

Editorial Etic Analyses

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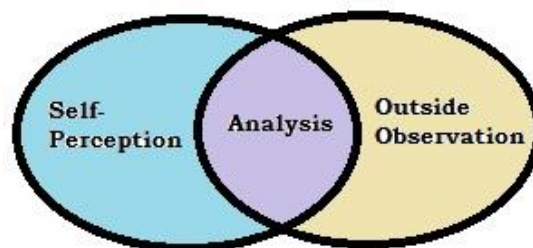
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As a translatable faith, the Christian faith is constantly adjusting within its various settings to the leading of God's Word and Spirit. Faithfulness to God's revealed Word is inexorably connected with what is appropriate and relevant within each total and ever-changing cultural-linguistic context within which God's Word and Spirit operate. Put in more proper personal terms, Jesus's followers are on an ongoing mission, dispersed as we are throughout the world's nations and contexts. Living out that mission as Spirit-empowered witnesses of Jesus Christ is inherently tied to living and speaking prophetically, compassionately, appropriately, and in ways relevant to people around us.

Living on mission as Christ's faithful, appropriate, and relevant (Shaw and Van Engen 2003) witnesses involves emic insiders to heed the Scriptural injunction to "work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12). God has always spoken to people in our own particular contexts, whether in the many Hebrew/Aramaic settings spanning the Old Testament, the several Aramaic/Greek settings within the New Testament, Jesus of Nazareth himself (the incarnate God-man), or the myriad settings into which the Scriptures have been translated, and within which Jesus's followers have lived, ever since. Emic insiders have the instinctive sensibilities and understandings to determine how God's Word and Spirit are leading them within each setting.

Even so, etic outsiders are also needed for pointing to how God's Word and Spirit operate in various settings. One reason is that the Christian gospel's translatable feature means that at some point the good news of Jesus Christ is communicated cross-culturally from an etic outsider(s) to an emic insider(s), or at least via a multi-cultural (etic-emic) communicator. Moreover, the self-preserving, centripetal pulls of all contexts that try and domesticate any change agent necessitate etic input to help emic followers of Jesus avoid being silenced and swallowed up by their particular settings. While emic followers of Jesus have the instincts to follow God's Word and Spirit within our own settings, we need etic friends to help us hear the dissonant emphases of God's Word and Spirit in relation to all unredeemed settings within which we live on mission.

The graphic below is not explicitly Christian, but it helpfully points to how emic and etic observations overlap into constructive analyses of people's situations:



(Dixon 2013)

Left to ourselves, insiders' "self-perceptions" will eventually fail to see beyond the confines

of our enveloping contexts. Left uninvolved, “outside observations” will simply fail to be relevant to any particular context. When emic and etic perceptions/observations intersect, however, genuine analysis can take place. For Christians, such overlap provides stimulus to live and speak prophetically, compassionately, appropriately, and in ways relevant to people around us.

In this January 2019 issue of *Global Missiology – English*, all four articles are etic analyses. One aspect of that etic quality is that the articles are practically entirely in English and hence do not include all of the languages inherently involved in the particular subjects addressed. Related is that the authors are etic observers of, and to varying degrees participants in, the situations – or at least parts of the situations – that the articles address. As trained, experienced etic analysts the authors offer insights that emic insiders might miss or at least express differently. Hence while the inner authenticity of some of the contexts described will unavoidably be missing, the keen insights the authors bring as participant etic observers offer essential components of healthy contextual analysis.

This issue’s articles exhibit in yet another fascinating way the complexity and challenge of missiological analysis, in these cases through etic input. I trust you will find the issue instructive in both content and methodologies employed.

References

- Dixon, Thomas (2013). “What's your perspective? Etic? Emic? How to address both? Can there be an absolutely ‘etic’ perspective?” *ESL101.com*. 101 Connections Communications Inc., <https://www.esl101.com/blogs/whats-your-perspective-etic-emic-how-address-both-can-there-be-absolutely-etic-perspective#.XEJf3lwzaUI>, accessed January 19, 2019.
- Shaw, R. Daniel and Van Engen, Charles E. (2003). *Communicating God’s Word in a Complex World: God’s Truth or Hocus Pocus?* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.