Mind Active, Mind Static

A. Kimball Romney and Roy Goodwin D'Andrade (Eds.)


Reviewed by Patricia Greenfield

The editors of this volume are anthropologists A. Kimball Romney at Harvard University and Roy Goodwin D'Andrade at Stanford. Chapter authors include the authors as well as Brent Berlin, Berkeley; Roger Brown, Harvard University; Charles O. Frake, Stanford; Shirley Hill, Stanford; Dell Hymes, University of Pennsylvania; Sidney M. Lamb, Berkeley; Fred L. Strodebeck, University of Chicago; William C. Sturtevant, Smithsonian Institution.

The reviewer, Patricia Marks Greenfield, is a 1966 PhD in social psychology, Department of Social Relations, Harvard. She spent nine months among the Wolof and French of Senegal in 1963 and 1964, doing transcultural studies in cognition. These studies are included in Studies in Cognitive Growth, recently produced by Bruner, Olver, Greenfield et al. She is studying on at Harvard in the Department of Social Relations.

Participants in the Merida Conference came together to explore the extent to which studies of cognition in each of the three fields of linguistics, anthropology, and psychology might be enriched by developments in the other two. The paths of their inquiry and its discoveries are documented in the present volume. The goal of the conference turned out to require a precise delineation of what it is that each of the three disciplines does, how each one goes about the business of investigating the intellect of man. This comparison of the disciplines, capably drawn by the editors in their introduction, in itself produces increased awareness of what psychology is and is not, what are its assumptions, methods, and findings.

The main body of papers, drafted before the conference to serve as a basis for discussion, is distinguished by the lack of articulation of its parts. The three contributors from the discipline of psychology, Charles Ogood, Shirley Hill, and Fred L. Strodebeck, seem to have even less in common with one another than with the anthropologists and the linguists. But the conference and, consequently, the book turn into a true dialectic as the participants discover opposing assumptions behind the lack of rapport and as they reconcile them in theoretically significant ways. This aspect of the volume is manifest particularly in the concluding "Summary of Participants' Discussion" by Roy Goodwin D'Andrade and A Kimball Romney and in the "Discussion of the Conference" by Roger Brown, as well as in Dell Hymes's article, "Directions in (Ethno-) Linguistic Theory," to be found in the linguistics section of the book. The last named constitutes a brilliant program for asking psychological and sociological questions about language, questions that are already implicit in the science of linguistics as it now stands. In the anthropological section of the book, Charles O. Frake's "Notes on Queries in Ethnography" is also exceptional for manifesting a deep understanding of psychology's efforts to understand cognition.

After the linguistic, anthropological, and psychological approaches have been related to each other, the benefits which psychology may reap from the other two fields become plain; herein lies the great value of Transcultural Studies in Cognition to psychologists. Methodologically, linguistics can show us a precise, 'scientific' way of working with qualitative, all-or-none phenomena. Anthropology, more specifically, ethnography, reminds us that situational contexts must carry much of the burden in the explanation of behavior; understanding how people act in an experimental situation does not suffice because the rules of the game, that is to say, situational constraints, dictate behavior as much as general human abilities and strategies. Granted this fact, anthropology offers valuable suggestions concern-