

Indigenous knowledge for Wikipedia

Bending the rules?

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Chapter Outline

- 1 Introduction
 - What is Indigenous Knowledge?
 - The Value of Indigenous Knowledge
- 2 Current Transformation for Wikipedia
 - From the Community to Wikipedia in Many Steps
- 3 Future Transformation for Wikipedia
 - Shorten the Chinese Whispers Chain
 - Alternative View on Wikipedia Policy
 - Bending the Rules?
- 4 Namibia Knowledge Portal



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Terminology

- **Indigenous**: originating in, and characteristic of, a particular region or country
- **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 1998)
 - not codified in writing but in stories, songs, customs, artefacts
 - practical rather than abstract
 - deduced from spiritual rather than scientific patterns of thought



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Value of Indigenous Knowledge

- IK = **knowledge**
 - Its assertions are true
 - It is believed
 - It is justified
- IK \neq **traditional** knowledge
 - Not just the peoples' history and culture
 - Ecology, agriculture, medicine, navigation, astronomy, bookkeeping, mechanics, metallurgy, . . .
- Oral knowledge transfer **works**
 - A few hundred years ago, **all** knowledge was indigenous
 - Writing is \approx 2,000 years old
 - Knowledge is at least 50,000 years old
 - Had knowledge not been codified in oral form...**we wouldn't be sitting here**



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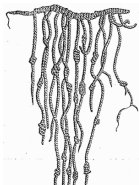
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What Wikipedia Misses Out On

- IK is **exciting** knowledge. **Did you know...**
 - ...that the 1st century BC **Antikythera mechanism** is considered to be the world's first **analog computer** ?
 - ...that **Unilever** bought the patent on the appetite suppressant **Hoodia gordonii** some 10,000 years after the **San** first used it?
 - ...that the meaning of **Talking knots** (*example pictured*) has never been deciphered?
 - ...that **terra preta** soil regenerates itself more than a thousand years after its creation?
 - ...that indigenous Africans build houses with **fridge**, **air conditioning**, **lighting**, and **stove**, without using electricity and only utilising clay, cast iron, and glass?



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Step 1: An Elder Tells a Tale

- A village elder in his environment, sharing knowledge



Step 2: A Visitor Enters the Scene

- His environment? Not quite:



Step 3: The Visitor Publishes his Findings

- Might have misunderstood the context, the meaning, the intended message, or a combination of these:
 - Not all variables are communicated in verbal form
 - Might not be sufficiently literate in the language
 - Or the translator might skip something
- Will select facts and explanations that are relevant to his/her research
- Peer review might lead to a change in the explanation, triggered by scientists that were not even present



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Step 4: A Wikipedian Looking for Reliable Sources

- **Good approach:**
 - 1 Read the paper in its entirety
 - 2 Write a summary for Wikipedia
 - 3 See in which article the summary fits
- **Not so good approach:**
 - 1 Spot a redlink, an empty section, a `{{Citation needed}}` tag
 - 2 Google the keywords
 - 3 Locate the relevant paragraph
 - 4 Rephrase to avoid copyright violation and plagiarism
- Which side are you on?
- Talking about rephrasing: This can twist the meaning yet again!



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Step 5: The Editor Community

- Some of our rural knowledge bearers:



- Encyclopedicity, notability, due weight
- as defined by the editor community, which is predominantly
 - 1 male, educated, 15–49 years old
 - 2 white-collar worker from a developed country
 - 3 liberal, technically inclined, English speaker



Step 5: The Editor Community

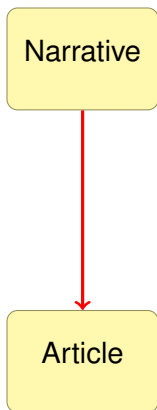
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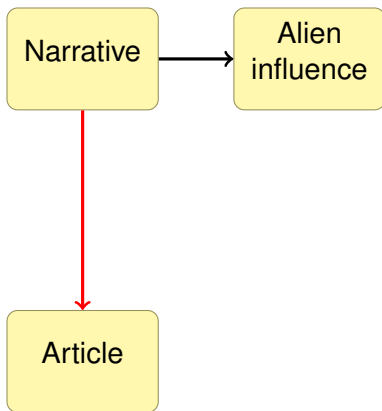
A Nine-Step Visualisation



- Only one abstraction step (rule bending)
- Publications are riddled with errors



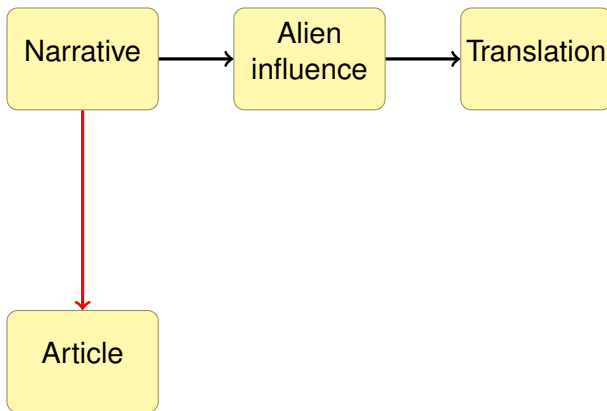
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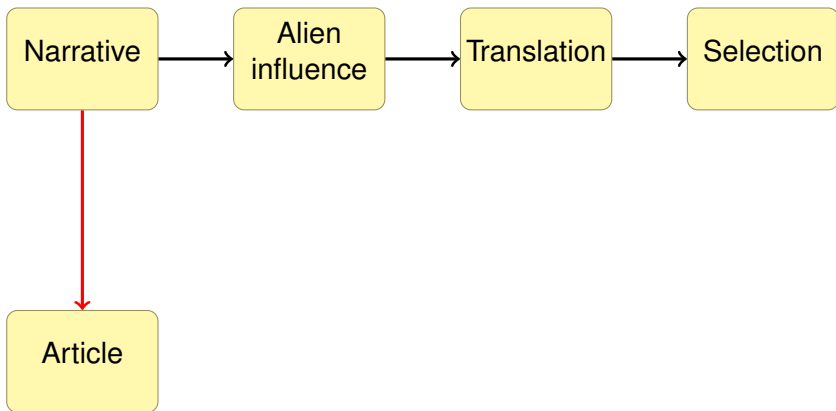
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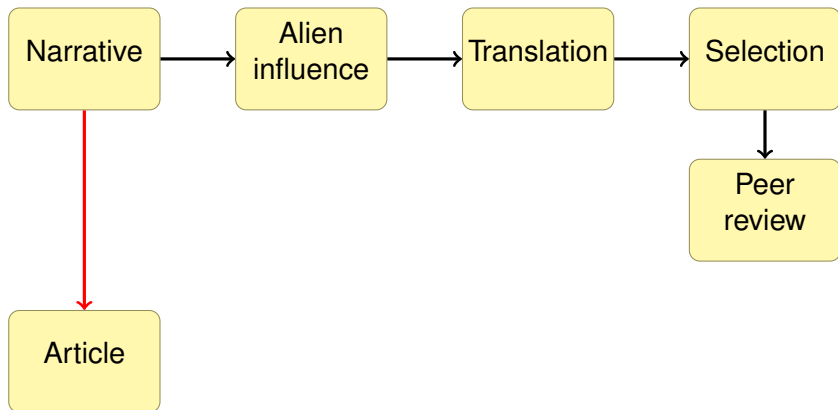
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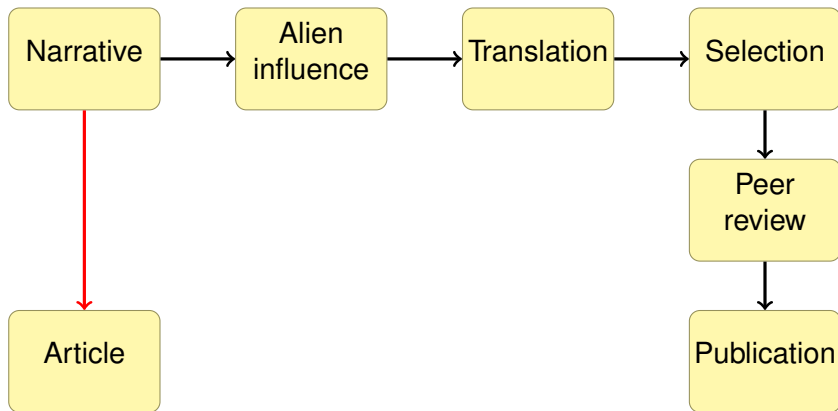
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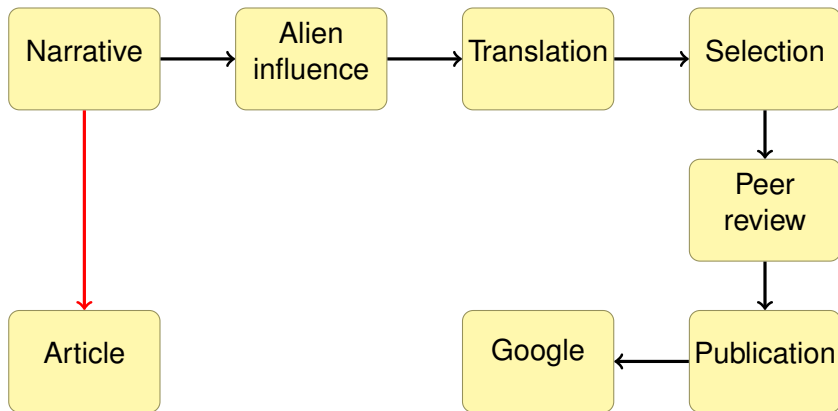
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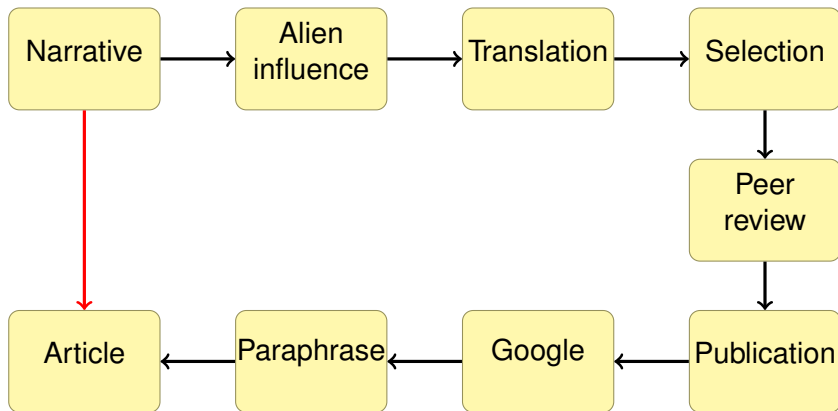
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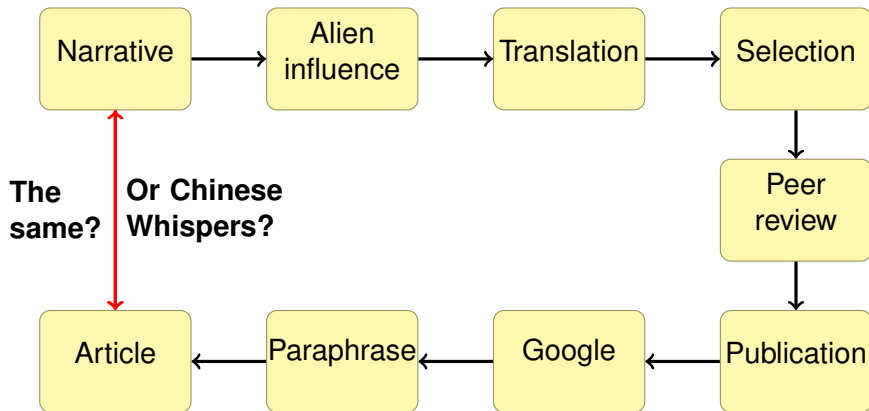
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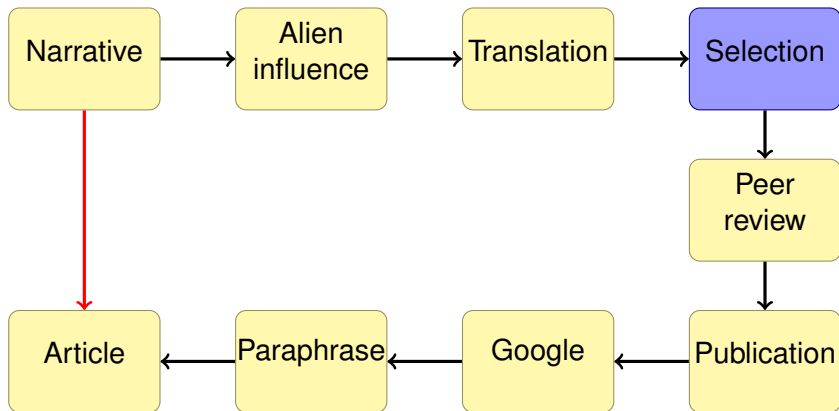
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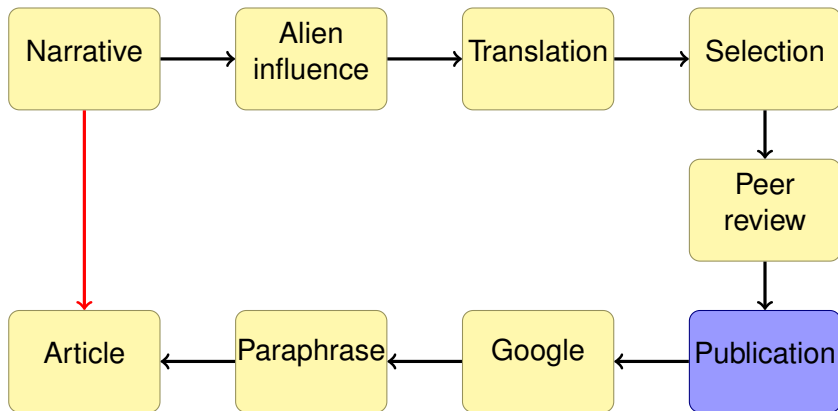
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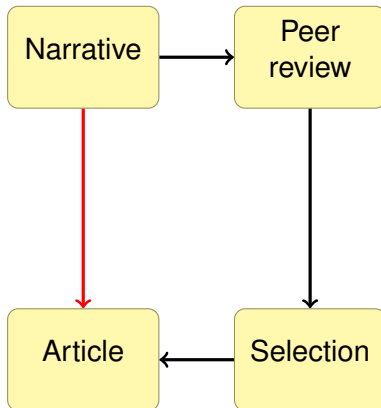


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A Shortcut



Peer Review?

- Indigenous knowledge is published knowledge
- **Orally published**, that is
- Oral knowledge publication is predictable and will occur, for example:
 - at anniversaries and commemorations
 - when a medicinal plant is ready to be harvested
 - event-triggered
 - in response to a good-faith request
- Like a museum director asked about a particular item. . . will always offer more or less the same narrative
- Indigenous knowledge is **peer-reviewed** knowledge
- Contentious narratives will attract immediate commentary



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WP:V

- Indigenous knowledge is verifiable knowledge. You just have to:

- 1 Travel to the particular location
- 2 Learn the language
- 3 Understand the organisation of the indigenous knowledge
- 4 Gain the trust of the community
- 5 Request a re-publication (orally) which will likely be granted

“Imagine a world in which every single person on the planet is given free access to the sum of **all** human knowledge.” (Wales, emphasis mine)

- An indigenous community member, wanting to verify a Wikipedia fact referenced to a library item would have to:

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Allow oral citations!

- Sub-case of `{{Template:Cite}}`
- Narrator name and role
- Context
- And some standard further information

Cite Oral

```
{{Cite oral
|narrator-last= Riruako
|narrator-first= Kuaima
|narrator-role= Paramount Chief of the [[Herero people]]
|community= Herero proper
|occasion= 90th anniversary of the reburial of Herero
Chief Maharero
|context= Speech of the Paramount Chief prior to the
horse parade
|date= 23 May 2013
|place= Okahandja, Namibia
}}
```

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Namibia Knowledge Portal

Gustaf Kandji JSS
Otjiene

Mkganedi Thlabanelo HS
Otjompos

Epukiro Post 3 JSS
Epukiro

Donkerbos PS
Donkerbos/
Sonneblom

Claudius Heuva
Combined School
Talismanus

Rietquelle JSS
Aminus

Mafaneta Junior Secondary School
Afanas

Donkerbos Primary School
Donkerbos / Talismanus

Mafaneta Post - Junior Secondary School
Afanas

Margaret Treacher High School
Otjompos

South West African Secondary School
Otjompos

Gobabis

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End of Presentation

Any questions?

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Further reading: Peter Gallert, Maja van der Velden (2013): “*Reliable Sources for Indigenous Knowledge: Dissecting Wikipedia’s Catch-22*”. Pre-release of a book chapter to appear in 2014, CC-BY-SA, Wikimedia Commons

Categories: Indigenous knowledge, Oral Citations, Wikimania 2013.

