The Reinterpretation and Elaboration of Fiestas in the Sierra Norte de Puebla, Mexico

Brad R. Huber

THE REINTERPRETATION AND ELABORATION OF FIESTAS IN THE SIERRA NORTE DE PUEBLA, MEXICO

Brad R. Huber
University of Pittsburgh

The importance of investigating culture change has long been recognized by anthropologists. By the 1930s, there were already a great variety of definitions, approaches, and methods used to analyze this process (e.g., Herskovits 1938; Kroeber 1923; Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits 1936; Sapir 1916). As is the case with work currently being undertaken in this area, these scholars disagreed about the role environmental, historical, social, and psychological factors play in culture change. The development of a general theory that satisfactorily accounts for this complex multivariate process still appears to be a long way off. There continues to be a need for empirical studies that examine specific aspects of culture change and culture transmission in detail (Boyd and Richerson 1985: 29). In particular, there is still very little known about the effect of psychological processes (e.g., simple conditioning, recall memory, complex rational calculation) on culture change.

The goal of this paper is to make a contribution to this body of literature. Specifically, changes that are thought to be primarily due to the nature and limitations of human memory are examined in a class of cultural institutions in rural Mexico. During the past 50 years, considerable modifications have been made to fiestas celebrated by the residents of San Andrés Hueyapan, a Nahuat-speaking community of the Sierra Norte de Puebla. Changes in this domain can be understood in light of Bartlett's (1932) seminal social-psychological study of folktales, and by examining more contemporary studies of recall memory.

Briefly, it is argued that when a new fiesta is initially introduced into Hueyapan, many of its characteristics are imperfectly known to its residents. Only those features that are typical of previously existing fiestas tend to be assimilated. The gaps resulting from the elimination of inconsistent features are filled in with typical features imported from older fiestas. Gradually, a fiesta reaches a point in which it closely resembles its traditional prototypes. After a fiesta has been reinterpreted to more closely fit existing cultural patterns, it is elaborated with features unique to it. Elaborating a fiesta with atypical features becomes more frequent through time and can take place indefinitely.

Support for this scenario is found when two claims derived from it are empirically tested. These findings lead to the development of a more widely applicable model of culture change that may be used to understand changes that have occurred to other kinds of social institutions and societies. The model specifies those features of social institutions that tend to be retained over time and those that tend to be lost. It also suggests that the social-psychological mechanisms referred to as assimilation, importation, and elaboration may underlie a variety of related types of culture change including syncretism and independent invention. Finally, an additional manner in which folk classifications reduce the complexity of an individual's environment is discussed.

RESEARCH SITE

The municipality of San Andrés Hueyapan is located in the Sierra Norte de Puebla, Mexico. Field research for this study was conducted in Hueyapan's headtown from August 1983 to August 1984.[1] Slightly more than 2000 of the 6000 residents of Hueyapan live in the headtown. Most male residents are engaged full- or part-time in the cultivation of corn, beans, squash, plums, avocados, oranges, and coffee, and the maintenance of horses, mules, and pigs. Female residents perform domestic activities, care for small livestock, and manufacture a variety of fine woven wool garments that are sold to store owners in Hueyapan and merchants in surrounding cities and towns. Except for a handful of families, all of Hueyapan's residents speak Nahuat as their first language. The majority of residents also speak Spanish, though they differ considerably in their proficiency.

Hueyapan's present ethnic composition and traditions are the result of a combination of historic factors; a brief historical sketch is presented here. At the time of the Spanish conquest, Hueyapan was a small town politically dependent upon Tlatlauquitepec, the seat of a province governed by Texcoco (Barlow 1949; Cepeda Cardenas 1976). Franciscan and Dominican priests were active in this region by the 1560s (Commons 1971; Schwaller 1981). Spaniards were operating several mines four kilometers east of Hueyapan by the late 1600s (Taggart 1983) and at least three Spanish families were living in the headtown by 1720, the time at which Hueyapan's oldest church was built. Farmers and cattle ranchers trickled into this region during the 1700s and 1800s. Others came when coffee became an important cash crop in the 1880s. The Spanish-speaking population of Hueyapan's headtown grew slowly but steadily from 1720 until the Mexican Revolution.

For various reasons, all but two of this community's Mestizo families left Hueyapan by the mid-1930s. Homes previously owned by Mestizo families were subsequently acquired by Nahuat-speakers. In 1947, the first of Hueyapan's eleven primary schools was built. A gravel road connecting the headtown with Teteles (and other Mexican towns and cities) was opened in 1955 and later paved in 1973. By 1983, the headtown's residents had access to a public telephone located in one of Hueyapan's numerous small stores, an overland mail service, running water, electricity, and a taxi and bus service.

THE CELEBRATION OF HOUSEHOLD FIESTAS

Fiestas in indigenous Mesoamerican communities, especially those associated with civil-religious hierarchies, have been of enduring interest to anthropologists (Cancian 1965; Carrasco 1961; Chance and Taylor 1985; DeWalt 1975; Dow 1977; Mathews 1985; Rus and Wasserstrom 1980; Wasserstrom 1977). Like community-wide celebrations honoring Catholic saints, household fiestas (weddings, baptisms, confirmations, etc.) are also integral components of the social organization of many Mesoamerican communities. In Hueyapan, household fiestas entail significant expenditures of time, cash, and material goods, reaffirm shared beliefs about people and their relationship to the supernatural world, and involve nearly all residents one or more times during their lifetimes regardless of their social status. Many household fiestas also formally establish ties of ritual kinship and thus provide a framework within which residents interact with each other and with inhabitants of other communities. In functional terms, household fiestas serve as rites of passage by validating an individual's change of status (e.g., not baptized to baptized).

Besides the hosts and godparents, representatives are present at traditional household fiestas.[2] Hosts and godparents are represented at fiestas by two couples each. *Tehuehueyome* (male representatives) and *tehilamayome* (female representatives) are the oldest living kinsmen of the male host and godfather. They act as spokesmen for their respective parties during the duration of a fiesta, direct most of the festive activities, and serve food, drink, and cigarettes as well. The *taquentiliz ilhuit* or dressing fiesta illustrates the most common activities engaged in by the primary actors at household fiestas.

At the present time, the dressing fiesta is most often held when godparents agree to buy their godchild or godchildren clothing for a baptismal or confirmation fiesta, but later find that they were financially unable to do so. When this occurs, "delinquent" godparents occasionally promise that they will sponsor their godchildren's "dressing" at a later date. After a date has been set for this fiesta, the godparents buy complete sets of clothing for as many godchildren of a family they have agreed to dress. In return, the parents of the godchild must hold a banquet for as many as 200 guests. Several pigs and approximately twenty turkeys are slaughtered for this occasion.

On the morning of the fiesta, the godparents, their representatives, a band, and their many guests meet and properly greet their hosts, the hosts' representatives, and their guests outside the hosts' home. After the *encuentro* or initial meeting of the godparents and hosts, the godparents enter their hosts' home. The *entrada* or the godparent's entrance into the hosts' home consists of the godparents' representatives requesting and receiving permission from the hosts' representatives to enter the main room and there waft incense and bless the saints on the household altar. Like all festive activities, the entrada is conducted in a very orderly fashion and performed with a great deal of respect. Guests always incense the saints before the hosts, males incense before females, and the oldest members of each party preceed the youngest.

After the entrada, the godparents' representatives request that the godchildren present themselves before the altar to be dressed. All of the

godchildren are then given a complete set of clothing. The band, which consists of a violinist, guitarist, and a bass player, plays throughout the dressing and rockets are fired after each person receives and tries on his or her clothing.

When the dressing or *vestuario* is completed, the principal male guests exchange *palmaxochits* (small hand-held crosses decorated with bread rolls and flowers) and *rosarios* (necklaces resembling Catholic rosaries). This exchange is followed by the men dancing the *son de xochitpitzahua* (song of the delicate flower). The dance begins at the request of the representatives who direct the men to form two lines facing the altar. During the dance, there is a great deal of shouting as the men pass a bottle of *aguardiente* (inexpensive rum) back and forth between the lines. When the men finish dancing, the women exchange rosarios and palmaxochits and dance the xochitpitzahua. The function of these activities is to demonstrate and intensify the respect and spiritual bonds of ritual kinship which exist between the godparents, their godchildren, and the godchildren's parents.

The godparents, their representatives, and some of their guests are then invited to a flower-adorned table and presented cigarettes, drink, and food by the hosts' representatives. The remaining guests are served after members of the godparents' party have finished their meal. Dancing, music, drinking, and smoking continue until the festivities end the next morning. Prior to their leaving, the godparents are presented with one or two live turkeys with rosarios placed around their necks as a token of the hosts' thanks and respect. The *salida* or departure of the godparents and their guests takes place before the altar where they once again incense and bless the saints.

Fiestas of the type described above are known as *fiestas de media flor* (celebrations by means of flowers). Fiestas which do not include an exchange of rosarios and palmaxochits and the dancing of the xochitpitzahua are *fiestas sencillas* (simple celebrations). Full ethnographic descriptions of all the household fiestas celebrated in Hueyapan are presented elsewhere (Huber 1985:145-202).

FOLK CLASSIFICATION OF HOUSEHOLD FIESTAS

Early in my residency, I noted that Hueyapanecos employ a variety of terms to refer to different kinds of fiestas. After several months of general ethnographic fieldwork, I explored how residents classify fiestas in a more formal manner. Standard taxonomic interviews (cf. Frake 1969; Kempton 1978; Tyler 1969) employing the question frames "What are different kinds of _____?" and "What is _____ a kind of?" were utilized to elicit terms referring to categories related by inclusion and direct contrast to the term *ilhuit calihtic*. This Nahuat term literally means "celebration in the house" and is used interchangeably with the Spanish *fiesta casera* (household celebration), *fiesta familiar* (family celebration), and *fiesta particular* (private celebration).

Taxonomic interviews were administered in Nahuat to nine informants by the investigator and a trained field assistant. Informants volunteered four taxonomic levels. One level includes a term more general than ilhuit calihtic and two levels include more specific terms. The fourth level refers to household fiestas for which two types exist. The two types of baptismal

fiestas, for example, are the *bautizo sencillo* (simple baptism) and the *bautizo de media flor* (baptism by means of flowers). Analogous subtypes exist for the wedding, house blessing, confirmation, first communion, end of year, saint's day, and graduation fiestas. In all, there are eighteen types of household fiestas.[3] Table 1 summarizes this information.

Table 1

Fiesta Taxonomy and Festive Labels

Level	English	Spanish	Nahuat
1	Celebration	Fiesta	Ilhuit
2	Household Celebration	Fiesta Casera	Ilhuit Calihtic
2	National Celebration	Fiesta Patria	-----
2	School Celebration	Fiesta Escolar	-----
2	Church Celebration	Fiesta de la Iglesia	Ilhuit dein Teopan
2	Patron Saint Celebration	Fiesta Patronal	-----
3	Dressing	Vestuario	Taquentiliz (Ilhuit)
3	Novenary	Novenario	-----
3	Holy Cross	Santa Cruz	-----
3	Silver Wedding	Bodas de Plata	-----
3	Child Jesus (at Home)	Niño Dios (en Casa)	-----
3	Fifteenth Birthday	Quince Años	-----
3	Birthday	Cumpleaños	-----
3	Car Blessing	Bendición de Coche	-----
3	Scapulary	Escapulario	-----
3	Image Blessing	Benedición de Imagen	-----
3,4	Wedding	Boda	Namictiliz (Ilhuit)
3,4	Baptism	Bautizo	Tamahcuiliz (Ilhuit)
3,4	House Blessing	Bendición de Casa	-----
3,4	Confirmation	Confirmación	-----
3,4	First Communion	Primera Comunión	-----
3,4	End of Year	Cabo de Año	-----
3,4	Saint's Day	Cuelga	-----
3,4	Graduation	Graduación	-----

FEATURE TYPICALITY

When speaking with residents about household fiestas, I became aware that membership in this category is graded. Informants indicated that certain types of fiestas, especially those celebrated *de media flor*, are more typical, representative, etc., than others (Huber 1985:207-211). Such a finding should not be considered an anomaly. Sapir (1944) and Lakoff (1973), for example,

suggest class membership in many categories is implicitly or explicitly gradable and that natural languages possess many terms which encode these gradients of representativeness. Houses can be more or less large, roomy, and expensive. Robins and sparrows (for North Americans) are more birdlike than are penguins and ostriches. Empirical support for the view that many categories are graded has been found for color categories (Kay and McDaniel 1978), common object categories (Rosch 1973), types of ceramic vessels (Kempton 1981), botanical classes (Berlin, Breedlove, and Ravin 1974), psychiatric typologies (Cantor, Smith, French, and Mezzich 1980), and situation categories (Cantor, Mischel, and Schwartz 1982).

Important to the present study is the fact that attributes of graded categories differ in the degree to which they are shared by class members (Rosch and Mervis 1975). Some attributes are shared by many members of a particular class, while others are attributed to only one class member. The distribution of attributes among class members is directly related to the degree to which an item is representative of members of its class. The more representative an item is of its category, the more attributes it shares with other members of the category. Clearly, the degree to which a feature is shared by class members is an important consideration in studies of folk classification systems.

In order to elicit attributes of household fiestas and determine the degree to which features are shared by members of this class, free description interviews (cf. Cantor, Mischel, and Schwartz 1982) were administered to 154 individuals living in the headtown. At the beginning of each interview, it was indicated that an informant's description of a fiesta might include what people do at a fiesta, how they feel, the things they use, etc. All responses were tape recorded and later translated and transcribed by several field assistants (Huber 1985:142-45).

Consistent with previous studies of natural categories, features of household celebrations were found to vary with respect to the number of fiestas to which they are attributed. Some features are associated with many or all household fiestas, while others are unique to a particular celebration. Following Cantor et al. (1982), a feature is defined as any word or phrase which "fills out" or "adds information to" the description of a fiesta. I refer to the degree to which a feature is associated with members of the household fiesta category as the feature's typicality. Quantitatively, a feature's typicality score is defined as the number of fiestas which have been credited with that feature. By definition, scores can range from 1 to 18.

HOUSEHOLD FIESTAS AND CULTURE CHANGE

As previously indicated, a significant number of social and technological changes occurred in Hueyapan after 1935. These changes coincided with a relative florescence of Hueyapan's fiesta system with residents adopting nine "new" kinds of household celebrations. In many cases, the introduction of these fiestas into Hueyapan has been unconsciously or consciously fostered by Hueyapan's economic, religious, and social elite. First celebrated by a wealthy Mestizo family originally from Zacapoaxtla, the girl's fifteenth birthday has become a popular fiesta for some segments of Hueyapan's

population. Similarly, Hueyapan's school teachers have urged residents to select godparents, and host fiestas for their children's graduation in an apparent effort to increase community support for school-related activities. In recent years, Hueyapan's priests have been moderately successful in convincing residents to begin celebrating their children's first communions. They have also been instrumental in the introduction of the silver wedding anniversary, blessing of a car, blessing of an image, and saint's day fiestas. The ideological authority that these and other high status individuals have in Hueyapan should not be underestimated. They have greatly facilitated the acceptance of many new social, religious, and material items during the past fifty years.[4]

One of the most salient characteristics of Hueyapan's household fiestas is their ability to be modified. Informants are very aware that household fiestas have changed considerably during the past 50 years. Several of the most acculturated residents of Hueyapan note that the girl's fifteenth birthday, car blessing, and silver wedding anniversary have become less elaborate since their being introduced into Hueyapan. The Zacapoaxtlan family who initially introduced the fifteenth birthday celebration into Hueyapan requested four sets of godparents who provided a large, several-tiered cake, hired a band, paid for a mass, and adorned the church, respectively. Subsequent celebrations in Hueyapan included only one set of godparents. In the nearby communities of Yaonahuac, Teteles, and Teziutlán, newly blessed cars are inaugurated by breaking open bottles of liquor, presenting an image of Saint Christopher to the owner, and then returning to the owner's home to eat, drink, and dance. In Hueyapan, these activities only rarely take place. Usually, the owner and godparents simply drink in a local store. Similar differences exist between the manner in which silver wedding anniversaries are celebrated in Hueyapan and the surrounding towns. Interestingly, informants suggest that one of the reasons these fiestas have been simplified has to do with the fact that many residents are unfamiliar with these kinds of fiestas and consequently do not really "understand" them.

Many residents also remark that several recently introduced fiestas, most notably the saint's day, first communion, and graduation fiestas, are increasingly being celebrated along more traditional lines. They state that these fiestas were originally very sencillas, but residents have recently been inclined to celebrate them de media flor. Thus, occasions which were initially celebrated with only a simple meal now have representatives and musicians, traditional encuentros and vestuarios, and even an exchange of rosarios and palmaxochits, and a dancing of the xochitpitzahua. Residents who are aware of these changes attribute them to the "traditionality" of the people living outside the center of town.

Several changes have occurred to older fiestas as well. Some fiestas, such as the novenary and end of year ceremony, continue to acquire traditional components of fiestas (e.g., going to mass is now a common feature of these fiestas). More important, however, is the fact that traditional fiestas are being elaborated with features relatively distinct to them. Vestuarios in baptisms and confirmations, for example, are now sometimes followed by the godparents presenting small gifts to their godchild or presenting guests with cards commemorating these events. In addition to serving aguardiente, the

traditional beverage at fiestas, many residents now make it a point to serve soft drinks, beer, and brandy as well.

HUMAN MEMORY AND CULTURE CHANGE

Changes that have occurred to Hueyapan's household fiestas resemble those observed by Bartlett (1932) in his experimental studies of serial recall of folktales. Bartlett's experiments were specifically designed to model the frequent situation by which cultural elements and complexes normally pass from society to society and from person to person. Initially, Bartlett presented a subject with a folktale taken from an unfamiliar cultural tradition. After the subject had read through the folktale several times, he was asked to reproduce it fifteen to thirty minutes later. Afterwards, another individual was presented with this reproduced folktale and requested to recall it from memory. In some cases, folktales were serially reproduced by twenty individuals.

Not surprisingly, Bartlett found that a number of the details of the original folktale were omitted during the course of only a few reproductions. Interestingly, the most frequently omitted details were those that had no counterparts in his subjects' culture. The overall effect was that "all the stories tend to be shorn of their individualizing features" (Bartlett 1932:173).

Graesser, Woll, Kowalski, and Smith (1980) observed the same bias in their study of story recall. When their subjects were asked to recall stories that had been presented to them a week earlier, their memory was significantly better for typical than atypical actions. (Typicality was measured by asking another group of subjects to rate how typical an action was of a particular story script.) This finding led these investigators to conclude that the recollection of information is primarily "reconstructive" in the sense that the generic schemata "guide the search, examination, and evaluation of specific memory traces" (Graesser et al. 1980:513). D'Andrade (1974), Higgins, Rholes, and Jones (1977), Rice (1980), and Spiro (1977) draw similar conclusions in their studies of social cognition.

In addition to individuals forgetting details of folktales inconsistent with their cultural tradition, Bartlett (1932) observed omitted details being replaced with stereotypical features current at the time. "Where the opinions expressed [by the protagonists in folktales] were individual, they appear to pass over into opposed conventional views; where the epithets are original, they tend to become current, commonplace terms" (Bartlett 1932:173).

More recently, Cantor and Mischel (1977) observed that individuals asked to remember previously presented profiles of personality stereotypes (e.g., extroverts, introverts) "recall" a substantial number of characteristics that were not presented to them. These recollections of nonpresented attributes were biased toward characteristics conceptually related to the personality stereotype. In a related study, Minsky (1975) found that when details of people or events are imperfectly known, "gaps" in knowledge are most often filled in with qualities typical of the domain in question. The same sorts of results using story scripts were obtained by Graesser, Gordon, and Sawyer (1979), Graesser et al. (1980), and Rice (1980).

Consistent with the above findings is Barnett's (1953) claim that an individual's previous knowledge of a domain is utilized to fill in

informational gaps for events whose details are imperfectly known. After reviewing a large body of historical, ethnographic, and psychological literature, he concludes that:

Individuals who do not definitely know about some past event proceed to model it upon something known to them. They fill in the details and gaps in accordance with what they think the event ought to have been, this being determined by its similarity with the known. Their incomplete knowledge may be due to faulty information, to lack of interest, or memory lapses. In any event, there is a retroactive interpolation, based on the prototype they call into service (Barnett 1953:240).

Bartlett observed an additional kind of modification made to serially reproduced folktales: elaboration. Elaborations, or as he sometimes called them, "inventions" of details occurred after a folktale was recalled by a relatively large number of individuals. The tendency for his subjects to elaborate was evidently very strong. He noted that the final versions of serially reproduced folktales "are all a little longer and in some respects more detailed than the original itself" (Bartlett 1932:145). He suggests that under normal social conditions, the tendency to elaborate would be "far more marked than it can ever be in serial reproduction when all subsequent versions have to be written down and where there is no audience to exert an influence" (Bartlett 1932:173-174).

Bartlett's seminal work with folktales and work more recently undertaken by researchers examining other domains suggest a way to better understand those changes that have occurred to Hueyapan's household fiestas. One suspects that when a fiesta is initially introduced into Hueyapan, many of its details would be imperfectly known to its residents. Only the more typical features of a new fiesta would tend to be assimilated. The gaps resulting from the initial elimination of atypical features would then be filled in with typical features. Previously existing fiestas would serve as prototypes for individuals assimilating and importing typical features to a new fiesta.

As the remaining few gaps in a fiesta are filled in and it reaches a more culturally appropriate form, it would then be elaborated with atypical features. Such elaborations would become more frequent as time passes and could take place indefinitely.

ANALYSIS

The above scenario makes certain claims concerning specific changes that have occurred to Hueyapan's household fiestas. Two of the more important claims are examined below. Both are tentative statements about the relationship between a fiesta's age and the features which have been attributed to it.

Older Fiestas Contain More Features

Due to the initial elimination of atypical features, newly introduced fiestas are expected to have relatively few features. The number of features attributed to a fiesta would be expected to increase as time passes, however, as gaps are filled in with typical features and fiestas are later elaborated with

atypical ones. Generally, older fiestas are expected to have a greater raw number of features than newer fiestas.

The Wilcoxen two-sample test is used to determine whether older fiestas have more features[5] than newer ones. Fiestas are ranked from most to least number of features and the ranks of "older" fiestas (i.e., fiestas celebrated for more than 50 years) are underlined. As can be seen from Table 2, the results of this test suggest that older fiestas generally do contain more features than newer ones. The claim that fiestas accumulate additional features over time is supported.

Table 2

Wilcoxen Two-Sample Test for Fiesta Age and Raw Number of Features

Fiesta	Number of Typical Features	Rank
Wedding	66	1
Baptism	63	2.5
House Blessing	63	2.5
End of Year	62	4
Dressing	57	5.5
Saint's Day	57	5.5
Confirmation	56	7
First Communion	53	8.5
Image Blessing	53	8.5
Scapulary	52	10
Novenary	50	11
Graduation	48	12
Holy Cross	47	13
Child Jesus	46	14
Car Blessing	35	15
Fifteenth Birthday	30	16
Silver Wedding	23	17
Birthday	22	18

$w = 56.5$ $\sigma_w = 11.324$

$\mu_w = 85.5$ $z = -2.56$

$p = .0052$ (one tail test)

Older Fiestas Have More Typical Features

Previously existing fiestas are expected to initially serve as prototypes for individuals assimilating typical features to new fiestas. Equally important, they would also serve as model fiestas during the importation of typical features to new fiestas when they are being reinterpreted to fit existing

cultural patterns. Consequently, fiestas are expected to continuously acquire typical features over time.[6]   Thus, it is predicted that older fiestas have a greater number of typical features than newer ones.

Features have been divided into two groups, more typical and less typical. Features are designated as typical if they are attributed to more than half of the fiestas; atypical features are features attributed to nine or fewer fiestas. The Wilcoxen two-sample test is used to test the above prediction. Fiestas are ranked from most to least number of typical features and the ranks of older fiestas are underlined. The results of this test (presented in Table 3) indicate that older fiestas do contain a greater number of typical features than newer fiestas. The claim that previously existing household fiestas serve as prototypes for reinterpreting successively introduced fiestas is supported.

Table 3

Wilcoxen Two-Sample Test for Fiesta Age and Number of Typical Features

Fiesta	Number of Typical Features	Rank
Baptism	48	1
Wedding	47	2
Dressing	44	3
End of Year	43	4.5
Saint's Day	43	4.5
Confirmation	42	6
First Communion	41	7
House Blessing	40	8.5
Graduation	40	8.5
Image Blessing	37	10
Holy Cross	35	11.5
Scapulary	35	11.5
Child Jesus	34	13
Novenary	30	14
Fifteenth Birthday	27	15
Car Blessing	26	16
Silver Wedding	20	17
Birthday	17	18

$w = 62$ $\sigma_w = 11.324$

$\mu_w = 85.5$ $z = -2.08$

$p = .0188$ (one tail test)

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION OF THE FINDINGS

The above findings have implications for anthropological studies of culture change. Specifically, this and previous work suggest a model that might be applied to changes occurring to a wide variety of social institutions and societies: When an unfamiliar institution is introduced into a society, individuals identify it as an instance of a class of institutions known to them. Features of this newly introduced institution that are consistent with previously existing members of its class tend to be assimilated. Informational gaps are then filled in with typical features imported from previously existing class members. As the remaining gaps are slowly filled in and this institution reaches a fairly stable cultural form, it is embellished with features unique to it. Such elaborations may continue indefinitely.

Three points can be made about this general model. First, this model accounts for both the maintenance of traditional folk classification systems, and their disintegration. Folk classification systems can be said to be maintained by a social group through the process of reinterpretation; i.e., by individuals assimilating and importing typical features of traditional cultural institutions to newly introduced class members. During the process of reinterpretation, however, some of the typical features of newly introduced institutions are inevitably lost. In addition, there is always the possibility that some of the elaborations that are made to cultural institutions today may become the traditional and typical features of folk classification systems tomorrow. Seen from this perspective, the model developed in this paper can accommodate the view that predicts the eventual disintegration of traditional folk classification systems in the long run (Kempton 1981:187). In any case, whether one sees maintenance or disintegration in changes occurring to folk classification systems is really a matter of emphasis and a consequence of the time frame one adopts. The value of the present model is that it specifies those features which tend to be retained during the process of culture change and those which can be expected to be lost.

Second, it is believed that the social-psychological mechanisms underlying the diffusion of cultural institutions also underlie a number of additional types of cultural change. Though the mechanisms of assimilation, importation, and elaboration are particularly relevant to the diffusion of cultural institutions (the diffusion of the girl's fifteenth birthday celebration from Zacapoaxtla to Hueyapan being a case in point), they may also form the basis for cultural change often referred to as syncretism and independent invention. Though space does not permit a lengthy discussion of these processes, they will be addressed in general terms.

Syncretism is a complex and somewhat variable historical process. For purposes of discussion, this term is used here to refer to the equating and subsequent blending of a foreign institution with an indigenous one. Clear-cut cases of this sort of syncretism are the identification of Catholic saints with indigenous Mesoamerican dieties (Nutini and Bell 1980:287-304; Wolf 1958).

In this type of syncretism, individuals do more than simply identify an introduced institution as an instance of a class of well-known ones. In addition to this general class identification, a newly introduced institution is

identified with a specific class member. One suspects, however, that the same general sorts of changes discussed in this paper would take place. Features of a newly introduced institution that are consistent with or, in this case, common to the previously existing member tend to be assimilated and gaps in knowledge are filled in with typical features imported from the indigenous institution. Once this institution reaches a culturally acceptable form, elaborations proceed in a manner analogous to those described for household fiestas.

The mechanisms cited in this paper can account for cases of independent invention as well. That is, not the origination of a wholly new and different cultural institution, but instances in which there is a spontaneous development of a new institution modeled on previously existing cultural patterns. For example, three households in Hueyapan recently purchased a treadle loom so that they may produce woven products faster than they could with a backstrap loom. If these residents suddenly felt a need to have these looms blessed and sponsored by ritual kinsmen, and later celebrated a fiesta to mark their new status, then such fiestas would be a good example of a spontaneous independent development. For an actual case analogous to this, see Vogt (1969:583-587).

In such instances, an institution from another cultural tradition is not introduced into a community and there are no features of a new institution to be assimilated. Individuals, however, are not at a loss to celebrate this type of fiesta. Fiestas for new objects (e.g., cars, images, houses) have been celebrated in Hueyapan in the past. Schemata of well-known fiestas permit residents to gradually fill in their gaps of knowledge. Typical features of the household fiesta class in general are the first to be imported. Elaborations specific to this type of event take place after this occasion has reached a culturally appropriate form. In sum, diffusion, syncretism, and independent invention can be seen as three kinds of culture change that are affected by the same sorts of social-psychological mechanisms; assimilation, importation, and elaboration.

The final point concerns the function of folk classification systems. Previous studies have emphasized that one of the primary functions of classification systems is to reduce the complexity of an individual's environment (Bruner, Goodnow, and Austin 1956; Mervis and Rosch 1981; Smith and Medin 1981). Classifications achieve this by treating similar, but discriminably different stimuli, as essentially equivalent. The ability to categorize the nearly infinite number of discriminably different stimuli into a more manageable number of classes permits individuals to better cope with their environment. For example, when an individual classifies an unfamiliar situation as an instance of a familiar class of events, he or she is better able to plan and initiate behaviors appropriate to that kind of situation (Cantor, Mischel, and Schwartz 1982).

The model developed in this section suggests an additional manner in which folk classifications reduce the complexity of an individual's environment. Like many people, the residents of Hueyapan live in a community which has undergone many changes in a relatively short period of time. Less than 50 years ago, schools, automobiles, telephones, and electricity were nonexistent in this municipality. Since that time, residents have been

exposed to these and other new material items as well as an enormous number of new ideas, attitudes, beliefs, and ways of behaving. The model proposed here suggests an important way individuals adjust to and accommodate these changes. Individuals encountering a new material item, social institution, or idea identify it with a class of similar items familiar to them. Over time, this new introduction is reinterpreted in light of familiar and well-known models. Gradually, this new introduction comes to resemble the traditional prototypes of this domain to a greater degree. Eventually, an item which was once unfamiliar and foreign becomes familiar and culturally appropriate. Thus, the initial act of identifying a new cultural item as an instance of a familiar category of objects, events, and ideas leads to continuity in an individual's life and the social organization of a community.

NOTES

1. This research was supported by a Fulbright grant, a Tinker Summer Research grant, and an Andrew W. Mellon Predoctoral Fellowship. The author thanks Richard Scaglion, Michael Coy, Catherine Huber, Judy Brink, Leonard Plotnicov, and Arthur Tuden for their useful comments concerning the content and organization of this paper. An abbreviated preliminary draft of this paper was read at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Washington, D.C., on November 20, 1985.

2. "Traditional" as used here is consistent with the way in which Hueyapan's older residents apply the term. "Traditional" refers to those fiestas and activities present in Hueyapan prior to 1935. "Traditional" is not being used as a synonym for "indigenous" or "prehispanic" since many of the fiestas and festive features designated as traditional in this paper originated in the colonial period when members of Hueyapan's ethnically mixed population were in constant daily contact.

3. The fact that most of the elicited terms were Spanish indicates that many household fiestas have no prehispanic counterpart or that some Nahuat festive names have fallen into disuse in this community.

4. See also Friedlander's (1975) discussion of change in Hueyapan, Morelos.

5. Only those features attributed by fifteen (10 percent) or more of my informants are included in this analysis and subsequent ones. The results do not change if the cutoff point for including features is raised to a much higher level (Huber 1985:211-212).

6. Fiestas also acquire atypical features when they are elaborated.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Barlow, R.H. 1949. The Extent of the Empire of the Culhua Mexica. Berkeley.

Barnett, H.G. 1953. Innovation: The Basis of Cultural Change. New York.

Bartlett, F.C. 1932. Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology. London.

Berlin, B., D.E. Breedlove, and P.H. Raven. 1974. Principles of Tzeltal Plant Classification: An Introduction to the Botanical Ethnography of a Mayan-Speaking Community of Highland Chiapas. New York.

Bruner, J.S., J.J. Goodnow, and G.A. Austin. 1956. A Study of Thinking. New York.

Boyd, R., and P.J. Richerson. 1985. Culture and the Evolutionary Process. Chicago.

Cancian, F. 1965. Economics and Prestige in a Maya Community, Stanford.

Cantor, N., and W. Mischel. 1977. Traits as Prototypes: Effects on Recognition Memory. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 35:38-48.

Cantor, N., W. Mischel, and J.C. Schwartz. 1982. A Prototype Analysis of Psychological Situations. Cognitive Psychology 14:45-77.

Cantor, N., E.E. Smith, R. French, and J. Mezzich. 1980. Psychiatric Diagnosis as Prototype Categorization. Journal of Abnormal Psychology 89:181-193.

Carrasco, P. 1961. The Civil-Religious Hierarchy in Mesoamerican Communities: Pre-Spanish Background and Colonial Development. American Anthropologist 63:483-497.

Cepeda Cardenas, G. 1976. Tlatlauquitepec. Masters thesis, Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico.

Chance, J.K., and W.B. Taylor. 1985. Cofradias and Cargos: An Historical Perspective on the Mesoamerica Civil-Religious Hierarchy. American Ethnologist 12:1-26.

Commons, A. 1971. Geohistoria de las Divisiones Territoriales del Estado de Puebla (1519-1970). Mexico.

D'Andrade, R.G. 1974. Memory and the Assessment of Behavior. Measurement in the Social Sciences, ed. H. Blalock, pp. 159-86. Chicago.

DeWalt, B.R. 1975. Changes in the Cargo System of Mesoamerica. Anthropological Quarterly 48:87-105.

Dow, J. 1977. Religion in the Organization of a Mexican Peasant Economy. Peasant Livelihood: Studies in Economic Anthropology and Cultural Ecology, eds. R. Halperin and J. Dow, pp. 215-226. New York.

Frake, C.O. 1969. The Ethnographic Study of Cognitive Systems. Cognitive Anthropology, ed. S.A. Tyler, pp. 28-41. New York.

Friedlander, J. 1975. Being Indian in Hueyapan: A Study of Forced Identity in Contemporary Mexico. New York.

Graesser, A.C., S.E. Gordon, and J.D. Sawyer. 1979. Recognition Memory for Typical and Atypical Actions in Scripted Activities: Tests for a Script Pointer + Tag Hypothesis. Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior 18:319-332.

Graesser, A.C., S.B. Woll, D.J. Kowalski, and D.A. Smith. 1980. Memory for Typical and Atypical Actions in Scripted Activities. Journal of Experimental Psychology - Human Learning and Memory 6:503-15.

Herskovits, M.J. 1938. Acculturation: The Study of Culture Contact. New York.

Higgins, E.T., W.S. Rholes, and C.R. Jones. 1977. Category Accessibility and Impression Formation. Journal of Experimental Social Psychology 13:141-154.

Huber, B.R. 1985. Category Prototypes and the Reinterpretation of Household Fiestas in a Nahuat-Speaking Community of Mexico. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh. (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms 86-00658).

Kay, P., and C.K. McDaniel. 1978. The Linguistic Significance of the Meanings of Basic Color Terms. Language 54:610-46.

Kempton, W. 1978. Category Grading and Taxanomic Relations: A Mug is a Sort of a Cup. American Ethnologist 5:44-65.

_____ 1981. The Folk Classification of Ceramics: A Study of Cognitive Prototypes. New York.

Kroeber, A.L. 1923. Anthropology. New York.

Lakoff, G. 1973. Hedges: A Study in Meaning Criteria and the Logic of Fuzzy Concepts. Journal of Philosophical Logic 2:458-508.

Mathews, H.F. 1985. "We are Mayordomo": A Reinterpretation of Women's Roles in the Mexican Cargo System. American Ethnologist 12:285-301.

Mervis, C.B., and E.H. Rosch. 1981. Categorization of Natural Objects. Annual Review of Psychology 32:89-115.

Minsky, M. 1975. A Framework for Representing Knowledge. The Psychology of Computer Vision, ed. P.H. Winston, pp. 211-77. New York.

Nutini, H.G., and B. Bell. 1980. Ritual Kinship: The Structure and Historical Development of the Compadrazgo System in Rural Tlaxcala. Princeton.

Redfield, R., R. Linton, and M.J. Herskovits. 1936. Memorandum for the Study of Acculturation. American Anthropologist 38:149-152.

Rice, G.E. 1980. On Cultural Schemata. American Ethnologist 7:152-171.

Rosch, E.H. 1973. Natural Categories. Cognitive Psychology 4:328-50.

Rosch, E.H., and C.B. Mervis. 1975. Family Resemblances: Studies in the Internal Structure of Categories. Cognitive Psychology 7:573-605.

Rus, J., and R. Wasserstrom. 1980. Civil-Religious Hierarchies in Central Chiapas: A Critical Perspective. American Ethnologist 7:466-478.

Sapir, E. 1963 [1944]. Grading: A Study of Semantics. Selected Writings of Edward Sapir in Language, Culture and Personality, ed. D. Mandelbaum, pp. 122-149. Berekely.

_____ 1963 [1916]. Time Perspective in Aboriginal American Culture: A Study in Method. Selected Writings of Edward Sapir in Language, Culture and Personality, ed. D. Mandelbaum, pp. 389-462. Berkeley.

Schwaller, J.F. (with the collaboration of A.C.T. Schwaller). 1981. Partidos y Parrocos bajo la Real Corona en la Nueva Espana, Siglo XVI (Coleccion Cientifica 104). Mexico.

Smith, E.E., and D.L. Medin. 1981. Categories and Concepts. Cambridge.

Spiro, R.J. 1977. Remembering Information from Text: The State of the "Schema" Approach. Schooling and the Acquisition of Knowledge, eds. R.C. Anderson, R.J. Spiro and W.E. Montague. New Jersey.

Taggart, J.M. 1983. Nahuat Myth and Social Structure. Austin.

Tyler, S.A. (ed.). 1969. Cognitive Anthropology. New York.

Vogt, E.Z. 1969. Zinacantan: A Maya Community of the Highlands of Chiapas. Cambridge.

Wasserstrom, R. 1977. The Exchange of Saints in Zinacantan: The Socioeconomic Bases of Religious Change in Southern Mexico. Ethnology 17:197-210.

Wolf, E.R. 1958. The Virgin of Guadalupe: A Mexican National Symbol. Journal of American Folklore 71:34-39.