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Little Rituals

John B. Haviland

Mexican folk discourses partake of several great traditions of ritual language, including the codified responsive dialogues of the Catholic catechism and the massive parallel diphrasism of Mesoamerican emotionally charged or powerful speech. Sometimes, in the Tzotzil of Zinacantán, Chiapas, the two forms are partially merged—for example, in the prayer of shamans and religious officeholders. Resonances of both these great traditions resound in interactions of more mundane sorts in Zinacantán, from domestic conversations to performances in political meetings, markets, and other public spaces. In this chapter I concentrate on these "little rituals," in which echoes of more thoroughly regimented, formulaic, and contextually bound ways of using language can be heard. What do such echoes tell us about the people who produce them, about what they are doing, and about talk and interaction in general? The Zinacantec material underlines the way ritual forms, themselves inherently multimodal, tend to leak beyond the boundaries of full-blown ritual events. Such leakage in turn illustrates again the profound indexicality of talk in interaction and begins to explain some of the coercive effects of ritual talk, on which I focus.

Zinacantec Tzotzil and its closest neighbors have been classic exemplars in the taxonomic study of "ways of speaking" (Gumperz and Hymes 1972), starting with the foundational works of Bricker (1974) and Gossen (1973,1974a, 1974b). My own studies of Zinacantec gossip (Haviland 1977a, 1977b, 1998) amplified but also somewhat undermined the early taxonomies. Irvine's (1979) critique of the notion of formality made it impossible to continue to confound distinct senses of the word—talking without elaboration of "formal language," for example—and a similar critical exercise could be mounted against the

term "ritual language." Further, Bauman's development of the notion of performance (1977; Bauman and Briggs 1990) highlighted both interactive and social-structural (or even ethical) aspects of ways of speaking missing in the classic formulations.

My understanding of the social life of talk draws on several foundations: the idea of interaction and face elaborated by Goffman (1981a, 1983); Silverstein's (1976) emphasis on indexical dimensions of language use, linking speech to contexts both assumed and imposed; and the recognition of the social historicity and multiple voicing of speech in work by Bakhtin and his circle (Bakhtin 1981 [1934], 1986). Goffman's insistence on placing talk in a wider interactive frame and his "interaction rituals" are obvious inspirations for the phrase "little rituals." Similarly, one could understand "ritualization" to be a displacement or recalibration of distinct but laminated contexts indexically projected, in Silverstein's parlance, by talk in interaction. Finally, the ritual echoes in quotidian Zinacantec interaction clearly reflect the generic leakage characteristic, for Bakhtin, of "secondary genres," but with somewhat more sociological bite.

A *Merolico*

I start not in highland Chiapas but in a central plaza of downtown Mexico City, the Alameda, where many of the city's poor go on Sundays for "free" entertainments. Among these are the spectacles provided by *merolicos,* celebrated fast-talkers who purvey everything from fortunes, herbs, and joke books to spells and recipes for conquering lovers or vanquishing enemies (Bauman 2004; Haviland 1993, 2005b; Sobrevilla del Valle 2000).

An accomplished *merolico* is Felix, who takes money from people in return for a magical talisman and an offer of spiritual and practical advice. At a crucial point in his performance, when he has arranged his public in a tight circle around him, arms outstretched, fists clasping their talismans, and each person having already "donated" a few small coins to him for his blessing, Felix demonstrates his extraordinary powers by inserting a steel ice pick into his nostril and apparently straight into his brain. As the public gasps and stares, he walks around the circle, ice pick projecting from his face, touching each person in turn. Then he kneels in the center of the circle. After incanting a blessing, he appropriates a piece of the catechism designed to ensnare the audience willy-nilly in a responsive commitment to his purposes. In the following portion of a transcription of such an exchange, M is the *merolico,* and A is the audience:

13 m; *os decimos…*
Let us all say…
14 *¡Así sea!*
So be it!
15 a; *Así sea*
16 m; *Ave María purísima* [placing his right palm over his heart]
Hail Mary most pure,
17 a; *Sin pecado concebida*
Conceived without sin.
18 m; *Ave María purísima* [louder]
19 a; *Sin pecado concebida*
20 m; *Ave María purísima*
21 a; *Sin pecado concebida*

Having secured the participation of the public—following his direct command (13), the assembled crowd repeats his "So be it" (15)—he goes on (16) to elicit, first somewhat uncertainly (17), then with perfect coordination in the repetitions (19–21), the appropriate response from the audience to his "Hail Mary most pure": "conceived without sin." He then induces the members of the audience to cross themselves, seemingly involuntarily, at the appropriate moment (24–27):

22 m; *En el nombre sea de dios bendito todopoderoso*
In the name of blessed, all powerful God,
23 *Danos tu bendición*
Give us your blessing.
24 *En el nombre del padre*
In the name of the Father,
25 *Del hijo*
Of the Son,
26 *Del espíritu*
And of the
27 *Santo*
Holy Spirit.
28 *Amen*

Felix now sits back on his heels and engages an entirely different though equally powerful set of folk religious traditions, oriented less toward the reflexive responses of Catholic ritual than toward the awe and fear associated with Mesoamerican magic. He assumes in sequence, via the hypothetical ascriptions of others, the roles of witch, sorcerer,

animal spirit companion (the *nagual* of Aztec tradition), snake charmer, diviner, spiritist (*santero,* i.e., devotee of a cult of saints), and shaman, pronouncing himself, finally, "teacher of teachers":

30 m; *Me dicen brujo*
They call me a witch.
31 *Me dicen hechicero*
They call me a sorceror.
32 *Me dicen nagual*
They call me a spirit companion.
33 *Perdónenme*
Excuse me,
34 *Otros me dicen pitonista*
Others call me a snake charmer.
35 *Hay quien me dice adivino*
There are some who call me a psychic.
36 *Señor*

37 *Soy santero*
I am a worshipper of saints.
38 *Soy curandero*
I am a curer.
39 *Soy*
I am
40 *Maestro de maestros*
Teacher of teachers.

The *merolico* endows himself (and by extension his talisman) with a variety of powers: those of priest and intermediary to God, of the saints and the Virgin, of sorcery and witchcraft, of divination, and of healing. He borrows language from Catholic and popular traditions to accomplish both crowd and mind control. He has earlier demonstrated his control over snakes, and most recently over a six-inch steel shank inserted apparently straight into his brain. As he speaks he now exercises his power over the members of the crowd, causing them to move their bodies and respond on his command. These same powers, or fear of them, will ultimately cause many in the audience to part with up to a week's earnings before they can be freed from Felix's circle.

Zinacantec Ritual Language

Let me turn now to Chiapas and to a seemingly inconsequential snippet of interaction. In August 2004, as I accompanied the entourage of a prestigious ritual officer ("cargoholder") en route to an important fiesta, we stopped at a village on the road to pick up several helpers. My ninety-year-old *compadre,* P, blind and nearly deaf, made his way out to the road to meet the passing group, and there ensued a brief encounter while the truck was being loaded with people and provisions. A senior helper and the cargoholder's wife greeted the old man and exchanged a few words, and the cargoholder's official *tot-me*ʔ (lit., 'father-mother', or ritual adviser) offered him a few sips of cane liquor. There could scarcely be a more prosaic interaction than this—a chance meeting between acquaintances, a mere parenthesis to a much larger ritual event. Before looking at its details, let me proceed to an extremely abbreviated mini-ethnography of Tzotzil ritual speech.

The language of prayer in Zinacantec Tzotzil is organized into parallel structures. Song (Haviland 1967), formal denunciation (Laughlin 1975), and some ordinary talk (Haviland, 1996) share with prayer the use of stylized images and sentiments, lexicalized as more or less fixed pairs (and sometimes triplets or quadruplets) of expressions structured tightly together (see Gossen 1974, 1974b, 1985, for Chamula prayer; see Laughlin 198[illegible]viland 1967, 2000 for Zinacantán).

In its canonical form, a Zinacantec curer's prayer proceeds as a series of strictly parallel lines that differ from one another in only a single element—sometimes a lexeme, sometimes just a root. Although every Zinacantec can muster at least some couplets, and other Zinacantec specialists may be extraordinarily proficient at the elaborate parallel speech of religious ritual, curing prayer is considered a gift from the gods. In Zinacantec theory, the ability to cure one's fellow human beings—and crucially, the ability to pray fluently—is bestowed by ancestral gods in a dream. It is not something one can *learn* to do.

In the following prayer fragment, a curer (C in the transcript) addresses the spirits of the mountain cave where the ceremony is taking place, to try to reverse witchcraft that has caused her patient's (P's) symptoms:

Example 1. A shaman prays to reverse witchcraft

1	c;	*k'elavil la jtot // k'elavil la kajval*
		Look here, father // look here, my lord.
2		*muʔnuk o chal t avalabe /*
		Your child didn't say anything //

3		*muʔnuk o chal ta anich'nab une*
		Your offspring didn't say anything.
4	p;	*an ch'ay xkaʔi*
		Why, I forgot.
5	c;	*pero yuʔun me chamelzanbon //*
		But still I want you to fix for me,
6		*yuʔun 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		*liʔ la chkom ta yo laveʔeb une //*
		May it remain here in your eating place,
10		*liʔ 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.

There are two highly productive aspects to the parallel structure of prayer. First are the paired doublets (or triplets), which alternate in the frame of a single sequence of lines. For example, the paired verbal roots *cham* 'be sick' // *laj* 'finish' refer in prayer to disease and death. Zinacantecs employ these paired roots with appropriate morphological elaboration as full words. Thus, (7) involves the pair *j-cham-el* 'sick person' // *j-laj-el* 'dying person' (with an agentive prefix *j-* and a nominalizing suffix *-el*), but one could equally well form a doublet around fully inflected verb forms: *ch-i-cham* 'I am sick' // *ch-i-laj* 'I am dying'. The morphological creativity of the language thus augments the already large inventory of paired roots, creating many possible doublets tailored to particular contexts of speech. More important, at the level of cultural meaning, these doublets have a dual character. On the one hand, they are the cells from which the tissue of prayer grows, the irreducible units of ritual expression. On the other, they are highly evocative images compressed into minimal elements of speech. Thus *cham // laj* makes available a means for referring to sickness, and it also incorporates a "stereoscopic" image (Fox 19741977) involving both the painful process of sickening and dying (the meaning of *cham*) and its ultimate finality (*laj,* lit., 'finish, come to an end'). An alternative image for a related concept is found in the doublet *ʔip* 'sickness' // *k'ux* 'pain' (11), which focuses on suffering.

The second productive aspect of prayer involves the frames within which doublets appear. Sometimes a pair of lines consists of nothing more than the couplets themselves, appropriately dressed syntactically and morphologically. Usually, however, there is a wider frame: parts of a line that are repeated without change in a parallel construction. These frames themselves comprise a restricted set of possibilities reflecting the conventionalized content of prayer, just as the inventory of doublets represents its conventional imagery. In the preceding transcript, line (1) uses the conventional summons *k'elavil* (lit., 'look and see'). Sometimes a particular phrase in prayer always co-occurs with a particular doublet, but sometimes a single frame admits a number of different paired doublets, resulting in slightly different meanings. The summons (1) is here directed at the lord of the cave, represented by the doublet *j-tot* 'my father' // *k-ajval* 'my lord', though elsewhere it might have other addressees.

Prayer as a code thus employs a limited constructional syntax and a large but heavily conventionalized imagistic lexicon. In fluent prayer, curers enter an almost trancelike state. They deliver the words rapidly, without hesitation, and with remarkably little repetition. 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. Zinacantecs cite the difficulty of the genre as evidence that the ability to pray is a gift from the ancestral gods. Skilled shamans can pray for hours at a sitting, improvising appropriate, nonrepetitive prayers throughout ceremonies that can last for more than twenty-four hours. Despite the Zinacantec metatheory of divine inspiration, the constrained structure of ritual language clearly facilitates the remarkable fluency a skilled shaman brings to curing prayer.

Dialogicity, Interactivity, and Uptake

Although shamanistic prayer often appears monologic—typically performed by a lone curer, who nominally addresses one or more supernatural authorities—and textual sediments of prayer have mostly been presented that way (e.g., Laughlin 1980), prayer, like virtually all other Zinacantec talk, is highly interactive, implying various sorts of "uptake" and response between interlocutors.[1] Previously (Haviland 2000) I argued that the participant structure (and consequently the set of interactive stances and implicated voices) of prayer is fluid, rapidly shifting, and constantly renegotiated in the moment. That is, specific addressees,

both real and virtual, are invoked and constantly shuffled in the course of even single lines of prayer.

What is more, the shaman is frequently accompanied in prayer by the patient or the patient's proxy. Much like a professional leading a novice in song or dance, the curer's words prompt appropriately refashioned prayer from the companion. The secondary prayer is thus partly an echo and partly a response. (There are moments when the priority is reversed, and a particularly fluent patient can apparently change the course of the shaman's prayer.) This tendency for one participant to repeat and transform the words of another is characteristic of Tzotzil interaction, conversational as well as ritual, and it is widely reported in Mayan languages (e.g., Brody 1991; Brown 1997) and elsewhere in Mesoamerica.

It is also typical of prayer and other highly parallel ritual genres such as song that they allow indirect interaction, operating like hints or cues to ancillary participants who are not directly addressed. Just as Zinacantec musicians signal to attentive helpers that liquor is to be served by singing a verse mentioning *xi?obil // sk'exobil,* lit., 'the cause for fear, the cause for shame'—that is, cane liquor—so shamans, by incorporating appropriate elements into their prayers, can indicate that certain actions important to a curing ceremony ought to be performed. Indeed, in the curing prayer fragment shown in example 1, lines 2 and 3, which are addressed directly to the lord of the cave (the "you" of "your offspring"), explicitly prod the "child // offspring" in question—namely, the patient—to begin to pray herself. Her remark "Oh, I forgot," at line 4, registers her chagrin at being reminded, and shortly thereafter she begs forgiveness in her own prayer. Here is a hint that, like the allusions to the Catholic catechism in the *merolico*'s routine, ritual forms in Zinacantán can also have a coercive interactive effect—here a gentle but effective chiding reminder.

Multimodality

Moreover, in prayer as in other kinds of talk, participants' whole bodies are typically involved. Rather than "ritual language," it is perhaps more appropriate simply to speak of "ritual action," which includes not only talk but also postures (including features of mutual gaze or its absence), demeanor, aspects of dress and grooming, spatial disposition, ancillary activities, and even props. The prayer session in the cave illustrates the point in several obvious ways. The prayer is the spoken accompaniment to quite specific sorts of action.

First, the interaction between shaman and patient is characterized by the stylized greetings or acknowledgments that take place between any two Zinacantecs in situations of sufficient gravity. At points of transition—when starting or stopping a prayer sequence, for example—the patient bows to her curer, with accompanying responsive spoken couplets. Such greetings are, indeed, expected concomitants to opening and closing *all* interactions, at least as I was taught them as a novice ethnographer in the 1960s. When two interactants are of unequal age, the younger bows to the older (in Tzotzil, *-nupbe sk'ob* 'meets her hand'), presenting her forehead, which the older person gently touches with the back of her hand (in Tzotzil, *-ak'be sk'ob* 'gives her hand'). When two people are of equal age, they may shake hands (if they are male) or, in certain ceremonial contexts, mutually bow to one another. Alternatively, especially if they are female or physically distant, they may simply acknowledge each other's presence by uttering the appropriate words without touching. Strikingly, in certain highly charged contexts, people will rise from their chairs (or from their mats on the floor if they are female) to walk across a crowded room to exchange a full-body greeting with a senior person.

Second, integral to these greetings is an elaborate calculus of address terms, based mostly on kin formulas, that specifies uniquely for almost any dyad what the correct term of address should be. Thus, if I greet an unknown senior woman, I will "meet her hand," saying, *me?tik* 'ma'am'. If she knows my name, she will intone it back to me as she "gives me her hand"; if not, she will merely touch my forehead without a word, call me *kere* 'boy', or perhaps utter the formula *la? chabot* 'come and be cared for'. Age differences can be neutralized terminologically by certain special relationships: *compadres* call each other "compadre" (but bow to each other according to age); cargoholders and other officeholders substitute cargo titles for names or kin terms, and so on. Thus the greeting is a mini-ritual rich with social structural, social historical, and contextual meaning, of which the words are but one, albeit especially pregnant, component.

In the anti-witchcraft cave, further actions are integrated with the prayer. The shaman lights the candles and otherwise arranges offerings to the Lord of the Earth, in whose dominion the cave lies. She gently strikes the patient's back, shoulders, arms, and legs with pine boughs to cleanse her soul of maladies. Liquor is exchanged and consumed, and helpers arrange offerings and other paraphernalia. Parts of the prayer explicitly refer to these accompanying actions. For example, lines 9–10 ask that the patient's sickness remain there in the cave, characterized

in couplets as "your eating place, your drinking place," an indirect reference to offerings that the shaman simultaneously prepares for the Earth Lord to "eat and drink."

Knowledge, Competence, and Power

Shamanistic prayer and its malevolent witchcraft cousins are the most specialized, formulaic, and contextually constrained kinds of speech in the Zinacantec repertoire. At the same time, prayer is fluid, creative, and—in the Zinacantec scheme of things—the most highly efficacious sort of talk imaginable. It can effect a cure and thus transform the world. On Silverstein's (1976) cline, prayer is thus at once highly presupposing, because to pray at all requires that appropriate circumstances obtain, and highly creative, because it is explicitly designed to transform the circumstances in which it is embedded.

Other related speech genres in Zinacantec Tzotzil are similarly formulaic, partake of the same shared repertoire of code elements (the same stereoscopic doublet imagery, for example), and relate in different ways to specialized knowledge and power to which Zinacantecs can aspire. These, too, are kinds of "formal" language, in Irvine's "positional identities" sense—language appropriate to and indeed expected of persons who occupy roles of specific kinds.

The most obvious and widespread examples of such ritual talk are the prayers, greetings, salutations, and elaborate thanks exchanged between cargoholders in the ceremonies and meals that are the main business of the civil-religious hierarchy (see Cancian 1965, 1992. Unlike shamanistic curing prayer, this sort of talk is never performed alone. Instead, it typically occurs in responsive dyads, where the content of the talk is linked to the immediate context of the ritual and where what one person says is matched to what the other says, with appropriate adjustments for the asymmetries in roles between them. These exchanged words are also accompanied by bowing and touching of the head or, in the case of the specially clad cargoholders depicted in figure 1.1, the touching of one's partner's rosary to one's forehead.

When one ritual officeholder offers bottles of liquor to another in order to invite him to put on special ritual garments during Holy Week, he says something like the following:

Figure 1.1. Cargoholders greet each other at the doorway of a house.

Example 2. Offerer's part of fragment of cargo prayer (t920413)

1 *ak'o pertonal*
Give pardon.
2 *o to jset'uk // o to jutebuk*
There is still a pinch // there [illegible] *ll a bit,*
3 *xiʔobil // sk'exobil*
Of the cause for fear // the cause for shame,
4 *li jch'ul man vinajele // jch'ul man lorya*
Of the holy buyer of heaven // the holy buyer of glory.
5 *ta jlap o jk'uʔtik //*
With it shall we put on our clothes //
6 *ta jlap o jpok'tik*
With it shall we put on our scarves.
7 *ba jkuxbetik yoʔon //*
We will go to rest the heart //
8 *ba jvik'betik ti sat*
We will go to open the eyes.
9 *jlikeluk // chaʔ-likeluk*
For a moment // for two moments.
10 *nichimal jmanvanej // nichimal jtojvanej*
The flo [illegible] *buyer of souls // the flowery payer of souls.*

His partner responds, simultaneously or with a fractional delay, with exactly the same words, except that for the first two lines he substitutes the following:

1 *bweno kolaval*
Well, thank y
2 *mi o to jset'uk // o to jutebuk*
Is there still a pinch? // Is there still a bit?

All adults are thought in principle to be able to learn to muster such talk, unlike curing prayer, although novice cargoholders need explicit instruction in exactly which formulas to use for which circumstances. One primary task of a *tot-me*ʔ, or ritual advisor—a senior man contracted to give advice to a cargoholder during his year in office—is to instruct the cargoholder in appropriate ritual speech. An enormous store of specialized knowledge is associated with such ritual talk, and just as it is (in principle at least) a source of pride and a mark of adult maturity and success to perform in the cargo hierarchy, knowing how to talk in these ritual contexts is also a valued skill.

Nor is it only religious ritual that gives occasion for such formulaic exchanges. Other events involve such greetings: baptismal meals, weddings, funerals, and associated events such as resolving elopements or divorce; the beginnings and endings of formal dispute settlements; housewarming fiestas; ceremonial visits to ask for loans or wives or ritual help; and so on. Because some people are simply better at such performance than others, more tongue-tied Zinacantecs make sure that to accomplish important business they take along a *j-k'opojel* 'spokesperson'. Expert talkers take a leading role in guiding less accomplished partners through the motions, sometimes truncating or simplifying a sequence when no appropriate response is forthcoming, and otherwise supplying single-handedly the whole content in the face of mumbled and halting replies.

Sometimes a specific social role demands speaking abilities that surpass those a given incumbent may possess. For example, the *jpetom,* lit. 'embracer', or godparent at a wedding—a person usually chosen more for economic might than for verbal prowess (see Haviland 1996)—is expected to deliver wedding instructions to the bride and groom in fluent parallel speech. But a career selling flowers or driving a truck, although it might have produced wealth, might not have prepared the godfather for fluent and elegant speech, so wedding exhortations sometimes fall short of the Zinacantec formal ideal. Often couplets

begin but fail halfway. Sometimes, instead of a parallel line, a godfather produces just a repetition or nonparallel "ordinary" talk.

In one wedding I attended, the exhortation began with an elaborate greeting between the godfather and the father of the groom, the latter a man with considerable cargo experience, a fluent master of the genre, who used ritual doublets to invite the other man to give advice to the newlyweds. As a measure of fluency, in 35 seconds of responsive parallel greeting, the father produced 5.5 syllables per second, whereas the less accomplished godfather managed a respectable but considerably lower average of 3.7. The godfather went on to give a halting, partly extemporized although substantively expert set of instructions to bride and groom, with encouraging additions from the father and another senior relative, and in counterpoint with his wife, the couple's godmother, who largely addressed nonparallel speech to the bride (fig. 1.2).

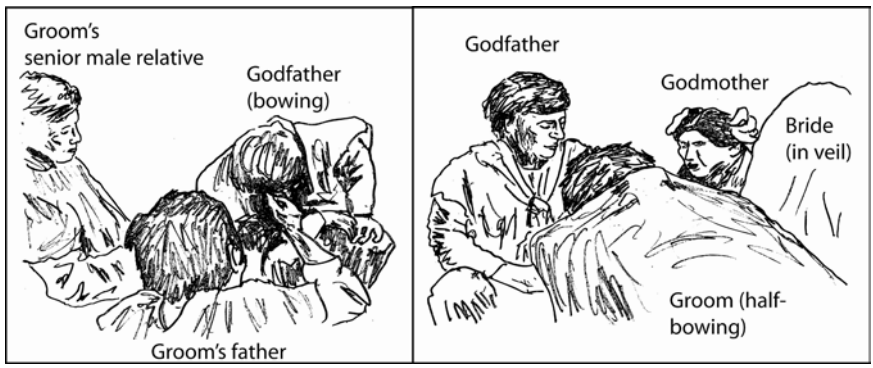

Figure 1.2. The godfather at a wedding, with elders and newlyweds.

The reciprocal relationship between the bride and groom and their linguistically semicompetent godfather illustrates a kind of ramshackle ritualization. Just as the godfather was only sporadically able to summon the sort of linguistic structure appropriate to the wedding exhortation, so the newlyweds seemed occasionally reluctant to respond with appropriate gestures of respect. In this same wedding, the father of the groom found it necessary from time to time to admonish his son, directing him explicitly at awkward transitional moments to "meet his godfather's hand"—that is, to bow and give thanks for the instruction he was receiving. The multimodal concomitants of ritual speech, that is, were as halting as the speech meant to elicit them. But once again, the ritual form itself provides a mechanism for bringing potential

insubordination—in this case, on the part of a groom uncomfortable at being lectured about how to behave, especially in the presence of his domineering father—back under control. Let me explore a bit further the gentle coercion associated with ritual language. A shaman shows power in part by marshaling the parallel structure of prayer. In the mouths of cargoholders and wedding godparents, parallel constructions index authority. In the transitional moments of other quotidian rituals, lapsing into ritual speech indicates solemnity and respect, or sometimes high emotion. Even the burlesque transformation of ritual language that drunks sometimes emit can have a kind of authority almost despite itself.

In the final days of the fiesta of San Lorenzo in August 2005, one of the helpers of a senior cargoholder—his brother-in-law—took it upon himself to lecture his teenage niece, the cargoholder's daughter, about appropriate behavior (fig. 1.3). The girl, who was trapped making bean tamales for an important ritual meal, resisted her tipsy uncle's harangue, which became ever more insistent and couplet-filled as it progressed. She made fun of his choice of images, turned his words back on him, and generally tried to brush him off, especially when his admonition—

Figure 1.3. A tipsy uncle harangues his niece.

itself a kind of burlesque of a wedding godfather's instructions to a bride—turned to the acutely embarrassing subject of her own eventual courtship and marriage. Nonetheless, despite insurrectionist giggles and ridiculing asides, the girl was willy-nilly drawn into the interactive form, until eventually she capitulated to the "positional identity" it cast upon her, bowing and offering formulaic polite thanks to ("meeting the hand" of) her uncle (fig. 1.4).

Figure 1.4. Harangued niece reluctantly bows to admonishing uncle.

Genres of Interpersonal Relations

Working in the nearby Tzotzil community of Chamula, Gossen (1985) linked the structure of prayer to a metaphor of "heat." Prayer "is exalted, ritually significant, hot, and fixed; it can be said only in a formal context" (1985: 86). Furthermore, according to Gossen, "emotional speech … is a key to understanding what happens to language when the 'heart is heated.' In a word, it multiplies; the same information is repeated"(1985: 86). Hence, the elaborate parallelism and repetition are direct icons of the character of the heated heart. "Emotional speech occurs in countless contexts of everyday and ritual life. It invariably

leans toward the redundant and formal, for such are the qualities of the heated heart of a Tzotzil speaker" (Gossen (1985: 92).

Whatever the native Tzotzil theory of parallelism, Zinacantecs tend to break into couplets in many circumstances when emotions run high. In angry denunciation, in lamentation and weeping, and in scolding, allusions to the parallel constructions of prayer (as well as doublets more scatological and scathing, characteristic of scolding) tend to emerge (see Haviland 2005a). Gossen's remarks suggest that the apparent leakage of ritual linguistic forms into nonritual contexts (Haviland 1994) derives not simply from a Bakhtinian revoicing or borrowing of primary genres by secondary ones but from a deeper interpersonal psychodynamic through which parallel form erupts almost spontaneously. The link between strong emotion and ritual language characteristic of power, authority, and coercion reemerges in the tiny encounter between the old man and the cargo party, to which I return shortly.

The vast literature on honorifics and respectful language (Agha 1994) and on politeness (Brown and Levinson 1978), and the classic work on competing dimensions in pronominal systems (Brown and Gilman 1960), repeatedly makes two observations relevant to the current argument. First is that simple dichotomies implied by terms such as "respectful" and "polite" fail to capture the multidimensional subtlety of multifold social relationships. Failing to be polite is not (necessarily) to be impolite, and appropriate "respect" may require extraordinarily polite words (or none at all) with some people but explicit vulgar joking with others. Second, we are reminded that respect or politeness is virtually never a matter of mere words, but rather that words are simply one part in a multimodal symphony of "respectful" behaviors.

Wracking my ethnographic brain for exemplary counterpoles to the highly parallel ritual language of Zinacantán, I am hard-pressed to identify any completely "*non*ritual" language to counterpose. I find no unmarked sort of "natural conversation" unconstrained by its own contextual conditions, no "informal" talk on any of Irvine's dimensions. I consider in turn a few apparently promising types.

There is what might be called "idle chat" in Zinacantán, a kind of maximally empty "polite" dialogue, massively repetitive, highly formulaic (Zinacantecs also turn, in awkward social moments, to the weather), and, in precisely Malinowski's sense (1923), phatic, because the point is seemingly never to convey propositional information. Learning how to ape such a form was one of my own first achievements as a novice Tzotzil speaker, a testimony to its emptiness and thus its ritualization in an ethological sense.

Another kind of nonritual talk, often juxtaposed with prayer and other ritual forms, is common to male helpers in Zinacantán, who often stand around killing time in the lulls between intense ceremonial activity. It, too, has a typical generic form and a characteristic content: boasting, tall tales, sexual innuendo, and hyperbole. Formally, such boasting talk is also highly marked, not by parallel constructions (although it is almost aggressively repetitive), but lexically by the heavy use of affective verbs (Laughlin 1975) and exaggerated positional images, and prosodically by elongated vowels and occasional falsetto voice. It is interactively competitive, filled with overlap, struggles for the floor and for the right to deliver punchlines—reminiscent of Zinacantec gossip (Haviland 1977b). Like the most intimate of conversational forms in Zinacantán, it is also punctuated by routinized joking, mostly in the form of punning and wordplay (Gossen 1974a), like the standard Mexican *albur* though usually not as sexually tinged. Such punning also takes a distinctive parallel interactive form.

I mention these generic forms and contrast them with a nonexistent hypothetical neutral conversational form because (for this ethnographer at least) they have a highly salient shared feature: they have to be learned. "Knowing how to speak Tzotzil" in a grammatical sense is simply not enough to be able to joke or boast with the guys, just as it is not enough to allow one to respond to a cargoholder's greeting or to pray in a cave. Instead, there is a veritable hegemony of genres, in which every utterance, like every interaction, has a character that is linked to and informed by its position on multiple dimensions of interpersonal relations. Like walking the right way, wielding a machete, holding a weaving stick, or tying a belt (Devereaux 1995), talking in Zinacantán is *always* a tiny formulaic ritual. Waking up, washing one's face, sitting down by the fire to start the day—these moments are pervaded by routines and have their *smelol,* their 'right way', indexed *always* to the co-presence of specific social alters. And so it is with talk.

The Old Man and the Passing Ritual Entourage

With this schematic preamble, let me return, finally, to the little interaction between my *compadre* and the passing cargo party. Working through the talk, I try to point to the "ritual" resonances I hear. The scene begins with the old man (P) checking with the senior helper (C) and the ritual adviser (M) about the exact calendar of events. When would the ritual activity finish in the distant town to which the group was heading?

1 p; *lunex to*
(You will stay) until Monday.
2 c; *yech to:*
Until then.
[
3 m; *a yech to leʔe=*
Yes, until then.
4 p; *=yech to*
Until then.
[
5 c; *yech to:*
Until then.
[
6 m; *e:y*
Okay.
[
7 p; *lunex to chmuy ta xmal k'ak'al*
They come back up on Monday at sundown.
[
8 c; *ji:*
Yes.
[
9 m; *jaʔ to*
Not until then.
10 p; *yech to*
Until then.
[
11 c; *yech un*
Then.
12 m; *ji:*
Yes.
13 c; *yech to un*
Until the deed.

In fact P is well aware of these details; in the isolation of his blindness and deafness, he spends his hours calculating and recalculating the crucial dates of the ritual calendar, anchoring himself in a world of ritual to which he has dedicated his life and which he carries around in his head. It is P who supplies (7) the fact that Monday is the day when the cargoholder himself will "climb" up the mountain from the other village back to Zinacantán to mark the end of the fiesta. Notice that both of P's interlocutors assume the role of "answerer," showing their agreement by multiply repeating his pronouncements.

P knows that the cargo party is in a hurry, only passing through his village. Having confirmed the dates, he immediately initiates a polite end to the interaction with a standard, formulaic preclosing:

14 p; *ji: te . k'el abaik aʔa*
Yes. So take care of yourselves.
15 *pas avokolik .*
Do your job.
[
16 m; *teyuk aʔa kumpa:*
Agreed, compadre,
17 p; *ch'omiloxuke*
You who are helpers.
[
18 c; *teyu:k*
All right.
[
19 m; *teyu:k*
All right.
20 c; *teyu:k*
All right.

Both interlocutors repeat the equally formulaic *teyuk,* lit., 'let it be then/there', that is, "agreed." (As M's reply to P [16] shows, the two men are *compadres*.)

A more intimate sequence ensues. C is P's relative, and the old man has served as ritual adviser for C's own cargo career. C now expresses more personal concerns before taking leave of the older man. (P is, in the meantime [23–24, 26], checking details with M about where they will await the arrival of the cargoholder, who is walking down to the other village in the saint's entourage.) C tells P to "watch after himself," addressing him as *tot* 'father', a term reserved for close older male relatives. P recognizes C's turn as a preclosing, a preamble to C's leaving the interaction, and he addresses him directly (by name [27]) with a series of polite leave-taking formulas, repetitively acknowledged in turn by the other.

22 c; *k'el aba un tot*
Look after yourself, father.
[

23 p; - *ta ba sten-*
At the mea-
24 *ba stenteje*
At the meadow.
[
25 c; *te k'el aba*
Look after yourself.
26 m; *jaʔ bi aʔa*
Yes, indeed.
27 p; *pas avokolik c.*
Do your work, C.
28 *pas avokolik un*
Do your work.
[
29 c; *teyuk*
Okay.
[
30 m; *teyuk xa o:*
All right, then.
31 c; *teyuk*
All right.
32 *te k'el aba*
Look after yourself.
[
33 p; *te k'el abaik*
Look-
34 c; *teyuk*
All right.
35 p; *jiʔ*
Yes.
[
36 c; *teyuk cheʔe tot*
All right then, father.
[
37 m; *jiʔ*
Yes.
38 p; *bweno*
Okay.

C knows that the older man cannot see. Because the circumstances resonate with ritual, however, he cannot simply truncate his leave-taking

and slip away. P is a man who has passed through an extraordinarily distinguished cargo career, having served in the same cargo that these helpers now serve and having maintained strong links to the ritual hierarchy throughout his life, as cargoholder, ritual adviser, and "holy elder"—a kind of ritual super-rank. C therefore goes to great lengths to "meet the hand" of the older man. "Can you see, father?" he asks (39), and utters a formulaic farewell (40, 43–44), bowing his head so low that he actually brings his forehead into contact with the older man's lowered right hand (fig. 1.5).

39 c; *mi chavil tot*
Can you see, father…
40 *chibat cheʔe tot*
Good-bye, then, father.
[
41 p; *teyuk un*
All right.
42 *te xak'el aba ech'el*
Take care as you go.
[

Figure 1.5. The ritual adviser takes leave of the old man.

43 c; *chibat tot*
Good-bye, father.
44 *chibat cheʔe:*
Good-bye, then.
[
45 p; *an teyuk un*
Why, all right.

The ritual adviser, M, himself a very senior man, follows suit, taking his leave with an elaborate bow. (P is, in fact, one of the very few men to whom M has had to bow during several weeks of intense ceremonial activity.) P cannot see him and is prompted by another man, J (48), to touch the other's forehead.

46 m; *chibat kumpare:*
Good-bye, compadre.
[
47 p; *mi chabat kumpare*
Are you leaving, compadre?
48 j; *ak'o lak'ob kumpa*
Give your hand, compadre!
49 m; *chibat*
Good-bye.
50 p; *te xabat kumpare*
Go, then, compadre.
51 m; *mm, teyuk un*
Hmm, all right.

There follows an especially poignant sequence. P assumes that C's wife, Mal, is present, as well as M's wife—his *comadres*—and he addresses them with preclosings (52, 54) on the basis of that polite and ritually completive assumption:

52 p; *te me xabatik ma:l*
Good-bye, then, Mal.
[
53 x; *teyan nox tot=*
Just stay there, father.
54 p; *=te xabatik kumale:*
Good-bye, comadre.

Instead, the woman present is X, the cargoholder's wife, a principal in the entourage. X gives P a preclosing of her own, tailored to the circumstances. "Just stay here, father," she says (53, 56), reflecting the fact that she is leaving and he is staying. He finally recognizes who she is, greeting her formulaically (57). She acknowledges the greeting (58, 61) and tells P that she will take along his daughter as helper. P chokes back tears of emotion (59–60, 63)—remorse, I surmise, for his blindness, chagrin that he has not recognized or acknowledged X's presence, and despair at his incapacity to participate more fully in ritual events on which he has centered his life.

56 x; *teyan nox . tot*
Just stay there, father.
57 p; *liʔote?*
You're here?
58 x; *jiʔ liʔone*
Yes, I'm here.
[
59 p; *mi-*
Are-
60 *a:y=*
Ay.
61 x; *=liʔone*
I'm here.
62 *jiʔ yuʔun xkik' ech'el aYe*
I am taking your (daughter) Y with me.
[
63 p; *mi nox-*
Have—

P recovers his composure, partly by again asking about procedures: Has the entire entourage set out for the other village? There is a reply and the expected "polite" repetition (66–68):

64 *mi tal xa skotol avajch'omtak*
Have all your helpers come
65 *mi o to komem*
Or did some still stay behind?
[
66 x; *ali te to komem jkot karro*
Uh, one carload of them has stayed behind.

67 j; *a karajo .*
Ah, damn!
68 p; *oy te komem jkot karo ..*
One carload has stayed behind?
69 *a bweno*
Ah, okay.

The two men C and M have already officially exited the interaction. But there is one more bit of ritual etiquette to accomplish. M, as the cargoholder's ritual adviser, has for days never ventured out in public without a small bottle of strong cane liquor that he presents to all men of sufficient religious status, a kind of roaming prestation from the cargoholder. Although P no longer drinks and rarely leaves his house compound, he is a man with a vast store of such status. M thus returns to proffer the bottle, using an elaborate self-humbling ritual formula to refer to it (72, 74) (fig. 1.6).

71 m; *mi cha—*
Will you—
72 *mi- mi muk' chanup jtz'uj kunen ch'amem vo*? *kumpa*
Won't you sip a bit of my little bit of poured-off water, *compadre*?

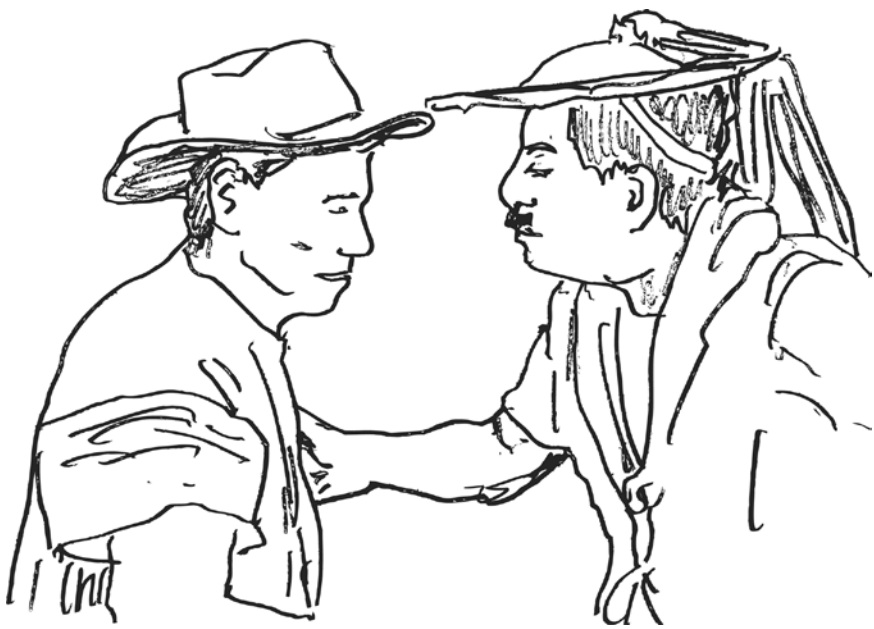

Figure 1.6. The ritual adviser offers a ceremonial drink to the old man.

73 p; *jej?*
Huh?
74 m; *mi muk' chanup jtz'uj kunen ch'amem voʔ?*
Won't you sip a bit of my little poured-off water?
75 p; *oy ach'amem voʔ?*
You have some poured-off water?

P, as custom dictates, demurs by referring to his incapacities (78, 82):

76 *yo:s*
Lord!
[
77 m; *oy jch'amem voʔ*
I have poured off water.
78 p; *yuʔun me mu xkil un kumpa*
But I can't see, compadre.
[
79 m; *vaʔi*
Here.
80 *muʔyuk aʔa*
No, you can't.
81 *vaʔi*
Here.
82 p; *jaʔ xʔelan lisoke:*
Since I am disabled.
[
83 m; *paso preva jtz'uj*
Just try a little.

M, as custom also dictates, insists, using a phrase lifted from cargo prayer (84). P (85, 89) and M (87, 88) then exchange formulaic drinking salutations:

84 *chʔech' o me sk'in ti jtotik santorensoe*
To celebrate the fiesta of Our Father San Lorenzo.
[
85 p; *kich'ban kumpa:*
I take it, compadre.
86 *kolaval ta (jnup) to*
Thank you, I will sip it.
[

87 m; *ich'o kumpare*
Take it, compadre.
88 *ich'o kumpare*
Take it, compadre.
[
89 p; *kich'ban kumpare*
I take it, compadre.

In normal circumstances, when a cargoholder or his proxy offers a drink, the recipient takes three long swigs from the bottle, each one bracketed by verbal insistence and exchanged toasts, before the interaction can close. Here, there can be no insistence (although there is an echo of it in M's pre-offer in 93), but P himself shortcuts the ritual by touching M's bottle to his lips three times before returning it with multiple thanks (91, 92, 94) (fig. 1.7). M acknowledges P's thanks with his own standard self-deprecatory formula (95–96):

91 p; *kolaval kumpa:*
Thank you, compadre.
92 *(kolaval lach'amem voʔ kumpa)*
Thank you for your liquor, compadre.
[

Figure 1.7. The old man drinks three times.

93 m; *mi xuʔ o chavaʔi kumpa*
Is that enough for you, compadre?
94 p; *kolaval xchiʔuk kajvaltik*
Thank you and Our Lord.
[
95 m; *jset'-*
a little
96 *jset' tajme:k*
Just a little.

Conclusion

I began with a straightforward example of permeable generic boundaries, in which the Mexico City *merolico* imported simulacra of religious and magical language into his performance, apparently to draw on their coercive power. I then considered different sorts of Zinacantec ritual communications, trying to arrange them along scales of formulaicity, contextual presupposition, and embeddedness in wider ceremonial activities, recalling that language is just one component in a whole-body performance. Finally, I presented a short Zinacantec interaction to illustrate how resonances of an entire ritual life permeate even a brief, chance encounter on the road.

Ritual communication in Zinacantán begins with form: from the highly structured parallelism of prayer to the plain repetition of secular genres; from the echoing responsiveness of cargo greetings to the minimal formulaic responses of common courtesy; from morphological elaboration of paired lexical doublets to creative lexical distortion in punning or proliferated affective verbs and positional roots in male boasting. In Zinacantán there hardly seems to exist any completely nonformulaic, unmarked conversation, any talk that is generically uncontaminated (i.e., allusive) or—correlatively—socially nonprojective. For form is linked to force. Every communicative act, even at its most truncated, carries both its formulaic load and its socially indexical resonances. Ritual language is linked to ritual not simply by being part of it but from a prospective and retrospective reliance on it. Even a mocking allusion to matrimonial exhortation recalls past marriages and anticipates future unions. The old man's life as a ritual officeholder and his truncated phrases of ceremonial courtesy energize an entire ritual apparatus in miniature.

Different time lines exist in ritual communication as well. One is the familiar Bakhtinian chain of utterances, a kind of discursive time in

which every utterance looks both forward and backward. Another is the course of a life. We know little about how ritualized forms of talk are learned in Zinacantán. Some children seem to know the cadence of prayer even before they know words (Lourdes de León, personal communication). Contrarily, some old people manage to pass through life, even through ritual office, without apparently learning more than how to mumble a few parallel couplets. Who are the master speakers, the apprentices, the bumblers? My aged *compadre*'s "little ritual" on the road demonstrates the weight of biography and of social history more generally on even the briefest communicative encounters.

A final theme has been the coercion of ritual forms, a variant of Bloch's argument that what he calls "formalized language" in political oratory "is a way whereby one speaker can coerce the response of another [and thus] … can be seen as a form of social control" (Bloch 1975a: 20), and further, that formulaic language, being the special province of experts, "is thus a form of power for the powerful rather than simply a tool of coercion available to anybody" (1975: 23). The *merolico* almost magically manipulates his crowd, inducing members of the public to move arms and tongues. The curer controls patient and spirits alike. The tipsy haranguer brings even the insubordinate child into line. The blind old man's courtesy extracts due respect almost despite his own self-deprecation, as though his very person—invoked by his words—embodies the entire ritual hierarchy to which he has dedicated himself.

The coercive force of ritual forms of talk (and ritual action more generally) and their ability to smooth out potential conflict by suppressing insubordination are evident not only in the vignettes presented here but also in Zinacantec metatheory. To the person who, from incapacity or inattention, fails to respond to a greeting, a toast, or a ritual formula, one says *Tak'avan la* 'Answer the person!' The bowed head needs to be touched; the first half of the couplet cries out for its second half. Ritual form, that is, implies both an interactive and a moral order, implicit in the Tzotzil couplet for "wisdom": *jp'el // chaʔ p'el, rason // mantal* 'one word // two words, of reason // of order'.

Notes

Some material in this chapter was presented during an invited talk at SALSA at the University of Texas, Austin, in April 2005. I am indebted to the organizers

of that session and to other participants for their comments, as well as to the other participants at the Wenner-Gren symposium in Sintra that gave rise to the current volume.

1. In fact prayer is virtually the only form of Zinacantec speech that does not *require* specific interactive uptake in the form of highly repetitive and almost institutionalized "back channel." The role of *jtak'vanej,* or "answerer" (Haviland 1988, 1996) is a near requisite for most Zinacantec speech. When someone addresses a group, one person usually assumes the role of the official answerer, supplying appropriate assessments and continuers (Goodwin 1986; Goodwin and Goodwin 1987), usually in the form of partial repetitions. Without such a ratified addressee, speech quickly falters and grinds to a halt. Gossen (1985: 88) claims that the phase-final enclitic *-e* in Tzotzil provides "a cue to listeners for appropriate moments in which to offer supportive or participatory statements," that is, "back-channel" (Yngve 1970).