

Chapter 3

The Domain of Gossip in Zinacantan

Pero mi yec xal 7o mi lo7il no van? (But is he telling the truth, or is it just gossip?)

When I speak of 'gossip in Zinacantan' am I talking about an activity that Zinacantecos recognize? Is there a Tzotzil word for 'gossip'? And, if not, how do I identify some random snatch of conversation as gossip? If we accept a certain ethnoscientific tradition, such questions seem to arise inevitably. That is, if any theoretical weight is to rest on the word 'gossip,' I feel obliged to show that 'gossip' labels some coherent class of phenomena in the Zinacanteco scheme of things; (and, ultimately, I may be challenged to show that Zinacanteco gossip resembles behavior we call 'gossip' elsewhere.)

In Chapter 6, I make a plea for certain sorts of ethnographic investigation which may be conveniently and suggestively labelled 'studies of gossip.' But there is little point in insisting on some conceptual coincidence between categories of gossip in Zinacantan and some other cultural milieu. Far from arguing for the universality of gossip (as a necessary and well-defined notion), I shall concern myself in this chapter with Zinacanteco native theorizing about the nature of talk (and knowledge) about one's neighbors and countrymen.

I have called 'gossip' all conversation between Zinacantecos about absent third-parties, as, indeed, such conversation seems to me gossipy. Against the seeming open-endedness of this working definition I hypothesized that such conversation would not be open: that it would not range over all subjects, nor dwell on all actions. Conversation has its own rules: not all facts are worth repeating; not all speculation is (or can be) mouthed. Or at least an audience will not be interested in every disclosure. Thus I was willing at the beginning to take as my subject (as 'gossip in Zinacantan') all conversation of the following form: A tells B about C. Moreover, I was willing to gather any information which rendered such conversation intelligible to its participants. Gossip rests on reputation. And in English it leaks into 'spreading news' at one end and 'slander' at the other. What I have included in the study of gossip in this thesis may then contain elements of all these: reputation, slander, news, report, libel, malicious and innocent gossip.

Yet this is not to say that Zinacantecos recognize no domain of verbal behavior that resembles gossiping. Despite the fact that no Tzotzil word is adequately glossed 'gossip', a considerable body of native speculation and theory surrounds the sort of conversation which I have described above. This constitutes what we might well call a Zinacanteco theory of gossip. In this chapter I concentrate on the native

intuitions on these matters and avoid the thorny and fruitless search for a monolexemic domain label, for a neat taxonomy,¹ for an unambiguous eliciting frame, and for Gossip.

Consider first the general domain of verbal behavior. Two Tzotzil noun roots are components of the various lexical items which have to do with speech: /k'op/ (meaning roughly 'word') and /lo7il/ (meaning roughly 'talk'). As nouns these words have elusive meanings, but their semantic content can be judged from two intransitive verb stems: /-k'opoh/ and /-lo7ilah/.² The verb /-k'opoh/ means 'speak', and refers to speech in all situations: talking a language, praying, arguing a case. /-lo7ilah/ means 'converse' or 'joke' and refers to informal conversation in some social context.

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Roger Abraham's (1970) argues that an important way to approach gossip is "to understand gossip in the context of the range of speech acts of a community." (1970:290). That is, of a wide range of communicatory behavior, gossip or something like it may have its own rules, may be a special sort of verbal performance, which can be delimited either explicitly as a native category, or --- as I try to do in this chapter --- by reference to implicit native theorizing.

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The suffix displayed in these derived forms (/Vh/) combines with noun roots to form intransitive verb stems which mean, roughly, "perform the appropriate action with this thing." Consider the following further examples:

/7ak'ot/ ('dance')	/-7ak'otah/ ('to dance')
/7elek'/ ('stolen goods, thief')	/-7elk'ah/ ('steal, steal things')
/7ol/ ('woman's child')	/-7alah/ ('give birth')
/sik'ol/ ('Cigarette')	/-sik'alah/ ('smoke')

Cf. Haviland (n.d.).

Other researchers eliciting taxonomies headed by the nouns /lo7il/ and /k'op/ have had mixed results. Bricker (1968) reports two such taxonomies for /lo7il/ elicited from Tzotzil speakers from Zinacantan.

"In the interviews, the informants were first asked to list the various kinds of lo7il with which they were familiar. It was obvious from their responses that most informants make an implicit distinction between lo7il (1) as a general term for verbal behavior and lo7il (2) meaning 'hearsay' or 'story'. [Figure 1] lo7il (1) is further broken down into lekil lo7il ('good' or 'nice talk') and copol lo7il ('bad talk'). Prayers, statements of what is moral and good, and most folktales are usually lekil lo7il. Copol lo7il may be further subdivided into loko lo7il ('frivolous talk') and nopbil k'op ('lies'). Depending on the informant, 'frivolous talk' may include male conversation about women, blasphemy, obscene utterances, and sexual references.

Lo7il (2) is broken down by one informant as lo7il skventa k'in ('stories about fiestas'), lo7il skventa kahvaltik ('stories about Our Lord'), and lo7il skventa kriXcanoetik ('stories about people'). 'Stories about fiestas' describe what goes on during fiestas; 'stories about Our Lord' include descriptions of ceremonies performed in honor of 'Our Lord' and the saints, and myths; 'stories about people' describe the everyday behavior of Zinacantecos, such as their work activities. Other informants do not distinguish between the three kinds of lo7il (2), but simply list activities subsumed under those categories. For example, one informant listed the following as members of the class, lo7il (2):

1. 'a story about a girl who did not want a husband.'
2. 'a story about a boy and a girl who met on the path.'
3. 'a story about a man who lost his money at a fiesta.'
4. 'a story about a man who had all his hair shaved off.'

Another informant offered a somewhat different scheme [Figure 2]. Instead of beginning by distinguishing between the general and specific meanings of lo7il as given above, he began by separating off 'frivolous talk' (loko lo7il) from other kinds of lo7il (Baz'i lo7il). He listed under baz'i lo7il

accounts of ceremonies honoring 'Our Lord' and the saints, and the everyday behavior of people. Under 'frivolous talk' he distinguished among loko lo7il no7ox xalik ('frivolous talk which is just talk'), loko lo7il ta bomba (obscene verses recounted during fiestas), loko lo7il ta 7anil ka7etik ("frivolous talk at horse races"), and loko lo7il ta htoy-k'inetik ('frivolous talk of entertainers' at the fiesta of San Sebastian)." (pp. 33-35).

Bricker goes on to indicate which sorts of /lo7il/ may be 'humorous', i.e., may evoke laughter when they occur in conversation. And she makes a basic distinction between ritual and non-ritual humor.

The position of what we might intuitively be inclined to call 'gossip' in this scheme of things is not clear. We should probably expect gossip to include "statements of what is moral and good" as well as "male conversation about women" and "sexual references" not to mention "'stories about people'" which "describe the everyday behavior of Zinacantecos." Or, to use the second taxonomy, gossip certainly has a component of /baz'i lo7il/: "accounts ... of the everyday behavior of people." But it seems to have no small amount of frivolousness, and most gossip is at least interspersed with, if not inseparable from what an obviously exasperated informant had in mind when he said: /loko lo7il no7ox xalik/ ("people simply call it 'crazy talk'").

Bricker finds it possible to isolate a type of humorous interaction which she labels "humorous gossip."; it is a

"...kind of humorous interaction in which deviant or loko lo7il-type (duels or exchanges of joking insults)

Figure 1: A taxonomy of /lo7il/ (from Bricker (1968:34))
transcription altered

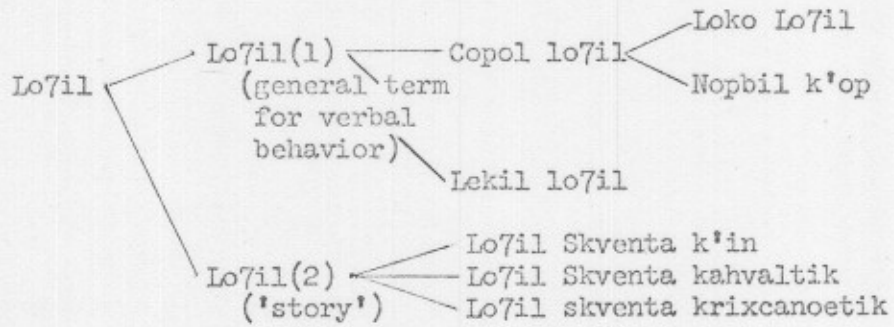
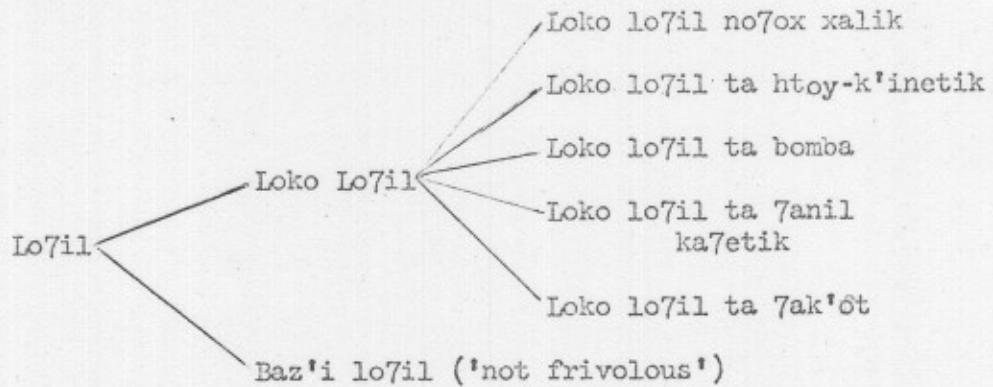


Figure 2: Another taxonomy of /lo7il/ (from Bricker (1968:36))



behaviors are verbally described before an audience by someone who witnessed the original performance or heard someone else describe it. Where Type I humorous interactions feature deviant behavior itself (i.e., consist of mocking deviance), Type III humorous interactions are based on accounts of deviant behavior. ...Type III humorous interactions may be called 'humorous gossip' or 'hearsay humor'; through gossip, humorous interactions are transformed into 'humorous stories.' In gossip settings the object of ridicule is not the performer in the interaction (that is, not the storyteller), but is the person who is the subject of gossip. The storyteller does not react with shame to his audience's ridicule, for he knows that their ridicule is not meant for him. He too ridicules the behavior he describes." (pp. 284-285).

This description seems to get at a domain of Zinacanteco behavior of interest here, (although this 'humorous gossip' is unlabelled in Tzotzil.) We may, however, be unwilling to commit ourselves to the restriction that 'gossip' be only funny stories. Some gossip may be dead serious --- may aim for something more sinister than ridicule.

Gossen (1970) reports a rather different taxonomy of verbal genres for Chamula Tzotzil, a taxonomy based on /k'op/ ('word') rather than /lo7il/. The basic division at the first level of contrast is between:

- (a) /lo7il k'op/ --- glossed as "regular speech";
- (b) /lo7il k'op sventa xk'ixmah yo7nton li kirsano³/
--- "speech for people whose hearts are becoming heated";

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I have altered Gossen's transcription to coincide with the symbols which we are using in this thesis. In this case I have also changed what I assumed to be a misprint --- /aventa/ to /sventa/.

- (c) /7ac' k'op/ --- "recent words": and
 (d) /7antivo k'op/ --- "ancient words." (Gossen
 (1970:162)).

Types (a) and (b), which correspond to 'ordinary language,' may be generally distinguished from (c) and (d), 'traditional genres.'

"Oral tradition differs from ordinary language, in the opinion of Chamulas, because the genres which comprise it have contextual and formal limits within which they can vary. Chamulas view oral tradition as functionally closed in certain respects and ordinary language as open, for the latter can be used freely for all other kinds of communication." (p. 152).

A crucial test case for this distinction is the position of gossip.

"It comes as quite a surprise that gossip, which is certainly 'new' for each event and often for each retelling, does belong to 'Recent Words' because it reports a single event which everyone potentially recognizes. Gossip is not, in theory, idiosyncratic or original in the way that Chamulas believe the intermediate types of verbal behavior to be. Gossip, therefore, becomes 'traditional' overnight, even though the report of it may be stated in a form indistinguishable from everyday speech. It is 'Recent Words' because it is a statement of fact; it is a significant segment of information which is known by several people and, ideally, will be passed on as a whole.... The statements of defendants, plaintiffs and officials at a court case are neither 'Recent Words' nor 'Ancient Words,' even though the elaborate formulae they use for speaking to each other are highly stylized. However, tomorrow's gossip about the court case will be 'Recent Words.'" (pp. 154-155)

That subdomain of /7ac' k'op/ which Gossen finds to include gossip is /7ac' lo7il/ ('recent talk'), which "generally includes what we might call recent folk history,

gossip, legend, and some folktales." (1970:189) These tales, among others, "deal with normative transgressions, threats and abuses against the established order. Either they report the consequences of such transgressions or they warn of these consequences....All of these genres, in fact nearly all genres of 'Recent Words,' share an almost obsessive concern for underlining and inculcating norms." (p. 190) Insofar as these observations hold true for neighboring Zinacantan, they provide another picture of the nature of the gossip one may expect to hear.

I managed to elicit a rather different taxonomy for /k'op/ and /lo7il/ (albeit from just one informant)⁴. In conversation, I discussed the meanings of various types of /lo7il/ and /k'op/ which appear in Gossen's and Bricker's taxonomies. It became obvious, for example, that most of the labels applied to verbal genres in Chamula were unfamiliar to my Zinacanteco informant --- despite the fact that these communities are geographically close, located on the opposite two sides of a ridge and valley. At the end of these conversations I asked my informant to name the different

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By a method which is not above suspicion, as I freely admit. By exposing the informant to previously elicited taxa I certainly interfered with his ability to 'conceptualize' freely. I do not find this troubling because, as I remark below, I have little faith in the efficacy of purer elicitation methods, or the usefulness of the taxonomies they produce.

'types' of /k'op/ and /lo7il/⁵, and to arrange cards with⁶ the different names into piles by similarity of meaning.

I then had him arrange piles into two large groups corresponding to a basic taxonomic split in the domain. (See Figure 3.)

I shall consider each category in turn. Figure 3 is headed by /k'op/ ('word'), and roughly divided into /copol k'op/ and /lekil k'op/ --- though these terms, in these contexts, were specially coined to label the two groups my informant produced. /Copol k'op/ means 'bad /k'op/' and /lekil k'op/ 'good /k'op/.' Under the category of 'good words' my informant listed the following types, and offered the following explanations:

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Tzotzil /tos/ is a numeral classifier used for 'kind of' and for 'group'; Bricker (1968) used this root to elicit taxa as well.

6

These are difficult notions. Can I really claim to have instructed my informant to group words at all by 'meaning'? In Chapter 7 I detail more explicitly the procedures used in such tasks. It is sufficient here to state the characterizations which the Zinacanteco gave in explaining why certain words went together, or did not. For cards grouped together:

/lek xci7in sbaik/ ('they accompany each other well')
 /lek snup sbaik/ ('they meet each other well, they fit together')

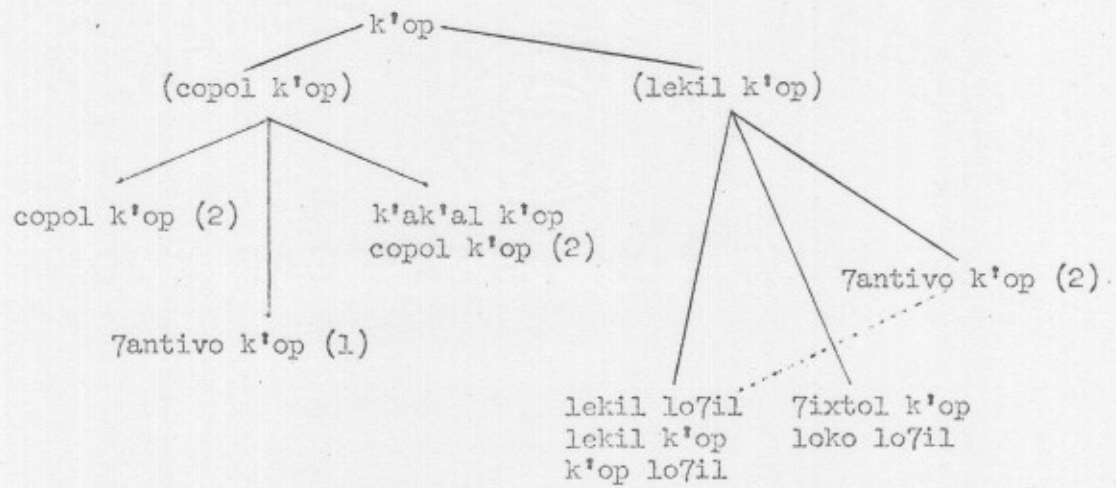
/baz'i ko7ol xk'ot/ ('they arrive together, i.e., they mean the same; they translate the same')

For cards listed separately:

/c'abal snup/ ('this has nothing to match with')
 /pero htos 7o tahmek/ ('but this is quite different')

Presumably semantic judgements of some kind underlie such remarks.

Figure 3: A taxonomy of /k'op/ in Zinacantan
 (Informant: /Cep k'obyox ta 7Apas/, May 7, 1971)



(a) lekil k'op ('good words')

lek tuk' clo7ilah, lek rason

'when people just talk
straight together; when
they talk sensibly.'

/Lekil k'op/ seems to imply ordinary conversation with some purpose. (People in Zinacantan do not talk, nor indeed, socialize, aimlessly.) In such conversations people make₇ decisions, or discuss questions in seriousness.

(b) lekil lo7il ('good talk')

/zhak'beik k'op zhak'beik rason muc'u sna7 rason
k'u ca7al totil-me7il, k'u ca7al 7oy stot-sme7
hpas-7abtel ha7 zko7oltasbe sk'op./

'This is when one asks
another for advice about
the wise course of action,
about the proper way ---
when one asks some wise
person like a ritual ad-
visor; as when a cargo-
holder agrees with his
ritual advisor about how
things should be done.'

Also:

/k'u ca7al clo7ilah totil-me7il/

'The way a ritual advisor
talks.'

A cargoholder relies on the instruction of an elder man who has learned proper ritual procedures; this man becomes the cargoholder's "father-mother" (ritual advisor) for his year in office. /Lekil lo7il/ is in this instance typified by the wise counsel of such a man.

(c) k'op lo7il ('current stories')

/7oy k'op 7oy lo7il mi ta shunleh parahel,
7oy yec slo7iltael 7anz bu 7ep sa7 yahmul/

'There are words, there is talk ---
perhaps throughout a whole hamlet;
sometimes there may be such stories
told on a woman who has many lovers.'

⁷
This is far from the ordinary use of the phrase /lekil k'op/, which is discussed below. See example sentences (32a) - (32c).

Also:

/mi 7ep zobol krixcano, xu7 xal li yan krixcanoc
mi slak'-na k'usi, tol alabal-k'op alabal-
lo7il, mi 7o muc'u slo7iltaik mi zeb mi
7anz mi vinik, 7oy sk'oplal ckaltike/

'If a lot of people gather together
some may say --- their neighbors,
perhaps --- "You have too much talk,
too much discussion." That is if they
are telling stories on someone, whether
it be a girl or a woman or a man ---
someone who has a reputation as we say.'

/K'op lo7il/ seems to refer to circulating gossip:
stories which spread around a hamlet.

Grouped along with categories (a) - (c) was one variety of
/7antivo k'op/.

(d) 7antivo k'op (2) ('ancient words')

/7oy to muc'u sna7be smelol k'utik x7elan sbinoh
li totil-me7il ta Hteklum, melzahem 7eklexya, batem
krixcano ta Ni7bak --- ha7 7antivo k'op calbeik/

'There are still people who know the
stories about how the ancestral gods
in Zinacantan Center got their names,
about how the church was created, about
how people first went to Ixtapa ---
that is what people call "Ancient Words".'

Such /7antivo k'op/ are clearly mythical accounts of
past events. (Cf. Wasserstrom (1970)).

Two joking genres were also grouped on the side of 'good'
verbal behavior.

(e) 7ixtol k'op ('banter')

/muc'u zzak ta yec no7ox lo7il, 7ak'o mi lek tuk'
clo7ilah ca7vo7 krixcano, li hune muk' xa lek stak' ---
7ixtol k'op xa xtak'av/

'(This is what is done by) someone who
engages another in purposeless conver-
sation; suppose two men are talking
together properly, but one of them no
longer answers appropriately --- he
has started to tease the other.'

This genre of speech is similar to what Gossen (1970:
210-220) describes in Chamula as /baz'i 7ixtol lo7il/ or
"Real Frivolous Talk." In the midst of an apparently

innocuous conversation one party begins to twist, pun on, or otherwise intentionally misunderstand the other's words so as to mock or tease him.

(f) loko lo7il ('joking talk')

/naka loko lo7il, ko7ol yec stak'be sbaik/

'Just crazy talk: both people answer each other the same way.'

From this brief description we suppose that /loko lo7il/ is like /7ixtol k'op/ except that both parties to the exchange are consciously funny and/or insulting as they talk. Bricker (1968:103) suggests that the following expressions are, in fact, all used interchangeably: /loko lo7il, 7ixtol lo7il, 7ixtol k'op/. These she finds to mean "teasing or frivolous talk," following Laughlin (n.d.).

By contrast to these categories, my informant grouped the following genres under the heading 'Bad words.'

(g) k'ak'al k'op ('heated words')

/bu kapem ck'opoh tahmek/

'When someone speaks with great anger.'

The way a man talks when enraged is characterized by low pitch, lengthened vowels in expletives, and shortened vowels in ordinary words.

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My informant felt that people had only recently learned to joke in this way. (/7ac' to tahmek stamoh yec krixcano./)
Two short exchanges which my informant offered by way of example follow:

- | | | |
|----|------------------|---|
| A: | /mi cabat/ | ('Are you going?') |
| B: | /cibat/ | ('Yes, I'm going.') |
| A: | /ta cukel ckale/ | ('To jail, I would say.') |
| A: | /mi cavak'bon/ | ('Will you give it to me?') |
| B: | /cakak'be/ | ('Yes, I'll give it to you.') |
| A: | /Iacak ckale/ | ('You'll probably give me your ass, I expect.') |

In my experience such joking is less common than exchanges in which Zinacantecos create puns on the words of the other. See especially Bricker (1968: Ch. 7 (pp. 106-158)).

(h) copol k'op (1) ('bad words')

/ha7 k'u ca7al mi 7oy 7utbail 7oy cukbail 7oy
 hmilvanch --- ha7 yec calik li krixcanoetik, mi
 7o ava7i mi yec to 7oy copol k'op ta 7ankostura/
 'This is when there is a fight,
 when people are jailing each other,
 or when there is a murder. Then
 people will ask, for example,
 "Have you heard, is it true that
 there is Bad Talk in Angostura?"'

I believe that /k'op/ in this sense is best not
 translated as 'word' at all, but better as 'dis-
 pute.' Thus /copol k'op/ (1) refers to trouble.

Categories (g) and (h) were grouped together, and then more
 loosely grouped with the last two genres.

(i) copol k'op (2) ('bad words')

/naka ta penteho, yu7nox cal penteho li muc'u
 c7ilin, ha7 k'u ca7al penteho, kavron/
 'These are words like /penteho/
 since someone who gets angry says
 things like "asshole" or "bastard".'

This is a category relating to swearing, vulgar or
 obscene language. The words in question are loans
 from Spanish: from pendejo ('stupid') and cabron
 ('cuckold, bastard').⁹

(j) 7antivo k'op (1) ('ancient words')

/k'u ca7al xk'opchik to7ox vo7ne moletik ya7el/
 'The way people long ago talked.'

This category refers to phrases which were once in use
 to describe or refer to norms or customs. My in-
 formant grouped them under 'bad talk' because the
 examples which came to his mind had to do with

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My informant thought that women were most likely to use the
 phrase /copol k'op/ to describe vulgar language. Women, he
 said, are likely to be angered by continual swearing, and
 will remark:

/naka ta copol k'op sna7 xk'opoh, naka ta yan x7elan
 k'op, mu7nuk lek xk'opoh/

'He only knows how to talk with bad words, with dis-
 gusting words; he doesn't speak well.'

punishment and cruelty.¹⁰

I have offered this taxonomy not because I believe it to contain the essence of Zinacantecos' conceptualizations about verbal behavior; (indeed, I know this not to be the case). Instead, the variety of taxonomic schemes uncovered by different investigators in Zinacantan lends support to my contention that hierarchical structuring is inadequate to characterize the organization of the Zinacanteco conceptualization of verbal behavior. If we are determined to find a taxonomically structured domain, our informants will oblige by offering convincing looking labels for the various tree diagram nodes which we offer them. The most immediate practical difficulty with the resulting trees is that they fail to work for us: we cannot use such trees to initiate further eliciting. Wasserstrom (1970) encountered just

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For example, the saying
 /makob ka7/ ('covering for a horse')
 refers to the load of corn which young men were formerly made to carry to encourage them to learn to walk strongly and bear heavy loads.

Similarly, the expression
 /pat p'in ckom/ ('he ends up like the outside of
 a cooking pot')
 refers to the appearance of a youth's back after being whipped. In olden days, according to the informant, boys and girls caught in illicit relations would be beaten by four or five men who used both hands to wield tumplines; after the whipping the victim's back would be 'black as the outside of a pot.'

this problem:

"... I tried to elicit tales concerning the Virgen del Rosario using the question,

Mi 7oy 7antivo k'op skwenta he'ulme7tik rosario?

Is there a story about the Virgen del Rosario?

Much to my surprise, I often had difficulty in conveying to informants my desire to hear such a story. Not only was this fact due to the artificiality of contrived eliciting situations (I was invariably more successful when I went to the spot at which something had happened and then asked about it), but also I believe that the domain of 7antivo k'op is not well-defined in the minds of Zinacantecos. Thus I was better understood by some informants when I asked the simple question,

Mi 7oy k'opetik skwenta ...?

Are there words about ...?" (p. 27)

Whether or not the words are 'well-defined', there are good grounds for doubting that labels which appear in the various taxonomies we have sketched govern domains at all, i.e., that they refer to conceptual classes of behavior or linguistic material. When we suggest an illustrative situation, an informant --- being fluent in his language --- is able to produce a phrase to describe it. Such a phrase may not be equally fortunate when applied to another example. For instance, when I asked my informant to reconcile the taxonomy of Figure 3 with the kind of talk that went on during Who's Who sessions --- in which a group of Zinacantecos discussed particular absent Zinacantecos' reputations in front of a taperecorder --- he was unable to pick any labels as appropriate descriptions. Who's Who sessions were /k'opetik no7ox, kapal lek kapal copol ya7el/ ('just words, both good

and bad mixed, I guess.') Yet the sort of talk that occurred at Who's Who sessions was, to all appearances, exactly the sort of conversation most common among Zinacanteco men.

More specifically, though the taxonomy of Figure 3 contains the category /k'op lo7il/ which resembles the category labelled 'gossip' in English, we should be unsuccessful trying to elicit gossip by asking for examples of /k'op lo7il/; nor should we be inclined to limit our investigation of gossip to examples of speech which could be unambiguously labelled /k'op lo7il/. The terms which appear in this, and similar taxonomies, do contrast with one another; but the contrasts only operate in certain contexts, for certain purposes. And it is only with reference to such contrasts (within what I have elsewhere called 'sense systems' (Cf. Haviland (1970b)) that these terms convey any information at all.

I nonetheless wish to make a case for the existence of a behavioral domain like gossiping in Zinacantan. There are words --- mostly verbs --- which describe activities that resemble gossiping. And these activities are grouped

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/Copol/ ('bad') in Figure 3 seems to label two features of speech: (a) that it is angry, unpleasant, ill-tempered speech; (b) that it deals with misbehavior, or disputes.

into a coherent domain by a body of native theory: about the origins, motivations, and consequences of gossip.

The two relevant Tzotzil noun roots for speech, /-k'op/ and /-lo7il/, combine with a number of affixes to form stems from other surface structure 'word classes'; they co-occur with other nouns and verbs in fairly limited contexts. In what follows I examine some of these occurrences drawn directly from ordinary speech in an attempt to present not a semantic analysis of the terms but rather data enough to lead the reader to an understanding of this segment of Tzotzil vocabulary.

Consider first the root /-lo7il/ which means 'talk' or 'conversation'; (Bricker (1968:109) emphasizes that /lo7il/ as opposed to /k'op/ is "informal conversation.") Ordinary usage includes the following forms and contexts:

- (1) /h-koh lo7il/
'one story'

/lo7iletik/ can be counted; in Tzotzil the same numeral classifier (Cf. Berlin (1968); Haviland (1970a)) is used to count 'stories' as is used to count steps, layers, curing ceremonies, levels in the religious hierarchy, songs, floors

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Bricker (1968:108-110) presents some of the derivational material we are concerned with. But she provides only English glosses for most words, ignoring Malinowski's warnings about translation. I am, nonetheless, indebted to Dr. Bricker for the insight that Tzotzil derivational morphology can shed considerable light on the inner workings of Zinacantaneco mind.

of a building, and crimes. When someone says in the midst of a discussion of another person's reputation

- (2) /ʔoy ʔetro hkoh loʔil ikaʔi.../
'I've heard yet another story (about him)...'

he conjures the image of piling one story on another.

- (3) /vinahem loʔil/ (W 28)
'the story is apparent'

- (4) /mu xa k'usi k'op yilel pero syempre ilok' loʔil/
(O 15)
'it seemed that there was no longer anything wrong, but the story came out anyway.'

When /loʔil/ occurs with certain intransitive stems, notably /-vinah/ ('be apparent, visible, audible') or /-lok'/ ('exit from, leave, go out'), it seems to imply a story which is liable to become public, and hence to induce scandal: scandalous gossip.

- (5) /lek yilel zeʔeh loʔilik yaʔel cak k'u caʔal liʔ
cotolotik/ (W 19)
'It seemed just like friendly conversation, just as we are having sitting here.'

- (6) /mu noʔox loʔil-k'opuk/ (W 108)
'It wasn't just ordinary conversation.'

The word /loʔil/ can express the quality of a conversation. In (5), the word /zeʔeh/ ('laughing') indicates talk that is all smiles, friendly: men accosted another on the path, and while appearing to engage him in friendly conversation, murdered him. (Ch. 1) In (6), two enemies meet each other; one tries to act naturally. The other immediately picks a fight, unwilling to ignore their enmity; he will not allow their meeting just to be ordinary /loʔil k'op/.

- (7) /zak sbaik ta lo7il/ (W 106)
'They engaged each other in conversation.'
- (8) /ilik slo7ilik/ (W 18)
'A conversation arose between them.'
- (9) /mu xbak', mu7nuk stak' lo7il, mu7nuk sze7in,
te nihil/ (H 67)
'He doesn't make a sound, he doesn't answer when
you talk to him, he doesn't laugh; he just sits
bowed over.'

One can /-zak/ ('grab') another in conversation, often to initiate some joking sequence. Or such conversation can just /lik/ ('arise') naturally. But it is considered anti-social and rude not to respond to invitations to friendly talk.

- (10) /lek yamiko sbaik clo7ilahik/ (P 127)
'They converse just like friends.'

In fact, the best sign of a good nature is the ability to carry on conversations, to /-lo7ilah/, and to avoid

- (11) /pukuh xlo7ilah/ (E 248)
'speaking ill-temperedly.'

/lo7il/ contrasts with adjectives /melel/ ('true, right') and /yec/ ('true, so, thus') in the following interesting way:

- (12) /mu7nuk lo7iluk yu7un ekal ta abail ta asatil/ (P 375)
'This is not just talk, for I'll tell you to
your face...'
- (13) /mi yec van/ (E 357); /mi lo7il no van/ (G 3)
'But is it true?' 'But is it just talk?'
- (14) /ta melel kere/ (P 176)
'Boy, that's the truth!'
- (15) /mu lo7iluk ka7uktik/ (G 3A)
'That's not just hearsay, you're right.'

When activated by such a contrast, /lo7il/ clearly has the sense
of simple hearsay, of stories and rumors that are not verified. 13

Finally, there is a transitive stem formed by adding the suffix /-ta/ to form /-lo7ilta/. Consider the following examples of transitive stems formed with /-ta/:

/7anil/ ('race, running')	/-anilta/ ('make run')
/7ov/ ('shouting')	/-apta/ ('shout at')
/zo7/ ('excrement')	/-za7ta/ ('shit on')
/cikil/ ('a tickle, ticklishness')	/-cikilta/ ('tickle')
/pom/ ('incense')	/-panta/ ('cense')
/xukʃum/ ('elbow')	/-xukʃunta/ ('elbow')
/lo7il/ ('story, conversation')	/-lo7ilta/ ('tell stories about, gossip about')

To /-lo7ilta/-someone is to tell a story in which he is involved, usually to his disadvantage.

- (16) /yu7nan 7ilbil, k'u ma ca7al ti xlo7iltaat/ (P 271)
'It is probably the case that he was seen (doing it); otherwise why would he be reputed (to have done it)?'
- (17) /ilo7iltabat szabal/ (W 11)
'He had stories told on his sister.'

This is clearly a verb which would be felicitously rendered 'gossip' in English; moreover, it is accompanied by the same

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Note that the particle /la/ represents "quotative evidence" (Jakobson (1957:4)); that is, it qualifies a sentence to the effect that the speaker cannot vouch for its truth: it is hearsay.

Note further the possibility that /lo7il/ and /lo7lo/ ('deceive, trick') are etymologically related; Laughlin (n.d.) lists the two stems under a common root. Perhaps the language suggests that talk is potentially deceitful; that gossip may trick the listener.

connotations of sneakiness, enjoyment at another's discomfort, behind-the-back sideness, and so forth, that we associate with gossip --- even as we enjoy it. In fact, the ritual
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 couplet companion for /lo7ilta/ is /laban/ ('mock'):

- (18) /mu hk'an calo7iltaon, mu hk'an calabanon/ (P 380)
 'I do not wish you to slander me, I do not wish
 you to ridicule me.'

We may derive from /-lo7ilta/ the deverbal noun /-lo7iltael/
 which is always possessed, and which translates as 'the gossip
 about ____' or 'what is said about ____'.

- (19) /stalel li buc'u 7o yabtel yec 7o slo7iltael/
 (P 159)
 'That's the way it is with people in (civil)
 office: there is always gossip about them.'

- (20) /k'al tana nu xpah slo7iltael/ (P 191)
 'And ever since then the gossip about him hasn't
 ceased.'

One is often able to elicit gossip in Zinacantan by asking
 about a specific person whether there is /slo7iltael/ ('gossip
 about him'). Such a question prods Zinacantecos to recount
 those parts of a man's reputation that would be appropriate
 'stories' to 'tell on' him, i.e., to ridicule him with.
 In natural gossip contexts, however, conversation begins not
 with particular individuals but with particular noteworthy

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Tzotzil, like other Mayan languages, employs couplets in ritual speech: prayer, formal petitioning, scolding, etc. Texts are composed of pairs of lines identical except for the last elements, which are often near synonyms --- metaphorically, if not literally. With respect to Zinacanteco song, such couplets are enumerated in Haviland (1967). Gossen (1970) reports similar phenomena throughout ritual speech in Chamula.

events or behaviors. The resulting gossip merely accrues to individual reputation and is subject to recall later --- as when the anthropologist asks about it.

To summarize the semantic properties of /loʔil/: (a) /loʔil/ represents a discrete story, which can be known or not known, which can remain hidden or suddenly become public (examples (1)-(4)); (b) /loʔil/ stands for friendly conversation, and can be used to emphasize the quality of an interaction ((5)-(11)); (c) in certain contexts /loʔil/ can represent the extreme of unverified (and dangerous) hearsay, as opposed to verified truth ((12)-(15)); and finally (d), /loʔil-ta/ labels storytelling activity which is conceptually related to ridicule, slander, and gossip ((16)-(20)).

The root /k'op/ has more complicated properties.

Laughlin (n.d.) bewilders us with the following gloss:

/k'op/: "word, language, affair, matter, situation, argument, dispute, war, curing ceremony."

Jane Collier (1970:78ff.) discusses the notion of /k'op/ as legal dispute, court case, or argument presented for settlement to various hamlet or municipal authorities. A plaintiff can /saʔ/ ('search for') such a dispute (i.e., initiate it), and continue the dispute until it reaches a conclusion:

/ilah k'op/ ('the dispute ended')
/imelzah k'op/ ('the dispute was settled').

Similarly, the ordinary verbs derived from the root, /-k'opon/ ('talk to ...') and /-k'opoh/ ('talk, speak') have a formal sense.

- (21) /ba sk'opon preserente/
'He went to petition the Presidente'.
- (22) /sna7 xk'opoh, lek xtohob ta k'opohel/
'He can speak, he can successfully speak for one
(as a lawyer).'

/k'op/ --- as dispute --- can 'be eased', 'appear and become public', 'arise', 'worsen', 'be multiplied', 'cool off'; and it is possible to 'hush up', 'settle', 'take responsibility for', 'accuse another of responsibility for', and 'exaggerate the seriousness of' such disputes.¹⁵ The root /k'op/ is probably most commonly used to indicate this sort of legal dispute.

Certain other contexts are of more immediate interest.

- (23) /isko7oltasbe sba sk'op/ (G 1)
'They agreed on the same story'.
- (24) /ko7ol sk'opik/ (G 3)
'They are in agreement, they share the same position'.
- (25) /ik'ehp'uh sk'op, isok xa ye/
'His word went astray; he made a slip: he changed his story.'

One's 'word' is conceived as one's position on a matter, one's story. Zinacantecos are aware that it is possible to manipulate such stories. /k'op/ appears in several couplets with a related meaning.

- (26) /vo7ot 7onox ta apwersa vo7ot 7onox ta ak'op li
x7elan inupun li hzebe/ (G 3)
'It was at your demand, at your urging that my daughter got married as she did.'

¹⁵

That is, the root /k'op/ occurs frequently in conversation with verbs which may be glossed as indicated.

(27) /mu7yuk ak'op mu7yuk arason/ (Laughlin (n.d.))
 "You have nothing to say, you have no thoughts."

(28) /muk' bu sk'op muk' bu smantal/ (P 218)
 'He has no word, he has no authority.'

In each of these couplets, /k'op/ represents the verbal element in some decision. In (26), it is a matter of /pwersa/ ('force') and argumentation; in (28) a child goes wrong because a parent fails to exercise his /mantal/ ('authority') and his spoken /k'op/. And in (27) someone is criticized for failing to speak up and exercise his /rason/ ('reason') in suggesting a course of action. In each of these examples /k'op/ appears in possessed form: someone's /k'op/ is his verbal contribution to an argument, an inquiry, or a decision.

We remark above that conversation allows social interaction in Zinacantan to proceed. The man who cannot or will not talk with his fellows is considered anti-social as well as ill-tempered.

(29) /mi ha7uk sk'opon hp'eluk i stote/ (P 393)
 'He didn't even say a single word to his father.'

(30) /yu7van xaval ti 7o hset'uk xcikin xak'opon/ (P 439)
 'Don't try to tell us that he'll lend you the slightest ear when you try to talk to him.'

(31) /lek 7amiko hk'opon hba hci7uk/ (P 172)
 'I get along / talk with him like a friend.'

(29) concerns a son, estranged from his father, who no longer accords his father even minimal respect and courtesy. (30) describes a man with whom it is impossible to reason. The man charges outrageous interest on loans; his brother by

contrast is described as follows:

- (32) /mas yo hz'uh, ha7 mas xa7i k'op/ (P 264)
 'He's not as bad, he is willing to listen to
reason.'

Though the ideology reflected in these examples resembles that of sentences (5)-(11), the occurrence of the root /k'op/ implies talk for a specific purpose, discussion of some problem or plan, rather than aimless /lo7il/ or conversation. In this connection I may cite the ordinary usage of the phrase /lekil k'op/ ('good words') (as opposed to the artificial use created by my informant to complete the taxonomy earlier in this Chapter.)

- (32a) /yu7ran lekil k'op ana7oh/ (P 167)
 'Don't tell me you think this is a proper thing
 to engage in!'
- (32b) /7ak'o yik' ta lekil k'op li zebe/ (O 13)
 'Let him marry the girl without a fuss.'
- (32c) /timi cavak' hpastik preva lavahnile cakol ta
 lekil k'op/ (O 7)
 'If you let us try out your wife, then you will
 be set free unharmd.'

When something is done /ta lekil k'op/ all parties are agreed; no rules are being broken, and no dispute arises from the matter. /Lekil k'op/ represents the triumph of reason over impulse.

Finally, the noun /-k'oplal/ is derived from this root. The word is used in a legal context, as described by Jane Collier(1970):

"When it is said that someone went to the Presidente

or an elder to sa7be sk'oplal it means that he is looking for a settlement. k'oplal means 'a plan,' and the plaintiff who goes to sa7be sk'oplal is literally 'looking for a plan' that will be agreeable to all parties to a dispute.' (p. 80)

But /-k'oplal/ is commonly used to mean 'news (of _____),' 'the affair (in which _____ is involved).' It is always possessed, and often occurs in couplets with /-lo7iltael/.

- (33) /mas c'abal to7ox sk'oplal slo7iltael/ (W 25)
'He used to have less of a reputation, less gossip about him.'
- (34) /mu xlam sk'oplal/ (P 111)
'This affair about him will not be hushed up.'
- (35) /na7 to inopoh ti k'alal c'abal mas sk'oplal/ (O 7)
'He only came near again when the affair was mostly forgotten.'

Just as /lo7iletik/ can be counted with the numeral classifier /koh/, so we can speak of /hkoh sk'oplal/ ('one story about him'). Similarly, someone's /-k'oplal/ can 'be made public,' can 'come out,' and can 'pass' (i.e., be forgotten, blow over) --- as can gossip. A person's /-k'oplal/ is the gossip about /k'opetik/ in which he has been involved: arguments to which he was party, ventures in which he participated, and so on. Notably, when a man dies it is possible to say

/lah sk'oplal/ 16
('He died; lit., his story ended. ')

At death, the dossier on a man closes, even if gossip about him persists.

In Zinacantan it is possible to elicit gossip about an individual by asking for /-loʔiltael/ or /-k'oplal/ about him. But in ordinary conversation Zinacantecos generally initiate gossip with more leading questions. That is, Zinacantecos realize that it is easier to evoke an interesting response by asking 'Has Xun done anything stupid recently?' than by asking 'What has Xun been up to recently?' No one ordinarily talks about (remarks upon) unmarked behavior.¹⁷ And nothing marks behavior more than positive badness, than transgressions of one sort or another.

Tzotzil has a rich vocabulary for describing mistakes, faults, sins, crimes, stupidity, failure, etc. But there is a small set of words which prod gossipy tongues into action. (The keywords are underlined in the examples that follow.)

- (36) /ʔoy nan sbolil hutukuk ʔonox/ (W 21)
'I guess he has his little stupidities after all.'

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This I take to be a conversational rule. That is, while we can in principle talk about anything we wish, no matter how normal or unmarked (or dull) it may be, we are ordinarily constrained from doing so by the conversational presumption that by mentioning something we are pointing out something worth mentioning. I take this moral from one reading of --- and perhaps a misunderstanding of --- Cavell's remarks about 'voluntary' (1958).

(37) /mi caz'ikbotikotik hboliltikotik/ (P 392)
'Will you endure our stupidity?'

(38) /7a7ibil sbolil, yec'o ti ikom ta hwera/ (P 439)
'People have heard about his stupidity and he has therefore been left out.'

I successfully elicited gossip by asking about a person's /-bolil/ ('stupidity, foolishness'); a man with a particularly bad reputation may be described as having a 'great amount of foolishness'. Similarly, a person (typically a wife) may disclaim responsibility for another's transgressions by saying:

(39) /mi ta hna7 k'u x7elan sbolil/ (H 74)
'How should I know the extent of his stupidity?'

Similarly, Tzotzil uses a loan word from Spanish maña ('a defect or bad habit.' (J. Collier (1970:77))

(40) /lek vaxal mol yilel xca7le sba pero te nan yunen manya hset'uk/ (W 21)
'He seems like a well-behaved old man --- or he tried to act that way --- but all the same he probably has his little wickedness.'

(41) /kavron toh manya molot/ (P. 238)
'Son of a bitch, you are a wicked old man!'

Zinacantecos use questions about a person's /-manya(il)/ to prompt tales of sexual misconduct or promiscuity. Men rarely utter the word without a smile in ordinary conversation (although the technical implications of the word in, e.g., a legal dispute are not humorous.) (Cf. J. Collier (1970:76-78)) Finally, references to jailing tend to stimulate conversation. The Tzotzil root /cuk/ means 'jail, tie up, tether.' Zinacanteco men are fascinated to learn