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Exotic Readings of Cultural Texts¹

by Roger M. Keesing

Can anthropologists *mis*read cultural texts? Currently fashionable relativisms insist that all readings are situated and perspectival. Yet our partial command of fieldwork languages and our theoretical orientations may lead us to misconstrue other people's talk. Our quests for cultural exotica predispose us to read cultural texts selectively and to mistake conventional metaphors for metaphysical accounts. Recent developments in cognitive and linguistic theory are examined to show why language creates traps for unwary exotica seekers. There are no magical pathways to "correct" interpretation (and no reasons to expect that all of what we once deified as "native actors" share the same meanings). Recent advances in the study of language, metaphor, and categorization not only show why interpretive caution and skepticism are needed but provide new ways and means for thinking about and studying other culturally constructed and humanly experienced worlds.

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1. I am indebted to Pierre Maranda, James Fernandez, and other participants in the symposium "Between Semantics and Rationality" at the 12th International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences in Zagreb (July 1988) for helpful comments and to Gilles Bibeau and Ellen Corin for inviting me to participate. This is a slightly revised version of the paper presented in Zagreb; I am grateful to Adam Kuper for suggesting that I might publish the paper outside the proposed symposium volume and to Bibeau and Corin for giving me permission to do so. The initial conception of the paper emerged partly through conversation with C. O. Frake. John Haviland has contributed particularly valuable suggestions for revision, and David and Kay French have usefully clarified a long-remembered anecdote.

In these days of fashionable postmodernist relativisms in anthropology, the possibility of a definitive interpretation, a privileged epistemological ground, is vanishing. As observers, we are always part of the picture. Interpretation is always perspectival; realities are always multiple, and constructed.

Along with the vanishing goal of a "true" interpretation seems to be vanishing, almost unnoticed, the possibility of a *mis*interpretation. If we cannot be right, can we still be wrong? If we can only interpret, can we still misunderstand?

Anthropologists remain, by and large, committed to projects of radical cultural translation, to crossing the boundaries of the familiar, to engaging languages and cultural traditions that are initially alien and opaque. I will argue that the nature of our project, prevailing research strategies, theoretical orientations toward language and culture, and the reward structures of our profession conspire to push us into cultural mistranslations.

I will suggest that some of our ethnographic accounts and interpretations are simply wrong, constructed out of misunderstandings and mistranslations—failure to grasp meanings that are, for native participants in a community, the stuff of everyday life and talk. In part, this is because we do not—cannot—stay long enough and learn local languages well enough. In part, it is because our projects—our goals and expectations in representing Otherness—push us to overinterpret. Our professional role as dealers in exotica (Keesing 1987) may impel us to seek deep and cosmologically salient meanings where native actors may find shallow, conventional and pragmatic ones: to discover nonexistent philosophies.

I will explore as well more subtle processes of selectivity and filtering. When we rummage through our field notes to find something worth writing about, do we select the most exotic materials to characterize and essentialize Otherness? And if so, do we leave what seems mundane—or simply familiar—undescribed?

The Quest for the Exotic

An anecdote can serve to illustrate one element in the subculture of anthropology that pushes us to choose exotic readings of cultural texts. A distinguished anthropologist recently recounted to me how, when some years ago he was invited to contribute to a Festschrift for Claude Lévi-Strauss, he had set out to write a paper analyzing the system of direction terminology and spatial orientation of the non-Western people with whom he had worked. Halfway through, he had decided that the orientation system he was describing was fundamentally the same as our own, and he had never finished the paper.

I, too, have combed the ethnographic and linguistic data from the non-Western people I study (the Kwaio of Malaita, Solomon Islands) for material exotic enough to merit publication. Thus, in preparing a paper arguing that semantic analysis of Kwaio required recourse to

cosmological premises and structures (and hence that a speaker's linguistic knowledge presupposes cultural knowledge [Keesing 1979]), I pored over my Kwaio dictionary (1975) seeking lexical entries that embodied takens-for-granted about the world radically different from our own. My point, perhaps a worthwhile one, was made, but in making it I distorted the general pattern of a semantic system constructed, as ours is, mainly in terms of pragmatic experience, not cosmological schemes.

Because of the reward structures, criteria of publishability, and theoretical premises of our discipline, papers that might show how un-exotic and un-alien other people's worlds are never get written or read. This filtering process is produced by, and sustains, a view of cultural relativism and radical diversity that pervades the discipline. Our predilection for purveying exotica and ignoring the mundane and unremarkable will be one of my concerns. But I have deeper, epistemological doubts. I will argue that we are impelled not only to choose the most exotic possible cultural data as our texts but to give them the most exotic possible readings—and, in doing so, often distort and mistranslate.

Ethnography and Language Learning

Another factor pushing us into mistranslation is the paradox that the search for radically alien cultural material leads us into communities in which local, non-European languages—languages that frequently have no written grammars or dictionaries or orthographies—are spoken. Struggling with local languages as best we can—some of us gifted language learners, most of us learning slowly and painfully—we usually come to speak them with far less than full fluency, certainly with far less than a full native command. Those of us who work in the field in “exotic” local languages like to imagine that despite our limitations in catching all the subtleties of conversation, joking, or oratorical allusion, we understand the essentials and participate acceptably in everyday social life. We may well (as Heine [1985] points out) delude ourselves or overrepresent our linguistic command to authenticate our interpretations.

Achieving even a rough practical working command of an alien language within the usual year or year and a half of fieldwork is a considerable accomplishment, particularly when language learning is ancillary to the tasks of ethnography. Where an ethnographer is primarily concerned with documenting a non-Western people's agricultural system or nutrition or articulation into the political processes of a postcolonial state, it may suffice for this task to work through an interpreter, use a lingua franca, or speak a local language with much less than full fluency. But increasingly, the fashions of our discipline push us into characterizing subtle structures of cultural symbolism, cosmological systems, or cultural constructions of “self” and “person.” For such analyses, I will argue, the confluence of our (theoretically motivated) quest for exotica, an inadequate understand-

ing of the nature of language, and an inadequate command of the particular language with which we are working may conspire to lead us into error.

Reverence for Linguistic Evidence

Any language presents us, in its morphological and syntactic patterns, with the elements and distinctions through which meanings are constructed and communicated. Reverence for the surface patterning of language does not, by itself, take us to the depths of meaning, but it is essential to our project of cultural translation that we attend to this evidence with the utmost care and rigor. My own errors have underlined for me the urgency of carefully unpacking all the surface evidence encoded in a language as the essential prerequisite for deeper interpretation. The problems and processes involved can be illustrated with reference to ethnographic interpretations of *mana* (and cognate forms) in Oceanic Austronesian languages (Keesing 1984, 1985a) of the southwestern Pacific. My own failures and those of my colleagues to attend to the surface linguistic facts closely enough not only underline the urgency of meticulous caution but illuminate one source of our error: the preconceptions we bring to the field.

In the languages of Malaita (Solomon Islands) the Oceanic Austronesian word *mana*² (in the reduplicated forms *mamana* or the metathesized *nanama*) is in its root form a stative verb, appropriately glossed as “be effective, be true, be realized, be successful.” *Mamana/nanama*, in addition to being a stative verb, is (with a following preposition) in the northern and central Malaita languages an active verb, referring to action imputed to or solicited from ancestors: the ancestors *mamana/nanama*-for (support, empower, protect) the living (Lau *mamana fua-gu* ‘empower me’, Kwaio *nanama fa-meeru* ‘support us’, both addressed to the ancestors in prayer).³ In Malaita languages, *mamana/nanama* is a noun only when marked morphologically by a nominalizing suffix.⁴ The nominalizing suffix not only distinguishes the form as a noun but indicates that it is an abstract verbal noun (following the pattern of ‘be hot’ > ‘hotness’, ‘be good’ > ‘goodness’, ‘be strong’ > ‘strength’, which are similarly marked), not a substantive.

Ethnographers working on Malaita have, however, failed to distinguish between the verbal root form and the nominalized form and, partly for this reason, have systematically mistranslated *mamana/nanama*. Having

2. Proto-Oceanic **manaN*.

3. In Kwaio and the languages of southern Malaita, *nanama* is also used with a transitive suffix to refer to the process whereby the ancestral ghosts protect, support, and empower the living (Kwaio *nanama-nge'eni-gia* ‘support us’, ‘Are’are *nanama-ini-nau* ‘empower me’).

4. A similar marking is used in some Western Solomons languages. In Roviana, for example, the marker is an infix (*mana* ‘be effective, be potent, be sacred’ > *m-in-ana* ‘potency, sanctity’; cf. *malahoro* ‘be hot’ > *m-in-alahoro* ‘heat’).

discovered these errors by belatedly noticing my own repeated mistakes (and having done longer fieldwork than the colleagues whose similar errors I will note), I point this out simply to illustrate a general problem.

I have elsewhere (Keesing 1985a, n.d.) discussed my own error in (prior to 1979) translating Kwaio *nanama* as if it were a noun and assigning to it the meaning I had learned in an anthropological tradition going back to Codrington (1891): *nanama* was “power,” deriving from the spirits. Not until I went back to original taped texts, in the course of writing a book on Kwaio religion (Keesing 1982), did I realize that I had been translating verbal usages as if they were nouns, qualities and acts as if they were an invisible substance.

When I looked at other Malaita languages, I found that in the northern Malaita languages the basic form is the reduplicated *mamana*. Used as a stative verb, *mamana* has been glossed for To’aba’ita (by Waterston 1924) “(be) true, real, faithful, prosperous, efficacious, proved true, fulfilled” and for the closely related Lau dialect (by Fox 1974) “be efficacious (of medicine), grow well (of trees), be good (of news), lucky, in good health; be true, come true, be fulfilled.” When used as a verbal noun, *mamana* is marked with a nominalizing suffix, either *-laa* (Lau *mamana-laa* ‘good health, good luck, success’, To’aba’ita *mamana-laa* ‘truth’) or, more commonly, *-a* (Lau *mamana-a* ‘spiritual or magical power’, To’aba’ita *mamana-a* ‘blessing, prosperity’).

Turning from the missionary dictionaries to ethnographic accounts, I discovered that from Hogbin’s time (the 1930s) onward, ethnographers of northern Malaita had been making translation errors parallel to my own.⁵ I shall illustrate only briefly (details are set out in Keesing n.d.). Ross (1973: 234–35), for example, observes that in Baegu “success, riches, and good health depend on . . . *mamanaa*. . . . As the Baegu use the word it can refer to an innate property of holy things, to the blessings granted by the gods, or to truth either as an abstract quality or in adjectival form. . . . According to context, *mamanaa* refers to some aspect of the . . . constellation of meanings ‘holy, blessing, good fortune, true, effective, power.’” Whereas Ross gives the nominalized form and assigns both nominal and stative meanings to it, for the neighboring Lau dialect Elli Maranda (1976) gives the stative form but translates it as a noun: “*Mamana* (*mana*) has its depository in the altars” (p. 180); “the *agalo* [ancestral spirits] give *mamana*, the foundation and support of life . . .” (p. 196). Elsewhere, Maranda and Maranda (1970) write that “the head . . . is the seat of *mamana*” (p. 848) and “[A man] gives [shell] money to . . . the priest of his lineage to obtain *mamana*” (p. 856, translations mine).⁶

5. In his earliest account of the *mana* concept in To’aba’ita, Hogbin (1936:259) gives a relatively apt characterization of the surface linguistic facts: “spirits are possessed of a supernatural power, *mamanaa*. . . . A successful man is said either to have *mamanaa* or to be *mamana*, the adjectival, and also the verbal, form of the word.” In his later writings (e.g., 1939), both the grammatical contrast and the adjectival/verbal senses disappear.

6. “La tête . . . est le siège du *mamana*” and “[Un homme] donne l’argent à . . . le prêtre de sa lignée, pour obtenir du *mamana*.”

Guidieri (1977) devotes an entire chapter to the concept of *mamanaa* among the nearby Fataleka. I will look rather more closely at his interpretations of *mamanaa* and related concepts, since they so clearly illustrate the problems of cultural translation and language with which I am concerned.

Guidieri’s citations and translations of Fataleka texts suggest that he had a very limited command of the language and a very partial understanding of Fataleka grammar. They further suggest that misunderstandings of recorded texts contributed to, and sustained, mystical characterizations of the Fataleka world view sharply at odds with the interpretations of other ethnographers of Malaita. My discussion of these translation problems must be bracketed with the proviso that I myself do not speak Fataleka and have been able to do only limited work with Fataleka informants;⁷ however, to a student of the comparative grammar of Malaita languages, many of the mistakes are unmistakable.

Guidieri’s characterization of *mamanaa* takes the word as a noun (even though in Fataleka, as in neighboring languages/dialects, the stative form is at least equally common). Some of the texts he cites contain *mamana* as stative verb, but he mistakes it for the nominalized form.⁸ However, it is with his characterization and translation of the nominalized form and his translations of texts in which it appears that I am primarily concerned. Guidieri translates *mamana-a* as “*l’authentique*.” “Truth” is indeed one element of the complex polysemy of *mamana-a* (although *réalisation* or *vérité* seems a better rendering in French⁹). But *mamana-a* in Fataleka in other contexts carries meanings that could be rendered in English with “potentiation, sacralization, effectiveness, blessing, empowerment,” and the like; moreover, in some contexts of Fataleka sacrifice and magic, *mamana-a* is used as a noun as a kind of euphemism for the ancestor(s) to whom the invocation is addressed.

Guidieri’s mystical characterization of *mamana-a* as “*l’authentique*” leads him to heights of interpretive imagination in representing its meanings in different contexts and the philosophy supposed to connect them. Here, I leave the French untranslated, since it is with interpretive language that I am concerned. He depicts the Fataleka priest (pp. 91–92) as

possédé, mais possédé par une force de voyance; autrement dit, l’être hanté est un être “rempli d’authen-

7. Although I have enlisted the assistance both of Fataleka priests and of informants well educated in English who have a strong interest in their ancestral culture and religion, notably Sam ‘Au and John Maetia Kalu’ae.

8. Thus, he explicates the causative *fa’a-mamana-a* as “*savoir atteindre l’authentique*” (p. 135). In Fataleka, as in other Malaita languages, the causative prefix converts the stative verbal form *mamana* to a transitive verb, “cause it to be *mamana*.” *Fa’a-mamana-a* can only be “make it true, effective, realized, blessed,” etc. Whereas Guidieri assumes the *mamanaa* following the causative to be the nominal form, in fact the *-a* is a quite different grammatical particle, a clitic “it” pronoun suffixed to a transitive verb that references its direct object.

9. Despite Guidieri’s etymological rationalization (p. 94 n. 1).

tique," être-de-pouvoir dont le rôle d'autorité coïncide avec le pouvoir que l'Absent, avec violence, lui a insufflé.

Le "pouvoir" est comme le *mana*: il bouge, il flotte: aussitôt saisi, il disparaît; si on l'a, déjà on craint sa perte. Il ne peut pas prétendre à la permanence, ni à la transmission. On le subit; on le guette, mail comme un feu il ne demeure dans le foyer ou il se brûle qu'en tant que présence temporaire.

The Fataleka world as depicted by Guidieri is populated by entities—"l'Absent" as causal agent, as well as "l'authentique"—that, I suggest, exist only in his translations, not in Fataleka linguistic usages or thought. Soon after (p. 95), we find another: "l'oubli."

Dans la proposition fataleka, l'oubli n'est pas seulement l'extériorisation d'un labour intérieur et puissant, agi par la force externe, qui s'est introduite dans un corps, mais la condition préalable d'un proces dont l'aboutissement conduit à l'acquisition d'un pouvoir, d'une "voyance." *Mamanaa* est ce qui se conquiert à travers l'oubli et qui permet de "voir" non seulement autrement mais mieux vraiment, grâce à l'oubli induit par la déviance.

Two textual examples will illustrate why I have little faith in Guidieri's translations and interpretations. He makes much, with regard to *mamana-a*, of a text he records as *fa'aburusye: na akaloraoe; mamanaa nia sakatafa*, which he translates as "(c'est le) produire-l'oubli: le travail de l'ancêtre; l'authentique est apparition." According to my Fataleka informants, the sentence (which should be written¹⁰ *fa'a-buru-sia; na akalo rao-a; mamana-a nia sakatafa*) means (in this context of sacrifice) something like "become possessed (lit., cause-[be blurred/confused/forgotten]-ize); the ancestor produces it; empowerment becomes manifest." Guidieri's rendering of the final clause is crucial (because he makes so much of it) and simply wrong. In other contexts, *sakatafa* is "emerge, come into view"; in this context, it is (metaphorically) "become manifest." It certainly has nothing to do (my informants insist) with the truth's being an illusion.

A second example of mistranslation is more blatant (though less crucial to Guidieri's argument). He gives as a text *na mamana fuu 'e'dao kaa fataa fwana*, which he renders as "L'authentique parle, et il écart (il disperse) les braises du feu" (The truth speaks, and it scatters the embers of the fire). He goes on to explicate the deep meaning of the text (again, I leave the French untranslated, since it is the character of the interpretation that I seek to convey): "L'apparition de l'authentique est vue (ainsi que l'oubli-apparition-de-la-mémoire) comme un souffle puissant qui l'abat sur un foyer vivant, s'y creuse une place et s'y installe pour, au coeur de cette chaleur qu'est la pensée-mémoire, agir sur elle." My Fataleka

10. Here I hyphenate morpheme boundaries for analytical purposes.

informants confirm what my comparative-grammatical eye led me to suspect, that the passage has nothing to do with embers or fires: *na mamana-a fuu e dao, ka fata fua-na* 'The ancestor comes and talks to him'.¹¹ What faith are we to have in philosophical explorations of the mystical depths of the Fataleka mind when they rest on linguistic misinterpretations and errors of transcription and translation?

Others have come to grief with *mana* cognates elsewhere in Melanesia by failing to attend to the surface linguistic facts and being deflected by Codringtonian orthodoxies brought with them to the field. Thus, Allen (1972) translated the key Nduindui (Ambae, Vanuatu) religious concept of *manaki* as "supernatural power." When I pointed out to him that the *-ki* was almost certainly the reflex of the Oceanic transitive suffix and therefore *mana-ki* must be a transitive verb ("*mana-ize*"), he took the opportunity to check, on a subsequent field trip. I was right.

Failure to get linguistic facts right is not a shortcoming confined to Pacific islands or ethnographers who learned what *mana* meant when they were students. Leach (1967), for example, showed symbolic equivalences between apparently homonymous forms in Jinghpaw, forms he thought were phonologically the same only because he did not understand the system of tonal contrasts in Jinghpaw or the phonemic significance of initial and final glottal stops. Differentiated tonally or with initial or final consonants, the supposedly homophonous morphemes are to native speakers as different as "far" and "fur" or "cat" and "at" in English (Leach 1967, Bradley 1977).

Heine (1985:13), who restudied the Ik made (in)famous by Turnbull, further illustrates the pervasiveness of the problem of mistranslation with reference to Turnbull's analyses of Ik religious beliefs:

We are told [by Turnbull] . . . that there is *gor*, the soul, which "flies past the moon that is good and the sun that is bad, and on to the stars, where the *abang* have their eternal existence" (Turnbull 1974:161). We are further informed that "A soul is round and red, but it has no arms or legs. It rests somewhere in the vicinity of the stomach . . ." (Turnbull 1974:161. This is hardly surprising, since *gor* (more precisely *gur*) is the Ik word for heart, which is occasionally used to mean "spirit," "soul." That *gor* is able to fly to the stars where the *abang* live is, however, a strange idea to the Ik. The word *aban* means "my father" and in no way refers to "ancestors" or "ancestral spirits," as Turnbull (1974:153, 167) claims.

Yet even if we attend to the surface linguistic evidence carefully, it does not guarantee us easy access to *la pensée sauvage*.

11. In this context of sacrifice, *mamana-a* is used as a euphemism for the ancestor to whom an invocation is being made. Guidieri was apparently confused by the similarity between *fua-na* "for-him" (here, "to him") and *fua-na ere* (or, for some Fataleka-speakers, *fue-na ere*), "embers of the fire."

Metaphors, Prototypes, and Interpretation

Recent developments in the understanding of language and cognition give further reason for concern in the encounter of an ethnographer with another people's world.

It is worth pausing to consider a question long insufficiently examined in both cognitive and symbolic anthropology and now squarely raised in postmodernist thought as it has filtered through to our discipline: whether "native" participants in a culture have privileged access to meaning. If we ask whether ethnographers can mistranslate and misinterpret, are we assuming that there is some "insider" sharing of meanings by native participants from which we are excluded? Are there "correct" translations and interpretations that native speakers of languages in effect imbibe with breast milk?

I make no such assumptions. I have long argued that the assumed sharing of meaning and the imputed omniscience of the "native speaker" are heuristic myths of our own making that have retarded critical thinking about the dynamics and politics of cultural knowledge. It is partly for this reason that I have focused here at the outset on relationships that are overtly marked on the surface of language: for native speakers of a language *do* share a code, at this level, that we may only partially understand. I believe that the stuff of daily life and talk—which is all most native participants in most communities in human history have had access to—is deeply and multiply ambiguous, allowing of alternative, perspectival interpretations. The native participant, like the ethnographer, is situated, part of the picture; the native participant, like the ethnographer, seeks to construct generalizations from particularities and fragments, to recover "rules" from patterns. Using data from my own Kwaio fieldwork (1987), I have illustrated how interpretation by native participants varies in depth and coherence—how meanings are *evoked by*, not *embodied in*, cultural symbols and how what we interpret, in our own worlds, depends on what we know. Where, then, lies the epistemological advantage of the native participant in contrast to the ethnographer who—I suggest—can still misinterpret and mistranslate? It might be too irreverent to suggest that—in addition to longer and deeper immersion in a language and the life of a community—the native participant has not studied anthropology. But I will at least suggest that our theories mislead us with regard to the nature of language and meaning.

The recent outpouring of work on metaphor in critical theory, linguistics, cognitive science, and other fields has made it clear that metaphors are not a surface embroidery on literal, propositional languages; rather, all languages are pervaded by—indeed constructed out of—metaphor. Deconstructing the opposition between metaphor and literal language in the style of Derrida, Culler (1982:148) suggests that "the literal is the opposite of the figurative, but a literal expression is also a metaphor whose figurality has been forgotten."

As Lakoff and Johnson (1980; Lakoff 1987) argue, most metaphors are not creative extrapolations from literal use. Rather, they are *conventional*, built into the semantics and even the structure of language. A schema of conventional metaphor establishes a similarity in pattern between a source domain and a domain likened to it. Lakoff and Johnson emphasize the experiential bases of metaphor as crucial both in the images drawn of the source domain and in the equivalences drawn between it and another.

Systems of conventional metaphor use body parts or spatial imagery or physical acts or states to represent other domains—temporal relationships, social relationships, inner states (such as emotions). The life cycle—birth, procreation, death—may be used to characterize social events and processes or cosmic processes. POWER IS HEAT, PEOPLE ARE PLANTS, LIFE IS A JOURNEY, INNER STATES ARE COLORS, THE BODY IS A CONTAINER FOR THE EMOTIONS, PARTS OF SOCIETY ARE PARTS OF THE BODY—such conventional metaphoric connections between domains structure talk in every language. They doubtless structure thought as well in important ways but ways that we are, I think, prone to overestimate.

It is not, as Lakoff and Johnson seem at times to imply, that other peoples' world views are constructed out of their metaphoric systems. Rather, as Quinn (1987) usefully insists, the metaphoric systems of particular peoples are *expressions* of their culturally constructed worlds as well as the reverse. Quinn argues that different metaphoric schemes in a particular language may themselves be connected in systematic ways reflective of cultural-conceptual systems that underlie them. Metaphors, that is, are constructed in terms of, as well as themselves being constitutive of, a people's view of the world. But that does not mean that we can easily infer from the metaphoric usages the systems of cultural assumption—if any—that underlie them. Nor does it mean that all native actors necessarily share assumptions about how the world works, despite being able to use the linguistic coin of the community. I have discussed (Keesing 1985a) the way English speakers talk about "luck" in conventional metaphors, as though "luck" were a substance people had more or less of and as though "Luck" were a person determining the outcome of what appear to be games of chance. These conventional ways-of-talk imply, however, no corresponding beliefs about the world, and individual speakers of the language apparently hold widely varying folk models of cause and chance. We have no reason to assume either that other peoples' schemes of conventional metaphor are more deeply expressive of cosmological schemes than our own or that their "cultural models" are more uniform than ours.

The connections between universes proposed in conventional metaphor thus create potential traps for the unwary ethnographer seeking cosmological structures and deep symbolic meanings. Conventional metaphors may suggest metaphysical relationships or cosmological

structures that in fact have no salience for native speakers.¹² As ethnographers, we may infer that for the people we are studying, the belly, or the liver, is “the seat of the emotions” when (as I have suggested [Keesing 1985a]) no more need be implied than we imply in our talk of “hearts.” The danger of our constructing nonexistent metaphysical schemes that seem to be implied by conventional metaphors but would be meaningless or absurd to native speakers if they could read what we write about them raises ethnographic nightmares for me.

The metaphoric structuring of language operates at deeper levels as well, and here too it may mislead us. Recent work on categorization (discussed by Lakoff 1987) shows how central metaphor and metonymy are in connecting the multiple senses of words. The Aristotelian assumptions on which 2,000 years of Western logic and philosophy have built—most centrally, the assumption that categories are defined with regard to common features—are turning out to misrepresent radically the cognitive bases of categorization, and hence of thought. Metaphor is crucial in the internal structure and articulation of categories.

Lakoff shows how, in what he calls “radial” semantic structures, several base models converge on a prototypic exemplar. Noncentral members of the category may each bear some resemblance to central or prototypic members, on the basis of metaphoric and metonymic connection; yet they need have no connection to one another. Lakoff illustrates with “mother” in English, which is structured according to base models of genetic connection, of nurturance, of giving birth, etc. Den mothers need have nothing directly in common with unwed or unfit or working mothers or with necessity, the mother of invention. The multiple senses may be played off against one another, as in “My real mother wasn’t a real mother to me,” readily understandable by any native English-speaker. Wittgenstein first pointed out in his late writings on “family resemblances” that members of a category need have no common feature. But whereas Wittgenstein suggested a kind of fan structure of partly overlapping meanings, with one end of the fan possibly quite different from the other, the recent work on natural categorization goes further, and in a different direction. Multiple base models converge on or overlap in the case of prototypic exemplars. Other members of the category are connected to prototypic members through metaphoric or metonymic connection to one or more of the component base models; all have some systematic resemblance to the prototype but in quite different ways.

One important mechanism here is what Lakoff (1987)

12. Indeed, the recent work on conventional metaphor makes clear that it will be by no means easy to distinguish metaphoric from nonmetaphoric talk. We cannot even assume that the boundaries between proper and common nouns will be transparent across cultural boundaries. I am reminded of David French’s story of his Oregon Indian informants’ becoming agitated each time he drove them past a particular precipitous spot. When he queried them, they explained that, as the sign warned them to do, they were watching out for Rolling Rock.

calls “image-schema transformations.”¹³ An abstract image—of, say, a trajectory along a path or an aperture—may be central to the meaning of a category, but the connections between senses of the category depend on transformations such that the end-point of the path is equated with the path (“He walked over the hill” > “He lives over the hill”) or what fits into the aperture is equated with the aperture (“They cut a window in their dining room” > “The new window for their dining room was delivered”). The way in which image-schema transformations and metaphoric extensions from them structure extremely complex categories has so far mainly been explored with reference to English prepositions. Summarizing Brugman’s (1981) work on the semantics of “over” in English, which shows how almost 100 senses of “over” are connected by images that are transforms of one another, Lakoff suggests that “there are certain very natural relationships among image-schemas, and these motivate polysemy, not just in one or two cases, but in case after case throughout the lexicon” (p. 440). Spatial image schemas, connected to one another through transformations, are extended metaphorically to nonphysical acts and states (“think it over,” “do it over,” “look it over,” “overstate,” “overlook,” “overthrow”).

The images on which categorization builds are experience-rich, grounded in visual and kinaesthetic experience (Johnson 1987, Lakoff and Johnson 1980); hence, they seem to vary less than our culturalist dogmas predispose us to expect. Universal patterns in the logics of categorization, the way image-schema transformations and chains of metaphoric connection operate, seemingly underlie the particularities of cultural meaning that infuse different languages. As Johnson (1987) suggests, these patterns are in a deep and natural way embedded in the experience of creatures with bodies like ours (and brains like ours) on the surface of a planet like ours. This is not to deny cultural diversity but to situate it theoretically. Casad (1982) shows for Cora (a Uto-Aztecan language) how non-Western cultures have their own rich systems of image schemas and metaphor. “The image-schematic structure of Cora is strikingly different from that of English, though . . . many of the elements and principles of image composition are similar” (Lakoff 1987:460).

Metaphor pervades grammatical systems as well. Thus, for example, grammatical relationships such as causation and transitivity build upon prototypic images of physical agency, of acts that physically manipulate or transform objects in the world. Yet in grammatical systems, relationships, events, and processes are conceptualized metaphorically as being similar to prototypic scenarios (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:69–76; Lakoff 1987:54–55). “The prototypical core of the concept CAUSATION, namely DIRECT MANIPULATION, is . . . a gestalt consisting of properties that naturally occur together in our daily experience of performing direct ma-

13. In this, Lakoff builds in particular on the work of Talmy (1975, 1978, 1981).

nipulations [and] is basic and primitive in our experience. . . . [This] prototypical core of CAUSATION is elaborated metaphorically in various ways" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:75–76). Whatever grammatical mechanisms develop in a language to express causatives or to mark transitivity may—through such logics of metaphor—be used to express relationships not based on "cause" or agency. This creates further traps for the anthropologist zealously seeking to interpret another culture through ways of talk. When we find, in another people's language of which we have acquired a partial command, that events and connections between them are characterized as if they were based on physical manipulation by a human agent, are we in danger, if we seek to characterize their concept of causality, of inventing nonexistent philosophies?

Heine and his colleagues (Heine and Reh 1984, Claudi and Heine 1986, Heine, Claudi, and Hunnemayer n.d.) have explored how grammatical patterns are structured by "categorical metaphors." Categorical metaphors draw on experientially salient connections between domains in a systematic way that seems to hold across languages. That is, domains have a "natural" relationship of experiential primacy or immediacy relative to one another, such that less immediate or more abstract domains are characterized in terms of more experience-rich or directly accessible or concrete ones. Heine and his colleagues characterize these domains in a chain: PERSON > OBJECT > SPACE > TIME > PROCESS > QUALITY. A particular domain in the chain may serve to characterize all those written to the right of it. Put another way, a domain may be likened metaphorically to any of the domains to its left in the chain. The metaphoric relationships proposed have been explored in some detail for the Niger-Congo language Ewe by Claudi and Heine (1986). They examine how a series of conventional metaphoric equivalences—AN OBJECT IS A PERSON, SPACE IS AN OBJECT, A QUALITY IS AN OBJECT, QUALITY IS SPACE, TIME IS SPACE, A PROCESS IS SPACE, QUALITY IS A PROCESS—are reflected in Ewe grammar.

The operation of metaphor and image-schema transformation in language is being studied not only synchronically but diachronically. In a burgeoning concern with what is being called "grammaticalization," linguists (including Heine and his colleagues) are examining how lexical forms progressively become transformed into grammatical elements.¹⁴ The lexical forms become, in the (metaphorical) parlance of grammaticalization theorists, "bleached" of their semantic content and come to serve abstract relational functions (although in other contexts they may retain their lexical force).

Heine and his collaborators have explored in detail how grammaticalization has operated in Niger-Congo languages. Thus, for example, they discuss how a verb of volition applied to a "willful human agent" comes, following the metaphoric equivalence of PERSON > OBJECT, to be used to mark grammatical relationships involving "a non-human entity incapable of willful actions." As metaphoric relationships lead to grammaticalizations along what Heine and his colleagues call "grammaticalization chains," the original lexical usages may remain, along with new ones. They illustrate with the Ewe lexeme *megbe* 'back', which "stands for at least seven differing conceptual entities constituting a chain of increasing 'abstractness' extending from a concrete, visible/tangible entity, a body part . . . to a grammaticalized word which has turned from a nominal into an adverbial entity" (Heine, Claudi, and Hunnemayer n.d.) Grammaticalization chains lead to the use of body parts as directionals (e.g., "back" and "front" in English), then markers of temporal relationships. Verbs for "come" or "go" become auxiliaries, then aspect markers, then tense markers. Possessives are formed out of expressions of spatial proximity or (as in many African languages) body-part terms (particularly "hand"). Second verbs in serial verb constructions become detached as postpositions and acquire new grammatical functions as complementizers.

Claudi and Heine (1986:320–21) point out that in Ewe "the conceptualization of actions/processes in terms of spatial orientation has become idiomatic, and it has been grammaticalized to the extent that modern speakers of Ewe are unaware of the metaphorical, and etymological, base of the progressive and ingressive aspects: the morphemes *le* 'be at', *m* 'in', *be* 'at' have entirely lost their locative significance [and are] frozen relics of what once constitute[d] lively metaphors."

All of these processes leave in a language trails of metaphoric connection, webs of loosely overlapping meanings. The connections between forms may, depending on how far the grammaticalization process has proceeded, remain visible to native speakers or be obscured from their view by convention and phonological shift.

Anthropological Interpretation

The residues of a language's history leave sticky traps for the unwary anthropologist seeking in linguistic usages evidence of radically different Otherness. Into a community in which the medium of daily talk is a language pervaded by conventionally metaphoric idioms (English "He broke her heart," "Some people have all the luck," "It was the hand of fate"), with a semantic system constructed out of metaphoric and metonymic chains of connection (reflect on the intricately interconnected senses of "back" in English) and a grammar that represents a complex history of metaphor-based grammaticalization chains, comes an ethnographer implicitly or explicitly in search of exotic cultural texts. Staying long

14. I am indebted to Talmy Givón for inviting me to participate in a symposium on grammaticalization at the University of Oregon in May 1988 and to him and colleagues in the symposium, particularly Eugene Casad, Zygmunt Frajzyngier, Joseph Greenberg, Bernd Heine, Charles Li, Frank Lichtenberk, James Matisoff, Ger Reesink, Gillian Sankoff, and Elizabeth Traugott, for helpful discussion.

enough to get a practical command of everyday conversational usage but far less than the five or ten years it would take to command the nuances of meaning, the ethnographer tries to characterize another people's culturally constructed world.

Even if we came trying to find another people's metaphors—rather than their cosmological premises, conceptions of time and space, or concept of person—we would be prone to misconstrue their talk. Lakoff and Johnson (1980:143) report that

an Iranian student, shortly after his arrival in Berkeley, . . . found . . . an expression that he heard over and over and understood as a beautifully sane metaphor . . . : "the solution of my problems"—which he took to be a large volume of liquid, bubbling and smoking, containing all of your problems. . . . He was terribly disillusioned to find that the residents of Berkeley had no such chemical metaphor in mind.

Fortunately, the Iranian was a linguistics student taking a course on metaphor from Lakoff and not an anthropologist intent on describing American cosmology or conception of self.

I will illustrate the traps a language leaves for the unwary exotic-seeker with examples from Kwaio—a language I have learned in almost five years of fieldwork and of which I have published a dictionary (Keesing 1975) and a grammar (Keesing 1985*b*). I have stumbled into some of these traps despite my fluency in the language and have avoided others.

THE PATH OF THE SELF

The ethnographer seeking evidence of the distinctive cultural construction of "self" or "person" could take as one important piece of evidence the way Kwaio talk of "selves."

We begin with the root form *tala* 'path.'¹⁵ With a directly suffixed possessive pronoun, *tala-gu* is 'my track' (i.e., the imprint I make on the ground).¹⁶ As in many languages, 'path' has various metaphor-based meanings in Kwaio. Thus, *suga tala-na* 'pay the way for [lit. "buy the path of"] a child by contributing bridewealth for the parental marriage'; *taunga'i tala-na* 'bring to maturity by working on his/her behalf' (lit. "work the path for"), 'bring an event to fruition through one's work'; *beri tala-na mae-na* 'bring death to through one's stealing' (lit. "steal the path of his death"). Through the common conventional metaphoric schema A LIFE IS A JOURNEY ALONG A PATH, further connections are opened up, as

15. The reflex of an old Austronesian form, reconstructed as some approximation to **jalan* 'road, path' in Proto-Austronesian.

16. In Oceanic languages, a distinction is made between grammatically inalienable possession (canonically for parts of a body or plant), in which a pronominal suffix is attached directly to the noun, and grammatically alienable possession, with the pronominal suffix attached to a particle, characteristically a locative. In many Oceanic languages further distinctions of semialienability (e.g., edibles, drinkables) are drawn.

in *tala'osi'a* 'grow to maturity without being seriously ill, disfigured by injury, etc.' (lit. "uninterrupted path"). By further extension from the domain of persons to the domain of inanimate objects, "path" is used to express separation and contrast: *ngai i tala-na* 'it's separate, it's different' (lit. "it's on its own path").

This then leads to a linguistic pattern for talking about the reflexivity of action: *ta-ku age-a i tala-gu* 'I'll do it myself' (lit. "do it along my [own] path"). This constructional pattern, using *tala-* as an inalienably possessed noun and following a locative particle, parallels constructions in Kwaio using directionals derived from body parts such as *i buri-gu* 'behind me' (lit. "at my back") and *i na'o-gu* 'in front of me' (lit. "at my front"). Kwaio goes a further step toward grammaticalization in using *tala-* with the possessive pronominal suffix but without the preceding locative particle, either following a verb or as object of a preposition. Again, the metaphoric basis for this usage is "on one's own path": *'agolo leka tala-dauru* 'Let's go ourselves'¹⁷ (lit. "go along our [own] path"); *Fa'afeloa ka lolofe'enia mola mae fana tala-na* 'Fa'afeloa connected the killing to himself', i.e., implicated himself, in this case falsely (lit. "for-it his-path"; cf. English "he brought it on himself").¹⁸ What might an ethnographer seeking a distinctive culturally constructed Kwaio concept of "self" or "person" create out of this partial grammaticalization of a conventional metaphor?

If the ethnographer were working in the neighboring Kwara'ae language, in which the metaphor-based grammaticalization of *tala-* as "self" has gone rather further, the possibilities of ethnographic imagination would be given freer rein: *ngai fa'a-ta'ini-a tala-na* 'He showed himself' (lit. "he cause-be shown his-path"). (In Kwaio *ngai e faa-te'eni-a i tala-na* would be "He showed it by himself.") Here, *tala-na* is used to label a "self" that is the direct object of a verb, hence a further step toward a kind of substantivization of the "self." A second example (like the first one, from an old missionary grammar [Deck 1934:51]) exemplifies how in Kwara'ae *tala-na* can be used (as in the third Kwaio example) as the object of a preposition. More significant, it illustrates a second grammatical device for indicating reflexivity, one which shows *tala* further along the way to grammaticalization: *wae ke tala lafu-ni-a 'a-na tala-na* 'Man exalts himself' (lit. "man REFLEXIVE exalt to-him his-path"). Either device can be used in Kwara'ae to indicate reflexivity upon a "self," or both can be used together, as in this example. An ethnographer seeking to characterize the Kwara'ae conception of "self" would be likely to pick up "his path" as evidence, since the possessive particle clearly indicates its lexical source, but the reflexive-marking *tala* as a preverbal grammatical element is a further step along the path of grammaticalization,

17. The dual inclusive pronoun *golo* indicates that reference is to "you and I."

18. This is a fragment from a recently recorded text regarding a resurgence of blood feuding and bounty hunting among Kwaio traditionalists.

having lost its pronominal possessive suffix and moved into the verb phrase. We might expect that, eventually, the fully grammaticalized preverbal marking of reflexivity with *tala* (in the Kwara'ae of the 22d century?) would replace the postverbal construction using the inalienably possessed noun *tala*. That is, the construction "on my path" to express reflexivity is a partial grammaticalization seemingly¹⁹ based on an extension of the A LIFE IS A JOURNEY ALONG A PATH metaphoric scheme (just as the Kwaio directionals are partial grammaticalizations based on the metaphoric equivalence of spatial orientations to body parts discussed at length for African languages by Heine and his colleagues). When a form moves further down the chain in the grammaticalization process, the historical metaphoric connection of grammatical element to lexical form (as with Kwara'ae *tala* as a preverbal marker of reflexivity) disappears.

We may well wonder what an ethnographer committed to the now-familiar task of showing a distinctive cultural construction of personhood/selfhood on some-Pacific-island-or-another (White and Kirkpatrick 1985) would do with the Kwaio (or Kwara'ae) self, conceptualized as a path through life. I am deeply skeptical of interpretations for which the main evidence lies in the stuff of language.²⁰

A MANTLE OF PROTECTION

In a paper in which I sought to show how languages are infused with cultural meanings, one of my examples was what I called a "'mantle' conceptualization of *mana*" (Keesing 1979:24): "The closest that Kwaio get to talking about *mana* in even quasi-physical terms is to treat *mana* by indirection as if it were a kind of mantle with which the ancestors envelop the living, their settlements, their gardens, protecting them from malevolent and dangerous uncontrolled powers of the world of nature." I have noted how I had been ignoring crucial surface-linguistic evidence in treating *nanama*, the Kwaio equivalent of *mana*, as if it were a substantive. Here, I will examine a usage I offered in the 1979 paper as exemplification of the "mantle" conceptualization:

The quasi-verbal form *'afuia* 'around, around the outside of' . . . occurs in constructions such as "pass around the outside of," or "stand on each side of me." *Aga 'afuinau* is "look after me, take responsibility for me." . . . Consider now several usages where the agent is a human actor but where the mantle of *'afuia* is the ancestral mantle of protection:

nalu 'afuia 'sacrifice in expiation of' (lit. "wash around the outside of," but here, "purify to restore the ancestral mantle around")

lii 'afuia 'consecrate a propitiatory pig to an ancestor to maintain the mantle around'

gama 'afuia kalonga 'ritually eat a sacred taro pudding to ensure ancestral benefits for the land'.

. . . The transparency of such forms to Kwaio-speakers is at least partly clear once the cultural idiom of *mana* as a protective mantle against malevolent and destructive forces has been explicated.

Although the general thrust of my argument about languages' being infused with cultural meanings probably remains reasonable, reading cultural meanings from or into linguistic forms is a more hazardous enterprise than I had realized a decade ago. Both on historical/comparative and on theoretical grounds, it seems that use of *'afuia* in these last, nonphysical senses represents the processes of metaphor and language change I have sketched. The root form *'afu* is a stative verb, "be wrapped." By metaphoric semantic extension, being wrapped up serves to express completeness: *akwalee 'ola e 'afu* 'fully ten things' (lit. "ten things it be wrapped up"); *lamo'afu* 'an all-purpose warrior' (i.e., one who manifests all the usually separate components of warriorhood); *'afu-ta-na ta'a* 'all the people'. In contemporary Kwaio, *'afu-i-a* is not used as a transitive verb. To form a transitive verb using *'afu*, Kwaio uses the causative prefix *faa-'afu-a* 'cause it to be wrapped up'.²¹ The form I offered in support of the supposed "mantle" conception of *mana*, *'afu-i-a*, falls into a small class of Kwaio prepositions which follow the morphological pattern of transitive verbs. The semantic bases of the prepositional verbs, in relation to the roots from which they are derived,²² are characteristically metaphoric, as in *fono-si-a* 'against' (from *fono* 'be blocked'). *'Afu-i-a* apparently has a similar metaphoric connection to *'afu*. In its most common manifestations, *'afu-i-a* refers to a spatial relationship, "around, around the outside of" (by analogy to a wrapping around the outside of something). By a further metaphoric semantic extension from this sense of "around," *'afu-i-a* has come in some contexts to mean "on behalf of." This is the sense expressed in *naru 'afuia* 'sacrifice in expiation of' and *gama 'afuia kalonga* 'ritually eat a sacred taro pudding to ensure ancestral benefits for the land'. I see no grounds, now, for assuming that such constructions entail any metaphysical implications regarding a "mantle" preserved by the ancestors. They simply represent the processes of conceptualization and linguistic change, metaphorically based, that I have characterized. If we want to be able to say with confidence that Kwaio conceptualize a mantle of protection maintained by the ancestors, we have to find evidence for such an interpretation outside the realm of linguistic forms: in what they say and do, not in the

19. John Haviland suggests the possibility of an alternative interpretation, in terms of a metaphoric schema MY PATH IS MY FACE/BODY.

20. I am, however, quite prepared to be convinced when the linguistically based inferences are strongly supported by folk exegeses or other evidence of corresponding "beliefs."

21. The transitive verb forms *'afu-a* 'wrap up' and *'afu-te'e-ni-a* 'complete, finish off, wrap up' have been recorded but are not in common use.

22. Where these roots are still used as free forms. Some, such as *fe'e-ni-a* 'with' and *fa'a-si-a* 'away from', presumably derive from old roots, probably stative verbs, but these have disappeared.

resources their language provides for expressing conventionalized meanings. Attending to our linguistic usages, I have suggested (Keesing 1985a), an ethnographer from another cultural world could—following the procedures I used a decade ago to interpret 'afuia—depict our world as a cosmic struggle between good luck and bad luck.

WHERE THE FUTURE LIES

In my quest for evidence of how Kwaio cosmology was embodied in language (Keesing 1979), I suggested that the use of directionals with reference to time was "motivated . . . by a cultural conception of time: . . . the Kwaio . . . conception that views the past as having moved forward and downward from the point of reference of the speaker" (p. 31). I used as evidence Kwaio expressions that use the directionals "down" and "up" with the lexeme for year: *farisi lofo'u* 'last year' (lit. "year down there"); *farisi lolo'o* 'next year' (lit. "year up there"); *farisi lolo'o mai* 'next year' (lit. "year coming down from up there"). I noted (Keesing 1979:31) that

The conceptualization of time in Kwaio culture is a permutation of a very widespread (conceivably universal) conception of human life as a line of march. The two critical cycles that probably always serve as paradigms of time are the seasonal cycle (homologous in this respect to the lunar cycle) and the human life cycle and passing of generations. These symbolic conceptions, plus the biologically structured apperception of temporality and experiences of memory, are woven into culturally patterned designs that are much less diverse than they might be. In culture after culture, one's predecessors are viewed as having gone ahead along a line of march you are following, and one's own life experiences are seen as having been "left behind."

This, I think, is apt enough. But I do not now believe the evidence of language gives adequate grounds for my having inferred that

Kwaio culture permutes this model by conceptualizing the time periods associated with those who have gone before . . . as being in front of and downward from the present. The past in general is *alata i na'o* 'time in front'; last year can be referred to as *farisi ka riu kau* ('year has passed by away-from-the-speaker'); and, as evidenced by linguistic usages and ritual procedures, it is conceived as having moved downward.

In view of recent studies of the metaphoric bases whereby body parts come to serve as directionals and directionals come metaphorically to reference relationships in time, I do not believe we can justifiably make inferences about cosmology on the basis of spatial deixis in time expressions. (Nor, in view of the way lexical verbs [and other forms] develop into markers of aspect and of tense, can we uncritically make such inferences on the basis of lexical sources of grammatical markers of the time-frames of events.)

If indeed there is evidence in "ritual procedures" or

other nonlinguistic realms of the dramatization or enactment of a culturally constructed view of time, an ethnographer can appropriately use such evidence (with caution) to make and justify claims about a people's world view. (I find myself skeptical, in retrospect, about my own claims that in the Kwaio case "ritual procedures" provide such evidence.) Linguistic patterns of the sort I have illustrated constitute very thin evidence of cosmology, although I have no doubt that the systematic exploration of other people's conventional metaphoric schemas would be culturally revealing in less sweeping ways (see Keesing 1985a, Casad 1982, Salmond 1983). The Iranian in Berkeley can well serve as a reminder of our fallibility in this project, as in others.

Metaphor, Semantics, and Symbolic Interpretation

The implications for interpretive anthropology that I draw from the new developments in semantics and syntax are by no means uniformly negative. I have recently argued (in Keesing 1988) that analyzing and interpreting the rich metaphoric and metonymic structures of categorization in non-Western languages is a major task. Indeed, I suggest that the developments in the semantics of natural categorization have given it new urgency. I argue that the metaphoric connections whereby semantic categories are extended and articulated may be directly related to patterns of ritual symbolism and myth, making analysis of ethnographic semantics and symbolist interpretation complementary tasks. A case in point is the Kwaio concept of *mamu*. *Mamu* is the invisible but irresistible attractive power of scent: *mamu* is the scent of flowers, and it labels as well the bait thrown into the sea to attract fish. But *mamu* is also the major complex of magic, involving elaborate ritual sequences, whereby valuables are attracted to a mortuary feast (Keesing 1982). The ritual dramas enacted and the magic performed for *mamu* build heavily on exactly the same metaphoric equivalences that structure the semantic category: powerfully aromatic leaves are used in magic, chewed and spat on chests and puddings, and thrown into the sea to attract valuables.

The new developments in understanding language and categorization open exciting vistas for anthropology. In bringing together our skills in cultural interpretation—and there is much in our practice to commend and admire despite the negative role as devil's advocate I have assumed here—with the new insights into grammaticalization, conventional metaphor, and natural categorization, a more balanced and positive view of how experienced and conceptualized culturally constructed worlds are at once unique and recognizably human can emerge.

Conclusions

It has fallen to anthropology, in the division of labor of the disciplines of 20th-century social science, to charac-

terize the nature and meaning of cultural differences. As the translators of other cultures to the West, we have become heirs to one of the projects of the broad sweep of Western scholarship that Said (1978) calls "Orientalism." We are the Orientalists who give critical, refined (and, we used to hope, "scientific") substance to Western ideas of Otherness. In place of "the Eastern mind" has come, in anthropological discourse, not simply "Chinese culture" or "Indian culture" but a much more finely differentiated mosaic of local cultural variation.

The anthropological conception of "culture" has always lent itself to essentialist depictions of other people's worlds as radically different from our own. Representations of Otherness that have been highly influential far beyond anthropology, such as Dorothy Lee's depiction of the Trobriand language, Kiriwinan, as encoding conceptions of time, space, and causality so deeply and fundamentally different from ours as to be almost incomprehensible (Lee 1949), have been a crucial part of our Orientalist project throughout this century. We have populated the tribal world with mystical philosophers and brooding paranoids, situated them in experiential worlds so different from ours that anthropology has had to be a translation of the radically alien. The currently fashionable emphasis on the cultural constructedness of emotions (Lutz and White 1986) and concepts of person and agency has generated further relativisms, further worlds of the exotic.

How different other people's experienced and cognized worlds are from our own remains an open question. My concern, as skeptic, is that our strategies of fieldwork (which lead us to learn local languages to limited degrees), our theoretical predispositions to focus on the most exotic cultural texts we can find and to read them in the most exotic ways we can construe, the career inducements for us to select in precisely these ways, and an inadequate understanding of the pervasively metaphoric structuring of language all conspire to produce, and reinforce, a view of other people's worlds as more radically different from one another and our own than they are. Our project of cultural translation, even in these relativistic days, can produce mistranslations.

Comments

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Keesing's argument is framed by intriguing assertions and observations, but he does not develop a discussion of these. The most far-reaching parts of this presentation are the least elaborated. I doubt that he will provoke much serious disagreement with the basic proposition that mistakes have been made and will continue to be made in the renderings of "experienced and cognized worlds" among various cultural traditions. But he has

asserted that "postmodernist relativisms" are contributing to a general decline in standards for such renderings and encouraging an "anything-goes" atmosphere for these endeavors. While the main body of the paper gives accounts of mistaken renderings that can now be improved, none of the examples are clearly attributed to the malign influences of "postmodernist relativisms." Systematic biases and lack of due caution or adequate preparation are given more direct blame.

Keesing faults the discipline of anthropology as a whole for fostering systematic biases in the manner in which such renderings are selected and presented. Whether and to what degree the discipline has fostered exaggeration of the exotic qualities of these experienced and cognized worlds are more debatable than the proposition that demonstrable mistakes have frequently been made in describing them. Keesing himself notes that most of his evidence for this point is anecdotal, but I share his belief on this matter. Other writers (e.g., Fabian 1983) have also noted how anthropology has consistently applied rhetorical devices that distance the observer from the object and otherwise overemphasize differences.

Since Keesing specifically denigrates "postmodernist relativisms" as detrimental to current inquiries, one should note that not everything going by a label of "relativism" should receive the same critique. In his call for stricter attention to "surface evidence," for greater awareness of the biases of received instruction, for attempts to master the languages involved more fully, Keesing is close in spirit to the reasons advanced by Herskovits (1973:38) for "methodological relativism"—the better to get at facts unvarnished by several systematic biases. While Keesing may find other faults with other relativisms, there are some that do not share the faults of the postmodernist variety.

As Keesing notes, the important matter is the open question that needs to be systematically investigated: To what extent do experienced and cognized worlds differ, and in what respects? Just how exotic can two or more of these worlds be to each other? The sorts of translations and renderings that ethnographers and anthropological linguists have been compiling (mistakes and all) do little except demonstrate that there are differences and similarities. Assessing the kinds and degrees of differences or similarities relative to each other is another matter. Keesing does not give much indication of how, in his opinion, this open question should be addressed. It is an important question and an enduring and elusive one, one that has challenged the best anthropological theory in each generation. To what extent can human cultures support the development of cognitive organizations that are inaccessible to each other? Are there truly different *kinds* of minding at work in different cultures, or are there similar kinds of cognitive functions with different content? Considering the high level of skill and scholarship that Keesing brings to bear on his topics, a description of how he would propose that anthropologists make a concerted effort at answering this question would be worth much.

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Keesing has written an interesting article. I agree with his main arguments and just want to elaborate two points:

1. Although it may be true that interpretation is always perspectival, that realities are always multiple and constructed, and that along with the vanishing goal of a "true" interpretation the possibility of a misinterpretation is also fading away, this does not mean that this post-modern tendency is warranted. We do not have to submit ourselves to an absolutist relativism. Of course knowledge cannot simply be viewed as mirroring the way reality is. We have to admit that it is "the outcome of long term interactions with the world that have been shaped into stylized fabrications" (De Vries 1987:219). This does not, however, imply complete freedom in conceptualizing the world. Reality may not speak for itself, but it kicks back if wrongly addressed or conceived. In this context a relevant distinction can be made between epistemic relativism, asserting that knowledge is indexical, contextual, and conventional, i.e., is socially and historically situated, and judgmental relativism, asserting that all beliefs are equally valid in the sense that there can be no rational grounds for preferring one over another (Bhaskar 1979a:734; 1979b:351). "Stressing the situatedness and the contextualised indexical nature of knowledge only implies that knowledge is assessed not by appeal to ultimate foundations but through criteria that are internal to and dependent on the community that wants them to be assessed" (Raven 1988:111). Although these criteria are, in the end, a form of rational persuasion that can never attain definite ahistorical closure, meaning that a definite answer may not be possible and disagreement may always remain, this is something other than the "anything-goes" formula of judgmental relativism. We only have to accept the idea of a socially restricted or relative relativism.

2. Keesing states that he is "deeply skeptical of interpretations for which the main evidence lies in the stuff of language." He does not, however, come up with an alternative research strategy. I want to stress the fruitfulness of praxis—or action—theories. From the semantic-praxeological perspective, linguistic utterances are interpreted as parts of more encompassing actions. This means that extra-linguistic criteria can be used to assess the validity and reliability of the anthropologist's interpretations. This perspective also offers more possibilities for acknowledging the heterogeneous, contingent aspects of culture than a purely linguistic approach, with its emphasis on the systematic and shared components of culture. I want especially to point to Geertz's theory of practice, because he emphasizes the public and intersubjective character of culture. In his view, culture consists of interrelated symbols (conceptions as well as their vehicles of expression) that are tightly linked to the concrete public activities of everyday life. This shift to describing and analyzing persisting and recurrent public events and activities may result in inhibiting the quest

for the exotic in anthropology. It may show that other people are motivated by similar existential needs or circumstances. It may accentuate the paradox of the interpretive anthropological enterprise: the exploration of the exotic, with its emphasis on cultural differences and otherness, is based on the thesis of the psychic unity of mankind.

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Keesing describes this article as devil's advocacy, but the devilry here seems like the balancing act so often found in anthropology (as in most human science) between the transcendent (in this case cognitive) explanation of human universals and the grounded interpretation of human particularities—differences that arise in the creation of culture and the revitalization of human solidarity in community. His critique of possible misunderstanding and overinterpretation of grammar and lexicon is salutary—indeed, it points us at just good ethnographic fieldwork.

I am not sure of the logic, in this relativistic age, of the argument that "though we can no longer be right we can still be wrong." This may mean that though we can never be right in our interpretations we can be wrong in our explanations. But this would seem to bring the old "truth-value" logic in through the back door. Most recent argument would maintain on this score—and in keeping with the shift from Aristotelian categories to family-relation-type categories with prototypical organization—that rightness or wrongness should be replaced with nearness or farness, relevance or irrelevance, being more or less in touch with local meanings—which is to say local images and local prototypes. Less relevant accounts of human thought and action are those that express the preoccupations and serve primarily the images and interests of the social group to which the account-giver belongs. More relevant accounts are as integrated as possible within the vectors of local awareness. In any event, Keesing is mainly interested in explaining cognitive processes of category construction and the limits that this knowledge places on free-wheeling interpretation of local awareness.

Although I do not doubt the frequency of misunderstanding—particularly in the area of cosmology or local philosophy—produced by superficial control of local language and the compulsion to find difference, I would like to balance the argument a bit differently. Keesing's focus on the dead metaphor trapped in convention and idiomaticity overlooks the "invention" or "creation" of culture or tradition (see Wagner 1976, Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). It misses the "social use" to which metaphor can be put, in difficult human circumstances, in problem solving and in building world views (Sapir and Crocker 1977). I would play "angels' advocate" for such a "pragmatics of metaphor"—for an enduring anthropological interest in human playfulness and human

capacity to create or enliven metaphors and to build universes on such grains of sand. I would argue that study of the conventional structures of dead metaphors should be enlivened by the field study of the lively "play of tropes" (Fernandez 1986). Indeed, in the "division of labor" in the human sciences of which Keesing speaks the study of such invention or creative play falls to anthropology as a primary task.

Keesing argues that we should not read lively meaning into dead metaphors, and of course we should not. On the other hand, we should not ignore the lively, once and future, figurality of these forms. A conventional metaphor, one whose figurality has been forgotten or is ignored, is subject to revitalization, and the often playful revitalization processes are, or should be, of particular interest to anthropology.

Keesing gives the instance, cited by Lakoff and Johnson (1980:143), of a foreigner's reading a chemical metaphor into the idiomatic English "I have a solution to my problems." Any reader can, however, recognize the poetry and the potential illumination in such "mistakenness." Indeed, such "foreign" readings occur every day, for our idiomatic expressions and the metaphors in our grammar can be ceaselessly brought back to life in many "foreign" ways. And in that sense language is a reservoir of potential for revitalized understanding. Revitalization movements themselves are full of such new readings of the conventional and the idiomatic (Fernandez 1982). In these movements, people who have been made "foreign" to themselves and their circumstances often find a "path" out of their alienation by creative metaphor. And such paths can even lead to complicated world views. Though we may misread active meaning in the merely conventional, lively metaphor once lay in it and is always potential in it.

Nor should one suppose that revitalization processes are strange and unusual. Of great variety, small and large, they happen all the time, in language as in religion, as an enlivening reaction to the overbearing "conventionalization" or routinization of life. Vico long ago argued (Vico 1976), as have many others since, that there is a cyclicity built into human affairs that involves a devitalization of meaningful metaphor and its subsequent necessary revitalization. In any event a sense of proportion and of the "division of labor" that Keesing addresses would seem to require that we complement the cognitive enterprise and its search for bare semantic structures with the anthropological enterprise and its attention to those recurrent cultural moments and cultural movements in which something new and lively and colorful is created out of—to use the linguist's metaphor he evokes—the "bleached bones" of the past.

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Keesing begins his insightful critique of anthropological methods with a reference to "postmodernist relativisms

in anthropology" and to the "vanishing goal of a 'true' interpretation." He then proceeds directly to the particular problems of "exotic readings" to which he seeks to sensitize the reader. It seems to me, however, that by remaining entirely within the (still dominant) tradition of ethnographic anthropology, he inevitably fails to find a solution to the methodological shortcoming that he quite rightly points out.

Frankly, it is somewhat of a relief for me, as a methodologically oriented interdisciplinary social scientist, to note the recent fall from absolute grace of ethnography and from absolute certainty of ethnographic anthropology. Notwithstanding all of the cautions long expressed by researchers and methodologists in the various social sciences (as distinct from those only more recently expressed by anthropologists as an unusually large number of doubts began to accumulate) pertaining to the many problems and uncertainties of ethnographic research, the general mood in connection with ethnography has been triumphalist, as if the methodological millennium had arrived. Such problems as were acknowledged were essentially intraethnographic ones—problems that true believers could hammer out with one another—rather than issues calling for more basic methodological comparison, criticism, or combination. Keesing's willingness to disclose several additional problematic wrinkles in ethnographic research is, unfortunately, really only more of the same "within-the-guild" self-criticism. Although obviously quite right as far as it goes, it is too little and too late to cope with the problem at hand. This also becomes clear from the fact that he limits himself to diagnosis without offering very much of a prescription.

Many of the criticisms of anthropology voiced by Keesing have been expressed before, some of them for well over a quarter-century, as can be noted from the extensive early (and subsequently recurring) criticisms of the linguistic-relativity work of Benjamin Lee Whorf (summarized in Fishman 1980, 1982). Within the context of triumphalist behaviorism, experimentalism, quantificationism, and formal measurement that was sweeping American psychology (and, in part, sociology too) at that time, such criticism seemed partisan and reductionistic in intent and in provenience. Anthropology as a whole was little influenced by it and ultimately, a generation later, rejected that criticism with an equally triumphant reinvestiture of ethnography. Lost in the shuffle was the fact that attempts to test Whorfian linguistic relativity via the formulation of hypotheses that could be examined by other methods than Whorf's (Carroll and Casagrande 1958) discredited it as far as the cognitive sciences were concerned.

The basic methodological danger in Whorf's work, and to which, as is beginning to be recognized (see, in addition to Keesing, e.g., Geertz 1988), ethnography constantly exposes itself, is that of a monism in which the measurer and the measure are one and the same. Given, as Keesing admits, that "interpretation is always perspectival," there is constant risk that anthropologists are telling us more about *themselves* in their ethnographies than they realize. It is exactly in this connection that

Geertz (1988:129) asks rhetorically, "Whose life is it anyway?"

What, then, is the solution to the anthropologists' dilemma? The baby and the bathwater have once before been thrown out together. It would be a major disaster for anthropology and for all of social science were that to happen again merely because ethnography is not the "know-all" and the methodological "cure-all" that its high priests originally represented it to be. Neither greater mastery of the local languages nor deeper familiarity with the cutting edge of linguistic theory will fully counteract the "exotic error." That error can, however, be minimized by adopting study designs that make a more conscious and conscientious distinction between the measure and the measurer and by deriving from anthropological ethnographies the kinds of hypotheses that these other designs might either confirm, reject, or refine. This was the lesson of Carroll and Casagrande's Southwest Project, and it is a lesson that more and more anthropologists are learning and teaching today (see Kirk and Miller 1986, Gephart 1988). While cutting ethnography down to size, it will help maintain the credibility of anthropology as a whole.

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All Keesing's irritation is focused on my alleged insufficient mastery of a language that he admittedly does not know himself. I have, according to him, confused *mamana*, a verbal form, with *mamana-a*, a nominalized form. My translation of *mamana-a* as *l'authentique* does, however, supply a nominalized form for a nominalized form. But what annoys him obviously lies elsewhere—in the alleged interpretive invention leading to my "mystical" characterization of Fataleka thought. The main point of his argument has to do with my use of two terms: *authentique* and *apparition*. His criticism of the use of *authentique* rests on a single argument: that *réalisation* or *vérité* would have been better. He seems unaware that the term *authentique* (cf. its original meaning in Greek) contains the senses of *réalisation* and *vérité*: it is simply broader and more fundamental than either. His representation of the term *mamana-a* as "a kind of euphemism for the ancestor(s)" is a little like substituting "God" for every occurrence of "the Eternal" in a biblical text on the pretext that the latter is only a kind of euphemism for the former with no particular significance. As for his criticism of my use of *apparition*, it borders on the ridiculous. The dictionary does indeed include, among the various meanings of the word *apparition*, that of "phantom," but it is obviously not in that marginal sense that I use the term. In philosophy, *apparition* and *manifestation* are synonyms, and therefore replacing *apparître* with *devenir manifeste* would be replacing like with like.

My knowledge of Fataleka would certainly have allowed errors of detail such as those to which Keesing

points with regard to the confusion between *fwana* and *fwana-ere*. Notions as crucial as *mamana-a* and *sakatafa*, however, have, I believe, received the attention they require, and the translations I propose are based on thorough knowledge both of French and of the tradition of thought attached to certain terms in that language.

At the heart of this debate, clearly, is whether it is proper to reduce all the types of discourse of a culture to a single one: the discourse of everyday life. Our languages and cultures have specialized discourses: the term "charity" does not mean the same to the clergy as it does to the press, although the two meanings are related. Denying other cultures this diversity of levels of discourse—considering them good only for the immediate requirements of everyday life—is either racism or ignorance. These are the two reefs on which most ethnologists, of whatever school, run aground. What is shocking is, at bottom, that these people are capable, on the basis of commonsense notions, of producing genuine conceptual elaborations. But this is understandable; conceptual elaboration is always shocking to those who are incapable of it.

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Burned lips on broth/Now blows on cold water.

W.S. MERWIN, *Asian Figures*

Keesing has been burned. He has caught himself making a false inference from grammar to cosmology, the sort of inference he has seen other anthropologists make, and now he wisely advises caution. He senses "a new urgency" and "exciting vistas for anthropology" in the recent insights that have come from cognitive linguistics, but, as he points out, he is more concerned about the dangers than about the possibilities. In recent years, anthropologists have wisely taken stock of the difficulties of interpretation and the ways analysts can impose interpretations on texts. It is time to put what has been learned to use and get back to the exciting—and demanding—work of studying the conceptual systems of people around the world.

The new developments allow for both a wide range of new insights and a check on mistakes of the sort Keesing cites. He may remain "deeply skeptical of interpretations for which the main evidence lies in the stuff of language," but his worst fears can be quelled. Such interpretations are also mistaken from the point of view of cognitive linguistics, and there are criteria that allow us, in a wide range of cases, to say why.

As Keesing suggests, the false understanding by my Iranian student of "the solution of my problems" came before he studied linguistics. The student told it to me, laughing at his former naiveté. He had just learned how to look for systematic evidence of metaphorical struc-

ture, and this was an example of a mistake he would have avoided had he known earlier what he had just learned. Keesing draws the moral: beware of linguistic evidence. I draw the opposite moral: with solid training in cognitive linguistics, you can make sense of the linguistic evidence and avoid such mistakes.

Linguistic evidence, when used with care, can be a guide to conceptual structure. But conceptual structure does not equal cosmology. When anthropologists describe the cosmology of a culture, what they usually have in mind is a folk model of (1) the universe that is (2) all-embracing, (3) consistent, (4) conscious, (5) believed, and (6) acted on. In general, the kinds of conceptual structure that we have found do not have all these characteristics. Individual conceptual metaphors map out separate conceptual domains that are very much smaller than the universe and limited in scope, domains like time, anger, love, thought, communication, morality, the self, and so on. Though internally consistent, they are often inconsistent with one another (see Lakoff and Johnson 1980: chaps. 16 and 17; Gentner and Gentner 1982). Though occasional conceptual metaphors are conscious, most, like rules of phonology and syntax, are not. Some are believed by at least some people, some are disbelieved, and most, though used unconsciously for the purposes of automatic conceptualization, are never even considered as possible objects of belief. A given metaphor may even be consciously disbelieved but nonetheless used for understanding and acted on. For example, no one believes that a country is a person, yet there is a popular theory of international relations in which a nation-state is viewed as a rational actor, and foreign-policy decisions are commonly made on the basis of this metaphor.

As for Keesing's example of the English concept of luck, no thorough, systematic metaphorical analysis that I know of has yet been done. From a cursory look at some of the relevant data, I would make the following unsubstantiated guess: we do have a metaphorical concept of luck in our conceptual system; it does not play much of a role in our overall conceptual system (e.g., does not enter into many other metaphorical concepts); some speakers seriously believe in luck but most do not; all speakers, whether they believe in luck or not, are capable of understanding common situations in terms of luck; and more people act on the concept of luck than actually believe in it. If I am right, then the language of luck reveals something significant about our conceptual systems but not an overall cosmology.

The exact conceptual status of a metaphor is an empirical matter that must be established one case at a time. Cosmologies make use of conceptual metaphors, but conceptual metaphors need not tell one anything about cosmology. What I take Keesing to be suggesting is a shift from the study of cosmology to the study of conceptual systems. From the little we know so far, many conceptual metaphors are widespread. It is just as interesting to find out what aspects of conceptual systems are widespread (or even universal) as it is to find out what aspects are limited to geographical regions or even

unique to a particular culture. And linguistic evidence can tell us a great deal about the nature of conceptual systems.

A careful cognitive linguist looks for convincing evidence. In the case of conceptual metaphor, there are five kinds of evidence that are considered:

1. Systematic polysemy—a systematic correspondence between source-domain senses of words and corresponding target-domain senses (see Lakoff and Brugman 1986). This requires working out the details of a source-domain structure and a structure-preserving partial mapping to a corresponding target-domain structure.

2. Inferential structure—a systematic correspondence between source-domain inferences and corresponding target-domain inferences (see Lakoff 1987: case study 1).

3. Experimental evidence (see, e.g., Gibbs and O'Brien 1989, Gentner and Gentner 1982).

4. Historical evidence (see, e.g., Sweetser's [n.d.] study of a range of cases in which a conceptual metaphor must be present before a semantic change in the lexicon can take place).

5. Poetic evidence—systematic extensions of live conceptual metaphors in poetry (see Turner 1987, Lakoff and Turner 1989).

Though it is difficult to find all five types of evidence, three or more types often converge. Typically one looks at the very least for polysemic and inferential evidence. And where there is more than one possible analysis (as there often is), one has to look for further evidence in the overall structure of the conceptual system.

Our evidential criteria are, like those of any science, by no means perfect, and they are still being developed. When evidential conflicts arise, it is a signal that something is wrong, and we try to find out what it is. But the process is highly constrained and protected to a considerable extent from the whims of the analyst.

Keesing's cautions against being an "unwary exotic-seeker" are real enough, but I am positive where he is negative. If I were Keesing, I would not wring my hands about the real difficulties of interesting research. I would, instead, do everything I could to make sure my students got some serious training in cognitive linguistics, training that would both turn them on to the possibilities of profound research into comparative conceptual systems and teach them what kinds of evidence they would need to establish their claims. The antidote to irresponsible research is responsible research, not no research at all.

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The concern and caution that are the main point of this article seem to me quite correct and well worth taking to heart, but I suspect that the article is open to serious misunderstanding, misquotation, and misuse. Keesing is warning us against a faddish focus on what is strange in another culture—against a skewing of the evidence to overemphasize the Other. He is *not* denying that there

may be much that is difficult or strange in one culture when viewed from the viewpoint of another.

His concentration on language as a potential red herring for an anthropologist attempting to get inside the thought patterns of a culture is unquestionably valid, though it will doubtless be hard for many to accept his estimate of a need for five to ten years' immersion in a language to gain adequate fluency in it.

Much is made of interesting recent work in linguistics by such scholars as Lakoff, Johnson, and Heine, but here, too, caution may well be in order. Language's sticky traps have caught not only anthropologists but also many linguists. I believe that Keesing's point will stand even when some of the theoretical details put forward by these scholars have been questioned, altered, or disproved through further study.

In connection with this, there is one point at which his own choice of terminology is a potential source of confusion. His use of the term "metaphor" is not meant to imply that the linguistic items referred to are real figures of speech for the speakers of a language, and I feel that it would be helpful to limit the use of the term to this meaning. Once the figure of speech has been forgotten and become a frozen relic, it is better to use a different term, perhaps "idiom." The surprising thing is that for many speakers even expressions that seem so clear that one would think they were living metaphors may still be used as idiomatic units with no metaphorical sense. It is possible to speak of "being at the end of one's tether" without once thinking of a metaphorical cow at the end of a rope; but this is only to reinforce what Keesing is saying.

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The gist of Keesing's article can be summarized in one sentence: In analyzing cultural texts, anthropologists sometimes make mistakes. This point is so obvious—or should be so obvious—that one's first reaction is amazement that a serious academic journal should bother to publish such a piece. When one looks at the specific sources of error discussed, however, it turns out that Keesing has raised issues that *are* timely and important, albeit not original, and thus deserve serious attention and discussion.

One of the factors that accounts for error is the "quest for the exotic," i.e., the tendency to choose symbolically rich interpretations of non-Western events and texts whenever possible. The potential for such bias has been well known for years (see Naroll 1962). More recently Geertz (1984:275) has spoken (approvingly?) of anthropologists as "merchants of astonishment." Spiro (1986:276), who approaches anthropological description and interpretation from a totally different perspective, parodies the anthropologist "whose appetite is nourished by strange customs of exotic peoples." Keesing unconvincingly ascribes much of the appeal of the exotic to

careerism. A simpler explanation is that what attracts people to anthropology in the first place is its reputation as an unconventional academic field offering challenge and adventure. As Geertz, crediting Kroeber, puts it, there is in anthropology a "centrifugal impulse . . . distant places, distant times, distant species . . . distant grammars" (1984:265).

Although general ethnographers by now should have become alert to the exotic bias, text-oriented anthropologists, linguists, and folklorists seem not to be, especially when they encounter figurative or metaphorical language. When a symbolic anthropologist learns, for example, that in Hausa "popularity" is *fárin jínii* ('white blood'), "bravery" is *jár zúuciyáa* ('red heart'), and "unhappiness" is *bák'in cíkii* ('black stomach'), the immediate assumption is that one is dealing with metaphor of cultural, cognitive significance. But is it true that figurative expressions such as these have a symbolic meaning for native Hausa-speakers that is any different from their more mundane English equivalents? As Keesing warns, anthropologists should be extremely wary of reading cosmological significance into other peoples' metaphorical language; so-called metaphorical expressions are often conventional manners of speech and nothing more.

Unfortunately, in reacting against what he sees as a naive infatuation with other peoples' exotic metaphors, Keesing goes too far and seems to rule out the possibility that a language's particular means of expression *might* be a symbolic key to matters of real cultural importance. That is, he in effect replaces the bias of exotic interpretation by an equally biased presumption of irrelevance. It may be true that "conventional" metaphor in any language is without cognitive salience or cultural import, but that begs the question of what is "conventional." The problem is to determine which metaphors (or other forms of expressive language) are alive and which are dead, and if they are alive, to what extent, for whom, and in what contexts. The rejection of gratuitous exoticism does not entail the adoption of a methodological approach that a priori turns its back on the essential anthropological goal of documenting human cultural and linguistic diversity wherever it exists.

The other source of error in textual interpretation that Keesing focuses on is inadequate knowledge of the native language. Without quite attacking the matter head-on, Keesing raises doubts about one of anthropology's sacred myths: the idea that fieldwork is carried out in the native language. This question was discussed openly a half-century ago in a forgotten exchange between Mead (1939) and Lowie (1940), but nowadays I think it is fair to say that the myth generally goes unchallenged. It is perpetuated by generation upon generation of professors who casually present a fieldwork ideal to their students as if it represented an attainable reality and by a code of silence in the profession itself. In the introductions to their books, most ethnographers tell where they conducted their research, for how long, who funded it, and—especially nowadays—who were the principal informants and/or assistants. Although the book will undoubtedly be strewn with native terms, there is un-

likely to be any explicit mention of the investigator's level of proficiency in the language: the reader is supposed to come naturally to the "correct" (actually false) conclusion regarding the ethnographer's language proficiency. The fact of the matter is that most anthropologists working in non-Western cultures have limited practical proficiency in the language of the people they are studying. There is no mystery why this is so and therefore no reason for it to be a deep dark secret: learning a language in the field takes considerably more time than most anthropologists have available. (Amusingly, Burling [1984:94–96] effectively admits as much in the final three pages of his little book, the rest of which treats the field-language myth as if it were a realizable goal.)

Whether one actually uses the field language for basic ethnographic research or not, it is essential to have a good command of the language if one intends to deal intelligently with text materials. One need not speak it fluently, but one has to understand it and understand how it works. The less one knows about the language, the greater the chance of making egregious errors (such as semantically conflating Hausa *bàakii* 'mouth' and *bak'ii* 'black' because both words appear orthographically as *baki*). Keesing's own discussion of Polynesian *mana*, however, is not well chosen, since in his attempt to illustrate linguistic error he falls victim to exactly the kind of exotic bias he is warning against. He emphasizes that what is usually translated as a noun ("power") is really a verb, as if this were significant. But, unless one takes an extreme neo-Whorfian position, there is no reason to suppose that the grammatical part of speech in which a concept is lexically embodied has any cognitive or semantic importance. Anyone who has worked on a bilingual dictionary of English (or French or German) and some "exotic" language is aware of the frequency with which parts of speech fail to match one another. As in the case of metaphorical usage, what we don't know in advance is whether these part-of-speech differences truly reflect differences at some cognitive, semantic, or cultural level.

In sum, Keesing's paper is valuable in drawing our attention to pervasive sources of error in anthropological interpretation. Whether the practical and philosophical constraints on anthropology in the 1990s will allow anything to be done about it is a different matter.¹

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Earlier this year Headland and Reid (1989) noted our need to study people in their context and honestly describe their interaction with that context, pointing out that so-called primitive people do not exist in our world.

1. This comment was prepared while I was a Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences. The financial support of NSF grant #BNS87-00864 is gratefully acknowledged.

Now Keesing enters the fray and argues that anthropologists should not be looking for the "most exotic possible readings," lest they "in doing so . . . distort and mistranslate." To all this I add a hearty "amen."

Anthropologists have often inappropriately focused on issues that set people apart. Instead, the focus should be on commonality, on the "mundane." In seeking to understand the varied particularity we tend to ignore the overarching issues that people everywhere, regardless of culture, must handle.

Mistakes may occur even where analysis is linguistically correct. The response of the Samo (Western Province, Papua New Guinea) to our first orthography is a case in point (Shaw and Shaw 1977). People regularly stumbled over certain words, and we discovered that all of these related to our phonemic decision to use portmanteau as the analytical solution to a knotty phonological problem. When reanalysis produced an equally valid alternative description and the orthography was accordingly changed, the stumbling disappeared and people learned to read much more quickly. What we had considered the best (and therefore an emic) analysis was unrecognizable to the Samo; it did not match their cognition.

Keesing warns against attributing too much cultural meaning to metaphoric usages and maintains that we must find interpretive evidence "outside the realm of linguistic forms." While taking this warning seriously for particular expressions, when forms have numerous manifestations in both language and culture an analyst can begin to suspect the existence of themes. The Samo use of location is an example. In a linguistic analysis of text material we discovered that locative forms occurred in 81% of all sentences, indicating that the Samo can hardly speak without including locational information (Shaw and Shaw 1973). Similarly, cultural manifestations of this concept abound: in the designation of individuals within the household or beyond, the recognition of groups within the boundaries of certain rivers and streams as allies and those on the other side as enemies, plant nomenclature dependent on location in forest, swamp, garden, or open area, and the relationship between natural and supernatural powers. This interest in location affects the way the Samo relate to time and space, understand causality, appreciate relationships, and classify their world. Location is a deep-structure aspect of their world view that affects nearly everything they do (Shaw 1976). We cannot infer world view from one manifestation, but when a particular concept is represented in many subsystems we can at least suspect its presence and begin to explore how people use it and what it means to them.

The "cultural distance" of anthropologists entering a context very different from their own contributes to the possibility of misunderstanding (Shaw 1987). Analysis of commonalities might produce a greater appreciation of mutual concerns and help us share our humanness. If cultural analysis is making "good guesses," where better to start than in those areas where our guesses are best made and can be explored to the benefit of all? Such an approach might help us avoid "exotic readings."

Reply

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 Canberra, Australia. 12 v 89

The critics seem to agree that we can and do sometimes misinterpret, overinterpret, and mistranslate. They give fairly widely divergent readings of what conclusions and lessons I was trying to draw from this (what better reminder of the problematic nature of authorship, as explored in recent critical theory, than such a range of interpretations of a text one remembers having written?) and propose relatively diverse solutions to the problem (whatever it is).

I find the comments by Lakoff and Fernandez particularly illuminating in that each develops an argument with which I mainly agree, an argument implied but not extensively developed in my own paper. As Lakoff knows, I fully agree with him that exploring "conceptual structures" comparatively is a crucial and increasingly possible task to which anthropologists and cognitive linguists can both contribute. Until this has been done far more systematically, general pronouncements about the similarities and differences between cultures as systems of thought will be relatively vacuous. I agree with Lakoff that "linguistic evidence can tell us a great deal about the nature of conceptual systems," provided we use it wisely and carefully and do not overstate our interpretations by great leaps into cosmology, theories of self and person, etc., and provided we do not select out the most exotic bits and pieces in the ways I have illustrated. "Our" concept of luck exactly illustrates the points I want to make, and I elsewhere (Keesing 1985a:208–9) advance an interpretation essentially the same as Lakoff's. So, too, does Boyer (n.d.). The point is not that language is unrelated to thought and experience or that conventional metaphors have no cognitive salience but, rather, that this salience lies mainly on different levels than the one on which anthropologists have often placed their interpretations. As I comment elsewhere (1985a:209),

We make implicit assumptions about the nature of the world perceived through sensory experience: the solidity of "solid" objects, the "downness" of down and "upness" of up, the commonsense perceptions of space, time, cause, etc. These assumptions are, I think, systematic and modelling, or paradigmatic. I have no doubt that they vary to some extent from culture to culture (as well as, to some extent, among individuals in a particular society); and I have no doubt that they are constituted in crucial ways by conventional metaphor, presented in the syntactic, semantic, and idiomatic channels of language.

I go on (p. 215) to observe that

[mapping] the conventional metaphoric schemata expressed in non-Western languages . . . and the metaphors in English and other Western languages

(and the way they shape experience and channel thought) . . . [poses] a major challenge to anthropologists in the next decade. In this search, there will be room for those who seek to demonstrate both that metaphors are constitutive of experience and guide and constrain thought and that the conventional metaphoric schemata of different peoples vary, thereby illuminating our own metaphor-boundness. There will be room too, I think, for skepticism. We cannot escape talking and thinking about the world through webs of conventional metaphor. Some are deep and deeply constraining of our thought (even though they may imply no profound metaphysic); others . . . are much less so.

I feel that my own explorations of the nature of "religious" categories of non-Western peoples have been partial and in some ways overly negative. Assessing my critiques of anthropological interpretations of *mana*, Boyer (n.d.) shares this view and observes that "the negative part of Keesing's argument . . . is certainly convincing, and the case for the elimination of hypostatized 'metaphysics' is overwhelming." He goes on usefully to explore, as an alternative to analysis in terms of conventional metaphors, what he calls the "pseudo-natural kind" hypothesis regarding the acquisition and cognitive organization of "mystical" categories linked to "magico-religious entities." Needless to say, I welcome such alternative lines of investigation, which I see as complementary to my own.

Far from "wringing my hands" and advocating doing "no research at all," I am at the moment packing my bags for yet another field trip into Kwaio country and a further journey into a non-Western conceptual system, inevitably following pathways of language. The scars from previous trips and slips lead me to proceed more cautiously and wisely but not to give up. Lakoff (1987) has written the best comparative guidebook I have read.

I agree with Fernandez that the conceptual structures expressed and reflected in language allow of creative innovation, reanimation, "a play of tropes," and that such creativity is inherent in (not a superficial embroidery on) language. I am concerned, though, that in celebrating the creativity and flexibility of language, we may be led to spurious exoticism in a different guise—to highlighting those discursive genres and contexts (oratory, gossip, poetry) in which such such creativity is most vividly manifest and submerging from view those genres and contexts in which talk is most routinized. Pawley (1985, 1986, 1988; Pawley and Syder 1983) has been exploring the remarkable extent to which everyday conversations, whether in English or Kalam, are formulaic, constructed out of "canned" sequences. The nature of everyday talk in everyday contexts is a matter for comparative investigation (see, e.g., Moerman 1988), not philosophical pronouncements, and despite recent progress rather little is yet known about it.

Although Davis reads my paper as a general attack on "postmodernist relativisms," I had not intended it as such. My use of "relativism" in two senses was perhaps

confusing. First, I noted an irony in relativist conceptions of *interpretation*: if no reading of a text can be authoritative or privileged, can a reading of a text still be *wrong*? It can be, I argue, if you don't know how to "read" the language. The other "relativism" is an ideology of radical cultural difference. While some streams in modern social thought emphasize radical Alterity and hence may promote spuriously exotic readings of cultural texts, some (e.g., Said and, as Davis notes, Fabian) subject our representations of Alterity to penetrating political and epistemological critique.

I agree with de Ruijter that "describing and analyzing persisting and recurrent public events and activities" can be a way of "inhibiting the quest for the exotic in anthropology," but it does not magically protect us from mistranslation. Our descriptions may be considerably thinner than they seem. In this connection, just before reading Mundhenk's comments about my extravagant estimate of "five or ten years' immersion in a language" to gain access to the nuances of meaning and metaphor, I had lunch with a graduate student who had spent some twelve years living in a Balinese village. Commenting that her command of Balinese (in an extremely complex system of vertical registers) still falls far short of native fluency, she described wryly the way her Balinese friends characterized the competence in Balinese of three generations of ethnographers of the island. I have argued elsewhere (1987) that our theories of language and the way it reflects thought/experience (as well as our imperfect command of fieldwork languages) may lead us to misconstrue everyday talk in everyday contexts, as well as the more ostensibly exotic discourse of ritual, magic, or myth.

Guidieri and I are, I think, talking past one another. On the specific issues of translation involved, the reader will be the judge. The issues of conceptual translation at stake here have very little to do with differences between "everyday" language and the registers used in communicating with the spirits and characterizing their nature and influence on human life. That there are different registers and also that individuals vary greatly in the extent to which they develop and understand philosophically laden discourses have been central themes of my book on Kwaio religion (1982) and recent papers on knowledge and interpretation (1987, n.d.f). (This does not necessarily mean that folk philosophers have deep mystical knowledge or developed theological beliefs on which their ritual use of language depends [see Boyer (n.d.) for an argument that "mystical" categories in tribal religious thought characteristically are *not* based on systematic conceptualizations or "folk models"].) In the book and the forthcoming paper on "The Uses of Knowledge," I explore in detail the gifts and powers of folk philosophers among the Kwaio (some 20 miles to the south of the Fataleka) and their role in the production and reproduction of knowledge.

I am as unclear about Fishman's "prescription" as he is about mine. I attempt to use ethnographic texts not in a "triumphalist" celebration of the particular but to illuminate the general. My argument is partly that the

reverse must also be true: "the general," including theoretical developments regarding language but also developments in social/critical/interpretive theory, must be drawn on to illuminate the particularities uncovered by ethnography. All the more reason, then, to be relentlessly self-critical and self-reflexive about our discursive modes and our projects of cultural translation. The contradictions, paradoxes, and epistemological and political problems posed by our representations of Otherness (and, through otherness, Ourselves) are formidable and go far beyond the issues of language and translation I have addressed here. I have considered some of these questions in other recent writings (Keesing 1989, n.d. b-e).

I find it difficult to (re)read my text as an attempt, in Newman's words, "to rule out the possibility that a language's particular means of expression *might* be a symbolic key to matters of real cultural importance." As Lakoff observes, we now have some relatively solid ways of pursuing such questions, guided by increasingly powerful theories of language and categorization. Can I really be read as advocating a "methodological approach that a priori turns its back on the . . . anthropological goal of documenting human cultural and linguistic diversity wherever it exists"?

I certainly endorse Shaw's proposition that "an analyst can begin to suspect the existence of themes" when "forms have numerous manifestations in both language and culture." That a culture constitutes a universe of thought and meaning that is in some important respects unique I take as a truism, and a starting point. Language is an essential medium for its coding, expression, communication, and acquisition. Despite my negative tone, I agree with Lakoff that the bottom line must certainly be the positive challenge of exploring and mapping that diversity, the levels on which it lies, and the commonalities that underlie it.

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Our Readers Write

One would have thought that as we prepare to enter the final decade of the 20th century the major international journal of anthropology would have dispensed with the anachronism "sciences of man" and adopted the far more accurate and fitting "sciences of humankind" or "sciences of the human species." We assure even beginning students that anthropology is the study of the whole species, not half of it. My *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (1986) provides this definition: "1: the science of human beings; esp: the study of human beings in relation to distribution, origin, classification, and relationship of races, physical

character, environmental and social relations, and culture." It consistently uses the term "human being," not "man," in defining such related words as "anthropic," "anthropocentric," "anthropography," "anthropoid," "anthropometry," "anthropomorphic," and so on. Why, then, should CURRENT ANTHROPOLOGY cling to a term that is so gendercentric, especially as our field increasingly is composed of women as well as men?

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Prizes

■ The International Social Science Council and the Conjunto Universitario Candido Mendes invite nominations for the fifth Stein Rokkan Prize, to be awarded for a substantial original contribution to comparative social science research by a scholar under 40 years of age on December 31, 1990. Nominations may be unpublished manuscripts of book length, printed books, or collected works published since December 1987. Four copies of a manuscript typed double-spaced or of a printed work, together with a letter of application with evidence of the candidate's age attached, should be delivered to the International Social Science Council

before March 15, 1990, and the award will be made at the ISSC General Assembly meeting in the fall of that year. The prize amounts to U.S. \$2,000 and may be divided should it be found difficult to adjudicate among equally valuable works.

The fourth Stein Rokkan Prize was awarded to Charles Ragin of Northwestern University for his book *The Comparative Method: Moving beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies*.

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