# 2.3 ANALYSIS OF A CONCEPT

## Learning Objectives

❖ Note the features of a concept and understand how it is analysed.

❖ Be aware that the attributes of a concept are conjured up by the person from whom the concept originated.

❖ Distinguish between the analysis and definition of a concept.

❖ Distinguish between concrete and abstract concepts.

❖ Think of the act of concept analysis as one of identifying and unpacking the attributes in the concept.

❖ Recognise the different types of attributes identified when analysing the concept.

Another aspect of the language of academic texts that is usually subject to analysis is concepts. Actually, this is not the first time we are dealing with the analysis of concepts in this unit. *Soft adventure tourism* and *communication process* are both  concepts whose analyses we examined earlier. However, at this stage, having already examined how analysis works, we will focus attention on the concept.

## Concept analysis in the calypso



**Figure 2.9 - David Rudder – composer of Calypso Music**

At the beginning of this Unit, you listened to *Calypso Music* by the calypsonian David Rudder. Rudder may not have thought he was engaging in the activity of concept analysis. Nonetheless, his work deserves consideration here. Here are two verses of the calypso:

**Verse**

*Can you hear a distant drum*

*Bouncing on the laughter of a melody*

*And does the rhythm tell you come, come, come, come*

*Does your spirit do a dance to this symphony*

*Does it tell you that your heart is a fire*

*And does it tell you that your pain is a liar*

*Does it wash away all your unlovely*

*Well are you ready for a brand new discovery*

**Chorus**

*Calypso*

*Calypso*

*Calypso Music, oh yeah, oh yeah*

**Verse**

*It is a living vibration*

*Rooted deep within my Caribbean belly*

*Lyrics to make a politician cringe*

*Or turn a woman's body into jelly*

*It is a sweet soca music – calypso*

*You could ah never refuse it – calypso*

*It make you shake like a Shango now – calypso*

*Why it is you shaking you don't know*

*That's calypso*

**(Chorus)**

According to Dictionary.com, a concept is 'an idea of something formed by mentally combining all its characteristics or particulars'. Merriam-Webster refers to it as 'something conceived of in the mind'. What is common to both understandings is that a concept has its origin in the minds of human beings who mentally bring together all the features, qualities, attributes of that entity that they consider relevant and/or appropriate to highlight when thinking of the entity. The analysis of the concept therefore occurs when the concept as a whole is broken down, pulled apart, or unpacked in order to reveal the individual attributes that were merged in the first place to form the concept.
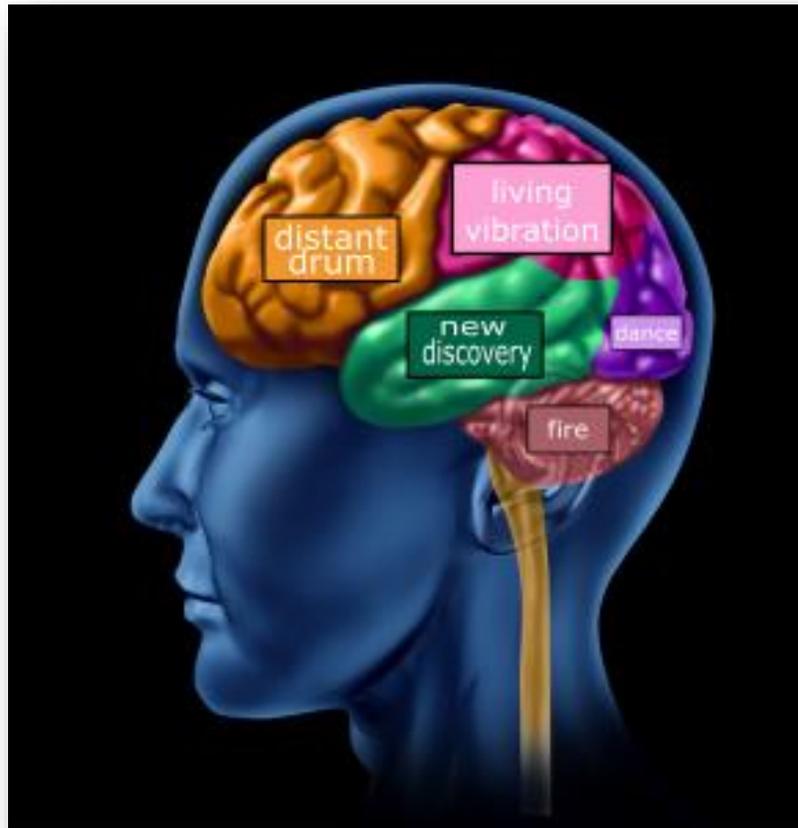
**Figure 2.10 – Attributes of the concept '*Calypso Music'* as conceived in the mind of the calypsonian**

The two verses of David Rudder's *Calypso Music* therefore reflect the attributes that the calypsonian has determined to be at the core of what is the calypso. It is among other things 'a distant drum bouncing on the laughter of a melody'. It is also 'lyrics to make a politician cringe and turn a woman's body into jelly'. These are all images conjured up in the mind of the calypsonian David Rudder and which together make up his understanding of what calypso is.

## Analysing versus defining a concept

Analyzing a concept is different from defining that concept. For example, the Oxford Dictionary defines calypso as 'a kind of West Indian (originally Trinidadian) music in syncopated African rhythm, typically with words improvised on a topical theme'. https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/calypso . A definition allows you to identify, point out or name an object, idea or person. Definitions are what dictionaries provide. On the other hand, the analysis of a concept delves inside to unearth, unpack, pull apart the inner attributes that

constitute the concept.
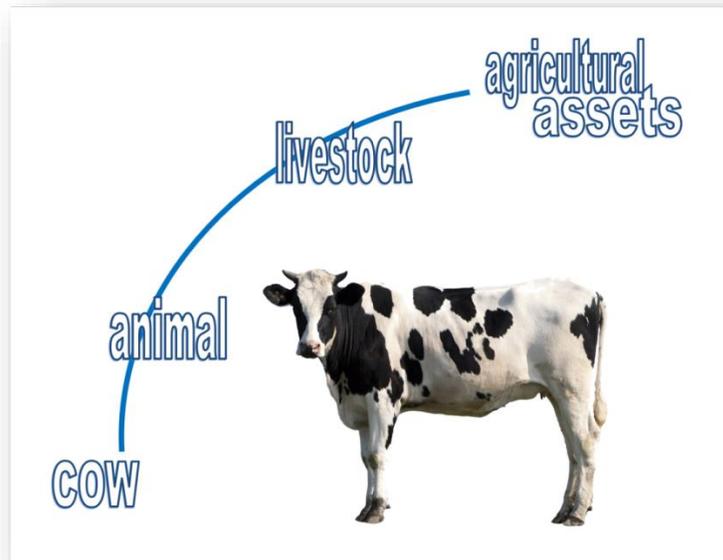
## Types of concepts



**Figure 2.11 - From concrete to abstract**

Concepts range from the concrete and tangible to the abstract and intangible. The former include objects, things, ideas and events that one can see, hear, touch and overall experience in very direct ways. Examples of concrete concepts, at one extreme of the range, would include motor car, dog, rain, village, and calypso. Examples of abstract concepts, at the other extreme, would include such ideas as happiness, belief, democracy, conflict, and peace. Of course, there would also be others within these two extreme points.

The term *abstract* is used to describe the latter group since they cannot be experienced in a direct way as in the case of the concrete concepts; they do not have a physical or near-physical form.

When writers of academic texts analyze concepts, more often than not, they are dealing with abstract concepts or at least those that are closer to the abstract end of the spectrum. They engage in this form of analysis when they want to give their readers a broader and more in-depth understanding of the concept as it relates to the total body of ideas that they are communicating. Two examples are provided below.

## Unpacking the concept



**Figure 2.12 – Unpacking the concept: pulling out the attributes contained in the concept.**

The first example below was taken from a much longer segment of a chapter in which the author analyzes the concept 'culture'. The chapter begins with an introduction that includes a brief definition of culture, contrasting it with society. It states as follows:

> *… a culture represents the beliefs, practices and artifacts of a group,*
> *while society represents the social structures and organization of the*
> *people who share those beliefs and practices.*

This definition, like the one on the calypso referred to earlier, allows us to state what culture is, and in addition, to point out how it is different from what society is. Pay attention to the way the definition of the term differs from the analysis in the extract below.

This extract comprises two segments, the first from the chapter's introduction and the second from the first main section, titled 'What is culture?'

**Extract 2.13**

**Introduction to culture**

Are there rules for eating at McDonald's? Generally, we do not think about rules in a fast food restaurant, but if you look around one on a typical weekday, you will see people acting as if they

were trained for the role of fast food customer. They stand in line, pick items from the colourful menus, swipe debit cards to pay, and wait to collect trays of food. After a quick meal, customers wad up their paper wrappers and toss them into garbage cans. Customers' movement through this fast food routine is orderly and predictable, even if no rules are posted and no officials direct the process.

If you want more insight into these unwritten rules, think about what would happen if you behaved according to some other standards. …

People have written entire books analyzing the significance of fast food customs. They examine the extensive, detailed physicality of fast food: the food itself, wrappers, bags, trays, those tiny ketchup packets, the tables and chairs, and even the restaurant building. Everything about a chain restaurant reflects **culture**, the beliefs and behaviours that a social group shares.

**What is culture?**

Humans are social creatures. Since the dawn of Homo sapiens nearly 25,000 years ago, people have grouped together into communities in order to survive. Living together, people form common habits and behaviours – from specific methods of childrearing to preferred techniques for obtaining food.  In modern-day Paris, many people shop daily at outdoor markets to pick up what they need for their evening meal, buying cheese, meat, and vegetables from different speciality stalls. In the Canada, the

majority of people shop once a week in supermarkets, filling large carts to the brim. The Parisian Roland Barthes disdainfully referred to this as "the hasty stocking up" of a "more mechanical civilization" (Barthes, 1977).

Almost every human behaviour, from shopping to marriage to expressions of feelings, is learned. In Canada, people tend to view marriage as a choice between two people, based on mutual feelings of love. In other nations and in other times, marriages have been arranged through an intricate process of interviews and negotiations between entire families, or in other cases, through a direct system such as a "mail order bride". To someone raised in Winnipeg, the marriage customs of a family from Nigeria may seem strange, or even wrong. Conversely, someone from a traditional Kolkata family might be perplexed with the idea of romantic love as the foundation for the lifelong commitment of marriage. In other words, the way in which people view marriage depends largely on what they have been taught.

Except for the heading, the actual introductory paragraph begins without even mentioning the word 'culture'. Instead the author takes us through the experience of eating at a fast food restaurant and through the description of that typical experience, leads us to an understanding of how rules, even though unwritten, guide our everyday behaviours. When the author eventually provides a definition of culture, we can easily recognize it as the embodiment of the core meanings in the description of the rules-governed behaviour when eating at a Macdonald's restaurant. Through this description, the author provides us with an analysis of the concept 'culture' leading into the definition. In terms of the analysis itself, do you see any similarities between this author's treatment of 'culture' and David Rudder's treatment of 'calypso music'?

The definition of culture as "the beliefs and behaviours that a social group shares", carries over into the beginning of the main section 'What is culture?' Two main attributes about the concept stand out in this segment. The first is that culture emerges out of the living together of humans and is reflected in their

collective behaviour. The second is that the behaviours that people practice as they live together are learnt; people are taught how to behave.

At the first layer of the analysis in this segment, the author communicates these understandings through two generalizations. The first, 'Humans are social creatures', introduces the first paragraph and the second, 'Almost every human behaviour … is learned' introduces the second.

Going deeper, at a lower layer in each paragraph, the author describes concrete real-world behaviours to support the meanings embedded in each of these initial statements. In the first paragraph he speaks of different habits that people develop through living together and in the second, he uses marriage practices among different groups of people to demonstrate how these practices are learnt.

This second segment continues the analysis of the concept in that it breaks it down into its core characteristics, as reflected in first, generalizations and subsequently in the author's description of real-life behaviours in a way that highlights the essential meanings of these generalizations.　See Figure 2.13 below.
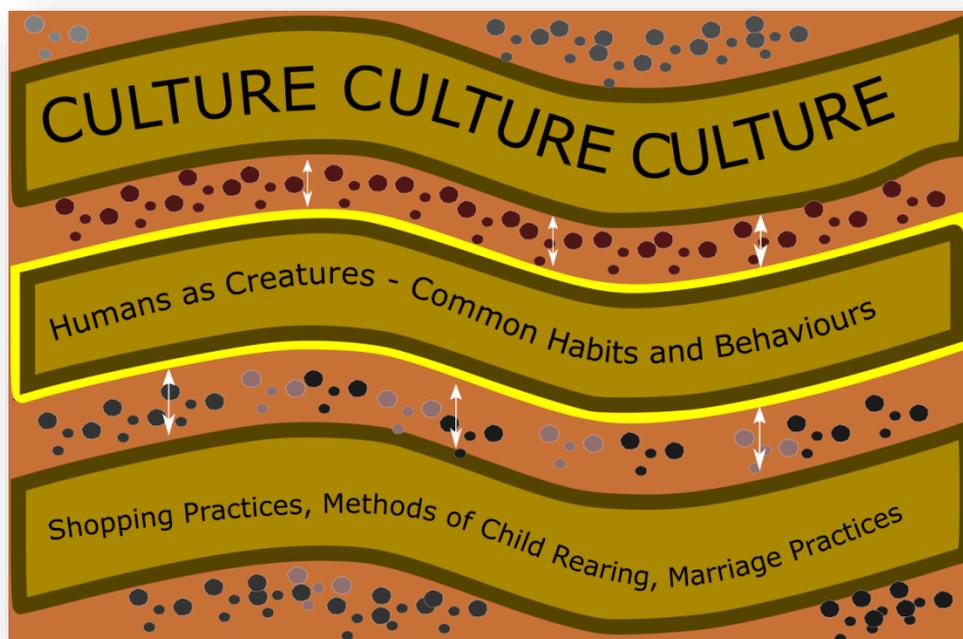


**Figure 2.13 – Analysis of the concept as a multi-layered activity**

An important point to note about the approach taken to introduce real-world scenarios into the analysis is the way the author ensures that the essential attributes of the behaviours being described are highlighted, thus enabling the reader to make linkages between the real-world practices and the broad statements.

The author of the second example, Extract 2.14, explores a type of behaviour that she has identified as being common among a particular group of workers in the Jamaican tourism sector. As far as she is concerned this specific behaviour, *skin-teeth*, does not simply refer to the act of showing one's teeth when smiling. Rather she sees it as being loaded with all kinds of meanings, hence her attempt to unpack it.

**Extract 2.14**

One of the cultural behaviours that helps individuals deal with inequitable situations they find themselves (in) is to show 'skin teeth'. This behaviour comes from the days of enslavement when any act outside of complacency was a form of resistance. Enslaved women did not take their station in life lightly. As Mathurin (1974) was first to argue and document, women used whatever 'weapons' were available to them to challenge the slave system. A wide variety of acts of defiance including insolence, occurred on a daily basis. As Bush (1990) explains 'unlike outright revolt, these unspectacular routine acts were resistance' to enslavement. Further, of all slaves, domestics probably exhibited the greatest degree of duality of behaviour. Outwardly they conformed and adopted white culture to a greater degree than the more autonomous field slave, while covertly (they) rejected the system (Ibid).

Masked emotions became a part of the cultural baggage. In one of her classic works on Jamaican folklore, Martha Beckwith (1925) notes the following sayings: 'No everybody wha' kin teet' wid you a you frien' and 'no kin teet' a kin teet'. These sayings mean not

everyone who you show a smile is a friend, and not every laugh is an honest laugh (Cassidy and Le Page, 1980). Showing skin teeth is a cultural practice that hides the true value of the behaviour from the receptor, especially when that person is not a social equal.

By the turn of the century … domestic service in hotels and in private homes, had become one of the predominate employers of women. The lack of alternative occupations for working class and poor women meant that this kind of work would become a mainstay for their earning a living. For the next 100 years, this would be the case with the continued degradation of the work, the inequality between employer and employee, and the low pay. …

It is easy then to see how skin teeth is used as a cultural coping mechanism in the tourist industry across job categories. Skin teeth are (sic) used against the social inequality, racism and sexism exhibited in any kind of face to face encounters of tourism.

The approach that the author uses to construct this concept is, first, to trace it back to its historical origins and to examine the circumstances that gave rise to it. The breaking down exercise starts off by locating the practice in the experience of the house slave (mainly female) in Caribbean plantation society. Specifically, it is shown as the behaviour that female house slaves engaged in as a means of masking their deep-rooted defiance against the treatment meted out to them by the slave masters, without openly engaging in acts of revolt.

According to the author, this practice persisted post-slavery into contemporary times, being particularly evident among 'working class and poor women' who constituted a large proportion of low-wage earners in the Jamaica tourism sector. Given the persistence of the master-slave relationship in the working environment of the sector, the practice of skin teeth served as a cultural coping mechanism for these female workers.

In her analysis of the concept therefore, the author  draws attention to the

socio-cultural factors that gave rise to the practice, showing how these factors are located in, and derive their meaning from the history of Caribbean plantation slavery in the first instance, and subsequently, from the emerging tourism sector of twentieth century Caribbean society. The author reinforces the analysis with broader explanations such as those that end this extract.

This concept is therefore constituted through a seamless merging of specifics of the practice itself, with references to the inequitable nature of the human interactions out of which the practice emerged, both viewed against the backdrop of the broader socio-economic arrangements at different points of the history of the Caribbean.

## Key Takeaways

- ❖ Concept analysis is based on a recognition that concepts are developed in the human mind.

- ❖ They are also the embodiment of attributes that the human mind ascribes to them.

- ❖ While the definition of a concept allows one to be able to identify it, the analysis allows one to be able to delve inside to unearth the attributes that make up the concept.

- ❖ Concepts range from the concrete to the abstract.

- ❖ The tools that authors may use to analyse a concept may include appropriate real-world experiences, generalizations, socio-cultural explanations.