ordered or supposed to do. They can be characterized as being jural (Leach 1965) or structural (Needham 1973). In a Dravidian terminology with exogamous lineages or clans, the prescription would be to marry a cross-cousin, as we have seen. From Leach's point of view, it is this obligation which creates the clan structure. For Needham, on the other hand, it is the structure of the terminology and of the clan system which, in order to be viable, imposes the prescriptive rule. While I have greatly simplified Leach's and Needham's points of view here, we may nevertheless conclude that this polemic is largely a chicken-and-egg question. In fact, to be operational, a rule needs some collective acceptance (jural) in order to have and to be of structural significance. Obviously, prescriptive rules are not tied merely to terminology and kinship. Consider, for example, India, where one of the prescriptive rules is to marry someone of the same caste. In contrast with proscriptive marriage rules, prescriptive rules point to a class of particular people who are acceptable for marriage. Spouses are prescribed, predefined, and predetermined by their structural position in the system. In addition to prescriptive rules, and particularly in complex systems, proscriptive rules have an important function.

A proscriptive rule defines who cannot be a spouse; it formulates an interdiction. It proceeds by layering these interdictions so as to crystallize what class of people are ideal or acceptable partners. The most elementary proscriptive rule is that of incest prohibition: siblings, parents, and children are in the great majority of cases proscribed as spouses, even though some exceptions of close kin endogamy seem to have existed, such as among European royal families, or even brother–sister marriages among Egyptian pharaohs. The basic incest prohibition rule is frequently extended to other classes of people. We have seen
p. 231 that, in Dravidian or ↳ Iroquois systems, parallel cousins (mother's sister's son, for example) are called by the terms denoting one's siblings. They are hence classified in the same category as oneself and are thus considered to be consanguines and not affines. The fact that it is the actual local words for ‘brother’ and ‘sister’ that may be applied to them indeed recalls a process of extending the incest prohibition rule to people other than actual and closely related kin.

Proscriptive marriage rules may also affect criteria other than those of class membership or terminological distinctions. The obligation of exogamy can in fact be applied or interpreted in different ways. It can be genealogical (prohibition from marrying close kin whatever their kin category), terminological (prohibition from marry people whom one calls by certain terms), spatial (e.g. prohibition from marrying people who live in the same village), or social (prohibition from marrying people from certain families, religions, roles, etc.).

In addition to the recording of discourses about marriage and marriage rules, the second source of information lies in marriage practices themselves: who marries whom, in what context, and for what obvious and less obvious reasons? Who organizes the marriage and decides on the suitability of marriage partners? Marriage practice is a far more complex matter to study than are discourses about marriage rules, because it often diverges from discourses for complex and often hidden or obscure reasons. Let me take an example from the Ngaatjatjarra and Ngaanyatjarra people of the Australian Western Desert to illustrate what is meant here.

While their prescriptive marriage rule is a cross-cousin one, there are many proscriptive rules involved as well: spatial exogamy (do not marry someone with whom you live or have lived) and genealogical exogamy (do not marry someone who is genealogically close even if the person is a cross-cousin) are at work. Ideally, the combination of the prescriptive and proscriptive rule could be formulated as follows: people marry a cross-cousin who is at least of the third degree (for example a MMMBDDD) and who is geographically distant. Ngaatjatjarra people also stress the necessity of exchange. It is, in principle at least, an elementary system where a man marries a woman whose brother is also the husband of that man's sister.

Observation and genealogies show, however, that marriages are very rarely an actual exchange of people and that the system cannot be considered to be an elementary one. Each man has several potential partners