

Paisanos and Chamulitas:
Speech and social relations in (and around) Zinacantán¹

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Life on the edge

As we carefully negotiated our way around the tiny bones of the fried *mojarra* that his woman had set before us, my *compadre* Lol and I talked about how times change.

"It used to be," murmured Lol, "that people down here never used to talk about *indios* at all."

We were in the town of Tonalá, on the Chiapas coast, taking refuge from the midday heat in a wattle and daub house set well back from the dusty street. Slow flower sales had given us the chance to leave Lol's market stall in the temporary care of a fellow Zinacanteco vendor, and to come "home" for a late lunch. Lol's "wife" hovered in the background, poking silently at two more fish spattering in the skillet.

"People here in Tonalá always used to say *paisano*--'countryman'--to anyone who came from outside, Indian or not. It's only recently that they've taken to calling us *chamulitas*." Lol took a gulp from his strawberry-flavored softdrink--a giant half-liter *Rey* pulled from the refrigerator which stood, incongruously, in the middle of the dirt floor--and flashed me his gold-flecked smile. This proud Zinacanteco, wealthy and influential in his own village far away in the mountains, clearly shrugged off as an ignorant joke the epithet "little Chamula." The inhabitants of the neighboring Tzotzil township of Chamula were, after all, notorious bumpkins, wearers of scratchy woolen clothes, poor overpopulated cousins who spent their lives looking for work away from their own hamlets. No one could seriously confuse Lol with one of them, his smile seemed to say. "Have you learned to speak Tzotzil, then?" I asked Lol's wife, in Spanish, hoping to draw her into our conversation. She shook her head, and Lol went on, in Tzotzil, that this was a difficult arrangement: perhaps he would have to leave her. She had taken to complaining that he didn't give her enough money; and her daughter was so unbearably *ch'aj*--lazy as a stick.

"Do you often go down to the sea shore?" I persisted to Lol's wife, undaunted.

¹ Some of the material discussed here, appeared, in preliminary (and unproofread) form, as Haviland (1984). My most recent fieldwork in Zinacantán, from 1983-1988, has been supported by grants from the National Geographic Society, the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation, and Reed College. I have benefitted by discussion of some of this material with Lourdes de León, and Penelope Brown.

"No, because *este muchacho* (this boy) never wants to go anywhere," she said, looking straight at my compadre Lol.

Speech relations and social relations

The social organization of an aggregate of people clearly sets the parameters of the organization of speech in the corresponding community. As %Moerman (1988) has recently reminded us,

"We all know that all talk is thoroughly and multifariously embedded in the historical, cultural, social, biographical, (and so on and so on) context of its occurrence. We make use of this in constructing and interpreting the sense, import, and meaning of every bit of talk we encounter" (1988:8).

On the other hand, I have also argued that "speech relations" (%Haviland (1984), %Haviland (1988)) and social relations more generally are, in an important sense, *co-extensive*; that social life is played out and constituted *typically*, if not *centrally*, by language interaction.

People inhabit a world that is, typically, only partly accessible to them. Elsewhere I have recently suggested that

"There are inevitable constraints--of power and economy, of control of production and access to resources--that circumscribe and configure the details of social life, where people talk, eat, work, joke, and love. But our contact with these material preconditions is ordinarily mediated by the interactions we have, face to face, with one another. At this level, abstract "social organization" comes to life as sociability, and "the social relations of production" are played out in the daily interpersonal interactions between friends, workmates, and neighbors. Whenever we talk, we use forms of language which have themselves been produced and molded by the forces of history; we confront one another in circumstances constrained by the material facts, and with motives which take their form from such facts. That is, speech responds to the same factors which influence other aspects of social life. In the same way, speaking with one another is a primary mechanism for producing, reproducing, and altering a social relationship. In this sense, given whatever primary constraints there may be on a social form, language not only reflects but also contributes to--indeed, constitutes--social organization" (%Haviland (1988)).

The features of interaction through speech--the resources it uses, the circumstances under which it occurs, and so on--are thus multiply interconnected with the social order.

There is thus a bidirectional thesis: that we must look to facts of social organization (in the broadest sense we can entertain) to understand language--both its form and its functions; and that we can look to linguistic interaction for the (proto-typical) raw material of social life. The thesis actually involves a set of interrelated but distinct propositions, corresponding to different realms of the analysis of social life, and of language itself.

First, it involves the claim that natives' cultural understandings typically connect language and speech with social life and sociability. We shall see that in Zinacantán, as elsewhere, native theory, insofar as it is reflected in vocabulary, makes explicit the link between formal and informal talk (lexically coded by the roots *k'op* and *lo'il*²) and both social institutions and sociability. Second, the thesis suggests that social relations unfold, and social organization is constituted--both conceptually and in fact--typically if not predominantly in the realm of acts of speaking; that there is a shared evolution between relations of speech and developing social relations. The inherent *indexicality* of speech thus turns out to be a necessary and characteristic *design* feature of language, seen now as a basic instrument of social action. Finally the thesis predicts that if both social relations and speech relations are, on a more perspicacious analysis, themselves epiphenomenal, or dependent functions of other independent constraints on human life, then both dance to the same tune. If, for example, there is an asymmetry in access to productive resources between two interacting groups of people, or a change in the balance of such access over time, then the asymmetry will be reflected similarly in both social arrangements writ large, and in the language they use with one another.

What, then, does one make of Lol's observation about changing habits of address towards Indians, in the ladinoized town of Tonalá, on the Chiapas coast? I think it's a long story, towards which the present essay will contribute only a few preliminary notes.

Tzotzil and Spanish, in central Chiapas

According to the 1970 Mexican national Census out of a total population of just over one million, of whom 590 thousand were literate, the Indian population of Chiapas was about 288 thousand. 140 thousand were shown as "knowing Spanish." This left more than half--about 148 thousand people--listed as monolingual speakers of Tzotzil, Tzeltal, Chol, Tojolabal, or one of the other less numerous Indian languages spoken in the state. The Census showed 50 thousand monolingual Tzotzil speakers and another 45 thousand who also spoke Spanish.

For Zinacantán, one of the 21 *municipios* in which Tzotzil is spoken by a significant portion of the population, the 1970 figures were as follows: 4,662 monolingual speakers of Tzotzil, and another 3,741 who also spoke Spanish. The breakdown by sex is somewhat more revealing, showing men as bilingual in more than half the cases, but women only rarely bilingual.

The 1980 Census, released in 1983, showed a total population for

² See %Bricker(1974), %Haviland(1977b), for discussions of the relevant lexical taxonomies, and %Haviland and Haviland (1983) for ethnographic elaboration.

Chiapas of just over two million³, of whom about 492 thousand were also shown as speaking "an Indian language." Slightly more than half of these were also specified as "speaking Spanish." The Census showed a total population for Zinacantán of 13 thousand, of whom 10 thousand (over the age of four) were speakers of Tzotzil⁴--again about evenly divided between Spanish speakers and a somewhat smaller group of (predominantly) Tzotzil monolinguals⁵. The two curves--the Tzotzil monolinguals, and the Tzotzil-Spanish bilinguals--cross twice: between the ages of 5 and 9, there are more Tzotzil monolinguals than speakers of Spanish, but the numbers are reversed for the group between 10 and 14 years, and stay reversed until, in the group of people forty years old and above, the monolingual Tzotzil speakers begin again to outnumber their agemates who are listed as also speaking Spanish.⁶

In my compadre Lol's village of Nabenchauk, the population since 1970 has grown from about 800 to well over 2000 people, and virtually every man between about 5 and 25 now speaks at least some Spanish, whereas it still seems rare to find girls out of their teens who will (willingly) do so.

Official policy regarding Indian languages, since the Conquest, has had a checkered and cyclical history in Mexico, as Shirley Brice Heath has documented (Heath 1972). In this Century there have been two competing philosophies vying with each other, each with cyclical periods of ascendancy. In 1911, for example, the platform of the *Partido Popular Evolucionista* included a plea for expanded teaching of Spanish, both spoken and written, especially among Indians, following the suggestions of the influential conservative educator Gregorio Torres Quintero, who wrote in 1913 that teaching Indians in their native tongues would help to preserve them, something that would be "very nice for linguists and antiquarians" but a "very considerable obstacle to civilization and the formation of a national

³ For the population of age 15 and over, 700,000, out of a total of 1,129,000 were listed as literate. In Zinacantán the comparable figures are (total) 6,844, and (literate) 2,133--1,555 men and just 578 literate women.

⁴ It is very unclear who the roughly three thousand Zinacantecos who, according to the census, did *not* speak Tzotzil were. Of course, the Census materials are notoriously unreliable.

⁵ By contrast, the *municipio* of Tonalá, with a total population of about 44 thousand, was shown as having only about 4 thousand Indian language monolinguals out of a total population of speakers of Indian languages of only about 6 thousand. Curiously, virtually all of these Indians were listed as speakers of Tzeltal, the vast majority under the age of twenty. One assumes that most of these people are, in fact, workers on Coastal plantations.

⁶ The 1980 census no longer breaks down linguistic information by sex.

soul"(1913:3-4). Torres Quintero presumed that Indian languages would simply wither and die if all education was in Spanish. Similarly, the Hispanic scholar José Vasconcelos, in the Obregón era around 1921, recommended the elimination of "*la personalidad india*" through a thoroughgoing hispanicization of Indian education, and an elevation of Indian souls by teaching them the great classics--Dante, Homer, Tolstoy--which he caused to be disseminated in Spanish among illiterate Indian peasants around the countryside (Heath 1972:136). By contrast, during the reforms of the 1930s, the Cárdenas administration formed the first Indian Affairs agency, and fomented bilingual programs to combat the massive illiteracy rate (at least 78% in Chiapas at that time according to Heath 1972:161-2). Language policy was influenced by a new concern for native languages, for cultural multiplicity, and even by Stalinist ideas about preserving native languages as effective means of education and development⁷. The same bewildering cycle of fashions and philosophies has been applied to Chiapas. Within the same community there can exist, side-by-side, schools directed and staffed by the local branch of the federal Indianist agency, with native Tzotzil speaking Indian teachers (especially recruited and trained as *promotores culturales*), and, as in Nabenchauk, other government schools which use a dogged "direct method" (in which teachers are monolingual in Spanish, and pupils monolingual in their own language!). Nabenchauk schoolteachers even in the early 1980s were uncertain whether the "dialect" spoken in the village was Tzotzil or Tzeltal, or whether it had "a grammar." In other Tzotzil-speaking communities there are school programs denominated "bilingual," with varying sorts of content. For example, in San Miguel Mitontik, the "bilingual program" in the school is conducted by bilingual Tzotzil-Spanish teachers whose syllabus is entirely composed of materials in Spanish from which they, sporadically, translate⁸.

Just as Vasconcelos wanted to elevate the Indian soul through teaching the classics, an influential Chiapas educator published, in 1974, a tract on the theory and practice of education, in which he argued, in explicit reference to the Indian population of Chiapas, that only through education can one "elevate man, sublimate his animal nature through intellectual, moral and artistic formation." He went on to assert that only through education in Spanish can we succeed in "incorporating into Chiapas 600,000 brains that up to the present remain inactive" (Weber 1974:31).

My compadre Lol, by no means victim of an inactive brain, tells of his experience in the Nabenchauk school as a lad: a total of half a day, after which he went off to the lowlands, with an older brother, to try to find work, never to set foot in school again. It was on

⁷ See E. Glyn Lewis (1972).

⁸ Lourdes de León, personal communication.

road-building gangs, in the late 1950s, that he learned the Spanish he now uses to hawk flowers and converse with his wife in Tonalá⁹. The specific history of Zinacantán has brought about more sweeping changes in the linguistic profile of the community than any system of education. Before the Mexican Revolution, Zinacantán comprised a set of small, isolated communities, hemmed in by large *ladino* (non-Indian) fincas. Zinacantecos raised corn on their own highland fields, and, as *arrieros*, engaged extensively in trade and transport, traditionally selling salt throughout the highlands, and running mule trains with a variety of ladino owned goods. Carranza's troops brought back into the community a great mass of former Indian peons who had been "freed" by force from the large haciendas of the lowlands. Later land reform, and revised strategies by non-Indian landowners to procure Indian labor on their properties, resulted in a shift away from trading to massive lowland farming, partly on newly acquired *ejido* land, but mostly through rental of cornfield land, and group or family sharecropping. It was only since the thirties and forties that Zinacantecos could afford the luxury of conducting their commercial lives largely in Tzotzil (working in independently organized Indian farming teams). Before that, Zinacanteco muleteers learned a good deal more Spanish in the course of making a living than their more provincial sons were subsequently required to do.

Formerly, also, the management of Indians for non-Indian (*ladino*) purposes was largely in the hands of *ladino* specialists. Those people who spoke both Tzotzil and Spanish were the non-Indian brokers of Indian goods and services: the *enganchadores* (literally 'hookers') who recruited and entrapped highland Indian laborers for the lowland coffee fincas; or the *atajadoras* (literally 'interceptresses'), predatory women who lined the roads and trails coming into commercial centers like San Cristóbal, cutting off Indian primary producers and parting them from their produce, in order to resell it themselves. (See Rus 1975.)

In Zinacantán, the few competent Spanish-speakers over about fifty years old virtually all acquired their linguistic skills (and considerable expertise in the ways of non-Indians as well) during periods as semi-adopted child servants in ladino households¹⁰. Such children were usually indentured to ladino families by impoverished Indian parents, becoming what are called in Tzotzil *kriyala* (Spanish *criada* or *criado* 'raised-one'), or more descriptively *j-prental* (from the archaic Spanish *prender* 'pawn'; cf. Sp. *prenda* 'token'). Although some of these people remain somewhat marginal members of their

⁹ To clarify matters: he has another (Tzotzil speaking) wife, the mother of his teenaged children, in his village at home in Zinacantán.

¹⁰ See, for example, Pozas 1952, Modiano 1968, Freeman 1974.

communities, neither Indian nor ladino, many, both men and women, have parlayed their skills into positions of some power and influence as mediators between their Zinacanteco fellows and ladino institutions, particularly the civil authorities. It is to such a *jk'opojel* 'talker' that a Zinacanteco might turn for help when going to plead with a ladino lawyer or bureaucrat; it was also to such people that ladino officials turned when their agendas included Indian affairs.

Nowadays, many Zinacanteco men in their twenties and thirties now once again command passable Spanish, learned, as in Lol's case, in the course of making a living in a world in which cornfarming with one's family members was no longer a reliable source of income. A few women, too, under the force of circumstances, have picked up the necessary Spanish to sell peaches in the Tuxtla market, or to ply passing tourists with handwoven shawls. The same day that I lunched with my compadre Lol on fried *mojarra*, I sat talking on a Tonalá sidewalk with a young Zinacanteco truck driver, who was more comfortable with the dual-transmission of a trailer truck than a hoe-handle, and who had to ask *me* for the Tzotzil names of some of the flowers we were unloading.

The linguistic varieties

The standard view of a language situation like that of highland Chiapas, and reflected in the statements of policymakers, first atomizes the varieties, and second, oversimplifies their distribution within individual repertoires. Policy recognizes only Spanish and *lengua indígena*, whereas there are, of course, not only many different Indian "dialects," spread over several languages in distinct communities, but also diverse varieties of Spanish, and a range of differentially distributed registers on both sides. Even within a small community like Zinacantán, however, the range of distinguishable varieties of Tzotzil covers rather wide ground. In addition to the geographically indexing dialectal variants (which allow a native ear to distinguish immediately between a man from Nabenchauk and another from neighboring Apas), there are also special "ritual" varieties (characterized by parallel couplet structure) which are appropriate to *k'ak'al k'op* 'heated speech,' prayer, "baby talk," and so on¹¹. The specialized knowledge associated with these varieties (some of which have register-like characteristics) is also differentially distributed through the community, so that not everyone who finds himself in a position requiring prayer is capable of the necessary language (%Haviland (1987e)).

There is also considerable *mixing* of varieties--mixing which clearly has gone on during all four centuries since the Conquest, judging by the various stages of phonological change towards the Tzotzil norm we observe in Spanish loans from different epochs. Indian languages

¹¹ See %Gossen (1985) for a recent survey.

borrow from one another and from Spanish, reciprocally¹². Such mixing is, of course, evidence that the social organization of this highland region must be considered as a single, though complex, "speech community," rather than, say, a cluster of distinct but interconnected communities.

Both the distribution of varieties, and the form of linguistic interactions themselves are characteristically asymmetric, especially in the traditional market center of San Cristóbal de las Casas. Indians "talk up," mustering the most polite Spanish they can in talk with ladinos. Zinacantecos, even with rudimentary Spanish, are often able to use complementary techniques to be polite: both alter-aggrandizement and self-belittling. As to the former, a Zinacanteco may address a ladino lawyer as *Señor Licenciado Don Chus*¹³, with three titles prefixed to the name in a kind of deferential hypercorrection. As for the latter, ladino acquaintances described a hapless Chamula man who came day after day to a government office to declare "*Quiero uno mi trabajito*"¹⁴--not only syntactically non-standard, but plaintively diminutive.

Rodolfo Stavenhagen, commenting on the ladino control of the commerce in foodstuffs in the area, points out that

These various forms of exploitation of which the victim is the Indian merchant, in his capacity as vendor and buyer, are due to the economic and political control of the ladinos of the city. This power is reinforced by a cultural superiority which is manifest in their acquaintance with the mechanisms of the formation of prices, with the laws of the country, and above all with the Spanish language, the ignorance of which on the part of the Indians is yet another feature of inferiority and social oppression. (*Las Clases Sociales en las Sociedades Agrarias*, 1969:225, my translation.)

It is not simply a question of control, but also of practice. Not only do ladinos *know* more and better Spanish than local Indians (usually) do, they routinely "talk down" to Indians. A ladino nurse, on a government health project, once uttered a sentence which is pragmatically self-contradictory. Speaking to the local magistrate, the highest hamlet official in a Zinacanteco village,

¹² Both Zinacanteco Tzotzil and the Zoque of Copainalá, whose relation to the Mayan family is undemonstrated, have the same word, *petet*, for 'drop spindle.' Similarly, the natives of San Cristóbal --which is known as *Jobel* in Tzotzil--refer to the supermarket complex on the outskirts (on the "*periférico*" or peripheral highway) of town as *Peri-jobel*, a play on the well-known commercial center in the Mexico City called *Perisur*, and likewise located on the ring-road at the southern end of the city.

¹³ Roughly, 'Mister lawyer sir Chus.'

¹⁴ 'I want one my little job.'

she asked:

¿Tú eres el agente municipal?

Are you the municipal *agente*?

The contradiction comes, obviously, from the juxtaposition of her addressee's title, which denotes a position canonically requiring, at least in a public setting, a certain formal deference, and the familiar pronoun *tú*.¹⁵

A similar example is due to Jan Rus. Indians are, routinely and regardless of age, *muchachos* and *muchachas* ('boys' and 'girls'--a standard euphemism for servants, as well, throughout Mexico) to the ladinos with whom they ordinarily deal in the towns. Many ladinos of San Cristóbal know smatterings of commercial Tzotzil, and some lace their talking down with bits of Tzotzil. Rus has told me of hearing a ladino re-seller of vegetables address a Chamula woman, from whom she was trying to procure cabbages or radishes, as *keremcita*, a semantically anomalous bilingual neologism composed of the Tzotzil root *kerem* 'boy,' plus the phonologically appropriate feminine Spanish diminutive suffix, yielding "little female boy."

Metaphors of language in Zinacanteco social life

Some time ago, Bricker(1974) contrasted the two central Tzotzil roots denoting language, which I have already mentioned above. *K'op* means 'word, language' but also refers to any affair, argument, dispute, or serious matter. *Lo'il* means 'speech, gossip, conversation,' and represents the canonical *informal* linguistic--and, by my original thesis, social--interaction. These roots combine, in well-described ways¹⁶, to produce a variety of stems which can be taken to encode the elements of a native "ethnography of speaking." Here I offer some observations, not about explicit Zinacanteco conceptions of speaking, but of their implicit theory of speech in social life, as evidenced by both word and deed.

Words as social lubricant

Ordinary sociability and friendliness, as well as most effective social errands, are not only carried on largely in words in Zinacantán, but are also denoted by expressions that make explicit reference to talk. Language, on the native theory, stands for all social life. Visiting, asking favors, making formal requests--all are occasions that can be described by the transitive verb *k'opon* 'speak to (someone).' The material lubricant of social interactions and agreements, the locally distilled bootleg cane liquor called *pox* is euphemistically characterized as "the agent of talking",

¹⁵ Lourdes de León (personal communication) points out that it is quite common for ladinos to state explicitly that they use *tú* with an Indian *porque él habla de tú solamente* "because he only uses *tú* with you."

¹⁶ See, again, %Bricker(1974), %Haviland(1977b), %Gossen(1974b) for exemplary taxonomies, and %Bricker(1974b) for some doubts.

k'oponobil.¹⁷ Prayer, exhortation, even scolding and denunciation, may involve the intransitive *k'opoj-* 'speak' or, frequently, the reflexive *k'opon-ba*, literally, 'speak to oneself.'

Making a formal arrangement with someone requires *speaking*, and just as my compadre Lol, when he embarked on flower selling, had to *k'opon* the older merchants to petition to be included in their trips, he himself now receives such "talking to."

ik'on ech'el

"Take me with you."

ja` xa chisk'oponik likel xa un

It is now to me that they have begun to speak.

If one doubts one's own abilities, one acquires a mouthpiece, a *jk'opojel*, to do the talking. Ritual events of all kinds have special authoritative talkers, and even a shaman¹⁸, in Zinacantán, is a kind of hired specialist talker, whose skills are evaluated in terms of how well he or she "talks"--i.e., prays.

As I have remarked, the formal language of ritual demands a special style, characterized by couplets: paired lines, syntactically parallel and typically terminated by the two elements of a conventional doublet. Speech itself figures prominently as a theme in this ritual language, and the doublets having to do with language are themselves revealing of Zinacanteco metalinguistic theory.

Formal occasions, reunions, and ceremonies of all kinds, are obliquely referred to as moments of talk. In song, participants at ritual events are characterized as 'conversing, dancing, laughing.' The celebrants refer to their next meeting in the following prayer couplet¹⁹:

Ta to nan jk'opon jbatik,

Perhaps we will talk again,

Ta to nan jti`in jbatik.

Perhaps we will converse again.

In a similar way, just as proper social relations are metonymically depicted as 'speaking, talking'²⁰ so is propriety, sobriety, and good behavior said to be captured by *k'op, mantal* 'words, orders.' At a wedding, the godfather addresses such words of wisdom to the groom²¹, urging him to high standards of verbal (and thus manly) virtue: timi ta jch'untik i k'ope // mi ta jch'untik i mantale

¹⁷ See %Laughlin (1975:197).

¹⁸ despite the name *j'ilol*, literally 'seer.'

¹⁹ From a prayer between *ch'ul moletik* 'Holy Elders' at an Easter ritual in Nabenchauk.

²⁰ The verb *k'opon* derives, transparently, from *k'op* 'word, language'; the verb *ti`in* derives from the noun *ti`* 'mouth.'

²¹ The next excerpts come from a wedding exhortation recorded in Nabenchauk in 1981. See %Haviland (1988).

If we obey the word // the command
ta xik'oponalotik // ta xiti`inalotik

We will keep talking // speaking...

A good man obeys these words and orders, especially when they come from such reputable sources as parents and elders;

ja` to ta xyul jch'uleltik `un //

And when we begin to have sense//

ja` to ta jk'opontik `ech'el `un

Afterwards, we have to speak

ti jtottik // jme`tike

to our father, to our mother.

He likewise, speaks 'words and reason.'

tuk' ta xkaltik ti k'ope // ti rasone

.. we are speaking proper words // reason.

Conversely, anger, enmity, and contention are characteristically conceived of as absences of or breakdowns in talk. When arrangements for a wedding in our house compound were continually being sabotaged by one crisis after another, my old compadre--the father of the prospective but thwarted groom--put his head in his hands and said K'u ma yu`un naka sóktesókte li k'ope?

Why is the word always being spoiled?

using the affective verb *-sóktesókte* which means 'ruining itself all over the place' or 'walking around getting spoiled,' to describe the *k'op*--the 'word' which denoted, here, the whole affair.

Bad words, like bad blood, can be sought out: "looking for words"--*sa`k'op*--means looking for fights. Similarly, when the possibility of "hostile words" arises, trouble is brewing. My compadre Lol described his early disputes with other flower sellers over their places in the Tonalá market:

ta xa ox jpojbe jbakotik

We were about to steal each others' places

ch`och xa ox kronta k'op

and the words of enemies were about to start.

pero yiyil xichi un

But I said, "Forget it."

tey ya`i sba xichi

"Let it just take care of itself," I said.

Words which are not "straight" also spell trouble. In the following extract from a political speech²², a powerful Zinacanteco orator laments the constant disputes plaguing the township, and states the platform of his party towards improving the word, and thereby, the village.

muk' bu xkiltik yech . labal k'opetik chk li`e

We have never seen such constant fighting as nowadays.

²² Recorded in the ceremonial center of Zinacantan in 1981.

ja' jk'antik xtuk'ib ti k'ope //

What we want is for the affair to be straightened
out //

jk'antik xlekub ti jteklumaltike

What we want is for our community to improve.

Relatives who have fought, broken off relations, *mu xa sk'opon sbaik*: no longer talk to one another. Here a Zinacanteco man, locked in a struggle with his brother over his inheritance, speaks of a possible reconciliation, all cast in a verbal idiom.

lek mi chkom ta `akwerto jchi`uk Mikele

It would be good to reach an agreement with Miguel.

timi xtal k'opojuk

if he comes to talk.

yan timi mu xisk'opon // mi kapeme

Otherwise, if he won't talk to me // if he is angry
yech'o k'u ma xi ta jk'opon jbatikotik

In that case, how are we supposed to talk to each other...

mi kapem k'u cha`al ti vo`ne `onoxe

..if he is still angry the way he always was before.

The silence can go still deeper: one of my oldest *compadres* fought bitterly with his eldest son, and for the last years of his life could no longer bring himself to utter that son's name, referring to him instead by an ironic but underspecified euphemism: *jtatatik ta jech* 'our grandfather across the way.'

As in the case of proper speech, the breakdown of social relations (and verbal interaction) is stereoscopically crystallized in the standard couplets of ritual speech. Here, in a formal prayer performed by a father asking for help with his wayward son, *k'op* 'word' is paired with *kolo* 'evil':

K'usi yepal li sk'ope, ti skolo`e

How much is the trouble, the evil

Ti jch'amale, ti jijoalik `une

of my child, of my son.

ilbeikon xa

watch for me..

Curing prayer also incorporates verbal images: a sick patient, anxiously, "counts his heart, talks to his heart." Similarly the standard couplet for both happiness, and, ironically, death, involves *tze`ej, lo`il* 'laughter, and conversation.'

Mu to xak' ti tze`eje, mu to xak' ti lo`ile.

There is no laughter yet, there is no talk yet.

Mu`yuk to stek'il, mu`yuk to xxanil.

There is no step yet, there is no walking yet.²³

As we have seen, the exhortation to a new groom involves instructions

²³ For a curing prayer recorded in Nabenchauk, in 1976, referring either to the patient's eventual recovery, or perhaps to her death.

about how (and how not) to talk: asking advice of one's parents; but not "searching for words," scolding, or "sticking words" to one's wife--accusing her, making trouble.

xak'opon ame` atotik

You will speak to your mother, your father

pero timi yu`un . sa`-k'op jun ut-bail une

but if there is trouble making, scolding

ma`uk xa ti ja` xa chastik'be k'op lavajnil

you shouldn't then start blaming your wife.

In fact marital woes in general incorporate words, both those that get a husband into trouble (by talking illicitly to another woman), and, if he's lucky, words that get him out of trouble again (from his 'talker' or *yajk'opojel*). The aggrieved wife may be precisely the one who makes trouble: 'looks for words.'

solel²⁴ ja` isk'opon li xunka` komis une

so he just went and talked to Juana Gómez.

ya`uk sa`be sk'oplal

and she deliberately went to search for a settlement

isa` lisenziado isa` jk'opojel

she got herself a lawyer, a talker

solel isa` k'op un

and just went looking for words (i.e., trouble).

People may come to *kuch k'op*, 'bear words,' that is, be subject to the bad opinion of others, or cause others to bandy about "the word on one," one's *sk'oplal*, or reputation. Something can *k'ot ta k'op* 'arrive at words'--which is to say, be gossiped about--and *ich' k'oponel*, literally, 'receive talking about.'

Moreover, the simple cause of "jealous words" may be that a wife merely "talks" to another man, even in the process of, say, handing him food, and being observed by a suspicious husband. My compadre Lol, acting as a local dispute settler in the case of a man who beat his wife, warns of dire consequences in the future

timi k'ex yech avalulan labal it'ixal k'o

if you keep saying nothing but jealous words to her

ikil chak'opon vinik mi xavute

if you say "I SAW you talking to another man."

Words can be "made" or "repaired"; that is, in fact, the literal job of a dispute settler, or a magistrate.

jmeltzanej-k'op-ot to noxtoke,

You are also still a dispute settler (literally, maker of words).

When a fight is finally settled, it is done so, whether at the town hall or before elder kinsmen, *ta lekil k'op* 'with good words.' The dispute settlers try to discover which "good words" will effect a reconciliation. *Epal k'op*, 'too many words' represent difficulty, bother, and just more trouble. The source of such trouble may be

²⁴ From a recorded gossip session, 1970, San Cristóbal.

lies, literally, *nopbil k'op*, 'thought up words.' But reasonableness and propriety are expressed as "straight talk." As Lol observed to the penitent husband:

pero mi yech ti batz'i li i`ilin li antz

but will a woman just get angry for nothing

ti k'al tuk' chak'opon ya`el

when you speak to her straight?

k'u cha`al kuxulotik une mi lek chak'opon ya`ele

the way we do when we are sober, when we speak to her well?

If things turn out well, if the dispute settlers succeed, and the couple is reconciled, that will be "the end of words."

ch'ab xi k'op

(then) the words will be finished

j`ech'el laj o k'op

once and for all the words will end.

Sticks and stones

It is through words that Zinacantecos reach the very limits of the acceptable social world. Illicit sexual liaisons (an issue that was part of the marriage affair's walking around spoiling itself) are examples of *k'opon-bail* 'talking together'--a youth can be dragged into a shotgun wedding for "talking to a girl in secret." Similarly in reverse: 'talks to boys' is a euphemism for the *loko tzeb* the 'crazy (i.e., promiscuous or loose) girl.'

Socially framed hostility takes a characteristic spoken form, as well. Tzotzil has a plentiful supply of words meaning 'mock, scorn, shame, make fun of ... verbally.' (*Labanel* 'libel, slander' is, of course, prosecutable, and I know a man who dragged his father-in-law into court and got a cash settlement because the older man had muttered some critical, though as it turned out unfounded, remarks.) Anger and disputation themselves take a characteristic verbal form, and heated denunciation or scolding will often be expressed in parallel couplets akin to the highly structured language of prayer and song that we have already met.

Standardized joking routines, in which people try to top one another with elaborate word-play²⁵, usually aimed at a particular victim, also sometimes turn serious. The hamlet where I work is split into two bitterly, often violently opposed political factions. I observed a lone man from one of the factions, somewhat drunk, subjected to a merciless verbal pounding by a large group from the other faction in one of these half-serious joking encounters. Shortly before passing into a drunken stupor, the man stood up and declaimed: "Hah! Who says that I can't answer *lo'il*?" *Lo'il* means 'talk' or 'conversation,' referring to the stylized joking interaction, here turned aggressive and nasty.

²⁵ See %Gossen (1974a) for a description of the genre in the neighboring township of Chamula.

For your ears only

In a study I wrote some years ago of gossip in Zinacantán, I claimed, on the basis of talk about talk, that "Zinacantecos believe that gossip *must* contain a grain of truth; yet they know from direct experience that some gossip is unreliable" (%Haviland (1977b:41)). There is a deep ambivalence, then, about words as potential lies, but as likely bearers of, at least partial, truth.

Talking is therefore a dangerous breach in the wall²⁶ of confidentiality that Zinacantecos, like other peasants, try to erect around their private lives. Not only can people overhear what one says, so that barriers are necessary, but all conversation outside one's own household is potentially perilous. When conversation on the outside is inevitable--when, for example, someone is being sent on an errand--precautions must be taken. The first measure is to issue precise instructions about what to say, to whom, and what exactly words to use. When our errant groom-to-be was running from the law, recently, hiding out in the woods, all the members of the household were told, around the fire, exactly what lie to disseminate about his whereabouts, should we be asked.

The reverse circumstance can also be dangerous: when people say things to you, there is the constant possibility of *cho`el*, literally 'peeling,' i.e., 'trickery.' When, before this same ill-starred wedding, a local official said to one of the groom's brothers "Everything is all right, go ahead with the marriage," the entire household was sent into a panic, trying to figure out what mischief the official *really* had in mind.

Speech relations at the boundary

Talk, then, has a central place both in the internal cultural view and in the day-to-day social practices of Zinacantecos. Let us begin to move outwards, stepping slowly into San Cristóbal de las Casas, then down from the Chiapas highlands, towards Tonalá, on even to the Distrito Federal, and then home again.

Just being human means being able to talk. The exceptional case is first: going to visit a kinsman after a three-year absence I was grilled by his neighbors in the prying fashion characteristic of Zinacantecos. I was subjected to a barrage of questions (all in Tzotzil), about where I was from, where I was staying, how long I would stay, what my relationship was to the man I had come to see, and so on. The *last* question was: "Do you speak Tzotzil?"--here interpretable as a request for information not about my linguistic skills--which had presumably been demonstrated--but about my genuine humanity, confirmed and ratified by my commitment to a human language.

²⁶ See %Haviland and Haviland (1983) for a description of the secrecy that surrounds what goes on "inside the fence"--that is, inside the enclosed yard of the house compound.

This is not the only contradiction inherent in a culture-internal view, which may be

". . . as selectively fogged as the view of the Zinacanteco woman who sees, among the hundreds of bustling figures in the ladino town of San Cristóbal de las Casas, only her own hamlet neighbors. For her, the rest do not exist. . . . neither do ladino landlords, government manipulators, coffee *fincas*, truck-owning monopolies, missionaries, foreign or domestic anthropologists, lawyers, storekeepers, or multinational corporations exist. They do not figure in the [cultural order] . . . although they do figure (often decisively) among the constraints which govern [Zinacanteco] life" (Haviland (1977b, p. ix.).

Zinacantecos, in town, seem often just not to see, not to recognize as social alters, non-Indians, especially non-Zinacantecos; the immediate social universe is the universe that can be talked to. A speech disability, in such circumstances, is tantamount to a mental defect: one of my goddaughters is big for her age, and, as her parents always tell me apologetically, she is still *chich*; this means literally that she either doesn't talk or talks foolishly, but it implies that she is simple-minded and immature. As far as I can tell, she actually *does* speak perfectly, but her lack of social grace is depicted, metaphorically, as a lack of verbal grace.

On the other hand, another compadre from Nabenchauk has two children who are *uma*` 'mute' and who have never learned to speak. Although they seem otherwise ordinary, and perfectly bright, they are regarded, with pity, as severely retarded and have never been sent to school.

Neighborliness

Zinacantán is small enough that one is likely to know almost everyone who lives in the same hamlet, and to know by sight many people from other villages as well. Moreover, since Indians in the Chiapas highlands still usually wear at least some part of their distinctive local costume when at home, they carry their ethnic allegiances on their backs. Even on the crowded streets of San Cristóbal, unacquainted Zinacantecos will often greet each other with the verbal formulas of a tiny interaction. To say, to another Zinacanteco, *chibat* "I'm going," and to receive the appropriate response, *batan* "Go!," is to establish, acknowledge, and immediately abandon, the minimal social relationship: the recognition of another as social being. Zinacantecos extend the same courtesy to other highland Indians in chance encounters on the path; reciprocal address terms between whole municipios provide a standard greeting which similarly acknowledges mutually recognized social co-presence. Zinacantecos and Chamulas address each other with the term *ulo*` ('visitor,' from *yul-* 'arrive'), even in absolutely minimal greetings. Zinacantecos and Ixtapanecos have the reciprocal term *amiko* 'friend'; and even with Indians from

Tenejapa, who speak Tzeltal rather than Tzotzil, Zinacantecos use and receive the term *molol* (related perhaps to *mol* 'elder man'). When Zinacantecos find themselves farther from home they often shed their brightly colored red and white cotton garments in favor of the anonymous garb of rural peasants. Nonetheless, verbal badges remain in place: typically the Chiapanecs of *Soktom*, Chiapa de Corzo, received the Spanish greeting *casero* from travelling Zinacantecos, offering in return a tiny Tzotzil address term: *bol*, 'brother-in-law' (and, homophonously, 'stupid'), a joking riposte²⁷. And, as my compadre Lol told me, even in distant Tonalá, where the only regular Indian visitors were Zapotec speaking *señoras* from Juchitán, townspeople greeted such strangers as *paisanos*. It was the lapse of such a convention of sociable naming that Lol lamented, in the conversation with which I began this essay.

When Zinacantecos venture forth into the wide world, filled with a Spanish babble, their ears remain pricked, attuned to the familiar words of *batz'i k'op*--Tzotzil or 'the real language.' I have been on a bus so crowded that chickens were stored on the luggage racks, and children crouched under seats, when the din of diesel engine drowned out nearly all talk, Spanish or otherwise, only to find that my Zinacanteco companions have eavesdropped in detail on the Tzotzil conversations of other Indians.

Speaking the real language, in such otherwise strange surroundings, constitutes a special claim to recognized personhood, and seems to allow people to interact immediately, without introduction or preliminary. Reversing what would seem a normal progression, I have seen a Zinacanteco intervene directly in a Tzotzil discussion among unknown Zinacantecos, asking about details of the land and crops being discussed, and only later (if at all) proceeding to introductions and identifications. Similarly, Zinacanteco flower vendors, on the streets of coastal Chiapas towns, will sometimes enter into direct conversation with the hapless Chamula sweet-sellers who pass by. They exchange news and compare notes about sales, although it transpires afterwards that they do not know one another's names, may have never spoken before. Here language provides both the license and the medium for establishing social interaction.

By contrast, it will not seem surprising that Zinacantecos do not expect their non-Indian interlocutors to understand Tzotzil, once they have left the restricted confines of the Chiapas highlands²⁸.

²⁷ The same term, *bol*, is the reciprocal term of address used between the *martomorey* and *mexon*, ritual guardians of the Chapel of the Señor de Esquipulas in Zinacantán Center, and the *mayol* who brings the ceremonial salt up from the valley of *Atz'am*.

²⁸ And sometimes even there: I have carried on a conversation with a

Tzotzil thus becomes a resource for espionage and intrigue. There is the predictable minor variety: two merchants consulting in Tzotzil about their bargaining negotiations before a *ladino* who is thereby excluded from their conspiratorial remarks.

There is also the flagrant variety: on a crowded block of Correo Mayor in Mexico City, at Christmas 1987, I eavesdropped on several Chamula youths, part of a large group who had gone to the Distrito Federal to sell handwoven yarn bracelets. They sat on a streetcorner and made scurrilous remarks about the passers-by, in raucous and hilarious, though (they thought) well-insulated Tzotzil.

Wider social relations, dealings with non-Zinacantecos--similarly quotidian in modern Chiapas, but with a somewhat different character--are also enacted through a verbal medium. The resources of speech available therefore enter into a feedback relationship with the resulting social forms. Let me end with a few brief vignettes. Outer words for inner pressures

Just as domestic quarrels require verbal settlement, bigger fights require more potent talkers. It has long been an evil Zinacanteco ploy to make trouble for your enemies by instituting legal proceedings against them, on whatever fabricated charges possible, in the *ladino* court system. Whatever the outcome and whatever the issue, one result is guaranteed: the costs and inconvenience of a legal wrangle will considerably put your enemy out (you as well, unfortunately).

The strategy has created a market for the Zinacanteco "lawyers" I mentioned earlier: people whose knowledge of Spanish makes them indispensable allies in any dispute that requires fluent and persuasive Spanish. Such people are viewed with considerable unease. In the Who's Who of Zinacantán I compiled some years ago, the description *sna`kastiya* 'knows Spanish' was consistently linked with the characterization *jsa`k'op* 'troublemaker.' (One of my favorite nicknames, *jtubtavanej* 'spitter,' belongs to one of these Zinacanteco lawyers whose everyday speech is said to be an almost incomprehensible mixture of Tzotzil, Spanish, and spit.)

Recent legal disputes between the two dominant political factions in the community have been particularly bitter. The ordinary man lives in fear of having to pay gigantic legal costs (to hire these and genuine *ladino* lawyers) and to face difficult Spanish

San Andrés woman, in the hinterlands of Chiapas, who refused to recognize for several minutes that I was responding to her halting Spanish in (Zinacanteco) Tzotzil. Here the issue was not the fact that speaking Spanish was more prestigious, but that under these circumstances the woman could simply not believe that an obvious stranger, passing by in a car, would speak Tzotzil. It was only her young daughter, tugging at her skirts, who pointed out to her, "Mother, he's speaking Tzotzil!"

interrogation. Ultimately the most talented talker seems to carry the day.

I have spent some time studying a long wrangling session before the director of a local Indianist development agency, himself a ladino lawyer with considerable influence in Zinacantán. A Zinacanteco hamlet elder had made a complaint against the local civil authorities for cutting down some of his *milpa* and fruit trees to build a road. The man is a respected *pasaro*, a man who has completed a distinguished career in the religious hierarchy, a *totilme`il*, a 'father-mother' or ritual advisor, and also the senior *ch'ul mol* or 'Holy Elder' responsible for Easter rituals. He is, indeed, a man celebrated for his skills at Tzotzil talk. Nonetheless, in such dealings with ladino officials, with the Nabenchauk political bosses arrayed against him and keeping up a constant Spanish din, he might as well have been mute.

Literacy and its cousins

Another feature of Zinacanteco political life has been the place of the Spanish written word. For many decades the most direct avenue of control over Indian communities by the outside ladino world was through the municipal secretary. Although the civil officials in Indian communities were Indians, at least in principle elected by the communities involved, the secretary was traditionally a ladino--often the single ladino resident in town²⁹. His was the job of keeping records in Spanish, and, importantly, creating the *actas*, the legal documents specifying the terms of legal settlements. Nearly every Zinacanteco house somewhere has a chest in which may be found a few worn, yellowed, carefully folded sheets of paper, which no one can read, but which seem to be important enough to keep. When documents are keys to action outside the community, the master of the written word is a powerful gatekeeper. Nonetheless, literacy is not widespread, and a full study of its distribution and effects in highland Chiapas is still lacking.³⁰

One of the few widely distributed literacy skills is the ability to write one's own name--that is, to render a signature--using the Spanish system of patronymic and matronymic. What renders the skill of dubious value is the fact that the Spanish system of names fails to identify people: so many people in a hamlet like Nabenchauk have the *same* Spanish name, that many hours are spent poring over lists of names trying to figure out exactly *which* Manuel Perez Perez this

²⁹ The B. Traven novel, *Gobierno*, describes the life of such a ladino secretary during the Porfiriato, before the Revolution.

³⁰ There have been recent literacy programs in Chiapas, with results as yet uninvestigated. See %Haviland (1987d), %de León and Haviland (1986).

one might be³¹.

Zinacantecos are becoming more literate, and the creation of new skills has produced new dangers. During the troubled course of the wedding I have mentioned from time to time, much was made of the fact that the bride-to-be *sna`vun* 'knew paper'--that is could read and write. When she threatened to call off the marriage (because, reportedly, she had heard that her intended husband had publicly slandered her), the great fear was that she would go herself to the priest, to ruin the arrangements already made. Her education represented a whole class of threatening new possibilities. Literacy also produces new possibilities for harassment. To be married in Zinacantán now requires that the bride and groom produce written evidence to prove that they have learned the catechism. (In the old days, according to my compadre, things were easier: if you didn't marry in *church* no one worried about catechism; and if you did have a religious wedding and could not properly answer the priest, he would only beat you.) The rule was evidently instituted not by the church, but by the political faction that includes within its ranks all the literate church sacristans, whose signature must appear on the *boletos* attesting attendance at catechism classes. Members of the other faction are thereby endowed with an added annoyance if they want their children to marry in the church³².

My compadre Lol, back at his flower stall in Tonalá, now finds it necessary to keep written records, to which end he carries around a small notebook. His old method of accounting--paying his costs from his cashbox, and putting his proceeds directly back--still serves him in good stead for figuring out if he has had profit or loss. However, his relations with many ladino *marchantes*, or regular customers, now necessitates a credit book, since people frequently delay paying him for what they take. He writes down what he knows, and for most of his customers this is just a first name: his notebook has such entries as

MARI 12R

JOSE 10 kg f

detailing, in this case, two transactions: that the owner of another market stall has taken a dozen bunches of *rábanos* (radishes), without paying for them, to see if she can sell them herself; and that a

³¹ The older Tzotzil naming system, which combined a Spanish and a Tzotzil patronymic with periphrastic nicknames, is much more successful in picking out individuals, but Tzotzil names are not ordinarily written. See Collier and Bricker (1970).

³² It also appears that the most profound effects on the literacy skills of Tzotzil speakers has been Protestant evangelization, which has produced masses of religious tracts and Biblical translations--not to mention hymns on cassettes--which sell voluminously on San Cristóbal streets.

certain elderly gentleman, known only as José, has sent his flunky by to pick up ten kilograms of beans (in Spanish, *frijoles*), also on credit.

These are only mnemonic reminders for Lol, however; the transactions are by word of mouth, based on trust. Lol showed me a page of his notebook which recorded the sad memory of about 200 liters of illegally transported cane liquor: delivered to a local *cantina* owner, and never paid for. *Tol xlo'lovan li mol le'e*, was Lol's comment: "that gentleman deceives people too much."

Middlemen

Zinacantecos are caught up in a web of commercial dealings with the wider state and Mexican economy that largely define their lives. Life is work. In our household, everyone schedules his or her activities with the dogged persistence of a workaholic: up before dawn to cook, or to start the walk or catch the truck that will land one at one's workplace, with a day segmented into discrete and continuous tasks that leave no room for "play"--something that children do. The commercial possibilities have always involved a ladino component, although it has been desirable to hold direct interactions with non-Indians to a minimum.

Cornfarming, for example, used to be organized among small groups of kinsmen, who together rented from a single lowland ladino landowner, usually one with whom they had established long-standing relationships, and who lived on the edges of the Grijalva within a day's walk from villages like Nabenchauk. Often these landowners, or their resident managers, were reasonably fluent in Tzotzil, having dealt with these same Indians over several generations, perhaps even having learned rudimentary Tzotzil as children playing with sharecroppers' kids. In any case, a single linguistically sophisticated Zinacanteco usually took over the negotiations over rent and the allocation of land, acting as spokesman for his farming group.³³ When Zinacantecos needed, in turn, to hire laborers for corn work, they hiked off to Chamula, a neighboring Tzotzil community, again to activate old contacts--or they waited for long-time former workers to come themselves looking for jobs.

Nowadays, even cornfarming takes Zinacantecos farther afield, both geographically and socially. As population has grown, as corn land near the lowland borders of Zinacantán has become exhausted and tired, and as roads have pushed farther and farther into the lowland hinterlands, Zinacantecos have started moving their corn operations farther from home. One compadre's cornfields of a few years ago lay a full days' truck and bus ride away from Nabenchauk, with a four hour walk at the end of it. His landlords were ladinos who, until recently, would hardly have seen a Zinacanteco.

The man in charge of organizing the farming operation in which men

³³ See %Cancian (1972).

in our household compound participated was, in fact, himself one of a very small group of ladinos who live in Nabenchauk, completely bilingual in Tzotzil and rural Chiapas Spanish. When we went, near the end of April that year, to burn off the felled trees and brush on the fields, in preparation for planting, it was this linguistically talented spokesman who not only organized commercial matters with the landlord, but who also kept relationships cordial. He made sure to call on the grown sons and daughters of the landlord, to drink with them, to offer (not without some explicit private calculations of costs and possible benefits) his and his Zinacanteco partners' help to the landlord in his own farming operations. My compadre himself remained a dumb appendage to such interactions, and only his sons have the linguistic skills to begin to negotiate these more complex linguistic paths without a ladino middleman.

Another strategy for acquiring corn land has been, in recent years, to try to force government application of land reform provisions to establish new *ejido* colonies on Federal land in Hot Country. Again, considerable linguistic and political expertise is required, and the only such movements that have succeeded have depended entirely on the persistent and persuasive abilities of the talented Zinacanteco "mouthpieces" of the sort I mentioned before: men who acquired fluent Spanish during extended periods among ladinos as children or youths.

J`ekel-nichim: the flower sellers

In Nabenchauk there is a group of men, like my compadre Lol, who make their livings without any corn farming. They are flower-sellers, who grow a few flowers (and vegetables) to sell in ladino markets, but who largely resell the produce of other highland Indians, transporting their weekly *'ikatzil* 'burdens' to lowland towns. Such men need to know enough Spanish to bargain (as vendors) in the markets, and to deal with the market and government bureaucracies (for example, to pay the tax for occupying a bit of space at the market, or the bribes required by the police who harass trucks on the highways).

Nonetheless, the business, when Lol began selling flowers years ago, was carefully organized to minimize dealings with non-Indians. The bulk of one's cargo was bought from other Tzotzil-speakers. When I accompanied the flower-sellers to the lowland markets in the late 1970s, we bought carnations from Indian women from San Felipe, on the outskirts of San Cristóbal, radishes and carrots, and the rest of our flowers, from Chamulas and other Zinacantecos in the San Cristóbal market itself. The cargo was transported to the lowlands on a Zinacanteco truck, retained on a regular basis for this job, and whose owner/driver had been carefully cultivated as a ritual kinsman by all the regular flower-sellers.

The whole business has taken a variety of astounding turns. A few Zinacantecos still make their entire livings selling flowers, and they still have weekly runs between the Tzotzil highlands and the

lowland markets where each individually has established his retail outlet. But the scale has grown incredibly. Certain Zinacantecos now make weekly or fortnightly trips from Zinacantán to the *Central de Abastos*³⁴--the central produce market--in Mexico City, a distance of over one thousand kilometers, or about twenty hours by open truck. They go to *buy* flowers--both exotic varieties, and familiar sorts of higher quality than Chiapas produces--grown in Michoacán market gardens, which are then transported back to Chiapas markets for sale. The costs of a trip, split among up to ten men, may amount to over a million (1988) pesos.

Some Zinacantecos now have semi-permanent residences in the towns where they sell flowers. In Tuxtla, the *Florería San Lorenzo*--an enterprise dedicated by its Zinacanteco owner to the patron saint of Zinacantán--advertises *servicio al domicilio* (home delivery) and two telephone numbers for orders. This owner places his own restocking orders by telephone to Mexico City, and the flowers arrive by air freight!

Not surprisingly, the linguistic relationships have also changed. As %Hughes(1972) has pointed out, contact between language groups may produce only rudimentary linguistic accommodation, but *bargaining* (and, I may add, thinking of my compadre Lol, romance) requires "a richer language." These modern floral entrepreneurs must negotiate a path through a Spanish environment that knows nothing of Zinacantán, and that has heard not even a word of Tzotzil. (In the same way, the trucks that carry these flowers must negotiate some tricky Mexico City streets--each truck is equipped with a "pilot" who has memorized the rat-run that will bring the truck from the outskirts of the city directly to the market, and out again). The ranks of such Zinacanteco flower-barons now include a few of the old mob of Zinacanteco "lawyers," but mostly comprise young men who have been to school, who are both fluent and literate in Spanish, and who have cultivated a facility with ladinos that is premised on working away from the Chiapas highlands, where the form of Indian/non-Indian relations is often fixed and unalterable.

The ambiguity of these Indians' identities is reflected in their ways of talking, in their command of a range of Spanish registers wider than that of their fathers, and in a peppering of once unfamiliar Spanish words throughout even in their everyday Tzotzil conversation. It is crystallized in the linguistic profile of that *mojarra* lunch, in Tonalá, in which a Zinacanteco and his *gringo* compadre, converse in Tzotzil in front of the Zinacanteco's ladino "wife" who speaks only Spanish.

Boundaries, linguistic and otherwise

³⁴ Formerly, when the business began, they travelled to the now defunct Mercado Jamaica. Trips are also organized to major flower markets in Puebla, and, seasonally, to the city of Oaxaca.

My flower-selling compadre Lol, who spends more than half of every week away from his house in Nabenchauk, carrying on his *negocio*, talks continually about the places he visits. It is easy to see him energized and stimulated by the freedom of travelling through the countryside, Zinacanteco clothes stuffed into a plastic travelling bag, and his Tzotzil origins hidden behind a markedly Indian but otherwise anonymous Spanish. Back home, however, he suffers the harsh criticism of *lo'il*, gossip about his doings when away, rumors about his "other wife" in Tonalá.

The tension, between the inside and the outside, becomes every day more intense. One of the constraining bonds of social life in Zinacantán comes from a communicative powerlessness that renders still more oppressive economic and political powerlessness. Zinacantecos in their native habitat wear the distinctive plumage of the Indian: if not the handwoven red pinstripe that sets Zinacantecos apart from all the other people of highland Chiapas, then at least the Tzotzil of their forebears. This Tzotzil arms them for certain interactions, at home, but even at home specialist interventions are required to negotiate the linguistic hurdles of everyday life.

Once outside the bounds of a Zinacanteco village, the problem is only exaggerated. The minute but constant reminders of the subordination of Indian to Mexican take the form of tiny interactions in which Indians typically lack the verbal armament to defend themselves, even if they have the opportunity and inclination to do so. Here are some closing scenes.

(1) In preparation for his wedding (which did, finally, take place), the young man of our house compound needed to buy a large quantity of sugar, both for the special wedding foods, and for gifts to the families of bride and wedding godfather. Sugar was, at that time, not always available in San Cristóbal, and was often rationed out in small parcels. There had been a rumor that in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, the state capital, larger quantities could be had. Indeed, we saw ladino matrons having their sacks of sugar hauled to their waiting cars. Chep, however, was told to carry his own fifty-kilo sack to the checkout counter. Once he had it there, the storekeeper announced the following rule: "you can only buy sugar, if you buy a matching amount of soap powder."

(2) On his way to the Hot Country cornfields, my compadre needed to travel for about six hours on a single bus. The only way to be sure of having a seat on the third class buses was to buy a ticket with a numbered seat designated. Since the bus was likely to be full, we arrived several hours early at the bus station, and tried to buy tickets for the bus which was to leave at 6:00 A.M. To the request "Quiero boleto" my compadre was told "No hay." Yet, minutes before the bus was to leave, a large party of ladino women bought their

tickets and took the last remaining seats.³⁵

(3) Returning from the lowlands several parties of Indians gathered at a crossroad waiting to flag down a truck to carry them into the mountains. Several Indian owned trucks passed, full. Finally, in desperation, one man approached a ladino, heading in the right direction with an empty pickup truck.

"Are you going to San Cristóbal?"

"Yes."

"May we ride with you?"

"Well, get on then, but hurry it up!" The ladino packed as many Indians as he could on board, and started off. He turned out to be a soldier from northern Mexico.

When it came time for people to get off, the driver demanded in payment about three times the normal cost of the ride. "Pay me, pay me," he shouted, "you don't expect me to carry you for nothing, do you?" The first group of Zinacantecos, without enough cash to pay what was demanded, stood silent.

"Well, then, what's in this crate? Mangos? I'll take them instead."

More silence.

Finally, some other Zinacantecos on the truck, thinking about what they would have to pay when their turns came, muttered, in Tzotzil, "Run and borrow the money, fool, before he takes your chickens, too."

(4) Back in Tonalá, we had finished our fish.

"Come and help me," Lol said to his wife in Spanish, and she obediently dipped water from a bucket and poured it over his hands as he washed by the front door. "I'll pour for you, *kumpa*," he offered.

As I washed the woman ventured her first remark. "You're very tall."

"True," I said, "but then so is my compadre's brother Xun. He's almost as tall as I, and they call him *Natil Xun* 'Long John.' Have you met him?"

"No," said she, eyes flashing, "this *chamulita* won't introduce me to his people."

Judas

People experience their social order through everyday encounters, whose medium is language. The tenor of these encounters, also expressed in language, sets the tenor of the relationships. In modern Chiapas, speech relations display an asymmetry that reflects a social, economic, and political asymmetry. Ladinos still patronize and browbeat Indians, through talking "down," much as they appear to have done for four centuries. The feeling, as I may remark, is not entirely unreciprocated. Scrawled on a notice, dangling around the neck of Judas, as he hangs from a rope above the Nabenchauk

³⁵ Of course, I expect all visitors in Chiapas have had comparable experiences at bus stations. My point is that many Indians are treated like visitors even in their own neighborhoods.

church door at Easter³⁶, are the words *mol kaxlan ta mejiko*: "important ladino from Mexico City."

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³⁶ See %Haviland (1987b) for a description of innovative Holy Week rituals in Nabenchauk.

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