"The Monkey Said What?": Yucatec Mayan Deontic Modality and Metapragmatics

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In this paper I mark the distribution of modal elements in orally performed narratives by Yucatec Maya speakers. In particular, I will look at the distribution of modals and their apparent relationship to discursive, metapragmatic tokens. I argue that the frameworks keyed by discourse-level tokens bind and contextualize social possibilities and necessities through the course of narration.

In this project I focus on reflexive and pragmatic tokens and their relation to modals. My texts are various transcriptions of historical and mythical stories that have been published by Mayan scholars. Within these narratives, I show a nonrandom distribution of modal elements at the text level, as framed by verbs of saying and other metapragmatic tokens. This distribution suggests that the modal function is subsumed under coherent, culturally specific frameworks, generating themes through manipulation of pragmatic and referential rules in discourse. That is, modals appear when the action and speech of a character are talked about in the course of storytelling. Mapping this distributional pattern shows us the governing principles of truths and obligations (marked by modal tokens) that are coded and reused through the course of many retellings and narrations.

> We believe that narrative consists not in communicating what one has seen but in transmitting what one has heard, what someone else said to you. Hearsay. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 76)

1. Introduction

In the Yucatan, like in all places where people speak to each other, there are assumptions that guide interactions. Yucatecos' cultural assumptions are like most others'. By and large, Yucatecos treat each other with the respect that comes from living in a complex social assemblage. The Golden Rule, while there are exceptions, is often a habitual and living practice in their largely Catholic lives. These ethical and moral assumptions weave together rich and varied genres of speech. These cultural ethics imply *proper* ways of doing things and saying things. These habitual speech forms are largely

substantiated, maintained, and reevaluated by performances of conventional and metapragmatic communication (i.e., narrative). This paper shows how Yucatec speech communities index, reference and maintain these social stances in narrative form. Specifically, I show a discursive governance of social possibility, obligation, and necessity, the very heart of social action.

This paper marks the distribution of deontic modals[1] and their relation to culturally specific discursive markers in Yucatec narratives (reported speech frames). This is intended to show the ways in which Yucatec speakers organize information in their narratives, specifically their deontic modal usages. Modals are pragmatic signs that have not been thoroughly studied by researchers to the detriment of our understanding of the context of utterance. I suggest that the use of explicitly deontic modal utterances is governed by the discursive form of narrative in Yucatec speech communities, specifically the rules governing the authorization of events through reported speech. This is to say that the use of modality (which codes in large part for subjectivity) is governed by discourse-level rules, especially in narrative. To test the relationship between the deontic modals and reported speech frames in Yucatec Mayan narratives, I counted the modal propositions in 24 Yucatec narratives and marked their relation to discursive tokens of direct and indirect speech. This is interesting to both anthropologists and linguists for two reasons. First, it links a grammatical category (deontic modals) to discursive rules. Yet, this is only interesting in light of the second insight: this linking gives us a way to map the organization of information and the 'truths' that are referenced in the speech community. Modality codes for social obligations and culturally specific possibilities that exist in the context of an utterance[2]. This paper defines a method that maps the way Yucatec speakers organize their deontic modal propositions within discursive frames, especially direct and indirect speech frames. This is to show us how Yucatec storytellers organize and express living social beliefs and obligations through discourse.

Through conducting a test that marked the distribution of all modal propositions in Yucatec narratives, I argue there is a discourse-level governance of modality forming a "rhetorical structure *component*" (Woodbury, 1987, p. 178). Namely, I argue my analysis shows modal usage as a "well-defined, recurrent, hierarchic organization that is present in a stretch of discourse and distinct from other such organizations" (p. 178). These *poetic* or *rhetorical* hierarchies form a large part of the discursive evidence that analysts focus on. In other words these ways of speaking—these hierarchies—are the *thing(s)* that persist and weave together a distinct cultural history. They form the rhythm and melody of culture.

2. Data

This paper attempts to show a hierarchy in Yucatec discourse. My data were taken from Lucy (1993, pp. 104-113), McQuown (1979, pp. 55-105), and Smailus (1975, pp. 25-293). These texts are transcriptions of orally performed stories; they consist of 24 individual stories told by different speakers of Yucatec Mayan. I chose narrated stories to map the habitual oral strategies of modal usage in verbal art. That is, how, in a performance of a story, the narrator represents the social obligations in the events and speech acts that happened (sometimes mythically) in the past. My methodology was first

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[1] Deontic modals in Yucatec Mayan are usually verbal auxiliary tokens that reference certain obligations within the context of utterance. See Table 3 for examples and explanations.

[2] For more information about the specifics of deontic modality and modality in general, see Palmer (2001).

to count all the clauses and mark them as deontic modal or non-deontic modal. I then calculated the probability of the modal propositions in the total number (Table 1). Table 2 shows the distribution of deontic clauses. This is followed by Table 3, which shows the deontic modals that I found in the stories and their frequency in reported and non-reported speech. I then conducted a chi-square analysis of the data (Table 4). In this table I show the correlation of four different relationships. I tested the relationship between the independent variables—R+ (reported speech frame) and R- (non- reported speech frame)—and the dependent variable of deontic modality. I derived the Chi-square values by adding up the absolute differences of all the categories and show their sum in Table 5.

(1)   Frequency of modals in the texts and their percentage.

Number of clauses (modal and non-modal)	Clauses with deontic modals	% of deontic modal clauses among all clauses
4923	400	8%

(2)   Distribution of unambiguously deontic tokens.

	Unambiguously Deontic constructions n=400
# within reported speech (R+)	398
# not within reported speech (R-)	2

(3)   The particular deontic modals and their frequency in reported and non-reported speech frames.

Modal Token	Explanation	# in reported speech	# not in reported speech
1. ko'ox	"Lets Go!" (exhortative)	75	0
2. yáan	obligative AM	89	0
3. Imperative constructions	Verbs that act as commands (e.g. Ocen! "come in!")	167	2
4. deber	"should" (Spanish loan)	2	0
5. b'in	"to go"	67	0

(4)   A chi-square table testing the dependence of deontic (D+) and non-deontic (D-) clauses on reported speech frames (R+) and non-reported speech (R-). It also shows the expected frequencies (eR+, eR-) for the respective categories. These expected frequencies were derived by squaring the result of the total of their respective column and row and dividing it by the total number of clauses (4,923). This is intended to show that the deontic clustering in narratives is not a result of chance, suggesting that the relationship between deontic modality and discursive tokens is a positive one.

	D+	D-	Total number
R+	398	1314	1712
eR+	139	1573	x
R-	2	3209	3211
eR-	261	2950	x
Total number-N	400	4523	4923

(5)   The results of chi-square analysis.

	Chi-square value
Deontic modals	804.12

In these narratives 99.5% of the deontic groups were distributed within reported speech. Each of the two deontic modal usages outside of reported speech occurred in the first line of a story and was of the form *The story I am **going** to tell you is… .* There is therefore an unambiguously strong tie between reported speech and deontic modals. The use of such modals in reported speech is commonsensible if we think of how even English speakers communicate to each other. For example, think of the way in which you might talk to a boss or superior; specifically, think of trying to get that person to do an action (call someone, open a door, sign something, etc.). It is much easier to use the authority of another superior (even the same person—what they said in the past) to support an action, such as in the request "Well, Dr. Treble said everyone *should* attend".

3. Contextual Analysis

To further explore the implications of the relationship between deontic modals and reported speech frames in Yucatec narrative, I analyzed the deontic forms in context. I marked what type of character (dad, son, king, soldiers, general, etc.) used the deontic modal and to whom they were speaking. This allowed me to determine the symmetric/asymmetric relations of speakers within the speech event. These symmetries (Hanks, 1990, pp. 43-50) represent contextual dimensions of the speech context. Namely, an asymmetric relation exists between father and son and symmetric relations exist between friends. It is on the basis of the symmetries between characters that the narrator of a story can implicitly suggest how to act by extension. This means that the narrator expects the listener to understand the symmetries and gather tacit information from them (how to treat your mother, friend, etc.) The data show two general trends that the deontic types take, referencing different indexes.

The first is between asymmetric agents. These modals are used by someone in a position of power to a less powerful agent for the purpose of telling the less powerful to do something. The usage of deontic modals in asymmetric relations reflected contextual relations, occurring only in *appropriate* situations. For example, a king could tell a soldier to kill someone, but a soldier could not tell the king to do so. Likewise, a dad could demand certain things of a son, but not vice-versa. An example from the text is:

(6)   Y aac bine': "*Paáten* awil máx tál óco bako'"
          And he says (the father): "*Stay* here to see who took the meat"
                                          (Smailus, 1975, p. 47)

This is followed by a confirmation in the text by the narrator that says the sons performed the action asked by the father. This confirmation of the obligation is extremely important to the discursive maintenance of the social relations referenced by the modals. Without this confirmation there would not be a consistent and meaningful context within which to use deontic modals. The fact is, these modals are not arbitrarily chosen to express social relations, but rather the social relations seem to govern the type of modal proposition used. These deontic modals reference social obligations; that is, they let the listener infer relations of the context. If we are talking about a king and his soldiers, we do not have to make explicit the power relation between the two. The title of king alone

suggests that he is the one in charge, and only he can make commands of others. It is these relations that make the moral implications of narratives work. After all, one *shouldn't* disobey the king, *should* one? A soldier's confirmation of the king's orders is important to the maintenance of the social hierarchy of the event. This confirmation allows the listener of the story to infer the relationship between speech and action, namely why a soldier tells himself that *I **must** kill the man*, and then fervently tries to kill the man immediately after being told to by the king. This speech act, the orders of a king, effect the action of the soldier (killing a man), and the modals used in the exchange will reference this order-confirmation rhetorical parallelism.

Urban (2000, p. 67) shows how this parallelism—that is, discourse internal similarities—between reported speech and reported action is a major factor in the organization of myth and, by extension, society. These parallelisms allow the listeners of a story to infer the social positions and possibilities of the characters in the stories through analogy to real world relations (my dad, my siblings). The actions (order-compliance) reinforce the social hierarchy of the event, allowing the discursive picture and structures to unfold. These confirmations and rhetorical parallelisms give the listeners a model for action that is reinforced by future retellings and the actions of the listeners themselves. Narrative and myth provide an outlet for meta-cultural practices. That is, they allow us to discuss and reevaluate social relations that are mirrored and spoken about in stories. Storytelling provides a formidable way for a speech community to discuss the relations of the community and gives ways for people to talk about appropriate behavior of any particular relation (brother-brother, king-commoner, wife-husband). They allow us to discuss normal and abnormal ways of behaving by implication.

So we have seen that first type of deontic usage follows the demands of asymmetric relations and speech events; that is, there were no commands given by marginal social agents to more powerful ones. There were, however, many deontic tokens used between symmetric agents. These functioned as many different types of speech acts (exhortatives, commands, and declaratives about an individual's own future action) and seemed to follow common sense relations. Speakers with symmetric relations with their listener talk about actions of the group (*We* need to go to grandmother's house) before they give a command (*You* need to go). An example from one of the stories involves talk between brothers who have just received order from their father to win a princess in a raffle. The father first says to the sons:

(7)   ...*yan* u dzoocl u beel yét e xprinsesáo...
         …you *need* to marry the princess…

Then four clauses later one of the brothers uses a parallel structure confirming this need, saying:

(8)   …*yan* c gánrrte le xprinsesáo...
         …we *need* to win the princess…
                              (Smailus, 1975, p. 124)

The second modal utterance of *yáan* mirrors the first and explains why the brother was licensed discursively to speak about the brother's actions. The father instilled the obligation of a wedding into the relevant factors of their particular linguistic present and context. Only after the father says there should be a marriage is there any need to get married. The father creates a referential framework for the sons to speak from, allowing

and disallowing certain actions and speech acts by the less powerful agents in the event (the sons). The father discursively forms the needs of the symmetric relations (the brothers) by telling them what they *should* do. This framework allows the one brother to speak for all of them—*we need to win the princess* as opposed to *you/I need to win the princess*.

Similar to these symmetric first person plural deontic usages (*we* need), commands in symmetric events occur only when relevant contextual factors allow them. The only times that there are command-like forms in symmetric speech events (e.g., a brother telling another brother to do something) are when there are pressing and relevant discursive facts that warrant that usage; perhaps there is imminent danger or the individual is speaking under the authority of a more powerful subject (e.g., *Dad said that you couldn't go*). The following example is from a story about a young man, Juan, who is being deceived by his brothers; Juan's jealous brothers are trying to kill him. Juan survives because of the help of a magical eagle (Juan's symmetric friend) that saves him from death. The eagle says:

(9)   …peroh ma' tuubu ti' ten. *Kaasene'* i tene' *yan* inwáncech.
        …but do not forget me. *Remember* I *will/must* help you.
                                                    (Smailus, 1975, p. 115)

This situation allows a command by one friend to another. Such symmetric commands do not refer to the same social obligation as asymmetric commands. This command is more of a helpful suggestion than a direct command, and therefore the imperative form is warranted. Symmetric speech events, consequently, allow all types of deontic modal propositions, whereas asymmetric types only allow deontic propositions to come from a dominant to marginal agent. Symmetric commands refer to different contextual factors than the asymmetric commands. That is, they have different rules of usage.

Using the following example, I would like to describe the deontic rules of use. I look at one story in particular with special attention to these rhetorical parallelisms between reported speech and reported action along the social symmetries shown earlier. I show a discursive hierarchy governing the usage of deontic elements in spoken Yucatec Maya narratives, demonstrating how these specific reference points are maintained through talk.

A case study of the parallel structure of deontic modal requests helps us understand the narrative function in Yucatec speech communities. I show how the parallel structures in the previous section can be played with in narrative to reinforce 'normal' behavior. Throughout this paper I have upheld the idea that verbal art—especially narrative—allows individuals in speech communities to speak about and evaluate social roles and positions; narratives are meta-cultural. Focusing on deontic usages that imply parallel actions, I illustrate how this is done in a Yucatec narrative about the Lord of Rain and a Monkey.

The short story is entitled *The Monkey and the Lord of Rain* (Smailus, 1975, p. 65). The story begins, as we might expect, with an introduction that mirrors the title:

(10)   1.   Unppé cwentoh.
        2.   Cwéntoil untú baadz yet u yuun chaac.

        1.   There is a story.
        2.   A story about a monkey and a Lord of Rain.

This opening establishes an asymmetric framework to follow. Specifically, it introduces two agents, one a monkey and the other a deity. Their titles imply an asymmetric relation and establish expected conduct, namely respect, reverence and even veneration on the part of the monkey. However, as Yucatecos might tell you, monkeys are generally mischievous and disrespectful; they are often metaphors for irresponsible and reckless people.[3] Immediately after the introduction of the story, there are expectations developed by previous Yucatecan understandings of these characters. There is not much said here to tell us about the events, time, status, or setting. Still, there are contextual references given to us. The opening in line 1 signals metapragmatically to the listeners that the following is a story, setting up expectations about speech tropes and specific speaking conventions (especially the maintenance of reported speech and their specific mood) that will be used. The narrator thus sets up a simple referential framework constructed around the implications of this social-relation (Lord-Monkey). These social-contextual indexes form a major part of the story's rhetorical effect, as we shall soon see. The next section has the Lord speaking:

(11)   3.   Y acce' yuum chaac, bino':
        4.   "Coox 'uuic máx maas kaan uy awat!", ci bi
        5.   Y aac e yuum chaac bine':
        6.   "Awatnen taani!", ci bin.

        3.   And the Lord of Rain says, he goes (says):
        4.   "Let's hear who has the loudest shout!" he says, it goes
                (they say).
        5.   Then the Lord of Rain says, he says:
        6.   "You shout first!" he says, it goes (they say).

There is now, in this context, an exhortative request and an imperative command given by a superior. This so far follows, or otherwise initiates, the asymmetric speech relation. These deontic tokens carry a mood that indexes the asymmetric character of the speech event. This calibration of mood to event, as we have discussed, is centered on the metapragmatic verbs of saying that signal reported speech. Reported speech is the only way that these moods and their contextual asymmetric/symmetric relations can discursively (at least in narrative form) appear and be made coherent. Reported speech allows the contextual references to arise; namely, it allows the mood that is associated with the Lord's command to be understood. The deontic modals need the voice-in-context to make sense. The mood is set by both a metapragmatic token and a modal index. We would expect, because of the nature of asymmetric relations, that the monkey would follow with an acceptance of the Lord's request. This would confirm the natural asymmetric parallelism that the context demands. However, the next lines are:

(12)   7.   Pero y aal tne':
        8.   "Ca awatne, ca awatnehe", e baadz tuno'
        9.   "Teche' ma' kaam awooti—
        10.   Tene' si más kaam inwoot" ci bin

        7.   But he then says (the monkey)
        8.   "You shout first, you shout first," the monkey says.
        9.   "You don't know how to shout loudly—

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[3] There are two other stories that deal with a mischievous monkey that confirm this reading.

> 10.   *I* know how to shout loud" he says, it goes (they say).

Here we see a brash, disrespectful monkey breaking the norms of the speech event, namely, the rule that an inferior cannot tell a superior what to do. That is, the inferior cannot use the specified modal mood due to his lack of metapragmatic authority to employ it. The question that follows is why there is a break of asymmetric parallelism; what does this accomplish rhetorically? Generally, narratives, stories, and myths have some sort of practical message, even if this message is not the overt intention of the speaker. The message comes in this story in the following closing lines of this short mythic narrative:

(13)   11.   "Te' bino', ca mach aba chich!", ci bin
         12.   Ca leele bin e yuum chaac, ca haadztaa' bino'. Pom!
         13.   C a luub bine' chuch maach tu weebos bin.

         11.   "Well then, hold on tight," he says (The Lord), it goes (they say).
         12.   And the Lord of Rain gave it to him like this. Bang!
         13.   He fell (the monkey); it goes, holding onto his balls.

The return of parallelism is swift. We immediately see a somewhat obscure cultural judgment that is signaled by the punishment of the Monkey for breaking the asymmetric hierarchy in the referential speech context. This tells the listener, while not overtly, that a person should not break these social hierarchies of speech moods or that person will face negative consequences. It is a sly commentary on appropriate behavior in Yucatec speech communities; it allows the listener to make meta-cultural inferences about the context of the story. These judgments are initiated by the Lord's opening command and mandate certain cultural expectations of speech behavior by the characters. Such expectations include the use of polite registers by the monkey and the acknowledgment and acceptance of a superior's command. However, as we saw, the monkey breaks the social conventions that make the events meaningful and is immediately and severely punished by the Lord of Rain.

The point of this section was primarily to enhance our conceptions of the narrative project in Yucatec speech communities. Recurrent rhetorical-cultural parallelisms reinforce appropriate speech patterns—in other words, social-cultural hierarchies are discursively maintained through modular parallelisms. This section focused on a case study of deontic tropes in narrative form to investigate these particular parallelisms. This particular story showed us how the breaking of the normal flows of rhetorical and syntactical structures created a meaningful message (Woodbury, 1987). That is, the interruption of the expected parallelism provides commentary on appropriate behavior, even if this meaning is not explicitly stated. Listeners interpret the meaning through the disruption of expected parallel structures. This follows my argument that discourse, especially narrative forms, establish, evaluate and play with rhetorical and social hierarchies. The mapping of deontic requests allows us to understand the maintenance and organization of these cultural hierarchies that are especially prevalent in reported speech. Deontic indexes refer to these hierarchies. Even more than that, they allow us to negotiate contextual frameworks, giving individuals the power to *make* someone *do* something.

4. Conclusion

Yucatec narrative structure, as has been noticed by its researchers (Bricker, 1989; Burns, 1983, 1992; Lucy, 1993; McQuown, 1979), has a rich and detailed history. It forms

an intricate part of the everyday speech patterns of the Yucatán Peninsula. Specifically, narrative allows a way for Yucatecos to negotiate and play with the social situation. I have shown how deontic modals play an intricate part in the textual cohesion of these narratives, further describing the manner in which social relations are indexed across discourse. More precisely, we see that deontic modals, and the symmetrical dimensions that they deal with, allow Yucatec storytellers to make apparent the linguistic present of the narrated event. Deontic modalities' contiguity in discourse is one of the factors that contribute to the textual cohesion of the culturally important practice of narrative.

These deontic modals, as evident from the data, habitually take form in reported speech. They have an illocutionary force that can only be understood, in narrative form, through reported speech and the regular lines defined by symmetric and asymmetric guidelines for that speech. More than that, these narratives mirror and evaluate the social relations they speak about; they are meta-cultural. We see that there is a habitual hierarchy at work in this speech community that governs the fashion in which imperative forms can be used. These discursive habits form an economy of persuasive social obligations and possibilities, showing how to think and feel about certain relations (father-son, brother-brother, wife-husband, etc.). Narratives discuss and evaluate these relations. Tracking the usage of deontic modals across them maps how social obligations are passed, maintained, and confirmed by reported action. The discursive requirements in narrative demand the usage of certain types of linguistic elements (e.g., modals), the meanings of which take shape only within the context, complete with the relevant obligations. These deontic modals must be "pragmatically calibrated" (Silverstein, 1993, p. 52; 1996, p. 96) by these factors.

I have shown that mapping these habits and calibration leads to cultural and social information. Namely they co-exist, pragmatically, with the living beliefs of the Yucatec speech community. They represent the *pragmatic* investment of sign-indexes in the speech community, connecting from one utterance to the next, the proper *ways* to speak about social possibility and obligation. Narrative form authorizes agents to contextualize their linguistic and social environment, allowing the agents to comment on themselves and their societal obligations. This meta-cultural function allows us to evaluate ourselves as agents working within the unconscious confines our discursive context.

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