

Article

Mastery, Modality, and Tsotsil Coexpressivity

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Abstract

“Coexpressivity” is the property of utterances that marshal multiple linguistic elements and modalities simultaneously to perform the distinct linguistic functions of Jakobson’s classic analysis (1960). This study draws on a longitudinal corpus of natural conversation recorded over six decades with an accomplished “master speaker” of Tsotsil (Mayan), adept at using his language to manage different aspects of social life. The research aims to elaborate the notion of coexpressivity through detailed examples drawn from a range of circumstances. It begins with codified emic speech genres linked to prayer and formal declamation and then ranges through conversational narratives to gossip-laden multiparty interaction, to emphasize coexpressive connections between speech as text and concurrent gesture, gaze, and posture among interlocutors; audible modalities such as sound symbolism, pitch, and speech rate; and finally, specific morphological characteristics and the multifunctional effects of lexical choices themselves. The study thus explores how multiple functions may, in principle, be coexpressed simultaneously or contemporaneously in individual utterances if one takes this range of modalities and expressive resources into account. The notion of “master speaker” relates to coexpressive virtuosity by linking the resources available in speech, body, and interactive environments to accomplishing a wide range of social ends, perhaps with a special flourish although not excluded from humbler, plainer talk.

Keywords: multimodality; Tsotsil; Mayan; conversation; gesture; gaze; pitch; speech rate; functions of language; stance; coexpressivity



Academic Editor: David Harrison

Received: 31 March 2025

Revised: 10 June 2025

Accepted: 20 June 2025

Published: 15 July 2025

Citation: Haviland, J. B. (2025). Mastery, Modality, and Tsotsil Coexpressivity. *Languages*, 10(7), 169. <https://doi.org/10.3390/languages10070169>

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1. Mastery

I first visited highland Chiapas, Mexico, in June 1966, originally to learn about “traditional”¹ ritual music in the indigenous community of Zinacantán. The musicians I met spoke their native Tsotsil (Mayan) and used little if any Spanish. They began to teach me not only to play the stringed instruments introduced four centuries earlier by Spanish friars, but to sing and to speak in their own language. I quickly realized that not all speakers of Tsotsil were the same. The senior musician to whom I was apprenticed was serving at the time as one of the *moletik* or “elders” who occupy the highest levels of the four strata of *j-pas`abtél*, literally “doers of work”: a hierarchy of ritual “cargoholders” (Cancian, 1965, 1972) who devote full years of their lives and resources to prestigious (and often costly) ritual service caring for saints, their paraphernalia, and their rituals on behalf of the entire *municipio* or township. The cargo system recruited and elevated men who had achieved or at least aspired to distinction in their community. It was thus no accident that the elders that year were virtually all accomplished in different ways as what I came to think of as not just Tsotsil speakers but *master* speakers (Haviland, 2002/2004a, 2004b). The musician, who appears at the top left in Figure 1, was a talented multi-instrumentalist with an encyclopedic knowledge of sacred song cycles. He was also sought after for his vast ritual

knowledge (garnered from years of service as a senior adviser to other cargoholders), along with another central skill essential to the job: his own good humor and talent with jokes and banter to entertain (and help keep awake) the armies of exhausted ritual specialists who danced to his music, sometimes for several days and nights without rest. A different master speaker was the man with the beturbaned head on the right in Figure 1, one of the senior *j'ilotetik* ("seers/shamans") of the community, who possessed a still more coveted linguistic ability: to transform a patient's health by addressing appropriate chanted prayers to spirits both malevolent and benign. The younger man on the upper right in Figure 1 was the *moletik*'s scribe recruited for his literacy (an essential—and at the time scarce—accounting skill for the *moletik*'s tax-collection duties, into which I myself was later dragooned as a substitute).



Figure 1. Senior cargoholders or *moletik* from Zinacantán, 1966.

That there are such Zinacantec “master speakers” is no surprise, since in ordinary life many people we routinely encounter are not just “speakers of a language” but people able to do special—sometimes specifically labelled—things with their languages: joke, gossip, entertain, instruct, sing, write, and cure; fight, encourage, cajole, insult, warn, command, convince, discourage, dissuade, entertain, soothe; and so on, among many other skills. Some people are known to be better than most at such things, while others are worse—sometimes much worse. Most important, for me personally and for this essay, was the smiling man in the middle of Figure 1, who over the next half century became my friend, my principal teacher, my mentor, and my ritual kinsman or *kumpare* (“compadre” or “co-father”) when he became the godfather of my oldest child. I will call him Don Pedro. Aside from his unusually successful career in the ritual hierarchy, throughout his life he was recruited as a *totil-me'il*, literally “father-mother”: a formal adviser in matters both religious and secular, from how to organize a ritual and arrange a marriage, or resolve a fight between neighbors or kinsmen, to how to pray at church, hire a musician, prepare a cornfield, placate an abused wife, or upbraid an enemy. He himself had his own fair share of disputes with family and neighbors, winning some and losing others. He was a skilled and appreciated raconteur and also, when opportunities arose, a scandalous gossip (and thus a central contributor to my early encounters with Zinacantec men’s conversation [Haviland, 1977b, 1977a]). As his eyes and ears began to fail late in life, he also became a sometimes reluctant, worried, or fearful sharer of his dreams (see Laughlin, 1976).

Perhaps the best-known realization of masterful speech in Zinacantec Tsotsil, widely attested in languages throughout the world and known in Mesoamerica as *difrasismo*, is what Robert M. Laughlin, in his monumental Tsotsil dictionary, labelled

“ritual speech” and “denunciatory speech.” These terms distinguish what we would consider to be two different contexts for the same speech phenomenon, but which I would venture Zinacantecs consider as a single context. Entries labeled “ritual” or “denunciatory” speech invariably form a part of traditional couplets

or blocks of speech which, according to the occasion, may be used during ritual activities at home, in church, or at a mountain shrine when addressing the gods or may be used in self-righteous declamations at home or at the courthouse. (Laughlin, 1975, p. 28)

Gary Gossen evokes “heat” to characterize a Chamula version of this same family of Tsotsil speech genres: “controlled heat serves as metaphor for describing mastery of the spoken word and evaluating individual performances, as for example, in oratory or prayer. To speak well, by this artistic canon, is to ‘speak with a heated heart’” (Gossen, 1974, pp. 449–450).

That Zinacantecs recognize those with special verbal abilities is captured, both structurally and metaphorically, in the opening words attributed to a beaten wife who appealed to a local political authority for help. Early in 1981, one of Don Pedro’s daughters, Antonia, who happened at the time to be a magistrate’s wife, recounted to her father how a young woman plaintiff, arriving at their door, had launched a complaint to the magistrate against her abusive husband (Example 1²).

Example 1	a	<i>`al-b-on</i>	<i>j-k'an-tik</i>	//		
		say-APP-1A-(IMP)	1E-want-PL			
		<i>‘What we want is for you to tell him for me.’</i>				
	b	<i>j-ch'amun</i>	<i>av-e</i>	<i>j-k'an-tik</i>	//	
		1E-borrow	2E-mouth	1E-want-PL		
		<i>‘What we want is that I borrow your mouth.’</i>				
	c	<i>tsits-b-on</i>	<i>j-k'an-tik</i>			
		punish-APP-1A	1E-want-PL			
		<i>‘What we want is that you punish him for me.’</i>				
	d	<i>k'u</i>	<i>`onox</i>	<i>ti</i>	<i>`animal</i>	<i>ch-i-s-maj-e</i> //
		what	always	CONJ	lots	ICP-1A-3E-hit-CL
		<i>‘How is it that he so often beats me?’</i>				
	e	<i>k'u</i>	<i>`onox</i>	<i>ti</i>	<i>`animal</i>	<i>ch-i-y-ute-e</i>
		what	always	CONJ	lots	ICP-1A-3E-scold-CL
		<i>‘How is it that he so often scolds me?’</i>				

The storyteller performed the speech of the abused spouse by putting into the latter’s mouth a triplet of supplications: “Tell him for me; let me borrow your mouth; punish him for me.” (Transcript lines ending in “//” are linked to the following line by formal parallelism.) This triplet illustrates how the Tsotsil genre Laughlin called “denunciatory speech” draws part of its emotional and pragmatic force—what Michael Silverstein (1981) dubbed its “metaforce” or, many years later, its “oomph” (Silverstein, 2003)—from the parallel poetic structure (Jakobson, 1960) with which the beaten wife is portrayed as phrasing her denunciation. Lines a and c show a close parallel structure. Both consist of a 2nd person imperative verb accompanied by the applicative suffix *-be*, which allows the plaintiff to add an explicit 1st person singular absolutive clitic *-on* to the command: not just “tell him” and “punish him,” but do it “for me.” Line b is a 1st person imperative that reverses the benefactive polarity: “let *me* borrow *your* mouth.” With further formal parallelism, all three lines end with the same word, an inclusive 1st person plural (which suggests that both speaker and addressee together are included in the wish): *jk'antik*, literally “we (both you and I) want it.” The construction thus gives a shared deontic flavor to the whole request as something we all (should) want. That final word in each clause serves more as a status marker (Jakobson, 1957) than as a full verb in itself. The parallelism continues in lines (d–e), where the two halves of a couplet “he beats me so much, he scolds

me so much” differ only by the single verb roots *-maj* ‘beat’ and *-ut* ‘scold,’ thus melding into a single stereoscopic image both physical and verbal aspects of domestic abuse.³ An additional formal linguistic feature of the little performance cannot be easily conveyed in a standard written transcript: its intonation. Courtesy of Praat (Boersma & Weenink, 2024), I have mapped the intonational curve of the audio recording in Figure 2. The three parts of the stylized request (lines a, b, and c of Example 1) display an identical pitch contour, with a lower pitched and rapid substantive part—“tell him; let me borrow your mouth; punish him”—and a distinctive high and dropping pitch on the final desiderative element *jk’antik* (“we want”). The beaten wife seems to chant her supplication in a parallel, highly stylized, and presumably at least partly conventional pitch curve.

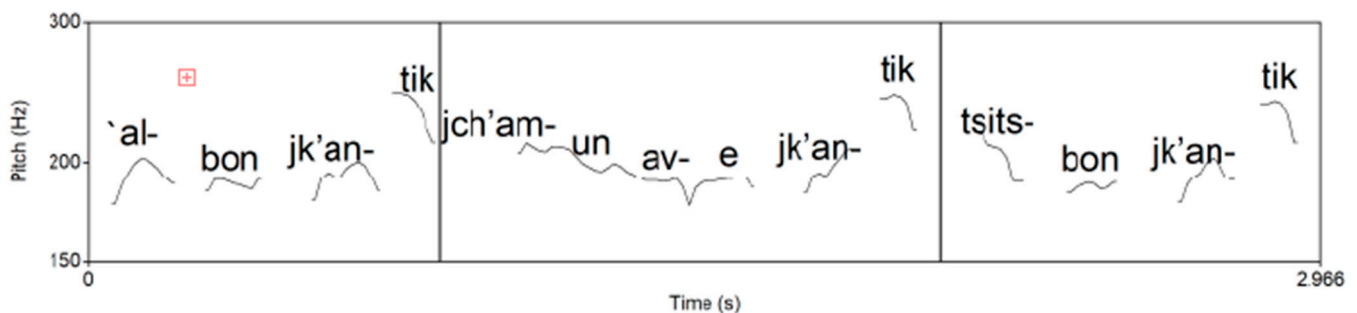


Figure 2. Pitch curve of the beaten wife’s complaint to the magistrate.⁴

2. Coexpressivity

This reported complaint by a beaten wife directly exemplifies what I have been calling “coexpressivity”—the routine use of multiple simultaneous and complementary devices to communicate diverse kinds of meaning. Some of these devices use different communicative modalities: spoken words, gestures and attitudes of the body, gaze, touch, and using the physical surroundings of interaction, including manipulating objects and space itself, both literally and conceptually. Some of these modalities involve multiple complementary expressive resources—non-speech sounds, pitch, rhythm, intonation, accent and voice, in the audible realm; mime, sign, gaze, posture, touch, and gesticulation with different bodily articulators—some draw on both naturally given features of geography and environment, and others invoke proxemic conventions of interaction in spatial realms.

If you asked an AI tool to look up the term “coexpressivity,” you would almost certainly be referred to genetic research on how multiple genes “express” or regulate the development of similar (or sometimes opposite) effects on a resulting phenotype. As my geneticist brother-in-law recently explained, “Operationally, gene ‘expression’ means that a portion of the genome is used to build a molecule: RNA or protein. . . In this context, ‘co-expression’ means that two or more genes are expressed together, at the same time, in the same cell/tissue. If you detect expression of one, you will also find expression of the other with statistical significance” (Collavin, 2024). Scientists also generalize such connections to whole networks of coexpressive (or, alternatively, “anti-expressive”) genes, sometimes comparing them statistically even across species and over (evolutionary) time (e.g., Crow et al., 2022).

More narrowly, in the realm of linguistics, searching an AI engine for “coexpression” might funnel you to a family of recent neologisms due to Martin Haspelmath⁵ in which “coexpressive” linguistic forms (or “shapes,” as he prefers to call them)—including, by extension, grammatical constructions—can share distinct meanings or functions in different contexts. Simple examples are Haspelmath’s cases of what is traditionally called “synonymy,” illustrated by the German *Tasche*, which means, in English, either “pocket” or “bag”; or, switching the languages around, the English “go,” which means both “go by foot”

(German *gehen*) or ‘go by vehicle’ (German *fahren*)” (Haspelmath, 2023, p. 2). The focus here is firmly monomodal and heavily referential, for both forms and meanings: spoken (or written) “shapes” on the one hand and their largely denotational “meanings” on the other.

By contrast, the core notion of “coexpressivity” used here is quite different, despite parallels and analogies with related words in the research just mentioned. The original impetus for the current special issue of *Languages* arose from an international collaborative research project, co-sponsored by UCMexus and CONACyT, and co-organized with my colleague Telma Kaan (CEM-UNAM) with a cohort of Mexican, Guatemalan, and North American colleagues all working in communities of speakers of Mesoamerican indigenous languages. To quote the call for papers for this special issue, “the notion—here dubbed ‘coexpressivity’—that human communication, including that linked to virtually all signed and spoken languages, routinely involves multiple simultaneous channels or modalities, some vocal and some not, is an ancient idea. Nonetheless, it has only recently received serious systematic attention from scholars of language and social interaction. Scientific advances in the study of coexpressivity, which often involve research by native and non-native researchers alike on endangered or little studied indigenous and community languages, pay careful attention to what Enfield (2009) called ‘composite utterances’ in which speech (or sign), gesture, bodily configuration, gaze, and/or touch coalesce to constitute and enable” the meaningful cooperative communicative action that epitomizes human social life (Goodwin, 2017).

In my own research, I trace this concept of “coexpressivity” to David McNeill’s *Hand and Mind*, a foundational book on gesture published in 1992. Early in the book, to illustrate different types of gestures, McNeill describes a moment from a video recording where “when describing a scene from a comic book story in which a character bends a tree back to the ground, a speaker appeared to grip something and pull it back” while saying “and he [bends it way back].” Temporally synchronized with the bracketed portion of the speech, the speaker simultaneously performs an “iconic” gesture in which his right “hand appears to grip something and pull it from the upper front space back and down near to the shoulder” (McNeill, 1992, p. 12). McNeill uses the temporal synchrony of speech with the arm movement as one demonstration of the linkage between word and bodily imagery, “the close connection that exists between speech and gesture” (p. 13). Beyond synchrony and the semantics of “bend,” he also notes that the perspective of both the spoken syntax (“he bends it way back”) and physical configuration of the gesture are presented from the point of view of the bender (and not, for example, of the tree). He concludes, “[t]hus, both semantically and pragmatically, in terms of focus, the gesture and utterance were parallel expressions of meaning.” McNeill goes on to argue, however, that “[a]long with this kind of coexpressiveness, there is also complementarity. Speech and gesture refer to the same event and are partially overlapping, but the pictures they present are different” (p. 13). It is this combination of parallel and complementary simultaneous but multiple expression that we refer to as “coexpressivity.” It may be multi-modal, as in McNeill’s combination of word and gesture, but it need not be. As McNeill’s example illustrates, the verbal expression itself—“he bends it way back” (as opposed to, say, an unaccusative “it bent way back” or McNeill’s alternative passive formulation “it got bent way back”)—simultaneously incorporates the semantics of the verb “bend” and, as McNeill writes, “implies [that is, coexpresses] the point of view of the actor” (p. 13).

McNeill took as a starting point the raw temporal generalization, independently argued earlier by both Kendon (1980) and Schegloff (1984), that gestures in speech appear to overlap with or just precede what Schegloff had called their apparent spoken “lexical affiliates.” McNeill wrote in 1994 that “gestures of the [Kendon] gesticulation type are co-expressive with speech; that is, they cover the same idea unit as the speech they occur

simultaneously with. At the same time, however, they also are nonredundant, that is, they supplement speech and have their own communicative effects. Such nonredundant, co-expressive, and synchronous gesticulations form, in the memory of a listener, a single unified system of meaning” (McNeill et al., 1994, p. 224), a notion he and his collaborators have developed in many subsequent studies on gesture and thought.

The elements of utterance characterized as “coexpressive” in McNeill’s work were stretches of speech on the one hand and contemporaneous episodes of “gesticulation” on the other. Several examples of Don Pedro’s storytelling, to be discussed shortly, illustrate such phenomena, in which speech—sometimes conventionally colored by the use of marked genres and intonation—combines with hand and head movement, gaze, and space, both narrated and co-present, to tell a story. The collaborative research project of which this essay is part has tried to expand both the notion of “expression” and its conjoint or cooperative nature so that not only multimodal aspects of utterance can be coexpressive but also monomodal elements, sometimes something as small as a single spoken form, or something as large as a construction that produces multiple expressive effects at once, simultaneously, and sometimes even spread across a range of other conjoint actions (even with different actors). I now return to such phenomena in the master speech of my compadre Don Pedro.

3. Coexpressivity, Multimodality, and Master Speakers

The metonym embedded in line b of Example 1 inspires the title of this essay: what makes a person’s mouth skillful enough for a Zinacantec to “want to borrow” it at all? *Whose* mouth do Zinacantecs (or any of us) want to borrow and *why*? I argue that speech worth “borrowing” is characteristically coexpressive: it gathers “force” or “oomph” by coordinating different, often simultaneous expressive modalities and mechanisms of the sort to be explored in this essay.⁶ The parallelism evident in talk from a “heated heart” is not merely syntactic, semantic, or lexical. It also involves sonorous, intonationally marked, rhythmic, embodied, and semiotically and pragmatically distinct expressive domains. In what follows, exhibits of such coexpressivity are drawn from more than four decades of Don Pedro’s interactions in the latter half of his life. The chronology traces our friendship from when I first met him as a mature and expert Zinacantec corn farmer, still with young children but already well embarked on a distinguished pathway of community service. It follows the development of his long ritual career as a powerful master speaker, during which time my family lived periodically in his house compound, sharing the vicissitudes of life. As he gained stature in his community, Don Pedro watched his children marry and move out. He gradually aged and ultimately withdrew entirely from public life.

By good fortune, my friendship with Don Pedro also coincided with technological advances that afforded ever more (at least partial) records of people’s interactions with one another. I first recorded the music and words of my Tsotsil teachers with reel-to-reel analogue audio tapes, which gradually gave way to more portable audio cassettes, as Don Pedro and my other Zinacantec interlocutors helped me penetrate subtleties of Tsotsil grammar (Haviland, 1981, 1992/1994, 1994) and spoken interaction: gossip (Haviland, 1977a, 1977b; Haviland & Haviland, 1983), conversational turn-taking (Haviland, 1986b), evidentiality (Haviland, 2002/2004a), joking, teasing, and affect (Haviland, 1986a, 1986b, 1989), as well as outright fighting (Haviland, 1987, 1997). The 3rd person report in Example 1, for example, was transcribed from a 1981 audio recording of a verbal retelling. In the recording, there is thus no access to the original protagonists’ bodily comportment directly—however constrained it is likely to have been in the initial stages of forceful denunciation—but only through the narrator’s oral representations of the beaten wife’s words. As time went on, such audio materials were supplemented by photographs, short sound film recordings, and eventually, by the late 1970s, video recordings of gradually improving quality and scope.

Having such varied mnemonic records widened the range of interactional phenomena available for detailed and repeated scrutiny. Thus, continuing research into Zinacantec interaction began to allow fuller appreciation of Zinacantec linguistic mastery. Since the coexpressivity between different communicative resources and the modalities they involve is the central theme of this study, the wider range of available materials involved requires a similarly varied repertoire of representational devices to supplement ordinary linguistic transcription, as the following exhibits will illustrate.

Consider first the photographs in Figure 3. Don Pedro was already far advanced in the hierarchy of cargoholders when I first met him, occupying a senior position in the third of four hierarchical levels. A decade later, he undertook one of the most prestigious positions in the fourth and highest stratum, which would normally have represented the final stage of his career as a cargoholder. In the 1980s, quite exceptionally, he was drafted to occupy a special post-cargo position as *ch'ul mol* ("holy elder")—one of six men who have completed distinguished careers in the normal four levels of the ordinary religious hierarchy and who are thereafter invited to serve, in principle for the rest of their lives, in yearly Easter rituals. (One of their main jobs is to tend to a wooden Christ figure, which they hoist and nail to a giant cross on Good Friday.) Figure 3a shows Don Pedro (who appears on the right side of the photographs) initiating a ritualized greeting with the 2nd ranked *ch'ul mol* seated at his right hand. In Figure 3b, both men in turn greet the next two more junior members of the cohort. By rank, the elder member of each dyad "gives his hand" to the younger interlocutor, who "meets" the other's hand with his forehead as both simultaneously speak the couplets appropriate to initiating ceremonial duties during *Semana Santa* (Holy Week) in 1985.



Figure 3. Greeting sequences and bodily postures: "give your hand," "meet his hand" (from photos taken at Easter, 1985), showing one greeting dyad (a) and two simultaneous dyads (b).

During this period, Don Pedro was at the height of his powers as both master speaker and *totil-me'il* "father-mother": giving advice and counsel to younger cargoholders, to neighbors, and to his own extended family. As a member of the household, I had often seen Don Pedro demonstrate his prowess as a ritual performer, skilled at prayer and ritual procedure. Although not pretending to have curing powers himself, Don Pedro accompanied shamans in responsive prayer and frequently led it in curing rituals, or as a proxy for ailing patients less skilled in the idiom. He was also regularly asked to administer wise admonitions about proper marriage to newlyweds, or more frequently to young couples who reappeared sheepishly, some months after eloping, to beg for forgiveness and make peace with the bride's family (Haviland, 1996).

On several late July afternoons in 1990, I sat with Don Pedro for hours under the eaves of his house on a rare occasion when there was no proper work (typically, at that time of year, weeding corn) waiting to be done. My daughter, Maya Haviland, then 13, used an early handheld video camera to record us talking. It was from perusing those early videos in detail that I first came to appreciate the roles of gesture (especially movements of the hands)

and the body more generally in Zinacantec interaction, a topic I have pursued elsewhere (Haviland, 1986a, 1994, 2000a, 2000b, 2003). In those same informal conversations, Don Pedro demonstrated in vivid detail other expressive virtues of spoken Tsotsil, among others its use of physical space(s).

In Example 2, I have transcribed how he began one of his tales.

- Example 2**
- | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|--|------|---------|------------|-------|----------|-------|---------|----------|
| a. | `ali | ja` | yech | 0-k-a`i | lo`il | noxtok | `ali: | | |
| | ART | i | thus | CP-1E-hear | story | also | ART | | |
| | <i>I heard a story like that</i> | | | | | | | | |
| b. | vo`ne | | | | | | | | |
| | long_ago | | | | | | | | |
| | <i>a long time ago.</i> | | | | | | | | |
| c. | `oy | jun | `ulo` | | | | | | |
| | exist | one | visitor | | | | | | |
| | <i>There was a guy from Chamula.⁷</i> | | | | | | | | |
| | [d0] | [d1] | [d2] | [d3] | | | | | |
| d. | i-0-k`ot | li` | ta | bak`o | yo` | s-na | li | y-ajval | toch`-e |
| | CP-3A-arrive | here | PREP | bridge | where | 3E-house | ART | 3E-lord | Toch`-CL |
| | <i>He arrived here at the bridge where the lord of Toch` has his house.'</i> | | | | | | | | |

As he introduced his narrative scene, Don Pedro was himself physically seated facing east in front of his house in his home village. He had his arms folded, thus constraining his hands from gesticulating freely. Indeed, except for one iconic hand gesture by Don Pedro (and a single index-finger point of mine), the uses of the body in this tiny initial scene are confined entirely to the eyes and the face. I was sitting to my compadre's left, fiddling with my tape recorder. With his arms still folded, Don Pedro gazed into a neutral space between us at Example 2[d0] (see Figure 4). Precisely as he started to say "here at the bridge," Don Pedro lifted his forehead and eyebrows fleetingly, orienting his face slightly to the east (or as one says in Tsotsil, to "where the sun arises") at [d1] and [d2] (see again Figure 4). He then turned his gaze to me [d3], apparently to check whether (and how carefully) I was attending to him.



Figure 4. The "bridge" where the Chamula went. [d0] Don Pedro gazes from "nowhere" space" to [d1,d2] lift his brow and eyes in the direction of the sunrise, and [d3] returns his gaze to his interlocutor.

Asking in Tsotsil, “Here in San Cristóbal?” I pointed with my right index finger in the direction to which I evidently perceived he had just tilted his forehead (Figure 5a)—that is toward the Mexican town of San Cristóbal some 15 km away as the crow flies, where, as I apparently interpreted it, the “bridge” he had just mentioned was to be found. Don Pedro replied with a “nod”—that is, a double downward dip of his head (Figure 5b)—turning his gaze to me as he pronounced an affirmative spoken *jii* (“yes”).



Figure 5. “You mean in San Cristóbal?” Interlocutor’s question with pointing gesture (a) and nodded reply (b).

Although not central to the argument here, I have written elsewhere (Haviland, 2000b, 2003) about the striking directional precision Zinacantecs display when they point and gaze to even distant places. Notably, for this article’s reflection on my compadre’s coexpressive virtuosity, even his tiny head gestures—meant to help set the scene for his story—are, geographically, spot on. He glances up from his yard in exactly the compass direction to where the bridge he describes actually lies: to the east across steep mountains and valleys. (See the composite Figure 6, images courtesy of Google Earth, which shows the actual lay of the land between my compadre’s village and the nearby Mexican town where the “bridge” is located. The inset shows my compadre’s house at the northwest edge of his home village, and the green arrow emanating from his house points in the approximate direction of his slight head tilt at line d of Example 2, shown also in Figure 4[d2]. Projecting that same direction outward onto the surrounding terrain would lead more or less exactly to where the bridge in question lies on the surrounding larger map.) Thus, even the details of Don Pedro’s tiny head movements, coupled with his acute awareness of his exact surroundings, helped locate his narrative in local geographic space, in ways that—in the case of at least this interlocutor—seemed to have direct interactive consequences, namely my own clarifying question about where the Earth Lord actually lived.

To dramatize what happened next, at line f of Example 3, unfolding his right arm, Don Pedro mimed the Chamula’s knocking at the door (Figure 7[f1]), then refolded his arms. (The word *ts-k’o:j* in line f of Example 3 [see the graphic representation of the timeline in Figure 8] has a notably lengthened vowel—about which more below—as he pronounces *k’oj* [“knock, rap”], a monolexemic onomatopoetic root that functions here as a transitive verb stem to denote both the action of hitting a hard surface with an instrument and the resulting noise.) After some slight apparent verbal hesitation (line g of Example 3), Don Pedro also gave what in English would be called a “shrug,” lifting both shoulders silently three times (Figure 7[g1]), apparently to suggest some unclarity about the exact sequence of events in his narrative. He went on to exploit a different sonorous modality (lines f1 and i1 of Example 3, and see Figure 9) by repeating the Tsotsil onomatopoetic root *vov* three times to portray, as “reported speech,” the dog’s bark that greeted the knock.

Example 3

f	[f1] <i>ts-k'o:j</i> ICP.3E-knock <i>The Chamula knocked on the door</i>	<i>ti`na</i> door	<i>li</i> ART	<i>`ulo`-e</i> visitor-CL		
g	<i>j-na`-tik</i> 1E-know-1PLInc <i>Who knows if he went up...?</i>	<i>mi</i> Q	<i>i-0-muy</i> CP-3A-go_up	<i>xa-</i> already	[g1] <i>`ali</i> uh-	
h	<i>ti`van</i> bark <i>A dog barked.</i>	<i>ya`el</i> EVID	<i>ts'i`</i> dog			
i	[i1] <i>voj</i> woof <i>"Woof, woof, woof," said the dog.</i>	<i>voj</i> woof	<i>voj</i> woof	<i>xi</i> said	<i>li</i> ART	<i>ts'i`-e</i> dog-CL

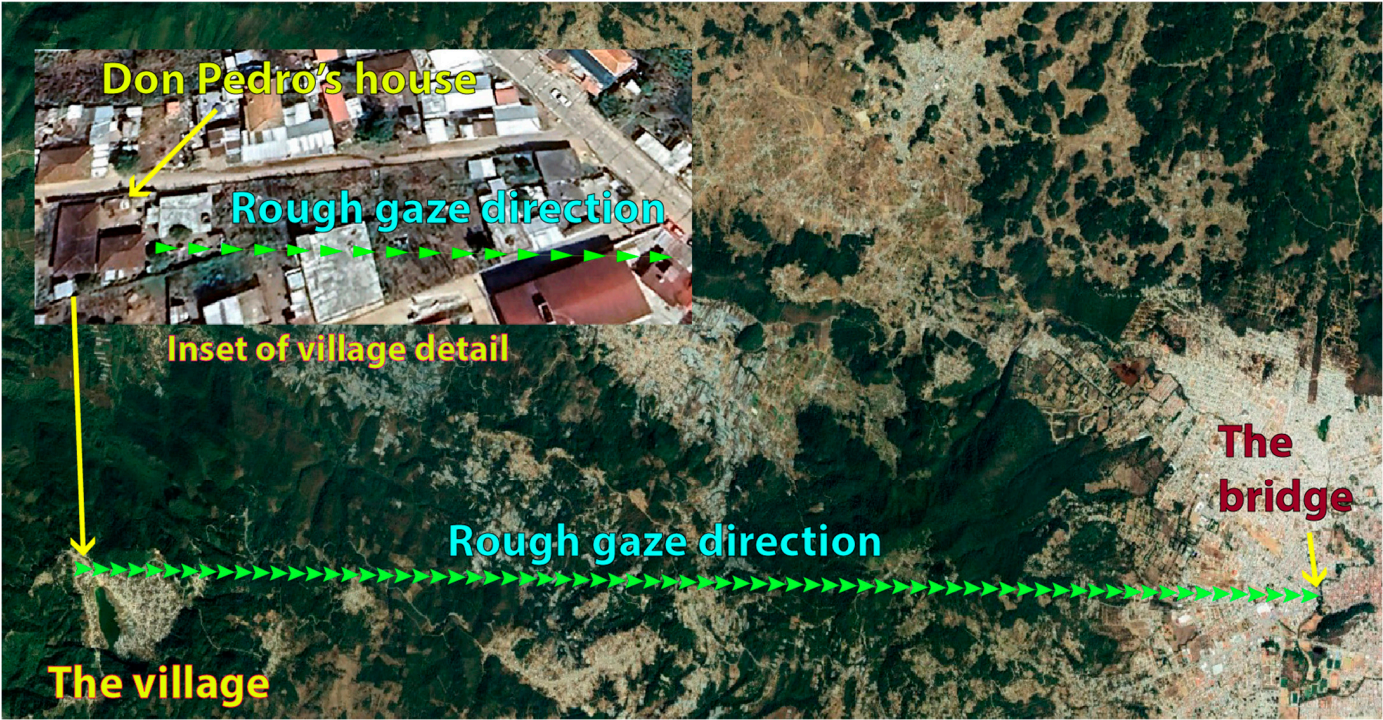


Figure 6. The bridge where the Earth Lord’s house sits from the perspective of Don Pedro’s house (shown in the inset) in his village.



Figure 7. The Chamula knocks [f1]; Don Pedro shrugs [g1]; the dog barks [i1].

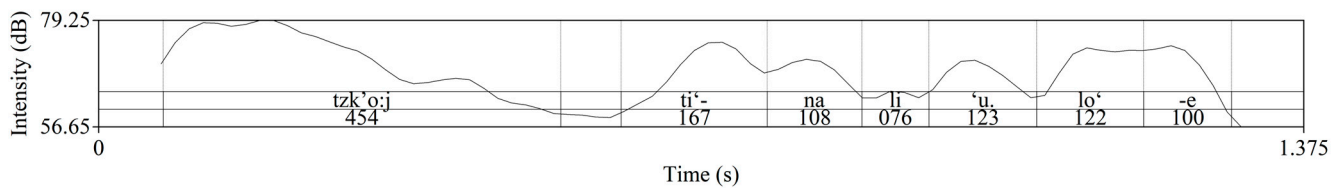


Figure 8. Performing action of knocking⁸ showing syllable lengths and intensity.

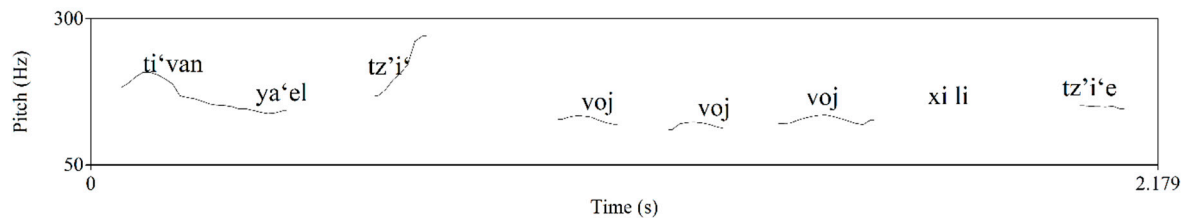


Figure 9. Vojvojvoj: onomatopoeia, with pitch curve.

In Example 4, Don Pedro moved on to the next narrated scene, as the boss's servant answered the door after the Chamula man knocked. With his arms still folded, Don Pedro looked forward and slightly down, into what I have called a “nowhere” space, training his eyes neither on me—his interlocutor—nor on anything apparent in the actual physical surroundings (Figure 10[h2]) and thus conjuring a virtual interactive space where his protagonists could be portrayed. He used another elongated vowel (a kind of hesitation marker or time filler—see Figure 11) to pronounce the completive prefix *-i-* on the verb *lok'* (“exit”) to introduce a new protagonist. He glanced at me briefly (Example 4[h3]) as he mentioned the servant (the “boy”) in the boss's employ (Example 4 at line h). He then voiced the “boy” asking the importunate Chamula what he wanted (Example 4 at line i), as Don Pedro positioned his eyes slightly higher in the nowhere space and looked straight ahead, presumably now miming the *muchacho* looking out of the door at the visitor (Figure 10[i1]). The Chamula's response followed (Example 4 at line j): “Is the boss here?” Don Pedro's gaze here shifted subtly down (Example 4[j1]), apparently to depict the conversational back and forth without having to turn his head from one full direction to another.



Figure 10. The boss's “boy” answers the door. (See text description).

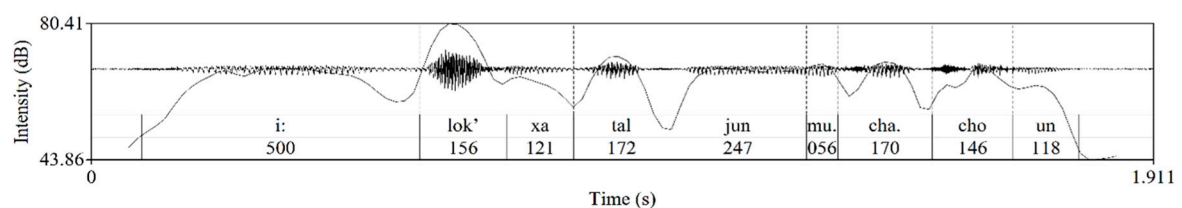


Figure 11. Elongated vowel: hesitation, filler.

Example 4						
h	[h1] [h2]				[h3]	
	<i>i:-0-lok'</i>	<i>xa</i>	<i>tal</i>	<i>jun</i>	<i>muchacho</i>	<i>un</i>
	CP-3A-exit	already	DIR	one	boy	CL
	<i>"A boy came out."</i>					
i	[i1]					
	<i>k'u</i>	<i>ch-a-sa'</i>	<i>xi</i>		<i>la</i>	
	what	ICP-2E-search	said		EVID	
	<i>"What are you looking for?" he apparently said.</i>					
j	[j1]					
	<i>Mi</i>	<i>li'</i>	<i>'ajvalil-e</i>	<i>xi</i>		
	INT	here	boss-CL	said		
	<i>"Is the boss here?" he said.</i>					
k						
	<i>k'u</i>	<i>ch-av-al</i>	<i>xi</i>			
	What	ICP-2E-say	said			
	<i>"What do you have to say?" he said.</i>					
l					[l1]	
	<i>Ta</i>	<i>j-jak'</i>	<i>mi</i>	<i>'oy</i>	<i>'abtel</i>	<i>xi</i>
	ICP	1E-ask	INT	EXIST	work	said
	<i>"I want to ask if there's work," he said.</i>					
m	[m1]					
	<i>'Aa</i>	<i>xi</i>				
	Ah	Said				
	<i>"Oh," he said.</i>					
n					[n1]	
	<i>Mala-o</i>	<i>j-likel-uk</i>	<i>xi</i>	<i>la</i>	<i>taj</i>	<i>muchacho-e</i>
	Wait-IMP	one-moment-SUBJ	said	EVID	that	boy-CL
	<i>"Wait a second," said that boy evidently.</i>					
o	[o1]					
	<i>Ba</i>	<i>s-jak'-be</i>	<i>tal</i>	<i>taj</i>	<i>'ajvalil</i>	
	AUX	3E-ask-APP	DIR	that	boss	
	<i>He went to ask the boss.</i>					

The dialogue between the Chamula and the *muchacho* continued as the visitor asked (Example 4 at line l) whether any work (Figure 12 at line l1) was to be had, which the boy acknowledged (Figure 12[m1], Example 4 at line m). Don Pedro returned his attention to me, his physical interlocutor in the real world (Figure 12[n2]), and holding my gaze, flicked his head back and to the left over his shoulder (Figure 12[o1]) with a contextual nod back inside the imagined scene (Figure 12[o1]), where the *muchacho* indicated that he would go to ask the boss himself for a response to the Chamula man's request for work.



Figure 12. Dialogue between protagonists. Two depicted characters converse [l1] and [m1]; and then Don Pedro converses with me, his real life interlocutor, [n1] and [o1].

The little scene ends as Don Pedro reports that the *muchacho* shortly returned to tell the Chamula man to come back “on Thursday” for the promised work, the beginning of the apparently hapless man’s long adventure in the underworld.

4. Family Battles, Captured on Audiotape

As Example 1 with which I began suggests, skilled Tsotsil talk makes use of several conventional genres, involving specialized lexicons and syntax, usually also characterized by intonation, rhythm, and voice quality. Laughlin’s specialized “ritual speech” genre incorporates often esoteric or archaic lexicon and conventionalized semantic pairings. As Laughlin mentioned, it is routinely used in prayer, formal greetings, admonitions, and heartfelt denunciation.

In 1993, I accompanied Don Pedro on an early morning visit to the village *agente*, a local dispute settler, called in Tsotsil a *j-meltsanej-k’op* (literally, repairer of words [or fights]), whose job is, as far as possible, to bring disputes into some mediated state of reconciliation. We were invited into the dispute settler’s kitchen and seated near the fire where his wife was toasting coffee beans on the griddle. The two men began to chat about the weather and the corn crop, ordinary conversational small talk: rapid, responsive, and peppered with mutual repetition. It was clear, however, not least because of the early hour, that Don Pedro had business on his mind.

Even everyday requests, especially if they are sufficiently serious to warrant a gift (traditionally of local rum, a bottle of which Don Pedro ultimately produced and placed on the floor in front of the magistrate) will engender a special sort of “pleading” voice. My compadre uttered a conventionalized self-deprecatory apology (for offering such a “small amount of very cold water”—referring to a liter of 70-proof bootleg liquor—Example 5, lines a–b). The *agente* asked “What’s it for?” Don Pedro proceeded to introduce his request.

Example 5	a.	<i>bats’i</i>	<i>`ak’-o</i>	<i>pertonal</i>	<i>j-set’-uk</i>		
		truly	give-IMP	pardon	1-little-SUBJ		
		<i>Really give pardon for a little</i>					
	b.	<i>k-unen</i>	<i>sikil</i>	<i>`a`al</i>	<i>kumpa</i>		
		1E-small	cold	water	compadre		
		<i>Of my little cold water, compadre</i>					
	c.	<i>li`</i>	<i>ch-a-j-k’opon-e:</i>				
		here	ICP-2A-1E-speak-CLIT				
		<i>That I have come to talk to you with.</i>					
	e.	<i>ch-a-j-k’an-be</i>	<i>pavo:r</i>				
		ICP-2A-1E-want-APP	favor				
		<i>I want a favor from you</i>					
	f.	<i>k’usi</i>	<i>x-’elan</i>	<i>x-a-na:’</i>	<i>mi</i>		
		what	ASP-be	ASP-2E-know	INT		
		<i>What do you think?</i>					
	g.	<i>mi</i>	<i>ja`</i>	<i>no`ox</i>	<i>mu</i>	<i>x-a-`abola:j</i>	<i>xa-</i>
		INT	i	only	NEG	ASP-2A-do_favor	ASP-2A-
		<i>Won’t you just please</i>					

- h. *x-a-* *tak-b-on* *ta* *ʼik'-el* *j-krem-oti:k*
 ASP-2E- send-APP-1A PREP bring-NOM 1E-boy-PL
send to have my boys brought in
- i. *lavi* *x-elan* *y-a`el* *ti:* *kap-em-ik* *y-a`el*
 now ASP-be 3E-seem CONJ angry-PERF-PL 3E-seem
For the way they now seem to be angry

Pleading also has a characteristic and exaggerated singsong rising and falling cadence with slow and deliberate syllables, notably elongated at the ends of phrases. A similar pitch cadence is used for other purposes—reciting lists, for example, with elongated (but less intonationally marked) final syllables. Figure 13 illustrates the corresponding pitch and syllable length contours for my compadre’s pleading in Example 5, lines e–g. The first part of the diagram again shows a familiar pattern in which each line has a characteristic rising and falling pitch cadence, reminiscent of the beaten wife’s complaint in Figure 1. Among other potential measures for this tiny example, one can calculate the average syllable length of the passage as 247 msec. per syllable, over the 18 syllables shown. However, neither these syllables (nor even individual orthographic “words”) are evenly distributed by length, with the final syllables in each line of the utterance notably elongated (at 478, 550, and 408 milliseconds each).

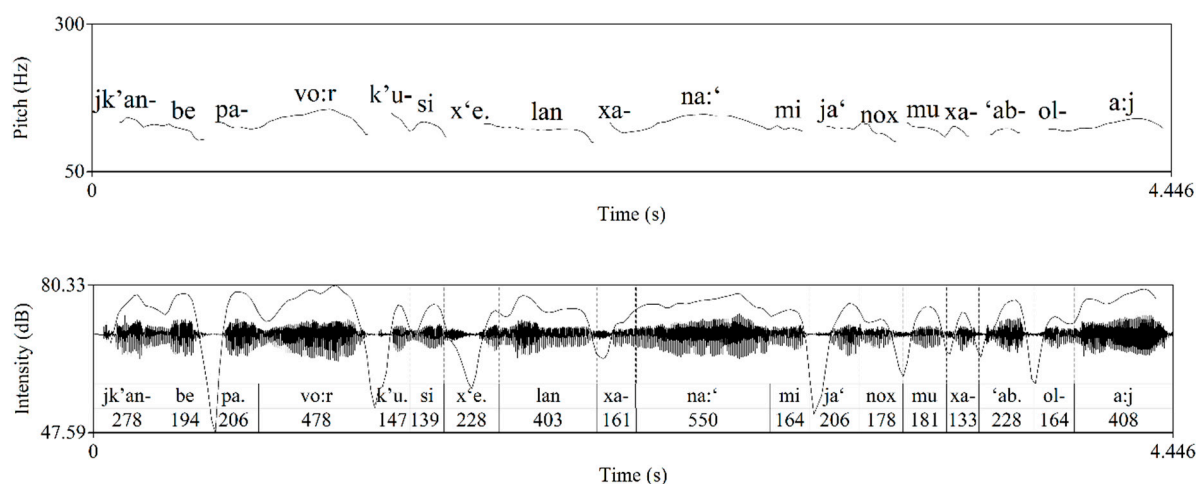


Figure 13. Pleading request cadence, pitch, and syllable length.

The entire conversation between my compadre and the town magistrate fell both topically and formally into distinct phases (see [Haviland, 2017](#) for more details), moving from the neutral “phatic” opening interchange of pleasantries into an impassioned plea for help by the older man. Another conventionalized speech pattern emerged when Don Pedro’s performance turned to representing (or perhaps parodying) the speech of his main antagonist, his son-in-law, whom he blamed for having corrupted his sons into fighting with him over their inheritance. He complained to the *agente* that when he had asked his daughter to ask her husband in turn to help him transport fertilizer down to his cornfields (where the younger man was farming himself), the hated son-in-law retorted that he had already helped his father-in-law the previous year (and was thus disinclined to do so again). The old man, the son-in-law complained, should find someone else to help him instead. In Don Pedro’s rendition of this anecdote, he put into his son-in-law’s imagined mouth the following words.

Example 6	a	`ak'-o give-IMP "Let him go!"	bat-u:k go-SUBJ	
	b	kuch-be carry-APP "I already carried it for him last year."	`onox anyway	junabi: last_year
	c	xi said So he said, I hear.	la EVID	un CL

Once again, there is phrase-final elongation in both lines a and b of Example 6, using a much narrower pitch range, without the pronounced rapidly rising and falling intonation seen above (see Figure 14). However, the son-in-law is portrayed in Don Pedro’s rendition as “angry” by two further features in his reported speech. First, even despite the elongated phase-final vowels, it is noticeably faster than previous speech in the conversation, *averaging* about 176 msec. per syllable despite the two elongated vowels. Moreover, although the spectrogram in Figure 14 is not detailed enough to make obvious the F0 irregularity it displays, the old man’s vocal representation of the son-in-law’s refusal is noticeably “creaky” (and also at the very bottom of the speaker’s pitch range) and therefore, to a Tsotsil speaker’s ears, coexpressively “angry.”

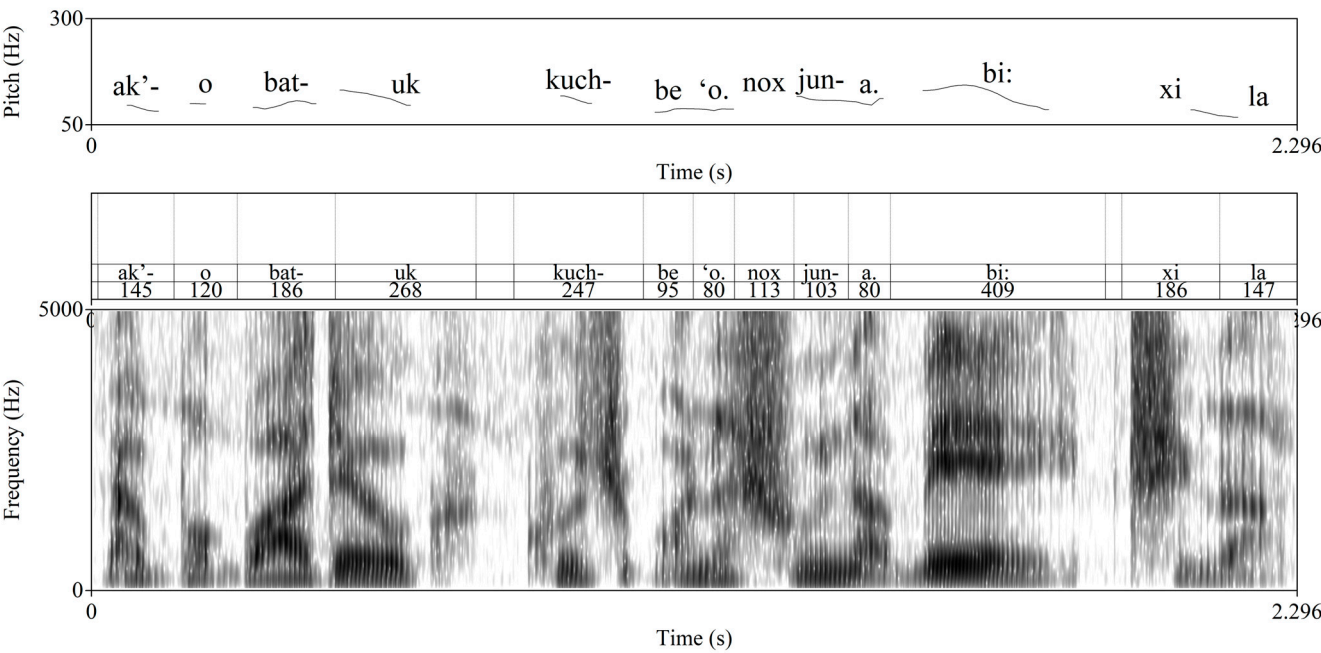


Figure 14. Angry (rapid and creaky) voice.

The overall conversation ended with the young magistrate’s elaboration of his own view of an appropriate solution (which notably did not include the old man’s first sugges- tion: disinheriting his sons), and a final grudging partial agreement between the two men about how to proceed.

5. Coexpressivity and Speech

Don Pedro’s artful interaction involves further types of coexpressivity, some linked more to spoken Tsotsil than to his head, eyes, hands, and body. Just as he moved cor- poreally between narrative spaces, the interactive space where he and I talked, and the wider geographic space of his village, he also overlaid his words with both conventional

and expressive intonation and the generic specificities of Tsotsil prayer, pleading, admonition, and scolding. With his very choice of words, he further embellished and injected perspectives—both his own and those of his protagonists—onto the scenes and situations he depicted. The communicative resources he enjoyed for such expression lay partly in details of Tsotsil lexicon and morphosyntax.

As with other Mayan languages, Tsotsil roots fall into formal categories based on the inflections they invite. Laughlin's (1975, 2008) monumental dictionaries of Zinacantec Tsotsil, with over 35,000 individual entries, isolated a total of just over 3100 putative lexical roots. Using morphological criteria devised with the help of Terry Kaufman⁹, he assigned over 2800 of these roots to syntactic classes. About half of these were categorized as “nouns” because, as minimally inflected bare stems, they function as nominal arguments. Most of the rest were verbal roots, almost all with a canonical CVC (consonant-vowel-consonant) shape.¹⁰ Root classes were based on morphological possibilities rather than on putative notional content. By far the largest such class consisted of so-called “positional” roots,¹¹ presumably so named because they included roots from which lexemes can be derived that denote bodily positions like “stand,” “sit,” and “lie,” among many others.¹² Monolexemic positional roots number more than 700 and exhibit exuberant semantic diversity, which extends rather anarchically from the anatomies, postures, and configurations of bodies (both human and otherwise), to sounds, and many other aspects of visual appearance (including color [see Collier, 1963; Haviland, 1999]), shape, and even consistency. Although lexicographers have singled out positional roots for no special treatment, their clearly hypertrophic elaboration begs for explanation. Why so much attention to such levels of semantic detail in Tsotsil and its sister languages? Part of the pragmatic and interactional motivation, I suggest, for such quantities of semantically highly specified lexical roots is to highlight a master speaker's ability to pick exactly the right word to capture an object's (or person's) position, configuration, or appearance. Such use of *mots justes* also offers multiple possibilities for spoken coexpression, as the next examples of Don Pedro's talk illustrate.

Laughlin's dictionary also apparently inherited from Kaufman's work on Tzeltal a series of stem categories, themselves formally derived from their characteristic morphosyntactic guises. Of special interest in this study of my compadre's coexpressivity are what Laughlin lists as “affective verbs.”¹³ These special stem forms can be produced from different root classes, but they are characteristic of virtually all positional roots. (They are also a criterial property of what Laughlin—apparently on semantic grounds—called onomatopoeic roots, which themselves number nearly 200 in his 1975 dictionary. These latter roots denote sounds and can, for example, be uttered as bare or reduplicated roots as interjections to “quote” such sounds onomatopoeically.)

Laughlin's characterization of “affective” verb stems in Tsotsil has been widely quoted:¹⁴

“Affective verbs are used characteristically in narrative description with a certain gusto, a desire to convey a vivid impression. They have dash”. (Laughlin, 1975, p. 26)

I take this to mean that such stems are subject to certain conditions of discursive (or interactional) appropriateness. Laughlin goes on, to demur about meanings: “[t]heir specific semantic value, however, is not easy to ascertain” (1975, p. 26). Kaufman's original baptismal terminology—which labelled as “affect verbs” stems with a specific formal morphological definition—has engendered an equivocation, as subsequent scholars, including Laughlin himself (as well as the present author), have sought instead to search for a common semantic core to the resulting “affective verbs” as formally defined.

The schematic meanings Laughlin offers for Tsotsil affective stems have to do with motion, intensity, and plurality—all frequent dimensions of verbal derivation across lan-

guages. He also mentions a few additional qualities: one suffix, for example, “emphasizes permanence, a single location, and a state of neglect or abandonment”; another “may stress the slowness or ponderousness of its motion, the ineffectiveness or repetition of an action, the loudness of a noise”; yet another indicates “a single sudden sound or movement” (1975, p. 26).

Consider Ringe’s preliminary study of Tsotsil “affect verbs” based on a selection of Laughlin’s published Tsotsil texts, which were normalized written transcriptions of audiotaped spoken tales.

“At least one semantic property is common to all affect verbs: they are vividly descriptive. A considerable number of these verbs denote loud or noticeable noises (gurgling, hissing, clucking, howling, banging, and the like), salient physical characteristics (baldness, fatness, length of hair, facial expressions, and so forth), distinctive positions of the body (leaning, bending over, sitting with legs stretched out, etc.), or periodic motion (circling, rippling, flickering, running and ducking, and so on); affect verbs in *-luj/-lij* describe sudden events. These are all well adapted to colorful description. It is significant that many of the examples [of “affect verbs”] in Laughlin’s texts exhibit lengthening of a vowel for rhetorical effect”. (Ringe, 1981, p. 62)

In her pioneering study of partially cognate Tseltal “affect” verbs, Maffi (following Kaufman’s original categorizations) characterized their semantics as follows.

“Overall, affect verbs seem to convey connotations of intensity, duration, repetition, or other characteristics of an event that attract the speaker’s attention as being deviant with respect to some implicit norm or expectation. At the same time, affect verbs also convey emotional, affective connotations, i.e., the speaker’s psychological reaction (of surprise, amusement, puzzlement, and the like) to the unexpected, deviant-from-the-norm, character of a given event”. (Maffi, 1990, p. 62)

She notes that “[o]ften, my collaborators would come up with whole ‘mini stories’ about individual stem tokens” (Maffi, 1990, p. 65). She continues,

“[w]hile referential, denotative meaning is unquestionably present in these words, they are used to serve a purpose that is not purely referential, but also expressive: to both describe a state of affairs and comment upon it by conveying one’s psychological reaction to it”. (Maffi, 1990, p. 66)

It is far from clear, however, that all of the schematic nuances linked to affect verbs are “affective” or “expressive” in such senses. To take a modern example, Tsotsil has a formally affective verb *kuchet*, derived from the root *kuch* (“carry (on the back)”), which means literally “carry around all the time.” However, the verb is routinely used with the subject *ch’ojon tak’in* (literally “metal wire,” i.e., cell phone) with virtually no affective overtones, since that is just how you describe something that is always on one’s person (for better or worse).

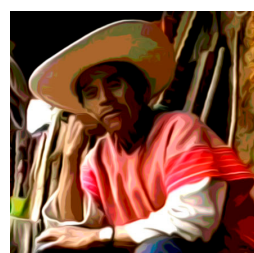
Nor is it the case that other formally non-“affective” stems lack notionally “affective” qualities.¹⁵ For example, Tsotsil positional verb roots inflected as unmarked adjectives may serve, in context, not only to describe but also to ridicule or to disparage entities found in unexpected or unanticipated positions, as we shall shortly see. Similarly, the complex semantic portmanteaux of characteristic Tsotsil compound color terms (see Collier, 1963; Haviland, 1991, 2003; Brown, 2011) often function almost like miniature three-syllable poems, combining a color word with another often positional root, and thus conjuring a tiny scenario (one of Maffi’s “mini stories”) that involves both hue and an evocative physical context.

6. The Brides of the Underworld

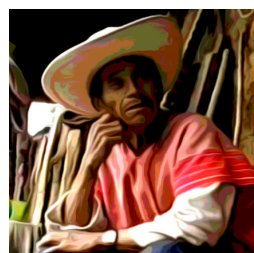
We now return to Don Pedro’s storytelling. In Example 2 above, he introduced the enterprising Chamula man who sought out the Earth Lord in hopes of employment. Summoned to return later, the eager young fellow embarked on a long adventure in the huge expanse of the Earth Lord’s subterranean domains, constantly dodging temptations as he sought his fortune without being tricked into eternal servitude.

After proving himself as a reliable worker, the young man was offered the chance to marry and settle down. As he began that episode of his narrative, Don Pedro gazed into a neutral point in the space where we sat (Figure 15[6a]), apparently conjuring the imagined scene where the Earth Lord invited the Chamula worker to pick out a bride (line 6 of Example 7). He shifted his gaze briefly to check that I was following him (Figure 15[6b]), and then he again adopted the perspective of the Earth Lord talking to his new recruit as he said “The girls are lined up here” (Figure 15[7a]), pointing and gazing into the imagined scene and thus virtually positioning the prospective brides within it. At line 7 of example 7, Don Pedro used the plain adjectival form of a Tsotsil positional root *chol* (“in an [orderly] line, in a row”) to characterize how the girls were arrayed for inspection. Such positional roots are ubiquitous in Tsotsil conversation. They characterize denotational semantics of (bodily) shapes and configurations, but they frequently embody complex coexpressive devices as well. For example, *chol* denotes a linear arrangement, saying nothing about what sorts of entities are so lined up. However, the suggestion—the implicature—is that the “girls” in question were lined up for something specific, an expectation that they had been put on display, waiting for something else to happen. What police call a “line-up” invited the young Chamula to inspect the row of girls and elect a candidate bride. The use of the root *chol* invokes both the somewhat unnatural arrangement and the expectation of the forthcoming choice (*t’uj*, “choose”) contingent upon it.

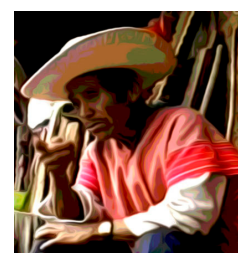
Example 7	[6a]]	[6b]]					
	6	<i>t’uj-o</i>	<i>av-ajnil</i>	<i>xi</i>	<i>la</i>		
		pick-IMP	2E-wife	said	EVID		
		<i>“Pick out a wife,” he said.</i>					
		[7a]]					
	7	<i>lavi</i>	<i>chol-ol</i>	<i>li</i>	<i>tseb-e</i>	<i>li`</i>	
		now	lined_up-PRED	ART	girl-CL	here	
		<i>Right now, the girls are lined up here.</i>					
	8	<i>t’uj-o</i>	<i>much’u</i>	<i>junkal</i>	<i>lek</i>	<i>s-verte</i>	<i>ch-0-k’ot</i>
		pick-IMP	who	one	good	3E-luck	ICP-3 ^a -arrive
		<i>Pick which one of them you will turn out to have good luck with.</i>					
	9	<i>lek</i>	<i>muk’-tik</i>	<i>tseb-etik</i>	<i>xi</i>	<i>la</i>	<i>av-u`un-e</i>
		good	big-PL	girl-PL	said	EVID	2E-belong-CL
		<i>“They’re good full-grown girls,” he said.</i>					



[6a]



[6b]



[7a]

Figure 15. “Pick a bride!”. Don Pedro gazes into the imagined scene [6a], at his co-present interlocutor [6b], and back at the imagined candidate brides [7a].

At line 10 of example 8, the wary Chamula, not yet willing to commit himself to remain in the Earth Lord’s kingdom, hesitated (as Don Pedro acts out in Figure 16[10a]). His employer persisted. “Pick one!” he said again (line 12 of Example 8). Note the emphatic, insistent elongated final imperative syllable of the repeated imperative: “Pi:ck one!”

Example 8

- [10a]]
- 10 *ejj, mu j-na` me- mi x-i-nop ya`el-e,*
 mmm NEG 1E-know EVID INT ASP-1A-think it_seems
“Hmm, I really don’t know if I am getting used to it.”
- 11 *mu x-i-nop ya`el*
 NEG ASP-1A-accustom seems
“I don’t think I am going to get accustomed.”
- 12 *t’uj-o:*
 pick-IMP
“Pi:ck one.”



[10a]

Figure 16. The Chamula worker demurs.

At this point, Don Pedro switched rapidly between a storytelling perspective (performing a kind of proxy observer of the narrated scene, painting it with his gaze and gestures, onto the neutral interactive space between us) and his own persona. Gesturing again into the narrated scene, he noted that it was a line of *smiling* girls (Figure 17[11a–11b]), Example 9, line 1), contrasting their demeanor with that of demure young indigenous women of the time who usually covered their mouths and shielded their faces with shawls when going out in public. Then, as he tried to recall to mind the proper Tsotsil word for the true identity of these apparent potential brides, he abruptly gazed away (as it were, into his own mental space—Figure 17[12a–12b]), trying summon the word to capture what they actually were, lined up oddly and smiling. He first came up with *sapo* (“toad”) in Spanish (Example 9, line 13).

Don Pedro finally dredged up the exact Tsotsil word he was searching for, *jenjen* (Figure 18[15a and 17a]). Laughlin (1975, p. 151) glosses the word as “giant tropical toad *Bufo horribilis*”¹⁶ and comments further that “[i]t is thought to be the earth lord’s maid”—a particularly grotesque such choice. That my compadre expended such effort to find the word—not common in modern Tsotsil and unknown to most younger people—is itself characteristic of his linguistic mastery, in which *mots justes* are valued in themselves. The root *jen* actually has both a positional sense (where it denotes a bulging belly) and an onomatopoeic sense (conjuring croaking sounds), and it is therefore multiply coexpressive as a Tsotsil lexeme on its own.

Example 9

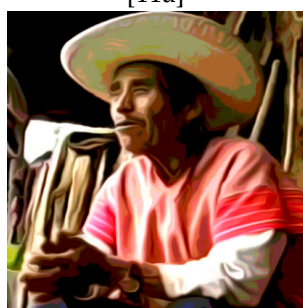
		[11a]	[11b]				
11	<i>tseb-etik-e</i> girl-PL-CL <i>The girls were already just there smiling.</i>	<i>naka</i> just	<i>xa</i> already	<i>0-tse'in-ik</i> 3A-smile-PL	<i>xa</i> already	<i>tajmek</i> very	<i>`un</i> CL
12	<i>v-a`i</i> 2A-hear <i>So, they were –uh—fucking uh–</i>	<i>`ali</i> ART	<i>`ali</i> ART		[12a] <i>jkobel</i> fucking	<i>`ali-</i> ART	[12b]
13	<i>k'usi</i> what <i>What are the damn animals called, toads</i>	[13a] <i>puta</i> whore	<i>chanul,</i> animal	<i>sapo</i> toad	<i>`un-e</i> CL-CL		
14	<i>ja`</i> i <i>They were those big toads, uh</i>	<i>li</i> ART	<i>muk'-tik</i> large-PL	<i>sapo</i> toad	<i>`ali</i> uh		



[11a]



[11b]



[12a]

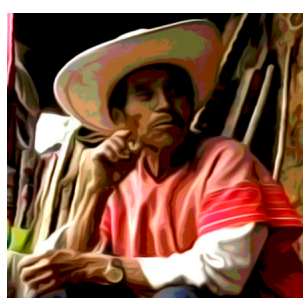


[12b]

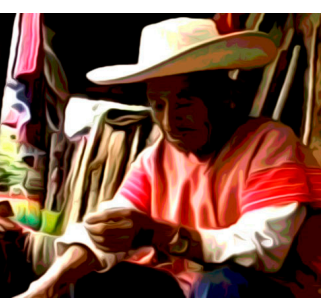


[13a]

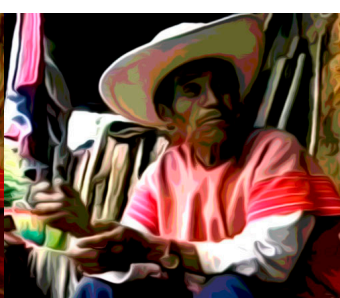
Figure 17. “What are those damned animals called?” Don Pedro uses an imprecation [12a], while trying to think [12b] of the right word, with another imprecation [13a].



[15a]



[16a]



[17a]

Figure 18. “They are called *jenjen*!”. Don Pedro recalls the right word [15a], shows the size of the toads [16a], and repeats the Spanish name for them [17a].

Don Pedro went on to describe the false brides to me using two more characteristic Tsotsil expressive devices, both involving speech rather than gaze or gesture. He pulled out one of several further positional Tsotsil roots to characterize the size, shape, and configuration of these hapless and—far from being blushing brides—rather hideous creatures the Earth Lord had arrayed to offer to his new recruit. Although they were supposed to be human girls, they were in reality huge toads, that “sat” (the root is *chot*, which suggests among other things that their anatomy includes a flattish surface on which they can be supported more or less stably) flat on the ground (Example 10, line 16, see Figure 18[16a]). With another highly descriptive phrase (Example 10 line 20, and note the elongated vowel on the word *lek* [“good”] in the intonational curve in Figure 19), he also joked that they were meant to be not toads but attractive women, with thick beautiful hair. The root *pul* in this context implied that their hair was thick, almost brimming over, hanging or cascading down in abundance. (Used as a transitive verb, *pul* refers to dipping out liquid from an overfull container.)

Example 10

			[15a]			
15	<i>ali</i>	<i>jkobel</i>	<i>jenjen</i>	<i>x-0-ut-ik</i>		
	ART	fucking	“jen jen”	ASP-3E-tell-PL		
	<i>Uh, those fucking “jen jen” (people) call them.</i>					
	[16a]					
16	<i>mol-ik</i>	<i>xi</i>	<i>chot-ajtik</i>	<i>ta</i>	<i>balamil</i>	
	big-PL	thus	seated-PL	PREP	ground	
	<i>Big as this, sitting on the ground.</i>					
	[17a]]					
17	<i>jenjen-il</i>	<i>sapo-etik</i>	<i>`un-e</i>			
	‘jenjen’-SUF	toad-PL	CL-CL			
	<i>‘Jenjen’ type toads, that is.</i>					
18	<i>ji`</i>	<i>la</i>				
	yes	EVID				
	<i>That’s what they were, they say...</i>					
19	<i>tseb</i>	<i>ta</i>	<i>`al-el</i>	<i>`un-e</i>		
	girl	PREP	say-NOM	CL-CL		
	<i>But supposedly they were girls.</i>					
20	<i>le:k-il</i>	<i>pulul-ik</i>	<i>s-jol</i>	<i>ti</i>	<i>tseb</i>	<i>`un-e</i>
	good-ATT	thickly_sprouted-PL	3E-head	ART	girl	CL-CL
	<i>Beautiful thick hair on the girls.</i>					

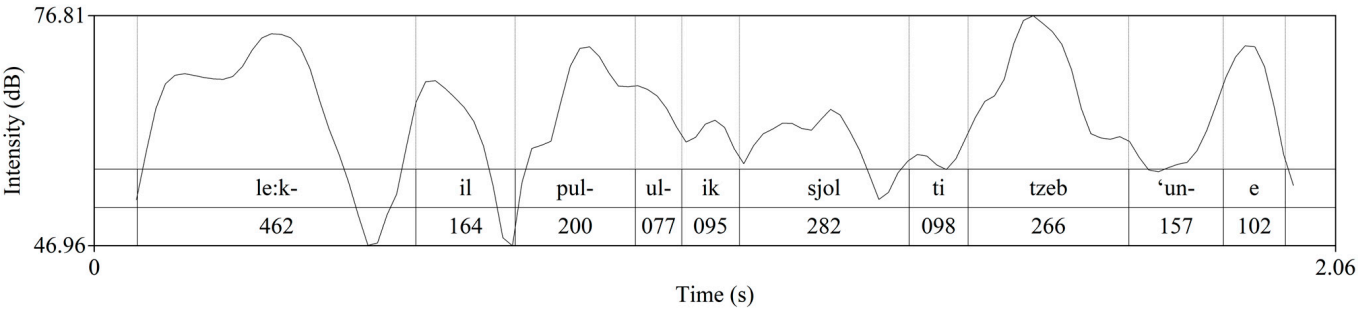


Figure 19.
 Pululik: beautiful thick hair.

Such use of highly specific lexical roots illustrates a different aspect of Tsotsil coexpressivity, based not on multimodality—gesture or gaze, for example, or spoken intonation—but on expressive possibilities flowing from the lexical specificity of Tsotsil vocabulary itself. One of the virtues of having many lexical roots for denoting, among other things, bodily positions is to encourage speakers to select among subtle differences to formulate appropriate descriptions. At the same time, such choices also enable a variety of expressive tropes that go beyond literal denotations, often suggesting metaphorical or figurative alternatives that move beyond mere description to joking, mocking, ridicule, criticism, pity, or other more affective attitudes such as disgust, revulsion, or anger. These beautiful girls, supposedly standing in a row, were in reality giant toads, which, in their true form, “sit” flat and immobile on the ground.

The Chamula man again resisted his employer’s temptations and the bountiful hair of the women, refusing the offered brides in both word (line 22–22 in Example 11) and gesture (as performed coexpressively by Don Pedro, see Figure 20[21a–21b]). The circumstances were captured with further, even more specific positional imagery, also conveyed in both word and gesture (line 23 in Example 11; see Figure 21[23a]). Don Pedro marshalled first the root *va*¹⁷ (“standing upright,” specifically “upright on two legs”). In such a posture, the potential brides looked plausibly human (as Don Pedro suggested, again pointing and glancing to where he had positioned them in his narrative space in Figure 21[23xb]).

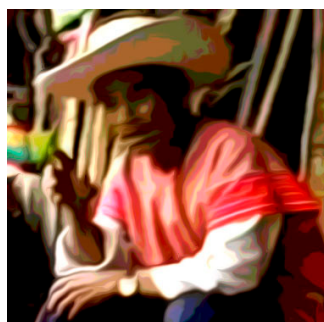


[21a]



[21b]

Figure 20. “I don’t want (a wife).” Don Pedro throws his hand up [21a], [21b], miming refusal.



[23a]



[23b]

Figure 21. “While they were standing [23a], they were pretty girls [23b].”

However, when the candidate brides heard the Chamula man say he did not want to marry them (line 25 in Example 11), immediately the “girls” were dramatically transformed.

Example 11

[21a]

[21b]

21	<i>k'alal</i>	<i>mu</i>	<i>j-k'an</i>	<i>mi</i>	<i>x-0-ut</i>	<i>la</i>	<i>`un-e,</i>
	when	NEG	1E-want	INT	ASP-3E-tell	EVID	CL-CL
	<i>When the guy supposedly told him, "I don't want them"—</i>						
22	<i>Mu</i>	<i>j-k'an</i>	<i>xi</i>	<i>la</i>	<i>`un-e</i>		
	NEG	1E-want	say	EVID	CL-CL		
	<i>"I don't want them," he apparently said.</i>						
	[23a]						
23	<i>k'alal</i>	<i>va`-ajtik</i>	<i>un,</i>				
	when	standing-PL	CL				
	<i>While they were standing up on two feet,</i>						
23x	[23xb]						
	<i>lek</i>	<i>`ono</i>	<i>la</i>	<i>tseb</i>	<i>yilel</i>	<i>x-0-cha`le,</i>	
	good	indeed	EVID	girl	apparently	ASP-3E-act	
	<i>They made themselves actually look like proper girls.</i>						
24	<i>bweno</i>						
	Okay.						
	<i>Okay.</i>						
25	<i>k'alal</i>	<i>mu</i>	<i>la</i>	<i>x-0-k'ane</i>	<i>`un-e</i>		
	when	NEG	EVID	ASP-3A-want-PASS	CL-CL		
	<i>When they were told they weren't wanted.</i>						

The women immediately left the scene (line 26 of Example 12). Don Pedro offered a quick gesture illustrating their departure (Figure 22[26a–26b]), accompanied by an elongated syllable on the phrase final clitic *`un* (see the precisely timed image in Figure 23) of the spoken clause, “They went.” The erstwhile girls were “transformed” in a way that Don Pedro’s downward pointing gesture at Figure 22[26c] suggests. They abandoned their artificial standing posture, plopping back down to the ground as their natural anatomy decreed.

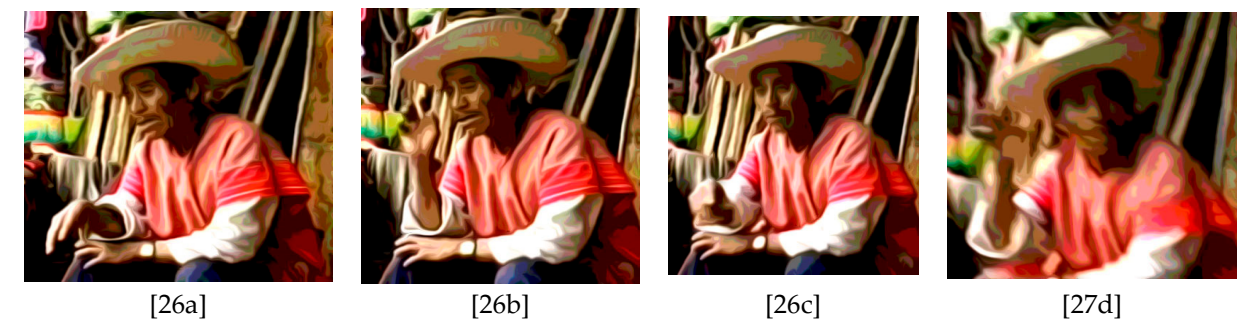


Figure 22. Don Pedro throws his hand up [26a] [26b] and down, then checks his interlocutor while describing the “brides” transformation.

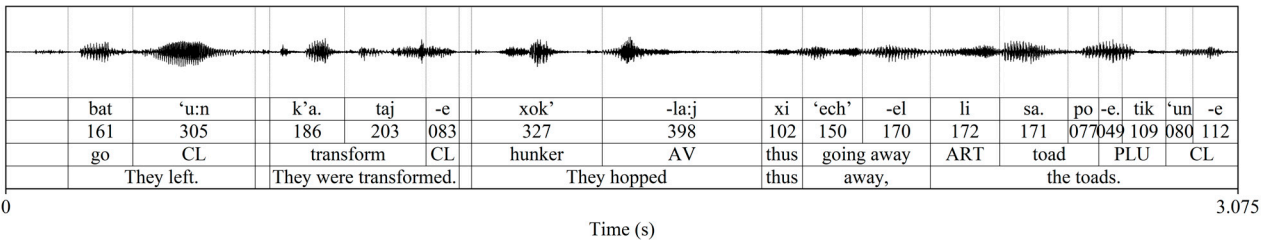


Figure 23. The toads hopped away (Praat waveform, individual syllable timing, and glosses below, linked to timeline).

Looking back at me, at line 27 of Example 12, Don Pedro delivered his punchline. Using another monolexemic positional root *xok'* (“squatting, on one’s haunches” or “with bent knees”), now dressed up with the affective verb suffix *-laj* (and also prosodically emphasized with an elongated final vowel—see again Figure 23), he joked that they resumed their toadlike form and hopped away, abandoning once and for all the illusion that they were girls at all (see Figure 24).

Example 12	[26a]	[26b]	[26c]			
	26	<i>bat</i>	<i>`u:n,</i>	<i>k'ataj-e,</i>		
		go	CL	transform-CL		
		<i>They left, they were transformed.</i>				
	[27d]					
	27	<i>xok'-la:j</i>	<i>xi</i>	<i>`ech'el</i>	<i>li</i>	<i>sapo-etik</i>
		squat-AV	thus	away	ART	toad-PL
		<i>The toads hopped away squatting.</i>				
			[28a]			
	28	<i>pero</i>	<i>tseb</i>	<i>`un</i>		
		but	girl	CL		
		<i>But they were supposedly girls.</i>				



[28a]

Figure 24. “But supposedly they were girls.”

Of the affective verb stems that Laughlin lists for Zinacantec Tsotsil, the form CVC-*laj*, of which *xok'laj* (“hop”) is an example, is relatively restricted, and its use seems in part contextually pre-determined. Laughlin wrote in his original dictionary:

“The affective verb CVC-*lah*¹⁸ occurs always in the sequence av + *ša* + directional verb. It implies the rapid motion of an object or animal towards or away from either the narrator or the protagonist”. (Laughlin, 1975, p. 26)

My compadre’s use of the affective verb *xok'laj* (“hopping away”) does not quite match Laughlin’s syntactic characterization, but the lexicographer’s suggested canonical context does tell us something important about when (and why) a narrator might employ such a verb form: it is itself coexpressive. First, according to Laughlin, this form of Tsotsil “affective verb” commonly (although not in Example 12 line 27) seems to prefer to link with a following spatio-temporal perspectival particle *xa* (“already”), which looks back to preceding events. The further link between the *-laj* verb and a further directional particle (most commonly “coming” or “going,” and in this case, the latter *ech'el* [“away from origin”]) also associates the motion to leaving the scene—a bit like “exit stage left” in a script. Such a verb is thus appropriate for a punchline or climax to a Tsotsil narrative passage: it tells what happens next, or more often in conclusion, after some other sequence of actions has set the scene. Second, it employs the rich—once again positional—imagery captured in the root from which it derives. *Xok'* as a positional root denotes “squatting,” “on one’s

haunches,” or perhaps better, “hunkering,” which seems an appropriate characterization of how a toad arranges itself: low to the ground, with its “knees” bent sharply backward. We may say, in English, that a toad “hops,” but hardly the same way, for example, that a human does, since the anatomies are quite distinct. Third, like virtually all “affective verbs” in Tsotsil, it is meant to have “dash” precisely by characterizing an action or a property that goes beyond pure denotation (here, what kind of position and anatomy appropriately characterizes its referent) to overlay an additional evaluative overtone.¹⁹ That overtone here is the ridiculous and ironic situation where the Chamula was meant to fall for (but evaded) a devilish trick, that what appeared to be marriageable human women (apparently standing in an upright position) were really toads, who cannot be *vA'* (“standing upright”) at all but only *xok'* (“hunkered”). The simple use of an affective verb accomplished both things at once: an accurate denotation and an evaluative joke: the girls were really toads, and how ridiculous that the Chamula could be so tempted, although luckily escaping the Earth Lord’s trap by observing how they exited the scene!

7. A Supernatural Encounter

Later the same afternoon, Don Pedro reprised the theme of the dangers one faces venturing alone into strange and threatening circumstances, turning to encounters that are part of the normal business of *campesino* life. He recounted the tale of one of his recently deceased neighbors, Markux (Example 13). The man had urgent work in his lowland cornfields, a long trek from his home, and he set out in the middle of the night with only a star to guide him. Once again, Don Pedro gazed and pointed (Figure 25) to imagined positions of stars in the sky (from the perspective of where we actually sat) to specify the exact time the man planned to set out.

Example 13

3	<i>ja`</i>	<i>no`ox</i>	<i>k'al</i>	<i>x-lok'</i>	[3a] <i>muk'ta</i>	<i>k'anal</i>	<i>xi,</i>	
	!	only	when	ASP+3A-exit	large	star	Said	
<i>Just when the big star comes out, he said.</i>								
4	<i>`oy</i>	<i>j-p'ej</i>	<i>mol</i>	<i>k'anal</i>	[4b][4c] <i>x-lok'</i>	<i>ta</i>	<i>sak</i>	<i>`osil-e</i>
	EXIST	one-NCL	big	star	ASP+3A-exit	PREP	white	land-CL
<i>There's one big star that comes out just at dawn.</i>								



Figure 25. Will you leave in the dark? Don Pedro points to where the “big star” would appear in the night sky, saying one [3a] big star will come out [4a–b], while checking his interlocutor’s gaze [4c] as he describes the dawn when the star will be visible.

The moon setting in the west would still be high enough to help light the way (Example 14). Don Pedro transposed his own orientation where he sat (where he could look up to where the moon would set over the western edge of the nearby valley—see Figure 26) onto

the imagined trajectory of the sky as his protagonist walked (and how low it would be in the matching direction during the narrated moment).

Example 14

[9a]
 9 `ali jch'ulme`tik-e mu xa bu x-ch'ay,
 ART Moon-CL NEG already where ASP+3a-lose
The moon ("our holy mother") will not have been lost yet.

[10a]
 10 toyol ch-kom xi
 high ICP+3A-remain said
It will still be high, he said.



Figure 26. The Moon would still be high. Don Pedro looks [9a] and points [10a] to where in the night sky the moon would still be above the horizon.

Still, my compadre emphasized, it was a lonely and ill-prepared party setting out on the trail: the farmer and his young son, with just one horse carrying seed corn, and nary a torch to light the way. Indeed, as they approached the cornfield, the moon had fully set, and “the earth had gone dark.”

Suddenly, the horse was spooked and refused to move. The farmer had been leading it, but the horse tried to turn around and go back up the path. The farmer tried everything to get the horse to move on, but to no avail. As it kept peering down the path (see Figure 27) it began to snort with fear, a noise Don Pedro simulated with an onomatopoeic expressive root *jok'* (Example 18, lines 27–28) accompanied by elaborately elongated vowels (see Figure 28).

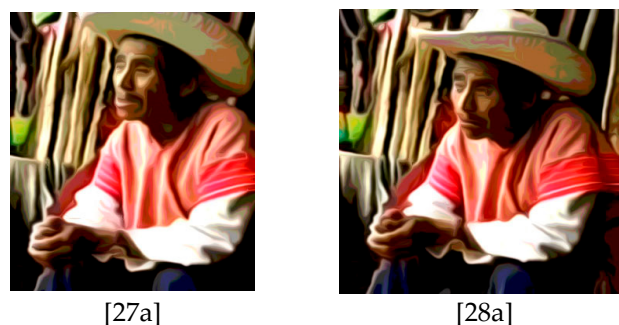


Figure 27. The horse snorted [27a] and kept looking [28a].

- Example 15**
- | | | | | | | | | |
|----|--------------|--------------------|----------------|--------------|-----------|--------------|-----------|-----------------|
| 25 | <i>ya`uk</i> | <i>s-ba`yubtas</i> | <i>y-a`-uk</i> | <i>s-tij</i> | <i>ta</i> | <i>s-pat</i> | <i>mu</i> | <i>x-0-anav</i> |
| | think-SUBJ | 3E-put_in_front | 3E-think-SUBJ | 3E-hit | PREP | 3E-back | NEG | ASP-3A-walk |
- He tried to make it go in front and to hit it on the back from behind, but it wouldn't walk.*
- 26 *kotol*
Standing(four legged)
It just stood there.
- [27a]
- | | | |
|----|-------------------|---------------|
| 27 | <i>jo:k-sjo:k</i> | <i>ts-ni`</i> |
| | snorting | PREP+3E-nose |
- It kept snorting.*
- [28a]
- | | | | | |
|----|-------------------|-----------|-----------|--------------|
| 28 | <i>s-k`el-o:j</i> | <i>la</i> | <i>li</i> | <i>ka`-e</i> |
| | 3E-look-PERF | EVID | ART | horse-CL |
- The horse just appeared to be looking (at something).*

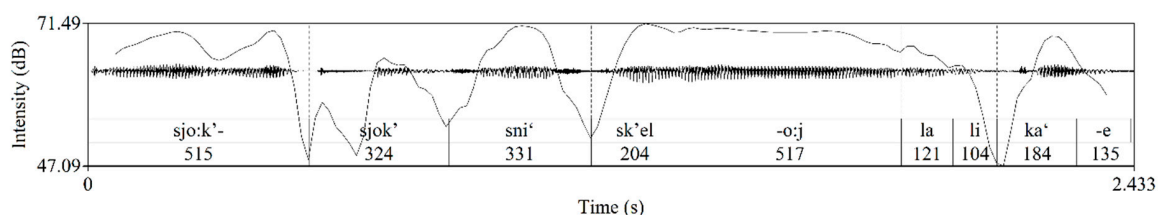


Figure 28. Praat drawing of “the horse snorted and kept looking” (several elongated vowels shown with msec. durations).

Markux himself could see nothing in the dark, so he decided to wait for the dawn (Example 16). Don Pedro denoted the phenomenon with the coexpressive Tsotsil lexical device referred to above as a “compound color word.” Tsotsil (and its cousin Tzeltal) are famously languages with very small vocabularies of canonical or “basic” monolexemic color words (Berlin & Kay, 1991)—Tsotsil has only five²⁰ such “basic” lexemes. On the other hand, there is a large—probably mildly productive—class of compound color expressions, which combine one of the monolexemic “color” roots²¹ with one of a potentially open set of other roots, most of which are positional or verbal in character, followed by the suffix *-an*. The resulting compounds are themselves highly expressive, as they denote both an attribution of hue and a characterization of the referent, often its shape or consistency. Don Pedro here combined the color word *sak* (“white”) with the verb root *jam* (“open”), and he attributed the resulting compound predicate, *sak-jam-a:n*—elongating the final vowel—to *balamil* (“the earth”). The imagery is clear: as the sky lightened (turned “white”), it revealed or “opened” the surrounding countryside to view (see Figure 29).



[35b]

Figure 29. *Sak-jam-an*: just getting light.

Example 16

[35b]

35	<i>sak-jam-a:n</i> white-opening <i>The earth was dawning already.</i>	<i>xa</i> already	<i>li</i> ART	<i>balamil-e</i> earth-CL
36	<i>x-vinaj</i> ASP+3A-appear <i>One could begin to see.</i>	<i>xa</i> already	<i>`un</i> CL	

As he continued (Example 17), his lengthened vowel (see Figure 30) expressed his hapless protagonist’s fright as he caught sight of a tall non-Indian²² man partly hidden among the trees lining the creek bed and “mounted” on a horse (Example 18). Don Pedro used another evocative positional adjective *kaj-al* (“on top of, perched but unattached”) with yet another elongated root vowel (of almost 800 milliseconds, Figure 31).

Example 17

49

`Eeee
EXCL
“Eeek.”

50	<i>`oy</i> EXIST	<i>te</i> there	<i>ch-il</i> ICP+3E-see	<i>ka:jal</i> mounted	<i>ta</i> PREP	<i>ka`</i> horse	<i>jun</i> one	<i>jkaxlan</i> ladino
<i>He could see there, mounted on a horse, a ladino man.</i>								

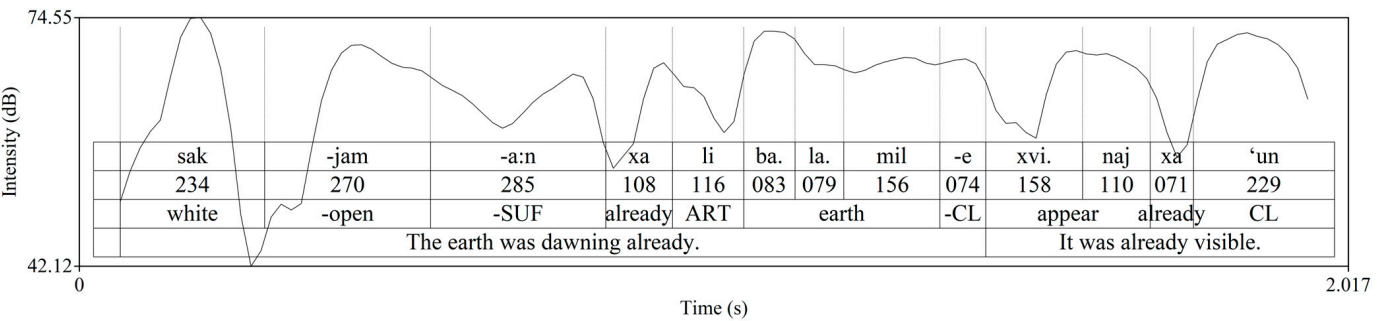


Figure 30. Sakjaman.

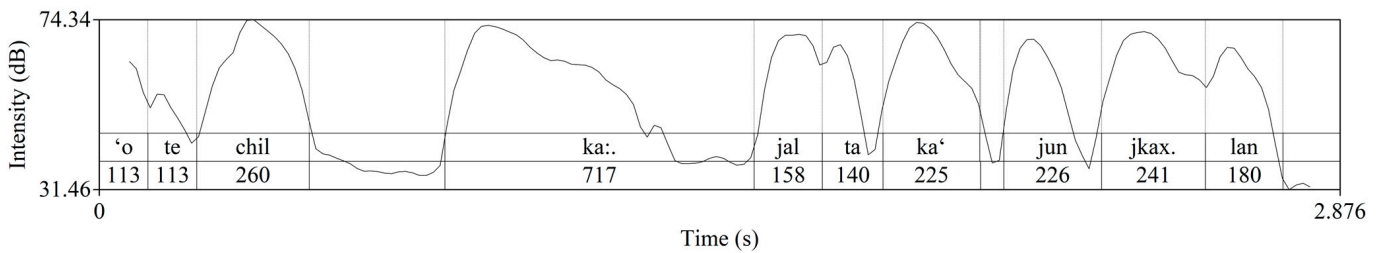


Figure 31. Mounted on a horse.

Don Pedro’s demonstrative hand gestures—with a final gaze at me (Figure 32) along with another especially elongated vowel on the accompanying word *mol* (“big”) (Figure 33)—illustrated the mounted stranger’s most prominent feature: his enormous wide-brimmed *sombrero* (Example 18).

Example 18	[51a]	[51b]	[51c]					
51	<i>mo:l</i> big	<i>y-u`n-la</i> 3E-belong-CL	<i>x-pixel</i> 3E-hat	<i>xi</i> thus	<i>to</i> PSP	<i>vi</i> look	<i>ch'ut</i> belly	<i>beo`-tik-e,</i> creek-DIST-CL
	<i>With a bi:g hat like this, in the creek bed.</i>							
52	<i>lek</i> good	<i>to`o:x</i> then	<i>sob</i> early	<i>tajmek</i> very	<i>`un</i> CL			
	<i>It was still very early in the morning.</i>							
53	<i>sombreron</i> Sombreron	<i>la</i> EVID	<i>`un</i> CL					
	<i>It was evidently a bogeyman.</i>							

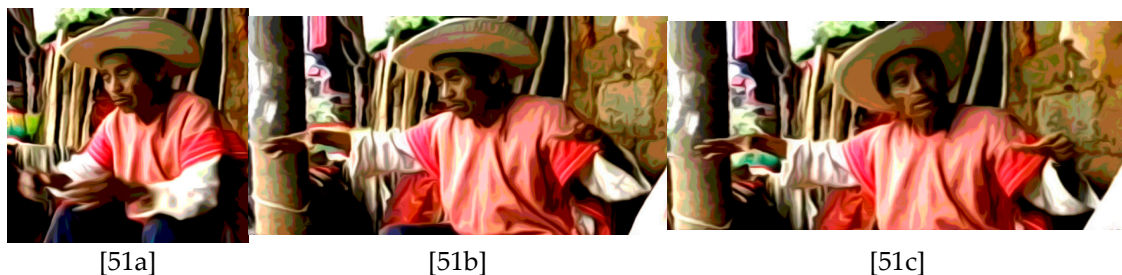


Figure 32. A very big hat. Don Pedro spreads both hands wide [51a], [51b] and checks his interlocutor's gaze.

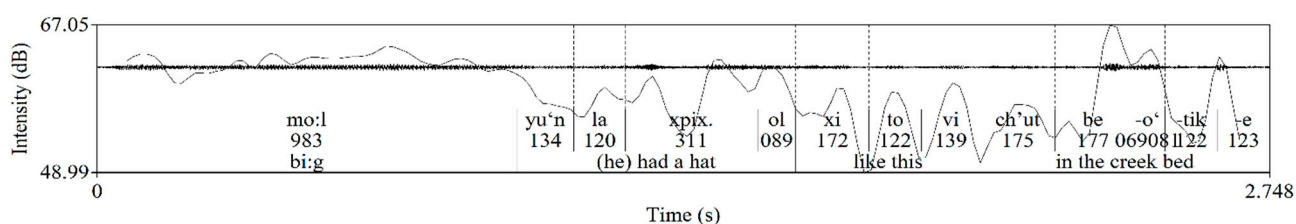


Figure 33. Big hat, with syllable length timing and intensity.

That hat, in turn, identified the stranger as a dreaded supernatural creature known in Spanish as the Sombrerón.²³ Unfortunately for him, Markux—too frightened to recover his wits sufficiently to deal properly with the bogeyman—did not recognize the spirit for what he was. The creature trotted off and vanished (Example 19, Figure 34). Don Pedro again describes the closing scene with a heavily elongated (Figure 35) affective verb, combining another positional root *lep* (“carried on piggyback, mounted (with one’s bottom sticking out)”) with a partially reduplicated suffix *-Con*. Of the latter derivational suffix, Laughlin writes that it

“intensifies the particular state of the root. It may stress the slowness or ponderousness of its motion, the ineffectiveness or repetition of an action, the loudness of a noise”. (Laughlin, 1975, p. 26)

I have translated this as “trotting,” but it clearly suggests something more than the mere gait of the horse. It expresses the bouncing, repetitive, and in this case perhaps menacing lifting of the spirit’s bottom off his horse’s back as he rides off.



Figure 34. He left [54a] & [54b], trotting [55a].

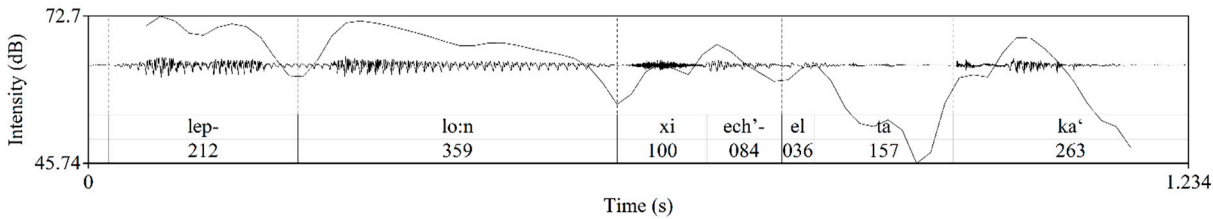


Figure 35. *Leplo:n* (“trotting”).

Example 19

	[54a]	[54b]				
54	<i>Bat</i>	<i>la</i>	<i>`un,</i>			
	go	EVID	CL			
	<i>Then he took off.</i>					
	[55a]					
55	<i>leplo:n</i>	<i>xi</i>	<i>ech'el</i>	<i>ta</i>	<i>ka`</i>	<i>`un</i>
	bouncing	thus	DIR (going away)	PREP	horse	CL
	<i>He trotted off on the horse.</i>					
56	<i>pu:ta</i>	<i>pero</i>	<i>l-i-xi`</i>	<i>`un</i>	<i>xi</i>	
	whore	but	CP-1A-fear	CL	said	
	<i>“Damn! But I was afraid,” he said.</i>					

As Don Pedro reenacted the conversation, after hearing of the supernatural encounter near the cornfield, he turned to Markux with a pensive look (Figure 36) and a chiding tone (Figure 37) that recalls both the beaten wife’s supplication (Figure 2) and his own formal request to the town magistrate (Figure 13). He warned Markux that by not fearlessly confronting the spirit, and thereby earning a fortune in return, he was doomed (Example 20).



Figure 36. “But Markux. . .: miming looking down [57a] and up [57b] at his imagined interlocutor.

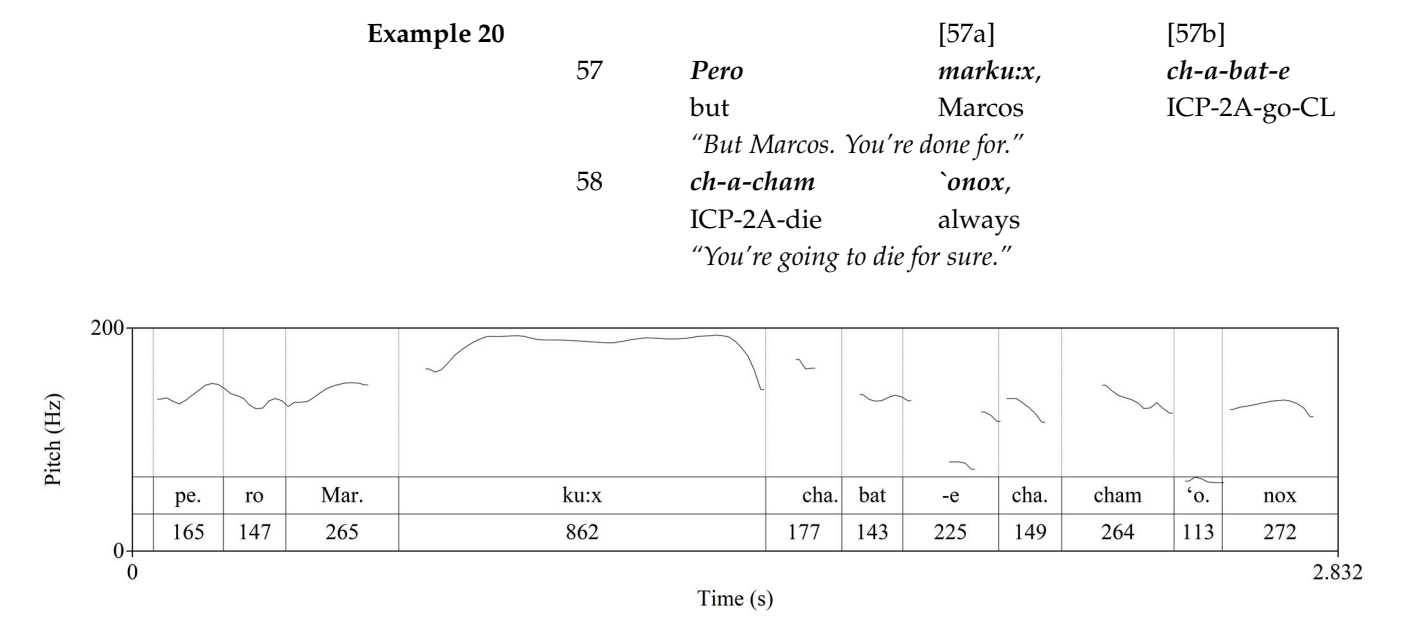


Figure 37. Emphatic address to Markux, with pitch contour and syllable timing.

His luck had been cut off (Example 21). Sure enough, as Don Pedro went on to remind me, Markux died soon afterwards.

Example 21

1.

P;

“You’re not going to grow old,” I told him.

2.

M;

“Is that certain?”

3.

P;

“Yes.”

4.

M;

“But how is that?”

5.

P;

“The bogeyman’ll come to take your luck,” I told him.

8. Coexpressive Interaction: Thieves

One final aspect of Tsotsil conversation and its coexpressive virtuosity remains to be raised, if only briefly cited. Soon after I met him in 1966, Don Pedro had begun to regale me with stories about his life, and he continued for more than two decades before I was able to film him. I was possibly adequate as his conversational partner. Ultimately, however, coexpressivity in talk is a virtue and a skill essentially distributed among interlocutors. It is mutual. It depends not only on interactants’ technical skills in grammar and vocabulary but also on much wider kinds of knowledge and experience, not only of language but of life: what one does; where one lives; how things work; who one knows and interacts with; and what makes any of it worth talking about. This mutually shared (and continually [re]created) knowledge feeds coexpressivity in many ways, but perhaps most obviously in the interactive responses between conversational partners, their displays of reciprocity (or occasionally its absence).

Exploring my compadre’s coexpressive virtuosity, in one last context, thus takes us forward a further six years to a filmed conversation between Don Pedro and a native Zinacantec interlocutor. By then, age and infirmity inevitably had begun to slow my compadre down. His eyes and ears started to fail, and although he continued to work in his corn and flower fields, he largely withdrew from wider social connections and the obligations his ritual career had necessitated. In late August 1996, he and I walked about an hour down the mountainside to the west of his village to inspect one of his flower fields. I carried my video camera with me. Despite poor eyesight and advancing age, Don Pedro’s

gait was both steadier and more reliable than my own slipshod walk down the narrow rocky path.

As we reached the turnoff to his fields, we encountered one of his nephews, Manuel, whose inherited lands bordered Don Pedro's own. The nephew, himself already a young grandfather, was stacking timber, which had been painstakingly cut and shaped with a handheld chainsaw, from large pine trees growing on his property. Don Pedro asked how much wood his nephew had managed to produce from the trees on his land and wondered where exactly on the property—land he had known intimately all his life—they had been harvested. He mentioned that he had walked over that corner of that same land some weeks before and noticed many young pine trees knocked to the ground and broken. There follows this little conversation (see Example 22, edited and rendered here only in English for brevity²⁴). Don Pedro asked whose plot it was.

Example 22

1. M: *Belongs to my little brothers.*
2. P: *Why do they ruin the pine trees?*
3. *They chopped them down, left the pines split wide open.*
4. *Just left them, didn't even take them. I stumbled (vuk'-laj) down there a few days ago.*
5. M: *But where exactly?*
6. P: *Above my son Antonio's land, inside your woodlands.*
7. M: *Ah, they're the ones who steal pine needles.*²⁵
8. P: *Thieves? Idiots!*
9. *Why should they chop baby trees?*
10. *"Don't they care about letting pines grow?" I asked myself.*
11. M: *No, because they're thieves.*
- [12a]
12. P: *Damn! They were baby pines just this big.*
13. M: *They bent down the tips of the pine trees and broke them off to carry them away.*
14. P: *Ee:y, damn!*

Even this short excerpt illustrates coexpressive features of Tsotsil talk that we have already met: a close attention to real-world locations and directions, in word, gesture, and gaze; gestural iconicity (see Example 22, line 12 “just this big,” and Figure 38), emphatic speech, exclamations, marked intonation, and elongated vowels for specific expressive effects (see the interjection in line 14); and even one self-deprecating “affective” verb—*xvuk'-laj* (“stumbling,” in line 4)—based on the transitive verb root *vuk'* (“kick/knock [something] down”)—with which Don Pedro evokes an image of his own unsure footing as he made his way down the steep slopes of the fields.



[12a]

Figure 38. Baby pine trees just this big.

The younger man's reaction to the tale of woe was also graphically apparent, largely in his face. As his uncle started to list the stolen items, Manuel was looking away from the older man (Figure 40[2a]), but he turned his gaze with a frown to Don Pedro at the mention of two stolen hand pumps (Figure 40[2b]), both costly pieces of farm investment; and he raised his eyebrows in apparent mild astonishment to react to his interlocutor's mention of the further loss of six liters of herbicide (Figure 40[4a]). When the litany of losses ended with Don Pedro's mention of the workers' spare clothes, Manuel finally uttered a spoken response, a generic male Zinacantec expression of disapproval, *kere!* (literally, "Boy!"), still facing Don Pedro but dropping his gaze from the older man's face (Figure 40[6a]). Manuel's expression and gaze both displayed his attention and supplement his spoken evaluations of what he was hearing.



Figure 40. Recipient gaze and facial assessment: looking back at interlocutor [2a], [2b]. wide-eyed reaction [4a], then dropping gaze [6a].

As in several of Don Pedro's tales, the most expressively loaded part of this story to his nephew about the lowland theft centered on an "affective verb." Without their tools, the workmen were unable to complete the weeding they had set out to do, and they had no recourse but to return to their mountain village. Don Pedro describes their return (Example 24) with the affective verb *moch'laj*, formed with the suffix *-laj* we have met before to denote climactic motions, in this case returning to their village (near where the two interlocutors stood as he narrated the story). Laughlin (1975, p. 239) glosses this verb as "walking huddled over /with cold/." ²⁶ The verb root is *moch'*—a positional root that suggests shriveled or doubled up in pain or cold (or heat). Here, it conveyed an image of the workers returning exhausted, unprotected, empty-handed, and unable to complete their work. Although not overly elongated, the syllable *moch'* is clearly emphasized in Don Pedro's remark (diagrammed with precise syllable timing in Figure 41) where the positional root lasted more than the normal duration of the other syllables in his remark.

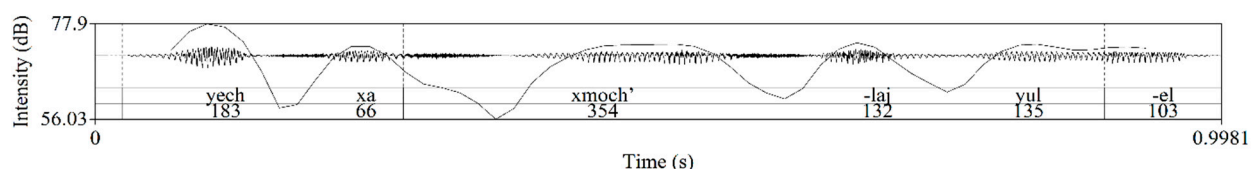


Figure 41. Praat drawing of *xmocho'laj* with intensity curve and individual syllable timings in milliseconds.

Example 24

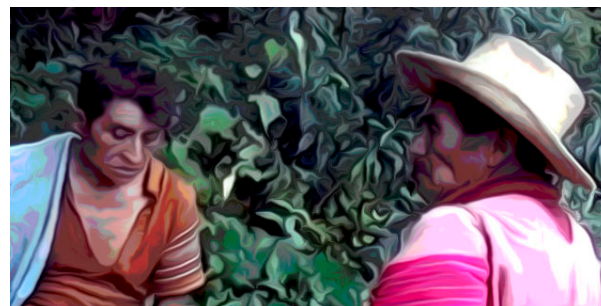
				[8a]	
8	P;	<i>yech</i>	<i>xa</i>	<i>x-moch'la</i>	<i>yulel</i>
		thus	already	ASP-shivering/huddled	DIR (arriving_here)
		<i>They got back here just empty-handed.</i>			

Don Pedro went on to repeat that he had thus lost two hand pumps. Manuel now offered a more expressive assessment in response, using an elaborate Spanish imprecation (at Example 25, line 10).

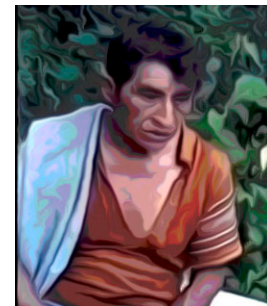
Example 25

9	P;	<i>ch'abal</i>	<i>xa</i>	<i>cha`-p'ej</i>	<i>vompa</i>	
		none	already	two-NCL[round]	pump	
		<i>And they were without their two pumps.</i>				
		[10a]				
10	M;	<i>nomp</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>dyos</i>		
		name	of	God		
		<i>In the name of God!</i>				
		[
11	P;	<i>mu</i>	<i>xa</i>	<i>bu</i>	<i>y-ak'-be</i>	<i>komel</i>
		NEG	already	where	3E-give-APP	DIR(staying)
		<i>They never applied the herbicide -</i>				

Both men had largely avoided looking at each other directly during this little exchange of turns. Don Pedro gazed into the distance as he uttered the affective verb *moch'la*, while Manuel looked down (Figure 42, line 8a). Similarly, Manuel raised his eyes and looked as well into empty space, adding a tiny head shake as he invoked the “name of God” (Figure 42, line 10a).



[8a]



[10a]

Figure 42. Manuel utters a strong imprecation (with little negative headshake).

However, Manuel finally met the older man’s gaze (Figure 43) as they engaged in a characteristic verbal meeting of minds, accomplished frequently near the end of a Zinacantec conversation, when interlocutors begin to mirror one another’s sentiments through sometimes elaborate repetition of each other’s words (see Brown et al., 2021). (For brevity, I also reproduce these final conversational exchanges—in English gloss only—in Example 26.)

- Example 26**
- | | | |
|----|----|--|
| | | [13a] |
| 13 | P; | <i>They still returned.</i> |
| | | [|
| | | [14a] |
| 14 | M; | <i>They still returned</i> |
| 15 | P; | <i>I have bought a replacements for one of my pumps.</i> |
| 16 | | <i>But they're expensive!</i> |
| | | [|
| | | [17a] |
| 17 | M; | <i>But they're very expensive!</i> |
| 18 | P; | <i>Expensive, now.</i> |
| | | [|
| 19 | M; | <i>Expensive now.</i> |
| | | [20a] |
| 20 | P; | <i>Impossible to buy them.</i> |
| 21 | M; | <i>Impossible to buy them.</i> |



Figure 43. Meeting gaze [13a] to conclude, with frown [14a] and facial reaction [17a].

By the time they reached the end of these miniature agreements, both men had again looked away, apparently centering their gazes outside the immediate interactional huddle (Figure 44) and preparing to carry on with their own tasks.



Figure 44. Mutual gaze breaks with a final repetition.

As a final coda, Don Pedro and his nephew prefaced their parting words with an assessment of thieves in general (Example 27), although they did not reengage mutual gaze (see Figure 45).

Example 27

			[8a]			
8	P;	<i>animal</i>	<i>vokol</i>	<i>li</i>	<i>puta</i>	<i>j`elek'-e</i>
		extremely	difficult	ART	whore	robber-CL
		<i>It is really hard (to deal with) damned thieves!</i>				
				[[9d]	
9	M;			<i>animal</i>	<i>chopol</i>	<i>s-jol-ik</i>
				extremely	bad	3E-head-PL
				<i>They have very bad heads.</i>		
10	M;	[10a]				
		<i>loj</i>		<i>ryox</i>		
		3E+see+PERF		God		
		<i>As God is my witness!</i>				



Figure 45. Final coda.

Notably, just as he pronounced the final imprecation (agreeing with himself—in God’s name—that thieves are bad), Manuel brushed his hands together (Figure 46), as if to say, “Ok, back to work,” before the two men took each other’s leave.



Figure 46. “God is my witness.”

9. Summary and Farewell

This excursion into forty years of friendship (and in effect apprenticeship) with my compadre Don Pedro attests to my enduring admiration for his mastery of spoken Zinacantec Tsotsil. By way of summary (and index), I reprise an inventory of what I have called coexpressive devices that comprise and enhance these skills. Some devices are multimodal, invoking the body and the environment—both social and geographic—to extend beyond speech. Others are embedded in the act of speaking itself—its poetic structure, pitch, intensity, and rhythm—to produce effects that go beyond referential and denotational functions

of talk. Others are derivative tropic effects of those same referential properties that recruit features of grammar and lexicon to express affective, deontic, and epistemological stances (Du Bois, 2007) that transcend mere denotation. Finally, others are plainly interactional devices for coordinating (or differentiating) such stances across multiple interlocutors. Coexpression, on this view, combines Jakobson's familiar "functions of language," which themselves derive from the essential "constitutive factors in any speech event" (Jakobson, 1960, p. 353). These include its "context" to which the "referential" (or "denotative" or "cognitive") function orients, but also the "emotive" or "expressive" function aimed at "direct expression of the speaker's attitude toward what [s/]he is speaking about" (p. 354). They are clearly also aimed at the attitudes of addressees and all others potentially present in a speech situation, as well as their wishes (Jakobson's "conative" function), desires, and beliefs. Jakobson also uses the Malinowskian term "phatic" to characterize a linguistic function linked to establishing, maintaining, or even shutting down communicative "contact" itself (p. 355)—as we have just seen in the previous example.

Jakobson goes on to distinguish two further linguistic functions, one involving speech "focused on the CODE: it performs a METALINGUAL (i.e., glossing) function" (p. 356). Metalinguistic speech is speech *about* language. Finally, Jakobson famously distinguishes a further "poetic" function for language, which focuses squarely on the form and structure of the linguistic message itself. Silverstein (1981, p. 6) restates Jakobson's cryptic definition of the poetic function (that it "projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination" [p. 358]) summarily as follows:

"Elements which are found together in the same utterance (say, in the various lines of a poem) in certain sequentially-definable positions, are "equivalent" in the sense of being metaphorically compared and contrasted."

Using the Jakobsonian categories as a guide, here is an inventory of what we have seen of my compadre's coexpressive mastery.

1. This essay began not with Don Pedro himself but with his elder daughter. In Example 1, she recounted a visit to her house and a complaint addressed to her magistrate husband by a beaten woman about the punishments she thought her own abusive husband deserved. Jakobson's "poetic function" was directly relevant to the generic specificities of this wife's lament, phrased in the chanted parallel lines of Tsotsil "ritual speech" with all of its generic specificities (rhythm and cadence, conventionalized doublets and triplets, often involving archaic or loan lexicons, and precise morphological parallelism) to highlight the metaphorical domains of importance—here, the conceptual link between speech and both abuse and punishment. Such a ritual speech genre is the Zinacantec default for shamanic and religious prayer, for ritual counsel and advice, as well as for denunciation, lament, and witchcraft.
2. Zinacantec society also embodies metaphors of rank: in spoken Tsotsil, through greetings, leave takings, and address formulas, but ordinarily accompanied by direct bodily manifestations, as for example in shaking hands vs. "bowing" and "releasing" to initiate or end interaction and conversation, rank order in walking or seating positions, and also turn-taking order or serving position for ritual prestations (see Figure 3).
3. Other conventionalized gestures are integral *parts* of ordinary face-to-face talk. (Consider the "nod" in Figure 5b, or the "shrug" in Figure 7[g1].) As in virtually all speech traditions around the world, iconic gestures complement the meanings of spoken Tsotsil words, offering referential specificity often absent in speech alone (for example, the "small trees" in Figure 38).
4. There are multiple indexical devices available for locating objects, oneself, and one's protagonists in physical, interactive, and virtual space(s). Notably, Don Pedro makes

systematic use of gaze, pointing (with various body parts and, sometimes, tools), and facial orientation (as well as with myriad spoken and gestured locational devices). These spaces may be given by one's actual physical (and biographic) position in the real world, at different levels of granularity; they may also be invoked by interactions, both given by the conversational circumstances or created discursively. Of these "spaces," Tsotsil presumes directional precision for known real places: east is east, and west is west (see Figures 4–6). Such orientation is also presumed in a depicted interactional scene (Example 4, Figures 10 and 12), and the conceptual complexity of mutually overlaid or transposed spaces can also involve recurrent, recursive, and even fractal orientation. (Consider the interactive space in my conversation with Don Pedro—for example Figure 15[6A], or the configuration of the Chamula's "bride" selection, Example 7—and how interactive space can also overlay or structure an imagined or conjured space, e.g., "over the shoulder" in Example 13.)

5. Tsotsil interlocutors use their gaze and their faces as indexical devices linked to "pointing," i.e., to indicate (by looking at or appearing to look at) locations and other referents, again in a myriad of different "spaces" ranging from the immediate speech situation and the surrounding wider geographical area at different levels of resolution, to imagined or conjured spaces implied by other conversations, mimed or retold. However, gaze in so-called "face-to-face" interaction has conceptually different communicative uses as well. Depending on cultural practices from place to place (see [Rossano et al., 2009](#)), gaze can be a central index of attention, mutual or disjoint, and also an index of different aspects of turn-taking (see [Kendon, 1967](#); [Goodwin, 1981](#) for early studies). There are also times in Zinacantán when politeness decrees certain gaze avoidance, but Don Pedro in most informal talk often uses his gaze to signal, to summon, or to monitor different sorts of attention. There are also what I have called "nowhere" spaces or internally created mental ones (Figure 17[12a-b]), towards which apparent (sometimes vacant) gaze may seemingly be directed. Similarly, both gaze and facial expression—a frown of disapproval or raised eyebrows in surprise (see Figure 40)—can offer an interlocutor's expressive commentary or "back channel" via the face, and such expressive devices can function as well as, if not better than, spoken assessments ([Goodwin, 1986](#); [Goodwin & Goodwin, 1987](#)).
6. The latter sections of this exploration of Don Pedro's verbal mastery and coexpressivity return to his speech, relying less on multimodality (gesture, gaze, and proxemics) than on his words (or sounds) themselves. Jakobson apparently had verbally encoded "assessments" directly in mind when citing as primary examples of the "EMOTIVE or 'expressive' function" what Conan Doyle writes as "*Tut! Tut*," which "consists of two suction clicks" (1960, p. 354). He continues, "[t]he emotive function, laid bare in the interjections, flavors to some extent all our utterances, on their phonic, grammatical, and lexical level" (p. 354). In addition to non-spoken emotive elements of the sort previously mentioned, Tsotsil interjections include, with a different valence, similar suction clicks, as well as full, etymologically transparent, lexical words like *kere!* ("boy," Figure 40[4a]) or loanword imprecations as in Example 25. Spoken expression of epistemic and emotional concordance and discordance are also frequent in Tsotsil speech, for example through the interactional mechanism of partial repetition of an interlocutor's exact words (see Example 26).
7. Like Conan Doyle's orthographic rendering of *tut tut*, Tsotsil onomatopoeic roots are conventionalized expressive elements in their own right. Although they may serve as the basis for verb stems, unlike most Tsotsil roots, they can also be uttered bare or reduplicated, often with unusual voice qualities; they are thus both imitative (iconic)

and expressive all on their own (the knock on the door and the dog's answering bark in Example 3; Markux's terrified horse whinnying in Example 15).

8. I have suggested that particular derivational morphology in Tsotsil produces direct coexpressivity. That is, words so derived combine both the core denotational semantic packet of the root involved and a coexpressive, not necessarily fully specified or pre-determined, additional dramatic or humorous flavor or effect. Don Pedro's examples above include Kaufman's "affect" or "affective" verbs and a few compound "color" words. The relevant semantic core mostly involves so-called positional roots, which denote sorts of entities (often bodies or body parts) and their shapes, positions, and configurations. Choice of such a root is central to mastery of Tsotsil, but the specificity of each configuration also makes each positional lexeme ripe for parody and ridicule. The candidate brides, who were supposedly standing bipedally and upright when they looked like human women, were revealed to be toads when they reassumed their natural squatting positions—described with the root *xok'* ("squatting")—and hopped off (Example 12). The "affective" verbal suffix *-laj* captured their abrupt, comical, and abject departure when rejected. Don Pedro mocks himself when he characterizes his unstable footing walking in the steep woodlands in Example 22, combining the same motion suffix with the transitive root *vuk'* ("kick something down"). Compound color words, as in Figure 30, associate specific hues with positional and other verbal roots to evoke shapes, configurations, and scenarios to which the colors may appropriately be applied, to suggest entire visual scenarios.
9. As quoted above, Jakobson argues that "the emotive function . . . flavors . . . all our utterances." Phonological features of my compadre's Tsotsil illustrate such flavoring. There are conventionalized melodic cadences not only for ritual speech, but also for formal requests, pleading (see Figure 13), and chiding (Figure 37). Speech rate also slows noticeably when one is a supplicant, whereas when one is angry (or being depicted as angry), speech is rapid and clipped, and often displays a creaky timbre (Figure 14). Finally, Don Pedro²⁷ makes liberal use of elongated vowels for a variety of purposes including hesitations (Figure 11), lists (Figure 13), and onomatopoeic and positional iconic emphasis (Figures 23, 30 and 32). He elongates both evocative root syllables and "affective" verbal desinences that "have dash."

I have summarized a handful of coexpressive devices my compadre Don Pedro demonstrated for me over the years during which he was my most assiduous and talented Tsotsil teacher. Consulting my ancient typescript notes, I see that we first met on July 18, 1966, when I was meant to be learning to play the Zinacantec harp. His fellow cargo holder, the musician who had agreed to teach me, realized that my preexisting literate skills would possibly be more useful for their own ritual task at the time: to collect 60 *centavos* from every household in Don Pedro's own village and others down the mountainside. He suggested that Don Pedro draft me instead to be his scribe as they collected money for the fiesta of the patron saint San Lorenzo, so that is what I did over the next few days until my tender gringo feet, shod in new sandals, surrendered to blisters from the steep, muddy mountain slopes. Thus began a continuous apprenticeship that lasted until Don Pedro's death on December 20, 2005, when I shared responsibility to *k'ech* ("cradle") my compadre in my arms on his deathbed. As I hope this long essay will hint, I continue to learn from Don Pedro until this very moment, nearly three score years after we met.

Funding: Support for this research was provided over different periods by the Harvard Chiapas Project; a National Institutes of Mental Health (USA) doctoral fellowship; a NATO Postdoctoral Fellowship in Science at the Australian National University; the National Science Foundation (USA) grants BCS-0935407, BCS-1053089, BCS-9980054, SBR-9222394; a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship, a fellowship from the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation; the Max Planck Society

Cognitive Anthropology Research Group; the National Geographic Society Committee on Research and Exploration; Reed College; CIESAS Sureste (Mexico); the University of California San Diego; CONACyT (Mexico); the *Instituto Nacional de Educación para los Adultos* (Mexico); and UC Mexus CONACyT.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Human subjects protection procedures had not been instituted during the period of data collection providing illustrative material in this publication.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was orally obtained from all subjects involved in the conversations presented in this study, all of whom are now deceased. Video clips have been reduced in resolution and deliberately posterized to help obscure the identities of participants pictured, all of whom (with the exception of the author) are now deceased.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the author to protect the privacy of participants.

Acknowledgments: My late *compadre* Don Pedro and his extended family have welcomed me and my own family members into their household and community continuously over six decades, and my debts to them cannot be measured. For the research on which I focus here I owe special gratitude to my daughter Maya Lolen Devereaux Haviland of the Australian National University as a young videographer, to my colleagues in the UC-Mexus Coexpressivity project jointly sponsored by the University of California, and CIMSUR (San Cristóbal), and to Juan Luciano Pérez Hernández, an insightful young Tsotsil linguist from CIESAS Sureste (México).

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Notes

- ¹ I write “traditional” here because, although this genre of stringed instrument music—a mainstay of all religious ritual in the community—has existed for at least 300 years, it was derived in both its instrumentation and form from late-16th-century Spanish music introduced by Colonial friars; see the article by the Irish (ethno)musicologist Frank Harrison and his English musicologist wife Joan Rimmer, a specialist in early European musical instruments (Harrison & Harrison, 1968).
- ² Tsotsil audio and video recordings were annotated for current purposes using ELAN software (ELAN, 2024). I use a slightly modified version of what is now a standard (and largely self-explanatory) Spanish-based practical orthography to write Tsotsil, using single Spanish letters to represent the most orthographically similar Tsotsil phonemes, digraphs (*ts*, *ch*) for similar affricates, and an apostrophe ['] for ejective (glottalized) consonants. I digress from the practical orthography only by using an inverted apostrophe [ˀ] for a glottal stop, to disambiguate such a consonant where necessary from a glottalizing apostrophe. Text examples are maximally transcribed line by line with *Tsotsil words* (shown in **bold** and split roughly into morphemes) on the first line, and corresponding morpheme-by-morpheme glosses in English (shown in plain non-italic type) on the second line, followed by an *English free gloss* (in italics) on the third. When appropriate, individual points in transcripts are marked above their lines (enclosed in square brackets) to crossreference corresponding illustrative video frames in accompanying figures. Abbreviations used in the morpheme-by-morpheme glosses include: 0, a null, unpronounced, or hypothetical “zero” morpheme; 1,2,3 first, second, and third person; A absolutive clitic; AGN agentive prefix; APP applicative suffix; ART article; APP applicative suffix; ASP neutral aspect; ATT attributive adjective; AUX auxiliary verb; AV affective verbal suffix; CL clitic; CONJ conjunction; CP completive aspect; DIR directional particle; DPL distributive plural; E ergative proclitic; EXIST existential nominal; EVID evidential clitic; ICP incomplete aspect; IMP imperative; INT interrogative particle; NEG negative; NCL numeral classifier; POSS possessive nominal; NOM—nominalizing suffix; PASS passive suffix; PERF perfective aspect; PL plural; PREP preposition; PRED predicative suffix; Q interrogative particle; SUBJ subjunctive or irrealis suffix; ! emphatic or topicalizing nominal. As common in conversational transcripts, overlapping speech by interlocutors are marked by an open square bracket ([]) where such overlap begins.
- ³ Silverstein (1981) treats in considerable detail a six-line fragment of a Tsotsil verse-prayer from Zinacantan (his example 4) displaying multiple layers of internal “poetic” structure that signal figures of metaphorical equivalence.
- ⁴ The Praat program analyzes digitally recorded audio to calculate acoustic properties of the signals. In this figure, to emphasize the pitch curve, I used a narrow pitch scale from only 150 to 300 Hz, compatible with the speaker’s voice range. An orthographic rendering of each Tsotsil syllable is written above the relevant segment of the pitch curve.
- ⁵ I am indebted to Doris Payne for reminding me of this recent coinage by Haspelmath and his colleagues, apparently first introduced in Haspelmath’s sense in (Hartmann et al., 2014), and elaborated as a more generalized typological (and terminological) proposal in Haspelmath’s 2023 paper (and cf. Haspelmath, 2019).

- 6 As Austin German reminds me, coexpressivity is not exclusive to “master” speakers, nor to highly valued speech genres, although it may reach metapragmatic consciousness most markedly in such contexts. It is, indeed, a property of all speech, even that of inexpert or clumsy speakers, as is apparent, for example even with some dispute settlers who may be selected in modern Zinacantán more for what lines their pockets than their golden tongues (see [Haviland, 1990](#), an essay which borrows from the same metonym as this one).
- 7 Chamula is the name of a neighboring Tsotsil-speaking community (or *municipio*) with which Zinacantecs have a longstanding and somewhat competitive relationship.
- 8 In this and following Praat graphics, pitch curves are shown generally aligned vertically with orthographic rendering of syllables. Intensity (volume) is sometimes roughly graphed, usually as individual lines over the speech wave. The left to right axis represents time, so that syllable duration can be read from the annotated length (in milliseconds) corresponding to each syllable, as well as judged visually from the intensity line. Lengthened vowels are usually also indicated orthographically with a following colon (:) in the case of notably long vowels. In Praat syllable-length diagrams, a period (.) orthographically links syllables that are part of longer orthographic words, whereas dashes (-) mark morpheme boundaries of various sorts.
- 9 Based largely, as I understand it, on diagnostics used in [Kaufman’s \(1963\)](#) dissertation on Tsotsil’s sister language Tseltal.
- 10 It was precisely this phonotactic canon that allowed Laughlin to use a mechanical method, introduced by Norman [McQuown \(1952\)](#) and later employed rigorously by Kaufman and his students as well as many others (e.g., [Collier, 1963](#); [Berlin, 1968/2017](#)), of generating all phonologically possible CVC roots and testing them exhaustively (and exhaustingly) one by one against possible morphological guises to discover (putative) “real” words. See [Kaufman \(2003\)](#) and [Laughlin \(1975\)](#) for more details.
- 11 Grouping together various formally defined subtypes of each main verbal category, the totals from [Laughlin \(1975\)](#) are 99 “intransitive” roots (defined by the fact that forms identical to the bare roots directly function as intransitive verb stems), 340 “transitive” roots, 182 “onomatopoetic” roots (with distinctive stem forms), and 761 roots categorized as “positional.” (There are also several much smaller root categories, including another 131 roots, for which Laughlin had insufficient attested stem possibilities to assign them confidently.) For details on the formal categorization of Tsotsil roots and stems, see [Haviland \(1992/1994\)](#).
- 12 Such notions [Ameka and Levinson \(2007\)](#) characterize as a typical subclass of “locative predicates,” because, in many languages, they characteristically provide sometimes obligatory verbs in locative sentences. Because of their exceptionally wide semantic range in Mayan languages, Steven Levinson once dubbed them “*dispositionals*,” a term adopted in a comparative study of Tseltal and Yucatec by [Bohnenmeyer and Brown \(2007\)](#).
- 13 [Kaufman \(2003, p. 5\)](#) includes the following brief autobiographical note about his introduction to Mayan languages: “During my first field season [in 1960 in Chiapas, working on both Tseltal and Tsotsil] I learned many fascinating things about Mayan grammar, and recognized the characteristic Mayan categories of ‘positionals’, ‘relational nouns’, and ‘affect verbs’.” ([Kaufman, 2003, p. 05](#))
- His 1963 dissertation lists a formal stem class for Tseltal, which he labels “affect verb,” whose members, unlike other stem classes, are always derived (p. 41) and which accept only limited verbal inflection (p. 169). He enumerates eight highly productive desinences which produce individual “affective verbs” from a range of different root types, with brief schematic characterizations of what such stems mean (pp. 88–92), although not explaining their supposed “affective” quality.
- 14 Aside from [Ringe \(1981\)](#), and a foundational paper on Tseltal ([Maffi, 1990](#)), by far the most substantial treatment of the form and use of “affect verbs” (renamed “expressive predicates”) is [Pérez González \(2012\)](#) on Tseltal, Tsotsil’s closest relative, which expands on Kaufman’s original list of stem forms, exemplified in detail from various textual and audio recorded sources. Pérez González includes a partial dictionary of 475 “affective” or “expressive” stems from the Tseltal of Tenango. Note that [Laughlin \(1975\)](#)—who used the exhaustive CVC root method to elicit possible forms—attests more than 4000 “affective” verb stems for Zinacantec Tsotsil. See also ([Zender, 2010](#)).
- 15 [Pérez González \(2012, p. 58\)](#) makes a similar point about cognate forms in Tseltal: “*Los expresivos además de evocar una escena de viveza en el discurso, pueden ser meramente descriptivos en determinados contextos, por lo que van y vienen de lo expresivo a lo llano, aunque la mayoría de las veces muestran connotaciones subyacentes al contexto pragmático en el que tienen presencia.*” (Expressive [verbs], in addition to evoking lively scenes in discourse, can also be simply descriptive in certain contexts, so that they move between expressive and plain uses, although mostly they show connotations that underlie the pragmatic context in which they occur. [JBH translation].)
- 16 In the Spanish version of his dictionary (2008, p. 97), Laughlin modified the Latin name to *Bufo marinus*. I am indebted to Austin German for asking about the apparent importance that Don Pedro seemingly assigns to recalling the exact name for the toad here.
- 17 The hypothetical or underlying Tsotsil vowel A is realized sometimes as *o* and sometimes as *a* according to morphosyntactic conditions not otherwise relevant here.

- Laughlin (1975) uses an English-based orthography for writing Tsotsil where *h* is used for the unvoiced velar fricative, now replaced in Mexican-Spanish-based orthography by *j*, and where the palatal fricative now written *x* was written *š*.
- I am indebted to Olivier LeGuen (personal communication, 12 March 2025) for a parallel example from Yucatec Maya conversational usage where a speaker will “use a positional root that is not really suited for a human body or position to talk about a human; thus the discrepancy makes the situation grotesque and absurd hence funny. e.g., *jenekbal* which is for a heavy bag of grain lying on the floor, used to talk about a very fat man on a motorbike, as if he had no legs or lower body, just his enormous belly.” The two lexemes *tsoj* and *chak* are in complementary distribution, depending on the derivational frames in which they occur, but both seem to denote the same hues, roughly “red.” See Collier (1963).
- Laughlin’s (1975) dictionary of Zinacantec Tsotsil lists more than 1100 such compound words. A very few initial roots that are not “color” words also occur in such compounds, including some that denote temperatures like *sik* (“cold”) and *k’ak’* (“hot”), although the total number of such compounds is tiny compared to those denoting colors.
- He uses the Tsotsil word *j-kaxlan*, which combines an agentive prefix *j-* with a Tsotsilized version of the Spanish loanword *castellano*, thus, “Spanish person,” commonly translated into Mexican Spanish as *ladino*.
- Laughlin (1975, p. 313) says of this creature: “It is believed that dwarf ladinos with enormous hats travel about at night frightening people. They are of two kinds: one is the ghost of unbaptized babies, the other, a thunder and lightning transformation of the earth lord. It is said that if, when you meet a big hat, you offer him a hatful of cigarettes, he will fill your hat with money. During the dry season big hats are believed to travel on deer to Guatemala to buy their stock of rockets for the forthcoming rainy season.” See also La Chica (2020) for other versions of this Chiapas bogeyman.
- For a more extensive treatment of this full conversation, oriented towards the use of mutual epistemic assessment, see (Haviland, 2002/2004a).
- In Zinacantán, pine needles and young pine boughs are required for decorating altars and other ritual purposes.
- As with many of the affective verbs—and, indeed, other “possible” words that he and his Zinacantec collaborators discovered by combining Tsotsil roots with various derivational morphemes—Laughlin often pressed his Tsotsil colleagues to imagine scenarios where such words might be possible, without necessarily trying to explore their full range of possible uses. On the other hand, Juan Luciano Pérez Hernández, a young Zinacantec linguist, recently volunteered that for him the verb Don Pedro used means exactly the same thing as another much more common affective verb *kiklajet*—derived from a positional root *kik* (“leaning against (something)”)—which Laughlin (1975, p. 174) glosses as “stagging (drunk), toddling.” However, the situation in Don Pedro’s story clearly suggests a rather different image from that of a staggering drunk. As an unpossessed noun, *moch’* also means “pain, tightening in limbs” (Laughlin, 1975, p. 239).
- As well, apparently, as virtually all of the Zinacantecs whose stories and dreams were published by Robert Laughlin (1976, 1977). Laughlin uses dashes to mark the ubiquitous elongated syllables throughout the Tsotsil renderings of the Zinacantec tales, as well as in their English translations. (Jakobson (1960, p. 354) mentions such elongation as relevant to the “emotive units” of even languages, like English, that make no referential use of phonemic vowel length, although it is nonetheless “a conventional, coded linguistic feature” that is “emotive.”).

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