1 Language, culture, mind: emblems of the status human

1. Converting desire into pain

The setting is my host's home, sitting around the hearth fire. The protagonist is Maynor, a three-year-old boy known for his angry antics. One morning, he pushes his tiny chair over, narrowly missing the anthropologist's outstretched foot. His ten-year-old cousin, visiting for breakfast, is the only family member who notices. *Ay dios* (goodness!), she exclaims, calling the boy's mother's attention to his misbehaviour, *xten raj li roq' laj Maynor* (Maynor would have hit his foot). Maynor's mother rights the chair and then asks the little boy point blank: *ma taawaj li la* (Do you want the stinging nettle?). Maynor sits back down, shaking his head, eyes on his mother, frowning. The anthropologist moves his foot out of range.

In this example, the girl uses the counterfactual particle *raj* to describe Maynor's action. Without this particle, her utterance could simply be glossed as 'Maynor (has) hit his foot', indicating that in the world of the speech event, the girl is committed to the truth of the narrated event. With the counterfactual particle, however, she signals that she is committed to the truth of the narrated event in a world *other* than that of the speech event. In effect, she says, 'In another world (but not in this one), Maynor hit the anthropologist's foot'.

Building on some ideas from Goffman (1981a) and Jakobson (1990a), we might say that this counterfactual particle serves to distinguish the speech event from what may be called a *commitment event*. In so doing, it allows this little girl to inhabit two roles that are usually indistinguishable: the role of *animator* (articulating an utterance in this world – the speech event); and the role of *principal* (committed to the truth of the proposition expressed by her utterance in another world – the commitment event).

Furthermore, by shifting her commitment to another world with the particle *raj*, the girl invites the inference that in this world (i.e. the world in which she is an animator), she is committed to the negation of the narrated event. This little girl, then, has revealed two opposing yet not contradictory commitments: while in another world Maynor did hit the anthropologist's foot, in this world he did not.

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Indeed, the girl's separation into animator and principal invites a separation of Maynor into *actor* (the narrated figure of certain actions) and *agent* (the effecting or intending subject underlying those actions). That is to say, in the world in which the girl is a principal and the boy is an agent, Maynor did carry out an action (hitting the anthropologist's foot). But in the world in which the girl is an animator and the boy is an actor, Maynor did not carry out this action. In effect, the girl's utterance allows a range of interpretations involving attributions of more or less cause and intention: from 'Maynor intended to hit his foot' to 'Maynor tried to hit his foot' to 'Maynor would have hit his foot' to 'Maynor almost hit his foot'.

Lastly, it is important to notice how Maynor's mother interpreted his actions as they were described to her by the girl: Maynor was enough of an agent to be responsible, such that he is culpable, such that stinging nettle as a threat is allowable. Indeed, diachronically, the counterfactual particle *raj* is probably a grammaticalization of *rajb'al*, a nominalization of the verb of desire (*ajok*). Ethnopsychologically, many speakers interpret an utterance involving the clitic *raj* with an utterance involving the verb *ajok*. In this way, just as Maynor's action was subject to public articulation, so this public articulation is subject to a psychological interpretation. With her rhetorical question, 'Do you want the stinging nettle?', Maynor's mother seems to have connected the private desire underlying his action to the public consequences of its possible outcome, thereby pointing out to him how a maternal calculus can transform desire into pain, or wilfulness into sting.

This monograph examines mind through the lens of language and culture. On the one hand, it takes what is most public and uses it to pose questions about what is most private. On the other hand, it takes what is most community specific and uses it to pose questions about what is most human general. Its central goal is to weave together the linguistic and ethnographic details of a particular speech community (in this case, that of the Maya, living in highland Guatemala), and the cross-linguistic and cross-cultural framework in which these details must be rendered (in this case, that of modern cognitive, social, and linguistic science). It aims to develop a theoretical framework within which both community-specific and human-general features of mind may be contrasted and compared.

More specifically, the empirical content of this monograph analyses the linguistic and cultural mediation of mind among speakers of Q'eqchi'-Maya living in the cloud forests of highland Guatemala. It is based on almost two years of ethnographic and linguistic fieldwork, most of it undertaken in a village of some 650 people, the majority of whom are monolinguals. It focuses on a variety of grammatical structures and discursive practices, wherein mental states are encoded and whereby social relations are expressed. These are: inalienable

possessions, such as body parts and kinship terms (e.g. the anthropologist's foot, the boy's mother); interjections, such as 'ouch' and 'yuck' (e.g. *ay dios*); complement-taking predicates, such as 'believe' and 'desire' (e.g. *ajok*); and grammatical categories, such as status and evidentiality, which indicate degrees of commitment to, and sources of evidence for, one's claims (e.g. *raj*). These linguistic resources have been chosen because they are discursively frequent, grammatically elaborate, cross-culturally salient, and cross-linguistically comparable. Moreover, they are also locally relevant, subject to rich interpretations by speakers themselves, and thereby caught up in Mayan theories of mind: from childhood inculcation and public ascription, to medical diagnosis and religious prohibition.

2.   Questions, concerns, conundrums

To frame the central concerns of this monograph as a puzzle, we may compare the linguistic and cultural mediation of mind with a similar mediation of natural kinds (say, flora and fauna) or physical properties (say, colour and position). To study these other modes of mediation, psycholinguists and cognitive anthropologists have brought a range of animal pictures, colour chips, and spatial settings to the field, and then compared the linguistic resources used by different groups to describe what they see (Berlin and Kay 1969; Levinson and Wilkins 2006; Lucy 1992a; Tomasello and Call 1997; inter alia; and see the classic early work on kinship by Kroeber 1909 and Greenberg 1966). For example, *penguins are birds*, *this stimulus is yellow*, or *the man is to the left of the tree*. They have thereby been able to pose many important questions, such as: what kinds of lexical and grammatical categories are used by speakers to encode their experience? How do these categories differentially construe the conceptual content and structure of what they communicate? Are there privileged syntactic and semantic resources – for example, resources more frequently used within a community, or more likely found across communities? How do language-specific resources compare to cross-linguistic resources? And how do human-specific cognitive resources, themselves both condition for and consequence of our language ability, compare to non-human primate cognition? In short, what do these results reveal about relatively specific cultural practices, and relatively general cognitive processes?

The results of this research have been highly revealing. Most generally, there is neither universal agreement, nor radical disparity. Rather, there is often comparable contrast relative to a principled set of dimensions encoding a privileged set of features. Such dimensions and features thereby reveal fundamental facts about our species, *Homo sapiens*: how culture and cognition mediate the relation between language and world. What might we then expect of similar studies, focused now on the linguistic and cultural mediation of mind?

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Such a question moves us away from relatively perceptible worldly refer-
ents (e.g. domains like flora and fauna, colour and position), and relatively
unproblematic linguistic resources (e.g. nouns and adjectives like *cat* and *blue*,
deictics and prepositions like *here* and *on top of*). That is, unlike the stereotypic
contents of such relatively concrete domains, the contents of mind seem to be
imperceptible to onlookers, and hence unable to be touched or tasted, smelled
or seen. What could we point to as a standard of comparison? Where do we
find an extensional background? What are the objects or events that we might
jointly attend to?

Moreover, language seems to be too tightly coupled to mind for such a com-
parative project. Not only does it most transparently encode one's own mental
states (for example, beliefs via assertions, intentions via promises), but its main
function is to transform the minds of others. Where wouldn't we find the lex-
ical and grammatical elaboration of mind if the central function of language
is to communicate mental states? How can we cut the domain down to a man-
ageable size?

Finally, given these two facts, how do we make sure we do not privilege the
analyst's tacit understanding of the salient features of the domain at issue –
their folk theory of what mental states there are 'in there' to be encoded, and
what linguistic resources there are 'out here' to do the encoding? In short, the
problem with studying this mode of mediation is that mind seems at once too
close to language, and too far from the world.

To answer such questions, address such concerns, and resolve such conun-
drums is a central task of this monograph. The next section introduces inten-
tionality, as one key property of mind. It outlines the relation of intentionality
to cognitive representations, linguistic practices, and social relations. Section 4
details the ethnographic context in which this research occurred. Section 5
describes the linguistic categories with which this research is concerned. And
section 6 outlines the expository logic of the core chapters.

3.   Intentionality: mental states, speech acts, and social statuses

In a tradition that goes back to Brentano (1995 [1874]; and see Brandom 1994;
Grice 1989a; Haugeland 1998; Searle 1983), intentionality refers to the object
directedness of mental states. Such mental states have propositional contents, or
satisfaction conditions more generally. They thereby represent states of affairs
in ways that can be correct or incorrect, fulfilled or unfulfilled. For example,
just as I may believe that it is raining, I may intend to go to the store. And just
as my belief may be incorrect, my intention may go unfulfilled. More gener-
ally, the representational nature of mental states means that they are caught up
in both logical and causal processes. For example, perceptions are caused by
states of affairs, and are used as reasons. Beliefs are in need of reasons, and

are used as reasons. And intentions are in need of reasons, and are causal of states of affairs. Thus, just as a state of affairs may cause a perception, which may be used as a reason for a belief, a belief may be used as a reason for an intention, which may cause a state of affairs. In this way, mental states not only inferentially relate to each other (within the mind), they also indexically relate to states of affairs (out in the world).

Crucially, such object directedness is also true of speech acts: just as I can believe that it is raining, I can assert that it is raining; and just as I can intend to go to the store, I can promise to go to the store. Speech acts, then, as a key means of making public our mental states, and transforming those of others, also exhibit intentionality. They too are caught up in logical and causal processes, but now of an interpersonal nature. For example, my mental state, insofar as it stands for a state of affairs, may give rise to a speech act. And my speech act, insofar as it stands for a state of affairs, may give rise to your mental state. More generally, just as I may use your observation as a reason for my assertion, you may use my command as a reason for your action. In short, mental states, speech acts, and states of affairs are inferentially and indexically interrelated – logically and causally connected – both within minds and across minds. Intentionality, then, provides a privileged vantage for studying the relation between language, mind, and world.

Mental states are not only related to speech acts and states of affairs, they are also related to social statuses, and normative processes more generally. Indeed, the essence of John Austin's (2003 [1955]) famous insight is this: assuming the proper words are said, and the proper actions are done, speech acts are only appropriate insofar as participants currently hold (or are taken to hold) certain mental states and social statuses; and speech acts are only effective insofar as participants subsequently hold (or are taken to hold) certain mental states and social statuses. Loosely speaking, an assertion is only normatively appropriate insofar as the one speaking believes what they are saying; and an assertion is only normatively effective insofar as the one spoken to comes to believe what has been said. A wedding ceremony is only appropriate insofar as the two people being married have the social statuses of unmarried, adult, man and woman; and a wedding ceremony is only effective insofar as the two people come to occupy the statuses of husband and wife. In short, mental states and social statuses are the roots and fruits of speech acts: they lead to them, and follow from them. Here, then, is where the intentionality of speech acts and mental states is most clearly caught up in the normativity of social relations, where language and mind are most clearly connected to culture.

While such connections are well known, a more subtle connection comes to the fore if one examines the nature of social statuses. In particular, the anthropologist Ralph Linton (1936) defined a *status* as a collection of rights and responsibilities attendant upon inhabiting a certain position in the social fabric.

That is, the rights and responsibilities that go with being a parent or child, husband or wife, patrician or plebeian, and so forth. And he defined a *role* as the enactment of one's status. That is, the behaviour that arises when one puts one's status into effect by acting on one's rights or according to one's responsibilities. A basic social process is therefore as follows: we perceive others' roles; from these perceived roles, we infer their statuses; and from these inferred statuses, we anticipate other roles from them which would be in keeping with those statuses. For example, just as you can infer I am a waiter by my having brought a menu to your table, you can subsequently expect me to perform other roles – such as reciting the daily specials, or writing down your order – that would be in keeping with this status.

Defined as such, social statuses have a lot in common with mental states. For example, just as inhabiting a social status leads to normative patterns of behaviour, so does holding a mental state – but now patterns of behaviour that are caught up in logical and causal processes. That is, we might think of a mental state (or 'intentional status') as a set of commitments and entitlements to behave in certain ways: normative ways of speaking and acting attendant upon 'holding a belief' or 'having an intention'. And we might think of the public face of such a mental state (or 'intentional role') as the enactment of that mental state: actually behaving in ways that conform to those norms. Thus, a basic process would be as follows: I infer you desire to get well, as an intentional status, insofar as I have seen you behave like someone who desires to get well; and as a function of this attitude (towards your status, having perceived your role), I come to expect you to act in certain ways (and sanction your behaviour as a function of these expectations). For example, just as I may infer what my son wants for his birthday by what he plays with in the store, I may expect him to smile when I present it to him at his party.

Crucially, given that any public behaviour that one evinces may be used by others to infer one's social status, there is much ambiguity: many different roles can indicate the same status; and the same role can indicate many different statuses. As a maître d' may be mistaken for a waiter, curiosity may be mistaken for desire. Hence, the idea of an *emblematic role* needs to be introduced: a role which is minimally ambiguous (so that it stands for only one status), and maximally public (so that we each know that we all know the status in question). As Durkheim (1947 [1912]: 230–1) argued for emblems of tribal and national statuses, such as totems and flags, such symbolic resources both create and clarify group sentiment. While the quintessential emblematic roles of social statuses are uniforms, there exist other relatively emblematic roles, such as actions, accents, and hairstyles. And just as there are relatively emblematic roles of social statuses, there are relatively emblematic enactments of mental states. For example, what a uniform is to a social status, an explicit speech act – such as *(I believe) it's gonna rain* – is to a mental state. Such an

utterance may be used to make explicit both a mental state (belief) and the
state of affairs it represents (that it's going to rain). In this sense, mental states
are no more 'private' than social statuses: each is known through the roles that
enact them, and only relatively incontrovertibly known when these roles are
emblematic.

Such relatively emblematic enactments of mental states may be called
stances (Kockelman 2002, 2005a). More broadly speaking, they may be under-
stood as the semiotic means by which we indicate our orientation to states of
affairs, usually framed in terms of evaluation (e.g. moral obligation and epi-
stemic possibility) or intentionality (e.g. desire and memory, fear and doubt).
The grammatical and lexical categories focused on in this monograph (inter-
jections, complement-taking predicates, verbal operators such as status and
evidentiality) have been chosen because they are cross-linguistically available
resources, themselves frequently incorporated into speech acts, for making
relatively public and unambiguous our mental states. And not only are they
used to express our own mental states and transform the mental states of others,
they are maximally caught up in the expression and transformation of social
statuses – and thus our relations to those with whom and about whom we
speak. Stances, then, provide a privileged vantage for studying the intersection
of language, culture, and mind.

In short, intentionality – like any other semiotic process (Kockelman 2007c) –
is distributed across signs (qua roles), objects (qua mental states or social sta-
tuses), and interpretants (qua attitudes). And these are themselves distributed
across signers (qua speakers), 'objecters' (qua topics), and interpreters (qua
addressees). Within such a framework, some readers may still be tempted to
think of mental states and social statuses as powers that are exercised, scripts
that are performed, or things that are revealed. However, if I may switch regis-
ters for just a moment, they might be best characterized as *imagined virtualities
abducted from putative actualizations and subject to unrelenting reification*.
(With apologies to Marx, Peirce, and Deleuze.) We will return to these points
in subsequent chapters.

4.   Ethnographic context

The data for this monograph are based on almost two years of ethnographic
and linguistic fieldwork among speakers of Q'eqchi', most of which was spent
in Chicacnab, a village of some 80 families (around 650 people) in the munici-
pality of San Juan Chamelco, in the department of Alta Verapaz, Guatemala. At
an altitude of approximately 2,400 m, Chicacnab is one of the highest villages
in this area, with an annual precipitation of more than 2,000 mm. It is also one
of the most remote villages in this area, the closest road requiring a three-hour

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hike down a steep and muddy single-track trail. Such a relatively high altitude
and remote location provide the perfect setting for the existence of cloud forest.
And such a cloud forest provides the perfect setting for the resplendent quetzal,
and is home to what is thought to be the highest density of such birds in the
world. Because of the existence of the quetzal, and the cloud forest in which
it makes its home, Chicacnab has been the site of a successful eco-tourism
project fostered by a non-governmental organization, the conditions and con-
sequences of which are detailed in my dissertation (Kockelman 2002).

Alta Verapaz itself, and the Q'eqchi'-Maya speakers who make up the
majority of its population, have had an unusual history even by Guatemalan
standards. In 1537, after the Spanish crown had unsuccessfully tried to conquer
the indigenous peoples living there, the Dominican Friar Bartolomé de Las
Casas was permitted to pacify the area through religious methods. Succeeding,
he changed the name of the area from Tezulutlan (Land of War) to Verapaz
(True Peace), and the Dominicans were granted full control over the area – the
state banning secular immigration, removing all military colonies, and nul-
lifying previous land grants. In this way, for almost three hundred years, the
area remained a somewhat isolated enclave, relatively protected by the pater-
nalism of the church in comparison to other parts of Guatemala. This ended
abruptly in the late 1800s, however, with the advent of coffee growing, liberal
reforms, and the immigration of Northern Europeans. Dispossessed of their
land, and forced to work on coffee plantations, the Q'eqchi' began migrating
north into the unpopulated lowland forests of the Petén and Belize. Within
the last forty years, this migration was fuelled by the civil war that ravaged
the Guatemalan countryside, with the Q'eqchi' no longer fleeing just scarce
resources and labour quotas, but also their own nation's soldiers – often forc-
ibly conscripted speakers of other Mayan languages. In this way, the last cen-
tury has seen the Q'eqchi' population spread from Alta Verapaz, to the Petén,
and finally to Belize, Mexico, and even the United States. Indeed, although
only the fourth largest of the twenty-some Mayan languages (with estimates of
more than 500,000 speakers), Q'eqchi' has now perhaps the largest percentage
of monolinguals, and the fastest growing and most geographically extensive
population of any ethnic group in Guatemala.

During my fieldwork, while the majority of villagers in Chicacnab were
monolingual speakers of Q'eqchi', some men who had served time in the
army, or worked as itinerant traders, spoke some Spanish. Almost all the vil-
lagers were Catholic. The village was divided by a large peak with dwellings
on both of its sides and in the surrounding valleys. It took about 45 minutes to
hike across the village. At one end, there was a biological station kept by the
eco-tourism project and used sporadically by European ecologists. And at the
other end, there was a Catholic church and a cemetery. In the centre, there was

a small store, a school for primary and secondary grades, and a soccer field. The surrounding landscape was cloud forest giving way to scattered housing sites, agricultural parcels, pasture, and fields intermittently fallow. Dwelling sites usually contained a scattering of houses in which resided an older couple and their married sons, all of whom shared a water source and a pasture. Many of the individual families themselves had two houses: a relatively traditional house with a thatched roof where the family cooked and slept, and a relatively new house with a tin roof where they hosted festivals and where older children and eco-tourists could sleep. While all villagers engaged in corn-based agriculture, very few villagers had enough land to fulfil all of their subsistence needs. For this reason, many women in the village were dedicated to chicken husbandry, most men in the village engaged in seasonal labour on plantations (up to five months a year in some cases), and many families engaged in itinerant trade (the women weaving baskets and textiles for the men to sell) and eco-tourism (the women hosting tourists and the men guiding them).[1]

5.   Linguistic categories

Q'eqchi' is a language in the Kichean branch of the Mayan family (Stewart 1980a).[2] Typologically, Q'eqchi' is an ergative-absolutive language: the subjects of intransitive verbs and the objects of transitive verbs are encoded with one set of forms (absolutive case); and the agents of transitive verbs are encoded with another set of forms (ergative case). Moreover, Q'eqchi' is a head-marking language: the arguments of predicates are cross-referenced, via obligatory inflectional affixes, on the predicates themselves.

To give a sense of the morphosyntax and semantics of Q'eqchi', and some of the typological properties of Mayan languages more generally, it is worthwhile exemplifying some of the linguistic constructions that will be of interest in this monograph. While the utterances analysed in subsequent chapters are taken from participation in and recordings of actual interactions which occurred during my fieldwork (as seen in the opening example of this chapter), this one is taken from a myth, recounted more than a century ago. It has been chosen because it clearly and compactly illuminates the relation between linguistic practices, social relations, and mental states. (Appendix B contains the original myth in its entirety, along with an interlinear translation and English gloss.)

[1] Two key ethnographies of Q'eqchi' speakers are Wilk (1991) and Wilson (1995). In addition to these monographs, there are also a number of dissertations and articles written about the history (King 1974; Sapper 1985; Wagner 1996), ecology (Carter 1969; Secaira 1992; Wilson 1972), and migration (Adams 1965; Howard 1975; Kockelman 1999a; Pedroni 1991) of Q'eqchi'-speaking people.
[2] Q'eqchi' is relatively well described by scholars such as Berinstein (1985), Freeze (1970), Sedat (1955), Stewart (1980a, 1980b), Stoll (1896), and Chen Cao *et al.* (1997).

1)   **a'an$_a$ pe' ki-Ø$_a$-elq'an r$_b$-e [in$_c$-rab'in]$_b$ (chan-Ø-Ø$_c$ sa' x$_c$-ch'ool)**
     Dm F Inf-Abs(3s)-steal E(3s)-RN E(1s)-daughter (say-Pres-Abs(3s) Prep E(3s)-heart)
     he must be the one who stole my daughter! (he says inside his heart)

This example is an instance of reported speech, taken from a myth that recounts the marriage between the sun and the moon, and thereby serves to explain the creation of the world. The moon's father, looking into his daughter's room, has just inferred that she eloped with the sun the night before. At the core of this utterance is the verb *elq'ank* (to steal), which is inflected with an evidential prefix (*ki-*) indicating that the event was unexperienced – either inferred by the speaker or reported by another source. This prefix belongs to a larger paradigm, whose members encode semantic features such as future tense, perfect aspect, and imperative mood. Such forms will be the topic of chapter 4.

This verb is also inflected with a person-number prefix (Ø, a zero morpheme), which indicates that the subject of this verb is third-person, singular-number. Here the referent is the sun himself ('he'), cross-referencing the demonstrative pronoun *a'an* in verb-initial focus position. (Cross-referencing is indicated by subscripts.) This pronoun is followed by the factive clitic *pe'*, which indicates that the speaker is committed to the truth of his assertion in *this* world (the speech event). In other words, in contrast to the counterfactive clitic *raj* used in the opening example, the factive clitic *pe'* markedly encodes what is usually assumed (i.e. that the speaker believes what he is saying), and thereby invites the implicature that the speaker was not committed to the truth of this assertion in another world (say, before having checked his daughter's bedroom). Loosely speaking, it indicates that while the speaker now believes this is the case, he wouldn't have believed it before. This simultaneous encoding of one kind of commitment and implication of another allows this clitic to function as both an index of surprise (in speaker-focused usages, as in this example) and an index of doubt (in addressee-focused usages). This clitic belongs to a larger set whose members encode semantic features such as optative status and negative polarity, or epistemic modality more generally. Such forms will be the topic of chapter 5.

This verb is usually transitive, and hence should have two core arguments: an agent (A) and an object (O). However, with the focus construction this verb is in derived anti-passive voice (akin to passive voice in English, but with the foregrounding of the agent and the elision of the object, rather than vice versa). Here the object is encoded using a relational noun that usually functions as a dative construction. And the object of this relational noun is the speaker's daughter, an inalienable possession (*rab'inej*). Unlike the majority of nouns in Q'eqchi', such an inalienable possession loses the suffix *-(b')ej* when possessed. It is part of a larger set of nouns, which includes the words for mother