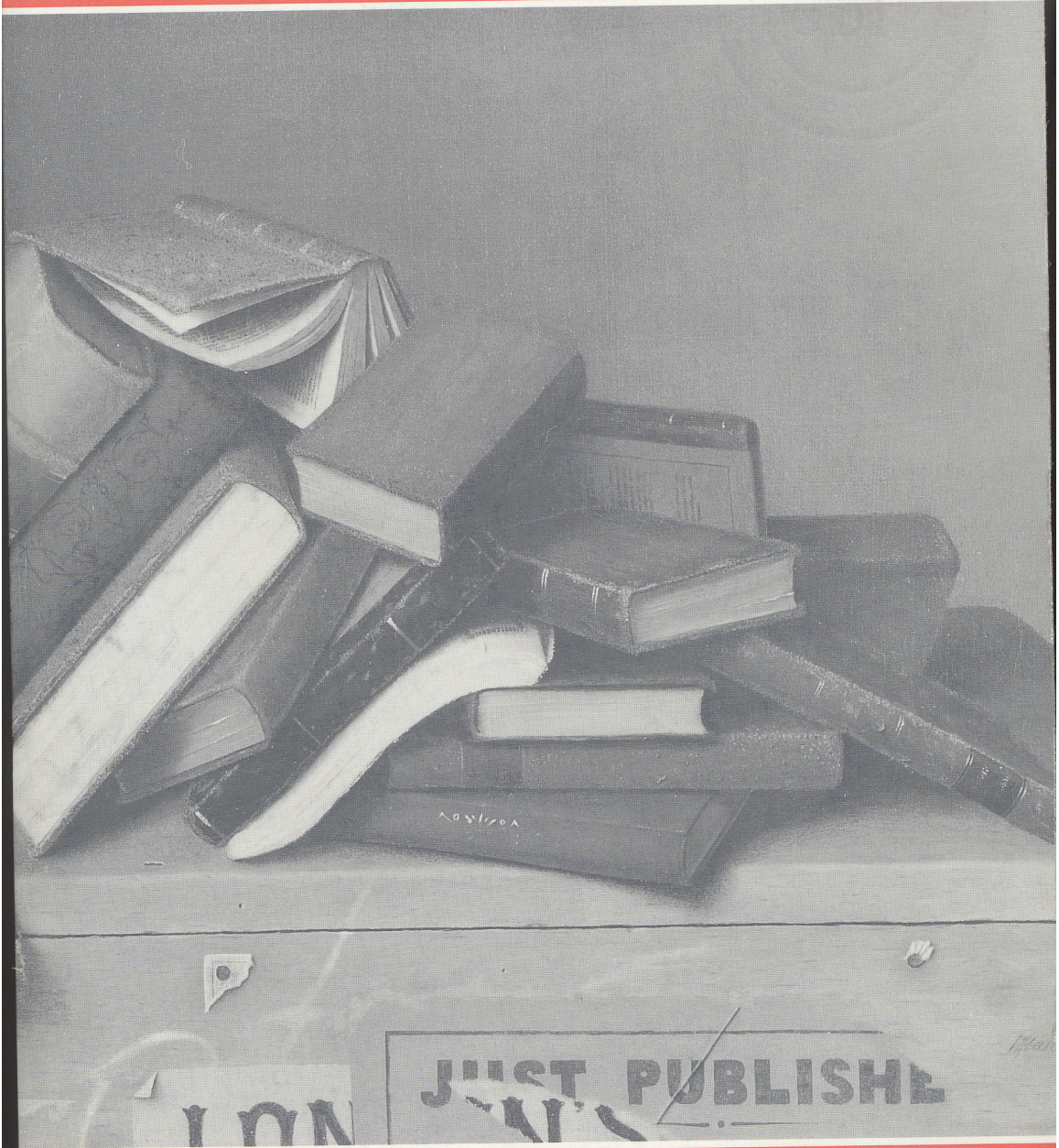# Natural Histories of Discourse

Edited by *Michael Silverstein and Greg Urban*

MICHAEL SILVERSTEIN is the Samuel N. Harper Professor of Anthropology, Linguistics, and Psychology at the University of Chicago.
GREG URBAN is professor of anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania.

Contents

2 Text from Talk in Tzotzil

John B. Haviland

Tzotzil Literacy

There is a growing literature on the nature of written language and its relation to spoken forms.[1] Part of the interest of this relationship derives from the conviction of many authors that the canons of writing and written style exert a powerful influence at least on people's conceptions of language, if not on their overt linguistic practices. The relation of spoken to written language is thus of compelling linguistic interest. More widely, for scholars such as Goody (1977), writing as an institution—as a "technology of the intellect"—transforms the cognitive possibilities of social beings, with profound effects on the resulting social forms. More locally, the habits and standards of literacy are often taken to be the measure against which people's intellectual achievements or capacities are measured: here the canons of writing, instilled through education, become normative instruments of power—the power to define what counts not merely as "correct," but also as "sensible," "logical," "coherent," or even, simply, "tellable." In this sense, a theory of written language becomes a potent instrument of social policy and political maneuver.

If we are to assess the theories that underlie such instruments, we need to understand what the canons of writing are, and where they come from. Here one ought to go beyond the literary traditions of the West, although little work has so far been done with naive or spontaneous writers, whose written productions emerge free from imposed standards, free from preexisting literary institutions.[2]

1. See Goody and Watt (1963), Chafe (1982), and Chafe and Danielewicz (1985).

2. Marianne Mithun (1985) examines Mohawk speakers' written narratives, showing how important features—syntactic, lexical, and pragmatic—of spoken Mohawk are first reversed when

Text from Talk in Tzotzil[1]

John B. Haviland

1. Tzotzil Literacy

There is a growing literature on the nature of written language and its relation to spoken forms.[2] Part of the interest of this relationship derives from many authors' conviction that the canons of writing and written style exert a powerful influence at least on people's conceptions of language, if not on their overt linguistic practices. The relation of spoken to written language is thus of compelling linguistic interest. More widely, for scholars such as Goody (1977) writing as an institutionõas "technology of the intellect"õtransforms the cognitive possibilities of social beings, with profound effects on the resulting social forms. More locally, the habits and standards of literacy are often taken to be the measure against which people's intellectual achievements or capacities are measured: here the canons of writing, instilled through education, become normative instruments of powerõthe power to define what counts not merely as "correct," but also as "sensible," "logical," "coherent," or even, simply, "tellable." In this sense, a theory of written language becomes a potent instrument of social policy and political maneuver.

If we are to assess the theories that underlie such instruments, we need to understand what the canons of writing are, and where they come from. Here one ought to go beyond the literary traditions of the West, although little work has so far been done

---

[1]   An early version of this paper was presented at the Stanford University School of Education, Feb. 12, 1986, and later at the meetings of the American Anthropological Association, Chicago, Nov. 19, 1987. My thanks to my colleagues in the Text and Power group at the Center for Psychosocial Studies, especially Don Brenneis and Greg Urban, for criticism; and to Shirley Heath, Charles Ferguson, Judith Langer, Lourdes de León, and John Rickford for comment on earlier versions.

[2]   See Goody and Watt (1963), Chafe (1982), Chafe and Danielewicz (1985).

with naive or spontaneous writers, whose written productions derive from unimposed standards free from preexisting literary institutions.[3]

   When naive writers, newly literate and familiar with few canons of textual form or content, produce written versions of originally **spoken** material, how do they go about it? In recent years, a few Tzotzil speakers, from the highlands of Chiapas, Mexico, have begun to write. Some of these writers began their careers as bilingual teachers, *promotores culturales* (cultural promoters) for government agencies, or as "informants" for anthropologists or linguists; their incentive was, in the first instance, the standard *pesos*-per-page salary that they could thereby command. Many Tzotzil writers have begun to produce stories, books, or pamphlets, modeled on similar products familiar elsewhere in Mexican society.[4] Recently there have appeared Tzotzil plays, organized around written scripts; and intrepid Tzotzil travelers have begun to compose letters, telegrams, and even FAXes in their native tongue.[5]

---

[3]   Marianne Mithun (1985) examines Mohawk speakers' written narratives, showing how important featuresõsyntactic, lexical, and pragmaticõof spoken Mohawk are first reversed when writers literate in English begin to produce texts in Mohawk, and later, as writers polish their styles and mature in the craft of writing, begin to reappear although in a new form appropriate to the virtues of a written medium. Robert M. Laughlin (to appear) considers the relations of style and voicing that obtain between a spoken Tzotzil autobiographical narrative and its written rendition by a trained Tzotzil writer. He discovers many of the same register changes I mention here and characterizes the style of the written text as "less personal" than that of the original spoken narrative.

[4]   See, for example, Arias (1990), or Pérez (1990); also, the growing production of *Sna Jtz'ibajom*, a Tzotzil/Tzeltal writers cooperative, founded by Robert M. Laughlin. In his bilingual Tzotzil/Spanish monograph about the history and customs of the municipality of San Pedro Chenalhó, Arias makes a single concession to marked oral forms: his conclusion is framed in the eloquent poetic parallelism of traditional ritual speech (see Haviland 1987c).

[5]   Although fuller study would take us well beyond the bounds of this paper, it is worth observing how the normal etiquette of spoken greeting is both preserved and transformed in, for example, a FAX sent to his family at home by a twenty-two-year-old Zinacantec visiting in the United States in September 1993. The literal question syntax of standard greetingsõ*mi li`ote* "Are you here?"; *mi ja` to yechoxuk* "Are you

A few Tzotziles have also tried explicitly to render into written form material which starts its life as **speech**: texts from talk. Writing dramatic dialogue, transcribing a curer's prayer in an ethnography, or inscribing a customary spoken greeting on a facsimile note all require just such a rendering. A dual process is involved: first detaching the speech from its indexical surround, its natural home; and second repackaging the written words in an appropriate textual form.

I will discuss two special sorts of such entextualized speech, one produced by a Tzotzil writer from a tape-recorded multi-party gossip session, and the other the conjoint product of a group of Indian literacy trainees who transcribed a staged conversation as part of a literacy workshop. In neither case were external standards for the written renditions explicitly applied, nor were the writers experienced with a pre-established literary tradition, Spanish or otherwise.

From these texts there emerge apparent native criteria for written renditions of speech that involve:

(1) normalizingõimposing a standard or normal form onõpragmatic features of the original speech context, especially the organization of its participants and relations between author and audience;

(2) smoothing the turn structure and other interactional features in the newly fabricated textual context;

(3) eliminating processing difficulties: production, reception, and grammatical hitches in the original speech;

(4) searching for a register appropriate to the text; and

(5) perhaps least surprisingly, adjusting the referential focus of the emerging narrative.

---

still well?"õsurvives unscathed in this medium which traverses "here" to "there" and which allows only an oblique and delayed reply.

I present exhibits based on this material to display the process by which speakers "reduce" their spoken words to writing, the natural history of entextualization. Parallel, and potentially embarrassing, morals about our **own** anthropological practices of entextualization or "de-centering," faintly disguised by my own naive talk of "transcription,"[6] should be easy to draw.

2. From the spoken word to the written text: two examples

In 1970 and 1971 I amassed a corpus of multi-party conversation from tape-recorded sessions in which groups of Zinacanteco men gathered together with explicit instructions to gossip about their fellows. In some cases the gossipers were hamlet neighbors of the gossipees (who were always absent, at least from the sessions in which they were being talked about). In other cases they were from other hamlets and might have been acquainted with the gossip targets only by reputation if at all. The resulting sessions were lively, ribald, and highly entertaining for all of us who participated.[7]

I used several methods for transcribing the tapes. Some I did some myself, inventing as I went along *ad hoc* standards for representing multiple participants, back-channel (Yngve 1970), and so forth. Others I wrote down with the aid of one of the Zinacanteco gossipers, who helped me puzzle out difficult bits of Tzotzil.

Transcripts were also produced by a third method. Another of the gossipers was "Little Romin," a trained Harvard Chiapas Project "informant," who was comfortable writing Tzotzil. After showing him a few of the sample transcripts I had produced, I gave him his own tape recorder and some of the tapes and asked him to write down selected parts by himself. As I had done in my own transcripts, Little Romin kept track of

---

6   See Ochs (1979).
7   See Haviland(1977b) for some results of this exercise.

individual participants. I further badgered him into writing down what at first seemed to

him inessential repetition. Little Romin had to construct for himself some notion of

(more or less) faithful or accurate rendering into writing of what he heard on tape,

although he evidently also felt the pull of narrative coherence as he wrote.

Armed with a different standard of the detail appropriate to conversational

transcripts,[8] I have recently re-transcribed some of the passages that Little Romin wrote

on his own. The present study analyzes fragments from one of these gossip sessions,

matched pairs of the two written renditions: my transcription of what I hear on the tape,

and the version Little Romin decided to write down. The excerpt in question comes from

one of the most hilarious sessions of all, which crippled the original participants with

riotous, convulsive laughter long into a rainy Chiapas afternoon.

The original impetus for this study, though, came from a subsequent experience in

Chiapas. As part of a Tzotzil literacy workshop, conducted together with Lourdes de

León,[9] I recorded a short conversation between two Tzotzil speakers from different

municipios or townships in Highland Chiapas. Both were *alfabetizadores*, trainee adult

literacy teachers, with basic but minimal literacy skills in Spanish, who were learning for

the first time to read and write in their native language. For the most part these Indians

had never seen a written text in Tzotzil, nor had they considered the possibility of such an

object.

I transcribed the recorded conversation according to my own standards and

presented a written version of the transcript to the group for their comments, reactions,

and revisions. Somewhat to my surprise, they evinced spontaneous criteria both for

correcting, and subsequently for altering my original transcript. That is, they quickly

---

8   See Atkinson & Heritage 1984: ix-xvi, for a recent incarnation of the standard; such
     a tradition did notõin 1970õexist in the public domain.
9   The workshop, in San Cristóbal de las Casas in October, 1985, was sponsored by the
     Instituto Nacional de Educación para los Adultos (see Haviland and de León 1985).

understood that I had tried to get down on paper exactly what had been said, and by whom. Yet they showed no hesitation in pronouncing some parts of the resulting transcript inappropriate for a written text, prompting them to edit it in various ways.

The main empirical moral I should like to extract from these serendipitous materials is this: these speakers, whose experience with reading and writing in any language (let alone their own) is next to nil, nonetheless by their practice are able implicitly to indicate **what a text should be like**. Of what does their textual **canon** consist? Where does it come from?

2.1. About the transcripts

First let me explain the Tzotzil materials, excerpted in what follows. There are two "complete texts" involved. The first is based on the staged workshop conversation about the day when the volcano *El Chichonal* erupted, at Easter 1982, snuffing out the sun and blanketing the entire Tzotzil area with a thick layer of volcanic ash. The emerging tale is one of fear and confusion, thoughts of the end of the world and mythological disaster, and frantic attempts by Indians to return to their villages to die in their own land.

The second text is extracted from a gossip free-for-all about the exploits of a licentious old woman and one *Proylan*, her former lover, with whom she had carried on a celebrated affair involving cornfield trysts and mischievous spying schoolchildren with slingshots.

Fragments from both conversations appear with my glossed transcription in one version, and, in corresponding lines, the edited ("native") renditionõresulting either from a collaborative editing session on the part of the literacy trainees, or from a single naive Tzotzil writer's understanding of the task of transcriptionõin the other. <u>Underlined words or phrases</u> correspond to sections of the conversational transcript that are <u>eliminated</u> from

the edited text; sections in boldface have been altered in the "native" rendition. The text
from which cited lines are drawn can be identified by the names "Volcano" for the
Chichonal story, "Lovers" for the gossip session, and when necessary by a suffixed
number: 1 denotes my detailed transcript, 2 the edited written version. Thus, for
example, Lovers2 refers to the anthropological informant Little Romin's rendition of the
Proylan gossip session, while Volcano1 is my putative transcript of the literacy workshop
conversation.

3. Naive writers' written renderings of spoken Tzotzil

It seems clear that the surgery performed on the original conversational materials
in order to produce a "native" written text falls into discrete categories. Let me consider
several varieties.

3.1 pragmatic normalization

The most obvious difference between the conversation and the resulting textual
sediment is the nature of the context in which each exists: the world, both social and
material, within which it lives its pragmatic life. In the conversational world, there are
participants whose very faces, let alone voices, are present and salient. There are
purposes, personalities, and power. There is also a breathless, almost competitive,
creativity about the conversational moment: speakers vie with each for the floor, the
word, and the moral, pushing topics in edgewise and interlocutors aside. In the written
text, all of these features are peculiarly bleached, or, as I have put it, **normalized**.

Consider such pragmatically active words as non-referential indices. The
quotative particle *la*, for example, accompanies declarative sentences in Tzotzil to mark

them as hearsay: not directly attested by the speaker.[10] The particle is, for example,

particularly appropriate to myths.[11] The indexicality of such a word is particularly

obvious when it appears in an interrogative sentence, as in line 4 of the volcano

conversation:

---

[10]   Michael Silverstein, in conversation, suggests the following formulation: the particle
       la (and its functional relatives in other languages), which mark a proposition
       (appropriately modalized) as originating with or vouched for by someone other than
       the speaker, create a new **frame**: "a perspective that projects the illocutionary
       relation between some [implicated] **other(s)** and the addressee of the actual
       message." See also Irvine (this volume), Hanks (this volume), and Haviland (1987a,
       1991). Since the actual speaker may or may not be included in the purview of this
       implicated other, *la* also can have a softening force, in commands for instance.
[11]   See Laughlin (1977:94), who describes a venerable Zinacantec storyteller as follows:
       "Quite deliberately he neglected to add the particle *la* which indicates that the story
       was only hearsay, for he wants you to know that he was there at the time of the
       creation."

Volcano1:4

a;   mi li`-oxuk `ox **la** k'alal i-yal   tan-e[12]
      Q here-2APl CL LA when CP-descend ash-CL
      <u>Were you here when the ashes fell *la*?</u>

The quotative effect here must be understood to fall on the illocutionary force of
the utterance, rather than on its propositional content. The quotative particle must be
understood, that is, to point implicitly to a questioner other than the speaker himself.

<u>Were you here when the ashes fell? (X [that is, someone else] wants
to know; or X asked me to ask you.)</u>

The actual speaker is, as it were, merely quoting or relaying another's question.

Notably, the first change that the Tzotzil writers wanted to make in my literacy
workshop transcript was to eliminate this *la* from their written text. Said the speaker
himself: "it doesn't **do** anything." Yet all were agreed that the *la* was on the tape, and that
it was not *chopol* 'bad,' or ungrammatical. What's wrong with the particle in the written
text is that it points inexorably to another shadowy conversational presence who, in the
rest of the text, is to remain invisible: to the person who asked the original question about
the day the ashes fell, namely to me myself, trying to launch the conversation. The
micropolitics of the conversational moment, in which the anthropologist-teacher **directs**
Tzotzil literacy students to "converse," do not emerge in the orthogonal textual

---

[12]   Tzotzil is written here in a Spanish based practical orthography, in which C'
       represents a glottalized consonant, and ` represents a glottal stop. Letters have by in
       large the pronunciation of the corresponding letter in Mexican Spanish; most
       notably, *x* stands for a voiceless palatal fricative, *j* for a voiceless glottal fricative, *ch*
       for a voiceless palatal affricate. In morpheme-by-morpheme glosses the following
       abbreviations appear: !=assertive predicate; 1=numeral one, or first person; 1PL=first
       person plural suffix; 1PX=first person plural exclusive; 2=second person; 3=third
       person; A=absolutive; E=ergative; ART=article; ASP=neutral aspect marker;
       ASP+3E=aspect marker plus third ergative portmanteau; BEN=benefactive or
       ditransitive suffix; CL=clitic; CONJ=conjunction; CP=completive aspect;
       DESID=desiderative clitic; ICP=incompletive aspect; ICP+3E=incompletive plus
       third person ergative portmanteau; IRREAL=irrealis suffix; NEG=negative particle;
       P=Proylan (a name); PF=perfect aspect suffix; PL=plural suffix; PREP=preposition;
       Q=interrogative particle; REL=relational clitic; SC=San Cristóbal [place name].

representation of the conversation,[13] which is thus normalized to a different, idealized, dialogic format in which only the speaking interlocutors are directly represented.

Generally, in transcribing the gossip session, the Tzotzil writer leaves the quotative *la* intact, preserving the depicted speakers' evidential integrity. Interestingly, Little Romin rewrites the remarks of one of the gossipers, at line 219 of the Proylan story. Where my transcription has CA saying

Lovers1:219

```
ca;   y-ich'      la uli`   li s-bek' y-a-te    xi-ik i-k-a`i
      3E-receive LA slingshot ART 3E-seed 3E-penis-CL say-PL CP-1E-hear
      He got shot la in the balls with a slingshot, they say, I have heard.
```

the native writer introduces a further evidential remove in his more colorful rephrasing:

Lovers2:219

```
ca;   kabron pero k'u t-s-sa`   ti  buy  x-jipjon    s-bek'
      damn   but  what ICP-3E-seek CONJ where ASP-swinging 3E-seed
            y-at-e   xi-ik la un
            3E-penis-CL say-PL LA CL
      Damn, but what is he up to flinging his balls about like that, they said la.
```

In the original line, the *la* records the fact, also represented explicitly by the framing verbs *xiik* 'they said' and *ika`i* 'I have heard,' that the speaker is reporting what someone else has said about what happened: that the miscreant lover was shot in the testicles with a slingshot. In the embellished text, the speaker puts alleged words directly into the mouths of the little children who watched the lovers in the cornfield, and the *la* now suggests: "this is what they are **said** to have said (as they watched)."

---

[13]   Notice that the particle *la* does survive at other points in the volcano text, for example at Volcano:99. Here **X** is talking about his mother and her companions, from whom he was separated at the moment of the eruption.
Volcano2:
```
      toj i-xi`-ik      la ta j-`ech'el
      much COM-be_afraid-PL QUOT PREP 1-time
      they got terribly frightened right away (la= so they say).
```
The report (presumably theirs) of their fright falls within the ambit of both participants and emplotted protagonists who survive as characters in the textual narrative of Volcano2.

At Lovers:190, another *la* is lost in the native writer's normalization of the conversation. Judging from my own transcript of the sequence, the particle was interactionally the prelude to a joking invitation to a co-present interlocutor to elaborate on the tale. R is telling about the mischievous students who went out to recessõ*la* 'it is said'õand later discovered the lovers in the cornfield. R goes on to suggest that M, another man present in the gossip session, was **himself** one of those schoolchildren.

Lovers1:

190 r;   k'alal ta x-lok'-ik   ta   rekreo li jchanvun-etik **la** une
            when   ICP ASP-exit-PL PREP recess ART student-PL   LA CL
            <u>when the school kids went out for recess *la*</u>..

. . .

192   x-chan-oj   nan   vun j-chi`il-tik    li` une je je
            3E-study-PF perhaps paper 1E-companion-1PL here CL
            <u>Perhaps our companion here was in school then himself</u>..

This *la* appears both to introduce a joking insinuation (that M was one of the slingshot-wielders) and indirectly to invite M either to take up the story, or at least to defend himself from the charge. M in fact proceeds to do just that, starting off with a little laugh.

193 m;   je
194   k'u cha`al jchanvun-on
            what way   student-1A
            <u>How could I have been a student?</u>

By contrast, in the Tzotzil transcriber's version of the sequence, this little interactive scuffle, signaled by the evidential, is represented as an orderly exchange of narrative turns. M is represented no longer as defending himself but simply as continuing the story in a joking vein.

Lovers2:
```
190  r;    k'alal ta  x-lok'-ik   ta  rekreo li  jchanvun-etik une
            when  ICP ASP-exit-PL PREP recess ART student-PL   CL
            when the school kids get out for recess.
191         ja`o nan    k'alal x-chan-oj  vun  li  j-chi`il-tik
            just perhaps when   3E-learn-PF paper ART 1E-companion-1PL
                le` une
                there CL
            Perhaps it was when our companion here was still in school?
196  m;     je juta yu`-me      ja` s-k'el-oj  i-y-ak'-be-ik    un
            what whore because-DESID !  3E-watch-PF CP-3E-give-BEN-PL CL
                taj-e
                that-CL
            Damn, THAT one was the one who watched them doing it!
```

The textual rendition simply carries the story forward without the negotiated multiple

dialogues and interactional asides that characterized the gossip itself.

3.1.2 Other evidential particles and discursive coherence

Tzotzil makes frequent use of further evidential particles, two of which also play

important roles in sequencing turns in conversation. Both orient the propositional content

of an utterance to the preceding utterances, commenting in one way or another on a

presumed body information **shared** between interlocutors, often called "common ground"

(Clark 1992). The two particles are *yu`van* and *a`a*, both usually translated 'indeed.'

Neither particle can easily be attached to a sentence in isolation, however, because both

imply in relation to the current utterance an evidential commentary on a (real or

presupposable) preceding utterance.

Thus, *yu`van*, in utterance final position, suggests "of course, indeed, what I am

now saying is true, and you should have known it (despite the fact that you appear to

have forgotten it or to be ignoring it, perhaps deliberately)."[14] Since *yu`van* is tied to a

---

14   A more perspicacious and motivated analysis of this and the other particles
     mentioned is of course much needed here. See Haviland (1987a) and Haviland
     (1989) for some alleged improvements. Silverstein (p.c.) points out the similarity to
     English utterance-initial unstressed "of course." Etymologically, this particle derives

prior utterance, when a written text irons out the content of an argument or position,

negotiated over several conversational turns, and collapses it onto a single, unitary,

synthetic turn, the particle itself has to go. This happens to CN's overlapped remarks, at

lines Lovers1:270-271, where he is arguing that the identity of the slingshot-shooting

miscreant must have become public knowledge, since even he, a man from another

hamlet, had heard the gossip. But what starts out as an oppositional or contrastive

maneuver in the gossip session:

Lovers1:
```
270   cn;   an pero te   (i-vinaj) ta  tz'akal un yu`van
            why but there CP-appear PREP later   CL YU`VAN
            Well, in that case it did come out later after all.
271         k'u ti  i-vinaj  to   t-s-lo`ilta-ik  to   i-k-a`i
            what CONJ CP-appear still ICP-3E-gossip-PL still CP-1E-hear
                taj un
                that CL
            since it came out later, they gossiped about her later and I heard about that.
```

becomes, in the native writer's rendition, simply a confirmatory remark, in the midst of

seeming general agreement. Thus the particle *yu`van* disappears.

Lovers2:
```
270   cn;   an pero y-u`un  i-vinaj  to   un k'u ti  i-s-lo`ilta-ik
            why but  3E-cause CP-appear still CL what CONJ CP-3E-gossip-PL
                to   i-k-a`i    taj un
                still CP-1E-hear that CL
            Why then it must have come out, if they gossiped about it and I heard that.
```

Sentence final *a`a* means "it's obvious" or "I already knew that." It suggests the

speaker's knowing agreement with an immediately prior utterance; thus, where that

utterance is absent in an edited text, the particle itself loses its place.

Moreover, when a conversation follows various currents at the same time, it may

be necessary for a speaker to design a single utterance so as both to make his own point

and to react to another's prior or current turn simultaneously, thus changing horses in

---

from *y-u`* (3E-cause, i.e. 'because') and *van* 'perhaps (only in interrogative contexts),'
thus 'is it perhaps because [of that]?'

conversational midstream. Such unhorsing seems to occur, for example, at Lovers1:173.

M remarks that Proylan went into his cornfield in the first place on a mission to guard his

young crop against marauding dogs. However, M's speech is almost totally overlapped;

he adds *a`a* apparently in agreement with what has just overlapped him (that Proylan had

his love trysts in the corn field):

Lovers1:
169   r;   pero ta y-ut   chobtik   une
                but PREP 3E-inside cornfields CL
                <u>But in the midst of the cornfields.</u>
                              [
170   cn;   (... nab ti yaloj   une)
                                  lake CONJ 3E-say-PF CL
                              <u>(the lake, they must have thought.)</u>
171   r;   ta y-ut   chobtik   la a`a
               PREP 3E-inside cornfields LA A`A
               <u>Yes, they say right among the corn plants</u>.
               [
172   m;   k'el-tz'i` y-ilel   ch-bat taj
               watch-dog 3E-seeing ICP-go that
               <u>It looked as though that (guy) was going to check for dogs</u>

173   taj mol Proylan nan   **a`a**
               that old Proylan perhaps A`A
               <u>old Proylan was</u>õ***yeah***õ
                    [   ]
174   r;   li Proylan-e che`e j-na`-tik   mi ta x-ba s-k'el
               ART Proylan-CL then 1E-know-1PL Q ICP ASP-go 3E-watch
                        x-chob   ta ti` nab
                        3E-cornfield PREP mouth lake
               <u>Who knows if F was going to look over his cornfield at the edge of the lake.</u>

        In Little Romin's written version, however, both of the first two lines are

attributed to M, who now need only agree with the previous suggestion that something

happened in the cornfield (hence an *a`a* is preserved in Lovers2:169), and whose talk is

no longer bothered by overlapping interlocutors in the edited written text.

Lovers2
169   M: in the cornfields **la a`a**
            he went to check for dogs, Proylan did
171   R: old Proylan went to look at his cornfield. . .

Another evidential particle, *nan* 'perhaps,' suggests propositional uncertainty and can thus be a device for conveying interactional (perhaps even moral) effect, functioning as an element in a conversational stratagem. Insofar as the textual rendering of a conversational moment may represent a rearrangement of the interactional balance between conversants, or a manipulation of their moral stances, it may be useful to adjust such a marker of doubt in a written text.

Whereas, in the rapid flow of conversation, speakers must continually monitor each other's turns, so that they know what will count õin the momentõas agreement or disagreement, the linear world of the text seems to smooth out such interactional details. Consider the complex exchange, at Lovers1:323-331, where the gossip session is at a point of transition: having described the old lady's misadventures with young Proylan, the group moves on to consider whether she has engaged in any **other** improprieties. Two participants, R and CA, seem gradually, and simultaneously, to remember the same story, and their fragmentary turns each prompt the other to continue: as her new sin (sleeping with the people who used to take her home, drunk, after she performed a curing ceremony) emerges, the two speakers are in an intricate dance of doubt, agreement, and confirmation, marked by evidential particles that track the state of discursive play at each moment.

Lovers1:
322 ca;   mi s-pas proval li mas krem yan   li j-ch`il-tik
             Q 3E-do attempt ART more boy other ART 1E-companion-1PL
             <u>Has she tried any more of our younger our countrymen?</u>
                          [
323 r;   an ja`  mu  j-na`
                          why !   NEG 1E-know
                          <u>Why, I just don't know.</u>
324   an o   **la** i-s-
             why exist LA CP-3E-
             <u>Why, she [did]</u> (***I've heard say)*** õ

R remembers having heard (see the particle *la* at 324) that the old lady had also been in trouble on another occasion. But before he manages to say where and when, CA

suggests (with a hedging *nan* 'perhaps') that it involved occasions when she was being

taken home:

```
325   ca;   pero ja` nan taj  y-ak'el-e
             but  !  NAN that 3E-giving-CL
             But perhaps that was when she was being taken . . .
                 [
326   r;          ch-ich'      intyeksyon k'alal
                  ICP+3E-receive injections when
                  She got injections when . . .
```

R continues, over the interruption of CA who suggests that the old woman's

misbehavior took place *ta yak'el* 'when she was being taken (home).' R takes up CA's

phrase in line 327,[15] and adds the clarification that she was being escorted home after

having performed a curing ceremony. R's final *a`a* at 328 apparently signals his

agreement with CA about the circumstances.

```
327         li  y-ak'el   k'alal x-
            ART 3E-giving  when   ASP-
            she was being taken [home] after . . .
328         ch-`ilolaj a`a
            ICP-cure   A`A
            . . . she has cured, indeed.
            [
329   ca;   ja` k-a`y-oj  a`a
            !  1E-hear-PF A`A
            Yes, I've heard that.
330         k'alal tz-sut    tal  ta  s-na    li jchamel ya`el
            when   ICP-return coming PREP 3E-house ART patient it_seems
            When she comes back from the house of the patient, it seems.
331         chbat ta  ilole
            ICP-go PREP curing
            When she has gone to cure.
```

Simultaneously, at line 329, CA agrees with R (also using the particle *a`a)*, saying that he

has also heard this story and that it had to do with the old lady's misbehavior after curing

ceremonies.

---

15   She accommodates her already enunciated but cut-off ergative prefix (*s-* at the end of line 324) to the
      new verb root `*ich'* with which she overlaps CA in the continuing line 326.

In the written version, this elaborate interactive exchange is smoothed out and

regularized, and the surviving evidentials are adjusted to suggest a more orderly, linear,

emerging story line, contributions to which are made by each participant in turn,

reflecting definite states of knowledge at each point. The narrative proceeds in a

sequence of exchanges between R and CA, each turn echoing agreement (marked by *a`a*)

with its predecessor.

Lovers2:

322-3   m; pero o   la x-ich'   indeksion[16] ta yan o un
              but exist LA ASP+3E-receive injection prep other REL CL
              <u>But she has gotten injections from others, too.</u>

325 ca;   ja` taj y-ak'el-e
              ! that 3E-giving-CL
              <u>Yeah, that's when they take her [home].</u>

327-8   r; ja` taj y-ak'el  k'al ta  x-`ilolaj **a`a**
              ! that 3E-giving when ICP ASP-cure A`A
              Yes<u>, when they take her home after she cures.</u>

329 ca;   ja` k-a`y-oj **a`a**
              !   1E-hear-PF A`A
              Yes<u>, I've heard about that.</u>

330   k'al sut(t)al   ta s-na   li jchamel ya`el-e
              when return-coming PREP 3E-house ART patient it_seems-CL
              <u>When she comes back from the house</u> of the patient, it seems.

331   bu ch-bat ta ilol-e
              when ICP-go PREP curing-CL
              <u>When she has gone to cure.</u>

The first suggestion about the story (and the evidential hedge represented by *la*) is

now put in the mouth of another speaker, M, at lines 322-3. The rest of the story emerges

in a sequence of orderly exchanges between R and CA, with each turn echoing agreement

(marked by *a`a*) with its predecessor. What starts out as disorderly multiple party

conversation in Lovers1 emerges as shared or dialogically animated narrative monologue

in Lovers2.

        3.2 The imposition of a standardized or idealized speech context

---

16   Little Romin, the Tzotzil transcriber, has here rendered the Tzotzil pronunciation of
      the Spanish loanword *inyección* differently from my own hearing, at Lovers1:326
      above.

It was clear to the Tzotzil writers that a written rendition, unlike the spoken conversation from which it derives, has been ripped from its physical setting. The immediate context of speech—the physical as well as the social environment—must recede in prominence.

For example, the writers elected to omit a deictic reference, at line Volcano1:41, since no Chiapas sun warms the written text.

Volcano1:

37 a;   bweno k'u x-`elan k'al i-k'ot   une
              well what ASP-be when CP-arrive CL
              <u>Good, so what was it like when [the ash] began to fall?</u>

38   mi `ora i-`ik'ub ta   j-mek k'u x-`elan?
              Q now CP-darken PREP 1-time what ASP-be
              <u>Did it get dark right away, or what?</u>

39 x;   k'unk'un ik'ub
              slow   darken
              <u>It got dark slowly.</u>

40 s;   ko`ol chk tok
              equal like cloud
              <u>Just like fog (or clouds).</u>

41 x;   jech nox chk k'u cha`al este .. **li`** x-k-al-tik-e
              thus just like what way   uh   here ASP-1E-say-1PL-CL
              <u>It was just like..uh.. **now**, as it were.</u>

42   sak   to   `ox **a`a**
              white still then A`A
              <u>Yes it was still light then.</u>

This passage is simplified to

Volcano2:

38   Mi `ora i`ik'ub tajmek, k'u x`elan?
       <u>Did it get dark right away, or what?</u>

39 x;   K'unk'un ik'ub.
       <u>It got dark slowly.</u>

40 s;   Ko`ol chk tok.
       <u>Just like fog (or clouds).</u>

42 x;   Sak to`ox.
       <u>It was still light then.</u>

Notice that just as the inappropriateõbecause unrecoverable?õdeictic reference (*li`* 'here, now') of line 41 is eliminated, the evidential *a`a* in the next line must also be pruned, as there is nothing left in the previous turn with which it can signal agreement.

The idealized context of speech has a social dimension as well. I have suggested that these naive writers began with no established canon of written text for Tzotzil. Of course, they were not without canons of discursive form. Indeed, a central point of interest in this (more or less natural) evolution of a written genre is its indebtedness to existing standards for speech. A prominent feature of much Tzotzil talk is its convergence on a **dialogic** format. Even when there are multiple conversants, speech tends towards an ideal **dyad**, with one central speaker, and his designated interlocutor or *jtak'vanej* 'answerer.' (See Haviland 1988, 1990; Goffman 1979.) When speech departs from this idealõas in an angry squabble before the magistrate, or a joking gossip free-for-allõsocial arrangements often conspire to nudge or elbow conversants back into orderly line. Indeed, skilled talkers count among their talents the ability to engineer an orderly exchange of turns, to suppress their own voices when they would hinder such exchange, and to trumpet them when such an exercise of verbal power will reimpose order. Such idealized dialogicity represents a **normalization** in its own right, producing in speech a convergence of very different verbal forms and tasks, and often masking the creative, multi-vocal, social complexity of emerging discourse. It will not surprise us that these novice Tzotzil writers impose a written counterpart of spoken dialogue in their edited texts, thus reducing interactive disorder to a textured but single thread of talk.

In the literacy workshop, for example, writers routinely and consciously purged overlaps and repetitions to straighten out the dialogue. Several passages already cited illustrate the phenomenon. For another example, I transcribed lines Volcano:67-70 as follows:

Volcano1:
```
67        o    bu   l-a-bat-ik
          exist where CP-2A-go-PL
          Or did you go somewhere else?
                  [`
68   x;         vo`on-e este
          I-CL    uh
          Well, I , uh. . .
69        k'alal este tal  ti  tan x-k-al-tik-e
          when   uh   come ART ash ASP-1E-say-1PL-CL
          When the ashes came
70        este li`  oy-un    ta Jobel-e
          uh   here exist-1A PREP SC-CL
          Uh, I was here in San Cristóbal.
71   a;   aa
72   x;   li`  oy-un    ta  Jobel
          here exist-1A PREP SC
          I was here in San Cristobal.
```

The same passage appears, in the writers' version as follows:

Volcano2:
```
67        o    bu   l-a-bat-ik?
          exist where CP-2A-go-PL
          [Or] did you go somewhere else?
69   x;   k'alal tal  ti  tan-e,
          when   come ART ash-CL
          When the ashes came
70        li`  oy-un    ta  Jobel-e.
          here exist-1A PREP SC-CL
          I was here in San Cristóbal.
```

More interestingly, there is also a smoothing of interactional edges. Where in the original conversations there were frequent struggles not only for the floor but for what might be called rights of authorship (for example, rights to tell a particularly juicy bit, to

deliver the punchline, or to be able to finish a story line), the edited versions sometimes

reorganize the emerging story so as to make things come out more neatly.[17]

The re-casting of authorship, for example, occurs at Volcano:77. A is seemingly

trying to preempt the narrative floor in preparation for launching his own story.

Volcano1:

74	x;	tal este k-ak' j-nichim-kutik x-k-al-tik
		come uh 1E-give 1E-flower-1PX ASP-1E-say-1PL
		<u>we had . uh . come to give our flowers, as we say.</u>
75		porke jech kostumbre oy-utik x-k-al-tik
		because thus custom exist-1P ASP-1E-say-1PL
		<u>Because that's the custom we have, as it were.</u>
76		komo nopol xa este semana santa x-k-al-tik
		as near already uh week holy ASP-1E-say-1PL
		<u>Because, as we say, it was getting close to Holy Week.</u>
77	a;	eso, nopol
		yes near
		<u>Right, it was getting close.</u>
78		mi y-olon mi s-lajel ech'el
		Q 3E-below Q 3E-ending away
		<u>Was it before (Easter), or already afterwards?</u>
79		vo`on-e ch'ay xa    x-k-a`i
		I-CL lose already ASP-1E-hear
		<u>I have forgotten.</u>
80	x;	mo`oj, y-olon  to  `ox
		no 3E-below still then
		<u>No, it was still before.</u>

In the edited version, his turn is reduced to pure questioning, so that X is

represented as continuing, unmolested, with his own narrative.

---

[17] Textual reorganizations of this kind may, of course, be as much products of the
different **interactional context of the transcription** as results of some emerging
textual canon. The writers share a common goal—settling on a text—whereas as
conversationalists they were in competition for the floor, for rights to tell the story.

Volcano2:

```
74   x;    tal kak' jnichimkutik,
           we had come to give (an offering of) our flowers.
75         yu`un¹⁸ jech kostumbrekutik.
           Because that's our custom.
76         yu`un nopol xa semana santa.
           Since it was getting close to Holy Week.
78   a;    Mi yolon mi slajel ech'el?
           Was it before (Easter), or already afterwards?
80   x;    Mo`oj, yolon to`ox.
           No, it was still before.
```

A more radical sort of reorganization takes place in a fragment of the gossip

session which we have already met.

Lovers1:

```
171  r;    ta  y-ut    chobtik   la a`a
           PREP 3E-inside cornfields LA A`A
           Yes, they say right among the corn plants.
                [
172  m;    k'el-tz'i` y-ilel   ch-bat taj
           watch-dog  3E-seeing ICP-go that
           It looked as though that (guy) was going to check for dogs
173        taj  mol Proylan nan    a`a
           that old P     perhaps A`A
           old Proylan wasõyeahõ
                [          ]
174  r;     li  Proylan-e che`e j-na`-tik   mi ta  x-ba  s-k'el
            ART P-CL     then  1E-know-1PL Q  ICP ASP-go 3E-watch
                  x-chob     ta  ti`  nab
                  3E-cornfield PREP mouth lake
            Who knows if F was going to look over his cornfield at the edge of the lake.
```

Here a chance remark by R is misattributed in the edited text to M, the established

narrator of the moment. M's subsequent rejoinder is in turn attributed to R, creating a

more orderly (dia)logic in the emerging story. (The question is when, why, and where,

the lovers made their way into the cornfields. The reason was supposedly because dogs

---

¹⁸   Such changes as the substitution of Tzotzil *yu`un* for Spanish *porque* reflect a
     conscious decision on the part of the literacy trainees, to which I return in section 6,
     to purge from their written text all Spanish loans in favor of their native
     "equivalents."

had been eating the young ears of corn. Proylan, the owner, had gone to inspect the

damage.)

Lovers2:
169 m;   ta yut   chobtik   la **a`a**
                 PREP 3E-inside cornfields LA A`A
                 <u>Yeah they say in the cornfields.</u>
172   a k'el-tz'i` la yil   ch-bat taj yil   proylan-e
                 go watch-dog LA disgusting ICP-go that disgusting P-CL
                 <u>He went to watch for dogs, I hear, that disgusting Proylan.</u>
174 r;   li **mol** proylan-e y-u`un ch-ba s-k'el x-chob
                 ART old P-CL   3E-cause ICP-go 3E-watch 3E-cornfield
                       ta ti` nab
                       PREP mouth lake
                 <u>Old Proylan went to look over his cornfields by the lake.</u>

   Much conversational back-channelõnormally required in polite Tzotzil

conversationõis purged from the written texts, as is multiple repetition, a phenomenon

prominent in Tzotzil talk. Sometimes the interactive flavor and collaborative

phraseology of the original talk is kept, although overt repetition is eliminated. Certain

interactional struggles, signaled in talk by explicit "paragraph markers" which serve to

reclaim the audience's attention and thus the floor (*va`i un*, literally "so listen!") are

simply done away with in the written versions. Conversely, some transition points in the

narrative are made cleaner, disguising the fact that considerable efforts were required to

achieve them in the conversational moment.

   Related to such interactional smoothing is the ironing out, in the edited text, of

irrelevant issues in the participant structure underlying the conversation, including what

can be described as relations of identity, dominance, subordination, and deference. In

speech, participants negotiate rights to telling the story, and the authority to tell it; they

also compete as appropriate hearers or interlocutors; and they may explicitly and

implicitly portray their relation and moral stance to the narrative, to its protagonists, and

to the other participants in the speech event. Many such issues of 'footing' (Goffman

1976) are blunted or eliminated in the naive texts.

Consider, for example, the inappropriate "self-referential honorific" occurring at one point in the gossip session when a speaker refers to the old lady being discussed as *jme`tik Petu`* 'our mother Petrona.' This first person plural inclusive possessive form is appropriate to, among others, familiar **non**-relatives (where it contrasts with, e.g., *me` Petu`* 'mother P' appropriate to junior kinsmen, or *me`tik Petu`* 'mother P' [without the 1st person possessive prefix *j-*] appropriate to a more distant acquaintance). Under the circumstances, such implicit claims to relationship are both inappropriate and somewhat ludicrous (since the whole point of the story is to ridicule the lewd old lady), and in the edited written version the reference is altered to *taj me`el Petu`* 'that old lady P,' implying no specific relationship with any of the speakers.

In general, facets of the relationships between interlocutors, patently available and interactionally exploitable if not necessarily exploited in the discursive event, are submerged in the decentered texts I have been presenting. They are only available to be read out **behind** the pragmatic bleaching and normalization. In the volcano conversation, for example, the fact that one of the narrators is a Zinacantec, whose Tzotzil dialect is also spoken by the workshop leader, gives his words a certain subtle prestige, a slight advantage over the variant of the other narrator, whose Chamula dialect is different. The only residue of this imbalance in the resulting text appears in potentially ambiguous phonological and morphological choices, which during editing were routinely resolved in favor of the dominant Zinacanteco forms. I will return below to the evolution of a written standard from such micro-politics.

4.0 Processing issues

Not surprisingly, these naive Tzotzil writers discovered that speakers "make mistakes" that must not be slavishly reproduced in written texts. With neither Saussurean

nor Chomskian coaching, they came to reject parts of texts, even straightforwardly
transcribable ones, as inappropriate.

Text from Talk in Tzotzil 29

4.1 Hesitations, false starts, and other dysfluencies

In the Volcano transcript, most of the editing effort was devoted to eliminating
hesitations, false starts, and other signs that the original conversationalists were nervous
and uncertain in their talk. Pause markers of all kinds (*este, pues, bueno*, loans from
Spanish, and *ali*, in Tzotzil) were routinely omitted from both texts. Similarly, certain
repetitive expressions were systematically pruned, particularly *xkaltik* '(as) we say,' a
rough Tzotzil equivalent of the ubiquitous American English *y'know*. Speaker errors and
hesitations were similarly smoothed. The writers confidently spottedõand
purgedõproduction errors, some involving mistaken intents, some involving speaker
uncertainty (as, for example, at Volcano:68, in a passage we have already seen), others
involving awkward expressions which resulted from mislaunching an utterance, which
thus required reformulation.

On the other hand, in the written version of the gossip session, the transcriber
decided to leave intact some speech twitches characteristic of several of the participants,
much as a novelist will endow his characters with verbal signatures. CN, a well known
fast-talker, retains his habitual form of wordsõhe ends his phrases with *uk une* (literally
'also then')õeven in places where on the original tape he does not appear to use the words.
The transcriber puts into this man's mouth words that make him **sound like himself**.
Thus, for example, the following set of lines in Lovers1 is reduced to a single,
stereotyped line in Lovers2.

Lovers1:
```
287  cn;   pen-
288        batz'i pentejo ali k-itz`in   i-k-a`i    ox
           real   asshole ART 1E-brother CP-3E-hear then
           "What a real asshole my brother is!" is what I heard
289        x-chi   li  mol prutarko
```

ASP-say ART old Plutarco
<u>old Man Plutarco say</u>.

Lovers2:
288   cn;   pentejo **tajmek**[19] li kitz'ine xi li mol Prutarko **uk une**
<u>"My brother is a real asshole," says old Plutarco, too.</u>

It is also unsurprising that the naive writers should apparently have felt free to edit the recorded utterances according either to standards of grammaticality and "intelligibility"[20] or to judgments about register and appropriate levels of formality. They altered everything from lexical items to verbal inflections, from auxiliary verbs to particles showing inter-clausal linkages. The literacy trainees even sought an orthographic solution to an intonational problem, introducing commas to help clarify an otherwise ambiguous parsing.

There is obviously a special problem that ordinary writers do not face in the written rendition of what starts as a spoken conversation: what to do with unintelligible material or uncertain hearings. In the Volcano conversation, the writers and I jointly decided on a transcription of the original, resolving questions of interpretation by committee, until we had a transcript from which we could proceed. In the Lovers transcript, the transcriber was on his own, and occasionally what he wrote seems to result from embellishment and over-interpretation of material on the original tape that is difficult to hear, overlapped, or plainly unintelligible.[21] There are numerous revealing instances in the text.

---

[19]   The intensifier *batz'i* 'really' is also replaced, in Lovers2, with another intensifier, *tajmek* 'very.'

[20]   The tape recordings I have of the editing sessions for the Chichonal text contain such evaluative expressions as *chopol* 'bad,' *mu stak'* 'it won't serve,' *mu a`ibaj lek* 'you can't understand it clearly,' applied to utterances that need reformulation.

[21]   I have not, since beginning this investigation, taken the obvious step of listening again with the original transcriberõnow a distinguished ex-President and powerful political figure in the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional*õto the original tape recording, to puzzle out his interpretations. I have, however, checked my own transcription with other Zinacantecos.

For example, at Lovers:226, where CN makes a joke

Lovers1:
226 cn;   ay x-chi xa   nan   li mol   une ja ja ja
             oh ASP-say already perhaps ART old-man CL
             <u>"Ay" said the old fellow, probably, ha ha ha.</u>

the transcriber interprets it as a **different** joke:

Lovers2:
226 cn;   muk' xa   jal   x-ixtalan li mol **uk** un
             NEG already long(time) ASP+3E-play ART old also CL
             <u>The old fellow didn't get to play around very long.</u>

I have already mentioned such embellishment and re-attribution in the case of another

joke, at Lovers:219-222.

5.0 Content issues

Clearly, the task of producing a text (which involves fixing its content, what it is

"about") puts strong constraints on these naive writers. Exactly where such constraints

arise is worth pursuing in more detail. Do these writers develop a "story" that

schematically divides the relevant from the inconsequential? Do plotsõwhether of

disasters with denouements or jokes with punchlinesõhave an internal momentum and

contour which must be maintained in a written rendition? Is there a kind of referential

focus here, which causes writers to stick to "the facts?"

We encounter in these empirical specimens what might be called the power of

narrative to regiment its own decentering.[22] In familiar ways, the story itself produces

its own kind of normalization, although the process is arguably a dialectic between the

narrative "facts" and the needs of the discursive moment. Nonetheless, the reduction of

conversational discourse to orthogonal text cannot simply be a result of pragmatic

"bleaching," since the narrative "events," the momentum of the "story," the

---

[22]   Consider the classical treatment of narrative and the strong social demands on its
        discursive realization in Labov (1972, Ch. 9); see also Haviland (1977, Ch. 4).

"denouement," and its the evaluative "moral," all independently motivate the pruning of those conversational sequences which do not advance narrative ends. The urge to keep to a central story line is also, I may add, driven both by the concerns of the discursive momentõwhen one "story" can be arguably represented as better than anotherõand by a retrospective interpretive glance at the moment of writing. The tale of volcanic disaster in Tzotzil terms is *lo`il no`ox* 'just talk, conversation.' The gossip about the slatternly old lady is a possessed deverbal noun, from the same root: *slo`iltael* 'the story told **on her**.' The morphology here suggests that **certain** narrativesõ*lo`iltael*õbeing aimed and barbed, are more **tellable** than others which are 'mere talk.'

5.1 Eliminating irrelevancies and side tracks

I have already mentioned that in the volcano story the writers began at an early stage to prune from the written text all extraneous characters, including me, limiting the text to two storytellers and their mutual interaction.

In the gossip text, however, the Zinacanteco transcriber needed to make more complex decisions about both the internal momentum and dramatic logic of the story. A clear example comes when the written text slyly cuts any mention of the schoolchildren's slingshots until the appropriate moment, seemingly so as not to undermine the coming comic sequence (in which the lovers are attacked from behind with slingshot pellets, bringing the cornfield tryst to an abrupt and painful end). Perhaps the author does not want his readersõjust as, in the original telling he did not want his audienceõto see the joke coming before he is ready to deliver it; or perhaps the writer, like the teller, wants the rightõand the spaceõto deliver the punchline himself. Compare the following transcribed fragment of a passage we have met before with the subsequent written formulation by Little Romin.

Lovers1:

210 r;   s-lok'-oj   la li s-vex   une
             3E-remove-PF LA ART 3E-pants CL
             <u>They say he had taken off his pants.</u>

211   x-vinaj   li s-bek' y-at   ta s-pat une
             ASP-appear ART 3E-seed 3E-penis PREP 3E-back CL
             <u>His balls were visible from behind.</u>
                              [
212 m;   ja ja ja
213 r;   y-a:k'-be   ech'el=
             3E-give-BEN away
             <u>He was giving it to her (facing away from them).</u>
214 all;   = ja ja jAA JAA
215 ca;   i-k-a`i   ti ji-
             CP-1E-hear CONJ
             <u>What I heard was that ..</u>
                     [
216 all;   ((laughter))
217 ca;   y-ich'   la-
             3E-receive LA
             <u>That he got it. . .</u>
                     [
218 all;   ((laughter))
219 ca;   y-ich'   la uli`    li s-bek' y-at-e  xi-ik i-k-a`i
             3E-receive LA slingshot ART 3E-seed 3E-penis say-PL CP-1E-hear
             <u>that he got hit by the slingshot right on the balls, they say, I've heard.</u>
                     [
220 all;   ((laugh))
221 j;   ja` nan   ch-p'it lok'el nan   li povre
             ! perhaps ICP-jump exiting perhaps ART poor
             <u>The poor fellow perhaps jumped right out.</u>

Little Romin, in his own transcription, renders the same passage as follows:

Lovers2:
210 r;   s-lok'-oj   la li s-vex   une
             3E-remove-PF LA ART 3E-pants CL
             <u>They say he had taken off his pants.</u>
211   x-vinaj   li s-bek' y-at   ta s-pat une
             ASP-appear ART 3E-seed 3E-penis PREP 3E-back CL
             <u>His balls were visible from behind.</u>
213   i-y-ak'-be   **la** ech'el **un**
             CP-3E-give-BEN LA away   CL
             <u>He was giving it to her (facing away from them), it's said.</u>
219 ca;   kabron pero k'u tz-sa`   ti buy x-jipjon   s-bek'
             damn   but what ICP+3E-seek CONJ where ASP-flinging 3E-seed
                  y-at-e   xi-ik la un
                  3E-penis-CL say-PL LA CL
             <u>Damn, but what is he up to flinging his balls about</u> <u>like that, they said,</u>
                  <u>supposedly.</u>
220 x;   aj aj aj aj
221 d;   pero batz'i x-mut'lij   xa   j-na` un
             but really ASP-jerking/shrinking already 1E-know CL

> But he must have been just about to ejaculate, I bet.

Little Romin eliminates CA's upstaging mention of the slingshot, at line 219, and presents the storyõwhich, incidentally, **he** was telling (he appears as R in the transcript)õin his own way.

The Tzotzil writers seem to have invented their own version of an inherently propositional view of language, in which superficially different formulations can be reduced to a common shared referential content. The problem is particularly pressing in the task they faced: to reduce a multi-party conversation with considerable overlap and interaction to a coherent linear text. The process of writing seems to allow a pragmatic restructuring, tending towards an ultimately monologic form, where propositional content takes precedence over the indexical microcosm of the parent interaction, and where interactive richness is pruned in favor of monologic narrative.

Some textual reformulations are offered in the guise of mere corrections. During the editing session one speaker, X, offered an improved version of "what he meant to say" at Volcano:46.[23] The original line,

Volcano1:
k-a`-uk       y-u`un wo`-uk   nox x-tal-e
1E-think-IRREAL 3E-cause water-IRREAL only ASP-come-CL
<u>I thought that only rain was coming.</u>

is re-rendered as

Volcano2:
ko`olaj x-chi`uk vo` i-tal.
equals 3E-with water CP-come
<u>It was the same as if it were about to rain.</u>

The reformulation, according to X, captured his intended meaning better than what he actually heard himself say on the tape.

---

[23]   *Mu a`ibaj k'usi xk'ot `o* "one can't understand what it leads to" is the criticism X launched against his own recorded utterance.

At a higher level, where, because of interruptions or generalized hilarity, episodes

in the original interaction are unable to reach a satisfactory narrative conclusion, the

writers occasionally introduce order from without. For example, Little Romin frames the

slingshot sequence with an initial "paragraph marker" *va`i un* (where the original text has

none), and he closes the scene in proper fashion with a clause-final clitic *une* at line 205.

Lovers2:

      r;   v-a`i   un
              2E-hear CL
              <u>so listen</u>
201   li jchanvun-etik une
              ART student-PL   CL
              <u>the schoolchildren. . .</u>
202   ta x-bat-ik un
              ICP ASP-go-PL CL
              <u>they went</u>
203   ta sa`-ik   mut ta x-lok'-ik j-likel ta rekreo un
              ICP 3E+seek-PL bird ICP ASP-exit-PL 1-moment PREP recess CL
              <u>they hunted birds when they got out for a moment of recess.</u>

204   ta x-bat-ik ta y-ut   chobtik un
            ICP ASP-go-PL PREP 3E-inside cornfields CL
            <u>they went into the cornfields.</u>

205   ja` ti bu  x-va`et-ik   une
            ! ART where ASP-standing-PL CL
            <u>or wherever they happened to loiter about.</u>

The written text thus imposes an episodic structure which in the original conversation can be inferred only from the interaction and not from the actual language.

6.0 Form, style, and register issues

Finally, differences between the original conversational performances and the written renditions reflect these Tzotzil writers' decisions about which <u>varieties</u> of language to reproduce in the texts they are creating. Despite a reputation (and a talent) for ridiculing their neighbors' dialects, the Tzotzil writers were enthusiastic about representing not only their own speech but also that of others, in readable form. The literacy teachers, for example, welcomed an alphabet in which each speaker would write as he or she spoke. The resulting dialect tolerance was combined with apparent criteria of dialect purity, so that sometimes speakers' written words were adjusted to coincide with their own appropriate dialects, even when the spoken words were, by such a criterion, "in error."[24]

Moreover, the literacy trainees displayed a developed consciousness about Tzotzil as a dominated language, and unsurprisingly (though to a certain extent, as a result of our urgings) began a campaign to purge Spanish from their Tzotzil texts. Throughout the editing process, with increasing enthusiasm the writers excised Spanish loans, including connectives that are a routine part of ordinary speech, and substituted often infrequently used Tzotzil "equivalents." Words like *porque* 'because,' *como* 'like,' and even *pero* 'but,'

---

[24] Laughlin remarks that a Chamulan's speech as it is rendered into writing by another Chamulan is pruned of the Zinacanteco-isms that the speaker has picked up in the course of his working life.

fell away before Tzotzil paraphrases, or were simply omitted when the writers found
them redundant in the context of an overall Tzotzil construction.

Even the gossip group created its own special euphemisms. The language of
"injections" evolved during the gossip sessions, from an apparently creative initial use to
a generalized group in-joke. The expression was incorporated willy-nilly into the written
text, and, duly, into the speech of at least a small group of Zinacanteco hamlet-
matesõincluding Little Romin himself, who still uses it twenty-five years later in joking
conversation.[25]

7.0 The pragmatic normalization of the written text

Between a conversational moment and representations of entextualized telos, the
balance between what Silverstein (1976) called relatively presupposing and relatively
creative (entailing) indexes in speech must necessarily shift. Partly this is a sequential
spelling out of indexical givens in the texts I have presented. Participants no longer
present themselves as human faces, with biographies and competing interests, but only as
disembodied words. There is no longer a negotiable universe of discourse, but instead a
textually established corpus of common knowledge, whose mutuality is not between
interlocutors but between text-artifact and reader. The channel eliminates in obvious but
occasionally profound ways the context of situation of some originary text. Any text
resulting from writing eliminates the warmth of the sun that the original conversants

---

[25] Don Brenneis has pointed out, in discussion, that the process of entextualization can
lead, at a later point, to retellings: the reincorporation into speech of something once
reduced to text. See also Haviland and de León (1988), and Sherzer (1983:201ff).
Here we see a single symptom of the more global process: the gossip group develops
its own highly context specific turns of phrase. These are in turn frozen onto a
written page. At the same time, through a parallel process of decentering, the writer
himself generalizes their usage by incorporating such phrases, now with echoes of
their dialogic origins, into less context-bound speech.

could point to deictically. It erases the tension between tellers, the scramble for punchlines, and the secret animosities between rivals for the floor thinly masked behind mildly competitive words, that were all too obvious to us gossipers. The remnants of such micro-politics are buried behind the process of entextualization itself. Little Romin, taking authorial control of the gossip text, nudges his own wordsõand his narrative authorityõvaguely to center stage. The literacy trainees endow the adopted Tzotzil dialect of the anthropologist leader with a passive prestige in the textual sediment, even as the anthropologist himself is rendered discursively invisible. And so on.

I have spoken about the pragmatic **normalization** involved when a text is extracted from a discursive centerõsay, a multi-party gossip sessionõand recast onto simpler, or at least transformed, indexical terrain: a linear narrative, or a semantic dialogue with simulated multiple voices presented in a monologic pragmatic medium. Perhaps writing as mere technology is responsible for much of the normalization I have described. Goody argues that the invention of writing and its institutional spread trigger a series of transformations of mind at the level of society as a whole. Much of the effect he attributes almost mechanically to the tangible product of writing: the manipulable, examinable, physical text-artifact itself.

> ". . . when an utterance is put in writing it can be inspected in much greater detail, in its parts as well as in its whole, backwards as well as forwards, out of context as well as in its setting; in other words, it can be subjected to a quite different type of scrutiny and critique than is possible with purely verbal communication. Speech is no longer tied to an 'occasion'; it becomes timeless. Nor is it attached to a person; on paper it becomes more abstract, more depersonalized" [1977:44].

The pragmatic reduction of spoken words in the texts produced by naive Tzotzil writers thus exemplifies minuscule preliminary steps down Goody's longer road to what is claimed to be a distinctively "modern" cognition.

On this view, literacy emancipates its beneficiaries from the contingency of the indexical surround, including personae and activities.

> ". . . words assume a different relationship to action and to object when
> they are on paper than when they are spoken. They are no longer bound
> up directly with 'reality'; the written word becomes a separate 'thing',
> abstracted to some extent from the flow of speech, shedding its close
> entailment with action, with power over matter" [Goody 1977:46].

However, part of the warrant for pragmatic normalization in these written texts derives from something deeper than technology. I have suggested, for example, that narrative may by its nature exhibit a strong decenterability, so strong that alternate texts and voices are drowned out in the process of creating coherence around a monologic story line. Bauman argues that

> ". . . events are not the external raw materials out of which narratives are
> constructed, but rather the reverse: Events are abstractions from narrative.
> It is the structures of signification in narrative that give coherence to
> events in our understanding . . ." (1986:5).

Events are thus segments of some entextualized narrative.

Pragmatic normalization in moving to text from talk (evident in the relation a narrative conversation has to its text-artifactual representation as accomplished by writers or transcribers), thus has an analog in what we might dub referential normalization, the process by which a narrative core is extracted/overlaid on a sequence of events, a feat engineered and accomplished by a storyteller and her or his interlocutors.

There is a further analogy. The classificatory imperative of language itself means that all utterances, spoken or written, convert "raw" phenomenaõwhatever these may beõinto the discrete units of experience, specific "narratables" now cast into Whorf-sized chunks, "fashioned" in speech. The agents of this ubiquitous process are, of course, speakers (i.e., actors) in general. There is thus (minimally) a three-step process of normalization, illustrated in Figure A.

Figure A.

("Raw") phenomena	<õõ>	The description/experience of
	{Native actor}	phenomena (of "narratables")
Sequence of events	<õõ>	Narrative *representation*
	{Narrator}	
Narrative conversation	<õõ>	Text-artifactual *representation*
	{Writer or transcriber}	

Moving from talk to text is thus a single moment in a larger, ubiquitous process of shearing away context to permit representation, the target of our joint metaphor of "decentering." The process requires filtering of the various indexical phenomena that defines narratables and incorporating those that survive into the text-artifact. Any narrative that results is more completely and autonomously determined--"decentered" or, perhaps, "(re)centered" on the text-artifact itself--than it was in the interaction from which it sprang.

There are at least two further important matters which have lurked in the background here, and which I will simply note in closing. The first is the ethnographic question about Tzotzil "genres": narratives, conversations, "gossip," or "jokes." How do such models together with local canons of the "interaction order" (Goffman 1983) interrelate with the sorts of phenomena I have reported?[26] Zinacantecos are, I think less

---

[26] A parallel question arises about the theorist's notion of "transcript," exemplified in my own texts.

interested in, say, the precise timing of overlap or the mechanics of repair than in what makes a good story, or how to frame events and opinions in a form that everyone can agree to. I have mentioned that talk, in Tzotzil *lo`il* 'talk, conversation,' via the derived verb *-lo`ilta* 'tell stories **on** (somebody)' can be aimed at a victim. Implicitly, Zinacantecos, like everyone else, know that only certain sorts of things can be told and only about certain people. Not all news is newsworthy; not all *lo`il* can be aimed. By extension then one presumes that only some (aspects of) tellings can be written, or would in the absence of the ethnographer's promptings be worth writing.

An important aspect of apparent Tzotzil theory about narrating surfaces in Zinacanteco legal discourse. In the courtroom before a Tzotzil magistrate, interest often centers less on the narrative sequence of a witness's account, but rather on whether *itz'ep'uj sk'opõ*whether 'his word slipped.' Did he, that is, inadvertently change his story, blurting out an inconsistency? The Tzotzil notion of "replication" (when a witness is asked to tell his story several times) is here seen to involve a referential thread together with the precise formulation of crucial details. A further look at the work of current Tzotzil writers will need to explore the connections between locally constituted genres and consciously fashioned texts.

Finally, this brings me to an issue I have left largely in the air: the matter of power, authorship, and authority. On the one hand, social power is mediated through the texts it produces (allows). An American court insists on "the whole truth," while a Zinacanteco magistrate searches for a "ratifiable account," replete not only with (self)confirmatory detail but also with opportunities for agreement or at least mutual acquiescence between antagonists. We are again balanced between coherence and accuracy.

However, the trick of producing text from discourse has a more immediate politico-economic dimension as well. After all, the Tzotzil writers whose products I have

surveyed here were in various ways doing my bidding. How did they understand their tasks? What did they think I wanted from them? What did they want from me? Both the literacy trainees hoping for a relatively well-paid government job if they could just satisfy our criteria for accurate writing, and Little Romin transcribing my gossip tapes at a standard salary of so much per page, had clear economic stakes in the production of their texts. For Tzotzilesõfrom anthropological consultant to bilingual schoolteacher, from Indian writer funded by development grants to mini-bus driver hoping for a driver's license, or would-be migrant worker looking for travel papersõliteracy pays. Perhaps pesos, more than pragmatics, motivate in ways to be explored the production of text from talk.

I have noted that the power of narrative itself may have compelling effects: the stories of Proylan and the old lady, or the volcanic eruption, may by their very nature warrant decentering, thereby producing the illusion of coherent integrated texts that can stand clear of the circumstances of their production. We engage in this sort of sleight of hand all the time, often perhaps unwittingly, in doing ethnography. I have here recorded the sad fact that heretofore innocent Tzotziles can be induced to engage in similar conjuring tricks.

References

Arias, Jacinto

   1990   *San Pedro Chenalhó, Algo de su Historia, Cuentos y Costumbres*. Tuxtla

           Gtz., Chis: Instituto Chiapaneco de Cultura.

Atkinson, J.M. and John Heritage

   1984   *Structures of social action*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.

Bauman, Richard

   1986   *Story, performance and event: contextual studies of oral narrative*. New

           York: Cambridge Univ. Press.

Chafe, Wallace

   1982   'Integration and involvement in speaking, writing, and oral literature.' In

           Deborah Tannen (ed.), *Spoken and written language: exploring orality and*

           literacy, Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex.

Chafe, Wallace and Jane Danielewicz

   1985   'Properties of spoken and written language.' In Rosalind Horowitz and S.J.

           Samuels (eds.), *Comprehending oral and written language*, New York:

           Academic.

Clark, Herbert

   1992   *Arenas of language use*. Chicago: CSLI & Univ. Chicago Press.

Goffman, Erving

   1979   'Footing.' *Semiotica* 25:1-29.

   1983   'The interaction order.' *American Sociology Review* 48:1-17.

Goody, J.

   1977   *The domestication of the savage mind.* Cambridge: Cambridge University

           Press.

Goody, J. and I. Watt

 1963 'The consequences of literacy.' *Comparative studies in society and history*.

    5:304-45.

Haviland, John B.

 1977 *Gossip, reputation, and knowledge in Zinacantan*. Chicago: University of

    Chicago Press.

 1987a 'Fighting words: evidential particles, affect and argument.' *Proceedings of the*

    Berkeley Linguistics Society, #13,

 1987c "Lenguaje ritual sin ritual." Paper presented to I Coloquio Swadesh, IIA-

    UNAM, Mexico City, Oct. 1987. (Forthcoming in *Tlalocan*.)

 1989 'Sure, sure: evidence and affect.' *Text* 9(1):27-68.

 1988 "A Father-Mother Talks back: the micro-creation of context in Tzotzil."

    Paper presented to the conference "Interpretive Sociolinguistics III:

    Contextualization" organized by Peter Auer and Aldo di Luzio at the

    University of Konstanz, October 2-6, 1988.

 1990 "We want to borrow your mouth": Tzotzil marital squabbles.

    Anthropological Linguistics 30(3&4): 395-447.

 1991 'Projections, transpositions, and relativity.' Paper prepared for Wenner-Gren

    conference on Rethinking Linguistic relativity, Ocho Rios, May 3-11, 1991.

    Working Paper: Cognitive Anthropology Research Group, Nijmegen. (In

    Gumperz, J.J. & Levinson, S.C. (eds.), *Rethinking Linguistic Relativity*, in

    press. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.)

Haviland, John B. and Lourdes de León

 1985 'Un modelo lingüístico para la alfabetización en Tzotzil.' Mexico, DF:

    Instituto Nacional de Alfabetización para los Adultos.

1988   '*Me tengo que tragar mis broncas* (I have to swallow my problems).' Paper

presented to the session "Interactive narrative," organized by Charles

Goodwin and Alessandro Duranti. Meetings of the American

Anthropological Association, Phoenix, November, 1988.

Labov, William

1972   'The transformation of experience in narrative syntax.' Ch. 9 in *Language in

the inner city: studies in the Black English Vernacular*. Philadelphia: Univ.

of Penn. Press.

Laughlin, Robert M.

to appear   "In the Book of Matthew Thus Spake John." In Jill M. Brody (ed.),

Discourse in Mayan Languages.

Ochs, Elinor

1979   'Transcription as theory.' In *Developmental Pragmatics*, E.Ochs and B.

Schieffelin (eds.), pp. 43-72. New York: Academic Press.

Pérez López, Enrique

1990   *Chamula, un Pueblo Indígena Tzotzil*. Tuxtla Gtz., Chis: Instituto

Chiapaneco de Cultura.

Mithun, Marianne

1985   'When speakers write.' *BLS #11*.

Sherzer, Joel

1983   *Kuna ways of speaking*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Silverstein, Michael

1976   'Shifters, linguistic categories, and cultural description.' In Keith H. Basso

and Henry A. Selby (eds.), *Meaning in Anthropology*, 11-56. Albuquerque:

University of New Mexico Press.

Yngve, V. H.

 1970 'On getting a word in edgewise.' Papers from the Sixth Regional Meeting,
     Chicago Linguistics Society, M.A. Campbell (ed.).   Chicago: Dept. of
     Linguistics, Univ. of Chicago.