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“Whorish Old Man” and “One (Animal) Gentleman”: The Intertextual Construction of Enemies and Selves

Working with a series of narratives about a family dispute told over more than thirty years by an elderly Tzotzil-speaking Indian, from Chiapas, Mexico, I consider several puzzles about the widely espoused notion of the “textual self.” Here the voices of others, perhaps more than that of the speaker whose self is being constituted, are centrally incorporated into his ongoing self-reflective biographical account. Moreover, as the narrator moves toward the end of his life, his story seems to lock itself into a closed discursive universe, in which the words of salient others become the repetitive, insistent, and inescapable theme of his self-conception and presentation. [Tzotzil, autobiography, self, intertextuality, kinship, argument]

Bakhtin’s concept of intertextuality radically questions the sociohistorical autonomy of utterances and the radical creativity of language, by placing all words in the mouth(s) of a Janus head that simultaneously looks back to prior words and forward to anticipated responses.

[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]

The inescapably interactive history of every utterance, resonating with multiple pasts and futures, is a compelling model for all discursive phenomena, from culture itself (Urban 1998) to the notion of the person. Consider Asif Agha’s deconstruction of notions of self into, minimally, “the self of memory, the remembered self which is constituted—often interactionally—in realtime psychological processes of recollection of past events” (Agha 1995:143), as well as “the self of habit” and any number of “culturally constituted selves.” He continues, “[b]ut from a discourse point of view, the most elementary notion of self is the self of interactional microtime,” which is inevitably conditioned by (1) perspective (of some observer[s], who may be instantiations of the “same” self at some other interactional moment), (2) relative to a contingent interactional context, and (3) multiply constructed, often from different perspectives, and usually calibrated *over time* (1995:143). Charles Taylor (1985) cites language as the crucial “locus of disclosure” of the person. Giddens argues that “[t]he reflexive project of the self . . . consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives” (Giddens 1992). Such a processual, inter-

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actional, and sometimes explicitly “conversational” view of self seems standard in at least some sorts of social psychology:

An individual emerges through the processes of social interaction, not as a relatively fixed end product but as one who is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which they participate. Accordingly, who one is is always an open question with a shifting answer depending upon the positions made available within one’s [*sic*] own and others’ discursive practices and within those practices, the stories through which we make sense of our own and others’ lives. [Davies and Harré 1990:46]

Indeed, as Crapanzano argues, “[n]arratives of the self . . . are taken to be a means of knowing the self. As such, at least in our medicalized era, they have, among others a therapeutic intention (however masked) that has replaced or, more accurately, come to dominate other intentions” (1996:108).

Ochs and Capps end their review of literature on the narrated self with the capsule observation that “narrative brings multiple, partial selves to life” (1996:37), having argued earlier that “[i]f we develop our selves through the stories we tell and if we tell them to others, then we are a complex, fluid matrix of coauthored selves” (1996:31). The notion of a “coauthored” intertextual “self” implies an evolving set of texts derived from chains of narratives, through processes of inscription, revision, and editing involving many voices, in addition to those of the “person” whose “self” is thus assembled, articulated, polished, as well as contested. Like any other discursive object, this “self” incorporates participant frames and voices, as well as allegiances, footings, and stances; it has its allusions and its chronology, looking both to the past and to the future. The compendium of a single person’s autobiographical accounts, along with the projected positionings of self that emerge from a life of interlocution, moves through time as self-conceptions are constructed, ordered, reordered, contested, revised, pulled apart, and renewed during a person’s lifetime.

In this underlying metaphor of the textual self lie many puzzles, ethnographic and conceptual. First, why and when do such discourses of self-disclosure and self-construction occur at all? If the self is a story we tell ourselves (and others) over and over again, changing as times change, what coherence can it have, and from what can any resulting stability derive? What intertextual processes weave together discrete narrative bits, each originally located in its own “interactional microtime”? And does the process of self-construction end only when its telling voice(s) are finally silenced? By tracking an ongoing chain of self-disclosing discourses over time—perhaps as some psychoanalysts do over the course of prolonged therapy—we might best understand the intertextual and interactive processes involved, as well as the ethnography of the textual self, the nature of the occasions that give rise to such “self-centering discourses” in the first place. Tackling a much smaller question here, I will argue that ironically it may be the narratives of *others* that most insistently create the textual self, as other voices, incorporated into an ongoing autobiographical story, become the central organizing features of the resulting composite text. Moreover, as one passes from being “the hero of one’s own story” into old age, as there cease to be “new” events in one’s life, the textual self may settle, or *congeal*, into a kind of thematic fugue, locked in its own discursive universe and more clearly reflected in the discourses of others than in one’s own distinctive voice—a point on which I shall touch at the end of the article.

In a wider project on the nature of linguistic “competence” in a culturally perspicacious sense, I have been studying the talk of highly skilled Tzotzil-speakers from Chiapas, Mexico. One—Mol Maryan, my teacher, friend, *compadre*, and mentor—is now about ninety years old. His life, like that of other Zinacantecs of his age, has been defined by his participation in the system of religious *cargos* (Cancian 1965), his productivity in agriculture, and his family.

My conversations with Mol Maryan span nearly four decades. The topics include his triumphs and failures, both grand and quotidian. Never far from the center of

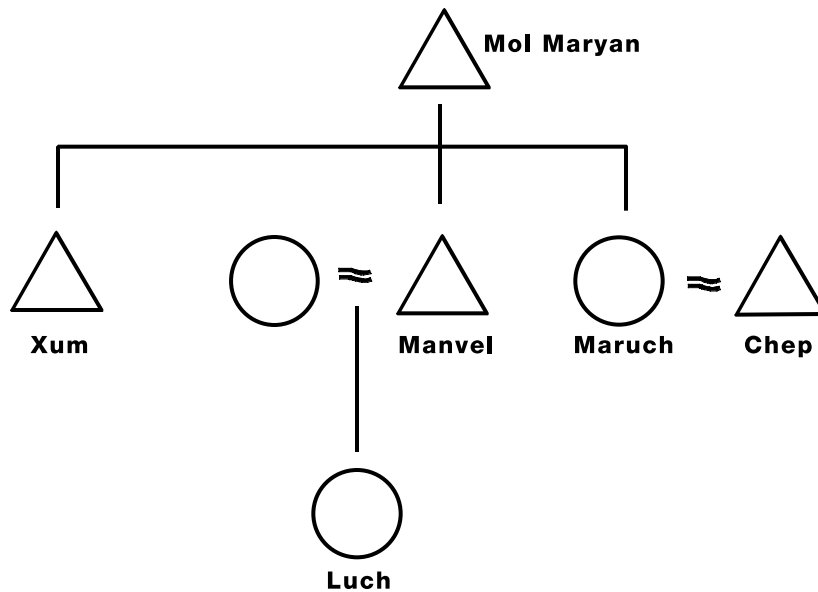


Figure 1
Maryan, Chep, and Manvel's kin relationships.

this talk are multitudes of others, both friends and foes. Their voices commingle with the speaker's voice (and sometimes with mine) through stories he tells, and retells, to project an ongoing "textual self" whose evolution can be traced over time. His recycling of words and events in two ongoing, highly conflictive personal relationships exhibits the apparent irony that the very core of a "self" is the coauthored result of multiple participants' often contradictory and sometimes downright belligerent intertextual manipulations. His self-image emerges in counterpoint to the textual selves of others. I will concentrate on the place of significant others in this ongoing story and on the freezing of self and other that seems to occur as Mol Maryan nears the end of his life.

Mol Maryan's troubled relations with his senior son-in-law Chep, and later with his eldest son Manvel, have been crystallized in discourse, refashioned, and re-narrated repeatedly over time, and these entextualized (Bauman and Briggs 1990; Silverstein and Urban 1996) relationships are now inscribed in the view Mol Maryan projects of himself in his social world. As he struggles with the proximity of death, his narrative self-positioning has taken on a semi-frozen fixity. The phrases, real or imagined, of his significant interlocutors emulsify the discursive flux and nudge his views of his life—his projected self—into a thickened, settled state.

A Questionable New Son-in-Law

In 1970, while chatting with a group of acquaintances,¹ Mol Maryan described conversations he had had about Chep four years earlier, just before the young man married his daughter. Pressured by his interlocutors, Mol Maryan admitted to reservations about the future son-in-law's character, evidenced by a bitter land dispute between the young man and his estranged elder half-brother. The quarrel displayed a recurrent motif in Zinacantec affairs: the competition between sons for the land of their fathers, and the concomitant tensions between siblings and parents over who deserved which pieces of land, if any. The worry was that because Chep had been able to outmaneuver his half-brother, he might think he could similarly dominate his father-in-law, and moreover that he was lazy, preferring to engage in disputes rather than to work for a living.

Example (1): Maryan talks about his son-in-law, 1970²

- 11 m; muk' to`ox bu ochem taj chepe³
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," in fact.

Notice that in this early interchange, not only Mol Maryan's opinions are expressed but also those of his interlocutors—in this case, the speaker shown as "Cha" displays prior knowledge of the derogatory nickname for Chep, the new son-in-law. Maryan was cornered by his interlocutors into admitting some (highly stereotypical) reservations about the son-in-law. His self-presentation as reluctant father-in-law, worried about filial industriousness and respect, was at least in part a product of his interlocutors' conversational pressures.

Despite professed early doubts, Mol Maryan permitted Chep to marry his daughter, and for the next 25 years the two men, later joined by Mol Maryan's eldest son Manvel, collaborated as farmers and wage earners. In 1990, for example, just before the narrative accounts I am about to present began to circulate in Mol Maryan's conversational repertoire, the three men were sharing responsibilities for cornfields, for the care and pasturing of horses, and for ritual obligations.

For the past 15 years, however, there has been total rupture between Mol Maryan, now deaf and blind, his son-in-law, and his son Manvel. Members of Mol Maryan's household do not talk to those of either Chep's or Manvel's household. All collaborations in work, curing ceremonies, and other social or ritual events have ceased. They do not offer each other even the minimal greetings Zinacantecs routinely exchange on the path. They do not, in Tzotzil parlance, "speak to each other," having "scolded each other" without afterward "settling their hearts" or being reconciled. I will trace the history and intertextual inscription of this rupture in old Mol Maryan's ongoing discursive autobiography and in his successive self-positionings with respect to these troubled relationships.

"Put a mol"

Zinacantec parents traditionally partitioned their lands among their offspring, part of a "patrimony" that children—especially male children—deserved and expected. In return, inheritance generated obligations to care for aging parents, and most particularly to bury them properly. Children who did not comply could be stripped of their "shares" either by indignant parents in life or by jealous siblings in postmortem disputes. The insinuation of Mexican legal standards, however, has introduced two important changes. First, bequeathing land has started to become strictly a voluntary matter. Second, once legally handed over, land becomes permanently that of the beneficiary, and no subsequent filial ingratitude, no matter how blatant, can automatically revoke an inheritance.

In June 1991, as he brought me up to date on recent happenings in the village after my absence of several months, Mol Maryan told me he had fought with his son-in-law Chep over inheritance. Chep had angrily and publicly insulted the old man, and this had sparked a deep rupture. Several days after telling me the story, Mol Maryan told it again to a visitor over a shared meal, and I here present the central drama of this second (for me) textual rendition of the events.

Mol Maryan had long before bequeathed to his daughter Maruch, Chep's wife, a small house plot too remote from her husband's domestic compound to be of much use

to her. Mol Maryan was now in need of money to cure an illness, and he had thus proposed to sell to a third party another plot of his land in a much closer and more desirable position than his daughter's inherited plot. The daughter had expressed interest in this closer land, and father and daughter had agreed to a swap. Mol Maryan would sell his daughter's inherited land for the money he needed for curing, but in return he would replace her inheritance with the plot of land he had originally proposed to sell.

Chep the son-in-law—referentially bleached in Mol Maryan's telling to only *li mole* (the gentleman)—on hearing of the proposal, instead of seeing its possible advantages, flew into a rage, publicly insulting his father-in-law with angry epithets—or so Maryan told his visitor.

Example (2): An early "puta mol" story, 25 June 1991 (M = Mol Maryan, P = the visitor)

- 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 whorish old man.
- 69 kap o me un
He got very angry over it.

Mol Maryan carefully framed each reported phrase with a quotative evidential particle *la*⁴ (see lines 66–68), which attributed to his son-in-law the indirectly quoted words (transposed to the first person, "I am a whorish old man, so he said"), and presented them as attested not by his own ears but rather by those of the land official who heard Chep and later told Mol Maryan, as his subsequent repetition makes clear.

Example (3): 25 June 1991 story, next part

- 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.

Notice the multiply embedded participation frames implicit in this discourse, and consequently the intertextual cross-penetration of the resulting words: Chep, miscreant son in law, complains to the lands commissioner; the lands commissioner then reports on this conversation to Mol Maryan; and Mol Maryan in turn retells the original interaction to a third party, framing it as having been reported to him.⁵ The self that emerges is hence doubly reflective: a conversation by others about self—thus a third-party characterization of how one is seen by specifically positioned others (here, a son-in-law whose loyalties are questionable)—is in turn retold to one's face, presuming concern by the interlocutor of that second occasion (also positioned: in this case, a hamlet official) about what one thinks and how one will react.

The interactional embedding does not stop here. Mol Maryan finished his account of his own conversation with the lands commissioner by recounting what the official had agreed to say, should Chep ask again about the disputed land transaction.

Example (4): 25 June 1991 story, last part 104

- 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.

Through multiple layerings, Mol Maryan anticipates and in fact scripts hypothetical future talk: Bakhtinian "responsive reaction" and "dialogic anticipation," looking both forward and back to alter-voiced self-constituting discourses (Bakhtin 1986).

The full story of the aborted land sale—its unexpected twists and turns and its eventual disastrous consequences over nearly twenty years—is too complicated to tell here. I will only trace some of its entextualizations. The key phrase is the vaguely self-contradictory epithet *puta mol* (*puta* [whore], from Spanish; *mol*, a Tzotzil term of mild respect for an elder male) that Chep was alleged to have used publicly, in the presence of an important hamlet official, to refer to his father-in-law Mol Maryan. The insulting phrase has resonated through the succeeding decade of accusations, threats, complaints, and declamations as the lexical leitmotif of the ruptured relationship. That a son-in-law would speak the words characterizes both the son-in-law and by reflection the aggrieved father-in-law.

Whether the son-in-law Chep actually uttered the words in question is, of course, something I cannot know. He has never denied it, and the land official who first reported the epithet to Mol Maryan had no particular reason to invent such a tale. (Both he and the son-in-law were important figures in the dominant local political party at the time and thus were at once allies and potential competitors.) Still, as the reported insult circulated through Mol Maryan's tellings and retellings and also filtered its way into the accounts of others, it became a verbal icon for the whole relationship between the elder man and his son-in-law and, depending on the teller on any given occasion, a potent vehicle for understanding both men's reputations and personalities. Among other things, it became a vehicle through which Mol Maryan could demonstrate what sort of a man he was in part by reporting what a specific and publicly characterizable other had called him.

Land Squabbles with Son and Son-in-Law

By 1993 the fight had extended to Mol Maryan's son Manvel, now allied with his brother-in-law Chep over what they saw as unjust distribution of the old man's lands. Somewhat unusually in this community where women frequently receive no inheritance, Mol Maryan had parceled out plots to his unmarried daughters and to his granddaughter, Manvel's eldest child Luch, now in her teens. Luch had been

adopted as an infant by one of her aunts—Manvel's sister—to relieve Manvel and his wife of some of the burden of childcare when a second child, a son, was born. When her parents moved out to form their own household, Luch stayed to be raised by her aunt and grandparents. Later the angry parents were able neither to get her back nor to gain access to her inheritance.

The immediate result was a confrontation in which Manvel, drunk and abusive, burst into his father's house compound shouting threats. Here is how my *compadre* described the scene to me.

Example (5): Reports of fight, Mol Maryan and JBH, 7 Jan. 1993

- 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 jijo la chingada 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 achi`uk aputa tzebetike 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 a declaration of war. The ugly epithet *puta mol*—resonating with the brother-in-law Chep's original insult from three years before—had now migrated to the son's lips, in Mol Maryan's representations. Again, it was the voice of the other, Mol Maryan's outrageously disrespectful son rejecting both his parents and his sisters, that provided the older man with an indirect contrastive commentary on his own responsible behavior in providing for his daughters and even his granddaughter.

Legal Squabbles and Verbal Squabbles

Mol Maryan tried to use Zinacantec law to disinherit his son and son-in-law, who had both benefited from land donations by the older man. He argued that neither was complying with Zinacantec expectations that receiving an inheritance obliges the recipient to give care and respect to the donors. Early on July 21, 1993, Mol Maryan visited the town magistrate to lodge a formal complaint. He incorporated into his narrative of the son's estrangement a reported conversation in which Manvel responded to another's interrogation about his relationship with his father in shameless and startling terms, claiming that his father was *obligated* to give him an inheritance and deserved no respect in return. (The evidential *la* in line 96 again shows that the entire animated dialogue was framed as report or re-presentation of what a different principal was alleged to have said.)

Example (6): Mol Maryan tells the magistrate how his son Manvel rejects him, 20 July 1993

- 90 m; mi`n mu xak'opon che`e xi
"What, don't you talk to him?" he said.
- 91 ch'abal muk' bu jk'opon .
"No, I don't talk to him."
- 92 pero avich'oj avosil
"But you have received 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, evidently.

Mol Maryan went on to recount, still at one degree of evidential remove, his son-in-law's angry remarks to the land commissioner about the proposed land swap and sale. Chep's insulting words *puta mol* reappear.

Example (7): Conversation with hamlet official continues

- 333 jpoj osil li **puta mole** kavron
"The whorish 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 whorish old man, damn it!"
- 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 [the lands commissioner] told me.

Mol Maryan's own measured words and his respectful and generous offer to his daughter and her husband (not to mention his implicit respect for tradition by having parceled out woodland properties to his heirs) stand in stark contrast to the depiction of Chep's angry and greedy demeanor.

Finally, Mol Maryan told the hamlet official about an angry confrontation between his son Manvel and the neighbor, named *Xun* or John, who had ultimately bought the disputed piece of land (located near Manvel's own house plot) when the ill-fated proposed land swap fell through. Mol Maryan again reanimates dialogue that had been recounted to him by a third party, in this case the neighbor himself, adding yet another third party's view of both the son and Mol Maryan's respective positions and public behavior.

Example (8): Mol Maryan's son Manvel confronts a neighbor over land purchased from Mol Maryan

- 152 m; va`i un yu`un chajak`be xun
"Listen, I want to ask you, John.
- 153 k'u cha`al atoj li balamil li`e xi
"How much did you pay for this land?" he [son Manvel] 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," I [i.e., the neighbor] 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 affective centerpiece of the text, and once again it is the depicted public circulation of the expression that motivates the old man's outrage and feeds his aggrieved self-representation.

Disloyalty and Insult

Late in 1993 Mol Maryan had a major curing ceremony in which, scandalously, neither Manvel nor Chep took part. Over the next two years Mol Maryan's son maintained hostilities, and the old man suspected that his more politically astute son-in-law was providing advice and moral support. "He is (Manvel's) pillar," he complained to me. In February 1995, the old man arranged an official hearing at the municipal courthouse to try to resolve who was to pay for the expensive curing ceremonies he needed as his health progressively deteriorated. The hearing ended with still more quarreling, as the daughter-in-law, Manvel's sharp-tongued wife, 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). Tensions escalated still further, as Mol Maryan came to believe that his son and his son-in-law were plotting to forge the old man's signature on land documents to guarantee their inheritances under Mexican law. In his conversations he based the belief again on evidentially bracketed interactions reported to him usually by unspecified third parties.

Example (9): Mol Maryan reports what "people" have told him about his son Manvel's plans, from a conversation recorded 5 September 1997

- 80 m; ati mi lok' tal li spirma
 "If I manage to get the signature,
 81 mi yak' spirma li jtote
 "If my father signs,
 82 esosi
 "Yes, indeed,
 83 bat ta myerta bi a`a
 "He can go to shit, then,
 84 ak'o slo`ik tzo` xi **la li jmanvele**
 *"Let him just eat shit," **evidently said my son Manvel***
 85 xchi`uk yajnil
 and his wife.

Publicly enunciated and rhetorically exaggerated disrespect, voiced by significant others, was becoming a narrative theme in Mol Maryan's conversations with all who would listen.

Making History Come True

Mol Maryan has recounted such events to me and to other interlocutors repeatedly over the past decade, though I cannot trace here all the intertexts. Here is a single line from a 1997 version of the story about son-in-law Chep's early fights with his half-brother. The reader will remember that Chep as a youth was reputed to have bested the brother in a dispute over inheritance. Mol Maryan's motives in this telling were radically reversed from those active in the gossip session of 30 years before. Chep was now not a new son-in-law-to-be, about whose character public doubts were to be put to rest, but instead a declared enemy. Mol Maryan had now no need to present himself as a judiciously skeptical father-in-law-to-be but rather as a responsible but wronged patriarch. In the course of the narrative from which the fragment is drawn, Mol Maryan touched on many currents flowing through his 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. Almost certainly with no memory of the recorded "Who's Who" conversation of 30 years before with which we began, he started his tale with a simple, negative characterization of the son-in-law.

Example (10): Chep an enthusiastic troublemaker as a young man, 5 September 1997

- 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.

Chep was no longer presented as simply an immature and possibly unindustrious youth but as a malevolent manipulator, willing to rob even his own brother out of land hunger. Consequently, Mol Maryan himself became the long-suffering victim of his son-in-law's ingratitude and greed.

Here is a final glimpse into Mol Maryan's evolving autobiographical edifice, taken from a conversation of scant months ago. Mol Maryan, now feeble, blind, and profoundly deaf, is preparing himself for death, sometimes characterized in his discourse as a welcome release from the never-ending squabbles with ungrateful and uncaring relatives. He has reconstrued the nature of the quarrels that have become the obsessive preoccupation of his recent talk with all interlocutors. His son, whose attentions he sorely misses, is estranged because he has been manipulated and misled by the evil son-in-law, a figure now frozen as the epitome of "bad head, bad heart."⁶

Mol Maryan recounts a visit of several years before by an unnamed and unidentifiable relative from a nearby hamlet. The story unites in a single, coherent (if perhaps fictional) narrative a series of phrases, sentiments, and circumstances that Mol Maryan has been cutting and pasting over two decades of fighting and talk. The tale reverberates with past words, both his and others', as I have heard them firsthand and as they have been played back to me through gossiping mouths. The phantom visitor tells Mol Maryan that he has recently met his son Manvel on the path. In the ensuing conversation Manvel was defiantly and revealingly unrepentant.

Example (11): A secondhand conversation between Manvel and a man from another hamlet, videotaped 17 Aug. 2002

- 432 m; ali: Manvel
"Uh, Manvel,
- 433 li` chajak'be
"Let me ask you.
- 435 mi kuxul to ti jtotik⁷
"Is our father 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 che`e
"Why yes, perhaps he's alive.
- 441 k'usi van cha`i pu:ta mol un
"What (sickness) might that whorish old man suffer?"
- 442 xi la un
He evidently said.

Manvel's disloyalty to his father and nose-thumbing at Zinacantec tradition are crystallized in his barefaced ungratefulness. The vehicle is again the epithet *puta mol*.

Mol Maryan in this same reported conversation explicitly links his son's waywardness with the bad influence of Chep, the son-in-law, whose ill temper and evil nature at a curing ceremony years before had become for Mol Maryan the underlying cause for the family rupture.

Example (12): How did Manvel go wrong? It was Chep's fault.

- 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 just went bad 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 och tal li j-⁸
! ART enter DIR ART one-
It was because of the entry (into my house)
- 363 chib ak`ubal li -kot mole ←
two night ART one-CLASSIFIER(animal) old_man
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].

The reference to Chep, the estranged son-in-law, is at once euphemistic, insulting, and hilarious. Instead of naming him, Maryan calls Chep only *mol*. Any respect the term might (perhaps ironically) convey, however, is explicitly overturned by its distancing inappropriateness for a son-in-law, and even more by the numeral expression *j-kot*, literally "one-CLASSIFIER (four-legged-thing)" (see line 363, with a morpheme-by-morpheme gloss), normally reserved for counting animals and furniture.

Finally, Mol Maryan establishes a conclusive link between his son's otherwise inexplicable misbehavior and the unmitigated and destructive propensity for trouble-making that he has now located firmly in Chep's flawed character. Just as, seven years ago, he was calling his son-in-law the "pillar" supporting his son in disloyal behavior, he now attributes this image explicitly to the mysterious and never-identified interlocutor, who warns Manvel about the risks he runs by ignoring the moral imperative to care for the aging parents who bequeath you land. The hypothetical conversation, replete with multiply embedded conversations, makes clear that the unrepentant son is untroubled by such risks.

Example (13): A final revelation

- 525 m; ii: xi la
"No," he evidently said.
- 526 mu j-
527 mu onox k`usi xixcha`le xa
"They can't do anything to me anymore (for not following the customs).
- 528 komo yech 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.'
- 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 ygun avgun 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 tzpat xokon
"For I am hanging from his back / his side.
- 538 kuchem 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 che`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.

Thirty years of conversations with Mol Maryan are filled with the intertextual resonances Bakhtin suggests to be the interactive core defining language. These resonances start at the constructional nucleus of Tzotzil narrative, the individual utterance, where particles such as the evidential *la* (hearsay) link spoken turns to "shadow" speakers (Irvine 1996) at several levels of embedding. To voice oneself, one must mobilize others to speak—perhaps especially Mol Maryan, who, deaf and blind, recedes into his own mind and memory and gradually loses contact with the interlocutors⁹ one normally relies on to fashion and maintain identity.

Figure 2 diagrams the multiple embeddings and complex voicing in the final conversational fragment. Mol Maryan tells me (in the outermost level) about what his mystery visitor (in the first embedded level) has told him. This visitor in turn recounts a conversation with the old man's son Manvel, in which (in the innermost level) Manvel retells another interchange with the hated son-in-law Chep. Moreover, the astute reader will note that in this innermost reported dialogue, Chep makes oblique reference (at line 538) to the very dispute with his own brother that Mol Maryan recounted in the first conversation reported here, from nearly forty years ago. The dialogic canon of Zinacantec narrative reflects in part a native theory of the person: that a person's character is (re)animated and displayed in his or her words.

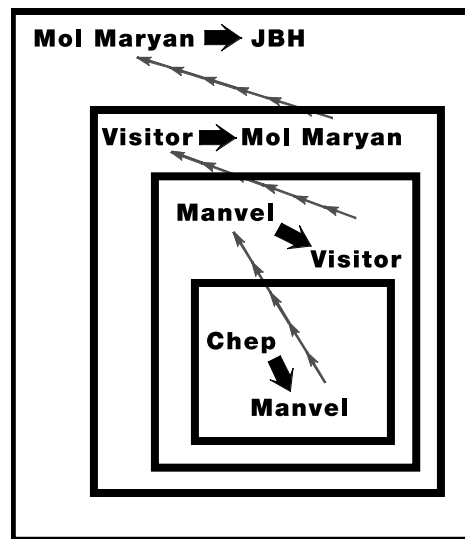


Figure 2
 Multiple embedded quotes

The phrases of these tales of woe and misfortune walk in 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). Mol Maryan projects his identity centrally by displaying talk with and of central others in his life. Each retelling of such talk not only projects the "original events"—the triumphs and the traumas of his life, as reported and construed—but also indexes the entire *chain* of narratives, anchoring Mol Maryan's projectable self in the talk of others as much as in his own.

I note with some sadness the resulting fixity, in the twilight of a life of discursive *flexibility*. Mol Maryan has been, for me, a canonical master of Tzotzil, a brilliant teacher of how one ought to behave and ought to speak, adapting and molding words to shifting circumstances. The gradual freezing of his projected relationships with son and son-in-law recalls Milan Kundera's remark, quoted by Ochs and Capps (1996), that "[w]e immediately transform the present moment into its abstraction. We need only recount an episode we experienced a few hours ago: the dialogue contracts to a brief summary, the setting to a few general features . . . remembering is not the negative of forgetting. Remembering is a form of forgetting" (Kundera 1995:128). Mol Maryan as a younger man was a master of compromise and reasoned negotiation—a role to which he was frequently recruited by relatives who relied on his interlocution to mediate otherwise intractable disputes. He could turn a domestic rupture into an occasion for reconciliation and reintegration. Unhappily, his own self-conception seems in his final years to have frozen into obsession over the reflected duel with evil in-laws and ungrateful offspring. An angry shouted insult has become, after two decades of retellings, a narrated icon of personality, an index of character, an essential feature of other, and thus a central reflected component of a gradually congealing intertextual self.

Notes

1. The context was a project on gossip (Haviland 1977), which brought several adult Zinacantecs together to discuss the reputations of hamlet mates, more or less well known in the community. Unconstrained by specific thematic instructions, and inexpertly herded by a fledgling ethnographer, these compilers of a "Who's Who of Zinacantán" largely picked their own topics and followed their own interactive dynamic. Although the interactional details of the resulting talk are interesting and germane to the point of this article, I will dwell little on them here, although they are partly the topic of Haviland (1996)

2. All illustrative fragments are transcripts of tape-recorded 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 their initials. "J" is usually the author.

3. Tzotzil is written in a practical orthography in which most letters and digraphs have their approximate Spanish values; ` represents a glottal stop, *x* a palatal fricative, and *C'* a glottalized or ejective consonant *C*. The orthography approximates one sporadically used by native Tzotzil writers, who still fail to agree about alternative representations for glottalized consonants and the glottal stop, or the choice between *tz* or *ts* for IPA [ts].

4. The pragmatic effect of *la* is to locate the illocutionary source for an utterance in someone other than the speaker (see Haviland 1987 and 2002).

5. Although the chain is not circular, it resembles in indirection and distantiation the "he-said-she-said" exchanges described by M. Goodwin (1990).

6. Tzotzil parallel doublets and triplets—also evident in the daughter-in-law's reported scurrilous remarks quoted earlier—are the generic staple of prayer, ritual speech, and denunciation (see Haviland 1994).

7. The first-person plural inclusive term of reference here, "our father," implicitly marks the speaker (as well as his interlocutor in the reported interaction) as Mol Maryan's relative, characterizing him as kin despite the fact that he remains unidentified.

8. The unexpanded abbreviations used for the morpheme-by-morpheme glosses are as follows: ! = emphatic nominal root; ART = article; DIR = directional particle.

9. Consider Charles Taylor's aphorism, "I become a person and remain one only as an interlocutor" (1985:276).

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