CHAPTER 16

MAYAN CONVERSATION AND INTERACTION

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1. INTRODUCTION

When I first came to Zinacantán, early in the summer of 1966, I had been schooled in basic Tsotsil grammar and etiquette as part of preparation for fieldwork in high-land Chiapas. This linguistic orientation went along with other sorts of training: practicing for involuntary bouts of heavy drinking, learning to take "fieldnotes" on ritual by attending my first Catholic Mass, and enrolling in a "field medicine" course in which I learned dosages for antibiotics, how to stave off dehydration, per-form CPR, temporarily fill teeth, and ultimately pull them out with just pliers and a screwdriver. The elements of Zinacantec Tsotsil my first teachers imparted to me were roughly parallel to carpenter's tools for performing oral surgery: they hardly began to prepare me for my immediate project (studying "traditional" Zinacantec stringed instrument music), let alone for the topic I ultimately pursued (quotidian gossip) in this Mayan community. Over the course of my first summer in Zinacantán I gained basic competence in conversational Tsotsil and enough novice skills at interacting with Zinacantecs to be able to feign humanity in at least some situations. I had, however, learned a more fundamental anthropological lesson: if you can't converse with people in the ordinary circumstances of life, you don't know the rel-evant language(s) well enough.

My interest in conversation and interaction in Mayan languages thus grew not from theory but from personal need. I was simply very bad at interacting with Tsotsil speakers. Subsequently, I think everything I tried to learn about Tsotsil derived from the desire to address my woeful inadequacy as a conversational partner.

There are two apparently competing strands in recent work on conversation and interaction, and this chapter on such research with Mayan languages reflects my own view of how to balance their opposing motives. On the one hand, recent proposals about a human interactional substrate that underlies quite different conversational tra-ditions or "talk in interaction" (Schegloff 2006), presume quite general, flexible, and widely shared mechanisms. On the other, my own experience – that learning to talk appropriately in unfamiliar circumstances is maddeningly difficult – suggests that the particularities of conversation and interaction from one circumstance to another may vary both widely and deeply. Mayan conversation and interaction have contributed a surprising amount to recent debates, and one aim of this chapter is to urge Mayanists to expand this contribution with further comparative work, emphasizing both distinct "cultural" styles as well as possible commonalities across the regions where Mayan languages are spoken.

2. INTERACTION

In early ethnography in Zinacantán notions of interaction were variously employed to characterize interpersonal relations, as part of the fundamental research on demography and ethnography in the Harvard Chiapas Project. Francesca Cancian (1964), for example, wrote about "the quantity and quality of interaction" in Zinacantec families – by which she meant "patterns of affection, dominance and interaction rate among household members" (p. 542). She based her coding scheme, derived from contemporary studies of small groups, on sequences of action involving both spoken Tsotsil and associated behaviors (for instance, a child's whining and being responded to, first with verbal "affection" from his mother, and then by being given something). At around the same time, to give a quite different example, T. Berry Brazelton (1972) was observing Zinacantec births and evaluating mother-child "interactions" through the cheerfully ethnocentric lens of his famous Cambridge (Massachusetts) pediatric practice. Brazelton and his colleagues monitored twelve infants of various ages from one to nine months and documented "mother-child interactions" over four-hour periods, annotating such "mothering activities" as "glances at infant's face," "number of times of talking to infant," "number of breast feedings," and "minutes held in *rebozo*." As "infant activities" Brazelton included minutes awake, "vocalizations," or "mouthing" of hands, and so on. In an explicit comparison with "mother-child patterns in our own culture," Brazelton remarks, among other things, that "mothers rarely attempted to elicit social responses from their infants by looking at their faces or talking to them. Even during feedings when the mother would preen the baby, her glances were perfunctory and without expectation of response" (1972:102).

Both these examples of early Chiapas ethnography derived from specific concerns with the quality and quantity of what Goffman (1957) called the "communion of reciprocally sustained involvement" (p. 49) between different social entities, conceived either as individuals (a mother and her child) or as relevantly defined social categories (parents and children, siblings, adults, and so on). Recent work on interaction has concentrated less on specific kinds of interactants and the resultant properties of their interaction, and more on general principles which enable and constrain different sorts of mutual human involvement – shared attention and attunement, reciprocal engagement, coordination, joint action or commitment to action, and intersecting moral stances (see Clark 1996; Enfield et al. 2014, for recent treatments).

Starting with mother-child interactions – the central raw material for both Cancian and Brazelton – has a compelling motive: if one of the hallmarks of our species is the protracted dependence of human infants on their caregivers, something must guarantee that particular locus of "sustained involvement"; and babies must be fed, whether in the Zinacantec or the Harvard Square manner. In much the same way, recent proposals about a shared interactional substrate for human sociality (Levinson [2006] postulates a human "interaction engine") anticipate quite specific interactional mechanisms, to be found wherever humans are, although inflected in locally specific ways. (Such inflections will, of course, themselves require interactional transmission.) There is an immediate link to conversation, in that human sociality finds what has been called its "primordial site" (Schegloff 1996) in conversational interchanges. Indeed, a strong motivation for the resulting program of research has been the conviction that many properties of ordinary conversation, often identified originally through close scrutiny of American English telephone calls, have remarkably close parallels in quite unrelated languages, circumstances, and communicative traditions.

Levinson's leading example derives from a short paper by the pioneers of conversation analysis (Sacks and Schegloff 1979) who proposed two usually coordinated but occasionally competing principles for initial references to persons in conversation (one calling for a formulation adequate to the mutual recognition of the person referred to, the other for a "minimal" referring expression which supplies no more information than required – both principles obviously calling for some calculations about speaker and hearer's mutual knowledge). Levinson argues that similar principles seem to apply to conversational exchanges in quite different and unrelated languages on which he has worked. Such a perspective both narrows and broadens earlier research on "interaction" by focusing it squarely on conversational interaction, but opening it up to the manifold circumstances in which such interaction occurs and to the seemingly limitless purposes it serves in social life. Mayan languages have, perhaps accidentally, played a central part in this program of research. A subsequent collection of studies (Enfield and Stivers 2007) explores Levinson's hypothesis by examining conversational references to person in nine languages, three of which happen to be Mayan (Tseltal, Tsotsil, and Yucatec – see Brown 2007, Hanks 2007, and Haviland 2007). Similarly, three out of the four chapters in the "Culture and sociality" section of Enfield and Levinson (2006) are about Mayan languages, adding Mopan to the mix (Danziger 2006).

Note that the study of conversation implies an empirical reach that extends beyond the normal Boasian triad of grammar, vocabulary, and text. Indeed, recent studies of conversation rely on technology – audio and video recording – that makes possible corpora of iconic representations of naturally occurring linguistic interaction simply not available to linguists in the days of Boas and Sapir. Furthermore, current standards of transcription call into serious doubt earlier textual representations of many of the conversational genres of central interest to anthropology: not only interviews and "traditional narratives" (whose interactive provenance is frequently excised entirely from text collections), but also oratory, prayer, scolding, insults, and jokes (frequently rendered monologically in text despite their deep embeddedness in multi-party performances), or even audio recorded "natural" conversational exchanges (which can only serve as pale mnemonics of the corporeal and spatially extended interactions of which they were originally a part). Given the ubiquity of cameras – found on the cell phones in most Indian pockets in present-day Chiapas, for example – slightly less limited representations of talk are accessible now to most fieldworkers, although managing the resulting volume of digital recordings remains a challenge. Videorecording conversation opens to analytical attention those aspects of human interaction which are visible but not audible, notably sign, gesture, orientation, gaze, and how interactants deploy themselves (and their body parts) in space.

3. CONVERSATION IN MAYAN

Many linguists have pointed out the massive use of conversation and "quoted" dialogue in Mayan narrative, suggesting that the organization of conversation is centrally important to the analysis of any large textual corpus. (See, for example, Laughlin 1977; Burns 1980). But for which Mayan languages do we have information about conversation? Despite more than half a century of modern research on Mayan languages, surprisingly little work has been done on the ordinary contexts of their use in daily life.

Research from Chiapas in the 1960s and early 1970s produced monumental textual studies of particular marked speech genres in Tsotsil, including discourses of marriage (Laughlin 1963; J. Collier 1968), insults (Bricker 1973b), jokes and ritual humor (Bricker

1973a, 1980), proverbs (Gossen 1973), legal discourse (J. Collier 1973), dreams (Laughlin 1976), verbal dueling (Gossen 1976), folktales (Laughlin 1977), and gossip (Haviland 1977a&b). Indeed, this early era produced some of the classic taxonomic studies of speech genres as ethnolinguistic categories in the "ethnography of speaking" tradition (Bricker 1974; Gossen 1971, 1974a, b), deriving from Tsotsil terminology for kinds of speech. Gossen's influential handbook article on Tsotsil literature (Gossen 1985) also developed in some detail the kinds of linguistic parallelism found in Tsotsil, and reported throughout the Mayan area and more widely in Mesoamerica.

A second wave of research, partly building on the first, uncovered some of the central features of ordinary talk in a slightly wider range of Mayan languages. In no particular order, here are some of the important contributors and languages involved, emphasizing research on interaction and conversation rather than other topics.

In Tenejapa, Penelope Brown launched a series of detailed conversational studies of Tseltal which continue to the present and which set the standard for ethnographic perspicacity, contextual embedding, transcriptional detail, and theoretical currency. After her dissertation on gender and interaction (Brown 1979), to cite only a few, she has incorporated conversational materials into studies of politeness (Brown 1980, 1990), irony (Brown 1995), repetition, especially its possible role in language acquisition (Brown 1998), and – as part of recent detailed cross-linguistic studies pursuing the "interaction engine" idea – detailed analyses of both person reference (Brown 2007) and question-answer sequences in Tseltal conversation (Brown 2010).

Jill Brody has described notable conversational features in Tojolab'al, particularly the prevalence of what she calls "repetition" (Brody 1986, 1994) and "indirection," especially in women's speech (Brody 1991, 1993, 1996). She has also analyzed discourse particles, derived from conversational as well as monologic and broadcast sources (Brody 1987, 2000a, b).

William Hanks has delved deeply into Yucatec conversation as part of his wider studies of both the modern and the colonial languages, concentrating on how language is simultaneously situated in physical and social surrounds (Hanks 1990, 1992, 1993, 1996b). In particular, his detailed work on divinatory practices by a Yucatec shaman, with whom he had a long and close apprenticeship, locate generic particularities in a wider range of interactional practices (Hanks 1984, 1996a, 2006, 2007).

My own work on Zinacantec Tsotsil began with a quintessentially conversational activity: gossiping about one's neighbors (Haviland 1977a, b, 1998). It moved on to teasing and arguing (Haviland 1986, 1987, 1996, 1997, 2005b, 2010), with excursions into prayer and other highly structured genres in Zinacantec ritual that often leak into quotidian interaction (Haviland 1994, 2000b, 2009), along with other more general conversational mechanisms (Haviland 2007). The work on gossip naturally led to issues of certainty, evidence, responsibility, and information flow as marked in talk (Haviland and Haviland 1982, 1983; Haviland 1988, 1989, 2002, 2005c). Shifting from always carrying around an audio recorder to routinely inflicting video cameras on my Zinacantec companions, I also embarked on the study of gesture in interaction (Haviland 2000a, 2003, 2005a).

Since the early efflorescence of work on spontaneous talk, a number of younger researchers, working on a variety of Mayan languages, have launched a series of investigations relying on corpora of natural conversation. Eve Danziger has used conversational data (including spontaneous gesture) to examine conceptualization in a variety of semantic domains – especially kinship and spatial cognition (Danziger 1994, 1998, 1999, 2001, 2004). Danziger has also recently joined debates on sociality and intersubjectivity

based on evidence from Mopan conversational exchanges (Danziger 2006, 2010, 2013), as has Kevin Groark, in his dissertation and a set of thoughtful papers on interpersonal awareness, empathy, and expressivity among Chamula Tsotsil speakers (Groark 2005, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2013) based on interviews and conversation. Robin Shoaps produced a series of studies of what she calls "moral irony" in Sakapultek (Shoaps 2004, 2007, 2009b), a conversational usage that combines modal particles with an ironic position- ing that helps "co-construct [. . .] the evaluative stance" that gives it a moral character (Shoaps 2007:323). Rightly (in my view) insisting on basing her analyses on "natural- ly-occurring Sakapultek speech events" – data "from indigenous speech events and . . . not the response to elicitation or informal interviews with the researcher" (ibid: 298, and fn. 3) – even when she analyzes a scandalous parodic ritual text written in Span- ish, Shoaps (2009a) takes pains to link its mechanisms to devices common in quotidian Sakapultek scolding and gossip, as well as in more structured dispute settlement. Olivier Le Guen has brought considerable insight about the workings of everyday Yucatec talk – including systematic uses of gesture – to his varied and growing corpus of cognitively oriented studies, concentrating first on space and deixis, and moving through domains as varied as time, emotion, and the "supernatural" (Le Guen 2006, 2011b, 2012a, b; see also Le Guen and Pool Balam 2012). Conversationally based studies have also begun to appear in the academic productions of young native-speaking Mayan scholars, a point to which I return at the end of the chapter.

Worth special mention in this bibliographic survey are the important contributions to the study of language socialization and acquisition by researchers who have studied spontaneous interaction among children and with their caregivers in different parts of the Maya area. Especially notable for analyzing conversational sequences – sometimes with both audio and video recordings – is the ongoing collaboration by Penny Brown (Tseltal), Lourdes de León (Tsotsil), Barbara Pfeiler (Yucatec), and Cliff Pye (K'ichee'), sometimes joined by Pedro Mateo Pedro (Q'anjob'al, Mam, Chol, and Chuj), and their individual contributions to the study of socialization into Mayan languages – too numer- ous and varied to characterize here. (See Pye et al. 2007, and Brown et al. 2013 for repre- sentative comparative examples; note also the individual bibliography entries for de León and Brown.) Although psychological work on children's interaction tends to rely more on "coding" than "transcription" (see, for example, Chavajay and Rogoff 1999, 2002), an important exception is the extended work by Suzanne Gaskins on Yucatec children (for example, Gaskins 1996, 1999, 2006), along with that of Ashley Maynard on Tsotsil (for example, Maynard 2002; Greenfield et al. 2003; Rabain-Jamin et al. 2003). The role of children in managing information through conversation has also been a theme in Mayan communities (e.g., Berman 2011).

Although one would expect spontaneous conversation to be a fundamental source for understanding bilingual choices, despite ubiquitous bi- (or multi-)lingualism in Mayan communities, rather few conversational studies seem to be based on such empirical mate- rial (but see Haviland 1984; French 2001; Collins 2005; Barrett 2008; Choi 2011).

4. "ORDINARY" CONVERSATION IN TSOTSIL

Mayan languages bring into focus several central issues in recent studies of conversation and interaction. One is the very nature of what constitutes "ordinary talk" as a "general organization of interaction" (Schegloff 2006:72), the main formal characteristic of which Schegloff identifies by the rubric "one speaker at a time." Departures from such a rule are taken to require specific, non-generic organizational or institutional arrangements which

Schegloff characterizes as "unsustainable" (ibid, and see fn. 3) as a default interactional device, by contrast with the general-purpose mechanisms for turn allocation postulated by Sacks et al (1974). Introducing a comparative study of question-response sequences in ten languages Enfield et al (2010) are somewhat less noncommittal about the nature of ordinary, "unconstrained" conversation. Their "contributors used only data from maximally informal social interaction in familiar settings between people who knew each other well. None of the data were institutional or staged. Because of significant cultural variation in terms of when conversation is least constrained, the specific activity context varied" (2617). Thus, whereas such "maximally informal" conversation in Italian or American English might take place over a meal, "Tseltal . . . speakers hardly talk while eating" (Enfield et al. 2010:2618).

Tseltal, one of the languages included in the study (Stivers et al. 2009; Enfield et al. 2010; especially Brown 2010; Enfield et al. 2012), is reported to behave like the other languages with respect both to preference patterns for how replies to questions are structured and organized, and to the timing of a response following a question. Here is one area in which further detailed study of Mayan conversation would contribute to a developing research effort. But what sort of "conversation" would be involved? Are Mayans *ever* on the kind of mutual footing that allows them to compete equally for such interactive resources as the conversational floor?

Apparently by contrast with their Tseltal neighbors, Tsotsil speakers almost *always* talk while eating – at least in the Zinacantec houses I frequent – and in many other circumstances as well, whether formal (whatever that might mean [Irvine 1979]) or not. Moreover, meals themselves – as well as the talk that occurs within them – are relatively more or less pre-structured depending on what the occasion is (a morning meal in the cornfield shelter vs. a post-baptismal repast in the parents' home, to take two opposing examples) and who is present (for example, a hired laborer from another *municipio* in the former case, vs. wealthy new godparents, who may be either older or younger than the hosts in the latter). There are also social interactions which move smoothly between phases, in some of which control and management of the conversational floor may be explicitly at issue. In Zinacantán for example, meals may begin with an exchange of empty pleasantries by those seated at a table, interspersed with side conversations directed at the cooks (sharing the eating space although perhaps clustered around a fire), followed by talk dedicated to getting the food appropriately served, then a heavily conventionalized series of polite exchanges inviting all assembled to eat, after which there may ensue an apparently more extemporaneous dinner time discussion, usually clearly "led" by a senior male, and ultimately a ritualized exchange of thanks as dishes are removed, water proffered to wash hands, and so on.

Indeed, in Zinacantán, meals often provoke special linguistics registers. Inviting a guest to an impromptu meal, a Zinacantec woman may start by passing a bowl of warmed water, asking "Mi ch-a-'atin?" (Q ICP-B2-wash) "Will you wash?" At a more ritually elevated meal, water will be placed on the table, and the most senior male will instead intone to each commensal, in descending order of rank, "*jax j-k'ob-tik, X*" (A1+wash A1-hand-1PL.INCL), "Let us wash, X" where the verb *jax* (which also means brush, or card [wool]) suggests a kind of self-deprecatory "pass our hands through water" and X is whatever address term is appropriate for the particular personal dyad involved. The interlocutor will repeat the formula, substituting the appropriate reciprocal address term.

The point of the example – or of the more general possibility that *all* conversation, at least in places like Zinacantán, is subject to ritual constraints (Haviland 2009) – is not to minimize the importance of a general-purpose turn-taking mechanism, but to point out that a "default" kind of conversation where such a mechanism unproblematically

applies will require ethnographic justification, perhaps beginning with an "ethnography of speaking"-style catalogue of "kinds of talk" complemented by analysis of the varieties of speech actually revealed on the ground.

For example, there exists a genre of hyper-polite Zinacantec "small talk" (as I call it – the genre is unlabeled in Tsotsil, as far as I am aware) which is both topically vacant and sequentially constrained. All turns are short. Moreover, the polite conventions of Tsotsil require that an interlocutor produce a spoken, if minimal, response for every few words a speaker utters. The result is a dense stream of more or less equal length utterances between conversationalists.

Consider the following extracts from a conversation between my compadre P and A, the magistrate of his village, which took place at the crack of dawn one morning when I accompanied P who wanted to resolve a land dispute with his sons. As is customary, before launching into the serious business of bringing formal complaints, P began with a variety of this "small talk." Fragment (1) presents the first part of P's conversation with the magistrate, a polite exchange about the weather and the resulting state of the cornfields.[1]

TSOTSIL ZINACANTÁN (transcribed audio conversation recorded 21 July 1993)   AuQ2

(1) P and A begin to talk[2]

1 a; li   x-Ø-mal   ali. chabje   le'
       ART   ASP-B3-set(sun)   ART two.days.ago there
       'Late, uh, day before yesterday there (in my cornfield)'

2   pero k'un i-Ø-k'ot
       But   soft CP-B3-arrive
       'Soft (rain) arrived.'

3 p; k'un i-Ø-k'ot
       soft CP-B3-arrive
       'Soft (rain) arrived'

4 a; k'un
       soft
       'Soft.'

5 p; pero . k'u   s-muk'-tikil un
       but what A3-large-PL CL
       'But how big is (your corn)?'

6 a; lek   y-unen s-muk'-tikil   une
       good A3-small A3-large-PL   CL
       'It's got a good little size.'

7 p; a   yech
       ah thus
       'Is that so?'
          [

8 a;   lek   i-Ø-yal-e
         good CP-B3-descend-CL
         'It (rained) pretty well.'

9 p; aa
       ah
       'Ah.'
          [

10 a; jii
       yes
       'Yes.'

The next part of the same conversation, in (2), displays a characteristic feature of formally polite Zinacantec interaction: a high degree of repetitiveness. Elaborate repetition, where one man echoes exact phrases or close variants of his interlocutor's previous turn, and subsequently is re-echoed by the other, is apparent. Substantively, the two men multiply repeated the observations (a) at lines 12–17 that A's cornfield was not infested by worms, (b) at lines 20–23 that the cornfields now simply needed more rain, (c) at lines 24–28 that they would just have to wait and see if it rained in the next couple of days, and (d) at lines 30–33, again, that the corn needed rain immediately.

TSOTSIL ZINACANTÁN (conversation recorded 21 July 1993)

(2) P and A exchange small talk

11	p;	muk' bu x-chanul a'a
		NEG where A3-animal EVID
		'It doesn't have any worms, does it?'

12	a;	ch'abal
		NEG
		'No.'

13	p;	ch'abal?
		NEG
		'No?'

14	a;	ch'abal
		NEG
		'No.'

15	p;	aa
		ah.
		'Ah.'

16	a;	ch'abal a'a
		NEG EVID
		'No, none.'

17	p;	ch'abal une
		NEG CL
		'None, then.'
		[

18	a;	jii
		yes.
		'Yes.'

19	p;	y-u'un lek o
		A3-because good REL
		'Well, that's good.'

20		ja' nox. k'u ora ch-Ø-k'ot y-a'lel kik un
		! only what hour ICP-B3-arrive A3-water EVID CL
		'It just depends on when it gets some moisture.'

21		ja' to (mi yaxub)
		! STILL Q CP+B3+become_green
		'If only it stays moist/green.'

22   a;   [
              ja' nox u:n
              ! only CL
              'That's all.'

23   p;   ja' to yu'van
              ! still EVID
              It just depends on that.

24   a;   y-u'nan   ta k'el-el   kik mi x-Ø-k'ot   li ok'ob   ch[...]
              A3-cause+EVID PREP see-NMLZ EVID Q ASP-B3-arrive ART tomorrow day_after
              One must just wait and see if perhaps it rains tomorrow or the next day

26   p;   puta y-u'un   ja' ta   k'el-el
              EXPL A3-cause ! PREP see-NMLZ
              Damn, one just has to see.

27   a;   y-u'n   me un
              A3-cause EVID CL
              That's right.

28   p;   ja' yu'van
              ! EVID
              Yes, indeed.

29   a;   [
                 jii
                  Yes
                  Yes.

30   p;   puta y-u'un xa.   tz-k'an   vo'   bi a'a
              EXPL A3-cause already ICP+A3-want water EVID EVID
              Damn, it really does want rain, eh?

31   a;   y-u'n   me tz-k'an   un
              A3-cause EVID ICP+A3-want CL
              Yes, it really does.

32   p;   tana yu'van
              soon EVID
              Soon, indeed.

33   a;   y-u'un   me
              A3-cause EVID
              Indeed.

Contrasting with such a conversational context – where there were pronounced but conflicting asymmetries in age and status between the participants, and where, although the conversation started out with empty pleasantries, a matter of great potential import about land and inheritance was meant to be broached – excerpt (3) is drawn from a much less consequential, casual encounter between two Zinacantec neighbors, shown as M and X on the transcripts. They were gossiping about a truck crash involving hamlet-mates that took place in Mexico City far from the village where they now sat. M asked X who was driving, to determine whether or not the driver was at fault.

TSOTSIL ZINACANTÁN (conversation videotaped 16 July 1990)
(3)   a.   m;   much'u s-pas   manejar

        Who (CP+)A3-do drive
        'Who was driving'

b.   pero ja' li pancho ta   nachij
        but !   ART Francisco PREP Nachij
        'But it (must have) been Francisco from (the village of) Nachij'

                                                     [

c.   x;   ja' li pancho   ta   nachij une
                                      !   ART Francisco PREP Nachij CL
                                      'It was Francisco from Nachij.'

Fragment (4) shows how the two neighbors went on to identify some of the people injured in the crash.

TSOTSIL ZINACANTÁN (conversation videotaped 16 July 1990)

(4)

a.   x;   ali jil chepil b.
              ART EXPL Joey   name
              'It was that whatsisname – Joey B.'

b.   chepil b.   le', lok'-em j- ch'ul-me'tik-e
        Joey   name there, exit-PRF AGTV-hold-mother-CL
        'Joey B.   there, the former (Mayordomo) of the Virgen.'

For a final example, contrast with the previous extracts the form and style in excerpt (5) of a quite distinct spoken genre, a fragment of a monologic Tsotsil "prayer" taken from a much longer interaction – a cornfield protection ceremony at the annual *k'in krus* 'Fiesta of the Cross' in May – in which a Zinacantec shaman or *j'ilol* was contracted by a group of farmers to help guarantee a successful crop. He began his prayer by addressing the spirit of the place, known (but not named in these circumstances) as *y-ajval balamil* (A3-owner earth) 'lord of the earth,' and conceived of as a greedy *ladino* or non-Indian, protecting his wealth and always on the lookout for the souls of incautious humans whom he could put to work as slaves. The shaman explained in the formally parallel doublets or triplets of prayer that the cornfield's human owners had come to beg for his intercession to prevent misfortunes: excessive wind, poor rain, falls, accidents, snakes. Here, the shaman knelt at an improvised cross erected at the edge of a recently planted cornfield, to ask various supernatural entities for their intercession.

TSOTSIL ZINACANTÁN (curing ceremony videotaped 12 May 2002)

(5) a.   y-u'un ch-ul   xa   s-k'an-ik a-pertonal
           A3-cause ICP-(B3)-arrive already A3-want-PL A2-pardon
           'Because they arrive here to ask for your pardon'

     b.   o'lol   balamil //³ o'lol   vinajel
          middle earth   middle heaven
          'Center of earth // center of heaven'

     c.   ja' ch-a-s-ta-ik   o ta na'-el //
        ¡   ICP-B2-A3-find-PL REL PREP know-NMLZ //
              ch-a-s-ta-ik   o ta   k'opon-el
              ICP-B2-A3-find-PL REL PREP speak-NMLZ

'So they encounter you in thought // they encounter you in speech'

  d.   yech′o ch′ul vinajel // ch′ul balamil // ch′ul rey
           thus   holy heaven // holy earth   // holy king
           'So it is, holy heaven, holy earth, holy king.'

  e.   mu me x-a-maj   // mu me x-av-ut
           NEG CL ASP-A3-beat // NEG CL ASP-A3-scold
           'Do not beat them // do not rebuke them.'
           . . . ((several lines omitted here))

  f.   komon me ti k′op=e   // komon   me ti   rason=e
           common CL ART word=CL // common CL ART reason=CL
           'May your words and reasoning be shared.'

  g.   san kixtoval j-tot   // san kixtoval   k-ajval
           St. Christopher A1-father // St. Christopher A1-lord
           St. Christopher, my father // St. Christopher, my lord'

  h.   kalvaryo ch′ul totil // marya ch′ul me'il
           Calvario holy father // Maria holy mother
           'Holy Father Calvario // Holy mother Mary'

  i.   y-u'un me jun-uk y-o'on k'usi y-epal
           A3-cause CL one-SUBJ A3-heart what A3-amount
           'May they be content for however much'

  j.   chanav-ik   // ch-bein-ik
           ICP+(B3)+travel-PL // ICP-(B3)-journey-PL
           'they travel // they journey.'

5. CONVERSATIONAL STRUCTURE

In what follows, I will refer to these examples of Tsotsil talk to illustrate several issues of interest in the study of conversational interaction, to which Mayan languages have contributed significantly – and should contribute more! They include (a) conversational "responses" and repetition, (b) formulation and "recipient design," and (c) "repair" and intersubjectivity.

5.1. Responses

The notion of an "interaction engine" invokes a possibly universal human "response system" (e.g., Brown 2010) and also a "feedback system" (recall Yngve's [1970] original notion of conversational "back-channel"), both linked to the allocation of turns at talk. Tseltal and Tsotsil have been claimed to institutionalize a kind of dyadic ideal even in multiparty conversation, with a single "respondent" serving as a foil – providing feedback – for a main speaker or narrator (Haviland 1986, 1988b, 1997; Brown 2010). The rate and nature of the feedback – what in Tsotsil is labeled with various derivatives of the root *tak′* 'answer (a person)' (Haviland 2010) – is of considerable comparative and theoretical interest. England (1987), for example, speculates that the amount of repetition in narrative may be an index of "language vitality." Students of child language have also found in dialogic repetition a possible source for specific details of Mayan language acquisition (Pye 1986; Brown 1998, 2014; de Leon 2007).

The applicative form of the Tsotsil root – *tak′* is *-tak'be* 'answer back.' Its syntactic direct object refers to the person to whose words one responds. A social adept knows

the proper responses in a wide variety of situations, to many sorts of speakers; he can be almost anyone's interlocutor. By contrast, the socially inept – a child, a fool, a 'leftover'[4] who has never learned the social graces – 'does not know what to answer'[5] when spoken to. Or, 'like a deaf person,' he will 'answer to one side,'[6] saying something inappropriate if he says anything at all. To say of someone that *mu s-tak' lo'il* (NEG A3-answer talk) 'he doesn't answer conversation' is to dismiss him as interactively clumsy and incompetent: someone who can't even defend himself verbally from a joke or an insult. On the other hand, if someone *lek l-i-s-tak'-be* (good CP-B1-A3-answer-BEN) 'answered me well,' she or he has either topped me in a verbal duel (out-answered me, as it were) or acceded to my request.

Explicit Zinacantec etiquette governs responsiveness. Talk requires uptake. Polite behavior typically comes in paired turns. In salutation, the younger person bows, the older releases, touching the first person's forehead. I greet you on the path with a polite "I'm going," and you counter with "Go, then!" When, in a toast, a first part (*k-ich'-b-an* [A1-take-BEN-B2.IRR] 'let me take it (for you)') goes without its matching reply (*ich'-o* [take-IMP] 'take it!') someone will invariably remind the delinquent speaker with *tak'av-an*[7] *la* (answer-IMP EVID) 'answer, they say!' (i.e., "answer, since someone is talking to you"). Indeed, conversation in Tsotsil, no matter how many potential interlocutors may be involved, normally reduces itself to an apparent dialogue between speaker and unique interlocutor: the first saying what there is to say, and the other *tak'be* 'answering him.'

The apparent mechanics of Tsotsil 'answering back' are especially plain in the introductory exchanges between P and A in excerpt (1) above. An interlocutor has available a variety of resources for constructing a responsive turn. Most prominently, he can simply repeat if not the entire previous clause then at least its major parts: verb or other predicate. Thus, in excerpt (1) line 2 is A's observation that recent rains were light: *pero k'un i-Ø-k'ot* (but soft CP-B3-arrive); the next two lines recycle this material: line 3, P's repeat of *k'un i-Ø-k'ot* (soft CP-B3-arrive) 'lit., soft it-arrived,' and A's line 4, *k'un* 'soft.' Lexical variants, such as the alternation between the expression with an explicit negative *muk' bu* (NEG where), i.e., 'there isn't any' and *ch'abal* 'none, not exist,' derived from the 'positional' root of non-existence *ch'ab*, provide raw material for extended sequences of repetition such as that at lines 11–17. A number of evidential particles and clitics are also available for embellishing a repeated phrase. For example, P's turn at line 30, when shorn of various evidentials, has as its heart *tzk'an vo'* 'lit., it wants rain.' A's reply, at line 31, prepends an evidential linkage and appends the otherwise empty phrasal enclitic *un*.[8] Then there are a variety of ready-made responses: 'assent' or 'agreement' markers (*aa* 'oh' and *ji*['] 'yes,' lines 9 and 10, or lines 15 and 18), expressions of 'news receipt' like *a yech* 'oh, is that so?' (line 7), or expressions of emphatic agreement like *yu'un me* 'indeed, that's why' (lines 27 and 33).

For several Tsotsil conversations, I have charted the volume of talk between the various speakers measured crudely in terms of the approximate number of syllables per turn. Such a syllable count, coupled with the alternating structure of utterance and response in Tsotsil, allows one to calculate a ratio of one person's talk to another's. In the opening sections of P's conversation with the magistrate in example (1) above, P has four turns which average 3.25 syllables per turn, while A's five turns average 5.2 syllables each. Figure 16.1 is a graphical representation of this syllable-per-turn measure. Each of P's turns is represented by a small square whose height corresponds to its number of syllables. The corresponding syllable counts for A's turns are shown with small diamonds. The scale of the vertical axis shows syllable counts; the horizontal axis is a time line of successive turns, where the numbers correspond to numbered lines of transcript. The figure
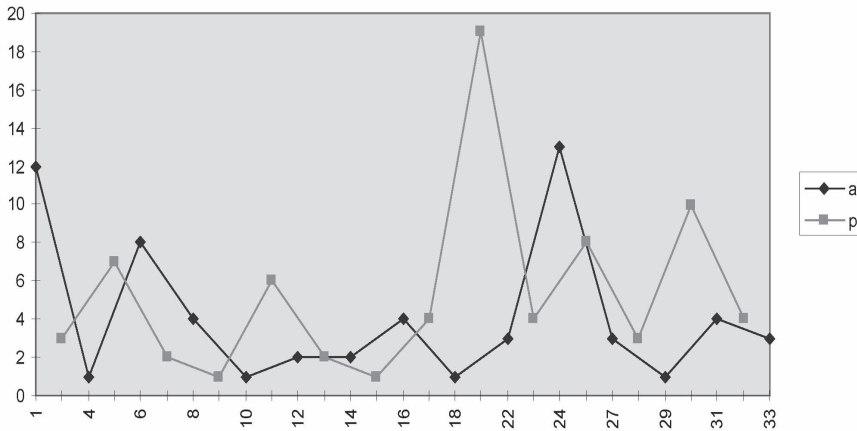
FIGURE 16.1 P AND A MEET, EXCHANGE POLITE PRELIMINARIES

shows the roughly equal distribution of the floor between the two men as they exchange pleasantries.

Such "small talk" only occurs, however, either as a prelude to more serious and purposeful talk (as here), or on those rare occasions when Zinacantecs are brought together with no particular purpose and feel themselves obliged to exchange words. Even in such cases, however, issues of status complicate a neutral allocation of turns, as some interlocutors command more of the conversational floor simply by virtue of age, expertise, or other kinds of micro-political dominance. Moreover, such unconstrained encounters are infrequent compared to other conversational forms, most of which are driven by specific purposes. (In Zinacantán, at least, one never goes to visit just to "shoot the breeze," but always with an errand; and part of the resulting dynamic focuses on interactants' trying to figure out what that errand is.) Divination (Hanks 2006, 2013), curing (e.g., Haviland 2000b), dispute settlement (Haviland 1997), ritual instruction – all specialized conversational venues in Mayan societies, with pronounced status differences between the participants – problematize even more how asymmetries of access, knowledge, and power, as well as shifting access to turns at talk, can (and cannot) be resolved, to facilitate joint action (Clark 1996).

Given what I said earlier about a principal speaker and her or his designated interlocutor in Zinacantec Tsotsil, it should be clear that the admittedly crude measure of speech volume represented in Figure 16.1 suggests who is talking and who is "responding" at any given point in a conversation. It also offers a very approximate measure of "responsiveness" for any given Tsotsil interlocutor. To see this, consider Figure 16.2, which graphically illustrates turn length across the whole of P's conversation with A. The graph shows plainly that the conversation divides itself into three parts. First comes the introductory section – the beginning of which we have already seen – where the two interlocutors trade short turns of roughly equal length. Second comes a section where P's turns are far longer than those of A – indeed, where A rarely utters more than monosyllables. There follows a section where the roles are reversed: A does most of the talking, although P's responsive turns are somewhat longer than were A's when he was "answering."

P's complaint is long, complex, and repetitive, harking back to a history of squabbles, slights, and silence between father and sons over almost ten years. In his litany of woes,
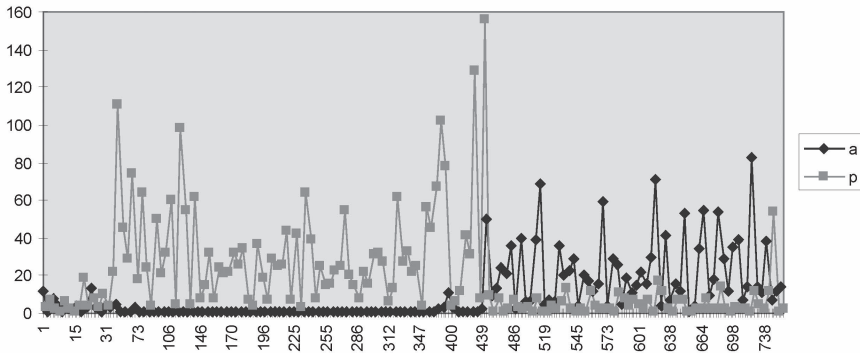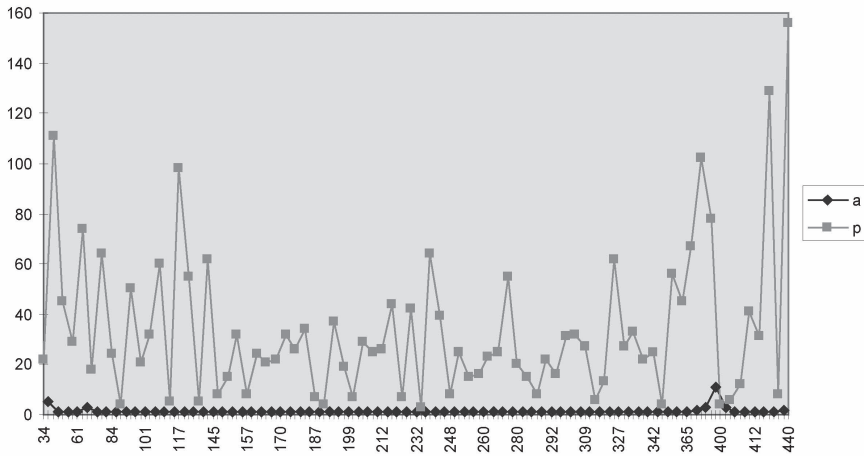
FIGURE 16.2 P VISITS A

FIGURE 16.3 P TELLS A HIS TROUBLES

P begins by describing how his sons never visit, never speak to him, never offer to help in farming or in the expenses of curing ceremonies. The turn-taking structure in the section of the conversation where P states his complaints is clear in Figure 16.3. Throughout P's long and impassioned speech, the magistrate offers only the barest of responses, rarely venturing more than a monosyllable.

After almost 20 minutes during which P has laid out a complaint against his sons, a drastic shift occurs in the conversation. Up to this point, A has listened to P's whole sorry history virtually without comment, offering responses which closely approximate Yngve's (1970) original notion of "back-channel" – a signal back "up the channel" from listener to speaker that communication is still proceeding. A shows he is listening, comprehending, and that P can continue. However, the notion that P might attempt to disinherit his sons and reclaim the land he has given them – even the plots of land where they have built their own houses – is too extreme for the magistrate to let pass. He steps in with his own optimistically more balanced view, one that might lead to eventual reconciliation instead of total rupture.
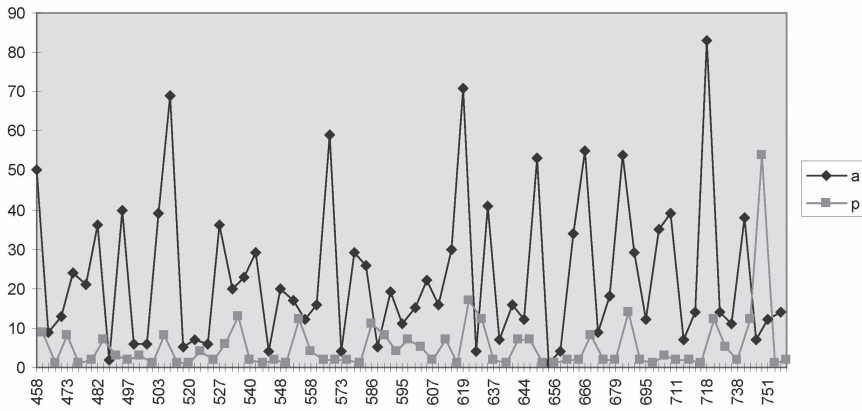
FIGURE 16.4 A GIVES P ADVICE

Once A starts to make substantive remarks, the conversational tables have turned. Abruptly the interchanges shift. A now takes the floor, to explain to P how he thinks matters should proceed. P's contributions recede to mere responses, albeit responses which are on average much longer than those of A in the earlier phase of talk. In the subsequent section of the transcript, for the next 125 turns or so, A averages about 22.2 syllables per turn. P's turns, clearly responsive, average 5.2 syllables. Recall, however, that in the preceding section, A's responsive turns averaged only about 1.3 syllables, which suggests the much more active role P takes in receiving and interpreting A's proffered advice than that taken by A when P was presenting his case. Figure 16.4 graphically depicts this phase of the conversation.

Frequently reported for Mayan conversation is the propensity, amply illustrated in the start of my compadre's conversation above, for "repetition" by which different authors have meant at least three different things.

(a) Mayan languages frequently formulate responses to a turn at talk by recycling or "repeating" some parts of the original (Brown 1979; Brody 1986, 1994; Haviland 1988b). For example, Penelope Brown writes, "during extended turns at talk such as a telling, Tseltal recipients are expected to respond at regular intervals with significant verbal material, repeating parts of the immediately prior utterance" (Brown 1979:ch. 4) (quoted in Rossano et al. 2009:230).

Of considerable interest is how such "repetition" is structurally constrained (see Brown et al. 2009; Brown 2010), and the fact that in multi-party conversations the strings of repetition can extend over many turns (see Haviland 2009), as in excerpt (2) lines 11–17 above. So, too, are the alternatives languages offer to such repetition, through other kinds of non-repetitive, special purpose responsive devices, often with quite specific interactional nuances (Brown 2010).

(b) The rubric of "repetition" is sometimes conflated with a quite different device, often called "parallelism," common throughout Mesoamerica and beyond (e.g., Fox 1974): a special linguistic register that employs exact syntactic parallel constructions often

combined with semantically linked lexical doublets or triplets (e.g., Monod-Bec-quelin 1979, among many others), and characteristic of prayer as well other sorts of discourse genres (Haviland 1994). Such parallelism is clear in the fragments of prayer cited above in excerpt (5). The shaman's talk is almost entirely organized in paired lines (shown with double slashes separating the two parts), in which a single frame is repeated with usually only a simple lexical alternation differentiating them. At lines d and e of (5), the shaman addresses the Lord of the Earth, calling him *ch'ul vinajel // ch'ul balamil // ch'ul rey* (holy heaven // holy earth // holy king). He pleads with this sometimes sinister protector of the fields *mu me x-a-maj//mu me x-av-ut* (NEG CL ASP-A3-beat // NEG CL ASP-A3-scold) 'Do not beat them // do not rebuke them,' i.e., do not mistreat the owners of the cornfield, for example by sending dangerous snakes or causing accidents to befall them as they work. The sometimes euphemistic paired imagery of such parallel talk indexes both the indirectness and the power that characterize such intercessions with the supernatural and the specialized knowledge of the shaman who wields parallel language.

(c) Gossen (1985) also identifies a further, perhaps related, propensity in Chamula Tsot-sil conversation for a kind of semantic redundancy in which single ideas are refor-mulated and repeated, either by a single speaker or by a dialogic partner, but without the strict syntactic parallelism of (b) above. The interactions between these different kinds of repetition in Mayan conversation have direct repercussions for structural analyses of the relevant languages.

5.2. Formulations and repair

A central issue in conversational analysis has been what Schegloff sometimes calls the "formulation problem" (Schegloff 1968, 1972) and its links to "recipient design": the fact that interactants in real time must "formulate" ways of putting things adequate both to their own purposes and to the specifics of the moment, in particular, to whom they are speaking (or intend to speak). How in conversation one refers to another person (Sacks and Schegloff 1979) is a particularly clear case of the constraints on formulations, and as mentioned above it has been studied in some detail for various languages, including three Mayan languages (Enfield and Stivers 2007). For example, if a particular *compadre* P talks to me in Tsotsil about "*l-a-kumpa R*" (lit., 'your compadre R') I must calculate whom he means by virtue of the fact (i) that P knows that R is my compadre, (ii) that P knows that I know he knows it, etc., and (iii) that R must therefore be someone P wants to identify by reference to *my* relationship to R rather than his own; and so on. In excerpt (3) above, the two neighbors seem to be able to agree immediately upon whom they mean by "Francisco from (the village of) Nachij," whereas in excerpt (4) the pause between C's first mention of "Joey B." in line (a) and the expanded formulation "Joey B. there, the former (Mayordomo) of the Virgen" in line (b) suggests an instance of repair (see below) in which the second formulation is intended to help his interlocutor recognize the person he's talking about.

Of course, the formulation problem afflicts all reference in conversation, not just ref-erence to persons. Moreover, much of "recipient design" is not about reference at all, but about appropriately calibrating personal identities, relationships, and social status between interactants. In Mayan conversation, such matters as gender, age, ritual exper-tise, kinship both real and fictive, and various sorts of social and personal authority, are always indexed in speech, via devices ranging from referential formulations to vocatives, from evidentials to pronominal inflections, or even to the proportion of the conversational

floor to which conversational partners are granted access (see bibliographic references to Brown, Brody, Danziger, Hanks, Haviland, Shoaps, inter alia). Arcos López (2009), in a recent MA thesis, argues that something as subtle as omitting the ubiquitous "gender prefixes" on personal names in Ch'ol can index dismissive attitudes towards the names' bearers. Even the existence of marked children's lexicons (Pye 1986), or the special place of children in calculi of respect and privacy (e.g., Reynolds 2008; Berman 2011) speak to the indexical power of linguistic formulations, as do newly emerging forms of, for example, evangelical Protestant discourse (Baron 2004).

The phenomenon of "repair" – mechanisms in talk that allow participants to note and correct various sorts of dysfluencies, mis-speakings, and (at least apparent) misunderstandings – has been proposed as another potentially universal aspect of conversational organization (see Schegloff 2006 for a recent account) which, in recent analyses, has been linked to the distinctly human phenomenon of "intersubjectivity" – the ability of interactants to perceive and share one another's thoughts, feelings, and perspectives (Dingemanse and Floyd 2014; Sidnell 2014). Again, Penelope Brown's work on Tseltal has contributed to a large comparative study of some of the linguistic devices involved in repair sequences, namely the existence in many languages of forms that work (and often sound) like English 'huh?' (Enfield et al. 2013). The very fact that such "repair initiators" seem to signal an interactive realization that what a speaker might have "meant to say" has not been properly "understood" is taken to be evidence for what is often called a "theory of mind" – a characteristically human perspective on mutual access to another's "inner states" (and a conviction that others have such states). Mayan languages have also been drawn up into comparative debates about the extent and depth of such presumed intersubjective access among individuals. (See especially Danziger 2006, 2010, 2013, and Groark 2013. But see Hanks 2013, whose nuanced notion of "co-engagement" gives a cognitively more neutral cast to the issue.) Mayan languages have made important theoretical contributions to a range of related phenomena, including evidentials (Martin 1998; Haviland 1987, 1989, 2002; Fox 2001; Kockelman 2003a, b, 2004, 2005) which index (and interactively engage) a variety of presumed states of knowledge among interactants, and markers of what is sometimes called "stance" (Haviland 1988; Shoaps 2004, 2007; Danziger 2013, or the contributions of Penelope Brown in Enfield et al. 2012) which expand the range of subjective attitudes in which speakers may be implicated by different linguistic devices.

6. MULTIMODALITY

Conversation most commonly takes place face-to-face (cell phones and iPads notwithstanding), and as a result interaction involves bodies as well as voices. It is thus worth making separate mention of contributions from Mayan linguistics – both past and potential – to the study of multimodality, especially visible aspects of utterance.

Gaze, for example, has been a focus of analysis in face-to-face interaction from the earliest studies to the most recent (Kendon 1967; Streeck 2014; see Rossano et al. 2009 for a review). Once again, Tseltal has contributed directly to comparative research: speakers from Tenejapa seemingly employ "gaze avoidance" at moments where mutual eye contact routinely occurs in other conversational traditions (Rossano et al. 2009). Brown and Levinson (2005) argue that as a result other sorts of feedback mechanisms must be marshaled to compensate for the lack of visual feedback. This may be one of the reasons, on their account, for the repetitiveness of Tseltal responses. Gaze avoidance, in turn, appears partly to result from "observed seating patterns": Tenejapans are said to "prefer" to sit

"side to side or at an angle" (Rossano et al. 2009:226) rather than, say, face-to-face, in at least some sorts of dyadic conversation. Patterns of bodily orientation – another early theme in foundational interactional research (Kendon 1990) – are thus linked to patterns of conversational structure.

Gaze is almost a perfect site to observe the contrast between universal claims (how conversational turn-taking as a general mechanism is universal, and how, if at all, gaze orientation may play a role in regulating it) and cultural difference: an interactive style in Tenejapa Tseltal, for instance, where you do *not* gaze at your interlocutor, for reasons both ecological (how your bodies are deployed in space) and "cultural" (where it is polite and appropriate to look, and where it isn't). More detailed studies of comparative bodily engagement in Mayan are required to separate potentially relevant analytic strands: is *all* conversation in Mayan languages similarly constrained, with respect to seating position or gaze? What happens when bodies dispose themselves in other ways – as in conversation when people are seated at a table, or around a fire, or when they move around because of other concurrent activities? Do status differences between interlocutors affect visible, as well as spoken, aspects of utterances? A pattern of bodily and visual interaction quite different from that suggested for Tenejapa Tseltal is described, for example, in Chamula Tsotsil by López (2010).

The role of other visible communicative behaviors – especially manual gestures – is still underappreciated for Mayan languages. There are a few exceptions (Haviland 1993, 2000a, 2003, 2005a, 2013b; Danziger 1994, 199, 2004; deLeon 1998, 2005; López 2010; Le Guen 2011a, b; Pérez González 2012), the authors of all of which have examined the role of pointing gestures in talk about space and time. Some well-known typological features of Mayan – the special classes of what have been called "affective" or "mimetic" verbs (Laughlin 1975; Maffi 1990) or "ideophones" (López 2010; Pérez González 2012), and the class of "positional" roots that elaborate the semantics of anatomies and their configurations – have been suggested to give rise to characteristic patterns of iconic gesturing, as though two complementary semiotic channels are involved in expressing those conceptual domains speakers choose to elaborate (Haviland 2005d).

As an example of how concern with visible and bodily aspects of interaction can complement and enrich ordinary linguistic approaches, consider how Zinacantec talk calls attention to what I have called "referential gestures" – indexical uses of the body that "pick out" referents in discourses of different kinds. Although Zinacantec Tsotsil, unlike many languages of the world, is relatively poor in terms for "cardinal directions" it may come as no surprise that Zinacantecs are extremely well-oriented geographically and make heavy use of that orientation both in talk (where a metaphor of "elevation" is turned to geographic use – *ak'ol* 'high' may conventionally denote East or *lok'eb k'ak'al* 'where the sun rises', and *olon* 'low' may denote West or *maleb k'ak'al* 'where the sun sets' – see de León 1994; Haviland 2005a; contrast Brown and Levinson 1993 for a different convention) and in bodily indications. Zinacantecs know or can calculate where relevant places lie "as the crow flies," and they rely on this knowledge in a variety of ways in conversation, although a large part of the evidence that they do so comes not from their words but from their gestures.

One visible manifestation of such orientation is gaze. Consider how the two conversationalists in the videotaped conversation transcribed in excerpts (3) and (4) above were seated. Figure 16.5 shows how the narrator (on the left in the figure) positioned his body as he said that the accident took place "late, about 2 or 2:30" as the neighbors left Mexico City with a load of freshly bought flowers for sale.

The crucial fact is that the narrator X, seated facing north, was looking up to the west; that is, he looked directly at the place in the afternoon sky where the sun would have
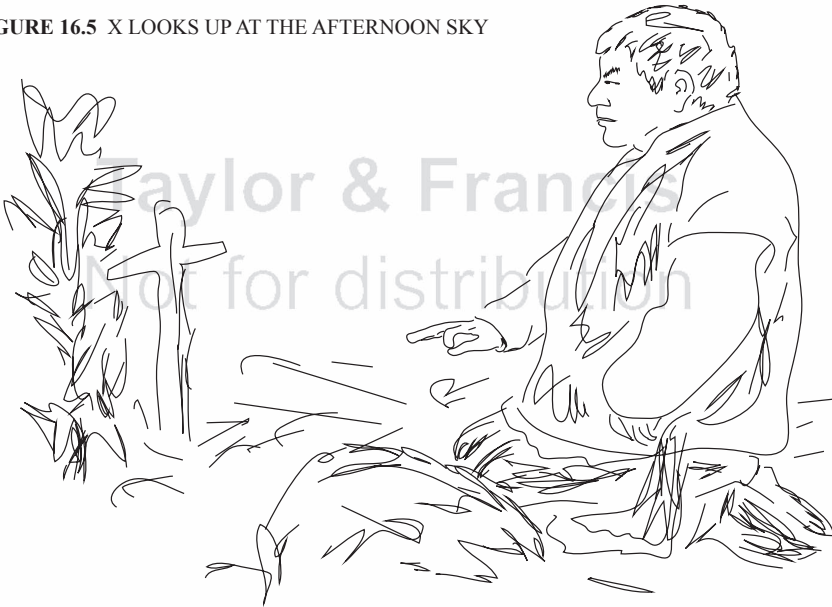
FIGURE 16.5 X LOOKS UP AT THE AFTERNOON SKY

FIGURE 16.6 SHAMAN ADDRESSES THE LORD OF THE EARTH AND THE CORNFIELD

been at the time of the narrated events, a convention of conversation in Zinacantán but doubtless common for many people living on the land around the world (see Haviland 1993; Floyd 2008). Note that the generalized use of such a referential device requires that conversationalists keep in mind where East and West are, and how the sun travels.

Somewhat more esoteric is the example of the Zinacantec shaman whose prayer is transcribed in excerpt (5) above. Unlike the altars of churches which are normatively arranged so that one prays to the East, the makeshift cross in this case was set up so as to allow the shaman to face the cornfield and its supernatural lord directly. In this case he was facing northwest (as one can see in the video frame from the light of the early morning sun in Figure 16.6).

Soon the shaman began to enlist less sinister inhabitants of the geography, asking for the joint intercession of the sacred mountains, named for saints, which surround the ceremonial center or *cabecera* of the municipality of Zinacantán as a whole. As he addressed these sacred mountains, he notably turned his body to address them, launching his prayer in the actual directions where they were located, some thirty kilometers away "as the crow flies" (Figure 16.7). That is, his bodily orientation reflected his exact knowledge of where he was *ta s-ba balamil* (PREP A3-face earth) 'on the face of the earth,' and where his distant addressees were, as well.

Geography has a social as well as a spiritual dimension, similarly central in Zinacantec interaction. When knowledge of space is absolute, shared, and highly presupposable, space itself becomes both metonym and mnemonic for social history and biography. The neighbors conversing about the car crash provide several exemplary demonstrations of the use of geocentrically oriented space as an anchored referential map. The two men, X and M, are seated side by side, facing slightly west of north. X, sitting on the viewer's left in the still frames (and thus on the east side) is the narrator, while M, on the right (i.e., to the west) is asking him for more details about the accident.

Their "anchored" uses of direction depend on where they actually sit to locate protagonists mentioned in the ongoing discourse. For example, they discuss whether the driver of the truck was at fault, and their means of identifying the driver are as much gestural as spoken.

In the dialogue transcribed in excerpt (3) above, just as M finished his question at line a, "Who was driving?" he, as it were, answered his own question with a gesture, gazing quickly up to his right (that is to the east of where he and his interlocutor sat), directly in the direction of Nachij, the town where the hired driver for this locally owned truck

FIGURE 16.7 SHAMAN ADDRESSES THE ANCESTRAL MOUNTAINS

lived (Figure 16.8). In fact, he thus identified the driver gesturally before he ventured his name in words.

X confirmed, in overlap, that M was right about the driver, simultaneously pointing with his right hand (Figure 16.9) toward the village of Nachij, about ten kilometers away over steep mountains (Figure 16.10).[9]

And just as X could refer to individuals by indicating where they lived, so could he refer to notable aspects of their biographies (for example religious offices or *cargos* they might have held) in identifying the man injured in the crash in excerpt (4). In fact, naming
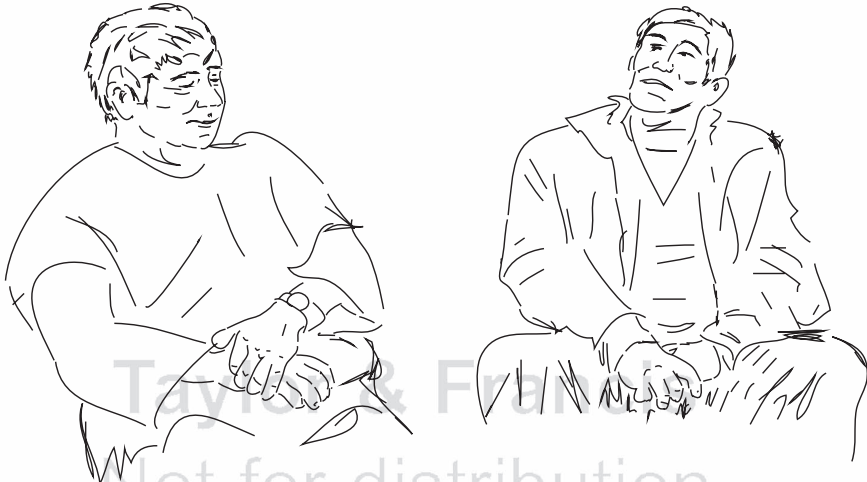
FIGURE 16.8 M GLANCES IN THE DIRECTION OF THE DRIVER'S HAMLET
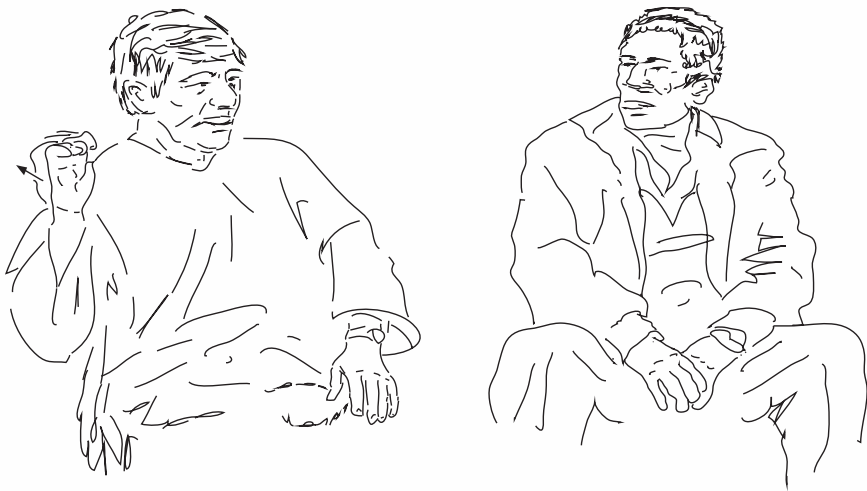
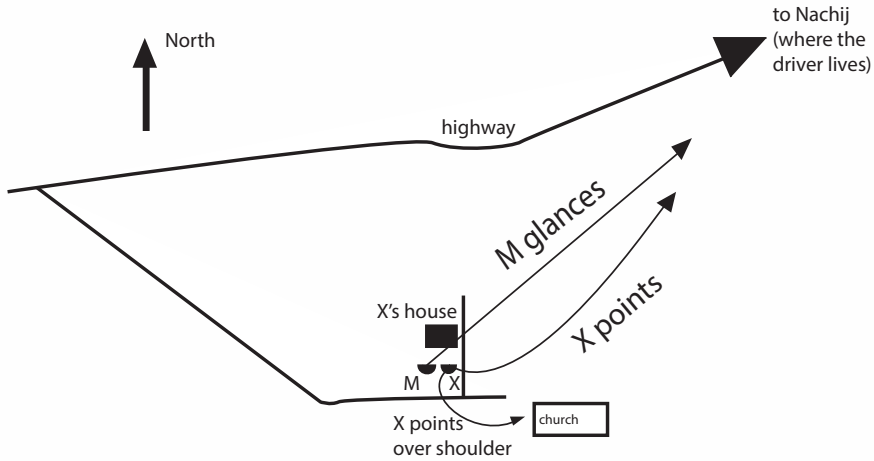**FIGURE 16.9** X GESTURES TOWARD THE DRIVER'S HAMLET

FIGURE 16.10 SIMPLIFIED MAP SHOWING RELATIVE POSITIONS OF INTERLOCUTORS AND THE PLACES MENTIONED

FIGURE 16.11 X INDICATES THE PROTAGONIST'S HOUSE AND NEARBY CHURCH

the individual seems to have been the source of different kinds of interactional "trouble." X himself apparently tried to bring the injured man's name to his mind in part by pointing first in the direction of the man's house from where he sat, even before he pronounced the name (Figure 16.11, left panel). As I noted above in discussing formulations and repair, X's first reference to the injured man met with hesitation from his conversational partner. X continued to point in the direction of the injured man's house as he repeated the man's name (line b of excerpt 4). He then switched the direction of his pointing finger (Figure 16.11, right panel), aiming it instead toward the village church (see the map in

Figure 16.10 again), as he turned to his interlocutor and added that the man in question had performed community service by holding a religious office there. This composite utterance was sufficient to allow M to identify the man.

It is a convention of Zinacantec (Tsotsil) conversation that deictic gestures be "correctly" oriented toward even distant referents, in ways these examples have shown. Such orientation with respect to the place of interaction thus gives interlocutors quite specific information (insofar as their own knowledge of geography allows them to recover it). It is a further convention that the deictic center from which directions are calculated can also be "transposed," that is, moved conceptually to an "origo" other than the actual place where interlocutors find themselves. In such cases a more complex directional precision obtains, and a speaker's pointing gestures are understood to be, as it were, lifted from the present spot and conceptually laminated on top of the new narrated origo, preserving cardinal directions. Such transpositions are extremely common in giving directions or talking about space, and the principles governing them – central for understanding the words involved – are only revealed in natural interaction (see Haviland 2005a).

7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

These topics are only a few among many aspects of ordinary conversation that deserve attention from the new generation of young Mayan linguists and anthropologists who can re-embed the structures of their languages in the ordinary contexts of quotidian use. Deserving special mention, in this context, is the exemplary thesis of José López (2010) on Chamula Tsotsil, which ranges across a broad spectrum of the topics I have mentioned here, from native categories of speech genres to parallelism, from Kendon's (1990) "f-formations" (ways people arrange their bodies in conversation) to iconic gestures and prosody, and from patterns of mutual gaze and attention to participation frames (Goffman 1979). It is only when scholars are able to address the social skills that conversational ability in a language begins to provide that the true genius of Mayan languages as vehicles of social life will begin to be revealed.

NOTES

1   The very first words exchanged, including the formal greetings as we entered the house, are not on my audiotape, as I only asked permission to turn on the tape recorder once we were seated.

2   Square brackets between lines give an approximate location for overlapping turns. Speakers are indicated by single letter pseudonymous prefixes followed by a semicolon. Parentheticals indicate uncertain hearing by the transcriber. In these simplified transcripts I apply a crude notion of "turn" to Zincantec talk, counting as a turn a stretch of a single person's speech sandwiched between the speech of other people. Within a turn so delimited other substructures may be discerned, signaled by pauses, intonation, and various grammatical parsing devices. I indicate these turn-internal divisions on transcripts by dividing a stretch of talk into lines.

3   The double slashes here separate individual subparts of the formally parallel repetitive constructions characteristic of Tsotsil prayer.

4   *kechel* 'leftover, leavings.'

5   *mu s-na' x-tak-av* (NEG A3-know ASP-∅-answer)

6   *jot o s-tak'-be* (side REL [CP+]A3-answer-APPL). The Tsotsil word for deaf person, *uma'*, literally means 'dumb' and is associated with either not speaking at all or with 'answering' inappropriately.

7   The root *tak'* produces a transitive stem *tak'* 'answer [something said],' a ditransitive applicative stem *tak'-be* 'answer [someone],' and also an intransitive stem *tak'av* 'respond.'

8   Unhelpfully, Spanish-speaking Zinacantecs ordinarily gloss *un* as *pues*, 'then.' Laughlin's gloss (1975) is "then /participle always occurring at end of phrase/."

9   Reference to individuals by pointing to places associated with them, such as their houses, is widely reported and specifically cited as a naming strategy in LSMY (Lengua de Señas de Maya Yucateco). See Kinil Canche 2015 as well as Haviland 2003 for other Mayan examples.

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