

Rethinking the communicative functions of evidentiality: Event responsibility in Nanti (Arawakan) evidential practice

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Abstract

Evidentiality has captured the attention of many socially-oriented students of language because of its relevance to the communicative construction of authority, responsibility, and entitlement. With regards specifically to responsibility, previous work has focused on the role of evidentiality in reducing speakers' responsibility for the *factuality* of utterances, an example of a broader phenomenon that I call 'discourse attribute responsibility'. In this paper I combine ethnographically-informed analyses of interactions among speakers of Nanti, an Arawakan language of Peruvian Amazonia, with grammatical analyses of Nanti evidentials and evidential strategies to show that Nantis deploy these resources to negotiate their own and others' moral responsibility for happenings in the world, a form of responsibility that I call 'event responsibility'. I argue that the efficacy of evidentials and evidential strategies in modulating event responsibility results from a chain of inferences that begins with understandings of the prototypical circumstances under which particular evidentials are used, and leads to inferences about the spatial relationship of the speaker to the event in question, which in turn leads interactants to make inferences about the nature of the speaker's involvement, and thus, causal responsibility, for the event. Combined with cultural understandings about causal and moral responsibility, interactants reach conclusions regarding the moral responsibility of the speaker for the event in question.

1 Introduction

One day I was in my house in the Nanti community of Montetoni when Hirero, my neighbor, visited to inform me of an unfortunate incident: the community boombox had stopped working. I walked over to the community leader's house with Hirero, where the boombox had been in use during a communal manioc beer feast, and where a group of concerned-looking young men stood around the silent boombox. I what had happened, and within moments, everyone was talking. Several young men who were frequent operators of the boombox, including Terohite, the community leader's son, were among the loudest, each explaining that they hadn't seen what had happened to it, and using quotative and reportive evidentials, indicated that they had learned of the demise of the boombox from others. Several bystanders contradicted Terohite, however, saying that he *had* seen what happened. Terohite remained adamant: he had heard about the boombox malfunction from someone else. This dispute continued for several minutes without resolution, and eventually we determined that the problem was a loose wire in the connection between the boombox and the solar-powered battery, which was easy to fix. After several bowls of manioc beer, I returned to my house, intrigued by how my inquiry about what had happened to the boombox had led to a quickly-escalating evidential dispute that focused not on what happened to the boombox, but how various individuals had come to learn of the problem with the boombox.

This paper is an effort to understand why, in part, evidential disputes like this arise in Nanti society, and to clarify their significance for our understanding of the social functions of evidentiality and evidential strategies.¹ The central argument I advance here is that some of the communicative uses of evidentials by Nanti individuals demonstrate that evidential and evidential strategies have a more a complex strategic relationship to social understandings of responsibility than is commonly acknowledged in work on evidentiality. Most work on the relationship between evidentiality and responsibility has focused on the use of evidentiality to construct responsibility for *attributes of discourse*, such as its factuality, or its appropriateness relative to local norms of politeness. Here I argue that evidentials can also modulate responsibility for *events* and *situations*, such as mishaps or successes.

One of my goals in this paper is to clearly distinguish these two forms of responsibility, which I refer to as *discourse attribute responsibility* and *event responsibility*, respectively, and to examine how evidentiality is employed in Nanti interactions to negotiate the latter. I argue that evidentials and related source-of-information specifications index relationships between knowing subjects and events, and that in Nanti society at least, these relationships can be deployed as metaphors for the subject's involvement in that situation. Involvement, in turn, serves as a basis for Nanti judgements of moral responsibility. The result is a *pragmatic metaphor* (Silverstein 1976), through which evidential specification can come to stand for moral responsibility for the situations referred to by those evidentially-marked propositions.

If this argument is correct, as I hope to show in this paper, the social significance of the evidential disputation in the opening vignette with Terohite and the boombox, and the motivations of the interactants, becomes clearer. The question of the sensory access Terohite had to the event of the boombox's breakdown is immediately relevant to the interactional construction of responsibility for the unfortunate event.

This paper is organized as follows: section 2 presents basic ethnographic and linguistic information on the Nanti people and language. Section 3 reviews the previous scholarship on the relationship between evidentiality and responsibility. Section 4 presents a discussion of general philosophical and anthropological approaches to responsibility, while section 5 discusses responsibility in Nanti society. Section 6 presents an overview of Nanti evidentiality and evidential practice, including a discussion of how Nanti appears to be in the process of independently innovating evidential marking. Section 8 is the empirical heart of the paper, an extended examination of the use of evidential resources and their relation to the interactional negotiation of event responsibility in a particular interaction. Section 7 provides an theoretical account of how evidentials come to be resources for the negotiation of event responsibility. Transcription conventions and morphological abbreviations are given in section 10.

¹Following De Haan (1999) and Aikhenvald (2004), I take evidentiality to be the grammaticalized expression of the 'source of information' for a given proposition, thereby distinguishing evidentiality from epistemic modality and non-grammaticalized expressions of source of information. Evidential strategies, in turn, are non-grammaticalized means for expressing source of information meanings, e.g., verbs of perception. I discuss the denotational and indexical components of evidentiality in detail in §7.

2 Ethnographic and Linguistic Background

Nantis are one of six Arawakan peoples who speak languages of the Nihagantsi² family: Asháninka, Ashéninka, Kakinte, Matsigenka, Nomatsigenka, and Nanti.³ These peoples live in a roughly contiguous area in the Andean foothills of southeastern Peru and the adjacent regions of lowland Peru and Brazil. Nanti is closely related to Matsigenka, being partially intelligible with it. There are approximately 450 Nantis, living in some eight to ten settlements in the headwaters regions of the Timpia and Camisea River basins, both located in the northern lowland area of the *departemento* of Cusco. Nantis have traditionally been semi-nomadic hunter-horticulturalists, and some remain so to the present, although contact with missionaries, school teachers, and petrochemical companies in the 2000s are leading to significant changes in Nanti lifeways. Nantis are culturally and historically most closely related to the much more numerous Matsigenkas (Baer 1994; Izquierdo 2001; Johnson 2003; Rosengren 1987; Shepard 1999), with whom Nantis initiated relationships in the late 1980s, after at least a century of avoiding contact with most non-Nantis (Michael and Beier 2004).

I gathered the discourse data on which this paper is based between 2003 and 2005, in the community of Montetoni, which with 190 inhabitants, was at the time the largest of the Nanti settlements. My ethnographic observations date back to fieldwork I began in 1999, and to earlier community involvement dating back to 1997. With the exception of some of young men who speak Matsigenka, and a smaller number of young men who have acquired a number of Spanish phrases and words, all residents of Montetoni at the time were monolingual in Nanti.

Like the other Nihagantsi languages, Nanti is a head-marking language with extensive, primarily suffixal, verb morphology. Verbal inflectional categories include aspect and reality status marking (Michael 2014). Nanti primarily exhibits nominative-accusative alignment, although it displays traces of the fluid-S system characteristic of the Ashéninka branch of the family (Payne and Payne 2005). Arguments are realized either as person marker clitics, or much less frequently, as free NPs (Michael 2004). Nominal morphology is minimal, consisting of optional plural marking and a single general postposition.

3 Evidentiality and responsibility: an overview

Evidentiality has captured the attention of many socially-oriented students of language because of its obvious importance in the interactional construction of authority, responsibility, and entitlement (Atkinson 1999, 2004; Fox 2001; Hill and Irvine 1993b; Sidnell 2005). While fact that evidentiality is implicated in the interactional negotiation of responsibility is well established, it is not typically clarified that there are at least two markedly different kinds of responsibility salient to the interactional role of evidentiality: responsibility for *attributes of discourse*, and responsibility for *events*. In this section I distinguish these two forms of responsibility, and review the scholarship on the role of

²In prior work I have referred to this subgroup as the ‘Kampan’ family, a widely-used name for this subgroup. The name ‘Kampa’ (also ‘Campa’), however, is viewed as pejorative by some speakers of some languages of this subgroup (Vigil 2010; Vigil and Zariquiey 2017) and I believe that it is time for linguists to adopt a different name. The name *Nihagantsi* corresponds to the reconstructed word for ‘language’ in the proto-language of this subgroup. Another name employed for this subgroup is ‘Pre-Andine’, which I argue is problematic, not from a social or political perspective, but a scientific one (Michael 2008:p.212).

³The classification of the varieties of the Nihagantsi family presents numerous challenges, not least because it includes a number of dialect continua. Experts disagree on the distinctions between dialects and languages in the family, with recent classifications ranging from three languages with multiple dialects (Campbell 1997; Kaufman 1994) to six distinct languages (Aikhenvald 1999). Michael (2008:pp.212-219) and Pedrós (2018) provide discussions of these issues by specialists in this subgroup.

evidentiality and evidential practice in the interactional construction of responsibility, showing that both forms of responsibility are relevant to our understanding of the social functions of evidentiality.

3.1 Discourse attribute responsibility: Definition and previous scholarship

Discourse attribute responsibility refers to the accountability of speakers for particular attributes of discourse that are singled out as salient by interactants and local language ideologies. Under this construal of ‘responsibility’, interactants are evaluated as praiseworthy or culpable for how their discourse displays or fails to display qualities deemed relevant by participants in interactions. The discourse attributes that have received the most attention with respect to the social-interactional functions of evidentiality are factuality and politeness. Evidentiality is relevant to the negotiation of this form of responsibility as a means for mitigating or underscoring the responsibility of interactants for these discourse attributes.

Linguistic anthropologists and others have explored in some detail the use of quotative and reportive strategies for negotiating discourse attribute responsibility.⁴ We find that Hill and Irvine (1993b), Fox (2001), and Atkinson (1999), for example, comment that quotative and reportive evidentials serve to mitigate a speaker’s responsibility for the factuality of an utterance. This result is a consequence of the differentiation of principal and animator participant roles effected by quotatives and reportives. The mitigating effect stems from the fact that animators are typically shielded from responsibility for the discourse attributes of the utterances they animate (Goffman 1979).⁵ This burden is instead that of the principal, which role the reportive or quotative typically distinguishes from the speaker.

These same evidentials can also shield speakers from the disapproval risked by violating local norms regarding appropriate evaluative statements of others’ behavior. For example, Irvine (1993), for Wolof society (Niger-Congo; West Africa), and Besnier (1993), for Nukulaelae society (Austronesian; Tuvalu), have shown how reported speech can insulate speakers from negative evaluations to which they may otherwise open themselves by making insulting or critical comments of others.

While linguistic anthropologists have tended to focus on quotatives and reportives, descriptive and typological linguists concerned with grammaticalized evidential systems have observed that other forms of evidentiality are also implicated in speaker responsibility and commitment to factuality. In the case of Wanka Quechua (Quechuan; Peru), for example, Floyd (1999) has argued that the use of direct evidentials, especially visual evidentials, indicates strong speaker commitment to the truthfulness of utterances, and that the use of weak evidentials, such as reportatives or inferentials, is linked to weak speaker commitment. Chafe (1986), Willett (1988:p.85-8), and many others have made similar observations. De Haan (1996:cited in Stenzel (2004)) characterizes the relationship between evidentials and discourse attribute responsibility in the following terms:

As far as the degree of confidence in the truth of the statement is concerned, by using evidentials, a speaker will not commit him or herself to any degree of confidence but will transfer any responsibility to the hearer.

3.2 Event responsibility: Definition and previous scholarship

The second type of responsibility I consider in relation to evidentiality and evidential practice, and the focus of this paper, concerns praiseworthiness or blameworthiness for events and states of

⁴Discourse attribute responsibility is simply referred to as ‘responsibility’ in these works.

⁵ As Shuman (1993) and Hill and Irvine (1993a:p.13) observe, reportive and quotative strategies are not foolproof, and may ultimately fail to achieve the sought-after fission of principal and animator, leading to the inability of participants to escape responsibility for the utterances they animate.

affairs. I refer to this form of evidentiality as *event responsibility*. Under this form of responsibility, interactants are held accountable for certain situations or eventualities having arisen, rather than being held accountable solely for the attributes of discourse.

The role of evidentiality and evidential practice in the interactional construction of event responsibility has not attracted a great deal of attention from either linguistic anthropologists or linguists. This is no doubt in part because discourse attribute responsibility and event responsibility are not clearly distinguished in the literature. Nevertheless, we do find sufficient mention of the relationship between evidentiality and event responsibility to infer both that the distinction between discourse attribute responsibility and event responsibility is salient for speakers of genealogically and areally disparate languages, and that evidentiality plays a role in the interactional construction of the latter.

Hill and Zepeda (1993), for example, discuss the use of discursive strategies to “distribute responsibility” in English-Tohono O’odham (Uto-Aztecan; USA and Mexico) bilingual interactions. A careful reading of their discussion makes it clear that their use of the term ‘responsibility’ covers both *event* and *discourse attribute* senses of the term. Their analysis shows that reported speech both mitigates discourse attribute responsibility via the animator/principal split discussed above (Hill and Zepeda 1993:p.198), and diminishes event responsibility for the “troubles” that are the topic of the interactions. In the latter case, reported speech serves to iconically represent an interactant’s belated acquaintance with certain crucial facts (Hill and Zepeda 1993:p.208), through which “she represents herself as being unable to directly influence the course of events . . . because she lacks the necessary knowledge at crucial junctures.” (Hill and Zepeda 1993:p.198). As we shall see below, this echoes certain strategies employed by Nanti speakers to mitigate event responsibility.

Bendix (1993:p.241-2) briefly describes some strategic uses of Newari evidential morphology to mitigate event responsibility via implicatures regarding intentionality and volitionality. His discussion concerns an ‘internal’ evidential (INT), which indicates direct knowledge of the intention to perform a given action, and an ‘external’ evidential (EXT), which indicates knowledge obtained through having observed incontrovertible evidence for it. Bendix remarks that “with EXT . . . I distance myself from involvement in the event, and thereby from responsibility for it.” As we shall see, a similar evidential distancing function plays an important role in Nanti’s negotiation of event responsibility.

Dwyer (2000:p.51-2), speculates briefly on how speakers of Salar (Turkic; China) may use non-firsthand evidentials to distance themselves morally from situations they deem shameful. Chirikba (2003:p.246) comments that speakers of Abkhaz (Abkhazo-Adyghean; Georgia, Turkey, and Ukraine) can use inferentials to indicate non-participation in an event as well as to reduce discourse attribute responsibility for the factuality of an utterance. He makes similar observations about the reportive, noting that it can serve both to reduce responsibility for an utterance as well as to ‘distance’ the speaker from the source of information (ibid., p.261, 264). Similarly, Dixon (2003:p.169-170) remarks on an instance in which a Jarawara (Arawá; Brazil) narrator employs a recent past non-eyewitness evidential, by which he “dissociates himself from responsibility for” a boat getting lost.

Event responsibility is in principle both positive, leading to praiseworthiness, and negative, leading to blameworthiness. However, to the extent that the literature discusses the relationship between evidentiality and event responsibility, the focus is on the role of evidentiality in mitigating blameworthiness. This asymmetry is also manifest in Nanti interactional data, where we find evidential resources being used to mitigate blameworthiness, but rarely, if ever, employed to construct praiseworthiness. This asymmetry may stem from the fact that evidentiality easily serves as a means for speakers to *distance* themselves from events, which readily lends itself as a strategy for reducing responsibility, but not for increasing it.

In closing this section, I wish to make clear that discourse attribute responsibility and event

responsibility do not simply reduce to ‘responsibility for talk’ and ‘responsibility for actions’, respectively. This tidy correspondence breaks down because utterances may be performative, making talk an act that brings about an event or a state-of-affairs. Event responsibility may thus in principle include responsibility for the social *consequences* of discourse (e.g. discord). This is one of the points made by Duranti (1993), which discusses how Samoan orators may be held blameworthy for the consequences of their talk. In cases such as this, the two forms of responsibility may overlap significantly, since blameworthy attributes of discourse can be seen as the causes of undesirable events.

4 Responsibility: philosophical and anthropological perspectives

In order to sharpen our analysis of the relationship between evidentiality and event responsibility, it is helpful to draw on philosophical approaches to responsibility. Ethical philosophers typically distinguish three basic types of responsibility, which, following Birnbacher (2001), I refer to as *ex post* responsibility, *ex ante* responsibility, and causal responsibility. *Ex post* responsibility is a form of retrospective responsibility that we associate with praiseworthiness or blameworthiness for acts or omissions.

Ex post responsibility is the kind of responsibility one incurs by being held ‘answerable’ for some act of one’s own, done by commission or by omission in the past. (ibid.: 9)

Both discourse attribute responsibility and event responsibility are forms of *ex post* responsibility.

Ex ante responsibility is a prospective form of responsibility associated with undertaking to perform certain actions:

Ex ante responsibility is normally ascribed to an agent (individual or collective) for the production of a certain state of affairs, with the acts realising this state of affairs lying in the future. (ibid.: 10)

Finally, causal responsibility is a non-moral form of responsibility, arising solely from substantive participation in a causal chain leading to some outcome:

Causal responsibility is not related to responsibility in the one or the other of its core meanings [i.e. *ex post* or *ex ante* responsibility]... The fact that the event E1 is causally responsible for event E2 does not imply anything about *ex post* or *ex ante* responsibility in the case. It only means that E1 is the cause or one of the more important causal conditions of E2... (ibid.: p.11)

Although causal responsibility is not itself a form of moral responsibility, it *is* a condition the *assignment* of moral, specifically *ex post*, responsibility. According to Birnbacher (2001:p.12-14, *passim*), a person is said to be *ex post* responsible if the following conditions are met:

1. The person held responsible is identical with the individual who performed the act for which responsibility is ascribed.
2. The person in question was free to act otherwise.
3. The person in question was under an obligation not to do, or not allow, the harm for which he or she is held responsible.

4. There exists a causal relation between the person's actions and the event for which he or she is being held responsible. That is the person is (partially or wholly) causally responsible for the event in question.

Causal responsibility is thus one of the conditions for *ex post* responsibility, leading an important *practical* relationship between causal and *ex post* responsibility: in specific interactional contexts, interactants frequently agree that *ex post* responsibility conditions 1 through 3 hold, based on shared world knowledge, cultural assumptions, and moral principles. Under these circumstances, the determination of causal responsibility becomes the locus of negotiation over *ex post* responsibility, with the affirmation of causal responsibility leading to the deduction of *ex post* responsibility. In this way, *ex post* responsibility may come to turn on the contingent facts of causal responsibility. As we shall see in §7, the role of causal responsibility in the determination of moral (event) responsibility is central to the efficacy of evidentiality in negotiating event responsibility in Nanti interactions.

Since I seek to apply the philosophical distinctions outlined above to a non-Western society, it is important to consider them in light of the anthropological literature on responsibility. Within anthropology, the earliest work on responsibility was by legal anthropologists, but more recently, responsibility has come to interest linguistic anthropologists also. Both subdisciplines appear to take for granted the basic philosophical distinctions sketched above, in effect understanding cross-cultural variations in ideologies of responsibility in terms of culture-specific variants of the four basic conditions of *ex post* responsibility.⁶ Documented areas of cross-cultural variation in ideologies of responsibility include local understandings of what constitutes an offense (condition 3), local theories of morally-relevant forms of causation⁷ (condition 4), and the salience of intentionality as a factor in the assignment of responsibility (condition 2). The first of these areas of variation is an ethnographic commonplace: moral values are known to vary from society to society. Variation in morally-relevant forms of causation is evident in work on classical topics in cultural anthropology, such as witchcraft (e.g. Evans-Pritchard 1937) and taboos (e.g. Frazer 1936).

Linguistic anthropologists' engagement with the concept of responsibility is motivated by a broader reexamination of 'personalist' theories of meaning (Duranti 1993; Du Bois 1993). Personalist theories seek to explain meaning in terms of the individual speaker's communicative intentions, an uncongenial approach for analysts who see meaning as negotiated through interaction. Sociocentric approaches, in contrast, seek to understand meaning as the outcome of interaction among multiple participants. The relevance of sociocentric approaches to meaning for understandings of responsibility is exemplified by Duranti's (1993) discussion of Samoan orators' responsibility for their utterances in political meetings (*fono*). Duranti observes that the socially-accepted meaning of an utterance is the consequence of the combined contextualizing and recontextualizing contributions of multiple orators, especially higher-ranking ones. Accordingly, the meaning for which the original orator is held responsible may be quite divergent from the one he intended.

Consequently, for linguistic anthropologists, differences in the role of intentionality in the assignment of responsibility is frequently the most interesting parameter of variation. In terms of the conditions of *ex post* responsibility enumerated above, intentionality enters as a factor affecting the second condition, namely, that the agent to whom responsibility is to be attributed was in the position to act otherwise than he or she did. If the agent did not act intentionally, the reasoning

⁶Attention to *ex ante* responsibility is unusual among anthropologists; Kuipers's (1993) discussion of Weyewa (Austronesian; Indonesia) "responsibility to the word" is a rare discussion of responsibility framed as prospective (discourse attribute) responsibility.

⁷An intriguing variant is reported for Dou Donngo society, in the form of a significantly weakened condition on causal responsibility (Just 1990). In certain cases in this society, liability is established solely on the grounds of it having been causally *possible* that the accused committed the harm in question.

goes, the agent was not in a position to choose not to bring about the event for which he or she would be held responsible. In early work, the significance of intentionality was framed in evolutionist terms, whereby its exclusion in determining responsibility (i.e. strict liability) was seen as a characteristic of “tribal” societies, and its inclusion a characteristic of “modern” legal systems (e.g. Gluckman 1965). Moore (1972) argued that this contrast is overdrawn, since ‘modern’ legal systems also include notions of strict liability (e.g. in tort law), and the close study of nominally strict liability systems shows that there is space in them for the consideration of intention (Just 1990; McLaren 1975). Some of the many societies that have been described as exhibiting strict liability include Barotse (Lozi, Bantu; southwestern Africa; Gluckman 1965), Yurok (Algic; USA; Kroeber 1925), Jalé (Trans-New Guinea; Irian Jaya; Koch 1978), Dou Donggo (Bimanese, Austronesian; Indonesia; Just 1990), Nukulaelae (South Tuvaluan; Tuvalu; Besnier 1993:p. 166), and to a significant degree, Samoa (Duranti 1993; Shore 1982).

Given that work of legal and linguistic anthropologists essentially presupposes the basic philosophical framework for responsibility delineated by ethical philosophers, it seems reasonable to infer that this framework is viable for cross-cultural work on responsibility. It is clear that the various criteria are weighted differently in different societies, leading, for example, to the greater prominence of ‘strict liability’ in some societies than others. Similarly, culture-specific theories of morally-relevant causation may vary considerably. It will therefore be prudent to be sensitive to Nanti-specific weighings of these parameters.

5 Event responsibility in Nanti society

The discursive construction of event responsibility is a major theme in Nanti interaction. In my experience, few mishaps that come to the knowledge of others are permitted to pass by without discussion of who bears responsibility for the unfortunate event. Determining the whos, hows, whats, and wherefores of mishaps is something into which Nantis frequently invest considerable interactional work. Although I have witnessed interactions in which the assignment of culpability may ultimately be abandoned, as when culpability appears to be gravitating towards socially prominent men, I have rarely heard Nantis articulate the view that something ‘just happened’ or that an event was the consequence of chance, if people were involved in the event. The conclusion that there is no *moral* responsibility for an event or state of affairs is for the most part only reached in Nanti interactions if the participants do not identify any human *causal* responsibility in the event.⁸

There is a distinct tendency for event responsibility to trickle down to the young and to women, following the tendency observed by Hill and Irvine (1993a:p.21) for less powerful members of a given society to be disproportionately saddled with culpability. Intentions, which generally do not play a major role in discussions about responsibility among Nantis, are cited much more frequently as a mitigating factor when it comes to socially prominent adult men than for anyone else.

The following incident exhibits the characteristically low importance placed on intentions in Nanti interactions involving responsibility. One day in 2004, I accompanied a group of some ten

⁸A reviewer raised the question of the role of witchcraft accusations in Nanti evaluations of human causal responsibility for mishaps and unfortunate events. This question is especially germane as Aikhenvald (2004) has suggested that the prevalence of evidentiality and widespread beliefs in witchcraft in Amazonia are non-trivially related. Strikingly, however, Nantis have not believed in witchcraft in living memory. When first exposed in the early 1990s to the ideas of witchcraft held by the Matsigenkas, their linguistically and culturally closely-related neighbors, Nantis expressed bemusement and incredulity. Given that all other Nihagantsi groups express similar understandings of witchcraft, and the terms employed to refer to witchcraft and witches reconstruct to Proto-Arawakan (Payne 1991), the absence of witchcraft beliefs in Nanti society is most likely a cultural innovation that post-dates the separation of the Matsigenka and Nanti populations.

members of my residence group on a trip to a nearby stream to fish with *kogi* (barbasco), a plant whose roots can be pulped to release a milky fluid, which, diffused into water, stuns fish. We had been following the cloud of *kogi* fluid downstream for about half an hour when almost everyone in the group froze: a *samani* (*Agouti paca*, a large rodent valued for its meat) was emerging sleepily from its burrow in the creek bank only a few meters away. One young woman, Nora, had her back turned to the hole, however. As Hirero and Shanebo limbered their bows to fire at the *samani*, Nora turned to see what everyone else was intently gazing at, and was so surprised by the nearby animal that she cried out: “*Samani!*” In the blink of an eye, the startled *samani* shot off into the undergrowth. The adults’ faces fell, and the men rounded on Nora to criticize her for scaring off the animal. Even the children of the group got involved, mimicking Nora’s cry of “*Samani!*” in mocking tones. Nora was very embarrassed and silently endured the criticisms and mockery. At no point in this interaction did the fact that her actions were unintentional surface as a relevant factor in her culpability for the events that had transpired.

When a mishap is revealed in the course of an interaction, and the responsible party is not obvious, it is not unusual for vulnerable parties to scramble to protect themselves. Culpability is circling, and it must land somewhere. In fact, socialization into this view of responsibility is, to me, a striking aspect of Nanti childhood. Very young Nanti children are very rarely criticized for their actions or for the consequences of their actions. Indeed, they seem immune to blame and are sometimes even encouraged by adults in the context of ‘play’ to display behaviors – such as expressing anger or greed, or demonstrating physical aggression – which are otherwise severely censured in Nanti society. However, this state of affairs changes radically at around four years of age, when children go from being virtually blameless to being magnets for culpability. Suddenly their actions become the objects of intense parental discursive scrutiny and assessments of culpability. Behaviors which are generally socially disapproved are of course objects of criticism and the assignment of culpability, but even minor unintentional mishaps may occasion extensive criticism and negative evaluation. When an infrequent theft occurs, or when there is damage to property, children are almost always the first suspects, and they are overwhelmingly ultimately designated as guilty parties. Indeed, a child’s mere proximity to some mishap may lead parents to hold them responsible.

Consider the following events: one day in 2005, I went to visit the household of Ihonisi and Behatrisa, in a neighboring residence group. On the way to their house, I noticed that their neighbor’s, Hórasa’s, house had collapsed. Hórasa rarely slept in his own house, preferring to stay in another residence group, and he did not maintain it. I asked Behatrisa about the house, and in a scolding voice (Beier 2005) she responded, *Iryo tíNteronkanake* ‘He knocked (it) down,’ indicating her seven-year old son Bisako, who stood sheepishly at her side. She repeated this several times, scowling at her son. When I mentioned this in a later conversation with Hórasa, he laughed, remarking, *Chíchata oteronkanake* ‘It fell down by itself,’ and pointed out that the houseposts were completely rotten. Clearly Hórasa did not credit the idea that Bisako was even *involved* in the collapse of his house, and I could not see how this small child could have knocked down the house either. Nonetheless, Behatrisa took the opportunity to hold Bisako responsible for the collapse of the house, even though it seems very unlikely that Bisako had any direct hand in the matter.

In this way, children quickly learn not only that every mishap is someone’s fault, but also that they themselves are particularly vulnerable to accusations⁹. Not surprisingly, after a few years of

⁹A reviewer was struck by the similarity between the great vulnerability of Nanti children to criticism and accusations of wrong-doing, and the historical phenomenon of child-witchcraft accusations reported among the Arawakan Yanésa, Ashéninka, Asháninka, and Nomatsigenga (see, e.g. Weiss 1972; Santos-Granero 2002). Santos-Granero (2002:pp. 513-516) argues that the phenomenon of child-witchcraft accusations originated during the colonial period as a reaction to these Arawakanpeoples’ experiences of colonization pressures. While in no way contradicting Santos-

such experiences, children begin to acquire discursive competence in deflecting the culpability that gravitates towards them. One of the arguments of this paper is that the strategic use of evidential resources is one way that they and adults do so. Nevertheless, sensitivity to blame, and the strong desire to avoid it, persists far into adulthood for most Nantis, especially for women.

6 Nanti evidentiality and evidential practice

The purpose of this section is to define the terms ‘evidentiality’ and ‘evidential practice’, and to provide an overview of the systems of evidentiality and evidential practice in Nanti. ‘Evidentiality’ is minimally defined as the marking of ‘source of information’ for a given proposition.¹⁰ Example (1), shows an instance of the Nanti reportive *ke*, which indicates that the source of information for the proposition was a verbal report.

- (1) *Noke ikentabetaka kemari.*
 no- ke i= kent -be -ak -a kemari
 1- REP 3mS shoot -FRUS -PERF -REAL.A tapir
 ‘I hear he wounded a tapir.’

One aspect of the definition of ‘evidentiality’, which is also relevant to the definition of evidential practice, is the degree of grammaticalization required of elements with source-of-information meanings before they can be considered ‘evidentials’ proper. All languages have some means of expressing source-of-information meanings (e.g. verbs of perception), but languages differ considerably in the degree to which such meanings are grammaticalized. At one extreme, (Aikhenvald 2004) has argued that source-of-information morphemes should only be considered ‘evidentials’ when they form an *obligatory* grammatical category. However, many languages exhibit highly grammaticalized source-of-information morphemes that are pervasive in natural discourse, but which are not grammatically obligatory. In fact, obligatory evidential systems appear to be relatively rare, and in many languages, the distribution of evidentials is governed by local communicative norms and interactional strategy, rather than by requirements on linguistic form alone. Consider, for example Epps’ remarks regarding evidentiality in Hup (Naduhup; Brazil; Epps 2005):

... the expression of evidentiality in Hup is to some degree optional, and it is guided more by Gricean-type pragmatic principles of informativeness rather than by any grammatical rule. Thus evidential markers are sometimes left off in situations where the information source is already made obvious by the discourse context or is otherwise seen as relatively non-salient. (Epps 2005:p. 779)

Similarly, de Reuse describes the use of evidentials in Western Apache in the following terms:

Granero’s claims regarding the genesis of child-witchcraft accusations *per se*, the fact that Nanti children are highly vulnerable to accusations of wrong-doing, despite Nantis having experienced little in the way of colonization pressure, suggests that the phenomenon of child-witchcraft accusations may have pre-hispanic roots in attitudes towards children among the Nihagantsi peoples and some of their other Arawakan neighbors.

¹⁰Through the 1980s and 1990s, ‘evidentiality’ tended to be conflated with epistemic modality proper (i.e. assessments of likelihood of factuality) (e.g. Chafe and Nichols 1986; Palmer 1986). Recently, however, Ferdinand de Haan (1996, 2001) and Alexandra Aikhenvald (2003, 2004) have compellingly argued that evidentiality and epistemic modality are notionally distinct. Moreover, mounting descriptive work has demonstrated the existence of languages in which evidentiality and epistemic modality co-exist in distinct paradigms that can combine freely with each other, showing the relationship between the two categories to be, in general, a defeasible one (Landaburu 2005; Dickinson 2000:e.g.).

Even though evidentiality is by no means an obligatory category in WA [Western Apache], WA speakers mark source of information more often and more precisely than European language speakers do. (De Reuse 2003:p. 95-6)

Like these authors, and in accord with common descriptive practice, I consider any morpheme that both encodes source-of-information meanings and displays significant grammaticalization to be an evidential.

Nanti exhibits three grammaticalized evidentials: a quotative clausal proclitic *ka*, exemplified in (2); a reportive clausal proclitic *ke*, exemplified in (3); and an inferential second-position clausal clitic *ka*, exemplified in (4) (Michael 2008, 2015). Under certain circumstances, evidentially unmarked declarative clauses are understood to be based on visual access to the event in question, but this evidential meaning arises from inference, and is defeasible.

(2) *Ika te, nonake haNta.*

i- ka te no= N- n -ak -e haNta
3MS- QUOT NEG.REAL 1S IRREAL- be -PERF IRREAL.I there
'He said: no, I will live there.'

(3) *Chapi noke ikanti ainyo, irirenti.*

chapi no- ke i= kaNt -i ainyo i- irirenti
yesterday 1S- REP 3MS= say -REAL.I EXIST.ANIM 3MP- brother
'Yesterday I heard he said he exists, his brother.'

(4) *Ainyoka irimage.*

ainyo =ka i= ri- mag -e.
EXIST.ANIM =INFR 3MS= IRREAL sleep -IRREAL.I
'He is presumably there sleeping.' (Inference based on knowing the referent is at home, but there being no sign of activity.)

As is clear from the example sentences, Nanti reportives and quotatives take person marking – the same person marking, in fact, as Nanti verbs. This is not surprising, as the reportive *ke* and quotative *ka* are clearly grammaticalized from person-marked forms of the verbs *kem* 'hear' and *kant* 'say', respectively. If one compares the paradigms of the reportive and quotative evidentials with person-marked forms of these verbs, it is clear the evidentials correspond to the leftmost disyllabic foot of the verb, as can be seen in (5) and (6).

(5) *(noke)make → noke*

no= kem -ak -i
1S= hear -PERF -REAL.I
'I hear'

(6) *(ika)ntake → ika*

i= kaNt -ak -i
3mS= say -PERF -REAL.I
'he said'

Despite their historical origin as verbs of perception and communication, it is clear that the Nanti reportive and quotative are synchronically distinct from these verbs. In particular, neither evidential may fall under the scope of negation, unlike the verbs from which they grammaticalized, and each evidential displays initial stress, unlike their verbal counterparts.

6.1 Nanti evidential practice

The specification of source-of-information, or *modes of sensory access* (see §7), is a pervasive aspect of everyday Nanti communicative interactions (Michael 2008). The use of evidentials in Nanti utterances is not, however, structurally obligatory. Nevertheless, the expression of source-of-information meanings is a significantly more pervasive aspect of communicative interaction for Nanti speakers than for speakers of English. In this respect, Nantis' use of evidentials resembles that described above for Hup and Western Apache society, or that described for Shipibo society (Panoan, Peru):

...I argue that evidentiality is “obligatory” in the sense that the evidential value of the information has always been grammatically marked in the forgoing discourse and is clear to native speakers. (Valenzuela 2003:p.57-8)

In these languages, as in Nanti, source-of-information meanings are highly salient to speakers, and as Valenzuela (2003) suggest in the preceding passage, speakers appear to be guided by a communicative maxim that the sensory mode of access that a speaker has to the events he or she describes should be clear to participants. The consequence of communicative maxims of this sort is a system of *communicative practice* in which the expression of evidential meanings is highly regular and pervasive in discourse, without being reducible to structural requirements on linguistic form. Systems of this type constitute a degree of regularization of expression of evidential meanings that stand between systems in which evidential marking is grammatically obligatory, on the one hand, and on the other, systems of evidential practice in which expression of source-of-information meanings is entirely optional, and consequently, sporadic. To adequately describe systems of this type, we must go beyond the grammatical description of evidentiality to the description of systems of *evidential practice*. By this latter term I refer to the real-time strategic deployment in interaction of both grammaticalized resources such as evidentials, as well as periphrastic expressions of source-of-information meanings.

As a component of Nanti communicative practice more generally, Nanti evidential practice forms part of the goal-oriented social action of Nanti individuals. Significantly, Nanti presently appears to be in the process of independently grammaticalizing evidentiality (see below). This is important in part because it is consistent with my impressionistic claim regarding the pervasiveness of specifications of modes of access in Nanti discourse. As observed by Bybee (2003), among others, frequency is the primary contributor to grammaticalization. Thus, the ongoing grammaticalization of evidentials in Nanti is congruent with high frequency of mode-of-sensory-access meanings in Nanti discourse. The fact that Nanti evidentiality is an independent innovation, rather than one arising through language contact, is also important because it suggests that the high frequency of source-of-information meanings in Nanti is driven by the active communicative needs of Nanti individuals. That is, the ideological and interactional aspects of Nanti communicative practice are driving the grammaticalization of evidentiality, rather than, say, the adoption of communicative or linguistic norms of a more prestigious language community in the context of language contact.

Although Nanti exhibits grammaticalized evidentials, they are not morphosyntactically obligatory. Rather, the pervasiveness of evidentiality and of periphrastic mode-of-access information in Nanti discourse arises from the high salience of source-of-information in Nanti communicative practice. There are numerous factors that influence the expression of mode-of-access information in Nanti utterances, but one in particular can be considered basic: the communicative maxim that the mode of access to the event or state of affairs to which a given proposition refers should be clear to the participants. Such clarity may be achieved by overt specification, using evidentials or periphrastic expressions, or by inferences from discursive context. Conversely, such specifications

may be omitted because the information imparted by the utterance is common knowledge (Michael 2001).

Since this particular motivation for mode-of-access specification is the *establishment* of mode of access to an event, rather than the formally-motivated marking of particular constituents, the turns of talk that introduce a body of information related to the event are particularly relevant sites for the specification of mode-of-access information. In short, mode-of-access specification tends to cluster in the early turns of talk related to a topic or event. In this particular phase of interaction, speakers tend to infer that utterances that do not overtly specify mode-of-access information are based on visual mode of access. In other words, in this context, Nanti has pragmatically-based, formally unmarked, visual evidentiality. It is not the case, however, that all clauses that do not specify mode of access are understood as based on visual mode of access.

7 Evidentiality and event responsibility

In order to understand how evidentiality is implicated in the discursive construction of event responsibility in Nanti society, it is helpful to consider the indexical components of evidentiality and their relation to its denotational component. I take the position that evidentials denote the *mode of sensory access* that the knowing subject indexed by the evidential has to an indexed event or state of affairs.

Since as early as Jakobson's (1990) work on Bulgarian evidentiality, it has been recognized that evidentials have a tripartite structure. In Jakobson's original formulation, evidentials take into account three events: the narrated event (E^n), i.e. the event described by the proposition over which the evidential has scope; the speech event (E^s), i.e. the interactional circumstance in which the proposition is uttered; and the narrated speech event (E^{ns}), the "alleged source of the narrated event". Jakobson's insight is echoed in more recent work that seeks to characterize evidentiality as an indexical or deictic category (Agha 2002; De Haan 2001; Floyd 1999; Mushin 2001; Schlichter 1986).

While Jakobson's analysis of evidentiality is clearly oriented towards quotatives and reportives, we can generalize from this analysis, and see that the 'narrated speech event' corresponds to evidentials' *source of information*, or *source event* (Kockelman 2004). Similarly, 'speech event' generalizes to a more generic notion of *event*. Mushin (2001) further refines this model by recharacterizing the indexical component E^s (speech event) as a component that indexes "some conceptualizer's subjective viewpoint" (ibid: p. 35). Agha (2002) makes a similar move when he characterizes evidentials as forming a "semiotic chain" that links *speaker* to *perceiver* to *source*, as does De Haan (2005) when he speaks of evidentials as "encoding speaker perspective." I will refer to the entity indexed by this component as the *knowing subject*. In these terms, then, evidentials denote the sensory/cognitive mediation between the indexed knowing subject and the indexed event. De Haan (2005) reaches a similar conclusion when he characterizes evidentiality as a form of propositional deixis that "mark[s] the relationship between the speaker and the action s/he is describing."

I now wish to focus on the characterization of the mediation between the knowing subject and event denoted by the evidential. As indicated above, it is typical to speak of this mediation as the *source*¹¹ for the knowledge encoded by the proposition within the scope of the evidential. Strictly speaking, however, this is misleading. The source of the knowledge in question is always the event. Consider an event: the death of a tapir. A knowing subject may acquire this knowledge of the tapir's death by seeing the animal collapse with an arrow in its side, by hearing the animal's death

¹¹This characterization is most apt for reported speech, where it is natural to speak of a narrated speech event as the 'source' of our knowledge.

rattle, by inference upon noting slabs of tapir meat smoking over the fire, or via a hunter’s narrative of the event. In each of these cases, the speaker’s knowledge stems from some sensory input, whose ultimate source, in some direct or ramified casual chain, is always the event in question. It is more accurate to say that evidentials denote the nature of a speaker’s sensory/cognitive *access* to the event in question, not the source of information.¹² Recasting the denotational component of evidentiality in these terms will be helpful in understanding the role of evidentiality in event responsibility, without running afoul of previous work based on the ‘source of information’ definition. Figure 1 illustrates the set of relationships discussed thus far.

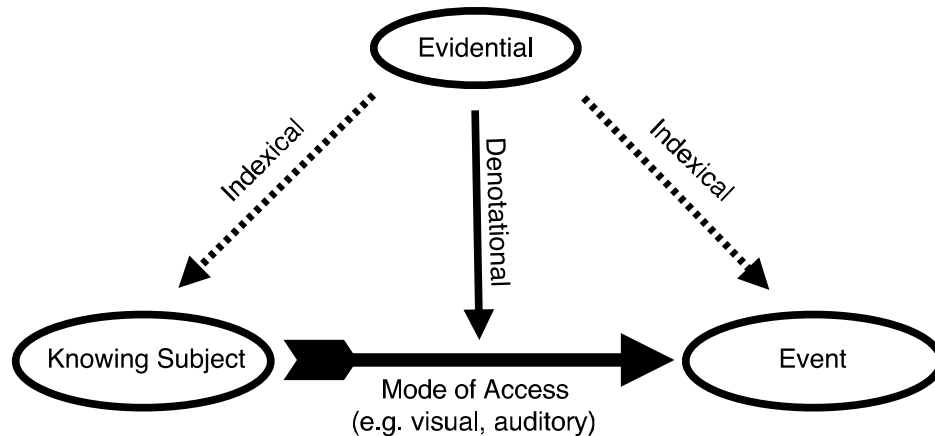


Figure 1: Evidentials: their denotational and indexical features

We now examine how the denotational and indexical relationships illustrated in Figure 1 form the basis for a chain of inference that relates evidentiality to event responsibility. We begin by considering the implications of two simple observations. First, as much as a given speaker is a *knowing* subject, he or she is also an *embodied*, physical subject. This fact places significant constraints on the kinds of circumstances in which particular sensory/cognitive modes of access are available to any given subject. The visual mode of access, for example, typically requires physical proximity and the absence of intervening obstructions.

Second, there is a cross-linguistic pragmatic preference for speakers to use the strongest licensed evidential in a given circumstance. It is an early result in pragmatics that the use of evidentially weak utterance implies that the use of a stronger one is not justified (see discussion in Horn (2004:p.15)). Recent work on the use of evidentiality strongly supports this observation as a cross-cultural trend, as argued by Aikhenvald (2004:p.307-9), De Haan (2001:p.197), Faller (2002), and Palmer (2001:p.51). Thus, the use of an auditory evidential implies that a visual evidential is not licensed, and the use of a quotative, reportive, or inferential evidential implies that no direct evidential is licensed.

Given the use of a particular evidential, these two considerations imply that the embodied subject was in a particular physical relation to the event in question – no closer and no more distant.¹³ Evidentials are thus associated with prototypical physical circumstances that permit the

¹²I believe Floyd (1999:p.161) takes a similar position when he speaks of evidentials expressing “how directly or immediately the speaker ‘contacts’ the designated scenario.”

¹³De Haan (2001) appears to go so far as to argue that presence/non-presence is part of the basic semantics of at

sensory/cognitive access denoted by the evidential (Floyd 1999:p.184-5). In short, the denotative content of an evidential leads to inferences regarding the physical relationship between the indexed embodied subject and event.

Physical proximity to an event alone, of course, carries no moral entailments regarding that event. However, physical proximity makes it possible for a person to be *causally responsible* for that event. Physical proximity is relevant to causal responsibility in two ways. First, physical proximity to an event affects the efficacy of any efforts to alter the course of the event in question: if one is insufficiently close to an event, one cannot affect it. Second, proximity to an event affects one's knowledge of the event: if one is ignorant of an event, one cannot act to alter it. Conversely, sufficient proximity makes possible the potential efficacy and knowledge required to alter the course of an event. Taking efficacy and knowledge to be different facets of *involvement* in an event, we can summarize by saying that an individual's physical proximity to an event allows us to infer their *involvement* in that event. The plausibility of the inference from physical proximity to involvement, and the role of evidentiality in that inference is supported, I believe, by de Haan's remark that

[e]videntiality is a notional category which directly reflects the degree of the speaker's involvement (or the lack thereof) in the action he/she describes. (De Haan 2001:p.216)

The perceived relationship between evidentiality and involvement is also manifest in Bendix's comment, cited in §3, that Newari evidentials can diminish responsibility by distancing the speaker from involvement in the event in question.

If we take as given that evidentials permit inferences regarding involvement, and hence causal responsibility, the step to event responsibility is a short one. As discussed in §4, if causal responsibility is given, deduction based on world knowledge and shared moral principles allows one to arrive at the assignment of *ex post* responsibility, of which event responsibility is a type.

The complete chain of inferences, illustrated in Figure 2, is the following: evidential mode-of-access marking leads to inferences regarding physical proximity, which in turn lead to inferences regarding involvement and causal responsibility. Assumptions regarding causal responsibility then lead to assignment of event responsibility, a form of moral responsibility.

I wish to be clear that the chain of implicatures that relates the mode of access denoted by the evidential and moral responsibility rests on culturally-based, if perhaps common, ideas regarding involvement and moral responsibility. The culturally-mediated nature of the relationship between evidentiality, involvement, and moral responsibility is clear when one compares Nanti evidential practice with Dickinson's (2000) description of Tsafiki (Barbacoan; Ecuador) evidentiality. Apparently, Tsafikis also employ evidentials to construct representations of involvement in events, with the inferential evidential serving to indicate reduced involvement. For Tsafikis, however, this distantiating serves to indicate moral condemnation of the events in question, rather than mitigating personal responsibility for them, as in the Nanti case. Although the Tsafiki case provides another example of evidentiality serving to indicate involvement, it also shows how the relationships between evidentiality, involvement, and moral responsibility are culturally-grounded.

least some evidentials. I think caution is advisable in this regard, however, since the relationship between evidentiality and physical presence is in general defeasible. Consider, for example, the fact that Shipibo-Konibo speakers use visual evidentials for events seen on television (Valenzuela 2003:p.52).

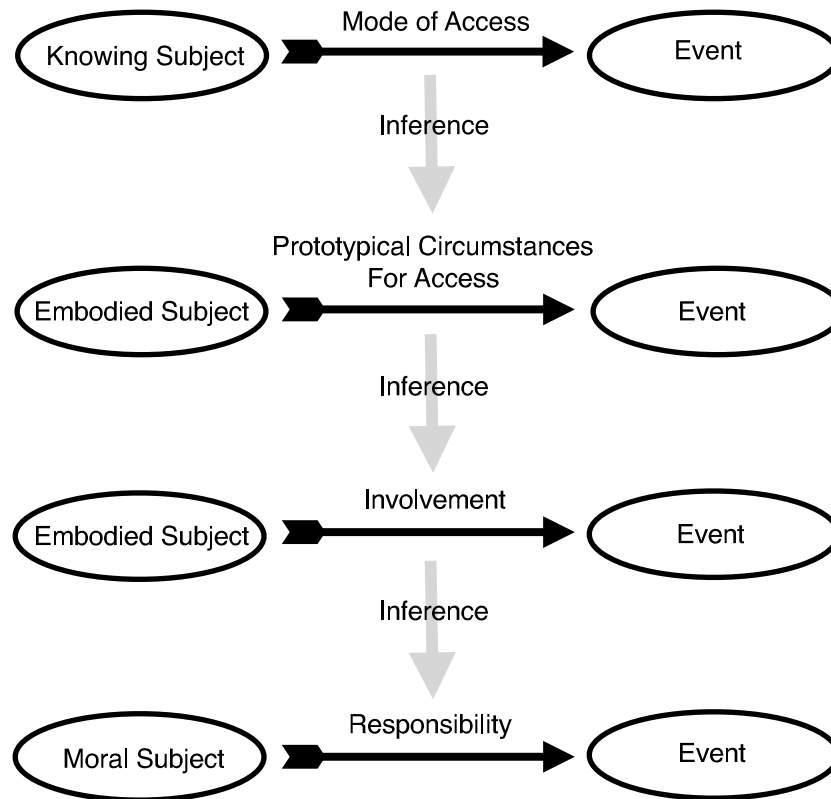


Figure 2: Inferences linking evidential marking to event responsibility

8 Evidential practice and event responsibility in Nanti discourse: an example

We now turn to an extended example of how evidential strategies are deployed in Nanti interaction to deflect culpability. The interaction involves six adults and several children. The principal participants are two women, Mecha (M) and Chabera (C); Pasotoro (P), Mecha's husband; Ahérika (A), Pasotoro's sister-in-law; and Tomás (T), Mecha and Pasotoro's son. The interaction takes place around noon in Mecha's cooking hut on September 27th, 2004.

The interaction we examine revolves around a burn that Mecha's daughter Rosa suffered the previous day. A few days beforehand, several men had cleared the tall grass in an open area near Mecha's family's cooking and sleeping huts. The grass was left to dry, to be burned a few days hence in order to slow the growth of new grass. Before the adults could do so, however, a group of children gathered the grass into piles and set it alight – a common turn of events, but one nevertheless disapproved of by adults. In the ensuing fun, Rosa inadvertently stepped into a pile of burning grass, receiving a severe burn on her foot and ankle. Rosa did not tell her parents about the burn at the time, however, and even slept in the family's chicken coop that night to evade detection. Only the next day did Mecha finally learn of the mishap from Rosa's younger brother,

Tómasi. She then tracked Rosa down and severely chastised Rosa both for burning her foot and for concealing the fact.

I was apprised of these events when I was passing by Mecha and Pasotoro's cooking hut and was invited in to drink manioc beer. After several minutes of appropriate visiting talk, Pasotoro told me of and showed me Rosa's burn, and asked if I could treat it. I left to obtain some aloe vera and topical antibiotics and returned with my research partner, Christine Beier. Not long after I had returned to treat Rosa's burn, Chabera, a good friend of ours and mother-in-law to Pasotoro's brother Tómasi, arrived and was given manioc beer by Mecha. She then pointed to Rosa's burn, and asked how it occurred. Note that in the transcript that follows I indicate at the right margin of each line the type of mode-of-access information contained in the line (e.g VISUAL, INFERENCE, QUOTATIVE, etc.), and the corresponding evidential or periphrastic expression is underlined.

Interaction 1: Chabera asks about Rosa's burn

- (7) a. C: *Tya okaⁿtaka oka?*
tya o= kaⁿt -ak -a o- oka
 where/how 3NMS= happen -PERF -REAL.A 3NM- this
 'Where/How¹⁴ did this happen?' (indicating Rosa's burn)
- b. M: *Kara chapí shiⁿpenashi.*
kara chapí shiⁿpena -shi
 there yesterday grass -CL:leaf
 'Over there, yesterday, in the grass.'
- c. *Otya maika oburoki nonehana(ke).* VISUAL
o- tya maika oburoki no= neh -an -ak -i
 3NM recently now yuca.beer 1S= see -ABL -PERF -REAL.I
 'I saw (it) just now, (when I was making) yuca beer.'
- d. *Otya maika nonehake.* VISUAL
o- tya maika no= neh -ak -i
 3NM recently now 1S= see -PERF -REAL.I
 'I saw (it) just now.'
- e. P: [*Oburoki ochapinitanahi.*
oburoki ochapini -an -ah -i
 yuca.beer evening -ABL -REG -REAL.I
 'When she was making oburoki, in the late afternoon.'
- f. M: [*Noka tata giⁿpi?* QUOTATIVE
no -ka tata og -i -Npi
 1S -QUOT what get -REAL.I -2O
 'I said, what got you?'
- g. C: [*Tya iro?*
tya iro
 where 3NM.FOC.PRO

¹⁴Because of the indicated polysemy of *tya*, this utterance is ambiguous. Mecha's response suggests that she interpreted Chabera's question as relating to the location of the accident.

- ‘Where did it happen?’
- h. M: *Oga ogima(tira), iroka agapokihiro.* INFERENCEAL
o- oga o= ogima -i =ra iro =ka agapokih -i =ro
 3NM- that 3NMS= burn REAL.I =SUB 3NM.PRO =INFR step.on REAL.I =3NMO
 ‘That (grass) which was burning, she presumably stepped on it.’
- i. *O- o- otsararaha.*
o= o= o= tsararah -a
 3NMS= 3NMS= 3NMS= horse.around -REAL.A
 ‘She– she– she was horsing around.’
- j. *Otya inka(hara) nonehake.* VISUAL
o- tya inkahara no= neh -ak -i
 3NM- recently earlier 1S= see -PERF -REAL.I
 ‘I saw (the burn) just a little earlier.’
- k. *Noka tata ginpi?* QUOTATIVE
no- ka tata og -i =Npi
 1S- QUOT what get -REAL.I -2O
 ‘I said, what got you?’
- l. *Oka onti tsitsi oga.* QUOTATIVE
o- ka o- Nti tsitsi o- oga
 3NM- QUOT 3NMS COP fire 3NM- that
 ‘She said, this is (due to) fire.’
- m. C: *Ontini oga meroka(ke).*
o- Nti =ni o- oga merok -ak -i
 3NMS- COP =CNSQ 3NM- that scorch.skin -PERF -REAL.I
 ‘So *that* is why that (i.e. Rosa’s skin) is scorched.’
- n. (pause)
- o. *Magatiro ogamaika tagake?*
magatiro oga =maika tag -ak -i
 all.INAN that =HEST burn -PERF -REAL.I
 ‘All that, uh, is burned?’
- p. M: *Magatiro aka, aka, nero oka.*
magatiro aka aka nero o- oka
 all.INAN here here see.IMPER 3NM- this
 ‘All over here, here, see this.’
- q. C: [*Oga tera ityara pincheme?*] AUDITORY
o- oga te =ra i- tya =ra pi= N- kem -e
 3NM that NEG.REAL =SUB 3NM when =TEMP 2S- IRREAL- hear IREAL.I
 ‘You didn’t hear it at the time?’
- r. M: =*Tera. yoga iryo yo-, otya maika ika maika* QUOTATIVE
tera i- oga iryo i= o o- tya maika i- ka maika
 NEG.REAL =SUB 3M that 3M.PRO 3MS fragment 3NM when now 3NM- QUOT now

- ‘No. This one, he-, just recently he said now’
- s. T: = *Atsi* (unintelligible)
atsi
 Hey
 ‘Hey (unintelligible)’
- t. A: [O- *otya maika oka notsi-*, *notsibuhoka(ke) tsi(tsi) oka tsitsi osakak(e)*.
 QUOTATIVE
o- o- tya maika o- ka no= tsi no= tsibuhok -ak -i
 3NM- 3NM- recently now 3NM- QUOT 1S= fragment 1S= stir.up -PERF -REAL.I
tsitsi, o- ka tsitsi o= sak -ak -i
 fire 3NM- QUOT fire 3NMS burn.person -PERF REALIS.I
 ‘She- she just now she said, I stirred up the fire. She said the fire burned (me).’
- u. *Oka tsitsi osakak(e)*. QUOTATIVE
o- ka tsitsi o= sak -ak -i
 3NM- QUOT fire 3NMS burn.person -PERF REAL.I
 ‘She said, the fire burned (me).’
 [...]
- v. C: *Ari (unintelligible) te piNkeme irage?* AUDITORY
ari te pi= N- kem -e o= irag -e
 really NEG.REAL 2S= IRREAL- hear IRREAL.I 3NMS= cry -IRREAL.I
 ‘Really, you didn’t hear her cry?’
- w. M: *Tenkanki irag(e)*.
tenkanki o= irag -e
 NEG.FOC 3NMS= cry -IRREAL.I
 ‘She didn’t cry at all.’
- x. P: [Te *irage*.
te o= irag -e
 NEG.REAL 3NMS= cry IRREAL.I
 ‘She didn’t cry.’

Some ethnographic contextualization of this interaction will be helpful in understanding the significance of the participants’ strategic moves. First, Nanti mothers are generally considered responsible for the safety of their young children in Nanti society. This responsibility is not absolute, however, and the older a child becomes, the more the child herself is held responsible for her own safety. Rosa, who is approximately nine years old, is at a transitional age, where both she and her mother share responsibility for her safety. In the context of this interaction, then, both Rosa and Mecha are the candidates for culpability for the accident. Second, Chabera is generally inclined to be more openly critical of others’ behavior than most Nanti women, and she is also more socially mobile than most women, visiting distant households and conversing openly with both men and women in those households in a manner more reminiscent of male than female inter-household visiting behavior. Mecha has ample reason to anticipate, therefore, that Chabera is likely to cast a critical eye on the events in question, and that Chabera will not hesitate to criticize Mecha’s behavior to others if she believes Mecha to have been negligent. I have frequently heard Chabera’s criticisms of others, and have at least once been subject to her criticisms myself.

As soon as Chabera starts inquiring into the events surrounding Rosa's burn, Mecha adopts intonational contours and supersegmental articulatory characteristics common among Nanti speakers who are defending themselves from criticism or accusations.¹⁵ This behavior indicates that Mecha interprets Chabera's questions as relevant to the assignment of culpability for the events under discussion. This assessment is supported by Mecha's reaction to Chabera's questioning. Note, for example, that in responding to Chabera's initial question regarding how/where the burn occurred, Mecha moves immediately from a brief response to Chabera's explicit question to an extended discussion that distances her from the event in question. Most of Mecha's contributions to the conversation are protestations of her protracted ignorance of Rosa's burn and evidentially-qualified descriptions of the event. In fact, in this interactional strip, the focus is much less on how Rosa suffered the burn, and much more on who knew about the accident when, and how. This is particularly clear in Chabera's repeated efforts to clarify if either Mecha or Pasotoro have failed to mention earlier knowledge of the burn than they initially admit, in lines (q) and (v).

It is informative to compare Mecha's response to Chabera's questioning with the interaction that took place some twenty minutes earlier, when Pasotoro first sought treatment from me for his daughter's burned foot. Reho (R) is the author.

Interaction 2: Pasotoro tells Reho about Rosa's burn

- (8) a. P: *Reho, tsitsi oka osakake.*

Reho tsitsi o- oka o= sak -ak -i
 Lev fire 3NM this 3NMS= burn.skin -PERF REALIS.I

'Lev, fire burned this.' [Indicating Rosa's foot and ankle]

- b. R: *Arisa? [pause] Nonkamosote.*

arisa no= N- kamoso -e
 really 1S IRREAL- check.on -IRREAL.I

'Really? [pause] I'm going to have a look'. [Goes over to sit by Rosa]

- c. *Cha- pairani?*

chapi pairani
 yesterday long.ago

'(Did this happen) yester- many days ago?'

- d. P: *Te, otya nkahara.*

te o- tya iNkahara
 NEG 3NM recently earlier

'No, very recently.'

- e. R: *INkahara?*

iNkahara
 earlier

'Recently?'

- f. P: *=He iNkahara.*

¹⁵The form of speech Mecha employs is characterized slight creakiness and significant nasalization; simultaneously, she deploys the upper extremes of her pitch range, beginning her breath groups at a high pitch and then lowering her pitch step-wise across the syllables of the breath groups. The metapragmatic interpretability of intonational contours and supersegmental articulatory characteristics such as those mentioned here are an important aspect of Nanti communicative practice. The reader is referred to Beier (2005) and Beier (2010) for further information.

- he iNkahara*
yes earlier
'Yes, recently.'
- g. R: *Onti oga, niha? Tera?*
o- nti o- oga niha tera
3NMS- COP 3NM- that water NEG.REAL
'That is due to (boiling) water? No?'
- h. P: [*Te-, tera iro.*]
te tera iro
NEG.REAL NEG.REAL 3NM.FOC.PRO
'No-, not that.'
- i. R: *Tsitsi.*
tsitsi
fire
Fire.
- j. P: *Tsitsi, ok- kanyorira oga yogimashihageti, oga osak(ake).*
tsitsi ok kanyorira o- oga i= ogima -shih -ge -i o- oga
fire fragment like 3NM- that 3MS= burn -CL:leaf -DSTR REAL.I 3NM that
o= sak -ak -i
3NMS burn.skin -PERF REAL.I
'Fire, like that (grass) they were burning, *that* burned (her).'
- k. R: [*Aha aha. (pause) Atsi totata, shiNtsi noNpokahe.*]
Aha aha atsi totata shiNtsi no= N- pok -ah -e
uhuh uhuh hey wait.a.sec quickly 1S= IRREAL- come -REG IRREAL.I
'Uhuh, uhuh. (pause) Hey, wait a sec, I'll be back quickly. Wait a sec, I'm going to bring some medicine.'
- l. *Tota, oga haNpi name.*
tota o -oga haNpi no= am -e
wait.a.sec 3NM that medicine 1S= bring -IRREAL.I
'Wait a sec, I'm going to bring some medicine.' [R finishes his bowl of manioc beer and stands to leave]

Although this interaction also touches on the circumstances of Rosa's burn, it proceeds very differently from that in Interaction 1. Note that Pasotoro makes no use of evidential resources in describing the events surrounding Rosa's burn, and displays no concern regarding the assignment of responsibility. Significantly, the discussion of the circumstances of Rosa's burn involved Pasotoro and myself,¹⁶ rather than Mecha and another Nanti woman. As Rosa's father, Pasotoro is in little danger of being held responsible for Rosa's burn, by Nanti standards. In addition, I have endeavored to maintain a helpful and non-judgmental persona in the community, which probably made Pasotoro even less worried about being held responsible by me than by other Nantis. It

¹⁶In inter-household visits like this one, men tend to address other men, and women tend to address other women, especially in the early stages of the visit.

is reasonable, therefore, to infer that Pasotoro does not feel vulnerable to being held culpable for Rosa's burn in this interaction, and that the significant difference in the way Pasotoro and Mecha react in the two interactions stems from the different risks the two face with respect to the assignment of responsibility for Rosa's burn by their respective interlocutors.

Pasotoro's discussion of Rosa's burn makes clear another important aspect of Mecha's and Pasotoro's shared epistemic orientation to the events in question: they appear to have no doubt in their minds regarding what happened to Rosa. Rosa herself admitted that she burned herself in the grass fire (see line (l), Interaction 1) and her little brother gleefully confirmed the account that Rosa sheepishly gave of her actions (see line (r), Interaction 1, which is an oblique mention of the little brother's testimony). Given this testimony and the circumstances of the grass burning, no one had any reason to doubt Rosa burned her foot in the grass, as she admitted. The certainty that the participants have regarding the events of Rosa's burn is evident in Pasotoro's unqualified description of what happened (lines (a) and (j), Interaction 2) when speaking only to me. Consequently, we cannot understand the participants' use of sensory access specifications in Interaction 1 as deriving from their uncertainty regarding what happened, or from their concern about avoiding discourse attribute responsibility for the factuality of their utterances regarding the events of the burn. Rather, they are attending to a different kind of responsibility: event responsibility.

Bearing in mind the heightened salience of event responsibility in the interaction between Mecha and Chabera, let us now take a closer look at Mecha's deployment of mode-of-access information in that interaction. Mecha's contributions mainly serve to distance herself epistemically from Rosa's accident, principally via the use of inferentials and reported speech. Even when Mecha speaks of *seeing* Rosa's burn (line (c): *Otya maika ... nonehanake* 'I saw just now'; see also line (j)), this visual mode-of-access specification is deployed to temporally and spatially distance her visual access to burn from the event of the burn itself (line (b): *kara chapi sinpenasi* 'Over there, yesterday in the grass'). Interestingly, Mecha's use of *nonehanake* 'I saw' involves a subtle morphological feature that further emphasizes her prior ignorance: the use of the ablative suffix *-an*. When used with non-motion verbs, this suffix indicates *change of state*.¹⁷ Mecha's use of the ablative therefore indexes a change of epistemic state: her having *come to see*, and know about, Rosa's burn.

Mecha employs quotative evidentials several times, either quoting herself asking for information about the burn (lines (f) and (k)) or quoting others informing her about the burn (lines (l), (r), and (u)). These uses of quotatives allow Mecha to present question-answer pairs that index for Chabera, via the presupposition of ignorance underlying the use of interrogatives, Mecha's ignorance about the events surrounding the burn at the time that she first saw it (lines (f) and (k)). Moreover, Mecha's use of quotatives to evidentially mark her own questions can hardly be seen as an effort to diminish her discourse attribute responsibility, since she is reporting her own speech. Rather, she is indexing her epistemic relationship to the event of the burn. By depicting herself as ignorant about the event of the burn at the time that it occurred, she effectively characterizes herself as having been at a sufficient physical remove that she would have been incapable of doing anything to prevent Rosa's burn. In other words, Mecha's use of the quotative leads to an inference of her lack of causal, and hence moral, responsibility for the accident.

Of course, the quotative-marked question-answer pairs also allow Mecha to report Rosa's utterances, which are effectively admissions of Rosa's own responsibility for the burn, since Rosa doesn't blame anyone else for the accident. Interestingly, it would have been perfectly acceptable, in the context of Nanti speech reporting practices, for Mecha to have reported only Rosa's speech. This is what Ahérika does in line (t) of Interaction 1, when she employs a quotative to report Rosa's explanation that she received her burn in the course of stirring up the fire. However, if Mecha

¹⁷Payne (1982) describes a similar meaning for the cognate morpheme in Ashéninka.

had simply reported Rosa's speech, this would not have so clearly indexed Mecha's ignorance of the accident. The fact that Mecha *did* report her own question – twice in fact – underscores the importance of the distancing effect of the evidential.

The epistemic distancing that Mecha introduces in line (f) with the use of the quotative is expanded upon by her use of an inferential. When in line (g) Chabera asks for information about how the accident occurred, Mecha responds in line (h) using an inferential, *Iroka agapokihiro*, 'she presumably stepped in it'. Mecha thereby characterizes her mode of access to the key event in the accident as indirect, again leading others to infer that she was not causally responsible for the event.

Significantly, Mecha explicitly indexes the issue of responsibility in next line (line (i)) by remarking *otsararaha* 'she was horsing around'.¹⁸ Note that this clause is not evidentially marked in any way, even though Mecha's access to the events immediately preceding the burn were presumably the same as her access at the precise moment of the burn. Thus, when Mecha shifts from distancing herself from the accident to pinning the blame on Rosa, she drops all evidential marking. This is another indication that Mecha's use of evidentials is related to her efforts to mitigate her own event responsibility.

In line (q), we see an interesting interactional move on Chabera's part, when she asks if Mecha heard the event, even if she didn't see it. Chabera appears intent on clarifying Mecha's access to the event, and specifically, when she learned of the event. In line (r), Mecha denies that she heard anything, and begins to indicate that her son told her about the burn, at which point almost everyone in the hut makes a bid for the conversational floor. In line (v), Chabera presses the issue even further, inquiring if Mecha didn't perhaps hear Rosa crying subsequent to the burn. Mecha responds that she didn't (recall that Rosa hid out in the family chicken coop to avoid detection), and her husband Pasotoro once again supports her.

We see in this interaction a great deal of work by the participants to clarify Mecha's mode of access to the events of the burn. Mecha takes great care to characterize her access using inferentials and quotatives, thereby situating herself at a great remove from the events in question. She uses the periphrastic visual evidential only in reference to the recent event of belatedly seeing Rosa's burn, some 24 hours after it occurred. Her husband Pasotoro twice supports her representation of her access to events of the burn.

Chabera, on the other hand, appears to be working to eliminate all possibility that Mecha is understating her epistemological access to the events of Rosa's burn, by inquiring if Mecha might have heard the event, or at least Rosa's subsequent crying.¹⁹

Having examined how Nanti interactants deploy evidentials to modulate event responsibility, we now turn to a pragmatic account of how the denotational and indexical meanings of evidentials serve as the basis for mitigating event responsibility.

9 Conclusion

Most previous work on the relationship between evidentiality, evidential practice, and responsibility has focused on the role of evidentiality and periphrastic source-of-information meanings in reducing speakers' responsibility for the factuality of utterances. In this paper I have argued that evidentiality also serves to mitigate responsibility for *events*. This proposal makes use of a distinction that has

¹⁸The verb *tsararah* denotes reckless running around and hollering, typical behavior when children are chasing each other.

¹⁹There may be another issue here: even if Mecha is blameless for the burn itself, it could certainly be seen by Nantis that a lapse of almost 24 hours before Rosa is treated for the burn is a sign of negligence on her parents' part.

not been clearly drawn to this point: the difference between responsibility for the socially-salient attributes of utterances and responsibility for events or states of affairs.

The analysis of interactions between Nantis shows that Nanti evidential practice includes the deployment of both evidentials and periphrastic mode-of-access meanings to negotiate individuals' responsibility for events. Mode-of-access specifications denote the nature of sensory access that indexed knowing subjects have to indexed events. Via participants' understandings regarding the prototypical circumstances under which the use of particular evidentials would be appropriate, these mode-of-access meanings lead to inferences regarding the spatial and sensory relationships between the speaker and the event in question. On this basis, interactants are able to infer the nature of the speakers' involvement and causal responsibility for the event in question. From this inference, and additional understandings about the nature of moral responsibility, interactants can reach conclusions regarding the moral responsibility of the speaker.

This work makes three contributions to our understandings of responsibility and evidentiality. First, it clarifies the analytical distinction between discourse attribute responsibility and event responsibility, a distinction implicit in previous work. Second, it shows that evidentiality is not crucially tied to responsibility for factuality, and hence, to epistemic modality, even in its pragmatic role. This is significant to the ongoing disciplinary debate regarding the status of evidentiality as a grammatical category distinct from epistemic modality. And third, this paper provides a model of the inferences by which evidentials and periphrastic mode-of-access meanings come to serve as a pragmatic metaphor for moral responsibility for events.

10 Orthography, transcription conventions, and morpheme abbreviations

The orthography is phonemic and largely self-explanatory; N represents a nasal unspecified for place of articulation. In the first line of any interlinearized Nanti text, sans-serif t and a represent epenthetic segments; they are not segmented or glossed in other lines. In certain contexts a morphophonemic process neutralizes the surface contrast between the realis suffix *-i* and the irrealis suffix *-e*. The contrast is maintained in the morphemic segmentation.

Transcriptions consist of four lines. The first line is a broad transcription of the recording, in which the following transcription conventions are employed: '–' indicates that the speaker has cut off the production of a word with a sharp glottal closure; '[' indicates the point at which overlap begins between the line bearing the bracket and the line immediately above it; '=' at the beginning of a line indicates latching with the previous line; '[...]' indicated elided material. Nanti text in parentheses in the first line is inaudible material, but material that is recoverable due to allophony that the inaudible material induces in the audible material, or because of morphological co-occurrence relations. The remaining lines are typical interlinearization, consisting of morphological segmentation (line 2), morpheme-by-morpheme gloss (line 3), and free translation (line 4). Note that in lines 2 and 3, '=' is employed to indicate clitics, and not latching.

The following morpheme abbreviations are used: 1S '1st person subject', 1O 'first person object', 2S 'second person subject', 2O 'second person object', 3MS '3rd person masculine subject', 3MO 'third person masculine object', 3NMS 'third person nonmasculine subject', 3NMO 'third person nonmasculine object', 3NM.FOC.PRO 'third person nonmasculine focal pronoun', 3NM.PRO 'third person nonmasculine pronoun', 1P 'first person possessor', 3MP 'third person masculine possessor', ABL 'ablative', CAUS 'causative', CL 'classifier', CNSQ 'consequence', COMP 'complementizer', COP 'copula', DSTR 'distributive', EXIST.ANIM 'existential, animate', NEG.FOC 'focal negation', HEST 'hesitation', INFR 'inferential', IRREAL 'irrealis (prefix)', IRREAL.A 'irrealis, A-class stem', IRREAL.I

'irrealis, I-class stem', NEG.REAL 'realis negation', NEG.IRREAL 'irrealis negation', PERF 'perfective', QUOT 'quotative', REAL.A 'realis, A-class stem', REAL.I 'realis, I-class stem', REG 'regressive', REP 'reportive', SUB subordinator, TEMP 'temporal'

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