

Otjiherero praises

and the genesis and structure of knowledge on Wikipedia

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Chapter Outline

- 1 Knowledge
 - Overview
 - Indigenous Knowledge
- 2 Memory
 - Wikipedia
 - Praises



Knowledge Operations

1 Creation (a.k.a. research)

- Western method: readup, conjecture, experiment, writeup, revision
- Indigenous method: commemoration, contemplation, adaptation, consensus-finding, narration

2 Transfer (a.k.a. education)

- Western method: formal, scheduled, summative assessment
- Indigenous method: informal, needs-driven, normative assessment

3 Storage and retrieval (a.k.a. memory)

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4 Summary (a.k.a. epistemology)

- Western method: axiomatic, deductive-nomological, on paper
- Indigenous method: spiritual, inductive, personal



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Indigenous Knowledge

- **Indigenous**: originating in, and characteristic of, a particular human group and biophysical environment (Purcell)
- **Knowledge**: justified, true belief (Plato)
- **Indigenous knowledge (IK)**: “the body of historically constituted (emic) knowledge instrumental in the long-term adaptation of human groups to the biophysical environment” (Purcell)
 - not codified in writing but in stories, dances, customs, artefacts
 - practical rather than abstract
 - deducted from spiritual rather than scientific patterns of thought
- ⇒ Not easily conserved by writing
- Better: audio, video, maps and images
- ‘Say it to my face’



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The 21st century encyclopaedia



WIKIPEDIA

- Started 2001, open source, content licensed under CC-BY-SA
- 2005: accuracy comparable to *Encyclopædia Britannica*
- 40 million articles, 294 languages
- Largest edition: English, 5.9 million articles, 10 billion page views
- Written by about 90,000 volunteers
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- 21st century's **outline, bibliography, and definition of knowledge**

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Wikipedia's relevance for Namibia

- Useful encyclopaedia: $\geq 5,000$ articles
- available in English, German, Afrikaans, Chinese, Portuguese
 - ... the native tongues of former and current colonial masters
 - Three editors actively writing about Namibia—two Germans, one Australian
 - \Rightarrow Namibian narrative again told from an alien perspective
- Namibian languages?
 - Setswana: 603 articles
 - Otjiherero: 80 articles
 - Oshindonga: 54 articles
 - Khoekhoegowab: 1 article
 - Silozi, Rukwangali, Ju|'Hoansi, Oshikwanyama, Taa, Thimbukushu... zero articles
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Praises

- Oral performances acknowledging events, people, objects, places
- Known to many indigenous peoples, including Namibian
- Example: Otjiherero praises (*Omitandu*)
- Well-known stanzas can be used as names
- For instance: *Metundu maZerumburuka. Rongutirwa yaKatjikwa ekondo . . .* The former homestead of Zemburuka, the striped trek oxen of Katjikwa
- Performed: Praise song, remembered: praise skeleton



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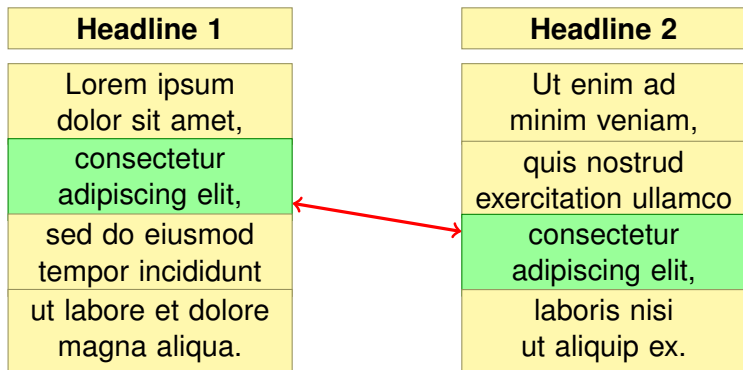


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Praise structure



- 1 Not just an art form or a performance
- 2 Knowledge vessel

Value Clash

- Western Values: Individuality, effectiveness, self-fulfilment
- Indigenous values: Deference, pride, stability, courtesy, ubuntu
- Software enshrines values
- Western software enshrines Western values.
- Example Wikipedia:
 - Congregate as a group? ⇒ Not easy
 - Work from home, or from the common meeting area? ⇒ Rarely possible
 - See what other group members are doing at the moment? ⇒ Very difficult
 - Check what people at [place and time] did last week? ⇒ Impossible
 - **Value:** Individuality
- Common value: Freely sharing knowledge



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End of Presentation

“Imagine a world in which every single person on the planet is given free access to the sum of all human knowledge. That’s what we’re doing.”

—Jimbo Wales

Any questions?

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