

## **SHOUTS, SHRIEKS, AND SHOTS: UNRULY POLITICAL CONVERSATIONS IN INDIGENOUS CHIAPAS**

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### **1. Uncooperative maxims, and sequential disorganization**

Most work on conversation follows one of two traditions: A (neo-)Gricean approach in which the conversational context, ordinarily an ambiance of rational cooperation, enables implicatures which supplement other inferential processes presumably active everywhere in interaction, verbal or otherwise; and a conversation analytic framework, constrained by austere principles of evidence, that concentrates on the mutual coordination of conversational turns at talk. Both approaches have taught us a good deal about how people manage their lives partly via speech. In both cases, however, the range of empirical materials has been remarkably narrow: If not invented then too often drawn from mundane and culturally familiar (although frequently ethnographically underexamined) situations. If we have learned about rational orderliness and cooperative collaboration by examining such conversations, we may have ignored equally striking regularities that characterize disorderly and openly contentious interaction. The simple moral, in what follows, is that in fights—least in certain Zinacantec fights—people frequently do NOT take turns and do NOT invite or encourage “normal” implicatures.

There are central assumptions in both approaches to conversation that cry out for comparative, ethnographically situated scrutiny. For example, a central premise of the turn-taking system in conversation (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974), is that speakers do actually share the floor. The putative empirical fact that in conversation “massively” one person speaks at a time has as a corollary the presumption that in the turn-taking process when one “turn” comes to an end, if two or more different speakers try to launch a subsequent “turn,” there will be some mechanism by which all but one cede the “floor.” Of course, in such a model much depends on what counts as “speaking” in the first place, what the contours of a “turn” are like, how much “floor” there is to go around, what sort of social entity can be the incumbent of a turn, i.e., a “speaker,” and so on. All these are empirical and in principle comparative questions, as is the putative “one at a time” generalization.

In what follows we shall eavesdrop principally on two fights: A Zinacantec legal wrangle in which sometimes more than a dozen Tzotzil speakers talk at once, and a personal argument, in Spanish, between two Mexico City academics. In the latter argument what is at stake is whether the two roommates have been sufficiently sympathetic to each others’ emotional needs. In the former, the legal dispute ostensibly involves shamans and their obligations to perform community ritual, but the whole matter is inextricably

intertwined with party politics and power struggles. In both cases, the considerable ‘overlap’ between speakers seems not to be something that requires ‘repair,’ but rather the result of strategic and deliberate ploys. In both cases, as well, notions of cooperation, rationality, relevance, and politeness—all cited as motivations for certain (presumed to be universal) principles of conversational inference—seem at best problematically applied.

These extended examples provide the raw material for several more pointed explorations, first about the nature and orchestration of ‘turns,’ and second about how inference and implicature seem to work when people are quarrelling rather than (or perhaps, as well as) “cooperating.”

On the one hand, the independence of turn “units” appears questionable in the face of both collaborative and contentious construction of utterances across speakers: We will observe such phenomena as “oppositional recycling,” “chorsing,” and “chiming in.” On the other hand, a variety of phenomena, from evidential particles to the culturally prescribed role of *jtakvanej* or ‘answerer’ in Zinacantán, suggest something about the regimentation of form, content, logical force, and even timing of conversational units in Tzotzil. We will examine several devices, including *voicing* and meta-conversational *markers* that control and license participation in these disputes.

As for the ‘logic of conversation,’ it will be clear that in these fights there is both non-cooperation and inference, albeit inference driven as much by quite specific “cultural logics” (or perhaps by tropes) as by universal principles of relevance or rationality. More striking, perhaps, is the rhetorical effect of particular *genres*, here the ritual language of Tzotzil prayer, which surfaces in implicit allusions even in political slanging matches.

## 2. Shouting down the enemy

Consider the following fragment of (what purports to be) Zinacantec Tzotzil.

(1) Political discussion at Jteklum cabildo, 1982

- |    |    |                    |
|----|----|--------------------|
| 1  | a; | ((unintelligible)) |
|    |    | [                  |
| 2  | b; | ((unintelligible)) |
|    |    | [                  |
| 3  | c; | ((unintelligible)) |
|    |    | [                  |
| 4  | d; | ((unintelligible)) |
|    |    | [                  |
| 5  | e; | ((unintelligible)) |
|    |    | [                  |
| 6  | f; | ((unintelligible)) |
|    |    | [                  |
| 7  | g; | ((unintelligible)) |
|    |    | [                  |
| 8  | h; | ((unintelligible)) |
|    |    | [                  |
| 9  | i; | ((unintelligible)) |
|    |    | [                  |
| 10 | j; | ((unintelligible)) |

11 k; [(unintelligible)] . . .

Here no fewer than eleven adult Zinacantec men speak—indeed, shout—simultaneously. These “turns” are not stretches of only a few words, but prolonged, elaborate, and in some cases multiple sentences. The fact that no single voice on the audiotape of this event is intelligible to the transcriber should not, of course, suggest that the participants themselves were unable to distinguish or attend to what the others were saying. Clearly, transcript (1) is a singularly uninformative representation of this complex event. Not only are the words indistinguishable, so, too, are the participants reduced to single letter identifiers, despite the obvious fact that they all came to the event in question—a politically charged dispute settlement—with specific biographies and allegiances. A more perspicacious rendering of a better recording might at least distinguish subgroupings within the overall babble, in which several men argued one position, against specific others who were arguing an opposing one. Indeed, it is exactly a micro ethnography of this event—to which I shall shortly return—that might allow us to make sense of the structure of its component talk, which is otherwise obscured—in fact, obliterated—by an evident lack of discrete “turns.”

A more accessible example along similar lines is the following short sequence from a destructive argument in Mexico City between two about-to-be-former roommates. To summarize briefly, P has recently made a trip overseas to settle certain personal matters. She now confronts her roommate L about their apparent lack of heart-to-heart communication since her return.

We might suppose that the “turn-taking system” of these middle class, university educated Spanish speakers will largely correspond to that familiar from classic studies of, say, American English conversation. The fragment—to which, like other material cited, we shall return repeatedly—can thus serve as an initial empirical domain for a comparative study of the “orderliness” of argument. Notably even with just two participants in the sequence shown in (2), to put the matter most neutrally, there seems to be a surprisingly large amount of “floor space” where both women are talking simultaneously. The fragment begins with P’s charge that she has been hurt and offended by L’s “attitude.”

## (2) Mexico City fight<sup>1</sup>

- |   |    |                                                                                                   |
|---|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | p; | pero con base<br><i>but based on . . .</i><br>[            ]                                      |
| 2 | l; | y ¿cuál fue mi reacción?<br><i>and what was my reaction?</i>                                      |
| 3 | p; | pero con base a ver tu actitud<br><i>but based on your attitude</i>                               |
| 4 | l; | ¿a sí?=<br><i>oh yeah?</i>                                                                        |
| 5 | p; | =yo vengo de España<br><i>come back from Spain</i>                                                |
| 6 |    | y es . el momento que estoy esperando a que =<br><i>and that is the moment when I'm expecting</i> |

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<sup>1</sup> This transcript fragment is drawn from Haviland and de Leon (1988).

- 7 =tengas Un minuto para hablar conmigo .  
*you to have ONE minute to speak with me*
- 8 l; ay P\*\*\* pues ¿cuándo (me has-)..?  
*Ay, P\*\*\*, but when have you ...*
- 9 p; [ ]  
y que me preguntes cómo =  
*and for you to ask me how*
- 10 =me siento  
*I'm feeling*
- 11 l; [ ]  
pues en mu:chas ocasiones  
*well, on lots of occasions*
- 12 p; [ ]  
el primEr momento=  
*(this is) the FIRST moment*
- 13 l; =a ¿sí?  
*oh yeah?*
- 14 p; me has visto en muchas ocasiones  
*You have seen me on lots of occasions*
- 15 l; [ ]  
es la primera vez  
*This is the first time*
- 16 p; porque voy (a otra) casa  
*Because I go to another house*
- 17 estás en tu onda que me parece muy-  
*And you are involved in your own affairs, which seems to me . . .*
- 18 l; es la primera vez que hablo contigo (entonces)  
*so this is the first time that I have talked to you?*
- 19 p; [ ]  
es que =  
*the facts is that...*
- 20 =no HAY comunidad-  
*there is NO sense of community*
- 21 sí es cierto  
*yes, that's true*
- 22 no hemos hablado UNA SOLA noche he hablado  
*we haven't spoken EVEN ONE night*
- 23 l; [ ]  
yo siento que he hablado contigo  
*I feel that I have spoken with you*
- 24 p; has hablaO conmigo pero de tU pedo  
*You have spoken with me but about YOUR troubles*
- 25 l; yo siento que he hablado contIgo  
*I feel that I have spoken with YOU*
- 26 p; [ ]  
sólo una vez  
*Just one single time*
- 27 has tenido . diez minutos para hablar conmigo  
*You have had ten minutes to speak with me*
- 28 l; [ ]  
a ¿sí?  
*Oh yeah?*
- 29 p; de tUs . broncas  
*About YOUR problems*
- 30 l; aja

31                    *Oh.*  
                       (entonces) (el) muy vale-madrista soy yo  
                       *So the one who doesn't give a shit is me.*

The argument continues with both participants marshaling a series of anecdotes to accuse the other of having been either indifferent or hostile.

In fragment (2), of twenty-one transitions where roughly speaking the floor passes from one speaker to the other, there is significant and sometimes prolonged overlap in nine, or about 43%. This leaves only slightly more than half of the turns beginning “in the clear.” In fragment (1) there are NO turns “in the clear.” Is overlap of the sort shown in fragments (1) and (2) a sign of some sort of breakdown in the turn-taking system? Perhaps a more constructive account is possible, building on principled situational and “cultural” differences in the practice of “turn-taking”<sup>2</sup> as well as to the detailed construction of individual turns themselves.

### 3. Cooperation?

Consider now the neo-Gricean tradition of analysis which presumes a cooperative ambiance for conversation. Elinor Ochs (Keenan 1976) long ago raised the possibility that local constraints on cooperation and the flow of information might enable inferences quite unlike those calculable from the familiar Gricean maxims, at the same time disabling standard implicatures of quantity and quality. Surely the problem arises more generally, even when we are not plagued by ethnographic doubt (about whether Malagasy speaking peasants, for example, are sacrificing quantity to a local standard of informational propriety). How do we know when our interlocutors are cooperating? Are there times when we are not even supposed to cooperate, either at taking turns, or at promulgating “rational” talk exchanges (Grice 1975)?

In their now classic study of verbal politeness, Brown and Levinson (1978) accept a Gricean framework as a “basic set of assumptions underlying every talk exchange” (1978: 100), but go on to observe:

“... [t]his does not imply that utterances in general, or even reasonably frequently, must meet these conditions ... Indeed, the majority of natural conversations do not proceed in such a brusque fashion at all. ... [O]ne powerful and pervasive motive for *not* talking Maxim-wise is the desire to give some attention to face. (No doubt many other motives exist as well; the want to avoid responsibility emerged as one in our fieldwork.) Politeness is then a major source of deviation from such rational efficiency, and is communicated precisely by that deviation. But even in such departures from the Maxims, they remain in operation at a deeper level. It is only because they are still assumed to be in operation that addressees are forced to do the inferential work that establishes the underlying intended message and the (polite or other) source of the departure—in short, to find an implicature, i.e., an inference generated by precisely this assumption” (1978: 100).

One might suppose that *impoliteness* (and other kindred phenomena) might also give

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<sup>2</sup> The possibility of cultural variants in “the turn taking system” as well as situational constraints on its free and unfettered operation have been the subject of numerous ethnographically oriented studies, some of which are reviewed in Schegloff (1987).

“motives” for not observing Gricean maxims directly, or at least not at a superficial “level.”

The most influential neo-Griceans, Sperber and Wilson (1986), build an entire theory of communication around inferential mechanisms that privilege a principle of “relevance” or of “least effort” in both the expression and processing of communicative intentions. Sperber and Wilson suggest, like Brown and Levinson, that principles of inference operate even in the face of non-cooperation—“at a deeper level.” Indeed, for Sperber and Wilson, the principle of relevance takes precedence over any particular conversational or situational context.

“It is not that first the context is determined, and then relevance is assessed. On the contrary, people hope that the assumption being processed is relevant (or else they would not bother to process it at all), and they try to select a context which will justify that hope: A context which will maximise relevance. In verbal comprehension in particular, it is relevance which is treated as given, and context which is treated as a variable” (1968: 142).

This position recalls the familiar distinction (Silverstein 1976) between relatively presupposing uses of indexical signs (in which the felicitous use of the sign depends upon or presupposes some pre-existing aspect of its indexical surround) and relatively creative uses (in which the very use of the sign entails some aspect of the indexical surround). Here, though, Sperber and Wilson stipulate that the search for relevance will be the overriding (cognitive) condition on all verbal interaction.

Once again, however, the range of “motives” for departures from (let alone compliance with) Grice’s Maxims, or the complex conditions on observable “calculations” of “relevance,” “effort,” and “context(s)” have hardly been explored. Brown and Levinson consider a narrow selection of examples which address what they call “face wants,” taken as largely unproblematic and presumed to be universal. Sperber and Wilson depend entirely on constructed examples of restricted (indeed, fictitious) ethnographic provenance. To understand the nature of the mutual interdependence between inference and context it seems useful if not necessary to study talk drawn from circumstances neither ethnographically familiar nor situationally mundane. At the very least, widening the empirical scope of our inquiries may demonstrate whether in the principles of conversational inference proposed we have a genuine tool for ethnographic discovery, or only a tautological *post hoc* interpretive heuristic.

My main example comes from a political argument in Zinacantán, a Tzotzil speaking Indian *municipio* in highland Chiapas, Mexico. But we need not go so far to appreciate the problem. One sleeting night in Chicago, I witnessed the conversational exchange in (3). The place was a bus-stop in front of the Regenstein library, where some dozen buses were parked, each with a letter designating its route. The interlocutors were a busdriver, standing in the door of his parked vehicle, and a female University of Chicago undergraduate, in a rush, cold, and loaded down with a large stack of books.

### (3) A night in Chicago in 1978<sup>3</sup>

student: Which bus do I take to International House?

driver: The “A” bus.

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<sup>3</sup> This example is drawn from Haviland (1988).

student: Thanks. ((moves off.))

The crucial datum here is that the busdriver was himself the driver of the “A” bus, the door of which he was at that moment blocking.

This driver was not evidently “cooperating” in the ordinary sense. His minimal reply literally addressed the student’s ostensible request for information but clearly ignored—and in fact was designed to frustrate—her “indirect” request for guidance. By omitting a crucial detail (and by not moving out of the way of the door of the bus) he mercilessly encouraged, perhaps via the Gricean maxim of “quantity,” the false inference that “The ‘A’ bus [that you want] is not this one.” The driver’s interactional attitude on this miserable night apparently expressed itself through a miniature act of social rebellion embodied in a refractory conversational turn.

Conversation in such circumstances, as well as in more dramatic cases of social disarray, interpersonal aggression, or naked hostility, has a special interest as a proving ground for putative universals of what is sometimes called “rationality,”<sup>4</sup> and their relevance to talk.

#### 4. A snippet of Tzotzil argument

For less familiar empirical support, I return in more detail to the Tzotzil speaking peasants of Zinacantán. Much Tzotzil conversation diverges systematically from the received models of both “cooperative inference” and turn-taking. However, the differences are perhaps most pronounced in verbal fights, which go beyond the often inconsequential, quotidian chat characteristic of much conversational literature. In recent Chiapas history, fighting talk has erupted in violence, as interactants move from exchanging angry words to exchanging blows and bullets. Such fights have a compelling interest, and are the subject of ongoing work. But the screams and shots that punctuate recent political gatherings in some Chiapas communities are difficult to represent in the standard notation of conversational transcripts (although perhaps no more difficult than the shouting match at the village townhall with which I began). I will focus here to material from a simpler time, long before every disagreement in Tzotzil communities became an excuse to bear arms and a potential occasion for mayhem.

To convey the flavor of one sort of Zinacantec fighting talk, here is a further fragment from a dispute<sup>5</sup> brought for settlement to the Zinacantán *cabildo* or ‘town hall’ in August 1982. The ostensible issue was a complaint by a curer from the hamlet of

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<sup>4</sup> With characteristic hedging, Grice locates his cooperative principle squarely within such a framework: “[o]ur talk exchanges do not normally consist of a succession of disconnected remarks, and would not be rational if they did. They are characteristically, to some degree at least, cooperative efforts; and each participant recognizes in them, to some extent, a common purpose or set of purposes, or at least a mutually accepted direction” (1975: 45).

<sup>5</sup> One gloss for the Tzotzil word *k’op* (which appears in the name of the language itself, *batz’i k’op*, literally ‘real word/language’) is ‘dispute,’ a fact which hints at the normally verbal nature of disagreements and fights in Zinacantán. The expression *sa` k’op*, literally ‘look for words,’ means to look for trouble, to pick a fight.

Nabenchauk (shown as participant “M”) against the main group of senior curers in the hamlet. M claimed to have been verbally threatened by his colleagues because he did not present himself for an annual gathering in which the male shamans of the village pray at mountaintop shrines, thereby guaranteeing the safety and good health of the entire village for the year. M’s excuse for not showing up was that he was sick, although while the ceremony itself was taking place he was seen scurrying off from his house for a conference with one of his political mentors. Allegedly the curers of the main group had accused M of faking his illness, and they had made remarks (“if he should happen to meet with an accident on the path, don’t expect us to intervene on his behalf”) which M took to be veiled threats of witchcraft. The case was heard not in the hamlet where the events had taken place, but instead in *Jteklum*, the “Ceremonial Center” of the municipality of Zinacantán where the main town hall is located, and where the magistrates for the entire community settle disputes.

At stake here was an issue deeper than possible threats, community well-being, or failed ritual obligations. In the early 1980s political divisions which had surfaced in factional squabbling throughout the Chiapas highlands since at least the 1950s suddenly began to turn violent in villages like Nabenchauk. Competition for resources channeled to Indian communities by the government in return for political support produced a vitriolic split in Zinacantán between members of the PRI,<sup>6</sup> the entrenched government political party, and a newly created local party which associated itself in name if not in political ideology with the established opposition party, PAN.<sup>7</sup> The renegade curer in this case was a member of the new PAN opposition, whereas the hierarchy of senior shamans was entirely controlled at the time by members of the PRI. (Such party disputes and competition for control of sources of income were to lead, in subsequent years, to brawls, beatings, and shootings, and to serious political, economic, and religious divisions within the community, mirroring similar fissions throughout the region.)

In fragment (4)—to which we will return repeatedly—several people talk.<sup>8</sup> “LR” is a former municipal president, a high-ranking PRI official from the hamlet of Nabenchauk, who has come to support the senior curers in the dispute. Together with the current municipal president (who does not speak in this fragment, but to whom most of the talk is officially directed), LR represents the voice of party-line mediation and settlement. M (whose Tzotzil name is Maryan) is the delinquent curer who has complained to the authorities about the threats of the others. “X,” “Y,” and “Z”—whose contributions are often masked by the talk of others (and of whose identities I am not always sure as I listen to the tape now, more than fifteen years later)—are three of the senior curers who have come *en masse* to the town hall to defend themselves against the recalcitrant curer’s charges and, indeed, to try to have him punished for not meeting his own ceremonial obligations. We shall first move through the content of the talk, to extract some of the

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<sup>6</sup> Partido Revolucionario Institucional, or Institutional Revolutionary Party.

<sup>7</sup> Partido de Acción Nacional, or Party of National Action, at the national level a conservative party drawing support from business and the Church.

<sup>8</sup> There are many more participants even in this fragment, but their words cannot be distinguished clearly enough on the audio recording to represent on the transcript.

necessary ethnographic background. There follows a closer look at both the sequential structure and, in Grice's phrase, the "logic" of the conversation.

Dispute settlement sessions before a Zinacantec magistrate (see Collier 1973), much like those negotiated by senior men in private, domestic settings, tend to follow a rough sequence.<sup>9</sup> The authorities are either elected officials, or village elders chosen for their skills at mediation and for their ability to talk, their *k'op // rason* "(wise) words, and reason."<sup>10</sup> Each phase of the dispute settlement has a slightly different allocation of rights, opportunities, and obligations to talk. In brief, in a preamble to the settlement, the opposing parties who have brought a dispute to the authorities state their cases. The airing of conflicting positions, initially in an orchestrated sequence of monologues punctuated by occasional questions from the magistrate, is allowed to dissolve into open confrontation in which opponents directly challenge and heckle each other. There usually follows a kind of free-for-all, in which choruses of disputants in shifting teams try to shout each other down. Fragment (1) above, with which we started, suggests how this phase of a settlement can look and sound, although much salient structure (among other things, the team alignment) is erased in my (deliberately austere) representation. Once they judge the shouting has gone on long enough, perhaps when they think the cathartic effect of such venting of emotions and arguments is sufficient, the dispute settlers intervene. They make pronouncements and ask the parties pointed questions, often explicitly suppressing back talk and side remarks. The gradual emerging evaluation of events and alternate positions is usually also taken up by a chorus of elders, who jointly announce their recommendations, although insurrectional backtalk, especially from bystanders in the back rows, may continue. The parties to the dispute are at least nominally free to accept or reject the dispute settlers' recommendations (although in the latter case they may, in disputes at the town hall at least, risk jail or other punishment). The entire event may well then end with the "losers" presenting gifts—soft drinks, sometimes beer and bootleg rum—to their opponents and to the dispute settlers, shaking hands, making apologies, handing over cash, and so on, as appropriate to the case. Somewhat less likely but still frequent is a less definitive outcome, in which the parties simply cannot come to an agreement. The dispute settlers will, in such a case, simply leave matters unresolved—the normal expression uses the Spanish loan *penyente* (< Sp. *pendiente*, lit. 'hanging')—often admonishing all parties to let their feelings cool down and to return at a later date to try again for settlement.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The specialized "turn-taking system" of the Western courtroom has, of course, been subject of considerable research by students of conversation. See, e.g., Atkinson and Drew (1979), O'Barr (1982), Conley and O'Barr (1988).

<sup>10</sup> This lexical doublet is one way of describing sober and reasoned argument and advice, using the formal language of Tzotzil couplets (see Bricker 1974; Gossen 1985; Haviland 1992b), which will be relevant to later discussion.

<sup>11</sup> Coercion, in which magistrates assert their own power to enforce an outcome, is an available if rarely exercised option, as is the more disruptive (and costly) ploy of appealing directly to Mexican law via non-Indian lawyers and legal procedures. In recent Chiapas history the tension between autonomous Indian "custom" and Mexican law has been not only a political issue, but a strategic lynchpin for political maneuvering; it is at the most local level of dispute settlement, however, that the issue is realized and fought out.

The fragment we will consider comes from the second stage of the dispute, as the opponents begin to confront each other, and the talk edges towards free-for-all. As the sequence starts, the speaker is LR, not himself a shaman but rather spokesman for the interests of the PRI oriented hierarchy of shamans against the charges of the delinquent PANista curer, M, who did not appear for community ritual.

LR compares the situation in the village from which the disputants come with that in *Jteklum*, the administrative and ritual center of Zinacantán, where the case is being heard. Throughout the municipality, people who have only recently begun to serve as shamans—according to local tradition as a result of a dream in which supernatural powers are bestowed on them—are often reluctant for their new skills to become widely known. They may deny to anyone outside their immediate families that they have engaged in curing, and only gradually will their curing powers become public knowledge.<sup>12</sup> Therefore in *Jteklum* whenever there is even the slightest rumor that a man<sup>13</sup> has been acting as a shaman by praying for sick people or by offering candles on their behalf, a constable from the town hall is dispatched to summon such a new *j`ilol* or ‘seer’ to the semi-annual gathering of the full male hierarchy of shamans in the town. That is, the civil and religious authorities take a direct hand in organizing the shamans’ ritual activities, meant to guarantee community welfare.<sup>14</sup>

## (4) z8201a.224

- |   |     |                                                                                                                               |
|---|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | lr; | mi o bu ya`i sbaik<br><i>If they have heard from each other</i>                                                               |
| 2 |     | oy xa buch'u x`ilolaj<br><i>About someone who is curing</i>                                                                   |
| 3 |     | oy xa buch'u . xk'oplavan<br><i>Someone who is praying over people</i>                                                        |
| 4 |     | oy xa buch'u chak' kantela la li` - li` ta jteklum =<br><i>Someone who is offering candles here .. in Zinacantán Center -</i> |
| 5 |     | =tajmeke<br><i>- itself.</i>                                                                                                  |
| 6 |     | yu`un saletik mayol<br><i>Why then a policeman is dispatched</i>                                                              |
| 7 |     | tak'bo mayol<br><i>“Send a policeman out after him!”</i>                                                                      |
|   |     | [                                                                                                                             |
| 8 | x;  | lok'uk mayol stzakbe ech'el sk'ob<br><i>Let a policeman go out to grab him by the hands</i>                                   |
| 9 | lr; | li` (stoj ...)                                                                                                                |

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<sup>12</sup> Since novice shamans are sometimes thought to have curing powers, people are in general eager to know about new debuts.

<sup>13</sup> Although both men and women are curers, only male shamans traditionally take part in the public gathering for community ritual of a town’s shamans.

<sup>14</sup> This implicit intermingling of civil and religious concerns, entrenched in Indian communities since the Conquest, runs directly counter to provisions of the Mexican Constitution. One dramatic result in recent Chiapas history is the violent expulsion of Indian Protestants from their traditionalist Catholic municipalities, and concomitant political upheaval.

- Here they . . .
- [
- 10 y; sna`oj stzakik=  
*They know how to grab them*
- 11 z; = sna`oj stzakik k'u yepal (???)  
*They are accustomed to grab as many (such curers as there are . . .)*
- [
- 12 lr; stzak sbaik li` to noxtoke  
*They also grab each other here (in Zinacantan Center), too*
- 13 x; (li`e chava`i une) yu`un jtzaktik xiik i =  
*Here, you know-- "Let's grab him," say ...*
- [
- 14 lr; ataj stzobojotik  
*When they call us together*
- 15 yu`un k'alal pus noxtok mi mu xch'une  
*And if they don't obey, they go right into the sweatbath [i.e., jail], too*
- [
- 16 x; = mol alkalteetike (yu`un ch`ech'ike)  
*the senior Alcaldes, (because they're in command)*

LR now goes directly on the offensive against the plaintiff M. Drowning out some other participants who evidently want to carry on with his earlier point, he sarcastically raises the challenging possibility that M did not show up for the joint shamanic ceremonies because he isn't really a curer at all. Does he really have the curing skills that he claims, or is he merely stealing the chickens that, according to tradition, are offered during the ritual meals that accompany curing ceremonies?

- 17 lr; kontanto kere mi yu`un ali  
*What's more, if uh ...*
- [
- 18 x; (mu ???)  
*Not (??)*
- [
- 19 y; yech che`e (???)  
*That's right!*
- 20 lr; mi yu`un ali  
*If uh ...*
- 21 yech nox ali cha-velk'an kaxlan  
*(If you) just steal chickens*
- 22 mi yech nox cha.ti` kaxlan ti bu chaxanav  
*If you just eat chickens wherever you go (curing)*
- [

LR's insinuation that M only pretends to be a curer leads M in turn to vent his own anger over the other curers' claim that he was merely pretending to be ill on the day of the gathering.

- 23 M; bweno  
*Well,*
- 24 timi jvovieluk j`ilolon-  
*If I'm just crazy, pretending to be a curer . . .*
- [
- 25 lr; mi yu`unuk j`ilolote



- 43 lr; pero ja` chopol xa nox ya`el =  
*The only bad thing is*  
 44 =chanop ta lok`el  
*if it turns out you`re lying*

M continues to fight back, however, charging that even LR himself would have been offended and would have sought redress had other people talked about him behind his back in the same way they have slandered M.

- 45 M; bweno  
*Okay*  
 46 porke vo`oti=  
*But if it were you*  
 47 kot ava`i ya`el ti o k`usi la`albatik porke  
*and people were saying things about you*  
 =[  
 48 lr; mu`nuk moletik o xak` kantela(???)  
*It`s not (only for) the elders that they are offering the candles*

Once again, a notable feature of this short stretch of talk is that there are extended sequences of overlap where several people talk at once.<sup>15</sup> It seems plain that both in this Zinacantec dispute and in the Mexico City argument presented earlier, both the sequential organization and the “logic” of the talk diverge from that of other more neutral “conversations.” A closer look at the details will make the differences (and similarities) clearer.

## 5. “Turns”

What counts as a “turn at talk” is of course a central question, among other things for: (i) defining and measuring “overlap” or, more contentiously, “interruption”; for projecting points at which it is potentially appropriate for one speaker to stop talking and another to start; for parsing transcripts into distinct “lines”; (ii) for interpreting stretches of talk as conversational “moves” or “acts”; or (iii) for relating syntactic to conversational “units”—all issues which have exercised conversation analysts, and which plague conversational participants as well. Fighting talk makes the definitional dilemmas particularly plain. When one speaker does not simply wait for another’s talk to finish, but actively searches for conversational cracks and crevices into which to jump, the sequential facts will predictably become complex. Further, when the whole point of talk is beating down insurrections, thwarting stratagems, and in general suppressing an antagonist’s rhetorical intent, the calculus of putative “speech acts”—in which a single “turn” has a single “illocutionary” intent, or even a range of interrelated “perlocutionary”

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<sup>15</sup> In fact, I have not attempted to transcribe the speech of all the participants, and much of what was said by those who do appear on the transcript was drowned out by others. Parenthesized question marks show some of these places.

effects—seriously breaks down.<sup>16</sup>

For one thing, one participant's "turns" are often built, both sequentially and substantively, out of the surrounding talk of another (Goodwin 1981), thus eroding the boundaries between the talk of both. In the Mexico City fight, for example, overlapped bits at the transition points between one person's turn and another's are frequently recycled "in the clear"—a well-known conversational phenomenon taken as evidence for the "one speaker at a time" rule. See, for example, fragment (2), lines 1-3. The effect in this case, however, seems to be not simply to guarantee a clear space (hearing?) for the initially overlapped talk (*pero con base* in line 1, recycled in line 3), but further to obliterate or render "inaudible" by deliberately ignoring the overlapping talk (L's question in line 2).

Similarly, recycling "in the clear" may be designed not only to get the speaker's words onto the record but more generally to enforce the hearing of her voice, over apparent opposition and intransigence. Consider lines 14-18 of fragment (2). L launches her ironic rhetorical question ("Is this the first time...?") once at line 15, and then relaunches it at line 18, despite P's extended refusal to cede the floor to it.

On one possible reading of P's extended turn in lines 16-17, she has heard L's *es la primera vez* "this is the first time.." in line 15 as the preface to an excuse (a 'pre-excuse'?). She thus understands L to be saying something like, "we haven't talked, despite the fact that we have seen each other many times, because this is the first time we have ... (had the opportunity to talk? been in circumstances that would allow us to touch on personal themes?) ..." P rushes in to cut off and thus to discount such an anticipated excuse, obscuring an attempted "turn" by L even as she interprets it. At line 18 L seems instead to intend an ironic question: "So you claim this is the first time I have spoken with you, then? (sc., because it isn't.)" P quickly moves on, ignoring L's irony. P is thus, as Sperber and Wilson put it, "echoing"<sup>17</sup> her opponent's words, but standing on its head their intent.

The same sort of dogged oppositional recycling is apparent in exchanges between LR arguing the shamans' case, and M, sticking up for himself, before the Zinacantec magistrate. Refer again to lines 23-27 of the curers argument in fragment (4). M recycles a conditional *ti jvovieluk* "if I were crazy" at lines 24 and 27 in order to launch a counterattack against LR's insinuation that he might only be pretending to have curing skills. LR has made such a suggestion in his previous talk, and he presses it again here in lines 25-26, breaking in over M's self defense.

Something similar happens at lines 30-31, and 34-36 of fragment (4), when LR tries to offer "advice" to the delinquent curer about how he ought to have behaved, beating back M's repeated protests that he had been sick all along. Once again, the construction of what seem both logically and formally single "turns" revolves around the concurrent construction of other participants' sometimes simultaneous talk, complicating the definition of a turn's boundaries.

Perhaps more striking than the mutual synchronic interdependence of turns shown

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<sup>16</sup> See Schegloff (1996) for some relations between turn organization and the grammar of individual utterances.

<sup>17</sup> The notion of "echo" is clearly misnamed—see Clark and Gerrig (1994), who drive home the oft-repeated point that what Sperber and Wilson call an echo need have no real non-echoed antecedent.

by the recycling of overlapped bits and pieces is the mutual exploitation, even by antagonists, of the substance of each other's turns, further complicating the notion of "turn." In the Mexico City fight, one person's gambit sometimes provides the exact phrasing for another's retort, so that sequences of distinct utterances re-use shared material in a kind of parasitic chaining of turns, partial turns, and repeated or inverted turns. Consider, for example, lines 11-14 of fragment (2). In line 11, L appears to start to say that contrary to P's charges (which she repeats in overlap in line 12) that this is their first heart-to-heart conversation since P returned from Spain, they have talked *en muchas ocasiones* 'on many occasions.' In line 14 P again echoes this same phrase and throws it back at L, now with a reversed apparent intent: "you have seen me 'on many occasions' (but you have never seen fit to talk to me about my problems)."

As the fight continues, the two angry roommates toss a kind of phrasal ball back and forth, each using the appropriately inflected frame *haber hablado con* \_\_\_ 'have talked with \_\_\_' in an unresolved game of catch-the-blame. The effect is reminiscent of Mayan parallelism, to which I return at the end of this essay, but here in contrapuntal form.

#### (5) Mexico roommates

22		no hemos hablado UNA SOLA noche <b>he hablado</b>	←
		<i>we haven't spoken EVEN ONE night</i>	
		[ ]	
23	l;	yo siento que <b>he hablado contigo</b>	←
		<i>I feel that I have spoken with you</i>	
24	p;	<b>has hablao conmigo</b> pero de tU pedo	←
		<i>You have spoken with me but about YOUR troubles</i>	
25	l;	yo siento que <b>he hablado contigo</b>	←
		<i>I feel that I have spoken with YOU</i>	
		[ ]	
26	p;	sólo una vez	
		<i>Just one single time</i>	
27		has tenido . diez minutos para <b>hablar conmigo</b>	←

In all Tzotzil talk, and characteristically in the dispute at hand, it is common for multiple voices to chorus a single message. There can be oppositional overlaps, as we have just seen, but more frequent is a pattern of "chiming in" and agreement. Talking about how the civil officials might react when they first hear of a debutante curer, LR suggests scenario in which a *mayol* 'policeman' is sent out, hatless with his tunic flapping (fragment (4), line 6). "Send a policeman after him," he says, adopting the voice of a hypothetical village magistrate ordering a deputy out. One of LR's allies in the dispute, X, chimes in at line 8, with his own phrasing, and adding a further image: That the policemen is sent out to *tzakbe sk'ob* 'bind the hands' of the delinquent curer. This latter image is in turn repeated by two further allies, Y and Z (lines 10-11), and finally by LR himself (line 12), as the circle of overlap and repetition closes. There are evidently several turns at talk here, but they are intertwined and, in a clear sense, equivalents of one another, in content, timing, and wording. The Tzotzil conversational pattern of repetitive echo phrasing here has none of the ironic, argumentative flavor of similar phrasal recycling in the Mexico City case. We can read these "turns" as supportive rather than oppositional mostly from the fact that LR, X, Y, and Z here can all be understood to be on the same "side" of the argument—that is,

from the ethno- and demo-graphic facts rather from a rational calculation on utterance content.

Even knowledge of biographical details about conversational participants and their alignments may leave the definition of turns unresolved. For example, there can be “team talk” in which different speakers contribute to a single rhetorical point, even by means of what appears to be an oppositional tactic. When LR argues, at lines 37-39 of fragment (4), that no one would have blamed M for missing the gathering of curers if he really had been sick, a note of doubt is sounded by his confederate X at line 41. “But he wouldn’t be going out (to talk to the magistrate) if he were (sick),” X points out, reminding all present that M was seen leaving his house to consult with a PANista ally at the time he claimed to have been sick, and thus underscoring the doubt with which all must treat LR’s overly generous hypothetical scenario: M truly sick at home, and thus meriting no blame for his delinquency. Both men—LR and X—wish to undermine M’s excuse, but they do so with a kind of orchestrated good cop/bad cop duet in which LR hypothesizes one extenuating scenario which X immediately undermines.

It might be argued that doubt about what constitutes a “turn” simply confuses formally unproblematic phenomena—the fact of transition between speakers, the apparent ease with which the stream of speech can be chunked into lines—with somewhat dubious rhetorical and notional issues about what speakers are “doing” with their turns, what interactional “moves” are involved in stretches of speech of undetermined size. Still, certain formal features of utterances themselves seem to confirm that speakers make at least an implicit analysis of such alleged rhetorical “moves.” Consider two examples.

First many explicit evidential elements in Tzotzil (see Haviland 1987a) are intertextual anaphors: Their semantics directs interactants to find antecedents in the surrounding discursive universe. The expression *k-a`-uk-tik* ‘1ERGATIVE-think-IRREAL-1PluralInclusive’ is derived from a verb root *`a`* (< *`a`i* ‘hear, understand’), and translates roughly as “we would think so.” It signals that the current speaker affirms and agrees with a previously expressed or implied proposition or sentiment, and that the speaker already believed that prior proposition before it was enunciated in the current conversational context. Thus, the expression has something of the force of English, “why, of course” or “indeed.”

In line 27 of the Zinacantec argument, fragment (4), M appends this evidential *ka`uktik* to his line “If I were crazy.” What is he “agreeing” with? On the one hand, he must be understood as continuing his previous turn from line 24, overlapped and abandoned in the face of LR’s onslaught in 25-26. On the other hand, there is not much really to agree with in this earlier aborted turn. M’s evidential seems to signal that he is following up on LR’s line of argument in the very limited sense that he is setting up a contrasting set of hypothetical conditions.<sup>18</sup> Just as LR sarcastically implies that M is not really a curer, M sarcastically suggests that the suggestion that he was just feigning sickness is ridiculous (“I’m not so crazy as to put myself to bed”).

LR turns M’s rhetoric back on him. After the little skirmish about whether or not M was sick, LR returns to his theme: “let’s say you really were sick . . . well, that would be OK.”

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<sup>18</sup> The hypothetical is marked by the IRREALis suffix *-uk* on *yu`un* ‘because’ in LR’s line 25, as well as by M’s own *juvoviel-uk* ‘1E-craziness-IRREAL, i.e., my alleged craziness.’

## (6) Ka`uktik #2

- 36 Ir; yech'o chakalbe ava`i un  
*Right, so let me tell you . . .*
- 37 ati yu`un ipot **ka`uktik** ta melel ←  
*If you were really and truly sick*
- 38 lek u:n  
*That's good*

The force of *ka`uktik* appended to the conditional “if you were truly sick” in line 37 seems contradictory; it produces an especially ironic effect by using the evidential to feign agreement (“of course, if you were really sick ..”) with a claim that LR clearly does not believe. Behind the rhetoric is evidence for a folk metapragmatic calculus of propositions and positions: It is only with a previous speaker’s “turn” that evidentials like *ka`uktik* can “agree.”

In the Mexico City argument, an evidential with a similar discourse-anaphoric character demonstrates that the antagonists here are still tracking each other’s “turns” despite sometimes protracted overlap. In line 18 of fragment (2), L comments with sarcasm that P seems to be claiming that since the latter’s return from Spain they have not had a single heart to heart talk. P, who bulls along giving L hardly any space to talk and launching in overlap a new line of argument (that the two roommates share no sense of “community”), responds belatedly to L’s sarcasm, affirming that what L says is (contradictorily) true: They **haven’t** talked. Once again, the placement of the explicitly evidential assertion *si es cierto* “yes, it’s true!” demonstrates that P has parsed and analyzed L’s oppositional turn even as she has tried to drown it out with her own talk.

The strategic use of evidentials, and such deliberate tropes as irony—all ways of playing with truth—suggest both a cultural and a logical complexity in arguments that goes beyond the “rational efficiency” sometimes imagined to characterize conversational inference.

The best evidence for the relevance to speakers of an analytical “turn” unit is the organization of conversation itself. In Tzotzil when one person talks for any extended period, however many people there may be in the “audience,” a single *jtak`vanej* or designated ‘answerer’ usually takes responsibility for providing “back channel” (Yngve 1970). The Tzotzil verb root *-tak`* ‘answer, reply’ denotes, in the first instance, the activity of providing verbal response, whether to a direct question, to structured ritual speech (Haviland 1986, 1992b), or to a distant call. In conversation, the stream of speech from a single speaker is normally broken up into short phrases which are punctuated by semi-conventionalized (though sometimes more substantive) interjections by the ‘answerer’ - “yes, aha, all right, listen to that, OK” (Haviland 1988c). The *jtak`vanej* is thus literally an “interlocutor,” although the responses offered are rarely more than a kind of verbal lubricant, “continuers” designed to facilitate and encourage the other’s ongoing speech more than to interrupt or supplement it. The precise timing and the frequency of these responsive utterances testifies to the fact that both speaker and interlocutor are framing their talk in terms of small, carefully parsed “turn” units.

In multiparty Tzotzil conversation, a single *jtak`vanej* will ordinarily emerge to ‘answer’ a prolonged sequence of turns by another participant. In most dispute resolution, the bulk of talk is formally directed towards the magistrate himself, who thus

conventionally takes on the ‘answerer’ role. However, more than one person may simultaneously offer back-channel, at least for short stretches of talk. The resulting chorus of overlap may be a sure indication (indeed, a symptom) of the microalignment of participants and “teams.” In Fragment (4) LR, reinforced by X, is arguing that the civil officials in Zinacantán punish recalcitrant curers by throwing them into jail if they do not present themselves for communal ritual. LR’s and X’s complementary arguments are presented in overlap (lines 15 & 16, 17 & 18). In still further overlap, their ally Y, in line 19, offers approving agreement (an “assessment” [Goodwin 1986]) *yech che’e* ‘that’s right!’, evidently ‘answering’ LR’s turn at line 15. Tzotzil argument and backchannel thus illustrate the (potential) underlying orderliness of sequential disorder.

(7) Z curers: “that’s right!”

14	lr;	<i>When they call us together</i>	
15		<i>And if they don’t obey, they go right into the sweatbath [i.e., jail], too</i>	←claim
		[	
16	x;	<i>the senior Alcaldes, (because they’re in command)</i>	←agreement
17	lr;	<i>What’s more, if uh ...</i>	
		[	
19	y;	<i>That’s right!</i>	←assessment

## 6. Orchestrating turns

Although Tzotzil fights often apparently dissolve into shouting matches, talk and talkers seemingly out of control, even when arguing participants have a variety of techniques for managing who gets to say what when. We may call these political stratagems. Presumably such techniques characterize all talk exchanges, but their use is particularly naked in contentious circumstances.

Basic issues about “participant frames” are matters continually to be resolved in speech (Goffman 1981; Hanks 1990). Who is talking? To whom? Who is present, and either listening or licensed to listen? Or to talk? Central structures of syntax and morphology are of course dedicated to these issues, through grammatical categories like person, voice, and mood. Properly conversational techniques accomplish much of the licensing as well, as when the two Mexico City antagonists, as we have seen at the beginning of Fragment (2), pointedly ignore each other. The pattern continues in the subsequent talk, at lines 8-9 of fragment (2). Here more is involved than mere overlap, as the attempt to overtalk an unwelcome conversational line by the other seems to proceed in line 8 of Fragment (2) by one speaker’s simply erasing the other’s turns by fiat.

Techniques involving less raw brute force are also available. Whereas in the Mexico City argument, P gains more of the floor than her opponent simply by occupying more of it, extra-conversational political facts act to endow certain Zinacantec voices with more authority than others. Returning to Fragment (4), lines 14-22, LR—himself a former municipal magistrate—is advancing criticism of the recalcitrant curer with chiming support from X and Y. Whereas X and Y are merely curers whose interests he represents, LR is a powerful political leader in his own right. At line 17 he begins a new line of attack, which he needs merely to recycle, with slightly increased volume, at line 20, in order once again

to gain exclusive control of the conversational floor. His collaborators, that is, immediately yield to his authoritative voice.

The conversationalists may employ indexical devices which invoke differential authority directly. Tzotzil etiquette discriminates a delicate hierarchy of power and status through address terms. The fact that LR, the spokesman for the traditional curer group, can address the delinquent curer by his first name, “Maryan” (for example, at line 34 of Fragment 4), shows the former’s elder status, for only an older man or a peer can so address an adult Zinacantec. More telling and less ostensibly friendly is LR’s use of the expression *kere* (from *k(e)rem*, literally ‘boy’) to preface a sarcastic and potentially ridiculing remark to his opponent at (4), line 18. The expression *kere* appears in Zinacantec male joking speech as a mild exclamation (cf., American English *boy!*, *man!*). As a term of address it is frequently (and often humorously) associated with an elder’s reproach to a younger male. LR dominates his opponent verbally through such gambits, seemingly tailor made for oppositional contexts.

Details of the construction and phrasing of turns may also produce, by more indirect means, what we might call “generic voicing” and a concomitant derivative authority. If a particular form of words characterizes “powerful speech,” then marshaling such words in other contexts may endow a speaker’s voice with power. Observe how LR, former President, describes what happens when the civil officials discover that a delinquent shaman has failed to present himself at the ritual gathering (Fragment (4), lines 6-8). LR’s performance of a hypothetical command (*tak-b-o* [send-BEN-IMP] *mayol* “send out a constable after him!”) echoes the hypothetical commander’s voice, thus bringing LR’s own words into indexical alignment with those of a sitting magistrate.<sup>19</sup> We will meet another form of “powerful speech” towards the end of this essay.

Tzotzil also includes verbal devices designed to manipulate and control the sequential organization of talk explicitly. Speakers frequently begin turns with expressions like *va`i un* (< *av-a`i un*, lit. ‘you hear then’), *kaltik ava`i* (> *k-* (1E) *al* (say) *-tik* (1PLIncl), lit., ‘Let’s say so that you hear’), which literally make a claim for the hearer’s attention, and which, in contentious situations like the one we have been examining, can serve as “shushing particles.”

Consider again the sequence at lines 30-38 of Fragment 4 which we have examined before. LR argues that if Maryan had really been sick, no one would have criticized him for missing the shamans’ gathering. Maryan is protesting against the others’ insinuations that he was only feigning illness, insisting that he was bedridden at the time. LR is trying to make the rhetorical point that no one would blame a truly sick person for missing the gathering. After several interruptions, LR simply takes the floor at line 36 with an assertive *chakalbe ava`i une* (literally, ‘I will tell you so that you will hear’), which will brook no further insurrection.

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<sup>19</sup> Notice that LR’s henchman X employs instead an “indirect command” with a 3<sup>rd</sup> person subjunctive *lok’-uk* [set\_out-SUBJ+3rd person] *mayol* “a constable should set out,” thus not presuming to speak the words as if himself giving the order.

## 7. Cooperation and inference

The verbal exchanges we have considered seem to be rife with lapses in Gricean cooperation. The two roommates deliberately ignore or distort one another's "contributions."<sup>20</sup> The curers and their political enemies try to outshout one another, to ridicule each other, and openly to challenge their opponents' veracity and good faith. Brown and Levinson, cited earlier, suggest that such "departures" from cooperative maxims do not mean that some Gricean model of inference and implicature cannot be salvaged. Sperber and Wilson suggest that an overriding, rational calculus of "relevance" is characteristic of all verbal communication, and that it is precisely a principle of relevance that allows participants to "work out" that what they are doing, in circumstances like those we are examining, is "fighting." That such a formulation sounds ethnographically implausible—surely, the Zinacantec curers had planned from the start a strategy to win their case and to have their political enemy punished; and one of the two Mexico City roommates appears to have been, as we might put it, "spoiling for a fight" and did not simply "discover" that she was in one—may lead to conclusions about what might be called the moral force of implicature, and its value as diagnostic of ethnographic facts.

There is no doubt that the talk we have been examining exhibits sequential non-cooperation. If a direct question makes "conditionally relevant" an answer (other things being equal, in the next turn, and by the question's addressee) we can see that in Fragment (2) P's *no hay comunidad* in lines 19-20 "deliberately ignores" L's "question" in line 18.

At the same time P clearly displays that she is deliberately "ignoring" L's remarks and not simply, say, failing to hear them, by managing to incorporate overlapped contributions by L into her own phrasing while simultaneously not responding to or reversing L's apparent intent. Thus P overlaps L's turn at line 11 but builds the exact phrasing into an oppositional move at line 14: "you have **seen** me 'on many occasions' (but you haven't talked to me about my problems)." P's turn thus stands L's intent on its head by echoing L's words (offering what Sperber and Wilson call a "representation" of L's utterance), but constructing a contrastive proposition around them.

The materials presented here also show how outright fighting and disagreement can themselves rely on inference, although it can hardly be called "cooperative." Consider the use of the second person possessive pronoun *tu(s)* in Fragment 8, or the phrase *diez minutos*. An apparent quantity implicature invites the inference from the emphatically stressed "YOUR troubles" to the claim "not MY troubles"; or from the quantified "ten minutes" to the charge "and no MORE than ten."

### (8) "YOUR problems."

- 24     p;        has hablao conmigo **pero de tU pedo**  
                   *You have spoken with me **but about YOUR trouble***
- . . .
- 27        has tenido . **diez minutos** para hablar conmigo  
                   *You have had **ten minutes** to speak with me*

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<sup>20</sup> Even our analytical vocabulary incorporates a cooperative image which seems hardly appropriate to fights—cf., the word 'contribution.'

- 28 l; [ ]  
a sí?  
*Oh yeah?*
- 29 p; de tUs . broncas  
*About YOUR problems*

The fact that these inferences are available in an openly contentious context first casts doubt on any inferential mechanism exclusively based on some calculus of cooperation or rational efficiency. Moreover, it appears that it is precisely the fact that P and L are fighting which provides what we might call the *polarity* of the quantity implicature: That is, it is not merely the pure semantic content (the raw quantity) of the expression “ten minutes” but its juxtaposition with P’s complaint that L has not paid her enough attention that provides the reading “no MORE than ten” (as opposed to, say, “no LESS than ten”). To consider a slightly more complex set of conversational inferences, let us return to the Zinacantec curers in lines 20-29 of fragment 4. In lines 21 and 22, LR carefully chooses his words to raise the possibility, without a direct accusation, that M is not really a curer at all.<sup>21</sup> The exact logic depends on cultural specificities: To *-elk’an kaxlan* “steal chickens” where one *xanav* “walks about,” or to eat chickens *ta yec nox* “just for nothing” refers to the fact that curers are conventionally rewarded with meals of chicken, and that patients must provide numerous chickens both to eat and to sacrifice. Indeed, chickens represent the bulk of the expense for most curing ceremonies, since usually shamans are not paid directly but only by being fed. LR thus suggests a veiled logic: The chickens you eat (when you are curing) are effectively stolen: You aren’t really earning them, if you are not a true shaman at all.

LR’s insinuation is not lost on the others present. Indeed, it provokes an immediate and angry response from the maligned curer himself, at line 23. “Do you suppose me to be a crazy person (only imagining myself to be) a curer?” M says, in overlap with LR.

Sarcasm, irony, and related tropes have been represented in the neo-Gricean tradition as “echoic allusions,” that is, as implicitly involving (by virtue of repeating or, in the terms of Clark and Gerrig (1990), “demonstrating”) the utterance of another, and at once representing the current speaker’s attitude towards that other utterance (Sperber and Wilson 1987: 708-709), and by extension towards its utterer. M, speaking about his own alleged malingering, indirectly (i.e., via implicature) attributes the slanderous and mocking language—*jbanan jba ta jvayeb* “I place myself like a great lump on my bed,” or *jpak’ta jba ta chamel* “I falsely represent myself as being sick”—to his enemies, in this case LR and the senior shamans for whom he speaks. What unreasonable people they are, M seems to suggest, for making such patently absurd claims. Here the sarcasm depends on taking what comes out of one’s own mouth and implicating it straight into another’s. However, it is the contentious circumstances, and not simply some “manifestly skeptical, amused, surprised, triumphant, approving, or reproving way” (Sperber and Wilson 1987: 708) of speaking—“ways” of speaking which are themselves all in need of comparative

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<sup>21</sup> If M really does have curing powers, as most everyone present presumably assumes, then he is also likely to have the power, if not the inclination, not only to cure but also to cause disease through witchcraft. Under such circumstances, a direct accusation of fraud would be not only impolitic but unwise and potentially unhealthy.

ethnographic scrutiny—that drive the appropriate inference.<sup>22</sup> One of the great difficulties with all theories of tropes is the poverty of the accompanying ethnography, and correspondingly one of the compelling reasons to study fighting is that people put considerable creative and culturally motivated energy into figuring out how to do it well.

## 8. Generic specificities

This brings me to my final point. Argument is a particularly potent arena for doing ethnography, in part because the language of argument directs us to people’s hearts. Part of the problem with the theory of implicature is that it is too general, too much a creature of an assumed universal disposition towards rational calculation. In fights, tongues often wag faster than brains can calculate, and antagonists often draw on routines, linguistic or otherwise, which have independent, ready-made potency.

This is nowhere more evident than in the last retort of the accused curer, M, in his choice both of words and of rhetorical form. Here are the lines, repeated from fragment (4):

### (9) Parallelism in the curer’s self-defense

- 28            yechuk nox ta **jbanan** jba ta jvayebe  
                  *then I would just lay myself down in a lump on my bed*
- 29            yechuk nox ta **jpak'**ta jba ta chamele  
                  *then I would just pretend to be sick*

First, as my glosses have tried to suggest, M uses two affectively laden verb roots. *Ban* (in line 28) is a positional root<sup>23</sup> which conjures images of huge, immobile, exposed objects: A giant white boulder, a bloated dead animal, or even the exposed rump of a drunk lying beside the road. *Pak'* (in line 29) is another positional root which combines the imagery of smearing or covering something with, e.g., mud, the notion of being incapacitated and bedridden, and the much more social idea of false accusation.

Probably more important for the rhetorical effect here is the clear formal parallelism exhibited in the two paired lines. Tzotzil, like its sister Mayan and other Meso-American languages (not to mention others from around the world), makes copious use of formal doublets in a wide range of speech, chief among them prayer and song<sup>24</sup>, but also including scolding and heated denunciation. The curer’s two lines of passionate self-defense bear all the hallmarks of Tzotzil parallelism. There is a shared frame starting each line—*ych-uk*

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<sup>22</sup> In other discursive contexts, Tzotzil provides explicit evidential particles, like the “hearsay particle” *la* ‘they say, it is said’ to mark utterances as originating with an illocutionary source other than the speaker herself. See Brown and Levinson (1978) for Tzeltal examples, and Haviland (1987a) for such particles in Zinacantec Tzotzil.

<sup>23</sup> CVC roots in Tzotzil produce different sorts of inflectional stems; one distinctive formal class has many roots which seemingly denote aspects of shape, form, and position, hence the traditional Mayanist term “positional.” See, for example, Haviland (1994a).

<sup>24</sup> See, among others, Gossen (1974a, 1974b, 1985), or Haviland (1992b), for Tzotzil examples.

*no`ox* “as if it were just for nothing that ...” What follows has exactly parallel syntax; both positional roots occur in a causative stem form with an accompanying first person reflexive pronoun *j-ba*. Both lines end with an appropriately parallel prepositional phrase, and both follow a strict pattern of identical rhythm and meter, right down to the phrase enclitic final *-e*. The speaker here not only claims to be an aggrieved and maligned shaman; he demonstrates his shamanic skills by marshaling precisely the parallel language of shamanic prayer to his own defense.

Identical techniques, exploiting the same sort of culturally driven inference, are evident throughout this Zinacantec dispute, and they are not the exclusive weapon of the accused shaman, plaintiff in the current proceedings. LR, conjuring his image of a hypothetical debutant shaman who must be brought by the hamlet authorities to meet his civic obligations, uses words whose ethnographic resonance provides a series of implicatures about his none too hypothetical opponent in the case. Also in a parallel construction—a somewhat loose formal triplet—LR begins fragment (4) by describing the hypothetical delinquent shaman as “curing people, saying little prayers for them, giving candles.” The latter expressions are standard euphemisms for curing, although the verb *k’oplavan* ‘speak over people’ is associated with only minor shamanic performances to treat non-serious illnesses. This skilled former magistrate also claims for himself the authority associated with parallel speech genres in Zinacantán. Simultaneously through his choice of words he plants the seed of an image he wishes to associate with his opponent: A young, inexperienced, novice shaman, still curing on the sly.

## 9. Conclusion and prospectus

If we are to be students of the mechanisms of talk, we need to *look at talk*. Long past should be the fashion of invented examples and imagined contexts. The laboratory of the discipline of pragmatics is all around us. Fights are an appropriate place to look because they are similarly ubiquitous, and because they are passionate—when arguing we frequently “forget ourselves”—and thus appropriate objects of Boasian or Labovian scrutiny. Fights teach us both about the sequential organization of talk and about its logic. They also bring us to the heart of *social* organization and to the fountain of history.

Far from being a principle or background assumption that governs talk, cooperative orderliness is itself a contingent outcome of particular ways of talking in certain (social) circumstances. Other quite different outcomes are also possible, and interactants may actively strive to achieve alternative results, as the fighting talk examined here has been intended to illustrate. Indeed, conversations—and fights as notable special cases—provide the characteristic micro-interactional locus for the exercise of power. Politics (and miniature facts of social history) thus pervade both the “sequential organization” and the “logic” of conversations.

The turn-taking systematics, at the heart of the conversation analytic tradition, represents as universal microinteractional logic what may merely be contextually, perhaps culturally, circumscribed practice. Fights, especially the routinized, sometimes elegantly choreographed formal disputes of Zinacantán, provide an empirical corrective.

First, fights point up the problematic nature of the notion of “turn” itself. To be sure, coordinated exchanges of the “floor” continue even in the quarrels we have examined,

but the coordination involves multiple simultaneous incumbency of the floor at least as often as “one person” speaking “at a time.” The independence of turns, even across speakers, is dubious: There is much mutual construction, even between openly non-collaborating interlocutors/disputants. In particular, we have seen “oppositional recycling,” both in timing and in substance. “Overlap” may be collaborative, or it may be contentious. Nonetheless, despite the fact that turns may be sequentially obliterated in fights, even conversational antagonists demonstrate by the way they construct their utterances—for example, by including explicit evidentials—that they are working with notional turns or “moves.” The internal logic of turns is thus available for conversational elaboration, giving evidence for an implicit metatheory of turn organization in turn construction itself.

The fact that in Tzotzil fights sometimes “massively” several people talk at once is not simply a managed result of an artificially controlled or deformed turn-taking systematics (as might be the case, e.g., in an Anglo American courtroom), although it may follow from an activity-specific sequential format. Tzotzil disputants can ignore, whether as social breach, deliberate personal confrontation (an exercise in micro-politics), or cultural tradition, the “orderly” transition of turns. The culturally prescribed role of the *jtakvanej* or “designated answerer” suggests how Zinacantec Tzotzil speakers regiment the form, content, and timing of conversational units.

As to “logic,” fights and other sorts of verbal hostility, whether outright (as in the warring roommates or the Zinacantec adversaries) or backhanded (outside the Regenstein library in Chicago) seem to confirm that cooperativeness cannot simply be assumed, thus driving inference, but rather that it is inference that enables interactants to understand what sorts of situation (whether cooperative, antagonistic, or otherwise) they are in. Even in the face of sometimes massive sequential non-cooperation, disputants may nonetheless rely on inference (e.g., Gricean implicatures of quantity), even if it may fail to be cooperative in nature. That is, the fighting context will push the calculation of implicatures in specific directions.

Inferences, in fights and elsewhere, may rely more on a quite specific “cultural logic” than on relevance or rationality, and the cultural logic may require an ethnographically informed theory of tropes (cf., irony, sarcasm). Generic specificities—for example, Tzotzil parallelism, exploited in conversational practice, both explicitly and by indirect allusion—can represent short cuts to inference, multivalent conversational mini routines whose power may derive partly by virtue of their falling below the level of conscious linguistic manipulation.

Finally, studying fights reminds us that the business of pragmatics is central to ethnography and social history. Political, historical, and, indeed, biographical background is never very far away in the arguments at hand, and we are thus not permitted the luxury of ethnographic blindness, a methodological myth of much conversation analysis. Orchestrating turns frequently involves political stratagems for controlling the floor. Licensing (and de-licensing) participants, differentiating voices, discriminating between identities and grades of authority (cf. “powerful speech”) are all exercises in power. (Some of these exercises may themselves be indexical, and thus potentially obscured or unavailable to consciousness [Silverstein 1981], the use of address terms being a familiar example.) Native metapragmatic markers (*va`i un* “listen here,” etc.) control turn allocation and participation, but their distribution in talk is regimented by micro-politics: Not everyone can use them. The *jtakvanej* ‘designated answerer’ role is eminently socio-

political, both in the recruitment of its incumbents, and in their comportment.

In Zinacantec legal disputes of the sort examined here, the idea is to see who gets to dominate whom, using the forces of public opinion and law to coerce others into a position of submission. The mechanisms we have uncovered not surprisingly continue to play a central role in the historical reality of modern Zinacantán. Three years after the Zapatista rebellion transformed Chiapas from a Mexican rural backwater into a focus for worldwide preoccupation with the exploitation of indigenous populations, many of the themes obvious from the 1982 Zinacantec court case remain current.

LR, still a powerful member of the PRI majority, continues to participate in Zinacantec dispute settlements. In May 1997, for example, he played a major role in a land dispute between a man and his sons over inherited land. A detailed analysis of the transcript of this case—something we cannot present here—shows how things have evolved. The new “democratic pluralism” of Mexican party politics now means that the old preeminence of the PRI is no longer assured: LR has to contend with powerful political voices from the opposition parties, both PAN and PRD, who have been recruited as allies to his adversaries. LR is still able to command a disproportionate share of the floor, with the same techniques of authority and control he was using fifteen years earlier, but the contest is no longer so one-sided. Other subaltern voices assert themselves and occasionally manage to beat back LR’s dominant voice. (Indeed, alongside the structures of authority clearly delineated in the 1982 dispute, there now emerges an explicit hint of potential physical violence, as one of LR’s opponents effectively invites him to “step outside” at a crucial heated moment of the argument.) Alongside the sequential force of ritual Tzotzil couplets one now observes a significant parallel power for Spanish rhetoric, in the mouths of younger speakers whose political education has taken them well outside the confines of Zinacantán and the Tzotzil-speaking world.

A central point in our analysis of Zinacantec fights was the construction and manipulation of *voice*, through both the turn-taking minutiae and the implicatures embedded in deliberately constructed argumentative diction. Part of the Zapatista rebellion had to do with what one might call the *voicelessness* of the Indian communities of Chiapas and Mexico as a whole, symbolized by the *facelessness* of the rebels themselves. The rebellion has brought about a reversal. Indeed, a potent symbol of the generic specificities we have identified in Zinacantec “powerful speech” can be discerned in *Subcomandante Marcos*’s deliberate use of an indigenous idiom—parallel couplets, wise words of Indian elders, Mayan lexical allusions—to endow his *comunicados* with the authority of Indian tradition.

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