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Basic Processes and Methodology Introduction

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INTRODUCTION

The largest common denominator of the chapters in this section is that they all address some basic issue in the relationship between behavior and culture. Together they represent a sample from the domain of topics that cross-cultural psychologists are engaged in and, perhaps even more, the range of methods that they employ. In the proceedings of early IACCP congresses one finds less frequently than here references to ethnographic or qualitative evidence, which offers more scope for exploration. At the same time, basic characteristics of cross-cultural research have remained much the same. In the present set of chapters, as in the past, strategies are employed such as linking specific outcomes to context (or "antecedent conditions" as authors would have said a few decades ago), and extending the range of contexts to unconfound variables that are confounded within a more limited range of societies.

In the first chapter of this section Mishra and Dasen write: "Comparative cross-cultural research offers quasi-experimental designs to disentangle, or unconfound the two variables of chronological age and schooling." They review research in India that helps to take apart the effects of school education and age (or maturation). The effects of schooling are an issue on which widely different theoretical positions have been expressed. The evidence leads Mishra and Dasen to reject the position that schooling leads to the emergence of new cognitive processes, but for all other positions they find some support. Both age and schooling are "packaged variables" that need themselves to be broken down into processes, even though this is not easy as the scope for the unconfounding of relevant variables is limited.

Dasen, Mishra and Niraula present empirical results on the same topic, comparing schooled and non-schooled children from India and Nepal on language development, spatial encoding and spatial concept development. Moderate support is found for effects of schooling with one exception, namely the encoding of spatial arrays. The authors distinguish between an egocentric and a geocentric frame of reference; schooling had no demonstrable impact on the choice between these two. This finding points to the relevance of the larger project of which this study forms part

that deals with relationships between ecological conditions and culturally favored spatial orientation systems.

Harzing tested with students from fourteen countries the cultural accommodation hypothesis: Do respondents adjust their responses in a way that reflects cultural values associated with the language in which a questionnaire is administered? Cultural accommodation was taken to be present when the mean scores for students who responded to an English-language questionnaire were closer to the mean scores of a control group of English students than to the mean scores of fellow students responding to the questionnaire in the native language. Evidence of cultural accommodation was present in all but four out of 46 cases where a significant difference was found between the two language versions of a questionnaire. Harzing points out that the practice of administering tests in a common language, like English, can lead to misrepresentation of cross-cultural differences.

There is also emphasis on method in the chapter contributed by Santosa on complex problem solving in small groups, conceived of as a form of discourse. The author describes a form of speech act sequence analysis as a tool to identify pragmatic meanings in interacting communities. Records of Indonesian and German groups working on a simulated complex problem in a business setting were analyzed with a view to identify common factors and differences of action sequences between cultures and between more effective and less effective small groups. Santosa sees speech act sequence analysis as a method that, with some modifications, can be used for the analysis of any human activity.

Chandra examines how three Indonesian cultures, the Javanese, the Batak Toba, and the Minangkabaus influence the development of critical thinking, an ability considered to be often lacking in Indonesia but important for national development. The study proceeded in two steps. First, existing literature was surveyed on values regarded as important by each of the three groups. In the second phase informants from the three groups were asked for their own understanding about themselves and their world. After content analysis and categorization of the results the same informants were asked whether or not they agreed with each of the resulting statements. Only statements unanimously agreed upon were considered valid. Tentatively the author suggests that Batak Toba and Minangkabau cultures are more conducive than Javanese culture to developing critical thinking.

Rees Lewis and Dittmar report a content analysis of statements made by students from Japan, Canada and the U.K. about two types of material possessions: a major purchase and a personal talisman, the latter being considered as a magico-religious object. A coding scheme was developed for use across both objects and all three samples. Several cross-cultural similarities and differences are reported. For example, U.K. students bought more play and leisure items, and Japanese more utility and art and culture items. There was considerable consistency in what was used as an amulet, although the popularity of Japanese *omamori* was evident. Talismans were referred to in terms of their shared history with the owner and relatedness to others, they were almost always gifts.

In two sets of quasi-experimental studies Samar Zebian shows that the processing of numbers is not a cognitive activity more or less independent of other cognitive functions, as it has been portrayed in the experimental literature, but is dependent on experiential background. By extending the range of contexts beyond what is normally found in western societies she obtained results that are clearly at variance with expectations formulated in the literature. Like the first chapters of this section, this chapter fits in the venerable tradition of unconfounding conditions that are confounded in the (western) contexts to which experimental researchers usually limit their studies. The work reported in this chapter earned Samar Zebian the Harry and Pola Triandis Doctoral Thesis Award for the best congress presentation by a young scientist.