

ENGLISH IN FOCUS

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ENGLISH IN FOCUS

# English in Social Studies

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H. G. WIDDOWSON

TEACHER'S EDITION



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# 4 Roles

## 1 READING AND COMPREHENSION

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<sup>1</sup>The operation of a social group depends on its members having certain parts, or roles, to play. <sup>2</sup>Each member has a particular position in the structure of the group and has particular tasks to perform in its activity. <sup>3</sup>So his part carries with it certain obligations. <sup>4</sup>But it also gives him certain rights, since the performance of his tasks entitles him to receive services in return from other members of the group. <sup>5</sup>These sets of rights and obligations can be said to define the individual's social roles.

<sup>6</sup>Although the general notion of role is clear enough, there has in the past been considerable difference of opinion about how it should be given an exact definition. <sup>7</sup>A useful survey of different views on this matter is provided in Banton (1965). <sup>8</sup>After referring to the work of a number of scholars such as Linton (1936, 1947), Nadel (1957) and Merton (1957), Banton comes to the conclusion that in spite of differences of approach and emphasis there is enough general agreement among scholars working in the field at present to arrive at an agreed definition of the concept. <sup>9</sup>He expresses this as follows:

<sup>10</sup>It is agreed: that behaviour can be related to a *position* in a social structure; that actual behaviour can be related to the individual's own ideas of what is appropriate (*role cognitions*), or to other people's ideas of what he *will* do (*expectations*), or to other people's ideas about what he *should* do (*norms*). <sup>11</sup>In this light a role may be understood as *a set of norms and expectations applied to the incumbent of a particular position*. (Banton 1965, pp. 28–9)

- (a) *Individuals have certain rights and obligations as members of a group.*
- (b) *An individual occupies a position in the structure of the group.*
- (c) *Scholars are not in agreement about how the concept of role should be defined.*
- (d) *Role cognitions refer to other people's ideas of what an individual's behaviour should be.*

<sup>12</sup>Although it is not clear from Banton's remarks what part the individual's own ideas play in defining role, nevertheless one may say that they reflect a

general agreement about how the concept of role is to be defined.<sup>13</sup> There is not the same consensus, however, on the question of how roles should be classified.<sup>14</sup> This is, of course, not surprising: different research purposes are likely to require classifications based on different criteria.

<sup>15</sup>Linton, in the works cited earlier, proposes a simple twofold classification.<sup>16</sup> He distinguishes ascribed roles from achieved roles.<sup>17</sup> The former are assigned to individuals by social custom by reference to such criteria as sex, age, kinship relations and caste.<sup>18</sup> Thus, for example, we might find that the role of hunter is an ascribed one in a particular society in that it is restricted to men of a certain age.<sup>19</sup> We might also find that when a man is too old to hunt he is automatically allocated another ascribed role – perhaps that of counsellor or priest.<sup>20</sup> Achieved roles, on the other hand, are those which the individual acquires by his own effort or by reason of certain personal qualities.<sup>21</sup> They are not bestowed upon him by social custom.<sup>22</sup> The role of president in the United States, for example, is achieved, whereas that of queen in Britain is ascribed.

<sup>23</sup>Linton's simple classification is a useful one.<sup>24</sup> The difference between caste and class systems of social stratification, for example, can be discussed by reference to ascribed and achieved roles.<sup>25</sup> The distinction also enters into discussions about the traditional roles of women in society.<sup>26</sup> Many women nowadays feel that they have roles ascribed to them and that they are prevented from acquiring other roles because these are only achieved roles for men.

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- Linton, Ralph (1936). *The Study of Man*. New York: Appleton Century Crofts.
- (1947). *The Cultural Background of Personality*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
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#### SOLUTIONS

Complete the following statements by referring to the sentences of the passage which are indicated in brackets. Note that sometimes more than one word is required.

- (a) . . . (1) of a group have certain roles to play.  
 . . . (5), as members of a group take on . . . (3).  
 = Individuals take on certain obligations as members of a group.

- Individuals also have the . . . (4) to receive services in return.  
 ∴ *Individuals have certain rights and obligations as members of a group.*
- (b) Social structure consists of a number of . . . (2).  
 Each . . . (1) of a group occupies a certain position in the . . . (1) of the group.  
 . . . (5) occupy . . . (2) in the structure of the group.  
 = *An individual occupies a position in the structure of the group.*
- (c) In the past, scholars have had different . . . (6) about the way to . . . (5) the concept of role.  
 = In the past, there was no . . . (8) on how the concept of role should be defined.  
 At present there is general agreement on the . . . (6) of the concept.  
 = Scholars *are* at present in general agreement about how the concept of role should be defined.
- (d) Other people's ideas about what . . . (5) should do are referred to as . . . (10).  
*i.e.* Norms refer to other people's ideas of what an individual's . . . (10) should be.  
 Role cognitions refer to the individual's own idea of . . . (10) behaviour.  
 = Role cognitions refer to the individual's *own* idea of what his behaviour should be.

#### EXERCISE A *Meaning assessment*

Refer to the passage and:

- (a) decide whether the following statements are true or false according to the passage.  
 (b) write out the true statement which expresses the most central idea.

##### *Paragraph 1*

- Members of a social group have the obligation to carry out certain tasks.
- An individual's social roles are defined by his rights and obligations.
- An individual's rights are defined by the tasks he has to carry out.

##### *Paragraph 2*

- The roles people play are defined by norms and expectations of behaviour.
- A position in a social structure has certain norms of behaviour associated with it.
- Role expectations refer to the way other people think an individual should behave.

##### *Paragraph 4*

- Achieved roles are assigned by social custom.
- Individuals can adopt roles by their own efforts.

3. Ascribed roles are restricted to certain members of a society.
4. Roles can be classified into two kinds: achieved and ascribed.
5. The role of hunter is an ascribed one.

### EXERCISE B Contextual reference

Refer to the relevant contexts in the reading passage and replace or expand the expressions printed in italics with expressions which make the meaning clear.

1. But *it* also gives *him* certain rights. (4)
2. A useful survey of different views on *this matter* is provided in Banton (1965). (7)
3. *He* expresses *this* as follows. (9)
4. Actual behaviour can be related to other people's ideas about what *he* should be. (10)
5. *This* is, of course, not surprising. (14)
6. *The former* are assigned to individuals by social custom. (17)
7. Achieved roles are *those* which the individual acquires by his own effort. (20)
8. *They* are not bestowed upon *him* by social custom. (21)
9. *The distinction* also enters into discussions about the traditional roles of women in society. (25)
10. *These* are only achieved roles for men. (26)

### EXERCISE C Summary

Write a summary of the reading passage by selecting one statement from each group (a, b or c) which relates most appropriately to the numbered statement and then by arranging all the statements in the most satisfactory order. Your summary should be in two paragraphs.

1. Finally, role cognitions have to do with what the individual himself believes to be appropriate behaviour.
2. The position that individuals occupy has an effect on their behaviour.
  - (a) This is related to role cognitions, norms and expectations.
  - (b) Role cognitions refer to the individual's own idea about behaviour.
  - (c) There is general agreement about how the concept should be defined.
3. Achieved roles, on the other hand, are acquired by the individual's own effort or because of his personal qualities.
  - (a) The role of president in the United States, for example, is an achieved role.
  - (b) Ascribed roles, on the other hand, are not acquired by the individual's own effort.
  - (c) Achieved roles are earned, therefore, whereas ascribed roles are not.

4. One way of classifying roles is to distinguish between those which are ascribed and those which are achieved.
  - (a) That is to say, achieved roles are not ascribed.
  - (b) Ascribed roles are assigned to individuals by social custom.
  - (c) Linton therefore proposed a simple classification.
5. Individuals have certain rights and obligations as members of a group, and they occupy positions in the structure of the group.
  - (a) These refer to the individual's own idea about appropriate behaviour.
  - (b) This set of rights and obligations associated with a particular position defines the individual's role.
  - (c) Role is defined by reference to certain rights and obligations.
6. We may define role, then, as a set of norms and expectations associated with a particular position.
  - (a) But although there is general agreement on definitions, there is less agreement on classification.
  - (b) The positions which individuals occupy has an influence on their behaviour.
  - (c) There is a difference of opinion about classification, but there is general agreement about definition.
7. Norms, for example, have to do with other people's ideas about what an individual's behaviour should be.
  - (a) Such norms have an influence on behaviour.
  - (b) Expectations, on the other hand, refer to what other people think an individual's behaviour *will* be.
  - (c) How other people think an individual will behave depends on their expectation.

## II USE OF LANGUAGE

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### EXERCISE D Distinctions and definitions

Look at Sentences 10 and 11 in the reading passage. They make a *distinction* between three kinds of influence on individual behaviour and provide a *definition* of each kind. We can show this as follows:

	influence on behaviour		
	role cognitions	norms	expectations
<i>Distinctions</i>			
<i>Definitions</i>	individual's own ideas about appropriate behaviour	other people's ideas about what individual <i>should</i> do	other people's ideas about what individual <i>will</i> do

We can write these notes out to make a summary statement as follows:

- (b) Banton makes a distinction between three kinds of influence on behaviour. He distinguishes between role cognitions, norms and expectations. Role cognitions refer to the individual's own ideas about appropriate behaviour, norms refer to other people's ideas about what the individual *should* do and expectations refer to their ideas about what they *will* do.
1. Write (a) notes and (b) a summary statement to show the distinctions and definitions relating to *role types* expressed in Sentences 15–26 of the reading passage.
  2. Consider the following passages and write (a) notes and (b) summary statements as illustrated above.
    - (i) Durkheim noticed that although suicide is in one respect a highly personal act, different societies have different but quite regular suicide rates. He therefore concluded that there must be social factors at work and set out to categorize different kinds of suicide with reference to the degree to which these social factors influenced the act. He used the term 'egoistic suicide' to refer to that kind of suicide which occurs when the individual is isolated, when the social bonds that link him to others are weakened or broken. 'Anomic suicide', on the other hand, occurs when there is a sudden change of accepted social norms or a breakdown of social values which normally regulate the individual's behaviour. The third kind of suicide is 'altruistic' and occurs when the individual's own identity is absorbed by the values of a particular social group and he acts to preserve those values.
    - (ii) In most societies we find some kind of transmission of heritage. Either the roles or the possessions or both of members of one generation are handed down to the members of the next. Following Rivers, we can refer to the transmission of roles related to rank or office as 'succession' and the handing down of property as 'inheritance'.
    - (iii) Bernstein speaks of the position-oriented family. This is one in which each member of the family acts out his allotted role: father, mother, son and so on. He compares this with what he calls the person-oriented family, in which the members of the family act more freely as individuals and in which the role structure is not precisely maintained. There is perhaps a tendency for position-oriented families to be more prevalent among the working class.
    - (iv) Sympathetic magic operates on the principle that one event can influence another event at a distance by a kind of mysterious sympathy. Frazer, in his well-known work *The Golden Bough*, suggests that there are two branches of sympathetic magic. 'Homeopathic' or 'imitative' magic is that which is based on the belief that 'like produces like, or that an effect resembles its cause', and in this

case the magician supposes that he can produce any effect he wishes by imitating it. 'Contagious magic', on the other hand, is based on the belief that once there has been contact between two things this contact will remain afterwards. In this case, by doing something with an object which was once in contact with a person, a magician believes that he can affect the person himself.

- (v) The folktales that are passed down from generation to generation, forming part of the 'cultural heritage' of a society, do not always have the same social function. Malinowski proposed a three-way classification and distinguished between myth, legend and fairy story. The first of these, he suggested, represents 'a statement of a higher and a more important truth of a primeval reality'. As such it is regarded as sacred. Fairy stories, on the other hand, are simply entertainment and nobody attaches any special significance to them, and nobody believes them to be true. Legends, however, are believed to be true historical accounts.

#### EXERCISE E *Discourse development*

Relate each of the following groups of sentences into paragraphs by arranging them into an appropriate order and using the following expressions where necessary:

for example, on the other hand, however, that is to say

(Refer to *Use of Language* exercises in Units 1, 2 and 3.)

1. (a) Some families are polygynous.  
(b) In some societies we find polyandrous families.  
(c) The families consist of a woman and more than one husband.  
(d) The families consist of a man and more than one wife.
2. (a) Nuclear families may be incomplete because of economic necessity.  
(b) Many workers in Europe have to find work outside their own country.
3. (a) A family can exist when a couple shares a common residence.  
(b) A family exists when a man and a woman live together in one home.
4. (a) In India, a person born into the Kshatriya caste cannot move into a higher caste and become a Brahman.  
(b) In a caste system individuals cannot move from one social stratum to another.  
(c) A working class person can, if he has the opportunity, become middle class in the course of his life.  
(d) In a class system there is a greater degree of social mobility.
5. (a) Income is not a very reliable guide to social class.  
(b) One way of defining social class is by reference to income.  
(c) People in the teaching profession in Britain earn less than many people in occupations associated with the working class.

- (d) We might define people earning a certain sum, say £2500 or less, as belonging to the working class.
6. (a) Secondary socialization provides for the individual's role in society as a whole.
- (b) Primary socialization provides for the individual's integration into the culture of his immediate environment.
- (c) Secondary socialization enables the individual to extend the range of his social activities.

### III GUIDED WRITING

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#### EXERCISE F

Put the verbs in brackets in the following sentences into the correct form.

1. Banton (adopt) a rather different approach to role classification.
2. By this, Banton (mean) the degree to which roles (be) dependent on each other.
3. By this Banton (mean) the degree to which the adoption of one role (restrict) the individual's choice of other roles.
4. Those roles which (ascribe) on the basis of sex can (restrict) the individual's freedom (choose) other roles.
5. Banton (classify) them by reference to what he (call) differentiation.
6. Examples of independent roles would (be) leisure roles such as golfer or chess-player.
7. There (be) *independent roles*.
8. In this respect, sex roles (be) dependent and undifferentiated.
9. In many societies there (be) certain roles which cannot (adopt) by women.
10. Banton (call) roles of this kind *basic roles*.
11. Independent roles (be) highly differentiated.
12. Independent roles can (adopt) by any individual regardless of sex, age, religion, race or occupation.
13. Roles of this kind (be) more differentiated than basic roles.
14. Roles of this kind (be) differentiated less than independent roles.
15. An example of the third class might (be) the role of priest, or the role of policeman.
16. Banton also (suggest) a third class.
17. Banton (refer) to the third class as *general roles*.

#### EXERCISE G

Put the sentences you have written in Exercise F into an appropriate order within their groups. Begin with:

Banton adopts a rather different approach to role classification.

#### EXERCISE H

Form the groups of sentences you have arranged in Exercise G into a paragraph. Join sentences together to form single statements where appropriate by using relative clauses. For example:

16+17 Banton also suggests a third class, which he refers to as *general roles*.

Relate statements where appropriate by using the following expressions: *for example, thus, on the other hand*. The completed paragraph is a continuation of the reading passage.

### IV READING AND NOTE-TAKING

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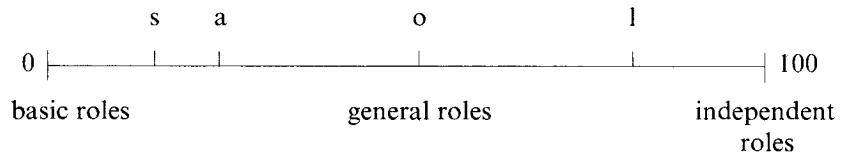
#### EXERCISE I Priming questions

Read the following passage quickly to get a general idea of its contents. Bear these questions in mind:

1. What is meant by the relative independence of different roles?
2. Are roles the same in different societies?

Banton adopts a rather different approach to role classification. He classifies them by reference to what he calls differentiation. By this Banton means the degree to which the adoption of one role restricts the individual's choice of other roles, the degree to which roles are dependent on each other. Thus, those roles which are ascribed on the basis of sex can restrict the individual's freedom to choose other roles. In many societies, for example, there are certain roles which cannot be adopted by women. In this respect, sex roles are dependent and undifferentiated. Banton calls roles of this kind *basic roles*. On the other hand, there are *independent roles*, which are highly differentiated and which can be adopted by any individual regardless of sex, age, religion, race or occupation. Examples of these would be leisure roles such as golfer or chess-player. Banton also suggests a third class, which he refers to as *general roles*, an example of which might be the role of priest, or the role of policeman. Roles of this kind are differentiated less than independent roles but more than basic ones.

Banton proposes that we might classify particular roles in a society by locating them on a scale with basic roles at one end, independent roles at the other and general roles in the middle. He illustrates this by means of the following diagram:



s = sex roles a = age roles o = occupational roles l = leisure roles

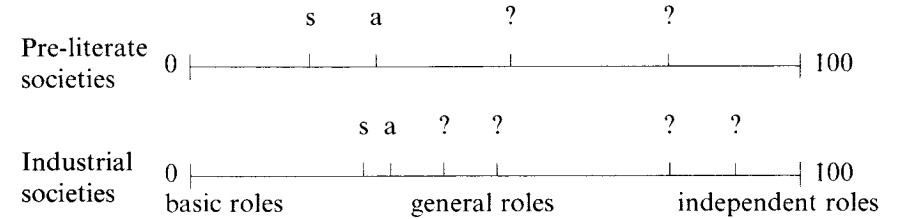
The diagram is intended to show the relative independence of different roles. The roles at the left-hand side of the scale restrict the behaviour of their incumbents, and so their freedom to adopt other roles at will, more than those which are nearer the right-hand end of the scale. As Banton puts it:

‘This scale compares the extent to which particular roles can be played independently of other roles. A person’s sex role usually affects the way people respond to him or her more than does any other role; it is relevant to conduct in a wide range of situations. A person’s occupation affects the way others behave towards him or her at a social gathering but has less influence than his or her sex. A leisure role – like golfer – has few implications outside the golf club.’ (Banton 1965, p. 33.)

The locating of different kinds of role on the scale will, of course, vary from society to society. Thus, as Banton points out, in pre-literate societies we will find that sex and age roles are less differentiated and so more dependent than they are in industrial societies. They will therefore be located further to the left of the scale. Another difference between industrial societies and pre-literate societies is that in the former there is a large number of general and independent roles. These, again, can be located on different points of the scale with reference to their degree of independence. The occupational role of priest, for example, leaves the incumbent with less freedom of choice to adopt other roles than does that of policeman. The leisure role of golfer is more independent than the role of student, which, as an occupational role, is much less restricted and much more differentiated than that of policeman. In other words, being a golfer does not prevent the incumbent from being all kinds of other things as well. The role of student is slightly more restrictive. That of policeman is even more restrictive in that the incumbent is not free to take on any other roles at will. The priest, of course, has even less social liberty of this kind.

**EXERCISE J** Notes

1. The way in which different roles vary in independence in industrial and pre-literate societies is illustrated by Banton by use of the following scales. Complete the scales by reference to the passage.

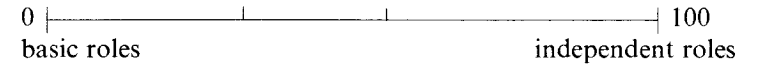


s = sex roles a = age roles o = occupational roles l = leisure roles  
 p = priest pc = policeman st = student g = golfer

2. Now label the position on the scales with reference to the information given.

(a) Society A: hunter (h) – restricted to men – certain age – special code of conduct

farmer (f) – unrestricted



(b) Society B: schoolteachers (st) – free to enter politics – university teachers (ut) – status of civil servants – not allowed to enter politics – regulations about publishing articles, extra earnings, etc.



**DISCUSSION**

Do you think Banton’s approach to the classification of roles is a valid one? What would be the relative positions on the Banton scale of the following roles in your own society?

schoolteacher, politician, soldier, tradesman, banker, religious leader, policeman.