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**Abstract**

Two trajectories of thought within ethnoclassification, one associated with the approach of Brent Berlin, the other with the approach of Ralph Bulmer, have influenced developments within cognitive anthropology (including evolutionary psychology) and ethnoecology respectively. The former is treated briefly. The latter is explored in greater detail. The aim of ethnecology is to understand and explain ecology as experienced and, ultimately, the project should reveal the diversity of human ecological experience. It is argued that the imagination is fundamental to those experiences. Within the frame of that argument a model of the origin of the imagination—of the capacity for and implications of figurative expression—is proposed (11)

The article states it will trace the path, theoretical, between ethnoclassification and ethnoecology. It begins by identifying two trajectories that have "influenced evelopments within cognitive anthropology and evolutionary psychology on the one hand and ethnecology on the other" (12). These are the perspective of Berlin and then of Bulmer. Note that PD distinguises ethnoecology ("ecology as experienced") from scientific ecology ("ecology as analysed")

**Ethnoclassification**

Two themes are isolated. The first is with "cross-cutting regularities in the hierarchical ordering of categories, with taxonomy ... the extent to which people all over th eowrld recongise the same discontinuities in the natural world, particularly at the leve of something analogous t 'species'." (12)

"The second theme was a concern with language universals, with cross-cultural regularities in both the conceptual content and the temporal appearance of higher order categories–Berlin's 'life forms' or Bulmer's 'primary taxa'" (12) PD notes here the contributions of Brown.

The first theme is more directly leads to ethnoecology.

PD makes a point that is well taken and criticizes the distinction between general and specific purpose classification:

"My general concern with nearly all this work, including my won (e.g., Dwyer, 1976) is that the representation of other people's understanding were, in the final analysis, grounded in, and deeply prejudiced by, our understandings. What was presented by 'their' taxonomy was, ultimately, the closest match that could be found to 'our' taxonomy. This was achieved by selective use of data and by devising overarching, metaclassifications that prioritized 'western' or 'scientific' understandings (See Ellen, 1993, who elaborated many of the matters I raise in this and the following section.) (12)

PD notes that many anthropologists in the field noted a number of different cross-cutting classifications used in different context.

"These, of course, confounded scientific aims and expectations. They disrupted the search for generality. The difficulty was resolved by resorting to a classification of classifications, by distinguishing 'special purppose classifications' from 'general purpose classifications' (e.g., Berlin et al. 1966). The former might deal with dietary, medicinal or ritual concerns and so forth. The latter always dealt with morphology and linguistic order and, thus, always emerged, for the people analysed, as the closest approximation to the kind of taxonomies favoured by scientists. But, of course, this approach was inherently arrogant. The 'generality' of general purpose classifications was only in the minds of the analysts. It could be most easily elicited in a very 'special' context of formal question and answer interviews that were divorced from the ways in which people experienced nature, in which they 'lived' with their classifications. It was highly improbably, I suggest, that a general purpose classification elicited by an analyst was any more than another special purpose classification to the people concerned" (13)

[Note then that PD is particularly concerned with what he calls the "experience" of classification, or classification as emerging from daily experience. Certainly one of these experiences should be communicative, how categories and classsifications emerge from daily discourse on the natural environment. It is here that documentary linguistics has perhaps the most to add as it can focus on communication and while because of logisitical problems the actual recording of this communication with need to be somewhat formalised, this can be augmented by fieldnotes on speaker interaction in the collection process: how individuals might discuss different taxa in the field]

PD concludes this section of his essay as follows:

In summary, an unfortunate consequence of these studies was to objectify systems of knowledge and to render invisible the human actors who build, experience, use and modify those systems. Despite the cautionary remarks of some workers, classifical approaches to ethnoclassification turned away from the truths that people are embedded within local environments and that knowledge of the natural world arises through their engagement with those environments (cf. Ellen, 1993; Ingold, 1992). In short, classical approaches sacrificed the relational foundations and ecological embeddedness of all knowledge in favour of devising formal schemes divorced from human agency (13)

[NOTE that classification is seem as emerging from experience and that the best way to understand and document this classification is through a study of experience. PD criticizes the formalism of Berlin-type ethnoclassification, apparently criticizing both the formalism of the results (the frameworks that are presented) and the formalism of the methodology: tasks removed from everyday experience]

**Trajectories: Berline versus Bulmer**

Bulmer is stated to have a "looser, less formal, and ultimately less constraining [principles] of thought, than those used by Berlin" (13)

Thus, Bulmer represented the rank of taxa as primary, secondary, tertiary and so forth and, in so doing, provided opportunities for other people's taxa to 'speak in their own right', to fall where they would into an hierarchical structure (Bulmer, 1970). Berlin, by contrast, represented the rank of taxa as unique beginner, life form, generic, specific and varietal and, therefore, was constrained to provide awkward, and often shifting, definitions of those categories (Berlin et al., 1973; see also Brown, 1987) and to force other people's taxa to conform to those definitions" (13)

[Note that I am not sure that the difference is that dramatic, particularly given PD's previous comments on general vs. specific classifications. Both Berlin and Bulmer seem to be proposing what is best conceived as an abstract rank hierarchy of taxonomic inclusion and not situated, daily sets of contextually defined categories. ]

For Bulmer (see Bulmer and Tyloer, 1968) cross-cultural commonalities were related to the proposed notion of a "specieme", "a group of 'creatures marked off from all other animals ... by multiple distinctions of appearance, habitat, and behaviour' a notion that was independent of, and unconstrained by, his own system for assigning rank within a taxonomic hierarchy" (Bulmer and Tyler, 1968:372–3). PD continues: "Berlin, by contrast, conflated the possible existence of a fundamental discontinuity in nature with his own imposed system of ordering taxa hierarchically. Berlin's 'genera' were both conceptually fixed ranks within a taxonomy and the most probable candidates for giving expression to recognised discontinuities in nature (Berlin, 1973)

[Note: again the point to be taken is the formalism of Berlin's cross-cultural universals that is greatly concerned with the universal character of the taxonomic rank-level hierarchy. Bulmer's scheme, as PD notes, "encouraged further exploration of data; that which were, so often, less than tidy" (14) whereas Berlin's principles appeared "more coherent because it had been accommodated within a fixed framework rather than interpreted in the light of one that was inherently fluid" (14). ]

**Towards Evolutionary Psychology**

PD ties the American school (Berlin, Brown) to developments in the field of "evolutionary psychology". He looks to Atran's 1998 article (and comments on) as proposing an overly structured taxonomy to ethnobiological classification.

PD offers a comment that I would agree in on the nature of variation and that this should not be considered as some sort of intermediate, unaffiliated taxa but perhaps as representative of how classification is experienced. PDs words: "The advantage of this mode of thinking [fixed modules, essences] is that awkward variation may be treated as aberration. The disadvantage is that appearances and variation may be the truths by which people live. And it is this possibility that will take me in the direction of ethnoecology" (15)

[NOTE: I think it important to stress the lived-in world of nature and how this is discussed. Although PD takes this in the direction of ethnoecology as experience, one can also take this in the direction of nature as a topic of communication and explore how this is communicated and discussed. Certainly classification is part of the way in which nature can be discussed, but it is also important that nomenclature and classification is part of a context of utterance [frame semantics] that needs to be included in definitions]

**A Digression on TEK**

PD begins by reviewing the discussion of the 1980s debate as to whether folk biological classifications were motivated mostly to serve intellectual or utilitarian ends, a mix of both or neither (cited a Berline and Berlin, 1983; Hays, 1982; Humm 1982; also Brown 1985, Lévi-Strauss, 1966).

PD sees TEK concerns as having emerged from a focus on the utilitarian aspects of folk biological classification:

"Systems of naming and of classifying came to be seen as part and parcel of environment-specific survival strategies of different language groups.... Studies made under the banner of TEK became divorced from a primary concern with systems of naming and classifying plants and animals and increasingly emphasized relationships—usually functional relationships—between people and wildlife. To the extent that 'knowledge' was understood to index those relationships so too it was sometimes regarded as extractable, as a potential commodity." (15)

TEK studies were often activist, pointing to what could be learned, e.g., about conservation, from elders in traditional societies. "And wit more nuanced appreciation of both anthropological scholariship, and the hazards of eco-colonialism, others moved TEK into well theorized considerations of intellectual property and the rights that might adhere to this (e.g., Brosius, 1997; Brunois, 1999; Escobar, 1998; Kirsch, 2001; Strathern, 1999)" (15)

Two developments out of TEK studies:

* "it animated interest in, and often provided a substantive data base for, studies made under the rubrics of both development and political ecology"
* "it redirected attention from names and classifications that had been disembedded from [16] local contexts in the course of analysis to people-environment relations that were sometimes encoded in those names and classifications and were sometimes expressed in other ways, perhaps simply in the course of a person's engagement with environment, with land and with other people. This refocus of attention was also significant in the development of ethnecology" (15–16)

[NOTE: then the progression from a debate on utilitarian vs. intellectualist motivation for names and classification to a focus on ethnoecology as indigenous knowledge, stressing both what can be learned, questions on IPR, and a gradual loss of interest in nomenclature and classification]

**Towards Ethnoecology**

PD devotes this section of his essay to a discussion of Ingold's *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (2000). PD notes that in the section on livelihood, Ingold argues that "ways 'of acting in the environment are always ways of perceiving' that environment" (16) as a ways of dissolving an artificial separation of "practically-grounded subsistence and imaginatively-grounded cosmoloyg". Then on 'dwelling' Ingold challenged the view "that people construct the world, or attach meaning to it, prior to acting in it" (16). [NOTE: I need to read Ingold, but I would wonder if this is really how people discuss world visions, i.e., as prior to living in the world'. At any rate, the focus is again on experience and living in the world as the basis for constructed meaning]. Finally, on 'skill' Ingold presents skills as not simply passed on but "regrown" from each.

**An Ethnographic Interlude**

**The Primal Trope and the Imagination**

PD discusses why Bulmer's ethnobiological classifications are "less tidy" than those of Berlin: "To read 'Why is the cassowary not a bird?' is to understand that questions of ethnoclassification may be never divorced from those of symbolization" (18)

PD then offers that he disagrees that classification of nature is a process of dividing or separating. Rather, he suggests:

"My preferred position prioritizes analogy as fundamental to the process of classification and polarity as fundamental to the products—the taxonomies—that result. Humans detect similarities between things in the world. Through their engagement with the world things are brought into conjunction. In the imagination those things appear as related, as being in some sense like one another. The relationship is established in the mind as a thing that contrasts with all other things in the world. In this sense, then, taxonomies are, in the first instance, the unintended product of a process of metaphorization or, more precisely, of abduction" (18)

[NOTE that this is, I think, an usual statement and not altogether clear. On the one hand there is the question of the internal structure of categories and the relationship among referents that are classified together. If PD sees this as a series of metaphoric extension, then for him categories would seem to be a central prototype that grows into a classificatory set. But perhaps PD is referring to hierarchical relationships among something that Paul Taylor might call co-hyponyms. Again, if this is the case then it would seem to be that PD is arguing that taxonomies build up from the bottom, a sort of Brownian perspective on the growth of nomenclature].

On p. 19, PD then suggests a way in which "prehuman" relations with the world are converted into protohuman cognitive structures. Basically, it seems, experience is internalized into cognitive structures. In PD's language: "My creature experiences the world but does not yet imagine it". (19)

[NOTE: again this seems to be a rather abstract presentation of the development of cognitive structures. Highly imaginary.

**The Scope of Ethnoecology**

PD, after stating admiration for Ingold's work, offers two difficulties:

1. "First, he disparages evolutionary thinking more than is warranted" (19)

2. "Ingold fails to allow a place for metaphor" (20)

This second objection is based on PD's stressing of tropes: "human engagement with the world, and the persons unfolding through that engagement, are always and necessarily grounded in metaphor, in tropes, in the imagination .... An ethnoecology which acknowledges that perceptions of the environment are grounded in tropes, that the environment as experienced emerges from this ground, and that the imaginary cannot be divorced from livelihood, dwelling, and skill" (20)

NOTE: apparently, then, the influence of Bulmer is in a "less tidy" ethnoecology, one that allows "that an ethnoecological appreciation of 'the west' may be quite unlike that of 'the rest'" (20). And, as well "In ethnoecology we must avoid the inverse temptation to interpret ourselves in their image. We must be careful to neither model nor judge ourselves or our compatriots in terms of understandings drawn from people who engage with worlds of entirely different shape" (20). In other others, in seems that PD is quite specifically denying that the goal of universality is a goal of social science research, but sees a more relativistic ethnoecology.]