) than to the works on Amazonian joking. I will first describe patterns of Arabela joking: recurrent schemes of joking and principal positions occupied by its participants. I will then show that the way this relationship is established corresponds to general principles of the Arabela attitude towards the Other present in mythology and shamanism.

The Arabela live in two villages – Buenavista and Flor de Coco – on the eponymous tributary of the Curaray river (a tributary of the Napo) in the Peruvian Amazonia. They are descendants of a handful of survivors from the Rubber Boom period, remnants of one of the groups speaking Zaparoan languages, inhabiting the vast region between Pastaza and Napo rivers. In 1945 they established peaceful relations with the national Peruvian society and a few years later they founded two villages on the riverbank of the Arabela and entered the regional social and political system of Mestizo and Kechwa communities. Today the larger of the two villages – Buenavista – is an important regional centre, having two-level schooling and a well-equipped medical post. The Arabela live on waged work for the oil companies operating the area and on extracting natural resources (timber, fish and game meat). The first language of communication is Spanish, only a few persons are fluent in Arabela, and in some contexts one hears conversations in Kechwa.

Although in various ways and in various situations all Arabela joke with each other, joking interactions take the most explicit form between in-laws or unrelated persons – between unrelated men and women and between brothers-in-law and male cousins. The context is also important. The Arabela especially joke during communal work, visits and other occasions when manioc beer – the main lubricant of Arabela social life – is served. In this paper I will focus on a particular joking that is related more to situations people encounter themselves in during everyday activities than to particular stable relations between them (kinship or other). This particular kind of joking mediates the establishment or changing of momentary relations between people, for example when they establish visual contact, enter or leave a group of people, and take turn in a conversation.

² I do not pretend to draw a complete map of joking interactions among the Arabela, as their everyday life is saturated with laughter. Here I focus only on one set of characteristic patterns of joking.

THE ARABELA AND THE OTHER

As a point of departure for my analysis I will sketch in broad strokes the Arabela attitude towards the Other as it can be reconstructed through the analysis of Arabela cosmology and specifically their discourse about interpersonal relations between humans and non-humans, in mythology and shamanism.

Arabela cosmology and – more generally – ontology is ‘animic’ (see Descola 2013). It means that for them the world is inhabited by collectives of persons, human and non-human (animals, spirits – masters of animals, aquatic spirits such as anaconda and dolphin, etc.). These persons are analogous to humans; they are intentional, reflexive, have similar cognitive capacities, use language, etc. Their collectives are organized in a similar way to the society of humans – they live in villages, work in gardens, prepare their food, drink beer, smoke cigarettes, marry each other, have their chiefs, etc. In some circumstances a human can establish interpersonal relations with some of those non-human persons, for example, the masters of the aquatic world (dolphin, anaconda) with the masters of salt licks, where game animals live or with the masters of the hallucinogenic *toé* plant used for curing people (*Brugmansia*).

In many mythical narratives about interactions between humans and non-human masters of salt licks and the aquatic world, there is recurrent pattern of relations which combines attitudes of aggression and complicity. The interactions between humans and personal masters of the salt licks (*dueño de la colpa*) are based on contrastive relations of the human with a non-human “friend” (*amigo*), and other inhabitants of the salt lick. The relation with the “friend” is profitable for the human, as the former offers him protection, gives him food, drink and promises animals for hunting (such as peccaries). Human receives these as a gift and is not expected to give his non-human friend anything in change. On the other hand, his interactions with other inhabitants of the salt lick are different. Some of them are ready to devour him (jaguars and anacondas), others try to cheat him and, by giving him their cigarettes and drinks, intend to transform him into a permanent member of their community. That is why the human must maintain a safe distance from them and follow the advice given by his friend, who plays the role of a protective intermediary between the human and other non-humans from the salt lick³.

Thus, the relations between humans and non-humans combine complicity and predation/avoidance⁴. I will show that a particular kind of Arabela joking interaction follows a very similar pattern of relation.

³ This account of the Arabela animic ontology is based on the theory of Philippe Descola, exposed fully in his book *Beyond nature and culture* (2013) [2005]. I omit here his exact formulation of what animism is, in terms of ‘interiority’ and ‘physicality’. For the purpose of my argument here it is not necessary. A concise resume of his theory can be found in Descola 2009. A full account of the Arabela system of relations is one of the subjects of my doctoral thesis (Rogalski 2015).

⁴ Strictly speaking, following the system of different “modes of relation” that can organize interactions between human and non-human developed by Descola, the interactions between the Arabela and the non-human inhabitants of the salt licks combine the schema of “gift” and “predation” (Descola 2012).

JOKING AS AGGRESSIVE SOCIABILITY

The first way in which the Arabela joking interaction follows the above pattern of relations with a non-human Other is its aggressive character. For the Arabela, a joke is always a (mock) verbal aggression and they never joke without having a precise and present target of joking. This can be seen in the expressions the Arabela use to refer to jokes: *hacer broma a alguien* (“to joke at someone”), vulgar verb *joder alguien* (“to fuck someone”), or *hacer reír a alguien* (“laughing at someone”), in all cases indicating the butt of the joke. The verbal aggression sometimes takes the explicit form of a joking threat (as: *Te voy a macear*, “I will kill you with a mace”, said jokingly by a little boy to his father), mostly however it consists in the fact that the joker imposes on the other a particular representation of him or her. In such a case, Arabela jokers establish assimilations between the butt of their jokes (between two present persons, or between a person and an element of the environment – an animal, etc.), drawing on sexual or onomastic identification. The joker either suggests that the butt of the joke is in a sexual relationship with an Other (human or non-human, present or absent in the interaction), or suggests that the butt has the same name as an Other (mostly human and mostly present in the interaction). All the examples presented below are of one or the other kind of joking identification.

The second point of my argument is that this aggressive joking plays a central role in everyday interactions between the Arabela. It is the most visible of one special kind of Arabela joking that – more than any other kind – has to do with establishing relations between people. These jokes are related neither to particular positions in the kinship structure nor to a specific context of social practice (as communal work, for instance), but are typical for the situations when people modify particular present relations between them (entering or leaving a group, taking turn in a conversation, getting into visual contact, etc.). These jokes typically occur between persons occupying different spatial domains (inside/outside of a house, river/land, etc.), different contexts of practice (participants of a communal work/outside), and playing different roles in a speech event (speaker/by-standing audience). I will call those jokes “phatic”, by analogy to one of the functions of language defined by Jakobson (drawing on Malinowski)⁵. The following is a typical example of a “phatic” joke.

This is an instance of a very common situation. A group of people hang around in a house drinking manioc beer (*masato*). One of the drinkers spots two people, a man and

⁵ Drawing on remarks of Malinowski (1923), Jakobson defined “phatic function” as one of six functions of verbal communication. According to Jakobson, examples of such a function of language are “messages primarily serving to establish, to prolong, or to discontinue communication, to check whether the channel works (‘Hello, do you hear me?’), to attract the attention of the interlocutor or to confirm his continued attention (‘Are you listening?’ or in Shakespearean diction, ‘Lend me your ears!’ – and on the other end of the wire ‘Um-hum!’)” (Jakobson 1960, 355).

a woman, as they appear coming back to village from the river bank. (Built on high platforms and with few walls, Arabela houses provide insiders a good vantage point of the surrounding space). The two people appear suddenly, the man with his fishing net, and the woman with a bowl full of laundry. One knows at first glance that they are entering the village independently from one another. But the drinker with his perception and intellect tuned up to playful associations will see them as accomplices of a sexual affair, getting back from a clandestine date. He calls one of them and asks *cuando era!*? (“When was it!?”). His drinking partners immediately turn their attention to the “couple” thus created, waiting for their retort. (At the time of my sojourn, the Arabela used to retort to this kind of provocation saying *endenantesito*, “a little while ago”⁶).

In the above interaction at least three kinds of relations are established: (1.) between the joker and its butts (relation of *laughing at*), (2.) between the joker and other people from his party (relation of *laughing with*), and (3.) between the butts of the joke (relation of *being laughed at*). The joker’s call associates the two persons together in opposition to the people gathered in the house, sharing the joker’s perspective. By putting the two persons in a certain situation of relativity (a clandestine encounter) the joke groups the outsiders from the perspective of drinkers. They become an object inside the drinkers’ point of view of the world. At the same time, the interpellation of the two persons coming back from the riverbank forces them to recognize the spatial, temporal and behavioural relation of their bodies. They were imprudent and have mismanaged their timing and found themselves together in one place, at one moment and sharing the same movement and its direction. The joker takes this complicity of their bodies as signal of their sexual relation, and by the joke he brings to their minds this representation. Simultaneously, the interpellation establishes a sort of communicative articulation between them: both hear the provocative call and they are both suddenly put one in front of the other. The two persons effectively become “couple” when they sound out each other’s reaction and tacitly negotiate a retort. In consequence, this typical joke transforms two independent groups of persons – drinkers and outsiders – into two interacting parties.

Thus, inside the vast domain of Arabela joking practices, a domain whose general feature is the aggression between the joker and the butt of the joke, there are special kinds of “phatic” jokes that mediate an establishing of relations between people. In the remainder of this note I will show that “phatic” jokes – apart from aggression – have further characteristics that repeat general Arabela models of relations with the Other. I will show that in their patterns we also find a homologue of the mythological and shamanic “connivance” between the human subject and his non-human “friend”.

⁶ I witnessed *Cuando era*-jokes many times during my first fieldwork, in 2005–2006. It was such a swift interaction that I made only one description of it. The instance cited here I reconstructed from memory in 2008.

COMPLICITY OF BUTTS

Following the indigenous vision of joking as an aggressive interaction from a joker to the butt of it, we can assume that each joking interaction comprises two basic parties: the active joking party (joker and his or her party) and the passive recipient party (butt or butts). The particular feature of the “phatic” jokes is that systematically those basic parties are split into two positions. The active party is often split into a person who spots the butt, invents a joking interpellation, and passes it to his or her companion who effectively utters it to the butt. The passive party, on the other hand, is split into a person who is the addressee of joker’s utterance and another, bystander, who is its actual (or additional) butt. First I will illustrate the splitting on the recipient side of the interaction.

A typical “phatic” joke aims at more than one person. A good example occurred during some collective work (*minga*) that took place in Buenavista one afternoon.

Isela⁷ invited some relatives for a short afternoon *minga* to help her to construct a new fireplace from wooden planks and clay. As the work went on, more people came to Isela’s place invited by the *mingueros* (“participants of the collective work”) to join the group, drink some masato and, eventually, to help them⁸. I came too and was given a bowl of masato. Suddenly, Isela’s father Abelindo said to me: *tú igual Pereira* (“you equal Pereira”), associating me with a woman – Diana Pereira – who was also present there as guest. While I searched for an appropriate retort, she said quickly *Pereira, buena gente, dile* (“Pereira, good person, say it to him”). Her utterance addressed me formally, but Isela’s father was its pragmatic target, though referred to with a third person pronoun⁹.

This basis of this joke is onomastic identification and it is an instance of a very common Arabela joke consisting in shifting names between addressee and a by-standing butt of a joke. Abelindo seemed to say that the woman and I resembled each other so much that we could have the same family name. “Comparing” me to Pereira, the joker actually identified me with the person bearing that name, although I don’t understand what could be the basis of this association (if there was any). In her retort Pereira took her opponent’s identification but changed its meaning. She transformed it into a generic identification based on a positive quality that we both shared – we both were *buena gente* (“good persons”)¹⁰. It is interesting to note that, just as in the

⁷ All personal names have been changed.

⁸ The tasks that were to be accomplished technically were pretty simple and light and didn’t require much assistance. In my view, a particular collective experience was sought rather than technical support.

⁹ Although I took Pereira’s words as a relief, it was she who had to respond to Abelindo’s words. She responded as it put in my place not because I was a *gringo* unfamiliar with local jokes. Probably an analogous exchange between the Arabela themselves would take the same form.

¹⁰ Another interpretation is also possible. By using the family name Pereira as a means of a verbal mock aggression, Abelindo charged it with negative meaning. Pereira profited from the fact that the negative meaning of her family name was implicit in Abelindo’s utterance and she invented an explicit posi-

Cuando era-joke cited above, the relation between the butts (me and Pereira) represented by the joker was in some way confirmed by us because both me and Pereira made an effort to find a retort.

When Isela's father spoke to me, I felt compelled to answer but I had no idea what to say. That is why I welcomed Pereira's intervention as a relief. However, although one could think that Pereira merely gave me a retort that I – coming from another culture – couldn't find myself, similar situations regularly occur among the Arabela themselves. In fact, in numerous Arabela jokes opening utterances address and refer to two different persons. That is why Abelindo's joke was not only addressed to me but also to Pereira. In some sense, Pereira, although introduced last to the interaction, was actually the principal target of it.

This question of butts requires more precision here. This example permits us to identify two distinct discursive positions on the recipient side: the first (minor) butt of the joke and the second, by-standing (actual) butt. This distinction seems to correspond to a distinction proposed by Levinson, who in his elaborations on the basic categories of the conversation analysis (1989) distinguishes between an *intermediary* (an addressee who is not the target), and a *goal* (an addressee who is the target) (Levinson 1989, 170). These categories are useful when we analyze a completed joking exchange and we take persons who produced utterances in it as the actual participants of it. A person who responds to a joking utterance (*tú igual Pereira*) appears to be its "true" target (Levinson's *goal*), while an addressee who remains silent would be a "false" target (Levinson's *intermediary*)¹¹. However, when we change the scope of our analysis and take into account a temporal aspect of those interactions, we realize that the speaker actually shifts the target of his or her utterance. Both recipients are targets but not at the same moment. The following Table shows shifting of recipients of utterances in the exchange analysed above.

	speaker	utterance	target
1	Abelindo	<i>Tú igual...</i> ("You equal")	Anthropologist
2	Abelindo	<i>Pereira</i>	Diana Pereira
3	Diana Pereira	<i>Pereira, buena gente, di-</i> ("Pereira, good person, say it")	Anthropologist
4	Diana Pereira	<i>le</i> ("to him.")	Diana Pereira

tive meaning of her family name. Note also that both utterances – Abelindo's jibe and Pereira's retort – constitute a sort of commentary on the double nature of names defined by Lévi-Strauss: depending on the situation, each name can play the role of distinction or classification (Lévi-Strauss 1962, 226).

¹¹ Diana was the target because using someone's name in his or her presence automatically means his/her interpellation. Even when it is used in the form of reference or to address another person, the person who responds is usually the one whose name was used for addressing another person.

Of the three persons concerned, only two play an active role at a time. Grammatically, they address the utterances to a third party with second person referring expressions (2nd pers. pronoun, verbal form). Pragmatically, they address each other with third person referring expressions (personal name in function of reference, 3rd pers. pronoun).

Joking interpellations incommode their recipients because they objectify them. Now we see that this objectification of the Other operates on two levels. First, on the level of semantic content (representing the Other in a sexual relation, for example). Secondly, on the level of pragmatic form: the primary recipient of the utterance realizes that it is not addressed to him/her (in this sense he/she is suddenly deprived of his right to answer), and a bystander, listening to the words of the other as a bystander (observer) realizes that these words point at him/her. Suddenly urged to take part in the exchange, the bystander finds himself caught in a trap¹².

In this sense, while creating two groups of persons – aggressor party and aggressed party – the joke immediately establishes a dynamic structure between persons belonging to the second group: between the recipient who is not the final target (ceases to be the addressee), and the by-standing and established target. In this way such interaction creates a kind of complicity between the butts of the joke. I propose that in this complicity we can see a mirrored reflection of mythological and shamanic complicity between a human and his non-human “friend”. It is interesting to note that many “phatic” joking interactions comprise another splitting of roles on the active side of interaction.

COMPLICITY OF JOKERS

Consider the following examples. During some *minga* work in a garden, one of my companions prompted me, *sotto voce*, to cry in the air, so that one of the women serving manioc beer heard it: *¿minga es?! (“Is it minga?”)*. He explained to me that

¹² One can also raise the question of Abelindo’s motivation to make this joke. Suppose, that he was driven by something more than ludic motivation and imagine that shortly before making this joke Abelindo had a sort of fugacious but salient impression of an identity between me and Pereira. This impression would be so evanescent that he couldn’t even tell which characteristic of our appearance or comportment would be the reason of it. Then his “joke” would be a form of test of the ontologically ambiguous reality. He would use a similar mechanism to that which lies behind the practice of Achuar hunters when they meet spirits in the forest. When they realize that a person seen in the forest is actually a spirit, in order to make it disappear they have to say “I’m a person too” and make a loud noise (Taylor 1993, 430). If these two situations seem to be incomparable, consider that according to Philippe Erikson, for the Amazonian societies ontological incertitude is inherent even in everyday greetings. As he observes, “It seems that often the goal of Amazonian greetings, even the most ordinary, is that of tracing the frontier between the dead and the living” [transl. from French – F.R.] (Erikson 2000, 117).

this joke meant that if it was *minga* we should be served masato – otherwise it was not *minga* but a hired work and we should be given our pay in cash. Usually, soon after crying these words, the *convidadora* (“woman serving beer”) would appear and force me to drink a bigger amount of beer (what I tried to endure according to the local etiquette). Bystanders (among them my prompter) carefully watched both me performing prompted words, and the woman’s ostensibly silent reaction to it. They welcomed the interaction with cheerful laugh¹³.

A similar interaction took place on one of those days when the community was at rest and silent after a couple of consecutive days of communal working. Artemio came to the abandoned house where I was staying. From my house we noticed the mosquito net of his brother and my neighbour. In spite of it being rather late in the morning, it was still out. His brother is an enthusiastic *masato* drinker and *minga* worker but he always needs a lot of time to recover from drinking. Artemio made a joke saying that Venancio was like an arowana fish¹⁴. He explained to me that arowana – although of a considerable size – is one of the first fish to become stupefied once poisonous *barbasco* (*Lonchocarpus urucu*) juice is spread into the water. Immediately, he prompted me to call Venancio shouting *arahuana*.¹⁵

The interactions cited above exemplify another characteristic element of the pattern of Arabela joking – the splitting of the active (aggressive) party between two roles, the author of the joking utterance, and the relayer who produces it to the target. The author is a sort of “brain of the operation”. He or she spots a potential target, invents a joking utterance, finds a person who will pronounce it and prompts him or her to utter it. The relayer takes upon himself or herself the role of active participant who speaks to the target. In my opinion, this interactional move contributes to creating a relationship of complicity between the prompter and the relayer against the target(s) of their joint joke.

¹³ On another day, during some collective work on the communal pasture, my *kumpa* (*compadre*, ceremonial friend) taught me a similarly provocative saying, this time in the Kechwa language: *Tianlli aswa o mana tianlli? si no, ñuka ña cutishu ñuka wasimi* [“Is there or there isn’t any masato? If not, I’m going home now”]. I was supposed to say it when one of the women serving manioc beer appeared, and her reaction would be as above.

¹⁴ *Arahuana*, *Osteoglossum bicirrhosum*.

¹⁵ These interactions are not examples of a mere socialization of a *gringo* into the local practice. This kind of prompting is present in the everyday interactions between local people. I collected a good example in a neighbouring community on the Curaray River. Two brothers were salting fish. The wife of the chief of the house was serving *trago* = *aguardiente* (sugar cane alcohol) with mashed *kamu-kamu* fruits (*Myrciaria dubia*). They worked on a platform adjacent to the kitchen part of the house. From the platform we could see the small house of the widowed sister-in-law of the two men. In front of her house, there were some people working with her cleaning fish nets. There was some *aguardiente* as well. Lucas’s wife *sotto voce* prompted her brother-in-law Wenceslao to call the widow: *Abi es!? Ya me voy!* [“Is it there? I’m coming!”].

Such a splitting of joking into acts of prompting and relaying also occurs in interactions involving physical teasing. This is the case when a bystander of a joking interaction finds and then passes an object to someone else who uses it to tease a third party (that object could be for example a piece of lemon handed to a woman who will rub it into the face of her joking opponent)¹⁶.

It is important to stress the systemic or formal character of these interactions. Taken individually, at least some of the examples of prompting cited above could be explained by particular relations between its participants. Some 'prompted' jokes would not be appropriate or would not "work" if they were pronounced by the prompter directly to the target. Also, sometimes it seems that the prompter chooses a person who occupies the best position for the joke to have effect from within a group of persons. For example, it was obvious that Artemio preferred to prompt me to call his brother with the name of a fish than do it himself, because teasing was more appropriate for my relation with that man, than it was for their relationship as brothers. Taken as a whole set of interactions though, these examples reveal the ordered character of their subjacent structure. Moreover, prompting and speaking *sotto voce* have too formal a character to be just a reflection of circumstances. In fact, they occur even in situations where they have no practical effect. That is so when prompting takes place in the immediate presence of the target (see for instance the retort *Pereira buena gente, dile* that was perfectly audible for Abelindo), or when *sotto voce* register is used even when the person to be teased is beyond earshot anyway.

I argue that prompting and talking *sotto voce* are means to create a particular configuration of interaction, based on two parties, the joker's party and the teased party. Prompting gives internal structure to the joking unit, while talking *sotto voce* differentiates the relationship within the aggressive party from the relationship between the two parties.

The last example shows an interesting transformation of the prompting/relaying pattern of joking interaction. One late afternoon we sat in the house of my neighbour and drank masato left from the previous day's communal work. Romario, as a guest,

¹⁶ The 'prompter' configuration (splitting of the active party into prompter and relayer) sometimes takes the form of the configuration of the 'announcer'. A good example of this is an interaction that took place when I was heading for a *minga* with Artemio and his brother and sons. On our way we had to cross a creek, and we needed a canoe. As we approached the creek, we saw a woman who was doing laundry in a small canoe. Artemio silently communicated to me that he was going to poke fun of her *ya le voy a joder* ["I'm going to f... her"], and then, as we arrived at her canoe, he said, *Rebeca, cárgame* ["Rebeca, carry me"]. It was a pun playing on the double meaning of the verb "cargar", which could refer to her helping him cross the creek in her canoe, as well as having a sexual intercourse with him (Rebeca ignored his joke and didn't respond to it). The point of this example is that by announcing to me his intention to make fun of the woman, Artemio made me an accomplice of his subsequent joke.

amused the others, “deceiving” them (*estaba engañando*) with playful stories. He said that he would wait with his bath for his young sister-in-law Karina, so they would bathe together. His words indirectly pointed to another guest, Lena – the daughter-in-law of the female head of the house. She was well known for her witty retorts which were often remembered and cited. Also, as they both were guests, they were expected to engage in a teasing verbal contest to amuse their hosts and other people present. In a short silence that followed Romario’s words, the audience awaited Lena’s response. Suddenly, we heard a loud repetitive call of a cacique bird (*Cacicus* sp.) that sings in the evenings. Lena imitated the bird’s call transforming it into sung name of her opponent: *Romario! Romario!* and added: *ahí está! la Karina te está llamando!* [“That’s it! That’s Karina calling you!”]. She artfully mocked Romario representing the bird as Romario’s real lover. Everybody laughed, including Romario.

First, Romario bragged about his seductive prowess. This way he teased Lena indirectly, whose retort was direct. Romario’s reaction to Lena’s retort was acknowledgement. With his cheerful laugh he recognized the power of her response. This three step interaction is typical for verbal duelling between Arabela men and women. Men indirectly provoke, to which women respond directly, and men endure their response.

It is interesting to note that although the prompter figure was absent in this interaction, Lena created it by including the bird’s call into her retort. The bird’s call was also useful because it helped Lena resolve the double-bind (Bateson 1972b) situation in which Romario’s teasing put her. On the implicit level of communicative conventions Romario was clearly teasing her (they were an unrelated man and woman and both were guests at a drinking party) so she was compelled to answer. But, at the level of content of what he said, he wasn’t aiming at her. Responding to his bragging would amount to an acknowledgment that his erotic adventures concerned Lena. In this situation, the bird’s call was a relief. By including it into her retort, Lena could respond to Romario without identifying herself with his wife or lover.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion of this short overview of Arabela “phatic” joking, I argue that a general pattern is visible, in which the active or the passive party of the joking interaction is split in two. Arabela “phatic” joking builds upon participant structure of four roles: author-promoter, relayer and two targets (explicit and implicit, or proximate and distant). This scaffolding is spanned by two contrastive relations of aggression and complicity. We can also note the crucial role that the intermediary plays in these interactions. On the active side, the relayer is the intermediary for the prompter in his relation to the target. On the passive side, the first butt is an intermediary for the joker to reach the second, principal, target of his or her joke.

In my opinion, this pattern of joking interaction is an expression of the general pattern of relation with the Other subjacent to Arabela mythology and shamanism. What in the latter is a combination of aggression-predation and complicity-gift giving, in the former takes the form of mock aggression between the active and passive sides of joking and complicity between jokers (author and relayer) and/or between butts (first target and second target). If the above interpretative experiment is correct, we would then have a compelling correspondence between the animist cosmology (and ontology) of Amazonian peoples and their everyday interactions¹⁷.

Of the many questions such a correspondence raises, I would like to point to only one, that of transmission of culture. I think that if we search for an explanation of this correspondence between everyday interactions and patterns of relation implicit in cosmology and shamanism, we would intuitively draw a causal connection departing from cosmology and shamanism (core areas of tradition) to everyday interactions. However, during my fieldwork among the Arabela I got the impression that relatively few people actually knew the myths or were interested in non-human persons inhabiting aquatic and forest depths. On the other hand, nearly all of them engaged in “phatic” joking described above. Faced with this, we could imagine that the causal arrow points the other way and that it is through participation in everyday joking interactions, from a very early age, that the Arabela acquire a disposition of living and conceiving their relations with the Other as aggression and complicity.

In my opinion, at least, this correspondence seem to confirm that there is a general implicit pattern of Arabela sociality and attitude towards the Other implicit in various areas of their social practice covering – at least – cosmology and shamanism on one hand, and everyday joking interactions, on the other. I believe that this is a promising ground for future reflections¹⁸.

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¹⁷ A partial test of my experiment could be achieved through an analysis of joking patterns of peoples sharing similar logic of relation in their cosmology and sociality. Two cases come to mind – that of the Paumari from Brazilian Amazonia, studied by Lydie Oiara Bonilla (2007) and the Toba of the Argentinian Gran Chaco, studied by Florencia Tola (2012). Both Bonilla and Tola reconstructed similar patterns of relation combining predation and gift-giving.

¹⁸ An Interesting exercise could be a comparison of patterns of joking of “predatory” Jivaro, “gift-receiving” Arawak and “exchanging” Tukano, whose contrastive logics of relation were synthesized by Descola 2012.

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