

## Minimal Maxims: Cooperation and Conversation<sup>1</sup>

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### Language and Chiapas ethnography

In the long history of ethnographic research in the highlands of Chiapas, many anthropologists have taken it to be both a practical necessity and a virtual point of honor to use the local language as a primary medium of field research. Chiapas was the site of classic lexical studies which demonstrated the conceptual richness and subtlety of local Indian languages, or which extracted ethnographic intuitions from the structural semantic analysis of lexical fields.<sup>2</sup> In the case of Zinacantán (see Vogt 1973:11) anthropological studies have depended on an ever increasing understanding of both the grammatical structure,<sup>3</sup> and what Laughlin (1975) calls the "genius" of Zinacantec Tzotzil: its expressive richness in its sociocultural matrix.<sup>4</sup>

In our own society, just as in those we study anthropologically, people converse, chat, and gossip about the events of the day and the personalities of the community. They give and receive orders, chide and scold, argue, make and change plans, conspire, cajole, and otherwise organize both their actions and their social worlds by often microscopic verbal means.<sup>5</sup> We pass our time, in grand measure, talking; as a result, we largely negotiate, maintain, and transform our social relations through talk. To learn to speak the language of a community is thus not simply a methodological tool which allows an ethnographer to extract "data" (through, perhaps, the semantic analysis of

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<sup>2</sup> Chiapas was a proving ground for early research in folk nomenclature, especially in ethnobotany. See Berlin, Breedlove, and Raven (1973), and Laughlin and Breedlove (forthcoming). Additionally, classic studies in ethnographic semantics were carried out on neighboring Tzeltal. See, for example, Berlin (1968), Metzger and Williams (1962).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Colby 1964, 1966, Haviland 1981, Aissen 1987.

<sup>4</sup> In addition to massive Tzotzil dictionaries, both modern and Colonial, compiled by Laughlin (1975 and 1988), which are peppered with an abundance of ethnographic and historical details, several monographs on Tzotzil speaking people, including Bricker (1973), Gossen (1974), and Haviland (1977), focussed on speech in context.

<sup>5</sup> See M. Goodwin (1990) for an explicit application of the study of conversational interaction to the delineation of social organization.

words or phrases); it is the basic technique for understanding a social life, since language is itself a central element in the *production* of social life.

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 and with whom 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 material facts, and with motives which take their form from such facts. Thus, speech responds to the same factors which influence other aspects of social life.

We can thus exploit, for analytic purposes, the mutual interaction, both semiotic and historical, between language forms and social forms more generally. The history of a language clearly mirrors the history of the communities of people who have spoken it, as even a casual glance modern Tzotzil dictionaries and their counterparts from the period of the Spanish Conquest would show. More significantly, as members of the Prague circle (e.g., Havránek 1962[1932]) were at pains to show, specialized linguistic functions deriving from specific social and historical needs exert a pressure on the structure of language itself. Recent work on situated linguistic practices (Hanks 1990) also demonstrates the links between even low-level morpho-syntactic processes and habitual or customary patterns of action that employ speech.<sup>6</sup>

Zinacantecs negotiate the social frontiers with other people, be they Indians or non-Indian *ladinos*, in the first instance by means of linguistic resources and conversational skills, as we saw in the previous chapter. Moreover, as this chapter will show, it is principally by means of conversation that Zinacantecs patrol the boundaries of the closed circle of their private, family lives. If we are interested in Zinacantec social life, then, it seems worthwhile trying to understand the structure and characteristics of Zinacantec conversation. In this chapter we shall concentrate on conversational content, moving to questions of sequential and interactive form in Chapter **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

## Grice and study of conversation

The study of natural conversation has generated wide-ranging interest, among philosophers as well as linguists, sociologists, psychologists, and anthropologists, at least since the mid 1960s when H. Paul Grice, building on notions of "meaning" enunciated some ten years before (Grice 1957), proposed a series of "cooperative maxims": principles which, according to Grice, can be discerned in well-formed conversation against a general background of rational cooperation (Grice 1975, Grice

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<sup>6</sup> See Lucy (1985) and Lucy and Wertsch (1987) for an interpretation of the work of Benjamin Lee Whorf which reemphasizes the importance of language in "habitual" thought. At the other end of the spectrum, various linguistic traditions propose an interaction between what people (frequently) need to accomplish with language and the sorts of formal resources languages "make available" (e.g., Levinson (1983, 1987), duBois (1987)).

1978). Later in the same decade, sociologically oriented students of natural conversation found in the details of conversational sequencing a method for studying social action at its most microscopic (see Sacks 1992, and Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974).

Grice's conversational maxims were seen to have a special importance for logic and semantics, since they appear to represent an extension of classical principles of deduction and inference (see Levinson 1983). That is, the maxims permit inferences and interpretations, based on what is *said* in a conversational turn, which nonetheless cannot be derived solely or directly from the literal meanings of the enunciated words or phrases. Such an extension of inferential processes by what Grice called *implicatures*<sup>7</sup> follows naturally from the fact that words and phrases do not occur in a vacuum but instead form part of both a sequence of linguistic elements and a socially grounded context of action, a complex of goals and intentions within a matrix of human interrelationships. Neo-Gricean theories propose that certain facts about language meaning and use follow from general principles of rationality, information processing, and cooperative reasoning, and thus need not be accounted for at the level of grammar and lexicon.<sup>8</sup> Grice's principles have thus been applied to the analysis of lexical structure (e.g., Horn 1984), to such syntactic phenomena as pronominal binding and control (Levinson 1987), to verbal politeness (Brown and Levinson 1986[1978]), metaphor (Levinson 1983), irony and speech acts, and indeed to a general cognitive theory of communication in general (Sperber and Wilson 1986).

The consequences of Grice's insights for a conversational "logic," a universal pragmatics, and for the radical pruning of semantics and syntax have been widely explored. Rather little attention, however, has been paid to the ethnographic virtues of Gricean reasoning: where are implicatures warranted and calculated *in practice*?<sup>9</sup> This chapter explores how the inferential processes triggered by Grice's maxims can be applied to a description of Zinacantec social life, and in particular, how the *minimal* maxims of conversational cooperation in Zinacantán not only constrain the interpretation of utterances but also illuminate the tenor of Zinacantec interaction.

### Indirect commands and implicature

Grice's maxims have inspired a considerable literature,<sup>10</sup> so I will here only review the broad outlines of the theory. Consider, by way of introduction, the problem of so-called "indirect speech acts" whose interpretations are often subsumed under Gricean principles (Levinson 1983:00ff, but see also Sperber and Wilson 1996:244ff.). The issue can be illustrated in the following brief interchange from a Zinacantec curing ceremony.

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<sup>7</sup> The coinage *implicate* is intended to distinguish such a mechanism from the logical notion denoted by *imply*; similarly one conventionally distinguishes (logical) *implication* from conversational *implicature*.

<sup>8</sup> But for an allegedly *semantic* theory of implicature, see Wierzbicka (1980).

<sup>9</sup> But see the work of John J. Gumperz for a notable exception.

<sup>10</sup> See Levinson (1983) for a lucid summary presentation.

M, a Zinacantec shaman, has arrived at P's house to perform a minor curing ceremony for a member of P's household. P is acting as hostess, on this occasion, and she asks, somewhat hesitantly at line 1, if the curer is ready to receive the embers which she will use to burn the incense which, in turn, she will blow over the patient. The curer will sprinkle a few particles of *copal* over the embers to produce the fragrant smoke which helps effect the cure.

(1) Tape Z 11.01.91, curing session with Me` Mal sme` Romin

1 p; mi cha.k'an la.vak'ale  
mi ch-a-k'an l-av-ak'al-e  
Q ICP-2A-want ART-2E-charcoal-CL  
*Do you want some embers?*

2 m; ta jk'an a`a  
ta j-k'an a`a  
ICP 1E-want indeed  
*I do, indeed.*

The curer assents, and, at line 3, P pours a small bucketful of live coals into the curer's *incensario*, expressing her concern at line 5 (echoed by the curer M at line 6) about whether there are enough coals to keep the incense burning. "Perhaps they will go out," she says.

3 p; li vi  
li av-il  
ART 2E-see  
*Here.*

4 m; mm

5 p; mu jna` mi xtup' van  
mu j-na` mi x-0-tup' van  
NEG 1E-know Q ASP-3A-go\_out perhaps+Q  
*I don't know if it will perhaps go out.*

6 m; mu jna`  
mu j-na`  
NEG 1E-know  
*I don't know.*

A typical "indirect speech act" now follows, at line 7. The shaman M utters an apparent question,<sup>11</sup> asking whether P (and her family) might have some *ste`el pom*, literally "wood of incense," impregnated wood chips which themselves burn, giving off fragrant smoke.

7 m; (mi) muk' bu jtz'uj ste`el apomik  
mi muk' bu j-tz'uj s-te`el a-pom-ik  
Q NEG where one-bit(NC) 3E-wood 2E-incense-PL

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<sup>11</sup> The interrogative particle *mi* beginning this turn is not fully audible. If it were omitted, the sentence would be transformed into a surface declarative, still more "indirect" if pragmatically interpreted as a command.

*Don't you all have a bit of incense-wood?*

The point of such a “question” is clearly directive: it amounts to an “indirect request” not for information (about whether P has any wood incense) but for action (that P should bring her some--although just a little). One can imagine P, upon hearing M’s turn of line 7, reasoning along these lines: we have just expressed doubt about whether the embers alone will burn well enough to produce the incense. The curer now asks me if we have any wood incense. She would only ask that if she wanted me to bring her some. Therefore, her question is really an indirect request for me to bring wood incense.

That this interpretation is more than an analyst’s idealization is moreover demonstrated by P’s actual interpretation, exhibited in her next turn at line 8.<sup>12</sup>

8 p; ta jsa` mi ali oy bek'tal pom a`a  
 ta j-sa` mi ali oy bek'tal pom a`a  
 ICP 1E-search Q uh exist flesh incense indeed  
*I'll have a look. You do have some incense (proper), I suppose?*

Here P offers to bring some wood incense (at the same time checking to see that M is also supplied with powdered incense [*bek'tal pom*]). The fact that P herself understands M’s “question” at line 8 as amounting to a request not for some sort of perverse answer (“Yes, we **do** have some wood incense”) but for some of the stuff itself confirms what was no doubt obvious: that the superficial interrogative form of line 7 **means** more than it says, in this context. Indeed, after several lines of by-play, omitted from the transcript, P repeats her offer, now with a question.

10 mi ta jsa`be tal li ste`el  
 mi ta j-sa`-be tal li s-te`el  
 Q ICP 1E-search-BEN DIR(coming) ART 3E-wood  
*Should I (now) bring the wood for it?*

11 m; k'ajom cha` sil  
 k'ajom cha` sil  
 only two sliver(NC)  
*Just two slivers.*

M gives a suitably polite reply, asking for a diminutive amount (“Just two slivers”) of the wood incense.

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<sup>12</sup> A principle of orthodox conversation analysis (here extracted from its *locus classicus*) requires that interpretations of how particular utterances are understood be demonstrable in the subsequent interaction itself.

“Since it is the parties’ understandings of prior turns’ talk that is relevant to their construction of next turns, it is *their* understandings that are wanted for analysis. The display of those understandings in the talk of subsequent turns affords a resource for the analysis of prior turns, and a proof procedure for professional analyses of prior turns, resources intrinsic to the data themselves” (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974:729).

One account of examples like this runs as follows. The sentence uttered at line 7--"do you all have a bit of wood incense?"--continues to be correctly analyzed, at the level of syntax and semantics, as a question. It means, literally, what it says. However, its issuance (by this speaker, to this addressee, under these circumstances) *implicates* something akin to a request for some wood incense. General principles of inference, on this account, may be adduced to move from the literal meaning of the words to the demonstrable effect of the utterance.

Notice that a considerable amount of ethnography is swept under this general account's rug. That is, we have yet to specify exactly what aspects of the situation, or the relationship between interlocutors, are relevant to triggering the implicature in question. In particular, I have glossed over a number of details: that both P and M are women; that M is, indeed, an *elderly* woman standing in a particular affinal relationship to P, and doing a special sort of favor for P and her household in this instance; and that the entire interaction is tinged with relaxed but formal politeness--also evidenced in the diminutive classifier expressions *jtz'uj* 'one bit' and *cha<sup>h</sup>-sil* 'two slivers' that M uses to minimize her request for the wood incense. The character of the current *activity*<sup>13</sup> is clearly also important: this is the preliminary to a curing ceremony in which the curer is known to need incense, which is in turn customarily provided by the patient's household. However, presumably even with only the background sketched the reader has no difficulty in following the transcript, or reading off the required interpretation of interrogative form as indirect request. The example will serve to introduce the flavor of Grice's cooperative principle, to which I now turn.

### The cooperative principle

Grice's cooperative maxims give a particular substance and framework for the idea of conversational implicature. They incorporate a hypothesis about the implicit ends or goals of conversational interaction, and they are derived from putatively universal principles of rational cooperation, which, so the argument goes, can be detected in most ordinary chat. Here is Grice's characteristically hedged formulation:

"Our talk exchanges do not normally consist of a succession of disconnected remarks, and would not be rational if they did. They are characteristically, to some degree at least, cooperative efforts; and each participant recognizes in them, to some extent, a common purpose or set of purposes, or at least a mutually accepted direction. This purpose or direction may be fixed from the start (e.g., by an initial proposal of a question for discussion), or it may evolve during the exchange; it may be fairly definite, or it may be so indefinite as to leave very considerable latitude to the participants (as in a casual conversation).

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This is a principle I will not, however, always honor since I have my doubts about the implied epistemology of such a "proof procedure."

<sup>13</sup> Levinson (1978) shows the relevance of what he calls "activity types" to the routine interpretation of utterances, building on a notion of "language game" (1958) that is still largely unincorporated into heavily rationalist theories of linguistic pragmatics.

But at each stage, SOME possible conversational moves would be excluded as conversationally unsuitable"<sup>14</sup> (1975:45).

We should presumably all agree that the verbal interchanges we might dub "conversations" are *not* normally sequences of disconnected utterances. Where conversations have a direction, a purpose, or a *point*--a notion that Grice himself concedes will be difficult to make explicit--the participants find themselves "under the brooding presence" (Dillon et al 1985) of what Grice calls the COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE:

(2) Cooperative principle

"Make your contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (1975:45).

Within this ambience of "conversational cooperation" Grice distinguishes four categories or families of "conversational maxims" for talk which is to obey the cooperative principle. Grice calls these the maxims of Quantity, Quality, Relevance, and Manner. Briefly, the maxims decree that conversationalists ought (or will at least be assumed) to speak informatively, sincerely, relevantly, and clearly (or in normal style). That is, one is ordinarily entitled to assume that in conversation one does not utter non-sequiturs without warning or jump willy nilly from one topic to another; that one does not tell lies or intentionally try to deceive one's interlocutors; that one chooses one's words more or less carefully, does not use one expression where another would be (in some sense) better; and so on. Grice also mentions the possibility that maxims other than the four enumerated may apply to most sorts of conversational interchange, and may also produce conversational, non-conventional, implicature--for example, the maxim "Be polite."<sup>15</sup>

## Relevance and quantity

In the context of Zinacantec conversation, there is a good deal to say about the maxims of Relevance and Quantity. The maxim of Quality--which says, in essence, "Tell the truth . . . and nothing but the truth" (but probably omits the part about "the whole truth")--is also occasionally problematic for Zinacantecs, as we shall see. The maxim of Manner, which says "Speak clearly and in a normal way," in the context of Zinacantec Tzotzil will be indirectly the subject of the bulk of this book.

Grice's formulation (1975:46) of the maxim of relevance (which he calls the maxim of relation) is terse:

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<sup>14</sup> As William Hanks (p.c.) has reminded me, the notion of "conversationally unsuitable" need not be limited to effects produced by Grice's cooperative principle: it is a wider notion that might include, among other things, such extraconversational factors as the social nature of the audience (e.g., particular third parties whose presence has a determinate effect on talk). For an extreme example, see Haviland (1979).

<sup>15</sup> Much of the considerable research about verbal politeness is reviewed in the new introduction (Brown and Levinson 1986) to the foundational work of Brown and Levinson (1978).

(3) Maxim of Relevance  
"Be relevant."

and we may suppose that one might add "(relevant) to the theme or direction of the talk exchange."<sup>16</sup> Some notion of relevance is clearly at the heart of conversational logic or coherence. The maxim permits (or, perhaps more accurately, requires) conversants to link a given conversational "turn" or utterance to the topic under discussion (however that is to be delimited), perhaps by a complex inferential route. Thus one can think of a conversation as a sequence of "turns" (defined by certain structural or sequential properties), each of which forms part of a *chain* of relevance.

Grice illustrated the interpretive principles embodied in the maxims with little two-line verbal exchanges invented for the purpose. Thus, here is an Americanized version of one of his Relevance examples.

- (4) A: I've run out of gas.  
B: There's a gas station on the corner.

In an obvious way, B's remark can only be understood (if we are to take it as *relevant* to A's previous turn) as permitting a series of inferences, including "and you can get gasoline there." (It would be plainly *uncooperative* to mention the gas station if B knew that it was closed, or that it was chronically sold out of gasoline.) Here the (potential, and thus inferable) relevance of the second turn to the first is reasonably clear, although much depends on the real-world relationship between gas-stations and gasoline.<sup>17</sup> Once again, the amount of ethnography buried behind the application of the maxim to inference is somewhat hard to delimit in such an idealized scenario as that between A and B.

Consider, instead, a situated example from Zinacantán. Here there are three interactants. A and R are brothers-in-law, partners in a lowland corn farming operation. AL is the hired worker of a third farmer. The men are all engaged in the rather arduous job of fertilizing a half-grown *milpa*. The task involves walking down rows of corn with a bucket slung from one's shoulder, pitching handfuls of superphosphate onto the ground near each corn stalk. Unfortunately, A has lost one of his buckets, and he and R are looking around for it, as AL looks on. A wants his bucket or a substitute to finish fertilizing a nearby field. (Notice already how the scene-setting ethnography here sets up a series of expectations about what sort of talk one will hear in the transcript I am about to present, and what different interactants might want or expect.) R has asked A whether he has found his bucket yet.

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<sup>16</sup> The additional specification is not without its problems; Grice himself considers some of the obvious difficulties for the maxim of determining what this direction might be, especially given changes of topic in the evolution of a conversation, or the nature of shared knowledge and assumptions among conversationalists, as well as their identities, different biographies, and so forth.

<sup>17</sup> This relationship, as must be obvious, has partly to do with *practices* as well as knowledge. Knowing that there is a Pemex station around the corner in Mexico City (where there may be queues, no gasoline, no jerrycans for carrying fuel, attendants who expect tips, etc.) is relevant to the desired purchase of gasoline (or other things) in a way rather different from parallel knowledge about, say, an Australian petrol station.



(5) Kuveta: NAB 83-1, at Las Maravillas, 30-7-83

1 a; ch'abal, jna`tik bu bat  
 ch'abal j-na`-tik bu i-0-bat  
 none 1E-know-1PL where CP-3A-go  
*It's not here; who knows where it went?*

R now finds a bucket of the appropriate size sitting at the edge of the clearing.

2 r; ali li`e che`e much`utik yu`un=  
 ali li`e che`e much`u-tik yu`un  
 ART here then who-PL possession  
*This one here, whose is it?*

3 a; =mu jna`  
 mu j-na`  
 NEG 1E-know  
*I don't know.*

4 al; [  
 a yu`un li Romin =  
 a yu`un li romin  
 ART possession ART Domingo  
*Why, it belongs to Domingo.*

5 =le`e a`a  
 le`e a`a  
 that indeed  
*--that one does.*

AL pipes up to identify the owner of the bucket in question as one Domingo. Domingo has already left the camp, with yet another bucket, to fertilize other fields. Thus, at line 6, R remarks that Domingo won't need the bucket they are looking at, prompting AL to make a further observation at lines 7-8.

6 r; pero yu`van chlaj yu`un (??) k'u ma itun?  
 pero yu`van ch-0-laj y-u`un  
 k'u me a- i-0-tun  
 but is it that? ICP-3A-finish 3E-AGENT  
 what DESID 2E- CP-3A-serve  
*But do you suppose he can use two buckets? What's he need it for?*

7 al; [  
 ja` la xtal stojbala:l  
 ja` la x-tal s-tojbalal  
 ! QUOT NT-3A-come 3E-employee  
*His worker is supposed to be coming.*

8 r; [  
 je`  
 je`  
 Hmph  
*Hmph.*

It seems clearly possible to discern unstated suggestions buried behind the words of the two turns at lines 6 and 7, and arguably Grice's maxim of relevance is behind the inferences that produce them. First, R seems to be suggesting that A could just as well use *this* bucket, if he can't find his own. AL seems to counter this

suggestion; his remark seems to invite the inference that Domingo's alleged worker will himself need this bucket. At the risk of stating the boringly obvious, let me sketch one way the argument from Relevance might run: R has no reason to comment on the fact that Domingo doesn't need this bucket, except insofar as such a comment is relevant to the business at hand (which is finding A a bucket). Thus, R's comment about Domingo may be taken to implicate that Domingo's bucket is available. AL, on the other hand, if he is being cooperative (con conversationally, that is; he need not be cooperating in A's search for a bucket--indeed, he seems determined to thwart it), must have some reason for mentioning Domingo's expected workman. If that workman is relevant here, it must be because of the bucket; *ergo*, the bucket in question is meant for him.

Again, we can inspect the subsequent dialogue to see whether or not the participants themselves have made the same inferential calculations as we. It appears that they have.

- 9 a; xtal stojbalal a`a  
x-tal s-tojbalal a`a  
NT-3A-come 3E-employee indeed  
*Yes, his worker IS coming.*  
[
- 10 al; yu`un la xtal jun stojbalal  
yu`un la x-tal jun s-tojbalal  
because QUOT NT-3A-come one 3E-employee  
*Because a worker is coming for him, supposedly.*
- 11 a; yu`nan muk' xich' tal skuveta li stojbalal  
yu`-nan muk' x-y-ich' tal  
s-kuveta li s-tojbalal  
because-perhaps NEG NT-3E-receive DIR(coming)  
3E-bucket ART 3E-employee  
*and perhaps his worker won't bring his own bucket.*

Both A and AL agree that another of Domingo's workers is expected, and A refers specifically to the supposition that this worker will need a bucket, at line 11.

Of course, Grice does *not* claim that all participants in every conversational exchange "obey" these maxims as unbreakable rules (since they obviously do not); his suggestion is different and rather more subtle. Grice suggests that a conversation will proceed, or that conversational turns--even those that appear to violate the maxims--will be interpreted, *as if the maxims were in effect*. That is, participants will (try to) understand contributions to such exchanges as informative, sincere, relevant, and clear; and when contributions fail to be so, in some obvious way, the maxims themselves will engender interpretations, or motivate a search for "conversational implicatures" which will *supply* relevance. Consider the following Mexicanized version of an example of Stephen Levinson (1983: 102).

- (6)  
A: Where's Sergio?  
B: There's a beat-up Volkswagen in Pilar's parking space.

In this imaginary exchange, despite the apparent fact that B's answer violates both the maxims of Relevance and Quantity (it is neither informative, in the context, nor does it answer the question--see [12] below for the maxim of Quantity), we can invoke precisely the seemingly violated maxims to construct a coherent interpretation of the

exchange. That is, we *search* for a connection, and conclude (for example) that B is suggesting (and communicating) that, if that beat-up Vocho is *Sergio's* beat-up Vocho, Sergio may well be visiting Pilar.<sup>18</sup>

Here it is not only the cooperative principle, nor simply the maxims, that push us to search for a reading of B's turn that is relevant to A's: there are also pressures from the conversational structure itself, insofar as we have an instance of a pair of linked turns<sup>19</sup> of the form: question/answer. The question requires an answer, or at least creates the expectation that an answer *is to follow*. Once A has asked his question, without some construable relevant link as a possible answer B's turn would have to be interpreted as a somewhat brusque and obvious rejection of A's question.

Nonetheless, the same sort of inferential process is at work in the following example (this one adapted from Grice) where there is no such structural pressure from illocutionary force.

- (7)  
A: Pilar is still without a boyfriend.  
B: She's spending a lot of time in Xochimilco.

According to Grice, in such an example B *con conversationally implicates* what it may be assumed that he believes in order to "preserve the assumption that he is observing the maxim of relation" (1975:51), that is, Relevance. In this case, following Grice's logic, B may be implicating that Pilar *does* have a boyfriend, indeed one who lives in Xochimilco, although other interpretations are obviously possible. (All of them, notwithstanding, must seemingly have *something* to do with Xochimilco: perhaps Pilar has taken up *chinampa* farming and forsworn boyfriends.)

### Implicature and ethnographic inference, in Tzotzil

So far, we have been on familiar and much trodden ground in the Gricean terrain of conversational logic. Now consider the following reconstructed fragments of conversation from Zinacantán.

- (8)  
A: Mi chabat ta k'in?  
*Are you going to the fiesta?*  
B: Tol vo`.  
*Much water (= there's too much rain).*

- (9)  
A: Mi chabat ta k'in?  
*Are you going to the fiesta?*

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<sup>18</sup> As William Hanks (p.c.) points out, given the right circumstances, the inference could be reversed: we know that the car belongs to Roberto--Sergio's rival for Pilar's affections--and therefore, if *Roberto* is visiting Pilar, Sergio must be somewhere *else*. And so on, and so on.

<sup>19</sup> Such linked turns are known in the jargon of conversation analysis as "adjacency pairs" (Sacks, Schegloos, and Jefferson 1974).

B: Jch'unoj ch'amunel.  
*I have agreed to be borrowed (= I'm busy).*

Here we can see clearly how the logic of conversational interaction can feed ethnographic inquiry. B's words, in (8), are evidently offered as an answer to A--that is, to satisfy the maxim of Relevance, B's turn must have something to do with whether or not B intends to go to the fiesta. Accordingly, A might reason, the rainy weather means that B does *not* intend to go. The inference depends, clearly, on what A knows about fiestas: in Zinacantán, nothing dampens enthusiasm for a fiesta more than the mud produced by Chiapas thunderstorms. Here, a possible chain of relevance is reasonably clear.

Ethnographic background is more important to calculating the implicature appropriate to B's response in (9). Without knowing details of the ritual system in Zinacantán, one cannot know whether the "busy" of the response, linked to the Tzotzil word *ch'amunel* 'borrowed,' suggests either that B can or cannot attend the fiesta. Typically, in fact, *ch'amunel* refers to services "loaned" to *jpas`abteletik*, the 'cargoholders' who serve in positions in the religious hierarchy, and whose responsibilities include ritual duties which are, in fact, a principal focus of fiestas. Under these circumstances, the unmarked implicature of B's "I'm busy"--in these conversational and cultural environs--is that B *will* go to the fiesta (since that is what he will be "borrowed" to do).

Thus the reasoning processes that permit conversational inferences follow patterns which derive as much from a socio-cultural context as from the conversational situation or, indeed, from the component words and expressions employed in utterances. Grice's maxim "Be relevant" proposes that, in certain conversational contexts, it be possible to construct a chain of propositions that connect an utterance with an extant topic (conversational "direction"). If constructing such a chain requires knowledge of a (cultural) world, then clearly conversational processes and the natural logic of conversational inference constitute a somewhat unexpected source for ethnographic insight.

## Violations

Grice suggests that the maxims can fail in four typical ways (1975:49):

- (1) A speaker can VIOLATE a maxim (perhaps intentionally), but without doing so obviously, in which case his "contribution" (his turn at talk, his utterance, and its reading in the evolving conversation) *misleads* (and again, this may or may not be his intention).
- (2) He can simply withdraw from cooperative activity (and thereby from the strictures of the Cooperative Principle); and this he may do either explicitly, or automatically as a consequence of the context (serving as a hostile witness, for example, in a courtroom).
- (3) It may turn out to be necessary to violate one maxim in order to follow another, if two maxims are in conflict.

Grice suggests that failures or compromises between maxims of the third type might happen if an utterance will be insufficiently informative in certain circumstances (thereby violating Quantity), but where nonetheless saying *more* would violate Quantity because the speaker has insufficient grounds. If a pilgrim asks me, on the path, "Where is Chalma?" I may know that he wants (and thus that my reply should ideally include) directions precise enough to allow him to continue his pilgrimage. However, if all I

know about Chalma is that is is “somewhere in the state of Mexico,” this is the only “answer” I can give that does not violate the maxim “Tell the truth, but do not say more than you know to be true.” The tendency of people to try to observe Quantity, despite violations of Quality, is, of course, the principle behind many jokes and aspersions cast on direction-givers when their directions lead nowhere.

Grice’s examples, again, seem to underestimate the complexity of other sorts of social constraints on applying the maxims. In particular, the maxims may come into conflict not only with one another, and with what an individual speaker “knows,” but also with socially grounded authority to speak. Again, we can turn to prosaic Zinacantec interaction for an example. J and P are two Tzotzil-speaking flower vendors in a lowland ladino town. X is their customer. She starts off fragment (10) at lines 1-2 by asking J for the price of some flowers, in Spanish. Although the flowers actually belong to P, J in fact knows the price, since he has been selling these flowers all morning. Nonetheless, at line 3 he asks P, in Tzotzil, how much to charge for them, thereby indicating that only P has the authority to set the price. Thus, the form of the exchange is governed not by what J knows, but what he *can rightfully say*. (There is clearly strategy here, too, since the manoeuvre suggests to X--even though she presumably cannot understand the Tzotzil exchange--that J is not in a position to haggle freely over the price.)

(10) Copoya, 24 Dec 1983

- 1 x; noventa y seis no?  
*ninety six, right?*
- 2 y este a como es?  
*and this, how much is it?*
- 3 j; k'u cha`al chavak' lanichime kumpa?  
*How much do you want for your flowers, compadre?*

In his reply at line 4, interestingly enough, P’s use of the final evidential particle *a`a* indicates that he knows already that J does know that the price is ten (pesos per bunch). (We return to the use of these Tzotzil evidentials in Chapter **Error! Bookmark not defined.**)

- 4 p; lajuneb a`a  
*Yes, ten.*
- 5 j; lajuneb?  
*Ten?*
- 6 p; jii, parejo xchi`uk li taje  
*Right, the same as with those (other flowers).*

Finally, Grice describes a fourth type of violation--the flagrant violation or “flouting”--which has received the most theoretical attention.<sup>20</sup>

- (4) The maxims can also be disobeyed openly, ostentatiously, shamelessly. As Grice puts it, they may be “flouted.”

When a speaker’s utterance clearly does not abide by the maxims, but when it is evident that he *could* abide by them--that is, he is not seen to be trying to mislead--the

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<sup>20</sup> For example, some analysts have proposed analyses of such tropes as metaphor and irony in terms of exploitations of conversational maxims. See Levinson (1983: 3.2.5) and Grice (1975: 53).

interlocutor will typically construct, from the speaker's utterance, implicatures which will *reconcile* the utterance with the Cooperative Principle. Thus come about those implicatures which Grice calls "characteristic": these are "exploitations" of the maxims (1975:49) because they represent not an attempt to mislead but rather a conscious use of the maxims as engines driving conversational inference.

### Relevance: San Antonio's clothes

The structure of a conversation, at multiple levels of complexity and with exquisitely detailed local architecture, often depends heavily on conversational inferences based on Relevance. Consider a further fragment of a conversation between members of a group of Zinacantec cornfarmers. The men are talking about a hand-woven garment, in the style of Zinacantec traditional costume, which one member of the group wants to present to the saint image that belongs to the landowner where these men cultivate their *milpas* (cornfields). The gift will play a role in the negotiations over rent and working conditions between the owners and the sharecroppers who work the land. The question here is: who will weave the gift?

#### (11) Filmed conversation among cornfarming partners, January 1982

1 M; ali.. mi cha`abolaj li xameltzanbon..

*Uh.. won't you do me the favor of making*

2 ali k'u`ul la kajvaltik un

*uh, the garment for Our Lord*

[

3 P; jii

*yes*

4 M; san antonyo

*San Antonio*

5 komem li sp'isome

*I left the measurement behind*

6 pero jna`oj

*but I remember (the measurements)*

7 {...}

8 R; K'usi

*What?*

9 M; Ali... chkak'be li...

*Uh, I want to give...*

[

10 P; chak'be sk'u` ali...

*he wants to give a garment to...*

11 M; sk'u` ali San Antonyo taj toe

*a garment to San Antonio, down there*

12 R; Mmm

*Ahh!*

13 P; Isp'is talel un

*He brought the measurements*

14 Pero mu jna` mi stak' jalel un

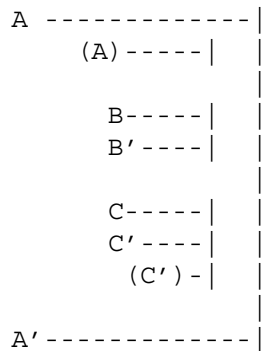
*But I don't know if it can be woven*

15 Batz'i bik'it

*It's very small.*

First, we could represent the internal structure of this fragment with the following diagram:

**Diagram of fragment (11):**



The entire fragment here has the form of an *adjacency pair*--a pair of linked turns whose parts typically or logically belong together: there is first a question (1-2), and last a turn at (14) which can be understood, with the help of the maxim of Relevance, as its answer. What comes in between consists of a series of sequences in counterpoint to this main conversational business: clarifying the point of the original question, and locating this sequence within the larger frame of the conversation as a whole. (The men are planning important rituals in the cornfield, and also making decisions about future planting.) In Tzotzil, and indeed in Spanish and English conversation, such clarifying "side sequences" or "insertion sequences" occur with regularity.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> For such question-answer pairs embedded in larger surrounding question-answer sequences, see Goffman (1976). A slightly different sort of example is provided by bargaining, as in the following fragment. X is still after flowers, and she asks the price. There follows a series of offer/response pairs which will be familiar to all hagglers. The whole transaction, however, is in a sense framed by the original question at line 7 and the offer to accept the price of six at line 12.

**(Error! Main Document Only.)** From Copoya, 24 December 1983

- 7 x; a como das esta?  
*How much will you sell these for?*
- 8 j; a- ocho  
*For ... eight*
- 9 x; seis  
*six*
- 10 p; siete  
*seven*
- 11 x; a seis  
*for six*
- 12 p; bweno agárralo  
*Okay, take them*
- 13 y; no da usted a cinco?  
*Won't you sell them for five?*

X's further move to back down on her offer of six, at line 13, is, as hagglers will again recognize, outside the rules of the game.

In (11) the original question at lines 1-2 does not receive an immediate answer. Indeed, it receives only an equivocal *jiii* at line 3.<sup>22</sup> As a result, M adds clarifying additional information at line 4, giving the name of the Saint which is to be beneficiary of the gift.

Note that it is characteristic of these adjacency pairs that the first turn *demand*s, within the conversational context, a second part; or, more exactly, the first part creates a conversational context in which the second part is *relevant*, logically to be expected. Importantly, the “conditional relevance” between a first part and a second part<sup>23</sup> represents a formal mechanism, deriving from the sequential structure of conversation, which *competes* with the processes of conversational inference provided by Gricean maxims. Following the maxims, what follows a question, to comply with the Cooperative Principle, must serve in some way (in terms of Relevance, Quantity, Quality and Manner, at least) as an answer. However, following conversational sequence, the relation between question and answer is more demanding, perhaps stronger by virtue of being structural: the question *conditions* the relevance of its answer. If the answer is not forthcoming, then there will necessarily follow some sort of interactional “repair”<sup>24</sup> to make up for a missing answer, or to allow interlocutors to hear an embedded question as furthering the answer to the first one.

In lines 5-6, M has a short sub-conversation, seemingly with himself. By at least notionally following the maxim of relevance, we can supply putative amplified glosses for the literal translations of these two turns:

Expansion of line 5<sup>25</sup>

“(the garment for the saint can’t be woven because) I left behind the measurements (of the saint).”

Expansion of line 6:

“But (even though I left the measurements behind, it doesn’t matter because) I still remember (what the sizes were).”

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<sup>22</sup> Such hesitation seems to provision an eventual demurral on the part of P. It is a so-called *dispreferred* response. See Pomerantz (1984), Sacks (1987), Levinson (1983) for the notion of preference forms, and their links with agreement actions. Indeed, P does eventually try to avoid the implicit request that he accept the weaving contract.

<sup>23</sup> See Schegloff (1968) on the notion of “conditional relevance,” and further discussion of the internal structure of question/answer sequences in Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974), Goffman (1976).

<sup>24</sup> Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks (1977). Another possibility, of course, is that the conversation will proceed to cancel the need for an answer: for example, by canceling the question itself or its understood motives: “How much is an ice cream cone?” “We’re all out.”

<sup>25</sup> In my suggested expansions, I include inferred material in parentheses. Whether such inferred material is the product of applying Gricean maxims, or the product of independently required mechanisms for calculating the referents of zero anaphors is an issue beyond the scope of this chapter. Clearly, an adequate theory of (conversational) ellipsis is required to settle the matter. For a proposed partial pragmatic solution to a related problem, see Levinson (1987).



Another peripheral sequence clearly illustrates how a conversation requires a logical chain that connects explicit utterances with a (mutual) topic. One of the men present, R, does not understand the reference to *k'u`ul kajvaltik* 'garment for Our Lord.' As I have said, the "Lord" in question is the tiny image of Saint Anthony which belongs to the landowner on the ranch where these Zinacantecs sharecrop. R asks for an explanation at line 8: "what are you talking about?" The other participants offer a more explicit formulation of what the conversation is all about, its "direction": that M proposes to offer, as a gift to the landowner's San Antonio, a miniature Zinacantec tunic.<sup>26</sup> Notice that M and P speak simultaneously at lines 9 and 10; R signals that he has understood at line 12.

P's turn at lines 13-14 is interesting because, at line 13 it makes explicit the reference, which M has made at line 5, to "measurement." In the course of the same turn, P returns to the original issue of the conversational fragment as a whole. That is, P ventures an indirect answer to the original question that M asked at lines 1-2. Once again, it is the maxim of Relevance which permits one to construct a logical connection between the original question and the uttered response. An amplified gloss for P's turn at line 14 is something along the following lines:

Expansion of lines 14 and 15:

"(I am unable to say whether the garment can be made or not because) I don't know if (the garment) can be woven (given that the saint image is) so small."

The participants here can maintain the conversational interaction only by following (that is, by cooperatively constructing) this implicit logical chain, based jointly on structures of conversational sequence and the maxim of Relevance.

### **Quantity implicatures**

Let me now turn to a further maxim, which Grice also suggests to have wide relevance, the maxim of Quantity. Grice's original version of the maxim (1975: 45) has two clauses:

(12) Maxim of quantity

(a) "Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purpose of the exchange)."

(b) "Do not make your contribution more informative than is required."

In many sorts of conversation, it might appear that the second clause of the maxim is unnecessary (although Grice points out that excessive information may deceive or at least mislead interlocutors). However, in certain contexts, in particular in many public interchanges in Zinacantán, the second clause has an explicit importance, as we shall see.

A standard sort of invented example here is the following:

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<sup>26</sup> As I mentioned, this ceremonial gift represents part of a larger, and well-understood, tactic in the wider negotiation of social and economic relationships between farmers and owner.

(13)

A: Fred got drenched the other day. How is he?

B: He got sick.

B': He died.

If B knows that Fred died after getting sick, it would be a violation of the maxim of Quantity (and considerably less than cooperative) to say merely that he got sick. Thus if the two predicates <get sick, die> represent a sort of scale<sup>27</sup> from less to more informative, the farther along the scale one can truthfully and sincerely go, the farther, according to the maxim, one **should** go. If B knows Fred died, he should say so. Furthermore, if B says only "He got sick" then A is, indeed, entitled to infer that Fred **didn't** in fact die, unless this implicature is explicitly cancelled. (B says, "He got sick, and, in fact, he died.")

Notice that it is not only discrete lexical items that can trigger Quantity inferences in this way. Even morphological mechanisms can produce informational scales of a parallel sort. Thus, the Tzotzil verb *cham* covers semantic territory comparable to that of the whole range of the English scale <get sick, die>. The exact nuance is specified not by a different verb stem but by the aspect employed. In incompletive aspect, the verb is best translated 'become gravely ill'; in completive and stative aspects it means 'die.' Thus, in recounting the story of how one of his horses sickened and died, P can first say (in remembering what he thought when he saw the horse rolling on the ground):

ta x-0-cham xa  
ICP ASP-3A-die already  
*It fell gravely ill, already.*

but must, when he returns home to tell his father of its demise, report

i-0-cham xa  
CP-3A-die already  
*It died already.*

### Universality of quantity?

Elinor Ochs (Keenan 1976) has suggested that the maxim of Quantity is not applicable to Malagasy conversation, among certain peasants of Madagascar. In the community where she worked, according to her analysis, information is considered a scarce resource. It is therefore not something to be lightly bandied about. In addition, Ochs' peasant informants profess an ideology of collective responsibility for all social action. As a result, these people try to avoid any action that would call attention to an individual capacity or talent, or that overtly attributes responsibility (including what we might call propositional responsibility). Malagasy conversation, by the same token, is indirect, evasive, and guarded. According to Ochs, it frequently appears that Malagasy peasants intentionally provide neither Relevance nor Quantity.

In the Malagasy language there are syntactic mechanisms, analogous to processes of passivization and the use of indefinites in European languages, that reduce

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<sup>27</sup> Dubbed by Levinson (1983) a "Horn scale."

the prominence of actors and other elements of a sentence (such as objects, instruments, even places). An illustrative hypothetical example (from Keenan and Ochs 1979) relates to a man's visit to his brother's village. When word is sent to the brother, instead of using forms (14a-c), the messenger would be likely to say something more nearly equivalent to (14d).

- (14) Indirection in Malagasy
- a. Your brother is looking for you.
  - b. Someone is looking for you.
  - c. Someone is looking (for someone).
  - d. There exists looking-for.

Ochs concludes that the conversational maxims that derive from Grice's Cooperative Principle cannot be universally applied--at least not to polite Malagasy conversation.

### Tzotzil etiquette

In an apparently very similar way the norms of conversational etiquette in Zinacantec Tzotzil appear to contradict Gricean maxims. For example, Zinacantecs frequently appear to violate Grice's maxim of Quality:

- (15) Maxim of Quantity
- "1. Do not say what you believe to be false.
  2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence" (1975:46).

Zinacantecs *do* tell premeditated lies, routinely; it is often a matter of preventing a leak in the carefully patrolled fences of privacy and domestic confidentiality.

- (16)
- A: Mi ip to li Chepe?  
*Is Joe still sick?*
- B: Lek xa, chanav xa jutuk.  
*He's well now; he can walk a little.*

The son of one of my compadres broke his leg while in the midst of a long and complicated courtship. His prolonged incapacity engendered speculation, gossip, and continual rumors: that he had had the leg amputated; that he had tried to shoot himself because his fiancée had run off with another; and so forth. Though he was still, in fact, confined to the house and in considerable pain, the members of the household were given detailed instructions about the exact phrasing of the lie<sup>28</sup> we should tell in case someone asked about him, as in the miniature exchange shown in (16).

Of course, the Cooperative Principle does *not* require that interlocutors never tell lies. A *flagrant* lie may be simply an exploitation, an undisguised and perhaps strategic violation of the maxim of Quality. Here we have one of the bases of irony ("What a

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<sup>28</sup> Lest it be thought that I am imposing an inappropriately culture-specific standard of *veracity* to these Tzotzil speakers, note that everyone was aware that Chep, though far from being at death's door, was *not* able to walk, at the time. The Zinacantec Tzotzil idiom for 'lie' is, revealingly, *nop k'op* literally, 'think of words.' (In neighboring Chamula Tzotzil there is a distinct root, *jut*, which means 'tell a lie.')

beautiful day!" when another day of drizzle dawns). But even a lie somewhat less ostentatious can set off speculations and inferential processes; that is, it can produce implicatures, especially in a context like that of Zinacantán where in many circumstances one *expects* some sort of dissimulation rather than the truth (let alone the *whole* truth). In fact, there is in Zinacantán almost a tradition, and certainly an interpretive technique, for extracting a grain of truth from the great boulders of deception that are routinely thrown about. There is, as it were, a sliding scale. Consider the following exchange between an anthropologist (A) and a Zinacantec flower vendor (B), with two alternate forms for B's reply:

- (17)  
A: Mi ich'am lanichime?  
*Did your flowers sell well?*  
B: Tey jutuk.  
*They sold a little bit.*  
B': Mu xch'am.  
*They didn't sell.*

If B answers *tey jutuk* 'a little' A knows that B *did* manage to sell the entire load. If B says *mu xch'am* '(literally) they weren't received,' A can infer that B in fact got out with a profit, although perhaps he did not manage to sell the entire load. It is, however, a foregone conclusion that B will never answer in wholly positive terms. The overall structure of inference and Gricean implicature survives, here, but subject to a Zinacantec convention about what can be taken as "literal truth."

### Public vs. private in Zinacantec etiquette

In the case of the Maxim of Quantity, the formulaic politeness of ordinary, often empty, sociable Tzotzil conversation makes plain a tension between what is public and what is private. In Zinacantec, or at least in the large but densely packed hamlet of Nabencáhuq that I know best, social life is atomistic and reserved. Families try to maintain a closed fence, as much physical as social, around their houses and affairs (see Haviland and Haviland, 1982, 1983). Conversational interchanges in Zinacantán often seem lamentably inadequate, if not downright evasive. When two people meet on the path, for example, the informative exchange<sup>29</sup> often goes like this:

- (18)  
A: Bu chabat? (*Where are you going?*)  
B: Muk' bu chibat. (*I'm going nowhere.*)

If the interlocutor persists in his questioning, B will continue to evade the issue.:

- (19)  
A: Bu la`ay? (*Where are you coming from?*)  
B: Li`ay ta vula`al. (*From a visit.*)  
A: Much'u tzna? (*At whose house?*)  
B: Tey ta ak'ol. (*Over up yonder.*)

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<sup>29</sup> To be contrasted with the conventional greeting, which is simply *chibat* 'I'm going' to which one replies *batan* 'Go!'

When a Zinacantec is intrusively inquisitive about someone else's affairs:

- (20)  
A: K'usi chapas? (*What are you doing?*)  
B: Mu k'usi ta jpas, yech no`ox.  
(*I'm not doing anything, I'm just here [as you see me].*)

Finally, the polite formulas uttered by a visitor who has arrived at a neighbor's house with an explicit errand seem to *deny* the errand. Here A is the host, and B the importuning visitor:

- (21)  
A: K'usi chaval? (*What do you [have to] say?*)  
B: Mu k'usi xkal. (*I'm not saying anything.*)<sup>30</sup>

These are not isolated examples; rather they illustrate the seemingly evasive flavor of most normal conversation in Zinacantán. Zinacantecs intentionally hide, or at least do not freely disseminate, all information about their affairs and movements.

Must we conclude that here as in Madagascar Grice's Maxims resist application? Has Grice located only limited and specialized devices for conversational inference--limited, that is, to certain cultures or societies? An adequate answer requires a more detailed analysis of the *social* processes we call "conversations." A close look at the Maxim of Quantity exposes several areas of potential confusion. In the first place, as with the Maxim of Relevance, what constitutes "*all that is relevant*" to a topic can vary considerably: with the specific situation, with the overall ethnographic context, and with a general cultural ambience. For example, perhaps the overall context "of culture" or the context "of situation" (in Malinowski's terms) can eliminate an ambiguity, or pin down the desired meaning of a conversational turn, despite the fact that the turn itself may appear to be egregiously inadequate in terms of Quantity.

Here is a straightforward example. When the sons of a Zinacantec friend arrive at our house compound (to visit their grandfather, who heads the family), someone is bound to ask them:

- (22)  
A: Bu t atot e? (*Where's your father?*)

Frequently the boys mumble a minimal response:

- B: Te. (*There [without a gesture].*)

These teenagers, like many of their age-mates in other cultures, are not given to prolix interchanges with their elders. Still, the literal meaning of *te*, 'in that place,' seems excessively elliptical and uninformative. Now, the man in question is a past municipal President and a powerful political leader in his village. He frequently finds himself marooned in his house, surrounded by supplicants, abandoned wives, and others seeking his legal advice and support. In this ethnographic context, *te*, the neutral

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<sup>30</sup> The framework of Brown and Levinson (1978) suggests that a possible strategy of politeness is to efface or minimize requests (which are inherently capable of imposing on their target or addressee) by denying them, precisely as a prelude to making them.

locative particle in Tzotzil, in fact does seem to indicate, with a certain spare precision, that the man is in his own house. For this political boss, the house is his *unmarked* location. The situated context of speech makes further specification redundant. Indeed, another Gricean principle, the Maxim of Manner (which says “Be brief, orderly,” etc.) may well be in operation here, leading the boys to a characteristically adolescent expressive parsimony, at the risk of reduced Quantity (whose lack may not bother them in the first place).<sup>31</sup>

We may on occasion be unable to expand the meaning of an apparently inadequate or informationally limited conversational turn without certain specific ethnographic detail. Here again we can see the utility of conversational material for ordinary ethnography. Consider the following dialogue, a variant of which we have already met in (19) as a putative violation of the Maxim of Quantity.

- (23)  
A: Mi li` li jkumpare? (*Is my compadre here?*)  
B: Batem ta vula`al. (*He’s gone on a visit.*)

A is inquiring about the whereabouts of his compadre; B is the latter’s wife. One could reconstruct two different sorts of scenario for this exchange. Consider, first, the circumstances in which I actually took down the example. A compadre of mine was involved in a village legal dispute. The son of one of his cornfarming partners (with whom my compadre shared the cultivation of nearby fields) had run off with another man’s daughter. The boy’s father had in turn asked my compadre, a village elder, to aid him in the delicate negotiations with the girl’s outraged father. B’s answer in (23), to a questioning A who knew the background (in this case, another member of the same farming group), might be expanded as follows:

“(He’s not here because) he’s gone on a visit (and you can infer that it is a formal visit, occasioned by the affair in which he is involved, that is, the business about the elopement and the girl; therefore, he has gone to talk to the girl’s father to try to negotiate a solution; therefore, you can surmise that he won’t be home any time soon) . . .”

A rather different gloss would be implied in an exchange with an interlocutor A who was not apprised of the context--a visitor simply arriving to look for my compadre. In such a case, B’s answer “he’s gone on a visit” would signify something considerably less informative, but nonetheless equally final:

“(He’s not here because) he’s gone on a visit (perhaps formal, in which case he won’t be coming home soon, and, in any case, you shouldn’t ask any more about it, because you certainly won’t be told. Goodbye.)”

In Zinacantán, *vula`al* ‘visit’ means not just the “literal” translation ‘visit’ but rather denotes, as a kind of circumlocution, a class of formal, closed, and private events, which usually last for an indefinite, probably long, time. B’s rather non-committal answer in (23), which pointedly omits any mention of whom the compadre is visiting, or with what purpose, signals implicitly that the interlocutor is not invited to pursue the matter further.

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<sup>31</sup> I am indebted to William Hanks for the latter suggestion.

Note, of course, that in both scenarios sketched, B interprets A's original question (*Mi li` li jkumpare?* 'Is my compadre here?') as meaning something like the following:

"(A wants to know) if X is here (because A wants to speak to X, and therefore, if X is *not* here, A wants to know where he can be found)."

B's response, then, can be understood as a complete and final answer to A's inferred questions as well as his explicit one. A therefore must understand B's failure to give more details as a signal that the matter has come to an end.

Note that Grice's Cooperative Principle does not specify the ends or goals of the "rational cooperation" that obtains. The Maxims are formulated in terms of the informative content of utterances (indeed, this is why Grice speaks of "contributions"); but of course it is possible that a verbal interaction have a purpose *other* than the exchange of information. Conversation may be a matter of the exchange of "meta-information." In the last example, what is said permits or invites inferences about the *availability of information*, or the limits to, or boundaries on, access to information. In the same way, through the empty formulaic interchanges between Zinacantecs who meet on the path, my interlocutor may ask me something (expecting all the while an answer that will be half-truth, if not outright lie), *not* because he wants to get information out of me, but because he wants to let me know that he is watching and aware of my movements, or because he wants to see exactly *which* lie I am going to tell.

Such considerations might lead us to reformulate the Maxim of Quantity so as to take account of certain inferential mechanisms in the following way:

(24) Maxim of Quantity, version 2

"Make your contribution sufficient so as to allow your interlocutors to infer what you know about the topic of the conversation; (and so as to exclude inferences *beyond* what you know)."

An example like (22) above falls under this revised Maxim, since the utterance *te* 'there,' in the circumstances, suggests (or permits the inference) that the man in question is in his house. Note that the revised Maxim also takes account of the essential relational nature of conversational inference, depending as it does on the minimally dyadic skeletal social system the interlocutors constitute.<sup>32</sup>

Since the mechanisms of conversational inference are meant to depend in a direct way on a background informed by the maxims in the first place, the revised maxim of (24) seems to introduce an undesirable indeterminacy<sup>33</sup> into the calculus of implicatures. What counts as "sufficient" is now whatever *can* count as sufficient given who one's interlocutor is, what he or she knows, and so on--what Clark and Marshall have called "common ground." Undeniably, though, the "informative content" of a conversational turn depends on what a speaker knows, and *also* on what his interlocutors know, and probably on what the speaker thinks his interlocutors know, and so on (as in the case of the two variant interpretations of B's turn in [23]).

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<sup>32</sup> See in particular Clark's work on common ground in Clark and Marshall (1981), and conversational collaboration Clark and Wilkes-Gibbs (1986), Clark and Schaefer (1989).

<sup>33</sup> William Hanks, in comments on earlier versions of this chapter, was harsher: he called it "pernicious circularity."

Conversational sufficiency turns out to be a somewhat shadowy, if not circular, notion in the first place.

Recall that Grice proposed the principles we have been considering as “cooperative maxims.” For Grice, they presuppose a cooperativeness, an atmosphere of rational interaction dedicated to certain communicative ends. At the same time, the maxims contribute to and in a sense guarantee this cooperative atmosphere. “Cooperation” here must be understood to refer to a *social* situation in which interlocutors share certain consistent goals, and in which, in the ordinary case, they cooperate in good faith to exchange information, reach a decision, arrange an affair, and so on. This is what Venneman (1973:314) has called “normal, honest discourse” --if, indeed, it is normal. Similarly, this perspective shows that Grice’s maxims cannot be taken as *logical* precepts but rather as *moral* ones: they depend on norms and expectations that themselves have a situated social origin.

We will all recognize that many “conversations” do not satisfy this presupposition of cooperation. There are, of course, interchanges that have a conversational form,<sup>34</sup> but where the interlocutors are in competition with one another or have an adversary relationship. A well studied example is the form of interrogation that characterizes judicial processes (Atkinson and Drew 1979), or police interviews with suspected wrongdoers (de León 1992). On such occasions, it is taken for granted that the protagonists do not want to cooperate, that they will consciously hide facts and information, or that they will respond to one another in a highly non-informative manner, even if they manage to stick to a literal truth. Lawyers who are to be experts at interrogation must learn to formulate questions which can trap hostile witnesses, by leading them into contradictions or into blurting out revealing involuntary admissions. The maxims, in such situations, must be at least partially suspended.

All this suggests that violations of Grice’s Maxims may also signal something about the nature of cooperation (or its lack) in a social or cultural context. Here we arrive at another link between natural conversation and the social life of a community. It is thus that we must understand the uncommunicative and evasive tone of conventional, polite Tzotzil conversational interchange in Zinacantán. The conversational style corroborates findings of other ethnographic studies about the nature of social isolation and atomism, about privacy and inter-family competition in Zinacantec hamlets. Individual Zinacantecs adopt adversary positions, in some ways analogous to those of policeman and suspect; or rather, they treat each conversational interlocutor from another household as a potential spy.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> See Schegloff (n.d.) for a discussion of systems of speech organization which have an outwardly conversational form, but which, on sequential grounds, he wishes to consider as activities rather different from conversation.

<sup>35</sup> Lourdes de León, in conversation, points out a notable material symptom of this attitude, especially by contrast with a *ladino* norm in Mexican society. When visitors arrive at a Zinacantec house, only the two upper leaves (and often only one) of a four-part front door are opened, to allow interaction between the visitor and those inside the house. (Indeed, sometimes conversations are carried on through the closed door.) Such a partial and clearly limited opening onto the social space of the house would be, I am told, extremely rude in *ladino* circles, even if the visitor was not to be invited inside.



In such circumstances we can (and we should) preserve the notion of conversational inference, and we must be careful not to discard the cooperative maxims prematurely. It is precisely through principles of "cooperation" that we come to recognize the highly restricted, suspicious, and individual nature of "cooperation" in Zinacantec society. What fails in Zinacantec conversation is not the Maxim of Quantity but rather a misplaced expectation of interpersonal collaboration.<sup>36</sup>

Politeness phenomena clearly demonstrate the connection between cooperative maxims and *uncooperative* ends. Brown and Levinson (1978) write that Grice's Maxims

"define for us the basic set of assumptions underlying every talk exchange. But this does not imply that utterances in general, or even reasonably frequently, must meet these conditions, as critics of Grice have sometimes thought. Indeed, the majority of natural conversations do not proceed in such a brusque fashion at all... Politeness is... a major source of deviation from such rational efficiency, and is communicated precisely by that deviation. But even in such departures from the Maxims, they remain in operation at a deeper level. It is only because they are still assumed to be in operation that addressees are forced to do the inferential work that establishes the underlying message and the (polite or other) source of the departure--in short, to find an implicature, i.e., an inference generated by precisely this assumption. Otherwise the polite strategies . . . would simply be heard as mumbo-jumbo. There is a basic assumption in talk that there is an underlying method in the madness" (1978:100).

According to Brown and Levinson, verbal politeness systematically exploits the maxims, or systematically flouts them in order to achieve interactional aims that, in turn, depend upon the maxims at a deeper level. In a similar way, Zinacantecs try to mislead and misinform their neighbors, a practice that produces interpretive procedures for penetrating the deception, which in turn lead to double-deceptions, triple deceptions, and so on, in a chain of interpretive maneuvers.<sup>37</sup>

Not only politeness (or its lack) may be involved. The degree to which a conversationalist, however rational, is forthcoming with his or her interlocutors depends crucially on the sort of activity they are engaged in. Let me depart temporarily from Zinacantán. M. Goodwin (1990) describes how what the Maple Street girls call "instigating"--telling a story to seed an eventual he-said-she-said gossip dispute--is an

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<sup>36</sup> John Gumperz addresses the separation of the notion of cooperation from the ordinary application of Gricean maxims, and considers complications in the idea of "cooperation" as applied to different activities types and socio-cultural matrices in Gumperz (1990). His discussion there, focussed on what he calls "contextualization cues" in certain less than ideally collaborative exchanges, leads him to conclusions much like those reached here.

<sup>37</sup> In a parallel way, Gumperz (1990), discussing an extract from testimony in a rape case presented by Drew (1990), argues that although counsel and witness "can be seen to be engaged in a contest over which of several possible interpretations should be accepted as the correct one"--therefore, *not* cooperating at this level--nonetheless the parties share a common understanding "that the underlying goal of courtroom interrogation is to establish the facts of the case for the benefit of judge and jury" (1990:5). It is at the latter, higher level that, according to Gumperz, "cooperation" can still be understood to obtain.

activity itself fraught with danger since “such stories constitute instances of talking behind someone’s back, the very action at issue in a he-said-she-said” (ibid:261). As a result, participants in such encounters “work to avoid implicating themselves in gossip until they can determine others’ positions regarding the person being talked about” (ibid: 191). The techniques involved require a cagy sort of dance in which speakers refrain from saying things, waiting to hear what their interlocutors (who are themselves dancing) will say first. There is cooperation here. However, as in Zinacantec conversation even explicitly designed for the exchange of information, as we shall shortly see, it is cooperation heavily constrained by social dangers and strategic calculations.

The relationship between the cooperative maxims and cooperation itself can be reinforced by some further exemplary contrasts. Consider two similar but crucially different contexts (both naturally occurring), where the difference revolves precisely on the nature of cooperation.

- (25) (A man speaks to a bus driver at a San Francisco bus stop)  
A: How do I get to Market Street?  
B: Come on, I’ll take you there.

Here the driver clearly interprets A’s question as something more than a request for information: the question was directed towards the driver because he could presumably offer not only information, but also advice, perhaps even material help, i.e., a ride. Thus A’s question could be minimally expanded to include such implicatures as

(I want to know) how I get to Market Street (because I want to go to Market Street) (and I’m asking you, a bus driver, because I think I can go by bus, and I want your advice).

It is equally clear that the driver recognizes the implicatures, and his elided answer represents a clear logical short-cut. He cooperates not just with A’s words but also with his A’s desires. His answer can be expanded to include an implied chain of reasoning something like the following:

(I know how to get to Market Street) (and in fact I am driving the bus that will take you there) (and so, if indeed you want to go) Come on! I’ll take you (to Market Street).

Given the social context of the encounter, it is clear that the interlocutors are cooperating, not only in their social and verbal interaction, but also in terms of the social organization, here instantiated in miniature. (It is worth mentioning that for many Mexican interlocutors the logical leap in the driver’s response seems somewhat brusque, even dangerous: several colleagues, especially women, comment that they read the invitation as inappropriate, intrusive, and harassing.)

By contrast, on a rainy, sleeting night in Chicago, I witnessed the conversation in (26), between a busdriver, who was standing in the door of his parked vehicle, and a female University of Chicago undergraduate, in a rush, cold, and loaded down with a large stack of books. The place was the bus-stop, in front of the University library, where a dozen or so buses parked, each with a letter designating its route.

- (26) (A cold, rainy night in Chicago in 1978)  
A: Which bus do I take to International House?

B: The "A" bus.  
A: Thanks.

The crucially hidden datum here is that B, the busdriver, was in fact the driver of the "A" bus! He was at that moment standing blocking the "A" bus's door.

The driver in this case was obviously not cooperating; and it is precisely the Maxim of Quantity that allows us to see that he was not. By not saying, for example, "This is the bus you want" or even "I can take you there" he implicated that he had said all that he knew of relevance to the student's innocent question. Interpreting the question, in turn, as not simply a request for information but a plea for guidance, the fact that he omitted the crucial detail (that that was the "A" bus) violated the Maxim, permitting the (false) inference that "The 'A' bus that you want is not this one."

This driver's interactional attitude on this miserable night expressed itself through a refractory conversational turn: a miniature act of social rebellion against the situation, against the sleet, against imbecile students in general.

A different example comes from the Mexican village of Tepoztlán, where there is a certain tension between the Tepoztecos and the "foreigners," whether they be *gringos* or *chilangos* (natives of Mexico City), who have flooded to the village to rent houses and escape the urban glut. Relations between the two groups are fraught with suspicion and hostility. On this occasion, a group of city people arrived at a house in Tepoztlán which the owner had advertised for rent. The owner was not home, and his wife seemed somewhat reluctant to attend to the visitors: she hesitated to give them information about the house for rent, its availability, its cost, and so forth. Deciding that they would have to wait and talk with the man of the house, one of the city people asked the woman what her telephone number was, so that they could speak later with the owner. This mistrustful Tepoztecan lady replied:

(27) Suspicious lady in Tepoztlán  
"No estoy muy segura, pero creo que empieza con 8."  
(*I'm not sure, but I think it begins with eight.*)

We now come to the ethnographic moral of this excursion through conversational structure. The form of Zinacantec interaction, both conversational and otherwise, reveals something reminiscent of the latent hostility of the Chicago busdriver or the Tepoztecan housewife. Zinacantecs perceive themselves in competition with one another. Zinacantecs sometimes act as if they would prefer to live behind a one-way mirror: invisible, but omnipresent, keeping the secrets of their private lives, but sticking their noses shamelessly into everybody else's. In such circumstances, all conversation, each tidbit of leaked information, carries danger, or represents a breach in the wall of confidentiality. Social interaction in general, and above all its canonical instance--informal, spontaneous, public conversation--is dangerous. The characteristics, now seen as inextricably social, that conversation displays, simultaneously reflect and reinforce other features of social life in Zinacantec hamlets: social atomism, and an abiding sense of privacy.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Other aspects of this same complex of attitudes and behaviors are documented in Haviland and Haviland (1982) and (1983).

### Minimal maxims in action: an extended example

Public spoken exchanges in Zinacantán are virtually never free from the overall ambience of circumspection and limited cooperation that characterizes normal Zinacantec encounters with social alters. I return again to the *moral* character of Grice's maxims: expressed as imperatives, they impose a normative model on the exchange of information that must always be relative to socially prescribed standards (what "information" matters or is appropriately conveyed) and socially constituted activities (which may, for example, involve the exchange of "information" only collaterally, or not at all). Moreover, even when the explicit promulgation of facts is the business at hand, in Zinacantán as elsewhere, conversation is always at least a two-way street. One leaks one's own information to try to extract that of one's interlocutors; and one withholds knowledge--much as Zinacantec flower-sellers withhold blunt final announcements of prices--in order to see what it can buy in a subsequent exchange.

The nature of the process, and the ethnographic power of applying Gricean precepts to it, can best be seen in a situated example. I have chosen a rather special sort of case for extended treatment.

Much of the ellipsis of ordinary Zinacantec talk is made possible by the mutual familiarity of interlocutors. People who stop me on the path to inquire politely where I'm bound usually know a good deal about me (probably, often, where I'm bound). Moreover, despite the morbid precautions many Zinacantecs take to wall in their private doings behind fences and half-truths, a Zinacantec hamlet is a porous place: small, exposed, populated by spying eyes and ears. Private matters, in such places as Nabenchauk, quickly become public knowledge, via multiple routes. Thus a situation where what is mutually known is in some doubt has special interest.

Let me return to Holy Week, April 1985, in Nabenchauk. In Chapter 1, I presented fragments of conversation between a Zinacantec PRI<sup>39</sup> political boss and a ladino lawyer, who were cooking up ways to punish a couple of brothers who had been involved in a shooting in which the political boss's wife had been wounded. All in all, three passing women, on their way to the corn mill, were shot in the incident.

The event quickly acquired the character of a party-based factional dispute. The shooters were supporters of the PAN opposition party. R, the PRI political boss, took on the project of punishing them as a personal vendetta. He not only traveled to San Cristóbal to consult ladino lawyers, but he also tried to enlist the aid of the families of the other wounded women. The main obstacle here was party loyalties. The woman most badly wounded in the shooting was as it turned out married to a man from the same political party as the shooters, who, under pressure from his fellow PANistas, was unwilling to involve himself in the campaign against the drunken brothers. The wounded woman was from another hamlet, the daughter of a powerful PAN leader there.

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<sup>39</sup> The *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* had at this point enjoyed almost half a century of undisputed political control in Chiapas, as well as in Mexico as a whole. The opposition *Partido de Acción Nacional* (PAN) had surfaced in Zinacantán as an organized opposition, feeding on previous factional divisions, in the late 1970s. See Haviland (1987b) and Collier (1990) and (1990b) for more background on Zinacantec politics of the last two decades. Since January 1994, the politics of Chiapas Indians have garnered world attention. See Collier (1995).

The shootings occurred about dusk on Good Friday, the 5th of April. The wounded women were rushed to a hospital in San Cristóbal late that night, and they spent most of Easter weekend receiving medical treatment. The wife of the PANista required surgery to remove the bullet. At the same time, much of Zinacantán was involved in the last stages of Holy Week ritual. R assessed the extent of his support in Nabenchauk, hoping to enlist the aid of the families of all the wounded women in pursuing the shooters. Here is a brief extract from my fieldnotes of that weekend:

Up to that point [late on Easter Sunday] there had been general agreement between PAN and PRI that [the shooters] should be punished for the shooting. But there was already some wavering in the ranks of PAN, and there was a rumor going around that the PANistas were going to try to support [the father of the shooters]. The latest evidence that this was so was that the PAN husband of the most severely wounded woman was claiming she had recovered, [that he] was going to take her to [his cornfields in] Hot Country, [that he] had not even informed the parents (who are [important supporters of] PAN[ . . .] in Nachij) of the wounding.

At the crack of dawn on Monday, the 8th, R decided to go to the neighboring hamlet of Nachij where the parents of the wounded PANista woman lived, to tell them himself about the events. He would thereby discover if it was, indeed, true that they had heard nothing so far. He hoped he could rely on their parental loyalties over their political affiliations.

R arrived (with two silent companions, including me) at the compound of the parents of the wounded woman. The only people he could raise in answer to his repeated calls were some children, including a little girl who said that the occupants of the house were her grandparents. They were not at home. At R's request, she ran off to fetch her mother, who appears as W in the following transcript. What followed was an elaborate sparring match in which information was both exchanged and withheld, as the two conversants cooperated in the characteristically limited Zinacantec fashion.

(28) Tape 1985-2B, R reports shooting

3 w; totik  
Sir  
4 r; la  
Ma'am.

When W appears, she greets R (at line 3) with the standard polite expression used to an older male one does not recognize or with whom one has no close relationship.<sup>40</sup> R reciprocates with the correspondingly anonymous standard greeting from a senior male to a junior female, *la*.<sup>41</sup> The entire interaction is thus interactively framed in a particular way, as having a particular sort of footing (Goffman 1979): by their use of socially indexing address terms, R and W constitute their interaction as between socially unequal, opposite sex, and mutually anonymous persons. (As becomes evident later in

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<sup>40</sup> A closer relationship would, instead, entail an address form combining a title (*totik* 'sir' or *tot* 'father') with a name.

<sup>41</sup> *La* is also used as a reciprocal address term between spouses in formal situations. Whether it is etymologically related to the evidential clitic *la* mentioned below and in Chapter **Error! Bookmark not defined.** is unclear to me.

the conversation [lines 160-165], however, this convenient construal does not precisely correspond to the facts: W actually knows quite a good deal about who R--a past municipal president of Zinacantán and well-known political figure--is and what he is up to.)

W continues by asking R about the purpose of his visit.

- 5 w; pero k'usi la<sup>42</sup> x`elan mantal  
*What is your business?*
- 6 r; yu`un ka`uk li` ali. ali  
*I thought that (your father-in-law) was here*
- 7 mi ja` a- avalib mol li tot Petule  
*Is Father Peter your father-in-law?*
- 8 w; ja` a`a  
*Yes he is.*
- 9 r; yu`un ka`uk li`uk ali  
*I thought he was here.*

The polite skirmishing about who's who and what is mutually known continues as R explains that he had actually come in search of the senior man of the household. In line 6, R actually says nothing of the person he "thought was here"; he hesitates, having to decide exactly how to describe that person. He knows that any description will commit him to a particular stance about who he is, what his relationship to the referent is, and also, by implication, to some guess about what W's relationship is. At line 7, he thus ventures a guess--"Is Father Peter your father-in-law?"--which puts W's relationship (not only with the father-in-law but also with the wounded woman back in Nabenchauk) into direct focus. It also makes a general (and perhaps not fully ingenuous) claim about R's relationship to the father-in-law: he refers to him as "Father Peter," thus showing that he is on friendly enough terms with the man to use his first name, and to call him *tot* 'father' rather than the more distant *totik* 'sir' (literally, 'our father').

All of these miniature manoeuvres help to negotiate the level of "cooperation" that will characterize the ensuing conversation. Because the conditions on the exchange of "information" in Zinacantán depend precisely on the interlocutors' social relationships, what level of openness will obtain depends on how R and W mutually constitute their relationship in this moment. As the initiator here, R must take several tentative shots in the dark.

- 10 r; chkalbe ali  
*I wanted to tell him*
- 11 mu jna` mi o ya`yoj  
*I don't know if he's heard*
- 12 ati s- stzebik tey ta Nabenchauke  
*That their daughter there in Nabenchauk*
- 13 lajem ta bala  
*has been shot*

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<sup>42</sup> The evidential clitic *la* here indicates that W has been summoned by another person--the little girl--so that she has heard about the *mantal* 'orders' that she is about to receive from R from a third party. I examine the use of such evidential devices in detail in Chapter **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

14 w; aa?  
oh?  
15 r; ji`  
yes.

Here R carefully switches to third person referents (“I don’t know if *they* have heard...”), although he is clearly also testing--without directly asking--whether W herself has heard of the Nabenchauk shootings. Again the result is equivocal. W appears to respond as though she knew nothing about it, although there are indications later (lines 109ff) that there *have* indeed been at least some rumors.

R now goes on to give an account of the events of the previous Friday evening appropriately constructed for the purposes of the moment. In particular, he says nothing about the nature of the fight in question, or the political party affiliations of the shooters.

16 w; k'u ma xi laj ta bala  
*How on earth did she get shot?*  
17 r; ali<sup>43</sup>: mm  
uhhhh . . .  
18 oy mu jyakubeletik  
*There were some drunkards.*  
19 oy maj bail ti xmal ta vyernexe  
*There was a fight late on Friday.*  
20 ali  
21 va`i un laj smaj sbaik un  
*So, they finished fighting.*  
22 ali  
23 k'alal ali:  
*and when..*  
24 laj smaj sbaik une  
*when they'd finished fighting*  
25 ch`ech'ik ta be li ali krixchano une=  
*Some people were passing by on the path*  
[  
26 w; ji<sup>44</sup>  
27 r; = taj antze j`ak'panin  
*The woman was going to the corn mill.*  
28 i much'uk xa yak'be bala un  
*and they just shot at anybody.*  
29 lajem un  
*and she was hit.*  
[  
30 w; aaa  
31 j`ak'panin taj a- taj antz taje  
*So that woman was on her way to the mill.*  
[

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<sup>43</sup> The word *ali* is both an introductory definite article and a Zinacantec “hesitation form.”

<sup>44</sup> *Ji(i)* or *j(i)i`* is a particle of assent, ‘yes.’

32 r;                               jii ak' -panin un  
                                       Yes, taking corn to the mill.

R injects the first more personal note when he reveals, at line 33, that his own wife was also wounded.

33 r:    yu`un lajem k'alal ta yajval jna uk un  
           Even the mistress of my own house was also shot.

                                      [  
 34 w;                               aa  
 35                               aa yu`un=  
           Ah, is that so?

36 r;                               =lajem  
                                       Yes, she was shot.

Without elaborating on this personal tragedy, which provides R with an apparently sufficient (and also non-political) motive for being involved in the affair, R quickly returns to Father Petul's daughter. This, he continues, is why he came today.

37 r:    yan taj une  
           But as for that one  
 38        yu`un ali k'usi xa li tal kal o lavi une  
           What I've come to say now  
 39        yu`un ika`i li naxe  
           is that I heard this morning...  
 40        ka`ukuk me ayuk xa yal ti smalal une  
           I had thought her husband had already been to tell (you).  
 41        ka`i li nax une  
           but I heard this morning

R now characterizes information about the husband of the wounded woman brought to his attention "earlier today," attaching a hearsay clitic *la* in lines 42 and 45,<sup>45</sup> and acting out a hypothetical speech attributed to the irresponsible son-in-law in lines 43-44.

42           mu xa sk'an la xak' ta poxtael un  
               that [it is said] he no longer wants to have her treated medically.  
 43           yu`un yiluk yil  
               "Well, never mind.."  
 44           lek ti lajan ta (bala..) ((car passes))  
               "It is just as well that you got shot."  
 45           ta la skil ech'el ta olon osil  
               ta la s-kil ech'el ta olon osil  
               INC QUOT 3E-drag away(DIR) prep low land  
               They say he wants to drag her off to Hot Country.

R thus implicates a good deal about the miscreant son-in-law: his inexplicable lack of concern for his wife must derive from some unstated pressures. By contrast, R continues in the next lines with the facts as he himself has witnessed them. He includes

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<sup>45</sup> Transcript line 45, and selected later lines, are shown with full morpheme-by-morpheme glosses to facilitate the discussion of the detailed construction of the utterances in question.



no evidential hedges, and he remarks explicitly that the woman was treated in the hospital as a result of his own efforts.

46        pero li antz une ja` to ilok' tal ta ospital  
           *But the woman has only just gotten out of the hospital.*  
 47        te to`ox ta ospital ku`un ti chabje une  
           te     to`ox                    ta     ospital k-u`un  
           there at that time prep hospital 1E-agency  
           ti                    chabje                    une  
           ART(remote) day-before-yesterday pt  
           *I had her taken to the hospital the day before yesterday*

In line 47 the word *k-u`un* signals that the woman's presence at the hospital on Saturday was "as a result of my agency," that getting her medical attention was something R himself had to do against (again unstated) opposition or resistance.

Oddly, there has been no discussion of how badly the woman had been wounded. R goes on to mention that the doctors had not yet managed to remove the bullet from her thigh (because, as it turns out later, it was lodged close to a bone). It is only here, in truncated turns at lines 51 and 53, that W even appears to ask for such details.

48 r;     yu`un te matz'al li balae muk' lok'em  
           *The bullet is still lodged in her, it hasn't come out*  
           [  
 49 w;     jii  
 50 c;     muk' jelavem li balae=  
           *The bullet hasn't passed through*  
           [  
 51 w;             bu-  
                   *Where [is it]?*  
 52 r;   =li` li` to e  
   *It is just here.*  
   [  
 53 w;   bu  
 54        aaa  
           [  
 55 r;       tey matz'al ta yo`  
           *It is stuck in her thigh.*  
 56 w;     jii  
 57 r;     jii

R again inserts a comparative personal note, and then he returns to the business of most interest to him.

58 r;     yan li yajval jna jelavem  
           *My wife, on the other hand, had the bullet pass through.*  
           [  
 59 w;     mu-  
 60        jelavem  
           *It passed through.*  
 61 r;     ox vo` lajemik  
           *Three people were shot.*  
 62 w;     ox vo`

three people  
[  
63 r; pero k'usi lavi une  
But what I've come for now

What R wants to convey to Father Peter and his family is the irresponsible attitude of the wounded woman's husband, the unmarked third person subject "he" of line 65, and the *le`une* "that one" of line 68.

64 k'usi ali ikap o jol tal kal li` une  
what I'm angry about, and what I've come to say here  
65 yu`un mu sk'an xik' xa ech'el ta loktor  
is that he no longer wants to take her to the doctor  
66 yu`un xa  
because  
67 li yajval jna chtal ta kombi ta jlikel  
My wife is coming in a bus in a little while  
68 le` une bat to yalbel mi chik' tal ta lekil k'op  
We sent word to ask whether that one was going to bring her willingly.  
69 ome mu`yuk une mas lek che`e  
And if not, it would be better..  
70 ba kalbe sme` stot xichi un  
..for me to go tell the parents, I said to myself.

Now, for the first time, R begins to reveal the true nature of his errand. Less worried about the wounded women, R shows that his concern is with punishing the shooters. The husband of Father Peter's daughter, suggests R, is somehow compromised.

73 jna`tik mi yu`un is-  
Who knows what he--  
74 li smalale mu jna` k'u x`elan  
I don't know what the husband's plan is.  
75 chkal nox taj ta -  
I have though that perhaps..  
76 ta xkal nox jtuke mu jna` mi xch'un k'oponel min =  
..I am not sure if someone has been speaking to him  
77 =i-  
78 istzak tak'in k'usi xi  
Or perhaps if he's taken money (to drop the matter)

The references here are deliberately vague: who has done the "talking to" the delinquent husband, or who has offered him money is left unspecified. Indeed, it is not in R's interests to spell out his partisan concerns, since Father Peter is himself a leader in the opposition PAN party that appears to be trying to defend the shooters.

Instead, R merely contrasts the inexplicable indifference of the wounded woman's husband with his own energetic efforts to punish the wrongdoers.

79 yan taj ali ali..  
On the other hand ...  
80 much'u yak'oj bala  
the ones who did the shooting  
81 jchukoj xa jun

*I have jailed one of them already.*  
82 w; jiii  
    [  
83 r; jii  
84 jatavem to cha`vo`  
    *Two of them have fled.*  
85 w; aaa?  
    [  
86 r; ox-vo`ik  
    *There were three altogether*  
87 w; jii  
88 r; jii ..

Another short piece of theater is now inserted into the scene. A young woman, X, whom W had evidently dispatched to look for other members of Father Peter's family, now returns. W has a short conversation with X, which is in turn clearly designed for R to overhear.

89 w; ja` mi ati  
90 muk' buch'u le`e Paxku`  
    *Is no one there, Pascuala?*  
91 x; ch'abal  
    *nobody*  
92 w; aaa va`i lajem la taj sloxa taj jme`tike  
    *So you heard that our mother's Rosa has been hurt?*  
93 lajem la ta bala  
    *She's apparently been shot.*  
94 loxa ..  
    *Rosa.*

By speaking the rhetorical question ("You hear, don't you, that Rosa has [they say] been shot?"), embellished again with the evidential *la* (thus locating the information in R's mouth), W clearly triggers the implicature that she herself had heard nothing of the affair beforehand. Such a device, however, allows W never to have to say explicitly that she hasn't heard.

Now she turns her attention to R once more, explaining that the woman's parents he has come to speak to have gone to Zinacantán Center.

95 w; yu`un ch'abal li`ik yajval na  
    *The people of this house are not here.*  
96 yu`un batem ta Jteklum  
    *They've gone to the Ceremonial Center.*  
    [  
97 r; k'us- k'usi to van ora  
    *What time do you suppose..*  
98 chul la lavie  
    *They're coming back today, I hear.*

When R asks when they will return (having clearly already had information on the matter), W again takes refuge in a side conversation to avoid committing herself to an explicit answer. Instead she directs a question to X, who is able to deny knowledge directly.

- 99 w; ej, mu jna` mi-- k'u ora o chul sutike ch'abal?  
*Oh, I don't know if-- When will they come back, or won't they?*
- 100 x; mu jna` k'u ora chulik  
*I don't know what time they're arriving here.*
- 101 w; aa  
[
- 102 r; a chulik xa nan yu`van  
*Ah, they must be arriving here soon.*

Here R tries to press the issue. Surely the wounded woman's parents will be coming soon, unless of course they have gone to fulfill some ritual duties, such as advising a religious official.

- 103 r; much'u batem sk'elik  
*Who have they gone to help?*
- 104 x; (...)

Now W adopts the standard non-committal stance characteristic, as I have claimed, of normal polite Zinacantec interchanges. She complies in only the most minimal way with the Maxim of Quantity (taking explicit refuge in the Maxim of Quality). She claims not to be fully informed of her father-in-law's affairs.

- 105 w; yu`un la oy tzmeltzan snaik xiik chka`i  
*They have gone to fix their house, I heard them say.*
- 106 yu`un muk' bu-  
*because they haven't...*
- 107 muk' bu xka`i lek uk  
*I really didn't hear very well.*

R clearly must abandon this line of inquiry. So, he continues, the parents have not heard about the shooting?

- 108 r; aaa
- 109 mu k'u la mu ya`yojik un che`e=  
*So they haven't even heard (about the shooting) yet?*
- 110 w; =ch'abal a`a bu cha`iik  
*No, indeed, they haven't heard.*

W says they have not heard, but again her evidence is remarkably indirect. Other family members have recently left Nachij for Zinacantán Center, she says, implicating (without directly stating) that they would have said something, had they known.

- 111 w; ja` to laj batikuk ikil li ali  
*Why I just saw their (stepson) going*
- 112 li ali
- 113 yitz`in vinikal vo`on a`a  
*the brother of my husband*
- 114 pero ja` to laj batikuk  
*but they just (recently) set out*
- 115 r; aa
- 116 w; jii
- 117 ech' to la skrem li jtotikotik nax  
*I heard that the old man's son passed through earlier.*
- 118 s- te xcha`-krem a`a

119 ech' to`ox a`a  
*Yes he passed through.*  
120 pero  
*but*  
121 bat xa ta Jobel ikil  
*He appeared to be going to San Cristóbal*

This line of reasoning in turn prompts R to reveal a few more bits of his own intelligence, also involving the wounded woman's brother.

122 r; aa, yu`un ali  
*Ah, so...*  
123 yu`un yu`un ja` yech ika`itikotik lo`il un  
*We also heard the rumor that...*  
124 yu`un la ali  
125 o la i- isnupbeik la ta be skremal xiik un=  
*that [they say] they met her brother on the path*

Once again, the identity of the relevant protagonists here is never made clear: was it the wounded woman's brother (whom W has just mentioned)? And who was it that met him?

126 w; aa  
[  
127 r; = mu jna` mi volje bu iyilik taj ali  
*I don't know if it was yesterday that they saw him*  
128 mu jna` much'u junukal o  
*I don't know which one of (her brothers) it was.*  
129 w; ji  
130 r; mu ya`uk kalbetik xiik la un  
*"Let's not tell him," they supposedly said*  
131 w; a muk' bu yalbeike  
*Oh, they didn't tell him.*  
[  
132 r; jii  
133 w; aaa

Having now established that there seems to be a conspiracy, in which the wounded woman's husband is involved, neither to pursue the offenders in the shooting nor to inform the wounded woman's family, R continues the theme of the husband's callous indifference to his wife's well-being.

134 r; yech'o ti chkal une  
*That's why I say*  
135 w; jii  
136 r; yu`un mu sk'an spoxtaik lek un  
*that they don't want get her proper medical treatment*  
137 (yu`un mu jna` k'uxi un)  
*I don't know what (they're thinking).*  
138 labal utel la chak'beik  
*They give her nothing but scolding.*  
139 w; labal utel chak'be  
*He gives her nothing but scolding.*

140 r; [ jii

W now shows that she has understood R's errand, and at the same time maintains her own distance from the affair by indirectly reframing the "exchange of information" as having passed not from R to her, but from R to the wounded woman's family.

141 w; yu`nan te-  
142 tey snop ya`el yavil ya`i li k'ox tzebetik li`  
*They'll decide what to do now that the little girls (the daughters)  
have heard (about the affair).*

W thus tries to divert responsibility for passing on R's information from herself to the little daughters of Father Peter's house.<sup>46</sup> They will be the ones to send word.

143 w; mi o bu stak' ech`el mantal chbat yalbe sme` ta =  
*(They'll) see if they will send word to her mother.*  
144 =jlিকেলে  
*in a little while*  
[  
145 r; pero  
*but*  
146 w; (...) mu a`ibaj  
*can't understand..*  
147 r; cha`i li k'ox tzebetik une  
*the little girl (can't understand) [what she has heard].*  
148 yalal li muk'ot xa li vo`ot chakalbe komele  
*Thus I have purposely told you, a grown person*  
149 k'elo buch'u xatak'  
*You decide who you'll send*  
[  
150 w; yu`u- yu`un nox hhhh  
*well, uh . . .*

R is not satisfied with this suggestion, and he makes W's responsibility for his information explicit. You send someone to tell them, he commands.

151 r; mi o much'u xavalbeik pavor ba yalbel  
*if there is anyone you can ask the favor of, to go tell them*  
[  
152 w; tey- tey ta  
*there will . . .*

W accepts the request, but in the most non-committal terms, formulating her promise to send the message via someone yet to be found with syntax that eliminates almost every

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<sup>46</sup> As the wife of one of Father Peter's elder sons, W apparently lives in a separate household, unlike the little girl Paxku` with whom she has been carrying on side conversations. Paxku` who apparently lives in Father Peter's household proper.

possible trace of agency, recalling Ochs' observations about Malagasy verbal voice.<sup>47</sup> A messenger, *y-ajval*, literally 'their master' (i.e., a person to do something for the wounded woman's parents) will--as she puts it--"receive looking for on their behalf." That is, someone will be found to go and tell the parents, but with no names named and no direct responsibility taken.

153 w; tey ta sa`--  
tey ta -s-sa`  
there prep COMP-3e-search for  
*There will be found--.*

154 xich' sa`bel ech'el yajval  
x-y-ich' sa`-b-el ech'el y-ajval  
asp-3e-receive search-BEN-NOM away(DIR) 3E-owner  
*A messenger will be found.*

155 r; [ jii  
156 w; te te ta chalbeik nan  
*He'll tell them perhaps.*

For further information, offers R, come to me. And, he continues, I suppose you know who I am.

157 r; ji ji mi`n yu`un tzk'an cha`ibe smelol  
*If they want to have the affair explained*

[  
158 w; jii

159 r; ja` te xisjak'be un  
*they can ask me about it.*

160 yalal ti xavojtikinon nan e  
*I suppose you recognize me.*

[  
161 w; aa

162 an xakojtikin  
*Why yes I know you.*

163 r; jii

164 w; ji xakojtikin nan a`a  
*Yes I do perhaps know you.*

[  
165 r; ji

W continues to be uncomfortable with the responsibility for R's information. R, however, insists.

166 w; mi mu tey  
*If you don't...*

167 tin ali  
*if uh ...*

---

<sup>47</sup> In Chapter **Error! Bookmark not defined.**, I discuss a variety of morphological devices in Tzotzil that are put to pragmatic use in manipulating attributions of agency and responsibility.

168 muk' bu j- chich' tak'bel ech'el mantale  
*If a message can't be sent...*

169 r; an tek tek nop ava`i xa un  
*Well, you decide what to do.*

170 w; [ ji

171 r; m- muk' bu kalbe li k'oxetik yech'o ya`uk kalbeik  
*I purposely didn't tell the children (here), that's why I asked them*

172 mi o buch'u li` muk'ta krixchano  
*if there were any adults around*

173 sa'bekon tal xkut un  
*"Bring me (an adult)," I told them*

174 w; aa

175 r; jii

176 w; jii

177 r; ji yalal ti chakalbe komel smelol chk taje  
*Yes, so that's why I have deliberately told you what happened this way*

R now drops yet another piece of indirect information, evidently in part to indicate how seriously he is taking the matter. The delinquent husband is being watched; the municipal magistrate, the *agente*, is involved.

178 r; tey to komem yajval le` a`a  
*Someone stayed behind to watch him.*

179 bat to yalbel yu`un ali  
*Someone went to tell him*

180 ali ajente mi mi tuk' chik' tal ta poxtael  
*on behalf of the magistrate, to ask (the husband) if he would bring her for treatment*

181 w; [ a taj ali taj =  
*oh, that-- her--*

182 =smalale  
*her husband?*

183 r; jii  
*yes*

184 w; jii

185 r; pero kalbe xa onoxe  
*But I had already told him*

186 albo komel ya`i ta jamal  
*"Tell him openly," he heard openly*

187 yu`un chba kalbe sme` stot lavie xkut ech'el  
*"I'm going to tell the father and mother now," I said to him before leaving.*

188 w; aa

189 r; jii

190 w; aa

191 r; jii

192 w; aa

Once again, and somewhat more explicitly, R tries to press W into taking direct responsibility for conveying the information he has brought.

193 r; yech'o yalal ti cava`iik une  
*So you have now heard about it.*

194 muk' bu xka`i mu xachiik ya`el=



Don't say "I haven't heard about it."  
 [  
 195 w; a teyuk- jii  
*alright*  
 196 r; = i mas lek tin oyuk buch'u spas pavor junuk o  
*It would be better if someone will do the favor*  
 197 bu chak' anbeik pavor  
*Someone you can ask the favor of*  
 198 ba yalbe  
*to go and tell them.*

Although she still resists, W is now forced to commit herself to passing the information on, at least to the wounded woman's mother.

199 w; a yu`nan tey chvinaj=  
*Why, it will perhaps become apparent*  
 [  
 200 r; jii  
 201 w; = mi o buch'u chalbe ech'el tana un  
*if there is someone who will go and tell them later*  
 202 ja` taj chich' albel taj sme`e  
*Her mother will surely be told.*  
 [  
 203 r; jii

Only now that he has received W's assurances that she will pass the information along does R return to the nature of the woman's injuries.

204 r; le` une jna`tik k'u x`elan  
*As far as that one [the woman], who knows what will happen*  
 [  
 205 w; ji  
 206 r; jna`tik mi x`ech' yu`une  
*Who knows if she will survive it.*  
 207 yu`un ja` chopol li k'u staoj bak  
*Because it's bad that it hit her bone.*  
 208 w; staoj bak  
*It hit her bone?*  
 [  
 209 r; staoj bak te mat' zal  
*It is lodged near the bone.*  
 [  
 210 w; ja` chopol taj muk' jelavem  
*It's bad that it didn't pass through.*  
 211 r; ji mu`yuk  
*Right, it didn't*  
 212 te pajem ta bak un  
*It's stuck there by the bone*  
 213 w; ja` chopo:l  
*That's bad*  
 [  
 214 r; jii  
 215 yan li cha` vo`e jelavem  
*But with the other two, it passed through*

216 w; [ aa  
 217 jii  
 218 r; jii  
 219 w; aa

With the main business of the errand settled, there remains only a final polite repetition of the main facts that have been exchanged.

220 r; ja` yech chk taj une  
*That's how it is.*

221 w; [ teyuk<sup>48</sup> tey chich' sa`bel ech'el =  
*Okay, someone will be found to take (the message)*

222 =mi o buch'u chba yich' albel taj sme`  
*if there is someone will go take the message to her mother*

223 ta Jteklume  
*in Zinacantán Center*

224 yu`un batemik ta Jteklum  
*because they've gone to the Center*

225 r; aa  
 226 w; jii  
 227 r; tek albo ya`i  
*Alright, tell them*

228 yu`un te te te li  
 [

229 w; an teyuk  
*okay*

As an apparent afterthought, R extends the conversation in order to elaborate the role he is taking in the whole affair. He now makes it clear that he intends to hound the shooters, suggesting that although Father Peter's son-in-law--the wounded woman's husband--may be reluctant to take such action, perhaps the old man himself will be more willing to collaborate on his daughter's behalf.

230 r; li sk'oplale  
*Because the affair remains to be settled*

231 yolel ta jmeltzanbe li vo`on a`a  
*I am going to settle it myself*

232 muk' bu ta xkikta jba  
*I'm not going to give up*

233 muk' bu ta jkolta vo`on a`a  
*I'm not going to let (them) go free*

234 yu`un jchukoj xa li june  
*for I've already jailed one of them*

---

<sup>48</sup> This *tey-uk* (literally, 'there-SUBJUNCTIVE,' i.e., 'let it be there/then'), which appears (as *tek*) in line 227 and again in 229, means effectively "agreed" or "OK," and signals that one party or the other to the negotiation is ready for the conversation to terminate. It is a 'pre-closing,' by virtue of signaling that the main business at hand has been successfully transacted, thus, as it were, leaving nothing more to say. W tries again to close the conversation by using *teyuk* below, starting at line 262.

235 w; ji chukul taj ali taj jmilvaneje=  
*Yes that one murderer is jailed*  
[  
236 r; jchukoj xa  
*I've jailed him*  
237 w; = slaj- taj j`ak'bala xkaltik  
*That is, the shooter, as we say.*  
[  
238 r; jchukoj xa jun  
*I've already jailed one*  
239 i cha`vo` jatavem  
*and two have fled*  
240 w; jii  
241 r; ji  
242 pero ta jk`el k`u ta jcha`le li vo`on a`a  
*But I am going to see what I can do to them*

In order further to enlist the old man's support, R adds even more gossip about the misbehavior and inappropriate attitudes of the son-in-law.

243 pero k`usi taje  
*But what is important is..*  
244 yu`un mu sk`an stik` sba un  
*that (the husband) doesn't want to involve himself*  
245 w; jii  
246 r; jii  
247 w; aa  
248 r; yech laj jlajesan jtak`in xi la  
*He says "I'll just exhaust my money for nothing"*  
249 yu`un la-  
250 oy chut  
*because he has scolded*  
251 chut la taj yajnil une  
*he evidently scolds his wife*  
252 w; ji ta xut o taj yajnil une  
*yes he scolds his wife over it*

This set of disclosures allows R to portray himself as simply showing proper respect and concern for Father Peter, the "gentleman" of line 255.

253 r; jii yech`o komo  
*yes and since*  
254 jna`oj -  
*I knew*  
255 jna`oj ti ja` stzebik li mol une  
*since I knew that she was the daughter of the old gentleman*  
256 yech`o ti ta xkalbe une  
*that's why I'm telling him*  
257 w; a ja` stzebik a`a  
*yes it is their daughter*  
[  
258 r; jii  
259 ja`  
260 w; ja` a`a

261 r; jii

W again tries to disengage, with the standard *teyuk*, 'agreed' (see footnote 48) which signals that the errand has been understood and accepted. R adds one further note about his own concern and efforts in the affair.

262 w; ji teyuk te ta  
Yes, well alright, I'll

[  
263 r; ja` onox te xi  
264 te xisalet ta sk'elel li chabje oxje  
I've been running around doing this yesterday and the day before

265 w; ji  
266 r; ji  
267 w; aa  
268 r; ja` yech  
that's right

Finally, R takes his leave, insisting one last time that his literal message be relayed, but now confident that the wider context of his concerns has also been selectively established.

269 w; a teyuk ika`ikotik  
Okay, we have heard (the message)

[  
270 r; lek ya`el ti ava`i tek takbo mantal un  
It is good you've heard, so go ahead and send word

271 w; a teyuk tey chich' takbel  
Okay, they will be sent (word)

[  
272 r; jii  
273 ava`i u:n  
So you've heard.

274 w; ika`i:  
I've heard

[  
275 r; ej, ta me xibat un yay  
I am going now, Miss

276 w; batan totik  
Go, sir.

By late that same day we heard the news that the father of the wounded woman had come to Nabenchauk, in order to upbraid his son-in-law, and to insure that the woman would indeed go into San Cristóbal to sign the various legal depositions that would be required in order to prosecute the shooters.

This extended example illustrates an overall style or tenor of certain sorts of semi-public interaction in Zinacantán. There is certainly conversational cooperation which allows inferences to flow from relatives of Grice's maxims. Moreover, the relationship between inference and the activity at hand is of a familiar bi-directional sort. To know what sorts of inference to draw protagonists must understand what sort of interaction they are engaged in. But they also set the parameters on the interaction itself by giving evidence about the inferences they are drawing.

Gumperz, in a discussion of inferences about “activity types” or “goals” triggered by prosodic, paralinguistic and other “contextualization cues” argues that the “inferential processes referred to here are implicature-like” (1990:13). These inferences include, centrally, understandings of what sort of cooperation is appropriate to the activity at hand. Furthermore, as should be clear in the case of Zinacantán, cooperation is itself a situation- or activity-relative notion, partly grounded in social conventions and partly constructed moment by moment in an evolving interaction. Situated “exchanges of information” between R and W show us something more. Inferences which participants draw about the nature and goals of a given activity are not simply “implicature-like” --that is, unstated, but to be derived by specific principles from the general conditions of social interaction. Rather, implicatures in general are bound to contexts, to the activities, in which they are warranted. Implicature is thus a metapragmatic notion: it involves some (presupposing or entailing) claim about the nature of the surrounding activity, and hence about the sort of cooperation that obtains within it.

Replying to Grice, out of petrol, that there is a petrol station around the corner, permits the implicature that Grice can get his petrol there. Said implicature--and the entire triggering and inferential process--thereby (signals and is a symptom of) the cooperative nature of the exchange (what Grice was doing when he confessed to be out of petrol, and what you were doing by making your “suggestion”). Correspondingly, when W responds to R’s request that word be sent to Father Peter with the indirect undertaking that “a messenger will be sought for them,” she implicates “but I myself am not taking direct responsibility for the message.” Said implicature again regimented the interaction itself: “Yes, I am hearing what you are saying, but my role here is relay, not direct participant.” The interaction thus regimented or defined is itself available for further tuning. This is precisely what R--not missing the nuances of W’s performance--goes on to do: to adjust its parameters.

### **Metaphors of interaction: greeting and leave taking**

Let me end this chapter with a suggestive metaphor derived from Zinacantec conversational structure.

Without developing the details, it is sufficient to note that all conversations, whether in Tzotzil or some other language, tend to display a similar sort of three-part structure:

(29) Rough structure for a conversation

- (1) the opening, or introduction, which typically contains an opening salutation; as in the analysis of Schegloff (1968), the opening itself has a complex micro-structure, with a summons and response, an identificatory sequence, and so forth.
- (2) the body of the conversation--whatever it is that the interlocutors have to say to each other on one or various themes.

- (3) a closing (Schegloff and Sacks 1973). Sometimes, an imminent closing is signaled by a “pre-closing” which presages the end of the interaction. For example, “(pause) Well, I guess you have to get back to work...” or “Well, so when will we talk again?” are formulaic indications that a conversation needs to be drawn to a close. As we saw in the last extended example, Tzotzil speakers use the word *teyuk* ‘let it be that way’ or more loosely ‘agreed,’ as a pre-closing in this sense. The word signals that the primary business of the interaction has been settled and that at least one party (the one who first says *teyuk*) wants the interchange to come to an end. The closing itself typically contains leave-taking formulas: *goodbye*, *adiós*, *see you later*, and so forth.

In Tzotzil the leave-taking has a certain literal finality about it:

- (30) Tzotzil leave-taking (and short salutation)  
A: Chibat. (I’m going.)  
B: Batan. (Go!)

Although there are other sorts of leave-taking formula, which incorporate different perspectives (see Laver 1981), I will not describe them here. The form shown in (30) is by far the most common way to end an interaction. It is, indeed, exactly how R and W ended their interaction, although the turns were there augmented by the appropriate address terms:

- (31) End of the interaction between R and W  
275 r; ej, ta me xibat un yay  
I am going now, Miss  
276 w; batan totik  
Go, sir.

The interactive metaphor appears in the case not of full conversations, but rather of short interactions, reduced conversational fragments, formulaic greetings without further content. When two Zinacantecs meet each other fleetingly on the path, for instance, etiquette requires a verbal salutation. Ordinarily, these brief salutations themselves may be analyzed as reduced forms of complete conversations. Thus, for example, in both English and Guugu Yimithirr, an Aboriginal language of Australia, a minimal greeting follows the pattern of a conversational *opening*.

- (32) Short greetings in English and Guugu Yimithirr  
E: Hello! Hi! Howdy!  
GY: Wanhtharra (‘How?’ [as in “How are you?”])

In Tzotzil, by contrast, these brief and reduced encounters on the path appear to be derived not from the introductory, opening part of a full conversation, but rather from the *closing* or the *leave-taking*. When two Zinacantecs meet on the path, they say: “I’m going” -- “Go, then!” -- just as in the closing sequence of (30).<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Note that in Spanish a brief *saludo*, even where it appears to have the form of a closing, often has an opening *meaning*: it may incorporate a promise or invitation, which prefigures a *future* interaction: *hasta luego* ‘until later.’ Or it may represent a *salutation* in a quite literal sense: *que le vaya bien!* ‘may it go well with you’ or *adios* ‘to God!’ (Compare the etymology of English *goodbye*, “God be with you.”) Of course, the form of

If, as a reasonable reading of Grice would have it, conversational habits and customs have both a logical and a structural relationship to other aspects of social life, it seems suggestive that, in Zinacantán, a greeting represents, metaphorically, a leave-taking: not the opening, but rather the closing off, of a social interaction. In the same spirit, I think, are the semi-cooperative *minimal* maxims of Zinacantec conversation.

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Spanish greetings varies much from place to place; forms like *Hola* 'hello' and *qué tal?* 'what's up' occur with regularity, often to initiate exchanges which are expected to go beyond mere salutations. In the Spanish of San Cristóbal de las Casas, as elsewhere in rural Mexico, it is frequent to hear greetings that appear to be calques from neighboring Indian languages: *ya me voy* 'I'm going now.'