Summary of a Conference Discussion on Cross-Cultural Research

A Conference on Cross-Cultural Research, with Special Reference to Archival Materials, was held at HRAF headquarters in New Haven on February 9-10. The conference consisted of four sessions. No formal papers were presented, although background papers which had been prepared by the HRAF staff were made available to the participants. These papers included an analysis of cross-cultural sampling and an annotated bibliography of cross-cultural research.

The sessions were organized as follows:

Session I—George P. Murdock, Chairman
Inventory and analysis of cross-cultural research during the past decade.

Session II—Harold Driver, Chairman
Problems in cross-cultural research (including group identification, sampling, reliability, comparability, and theory).

Session III—John Roberts, Chairman
Future directions for improvement of tools (including bibliographies, gazetteers, indexing, files, precoded data, machine manipulation, and theory development).

Session IV—Fred Eggan, Chairman
Summary and recommendations.

In addition to the HRAF staff (C. S. Ford, F. W. Moore, F. M. LeBar, H. C. Koh, R. O. Lagace, J. W. Steffens, J. M. Beierle, G. R. Bedell, and T. J. O'Leary), the participants were:

Dr. Harold E. Driver, University of Indiana, Anthropology
Dr. Fred Eggan, University of Chicago, Anthropology
Dr. Ward H. Goodenough, University of Pennsylvania, Anthropology
The conference was supported by NSF grant No. GS 1457.

The first three sessions of the conference covered a wide range of topics relating to needs for new and better tools for cross-cultural research, with special reference to the role that HRAF and other institutions could and should play in the development of these tools. The final conference session was devoted to summarizing and recapitulating the recommendations and suggestions of the three previous sessions.

The following suggestions were made, discussed, and agreed upon by the group:

1. HRAF should develop a set of 60 Quality Control Sample files, selected by probability sampling techniques.
2. New and better quality control features should be built into these files.
3. Unit identification techniques should be developed and incorporated into these files.
4. The various institutions and individuals that now possess coded cross-cultural data should make an effort to place these data on the public record. HRAF should take on the function of storing these machine-readable codings and should provide for their dissemination on demand.
5. Computer applications to cross-cultural research and information retrieval should be explored and exploited, and HRAF should take the lead in this area.

6. A file of cross-cultural findings should be established by HRAF as soon as possible.
7. Bibliographic research on a broad scale, with machine handling, should be investigated.
8. HRAF should continue its work in producing ethno graphic gazetteers.

The Quality Control Sample concept is based on two primary considerations. First, the selection of the 60 cultures to be included is to be determined by random techniques from a two-stage selected universe. Second, these are to be "model" files, with maximum literature coverage, full quality control, and unit identification data.

The purpose of the Quality Control Sample is to provide a universal probability sampling unit which will be useful for almost every cross-cultural research problem. It will serve as a convenient starting point by providing a carefully planned and executed minimal sample unit for preliminary research, which can also serve as a check on larger or less randomly selected samples. In view of the fact that these 60 files will have relatively complete descriptions of the cultures involved, the Quality Control Sample will be adequate for many problems without further research. It will also be of great value to beginning researchers and students who are unfamiliar with sampling techniques and who will thus be able to proceed directly to their research problems without being forced to expend a large effort on sample selection.

Whiting stressed the importance of processing all available data, including medical, ecological, and demographic data, and of keeping up to date on all materials. Naroll outlined the agreed-upon procedure for selecting these files. The 60 files are to be distributed as follows (based on Murdock's Ethnographic Atlas): 12 from Africa, 8 from the Circum-Mediterranean and Europe, and 10 each from Asia, Oceania, and North and South America. The specific file possibilities in each area will then be determined on the basis of objective standards, by establishing minimum requirements of available literature. From this list of file possibilities for each of the 60 areas, the final selection will be made randomly and independently of HRAF (by Naroll). This
will constitute a multiple-stage probability sample. It was agreed that a second sample of 60 should be selected for other purposes, though HRAF will not be expected to produce files on this entire group. The importance of providing at least a small sample of files on modern homogeneous states was stressed by Textor, Janda, and White.

The quality control aspect centers around author identification, description of field circumstances, and orientation. It was suggested by Naroll that the quality control system developed at HRAF, primarily by Hesung Koh for the Korean Social Science Bibliography Project, should form the basic starting point for a sharply expanded emphasis on this aspect. At this point we have no firm knowledge as to what quality control factors are most significant for data control, consequently we should seek to cover as many factors as possible with a view toward eventually dropping some nonsignificant factors. Naroll further proposed that HRAF use author questionnaires or even interviews, to obtain as complete data as possible. The starting point for collecting these data will of course be the files themselves, as well as basic reference works such as Who's Who and other academic directories. Murdock and Spiro commented that there were limits to the value of this information, and that this value should be considered in terms of the amount of time and money spent on obtaining it. Goodenough and Naroll provided instances of the effect of the age and sex of the investigator on the problem of gathering data and on the reliability of the data. The significance of the nationality of the author, the role of the author, and his knowledge of research language were discussed. Whiting commented on the use of pidgin in field research. Goodenough suggested that journal editors be contacted and influenced to require that data quality control information be published along with articles. This suggestion met with general approval. Moore stated that certain aspects of data quality control were likely to be somewhat unflattering to the author, and that information would have to be gathered from published sources or, if not, with the consent of the author involved to avoid possible misunderstandings which could damage HRAF's relations with field workers. Also HRAF has to avoid any appearance of "investigating" researchers. Psychiatric and racial factors were mentioned by Murdock and Köbben as important but sensitive issues that would have to be handled very circumspectively.

It was agreed that unit identification techniques and procedures should be instituted which would provide the researcher with as much detail as possible as to the exact provenience of data. Naroll suggested that special slips should be prepared, which would give information on: mutual intelligibility of dialects, state membership, contact gaps, provenience date, the date as of when the data are (or were) valid, and ecological adjustment. Goodenough stated that the exact location where the ethnologist made his headquarters is significant. Moore indicated that HRAF already does this to a degree, but that the procedures can be formalized and refined. Increased use can also be made of subheads to indicate time and place. HRAF will attempt to devise rules and procedures for standardizing unit identification factors.

The problem of coordinating and making available machine-readable codings from various researchers and research centers was discussed. Murdock proposed that HRAF should take on the function of storing and disseminating on demand copies of punch cards and computer tapes. Whiting agreed, but said that for the program to be effective, HRAF would also have to distribute code definition information. Janda suggested that computer programs could also be supplied. Murdock suggested that HRAF is ideally suited for this role, since it has an established distribution system, is itself the central organization, and has wide contacts and experience in this sort of operation.

Janda stated that the above operation would provide an ideal way for HRAF to begin computer applications to archival data. Textor commented that a great deal is being done in this area and that it is important that HRAF be aware of these developments. Naroll and White emphasized the important part that computers will play in information services of the future and stressed that HRAF should begin now to plan for these developments.

Whiting asked Ford about the experience HRAF had had with an experimental theoretical file in the past. Ford said that it had worked out reasonably well, but that the type of data
then available had not created much interest. He suggested a file of cross-cultural findings. This file would bring together the published and unpublished cross-cultural studies, organized by Outline of Cultural Materials topics. Moore suggested that it would be useful to have cross references to the specific area files. Whiting agreed that this would be highly valuable. There was general agreement that this is a high priority project.

Bibliographic research and related problems were discussed at some length. Murdock suggested that keeping up a comprehensive bibliography is a job beyond HRAF's means, and that in any case it is not necessarily within HRAF's preferred role. Janda felt that HRAF could profitably start on a limited basis, possibly with the current year's new bibliographic content, and then gradually expand its coverage. Naroll felt that additional bibliographic coverage was badly needed for certain areas, particularly for parts of Asia and Europe, where no adequate bibliographies are available comparable to HRAF's Ethnographic Bibliographies of North and South America. Murdock felt that general bibliographic service is more properly a librarian's job. Several people dissented from this view, stating that librarians are not doing an adequate job of it now and cannot be expected to do so in the future. Ford commented that the Peabody Museum at Harvard, which has been maintaining a comprehensive ethnographic bibliography, is about to discontinue it because the job is getting too large to handle. It has been suggested that HRAF is the appropriate institution to take over this function. No formal consensus was obtained on this point, but it appears that HRAF should maintain an active program of preparing area ethnic gazetteers. LeBar presented facts on his current proposal for a gazetteer of the ethnic groups of insular Southeast Asia. Spiro commented that this activity is one of HRAF's most widely appreciated efforts. Murdock called attention to the need for including Dutch anthropologists in the current project. LeBar replied that this has been done.

In addition to the specific recommendations detailed above, the group discussed a wide range of subjects relating to cross-cultural research. The two most prominent topics were unit identification and sampling techniques, Naroll, Whiting, and others debated the various approaches to unit identification with special reference to Naroll's cultunit concept. Probably the most basic findings of this discussion were that the participants are aware of the problem and that solutions are gradually being found. There was general consensus that identifying and working with the most localized group possible (depending on the particular research problem) provide the most satisfactory unit for comparative research. Goodenough pointed to the differences in social organization from village to village even in relatively homogeneous societies. Driver remarked that these factors depend on the nature of the problem and the type of comparison involved.

Sampling techniques were discussed primarily in light of the recent emphasis on more sophisticated statistical techniques. Driver and Eggan commented on the difficulty of keeping up with the latest developments in this area. Udy remarked that sociology is equally concerned with these problems. Roberts reported on the results of a new summer program to improve the statistical background of new anthropology students. It was generally agreed that probability and random sampling techniques are growing in importance, though Driver was unconvinced of the randomness possible in this type of research. Another topic was the growing importance of precoded material and the need for some means of access to machine-readable codings produced by researchers in various places. This growing body of coded data can have a most important effect in providing a cumulative and constantly-growing base for the rapid expansion of cross-cultural research in the future.
Behavior Science Notes regularly reports news of the activities of HRAF in facilitating research in the behavior sciences. In addition, the editors welcome contributions from other scholars, in particular those reporting methodological or theoretical results of cross-cultural research, preliminary results of field research, and descriptive or theoretical research based on substantive ethnographic data. Annotated bibliographies on specific areas or topics of ethnographic interest are especially welcome. Contributions should not exceed 50 manuscript pages, and articles of 25-30 manuscript pages in length are preferred.

BOOK REVIEWS
Behavior Science Notes will list and occasionally review books, monographs, and longer articles reporting on cross-cultural research. Studies employing a sample large enough for meaningful statistical techniques will be given preference. Address all books and inquiries to Book Review Editor, Behavior Science Notes, Box 2054, Yale Station, New Haven, Conn. 06520.

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