

that included poultry had consequences for Newfoundlanders' health, an aspect of their biology. And human biology in turn required that certain adjustments be made to local culture and environment. The interaction of this triad of human biology, environment, and culture is the core of the bio-cultural question, covered in the next chapter.



## Chapter 5



### EXERCISES

#### Exercise 1: Enduring Historical Patterns

This exercise demonstrates that our culture is patterned, shaped by historical events a hundred or a thousand years ago. Furthermore, it demonstrates that we practitioners of the culture are not always aware of its patterns. Language, the core of culture, will serve to illustrate this point.

##### *Part 1—the Historical Pattern*

Imagine that an anthropologist from a society with very different culture—a Cambodian, for example—were interviewing you as an informant of American culture. (If you *are* Cambodian, then carry on anyway; and isn't America a strange and interesting place?) The anthropologist asks you,

“I am studying your cooking practices and I'm confused. What is the difference between what you call *baking* and what you call *roasting*?”

Take a couple of minutes to write down your reply to this question. Your instructor will then lead a discussion to determine whether there is a shared understanding among you about the meaning of these words. (I have given your instructor some suggestions about how to proceed.) Do you share a pattern of usage? Where did that pattern come from? Keep some notes on the pattern, its origin and evolution for your report. I predict that a pattern will emerge, and I propose that the Norman Conquest and the Industrial Revolution have influenced it. Developments in agribusiness after World War II have also played a part. Particularly provocative, I think, is the fact that we perpetuate this old pattern *without being aware of it*, but have learned it with our English (Leaf 1975).

##### *Part 2—the Future*

Now consider current and possible future trends in the terms. How long do you think the linguistic pattern for the terms *baking* and *roasting* will endure in English? What changes might nudge it out of existence? In this way the temporal question is asked of contemporary cultural practices in the process of change. What changes in our language, for example, has microwave oven technology

brought? Have we created new words to talk about cooking? How many ways, for instance, can you finish this sentence:

“I am going to warm up my coffee in the \_\_\_\_.”

Have we created new words to describe the process of cooking in this machine? How many ways can you finish this sentence:

“I am going to \_\_\_\_ this ham in the microwave oven.”

Have you applied your old *bake* and *roast* vocabulary to the new technology? That is, could you use the terms *bake* or *roast* in the sentence above? If yes, explain the circumstances for which it would seem appropriate. Is your use of those words in this sentence consistent with the pattern discovered through class discussion?

### Part 3—Other Patterns

Are there other patterns in our language like *bake/roast*—perhaps ones about subjects you feel more strongly about than you do about cooking, such as money, sex, race, or the environment? Might these patterns influence the way we see the world, distinguishing our view, for example, from the Cambodian’s, whose language has different patterns? These linguistic patterns are powerful, partly because we are unaware that we created them, so we tend to think that’s the way the world really *is*.

### Part 4—Implicit Culture

In Chapter 1, I pointed out that culture is now often described as constructed, meaning that a group creates it; reality doesn’t hand it to them. “Constructed” further connotes that these human creations are intentional and that they have a structure or pattern. It does not follow, however, that those who learn the construction, as you did when you learned English, are aware of it. Does the language pattern revealed by this *bake/roast* inquiry fit these definitions of culture as constructed? This exercise suggests to me that even if a culture is constructed, we who practice it can only change (fix, negotiate, or replace) the parts of which we are aware. I propose that there is quite a bit in a culture that we are not aware of. Anthropologist Edward Sapir (1927) called this **implicit culture**, which would shape the differences, for example, in the way European Americans walk compared to the ways Filipinos or Masai walk. Can you think of other elements that are implicit in your culture? Why are we unaware of so many aspects of our culture? The prevalence of this implicit culture may provide another reason for anthropologists to use their etic perspective to point it out. How would the etic perspective help to uncover the elements of implicit culture? Should we even try to bring more implicit culture to light?

## Exercise 2: Pronoun Change

In this exercise we ask the temporal question about pronouns in English. We will discover that English once shared a pattern with related languages, but diverged

from the original pattern when it dropped several of the pronoun forms. Some American English speakers have retained regional variations of the original pronoun forms, so I conclude by asking if “standard” English should be changed to be more like them.

### Part 1—a Pronoun Is Lost

With some exceptions to be noted later, the only second-person pronoun in English today is “you.” Older English documents reveal that we once had other second-person pronouns; most contemporary European languages still have multiple pronouns. French speakers use *tu* when speaking to an individual with whom they are intimate, such as a family member or friend, or to anyone with whom informality would be acceptable, such as a child. Linguists call that the T form. The French use *vous* when speaking to more than one person, to someone with whom they are not intimate or familiar, or to someone whose social status demands a degree of formality. Linguists call that the V form. Similarly, the Germans use *du* for the T form, *Ihnen* for the V form. Spanish speakers use *te* for the T form, *usted* for the V form. Italian, Portuguese, and the Slavic languages also have T and V forms.

Once, English had two V form pronouns. They were *ye* and *you* (*ye* was the nominative form, as in “ye know not,” and *you* the accusative form, as in “I see you”). Over the last three hundred years English has dropped the T forms completely and collapsed its two V forms into *you*. So, only one form (out of four) remains of the English second-person pronouns, and only English underwent this change. Table 5.1 summarizes the situation today. Consider these questions, in discussion with your instructor:

1. What was the singular/intimate/subordinate term (in fact, there were two terms, a nominative and an accusative form).
2. What happened to those pronouns?
3. Why didn’t French, German, or Spanish also change?

### Part 2—Candidates for Replacement Arise

Not all speakers of American English accept this simplification. I often hear my server in a restaurant here in northern New York or Canada ask, “What can I get youse?”

**Table 5.1** The Second-Person Pronoun in Four Languages

	French	Spanish	German	English
The T form (singular, intimate, or subordinate).	tu, te, toi	te, ti, tu	du, dich, dir	??
The V form (plural, distant, or higher status).	vous	usted	Sie, Ihnen	(ye), you

1. What conventional English grammatical transformation has the speaker exercised on “you” to make “youse”?
2. Into which second-person category of Table 5.1 has the speaker placed the “youse”? What pronoun do you expect this person uses in the other second-person category?
3. If earlier you answered (mistakenly, I think) that English simplified its second-person pronouns because it was “easier,” how do you explain this reversal of adding “youse”?
4. Can you identify other examples of second-person plurals used in American English?
5. Some people might snicker at these pronouns as ethnic markers or indications of limited education. On the contrary, I think they should become standard usage because I find that making the distinctions is useful. What do you think?
6. Perhaps the term “youse” will never achieve enough dignity to indicate respect toward the listener, but wouldn’t it be useful to indicate in some way that more than one person is being spoken to or that the speaker is declaring some emotional distance from the listeners? Is there some other way that we American English speakers who avoid “youse” actually communicate these points? Can you imagine another way we *could* communicate them?

### Exercise 3: Syncretism

As you learned in the chapter, syncretism is the cultural change process of combining features from tradition, other cultures, and inventions into a new phenomenon. Nouvelle cuisine, for example, combines French and Chinese cooking techniques, ingredients from the global supermarket, contemporary European American ideas of healthy diet, and Japanese aesthetics of presentation.

In this exercise you will analyze the syncretic process that generated a practice widely adopted in America. Here are three suggestions for topics that may interest you: the college sport of lacrosse, the holiday Kwanzaa, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons). Each of these I have reason to believe is richly syncretic and fairly easy to research. Each is also recent enough (having nineteenth- or twentieth-century origins) that investigating its origins is possible.

Begin with a little background research on the topic on websites and in printed literature. Next, interview someone who is involved in the practice on a regular basis. Finally, write a temporal analysis of the topic. Here are some guidelines.

#### *Background Research*

Who started this, when, and where? Why was something new created at all? Why was it syncretized this way? What were the traditional, borrowed, and invented elements that were combined to create it? How has it changed since it began?

Where is it going? Here are some websites as of 2005 and some books to research each of the three topics.

1. Lacrosse  
[www.hickoksports.com/history/lacrosse.shtml](http://www.hickoksports.com/history/lacrosse.shtml)  
*Lacrosse: A History of the Game*, Donald M. Fisher (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002)
2. Kwanzaa  
[www.officialkwanzaawebsite.org](http://www.officialkwanzaawebsite.org)  
*Kwanzaa: A Celebration of Family, Community and Culture*, Maulana Karenga (Los Angeles: University of Sankore Press, 1998)  
*The Complete Kwanzaa: Celebrating Our Cultural Harvest*, Dorothy Winbush Riley (New York: Castle, 2003) or (New York: Perennial, 1997).
3. Latter-Day Saints  
[www.mormon.org](http://www.mormon.org); [www.mhahome.org](http://www.mhahome.org); [www.shire.net/mormon](http://www.shire.net/mormon)  
*The American Religion: Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation*, Harold Bloom, (New York: Touchstone, 1993).

### Interview

From what you have learned in background research, prepare a semistructured interview protocol of questions for an informant. Enlist a participant in the practice—an athlete, an African American, a Mormon—who will donate thirty minutes or so to answer your questions. The theme of your interview is how this topic actually unfolds in the contemporary practitioner's life. Aspects to make into questions include these:

1. The informant's awareness of the syncretic nature of the practice as you learned it in background research
2. Differences between the informant's practice and what you learned in background research
3. The informant's answers to questions about the practice, which you formed during your background research

### Report

Submit a report answering the temporal question about this topic. That is, what were its origins and how has it changed to be what it is today? Where does it appear to be going? Emphasize the syncretic process. Of what tradition, borrowings, and innovations is it composed? Cite your informant and documentary sources (remember, your informant deserves anonymity).

## Exercise 4: Futures Research

In this exercise you will conduct futures interviews as Textor did in Thailand and I did in Newfoundland. Form a team of three to five interviewers who will share a topic, pool their interviews, analyze the answers, and report to the class.

Select a topic from American life that is changing or is likely to undergo some change in the next five years. Here are some examples:

- A major institution, such as marriage, your college or university, race relations, religion
- A current political or social concern, such as presidential electoral politics; national security and personal liberty; environmental integrity (air and water, biodiversity, wilderness preservation); computer technology
- An American tradition or distinctive characteristic, such as automobiles and driving, professional basketball, tattoos

Shape the topic into the three questions you will ask of your panel of informants. Suppose that you chose to work with “automobiles and driving,” then narrowed it to the future of hybrid gas/electric autos. Your preamble and questions might look like this:

“Our team is interested in what the American driving public thinks will be happening in the near future concerning hybrid gas/electric cars. I will ask you to imagine three scenarios about the near future of hybrid cars—your hopeful scenario, your fearful scenario, and your likely scenario. I’ll take notes while you talk.”

1. “What do you *hope* will happen in the United States in the next five years regarding hybrid cars?”
2. “What do you *fear* will happen in the United States in the next five years regarding hybrid cars?”
3. “What do you think is *most likely* to happen in the United States in the next five years regarding hybrid cars?”

Each member of the interview team will interview two persons from among acquaintances who are involved in or knowledgeable about the subject in question. As usual, those persons will be given pseudonyms and remain anonymous. The key to a successful interview is finding an interested informant, locating yourselves in a good setting for talk, and making the informant feel comfortable to think about the answers and elaborate the scenarios.

The research now proceeds in four phases.

### Phase I

1. Acquire your informant’s permission to be interviewed.
2. Conduct the interview, allowing at least twenty minutes for the “warmup” and preamble, thoughtful answers to the three questions, and a “cool-down” chat at the end.
3. Take good notes. Electronic recording and then transcribing is more accurate, but very time consuming.
4. Type your notes of the informant’s answers to the three questions.
5. Repeat for a second informant.

## Phase 2

6. Give the informants a copy of their own interviews to read.
7. Ask for changes to their answers to the three questions.
8. Type the revised interview.
9. Give a copy to the informants.
10. Bring a copy to the team.

## Phase 3

The team reviews and summarizes all the interview texts.

11. Compare all the answers to the first question, then the second, etc.
12. Try sorting answers into types, or picking out frequently used phrases and words that typify the answers to a particular question. Certain themes may be running through the answers.
13. Try summarizing in writing the consensus (if there is one) to each question.
14. Record the team's comments on the results.
  - In what ways are the results as you might have predicted, and how do they differ from what you expected?
  - Do informants' answers indicate how they approach the future?
  - Are these answers what you would have given if you were interviewed?
  - To what degree are your informants' views part of American culture—in other words, is there a shared understanding of how to look at this issue?

## Phase 4

In class discussion, each team reports its results and comments.

- Are there similarities among the different panels of informants who were asked related questions, such as about technology or education?
- Are there similarities among the different panels of informants even on different topics, indicating that there is a common American cultural approach to the future?

Each team member's product is a written report of the results of Phases 3 and 4, attaching the transcripts of the two interviews the team member conducted.

## Exercise 5: Explaining Change

In this exercise you will collect a sample of images of a common object in American life and explain the changes it has undergone during the last hundred years.

### The Sample

Assemble a set of pictures, one from each decade since about 1900 until now, of a cultural artifact such as a car, a camera, women's party dresses, or men's headwear. Technology and fashion are probably going to change more visibly than other cultural elements during that time. Photocopy each image and label it with the source and date. The most likely sources of images are serial publications such as magazines or newspapers. Browse the bound general-readership magazines such as *National Geographic*, *Look*, and *Redbook* in the "AP . . ." section of your library stacks. Find possible serials in the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*. Publications in microfilm will also serve as resources for this exercise if photocopies of their images can be made. You may use more than one publication to find data for the sample time periods.

### The Analysis

1. Describe the changes that have occurred in the object over the last hundred years.
2. Label (or invent a name for) the processes of change involved. Does it involve diffusion of objects, ideas, or practices into the United States? Or does it involve acculturation, independent invention, revitalization, or reinterpretation?
3. Explain the change in terms of Figure 5.7, the generalized model of culture change.

The product of this exercise is your analysis and the ten images.