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**Mu xa xtak'av: "He doesn't answer"**

Society normally regiments argument: the kinds of things about which one fights, with whom, and the frontiers of conflict and possible resolutions. But arguments themselves in uniquely and potentially catastrophic ways rearrange both social relationships and the possibilities for their future rearrangement. Based on a Zinacantec court case to resolve a long running family land dispute, I consider first a Zinacantec theory of the links between mutual talk and sociality. I consider both internal, sequential facts of Zinacantec fighting, and wider sociopolitical constraints on who can fight with whom and when, as illustrated by evolving realignment and rupture in an extended Zinacantec family. Arguments in Zinacantán, while nominally about disputed facts and their construals, tend to revolve around skirmishes over power and authority, both as conceived globally and as interactively constituted in arguments themselves. However, "power and authority" are pragmatically realized interactively in speech and involve various kinds of "answering" or response, in both amicable and argumentative talk. Whereas orderly disputes may refashion social arrangements but leave them largely intact, a common Zinacantec idiom for winning a verbal battle—reducing one's opponent to silence—suggests one way an argument can entirely put an end to a social relationship. [Tzotzil, Mayan, Zinacantán, Chiapas, Mexico, fights, verbal interaction, legal argument, indexicality, ritual language, land tenure]

What does it take for people to fight, and I mean *really* to fight: to transform what might have been an amicable social relationship, warts and all, to open antagonism and perhaps to complete rupture? (And what could it mean to “win” such a fight?) The people I work with in southeastern Mexico have an explicit theory about one sort of ‘rupture’ that fights can produce—a social relationship characterized by profound and often enduring mutual silence—and they seem to live through cataclysmic, transformational fights resulting in such silence with disconcerting regularity.

There are many ways to explain the brittleness and susceptibility to eventual fracture of certain relationships in the Tzotzil (Mayan) speaking community of Zinacantán, in highland Chiapas. Partly, as everywhere, it is a matter of what kind of person you are: some people are feistier than others and have bigger toes to step on. A husband and his family are suspicious of a new bride’s loyalties, and vice versa. People are concerned both with prying neighbors and with prying on neighbors. They fight over possessions: anyone who has anything, from wealth and happiness or a 3-ton truck to an embroidered skirt or new pot, fears and expects envy (and perhaps concomitant witchcraft) from a neighbor who doesn’t—or even from one who, meanly, does. In recent times, most public disputes seem to center on inherited land. Siblings—especially brothers—are in competition for resources, particularly their parents’ property, even if recent population growth has reduced inheritable land to little more than a potential house plot.

It was once the case that Zinacantec parents bequeathed land, mostly to their sons (and usually in order from eldest to youngest) at their pleasure (see G. Collier 1975), and contingent on the inheritors' continuing to render care and assistance to the parents in their old age and, crucially, to contribute to their burial costs. Parents were free, however, to complain to community officials and to reclaim land if the inheritors did not comply. As Mexican law has gradually come more directly to influence Zinacantec patterns of land tenure—mostly as Zinacantecs themselves have learned to employ Mexican bureaucratic institutions for their own—legal protection for inheritors has made it less easy for disgruntled parents simply to dispossess estranged children from inherited land. One result has been increased bureaucratic caution when plots of land are “officially” transferred to offspring as opposed to simply made available for their use. Although there is no space to give full details here, disputing parties have multiple possibilities for pursuing land disputes. As with all bureaucratic transactions in modern indigenous Mexico the intricacies of choice between legal options involve everything from affiliation with political parties and networks of friends or allies, to knowledge of Spanish, literacy, and the contingencies of financial resources, potential witnesses, and the existence of written documents to substantiate claims.

When people fight over land and other matters, things can come to blows (and in post-Zapatista times Zinacantecs may resort to more serious weapons). Local courts thus sometimes have to deal with brothers who have punched each other in a drunken rage, husbands who have battered (or sometimes been battered by) their wives, and suspected witches dragged from their houses in the middle of the night who have survived to complain to a magistrate about it.

Usually, however, Zinacantecs fight with words. A powerful axiom of modern linguistic anthropology puts interaction—the real time encounter of interlocutors—at the heart of multiple mutually reinforcing “orders of indexicality” (Silverstein 2003) from which most of our evidence for social categories writ large must be drawn. People talking together, and the linguistic forms they employ, give us first order, ground-level evidence about social life writ small. Higher-order theorizing (native but also analytic) about such first-order encounters is the basic stuff of further social analysis. In Zinacantán, for example, just as friendliness is framed in a verbal idiom, so, too, is antagonism: when things go well, people *lek sk’opon sbaik* ‘talk together well’; when they don’t, *mu xa sk’opon sbaik* ‘they no longer talk to each other’ at all. “Talking together,” in fact, is a standard euphemism for being a friend, an ally, or a lover; it is what miscreant teenagers and would-be spouses do, as well as formal petitioners seeking a favor, politicians making a deal, or even just friends agreeing to hang out together. When agreements are reached or arrangements made in a proper way, they are said to have been achieved *ta lekil k’op* ‘with good words.’ On the other hand, the root *k’op* ‘speech, language, word’ also means ‘serious matter, dispute, fight,’ especially when grammatically possessed. When people have a disagreement, *oy s-k’op* (3E-k’op)<sup>1</sup>, literally ‘their word exists, i.e., there is a dispute between them,’ and if the matter is complex people observe that *ep s-k’op-lal* (3E-word-SUF) ‘there’s a lot to be said about it.’ Telling a lie is to *nop k’op*, literally ‘think (a) word.’ The transitive verb of saying *ut* ‘to tell someone [something]’ also means ‘to scold’ or ‘to upbraid,’ and its reflexive form comes close in meaning to verbal ‘fighting’: a mutual exchange of angry words. When people *yutoj sbaik* ‘have scolded each other’ they have quarreled in such a way that one can presume their

relationship to be somehow at least temporarily broken. This is the metaphor behind the name for a magistrate or dispute settler, *j-pas-k'op* or *j-meltzanej-k'op*, literally “maker’ or ‘fixer of words.’ All of these verbal tropes for social relationships rely variously on how people actually address themselves to one another in different face-to-face situations, and the stances (DuBois 2007, and see Jaffe 2009) they adopt on such occasions. By attention to specific formal details of how argumentative exchanges are constructed, “the sociocultural reality manifested in-and-by discursive interaction becomes analytically visible, an immanent semiotic fact in such events of self- and other-definition” (Silverstein 2003:227).

In this paper, I consider one main aspect of Zinacantec verbal fights: how people sometimes conceive of winning them by reducing an opponent to silence. But silence has its own social and interactive consequences, and these too will be part of my concern. The overall theme, shared by other papers in this issue, is the universal tension between opposition and collaboration in social life, or between aggression and other kinds of engagement (and non-engagement). Society mediates these tensions by providing the spaces in which people come together for both conjoint and disjoint ends, for both competition and cooperation. The arenas in which both fights and peace are manifest are in some sense the same, just as conflict and agreement are intertwined and conceptually inseparable. Thus, to summarize with an aphorism, fighting is constitutive of social order, even as it transforms it.

An ambiguity in the word ‘fight’ points in the same direction, for only sometimes do we mean by ‘fight’ a gloves-off, no-holds-barred free-for-all. More often fights are heavily regimented, partly orchestrated, rule-governed battles—a chess or basketball game, a boxing match, or a debate—with more or less well-

defined “rules of battle.” (Even in war, where people are actively trying to kill one another, so-called “rules of engagement” remain rules, and combatants and commanders-in-chief are liable to be sanctioned for ignoring them, or so we hope.) Courtrooms, which will be one locus of attention in this study, are also arenas of combat with well defined constraints on open aggression, and they have received considerable attention, both in general and in the same ethnographic area which concerns me (see for example J. Collier 1973, Brown 1990). Explicit discourse about fights can both reflect and help lay out ground rules of battle (consider everything from Robert’s *Rules* to those of the Marquis of Queensbury<sup>2</sup>) and part of my focus will be fragments of such Zinacantec meta-argument.

I first present evidence for the conceptual link in Zinacantán between affiliation and mutual speech by showing how breaches in one are taken to imply breakdowns in the other. I consider how pronominal usage and other mechanisms of voicing and framing (including the use of parallel speech reminiscent of “ritual” language) allow shifting engagement and disengagement of protagonists, thus also altering the explicit or “onstage” possibilities for verbal contention by bringing people in and out of “mutual speech.” After a short digression on the nature of “answering” or “replying” in mutual talk and stylized Tzotzil “verbal duels,” and corresponding evidence about a Zinacantec theory of silencing one’s opponent in a fight, I turn briefly to what one might consider the most orderly Zinacantec arguments—in this case the settlement of a marriage dispute by family elders—which tame verbal aggression by allowing it to surface only in highly constrained forms (formulaic scolding, mocking, joking, stylized submission, and so on). Finally I consider a more drastic example of how social “order, although it normally contains and foments only

certain orderly kinds of disorder, can still provide mechanisms to silence “replies,” thus potentially snuffing out social interaction altogether.

### **1. Greetings, silence, and anger**

My data derive from the last decades of a prolonged family fight, centered on the vitriolic dispute between Paco, a senior man with a distinguished ritual career, and his son-in-law Ran, a young political leader. After many years of squabbling about different pieces of land, variously bequeathed by Paco to his children, including Ran’s wife, and shuffled amongst them as circumstances changed, Paco—now old, deaf, and almost blind—had summoned all his children to the municipal town hall to complain about their behavior. As mentioned, according to Zinacantec tradition in return for inherited land children must show their parents respect and in particular help feed and care for them as they grow old. Although Paco lived with his adult daughters and enjoyed an uneasy kind of cooperation with his younger son Antun, he had for years been at odds with both his older son and with Ran, Paco’s eldest daughter’s husband, over the fact that they inherited land from the old man but maintained only minimal contact with him. As everyone knew, “*Muk’ bu lek sk’opon sbaik.*” “They do not talk together well.”

Figure 1 shows the rough spatial layout of the climactic confrontation at the court. Several hamlet and municipal officials sit in a row on a bench in front of the town hall; they orchestrate the hearing by directing questions at individuals and trying to tame unwanted insurrection. The central combatants are the old man Paco and his son-in-law and enemy Ran. Flanking the old man is his younger son Antun, currently allied with his father, although he formerly followed Ran along with his older brother

in shunning the old man. In between, but singled out spatially and in terms of formal recognition by the dispute settlers, sits Xap, another politically influential man who has come to help the old man Paco present his case. (The author, inextricably linked in the public eye with Paco, sits on the old man's left with a tape recorder, whose microphone has been ostentatiously set on the floor in front of the old man.<sup>3</sup>) Both sides have come *en masse*, with relatives, political allies, and spokespersons skilled in the language of public argument. Toward the back of the assembled crowd of onlookers but directly behind their principals stand the women from both Paco and Antun's immediate households. Similarly, members of Ran's household (including his wife, Paco's daughter) are arrayed behind Ran in the crowd, standing next to Paco's older son—allied with Ran against his father—and his family.

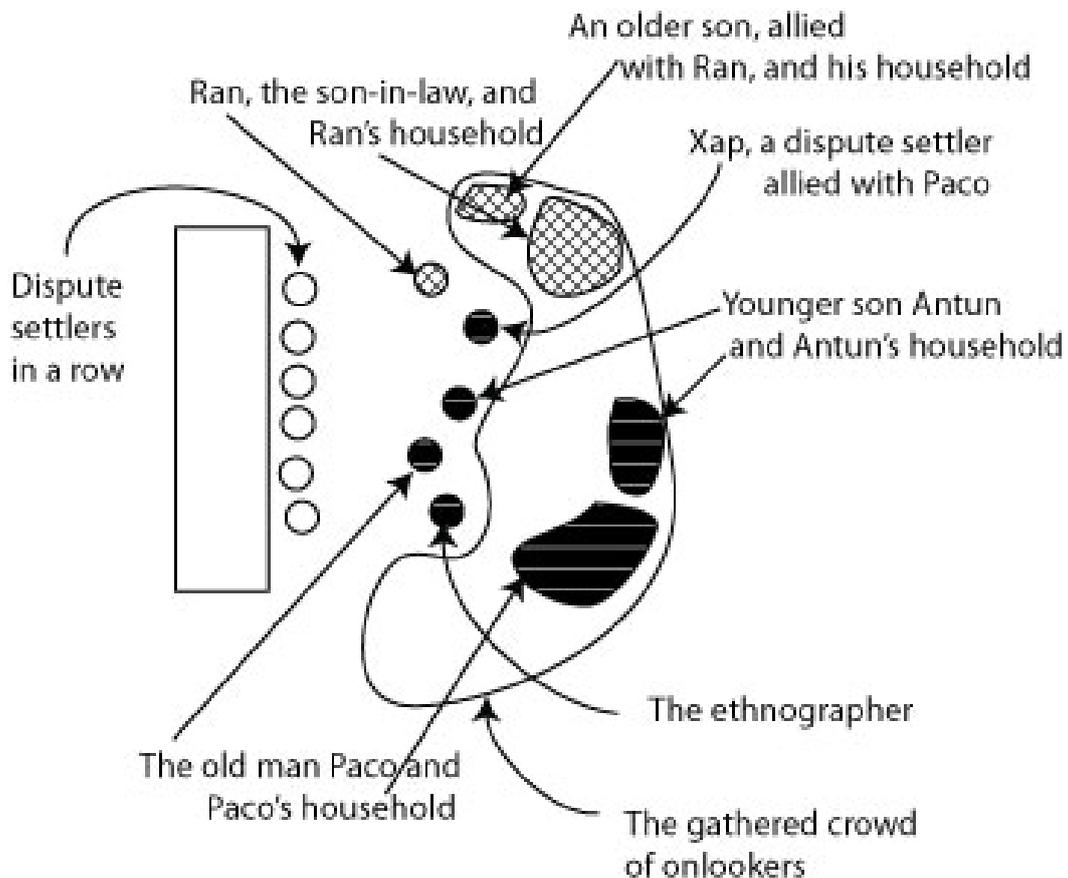


Figure 1: the rough spatial layout of protagonists at the town hall.



normally involves two or more matched lines which differ only in the root of the final lexical word (Haviland 1992, 2000c), although considerable flexibility is possible in how parallel lines are constructed. In Figure 2 I borrow a representational device DuBois, in his studies of dialogic syntax, has dubbed a “diagraph” (DuBois 2001) to display the partly parallel structure shared by Paco’s opening lines.

1	mu xa x-a-k'opon a-	me` //	<i>You no longer speak to your mother.</i>
	NEG CL ASP-2E-speak 2E-	mother	
2	mu x-a-k'opon . a-ni`	me`-el	<i>You don't speak to your mother-in-law.</i>
	NEG ASP-2E-speak 2E-AFFINE-	mother-SUF	

Figure 2. Diagraph of a near parallel couplet

Paco’s use of couplet language lends weight and authority to his words, because it alludes to his mastery of ritual language from a lifetime of cargo service. It also highlights the intensity of the old man’s anger, since intensity of feeling is conventionally indexed precisely by this departure from ordinary conversational language (see Gossen 1974b). Even the exact choice of the final doublet is a sly accusation. Part of the son-in-law Ran’s respectful treatment toward his mother-in-law would include routinely addressing her not as ‘mother-in-law’ at all but more intimately as *me`* ‘mother,’ a canon of ignored etiquette captured in Paco’s pairing of *a-me`* (2E-mother) ‘your mother’ with *a-ni`-me`el* (2E-affine-mother) ‘your mother-in-law.’

Ran retorts in turn, building dialogically on Paco’s opening salvo. First he demands rhetorically (line 4 in the transcript fragment above), “Am I the one who

doesn't speak?" With studied pronominal indirection<sup>5</sup> he launches his counter accusation not directly at Paco but in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural (line 8), footing his remark so as to address it to the audience at hand (that is to the assembled multitude, most pointedly the magistrates themselves<sup>6</sup>) rather than to his accuser, who is now subsumed under an unspecified 3<sup>rd</sup> person collectivity.

6	<b>Ran</b> ; ali vo`one	<i>As for me</i>
7	chik'opoje	<i>I do speak.</i>
8	mi ja`uk xtak'avik	<i>But they don't even answer.</i>
	[	
9	<b>Paco</b> ; ma`uk yech	<i>That's not the right way to act.</i>

In the sequence that follows, Paco uses similar pronominal delicacy to make clear by switching to the plural<sup>7</sup> (between lines 10 and 11—see the Tzotzil glosses included on the transcript below) that it is not only Ran he is criticizing. “Have you no mouths? Are you animals?” he demands. He gives the offense a social and collective character by extending it explicitly—since Tzotzil plural is infrequent in speech and never grammatically obligatory—to a nonetheless underspecified set of 2<sup>nd</sup> person addressees, suggesting that Ran and his whole family (including, most damningly, Paco’s own daughter, Ran’s wife) fail to offer even the minimal expected greetings. In a pragmatic countermove to Ran’s pronominal indirection (which obliquely demonstrated that he was not really in dialogue with his father-in-law but instead with the magistrates), Paco goes directly on the attack against his son-in-law and his entire entourage. He also laterally addresses Ran’s own pragmatic move (that is, addressing the magistrates rather than his opponent), at lines 13 and 16, by observing scathingly and also in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person that Ran, a former magistrate himself, should know better how to behave.

However, starting at line 12, in unabashed shouting overlap Ran counters that it is instead his parents-in-law who do not respond to his greetings, although “even their disgusting black dog,<sup>8</sup> following close behind, will wag its tail.”

10 **Paco**; mi muk' av- e

Q NEG 2E- mouth

*Do you have no mouths?*

11 mi animal -oxuk

Q animal -2APL

*Are you animals?*

[

12 **Ran**; o x- xtijet jkot sil ik'al tz'i`

*They have their awful black dog following behind*

[

13 **Paco**; lok'em jpas-k'op

*A former dispute settler*

[

14 **Ran**; ja` =

*And it--*

15 =sbitzluj sne

-- *wags its tail.*

16 **Paco**; lok'em jpas-rason

*A former fixer of disputes.*

[

17 **Ran**; yan stukike mi ja`uk xtak'avik

*But they themselves don't bother to answer.*

I argued above, partly on the basis of the standard usage of Tzotzil verbs like ‘speak’ and ‘tell,’ that in Zinacantán a breakdown in mutual speech is a central diagnostic index of social antagonism: people fighting with each other eschew talking together, and they as well as others draw appropriate conclusions. This first discursive fragment demonstrates in multiple ways the same point: that talk is a basic

Zinacantec idiom of amicability. In this public squabble, an explicit substantive bone of contention *is* mutual talk (and its absence). The discourse also demonstrates breakdowns in mutual talk by means of an indexically potent *withholding* of mutuality in the play of pronouns. Talking *about* talking together (or not) is coupled with talking together (or not), and both the talk and the metatalk are clear signals about the broken social relationship writ large: a kind of pragmatic metonym, or a tropic comment on a relationship by virtue of the indexical positioning taken by its protagonists.<sup>9</sup>

## **2. Replies, retorts, and insults**

The court session from which Fragment A was drawn pits two warring sides of a single family against each other in vituperative, insulting, mutual accusation, sometimes in elaborately structured parallel Tzotzil, and usually with little apparent regard for niceties of sequence, relevance, or adjacency. The whole interaction, far from displaying an overarching ambience of cooperation, is combative, angry<sup>10</sup>, and defiantly uncooperative. The interlocutors' oppositional stances drive the combative construal of individual turns and fuel a kind of sequential anarchy. One observes complex shifts of footing in public Zinacantec battles, through a subtle aggregation and reshuffling of nuanced social personae, manipulated by shifts in person and number marking. Simultaneously, turn construction and turn taking—or what remains of it when talk turns to shouting—can propel interlocutors into rapidly escalating war, or from at least potential realignment to hardening disagreement. Rather than construction of common ground, here one has its withholding or

withdrawal; rather than conjoint action (Clark 1996), one has disjoint and oppositional parrying.

To anticipate one conclusion: a bit like that between battles and wars, there is an ironic relationship between “winning” a verbal duel and “losing” the social game. The basic collaborative mechanism that underlies all conversation, including verbal antagonism—providing for a next turn (see Stivers et al. 2009), the possibility of a “future engagement”—requires winning without trouncing. A boxer is not supposed to murder his opponent. Shutting up your enemy can shut down your relationship, perhaps permanently, by allowing *no* next turn. If the aim in verbal battles is to reduce one’s adversary to silence (as in the Tzotzil phrase from my title, *mu xtak’av* “he doesn’t—i.e., *can’t*—reply”), as such battles are repeated they can concomitantly reduce one’s relationship to a state where people *mu xa sk’opon sbaik* “no longer talk to each other.”

I will consider next what it means to ‘reply’ or ‘answer’ in Zinacantec interaction; then how ‘answering’ is supposed to work in contexts of official disputing; then how it tends to change in serious fights, receding sometimes into silence. The Tzotzil root for ‘answer’ is *tak’*, which surfaces in an intransitive verb stem *tak’av* ‘to respond,’ as a transitive stem *tak’* (which means both ‘answer’ and ‘be possible, function’), and as an applicative (‘reply to someone’ and sometimes ‘talk back’). Ordinary Tzotzil conversation cannot proceed without interlocution: there is virtually no monologue in normal talk. Turns are short, punctuated by an interlocutor’s frequent backchannel.<sup>11</sup> Without someone to *tak’van* ‘answer back’—often with heavy repetition—talk grinds inexorably to an uncomfortable halt. When a speaker addresses a group, one person usually emerges as a kind of designated

*jtak'vanej* 'answerer.' In a parallel way, the minimal Zinacantec social encounter—an exchange of greetings—involves a highly regimented sequence of embedded adjacency pairs, which one person initiates (*chibat me`tik* "I am going, ma'am") and the other completes by answering (*batan kere* "go, boy!"). If someone greets a person who for some reason (deafness, inattention, drunkenness) fails to respond, others will usually prod with an imperative *tak'av-an la* (answer-IMP CL) 'answer!'

Note that the clitic *la* in the last form cited hints at a wider social configuration for properly socialized Zinacantec speech. *La* is an evidential "hearsay" clitic which—in contrast with other more specific evidential clitics or an evidentially unmarked utterance—shows that the "principal" in Goffman's (1979) terms is someone *other* than the speaker—namely, here, the person who initiated the greeting (Haviland 1987, 1989, 2002). That is, *la* nods in the direction of someone other than the person doing the reminding, implying minimally a discourse triangle. Though I will talk about the Zinacantec metaphor for besting an opponent—"he cannot answer"—in which one person silences another, in fights, as in most "dialogue" (Bauman 2004: 60), matters are rarely dyadic.

When a dispute is serious enough to be brought for formal resolution before Zinacantec magistrates or elders there is a macroscopic regimen of responsive talk. It involves first what I have called a "monologic phase," followed by a "free-for-all", followed by a "pronouncement" or verdict formulated by the magistrates themselves.

Since the object of the exercise is to get disputants to *laj yo`onik* lit., "finish their hearts" or stop being angry—i.e., to resume "talking together"—experienced dispute settlers first let opposing sides *chap* 'prepare or arrange'—that is, lay out—their positions. They are encouraged to tell their own stories, with interlocation from

the magistrates themselves but with minimal interruption from opposing sides. This is the “monologic” phase of the dispute settlement, although it is a far cry from a true uninterrupted monologue.

Magistrates also know, however, that sooner or later they will have to loosen the reins and let people have it out. The idea is to give people a chance to reveal what they really feel and want, both in monologue and in open shouting matches, before the dispute settlers finally take control of the interaction to try use their experience and moral authority to reconcile conflicting desires and to forge a compromise that embraces their construal of “tradition” and “law.” The discourses of self-revelation when individuals lay out their own sides of a dispute regiment selves: they allow speakers to indulge in naked self-presentation in the monologic phase. On the other hand, when magistrates allow the shouting to begin in what I call the “free-for-all” phase of the settlement, it is argument which regiments if not truth (only laterally an issue in most Zinacantec court settlements—magistrates assume that everyone is lying to some degree, but conversely that there must be a grain of truth in what most people say) then settlements. The agreement and closure that a court session aims to produce—in the final “pronouncement” phase dominated by the magistrates—only emerges once people have had a chance to vent their anger and shout out their grievances. My exemplary fragments largely come from the verbal contests that emerge in the free-for-all phase of the critical court case between Paco and his son-in-law Ran.

Contrast the form of stylized verbal dueling. Tzotzil speakers have their own “ritual” or “playful” verbal battles, documented by Gary Gossen (1976), who

describes a routine among Chamula men that resembles Mexican *albur*: exchanges of veiled allusions often to the other's homosexuality.

“[T]here is always a winner, he who says the last word,  
and a loser, he who cannot answer the challenge.”

(Gossen 1976:126)

A more common variant in Zinacantán takes the form of extended sequences of humorous, frequently ribald, puns, based on someone's chance remark, where each person tries to outdo the others in the cleverness of his word play and the outrageousness of his image, often pointedly directed at another's person. Here instead the “winner” is usually the penultimate contributor, the one whose pun gets the biggest laugh, after which only a feebler attempt follows, thereby exhausting the motif. In both the Zinacantec and the Chamula cases, the “losers” *mu xtak'av* ‘cannot answer.’<sup>12</sup>

Native Zinacantec categories do not match well with our own folk fighting terminology. There is as far as I know no very good Tzotzil word meaning ‘insult’ despite perhaps related categories like scolding (the verb *ut* mentioned above) or mocking (derived from the root *lab* which is conceptually linked to bewitchment and “critical or hostile glances” [Laughlin 1975]). The Latin origins of ‘insult’ suggest physically jumping on someone, and, indeed, verbal battles in Zinacantán are intensely corporeal, even when the protagonists do not come to blows.<sup>13</sup> In a society where age, status, and rank are usually clearly indexed in interpersonal demeanor and mutual terms of address, what we might call an insult may simply be a perceived lack of proper deference and respect: *mu xisp'is ta vinik* ‘he does not respect me (literally, he does not measure—i.e., treat—me as a man)’ is a frequent complaint. Alongside

such (English) folk metalinguistic labels that Laughlin (1975) finds appropriate to apply to Zinacantec Tzotzil words as “male joking speech” or “ritual speech” are other rubrics like “scolding speech,” “mocking speech,” or “denunciatory speech”<sup>14</sup>—seemingly characteristic of various sorts of verbal conflict. Zinacantecs, as we shall see, use many of the same specialized “honorific” devices (Agha 2002, 2007 ch. 7) that allow them to be appropriately polite and respectful—treating others “like a man”—in a kind of ironic inversion to display bald faced lack of respect.<sup>15</sup> Notably this includes the parallel couplets ordinarily associated with ritual and prayer but turned to disrespectful ends.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, Tzotzil ‘s elaborate evidential devices (Haviland 2002), including the “hearsay” clitic *la* mentioned earlier, usually leave little doubt when a referentially innocuous remark amounts to an ironic criticism or a stinging rebuke. The resulting hurt or anger takes recognizable and diagnostic interactional forms, chief among them withdrawing from mutual speech.

Zinacantecs can also have unregimented verbal battles, both behind closed doors and in the open. In the following fragment Paco’s daughter Xunka` describes another scene from the same family land dispute, which took place far from the constrained confines of the court. One of Xunka`’s brothers allied himself with his brother-in-law Ran against Paco, his own father. Though this hated brother had inherited paternal land, the old man and his adult unmarried daughters—of whom Xunka` is the leader—continually challenged the brother’s right to use it, since he no longer maintained cordial relations with them.

When Zinacantecs *retell* serious verbal battles which involve angry exchanges, they typically portray—i.e., ‘voice’—the antagonists as verbally and physically aggressive, and the vanquished (perhaps with certain wishful thinking) as like those

bested in a verbal duel: rendered mute and still, as if physically “unable to answer.” Of course retellings are reinterpretations, opportunities for n+1th order indexical demonstration of a nth order indexical performance (Silverstein 2003), in which typified or stylized views of how an encounter went (or a narrator wants to argue that it went) inhere in the very depiction of what happened. This is the power of gossip (Haviland 1977) as evidence for native metapragmatics.

In fragment B Xunka` describes to me in triumph how she upbraided the brother and his son when she surprised them taking firewood from the disputed land, deep in the forest far from the village. By her account, she accosted the men fearlessly, rebuking them with angry, hostile words.

At one point in the retold scene the nephew over-ostentatiously pulled out a mobile phone and gave at least the appearance (since he was almost certainly out of the limited signal range) of trying to summon village authorities to come and arrest her for her verbal abuse. Xunka` “quotes” him at lines 1-3 as he describes her—indirectly “on the phone”—with the offensive epithet *lev-sat me`el* ‘gash-eyed old woman.’

(B)

1    **xunka`**;    li` me li: lev sat me`ele:    *"The uh... gash faced old woman is here--*  
 3                    ja` tal ilinu:k                    *"She has come very angry."*

In Xunka`’s account of the events, these are the very last words the nephew manages to utter. She responds immediately, angrily, and with hyperfluent parallel constructions. Even as she recounted the story to me, sitting in her kitchen addressing the assembled household, she was flushed, breathing hard, and clearly transported to the scene and her (at least imagined) rage in retrospect. She retorts that the boy by

mocking her mocks God himself, and she underlines the point first by quoting herself and then by putting hypothetical speech into the boy's mouth.

4	vo`one levlev jsat //	<i>'As for me, I may be gash faced</i>
5	vo`one yak'oj kajvaltik	<i>That is how God made me.</i>
8	ali vo`ote	<i>But as for you--</i>
9	mas chopolot //	<i>You are worse.</i>
10	ali vo`ote	<i>As for you, (you say)</i>
11	ay	<i>"Ay.</i>
12	ali kajvaltike	<i>"Our Lord God (you would say)--</i>
13	mas to chopol //	<i>-- is still worse.</i>
14	mas to yan x`elan	<i>"Is still more disgusting."</i>

Xunka` continues her counterattack, mocking the boy for his supposed superiority, and accepting his characterization of her with feigned humility, as "just the way God made me." In her retelling, Xunka`'s words pour from her mouth in a breathless torrent, and her co-present interlocutors are given as little air space as the feckless nephew probably was in the moment.

16	ali kajvaltike	<i>(But) Our Lord--</i>
17	te luchul ta altal //	<i>--is perched atop the altar.</i>
18	ali vo`ote	<i>But you--</i>
19	na`tik bu la.tal //	<i>Who knows where you've come from?</i>
20	ch'ul rreyot <sup>17</sup> le` krem	<i>You are a holy king, boy.</i>
22	vo`one	<i>As for me,</i>
23	ja` ti k'u x`elan volol chanul liyak' li kajvaltike: //	
		<i>I am however enclosed an animal<sup>18</sup> I was made by GOD</i>
25	ja` ti k'u x`elan . muk' lek patbilon <sup>19</sup>	<i>however badly I was formed,'</i>
26	xkut un	<i>I said to him.</i>

She observes in triumph (line 30, below) that after this onslaught the cowed nephew could muster no scolding retort. *Mu xa xtak'av un*, he couldn't answer.

28	ijo solel mi . batz'i	<i>Damn! He couldn't even--</i>
29	stz'ejtz'on <sup>20</sup>	<i>--keep scolding.</i>
30	mu xa xtak'av un	<i>He could no longer reply.</i>

This little performance has a complex structure of embedded reported speech, diagrammed in Figure 3, in which while speaking to her assembled household, she presents first the nephew's "telephone call" for help and her subsequent verbal counterattack. This latter in turn includes an embedded interlude where, rather than allow the nephew to retort, she speaks for him, putting hypothetical words into his mouth and thus both occupying the full floor of the reported encounter and recasting the nephew as the sort of person who thinks himself better than God. Each layer of represented talk here is also a layer of action (Clark 1996). Each corresponds at once to a report of the supposed events in this angry encounter and a locus for Xunka's interpretation of what transpired and how, in the end, it contributed to the besting of her opponent.

XUNKA' to ethnographer

NEPHEW to the mobile phone

The gash-faced old lady is here.  
She has come very angry.

XUNKA' to the NEPHEW

As for me, I may be gash faced //  
As for me, that's how God made me.

But as for you, you are worse //  
As for you, (you say)

NEPHEW to the world

Ay!  
Our Lord God is still worse //  
is still more disgusting.

But Our Lord is perched atop the altar //  
But you--  
who knows where you've come from //  
You are a holy king, boy.

As for me, I am  
however enclosed an animal I was made by God //  
however badly I was formed.

I said to him.  
Damn! He couldn't keep scolding //  
He could no longer reply.

Figure 3. Embedded depicted speech in a retold rebuke.

The extemporized parallel constructions throughout the rant have similarly multiple effects. They demonstrate Xunka's altered and emotional state of mind; they resonate with the social power associated with ritual genres of speech to show how effectively she is able to put her nephew in his place; and, notably, their fluency smothers under a torrent of words any chance the nephew might have to reply.

### 3. A sequential template for argumentative cooperation

By contrast, when there is cooperation even with opposition—as in the next short fragment from the settlement of a marital dispute<sup>21</sup>—rather than giving him or her *no* space to reply, interaction is constructed so as to constrain an opponent's turns by maximally regimenting them. This is how dispute settlements are canonically *supposed* to proceed in Zinacantán.

Several Zinacantec elders have been called to resolve a dispute between Andrés and his wife, whom Andrés has badly beaten.

(C)

1	<b>Xun;</b> yan x`elan li antz un	<i>When one's wife is awful,</i>
2	so:lél batz'i yu`un te xvoet yajnil	<i>When one's wife is just always snarling</i>
3	pero k'u yu`un pero k'u cha`al pero	<i>But why? But how come?</i>
4	melel ak'o mi oy xkut jbatik	<i>True, we may scold one another</i>
5	j`ech'el	<i>But just one time</i>
6	laj o k'op	<i>And then it's finished.</i>

Xun, the main dispute settler, begins this little segment by arguing that it is all right for husband and wife to quarrel; but their anger should be expressed and then cease. He is quickly joined by Lukax, another elder, who repeats the same sentiment (lines 8 and 10-11) in overlap with Xun who simultaneously goes on to produce an alternate formulation of the same point (line 12): one quarrel is alright, but not repeated fights day after day.

7	<b>Xun;</b> bat o ta ik' melel-	<i>It just blows away on the wind</i>
	[	
8	<b>Lukax;</b> jp'el nan e	<i>Maybe just one word (of scolding)</i>
	[	
9	<b>Xun;</b> yan solel .	<i>On the other hand-</i>

[

10 **Lukax;** k'alal =

11 ta jlikele lek un *When it only last a short while, ok.*

=[

12 **Xun;** ta jujun k'ak'al ta jujun k'ak'ale *But every day, every day...*

13 mu yorauk un *That's hopeless.*

14 mu xtun . *It won't do*

Only now does the accused husband, Andrés, manage a turn (line 16, below), echoing submissively what the elders have just said. Even his turn is overlapped by a third dispute settler Petul (at line 17), who continues in further alignment with Xun's argument.

16 **Andrés;** mu xtun che`e *It won't do, no.*

[

17 **Petul;** puta mu ja`uk xive`otik o ya`el *Damn, that puts no food on the table.*

The object of this cooperatively framed dispute settlement is not to silence the misbehaving husband into submission, but by a chorus of reasoned argument to elicit the wrongdoer's agreement—indeed, to induce him to join the dispute settlers' chorus.

#### 4. Insult from implicit to insistent

In stark contrast, let me return to the cataclysmic court case from which Fragment A was excerpted. To repeat, the dispute revolves around inherited land. The main protagonists are the once-powerful but aging ritual elder Paco, and his son-in-law Ran, an influential political leader. Once close allies, the two had become bitter enemies in a series of disputes over Paco's allegedly fickle land prestations to the son-in-law's wife and Ran's concomitant public disrespect for the old man which

caused deep family rifts. This court case marked the decisive final confrontation in this family rupture, and each move in this public face-off is a masterpiece of malice, a tiny ingot of interactive invective, constructed so as to maximize offense in both substantive content and interpersonal contour.

Tensions about inherited land are clear in Fragment D, extracted from Paco’s normatively monologic “laying out” of his version of the crucial events following the initial verbal skirmishes from which fragment A was drawn. Paco describes how his son-in-law reacted scornfully when the old man first offered his daughter, Ran’s wife, part of her inheritance. The old man places disrespectful and arrogant words (and an angry tone of voice) into his son-in-law’s mouth: “What do I care about a woman’s land? I have my own.”

(D)

1	Paco; k'elo lavosilike xkut	<i>"Take care of your land," I told him.</i>
2	mu k'u jtu`un yosil antz	<i>"I have no use for woman's land.</i>
3	o k-osil uk // EXIST lE-land also	<i>"I have my own land, too.</i>
4	oy j- balamil uk EXIST lE-earth also	<i>"I have my own earth, too."</i>
5	xi li ran ya`ele <sup>22</sup>	<i>said Ran it seems.</i>
6	mu la k'u stu sk'el la yosil antz un .	<i>According to him it's of no use to him to take care of woman's land.</i>

The anger in the younger man’s alleged reply is also portrayed by the parallel couplets (pairing the words *osil* and *balamil* ‘land, property’ in lines 3 & 4) that Paco attributes to him. Moreover, although the son-in-law is sitting physically nearby in court, Paco maintains a double interactive remove from him. In line 6, Paco paraphrases Ran’s words in the third person, and he marks it twice with the the “quotative” evidential *la*

which, by contrast with an evidentially unmarked formulation, distances the speaker from both sentiment and formulation in the implicated (reported) original speech act. (It also suggests that Ran disdainfully rejected the offer of land behind the old man's back.)

The younger man angrily retorts—interrupting the old man's privileged narrative—with a direct counter accusation at lines 7 & 9: “But first you give the land, and then you steal it back.” (On the original audiotape one hears women from the two opposing sides bickering simultaneously in the background.)

7 **Ran**: pero julikel chapoj sutel chava`i une

*But every little while you steal it back again, you see.*

8 **Xap**: bweno

*OK*

[

9 **Ran**: chavak' y chapoj sutel

*You give it and then you steal it back.*

Note as well the apparent attempted intervention by another man present, Xap, at line 8. We shall return to Xap—one of Paco's supporters—again shortly.

Irvine's (1993) deconstruction of the notion of 'insult' in her analysis of the Wolof *xaxaar*—poetic abuse aimed at a new bride and her family publicly performed at a wedding—elaborates a formulation that requires both a local theory of what “counts as insulting” coupled with a participation structure (counts for whom? if said by whom? in front of whom? and so on). Like a Wolof wedding, the Zinacantec town hall brings together people—often whole families—who might usually try to avoid direct confrontation with each other, and it frequently attracts a large crowd of onlookers as well, putting insult both bald and off the record into public circulation. Here there is little mitigation of responsibility or hiding behind professional

mouthpieces or griots: the principals largely talk for themselves, and the official context gives them no room to squirm away from responsibility for their words. Nonetheless, the layered piling on of accusation and squabbling by family members and friends in the backstage potentially mitigates the confrontation of principals: the latter can treat each other with at least nominal civility, leaving the background teams to spit out their vituperative poison. The social organization of fighting thus again allows—indeed, encourages—cooperation and antagonism to coexist. The entire cast of characters present in the court case illustrates the issue, since knowing exactly who is on whose side is central to calculating everything from whom one should address and how, to where to stand in the crowd.

The phases of the dispute settlement, sketched in section 2 above, remind us of a further sequential dimension to potential ‘insult’: one can speak “out of turn” (by interrupting when one is not entitled to the floor, as in Fragment D); and one can fail to speak at all when adjacency seems to demand it. In Fragment E Ran, the son-in-law, angrily challenges Antun, Paco’s son and a younger brother of Ran’s wife, with a highly disrespectful rhetorical question. Antun has complained that after the official division of the disputed land, Ran boycotted the standard protocol and failed to attend a ritual meal at Antun’s house for those who had witnessed the inheritance procedure.

(E)

1 **Antun**; muk' bu a ve`an ta na le`e vi

*But you didn't even go to eat at the house over there.*

2 te xa lakom ta ana

*You just stayed in your own house afterwards.*

3 **Ran**; k'usi batz'i pwersa chive` ta ana

*What? So am I obliged to eat at your house?*

Ignoring Ran's implicit insult at line 3, Antun ploughs on to chide his brother-in-law for upbraiding the village officials who presided over the division of the land. (The implicature is about Ran's arrogance in disrespecting such political authorities.) Somewhat later, in the next fragment, Ran jumps in on him three more times with unanswered challenges: "I scolded him? I scolded him?" (lines 7 and 10).

(F) Adjacency ignored T9708b 0:31.09:ikut

- 1 **Antun;** povre komiteetike  
*Poor land commissioners.*
- 2 utel to iyich'  
*They were given a scolding.*
- 3 mi ja` la yech li x`elan spasulan ta sp'isulan =  
*"Is that how you are supposed to do it, when you measure -*  
 4 =balamil  
*land?"*  
 [
- 5 **Xap;** i tambyen imeltzaj akta noxtok li` kumpa  
*And there was also an agreement signed here, compadre.*  
 [
- 6 **Antun;** chaxi xava`i une, te lajativ =  
*(That's what) you said, remember. Then you ran back-*  
 [
- 7 **Ran;** ikut vo`one?  
*I scolded them?*
- 8 **Antun;** =tal ta PV  
*here from PV (name of the cornfield site where the land was being divided).*  
 [
- 9 **Xap;** mi .  
*Did-- ?*  
 [
- 10 **Ran;** ikut vo`one?  
*I scolded them?*



be introduced as topics into argument, providing further rhetorical ammunition. In Fragment G Ran has counterattacked. Although Antun may now be allied with his father Paco, Ran asserts that formerly Antun had opposed the old man, going so far as to sponsor a witchcraft ceremony against him. Ran aims both to divide Paco's camp and also to discredit everything Antun might have to say about cooperating with the old man. Ran asks that witnesses be summoned who can testify to Antun's boasts about trying to witch his father.

(G)

- |   |                              |                           |
|---|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 | <b>Ran;</b> pwes le`e        | <i>So as far as that,</i> |
| 2 | ja` cha`abolaj               | <i>You will please</i>    |
| 3 | chajak`bekon un              | <i>ask them for me</i>    |
| 4 | ak'o yali:k                  | <i>Let them say</i>       |
| 5 | j <sup>23</sup> ; yech che`e | <i>Alright.</i>           |
| 6 | <b>Ran;</b> li` oyone:       | <i>Since I am here.</i>   |

Antun now breaks in to argue that this whole topic is irrelevant to the matter at hand—a position that Paco himself seems to echo (at lines 13-14 below) once he understands what is going on.

- |    |   |   |
|----|---|---|
| 7  | <b>Antun;</b> bweno k'u`n ti ja` to atam o tal abae |   |
|    |   | <i>Well, but why are you just now bringing this up?</i> |
| 8  | li`e ma`uk ta jtzaktik ak'-chamel                   |   |
|    |   | <i>Here we're not talking about witchcraft.</i>         |
|    |   | [   |
| 9  | <b>Ran;</b>   | anch'an vo`ote  |
|    |   | <i>You shut up!</i>                                     |
| 10 | <b>Paco;</b> ataj (???????????)                     |   |
|    |   | <i>As far as that-</i>                                  |
|    |   | [   |
| 11 | <b>Ran;</b> malao vo`ote anch'an                    |   |

*You wait, shut up!*

[

12 **Antun;** ((shouting))

[

13 **Paco;** ((shouting)) ja` to =

*Only now-*

14 k'ot aval ta komite chatal

*-are you coming to tell the land commissioners this.*

=[

15 **Ran;** vo`ote m- anch'an- anch'an

*You shut up, shut up.*

16 anch'an

*Shut up!*

[

17 **Paco;** atimi chak'an chameltzane chatakbat ta ik'el ta =

*If you want to settle that, wait until you are summoned by-*

18 =ta ik'el taajente

*-the magistrate*

19 chatal ta meltzanel yechuke

*You should come for a proper settlement instead.*

[

20 **Antun;** unen pasob-rason uk

*You're supposed to know a little about how to settle disputes*

21 **Paco;** a li`e tambil latal // ik'bil latal

*Now you were forced to come // you were brought<sup>24</sup>*

[

22 **Ran;** malao malao

*Wait! Wait!*

23 vo`ote mu xatik' aba

*You, don't butt in!*

Ran repeatedly orders Antun to shut up, in terms normally too direct for public discourse. He has thrown down a verbal gauntlet, not dueling his adversary into

silence but nakedly commanding it. Paco also starts to shout angrily at this point, charging that Ran is being disrespectful to the current process, which involves land commissioners rather than the magistrates who might deal with witchcraft accusations. Though it is hard to tell from the transcript alone, Ran avoids answering Paco's charges, instead dismissively telling his brother-in-law Antun to shut up (at lines 11, 15-16, and finally at 22-23, after Antun points out at line 20 that Ran, as a former magistrate, ought to behave better).

As a powerful political figure in the village, Ran is on fairly safe ground openly confronting his brother-in-law, a notoriously unreliable town drunkard and a much younger man, who would normally owe his senior brother-in-law respect. The fact that Antun does not *tak'be* 'answer him' in Fragment F or that Ran claims the right to shut him up in Fragment G without bothering to address any substantive arguments shows that Ran has indeed managed effectively to devoice the younger man. The baldness of Ran's challenges to Antun—somewhat as if he were a magistrate himself rather than a principal—indexes Ran's stronger, dominant position. As Irvine points out, "in some relationships a speaker needs no lines of retreat at all, for the relationship itself provides one" (Irvine 1993:129).

More striking than his dismissive silencing of his younger brother-in-law is the naked hostility Ran expresses publicly toward Xap, his *compadre* and a man of similar age and political influence who was supporting the old man Paco's cause in court. As Irvine points out, regardless of its "traditional" character and its mediated delivery, Wolof *xaxaar* insult poetry can have dramatic life-altering consequences. One woman who was a target of the "epithalamium of blame" in the aftermath of a wedding performance that Irvine analyzes in detail suffered a nervous breakdown that

“villagers attributed to the intensity of criticism of her in *xaxaar* and in the gossip sessions” that followed, and she “died in 1975 after wandering off distraught into the bush” (Irvine 1993:120). The long term, potentially catastrophic consequences of verbal fights move us from the realm of discourse to biographies and social lives irrevocably altered by the apparent vagaries of talk, that is, refigured in part by repeated indexical maneuvers in interaction.

When Xap repeatedly tries to break the effective wall of silence between the two brothers-in-law in Fragment H below, Ran suddenly turns on him with what in the context is an outrageously aggressive move. In insistent overlap Ran challenges Xap’s authority and ability to involve himself in this dispute resolution at all. “Fix (this dispute), if you know how to fix (disputes), *compadre*,” he shouts (lines 4-5). “Speak your wisdom,” he continues sarcastically (lines 6 & 8 in the next section of the transcript), “if you feel that you have some little official position.”

(H)

1 **Xap**: bweno . pero

*OK, but--*

2 kaltik ava`i un kumpa

*Listen, compadre.*

3 poreso ali k'op k'u xa(??)

*That's why, as for this fight, what will-*

[

4 **Ran**: meltzano k'u x`elan xana` smeltzanele kumpare

*Settle the dispute however you know how to settle it, compadre.*

6 alo raso:n

*Give your advice!*

Xap, somewhat taken aback, acknowledges Ran’s own past history as a high-level magistrate and dispute settler. (Ran is a former municipal president who presided



*Why, let's settle it together, eh?*

[  
12 **Ran**;  
yechot u:k  
*Same as you, too.*

13 pasaro jpask'opot chava`i une:  
*You are a former dispute settler, you know.*

[  
14 **Xap**;  
yu`van-  
*You don't suppose that--*

15 unenotik to  
*--we are still babies.*

16 yijubemotik  
*We are grown ups.*

Xap in turn tries to shame Ran by indirectly accusing him of acting like a child<sup>25</sup> (lines 14-16).

This highly public dispute involves many people both inside the extended family and well beyond it, and it takes place in the most exposed of public circumstances—the town hall—in a community where people prefer to conduct their affairs if not in secret at least behind enclosing courtyard fences and walls (see Haviland and Haviland 1983). Arguments in such a public setting inevitably link to public power, embodied most nakedly by those who have a public voice themselves, and by those who assume the sequential authority both to authorize and to silence other voices. Public conflict is an index of public might, and private squabbles as well as public disputation thus deserves a central place in studies of politics writ both large and small.

Of course, in some circumstances (academic department meetings, or family fights, for example), one can be silenced but retain a certain dignity through the tried

and true technique of “walking out” when the insults fly too fast. The centripetal structure of family (or professional) relationships may keep the group together even in the face of transitory rupture. In this public forum, with the village’s most influential people present, no easy retreat is possible. Since Ran’s insults are baldly produced, unambiguous, and unretractable, there is really no turning back from the consequences of public wounding and shaming. Ran has earned Xap’s enmity. Indeed, the two men have continued to run each other down publicly in subsequent years and to square off against each other in dispute after dispute, having established themselves as spokesmen for two opposing political factions in the village.

## 5. Conclusions

Political life perhaps inevitably breeds feuds like the one between Ran and Xap. I know that some political actors rate their successes in terms less of the friends they have than the enemies they have cultivated. In this sense, too, arguments can be constitutive forces in social life. But “constitutive” here usually also means “transformative.” Arguments in a community like Zinacantán form part of the social fabric, but they rarely leave it intact, unpatched, or even recognizably part of the same garment. For many Zinacantecs this is the terrible part of “not speaking”—since social interaction largely consists of mutual talk, not being able to talk means one cannot comfortably share a social space with an enemy. Angry exchanges of words, and transgressing the boundaries of normally regimented public speech refashioned Ran’s and Xap’s relationships as one of public enmity and opposition, although Xap—another of my *compadres*—insists to this day that while Ran *mu xa xisk’opon*

“won’t speak to me any longer” (just as he will not to me), he, Xap, always politely greets the other man when they pass each other on the path.

Of course, social relationship (and arguments as part of them) have histories and evolve over time.<sup>26</sup> It is probably rare in Zinacantán (outside of ideologized retellings like Xunka`’s in Fragment B above) that one interlocutor so thoroughly silences another that “no reply” is literally possible.<sup>27</sup> The reciprocity of turn-exchange—generalized from a default conversational sequencing device to a metaphor for social life through the Zinacantec ideology of sociality as “speaking together”—may at least in this society mean that there always remains the possibility that an enemy, once shut up, will pipe up again; or that a family wrenched by schism will kiss and make up, and again start to “talk together.” This happens in Zinacantán sometimes even after decades of enmity, so that perhaps one day even Ran and Xap will find themselves on the same side of a future battle and thus open themselves again to mutual speech.

More serious, therefore, were the consequences of Ran’s undisguised though somewhat less “direct” insulting exchanges with his father-in-law Paco. These coupled with similar affronts to the old man addressed to others in ways so public they could not help but reach the old man’s ears (see Haviland 2005) turned the two men into bitter enemies, a fact of social life that no reworking of the “facts of the case” could ever reverse.<sup>28</sup> And though each man could argue, for any given fighting encounter, that he might have “won” the skirmish by virtue of putting his opponent into a position where the other “could not reply,” this was a fight that overall could not be won. In fact this court case, which took place more than a decade ago, represented for most of the battling protagonists the last time they have ever *isk’opon*

*sbaik* “talked to each other.” Paco and his son-in-law never again exchanged words directly, and the old man carried his angry silence to the grave.

## Notes

*Acknowledgements.* I thank Valentina Pagliai, several anonymous reviewers, Elena Collavin, and Judith Irvine for comments and suggestions on earlier versions of this chapter. My main indebtedness is to two kinsmen from Zinacantán: my late *compadre* Paco and his daughter Xunka`.

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<sup>1</sup> Grammatical abbreviations used in glosses include: CL = sentential enclitic, Q = interrogative proclitic, ! = presentative predicate nominal, IRREAL = irrealis enclitic, ASP = neutral aspect, PL = plural suffix, NEG = negative particle, 1E=1<sup>st</sup> person ergative/possessive, 2E = 2<sup>nd</sup> person ergative/possessive, 3E = 3<sup>rd</sup> person/ergative/possessive, 2APL = 2<sup>nd</sup> person absolutive plural.

<sup>2</sup> Section 15.2 of the World Boxing Association “Rules and Regulations” (WBA 2008) illustrates how professional fisticuffs regiment both *dramatis personae* and wardrobe: “When, for any reason, a boxer loses the mouth protector during the contest, the referee shall stop the fight, pick up the protector, and shall deliver or throw the protector to the seconds of the boxer in order for them to clean it...” Note that this particular rule imposes a duty on the referee, a near analogue of a Zinacantec magistrate in several senses, and perhaps not unlike the teachers who mediate disputes, with more or less success, in the preschool classes described by LeMaster (this issue)..

<sup>3</sup> My fieldwork in Zinacantán over forty years has involved a close connection to Paco’s family, and although his son-in-law Ran is also my ritual kinsman and a very

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old acquaintance, given village norms of social interaction my continuing friendship with the old man necessitated a reluctant break with the younger man which has resisted attempts at repair. For better or worse, for decades before IRB constraints began to regiment such practices I was well known for hauling a loaded and openly displayed tape recorder around with me wherever I went, and the transcripts in this article are based on several of the resulting audio recordings.

<sup>4</sup> Tzotzil is written in a Spanish based practical orthography in which ` represents IPA /ʔ/, *ch* is /tʃ/, *x* is /ʃ/, *tz* is /ts/, *j* is /x/, and *y* is /j/. Transcripts are drawn from audio recordings of public court settlement, or recorded spontaneous conversation, each labeled at the beginning of each fragment. Most are simplified to show only *free English glosses* (in italic Roman font) and transcribed Tzotzil (shown in courier font) to which indications of synchrony and overlap are linked. An open square bracket ([) marks places where the material transcribed on the line below the square bracket overlaps material in the line before it. Latch marks (shown with ‘=’) link lines which follow each other directly without a discernable pause. Where details of the Tzotzil form are relevant to the argument, I provide a morpheme breakdown in the Tzotzil line, and an intermediate third line with a morpheme-by-morpheme gloss. Where questions of overlap are non-essential to analysis, and where space permits, I sometimes present Tzotzil and English free glosses in two columns, mostly to allow inspection of parallelism between matched Tzotzil phrases. When one Tzotzil line can be formally paired in this way with the line that follows, the first is marked with final double slashes (//).

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<sup>5</sup> See Brown (1990) for more detailed treatment of “indirection” as a trope of both politeness and its opposite in neighboring Tselal.

<sup>6</sup> By seemingly addressing the magistrates, Ran—a former senior magistrate himself—pragmatically allies himself with them, a classic maneuver of indirect “stance taking” (DuBois 2007).

<sup>7</sup> The form *av-e* (2E-mouth) ‘your mouth’ is unmarked with respect to plurality, but the predicative *animal-oxuk* (animal-A2pl) ‘you are animals’ is formally plural.

<sup>8</sup> For Zinacantecs the excrement eating dog is the prototype of the lowly and disgusting.

<sup>9</sup> Pointedly failing to talk together, in circumstances where mutual talk would be expected, is a way of using language (that is, a pragmatic act) to demonstrate a certain kind of (here, brittle or testy) speech relationship. Insofar as that particular sort of speech relationship can, in Zinacantán, be taken to stand for a wider antagonism, the pragmatic act that indexes it has a tropic character, signaling the whole by exhibiting one of its central component parts, another illustration of “the complex, real-time process whereby linguistic forms associated in the first instance with interactional stancetaking may come to be ideologically tied to larger social categories” (Bucholz 2009:147). See, too, Silverstein’s theorizing of what he calls “‘baptisimal’ essentialization” of indices (2003:203), and of the “figuration” of indexical facts at higher metapragmatic levels (2003:208ff).

<sup>10</sup> Goodwin and Alim (this issue) argue for analysis of “transmodal” means for stylizing oneself and others, following work of C. Goodwin (2000) and many others. In the oral presentation from which this paper emerged, the central exhibits were

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snippets from the original audiotapes whose rendering into textual transcript fragments here disallows more than such pale metalinguistic labeling of identifiable “paralinguistic” features as, say, “angry voice.”

<sup>11</sup> For treatments of dialogic repetition in other Mayan communities, where the phenomenon is widely described, see Gossen 1974a, 1974b, 1976; 1985; Bricker 1974, Brown 1990; Brody 2000, 2005, among others. On the general issue of different interactive turn-taking styles and other concomitants, linguistic, corporeal, and social, see Levinson 2006.

<sup>12</sup> Recall Labov’s early observation about trying to elicit rhymed dozens. “The winner in a contest of this sort is the man with the largest store of couplets on hand, the best memory, and perhaps the best delivery. ... One must be quite careful in using the rhymed dozens with younger boys: if they cannot top them, they feel beaten from the start, and the verbal flow is choked off.” (Labov 1972:308.) See also Pagliai’s remarks (this issue) about how experienced *contrasto* poets use care in setting challenges to younger opponents.

<sup>13</sup> Definitional questions may be somewhat easier to resolve in the case of “fighting words” that do lead, directly, to punches. See Mendoza-Denton 2008, ch. 7.

<sup>14</sup> Notably, “denunciatory speech” which is characteristic of people complaining to magistrates, or even wailing to ancestral deities in powerful caves or on mountain tops bemoaning their fate and the wrongs committed against them, typically follows the systematic parallel structure of prayer and other ritual speech.

<sup>15</sup> Brown (1990) makes a similar argument about inversions of normally “polite female” speech in a Tzeltal court case for ironic, argumentative ends.

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<sup>16</sup> Consider how an ironic V imperative—what Agha calls a “hyperpolite” form—can be more insulting than a T version. In Spanish: *Tenga la bondad de tirar la basura*. “Have (2<sup>nd</sup> person V imperative) the kindness to throw out the garbage!”

<sup>17</sup> Although Tzotzil does not distinguish phonemically between a tap and a trilled *r* I have transcribed Xunka`’s exaggerated Hispanicized (and therefore mocking) pronunciation of the loan word *rey* ‘king’ here with its trilled initial *rr*. See note 10 above.

<sup>18</sup> Zinacantecs sometimes describe the process of birth as pairing a human soul and body with a corresponding animal spirit, kept in a supernatural corral inside the mountains and guarded over by ancestral deities.

<sup>19</sup> The root *pat* used here suggests that God formed Xunka’ in the same way that a potter molds a clay pot. Note that the parallel structuring of these final two lines extends beyond the fully repeated initial phrase *ja` ti k’u x`elan* “however much it may be the case” to the semantic-grammatical frame of the final predicate “I was made (in the form of an enclosed animal) by God// I was made(by God).” The syntactic and categorical parallelism in Tzotzil discourse is too complex a topic to treat more fully here; but see Gossen 1974b.

<sup>20</sup> Laughlin (1975) links the onomatopoeic root *tz’ej* to the chattering of squirrels.

<sup>21</sup> See Haviland (1996) for more on the carefully regimented discourses of Zinacantec marriage.

<sup>22</sup> The evidential particle *ya`el* here derives from the verb *a`i* ‘hear, perceive’ and has a semantics similar to that of the ‘hearsay’ clitic *la* though it is somewhat less specific about the sensory or epistemic evidence for the indirect illocutionary source.

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<sup>23</sup> J is one of the magistrates.

<sup>24</sup> Paco again resorts to paired couplets in this line.

<sup>25</sup> The motif of immaturity is a poetic thread in this entire exchange, starting with Ran's derisive diminutive in line 8 referring to Xap's non-existent official role (or "work") in this court hearing, *av-unen abtel* (2E-child work), and in Xap's retort in lines 14-15 which uses the same word, *unen* 'child' indirectly to accuse Ran of childish petulance.

<sup>26</sup> A particularly heart wrenching example from the urban USA is the study by Goodwin and Alim (this issue) of the long term processes to exclude one girl from a school clique, partly through incremental insult. For extended treatment see C. Goodwin(2006).

<sup>27</sup> There are certain bureaucratic contexts with which Zinacantecs are familiar where effective gagging takes place, and they are remarked upon with approval or distress depending on who is forced to wear the gag. Thus, in certain official Mexican land tribunals judges have been known simply to tell Zinacantec disputants to sit down and shut up, a possibility breathtakingly unlike what normally happens in Zinacantec dispute settlement. I have also been party to a Tzotzil curing ceremony designed explicitly to befuddle an enemy and render him speechless, but that is another story. I am informed by Marco Jacquemet that he once witnessed a *contrasto* duel between Roberto Benigni and Umberto Eco in which Benigni so thoroughly bested Eco that to cap the performance he permitted himself the "atomic bomb" of *contrasto*, using the closing pair *tigre/pigre* for which Italian simply has no further rhymes, a device so

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thoroughly *chiuso* (Pagliai, this issue) one could otherwise never use since it guarantees that there can be no further riposte.

<sup>28</sup> I once tried, with undoubted naiveté, to make a start at patching things up and to induce Paco at least to talk with his estranged daughter, Ran's wife, by conspiring to bring them together on a solitary trek to the forest cornfields. After realizing who it was I had brought along on our walk, nearly blind Paco mumbled only a perfunctory salutation and then walked in stony silence for the next twenty minutes until his daughter simply turned off on a different path and left him alone.

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