

# Dialogic and ritual language resources in a colonial Mayan text to heal smallpox

## Abstract

This essay describes language practices in a 16th Century colonial Yucatecan Mayan text to cure smallpox, included in the *Ritual de los Bacabes* (*Bacabes Ritual*) by Joan Canul. The textual characterization involves the dialogical nature of the spell, performed in the different roles assumed by the healer or magician priest when interacting with his interlocutors, mainly, the deities and spirits related to the creation and healing of smallpox, and the *bacabes*, who hold the sky. The analysis includes multiple meanings in symbolic and contextual perspectives. The Mayan ritual exhibits evidence of oral tradition and reading practices from ancient codex texts. Language ritual resources include lexical, semantic, discursive, and stylistic manifestations to achieve certain communicative intentionality. In these ritual documents, it is possible to appreciate the transmission of spoken tradition to the alphabetic written texts in practices involved to cure a variety of physical and emotional illnesses in the colonial Mayan culture.

**Keywords:** mayan literature, ritual language, dialogical expressions, oral tradition, textuality

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## Introduction

In prehispanic and colonial literature, the oral tradition is expressed in various manifestations in the multiplicity of language resources and communicative functions, mainly in traditional ritual medicine. These ancient texts allow us to identify and reconstruct the contents of orality and textual communication, as well as the multiple discursive, lexical, grammatical, rhetorical, ritual and cultural manifestations, in this case, in the 16th Century Yucatan Mayan spell to cure smallpox, included in the *Ritual de los Bacabes* by Joan Canul in the version of Arzápalo.<sup>1</sup> In this text, we can notice the transmission of cultural and historical content through orality, ancient writing in codex texts, translation, and transcription in alphabetical writing in colonial culture.

In ritual texts to cure physical and emotional illnesses, we can appreciate language practices that fulfill many communicative functions in certain contexts and pragmatic interactions in dialogic language in the roles assumed by the protagonists. The description of the spell to cure smallpox involves intentionality through diverse lexical, discursive and rhetorical manifestations, as well as the multiplicity of symbols and meanings. In this way, the healer interacts as a medicine man, priest, sorcerer, or exorcist that confronts various cultural interlocutors, most of them are spirits and deities who participate in the creation of the disease and its cure. The description of the ritual emphasizes elements that retrieve evidence of information from prehispanic codex texts and oral tradition.

This essay values the daily and literary themes of rituals in Mayan culture. It also contemplates the context, and communicative functions, and textualization of traditional ritual practices. The following sections include information about the spell to cure smallpox in the *Ritual de los Bacabes*, some conceptual and methodological considerations on the proposed categories for textual description, and the characterization of representative fragments of the colonial text. This paper ends with some reflections on expectations and possibilities in future research on this topic.

The objective of this essay is to characterize the ritual language resources in the Yucatecan Mayan colonial text to cure smallpox, included in Joan Canul's *Ritual de los Bacabes* (*Bacabes Ritual*). The descriptive characterization involves the dialogical nature, expressed with multiple interlocutors in the roles assumed by the healer or priest, and the discursive, semantic, and rhetorical language resources.

## About the *Ritual de los Bacabes* and the spell to cure smallpox

This document is a 16th-Century colonial Mayan text, representative of prehispanic traditions in Yucatan, Mexico. It is a remarkable example of the colonial Mayan language. It includes religious, medical, and magical spells, which recover oral tradition in daily interactions. Arzápalo<sup>1</sup> incorporates the Spanish translation with a complete study on lexical, grammatical, and stylistic resources. The diversity of meanings predominates in a figurative and symbolic language. Its interpretation requires contemplating cultural contexts in prehispanic and 16th century periods.

The currently preserved text corresponds to a 1779 copy that exhibits the name of Joan Canul. From comparisons with the *Chilam Balam of Chumayel*,<sup>2</sup> the *Book of Chilam Balam books*<sup>3</sup> and the *Calkini Codex*,<sup>4</sup> it seems that the original corresponds to a late 16th-Century unknown codex. In the *Ritual*, we can identify references to writing with glyphs. Therefore, we can consider that the author relied on prehispanic documents. In fact, in the text, we can read that "the glyphs will have to give us the answer" (file 48: 46-47). Unfortunately, the European conquerors destroyed most of the Mayan codex documents. Therefore, in this case, we cannot know the text, painting, or glyph referred to by the healer in this fragment. In the images from the Dresden Codex, we can observe deities or persons that interact. They are surrounded by glyphs, which possibly serve as a support to complement oral expression. In image 1, we can appreciate the interaction with an animal representation, and in

Image 2, maybe a healer is preparing his requirements for the ritual, mainly herbs, and animals. Both images include morphosyntactic, grammatical, and numerical glyphs. Undoubtedly, the reading of this codex and its possible interpretations implies relevant research for specialists.

Ritual language involves linguistic, lexical, semantic, and rhetorical resources, as well as multiple interpretative possibilities that respond to the communicative and contextual functions in oral tradition. In the spells, we can appreciate ritual repetitive phrases, dialogical evidence through questions, answers, and imperative inquires in the interaction between the priest and his interlocutors: the spirit of smallpox and other deities. The symbolic language involves the context and polysemy in certain words and translations that correspond to Mayan religion and mythology concepts. We can identify symbolic meanings in the personification of deities and spirits.

### The spell to cure smallpox

The spirit of smallpox is represented with multiple attributes through fire and macaws as the symbolic smallpox birds, associated with red, white, and black. The *Ritual de los Bacabes* contains two parts that make up the spell to cure this illness, perhaps corresponding to the sessions required for the cure. In the “healing of smallpox with fever” procedure, the priest-healer emphatically challenges the disease spirit by saying: *Yo seré quien deshaga tu conjuro hermano menor del frenesí*, “I will be the one to undo your spell, younger brother of frenzy”. In a dialogical interaction, the healer discovers the smallpox attributes, through questions addressed to different deities, spirits, and the patient. The interaction includes repeated emphatic phrases of pain and suffering of the type: *¡ay!, ¡ay, no, no!*.

The priest assumes different contrasting roles. On the one hand, he appears as an experienced doctor explaining symptoms, ailments, attributes, symbols, and healing procedures, and, on the other hand, he behaves as an emphatic exorcist who struggles with the smallpox spirit and other deities and symbolic creatures. Furthermore, he expresses doubt through rhetorical questions and inquires for advice. Finally, he finds solutions and explains the way to overcome smallpox.

The second session corresponds to the text for the “healing of the so-called *Ix Chac Anal Kak*, *viruelas rojo encendido*, “Deep red smallpox”. The healer-priest explains the origin of the disease, its parents in a mythological setting, and the deities involved. The interaction resembles a dynamic dialogical language with textual representations of interlocutors through questions, answers, and emphatic threats. *Kin Chac Ahau*, “The Great Sun King”, creator of the fire, is associated with the powers of the disease. In a constant change of roles, the priest invokes deities or feminine spirits in repetitive cycles, typical of religious rituals, to which he adds symbolic attributes.

### Approach

In the *Ritual de los Bacabes*, by Joan Canul, Arzápalo<sup>1</sup> provides a complete research approach with a facsimile text, transcription, and bilingual version with annotations on language resources in context. It also provides lexical, semantic, and grammatical analysis, as well as quantitative and qualitative elements in textual characterization. This edition enriches linguistics, anthropology, and history. In these perspectives, Barrera Vázquez,<sup>5</sup> González Torres,<sup>6</sup> and Álvarez<sup>7,8</sup> provide similar research on the colonial Mayan vocabulary and the structural description of *Chilam Balam* of Chumayel. These studies

are fundamental for understanding the linguistic environment in colonial language and they are obligatory references that support and complement Arzápalo’s research.

The discursive approaches on language resources, in the classic perspective of Foucault<sup>9</sup> and Bajtín,<sup>10</sup> contributed to the criteria of the diversity in culturally contextualized communicative functions, and the complexity and richness of the textual and discursive genres in constant evolution. These perspectives allow us to emphasize the study of the interrelation between oral and textual genres in the historical and cultural traditions. In this way, Miguel León-Portilla<sup>11,12</sup> enriches research on the transmission of contextual, cultural, and historical content through orality, codex written modalities, translation, and transcription into alphabetical writing in traditional texts. Hernández Rodríguez<sup>13</sup> provides an example of textual dialogical characterization related to oral and written tradition in colonial language practices. In the *Ritual de los Bacabes*, Gubler<sup>14</sup> characterizes the healing interaction, and Lema<sup>15</sup> explores ritual repetition in symbolic phrases and their impact on prayers.

The present study focuses on the characterization of language and textuality in the *Ritual de los Bacabes* (*Bacabes Ritual*) in a linguistic and discursive perspective. However, this masterpiece also highlights the possibility of multidisciplinary perspectives on the diversity of themes involved. In this way, we can read the ritual through historical, cultural, artistic, mythological, and anthropological approaches. The ethnographic perspectives help us to contextualize the historical, daily, and current religious and ritual practices in traditional medicine and natural procedures to heal emotional and physical illnesses. For this reason, the analysis of language and textuality will always be complemented and enriched with multidisciplinary approaches. For example, regarding the traditional context of ritual medicine, Sánchez Aroche<sup>16</sup> provides preserved historical evidence in the textual tradition. Chávez Guzmán<sup>17</sup> considers practices in colonial Mayan medicine. Hirose López<sup>18</sup> highlights the permanence and possible extinction of these healing practices and Nájera Coronado<sup>19</sup> addresses the ritual language related to fire as a natural force related to smallpox.

### Methodological criteria for descriptive characterization

The characterization involved the following categories to analyze representative examples from the text: 1) dialogical practices in the roles that the healer assumes when interacting with interlocutors, 2) language resources: vocabulary, semantics, rhetoric, and ritual style, 3) multiplicity of meanings and symbols in context, and 4) evidence of information from the oral and the codex writing traditions to the text translated in the alphabetical version. Since these categories correspond to textual resources in an integral manifestation, the characterization focusses on the roles assumed, as part of the dialogical interaction. The analysis highlights the possibility of multiple interpretations, trying to recover the context and the intentionality in the roles, and dialogical interaction.

To spread the richness of languages in the spell, the selected examples appear in the original bilingual version, Mayan-Spanish, as presented by Arzápalo.<sup>1</sup> The English translation in this essay tries to retrieve the original intention. Therefore, it respects the phrases corresponding to names and attributes of the gods in the original language. On this occasion, this research focuses only on the descriptive aspects, previously presented, without grammar or lexical characterization.

## Descriptive characterization of the spell to cure smallpox

In its formal characteristics, the spell is a monologue personified by the priest or healer. The main interpretation in this essay is that, as healer and sorcerer, he establishes the dialogical interaction and appears in the roles of narrator, doctor, healer, exorcist, priest, patient, and spirit or deity. As an exorcist, an interpretation is that multiple spirits and deities communicate through his voice. Hernández Rodríguez<sup>13</sup> and Gubler<sup>14</sup> study similar dialogical interaction in colonial rituals. The following example exhibits the role of the narrator, who introduces the ritual and its purpose and relates the mythological creation of smallpox. The number four constitutes a sacred, magical, and mythological symbol with multiple interpretations, for example, a cosmic center referring to the cardinal points, constantly repeated as an oral tradition resource.

### Example 1: (file 106: 1-6).

#### Spanish / Mayan

La curación del llamado *Ix Chac* / *U pedzil Ix Chac*  
*Anal Kak* “Viruelas-rojo-encendido” / *Anal Kak lae*  
*Érase Can Ahau Tii Cab* “Cuatro-ahau-de-la-tierra” / *Can Ahau tii Cab*  
*Can Ahau Caan* “Cuatro-ahau-del-cielo” / *Can Ahua Caanal*  
 cuando nació / *uchic u sihil*  
 cuando fue creado. / *uchic u ch’abtabal*

#### English

The healing of the so-called red essence  
 Deep red smallpox  
 Once upon a time there was Four-*Ahau*-of-the-Earth  
 Four-king-from-heaven  
 when he was born,  
 when it was created.

In the following example, the healer assumes himself to be an expert physician who explains the remedies for healing.

### Example 2: (file 105. 137-142).

#### Spanish / Mayan

La bebida ha de ser a base de *chacah* / *Yuklil Chacah*  
 con dos chiles, / *Yetel cap’el ic*  
 un poco de miel / *yetel cab dzedzec*  
 y el jugo de tabaco; / *yetel u kabil kutz*  
 éste ha de ser en poca cantidad / *dzedzec bin*  
 y, naturalmente, ha de ser del jugo / *yetel u kabil lae*

#### English

The drink must be based on *chacah* plant  
 with two chilies,

a little honey  
 and tobacco juice;  
 this has to be in small quantity  
 and, naturally, it must be from the juice

The healer associates this disease to fire and fever, due to the red color of smallpox. Nájera Coronado<sup>19</sup> considers the relationship with fire in this type of rituals. The reiterations of the adverbs *ahí*, “there” and *y que ahí*, “and that there” are evidence of the spatial reference corresponding to the reading of a codex and oral tradition.

### Example 3: (file 113: 193-204).

#### Spanish / Mayan

Y que ahí ardió la fuente / *Tii el bin sayabi*  
 y que ahí ardió el pus / *tii el bin puhi*  
 y que ahí le ardió la sanguaza / *tii el bin nab*  
 y se dice que ahí ardió / *ti el bin halal*  
 y comenzaron a calmarse las hinchazones; / *uchic bin u hauual*  
*buth*  
 ahí se le pudrieron / *tiix tuhaal*  
 al surgir la hoguera / *u chic u toc*  
 al surgir ese dolor de las viruelas; / *uchic u kinam kak*  
 se desvanecía el intenso fuego / *kax u ninil kak*  
 que estaba denso, / *chac nicen*  
 al rojo vivo, / *chac tip’en*  
 cuando nació. / *cat sihi*

#### English

And that there the source burned  
 and that there burned the pus  
 and that the blood burned there  
 and that it burned there  
 and the swelling began to relieve;  
 there they rotted  
 when the bonfire arises  
 when that pain arises from smallpox;  
 the intense fire was fading  
 that was dense,  
 as the red hot,  
 when he was born.

And finally, the doctor highlights fever as a “red hot” manifestation and that the disease will be cured with fire to dispel virulent manifestations. The interjection *¡ay!*, “ouch” is an expression of pain from the patient. Chávez Guzmán<sup>17</sup> highlights these ritual procedures that incorporate natural remedies in traditional Mayan medicine practices.

**Example 4: (file 102: 34-40)****Spanish / Mayan**

¡Hoguera al rojo vivo, / Chac molonche  
 asadlas! / kakhex  
 ¡ay, fueron tres montones de viruta / Ox nicib susbe chee  
 Los que se introdujeron en las piedras, ay! / oc tu tunilob chee  
 ¿Qué tal con lo que ha de decirse / Cux u habalobe  
 para que se desvanezcan / hex u binelbe  
 hasta las cavernas de fuego?, ¡ay! / tii holom kakilbe chee

**English**

Red hot bonfire,  
 roast them!  
 Ouch, it was three piles of burrs  
 Those who entered the stones, ouch!  
 How about what has to be said  
 so they fade away  
 to the fire caves?

In contrast, in the following example, the medicine man doubts about the cure and seems to be an apprentice. By rhetorical questions, he inquires about the remedy in the reiteration of the expression *cuál será...?*, “which will be...?”.

**Example 5: (file 104: 92-95)****Spanish / Mayan**

¡Ay! ¿cómo habrán de cortarse? / xotom bacin chee  
 ¿Cuál será la planta / Max u che  
 y cuál será la yerba / max yaban  
 que corresponde a la viruela? ¡Ay!” / kak be chee

**English**

Ouch! How are they to be cut?  
 Which will be the plant  
 and which will be the herb  
 which corresponds to smallpox? Ouch!”

Likewise, the healer inquires, with rhetorical questions, about the magical phrases needed to fulfill the spell and which the results will be. The expression of pain *¡ay!*, “ouch” may be attributed to the patient, or the healer himself, due to his doubts and possible errors. The passage closes with repetitive phrases to give strength to a possible response: *los dobleces del inframundo que las van consumiendo*, “the folds of the underworld that are consuming them.” In this perspective, Lema<sup>15</sup> highlights the impact and ritual effectiveness produced by this type of reiteration in colonial Mayan prayers.

**Example 6: (file 102: 38-53)****Spanish / Mayan**

¿Qué tal con lo que ha de decirse / Cux u habalobe  
 para que se desvanezcan / hex u binelbe

hasta las cavernas de fuego? / tii holom kakilbe chee  
 ¿Qué sucede con los huesos / Cux u bacelebe  
 que han de dirigirse / hex u binelbe  
 hasta la hoguera? / tiix bakakilbe  
 ¡Ay de sus huesos! / Ubocelabache  
 ¿Qué sucede con la sangre / Cux u Kike be  
 que ha de dirigirse / hex u binelbe  
 hasta la gigantesca perforación / tiix chac hulub  
 que conduce a la hoguera? ¡ay! / tii kakil be chee  
 ¡Ay!, serán seis los dobleces / Uac uudz hiix tee  
 del cielo, / caan chee  
 seis los dobleces del inframundo, Uac uudz hiix metnal  
 que las van consumiendo, / xanan xupic  
 que las van lanzando, ¡ay! / ch'intabale che

**English**

How about what has to be said  
 so they fade away  
 to the fire caves?  
 What happens to the bones  
 that have to go  
 up to the bonfire?  
 Oh! About his bones!  
 What happens to the blood  
 that has to go  
 down to the gigantic cavity  
 which leads to the bonfire? Ouch!  
 Oh, there will be six folds of heaven,  
 six the folds of the underworld,  
 that are consuming them,  
 they are launching them, ouch!

It seems that the healer loses confidence when he realizes that he does not recognize the characteristics of the disease and addresses questions to the spirits, about smallpox parents. We can interpret that the spirit of smallpox confirms that the sun is his parent, or that the healer hears that voice, and he explains it to his interlocutors. Then, the healer determines that the disease goes further. Therefore, he considers that, in any previous moment, the spirit of smallpox seized the soul of the patient.

**Example 7: (file 106: 7-15)****Spanish / Mayan**

¿Quién fue tu engendrador? / Max tah ch'abi  
 ¿Quién fue el que te dio la vida? / max tah akabi  
 El progenitor fue su padre / U ch'ab u yum

*Kin Chac Ahau* “El-gran-rey-sol” / tii Kin Chac Ahau

*Kolop U Uich Kin* “El-sol-del-rostro-desollado” / Kolop U Uich Kin

Y fue poseído por el fuego de la viruela / U ch’ab kan bin

la maldición de las viruelas de fuego, / kak tamaye

el rabo del fuego, / kak ne

el artefacto encarnado, siete rabos / chac pat uuc ne

### English

Who was your father?

Who was it that gave life to you?

The progenitor was his father

The-great-sun-king

The-sun-of-the-skinned-face

And he was possessed by smallpox fire

the curse of the fire pox,

the tail of the fire,

the incarnated artifact, seven tails

The adverbial repetition *acaso*, “perhaps” strengthens the feeling of doubt and the search for an answer about the identity of the smallpox deity. In this way, the spirit responds and identifies itself as smallpox on the red hill.

### Example 8 (folio 101: 4-10)

#### Spanish / Mayan

Yo seré quien deshaga tu conjuro / Ten c lub a ch’ue

hermano menor del frenesí / tech yidzin tancase

Son seres humanos / Macobe

¿Acaso son viruelas? / Kako bacin

¿Acaso serán cortadas? / Xotom bacin

¡Ah! ¿Quién eres? / maxech chee

Las *Chac Mul Ah Kakob* “viruelas del cerro rojo” / Chac Mul Ah kakob

### English

I’ll be the one to undo your spell

younger brother of the frenzy

They are human beings

Are they smallpox?

Will they be cut?

Oh! Who are you?

The Smallpox of the red hill

In the following passage, the patient explains the disease process. León-Portilla<sup>11,12</sup> considers the intentional power of the adverbial repetition in oral tradition, as evidence of references to images from a codex, such as the phrases *ahí*, “there”, *ahí hirvió*, “it boiled there”, and *hasta ahí*, “until there”.

### Example 9: (file 112: 165-176)

#### Spanish / Mayan

Ahí se me quemó / Tii el bin

la bolsa roja, ahí mismo / chacal tem tei

Ahí hirvió / Tii el bin

la mar roja y brava / chacal tuntún haai

Ahí hirvió / Tii el bin

la mar roja y tranquila / chacal musem haai

hasta ahí se lanzó / tii tah ch’intabi

se dice que fue detrás del Acantún “Piedra parlante” / tii pach bin Acantun

surgieron las llamas / uchic u toc

surgió el dolor de las viruelas / uchic u kinam kaki

se desvanecía el fuego / kax u tunil kak

(aunque) estaba tupido el fuego / chac nicen kak

### English

There it burned me

the red bag right there

There it boiled

the red and rough sea

There it boiled

the calm red sea

up there launched

it is said that it was behind the talking stone

flames arose

the pain of smallpox arose

the fire was fading

(although) the fire was thick

The patient emphasizes the experience of the disease and relates it to the mythological birth of smallpox, the fight against fever in the fire, and his fall into the burning sea. Therefore, the text involves the creation of smallpox at its resemblance to the symptoms experienced by the patient.

### Example 10: (file 112: 177-192)

#### Spanish / Mayan

estaba vivo el fuego /chac top’en kak

cuando nació / ca sihi

iba caminando, / ximbal u caah

iba dando vueltas / sut u caah

(alrededor de) las varillas rojas, / chacal hilib

de las fogatas rojas / chacal nuchop

Fue abofeteado, / U tahlatabal bin



Cuatro veces se puso de pie, / ti canil nal  
 cuatro veces se arrodilló. / ti canil xol  
 Y que cayó en el oriente / U lubul bin lakin  
 en el mar. / kaknabil  
 Y que ahí le ardió la boca / Tii ek bin u chii  
 y se le desolló / susi  
 que ahí le ardió la boca / tii ek bin u chii  
 en el mar. / kaknabil  
 Y que ahí ardió el río. / Tii el bin yoc haal

**English**

the fire was alive  
 when it was born  
 it was walking,  
 it was going around  
 (around) the red rods,  
 of the red bonfires  
 He was slapped  
 Four times he stood up,  
 four times he knelt down.  
 And it fell in the east  
 at sea.  
 And that his mouth burned there  
 and skinned him  
 that his mouth burned there  
 at sea.  
 And that the river burned there.

There is a constant confrontation between the healer and the spirits. In the following excerpt, it seems that the spirit of smallpox identifies and confirms its feverish nature from fire.

**Example 11: (file 101: 9-14)****Spanish / Mayan**

¡Ah! ¿Quién eres? / maxech chee  
 Las *Chac Mul Ah Kakob* “Viruelas del cerro rojo” / Chac Mul Ah Kakob  
*Ocom Kakob* “Viruelas penetrantes” / Ocom Kakob  
*Chacuil Kakob* “Viruelas perforadoras” / Chacuil Kakob  
*Chacuil Kakob* “Viruelas febriles”, / Chacuil Kakob  
 le corresponden / u cuch.

**English**

Oh! Who are you?  
 The Smallpox of the red hill

Penetrating Smallpox

Drilling pox

Fever pox, that correspond to him

Another evidence of dialogical interaction appears when the healer-priest asks directly to the deity about his creation. The spirit of smallpox answers that the sun and fire gave life to the disease.

**Example 12: (file 108: 60-72)****Spanish / Mayan**

A ti me dirijo, sangre, / Cech kike  
 a ti, sangre coagulada / cech olome  
 a vosotros benditos, se les apuñaló / cex cich lome  
 ¿A quién creaste? / Mac tah ch'abi.  
 Lo creado fue / U ch'ab  
 el padre de / u yum tii  
*Kin Chac Ahau*, “El-gran-rey-sol” / Kin Chac Ahau  
*Kolop U Uich Kin* “El-sol-del-rostro-desollado”. / Kolop U Uich Kin.

Lo creado fue su fuego; / U ch'ab in kak  
 llegó el fuego / tii ulac kak  
 hasta la maldición / tu tamaye  
 del rabo de fuego, / kak ne  
 habrá de decirse. / u yal bin

**English**

It is you to whom I speak, blood,  
 to you, clotted blood  
 you blessed, you were stabbed  
 Who did you create?  
 What was created was  
 the father of  
 The-great-sun-king  
 The-sun-of-the-skinned-face.  
 What was created was his fire;  
 the fire came  
 up to the curse  
 from the tail of fire,  
 it will have to be said.

The following fragment fosters the association of macaws as symbolic birds of smallpox in its many representative colors. The repetition of phrases creates an atmosphere of hypnotism and exorcism in the ritual: *la perversidad*, “perversity”, the interjection *Ay*, “Ouch” and the identities of the colorful macaws. The adverbial expressions, such as *aquí son captados*, “here they are caught”, emphasize the search of symbolic creatures in the sky.

**Example 13: (file103: 64-78)****Spanish / Mayan**

La perversidad del parto, /U cool al  
 la perversidad de la creación. / u cool cha'abe  
 ¿Qué fue lo que sacaron de ello? / Max tah ch'abobi  
 ¡Ay lo que se entendió / U ch'abob  
 fue lo de los padres! / citbil be chee  
 ¡Ay, no son malvados precisamente! / Maai cobe chee  
 ¡Ay, viruelas llagadas! / Bobote kakob be chee  
 ¿Cuáles son los simbólicos pájaros, / Max u chi'ich'il  
 los símbolos / u mutil  
 de la viruela? ¡Ay! / kakobe chee  
 ¡Ay! Aquí son captados / Hex u ch'abtabal be chee  
 por sus plantas: / tu menel chee  
*Chac Tan Mo* "Guacamaya-roja" / Chac Tan Mo  
*Sac Tan Mo* "Guacamaya-blanca" / Sac Tan Mo  
*Ek Tan Mo* "Guacamaya-negra" / Ek Tan Mo

**English**

The perversity of childbirth,  
 the wickedness of creation.  
 What did they get out of it?  
 Oh, what was understood  
 it was that about the parents!  
 Oh, they are not exactly evil!  
 Ouch, sore pox!  
 What are the symbolic birds,  
 the symbols  
 of smallpox? Oh!  
 Oh! Here they are caught  
 for its plants:  
 Red Macaw  
 White macaw  
 Black Macaw

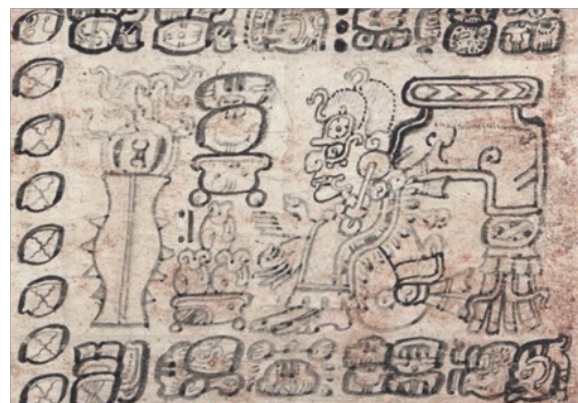
The intentionality manifested in the ritual involves the possibility of interpretations about the meanings that the author tried to express, through symbolic multiplicity, as well as the interpretative creativity of the reader. In this perspective, Beuchot<sup>20</sup> considers that a text:

"supposes an author, as well as a reader or interpreter, who will interpret it. There is, on the one hand, an intention of the author, which is what he wanted to express in his text; and there is another intention, that of the reader, which does not always interpret what the author wanted it to be understood, but adds new meanings" (p. 129).

Therefore, this colonial Mayan ritual to cure smallpox is a representative example of meaning creation when trying to make sense of reading. The intentionality of the author and the reader enrich the vitality of the text through the multiplicity of interpretations, as well as in various daily practices to cure different diseases. Figures.<sup>21</sup>



**Figure 1** Source: World Digital Library (2017), *Dresde Codex*: United Nations for Education, Science and Culture Retrieved from <https://www.wdl.org/es/item/11621/>.



**Figure 2** Source: World Digital Library (2017), *Dresde Codex*: United Nations for Education, Science and Culture Retrieved from <https://www.wdl.org/es/item/11621/>.

**Final considerations**

The characterization of the ritual language in the spell to cure smallpox, from the *Ritual de los Bacabes*, allows us to appreciate the integral manifestation of dialogical intentionality, which includes the healer-priest, the patient, the spirits and the deities associated. Furthermore, it is possible to identify the diversity of language resources, multiple symbolic interpretations, and manifestations of the oral tradition and references to writing through images or glyphs in codex texts. Besides, the spell, written in the 16th Century, recovers prehispanic mythological contents, related to healing practices through traditional medicinal remedies, religion, magic, and exorcisms in the Mayan cultural colonial setting.

The intentionality of the author and the interpretations of the reader enrich creative symbolic meanings. Also, the healing theme is essential in everyday life. We can notice the inheritance of daily practices in the interpretation of traditional remedies, in healing approaches, and the magical beliefs involved. Also, it is possible to read the ritual with multidisciplinary perspectives, which will always enrich language, discursive, and textual characterization.

The textual description method incorporates comprehensive criteria and categories to study communicative intentionality in the spell. The decision to describe dialogical interaction and the roles assumed by the healer-priest, were useful to integrate the diversity of lexical, discursive, semantic and rhetorical resources, as well as the textual evidence of orality and reference to the ancient writing. In this perspective, this essay provides methodological criteria and categories for classification and analysis, that may be useful in future research about ritual texts.

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