



# **TIME AND PUNCTUALITY: CAMEROONIAN AND AMERICAN CULTURAL SCRIPTS**

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## INTRODUCTION

- ❑ Various cross-cultural studies have addressed multiple cultural aspects of European and Asian countries with fewer cross-cultural studies of Western and African speech communities within the NSM approach (Ameka, 1987).
- ❑ No previous research compared African and Western conceptions of time and punctuality within the framework of NSM approach and the theory of cultural scripts.
- ❑ The paper sets out to untwist the cultural meanings and values of these concepts and cross-culturally compare them so as to balance “cultural otherness” and to ameliorate cross-cultural communications between Africans and Westerners.

# THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

- The Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) uses culture-free lexical semantic primes for semantic analyses.
- The sixty or so culture-free semantic primes include: I, YOU, SOMEONE/PERSON, PEOPLE, THINK, KNOW, WANT, FEEL, SEE, HEAR, THIS, THE SAME, OTHER ONE, TWO, SOME, ALL, MANY/MUCH GOOD, BAD, etc. (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2007:3)
- The theory of Cultural Scripts: technique for articulating cultural norms, values, and practices using the NSM Metalanguage of semantic primes as the medium of description (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2007:6).

# DATA

## I. PRIMARY DATA SOURCE: 65 INFORMANTS

- ✓ 50 Yaoundé city dwellers interviewed at random
- ✓ 15 informants ( shepherds and farmers )living in different villages of the Adamawa region of Cameroon
- ✓ 10 American Peace Corps Volunteers serving in Cameroon

## II. SECONDARY DATA SOURCE:

- ✓ Chinua Achebe's *THINGS FALL APART*

## DATA FROM ACHEBE'S *THINGS FALL APART*

- “During the planting season Okonkwo worked daily on his farms **from cock-crow until the chickens went to roost** .p.9
- “Yam, the king of crops, was a very exacting king. **For three or four moons** it demanded hard work and constant attention **from cock-crow till the chickens went back to roost**.p.15
- “I shall wait too. It is almost dawn. **The first cock has crowed**.p.41
- “**The first cock had not crowed**, and Umuofia was still swallowed up in sleep (...) p. 45

## RESULTS

- For many Cameroonians time is perceived as an easily possessable asset: they are masters of their time.
- Some traditional Cameroonians still use natural elements and events to estimate time.
- Americans view time as an easily losable valuable that requires good management for efficiency.
- African and Western conceptions of punctuality are equated with their conceptions of time.

# AMERICAN CULTURAL SCRIPT OF TIME

[people think like this:]

when a person has something to do, it is good if this person can think like this:

I know that time is something that moves moment after moment

I will do this thing now

because I want to do other thing after now

and I do it at that time

# CAMEROONIAN CULTURAL SCRIPT OF TIME

[ people think like this:]

when a person has something to do, it is good if this  
person can think like this:

I know that time is something that moves towards me

I can have it when I want

If I want to do some things I do them when I want at the  
same moment

# WESTERN CULTURAL SCRIPT OF PUNCTUALITY

[ people think like this:]

when a person has something to do, it is good if this  
person can think like this:

I know that time is something that moves moment after  
moment

If I have something to do, it is good to do it when I say I  
will do it

# AFRICAN CULTURAL SCRIPT PUNCTUALITY

[ people think like this:]

when a person has something to do, it is good if this

person can think like this:

I know that I can have time to do this thing

If I have something to do, it is good I do it when I want

# DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

- ❑ There are cultural misunderstanding between Cameroonians and Americans on the conception and translation of time and punctuality as couched in their respective cultural scripts.
- ❑ “African time” and “African punctuality” contrasted with “Western time” and “Western punctuality” are rooted on the cultural pragmatics of each group in attempts to semantically encode these notions.
- ❑ The traditional Africans’ reliance on natural elements and events for time-checking could justify the concept of “African time” and “African punctuality” we frequently hear today.
- ❑ These conceptual interpretations should not be viewed as derogatory on the part each group but be savored based on the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis.

## REFERENCES

- Ameka, F 1987 *A Comparative Analysis of Linguistic routines in two languages: English and Ewe* . Journal of Pragmatics 11, 299-326 North-Holland.
- Goddard, C and Wierzbicka ,A 2007 *Semantic primes and cultural scripts in language learning and intercultural communication*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 105-12.

*Thanks for your kind ATTENTION!!!*