Temporal Landscapes of Moral Evaluation in Parent-Teacher Conferences[1]

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As many scholars have noted, narrative is a primordial tool for making sense of life experience (Brockmeier 2000; Ochs & Capps 2001). While often described as a mode of relating experience that organizes events along temporal dimensions, research has also shown how participants in narrative activity explore the experiential logic of events by theorizing and evaluating the causes, consequences, responses and attempts to deal with problematic or unexpected situations (Ochs, Taylor, Rudolph, & Smith 1992; Stein & Glenn 1979). This paper explores how educators and parents evaluate the moral identity of a problematic student through narrative activity in a Thai parent-teacher conference. Drawing on Taylor's (1989) conceptualization of *the good* as a moral space of questions within which modern persons orient themselves, the paper extends Taylor's metaphor of orienting moral persons in moral space to a notion of orienting them within temporally structured moral frameworks, including actual, realized, normative, and possible worlds. The analysis focuses on how narrators discursively configure a temporal landscape of moral evaluation within which narrated persons are oriented, focusing in particular on the use of tense, aspect and modality in temporal perspective taking (Andersen 1997).

Introduction

To know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand. My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose (Taylor 1989: 27).

Narrative is a powerful tool for the interpretation of experience. By juxtaposing and relating events on a narrative time-line, we as human beings explore, display, and assert our understandings of the relationships between events in our experience and the relevance of those events for our current and future ways of being. Through narrative we attempt to grasp the continuity of our experience over time, and by grasping this continuity we are able to articulate where we stand in relation to moral frameworks. Such orientation in moral space, as Taylor (1989) has pointed out, is a necessary basis for the modern conception of self. This paper explores narrative as an activity in which frameworks of moral evaluation are configured, and in which persons are evaluated in relation to these frameworks. While these frameworks are often conceptualized metaphorically in spatial dimensions, I argue that narrative genres provide a means for configuring temporal landscapes of moral evaluation by virtue of the organization of narrative structure and the convergence of narrative's logical/temporal organization in conjunction with the use of grammatical tense/aspect/modality. In the narrative genre, speakers orient themselves and others in relation to discursively configured realized, normative and possible worlds.

According to Taylor, modern subjects draw on morality as an interpretive framework to make sense of experience and to imbue action with significance. Morality provides the "background we assume and draw upon in any claim to rightness" (8-9). Defining morality consists not only in classifying social obligations according to some externally validated sense of "right" action, but also in understanding "what makes life worth living"; a sense of morality includes notions such as "what it is good to be" and "the nature of the good life" (3-4). This "good life" of modern morality is situated in the ordinary conduct of work and family life, rather than being defined in terms of some higher spiritual ideal.

Taylor argues that the modern moral compass supplements or supplants the moral directives of "objective" (e.g., religious) institutions in modern life: So, how do modern subjects navigate their moral worlds? Three basic elements of "moral thinking" are outlined by Taylor: a sense of obligation to and respect for others, a sense of what makes life meaningful, and a sense of dignity. This sense of dignity is concerned with "the characteristics by which we think of ourselves as commanding (or failing to command) the respect of those around us" (15). The moral framework guiding our responses to problematic and unexpected events is referred to by Taylor as *the good*, which he views as a moral space of questions within which we orient ourselves: "the notion of self... is meant to pick out this crucial feature of human agency, that we cannot do without some orientation to the good, that we essentially are (i.e., define ourselves at least inter alia by) where we stand on this" (33).

In narrative activity, individuals draw on these moral frameworks for evaluating conduct and action. Narrative, like life, often presents problems, or unexpected turns of events, which must be dealt with and responded to

by characters in the narrative drama, as well as participants in the event of narration: These problems raise questions about how to respond, and the modern moral compass helps to make sense of persons' responses and moral reactions. By providing instances of responses to a problematic event, narrative activities are an excellent locus for the characterization of narrated and narrative participants' orientations to *the good* as a means of exploring the personhood of self and others. The analysis presented here extends Taylor's metaphor of orienting in moral space, to a notion of orienting within moral landscapes constituted in temporal dimensions. Narrative characters' actions (responses, attempts, reactions) and characteristics are temporally oriented as actual, realized, unrealized, hypothetical, and possible in relation to discursively constructed normative and expected temporal landscapes.

Taylor's conceptualization of *the good* is not defined as a set of rules to live by. Instead *the good*, in Taylor's view, is a set of the right answers to questions about our manner of living the ordinary life:

> We take as basic that the human agent exists in a space of questions. And these are the questions to which our framework definitions are answers, providing the geography within which we know where we stand and what meanings things have for us (29).

If one understands *the good* as a framework of answers to questions and sees the questions as partially composed of "what ought to be done" and "what it is good or valuable to be", then the answers must constitute those responses, attempts, and methods for dealing with day-to-day problems and circumstances, the description and evaluation of which are at the very core of narrative activity. Moral space consists of alternate worlds in which certain actions and ways of being exist.

An analysis of narrative time must go beyond the notion of narrative as representing a sequence of events in a given time frame (i.e., past, present, future). Instead, narrative is seen as a medium through which past, present and future are brought together in a unity of relevance and consciousness (Brockmeier 2000; Heidegger 1953; Ochs 1994; Ricoeur 1981). The story genre invokes a relevant past which has an impact on the present and implications for the future: "The existential 'now' is determined by the present of preoccupation, which is a 'making-present,' inseparable from awaiting and retaining" (Ricoeur 1981: 169). Not only do we bring the past to bear on the present and future, but we also bring the present to bear on the past, or on the future.[2] By relating our quests in narrative,

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[2] Brockmeier (2000) notes that certain narratives, such as narratives of trauma and loss, are "static"-- destined to remain fractured and disjointed from the temporality of our life stories (67-68). These narratives must remain beside, and not integrated into, one's preceding or following life experiences, for there is no making sense of such tragedies. At the same time, however, these narratives often constitute the inescapable emotional fabric of everything that follows, and the emotional filter over the memory of everything that preceded them.

which are brought to bear on our actual situations and understood in terms of their consequences for our destiny, we create an understanding of who we have become, or who we are: "repetition for Heidegger means more than a mere reversal of the basic orientation of care toward the future; it means the retrieval of our most basic potentialities inherited from our past in the form of personal fate and collective destiny" (Ricoeur 1981: 176). The weight of the past, then, plays a role in defining who we have become, temporally positioning us in relation to *the good*.

Moral evaluation in educational settings

Parent-teacher conferences are activities in which the teacher presents a report on the successes and failures of the student. As representatives of a powerful institution, teachers and administrators communicate to parents the institutional expectations and requirements by which a student's actions may be judged. This moral evaluation of the student involves social stratification, as the student gets characterized in terms of how he or she compares with other students of the same age and level. The way in which educators identify, characterize, and evaluate students is highly consequential, impacting students' educational, social, and affective trajectories. Mehan (1996) argues that the identification of students—in his case as Learning Disabled—produced through interaction in multiple events, genres, and registers involves the progressive objectification of perceived student attributes as these discourses of identification become further removed from the contextually contingent behavior of the student. This process of identification "structures students' educational careers by opening or closing their access to particular educational opportunities" (271). Fleeting and seemingly insignificant events in which students are characterized, evaluated and identified are powerful because they form a link in a chain of events through which particular identities get stabilized, solidified, and "thickened" such that they become more real for both institutional agents making decisions that affect a student's trajectory, and for the student herself (Holland & Lave 2001; Wortham 2003, 2006). These events of identification reproduce social structure through the application of category labels such as "normal" or "disruptive", and typify a student as one who generally thinks, feels, and acts in particular ways in the world.

Parent-teacher conferences are one site in which such identification takes place. They are described as events in which accounts and evaluations of student progress, achievement and behavior feature prominently (Baker & Keogh 1995; Garcia Sanchez & Orellana 2006; Pillet-Shore 2003a). In the parent-teacher conference presented here, the student is constructed as outside of the norm, as someone who violates the norms and expectations established by convention, by the institution, and by the typical actions of other students. In Taylor's (1989) terms, teachers develop and explain their perspective on what constitutes *the good*, and position

students in relation to that perspective. But the student is not the sole story personage whose identity falls under scrutiny at such meetings: When problems arise, the parents, teachers, and program administrators are all considered responsible for taking appropriate actions to resolve them. The conference also involves the characterization and evaluation of the parents' and the teachers' conduct related to the student (Baker & Keogh 1995; Garcia Sanchez & Orellana 2006; Pillet-Shore 2003b).

Data and Methods: The Parent-Teacher Conference

This paper examines the discursive construction of moral identity in a parent-teacher conference that occurred in a Thai college setting. The data used for this study comes from a parent-teacher conference that took place in a teacher preparation program at a Teacher's College in Bangkok Thailand.[3] Teachers—concerned about the academic performance of a 20-year-old female student in the final year of this three-year teacher certification program—asked the student's father to attend a parent-teacher conference. According to her teachers, this student's performance in the program had been problematic from the start. Throughout much of the conference, the program director is speaking to the father about the student, and another teacher joins the conference later. Although the student was also expected to join the conference, she failed to attend. This conference lasted approximately forty-five minutes and included three participants: Professor Fah is a female professor and director of the teacher-training program; Po is the father; and Mek is a male teacher who joined the conversation later in the session. The conference was audio taped with the participants' permission, and transcribed by a native speaker.[4]

Over the course of this meeting, the program director delivers, piece by piece, the bad news to Po about his daughter's situation in school and its implications for her academic future. The student has failed to fulfill several of the program requirements, including a test and an internship, and she has an extremely low grade point average that is not adequate for graduation from the program. Po indicates that he was not aware of the problem, and that he lives too far from the school to stay informed about her progress. Most of the talk in the meeting revolves around deciding

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[3] In Thai colleges and universities parent-teacher conferences are conducted only under special circumstances at a time mutually agreed upon between the teacher and the parent. In Thailand, unlike the United States, parents are considered to be the legal guardians of undergraduate students, thus information is shared more freely with the parents of college students than it is in the US context.

[4] I am most grateful to Dr. Shoichi Iwasaki, who collected this data as part of a larger Thai language data corpus, and generously shared the corpus with me and other scholars of the Thai language. I am also grateful to Dr. Amy Meepoe Baron who transcribed this conversation, and who has consulted with me extensively on translations of this text. She and Ms. Jai Chenawongsa consulted with me on matters of Thai language grammar and use more generally. I must also gratefully acknowledge Dr. Supa Angkurawaranon and Dr. Ketckanda Jaturongkachoke, who have also consulted with me on matters of Thai language, grammar, and culture.

what to do next about the student. Despite the fact that the situation is characterized by the teachers as beyond the point of no return (i.e., that there is no way that the student will be able to graduate), they never baldly state that she is to be expelled from the program, but rather they entertain a delicate negotiation with Po, leaving him to conclude for himself the actual consequences of the situation.

Participants in this event understand that parent-teacher conferences are generally focused on the central problematic situation of this student's poor performance in school. This understanding frames their interpretation and participation in this activity. As long as the meeting continues and no other activity frame has been keyed, the participants draw on their expectations about this type of event to interpret ongoing talk. To the extent that talk within this activity explores causes, consequences, and responses to the central narrative problem of the student's academic failure, the entire meeting is treated, in this analysis, as narrative activity, or more specifically as a conversationally co-constructed "story" (Ochs et al. 1992). Within this story telling activity there are multiple embedded narratives that constitute episodes of the larger story.

Narrative Logic and Narrative Structure in Evaluation

Narrators in this parent-teacher conference sketch out moral landscapes and locate narrated actors temporally in relation to the actual, realized, normative and possible worlds configured in those frameworks. This is accomplished and understood through a conjunction of the specific grammatical marking of temporality, the narrative exploration of the causes and consequences of action, and further by the structural/thematic conventions of the narrative genre (generic conventions).[5] Previous work has elucidated the logical organization of narrative defined in terms of its logical relationships, and characterized as a mode of discourse in which the causes and consequences of a central problematic event are explored. In their analysis of story comprehension, Stein and Glenn (1979) articulate an experiential logic of stories which includes a setting, initiating event (IE), response to the IE, attempts to deal with the IE, the resolution or consequences of those attempts, and reactions to such consequences. Similarly, Ochs et al. (1992) define a type of narrative activity, called a story, that is primarily concerned with understanding a problematic event: a story is "narrative activity which articles a central problematic event or circumstance arising in the immediate or distant past and the subsequent past, present and

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[5] Bauman (2004) defines 'genre' as "a constellation of systemically related, co-occurrent formal features and structures that serves as a conventionalized orienting framework for the production and reception of discourse" (p. 3).

future actions/states relevant to interpreting and responding to the problem" (43).

Ochs et al. (1992) and Ochs & Capps (2001) show that the experiential logic of narrative plays a particularly important role in the dialogic co-construction of moral stance in conversational narrative: As explanations of the causes and consequences of problematic or unexpected events, stories build theories of experience that are made available to be challenged and negotiated, including the appropriateness of the actions, beliefs, and motivations of story characters. This dialogic problem-solving nature of narrative affords the exploration of the moral positioning of narrative characters and participants. Stories are always recounted from a particular perspective, and because they address a problematic or surprising event, this perspective often constitutes a moral stance: "Recounting the violation and taking a moral stance toward it provide a discursive forum for human beings to clarify, reinforce, or revise what they believe and value" (Ochs & Capps 2001: 46).

Previous work has also shown how different phases of narrative are associated with the narrative conventions that provide varied resources by which narrators construct the moral positioning of themselves and other persons. In the story preface, the narrator secures the attention and interest of co-participants, characterizes the nature of the upcoming story, and seeks alignment for holding the floor over multiple turns (Sacks 1974). Story settings provide background information about the time, place, participants and circumstances of the action presented in the narrative (Labov 1972). The background information included in narrative settings provides frameworks for understanding and explaining the events delineated in the narrative (Ochs & Capps 2001). In the complicating action, stories proceed through webs of logic and sequence that underlie the exploration of events along with their causes, consequences, and protagonists' responses and reactions to those events (Ochs & Capps 2001).

It is helpful to start by presenting the basic story logic in the parent-teacher conference examined here, followed by an exploration of how this co-articulates with the generic conventions of different phases of the story and grammatical marking of time. The program director, Professor Fah, lays out what she sees as the basic problem to be addressed in this meeting: the student's low achievement and failure to fulfill requirements. Her narrative also describes the responses of students and teachers to this problem, various attempts to deal with it, the consequences of these responses and attempts, and various reactions to these consequences. In addition, co-narrators explore various possible reasons for the student's poor performance. The narrative depicts an unsuccessful student who has failed to complete several program requirements and who has received very low grades for her work despite repeated attempts by teachers and fellow stu-

dents to intervene. The central episode of the story narratively sketches the following logic:

1. Problems (Initiating Events):
   • the student has failed to start an internship;
   • the student failed to take a test;
   • the student has not finished one course;
   • the student has received unacceptably low grades.
2. Responses to the problem:
   • the teachers don't know what to do.
3. Attempts to deal with the problem:
   • the father has been called by the teacher to a conference;
   • the teachers sent someone to find the daughter when she failed to arrange an internship.
4. Consequences:
   • no resolution of the problem, the problem is getting progressively worse;
   • the student will not be able to graduate;
   • the student always gets the worst score, which is bad for her self-esteem.

Once the current, problematic state of affairs has been explicated, the program director moves back in time, to a period when she first noticed the student's problems, providing the nature of the problem, as well as her response and attempts to resolve it, as represented in the following list.

1. Problem leading to the Initiating Event:
   • the student's language skills were inadequate during her first year.
2. Responses to the problem:
   • none.
3. Attempts to deal with the problem
   • the program director talked with her teachers about her low language proficiency;
   • the teachers talked to the student about the problem.
4. Consequences:
   • the student says she likes the program and is motivated to study English.
5. Reaction:
   • the student is allowed to stay in the program.

This second episode of narrative activity explores the web of causes and consequences leading up to the student's current problem, and the program director's actions in addressing the problematic situation. After

this episode, the story continues in a similar fashion, as the co-narrators weave in additional story elements that explain the story's problem, lay out possible consequences, evaluate the methods and attempts to deal with the problem by various story characters, or provide accounts in defense of their own methods and actions.

Story Preface

In the same way that diagnosis of a problem can organize the talk and interpretation of talk in a patient's visit to a doctor's office, the implicit goal of parent-teacher conferences—discussing, evaluating and problem-solving the performance of a student—organizes the talk within this activity. Very soon after Po's arrival, the program director begins her delivery of the news by eliciting his opinion on his daughter.[6]

Segment 1

4 **Fah:** pòkkatĩ lɛ́w nísăy pen yaŋŋay khá ây nuu nĩa
    'what is she like, usually, that kid?'

5 **Po:** man kɔ̂ mmˈ phom mɔɔŋ duu man kɔ̂ yaŋŋan
    'she is ..., mm, as far as I can tell'

6   mây hĕn pen lay
    'I don't see anything wrong.'

7 **Fah:** lɔ̌ə   há
    'Really?'

8 **Po:**   kháp
    'yes'

9   (5.0)
    ((sound of shuffling papers and boxes))

Beginning by eliciting Po's perspective on his daughter, Professor Fah establishes a frame of interpretation for the following talk as centering on trouble. In line 4, the professor asks Po to characterize his daughter's "usual" demeanor, to which he supplies a hedged and non-committal response "as far as I can tell I don't see anything wrong." Fah immediately displays a stance of non-alignment toward this assessment of the student's character. Her other-initiated repair, in line 7, is an unspecified interrogative that locates the entire previous utterance as a problem, and more specifically displays doubt as to the verity of the previous statement. Her five-second pause after line 8 foreshadows a possible dispreferred response (such as disagreement), so it is a sign of trouble. After such a strong display of her non-alignment to Po's characterization of the student

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[6] This is similar to the way that doctors have been found to deliver "bad news" through "perspective-display sequences" (Maynard 1990). In these sequences, doctors delay the delivery of bad news by attempting to elicit the patient's opinion on their own diagnosis. In this way, the doctor can design his delivery of bad news in a way that displays (partial) alignment with the patient's viewpoint. I would like to thank Jeanne Katzman for pointing this out.

as being "okay," and given that the participants in this activity know that parent-teacher conferences are meant to assess the progress of students, this story preface foreshadows narrative activity that will negatively evaluate the student.

Story Setting

With such an interpretive frame firmly established in the story preface, Fah's narrative setting launches a description of the program, its requirements, and current students' normative activity in the program, as shown in Segment 2.

Segment 2: Configuring the conventional grid

10 **Fah:** khɯɯ yaŋ nii yaak ca ca rian hây sâap waa
'umm, I would like to inform you that'

11 **Po:**   kháp
'yes?'

12 **Fah:** thəəm níi nǐia (4.0) thəəm níi nǐia thúk khon nák sùk sǎa thúk khon
'this semester,(4.0) this semester everybody, all the students'

13   ca tôŋ fùkŋaan
'will have to do an internship.'

14 **Po:** kháp
'yes.'

15 **Fah:** ná há law ca tôŋ soŋ pay fùkŋaan
'O.K.? We have to send them for an internship.'

16   ʔəə (.5) ciŋ ciŋ lɛ́ɛw chûa m- ʔəə ʔəə thəəm thîi fùkŋaan ciŋ ciŋ nǐia
'uh, (.5) actually, the section, uh, uh, the actual semester for an internship.'

17   khɯɯ (1.8) thəəm plaay (.2) khɔ̌ŋ pii nâa
'is (1.8) the last semester(.2) of next year.'

18 **Po:** kháp
'yes.'

19 **Fah:** tɛ̀ nûaŋ càk /əə acaan thîi pùk sǎa nǐia kleeŋ waa
'but since, uh, the advisors fear that'

20   ŋ ŋ̩ nák sùk sǎa ca mii panhaa ʔalay
'the students may have some problems,'

21   law kô̂ ləəy hây pay fùk sǎ kɔ̀ɔn thəəm nii
'we make them get an internship this semester.'

22 **Po:**   kháp
'yes.'

23 **Fah:** [ná há]
['O.K.?']

24 **Po:** [khaw   ] khaw kô̂ bɔ̀ɔk phǒm múan kan
['She,   ] she told me that too.'

25 **Fah:** khà phùa wâa thəəm thəəm plaay ñia
    'uh-huh, in case, the last semester, '

26   thâa khay săamâa hăa ŋaan tham dây ləəy
    'if any students could find a job,'

27   tua eeŋ kô ca day sabaay
    'they themselves would be fine.'

28 **Po:** kháp
    'yes.'

29 **Fah:** cháy máy há man ca day cop lew nɔ̀y
    'right? So they will graduate a bit early.'

30 **Po:** kháp
    'yes.'

31 **Fah:** dây ŋaan tham lew nɔ̀y
    'get a job a bit early.'

32 **Po:** khaw kô pay bɔ̀ɔk phŏm mŭan kan yaŋñii
    'She also came to tell me that."

In this story setting the program director informs Po of the current program requirements, and the progress of other students in the program. Professor Fah characterizes internships as an institutional requirement, the timing of which has been moved forward from a later semester to an earlier one by the program in which the student is enrolled. Fah then provides a warrant for that program decision, describing the felicitous consequences of internships at this earlier time-- getting a job, graduating early, getting a job early-- and explains that the students' participation in internships will allow them to reach the valuable goals of graduating and working. This narrative setting also argues the importance of internships within the program, and characterizes the normative nature of internships, reporting that "everybody, all the students," must conduct them.

The narrative setting, then, establishes a conventional grid[7] for students in this academic program, what is normative of those students, and what is *good* for the students to do. This conventional grid serves as a moral landscape in relation to which individual students can be oriented. In this narrative setting, Professor Fah explains institutionally authorized program requirements, relates the social desirability of conducting an internship as a valuable method of achieving socially acceptable goals and avoiding undesirable problems. Internships are also characterized as normative activities in the sense that all students are expected to participate.

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[7] This term was suggested by Elinor Ochs.

Complicating Action

Following the setting phase of the story, Fah describes the complicating action: specific past events leading up to the initiating, or problematic situation.

Segment 3: Complicating action

33 **Fah:** khà (.8) ta ní nîa (.4) phûan kháw maa kan mûa wan thîi pɛɛt nîa ná
khá
'uh-huh. (.8) now, (.4) her classmates came together on the eighth.'

34 **Po:** kháp
'uh-huh'

35 **Fah:** [maa] cɔə kap acaan lîap lɔɔy
'they all came to see the teachers already.'

36 law kɔ̂ mɔ̂ɔp tua hây pay fʉ̀kŋaan
'we assigned each of them an internship,'

37 **Po:** kháp
'uh-huh'

38 **Fah:** sàŋ sɔ̌ɔŋ pay luam thán law phûut thʉ̌ŋ ây wíchaa
'having taught them, we also mentioned about the courses...'

39 thîi rian thəəm tɔɔ pay dûay
'that they would study next semester,'

40 sʉ̂ŋ pen lûaŋ sǎmkhan thaw nán ləəy
'all of which were important things.'

41 **Po:** kháp
'uh-huh'

42 **Fah:** kháw kɔ̂ mây maa hǎa ləəy
'she didn't come at all.'

43 **Po:** lʉ̌ɯ kháp
'Really?'

44 **Fah:** hâ (.8) hay phûan taam
'yes. (.8) We sent her friends to find her.'

In the narrative setting from segment 2, the program administrator had explained the problems with not having an internship, as well as the benefits of having one. In segment 3, she recounts the attempts of the teachers to enroll students in internships and advise them on their progress through the program. Professor Fah reports that all of the other students attended this advising meeting and were assigned an internship. This complicating action, then, is another means of continuing to configure the conventional grid against with Po's daughter will be evaluated. This depiction of the action leading up to the problematic event constructs a model of normative actions performed by most students in response to the situation. In stark contrast to the other students' successful fulfillment of expectations, Fah then describes

Po's daughter's failure to seek an internship or attend the advising meeting. This juxtaposition positions Po's daughter outside the conventional grid, in contrast to the other students' normative and expected actions.

Up until this point, Fah has accommodated Po's stated perspective on his daughter (that she is usually "okay"), by maintaining a distance from the narrative problem, gently leading up to it through an elaborate story setting and complicating action that together establish a conventional grid for interpreting the conduct of this particular student. After having mentioned this first, and most major problem, a floodgate of problems seems to burst open, breaking her story free from these polite constraints: She now (line 44) begins relating an onslaught of problems with the student's academic endeavors.

Segment 4: Narrative problems

42 **Fah:** kháw kô mây maa hăa lǝǝy
　　　'She didn't come at all.'

43 **Po:** lɯ̌ɯ kháp
　　　'Really?'

44 **Fah:** hâ (.8) hay phɯ̂an taam
　　　'yes. (.8) We sent her friends to find her.'

45 　　　leew kô mii wíchaa nɯŋ thîi yaŋ mây sèt
　　　'And there is one course she hasn't finished yet.'

46 　　　　　　(1.5)

47 **Po:** ʔɔɔ
　　　'uuh'

48 **Fah:** ná khá kháw kô mây maa sɔ̀ɔp
　　　'O.K? She didn't come to take the test.'

49 **Po:** lɯ̌ɯ kháp
　　　'Really?'

50 **Fah:** kap ʔacaan
　　　'with the teacher,'

51 　　　ná há law kô mây lúu ca wâa yaŋŋay
　　　'O.K.? We don't know what to do.'

52 　　　　　　(1.0)

53 **Fah:** ah lɛ́ɛw kô khanɛɛn kô mây dii ná khá
　　　'And her grades are not good, either.'

54 **Po:** lɯ̌ɯ kháp
　　　'Really?'

55 **Fah:** khanɛɛn nîa (1.0) thɯ̌ŋ nɯ̀ŋ cùt hâa lɯ́ pàaw
　　　'The GPA (1.0) may not be above 1.5,'

56 　　　kô mây sâap
　　　'I'm not sure.'

57 **Po:** ʔooy rian yɛ̂ɛ
     'Oh! she studies badly.' ((surprised))

58 **Fah:** khâa ca mây còp /aw
     'Yes. She will not be able to graduate.'

59 **Po:** lɯ̆ɯ kháp
     'Really?'

60 **T:**   khâ
     'Yes.'

The initiating (problematic) events presented in segment 4 of the story constitute various ways in which this student has failed to meet program requirements. By outlining these failures, Fah continues to characterize the student's conduct as distinctive in relation to a commonly understood, institutionally authorized, conventional grid, such as taking final exams and maintaining a reasonable grade point average. Fah complains that the teachers do not know how to resolve these problems, and finally relates that a major consequence of the unresolved problematic situation is that the student will not be able to graduate. Po continues to maintain his own narrative in relation to the teacher's, expressing surprise and lack of knowledge about his daughter's performance, perhaps as means of explaining his own lack of response to his daughter's academic troubles.

In segments 1-4, then, Professor Fah has drawn upon narrative resources to construct a conventional moral framework that can be used to make sense out of Po's daughter's actions. This framework, along with presupposed, institutionally sanctioned frameworks, establishes the standard by which the student's actions can be judged to be distinctive: It establishes the other students' actions as normative, and evaluates the appropriateness of certain methods in the context of achieving socially valued goals. The conventionality of methods that most students employ in their program, as well as the value that society places on certain goals over others, constitutes *the good-* a moral landscape of evaluation- as constructed by the teacher. Presented within this interpretive framework, as they are in Fah's narrative, the actions of Po's daughter are positioned as distinctive, and thus as situated outside the landscape of *the good*.

Moral Positioning through Tense, Aspect and Modality

To know who you are is to be oriented in moral space (Taylor 1989: 28).

Within the conceptualization of *the good* developed above—as an ideal world among alternates—the temporal dimension of moral positioning

becomes critical in the project of orienting self and other in moral space through narrative activity. These alternate worlds can be described as actual, realized or unrealized, hypothetical, or possible. In Thai narrative, evaluating persons in relation to *the good* involves grammatical devices that orient persons within these temporal realms. This section describes the use of tense, aspect and modality markers in orienting story characters and protagonists to *the good*.[8]

Constructing the good: A hypothetical world.

Co-narrators must construct the moral frameworks and conventional grids that they are using to orient narrated persons, including themselves, in relation to *the good*. In Thai, narrators use the future particle, *ca*,[9] to sketch out the landscape of the normative and socially expected world of situations that constitute *the good*.

Future and the modality of obligation. The future tense and the modality of obligation are used (often together) to construct an ideal hypothetical world that fulfills social expectations, especially in the setting phases of narratives. In Thai the following grammatical items are used to construct such a world:

- *ca* ('will'): a pre-verbal particle marking relative posteriority (future, conditional, past habitual, hypothetical situations).
- *tɔ̂ŋ* ('must'): a modal verb of obligation.[10]

In the following examples, the teacher configures the conventional grid by which narrated situations and persons will be judged, depicting an ideal hypothetical world in which persons perform socially expected actions.

Segment 5: (lines 11-12)
Fah: thəəm nií nîa (4.0) thəəm nií nîa thúk khon nák sùk sǎa thúk khon
'this semester,(4.0) this semester everbody, all the students'

ca tɔ̂ŋ fùkŋaan
'will have to do an internship.'

Segment 6: (line 14)
Fah: ná há law ca tɔ̂ŋ soŋ pay fùkŋaan
'O.K.? We will have to send them for an internship.'

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[8] Grammatical description in this section draws on Iwasaki & Ingkaphirom (2005), Smyth (2002), and on Bybee, Perkins, & Pagliuca's (1994) typological, cross-linguistic description of the evolution, meaning, and use of tense, aspect and modality.

[9] Smyth (2002) refers to *ca* as a marker of future tense, while Iwasaki & Ingkaphirom (2005) refer to it as a marker of 'challengeability'. Thai does not have obligatory tense marking. This marker does not indicate absolute posterior time reference, but rather relative posterior time reference. In addition, it often allows an epistemic stance reading in some contexts, including some element of doubt or uncertainty. It has hypothetical, conditional, (past) habitual, and relative future uses.

[10] These two items can be used in combination.

Segment 7: (line 90)

Fah: khâ ca còp nĩa tôŋ dâay yàŋ nɔɔy sɔ̌ɔŋ cùt sǔun sǔun

'yes. To graduate, students must get at least 2.0.'

In these segments, Professor Fah uses the grammatical marking of future and obligation together to construct a hypothetical temporal frame along with a normative moral evaluation, to describe would-be conduct that is socially or institutionally expected, such as doing an internship, sending students on internships, and getting a 2.0 grade point average.

A conditional future. The future particle (*ca*) also serves to mark a conditional future, constructing an ideal world that will result if certain felicitous actions are carried out. In the following example the teacher is describing the future situation that she believes would result from having an internship. If the students complete their internships now, they will later reap the benefits.

Segment 8: (lines 24-30)

Fah: phùa   wâa   thəəm thəəm plaay nĩa

'In case, (during) the last semester, '

thaa khay sǎamâa hǎa ŋaan tham dây ləəy

'if any students could find a job,'

tua eeŋ kɔ̂ ca dây sabaay
'they themselves will be fine.'

cháy máy há man ca dây cop lew nɔ̀y

'right? So they will graduate a bit early'

dây ŋaan tham lew nɔ̀y
'and get a job a bit early.'

Constructing the already good: A realized world

Co-narrators position narrated persons as temporally oriented within *the good* by identifying them as someone who has already performed appropriate, normative, or expected actions, as someone who has had valuable or important experiences, or as someone who has normative or expected characteristics. Using the grammatical constructions that express completive, realized, perfect and experiential meanings, the co-narrators construct a *good* world that has been realized through experiences, actions or characteristics.

The realized good. Co-narrators orient themselves and others within these temporal landscapes of evaluation by indicating that appropriate and expected actions have been completed or realized using the grammatical

and lexical forms that are equivalent in meaning to "already":

- *kɔ̀ɔn* : an adverb and preposition meaning "before."
- *rîaprɔ́ɔy* : an adverb (lit. "tidy, orderly") used to refer to achievements or accomplishments that are already done completely.
- *lɛ́ɛw* : a present perfect marker indicating the current relevance of a preceding situation (sometimes translated 'already') (Howard 2000).

In the following examples, the teacher indicates that she and others have already taken actions that she had already characterized as lying within the domain of *the good* before these lines: for the teacher, having assigned each student to an internship; for the students, having sought and secured an internship assignment.

Segment 9: (line 20):
Fah: law kɔ̂ lǝǝy hây pay fʉ̀ksǎ kɔ̀ɔn thǝǝm nii
  'we gave them an internship before this semester.'

Segment 10: (lines 32-34):
Fah: phûan kháw maa kan mûa wan thîi pɛɛt nîa ná khá
  'her classmates came together on the eighth.'
  maa cǝǝ kap ʔacaan lîaplɔ́ɔy
  'they all came to meet the teachers already.'

In these segments, teachers and all of the other students are described as having realized expected and normative actions, thus they are temporally positioned as lying squarely within the landscapes of *the good*.

The experienced good. Co-narrators use experiential markers, resultatives and perfect markers to describe a person's past experience of the *good* world, placing them within that world at the moment of the narrative telling. The following are some examples:

- *khǝǝy* : an experiential marker indicating that a situation has been experienced at some time prior to a reference point.
- *wáay* : a completive/resultative marker.

In the following example, Professor Fah uses these markers to characterize herself as having experienced *the good*, emphasizing that she had already had the experience of making attempts to deal with Po's daughter's problems. In this example, her use of the experiential indicates

actions that the teacher feels she has already attempted. The use of the resultative marker indicates that this attempt is not only prior to the narrative reference point, but also that it has continuing material and/or emotional consequences that are relevant. The use of these two markers together emphasizes the realization of this relevant experience, firmly grounding the person as situated within the landscape of "the good".

Segment 11: (lines 62-66):

Fah: ñî tɔɔn thîî tɔɔn thîî acaan ann fàak mûa pii nùŋ nîa

'When, when Ajaan Ann let her in her first year,'

dây khəəy rian acaan wáy hɔɔ còp pii nùŋ pay lɛ́ɛw nîa
'I already had the chance to inform the professor that, when she had finished the first year.'

khəəy rian acaan ann wáy wâa hhh.
'I (had) already informed Ajaan Ann that hhh'

phasǎa kháw nîa mây khɔy dii
'her language was not so good.'

Here Professor Fah argues that she already attempted to address problems with this student that were evident in the first year of her studies by informing her other teachers. The narrator describes this action to position herself as someone who has already taken appropriate steps in relation to the central problematic situation presented in the narrative.

Constructing the un-good: An unrealized world

Just as story characters and co-narrators can be evaluated as morally correct by recounting how they have performed and experienced in ways that have allowed them to realize the hypothetical and ideal *good* world, they can be constructed as being oriented outside of *the good* by not having realized that world. In fact, a striking observation that can be made of the talk in this conference is that the student is characterized as not yet good, un-good, unable to be good, or never to be good rather than being characterized as bad. She is thus temporally oriented outside of an idealized possible world that includes conventional and normative action, feeling and being. Her actions are thus evaluated by directly invoking the hypothetical world constructed as *the good*, against which she is compared.

The not yet good: an unrealized past. Those outside the realm of the *good* are constructed as not having realized expected, normative or appropriate past actions. In such instances, the grammatical negator *mây* is found to modify verbs describing conduct that would fit with norms and expectations, such as those constructed in the setting or complicating action of the

narrative. In the following examples, the teacher mentions required or expected actions that the student has failed to perform: coming to get an internship, finishing a course, and taking a test.

Segment 12: (line 41)

Fah: kháw kɔ̂ mây maa hăa lə́əy
    'She did not come at all.'

Segment 13: (line 44)

Fah: lɛ́ɛw kɔ̂ mii wîchaa nɯŋ thîi yaŋ mây sèt
    'And there is one course she still has not finished.'

Segment 14: (line 46)

Fah: kháw kɔ̂ mây maa sɔ̀ɔp
    'She also did not come to take the test.'

The not yet good: the lack of past experiences. The negated experiential is used to construct a person who has never yet experienced a certain aspect of the *good*:

• *mây khəəy* : negative + experiential, indicates a relevant situation which has not yet been experienced.

Segment 15: (lines 59-61)

Fah: ciŋ ciŋ kháw mây dây mây dây dây sɔ̌ɔŋ kwàa
    'In fact, she doesn't get, hasn't gotten more than 2.0. '

    ná há mây khəəy thŭŋ (.8) ná khá
    'okay? She has never yet reached it, (.8) okay?'

In this example, Professor Fah reports that Po's daughter has not yet reached even a minimal grade point average in her courses.

The un-good: negative present states. The un-good are described as lacking positive qualities, through the use of negated stative verbs in the present. It is noteworthy that the student and the things closely associated with her are frequently characterized as failing to represent qualities that are expected or normal, rather than as being outright bad. In segment 16, the student's grades are described as "not good", and in segment 17 she is described, by both father and teacher, as "not enthusiastic".

Segment 16: (line 50):

Fah: ah lɛ́ɛw kɔ̂ khanɛɛn kɔ̂ mây dii ná khá
    'And her grades are not good, either.'

Segment 17: (lines 80-81):

Po: mây mây mây katɯɯlɯɯlon
'(She's) not, not, not enthusiastic.'

Fah: khâ kháw mây katɯɯlɯɯlon thâwray ná khá
'Right. She is not so enthusiastic. okay?'

The unable-to-be-good: impossible worlds. The student is also described as lacking the ability to reach *the good* by currently lacking the ability to achieve desired goals. In segment 18, the teacher is describing the consequences of the student's present circumstances, namely not being able to graduate, and in segment 19 the teacher claims that there is no possible action she could now take in order to achieve the desired grade point average.[11]

Segment 18: (line 55):

Fah: ca mây còp ʔaw
'She will not be able to graduate.'

Segment 19: (lines 94-95):

Fah: sɯ̂ŋ tham thawlay
'no matter how much she does'

kô mây mii thaŋ thîi ca thɯ̆ŋ sɔ̆ɔŋ
'there is no way that she'll reach 2.0'

In these examples the means of expressing negative ability are also collocated with the particle, *ca* (relative future), indicating that the world she does not have the ability to achieve is a hypothetical world whose possibility of being realized is in question.

The never-to-be-realized good: An un-good possible world. The teacher also occasionally describes a likely future world in which the student has not achieved normative goals and desired actions or outcomes (in contrast with the impossible world described above). This world is presented as a certainty, one in which the student is placed squarely outside the conventional grid. This is accomplished through the conjunction of the future particle and the negative marker, as in segment 20.

Segment 20: (lines 95-96)

Fah: mây thɯ̆ŋ nùŋ ca m̥
'won't reach, she won't-'

ca mây thɯ̆ŋ nùŋ cùt pɛɛt sĭa dûay sam pay
'she will not even reach 1.8.'

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[11] There is a wide range of possibility modals in Thai, including pre-verbal modal auxiliaries, and serial verb constructions that are lexically determined and thus depend on the particular verb being used. For that reason they are too numerous to enumerate here.

Conclusion

In narrative temporality, the weight of the past is brought to bear on who we have become as we orient toward a future of possible worlds (Brockmeier 2000; Ricoeur 1981). Our sense of self involves orienting ourselves within the landscapes of moral evaluation established by what are considered to be the right ways of responding to life's challenges. Temporality is the compass that establishes where we stand in that landscape: The hypothetical world of rightness can be realized, existent and possible, or it can be unrealized, non-existent, and impossible. Narrators paint a landscape of moral evaluation, and actors are oriented temporally within (or outside of) these landscapes through the evaluative power of temporal perspective-taking (Andersen 1997) in narrative. Andersen argues that tense and aspect are used by speakers to convey "a particular perspective on an event or a situation, including temporal and aspectual attributes of the situation or event" (1). In the narrative activity presented here, tense, aspect, and modality play a crucial role not only in presenting perspectives on chronological time and temporal relations, but also in displaying one's perspective toward the moral and social identity of story tellers and protagonists.

In the data examined here, a student's parent and teacher are meeting to discuss her status as a student, as well as their roles as parents and teachers. In so doing, they characterize themselves and the student in relation to normative, expected, and appropriate moral worlds, which can be realized through the methods that each person employs in the avoidance and resolution of problems. This ideal moral landscape is established, in part, by discursively constructing a conventional grid in the story setting and complicating action, against which protagonists' thoughts, feelings and actions can be compared. Ochs and Capps (2001) describe the power of narrative to legitimize expectations: By its very nature, narrative is a genre in which co-narrators not only depict and characterize the actions of narrated persons, but also configure the framework of interpretation for understanding the events thus depicted. Narrative settings often provide the backdrop against which interlocutors can interpret the problematic nature of events being depicted. As such, narrative settings are often used to elaborate and affirm the institutional, social, and conventional authority of the expectations that have been dashed by the story's central problematic event. The story's protagonists can be described as having realized this hypothetical, morally correct world through their actions and ways of being, thus orienting them within the temporal landscape of *the good*. In this case, the problematic student's actions are set against the backdrop of institutional and conventional expectations as well as other students' normative behavior. She is described as not having realized the expected and normal conduct, as not possessing the characteristics associated

with "normal" or "successful" students, and as unable to take actions that would place her in the realm of the *good* student.

Taylor (1989) describes morality as existing within a space of questions about what it is good or valuable to be and what makes life worth living in the everyday realms of our work and family. Moral thinking, in his view, involves a sense of obligation to and respect for others, a sense of what makes life meaningful, and a sense of one's own dignity. Narrative explores how actors respond to the questions that life poses, how they feel about, react to, and attempt to resolve problematic or unexpected situations. In the process of recounting such events, co-narrators negotiate evaluations of what is obligatory, what is expected, and what is normal to do. Rather than simply presupposing such moral frameworks, narrators establish explicit links between current descriptions and the metapragmatic models that "mediate" our sense of identity (Wortham 2001, 2006). Narrative activity not only draws upon presupposed frameworks of morality in constructing characterizations and evaluations of story characters, it is also a prime site for narrators to build and construct those frameworks for use in current evaluations.

The means by which teachers identify and frame children is consequential on a number of levels. It may be that these characterizations (in this narrative) have arisen out of a chain of characterizations and identifications that have impacted this student in ways not visible in this data. The interpretation of the student as built in this narrative activity will certainly be consequential for her future identity both as a student and as a daughter. It is clear in this data that this student has been characterized in a chain of previous narratives, not only with teachers, but also with other students who were involved in the attempts to deal with her problems. In Thai evaluations of students, it is notable that people are seen as becoming, rather than being, as containing multiple potentialities across timescales that extend beyond this lifetime. The discourses of evaluation crucially involve characterizing the student as not yet good as opposed to bad, and as not possessing the characteristics of the good, as opposed to possessing negative qualities: She is characterized as un-good, rather than as positively bad. This conceptualization of the person allows for the possibility, and perhaps even assumes, that she will someday reach her potential as a good person, and walk in the sunny landscape of the good.

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