



ETHNOGRAPHICALLY INFORMED COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL ASSESSMENT  
RESEARCH SYSTEMS (EICCARS) WORKING PAPER SERIES

## **Basic Classical Ethnographic Research Methods**

Secondary Data Analysis, Fieldwork, Observation/Participant Observation,  
and Informal and Semi-structured Interviewing

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July 17, 2005

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## Introduction

This document is another in the *Ethnographically Informed Community and Cultural Assessment Research Systems* (the EICCARS) Working Paper Series. In another of these working papers, titled *What is Ethnography? Methodological, and Epistemological Attributes*, I posit two of the attributes as: **(1)** ethnography includes both qualitative and quantitative methods; and **(2)** ethnography includes both classical and non-classical ethnographic approaches. The argument for the first is supported by the fact that while methods that are considered to be qualitative have long been the dominant methods paradigm in ethnography, many ethnographers trained in anthropology have also long used quantitative methods as well, as the anthropological ethnographer learns to be opened to any and all methods that can help him or her best understand the cultural system in which he or she is studying.

Arguments for these two attributes were made to address first the perspective among anthropologists, that the primary difference in ethnographic approaches is qualitative versus quantitative. Secondly, however, because of the debate in anthropology, in which some methods are discussed as being truly ethnographic and others as not, I have found discussions of *classical*, *non-classical*, and *core* ethnographic methods as helpful in differentiating the types of methods suitable to various ethnographic situations, while not excluding any from the range of methods that an ethnography should feel free to use so that they can adequately study the range of social setting to which ethnography is appropriate. For me, classical ethnographic methods are those that have been traditionally used by anthropologists, such as *secondary data analysis*, *fieldwork*, *observing* activities of interest, *recording fieldnotes* and observations, *participating in activities during observations* (participant observation), and carrying out various forms of *informal and semi-structured ethnographic interviewing*. I also refer to these as *Basic Classical* ethnographic methods, to distinguish them from other classical ethnographic methods long employed by anthropologists, including the *physical mapping* of the study setting, conducting *household censuses* and *genealogies*, *assessing network ties*, and using *photography* and other *audio/visual methods*.

The difference between the larger category of classical methods, and the subcategory of Basic Classical methods is associated with the *social setting* to be studied. The full range of classical ethnographic methods have been frequently associated with the study of communities or populations, while the Basic Classical methods are those that are administered not only to human residential communities and populations, but also applied to other social settings, such as organizations, institutions, meetings, and just about any setting in which humans are interacting. This application of Basic Classical ethnographic method to any human social setting has been an a steady growing trend in ethnography over the past 40 years, increasing with a steady growing trend of anthropologists and ethnographers working in non-academic or applied settings. This is a characteristic (recently increasing trend) that Basic Classical ethnographic methods share with *non-classical* ethnographic methods. Another trend in non-classical ethnographic methods is their adoption by researchers outside of the disciplines of ethnography and anthropology. Included among such as non-classical ethnographic methods are; (1) focus and other group interviews; (2) computer assisted technologies, some used to enhance classical ethnographic techniques, such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS) used to enhance the ethnographers ability to map their host communities; (3) highly structured interview techniques, some of which have psychometric scales and other cognitive elicitation and measurement methods. There is one form of structured interviewing that has also grown in popularity among anthropological ethnographers over the last 20 years, and is now associated with that discipline, although it is now being adopted by those outside of the discipline to whom the method has been introduced. This technique is the assessment of cultural domains or units of cultural meaning. Why included here as a non-classical ethnographic method, domain analysis is a contemporary approach of a classical interest in ethnography, and that is exploring cultural meaning through the analysis of language, or ethnosemantics. Of the three categories of ethnographic methodological orientations that have been discussed in this introduction, the present working paper will, however, focus only on those classical ethnographic methods, that are categorized as core.

## 1. Secondary Data Analysis

Secondary data is simply a reference to *existing data*, as compared to *new data* that are being collected, or have been recently collected. Ethnography, similar to any other type of research usually begins with the researcher availing him or herself of the range of information that already exists on the topic or people being studied. In more positivist or quantitative approaches, it is such knowledge that helps to develop hypothesis to be tested in the new research process. In the more open-ended and discovery oriented approaches to ethnography and qualitative methods, secondary data analysis are important in exploring research assumptions (which some researchers refer to as early hypothesis), or to generate research questions to be further explored. For all research approaches, secondary data analyses help in identifying gaps in what is known about particular research topics, and suggesting the specific methods that might be used to secure the most valid data related to the questions or topics of interest. In another EICCARS Working Paper titled, *Introduction to Community and Cultural Research Systems*, I have listed the following secondary data sources on the population or setting being studied:

- Scholarly and popular (including media) publications and products.
- Archival and statistical data found in various administrative sources at the national, state and local levels (e.g., national censuses, government agencies, state and local planning offices, police stations, city and town hall ledgers, budgets, sales records).
- Other archival documents, such as maps, atlases, abstracts of titles, and title deeds;
- Records and data collected by business, educational, health, social services, labor and professional associations, church records, and other entities that collect data for their particular missions;
- Data collected in various types of directories, including telephone, local business directories, special ethnic publications;
- Personal and Individual data, such as diaries, family histories, biographies and autobiographies, tombstones, etc.

It is highly recommended that ethnographers should explore all that they can about their topic or study population before moving on to the collection of primary data. With regards to existing statistical data, and other secondary sources, many agencies, organizations, and associations may have relevant data available online. Thus It is also highly recommended that ethnographers first *explore online sources, prior to engaging in more traditional and labor intensive methods of contacting agencies and organizations for their hard copy data documents.*

## 2. Fieldwork is an Essential Attribute of Ethnography

In ethnography, primary data collection is carried out primarily through fieldwork. In fact for many anthropologists fieldwork is almost synonymous with ethnography<sup>1</sup>. My position is that fieldwork is essential to ethnography. So what is fieldwork, and why do anthropologists consider it so essential to what we call ethnography? Wolcott (1995) defines fieldwork as a form of inquiry that requires a researcher to be immersed personally in the ongoing social activities of some individual or group carrying out the research. For classical ethnographers, who primarily studied local communities, it meant the total immersion of the researcher in the field setting 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, and different seasons of the year, for an extended period of time (e.g., one year). In this way the ethnographer not only becomes familiar with the spatial dimensions of the research setting, and its socio-cultural dynamics, but also how those dynamics may change at certain times of the day, week or year. Of course, ethnographers

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<sup>1</sup> For example, as Agar (1980) puts it, “the very name for “*doing ethnography*” is fieldwork. “

work in settings other than simply local communities today, where such 24--7 immersion is not possible, and unnecessary (e.g., a work setting). But the importance of spending considerable time where members those being studied carry out routines and activities relevant to the topic of study is still to relevant to the ethnography perspectives, regardless of the study setting (more on this later).

The significance of fieldwork to ethnography is related to what ethnography is, which is explored in another EICCARS Working Paper titled, *What is Ethnography?: Methodological, Ontological and Epistemological Attributes*. My argument there is that ethnography, similar to any other research paradigm, is about more than simply methods, but is also grounded certain ontological and epistemological perspectives. Here I use Guba and Lincoln's definition of ontology as one perspective on the nature of what is being studied, whether it exist as some objective fact of reality, or does the nature of that being studied vary due to a range of possible factors, including social, economic, political, situational, or experiential/personal; and their definition of epistemology as perceptions of research findings as an objective product of the neutral observer, or as an intersubjective product constructed by the relationship between the researcher and the study population. In the case of both ontological and epistemological perspectives, I argue, ethnography tends to share with other qualitative researchers the idea of ontological view of what they are studying varying based on environmental factors, and their findings as an intersubjective product of the researcher and the research. These ontological and epistemological orientations of ethnography provide the foundations for the various attributes of ethnography, including fieldwork, and helps to understand why fieldwork is essential to these other attributes, and thus to ethnography itself. The other attributes that I consider associated with ethnography, include the following:

- Ethnography is a *holistic* approach to the study of *cultural systems*.
- Ethnography is the study of the *socio-cultural contexts, processes, and meanings* within cultural systems.
- Ethnography is the study of cultural systems from both *emic* and *etic* perspectives.
- Ethnography is a process of *discovery*, making *inferences*, and *continuing inquiries* in an attempt to achieve *emic validity*.
- Ethnography is an *iterative* process of *learning episodes*.
- Ethnography is an *open-ended emergent learning process*, and not a *rigid investigator controlled experiment*.
- Ethnography is a *highly flexible* and *creative*<sup>2</sup> process.
- Ethnography is an *interpretive, reflexive, and constructivist* process.
- Ethnography requires the daily and continuous recording of *fieldnotes*.
- Ethnography presents the world of its *host population*<sup>3</sup> in human contexts of *thickly*

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<sup>2</sup> A caveat here is that this list of ethnographic attributes should not be considered to be exhaustive. Other ethnographers may see other attributes that are not listed here, and maybe even disagree with these. The remainder of this paper, however, will consist of brief discussions of each of these fourteen attributes.

<sup>3</sup> In writing this essay, I have adopted the phrase of "host populations" or "ethnographic hosts" to refer to the members of the cultural system being studied by the ethnographer. I prefer the word hosts rather than the traditional ethnographic term of "informant" because in my work in inner city communities I found the word informant to be quite awkward because of the use of the same word to refer to police snitches, who are greatly disliked. The word host also fits the epistemological orientations being discussed in the present paper of moving away from any connotation of the researcher being the dominant actor in the researcher-researched dyad. As such, I prefer the word hosts over the psychological research use of study subjects, or the sociologists use of respondents or study populations, because these terms can also imply a higher status in the researcher researched relationship for the researcher. I selected the word hosts also, to further confirm the role of fieldwork in the ethnographic process, where in the ethnographer is living in the world of his or her hosts.

*described case studies.*

In the *What is Ethnography?* Paper, I introduce the concept of emic validity, and suggest that a primary reason for fieldwork in ethnography is to achieve the emic validity that ethnography promises. I define emic validity simply as understanding the study host(s) from their own system of meanings. I argue that this can be achieved only by being in the host community and coming to a thorough understanding of the daily lives of the study hosts. As Malinowski pointed out more than 80 years ago, the goal of ethnography is “to grasp the native’s point of view...to realize his vision of the world” (1922:25). Moreover, as suggested by Guba and Lincoln (1997:198), the various hypotheses, theories, and interpretive frameworks brought by outside investigators “may have little or no meaning within the emic view of studied individuals, groups, societies, or cultures.” Fieldwork allows the researcher to observe and examine all aspects of a cultural system, especially those that could not be addressed through laboratory or survey research alone. Spending long periods of time in the field is considered the crucial aspect of the classical ethnographer’s ability to comprehensively describe components of a cultural system as accurately and with as little bias as possible. In summary, from an epistemological perspective, the classical ethnographer believes that the only way to gain a native’s view of his or her own world is to spend considerable time in that world. This point will become clearer as we discuss the role of fieldwork in the achievement of several other attributes of ethnography.

In the *What is Ethnography?* paper, I not only point out that Ethnography is a *holistic* approach to the study of *cultural systems*, but define **culture as a “holistic” flexible and non-constant system** with continuities between its interrelated components. I suggest that these interrelated components to be shared *ideational systems* (knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, values and other mental predispositions), and *preferred behaviors* and *structural (social) relationships*. Or stated in another way, human individuals live their lives in wider social contexts (e.g., family, peers, etc.) of shared ideational systems (beliefs, attitudes, values, etc.) and preferred behaviors, that help to meet a range of human needs, and that are influenced by significant historical events and processes. Thus the specific ideas and behaviors of an individual member of the cultural system can be influenced by any of these components of that system (social structure, shared ideas, and preferred behaviors), and the broader issues that have some influence on that system (physical environment, history, and real and perceived human needs). While one can interview cultural members outside of those contexts, and may secure somewhat *emically* answers, again the strongest means to achieving the greatest validity regarding the system is through fieldwork, and the opportunity for repetitive, iterative, and situational observations and interviews that such fieldwork allows.

With regards to ethnography as the study of the *socio-cultural contexts, processes, and meanings* within cultural systems, I define: (1) socio-cultural contexts as of several types: *social contexts* as represented in the social systems discussed (households and families, formal and informal networks, organizations, groups, dyads, institutions and relationships of the wider community, society, inter-societal linkages), that can influence behavior, of which individuals are members, of the **physical environments** occupied by individuals and their significant social systems, and of **significant individual and shared historical patterns**; (2) *the socio-cultural processes* included in the **interactions of individuals with and within their significant social systems**, with and within the physical environments that individuals and their significant social systems occupy, and in individual and shared histories and patterns of individual and group human needs fulfillment; and (3) *the socio-cultural meanings* that individuals and their significant social systems apply to social systemic relationships, the physical environments they occupy, individual and shared historical patterns, and patterns of basic human need fulfillment<sup>4</sup>. By these definitions, one can see that achieving the greatest emic validity in terms of socio-cultural contexts, processes and

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<sup>4</sup> There are three categories of human needs outlined in the CSP, not only the basic or biological/organic needs as outlined by Maslov, but also social needs such as education, and expressive needs such as the need for having an orderly view of the physical, social, and metaphysical worlds. The three categories of human needs are discussed in more detail in the CEHC Working paper, “The Cultural Systems Paradigm.”

meanings can only come from fieldwork. It is through observing, interacting with, and participating in their activities that the ethnographer is able to place his or her study participants into socio-cultural contexts that have meaning for them. It is through repeated observations, conversations, and more structured interviewing that the ethnographer gets an emically valid understanding of the sociocultural contexts, processes, and meaning systems that are of significance to the study participants.

There is one other point on the significance of meaning systems to ethnographers, and the importance of fieldwork to the understanding them. Ontologically, anthropological ethnographers have long criticized positivist approaches to social research because of their lack of attention to meaning systems, and the fact that humans, as the primary object of study, construct *multiple realities* that are complex, multifaceted, differently expressed in specific situations (context), and continually undergoing change (process). Epistemologically, to grasp an understanding of such realities, the classic ethnographic enterprise does not begin with predetermined hypotheses to be proved or disproved as objective social fact, but begins with open-ended exploratory attempts to learn as much as possible about those realities. In the end, this process enables the ethnographer to describe these realities and the connections between them with as much emic validity as possible.

In my discussion of cultural systems in the *What is Ethnography?* paper I also discuss the concept of culture as having a number of attributes, including the fact that **cultural expressions may exist as real for its practitioners, or may represent simply an ideal (of what they think or would like something to be), or may exist as explicit or tacit. Here I follow Spradley's (1979:8-9) definitions of explicit culture as cultural knowledge that people can easily talk about in a direct fashion, and tacit culture as knowledge that motivates particular ideational or behavioral patterns, but about which people may not be able to directly speak.** These concepts are very important in the discussion of emic validity because what may be picked up in an interview taken from outside of the natural contexts of the study participant's cultural contexts can result in responses that represent the ideal rather than the real, or may not represent what is truly important because "the truth" might be tacit rather than explicit. Here again ethnographic fieldwork, through the opportunities for repetitive, iterative, and situational observations and interviews that such fieldwork allows.

Another of the attributes of ethnography that I discuss in the *What is Ethnography?* paper is that ethnography is not a rigid investigator control experiment, but in the attempt to achieve the highest emic validity possible, ethnography is rather, a *process of discovery, making inferences, and continuing inquiry.* Because fieldwork places the ethnographer in the world of his host community, it is difficult to have investigator control, which is the hallmark of the dominant positivist paradigm. However, this lack of investigator control is sometime very valuable in the ethnographic attribute of discovering cultural phenomena that may be most meaningful to the host community regarding the topic of study, but would have been missed if the research would have followed a positivist orientation of investigator control.

This process of discovery often occurs when the ethnographer experiences what Agar refers to as ethnographic breakdown, a "disjunction between worlds"—the ethnographer's world and the host culture's world. That is, the ethnographer does not have a framework for making sense of what he or she is observing, as his or her assumption of *coherence* has been violated. The motivation to find coherence or meaning will often time contribute to an acceleration of the ethnographic processes of focused observations and interviewing until this breakdown is resolved and coherence (understanding) is achieved. This process of *breakdown-resolution-occurrence* also accentuates the importance of fieldwork, as such processes will occur more frequently in those environments in which ethnographic hosts spend most of their time, but which is a relatively newer cultural system for the ethnographer.

Ethnographic discovery is not only about uncovering heretofore unknown phenomena, but in many instances, discovering the right questions to ask to understand the emic meaning of known phenomena, as well as newly discovered phenomena. As such, ethnography is then defined as an *open-ended emergent process of learning episodes* that is facilitated through *iterative* processes of continual observations, asking

questions (interviewing), making inferences, and continuing these processes until those questions have been answered with the greatest emic validity possible. This process of open-ended emergent learning is facilitated through another departure from the positivist approach of following a rigid methodology, and that is the ethnographer must be ontologically, epistemologically, and methodologically *flexible* and *creative* in the use of a range of methodologies that will help in understanding the people and the study topic with the greatest emic validity possible. Emic validity is also achieved during ethnographic field work through the *daily* and *continuous* recording of fieldnotes. The daily recording of fieldnotes is important to the ethnographic process so that various components will not be forgotten. This process of recording fieldnotes facilitates the iterative process in ethnography, as questions emerge from the findings that are then viewed as important, and can help in the formulation of new or supplemental questions that furthers the assurance of emically valid products. The continuous recording of fieldnotes is also important because of the ethnographer's perspective that his or her product (findings) is *interpretive*, and those interpretations will often change over the duration of the fieldwork process. This occurs because early interpretations are often colored by paradigms that the ethnographer brings to the field. As he or she goes through the process of emically learning the cultural system being studied, they often find that later interpretations of the same phenomena differ from those earlier interpretations.

In recording fieldnotes, ethnographers not only continuously record their notes on the host community, but they also need to keep records on his or her reactions and feelings regarding their field experiences. These personal notes should be periodically analyzed in relationship to interpretations about the host community, or *the Other*. This process is referred to as *reflexivity*, is important in overcoming what those in more positivist paradigms refer to as investigator bias. In ethnography, however, we know that emically valid representations of these others, or so called objectivity in positivist paradigms, is enhanced by moving away from the more positivist orientation of the so-called objective neutral investigator, to accepting and analyzing our own human subjectivity in this process. The ethnographer then comes to understand that his or her product representing the host community is indeed a *constructivist* product of the intersubjectivity between the researcher and the researched.

In conclusion, it must be pointed out that achieving emic validity does not mean that ethnographers "go native," or discard all of the knowledge paradigms that they bring to the field with them. One of the attributes of ethnography discussed in the *What is Ethnography?* Paper is the ethnographer should maintain both *emic* and *etic* perspectives in their studies of cultural systems.. That is in addition to the emic approach of trying to understand components of a cultural system from the perspective of the group being studied, the ethnographer must also utilize, where appropriate, the theoretical, methodological, and other knowledge systems that will help in carrying out an emically valid research product. Because of such issues as multiple realities, and ideal and tacit cultural phenomena, discussed earlier, etic knowledge helps in understanding what is truly emic, or "true" in the study of a cultural system.

### **3. A Conceptual Model for the Ethnographic Study of Cultural System: *The Cultural Systems Paradigm (The CSP)***

One of the attributes of ethnography discussed in the *What is Ethnography?* Working Paper that needs further discussion here is the idea that *ethnography is the holistic study of cultural systems*. At the center of this attribute is the concept of culture, and the problems with there being a lack of any agreed upon definition of the concept. Because of my long career as a cultural anthropologists working in the field of public health, I found that I needed to operationalize the concept so that it could be understood by non-anthropologists (as well as myself), and could be used to inform the work in which I was involved in adopted field. The result of this operationalization of the concept of culture has been the Cultural Systems Paradigm (the CSP), to facilitate the holistic study of cultural systems. I will only briefly described the CSP here as a more detailed discussion of its origins and characteristics can be found in the CEHC Working Papers, *What is Ethnography?* and *The Cultural Systems Paradigm*.



The CSP began to emerge in the early 1980s to respond to two methodological needs that I had at the time:

- the lack of adequate models for interpreting the complex data generated by ethnographic approaches in a manner appropriate for applied settings (Pelto et al, 1980); and
- the frequency with which ethnographic inquiry yielded narrative answers from informants which expressed a range of concerns outside of the research questions but which appeared to be of extreme importance to those being studied.

Increasingly I found that the data that I was collecting from study after study provided the answer to my dilemma and gave rise to three underlying ethnographic principles which are built into the CSP. First I found that my data from most of my studies could be organized into nine broad categories, with multiple subcategories in each (See Figure 2). The major categories of the CSP are:

- (1) **The individual human organism** and its biological status, psychological makeup, personality and idiosyncratic tendencies (including agency), “intelligence,” skill levels, etc.
- (2) **The social systems** or units of social relationships which individuals interact within, are influenced by, and have an influence on (residential units, extra-residential networks and dyads, and community or societal organizations and agencies).
- (3) Individual and shared (with others in select social systems) **behavioral patterns**.
- (4) The significant “**idea**” **systems** (knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, values, and symbolisms or “units of meaning”) held by individuals and social systems.
- (5) **Expressive Culture** as represented in such forms as language, music, art, etc.
- (6) Technologies and human made material objects, or **material culture**.
- (7) The **physical environments** in which humans interact.
- (8) **Needs** that humans must meet in order to achieve the level of physical functioning necessary to the survival of the individual and group.
- (9) The human group's **shared history** of significant events and processes.

These nine ethnographic categories gave rise to the first ethnographic principle of the CSP, *The Principle of Universal Human Cultural Categories*. This principle holds that there are certain categories of phenomena which are universally relevant to human communities, though these communities differ in terms of how these phenomena are expressed (*culture*). This assumption suggests that *we look for ways that humans and their cultures are similar* before we began to look for how they vary. However, very important to this particular orientation is that while the CSP suggests *broad universal cultural categories*, it must be noted that *human communities and their individual members vary in terms of how those components are expressed*. The job of ethnographer, then, is to *decipher the specific cultural and individual expressions within these data categories*.

The second ethnographic principle of the CSP is what I call the *Principle of Paradigmatic Flexibility*, which states that because of the differences in behavioral and ideational expressions across human groups and individuals, *conceptual frameworks that inform the study of cultural systems must be flexible*. As a consequence of variations in expression, while the categories of the CSP provide a framework for initiating ethnographic study and storing ethnographic data, the boundaries of these categories are not rigid. Data that are stored in one CSP category at one point in the ethnographic process may be moved to or shared with another category as the ethnographer continues to learn about his or her host culture. The categories of the CSP are not necessarily permanent. Indeed the CSP's categories and subcategories have changed a great deal since the paradigm was first conceptualized—a process of evolving conceptualization that will continue as conceptions of human cultural and individual variations also evolve.

The third ethnographic principle of the CSP is what I call the *Principle of the Interrelationship between Socio-cultural Contexts, Processes, and Meaning Systems*. This principle holds that in order to understand why

certain behaviors emerge and persist, including health risk and resiliency behaviors, we must understand the socio-cultural contexts in which these behaviors occur, the socio-cultural processes of behavioral contexts, and the socio-cultural meanings that these contexts and processes have for those who practice them. More specifically, the CSP allows us to holistically study:

- (1) *the socio-cultural contexts* of the **social systems** (households and families, formal and informal networks, organizations, groups, dyads, institutions and relationships of the wider community, society, inter-societal linkages), of which individuals are members, of the **physical environments** occupied by individuals and their significant social systems, and of **significant individual and shared historical patterns**;
- (2) *the socio-cultural processes* included in the **interactions of individuals with and within their significant social systems**, with and within the physical environments that individuals and their significant social systems occupy, and in individual and shared histories and patterns of individual and group human needs fulfillment; and
- (3) *the socio-cultural meanings* that individuals and their significant social systems apply to social systemic relationships, the physical environments they occupy, individual and shared historical patterns, and patterns of basic human need fulfillment<sup>5</sup>.

## 4. Basic Classical Ethnographic Field Methods: Ethnographic Observation, Interviewing, and Interpretation as Cyclic Iterative Processes

### 4.1. The Natural Cultural Learning Process: The Child as an Ethnographic Model

Usually, discussions of ethnographic observations, interviewing, and data interpretation are presented in separate sections of a document, separate chapters in books, or as separate books. However, because ethnography is a cyclic iterative process, wherein the ethnographer, moves back and forth between observations, interviewing, and interpretation. In this sense, the ethnographer trying to learn the rules, routines, and meanings of a new cultural system is similar to the young child first learning the culture of which he will become a member. Any new parents, or others who have spent time with human infants, one will notice that they learn their culture through the following processes of *observations, asking questions, interpretation, and participant observation*, the primary methods used in Basic Classical ethnographic field methods. As such I refer to these methods as the *natural cultural learning process*, or NCLP.

I came to use the young child an ethnographic model, and NCLP terminology, because of my involvement in introducing ethnography to audiences who have no background in either anthropology or ethnography. Anyone who has taken care of toddlers, and has to sit the child down while doing other things, might notice how the child eyes follow you, taken in every thing that you are doing. This is the way the child begins to learn the rules and routines that are associated with the first cultural system that they are consciously aware of. As the toddler begins to talk, and to formulate questions, the questions then come continuously. The child then experiments, or participates in the various activities he has observed, as well as attempt new ones. As he or she begins to walk, the methods of experimentation broadens, and parents are kept busy, to make sure that he doesn't injure him or herself. Parents are helping the child learn the boundaries, rules and routines of this early cultural system. With each of these *cultural learning processes*, the child is making interpretations, refining these interpretations with every

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<sup>5</sup> There are three categories of human needs outlined in the CSP, not only the basic or biological/organic needs as outlined by Maslov, but also social needs such as education, and expressive needs such as the need for having an orderly view of the physical, social, and metaphysical worlds. The three categories of human needs are discussed in more detail in the CEHC Working paper, "The Cultural Systems Paradigm."

phase of the process. As children grow older, they use others in new socio-cultural systems as they used their parents, including older siblings, peers, teachers, and so on, in learning the various socio-cultural systems that these persons represent.

The methods used by children in learning the various socio-cultural systems that they interact, are the same methods that are used by the ethnographer in learning a new cultural system: *observation, interviewing, participating, and making interpretations*. In terms of observation, one might notice that as the toddler continuously watches parents and older siblings in learning its earliest socio-cultural system, it lifts its other senses to the highest level of awareness as well, hearing, smell, touch, and taste. The ethnographer does the same, as ethnographic observation not only means the collection of information through elevated use of the sense of sight, but through all of his or her senses. This is the meaning of the ethnographer's frequent use of the concept of the ethnographer as his or her primary research instrument.

The child's use of members of specific cultural systems as sources of information is similar to the ethnographers' use of cultural "informants," through observations and interviews, as well as with whom to participate in experiencing components of that system. As the child goes through the different phases of information gathering (observations, interviewing, participation/experimentation), there are different phases of interpretations regarding the information collected, until the child achieves a level of satisfactory coherence regarding the phenomena about which data were collected. This is the same process used by ethnographers as they moved towards a sense of emic validity, as discussed in the preceding section.

Figure 1 illustrates the iterative nature of the NCLP. The bottom of the figure suggests that the ethnographer uses similar skills in resolving breakdowns leading to the coherence of new cultural systems. During initial periods of cultural learning, human infants can be viewed in somewhat contrasting ways with regards to the breakdown-resolution-coherence process. First they initially do not suffer breakdown, because they have no existing framework that needs deconstructing, in order to move on to new cultural learning; or breakdown could be viewed as the only state that they know for the same reason. Whatever their state, it is one that accelerates the process of resolution—they could be viewed as in a continued as would an adult learning a new culture, because there is a constant state of breakdown because is also an illustration of the ethnographer, going through the processes of *breakdown, resolution, and coherence* discussed earlier. For, while the ethnographer uses skills to learn a new culture, that are similar to those of the child learning his or her native culture, iterative observational, interviewing, interpretation, and participation/experimentation.

I began to use the child as model in providing training in basic or Basic Classical ethnographic methods to novices to ethnography to also demonstrate that there is nothing mystical about the concept; but that these were skills that we learned earlier in life, and that we continue to use as adults, but with decreasing efficiency, as we learn the various aspect of our own indigenous socio-cultural systems. Infants and toddlers are very efficient at cultural learning because they don't have an existing cultural framework, which might act as a barrier to interpreting a particular thing or action within its own socio-cultural context. Without such a framework, all of the child's senses (sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste) are highly tuned to environmental stimuli. As we get older, we are not as efficient in cultural learning because we enculturate the various aspects of our own socio-cultural system, and no longer have to use our senses at such a level. We make interpretations base on existing frameworks, and over time lose some our natural cultural learning skills. Basic Classical ethnographic training then is about helping to restore some of these skills, and to move beyond natural cultural learning skills of children and everyday people, to the more systematic, purposive, and structured skills of ethnography.

## 4.2. Descriptive Observations

As stated earlier, there are many forms of ethnographic observations and interviewing. First ethnographers generally view ethnographic observations as generally being of two types:

(1) observations *without the ethnographer participating in the activities being observed*; and observations with participation in the community activities in addition to observation, a concept deemed *participant observation in ethnography*.

The term observation is usually associated with the sense of sight. But In the purest form of observations without participation, ethnographers raises all of their senses, sight, hearing, smell, taste, and feel, to levels higher than normal, and take in stimuli from all sources of the cultural environment in which they are studying and living. In other words, the ethnographer's whole body becomes a highly charged data-collecting instrument to take in and process stimuli that might have meaning for the members of the community, or that provide insight regarding their lifeways. Some ethnographers often view this process as one in which they are responding to inquiries about the study community from themselves, although sometimes they might not consciously be aware of any questions that they are pursuing responses to. As Spradley comments, every thing that the ethnographer observes are actually answers, and the process of observation is actually finding questions to those answers.

Ethnographic observations in which the ethnographer participates during social activities he or she is observing (*participant observation*), help the ethnographer or ethnographic team to gain an *emic* or indigenous sense of the social setting being studied. This usually happens during involvement in carrying out roles within that setting, and experiencing the socio-cultural dynamics of such participation<sup>6</sup>. Some ethnographers view ethnographic fieldwork and participant observation as synonymous, because fieldwork (living in the study community) for any period of time is impossible without participation, and moving beyond interviewing, to ask questions, even if such questions are unstructured and a part of normal conversation.

I also use Spradley's (1980) observational s categories of as *descriptive, focused, and select*. Spradley says that one usually start ethnographic fieldwork conducting descriptive observations, which usually means entering the field setting or situation with a goal of recording as much information as possible. This characterizes the open-ended approach to ethnography discussed earlier. Descriptive observations are usually carried out observing everything, through the heightened awareness of the senses, discussed earlier, and by, according to Spradley (1980:73), "approaching the activity in process without any particular orientation in mind, but only the general question, "What is going on here?"

There are other questions however, that ethnographers might use when not being quite sure of what should be observed in social settings, and those are what I called the *natural inquiries*. In additions to questions of *what*, when people are observing or learning about new settings or situations, naturally, although perhaps subconsciously ask themselves the questions, *who, how, where, when* and *why*. I refer to these as natural inquiries also because these are question that humans normally ask when faced with an issue about which they are not sure of the correct answer, and continually asked by young children when learning aspects of their own culture. Thus when one is carrying out one's first ethnographic observations of a social setting, but is not sure what he or she should be observing, these natural cultural learning process inquiries should be kept in mind.

In continuing to read Spradley, one becomes aware that the question, "what is going on here?" is not the only one that he asks when carrying out descriptive observations. He presents nine (9 categories) of phenomena that might occur in any setting of human interaction, and those are:

- The *actors* in the setting.

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<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that Spradley delineates four levels of participation: (1) *passive participation*, wherein the observer is present at the setting, but participation is very limited; (2) *moderate participation*, wherein there is greater participation than in passive, but still somewhat limited because the observer attempts to maintain a balance between emic and etic experiences; (3) *active participation*, wherein the observer not only seeks to do what others are doing, not only to gain acceptance in the setting but also to more fully learn the cultural rules for behavior; and (4) *complete participation*, wherein the observe is fully involved in every aspect of the setting in which his or her role allows.

- The *behaviors* that are being carried out by these actors in terms of *acts* (smallest units of behavior), *activities* (a set of related acts), and *events* (a set of related events—more discussion on these will be provided later)
- The *space* occupied by these actors, and how these actors are situated in the space.
- The *objects* in that space, and how these objects are situated or arranged.
- The *time* of observations (hours of the day, days of week, specific months or seasons of the year)
- Whether there seems to be any *goals* associated with the behavior of the actors?
- Do behaviors seem to be carried out with any level of *emotions*, or feelings?

The reader might note that I mentioned Spradley's suggestion of nine observational categories, but I only have seven bullets. The reason for what seems to be a discrepancy is that I combined three of his categories, acts, activities, and events into one category, *behavior*. I want to point out however, that while I combine his three categories into the larger category in which his three can be grouped, behavior, in the collection and analysis of ethnographic data, I maintain his nine categories.

Spradley suggests these categories of phenomena for observation because they represent the range of what might be observed in any specific social setting, and because phenomena within any of these categories may carry (cultural) *meaning* for the participants in the setting. I always found Spradley's categories useful in their potential for generating questions for ethnographers to look for while observing social settings. He provides a matrix based on just these nine categories to show the range of questions that the observer might use, in using him or herself as an interviewee (See Spradley's descriptive observation matrix in Table 1).

I found it necessary to add four other categories to those of suggested by Spradley, that also overlap with his, because they are also sources of meaning, and they are:

- The *language* used by the actors in the setting.
- The *interactive patterns* between the actors in the setting.
- *Discourse Content* that appears to influence the actors in the setting.
- The presence of *Actor Groups* in the setting, or persons that can be differentiated by some shared similarity, such as by sex, age, kinship, vocational or some other type of affiliation (such as persons in a hospital setting differentiated by administration, doctors, nurses, non-medical staff, patients, etc.)

As the CSP emerged, I found that it suggested that there were even more categories to be added to Spradley's list for descriptive observations, even though a number of the major analytical categories of the CSP seem to overlap with many of Spradley's. The CSP categories, however, provide greater interpretive or analytical strength through its provision of subcategories. For example, the CSP's Material Culture category is similar to Spradley's Object category. Similarly, the CSP's Social Systems is similar to Spradley's Actor category, in that both are a reference to the people in the setting. But Social Systems also refer to subcategories and groups of Actors, such as those organized by domestic units, extra-residential groupings, institutional and organizational structures, local communities, societies, and extra-societal relationships. These Social Systems subcategories are ever further subcategorized in terms of varying characteristics.

Similarly the CSP category of Behavior overlaps with Spradley's categories of Acts, Activities, and Events, but the CSP's Behavior category is further divided into two subcategories, Behavioral Activities and the Socio-cultural Characteristics of such activities. These two behavior subcategories are further subcategorized. For example in the case of certain types of food or drug behavioral activities in which I have conducted research, I found it necessary to understand such behavior in terms of *acquisition behavior*,

*processing/preparation* behavior, *dispensation* or *distribution* behavior, and consumption (including pre-and post) behavior. Similar with the sociocultural characteristics of such behavioral activities, understanding them in terms of *content*, *method*, *participation*, *location*, *time*, and *reason*. One should note that these categories of behavioral socio-cultural characteristics are the same as the natural inquiries discussed earlier of *what* (content of the activity, such as what is being acquired), *who* (the participants in the activity), *how* (the particular method for carrying out the activity), *where* (the location of the activity), *when* (the time of the activity, as well as whether repetitions are routinized), The CSP however, differs from Spradley's descriptive observation questions, in that in the answers to the first four natural inquiries (content, method, participation, location, and time, can usually be answered through the observation of behavior. However, the answer to questions of *why* are provided through exploration of the other major CSP categories (i.e., ideational, social systems, history, physical environment, expressive and material culture, and history).

One of the most extensive categories of the CSP are human needs. One might think that this category might overlap with Spradley's category of goals, but as one can see in Figure 2, the CSP has three different categories of human needs, and a number of subcategories within each of the three. With all of the additions that I made to Spradley's original nine, I offer the following to be used in informing descriptive, focused, and selective observations.

- *Space*: The nature of the space utilized in the social setting.
- *Objects*: The material culture found in the social setting, and how this material culture is organized.
- *The Individual Actors* within that setting, and their specific characteristics
- *The Social Systemic Context* of the Actors in the Setting (i.e. Actor Groups)
- The *Behaviors* that are being carried out in a socio-cultural setting (acts, activities, and events).
- The *Language* used by the actors in the space
- Other Forms of *Expressive Culture* found in the social setting beyond general language (e.g., music, song, dance, art, architecture, etc.).
- *Patterns of Interaction* carried out by the actors within the social setting.
- *Discourse Content* of the Setting as reflected in the language, expressive culture, and social interactions the actors in the social setting
- *Emotional Level* of the Discourse
- *Ideational Elements* (Beliefs, Attitudes, Values, significant symbolisms) that appear to be present in a Social Setting
- *Broader Social Systems* that might influence the actor, behaviors, and ideations found in any specific social system.
- *Physical Environmental Elements* present within or surrounding a specific social setting.
- *The Goals, Motivations, or Agendas* of the various individual and groups of the actors within the social setting.
- *Human Need* fulfillment that is attempted or met within the social setting or interaction.

Appendix 1 is a simple Workbook for recording descriptive observations using these categories.

### 4.3. Study Community Entré and Initial Ethnographic Tours

There are many issues related to entering the community of study, such as issues related to how the ethnographer introduces him or herself to the community, as well as how to manage becoming comfortable with such introductions, as well as with questions, stares, and general curiosity that community members have of the ethnographer. But for the time being I will focus on initial ethnographic tours. An initial ethnographic tour is a tour of the community using basic ethnographic methods. Such tours may be riding, or what is commonly called in community health, *windshield tours* and *walking tours*, in which one drives through the community making various descriptive observations of various community settings. The 15 ethnographic categories used in Section 4.2 can be used to structure these observations. In my work, these tours are carried out in teams, wherein one team member focuses on driving, while the others focus on recording what is seen, heard, etc. Where possible, the information collected during such tours can be enhanced through the use of a *Key Community Expert*, one who is indigenous and knowledgeable about the community, or one who has gain knowledge of the community through some other source (e.g., long term work in or study of the community).

Windshield tours are carried out in large communities, where a vehicle is needed to get to all or major portions of the community. In rural and/or small communities, however, the initial ethnographic tour may be a walking tour. In the larger communities, walking tours usually follow the initial windshield tour. It is here that I began to use focused and select observations in a different way than how they were first described by Spradley. In the community assessment studies that I do, initial windshield or walking tours may yield areas of the community upon which the ethnographer want to focus because of person interests, topical interests (e.g., places of worship if religion is the topic of interest), or theoretical interests. The ethnographer will then follow up these initial descriptive tours with additional windshield or walking tours to carry out more focus observations. Certain peculiarities of this area of the community may lead then to select interviews, as the ethnographer moves towards an interpretation of what is being observed with the greatest emic validity possible.

### 4.4. Selecting Social Settings for Ethnographic Study

As stated in the Introduction of this paper, classical ethnography has traditionally been associated with local communities or populations. Ethnographers have however, also studied a range of social settings, such as organizations, institutions, meetings, and just about any setting in which humans are interacting. Following are some different settings that have been studied by ethnographers.

bars	parks	city halls
churches	court rooms	agencies
playgrounds	a family settings	main streets
gymnasiums	hog killings	busy neighborhoods
beauty parlors	industry or work settings	town meetings
discos	slaughter houses	office meetings
farmers markets	school rooms	parties
sports events	cafeterias	airport/bus terminals
food activities (dinner, feast)	swimming pools	barber shops
festivals	grocery stores	mental institutions
shopping malls	hospitals	Ad Infinitum
jails/prisons		

The ethnographic study of various types of social settings is based in various attributes of human interaction, and those are:

- As socio-cultural beings, humans are users and producers of culture, which include the creation of *routinized* patterns or *rules* of behavior and interaction.
- *Any human social setting* or encounter (social situations) may have routinized patterns or rules of behavior and interaction.
- The rules or routinized patterns of social situations are functionally oriented toward the provision of *order, regularity, and predictability* to social interaction.
- Communication or *interactional breakdowns* occur when one or more of the actors in the situation do not know the rules for the situation, or the actors are attempting to interact utilizing more than one set of rules.
- The routines and rules observed in social situation may sometimes provide clues regarding *broader socio-cultural contexts* (e.g. observations at a disco could yield patterns of dancing that reflect broader socio-cultural norms regarding male-female behavior).
- The routines and rules observed in social situations may sometimes provide clues regarding *deep structural*, as well as surface functioning (e.g., a feast may not only function to meet nutritional and economic need – i.e., food exchange in the case of the latter; it may also provide clues regarding social status and network functioning).
- Observations as used here are not simply a use of the sense of sight, but a reference to raising all one's senses to a heightened level of analysis in order to pick up stimuli that offer information about the socio-cultural patterns of the setting.
- What people *say* they do and what they *actually* do frequently differ. The objective of focused observation is to be able to discern the *real* from the *ideal*, the *tacit* from the *explicit*, and the *back* from the *front*.

#### 4.5. From “Grand Tour” to “Mini-Tour” Observations to *Informal, Unstructured, Conversational, and Descriptive Interviews*

This list of ethnographic categories are not only useful for descriptive observations but they also further the iterative process of ethnography, wherein episodes of are interspersed with additional episodes of data collection. Thus even when Spradley says that descriptive observations begin with observing everything in the setting, the process quickly moves to one of organizing observed phenomena into categories for interpretive purposes, the first phase of analysis. Such early categorization facilitates the iterative process of further inquiry development, and moving from what he calls *Grand Tour Observations* to *Mini-Tour Observations*. Grand Tour observations are those descriptive observations in which everything is being generally observed in the setting. But even when such open ended approaches as those implied in Spradley's Grand Tour observations, the process quickly moves towards categorization, if not the 15 above, then to some form of categorization. For without some type of categorization, neither interpretation nor analysis can be done, and the information remained meaningless, or incoherent.

The next stage of data collection may be continued Grand Tours until there is some satisfaction with the information general information collected for the list of analytical categories, such as the 15 that I use.. Or the decision may be to carry out Mini-Tours that focus in on one specific category. Both grand and mini-tours may be complemented by *Informal Unstructured, Conversational and Descriptive Ethnographic Interviews*. Bernard (2002) talks about ethnographic interviews being of four types, based on the level or *structure* and/or *control* that the investigator is able to provide to the interview process. The less structured or ethnographer controlled interview, he refers to as informal, which he characterizes by a *total lack* of structure or control, but that the ethnographer simply tries to remember and record conversations during the day (Bernard 2002:204). The next type of ethnographic interview in terms of structure, Bernard says, is the unstructured interview, which he says is based on a clear plan that the ethnographer



constantly keeps in mind. At the same time, he says, the ethnographer maintains a minimum of control over peoples' responses, with the purpose of getting people to "open up and let them express themselves in their own terms, and at their own pace" (op cit, p.205). Bernard believes that "a lot of what is called ethnographic interviewing is unstructured, being used in situations where the ethnographer has lots of time, as in doing long term (classical) fieldwork and can interview people on many separate occasions" (*ibid*).

However, because Bernard (*ibid*) also characterizes the unstructured interview is also where the ethnographer "sits down with another person, and hold an interview...." ...with both the interviewer and interviewee know what is going on, without deception and more than "pleasant chitchat," there is another form of ethnographic interview that I think occurs between what he describes as informal, and unstructured. This is the descriptive interview that is *conversational* in format. I call this format the *natural conversational ethnographic interview*, because the discourse is similar to what naturally occurs in a conversation, and usually occurs when the ethnographer is simply another participant in a conversation. However, ethnographers, having some idea of what it is that they want to learn in the setting, aspects of their research concerns are never far from their consciousness, even though the conversation or the activity maybe primarily social or informal. Because some form of research paradigm is part of an ethnographer's consciousness, she or he are not only alert when something emerges in the conversation in which they don't quite understand, but also when the conversation seems to be moving into an area related to that research paradigm. In such instances, the ethnographer may ask a question to further explore the issue of interest, then become the alert listener, and then insert the appropriate natural inquiries of what, how, who, where, when, and why, that were mentioned earlier in the discussion of descriptive observations.

The point is that the natural conversation format may start out as an informal interview, as this genre is describe by Bernard, and may start with no conscious structure. But structure begins to develop as the ethnographer may come to influence the direction of the conversation because of the research paradigm that he or she brings to the conversational scene. The ethnographer may then add more structure around the topic in future conversation, but maintain the natural conversation format, rather than holding a sit down interview, even though the process may eventually lead to the sit down interview that Bernard associates with the unstructured interview. This again is part of this ongoing iterative process of ethnography, the movement from less to more structure in ethnographic interviewing.

During walking tours, discussed in 4.3 above, ethnographers can begin unstructured or natural conversational interviews. These can be opportunistic, in simply saying hello to persons with whom one comes in contact with during these walks. Frequently, community persons will engage the ethnographer in questions, being curious about the new persons in the community. The ethnographer then takes advantage of such contact by continuing the conversation with descriptive questions, followed by probes using the natural inquiries. Through this process, the ethnographer may eventually identify participants for further semi-structured or even structured interviews, as well as meet additional community members. For example, I have found asking a question like "what do people around here do to enjoy themselves," I get invited to another setting such as a rum shop, a food event, or some other activity.

#### **4.6. From Descriptive to Semi-Structured, to Structured Interviews**

In the preceding section, I referred to natural conversational ethnographic interviews as descriptive in nature, becoming more structured through the iterative process. Spradley (1979) describes descriptive interviews as having the same purpose as descriptive observations, being used to *elicit broad categories of information as provided by members of the study population from their own perspective*. As such, in descriptive interviews Grand Tour and Mini-Tour questions are the counterparts of descriptive observations with the same name. Spradley also mentions three *other types of descriptive questions: example questions, experience questions, and native language questions*. He cites an example question as one that might follow the answer

to a grand or mini-tour question, in which the study participant is asked to give an example of something that was just mentioned. An experience question is one in which the study participant is asked have they ever had a particular experience of interest to the study. Spradley describes native language questions as simply asking a study participant for information using the terms and phrases most often used in the socio-cultural setting being studied. These forms of descriptive questions also represent a move from less to more structure as the ethnographer moves from collecting more general information to greater focus on the data collected.

The next level of structured interviewing, is the semi-structured interview, which Bernard describes as having “much of the freewheeling quality of unstructured interviewing, but is based on the use of an interview guide... a written list of questions and topics that need to be covered in a particular order” (Bernard 2002:205). Semi-structured interviewing follows the open-ended approach that is characteristic of ethnographic and qualitative research. While the interviewer has this written list of questions and a particular order to follow, there is not the set list of response possibilities, such as that found in the survey style of structured interviewing (discussed in the next section). In semi-structured interviewing, the interviewer elicits answers fully from the perspective of the study participant, and attempts to gain a greater understanding of the context and meaning of those responses through various forms of probing.

The highest level of interviewing in terms of structure is referred to as the structured interview, which, according to Bernard (2002:205), “...people are asked to respond to as nearly as identical a set of stimuli as possible.” Bernard goes on to describe structured interviews in ethnography as being of two primary types. The first is the structured interview that uses interview schedules or questionnaires, which may be *administered by an interviewer*, either face to face or by telephone, or may be *self-administered* by the study participant. This type of structured interview not only asks people to respond to the same set of stimuli or questions in the same order, but respondents are given the same choice of responses to select. The logic of such structured techniques, most often used in surveys, is that they provide against threats to reliability and validity. Ethnographers include them in their methodological toolkits, primarily to see how broadly represented a particular finding among the community or population being studied. However, the most common structured interview techniques used by contemporary ethnographers is the second mentioned by Bernard, which is more of a category of multiple types of structure interviewing, is *cultural domain analysis*. Included among the structured interview techniques used in analyzing cultural domains, according to Bernard are *pile sorting*, *frame elicitations*, *triad sorting*, and *rating* or *rank* ordering lists of things. Different from the usual way that structured interviewing is carried out in survey formats, however, in ethnography, these structured interview formats to reveal the structure of cultural domains are part of the iterative process that characterizes ethnographic inquiry that may include questionnaires as also part of this process. The structure interview methods for exploring cultural domains are used themselves used in a recursive way in relationship to each other between. However, the exploration of cultural domains not only includes methods of interviews, but also methods of observation. And here we return to the other two types of observations discussed by Spradley, *focused* and *select*.

#### **4.7. Exploring the Structure of Culture Domains: Focused and Select Observations and Semi-Structured and Structured Interviews**

As discussed above the purpose of descriptive observations are to begin to identify the most general features of phenomena within a social setting. A next step is to begin to establish categories or domains for organizing and beginning the earliest processes of analysis. To further pursue an understanding of these general domains, the ethnographer may move from Grand Tour descriptive observations to Mini-Tour observations. This process is further facilitated through the use of descriptive interviews, beginning with the most informal or unstructured interviews, adding more structure as one moves further along this iterative process.

After identifying and exploring the most general cultural domains, the next step is to explore the

structural characteristics of these domains. Following on the work of earlier anthropologists who took an ethnosemantic approach to their ethnographic explorations, Spradley suggested that such structural relationships can be found in a people's language, in the way that human groups structure their language in understanding their worlds, and in communicating that understanding to others. As such he offered nine categories that he suggests cover the range of domain structures found in human languages. Table 2 shows Spradley's nine semantic relationships and examples of each.

Specific cultural domains to be explored in any ethnographic study may emerge due to topical interest (e.g., illness and healing systems), theoretical interests (e.g., categories of the the CSP), or concerns or suggestions of the study participants. The structure of that domain can be fully explored through the generation of questions following these nine semantic relationship categories. For example using illnesses as a domain, one might develop questions to explore *kinds of illness* (strict inclusion), what causes the specific illnesses (cause-effect), ways to overcome a specific illness (means-ends), etc. Such domain structures may first be explored through *focused observations*, wherein the ethnographic focuses on the domain and direct observations towards the discovery of such relationships. However, explorations of cultural domains alone will most likely not yield the full structure of any culture domain, and thus *structural questions* are asked of study participants. An example of a structural question based on the cause-effect semantic relationship might be: "What are some ways of getting sick" (or more specific..."coming down with the flu.

As one develops the internal structure of a cultural domain, one will often find that there are terms within the domain that are very similar. The ethnographer needs to explore, however, whether there is some difference between the terms. Such explorations are made through *select observations*, and *contrast interview questions*. For example, in the ethnographic and qualitative studies during the 1990s, to questions of kinds of women, study participants would list "freaks" and "skeezers." These terms were very close in meaning, both being defined as young women who were open to any type of sexual practice requested. However, through the use of contrast questions, such as what is the difference between a freak and a skeezer, is that the skeezer would do anything sexual in exchange for drugs, especially crack cocaine.

Spradley says that the ethnographer may begin to explore contrasts of very similar constructs in a domain through select observations of potential difference. However, interviewing through contrast questions Interviews is most necessary to confirm what one thinks one is observing. Moreover, contrast questions are the only source of information of particular domain constructs that the ethnographer may not be able to observe. (For example, in the example given in my own research of the difference between the skeezer and the freak, I could not observe the difference between the sexual behaviors of the two. And even if I could have, the ethics of such observations would have been questionable).

There are different interview procedures for carrying out the analysis of structure of cultural domains. The first interview method, *Free- listing*, is exploratory, where a study participant may be asked to list all of the items that they can think of in a domain. An example may be, "Tell me all of the illnesses that you know about." While this is a strict inclusion category, one might do the same with the other 8 semantic relationships in Spradley's categorization. This type of interview method is generally referred to in ethnography as elicitation. Other forms of ethnographic elicitation cited by Bernard (2002:283) are:

- (1) *Sentence Frame Elicitations*, that may call for direct yes/no or true/false responses to questions (e.g., Unprotected Sex can lead to AIDS), or filling in blank spaces in sentences (e.g. Unprotected sex can lead to catching\_\_\_.);
- (2) *Triad Tests*, in which people are shown three things, and are told to "choose the one that doesn't fit, or "choose the two that seem to go together best" or choose the two that are the same.";

- (3) *Pile Sorts*, which takes the items yield through freelistings, put each item on a card, shuffle the cards, and then ask the study participant to put the cards into piles, based on how similar he or she thinks these things are, putting them into as many piles as they would like (Also see Borgatti, 1999:131). Pile sorts are also an effective way to further reveal the intricacies of a domains structure through the use of creating taxonomic trees or networks, by asking study participants to sort the cards into piles based on similarity, and then to create new piles of similarity from those, and continue repeating this process, until they say they can't do this any more.
- (4) *Paired Comparisons*, in which each item collected for the domain is compared with every other item, to give a number of pairs. Then the study participant is asked to circle the item in the pair that conforms to some criterion. (Bernard gives the example: "Here are two animals. Which one is the more \_\_\_\_\_?" (2002:293).
- (5) *Rankings*, in which people are asked to rank the items in a domain based on some sort of criterion (e.g., on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the highest, and 10 being the lowest, or from the most to the least with regards to the criterion).
- (6) *Ratings*, where people are ask to rank items in opposing cognitive directions, eg., in scale indicators frequently found in questionnaires such as strongly agree, agree, no opinion, disagree, strongly disagree.

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## **TABLES**

**Table 1: Spradley's Descriptive Question Matrix**

**Table 2: Spradley's Proposed Universal Semantic Relationships for Use in Domain Analysis**

Type of Relationship	General Nature of Relationship	Example of Relationship in English
1. Strict Inclusion	X is a Kind of Y	Milk is a kind of food
2. Spatial	X is a place in Y, X is a part of Y	A kitchen is a room in a house
3. Cause-Effect	X is a result of Y, X is a cause of Y	Stoning will result from adultery
4. Rationale	X is a reason for doing Y	Needing money is a reason for selling crack cocaine
5. Location	X is a place for doing Y	A gymnasium is a place to get exercise
6. Function	X is used for Y	Drugs are used to get girls
7. Means-End	X is a way to do Y	Working hard is a way to "get ahead."
8. Sequence	X is a step (stage) in Y	Descriptive observation is a step in doing Ethnography
9. Attribution	X is an attribute (characteristic) of Y	Being touch is an attribute of a strong man

## Figures

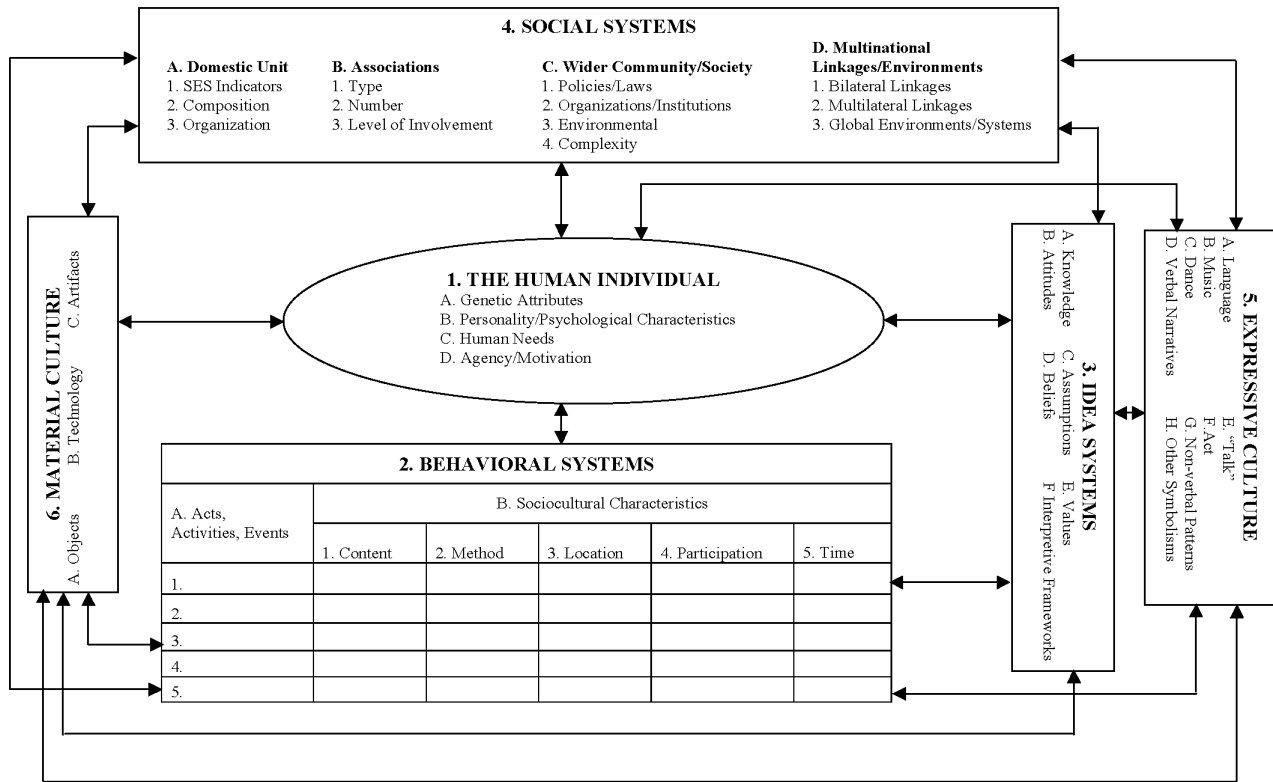
**Figure 1: Natural Cultural Learning Process as a Model for Basic Ethnography**



**Figure 2: The Cultural Systems Paradigm**

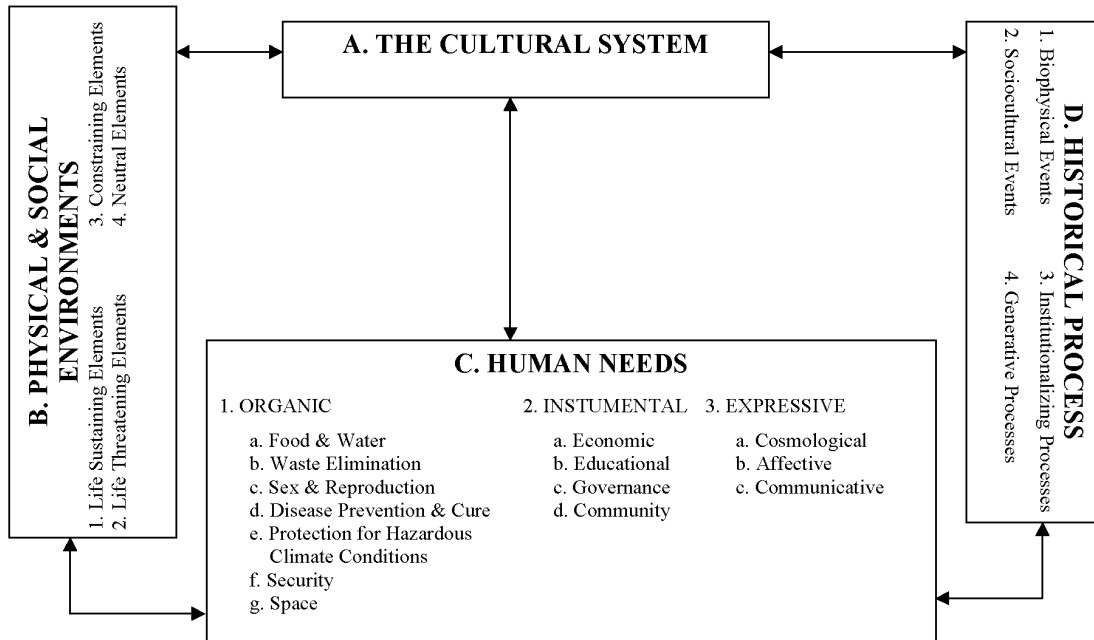
**FIGURE 2A**

**THE CULTURAL SYSTEMS PARADIGM (CSP):  
“THE CULTURAL SYSTEM”**



**FIGURE 2B**

**THE CULTURAL SYSTEMS PARADIGM (CSP)  
“THE HUMAN ECOSYSTEM”**



Source: Whitehead 1990a; Modification of Whitehead 1984

## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix I: Workbook for Recording Descriptive Observations**

**Appendix II: Contact Summary Form (Modification of Miles and Huberman, 1994:51-54).**

**Contact Type (Check with X):**

**Contact Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

Visit: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

**Today's Date** \_\_\_\_\_

Meeting \_\_\_\_\_

Other (Specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**Written by** \_\_\_\_\_

Sites: \_\_\_\_\_

**In answering each of the following questions, enumerate as needed, and write on back of sheet if not enough space.**

1. Are there specific things that you would like to learn at this contact?

2. Who were the actors present at the contact? (Provide real names or pseudonyms if necessary, affiliation, and title)



