

CGSC 130 Reading Notes: Bartlett on "The Method of Repeated Reproduction"

Bartlett's experiments on remembering are classic texts in psychology and cognitive science. Two things to keep in mind when you read this. First, the original research was published in 1920 (your version is from Bartlett's book, published in 1932 and still cited today); it uses the rhetorical style and idioms of the time. Second, the research was originally published in an anthropology journal, and the source material (the Native American story Bartlett had his British student subjects memorize) was from the work of Franz Boas, who is considered the father of American anthropology. One of Bartlett's aims was to see how one's cultural background affected one's recollection of a story, along with the nature of semantic memory itself.

Another note: Bartlett recounts the results of a number of individual subjects in great detail (this was the standard way of reporting experimental results in his day, and it does give one a keen sense of the differences between individual participants). You can skim through these details.

Terms and Concepts

- General
 - Recognition vs. Recall – Ari Conati
 - Effort After Meaning
- Experimental Procedures
 - Method of Description
 - Method of Repeated Reproduction – Scott Bown
- Memory Factors/Results
 - Affective Determination
 - Atmosphere
 - Ordering of Events
 - Style and Manner
 - Omissions, Transpositions, Additions/Inventions/Importations
 - Persistence of Form
 - Rationalization/Bias

Discussion Questions

1. What did most of Bartlett's participants retain, and what did they omit, in their retellings of "The War of the Ghosts"? – Cayden Ehrlich
2. What general memory processes did Bartlett infer from this pattern of retention and omissions?
3. What is the significance of the different time intervals at which Bartlett asked his participants to remember "The War of the Ghosts"?
4. What does Bartlett's experiments tell us about the way that long-term memory works?