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Folk Concepts

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Folk Concepts

Anthropology is strongly concerned with conceptual analysis in that a large part of its purpose is to penetrate and interpret cultural meanings. Unlike philosophy and psychology, both of which devote considerable attention to theories and techniques for studying concepts (which may be defined as “units of thought”), anthropology’s approach to concepts stresses cultural particularities or contingencies rather than universals. Anthropology’s distinct contribution to conceptual analysis lies in its method of eliciting concepts and meanings from people through participant-observation, which ideally involves extended and fully committed absorption into their community, during which the anthropologist not only conducts formal interviews but also aims to learn a culture at a personal level by observing and participating in community life.

This methodology, along with anthropology’s intellectual heritage in studying traditional, often nonliterate societies, makes the anthropological approach highly suited to the study of folk concepts. A folk concept is a notion that has a general, popularly understood meaning particular to a sociocultural grouping, but which has not been formally defined or standardized. Folk concepts are encoded in discourse, nonverbal behavior, and social practices rather than in published texts (such as newspapers, magazines, or books) or other media. They could, however, arise from folk interpretations of texts or other media. Folk concepts and other kinds of concepts penetrate each other in many ways. For example, the practice of saying grace before meals may combine culturally specific folk practices with textually based religious teachings. The important point is that ethnographers discover and interpret folk concepts based on the study of human behavior rather than on texts. Once folk concepts are recorded in writing or other media, they are no longer undocumented; but unless such documentation causes a change in meaning and affects the way people know the concept, they remain folk concepts.

The folklorist Alan Dundes uses the term *folk ideas* and defines such ideas as “traditional notions that a group of people have about the nature of humanity, the world, and life in general,” “unstated premises which underlie the thought and action of a given group of people” (Dundes, 2007, p. 185). They are “part of the unconscious or un-self conscious culture of a people” (Dundes, 2007, p. 189). Such folk ideas are the building blocks of a worldview. Since people are not fully conscious of them, they must be “extrapolated” from folkloric data. Dundes overlooks the fact that many unstated traditional notions underlying thought and action do not directly concern the nature of humanity, the world, or life in general, but are significant only in some more limited sphere of life.

Folk concepts may be embedded in oral tradition or spoken discourse, but it is important to realize that many concepts are not verbalized, for example, knowledge about making craft items or tying knots, or the practice of saluting the flag as a sign of respect for the country. Since interviews are carried out in language, nonverbal concepts are more difficult to interrogate than verbal concepts, and thus, they present a special challenge for ethnographers.

Emic Versus Etic and Related Distinctions

The emic/etic distinction refers to the distinction between the subjective or internal viewpoint on the one hand and the objective or external viewpoint on the other hand. This distinction, which can be most simply glossed as “insider” (emic) as compared to “outsider” (etic) outlooks, has been pondered by many anthropologists, most notably Kenneth L. Pike (who coined the terms) and Marvin Harris, and it underlies much anthropological work (Headland, Pike, & Harris, 1990). It is useful in locating the position of folk concepts in anthropological inquiry. Folk concepts are *emic*, meaning that they represent the insider’s viewpoint. The concepts anthropologists use to ground their inquiries come from an external perspective. The external perspective is called *etic*. Etic concepts are also objective, scientific, and operational, and they may yield measurable and falsifiable data. The etic perspective concerns behavior rather than folk concepts. But the etic approach is usually the starting point for the effort to elicit and explicate emic folk concepts. The emic/etic distinction underscores the need to differentiate between observed realities and informants’ statements. This does not mean that etic data are more important than emic data. Both approaches are needed in field studies, and they provide complementary data. Emic analysis of concepts is the linking of concepts to other concepts in a domain. Etic analysis is the linking of concepts to behavior and to outcomes.

Emic concepts emerge from data that are obtained initially through etic inquiries. For example, an anthropologist studying folk concepts concerning property will begin with anthropological notions about the characteristics and associations of property, such as those defined in detail in *Outline of Cultural Materials*, published by the Human Relations Area Files (Murdock, 2004). The starting definition of property must be shared by other researchers and based on objective characteristics. By asking questions about property in a vernacular language, it is possible to work up folk concepts about property in vernacular terms. These notions and definitions may express ideals, such as norms for the inheritance of real property. By observing transactions, the ethnographer may see how much these concepts guide behavior and whether actual behavior diverges from definitions and concepts. Descriptions of actual behavior pertaining to property (as locally defined) use etic terms. Emic data concerning unstated assumptions about property are treated to both emic and etic analysis.

Etic and emic knowledge are parts of different models of reality. Rappaport's distinction between the cognized model and the operational model of reality is identical to the emic/etic split. The operational model includes

elements of which the actors are unaware (such as microorganisms and trace elements) but which affect them in important ways. The cognized model, on the other hand, may well include components, such as supernaturals, whose existence cannot be demonstrated by empirical procedures, but whose putative existence moves the actors to behave in the ways they do. (Rappaport, 1979, p. 98)

Related, too, is the distinction made between beliefs and knowledge, since knowledge is that set of beliefs that are objectively true, universally applicable, and can be verified empirically. In the context of health, for example, *knowledge* might refer to concepts such as the role of the mosquito in causing malaria, while *belief* might refer to ideas about malaria being spread by "bad air" or "miasma." In environmental anthropology, too, there is a movement to document indigenous knowledge, which refers to factual, empirical knowledge of the environment and means of managing resources and to a differentiation between belief and knowledge.

Calling something a belief rather than an instance of knowledge suggests an etic perspective and implies that the phenomenon or statement represents something that is untrue or does not exist. The term *folk belief* suggests that something is erroneous and a potential obstacle to development. For example, thinking that a child's illness is caused by a spirit attack may induce parents to seek help from a spiritual healer rather than a clinic. Pelto and Pelto (1977) pointed out that differentiating between knowledge and belief based on truth value puts the ethnographer in the uncomfortable position of having to judge whether a belief is true or not, whereas the ethnographer's focus should be on the relationship between belief/knowledge and practice. For this reason, Pelto and Pelto think it may be useful for ethnographers to lump belief and knowledge into a single notion, belief/knowledge. To the extent that one wishes to emphasize that a folk belief is false, one might call such a belief a *folk fallacy*, as Dundes (2007) did. Other anthropologists, like Ellen, Parkes, and Bicker (2000), want to emphasize the content of folk concepts as practical knowledge.

Yet another important distinction of interest to anthropologists studying concepts is between cognition and affect. Belief and knowledge refer to the cognitive side. Affect refers to the emotional charge and associations that may involve the five senses. The affective side includes opinions, attitudes, and levels of emotional commitment to or rejection of something. To the extent that a folk concept has any affective dimension, part of conceptual analysis is to uncover that aspect.

The Ethnographic Method

Ethnography, the chief methodology of cultural anthropology, combines interviewing with observation and participation. The ethnographer is usually an outsider, and in many cases ethnography proceeds without an exact plan; or, if there is a plan, then it is revised or even scratched as one discovers salient topics. Ethnographic research is often undirected (at least at first), because it may be impossible to know in advance which areas will come into focus. The informal, ad hoc quality of ethnographic research permits flexibility to focus on problems of which the ethnographer was initially unaware and to constantly revise and adapt techniques of inquiry. Through the discovery of salient concepts, the ethnographic project of explaining these concepts in depth emerges.

The ethnographic method generally aims for total cultural immersion, participation, and observation in addition to interviews and any other measures or tests. To the extent possible, and depending on the topic, the ethnographer lives in the community under investigation and thus can observe or join in activities whenever they occur, rather than going by the ethnographer's schedule. The practically unattainable ideal of total immersion underscores the goal in anthropology of accounting for the total culture.

The ethnographer begins with conversations and the informal asking of questions, and only later moves on to more formal methods. One of the first considerations is to establish relationships with interview subjects (informants) who will be sources of information throughout the study. Depending on the needs of the study, a sample representing different constituents of the community needs to be recruited. In any case, it is important to have good demographic data (age, sex, marital status, etc.) and to link all interview data to informants. Typically, a few informants will stand out as persons who can help explain data obtained from other informants. Some informants may stand out as "experts" in a given domain (hunting, for example). In such cases, it is useful to know by what standard the person is an expert and whether many others in the community agree with such an assessment. The variation in knowledge among individual persons, for example between experts and laymen, can be tested by using structured interviews. Garro used illness terms she had previously elicited and sentence frames ("Does ____ come from eating lots of 'hot' foods?") to examine consensus and variation in knowledge (or belief) between curers and noncurers in a Tarascan village.

Choice of informants is an important part of ethnography and needs to be analyzed rather than taken for granted, since informants are rarely selected randomly in a community study. One should check how representative of the community an individual is. One way to do this is to work with a broad variety of persons along with one's key informants.

Concept Elicitation

The goal of ethnography, as far as the study of folk concepts is concerned, is to explain how these concepts are understood and used by participants in their context of action and in relation to other concepts. Before they can be analyzed, concepts first must be identified. In a naturalistic setting, concepts may come to the ethnographer's attention without direct interrogation. Once these concepts have been discovered and identified, the ethnographer can develop hypotheses about them that can be tested through interviews or conversations with informants.

For topics that rarely come up in normal conversations, it is possible to start with interviews only if one already knows which concept one wants to study. Naomi Quinn (2005), who studied American folk concepts concerning marriage and commitment, used such an approach. As an American woman, she already knew a great deal about her chosen topic. But her interviews were open-ended and undirected, with the only directive being that interviewees talked about their marriages. From these interviews, a small number of themes emerged that Quinn analyzed as metaphors.

Quinn used interviews to elicit information that would come out in ordinary talk but where regular participant-observation was not feasible, since marriage is not a subject that ordinarily comes up in public discourse. Interviewers took note of keywords and phrases used by interviewees along with paralinguistic and kinesthetic cues. They let interviewees talk with a minimum of interruptions or questions, with the hope of getting people to open up about their reasoning processes as shown in notions about cause and effect. Afterward, they guided each subject through a checklist of questions about all aspects of marriage in general, and their own marriages in particular, that had come up in the previous interviews.

In such an approach, concepts emerge through conversation and the informal asking of questions. The informal approach moves to a more formal method when terms or expressions are compiled that encapsulate what the ethnographer thinks are concepts, and interview subjects (informants) are asked questions about each term. In taking notes on the interview, the ethnographer records observations about nonverbal behavior as well as verbal answers. In many cases, it is useful to obtain information on affect and personal experiences relating to a concept.

Part of elicitation, beyond casual interviewing, is to get at those aspects of concepts that are below the surface of consciousness. Complex concepts are not explained just through words; one is informed about them through observation, practice, and sometimes participation. Anthropologists must strive to maintain objectivity in documenting not only their informants'

subjectivity but also their own in this learning process, accounting for the effects of their presence in the mix.

The ethnographic method is chiefly descriptive and observational rather than experimental. However, certain experiments can be done with informants by having them perform a certain task or respond to a list of questions. The more formalized an ethnographic approach is, the closer it approximates experimental science procedures. An example of a semiexperimental approach is to have an informant name every plant he knows, while counting the number of plants he cannot name within a circumscribed plot of land (Bernstein, Ellen, & Antaran, 1997).

A methodological problem is that a vocabulary is needed to elaborate a concept, even though the concept may not be a verbal one. For example, concepts about food involve the five senses as well as actions and behaviors involving food preparation, storage, eating, and so forth. The terminology of food may not reflect the full richness of the concepts. Yet, this vocabulary is an opening-up point for interrogation about food concepts.

Holy and Stuchlik (1983) maintained that the study of folk concepts (“notions”) is rather straightforward in terms of data collection but that the interpretation of these notions poses problems in terms of relating them to actions. People use and know about many concepts that they cannot define. The concepts’ meanings are obscure and inscrutable, even though they are used in actual practice. These complex concepts may be “fundamental notions.” Boyer (1990) gave as an example in the Fang concept of *evur*, which is generally glossed as “witchcraft substance” or “witchcraft organ” but which he says is far more complex, since “people have extremely vague views on what *evur* actually consists of and the mechanism of the action” (p. 26), even though they are clear about the effects of *evur* and the social relations revolving around *evur*-related actions. Boyer finds that these vague kinds of concepts, which he considers “vacuous,” tend to be the focus of traditional symbolism and practices. He notes that there are three kinds of discourse in which such concepts occur: common discourse, gossip, and expert discourse; only the last is both definite and reliable. Most people use such a concept and its verbal label without knowing what it really means. The same can be said about technical knowledge that is not mystified: For example, people use notions of electricity and telephony without knowing or understanding the science and technology underlying them. The “anthropology of experience” (Turner & Bruner, 1986) takes into account the processes by which concepts are learned and the feelings associated with learning and transmitting them.

When starting research, the ethnographer knows neither the criteria nor the limits of a domain. The “free listing” approach can be used to elicit terms that can provide information on the domain. By asking different kinds of informants to list all the kinds of X they know, it is possible to determine the salience of certain items and how knowledge of them is distributed within the society. This may help the ethnographer map the concept. More formal analysis can be used to

determine the perceived similarities and differences between terms within a conceptual domain using sorting. Through successive sorts, it is possible to discern the clustering of data into taxonomies (Weller & Romney, 1988).

Informal interviews can be used to ask about the extent of a concept. In asking about spirits, for example, one might ask the informant to name every spirit known to him or her, along with the spirits' attributes and locations and any other information about them. If the ethnographer can obtain a comprehensive list using this technique, then the process is reversed by asking informants about each item (in this case a spirit entity) on the list. Such a method, when given to a range of informants, will provide a sense of the extent of a concept in its domain.

Symbolic and Cognitive Anthropology

A focus on cultural meanings spawned movements in cognitive and symbolic anthropology, both of which led theoretical developments and ethnographic practices in the 1960s and 1970s. Present approaches to the anthropology of folk concepts and meanings are descended from these earlier schools of thought. (Indeed, certain anthropology departments were closely identified with either cognitive or symbolic anthropology.) Cognitive anthropologists zeroed in on language usage, but their aim was to uncover the classificatory principles such as taxonomies and paradigms underlying identifiable domains such as property, kinship, or the spirit world. While the terms just used are etic, cognitive anthropologists sought to lay bare emic domains using linguistic models. Cognitive anthropologists viewed ethnographic description as specifying what one needs to know in order to function appropriately within a given role in a society as well as what is appropriate knowledge for behavior.

Agar (1966), a cognitive anthropologist, advised that to obtain information on folk concepts, one should get informants to contrast terms or sort them into categories or give them values (e.g., numbers on a scale, rank order based on a given criterion). The field of meanings of concepts is based on relations between terms. For example, A is a kind of B, A is used for B, A is part of B, A is a process of B. Questions are asked in the form of a frame, a sentence with a blank word to be filled in, for example, "A _____ is a kind of car," or "A father's sister's husband is called _____."

The symbolic anthropologists had a somewhat different agenda. The field of symbolic anthropology emphasized salient concepts that were thought to symbolize other things and have pervasive meanings relating to core values and ultimate realities. A classic example is the *mudyi* ("milk") tree, which has a variety of emotionally compelling but contradictory significations in Ndembu culture, as analyzed by Turner (1967). Pointing out that the *mudyi* tree combines two polar aspects of meaning (natural/biological and sociomoral), he identifies the *mudyi* tree as a dominant symbol. Similarly, Ortner looks for focal, master, or "key" symbols in

a society. As for how we would know that a symbol is salient, Ortner provides some helpful guidelines: (1) The natives tell us X is important, (2) the natives seem positively or negatively aroused by X rather than indifferent to it, (3) X comes up in many different contexts, (4) X is culturally elaborated through vocabulary, folklore, and so on, and (5) numerous cultural restrictions surround X. The symbols of interest to symbolic anthropologists sum up and condense pervasive cultural themes and may metaphorically extend to views about life and the world.

Early cognitive anthropology was heavily linguistic, with language categories assumed to be equivalent to conceptual categories. Subsequent anthropologists in the cognitivist tradition, such as Maurice Bloch (1998), warn against a view of cognition that relies mainly on language, and they recommend the theory of connectionism, in which thought is seen to occur in clumps with multiple interconnections working simultaneously rather than sequentially. Bloch uses such an approach to explicate Zafimaniry concepts of the person, gender, and the natural environment, arguing that this knowledge, which “goes without saying” in Zafimaniry society, is best learned through ordinary participant observation rather than interrogation. Cultural knowledge is only partly lexical and is also tactile, visual, aural, gustatory, and olfactory. This view is shared by William Merrill (1988) in his study of Rarámuri (Tarahumara) religion, particularly concepts of the soul. Merrill found that folk concepts were tacit rather than explicit and were transmitted mainly through nonverbal practices such as community events, drinking parties, and healing. Depth psychology techniques akin to psychoanalysis may also be used to elicit folk concepts that are not verbalized. Ultimately, even these techniques rely on verbal statements. As a result, some ethnographers have attempted to learn techniques themselves through apprenticeship. Such an approach seems appropriate in gaining access to knowledge about arts such as weaving, sculpting, or dance.

The nonverbalizable concept is perhaps a material object, either crafted, like the Hopi *kachina*, or occurring in nature, such as the aforementioned *mudyi* tree in Ndembu culture. The ideology surrounding such objects can be complex. Among the Taman, the stones used by shamans in curing patients are supposed to be neither natural nor manmade but to have been transformed from pathogenic spirits during initiation ceremonies. These stones are central to healing practices in Taman society; their individual identities are revealed to practitioners in dreams (Bernstein, 1997).

Symbolic anthropology, previously concerned with abstract and disembodied meanings, has evolved into interpretive anthropology, with an eye open to practices, embodiment, and power relations. But the notions of symbolic and cognitive anthropology have both come to seem outdated, as succeeding generations of anthropologists search for fresh approaches to cultural meanings that will avoid the shortcomings of those fields: for cognitive anthropology, an

exposition of trivial domains; and for symbolic anthropology, a sense of self-indulgence and unclear demarcations between folk concepts and the ethnographer's own ideas and interpretations. Symbolic and cognitive anthropology have at times joined forces, and both fields can be revitalized by expanding their horizons (Colby, Fernandez, & Kronenfeld, 1981), but future research on folk concepts will probably draw on theories of meaning and knowledge originating outside anthropology.

The Breadth of Topics

Anthropology's involvement with folk concepts has spanned the gamut from "exotic" to "mundane" topics. Many scholars have observed and complained about anthropology's stress on peculiar, exotic phenomena in the cultures they study and particularly on the conceptual systems underlying behavior. Keesing (1985) maintained that the tendency in anthropology to translate folk concepts as nouns rather than verbs gives them a mystical aura they would not otherwise have. This has the result of attributing to people's belief systems invisible beings and mysterious substances. Folk concepts can get reified as well, because they are considered "traditional," which implies that they do not change over time. Ethnographic studies carried over a given stretch of time cannot show whether or not a concept ever changes.

The more exotic areas of inquiry have involved concepts of illness in which folk terms for illnesses do not correspond to a single illness as defined in scientific medicine. This is often because the principles by which illness is defined are different from those used in scientific medicine. A classic study by Frake (1961) on Subanun concepts and vocabulary about skin ailments reflected classificatory principles of diagnostic criteria and levels of specificity. Through interrogation, Frake was able to reveal the structure of Subanun concepts about these illnesses. Even more exotic are culture-bound syndromes, which are specific to certain ethnic groups. These include *amok* in the Philippines ("running amuck"), *susto* ("magical fright") in Hispanic America, *latah* in Malaysia, and *windigo* psychosis among North American Indian tribes. Although these may be said to be psychiatric disorders, they do not translate into any standard psychiatric categories and have culturally specific, often paradoxical, symptomatology. An illness like *windigo* psychosis, which involves humans who are transformed into monsters who have cannibalistic urges, can only be understood in terms of folk concepts. Other culture-bound syndromes also have bizarre characteristics: *Koro* is characterized by a fear that the genitals or breasts will retract into the body, resulting in death, and *latah* is characterized by the blurring out of obscenities upon being startled (Simons & Hughes, 1985). These illnesses raise questions not only for anthropology (in the interplay and entanglement between emic and etic) but also in psychology and psychiatry about the ability to generalize cross-culturally about psychological processes and mental illnesses.

Another classic field for the study of folk concepts is the explanation of misfortune, including illness and death, in terms of magical human causation. This is obviously connected to the work on folk medical concepts. Many have wondered whether a belief in witches and sorcerers is rational or whether it expresses an alternative rationality. The study of the rationality of beliefs in witches led to the question of whether foreign cultures can be understood at all. E. E. Evans-Pritchard's 1937 study of witch beliefs among the Azande people of the Sudan set off a longstanding debate among philosophers about the rationality of such beliefs and the comprehensibility of foreign cultural belief systems (Horton & Finnegan, 1973; Wilson, 1970). In addition to concepts about magical causation through witchcraft and sorcery, folk concepts about time have received considerable attention (Munn, 1992). These investigations reveal folk metaphysics.

A more mundane area for investigation of folk concepts has been the area of kinship studies, with anthropologists studying the principles whereby people were reckoned to be related to one another, and the meaning of vernacular kinship terms in both theory and practice. Here, too, anthropologists have sought to define dimensions of contrast and components of meaning. Much of the main research in the "ethnoscience" tradition of cognitive anthropology used componential analysis to account for levels of contrast used to define kinship terms. Any given language's list of kinship terms is small enough that an entire vocabulary can be identified, and one can study the dimensions of contrast between terms. The study of kinship concepts extends outward toward research on concepts concerning gender, age, and interpersonal relations, and inward toward concepts of the person or self.

As with conceptual analysis itself, the concept of the person or self is most frequently approached from the angles of philosophy and psychology. Anthropologists have challenged the supposition that the concept of the self is universal, noting that it is culturally shaped in many ways. Anthropology's role in studying the concept of the person is to reveal cultural patterns in these notions. One of the first such studies was A. Irving Hallowell's (1967) work on the Ojibwa Indians. More recent work has paid attention to notions about emotions, intentionality, action, hierarchy (as in race or caste), thought, and consciousness. Some, like Howell (1989), have linked concepts of the nature of the human being to larger cosmological systems and notions about life in traditional societies.

Biographical interviews, as well as folklore and origin myths, can yield data about culturally specific senses of the self. In some theories, the self is a social construct rather than a psychological one, and in some ways, the self is culturally constituted. According to Hallowell, culture provides multiple orientations through language: self-orientation, object-orientation, spatiotemporal orientation, motivation, and norms. Concepts can also relate to interpersonal relations, as with jealousy and commitment.

Another area for investigation of folk concepts has been the understanding of the natural environment, including concepts about plants and animals—how they are perceived, categorized, and classified. While ethnobiology includes some exotic topics, such as supernatural characteristics associated with plants and animals, it is more frequently concerned with utilitarian issues, such as the usability of trees in construction or firewood. Most significant in ethno-biology has been the study of the hierarchical ordering of concepts and vocabulary about plants and animals from the most general to the most specific levels (Berlin, 1992). The study of ethnobiology also encompasses empirical knowledge about the natural environment and traditional means of managing resources (Ellen et al., 2000).

Mention should also be made of studies of sociopolitical folk concepts: value systems and notions about race, ethnicity, and other social groupings. A classic groundbreaking ethnographic study of sociopolitical concepts in a nonstate society is Edmund Leach's *Political Systems of Highland Burma* (1954), which looked at contrasting ideologies and theories of rival groupings about themselves and their enemies within a single larger society, the Kachin.

Folklore is an obvious source of data on folk concepts. Besides stories, legends, folktales, myths, proverbs, and axioms, data also come from jokes, riddles, songs, superstitions, and other genres. In addition to verbal and narrative arts, there are games, charms, handicrafts, and other nonverbal genres that come under the larger category of folklore. All of these involve conceptual systems.

Schema Theory

In understanding a cultural concept, it is not enough to know only what it identifies; one must also know the expectations, feelings, and motivations regarding it. In other words, part of the meaning of a cultural concept concerns associations causing happiness, anxiety, and other emotions. The full meaning of a concept is situated in a larger semantic field. In studying folk concepts, one also wants to know how much what it means or represents is valued, how much it is shared, whether it is considered true (e.g., Santa Claus is a ubiquitous and well-defined folkloric person representing many things, but he is not believed to be a real person), whether it is thought to represent the whole society, and whether it is associated with any restrictions or prohibitions.

The contemporary anthropological view of the meaning of concepts concerns schemas (or schemata), or cultural models. Schemas are the way people understand whole scenes. They are the unspoken meanings embedded in cultural models, and they include not only what a concept identifies but also the expectations, feelings, and motivations surrounding it. A schema is a simplified scenario; it may be well theorized, inarticulate, or somewhere in between. To understand the notion of schemas, one can imagine observing a high school setting and seeing

students dressed in various ways, wearing different kinds of accoutrements and accessories, and having different styles of behavior and speech. A knowledgeable informant might identify numerous subcultures among the students, each associated with certain television shows, kinds of music, preferences in food, automobiles, and many other things. These associations are the schemas. Schemas enable us to make sense of artistic works, such as paintings and photography, since they provide narrative stories implicit in a scene. The association of ideas in schemas works automatically in members of a culture (or subculture) but must be explained to outsiders and those who, like ethnographers, visitors, or journalists, are learning the culture. To master a kinesthetic procedure (such as weaving), it is necessary to practice it rather than just have it explained.

From interviews, it is possible to develop schemas. Agar and Hobbs (1985) gave an example of how such analysis might proceed in the case of a person telling the story of how he became a burglar. Their analysis shows causation and action in terms of behavior and identifies elements of the schema: hustling, fencing stolen goods, being ratted out, getting busted, and so forth. Quinn (2005), as noted above, also discovered and formulated schemas that she found embedded in narratives. She found the work to be highly laborious, since it required the collection of extended interviews, all of which needed to be transcribed. Only when she pored over multiple transcripts did the schemas emerge. In her analysis of schemas, Quinn reconstructed implicit, culturally shared assumptions from statements.

Psychological and anthropological approaches to schemas are complementary. Unlike the psychological study of mental models, the anthropological approach used by Strauss and Quinn (1997) among others (Casson, 1983) looks for shared cultural models that underlie and affect an individual's constructs. Psychologists, unlike anthropologists, examine the concept-formation process at an individual level.

In Shore's (1996) complex taxonomy of cultural models (his term for what others have called schemas), conceptual models, which he combined with expressive models, are but one of several functional forms of models, the others being orientational, spatial, and task-oriented. Conceptual/expressive models he divided into classificatory models, ludic models, ritual and dramatic models, and theories. For Shore, the most important cultural model is the foundational schema, which organizes and links other schemas together.

D'Andrade (1984) presented a readily accessible example of a cultural construct: the concept of "success" in American culture. D'Andrade asserted that success can be understood as a domain that can be elucidated through an explication of related terms that are components of success: accomplishment, recognition, hard work, prestige, self-satisfaction, and others. The model of success is used in many schemas, in that we can think of things that lead to success in a given domain of life. Within the domain of success itself, we can find putative causal relationships

among terms. For example, hard work leads to recognition and is accompanied by self-satisfaction.

Future Directions

As an older, established academic field, anthropology is being swept up in a movement of new interdisciplinary formations and is being absorbed by other disciplines more than it absorbs other disciplines. As such, the future of anthropology is in its contributions to emerging fields of knowledge. The ethnographic approach to concepts fills a gap in a broad multidisciplinary science of cognition by focusing on culturally shared meanings and models. Possible contributions lie in science and technology studies, environmental science, and health studies, along with more traditional applied fields such as management and education. The ethnographic approach to folk concepts also has applications in consumer research and in settings such as offices, hospitals, and libraries, and in city and regional planning.

The emerging field of knowledge organization, which grew out of library and information science, is in a position to take advantage of the anthropological approach to concepts. Knowledge organization research not only tends to focus on documented knowledge but also recognizes undocumented modes of knowledge. Hjørland's (2009) survey of concept theory, in connection with frameworks for the theory of knowledge (empiricism, rationalism, historicism, and pragmatism), illustrates how the documentation and study of folk concepts fit into broader intellectual movements.

The growth of social networking over the Internet presents new opportunities and challenges for the ethnographic study of folk concepts in cyberspace. Sites such as Second Life create virtual worlds in which users interact through the use of avatars. These sites provide opportunities for persons to communicate, collaborate, and present themselves in ways never before possible (Turkle, 1995). In doing ethnography in such a space, anthropologists might choose to create their own avatars and interact with users in the virtual environment rather than try to meet informants in the flesh. Such an unorthodox approach can be justified by reasoning that the entire user community exists online rather than in "real life" and may never meet face to face.

In addition, many Web sites allow users to tag objects and ideas and to relate to others interested in the same domain (Weinberger, 2007). Web 2.0 technology has spawned social networking sites, such as Delicious and Flickr, that encourage users to label content with their own tags. Such tags have evolved into *folksonomies*, user-driven classification systems that bring out nonhierarchical relationships between individual tags. The concepts emerging from such environments are part of new cultural formations that transcend fixed locations. Such environments lend themselves to ethnographic research strategies, even though the particular

techniques are vastly different from those of traditional ethnography. In a remarkable study, Jenkins (2001) was able to observe the underground culture of pedophiles entirely by gaining access to online child pornography bulletin board systems and reading messages posted by participants without downloading illegal images. Of course, the study of cyberculture can also be integrated in to, or added on to, more traditional research methods. Ethnographers can also participate in emerging forms of interaction based on new information technologies, such as text messaging, instant messaging, and the exchange of digital audio, image, and audiovisual files.

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