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authenticity and ambivalence in the text: a colonial Maya case

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Like native elites in other colonial societies, the Maya nobility occupied an acutely ambivalent position in early colonial Mexico. They maintained systems of knowledge and action rooted in preconquest Maya society while at the same time holding office in the postconquest system of local government known as the *cabildo* (Farriss 1984:Ch. 8; Roys 1943). They were among the first converts to Christianity and became church instructors themselves (Collins 1977) while still carrying on indigenous forms of ritual practice outside the church. They were accorded special treatment by the Spanish Crown, allowed to dress as Spaniards, ride horses, bear arms, and be addressed as *don*. They were trained by the friars to be official scribes in the new colonial society. Yet access to these privileges depended on their ability to legitimate themselves before the Spaniards as genuine native nobles. They were the very symbol of an autochthonous system, yet at the forefront of acculturation. This paper explores the consequences of this ambivalence for communication in 16th-century Yucatan. It proceeds by way of discourse analysis of selected native language documents, taken first in relation to the broader social context of their production, and then to the semantic and rhetorical forms embodied in them. One major goal of the paper is to show how an account of ambivalence in discourse can lead to a deeper understanding of the forms of representation in colonial contexts.

Alongside the substantive focus of the paper is an equally important methodological one, bearing on the interpretation of ambivalent documents. The difficulty of locating an authentic native perspective in a fundamentally equivocal context is obvious but has not stopped some scholars from positing a pure Maya voice, separated from the Spanish by an “autistic disjunction” (Edmonson 1982:xx). I argue against this approach to colonial society, by showing that it leads one to overlook or misconstrue ambivalence while searching for a purely indigenous system. This in turn obscures the social value and meaning of the discourse in its contemporary context.

In order to make the point forcefully, it will be argued through a concrete case study. In 1567, 20 years after the conquest of Yucatan, a series of letters was sent to King Phillip II of Spain,

The Spanish conquest of Yucatan created a new discourse in which Maya and Spanish systems of representation were encompassed, interacted, and then produced hybrid cultural forms. The Maya nobility played an important role early on in this process, through their participation in both Spanish and indigenous sectors of colonial society. This paper explores the ambivalence of the nobility by analyzing their letters, addressed to the Spanish Crown, in Maya language. The hybrid character of these texts is demonstrated in the forms of royal address, the representation of the Franciscans and the secular clergy, and the network of intertextual relations linking the letters to a broader contemporary discourse. [Mesoamerica, Maya, discourse analysis, colonial documents, native elites, Catholicism, missionaries]

composed in Maya and bearing the names of some 80 Maya nobles. Seven were sent in February, one in March, and one in April. These are among the first letters to appear in Maya language, and document the emergence of a new discourse form. The linguistic ambivalence of the form, a lesser Spanish genre cast in Maya, parallels the equivocal position of the signatories in colonial society. Noting the Spanish influence in the letters, historians have judged them to be inauthentic—not true expressions of the native perspective, but rather Franciscan concoctions (Gates 1937; Tozzer 1941; Gonzalez Cicero 1978). At stake in this conclusion is not only the status of these particular letters, but more importantly the methodology one uses in analyzing ambivalent documentary sources. Since many, if not most, colonial documents are equivocal in present terms, the issues that arise here are of relevance far beyond the Yucatec case.

The documentary value of these letters—and of the Nahuatl sources laid out in Anderson, Berdan, and Lockhard (1976)—is twofold. On the one hand, they refer to and describe many aspects of the contemporary scene. Their value in these terms is a function of how well they correspond to the world they portray. In order to judge this, the document and the object of description must be distinguished and compared. Is the text true or false? On the other hand, the letters are also *part of the world they describe*, and a second aspect of their value derives from this. They are the precipitate of an ongoing, intensely conflictual process, involving many actors, both Maya and Spanish. In the search for descriptive fact, scholars have overlooked the more basic questions of what kind of communicative acts the letters embody, and to what ends. Even as descriptive utterances, their value is “oblique” in the sense that they reflect the ideological horizons of their authors (Bakhtin and Medvedev 1985[1928]:21), not an objective reality.

Yucatan in the 1560s was in the throes of a major crisis. Following a period of zealous and apparently successful evangelization by the Franciscans, it was discovered that some native nobles continued to practice idolatry. With the aid of civil authorities in the provincial capital of Merida, Franciscans under the Provincial Diego de Landa undertook an inquisition in 1562 that lasted officially less than a year but is reported to have continued unofficially for more than a century (Bricker 1981:20; Scholes and Adams 1938, Vol. II:71–129; Tozzer 1941:78–83). In the latter half of that year, Francisco de Toral arrived in Yucatan as the first resident bishop and, being informed of the Franciscan actions, immediately halted the inquisition and initiated an investigation. There ensued a power struggle between Landa and Toral that involved Spanish civil authorities, wealthy colonists and, inevitably, the Maya.¹ Segments of the native nobility suffered brutal humiliation at the hands of the friars in the inquisitorial process. Others were less directly involved in the inquisition but still became engaged in the subsequent disputes. Since well before the conquest, the native nobility had been fragmented into some 19 independent states whose relations were in many cases hostile (Roys 1943, 1957). Given this context, it is clear that the very production of a letter to the king is an attempt to exercise the “symbolic power” to create appearances and belief, to confirm and transform the vision of the world (Bourdieu 1977:117, 1985). As with their knowledge of the Catholic moral order, the Maya nobles learned alphabetic writing from the friars as an instrument of conversion. Yet, from as early as the 1560s, they used these skills to constitute their own place in colonial society.

The discussion proceeds in five main steps. First, the letters are situated within the broader discourse context from which they arose and to which they were oriented. Next, they are shown to form an *intertextual* series on the basis of their graded incorporation of Spanish linguistic conventions. Following this, *intratextual* ambivalence is explored within the individual letters, first in the address forms to the king, then in the description of the Franciscan mission in Yucatan, and finally in a sweeping critique of the secular clergy. By moving from the level of the broader social field, to the intertextual series, to the intratextual rhetorical structure of the documents, I will demonstrate both the continuity of these orders, and the key role of ambivalence in their organization.

ambivalence and authenticity in the native voice

The Maya letters of February and March 1567 lavish praise on the Franciscan fathers, and entreat the Crown to send more quickly. The strong pro-Franciscan rhetoric of the texts has been seen as evidence that they were, in Gates's (1937:114) terms, "concocted by the friars to influence the king." Tozzer (1941:83, n. 350) concurs with Gates, as does Gonzalez Cicero (1978:110) in her study of religious affairs in 16th-century Yucatan. The evidence in support of this conclusion is initially compelling.

It is paradoxical that the letters praise Landa, who had directed the inquisition, rather than Toral, who put a stop to it. According to Tozzer (1941:81, n. 344) and Gonzalez Cicero (1978:127), Bishop Toral, upon his arrival in Merida, found two opposed factions: Landa, most Franciscans, and then-Alcalde Mayor Diego de Quijada on the one hand, and a few Franciscans, the wealthy Spaniards, and the secular clergy on the other. In letters to the Crown dated 1 and 12 March 1563, he condemned the ignorance and excesses of the Franciscans and requested that a new group of clergy be sent (Scholes and Adams 1938, Vol. II:34–41, 43). During the same period, he freed many Maya who had been incarcerated on charges of idolatry (19 February 1565 in Scholes and Adams 1938, Vol. II:396). Over the next five years, he succeeded in having Quijada fined and imprisoned for having abetted the inquisition (Scholes and Adams 1938, Vol. II:363ff., cf. Toral to Crown 3 March 1564, Scholes and Adams 1938, Vol. II:68–73). In brief, Toral appears to have acted as a defender of the Indians. Gonzalez Cicero concludes, plausibly, that the 1567 letters, signed by Maya nobles and expressing affection for the Franciscans, must be a self-serving concoction of the friars. What they show is not the authentic sentiments of the Maya but their extraordinary malleability and the extent to which they were used by Toral's enemies (Gonzalez Cicero 1978:111, 194–195).

Not only do the Maya letters appear bogus for their support of the Franciscans, but they also look as though they were copied from a single Spanish template. Gates made this point, and used it to argue that "Its [letter of 12 February 1567] value as a real expression of Maya sentiment is considerably invalidated by [it]" (Gates 1937:114). Tozzer (1941:83, n. 350) cites the existence of seven letters, all identical, dated 12 and 13 February 1567, clearly the same ones Gates refers to. To these should be added a considerably longer one dated 19 March 1567, bearing many of the same signatures as the others, also praising the Franciscans (Hanks 1985a; cf. Spanish version in Gonzalez Cicero 1978:232–235). Thus, the existence of eight letters of strikingly similar content, signed by some 80 Maya nobles and each corresponding to a Spanish version, appear to give further evidence of fakery.² Add to this the fact that the signatures of the seven February letters were obviously written by the scribe, not by the principals whose names are represented.

If the evidence of inauthenticity were not already compelling, there is another major piece. In a letter to the Crown, dated 12 April 1567 and signed by four native lords of Mani province, the sham is denounced explicitly, and the Franciscans condemned for their abuses (Zimmermann 1970:36–37). Surely, this squares better with the facts of Franciscan conduct than do the February and March accolades. There is no question in the received view, then, that the February and March letters are bogus, and that their value as expressions of Maya experience is vanishingly small.

On closer inspection, this common sense reasoning becomes muddled. The similarity of handwriting in the texts and signatures of the February letters is evidence that a single scribe wrote them, but it is irrelevant to the more basic question of whether the principals authorized placement of their names. The signatures of the March letter are *not* all in the scribe's hand. The existence of Spanish versions of the letters fails to prove whether the Maya or Spanish texts came first, and may be explainable simply by noting that the Maya knew that Phillip II, their addressee, spoke Spanish and not Maya. A comparison of the two versions of the 19 March letter shows that the Spanish one is simplified with respect to the Maya (compare Maya version

in AGI Mexico 359 with Spanish in Gonzalez Cicero 1978:232). It also is worth noting that the April repudiation by the lords of Mani also appears in Spanish, but no one has adduced this as evidence of inauthenticity.

As Zimmermann (1970) showed, there are actually two significantly different variants of the February letters, each with its corresponding Spanish gloss. It is only from the perspective of a reconstructed (but unattested) common text that the February letters can be spoken of as copies of a single one. The March letter is similar. All are addressed to the Spanish king, making partly identical petitions, praising the Franciscans in many of the same terms, bearing signatures of many of the same Maya nobles, and dated within five weeks of one another.

The letters also differ in significant ways, beginning with the fact that the February ones antedate the March one and can be seen as preludes to it. The February variants were 29 (version I) and 25 (version II) orthographic lines in length, including text and final etiquette, and have between 6 and 18 names of Maya nobles apiece (facsimiles in Gates 1937:114; McQuown n.d.; Zimmerman 1970: plates 30, 31). The March one is 138 lines long, with 26 signatures of Maya nobles plus four Spanish officials: Pedro Diaz de Monjibar and Gregor Rodriguez, *defensores* (defenders); Alonso de Arevalo, interpreter; and Geronimo de Castro, royal scribe. Eleven of the March Maya signatories also signed one or another of the February letters, but the rest are distinct. Unlike the February letters, the March one is followed by a 12-line statement in Spanish by the scribe that identifies the provenience of the signatories and testifies to the authenticity of the document. Whereas the February letters praise the Franciscans, the March one also presents a detailed description of Spanish civil and religious authorities. There is also an extended critique of the secular clergy, a number of suggestions to the Crown on the governing of Yucatan, and a description of the exhaustion and anguish of the Maya. The February letters establish a channel of communication, and the March one builds on this, greatly expanding the message. In this light, the 12 April repudiation by the lords of Mani province can be read as an attempt to repossess the right to speak for "we here in Yucatan." It makes a competing claim to symbolic power in the name of a distinct Maya voice.

Gates reasoned that because there were multiple Maya versions of the February letter, with different signatories, the letter could not be a sincere expression of any one group. But this makes sense only under the assumption that a "letter" expresses a unique, individual point of view. There is no evidence that the Maya signatories viewed their communications in this way. Indeed, writing was not used for interpersonal correspondence in preconquest Maya society (Chi in Tozzer 1941:230; Roys 1943).

Assuming the necessary level of consensus, the alternative to seven nearly identical letters presumably would be for the principals all to sign a single copy, and be done with it. Why do they assert their allegiance one by one in parallel repetition instead of in unison? The evidence from other kinds of Maya writing and formal speech is that, within texts, repetition is a ubiquitous and culturally valued stylistic device in the Mayan cultures.³ Various of the books of Chilam Balam, native prophetic histories, also show unifying similarities alongside regional differences.⁴ Neither stylistic repetition at the level of a single text nor recurrence of units of discourse across texts proves inauthenticity. It is more likely that the sevenfold repetition of the February letter was an authenticating device. It also permitted the signatories to differentiate themselves by groups while still taking up the same position.

Scholars have been quick to believe the April repudiation by the Xius and Pacabs of Mani province, but this letter is open to the same basic doubts as the others. Why is it in Spanish? Why does it also request more priests? The letter basically recapitulates Toral's stance vis-à-vis Landa, Quijada, and certain Franciscans. Did he therefore collude in its composition?

In fact, all of the letters are clearly part of a larger discourse that includes Spanish language communications. They share with the Spanish a common addressee in the person of the king, and they describe many of the same individuals described elsewhere in contemporary Spanish documents. They praise the Franciscans in terms similar to those used by Quijada in a letter to

the Crown dated 15 February 1565 (Scholes and Adams 1938, Vol. II: 170–171), and by the civil authorities of Merida to the Crown 16 May 1567 (quoted by Gonzalez Cicero 1978:194, n. 112). In a letter of 20 May 1564 addressed to the Crown, Quijada criticizes Toral for the economic burden he placed on the natives (Scholes and Adams 1938, Vol. II:83–84), a problem also raised, though less directly, in a letter to the Crown dated 16 October 1567 and signed by six Franciscans (Scholes and Adams 1938, Vol. II:378). The 16 May 1567 letter from civil authorities of Merida also criticizes the secular clergy for their greed and inability to speak Maya (cited in Gonzalez Cicero 1978:194). The very same criticisms are leveled in the Maya letter of 19 March, the same year. A thorough investigation of the contemporary Spanish documents would undoubtedly turn up many more specific features shared by Maya and Spanish texts.

The April letter from Mani has the appearance of “truth,” because its signatories had borne the full force of Landa’s inquisition. It is also self-serving, however, since it asserts the authority to speak for the Maya. Before granting this power of representation exclusively to one group of nobles, we should consider that whereas the April signatories had suffered the full force of the inquisition, the February and March ones (probably) had not. Instead, they were from Ceh Pech, Ah Canul, Ah Kin Chel, Chakan, Campech, and Chakan Putun provinces, none of which appears to have been the site of inquisitorial activities. This points up one of the basic errors of the traditional interpretation of this correspondence, namely the erroneous assumption that there existed a single Maya perspective against which to judge authenticity.

Another basic problem with the received interpretation is that it attempts to understand the Maya letters solely in the light of the Toral-Landa controversy. The inquisition of 1562 was so horrific and the subsequent recriminations so bitter, that historians have measured the Maya correspondence against these events. One need not deny the catastrophe, however, to deny it the privileged position of determining what is true. There was more going on among the Spaniards, among the Maya, and in their interrelations, than this one dispute.

The Franciscans during the years prior to 1562 had developed relatively close ties with many Maya, preaching the goodness and paternal affection of their Christian god (Gonzalez Cicero 1978:112–114) and standing between them and the depredations of the *encomenderos* (Gonzalez Cicero 1978:118). The ability of the early friars to speak and preach in Maya is well known, as is the fact that they first schooled the Maya in writing and Spanish and trained the official interpreters (Farriss 1984:97).⁵ When they learned in the spring of 1562 that Maya continued to worship idols even after Baptism, the Franciscans were revulsed (Landa in Tozzer 1941:75f.; Scholes and Adams 1938, Vol. II: 71f.; cf. Farriss 1984:291f.). The initial evangelization of the natives gave way to a new phase of reaffirmation and maintenance of their Christianity (Gonzalez Cicero 1978:114; cf. Phelan 1970).

During the same time, Toral’s assault on the Franciscans and their Provincial Landa was taking its toll. In September of 1562, the friars convened in Merida, and decided to withdraw from many of the rural missions into the main churches of Merida, Mani, Valladolid, Campeche, and Izamal, while at the same time ceasing to administer the sacraments to a Maya population whom they no longer trusted to be true Christians (Gonzalez Cicero 1978:126). This all aggravated the need for more clergy to carry forth the conversion. Toral repeatedly appealed to the Crown that more Franciscans and clergy were needed (12 March 1563 in Gonzalez Cicero 1978:169; 17 October 1565 in Gonzalez Cicero 1978:184). Quijada (10 February 1565 in Scholes and Adams 1938, Vol. II:171) makes the same point, as do de la Torre to the Crown (4 May 1567), civil authorities of Merida to the Crown 16 May 1567 (cited by Gonzalez Cicero 1978:194, n. 112), and Franciscans to the Crown 16 October 1567 (Scholes and Adams 1938, Vol. II:378). In petitioning for more Franciscans, the Maya letters of February and March reflect the fact that, indeed, by 1567, there were few friars, and even they had cut off the Maya from access to the sacraments.

Over the course of Toral’s time as bishop of Yucatan, he became increasingly isolated. He denounced Quijada, Alcalde Mayor as an abuser of Spaniards and Indians alike, and brought

charges against him for having overstepped his authority in aiding the Franciscans in the inquisition. As early as 20 May 1564, Quijada was counterdenouncing Toral in correspondence with the Crown (Scholes and Adams 1938, Vol. II:83–84), saying that he was in collusion with the wealthy Spaniards, and that he was a tremendous economic burden on the Maya, from whom he extracted many goods and services (Gonzalez Cicero 1978:188; Franciscans to the Crown 16 October 1567 in Scholes and Adams 1938, Vol. II:378). He also supported a plan for graduating tribute according to individual wealth, which would further alienate him from the Maya nobility. In a letter of 10 February 1565, Quijada also complains of the clergy, who were said to be prospering under Toral, and alleged to maintain black slaves (Scholes and Adams 1938, Vol. II:171, cf. Gonzalez Cicero 1978:191).

It seems unlikely that Toral had very positive relations with the wealthy Spanish. He complained often of the poverty of the church and attempted to extract support from the Spanish *encomenderos*. But they apparently never complied and Cespedes did not provide the civil authority to impose the tithe in support of the church. Consequently, Toral censured the governor and civil authorities (Gonzalez Cicero 1978:111). He was embittered by the sense that his efforts were futile and that his inability to speak Maya cut him off from the native population (letter of 17 March 1566 to the Crown, cited in Gonzalez Cicero 1978:200). By holding the Franciscans in check, he helped to create the conditions for the secular clergy to play a more important role in the evangelization of Yucatan, thus contributing to the general weakening of the monastic orders in New Spain and Yucatan that was characteristic of the reign of Phillip II (Phelan 1970). Yet he condemned the clergy as self-interested and avaricious, lessons he had learned while serving as Franciscan Provincial in Michoacan (Gonzalez Cicero 1978:186). He was, ironically, a Franciscan himself and was probably antiseccular by virtue of his belonging to this order (Phelan 1970:Ch. V).

The contradictions and isolation of Toral's position in Yucatan seem to have had a significant impact on him, and by March 1569 he requested permission from the Crown to renounce the bishopric (Gonzalez Cicero 1978:205). Given this trajectory, it is not surprising that none of the Maya letters expresses support for him. If the Maya nobles were paying any attention at all, they would have realized that Toral would not make an effective ally, besieged as he was, from all sides.

According to Toral, in March of 1564, there were only six seculars in Yucatan (Scholes and Adams 1938, Vol. II:68–73). One year earlier he had requested two dozen additional clergy (Gonzalez Cicero 1978:169), and in October of 1565 he requested 50 more.⁶ He never got nearly as many as he sought, but he appears to have introduced eight to ten seculars despite his ambivalence about their general character (Gonzalez Cicero 1978:192–193). With the Franciscans on the wane, the role of these clerics as church representatives in Maya towns would have been proportionately greater than in the past. The Maya letter of 19 March 1567 mentions Toral only once by name, saying that it was he who brought the clerics. He was isolated from the Maya therefore, their relation being mediated by the almost universally despised secular clergy. By 1567, the situation appears to have deteriorated sufficiently to motivate a Maya critique of Toral, the secular clergy, Quijada, and the endless bickering, without assuming direct Franciscan interference. The March letter provides this critique.

One more major weakness in the received view is the implicit assumption that these documents can be evaluated in terms of their truth value as indicators of what was "really going on." Did the signatories truly love the Franciscans and despise the seculars as they said, or was it a thinly veiled fake? On the grounds of evidence mostly external to the letters in question, I have argued that these things could be true. At this point, I wish to argue that the issue of truth is, in any case, not the central one. Truth versus falsity is a meaningful measure of descriptive statements, not of requests, orders, interjections, and so forth. If, for example, the point of the Maya letters were to establish a communication with Phillip II, to elicit his sympathy, to create an identity for the signatories, to persuade him to act in certain ways, or to claim the right to

speak for “the Maya,” then truth is less important than effectiveness. The received interpretation inappropriately singles out veracity as a criterion, without considering the nontruth functional aspects of the communication. This is symptomatic of a failure to see that these documents are not brute indicators of a reality that exists external to them. They are instead artifacts of communicative actions performed in a complicated, changing context.

an intertextual series

The existence of multiple versions of the February letter, along with the similarity between them and the March one, do not demonstrate inauthenticity. Rather, they demonstrate that the texts are concretely interrelated. This raises the important question of how these Maya letters fit into the broader discourse of Maya to Maya, Maya to Spanish, and Spanish to Spanish communication. These other communications are a central aspect of the context in which the letters were produced. They constitute an intertextual context.

Following Jenny (1982), “intertextuality” is a general term for a variety of relations among texts. Two texts may be linked to one another by concrete shared features, for instance, by reference to each other, by amplification (where one text elaborates on the other), by contradiction or by reinforcement. They may also be related by common membership in a single genre within a given literary tradition (cf. Culler 1981: Ch. 5). Concrete intertextual relations often take the form of transpositions of segments of one text into another. The transposed element is necessarily modified as it is integrated into the new structure, and may or may not retain its recognizability as having originated from without. As a consequence, the presence of intertextual features in the discourse tends to break down the boundary between text-internal and text-external planes. Interpretation of the discourse cannot treat it as an isolate, but rather as part of a series of texts situated within a larger network. The intertextual context is also a key part of the field of action insofar as it provides objective resources for intelligible communicative performance.

The near identity of the seven February letters is an extreme instance of intertextual linkage, so much so that one is tempted to see seven instances of a single text.

The two variants of the February letter seem to correspond to a dialect difference among their signatories (see Zimmermann 1970: plate 30 versus plate 31). Version I, from the northern region (Ah Canul, Ceh Pech, and Ah Kin Chel), shows 18 Spanish terms (23 tokens) (see Table 1). It is noteworthy that the Spanish borrowings are overwhelmingly nouns, religious in reference, as they are also in Version II from Chacan Putun and Tixchel provinces (see Table 2). This is consistent with what one finds in Nahuatl documents from the same period, and presumably reflects the predominant role of the friars in teaching literacy skills to the nobles (cf. Anderson et al. 1976).

There is a noticeable difference in the two versions in their respective uses of Spanish. Version I (with 19 tokens) has a third more borrowings than version II (13 tokens), partly due to its greater length (29 versus 25 lines). In four noteworthy cases, version I has a Spanish term where version II has a corresponding Maya one. *Cristianoil* (Christianity) in version I becomes *yoc olal cristo* (faith/will in Christ) in II; *tuprovinciail* Toledo in I becomes *tucuchcabil* Toledo (from the province of Toledo) in II; *años* in I becomes *habob* (years) in II. Centered at the top of the page, version I has the expression of S.C.R.Mag[†], abbreviating “Sacred Catholic Royal Majesty,” with the cross on the “Majesty.” In exactly the same position, version II has the Maya expression *cicithanbil₁ cilich₂ noh ah tepal₃* (sacred₂ sweetly addressed₁, great majesty). In summary, version I displays a more extensive engagement in Spanish speech forms than does version II. This might correspond to different degrees of fluency with the language on the part of the principals involved. Alternatively, it could reflect a stylistic choice. By using key Spanish terms—for the divine king, the Christian faith, social space, and time—version I identifies itself as already

Table 1. Spanish terms in Maya letter, 11 February 1567 (Version I).

Form	Gloss
<i>yahaulil castilla</i>	the kingdom [reign] of Castille
<i>cristianoil</i>	Christianity (2 instances)
<i>frailes franciscos</i>	Franciscan friars (2 instances)
<i>doctrinas</i>	doctrines (2 instances)
<i>yalmah thanil dios</i>	the spoken word of God
<i>tulumil castillae</i>	in the land of Castille (2 instances)
<i>tubelil dios</i>	on the path to God
<i>tuprovinç iail toledo</i>	in the province of Toledo
<i>frai</i> [name]	friar so-and-so (4 instances)
<i>cayumil ti dios</i>	our lord in God (2 instances)
<i>uchayan padresob</i>	the rest of [the] fathers
<i>tacristianoil pucçikal</i>	to your Christian heart
<i>tu.11.ukinil hebrero</i>	on the 11 day of February
1567. añqs	1567 years
S.C.R.Mağ	Sacred Catholic Royal Majesty

Source: Zimmermann 1970:32.

Table 2. Spanish terms in Maya letter, 11 February 1567 (Version II).

Form	Gloss
<i>ti padreob</i>	to [the] fathers
<i>ti oc olal cristo</i>	in Christian faith
<i>padreob san francisco</i>	San Franciscan fathers
<i>udoctrina</i>	their [his] doctrine
<i>yalmah thanil dios</i>	the spoken word of God
<i>españa e</i>	Spain
<i>padreob san francisco</i>	San Franciscan fathers
<i>tubelil dios</i>	on the path to God
<i>españa e</i>	Spain
<i>frai</i> [name]	friar so-and-so (3 instances)
<i>hebrero 1567 habob</i>	February 1567

Source: Zimmermann 1970:32.

within the Spanish frame of reference. Version II, with its elegant Maya formulations, identifies itself as authentically and nobly Maya.

The March letter is longer, with 138 lines, and shows proportionately more Spanish terms (64, see Table 3). They are still all nouns, but range over religious terms, place names and descriptions, the date, institutional titles and “official,” Spanish-dominated, aspects of colonial society. As is evident from the tables, these foreign words are grammatically converted into Maya linguistic structures by inflection and derivation. Their presence in the discourse is a reflection of the interaction between native and nonnative frames of reference in the contemporary social context. The Maya nobles were already deeply engaged in Spanish discourse, and the gradience of incorporations, from least in version II of the February letter, to most in the March, forms an intertextual series. The increasingly elaborate use of Spanish is paired with an increasingly elaborate thematic development in the texts, from a religious focus, to a broad narrative account of the contemporary scene. As Bakhtin (1981:275) observed, the objects of description themselves serve to introduce into the discourse other descriptions in socially distinct, competing languages. Because the letters authentically are engaged in their contemporary world, intertextual disparities in the context are played out as heteroglossia within the texts.

Beyond the incorporation of Spanish lexical items into the discourse, the letters also incorporated the overt features of the Spanish *carta*. At the top of each is the royal sign, *Sacra Catolica Real Majestad*, in abbreviation or unabbreviated Maya equivalent. While the elaborateness of

Table 3. Spanish terms in Maya letter, 19 March 1567.

Form	Gloss
<i>ek padresob clerigo</i>	black fathers clergy
<i>ek padre(s)ob</i>	black fathers (6 instances)
<i>sant fran^{co} padresob</i>	San Franciscan fathers (8 instances)
<i>frai diego de landa provinç iail</i>	Friar Diego de Landa Provincial
<i>ti provinç iail</i>	to the Provincial
<i>obispo</i>	bishop (2 instances)
<i>obispo [name]</i>	Bishop [Toral]
<i>clerigosob</i>	clergy
<i>utibilil xp̄ianosob</i>	the goodness of the Christians
<i>doctrina</i>	doctrine (2 instances)
<i>missa</i>	mass (2 instances)
<i>evangelio ukaba tumen españolesobe</i>	[the] gospel it is called by [the] Spaniards
<i>doctrina xp̄iana ukabae . . . missa</i>	Christian doctrine it's called . . . mass (2 instances)
<i>cayumil ti dios</i>	our lord in God (2 instances)
<i>umehen dios</i>	the son of God
<i>tutan dios</i>	before God
<i>dios</i>	God (3 instances)
<i>uay ti provinç ia yucatan (lae)</i>	here in [the] province of Yucatan (2 instances)
<i>uay tuprovinç iail yucatan e</i>	here in the province of Yucatan
<i>uay ti ç iudad de merida. yucatan</i>	here in the city of Mérida, Yucatán
<i>tubolonpiç ukiniil yuil março</i>	on the 19th day of the month of March
<i>año de mil y quis y sesenta y siete</i>	year of 1000 and 500 and 60 and 7
<i>españolob</i>	Spaniards
<i>españolesob</i>	Spaniards
<i>defensorob</i>	defenders
<i>ufirmasob</i>	their signatures
<i>ajustiç ia yetel uchayan españolob</i>	your Justice and the rest of the Spaniards
<i>ajusz^o</i>	your Justice
<i>ajustiç ia</i>	Your Justice (2 instances)
<i>ucah juez</i>	he [acts as] judge
<i>yocç ic ubaob ti juezil</i>	they insert themselves into [the] judgeship
<i>agovernador ti don luis cespedes de obiedo</i>	your Governor don Louis Cespedes de Obiedo
<i>ti governador</i>	to [the] Governor
<i>oyador loaysa</i>	Oyador Loaysa
<i>S.C.R.ñ</i>	Sacred Catholic Royal Majesty

Source: Hanks 1985a.

the opening salutations differs across the letters, all have a clearly identifiable closing in which the king is revered and the date and place of provenance, along with the title of signatories, are given. The signatures are laid out after the closing and, at the bottom of the March letter, there is a testament of authenticity by the scribe. The script is neat, regular, and mostly free from abbreviations (cf. Anderson et al. 1976:33). Written on the top of the March document is “letter from the Indians to his majesty (it is translated” in abbreviated Spanish. These features of format key the document as being of the generic type *carta*. Along with the lexical borrowings, they reinforce the perception that it is a Spanish discourse form. Accurate within limits, this perception should not obscure the fact that the genre is being transformed, and these *cartas* are quite unlike Spanish discourse in other ways. Anderson et al. (1976:30) said that 16th-century Nahuatl letters to the king displayed “essentially the polished rhetoric of old Tenochtitlan and Texcoco, the style of the orations of kings and priests in Sahagún.” Of the present letters it can be said that they display the elaborated style of Maya literary and ritual discourse, in combination with the Spanish format and lexical items.

There is also extensive evidence that the letters are linked to Maya discourse traditions. One of the most obvious indicators of this is the fact that they are written in Maya language, according to its grammatical and semantic conventions. Moreover, the style—as well as the grammar of the discourse—is recognizably Mayan. The evidence for this assertion comes from a

comparison of the letters with other linguistic artifacts in Mayan languages. Comparison shows that they share characteristic features of “formal” Mayan discourse, found also in the Maya Books of Chilam Balam (Edmonson 1982), native chronicles (Barrera Vasquez 1984), prayer (Hanks 1984) and narrative. For example, they contain noteworthy semantic couplets, in which two immediately adjacent lines are identical except for one contrasting element, as in “we are humbled beneath your foot, we are humbled beneath your hand.” Taken together, the two different parts of the couplet (foot, hand) stand for a third concept, in this case the whole person of the ruler.⁷ Scholars have noted the importance of the semantic couplet as a literary device in Quiche Mayan (Edmonson 1968; Norman 1980; Tedlock 1983), Tzeltal Mayan (Becquelin Monod 1979, 1981), and Tzotzil Mayan (Gossen 1974; Haviland 1977), as well as in Yucatec Maya (Bricker 1974; Edmonson 1982), the language of the letters. The fact that they are partly formulated in couplets strongly suggests that the author(s) were familiar with this Mayan literary convention. Not only the couplet, moreover, but also triplets and cases of extended parallelism are attested both in the letters and in other Mayan language artifacts.

These literary devices work together in the letters to indicate that the language has been formulated within Mayan aesthetic and rhetorical conventions. This in turn reinforces and authenticates the identity of the signatories as genuine Maya nobles. In relation to the display of Spanish elements in the same letters, the identification of the signatories as native is a rhetorical counterpoint. The dialogism between Spanish and Maya components of discourse is evident intertextually in the gradience of Spanish in the different letters. It is also present intratextually in the variation from section to section and in the basic tension within single sections of text.

Unlike the February letters, the March one presents a broad-ranging narrative account of the contemporary scene. Like the “novel” as described by Bakhtin (1981), it is a complex discourse form, built up in a variety of social voices. In an intensely affective rhetoric, the authors present themselves as the humble servants of God and the king, suffering greatly under the local colonial administrators, and anxious to become more perfect Christians. They take on the language of Franciscan mysticism to deprecate themselves as blind idolaters and give evidence thereby of having already entered into the colonial dialectic of self-representation through an imposed language (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 1986). They shift suddenly between this and a scathing denunciation of the secular clergy, formulated in elegant Maya literary language, and then back to an almost matter-of-fact voice in which suggestions are made to the king on how best to rule Yucatan. Although it would be impossible to encompass the whole of the March letter in this paper, one dimension that seems central is the stance taken up by the authors before the king.

The act of addressing the king in a language at least partly foreign is itself a display of the elite status of the signatories. The Maya nobility claimed foreign descent itself, prior to the conquest, and legitimated this claim through knowledge of the esoteric “language of Suyua,” said to derive from the Toltecs (Stross 1983). By addressing the paramount, the speakers reproduced their noble status within indigenous society. They addressed Him as Ruler and Majesty, speaking up from below, and into the light from the darkness. The forms of royal address vary across the letters, and within each letter, in accordance with the immediate discourse contexts in which they occur. All of the letters begin with a salutation in which the signatories present themselves and explicitly establish their subordinate relation to the king. For the remainder of the text, the king is present, either as overtly signaled second person (you) or as the presupposed addressee to whom the rhetoric is directed. In the overt mode, he is always addressed in asymmetric terms; every second person reference accompanied by a reverential epithet. As the unstated object of persuasive rhetoric, he is appealed to in a variety of ways, including expressions of devotion, so that he might reciprocate by showing mercy. The forms of address reflect these shifts in footing, and will be explored in the first set of examples.

The praise lavished on the Franciscans is formulated in terms of a series of reciprocal relations with the signatories, in which they share with them enduring love, a common language, the

enlightenment of Christianity, and the familiarity of habitual accompaniment. The secular clergy, by stark contrast, are in all ways unreciprocal. They return hate for love, rage for devotion; they do not speak, they exploit. The contrasting relations set up between the Maya and the friars, as opposed to the seculars, form a paradigm that can shed light on the role of the king as well. By elaborately describing the goodness of Franciscan reciprocity while at the same time expressing total devotion to the king, the authors set up the presumption that he will reciprocate with favor. The alternative is embodied in the unreciprocating seculars. In this light, the final set of examples, which focus on the representation of the seculars, bears also on the overall logic of address. (I am indebted to Terence Turner for suggesting this perspective.)

structures of royal address

The March letter begins with an opening construction consisting of three parallel blocks of verse, followed by an isolated line. This is shown in Example 1.⁸ Note that each block, labeled I, II, III begins with *yoklal*, a connective expression meaning roughly “regarding, in consideration of, in favor of, because” (Barrera Vasquez, Bastarrachea Manzano, Brito Senores 1980:979, cf. 601). It is a commonly attested phrasing device in the letters, used to mark off the beginning of short sections of discourse, as in the blocks here.⁹ In each block, the first two lines describe the signatories as “gathered together, simple (common) men” (lines 1.1–1.2), “truly humbled beneath your foot, beneath your hand” (lines 3.2–3.3), and “here in our land, natural citizens” (lines 5.1–5.2). These lines establish the total subjugation of the signatories to the royal addressee, joined with their status as legitimate *naturales*. The remaining lines of blocks I and III are grammatically parallel, each with a transitive verb with “we” as subject (1.3, 5.3) followed immediately by reference and address to Phillip II, plus the honorific epithets “you, you (who are) great ruler majesty” (2.1–2.2) and “your ear you Ruler” (5.3–5.4). The

Example 1. Opening lines from letter of 19 March 1567.

Line	Block		Gloss
1.1	I	<i>yoklal tumulcñabilon</i>	For we [who are] gathered together
1.2		<i>con chambel uinic</i>	we simple men
1.3		<i>canaate cayumil ti dios.</i>	we understand our lord in God
2.1		<i>yetel tech cech</i>	and You You [who are]
2.2		<i>noh ahau ah tepale</i>	Great Ruler Majesty
2.3		<i>yanix ti col ca Coclukeç lauac bal</i>	we wish too that you accomplish some-
		<i>kananil</i>	thing necessary
3.1		<i>tech xan</i>	you
3.2	II	<i>yoklal hach thonanoon</i>	For truly we are humbled
3.3		<i>taclacal yalan auoc yalan akab</i>	we all beneath your foot, beneath your
			hand
3.4		<i>hibahunon con batabob</i>	however many we be, we [who are] chiefs
4.1		<i>yetel canucteyilob</i>	and our elders
4.2		<i>yan uay ti provinçia yucatan lae</i>	[who] are here in the province of Yucatán
5.1	III	<i>yoklal uay caluumile</i>	For here in our land
5.2		<i>ahotochnalonixan</i>	we are natural born citizens too
5.3		<i>coltic capatcante taxicin</i>	we wish to recount it to your ear
5.4		<i>cech ahaue</i>	You Ruler
6.1		<i>uchebalix açñaic unucul xan</i>	in order that you take up its meaning too
6.2	IV	<i>he tun cathan lae</i>	Here then we speak
7.1	V	<i>hach kanan uuilal</i>	Truly there is great need
7.2		<i>uay ti provinçia yucatan</i>	here in the province of Yucatán
7.3		<i>Sant fran^{co}. padresob toon.</i>	[of] San Franciscan fathers for us.

remainder of each block describes the goal of the letter, to get the king to reciprocate by acting in a certain way. Following the end of III is an isolated line framed by deictic particles, which present the letter itself as the speech of “we” (6.2).

Looked at as a whole, this construction of triplet plus isolated presentative establishes all of the critical deictic parameters of the communication, specifying in order: “We” (the addressers), “you” (the addressee), “here” (location of composition), and “this language” (the letter itself). These dimensions ground the event in social space and time, and establish the relation of the nobles to the Crown in terms of communicative roles.¹⁰

Within each block, there is a tendency toward semantic and syntactic couplets, evident in the restatement of key phrases just twice, in parallel form. In each block, the first two lines describe the signatories in terms of a couplet. Lines 1.1–2.1 unite “gathered together” with “common.” These jointly describe the nobles as a vulgar multitude in contrast to the exalted singularity of the Crown “you.” The form *thonanoon* in line 3.2 means “humbled” in the palpable sense of domination beneath a crushing burden (see Barrera Vasquez et al. 1980:841). The verticality inherent in this image is elaborated in the canonical couplet “beneath your foot, beneath your hand.” The ordered pairing of “foot-hand” to stand for a whole person is widely attested in Mayan literatures (Becquelin Monod 1981; Gossen 1974:194–195; Norman 1980:395) and occurs not just here, but at the end of this letter also, where the nobles “reverently kiss the tip of your foot, the tip of your hand” (Hanks 1985a:lines 122–123; cf. note 7). Finally, the opening couplet of block III, lines 5.1–5.2, establishes the spatial nexus between the nobles, their land (*luumil*), and their natural homes (*otochnal*). This three-way relation is asserted at least partly in response to Crown policy of recognition of native status (*naturales*).

There are two more noteworthy couplets in these lines. The first occurs at lines 2.1–2.2 and consists of the dual pairing of *tech cech* (you you [who art]) with *noh ahauah tepal* (great ruler majesty). The former are both second person deictics used to create the addressee; the latter are nondeictic descriptors in apposition to the second person forms. The use of these descriptive epithets in address and reference to the king is common in both versions of the February letter and the March one, as well as in the Yaxkukul Chronicle, dated 1544, which recounts the history and boundaries of Ceh Pech province (Barrera Vasquez 1984).

According to glosses in the Motul dictionary and examples in other contemporaneous documents, *ahau* describes “ruler” or “chief” in a series of differentiated ranks. *Tepal*, on the other hand, means “majesty” or “glory,” focusing more on the preeminence and abundance of the ruler than on his positional superiority (Hanks 1985b). The pairing of the two terms in descriptions of Maya lordship is attested in the Chilam Balam of Tizimin, as in Examples 2 and 3 below.

In Example 2, the pairing describes not the chief himself, nor the position of chief, but rather chiefly reign, in construction with the homologous pairing of *cab* (land [in undifferentiated sense of “earth”]) and *peten* (region, island [delimited area]). The proportion *cab:peten :: tepal:ahau* neatly captures the semantic likeness of *peten* and *ahau* as the segmented counterparts of *cab* and *tepal*. Immediately following this, the triplet *ah mahan x, y, z* places *tepal* (majesty) in construction with *pop* (mat) and *tz’am* (throne). The mat and throne appear to make up a traditional Mayan couplet standing for chiefly rule (cf. Edmonson 1982:line 1256).

It is also noteworthy here that the verse form consists of a combination of couplets with triplets. In particular, the embedding of one couplet within another to yield an apparent triplet—[(A B) C]—is a structure type that recurs in the letters of 1567. In Example 3 the same pairing is shown again, this time with *ahaulil* preceding *tepal*. Observe that, once again, the inclusive couplet formed by the two lines beginning with *ti yahaulil* and *tutepal* can be analyzed into an embedded pair (*ah bolon kin, ah bolon tz’am*) followed by a third (*ah Uuc Cha Pat Kin*). Hence, the same structure [(A B) C] is at play.¹¹

The linking of *noh ahau* (great ruler) with *ah tepal* (majesty) in the opening lines of the March letter appears to be based on a traditional semantic couplet. The Chilam Balam of Tizimin shows it in reference to native lords and the Yaxkukul Chronicle shows it in reference (not

Example 2. From the Book of Chilam balam of Tizimin. Source: Edmonson 1982; line breaks and glosses retained.

Line		Gloss
1420	<i>Cehom uuich</i>	With wooden faces
1421	<i>t u cab</i>	in the land,
1422	<i>t u peten</i>	in the country,
1423	<i>t u tepal</i>	in the rule
1424	<i>t u y ahaulil</i>	in the lordship
1425	<i>Ah mahan pop</i>	borrowers of the mat
1426	<i>Ah mahan tz'am</i>	borrowers of the throne
1427	<i>Ah mahan tepal</i>	borrowers of the rule

Example 3. From the Book of Chilam Balam of Tizimin. Source: Edmonson 1982; line breaks and glosses retained.

Line		Gloss
1270	<i>ti y ahaulilob</i>	in the lordships
1271	<i>ah bolon kin</i>	of the nine-day
1272	<i>ah bolon tz'am</i>	of the nine-throne people
1273	<i>t u tepal Ah Uuc Cha Pat kin</i>	in the rule of the 7 priest Cha Pat's days

address) to the Spanish king. From a semantic perspective, this joining of the ideas of articulated rule with abundant preeminence meshes with the duality of the Spanish kingship as worldly and divine. Recall that the insignia S.C.R.Ma g . is glossed in version II of the February letter as *cicithanbil cilich noh ah tepal*, thus aligning the majesty of the king with his status as *noh ah tepal*. Unlike the March letter, which appeals to both aspects of the king, it is mainly the beneficent provider that is invoked in the February letters, with their appeal for mercy. Whereas the March letter has the dual epithet in its opening lines, the February ones have the single form *cech ah tepal e* (you [who art] majesty). The term *ahau* seems to appear only in passages that invoke the king as dominant ruler. Alongside this semantic motivation for the different address forms in the letters is another one, which derives from the immediate linguistic context. The dual form in the March letter fits into a larger verse construction in which there is a strong tendency toward couplets embedded within triplets. This tendency is missing in the corresponding lines of the February letters.

The last couplet illustrated in Example 1 is the epithet for “we” in lines (3.4–4.1): “however many we be, we (who are) chiefs and our elders.” Just like the royal address forms, the epithet begins with paired deictic reference (this time “we” rather than “you”) and is completed with paired descriptive expressions. Whereas the “great ruler” and “majesty” characterize the same unique individual, “chiefs and our elders” describes two different groups of people. They are all included within the “we” of the signatories, but distinguished by status. *Batab* is usually glossed as Spanish “cacique,” that is “chief” at the town level (see discussion in Farriss 1985:Chap 8; Roys 1943, 1957). The *nuc*, *teilob*₂ (principals, elders [lit. great/old, trees₂]) complement the chief in the governance of the town and appear to have had significant influence in the formulation of policy. This appeal to a native structure of authority carries forth the appeal to the king as ruler in the March letter; both are absent from the February letter. Furthermore, like the royal epithets, this one is embedded in an immediate verse structure in which the couplet dominates. Thus, the material form of the epithet encapsulates both the semantic-thematic focus on hierarchical rule, and the constructive dominance of the couplet within the immediate verse context.

We can glimpse aspects of the Spanish world in these lines, in the reference to God, the province of Yucatan and the assertion of the native status of the signatories; but it is the Maya

frame of reference which predominates. The symbols of rule and status, along with the formal symmetries of their statement come from Maya literary tradition. Within the dialogical tension between perspectives, the Maya encompasses the Spanish, transforming the *Rey* into *Ahau* and recasting the network of related concepts. The opening lines of the February letter strike a somewhat different balance.

enlightenment and the Franciscan mission

Example 4. Opening lines from letter of 11 February 1567 (Version I). Source: Zimmermann 1970:32.

Line	Block		Gloss
1.1	I	<i>yoklal achinamob tulacal</i>	For all of your vassals
1.2		<i>-cech ah tepal e-</i>	-You [who are] Majesty-
1.3		<i>naata cacah ti yulolalil</i>	we understand willfully
1.4		<i>hibici unah tulacal</i>	how all is necessary
1.5		<i>uchebal ca lukulob e,</i>	in order that we be saved,
2.1	II	<i>lai tah oklal</i>	For that reason
2.2		<i>-cech ah tepal e-</i>	-You [who are] Majesty-
2.3		<i>bailcun a tumtic ychil auahaulilob</i>	would that you provide within your kingdoms
2.4		<i>yah bebeç ahulob,</i>	the ministers,
2.5		<i>ca utzac utichkacticob</i>	that they might illuminate
2.6		<i>yetel uçaç cunicob</i>	and enlighten
2.7		<i>yetel ucambeç icob</i>	and teach
2.8		<i>himac mabal yohmahob e;</i>	whosoever knows naught;
3.1	III	<i>bacx nachacoon</i>	Even though we be distant
3.2		<i>yetel tippanacoon</i>	and perceivable [from afar]
3.3		<i>yan ti yahaulil Castilla</i>	from the kingdom of Castilla
3.4		<i>ti lob e,</i>	notwithstanding
3.5		<i>canaatma tan olanil tamen</i>	we understand forthrightly [that] you do
3.6		<i>-cech ah tepal e-</i>	-You [who are] Majesty-
3.7		<i>baihi nedzanacoon yan e;</i>	as if we were close;

Several differences between these lines and the corresponding ones in the March letter are immediately evident. There is no overriding triplet and no isolated presentative to separate opening from the body of the text. The second block (lines 2.1–2.8) in Example 4 goes directly to the central wish expressed in the letter, that more religious be sent to enlighten and teach the Maya. It is only after this, in the third block, that the relation between signatories and king is elaborated. There is no overt description of the signatories, nor of their submission to the king, just as there is no description of “here.” Rather, “here” is the assumed but unstated place from which Castile is “far away.”

Recalling the sequence of deictic references in the March letter, the contrast with the February one is striking. There is a marked paucity of overt first-person description in the first two blocks in Example 4. Although “your vassals” in line 1.1 refers to the signatories, it is actually inflected as third person plural (*ob*). The description of this plurality is not elaborated, as it was in the March letter. Similarly, there is little overt description of the royal addressee in Example 4, save the almost perfunctory *cech ah tepal e* (You [who art] majesty) in lines 1.2, 2.2 and 3.6. The spatial matrix set up in the opening of the March letter is entirely lacking in the February. Finally, the language itself is nowhere commented on in 4, whereas Example 1 showed explicitly self-reflexive description in lines 5.3, 6.1 and 6.2. In all of these ways, the relation between the king and the signatories is more concrete and specific in the March letter than in the February.

While the first five lines in Example 4 are almost totally lacking in verse parallelism, it becomes clear by line 2.1 that there is a remote parallelism between lines 1.1–1.2 and 2.1–2.2.

Lai tah oklal in line 2.1 is an anaphoric variant of *yoklal* in line 1.1. In conjunction with the identical address forms in 1.2 and 2.2, this reinforces the perception that the two blocks are parallel. But it is a weak correspondence because, while the first block is in prose, the second is in measured verse.

Note that beginning with the second half of line 2.3, there is a series of six lines, all measuring between six and eight syllables, all ending in *ob(e)*. The first two lines in the series, *ychil au ahauliloblyah bebecahulob* (in your kingdoms / its ministers) form a couplet on the basis of the end rhyme (*lob*) and of the partial grammatical parallelism between them as possessed noun stems that end in a [VI] suffix, (*il* in the former and *ul* in the latter). The next three lines (2.5–2.7) carry forth the *ob* end rhyme, but differ precisely from the preceding couplet. Rather than possessed nouns, they are all transitive verbs with identical inflections: *u-STEM-ic-ob*, where *u-* . . . *-ob* marks plural subject and object, and *-ic-* marks transitive incompletive aspect. Each is preceded by a connective element, “in order that” in the first, and “and” in the second and third. The final line in the series, (2.8), carries the same plural *ob* in precisely the same metrical position (seventh syllable in the line), this time followed by the terminal particle *e*. This particle is isolated by the rhyme and meter scheme of the preceding lines, and its isolation emphasizes its function in bringing the verse series to a close. Combining with all of these structural links among lines is the presence of extensive alliteration in the vowels.¹²

Lines 2.1–2.8, therefore, illustrate what Tynianov (1981 [1924]) called a verse series, based on the combination of grammatical and sound parallelism. This series is more compact than any of those illustrated in Example 1, because it is constructed with a larger number of smaller units arranged in more immediate proximity to one another. Furthermore, the almost total absence of parallelism in the preceding lines establishes a background against which the verse series emerging from line 2.3 is in stark contrast. These formal facts are inherently significant to the rhetoric of the letter, because they constitute a virtuoso display of artistic competence in Maya. They are in this sense authenticating devices.¹³ The compact verse structure intensifies the request and its rationale while unifying them into a single bounded construct. Starting from recognition of the realm and its representatives (lines 2.3–2.4), it moves to a statement of the enlightenment derived from them. This simultaneously ratifies the association between the king’s representatives and light, ignorance and darkness, while conveying the desire of the signatories to be taught. The Crown becomes the luminous center of space, Yucatan the dark, remote periphery, and the ministers the means of transforming darkness to light.

In lines 2.5–2.8 the semantic association between light and knowledge is neatly formulated in a triplet. As in earlier examples, this triplet is analyzable into a semantic couplet (illuminate, enlighten) within an encompassing couplet (illuminate, enlighten, teach), thus (IA B) C). The merger of light with knowledge is a familiar Maya theme, attested also in Quiche divination (Tedlock 1982:Ch. 7), modern Tzotzil oral literature (Gossen 1974:38–40), and modern Yucatec prayer performed by shamans (Hanks 1984). Similarly, both spatial remoteness and its association with darkness were discussed by Gossen (1974:Ch. 1) for Tzotzil.

Despite the intricately Mayan literary style of the language in Example 4, there is another reading of the passage on which it makes good Franciscan sense. This other reading dialogizes the text and relates it to a wholly distinct intertextual tradition. In his brilliant study of Franciscan mysticism in the New World, Phelan (1970:Ch. 6) showed that for the Franciscans, the Indians were spiritual children, capable of perfect salvation through faith. The New World was literally outside of the Old, a place where a more perfect Christianity could be achieved. Under the guidance of the Franciscans, the Indians would become citizens of the City of God, leaving to the Old World the City of Man. Phelan discusses the “twin apexes” of medieval Franciscan mysticism, the Apocalypse and the sanctification of poverty (1970:Chs. 2 and 5). In preparation for the coming of the Millennial Kingdom, the Catholic monarchs were to preside over the extirpation of what Mendieta called “the three diabolical squadrons (of) ‘perfidious’ Judaism, ‘false’ Mohammedanism and ‘blind’ idolatry” (cited in Phelan 1970:13). The reference to

blindness here brings up the dichotomy of darkness and light; the extirpation of idolatry—the Franciscan task in Yucatan—was an enlightenment to those who could not see. The perfection mentioned in line 1.5 of Example 4, the enlightenment in lines 2.5–2.6, the teaching in 2.7—all of these are interpretable within the framework of Franciscan thought. This dialogism in the text is motivated by the social conditions of its production: it *does* reflect a Franciscan voice (among others), because this was a major part of the contemporary field of action.

The opening lines of the February and March letters also display several features of Mayan literary style. Formal devices in Example 1 included particle phrasing at the beginning of each block, syntactic, morphological and semantic parallelism among lines, including the combination of couplets with(in) triplets. All of these features are attested in Mayan literatures in one or another of Yucatec, Quiche, Tzeltal, and Tzotzil. Example 4 from the February letter lacks the overall block structure of Example 1, but adds a notably compact verse construction based on grammatical and semantic parallelism combined with rhyme, alliteration, and meter. In each case, the finely wrought language is a display of virtuosity, an indication that one of the voices it speaks is authentically Mayan.

the blackness of the secular clergy

A further example of ambivalence is the bitter denunciation of the secular clergy, who are first introduced as the “black fathers clergy” as shown in Example 5.

Example 5. From letter of 19 March 1567. Source: Hanks 1985a.

Line		Gloss
11.3	<i>habla bacacix likul tac chi</i>	Even though as appointed
12.1	<i>hulci obispo tatuxchi</i>	[there] arrived [the] bishop [whom] you ordered
12.2	<i>frai fran.^{co} toral ukabae</i>	Fray Francisco Toral [is] his name
12.3	<i>yulçah caix uthoxah</i>	he brought and he distributed
13.1	<i>ek padresob clerigo</i>	black fathers clergy
13.2	<i>ucate ukabaobe</i>	his lesser brothers [?] [are] their names
13.3	<i>ca uuacunahob</i>	then he posted them [stood them up]
13.4	<i>ti canan cahob</i>	as town curas
13.5	<i>ychil cacahal</i>	without our towns
13.6	<i>yalabob uthan dios toon.</i>	[that] they might say the word of God to us.

In the lines just preceding these, the Franciscan fathers, (*sant fran^{co} padresob*), are said to be greatly needed in Yucatan.¹⁴ For the remainder of the letter, neither the bishop nor the clergy break out of their status as dark forces antithetical to the well-being of the Maya. The full three-part epithet (*ek padresob clerigo*) occurs only in the first reference to the clergy, while the shortened form *ek padres(ob)* (black fathers) occurs eight times, and *clerigos* (clerics) occurs only three. All other references to the secular clergy (as opposed to the Franciscans) are pronominal. Thus, *ek padres(ob)* is by far the most common epithet for the seculars, as opposed to *sant fran^{co} padresob* for the Franciscans. To my knowledge, this is the only document in which a group of actors, Spanish or Maya, is described as “black.” The uniqueness and prominence of the epithet are combined with its semantic contribution to the rhetorical assault on the clergy. It provides an organizing center for the critique of the clergy by drawing together the reprehensible properties attributed to them.

According to the Diccionario de Motul (folia 162r, 163, 163r in Martínez Hernández 1929:343–345), *ek* at this time conveyed darkness and darkness of color as well as moral corruption, as in “*ek: I eek* (a black thing). From this *paynum yekil a pixan tuuich Dios yokol chuuc tumen a keban* (greater is the blackness of your soul before God than charcoal because of your

sins)" (folio 162r, English gloss translated from Spanish by author). While this association of sin with blackness of the "soul" is almost certainly derived from Christian ideas of spiritual purity and impurity, this citation demonstrates that the association was already in place by the late 16th century. In combination with *ich*, meaning "eye, face, manner," it conveyed "a surly person who is standoffish and never shows a good face, nor wishes to converse." In combination with *chenan* (meaning undetermined), it conveyed "dark, frightening" (folio 163); *ek may* is glossed as "blind, blind person." As a descriptor of individuals or states of affairs, *ek* appears to focus on the lack of sociability, lack of sight, and frightening darkness. Citing 19th-century sources, the Cordemex dictionary (Barrera Vasquez et al. 1980:149) adds to these senses the ideas of wildness (*bravo*) and standoffishness. According to Roys (1943), black paint was applied to the bodies of unmarried youths and common warriors going into battle, which is consistent with the marginality of the black clergy.

As a color, *ek* was associated with the west as opposed to *chac* (red) of the east. This directional corollary introduces further ones, including under (lower) as opposed to over (higher) and evil or ambivalent as opposed to good.¹⁵ *Ek* (black) is also meaningfully opposed to *sak* (white) as a descriptor applied to Europeans. In the Chilam Balam of Tizimin, the coming of the white men with red beards from the east is described, as shown in Example 6.

Example 6. From the Book of Chilam Balam of Tizimin. Source: Edmonson 1982; line breaks and glosses retained.

Line		Gloss
1169	<i>u hun tz'it katun</i>	The first part of the Katun
1170	<i>ulic sac uinicob</i>	there arrived white people
1171	<i>ich can si ho</i>	heaven born Merida
1172	<i>u hetz' katun</i>	was the seat of the Katun
1173	<i>bee chac u mexoc</i>	so, red were the beards
1174	<i>u mehen kin</i>	of the sons of the sun,
1175	<i>sac uinicob e</i>	those white people
1176	<i>be okbac on ti tali ob</i>	so we wept at their coming.
1177	<i>ti likin u tal</i>	they came from the east;
1178	<i>ca uliob uay e</i>	then they arrived here,
1179	<i>ah mexob</i>	the bearded men
1180	<i>a pulob</i>	the guayaba people,
1181	<i>ti chicul ku sac</i>	and manifested the white God
1182	<i>uahom che canal</i>	standing on the tall pole.

Note that the arrival of the white men marks the arrival of (the) white god, evidently the sign of Christianity. It is in direct opposition to the prototype of white religion that the blackness of the clergy takes on its full force in the March letter. Furthermore, *ek* as darkness stands in opposition to *saasil* (light), whereby it represents the absence of enlightenment. Recall from the February letter that enlightenment was associated with the Franciscan mission in Yucatan. This complementarity is another indication of the intertextual relation among the Maya letters, including the April repudiation, which speaks of blindness and vision. It is also consistent with the strict antithesis between the Franciscans and the seculars as portrayed in the March letter. Consider the following passage, in which several of the paradigmatic associations of *ek* are explicitly cited.

Example 7. From letter of 19 March 1567. Source: Hanks 1985a.

Line		Gloss
hex	<i>uCan ubelob</i>	here too their ways are folded
50.5	<i>clerigosob lae</i>	these clerics
51.1	<i>hach kuxob toon</i>	truly they are hateful towards us

51.2	<i>tamuk uCaCalic capach</i>	whereas they oppress us (on) our backs
51.3	<i>cabeelte ti yotochob</i>	we do in (at) their homes
52.1	<i>lauac bal ca yalicob toon</i>	whatever thing they tell us (to)
52.2	<i>yoklal yantacob yotochob</i>	for they have their (individual) houses
52.3	<i>yanix upalilob</i>	and they have servants (slaves)
52.4	<i>ek uinicob</i>	black men
53.1	<i>yantacobix utziminob</i>	and they have horses
53.2	<i>.y. uthulob</i>	and rabbits
53.3	<i>he tun tucutalob</i>	moreover they reside
53.4	<i>ychil cacahalob e</i>	within our towns
54.1	<i>cacalah tzentob</i>	we feed the lot of them
54.2	<i>.y. ubal yotochob</i>	along with the things of their households
54.3	<i>maix bal ubolil</i>	and they pay naught
55.1	<i>maix tan cakatab tiob</i>	and we shan't ask them to
55.2	<i>yoklal ç ublaconob tiob</i>	for we are ashamed before them
55.3	<i>ç ahconix tiob xan</i>	and we are frightened of them also

In the midst of a litany of criticisms of the seculars occurs the expression *ek uinic* (black man) (line 52.4), exactly the opposite of *sac uinic* (white man) of the Chilam Balam of Tizimin. Just before this in the text, the clergy are described as *kux* (hateful, rancorous, abhorrent, that which causes pain) (Barrera Vasquez et al. 1980:425–426), and as oppressing the backs of the Maya (*CaCalic ca pach*) “forcing down (exigently) our backs.” The latter reference to pressing downwards is consistent with the vertical connotations of *ek* as west-under (see note 15), and recalls explicitly the relation between the Maya and the evil of idolatry, as stated just 20 lines earlier in the letter: *yoklal hach bulanoon tu-Cal-pach ciçin cuchi* (For truly we [were] mired in the violent exigencies of the devil) (Hanks 1985a, lines 23.3–24.1). The form *Cal-pach* is a compound of the same roots *Cal* (oppress) and *pach* (back) that occur in Example 7, thus establishing the relational equivalence of the secular clergy and the “evil squadron” of idolatry. Later in Example 7, the seculars are described as provoking shame and fear among the Maya. Although *ek* occurs only once in this passage, its pall covers the whole. The phrase *ek uinicob* (black men) is actually ambiguous in this context, and can be interpreted as either the African servants some of the clergy are said to have kept or the “black” clergy themselves (cf. Quijada to Crown 10 February 1565 in Scholes and Adams 1938, Vol. II; 170–171; Hunt 1976:42). While it may be that the secular clergy in fact wore black, therefore, their black habits are thoroughly revalorized within the rhetorical framework of the letter. It is the cultural loading of blackness that guides its appropriation in the discourse; hence the dark brown habit of the Franciscans is never mentioned.

Instead of readily discernible blocks of verse, this example illustrates a variety of poetic features that recur from line to line, but only occasionally coalesce into a dominant couplet or triplet. Most of the lines are between six and eight syllables long and correspond to a sentence. The coincidence of these facts creates the artifice of equivalence among the lines, based on quantity. Reinforcing this is the occurrence of 20 tokens of the plural marker *ob* in the course of the same passage. Recall that repetition of *ob* in final position in six to eight syllable lines was one of the poetic devices used also in the opening of the February letter.

Example 7 provides several illustrations of grammatical parallelism. Lines 51.1–51.2 could be read as a semantic couplet in which the two parts characterize the reprehensible conduct of the seculars. Note that the two lines are formally dissimilar. Lines 54.3–55.3 on the contrary are quantitatively regular at six, eight, eight, and six syllables respectively; grammatically parallel *maix X*, *maix Y*, *yoklal X (yoklal) Y*; semantically related (they don't pay, we don't ask them to; we're ashamed before them, we're afraid of them), and bound by the end rhyme (*tiob . . . tiob . . . tiob xan*) in the last three lines. The relative density of parallelism here reinforces the thematic unity of the segment; the unwillingness to pay for services rendered, the unapproachability and the provoking of shame and fear summarize the exploitative relation-

ship of seculars to the Maya. It is in lines 52.2–53.2 however that verse parallelism combines most explicitly with the rhetoric of blackness.

Lines 52.2–53.2 consist of three sentences, each with the verb *-an* (to exist), *y-an-tac-ob* (there are [it-exists-collective-plural]), *y-an-ix* (there is/are also), *y-an-tac-ob-ix* (there are also). The identity of the verbs plus the alternation of inflections sets up a three-part syntactic frame in which the existence of five objects is asserted, one object per line in final position. Looking only at the first (leftmost) part of each line, there is an overlaid alliterative series *yo-ya-ya-ya-ye* (.y. abbreviates *yete/* [and, with]), to reinforce the grammatical parallelism. In the last half of each line (including all of line 52.4) are the five objects, all noun phrases ending in *ob* (plural), with three, four, four, four, three syllables respectively. The first two and the last two in the series are overtly possessed, marked by [y-] ~ [u-] (their, his, her, its). All four nouns are in exactly the same relations to their respective verbs, and to the clerics who possess them. This pattern leaves isolated, right in the middle, the epithet *ek uinicob* (black men), as the only noun phrase lacking possessive inflection, and unaccompanied by any verb or conjunction in its line. This foregrounds the entire construction and the epithet within as something distinct from what precedes and follows it. The motivation for this elaborate framing lies not in the formal construction itself, however, but in the semantic and symbolic values carried by *ek* (black).

The exquisite manipulation of the language in this passage sustains the display of Mayanness in the text. It has been closely worked according to indigenous conventions of formal discourse. Knowledge of these conventions was itself an indicator of the high status of the signatories within Maya society. Yet like all of the other examples, this one is ambiguously native. Numerous points of similarity between this letter and contemporary Spanish discourse (see section 1 above) indicate that they were formulated from within the same contemporary scene.

The passage is also imbued with the ever-present Franciscan perspective. While the meaning of *ek* can be explored within an indigenous framework, the possession of worldly objects, slaves, and domestic stock carries no standard negative overtones in Maya. It is from the perspective of the Franciscan vows of poverty that worldly possessions are intrinsically bad. In fact, the nobility is known to have traded in slaves, particularly in the provinces of the signatories (Roys 1943:68). When the clergy are berated for having or desiring wealth (for example, lines 91–94 of the same letter, Hanks 1985a), the criticism plays on the Franciscan assumption that wealth in all forms is antithetical to the spiritual mission of the church in the New World. What the letter shows, then, is a fusion of Maya and Spanish frameworks at several levels simultaneously, both deeper and more superficial than the meanings of the words.

conclusion

The Spanish conquest of Yucatan created a new discourse, within which Maya and Spanish systems of representation were encompassed. In some cases, the two systems remain distinguishable from one another, while interacting within a single whole. This can be seen at various levels, from the occurrence of Spanish lexical borrowings in Maya sentences to the use of Maya language to write a *carta*, preach Catholicism, or pay allegiance to the Spanish king. In other cases, it is more difficult to assign forms of representation to one system or the other. Some elements may be common to both cultures, such as the cross as a ritual symbol. More often, it is impossible to sort out two systems, because they are fused within the larger whole. This is the case with much of modern Maya ritual practice, which addresses a hybridized spiritual world, in a language merged from Catholic prayer and archaic Maya. The fusion of the two systems may be brought about through long-term interaction, but need not be. It can be performed creatively as well. The production of hybrid discourse is a pragmatic process that takes place in action. This process was already well underway by the 1560s in Yucatan, with the Spanish friars and native elites at the forefront.

Farriss (1984:98f.) presents an interesting example of cultural ambivalence in the career of don Francisco Uz, a hereditary chief (*batab*) from Mani province. Born in 1567, Uz held the position of Indian *gobernador* in two large towns in the area, learned to speak and write elegant Spanish, and became an official interpreter and senior aide to the Spanish governor. In the end, he was accused of complicity in the 1610 uprising in Tekax, Mani. Farriss suggests that his main crime was that he was too ambitious in manipulating the colonial system, and his success bred resentment. Dibble (1985) presents a complementary example from the same period in the Nahuatl region, where the works of Sahagún incorporated many elements of Nahuatl vocabulary and literary style. In writing his *General History of the Things of New Spain*, in Nahuatl, Sahagún became deeply familiar with native ritual practice, and language. In his evangelical writings he seldom mentioned native practices, but drew on them extensively in translating scripture and doctrine into the Nahuatl frame of reference. Like Uz and the signatories of the letters studied here, Sahagún contributed by his labors to a new, ambivalent discourse.

Previous analyses of the Maya letters of 1567 have fixed on the apparent failure of these documents to display the “native perspective.” Their very transparency as a bid to shore up the Franciscans before the king reinforces the perception that they are not really Maya. The presence of Spanish throughout the documents at all levels seems to lead in the same direction. This line of reasoning overlooks some central facts. The native perspective is blurred because there was no unitary native perspective to express itself. Moreover, the addressee, many of the referents, and the format of the discourse itself were Spanish. If it were possible to produce a fully monolingual (monologic in Bakhtin’s 1981 terms) expression under these circumstances, it is doubtful whether it would be intelligible to the addressee. In part, the heterogeneity of the language follows from that of the pragmatic field in which it was performed. This field included more than Spanish civil and ecclesiastical institutions. Accordingly, the letters cannot be understood solely in relation to the dispute between Toral and Landa, however important this was. Viewed in a broader discourse context that includes native language literature as well as a range of Spanish materials, they become more intelligible. By positing a pure native voice that is absent, one silences the native components that are in the language. Ambivalence takes on the appearance of inauthenticity.

I have argued in this paper that ambivalence in discourse is a corollary of the hybridization inherent in colonial contexts. While rooted in the broader social world, ambivalence takes on its distinctive forms in concrete communicative expression. In order to understand it, therefore, it is necessary to give an account of its specific realizations in discourse. We began this account by placing the Maya letters within their contemporary field, comparing them to one another, and to other written documents produced in the same context. This was the intertextual aspect of the analysis, in which the letters were viewed as members of larger series, interconnected by generic features, transpositions, shared references, reinforcements and contradictions. Intertextuality tends to break down the boundary between what is inside a text and what is outside it, giving it the appearance of a mosaic of parts derived from elsewhere. The ambivalence evident at the intertextual level is coupled by that at the intratextual level. Not only contemporary discourse in the collective sense was a hybrid, but particular instances were ambivalent as well. By detailed examination of segments of the February and March letters, it was demonstrated that the language itself is ambivalent in these texts. The address forms applied to the king reflect an indigenous logic of articulated rule and abundant prosperity, in combination with the Spanish framework of a unique Catholic monarch. The requests for Franciscans and the denunciation of the seculars obviously reflect a fusion of Franciscan and Maya systems of thought. These findings suggest the fruitfulness of bringing close discourse analysis to the interpretation of historical documents, including letters, but not limited to them.

If ambivalence is a general feature of 16th-century Yucatan, and not only of these letters, then it ought to arise in other forms of discourse as well. Like the nobility in the 16th century, “native” literature in anthropology has been seen as an icon of indigenous systems. It would

be productive to reexamine native literary types, such as the Books of Chilam Balam (Edmonson 1982), the Ritual of the Bacabs (Roys 1965), and the native chronicles (Barrera Vasquez 1984), from the perspective of their ambivalence. Many apparently Spanish forms of discourse are also likely to be equivocal, particularly those produced by friars. With all of these materials, the main challenge is not to find the native, but to show how social interaction in the colonial world gave rise to new forms of discourse, and with them, new possibilities for action.

notes

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¹My treatment of the immediate historical background of early postconquest Yucatan is necessarily selective. Cf. Farriss 1984, Roys 1957, Scholes and Adams 1938, and Tozzer 1941:78–83 and further references therein.

²Jane Rosenthal has shown me strikingly similar letters, dated January 1562, written in Nahuatl, from Huehuetenango, Guatemala, and Mazatlan Soconusco, Mexico. Victoria R. Bricker has made a similar point (personal communication), observing that strong similarities among early documents in various native languages support the conclusion that they were produced from Spanish templates. Anderson et al. (1976) show numerous Nahuatl documents with similar features.

There is no doubt that the Spanish (particularly the Franciscans) had a fundamental role in the production of these native language texts. It does not follow from this that the texts are unequivocal Spanish productions, just as they are not unequivocal native productions.

³The symbolic efficacy of repetition and parallelism in Mayan literary and ritual practice is widely recognized and noted in Bricker (1974), Edmonson (1968), Gossen (1974), Hanks (1984), Roys (1965), B. Tedlock (1982) and D. Tedlock (1983).

⁴The books of Chilam Balam are a genre of indigenous Maya documents, of which a number of instances are known. The genre is described in Barrera Vasquez and Rendon (1974[1948]) and Tozzer (1977[1921]), and exemplified in Edmonson (1982) and Roys (1933).

⁵The training of the Maya nobility in Spanish language, writing (both Spanish and Maya), and reading was conducted by the Franciscans in Yucatan, and is discussed in Collins (1977), Farriss (1984:96–97), and Lizana (1893 [1633]:46–56v).

⁶The term Toral uses in his request is “teatinos,” which Gonzalez Cicero (1978:169) notes might refer to either “Jesuits” or members of an order founded by S. Cayetano de Thiene. She prefers the former interpretation.

⁷It is almost certain that the pairing “foot, hand” derives at least partly from the Spanish, particularly Franciscan (?), convention of closing letters to the king with the expression, “we kiss your royal feet and hands.” Cf. Anderson et al. 1976:30 for Nahuatl analog.

⁸The presentation of textual examples is guided by the following conventions. Orthography and spelling follow the original, handwritten texts, facsimiles of which are in Zimmermann (1970) and Hanks (1985a). The symbol [C] is used in Maya examples to stand for glottalized [ts], written [ɕ] in the sources treated here. The line breaks and the separation into blocks are introduced here in order to help show grammatical and poetic phrasings. The original documents are written in the continuous line format of prose. In all examples, the numbering of the lines reflects both the original orthographic lines in whole numbers (1 to 7 in Example 1) and the imposed verse phrases in fractions (.1 to .3 in the first line in 1). Thus for instance, 7.2 may be read “the second phrase in the seventh orthographic line.” Beyond this heuristic utility, the numbering is arbitrary. Grammatical analyses rely on McQuown (1960) and the author’s research.

⁹Other connectives used frequently as phrasing devices include *yetel* (and, with), *tamuk* (whereas, however), *uchebal* (in order that), *ca utzac* (in order that), *lai tah oklal* (for that reason), *habla* (even though), *-ix* (and), and *xan* (too, also).

¹⁰The use of deictic elements appears to be one dimension along which genres of Maya literary and ritual language differ. In books of Chilam Balam for instance, “here,” “you,” “now,” and “we” (and so forth) are often obscured or left unspecified, making interpretation considerably more difficult. In shamanic prayer, they are precisely specified (Hanks 1984).

¹¹It is also noteworthy that the order *tepal, ahaulil* (2) is inverted to *ahaulil, tepal* (3). The ([A B] C) phrasing would be as follows: *ti yahaulilob ah bolon kin* (A); *ah bolon tz’am* (B); *tutepal ah uuc cha pat kin* (C).

¹²Alliteration is also a common feature of modern Yucatec shamanic prayer (Hanks 1984). Cf. Roys (1965:xix) on its importance in the incantations in the ritual of the *bacabs*, and see B. Tedlock (1982:Ch. 5) on sound play in Quiche divination.

¹³Other aspects of the texts that display or confirm the genuineness of the letters include frequent use of the intensifying particle *hach* (very, really); the confession of past offenses expressed with apparently heartfelt remorse (for example, lines 23–29 of the March letter); the appeal to intense affect in the relation of the Maya to the Franciscans (love, benevolence); the assertion of sincerity, as in lines (1–30) of the March letter; and the inclusion at the end of the March letter of a testimony in Spanish, attributed to the scribe, affirming the veracity of the document and of the identity of the signatories.

¹⁴The Franciscan mission in Yucatan is expressed as, “say the word of God, say mass, instruct us in our language.” This appears as a potential triplet in the text, analyzable into a couplet [say x, say y] followed by a third semantically related but slightly different line [instruct z]. A comparison of this with lines 2.5–2.7 of the February letter (Example 4) reveals a striking similarity, “they illuminate, they enlighten, they teach.” This too is a couplet, based in this case on the concept of light, followed by a related but distinct verb describing teaching. The clear parallel between the two letters on the statement of the Franciscan mission in Yucatan further demonstrates their intertextual relation. The fact that the wordings in the two are distinct but relationally homologous shows that what they share is not a stock of fixed expressions, but a more abstract logic of poetic representation.

¹⁵The association of the directions with colors and qualitative characteristics is well known in Mayan cultures. Cf. for example Edmonson (1968) on colonial Yucatec, Hanks (1984) for modern Yucatec, Edmonson (1973:241) on the Popol Vuh (Quiche), B. Tedlock (1982:Ch. 6), and Tedlock (1983:149) on Quiche, and Gossen (1974:Ch. 1) on Tzotzil.

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