

"Whorish Old Man" and "One (Animal) Gentleman": the intertextual construction of enemies and selves.

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It can be argued that selves are discursive constructs, not the pure consciousness of a psycho-physical entity or its projection through some collection of behaviors, but rather an evolving set of "texts," whose rhyme, reason, and historical continuity are bestowed on it by processes of inscription, revision, and editing involving various participants, including but not limited to the "person" whose "self" is thus assembled, articulated, polished, and perhaps contested. Giddens appears to argue exactly this when he writes

"The reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choice as filtered through abstract systems" (Giddens 1992: 5).

The self, as an (auto)biographical text, is thus liable to the same intertextual processes as any other discursive object: it has its voices, its allegiances, its allusions, its memory, and its history.

In the context of a wider project to understand the nature of linguistic knowledge and "competence" I have been perusing the talk of a series of highly skilled speakers, mostly Mayan Indians from Chiapas, Mexico. In some cases, my conversations with these "master speakers" span more than three decades. Frequently the topics include the speakers' triumphs and failures, both grand and quotidian. Never far from the center of this talk are multitudes of others, both friends and foes. Their voices co-mingle with the speaker's voice (and sometimes with mine) to produce an ongoing "textual self" which is elaborately if not always consistently structured, multivalent, and multivocal, and whose evolution can be clearly traced over time. The insight is, of course, due to Bakhtin:

"[E]ach utterance is filled with various kinds of responsive reactions to other utterances of the given sphere of speech communication. These reactions take various forms: others' utterances can be introduced directly into the utterance, or one may introduce words or sentences, which then act as representatives of the whole utterance" (Bakhtin 1986: 91).

"[A]n utterance is a link in the chain of speech communication, and it cannot be broken off from the preceding links that determine it both from within and without, giving rise within it to unmediated responsive reactions and dialogic reverberations" (Bakhtin 1986: 94).

I will examine a single speaker's recycling of words and events in two ongoing, highly conflictive and crucial personal relationships, to explore the apparent irony that the very core of a "self" is thus the collaborative—although perhaps conspiratorial and contested—result of multiple participants' sometimes contradictory intertextual

manipulations. My compadre Mol (i.e., Mister) Maryan, teacher, friend, and mentor for the more than three decades I have worked in Zinacantán, is now about ninety years old. His life, like that of other Zinacantecs his age, has been defined by his participation in the system of religious *cargos*, his productivity in agriculture, and his family. My focus here will be Mol Maryan’s troubled relations with his eldest son Manvel, and his senior son-in-law Chep, husband of his eldest daughter: how these troubles have been crystallized in discourse, refashioned and reused over time, and now inscribed in his own view of himself and his social world, a view which is itself—insofar as it is knowable at all—crystallized in an ongoing chain of interactively produced texts.

A questionable new son-in-law

In mid 1970, my compadre Mol Maryan, chatting with a group of other Zinacantec men about the important people of his hamlet (Haviland 1977), described conversations he had had about Chep in the months before the young man became his son-in-law.

Example (1): Maryan talks about his son-in-law, 1970¹

- 1 m; komo chkalbe ya`ele:²
So I said to him.
- 2 chabajkotik un
“Let’s farm milpa.
- 3 mi muk cha`abtej meltzan chobtik
“Don’t you want to work, to make milpa?”
- 4 yu`un mu sk’an x`abtej le`e
Because supposedly he didn’t want to work
- 5 teyuk xi
“OK,” he said.
- 7 yal li smuk’ta tot mol r**
*Because according to his grandfather, old man R**,*
- 8 kere pero le`e batz’i mu xve`
“Boy, that one will not be able to feed himself.
- 9 batz’i ben ch’aj xi li mol r**
*“He’s really lazy,” said old R***,*

¹ All illustrative fragments are verbatim transcripts of tape recorded naturally occurring conversation, except that identifying names have been replaced with pseudonyms. My compadre Maryan, a recurrent speaker in these transcripts, is shown as “m.” Other participants are identified with other initials; in the present transcript the three other speakers, “cha,” “chn,” and “p,” are other Zinacantec men who participated in the “Who’s Who” sessions described later. “J” is usually the author.

² Tzotzil, a Mayan language spoken by some 250,000 people in Chiapas, Mexico, is here written in a practical orthography based on Spanish. Notably, the symbol **j** represents IPA [x], **x** represents IPA [Σ], **ch** and sometimes just **c** represent IPA [tΣ], the digraph **tz** and sometimes just **z** represent IPA [ts], an apostrophe represents ejective or glottalized consonants, a reverse apostrophe (´) a glotal stop IPA [ʔ], and a colon (:) indicates expressive vowel lengthening. Transcripts show conversational overlap in a somewhat simplified way, with square brackets ([]) linking overlapping or synchronous speech between different interlocutors.

10 aa xkut
"Oh," I replied.

Maryan’s interlocutors at the time, other senior Zinacantecs from neighboring hamlets, also had heard something about the son-in-law’s character.

11 m; muk' to`ox bu ochem taj chepe
Chep had not yet started as a suitor
 12 komo mu to`ox bu jak'olajem ya`el un
He hadn't yet asked for my daughter's hand.
 13 ch'aj la...
But they said he was lazy.
 14 cha; ja` sbi`inoj o taj...
That's how he got the name . . .
 15 p; "ch'aj chep" un che`e
They used to call him "Lazy Chep."

Understandably, my compadre was worried about giving his daughter to a man who might be unable to maintain her.

25 m; ijjak'be sk'oplal
I asked [the boy's grandfather] for the word on the boy.
 26 mi lek li krema
"Is the boy good?"
 27 mi muk' bu sna` x`ilin muk' bu pukuj k'u x`elan un
"Doesn't he get angry, or have an evil temper?"
 . . .
 35 pero jna`tik mi xve` me yu`un
"Who knows if he will be able to feed her,
 36 va`i mu sk'an x`abteje xkut
"Since you say he doesn't know how to work," I said to him.
 37 mu la xak'intá skajve
"Since you say he doesn't weed his coffee plants
 38 mu la xchabaj xkut
"Since you say he doesn't farm corn," I said to him.
 39 jeee mu sna` x`abtej a`a xi li mol r**
*"Eh, it's true he doesn't know how to work," said old man R**.*
 40 pero jna`tik mi xve` yu`un jch'amal
"Who knows if he can keep my child fed?"
 41 yil nan yil xkut
"Perhaps we should forget about [this marriage]," I said to him.
 42 pero yiyil mi chul xch'ulel xi li jjak'oletike
"But never mind so long as he gets some sense," said the wedding petitioners.

Despite the fact that at the time of the conversation thirty years ago his daughter was newly and happily married to Chep, my compadre Maryan was forced by his interlocutors to admit to having at least some (highly stereotypical) reservations about the son-in-law.

53 m; vo`ne batz'i mu xch'un mantal
In the past he simply wouldn't do what he was told
 54 solet mu xch'un rason
He simply wouldn't behave reasonably
 55 yu`nan mu xtal xch'ulel un
Perhaps because his soul hadn't arrived yet.
 56 cha; na`tik mi yu`nan xa`uk nan lekuk ti k'u cha`al =³
 57 =yulem sjole

³ The equals signs in transcript lines (=) “latch” together two lines which follow another without audible pause.

58 *Who knows if he thought it was good to behave the way he had learned to behave.*
 58 komo ja` j`ech`el li yiloj ya`el ti xu` sa`-k`op =
 59 =ya`el

60 p; *Because he had that one time discovered that he could succeed in making trouble.*
 60 k`u cha`al sbankile
 61 cha; ja` isa` i k`op xchi`uk sbankile
 61 *Like with his older brother.*
 62 *Yeah, he made trouble with his older brother.*
 62 bueno pero lek un
 63 “OK, that’s good.”
 63 mi ja` xa chixi` o li jni`-moltake
 64 “*So why should I be afraid of my parents-in-law?*”
 64 xi nan ta yaloj une. . .
 65 m; *Perhaps that is what he thought to himself.*
 65 mu`nuk van ali mi mu`nuk van te sa` k`op xchi`uk =
 66 =li yajnile
 66 *So maybe-- maybe he though of making trouble with his wife, too!*
 67 p; yu`nan un
 67 *Maybe.*
 68 mu sk`an lek stoj
 68 *He didn’t want to pay for her properly.*
 69 m; mu sk`an stoj
 69 *He didn’t want to pay for her.*
 70 mu sk`an xnupun
 70 *He didn’t want to get married officially.*

My compadre Maryan was a distinguished performer in the system of ritual office, about to embark--even as he gossiped about his son-in-law--on a year at the fourth and highest level of the hierarchy. This exceptional cargo career would be followed by two more decades of service as a *totilme`il* ‘father/mother’ or ritual adviser to other cargoholders, and as a *ch`ul mol* a ‘holy elder’ whose major responsibility was nailing the figure of Christ to the cross during Holy Week. His son-in-law was, in 1970, a young but promising political figure, fluent in Spanish and well-connected to the bureaucracy of the official government political party. Over the next two decades he was to serve several times in the hierarchy of civil authority, becoming municipal president precisely in the moment that virulent party politics emerged onto the political stage of indigenous Chiapas. He, too, was to serve in a prestigious first-level cargo, and his father-in-law Maryan would serve as his ritual adviser.

Since marriage was precisely the issue in Maryan’s pointed inquiries into the young Chep’s inclination for work—particularly traditional work raising *milpa* ‘cornfields’—the stories provide an implicit image of what one looks for in a prospective Zinacantec bridegroom: industriousness (not being *ch`aj* ‘lazy’), compliance (willingness to *ch`un mantal* or “obey orders”--especially, perhaps, those of ones father-in-law, with whom the groom will be *talel batel* ‘coming and going’), a good temper (*mu x`ilin* ‘he doesn’t get angry,’ *muk` bu pukuj* ‘he’s not evil tempered’). Also important were prospects for the future: it was clearly a bad sign that Chep *mu xve`* ‘did not eat,’ i.e., could not keep himself in food; but there was an implicit promise in the fact that he had *skajve* ‘his own coffee trees,’ even if he was disinclined to weed them.

From the allusion to this son-in-law’s problems with his elder brother, there were clearly doubts about Chep’s perhaps overeager willingness to engage in disputes. The crucial expression here is *sa`-k`op* (lines 58, 61, 65), literally ‘search for words’ that is, to

pick a fight, to go looking for trouble, often with serious legal repercussions. This potential fault in Chep’s character--the worry that because he had been able to dominate his brother in a dispute, he might think he could similarly dominate his father-in-law--already was a cause for concern. The quarrel in question displayed a recurrent motif in Zinacantec affairs: the competition between sons for the land of their fathers, the fact that daughters were in principle not expected to share fully in such inheritance, and the concomitant tensions between siblings and parents over who deserved which pieces of land.

In 1970, when I recorded the conversations excerpted above, Chep had only recently married Maryan’s daughter, and the two men had begun to collaborate in their farming operations, the older man often overseeing work in the cornfields of the younger man, who in turn began to seek other sorts of employment on the basis of his linguistic and political skills. Within the next few years, Maryan’s eldest son Manvel also married and set up a household with his new bride on a house plot within his father’s house compound. (I have diagrammed some of the relevant kinship relations in Figure **Error! Bookmark not defined.**)

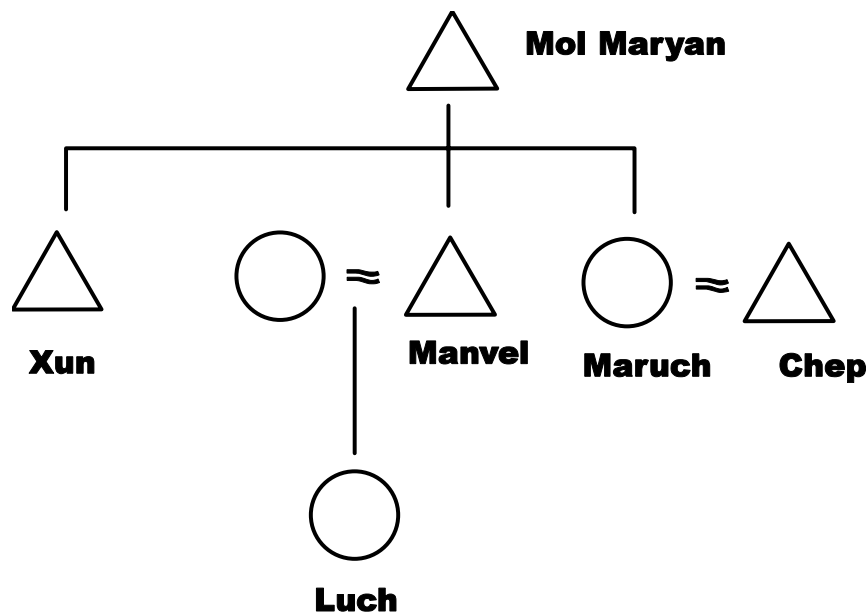


Figure 1: Maryan, Chep, and Manvel’s kin relationships

In 1977, when I had been absent from the village for an extended period, Mol Maryan sent me a cassette reciting a litany of disasters: a major quarrel with his own brother and father over land, the destruction of the Zinacantán church and most of the saints in an unexplained fire, and a deep political schism in the community, foreshadowing major political changes over subsequent decades. Manvel, the son, had by then moved into his own house on inherited land separate from his father’s domestic compound. Chep, the son-in-law, had been elected municipal President (or Mayor), but only after a bitter political division that spawned an opposition political party for the first time, challenging the dominant PRI party to which Chep belonged. Because Mol Maryan’s parents and siblings had abandoned the PRI and joined the opposition, Mol

Maryan was now isolated from much of his family, since he remained politically allied with his son-in-law.

More than a decade later in August 1990, a group of us, including Mol Maryan, Manvel, and Chep, walked six hours from the village to a lowland field where horses could be put out to pasture. Tape recordings of our conversations walking on the path and working to repair fences show that relations between the three men were cordial and cooperative, although it was already clear that the balance of authority on work and farming matters between Mol Maryan and his son-in-law, now a powerful man in his own right, had begun to shift, perhaps uneasily. Even in July of 1991, when Mol Maryan fell ill and staged a major curing ceremony for himself which sparked much of the subsequent family problem, he still praised his son Manvel for being *ssalet ta mantal* “always out running errands” in preparation for the ritual.

For the past dozen years, however, there has been total rupture between Mol Maryan, now deaf and blind, and his son-in-law Chep and his son Manvel. Members of Mol Maryan’s household talk to members of neither Chep’s nor Manvel’s households. They do not offer one another even the minimal greetings Zinacantecs routinely exchange on the path. They do not collaborate in work, in curing ceremonies, or in other social or ritual events. They do not, in Tzotzil parlance, *sk’opon sbaik* ‘speak to each other,’ having *yutoj sbaik* ‘scolded each other.’ In this paper I trace the history and intertextual inscription of this rupture in old Mol Maryan’s ongoing discursive autobiography.

Changes in Zinacantec inheritance

An important change in the material conditions of Zinacantec life in the past two decades has been a gradual erosion of practices surrounding the tenure and inheritance of land. There are at least two causes: the changing significance of land in the evolving economy, and a growing influence of Mexican law about inheritance and the control and management of communal and *ejido*⁴ property. In “traditional” Zinacantec practice of the 1960s and 1970s, a man’s daughters were likely to inherit little if any of his property. The bulk of the land went to his sons, with the best agricultural tracts reserved for the youngest son, who normally did not move from his paternal home after marriage, and who received the parents’ house and plots in exchange for caring for his them in their old age. Daughters were expected to be provided for largely by their husbands.

Inheritance in this Zinacantec system was always delicate and brittle. Parents were expected to divide their lands up among their children, part of a “patrimony” that a child deserved. At the same time, receiving an inheritance generated obligations to care for ones aging parents, and, crucially, to bury them properly. Children who did not comply could be stripped of their *rasyon* ‘shares.’ However, the growing bureaucratization of the local land commissioners—who began, for instance, routinely to measure tracts of land and issue legal titles—and the concomitant insinuation of wider

⁴ The *ejidos* of Mexico are areas of land claimed by groups of landless or land poor peasants under provisions of agrarian reform laws.

Mexican legal standards affected both sides of this relationship. Bequeathing land to ones sons and daughters now became a strictly voluntary matter. Once legally handed over, however, land was now permanently that of the beneficiary—no subsequent ingratitude or shifting of allegiances could automatically revoke an inheritance.

A growing population in communities like Nabenchauk and the reduced importance of large-scale agriculture in the overall economy also changed people’s needs for land. House plots inside the village itself—as opposed, for example, to woodlands or marginally productive highland fields—began to assume a special importance. Such land grew scarce, and commercial possibilities for plots near roads and centers of habitation became more important. Here, too, the gender asymmetry which gave “sense” to the idea that men were more deserving than women of inheriting their parental lands began to fade, changing the underlying logic. Women were as able as men to conduct small scale commerce, and thus had, it began to emerge, an equal claim to that of their brothers on land within the village, or garden plots on the edges of hamlets.

“Puta mol”

Through the 1980s, the relationship between Mol Maryan, his son, and son-in-law was close, cooperative, and complementary. Though not without their disagreements, the old man and his son-in-law continued to collaborate on corn-farming, sharing the expenses of the chemical-intensive technology that came to dominate Chiapas agriculture, trading hired laborers, reciprocally donating their time and labor to the others’ farming and building projects. Although he was now in a separate household, with his own corn supply, Mol Maryan’s son Manvel also continued to collaborate closely with his father and brother-in-law in productive work.

Early in 1991, however, these relationships began to crumble. When I arrived in the village in June of that year, Mol Maryan, as was his custom, sat me down to recount events since my previous visit six months before. One of the first things he told me was that he had fought with his son-in-law Chep. The issue was land. There had been a misunderstanding between the two men about a complicated negotiation in which Mol Maryan would sell a piece of land which he had given as an inheritance to his daughter Maruch, Chep’s wife. In exchange he would replace Maruch’s inheritance with a better plot that belonged to him. Chep had then accused the old man of taking back land he had already given away and trying to sell it in secret.

Several days later, over a shared meal, Mol Maryan told the story to a visitor. He began by saying that the land in question was not, in fact, for sale, since his unmarried daughters, destined to inherit it from him, were “looking after it.”

Example (2): A first “puta mol” story, 25 June 1991. (M = Mol Maryan, P= the visitor)

- 1 m; oy to yajvaltak
It still has owners.
- 2 jch'amaltak
My children.
- 3 p; oy to

4 m; *It still has (owners).*
 tzk'elik li tzebetike
 The girls are looking after it.

Mol Maryan implied that his daughters were in his good graces. But sons? Well, that was another story.

7 m; yan ti . oy to jkrem xachie, ch'abal
 On the other hand, if you think I have sons, I don't.

The visitor thought Mol Maryan merely referred to the fact that his sons had married and moved out into separate households of their own. However, Mol Maryan hastened to point out that the problem was more serious. His daughter Maruch, Chep's wife, had a small piece of land at the far eastern end of the village, land that he had given her as part of her inheritance. This plot was too remote from her own house to be of much use to her. Mol Maryan was currently in need of money, to cure an illness. He had thus proposed to sell another plot of land in a much more desirable position. His daughter had expressed interest in this closer land, and they had agreed to a swap: Mol Maryan would sell his daughter's inherited land for the money he needed, but in return he would replace her inheritance with the plot of land he had originally proposed to sell. This latter piece of land, he added, would make a marvelous site for a house at some future time. Mol Maryan arranged an initial swap with his daughter.

58 m; nopo mi chachon vo`ot
 "Decide whether you will sell it yourself,
59 mi ta jchon vo`on
 "or whether I should sell it for you.
60 ta jeltabot un
 "I'll exchange (your land for another plot).
61 ja` chavich' yo` li`e xkut
 "And you will get this (piece of land) over here," I said to her.
62 bweno xi
 "OK," she said.
63 abulajan che`e xi li . jtzebe
 "Please do me the favor," said my daughter.

Now came the central drama of the story. Chep the son-in-law—referred to, somewhat hesitantly⁵ only as *li mole* ‘the gentleman’⁶—heard of the proposal. Instead of seeing its advantages, he reportedly flew into a rage, insulting his father-in-law with angry epithets.

65 m; ora ya`i li . mole
 But later, the . gentleman (her husband) heard about it.
66 k'u la yu`un ta jchon balamil
 (And he asked) why I was selling land.
67 k'u la yu`un batz'i lok' balemon ta chon osil
 (And he asked) why was I so intent on selling off property.
68 puta molon la
 (And he said) I was a whoring old man.
69 kap o me un

⁵ In line 65, as elsewhere in the transcripts, a period (.) (in line 65 before the word *mole*) represents a perceptible pause: Petul hesitates before deciding how to refer to his son-in-law.

⁶ *Mol* refers to a senior male; it is often prefixed to a proper name (e.g., *Mol Maryan* ‘Mr. Mariano’) and it can also be used, in both address and reference, as a sign of mild respect.

He got very angry over it.

The syntax of Chep's reported reaction here is notable. Mol Maryan carefully framed each reported phrase with a quotative evidential particle *la*⁷ (see lines 66-68) which attributed the indirectly quoted words (they have been transposed to the first person, "I am a damned [literally, whorish] old man, so he said") to his son-in-law, and framed them as attested not by his own ears but rather by those of a third party who allegedly heard Chep and later told Mol Maryan.

The context of the reported offense is made patent in what follows.

- 71 m; yalbe komite
He told the commissioner of lands.
- 72 liyalbe li komite
And the commissioner told me.
- 73 ja` yech chk li`e ja` yech chk li`e
"This is what he said. This is what he said."
- 74 k'u la atu`un chachon osil
"(He asked) 'What business of yours is it to sell land?'"
- 75 balemot to chon osil
"You are just intent on selling land."
- 76 puta molote
"You are a whorish old man."
- 77 xiyut i lol
That's what Lorenzo [the then commissioner of lands] said to me.

It was in conversation with the commissioner of lands that Chep allegedly uttered these insults, insults which Lorenzo the commissioner repeated to Mol Maryan verbatim. (There is thus no quotative *la*, perhaps because Lorenzo, the reported speaker, had heard these words with his own ears. Only in line 74 does *la* appear, making explicit that the reported speaker—Lorenzo—was in turn quoting the angry son-in-law Chep.)

Mol Maryan finished his account of his conversation with the lands commissioner by repeating what had been agreed the official should say, were Chep to ask again about the transaction.

- 104 atimi tal to sk'oponote
"If he comes to speak to you again,
- 105 ixchon yosile
"(Tell him) 'He sold his land.'"
- 106 mi ava`i mi xie
"If he asks, 'Have you heard about it?'"
- 107 ka`yoj uto me un xkut
"Tell him 'I've heard about it,' " I said to him.
- 108 yan le` mu jk'an xa yech ali . ta jchon ta mukul =
"Because otherwise, I don't want (people to say) that I am just selling
- 109 =osil
land in secret."
- 110 cha`i xa komite xkut
"(Say) 'The commissioner has heard about it,' " I told him.
- 111 p; mm
- 112 m; bweno yech chkalbe xi
"OK, I'll tell him that," he said.

⁷ See Haviland 1987, 1989.

With the multiple embeddings of speech (all clearly distinguished by pronominal transpositions and verbs of speaking),⁸ and explicit instructions about what phrases to repeat if asked, Mol Maryan both anticipates and voices (or scripts) hypothetical future talk, explicit Bakhtinian “responsive reaction” and “dialogic anticipation.” These entextualizations of alleged conversation are replete with explicit allusions to other talk past and future.

The “facts” of the proposed land sale, its unexpected twists and turns, and its eventual disastrous failure and consequences are considerably more complex than this little narrative makes explicit, and there is no space to provide fuller details. However, the key phrase in the story is the epithet *puta mol* (*puta*, from Spanish, ‘whore,’ *mol* a Tzotzil term of mild respect for an elder male), that Chep is alleged to have used publicly, in the presence of an important hamlet official, to refer to his father-in-law Mol Maryan. The phrase is highly disrespectful, and it has resonated down through the succeeding decade as the leitmotif of the ruptured relationship between the two men.

Indeed, the phrase quickly percolated out into a wider social universe, which included Mol Maryan’s youngest son Xun, not (at that point) estranged from his father over land matters. Only two days after Mol Maryan gossiped to his friend about the fight with his son-in-law, there was an angry confrontation. I quote from my field notes.

“June 27 1991. As for Chep, Xun explained that he had some quarrels with him. I had heard earlier that it had to do with residual anger over Xun's chopping down a pine tree to *jis xak toj* [gather pine needles] on Chep's land last year. But it turns out that Xun had also gone to shout at Chep, when drunk recently, yelling *k'u yu `un xap'is ta puta mol li jtotike* [why do you show your (dis)respect for our father, i.e. Mol Maryan, by calling him a *puta mol?*], in response to remarks Chep made publicly about the potential sale of his wife’s land.”

Around Mol Maryan’s hearth as the year went on one began to hear repeated scurrilous reports about the son-in-law who had, in past years, been an unassailable figure of authority and good judgment. Despite his former importance to the family as a powerful and respected figure in the community, Chep was now distanced from his in-laws, who had previously depended heavily on his counsel and support.

Land squabbles with son *and* son-in-law

By 1993 matters had escalated. The fight had now extended to Mol Maryan’s son Manvel, who had allied himself with his brother-in-law Chep in protest over what he saw as unjust distribution of the old man’s lands. Among other things, Mol Maryan had parceled out plots to his unmarried daughters. A more serious issue was Manvel’s eldest daughter Luch, now in her late teens. She had been effectively adopted as an infant by

⁸ See Hanks 1989, 1990, Haviland 1996a, Lucy 1992.

one of her aunts, to help Manvel and his new wife when a second child, a boy, was born. Even when her parents had moved out of the compound to form their own household, Luch had stayed behind, living with her aunt and her grandparents for her whole life. Now Manvel, the biological father, wanted her back.

Example (3): Reports of court case to transfer Mol Maryan's granddaughter back to her parents⁹

55 m; va`i un i-
So listen

56 ja` zk'an ox sutel szeb ti jManvel une
My son Manvel wanted his daughter back.

57 j; aha
58 m; pero iyal-
59 yal li- jmelzanej k'op une
But the magistrates said

60 muk' ono tun xak'an zeb
"It won't do for you to ask for the girl.

61 tey ic'i ta snaik
"She has grown up in their house

. . .

68 a le` muk' xa li zebe
"That girl is already big.

69 oy xa xc'ulel .
"She has a soul.

70 mi cabat ta - sna latote
"Will you go to your father's house?"

71 i`i xi
"No," she said.

72 j; i`i xi
She said no.

73 m; mu xibat
"I won't go."

74 j; va`i un
Imagine that.

75 m; va`i un
"So

76 mu k'u xkutik un
"We can do nothing about it."

77 j; zmantal stuk xa
She made up her own mind.

78 m; le`e sna`oj k'u x`elan xve`
"That one knows how to find her own food.

79 mi oy xa jset' . zsa` xa k'usi sna` xconel
"She can find some little things to sell.

80 yulem xa xc'ulel xkut
"Her soul has already arrived," I told them.

Mol Maryan said that he knew his decision to give Luch her own inheritance was likely to cause trouble.

99 m; jna`oj ti za` k'op manvele
I knew that Manvel would look for trouble

100 mu-
101 kak'be yosil li j- ali luch une
(because) I gave Luch her own lands/

102 j; ji`

⁹ Conversation between Maryan and JBH recorded 7 January 1993

[
103 m; jc'akbe yosil li` toe
I gave her land here (i.e., a house plot)
104 jc'akbe yosil ta te`tik
And I gave her land in the forest (for cultivation and firewood).

The immediate result was a confrontation when Manvel, drunk and angry, burst into his father’s house compound shouting abuse. (Mol Maryan was able to tell me this story only after breaking down in tears of grief for his son José, deceased some five years earlier, who should have inherited the old man’s house and domestic gardens, object of Manvel’s desires and cause for his wrath.)

281 m; yak' sk'ak'al ko`on
It made me very angry.
282 a staon ta na li jManvele
My son Manvel came to accost me in my house.
283 ji jo la cingada xi
“Son of a bitch!” he said.
284 puta mol kavron
“Whorish old man, you bastard!”
285 lek- le` ma`uk ana
“This is not your house!”
286 lok'an aci`uk aputa zebetike xi
“Get out with your whorish daughters!” he said.

Furious, Mol Maryan had his son thrown into jail to sober up, a deliberate public shaming and declaration of war. The ugly epithet *puta mol* had now migrated to Mol Maryan’s own son’s lips.

When a few months later I proposed a reconciliation with his son and son-in-law, Mol Maryan exclaimed bitterly:

Example (4): Mol Maryan, on reconciliation with his son-in-law¹⁰

mu`nuk jbankil to
He is not my older brother.
mu`nuk kajvaltik
He is not Our Lord (i.e., God)
vo`on ba`yi chik'opoj.
That I should be the first one to speak.

Why should I, the father-in-law, go on my knees to beg pardon of this upstart, already too big for his britches? he argued. Haven’t I given him my daughter? Doesn’t he owe me respect? Mol Maryan was not going to be the one to break the impasse. The sentiment was evidently mutual, for old Mol Maryan reported that Chep had made a similar declaration.

Example (5): Chep, reportedly rejects reconciliation with his father-in-law¹¹

mu jtek'be sti` sna
I won't step over his threshold,
mi tana
Not today,
mi ok'ob

¹⁰ From my fieldnotes, 15 July 1993.

¹¹ From my fieldnotes of July 20 1993.

*Not tomorrow.*¹²

Remarking bitterly that he had no need for sons, Mol Maryan also quoted Manvel’s wife’s angry declarations at court. The woman had used identical couplets (although she blamed the prohibition on Mol Maryan and his family via the evidential particle *la* in line 408)—at the trial in which she failed to regain custody of her daughter.

Example (6): Mol Maryan’s daughter-in-law also rejects reconciliation.¹³

405 m; tak'av yajnil i Manvele
Manvel's wife responded.
406 i: baz'i ep yal li- yajnil Manvel une
Eee, Manmvel's wife said all sorts of things!
407 bwenó, muk' bu jk'el li jtótikótik a`a
“Well, I won't look after our father (i.e., her father-in-law)
408 mu la xu` jtek'be sna
“(They say) I cannot step into his house.
409 mu xu` jtek'be . sti` sna
“I cannot step over his threshold.
...
411 mi tana mi ok'ob xut komel le`e
“Not today, not tomorrow” she told[the magistrates]as she lef [the court].

Legal squabbles and verbal squabbles

Mol Maryan now planned to take his complaints to the hamlet level civil officials, to see whether he might be able to use Zinacantec law to disinherit his son and son-in-law, stripping them of the lands he had given them since they were not complying with the Zinacantec rule that one received inheritance only in exchange for care of and respect for the donors.

Early on July 21 1993, I accompanied Mol Maryan to visit the Nabenchauk *agente municipal* ‘town magistrate’ who presided over the local court where serious disputes were heard. In an impassioned plea before this sleepy official, Mol Maryan detailed his complaints against his the younger men, asking that they be summoned to the courthouse to explain why they should not have their lands taken away, why they should not be forced to *stam smaleta* ‘pack their bags.’

He began by telling the official that his son was not only estranged, but that he had reportedly spoken ill of his father in shameless and startling ways. He incorporates into his narrative a conversation in which Manvel is represented as taking part.

Example (7): Mol Maryan tells the *agente* how his son Manvel rejects him¹⁴

80 m; yu'un la chal ti jmanvel ya`el ta kuxul bu =

¹² Note that both men frame their sentiments in parallel constructions; see footnote **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

¹³ Conversation between Maryan and JBH recorded 7 January 1993.

¹⁴ Conversation between Maryan and the *agente municipal* recorded 20 July 1993.

81 =chlo`ilaj
My son Manvel says, when he is sober, in conversation

82 ma`uk ta syakubel
not when he is drunk

83 a; ji`
84 m; . . .
85 k'u x`elan ya`el
“So what’s the situation?”

86 mi . mi mu . chba ak'el atot lavi ipe x`utat la un
“Will you go and see your father, since he is ill?” he was asked.

87 a; aa
[

88 m; ch'abal xi la
“No,” he said la.

89 a; ej
90 m; mi`n mu xak'opon che`e xi
“What, don’t you talk to him?” he¹⁵ said.

91 ch'abal muk' bu jk'opon .
“No, I don’t talk to him.”

92 pero avich'oj avosil
“But you have recieved your lands [from your parents]?”

93 kich'oj a`a
“I have received them, yes.”

94 pero yu`un chak' onox kosil
“But he would give me lands anyway.

95 k'u ti jtot chava`i une .
“After all, he is my father, you know,”

96 xi la li jmanvel une
said my son Manvel, evdiently.

97 a; mm
98 m; bweno k'al ti mi x`ipaj une
“OK, and if he gets sick?”

99 yu`un ch'abal ta jmo:j
“No, not at all.

100 muk' bu jk'opon xi la
“I won’t talk to him,” he said evidently.

. . .

107 m; bweno li k'alal mi xcham une
“Well, if he dies,

108 mi o k'u spas une xut la
“Or if something happens to him?” he said to him evidently.

109 bweno te ta jnop to ka`tik
“Well, I’ll think about it,

110 mi chba jk'el k'alal mi tey xa ox telel a`a
“Whether I’ll go to see him when he is already laid out.

111 ta jk'el kik
“I’ll see, perhaps.

112 ta jnop to
“I’ll think about it then.

113 pero timi mu`yuke yu`un mu`yuk xi la li jmanvele
“But if I don’t, I don’t,” said my son Manvel, evidently.

114 a; ji`
115 m; kuxul la chale
Evidently he was sober when he said that.

¹⁵ The identity of this implied interlocutor is unspecified in Maryan’s rendition. But see below for another retelling of this interaction..

Old Maryan also used a pointed behavioral image, with the positional adjective *ja`al* ‘head tossed back, i.e., haughty’, to describe how his son treated him in situations where one would expect cooperation and mutual aid in work.

Example (8): Mol Maryan complains about his son’s impolite behavior. ¹⁶

324 m; komo le` chkak'be ak'in jchob le` ta pat apas =
325 =lavi ech' ora ya`el une
When I was weeding my fields behind Apas this season
326 a; mm
[
327 m; mu`yuk sikera jun k'ak'al (i`ay)
He didn't even come a single day.
328 te nox xa ja`al xi jelavel k'alal yolel chi`abtej =
329 =une
He would only walk past with his nose in the air as I was working.

Moving on to the dispute with his son-in-law over the land swap, Mol Maryan described to the official how he had presented his daughter with a highly advantageous proposal, which his son-in-law Chep had angrily refused. In this extended retelling, Mol Maryan continued to exercise rhetorical care. First he made it clear that his original intention to sell land was well publicized among those who could be expected to have first claim on a purchase, most importantly his sons, and his son-in-law. Indeed, as he tells it Mol Maryan discussed his intention to sell land with Chep even before he sought out a buyer.

Example (9): Another version of the “puta mol” story, told to the Nabenchauk magistrate, 21 July 1993

37 m; vo`ne le` kumpa
A long time ago, compadre
38 ikalbe onox ya`i
I told him.
39 a;¹⁷ aaa
.
44 m; ali chep
“Chep,” (I said).
45 ta me jchon kosil
I want to sell some of my land.
46 mi mu` jchon xana`
“Do you think I shouldn’t sell it?”
47 xkut, jp'is ta vinik
I said to him—I was showing him my respect (by asking his advice).
48 a; mm
49 m; bu xi
“Where is it?” he said.
50 ja` le`e ta yak'ol ka`ale
“It’s there above my well.
51 ti mi ta jchon . k'uk yepal le`e
“I might sell some part of it,
52 yu`un xtun ku`un tak'in le`e
“Because I need the money

¹⁶ Extracted from conversation between Maryan and the *agente municipal* recorded 20 July 1993.

¹⁷ “A” is the *agente municipal*.

53 chkal o jba vokol
 “For a curing ceremony,
54 yu`un ch`abal li jtak`ine xkut un
 “Since I have no money,” I told him.

Mol Maryan depicted his son-in-law as concerned about whether this proposed land sale would prejudice the interests of the old man’s daughters (presumably including those of his wife Maruch).

56 m; aa xi
 “Oh,” he said.
57 bweno yich`oj sparte tzebetike xi
 “Well, have the girls [Mol Maryan’s unmarried daughters] received their inheritance?”
 he asked.
58 ali tzebetike
 “As for the girls,
59 tey onox komem li osiletike
 “Land has been reserved for them.
60 mu`nuk laj o
 “This would not be the end of the land
61 epal osil te ku`une
 “Because I still have lots of property.
62 ta ta jch`akbe xkut
 “I will divide it among them,” I told him.
63 a; mm
64 m; aa xi
 “Oh,” he said.
65 bweno chono me mi`n aparte atuke
 “OK, sell it if it is part of your own share.”
66 ku`un jtuk xkut
 “It’s mine alone,” I said to him.
67 xu` xachon bi a`a xi
 “You can sell it then,” he said.
68 yech`o nopo me mi o chak`anik xkut
 “All right, in that case think it over—perhaps you [and your wife] want it,” I said to him.
69 i`i xi
 “No,” he said.

Mol Maryan’s consultation with and offer to his son-in-law, in this depiction, gave the younger man his due respect as a “reasonable person” whose opinion the older man valued.

In the next part of the narrative Mol Maryan spoke to his sons about the proposed sale, in the following terms.

74 m; oy akremotike
 “You have sons.
75 ep ach`amaltike
 “You have many children.
76 mu mu`nuk ata yav ana me ti bak`ine
 “What if you don’t find house sites for them when the time comes?”
77 ta me jchon li balamile xkut un
 “I want to sell some land,” I told them.
78 a; mm
79 m; e i`i nan
 “Eh, perhaps not.
80 chono xi
 “Sell it,” they said.

When none of his immediate family wanted the land, Mol Maryan began to show it to others and ultimately found a buyer who wanted to build a house there.

Complications arose when his daughter Maruch, Chep's wife, approached him on her own to express interest in the land. Again, his extended recounting of this part of the story allowed Mol Maryan to emphasize that his plan was reasonable, that his intentions were honest, and that he had observed all the required protocols.

94 iya`i li jtzeb une
My daughter heard about it
95 yajnil chepe
Chep's wife.
96 a; mm
[
97 m; mi chachon lavosile
"Are you going to sell your land?"
98 ta jchon
"I am."
99 a; mm
100 m; ee, pero manchuk mi ok jtak'ine
"Oh, if only I had the money,
101 chkich' vo`one
"I would buy it myself.
102 ja` lek ya`el
"It's good land.
103 ta jnakan ti jnae
"I would put my house there.
104 nopol tajmeke
"It's near (to you all).
105 toj lek ya`el pach'altike
"It's nice and flat.
106 ta jnakan jba jna
"I would put my own house there.
107 ti mi o k'u cha`al chilok' talele
"If I move down in this direction."
108 nopik mi chamanike
"Think about whether you [plu.] want to buy it.
109 pero . kalbe ya`el la.malal ti mu-
"I already offered it to your husband,
110 mu snop yo`on chka`i xkut
"But I don't think he was interested," I told her.
111 vo`one ta jnop xi
"I'll think about it," she said.

In this retelling, tailored to the magistrate's ears) Mol Maryan was careful to advise his daughter to take the proposal up with her husband Chep. His plural verb in line 108 made clear that both Maruch and her husband should think about the wisdom of his proposal. He made this even clearer, in his narrative, in the hypothetical dialogue between Maruch and Chep that he went on to construct.

126 m; pero albo abaik ba`yuk
"But speak to each other about it.
127 mi chachonik i balamil taj ta ak'ole
"Decide whether you want to sell that other land.
128 albo abaik ba`yuk k'uxi
"Talk about it, see what he says.
129 mi jchontik mi xie
"If he says 'Let's sell it!'
130 chachon xkut
"Then you sell it," I told her.
131 mi mu`yuk mi xi
"If he says 'No!'
132 yu`un mu xachon xkut
"Then you won't sell it," I told her.
133 ey xi ya`el

“Right,” she said.

Mol Maryan took advantage of the conventional Tzotzil use of reported dialogue in narrative to project not only his protagonists’ actions but their very voices. What happened when his daughter mentioned the possibility of land swap to her husband? Mimicking brusque and angry tones, Mol Maryan demonstrated his son-in-law’s reaction.

135 aa, i`i muk' bu chachon balamil
“Ah, no, you won’t sell any land!
136 ep smansana le` turasnual
“That land has lots of apple trees, and peach trees.
137 k'u yu`un chachon
“Why should you sell it?
138 bu ma chnaki lakremotik
“Where wil lyour boys [i.e., our sons] live?
139 ja` yosil akremotik le`e
“That land is for your sons,”
140 xi la li mol une
The gentleman is said to have said.

(Note again in line 140 the use of the quotative particle *la*, which identifies this little reported speech as what Mol Maryan’s daughter told him her husband said.)

Hearing that Chep was opposed to the swap, Mol Maryan abandoned the idea and decided to pursue his original plan to sell his own plot. But after some time had passed, his daughter again asked him to sell the land to her. The fact that his daughter raised the possibility a second time allowed Mol Maryan, in this detailed account of the affair, to take up a theme he wished to elaborate: the domestic problems in Chep’s own house that cast doubt on his suitability as a “fixer of people,” a dispute settler.

165 mu k'usi tot yu`un li abolajan sa`bon yajval kosil
“Do you know what, father? Please find a buyer for my land.
166 ta jchon ta jmoj
“I definitely want to sell it.
167 komo och xa jk'optikotik chi`uk li mole
“Because we have begun to fight, the gentleman and I.
168 yu`nox chital onox a`a
“And I will come after all,
169 ta jnakan jna lavi li nopol jta li balamil =
170 =chachone
“I will move my house here closer to you on the land you are selling.
171 ta xkich' jmoj xi
“I definitely want to buy it,” she said.
172 mi xavich' xkut
“You’ll buy it?,” I asked her.
173 ta xkich' xi
“I’ll buy it,” she said.
174 mi och ak'opik
“Are you starting to fight?”
175 aa, li jk'optikotik te nox k'alal xi
“Ah, fight? Don’t even ask,” she said.
176 aa xkut
“Ah,” I said to her.

Honoring his daughter’s request, Mol Maryan began to negotiate with potential buyers for his daughter’s land, located in another part of the village.

As fate would have it, the people who ultimately agreed to buy the land were Chep’s ritual kinsmen. Thinking that the deal was firm, and also not knowing that the plot of land they had agreed to buy was not Mol Maryan’s to sell but rather his daughter’s, these buyers went independently to visit Chep to ask him to witness the purchase. When he heard that the land in question was actually his (that is, his wife’s), an angry Chep went immediately to complain to the land commissioner. In this version, too, his insulting words—*puta mol*—form the crucial centerpiece of the story.

326 ali . chep une
So that Chep
327 jlikel la ba yalbe li . komite ta ora un
Right away he went to tell the land commissioner.
328 a; mm
[
329 m; kavron
“Bastard!
330 bat xa li kosile
“My land is gone!
331 xchon un
“He’s sold it!
332 komem ta manya
“He is up to no good.
333 jpoj osil li puta mole kavron¹⁸
“The whoring old man is a land thief, the bastard!
334 ak'o yich' skotol li yak'anoj ta te`tik kavron
“Let him just take back everything, all the woodlands he has divided up!
335 ak'o stzob skotol puta mole kavron
“Let him gather it all, the whoring old man!
336 jchon-osil le` kavron
“He’s a seller of land, damn it!
337 j`elek' osile
“A land robber,
338 jpoj osil xi me un xiyut i lol
“A land thief,” he said—that’s what Lorenzo told me.
[
339 a; mm

(Notice again that Mol Maryan omitted the evidential particle *la*. He was reporting what he heard directly from the lands commissioner: “this is what Lorenzo said to me.”)

Mol Manvel also recounted to the hamlet official a conversation he had been told about in which his son Manvel had an angry and abusive confrontation with the neighbor who ultimately bought the old man’s disputed piece of land (just on one side of Manvel’s own house plot).

Example (10): Mol Maryan’s son Manvel asks a neighbor about the land he purchased from mol Maryan.¹⁹

152 m; va`i un yu`un chajjak'be xun
“Listen, I want to ask you, John.

¹⁸ The loan *kavron* from Spanish *cabrón* is used here as a sign of Chep’s anger, not as an epithet directed at (predicated of) the father-in-law.

¹⁹ Extracted from conversation between Maryan and the *agente municipal* recorded 20 July 1993.

153 k'u cha'al atoj li balamil li'e xi
“How much did you pay for this land,” he said.
154 yu'un li` nakalote xut la
“Because you are living here,” he told him evidently.
155 a; a
156 m; ana ja` yech chk li'e xkut la
“Why, it was this much,” I²⁰ answered evidently.
157 a; aa
158 m; ke chingada kavron
“Son of a bitch, damn!”
159 jna` k'u stu'un xchon li puta mole kavron xi la =
“I don't know what business the whorish old man has in selling it,”
160 =li jmanvele
said my son Manvel evidently.

Once again, the insulting epithet *puta mol* is the centerpiece of the text. (This particular encounter ended in a fistfight as Manvel, somewhat drunk, also insulted his neighbor's wife and was punched and jailed as a result.)

After hearing Mol Maryan's tale of woe, the magistrate agreed to do what he could to arrange for a settlement. Despite the elaborate preparations, however, the official resolution that Mol Maryan had hoped for did not take place, as both Mol Maryan's son and later his son-in-law Chep managed to find ways to avoid a formal court hearing.

Disloyalty and insult

Toward the end of 1993 Mol Maryan, now in failing health, had another major curing ceremony in which, scandalously, neither his sons nor Chep took part—another clear sign of the depths of family rupture. Over the next two years Mol Maryan's son maintained hostilities, and the old man suspected that his son-in-law was giving him advice and moral support. (*Ja` yoyal* ‘he is their pillar,’ he complained to me.) In February 1995, the old man finally arranged an official hearing at the municipal courthouse to try and resolve the differences, particularly questions about who was to pay for the expensive curing ceremonies the old man needed as his health progressively deteriorated. The hearing ended with still more quarrelling, as Manvel's wife again made disparaging remarks about how she had no desire to care for a *tana-jol mol*, *xoka-jol mol*, *luk-`akan mol* (bald-headed, spotted-faced, skinny-legged old man). During the rest of 1995, as Mol Maryan's eyesight and hearing continued to fail and as he tried one remedy after another, he was supported only by his daughters. His son remained hostile, and his son-in-law Chep distant if not openly aggressive.

In March 1996, Mol Maryan made new efforts to procure a binding legal agreement, signed by his children and witnessed by officials from the government

²⁰ This framing speech verb *xkut* is in the first person, ‘I said’; complemented by the evidential quotative *la* it shows that Maryan here is “quoting” a description of this interaction which the speaker of the line, John, had in turn recounted to the older man.

Agrarian Reform agency, about what responsibilities the children would take for their parents in return for the property they had inherited. There was to be a major settlement at the hamlet town hall, with a Mexican official as well as past magistrates and land commissioners present to ratify the agreement. The *puta mol* story again reared its ugly head. According to the magistrate, Chep refused to participate because he was “still angry that [Mol Maryan] had sold off all his land, including that of his daughters.” Chep, the magistrate went on, wanted nothing to do with the old man and his tortured affairs. Although he was unable to retell the story in all its detail, Mol Maryan defended himself against this charge by rehearsing to the magistrate a brief version of the abortive land swap and sale. During the court hearing,

Mol Maryan also repeated words his son had used when defending himself against the charge that he did not deserve his inherited lands because he did not assume responsibility for his aging father.

Example (11): Mol Maryan repeats his son Manvel’s insulting retort²¹

611 m; k’u yu’un chasa` avajnil
“Why did you bother to look for a wife?
612 atz’ites ach’amal timi mu xavak’be yosil
“Or to raise your children, if you were not going to give them land?”
613 xiyut li manvel une
That’s what Manvel said to me.

The settlement at the court house took place in the absence of son-in-law Chep. Mol Maryan’s son agreed to support his father by giving him twice yearly amounts of corn and cash. The daughters, too, were asked to sign the document guaranteeing their more modest obligations to support their aging parents. However, when town hall officials were dispatched to bring Chep’s wife to the courthouse to put her thumbprint on the document, they were met by an angry Chep who refused to let her go. “She doesn’t even know how to read or write,” he shouted, “what interest does she have in signing a piece of paper?”

Several months after the settlement in which all of Mol Maryan’s children were officially obligated to contribute money and care to their parents, it was clear that Manvel had not responded. Resuming a theme that had already surfaced in his rhetoric, Mol Maryan laid the blame on his ill-tempered daughter-in-law, and on his son Manvel’s immaturity and indecisiveness, a character fault.

Example (12): Mol Maryan argues that his son Manvel is being henpecked by an ill-tempered wife, and the he should be more mature²²

173 m; mi ja` ixc’un mantal li ali mole
Even if the gentleman wants to do as he has been ordered (by the hamlet authorities)
174 ja` zpasvan ta mantal li me`ele

²¹ Extracted from recording of townhall settlement, 19 March 1996.

²² Extracted from conversation on the path to the cornfield with his younger son Antun, 20 Aug 1996.

- 175 *It is the lady who gives the orders.*
ma`uk yec un
176 a; *That's not right.*
a yu`un copoltik a`a
 It's somewhat bad, yes.
- 179 m; pero li ck le` une
 But this way,
180 mu xba ak`el me`el mole
 “Don't go visit the old man,”
181 yu`un nan xi un
 Perhaps that is what she says.
- 229 m; kere: mol xa
 Damn! He is old enough.
230 ja` jnitvanej ti yecuke yu`van
 He should be a leader, after all.
231 a; e ja` yec uk une
 Yes, it should be that way.
232 m; mi yora zpas unenal li mole
 Is this the time for the gentleman to be acting like a child?

By the following year, tensions had escalated still further, and Mol Maryan believed that there was a major conspiracy against him, headed by his son Manvel and his son-in-law Chep, both of whom were said to be plotting to obtain the old man's signature on land documents to guarantee their inheritances under Mexican law.

Example (13): Mol Maryan reports what “people” have told him about his son Manvel's plans and horrid words²³

- 69 m; li`albat k'alal leklekone
 I was told when I was still somewhat well
70 mi p'is xa yosil amanvele xiyutik
 “Have you measured out land for your son Manvel?” they asked me.
71 ip'is xa
 “I have.
72 le laj slok'esbe svunal xkut
 “He has taken out official title papers,” I told them.
73 mi chavak' apirma xi
 “Are you going to sign it?” they said.
74 mu jna` mi xkak'
 “I don't know if I will.
75 yunan mu`yuk to
 “Perhaps not yet.
76 tek nak'luk li vune
 “Let him just store the title.
77 te to chkak' ta tz'akal xkut
 “I'll sign it later,” I said
78 ti much'u liyalbe
 to the one who told me.
79 pero ka'i me un
 “But I have heard something,” [said the other].
80 ati mi lok' tal li spirma
 “If I manage to get the signature,
81 mi yak' spirma li jtote

²³ Extracted from a recorded conversation 5 September 1997 in Mol Maryan's house and yard.

82 *“If my father signs,*
 esosi
83 *“Yes, indeed,*
 bat ta myerta bi a`a
84 *“He can go to shit, then,*
 ak'o slo`ik tzo` xi la li jmanvele
85 *“Let him just eat shit,” evidently said my son Manvel*
 xchi`uk yajnil
 and his wife.

Recycling and intensification

In late 1998, Mol Maryan continued to brood on the events that had set off this deep division in his family. As we sat together in the warm sun of the yard to which he is largely confined these days, he returned again and again to events that had given his life its current somber tone. The insulting epithet *puta mol* still rang in his ears and offended his sensibilities. In his new refashionings the events were much the same, but he recast the principal protagonists either as deeply self-interested, ill-tempered, and evil (in the case of his son-in-law), or as manipulated by other evil people (as in the case of his son).

In a 1998 retelling of the *puta mol* story, Mol Maryan’s account of how his daughter Maruch came to hear of the possibility of a land swap now portrays naked conflict between Chep and his wife. As in previous versions, Mol Maryan recounts how he first invited both his son and his son-in-law to buy the plot he intended to sell. In this telling, however, it is revealed that Chep didn’t even bother to inform his wife that her father intended to sell land—a symptom of their internal domestic problems, in Mol Maryan’s view.

Example (14): Mol Maryan recalls the abortive land swap, with me as his interlocutor, September 14, 1998.

94 m; mu no nan isna` xk'ot lo`ilajuk ta sna
 Perhaps [Chep] was not in the habit of conversing at home [with his wife].
95 k'u nan x`elan li pentejo une
 Who knows what habits the idiot had?
96 ja` iya`i taj akumale une
 Your comadre (Chep’s wife) heard [about the possibility of a land sale].
97 mi chachon avosile xi
 “Are you selling your land?” she asked
98 (ta) jchon xkut
 “I am,” I told her.
99 mi ava`i xkut
 “You’ve heard, have you?” I said.
100 ka`i:
 “I have.
101 yu`van o bu chiyalbe un
 “But don’t think that [Chep] said anything about it to me.
102 muk' k'u xiyalbe
 “He said nothing.
103 muk' k'u sna` xlo`ilaje xi
 “He’s not in the habit of telling me things,” she said.
104 aa xkut
 “Ah,” I replied.

Mol Maryan then proposed the land swap. Predictably, Chep’s reported reaction to the proposal was strongly negative, a reaction that Mol Maryan, in this telling, appeared to anticipate. (See the hypothetical refusal that he puts into Chep’s mouth at line 128 below, a hypothetical refusal that precedes the actual reported refusal starting at line 133.) Mol Maryan first insisted that his daughter take the matter up with her husband before proceeding.

124 m; pero ba albo abaik ba`yuk un
 “But first go and speak to each other about it.
126 mi xtal xch'am entrok'al un
 “See if he will come to receive the land officially.
127 naka mi mu chopoluk xa`i
 “He might otherwise take it badly.
128 mu k'u jtu`un mi xi likel une
 “What if he says, ‘I have no use for that [land]’?”
129 sa`ob k'op me xkut un
 “It will just be the cause for an argument,” I said to her.
130 j; aa
131 m; chkalbe xi .
 “I’ll tell him,” she said.
132 iyalbe la un
 So she evidently told him.
133 a mu k'u jtu`un
 “‘Ah, I’m not interested in [that land].’
134 yil tz'ajeb vo`tike
 “‘Forget it; that land gets flooded [in the rainy season].’
135 k'u atu`un li balamile
 “‘What do you want land for?’
136 lek i balamil ta ak'ole
 “‘The other land up above [that is, her original inheritance] is fine.’
137 mu xach'am
 “‘Don’t accept it!’
138 yiluk yil
 “‘Forget it!
139 xiyut un xi
 “That’s what he said to me,” she said.

When Mol Maryan’s daughter asked him a second time to find a buyer for her land so she could take the nearer plot in exchange, in this version of the story her cards were clearly on the table: she planned to divorce Chep and leave him to his ill-humor and thoughtless ways.

145 m; a le` tot
 “So, father,
146 sa`bon yajval kosil
 “Find me a buyer for my land.
147 mi`n chachonbon
 “Whether you want to sell [your land] to me,
148 mi ta jjeltik k'u cha`al yu`nox chital a`a
 “Or whether we exchange plots, in any case I am going to come [to live on it].
149 ta jjip komel li mole
 “I’m going to abandon the gentleman.
150 yu`nox kom o
 “He’ll just stay behind.
151 ta jchotan komel
 “I’ll leave him sitting where he is.”
152 xi talel noxtok i maruch une
 That’s what Maruch said when she came [to talk to me].

There is also added spice to Mol Maryan’s account of his encounter with the land commissioner on the first Friday of Lent. This is when he learned of the abuse his son-in-law had heaped upon him.

223 m; li`ay ta eklexa un
I went to the church
224 va`i ja` tey li komite une
So, there was the commissioner.
225 mi lalok' xa tal ta proxeyon totik maryan
“Have you come out for the procession, Mr. Maryan?”
226 lilok' xa tal xkut
“I have come out,” I said.
227 aa xi
“Ah,” he said.
228 ataj osil li` ta sna p***
*“And that land here by the house of P**,*
229 mi`n yech ti achonoje xi
“Is it true that you have sold it?” he asked.
230 muk' bu jchon xkut
“No, I haven’t sold it,” I told him.
231 pero yu`un la achonoy xa xi li . mol chep
“But, supposedly you have sold it, according to Mr. Chep.
232 te ay yalbone
“He came by to tell me.
233 yu`un la . chono la skotol li osil bu lavak'an =
234 =taj ta te`tik
“(He said that) you should sell all the land that you have given away in the woodlands,
235 ta bu ta pat apas
“Or behind the village of Apas.
236 chono la skotol
“You should sell it all, he said.
237 batz'i puta mole xi me ayel xi . li komite
“The damned whore of an old man, he said when he came by,” said the commissioner.

Making history come true

Almost thirty years later Mol Maryan retold a story about his now estranged son-in-law. Mol Maryan’s motives now are radically reversed from those active in the gossip session of thirty years ago with which this paper began. Chep is now not his new son-in-law but his declared enemy. Mol Maryan touches on the currents flowing through the troubled relationship with Chep over the years: competition for land, rivalries between siblings, the interventions of Mexican law in Zinacantec inheritance practices, the machinations of power, and the unabashed appetite of the younger man for making trouble. Here is a 1998 version of the story about Chep’s fight with his own brother over land.

Example (15): Chep already was an enthusiastic trouble-maker as a young man.²⁴

1 m; sokem ono:x
He was already going bad.
2 batz'i ben onox kavron tajmek ich'i le`e
He was a real bastard even as he was growing up.
5 sa`-k'op tajmek i: chep ali: xchi`uk skajve
He made all kinds of trouble over his coffee lands.

²⁴ Fragments of gossip recorded 5 September 1997.

Haviland, AA 2002 "Intertextuality", draft p. 26

6 yosili ta. pojbalal osil skwenta ejidataryo
He had land that had been reclaimed under the ejido laws.
 . . .

8 m; oy sbankil ta apas un
He has an older brother in the hamlet of Apas.

9 lukax
Name of Lucas.
 . . .

11 ja` tzpoj kajve li bankilal une
The older brother wanted to take away the coffee lands.

12 komo ch'abal yosil li bankilal une
Because the older brother had no property at all.

13 stuk stzoboj osil ali chep une
Chep had gathered all the land together for himself.

14 j; ja`
Yes.

15 m; bweno li bankilal une, sk'opon ti komite un
Well, the older brother spoke to the lands commissioner.
 . . .

19 m; bweno take ta ik'el le` une
Well, [Chep} was sent for.

20 j; a

21 m; mu xtotz la un
But he wouldn't budge--

22 li chep une
Chep, that is.

23 ta:l yik'el ta pwersa tajmek
They came to take him by force,

24 ta mayoletik un
with deputies from the town hall

25 kuche muyel ta karo
He was taken up (to the municipal center) by truck.
 . . .

30 m; bweno li: kavron une
OK, but that bastard,
 . . .

34 li chep le`e te ch`ik'e yalel ta nachij un
They were going to get Chep off the truck in Nachij.

35 li karo une, te koti ta nachij un
The truck stopped there in Nachij

36 tzyales li. ali jmantaletik une
To let the authorities off.
 . . .

39 ali chepe ta kabina ibat xchi`uk i chofer un
Chep was inside the cabin of the truck with the driver.

40 j; aa

41 m; bweno timi iyal i jente le` . . .
"OK, when the people get off, don't . . .

43 ja` no me iyal une
"As soon as they've all gotten off,

44 nito ma ta ora lakaro
"Just start up your car

45 yu'un la jobel chibat xi la un
"Because I'm going to San Cristóbal," he said, supposedly.
 . . .

49 m; va`i un iyal ti jmantaletik mayoletike
So when the deputies and other authorities got off

51 nit skaro li . ali . j`ayel chofer
The damned driver just drove off

52 k'alal jobel
Right to San Cristóbal.

53 j; kere
Boy!

54 m; ati jmantaletik ta va`al ikom

55 *The authorities were just left standing there.*
muk' ista ech'el yikatz
They didn't take their prisoner with them.
. . . .

.57 ijatav ech'el ta jobel li chepe
And Chep just ran away to San Cristóbal.
59 k'alal ik'ot ta . jobel une
When he got to San Cristóbal
60 k'ot la sk'opon lisensyaro un
He went straight away to speak to a lawyer.
. . . .

71 ja` sk'opon sba xchi`uk komite un
[The lawyer] went to make a deal with the land commissioner.
72 ora li kajvele
Now, the coffee lands
73 ak'o entrokak avosile . x`utat i mol . li chep
“Hand over your land,” Chep was told.
75 yak' entrokak li osil une
He handed over the land.
76 ja` muk' xa xich' yosil sme` stot ya`el ti lukax une
But Lucas received none of the lands of his father and mother
78 ja` stuk iyich' i chep une
Chep took all of them.
. . . .

82 meltzaj o ti k'op une
That's how the dispute was settled
. . . .

85 batz'i ben tajme:k sa` o k'op i.muy tal k'ak'al le`e
[Chep] just spent all his days looking for trouble as he grew up.

Chep is no longer presented as simply an immature, selfish youth (whose “soul has not yet arrived”), but as a malevolent manipulator, willing to rob even his own (half)brother of his rightful inheritance out of greed for land.

As a final glimpse into Mol Maryan’s evolving construction of his autobiography, here are fragments from a conversation I had with him just a few months ago about the state of his relationship with his son Manvel. Mol Maryan is now extremely feeble, completely blind, and so deaf that even his hearing aid (a gift from anthropologists two decades ago) is of little help. He is, indeed, preparing himself for death, which he now appears to view as something of a release from the never ending squabbles with relatives. He has distanced himself from the quarrels with the estranged son and son-in-law, and this emotional distance is reflected in the narratives he now constructs about his relations with them.

Mol Maryan began by recounting the somewhat ludicrous form in which Manvel, his own son, came to deliver the twice yearly amount of corn mandated by the court settlement several years ago. Rather than simply bringing the corn and giving it to his father, he asked representatives of the local land council to accompany him and to observe the transaction officially. Moreover, when the land council officials scolded Manvel for not giving his father occasional gifts of cash, he handed over 20 pesos to the old man, who only later discovered that the money was really that of one of the officials, who forced Manvel to give it. The younger man left promising to return to visit his father after a couple of days, but by the time of our conversation three months had passed without a sign of him. Such silliness Mol Maryan summed up with the phrase *chopol yunen jol lok'em*, literally, “his little head has turned out bad,” which ironically

juxtaposed the diminutive adjective *unen* ‘small, childlike’ with the son’s alleged bad head.

The centerpiece of this recent conversation with Mol Maryan is his account of a visit which, he says, he received several years ago from an unnamed and unidentifiable relative from the nearby hamlet of Apas. (He repeated several times that he had unfortunately never asked this relative’s name, nor interrogated him about several other details about the events supposedly recounted, even though at the time the alleged conversation took place old Mol Maryan would still have been able to see and hear relatively well.) The story unites in a single, coherent, although highly contentious narrative a whole series of phrases, sentiments, and circumstances which Mol Maryan has clearly been cutting and pasting from more than a decade of fighting and talk. The tale reverberates with past words, both his and others’, as I have heard them first hand and as they have been played back to me through gossiping mouths.

The stranger from Apas tells Mol Maryan that he has recently met son Manvel on the path. They struck up a conversation in which Manvel was defiantly unrepentant.

Example (16): A second hand conversation between Manvel and a man from another hamlet.²⁵

432 m; ali: Manvel
“*Manvel,*
433 li` cajjak'be
“*Let me ask you.*
435 mi kuxul to ti jtotik
“*Is our father*²⁶ *still alive?*
436 mu xa bu jnup ta bee .
“*I never meet him on the path anymore*’.
437 xkut un xi
“*I said to him,*” he said.
438 j; eso
Right.
440 m; an kuxul nan ce`e
“*Why yes, perhaps he’s alive.*
441 k'usi van ca`i pu:ta mol un
“*What (sickness) might that whorish old man suffer?*”
442 xi la un
He evidently said.

The damning epithet *puta mol* now trips easily off the narrated lips of both son and son-in-law. Similarly, Manvel’s disloyalty to his father and nose-thumbing at Zinacantec tradition is enshrined in his barefaced declarations about not planning to take care of, or even visit the old man again, never mind the inheritance he has received.

²⁵ From the same dinnertime conversation between Mol Maryan and JBH videotaped 17 Aug. 2002.

²⁶ The referent term *jtotik* ‘our father’ shows that the otherwise unidentified interlocutor from Apas counted himself one of Maryan’s junior relatives, and thus could use the first person plural inclusive possessive form in conversation with Manvel.

Example (17): Manvel's reconstructed conversation with an interlocutor from another village continues.²⁷

- 480 m; je kavro:n
"Heh, damn!"
- 481 baz'i mu jna` cka`i li pu:ta mole kavron xi la
"I just don't know about that whorish old man," he evidently said.
- 482 j; ijole
Damn!
- 483 m; mi ck'ot ak'el un
"Do you still go to visit him?"
- 484 c'abal xi la
"No," he said evidently.
- 485 j; c'abal xi- jamal iyal
"No," he said. He admitted it!
- 486 m; [c'abal
"No."
- 487 mi cba ak'el to onox
"Will you ever visit him again?"
- 488 i`i xi la un
"No," he said evidently.
- 489 j; jej
- 490 m; i`i
"No."
- 491 muk bu cba jk'el
"I won't go to visit him.
- 492 mu k'u jtu`un xi la
"I have no use for him," he said evidently.
- 493 j; ijola
Damn!
- 494 m; a timi cam une xi
"And if he dies?" he said.
- 495 pero te ya`i sba:
"Then that's not my worry.
- 496 tek smukik i . zebetike
"Let his daughters bury him,"
- 497 xi la un
He said evidently.
- 498 j; kere:
Boy!
- 499 m; aa:y xi
"Ay," he said.
- 500 mi muk' yak'oj avosil un
"Hasn't he given you land?"
- 501 ali osile yak'oj pero jme` jtot un
"As for land, yes he has given it. But they are my mother and father.
- 502 k'u lizs'ites ce`e
"Why else would they have brought me up?
- 503 yak' a`a pero jme` jtot . xi la un
"Indeed, they had to give me land; they are my parents after all," he said evidently.

Mol Maryan in this same conversation explicitly links his son's waywardness with the bad influence of Chep, the son-in-law, whose aggressive ill-temper at the curing

²⁷ More from the same dinnertime conversation between Mol Maryan and JBH videotaped 17 Aug. 2002.

ceremony years before had become the evil on which Mol Maryan blamed the family rupture.

Example (18): How did Manvel go wrong? It was Chep’s fault.²⁸

359 m; lek to`o:x
He used to be all right.
 360 ja` xa no me sok o sjol ti li`ipaj vo`ne
But his head was just ruined when I got sick a long time ago.
 361 j; ji` jna`tik k`usi sok o li sjole
Yes, who knows how his head got ruined?
 362 m; ja` li oc tal li j-
It was because of the entry (into my house)
 363 cib ak`ubal li jkot mole
of one[animal] gentleman for two nights.
 364 ja` istik`be sbaik k`op un
And the two of them provoked each other (into fighting with me).

Mol Maryan’s reference to Chep, the estranged son-in-law, is at once euphemistic, insulting, and humorous: instead of naming him, he calls him only *mol* ‘senior male, gentleman.’ Any respect the term might otherwise connote, however, is negated both by its distancing inappropriateness for a son-in-law, and even more by the numeral expression *j-kot* literally ‘one-CLASSIFIER(four-legged-thing)’ normally reserved for counting animals and furniture.

Finally, returning to the second-hand conversation with the unidentified “relative from Apas,” Mol Maryan establishes the final and conclusive link between his son’s otherwise inexplicable misbehavior over the years, and the unmitigated and destructive propensity for trouble making that he has now located firmly in his son-in-law Chep’s flawed character. Just as, seven years ago, he was calling his son-in-law the *-oyal* or ‘pillar’ which supported his otherwise politically inept son in dangerous and insubordinate behavior, he now locates this image in the mouth of the mysterious interlocutor, who warns Manvel about the risks he is taking by ignoring the moral imperative to care for ones aging parents, especially when they have bequeathed land to one.

Example (19): A final revelation about the son and the son-in-law

525 m; i:i: xi la
“No,” he evidently said.
 526 mu j-
 527 mu onox k`usi xixca`le xa
“They can’t do anything to me (for not following the customs).
 528 yomo yec xal li jmol bole
“Because that is what my elder brother-in-law [i.e., Chep] says.
 529 ja` te jok`olone ti jbol chepe
“For I am hanging there, from my brother-in-law Chep.
 530 mu xak`el
““Don’t visit him.”
 531 mu xa.tuk`ulan i mole kavron
““Don’t take care of the old man, damn it’.

²⁸ From a dinnertime conversation between Mol Maryan and JBH videotaped 17 Aug. 2002.

532 yasta ti iyak'be li spirma li-
 “‘Wait until he has given his signature...’
 533 ali vunal osile
 “‘On the land title’
 534 e:sosi yu'un avu'un xa
 “‘Then, yes, it will be yours’.
 535 jipo komel
 “‘Throw him away and leave him.’
 536 xiyut ti jbol chepe
 “‘So says my brother-in-law Chep to me.
 537 ja` te jok'olon zpat xokon
 “‘For I am hanging from his back / his side.’²⁹
 538 kucem ku'un muk'tik k'op . xi li jbol chepe
 “‘“I have survived many major political battles” says my brother-in-law Chep.’”
 539 xiyut xi
 “‘He said to me,” he said.
 540 j: ijola
 Damn!
 541 m; aa: va`i bu jok'olot ce`e
 “Aa, so that is where you are hanging, then.
 542 va`i bu . lek avoyal xut la un
 “That is where your strong pillar is,” he evidently said to him.

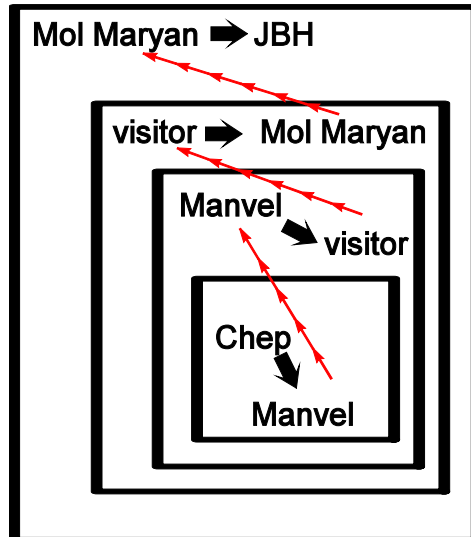


Figure 2: multiple embedded quotes

Thirty years of conversations with Mol Maryan are filled with the intertextual resonances Bakhtin suggests to be the interactive core and true nature of language. These resonances work from the inside out, starting at the constructional nucleus of Tzotzil narrative, the individual utterance, where particles like the evidential *la* ‘hearsay’ link spoken turns to “shadow” speakers at several levels of embedding. Mol Maryan recounts his mystery interlocutor citing the words of Manvel, who in turn quotes the hated brother-

²⁹ The doublet *pat / xokon* ‘back / side’ incorporates the a standard ritual image for ones body, in this case extended to the whole sphere of influence of the brother-in-law, a past political leader. I have only indicated the full complexity of embedded quotes in the translations of lines 538 and 539 in this fragment.

in-law Chep (line 538 of the last example, and Figure 2). The phrases of these tales of woe and misfortune—the *puta mol* or ‘whorish old man’, the estranged relative who will not “step across the threshold, not today, not tomorrow,” or the evil son-in-law whose whole character is filled with the urge to *sa`k’op* ‘search for words, i.e., trouble’—walk in precise Bakhtinian shoes from one story to the next, year after year, both because they “presume the existence of preceding utterances” and because they “expect[] response, agreement, sympathy, objection, execution” (Bakhtin 1986: 69). Moreover, one day’s angry shouted insult becomes, after a month or a decade, an icon of personality, and index of (perhaps deeply flawed) character, an essential feature of other, and thus a reflected component of self.