

CHECKING THE ANALYSIS

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Purpose

The purpose of an analysis check is to assess a preliminary analysis made in the classroom, apart from the society whose music is being studied. In this presentation the focus is on an initial checking session to determine what melodic intervals are significant to the members of that society. The music systems investigated are only those which have no written tradition and no tutoring process; that is, the composers and performers are unaware of their music's structure (in terms of fragments such as melodic intervals, pitch inventory, etc.).

Data for preliminary analyses were collected on tape and supplied by the professor. Students did not collect these data and had no personal contact with the people whose music they were studying until the following summer's checking sessions.

Etic transcriptions of the taped songs were made, and then the basic tenets of emic analysis¹ applied in order to form tentative conclusions as to whether the intervals heard and notated were emic, that is to say, whether they would be considered significant by the musicmakers of that society. If significant, the intervals in question had identity as separate units in the music system. ("Systems" referring to a network of controls which traditionally govern the relationships and ordering of a music's constituents).

Tentative conclusions were made objectively, as in a laboratory; but in order to assess these conclusions, it was necessary to test them with musical members of the specific society. Such a task is productive when undertaken

¹Chenoweth, The Usarufas and Their Music, Part II, SIL Museum of Anthropology, Dallas, 1979, pages 127-8.

with the assistance of those members of the society who are musically prominent. People generally are aware of who are the musical leaders. When the population begins to recollect who invents songs, who begins the singing in a mixed group or who organizes music events, they are indicating the names of potential informants.

Informant

An expert with whom the music analyst checks his hypotheses is in this paper termed an "informant." The informant is to remain unaware of what the researcher is testing specifically, in order that the informant's responses will be natural. A linguist, who is fluent in the vernacular and compatible with the informants, explains to them that they can help the analyst to understand the music by imitating what the analyst sings. It is important to assure an informant of the fact that he is the teacher and the musical authority. The difficulties in attempting to explain, in vernacular, analytical procedures as such is formidable and rarely makes any sense to them as music is not thought of in a fragmentary way. The check is best made in the surroundings familiar to the informant.

It is emphasized that the choice of informant is important. He must know the repertoire and have sufficient pitch memory to repeat the succession of pitches sung to him/her. It is advisable to consult several informants, male and female. It often creates a comfortable atmosphere for them to be included together, able to consult with one another. The naïve informant gives clearer reflection of vernacular musical thought. The term naïve refers here to one who has had little or no exposure to music systems unlike his own, who has had minimal contact with researchers or Western education.

It has been repeatedly observed that the naïve informant, well-versed only in his own music system, will fit another musical universe into it. For example,

if an interval the size of what Western theory calls a "minor" second does not exist in his vernacular music system, he will imitate it by singing a close equivalent which is in his system, such as a major second or something else, like a microtone variant. The response is sometimes very pronounced as the informant seeks to correct what the analyst has sung. In Illustration II, the informant was given a minor second to repeat. He "corrected" the analyst by singing back a major second, exaggerating its width. The naïve informant will not sing what is outside his musical universe. His repeat of what is sung is asked for once, and perhaps once more again at a later date if the researcher is not certain of the response. However, the sequence to be repeated is not sung over and over to try to elicit a response the analyst may desire, for this would be teaching the interval and is a technique to be avoided.

An informant who is non-naïve will be referred to as "sophisticated." He may be bilingual, trilingual, or even bicultural as when parents are of two contrasting cultures. The "sophisticated" informant's assistance may be less reliable because of this cultural fusion. On the other hand, the music system heard early in life is difficult to erase. Only last July one of my students conferring with a Nasioi man of Bougainville Island, who has a university education, gave a musical response almost identical to that of a naïve Nasioi informant. At different times and locations, each was asked to sing the series: M2a, m2a, M3d; neither informant ever sang a minor second. What can be concluded from this? The conclusion was that a minor second ascending was not a significant/emic interval in the system. Returning to the corpus of transcribed songs, it was discovered that the minor second ascending only occurred in two songs, and then only as a variant of a major second. For these reasons, the analyst concluded that the major second ascending was an emic unit with two etic manifestations, that of a major second and of a minor second /M2a/ + (M2a), [m2a].

To prepare for a checking session, the researcher looks for etically similar units (intervals, in this case), locating them in his song transcriptions. Any two intervals to be compared must be in different songs. The researcher seeks to find the two in a series whereby the intervals preceding and following are the same. This is referred to as identical environment, or identical context.

For example, p4a, M3d, M3d
 p4a, m3d, M3d

As in any scientific experiment, two elements to be compared must be subjected to like conditions; only then may it become apparent that they are the same or different. For example, in etic-emic analysis, say the two intervals M3d and m3d occur within the same environment in separate songs. The occurrence of both suggests that they are recognized by the singer as two different entities. The researcher tests this by singing the one sequence with a major third descending, which the informant imitates, then the other which includes a minor instead of major third descending, which the informant imitates. If the two similar intervals are separate emic units, the informant will respond to them as being different, by singing a major third the first time and a minor third the second time.

In language this phenomenon has many parallels. An English speaker clearly pronouncing the word fly may be imitated by an immigrant with the work fry because the particular phoneme represented in English by the letter l does not exist in his linguistic inventory, or at least not in that sequence. Another immigrant may contend that his name is Ger, but Americans continue to call him "Hare," because the phoneme (a velar fricative) pronounced [x] does not exist in the English linguistic system, thus American English speakers substitute the nearest equivalent, a sound represented by the letter h. American speech is loaded with retroflexed r's, and this sound is a phonemic stumbling block to many who learn American English as a second language.

Americans say: It was a nice party. (retroflexed r)
An Englishman says: It was a nice pahtee. (silent r)
A Frenchman says: It was a nice party. (flapped at the back of the throat)
An Hispanic says: It was a nice pa[~]rty. (flapped at the front of the mouth)

All of these pronunciations are etic variants of one emic unit, symbolized by the letter r. These variations do not change the meaning of the word. Such variants are conditioned by the interference of another linguistic system.

Technique

The analyst assumes the position of learner. He is learning about the music system by what the expert sings back to him when the analyst sings a sequence which contains the interval in question. However, the entire sequence is the focus rather than that one interval. The broader focus will avoid any hint of what might be expected in the response. Consequently, the informant is better able to respond naturally, without an attempt to please the analyst by giving him what he expects that the analyst wants to hear. The analyst affirms every response, avoiding any suggestion that there is a right or wrong answer, a good or bad answer, or a correct or incorrect one. Indeed, every response does tell the analyst something. The more experienced he/she is in analysis checking, the more each response reveals. (In linguistics this is called psycho-linguistic testing.) The informant is not being tested. The analyst's preliminary decisions are being tested, objectively, because he truly does not know if his preliminary analysis represents the system.

Here are several examples of analysis checking taped in Irian Jaya among the Berik people, and in Papua New Guinea among the Komba people of Morobe Province. Some of the tests confirmed what was concluded in the preliminary analysis, and some responses necessitated changes in the analysis. All responses were enlightening.

A first tenet in etic-emic analysis states that when two similar melodic

units occur in like environments, the two are expected to be responded to by the informant as being two separate emic units. Notice that these environments were extracted from different songs. In this first example, the student's original conclusion was confirmed by testing.

Illus. Berik song ① lines 1,2

I

given: p4a, u, u, p4a, M2d

Berik song ④ lines 5,6

given: p4a, u, u, u, M3a, M2d

Both perfect fourth ascending and major third ascending were imitated by the informant.

A second tenet has three parts. Part B suggests that two similar etic units may be found to be in conditioned fluctuation, where one may substitute for the other under certain conditions. In Komba, a language group located in Morobe Province of Papua New Guinea, the minor second and major second were found to be variants of one emic unit. The informant imitated both by singing a major second. The conclusion was that a minor second, transcribed in Komba songs, is a variant of a major second and is not a separate emic unit. There is a conditioning factor. The variant of a minor second occurs etically in a weak rhythmic position. Combinations of major seconds ascending and descending were readily repeated by the informant, but when a minor second descending or a minor second plus a microtone was inserted between two major seconds ascending and all intervals given the same rhythmic weight (all quarter notes), the informant would not sing a minor second descending.

Illus. II

Komba

given: M2a, M2d, M2a

given: M2a, m2d, M2a
(or m2d+)

informant: M2d

Later the example sung was changed to a minor second descending preceded by a perfect fourth descending and followed by a major third ascending, all sung as quarter notes with equal rhythmic weight. The informant first ignored the minor second, then he switched it to a minor third ascending, and finally substituted a major second for that minor third. None of the informants would sing a minor second.

Illus. III

Komba

given: p4d, m2a, M3a

informant

m3a

M2a

Part A of the second tenet suggests that two similar etic units may be in free fluctuation, that is, the two are mutually substitutable. In Berik music of Irian Jaya, it was concluded that minor seconds and unison (repeated notes) might substitute one for the other without qualification. (There may possibly be some emotional or textual cause for the substituting. In which case the fluctuation would be conditioned rather than free, but the informant -- a very fine musician -- did not indicate such.) When the student researcher sang two versions (A) and (B) of a phrase, the informant said - in his own language - they

were the same. Then, he was asked to sing it.

Berik song (5)

Illus. IV given: Version (B)

lines 5, 6

informant:

informant:

When the informant sang it, the tonal center shifted, and the middle section was skipped, but it was the phrase ending which was crucial to the test. The expert sang no minor seconds but instead, sang unisons. The analyst concluded that unison and minor seconds fluctuate freely and are two etic variants (or manifestations) of one emic unit, the unison, /u/ = [u], [m2a], [m2d]. The analyst adds a note to his conclusion stating that in six or more additional examples, the expert sang minor seconds as unisons.

Summary

The minimal dynamic units of any music system are its melodic intervals. Once their emic status is verified by the music experts among a people with an unwritten, but nonetheless homogeneous music system, then emic pitches are dis-

cernable. They are the terminal points of emic intervals. Advanced analysis concerns itself with the covert controls ("rules") by means of which these pitches are ordered in relation to one another, to rhythm, to a tonal center and to larger units. Additional description of the musical heirarchy - through the phrase stratum, rhythmic plan, tonal plan, text, compositional form, style variation and all the subheadings of a musical event - is necessary before the analyst has sufficient information to generate new melodies within the system.

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