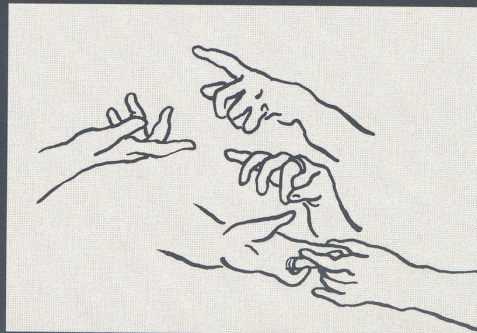


LES RITUELS DU DIALOGUE



PUBLIÉ PAR
AURORE MONOD BECQUELIN ET PHILIPPE ERIKSON



SOCIÉTÉ D'ETHNOLOGIE

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JOHN B. HAVILAND

*Warding off witches:
Voicing and dialogue in Zinacantec prayer*

The cave at Isak'tik

It was just dawn as we started to pick our way down the steep path leading to the cave at *Isak'tik* ("Potatoes"). The sky had begun to lighten while we were driving up the winding gravel road from *Atz'am* ("Salt"), named for the sacred salt wells just outside the church of the Virgin which had been our first stop. We had left the hamlet of Apas shortly after midnight, hoping to arrive at the church in Atz'am before any prying eyes or overhearing ears were likely to be around. We were embarked on a twenty-four hour curing ceremony designed to release my goddaughter *Antel*—now a 35 year-old mother of seven—from the grips of witchcraft.

The hired driver had parked his battered VW combi by the side of the road, near the cross that marked the trail down to the cave. He had then promptly curled up for a nap on his front seat. The other helpers had gone to collect firewood. This left seven of us to walk down to the cave. First were the patient and her husband, together with the curer. Then came the curer's husband, who also served as her *mayol* or deputy. He was heavily burdened with candles, flowers, and the live chickens to be left as a sacrifice in the cave. Then there were the two anthropologists—my wife and me, Antel's godparents—and a couple of children, our 8-year-old daughter and another small boy who carried several liters of cane liquor.

The descent was difficult, and the women straggled behind. The rest of us halted at the end of the path, still only halfway down the mountainside. Looming above us on a sheer rocky outcropping was the mouth of *Isak'tik*, several meters above us, gaping dark and cold in the morning light. On my previous visit, fifteen years before, the only way into the cave was to scabble up a rickety, makeshift ladder. Now concrete steps led up to the lip of the cave.

Warding off witches: voicing and dialogue in Zinacantec prayer

John B. Haviland

Reed College / CIESAS-Sureste

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There was a certain reluctance to enter. The patient's husband, *Maryan*, carried his load of pine needles up the stairs and ventured inside. One by one we followed him into the gloom, hearing the scuttling and pumping of bat wings, our eyes blind in the darkness even after the meager light of dawn. The rock floor of the cave underfoot was damp and greasy. As our sight gradually returned we could make out piles of desiccated flowers and pine boughs, stubs of old candles, and a small passageway to the east, the walls black with what appeared to be the soot of aeons.

The curer and her patient had now made their way up into the cave, and they knelt to cross themselves by the entranceway. Facing the small passageway, they began to pray. The shaman's fierce voice echoed off the walls, drowning out the words of her patient *Antel*, a much younger woman who knelt to one side. They addressed the lord of the cave, explaining their mission and announcing their intention to enter the depths of the earth.

Here is part of the curer's introductory prayer, delivered in the characteristic parallel form of Zinacantec Tzotzil prayer.

(1) At the cave mouth¹

- 1 cu; chjelav ti jpat une //
 chjelav li yo jxokon une
my back will pass// my humble side will pass
- 2 ak'u sk'upin un //
 ak'u slekin un
let her desire // let her enjoy
- 3 jujun lach'ul nichim bae //
 jujun lach'ul nichim sate
each flowery face of yours // each flowery visage of yours
- . . .
- 6 yu'un xa ja` chajtatik ta jk'op //
 yu`n xa ja` chajtatik ta yo jti`
We greet you with my words // we greet you with my mouth
- ..7 kejelon o tal //
 patalon o tal
I have come kneeling //I have come prostrate
- 8 ta jk'an li pertonale //
 ta jk'an lesensya
I ask for pardon //I ask for forgiveness
- 9 te chkom yo jkot ti sjelole //
 ti slok'ol
there will remain one lowly substitute // one replacement
- 10 ti jchamele //
 ti jlajele
for the sick one // for the ill one
- 11 ti stoje //
 ti skantelae:
her pine // her candle

We had come to this foreboding place after more than a year in which Antel had suffered from unexplained swellings, pains, and periodic blackouts. Her youngest child, almost two, was sickly and feeble, still unable to walk or talk. The small village where they lived, several kilometers from the Pan-American Highway that winds up into the highlands from the central plains of Chiapas, Mexico, was divided by factional political and religious fights, fights that Antel and her husband—a former hamlet official for the dominant but recently besieged political party—could hardly avoid. Several hamlet

¹ The prayers transcribed in this essay were videotaped at Isak'tik in August 1996. The transcripts reflect the author's most confident hearing of the distinguishable words, supplemented by further hearings and interpretations of the patient and her husband. Some dubious phrases, as well as those sections of prayers not captured on the video soundtrack, are not included in the fragments that follow. Tzotzil is written in a practical orthography, based on Spanish; glottalized (ejective) consonants are shown with a following apostrophe ('); glottal stops are shown as a reverse apostrophe ('). Parallel lines (see below) are shown with double slashes (//) separating the matching parts. I am indebted to Chep Akuxtin, Lourdes de León, and the National Science Foundation (USA), grant #BNS-8011494, and CONACyT (Mexico) for help and support in the preparation of this essay.

shamans had been called to attend Antel when her *ch'ulel* would take leave of her body, causing her to fall into an unexplained faint. Now this elderly *j'ilol* "seer or curer," one of Antel's *comadres* or ritual kinswomen, had prescribed a major curing ceremony to rid Antel of her ills once and for all. This ceremony entailed considerable planning, preparation, and expense. It involved a journey first to visit the Virgin, patroness of the church in Atz'am, then to the cave at Isak'tik where the *yajval balamil* "Lord of the Earth" gathers together Zinacantán's ancestral deities, then to another altar at a rocky outcropping, *Ch'ul Ton* "Holy Rock," a little way up the road toward the ceremonial center of Zinacantán, and then three more stops back in Antel's village, ending finally at her house where she would be bathed and put to bed for three days and nights. (See Map 1.) Such a journey required that Maryan hire a vehicle to make the two hour drive from their village to the remote hamlet of Atz'am, and stopping twice on the return. He also had to buy or collect the flowers prescribed by the curer, as well as to purchase candles, chickens (both to eat and to sacrifice), and cane liquor in abundance for the various stops on the curer's itinerary.



Map 1: The curing route

The cave at Isak'tik, as everyone knew, was a site not only for reversing but also for performing witchcraft—selling the soul of one's enemies to the Lord of the Earth, in

exchange for wealth or favors, or sometimes out of pure *k'ak'al o`onil* “heated heart,” that is envy and hatred. The place radiated danger and power. *Kuxul li balamil le`e*, people would say, “the earth there is alive.” Worse, things had already taken a disturbing and non-propitious turn before we ventured into the cave. Contrary to our expectations, someone was waiting at the church, even before we arrived in the blackness of predawn Atz'am. It was a drunken man, Romin, a shaman himself, but more than that, a notorious and dangerous witch, who refused to leave our curing party in peace, overlapping the curer's prayers with his own, and lurking on the edges of our little party until he was offered his own share of our liquor and food. Mol Chep, our curer's husband and the man in charge of burying the sacrificial chickens, had been forced to drink more liquor than he should. He was by now reeling from its effects, muttering to himself in slurred but distinctly parallel couplets as he prepared the flowers and other decorations for the cross inside the cave at Isak'tik. Our curer, too, was angry. Why had that other drunken man come to *tuch'be sk'opik* “cut her words”? Why was her own husband, an experienced ritual helper, so undisciplined as to drink without necessity, knowing that considerably more *pox*—the locally distilled bootleg cane liquor that punctuates all curing ceremonies—remained to be consumed?

The curer's nervous mood infiltrated her prayer, as she and her patient prepared to move forward into the bowels of Isak'tik.

(2) The introductory prayer concludes

12 mu me ilbajinbiluk li me- li spate //
 mu me ilbajinbiluk li xokone
 may her back be not molested // may her side be not molested

14 vo`onikon mu ilbajinbiluk ti jch'ulele //
 ti kanima une
 and even me, may my soul be not molested // may my spirit be not molested

16 ta lek me un //
 ta utz me un
 for good // for happiness

17 kajva:l
 my Lord

18 ja` me chajta o ta k'op //
 ja` me chajta o ta yo jti`
 I greet you with my word // I greet you with my lowly mouth

20 ja` me ta jtun o ti yo lak'obike //
 yo lavokike
 I will make use of your hands // of your feet.

21 chjelav ti jpat une //
 chjelav ti jxokon une
 My back will pass // my side will pass.

22 ti yo spat une //
 ti yo xxokon une
 And her lowly back // her lowly side.

23 kajval
 My lord.

As they prayed, the curer and her patient were engaged in two seeming monologues, albeit simultaneously delivered and at least partially coordinated with each other. Despite this appearance, they clearly were addressing their words to a complex

audience which included the assembled members of the curing party—helpers and relatives—as well as the nominal addressees, indexed by the second person forms scattered throughout the prayer: the ancestral deities and, above all, the Lord of the Earth whose domain we had entered by crossing the threshold of Isak'tik. The monologue of highly structured prayer thus echoed through a cave replete with dialogic possibilities (Bakhtin 1981, 1986) inherent in the social circumstances.

In a recent paper, Judith Irvine (1996) invokes the idea of “shadow dialogues”—a potentially multifold layering (Clark 1996, Ch. 12) of occasions of talk, past and present—which maintain echoes in and lend sometimes hidden structure to any given stretch of verbal interaction. There are, in Irvine’s earlier terminology (Irvine 1987), “implicated participants” lurking behind the words, the attitudes, the sentiments, and the actions of even solitary monologists. Scraping away some of the layers exposes part of the diachronic social history of speech, a topic of central interest to an ethnographer of the social life of language. My purpose in this essay is a small exercise in the archeology of shadow dialogues.

Zinacantec ritual language

The language of prayer in Zinacantec Tzotzil, as in other Mayan languages and, of course, in languages throughout the Americas and beyond, is organized into parallel structures. Song (Haviland 1967), formal denunciation (Laughlin 1975), and, indeed, much ordinary talk (Haviland 1992, 1996) share with prayer² the use of stylized images and sentiments, lexicalized as more or less fixed pairs (and sometimes triplets or quadruplets) of expressions used together in a tightly structured way. The overall form of Tzotzil³ prayer is well described,⁴ although, with the exception of several lengthy but largely uncontextualized texts,⁵ little work has situated such speech in its natural habitat: for example, prayer intended to be efficacious in curing a suffering patient. Although the primary aim of this essay is to sketch the multi-vocal and dialogic nature of the prayer in Antel’s curing ceremony, it will nonetheless be useful to discuss prayer structure first.

² As recent work by Baron (1997) shows, this parallel structure is carried over into the considerably less regimented prayer of Tzotzil converts to evangelical Protestantism, who employ a kind of stylistic bricolage in the newly invented genre.

³ Studies exist for Tzeltal, a close relative and neighbor of Tzotzil. See for example, Becquelin Monod (1987). Although similar parallel structures are known to exist in other languages of the region, there are surprisingly few detailed studies of either the structures themselves or of the performance of prayer. A notable exception is the work of William Hanks (1984, 1987, 1990, and especially 1996).

⁴ See especially Gossen (1974, 1985).

⁵ Perhaps the best collection for Tzotzil is found in Laughlin (1980), with selections from personal prayer, curing prayer, *cargo*-ritual, denunciation, and song. More song texts from Zinacantan are presented in Haviland (1967).

In its canonical form, a Zinacantec curer's prayer proceeds as a series of strictly parallel lines, usually pairs of lines which differ from one another in only a single element—sometimes a lexeme, sometimes just a root. Although every Zinacantec in one degree or another can muster at least some couplets, and although other Zinacantec specialists may be extraordinarily proficient at the elaborate parallel speech of religious ritual, curing prayer is considered to be a gift from the gods. Individual curers may have very different styles of delivery, and although all are likely to use a core of standard phrases for a given situation, some *j`iloletik* are known for employing unusual, even novel images and wording. In Zinacantec theory, the ability to cure one's fellow human beings of a variety of maladies, which crucially includes the ability to pray fluently, effortlessly, and appropriately in a range of circumstances, is bestowed by the ancestral gods in a dream (or a sequence of dreams). It is not something one can learn to do.

There are two highly productive aspects of the parallel structure. First are the paired doublets (or triplets) which alternate in the frame of a single sequence of lines. Zinacantecs in general know many such doublets, and they know as well their conventional significance. For example, the paired nominal roots *k'op* 'word' // *ti`* 'mouth' refer to speech in general, and to the genres of speech that employ parallelism in particular. Zinacantecs understand that to refer to speech in prayer one will employ these paired roots. The roots themselves ordinarily require morphological elaboration as full words, and the language thus provides a means for multiplying possible couplets by applying both inflectional and derivational mechanisms to the roots. Thus, for example, one can form parallel lines (see lines 6 and 18 of the fragments quoted) around the pair *j-k'op* // *j-ti`* "my words // my mouth" (where *j-* is a first person possessive prefix), and equally well around the verbalized nouns *k'oponel* // *ti`inel* "speaking (words) // speaking (with the mouth)." The morphological creativity of the language thus augments the already large inventory of paired roots, creating possible doublets tailored to particular contexts of speech. More importantly, at the level of cultural meaning, these doublets have a dual character. On the one hand, they are the atoms from which the tissue of prayer grows, the irreducible units of ritual expression. On the other, they are highly evocative images compressed into the minimal elements of speech. Thus *k'op* // *ti`* both makes available a means for referring to prayer itself, and at the same time incorporates a culturally complex image (prayer, like other *k'op* or 'words,' with suggestions of socializing, negotiation, and even fighting; but also prayer as embodied in the *ti`* mouths of both curer and patient).

The second productive device of the ritual genre derives from the frames within which doublets appear. Sometimes a pair of lines consists of nothing more than the couplets themselves, appropriately dressed syntactically and morphologically. Thus in lines 9-11, the curer announces in prayer that the sacrificial chicken (the *jelol//lok'ol* 'replacement // copy' of the patient) will be left as an offering, continuing by simply intoning two further doublets in a row without elaboration: "There will remain the replacement // the copy, of the sick person // the ill person, (and also) her pine // her candles." Sometimes, however, there is a wider frame--parts of a line that are repeated without change in a parallel construction. These frames themselves seem to comprise a highly restricted set of possibilities, reflecting the conventionalized content of prayer just as the inventory of doublets represents its conventional imagery. Sometimes a particular phrase in prayer always co-occurs with a particular doublet. For example, the phrase that begins *cha-j-ta-tik* (ASP-1E-find-1PLIncl, i.e., "we find you, we meet you"), in lines 6 and 18, always ends with a doublet based on the pair *k'op* // *ti`*. Thus "We meet you with my words, with my mouth" as shown in line 6 may alternate with

chajtatik ta k'oponel // [chajtatik] ta ti'inel
We meet you with speaking (words) // [we meet you] with speaking (with our mouths).

(Frequently part or all of the repeated frame of the second line is elided, as shown by the bracketed words in this example.) Sometimes a single frame admits a number of different paired doublets, with slightly different meanings resulting. To describe passage in or out of a sacred space (for example, the inner cave at Isak'tik where candles will be planted before a cross), ritual language uses a frame based on the stem *jelav* 'pass,' as in lines 1 and 21. However, the verb can be combined with either a doublet referring to the body (*pat//xokon* 'back//side') of the person who will cross such a boundary, or with a doublet (based on the pair *ba//sat* 'face//visage') referring to the sacred space itself (*ta anichimal ba//ta anichimal sat* "before your flowery face // before your flowery visage," i.e., at your altar).

In fluent prayer, some curers enter an almost trancelike state. The words are delivered rapidly, without hesitation, and with remarkably little repetition. When Antel's *j`ilol* ("curer," literally "seer") was interrupted in her delivery—for example, when she broke off praying to bark an order at her *mayol*—she would often recycle the current parallel doublet of lines from the beginning in order to get herself restarted. Each line exhibits one of a characteristic range of repetitive melodic and rhythmic cadences, with several lines grouped into phrases whose prosodic structure exhibits the same kind of repetition as its wording.

The dual imagery of the couplets of Mesoamerican ritual language has prompted theorizing about complementarity in thought, binary oppositions, and duality in general. Here, in passing, is the first aspect of "dialogue" in the prayers at Isak'tik. The very structure of Tzotzil ritual language incorporates a kind of second-order dialogicity, because in many cases both the lexical choices available to prayer and the stylized sentiments or formulae embodied in its frames are the clear sediment of a historical dialogue between Indian and friar during the Conquest of this part of Mexico. At the most obvious level, one observes the presence of Spanish loanwords (loanconcepts) in the doublets themselves (*toj//kantela* 'pine//candle,' which employs an archaic Spanish word *candela* 'candle'; *maretik//ajvetik* 'oceans//lords' where the Spanish loan *mar* 'sea' is combined with a Tzotzil plural marker *-etik* and paired with an ancient Mayan root *Ajv* meaning 'lord.'). Similarly, the formulas of Catholic prayer have been taken over in full cloth as both the introductory and closing sequences of each prayer episode at Isak'tik: *yos, jesukristu, kajval* "God, Jesus Christ, my Lord" and *batz'i ch'ul ryox totil, batz'i ch'ul ryox nich'onil, batz'i ch'ul ryox piritu santu* "True Holy God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost." Tzotzil prayer thus freezes a dialogue of five centuries ago—involving theological, cosmological, and social ideas—into the ritual practices of today.⁶ Moreover, insofar as the meanings of many archaisms—whether Spanish or Tzotzil in origin—remain obscure to modern speakers, their presence in prayer also represents for

⁶ It is interesting, but beyond the scope of this paper, to compare the incorporation of Catholic elements into this "traditional" prayer with current attempts, on the part of modern evangelists, to recast others parts of Catholic ritual language into Tzotzil, which ignore almost completely the parallelism of native ritual genres. See Baron (1997).

Zinacantecs a virtual dialogue with the past, or with the ancestors who knew exactly the meanings of formulae that speakers today can only repeat.

Meaning and propositionality

Prayer as a code thus employs a limited constructional “syntax” and a large, but heavily conventionalized, imagistic “lexicon.” One piece of evidence that Zinacantecs cite to show that the ability to pray is a gift from the ancestral gods to those with sufficiently strong souls is the difficulty of the genre: skilled shamans can pray for hours at a sitting, improvising appropriate and non-repetitive prayers throughout ceremonies that can last for more than twenty-four hours. Whatever the Zinacantec metatheory of divine inspiration, the constrained structure of ritual language very likely facilitates the remarkable fluency a skilled shaman brings to curing prayer. A relatively limited repertoire of “propositions,” and a relatively fixed inventory of “referring expressions,” themselves structured in parallel, are the raw material for which the shaman must provide the indexical engine—that is, which the shaman must tailor to the occasion at hand.

It is in curing prayer, this most highly efficacious of language, that we see perhaps most clearly how talk, in the Malinowskian dictum, is “part of action and equivalent to action” (Malinowski 1923). The efficacy of prayer, linked to its parallel imagery and the conventionally disguised meanings of its words, makes ritual speech the very opposite of “plain talk.” One does not, in shamanistic prayer, simply “say what one means” or “express one’s thoughts,” since the explicit aim is to effect a cure. Something other than just “performativity” is at stake, as well. The words of the prayer have conventional propositional meanings, often strung together in conventional declarative form; however, these meanings have been deflected from those of ordinary talk, and their illocutionary forces have been similarly redirected.

(3) Prayer while beating the patient’s back with pine boughs (see video clip “Beat.mpg”)

1140 cu; an yos jesu kristu kajval
God, Jesus Christ, my Lord

1141 k'usi yepal un
How much is there?

1142 mi ta lubul xa un // mi ta pich'il xa un
Will it be with fatigue // with exhaustion?

1143 mi mu xa bu slekil un
Will there be no more goodness?

1144 ti spat une // ti xokon une
for her back // her side

1145 li` la me chyal li kok une // li` la me chyal li jk'ob une
Here (it is said) my foot has descended // here (it is said) my hand has descended

1147 tzitzeluk no la un // k'oponeluk no la un
Let it be just punishment // let it be just speaking (it is said)

1148 ja`aneluk no la un // chimaneluk la un
Let it be just lifting the head // let it be just bowing the head (it is said)

1149 ta spat un // ta xxokon u:n
for her back // for her side

1150 t amanbil antz une // t atojbil antz
of your bought woman // of your paid for woman

1151 batz'i ryox totil . . .

True God the father

The curer has passed a bunch of pine boughs carefully over the candles and flowers that have been offered to the lords of the cave at Isak'tik. As the patient bows her head forward, the curer intones the words of Fragment (3) and gently beats her neck and back with the boughs, “cleaning” the patient through the virtues with which the boughs are now imbued. Although the conventional imagery disguises the curer’s intended meanings, each line of her prayer is intended to have an immediate effect. The shaman refers first to the patient’s ills—her “tiredness // his exhaustion”—and to her desperation in illness—“will there no longer be goodness for her back // her side?”—using explicit interrogative form. (The form raises a further issue, to which I shall return: to whom are the questions addressed?) She refers to her actions—beating or “cleansing” her patient with blessed pine boughs—euphemistically, as the “descent of my feet // my hands.” What is the purpose of this beating? “Just let it be punishment [or admonition] (it is said) // just speaking [advice] (it is said); just raising the head [in pride] // just bowing the head [in humility].” (And why does she say “it is said,” using the evidentially distancing particle *la* apparently to attribute these sentiments to someone else’s voice? To whom this “other voice” might belong is another issue to which I shall return.) The action takes place on the stage of the body (“her back // her side”) of the sick woman (“your bought woman // your paid for woman,” i.e., “the woman for whom you have paid”). (One last issue to be postponed until the next section: who is the “you” referred to?)

Here, then, is a second sort of virtual dialogue, which connects the words of prayer with the actions of the moment. The words follow the rhythm of the actions, and the actions draw force from the words.

Dialogicity and multivocality

A third sort of dialogue present in the anti-witchcraft prayer at Isak'tik is more explicit and familiar. It involves the real interlocutors of the moment, not simply those of several centuries ago, nor the virtual “interlocutors” drawn from the realms of non-speech. The ritual is guided by the shaman herself, but it nonetheless proceeds in negotiated stages, through interactions between the shaman, the patient, the shaman’s assistant, and the other helpers present. Moreover, by invoking—indexically creating—a range of otherwise invisible interlocutors, prayer produces dialogues and miniature social worlds that go well beyond the narrow limits of the immediate curing party. I turn to some of the most explicit of these dialogic encounters, and the voices that they comprise.

Pronominal forms running through the prayers establish a sequence of interactive spaces, some embedded within others, and all defined by their implicated participants. For example, in all the prayer fragments presented so far, the triangle of persons has been roughly as in Figure 1.

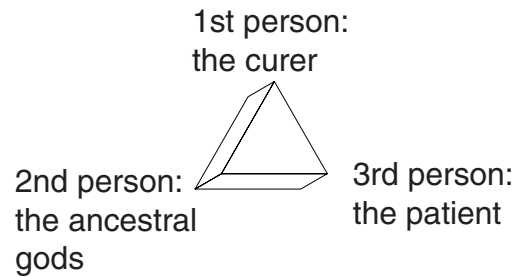


Figure 1: The normal allocation of person marking.

Thus, in her prayer at the crosses atop *Ch'ul Ton* 'Holy Rock,' our next stop after leaving Isak'tik (see Fragment 4), the curer refers to herself—kneeling at the cross (line 1), praying (lines 8 and 9), or interceding on behalf of her patient (lines 4-6) with first person pronominal forms. She refers to her patient (or in this case her patient's young daughter) with a generic third person ("her back // her side," i.e., her body in line 7), coding the reference to the sick baby with a conventional doublet to refer to a child as a flower, "the little carnation // the lily" (line 3). Finally, she reserves second person forms for the ancestral spirits who inhabit this place, honoring them with a reference to "your flowery faces // visages" (line 2) and acknowledging their power through second person verbs (lines 4-6).

(4) Unmarked triangle of pronominal reference. Praying at *Ch'ul Ton*. (See video *Ch'ul ton1.mpg.*)

- 1 c; ja` me kejelon o tal // ja` la me patalon o tal
Thus have I come kneeling // thus have I come prostrate.
- 2 ta yo lanichim ba // ti ta yo lanichimal sate
To your flowery face // to your flowery visage.
- 3 xchi`uk li lavalena // xchi`uk li asasena
With the little carnation // with the lily.
- 4 mu xamajbekon un // mu xavutbekon un .
Do not beat her for me // do not scold her for me
- 5 mu xak'ak'al-ilbekon un //
Do not see her with anger, for me //
- 6 mu xaka'ak'al-k'elbekon un
Do not look on her with anger, for me
- 7 ti yo spat une // ti yo xxokon une
Her lowly back // her lowly side
- 8 ja` me laj o jk'an o li ch'ul pertonal //
I have finished asking for holy pardon//
- 9 laj o jk'an o li ch'ul lesensya
I have finished asking for holy permission.
- 10 ti marya rosaryo ali me` //
Mary of the Rosary, Mother
- 11 ti marya rosayo kaxayile
Mary of the Rosary, Lady
- 12 ti vinajelal antze // ti vinajelal sinyora une
Heavenly woman // heavenly seņora

To make more direct reference to the deities to whom she nominally speaks, the curer has recourse to a variety of address forms. She may use simple second person pronominals, both singular and plural. (For example, when she implores the lords of the cave to “stand up // stand firm” in taking responsibility for her patient’s well-being, her expression is explicitly plural: *xava`an abaik // xatek`an abaik* “you will stand **yourselves** up // you will make **yourselves** stand firmly.”) Or she may call directly on her addressee(s) using such doublets as: *tot // kajval* “father // my lord,” *me` // kaxayil* “mother // lady,” or most explicitly referring to the lords of the place by name: *isak` ch`ul maretik // isak` ch`ul ajvetik* “Isak’(tik), holy oceans // Isak’(tik), holy elders,” or here at Ch’ul Ton, *marya rosario, vinajel antz // vinajel sinyora* “Mary of the Rosary, heavenly woman // heavenly lady.”

Correspondingly, the shaman is able to triangulate the third person references to her patient by explicitly linking the sick person to her addressees, usually calling Antel *avalab // anich`nab* “your child // your offspring,” or *amanbil antz // atojbil antz* “your bought woman // you paid woman” (i.e., the one for whom you have paid, the one you have bought, i.e., taken charge of—or, in the case of Christ, whose sins you have ‘bought’).

Only at one point during the whole ritual at the cross inside Isak’tik does this basic unmarked allocation of persons switch. When the cross is decorated and the candles prepared, the curer turns to her patient and invites her to light the candles and initiate a long prayer, asking for forgiveness, as the candles burn. Here, momentarily, a direct dialogue between curer and patient is indexed by the pronominal triangle shown in Figure 2.

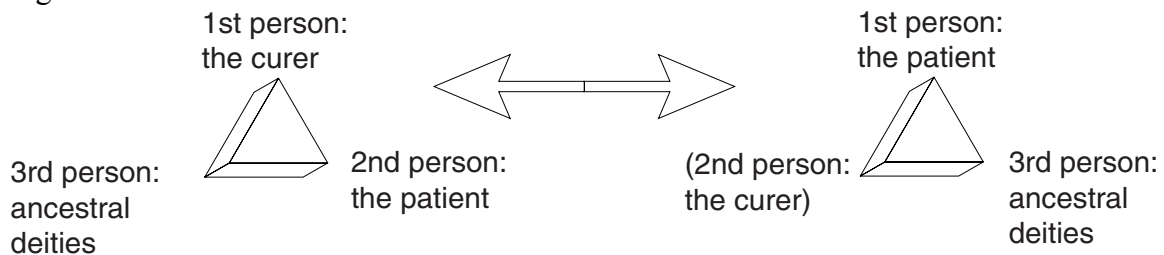


Figure 2: Complementary triangles of persons in direct dialogue.

(5) Switching addressees: dialogue between curer and patient. (See Video Pertonal.mpg.)

687 cu; *chkom o ti yo latoje // chkom o ti yo lakantela*
Your lowly pine will remain // your lowly candle will remain.
 688 *chkom o ti yo lajelole // ti yo lalok'ole*
There will remain your lowly substitute // your lowly replacement.
 689 *mu teyuk nox ti ipe // mu teyuk nox ti k'ux une*
May the sickness not merely be there // may the pain not merely be there
 690 *ja` jch'unoj o tal k'op uk // ti mantal uke*
I have come obeying the word // the order
 691 *mi lekil ch'ambil // mi lekil nupbil*
Will it be well received? // will it be well met??
 692 **ti yo stoj une // ti yo lakantela une** ←
Her lowly pine // your lowly candle?

Even here, the curer seems momentarily to slip back into the established participant frame of Figure 1 in which her patient is the third person. In Fragment 5, at line 692, the curer refers, within the same doublet, to the patient's offerings first as *stoj* "her candle" and then as *akantela* "your candle," perhaps correcting herself in mid line, perhaps briefly switching intended addressees. (As she speaks, the shaman is simultaneously adjusting the candles she has lit in front of a flower-bedecked cross, and also turning to touch the forehead of her patient who bows periodically to her as the prayer proceeds. The line in question is uttered as the shaman is in the midst of this transition from looking towards the candles to addressing her patient directly.)

As the prayer continues, the interplay—fully in prayer—between the curer (whose speech is shown by the abbreviation "cu") and patient (shown as "pa") is particularly obvious. The patient (not all of whose speech is transcribed in Fragment 6) echoes the curer's turns with just a fractional delay. Curer, at line 693: "we will leave **your** substitute // **your** replacement (i.e., the sacrifice for you)." Patient at lines 694-5: "**My** replacement // **my** substitute will remain (here in the cave)." Curer: "beneath the feet // beneath the hands (i.e., at the altar)" (line 704) of "Isak' holy oceans // Isak' holy lords" (lines 704, 706)—echoed verbatim by the patient (lines 705, 707-8). This is conventionalized, responsive dialogue; curer and patient maintain their immediate, individual perspectives while directly engaging the other's talk.

(6) Contrapuntal prayer between curer and patient. (See Video pertonal.mpg.)

693 cu; ti yo lajelol une // ti yo lalok'ol une
Your lowly substitute // your lowly replacement

694 pa; ja` me chkom =
 695 =o ti yo jjelole // chkom o ti yo jlok'ol une
Here will remain my lowly substitute // my lowly replacement

696 cu; ja` xa me =
 697 =chaj-
 698 ja` xa me chajk'opon o // chajti`in o
For that reason I am talking to you // for that I am speaking to you

699 mi xakejan aba // mi xapatan aba
Will you kneel // will you prostrate yourself

700 pa; ta jk'an o li ch'ul pertonal // =
 701 =ta jk'an o li ch'ul lesensya
With that I will ask for holy pardon // with that I will ask for holy forgiveness

702 cu; mi xa`ok' // mi xa`ava:n
Will you weep // will you cry?

703 ja` me jta o ti ta-
 704 ti yolon yoke // ti yolon sk'obe
Thus will I (we?) come beneath his feet // beneath his hands

705 pa; ti ta yolon yok // ti ta yolon sk'ob
beneath his feet // beneath his hands

706 cu; ti isak' ch'ul maretik // isak' ch'ul ajvetik une:
of Isak' holy oceans // of Isak' holy lords

707 pa; isak' ch'ul maretik // =

- 708 =isak' ch'ul ajvetik une
of Isak' holy oceans // of Isak' holy lords
- 709 cu; k'opojkotik un // ti'ijkotik u:n
Let us talk // let us speak
- 710 pa; [k'opojkotik kumale:
let us talk, comadre
- 711 cu; [jk'antik i pertonal
let us ask for pardon

There are, of course, multiple possible “third persons” represented in the curer’s prayer at Isak’tik. She frequently indexes as third persons not only the patient, but also her own husband, the *mayol* // *j`alvasil* “deputy // aide” whose job it is to prepare and bury the sacrificial chicken. As we have seen, the curer also refers to Antel’s two-year-old baby with the doublet *lavalena* // *asasena* “the little carnation // the lily.” A more shadowy background presence is the presumed witch, responsible for Antel’s illness. This personage is rarely accorded even a pronominal reference, masquerading instead behind such images as *k`ak`al o`onil* // *tzajal o`onil* “the heated (i.e., jealous) heart // the red heart.”

The curer may also modulate voice, delicately indexing the relationship of intermediary which she has between her patient and the ancestral deities who will cure her. In Fragment 7, for example, the curer falls somewhat behind the patient in the contrapuntal chorus of prayer. Whereas normally it is the patient who will echo the lines of prayer previously uttered by the shaman, here the shaman appears to take up a line pronounced by the patient. At line 805 Antel observes in prayer that she has “come kneeling // prostrate.” The curer in turn takes up the same image in line 807.

The asynchrony continues in lines 812-815. The patient makes the following plea in lines 812-813: “let there be an end, please, to the one sickness // the one illness.” Now the shaman introduces a subtle, dialogic, shift of perspective. She repeats the patient’s words in lines 814-815, but with a single substitution. The patient uses the desiderative particle *me* in phrasing her request, signifying that it represents her own desire expressed to the ancestral deities directly. The shaman replaces this particle with an evidential particle *la*⁷ which typically accompanies “hearsay,” that is, reports of the speech of others. She thereby transforms the direct request of the patient that there be no more sickness into an indirect request, which she represents as being relayed through her from patient to the deities, all the while staying within the parallel structure of prayer.

(7) Patient leads, curer elaborates

- 804 cu; mi itzutz ti ke une // mi itzutz ti yo jti` une
Has my mouth completed? // Have my lips completed (i.e., their work)?
- 805 pa; ja` me ta kejelon o tal // ja` me ta patalon o tal
I have thus come kneeling // I have thus come prostrate
- 806 cu; [ja` xa me =

⁷ See Haviland (1987a, 1996c).

807 =kejelon un // ja` xa me patalon un
Thus have I come kneeling // thus have I come prostrate

808 ja` xa me - ta jk'an o ach'ul pertonal // ta =
 809 =jk'an o ach'ul lesensya:
*Thus have I come to ask for your holy pardon // to ask for your holy
 forgiveness*

810 ti =
 811 ta yo lanichim ba // ti ta yo lanichimal satik une
at your flowery face // at your flowery visage
 =[

812 pa; te xa no me k'alal li jun chamele // te xa no me =
 813 =k'alal li jun lajele
let that just be the end of the one sickness //
let it be the end of the one pain

814 cu; te xa no **la** k'alal li chamele // te xa no la = <←---
 815 =k'alal li lajele
let that just be the end of the one sickness (she says) //
let it be the end of the one pain (she says)

This part of the ritual is especially dramatic, and it points up the explicitly supernatural dialogue represented by the ceremony as a whole. Why have we come to Isak'tik? This dark and somewhat frightening place is known to be one entry point into the malevolent underworld, where the fat, cigar-smoking Earth Lord dwells in shadowy splendor, tending his flocks and cattle, and occasionally exchanging wealth for the souls of human beings offered up by witches to descend into the darkness to be his slaves. It is thus a place where the patient, and the curer on her behalf, can make a plea with the same Earth Lord for the return of a bartered soul. Prayer is the only medium through which such a plea can be made. It is, therefore, the vehicle for *dialogue* with the powers of earth and heaven that can cure illness. In Fragment 8, curer and patient pray together as the helper prepares to leave the sacrificial chicken brought as an offering to the Earth Lord. Antel (whose words are largely drowned out by the stronger prayer of the *j'ilol*) is overcome with emotion, weeping and sobbing, hardly able to squeeze out the words that ask the spirits of Isak'tik to take pity on her plight, to recognize her abject state. Her shaman simultaneously intercedes on Antel's behalf, at once describing the actions she is taking to please the gods (at lines 821-822 she mentions explicitly the gifts of cane liquor, candles, and sacrificial animal they have brought to the cave), and relaying further requests from her patient (at line 826-7, again using the evidential *la*, asking on behalf of Antel that her body be no longer punished). This is, typically, a multivocal and multidirectional dialogue. Both curer and patient ostensibly speak to a supernatural addressee, the shaman using both her own authorial voice and relaying the desires of her patient. The patient, in turn, constantly monitors the shaman's words, trying to synchronize her own prayer with that of the older, more powerful woman. (Notice how the patient repeats the shaman's image of "kneeling // prostrate" at lines 829-832.) The shaman's prayed "reports" about her patient's actions (for example, her reference to the great expense the ceremony represents for the patient and her family in lines 833-34) thus serve as hints to the patient herself about how she ought to pray.

(8) Patient weeps as she prays, with curer

819 cu; ja` xa me chajtatik ta k'oponel //
 820 ja` xa me chajtatik ta yo ti`ine:l
Now we find you with our talking // now we find you with our speaking

821 (jp'ajel) ti ta yo lave // jp'ajel ti ta yo lati`e
One drop (of liquor) for your lowly mouth //
one drop for your lowly lips

822 chak' o entrokal ti kajmayol // ti kaj`alvasil une
It is delivered by my deputy // by my sheriff

823 .

824 pa; ((weeping)) mu xa bu xtal un //
 825 mu xa bu xlok' tal un
It does not come // it does not come forth
 =[

826 cu; ma`uk la majben li spate //
 827 ma`uk la majben li xxokone
May she not suffer punishment on his back //
may she not suffer punishment on her side (she says)

828 ti jch'ul chamele // ti jch'ul lajele une
my holy patient // my holy ill sufferer

829 chaviluk me ti lek kejelone // ti lek patalone
may you see that I am kneeling well // that I am well prostrate

831 ti yo smul une // ti yo skolo` une
her lowly sin // her lowly evil

832 pa; ja` me ta kejelon o tal // ja` me ta patalon o tal
I have come kneeling // I have come prostrate

833 cu; [ispi kik xa =
 834 =la ti tak'ine // spikik xa la ti meryoe
They have already touched money // they have already touched coins

This sort of transposed dialogue, in which the shaman relays by second hand the patient's request, is schematized in Figure 3.

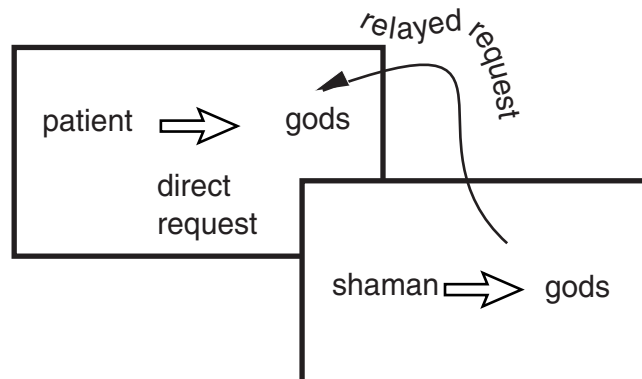


Figure 3: an essentially transposed dialogue

Switching in and out of the genre

The main business of the visit to the cave at Isak'tik was to perform the rituals—prayer, offerings, sacrifice—designed to cure Antel of her debilitating symptoms. The frame of prayer, as we have seen, is in many ways predetermined by the circumstances and heavily constrained in structure. Nonetheless, practical exigencies from moment to

moment, ranging from deciding how to decorate the cross or bury the sacrificial chickens in a cave with no soil, to the distress of Antel's baby girl as the ceremony dragged on or the curer's helper's unexpected drunkenness, all required extemporaneous alterations in what might have been the original design of the ceremony. Conceptually one may thus imagine a further dialogue: between the plan of the curing ritual, directly expressed in the sequence of events and the prayers that tracked them, on the one hand; and on the other, the contingencies of the moment. Many such contingencies, in turn, find expression as breaks in the frame of prayer, moments when, for example, the curer is forced to drop out of parallel speech into normal conversation.

One such illustrative moment is transcribed in Fragment 9, a sequence which immediately precedes that shown in Fragment 3. The curer has now lit and prayed over the main offering of candles, and she is about to begin gently beating Antel's back and legs with the pine boughs which she has blessed. This is an expected part of the cure itself. However, Antel's two-year-old daughter is currently strapped in her mother's shawl, trying fitfully to sleep. The baby has been whimpering with fear and distress during the previous long prayer of forgiveness. (In fact, the patient's father had been holding the little girl during much of the previous prayer sequence, until the baby began to cry so strongly that her mother herself broke off praying to ask her husband to pass the child back for nursing.) Aware that the apparent violence of her blows might upset the child further, the curer breaks off from prayer at lines 1137-38 to ask her patient whether they should simply abandon the next phase of the ritual. When the patient suggests (line 1139) that the baby will not be frightened by the feigned blows, the curer immediately begins praying again (lines 1140 ff.) and the ceremony continues.

(9) Breaking prayer: "Will your baby be frightened?"

1132 cu; ja` xa me chalok'esbe komel ti xchamele // ti slajele
May you thus remove from her her sickness // her illness

1134 batz'i ryox totil
true God the father

1135 batz'i ryox nich'onil
true God the son

1136 batz'i ryox spiritu santu kajval
true God the holy spirit, my Lord

1137 **mi ja` nox xu` une** ←
Can we just do it?

1138 **mu jna` mi xi` nan avole** ←
I don't know if perhaps your baby will be frightened.

1139 pa; **i`i nan, k'un k'un** ←
Perhaps not, it will just be gentle

1140 cu; an yos jesu kristu kajval
God, Jesus Christ, my Lord

1141 k'usi yepal un . . .
How much will ...

After the curer begins the beating treatment, Antel's child does indeed begin to cry (see again the final part of Video clip **Beat.mpg**), and the curer truncates the ritual so as to cause no further distress to the child.

This and other similar moments show the permeability of the ritual idiom. Despite its insistent and fluid parallelism, the structure of prayer is nonetheless

interruptible. When the curer is worried about the well being of the patient's daughter, or when she is annoyed by her drunken helper/husband's intransigence, she is able to break off praying even in mid couplet, bark an order, and resume almost exactly where she left off. She maintains a constant dialogue with circumstances by monitoring her surroundings and punctuating her performance as needed.

Authority and improvisation

The idiom of prayer is permeable in yet another way, also related to dialogicity. Although according to native metatheory, prayer has a rigid form, circumstances may oblige an expert ritual speaker to modify prayer itself, or to adapt it to the needs of the moment rather than merely break out of it momentarily for special purposes.

Part way through the ritual at Isak'tik, Antel discovered that several of the candles they had brought from the village, carefully wrapped in handwoven cloths and wedged into a basket between pine boughs and bunches of bromiliads, had been broken in transit. Broken candles are the tools of witches. They are not, in any event, acceptable as offerings in a curing ceremony. The size and number of candles to be used over the course of a curing ceremony—especially a long one which, like Antel's, involved visits to half a dozen different sites—is carefully calculated in advance by the shaman. Therefore, our party was now short several important pieces of ritual paraphernalia. The curer immediately intoned an extemporized prayer (Fragment 10), bending over the broken candles which she tried to repair in the flames of others already lit.

(10) Prayer to fix the broken candles

615 cu; batz'i ryox nich'onil
true God the son
 616 lekil meltzanbon un // lekil chapabon
fix for me well // prepare for me well
 617 li ch'ul toj une // li ch'ul kantela une
the holy pine // the holy candle . . .

However, the curer's efforts were to no avail, and the candles remained forlornly broken. The curing party decided instead to use candles intended for a later stage of the ceremony, hoping to buy replacement candles on our return to the village. However, the lapse in the orderly curing procedure continued to echo throughout the ceremony, as the curer incorporated doublets of blame and self-exoneration into her subsequent prayer. Interspersed with her patient's simultaneous tearful prayer, the curer first aimed a barb at her drunken husband, whose carelessness with the basket she indirectly blamed for the broken candles.

(11) Laying the blame for breaking the candles

780 ti x`elan xa yul tal
The way they arrived here
 781 li ch'ul toj une // li ch'ul kantela une
the holy pine // the holy candles
 782 k'u cha`al chapao // k'u cha`al meltzano
somehow repair them // somehow fix them
 . . .
 786 much'u ma li smule // much'u ma li skolo`e

787 *whoever is guilty // whoever is sinful*
 ja` nan ti kajmayole // ti kaj`alvasil une
perhaps it is my deputy // my sheriff
 . . .

790 mu jayuk ka`i:
I didn't even know about it

791 yu`un no me stu chva`i tal li spat une //
 792 te chva`i tal li xxokon une
because it his job to stand forth with his back // stand forth with his sides

793 k'u la xi ti unen chichone // li unen tzontzone
however much I may be a little foolish one // a little stupid one
 . . .

797 xavil me ti lek iyul ti ch'ul toje //
 li ch'ul kantela ta jkwentae:
But you have seen that the holy pine //
the holy candles, arrived in one piece, on my account

Later, after leaving Isak'tik, the curing party stopped again at the crosses at *Ch'ul Ton* 'Holy Rock' where the curer had originally planned to leave large one-peso size candles. Since they had substituted these larger candles for the broken 50 centavo candles at Isak'tik, there were now not enough to go around. In her prayers at *Ch'ul Ton* the curer switched the blame for an incomplete performance to the patient herself—*ja` nan smul lavalabe // lanich'nabe* “perhaps the fault is with your child // your offspring”—since insufficient candles had been purchased to make up for such an eventuality. Indirect references to the broken candles and to the curer's own blamelessness in the mishap were interspersed throughout the prayer at *Ch'ul Ton*.

(12) Oblique reference to the broken candles at *Ch'ul Ton*. (See video clip *Ch'ul ton 2*.)

10 k'u la ti stamoj // k'u la ti yich'oj
What did she claim to pick up // what did she claim to bring?

11 t avalabe // t anich'nabe
Your child // your offspring.

12 ti k'alal ch'abale // ti k'alal mu`yuke kajval
But when there is none // when there isn't any, my Lord

13 yu`nan oy ti jset'e // oy ti jutebe
There may perhaps be a little // there may perhaps be a bit.

14 ja` xa la tamo tal li spate //
Thus, she asks, lift her back //

15 ja` xa la tamo tal li xokone
thus, she asks, lift her side

16 mi o stak'el ti-
 17 mi o stak'el ti ke uke //
Will there be a reply to my mouth?

18 mi o stak'el ti yo jti` uke
Will there be a reply to my lips?

Perhaps the most extreme example of the curer's authoritative voice imposed upon prayer is in her explicit instruction to others about *how* to pray and *what* to say. In normal circumstances, the shaman leads prayer, and others—patients, helpers, relatives—follow her in their own prayers. However, the shaman's lead can be more directive. In Fragment 13, for example, the curer is preparing the pine boughs which she will use to

“cleanse” the patient in the beating treatment we have already seen. The patient herself, in the normal course of events, is expected to ask the curer formally to begin the treatment, but at this moment Antel has forgotten. At lines 2-3, the curer remarks, ostensibly in prayer to the ancestral spirits, that the patient has “said nothing,” prompting Antel, at line 4, to remark that she has forgotten, after which the prayer proceeds normally.

(13) The shaman reminds her patient of something, via prayer. (See video clip cave01.)

- 1 c; k'elavil la tot // k'elavil la kajval
Look here, father // look here, my Lord.
- 2 mu`nuk o chal t avalabe //
Your child didn't say anything //
- 3 mu`nuk o chal ta anich'nab une
Your offspring didn't say anything.
- 4 p; an ch'ay xka`i
Why, I forgot.
- 5 c; pero yu`un me chamelzanbon //
But still I want you to fix for me
- 6 yu`un me chachapabon ech'el
I want you to prepare for me
- 7 ti jchamel une // ti jlajel une
The sick one // the hurt one
- 8 li joyijel une // ti tz'epp'ujel une
The spinning one // the tripping one
- 9 li` la chkom ta yo lave`eb une //
May it remain here in your eating place
- 10 li` la chkom ta yo lavuch'eb une
May it remain here in your drinking place
- 11 ti ip une // ti k'ux une
The sickness // the pain.

The curer intervened more directly in the somewhat incoherent prayers offered by her *mayol*—her husband—who had gotten unacceptably drunk and was thus only marginally able to carry out his duties. His main obligation was to carry the sacrificial chicken into the upper reaches of the cave, where he was to bury it in pine needles with an offering of flowers and cane liquor. Unfortunately, this tipsy *mayol* became too frightened of his precarious perch high in the cave, and he descended precipitously without having managed to light the candles.⁸ In Fragment 14 the *mayol* takes leave of the cave with a truncated prayer tearfully addressed to the lord of Isak'tik. However, the shaman is dissatisfied both with his performance as helper and also with the formulation of his prayer. He has neglected the central issue, namely whether or not the patient's offerings have been successfully received by the lords of the cave. In an ordinary voice, but still in parallel constructions, she overlaps her husband's prayer (which is mostly concerned with whether he himself has escaped unscathed from his encounter with the cave). She appears to feed him lines, suggesting a reformulation of his prayer. (See lines 1037 and 1043.) Here is yet another kind of multi-voiced dialogue: as the *mayol*

⁸ As the most appropriate alternate person, the patient's godfather—in this case the anthropologist--was called on to clamber up to the top of the cave and complete the job.

addresses the gods, the curer whispers in his ear, indirectly passing along to the mayol's addressees the shaman's own message. This three participant dialogic chain is schematized in Figure 4.

(14) The curer puts words into the mouth of her drunken mayol

1027 my; yos
God

1028 k'elavil tot // k'elavil kajval
Look here, father // look here, my Lord

1029 mi ajipbon tal // mi atenbon ech'el
Have you thrown down for me // have you tossed away for me

1030 ti toj une // ti kantela une
the pine // the candle

1031 kak' entrokal .
I have delivered

1032 ta syalemal avoke // syalemal ak'obe
to the place your feet descend // to the place your hands descend

1033 xchi`uk li slok'olil // ti sjelole
with the substitute // with the replacement

1034 ti jchamele // ti jlajele
of the sick person // of the hurt person

1035 tot // kajval
father // my lord

1037 cu; **mi chach'amun i jset' une // mi chach'amun i juteb une** ←
will you accept the little bit // will you borrow the tiny bit

1039 my; jch'amun to // jmaki to
I will borrow // I will take

1040 la krasya // labentisyon
your grace // your blessing

1041 to:t // kajval
father // my lord

1042 papasito ((weeping))
little papá

1043 cu; **mi ch'ambil xa // mi ich'bil xa** ←
has it been received? // has it been taken?

1044 my; tot, ikak' entrokal // komel
father, I have delivered // I have left

1045 ti sjelolil // slok'olil
the substitute // the replacement

1046 li jchamele // li jlajele
for the sick person // for the ill person



Figure 4

Dialogue and danger

The parallel language of Mayan prayer is said to be conceptualized, in native metatheory, as an “ancient genre” (Gossen 1974a), whose content and form have been handed down from the primordial ancestors. As we have seen, Zinacantecs locate its source in divine inspiration. Yet in the depths of the cave at Isak'tik prayer is located firmly within a miniature, if complex, social order. It is at once fixed and fluid, prescribed and improvised, monologue and multi-vocal dialogue. I have identified several moments of dialogue in just a few short segments of a much longer event, which traveled across a wide social terrain, encountering and incorporating further voices all along the way.

Let me recapitulate some of these dialogues before concluding my story.

1. First there is the dual imagery of the couplets themselves, each element resonating off its partner, suggesting alternate ways (alternate voices) for saying “the same thing.”
2. There is an implicated historical dialogue: in the deepest cultural history a resurrected interaction with the *vo`ne moletik // me`eletik* ‘the ancient men // the ancient women’ or *totil me`iletik* ‘father-mothers’ whose imagery is put to use in curing the children // the offspring. In the bilingual structure of many prayer doublets there can also be heard a dialogue in colonial history with the Spanish conquerors // evangelizers whose language and beliefs left an indelible imprint on the talk (and the world) of today.
3. In the progress of a curing ceremony, punctuated and tracked in prayer, there appears a dialogue between words and action, in which the “plot” of the prayer both reflects the “events” of the curing ceremony and at the same time effects results and produces actions creatively.
4. In the performance of prayer there is a literal conversation, with multiple and shifting participants: shaman, patient, helper, consort, onlooker, and even the patient’s child. All these identities and roles in the unfolding curing process are delicately indexed in the language of prayer.
5. There is a further contrapuntal, poetic dialogue between partners in a chorus of prayer: repeating, elaborating, reformulating, and redirecting one another’s words.
6. One observes, as well, a multilogue of genres, as participants move in and out of prayer, invent new phrases, and likewise intervene in and transform the prayers of others, by imposing or insinuating an authoritative voice.
7. Finally, there are the shadow participants: not just the ancestral deities, nor even the Earth Lord whose ominous presence clouded our minds deep in the bowels of the earth, but implicated others who lie behind the whole performance.

All this brings me back to the story. As it turned out, this *j'ilol* had never before performed a curing ceremony at Isak'tik. This was her first visit to this powerful place, a fact that partly explained her nervousness and discomfort as one mishap after another stained the fabric of the cure. How had she decided on this course of treatment? There was a clue in the last phrases of her prayer, which accompanied the dying flames of the candles deep inside the cave.

(15) Shadow prayer of the shaman's deceased sister

883 va`i yolon lum // yolon ach'el xa
So you know [she is] under the earth // under the mud

884 ti k'u cha'al ti jchi'il ta vok'el //
 885 jchi'il ta ayanel
My companion in hatching // my companion in birth.

886 va`i yu'unox yech yaloj // yech spasoje
So you know, thus she spoke // thus she did

887 k'elavil kejelon o tal // patalon o tal
So you see for that I have come kneeling // for that I have come prostrate

888 ja` no nan yech ali ke uke //
 889 ja` no nan yech ali jti` uke
Only thus is my mouth // only thus are my lips

890 ja, no nan yech ali jk'op uke //
 891 ja` no nan yech ali jrason uke
Only thus is my word // only thus is my reason.

The first shaman to diagnose Antel's illness, as it happened, was the present curer's elder sister. A powerful curer herself, the older woman frequently brought her patients to Isak'tik in search of relief. One year before our curing ceremony, the elder sister had read in Antel's pulse that such a cure would be efficacious in this case. This older curer, however, had died suddenly before completing Antel's cure. It fell then to the younger sister—the present shaman—to carry out the prescribed treatment. Here in prayer she acknowledges the shadowy presence of her deceased sister, and indirectly she speaks with the other's voice—her mouth // her lips // her words // her reason.

My first conclusion is crystallized in the shadowy presence of this now deceased shaman. She may have passed “beneath the earth // beneath the mud,” but her voice lives on, even in the most prescribed and formally restricted language of prayer. My theme in this essay has been the fundamental dialogicity of shamanistic prayer in Zinacantán, a subplot in the overall drama of the dialogues of ritual. However, it is a feature of language in general, in the enactment of speech, that it is multivocal and layered, a sediment of (sometimes miniature) social history. This is, indeed, what makes speech a rich tool of ethnography.

My second observation is an old one, indeed, a truism, although one often forgotten in structuralist and semiotically minded studies of language. The main business of much saying is doing, and this is nowhere more obvious than in the cave at Isak'tik. Prayer would not, of course, exist were it not efficacious. The language of Zinacantec anti-witchcraft prayer, however beautifully crafted and laden with cultural, historical, and personal meanings, is primarily designed to *work*. Its life is defined by what it accomplishes more than by what it says (or means). The journey to the cave at Isak'tik was mounted in order to put language the language of prayer squarely into action.

What, in the end, did the prayers of Antel, of her shaman, and of their drunken helper accomplish? Disease, curing, and witchcraft are all complicated phenomena in modern Zinacantán. The jealousies and envy that have always plagued the township, and which in the past were often reputed to induce witches to sell their enemies' souls, have grown only more intense as differences in wealth and resources have become vast in the wake of economic boom and crisis in the Chiapas countryside (Collier 1995). Still worse, in Antel's village, religious divisions in the wake of Protestant evangelization as well as fractious party politics have produced new cleavages and enmities, replete with possibilities for supernatural punishment and illness.

Antel soon recovered from the fainting spells and the aching joints that had plagued her for more than a year. Her little daughter suddenly began to walk and talk, and turned from a crying, frightened baby into a normal Zinacantec toddler.

The curer and her husband were less fortunate. Within a few months of returning from Isak'tik, the curer herself was stricken with an inexplicable paralysis of the legs, which curled up and would no longer support her weight. She and her husband, fearful for the state of their souls, flirted briefly with one of the evangelical sects—unusual but not unheard of even for the apparently most “traditional” of healers. The shaman did not recover, however. Within a year of the visit to Isak'tik the curer died, never having regained the ability to walk.

Antel, listening now to my recordings from the cave, is struck by the lines that her shaman spoke, in her opening dialogue with the lords of Isak'tik, and with which we in turn began the present excursion into the dialogues of prayer. She hears in them a prophetic dialogue between the shaman and the ancestral deities who cured the patient, but who allowed the shaman herself to succumb.

(16) Prophetic couplets?

- 12 mu me ilbajinbiluk li me- li spate //
 mu me ilbajinbiluk li xokone
 may her back be not molested // may her side be not molested
- 14 vo'onikon mu ilbajinbiluk ti jch'ulele //
 ti kanima une
 and even me, may my soul be not molested // may my spirit be not molested
- 16 ta lek me un //
 ta utz me un
 for good // for happiness
- 17 kajva:l
 my Lord

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