

Human universals compiled by Donald E. Brown

As published in *The Blank Slate* by Steven Pinker, 2002, New York: Viking Press

Brown, D.E. 1991. *Human universals*. New York: McGraw-Hill

also see Brown, D.E., 2000. *Human universals and their implications*. In N. Roughley (Ed.) *Being humans: Anthropological universality and particularity in transdisciplinary perspectives*. New York: Walter de Gruyter.

abstraction in speech & thought	magic
actions under self-control distinguished from those not under control	magic to increase life
aesthetics	magic to sustain life
affection expressed and felt	magic to win love
age grades	making comparisons
age statuses	male and female and adult and child seen as having different natures
age terms	males dominate public/political realm
ambivalence	males engage in more coalitional violence
anthropomorphization	males more aggressive
anticipation	males more prone to lethal violence
antonyms	males more prone to theft
attachment	males, on average, travel greater distances over lifetime
baby talk	manipulate social relations
belief in supernatural/religion	marking at phonemic, syntactic, and lexical levels
beliefs, false	marriage
beliefs about death	materialism
beliefs about disease	meal times
beliefs about fortune and misfortune	meaning, most units of are non-universal
binary cognitive distinctions	measuring
biological mother and social mother normally the same person	medicine
black (color term)	melody
body adornment	memory
childbirth customs	mental maps
childcare	

childhood fears
 childhood fear of loud noises
 childhood fear of strangers
 choice making (choosing alternatives)
 classification
 classification of age
 classification of behavioral propensities
 classification of body parts
 classification of colors
 classification of fauna
 classification of flora
 classification of inner states
 classification of kin
 classification of sex
 classification of space
 classification of tools
 classification of weather conditions
 coalitions
 collective identities
 conflict
 conflict, consultation to deal with
 conflict, means of dealing with
 conflict, mediation of
 conjectural reasoning
 containers
 continua (ordering as cognitive pattern)
 contrasting marked and nonmarked
 sememes (meaningful elements in
 language)
 cooking
 cooperation
 cooperative labor
 copulation normally conducted in privacy
 corporate (perpetual) statuses
 coyness display
 critical learning periods
 crying
 cultural variability
 culture
 mentalese
 metaphor
 metonym
 mood- or consciousness-altering techniques
 and/or substances
 moral sentiments
 moral sentiments, limited effective range of
 morphemes
 mother normally has consort during child-
 rearing years
 mourning
 murder proscribed
 music
 music, children's
 music related in part to dance
 music related in part to religious activity
 music seen as art (a creation)
 music, vocal
 music, vocal, includes speech forms
 musical redundancy
 musical reptition
 musical variation
 myths
 narrative
 nomenclature (perhaps the same as
 classification)
 nonbodily decorative art
 normal distinguished from abnormal states
 nouns
 numerals (counting)
 Oedipus complex
 oligarchy (de facto)
 one (numeral)
 onomatopoeia
 overestimating objectivity of thought
 pain
 past/present/future
 person, concept of
 personal names

culture/nature distinction
customary greetings
daily routines
dance
death rituals
decision making
decision making, collective
differential valuations
directions, giving of
discrepancies between speech, thought,
and action
dispersed groups
distinguishing right and wrong
diurnality
divination
division of labor
division of labor by age
division of labor by sex
dominance/submission
dreams
dream interpretation
economic inequalities
economic inequalities, consciousness of
emotions
empathy
entification (treating patterns and
relations as things)
environment, adjustments to
envy
envy, symbolic means of coping with
ethnocentrism
etiquette
explanation
face (word for)
facial communication
facial expression of anger
facial expression of contempt
facial expression of disgust
facial expression of fear

phonemes
phonemes defined by set of minimally
constrasting features
phonemes, merging of
phonemes, range from 10 to 70 in number
phonemic change, inevitability of
phonemic change, rules of
phonemic system
planning
planning for future
play
play to perfect skills
poetry/rhetoric
poetic line, uniform length range
poetic lines characterized by repetition and
variation
poetic lines demarcated by pauses
polysemy (one word has several meanings)
possessive, intimate
possessive, loose
practice to improve skills
precedence, concept of (that's how the leopard
got its spots)
preference for own children and close kin
(nepotism)
prestige inequalities
pretend play
pride
private inner life
promise
pronouns
pronouns, minimum two numbers
pronouns, minimum three persons
proper names
property
proverbs, sayings
proverbs, sayings - in mutually contradictory
forms
psychological defense mechanisms

facial expression of happiness
facial expression of surprise
facial expressions, masking/modifying of
fairness (equity), concept of
family (or household)
father and mother, separate kin terms for
fears
fear of death
fears, ability to overcome some
feasting
females do more direct childcare
figurative speech
fire
folklore
food preferences
food sharing
future, attempts to predict
generosity admired
gestures
gift giving
good and bad distinguished
gossip
government
grammar
group living
groups that are not based on family
habituation
hairstyles
hand (word for)
healing the sick (or attempting to)
hope
hospitality
husband older than wife on average
hygienic care
identity, collective
imagery
incest between mother and son
unthinkable or tabooed

rape
rape proscribed
reciprocal exchanges (of labor, goods, or services)
reciprocity, negative (revenge, retaliation)
recognition of individuals by face
redress of wrongs
resistance to abuse of power, to dominance
rhythm
right-handedness as population norm
risk-taking
rites of passage
rituals
role and personality seen in dynamic
interrelationship (i.e., departures from role can be explained in terms of individual personality)
sanctions
sanctions for crimes against the collectivity
sanctions include removal from the social unit
self-control
self distinguished from other
self as neither wholly passive nor wholly autonomous
self as subject and object
self-image, awareness of (concern for what others think)
self-image, manipulation of
self-image, wanted to be positive
self is responsible
semantics
semantic category of affecting things and people
semantic category of dimension
semantic category of giving
semantic category of location
semantic category of motion
semantic category of other physical properties
semantic components
semantic components, generation
semantic components, sex

incest, prevention or avoidance
in-group distinguished from out-group(s)
in-group biases in favor of
inheritance rules
institutions (organized co-activities)
insulting
intention
interest in bioforms (living things or things that resemble them)
interpolation
interpreting behavior
intertwining (e.g., weaving)
jokes
judging others
kin, close distinguished from distant
kin groups
kin terms translatable by basic relations of procreation
kinship statuses
language
language employed to manipulate others
language employed to misinform or mislead
language is translatable
language not a simple reflection of reality
language, prestige from proficient use of law (rights and obligations)
law (rules of membership)
leaders
lever
likes and dislikes
linguistic redundancy
logical notions
logical notion of "and"
logical notion of "equivalent"
logical notion of "general/particular"
logical notion of "not"
logical notion of "opposite"
logical notion of "part/whole"

sememes, commonly used ones are short, infrequently used ones are longer
senses unified
sex differences in spatial cognition and behavior
sex (gender) terminology is fundamentally binary
sex statuses
sexual attraction
sexual attractiveness
sexual jealousy
sexual modesty
sexual regulation
sexual regulation includes incest prevention
sexuality as focus of interest
shame
shelter
sickness and death seen as related
snakes, wariness around
social structure
socialization
socialization expected from senior kin
socialization includes toilet training
spear
special speech for special occasions
statuses and roles
statuses, ascribed and achieved
statuses distinguished from individuals
statuses on other than sex, age, or kinship bases
stinginess, disapproval of
stop/nonstop contrasts (in speech sounds)
succession
sucking wounds
sweets preferred
symbolism
symbolic speech
synesthetic metaphors
synonyms
taboos
tabooed foods

logical notion of "same"

tabooed utterances
taxonomy
territoriality
thumb sucking
tickling
time
time, cyclicity of
tools
tool dependency
tool making
tools for cutting
tools to make tools
tools patterned culturally
tools, permanent
tools for pounding
toys, playthings
trade
triangular awareness (assessinjk relationships among the self and two other people)
true and false distinguished)
turn-taking
two (numeral)
tying material (i.e., something like string)
units of time
verbs
violence, some forms of proscribed
visiting
vocalic/nonvocalic contrasts in phonemes
vowel contrasts
weaning
weapons
weather control (attempts to)
while (color term)
world view