'Con Buenos Chiles': Talk, targets and teasing in Zinacantan

JOHN B. HAVILAND*

Abstract

Exploring the premise that conversationalists are engaged in a rich and peculiarly accessible form of social life, I pull apart the normal participant roles identified in conversation, concentrating in detail on the marked role of interlocutor, *in Zinacanteco Tzotzil talk. I argue that multi-party interaction, involving three or more participants, is the 'canonical' case, around which conversational mechanisms are designed. Looking in detail at a fragment of prosaic interaction, in which Zinacanteco peasant corn-farmers plan a ritual, I show that there is a constant interplay between speakers and hearers, social identities and interrelationships, and conversational topics. In an apparently unrelated side-sequence, in which several adults tease a little boy, I suggest that topics of situational and cultural relevance are being explored between conversationalists, even when they do not directly address one another. It is, then, the 'texture' of the audience that is both exploited by interactants and a resource for ethnographic insight.*

1. Activity in language

Ethnographers, like everyone else, meet language through the activities of everyday life. Even those of us particularly interested in words do not ordinarily find ourselves picking them apart, or hoisting them out of their

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EL PROBLEMA DE LA EDUCACION
BILINGUE EN EL AREA TZOTZIL

John B. Haviland

¿EXISTE UN PROBLEMA DE EDUCACION BILINGUE?

A pesar de la larga historia de controversias acerca de la política del lenguaje en México, a pesar de que el I.N.I. estableció el primer Centro Coordinador en la región Tzeltal-Tzotzil de Chiapas en septiembre de 1950; y a pesar de los trabajos llevados a cabo aquí en los Altos desde las décadas de 1940 y 1950 por antropólogos, lingüistas, educadores, licenciados, evangelistas, políticos y otros funcionarios indígenistas; a pesar de todo ésto, se puede hacer constar que este problema no existe porque la educación bilingüe no existe en el área tzotzil. Además, es posible argumentar que la educación bilingüe es una contradicción: un bilingüe debe ser por definición un indio, y en esta área no puede haber un indio educado. En esta ponencia, exploraré el desarrollo, casi cíclico, de la política del lenguaje en México y sus bases teóricas y políticas. Además, haré unas sugerencias muy tentativas sobre una educación monolingüe para el área Tzotzil, que sería una educación monolingüe en Tzotzil.

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VERBS AND SHAPES IN (ZINACANTEC) TZOTZIL: THE CASE OF "INSERT"

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Minimal Maxims: Cooperation and Natural Conversation in Zinacantan

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Los procesos de la inferencia pragmática, combinados con los princi-
pios cooperativos conocidos como 'máximas conversacionales,' estruc-
turan la comunicación en los intercambios verbales. Este trabajo
investiga la aplicación etnográfica del estudio comparativo de los pa-
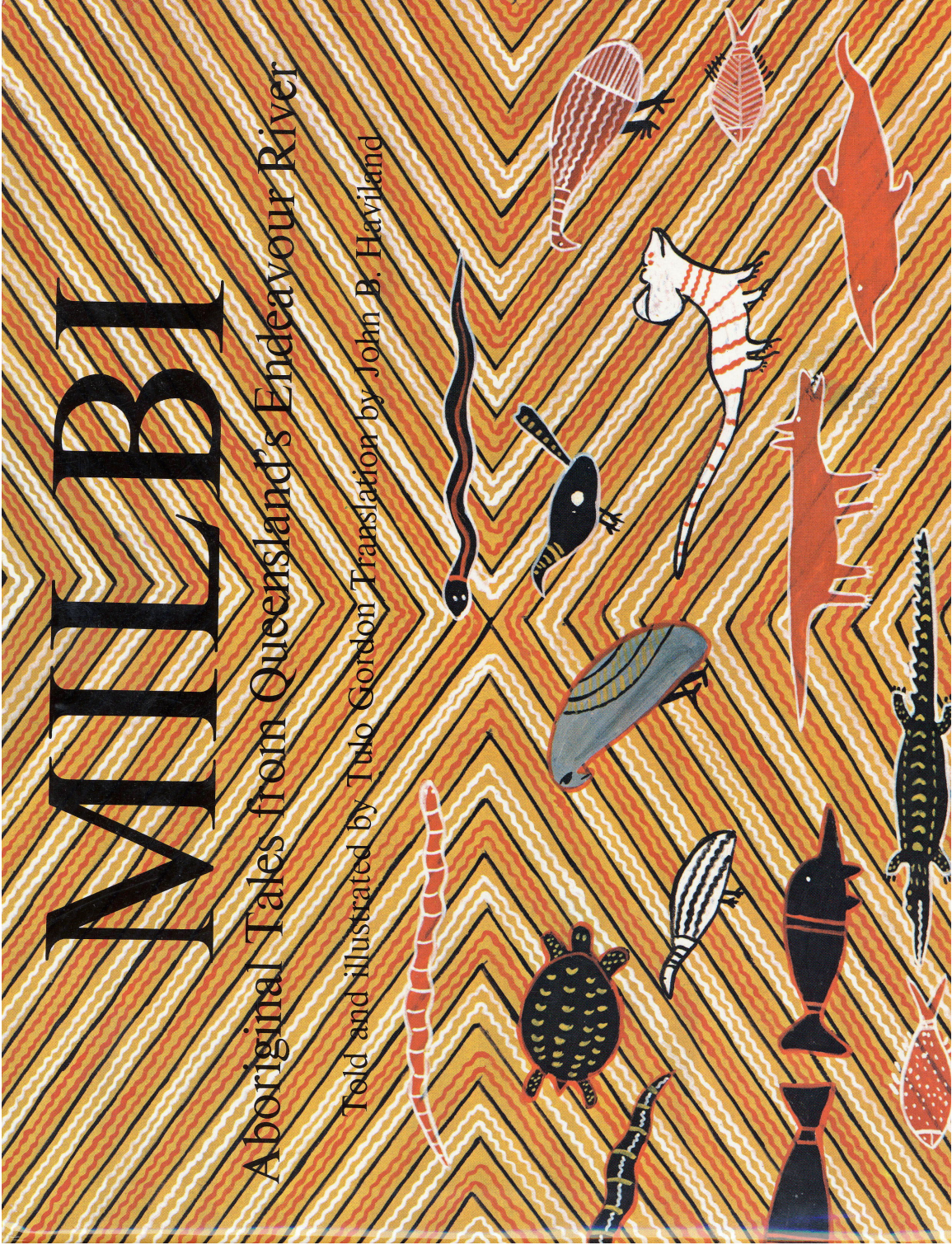trones conversacionales en una comunidad tzotzil.

In the long history of ethnographic research in the highlands
of Chiapas, anthropologists have taken it to be both a necessity and
a virtual point of honor to use the local language as a primary
medium of field research. In the case of Zinacantán (see Vogt 1973:
11) many anthropological studies have depended on an ever increas-
ing understanding of both the structure and what Laughlin (1975)
calls the "genius" of Zinacanteco Tzotzil: lexical studies which dem-
onstrate the conceptual richness and subtlety of the Tzotzil universe,
or which extract ethnographic intuitions from the structural seman-
tic analysis of lexical fields;[1] or syntactic descriptions of Tzotzil
grammar (Haviland 1981), which incorporates the systematic com-
plexity of the expressive resources of Tzotzil speakers. Nonetheless,
linguistic description serves the ends of anthropological inquiry
more directly when it goes beyond lexical or syntactic structure to
illuminate the nature of *natural conversation*. For the anthropo-
logical fieldworker, the central goal is not simply to collect a hand-
ful (or a boxful) of lexical items or paradigms; it must extend to
learning an entire repertoire of ways of speaking, in quotidian situ-
ations. In our own society, just as in those we study anthropologi-
cally, people converse, chat, and gossip about the events of the day
and the personalities of the community. We pass our time, in grand

MILBI

Aboriginal Tales from Queensland's Endeavour River

Told and illustrated by Tulo Gordon Translation by John B. Haviland

WORKING PAPERS AND PROCEEDINGS OF THE CENTER FOR PSYCHOSOCIAL STUDIES

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Paisanos and Chamulitas: speech and social relations in (and around) Zinacantán[1]

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Abstract

The following paper is an analysis of the speech and social relations in and around Zinacantán in the highlands of Chiapas, Mexico. The villages in the region, populated chiefly by Tzotzil speaking Indians, are the focus of the claim that natives' cultural understandings typically connect language and speech with social life and sociability. The actual act of speaking becomes a basic instrument of social action, as seen in the example of changing habits of address towards Indians in Tonalá, on the Chiapas coast.

People experience their social order through everyday encounters, whose medium is language. The tenor of these encounters, also expressed in language, sets the tenor of the relationships. In modern Chiapas, speech relations display an asymmetry that reflects a social, economic, and political asymmetry.

In Zinacantán, as elsewhere, native theory, insofar as it is reflected in vocabulary, makes explicit the link between formal and informal talk and both social institutions and sociability. The features of interaction through speech — the resources it uses, the circumstances under which it occurs, and so on — are thus multiply connected with the social order, and conversely, the facts of social organization help us to understand language — both its form and its functions.

Life on the edge

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

"Te xa setel xulem" [The buzzards were circling]: categories of verbal roots in (Zinacantec) Tzotzil[1]

JOHN B. HAVILAND

Abstract

The semantics of Zinacantec Tzotzil verbs displays an apparent preoccupation with space, shape, position, and configuration, which pervades all aspects of normal language use. Spatial notions are routinely conflated with states and actions. Surface verb stems derive from verbal roots that can be partitioned into formal types on the basis of derivational possibilities. These formal types, in turn, represent unmarked vehicles for expressing certain schematic semantic domains. The paper sketches both the formal and the notional categories that must be distinguished across the entire verbal inventory of the Tzotzil lexicon.

1. Verb roots and spatial description

If one starts with a pretheoretical notion of "space" and tries to catalogue resources for "spatial description" in a language like Tzotzil,[2] one is quickly led to verbs. Although the language uses nominal devices — "body part" words and "relational nouns" — to express part–whole relations and certain sorts of proximity and configuration, the elaboration of such notions is limited to a closed class of nominal roots (de Leon 1992). Certain schematic paths (Talmy 1985), sometimes understood as expressing orientation, are grammaticalized in a small set of auxiliaries and directionals. These elements have verbal provenance, transparently deriving from full lexical verbs of "motion" (Haviland 1990a, 1993; Aissen, this volume). Moreover, it is with verbs that the Tzotzil lexicon seems to explode with expressive richness in characterizing such apparently spatial notions as shape, relative position, contact, support, containment, and manner of motion. Some of these verbs appear to complement a schematic geometry or anatomy encoded in body-part words (see Haviland 1992b; Levinson, this volume). Others concentrate

In this issue

'Sure, sure': Evidence and Affect[1]

JOHN B. HAVILAND

Abstract

When people fight, they typically display their feelings; and since people often fight over matters of fact, declarations of truth and accusations of deceit are frequent vehicles for affective language. I examine evidential devices in Tzotzil arguments, to display the complex formal and functional intermingling of referential usage (the normal accepted domain for questions of truth), rhetoric and genre (in particular, the highly charged formal speech style in Zinacanteco Tzotzil), illocutionary force, and affect. I conclude that (Tzotzil) conversation as much establishes a moral as a propositional universe of discourse, and that evidentials can be about feelings and commitments as well as about truth.

Fussing and fighting

On the radio, the Bickersons[2] are at each other again:

John: Blanche, what's the matter with you
         it's three o'clock in the morning
         You had a good time t'night
         Now whyncha let me sleep?
Blanche: had a miserable time
         it was the UNhappiest anniversary I ever spent
         Why didn't you show up for the party, John?=
John: =I TOLD ya
         I got stuck at the office
Blanche: I'd like to believe that
         What were you doing?
John: working
Blanche: su:re sure
         That's always the first excuse
         If I don't fall for that?