

**Knowledge, Belief,
and Witchcraft**

*Analytic Experiments in
African Philosophy*

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With a New Foreword by W.V.O. Quine
and a New Afterword by Barry Hallen

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2. An African Epistemology: The Knowledge-Belief Distinction and Yoruba Discourse

1. Introduction

In this chapter we propose to attempt at least three things. The first is to demonstrate the dangers of assuming that such philosophically significant terms as 'know' and 'believe' in the English language have precise meaning equivalents in other, particularly African, languages. This may be another variant of Quine's myth of universal propositions but in fact, as recounted in the Introduction, we noticed that the supposed Yoruba equivalents of these terms were occurring in contexts foreign to their English-language counterparts even before we came to develop an interest in Quine.

A second is to engage in the concrete experiment referred to in the last chapter in the cross-cultural translation of select abstract meanings in an effort to determine what practical consequences, if any, follow from the indeterminacy thesis for such exercises. The third is to demonstrate and promote our own analytic approach to African philosophy by selecting for this experiment concepts that are philosophically significant in their own right – the English-language 'know' and 'believe' and their supposed equivalents in the Yoruba language. (When we say 'supposed equivalents' we are referring to those stipulated by the two existent Yoruba-English dictionaries (Abraham 1958; Oxford 1950). In the succeeding text, whenever we make reference to a translation equivalence drawn from them, following Quine we shall refer to it as from the *etm* (established translation manual).)

In what follows, making reference to several standard Western philosophical works and a bit of common-sense, we endeavour to identify to what it is that words like 'know' and 'believe' are meant to refer. We then proceed to identify their varieties, if any, their objects (what kinds of things one may 'know'), the criteria that must be satisfied before one can have a particular kind of knowledge or belief, and that are invoked when that knowledge or belief is challenged or disputed. Making use of the explanations and analyses of the *oníṣẹ̀gùn*, we then endeavour to do the same for their

supposed Yoruba equivalents, 'mọ̀' and 'gbágbó'. After comparing meanings between the two language systems with reference to these four terms we shall reintroduce Quine and, in the end, disagree with him over the degree to which indeterminacy may be a problem. We shall also argue that our analyses suggest that propositional attitudes are *not* universal.

2. Quine on the Indeterminacy of Universal Propositional Attitudes

Now of all examples of propositional attitudes, the first and foremost is *belief*:
(Quine 1955: 186)

In English-language philosophy verbs like 'believe', 'know', 'doubt', 'hope' and 'want' are described as *psychological attitudes*, words meant to express a person's attitude towards a subordinate proposition. It is this latter relationship – of attitude towards statement – that has led to these same terms also being described as *propositional attitudes*. In other words, they are statements that are of the standard form, 'I believe that X' or 'I wish that X', where X is itself a proposition like, for example, 'he would register for the course'.

Psychologists, philosophers and anthropologists often presume that these propositional or psychological attitudes are so fundamentally human that they are transcultural. Belief, in fact, is one of the most commonplace and familiar things in the world' (Price 1967: 24) In the English language the word may be 'believe', while in French it is '*croire*' and in Yoruba it is '*gbágbó*'. But the underlying meaning, the state-of-mind each seeks to express, is the same, and further, meaning equivalents can presumably be found in other language cultures.

One of the most powerful arguments against the universality of propositional attitudes arises from Quine's indeterminacy thesis of radical translation. In section ten of this chapter we shall make a more careful evaluation of the evidence for indeterminacy and also of the criteria Quine proposes for the composition of inter-linguistic translations. The primary aim of the present section is to summarize briefly his position with respect to propositional attitudes and then examine some of its consequences for cross-cultural comparisons.

With reference to indeterminacy generally, we have seen that the principal conclusions Quine wants to establish are: that it is impossible to prove there are culturally universal propositions (meanings); that verbal and non-verbal meanings, relative to any language, are learned and defined behaviourally; that the evidential gap between statements of empirical observation and statements of theoretical interpretation is more distinct and

attitudes as they themselves would in an analogous situation. He repeatedly refers to the drama, to the idea of 'casting our real selves thus in "dramatic roles" (1960: 219) But he does so with approval, for he can see no alternative. Nevertheless, indeterminacy always provides that another translator may improvise an alternative natural, and therefore again cautions us against *really* claiming to know that propositional attitudes are universal.

The fourth criterion requires that we do the equivalent with the unnatural. If it would be unnatural for the translator (as a member of his language culture) to express a certain propositional attitude in a certain situation, it is safer if he presumes the same holds for the aliens.

The linguistic ideal in any event would be a humdrum sort of discourse on the native's' part and anything startling or surprising should be *prima facie* evidence of error.
(First General Discussion Session' Davidson, et al., 1974: 495)

Quine is aware that alien propositional attitudes may be different from our own. But he feels that an embarrassing number of translations that have given precedence to this possibility have resulted in representations of alien attitudes that are both silly and offensive. Too much emphasis has been placed upon the bizarre and too little on the commonplace.

If there can never be sufficient evidence to support objectively true translations of alien psychological attitudes, would it not be safer to dispense with them as terms of reference altogether – at least for translation? Quine's responses to this would likely be the following. Since indeterminacy affects translation generally, agreeing to dispense with psychological attitudes would set a dangerous precedent for dispensing with the translating of all behaviour that goes beyond the simplest material object level.

Propositional attitudes, even as indeterminate, have a genuine utility as mediums of translation. Even the pretence of 'entering into' the alien's mood makes the interpretation of his behaviour seem that much more real and natural to us. Therefore let translators continue to utilize propositional attitudes as elements of language, but let them avoid defining them in 'mental' terms. An individual's mind or state thereof is by definition private. Psychological or propositional attitudes are best identified, understood and defined on the basis of patterns of overt behaviour.

It is here [the behavioural level], if anywhere, that we must give our account of

⁴Quine's use of the term 'native' is ironic, for the point of indeterminacy is that anyone can be an alien and thereby a 'native'.

the understanding of an expression, and our account of the equivalence that holds between an expression and its translation or paraphrase.

(Quine 1975b: 87)

3. To 'Know' in English-Language Discourse and Philosophy

Perhaps the greatest agreement among Philosophers has concerned the relation of knowledge and truth... I cannot possibly know that any sentence is true unless that sentence is true. Hence truth is a condition of knowledge.
(Lehrer 1974:24)

'Knowing' and 'believing' are complex and sometimes technical terms, both in ordinary usage and that specialized area of English-language philosophy known as epistemology or the theory of knowledge. The aim of this and the two following sections is not to present a comprehensive or even consistent theory of either term, or an exhaustive account of usage. Rather we shall select judiciously, hoping to touch upon enough materials to give fair representation of the complexity of each concept and of their interrelations on the level of ordinary language, and at the same time laying the foundations for interesting comparisons with what are said to be their Yoruba counterparts.

If knowing is by definition true, then our first concern will be to determine whether all knowing is of the same basic kind and, if not, what the varieties are. We shall then go on to ask *why* or *how* something is or comes to be knowledge. Or, another way of phrasing the same question, what sort(s) of evidence must be produced, justification given, or conditions satisfied – if the need should arise – in order to prove that what one claims to know is true. This latter point will require paying some attention to the so-called theories of truth that form one of the cornerstones of philosophical epistemology.

Now in ordinary everyday English the verb 'to know' is generally used in a dispositional sense; not quite invariably perhaps, but certainly the dispositional use of it is by far the most common.
(Price 1969: 42)

There are philosophers who disagree with this and claim that 'knowing' has a distinctive tone as a private mental state that intuitively distinguishes it from other psychological attitudes. Therefore, when I say 'I know that p', I am referring to that distinctive state-of-mind, or consciousness, at the time.

Ordinary English usage, however, indicates that the word is used far more commonly in a dispositional or behavioural sense. 'Disposition' is here being used in the sense of latent tendency or trait. If I say that someone

knows his way around London, what I mean is that if and when he finds himself there, he will act in a manner that demonstrates he is thoroughly familiar with that city.

Whether characteristically defined as a private and distinctive mental state, or as a latent disposition to behave in a certain manner, philosophers and ordinary usage have gone on to distinguish three different varieties of knowing: (1) knowing that (or information); (2) knowing how (or competence); and (3) knowledge by acquaintance.

'Knowing that' is certainly the most common usage, and may be implied by the other two. Bertrand Russell has sought to clarify ordinary usage by stipulating more precise criteria and renaming 'knowledge that' knowledge by description. But as we prefer ordinary usage as a base for our eventual cross-cultural comparisons, there is no need to consider Russell's theory in detail. 'Knowledge that':

does not have the character of 'first hand encounter' which knowledge by acquaintance has. There is something indirect or second hand about it. Most frequently we get it from testimony, from reading what others have written, or hearing what they tell us. (Price: 65)

'Description' is appropriate, since this type of knowledge does involve understanding a description ('Tokyo is the capital of Japan.') that is existential in character. Nevertheless, 'when a piece of knowledge by description is analysed, it turns out to be reducible to knowledge that, knowledge of facts or truths' (Price: 65).

As we shall see, it is also possible to have knowledge by acquaintance of something of which one has 'knowledge that' ('I know that Tokyo is the capital of Japan. I visited the city in 1979.'). But the more interesting cases for comparative purposes, and for purposes of understanding the uniqueness of this English-language epistemological category, will be those in which something is known to us *only* by description. This includes any information we obtain from printed or oral sources, and to which we could refer in the context of the statement, 'I know X', where X is a proposition ('that Tokyo is the capital of Japan'). Hence 'knowledge that' is a clear example of a propositional attitude.

'Knowing how' to do something is used to characterize a practical skill or proficiency (such as playing a musical instrument or repairing automobiles), even when the possessor may not be said to have significant conceptual or cognitive knowledge relevant to understanding or explaining the skill. Such knowledge can also be intellectual, as in the case of the clerk who can mentally calculate the postal rates for parcels being sent through the mail.

Nevertheless, as with the majority of situations in which knowing means 'knowing how', the significance of the term attaches to a practical activity rather than, as in the case of knowing that, to a cognitive or propositional attitude directed towards something by definition true.

'Knowledge by acquaintance' is another variety of knowing which Bertrand Russell has sought to clarify theoretically. In ordinary usage, however, it has at least two characteristics: (1) I must know the object, event or person first-hand. 'Knowledge by acquaintance is contrasted with the second-hand or "hearsay" knowledge which we get from testimony, spoken or written' (Price: 54); (2) I must be sufficiently familiar with the thing or person so that under ordinary circumstances I will be able to recognize it again.

Because what is known is neither a fact nor a truth, acquaintance is not a propositional attitude. It is possible to have knowledge by acquaintance of a philosophical argument and still not be convinced that it is true. As for the earlier claim that 'knowing that' is entailed by the other two forms of knowing, it is difficult to imagine a situation in which one would obtain 'knowledge by acquaintance' and derive no 'knowing that'. Perhaps an encounter whose consequences were *total* confusion would be the exception. However, as one of the conditions of knowledge by acquaintance is that one would be able to recognize the thing if a further encounter should occur, total confusion would, appropriately, indicate a situation in which there is no variety of knowledge. Similarly, if I know how to do something, then I must have at least *some* information about it.

It is now time to proceed to the relationship between 'knowledge' and 'truth', the so-called *theories* of truth that have been proposed in the effort to explain *how* and *why* it is that a person has knowledge. For purposes of the representative model we are trying to construct, 'knowing that' will be taken as the primary meaning of 'knowledge', and the others as subsidiaries available for situations or comparisons wherein 'knowing that' does not seem to make sense or seems to be otherwise inappropriate. In any case, the theories of truth are mostly concerned with outlining the conditions for explaining the basis of 'knowing that'.

In the exposition and analysis of these theories of truth we shall rely upon Keith Lehrer (1974) as our basic reference. This is not because we have rated his analysis as the best of its kind, either from the standpoint of reporting ordinary usage or of developing an original theory. (His primary interest is in the latter.) But it so happens that, in the course of working out his theory of knowledge, Lehrer takes special interest in a number of issues that will prove relevant to the concerns and viewpoints of the Yoruba.

... the most customary use of the word 'know'. Commonly, when men say they know they mean they know for certain, and they assume there is no chance of being in error. (Lehrer: 239)

It is because of this assumption that theories of truth are employed primarily as theories of justification or verification, steps people resort to when their 'truth' is challenged, with the eventual aim of making us agree that their truth should be our truth. The two theories we shall survey are commonly termed the Correspondence theory of truth and the Coherence theory of truth.

In the traditions of Western philosophy, the best known argument over what truths are to be taken as more reliable is that between the so-called rationalists and empiricists. The former, often typified by Descartes, argue that there are some truths that may be certified indubitably by the powers of the mind or reason alone, and then serve as a basis for all other knowledge. The latter, typified by Locke and Hume, argue that sensory experience, or sensation, serves as a basis for all the basic truths that are known, or not known, about the world. The literature reflecting the wrangling that has gone on between and within these two 'schools' of academic philosophy is vast and, for the most part, too technical to be of use in this chapter. The important point to bear in mind is that the word 'correspondence' is used for the overall theory because these basic truths, and the others derived from them, are said to correspond to and therefore accurately reflect reality.

What is of special interest in Lehrer's treatment of the correspondence theory is his account of the philosopher Thomas Reid's analysis of what the *average* man, apparently in any culture, treats as his basic truths. The average man is not so rigorously systematic in ordering them as the philosopher. Nevertheless his behaviour shows his commitment to a polyglot mixture of 'truths' that serve as the basis of an everyday and culturally distinct life.

Some [truths], for example perceptual [truths] concerning what we see immediately before us, are in no need of justification. Though they can be erroneous... they nevertheless stand justified in themselves without need of independent corroboration. (Lehrer: 101)

Much of the traditional knowledge a man imbibes simply by virtue of being a member of his society shares this same character. Reid describes the justification underlying these basic truths as that of '*birth and ancient possession*', and argues that the man who relies upon them 'in forming his plans and shaping his convictions' will be described as eminently reasonable.

We may, in the customary affairs of life, rely upon the intrinsic guarantee of truth and the attendant justification that attaches as a birthright to various of our beliefs. They are completely justified in themselves without need of any independent information or justification. (Lehrer: 102)

It is when an argument or evidence is produced that challenges our perception or our traditions, or when an enterprise of enormous practical significance is likely to depend upon them, that the 'intrinsic guarantee of truth' is withdrawn or suspended. We have then to face the problem of what constitutes a satisfactory justification or verification of something as knowledge.

Coherence theory argues that there are no basic truths that may be directly, individually and indubitably verified. Truths do not occur in isolation from one another, but in the form of interrelated systems wherein one truth either explains or is explained by (or perhaps both) others. Any single truth that is a component of a coherent system must be consistent with the others. But as any number of alternatives might also be consistent with the overall system, the single component truth selected must 'either explain or be explained in relation to the system *better* than anything which contradicts it' (Lehrer: 164; our italics). The problems involved in defining 'better' are eloquently expressed by Lehrer:

Little has been written on the question of what it means to say that E1 is a better explanation than E2 of F. Moreover, we shall not attempt to explicate that concept here. The hopelessness of obtaining any useful analysis militates against the attempt. (Lehrer: 165)

However, the major problem with the coherence theory is that it is in practice possible to develop *a plurality of systems*, all purportedly true, 'that are equally satisfactory from the standpoint of explanation' (Lehrer: 181). The dilemma, then, as Lehrer puts it, is that:

We are left with the problem of *inconsistent* systems of [truths] having a maximum of explanatory coherence. (Lehrer: 181-82; our italics).

There have been any number of attempts by philosophers to formulate a supplementary criterion that would provide for choosing one from amongst this plurality of coherent systems. One of the more popular has been *simplicity*, but it has been found difficult to define it clearly, and to decide precisely what elements (postulates, basic concepts, ontology, etc.) of a system it is most important *be* simple. In consequence Lehrer concludes that neither simplicity nor any other criterion has yet to be produced that is an adequate or reliable guide.

We have chosen 'knowing that' as our paradigm of ordinary usage in the

English language. Does ordinary usage express any preference with reference to a theory of truth? What we should like to do at this point is to review the position of Thomas Reid, that of the so-called 'average' man and his truth(s) of birth and ancient possession.

Reid does presume that the average man operates on the basis of a form of correspondence theory. Perceptions correspond to what actually exists or is taking place in the world, and traditions (shall we call them 'social truths'?) are worth learning and applying because they are based upon factual knowledge.

Unlike the philosopher, the average man is not concerned to rigorously systematize nor to prove in advance everything that he is prepared to assert as true. It is only when his truths are challenged by others that he will concern himself with justification. And as he operates on the basis of correspondence, his initial justification should consist of proving that his *account of his perceptions* or that his *knowledge of his traditions* is accurate. If either of these is not accepted by the challengers, and the justification must proceed to a deeper level – that of proving the truth of the perception itself or the truth of the tradition itself – then obviously further proofs of correspondence will come into play.

Coherence theory – that there are no basic truths – seems less likely to be taken up by the average man and more the domain of the academic philosopher. Correspondence theory can identify and correct inconsistencies in a set of truths as effectively as coherence theory, and such notions as 'explanatory coherence' and 'simplicity' are of so technical a nature that it is difficult to translate them into average or ordinary terms. Therefore, from this point onwards, we shall incorporate correspondence theory into our model of 'knowledge' in the English language.

4. *To 'Believe' in English-Language Discourse and Philosophy*

Belief, in fact, is one of the most commonplace and familiar things in the world. (Price: 24)

The above quotation may give the impression that the definition and analysis of 'believing' will be easier than that of 'knowing'. In fact the opposite will prove to be the case. Arriving at a non-controversial definition of 'believe', either from the standpoint of ordinary usage or epistemological theory, is a difficult task.

Price (1969) and Needham (1972) will serve as our primary sources. They themselves disagree in their conclusions about the meaning of 'belief' in the English language. This is interesting because the two published their

conclusions contemporaneously yet independently of one another. Price's analysis antedates Needham's, but the latter admits to being unaware of it until his own was virtually complete.

As with 'knowing', we will divide up our analysis between the varieties of belief and the criteria (in respect of justification or verification) of belief. This will first be done from Price's point of view and then, again, following Needham.

With reference to the varieties of 'believing', the first problem that must be dealt with, as in the case of 'knowing', is what is the best method for analysing the meaning of 'belief' generally. English-language culture has to date devised two major, alternative methods that claim to be able to do this.

The oldest is that belief is a unique kind of mental occurrence or act that can be introspected by the person who experiences it. Price describes this theory as traditional Occurrence Analysis. Its primary aim is to provide a careful, introspective analysis of the mental 'tone', characteristics or qualities of this distinctive state of mind.

The second, Dispositional Analysis, rejects the idea that belief is a distinctive state of mind. We may find ourselves affirming that we believe something, but it is wrong to regard this as a state of *mind* that can be uniquely characterized. Believing is behaving, and if we attribute it to ourselves or to another person, what we mean is a conditional statement (If p, then q.) to the effect that the person referred to would say, do or feel a certain something if a certain kind of situation were to arise.

Over and above the question of whether belief in general is best understood as a mental act or disposition, English-language philosophers have catalogued at least three different senses in which the term is used in ordinary discourse: (1) 'believing that'; (2) 'believing a person'; and (3) 'believing in'.

Believing 'that' is by far the most common usage. It occurs when the verb 'believe' is followed by the relative pronoun 'that' and it, in turn, by a proposition (as in 'I believe that it will rain tomorrow.'). The object of belief, the proposition, may be either true or false – it may or may not rain. Obviously, this sense of 'believe' expresses a propositional attitude.

Less frequently we speak of believing a person, as in the proverbial case of the man who complains; 'She told me we would get married and I believed her.' Price argues that there is a logical connection between believing a person and believing 'that'. For we come to believe (or not to believe) a person on the basis of our experience of his previous true (or false) assertions.

The English language allows one to believe 'that' (a proposition is true or false) or to believe a person to varying degrees:

You may believe . . . very firmly, or fairly firmly, or mildly. A rough scale of degrees of belief may be constructed, ranging from conviction at the top end to suspecting at the bottom end, with varying degrees of opinion somewhere in the middle. (Price: 39)

However, those who choose to use the word 'believe' in the third sense, believing 'in', reject the idea of varying degrees, and usage allows them to do so. They insist that one must be *absolutely* convinced of what one believes (as in the context of religious commitment). Anything less may be designated 'opinion', 'being almost certain', etc. but not 'belief'.

. . . in the special case of believing, the two questions 'what is your evidence for . . .' and 'what are your reasons for . . .' amount to pretty much the same thing. (Price: 93)

When it comes to the *justification* (reasons) or *verification* (evidence) of beliefs, and the consequent appeal to something more than other beliefs to provide this, English-language epistemologists have identified four basic sources of evidence: perception, self-consciousness, memory and testimony. The arguments and literature relating to the first three of these are again vast and it would be a hopeless task to try and summarize them here. We shall therefore wait until the Yoruba material has been introduced, and then work backwards – *from* it to relevant English-language comparisons and contrasts.

The fourth source of evidence, testimony, does deserve immediate attention. This is because it is comparatively underrated by English-language philosophers, and because it would seem especially relevant to evidence for beliefs in a culture like that of the Yoruba, which is often said to be based upon oral tradition. 'Testimony' refers to information which I receive from someone else and of which, consequently, I do not have first-hand experience.

The whole point of testimony is that it is a substitute for first-hand experience, or an extension of first-hand experience, whereby each of us can make use of the experiences which other persons have had. (Price: 117)

Price cannot envisage a society that would function or survive if it rejected testimony as a source of belief. The percentage of our beliefs that are derived from direct, first-hand experience is tiny by comparison with the percentage derived from testimony. If we insisted upon attempting to verify everything for ourselves, all forms of social cooperation would cease. Price therefore posits a *Principle of Charity* as an attitude that he feels does

underlie our behaviour and therefore serves to illumine it: 'Accept what you are told unless or until you have specific reasons for doubting it' (127). He also argues that there is a moral dimension to the principle (and belief itself) in that part of its meaning is 'every person, just because he is a person, has at least a *prima facie* claim to be believed' (114).

Several ancillary consequences follow from this analysis of testimony that may prove important to us later on:

(1) 'Belief' is an area where the theory of knowledge and moral philosophy overlap.

(2) If a belief held on the basis of second-hand testimony is subsequently verified by first-hand experience, the testimony becomes redundant.

Finally, Price finds himself grown weary of the endless appeals to *public verifiability* as the ultimate test of the rationality of testimony or belief. There is no corporate 'public'. Nor is there a corporate 'Science' to perform these tests. Both are composed of individuals, and in the end – even as scientists – people will still be accepting or rejecting one another's testimony as a basis for their beliefs. It is more representative to focus attention on the problems common to accepting testimony in any forum. There is always a risk involved. But the (English-language) Principle of Charity admonishes that:

it is reasonable to take this risk, and unreasonable not to take it. If we refuse to take it, we have no prospect of getting answers, not even the most tentative ones, for many of the questions which interest us. (Price: 128)

In *Belief, Language, and Experience* Rodney Needham complains that many Western ethnographers treat the philosophy of mind they inherit from their own language systems as a kind of received truth whose categories are honoured universally.⁵ Their concern, therefore, is to locate the equivalents in non-Western languages for terms such as 'knowing', 'believing', 'doubting', 'willing', 'hoping', 'desiring', 'intending', rather than in considering whether the propositional attitudes of an alien language express an entirely different philosophy of mind. Consequently, with special reference to belief, English-language anthropological monographs make constant reference to 'beliefs', 'belief systems', 'ritual beliefs', 'religious beliefs', 'primitive beliefs', and so forth.

Needham proposes that a necessary step towards determining whether 'belief' can be of value to cross-cultural studies is to be clear about its meaning in the English language. That the language has produced and

⁵ A thesis with which Quine would obviously agree. Needham, however, makes no reference to him in this book.

preserved the words belief/believe would seem to imply that they denote something distinctive. Whether belief be regarded as a mental act, a behavioural disposition, or an epistemological category, what are the empirical grounds in support of any or all of these?

The argument that belief is a distinctive form of mental state or experience is found to be empirically unacceptable. Inner states are private and non-empirical. As for the (public) dispositions or non-verbal, behavioural manifestations of belief, in English-language culture there do not seem to be any. The only remaining behavioural possibility is 'people's statements about their *apprehensions, intuitions, awareness and other subtle modes of experience*' (Needham: 15; our italics). In standard analytic fashion the latter three are reduced to the first when Needham concludes, again because feelings are private: 'Is there a feeling . . . of belief itself? The issue can be publicly resolved only by resort to *the facts of language*' (Needham: 94; our italics). Statements, as public pronouncements, are empirical in their own right. Therefore what is it people say about belief.

If one attempts to collate the various usages, it becomes apparent that the general notion represented by the English verbal concept of belief is complex, highly ambiguous, and unstable' (Needham: 43). To 'believe' can mean to trust, to assess something as true, or to have faith (though what this means, even in a Christian context, Needham finds confusing).

Philosophers and religious thinkers who have tried to clarify the meaning of 'believe' have, again, proposed such diverse alternative analyses that the overriding conclusion is that more than two hundred years of masterly philosophical application have provided no clear and substantial understanding of the notion of belief. (Needham: 61)

Because of its ambiguity and vagueness, 'belief' does not merit classification as a concept. This is why Needham refers to it as a notion.

Needham turns to the methodology of Wittgenstein to identify the species of minotaur he has unearthed and to lead him out of the labyrinth of meanings. Inspired by the former, he reissues the warning that 'a word does not entail the existence of a thing that corresponds to it' (Needham: 128). He then restates his earlier conclusion that clearly there is no single, essential definition of either 'belief' or 'to believe'. Furthermore, when one analyses the various usages, they do not evidence sufficient shared properties for them even to be characterized as united by Wittgenstein's family resemblances.

I must stress that this confusing situation is not merely a result of the fact, to which we have repeatedly adverted, that a classificatory concept -

particularly perhaps a psychological one - is characteristically composed of numerous connotations bearing family likenesses one to another. It is not just that it is difficult to isolate one distinct or definitive meaning from the concept of 'belief', and then to match it to an equally discriminable meaning isolated from an alien verbal concept that is thought to be somewhat equivalent to the English word. The fundamental source of obscurity and misunderstanding is that the grammar of 'belief' does not permit anything like the precision of analysis and exactitude of expression that ideally we require in the determination of human capacities. (Needham: 233)

'Belief' is therefore best described as an 'odd job word' (Needham: 124). It has been pressed into service by English-language culture for diverse reasons and picked up diverse meanings 'suited' to diverse contexts. 'Belief is an artificial contrivance for the convenience and advantage of society' (Needham: 150). It is a convention, a tradition, a socially acceptable noise that evokes inconsistent and ambivalent contextual meanings. But it is not a concept with genuine empirical content. 'The grammar of belief tells us that there is no such object.' (Needham: 131)

If this is the conclusion Needham comes to about the varieties of belief, he can have nothing of a more positive nature to say about the criteria for verification of this non-empirical notion. The consequences of his arguments for cross-cultural translation also are serious. If it is not possible to find a definition of the term in English, it would be odd to claim that it has an equivalent in an alien language. He is willing to concede that some bodily signs may be universal to mankind and 'can be mutually recognized independently of their social and linguistic forms'.⁶ But as belief is not in this category, and as it is an English-language convention, it is best that attempts to impose it upon (or transplant it into) alien systems cease altogether. They only serve to obscure the possibility that such systems may offer different epistemological categories and viewpoints that have as good *prima facie* objective grounds as those made familiar to us by our primary language.

The differences between Price's and Needham's positions are irreconcilable. The former argues that belief has different but determinate usages and that it is a cultural universal. The latter argues that it does not have determinate usages and therefore there is no basis for extending its use beyond the English language. We shall somehow have to choose between the two.

Needham's approach is certainly unique. He writes as a social

⁶A point developed by Vernon Reynolds in a paper entitled 'Man also Behaves', in *The Limits of Human Nature* (ed. J. Benthal), Allen Lane, 1973, pp. 141-157.

anthropologist, working upon the language of his own culture, using a methodology borrowed from analytic philosophy. It is his anthropological approach, we presume, that causes him to lump ordinary usage and philosophical theories, as both products of the same English-language culture, together.

This is something philosophers would resist, and it is important to understand why. If we make use of the first-order, second-order distinction, ordinary usage (the way people who speak the language in everyday life use the word 'believe') is a first-order enterprise. It is commonplace to find that such usages are inconsistent with one another and that the criteria distinguishing them are not always clear, or even articulated. The philosopher who takes an interest in the confusions of everyday language may therefore choose to go a step further and recommend a (second-order) *theory of belief*, which would have serious practical consequences that involve clarifications and changes in ordinary usage.

The important point is that such a theory of belief is not meant simply to *reflect* ordinary usage. It is meant to *reform* it. Consequently it will almost certainly be inconsistent with ordinary usage on a number of important points. When Needham lumps these first and second-order approaches together, as products of the same language culture, these inconsistencies become more and unfairly exaggerated.

Price does honour the first-order, second-order distinction in his analyses and is thereby able to maintain order over the various levels of meaning 'belief' has taken on in English-language culture. For this reason we shall prefer his model when it comes to making comparisons between this term and possible Yoruba-language equivalents.

We do, however, appreciate the attention Needham draws to the importance of looking at a language and its philosophies as a cultural vehicle or viewpoint. English-language philosophy, and concepts, are too often taken as paradigms. Even Price is guilty of this, as evidenced by the quotation that introduces this section (see above). We shall therefore endeavour, at some point, to speculate about the cultural, as well as theoretical, significance of the differences between the epistemological systems that arise from 'knowing' - 'believing', 'mò' - 'gbàgbò'.

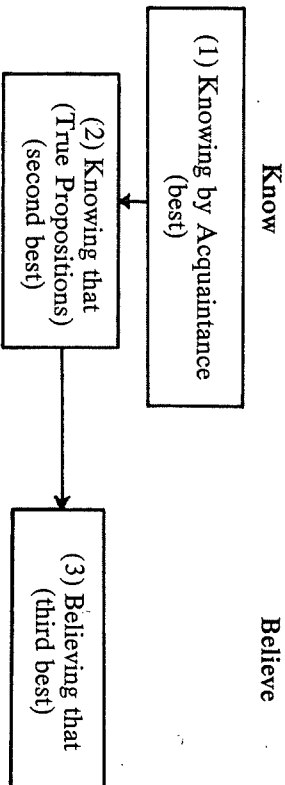
5. Relations and Comparisons Between 'Knowledge' and 'Belief'

Belief is often contrasted with knowledge... Knowledge is what we aim at in all our enquiries and investigations. But often we cannot get it. Belief is a second best. (Price: 72)

Our aim in this chapter is to do more than tabulate the various kinds of knowing and believing. We hope to arrive at representative theories of knowledge and belief, derived primarily from common usage. One point of these theories will be to specify the conditions or criteria that must be satisfied in order for a person to know or to believe something.

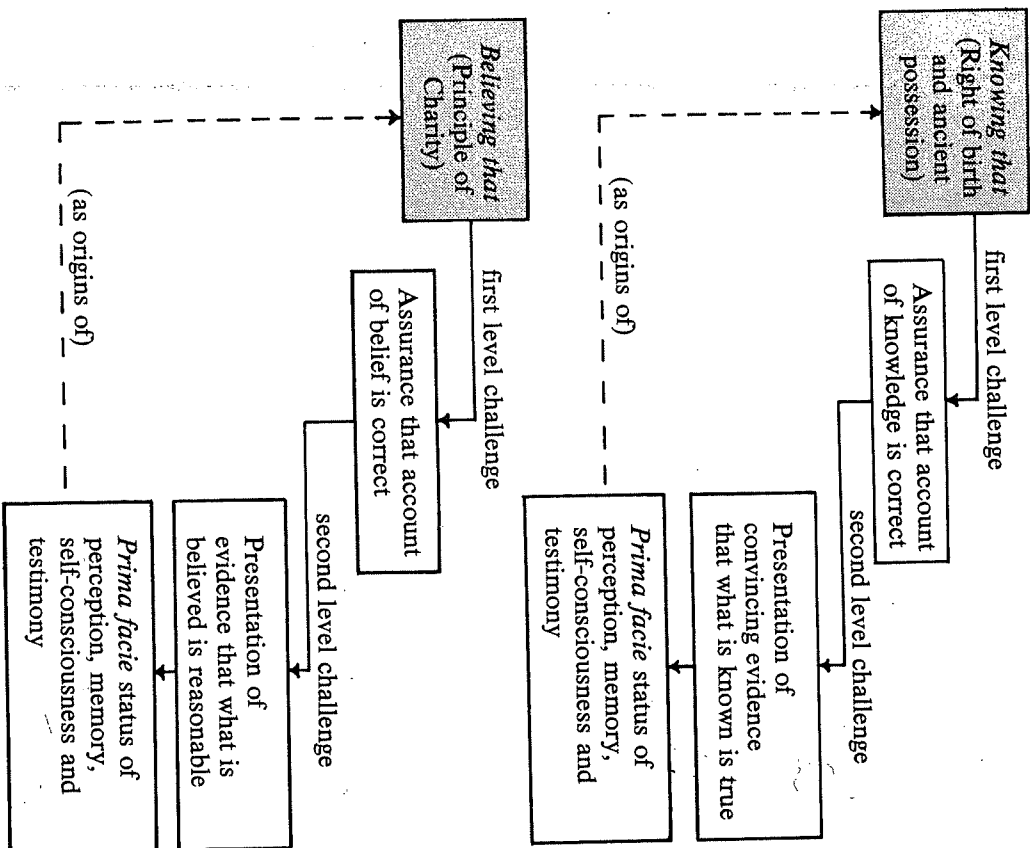
We have selected 'knowing that' as our paradigm of 'knowledge', and the correspondence theory of truth as the basis upon which the criteria for its verification or justification should be interpreted. Our choice was influenced by considerations that the former is the most common usage and is entailed by other usages, while the latter best represents the theoretical viewpoint of the 'average' English-speaking person. We have yet to make similar headway with 'belief'. We may prefer Price's methodological approach to Needham's, but we have still to determine whether any one of Price's meanings is primary, and the importance of testimony (and evidence generally) to it specifically.

Agreeing upon a primary meaning for comparative purposes is a fairly straightforward task. 'Most commonly, the verb "to believe" is followed by a that-clause' (Price: 38). That this is also the meaning suitable for a comparison with 'knowing that' is demonstrated by Price's arguments that there is no common basis on which to contrast the meanings of 'knowing' and 'believing a person', of 'knowing how' and 'believing', or of 'knowing' and 'believing in'. In other words, by a process of elimination, the only contrast remaining *is* between 'knowing that' and 'believing that' (as long as we bear in mind that 'knowing that' is itself contrasted with 'knowledge by acquaintance' as *its* second-best). Our English-language hierarchy, then, is actually three-tiered:



According to English usage, if a person 'knows that' X, then X must be true. The same does not hold with believing. What a person believes may be false. In fact every person in the world could believe X and it could be false.

Nevertheless, people do refer to a belief as 'reasonable' because there is at least a certain amount of evidence in support of it. And the ordinary presumption is that a reasonable belief more or less corresponds to whatever it is meant to represent.
A correspondence model for the verification or justification of knowing and believing may, therefore, be constructed along the following lines:



In each case the challenges to what is known or believed are two-tiered. The challenger is first concerned to determine whether the person has said what he in fact knows or believes. Once this has been established, if the challenger is still not satisfied, he will go on to challenge the knowledge or belief itself. The onus will then be on the person to present evidence that his knowledge is true, or that his belief is reasonable.

When Lehrer introduced Reid's *right of birth and ancient possession*, he made reference to an 'intrinsic guarantee of truth' that attaches to certain areas of experience. His favourite example was perception:

In general, men think there is very little chance that such beliefs⁷ are erroneous. If I believe I see something . . . then I shall believe there is so little chance I am in error that I readily repudiate any competing hypothesis and claim complete justification for my belief.

(Lehrer: 188)

Lehrer's rhetoric strongly implies that he is speaking on a culturally universal level, and this we would in principle question. Nevertheless even in culturally relative terms his point, expanded a bit for purposes of our special evidential interests, would be that in English-language culture information derived from perception, memory, self-consciousness and testimony is *prima facie* true.

The evidence a person has for a proposition is what justifies him in taking either a knowing or believing attitude towards it. But with reference to testimony, in particular, it is not clear how its role differs when comparing 'believing that' with 'knowing that'.

. . . each of us depends on testimony for almost all that he claims to *know* about anything which is beyond the range of his own first-hand observation and memory.

(Price: 113; our italics)

According to our ordinary way of thinking, testimony is one of our most important sources of *knowledge*.

(Price: 112; our italics)

What percentage of 'knowing that' is on the basis of first-hand observation? Most of the factual information people claim to 'know' from reading books, for example, is second-hand. That such information is in fact true is not, and often could not be, confirmed by the readers' first-hand experience. Yet, given ordinary usage, it is more often than not classified as 'knowing that'.

It may well be that much of the knowledge by description which we ordinarily

⁷Lehrer's use of 'belief' rather than 'knowledge' in this passage is a consequence of his revisionist theory of knowledge, in which what ordinary usage terms the latter he terms the former (Lehrer: 239).

claim to have is belief rather than knowledge, if only because so much of it depends on testimony, spoken or written, and the reliability of the testimony is often taken for granted without much or any investigation.

(Price: 73)

The physical and social sciences (including history) devote much of their time and energy to elaborating methodologies which may be used to verify or to justify 'knowing that' claims. But that is not the point at issue. What we are interested in trying to understand is why, in ordinary usage, many propositions that do not in fact fulfil the conditions of knowledge are normally referred to as if they do. With reference to 'believing that', Price has exonerated this practice by hypothesizing a Principle of Charity. But if Charity were extended to 'knowing that', the distinction between the two would collapse. Truth, not Charity, is a condition of knowing that.

The *right of birth and ancient possession* does provide *prima facie* support for knowledge based upon perception, etc. In this respect its role (with reference to knowledge) is analogous to the Principle of Charity (with reference to belief). But this analogy is only of passing interest, for it still offers no solution to the stubborn problem of how to determine, once correspondence is challenged, at what point sufficient evidence has been introduced to support a knowledge claim. The confusion in the English language about the epistemological status of testimony reinforces this point and perhaps even justifies regarding the problem as a dilemma.

6. The Onisègùn Explain 'Mò' in Yoruba-Language Discourse and Thought

(1) The one you use your own eyes to see and which your *òkòṅ* witnesses you that it is *òdíyó* – this is the best.

(2) It is clear in my eyes. This means that I have witnessed it myself. It is *òdíyó* that he does this thing... It is clear in your eyes.

In these two quotations the *onisègùn* state the conditions that must be satisfied for something to be regarded as *imò*.⁸ There appear to be two. The first is that the experience *must* be first-hand. The person who claims to *mò* must literally have seen the thing himself. 'You see (*ṛ*) it before you *mò* it.'

The verb '*ṛ*' refers to visual perception ('This one is clear in my eyes (*ojú*)'), and it is considered clearer and more reliable than other forms of sensation:

⁸The noun form of '*mò*'.

(3) The one you see is better.

(4) If you see something, the first time it smells, the second time it smells, and when you come across the smell the third time you will *mò* it. If it smells only once [and you do not see it], you will not *mò* it. You will simply say that *something* around is smelling.

(5) If you *mò* it [by touch], you have already *mò* [by sight] what you put there. If I close my eyes now, and I touch (*fí ọwọ́ kẹ́n*) this funnel, I will *mò* that it is a funnel. Or this cup. If I touch the cup and I *mò* it, it is because I have *mò* [by sight] it before.

(6) If you had not seen it before, and you touch it, you touch it in vain. Because the person you *mò* from before – if you do not see him but you touch him – you cannot *mò* him.

We conclude that perception has a *prima facie* status, in that it alone of all the senses is a necessary condition for *imò*.

We must now turn to the correlative element of cognition – the witnessing of the *òkòṅ* (*ẹ̀rí ọkòṅ*). This is the second condition that must be fulfilled in order to have *imò*.

(7) You *mò* this is a cupboard. If another person told you it was not a cupboard, you would insist it was a cupboard and that you *mò* it very well. The witness of your *òkòṅ* (*ẹ̀rí ọkòṅ*) would support you in saying that it is a cupboard. This white bottle – if they say it is black, you would *mò* very well that it is white. It is clear in your eyes that it is white. I *mò* that it is white.

Òkòṅ is the Yoruba word for both 'heart' and 'mind' or 'apprehension'. Although the former is identified as the physical correlate of the latter, the Yoruba often intend to give preference to one of the two meanings in discourse. In the above quotations the intended meaning is 'mind' or 'apprehension'.

Ẹ̀rí ọkòṅ – your mind witnessing something 'for' or 'to' you – indicates *self-consciousness*. But it also indicates *comprehension* and *judgement*. As well as seeing the thing first-hand, one must also comprehend what one is seeing and judge that one has done so:

(8) It means that your *òkòṅ* does not witness the thing – whether it is or is not. This is when you see something, but you are having two thoughts about it.

(9) You can be invited to go and visit a person. You could say, 'If you are going to so-and-so's house, I'm not going'. Your *ẹ̀rí ọkòṅ*⁹ tells you not to go.

⁹The meaning of this expression in certain areas of Yorubaland has been altered by the Christian habit of making it the equivalent of the English-language 'conscience'. We feel that restricting it to a moral sense is not representative, and that the original meaning is rendered more accurately by 'judgement'.

And if you are dragged there, and it happened there is a quarrel, you will say that you did not want to come, that your *eri okòn* told you not to come there. It is your *eri okòn* which tells you whether something is good (*dàra*) or bad (*bura*), and this is more important than accepting advice from someone. If your *eri okòn* speaks with you, it will be difficult for another person to persuade you from doing what you want to do.

(10) This is what warns one. If I like you, my *eri okòn* will tell me if you are not there [it will be responsible for my noting your absence]. But if I don't like you, and I want to do harm to you, and I see you and greet you cheerfully, yet my *eri okòn* will tell me that I don't like you.

Anything that I *mò* is *òdíró*. If the first quotation in this section of the paper (*ri + eri okòn* \supset *òdíró*) is compared with the first quotation below (*òdíró* \supset *ri + eri okòn*), it appears that the relationship between these two terms is a symmetrical one. The established manuals of translation (*etm*) translate *òdíró* as 'truth'. This we may provisionally accept, as long as we bear in mind that it is 'truth' as defined by the conditions stipulated by the above relationship:

(11) It is [emphasized] *òdíró* that this motor vehicle stands here. If people say that the motor vehicle does not stand here, you will say that you use your own eyes to see it – that it is *òdíró*. You should not have two thoughts.

Ódíró appears to be a property of certain forms of experience and of statements recounting that experience:

(12) If we are talking about something, some of it may mean nothing, and some may mean truth. Concerning speech: some have the gift of speaking, some people are known for telling lies, while some will be telling the truth. If you are speaking you may be telling lies or you may also be telling the truth.

When *imò* is challenged, an argument (*aríyàn jiyàn*) results. *Verification* is obtained by empirical testing (*o sèsése/kò sèsése*):

(13) If you see (*ri*) something and you say we should do it, I may say, 'Let us try it' – to see if it will be *sèsése* (possible). If it is not *sèsése*, we will say, 'Kò sèsése'. But that which we say is *sèsése* is what we lay our hands on [try] and that is [proves to be] *sèsése*.

Justification is obtained by explanation (*áláyé*):

(14) They can explain (*áláyé*) to each other. One [of the disputants] can say, 'This thing you say you *mò* – who has ever done this in your eyes before?' The other may reply that, 'On that day I was there with somebody X [expression for name of anyone]'

(15) The way they can take [to settle an argument] is that [asking of one disputant], 'What do you see (*ri*) that you say this?' He will explain (*áláyé*) it. [Then asking of the second disputant:] 'What you, the other person saw before [so that] you refused to agree with that person.'

The fundamental problem with regards to arguments over *imò* is that one disputant has not seen first-hand what the other claims to have seen. If it is possible for the disputants to empirically test one another's *imò* (as above), and thereby see for themselves whether they are *òdíró*, the argument may be resolved. But the Yoruba are well aware that such direct testing may not always be possible. In this case, the argument must be resolved by a more circuitous route. For, if testing is *not* possible, there is no way that the *imò* of one man can become the *imò* of another.

The first step is to encourage each of the disputants to state fully the *imò* to which he lays claim. Then, if the dispute is to be resolved, one of two things may happen. First, there may be another *witness* (the 'third person') to one of the contesting *imò*:

(16) I may say, 'I hear the sound of the rain.' Someone [else] will say, 'It is not true (*òdíró*) that you hear it' [e.g., there is a sound, but he disagrees about it being the rain]. If a third person says that he does not hear it, but hears the sound of a motor vehicle, you see now that the third person has cleared the matter.

Here the three are in the same place at the same time. But it may also happen that the 'third person was a witness to only one of the contesting *imò* (to complete the passage in quotation 14):

(17) And if that third person witnessed it [thereby verifying one of the contesting *imò*], the other man who is making the argument would say, '*Mò gbàgbò?*'

We shall come to the meaning of '*mò gbàgbò?*' shortly, but the 'third person' is an interesting phenomenon in its own right. Given the regularity with which it occurs in the explanations of the *onisègun*, it assumes the status of an epistemological idiom that may be compared, in a very rough and tentative manner, with the Ideal Observer (Brandt 1959) in contemporary moral philosophy:

(18) [If there is a dispute (*aríyàn jiyàn*) between two people:] the first were to say, he saw (*ri*) you dancing, but the second said you were not the one dancing. We can say he forgets. We would assume that he does not put his eye on things properly.

Suppose the person said that *was* what he saw. They could invite a third person to confirm [it], and who will tell him that he does not put his eye on things.

Is it possible for the two of them to agree that you were the person dancing?

Yes. This would mean that their *èmi*¹⁰ work together.

Is it not possible that the two of them could say that you are *not* the person dancing?

It is not possible.

The 'third person' fulfils the epistemological ideal of what a perfect observer would *mò*, if he existed. The 'third person' cannot pretend ignorance and his agreement, once given, cannot be withdrawn. But this raises a problem, again analogous to that faced by the Ideal Observer theory. Does the 'third person' agree because it is *òdíró*, or is the *òdíró* that with which the 'third person' agrees?

We said above that if testing is not possible, one man's *imò* cannot become another's (because he is not able to see it for himself). This means that if the 'third person' corroborates one of the disputants, the other – even if persuaded – cannot then also claim to *mò*. The most he can claim is that now he can *gbá* with the others, or *gbò* the others. It is therefore now appropriate that we deal with the conflation of these two terms – *gbágbò*.

7. The Onisègùn Explain 'Gbàgbò' in Yoruba Language Discourse and Thought

(19) You can ask whether I *gbá* that you should come tomorrow, that you should come or not come. I may reply 'Mo *gbá*'. This means 'I approve'.

(20) If a person did something and when they asked from me, I will say, 'I've already heard (*gbò*) [it]'. It means that he has told me.

The established manuals of translation make '*gbá*' equivalent to 'agree', 'accept', and 'receive'. '*Gbò*' is translated as 'hear', though as the ensuing quotations will indicate, it is a 'hearing' whose meaning encompasses understanding or comprehension of what is being said as well as auditory sensation. Their conjunct, *gbágbò*, which is our primary interest, would therefore literally translate as 'agreeing with what one hears' or 'receiving what one hears'. We prefer the slightly more figurative rendering of 'agreeing to accept what one hears from someone':

(21) What you use your own eyes to see – this is not what you are told. What you are told may not be true (*òdíró*). But if you use your own eyes to touch it, like this [gesture], you will understand (*yé*) it. You've used your own eyes to see it.

¹⁰ A term whose meaning can shift significantly between contexts, but here probably being used in the sense of '*mi*' – the locus and source of serious or 'deep' thought.

(22) If you have been noticing the behaviour (*iwá*) of a person, we can say, 'He can do a certain kind of thing'. But if he has not done such a thing in [before] your eyes, you will say, 'I *gbágbò*'. But if he has done such a thing in your eyes, you will say, 'I *mò*'. This means it is clear in your eyes.

(23) It means that your *òkòrùn* does not witness the thing – whether it is or is not.

'*Gbágbò*' is considerably more difficult to analyse and translate than *mò*, for it is used to characterize information gathered from and in a wider and more complex variety of circumstances. Nevertheless we may begin by saying that its negative conditions, as indicated by the above, are that one does not see the thing for oneself, and that consequently there is no opportunity for the *òkòrùn* to witness it. Its positive condition we shall for the moment leave simply as 'what you are told', what is second-hand.

Though the *onisègùn* do not explicitly identify different varieties of *igbágbò*,¹¹ we find it helpful (for purposes of analysis) and, we believe, also representative to distinguish four. If one reduces this verb to its two separate components, the application of negation produces four logical possibilities: (1) Hearing and Agreeing (p. q); (2) Hearing and Not-Agreeing (p. ~q); (3) Not-Hearing and Not-Agreeing (~p. ~q); (4) Not-Hearing and Agreeing (~p. q):

Hearing and Agreeing: This would represent successful communication, in that the hearer (in a speaker-hearer relationship) feels he understands what is being said and accepts it – with the status of *gbágbò* – as part of his own store of information.

There seem to be different degrees of at least this variety of *gbágbò*. The highest degree is expressed by *gbágbò jù*:

(24) It is the voice of the mouth [reference how convincing a person may be]. For example, when the *òyínbó* said that he was going to my house that time, he did not know that I was inside [watching him saying it while he was just outside the house]. If he doesn't know that I saw him, if he returns back home [without coming inside], and when he sees me at another time, if I ask him whether he has been to my house, if he says he has not, we may begin to say this [i.e. to worry about his honesty because being just outside is regarded as a visit]. He may continue to say it – that he did not come. After some time he may say that he did come. But if I ask him and he answers me 'in one voice' and says that he did come, I will agree (*gbágbò*) – more than that (*gbágbò jù*).

The word '*gbágbò*' by itself – unmodified – signifies a 'normal' or 'average' degree. There seems to be at least one idiomatic expression for

¹¹ The noun form of *gbágbò*.

less than normal. This is 'ó dá bí é ní pé', which the *oníségún* explain by:

(25) It means 'ó ní bí eni yíi sè kìnì yí' (it seems as if this person does this thing), but you did not see him do it. *They* say he did it.

Hearing and Not-Agreeing: This would be a situation in which the hearer feels he understands (*gbó*) what is being said but refuses to accept (*gbá*) that it is a correct or objective account. The most common example referred to by the *oníségún* is that of the person who is listening to a known liar (*tró*), though it is important to note the etn also translates this term as 'falsehood':

(26) But if you know that he is a liar (*eláke*), nobody will *gbágbó* him. They will say, 'He tells lies'. They will not answer him.

(27) This is what a person does not do while people continue to say he did it. You can say that they tell lies against such a person.

Not-Hearing and Not-Agreeing: This would be a situation in which the hearer does not understand what is being said (including, it appears, by himself) and therefore cannot affirm or agree with it. The *oníségún* frequently refer to *iyé méjí* (which may be idiomatically rendered as 'of two minds' or 'two thoughts') when the hearer is confused about the correct interpretation to be placed upon what was said:

(28) Yesterday, when I told you to come here today, you agreed to accept (*gbágbó*). But if I say again [on another occasion] that I've asked you to come, and if I come to think again that you will not come, this is *iyé méjí*. But as you have now come and I'm here for you, we both had *igbágbó* [that we should come]. A person with *iyé méjí* is someone who does not know what he said yesterday. This means that he may not carry out the promise which he made yesterday.

(29) This is what we call *iyé méjí*. He has no *igbágbó*.

(30) It means that your *ókòṅ* does not witness the thing – whether it is or is not. This is when you see something, but you are having two thoughts (*iyé méjí*) about it.

(31) If you hold something, do not take your hand away from it so as to hold another one. This is why *Olórún*¹² said we should ask for *igbágbó* without *iyé méjí*. If the *ókòṅ* of a person moves like that and like this [gesture indicating back and forth; oscillation] . . .

Not-hearing and Agreeing: The evidence supporting usage of the fourth of our logical possibilities is not as convincing. Perhaps the case of the fool, of the person who claims to have agreed and then makes statements that indicate he never understood in the first place, is a candidate:

¹²The supreme deity of the Yoruba.

(32) If a person is saying something, and if he goes on to say it like 'the word of animal', or the word of a foolish (*agó*) person, then people will come to say that 'that' is not how people should do things. 'That' is not how people usually say (*éé sí bẹ́ kán an wí*). 'This' is how people usually say. If he is a real person, he will know that what he has done that time was not good.

As with *mó*, *gbágbó* is associated, or its locus is, with the *ókòṅ*. This is indicated by quotation 30, and by the following:

(33) If the *éni*¹³ of a person does not stay on something which he is taught, [even] if this [physical] ear hears, he cannot understand (*yé*). It. You know that the hearing is in the *ókòṅ*. When you use the ear to hear what they teach you, it goes into the *ókòṅ*.

As the *oníségún* refer only to the *ókòṅ* and not the *éyí* *ókòṅ*, we infer that the service it performs is not the same. A reasonable interpretation would be that as the person does not witness the information in a first-hand manner, the most he can judge or decide is whether he understands and (however tentatively) agrees to accept someone's words. He is not in a position to determine *ótító*.

The objects of *gbágbó* – the things that one agrees to accept upon hearing them from someone – are the most difficult aspect of this complex term. It is easy enough to say 'anything that is second-hand', but once one recognizes that this may also include the whole of oral tradition, the analysis becomes potentially controversial. For it is oral tradition that has been stereotyped as the locus of *knowledge* in traditional cultures.

(34) We ourselves depend mainly upon *ítán* (etn. 'story'; 'history'). We will say that our fathers said this kind of thing has happened before. Those who are dead cannot *mó* what is happening now. And we cannot *mó* what they have done in the past . . . You can only know the one you see with your own eyes.

(35) This is what you hear from other people. This is what you don't *mó* but which you are saying. But if you don't hear it from people themselves, you cannot [should not] say it.¹⁴

(36) I say [mean] this [is something that] will happen. This means that something which 'our forefathers have been saying' is reliable (*òrò àgbà sẹ́*). This is like a prophecy (*á sọ rẹ́lẹ́*).¹⁵

(37) This is what you *gbó*. You may not understand it. You don't see it. But you *gbó* it.¹⁶

¹³See footnote 10 above.

¹⁴⁻¹⁷Each of these passages is meant to be an explanation of the following (in sequence) idioms used to signify an appeal to tradition: ¹⁴'*áwon kan nso wipe*'; ¹⁵'*áwon baba nla wa mada nso*'; ¹⁶'*agbó wipe*'; and (next page) ¹⁷'*áwon baba nla wa ni ó sọ éyí*'.

(38) This is an *àbí nìbí* (etm: 'traditional') expression. This is what my father has been saying [as contrasted with my own 'seeing'] in my presence.¹⁷

The practical value of oral tradition, as in the passage above comparing it to a prophecy or prediction, is that it may contain solutions to problems that arise in the future:

(39) If you are a person who asks many questions [i.e. places a priority on collecting information], you may ask a word from someone and you will keep on asking from three to four [more] people. If they tell you, you will know it more than someone who keeps quiet. You will know what you want from the words of these three to four men who answered your question. You will have one or two words [ideas] from what the people told you. Anyday a question is asked about these things, you will find an answer [i.e. by recalling the solutions to similar problems that you've learned on the basis of your past 'questions'] which is similar to the answer [solution] you give.

We shall have more to say about the cross-cultural consequences of the Yoruba classifying oral tradition as *gbàgbò* rather than *mò* in the next two sections of this chapter.

A second, closely related object of *gbàgbò* is the information conveyed in the context of a so-called 'formal' education:

(40) This is really the knowledge of putting *òkún* into something, which you go to school to learn. You know (*mò*) that your teachers don't come home with you. But when you get home and take your book and say, 'These are the things we learned today'. This is the same thing as 'Bayi ni àwọn bàbá míá wá sọ fun wá' ('This is what our forefathers told us'). It is putting *òkún* into things.

A third object of *gbàgbò* is so-called factual or 'book' information:

(41) In the past, when they taught you *oògùn* (etm: 'medicine'), or when an *ìtàn* (etm: 'story'; 'history') was told they put it 'inside' (*ínú*)¹⁸ [i.e. learned it]. It lived 'inside'. Whatever you are told as a story now, you put it 'inside' (*ínú*) book [i.e. it is being written down]. And it will appear there [in the book] forever. There is no reason for another person to tell the story again. You just take the book and begin to read it.

A fourth, and by no means the least important, object of *gbàgbò* is the vast amount of information we take in from other people which we do not *mò* and which is not part of the established oral tradition. This may be what a friend tells us he did in Lagos last week, what we read in the daily newspaper, or what we hear on the radio.

Òdíń is firmly linked to *mò*. There is no equally firm correlate of *gbàgbò*

¹⁷See footnote 14, above.

¹⁸A term that is at least as complicated as *òní*. See Hallen and Sodipo 1994. Here the idiomatic 'inside' must suffice if we are not to be led too far off the track of 'knowledge' - 'belief'.

but there are several terms that are frequently associated with it. They are '*ògbón*' (etm: 'wisdom'; 'sense') and '*òyé*' (etm: 'understanding'; 'wisdom'; 'intelligence').

(42) When you have a child you begin to teach him *ògbón*. When the father becomes old, then he will begin to say 'this' and 'this' are the things which they told us.

(43) This is what we call *oyé*. If a person is able to say what the elders (*agbá*) have been saying for the past five years or ten years [i.e. oral tradition], the people who are there will say, 'This child (*omódé*) has *oyé*'. It is *oyé* that we call *ògbón*, and *àgbàgbé* (etm: '?; 'not forgetting') and *làkàkàyé* (etm: '?; 'common-sense'). This is the something that makes you remember (*rántí*) all the things we have done.

We do not find it necessary to claim that *gbàgbò* is the only context in which they occur, or that it is a sufficient condition of the only meanings they have.¹⁹ We are only suggesting that it is at least significant that they do occur in the present context.

When *igbàgbò* is challenged, *àrìyàn jìyàn* (an argument) is again the likely consequence. *Veriřication* by means of empirical testing is a possibility, but we can now enlarge upon the circumstances outlined in the last section.

The speaker may lay claim to *mò*, while the hearer(s) have reservations because they themselves did not witness the affair. If the speaker's *imò* involves some testable consequences, *o seře/kò seře* may be invoked. However, if the test confirms the speaker's *imò*, the hearers would then say they too *mò* rather than that they *gbàgbò*. For they now have witnessed the thing themselves and are entitled to regard it as *òdíń*.

A second possibility is that the speaker only lays claim to *gbàgbò*. If some significant form of testing is possible, and his *igbàgbò* is confirmed, then all parties to the *àrìyàn jìyàn* - speaker and hearer(s) - are entitled to regard the information as *imò*.

If testing is *not* possible, if the only solution to an *àrìyàn jìyàn* is by means of the *justiřication* of someone's claim, things become much more difficult. For then the argument must be resolved on the level of *gbàgbò*.

(44) If four people are talking, if the first says, 'I agree (*gbá*)', and the second and the third. But the fourth does not agree. We will ask him why he does not agree with this. And, if he agrees, this would mean that all of us have agreed. Then we shall say, '*Papá*' (etm 544: 'the word has come together'). But 'the word has not come together' when a person still disagrees.

¹⁹We say this because from other contextual associations it may be that *ògbón* and/or *oyé* are the broader generic categories that sometimes contain both *igbàgbò* and *imò* as species.

'The word comes together' when all the contesting parties agree and the dispute is settled. And what must happen if this is to obtain is that the various parties agree that they have reached the *nwádi* of the matter:

(45) This is an *áryán jiyán*. People may ask them not to fight about this, but to go and find out from its *nwádi* (emr. ?; seek for base/bottom/cause/reason of the matter).

We suggest that *nwádi* is roughly equivalent to a correct understanding of the matter. But here again, one is unsure as to whether the proper formulation is that agreement automatically ensures that ('the' or 'a'?) correct understanding has been reached, or the reverse.

There are various routes to *nwádi*. To return to the possibility of the 'third person',²⁰ his having witnessed the *imò* of one of the contesting parties may be enough to convince the other(s) that they should *gbágbó*.

A second route is to appeal to the *iwá* (past public behaviour or moral character²¹) of a speaker:

(46) Because I have been moving with someone, I know all his *iwá*. I know what he could do and what he could not do. If another person should come and tell me that he does certain things, since I know his *iwá* I know whether he can do it or not. I will *gbágbó* that he does it. But if I do not know his *iwá*, then I will say I do not *gbágbó*.

(47) I *gbá* *o gbó* (*gbágbó* you) when I *mò* your *iwá*. But it is the one you see (*ɾɿ*) that is bigger [more convincing]. I see it with absolute certainty (*dájiú dájiú*) I *gbá* *ó gbó* but I did not see the thing. But what I see clearly (*kedere*) I know with certainty (*dájiú*).

(48) If they say someone did something, and if the second person says it is clear in his own eyes that the first person could not do such a thing, he will say, 'I *gbágbó* he could not do such a thing'. Or he will say, 'I *gbágbó* in that person, that he would not do such a thing'. Or he may say that, 'I *gbágbó* he could do it'. This is [means] that he knows his *iwá*.

(49) The difference between what I *mò* and what I *gbá* – the reason why you agree is that you have seen that thing or that the person who told you will never tell lies.

Obviously *iwá* must also play an important role when a hearer is first assessing a speaker's claims to either *imò* or *igbágbó*. But the *onifégún* make specific reference to it more frequently when a claim to *gbágbó* is disputed. (After all, even liars (*eléke*) may often tell the truth.) The important point, however, is that an appeal to *iwá* – if successful – cannot produce *imò*. It can at best end in *igbágbó* (for the hearer(s)).

A third route is the use of plain, unmitigated *áláyé* (explanation). But the

²⁰See page 63 above.

circumstances under which a hearer may ask a speaker to *sé áláyé* also vary. First, without necessarily casting aspersions on the speaker's character (who, by the way, is also judging the hearer's character), the hearer may honestly feel that he has not understood what the other person was saying ('Not-Hearing and Not-Agreeing'):

(50) If you are telling me something now, if you say everything without any stop and I don't understand what you are telling me, I will say, '*Sé áláyé* how this matter starts'. It is then you will tell me, line by line. If you are sending me on an errand, it is then that I will understand what you are asking me to do.

Such a positive result is somewhat optimistic, for the speaker may deliberately choose to give a *bad* explanation:

(51) There are bad (*burúkiú*) explanations. If I want to deceive you, I will give you bad explanations. If I don't want to deceive you, I will make good explanations for you. If I explain good things to you, it means I like (*férán*) you. If I want to deceive you, the explanation which I want to give you will not be good. Since you don't know whether what I'm saying is good or bad, these are the two types of explanations [bad and good; deceptive and non-deceptive].

It is not clear that a bad explanation *necessarily* implies a bad character (*iwá*). Error, incompetence, and perhaps even morally justifiable deceit are also possible. *Iwá* could only become relevant to the degree that it is possible to infer and condemn motives from past behaviour.

In any case, even if the speaker gives the best explanation he can, and the hearer listens as carefully as he can, it is still possible that the affair will end in a stalemate. The situation is still one of *áryán jiyán*. In such cases the recommendation of the *onifégún* is as eloquent as it is realistic:

(52) This may come out when we are arguing (*iyán yíá*). If we are trying to know the 'bottom' (*nwádi*) – if the words of three people are together and those of two [other] people are different, the words have not come together. If their words are not together, the only thing we can do is to be patient (*surú*) and to start looking for another 'bottom' of it.

8. Relations and Comparisons Between 'Mò' and 'Gbágbó'

It seems a safe generalization to say that the *onifégún* link *mò* to first-hand or direct experience, and *gbágbó* to second-hand experience or testimony. Hence, when a father passes on his own *imò* to a son, if it is something to which the son is not *himself* a witness, it is received (by him) as *igbágbó*. This may be exemplified by completing the passage that was partially quoted above (42):

(53) When you have a child you begin to teach him wisdom (*logbòṣin*). When the father becomes old, then he will begin to say 'this' and 'this' are the things which they told us. Whatever he has seen or heard, he will be saying [passing along] the same thing to his son. But the son has not seen all this. Whatever we have not seen but of which we are told is what we call 'this' and 'this' are the things they told us.

It also appears reasonable to conclude that information obtained on the basis of *mò* has a significantly greater degree of certitude (e.g. *dáin* as used on page 70 above) than information obtained on the basis of *gbágbó*:

(54) You will see that you use your own eyes to see (*rí*) it—that it is *òótó*. You should not have two thoughts of it.

It is possible for information obtained on the basis of *gbágbó* to become *mò*. A father may tell his son of a certain procedure to follow when faced with a certain problem. But it is not until the son actually puts his father's suggestion to the test and has the opportunity to see it for himself and have it witnessed by his *okón* that it *may* (it may fail the test) become *imò* for him. This also highlights the importance of testing. As the system has been expounded, there is virtually no margin for *imò* that has not been empirically confirmed.

* * * *

What is most intriguing is the degree to which this epistemological system (arising from the conditions of *mò* and *gbágbó*) differs from the supposed model of traditional epistemological systems – systems of information that incorporate a significant element of oral tradition. That model is itself somewhat controversial, for there are those who maintain that it is only incidentally empirical and instrumental in character (Beattie 1966a) and those who argue that it is, though not to a degree that makes it characteristically critical or objective (Horton 1967).

Those who defend the first alternative argue that analysing such a system *as if* it were structurally somehow scientifically empirical overlooks the symbolic, poetic, expressive, and magical elements that constitute its most distinguishing characteristics. The ritual elements of such information systems are there precisely because the people do not have the requisite empirical expertise at hand to do for themselves – on the empirical level – what needs to be done. Hence they *express* their desire that it be done in a symbolic form.

The second alternative argues for the essentially theoretical character of traditional thought. In other words, it really is meant to explain, predict and control events in the empirical world. But its character is flawed by the fact

that the established theories are assigned 'an absolute and exclusive validity'.

Much has been made of the scientist's essential scepticism toward established beliefs; and one must, I think, agree that this above all is what distinguishes him from the traditional thinker. (Horton: 168)

This underlying readiness to scrap or demote established theories on the ground of poor predictive performance is perhaps the most important single feature of the scientific attitude. (Horton: 169)

One theory is judged better than another with explicit reference to its efficacy in explanation and prediction. (Horton: 164)

Once a traditional theory has been developed it tends to remain in force indefinitely, and to undergo insignificant change. Often the members of the culture concerned can do nothing but appeal to tradition ('We believe it because the forefathers believed it'), when asked to explain or to defend the theory. 'Causal accounts are not worth giving for the beliefs of individuals who have simply been taught what their social group holds.' (Peel 1969: 71) Consequently the identification, abstraction and analysis of the structural elements and characteristics of theoretical systems, of explanations, tends to be relatively underdeveloped:

traditional thought has tended to get on with the work of explanation, without pausing for reflection upon the nature or rules of this work. (Horton: 162)

Each of the above alternatives has generated considerable controversy and opposition – from the other and from external sources.²¹ Our concern is not so much in adding to this debate as it is in trying to understand *why* our own model of a Yoruba theoretical system has come to be so much at variance with all of the above. For we have outlined a system that is more reflective, more theoretically attuned, more sceptical, and more empirical than had previously been entertained.

The refrain, 'What you are told may not be true', is so profoundly associated by the Yoruba with the *mò-gbágbó* distinction that it is clear they have learned it from 'experience' and do regard it as applicable to oral tradition. Given the added conditions that *imò* must be seen for oneself, and that *gbágbó* (which includes tradition) cannot qualify as *imò* unless one does, the evidence supporting an uncritical attitude towards tradition is no longer convincing.

However, before we are tempted into drawing sweeping comparisons or

²¹See Horton 1960; Goody 1961; Beattie 1966b; Horton 1967; Turner 1967; Goody and Wat 1968; Peel 1969; Pratt 1972; Horton and Finnegan 1973; Gellner 1970; Skorupski 1976; Goody 1977; Marwick 1973; Wiredu 1980; Hallen and Sodipo 1994.

conclusions, our own approach may be open to challenge for its own inadequacies. These must be weighed before we begin to take for granted the objectivity of our results. The most obvious is that our reporting of the *onişégún* is not representative. Either we have misinterpreted the significance of their remarks or our remarks during the course of the discussions persuaded them to speak in a manner in which they would not ordinarily.

We would argue against either of these alternatives. We have quoted them at length (see also Appendix) and so frequently to demonstrate that we are accurately conveying their viewpoint. Furthermore, they are men who are distinguished in their profession and relatively prominent in their community. They are no one's fool and cannot be enticed or misled into making pronouncements on subjects of which they are ignorant.

A second possibility would be that they have somehow been touched or influenced by a 'scientific' attitude or outlook that is not indigenous: This we also would reject. None of these men have undergone formal education or speak the English language. Consequently there is no significant avenue by means of which such influence could have been conveyed.

A third possible failing would be that, as the *onişégún* constitute a professional 'elite' in Yoruba society, it is misleading to take their viewpoint as generally representative of the society and its attitudes towards tradition, etc. If we had been encouraging them to speak specifically as *onişégún*, this complaint could be legitimate. But in the majority of the quoted passages they are deliberately endeavouring to report ordinary usage – to explain the attitudes of the average person towards the information he possesses.

A fourth possibility would be that our presentation of *mó* and *gbàgbò* and the relations between them is not representative because we place an emphasis upon certain components of the 'system' that is different from that assigned to them by either the *onişégún* or the average Yoruba. For example, because we have been conditioned to appreciate the value of empirical testing and verification, we seize upon and inflate the few vague references to it in the *onişégún*'s remarks and inflate their significance far beyond what was ever intended.

It is more difficult to make a convincing reply to this criticism than the others. We beg indulgence to delay the attempt until we have had the chance to take account of the next and final criticism. This has two parts: that actions speak louder than words, and that form cannot be adequately treated independently of content. The first part would argue that the greatest limitation to our methodology is the disproportionate emphasis placed upon how people describe and explain what they do. Virtually no

account is taken of comparing this with behaviour. It might therefore be the case that the emphasis placed upon the empirical by the remarks of the *onişégún* would be repudiated by their actions. For example, they may describe themselves as willing to declare hypotheses false, but practice would show that they have constant recourse to secondary elaboration.

The second 'part' would argue that it is, to put it politely, misleading to exaggerate the empirical and sceptical form of a system of information that permits, as component beliefs, things like incantations, witchcraft and a host of spiritual forces and powers. A truly empirical and/or sceptical system of information would have singled out and dispensed with such unempirical elements.

Let us first deal with 'actions speak louder than words', and suggest it should be reformulated as 'words should speak as loud as actions'. To the best of our knowledge there are virtually no published studies of the Yoruba conceptual system from an analytic point of view.²² Why is this? We would suggest that it is in some measure a consequence of the stereotype referred to above. For there is a feeling that there cannot be much of analytical interest or importance to find in a conceptual system that is 'traditional' (e.g. magical, insignificantly critical, etc.) in nature. But surely it is important to appreciate the perspectives the Yoruba themselves take upon what they are doing, particularly when we discover a much greater and more explicit emphasis on elements like the hypothetical, the empirical and the critical than had heretofore been imagined.

In the quoted passages the *onişégún* introduce numerous concrete examples (including many that obviously did happen or are happening in the room where the discussion is taking place). These are still in the form of 'words', but they are about as close as one can get to picturing actions with them. What is more important, however, is that they take the accounts of the *onişégún* well beyond the realm of epistemological or methodological platitudes. They provide action-oriented illustrations of a methodology intrinsic in the criteria of these two concepts.

As for form versus content, there already is an interesting, ongoing debate on this issue (Horton 1967; Gellner 1970; Hallen and Sodipo 1994). All we should like to add here is that it is possible for the social scientist to place *too much* emphasis upon a belief in incantations or in witchcraft. To refer again to the examples of the *onişégún*, it is clear that the information system also contains a large amount of theoretical elements and relations that are non-'magical'. It is important that the *onişégún* do not find it necessary to refer to 'magical' elements when elucidating the conditions of *mó*

²²See Sodipo 1973 and Abimbola and Hallen 1993.

and *gbàgbò* (From previous discussions we are convinced that this is not because they were cautious or secretive about making reference to such things.)

To come finally to the objection that this account may be guilty of ethnocentric emphases upon individual theoretical elements: it is an account of a theoretical *system* as well as of its component elements. Testing does not occur in isolation. It occurs as one possibility when there is a controversial information claim. We feel that the importance we have assigned to testing in our own analyses reflects the importance assigned to it in the remarks of the *oniṣégún* relative to other theoretical elements (*òṣù, àlàyé, iwá, oḡbón, papò, gbàgbò*, etc.).

We therefore feel that this presentation of a Yoruba theoretical system is representative and should at least have the consequence of making the academic fieldworker take another look at how these criteria may work out in practice. The system that this chapter presents in outline form is radically different from the model assumed appropriate to traditional cultures. If that difference is not a consequence of our faulty methodology, then it represents what the *oniṣégún* really do think. If so, it is extremely important to pay careful attention to how *they* apply *this*²² system in practice.

9. Comparisons of the 'Knowledge'-'Belief' Distinction with the 'Mò'-'Gbàgbò' Distinction

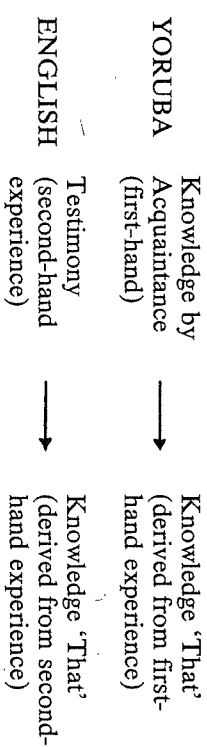
The *oniṣégún* do not explicitly identify varieties of *mò* that are immediately comparable to 'knowing that', 'knowing how', etc. However this does not mean that it is impossible to say the equivalent of 'Mò *mò* that' or 'Mò *mò* how' in Yoruba.

It is possible to identify several varieties – or perhaps levels – of *mò* indirectly, by means of *òṣùtò*. Certainly the relationships between 'know' and 'true' and between '*mò*' and '*òṣùtò*' seem remarkably similar. Both indicate epistemologic certainty and both apparently express a correspondence: between what is known/*mò* and whatever actually *is/was* the case. From the quotation on page 62 above, it appears that *òṣùtò* is only different in that it may apply *both* to a certain kind of experience and *also* to propositions recounting that experience. An English-language speaker would not normally describe experience as 'true'. 'True' is a term reserved for propositions.

²²Without immediately importing alien notions of meaningful behaviour, scientific method, functional relevance, or even of 'common' sense.

When casting about for English-language equivalents, if one considers the conditions of *mò* (*ṛt + ẹ̀rì ọ̀kọ̀n*) and couples these with the usages of *òṣùtò*, it appears that the most accurate model would be a combination of 'knowledge by acquaintance' and 'knowledge that'. The English-language conditions of knowledge by acquaintance were sufficient first-hand experience of something so that the person could recognize it again. This first-hand element is certainly compatible with the conditions of *mò*. Furthermore, in the Yoruba system it is only when I have made the acquaintance of a thing that I am entitled to claim that I *mò* something of it in propositional form ('knowledge that'). (If the first-hand element is lacking, the appropriate term would be *gbàgbò*.) This means that for the Yoruba it is impossible to have the equivalent of 'knowledge that' of something one has not 'known by acquaintance'. Or the other way round, 'knowledge by acquaintance' is a prerequisite to (or condition of) 'knowledge that'. On the other hand, in the English-language system the role of testimony or *second-hand* information in 'knowledge that' is enormously important. In English, knowledge by acquaintance is not a sufficient condition of knowledge that. This will shortly become a key element in our comparison of the two systems.

Knowledge – Ìmọ̀

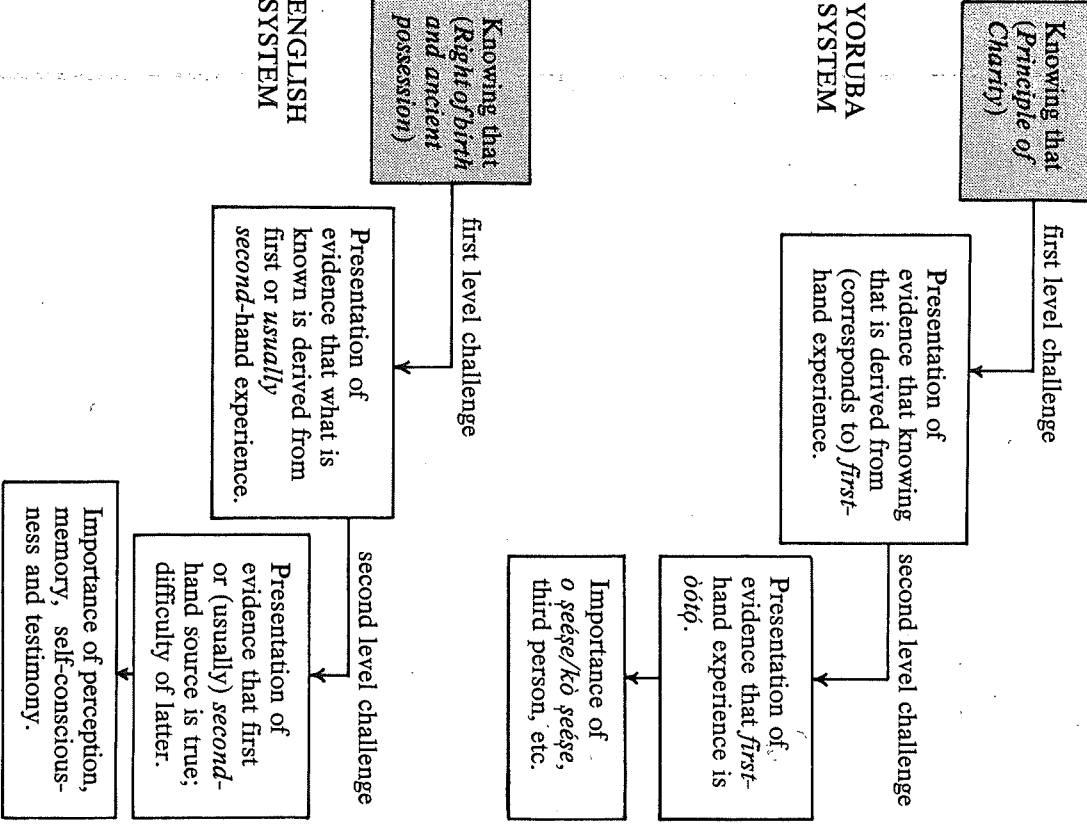


We used the term 'correspondence' just above, and the Yoruba system does display elements of Correspondence theory. Statements recounting *ìmọ̀* are presumed to correspond to what one has seen and comprehended. But there does not seem to be a Yoruba equivalent of *the right of birth and ancient possession*. This was said to provide a *prima facie* justification for the 'traditional knowledge' a man imbibes but does not explicitly verify simply by virtue of being the member of a certain society. As we have remarked, such 'knowledge' would be classified in the Yoruba system as *ìgbàgbò*. The role of testimony (of second-hand information) on the level of *ìmọ̀* is not significant.

In practice it does seem to be the case that a person is most often called upon to justify his claim to *mò* when it is challenged. Perhaps it therefore is

appropriate to hypothesize a Yoruba Principle of Charity on the level of *mọ*. For it would be unrealistic to presume the system requires the verification of every claim to knowledge, all the time.

Verification of Knowledge/Imọ



It is not clear whether *mọ* is regarded as the equivalent of a private mental state or whether it is dispositional or whether it may be both. More detailed study and analysis of the psychology and physiology underlying the Yoruba epistemology would be required.

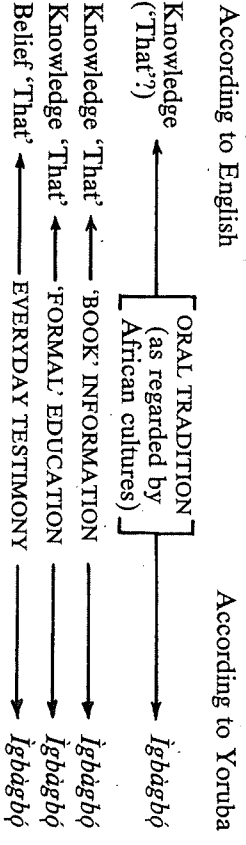
Comparisons between the varieties of 'believe' and 'gbàgbò' also are possible on a selective basis. Since the *iwá* of a speaker may always be a consideration, the most accurate English-language model would be a combination of 'believing a person' and 'believing that'. In English either is subject to degrees and in Yoruba, as we have suggested, so would be the equivalent of their combination. A person's willingness to *gbàgbò* what someone is saying is a function of how sure that person is of the speaker's *iwá*.

If our four 'logical' varieties of *gbàgbò* are representative, then the latter two ('Not-Hearing and Not-Agreeing' and 'Not-Hearing and Agreeing') characterize negative *gbàgbò* - situations in which there is no *gbàgbò*. And the second variety ('Hearing and Not-Agreeing') is appropriate to a situation where the hearer makes a negative assessment of a speaker's character and so refuses to *gbàgbò* what he says.

The *oníṣẹ̀gùn* do not articulate a subsidiary usage of *gbàgbò* that could be equivalent to 'believing in' - to an absolute, degreeless conviction or commitment to another person or creed. Nor would it be helpful to suggest that this may be found on the level of *mọ*. A hearer can *mọ* the *igbàgbò* of another only if he can see and witness it for himself. The element of 'faith', of 'trust' in an external source, is no longer there.

Does *gbàgbò* function as a propositional attitude? If our 'figurative' rendering of it into English ('agreeing to accept what one hears from someone') is acceptable, then clearly what speakers say and listeners 'hear' are propositions. It is when one compares believe and *gbàgbò* with reference to their objects, the classes of propositions towards which they may be attitudes, that the significant differences occur.

CATEGORIES OF INFORMATION



We have previously remarked upon the erroneous English-language model that insists African propositional attitudes towards oral traditions are best translated as the equivalents of 'knowledge'. We also pointed out that, as the Yoruba regard the contents of 'book' information and 'formal' education as extensions or relations of oral tradition, they also are classified as *igbágbó*. Therefore it is apparently only with reference to the status of 'everyday' testimony that the two systems agree.

In English, verification or justification of belief is usually called for when it has been challenged. Otherwise a Principle of Charity is implicitly operative. In Yoruba *árinván jirván* also effectively represents a challenge. We therefore suggest that it is reasonable to hypothesize a parallel Principle of Charity.

We find an interesting difference in emphasis between the two systems when it comes to the justification of belief. The Yoruba system of *aláyé* (explanation) strikes us as much more listener-oriented. In the English-language system the primary emphasis is upon the speaker's justifying his belief by means of appeals to other beliefs or to *prima facie* evidence derived from perception, memory, etc. In the Yoruba system all participants to a debate are *explicitly* called upon to provide whatever relevant *igbágbó* and information they may possess, and all are *explicitly* called upon to judge the outcome.

Again, it is not possible to make any determinate decision with reference to whether *gbágbó* is used to indicate a disposition, a private 'mental' state or some combination of the two. More research and analysis is required.

We have now reached a point where it is possible to compare the English (know-believe) and Yoruba (*mò-gbágbó*) systems. Let us first deal with the obvious similarities: (1) there is something first-hand about know and *mò*, and second-hand about believe and *gbágbó*, in both systems; (2) there is greater certitude attached to know and *mò* than to believe and *gbágbó*, in both systems; (3) it is possible for information that is belief and *igbágbó* to become knowledge and *imò*, in both systems.

We previously suggested that the English-language system is three-tiered. We would say the same for the Yoruba one, though the content of each tier is different:

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <p><i>MÒ</i></p> <p>(1) <i>Mò</i> (best)</p> | <p>→</p> <p>(2) <i>Gbágbó</i> that may be verified (<i>o seése/ko seése</i>) (<i>second best</i>)</p> | <p><i>GBÁGBÓ</i></p> <p>(3) <i>Gbágbó</i> that may only be justified (<i>aláyé</i>) (<i>third best</i>)</p> |
|--|---|---|

Gbágbó that may be verified is *gbágbó* that may become *mò*. *Gbágbó* that is not open to verification (testing) and must therefore be evaluated on the basis of justification (*aláyé, papò*, etc.) cannot become *mò* and consequently its *óhò* must remain indeterminate.

The point of difference between the two systems that we find to be of greatest significance is the relative role of testimony or second-hand information. In the Yoruba system any information conveyed on the basis of testimony is, until verified, *igbágbó*. In the English system a vast amount of information conveyed on the basis of testimony is, without verification, classified as 'knowledge that'. Much of the latter is information that the individual concerned would not even know *how* to verify. Yet it is still 'knowledge that'.

How ironic, then, that the model of African thought systems produced by English-language culture should typify them as systems that treat second-hand information (oral tradition, 'book' knowledge, etc.) as though it were true, as though it were knowledge! This is precisely what the Yoruba epistemological system, as outlined above, outspokenly and adamantly refuses to do. But the English-language epistemological system does – grossly. Therefore it, in the end, fits its own model for traditional thought systems better than Yoruba ever can!

10. Final Comments on the Transitional Indeterminacy of Propositional Attitudes

In this paper we have been describing and analysing Yoruba terms with English-language meanings. This is a practice about which Quine would have serious reservations, unless one is prepared to acknowledge the accompanying indeterminacy. This, to a degree, we are prepared to do. But we shall argue, *contra* Quine, that our translations of Yoruba propositional attitudes into the English language are *sufficiently* determinate to demonstrate that such 'attitudes' are not universal.

A preliminary consideration should be whether one is justified in regarding *mò* and *gbágbó* as propositional attitudes in the Yoruba language. The em may translate them as such, but does our own data and analysis confirm this? (More extreme would be to ask whether the category 'propositional attitude' need be universal.) We feel that sufficient evidence is presented in this chapter to support the common association of these two terms with propositions in a manner closely resembling their English-language counterparts. (Though we also noted that *mò* may have experience as well as propositions as its object.)

latter open to alternate interpretations. One may worry over empirical 'contents' and *infitum*. One may squeeze criteria of every drop of behavioural reference. The margin that remains is *still* unmanageable when it comes to providing a final translation.

We disagree, and suggest that the analyses presented in this chapter justify that disagreement. Theoretical translation is extremely difficult but it is not so radically indeterminate. Neither is it totally determinate. It falls somewhere in between, and may vary with the term. Nevertheless there are guidelines to follow. There are measures to take which may provide a clearer indication of alien theoretical meaning in the language of translation.

11. Conclusion

The alien who refers to a bilingual dictionary and relies upon its single term equivalents will likely presume that the objects and conditions of the two terms are the same. One is therefore led to wonder how frequent the occasions are on which one may find a Yoruba speaking English words but assigning them Yoruba-language criteria and objects ('meanings'), or the reverse? And how serious the consequent misunderstandings may be?

In this chapter we feel that we have made a case for the following:

- (1) That certain techniques may be borrowed from the philosophical 'school' known as conceptual analysis and utilized with value in cross-cultural, conceptual comparisons.
- (2) That indeterminacy on the level of theoretical translation is a serious problem. However there are measures that may be taken to reduce it to a level where significant determinate translation of theory becomes possible.
- (3) That the analyses and comparisons made between 'know' and 'mò' and between 'believe' and 'gbagbò' demonstrate that their meanings are significantly different.
- (4) That these differences are sufficient to justify our concluding that propositional attitudes are not universal. It is therefore hazardous to take the propositional attitudes of one language as paradigms for the propositional attitudes of other languages.
- (5) That the conceptual systems of alien languages – including those of so-called 'traditional' cultures – have implicit in them alternative epistemological, metaphysical, moral, etc. systems that are of philosophical interest in their own right.

- (6) That these conclusions are incomplete (not indeterminate!). Many interesting comparisons between the two systems as presented remain to be made, but considerations of time and space force us to conclude at this point.