

# Strategies Used in O'odham Creation Legends to Present Cultural Values

Laura A. Moll

*University of Arizona, Departments of Linguistics and Anthropology*

## 1. Introduction

Within the framework of a discourse-centered approach to language and culture (Sherzer, 1987; Urban, 1991), recordings of cultural legends are specific occurrences of discourse that are linked to the past through other tellings of the same and related legends (Bakhtin, 1981 [1934]), but are also elements in the ongoing discursive process of the definition of cultural values. In keeping with these ideas, I investigate a series of O'odham narrative texts about the beginnings of the world, concentrating on the strategies that are used within them to present moral judgements and values. Although I do not wish to privilege legends as the prototypical carriers of cultural knowledge, these stories can be especially important in the transmission of traditional customs and values within societies (such as the O'odham) that are experiencing language and culture loss.

The legends that I examine in this paper are part of a collection edited by Dean and Lucille Saxton (1973). These narrative texts were collected by the Saxtons from native speakers of O'odham and from older recordings stored in archives. The translations given are those provided by the Saxtons in their collection.

My analysis follows the work of Labov (1972) in the identification of evaluative comments within narrative texts. Some of the moralizing found in the legends is presented through simple statements by the narrator (either with regard to past events, or with regard to the effects of those past events on present life). However, moral judgement is also conveyed through the use of reported speech of characters, constructed dialogue between characters, and the use of evaluative adjectives or adverbs.

In addition to these rather overt means of transmitting cultural values, a variety of rhetorical devices are used to indicate the narrator's affective stance with regards to the events being reported (Bakhtin, 1981 [1934]; Hill & Zepeda, 1992; Hill, 1995). These include the use of evidential markers and the point of view assumed by the narrator.

## 2. General Thoughts on the Issue of Studying Written American Indian Texts

It is important to think about texts of oral narrative as being passed through a filter when they are written down. The writer chooses to write certain things and not others, chooses to edit out certain things and not others. In a translated text of an oral narrative, there are layers of filters, including at least: the context in which the narrative was created; the culture of the narrator; the language of the narration; the culture of the writer; the editing of the narrative; the translation into another language; and the context in which the narrative is read.

The legends in this collection are presented as whole texts that have not been changed, other than by addition of translations. It would be interesting to see if there are differences between sets of narratives, grouped by when they were collected, who collected them, who narrated them, or who translated the stories. Differences might be found in the strategies used to present moral judgments and values, or in the values themselves. However, that investigation is outside the scope of this paper.

While these narrative texts are presented as representing the traditions and culture of the O'odham people, they only reflect the lives and values of contemporary O'odham people if they are still being told within that community. If they are being told within the community, then I expect the forms in which they appear are different than the forms they take in this collection, since texts in use will be constantly modified and renegotiated.

## 3. Values Presented in these Narratives

Within a dominant reading of these texts there is an implicit judgement that the things talked about within the narratives are important enough to talk about and / or that they are appropriate topics to be addressed within the given situation. Conversely, one may assume that topics not discussed may be either unimportant or inappropriate to discuss within the context in which these tales were collected. Given this background of assumed appropriateness and importance, in the following examples I will present more overt instances of values being asserted than the mere inclusion or exclusion of a topic from the narratives. I discuss five themes that recur throughout the set of legends considered.

- (1) Themes recurring through legends
  - a. caretaking responsibilities
  - b. models of kin relationships
  - c. the place of the First Born
  - d. singing to manage difficult situations
  - e. the power of singing

The first theme that I address is that people have certain responsibilities to others. In (2), the narrator simply makes a statement about what has (reportedly) happened. However, there seems to be an added assumption that there is a "right thing to do" and that the right thing to do is to take care of something / someone that you have made, no matter who (or what) you are.

- (2) Sp hascu i na:to 'i:da 'ali, heg wa ñu:kud c gegosid c ge'el.<sup>1</sup>  
 'Whatever made the child took care of him, fed him, and raised him.'

The next two examples bridge across the themes of 'caretaking responsibilities' and 'models of kin relationships', as caretaking responsibilities are seen to be tied in these examples to specific responsibilities that people have to their kin. (3) presents a model for how a grandfather should treat a grandson by transparently describing what a grandfather should and should not do.

- (3) Heki hu:, □ hema wu□ 'al keli kc kc 'i□ cum hekid 'al s-ke:'id g 'e-ba'ama□.  
 Ku□ pi hekid ha'icu has wuijide g 'e-ba'ama□ hab masma mat g keli wo  
 ga:tc g 'ali, wo hapotc, wo □onigiwulc, o s-ke:g ha'icu wo 'a:gi g 'ali.  
 'Long, ago, it is said, there was a little old man who hated his daughter's  
 child. He never made anything for this grandson as an old man should, like  
 making a bow and arrow, a racing ball, or telling something good to a child.'

While (4) also presents a picture of how specific kin relationships should work (how a son should treat his father, and how a woman should treat her husband and father-in-law), it is more subtle about the presentation of these values. These values are presented via models of behavior and expectations.

- (4) Ku□ 'am hu: wa he'es hab i 'e-ta:t, "Mant hig wo 'u:hum hi:. K wa hab kaij  
 g ñ-'o:g mant □a hebai wo ho:nt k 'am wo i bek 'am wo 'u'apa. Kut□ wa ha  
 we:heje□ ha'icu wo s-ap'ek."  
 'After awhile he thought, "Maybe I'll go home. My father said that when I  
 married I should bring her home and she would be helpful to them.'"

So we can assume that it must be a good idea to obey your father because the man in this selection is thinking that he should do that. Additionally, it must be good for a woman to help her husband and father-in-law because this was the hope of the man's father if the man should find a wife.

Elder Brother is a responsible and privileged position to hold within kin relations. This is demonstrated in (5) by the fact that everyone goes to Elder Brother for advice and assistance in crisis. Additionally, (6) shows that the elder brother is a more valued kin position than is that of the mother's younger brother.

- (5) Kuş ha'icu 'am i s-mai mat pi hebai wo 'e do'ibia k aş 'am dada t-Si'ihe wui  
 k 'am cu'ick maş hebai has 'e ju: k wo 'e do'ibia.  
 'No one could find a place to escape to. So they came to Elder Brother and  
 asked where they would be safe.'
- (6) "A:ñi 'añ wu□ wa 'em-si:s. 'A:pi 'apt wu□ wa□ wo ha-tatalk we:s ha'icu  
 doakam." Ba□ kaij g t-Si'ihe.  
 "I am your Elder Brother. You will just be everyone's uncle (mother's  
 younger brother)." That is what Elder Brother said.'

<sup>1</sup> The O'odham data are presented in the Alvarez / Hale writing system, which was adopted as the official orthography of the Papago tribe (now the Tohono O'odham Nation) in 1974.

While the examples given above treat the cultural hero, Elder Brother, I believe that the emphasis placed on this specific kin relationship points to the importance of elder brothers in general. This generalization is supported by the positive valuation of the first born child, discussed below.

The identification of a protagonist as 'the First Born One' provides another example of a value that is assumed to be recognized (and probably held) by the audience. This value is that the first born child in a family has a special importance. The First Born in this collection of narrative texts is a cultural hero, very powerful and holding a special place of honor. Example (7) shows this importance of the First Born One as creator of the world and the life in it while (8) shows that other creatures do things to help out the First Born.

- (7) Ba□ masma na:to g jewē□ g We:peg Ma:sikam k 'id da:m 'am hahawa 'ep ha na:to we:s ha'icu doakam c we:s ha'icu mo wu:□añ.  
'In this way, First Born finished the earth. Then he made all animal life and plant life.'
- (8) k heg 'oidk hab wo 'e-ju:.  
'and the little termites did that for the First Born One.'

It is also assumed and taken for granted that the correct thing to do at problematic junctures is to sing a song. This is shown in examples (9) and (10).

- (9) Š 'am hihi: g 'al hiopc k i beihi g mamedho□ k am ce:kidahim g We:peg Ma:sikam. T 'ia'i ge'eda 'i:da mamedho□. T 'am dahiwua g We:peg Ma:sikam k cum mamce mat has wo ju: 'i:da 'e-daiku□. T hab pi cum hebai wa□ wo wi'ickwuhid. Š 'id 'am 'a: 'e-ñe'i:.  
'The termites gathered a lot of algae and First Born tried to decide how to make a seat so the wind could not blow it anywhere. This is the song he sang:'
- (10) T 'ab i ce□ g ta□ k gnhu: hab wa□ him. K pi we:sko s-ma:s g jewē□. Š gm hu: hu□ g ta□ k 'ep s-cuk. T hab kaidam ñei g We:peg Ma:sikam:.  
'The sun rose and went over to one side, but it didn't light up the whole earth. Then it went down and again it was dark. So the First Born one sang like this:'

In addition to singing being an appropriate way to manage difficult situations, singing can be seen to have power, in and of itself, to accomplish goals.

- (11) K ñe'e k 'id we:m cewelhim g 'e□aj. Š wu□ hegai mac hab 'a'ago 'wako'. Š cewelhim k ga hu: 'ai g 'uw|. T 'id 'ab i ce□ g nawijju k ga hu: bei g 'uw| k si s-ap i hu□uñ.  
'As he sang, what he had planted grew. It was what we call 'gourd'. It grew up and reached the woman, then he climbed up and got the woman and brought her down.'
- (12) K hab kaij g Hu:ñ, "Ia 'att wo ñei. T hekid wo ma:si, tt 'am wo hihim k wo ñei. Wa:šan 'ant 'ei ha'icu 'aki ciñ 'an. Tp hems s-ap wo 'e ju: k 'an wo wu:š. Mt wo ñeidok wo s-ma:ck mat 'i'ajed wuḏ wo gi'ik tašk, t wo bai g 'i-

'e'es. Mt wo 'u'u k wo kaickat. T hekid 'ab wo i 'e 'ai, haş wo cum ju:, mt wo ga: g s-ke:g jewed. 'A'aki ci:ciñ 'an o s-wa'usig g jewed c 'ep s-moik. Mt 'am wo 'e'eşa 'i:da ha'icu hugĭ. T hedai mu'i wo ha mai 'idam ñi-ñeñ'ei k wo s-ke:g ñe'ic g g 'e-'e'es, t wo s-ke:g wu:şañ k wo s-ke:g bai. T hedai pi mu'i wo ha mai 'idam ñi-ñeñ'ei k pi mu'i wo ñe'ic g 'e-'e'es, t pi mu'i wo wu:ş, o 'atp hi wo wa wu:şañ k waş wo gakṣ.

'Then Corn said, "Here we will sing. And when morning comes we will go and see. I planted something over there. Maybe it will do well and come up. You will see it and know that it will be four days from now that my planting will ripen. Then you will get it and prepare seed. When another year comes and it is about to rain, you will look for good ground. At the arroyo mouths the land is moist and soft. Plant this food there. Whoever learns many of these songs of mine and sings well for his crops, they will come up and ripen well. Whoever does not learn many of these songs of mine and does not sing them to his crops, not much of his crop will come up. Or if it comes up, it will just dry up."

In these examples, it is not the power of the individual singing that accomplishes the goals. It is the singing of the songs themselves that effects the desired results. This is shown especially clearly in (12), where Corn teaches the growing songs to the people so that they will be able to grow this new kind of food in the future.

#### 4. Voices Heard in these Narratives

Following Hill (1995) and Bakhtin (1981 [1934]), I identify five different classes of voices that are used to present information in these narratives. These are:

- (13) Voices Used in Narrative
- a. narrator when presenting legends – use of evidentials
  - b. narrator when stating "truths" about the world – no evidentials
  - c. the First Born talking
  - d. Coyote talking
  - e. other characters talking

I discuss the different voices in this body of work according to the level of authority that is presumably imbued in each voice in a dominant reading of the texts (Mills 1995). While I assume that much of the information in the text would be compliantly accepted as authoritative, there are several factors that affect the level of authority that the specific words could be assumed to carry. In the following, I discuss occurrences of each of these categories of voice and the level of authority that I attach to that voice.<sup>2</sup>

The narrator's presentation of events often includes the use of the evidential particle *ş*. This particle indicates that the narrator does not know firsthand of the events being reported. It bears the meaning of 'reportedly, presumably, they say' and serves to distance the narrator from what is said, lessening the narrator's responsibility for the content of the

<sup>2</sup> In this discussion, I am extrapolating levels of authority within the O'odham community. However, within a larger context it is interesting to note that the title of the collection in which these narrative texts are found (*O'othham Hoho'ok A'agitha / Legends and Lore of the Papago and Pima Indians*) can be assumed to lessen the authority of the voices presented therein vis a vis an English-speaking audience.

utterance. However, it also can be assumed that a compliant audience will interpret words presented using an evidential marker as knowledge handed down from the ancestors. This evidential particle is only occasionally translated directly into English in this collection, but occurs fairly often in the original O'odham text. Examples (14) and (15) contain such uses of the evidential particle (in bold).

- (14)    § 'ia □u:daḡ | da:m wo'o 'i:da 'ali c hab wa'i 'e-wua mo g 'ali 'e-'e'ebcud.  
           'The child lay upon the water and did as a child does when it is being made to stop crying.'
- (15)    § pi ha'icug g ta□ c pi ha'icug g ma□ad. Cum hekid s-cuhugam.  
           'There was no sun or moon then, and it was always dark.'

Any distancing of the narrator from the words being spoken due to the use of the evidential particle will reduce the level of authority that the words carry. However, these sentences can, nevertheless, be assumed to carry a fair amount of authority due to the expected interpretation of them as ancestral knowledge.

There are times, also, when the narrator's voice presents information as general knowledge, not reported. In these cases, no evidentials are used and there seems to be a strong naturalization of the information presented, as well as an assumption of shared knowledge between the narrator and the audience. Sentence (16) is an example of such "generally accepted knowledge" about how a mother comforts a baby.

- (16)    (Je'ej wo ñe'ed c wo 'ulugidad c 'inhas 'ep wo himad.)  
           '(Like when its mother sings and tosses it up and down and walks back and forth with it.)'

Sentence (17) also presents such a statement of "generally accepted knowledge". However, in this case there is the added assumption that there is a "known" value of certain actions. Here there is an assumption that sitting and thinking are good things to do, else the First Born would not want to do them.

- (17)    T 'am da:m wo dahiwa k ha'icu wo cegito k heg 'oidk hab wo 'e-ju:.  
           'So he could sit down on it and think about things to do.'

This voice is probably the most authoritative of those presented within this paper. I base this assessment on the fact that these statements are made with no attempts by the narrator to distance himself / herself from the statements and that the narrator makes them directly. These statements can be assumed, therefore, to be fully naturalized and unmarked, accepted by the narrator and audience as simply the way that things are and should be. The narrator must not need to distance himself /herself from the utterance in these cases because of the general acceptance that the audience will understand and agree with what is presented. While this type of statement does not overtly show its authority, it is the most authoritative of all since it is simply presumed to be true.

Information is also presented in these narrative texts as quotes attributed to the First Born. These appear in two forms. In some cases, the First Born is talking to other creatures and telling them what it is that they should (or will) do. (18) and (19) provide examples of this way of talking.

- (18) “Mt wo cecc hegai mat ’ab wo i ce□ad k wo ’em-ma: g tonlig.”  
 “‘Alright, you(pl.) name what will come up in the sky to give you light.’”
- (19) “Pt pi wo ha nawojk c cum hekid hejel ’an wo □o’ig gegsid.”  
 “‘You will not have a friend and will always crawl modestly along alone.’”

Additionally, the First Born is sometimes represented as singing and the words of the songs he sings are given as quotes. Examples (20) and (21) are given to show the difference between the spoken quotes given above and quotes of the First Born singing songs.

- (20) T hab kaidam ñei g We:peg Ma:sikam:<sup>3</sup>  
*Wac i i e ta□ai wa na:to*  
*Ka we:maji ñeñeoki. Hihi:.*  
*Wac i i e ta□ai wa na:to*  
*Ka we:maji ñeñeoki. Hihi:.*  
 (Watt highi g ta□ na:to k we:maj ñeñeok. Hi: Hi: Watt highi g ta□ na:to k we:maj ñeñeok. Hi: Hi:.)  
 ‘So the First Born one sang like this:  
 “Didn’t we make the sun and talk with it? Hihi:.  
 Didn’t we make the sun and talk with it? Hihi:.”’
- (21) Ş wenog ab i ceş g taş k ab hi: mo hemu ’ab hi:him. Ş ’ab ñeid g We:peg Ma:sikam c hab kaidam ñe’e:  
*Jewen Ma:kai jewen na:to.*  
*Jewen Ma:kai jewen na:to*  
*Himlu. Himlu. Himlu.*  
*Him. Cu:c.*  
 (Jeweđ Ma:kai at g jeweđ na:to. Jeweđ Ma:kai at g jeweđ na:to. Himini. Himini. Him o. ’Am o cu:c.)  
 ‘Then the sun rose in the place it is now, and First Born looked at it and sang:  
 “First Born made the earth.  
 First Born made the earth.  
 Go along, go along, go along.  
 It’s going along. Now all will remain as it is.”’

Since these are the words of a cultural hero and the entity who created the earth, they can also be assumed to be quite authoritative. When the First Born tells other characters what to do, they do it - even to the point where we can see today that Rattlesnake still has no friends and modestly crawls along. Furthermore, as we have seen, singing has special power and cultural significance. Therefore, the songs of the First Born are almost certainly more powerful and more significant than the songs of others.

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<sup>3</sup> The italicized version of the song text is as it would occur in a song (with marked phonology and prosody). The second version gives a representation of the song words as they would occur if spoken. For more information on the special phonology of Tohono O’odham songs see Fitzgerald (1998).

Coyote's is another voice that is heard within these texts.

- (22)     Ş mel g Ban k hab kaij, "Ce□! Ce□! Bat wo ce:gigk 'tonlig'." Ş pi he□ai s-ho:hoi.  
           'But about then Coyote came running, and said, "It rose! It rose! It will be named 'light'." But nobody agreed.'
- (23)     Wenog maşp g hu:ñ si we:peg 'e 'eşad c 'e ñe'icud, ş g Ban kokşo c pi hema mai g Hu:ñ ñeñ'ei k waşaba 'ei g 'e-kaicka k hab kaij, "Nt waş wo hema ñe'it. T hab wo wa s-ke:gajk hab masma mo g Hu:ñ ñeñ'ei."  
           'When the corn was first planted and sung to, Coyote kept sleeping, so he didn't learn a single corn song. So as he planted his seed he said, "I'll just compose one song. It'll be just as beautiful as Corn's songs.'"

Coyote, like the First Born, is a character who often appears in O'odham legends. However, Coyote is the trickster. While Coyote may be strong and powerful, he is known to do many things that are culturally proscribed, serving, "by contrast, to reinforce the existent moral structure" (Lopez, 1977). Therefore, Coyote's words can be considered counterauthoritative, and this can be seen in other characters' disagreement with him in (22) and in the fact that Coyote's corn seeds grew a weed, "Coyote tobacco", instead of corn as they would have if Coyote had learned the songs sung by Corn in (12).

Other animal and human characters are also given dialogue in these narrative texts. Despite a fair amount of diversity within this group, I present these voices together due to the fact that, in general, these are not recurring characters and, therefore, hold no special personal claims to authority (or detractions from authority). In example (24), Black Beetle's speech is reported. (25) gives an example of a human character speaking.<sup>4</sup>

- (24)     "Ñi hab 'elid mat hekit hema ta□ wu□ wo wa'i doakamk c wo mu: k hi: heb hu: k pi hekid in hu: 'ep wo i wu:□."  
           "I think that when someone has lived a long time he should die and go away and never come back here again."
- (25)     Ku□ hab kaij g 'uw|, "Mapt gamai wo him k wo ha ñei 'e-hajuñ. Pi 'ant 'am hu: wo hi:. Pi 'añ ha ma:c g m-hajuñ. Kutp hems pi wo ñ-ho:hoi."  
           'The woman said, "Go ahead and see your relatives, but I won't go. I don't know your relatives and maybe they won't like me.'"

The dominant interpretation of the level of authority of each of the voices in this category is indicated by the context in which the words appear and by the larger context of the world of the narrator and audience. For instance, Black Beetle's statement here is given authority by the fact that people and animals in our world do die. Conversely, the woman's words in (25) lose authority based on the fact that these words to her husband cause marital conflict and run counter to the model of a wife's responsibilities in kin relationships exemplified in (4). Therefore, a general characterization of a context-free authority level of quotes by characters other than the First Born and Coyote does not seem to be feasible within the limited data considered here.

<sup>4</sup> I have not investigated the effects of humanness, age, or gender on authoritativeness of presentation, but these are certainly factors that might be used to index certain levels of cultural authority within narratives.



## 5. Conclusion

Through this paper, I show how certain aspects of traditional culture and values are presented through particular tellings of O'odham legends. This presentation is bolstered through the naturalization of information presented, through the use of authoritative voices, through the use of proscribed behavior to contrast with normative morality, and through the repetition of certain themes throughout the narratives.

While I have presented these values as being transmitted authoritatively and repeatedly, I must emphasize that this analysis assumes dominant readings of the legends and compliant audiences who will accept these dominant interpretations. While these recorded narrative texts are repositories of cultural information, there must be a body of legends accessible to the community on a regular basis for the morality presented in these myths to be effectively adapted to the present lives of the audience, and for this redefined morality to be incorporated into the value systems of individuals within this community (Urban 1991; Sarris 1993). Therefore, we can not know from this collection of narrative texts whether the traditions and values presented here are representative in any way of current O'odham people.

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Department of Linguistics  
University of Arizona  
Douglass 201E  
Tucson, AZ 85721  
mollmoll@u.arizona.edu