17

THE ETHNOGRAPHIC CONTEXT OF SOME TRADITIONAL MAYAN SPEECH GENRES

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It is a well documented fact that during the Colonial period, the Indians of Middle America often expressed their thoughts in semantic couplets (and occasionally, triplets). The largest corpus of such materials is in the Nahuatl language, but other languages such as Otomí, Quiché and Yucatec Maya are also represented. Garibay (1953) has documented the use of couplets by the Nahuas and Otomís of central Mexico. Edmonson (1971) has shown that the *Popol Vuh*, the sacred book of the Quiché Maya of highland Guatemala, is written in semantic couplets; so too are the *Chilam Balam of Chumayel* and the *Ritual of the Bacabs*, both of which are written in Yucatec Maya (Edmonson 1968).

The essence of such couplet poetry is that ideas are expressed in parallel form.

> Sometimes a thought will be complemented or emphasized through the use of different metaphors which arouse the same intuitive feeling, or two phrases will present the same idea in opposite form ... Another device used in lyric poetry, as well as in discourses and other forms of composition, consists of uniting two words which also complement each other, either because they are synonyms or because they evoke a third idea, usually a metaphor ... Examples of this are the following: flower-and-song which metaphorically means poetry, art, and symbolism; skirt-and-blouse which implies woman in her sexual aspect; seat-and-mat which suggests the idea of authority and power; face-and-heart which means personality. (León Portilla 1969: 76–7)

Whereas the semantic structure of the metaphorical couplet has been analyzed in some detail (Edmonson 1968, 1973; León Portilla 1969), its ethnographic context has not. Indeed, a contextual analysis is impossible for the sixteenth-century documents written in couplets. But fortunately this verse form still survives in many parts of Mesoamerica, including the area of highland Chiapas where I have conducted most of my research and the peninsula of Yucatan where I have recently begun some investigations. From the Yucatan peninsula I have obtained some data from the nineteenth century which link the couplet tradition of the sixteenth century

with the ethnographic use of couplets today. But my most complete information comes from Zinacantan in highland Chiapas, where the couplet structure is identified exclusively with ritual or ritualized speech. Structure, context, content, and use are the salient variables of Zinacanteco speech.

The couplet genres of Zinacantan

STRUCTURAL FEATURES

The Zinacanteco taxonomy of speech neatly distinguishes between those genres which are characterized by the couplet structure and those which have no structural properties in common. On the most general level the speech genres are classified as *k'op* 'formal speech' and *loʔil* 'informal speech.'[1] The noun *k'op* means 'word, language, argument, war, curing ceremony,' while the noun *loʔil* means 'hearsay, news, conversation, discussion, joke' (Laughlin n.d.a). Expressions derived from the root *-k'op* refer to contemplation (*k'opoh ʔoʔon*), planning (*k'oplal*), praying (*k'opon, k'op rioš*), myth or legend (*ʔantivo k'op*), and frivolous talk or joking (*ʔišlol k'op*) (Laughlin n.d.a). Song (*k'evuh*) and prayer-greeting (*krasya*) are the only formal genres labelled by terms not based on the root *-k'op*. The names of the principal genres of 'informal discourse' – gossip (*loʔiltabe*), discussion (*loʔiltael*), and humorous talk or joking (*ɬeʔeh loʔil, ʔišlol loʔil, loko loʔil*) – are derived from the root *-loʔil* (Fig. 16). All the formal genres are structurally alike: they are expressed as semantic couplets. The informal genres have no common structure, and the semantic couplet structure is characteristic of none of them.

The six verses of the prayer that follow illustrate the structural principles quoted from León Portilla (1969:76–7) above.

1. *ʔana yaya tot,*
   ʔahvetik:
   Well grandfather,
   Lord:

2. *k'u yepal mi liʔ čamala hlumale?*
   mi liʔ čamala kač'elale?
   How long have you been waiting here for my earth?
   How long have you been waiting here for my mud?

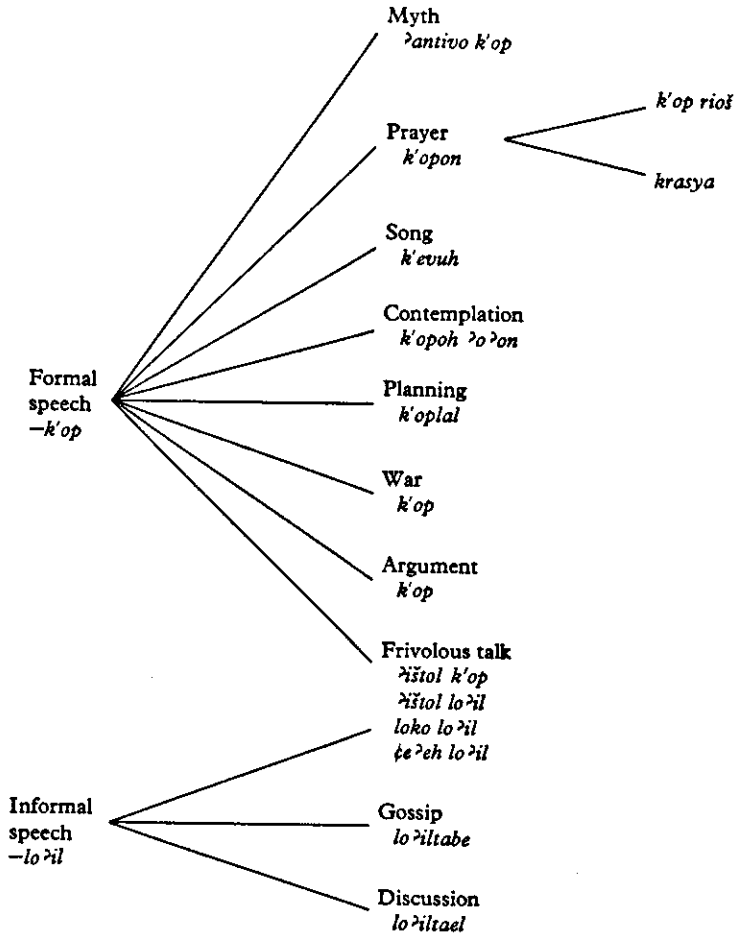

Fig. 16. Zinacanteco speech genres

3. *ɬobolon tal;*
lotolon tal.
I am gathering together here;
I am meeting here.

4. *tal kilbe smeʔanal na;*
tal kilbe smeʔanal k'uleb
I see the house of poverty;
I see the house of wealth

5. *li yahʔabtele,*
li yahpatane.
Of His laborer,
Of His tribute-payer.

6. *li č'ul ʔiskipulae, htotot;*
hmeʔot.
Holy Esquipulas, thou art my father;
Thou art my mother.

The second couplet employs synonyms: 'earth' and 'mud.' The fourth couplet uses antonyms: 'house of poverty' and 'house of wealth.' Each set of parallel terms in the first, second, fifth, and sixth couplets evokes a third idea: 'grandfather' and 'Lord' together connote elder; 'earth' and 'mud' together connote arrival (because the traveller's feet are stained with earth and mud); 'laborer' and 'tribute-payer' together connote vassal; 'father' and 'mother' together connote parents.

Verses 2–6 are not only semantically parallel, they are also *syntactically* parallel. Syntactic parallelism is characteristic of many, but not all, Zinacanteco couplets. Each of the five verses in question is composed of (1) a frame, part or all of which appears in both lines of the verse, and (2) one or more slots which are filled by pairs of variable elements that complement each other. In the second verse, the frame is:

*k'u yepal liʔ čamala h-/k-*_____?
How long have you been waiting here for my _____?

and the variable elements are the noun stems *-lumal* 'earth' and *-ač'elal* 'mud,' which occur as the terminal words of the couplet. The allomorphs of the first person subject pronoun, *h-* and *k-*, serve as the syntactic environment of *-lumal* and *-ač'elal*. However, the variable elements are not always noun stems, nor do they necessarily occur at the end of frames. In the third verse, the variable elements are the verb roots *ɬob-* and *lot-* and the slots which they fill occur in initial position:

_____*-olon tal.*
I am _____here.

Zinacanteco couplets utilize most of the grammatical categories listed by Jakobson (1968:604) for parallelism and contrast: parts of speech, numbers, cases, aspects, moods, voices, classes of abstract and concrete words, animates and inanimates, appellatives and proper names, affirmatives and negatives, and 'diverse syntactic elements and constructions.'

The pairs of terms that fill the slots in syntactic frames form meaning sets. Each pair of terms, even if they are antonyms, shares at least one meaning component that defines the set. Thus although, in the sixth verse, the noun roots *-tot* 'father' and *-meʔ* 'mother' are antonyms, they share the meaning component 'parent' which is the 'sense' of their use in the couplet. The two terms exhaust the possibilities of the set 'parent' by accounting for the two sexual alternatives (which are the only alternatives). Moreover, a pair of terms 'fixes' the meaning of both terms when there might be ambiguity if only one term were used. The pairing of 'mother' with 'father' in the sixth verse indicates that the meaning component 'parent' is the one intended, not the other possible meaning component 'male.' This disambiguating function of pairing is even more effective when one of the terms in question has several homonyms (see Edmonson 1971:xi-xii for further discussion of this point).

Another interesting structural feature of Zinacanteco couplets is the frequent use of Spanish loan words as complements for Tzotzil terms in syntactic frames:

7. *yuʔun i smuk'ta k'ine,*
   yuʔun i smuk'ta paskuae.
   For his great festival,
   For his great celebration.

8. *čiʔuk ʔoʔlol č'ul vinahel,*
   čiʔuk ʔoʔlol č'ul lorya.
   With the center of divine Heaven,
   With the center of divine Glory.

9. *ti čanib yo stoh,*
   ti čanib yo skantela.
   Of his four lowly torches,
   His four lowly candles.

In each example the first slot is filled by a Tzotzil word (*k'in, vinahel, toh*) and the second slot is filled by a Spanish loan word (*paskua, lorya, kantela*). The loan words function as synonymic complements for Tzotzil words that may not have Tzotzil synonyms.

In other examples, both slots are filled with Spanish loan words:

10. *ʔak'o noš č'ul pertonal;*
    ʔak'o noš č'ul lesensya.
    Only grant holy pardon;
    Only grant holy forgiveness.

11. *skotol č'ul rioš,*
    skotol č'ul santo.
    All the holy gods,
    All the holy saints.

The loan words *pertonal* (Sp. *perdonar*), *lesensya* (Sp. *licencia*), and *santo* (Sp. *santo*) refer to concepts that may have been foreign to the aboriginal Zinancanteco religion, for there are no Tzotzil synonyms for these terms. Sixteenth-century Tzotzil did, however, have a word for 'God,' *ču* (Calnek 1962:58), but it has been completely replaced by the loan word *rioš* (Sp. *Dios*), perhaps because of its original association with idolatry.

CONTEXT, CONTENT, AND USE

Verses 1–6 introduce a type of prayer that Zinacantecos call *krasya* (literally 'grace,' from Sp. *gracia*), which Cancian (1965:56–7) glosses as a 'prayer-greeting.' Cancian uses this term

> to refer to a whole class of formalized conversations between persons in ritual contexts. Both speak at the same time, with a prayer-like intonation. The speeches are almost always interval-markers in a ritual, and are most often greetings at the beginning and end of important segments. The wording of the speeches is not absolutely set, but the general content seems to be fairly generally known, though younger people and women often mumble their way through them. The person in the senior role (usually the older person) sets the pace, and the junior person responds, usually following a few words behind. (Cancian 1965:57n)

The interrogative form of the second verse marks the prayer as a greeting, that is, as a prayer that requires a complementary couplet response from a social inferior:

12. *lok' tal lalumal;*
    lok' tal lavač'elal.
    Your earth has ended here;
    Your mud has ended here.

In general, prayers describe what is going on in rituals. Songs (*k'evuh*) closely resemble prayers in their context, content, and function (Haviland 1967:50). The principal difference between prayers and songs is that prayers are simply recited, while songs are sung to a musical accompaniment of stringed instruments (violin, harp, guitar) or a wind–percussion trio composed of one flute and two drums. A song is identified by the couplets which compose it, not by the music which accompanies it. Different groups of verses that are sung to the same tune are called different songs.

Prayers and songs are similar in content when they both refer to the same ritual event. During the fiesta of San Lorenzo, the patron saint of Zinacantan, homage is paid both to San Lorenzo and to another saint called Esquipulas. The cult objects associated with Esquipulas include two necklaces of coins wrapped in layers of cloth bags and stored in a wooden chest. In the course of the ritual in honor of the saint the bags are taken out of the chest, the necklaces are removed from the bags, and the coins are counted. The order of ritual events is determined by musicians, informally in conversation, and formally in song. In the following verses of a song the musicians order the cult leaders to unwrap the coin necklaces:

13. *lok'es bo sč'a sničim ba;*
lok'es bo sč'a sničim sat;
Now take out the flowery [divine] face;
Now take out the flowery [divine] visage;

14. *ʔiskipula č'ul kahvaltik,*
ʔiskipula č'ul yaya tot.
Of Esquipulas our holy Lord,
Of Esquipulas our holy grandfather.

And the cult leaders respond in prayer (without music):

15. *člok' ʔo sničim ba;*
člok' ʔo sničim sat li sinyor ʔiskipulae.
His flowery [divine] face will be taken out;
His flowery [divine] visage will be taken out, Señor Esquipulas.

The content of argument (*k'op*), like prayer and song, is thematically related to associated non-verbal behavior. In the following example, a woman scolds her drunken husband whose belongings were stolen from him:

16. *ba saʔo tal ti k'usi ʔač'ayohe,*
ti k'utik ʔahip ʔeč'el.
Go look for what you lost,
For what you threw away.

17. *skoh ʔačopolal;*
skoh ʔapentehoal.
It was because of your evilness;
It was because of your waywardness.

18. *ʔa ʔič'ay hpok',' šači;*
ʔa ʔič'ay hpišol,' šači ʔun.
'Ah my kerchief lost itself,' you say;
'Ah my hat lost itself,' you say then.

19. *k'usi šahbalinbe ʔun leʔe?*
k'usi šahk'elbe ʔun leʔe?
Why should I be worthy of you like that?
Why should I look after you like that?

The woman's complaint has some ethnographic validity; either because they later cannot remember where they left their clothes or because other men take advantage of their helplessness and steal them, Zinacanteco men do customarily lose their hats and kerchiefs when they pass out from excessive drinking.

Prayers, songs, and arguments are expressed wholly and consistently in couplets which are usually both syntactically and semantically parallel. The couplet structure of myth, or the other hand, is looser and less consistent:

20. *ʔa ti voʔne,*
ʔital nohel.
Once upon a time,
A flood came.

21. *ʔičam ti končaveetike,*
ti baʔyi krišč anoe čam hʔoʔlol;
The dwarfs died,
The first people, half died;

22. *ʔisbah sbaik tak kahon hʔoʔlol,*
ʔimuyik ta teʔ hʔoʔlol;
Half shut themselves up in coffins,
Half climbed trees;

23. *ʔiskušik sat teʔ,*
ʔiyipanik čočob;
They crunched nuts,
They lived on acorns;
(Laughlin n.d.b, Tale 7)

Only two verses in this example (nos. 22 and 23) are both syntactically and semantically parallel; one verse (no. 21) is semantically, but not syntactically

parallel; and one verse (no. 20) should probably not be considered a couplet at all.

Joking is referred to by several terms in Zinacantan: *ʔištol k'op*, *ʔištol loʔil*, *loko loʔil*, and *ɬeʔeh loʔil*. The first three terms are synonyms for 'frivolous talk'; the last term refers to any kind of informal speech that evokes laughter. Most joking is informal (*loʔil* rather than *k'op*) and is not expressed in couplets. Some joking interactions, however, begin with proverb-like utterances (see Gossen 1973) which have a two-part construction and are semantically, but not syntactically parallel:

24. *buč'u tol šk'opohe,*
yuʔun šʔilin.
He who talks too much,
Is quarrelsome.

25. *k'unk'un šatih lavobe;*
k'an me štuč' yak'il.
Slowly you play your instrument;
Maybe its string will break.

A joking interaction is composed of two or more insulting verbal utterances from at least two speakers. An insulting remark is one which claims that the person in question has personal qualities or behavior patterns which members of his community judge to be undesirable for someone of his age, sex, or role. Such remarks are critical or disapproving and therefore are related in content and function to scolding speech.

The opening gambit of a joking interaction is usually an *implied insult*. Its denotative or literal meaning is innocuous as far as the person at whom the remark is directed is concerned, but its connotative meaning is insulting to him. The person who initiates a joking interaction expresses his opening insult implicitly in order to protect himself should his words be taken as he had not intended them to be (as criticism or defamation rather than joking). If his opening remark is received as an insult and the response to it is an accusation of defamation, he will ask that his remark be taken literally and claim that the implied meaning was accidental. The distinction between explicit and implied insults is upheld in legal contexts. In determining whether an offending utterance is a joking insult or a defamatory insult, the magistrate of Zinacantan considers whether the denotative meaning of the remark is insulting before deciding who, if anyone, is guilty of defamation (see Bricker 1973a and n.d.a for additional information on Zinacanteco joking behavior).

The cryptic examples cited above are implied insults. The first couplet (no. 24) implies that the joking partner talks so much that he appears quarrelsome. The second couplet (no. 25) is said to the musician who falls asleep over his instrument to encourage him to play faster.

Having made my case for the association of formal speech with couplets, it is only fair to add that Zinacantecos do not themselves talk about structure as a criterion for differentiating between formal and informal speech even though all Zinacantecos use couplets when they sing, pray, or scold. Instead, what serves as the criterion for classification at this level is the value judgment in terms of good (*lekil*) and bad (*čopol*). The formal speech genres are 'good' and the informal speech genres are 'bad.' But even if Zinacantecos do not talk about structure, they do give it implicit recognition in parodies of formal speech. I quote, first, some verses from a bonesetter's prayer:

26. *yašal bak,*
yašal č'ušuv;
Green bone,
Green muscle;

27. *likanik ʔun;*
hulavanik.
Rise then;
Get up.

28. *k'elavil č'ul bak!*
k'elavil č'ul č'ušuv!
Look, holy bone!
Look, holy muscle!

29. *vaʔlanik ʔun!*
tek'lanik ʔun!
Stand erect then!
Stand firm then!

30. *hulavanik ʔun, bak!*
kušanik ʔun, č'ušuv!
Get up then, bone!
Recover then, muscle!

31. *ʔunenal yol bak,*
ʔunenal yol č'ušuv.
Tender little bone,
Tender little muscle.

which should be compared with a parody of it:

32. *yašbil ton,*
yašbil ʔak';
Green stone,
Green vine;

33. *ʔunenal bak,*
ʔunenal č'ušuv.
Tender bone,
Tender muscle.

34. *šač'an bak!*
šač'an č'ušuv!
Stretch out, bone!
Stretch out, muscle!

35. *naʔo lavave, bak!*
naʔo lavave, č'ušuv!
Remember your place, bone!
Remember your place, muscle!

36. *mu šakomłan ʔač'en č'ušuv!*
mu šakomłan ʔač'en bak!
Don't leave your cave, muscle!
Don't leave your cave, bone!

These verses are the linguistic part of a mock curing ceremony that is performed every Christmas and New Year's Day. The curer-impersonator pretends to cure a female-impersonator and her 'husband' of imaginary wounds which were supposedly inflicted on them by a bull-impersonator. The 'curer' strikes their genitals whenever he speaks of healing their broken bones and torn muscles. The non-linguistic behavior provides a context in which 'bone' and 'muscle' together connote penis and 'cave' and 'place' together connote vagina (Bricker 1973b). The fact that the parody of the prayer is expressed in couplets suggests that the couplet structure is intrinsic to prayer.

Finally, couplets are the verbal expression of a dualistic principle that is pervasive in Zinacanteco culture. This principle is usually expressed as a contrast between the terms *bankilal* (older, senior, superior, male, right, larger, upper) and *ʔiłʼinal* (younger, junior, inferior, female, left, smaller, lower) and it is applied to the domains of kinship, religious and political roles, physical objects, and natural features of the landscape (Bricker n.d.b; Vogt 1969:238–45).

Whenever a ritual is performed by a *bankilal–ʔiłʼinal* pair of religious practitioners, this fact is noted in prayer and song in parallel form:

37. *martomorey bankilal,*
martomorey ʔiłʼinal;
Senior Mayordomo Rey,
Junior Mayordomo Rey;

But although couplets express pairs of ideas and sometimes refer to pairs of individuals, the *actions* or *behavior* to which they refer are not paired. Instead, each couplet refers to a pair of attributes that characterize a particular action. In other words, the dualistic structure of formal speech is not a characteristic of the behavior which that speech describes.

TEMPORAL IMPLICATIONS

Gossen (1970) has found that in the neighboring Tzotzil-speaking community of Chamula the speech genres are most generally classified in terms of whether they are 'ancient' (*ʔantivo*) or 'recent' (*ʔač'*). Zinacantecos do not explicitly classify their speech genres in those terms, but when asked, in the case of each speech genre, which of the two terms best applies, the responses invariably place the formal (or couplet) genres in the 'ancient' category and the informal genres in the 'recent' category. By 'ancient,' Zinacantecos mean that the formal genres are traditional in contrast with informal speech which is spontaneous or 'new.'

The fact that the formal genres are considered 'ancient' in contrast with the informal 'recent' genres suggests some antiquity for the couplet genres. There is some evidence, albeit slight, that the association of formal speech with the couplet structure has some time depth. First of all, some of the vocabulary in the couplets seems to be archaic in the sense that those who recite them can neither gloss them nor interpret them, yet they were common enough in the sixteenth century to have been listed in Tzotzil dictionaries of the time. For example, the word *ʔahvetik* in the first couplet cited in this paper was spelled *aghauetic* in a sixteenth-century dictionary and was glossed as 'nobleman' (Sp. *hidalgo*) (Calnek 1962:82), but Zinacantecos do not know what the word means.

Second, a nineteenth-century Tzotzil document has recently come to light at the Smithsonian Institution,[2] which gives some additional time perspective to my Tzotzil data. The document is a proclamation, dated August 7, 1812, from the King of Spain in Cádiz to the Indians of Chiapas, ordering them to beware of the lies of Napoleon. In that year Cádiz was the only Spanish city that had not fallen to Napoleon. The text obviously was not the work of a Tzotzil Indian, but was probably composed by a priest

who had returned to Spain after spending many years in highland Chiapas among Tzotzil speakers. According to Robert M. Laughlin (personal communication), an expert on the Tzotzil language, the text is written in excellent and idiomatic Tzotzil, but is probably not an example of the Zinacanteco dialect. More important, Laughlin pointed out to me that parts of the text are expressed in couplets (transcription as in the original):

38. *ytal ta yan,*
slecóg osil
There came from another,
A different land

39. *jun coló huinic,*
hun mu ibeiluc tzameshuaneg.
An evil man,
A treacherous killer.

40. *Napoleon*
sbiil.
Napoleon
Is his name.

41. *spasog sbá lolo huaneg;*
spasog sbá gnoxol.
He has become a deceiver;
He has become our neighbor.

This implies that the person who wrote the text, although probably not an Indian, was familiar with the structural characteristics of Tzotzil formal speech.

On the other hand, the occurrence of Spanish loan words and Christian themes in couplets suggests that the content, if not the structure, of the formal genres has been subject to change since 1524, when Spaniards first penetrated the highlands of Chiapas. In verses 7–9, a Tzotzil word in one phrase is complemented by a Spanish synonym in the other. In verses 10 and 11, both slots in the couplet frame are occupied by Spanish loan words.

But if the Zinacantecos were willing to alter the content of their prayers and songs in the interest of conversion to Catholicism, the same cannot be said for structure. All Zinacanteco prayers are expressed in couplets, including those addressed to Catholic saints. If a Zinacanteco prays to one saint, he does so in terms of two of its attributes, but if he calls upon more than one saint, the number of saints is usually two or a multiple of two:

42. *sčiʾuk li santorenso,*
čiʾuk li santorominko,
With San Lorenzo,
With Santo Domingo,

43. *čiʾuk li čʾul mariya rosaryo, vinahelal ʾanɬ,*
vinahelal sinyora.
With holy Mary of the Rosary, Heavenly Woman,
Heavenly Lady.

Both lines in the first couplet refer to male saints. The second couplet refers to one female saint, who is described first in terms of a Tzotzil attribute (*ʾanɬ*), and then in terms of a Spanish synonym for that attribute (*sinyora*). The couplet structure seems to have been so basic to the Zinacanteco conception of prayer that Catholic worship was cast in the same mold.

Comparative data from Yucatan

The metaphorical couplet as a formal device in Mayan speech has a longer known history in the Yucatan peninsula than in highland Chiapas. Edmonson (1968) has demonstrated that passages from the *Ritual of the Bacabs* and the *Chilam Balam of Chumayel* can be scanned in terms of semantic couplets. Although both manuscripts date from the eighteenth century, Roys (1933:6, 1965:vii) believes that they were copied from much older manuscripts written during the seventeenth century or even earlier. The *Ritual of the Bacabs* 'consists largely of medical incantations' (Roys 1965:vii). The more heterogeneous *Chilam Balam of Chumayel* includes examples of song, history, ritual, prophecy, incantation, and riddles.

The couplet genres of modern Yucatec speech are proverbs (*pʾis kʾiin*), prayers (*š payal čiʾ*), riddles (*náʾat*), and history (*ʾúučben tʾàan*).

Some proverbs interpret events in terms of their significance for the future. This class of proverbs is called prophecy (*tomoh čiʾ*). The following is an example of a prophetic proverb:

44. *t u yàakʾil š mehen kʾúumeʾ,*
maʾ t u čʾúuyul š nuh kʾúumiʾ.
The vine of an unripe squash,
Will not support a mature squash.

It implies that an immature child cannot be expected to support his father.

Prayers include blessings (*pul kiliʾič tʾàan*) and incantations (*kʾaš ʾikʾ tʾàan* and *wač ʾikʾ tʾàan*). Incantations may be used to cast spells (*kʾaš*

ʔik' t'àan) or to lift them (*wač ʔik' t'àan*). A priest protects a newly planted cornfield by casting a spell on it; he cures a bewitched patient by reciting an incantation to lift the spell that made him ill. The following incantation invokes the services of the four winds, God, and San Miguel to protect a cornfield:

45. *k u yantal;*
in k'ubik sakaʔ
Here it is;
I offer this gruel

46. *tiʔ nohol ʔik',*
y éetel tiʔ k'ak'al moson k'amik;
To the south wind,
And to the tumbling whirlwind to receive;

47. *bey šan tiʔ noh lak'in ʔik';*
bey tiʔ túun tiʔ kan tíʔiʦ in kòol šan.
So also to the great east wind;
So then to the four corners of my cornfield also.

48. *k u yantal;*
in k'ubik
Here it is;
I offer it

49. *tiʔ yùum báalamóʔob,*
tiʔ šaman ʔik',
To the Lord Jaguars,
To the north wind,

50. *tiʔ čikin ʔik',*
tiʔ nohol ʔik',
To the west wind,
To the south wind,

51. *tiʔ nohoč dios yùumbil,*
yùum san migel arkanhel.
To the great God the Father,
Lord San Miguel Archangel.
(after Redfield and Villa Rojas 1934:339)

Riddles are popular in Mayan communities. A typical riddle is:

52. *wíʔih t u bin;*
náʔah t u sùut. báʔasiʔ?
It goes thirsty;
It returns full. What is it?

The answer is 'a water bucket' (*č'òoy*).

The couplet structure is also evident in the following excerpt from a folk historical account of the Caste War of Yucatan (1847–53):

53. *bwenoh tiʔ yáʔabač sufrimientoh*
u páadesert:
Well a great suffering
They suffered:

54. *t u láakal nohoč,*
čičan;
All the old,
(And) the young;

55. *t u mèen t u tàal u huntartik,*
čukáʔan henteh tiʔ kàahalkàah.
Because they came to round them up,
The people trapped in all the towns.

56. *k u taal máʔ čéen tiʔ hun p'éel kàah;*
máʔ čéen hun túul henteh k u číʔikiʔ;
They came not just to one town;
Nor did they recruit only one person;

57. *sinoh keh t u láakal,*
le henteh k u molkoʔ.
But it was all of them,
Those people whom they recruited.

58. *wáah k u lah kíinsik*
wáah máʔ t yantal y éetel.
For they killed everyone
Who would not be with them.

It seems clear that, with the exception of song (*k'àay*), which seems to have been heavily influenced by Spanish rhyming conventions, the traditional couplet genres of Yucatec Maya speech survive today.

The examples suggest that Yucatec Maya couplets are not as 'tight' in structure as Tzotzil couplets. In Zinacantan, prayers are invariably both

semantically and syntactically parallel in structure. Yucatec Maya prayers are always semantically, but only rarely syntactically parallel. The same is true of other Yucatec Maya formal genres. Of the fifteen Yucatec Maya examples I have cited, only four of them (nos. 44, 50, 52, and 54) are obviously syntactically parallel. It can be argued that four other couplets (nos. 46, 47, 49, and 56) exemplify *partial* syntactic parallelism on the grounds that they contain some framing elements such as *ti'-* in nos. 46 and 49, *bey-* and *ti'-* in no. 47, and *má' čéen-* and *hun* + numerical classifier- in no. 56. The other seven examples are semantically parallel in terms of synonymy (nos. 45, 48, 51, and 53) or apposition (nos. 55, 57, and 58).

All Yucatec Maya speech genres are classified as *t'àan* 'word, language, speech.' Although each of the couplet genres has its own label, they are not grouped together into any one category that might be defined as formal speech. Their classification is strictly functional. Thus here, too, we can ask: what role does structure play in the definition of speech genres?

An answer to this question may be provided by some documents I discovered in the State Archives of Yucatan in Mérida during the summer of 1971. The relevant documents date from the early years of the Caste War of Yucatan, the conflict which is described in the example of folk history cited above (couplets 53–8). In 1850, some of the Indian leaders of that rebellion founded a new religious cult based on the concept of a Talking Cross. The Cross supposedly dictated the sermon and five letters which I found in Mérida.

The sermon was delivered to the inhabitants of Chan Santa Cruz, the cult center, on 15 October 1850. The contents are largely prophetic in nature. For example, the people of Chan Santa Cruz were told on that day:

59. *bíin a w oheltéʾešeʾ,*
kristianoh kàahéʾeš,
It is going to be made known to you,
You Christians who live here,

60. *tèen in w éet máanéʾeš t u láakal ʾòorah;*
tèen k u máan in w áalkab táanil tiʾ téʾeš
t u táan enemigóʾob
That it is I who am always at your side;
That it is I who go before you confronting
the enemy

61. *t y óʾolal máʾ y úučul téʾeš,*
miš hun pʾéelóʾob in sihsàh máasewalilèʾeš.
So that nothing will befall you,
Not one thing, oh you Indians whom I
engendered.

This passage seems to be expressed in semantic couplets as are other portions of the text. But not all passages can be scanned so easily in terms of parallel couplets. In fact a later copyist, perhaps feeling that a prophetic text should be expressed in couplets, rewrote some passages in that form. The later version of the Sermon of the Cross which I consulted is today the sacred book of the Indians of X-Cacal, who are descendants of the rebels who established Chan Santa Cruz as their cult center (Villa Rojas 1945).[3] The manuscript was copied in 1903 from another manuscript first written down in 1887, which was in turn copied from the 1850 manuscript or from a copy of it.

What in the 1850 manuscript appears as:

t u mèen t u kʾuč t u ʾòorahil
because the hour has come

has been edited in the later version to read:

t u mèen kʾuč t u ʾòorahil t u háʾabil
because the hour and the year have come

which can be scanned as the couplet:

62. *t u mèen kʾuč t u ʾòorahil,*
t u háʾabil.
Because it has arrived in the hour,
In the year.

In another example, the 1850 manuscript gives:

miš hun pʾéel hustisiah bíin mèentáʾak tèen
not a single judgment will be made for me
máʾ t u bèeliʾ.
that is not right.

This was later rewritten as:

máʾ u yantal u mèentáʾal tèen miš hun pʾéel
it has never been that there was made for me,
hustisiah máʾ t u bèeliʾ wáah š máʾ t u tòohil.
not a single judgment that was not just, nor one
that was not right.

which can be scanned as the couplets:

63. *máʾ u yantal*
u mèentáʾal tèen
It has never been
That there was made for me

64. *miš hun pʾéel hustisiah máʾ t u bèeliʾ,*
wáah š máʾ t u tòohil.
Not a single judgment that was not just,
Nor one that was not right.

In the next example, the copyist made two phrases which were originally only semantically parallel, also syntactically parallel, changing:

65. *u tiáʾal káʾa h y úʾub čičan,*
y éetel nohoč
In order that the young may hear,
And the old

to:

66. *u tiáʾal káʾa h y úʾub čičan;*
y éetel káʾa h y úʾub nohoč;
So that the young may hear;
And the old may hear;

The five letters supposedly dictated by the Cross were written during 1851. Four were sent to Miguel Barbachano, the Governor of Yucatan; the fifth was sent to the Commander General of Valladolid. They, too, contain prophecies and they are partly expressed in couplets. They differ from other letters of the time both in content and structure.

Even dates are expressed in couplets in the letters:

67. *bayhelelaʾ t u šòokol 28*
u mèesil agosto
Here today in the twenty-eighth count
Of the month of August

as are other passages, such as:

68. *y óʾolal a mèentik u šòokol,*
y úʾub:
So that you make them read,
(And) understand:

69. *čičan,*
y éetel nohoč,
Young,
And old,

70. *káʾa h yanak a w ohetkéʾešeʾ in w éet máanéʾeš;*
tiʾáʾanen t a w ičiléʾešeʾ;
That I accompany you;
That I am among you;

71. *táan in máan*
in štímbat yukataneʾ.
As I travel through
(And) visit Yucatan.

These data suggest that Yucatec Maya speakers, like Tzotzil speakers, implicitly differentiate speech genres in terms of structure. This may be clearly seen by comparing the prophetic letters dictated by the Cross with other letters written by Indians during the Caste War. Ordinary letters began with the standard flowery salutation:

in yamahil noh talan tikbéʾenil yùumeʾ,
My beloved and most excellent Sir,

and closed with:

halilih u šûul in tʾàan tiʾ a tikbéʾeniloʾ.
Verily my words to Your Excellency have ended.
káʾa h yùumil tiʾ dios u kanáant a santoh pišan
May the Lord God care for your holy soul
t u yáʾabal háʾab.
for many years.

But they were not written in couplets.

The fact that the Sermon of the Cross, which is a non-traditional instance of prophecy, was expressed at least partially in terms of semantic couplets implies that the couplet structure is essential to prophecy. This argument is reinforced by the fact that the later copyist(s) rewrote parts of the text, making some of the phrases more parallel in structure. In fact, it may be that the more traditional examples of couplet verse are not just more consistent in their structure, but are the culmination of generations of editing and reediting. One might argue further, by analogy, that the traditional genres of Zinacanteco speech evolved through similar stages before becoming enshrined as perfect couplets, or 'good' speech.

Conclusions

In this paper I have considered the structure and function of Mayan couplet speech, using data from Zinacantan in highland Chiapas and from several communities in the Yucatan peninsula. I began by showing that couplets may be either syntactically or semantically parallel, or both, and that syntactic parallelism is very common in Zinacanteco couplet speech, but relatively rare in Yucatec Maya couplets. I then discussed the ethnographic context of Zinacanteco couplet speech, arguing that Zincantecos use syntactic and/or semantic parallelism to mark formal speech. My data from the Yucatan peninsula were not as complete as for Zinacantan, but they did suggest that those Yucatec Maya speech genres which correspond in name and function to the Zinacanteco formal genres (and have not been influenced by Spanish rhyming conventions), are likewise marked by semantic, and sometimes also syntactic, parallelism.

I noted that neither the Zinacantecos nor the Yucatecan Maya refer to structure when they classify speech genres. Rather, their classifications are made strictly in terms of function, moral value, or provenience (traditional or recent). However, analysis of two versions of a nineteenth-century Yucatecan document suggested that even though the couplet structure of formal speech is not as cognitively salient, the Maya will rephrase unstructured speech which has a ritual functional in terms of both semantic and syntactic couplets. I therefore conclude that it is possible that whenever informal recent unstructured speech begins to serve ritual functions, then it is gradually rephrased in terms of couplets, perhaps according to the model provided by the two versions of the nineteenth-century Yucatec Maya document. By this argument the genres of Zinacanteco formal speech which employ the couplet structure loosely and inconsistently, would be in the transitional stage exemplified by the 1850 and 1887 (or 1903) versions of the Sermon of the Cross.[4]

18

TO SPEAK WITH A HEATED HEART: CHAMULA CANONS OF STYLE AND GOOD PERFORMANCE

GARY H. GOSSEN

This paper explores a central metaphor which Chamulas use to talk about and evaluate speaking. I shall attempt to show how this metaphor – heat – functions as a basic canon of native criticism of nearly all kinds of speech performances which Chamulas recognize, from ordinary language to formal ritual speech and song. Heat possesses great religious significance because its primary referent is the sun deity (*htotik k'ak'al* 'Our Father Sun'), who created and now maintains the basic temporal, spatial, and social categories of the Chamula cosmos. Controlled heat, therefore, symbolizes order in both a diachronic and synchronic sense. Language is but one of several symbolic domains which Chamulas think and talk about in terms of heat metaphors. Ritual action, the life cycle, the agricultural cycle, the day, the year, individual festivals, political power, economic status – all are measured or evaluated in units which derive ultimately from 'Our Father Sun,' the giver of order. Canons of verbal style and performance will therefore be described as ideal patterns which extend, in homologous fashion, into the whole fabric of Chamula social life and expressive behavior. I hope, thereby, to show how certain Chamula ethical and esthetic values behave as a unitary normative code.

After describing the community and the categories of cosmology which give symbolic power to the heat metaphor, I shall briefly outline the categories of verbal behavior which Chamulas recognize. Within this folk taxonomy, which can be seen as a continuum of style in which the individual genres are expressed, I shall discuss patterns of formalism, style, redundancy, and dyadic construction which are part of adult linguistic competence. Nearly all criteria which Chamulas use to evaluate these esthetic patterns are also moral criteria which apply to other aspects of their society. Controlled cycles of heat provide the metalanguage of native criticism for evaluating what is well spoken and beautiful. The same cycles of metaphorical heat provide the criteria for the good and the desirable in the life cycle, social relations, and cosmology. This equivalence leads me in the final section to some speculation about a dimension of Chamula thought which might be called philosophy of language.