

Watching people operate on their cultural rules through gossip also shows us the folly of our belief that culture *provides* sets of ideal rules which apply to particular configurations of people, places, things, and events. The contingencies of life themselves restructure the rules, even change them over time. Thus, in gossip people may mouth the same words, may invoke the same rule, and derive different conclusions. They may talk about the same facts, espouse the same standards, and still contradict one another. Here is the source for doubt about modeling the cultural rules so as to predict those occasional troublesome marriages that don't fit the marriage rule, residence choices that violate the accepted norm. A skilled native rationalizer could doubtless reconcile almost any aberration with some rules; and gossip about such aberrations might cut both ways—some will say “freakish and immoral,” others “just what one would expect.” It is in gossip sessions that people most often confront rules directly; at such times the rules have no independence—one's whole understanding of the cultural code depends on the particular setting, on the configuration of past experiences and knowledge, which is suddenly relevant to the application of rules and standards to the facts in question.

We must not be misled by the fact that people typically state cultural rules baldly and absolutely. Informants could certainly state the traffic rules governing intersections. We know—as competent drivers—that the rules are subject to contingencies, and that we apply them (as I suggested before) other things being equal. Gossip, in looking at past sequences of actual behavior, leads participants precisely to the point where unnecessary details have been shorn. Other things *are* equal: one can apply the rules with an appearance of objectivity and absoluteness. The insignificant variations of fact have been masked by gossip's rhetoric. Gossip continually works toward a verbal representation of the facts amenable to the application of rules, to evaluation, and to mental filing for future reference.

I propose that the native's ability to act appropriately is—though epistemologically on a different level—essentially equivalent to the gossip's ability to understand his action.<sup>10</sup> At least, for purposes of our ethnographic descriptions, we may treat rules as operating after the fact to explain behavior. We have not really learned the rules of a culture until we know how to manipulate them in gossip. Moreover, we are still novices at a culture until we can listen to its gossip with an understanding ear. Finally, I claim that when we crack the gossip that pervades social life we see the cultural tradition in its most dynamic form as it applies itself to the kinds of behavior most interesting to natives. We see people actively speculating about the nature of their neighbors, their lives, and, in short, their world.

Following a suggestion of Abrahams (1970), it appears useful to locate gossip within a native classification of verbal behavior, as a particular type of performance, as a speech genre, at least as a lexically labeled behavioral domain. Such a procedure would allow the analyst to state the criterial attributes of what he is going to call “gossip,” and to relate these attributes to the criterial attributes of “gossip” in his analytical language (in this case, social science English). Rather than employing ordinary “ethnoscience” procedures to produce a taxonomy of “verbal behavior,” in chapter 3 I elected to present evidence for a Zinacanteco theory of the properties of certain sorts of conversation which I claim resemble gossip. This choice reflects my opinion that artificially elicited taxonomies (particularly taxonomies of *nouns*) tell us little about the attributes of actually occurring behavior, and not much more about how people manipulate words (of various syntactic shapes) to “order their experience.”

Fortunately, various anthropologists have provided taxonomies of Tzotzil words for speech, and it will be illuminating to try to discover a domain of “gossip” within these taxonomies.

Victoria Bricker (1974) reports that standard eliciting techniques with various informants in Zinacantan produced apparently divergent taxonomies of *loʔil* (“speech”). These Bricker was able to reconcile by inviting informants to elaborate on what seemed incomplete responses and to clarify responses which seemed to confound relations of contrast and inclusion.<sup>1</sup> The resulting “suggested composite speech taxonomy” (1974, p. 80) is presented in figure 10. The position of a domain resembling that of English “gossip”

in this scheme is not clear. Bricker suggests that “the term *loʔil* has a general meaning, ‘speech,’ and a specific meaning, ‘gossip;’” (1974, p. 75, note 6), where *loʔil* (“stories”) about nonverbal behavior are thus “gossip.” (One of Bricker’s informants gave, as one answer to the query, “What are the names of the kinds of speech?” the following: “speech called ‘the man who quarrels with his wife because he has a mistress.’”) We should expect that several of the categories on Bricker’s taxonomic tree would include gossiplike behavior: certainly much gossip is frivolous (although much is dead serious); much gossip is lies; and “stories about people” are presumably as often gossip as they are, say, news reports.

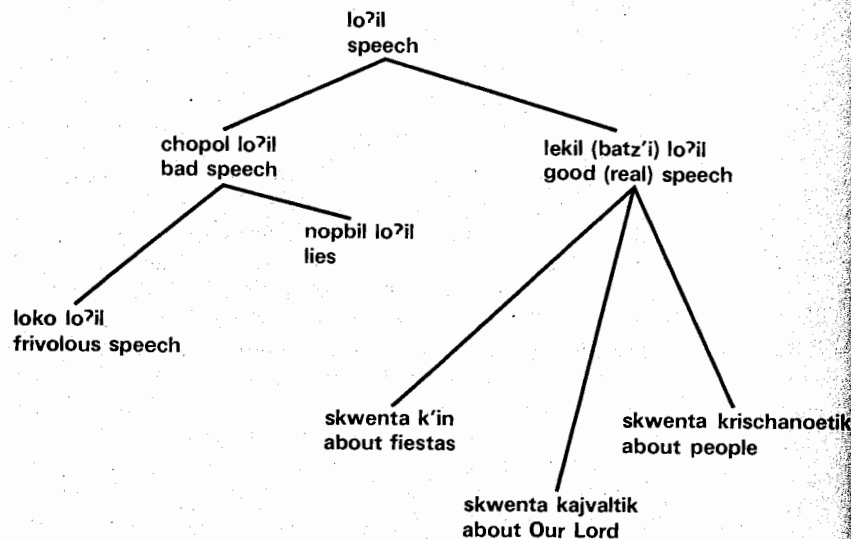


Fig. 10 Suggested taxonomy of speech for Zinacantan. (After Bricker 1974, p. 80)

Bricker delimits a genre which relates more closely to gossip in a paper on Tzotzil insults (1973b). Among other things she is concerned to distinguish “teasing or frivolous talk” (which includes *loko loʔil*) from *labanvanej* (“ridicule”) and *ʔut bail* (“criticism”).<sup>2</sup> All three genres, she says, are characterized by insult;<sup>3</sup> but the insult takes different forms in each genre, and the legal repercussions of insulting someone in one genre or another are quite different. She writes:

When sober, Zinacantecos do not like to confront each other with explicit insults. Even though insults which are true may be expressed directly in the second person without fear of legal punishment, most Zinacantecos prefer to wait until they can express insults as ridicule to some third party, in the absence of the victim, rather than to confront him with criticism. [1973b, p. 196]

These “insults . . . made behind the victim’s back” belong to the category of *labanvanej* (“ridicule”); and they seem to fall naturally within behavior we would class as gossip.

Here Bricker appeals to two criteria to distinguish “ridicule” from “criticism.” The first criterion amounts to the requirement that “ridicule” never be directly addressed to its victim—a requirement similar to the one I imposed in my working definition of gossip. The second requirement is that insulting remarks about someone which are false, whether directly expressed or not, are *ʔut bail*—and, accordingly, are grounds for legal action (1973b, pp. 129–93).

Whenever an alleged case of defamation is brought before the magistrate, his first concern is to determine whether the insulting accusation in question is true or false. This he does by consulting witnesses. If they say it is true, the case is dropped. [1973b, p. 197]

Truth can of course be garbed in more or less insulting ways, and the notions of truth and falsity are in most social discourse themselves negotiable.<sup>4</sup> Doubtless people often fear disclosure of potentially damaging information that is true more than the spreading of fabrications. After two men made a secret deal to trade cargos, one man said to the other: *mu xalabanon* (“don’t go and mock me”)—in this case, a better translation might be: “don’t reveal this [potentially damaging] information about me.” But, as I show in chapter 3, this criterion cannot be decisive about gossip, for people consider that gossip may be false but usually must contain a *grain* of truth. And gossip is not often grounds for claiming damages from the offender at the town hall.<sup>5</sup>

Gary Gossen (1974) bases a slightly different taxonomy of the usage of neighboring Chamula on the word *k’op*. The basic first level of contrast may be represented as in figure 11.

Ordinary language is restricted in use only by the dictates of everyday social situations, and by the grammar or intelligibility of the utterance. It is believed to be totally idiosyncratic and without noteworthiness in style, form, content or setting; it is everyday language. Pure words, in contrast, include all of the stable genres that comprise Chamula oral tradition; they have formal and contextual constraints of many kinds. Chamulas view pure words as “closed” in certain respects and ordinary language as “open,” for the latter can be used freely for other kinds of communication; pure words are “bound” in that they are destined to be performed only in specific social settings. [Gossen 1974, pp. 47–48]

The position of “gossip” within this classification is particularly revealing.

What we would call “gossip” is in Chamula a form of pure words because it reports a single event in a predictable way in a predictable setting. It is not, in theory, idiosyncratic or original, as is language for people whose hearts are heated. Gossip is classified as true recent narrative, a genre of pure words, for it is a significant segment of information, known by several people and potentially available to everyone, which is told in a familiar narrative style in a predictable setting. For example, the gossip

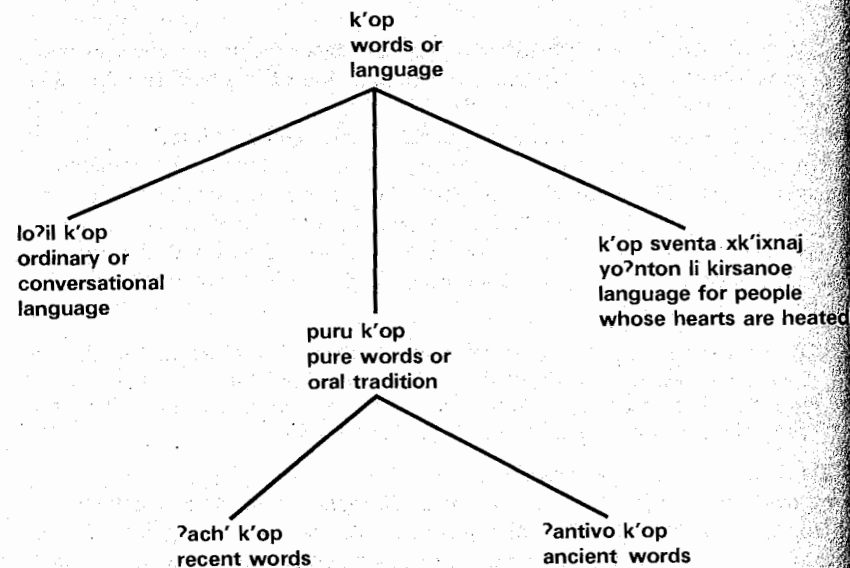


Fig. 11 Partial taxonomy of Chamula *k'op*. (After Gossen 1974, pp. 50-51)

among women at a waterhole about the presidente's oration to the Chamulas at the past Festival of San Juan is true recent narrative, a form of pure words, whereas the oration itself is not, because no one knew exactly what the presidente was going to say, only how he would say it and where. [1974, p. 52]

Here we find a rather static view of gossip—as true, more or less, standardized recounting of (actual) recent events—which contrasts rather sharply with the picture of gossip that emerges from Zinacanteco native theory I expound in chapter 3.

I managed to elicit a rather different taxonomy for *k'op* and *lo?il*. In conversation, I discussed the meanings of various types of *lo?il* and *k'op* which appear in Gossen's and Bricker's taxonomies. It became obvious, for example, that most of the labels applied to verbal genres in Chamula were unfamiliar to Zinacantecos—despite the fact that these communities are geographically close, situated on the opposite sides of a ridge and valley. At the end of these conversations I asked a Zinacanteco friend to name the different "types" of *k'op* and *lo?il*,<sup>6</sup> and to arrange cards with the different names into piles by similarity of meaning.<sup>7</sup> I then had him arrange piles into two large groups corresponding to a basic taxonomic split in the domain (see fig. 12).

I shall consider each category in turn. Figure 12 is headed by *k'op* ("word") and roughly divided into *chopol k'op* and *lekil k'op*—though these terms, in these contexts, were specially coined to label the two groups.

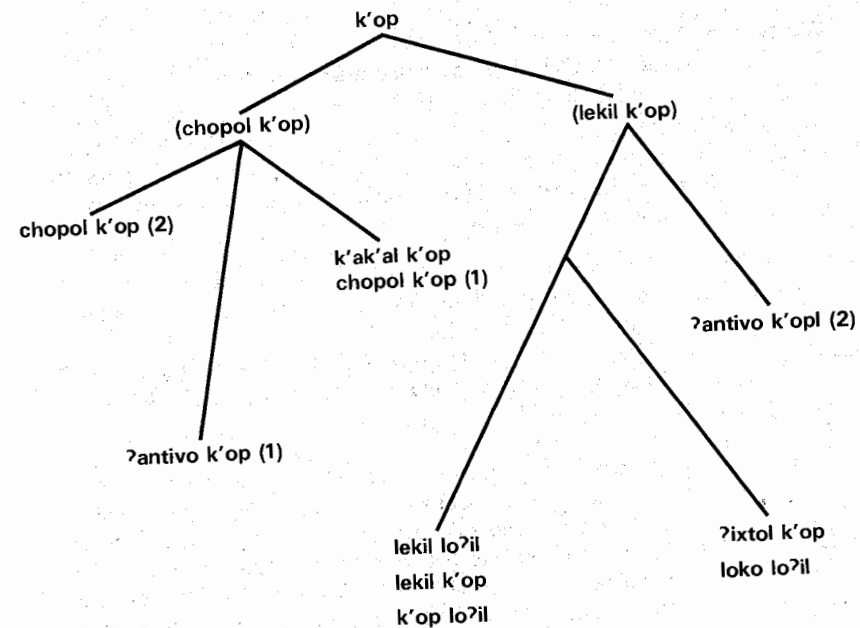


Fig. 12 A taxonomy of *k'op* in Zinacantan. (Suggested by Chep K'obyox ta ?Apas, 7 May 1971)

*Chopol k'op* means "bad *k'op*," and *lekil k'op* "good *k'op*." Under the category of "good words" my informant listed the following types and offered the following explanations:

- a. "good words" *lekil k'op*  
lek tuk' chlo?ilaj, lek rason  
"When people just talk straight together; when they talk sensibly."

*Lekil k'op* seems to imply ordinary conversation with some purpose. (People in Zinacantan do not talk, or indeed, socialize, aimlessly.) In such conversations people make decisions or discuss questions in seriousness.<sup>8</sup>

- b. "good talk" *lekil lo?il*  
Tzjak'beik k'op tzjak'beik rason much'u sna? rason k'u cha?al totil-me?il, k'u cha?al ?oy stot-sme? jpas-?abtel ja? tzko?oltasbe sk'op.  
"This is when one asks another for advice about the wise course of action, about the proper way—when one asks some wise person like a ritual adviser; as when a cargo holder agrees with his ritual adviser about how things should be done."

Also:

K'u cha'al chlo'ilaj totil-me'il.  
 "The way a ritual adviser talks."

A cargoholder relies on the instruction of an elder man who has learned proper ritual procedures; this man becomes the cargoholder's "father-mother" (ritual adviser) for his year in office. *Lekil lo'il* is in this instance typified by the wise counsel of such a man.

- c. "current stories" *k'op lo'il*  
 ?Oy k'op ?oy lo'il mi ta sjunlej parajel, ?oy yech slo'iltael ?antz bu ?ep sa? yajmul.  
 "There are words, there is talk—perhaps throughout a whole hamlet; sometimes there may be such stories told on a woman who has many lovers."

Also:

Mi ?ep tzobol krixchano, xu? xal li yan krixchano mi slak'-na k'usi, tol alabal-k'op alabal-lo'il, mi ?o much'u slo'iltaik mi tzeb mi ?antz mi vinik, ?oy sk'oplal chkaltike.  
 "If a lot of people gather together some may say—their neighbors, perhaps—'You have too much talk, too much discussion.' That is if they are telling stories on someone, whether it be a girl or a woman or a man—someone who has a reputation as we say."

*K'op lo'il* seems to refer to circulating gossip: stories which spread around a hamlet.

Grouped along with categories (a) – (c) was one variety of ?*antivo k'op*.

- d. "ancient words" ?*antivo k'op* (2)  
 ?Oy to much'u sna?be smelol k'utik x'elan sbiinoj li totil-me'il ta jteklum, meltzajem ?eklexya, batem krixchano ta Nibak—ja? ?antivo k'op chalbeik.  
 "There are still people who know the stories about how the ancestral gods in Zinacantan Center got their names, about how the church was created, about how people first went to Ixtapa—that is what people call 'ancient words'."

Such ?*antivo k'op* are clearly mythical accounts of past events (cf. Wasserstrom 1970).

Two joking genres were also grouped on the side of "good" verbal behavior.

- e. "banter" ?*ixtol k'op*  
 Much'u tztzak ta yech no'ox lo'il, ?ak'o mi lek tuk' chlo'ilaj cha?vo? krixchano, li june muk' xa lek stak'—?ixtol k'op xa xtak'av.  
 "[This is what is done by] someone who engages another in purposeless conversation; suppose two men are talking

together properly, but one of them no longer answers appropriately—he has started to tease the other."

This genre of speech is similar to what Gossen (1974) describes in Chamula as *batz'i ?ixtol lo'il* or "Real Frivolous Talk." In the midst of an apparently innocuous conversation one party begins to twist, pun on, or otherwise intentionally misunderstand the other's words so as to mock or tease him.<sup>9</sup>

- f. "joking talk" *loko lo'il*  
 Naka loko lo'il, ko'ol yech stak'be sbaik.  
 "Just crazy talk: both people answer each other the same way."

From this brief description we suppose that *loko lo'il* is like ?*ixtol k'op* except that both parties to the exchange are consciously funny and/or insulting as they talk. Bricker (1973b, p. 189) suggests that the following expressions are, in fact, all used interchangeably: *loko lo'il*, ?*ixtol lo'il*, ?*ixtol k'op*. These she finds to mean "teasing or frivolous talk," following Laughlin (1975, p. 63).

By contrast to these categories, my informant grouped the following genres under the heading of "bad words."

- g. "heated words" *k'ak'al k'op*  
 Bu kapem chk'opoh tajmek.  
 "When someone speaks with great anger."  
 The way a man talks when enraged is characterized by low pitch, lengthened vowels in expletives, and shortened vowels in ordinary words.
- h. "bad words" *chopol k'op* (1)  
 Ja? k'u cha'al mi ?oy ?utbail ?oy chukbail ?oy jmilvanej—ja? yech chalik li krixchanoetik, mi ?o ava?i mi yech ti ?oy chopol k'op ta ?ankostura.  
 "This is when there is a fight when people are jailing each other, or when there is a murder. Then people will ask, for example, 'Have you heard, is it true that there is bad talk in Angostura?'"

I believe that *k'op* in this sense is best not translated as "word" at all, but better as "dispute." Thus *chopol k'op* (1) refers to *trouble*.

Categories (g) and (h) were grouped together and then more loosely grouped with the last two genres.

- i. "bad words" *chopol k'op* (2)  
 Naka ta pentejo, yu?nox chal pentejo li much'u ch'ilin, ja? k'u cha'al pentejo, kavron.  
 "These are words like *pentejo*, since someone who gets angry says things like 'asshole' or 'bastard'."

This is a category relating to swearing or to vulgar or obscene language. The words in question are loans from Spanish: from *pendejo* ("stupid", lit. "pubic hair") and *cabrón* ("cuckold, bastard").<sup>10</sup>

- j. "ancient words"      ?antivo *k'op* (1)  
     K'u cha'al xk'opojik to'ox vo'ne moletik ya'el.  
     "The way people long ago talked."

This category refers to phrases which were once in use to describe or refer to norms or customs. My informant grouped them under "bad talk" because the examples which came to his mind had to do with punishment and cruelty.<sup>11</sup>

I have offered this taxonomy not because I believe it depicts the essence of Zinacanteco conceptualization of verbal behavior (indeed, I know this is not the case). Instead, I mean to suggest that a hierarchial structure of nominal forms will be of little use in characterizing such conceptualization. For one thing, we should probably have more success if we concentrated on speech *verbs* (like *lo'ilta*, *laban*, *lo'ilaj*, *k'opoj*, etc.). How to delimit the distinctions within such a set is a problem with no obvious solution. If we are determined to find a taxonomically structured domain, our informants will doubtless oblige by offering convincing labels for the various tree nodes we offer them. But, as I remarked in chapter 3, we are unlikely to be able to use the resulting labels for eliciting. Moreover, there are good grounds for doubting that labels which appear in the various taxonomies we have sketched govern *domains* at all; that is, that they refer to conceptual classes of behavior.

When we suggest an illustrative situation, an informant—being fluent in his language—is able to produce a phrase to describe it. Such a phrase may not be equally fortunate when applied to another example. For instance, when I asked my informant to reconcile the taxonomy of figure 12 with the kind of talk that went on during Who's Who sessions—in which a group of Zinacantecos discussed particular absent Zinacantecos' reputations in front of a tape recorder—he was unable to pick any labels as appropriate descriptions. Who's Who sessions were *k'opetik no'ox*, *kapal lek kapal chopol ya'el* ("just words, both good and bad mixed, I guess").<sup>12</sup> Yet the sort of talk that occurred at Who's Who sessions was, to all appearances, exactly the sort of conversation most common among Zinacanteco men.

More specifically, though the taxonomy of figure 12 contains the category *k'op lo'il*, which resembles the category labeled "gossip" in English, we should be unsuccessful trying to elicit gossip by asking for examples of *k'op lo'il*; nor should we be inclined to limit our investigation of gossip to examples of speech which could be unambiguously labeled *k'op lo'il*. The terms which appear in this and similar taxonomies do contrast with one another; but the contrasts operate only in certain contexts, for certain purposes. And it is only with reference to such contrasts (within "sense systems") that these terms convey any information at all.<sup>13</sup>

There is certainly a point to trying to delimit carefully the possibilities of contrastive expression made available by a lexical set, or to propose precise definitions of terms for analytical purposes (see Paine 1970 for such distinctions between "gossip," "rumor," and "scandal"). It has been suggested to me<sup>14</sup> that what is distinctive about gossip is that it characteristically conveys derogatory messages about its victims, and that it often tells one a good deal more about the motives and personality of the gossip than about the protagonist. It may often be true that gossip promulgates information about people that they would rather not have spread about (and note the imagery of such words as "spread," "circulate," "leak out," and so forth, that describe gossip); but it is important in this connection that there are cultural and situational constraints on what sorts of information are potentially damaging. Thus, clearly, what is damaging in one context ("Petul is very rich, so why doesn't he do a cargo?") may be innocent or praiseworthy in another ("Petul is rich, so why is his younger brother such a lazy lout?"). Thus, if gossip is venom, we still need to discover and describe why one man's poison is another man's meat.

Table 1 shows the most highly developed Who's Who category list. The first categories have to do with a man's performance in the religious and civil hierarchies and their peripheral posts. About each man we asked

Mi ?ech'em ta ?abtel?

"Has he passed through any work?"

"Work" in this context is always understood to mean "religious cargo," and the question would prompt informants to recount the man's whole cargo history. The first category in table 1,

1. j-pas-?abtel  
"cargoholder"

elicited the names of men in a hamlet currently serving in a religious office or known to be expecting such a post at a definite future date. Most hamlets have at least one

2. pasaro  
"pasado" (man who has passed through all four levels of the cargo system)

who is a respected older man. Occasionally a man who has decided to retire from the system after only three (and sometimes two) cargos may be called a *pasaro*.

If the cargo system is a mechanism for securing (buying) prestige, then a man will be interested in comparing his own success in the system with that of others. One might hear the following exchange in a discussion of someone's cargo career:

"Wasn't his second cargo *San Pedro Martir*?"

"Yes, I remember hearing that it was just a *small cargo* [*bik'it no?ox yabtel iyak'be*]."

The speaker betrays his feeling that the cargo was just a little one: inexpensive and inferior. Zinacantecos may keep track of—and gossip about—other men's cargo records, since such records are explicit models against which they can test their own success.

Some older men are also known to be

3. totil-me?il  
"father-mother" (ritual adviser to cargoholder, or for other ceremonies)

These men are well-versed in the details of correct ritual performance and thus guide their charges through ceremonies.

A fairly young Zinacanteco who had passed through two cargos before he was thirty-five told me why he had refused a request to be ritual adviser to one of his relatives.

"I guess I know the proper way to perform a cargo. I am not afraid of performing badly. But I do not want to be criticized and scolded by the elders. Even if the cargo holders were older than I, since my head would be red [wrapped in a red kerchief as a sign of office] I could not bow to them. I would be ashamed to bow as a ritual adviser. No, I am too young yet."

Two categories relate to performance beyond the ordinary bounds of the religious hierarchy:

4. ch'ul mol  
"holy elder"
5. j-k'echnomal  
"saint-bearer" (or "pallbearer")

The Six Holy Elders are *pasaroetik* who serve for life, and whose most significant ritual function is nailing the Christ image to the cross on Good Friday (Vogt 1969, p. 259). The bearers carry Christ nailed to the cross during Lenten processions; they are senior cargoholders.

Two further important classes of people are at the periphery of the religious cargo system.

6. pixkal  
"sacristan"
7. Chk'ot ta ch'omil.  
"He goes as someone borrowed." [i.e., he serves as a helper]

Nowadays, it is usually young men literate in Spanish who serve as *sacristanes*; they care for the church, opening and closing the doors, ringing the bells, and so forth. During their terms they acquire ritual expertise; cargoholders cultivate them as useful allies and advisers. At the same time, rumor has it that *sacristanes* tend to steal from offerings to the saints and to seduce cargoholders' wives.

Men also become well known for serving frequently as helpers to cargoholders. Helpers are responsible for assembling and carrying ritual parapher-

nalía, or for managing a cargoholder's supply of liquor. In this capacity they learn proper ritual form.

One elicits names of men who have served in the civil hierarchy by asking about

8.           ?abtel ta kavitlo  
              "work at the town hall,"

though, alternately, people often ask whether a man has ?ech'em ta melt-zanej-k'op ("had experience at settling disputes"). Zinacantecos can name past *presidentes* or *agentes* (hamlet-level magistrates; see categories 9 and 10) more often than they can remember lesser civil officials, who are sometimes just called *kavitlo* ("town hall people").

Finally, in response to the most general question,

- Mi ?o k'usi tunem ?oe?  
              "Has he served as anything at all?"

members of the panel gave a wide range of hamlet-level officials, temporary fiesta offices, officials associated with short-term projects (electrification, potable water), and so on. Table 1 retains only the most frequent such categories (11–15). Most of these positions are minor, though being on the *ejido* or education committees may represent a first step toward political power.

Several categories refer to auxiliary personnel in the cargo system. There are positions which must be filled by old women.

16.           j-chik' -pom  
              "incense burner" (who is responsible for keeping the *incensario* lit during ceremonies).
17.           j-jap-kantela  
              " Candle-bearer" (for elders during Lent)

Only a few women are qualified to serve in such positions, and these are the first *women* to be named in a Who's Who session. Other ritual specialists include the musicians;

18.           j-vabajom  
              "stringed instrument player"
19.           j-?amarero, j-tampolero  
              "flutist," "drummer"

Musicians not only provide the musical entertainment for *kajvaltík* ("Our Lord") during ceremonies, but also are known for their joking ability (see Haviland 1967). In Who's Who discussions, informants distinguished between those musicians who were good enough to play for cargoholders in Zinacantan Center and those who played only in their own hamlets. Furthermore, people would often identify a man as a musician and immediately comment upon his haughtiness, general tractability, and willingness to serve as a musician when asked.

A well-known musician, Chep, had agreed to serve as musician for a cargoholder; but for three successive weeks he failed to show up for the ceremony.

" . . . so you see how haughty he is. Who knows what the trouble was—maybe he wasn't fed or given liquor to drink, I don't know."

"Ahhh, no, it was simply uncooperativeness. Couldn't he have spoken up if there was something wrong? Even if he couldn't simply say that the cargoholders gave insufficient gifts, he could have told them he was busy, that they must look for someone else."

"Yes, so he should; the cargoholders could have made other plans then."

"That's the way it should have been."

"But the way he did it was deceitful; he lied when he agreed to perform."

"But he hasn't been abandoned as a musician. He was old Jvakin's violinist just last year. So I guess he's still good for something."

"It's just that he is very unreliable, but I guess that can be endured."

The rosters of available ritual specialists like these (as well as the names of qualified cannon-tampers who set off thundering blasts which accompany a cargoholder's retinue) must be public knowledge; a man's skills must accrue to his reputation if he is to be recruited.

People are known in Zinacantan for special skills outside the religious or civil hierarchies. There are the medical practitioners (categories 21–23)—both men and women (though men are ordinarily not midwives). The public always strives to discover which practicing curers are the most powerful, the most successful, those with the most recent debut. Gossips speculate about the likelihood of people's claims to curing power or the circumstances under which such power was (allegedly) acquired.

A Zinacanteco named Palas was subject to attacks of epilepsy (*tup' 'ik'*). Curers reported that this was a symptom of his curing abilities, and that he himself should become a curer.

"Palas was elated, because he would become a curer and would be able to enjoy meals of chicken (eaten at curing ceremonies); also he would recover from his sickness. . . . So he carried his staff and prayed the way curers do; but it sounded as if he had learned the prayers—he didn't just know them himself, because he wasn't a real curer. He had only been told that he was; and he didn't know this was just trickery and deceit because he had a simple soul. . . . His epilepsy got worse. When he finally recovered, people began to think that they would ask him to serve as their curer. For they knew that a *new* curer has more success in relieving sickness. But when Palas heard that he was going to be asked to cure he just fled; he didn't let anyone even catch a glimpse of him."

Another set of categories relates to verbal skills and talents as a mediator in disputes.

24.           Sna? smeltzan k'op.  
              "He knows how to settle disputes."

25. Sna<sup>?</sup> rason.  
"He knows the proper way to do things; he is wise."

Community elders are often called upon to settle disputes. Jane Collier characterizes such elders as:

older men, known for their wisdom in settling conflicts, who can be approached by a person involved in a dispute. Such elders are usually leaders of their own descent groups, but affinal, *compadrazgo*, and political ties allow them to extend their range of influence. . . . In a few hamlets there is one paramount elder who handles most of the hamlet disputes. Such men are powerful political leaders, have extensive *compadrazgo* ties, and are known as men who look after their hamlets. [1973, p. 26]

There was usually little doubt in an informant's mind which few men were the best mediators in each hamlet; to attribute "reasonableness" or ability at settling disputes to an elder is to speak as much about his actual political power as about his bargaining skills.

About some Zinacantecos it may be said that

26. Xtojob ta k'opojel.  
"He is successful at talking."

This may mean that

27. Sna<sup>?</sup> k'op ryox.  
"He knows how to talk to saints [i.e., to pray],"

or, more likely, that he is a good "mouthpiece": that he is a useful ally in any dispute because he is a convincing talker. In particular, there are the "Zinacanteco lawyers" who negotiate with ladino lawyers and legal officials (Freeman 1974). Thus, knowing Spanish is a related ability.

28. Sna<sup>?</sup> kastiya.  
"He knows Spanish [i.e., can speak it fluently]."

29. Sna<sup>?</sup> vun.  
"He is literate [in Spanish]."

Though many men of all ages can speak and understand some Spanish, literacy is almost totally confined to men under the age of thirty; the percentage is low in any case. Knowing how to read and write is not a highly valued skill in Zinacantan, but there are enough occasions when Zinacantecos need documents read or written that it is important to know who can do it (Haviland 1974a).

Only older men with certain ritual skills are asked to be godparents at weddings (table 1, category 30). The godfather must instruct a newly married couple in marital obligations, and he becomes responsible for the success of the marriage after the wedding. It is his "duty to mediate between the couple in serious disputes" (Jane Collier 1973, p. 188; and cf. Jane Collier 1968). The choice of wedding godfather is important for the couple and for the families of both bride and groom; only a few men have the reputation of being often wanted for the role.

Particular Zinacantecos are known for their special abilities—knowledge of adobe-making and house-building, ability to make traditional hats, Zinacanteco violins, and so on (see table 1, categories 31 and 32)—and when these abilities are important to others, they are frequently mentioned in conversation. Hence, one asks which of one's neighbors are competent masons when one intends to build a new house.

Though Zinacantecos rarely identify others by explicit reference to wealth (or poverty), they are certainly aware of which men are

33. j-k'ulej  
"rich"

and which are just *j-k'ulejtik* ("moderately rich") or *ta lekлектik no<sup>?</sup>ox* ("just so-so"). Conversations often revolve around the economic fortunes and misfortunes of others.

Old Manvel was reputed to be one of the richest men in Zinacantan, having inherited wealth from his father, who in turn stole money from the Earth Lord. But now he has lost his considerable fortune from unwise lending.

- "Kere, the money he used to have—lots, they say!"  
"He's just spread it all around, I understand."  
"But it is never repaid, that's why the old man himself must now go into debt."  
"Putá, but that is bad."  
"That old man just seems to have lost everything."  
"Why do you suppose that is?"  
"I guess it is because he just distributed his money."  
"It was just like giving it away."  
"He treated it as if he had as much as he wanted—just as if he could pick it [as one picks peaches], just as if he could manufacture it. So he just gave it away to other people."

Zinacantecos frequently have occasion to borrow money, whether for cargo expenses or more immediate needs. Men can ordinarily approach their kinsmen or *compadres* for such loans; when they need larger amounts they may ask wealthy Zinacantecos, some of whom charge interest.

38. [Lek] xak' ta ch'om stak'in.  
"He [willingly] lends his money."

39. Xak' ta jolinom stak'in.  
"He lends money at interest."

Zinacantecos gossip about how willingly men lend the money they have. There is a certain presumption that wealthy people *will* lend, especially for cargo costs or the expenses of a curing ceremony. Knowledge of which men demand high interest and which are good-hearted about lending is a crucial part of the common store of information.

Other economically motivated categorizations have to do with notable things people own (categories 34–37), especially when they represent non-



traditional uses of wealth: trucks, kerosine-powered corn mills, stores, and so forth. Similarly, since most Zinacantecos still support themselves by growing corn, mostly on share-cropped land, it is significant to make one's living in any other way.

40. j-chon-<sup>?</sup>atz'am  
"salt-seller"
41. j-<sup>?</sup>ekel -<sup>?</sup>ixim, -turasnu, -nichim  
"reseller of corn, peaches, flowers"
42. Sna<sup>?</sup> slakan pox.  
"knows how to distill liquor"

A few families have traditionally supported themselves by selling salt from Ixtapa throughout the highlands (in many faraway *municipios* any man in Zinacanteco clothes is taken for a salt vendor). Recently some young men have begun to derive nearly all their income from trade in fruit and flowers between the highlands and the lowland and coastal regions, a return to a pattern common before the Mexican Revolution. Finally, it is still possible (though rare in Zinacantan) to earn extra money by dealing in bootleg liquor.

The last categories on the Who's Who lists distinguish people with undesirable character traits or abnormalities.

43. <sup>?</sup>Oy sryox.  
"He has a [talking] saint."

Saint images and certain other objects in Zinacantan and throughout the highlands are often reputed to have the power of speech, as well as, for example, the ability to diagnose and cure disease or to help barren women become pregnant. Nativistic movements in the highlands have been inspired by such oracles (see Gossen 1970, pp 61 ff.; Reed 1964; Gossen 1974, pp 280-81, and Vogt 1969, pp. 21 ff.).

Zinacantecos consult these talking saints, called *j-k'opojel ryox* ("talking saint") or more commonly *kuxul ryox* ("living saint"), about diseases, difficult pregnancies, and so forth. Some saint owners call themselves curers but acknowledge that their powers are due to their saints. There is always a fee for a saint's services, and a patient is expected to sponsor small ritual meals and to give candle offerings to the saint. In Who's Who gossip sessions talking-saint owners are objects of considerable scorn; none of my informants seemed to be a believer, though I know that at least one has consulted a talking saint recently.

Witches are unambiguously thought to be evil.

44. j-<sup>?</sup>ak'-chamel  
"witch" (lit., "giver of sickness")

Jane Collier (1973, pp. 113-25) distinguishes six or seven witchcraft techniques, two of which appear in table 1.

45. sna<sup>?</sup> xchonvan ta balamil  
"knows how to sell people to the Earth Lord"

46. sna<sup>?</sup> xk'opoj ta balamil  
"knows how to pray to the Earth Lord" (e.g., to ask that sickness be sent to other Zinacantecos)

Notorious witches are feared throughout Zinacantan; they are given a wide berth and are not to be crossed.

47. jmilvanej  
"murderer"
48. jmak-be  
"highwayman, assassin"

If a man commits murder in Zinacantan, or seems implicated in a murder, his impulse is to flee. If he is caught, he will be sent to San Cristóbal to be dealt with by ladino authorities. Instead, many a murderer would rather endure several years of self-imposed exile, after which he may "return quietly to beg pardon of the close relatives of his victim, of the elders of his hamlet, and of the new *Presidente*. If he is successful in approaching all these men, he can return to live peacefully in Zinacantan, enjoying a reputation as a man not to be angered" (Jane Collier 1970, p. 133). That so many men living in Zinacantan are known murderers testifies to the fact that one can not only get away with murder in Zinacantan but in some senses profit by it.

"Highwaymen" ambush people on the trail at night, usually to rob and murder them. Since any sort of roaming about after dark is suspicious, people who seem to be unaccountably absent from home at night expose themselves to gossip as assassins or witches. In fact, the concept of "highwayman" seems to be a relic of past times when Indians made long journeys on foot to other *municipios* and hamlets. Old men alive today claim to have met *jmak-be* in their youths.

"As far as the highwayman is concerned, old Antun was walking along, and he looked over by the side of the road where he saw a man dressed in long pants."

"In the daytime?"

"That's what he says. He said to himself, 'What is that person up to? Perhaps he is getting a drink of water.' So he started to pass by.

"Suddenly the man stood up. 'Let's go!' he said. He had an old horse with him. *Putá*, that's when old Antun saw the others coming out. About five or six of them gathered together.

"Where are you going?" they asked."

"I'm going home," he said."

"Do you have any tortillas?" they said."

"None," he said."

"You bastard!" they said. 'If you have no tortillas, then let's play awhile.'"

"I don't care," said old Antun, 'But I don't know what kind of a game you have in mind.' They started to play [i.e., to fight]. 'I took a bad machete blow,' old Antun told me later. 'But when I hit him with my machete, he couldn't dodge the blow, and his head landed far away. He fell to the ground.'"

"Then up came another of them, and three or four all tried to get into the act together. Old Antun said, 'Listen, we are not women. We should only play one at a time. If I get killed, then you can carry me away. If one of you dies then another can try, too.'"

"Well, then they began fighting each other one at a time. Up came one—zap!—down to the ground with the highwayman. Another—zap!—down to the ground. He claims to have killed five or six right there on the path. Then he dragged one over and threw him into the creek."

"'Kabron, why should I carry them?' he said to himself. 'What good is the horse anyway?' So he tied the other dead men to the horse and dragged them off into the woods."

"Ah, you see, that old man drags people around by horse. (Ha ha ha)."

The label "thief" (category 49) is applied to people who have been caught by ladino authorities stealing some large item (e.g., a horse) and thrown in jail, and to the poverty-stricken, pitiful old women and lazy youths who steal chickens and household goods. One man had the nickname *takwatz* ("possum") because of his reputation for chicken-stealing. Stealing in Zinacantan is something one is ashamed of and can be openly mocked about.

Zinacantecos are aware that certain people readily involve themselves in court disputes. In large factional disputes in the hamlet of Nabenchauk there have indeed been certain troublemakers who have *-tik' -ba* ("stuck themselves into") nearly every controversial issue (see Rush 1971). Such people seem, literally, to be looking for a pretext over which a dispute can be brought to court.

50. j-sa<sup>2</sup>-k'op  
"troublemaker" (lit., one who looks for a quarrel)

Zinacanteco theory on the subject of troublemaking holds that such aggressive people are as likely to be jailed themselves as they are to win their disputes.

Moreover, to have the reputation as

51. j-chuk-van-ej  
"one who jails people"

or

- 51a. pukuj yo<sup>2</sup>on  
"evil-hearted"

is to be known for mercilessness. Such people take every opportunity to throw someone—whether it be debtor, political enemy, or hapless potential son-in-law—in jail.

Similarly, some people

52. <sup>2</sup>ep sta chukel, lek xa<sup>2</sup>i pus  
"are often jailed" or "enjoy the sweatbath."

Being jailed is always *sa<sup>2</sup>bil* ("sought after"); hence, to say that one enjoys the "sweatbath," that he longs for the cooler, reflects the orthodox Zinacanteco view that a reasonable man restrains himself from behavior which is likely to end in jailing.

All ritual and, in fact, nearly all social intercourse in Zinacantan is accompanied by drinking. Every request is accompanied by a gift of liquor; every agreement is sealed with a bottle.

53. jyakubel  
"drunk"

There are alcoholics who drink more than ordinary social life requires. Zinacantecos recognize that excessive drinking impairs one's ability to work, as well as one's moral sense. They therefore consider perpetual drunks both laughable and self-destructive. A man's drinking habits and capacity are subject to public scrutiny, and people may label a man a "drunk" if he is especially noticeable when intoxicated, even if it happens rarely.

The inverse of category (38) is

54. Mu sut yu<sup>2</sup>un yil.  
"He can't repay his debts."

Some people are notoriously bad risks for a loan. It is difficult to refuse a persistent borrower outright without being patently rude; thus one tries to avoid relationships which would ordinarily let such people ask for loans. Everyone clucks publicly over the man who doesn't repay loans and shuns his creditors; as a rich gringo I was considered an easy touch for a loan, and the largest amount of unsolicited gossip and advice came from Zinacantecos who wanted me to know which men *not* to lend to. Conscious of the financial condition of their neighbors, Zinacantecos know when men are *tzinil ta<sup>2</sup> ?il* ("stuck tight in debts"). Having unpaid debts is considered as much a matter of poverty as of bad will.

55. me<sup>2</sup>on  
"poor"
56. ch'aj, mu sna<sup>2</sup> x<sup>2</sup>abtej  
"lazy" or "won't work"

Some men are said not to be able to feed themselves or their families; such men are unlucky or unskillful farmers. Even when they work they get no return. Other men are unabashedly lazy.

"Her son is terribly lazy."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, once I went to him with a bottle of liquor. 'Please, will you work for me in Hot Country,' I said. But he didn't go. 'Please, work for me near *Atz'am*,' I told him.

"'All right,' he replied. 'I'll be there.' But until this very day he hasn't showed up. That was a year ago. He just drank my liquor for nothing."

"Has he a wife?"

"No, no. He is too lazy. He doesn't want work. He is still young, but even if the work is nearby, even if it is only for one day, he doesn't want to do paid labor. He just stays there, hanging around his house, or sitting on his haunches sunning himself."

The last few undesirable characteristics involve madness and feeble-mindedness.

57.           chuvaj  
              "madman"  
58.           jvoviel  
              "madman"  
59.           xchujil  
              "dim-witted person" (lit., runt)

There are Zinacanteco madmen who wander around with tattered clothes and wild, unruly hair, muttering to themselves. They are harmless, though bizarre, and they probably come under the category of *chuvaj*. There are also people who begin to rave, strip themselves naked, and run about wildly like rabid dogs; mad dogs and madmen are called *jvoviel*. Finally, there are individuals whom informants seem unwilling to call crazy who are nevertheless clearly considered subnormal, dim-witted. They are likened to the runt of a litter, or a stunted peach, *xchujil*. Such people grow old without marrying and are unable to work or feed themselves. Several other minor forms of mental incapacity appear.

60.           sonso  
              "stupid"  
61.           sovra  
              "leftover, worthless person"  
62.           ?uma?  
              "dumb person, speechless person"

A man may be reputed to be *sonso* if he is simply good, that is, not distinguished by particular wrongdoings. Or he may be identified as either stupid or worthless if he has never done *anything* to distinguish himself, if he has little contact with his neighbors.

"But he's not very well known."

"No, he hasn't served any office."

"He is just a hidden person; we never see him leave his house."

"Nope. One has nothing to ask him and nothing to tell him."

"We never see his face."

"When the whole hamlet gathers together, or when public decisions are to be made, he still doesn't come out. He stays hidden in the house just like a girl."

"Then he is just a little leftover, as we say. . . ."

"What do you mean? He's a good man; he works. It is on purpose that he hides himself, that he doesn't let other people see him."

"But in any case he doesn't want to be good for anything."

"You must admit he acts like a worthless person; he isn't a fully good man."

Finally, a person who can't talk is often considered to be mentally deficient; a speech impediment is also a serious social impediment in a culture which places such emphasis on verbal interaction.

In what follows I give a brief description of the sort of thematic material that is categorized under each of the subject headings by which the corpus of gossip stories was indexed. I also show the frequencies associated with each category.

Category	Frequency	Explanation
10.	23 anger	Stories including mention of great anger or fury, people who get angry when drunk or act angry when they talk. Key roots: <i>-kap</i> , <i>-?ilin</i> .
	3 envy	Stories that use the root <i>-?it'ix</i> , ("envy") with respect to either things or people.
	1 jealousy	
11.	2 omens	Stories involving predictions: e.g., a man correctly predicted his own death when he could not get his cigarette to light.
	31 belief	A category including all references to <i>kreyensya</i> (Sp. <i>creencia</i> , "belief") of the old people, or having to do with the residual category of "bizarre" notions. I have included, among other things, stories about the hot or cold properties of foods, about buried treasure, about the healing properties of certain

		herbs, about loss of potency through sexual mismatch ( <i>-lok' -chon</i> , "lose one's animal"), and so on.
12.	11 borrow 14 lend  22 debt/repayment	Stories which contain reference to the institutionalized lending of money. Stories which emphasize something about a person's reputation for repaying loans: bad risks, honest hardworking men who always repay, etc.
13.	57 cabildo 10 settling disputes  5 settler of disputes	Stories which include scenes of conflict settlement, either at the town hall or elsewhere. Stories about people's capacities for settling disputes, especially if they are bad at it.
14.	38 cargo performance   11 cargo expenses  5 cargo request  11 cargo lost 4 no cargo career  28 cargo helpers	Stories dealing with such things as incomplete or improper cargo performance, one's cargo career and its peculiarities, the requirements for success, the difference between passing religious and civil offices, complete cargo service, etc. Stories dealing with the costs of religious office and the equipment necessary. (One story, for example, mocks a man for not having built himself a suitable house for his cargo.) Stories dealing with the circumstances by which individuals gain or enter cargos. Stories about people who fail and flee their cargos, or fail to enter them for some reason; or about men who grow old without ever taking religious office. Stories about the duties and performance of various

- auxiliary personnel: scribes, *sacristanes*, musicians, ritual advisers, etc.
15. 8 childless  
2 barren  
4 sterile  
10 impotent/inadequate
16. 19 civil office
17. 11 clothes  
1 appearance
18. 15 courtship-OK  
8 bad performance  
10 suitor rejected  
7 abandoned  
11 third person interferes  
11 elopement  
3 girl flees  
13 bride-price
19. 40 curing power  
15 curing practices  
3 bonesetting, midwifery
20. 24 deceit
- Stories about couples without children, as well as men or women who are unable to have children.
- Stories about impotent men, or women who fail to have sexual satisfaction.
- Stories typically about a man's performance in the civil hierarchy.
- Stories which mention a person's tattered, dirty, old, or otherwise peculiar dress or looks.
- Stories which remark on successful courtships.
- Stories in which courtship fails for one of the reasons indicated.
- Stories focusing on the financial aspects of courtship.
- Stories about curers and their particular propensities and abilities. (For example, several stories contrast the abilities of a curer whose talents are God-given with those who learn to cure from talking saints.)
- Stories which detail curing ritual.
- Self-explanatory.
- Stories involving actions describable with the roots *-lo<sup>2</sup>lo* ("trick") or *cho<sup>2</sup>* ("betray, fool"), and involving some sort of broken agreement or chicanery.

21. 7 disrespect  
8 disobedience
22. 132 drunken behavior
23. 29 factions
- 11 enemies
24. 39 fighting  
33 beating
25. 50 fleeing
26. 12 good man  
8 good in appearance only
27. 24 gossip
28. 6 haughtiness  
4 bragging
29. 20 identity change
- Stories about people who do not properly *p'is ta vinik* ("measure as a man") their elders; or who do not *-ch'un mantal* ("obey orders").
- Stories which detail the factional alignments of individuals on particular divisive questions.
- Stories about particularly unfriendly relations, especially long-term enmities.
- Stories in which instances of violence represented by the verb *-maj* ("hit") occur.
- Stories about the causes and incidence of fleeing Zinacantan, or a particular *paraje*: e.g., running away from cargo; running away to avoid punishment for crimes or witchcraft; running away to avoid marriage; etc.
- Stories which focus on virtuous, sin-free men.
- Stories which deal with the irony of evidently respected, virtuous men who have secret past crimes or misadventures.
- Stories about the origins and effects of gossiping.
- Stories about people who act uppity, who *-toy -ba* ("raise themselves") and are uncooperative.
- Gossip instances in which a speaker uses the gossip sessions as occasions for self-aggrandizement.
- Stories about Indians who become ladinos, Chamulas who became Zinacantecos, etc.

30. 30 illegitimate child  
9 paternity problems
31. 83 illicit sexual relations  
21 incest  
6 caught in the act
- 6 age mismatch
32. 89 jail  
12 punishment
33. 3 joking ability  
18 lewd joking
34. 9 ladino ways, things
- 15 ladino connections  
12 ladino government
35. 33 ladino law
36. 32 laziness
37. 14 luck
- Stories about women who bear children out of wedlock, and about men accused of fathering them.
- Various kinds of sexual offenses: premarital, extra-marital intercourse; affairs with godchildren or *comadres*; lovemaking with one's mother-in-law; being discovered in a compromising position; etc.
- Sexual relation between people of different ages (usually leading to sickness and loss of potency).
- Stories in which someone is jailed or subjected to some other sort of punishment: fines, forced labor, being made into low-ranking *mayol* for a year, etc.
- Stories about the joking ability of protagonists; or gossip which is characterized by long exchanges of lewd jokes between participants.
- Stories which discuss articles and institutions from the ladino world, or from gringoland, e.g., medicine.
- Stories in which Indians become involved with ladinos, especially with organs of the government: soldiers, Instituto Nacional Indigenista projects, etc.
- Stories involving appeals to non-Indian legal institutions.
- Stories which characterize people as *ch'aj* ("lazy") or feature characters who *mu sna? x?abtej* ("won't work").
- Stories involving the notion of "luck" (roots like *-ora* or *-yaxal*), especially with respect to bad luck or loss of

38. 20 madness
39. 4 *manya*
40. 18 marriage  
2 civil marriage
- 5 sexual incompatibility  
5 age incompatibility
- 20 wife-beating  
4 husband-scolding
41. 39 mocking
42. 54 murder/killing
43. 14 musician
44. 46 nickname  
11 reputation
- luck (i.e., loss of the ability to make money, to grow things).
- Stories in which people are mad, feeble-minded, or epileptic. (Tzotzil: *chuvaj*, *-chujil*, *vov*).
- ("wickedness, mischievousness"). Attributions of the concept *manya*.
- Stories of weddings, the ramifications of marriage; especially when these stories involve aberrations: forced marriage, marriage to a Chamula, marriage at a young age, etc.
- Stories whose interest derives from the sexual problems arising from an unfortunate marriage.
- Stories of marital difficulties of one kind or the other—these two being the most recurrent themes.
- Stories about mocking (Tzotzil root: *-laban*, *-lo?ilta*), either between protagonists or by participants in gossip sessions; for example, in a Who's Who session the men spent fifteen minutes making jokes about a man who lived off his wife's money.
- Stories involving not only actual murder but also murder conspiracies and attempts; also stories about highwaymen in the older days.
- Stories about musicians and their failings: typically, haughtiness or lack of piety.
- Stories which detail people's nicknames, or which dwell on salient features of their

- reputations (or toss them off in short remarks).
45. 27 old age  
Stories which talk about the failings of old age: old men who have spent useless (i.e., cargoless) lives; who are senile; who look older or younger than they are; who are impotent with age; etc.
46. 14 owner  
Accounts of the various large items certain people own: mills, trucks, cattle, horses, etc.
47. 32 past times  
Accounts of conditions in the past, and notable events: the famine (*vi<sup>p</sup>naltik*), the flood in Nabenchauk, and so on.
48. 6 physical injury  
21 physical abnormality  
Accounts of accidents and disabilities, of lameness, light skin, deafness, dirtiness, heavy beards, horns, etc.
49. 10 serial polygamy  
12 polygyny  
Accounts of people with many spouses, whether all at once or one after the other.
50. 48 promiscuity (female)  
15 womanizing (male)  
Gossip and joking about excessive sexual appetite, whether of men or women, and the reputations for looseness accorded to different individuals.
51. 17 property rights  
Accounts of disputes over land, land frauds, attempts to borrow money from banks using other people's land as collateral, etc.
52. 19 *pukuj*  
6 *pukuj*  
("ill-tempered")  
("demonic, devilish, supernaturally evil")  
Stories either (a) about unpleasant people; or (b) about supernatural goats and other demons that roam about.
53. 47 rape  
Stories of rapes, completed or attempted.

54. 11 *raŋon*  
("reason, correct thinking")  
Stories about the lack of, the acquisition of, the nature of *raŋon*—the ability to think clearly and correctly on a subject.
55. 90 kin disputes—various types  
Stories in which people can't get along with their relatives, near or far.
56. 3 religious behavior  
7 irreligious behavior  
Stories of such things as blasphemy and improper demeanor in churches.
57. 22 residence change  
Stories in which, for one reason or another, a protagonist changes his domicile: whether he goes from one *paraŋe* to another or moves permanently to Hot Country or Tuxtla Gutiérrez.
58. 52 scolding  
7 quarreling  
2 insulting  
Stories involving some sort of verbal abuse and hostility, often represented by the Tzotzil root *-ut* ("scold, say something to someone"), either singly (meaning "scold"), or in reflexive form (meaning "quarrel").
59. 29 selling  
Stories in which protagonists trade in some goods, typically cane liquor, hats, corn, flowers, peaches, firewood, charcoal, salt, or peanuts. Selling salt is an old Zinacanteco tradition in certain families. Selling charcoal or firewood is a mark of poverty.
60. 25 sex-role reversal  
Stories about unusually aggressive women, men who live off their wives, etc.
61. 61 sexual desire, advances  
29 sexual perversion  
Stories which relate to the extraordinary sexual desires of old ladies, corn resellers; and on such perversions as homosexuality, bestiality, looking at genital organs, etc.

212	Appendix Three	
62.	17 shame	Stories with occurrences of the root <i>k'exl-</i> ("shame, embarrassment").
63.	45 sickness, death 14 VD, <i>xok</i>	Stories about long illnesses, strange deaths, itchiness, worms, various kinds of rot and venereal disease.
64.	8 soul, dreams	Stories in which dreams are recounted or containing exploits of peoples' <i>ch'u'el</i> ("souls"), which are believed to roam around during dreams.
65.	13 <i>sovra</i>	("leftover, worthless person") Stories about such people.
66.	8 special skills 5 lawyer skills	Stories which display the special talents of individual Zinacantecos: house-building, butchering, liquor-making, water-divining; and especially the good talking abilities of Zinacanteco "lawyers."
67.	14 Spanish	Tales involving skill at speaking Spanish.
68.	14 spells, potions, medicines	Stories containing recipes for various concoctions with healing powers, or powers to make people ill or amorous.
69.	3 spouseless woman 16 wifeless man	Stories dwelling on the curious people who live alone.
70.	60 stealing 10 embezzling	Stories of theft, whether of private goods or public funds.
71.	10 stupid/smart	Stories which characterize protagonists by such Tzotzil roots as <i>sonso</i> ("stupid") <i>p'ij</i> ("clever"), or <i>bivo</i> ("lively, smart").
72.	22 supernatural	Stories in which supernatural creatures appear: witch/goats, bells in the earth, blackmen, snakes, devil-women, jaguars, etc.

213	Gossip Subject Frequency List	
73.	23 talking saint	Stories usually dealing with the fraudulent nature of most saint images which talk, predict, and cure.
74.	11 treasure	Stories about buried treasure and such supernatural objects as <i>me'tak'in</i> (lit., "mother of money"—a treasure which replenishes itself).
75.	43 troublemaking	Stories about people who get into, search for, and otherwise stir up disputes: <i>sa' k'op</i> ("look for trouble").
76.	39 violence/arrest/weapons	Violence characterized by grabbing people or using weapons other than fists: usually rifles.
77.	92 wealth/poverty	Stories having to do with extremes of either wealth or poverty; also stories that deal with squandering wealth or unnatural sources of wealth; and stories about selling children and land because of extreme poverty.
78.	65 witchcraft 5 belief in witchcraft	Stories about actual cases of witchcraft. Gossip sessions in which participants speculate about witches and their alleged powers.
79.	74 adultery	Stories of those particular illicit sexual relations which are adulterous.
80.	87 divorce 9 reconciliation 15 child support	Stories about those particular marital disputes which end in divorce; also stories about the ramifications of divorce such as child support; the problems of eventual reconciliation.

These categories are not intended as reflections of any native Zinacanteco classificatory scheme. Nor can I claim that the various similarities which cause us to group particular stories together would strike Zinacantecos as similarities at all. Instead, this list of subjects is a quick index of material which occurred in the gossip collected.



In this book I use a practical orthography for Tzotzil based on ordinary Spanish orthography. I hope that such an orthography will eventually find some use in promoting pan-Tzotzil literacy and solidarity. A description of Tzotzil phonemes is to be found in Colby (1963) and Laughlin (1975). I use the following special conventions:

- ʔ for glottal stop  
 j for x (voiceless glottovelar fricative)  
 ch for č (voiceless alveopalatal affricate)  
 x for s (voiceless alveopalatal spirant)  
 tz for tʃ (voiceless alveolar affricate)  
 ' to represent glottalized consonants (except for b), i.e., k',  
 ch' (č'), p', t', and tz' (tʃ')

The letter *b* may be thought of (synchronously) as a glottalized *m*, hence as a voiced bilabial glottalized stop, sometimes implosive.

Glottalized consonants are strongly glottalized in word-initial position; intervocalically they are strongly glottalized, slightly preglottalized, and engender slight lengthening and nasalization of the preceding vowel. Elsewhere (before a consonant and at the end of a word) they are strongly preglottalized and engender lengthening and nasalization of the preceding vowel. Hence, one finds:

<i>k'ok'</i>	<i>ʔabtel</i>
[k'õ:ʔk]	[ʔã:ʔmtel]
<i>bot</i>	<i>tzeb</i>
[b'ot]	[tʃe:ʔm]
<i>lobol</i>	
[lõ:(ʔ)b'ol]	

In the following text, transcribed from a Who's Who gossip session, the participants discuss the loose and dangerous behavior of a certain old woman. During this session most of the men were reduced to tearful laughter and ribald guffaws.

- M: Jlikel ismilbe ʔech'el noxtok ti yajnil P——.  
 "She quickly killed off P——'s wife, too."  
 R: Mi la icham xa ti yajnil P——?  
 "So is P——'s wife dead already?"  
 C: Icham la aʔa.  
 "Yes, I hear she's dead."  
 R: Kere.  
 "Boy!"  
 M: Mi la mu jaʔuk yok'al ti icham L——?  
 "Wasn't that at the same time L—— died?"  
 C: Mi muʔnuk koʔol iʔoch ta ch'en xchiʔuk li L—— cheʔe?  
 "Weren't she and L—— both buried at the same time?"  
 R: Muk' bu xkaʔi, jaʔo batemon ʔox ta ʔOlon ʔOsil taj k'al icham L——.  
 "I didn't hear about it; I was down in Low Country when L—— died."  
 C: Mi la mu teuk xa ikaʔi tal ta ʔOlon ʔOsil ʔuk ʔun?  
 "Well, didn't I too only hear about it coming from Low Country?"  
 J: K'usi tzpas? Mi chak' chamel?  
 "What does she do? Is she a witch?"  
 C: Yuʔun jaʔ taj snaʔ xchonvan ta balamil ʔune.  
 "She knows how to sell souls to the Earth Lord."  
 M: . . . Yuʔun la jaʔ stiʔojbe ʔech'el taj yajnil ta ʔalel ʔune. Yuʔun icham xa taj ʔune.

- “ . . . She is the one who is supposed to have witched away the wife. She has died, after all.  
 Yu<sup>2</sup>un ja<sup>2</sup> tzk'elbe <sup>2</sup>elav.  
 “She enjoyed the wife's demise,  
 Ja<sup>2</sup> ti mu<sup>2</sup>yuk x<sup>2</sup>ik'e chava<sup>2</sup>i stuk <sup>2</sup>une.  
 “For she herself wasn't married, you see.  
 Ja<sup>2</sup> no<sup>2</sup>ox i<sup>2</sup>ak'bat yol <sup>2</sup>une.  
 “She was just made pregnant.”
- C: Yu<sup>2</sup>un ja<sup>2</sup> muk' x<sup>2</sup>ik'e.  
 “It was because she was never taken in marriage.”
- M: Yech no<sup>2</sup>ox i<sup>2</sup>ak'bat yol chava<sup>2</sup>i <sup>2</sup>une.  
 “She was just made pregnant with no recompense, you see.  
 Muk' bu i<sup>2</sup>ik'e <sup>2</sup>une.  
 “She was never married [by her lover].  
 Yech'o ja<sup>2</sup> nan ko<sup>2</sup>ol <sup>2</sup>o iya<sup>2</sup>i <sup>2</sup>un.  
 “That's perhaps why she was so displeased.”
- C: Ja<sup>2</sup> skrem ti mol C—— ta Nabenchauk taj yajmul taj me<sup>2</sup>el <sup>2</sup>une.  
 “It was old C——'s son, from Nabenchauk, who was that old woman's lover.  
 Solel kremkrem tajmek ya<sup>2</sup>el li kreme.  
 “The boy was quite young indeed.”
- R: Krem to<sup>2</sup>ox, pero vo<sup>2</sup>ne xa <sup>2</sup>un.  
 “He used to be young, but that was long ago.”
- C: Pero <sup>2</sup>ali me<sup>2</sup>el <sup>2</sup>une, yu<sup>2</sup>un xa <sup>2</sup>ox me<sup>2</sup>el <sup>2</sup>un.  
 “But the old lady was already fairly old by then.  
 Muk'tik xa <sup>2</sup>onox skremotik ya<sup>2</sup>el <sup>2</sup>un.  
 “Her sons were already grown by then.”
- J: Jiii.  
 “Oh.”
- C: Va<sup>2</sup>i <sup>2</sup>un, taj <sup>2</sup>ali skrem taj mol C—— ja<sup>2</sup> krem to<sup>2</sup>ox  
 “So, that son of old C—— was just a boy then.  
 Isk'upin krem jkaxlan xkaltik taj me<sup>2</sup>el K—— <sup>2</sup>une.  
 “And that old lady K—— desired a young ladino, as we say.  
 P'ayan jun xch'amal <sup>2</sup>un.  
 “And one child was born [as a result].  
 Muk' xa xch'amal.  
 “That child is now grown.  
 Jutuk xa nan mu ko<sup>2</sup>oluk syijil xchi<sup>2</sup>uk li<sup>2</sup> <sup>2</sup>une. . . .  
 “He's probably about the same age as this guy here. . . .”
- M: <sup>2</sup>Oy xa yajnil taj xch'amal K—— a<sup>2</sup>a.  
 “Yes, old lady K——'s son has a wife of his own now.”

- C: Va<sup>2</sup>i <sup>2</sup>un, isa<sup>2</sup> yajnil li<sup>2</sup> ta Jobel <sup>2</sup>une.  
 “Anyway, the lover sought his own wife here in San Cristóbal.”
- J: A bweno.  
 “Ah, good.”
- C: Pero yu<sup>2</sup>un leklek li <sup>2</sup>antz iyik' <sup>2</sup>ech'el ya<sup>2</sup>el <sup>2</sup>une.  
 “But she was a good woman, that he married and took away with him [to Nabenchauk].”  
 Jna<sup>2</sup>tik mi yech ti yu<sup>2</sup>un ja<sup>2</sup> iyak'be chamel mi ixchon ta balamil k'u cha<sup>2</sup>al taj me<sup>2</sup>el K—— <sup>2</sup>une  
 “Who knows if it's true that she witched her or that she sold her soul—old lady K——, that is.  
 Pero xinulan, xinulan taj yajnil <sup>2</sup>une.  
 “But she was a ladina, the man's wife was a ladina.”
- R: Isa<sup>2</sup> yantz taj P—— yu<sup>2</sup>un krem to<sup>2</sup>ox.  
 “So P—— got himself a mistress, in his youth.  
 Pero taj jmeme<sup>2</sup>tik <sup>2</sup>une, me<sup>2</sup>el <sup>2</sup>un.  
 “But the old lady was already old.”
- J: Ja<sup>2</sup> me<sup>2</sup>el xa <sup>2</sup>un.  
 “Ah, so she was old already.”
- R: Ispas sba ta tz'itz'irin taj P—— <sup>2</sup>une ti vo<sup>2</sup>ne <sup>2</sup>une.  
 “Yes, P—— acted like a young cock back then.  
 Lek la yij <sup>2</sup>inyeksyon yu<sup>2</sup>un tajmek li P—— <sup>2</sup>une.  
 “And they say he had a good thick injection-giver.  
 Iyal to la <sup>2</sup>un.  
 “She even said so, later:  
 “Li porkirya le<sup>2</sup>e <sup>2</sup>animal no<sup>2</sup>ox yij sil <sup>2</sup>at <sup>2</sup>i <sup>2</sup>animal nat.  
 “That disgusting thing—his damned penis is terribly thick and terribly long.  
 Pero me<sup>2</sup>elon xa.  
 “But I'm already an old woman.  
<sup>2</sup>Ep xa koltak.  
 “I already have many children.  
 Pero batz'i xita<sup>2</sup>et xa.  
 “I'm completely worn out and exhausted.  
 Ikuch ku<sup>2</sup>un tajmek.  
 “I have endured a good deal.  
 Batz'i lek stzininet iyak' tajmek,” xi la <sup>2</sup>un.  
 “But he just gave it to me nice and snugly,” she said.”
- All: “Ha ha ha ha.”
- C: Ilaj to svok'an baketik xi la.  
 “It just smashed up one's bones, she said.”

- R: Pero ta yut chobtik la ta xak'beik 'ech'el tajmek.  
"But they used to fuck away out in the cornfield.  
Te ta ti'ti? nabtik 'un.  
"Just at the edge of the lake."
- M: Ta yut chobtik la a'a.  
"Yes, in the cornfields. . . .  
"A sk'el tz'i? la taj yil P——.  
That stupid P—— would say he was going out to look for dogs."
- R: Li mol P—— yu'un ba sk'el xchob ta ti? nab.  
"Old P—— supposedly went to watch his cornfield by the lake."
- C: Yu'un chlaj la ta tz'i? yajan.  
"Because, he said, dogs were getting at his *elotes*."
- M: Pero ta me? tz'i? chlaj 'un.  
"But they were *female* dogs doing the eating! (Ha ha ha.)"
- R: Pero k'al ta xak'beik 'une, ja? la yikoh li chobtik 'une.  
"But while they were fucking, they bumped against the corn.  
Ja? yikoh ta xich' 'inyeksyon 'un.  
"They grabbed the plants while getting injections.  
Bweno, komo 'oy jchanvunetik 'une . . . K'alal chlok'ik ta rekreo li jchanvunetik 'une, Ja'o nan k'alal xchanoj vun li jchi'iltik le? 'une . . .  
"Well, since there were schoolchildren nearby . . . when the students got out for recess . . . maybe our companion here was in school then. . . ."
- M: Je juta, yu'un me ja? sk'eloy iyak'beik 'un taje . . .  
"Hell, yes, he watched them fucking. . . ."
- C: ?An mi mu yechuk ti iyak'beik 'uli? sbek' yate che'e . . .  
"Say, isn't it true that they shot him in the balls with a slingshot? . . ."
- R: Jiii?, pero mala to 'un . . .  
"Yes, but wait a minute. . . ."
- All: "Ha ha ha ha ha."
- R: Va'i 'un, li jchanvunetik 'une ta xbatik 'un,  
"So, listen, the school kids went out,  
Ta sa'ik mut,  
"They would hunt birds.  
Ta xlok'ik jlikel ta rekreo 'une.  
"They would go out for a while at recess,  
Ta xbatik ta yut chobtik 'un,  
"They might go into the cornfields,  
Ja? ti bu xva'etik 'une . . .  
"Wherever they happened to wander . . ."

- Jiii, k'alal iyilike,  
"Oooh, when they saw them,  
isk'elik ta jilail chobtik 'un,  
"when they looked down between the rows of corn,  
te yolel ta xak' 'inyeksyon li P—— 'une.  
"there was P—— in the midst of giving injections.  
Slok'oj la li svex 'une.  
"He had taken off his trousers, I hear.  
Xvinaj li sbek' yat ta spat 'une,  
"You could see his balls from behind,  
'iyak'be la 'ech'el 'un.  
"as he fucked away."
- C: "Kabron, pero k'u tza? ti buy xjipjon sbek' yate, xiik la 'un.  
"The bastard, what is he up to there, swinging his balls about,' said the kids."
- All: "Ha ha ha ha ha."
- D: Pero batz'i xmut'lij xa jna? 'un . . .  
"But I'll bet he really jerked [when he felt the stone]. . . ."
- C: ?Ora nan isbotz' lok'el ta 'anil 'un.  
"He probably yanked it out in a hurry."
- N: Muk' xa jal xixtalan li mol 'uk 'un.  
"He didn't keep playing for long."
- C: Jal la te chotol xiik 'un.  
"They say he just sat there for a while."
- R: Pero mu la bu istabe li sbek' yate.  
"But they didn't actually hit him in the balls."  
Ta xchak la ik'ot.  
"Instead they got him on the ass, I hear.  
"Ay!" xi la li P——.  
"Ouch!" said P——.  
'Ali me'ele, 'anil la iva'i.  
"The old lady stood up quickly.  
"K'usi apas?" xi la.  
"What happened to you?" she said.  
"Mujna?" xi la, ya'uk xa la sk'el.  
"I don't know,' he said, and started to look around."
- C: Ibat xa 'ox li j'ak'-'uli? 'une.  
"But the slingshot-shooters had already left."
- R: Li jchanvune, ibat la ta 'anil 'un.  
"The schoolchildren had gone off in a hurry."
- All: "Ha ha ha ha ha."
- R: Li jchanvune, 'i'och xa 'ox ta 'iskwela,  
"The students had already entered school again,

ta xchan xa vun.

"they were back hard at work.

Mu me jna? much'u ti jkobel yak'oj ?uli? ?une . . . .

"I just don't remember which kid shot the slingshot . . . .

Pero ka?yoj to ?ox, pero mu xa jna? much'u ?un.

"I heard once, but I can't think who it was."

N: Kuxul to nan li j?a?yele,  
"But I presume this person is still alive?

mi ichone van ta balamil?

"Or was he perhaps sold to the Earth Lord?"

R: Mi?n ta sna? ?un. . .  
"How could she know who it was?"

N: Mu nan bu ivinaj ?onox.  
"Perhaps it was never discovered."

R: Pero ta tz'akal to ilo?ilajik li jchanvun ?une. . .  
"No, later on the schoolchildren joked about it."

N: "Pentejo tajmek li kitz'ine," xi li mol Pru—— ?uk ?une.  
"My younger brother is very stupid," says old Pru——.

"Muk' ta sk'el ?osil kabron," xi ?un.

"He isn't circumspect, the bastard," he says."

C: Pero muk' xa skrem ta P'ij ?uk li mol Pru—— ?uke."  
"Yes, but old Pru—— himself has a grown illegitimate son  
in P'ij."

N: Mol nan a?a.  
"He does at that.

Pero yu?un muk' xlaj ta ?uli? nan sbek' yat nan cha?i ?uk  
?une.

"But then he's never been shot in the balls with a slingshot,  
or so he figures it.

Yu?un yich'oj kwenta ?un.

"He pays attention to what he's doing,

Yech'o pentejo li kitz'ine, xi li jkobel ?uk ?un.

"and that's why he calls his brother P—— stupid."

M: Pero ?o la xich' ?inyeksyon ta yan ?o ?un.  
"But that old lady has also gotten injections from others."

R: Ja? taj yak'el k'al ta x?ilolaj a?a.  
"Yes, she gets it when she is curing."

C: Ja? ka?yoj a?a.  
"Yes, I've heard about that.

K'al tzut tal ta sna li jchamel ya?ele,

"When she returns home from the patient's house,

bu chbat ta ?ilole,

"where she has gone to perform a curing ceremony,

ta xich' ?inyeksyon ta be.

"she gets injections on the path."

R: Komo ta xyakub ?une.

"Because, you see, she gets drunk.

?Ali much'u ta xtal ?ak'vanuk ?une

"The person who accompanies her home

ta xak' komel ?inyeksyon noxtok ?un.

"leaves a few injections behind when he leaves."

N: Pero muk' bu xlaj ta ?uli? sbek' yat. . .

"But he doesn't get shot in the balls with a slingshot."

C: Komo ?ak'ubaltik chava?i ?une,  
"Since it is nighttime, you see,

?O la ta be no?ox chak' ?inyeksyon,

"sometimes they give injections right on the path.

Mi mo?oje, ?o la ta batz'i yut xa sna.

"If not, sometimes they even do it right inside her house.

Chak'beik mas li poxe,

"They give her more liquor,

yo?o ta xlom ?o ta lum.

"so that she'll pass out and fall to the ground.

?Ora mi ilom ta lum ?une,

"As soon as she has fallen to the ground,

Lek xa chak'ik ?inyekseyon li jkobeletik ?une.

"then the fuckers give her a good injection."

All: "Ha ha ha ha ha."

N: Jkobel . . .

"Damn . . . !"