Sergio Duarte

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Dear Reader,

The paper you are about to read was crafted with the purpose of reflecting on the discipline of anthropology, a class I am taking this quarter. More specifically, I wanted to figure out what type of information the discipline produce and how. To answer this question I researched the discipline in multiple ways such as textbooks and articles. I read these articles looking for different writing practices and how they presented information. Then, I analyzed how and why they present this cultural information in order to give me a perspective on how anthropologists write. Through this research I learned a lot as to how and what information is presented. Reflecting on what I have learned about my discipline, I realized that I am even more interested than because I now understand the various techniques that anthropologists and authors of anthropological works use to portray their ideas. Something I also found fascinating was the way anthropologists approach problems. This is a little bit of a spoiler, but the Yanomami article I talk about in the paper presents the problem of the violence within their community, and is approach by analyzing the different explanations and theories as to why they behave that way. Anthropologists also pose many questions and ideas to get the readers thinking about the topics at hand in cultural perspectives outside of their own. Overall, this was a great learning experience because I acquired a lot of information about a class that I really like. I can now understand the different types of techniques used and identify them while reading my homework for that class.

WP2

This quarter, I was encouraged to take a class that I originally knew nothing about. I chose a class called cultural anthropology. To my surprise, I learned to appreciate the course. There was something about the course that intrigued me enough to actually enjoy it. It wasn’t just about the topic itself, being study study of cultures, it was the way information was presented. I had no idea how to go about describing the different conventions and practices used to present information, so I began to analyze different articles and my class textbook to see how it is communicated. After my analysis, I came to the conclusion that the discipline of anthropology presents information on cultures through writing practices such as examples, organization, and defining terms in order to show similarities between varying cultures throughout the world. Anthropologists practice this by viewing cultures through the lens of that culture so that they can inform people on other cultures so that they see that multiple other cultures exists besides their own.

For my article analysis, I used two articles on the topic of cultural anthropology, but specifically the description and perspective on other cultures. This is also known as an ethnography. An ethnography serves the purpose of informing people of another culture, but can often include varying perspective and biases toward the culture that is being presented. When anthropologists write these, they reflect the information on different cultures through an unbiased, culturally relative perspective.

The first article, “Ethnography and Culture” by James P. Spradley1, is written with the purpose to educate scholars on how to deliver a valid, unbiased ethnography. It asks us to imagine ourselves in the shoes of someone from an outside culture coming into the US. It also asks us to think beyond our own cultural beliefs to understand other cultures. The article strengthens its points with evidence from previous pioneers in anthropology as well as works from other scholars. For example, Spradley brings in Bronislaw Malinowski’s idea that the purpose of an ethnography is “to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world.” (Malinowski 22)2. The information was analyzed well within the constructs of the article. Spradley applied it to modern society and events in order for easier understanding. He also posed questions to allow readers to ponder on the subject and think about cultures in their own context.

For the second article I read “Yanomami: The Fierce People?” by Barbara Miller2. This article discusses the living situations and behaviors of the Yanomami people. The questions this article poses are not literal questions. Instead, they are statements that provoke the reader to think about the topic. Using statements, the article “asks” why the Yanomami men are violent. It also presents the issue of whether or not violence is a human trait or an acquired characteristic. Miller used biological anthropologist Napoleon Chagnon’s evidence, someone who has studied several Yanomami villages, as well as credible theories from other anthropologists. The evidence was not really analyzed, just described and applied to different theories. These theories involved explanations as to why they are violent, one example being the scarcity of food and another example being that successful warriors have a higher chance of reproducing. What does that tell you about how anthropologists think? This shows that these anthropologists thought in such a way that analyzes the Yanomami culture within their own context.

The language and format are also important techniques used by authors to write article for scholarly purposes. The first article used terms related to anthropology such as tacit, explicit, ethnography, insider/outsider, culture. The format of it reflects the goal to present the idea that culture is an acquired knowledge. It also cited sources in order to build credibility. The second article is similar because it used language that described culture and theories. However, it included somewhat easier language to understand, so that anyone could take something away from it.

Communicating a discipline is not an easy task. After reading through the textbook required for my anthropology class, there were several forms of communication and literary practices used to present their information in an efficient manner. Anthropology and culture are presented effectively in my textbook through means of examples, organized sections, definitions, and many more literary practices. These are the practices needed to convey the topic effectively.

The first practice I observed in my textbook (this could also go for any textbook, but specifically one that discusses culture) was the use of examples from other cultures to portray the topics discussed in the chapter. The examples serve to draw similarities to the reader and apply the topics in context. For example, the book gives an example of the Inuit children that learn culture from their elders (Nanda 33)3. The story helps illustrate to readers the process of enculturation, or the process of learning to be a member of a particular cultural group. Another example is how Indian people believe that women should stay in their homes rather than go out with their friends (Nanda 43). This is to show how morals and norms differ in every society, because in the US this belief is not popular at all. The various examples from around the globe help communicate the different issues in cultural anthropology to its readers.

Organization is also a key factor in effective communication. In this book, Nanda uses different patterns and organizational skills to walk the reader in understanding the subject at hand. For starters, she divides each topic into a separate chapter in order to draw emphasis on one particular cultural aspect that she thinks is important; she makes chapter 8 about stratification and chapter 9 about kinship and marriage. Furthermore, each chapter is split into subheadings. For example, chapter 8 has different subheadings within the topic of stratification. There’s a subheading for race, class, and gender. These subheadings serve the purpose of elaborating extensively on the topic and bringing in different aspects to help further her points. She talks about how genders have stratification between them in the subheading within the general topic.

Within each of these chapters and subheadings, the reader might find themselves confused with what the reader is trying to say, particularly with the words used. As they might be foreign words to some people, Nanda avoids this issue by giving the definition of each word in the context of the chapter. Namely, the definition of social stratification is given in the beginning of chapter 8 so that the read can follow along and have an idea of the scholarly ideas she is bringing forth.

These definitions and words are examples of cultural language. While observing these chapters and words, I began to recognize a pattern. The pattern is that most of these words, I already knew, I just did not associate a specific defining term for each of them. The cultural language presented (for example, diffusion: the spread of cultural elements from one society to another) was already an idea in my head, and I think it is safe to say that most people get this concept, but I just had no word to tie it with. Anthropologists want to attach words to these universal ideals in order to make it easier to communicate them and establish a concrete term for them. The language communicates the topic effectively because it associates a term with an idea people already had existing in their minds, making it accessible and easier to express.

Writing this, I realized that some of the writing practices I used overlapped with the practices in the articles. I used the same language and cultural terms in the first paragraph of the essay, being ethnography. I also described how applying theories to a situation helps readers make sense of what is actually going on. Reading these two articles helped me discover these writing practices and apply them to my own writing.

The form in which the authors exhibit their topics and communicate them is effective. They uses writing practices such as examples, organization, and defining terms to present cultural anthropology to their readers. These conventions are essential to provide a detailed account for cultural anthropology, and other authors in this discipline should use them as well. Communicating this topic can be turned from a difficult task into an effortless job with the assistance of the above-mentioned practices. All of these practices help convey information on other cultures so that readers see that multiple other cultures exists besides their own. Anthropologists communicate this information by viewing cultures through the lens of that culture.

Works Cited

1. Spradley, James. "Ethnography and Culture" *Participant Observation* (1980).

2. Malinowski, Bronislaw. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. London, Routledge. (1922).

3. Miller, Barbara. “Yanomami: The "Fierce People"?” *Cultural Anthropology. 6th Edition. Prentice Hall*. (2011).

4. Nanda, Serena, and Richard L. Warms. *Culture Counts: a Concise Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*. Cengage Learning. (2018).