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HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE
OF THE EMIC/ETIC DISTINCTION

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Cultural materialism shares with other scientific strategies an epistemology which seeks to restrict fields of inquiry to events, entities, and relationships that are knowable by means of explicit, logico-empirical, inductive-deductive, quantifiable public procedures or "operations" subject to replication by independent observers. This restriction necessarily remains an ideal aim rather than a rigidly perfected condition, for it is recognized that total operationalization would cripple the ability to state principles, relate theories, organize empirical tests. It is a far cry, however, from the recognition that unoperationalized, vernacular, and metaphysical terms are necessary for the conduct of scientific inquiry to Feyerabend-like invitations (13,14) to throw off all operational restraints. The plain fact of the matter is that many social scientists literally do not know what they are talking about and cannot communicate with each other because they cannot ground any significant portion of their discourse in a coherent set of describable observational practices. Under such circumstances, it is sheer obscurantism to promote the further expansion of unoperationalized terms.

Mind Versus Behavior Stream

Cultural materialism rests on a second epistemological postulate which is uniquely relevant to the operationalization of the broad class of phenomena—the field of inquiry—with which it is concerned. This postulate holds that there are two fundamentally distinct kinds of sociocultural entities, events, and relationships.

On the one hand there are the phenomena which comprise the human behavior stream (1)—all the body motions and environmental effects produced by such motions, large and small, of all the human beings who have ever lived. On the other hand there are all the thoughts and feelings which we human beings experienced within our minds. The existence of this duality is guaranteed by the distinctive operations that groups of observers must employ to make statements about each realm. To describe the universe of human mental experiences, one must employ operations that are capable of penetrating inside of other people's heads (16). But to describe body motions and the external effects produced by

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body motions, it is not necessary to find out what is going on inside of other people's heads—at least it is not necessary if one adopts the epistemological stance of cultural materialism. For reasons to be made clear in a moment, the operations suitable for discovering patterns with respect to what goes on inside of people's heads have come to be known as "emic" operations, while those which are suitable for discovering patterns in the behavior stream have come to be known as "etic" operations.

The Central Question of Materialist Epistemology

To speak of a choice between materialist and idealist strategies presupposes that we are capable of identifying "material" sociocultural entities independently of the ideational constructions that reside in or emanate from the minds of the people being studied. How is this independence to be achieved?

In *The German Ideology,* Marx & Engels (37) proposed to upend the study of sociocultural phenomena by focusing on the material conditions that constrain human life. Integral to this materialist upending was knowledge of "real" people situated as they "really are":

> The Social structure and the state are continually evolving out of the life process of definite individuals, but of individuals not as they may appear in their own or other people's imagination, but as they really are. . . .
>
> In direct contrast to German philosophy which descends from heaven to earth, here we ascend from earth to heaven. That is to say, we do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived in order to arrive at men in the flesh. We set out from real active men. . . .
>
> In the first method of approach, the starting point is consciousness (mistaken) for the real living individual; in the second, it is the real, living individuals themselves, as they are in actual life. . . .(37, pp. 13–15).

What did Marx & Engels mean by "individuals as they really are," "real active men," and "real living individuals"? What did they mean by "actual life"? We are only told that real men and women are those who "are effective, produce materially and are active under definite limits . . . and conditions independent of their will."

It is clear that the main concern here is to draw a distinction between the entities and processes of social life that are real and important to the participants versus entities and processes which by virtue of their scientific status are capable of efficaciously explaining (and changing) social thoughts and activities, regardless of whether they are real or important from the participant's point of view. However, the terminology in which Marx & Engels propounded this distinction is inadequate, especially in its conjunction of the ideal with the imaginary or unreal, and of the real with materiality. Cultural materialism, like all empirical sciences, seeks to separate thoughts about wholly imaginary entities, such as Carlos Castaneda's 100 foot gnats and flying shamans, from thoughts about empirically known gnats and the effects of gravity on people who jump out of windows. But cultural materialism rejects an implication that the thoughts themselves are "unreal" or that matter (whatever that might be) is

more real than ideas. Recognition is also accorded the fact that purely imag-
inary, unreal entities can be cognized by ethnographers as well as by native
participants. The statement of the basic materialist principles of sociocultural
determinism rests instead upon the separation of conscious or unconscious
autocognitions of actors from the conscious cogitations of the scientifically
informed observer. In Lenin's words: "In all social formations . . . people are
not conscious of what kind of social relations are being formed. . . . Social
consciousness *reflects* social being—that is Marx's teaching" (34, p. 335). What
is the nature of this social consciousness (or unconsciousness) as opposed to the
nature of "social being"? I believe that the discussion of etic and emic options
can make a decisive contribution to the clarification of this central episte-
mological problem (which Lenin, by attacking positivism, failed to solve).

Operationally, emic refers to the presence of an actual or potential interactive
context in which ethnographer and informant meet and carry on a discussion
about a particular domain. This discussion is deemed productive to the extent
that the ethnographer discovers principles that represent and account for the
way in which that domain is organized or structured in the mental life of that
informant. As Ward Goodenough has written, emics is "The method of finding
where something makes a difference for one's informants" (21, p. 144; see also
20). Emic operations necessarily result in the identification of phenomena and
structures that correspond to what Marx & Engels were writing about when they
rejected that form of philosophy that sets out from and effectively confines itself
to what men imagine, conceive, and think. (What they "say" and "narrate"
requires separate consideration, see below).

The operational meaning of etics, in contrast, is defined by the logically
nonessential status of actor-observer elicitation. Interaction between an-
thropologist and actors is deemed productive only to the extent that principles of
organization or structure that exist outside of the minds of the actors have been
discovered. These principles may in fact be contrary to the principles elicitable
from the actors themselves with respect to the manner in which they organize
their imaginations, concepts, and thoughts in the identified domain. It is clear
that the analytic results of an etic strategy correspond to what Marx & Engels
intended by "real living individuals" as they are in "actual life." Once again,
however, let me categorically reject any notion of superior and inferior realities
associated with emic and etic epistemological options. Everything that we
human beings experience or do is real. But everything we experience or do is not
equally effective for explaining why we experience what we experience and do
what we do.

Origin of the Terms "Etic" and "Emic"

"Etics" and "emics" are neologisms coined by the linguist Kenneth Pike from
the suffixes of the words phon*etic* and phon*emic* in his book, *Language in
Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior* (42). Phonetic
accounts of the sounds of a language are based upon a taxonomy of the body

parts active in the production of speech utterances and their characteristic environmental effects in the form of acoustic waves. Thus the linguist discriminates between voiced and unvoiced sounds, depending on the activity of the vocal cords; between aspirated and nonaspirated sounds, depending on the activity of the glottis; between labials and dentals depending on the activity of the tongue and teeth. On the other hand, phonemic accounts of the sounds of a language are based on the implicit or unconscious system of sound contrasts which native speakers have inside of their heads and which they employ to identify meaningful utterances in their language.

Pike's stated intention in coining these terms was to apply a single comprehensive research strategy to language and behavior based on analogies with the concepts and principles of structural linguistics, the school of language study responsible for the development of the concept of the phoneme. In structural linguistics, phonemes—the minimal units of contrastive sounds found in a particular language—are distinguished from nonsignificant or nondiscriminatory sounds and from each other by means of a simple operational test. If one sound substituted for another in the same sound context results in a change of meaning from that of one word to another, the two sounds exemplify (belong to the class of) two different phonemes. Sounds enjoy the status of phonemes, not because they are inherently (whatever that may mean) different, but because native speakers perceive them to be in "contrast" when one is substituted for the other.

Pike's Behavioremes

What Pike tried to do was to apply the principles by which linguists discover phonemes, morphemes, and other emic units of language behavior to the discovery of emic units—which he called "behavioremes"—in the behavior stream. To do this Pike recast the specific bimodal principles of *complementary* and *contrastive* distribution into a trimodal form of analysis involving what he called (*a*) *feature,* (*b*) *manifestation,* and (*c*) *distribution* modes. (*a*) An emic unit or "eme" in language or more general behavior has certain features which stand in contrast with other features. In language, the fundamental criterion of contrast is a difference of *form-meaning* attached to an utterance. For nonverbal behavior-stream events, it is a difference in form-purpose associated with an activity. Emes viewed in their feature mode are thus form-meaning or form-purpose composites. (*b*) The manifestation mode covers the fact that emes comprise classes whose members or variants—like the allophones of phonemes —manifest themselves in different forms in different contexts. (*c*) Finally, the distribution mode refers to the fact that emes occur in particular "slots." Thus, analogous to the restrictions on the occurrence of morphemes, there are behavioral distributions such that, to use Pike's examples, orange juice normally precedes cereal at breakfast, or the collection plate follows the sermon at a church service.

By identifying behavioremes, Pike hoped to extend the research strategy which had proved effective in the analysis of languages to the study of the

behavior stream. Pike never considered the possibility of studying the behavior stream in its own right, apart from what it meant to the people whose behavior it exhibited. The paradigmatic unity which he sought was a unity of reduction, not of synthesis. Pike rejected virtually without discussion the possibility that an etic approach to the behavior stream might yield more interesting gener-alizations than an etic approach to language, and conversely that an emic approach to the behavior stream might yield far less interesting results than an emic approach to language.

To the extent that one could even talk about the existence of etic behavior stream units, they were for Pike necessary evils, mere stepping stones to higher emic realms. Observers necessarily begin their analysis of behavior stream events with etic categories, but the whole thrust of their analytical task is the replacement of such categories with the emic units that constitute structured systems within the minds of the social actors. In Pike's words (42, p. 38): "etic data provide access into the system—the starting point of analysis" . . . "the initial etic description gradually is refined, and is ultimately—in principle, but probably never in practice—replaced by one which is totally emic" (p. 39).

This position clashes with the epistemological assumptions of cultural materi-alism. In the cultural materialist research strategy, etic analysis is not a stepping stone to the discovery of emic structures, but to the discovery of etic structures. The intent is neither to convert etics to emics nor emics to etics, but rather to account for the divergence and convergence of both etic and emic structures.

Emics, Meaning and Purpose

Pike's scheme in its totality amounts to nothing less than the analogizing of every level of sociocultural phenomena to the levels of linguistic analysis. Society as a whole is viewed as the analogue of a language. In its feature mode, language has the purpose: "fruitful communication between its members," whereas in its feature mode society's purpose is "maintaining orderliness of personal interaction" (42, p. 644). Kinship groups are compared with phonemes and voluntary associations are like morphemes:

> As phonemic units can arbitrarily be joined to form morpheme units such as *cat* and *dog,* so individuals who in their selection cross over kin group lines may be joined into various units for particular purposes. . . . The purpose of such a group (e.g. a football team), when it is specifically goal-oriented, has this lexical-like flavor, as over against the much more diffuse purpose of a kinship group (42, p. 647).

Grammatical rules are paralleled by social rules defining slots or statuses. The meaning of the rule is the role defined in terms of expected behavior. Sentences have their analogues in the total activity of such groups as college football teams which are organized for the purpose of "playing the game according to the written rules" (p. 649).

This brief recapitulation of Pike's grand design should suffice to dispose of the opinion expressed by linguists that my use of the term emic and etic is deviant. Mridula Durbin (11), for example, claims that emic ought to be restricted to units

identified strictly on the basis of the criteria of contrastive and complementary distributions. Taking a kind of "strict constructionist" view of things, Durbin argues that the "significant feature of the phonemic model"—the major achievement of structural linguistics—"is that the functional criterion of classification is operationally shifted to distributional criteria" (11, p. 384). What this shift comprised historically was that structural linguistics sought to minimize the importance of knowing the meaning of an utterance as a step in its phonemic analysis. Not so for Pike, however. Pike explicitly rejects the "extreme of the 'fundamental purely formal definition (associated with the work of Bloomfield and Zelig Harris) in which a morpheme is an arrangement of phonemes' . . . without the meaning as part of the basic definition itself" (42, p. 185). In other words, he explicitly rejected Durbin's "significant feature of the phonemic model."

Pike repeatedly insists that in their feature mode, emes involve composite form-meaning contrasts and that neither form nor meaning alone suffices for the identification of language or behavior stream units. Thus for Pike, emic analysis is certainly not tied to the strict distributional criteria characteristics of the phonemic level. If it had been so severely restricted, he could never have proposed the grandiose scheme of analogies a small part of which I have set forth above.

While I do not reject Pike's emphasis on the importance of the form-meaning, form-purpose composite, I insist that the essential operational ingredient in the emic approach remains the matter of "contrast," as exemplified in phonemic analysis. On this level—the level of phonemes—there is no question of the specific meaning of an eme. The phoneme (p) doesn't mean anything; hence, the form-meaning composite (p) consists merely of a particular sound and its contrast to other sounds in the minds of native speakers of English. The crucial criterion is not whether the contrast is a contrast of specific meanings, but whether with or without specific meanings, the contrast is significant because it is loaded with significance (carries meaning) inside the heads of the actors. Any language unit that observers deem to be contrastive because native actors carry out discrimination of similarity and difference *inside their heads* on the basis of its presence or absence is an emic unit.

Burling's Critique

Following Pike's usage, therefore, I previously defined emics and etics as follows:

> Emic statements refer to logico-empirical systems whose phenomenal distinctions or "things" are built up out of contrasts and discriminations significant, meaningful, real, accurate, or in some other fashion regarded as appropriate by the actors themselves (23, p. 571).
>
> Etic statements depend upon phenomenal distinctions judged appropriate by the community of scientific observers (p. 575).

Like Durbin, Robbins Burling condemns this usage as non-Bloomfieldian:

> By these definitions, the Bloomfieldian phoneme is not an "emic" unit, since the
> Bloomfieldians were firmly, even obstinately, opposed to any sort of mentalistic
> interpretation of language (9, p. 826).

All this proves, however, is that neither Pike nor I are followers of Bloomfield.

Moreover, despite Bloomfield's desire to exclude specific meanings from the
definition of phoneme, the fact remains that (*a*) the operation of minimal pairs
requires elicitation of judgments of same or different from native speakers; and
(*b*) that even Bloomfieldian phonemes had to be capable of being combined into
utterances that were meaningful, real, appropriate, etc to the native speakers
(regardless of whether or not the linguist knew what the utterances meant)! It
seems to me difficult to deny the mentalistic character of phonemic distinctions
even if Bloomfield did wish to reduce the mental component to a minimum. As
Emmon Bach has put it:

> The data of linguistics are not mere physical events, but physical events together with
> judgments of native speakers about these events . . . language as a cultural product
> cannot be adequately studied apart from the native speaker's judgments.
>
> The native speaker judges some utterances as being repetitions of the same sen-
> tence, phrase or word. And it is only the native speaker's judgment that can tell us
> about this fact (2, p. 34).

It is true that at one point Pike emphasizes the importance of distributional data
in identifying the purpose of a nonverbal activity: "We assume that the basic
purpose or meaning of a nonverbal activity, like that of a verbal one, is to be
detected by the objective evaluation of objective distributional data of elicited
responses" (42, p. 157). What this means is that the purpose of an activity may
not be directly elicitable from the actors.

The analogous situation in language analysis is the establishment of the
meaning of *ly* in lovingly. The actors may not consciously detect the meaning,
but the linguist can infer it on the basis of the recurrence of *ly* at the end of verbs.
Similarly, actors may not consciously detect the purpose of some activities, but
by noting their distribution and by *eliciting* responses concerning their appropri-
ateness in various contexts, observers may endow them with a specific purpose.
At no point, however, does Pike state that direct elicitations of purposes are
operationally forbidden. Ultimately, to paraphrase Bach, it is only the native
actor's judgment that can tell us that some acts are repetitions of the same
behavioreme.

How To Get Inside of People's Heads

The question of whether a construct is emic or etic depends on whether it
describes events, entities, or relationships whose physical locus is in the heads
of the social actors or in the stream of behavior. In turn, the question of whether
or not an entity is inside or outside some social actor's head depends on the
operations employed to get at it. Pike formulated an operational definition of
emic and etic. "Two units," he wrote, "are different etically when instrumental
measurements can show them to be so. Units are different emically only when

they elicit different responses from people acting within the system" (42, p. 38). But Pike's phrase, "elicit different responses from people acting within the system," must be clarified in order to render the crucial operation explicit. As it stands, Pike's eliciting operation might be taken to mean that when an event E_1 occurs in the behavior stream and people react to it differently from event E_2, then E_1 and E_2 are emically different. But what has to be made clear is that you cannot get inside of people's heads by observing what they do during the natural course of behavior stream events. Observing what people do during the natural course of behavior stream events leads to etic not emic distinctions. Of course it is always possible to make inferences concerning what is going on inside of people's heads from purely etic data. But as Pike and so many others have insisted, strangers who do so will be led astray by their own projections. For example, during the course of fieldwork in a small Brazilian town, I noticed that a number of children came to school or went to the weekly market wearing only one shoe or sandal. A reasonable inference about what was going on inside their heads was that being children they preferred to go barefoot, and that wearing one shoe was therefore better than wearing two. The emic purpose of the activity, as determined by questioning children and their parents, was something else. Informants argued that it was better to wear two shoes; the purpose of wearing only one was to have siblings share the same pair of shoes, an important economy for poor households.

The way to get inside of people's heads is to talk with them, to ask questions about what they think and feel. When such questions are presented in formal, organized fashion aimed at mapping how participants view the world, we may speak of *eliciting operations*. As Frake (16, p. 76) has indicated, the basic methodological concept advocated by cognitive anthropologists is "the determination of the set of contrasting responses appropriate to a given, culturally valid eliciting context." The paradigmatic model for eliciting operations is the identification of phonemic contrasts by means of minimum pairs. In Pike's scheme, the equivalent test with respect to wearing shoes should involve eliciting a native's judgment if the wearing of one and two shoes are manifestations of the same or different form-purpose unit (the feature and manifestation modes) and if they are "appropriate" performances in the slot constituted by children walking to school (the distribution mode).

Eliciting operations are based on the assumption that social actors have learned to regard certain kinds of differences in thought and behavior as contrastive and others as noncontrastive and to regard the occurrence of certain kinds of thoughts and behaviors as appropriate or nonappropriate with respect to different contexts. The aim of emic analysis is to describe the structure of the "program" which generates these native judgments of contrast and appropriateness.

The Locus and Reality of Cognitive Rules

According to Burling (10), residence rules, grammatical rules, and kinship terminology rules, as well as Bloomfieldian phonemes, "stand or fall on their

ability to account for observable phenomena," and "whether or not they are in any sense cognitively or psychologically real is an entirely separate question" (10, p. 826). I submit, on the contrary, that these are entirely separate questions only if one has no interest in providing a scientific explanation for speech acts, residence patterns, and domestic organization. If by "account for" one means the ability of a rule inside of the observer's head, or as expressed in writing, to summarize or predict the probable state of such noncognitive etic phenomena as residential alignments and domestic organization, the question of whether the rule is in some sense also inside the heads of the actors is indeed moot (17, 28). But if one intends to "account for" emic cognitive phenomena—grammatical competence, kinship taxonomy, residential·preference—it would be senseless to view the appropriate rules as existing exclusively inside the heads of the observers and outside the heads of the actors. How can such rules account for what goes on inside of actors' heads, if they are not inside them? Shall we posit that they account for the actor's cognitions by virtue of their location within the head of the family cat?

Burling has confused two facts here: (a) that observers frequently make rival inferences concerning what kinds of rules exist inside of other people's heads with (b) the fact that there are also etic *rules,* which make no claims at all about what goes on inside of people's heads. It is perfectly true, of course, that rival hypothetical emic structures, none of which accurately portray what goes on inside of people's heads, can be erected on the basis of erroneous inferences from inadequate data. The way such inadequacies are normally detected is by predictive failures concerning informant's elicited judgments of appropriateness or acceptability. For example, from a knowledge of a rule prohibiting sexual relations between close genealogical relatives one might erroneously predict that informants will accept the statement "mother brother's daughter and father sister's son must not marry each other." The psychological "reality" of a rule can only be measured by its predictive success. If two competitive emic rules are equally successful, they must be accorded equal psychological "reality" (9).

This problem—the problem of alternative emic algorithms and alternative logical models—is to be distinguished from that of consciousness. "Real" rules need not be conscious rules, as we have seen.

Transformation algorithms and other rules acquire an ambiguous episte-mological status to the extent that they are not systematically tested through eliciting techniques aimed at exposing their predictive inadequacies—an un-avoidable lapse when one lives in New Haven and relies on published reports of kinship terminologies attributed to anonymous or deceased informants in the Trobriand Islands (5, 25, 26, 29, 30, 32, 36).

Accounting for Behavior Stream Events

The most important source of Burling's epistemological quandary is the conflation of attempts to "account for" residence rules, taxonomies, symbol systems, moral codes, etc, with the attempt to "account for" the flow of speech acts, scenes, and other components of the behavior stream. The notion that

mental rules (even the most "accurate" and "real" ones) can account for behavior stream events is the dominant principle of idealist as opposed to materialist research strategies. "Accounting for" in this context must mean "prediction," and materialists deny that a knowledge of emic rules can provide the basis for accurate predictions about behavior stream events. It is not surprising therefore that Burling accuses me of a "simplistic" dichotomy: "Harris' simplistic bifurcation into idealist 'emics' and materialist 'etics' is in danger of squeezing out the middle ground between them" (10, p. 821).

I do intend to squeeze out this middle ground because I believe that the inability to decide whether a datum is an idea in an actor's head or an event in the behavior stream is epistemologically intolerable. This does not mean that systemic relationships between ideas and behavior stream events cannot be found, but rather that it is unlikely that they will be found if they (emic and etic events) are not first distinguished.

Idealists may not like to see the concept of emics harnessed to the task of defining a strategy which challenges their own. But my authorization for defining emics as an aspect of the mental life of informants is thoroughly consistent not only with Pike's original definition but with the definitions of most anthropologists and linguists. The linguist William Bright, for example, writes: "First, a division must be made between the observational, or etic, universe, to which 'word' and 'object' belong, and the structural or 'emic' universe, within the human mind" (8, p. 20). Pelto in tracing the history of the emic approach, quotes Boas (7) to the effect: "If it is our serious purpose to understand the thoughts of a people the whole analysis of experience must be based on their concepts, not ours" (40, p. 69). He quotes Sapir (46) to the effect that an outsider cannot produce description that "would be intelligible and acceptable to the natives themselves."

Emics and Consciousness

Pike and others who have used linguistics as the model for emic analysis stress the fact that the immediate products of elicitation do not necessarily furnish the structured program that is the desired end product of emic analysis. For example, in determining whether the two /p/'s in *paper* (the first is aspirated) are phonemically same or different, we cannot rely on the native's conscious powers of autoanalysis. Nonetheless, Pike did provide for what he called *hypostasis,* namely the elicitation of conscious structural rules, such as "don't use double negatives." When one turns to elicitations that are concerned with the structure of thought and behavior as distinct from the structure of language, hypostasis is far more common. The answer to questions like: "Why do you do this?" or "What is this for?" "Is this the same as that?" and "When or where do you do this?" "What ought you to do in these circumstances?" are essential for specifying the trimodalities of Pike's emes. There is nothing antithetical therefore in attributing to emic structures both conscious and unconscious dimensions. Working with elicited responses, the observer is free to abstract and construct all manner of emic structures, conscious or unconscious, such as plans, cognitive maps, rules, themes, values, symbols, moral codes, and so forth.

Mary Black (6, p. 524) has taken Pelto (39, p. 83) to task for claiming that "the ethnographer termed by some 'emicist' goes about collecting 'verbal statements *about* human action' while an eticist is out there observing human action first hand." Black insists that it is the structure of the system of beliefs, including beliefs about action, that is studied in emic research, not the statements about the beliefs themselves. Joining the chorus of anthropologists who find contrary views "simplistic," Black writes:

> . . . the idea that ethnoscience is interested in language and linguistics for the purpose of having informants *make statements about their patterns of behavior* is rather simplistic and can be held only by those who have not done ethnosemantic work (6, p. 526).

It is not simplistic, it seems to me, to acknowledge that emics is concerned both with the content of elicited responses and with the structure that may be found to underlie that content at several different levels. Structural rules can be elicited directly in certain domains (for example, how to play football or poker, or how to make a shrunken head). Goodenough's (21) concept of "duty scale" involves directly elicited rules. Also, comparison of rules elicited from officials in bureaucratized organizations with those elicited from the organization's workers (47), or rules elicited from males and females, landowners, and peasants may achieve structural significance at the level of manifest content. Furthermore Black's notion of what constitutes authentic "ethnosemantic work" would seem to exclude sociological surveys and opinion polls which acquire structural significance as soon as their results are tabulated. The fact that ethnosemantic studies have not concerned themselves with manifest ideological structures is merely a reflection of their predilection for dealing with static, esoteric, and politically trivial taxonomies. Fortunately, emic studies are not restricted to the analysis of terminological distinctions. If Black wants to plant the flag of "ethnosemantic work" in the most static, esoteric, and politically trivial emic domains, she is welcome to exclusive full proprietary rights.

Etics as Observable

I should also comment at this point on Burling's and Bright's understanding of the term "etic" as data that are "directly observable." Having proposed a series of "rules" which hypothetically govern the formation of households in India, Burling notes:

> I think it not unreasonable, and in accordance with general usage, to call all ordinary grammatical rules and my rules of household composition "emic," because they represent theoretical statements, separated in certain respects from (and not algorithmically derivable from) the more directly observable "etic" data, such as households on the ground or sequences of noise, but at the same time the rules provide a means of interpreting and understanding the observable (and "etic") data of real households or real sentences. Of course it is silly to argue about the meaning of a word, but even if we decide that "emic" is not appropriate for such descriptions, it is still important to keep them distinct from the more directly observable "etic" phenomena (10, p. 827).

This definition of etic is inadmissable because there is no such thing as "direct observation." The "on-the-ground" composition of household cannot be directly observed, any more than a neutrino, a gene, or any other event, thing, or relationship can be directly observed. Moreover, Burling's example is especially infelicitous in view of the controversy surrounding the emic definition of residence among anthropologists (4, 15, 18, 40) and the excruciating consequences of different definitions of residence in political-economic contexts such as taxation, labor conscription, and welfare (4, 43, 50).

Behavioral and Mental vs Etic and Emic

If the locus of emic events lies in the actor's mind, while the locus of etic events lies in the behavior stream, are not Pike's neologisms redundant and scientifically dispensable? Why not simply contrast "mental events" with "behavioral events"? The answer is that both actors and observers are capable of describing the events in the behavior stream. Pike's unique contribution among idealists was precisely his attempt to emicize the description of the behavior stream (as distinct from more fashionable attempts to elicit grammars, folk taxonomies, symbol systems, values, and moral codes). That is, for Pike, descriptions of behavior which do not involve phenomenal distinctions—contrasts and distributions—that are significant and meaningful to the actors are unacceptable. In other words, Pike sought to situate the structural aspects of the behavior stream within the minds of the actors. But behavior stream events seen through actor's categories remain, in one sense at least, behavioral events, just as behavior stream events seen through observer's categories might in another sense be called mental events, because they are what the observers think them to be. Emic and etic are therefore not redundant with respect to mental and behavioral events because these neologisms invoke a separation of observers and actors and their respective phenomenologies of behavior stream events in ways not forseen in the controversies between psychologists following mentalist and behaviorist strategies.

If behavioral events are described in terms of categories and relationships that arise from the observer's strategic criteria of similarity, difference, and significance, they are etic; if they are described in terms of criteria elicited from an informant, they are emic. A clear and historically crucial case is the much celebrated choice made by Goodenough in his description of Truk locality patterns. In a number of Truk households, John Fischer (1950) had described as patrilocal the residence pattern in which married male ego lived with father who was living with father's mother-in-law. Goodenough classified this same situation as avunculocal, even though mother's brother resided elsewhere, on the grounds that the people of Truk were traditionally matrilineal and that they therefore could not be practicing patrilocality: "Patrilocal residence . . . can occur in Truk only following upon a fundamental change in . . . cultural principles" (18, pp. 35–36). As Goodenough (21, p. 104) now explains, the source of the difference between himself and Fischer was "our different conception of the objects of residential choice as the Trukese perceive them." In fact, the differ-

ence was that Fischer had followed an implicitly etic strategy while Good-
enough had followed an explicitly emic one. As Glenn Petersen (41) has pointed
out, Fischer's view was at least as viable as Goodenough's, since the Truk
pattern of residence was in fact shifting to ambilocality or even partilocality.

Etic and Emic Use of Informants

The distinction between mental and behavioral descriptions of behavioral
events is more complex for anthropologists than for behaviorist psychologists
who work with infra-human organisms. As a matter of practical necessity,
anthropologists must frequently rely on native informants to obtain their basic
information about who has done what. Recourse to informants for such pur-
poses does not automatically settle the epistemological status of the resultant
descriptions.

Depending on whose categories establish the framework of discourse, infor-
mants may provide either etic or emic descriptions of the events they have
observed or participated in. When the description is responsive to the observer's
categories of time, place, weights and measure, actor types, numbers of people
present, body motion, and environmental effects, it is etic. Roger Sanjek (45),
for example, has shown that network analyses can be carried out in two quite
distinct ways, although in both instances actual, on-the-ground, behavioral
phenomena are being reported. In the emic version informants provide informa-
tion only about ''significant others,'' filtering out individuals judged not to be
essential to their social world; in the etic version, informants are encouraged to
recall all interactive alters, regardless of their lack of emic significance.

Obviously, reliance upon informants for etic descriptions represents a meth-
odological compromise. But as I stated at the beginning of this article, no one
expects to achieve absolute operational purity.

Emics, Etics, and Cross-Cultural Comparisons

Among the criteria listed by Pike (42) as characteristic of emics and etics are the
following:
Etic units: cross-culturally valid
Emic units: culturally specific, applied to one language or culture at a time

Much to my astonishment, prominent theoreticians apparently believe that
this aspect of the emic/etic contrast lies at the very heart of the definition
intended by Pike. Raoul Naroll (38), for example, actually defines emics and
etics exclusively by reference to the distinction between concepts of particular
cultures and pancultural concepts: ''Emics are the study of concepts peculiar to
particular cultures. Etics on the other hand, are the study of concepts for the
study of culture in general—panculture'' (38, p. 2).

My astonishment derives from the fact that this approach to the definition of
emics and etics evades the epistemological issues with which Pike was con-
cerned as reflected in elaborate discussion of the form-purpose, manifestation
and distribution modes. It is this discussion alone which demands that the emic/

etic distinction be assigned a role in the historic development of competitive philosophical and scientific paradigms and strategies. To assert that certain statements about a field of inquiry are restricted to the particularities of one portion of that field, while other statements apply more generally, yields no clarification whatever concerning the epistemological status of either type of statement. The question of the degree to which emic events and relationships are replicated cross-culturally obviously cannot be settled without empirical tests. It is of course theoretically possible to so refine the particularities of a phonemic system, kinship terminology, moral code, or football team, that no comparable phenomena can be found anywhere in the world (one might, for example, insist that all relevant concepts be rendered exclusively in the native language). But this option is not closed to etic descriptions; no two etic events repeat themselves if they are looked at closely enough. In any field of inquiry, the claim "everything is different" is as true as the claim "everything is the same"; both lead equally to a total collapse of empirical testing. The normal resolution of this connundrum is to extract some similarities and ignore some differences; to specify ranges and limits; to construct logical and empirical classes and categories. Thus there is nothing that prevents us from finding less-than-perfectly described emic events, categories, and relationships approximately replicated in more than one culture. And this is exactly what anthropologists have devoted most of their efforts to. As Naroll (38), following "a brilliant chapter by Ward Goodenough" (21), illustrates with the example of kinship studies: "the pan-cultural analysis of kinship terms has proceeded from a crude description of particular kinship practices (read *ideas*) to an inventory of key distinctions which may or may not be important in particular kinship systems, and from these distinctions has come the componential analysis of particular kinship terminologies." He then lists the eight key concepts: 1. Consanguinity/affinity; 2. Generation; 3. Sex; 4. Collaterality; 5. Bifurcation; 6. Relative Age; 7. Decadence; and 8. Genealogical Distance; and he correctly identifies the work of Alfred Kroeber (31) as the most important source of these "components." The only trouble is that following Goodenough and William Sturtevant (1964), Naroll identifies the concepts of consanguinity, generation, sex, etc., as etic concepts. "These are the eight key etic concepts. . . . The inventory . . . is validated by the fact that every known emic kin-term system can be most parsimoniously defined by using the eight etic concepts" (38, p. 3).

As I have previously maintained (23, p. 557), Kroeber's kin terminology components are emic not etic. They are emic because (*a*) they refer to a phenomenological reality whose locus is inside of the heads of the actors; and (*b*) they are built up out of forms and meanings that are intended to reflect significant and appropriate distinctions within the heads of the actors in each of the cultures in which they occur. To repeat, the whole point of Kroeber's famous article was to replace L. H. Morgan's sociological treatment of kinship with a linguistic treatment, i.e. to make the meanings of kin-terms dependent on how they reflected cognized properties rather than on how they reflected the functioning of domestic groups.

Goodenough admits that Kroeber was indeed saying that "kinship termi-nology must be understood from the point of view of . . . what we would now call cognition . . ." but nonetheless my (Harris's) characterization of componential categories as emic is incorrect. They are etic, Goodenough insists.

> What Harris seems to mean by etics is evidently not what Pike (1967), who coined the term, I, or others he criticizes mean by it. Harris has failed to learn the "culture" of those he criticizes.

What I allegedly fail to understand is that improved emics lead to improved etics, which in turn lead to improved emics.

> As I have said, emic description requires etics, and by trying to do emic descriptions we add to our etic conceptual resources for subsequent description. It is through etic concepts that we do comparison. And by systematizing our etic concepts we con-tribute to the development of a general science of culture. Therefore, I agree heartily with Harris about the fundamental importance of etics. But unlike him I see etics as bogging down in useless hairsplitting and over-preoccupation with recording hard-ware, unless it is accompanied by a concern for emics. For Harris, concern with emic description competes with the development of etics; for me, it contributes most directly to it (21, p. 113).

Thus, for Goodenough, Kroeber's identification of the basic semantic di-mensions of kinship terminology "increased our potential for systematic com-parison" and "componential analysis is requiring us to make further refinements in our etic kit and in laying the basis for an even more systematic account of how the properties of genealogical space can be employed in their various combi-nations to describe the emic categories of kinship relationships" (21, p. 114).

In rebuttal, I can only repeat my earlier comment (23, p. 577): emic entities cannot be transmuted into etic entities. If *emes* recur cross-culturally, they remain *emes*. Once an eme, always an eme.

How is it possible for such divergent interpretations to persist? I think there is considerable merit to Goodenough's charge that I have failed to understand the "culture" of those I have criticized. More charitably put, "culture" here means paradigm or research strategy. I see emics and etics from the perspective of a research strategy that is radically different from Goodenough's. I see Pike's emic/etic distinction as providing the key epistemological opening for a materi-alist approach to the behavior stream. Goodenough "sees" emics and etics from an idealist perspective in which the entire field of study—culture—is off limits to materialist strategies. That is, for Goodenough and other cultural idealists, culture designates an orderly realm of pure idea while the behavior stream is a structureless emanation of that realm. In Goodenough's words:

> The great problem for a science of man is how to get from the objective world of materiality, with its infinite variability, to the subjective world of form as it exists in what, for lack of a better term, we must call the minds of our fellow man . . . (19, p. 39).

In the strategy of Cultural Materialism, on the other hand, culture is not a realm of pure idea; rather, culture designates both patterns of thought and patterns of behavior. Furthermore, in the strategy of cultural materialism behavior is not regarded as an emanation of thought; rather, thought is regarded as an emanation of behavior (24). It is clear that Goodenough has failed to learn the "culture" of cultural materialism.

Emics, Etics, and Speech Acts

Considerable misunderstanding has arisen concerning the relationship between etic behavior stream analysis and communication events. Does the emic/etic option apply to such events? Since language is the primary mode of human communication, and since it is the function of language to convey meanings, one might readily conclude that the emic mode is the only feasible approach to language as the conveyor of meaning. In the strategy of cultural materialism, however, there are both emic and etic approaches to communication behavior.

Those who would describe the behavior stream of any higher organism must confront the task of identifying activities that are primarily communicative or that achieve (their environmental effects primarily through the intermediation of communicative acts (3). Dell Hymes (27, p. 13) defines communicative acts in terms of the concept "message." He lists seven criteria of messages: 1. code or codes in terms of which the message is intelligible; 2. participants, minimally an addressor and addressee; 3. a transmission event; 4. a channel; 5. a setting or context; 6. a definite form or shape to the message; 7. a topic—saying something about something. But for Hymes, messages must also possess an emic status which he defines as the "intersubjective objectivity . . . of the participants in the culture" (27, p. 11). Hence the above criteria cannot alone identify messages, just as "what counts as phonemic feature or religious act cannot be identified in advance."

The apodictic restriction of the ethnography of speech to emic meanings is a form of dogmatism not uncommon among idealists like Hymes, for whom "culture" is a term that cannot be applied to the behavior stream (48).

It is obvious however that an ethnography of messages can be based on etic as well as emic operations. It is obvious because psychologists, ethologists, and primatologists routinely study the messages exchanged between infra-human organisms independently of any eliciting conversations. Chimpanzees cannot be asked if a whisper or a whine changes the meaning of an utterance. Note that asking such a question is not to be confused with experimental manipulation of signals in order to test the etically derived meaning—as in observing the response of a duck to a duck call, or of a gorilla to prolonged eye contact. Only humans can carry on discussions involving requests for information, with the exception of a computer and a few chimpanzees who at great cost have been programmed to participate in rudimentary discourse.

With respect to the natural communicative acts that occur among infra-human species, it is possible to identify all seven of Hymes's basic criteria for messages.

Why therefore is it forbidden to identify etic messages and their meaning among humans? I think the objections of Hymes and other idealists boils down to this: they fear that if human messages are not approached from an emic point of view, the messages will be "misunderstood." But this objection applies with equal force to the interpretation of messages exchanged between ducks or between gorillas. As Franz Kafka long ago pointed out, if an ape could address a learned society, we would be astonished by all the things it had on its mind. Lacking such an ape, we do not know if messages which chimpanzees exchange have the same meaning for them as they do for Jane Van Lawick-Goodall (33). In the human case, however, we are more fortunate. We have the opportunity of finding out what messages mean according to two different meanings of meaning: first what messages mean independent of emic eliciting operations, and second what messages mean in response to elicitations concerning their meaning.

In my original approach to this problem (22), I was content to identify a "talking actone" and to propose that identification of the meaning of specific speech messages was accessible only through emic operations. In 1968 (23, p. 579) I stated: "From an etic point of view, the universe of meaning, purposes, goals, motivations, etc is . . . unapproachable." What I should have said was that from an etic point of view the universe of meaning, purposes, goals, motivations, etc is in the messages and not in the heads of the actors. That is, from an etic point of view nothing is asserted about what is going on inside of the heads of the actors when they exchange messages which have a determinate etic meaning. From an etic point of view, to counter Wittgenstein, as quoted by Searle (49, p. 145), people can say "it's cold here" and mean "it's warm here."

Etic Meanings of Speech Acts

The difference between etic meanings and emic meanings is the difference between the first level surface meaning of a human utterance and its total psychological significance for speaker and hearer respectively. I can explain this distinction by reference to videotape studies of behavior stream scenes in New York households (12, 44, 51). These studies have attempted to describe patterns of superordination and subordination in terms of the responses which members of households make to an *etic* category of speech acts which we (the observers) call "requests." This class of speech acts includes "requests for attention," "requests for action," and "requests for information" (Mom!; "Take the garbage out"; What time is it?). In English, observers can operationally define requests as speech acts involving certain grammatical and tonal features (such as omission of pronouns and emphatic or rising tones). It is presumed that while "requests" would have to be identified by different specific criteria in different languages, all human languages (and many infra-human communication systems) have provisions for sending messages which the sender would use if the sender seriously intended to alter the behavior of the hearer in a specific fashion. The need for discriminating between the surface meaning or the etic content of a message and its psychological or emic meaning is dramatically evident when one

is confronted with the fact that in the households studied to date, hearers on the average do not comply with requests about one and one-half times more frequently than they comply with them. Several emic interpretations which do not involve the assumption that the speaker seriously intended to communicate the surface meaning of the message are compatible with this situation. For example, consider the speech acts in the following behavior stream events involving a mother and her 8-year-old son as recorded on videotape. Starting at 10:50 A.M., the mother repeats a series of requests to her son in which she asks him to stop playing with the dog.

Time	Request
10:50	R., leave him (the dog) alone.
11:01	Leave him alone.
11:09	Leave him alone.
11:10	Hey don't do that.
11:10	Please leave him alone.
11:15	Leave him alone.
11:15	Leave him alone.
11:15	Why don't you stop teasing him?
11:16	Leave Rex alone, huh?
11:17	Leave him alone.
11:17	Leave him alone.
11:24	Keep away from him.

During the same scene the mother also requests the same child to turn down the volume on the radio in the living room, as follows:

10:40	Keep your hands off that (radio).
10:41	I don't want to hear that.
11:19	Lower that thing (the radio).
11:20	Come on, knock it off.
11:20	Lower that.
11:20	Get your own (radio in another room).
11:20	Keep your hands off this thing (the radio).
11:26	Alright, come on. I've got to have that lowered.
11:27	Leave it alone.
11:27	Leave it alone.
11:29	Turn it off right now.
11:29	You're not to touch that radio.
11:29	Keep your hands off that radio.

It is clear that one cannot simply assume that a component in the meanings of the above requests is the intention of the speaker to be taken seriously about turning the radio off or leaving the dog alone. If the mother intends to be taken seriously, why does she repeat the same requests 12 or 13 times in less than an hour? One cannot argue that repetition is a token of her seriousness (like a prisoner who repeatedly tries to escape from jail) because she has numerous alternatives—she herself can turn the radio off, for example, or she can segregate the child and the dog in different rooms. Her failure to take decisive action

may very well indicate that there are other semantic components involved. Perhaps she really intends merely to show disapproval. Or perhaps her main intention is to punish herself by making requests with which she knows her son will not comply. The emic ambiguities are even more marked when we examine the hearer's role. One possibility is that the child rejects the surface meaning of the request, knowing that his mother isn't really serious. Another possibility is that the child thinks that the mother is serious but rejects her authority. Or does the child interpret the repetitions to mean that his mother would rather punish herself than punish him? To disambiguate these meanings one must employ eliciting operations, and these alone are the hallmark of emic events. The etic meanings however, remain the same, regardless of the ultimate result of the elicitation process (which incidentally need not result in speaker or hearer meaning the same emic things). Emic meanings are inside of the heads of the actors. But etic meanings are inside the message in the speech act viewed as a behavior stream event.

To all of the above, I expect the rejoinder: You have now admitted that to identify and understand requests and other speech acts it is necessary to know the language in which the speech acts are made. Since the surface meaning of a speech act ultimately derives from semantic distinctions that are meaningful and appropriate to the native speakers, the surface meanings really are located inside of the native speakers' heads, are knowable through elicitations, and are therefore emic. And once an eme always an eme. Thus any codings of speech acts must necessarily be emic.

The rebuttal is as follows: To be a human observer capable of carrying out scientific operations presumes that one is competent in at least one natural language. Thus, in identifying speech-acts in their own native language, observers are not dependent on eliciting operations and can readily agree that a particular utterance has a specific surface meaning whose locus is in the behavior stream.

That such surface meanings are also probably shared by the actors is not a decisive operational criterion, although it is a reasonable assumption.

This line of reasoning can easily be extended to include foreign speech acts, if we grant the proposition that all human languages are mutually translatable. This means that for every utterance in a foreign language, there is an analogue in one's own. While it is true that successful translation of a foreign speech act is facilitated by the collaboration of a native informant, the locus of the cognitive reality of the translation remains inside the observers' heads. That is, what the observers intend to find out is which linguistic structures inside their own heads have more or less the same meaning as the utterances in the behavior stream of the foreign actors. Thus the translation amounts to the imposition of the observers' semantic categories on the foreign speech acts, and as previously explained, the use of native informants is perfectly compatible with etic descriptions. Of course, in any competent translation we again assume that there is a close correspondence between the observers' surface meaning and the native speakers' surface meaning. But once this correspondence has been established,

the observers have in effect enlarged their competence to include both languages, and hence they can proceed to identify the surface meanings of foreign speech acts as freely as native speakers of English are able to identify the speech acts listed above. Indeed, in the actual identification of requests in the videotape study from which the above examples are drawn (12), there were several coders who were not native speakers of English.

It should not come as any surprise that a *comprehensive* etic approach to the behavior stream presumes a knowledge of the language of the participants. In studying the behavior stream of infra-human species, we expect to include communication acts. Exactly the same assumptions about surface meanings are made in the infra-human case, except that the assimilation of these meanings to our shared language competence cannot be facilitated by native informants acting as translators. I italicize *comprehensive* because the argument I have just presented does not lead to the conclusion that the etic approach like an emic approach *necessarily* demands a knowledge of the social actors' language; on the contrary, many etic operations, including the study of some aspects of communication phenomena, can proceed entirely without foreign language competence.

The Emics of the Observer

A theme in the critique of the emic/etic distinction which is especially valued by partisans of obscurantist strategies is that etics, after all, are "nothing but the emics of the observers" (35). This statement has a grain of truth in it because one cannot deny that the locus of the reality of the behavior stream lies in part inside the heads of the observers. But it amounts to nothing more than a rerun of Bishop Berkeley's argument on behalf of an idealist ontology. Those who maintain that the behavior stream *only* exists inside of the minds of the observers, to be consistent must also believe that the observers themselves have no existence except as a sophistic figment. Why therefore don't they lapse into silent contemplation of their brain waves and let those of us who are so benighted as to believe that there are pluralities of minds and bodies out there go about our business?

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