THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE FUTURE OF TOTONTEPECANO MIXE:
YOUTH AND LANGUAGE IN THE MIXE HIGHLANDS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

AND

THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES

DEPARTMENT OF LINGUISTICS

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

MARCH 2005

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For Joanne & Albert Greenberg

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are a number of people that I need to thank for their friendship, support, and assistance in the production of this dissertation. I must begin by expressing my everlasting gratitude to the people of Totontepec. *Nde'yam mgujo'yüxjadap.*

Then there are my professors, who showed me tremendous kindness and patience throughout my undergraduate and graduate career, and who never failed to inspire me with their wit and intellect. Special thanks go to John Haviland, Lourdes de León, Robert Brightman, Robert Moore, Paul Kroeber—my teachers at Reed College. And at the University of Chicago: Susan Gal, Michael Silverstein, Amy Dahlstrom, William Hanks, John Lucy and many others in the departments of anthropology and linguistics and the Center for Latin American Studies. Anne Ch'ien deserves special thanks for guiding me through the University of Chicago system with such patience and expertise. I also thank the faculty of the University of Virginia's department of anthropology, who hosted me in the spring of 2002, especially: Eve Danziger, Ellen Contini-Morava, Dan Lefkowitz, Wende Marshall, Lise Dobrin, Rich Handler & Adria LaViolette.

I must also express my gratitude to the members of the Project for the Documentation of the Languages of Mesoamerica, and especially its directors: Terrence Kaufman, John Justeson, and Roberto Zavala for supporting my work on Mixe-Zoquean languages and training me in the fine art of field linguistics and language

documentation (1996-present). The field research I did in 2000 and 2001 was also made possible by a small grant (#6639) from the Wenner-Gren Foundation.

This document benefited greatly from the comments, critique, and useful suggestions provided by my friends and colleagues, including: (in no particular order) Alex Mawyer, Christopher Ball, Petra Shenk, Adi Hastings, Paul Manning, Emily McEwan-Fujita, and Jillian Cavanaugh. My last burst of writing would not have been possible without the generosity of Hylton White and Ashlinn Quinn and Hylton White's extensive proofreading and editorial advice.

Bits and pieces of the dissertation were originally presented at the University of Virginia's Linguistic Anthropology Workshop (2002), the University of Chicago's Semiotics: Culture in Context Workshop (2003), the "Michicagoan" graduate student conference (1999, 2000), and at several panels at the annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association (1998, 2001, 2002, 2003), made possible by a fantastic group of organizers, including: David Tavarez, Jennifer Dickinson, Janina Fenigsen, Robert Hamrick & Paja Faudree, and enrichened by a stellar group of discussants that included Anthony Berkeley, Bruce Mannheim, Nancy Farris, Kathryn Woolard, Richard Bauman, and Gregory Urban.

ABSTRACT

The generation of Totontepecanos born in the late 1970s and early 1980s was the first group to be systematically raised as Mixe-Spanish bilinguals, to be put through secondary school, preparatory school and beyond, and to have access to the Valley of Oaxaca and the urban centers of Mexico and the United States. In short, they were the first Totontepecanos to experience modern Western-style adolescence. Young Totontepecanos are easily the most Spanish literate segment of their community, but they also count among their numbers the most vocal and adamant Mixe language purists.

In this dissertation I examine how Totontepecanos are actively reconceptualizing the category of youth and the nature of intergenerational relations, and I assess the role that language is playing in this process. Age categories tend to be treated as an independent, static grid across which linguistic changes occur. Unfortunately, this habit distorts our view of how change actually takes place. My central argument is that the sociolinguistic category of youth needs to be understood first and foremost as a folk category and thus culturally variable. It is not simply a correlate of linguistic practices. Rather, it forms part of a linguistic ideology that dialectically engages with the linguistic practices of speakers at all age levels, driving grammatical/lexical/sociolinguistic changes by associating certain speech forms with various kinds of young people and youthful activities.

ABBREVIATIONS & SYMBOLS

1	first person	INCL	inclusive
2	second person	PL	plural
3	third person		
A	absolutive	E	ergative
VI	intransitive verb	VT	transitive verb
d	independent	COM	future/potential/irrealis
i	dependent	INC	incompletive aspect
t	transitive	IMP	imperative
ADJ	adjectivizer	APL	applicative
ASRT	assertative	CAUS	causative
DEF	definite article	DEM	demonstrative
DESID	desiderative	FOC	focus
FRUST	frustrative	HESI	hesitation marker
IND	independent pronoun	INSTR	instrumental
INV	inverse	NEG	negative
NF	non-finite	NOM	nominalizer
PERF	perfective	QUO	quotative
R-R	reflexive/reciprocal	VERS	versive

Other Symbols

-	affix boundary	#	word boundary
+	compound boundary	=	clitic boundary

e.g. öts n= yak- 'ix + pök -pa 'my teacher'
1IND 1E= CAUS- see + gain -NOM

CAPS	stressed syllable
underlining / **bold**	emphasized word or phrase

ORTHOGRAPHIC CONVENTIONS

Consonants

	Labial	*Alveolar*	*Palatal*	*Velar*	*Glottal*
Voiceless stops/affricates	p	t, ts	ch	k	'
Voiced stops	(b)	(d)		(g)	
Fricatives	(f), v	s	x	(jh)	j
Nasals	m	n	(ny)		
Liquids		l, r			
Glides			y		

Several of these symbols are at variance with standard Americanist practice, as follows:

ch	=	č
x	=	š
j	=	h
jh	=	x
ny	=	ñ

The sounds listed in parentheses are phonemic in Spanish borrowings, but *b*, *d*, *g*, and *ny* also appear phonetically in native Mixe words as a result of voicing and palatalization. The liquid sounds /l/ and /r/ are found in a number of sound symbolic lexical items in addition to Spanish borrowings. The *r* is a trilled sound. The phoneme /x/ is pronounced with retroflexion unless it precedes a /y/.

Vowels

	Front unrounded	Central unrounded	Back rounded
High	i	ü	u
Mid	e	ö	ù
Low	è	a	o

Vowel length is phonemic and is represented by doubling the symbol, as in *aa*, *ii*, *uu*. The vowel *ù* is a diphthong which begins in a more central and less rounded position and ends in a mid-back rounded position. The vowels *a* and *o* are both produced somewhat lower than Spanish a and o. The vowel written *ö* here is pronounced slightly lower than the sound represented by a schwa in the international phonetic alphabet and the vowel written *ü* is pronounced somewhat higher. Neither sound is produced with rounded lips. In rapid speech unstressed /ü/ is frequently realized as [u] when in the vicinity of a labial consonant and [i] elsewhere.

N.B. An explanation of how this practical orthography was developed and how it compares with several alternative proposals for a Mixe orthography can be found in Chapter Three.

CHAPTER ONE

FROM TOTONTEPECANOS TO "GLOBALIZANOS"

One of the highlights of the 2003 Oaxacan cultural festival at the *Museo Nacional de Culturas Populares* in Mexico City was a musical performance by Noé Alcántara Gómez entitled *öövap xa ötse'e n'ayùùk -- también canto en mi lengua mixe* (I also sing in my Mixe language). Alcántara Gómez was there to celebrate the music and language of the Mixes, a group of indigenous people who hail from a mountainous enclave east of Oaxaca City. More precisely, he was there to share some of the rich musical tradition of his hometown of Totontepec, which is located in the northwestern corner of the *Sierra Mixe* (The Mixe Highlands). This 55 year old singer-songwriter was born and raised in the Sierra Mixe, but he had moved to Oaxaca City to further his education, and then to Mexico City, where he found steady work at the post office. Over the previous several years he had been spending much of his spare time composing bilingual Mixe-Spanish songs.

Alcántara Gómez's goal, as he explained in an interview with the Notimex news service, was to "recuperar el vocabulario del mixe, y motivar a la niñez y a la juventud de mi pueblo a que cante en su propia lengua" (to recuperate the vocabulary of Mixe, and to motivate the children and the youth of my community to sing in their own language).[1] He added:

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1. Source: http://www.terra.com.mx/ArteyCultura/articulo/118907.

> *"Hace muchos años, cuando iba uno a la escuela lo castigaban en el patio cargando piedras por hablar mixe; la parte educativa se preocupó mucho por introducir el español, pero en este momento es al revés, y pienso proponerle a la gente de mi pueblo que pongan a cargar piedras al que no hable mixe."*
>
> Many years ago, when someone would to go to school, they would punish him in the schoolyard by making him haul rocks for speaking Mixe; the pro-education faction was once very anxious to introduce Spanish, but in the present moment it's reversed, and I'm thinking about proposing to my people that they make those who don't speak Mixe haul rocks around.[2]

His song-writing project forms part of a broader series of efforts made by his generation of Totontepecanos to influence the attitudes and practices of the subsequent generation—"la juventud de mi pueblo"—and their younger siblings and cousins—"la niñez."

This dissertation is an ethnographic and linguistic-anthropological study of these efforts. In part it is about how Totontepecanos came to recognize the relationship between language maintenance and youth as a problematic one. At the same time it is about those bilingual Totontepecano youths who find themselves the object of so much anxiety about and hope for the future of their community. More generally it is an exploration of what happens to a group of people when new ways of thinking about its youngest members take hold and how this development has shaped local efforts to preserve and promote local values and local ways of speaking and behaving.

In some ways Totontepec has been the victim of its own success. Back when don Noé and his peers were children, Spanish language education was just beginning to shift from the exclusive privilege of a few elite Totontepecano families to a community-

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2. Unless otherwise noted, these and all subsequent translations from Spanish to English are my own. In what follows I only include the original Spanish when it seems prudent or illuminating to do so.

wide concern, thanks to the growing presence of the federal government in the region as well as the recent arrival of two very different missionary groups—Salesian Catholics and Seventh Day Adventists. Around the time that don Noé and his contemporaries were themselves becoming parents, a campaign to obtain the road that would connect their village to the Valley of Oaxaca finally liberated the people of Totontepec from centuries of economic subordination to their Zapotec neighbors. Zapotec towns such as Yalalag and Betaza had long held a virtual monopoly over trade in and out of the Sierra Mixe. But direct access to the urban markets of Oaxaca City and Mexico City opened up the flood gates to new flows of commercial goods, media and people. For centuries the second most important language for Totontepecanos to speak and understand had been Zapotec. Almost overnight, Spanish eclipsed Zapotec as the language of commerce.

Don Noe's early experiences with Spanish were not pleasant ones, as his wry comments about hauling rocks in the schoolyard make clear. Without much prompting, he and his peers will tell grim narratives about how, lacking pencils and paper, they had to learn Spanish literacy using sticks to write in the mud of the school yard or cutting their fingers to use drops of blood when no ink was available. After enduring this kind of "education," many members of his generation vowed that *their* children would be better prepared to defend themselves in the Spanish-speaking world that seemed to be so rapidly encroaching on their own. That meant preparing them for success in elementary school by speaking whatever Spanish they could to them in their first years of life. It also meant working to acquire a local federal middle school in 1985 in order to avoid having to send their children away to boarding schools. Finally in 1994 Totontepec obtained a local branch of the state system of public preparatory schools, the

COBAO.[3] The very first group of high-school educated Totontepecanos, educated entirely in Totontepec, graduated in 1996.

Expanding the education of dozens of Totontepecano children from one or two years to six years, and then to twelve or more years, added another three to seven years of adolescence to their lives. In effect, it carved out an entirely new local age category: the teenager. Not so long ago Totontepecano boys began doing mandatory public service around the age of fourteen, and both boys and girls would begin to prepare for marriage and the formation of a new household at the age of sixteen or so. Now well over one hundred Totontepecano teenagers spend their mornings in school and their afternoons at the library or on the basketball court. As long as they maintain adequate grades, these students are officially excused from other civic duties. Nor are they expected to seek marriage partners until after they are adequately *preparado* (educated/trained).

Totontepec's older residents have deeply ambivalent feelings about these teenagers and their place in the local social order. In 1997 the Totontepecano authorities instituted a 10pm curfew, not in response to any actual acts of vandalism or teenage mayhem but as a preventative measure. Town elders had heard wild tales about how other Oaxacan communities had been plunged into chaos by drug gangs and young hoodlums. A great deal of concern began to center on the clothes that young people were wearing and the music that they listened to. Where were these commodities coming from and how were they being paid for? Did these strange fashions exercise some sort of corrupting influence? In 1999 the town's *síndico* (a post vaguely analogous

3. That is, the COlegio de BAchilleres—Oaxaca. When Totontepec's COBAO began operating in 1996, the teachers and students took over the elementary school every evening and used its classrooms. Construction of the Totontepecano COBAO campus began in 2000 and was completed in the spring of 2002.

to the chief of police) identified a group of Totontepecano boys that had started dressing in black t-shirts and bandanas, and he called them into his office for questioning. After hearing their response—a sullen chorus of *vè 'è... ka 'a öts nüjava*[4]—he proceeded to spend the remainder of the afternoon lecturing them about how any fool in Oaxaca city could dress like that, but as proud Totontepecanos they were expected to distinguish themselves from the *amaaxün* (Spaniards) and *viijnk jayu* (foreigners).[5] They might not know what their rock-and-roll t-shirts meant (or have been able to express what they represented in terms that the síndico would have understood and accepted), but as far as the town authorities were concerned these items of clothing stood for foreign values and interests.

This brings us to the title of this introductory chapter, which comes from a conversation I had one morning with Totontepec's resident genius and culture broker, Arelí Bernal Alcántara—a man whom most locals simply call "The Engineer." Don Arelí is trained as an agronomist and his passion is experimenting with techniques for increasing the yield of his cornfields. He is also the person most responsible for bringing a branch of the COBAO to Totontepec and the founder of a local cultural center called the *Instituto Kong Oy*. Kong Oy is a Mixe culture hero who, according to legend, saved his people from one Zapotec onslaught after another. Eager for victory at any price, the Zapotecs cornered Kong Oy and his army and set their mountain refuge

4. Translation: "Uh... I don't know."

5. This episode was reported to me after the fact by several independent sources. On one occasion a recounting of this story led to a debate about whether or not the síndico even had the authority to chastise this group of boys. Since most of the participants in this discussion will one day hold the office of síndico or had already done so, this was not just idle punditry.

on fire. Kong Oy outsmarted the Zapotecs by figuring out a way to hide everybody inside of the mountain until the raging fires had burned themselves out.[6]

One of the most important functions of Totontepec's Instituto Kong Oy is that it provides rehearsal space for its new *banda juvenil* (youth orchestra), which was reconstituted in 1998. Like other Mixe and Zapotec towns in the Sierra, Totontepec's musical tradition is an all-important emblem of local identity and a source of tremendous pride. Its municipal band has been the subject of several documentary films, and cassette tapes of its music are widely available. Because the town band performs at every rite of passage in one's life—baptisms, high school graduations, weddings, inaugurations, funerals—its slightly out-of-tune off-tempo sound never fails to evoke powerful feelings of nostalgia and belonging. And the band performs a diplomatic function, too, representing Totontepec's interests abroad whenever it travels to perform in neighboring mountain towns or down in the city. Many believe that the reason why the highway which now links Totontepec with the valley of Oaxaca finally got built was that an especially stirring performance by the band moved the governor of Oaxaca to tears.

I was speaking with don Arelí one afternoon about his hopes for Totontepec's *banda juvenil*. In the 1970s Totontepec's musical tradition had been deeply threatened by Adventist missionaries, who were specifically targeting musicians for conversion. Today, he explained to me, the single greatest problem that threatens the cultural integrity of his community is that too many young Totontepecanos are turning into

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6. This mythic figure is also called *Kondoy*, which literally means 'burnt king' (from the root /toy/ 'to burn'). In a recuperating move, don Arelí and other Mixe intellectuals have decided that he was originally called *Kong Oy* (from the root /'oy/ 'good') which means 'good king'. I take up the question of how Mixe historical consciousness is being adapted to reflect contemporary concerns in several subsequent chapters.

"Globalizanos." By this he meant that too many local young people were consuming music produced in distant places like Mexico City and Miami and too few were willing to take an active role in producing and enjoying their own homegrown music. His great hope was that the debut performance of the youth orchestra at the November 2000 fiesta of Santa Cecilia (the patron saint of musicians) would turn the tide in this latest struggle to shape Totontepec's destiny.

With his catchy neologism "globalizano", don Arelí invoked several of the most pressing questions in contemporary anthropological research. How are local cultural scenes being reshaped by the globalization of economic arrangements, legal frameworks, flows of commodities, ideas and fashions? How are local groups responding to (and, indeed, actively participating in) these changes? And to this we can add the following: as indigenous groups become increasingly sophisticated and self-conscious about the politics of having and displaying an indigenous culture, what does it mean when their children find themselves so attracted to alien styles and symbols?

The Anthropology of Local Language Communities

Linguistic anthropology and related fields have only recently taken up the challenge of systematically investigating the processes through which language communities emerge (e.g. Crowley 1990; Romaine 1992; Siegel 1987), persist (e.g. Kroskrity 1993; Woolard 1989) and sometimes dwindle and disappear (e.g. Dorian 1981; Gal 1979; Moore 2000). This emerging body of scholarship addresses the central sociolinguistic and historical linguistic concerns of language contact, bilingualism, code-switching, creolization and standardization (cf. Heller, ed. 1988; Milroy & Muysken, eds. 1995; Myers-Scotton 1993; Thomason & Kaufman 1988). However, in

each case the object of study is not a particular linguistic variety in and of itself. Rather, the focus is on the complex communities in which these varieties co-exist with other linguistic forms.

Throughout this dissertation I follow Silverstein (e.g. Silverstein 1996a) in taking care to distinguish the concept of a *language community* from that of the *speech community*. Language communities are dialectically constituted cultural forms, like the languages that they centers around. Members of a language community all share some degree of allegiance to the shared grammar that is presupposed when they communicate with one another. A speech community on the other hand is defined by regularities of discursive interaction among some population of speakers, not necessarily by shared grammar. Speech communities are always heterogeneous and usually plurilingual. Speech communities are the broader context in which language communities emerge and are transformed. Consider for example the common case of a trading outpost or seaport in which people who speak non-mutually-intelligible languages meet to conduct trade. We can imagine that over time these speakers develop a pidgin, a simplified linguistic system for doing business with one another. We can even imagine a set of sociohistorical circumstances in which speakers, over the course of several generations, flesh-out this pidgin and a complete language emerges—a creole language as they are commonly called.

Language communities become "local" language communities when they become involved in and defined by larger processes such as imperial expansion, nation-state formation and the intensification of international networks of trade and communication. As ever-increasing flows of people, commodities and ideas around the globe enter local spaces, people manage to take what is seemingly residual to such

processes and therefore negatively defined and produce for themselves a contrastive and positive sense of belonging. They assert their distinctive local identity through practices and institutions which foster and reinforce a sense of historical and ethno-geographical community boundedness (Appadurai 1996; see also Geertz 1983; Feld & Basso, eds. 1996; Keane 1997).

Often linguistic practices are a crucial component of these local projects. Speaking a local language becomes a way of asserting that one belongs to a locality (Silverstein 1998). We can contrast local language communities with, for example, the increasingly global English language community. Most of its members will never interact with each other and may have startlingly different ideas about what English means to them. Nevertheless they may share a variety of assumptions about e.g. how to form a passive sentence, how to encode progressive aspect, how to coin a new verb.

Contemporary research on the creation and maintenance of linguistic boundaries (e.g. LePage and Tabouret-Keller 1985; Irvine & Gal 2000; Urciuoli 1995) plays a crucial part in the anthropology of local language communities. This research builds on the earlier insights of Frederik Barth (1969), who argued that ethnicities are necessarily produced and maintained *in contrast* to other social groupings and *within* larger social ecologies. Thus, understanding the nature of ethnicities and other social groupings requires a reconceptualization of how group-internal dynamics and inter-group boundary negotiations fit together in larger orders of social process. In a similar fashion, Irvine and Gal (2000) propose a shift in focus away from shared rules of interpretation (Gumperz 1972; Hymes 1986) or shared attitudes about linguistic variants (Labov 1972) within a given speech community.[7] Instead they call attention to processes of

7. Or social network (Milroy 1980), or community of practice (Wenger 1998).

linguistic differentiation and boundary-making. They argue that the language ideologies of all the participants in a given sociolinguistic field are central to these processes of boundary recognition. This insight, that people's sets of beliefs about language and their culture of language use mediate between language structure, linguistic practices and social organization, has become a cornerstone of contemporary linguistic anthropological theory.[8] A host of studies confirm the crucial role that linguistic ideologies play in how patterns of language use and grammatical structures change over time.

Code-switching practices have come to be seen as an especially rich and revealing site where linguistic differentiation and the ideologization of linguistic difference can be observed and investigated. Among other things, speakers' choice of one language or the other can reveal "...how they understand their historic position and identity within regional economic systems structured around dependency and unequal development" (Gal 1987:637). In more general terms what code-switching does

> is to flag for the analyst a moment, a locale, a piece of social process where somehow at least two sets of symbolic and material resources are at issue for the participants. It is as a result a point of entry into understanding the nature and significance of those resources for the different groups of people involved in their production, allocation and consumption, and hence into the nature of the relationship among those groups (Heller 1995:171).

Linguists oriented toward more formalist and cognitivist concerns have labored to understand the mechanics of code-switching and to distinguish it from such practices as code-mixing and borrowing. In this dissertation I largely side-step these concerns and

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8. A number of related, but distinct definitions of "linguistic ideologies" are in circulation. Two of the most often cited are: "sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use" (Silverstein 1979:193), and: "cultural system[s] of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with the loading of moral and political interests" (Irvine 1989:255).

focus instead on how speakers come to recognize a given linguistic form or lexical item as belonging to either or both codes and what the consequences of those beliefs are, both for communication and ultimately for the grammar of each language. In subsequent chapters we will consider, for example, what happens when utterances that older Totontepecanos understand to be entirely Mixe are perceived by their children as riddled with Spanish borrowings. And we will ask why it should be that utterances in Totontepecano Mixe that are about as structurally distant from Spanish grammar as you could possibly get are nevertheless perceived by certain speakers of Southern Highland Mixe as distorted by the corrupting influence of Spanish.

Obsolescence and Adolescence

In this dissertation I engage with a range of scholarly literatures and concerns. Chief among them are the study of languages shift and linguistic obsolescence and the study of language socialization. While the two areas of concern complement each other nicely, they have rarely been addressed together. Kulick (1992), Pye (1992), and others have lamented that obsolescence studies have largely neglected to investigate language acquisition and socialization, even though linguistic obsolescence is essentially the result of a failure to transmit a language from one generation to the next.

In her essay "Age as a Sociolinguistic Variable" Eckert points out that: "[t]o the extent that social and political events can affect the way people speak, age differences in variation can reflect social and political change" (Eckert 1997:166). I think she would agree, though, that age-linked linguistic variation can do more than simply reflect broader changes. It can also be the semiotic modality through which changes are understood and articulated, hence a kind of second-order indexicality. At the same time

it can be or stand in for the very set of resources that conflicting parties are struggling to control (Irvine 1989).

In this light it makes sense to take a critical look at the notion of *generations* and how this it has been employed in linguistics. The literature on linguistic obsolescence and language death frequently describes the declining use of indigenous languages as a process that takes place over the course of several generations of speakers. Annette Schmidt (1990:117), in her discussion of the fate of Aboriginal Australian languages, diagrams the relation between generational groups and language loss like this:

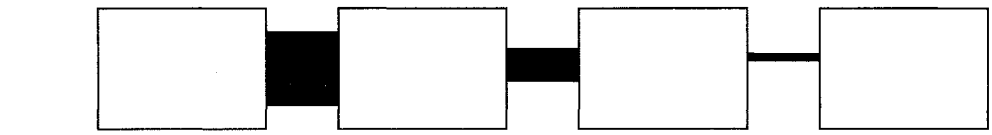

Figure 1.1. "Language transmission and language loss"

She writes: "Regardless of the varying time spans of the language shift process, a common feature of most language shift situations is that each generation has considerably less language knowledge than the preceding one to transmit to their own children (Schmidt 1990: 118).

Michael Krauss (1998:11), in a strikingly similar fashion, has developed and refined the following four point scale for assessing the vitality of indigenous American and Canadian languages:

Class A: still spoken by all generations including young children

Class B: spoken only by parental generation and up

Class C: spoken only by grandparental generation and up

Class D: spoken only by the very oldest, over 70, usually fewer than ten persons—nearly extinct

In the mid-1990s, according to Krauss' calculations, 11 percent of the indigenous languages spoken in the United States belonged to Class A, 17 percent to Class B, 40 percent to class C, and 31 percent to class D. In the intervening decade, a majority of C-languages have probably become D languages, close to falling entirely out of daily use.

While I recognize the utility of such a classification, it raises some obvious questions. Krauss admits that it is intended to be used impressionistically, with hedges such as "partly in Class A" or "at best in Class B." He even worries that the A-B-C-D scale may even be a "dangerous oversimplification" (1998:14). Nevertheless it makes explicit a certain intuition shared by many of the outsiders who have been documenting language shift and loss (e.g. Dorian, ed. 1989) and, indeed, many of the speakers who are participating in these processes (e.g. Gutiérrez Morales 1998). This is the sense that language shift takes place over the course of several generations and that at some level it is the result of failed inter-generational transmission of linguistic (and other cultural) knowledge.

What has been missing from the discussion on language shift is a serious attempt to unpack and examine this commonsense notion. Language shift and linguistic obsolescence can be viewed as particularly stark cases of what sociologist Karl Mannheim (1952 [1928]) famously labeled "the problem of generations." The essence of the problem is this: historical change is continuous: people are constantly being born and passing away. And yet, people experience historical change in terms of discontinuous generational groups, sometimes marked off from one another by "generation gaps" (see also Ryder 1965). Similarly, diachronic linguistic change is always underway, but speakers are apt to associate particular linguistic variants with specific age groups or historical periods, and specific landmark events.

Students of language socialization and language shift could also benefit from thinking about age and age categories in a more critical way. In a recent review article on language socialization Garrett and López (2002:349) explain that:

> Studies of adolescents have tended to focus on their construction and negotiation of social identities and on the formation of identity-based social groupings in which gender, class, ethnicity, and other salient social groupings are constituted and indexed through both discursive and nondiscursive practices…

My sense is that they intend this to be a compliment, whereas I would respectfully suggest that this highlights one of the great shortcomings of research on adolescent language use. Too many investigations that claim to be about adolescence or youth turn out to be studies of the social construction (and in particular, the discursive construction) of gender, class and race. The novelty here is that instead of working with adults, they have chosen to investigate how adolescents do race, gender, etc. And there are, in fact, sound reasons for suspecting that adolescents play a crucial role in the formation of e.g. racial identities. But what about how adolescence itself is "constituted and indexed through both discursive and nondiscursive practices"? Unfortunately, adolescence continues to be treated as a given, and age continues to be treated as an independent variable.

This habit leads to a distorted picture of the social worlds that our subjects inhabit. And it obscures the important interconnections between age categories and other kinds of social groupings. How else can we understand, for example, why certain stigmatized social identities become infantilized, or how traditionalist stances become associated with old age? Throughout this dissertation I argue that it is simply not sufficient to view language socialization and linguistic change over time as processes that happen across static, unchanging grids of age categories or life stages. In the case

of vulnerable local language communities being swept up in profound regional and global transformations, ways of reckoning age categories are also in flux and are as much the product of language use as the background context in which it occurs. Age must be taken seriously as a social variable every bit as complex, constructed and sensitive to political-economic contexts as gender, race and class.

I am certainly not the first person to stress the necessity of viewing age categories like "youth" or "adulthood" as necessarily embedded in more encompassing systems of age categories that are themselves connected in myriad ways to other dimensions of local culture. Anthropologists have been arguing for this perspective at least since Margaret Mead published *Coming of Age in Samoa* in 1928. Nor am I the first to notice that when local ways of reckoning age and human development are stretched, distorted or replaced, these changes impact every other aspect of life, including patterns of language use. One of the most thoughtful recent discussions of age and anthropological theorizing is found in Sarah Lamb's (2000) *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes*, and investigation of aging and gender in West Bengal. Lamb laments that "[j]ust as old people are often separated socially in the United States... aging is often separated theoretically in anthropological discourse and treated as a closed domain of inquiry, isolated from broader questions about how sociocultural worlds are constituted more generally" (Lamb 2000:8). She continues, arguing eloquently that

> [s]ocial relations are "aged" just as they are gendered... Processes of aging (however defined) cut across all of our bodies and lives; they play a central role in how we construct gender identities, power relations, and the wider social and material worlds we inhabit—indeed, what it is to be a person (Lamb 2000:9).

It is frustrating that age has been and continues to be given short shrift in comparison with race, gender, class, ethnicity. However, I suppose it should not be terribly

surprising given that we live in a society where racial segregation is, if not unthinkable, highly stigmatized, while age segregation is still seen as entirely reasonable and even natural.

Which ever way youth and maturity (or other ways of reckoning juniority/ seniority) get contrastively defined in a given social order, they are inevitably linked to distinct sets of linguistic variants. That is to say, different words, accents, speech genres and other linguistic stuff evokes or "points to" different age identities. These indexical connections can quickly become naturalized and the history of their emergence forgotten or suppressed. This is the semiotic process that Irvine & Gal (2000) label *erasure*. For instance, in American popular culture we find "kids saying the darndest things" simply because we believe that this is what kids naturally do, rather than recognizing their behavior and adult responses to it as the product of a very particular set of discourses and practices about children, located at a very specific moment in our history.

The cultural historian Philippe Ariès (1962) points out that in Renaissance Europe *adolescence* was a term that referred to the first half of life, that period which began at birth and lasted till full maturity was reached (adolescence, followed by senescence and death). And terms such "youth", "child" and "babe" had more to do with the status of dependency than with age or physical development *per se*. His thesis is that between the 13th and 20th centuries children moved from a rather peripheral position in European society to the focus of everyone's attention. He means focus in a completely literal sense. When you examine pre-Renaissance portrayals of European families, children are typically shoved off to the margins or entirely absent. When you look at contemporary family portraits—think Sears Portrait studio—the children are

displayed front and center. Ariès sees the emergence of modern adolescence at the end of the 19th century as the end-result of two centuries of industrialization, urbanization and the spread of universal public education through Western Europe.

In other parts of the world modern adolescence, what Pierre Bourdieu (1993:96) once called "the halfway house between childhood and adulthood," is an even more recent arrival. And its appearance on the scene has had unexpected and profound consequences for local notions of personhood and group identity. The imposition and adoption of public education, new forms of labor migration, mass media, Christianity, and other mainstays of modernity have stretched and distorted indigenous systems of reckoning age and understanding human development. In particular these developments have conspired to insert this new intermediate life stage between childhood and adulthood, however it happens that childhood and adulthood are locally understood and ritually demarcated. Following swiftly in the wake of modern adolescence are the inevitable moral panics about the role of the adolescents in society. They get viewed as irresponsible, wild-oats-sewing, not-yet-fully-formed adults. Enormous resources get spent on socializing them to uphold local values and reproduce the local social order. But the very institutions created to accommodate them, schools in particular, serve to further set them apart from both their elders and their younger siblings and cousins (see e.g. Amit-Talai & Wulff, eds. 1995)

This, I argue, is precisely what is beginning to take place in Totontepec. And Totontepec is not unique. A number of anthropological studies have focused on the arrival of modern adolescence in indigenous communities and its far-reaching impact. Richard Condon (1987:7), for instance, writes that before Euro-Canadian contact,

Copper Inuit culture featured no prolonged period of maidenhood or bachelorhood that divided childhood from adulthood:

> The attainment of social maturity and adult responsibilities roughly coincided with the attainment of physical maturity. The harsh arctic climate and scarcity of resources did not allow a prolonged period of adolescence. Children had to quickly acquire the necessary skills for survival.

Interactions with one's parents were far more important than peer-peer interactions in Copper Inuit society, because the nuclear family was the primary social and economic unit. The extreme dispersal of the population meant that young people needed their parents' help in order to meet and obtain spouses. However, Condon observes that recent changes, including the concentration of populations into nucleated settlements, increasing contact with neighboring settlements and the introduction of formal schooling have all contributed to the "elaboration of a stage of life now referred to as the 'teenage' years" (Condon 1987:7-8).

Peterson (1976) reported something quite similar occurring in Mississippi Choctaw communities in the late 1960s and early 1970s. He identified four developments that had led to "a socially defined grouping of adolescents of very recent origin (1976:161)." These four developments were: the mechanization of agriculture, the completion of a local high school, increasing access to consumer goods (especially television sets and automobiles) and access to mass media. Two of the consequences that he observed were hesitant attempts at "dating" and a delay in the timing of marriage. Intriguingly, Peterson writes that the up-and-coming generation of Choctaw adolescents were experimenting with a new form of Choctaw identity that would "embrace all the Choctaw population" (1976:165) rather than specific sub-communities (defined by their dialect). This group of young Choctaws, made up principally of high

school students, had begun forming traditional dance groups and choral groups in an effort to create for themselves a "shared tribal culture" that their parents had not known.

In other parts of the world comparable changes have been taking place. Let me quickly cite two examples. In the city of Kathmandu Mark Liechty (1995) found that the Nepalese now recognize two types of young people, one type that goes by a Nepalese expression that means "boys and girls" and another type that they call *teens* (they have borrowed the English word). Teens are young urban Nepalese who have the disposable income to partake in what Liechty labels "consumer modernity" as well as those young people who dream (largely in vain) of obtaining that kind of lifestyle. In other words teen-ness in Kathmandu is a category of personhood that is defined by real and imagined patterns of consumption rather than by physical development, age grade, or chronology. For many poor and disaffected young Nepalese, teen identity has a powerful allure and undeniable glamour. At the same time older residents of Kathmandu reserve the label "teen" for the no-good trouble-makers who loiter on street corners, refuse to settle down and start a family and squander their family money on drugs, pornography and designer jeans.

In Sharon Hutchinson's (1996) re-visitation of the Nuer after decades of civil war and strife she reports on the emergence of a new category of person known as the bull-boy. As Evans-Pritchard explained long ago, "bull-boy" is the quintessential Nuer oxymoron. Bull-boys are young men who for one reason or another did not undergo ritual scarification and hence never joined a Nuer age set. They skipped that most important male rite of passage, often in order to go to school and obtain government jobs. While bull-boys are not truly men in the eyes of the traditionalists, their

knowledge of English and Arabic and their access to capital give them undue power and influence.

Nowhere is the role of public education more apparent than in Eckert's research on phonological changes taking place in the suburbs of Detroit (Eckert 1988, 1989, 2000). Her work raises important questions about the timing of how and when during the course of a linguistic life course social change is most likely to provoke linguistic change. Adolescents are leading the way in phonological innovation all over the English-speaking world (Chambers 1995). Eckert cites many aspects of the sociology of American adolescence that contribute to this pattern. Foremost among these factors is the adolescent's relationship to the institution of the public high school. It is "almost a defining fact" she writes (Eckert 2000:5). Even young people who do not attend high school are not positively defined by their alternative choices—they are stigmatized as "drop-outs." Her data largely mirror the patterns found in other Western, urban contexts where adolescents are treated as a distinct age group with only partial adult rights and responsibilities, and where they spend their days in school, set apart from the adult sphere. Think for example of Paul Willis' classic study of working class British "lads" who define themselves in opposition to the studious, obedient "ear 'oles" (Willis 1977).

Eckert reveals how class-related differences in adolescent orientation to the high school social order are leading to differences in the influence of sociolinguistic norms, which cluster together and are perceived as distinct "styles." These differences, in turn, shape the flow of phonological change within and between the communities she studied. Those suburban teenagers who participate in working class social networks and spend more time in the city—the "burnouts"—are acquiring urban linguistic

innovations more rapidly than their upper-middle class, college-bound peers—the "jocks."

Should we expect to find this kind of stylistic and sociolinguistic differentiation emerging in contexts where high schools have just recently been introduced? It appears that young Totontepecanos are in fact sorting themselves out into two groups, one of which is oriented toward agricultural pursuits and traditional careers within the local social order and another that aspires to move beyond the local community. The latter group is adopting urban styles and foreign values more readily; the former is apt to make fun of their citified peers for doing so. Their situation, however, is made more complex by the fact that these youths are almost all bilingual. While the local sociolinguistic variation of Spanish indeed reflects a tug-of-war between several different norm-generating sites, between standardized Mexican Spanish and regional, rural vernacular Spanish, the norms for Totontepecano Mixe are all generated within the community. So, too, are the norms regulating code choice. And crucially, Mixe is not spoken at all in Totontepecano classrooms and rarely in the schoolyard. The norms that govern Mixe language use are being generated elsewhere. Another profound difference is that unlike many American households, many Totontepecano families hedge their bets by sending their most studious children to school, keeping a few at home to work in the cornfields, and having one or two seek out their fortunes in the city.

The wave of recent publications in linguistic anthropology and related fields on youth language and youth culture partly reflects the growing focality of children in our lives. But it also reflects a growing recognition of the new economic and demographic realities of the late 20th/early 21st centuries. It should not be surprising that in the

"greying" societies of the United States and Western Europe, where much of the labor is performed by significantly younger immigrant groups, refugees from post-colonial wars, and internal minority populations, we find that emblematic bits of the way that those under-classes speak are not only associated with working class authenticity and street smarts but with youthfulness itself.[9] Witness the German youths who use Turkish expletives to offend their parents, the Catalan street toughs who use Andalusian to express their masculinity and contempt for all things middle-class (Pujolar 2001), the English kids who pepper their talk with Punjabi and Caribbean linguistic material (Rampton 1995), and the French and Israeli youths who strategically employ Arabic slang.

Indigenous youths, like young Mixes, Inuits and Choctaws, find themselves in the opposite boat when their local languages become associated with custom, tradition, and antiquity. There dilemma is analogous to the that of the Basque youth described by Jacqueline Urla (1993), who not only have to "confront their own contradictory feelings about modernity and Basque culture" but have to do so in the midst of a sea of mass produced images that portray the Basque people as either "quaint" or as "terrorists" (Urla 1993:118). Can indigenous Mexican youths speak their language or at least employ emblematic bits of it without sounding like living archeological relics? Is it possible to sound young in their own language?

An often-cited study that addresses this question is Annette Schmidt's (1985) monograph on *Young People's Dyirbal*. Schmidt studied the speech of the adolescent residents of an Australian settlement called Jambun. Her focus is on what she calls "young people's Dyirbal" (YD), a form of the Pama-Nyungan language Dyirbal

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9. A number of economists have labeled this demographic trend the "geezer glut." Conservative pundit Patrick Buchanan has on several occasions glumly referred to it as "the death of the West."

characterized by reduced morphology and numerous English borrowings. She describes how older Dyirbal speakers view YD as "mixed-up" and "full of mistakes", but then she goes on to analyze how young Jambuners were using it as an in-group code to distinguish themselves both from their elders and from their peers at the settlement school. She also gives serious attention the non-standard "Jambun English" that these young people were using.

A second study that bears directly on these questions is Don Kulick's (1992) *Language Shift and Social Reproduction*. Kulick reports on how a local language called Taiap is being replaced by a national language, Tok Pisin, in the small village of Gapun, in the Sepik River Valley region of Papua New Guinea. Through a careful analysis of Gapuner language use and their ideas about language he confirms the centrality of child rearing and language socialization practices in this shift from local multilingualism to Taiap-Tok Pisin bilingualism and finally to Tok Pisin monolingualism. Kulick essentially argues that because what it means to be an adult human being has changed so drastically as a result of the intensive efforts of Protestant missionaries, Gapuners began to raise their children in new ways. These new practices ended up associating Tok Pisin with masculinity, maturity, and self-control while Taiap became ever more closely linked to childishness, selfishness, and impulsiveness and other undesirable attributes. As a result, Gapuner children stopped learning Taiap, despite the fact that no one in the village ever explicitly decided that this should be so. Indeed, Kulick reported that many of the adults were surprised and a little puzzled by this development.

At first blush, it would appear that this dissertation explores much of the same thematic and theoretical territory that Kulick so ably covered. However, there is one key difference. Kulick implies that while notions of what it means to be an adult human

being were being transformed, Gapuner notions about their children and childhood had remained relatively static, less "penetrated" by occidental, Christian culture. Whether or not this was actually the case in Gapun, I found rather the opposite to be taking place in Totontepec.

A third major inspiration for this project was the monograph *Speaking Mexicano*, by Jane and Kenneth Hill (1986), which was a groundbreaking publication in its day and helped to re-stimulate interest in the relationship between patterns of language use and political economy. It is this body of work more than any other that encouraged me to reach beyond my work on the grammatical structure of indigenous Mexican languages and consider the interplay between these linguistic forms and the social and historical contexts ways in which they emerged. In their book and a series of related publications (esp. Hill & Hill 1980; Jane Hill 1985, 1992), Hill & Hill analyze an ongoing shift from Nahuatl-Spanish bilingualism to Spanish monolingualism in the Malinche Volcano region in Central Mexico. They identify a highly hispanicized register of Mexicano speech that they call the "power code" and a second register which they label a "purist code." Power-code speakers mix Spanish lexical items, particularly discourse markers, into their Nahuatl speech in order to evoke the power and prestige of the Spanish-speaking overlords. The power code emerged during an era in which access to Spanish symbolic resources was very limited and highly valued. Purist code, in contrast, self-consciously excludes Spanish-sounding words. And a favorite purist practice is to liberally criticize the presence of hispanicisms in other peoples' speech. When a speakers uses purist code, he implies that the presence of hispanicisms in his interolocutor's speech is indicative of corruption and ignorance.

Hill and Hill see these competing codes, correctly I think, as verbal weapons being used in an intergenerational power struggle between the elderly men who had been running things in the Malinche region and the middle-aged men attempting to wrest control from them. These older men may advocate purity, but they speak the language of power. Hill and Hill have much less to say about the youngest generation of Malinche residents. However, they do suggest that one of the unfortunate results of this conflict may be that young people have chosen not to speak Nahuatl at all in order to avoid being criticized by their purist elders for speaking it poorly.

Be that as it may, the unsung hero of *Speaking Mexicano* is the Hills' sixteen year old translator, Alfredo. He is not merely a competent speaker of both Spanish and Mexicano. He is skilled enough to beat the best purists at their own game. In one vivid scene a 65 year old man named Don Leobardo, who had spent most of his life in Mexico city and speaks Nahuatl quite poorly, mounts a purist attack on Alfredo. However, when Don Leobardo tries to stump Alfredo by asking him how old he is, Alfredo coolly utters *máhtlactli huan chicuacen* 'sixteen' rather than the Spanish number *dieciseis* that Leobardo had been expecting. Leobardo is taken aback. He repeats Alfredo's response thoughtfully, nods his head with approval and actually backs off (Hill & Hill 1986:133-34):

23.	**DL:**	Y, y nicnequi nicmati quen	And, and I want to know that, how
24.		quenin motoca, in, montantzin?	how is your mother named?
25.	**A**:	Quēnin ītōca?	How her name is?
26.	**DL**:	Tlen itoca?	What is her name?
27.	**A**:	Pues, quēh yōnimitzonilih,	Well, like I told you already,
28.		Ana Montes.	Ana Montes.
29.	**DL**:	Huan motahtzin?	And your father?
30.	**A**:	Otilio Zapata	Otilio Zapata
31.	**DL**:	Entonces, ye moneye	Then it's now, it's mixed
32.		moneneloa.	Now.

33.	**A**:	Aha.	Uh-huh.
34.	**DL**:	Ye moneneloa.	Now it's mixed.
35.	**A**:	… ye neneloa īca--	… now it's mixed with--
36.	**DL**:	Ye moneneloa.	Now it's mixed.
37.	**A**:	īca castellano.	With Spanish.
38.	**DL**:	Y, in teh, quezqui	And as for you, how old
39.		xihuitl ticpia?	are you?
40.	**A**:	In neh? Nicpia	Me? I'm
41.		máhtlactli huaan chicuacen.	sixteen ("ten and six").
42.	**DL**:	Máhtlactli huan chicuacen.	Ten and six.

This is more to this scene than Alfredo's impressive Nahuatl numeracy. Hill & Hill point out that when you look closely at lines 24-27 you can see that Leobardo fails to distinguish between between short and long vowels (e versus ē and o versus ō) despite Alfredo's attempts to correct his pronunciation. Alfredo also tries to correct Leobardo's grammar. Leobardo's initial phrasing of the question "what is your mother's name" is a calque of the Spanish clause ¿cómo se llama? Rather than simply answering Leobardo Alfredo echoes his oddly-worded question back to him. Then again in lines 34-37 Alfredo steps in to help Leobardo correctly formulate the sentence "now it's mixed with Spanish." Alfredo is running linguistic circles around his elder.

Whether or not Alfredo was an exceptional figure in the Malinche Volcano region in the early 1980s when Hill & Hill did their sociolinguistic survey, I found that the Sierrra Mixe in the late 1990s was bursting at the seams with Alfredo-types. The biggest purists in Totontepec were not older men, defending their privileges. They were high school students and recent graduates; and many of them were young women. Likewise, when I would ask people to identify the best Mixe speakers in town more often then not they would give me the names of people who were not much older than Alfredo.

Before concluding this section let me quickly note that the other significant set of differences between the Mexicano case described by Hill & Hill and the Mixe case has to do with how these two groups of indigenous people experienced Spanish conquest, the colonial era and post-colonial Mexico, and how those experiences have shaped their language attitudes, self-conception and contemporary political aspirations. Whereas Nahuatl speakers "bore the brunt of cultural contact with the Spanish" (Lockhart 1991:2), Mixe-Spanish contact was much more circumscribed, and its consequences subtler. Because the timing and degree of Mixe integration into the surrounding colonial New Spanish and post-colonial Mexican worlds contrast in significant ways with the better attested cases of Mexico's Nahuatl- and Mayan-speaking indigenous communities this dissertation should be of great interest to other Mesoamericanists.[10]

The Field Research

I began studying Totontepecano Mixe in the summer of 1996, under the auspices of the Project for the Documentation of the Languages of Mesoamerica (PDLMA). I first visited Totontepec in the summer of 1998. On that occasion, and in subsequent visits, I lived with the family of my first PDLMA linguistic consultant, Oliva Amaya Osorio. Oliva was a single mother in her early twenties who lived with her parents and other kin in a neighborhood located twenty minutes (by foot) from the center of town. At any one time between eight and eighteen adults and children were living in her house. The Amaya Osorio household was always bustling with activity. In

10. It bears repeating that Nahuatl-Spanish contact also led to the Nahuatlization of Mexican Spanish. The vast majority of indigenous lexical material incorporated into the lexicon of Mexican Spanish comes from Nahuatl, e.g. place names, terms for native plants and technologies.

the domestic sphere, much of Totontepecano life still revolves around the acquisition and preparation of food through a combination of corn farming, gathering and bartering. This family was no exception in this regard. They basically lived off the land, but they supplemented their income in a variety of ways. For example, they had built a brick oven and baked and sold bread whenever they could obtain the necessary ingredients.

The thing that set the Amaya Osorio family apart from most of their neighbors is that they belonged to a small religious splinter group, the *reformistas* (Reformed Seventh Day Adventists). Reformistas were known for their strict vegetarian diet, abstinence and contempt for Catholic and even mainstream Seventh Day Adventist practices and beliefs. In fact, after my arrival in 1998 I found myself obliged to dance, drink, swear and make it patently clear to other Totontepecanos that I was not a *reformista* missionary. Had I been one, I would have been quickly sent packing by the local authorities. Fortunately, as suspicion gave way to familiarity I found that I was able to move easily between the different religious groups in town. And because of my Jewish background (a novelty in the Sierra Mixe), I was never obliged to declare allegiance to any of the rival religious factions.

After one month-long visit to Totontepec in August 1998 and a second one the following summer, I asked for and received permission from the town authorities to return and carry out my dissertation research there in 2000 and 2001. One of the conditions of my stay was that I live and work in the community as any citizen of Totontepec would do. A second condition was that I present my final results to community in a form easily accessible to them and deposit a copy of my dissertation in the town library. The authorities made it clear to me that my stay was conditional and that at any moment the town could revoke my permission. So, with utmost care not to

make a nuisance of myself or upset anybody unduly, I began my dissertation research in January 2000.

I did four months of field work from January 2000 to April 2000 and another nine months beginning in June 2000 and ending in March 2001.[11] While I spent the majority of my days in Totontepec, I made regular trips to Oaxaca City once or twice a month, a couple of brief trips to Mexico City and a two-week long trip to Guadalajara, where I lived with a Totontepecano family that ran a café in that city. I briefly visited Oaxaca City and Totontepec again in August 2002. I also made several visits to Totontepec's *agencias* (satellite villages) and *rancherías* (lowland agricultural settlements) to have a look around and meet some of the residents. In the future I hope to return to these outlying areas and do a comprehensive study of life and language use there but time did not permit such an undertaking in 2000-2001.

I spent most of my first four months in and around Oliva Amaya's neighborhood, a collection of two dozen or so homes built on a steep slope on the road northward to Amatepec. I worked for an average of two hours per day with one or another linguistic consultant on eliciting grammatical data or transcribing recorded texts. I spent another hour or so each day conducting informal, open-ended interviews. When I was not doing elicitation, surveying, or writing up my field notes I did daily chores with my host family and visited with the neighbors. Most of these chores involved the collection and processing of corn, coffee and firewood. Since young and middle aged men spent most of their days working in the fields or in construction and since quite a few of them had left to find their fortune in the United States or other parts of Mexico, almost all of my initial socializing was with young mothers, children and

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11. This period of work was funded by the Wenner-Gren Foundation (Gr. #6639), for which I am grateful.

grandparents (in descending order of frequency). When I would go on trips to the city I would return with bags full of diapers, knitting supplies and baby formula. The recipients appreciated this gesture, but the diaper deliveries earned me a *colorful* reputation in other circles.

When I returned at the end of June 2000 to begin my second long stint in of fieldwork the town authorities presented me with a half-joking invitation to become a *topíl* (errand boy) for the remainder of the calendar year. I accepted their proposal. This low-ranking public office (which I discuss in much more detail in Chapter Two) involved spending one week out of every four doing unpaid community service all day every day. As a topíl I worked with a crew of young men from dawn till dusk painting, sweeping, delivering messages, paving streets with cobblestones, guarding the town jail and other assorted tasks. For the first time I was able to really observe how young Totontepecano men spent their days. The job also gave me unprecedented new access to the public affairs of Totontepec and the day-to-day operation of its government. My willingness to involve myself in this way with the community opened up a number of previously closed doors and helped to solidify my relationship with the town.

The annual calendar in Totontepec is punctuated by a series of important civil and religious events. I attended all of these events and took notes and piles of photographs. Several local entrepreneurs make and sell videotapes of these events. Rather than filming many of these activities myself, I ended up purchasing copies of their videos and re-viewing the events through local filmmakers' eyes. Two annual fiestas are held, one in mid-August to celebrate *Asunción* (the Virgin Mary of the Ascension). The other is held on January 20 in honor of *San Sebastian*. Musical performances take place on November 22 to celebrate *Santa Cecilia*, the patron saint of

musicians. Community-wide religious observances are also held on Christmas, Easter, and—most importantly—the Day of the Dead. Town assemblies are held every month or two, and on the first Sunday of every September the town assembles to nominate and elect cargo holders for the following year. These newly elected officers take up their new positions on January 1st, in a ceremony in which ribbon-adorned *bastones* (wooden staves) are handed over from the old set of civil authorities to the new group. I attended many of the town assemblies, but was strictly forbidden to tape- or video-record any of the discussions that took place there. This policy was an expression of Totontepecanos' desire to control the flow of information into and out of their community—a move that they felt was needed in order to maintain their autonomy and to protect their reputation.

In the course of my investigation I drew on the methodological strategies employed by a number of inter-related fields including speaker-centered sociolinguistics (e.g. Milroy 1987), ethnography of speaking (e.g. Hymes 1962) and Peircian semiotic anthropology (e.g. Parmentier 1994, Silverstein 1996b). The project also drew heavily on the approach of language socialization studies with its twin focus on "socialization through the use of language and socialization to use language" (Schieffelin and Ochs, eds. 1986:163). Grammatical data were generated primarily through one-on-one elicitation sessions with several different linguistic consultants. Data taken from transcriptions of spoken Mixe discourse provided for the elaboration and refinement of the conclusions reached during the elicitation process. I spent an average of 5-10 hours per week doing this kind of elicitation. Sociolinguistic survey data was collected through a combination of structured and more informal interviews.

The research involved a number of tasks, including ethnographic observation and analysis of Totontepecanos' language use, formal linguistic analysis of the

grammatical and discursive resources involved, and sociolinguistic surveying and analysis of the distribution of language ideologies and linguistic resources across the community. I also collected some historical data through a combination of library and archival research in Totontepec and Oaxaca City and the taping of oral histories. All of the data and interviews were recorded using a minidisc recorder and stereo microphone and then later transcribed, annotated and catalogued as necessary. Some of the transcription and surveying that I carried out was done with the aid of paid consultants from the community.

When I began my field work my plan was to study the speech of adolescent Totontepecanos. I had a few broad questions in mind. First, how do adolescents in indigenous Mexican communities employ their newly acquired linguistic resources and ideas about language as they begin to establish their adult social identities? Second, how does adolescent language socialization contribute to changing patterns of language use in such places? After a few months of research, a third question, lurking in the background came to be the one that captured most of my attention: how has the introduction of a new kind of youth identity in Totontepec (educated, attuned to global flows of youth culture and participating in teenager-style patterns of consumption) impacted and transformed the local sociolinguistic order?

This shift from a focus on adolescence—defined by external criteria such as chronological age and physical development—to a focus on youth as it is locally understood in places like Totontepec was a response to my growing awareness of how Totontepecanos themselves understood aging and development (cf. Schlegel & Barry 1991). When many Totontepecanos spoke about young people, their frame of reference

was not their date of birth or grade in school, but a distinct system of age categories and, for boys in particular, their fitness for service in the civil-religious cargo system. In large part I was drawn to this question because it was one that elder Totontepecanos seemed to be spending considerable energy on. How had they come to believe that they had a *youth problem* and how did they plan to resolve it? How were the young people of Totontepec responding?[12]

At the same time I found myself drifting from discourse-oriented work to a more broadly socio-cultural approach. This reflected my coming to terms with the practical challenge of recording and transcribing Totontepecano Mixe conversations, given my level of linguistic competence at the time. In the near future I do hope to be able to carry out a more thoroughgoing study of the everyday speech of young Totontepecanos in all of its textual richness and complexity. For the present, I have concentrated on how Totontepecanos talk about how their young people talk.

In a provocative essay on "post-Malinowskian fieldwork" Bruce Albert writes: "Traditional fieldwork, as canonized by Malinowski in the preface to *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*... is, as we all know, dying out. Not because indigenous peoples are doomed to extinction, as Malinowski wrote... but, on the contrary, because they are increasingly becoming subjects of their own history and readers of their own ethnographers (Albert 1997:53). Later in the essay he points out that anthropologists face "two ethical and political obligations which were eluded by classical ethnography, but are unquestionable nowadays" (Albert 1997:56). The first is accountability to the

12. See Bucholtz's (2002) review essay on youth and cultural practice for an elaboration of these ideas. When her review essay was published, about a year after my return from the field, I took great heart from her arguments in support of a shift in focus from the anthropology of adolescence to an anthropology of youth, one which emphasizes "that youth-based cultural practices continue to be local phenomena, even when they take their inspiration from mediated cultural forms" (2002:544).

people who are the objects of our studies, and the second is assuming responsibility for the role that the ethnographic knowledge that they accumulate might play in engagements between indigenous groups and the states that dominate them.

I happen to agree in principle with much of what Albert has to say about anthropologists acting as advocates and colleagues. However, he leaves unanswered the practical question of what form a contemporary ethnographic text—one that will presumably be read by both the people it describes and by their rivals, detractors, business partners and other interlocutors—ought to ideally take. He implies that *Argonauts* and its canon-mates fall short. But on the other hand he acknowledges that in the current 'culturalist' political environment, leaders of indigenous movements value ethnographic discourse as a means of legitimation and a resource for their own efforts to establish and promote their own culture. Ethnographies that foreground the presence of the ethnographer and the dialogic nature of the field work, eschew good old-fashioned objectifying statements, and dispute the utility of the culture concept may well have scholarly value. But they are often not very helpful for indigenous organizers who are trying to assert their rights vis-à-vis nation-states and international organizations.

In my search for a workable model I turned to my Totontepecano friend and colleague don Arelí for advice. I asked him if he had any strong opinions about how I ought to represent the point(s)-of-view of my Totontepecano subjects in print. His response caught me by surprise, but I now recognize it to be a typical Totontepecano attitude (though by no means universally shared). He told me, simply, not to worry about speaking on anybody's behalf because Totontepecanos are perfectly capable of representing themselves and their interests. What *he* wanted to hear—quite keenly in fact—was *my* perception of his community and way of life. He and his peers were

always extremely curious to find out what outsiders thought of them, and they considered this form of feedback to be quite useful. He explained: they might not agree with my interpretation of what was going on in Totontepec. They might even find my presentation laughably ignorant, but they would value the feedback nevertheless. And for don Arelí what make the observations and insights of anthropologists particularly useful (especially anthropologists from outside the confines of Mexico's academic infrastructure) are our broadly comparative outlook and capacity to relate what goes on in localities such as the Sierra Mixe to other far-flung places. In short, he wanted to know how Totontepec "stacked up" to other indigenous communities, particularly in terms of its level of organization and its commitment to local language and culture.

My approach, then, is not to try to present this portrait of Totontepecano society as a dialogue between myself and my Totontepecano interlocutors (though clearly it emerged out of many such conversations). I have instead tried to produce description and commentary that is frank and forthright and, hopefully, useful for the community in some small way. Except where noted (and I happily give credit where credit is due), all of the opinions expressed herein are my own. When I discuss Totontepec's place in the larger Mixe universe my pro-Totontepec bias will be particularly clear to Mixe readers. I do not apologize for this, but I do hope that readers from other parts of the Sierra Mixe will be patient enough to grant me an opportunity to hear more of their side of the story in the near future.

Outline of the Dissertation

Let me conclude this introductory chapter with a brief outline of what is to follow. In the subsequent chapters I set out to accomplish two tasks. The first is to trace

how Totontepecano understandings of aging, intergenerational relations and social reproduction have been transformed in the last half century. The second is to assess the role that language has played in these transformative processes and to examine the linguistic repercussions of these changes for both grammar and usage.

I begin, in Chapter Two, by describing the community of Totontepec and locating it geographically and historically—with respect to the Mixe region, the state of Oaxaca and the wider world. In the second half of this chapter I explore the three institutions that define public life in Totontepec: the town government, the church, and music-making. I do this with two issues in mind. First, there is the question of how these institutions combine to form a framework in which age differences among participants are made meaningful. And second there is the question of how language and language use form an integral part of these institutions. The cargo system, I argue, does not just provide a model for thinking about local age differences and how right and responsibilities should be differentially distributed among age groups. It also provides a model for thinking about certain kinds of sociolectal variation in Mixe speech. Another central argument of this chapter is that Totontepecanos conceive of their identity as a kind of citizenship, and despite the rise of Spanish usage in their community they still consider Mixe competence to be a requirement for all citizens.

In Chapter Three I shift perspectives and examine how the Totontepecano Mixe language community is constituted. That is to say, I begin to ask what defines Totontepecano Mixe speakers as a group and what relationship this group might have to the community of Totontepec, and Mixe society more broadly speaking. As I develop this more precise description of the language community, I analyze several defining aspects of the grammatical structure of Totontepecano Mixe. I begin with an

examination of Totontepecano Mixe's phonemic inventory and the debates that have swirled around how these sounds should be represented in print. Next I examine word classes, word-formation, inflection and issues of word-order. I also devote several pages to Totontepecano Mixe's numbering system and its wealth of indigenous discourse markers, since these are two of the domains of linguistic structure that have been most susceptible to replacement by Spanish forms across Mesoamerica.

Chapter Four traces the rise of Mixe-Spanish bilingualism. Here I move beyond considerations of the Totontepecano Mixe language community and examine Totontepec as a complex, plurilingual speech community with a shifting set of linguistic resources at speakers' disposal and changing ideas about how these different codes are linked to different kinds of speakers and social contexts. The heart of this chapter is an ethnohistory of contact between Mixe speakers and Spanish speakers. This includes both a description of the relevant grammatical and discursive patterns and a discussion of the language attitudes held by all of the parties involved. Other important considerations, following Silverstein (1996a), include the ratios of speakers, the intensity and periodicity of contact between them, and an understanding of the institutional loci where contact took place. In order to do this I draw on a number of resources including colonial accounts of the Mixes, historiographies of colonial Oaxaca, linguistic evidence, census figures, and local oral history. In the latter half of this chapter I examine how Totontepecano attitudes toward Spanish are revealed in their stories about the struggles of barely bilingual men to express themselves in the Spanish-speaking world.

Chapter Five focuses squarely on how age, aging and the socialization of children are understood in Totontepec. Here I provide an ethnographic account of local

ideas about and practices revolving around adolescence. At the same time, I examine how recent developments such as the arrival of missionary and federal schools, labor migration, and the introduction of mass media are reshaping local understandings of youth and its place in the local sociocultural order. Next I turn to the question of how language is used to construct and express youthful Totontepecano identities. In particular, I investigate the linguistic purism that is characteristic of how so many young Totontepecanos use and view language and their attempts at creating and popularizing Mixe slang.

In the sixth and final chapter I re-visit the major issues I raise in the thesis and look at the broader implications of the Totontepecano case for a comparative study of youth culture and youthful talk. I also try to relate my findings to broader debates in Mesoamericanist anthropology about acculturation, syncretism, and other models for understanding processes of cultural contact and change.

CHAPTER TWO

ANYÜKOJM: THE COMMUNITY OF TOTONTEPEC

If, as Benedict Anderson (1991) has demonstrated, modern nation-states can imagine that they are small face-to-face communities, then it is should come as no big surprise that some small face-to-face communities conceive of themselves as nation-states. Such is the case with Totontepec Villa de Morelos. Totontepecanos talk about their community as if it were a Hellenic polis, part of a loosely federated group of nineteen such city-states that together make up the *Distrito Mixe* (Mixe District). This is hardly an exaggeration. In a 1926 town assembly, in which Totontepecanos were debating how to respond to the imperial ambitions of the *caciques* (political bosses) that controlled the neighboring Mixe communities of Zacatepec and Ayutla, a local priest named Angel Martinez reportedly rose to his feet and declared before the gathered crowd: "*Mientras Zacatepec sea una Roma, Totontepec será una Grecia.*"[1] In other words, Zacatepec may be saddled with an authoritarian regime, but Totontepec would refashion itself as an enlightened Democracy.

The Mixes have the distinction of being the only indigenous ethnic group in Mexico with their own political district, a semi-autonomous court system, and a political system in which all local officials are chosen following customary law rather

1. "While Zacatepec may be a Rome, Totontepec will be a Greece." Source: Bernal Alcántara (1991:61).

than through contests between national political parties.[2] They have been "disproportionately influential" (Newling 2001:12) in the indigenous autonomy movement in Mexico. A Mixe lawyer even participated in the 1996 San Andrés peace accords between the Mexican government and the EZLN (the "Zapatistas") and was one of the signatories. The Mixes are quite proud of the united front with which they face the outside world (see also SER 1995). Still, the Mixe region is a complicated place, cross-cut by power struggles and shifting allegiances. Presenting such a unified front is the product of enormous and continual effort.

That the Distrito Mixe is encompassed by the state of Oaxaca and the Republic of Mexico is an uncomfortable fact which Totontepecanos acknowledge but prefer not to dwell on. If nothing else, the scandals and corruption that plague Mexican political life provide Totontepecanos with a steady stream of opportunities to point out the superiority of their local system. Totontepec, like almost all of the indigenous communities of the Sierra Norte region of Oaxaca, adheres to a form of governance known in Oaxaca as *usos y costumbres* (customary law). The details vary from pueblo to pueblo, but the essence of usos y costumbres is that local communities are permitted to elect their leaders in their own fashion and according to their own timetable. Though individuals can and do belong to national political parties such as the PRI (the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional*) or the PAN (the *Partido de Acción Nacional*), these parties are absolutely forbidden to be directly involved in local elections. Clearly, in some communities they manage to do so anyway. Totontepec, though, has a fairly solid record of independence. Toward this end, the display of posters, painted slogans and

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2 . In the year 1992 the state of Oaxaca officially recognized the right of indigenous municipalities to elect their leaders and run their local governments according to customary law, or "usos y costumbres" for the very first time. Over 400 Oaxacan municipios currently operate under the *usos y costumbres* system.

other partisan propaganda within the limits of Totontepec is strictly forbidden. Because of this, Totontepec looks strikingly different from many other Mexican villages, whose walls are frequently plastered with party logos and slogans.

Like any modern state, Totontepec has its own national holidays, its monuments, and it even has its own language to set it apart from its neighbors. Of course, a number of other languages are spoken in Totontepec, including Zapotec, Chinantec, Spanish, English, and even Italian and Serbo-Croatian.[3] However, only Totontepecano Mixe is recognized as the official language of governance. All good citizens of the community must understand at least enough Mixe to participate in town assemblies and other political functions. This fact is the cornerstone of Totontepecano Mixe language maintenance, and if it ever becomes the case that Spanish is ruled an acceptable language (or the one and only acceptable language) for conducting official municipal business in Totontepec, then this will probably spell the end for Totontepecano Mixe as a viable language.

Totontepec even has its own national anthem, entitled *Anyukojmit xa öötse'e* (We are Totontepecanos). The pronoun *ööts* is the exclusive first person plural, which means that this song is intended to be sung by Totontepecanos in the presence of some imagined or real audience of foreigners. The the particle *xa* appears to function as an assertative or an indicator of contrast. The anthem is performed on many public occasions, particularly events organized by the local schools. I first heard it in the summer of 1998, and my host Oliva and a friend of hers agreed to let me record their rendition. Like any good national anthem it features a couple of high notes that few

3. The first Salesian priest to arrive in Totontepec was a native speaker of Italian, and he taught his language to several of the locals who assisted him. And not too long ago a Totontepecana woman living in Mexico City married a Serbian man. Her husband and brother-in-law have become regular visitors to Totontepec.

people can hit without straining their voice. Its lyrics are bilingual, sung first in Mixe and then in Spanish. Here is the version I recorded on that afternoon:

Somos Totontepecanos—Anyükojmit xa öötse'e[4]

Anyükojmit xa öötse'e
ayùùk jayu y'it jootm
jèm jùma may ja kopk kèèts
juu' ja it tü yaktsojüpöjktup.

Jèm jùma it xö'ma tùùp jyùùjntnax
jats ja poo'p vin'üts kajpün tü yakvintsuk
jèm jùma ja jèèyva tönük
xùùjntkin tü yaktakukyotsta tù'k yukjoot.

May tsujit püjts ööts jèm nmööt
juu' ve'e viinm naxvimbijtsumdup
ax jù'n y'ixuva ja chù'jin
pön jè'è ve'e tü katsokup.

Anyükojmit jayu xyam mvin'öövidup
y'ayùùk möjü xoojntykin mööt
yö öötse'e n'üv myaktukitöjkijidup
küx nmöjin nmooyp xa ööts mitse'e.

Somos totontepecanos	*We (excl) are Totontepecanos,*
de la sierra de los mixes,	*from the mountains of the Mixes,*
donde hay tantas montañas,	*where there are so many mountain peaks,*
que nos dan bello paisajes.	*that provide us such beautiful vistas.*
Donde las lluvias nunca se van	*Where the rain never leaves,*
y blancas nubes mantas son,	*and the white clouds blanket us,*
en estas selvas que aves dan,	*and in these forests birds give*
trinos que alegran el corazón.	*trills that fill our hearts with joy.*
Hay lindos lirios en mi tierra,	*There are beautiful flowers in our land,*
que en campiña solos brotan,	*that grow in the open fields,*

4. According to one of my sources, the original lyrics were composed in Spanish by a government inspector named Ramón Robles. In 1959 they were translated by Samuel Alcántara into Mixe (and refashioned) in 1959, and Alcántara is most often credited as the composer. In Noé Alcántara's version of this song, the first two Mixe lines are somewhat different than they appear in this version. He sings:

Ayùùk jayu xa öötse'e,	*We (excl) are Mixe people,*
Anyukojmts öötse'e nkajpün xyööj.	*Totontepec is the name of our town.*

como flores quien pudiera, sus colores a rebatir?	*they look so beautiful,* *who could deny it?*
Nuestras sonatas todos cantemos, con la alegria del corazón, A nuestro pueblo vivas gritemos, con sentimiento y gran emoción.	*Our sonatas, let us all sing them,* *with joy from the heart,* *let us shout "vivas!" to our people,* *with sentiment and great emotion.*

The lyrics foreground the intimate connection that Totontepecanos feel between themselves and the countryside that they call home. They invoke the mountains, which many Mixes believe to be sacred. And when they sing that the rain never leaves and the clouds cover everything like a white blanket this is hardly an exaggeration. The climate of Totontepec can be grueling for those who are not accustomed to it. Situated just on the Gulf coast side of the Continental Divide it is buried in clouds, and it rains most of the year. The rains begin around the end of April and last through the end of February. In the autumn months it can sometimes rain for up to three weeks without a break. A local *dicho* (saying) describes the climate as "*tres meses de lluvia tres meses de llovizna, tres meses de lodo, y tres meses de todo*" (three months of rain, three months of drizzle, three months of mud, and three months of everything). On the bright side, the cloud forests that surround the town are intensely green and bursting with ferns, orchids and vines. Many of the outsiders who pass through town are botanists in search of rare ferns and orchid species.

The Distrito Mixe is broadly divided into three geographical areas: the highlands in the west, the midlands and the lowlands in the east. As one moves eastward out of the mountains, temperate midland valleys gradually descend into the tropical lowlands of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Each of these altitudinal zones is said to contain populations that speak mutually unintelligible varieties of Mixe. The highlands are

organized around the 3,200-meter peak of Mount Zempoaltépetl: the cosmological *axis mundi* of the Mixe universe. This zone is the most heavily populated of the three. The town of Zacatepec, located in the midlands, is the district capitol.

The municipio of Totontepec is not the most populous municipio in the highlands zone, but it is easily the largest and richest in natural resources. It has a little over 6,000 residents, almost a quarter of which live in the town of Totontepec Villa de Morelos. The rest live in one of nine politically subordinate communities, called *agencias*. They are:

> Tepitongo, Amatepec, Jareta, Chinantequilla, Moctum,
> Ocotepec, Jayacaxtepec, Metepec, Huitepec

These communities appear on the very earliest maps of the region and are quite independent of one another. What unites them is their use of a distinct variety of Mixe and their orientation toward the old trade routes that passed through Yalalag, Totontepec and down toward Choapan and the Gulf Coast. This pattern is wholly distinct from the municipios of the southern Mixe highlands which feature only minor settlements outside of the head towns. The municipios of the Southern Highlands are also more oriented toward the Valley of Oaxaca and their residents speak mutually intelligible varieties of Mixe.

Totontepec can be reached by a 6-hour bus ride from Oaxaca City, via a partially-paved, partially-two-lane highway. The buses are always overcrowded and frequently break down. Late autumn mudslides block the road for several hours or even days at a time. The highway heads north from the valley town of Mitla up into the mountains and then passes through the Southern Highland Mixe municipios of Ayutla, Tamazulapan and Tlahuitoltepec as it winds around the western slopes of Mount

Zempoaltepetl and crosses the continental divide. Mount Zempoaltepetl, which Totontepecanos call *Ku'u Kopk*, is the massive mountain peak that sits at the center of the Highland Mixe universe and is venerated as a deity. On most days its upper reaches are buried in the clouds.

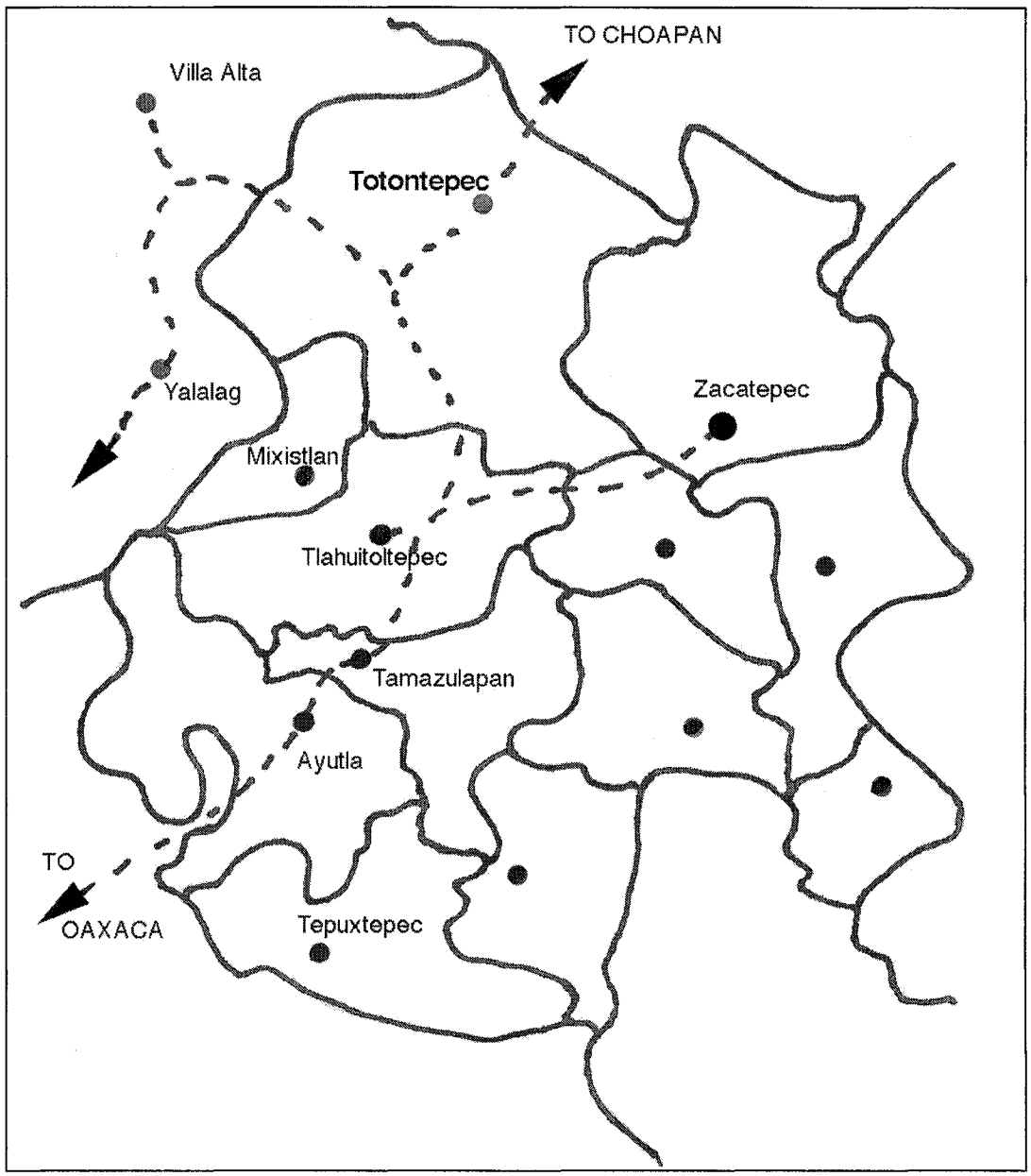

Figure 2.1. The Mixe Highlands and surrounding areas

The first thing that visitors notice when they arrive in Totontepec is the jagged rocky peak known as *Anyu Kèèts* (the lightning crag) or *la Mitra* (the mitre) that looms over the town. *Anyu Kèèts* stands watch over the town below and its image serves as an icon of Totontepecano identity. It appears, for example, on the backboards of the basketball hoops located in front of the municipal building and on the official letterhead of the town government. Despite four decades of intense missionary activity in the area Totontepecanos still make ritual offerings to *Anyu Kèèts* in exchange for successful corn crops and a variety of other favors. They celebrate its birthday each year on the day after All Saint's Day. Totontepecanos believe that *Anyu Kèèts* protects them both at home and abroad. More than one Totontepecano told me about the time that he got mugged in the city, and how if it had not been for the *Anyu Kèèts* then his assailants would have killed him, or discovered his hidden stash of pesos.

The second thing that new arrivals notice is the menagerie of topiary animals that adorn the church yard and the elementary school yard across the street. These animals were sculpted by Otilio Bernal, who learned the skill in Idaho and perfected it in Minnesota when he traveled to the United States in the 1940s as a *bracero*.[5] The topiary animals in the church yard surround a statue of Don Giovanni Bosco. Bosco was the founder of the Salesian Catholic order, whose presence in Totontepec has had a profound impact on the local economy and religious practices. The statue portrays Don Bosco standing between a young boy and a young girl, with a hand resting on each one's shoulder and his eyes gazing straight ahead toward a brighter tomorrow. Don Bosco was known for his tireless work on behalf of children and the Salesians of today

5. A Mexican hired-hand who went to the United States during World War II through a federal guest worker program designed to compensate for the labor lost (chiefly in the agricultural sector) by having sent so many young American men to fight in Europe and the Pacific.

continue his legacy by building schools and cultural centers and fostering the belief that "the children are the future."

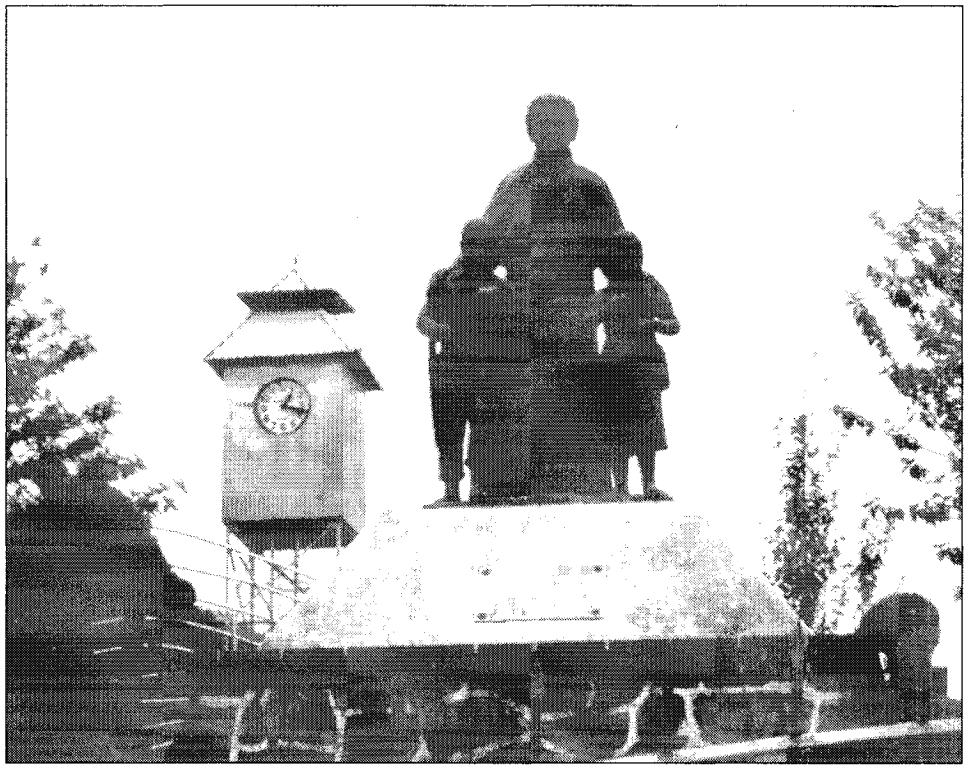

Figure 2.2. Don Bosco with boy and girl

It is also apparent to visitors that Totontepec is in the grips of an explosion of new construction. Enormous red brick houses and a variety of new businesses including a tortilla factory, two new diners, and two stationary shops have been sprung up all over town. A new campus for the preparatory school was completed at the beginning of 2002 and construction on a new all-purpose ("*usos multiples*") municipal building is well underway. This construction boom has been largely funded by Totontepecanos living abroad in the urban centers of Mexico and the United States. The debt crisis of 1982—when Mexico could no longer meet its obligations to international lenders—and

the coffee crisis of the 1990s, when a world glut in the coffee markets sent prices spiraling downwards, spurred a number of Totontepecanos to leave their fields in search of distant economic opportunities.

The town is strung along an unpaved road that winds down from the agencia of Metepec, around the waist of *Anyu Kèèts*, and then ascends toward the agencia of Amatepec. It covers most of the steep southeastern face of *Anyu Kèèts* and spills down into the valleys below. It has several neighborhoods, including: the center, an upper area by the new campuses of the preparatory school and middle school, a *barrio* (neighborhood) 15 minutes further down the road to Amatepec, and a barrio near the town cemetery on the road to Jareta. In addition to the large Catholic church, there are two *adventista* (Seventh Day Adventist) temples of more recent vintage and a small *reformista* (Reformed Seventh Day Adventist) temple. The Catholic church sits just southeast of the town center; the other temples are located closer to the outskirts of town. On the far side of the Catholic church is a large building called the *Centro Cultural Totontepecano* (CCT), built by the Salesians, that houses an elementary school, dormitories and an auditorium. Just below the CCT is the still-unfinished brick building that houses the *Instituto Kong Oy*, dedicated to the preservation and promotion of Totontepecano culture. This is the building where the town youth orchestra rehearses and stores its instruments.

The town center houses the municipal building and adjoining facilities (the jail, the post office, the covered area where market stalls are set up on Sundays and town assemblies are held, and the basketball court. Up around the corner from the "*muni*" is Gloria Alcántara's *comedor* and *caseta*—a social hub where out-of-town visitors and locals with disposable income can dine and drink. More importantly, the caseta has

three phone lines and until recently offered the only phone service in the whole municipio. From 7am till 9pm Gloria and her daughters get on their loudspeaker, announce incoming phone calls and deliver other important messages to the community. All day long their voices echo from one ridge to another: "*Juan Vasquez Gómez, Juan Vasquez Gómez... tiene una llamada telefónica... está en linea... Juan Vasquez Gómez, Juan Vasquez Gómez... tiene una llamada telefónica... está en linea...*" There are several small shops in the town center, most commonly referred to by the first name of the owner, as in "Laura's" and "Hipólito's".

The People

I am focusing for the moment, on the town of Totontepec as a geographically discrete, geographically locatable entity—a place. However, it is important to bear in mind that Totontepec the community has become increasingly urban and multi-sited, with large, highly organized colonies in Oaxaca City, Mexico City, Los Angeles and New York and smaller outposts in other North American cities. Indeed, reconciling the dispersal of community members across North America with their intense love for and deeply felt connection to the mountain peaks, valleys and fields that they call home is one of the greatest challenges presently confronting Totontepec.

Twenty percent of Totontepec's economically active adult population spends at least part of each year working in distant Mexican and North American cities. Most of the rest are subsistence farmers and gatherers who occasionally sell coffee and tropical fruit to visiting traders for a fraction of their true market value. The steep terrain makes it almost impossible to raise livestock. Many men earn extra money doing occasional

construction work or helping others to care for their fields and harvest their crops. A handful of men and women work as shopkeepers, teachers, and government employees.

Three fifths of Totontepec's residents consider themselves Catholics and the other two fifths belong to a growing Seventh Day Adventist faction. Totontepecano Catholicism has been reshaped in the last forty years by the presence of an extremely committed and charismatic group of Salesian missionaries from Europe, who place great emphasis on children's rights and on the family. They also run a primary school, which provides an attractive alternative to the federal school for many parents. Meanwhile, Adventist missionaries have impressed upon their Mixe congregations the importance of Spanish literacy for biblical study and inculcated a disdain for fiestas and their carnal accompaniments. Nevertheless the local Adventist congregations use a great deal of Mixe in their Saturday services, because an enormous value is placed on sincere and spontaneous forms of prayer, and Mixe is still seen as the vehicle that best expresses sincerity and intimacy in Totontepec.

Totontepecanos perceive their community to be an island of friendly, generous, "civilized" people surrounded on all sides by mean, stingy places where no one greets you on the street, much less invites you to dinner, and where crime and violence are rampant. According to them, most of the other pueblos of the *Sierra* are "*divididos*" (divided) in one way or another. Totontepec prides itself on having overcome political factionalization in the early part of the 20th century and presenting an entirely united front to the outside world ever since. The recent introduction of Seventh Day Adventism is, not surprisingly, a source of considerable tension. But this tension is heavily surpressed and has not yet led to violence or a radical reorganization of the local order. It manifests itself only in frequent grumbling and criticism. Members of all

religious sects in Totontepec can and do hold political offices. Both the Catholics and Adventists end up buried in the same cemetery. Everyone seems to agree that the Catholics throw better parties.

Totontepecanos call their home *Anyükojm* (hot mountain) or sometimes *Anyukojm* (lightning mountain), and they call themselves *Anyükojmit Jayu* (Totontepecano people). Ninety-five percent of them speak the local variety of Mixe, which they call *Ayùùk*. A handful of Zapotecs and spouses from other places reside in Totontepec. However, the vast majority of Totontepecanos consider themselves to be Mixe or *Ayùùk Jayu*. Spanish, which they call *Amaaxün*, is spoken by almost 90% of the residents of Totontepec. People of Spanish descent are known as *Amaaxün Jayu*. They employ a variety of labels for the other types of people that they encounter, depending upon whether they are Zapotec, Chinantec, European or otherwise foreign. Often people with European features are called *Vintsùxk* (green-eyed). Foreigners—that is visiting clergy, anthropologists, tourists, government officials—pass through town only on occasion.

Among other Mixe communities, Totontepec enjoys a reputation for being the most *mestizo* (mixed), hispanicized/zapotec-ified town, both racially and culturally. Tlahuitoltepec, to the south, is where the people are said to be the most traditional and racially pure. Totontepecanos tend agree with both assessments. To the extent that Totontepecanos think of their community as an autonomous political entity, they perceive Totontepecano identity to be less a question of race, mother tongue, or birthplace then a matter of citizenship. One's Totontepecano identity is primarily expressed through participation in town assemblies and performing *cargo* duties (ritual and political offices) and *tequio* (community service) when called upon to do so. A

Totontepecano need not be ethnically Mixe, but he/she must participate fully in the civic life of the *pueblo* and essentially renounce their former affiliations.

The very first public event I attended in the Mixe town of Totontepec was, oddly enough, a Zapotec wedding. Don Rogelio, who had owned and operated a shop in Totontepec for decades, was born in raised in the nearby Zapotec town of Yalalag. His son, Juan, who had grown up in Totontepec was going to be marrying a Yalalteca bride, one of his *"paisanas"* (fellow country-women). Juan's Totontepecano peers jokingly labeled him a "*sapomije*" (a blend of "Zapotec" and "Mixe"), figuring that growing up in Totontepec must have made him at least half Mixe by this point. Rogelio and his wife had both contributed an enormous amount of time and labor to Totontepec. But at the end of the day they planned to retire to Yalalag and be buried there with the rest of their family members.

The wedding was an opportunity for don Rogelio to share his happiness and good fortune with both his home town and his adopted community. And it was an opportunity for Totontepec to reassert its reputation as the most open and friendly Mixe town in the *Sierra Norte* region by hosting dozens of Yalalteco guests. It is difficult to imagine this event happening in any other Mixe town. The Yalalteco visitors were immediately recognizable with their considerable girths and loud speech. Totontepecanos are, by and large, skinnier and more reserved. The brightly-colored outfits worn by the Yalalteca women and braided hair with ribbons set them quite apart from the Totontepecanas, who prefer drab grey and black shawls draped over white blouses. A joking commentary was also circulating around town that the typical Zapotec wedding party lasts seven days and the typical Mixe wedding only lasts a

single day, so the organizers had decided to split the difference and put together a three-day-long celebration.

Regional and Historical Context

In the early 1970s a Japanese ethnologist named Etsuko Kuroda spent two years in the southern part of the Mixe Highlands and produced one of the most detailed studies of Mixe society to date (Kuroda 1984). He describes the socio-geographical consciousness of the Mixes of Tlahuitoltepec and Ayutla in terms of increasingly inclusive spheres of influence. The innermost space, according to Kuroda, is that of the municipio with its town center and its outlying *ermitas* (hermitages) and *rancherías* (homesteads). Next comes the space of the adjacent Mixe municipios, in particular the three other municipios where mutually intelligible forms of South Highland Mixe are spoken. Kuroda (1984:11) reports that southern highlanders have a popular legend about five brothers who lived with their mother somewhere near the river of Tamazulapan. They each set off in a separate direction and founded one of the five south highland Mixe towns of Tlahuitoltepec, Ayutla, Tamazulapan, Tepantlali, and Tepuxtepec. The third space is that of the Mixe region as a whole. The distant midland towns of Zacatepec, Quetzaltepec and even more remote lowland communities such as Jaltepec and Guichicovi are recognized as the home of distant relatives with similar language and beliefs. However, little is known about their people and few men from Ayutla or Tlahuitoltepec have ever visited there. The fourth space is the encompassing world of the culturally and economically dominant Zapotecs. To the southwest live the trade monopolists of Mitla. To the north lie the Zapotec coffee plantations of Choapan, and to the west lie the important market centers of Betaza, Yalalag and Villa Alta, from

whence came various styles of music, dance, food preparation and material culture. The fifth sphere is that of modern Mexican national culture.

The story is much the same for the residents of Totontepec. However, residents of the northern highland area were always somewhat detached from the southern highlands and more closely oriented toward the Zapotec towns to the west and north. Also, over the last three decades people all across the Mixe District have become enormously more invested in the idea of a unified Mixe nation whose residents share a common history and common aspirations. Local allegiances and rivalries have become less important than regional planning and politics. At the same time, access to the markets and resources of Oaxaca City, Mexico City and the rest of North America has broken the long-standing monopoly that the Zapotecs once held over trade in and out of the Mixe region.

Increasingly, the Zapotecs (particularly the Zapotecs of the Sierra Norte) are seen as fellow *indígenas* (indigenous people), *paisanos* (countrymen) and allies in a struggle for indigenous autonomy and self-respect. Mixe and Zapotec intellectuals sound positively enamoured of each other in some of their most recent publications. For example, Joel Aquino, an activist from Yalalag lauds the Mixes, proclaiming that "the Mixes conserve many things in their communities [while] we are fighting to reconstruct them. What we do in a week they do in a day. That is why there is so much order and tranquility, the Mixes are very rigorous, and they know what they have to do" (Aquino [1994], quoted in Maldonado & Cortés 1999:133).

Relations between Totontepecanos and their Zapotec neighbors were not always so amicable. When the Spaniards arrived in the Sierra Norte of Oaxaca early in the 16th Century they encountered the Sierra Zapotecs and the Mixes in a constant state of

conflict. The Spanish garrison of Villa Alta de San Ildefonso de los Zapotecas was established in 1527 on the western Mixe-Zapotec frontier in order to put an end to the Mixe-Zapotec wars. Despite their efforts, skirmishes continued up until 1570, when the last great Mixe uprising took place. In that year the Mixes bypassed Villa Alta completely, basically ignoring the Spanish presence, and staged a series of massive raids on several Zapotec towns. The Spanish had to call in additional troops from Antequera (old Oaxaca City) and 2,000 Mixtec reinforcements from Cuilapan in order to quell the uprising and restore order (Burgoa 1989 [1674]:146-47).

By the end of the 16th century the Mixes and Zapotecs had largely ceased hostilities. Repeated Spanish attempts at conquering the Mixes through military might had largely failed; the terrain was treacherous, the Mixes fought hard, and the Conquistadores quickly concluded that that the Mixe region had few riches to offer them. On the other hand, the spiritual conquest of the Mixes was already well underway. The Dominicans first arrived in Oaxaca in 1528. In 1535 the bishopric of Oaxaca was established. In 1548 they established themselves in Villa Alta and from that base of operations they went on to found various parishes in the Mixe and Zapotec communities of the Sierra Norte. Totontepec became one of four Mixe parish centers in 1572 and in that year construction began on Totontepec's church (Chance 1989; Kuroda 1984:14).

The royal decree ordering the *reducción* of the Mixe in 1600 introduced Spanish style urban planning and the plaza complex to the Sierra, but it did little to change Mixe residence patterns.[6] Most Mixes continued to live in small, kin-based groups in widely

6. *Reducción* was a procedure that involved taking scattered indigenous households and congregating them into a town with all the hallmarks of Spanish colonial urban planning, i.e., a central plaza surrounded by a church and a municipal palace. It is interesting to note that the same term was used

dispered homesteads. Villages continued to be "empty centers" used for ritual and commercial purposes only. However they now featured plazas, churches and municipal palaces (Kuroda 1984:14). In 1712 the Colonial government granted land titles to the Mixe towns of Totontepec, Ayutla, Tepantlali, Tamazulapan and Tlahuitoltepec (Kuroda 1984:14-15).

The first half of the 18th century was the golden age of the Dominican order in Oaxaca. Bells were built for for many of the Mixe churches, the bishop visited the Mixe area in 1782 and dispatched a series of *cordilleras* (official statements) to the local parish priests on topics ranging from epidemics, to church policies, to the Napoleonic wars (Kuroda 1984:15). During this period Antonio Alcántara, a metalworker of Corsican descent, came to Totontepec to forge the bells for its church and for other churches in the area. He eventually settled there and established what would become one of Totontepec's largest and most powerful families. His children inherited his metalworking skills and came to specialize in the construction and maintenance of brass instruments. According to Kuroda (1984:14) the arrival of the Alcántaras marked the beginning of Totontepecano *mestizo*-ization, or racial and cultural mixing with the Europeans. The Dominican hold on the Mixe region weakened steadily through in the second half of the 18th century, as the order fell into scandal and disarray. They abandoned Totontepec in 1812 (Bernal Alcántara 1991:5). Lay priests, recruited locally, took over the operation of Mixe churches and remained in charge for the next century.

The wars of independence, the French Intervention and the Revolutionary war left the Sierra Mixe largely unaffected. One of the notable developments of the 19th century was that the institution of the municipal brass band was imported from the

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to refer to the production of Spanish Colonial dictionaries and grammars of indigenous languages, taking scattered words and phrases and placing then in an orderly scheme.

Zapotecs and quickly took on a special importance. Totontepec, in particular, came to be known for its composers and musicians, and Totontepecanos now consider their music to be emblematic of their distinctive identity. The other noteworthy event that took place during this era was the arrival of large-scale coffee production in the Mixe lowlands and Midlands and the *Valle Nacional* to the north of the Mixe region.

In the 1930s the Catholic priesthood was mercilessly persecuted by anti-clericalist governments in southern Mexico, and from the 1930s till the 1960s there were only four lay priests living in the entire Mixe area. The Salesian order entered the Mixe region from Europe in 1962. They founded the *prelatura mixepolitana* with the blessing of the Catholic hierarchy and quickly ensconced themselves in various communities, including Totontepec (Bernal Alcántara 1991; Kuroda 1984:19-20). Seventh Day Adventist missionaries from the United States and Central America began proselytizing in Totontepec in the late 1960s. The Salesians emphasized children's rights, education and the centrality of the family to social life. While discouraging Mixe rituals such as turkey sacrifices, they encouraged fiestas and the strong local tradition of music and dance. They deliberately cultivated a generation of young Mixe scholars to become future leaders of their communities. For their part, the Seventh Day Adventists attracted many of the poorer and more marginal members of the community with an emphasis on biblical literacy, a personal relationship with God and the millenarian belief that Judgement Day was at hand.

During the 1920s-1950s two Mixe *caciques* (political bosses) rose to power and came to completely dominate the regional scene. "Coronel" Daniel Martinez, from the southern highland town of Ayutla fashioned himself a revolutionary war hero and put together an expeditionary force that "pacified" various Mixe towns from Ayutla

eastward toward the Isthmus. He was extremely interested in building schools, building roads and installing telephones. Luis Rodriguez, from the midland town of Zacatepec, was a self-educated man who had big plans for consolidating the Mixe region under a single district government, building schools and clinics, promoting use of Spanish and suppressing what he considered to be "primitive" religious practices.[7]

Both men shared the progressivist vision of a modern, independent Mixe nation; however, the Sierra Mixe was not big enough for the two of them. Eventually Martinez lost out to Rodriguez and his supporters. Martinez was assassinated in 1943, allegedly by one of Rodriguez's gunmen.Totontepec passively sided with Rodriguez and Zacatepec during this dispute, in spite of its leaders' worries about the ambitions of its neighbor (Bernal Alcántara 1991). Oral history in Totontepec emphasizes that Rodriguez looked to Totontepec, to the Alcántaras in particular, for cues about how to dress and speak in a more sophisticated and educated manner. In 1938 Rodriguez successfully brokered a deal that established Zacatepec as the capital of a new Mixe District that included 19 Mixe municipios which had formerly belonged to three separate judicial districts (Acevedo Conde 2002:155).

In the 1930s and 40s a handful of Totontepecano men began looking for seasonal employment in the coffee plantations across the border in Veracruz State and experimented with *bracero* work in the United States. But the vast majority of Totontepecanos still remained at home and fed their families through a combination of subsistence farming, gathering and small game hunting. Labor migration increased dramatically in the 1940s and 1950s as the infrastructure that connected the Sierra Mixe with the Valley of Oaxaca improved (Romer 1982). The road from Mitla to Ayutla was

7. See Laviada (1978) for a detailed history of the rise and fall of these two political bosses.

opened in 1966 the stretch from Ayutla to Tlahuitoltepec opened in 1974, but it was not yet safe enough for cars (Kuroda 1984:9-10). In 1970 a trip from Totontepec to Oaxaca City took five-seven days of travel in each direction and required the use of pack animals. In 1980 a person could drive to Oaxaca City in about 8 hours. With the completion of the toll way that connects Mexico City to Oaxaca City at the end of the 1990s it became possible to travel from Totontepec to Oaxaca City in a single (albeit long) day.

School reforms came to the region in the 1920s, thanks in large part to the efforts of Daniel Martinez. The first federal school teacher arrived in Totontepec in 1928, but he only had three pupils and reportedly was more interested in fathering illegitimate children than in teaching Spanish. In 1954 the region was organized into one school zone and the municipios began paying their school teachers (Kuroda 1984:19; Nahmad-Sittón 1965:98). Federal organizations like INI (the National Indigenous Institute) began appearing in the 1970s (Kuroda 1984:20), along with health clinics, other social services and rural electrification. In 1977 the Choapan to Oaxaca City highway (an unpaved, single-lane road) was completed. Since that date direct contact with ladinos (non-indigenous, Spanish-speaking Mexicans) and foreign visitors has steadily escalated while dependency on Zapoteco merchants and middlemen has dwindled. The highway has made it possible for urban Totontepecanos to regularly visit their friends and family in the Sierra and for people from the Sierra to take advantage of the schools, hospitals and markets located in the city.

After Mexico's 1982 monetary crisis, migrant work in the United States became an attractive alternative to working in other parts of Mexico. In fact, so many Totontepecanos have relocated to Los Angeles and the New York area that they have

formed local committees with annual budgets and elected officers. These committees meet regularly to share information, discuss strategy, organize fund-raisers for Totontepec and help out fellow migrants in need. They are modeled after the committees back in Totontepec, such as the water committee and transportation committee. New networks have begun to form in places such as Miami and Denver. Most of these migrants are young and unmarried, and almost all of them plan to return to Totontepec after they have saved up enough money to build a house, raise a family and fully participate in the town's civil-religious cargo system. Roughly equal numbers of men and women are involved in this migration. Most of the men work in housing construction, restaurants and agriculture. The women have found work either in agriculture or as domestic helpers and street vendors. All but a handful of Totontepecanos cross the border illegally and spend their first year in the United States working to pay off the "coyote" who arranged their border crossing.

One of the most fascinating ironies of this latest wave of migration is that many Totontepecanos never thought of themselves as Mexicans until they started living in the United States. They had tended to view Mexico as a hostile foreign society. For these new migrants Spanish competence has proven to be essential because they spend almost all of their time in the United States working with and being employed by Spanish speakers, and they tend to live in Spanish-speaking neighborhoods. In other words, they had to learn Spanish in order to find work in the United States. While some have embraced this novel Mexican national identity, many have acquired a sizeable vocabulary of borrowed English lexical items and Anglo-American habits in an apparent attempt to distance themselves from other Mexican immigrants. Spurred on by migrant workers who returned to Totontepec to raise their children there, English

language instruction has become a very popular part of the middle school and high school curriculum.

For the first two centuries of Spanish colonization, Totontepec was the most prominent Highland Mixe town, by virtue of its size, bellicosity and its proximity to the colonial outpost of Villa Alta and the Zapotec towns of Yalalag and Choapan. It was the commercial and cultural gateway to the Mixe highlands during the 18th and 19th centuries. But by the middle of the 20th century it had receded in importance. Ayutla, located closest to the Valley of Oaxaca, became the most important Mixe commercial center, Zacatepec became the district capital. Tlahuitoltepec, perhaps by virtue of its proximity to the peak of Mount Zempoaltepetl, came to be seen as the center of Mixe culture and tradition. Nowadays Totontepec occupies a marginal place in the Mixe world. Nevertheless it maintains its reputation for being progressive, sophisticated and open to outside influence. It is also known as the most *mestizo* (racially mixed) community in the Sierra Norte.

A recurring theme in texts written about and written by Mixe people is the relationship between language and altitude. The very name that Mixe speakers use to refer to themselves and to their language, *Ayuuk*, is derived from the root /yuk/, which means 'up above' or 'mountains.' Virtually every description of the Mixe region begins by noting that it is divided into three altitudinal zones, the Highlands (1800-2200 meters above sea level), the Midlands (1200-1600 meters above sea level) and the Lowlands (300-1000 meters above sea level). This 3-way division reflects differences in agricultural practices, settlement patterns, political orientation and language use, too. Lowland dwellers do indeed speak a distinctive form of Mixe, as do the Midlanders. But in the highlands, as I have mentioned, two very distinct kinds of Mixe are spoken.

At least, the conventional wisdom about Mixe geography used to be that the municipio of Totontepec formed a part of the Highland area. A number of recent publications coming out of the Southern Mixe Highlands (e.g. Villanueva Damián 2000) and a new map posted on the most important Mixe website (www.laneta.apc.org/rci/ser) have reassigned Totontepec to the Midlands. I do not believe that anybody would claim that Totontepecanos have been speaking Midland Mixe all this time (nobody thinks that they do), or otherwise acting in concert with the Midlanders, or even that the altitude of Totontepec had been mismeasured. Rather, this move reflects the belief of the increasingly culturally and politically dominant people of the Southern Highlands that there ought to be only one variety of Mixe associated with the Highland zone. That is to say, they literally—and figuratively—want to claim the high ground for themselves.

This gerrymandering is a small part of a larger internal political struggle over control of symbolic (including linguistic) resources in the Mixe Region. Ultimately, it has to do with which the question of which variety of Mixe (if any) can stand as an emblem of the entire Mixe nation, a nation conceived of very much in the Andersonian sense. Or if, alternatively, the Mixes can envision a society that embraces diverse ways of being and speaking Mixe. For the Southern Highlanders, particularly those most heavily invested in indigenist politics, Totontepec has always been a thorn in their side. Its relative autonomy and historical openness to outsiders have never sat well with them. For Totontepecanos, many of whom are vocal advocates of Mixe unification, the problem is how to achieve pan-Mixe unity without giving up everything that is distinctively theirs. Nor do they want to be seen capitulating to their southern neighbors.

Public Institutions

Three interlocking institutions define and anchor Totontepecano public life: town governance, the church, and the municipal band. My aim in the last section of this chapter is to explain how these institutions foster a sense of community in Totontepec. Along the way, I begin to examine some of the linguistic practices that form an integral part of these institutions and explore how, via participation in these institutions, differences between younger and older Totontepecanos become meaningful.

Civil-religious cargo systems were instituted in indigenous Mesoamerican communities during the Colonial period (though they certainly absorbed a number of pre-Columbian practices), and have persisted up till the present day. They have flourished in many parts of Oaxaca and have even come to be viewed as one of the cornerstones of indigenous Oaxacan sociality. A *cargo* is, roughly, a "duty," "charge," or "office" that a citizen may volunteer for or be drafted by the community to perform. These offices imbue their holders with prestige and influence. They are not typically salaried positions and often require enormous outlays of money. Cargo holders spend a tremendous amount of time, money and wealth in order to fulfill their obligation. Hence in order to be a suitable candidate for a cargo one has to have the broadest possible network of kin and companions that can provide assistance. An individual may occupy a cargo, but his whole household is responsible for carrying out his obligations and everyone shares in his success (cf. Matthews 1985). In recognition of the effort involved, successful cargo-holders are granted one or more years of rest before they becomes eligible to hold yet another cargo.

The most important elections in Totontepec are held on the first Sunday of each September at events called *juntas*. All Totontepecano citizens are obliged to attend—the

authorities take attendance and issue fines for people who fail to appear. Citizens who show up to a junta inebriated get unceremoniously tossed in jail. Because cargos are such an enormous drain on a family's resources, election-day speeches in Totontepec can often be spectacularly self-effacing. Nominees for office will stand up one by one and explain why they cannot possibly be the best choice for the office. They must strike a careful balance here—if a nominee makes too persuasive a case through the skillful use of language then the public will be impressed by their thoughtfulness and eloquence and vote for them despite their pleas to be left alone. Sometimes that is exactly what the orator is secretly hoping for.

Cargos are hierarchically ranked, beginning with a post akin to page or errand boy and culminating in the offices of town president and town judge. A man cannot hold a higher office until he has successfully completed each of the lower-ranked offices. These organizational schemes are often described as ladders. A man who has climbed the ladder to the top by completing each cargo becomes a *principal*, an elder statesman who may attend all important town council meetings and weigh in with his opinion. In many communities the principales form a *consejo de ancianos* (council of elders) who constitute the ultimate authority in all matters of local governance.

In all there are five different sets of cargos in Totontepec, corresponding to different sectors of Totontepecano society. First and foremost are the cargos of municipal governance. A second set of cargos revolve around the Catholic Church and Totontepec's two annual fiestas. A third set of cargos revolve around the town's brass band and music school. A fourth set of cargo holders are responsible for the stewardship

of the community's natural resources (e.g. land, mineral wealth, water-ways).[8] Finally, there are a large and growing number of committees, each with its own cargos of president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer and so forth. These include the potable water committee, the elementary school committee, the transportation committee, the corn mill committee and so forth. In Totontepec women have been historically excluded from the first and fourth sets of cargos, but they can sponsor festivals and play in the band. They are particularly well-represented in committee work.

One of the notable features of Mesoamerican cargo systems is that to a greater or lesser extent they intertwine civil offices with religious offices. Foremost among the religious cargos is the office of *mayordomo*. A mayordomo is a sponsor (or co-sponsor) of a festival held in honor of a local patron saint. This is not just a tremendously expensive proposition. In some cases a mayordomo must meet other ritual demands, such as abstaining from sexual activity for some period of time preceding the festival. As men move their way up a typical civil-religious cargo hierarchy they alternate between holding civil cargos and sponsoring festivals. They must successfully complete one or more *mayordomías* before becoming eligible for certain higher civil offices. In the Mayan communities of Chiapas religious cargos have historically been more numerous and prestigious than civil cargos. In the Sierra Norte of Oaxaca the reverse is true. This makes sense, given that the Church had a much more prolonged and extensive presence in indigenous Chiapanecan communities. One consequence of this difference is that Protestantism has had a much more profound and divisive impact on those communities that have traditionally placed more emphasis on religious duties.

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8. In numerous indigenous Mexican communities the land and natural resources are *ejido* lands, granted to the group by the federal government as part of a massive land-redistribution plan undertaken during the 1940s-1960s. In contrast, Totontepec's communal landholdings have always been theirs.

Two features of the Totontepecano cargo system stand out as distinctive. The first is that in Totontepec the civil hierarchy has become almost completely detached from the religious one. A man can be eligible for the offices of presidente and alcalde without ever having been a mayordomo. This means, among other things, that Protestants, who are not supposed to participate in festivals honoring Catholic saints, are still eligible become town president. This is not true in many neighboring towns, and the neighbors have been known to point this out as another example of how progressive or hispanicized Totontepec has become.[9]

The second surprising feature is the prominent place of the town brass band as an alternative route to success in the cargo system. Music is important in many indigenous Mexican towns, but in Totontepec it is a high calling. Given the prominence of the municipal band, I believe it would be more accurate to describe what Totontepec has as a civil-religious-*musical* cargo system. In most cargo systems described in the literature, band-related cargos are grouped together with religious cargos. While is true that members of Totontepec's band do perform at Catholic masses, the band performs so many secular functions that it does not make a lot of sense to see it as a strictly religious institution. Second, service in the brass band exempts a person from other cargo obligations. There are various reasons why musicians may choose to take on a cargo and set their music aside for a time, but musicians are never obligated to do this. Third, playing in the band (and especially holding the position of *capillo* 'band leader' or band committee president), counts toward a man's qualifications for holding higher

9. According to Beals (1973 [1945]) civil and religious cargos were tightly interlinked in Ayutla in the 1930s. Kuroda (1984) reports that this was no longer the case in the 1970s, nor was it the case in Tlahuitoltepec. He argues that changes were already underway in Ayutla, but that the Salesians, who arrived in 1962, are held directly responsible for diminishing the importance of mayordomías in Ayutla and elsewhere in the Mixe region.

ranked cargos. Musicians can skip several rungs of the cargo ladder and become eligible for higher offices even though they have not occupied all of the lower ones. Indeed, many of the town's past presidents began their public careers playing in the band.[10]

In addition to cargo duties, all able-bodied citizens must perform *tequio* (unpaid community service), or *kumùùn tùùmba* as Totontepecanos call it. *Tùùmba* comes from the root /tun/, which means 'work' or 'labor,' and *kumùùn* is an old borrowing of the Spanish word *común* meaning 'common,' 'communal,' or 'mutual.' Tequio is essentially a form of taxation on all citizens of Totontepec. Whenever the call goes out for people to do tequio work they must either report to the municipal building the next morning or else pay someone to go in their place. On average, people are obliged to perform one or two days of tequio work each month. Even Totontepecanos who live abroad are expected to send cash contributions back to the community in lieu of providing physical labor. Tequio labor is used for all kinds of public works, but typically it involves things like street cleaning, repairing storm damage or repainting public buildings. Formerly, tequio laborers were also put to work on readying fields for planting, and for harvesting crops.

In exchange for a citizen doing his or her tequio, the community is obliged to look out for that citizen's welfare. This includes providing citizens with small parcels of land to build their home on and to grow staple crops, looking after them if they are ill or infirm, and burying them properly, in the local graveyard. This last privilege of citizenship is perhaps the one that is dearest to their hearts. When, during my stay, a Totontepecano living in the United States died in an accident, the town took up a collection to fly his remains back to Oaxaca to buried in his native soil. If someone

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10. Kuroda (1984) reports that in Tlahuitoltepec, too, the band's *capitán* (captain) has been known to skip up the cargo ladder.

repeatedly fails perform his duties he can literally be ex-communicated—the plot of land where he live and the fields he farms can be taken away and he can be driven out of town. I only heard of one case of this ever happening—for most Totontepecanos this is an unthinkably harsh punishment. As more and more Totontepecanos perform regular wage labor rather than tending to their own crops or doing odd jobs, figuring out how to meet the demands of tequio has become trickier. Still they rarely complain and appear to take great pleasure in doing community service. When they talk about the streets that they helped to pave with cobblestones or the municipal facilities that they repainted and decorated you can see the pride in their eyes.

In ascending order, from lowest rank to highest, the Totontepecano civil cargo hierarchy consists of the following offices:

- topil
- regidor
- síndico and *suplente* (deputy)
- presidente
- alcalde and suplente
- principales

The cargo of topil is the lowest ranked post in Totontepec's local civil cargo system and one that, roughly speaking, combines the duties of an errand boy or page with that of a police officer. As soon as a Totontepecano boy reaches puberty he may be selected to become a topil. In an average year, thirty are chosen for this cargo. The prototypical topil is an unmarried adolescent. He is not yet a full Totontepecano citizen, but by assuming the cargo of topil he marks his entrance into civil society. This will be the first time he takes on responsibilities outside of his household. A young man may be called upon more than once to do a year of service to the community as a topil. His eligibility

continues until he is elected to serve as a *regidor* (alderman), the next highest office in the local cargo system, or he grows too old (over age thirty or so).

Once a young man is named a regidor he has moved onto the next level. After completing a tour of duty as *regidor* he then becomes eligible for an even higher cargo. The office of *presidente* is akin to that of a county commissioner or mayor. He is the official representative of the municipio of Totontepec in all dealings with district, state and federal agents. His duties require frequent trips to Oaxaca City in order to fill out paperwork, apply for and obtain funds and represent Totontepec's interests. In Mixe the presidente is called the *kajpün kuvajk*, literally the 'head of the town.' The *síndico*, meanwhile, is in charge of most of the day-to-day affairs of the town of Totontepec. He directly oversees the regidores and topiles as they go about doing municipal business. One of his most important duties, especially in recent years, is to supervise all public works projects, such as the construction of the new preparatory school facilities and the resurfacing of roads. For this reason he is sometimes called the *yaktùù'avaatspa*, which means 'road clearer.' This title has an obvious double meaning—he is also an-all-purpose problem solver.

Although the cargo of *alcalde* sits at the top of the civil cargo ladder, the alcalde's duties are more ceremonial in nature. He is something like the chief justice of the municipal court and his word is final on matters of local law. The alcalde is also responsible for settling disputes between the town of Totontepec and the nine agencias that make up the municipio of Totontepec. In Mixe the alcalde is called the *möödajk*, literally the 'big cane.' The big cane in question is a sceptre adorned with ribbons. Like a Homeric *skeptron,* which compelled others to listen to its wielder, the *möödajk*'s sceptre represents his authority to call for a town meeting and to address

Totontepecanos as a corporate group. The citizens of Totontepec are compelled to listen to what he has to say (literally, because he can ask the síndico to send out the topiles to round them all up and drage them to the junta), and his presence at an event transforms it into a public occasion.

There are two other high-ranking cargos that stand somewhat apart from this ladder: the town treasurer and the secretary. In Totontepec these office holders are paid a small salary and they may hold the position for as many years as they care to and the public wishes to renew their contract. They are chosen from among the town's most Spanish literate and numerate citizens. Not too long ago only a few citizens had the necessary skills to hold these offices, which meant that a couple of prominent families had a firm grip on the town's purse strings. This is no longer the case. Between 1998 and 2002 the town secretary was a young, unmarried woman who had graduated from prep school and had acquired basic office and computer skills along the way.

In Totontepec as in other Mixe communities higher cargo holders are generically referred to as *autoridades* (authorities). Rodriguez & Ballesteros (1974:49) write that

> [o]ne of the words that one hears most in dealings with the Mixes is the word "autoridad", referring to flesh and blood individuals: there are the "autoridades municipales" [civil cargo holders], "autoridades de la Iglesia" [religious cargo holders] (this does *not* include the priests), the "autoridades de la música" or "autoridades de la banda", the "autoridades de la escuela" [school committee cargo holders], etc.

In public settings, Totontepec's *autoridades* are always addressed deferentially, and when they visit someone's house in an official capacity the homeowners are expected to offer them their highest level of hospitality. Totontepecanos are fervent believers in the dictum that you must respect the office regardless of how you feel about the person

currently occupying it. One young woman explained to me that she was very close to her uncle (they had a classic joking relationship), but that during the year that he held the cargo of síndico she made sure to address him as *nde'm siindiko* (mister síndico) whenever they encountered each other in a public setting. In fact, in an effort to avoid the appearance of currying favor or of disrespecting the office, she often treated her uncle even more formally than decorum demanded. High-ranking cargo holders expect to be addressed in a certain manner and that in public settings this supercedes the form of address that the intergenerational relationship between speaker and addressee would otherwise dictate. In other words, a Totontepecano must address the current town president as *nde'm presideente* 'mister president' even if the president is his sibling or even nephew.

Having sketched out how the cargo ladder operates in a general way, I would now like to examine what it is that topiles and regidores do in more detail, since in a very real sense these two cargos have traditionally defined the transition from childhood to bachelorhood to adulthood for young Totontepecano men. I then turn to an extended example a how young Totontepecano woman first became involved in the civic life of her community.

During their year of service topiles are obligated to spend one week out of every four working for the community. This labor is typically referred to as *semaana tùùmba* (week work). Topiles may also be called up during an emergency and are required to put in extra hours at fiesta time. Each crew of topiles—there are four crews since each topil works one out of every four weeks—has a captain who is responsible for making sure that the other members of his crew are present and accounted for and that they are

doing their job. In general topiles report directly to the síndico, but they are obliged to follow the orders of any higher-ranked cargo holder and often work directly under one of the eight regidores. The principal duties of a topil are:

- to spend the night in the municipal building, and maintain a night watch

- to keep watch over any prisoners who might be spending a night or two in the town jail

- to enforce Totontepec's nightly 10pm curfew by patrolling the major streets and stopping anyone found out wandering about

- to sweep and clean the municipal building and basketball court

- to work each day from 8am to 5pm on public works projects. In recent years this has meant paving all of the major streets of Totontepec with cobblestones and cement.

- to run errands (e.g. to deliver messages) on behalf of the town authorities.

In recognition of this last duty, topiles are often called *tök'ayo'yiva* (errand runners). This title is derived from the roots /tök/ 'house' and /yo'y/ 'to go walking.' Topiles travel from household to household delivering messages from the authorities. That is, they deliver official messages from the body public to the private domestic spaces of their addressees. Before loud speakers were installed in the 1980s capable of delivering messages from the authorities to the most of the town simultaneously, this was, in fact, the topiles' most important duty.

Topiles may be as young as 14 or 15 years of age and can be old as 35. A young man must be a topil at least once before he becomes eligible to become a regidor. Many young men do several tours of duties as topiles before moving on to higher cargos. A few of them never make it past this lowest cargo. After the annual town elections have taken place in September the current office holders and the men who will take over in

January meet with the principales (town elders) to select the coming year's roster of regidores and topiles.

Two groups of young men are particularly likely to be chosen as topiles. Many young men are chosen to be topiles because they show enormous promise. The town elders and the cabildo see great potential there and are anxious to speed them forward on their career. The sooner they can get through their mandatory service as topiles the sooner they can move on to more important and prestigious cargos. A number of topiles, however, are selected each year from among the ranks of the biggest trouble makers and scofflaws in town. The idea is that by putting them to work on behalf of the community they can be turned around, or rehabilitated, and then go on to become responsible, law-abiding citizens. At the very least, their work as topiles keeps them too busy to get into trouble. At the same time it is hoped that this intermingling of good kids and miscreants will toughen up the gentler and relatively well-heeled recruits. The institution forces the sons of prominent families and boys who do not even own a pair of shoes to rely upon each other.

In spite of the fact that they serve with pride and are rewarded for their efforts, topiles are all treated as if they were juvenile delinquents, even the straight-arrow, high-potential ones. They are valued for their muscle-power, not their brains, and they are not seen as particularly trustworthy or responsible. Their style of dress, their behavior and their speech are the very model of roughness and adolescent masculinity. Topiles have characteristic ways of speaking and of being spoken to that are seen as bawdy and puerile. Topiles are also the stereotypical addressees of brusque commands. They are there to be bossed around. This contrasts with higher-ranking cargo holders who must always be addressed as if they were one's parent or grandparent.

One pattern in particular caught my attention because it is so closely associated with the way in which topiles speak. Utterances such as in (1) below were most likely to be uttered by an adolescent to his siblings or cousins, whereas the alternatives in (2) were a more suitable, or perhaps courteous, way for that adolescent to express the same thing when someone from his parents' or grandparents' generation was present:

(1)	nöjkx öts ntsi'iv		I am going bathing.
	go 1IND 1=bathe-DINC		
	nöjkx öts ntun		I am going working.
	go 1IND 1=work-DINC		
(2)	nöjkx öts ti tsi'ivü		I am going to take a bath.
	go 1IND REL bathe		
	nöjkx öts ti tùnü		I am going to work.
	go 1IND REL work		

In the first pair of sentences the subordinate verb is inflected for person and aspect, while in the second pair of sentences the subordinate verb remains uninflected (non-finite) and the linkage between the two clauses is much looser.

In my attempts to learn how to employ these two variants in appropriate ways, I initially thought that the forms with tighter clause linkage were more "informal" or "intimate" or "coarser" because I observed that young people tended to use the uninflected variant whenever their elders were present. However, when I presented these examples to various Totontepecano consultants and asked for their comments, the their reaction to the inflected variant was typically that this is how *topiles* speak. In fact all kinds of forms that I had taken to be more informal or ruder were described as quintessential "*topil* talk."[11]

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11. Only Mixe utterances elicited this response. While *topiles* can and do utter endless streams of informal Spanish, they are not especially identified with any particular use of Spanish.

Totontepec no longer has a special religious cargo for adolescents and young men. However, such a cargo once existed in Ayutla and probably Totontepec as well. It apparently went out of fashion before the Salesians arrived and re-energized Mixe Catholicism. Ralph Beals' discussion of the Ayutla's cargo system in the 1930s features the following comments about the religious cargo of *topilillo* (little topil)—something akin to "altar boy"—and the civil cargo of topile [sic]. It should be noted that in Beals' description "policeman" is synonymous with topil, and that a *mayor* or "police chief" is a topil who, by virtue of his talents or seniority is placed in charge of a group of other topiles:

> When a youth at Ayutla reaches the age of about seventeen, he is expected to begin to take a man's part in the community and he will be named *toplillo* of the church. Already he has probably been working in the tekio or communal labor since the age of twelve or even younger, if not by order, at least as a helper to his father... Theoretically every young man must begin his service as a toplillo before reaching the rank of topile. Actually, as there are fewer places in the lowest grade, some youths of poorer families escape this appointment.
>
> It is very unlikely that anyone will escape being named a topile [sic] or policeman. Again, each alternate week must be spent in town under the orders of the chief of the division. The policemen arrest drunks and bring all those charged with offenses before the judge. They run errands, notify people to serve their communal labor, collect contributions levied by town councils, and do any other service required. If a policeman is sent as a guard to bring back some prisoner from another town, this is usually the first time he leaves his native village. But should a youth be fluent in speaking Spanish and apt at reading and writing, he may be named secretary and escape police service as well as other services below the grade of alternate [suplente] to the síndico. If ambitious and not too poor, a young man will soon be named *mayor* or police chief. A greater maturity and seriousness is required for the next office...
>
> If a youth aspires to higher offices, he must be prepared to serve the town an entire year at a time. No longer will he be able to return to his ranch every other week. An absence from town of more than a day on private affairs would be severely criticized and he might even be fined. If, as probable, he is married when named for a higher office, he must

> rent a house in the village, if he has none of his own... (Beals 1973:23-24)

The role of topil has historically been something analogous to adolescence or a "coming of age" rite for young Totontepecano men—a transitional period—between a childhood that revolves around household obligations and a sociological adulthood that revolves around the community and one's new family. Completing this service and being chosen to become a regidor has thus constituted a confirmation of one's status as an adult.

It was once the case that all Totontepecanos over the age of thirteen had to contribute their time and labor to their community. Nowadays, Totontepecano children are excused from doing tequio and holding cargos until one year after they finish school. Many of them will not begin to participate in the system until they are in their late teens or even twenties. The irony is that the very same pressures that have driven certain young Totontepecanos to acquire the skills that they will require to lead their community in the coming decades have made it more much difficult for many them to actually participate in town government by changing how and when they enter into the system.

Regidores are chosen based on their maturity, their potential for leadership, their ability to work hard, and their potential to successfully gather together the resources necessary to provide two large feasts, one for each fiesta. Virtually all regidores are married, and it is impossible to fulfill all of the duties of a regidor without having a sufficiently large group of kin to assist. Their ages range from 20 to 45 or so, but the typical regidor is in his late 20s or early 30s and has one or more young children. Regidores from the city either have to rely heavily on their relatives back in Totontepec

or else consider moving their wife and children back to Totontepec to live with them and help out during their year of service.

The Mixe name for the cargo of regidor is *texükööyva*, derived from a root that means 'dish' or 'plate' and root that means 'to bear.' Hence a *texükööyva* is literally a dish-bearer. The most important ritual duty of a regidor is to supply the food and drink. If the musicians are not well-fed then they will not be able to perform well and with gusto. Regidores are on duty one out of every three weeks. Most of their time is spent supervising topiles on public works projects or assisting the síndico, presidente and alcalde. In theory they each have a specialization—one is supposed to focus on education, one on health, and so on and so forth. But in practice they are generalists and share their burdens.

Like topiles, regidores are chosen by the outgoing authorities and the principales. Eight new ones are chosen each year, four from the barrio of Asunción and four from the barrio of San Sebastian. One half represents femininity, the Virgin of the Acension and the harvest. The second half represents masculinity, Saint Sebastian and spring planting. These two moieties do not correspond to two distinct spaces. Most of the people I spoke with believe that they once did, although opinions varied widely about where the dividing line between the two halves of the town might have lain. One's barrio affiliation is inherited from one's father. However, children whose fathers are from outside the community often get assigned a barrio based on the cabildo's need to balance out the groups.

Figure 2.3. The new *regidores* prepare to accept the *bastones* of authority

In 1926 Totontepec was overcoming several decades of disputes between the barrio of San Sebastián and the barrio of Asunción. The former group was closely associated with the Catholic Church. Members of the latter group were self-fashioned intellectuals and their turf was the town's brass band. At this historical moment they were slowly beginning to work out their differences and forming a new kind of local civil society. In the neighboring Mixe towns of Zacatepec and Ayutla two powerful political bosses had emerged in the wake of the Mexican revolution. These two were wreaking havoc in the countryside, stealing land and intimidating and killing everyone who got in their way. Totontepecanos wanted to prevent this from happening in their town. And furthermore they believed that they could only defend themselves from their neighbors if they overcame their internal differences and presented a united front.

In 1931 a new system of electing local officials was put into place, and this system has survived largely intact into the 21st century despite efforts by the PRI (Mexico's dominant political party until the 2000 elections) and other outside influences to reform and replace it. One of the bylaws established at that time is that eight regidores will be chosen each year, four from each barrio. Neither San Sebastián nor Asunción would be allowed to dominate. The result has been a stable political order for seven decades.

Recent developments, particularly migration, have challenged this stability. In 2001 the community started experimenting with a procedure whereby one regidor position be set aside each year for someone from Oaxaca City or Mexico City. The organizing committees in each of those two Totontepecano colonies put together lists of potential candidates and submit them to the autoridades in Totontepec for consideration. This move is supposed to accomplish two things: (1) to increase participation of urban Totontepecanos in the affairs of their hometown and to increase their voice; and (2) to end the practice of electing regidores and other cargo holders who live in the city without consulting them first.

Religious differences have also figured into the politics of regidor selection. Catholic regidores are believed to put on better spreads and to participate more fully in the two fiestas and other important civil-religious occasions. Several Catholic informants confided in me that the feasts thrown by Catholic cargo holders were always better because more people would attend and the mood was always more festive (less tense). However, when the Protestants do not feel adequately represented in the cabildo they complain loudly. Protestant cargo holders are always more susceptible to criticism for not providing enough food and entertainment or the wrong kind of food, or other

related shortcomings. It was assumed that they would spend less money and not provide enough alcohol.Often the criticism is well-founded, but I observed that several Protestant cargo holders actually *over*-compensated in order to avoid these accusations.

Since the number of committees that oversee such sectors of Totontepecano society as the schools, transportation, and water has drastically increased, so too has the participation of woman in the civil affairs of Totontepec. Young women become eligible for committee assignments when they get married or have a child out of wedlock, i.e., when they become sociological adults. Women whose husbands have migrated to the United States to earn money are particularly liable to be given committee cargos. Almost every committee in Totontepec is organized along the following lines. There is a committee president (presidente) and vice-president (suplente), a secretary, a treasurer, and the remaining members are called *vocales*. Because young women are much more likely to be numerate and literate than members of their parents' and grandparents' generations, they are regularly given the offices of secretary and treasurer. Like the civil cargos I described above, committee members typically have to do some sort of routine work—like fixing broken pipes or cleaning the motor of the corn mill—one out of every three or four weeks in addition to attending regular meetings.

I recorded the following narrative shortly after I first began studying Totontepecano Mixe. The narrator, my very first Mixe-speaking linguistic consultant, was having an enormously difficult time obtaining permission from the síndico to take time off from the cargo she held that year to spend time working with me. It was at that moment that I first understood how seriously Totontepecanos take their civic

obligations. And it was not just that my consultant could be fined or punished for dereliction of duty. It was a matter of her reputation and honor.

Oliva became eligible to hold cargos and to vote in local elections when she became a single mother at the age of 19. Even though she and her son still lived with her parents, she became, for legal purposes, a head of household. As such, she was now required to do the cargo work assigned to her. But in exchange she was eligible to petition for her own plot of land on which to build a house for herself and access to communal farm land on which to plant her own corn.

Oliva's First Cargo[12]

Disyembre po'o it xa ve'e öts jayu xpöömba para öts molino nyakjötsüt.
In the month of December the people assigned me to grind in the mill.

Ka'a jèmts ötse'e ntaak di jatun yakjaty,
My mother wasn't going to permit it,

pero kum ve'em tse'e öts nkajpün köjxum jats pön ti ve'e may jayu kyöjtsp,
but in my town we have to do what the majority says,

ax jè'è tse'e jayu tyùnup, di jakatsökam jayu.
and that's what one has to do, although one doesn't want to do so.

Ax pön ka'a tse'e jayu di tun, ax muulta tse'e jayu yakpöjkjip.
And if the person doesn't do it, they fine that person.

Ax ve'emts öötse'e njajty.
And that's what happened to us (excl).

Ax van'it vè'èts ötse'e nyakpüüjm para öts meen nkoojnöküt,
And that time they assigned me to be treasurer,

pero jèptse'e tù'k ja ntaa'm vye'na juu' di xööj O--,
but there was a woman named O--,

ax ka'ats ja ve'e di tsök para öts meen nkoojnöküt
and she didn't want me to guard the money

12. Recorded in July 1996.

jè'è köjx kuuk öts mùùtsknum jats jè'è 'amöjani.
because I was still young and she was old already.

Jats ötse'e xnüüjmja: ka'a mits xvinmayüt ku öts nsemana ntùnüt,
And then she told me: don't worry when it's my week to work,

küx ka'a öts meen nyaküt
because I am not going to give you the money

porke ka'a mitsap yö mjè'è, jats antes para maas mits ötse'e mjè'è xmo'ojup
because it's not yours, and before you have to give me yours

küx jè'è ku mits mùùtsknum, jats tù'ma ja meen xyaktùnüt.
because you are still young, and you might spend it.

Jats ötse'e nüüjmji: pön ayoop xa öts mits x'ix, uk pön ka'a öts pön nöyaa'y
And I told her: if you see me as poor, or because I have no husband

ka'a jamts öts nmeetsna ni jè'è.
I will never steal, no way.

Jats öts xkayakmèètsüt xjaka ijtja öts pön ti öts njö'kxup.
I won't be a robber even though I might have nothing to eat.

Ka'a jamts öts nmèètsüt.
I am never going to rob.

Ax van'its ötse'e xnüüjmja: ka'a ntsöjkp xa öts mits,
Then she told me: no, I *like* you,

pero ka'a tse'e x'avanat juu' öts n'avanavaampy.
but don't say anything about what I am going to tell you.

Jatse'e vya'any: jèp xa ve'e meen, pero ka'a tse'a may jayu di nöjava
And she told me: there is money, but the people don't know

jats jèp ja ve'e, ax pön ka'a tse'e x'avanat ax nyakupts öts jè'è.
that there is any, and if you don't inform them then I am going to give it to you.

Tövants ötse'e ve'em xnüüjmja vye'na,
She had already told me this,

ax van'its 'ötse'e nmöötnavyaatji ja ntaa'm juu' di xööj Y--
and then I met with a woman named Y--

ax jè'è tse'e presidenta para ja molino. Ùm öts ja ve'e xnüüjmja:
and she is the president of the mill committee. So she told me:

uk mtùnup mitse'e maa'yin jats mètsüt tù'k juunta
can you please come to a meeting

juu' öts ntùnuvaampy mööt presidente
that the [municipal] president and I want to hold

jats tù'kkö'öji üü'mda mööt vokaajltöjkta ixyam la sinko de la tarde?
and all of us together with the committee spokespeople today at five pm?

Jats ötse'e nüüjmji jats o'yip
And I told her yes.

Ax kuts ötse'e njè'ynü, jats ötse'e ntaak nvaajnji jats vintsove'e jyajty.
And when I arrived [home], and I informed my mother about what had happened.

Jats ötse'e xnüüjmji: tyüva xa mits x'avanat tù'kkö'öji
She told me: you have to tell the entire truth

pön vintsoj jaty tù'k ukpu jadù'k mnö'müxjü.
about what each person said to you.

Ax ku tse'e tanan öts nöjkxnuva,
And when I went back in the afternoon,

van'its ötse'e ntöjki jèp ofisiina jùma presidente yakutuk.
then I entered the president's office.

Ax van'its ötse'e xnüüjmja ja O-- ayu'uts jats ka'a ötse'e n'avanat
And then O-- told me in secret that I'd better not say anything

vintsoj öts ja ve'e ti xnüüjmja.
about what she had told me.

Amö'öts ötse'e ntaani. Ka'a ötse'e n'uk nöja'vinü pön ti ötse'e nkoo'tsup.
I didn't say a thing in response. I didn't know what to say anymore.

Jatse'e ja juunta di ukvaajny,
And the meeting began,

jatse'e ja presidente di kojts'ukvaajny pön vintsoj öts jèpe'e ntun.
and the [mill] president started to ask how we were working.

Jats ötse'e nvaajny jats: oy.
And we all answered: "good."

Pero ka'a tse'e di nöjava jats ti ve'e tùùjnjup.
But I didn't know what was [really] going on.

Kwando tù'mayji ja presidente vyaajny jats töve'e di nöjava
Then suddenly the town president informed us

jats jèpe'e di 'it tù'k motoojr, pero töötse'e tyokinü,
that there was a motor [for the mill], and that it was missing,

jats ka'anyip jèpe'e tij
that it was no longer there.

Jatse'e amö'öt tù'kkö'öji tyanköjxti.
And we all stayed silent.

Jatse'e tù'mayji ja presidenta vyaajny jats ka'a jam jèp ti vye'na ku ööts ntöjki.
Then suddenly the mill president said that it wasn't there when we (excl) entered [= 'began our year of service'].

Ax van'itse'e ja presidente vyaajny:
Then the president said:

Bweno pön ka'a xa ve'e mits xyakjè'yidinuva, ax kajpön tse'e yakvaajnjap
"well if you all do not bring it back, the town will be told."

Jats öötse'e tù'kkö'öji ntsö'ki köjx ax kum ka'ats öts ntinatyukjava.
And then we all got scared, because I didn't know anything about that.

Jats öts nvaajny jats o'yip, jats kujöpitji ve'e yaktùnüt,
And then I said that yes, that it would be done on the following day,

katiyap yak'a'ixup.
that he wouldn't have to wait.

Jatse'e kujöpit yaktuujn ja juunta, kutse'e nümay jayu jyè'y.
And the following day was the town meeting, and a lot of people arrived.

Jatse'e ja presidente vyaajny jats ti ve'e molino di tyoki
Then the president said what had been lost in the mill.

Van'itse'e may jayu vyaajny jats ööts ntùnüt maa'yin jats ööts nökùtsüt
Then the people said that we ought to please tell

pön jùma ve'e 'it.
where it was.

Jats öötse'e tù'kkö'öji nvaajny jats ka'a ööts nöjava.
And we all answered that no one knew.

Kwando tù'mayji ve'e ja O-- vyaajny jats H-- ja di mööt ja motoojr,
Then suddenly O-- said that H-- had the motor,

jats jè'è ja nök ti pöjkji ja E-- ku jè'è vye'na sekretarya
that he had taken the papers from E-- when she was secretary

ax 'ixam paat jè'è tse'e di mööt.
and until now he had had them.

Van'it tse'e ja O-- ööts xnüüjmji jats ka'a öötse'e n'avanat
Then O-- told us that we shouldn't say anything

vintsoj ööts ja ve'e xnüüjmji.
about what she had told us.

Tù'k po'o tse'e tyempo yakmooydi ja H-- mööt ja O-- para di yakjè'yidinuvat ja motoojr.
They [the assembly] gave H-- and O-- one month's time to return the motor.

In this short text, we catch a glimpse of how age politics intersect with the cargo politics in Totontepec. When this young woman became a single mother she also became a potential cargo holder, even though she was not necessarily ready or willing to carry this burden. Her first cargo thrusts her in the uncomfortable position of having to navigate between the conflicting demands of her family, the committee she was drafted to work for, and the town authorities. Because she was more numerate than her elders she was made the treasure of the corn mill committee. However this presented a problem for the mill committee president, who did not trust her to guard the money. Ironically, the narrator explains that the head of the committee turns out to be the crook. Oliva's narrative also conveys how in matters of town governance, average every-day

Totontepecano citizens feel absolutely compelled to obey the will of the town authorities, even when their demands conflict with one's familial obligations or personal religious beliefs.

Public Language and Rituals of Unification

This kind of talk about how individual Totontepecanos understand their relationship to their community goes on constantly. But the relationship between language and community in Totontepec is more than merely that of sign and referent. In the opening section of this chapter I noted that Totontepecano Mixe is the only official language of community governance and civic ritual (e.g. town assemblies, rites of political succession, community service). This has important implications for the future use and value of this language in this community. It means that despite the intense pressures that young children and their care takers feel to speak Spanish in order to ensure success in school, all adolescents who plan to stay in Totontepec and to maintain their good standing as citizens have to acquire at least a modicum of Mixe competence.[13]

Totontepecanos also believe that public speech use belongs to the community rather than to the individuals who utter the words. As such, the elected authorities are charged with protecting it and are the ones ultimately responsible for its disposition. One consequence is that I was forbidden to do any recording during any of the juntas that I attended while living in Totontepec. While a given orator might have had no objections to letting me record, any other member of the community would have been

13. In some cases these contrary pressures have even led families to an informal division of linguistic labor among siblings (e.g. one son learns Spanish and gets a good job in the city and sends cash back home while the other stays, takes care of the corn fields and makes his way up the cargo ladder).

within his rights to complain to the *autoridades* that I was violating their trust. The autoridades themselves, I should note, had no particular objections to my plan to record public speech, but decided that they would rather avoid the hassle and potential criticism.

Ritual speech, interestingly, is not closely guarded the way that talk at town meetings is. Perhaps this is because it rises above the mundane affairs and intrigues of life in Totontepec and speaks to univeral truths. It is not associated with any particular group of cargo-holders or local faction. Perhaps also, the formal dimensions of ritual speech, its poetic structure, are viewed as more important than the semantic content.

It is hard to imagine a Totontepecano achieving a great deal of success in his cargo career without a good measure of Mixe competence. But at the very least he has to learn certain ritual oaths, salutes and other ceremonial speech forms and perform them flawlessly. The first such speech act that a regidor must perform is a ritual greeting called a *tukkojtspoo'kxün*. Tukkojtspoo'kxün could be translated as 'greetings' or 'salutations,' but it there is more to it than that. This word is made up of the root /kots/ 'to speak' and /poo'kx/ 'to rest,' plus a nominalizing suffix and an instrumental prefix. Literally, it means 'an instrument for putting people at ease through speech.' Of course, this begs several questions about how this speech act might help to put one's addressees at ease and why they might be presumed to be anxious or ill at ease in the first place. This most ceremonious ritual greeting is performed by all eight regidores. Like all true ritual speech, both the poetic structure and the form of the event are completely over-determined. The tukkojtspoo'kxün employs parallel couplets in a manner that is characteristic of many Mesoamerican ritual speech acts. The greeting is as follows:

Nte'yam Tukkojtspoo'kxün (Our Lord's Salutation)[14]

Mèè'kxtap miits.
Please excuse us.

Oy tùù'da'akyam Nte'yam mmo'ojadat,
Our Lord will guide you on the path

xönajxün tsùnajxün
through day through night.

Ntukmuja'vip ööts Kunuu'kx Tee',
We (excl) extol our Blessed Father,

Kunuu'kx Onük,
Blessed Child,

jats Kunuu'kx Ja'vin
and Blessed Heart,

pön y'ajajtk atö'kxtk
his splendor and light

tüdüpüm tüdükunuu'kx.
he makes and he blesses them.

Ntaakamda Möjüvintaj juu' tsajpèjtnu,
Our (incl) honored great mother who ascended to Heaven,

pön kyö'm pön pya'tkup
in her hands and under her mantle

üü'm n'ijtumda.
she has all of us.

Tata Saanto möjümaa'yinntùùmba,
Our miracle-working Grandfather Saint,

pön njayèjpumdup kuvaamba kukojtspa,
who looks out for all of us and speaks out on our behalf,

yùùj köjxm pa'am köjxm.
in poverty and in sickness.

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14. As recounted by Juan Arelí Bernal Alcantara (p.c. 2001). The English translation is my own.

Jè oo'kpa jya'vinda pön ijtinup Nte'yam möötˊ,
The beloved dead who are with Our Lord,

jè'è tse'e nùù'kxtkin püktso'vün düyaktökadap,
because they plead and pray,

Kunuu'kx Tee' tsapjootumit vyinkùjkm,
before Blessed Father in heaven,

miitsta jè m'oy jùùjntykin m'oy naxviijnin köjx.
that you may all have good life and goodly lands.

Jè Nte'yam myutùùmba myupöjkpa,
The Lord's workers and agents [i.e., angels],

pön x'ixumdup xjayèjpumdup,
who care for us (incl) and look after us (incl),

jovum xööj jovum tsùùj,
every day, every night,

kin nka'ijtumda muvaamba tsù'ùxpöjkpa kyöjootm.
so we all may stay out of the hands of provokers and aggressors.

Xoojntkin möötˊ jats oy ja'vin möötˊ,
With happiness and with a good heart,

ööts miitsta tù'k Nte'yam ntukkojtspoo'kxta,
we (excl) salute you all in the name of Our Lord,

yaja jùma nnay'ixumjada nnavyaatumjada.[15]
Here where we (incl) see and encounter each other.

This greeting is the first act of public speaking that a regidor will perform on behalf of his community. It is also the very last one he will perform before returning to private life, uttering it one final time as he and his peers greet the group of men that will

15. The alternative ending for when the ceremony takes place at someone's home is:

yaja jùma mxoojntkin m'ayo'vün xyaknaxta.
here where all your joys and miseries take place.

take over their offices on New Year's Day. New regidores are taught the greeting by their elders and have to rehearse it repeatedly until they get it just right. The very first time that they perform this greeting will be when the town's authorities go to visit the directors of the town's brass band and formally request that they continue to perform their music for another year. The brass band, as I noted earlier, is required to perform at many of the important rites of passage in a Totontepecano's life, it serves a diplomatic function, and its music is used to propitiate mountain divinities and ancestral spirits.

As Totontepec has become a diasporic community, the ceremonial greeting is increasingly used to reassert the bonds between the home town and its large colonies in Oaxaca City and Mexico City. Each year the new civil authorities must venture forth to pay their respects to the new local organizing committees in each city. The committees in the cities want reassurance that the people they represent will be repatriated to Totontepec after their death and that the band will play at their funerals. In exchange they offer their fealty and their considerable financial support.

The ritual greeting does the work of reconciling and transcending divisions and reproducing Totontepec as a single, unified polity. It is no coincidence that this greeting takes the form of a prayer to the Catholic divinities rather than to the Mixe divinities. Neither is it a coincidence that this salute is first and most importantly given to the town's musicians. It is in fact a ritual reenactment of the Totontepecano moeity associated with the church making an overture of peace to the moeity associated with the band. This greeting is hence fundamentally about maintaining this balance of power between the two groups.

The remarkable thing about what has taken place in Totontepec is how consciously the system was re-worked and how thoroughly it got rationalized. This was

accomplished in such a way that various oppositions and opposing subgroups within the community were made symmetrical and lined up in a fashion that encourages their persistence but allows them to be periodically overcome through rituals of unification. During my time in Totontepec I often heard an apocryphal story about John Crawford, the first SIL linguist to visit the town. "Don Juan," they say, "came to Totontepec to introduce a new religion and divide us. But when he saw how united we were, he realized that this would be impossible. So instead he picked up his trumpet, and began to play with the municipal band." While I do not doubt that this story has a basis in fact, note the remarkable parallel here to the ritual reconciliation between the church and the band. This is the idiom through which Totontepecanos express their unusually tight sense of group-ness.

* * *

Let me conclude this chapter where I began, with the observation that Totontepecanos like to think of their identity as a national identity, and their relationship to Totontepecano-ness as that of a citizen to a state. It is often asserted that the connection between language and ethnic identity is a simple and straightforward one in which a given language is emblematic of a social group and that speaking said language is tantamount to an assertion of group membership. Despite the allure of such a simple picture, this relationship between language and ethnic identity is a good deal more complicated. Totontepecano identity, as it is conceived by Totontepecanos, is fundamentally a matter of citizenship. And being able to speak and understand Mixe remains an important part of what it means to be a good citizen in this community.

In the next chapter, while continuing to probe the question of *why* Totontepecanos speak Mixe, I expand the scope of this inquiry to investigate some of

the mechanics of *how* they speak Mixe, that is to say, how Mixe grammar and discourse are organized. Ultimately, patterns of language use and even, to an extent, grammatical structures are shaped by the needs of speakers. Hence I will be focusing on those grammatical forms which are most directly implicated in contemporary debates about the relationship between Mixe language and Mixe society.

CHAPTER THREE

AYÙÙK: THE TOTONTEPECANO MIXE LANGUAGE

> Few Mixes speak Spanish well and in some towns the women and older men practically do not use that language. Their own language is harsh and guttural. It requires eighteen letters for its writing. Combinations of two or three consonants and doubled vowels are frequent. Verbal nouns are extremely numerous… The Mixe language is fairly uniform: Ayutla, Juquila, Ocotepec, Quetzaltepec, Camotlan, Ixcuintepec, Coatlan—the towns which we have visited appear to speak much the same. Our carriers from Juquila had no difficulty making themselves understood in all. Totontepec is asserted to have a notably peculiar dialect.
>
> — Frederick Starr (1900:53).

The language that is most closely associated with Totontepec is known as Totontepecano Mixe or North Highland Mixe (NHM). Its speakers call it *Ayùùk*. In the following pages I provide a more detailed description of the Totontepecano Mixe language community and outline a few of the most important and typologically distinctive aspects of this language. A thorough, comprehensive grammar of Totontepecano Mixe would fill several dissertations. My considerably more modest goal here is to highlight those grammatical features which have become most salient in local discussions of how Mixe ought to sound and why it is structured in the way that it is. Many of these features have emerged to prominence in the course of regional debates about what defines Oaxaca Mixean languages and what distinguishes them from one another, if indeed there are individuable varieties of Mixe. Other aspects of Mixe grammar that may prompt heated discussion are implicated in changes resulting from

the contact between Spanish and Totontepecano Mixe. And, to be sure, several of the grammatical patterns that I identify in this chapter participate in the age-linked linguistic variation that I discuss throughout the dissertation.

My other motivation for having such a chapter (rather than stowing away all of the grammar in an appendix to the dissertation) is to emphasize the need for bridging the gap between overly technical studies of Totontepecano Mixe grammar, such as Crawford's (1963) monograph on Totontepecano "phonotagmemics," and studies such as Aubague et al's (1983) *Dominación y Resistencia Linguistica en el Estado de Oaxaca (El Caso de la Mixe Alta)*, which suffers from a superficial understanding of the structure of Mixe.[1] In a dissertation on the intergenerational transmission of Totontepecano Mixe it seems warranted to devote a few pages to this language's intricate structure, so that the reader may come away with a better appreciation for what is at stake.

Previous scholarship. Totontepecano Mixe remains a little-studied, poorly understood language. John Crawford, from the Summer Institute of Linguistics, produced a doctoral dissertation on Totontepecano phonology based on work that he did in the 1950s that was published several years later in 1963. His SIL successors, Alvin and Louise Schoenhals, produced a dictionary, first published in 1965, and a series of bible translations. Alvin Schoenhals also wrote an unpublished master's paper on Totontepecano Mixe verb classes (1962) and an article on Totontepecano Mixe clause types and their discursive functions (1979). Over the last several years Roberto Zavala has produced a series of papers (e.g. 1999, 2001, 2003) and a doctoral dissertation

1. Translation: *Domination and Linguistic Resistance in the State of Oaxaca (the Highland Mixe Case)*.

(2000) on Oluteco, a Mixean language spoken in southern Veracruz. His work on Oluteco represents the most the most indepth work to-date carried out on any Mixean language and the influence of his approach and his analyses have heavily informed this sketch. Many of my analyses of Mixe grammar would not have been conceivable without the wealth of historical-comparative work done by Terrence Kaufman (e.g. 1996, 1997) and Søren Wichmann (e.g. 1994, 1995).

My own work on Mixe began in the summer of 1996. For three summers I worked with the Project for the Documentation of the Languages of Mesoamerica on an analytical dictionary of North Highland Mixe. During those summer sessions I worked intensively (50 hrs/wk) with a Mixe speaker from Totontepec named Oliva Amaya Osorio for three summers. I also had access to taped narratives of several other Totontepecanos (including her brother-in-law Sótico Réyes). Together we compiled a set of over 5,000 lexical items and accomplished much in the way of preliminary grammatical analysis. Much of the data presented in this sketch came from elicitation work I did in the winter of 2000 while residing in Totontepec. My principle linguistic consultant during this period was with a middle-aged Totontepecana woman named Braulia Réyes Gómez, who shared a home with her elderly monolingual mother María Gómez. I returned to the PDLMA in the summer of 2002 to collect more data for the Totontepecano Mixe dictionary, to refine my analyses and carry out extensive editing. During that summer season I worked with a Totontepecano Mixe speaker named Alfonso Quintín Sánchez. Don Quintín was 76 years old at the time, and his wife had recently passed away. His father was the very federal first school teacher to come to Totontepec. However, the teacher's stay was a brief one—don Quintín was raised by a single mother. In his day he played in the band and even served as Totontepec's

presidente for a year. By the end of the 2002 session we had managed to produce a lexical database that contained over 7,500 entries. In the summer of 2003 I began to write a grammar to accompany the database. A portion of that work appears here.

Context. Totontepecano Mixe is one of four principle varieties of Mixe spoken in the Mexican state of Oaxaca today. Altogether there are more than 100,000 speakers of these varieties of Mixe. The vast majority of Mixe speakers live in an ethnic enclave east of Oaxaca City, a territory that their ancestors have occupied for over a millennium. This area stretches from the heights of the Sierra Juarez down toward the steamy lowlands of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. It is surrounded on three sides by more populous and economically dominant communities where Zapotec is spoken. Chimalapa Zoque is spoken to the east and speakers of Chinantec live in nearby communities to the north of the Mixe region. Both Zapotec and Chinantec are members of a large linguistic family called Otomanguean, a group comprised of several dozen languages spoken throughout the central valley of Mexico and southern Mexico. Otomanguean languages are perhaps best known for their complex tonal systems. Totontepecano Mixe and Chimalapa Zoque, on the other hand, are members of the Mixe-Zoquean family, a small group of languages spoken in the southern Mexican states of Oaxaca, Veracruz, Tabasco and Chiapas.

The Mixe-Zoquean family possesses two major subgroupings, the Mixean branch and the Zoquean branch. Languages in the first branch include Highland, Midland, and Lowland Mixe, Oluta Popoluca and Sayula Popoluca. The second branch includes Chiapas Zoque, Santa María Chimalapa Zoque, San Miguel Chimalapa Zoque,

Ayapa Gulf Zoquean, Texistepec Gulf Zoquean and Soteapan Gulf Zoquean (also known as Sierra Popoluca).

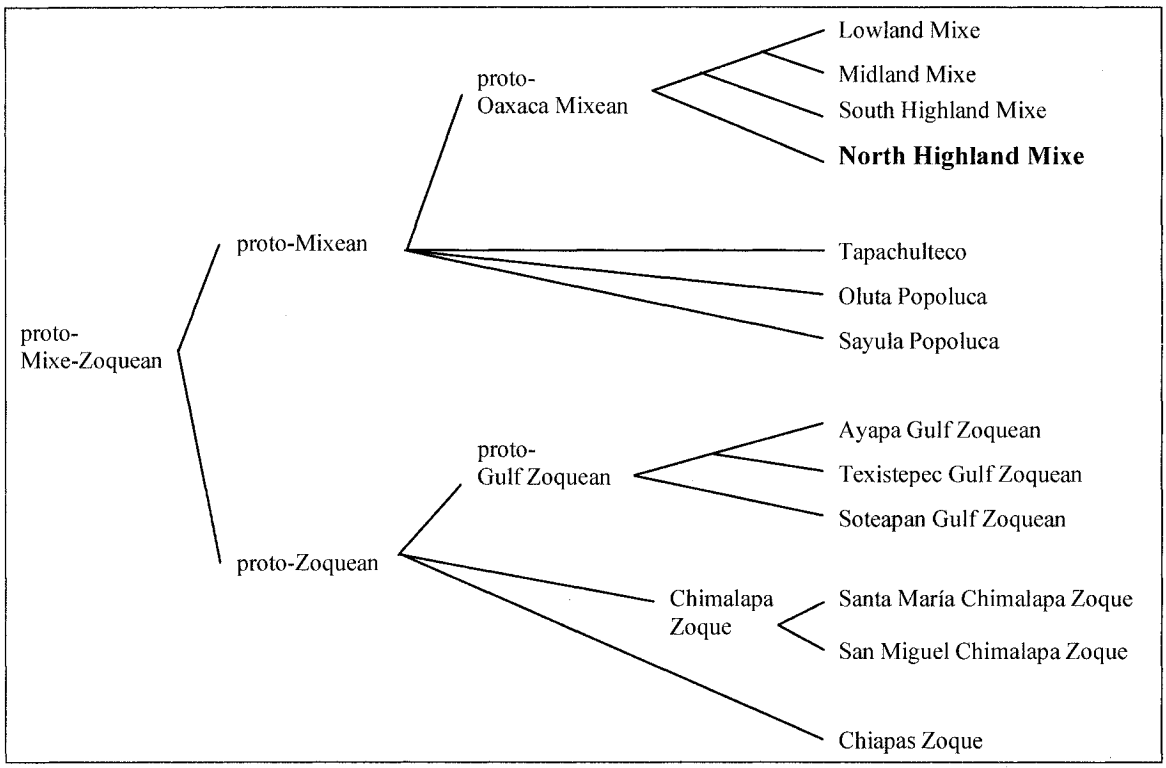

Figure 3.1. The Mixe-Zoquean language family (Wichmann 1995:9-10)

Mixe-Zoquean languages and their speakers occupy a pivotal position in the cultural and linguistic history of Mesoamerica, having influenced and in turn been influenced by Otomanguean- and Mayan-speaking neighbors (Campbell 1976; Campbell, Kaufman, and Smith-Stark 1986). The contemporary geographical distribution of Mixe-Zoquean speakers and various forms of archeological and linguistic evidence suggest that speakers of Mixe-Zoquean languages played a central role in Olmec and post-Olmec society (Campbell and Kaufman 1976; Lee 1988; Lowe 1983; Justeson and Kaufman 1993) and perhaps Teotihuacano society as well (Kaufman

2002 ms). These languages are also replete with linguistic phenomena of great interest to current linguistic theorizing, most notably in the areas of grammaticalization, the syntax of cliticization, noun incorporation, transitivity and argument types, and selectional restrictions in the semantics of verb roots (see Wichmann 1993, 1994). In the 1950s-1970s the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) produced several dictionaries, biblical translations and linguistic analyses of Mixe-Zoquean languages (e.g. Clark 1977; Elson 1967; Nordell 1962; D. Lyon 1967; S. Lyon 1967; Hoogshagen 1984). More recently, a number of secular linguists have started to study them in earnest (e.g. Herrera Zendejas 1995; Johnson 2000; Villavicencio 1990).

Søren Wichmann, the linguist who coined the label "North Highland Mixe," was the first to argue that the variety of Mixe spoken in and around Totontepec, ought to be considered a distinct Mixean language owing to the time depth of a cluster of sound changes which distinguish it from South Highland Mixe and another set of innovations which would seem to group South Highland Mixe together with Midland and Lowland varieties of Mixe (Wichmann 1995). I agree with Wichmann's assessment; Terrence Kaufman (p.c.) is still a little skeptical of the division between Northern and Southern Highland Mixe.

Mixes themselves are keenly aware of the extent to which Mixe grammar varies from place to place, but generally consider all varieties of Oaxaca Mixe to belong to a common language (Cortés 1995). They call this language *Ayuujk*—from /'av+/ 'relating to the mouth' and /yuuk/ 'wilderness, mountains, up above'. They refer to themselves *Ayuujk Ja'ay* 'Ayuujk people' (or dialectal variants thereof). Leading Mixe intellectuals have translated Ayuujk as "the sacred word" (Maldonado A. & Cortés M. 1999), because mountain peaks are sacred places, and "the word which is florid like the

jungle" (Reyes 1995). As for the ethnonym "Mixe", its ultimate source is unclear. Many Totontepecanos believe that it comes from the Mixe word *mixy* 'boy', because their Zapotec neighbors have historically used *mixy* to address Mixe men in a condescending manner.[2] In Totontepec the ethnonym *Ayuujk Ja'ay* 'Mixe people' is pronounced *Ayùùk Jayu*. The town of Totontepec is called *Anyükojm*,[3] and people who come from Totontepec are thus *Anyükojmit Jayu*. It might make sense to refer to Totontepecano Mixe as *Anyükojmit Ayùùk*, but the speakers themselves do not use this term. They prefer, simply, *Ayùùk*.

A majority of the members of the North Highland Mixe language community—5,000 speakers or so—reside within the municipio of Totontepec. Outside of the municipio of Totontepec, North Highland Mixe is spoken in the town of Tonaguia, which lies just over the border in the neighboring district of Villa Alta, and by many of the residents of la Candelaria, which is the western-most *agencia* (politically subordinate village) of the municipio of Zacatepec. Quite a few residents of Yacochi, an agencia of Tlahuitoltepec, speak it as a second language. Some North Highland Mixe speakers and people with at least limited knowledge of the language live in nearby Zapotec towns such as Yalalag and Choapan.

Large immigrant communities of Totontepecano Mixe speakers now reside in Oaxaca City, Mexico City, Los Angeles, California and Danbury, Connecticut (commonly referred to in Totontepec as "*Nueva York*"). Smaller numbers of speakers reside in dozens of other Mexican and American cities. Perhaps as many as a thousand

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2. Terrence Kaufman (p.c.) suggests that the source is *miixi, a Wanderwort in Oaxaca and Veracruz.

3. That is /an-I + koj-m/ 'heat-PCP + mountain-LOC', i.e., 'hot mountain'. In other varieties of Mixe one hears the fuller forms *kopkm* or even *kubajkm* where Totontepecanos say *kojm*.

speakers live in Mexican urban areas and as many as five hundred live in the United States. With recent improvements in the highways, travel between Mexico City and Totontepec has become easier than ever. It is possible to make the trip in 10 hours. The population of Totontepecano Mixe speakers in the United States continues to increase, fueled by migration. In all, the North Highland Mixe language community may have as many as 7,000 members. And despite the inroads that Spanish has made in the region, there have never been as many living speakers as there are today.

The form of Mixe spoken in the town of Totontepec possesses several features that set it apart from the North Highland Mixe variants spoken in its satellite villages (*agencias*). Inter-intelligibility is near total, by all accounts, but the differences can be used to quickly identify a person's community of origin. Most of these differences are lexical, having to do with the extent to which a shift in stress from the second syllable to the first syllable of disyllabic roots has spread through the lexicon. The town of Totontepec leads the way while some of its agencias lag behind, e.g.

(1)	Totontepec	Tepitongo	Gloss
	Ùnük	uNAK	child

Another distinguishing feature of the Mixe spoken in the town of Totontepec is that in a number of lexical items the low back vowel *o* has become a centralized *ö*, e.g.

(2)	Totontepec	Tepitongo	Gloss
	tö'öxtöjk	to'oxtöjk	woman
	ja nayjöp	ja nayjop	until tomorrow

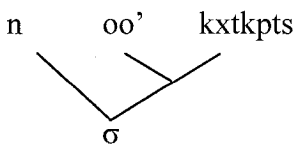
Perhaps the most salient differences between dialects of North Highland Mixe are to be found in the pronunciation of function words. For example, negativity is expressed in

Totontepec with the particle *ka'a* while in nearby Amatepec the equivalent is pronounced *ki'i*.

Totontepecano Mixe is a morphologically complex language with a tendency toward SOV word order. This is an archaic pattern for Mesoamerica which has been largely replaced by VOS word order in the Mixe-Zoquean family. Although its ancestor was highly agglutinative, Totontepecano Mixe has been becoming ever-more fusional. It is a head-marking language, and almost all inflection appears somewhere in the verb complex. It features the remnants of an ergative-absolutive system for marking agreement and a robust inverse-direct alignment system that relies on several intersecting hierarchies of possible arguments types to keep track of who is doing what to whom.

In some respects Totontepecano Mixe's phonology and canonical root shapes are among the most conservative of the Oaxacan Mixe languages, but stress shift and syncope have conspired to obscure the sources of much of its verb morphology. For these and other reasons Totontepecano Mixe words feature some of the most complicated syllables that one is likely to hear in this part of the world, as in the underlined portion of the following sentence:

(3) Myunoo'kxtkpts jè'è ve'e 'he is begging for pardon'[4]
/y= mu.noo'kx.tük -p =ts jè'è ve'e/



4. This example comes from Schoenhals & Schoenhals (1965:300).

The most often noted difference between Totontepecano Mixe and its closest relatives is its inventory of nine distinct vowel qualities. Three additional vowel qualities were added to the proto-Mixean inventory of six as the result of a series of historical developments, including lowering umlaut and the desyllabification of glides in certain environments.

Phonetics and Phonology

There are nine vowel sounds in Totontepecano Mixe, and vowel length is distinctive. In unstressed syllables, only four of those sounds appear, and two of them, *ü* and *u*, are in complementary distribution. The latter appears before labial consonants such as *p* and *v* and the former appears everywhere else. The vowel written *ö* sounds like the vowel in the word "cut", as it is pronounced in many varieties of American English. The vowel written *è* is similar to the vowel in the word "cat". Both *a* and *o* are pronounced lower and further back than Spanish *a* and *o*. The vowel *ü* is high and unrounded. The vowel sound written *ù* is a diphthong that sounds a bit like the vowel heard twice in the English word "yo-yo".

Table 3.01. Approximate Phonetic Values of Totontepecano Mixe Vowels

	In stressed syllables			*Post-tonically*		
	front	center	back	front	center	back
high	i	ü	u	i	ü	u
		ù				
mid	e	ö				
	è					
			o			
low		a			a	

The core consonants of Totontepecano Mixe are *p, t, ts, k, x, ', j, m, n, v*, and *y*. The consonant represented by an apostrophe is a glottal stop. The consonant written *ts* is an alveolar affricate, and *x* is a retroflexed palatal fricative. The symbol *v* stands for a sound that is typically a labiodental fricative, although after an *m* it is pronounced [w]. Some Mixe writers prefer to use the symbol *b* to represent this sound. Either way, it is *not* pronounced the same as the bilabial fricative of Spanish, heard in the words *vaca* and *burro*. The Mixe sound written with a *j* is uttered with much less friction than the *j* of Spanish (which I write <jh> whenever it is necessary to distinguish the two). Totontepecano Mixe also possesses a set of more marginal consonants. These include the native sounds *ch, l, r, s* and a number that entered Mixe via borrowed Spanish lexical items, such as *f* and *jh*.

A number of phonological processes in Totontepecano Mixe group these consonants together into classes: the obstruent class -- *p, t, ts, x, k*; the nasal class -- *m, n*; the sonorants -- *m, n, l, r, v, y*; and the glottals -- *j, '*. All of the obstruents and sonorants have palatalized alternants that appear before the consonant *y*. They also have voiced allophones (sometimes written *b, d, dz, zh, g*) that are heard whenever they appear immediately after a nasal consonant and before a vowel (N_V). All of the sonorants have voiceless allophones that appear following a glottal consonant or in word-final position.

The consonants of Totontepecano Mixe can also be grouped into a *weak* set -- *j, ', v, y* -- and a *strong* set that includes the rest of the sonorants and all of the obstruents. Unlike the strong consonants, the weak consonants are all vulnerable to metathesis and

deletion. It is interesting to note the epi-Olmec writing system, essentially a syllabary, formally distinguishes these two groups of consonants (Terrence Kaufman p.c.).

For the most part, the symbols that I use to represent the consonants of Mixe follow the emerging standards that Mixe linguists and educators have been developing for themselves. This is easy to do because the consonantal inventory varies little from one Mixean language to another. I also follow the standard Mixe practice of leaving out word-initial glottal stops when I am not discussing underlying forms, although in fact *all* Mixe words begin with a consonant. One difference is that I use <ch> to represent the palatalized form of *ts*, whereas many Mixe writers now insist on <tsy>.[5] Another difference is that I insist on using the symbol <v> for representing voiced labiodental fricatives, rather than <b>, which I reserve for representing the voiced allophone of /p/.

Choosing a set of symbols to represent the vowels of Totontepecano Mixe has been and continues to be a thorny problem. In large part this is because the regional committee in charge of developing an official Mixe orthography very much wants a system that works the same for all varieties of Mixe. However, Mixean vowel sounds vary significantly from place to place, and Totontepec's 9-vowel system simply does not map neatly onto the 6-, 7- and 8- vowel systems found in other forms of Mixe. This is not just a matter of accent, either. Often differences in vowel quality are the only indicators of such grammatical categories as aspect and transitivity. As a consequence of these challenges, the orthographic symbols that Mixe writers use to represent Mixe vowel sounds have changed repeatedly over the last decade, and it is unclear how/when a single standard will emerge.

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5. The advantage of <tsy> is that the *y* (or palatalization of the preceding consonant) is often an exponent of one of several inflectional categories, e.g. 3rd person possession, and spelling it out calls attention to this fact.

Until such time as a definitive and workable decision has been reached, I have been using my own system for representing Totontepecano Mixe vowel sounds that makes practical sense in terms of the particulars of its phonology. The symbols *i, u, e, and a* are employed in exactly the same way in my system as they are in every version of the official Mixe orthography that I have seen. The sound that I write *è* is a lowered reflex of proto-Mixe *e, and the same goes for *ù*, which comes from *u. The grave accent is intended to represent this lowering iconically (at various times the former has been written *ä* or *e̲* and the latter has been written *ö* or *o*). The Totontepecano Mixe vowels *a* and *o* are also lower than their historical antecedents, but I leave off the diacritic in both cases because there is no possibility of confusion here. For the high central vowel, I use *ü*, which has been the most common way of representing a high central vowel in Mixe writing (however, *ï*, *ö*, and *u̲* have also been used). Finally, in Totontepecano Mixe the lowered alternant of *ü* and the raised alternant of *o* are phonetically indistinguishable, and so I represent both of them with *ö* (this sound has variously been written *ë*, *ä*, *a̲*, and *ü*). I chose this symbol because it combines graphic elements of the symbols <ü> and <o>.

Ablaut and umlaut. The vast majority of Totontepecano Mixe root shapes are monosyllabic. These shapes may be divided into two formal classes. One group of root shapes is invariant. The second group consists of roots that appear in one form when they precede a vowel and a second form when they precede a consonant or appear word-finally. The invariant shapes are: CVj, CVVj, CVV'C, CVV'Cx, CV'Cx, and CVjCx. The variable root shapes are summarized in the following table:

Table 3.02. Variable Root Shapes[6]

underlying root shape	pre-vocalic shape	pre-consonantal shape
CVT	CVT	CVjT
CVN	CVN	CVV(j)N
CV'C	CV'VC	CV'C
CVVC'	CV'VC	CVVC

Several processes are at work in these alternations. Whenever a root-final obstruent precedes a consonant-initial suffix or appears word-finally a *j* is inserted before it. This process could also be viewed as "pre-aspiration." Note that this also accounts for the invariant root shape CVjCx and the fact that there is no corresponding CVCx shape.

(4)	/m= nèp-pI/	mnejpp	'you are kicking it'
	/tök/	töjk	'house'
	/pèt-p/	pèjtp	's/he ascends'
	/tü= vits-pI/	tüvijtsp	's/he carries it'
	/nax-p/	najxp	's/he passes'

Sonorants, too, undergo preaspiration when they appear word-finally or before a cluster of obstruents. In this environment the preceding vowel also gets lengthened.

(5)	/vin/	viijn	'eye'
	/'ay/	aajy	'leaf'
	/'av/	aaj	'mouth'

There is one significant difference between how CVT and CVN roots behave. When a CVT root precedes a glottal stop, pre-aspiration occurs as expected. But when a CVN root precedes a glottal stop the glottal stop metathesizes with the sonorant and neither vowel lengthening nor preaspiration occur.

6. This is a very simplified summary. The symbol T = any obstruent and N = any sonorant. When CVN roots precede a glottal stop the N and glottal undergo metathesis and the vowel of the root remains does not lengthen.

(6)	/nùm-'um-p/	nù'mump	'we (incl) run'
	/tan-'um-p/	ta'nump	'we (incl) stay'
	/kay-'um-p/	ka'yump	'we (incl) eat'
	/'öv-'um-p/	ö'vump	'we (incl) sing'

This phenomenon makes it possible to test if the initial segment of a suffix is a glottal stop.

The most important thing to note here about the CV'C and CVVC'-shaped roots, is that they are indistinguishable in pre-vocalic contexts, but they differ when preceding a consonant.[7]

(7)	/n= mo'ts-up/	nmo'otsup	'I will scratch it'
	/n= mo'ts-pI/	nmù'tsp	'I am scratching it'
	/m= pèèt'-up/	mbè'ètup	'you will sweep it'
	/pèèt'-pa/	pèètpa	'sweeper'

Along with alternations in root shapes, Totontepecano Mixe features alternations in the height of the root vowel. Outside of the highlands area, the other members of the Mixean branch of the family have maintained the Mixe-Zoquean inventory of six vocalic phonemes, two front vowels, two central unrounded vowels and two back rounded vowels:

Table 3.03. Proto-Mixe Vowels

	front	mid	back
high	*i	*ü	*u
non-high	*e	*a	*o

7. There are several good reasons, historical and synchronic, why their basic shapes must be as they are given above, even though they never surface with a final glottal stop. The arguments are too lengthy to go into here.

In the highland Mixe zone this standard set of six got contorted and expanded a little differently in each community.[8] In Totontepec *i was left intact, and *a was lowered a bit but was otherwise left alone. The other four vowel sounds underwent a split into a higher allophone and a lower allophone and eventually into two separate phonemes when the conditioning environments that had first triggered the split were lost in several contexts.

In contemporary Totontepecano Mixe the higher sound is heard in stressed syllables when the following syllable contains an underlying high- or mid- front vowel (symbolized here with a capital I). This final vowel gets deleted before it surfaces. The lower vowel sound is heard in all other stressed syllables.

(8) Raising and deletion

$èC_1I$	→	eC_1
$ùC_1I$	→	uC_1
$öC_1I$	→	$üC_1$
oC_1I	→	$öC_1$

This development ought to have resulted in a symmetrical ten vowel system. However, the higher member of the *ö-o* pair is phonetically indistinguishable from the lower member of the *ö-ü* pair. So the result is actually a nine vowel system.[9]

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8. Readers interested in the details can consult Wichmann (1995) for a comprehensive account of what happened in the South Highland Mixe zone.

9. It is conceivable that in another north highland town this is exactly what has happened, but if this dialectal variant exists I have not yet discovered it.

When an underlying high vowel follows a stressed *i* it simply gets deleted. When it follows a stressed *a* it becomes a glide and, where relevant, fuses with the preceding consonant.

(9) Deletion

$iC_1I \rightarrow iC_1$

(10) De-syllabification

$aC_1I \rightarrow aC_1y$

The following table summarizes these relationships:

Table 3.04. High-Low Vowel Alternations

	Invariant		**Variant**			
High	i	a	u	ü	ö	e
Low			ù	ö	o	è

These high/low alternations take place in both derived and underived contexts. So, for example, the proto-Mixe word **küpi* 'tree' is pronounced *küp* in contemporary Totontepecano Mixe, not *köpi* or *köp* as one might expect. And pM * *'ajtsi* 'older brother' has become *ajch*. Similarly, the verb root /'èts/ 'to dance' undergoes vowel-raising when followed by the dependent/incompletive suffix *–I*, the homophonic but historically unrelated nominalizing suffix *–I*, or the independent/incompletive/ transitive suffix *–pI*:

(11) /'èts-p/ èjtsp 's/he dances'

/'èts-pa/ èjtspa 'dancer'

/y= yak-'èts-pI/	yak'etsp	's/he makes him dance'
/ka'a y= 'èts-I/	ka'a y'ets	's/he doesn't dance'
/'èts-I/	ets	'(a) dance'

Along with the loss of word-final vowels, both derived and underived, a penultimate stress rule eventually gave way to lexicalized stress. In contemporary Totontepecano Mixe primary stress always falls on the lone syllable of a monosyllabic root, regardless of what derivational or inflectional morphology may follow. The most well known illustration of this (and one of the few minimal stress pairs) is:

(12) Apit 'thorn' (from /'ap -it/)
aPIT 'to roll it up' (from /'a- pit/)

Primary stress always falls on the first syllable of a disyllabic root and on the right-most root in a compound stem.

Orthography and Mixe Cultural Politics

A few pages ago I mentioned that developing an orthographic system for Totontepecano Mixe in particular or for Oaxaca Mixean languages in general has been the source of more than a little conflict among Mixe intellectuals, educators and other interested parties. For over two decades people have been working to design a unified Mixe alphabet. In theory, it should not be too hard to develop a practical orthography for any one variety of Mixe. Although Mixean languages feature complicated phonologies, their phonemic inventories are not very large or typologically unusual. The difficulty, of course, is that the label "Mixe" refers not to a single linguistic code but to a cluster of languages that share a common history but have diverged considerably since Oaxaca Mixean began splitting apart some eight or nine centuries

ago. At the same time, the Mixe people—for all of their shared experiences and cultural assumptions—have yet to allow any desire for national unity to get in the way of sometimes bitter local rivalries. Mixe efforts to develop and promote their own standardized pan-Mixe alphabet may eventually aid in the "erasure" of internal divisions, both social and sociolinguistic (*à la* Irvine and Gal 2000). But to date it has only served to bring certain differences between Mixe communities into sharper focus.

As the now familiar refrain goes, language ideologies are never *just* about language.[10] Protracted disputes about how to write a certain sound, Totontepec's scandalous diphthong *ù* for instance, have as much to do with the speakers who utter such a sound and with what their neighbors think of them as with the technical challenges of creating a writing system. Ultimately debates about spelling turn out to be about competing visions of the role of language in Mixe society. The people involved in these debates are, of course, aware of the broader meaning of having an alphabet. In one of their early reports they write:

> To say alphabet is equivalent to saying a collection of graphic symbols that satisfy (and must satisfy) the needs of the Mixe speakers themselves. For this reason, each letter, each symbol ought to respond to our vision and our decisions about our language, as a vital part of our culture… That is to say, our Mixe life has produced our language and our language expresses our life, our culture.[11]

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10. A number of recent studies have highlighted the linguistic ideological entailments of representing language in print, e.g. Haviland (1996); Preston (1985); Ochs (1979); Schieffelin and Doucet (1994); Winer (1990); Jaffe (1996); Fenigsen (1999) and standardizing language, e.g. Silverstein (1987).

11. Source: IEBM September 1983 report, reprinted in Acunzo (1991:179). Original text: Decir alfabeto, equivale a decir conjunto de grafías que satisfacen (y deben satisfacer) las necesidades propias de los hablantes del mixe. Por esto, cada letra, cada símbolo trata de responder a nuestra visión y decisión sobre nuestra idioma, como parte vital de nuestra cultura, como parte vital de nuestra lengua. Es decir, nuestra vida mixe ha producido nuestra lengua y nuestra lengua expresa nuestra vida, nuestra cultura.

My sense is that they have been more reticent to acknowledge what might have to be sacrificed in order to achieve their goal of a unified Mixe writing system.

Mixe consonants vary little from one place to another. The vowels are another story. Each Mixe community has its own unique set. These distinctive vowel sounds can be exponents of several grammatical categories including aspect, transitivity and clause type. They can also distinguish verb roots from de-verbal nouns. The following examples from Totontepecano Mixe illustrate:

(13)	**oo**'k	to die
	ùù'k	death
	oo'k jè jayu	The person died.
	ka'a jè jayu y'**ùù**'k	The person is not dying.
(14)	yak'ixp**ö**jk jwan	John taught.
	ka'a jwan yak'ixp**ü**k	John does not teach.

These distinctions must be graphically represented *somehow*. They cannot be ignored or reliably inferred from context.

All of the present day vowel inventories of Oaxaca Mixean are descended from a proto-Mixe-Zoquean system that features six vowel qualities and contrastive vowel length (see Table 3.3 in the previous section). In the Lowlands and Midlands the original system remains basically intact, though actual pronunciation varies from place to place. Several linguists had suggested that contemporary Lowland Mixe features not two, but three (!) distinctive vowel lengths (Bickford 1984, 1985; Hoogshagen 1959; Van Haitsma & Van Haitsma 1976). However, those claims have been discredited (Wichmann 1995). In the Southern Highlands, every community developed a slightly different set of vowel qualities, and in some cases a seventh and even eighth phoneme

emerged when the word-final high vowels that triggered the raising/lowering of the preceding vowel were desyllabified.

As I pointed out earlier, in the Northern Highlands, in and around Totontepec, the phonemes /i/ and /a/ stayed more or less in place while the other four developed a split between a higher allophone—[e], [ö], [u] and [ü]—heard in stressed syllables preceding high front vowels and a lower allophone heard in all other stressed contexts—[è], [o], [ù] and [ö]. When the segments that conditioned this alternation were lost, this split became phonemic. This ought to have resulted in a new 10-vowel system, but because the lower allophone of /ü/ ended up being indistinguishable from the higher allophone of /o/ the final tally was nine. Also, the vowel currently written <ù> came to be pronounced as a diphthong that begins in a central unrounded position and rounds as it glides further back.

Apart from their grammatical function, vowel sounds have become the most salient sociolinguistic indexes of the different groups of Mixe speakers who utter them. This was most often explained to me in terms of differences in *tono* ('tone' or 'accent'). In answer to a question such as "how could you tell that so-and-so was from the town of *Püügojm*?" a typical response would be: "you can tell by his *tono*." When pressed for more explicit details my Mixe interlocutors would perform imitatations of their vowel sounds. If you were to ask anyone from the Mixe region about how people from the town of Totontepec speak, that person will inevitably volunteer this classic minimal pair, with an admonition about getting the pronunciation just right:

(15) ùk 'dog' *versus* ok 'grandmother'

Mixes, both in and outside of Totontepec, who are familiar with the debates over spelling will often refer to *ù* as "the ninth vowel." When Totontepecanos speak of their "ninth vowel" it is with some degree of pride, but when other Mixes do so there is a subtle insinuation that it is a needless extra flourish and a complication.

Previous efforts to create a writing system for Mixe have met with only limited success. A sustained writing tradition has yet to emerge. During the colonial period there was only one systematic attempt to develop and employ a spelling system. Its author, a Dominican friar named Agustín de Quintana, produced a Mixe grammar, a confessionary and a small collection of hymns and prayers in the 1720s and 1730s.[12] Quintana neatly summarized the challenges posed by Mixe vocalism in a section of his grammar called "Of Diphthongs and their Necessity." Because the Dominican order was forced to withdraw from the Mixe region shortly after Quintana's retirement, his writing system ended up forgotten. In the 1950s and 1960s the Summer Institute of Linguistics began working on Mixe and eventually produced a number of dictionaries and biblical translations. The orthographic choices they made, designed to be practical and accessible, were never adopted by Mixe writers for their own purposes. And while they drew from a common set of alphabetic symbols and diacritics, they employed them in distinct ways for each of the four Mixe varieties that they worked on.

The SIL's approach came to be viewed by a number of Mixe intellectuals as a component of a divide-and-conquer strategy. In the words of the 1983 "Instrumentación de la educación basica mixe" report: "Because of the great diversification of the letters used, in different conditions and with different meanings, it is easy to deduce, too, that

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12. All surviving legal documents generated in the Sierra Mixe during this period (1572-1822) were written in either Spanish or Nahuatl (Chance 1989).

the work of the SIL has been the linguistic and social fragmentation of our communities" (Acunzo 1991:176).

The idea of a unified alphabet, designed by Mixe linguists for Mixe purposes, was first proposed during a 1979 regional summit. This alphabet would be a vehicle of Mixe unification and part of a larger initiative to take local control of public education. It would pointedly *not* be created in order to fulfill any state agenda (cf. Valiñas 1983). The "Manifiesto al Pueblo Mixe" drawn up during this summit asserts that "unity is, without discussion, the most important thing that we have to achieve" (Acunzo 1991:138). It suggests that without it, Mixe society will eventually be torn apart by internal fights and lawlessness. Nor will it be able to successfully petition for resources from a disinterested federal government. The authors of the manifesto go on to exclaim:

> We deliver this manifesto to all the Mixe Communities so that they might reflect and think that only united will it be possible to change our situation. We must think that nothing can impede the union of those who live in the Highlands, the Midlands and the Lowlands. If someone opposes it, or does not understand the situation, then he is simply an ally in the service of our enemies (Acunzo 1991:139).

Shortly after the summit, the Committee for the Defense of Mixe Resources (CODREMI) was established. Its mission was to help put an end to the depredations of local political bosses and to organize Mixe responses to the external threats posed by the government, missionary groups and big business. The name of the organization speaks to a certain defensive stance that is said to be characteristically Mixe. This is the attitude toward the outside world embodied in the figure of their culture hero, Kondoy, who set their holiest mountain aflame in order to prevent its capture by invading Zapotecan armies.

Eventually the CODREMI was succeeded by a non profit organization called the Servicios de los Pueblos Mixes (SER). SER, with its office in Oaxaca City and staff of lawyers, is currently the most prominent and well-positioned pan-Mixe organization. It does everything from providing legal representation for Mixe litigants to working with agronomists on improving crop yields. SER is an intentionally less confrontational name than CODREMI, one that suggests a willingness to collaborate with other entities when doing so can further the Mixe cause.

The specific work of designing the new Mixe alphabet has been carried out by a task force made up of local bilingual elites, including cultural promoters, intellectual leaders and ethnolinguists. They either volunteered for the work or were chosen to represent their home communities. Over the years they have issued a series of status reports. The bottom of the final page of their very first report concludes with this remarkable exhortation:

Our fight for five centuries
The forests and other riches are ours
We know how to be united
Our language is not difficult to write
We are a People with a future. May we not forget it[13]

The first line invokes the Colonial and post-Colonial past, while the final line addresses the future. Mixe writing (a symbolic asset) is listed in parallel with the riches of their forests and fields (their material assets). In fine poetic fashion, an affirmation of Mixe unity comes in the very middle of this exhortation.

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13. Acunzo (1991:169). Original text and format:

Nuestra lucha por cinco siglos
Los bosques y demás riquezas son nuestros
Sabemos como estar unidos
Nuestra lengua no es difícil escribirla
Somos un Pueblo con futuro. No lo olvidemos

From the start, the alphabet task force recognized that in order to unify Mixe spelling they would have to deal with Mixe variation. I believe, however, that they seriously underestimated its extent and their successors continue to do so today. Even if they *could* put together a set of symbols that captures all of the essential phonemic contrasts found in Mixean languages, they would be able to do little more with them than to sound out each other's written documents. One of their reports compares Mixe variation to Spanish variation (Acunzo 1991:178). They write: "Take Spanish for example. Is it pronounced the same everywhere that it is spoken? As we know, it is not. But it is written the same."[14] This is not exactly a fair comparison, given that inter-intelligibility between the four main varieties of Mixe in Oaxaca is minimal at best. A more realistic comparison would place Mixe side-by-side with the Western or Iberian branch of the Romance language family.

Added to this, the membership of the task force subscribes to a very popular local discourse about linguistic differentiation. It holds that before the Spanish arrived all Mixes understood each other and spoke the same way, that the present state of affairs is the result of continual efforts by the Spaniards, the missionaries, the Mexican government and other foreign interests to divide and eventually conquer the Mixes. For a group of people who take enormous pride in being known as *la gente jamás conquistada* 'the unconquered people' linguistic diversity poses a serious threat, a problem that must be overcome.[15]

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14. Original: ¿Acaso se pronuncia [español] igual en todas partes donde se habla? Que se sepa, no. Pero se escribe igual.

15. Unfortunately this story about the origins of dialectal diversity in indigenous Mexican languages has been accepted and promulgated by several influential Mexican sociolinguists despite the lack of any evidence supporting such claims. The irony, of course, is that the intensity of local linguistic variation encountered by the Spanish was one of the many factors that made the Mixe region so difficult to invade and exploit.

On the other hand, the people who have been working on the unified Mixe alphabet have been quite keen to take advantage of the Spanish literacy of its intended users and to design an orthographic system that will be consistent with Spanish spelling rules whenever possible. In this respect they are responding to widespread concerns that Mixe is just too difficult to write. "Difficulty" in this instance is a measure of relative distance from the norms of written Spanish.

Several participants in the Mixe alphabet task force are simply offended by the idea that Totontepecanos get to have extra symbols that no one else uses. It clashes with their notion that the best unified alphabet ought to have the fewest number of letters. In order to keep their <ö> (the diphthong that I represent here with an <ù>), the Totontepecano members of the task force even capitulated to the demand that they use the letter <b> to represent both /b/ and /v/. They were willing to sacrifice <v> in order to preserve their <ö>. The latter has become such a stereotypical feature of Totontepecano speech that it was deemed to be too important to give up.

The following remark, taken from a letter dated August 28, 2000 (with permission from the author) is representative of how these issues are being discussed:

> As you will have realized, I corrected your spelling in the writing of V to B, because that is the nomenclature accepted in the whole Mixe region, because we have now come to an agreement about the spelling system, where we all had to cede something in order to arrive at a general concensus. For us, it was to cede the V for the B, but they accepted our nine vowels, almost like we would write them before. Recently a linguist came who worked on the reunification of the language and s/he replaced my CH with TSY.[16]

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16. Original Spanish text: Como te habrás dado cuenta que te corregí tu ortografía en la escritura de la V a B, porque es la nomenclatura aceptada en toda la región mixe, porque ya nos pusimos de acuerdo todos en la escritura, en donde todos tuvimos que ceder algo para llegar a un consenso general. A nosotros nos tocó ceder la V, por la B, pero ellos aceptaron nuestras 9 vocales, casi igual como lo escribíamos antes. Ultimamente vino una lingüista que trabajó en la reunificación de la lengua y me corrigió CH por TSY.

The letter writer, a resident of Totontepec, was writing to his relative in Mexico City. The linguist he refers to seems to have been a Mixe speaker from another community, one of the other members of the regional orthography committee. The author himself was a member of this committee, but because of his handicap his attendance at their meetings was irregular. I especially want to call attention here to his use of the word "reunification" and all that this loaded term implies. First there is the idea that once upon a time all Mixes spoke the same language, second is the notion that a uniform spelling system might enable speakers of now divergent forms of Mixe to read each other's writing and perhaps even oblige them to speak more alike. Underlying all of this is the idea a (re-)unified Mixe would be desirable.

Back at home, the Totontepecano members of the task force have met with significant local resistance to their proposals. The two most commonly voiced objections are—predictably—that it looks too complicated (from the perspective of a Spanish reader/writer) and that it makes too many concessions to other Mixe communities. In August 2002, for example, I visited with a prominent Totontepecano official, and the first thing that he wanted to ask me about was Mixe spelling. As far as he was concerned, the most recent alphabetical edicts seemed like a step in the wrong direction. He still could not fathom why extra letters were needed at all to represent certain vowel sounds. This man was, among other things, an avid francophile, and he announced to me that in place of <ö> he wanted to propose the digraph <ou> or perhaps <eu>. This was not just an idle remark, because this individual had the power to raise the issue at a town assembly, and put his orthographic counter-proposals to a vote.

For Totontepecanos, the crux of the problem is this: their local form of Mixe, by virtue of its divergent pronunciation, stands accused of being the kind of Mixe most heavily influenced by contact with the Spanish. At the same time, its florid vowel system makes it the kind of Mixe that sounds the least like Spanish and fits most awkwardly into the procrustean bed of Spanish spelling.

Because the official Mixe orthography is better adapted to the phonology and grammar of South Highland Mixe, recent initiatives to foment Mixe literacy in Southern Highland communities have been yielding encouraging results (for details see BICAP 2001). This cannot be said for Totontepec and the Northern Highlands. The current climate is such that would-be Totontepecanos authors are reluctant to write anything down in Mixe at all because they worry that the spelling rules will change yet again and render their text obsolete. And even though Totontepecano parents appreciate the idea of teaching Mixe reading and writing in local schools, they are reluctant to waste scarce educational resources on something so tenuous. More frustrating still, this lag is being taken as further evidence of Totontepec's assimilationist tendencies and relative lack of interest in Mixe language and culture. The harder that Totontepec's representatives work to find compromises in the name of Mixe unity, the more difficult it has become for them to express that vision in print.

Totontepecano Mixe Word Classes

Nouns. Totontepecano Mixe nouns and may be inflected for number, locative case and possession. There are no formally marked genders or noun classes, and there is no system of noun classifiers such as the ones found in some neighboring Otomanguean languages.

Plural number is optionally expressed on nouns with the suffix *-ta*. This suffix can be used with inanimate nouns—provided that they have individuable/countable referents—but this is rarely done. Instead, numbers or quantifiers are used to express plurality. The plural suffix appears most frequently in NPs that have human referents. Even then, it may be left out if plurality is indicated via verbal agreement or with a quantifier or if the plurality of the referent has been previously established.

(16)	kùùydum	avocado(s)
	?kùùydum-da	avocados
	may kùùydum	many avocados
(17)	pojtspa	brick-layer
	pojtspa-da	brick-layers
	majk pojtspa	ten brick-layers
(18)	öts n='uts	my younger sibling
	öts n='uts-ta	my younger siblings

Nouns can also be possessed, which is indicated through the use of pronominal proclitics. The person of a possessor is indicated with same set of pronominal proclitics that Totontepecano Mixe speakers use to indicate the person of the agentive arguments of independent, transitive verbs. In this case the proclitic attaches to the possessed noun. When the possessor is overtly expressed it always appears before the possessed noun.

(19)	n=	first person possessor
	m=	second person possessor
	y=	third person possessor
(20)	töjk	house
	öts n=töjk	my house
	üü'm n=töjk	our house (incl)
	mits m=töjk	your house
	jè'è y=töjk	his/her house
	ööts n=töjk	our house (excl)
	miits m=töjk	your house
	jè'è-da y=töjk	their house

(21)	tojkx	food
	ööts n=tojkx(-ta)	our food
	miits m=tojkx(-ta)	your (pl) food
	miits(-ta) m=tojkx	your (pl) food
	yö'ö y=tojkx-ta / yö'ö-da y=tojkx	their food

When the plural suffix appears on the possessed noun it can indicate either the plurality of the possessor or the possessed noun or both. There are no inalienably possessed nouns, though some noun roots are hard to elicit without possessive marking for semantic and cultural reasons.[17]

Totontepecano Mixe features a rich set of possibilities for changing the lexical class of roots and stems, above all for creating de-verbal nouns and participle-like adjectives. The most productive suffix is *-pa*, which can be added to any verb stem to form an agent/actor nominalization, i.e., a noun that means "someone/something who VERBs." Examples include:

(22)	èts	to dance	èjtspa	dancer
	it	to be (in a place)	ijtpa	resident
	tùn	to work	tùùmba	worker
	jèy	to fly	jèèyva	flyer
	tsè'ts	to eat meat	tsè'tspa	carnivore
	mookA+yuuj'	to plow corn	moküyùùva	corn farmer
	mèèts	to steal	mèè'tspa	thief
	töy	to hunt	tööyva	hunter
	yo'y	to walk, to go	yo'yiva	walker, passenger
	jokx.Ay	to get warm	ajokxiva	lover

This same suffix, or one that in Totontepecano Mixe has come to sound exactly like it, can be used to form gerund-like complements (or the heads of non-finite verb phrases?) that take no verbal inflection and mean something like "to be VERBing". The easiest

17. Every Totontepecano Mixe speaker that I have worked with will vouch for the grammaticality of sentences like "three mothers walked by" or "he found several arms and legs lying in front of the cave." In Ayapa Gulf Zoquean, a Mixe-Zoquean language with a robust distinction between alienable and inalienable nouns, such sentences are unelicitable.

way to elicit this form (as opposed to the agent nominalization is in the following type of phrase, where it will appear following the auxiliary verb *nöjkx* 'to go':

(23)	nöjkx öts ti ____-pa		"I'm going ___-ing"
	e.g.	nöjkx öts ti tsiiva	I'm going bathing

A second kind of nominalization is formed with the suffix *-k* and it creates nouns that mean either "the activity of VERBing" or "a thing that gets VERBed":

(24)	tùn	to work	tùùnk	work
	nùm	to run	nùùmk	race
	ix	to see	ixk	demonstration
	pùj	to wash	pùjk	(the work of) washing
	tsi'ts	to suckle	tsi'tsk	breast

The nominalizing suffix *-'ün* takes verb stems and converts them into nouns meaning roughly "an instrument for VERBing." This suffix is also highly productive, and in combination with the causative prefix *tuk-* it is even more so:

(25)	pèèt'	to sweep	pèètün	broom
	pùx	to cut	pùjxün	knife
	xon.tük	to be happy	xoojntkün	happiness
	tsoo'n	to leave	tsoo'nün	exit
	xùù'k	to smell, to stink	xùù'kün	pestilence
	ooj	to scold	oojün	(a) scolding

Two other suffixes exist that create result nominalizations or past participle-like forms out of verb stems. One of them, *-I*, is highly productive. The other, *-A* is much less so. A handful of examples of *-I* nominalizations follow:

(26)	tùùt'	to lay eggs	tu'ut	egg
	taats'	to urinate	ta'ach	urine; urinated
	xok	to spy	xök	nightwatch, guard
	xots	to tie	xöts	knot; tied up
	mots	to wrap	möts	wrapped up
	pèt	to rise	pet	rise; risen

yù'ts	to hide	yu'uts	hideout; hidden
pot	to break	pöt	broken
pöj	to blossom	püj	flower; blossomed

De-verbal nominals formed with *-A*—such as the set of examples below—appear most frequently in lexical items that refer to clothing (derived from verbs of wrapping or covering) and items that refer to physical handicaps or injuries:

(27)				
	tsaam'	to ripen	tsa'am	plantain, banana
	pè'n	to spread	pè'èn	nest
	ma't	to dislocate/fracture	ma'at	dislocated, fracture
	kèt	to hobble	kèt	lame
	a.kots	to announce it	akots	gossip
	üx.mots	to wrap its behind	üxmots	underwear

It is not always easy to recognize the underlying form of these two derivational suffixes, owing to the phonology of Mixe. However, there are three primary kinds of available evidence for the identification of the initial segment or two of a suffix:

- umlaut
- metathesis
- alternation of root shapes

One can tell that both suffixes are vowel-initial because of the surface shape of the preceding stem. Also, the suffix *–I* causes the preceding stem vowel to be raised (where applicable), but the *–A* suffix does not. Because neither vowel ever surfaces intact it, all we can say for sure is that *–I* is a front, non-low, non-rounded vowel and *–A* is a low, non-rounded vowel Unfortunately, when the stressed syllable of a stem contains an /i/ or when the final syllable of a stem is unstressed then the umlaut test is unavailable. And when the final segment of a stem is not a sonorant or the final syllable of a segment is not stressed than the metathesis test is unavailable. Likewise, when the final syllable of the stem has an invariant shape then the alternation test is unavailable. However, if a

stem that begins with any consonant besides a glottal stop can be attached to the right of the nominalized lexical item, then any underlying V-shaped suffix will surface as [u] before a labial consonant and [ü] before other consonants.

Demonstratives. North Highland Mixe features three demonstrative roots that can appear independently or in combination with various kinds of inflectional and derivational affixes. These three demonstratives encode information along two dimensions: relative proximity to the speaker/hearer and presence versus absence. The demonstrative *yö'ö* is used to point to entities that are both visible and relatively near to the speaker, the demonstrative *xii'* is used to point out entities that are relatively distant but visible or perceivable with another sense, and the demonstrative *jè'è* is used to refer to absent entities. The form *jè'è* is thus the demonstrative heard most frequently in narrative accounts when the speaker refers to previously established referents. It also appears in the expression *jè'è küjx* 'for that reason; that's why...' These independent forms can be used as third person anaphoric pronouns, acting as NPs all by themselves. When they play this role they can take optional plural inflection, they function as the possessor in a genitive construction and they can be modified by adjectives, locative expressions and relative clauses.

Each demonstrative also has a reduced, CV shape that functions as a definite article. Unlike the independent forms, these articles are never stressed and can never fill the role of an argument all by themselves. Syntactically, they always appear in a position preceding the nominal head that they modify.

In addition to the independent form and the article form, these demonstrative roots can combine with three different locative case endings to form a variety of

locative and temporal expressions. It is hard to specify exactly what the three cases mean or how they differ from one another, but I would like to at least float a few tentative suggestions. The -ja forms—*yaja, jèja, xija*—are used for referring to spaces rather than to any entities that may be located within them. In contrast, the -m and -p final forms—*jèp, xip, yam, jèm, xim*—are used to pick out entities within more or less broadly defined locations. They are often used in existential expressions in the same manner that English speakers use the "existential" *there*, and in Spanish they get translated with the all-purpose *hay*, even though they encode more information than *hay* does.

The *-m* and *-p* case-marked forms can also combine with the suffix *-tsov* to indicate direction, as they do in example (28):

(28)	jùma tü= y= nöjkx-I	Where did he go?
	xip-tsov	That-a-way.
	xim-tsov	That-a-way (accompanied by pointing gesture).

Here the -m case-marked form is accompanied by a gesture, because the location being indicated is not immediately visible.

The proximal *yam* and distal *jèm* are also used as temporal deictics. In this capacity, *yam* can mean 'now, today, nowadays, presently, etc.' and *jèm* 'then, once, before,' as in the commonly heard term *jèmani* 'long ago.'

Table 3.05. Demonstratives

	+proximal +present	*-proximal +present*	*-proximal -present*
independent forms	yö'ö	xii'	jè'è
as demonstrative	*this (one)*	*that (one)*	*that (one)*
as 3rd person pronoun	*he/she/it*	*he/she/it*	*he/she/it*
w/ plural inflection	yö'öda	xi:'ta	jè'èda
	they	*they*	*they*
reduced forms	yö	xi	jè ~ ja
as definite article	*the*	*the*	*the*
case-marked forms			
-jI locative case	yaja	xija	jèja
	here	*over there*	*there*
-p locative case	xyap	xip	jèp
	here in	*over there in*	*there in*
-m locative case	yam	xim	jèm
	here in/at	*over there in/at*	*there in/at*

One of the distinctive properties of the Totontepecano Mixe noun phrase is that all of the locative case markers within the span of a given noun phrase must agree. E.g.

(29) jè töjk — the house (not visible)
xi töjk — the house (distant)
yö töjk — the house (nearby)

(30) jèm töjkm — there in the house
jèp tüjkp — there inside the house
yam töjkm — here in the house
jèja tüjk — there in the house

(31) *jèm tüjkp
*jèp töjkm
*jèja töjkm

One subclass of nouns plays a special role in expressing location. They could legitimately be called "relational" nouns, though unlike relational nouns in e.g. Yucatec Maya they are not possessed. These nouns immediately follow the head of the noun phrase and take one of the case suffixes. Almost all of them come from noun roots that refer to body parts. Here are two of the most commonly used relational nouns:

(32)	aaj	/av/	mouth
	+aajy	/+av-jI/	by
	+ap	/+av-pI/	in
	+am	/+av-m/	in, at
	e.g. tùù'aajy		by the road
(33)	joot	/joot/	stomach
	+jööt	/+joot-jI/	in
	+jöötp	/+joot-pI/	in
	+jootm	/+joot-m/	in
	e.g. yukjootp		in the forest

Personal Pronouns. First and second person arguments can be expressed by one of the following set of independent pronouns, and like other nouns they may optionally take the plural suffix *-ta*.

Table 3.06. Personal Pronouns

	singular	*plural*
1st	öts	ööts(-ta)
1st (incl)	üü'm	üü'm(-da)
2nd	mits	miits(-ta)

When the first person inclusive pronoun takes the plural suffix –ta, the meaning is super-inclusive, i.e., 'you, me, and everybody' or 'all of us.'

(34) üü'm tsoo'nump — we are leaving (you and I).
üü'mda tsoo'nump — everybody's leaving.
üü'm tsoo'numdup — everybody's leaving.

Unlike demonstratives and nouns, personal pronouns cannot be possessed.

Noun phrases can appear in a variety of guises. Here are some of the most common roles they fill, which I illustrate using independent pronouns:

Table 3.07. Noun Phrase Roles

	1st Person	**Inclusive**	**2nd Person**	**3rd Person**
reflexive	öts viinm *myself*	üü'm viinm *ourselves*	mits viinm *yourself*	jè'è viinm *him-/her-/it-self*
possessive	öts n=jè'è *mine*	üü'm n=jè'è *ours*	mits m=jè'è *yours*	jè'è y=jè'è *his/hers/its*
additive	öts=pa *I, too*	üü'm=ba *we, too*	mits=pa *you, too*	jè'è=va *him/her/it, too*
purposive	öts köjx *for me*	üü'm köjx *for us*	mits köjx *for you*	jè'è köjx *for him/her/it*
limitive	öts=ji *just me*	üü'm=ji *just us*	mits=ji *just you*	jè'è=ji *just him/her/it*

Adjectives. One of the distinguishing syntactic features of Totontepecano Mixe adjectives is that when they are being used as predicates they can be repeated in order to intensify their meaning:

(35) poo'p jè jayu — the person is white
white DET person

poo'p poo'p jè jayu — the person is very white
white white DET person

(36) xù'ùjk xù'ùjk! — very tasty!
tasty tasty

Adjectives can also be used to modify nouns, in which case they almost always precede the head of the noun phrase. E.g.

(37) jè poo'p jayu — the white person
xi nam töjk — that new house

Adjectives can be formed from noun stems with the addition of the derivational suffix *-jax*. Based on the comparative evidence from Oluta this suffix is probably an old verbalizing affix followed by a nominalizing suffix such as -A. But in Totontepecano Mixe it never gets used to form verb stems. It works in much the same way that the English adjectivalizing suffix *-y* (as in *fish-y*) does. Here are several illustrative examples:

(38)

nööj	water	nööjax	watery, juicy
apit	thorn	apitax	thorny
ak	skin, hide	akax	thick-skinned
jöp	nose	jöjpax	pointy

(39) ii'px kö'ax ii'px tekax — centipede (lit: '20 hand-ed 20 foot-ed')
/'ii'px kö'ö -jax 'ii'px tèkI -jax/
20 hand -ADJ 20 foot -ADJ

The Mixe word for 'centipede', incidentally, exemplifies the Mesoamerican predilection for units of twenty.

Both Totontepecano Mixe nouns and adjectives can be converted to verb stems with the versive suffix *-Ay*. This process is quite productive and could be considered one of the defining traits that distinguishes nominal roots from verbal roots.

(40) ja jayu poo'p — the man is white
ja jayu poo'pap — the man will whiten

(41) tsaach — a wound, an injury
tsaacha — to wound

(42) mo'ots — mud
mo'otsa — to be muddy

One of the quirks of Totontepecano Mixe grammar is that nouns and adjectives can only serve as predicates in *independent* attributive clauses. If a clause with an adjectival predicate is, for example, negated, then the adjective must be verbalized with the versive suffix *-Ay* and inflected for person and aspect/mode. Note the use of the person marker y= in the following examples:

(43) möj — It is big.

ka'a myöja — It is not big.
/ka'a y= möj -Ay -I/
NEG 3A= big -VERS -dINC

(44) Veejl mùùtsk — Manny is short.

ka'a Veejl myùùtska — Manny is not short.
/ka'a Veejl y= mùùtsk -Ay -I/
NEG Manny 3A= short -VERS -dINC

Numbers and Quantifiers. One area where Totontepecano Mixe has ceded little ground to Spanish is its mode of expressing quantities. It maintains a highly sophisticated counting system, based on fives, tens and twenties. The numbers one through ten are as follows:

(45)

tù'k	'one'	tùjtük	'six'
mèjtsk	'two'	vüxtùjtük	'seven'
tùùjk	'three'	tùdùjtük	'eight'
maktaaxk	'four'	taxtùjtük	'nine'
mugooxk	'five'	majk	'ten'

All of these numbers end with -(ü)k, which perhaps is the residue of some sort of classifier. Also note that numbers six through nine by combining a numerical prepound with the root /tùt/ or perhaps /tùj/. The prefixes *vüx-*, *tù-* and *tax-* seem to mean 'plus

two', 'plus three' and 'plus four' respectively, as in 'five plus two', 'five plus three', 'five plus four.'

Numbers eleven through nineteen are formed by prepounding the root *mak+* 'ten', as in *maktù'k* 'eleven' and *maktaxtùjt* 'nineteen.' The number twenty has its own unique root *ii'px*. Numbers 21-39 procede exactly like one through nineteen except each begins with the independent, stressed word *ii'px*, as in *ii'px tù'k* 'twenty one' and *ii'px maktaxtùjt* 'thirty nine.'

The words for forty, sixty, eighty and one hundred are each formed by combining a numerical form with appears to be a reduced form of *ii'px*:

(46)	40	vüjxtkupx	/vüx-tük + 'ii'px/
	60	tùùgupx	/tùùk + 'ii'px/
	80	majktupx	/majkts + 'ii'px/
	100	mokupx	/mokx + 'ii'px/

The intervening quantities work the same way that one through nineteen do. So, for example, 51 is literally "forty & ten + one" and 85 is "eighty & five."

After one hundred, higher values are formed with the prefix *ja-*, which when combined with numbers and quantifiers means roughly 'another':

(47)	100 & 20	mokupx ja-'ii'px
	100 & 40	mokupx ja-vüjxtkupx

Values above one thousand are most commonly formed with the Spanish loanword *mi:jl*:

(48)	1000	tù'k miijl
	8000	tùdùjtùk miijl

Totontepecano Mixe forms ordinal numbers by prefixing *mu-* to any numerical stem:

(49) Ordinal number formation

/X/ ←→ /muX/ *where X = any numerical stem*
[+cardinal] [+ordinal]

e.g. tù'k 'one' → mutù'k 'first'
majk 'ten' → mumajk 'tenth'

And partitive expressions are formed by prefixing *nü-* to any cardinal number:

(50) Partitive formation

/X/ ←→ /nüX/ *where X = any numerical stem*
[+cardinal] [+partitive]

e.g. tù'k 'one' → nütù'k 'one of them'
majk 'ten' → nümajk 'ten of them'

Approximate quantities can be expressed by pairing the partitive form of any number with the partitive form of the next highest number:

(51)

nü-tù'k nü-mèjtsk	a couple
nü-mèjtsk nü-tùùjk	several
nü-'ii'px nü-'ii'px tù'k	twenty or so

For less precise counts or for relative quantities, Totontepecano Mixe possesses a variety of other quantifying expressions. What follows is a fairly comprehensive list:

(52)

vèè'n	a little bit, a few
yüü'nam	a little of
jadù'k	another
amèjtsk	both
eejy	a few (e.g. sticks of firewood)
vingex	some
kùjkm	half
may	many
yùka	many
nüyùjk	too many, a whole lot of
nüjux	various, many of (e.g. sacks of things)
kom	a lot of (e.g. liquids)

nüjùm	all of
tù'kkö'öji	all, everything

Several of these items classify the sorts of nouns with which they can occur. For instance, *kom* is only used for referring to quantities of liquids. Quantifying expressions can be made even more expressive with the addition of the prefix *ja-* 'another' and the limitive enclitic *=ji* 'just' e.g.

(53)	ja-yüü'nam	another little bit
	yüü'nam=ji	just a little
	ja-yüü'nam=ji	just a bit more
	ja-mèjtsk	another two, two more
	mèjtsk=ji	just two
	ja-mèjtsk=ji	just two more

Independent vs. Dependent Clauses and Inverse Voice

A striking feature of Totontepecano Mixe is that it has two different clause types that take two different sets of obligatory inflection. I use the labels *independent* and *dependent* to distinguish these two types and the two inflectional paradigms that go with them. Dependent clauses also feature tighter restrictions on word order than independent clauses, and they perform several discursive roles that set them quite apart from independent clauses.[18]

Every Totontepecano Mixe verb must take one of the following nine inflectional suffixes:

18. My discussion here draws heavily on the prior work of Alvin Schoenhals (1979) who employed the labels "stage clause" and "event clause" (for independent and dependent, respectively), foregrounding the discursive functions of these two clause types. Another source is Searle Hoogshagen (1984), who uses the more antiseptic terms "disjunct" and "conjunct" to refer to the same phenomenon as it appears in Southern Highland Mixe. Here I follow Zavala's (2003) terminology and the general thrust of his argument.

Table 3.08. Obligatory Suffixes

	independent	*dependent*
completive	-W	-jI
incompletive	-p	-I
incompl-trans	-pI	
future-potential	-up	-üt
imperative	-ü, -k	

Here the symbol *I* stands for an underlying front vowel. The suffix written *–W* comes from **-wü*. The *W* never surfaces intact, but it causes any vowel that precedes it to become rounded.

The most notable difference between the independent and dependent paradigms is that in the former there are two different incompletive suffixes: *-p* for intransitive clauses and *-pI* for transitive clauses. The *I* of the incompletive-transitive suffix *-pI* is descended from a proto-Mixean suffix *-e that functioned as a direct object marker:

Table 3.09. Modern Mixean Reflexes of the Direct Object Marker *e

Language	*Root Vowel*	*Intransitive*	*Transitive*
proto-Mixean	*a *i *e, ü, u, o	*-pa	*-pa -e
Oluteco	a i e, ü, u, o	-pa	-pe
Totontepecano Mixe	a i è, ö, ù, o	-p	a… -^{y}py i… -p e, ü, u, ü … -p

This feature of Totontepecano Mixe inflection is one of the phenomena that make it possible for us to determine the transitivity of a verb stem.

Totontepecano Mixe verbs must also take one the following pronominal proclitics: *n=, m=, y=, tü=, x=*, or else zero inflection. Just one of these clitics can appear in any given verb complex, and depending upon the syntactic context, it can encode one of a number of different possible relationships between the verb and its highest ranking core argument. The ranking of an argument is determined by the following hierarchy:

(54) 1st person > 2nd person > more topical 3rd person > less topical 3rd person

Here 'topical' is being used as an intentionally vague cover term for a cluster of potential relations including:

(55) more animate > less animate
more salient > less salient
proximal > distal (in both social and spatial terms)

In intransitive clauses, the relationship between argument, pronominal proclitic and verb is relatively straightforward. There are two different series of clitics, depending upon whether the clause is independent or dependent:

Table 3.10. Intransitive Person Marking

	independent	*dependent*
1st	Ø=	n=
2nd	m=	m=
3rd	Ø=	y=

The independent second person pronoun *mits* may be omitted without creating any ambiguity, but the independent first person pronoun or an overt third person argument may be required, e.g.

(56) kaayp öts — I eat.
kay -p öts
eat -iINC 1IND

(57) mgaayp (mits) — You eat.
m= kay -p mits
2A= eat -i INC 2IND

(58) kaayp jè'è — S/he eats.
kay -p jè'è
eat -iINC 3IND

In intransitive independent clauses independent pronouns tend to follow the verb, whereas they must precede the verb in dependent clauses, e.g.

(59) ka'a öts ngay — I don't eat.
ka'a öts n= kay -I
NEG 1IND 1A= eat -dINC

(60) ka'a mits mgay — You don't eat.
ka'a mits m= kay -I
NEG 2IND 2A= eat -dINC

(61) ka'a jè'è kyay — S/he doesn't eat.
ka'a jè'è y= kay -I
NEG 3IND 3A= eat -dINC

As I previously noted, the three pronominal clitics used in dependent intransitive clauses are the same three that are used in possessive constructions to indicate the person of the possessor, as in examples (19-21) and again in (62):

(62) öts n= tee' — my father
mits m= tee' — your father
jè'è y= tee' — his/her father

Following Zavala (2003) we can label the *Ø, m=, Ø* series "Set A" and the n=, m=, y= series "Set B."[19]

19. who in turn has borrowed this A-set B-set terminology from Norman McQuown and other linguists who used it to describe the pronominal systems of Mayan languages.

Several contemporary Mixe-Zoquean languages, as well as the historical antecedents of modern Mixean languages, feature a pattern known as "ergative shift". In essence this means that in dependent clauses Set A and Set B switch roles. In intransitive dependent clauses the Set B pronominal agreement markers are employed, and in transitive dependent clauses the Set A markers are used.

Table 3.11. Ergative Shift

Controller	Set A	Set B
possessor		x
independent clauses		
absolutive argument	x	
ergative argument		x
dependent clauses		
absolutive argument		x
ergative argument	x	

In North Highland Mixe the 2nd and 3rd person Set B agreement markers may still undergo ergative shift as per the older pattern. However, in other respects Totontepecano Mixe diverged. A different 3rd person agreement marker takes over the role of ergative agreement in dependent transitive clauses and then later spread to independent transitive clauses, too, where it takes over some of the contexts in which y= was formerly used. Meanwhile, first person agreement stopped undergoing ergative shift and instead came to consistently indicate whether a first person argument is ergative or absolutive, regardless of clause type.

Table 3.12. Totontepecano Mixe Pronominal Proclitic Sets

	A SET	B SET	C SET?
1	Ø= 1A	n= 1E	x= 1INV
2	m= 2A	m= 2E, d2A	x= d2E
3	Ø= 3A	y= 3E, d3A	tü= d3E

A paradigmatic overview of person marking in independent and dependent transitive clauses should make it a little clearer how this complex system operates.

Table 3.13. Independent-Transitive Person Marking

	patient/theme			
agent	1	2	3	3obv
1		n=	n=	n=
2	x=		m=	m=
3	x=	m= … -jü		y= / tü=
3obv	x=	m= … -jü	Ø= … -jü	

Table 3.14. Dependent-Transitive Person Marking

	patient/theme			
agent	1	2	3	3obv
1		n=	n=	n=
2	x=		x=	x=
3	x=	m= … -jü		tü=
3obv	x=	m= … -jü	y= … -jü	

In this system the 2nd and 3rd person are grouped together, while the 1st person is marked in a distinct manner. Any time a transitive clause possesses a 1st person argument, one of two pronominal agreement markers will be used. When the 1st person argument occupies the highest ranking semantic role, the *n*= proclitic is used. When the

1st person argument does not occupy the highest ranking semantic role, then the *x*= proclitic is used. This is true regardless of whether or not the clause is independent, e.g.

(63) öts ntsöjkp — I want it.
öts n= tsok -pI
1IND 1E= want -iINCt

(64) öts mits ntsöjkp — I want you.
öts mits n= tsok -pI
1IND 2IND 1E= want -iINCt

(65) öts mits xtsöjkp — You want me.
öts mits x= tsok -pI
1IND 2IND 1INV= want -iINCt

(66) töö öts ntun — I did it.
töö öts n= tön -I
PERF 1IND 1E= do -dINC

(67) töö öts mits ntsii'k — I (just) hit you.
töö öts mits n= tsii'k -I
PERF 1IND 2IND 1E= hit -dINC

(68) töö öts jè'è xtsii'k — S/he (just) hit me.
töö öts jè'è x= tsii'k -I
PERF 1IND 3IND 1INV= hit -dINC

Whenever the highest ranking argument in an independent transitive clause is a 2nd person, the proclitic *m*= is used. When a third person argument in the clause plays a more agentive role, the inverse suffix *–jü* must be employed e.g.

(69) mits mtsöjkp — You want it.
mits m= tsok -pI
2IND 2E= want -iINCt

(70) öts mits xtsöjkp — You want me.
öts mits x= tsok -pI
1IND 2IND 1INV= want -iINCt

(71) mits jè'è mtsöjkp — You wants him/her.
mits jè'è m= tsok -pI
2IND 3IND 2E= want -iINCt

(72) mits jè'è mtsojkjup — S/he wants you.
mits jè'è m= tsok -jü -pI
2IND 3IND 2E= want -INV -iINCt

In dependent transitive clauses the choice of agreement marker also depends on whether the 2nd person argument occupies the highest ranking semantic role or not. When it is the most agent-like argument, the clitic *x*= appears. When it is more like a theme or patient then the proclitic *m*= appears, e.g.

(73) töö mits mtun — You (just) did it.
töö mits m= tùn -I
PERF 2IND 2E= do -dINC

(74) töö mits jè'è mtsii'k — You (just) hit him/her.
töö mits jè'è x= tsii'k -I
PERF 2IND 3IND d2E= hit -dINC

(75) töö mits jè'è mtsii'kjü — S/he (just) hit you.
töö mits jè'è m= tsii'k -I -jü
PERF 2IND 3IND 2A= hit -dINC -INV

Here, and in clauses that only feature 3rd person arguments the suffix *-jü* works in tandem with the pronominal clitics to keep track of the grammatical roles that 2nd and 3rd person arguments are playing in the clause. As I mentioned above, this pattern is absent in transitive clauses with first person patients or themes.

In clauses with two non-speech act participants (non-SAPs) there is some pragmatic play in the use of inverse vs. direct morphology. This is particularly clear in dependent clauses, in which the proclitic *tü*= clearly indicates that the highest ranking core argument is an agent and *y*= is used when that argument is either an intransitive subject or a transitive object/patient, e.g.

(76) töö Tùlya tütun — Vicky did it.
töö Tùlya tü= tùn -I
PERF Vicky 3E= do -dINC

(77) töö Pèèn jè'è chii'kjü — S/he has hit Pete.
töö Pèèn jè'è y= tsii'k -I -jü
PERF Pedro 3IND 3A= hit -dINC -INV

In the first sentence above, "Vicky" is the most salient third person argument in the sentence and also the most agentive argument, so direct inflection is used. Contrast this with the following sentence "s/he has hit Pete." Here *Pete* is the most salient argument, but occupies the role of patient. Therefore, inverse inflection is used.

Reflexive/reciprocal clauses use the same person markers that one would find in an intransitive clause, which is exactly as we would expect.

Table 3.15. Reflexive-Reciprocal Person Marking

	independent	*dependent*
1st	Ø= nay- … -jü	n= nay- … -jü
2nd	m= nay- … -jü	m= nay- … -jü
3rd	Ø= nay- … -jü	y= nay- … -jü

However, in contrast to inverse constructions, when the first person appears in a reflexive construction the suffix *–jü* is used:

(78) nay'ixjup öts — I will see myself.

(79) ka'a öts nnay'ixjüt — I will not see myself.

Rhodes (1996) argues that the Sayulteco, Oluteco and Totontepecano Mixe inverse have probably all developed and diverged from an older Mixean pattern of inverse marking in which one of the functions of the suffix *-jü was used to mark non-

local inversion (the case of an obviative third person acting on a proximate third person). Oluteco still operates this way. Sayulteco has altogether lost this particular use of the suffix. Meanwhile Totontepecano Mixe has generalized its use to mark the case of a third person acting on a second person and replaced the local/non-local morphological split with a first-person/non-first person split.

Now let us return to the topic of independent versus dependent clause types. "Dependent" should not be interpreted as "embedded" or "subordinate". In simplest terms, any clause that begins with a pronoun, an NP argument or a verb takes independent inflection. In contrast, any clause that begins with an adverb, adverbial adjunct or auxiliary verb takes dependent inflection. This means that clauses beginning with relative pronouns or interrogative pronouns that can stand in for core arguments (e.g. subject, direct object, indirect object) will take independent inflection, e.g.

(80) jè jayu juu' Veejl y= tsii'kuvaan'-pI — The man that Manny wants to hit.

(81) ti mits m= tun-pI? — What are you doing?

(82) pön mits m= koy-pI? — Who are you painting?

Meanwhile clause-initial interrogative pronouns that stand in for temporal, locative or manner adjuncts trigger the use of dependent morphology, e.g.

(83) vin'it Veejl **y=** tsoo'n-**üt**? — When will Manny leave?

(84) jùma jè meen **tü=** yu'ts-**jI**? — Where did he hide the money?

In independent clauses word order can be quite flexible. The initial position in the clause appears to be reserved for new information. Elements in this position receive

the heaviest stress and highest pitch. This pattern is illustrated by the following question-and-answer pairs:

(85) Q: Who hit me?

A: *öts* mits n= tsii'k -W — *I* hit you.
1IND 2IND 1E= hit -iCOM

(86) Q: Whom did you hit?

A: *mits* öts n= tsii'k -W — I hit *you.*
2IND 1IND 1E= hit -iCOM

(87) Q: What did you do to me?

A: *n= tsii'k -W* öts mits — I *hit* you.
1E= hit -iCOM 1IND 2IND

This pattern holds true even when the first person argument is the patient and inverse alignment is being employed:

(88) Q: Whom did Manny hit?

A: *öts* Veejl x= tsii'k -W — Manny hit *me.*
1IND Manny 1INV= hit -iCOM

(89) Q: Who hit you?

A: *Veejl* öts x= tsii'k -W — *Manny* hit me.
Manny 1IND 1INV= hit -iCOM

(90) Q: What did Manny do to you?

A: *x= tsii'k -W* öts Veejl — Manny *hit* me.
1INV= hit -iCOM 1IND Manny

Even when a transitive verb starts with the phoneme /p/, which neutralizes the distinction between the 1st person pronominal proclitic *n=* and the second person pronominal proclitic *m=*, then the word-order possibilities are not diminished because

inverse-direct morphology still makes it clear whether the first person argument is functioning as an agent or a patient:

(91) *öts* mits mbatsoo'n — *I* followed you.
öts mits n= patsoo'n -W
1IND 2IND 1E= follow -iCOM

(92) *mits* öts mbatsoo'n — I followed *you*.
mits öts n= patsoo'n -W
2IND 1IND 1E= follow -iCOM

(93) *öts* mits xpatsoo'n — You followed *me*.
öts mits x= patsoo'n -W
1IND 2IND 1INV= follow -iCOM

The one thing that a speaker cannot do in this instance is to drop the independent first person pronoun altogether:

(94) mits mbatsoo'n
mits m= patsoo'n -W
2IND 2 E= follow -iCOM
You followed someone.

mits mbatsoo'n
mits n= patsoo'n -W
2IND 1E= follow -iCOM
*I followed you.

When an independent transitive clause has two overt third person arguments then things get interesting. In Totontpecano Mixe there are two third person pronominal proclitics that can agree with the agentive argument. One, the proclitic *tü=*, is employed when the subject is the topic and appears in the initial position of the clause. The other, the proclitic *y=*, is used when the object appears in initial position but is not the topic of the clause. When the object is the topic of the clause then inverse morphology is used. In an independent clause this means that there is no overt proclitic and the verb stem is followed by the inverse suffix *-jü*. An added twist is that when *tü=* is used, the incompletive aspect suffix must be *-p*, even though in ever other independent transitive

clause the transitive incompletive suffix *-pI* must be used.[20] To summarize in tabular form:

Table 3.16. Third Person Proclitics

clitic	used when...	along with suffix...
tü=	clause-initial NP is subject and topic	-p
y=	clause-initial NP is object and is not topic	-pI
Ø=	object NP is topic, alignment is inverted	-jup

Totontepecano Mixe's extra split in the third person agreement marking of independent clauses, absent in Oluteco and Sayulteco, allows the speaker to focus on a patient by uttering it in sentence-intitial position while maintaining the agent as the topic of discourse. Hopefully some examples will help to clarify how these different patterns operate:

(95) Pèèn Veejl tümajtsp — *Pete* grabs Manny.
Pèèn Veejl tü= mats -p
Pete Manny 3E= grab -i INC

(96) Veejl Pèèn myajchp — Pete grabs *Manny*.
Veejl Pèèn y= mats -pI
Manny Pete 3E= grab -iINCt

(97) Pèèn Veejl majtsjup — Manny grabs *Pete*.
Pèèn Veejl mats -jü -p
Pete Manny grab -INV -iINC

In dependent clauses there is a much stronger tendency for verbs to appear last. The most common order in dependents clauses is Subject-Object-(Instrument)-Verb.

20. It looks as if, in the development of modern Totontepecano Mixe, the proclitic *tü=* has spread from dependent clauses to independent clauses. It is hard to say exactly how it came to complement the function of *y=* in independent clauses so neatly rather than replacing it completely. Perhaps this also hints at something about the role that the -I of *-pI* (from pM *-p-e) plays or has played in tracking topical NPs across clauses.

Word order in independent transitive clauses is somewhat flexible when either a first or second person argument is present. When both arguments are third persons and the semantics are such that either NP could play the role of e.g. agent or patient then the most topical or salient argument appears first, e.g.

(98) Veejl Pèèn tütsii'kp — Manny hits Pete.
Veejl Pèèn tü= tsii'k -p — *Pete hits Manny.
Manny Pete 3E= hit -iINC

The same holds true when the inverse is employed, e.g.

(99) Veejl Pèèn tsii'kjup — Pete hits Manny.
Veejl Pèèn tü= tsii'k -jü -p — *Manny hits Pete.
Manny Pete 3E= hit -INV -iINC

Totontepecano Mixe offers several possibilities for linking clauses to former larger units of discourse. One set of clause-initial discourse markers is neutral, to borrow Schoenhal's (1979) term, in the sense that these discourse markers do not necessarily trigger dependent inflection in the clause that follows. Two examples are the particles *jats ~ jèts* (perhaps derived from the article *jè* and the assertive enclitic =ts) and *ax*. The former can be used to conjoin any like constituents from nouns to NPs to whole clauses. It also gets used as a discourse marker, advancing narrative action. The particle *ax* 'and' helps to place clauses in sequential order, but adds little semantic content.

(100) ax öts ntee' jùùjntykipnats jè'è
ax öts n= tee' jùùjnt-tük -Ay –p =na =ts jè'è
and 1IND 1E= father life -VERS -iINC =still =ASRT 3IND
And my father still lives.

One the other hand, *van'it* 'so then, next, later' (perhaps underlyingly /vaan'+'it.I/) always demands the use of dependent inflection. This particle is used in narratives to place events in a temporal sequence. In fictional accounts, mythological narratives, and narratives of events not personally witnessed by the speaker, this conjunction is frequently followed by the quotative enclitic =ük or the assertive enclitic =ts plus the focus particle (v)e'e or both, as in:

(101) ax van'itüktse'e öts jè njay'ap vya'any...
ax van'it =ük =ts =e'e öts jè n= jay'ap y= vaan' -I
and so_then =QUO =ASRT =FOC 1IND DEF 1E= compadre 3E= say -dINC
And so then my compadre said...

(102) van'itts ötse'e nüümja…
van'it =ts öts =e'e n= nëm -jAy -I
so_then =ASRT 1IND =FOC 1E= say -APL -dINC
So then I tell him...

Schoenhals (1979) observes that borrowed Spanish discourse particles, such as *kwando* 'when', *pero* 'but', *desde* 'since', are, for the most part, neutral. In and of themselves they do not influence the inflection of the clause that they precede. Like all neutral particles they frequently they get paired with Mixe particles or adverbial phrases and rarely appear on their own, e.g. *kwando ku* 'when when', *desde van'its* 'since then.'

There is exactly one borrowed Spanish conjunction that automatically triggers dependent inflection: *para* 'in order to, in order that':

(103) para düyakva'atsüt jè tsaptöjk
para tü= yak- va:ts' -üt jè tsap + tök
in_order_to 3E= CAUS- clean -dFUT DEF sky + house
in order to clean the church

Even though there are several Mixe conjunctions and discourse particles still in use that cover the same semantic/functional ground as *para*, this Spanish function word has long been a standard element of Totontepecano Mixe grammar. Purist Mixe speakers recognize its Spanish origins and take pains to avoid it when they are are concentrating hard on their speech. Yet it regularly appears in the speech of even the most die-hard Spanish-avoiders.

Summary

I began this chapter with a description of the Totontepecano Mixe language community. Next I examined the Totontepecano Mixe phonemic inventory, its historical development, and current debates about how to represent Mixe sounds in writing. I then proceded to investigate various aspects of its grammar, including features of its phonology and its inflectional system. I devoted some time to Totontepecano Mixe numbers and quantifiers because their perserverence exemplify both the linguistic conservatism of Mixe speakers and a Mixe fascination with numerology, reflected in their calendar keeping and ritual offerings to the sacred mountains (see Andrade 1995; Lipp 1991). Other native Mesoamerican systems have not faired nearly as well. Ayapaneko, a member of the Zoquean branch of the Mixe-Zoque language family only retains the numbers one through five. Spanish lexical material and word formation rules have replaced the rest of the system. I also briefly discussed the functioning of Mixe discourse markers and the extent to which borrowed Spanish discourse markers have been integrated into the system. The prolific use of Spanish discourse markers in Mesoamerican languages is taken by Mesoamericanist linguists as a symptom of long-term language contact in a context in which Spanish was the language of governance,

law, political rhetoric and religious sermons. Languages like Ayapaneko and Chiapas Zoque have almost completely replaced their indigenous discourse particles with Spanish ones. In Totontepecano Mixe and other varieties of Oaxacan Mixe this has not yet taken place. The relatively infrequent use of Spanish conjunctions such as *pero* 'but' and discourse markers such as *entonces* 'so then' in contemporary Totontepecano Mixe language use and the marginal impact of these borrowings on Mixe grammar is further evidence that wide-spread bilingualism is a 20th century recent phenomenon.

From the perspective of other Mixe speakers, Totontepecano Mixe is indeed—in Frederick Starr's words—"a notably peculiar dialect." It is quite distinct from the kinds of Mixe spoken in the Southern Mixe Highlands and in the rest of the Mixe world. In many respects it is the most conservative variety of Mixe, and where it has innovated, those innovations have moved it typologically farther from Spanish. While Totontepecanos may look and dress more European than their neighbors, their way of speaking Mixe is in some sense the least Spanish-like of all. However, its distinctiveness is seen by many Mixe neighbors as the unfortunate result of Spanish corruption. Ironically this means that Totontepecano Mixe is, in a sense, the least Spanish-sounding variety of Mixe and yet at the same time it is the variety of Mixe that is believed to be most influenced by Spanish. The focus of the next chapter is on Spanish-Mixe language contact, real and perceived. In it I take a much close look at where Mixe grammar has borrowed from Spanish and where it has diverged over the course of several centuries of contact.

CHAPTER FOUR

AMAAXÜMBA: MIXE & SPANISH

Richard Diebold's (1961) classic article on "Incipient Bilingualism" among the Huave provides a convenient starting point for any discussion of Spanish language contact and bilingualism in Oaxaca. The dissertation research on which it was based was a pioneering attempt to apply the theoretical tools developed in Uriel Weinreich's (1964 [1953]) *Languages in Contact* and Einar Haugen's (1953) *The Norwegian Language in America* to a Mexican case.

Diebold reported that he had caught several Huave speech communities in the very act of shifting from Huave monolingualism to Huave-Spanish bilingualism. He made his case using census data, word frequency counts and translation tests. His most surprising discovery was that even his sample of monolingual Huave speakers, as defined by the Mexican Census of 1950, managed to correctly identify and define of an average of 37 out of 100 Spanish lexical items on the translation tests he gave them (range: 5% - 68%). These test subjects were not really monolinguals after all. They were, in his now well-known words, "incipient bilinguals."

The importance of Diebold's research on Huave and its influence on future work on language contact in Latin America cannot be overstated. His project inspired a number of investigators, including me. Still, in hindsight, his study suffered from two serious weaknesses. One shortcoming was that his linguistic analysis lacked any

historical depth. A number of the Spanish loanwords he discussed were newly borrowed into Huave. But several of his examples were probably first borrowed centuries earlier, in the immediate wake of the Spanish conquest and Christianization of Oaxaca. Among these items were terminology from Catholic liturgy and names for imported Spanish crops and livestock. If Diebold *had* worked out the historical layerings of the borrowing and integration of Spanish lexical items into Huave, he would have come to the odd-sounding conclusion that the Huaves have been incipiently bilingual for several centuries.

In fact, what Diebold documented was not the beginnings of bilingualism, but another shift entirely: from the tail-end of a phase of language contact which had begun in the 16th Century to the onset of a new kind of contact, different in both form and intensity. During the first phase, only a small minority of Huaves had direct access to Spanish language resources, the competence to use them and the necessity to do so. The vast majority interacted solely with other Huaves (monolingual and bilingual) and with Zapotec merchants. They had little in the way of direct access or exposure to the Spanish-speaking world. In the new phase, mass media, new forms of transportation, new economic arrangements, and the increasing involvement of the Mexican government in local affairs was making Spanish a part of everyone's daily existence. Some minimal amount of Spanish competence was becoming an inevitable component of every Huave's repertoire. The mediated spread of Spanish into the lexicon of Huave was giving way to a more direct form of contact in which Huave ideas about Spanish and Spanish speakers and the attitudes of their Spanish-speaking interlocutors would play a crucial role in the process.

This points to the second major shortcoming of Diebold's study: the absence of any real engagement with the Huaves' own language attitudes.[1] Which Spanish borrowings did his informants recognize as such, if any? What was their attitude toward the mixing of codes? How did they themselves determine whether or not someone was a Spanish speaker or a Huave speaker? One unfortunate (though probably unintended) consequence of Diebold's approach is that he leaves his readers with the impression that his poor Huave-speaking informants were turning into Spanish speakers without even realizing what was happening to them.

The Huaves, who live along the Pacific Coast near the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, have much in common with their mountain-dwelling Mixe neighbors. They were a marginal population during the epochs of Aztec, Zapotec and Spanish dominion and remain somewhat marginal to the main stream of Oaxacan life today. Both groups live in small ethnic enclaves surrounded on all sides by large populations of Zapotec speakers. And in both cases their Zapotec neighbors have mediated most of their commercial and cultural interaction with the Spanish-speaking worlds of colonial and post-colonial Mexico. Only since the 1960s has it been practical for large numbers of Mixes and Huaves to bypass Zapotec trade monopolies, travel directly to Oaxaca City and buy or sell products at anything approaching their full market value. Finally, because their direct contact with Spanish was so limited during the colonial era, both Mixe and Huave lie at the opposite end of the spectrum from Mesoamerican languages such as Nahuatl and Andean languages such as Quechua. Spanish borrowings in Mixe and Huave, while present, are not nearly as extensive.

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1. Weinreich and Haugen had quite sophisticated things to say about the role of language attitudes in language change, but in Diebold never seriously took up any of their arguments. Without naming any names, the same can be said for many of their successors.

Mixe Participation in New Spanish Communicative Regimes

Contact-driven change in Mixe language use followed a distinct historical trajectory for several reasons. Mixe territory was never overrun by Spanish soldiers or colonized by Spanish and *mestizo* settlers. Their mountainous homeland had little to offer in the way of mineral wealth (despite early hopes to the contrary) or agricultural potential. The Spanish found the terrain rugged and the climate cold, wet, and miserable. The Mixes' numbers were too small and their settlements too scattered (despite repeated attempts at *reducción*) to provide a ready source of labor to would-be *encomenderos*.[2] Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Mixe country was surrounded on three sides by Zapotec polities that were larger, economically and culturally dominant, and generally hostile. When the Spanish encountered the Mixes they were an embattled minority with an acute sense of ethnic distinctiveness and a millenarian belief that their culture hero Kondoy, 'the burning king' would return from his cave beneath Mount Zempoaltepetl to defend them from their enemies.

Mixe-Spanish contact in New Spain was largely limited to the presence of a handful of Dominican and secular clergy stationed in each major community. And apparently these clergy, the Dominicans in particular, endeavored to communicate with their Mixe congregations in their own tongue. According to Burgoa (1989 [1674:149) a Dominican friar named Pedro Guerrero mastered the Mixe language in 1559 or 1560 after just six months of training. His facility with Mixe impressed its speakers greatly and became a key to the success of his missionary efforts. Legal dealings with the Spanish authorities were conducted, not in Spanish, but in Nahuatl. This followed from

2. *Encomenderos* = Spaniards who were granted local landholdings and the authority to exploit the labor of the native people who lived there.

a 1570 *cédula* (royal decree) ordering that all of the Indians of Oaxaca learn to speak Nahuatl. As John Chance observes, Nahuatl would have been an ideal lingua franca for pre-Columbian Mixe-Zapotec communication. On the other hand the Sierra region never came under Aztec control (Chance 1989:125). It is much more likely that Nahuatl was taught to Mixe elites by the Dominicans or the descendants of the Nahuatl-speaking Tlaxcalan soldiers who settled in the Analco barrio of Villa Alta. All we know for sure is that the majority of the 17th and 18th century legal documents produced in the Mixe highlands were composed in Nahuatl. A translation of a viceregal decree dated 1774 is the first Mixe language document that appears in the Villa Alta Juzgado archive (Chance 1989:125).

Most of the Mixe Highlands were assigned to the colonial district of Villa Alta. However, the Mixe Midlands were assigned to the district of Nejapa and the Lowlands fell under the jurisdiction of Tehuantepec. Mixe-Zoquean linguists recognize three or four distinct language areas which correspond rather nicely with the boundaries established by these colonial districts (Wichmann 1995). It is unclear whether these boundaries simply ignored dialectal divisions, followed them, or in fact helped to shape them. In general Mixe town centers were located on defensible ridges and hilltops, in the proximity of sacred mountain peaks, but most people lived in scattered *rancherías* (typically occupied by a single extended kin group), taking advantage of diverse altitudinal zones. Colonial *reducción* did not do much to change this, and few Mixe towns follow the familiar colonial grid layout found in other parts of the Americas. Nevertheless, significant numbers of people were relocated. And epidemics took a drastic toll on the Mixe population, which also served to isolate settlements from one another.

In 1572 Totontepec became the first *cabecera de doctrina* (parish seat) in the Mixe region and construction of the first cathedral and convent began. At the same time colonial authorities began attempting to relocate a number of Highland Mixe settlements to warmer, lower sites. But these early efforts were largely unsuccessful and eventually abandoned (Chance 1989:83). In 1600 more ambitious but only slightly more successful attempts at *reducción* were undertaken in the areas of Totontepec, Alotepec and other strategically situated Mixe settlements. Meanwhile, in the southern part of the Mixe region on the border between the colonial districts of Villa Alta and Nejapa the Spanish attempted to relocate Mixes from the *cabeceras* (head towns) of Ocotepec, Cacalotepec, Tepuxtepec, and Tepantlali to the site of Juquila, a former *subjeto* (satellite town) of Ocotepec. This site was chosen for its proximity to trade routes and transportation. It was also selected to become the second Mixe *cabecera de doctrina.* Despite the usual resistance of the Mixes to relocation, the population of Juquila did increase from 300 to 1,741 by 1661. In part this project failed because of Tepantlali and Puxtepec's linguistic and cultural affinity with Tlahuiltoltepec (Chance 1989:83-84). For several decades an alternative configuration was tried, in which Tlahuitoltepec was designated a political *cabecera* and Tamazulapan, Ayutla, Tepuxtepec and Tepantlali its *subjetos*. But in 1706, Ayutla became a Dominican *cabecera de doctrina* and the political *cabecera* of these other four South Highland Mixe towns (Chance 1989:84; Gerhard 1993:370-71).

So at the beginning of the 18th century the North Highland Mixe linguistic area, centered on Totontepec, was united under the same legal and clerical jurisdictions, and the South Highland Mixe linguistic area, centered on Ayutla, was similarly united. Meanwhile Juquila and its *subjetos* remained a bit of a dialectal hodge-podge of South

Highland Mixe speakers originally from the vecinity of Tepantlali, South Midland Mixe Speakers and North Midland Mixe Speakers. In Agustín Quintana's [1729] treatise on the grammar of Mixe he points out the existence of two dialects in his jurisdiction, distinguished by the form of their future subjunctive suffix. But he downplays the significance of the differences between them and asserts that inter-intelligibility did not pose a problem for native speakers.

By far the clearest case of colonial influences in Mixean dialectalism is the speech of Camotlán, a community whose residents were resettled from further east. This town was designated a *subjeto* of the Midland town of Quetzaltepec which became a *cabecera de doctrina* shortly after Juquila. Not coincidentally contemporary Camotlán Mixe looks like a Lowland Mixe dialect heavily influenced by Midland Mixe (see Wichmann 1995:207-13 for the grammatical details).

The most notable Dominican missionary to work in the region was a friar by the name of Augustín de Quintana. Quintana was born in Antequera (old Oaxaca City) and served in Juquila for 28 years, from 1688 to 1716. After his time in Mixe country Quintana was appointed superior of the convent of Zacavila, but he was not healthy enough to accept the appointment and instead retired to the main convent at Antequera. He devoted his latter years to writing his grammatical studies of Mixe, translating Christian doctrine into the Mixe language and seeing his manuscripts through to publication. Despite his infirmity he made several trips to the printing press in Puebla in order to oversee the project and supervise the making of several types. In 1729 he published a grammar and a series of works on the principal articles of the Faith, under the title, *Institución Cristiana y Guía de Ignorantes para el Cielo, que contiene el Arte*

de la Lengua Mixe, etc.[3] And then in 1733, shortly before his death, his *Confesionario en la Lengua Mixe con una Construcción de las Oraciones de la Doctrina Christiana, y un Compendio de voces mixes para ensenarse a pronunciar la dicha lengua* was published (Mooney 1997).[4]

In the prologue to his *Confesionario* Quintana notes that only a few short and badly written Mixe language documents had preceded him. And, sadly, few were produced after his death. The Dominicans were forced to completely withdraw from the Mixe region shortly after Quintana's tenure and were replaced by secular clergy who treated the region with benign neglect. Hence his body of work stands alone as a unique testament of the sound and structure of 18th century Mixe. He explicitly intended his work to be a learning tool for future missionaries, but it is not clear that it ever served this purpose.

Father Quintana's *Confesionario* includes a series of helpful pronunciation exercises, designed to teach Spanish speakers to negotiate Mixe's more formidable consonantal clusters and to distinguish between minimal pairs involving vowel sounds that are not found in Spanish. And his *Arte de la Lengua Mixe* is full of friendly warnings to his readers to practice diligently and not lose heart:

> Everything said in this section on the Verb, taken by itself, without practice, is very difficult; but with practice it will become easy (p. 27).
>
> ... Practice will make one a master of the language, even though at the outset it appears impossible to know (p. 27).

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3. Translation: Christian Instruction and Guide for Ignorants toward Heaven, that contains the Art of the Mixe language, etc.

4. Translation: Confessionary in the Mixe Language with a Construction of Prayers from the Christian Doctrine, and a Compendium of Mixe exercises to teach the pronunciation of said language.

> Everything said here are no more than a few warnings so that novices can begin to study this language which is truly difficult due to its irregularity. (p. 31).

Quintana employed the traditional Latin categories. He was oblivious to the fundamental role of transitivity in the Mixe verb morphology, but very sensitive to matters of tense and aspect, and even how certain inflectional endings varied from one form of Mixe to another.

A few copies of Quintana's *Confesionario* made their way into Mixe country, circulated and ended up as family heirlooms (noted in Sanchez 1947). And both documents were republished in the 19th century by the Comte de Charency for an audience of French philologists. The *Arte de la Lengua Mixe* was also republished in Oaxaca City in 1891 and excerpts made their way into Raoul de la Grasserie's 1898 *Langue Zoque et Langue Mixe*. Leopoldo Ballesteros, a Salesian priest based in the town of Tlahuitoltepec, reported in 1974 that the elders of Tlahuitoltepec continued to recite Quintana's Mixe prayers in the Juquila dialect (Rodriguez and Ballesteros 1974:25). This begs the question of whether these prayers were transmitted from generation to generation with the aid of the published text or whether Quintana's translations became part of an entirely oral tradition. Ballesteros believes that the latter was the case.

19th and 20th Century Contact

19th century historians of Oaxaca knew precious little about the Mixes and relied heavily on colonial reports and pure conjecture. They were apparently consumed with question of where the Mixes originated and quite unconcerned with contemporary events in the Mixe region. In his 1881 *History of Oaxaca* Antonio Gay—Oaxaca's most

illustrious 19th century historian—listed four reasons why he believed that the Mixes had a European origin: the fact that they must have come to Oaxaca from the Gulf Coast, their physical traits, their fierce love of country, and their language. Regarding their language he writes:

> If some have believed that the grandiosity and roughness of the land that the Mixes inhabit powerfully influence their physical and moral condition, their arrogant size and high character, others have judged that the strong accent and distemperate tone of their voice should be attributed to their having to make themselves heard over the noise of the torrents and thundering of the rainstorms. It is certain that the Zapotecs, who live nearby and enjoy the same conditions, do not share similarities in character or language. There could hardly be in the state of Oaxaca Indians of weaker character than the Nexitzos of the Rincón, despite the vigor that the climate displays there. The Mixe has an overabundant nature and a temper, and hence his language is coarse, but with a certain manly beauty, that those who hear it have always recognized. It is notable that in the city of Oaxaca—this is certain—some foreigners (Dalmatians or Poles) understand the Mixes. (Gay 1982 [1881]:14-15)

This description is based almost entirely on the writing of two of Gay's 17th century predecessors. He (1982 [1881]:15) remarks in a footnote to this passage that his observations about the European character of the Mixes had already been made three centuries previously by Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas, King Phillip II's *cronista mayor* (the Spanish court's royal cosmographer). Here Gay goes on to quote Herrera's assertion that the language of the Mixes 'is spoken very thickly, in the manner of the Germans' and that the Mixes 'have beards, something rare in those parts.' Herrera made some other startling claims about the Mixes, which Gay left out:

> In the Province of the Miges... which is 20 leagues from Oaxaca, are a people of good stature, they have long beards, a rare thing in those parts, and their language is spoken very thickly, in the manner of the Germans... These people are cruel, warlike, great friends of human flesh, more valiant than however many nations there are in New Spain, because even though the entire province does not have 2,000 men, they

> were never subjugated by Moctezuma nor by the Zapotecs, although they are more numerous. And being together in the same Sierra of the Zapotecs, they do not capture a single man, woman or child without killing them and eating them, and they would continue to do so up until they were conquered. They rebelled against neighboring indians in order to eat human flesh. They walk around nude, wearing only a dearskin wrapped around the buttocks and tied at the waist, and this skin is very white and soaked with human brains (Década 4, Libro 9, Cap. 7, p. 187).

Herrera's fantastical description was based on the reports of Oaxaca's *conquistadores* and a letter from Cortés to King Charles V, which portrayed the Mixes as cannibals and an ongoing threat to their Zapotec neighbors in order to justify their conquest and enslavement.

Gay's remarkable argument that the Mixe character and language *cannot* be explained by appealing to their natural environment is a direct rejoinder to Francisco de Burgoa, a Dominican friar from Oaxaca who published in 1674 a very partisan history of the Dominican presence in the region and its miraculous successes. Burgoa saw a causal connection between landscape and language. He wrote:

> In their natural environment [the Mixes] are arrogant, of haughty condition and physique, and their tone of voice expresses everything; they always shout, and although this noisy articulation is often attributed to their immoderate and tempestuous nature, I have noticed that the intractable mountains have made shouting customary, because the mountains follow one after the other, they have deep ravines in their settlements, the wind rattles through the jungle and torrents rush through canyons, and all of this results in such a confusing cacophony that in order to be understood it is necessary to speak in high-pitched and thunderous tones... it is equally true that the homebodies and domestic types which now live in towns do not sound so noisy. (Burgoa 1989 [1674]:146-47)

Burgoa does not go so far as to describe the Mixes as cannibals. Still, they are portrayed as brutal people who terrorized their neighbors and strode through their mountain realm "without fear of lions, tigers, bears or snakes" (1989 [1674]:146). In another passage he

refers to the Mixe as a "ferocious and barbarous nation, demonstrating an indomitable condition" (1989 [1674]:188). To be sure, Burgoa embellishes his description in order to make the spiritual conquest of this people appear all the more miraculous. Gay, however, does not question the accuracy of Burgoa's characterization, only his theory about the nature of their language and character.

Early 20th century characterizations of the Mixes did not fare much better. In part this was because many reports about them were colored by the prejudices of their Zapotec neighbors. When Elsie Clews Parsons (1936:365) was doing research for her book on the Zapotec town of Mitla, she documented these attitudes:

> "*Tontos son los Mixes!* The Mixes are fools!" The Zapotec look down upon the Mixes. At San Domingo, when the maudlin secretary was speechifying to us, he said apologetically, "*Somos Mixes*, We are Mixes," meaning that we were to make allowances for him...

Frederick Starr (1900:53), similarly, noted that

> [t]he Mixes have a generally bad reputation with outsiders. They are frequently characterized as filthy, stupid, and vicious. They are really suspicious of, and timid toward strangers, and unusually superstitious.

Starr was particularly impressed by stories of Mixe conservatism: "The [Mixe] people are conservative in the extreme and only wish to be left alone. They were never reduced by the Aztecs or Zapotecs and barely by the Spaniards" (1900:53).

However Starr also comments that "[c]onsidering the religious and linguistic conservatism of the Mixes they are surprisingly non-conservative in dress. Not only men but women go largely clad in stuffs from outside made up after "civilized" fashions" (1900:54). This anticipated much of what has been written about the Mixes since World War II. Ethnologists and social scientists looked to the Mixes for survivals

of pre-Columbian customs—and found them in abundance. But they also found an interest in music and modern fashions and the world outside the Sierra Mixe.

Totontepec, in particular, has been characterized in this way. Beals, who visited the town briefly in 1933, describes the scene of an elaborate wake for a child that he attended there:

> ... The body was dressed in a red garment with a flowing cape of dark blue, both decorated with pasted-on designs cut out of gold paper. A red cap, with similar decoration, and white stockings completed the dress. The hands were tied up to hold a huge bunch of flowers on the chest. A portable organ provided the music, mostly waltzes and fox trots (Totontepec is the most sophisticated Mixe town in many ways), and there was dancing of a sort on the hard earthen floor (Beals 1973 [1945]:61).

One of the most extensive ethnographic portraits of the Mixes—Nahmad-Sittón's (1965) monograph *Los Mixes* (1965)—is largely devoted to questions of acculturation and assimilation. Nahmad-Sittón created a scale of acculturation/resistance and ranked each major Mixe pueblo on 15 different measures including literacy rates, clothing, types of housing, public health, and infrastructure. According to his calculations Totontepec scored 22 points, out of a possible 45, which placed it in the middle of the range for Mixe towns, in the category of "accelerated development". Morgan (1980) applied Nahmad-Sittón's scale to Totontepec, as it was in 1930, and Totontepec in 1979, when she visited. She concluded that in 1930 Totontepec would have scored a 10, placing it in the category of "slowly acculturating" but that by 1979 it had garnered a 39 out of 45, making it "highly developed (Morgan 1980:30-35).

Yet even as government officials, Mexican social scientists and outsiders were busy measuring how quickly the Mixes were "catching up" to the rest of Mexican society, Mixe thinkers and politicians were pouring over the historical accounts of

Burgoa, Gay, and others (almost as soon as they had access to them) looking for confirmation that they are truly *gente jamás conquistada* "a people who were never conquered" and buttressing their view of Mixe history as a series of failed attempts by powerful outsiders—the Aztecs, the Zapotecs, the Spaniards—to conquer them and profane their sacred lands. What Zapotec neighbors had described as the shameful poverty and ignorance of the Mixes, Mixe people have now valorized as a virtuous disdain for materialism and the corrupting influence of outsiders (Barabas & Bartolomé 1984). The following remark is typical of current Mixe discourse: "The *Ayuuk* rebellion against domination is a pacific one today, but it lives on and is expressed in the diverse efforts of its organizations which grew out of the confrontation with political boss-ism [*caciquismo*]" (Maldonado & Cortés 1999:100).

Language Shift in Totontepec

According to Mexico's 2000 census 81% of the 5,626 people who live in the municipio of Totontepec identified themselves as Mixe speakers. Two varieties of Zapotec (Yalalteco and Choapaneco) are the first languages of approximately 85 people, and about a dozen people speak Chinanteco. Children of Mixe-speaking parents are continuing to acquire and use at least some form of Mixe, and children of Spanish- and Zapotec-speaking parents are picking up Mixe language skills from their peers. Several residents speak both Totontepecano Mixe and Yalalteco Zapotec fluently. It is common for all older Totontepecanos to know at least a few words of Zapotec. The census does not distinguish between varieties of Mixe or Zapotec. So, for example, it is unclear how many people in Totontepec can speak more than one variety of Mixe.

Totontepec had a small number of bilingual elites at least since the beginning of the 19th century, perhaps far earlier. Their use of spoken Spanish seems to have mostly been about asserting worldliness and sophistication, but had little day-to-day value. Spanish literacy, in contrast, figured importantly in the legal realm, and the community always had a few expert scribes on hand for the purpose of producing wills, land titles and other legally binding documents. The number of Totontepecanos with some Spanish competence began to increase slowly in the first half of the 20th century and particularly after the very first federal school teacher visited Totontepec in 1928. Then, between 1950 and 1980, the number of Spanish-speaking Totontepecanos increased dramatically.

Totontepecanos talk about the shift to Mixe-Spanish bilingualism as if it took place over the course of three generations, beginning with children born in the 1930s. It is useful to contrast Totontepecano perceptions of language shift with the statistical messiness of changing trends in language use over the last half century (census data on Totontepecano bilingualism is unavailable before 1950). The following figures come from Mexico's decennial *Censo General*:

Table 4.01. Census Figures for Totontepec (1950-2000)

Year	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Total population of Totontepec	4387	4527	4377	5164	5394	5626
Total population of indigenous language speakers (over age 5)	3794	3803	2920	3730	4396	4641
Total population of Mixe speakers (over 5)	-	-	-	-	4281	4545
Bilingual: indigenous language + Spanish	889	2215	2470	2695	3436	3734
Monolingual: indigenous language only	2904	1588	450	937	869	894
Monolingual: Spanish only						238
Unspecified	-	-	-	88	91	16

Between 1950 and 2000 several substantial changes in the kind of linguistic data collected and collection procedures took place. Clearly, these figures need to be taken with a large grain of salt. Nevertheless, the overall trend is clear.

According to these figures, in 1950 a little over one fifth of the people living in the municipio of Totontepec were identified as bilinguals. By 1960 almost half of the residents of Totontepec were counted as bilinguals, and for the first time they outnumbered the population of monolingual speakers of Mixe and other indigenous languages. In 1980 more than half of the municipio's residents were listed as bilinguals. In the 1990 census and 2000 census about 65% of Totontepec's residents were identified as bilinguals. The leveling off of the curve which took place between 1970 and 1990 can be attributed to a number of factors, including a significant increase in average life expectancy and the out-migration of Spanish speakers. The number of monolingual speakers of Mixe and other indigenous languages plunged between 1950 and 1960, but held surprisingly steady between 1980 and 2000.

For a slightly different take on the rise of bilingualism in Totontepec we can compare the number of bilingual speakers to the total number of indigenous speakers.

Table 4.02. Bilinguals as a Percentage of the Total Population of Indigenous Language Speakers in Totontepec over the Age of Five (1950-2000)

Year	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Percent bilingual	23.4	58.2	84.6	72.3	78.2	80.5
Percent monolingual	76.6	41.8	15.4	25.1	19.8	19.3

In 1950 about one quarter of Totontepec's speakers of Mixe and other indigenous languages were also counted as Spanish speakers. Ten years later more than half of them were also Spanish speakers and by 1970 more than four fifths of them were listed

as bilingual. Since peaking at 85 percent in 1970 this number has floated between 70% and 80% or so ever since.

During this same 50-year span of time the population of Totontepec increased by at least five hundred (maybe as much as one thousand) and the percentage of the population over five years old identified as speakers of an indigenous language dropped from 86% down to 66% and then back up to almost 95% of the total population.[5] Both the total number of Mixe speakers and the total number of Spanish speakers rose over this period. In the 1990 and 2000 census, the percentage of Totontepecanos who were identified as monolingual Mixe speakers hovered just below the 20% mark. It is however noteworthy that between 1990 and 2000 the absolute number of bilinguals in Totontepec increased by almost 300. In the 2000 census 238 people were identified as monolingual speakers of Spanish, that is, about 4% of the population. It should also be emphasized that the percentage of bilinguals living in the town center of Totontepec, as opposed to one of its *agencias*, is undoubtedly much higher. The center of town is where almost all of the monolingual Spanish speakers and speakers of Zapotec in the municipio live.

To put this all another way, in 1950 the typical Totontepecano spoke the local variety of Mixe and little or no Spanish. He probably spoke at least enough Zapotec to conduct business in foreign markets (especially if he was an adult male), and he may well have also spoken at least one other variety of Mixe. At present, eight out of every ten people living in Totontepec still speak Mixe, but six or seven out of every ten use Spanish, too. Only four out of every one hundred residents speak little or no Mixe. If a Totontepecano happens to speak a third language, that language is now more likely to

5. There was a small population dip around 1970 due to out-migration, but I believe that this drop from 86% to 66% is greatly overstated.

be English (because of migration and English classes in the middle school and preparatory school) than an indigenous Mexican language.

Contact-driven Change in Totontepecano Mixe

A surprising fact about language contact within Mesoamerica prior to the arrival of the Europeans is how little borrowing took place between languages. Centuries of contact between speakers of different Mesoamerican languages seldom resulted in the transfer of more than a dozen lexical items or so (Kaufman 2002 ms.). It appears that between two and three millennia ago the common ancestor of modern Mixean and Zoquean languages (or perhaps an extinct third branch of the family, Kaufman (2002 ms.) hypothesizes) exerted a significant influence on the Aztecan languages spoken in the Valley of Mexico and further north, "mesoamericanizing" Nahuatl as a result. Over this last millennium Mayan languages exerted a noticeable influence on the grammar of the easternmost members of the Mixe-Zoquean family. Yet despite the significant influence that the Zapotecs of the Sierra have had on the material culture, dances, music, commerce and other aspects of Highland Mixe society over the last seven centuries I have yet to identify even a single clear cut case of a Zapotec loanword or grammatical convergence. The features that they do share are common to languages throughout the Mesoamerican linguistic area. Moreover, many of these Mesoamerican traits are closely associated with elevated, ritual language e.g. vigesimal counting systems, calendrical terminology, and the extensive use of couplets in ceremonial discourse.

Given the paucity of loans from one Mesoamerican language to another, it is striking how deeply Spanish lexical items and grammatical patterns got incorporated

into so many Mesoamerican languages after the fall of Tenochtitlan.[6] When compared to the linguistic syncretism found in contemporary Nahuatl language use (Hill & Hill 1986; Lockhart 1991), in various Mayan languages (as reported in e.g. Brody 1987) and in the Zoquean branch of the Mixe-Zoquean language family, the relative paucity of Mixe-Spanish inter-influence is striking. Especially notable is the rarity of Spanish discourse markers and conjunctions in contemporary Mixe discourse as compared to other reported cases from Mexico. Mixe speakers are also highly conservative in such lexical domains as toponyms, numbers and calendrical terminology.

And yet, contemporary Mixe language use reveals the indelible traces of prolonged contact with the Spanish language and Spanish-speaking world. North Highland Mixe greetings and expressions of thanks regularly invoke *Dios* 'God', while the inquiry *ti yaaxp* 'what time is it?'(literally: 'what is it crying/ringing?') hearkens back to the introduction of the church bell tower and its attendant time-keeping practices.

Spanish linguistic influence on different varieties of Mixe during the Dominican era (1550-1800) was almost entirely limited to a low level of lexical borrowing—calques and neologisms were by far the most common way of naming imported plants, animals, technologies and religious and political concepts. A variety of terms for imported Spanish items and concepts were coined by compounding the root *tsap* 'sky, heaven' to native stems. The following list includes most of the cases found in my lexical database of Totontepecano Mixe: [7]

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6. See Brown (1994) for a quantitative overview of lexical borrowing in these languages.

7. This database features over 7,500 separate entries and is far and away the most comprehensive Mixe dictionary. I should add that a number of additional lexical items in this database take the expressions listed above and add further derivational morphology or compound them with other stems. Other items formed with *tsap* that I do not include here rely on its more literal sense, as in *tsap'ixün*

(1)

word		gloss
tsap + töjk	'sky + house'	church
tsap + kots	'sky + to_talk'	to pray
tsap + kaaj	'sky + beast'	bull
tsap + kaaky	'sky + tortilla'	bread
tsap + kov	'sky + instrument'	guitar
tsap + tsùù'k	'sky + sapote'	orange
tsap + xök	'sky + bean'	fava bean
tsap + xoj	'sky + oak'	quince
tsap + yaav	'sky + ear_of_corn'	pomegranate

From these forms other words may be derived, such as *tsapköts* '(a) prayer', *tsapköjtspa* 'one who prays' and etc.

There is no evidence that *tsap* refered to foreign things or concepts before the arrival of the Spanish. We can certainly speculate that the association between the sky and Spanish imports began with the clerical attempts to convey the idea of Heaven, and God via some reduced form of Mixe or using Nahuatl as a lingua franca. This set of terms is so small that it is hard to say if the meaning of *tsap* was extended at some point in time to cover cases of imported items that did not necessarily have religious significance or if each of these items, pomegranates, guitars, etc. figured into early Dominican efforts to proselytize the Mixes.

Others words were formed using the word *maaxün* as a base. Wichmann (1995:375) assigns the speculative meaning 'mana' to its reconstructed proto-Mixe-Zoquean source *maasan. In all modern Mixe-Zoquean languages its cognates mean something like 'holy' or 'Spanish':

'telescope' (from sky + lens). Schmieder (1930:61) noted down several terms that are no longer in use: *tsapjayu* 'white people', *tsappit* 'imported thread', *tsapvit* 'imported cloth.'

(2)	amaaxün	'mouth-Spanish'	the Spanish language
	tsamaaxün	'rock-holy'	stone idol
	maaxün ùnük	'holy child'	godson
	maaxün pù'ùjts	'Spanish rot'	smallpox

In other cases the meanings of indigenous terms were extended to cover imported animals, plants, technologies and etc. For example, the word *jaach* "deer" was used to refer to horses and pack animals and the word for "stone hatchet" *pùjxün* was used to refer first to imported cutting implements and secondarily to objects made of iron. Similarly, the verb for slinging rocks was used to describe the shooting of a rifle and eventually derived forms were used to refer to guns and to soldiers.

Spanish loanwords in Mixe were exceedingly rare and largely limited to religious and bureaucratic-political terminology. Most frequently heard among this set of borrowings was the word *dyoos* 'God', which was taken from Spanish along with a variety of expressions of greeting and thanks-giving, e.g.

(3)	dyoos meep	God be with you.
	dyoos mkujù'yüxjadap	May God repay all of you.

Introduction of the Spanish word *campana* "bell" was surely attributable to the 18th century arrival of Antonio Alcántara, who came to town to make the bells for Totontepec's church and whose descendents came to dominate 19th and 20th century Totontepecano politics and culture. The Alcántaras were not Totontepec's first Mixe-Spanish bilinguals, but through these two centuries their familial identity was closely bound up with their ability to speak and read Spanish during a period when few other Totontepecanos could.

These linguistic patterns are exactly what one would expect given the tiny and transient population of Spaniards who lived in the region. In a 1781 sales tax survey, Totontepec registered a population of 960 Indians and just four Spaniards (Chance 1989:38-39). In that same survey Villa Alta, the closest Spanish garrison, had a population of 64 Spaniards and 92 residents of mixed ancestry. Virtually all of the Spaniards who passed through Totontepec in the 16th-18th centuries were affiliated with the Catholic Church in one way or another.

Many of the terms borrowed from Spanish prior to the advent of widespread bilingualism were reworked to conform to Mixe phonology. Stressed vowels were reinterpreted as long vowels, the central back vowel /o/ of Spanish was reinterpreted as a diphthong and word-final sonorants were de-voiced, e.g. *mil* 'thousand' > [miijl], *hora* 'hour' > ['ùùra], as in *ùùrapayo'yün* 'clock' (literally: hour-chaser). This process remains productive, although Spanish words are now more likely to be borrowed with little or no Mixe-ization of their form.

At some point a process for borrowing Spanish verbs was innovated. The procedure involves taking infinitive forms, lengthening the final vowel and devoicing the final /r/, and then appending a suffix that is realized as [a] or [i] depending upon the morphological and phonological environment, e.g.

(4) Sp. *castigar* 'to punish' > *kastigaajra*

jè jayu	myaajntk	tü dü kastigaajra
DET man	3E= son	YA= 3E= punish-dINC

'The man punished his son.'

jè jayu	myaajntk	tü kastigaajrip
DET man	3E= son	3E= punish-iINCt

'The man punishes his son.'

This mode of using Spanish verbs in Mixe discourse has become very common, especially among less fluent speakers who do not know the Mixe stem or are momentarily unable to derive it correctly. For example, at town meetings, where people are required to speak in Mixe, Spanish-dominant bilinguals rely heavily on this process in order to voice their opinions. This contrasts with Mixe-dominant bilinguals who, when speaking Spanish, will code-switch into Mixe if they cannot summon up the Spanish verb that they wish to employ. Even though Spanish morphology offers the means to hispanicize Mixe stems, this is never done.

Spanish-Mixe convergence has also been taking place at the morpho-syntactic level of structure. One such example is a tendency for some speakers to use the comitative particle *mööt* 'with' to introduce instrumental arguments, rather than (or in addition to) using the verbal prefix /tuk-/. This pattern has been borrowed from Spanish, which uses the preposition *con* 'with' to introduce both comitative and instrumental arguments, e.g.

(5) Spanish

Voy a la Iglesia con Pedro.
I go to the church with Peter.

Pego a Pedro con la vara.
I hit Peter with the stick.

(6) Mixe (more conservative form)

öts	tsaptöjk	nöjkx-p	mööt	Pèèt
I	church	go- iINC	with	Peter

I go to the church with Peter.

öts	Pèèt	jè vi'tsün	tuk-vop-pI
I	Peter	DET stick	INSTR-hit-iINCt

I hit Peter with the stick.

(7) Mixe (more convergent form)

öts	tsaptöjk	nöjkx-p	mööt Pèèt
I	church	go-iINC	with Peter

I go to the church with Peter.

öts	Pèèt	(tuk-)vop-pI	mööt jè vi'tsün
I	Peter	(INSTR-)hit-iINCt	with DET stick

I hit Peter with the stick.

This shift from a head-marking construction to a more dependent-marking one is only found in the speech of Mixe-Spanish bilinguals and is undoubtedly a recent innovation.

Even as this sort of convergent change is taking place, other aspects of the Mixe that is spoken by Totontepecano bilinguals have been undergoing divergent change. In Chapter Three I described the complex interplay between syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic factors that determine possible ordering of elements in a Mixe clause and the the interpretation of those clauses. So in an intransitive sentence the subject can sometimes be inferred from verbal inflection, as in (8):

(8) mdaamp — You are staying.
m= tan -p
2A= stay -iINC

But when this is not the case, it must be explicitly expressed with an independent pronoun or a more complex noun phrase:

(9) taamp jè'è — He is staying.
tan -p jè'è
stay -iINC 3IND

(10) taamp Veejl — Manny is staying.
tan -p veejl
stay -iINC Manny

Because independent, intransitive clauses only feature a single core argument, the subject can precede the verb or follow it, with little possibility of confusion or

ambiguity. Hence, example (11) is perfectly grammatical, albeit less frequently uttered and pragmatically marked:

(11) Veejl taamp — *Manny* is staying.
veejl tan -p
Manny stay -iINC

By way of contrast, the subject in a dependent intransitive clauses always precedes verb:

(12) ka'a Veejl tyany — Manny is not staying.
ka'a veejl y= tan -I
NEG Manny 3A= stay -dINC

This ordering of elements, in which the absolutive subject precedes the verb, appears to be a survival of an archaic pattern. OV word order once the rule, but this order has all but disappeared in Mesoamerica. Contemporary Zapotecan languages, for example, all favor VSO word order.

I have found that Spanish-literate bilinguals in Totontepec do not like sentences such as (11), and actively try to avoid them in their own speech, even where it might be useful to move the subject to a clause-initial position. Why? Because—it was explained to me—they are taught in school that in Spanish the subject is supposed to come before the verb. And they suspect that when this happens in Mixe it must be the result of interference from Spanish. Moreover, Southern Highland Mixe speakers always place the subject after the verb in intransitive independent clauses and even in many dependent ones. And Southern Highland Mixe is generally assumed to be a more conservative variety because the stereotypical Southern Highlander is more culturally conservative.

A second symptom of this anxiety about the corrupting influence of Spanish has to do with the variable pronunciation of /ü/. For many Totontepecano Mixe speakers it gravitates toward [i] in unstressed, pre-tonic contexts. Hence the sentence "Manny made him stay," can be uttered:

(13) [veejl tüdüyaktany] Manny made him stay.
veejl tü= tü= yak- tan -I
Manny PERF= 3E= CAUS- stay -dINC

But many utter it:

(14) [veejl tidiyaktany] Manny made him stay.

with the thee perfective proclitic pronounced [ti] and the third person proclitic pronounced [di]. Speakers are especially liable to do so in rapid speech. During my linguistic elicitation sessions I observed that the more bilingual a speaker was, the more apt he or she was to correct me when I uttered sentences such as (14) and to correct their own pronunciation whenever [i]s popped out instead of [ü]s. Illiterate consultants tended not to mind [i] so much. Why was this happening? I strongly suspect that this is because [i] is a vowel sound heard in both Mixe and Spanish, whereas bilinguals recognize that [ü] is unique to Mixe. In fact, certain lexical items that historically featured an /i/ are getting hyper-corrected by bilingual Totontepecanos, as in ['ixyam] 'now' > ['üxyam].

Buying Spanish

I began this chapter with Diebold's argument about incipient bilingualism. It is instructive to contrast Diebold's portrait of the incipient bilingual with the ones found in dozens of humorous and poignant stories that recount the struggles nearly monolingual

speakers of indigenous Latin American languages face when forced to express themselves in Spanish. They are stories of country bumpkins from not so very long ago or from just a little ways further down the road who are valiant, fearless and hardworking, but who lack the symbolic resources to defend themselves in the Spanish-speaking world. The protagonists of these narratives are *painfully* aware of the limits of their Spanish competence. These narratives give us a glimpse of how indigenous subjects have experienced the presence of Spanish in their lives.

Bruce Mannheim offers us a marvelous Andean example in his book *The Language of the Inka since the European Invasion* (1991). In this tale three Peruvian Quechua speaking men decide that they need to purchase some Spanish phrases so that they can prevent a Spanish-speaking landlord from stealing their communal lands. Unfortunately they only have enough money to buy three Spanish utterances, and their poorly timed use of those utterances lands them in jail for a crime that they did not commit:[8]

> In the town of Huanta, one time a few years back, an *hacendado* wanted to grab a community's lands.
>
> So the Runa of the community said: "By speaking Spanish, he'll defeat us in this court case," they said.
>
> "So what'll we do?" they said.
>
> "It's best we go to Lima," they said.
>
> So one Sunday they had an idea [*yuyarisqaku*]. They selected three Runa with good memories [*allin yuyaysapa*] to come to this town of Lima to buy Spanish. Each one could only manage to buy one Spanish expression, because they cost so much.
>
> So they said, "Which should we buy?"
>
> "*Ñuqayku*" ['we' or 'us' excluding the addressee].
>
> "And another one to go with it?"

8. Source: Mannheim (1991:82-84). The English translation and interjected Quechua are Mannheim's.

"*Munaspayku*" ['because we want to…'].
"And after that?"
"*Chaytam munaniyku*" ['that's what we want']…

Note here how the opening scene of this story expresses both the notion that Spanish can be used as an instrument for wealthy people to acquire more wealth, and the notion that Spanish expressions themselves constitute a form of wealth that can be bought and sold.

… So the three Runa came toward the town of Lima on foot, until they got to La Mejorada. From La Mejorada they came to the city of Lima in a train.

When they arrived in Lima, they went to the home of a fellow Huanteño to rest.

So, while they were in Lima the Huanteño asked them, "How come you came?"

So the people who came from Huanta said, "We came to buy Spanish, dear brother."

"What do you want to buy Spanish for?"

So the Runa who came from Huanta said, "Dear brother, this landlord is trying to throw us off our community's land by speaking Spanish, so we also came to buy Spanish in order to defend ourselves."

So the Huanteño who was here [in Lima] said, "What expressions would you like?"

"We want just three."

So the Lima Huanteño said, "*I* can sell them to you."

So one of the Huanteños spoke again, "How much will you charge us for each expression?"

So the Lima Huanteño said, "I'll sell them to you for fifty each expression."

So the Huanteños said, "Give us a discount, dear brother, it's for our hometown."

"Entonces *sesenta soles* [sixty *soles*], I'll charge you for each one."

"All right, dear brother."

"Which one of you will buy first?"

So one of them said, "Me first."
"And what expression do you want?"
"*Ñuqayku*" ['us'].

So the Lima Huanteño said, "*Nosotros*. That's how the expression is said," he said.

Then another said, "Now to me."

So the Lima Huanteño said, "And what would you like?"

So the Huanteño said, "*Munaspayku*" ['because we want to…'].

So the Lima Huanteño sold him this expression, "*Porque queremos*."

And then the Lima Huanteño said to the other, "You, what would you like?"

So the last Huanteño said, "For me, *Chaytam munaniyku*" ['that's what we want'].

So the three Huanteños learned by buying…

In the second scene of this narrative we encounter the middle-man or linguistic broker. He is a Huanteño, but one who lives in the and speaks Spanish. Note the negative evaluation of this character and the implication that to become citified and hispanicized is to risk becoming corrupt. The Lima Huanteño is wealthy, but perhaps morally bankrupt.

… So, after they learned [the words], they traveled back toward their village by train until they got to La Mejorada, and from there went on foot.

So, as they were going on a mountain, they came upon a dead person, still fresh, dripping with blood.

When they came upon him, the Huanteños said, "What kind of heart to have killed him like this!"

While they were saying that, three Civil Guards came, seated on horseback.

"*¿Quién mató a ese hombre? ¡Hablen! ¡Hablen!*" [who killed this man? Speak up! Speak up!].

So the Huanteños ran off in fear. Then they said,

"They are making us squander ourselves [causing us to spill out] by speaking Spanish," they said.

"But we were buying Spanish in order to defend ourselves," they said.

And the Civil Guard spoke to them only in Spanish. That being so,

"You! You bought the first. You answer!"

> So the first Huanteño to buy Spanish came back at the Civil Guard,
>
> "*¿Quién mató a este hombre?*" [who killed this man?] he was asked.
>
> "*Nosotros*," ['us'] he said.
>
> So the Civil Guard asked, "*¿Porqué lo mataron?*" [why did you kill him?].
>
> And the Huanteños said, "Now you!"
>
> So the second purchaser of Spanish came back at the Civil Guard, "*¿Porqué mataron?*" [why did you kill?].
>
> "*¡Porque queremos!*" [because we wanted to!].
>
> So the Civil Guard said, "*Pues ahora van presos*" [then you are under arrest].
>
> So the last one said, "*¡Eso queremos!*" [that's what we want!].
>
> So as the Civil Guards led them off they said,
>
> "They'll give us a prize for sure; that's why they are leading us off. Justice is great!" they said…

And observe here how the denotational content of the three Spanish expressions that the Huanteños purchased in Lima is not foremost on their minds. They turn out to be much more interested in the indexical value of the Spanish as an instrument of authority and influence. In fact, they are expecting to be reward for their efficacious use of their three phrases:

> So now they arrived before the judge, who questioned them in Spanish.
>
> The Huanteños looked at each other. "We bought Spanish in order to defend [ourselves]," they said.
>
> So the judge asked, "*¿Quién de ustedes mató a ese individuo*?" [which of you killed this individual?].
>
> So the first Huanteño who bought Spanish began when the judge asked, "*¿Quién lo mató?*" [who killed him?].
>
> "*Nosotros*" [us].
>
> "*¿Porqué lo mataron?*" [and why did you kill him?], he continued.
>
> "*¡Porque queremos!*" [because we wanted to!].
>
> "*Entonces los condeno a veinticinco años de cárcel*" [in that case, I sentence you to twenty-five years in prison].
>
> "*¡Eso queremos!*" [that's what we want].

> So, up to now, the Huanteños have been sitting in jail. Now that you know about their lives, bring them a little something, even if it is only coca.

As Mannheim points out, this is not just a story about three rubes who get swindled by a fellow countryman. It illustrates how Spanish is experienced by the Runa people as associated with the power of the state and the judiciary, a power that acts upon them in arbitrary ways (Mannheim 1991:84-85). The protagonists misperceive that power as inhering in the Spanish words themselves. However, their belief that without some Spanish they will be powerless to defend themselves has a basis in fact.

At this point I would like to introduce a second text, one from Totontepec. I recorded the story I call "Coffee Picking" in August of 1998, about a week into my very first field trip to Totontepec Oaxaca. At the time the narrator, Gertrudis Gomez Réyes, "Tulis" to her friends, was 20 years old. Like a number of her contemporaries she did not speak any Spanish at all outside of school when she was growing up. When I first met Tulis she was just starting to attend law school in Oaxaca City. Her law school scholarship money came courtesy of the INI (the National Indigenous Institute). She won it in a competition that involved translating a popular folktale from Spanish into written Mixe. In exchange for her scholarship money she was obligated to periodically write essays about aspects of local tradition—marriage, land tenure, mythology, fiestas—to be published in a series of edited volumes of ethnology. In a sense, the government had offered her and her fellow scholarship-holders an unmediated exchange of tradition for modernity.

Tulis, then, was disposed to listen keenly to her elders and write down the things that they told her. But it was not just about the scholarship money. Their talk also contained quite a good deal of wisdom and wit. Not to mention an almost inexhaustible

supply of old-timey Mixe expressions that could be picked up and re-enter circulation as youthful slang. She offered me (and her little brother Froylan, who was also in the room) this story as an example of the richness of her language, explaining that it did not sound funny at all in Spanish, but when told in Mixe it always produced gales of laughter. I decided to try reading it aloud to other Totontepecano acquaintances, doing my best to imitate Tulis' patterns of intonation. Lo and behold it never failed produced the hysterics that she had promised.

I did not think too much more about her story at the time and did not have a sufficient grasp of Mixe or of the context that her narrative presupposed to make much sense of it. Several years later, when I finally sat down and transcribed the story, I realized that there was something interesting going on here, and that it resonated with a number of other tales I had recorded over the last two years. These narratives illustrate—in their humorous and poignant way—exactly what was at stake for Mixe speakers when they first ventured out into the Spanish-speaking world. Some of these stories contain true events or even autobiographical content, but many simply borrow and re-tool material from old stories, jokes and legends.

"Coffee Picking" is set during the time period before WWII when a few daring Totontepecano men began venturing down from the mountains into the vast new coffee plantations of Veracruz in search of wage labor. This seasonal migration to coffee country continued sporadically until the end of the 1950s, but by then work in the United States and the job opportunities available in Oaxaca City and Mexico City had become much more attractive options. Texts like this contribute to the Totontepecano sense of place by portraying themselves as people "up above" who encounter other types of people "down below." The narrative recounts an apocryphal encounter between

a fellow from Totontepec and a Spanish-speaking plantation boss. When the boss sees that the Mixe men work much harder than any of the other peons, he decides to take advantage of them. Instead of giving them little tiny tin cans to fill, he gives them enormous crates. But he still pays them the same number of pesos per container. The Totontepecano protagonist tries mightily to protest, but he simply lacks the linguistic competence to make himself understood:

Kafeepiva (Coffee Picking)[9]

G: Ka'a nax jè'è xmotu?
You've never heard it?

Ka'a xa Froy?
Right, Froy [the narrator's younger brother]?

F: Juu'?
Which one?

G: Juu' jè myaajytktup jats kuuk **este** üü'm njayuvamda,
The one they tell about when our (incl) countrymen,

Jèmani nyöjkxta y'ijt, xip tù'k ava'tsov,
A while back, they would travel, to the lowlands,

Nöjkx **kyafee**pivda.
They would go to pick coffee.

Ax **este**, vè'èk tse'e, jèp jè Anyükojmit jayuda,
And, well um, down there the Totontepecanos,

Atü'üts atü'ütsük tse'e **kyafee** dü tumpivda,
Quickly, quickly they would pick coffee,

Jaty jaty.
Rapidly, rapidly.

Juu'ts viijnk kajpün jayuda, vè'èts, oytyunükts jè jyè'è dü tumpivda.
And the people from other towns, well, they would pick very slowly.

---

9. Recorded on 11 August 1998 in Totontepec Oaxaca. Narrated by Gertrudis Gomez Réyes. Transcribed and translated in February 2000 by Daniel Suslak and Braulia Reyes Gomez.

Ax juu'k tse'e jè vintsön, juu' jè **kafee** kam tü nüvintsönip,
And he who was the boss, he who was the head of the coffee plantation,

Ax vè'èkts jè ve'e myooydup y'ijt jè tùùmbatöjk pi'k, vè'è, pi'k **laata**
Well he would give the peons little, um, little tins

Jùma dü apiv'ùtsta jè **kafee**.
In which they would toss the coffee.

Ax kuukts üü'm njayuvamda jatyjits jè'è **lyaata**da dü apiv'ùtsta y'ijt.
And so our (incl) countrymen filled their tins so quickly.

Ax juu'ts viijnk jayuda, vè'èts, otyunükts jè'è tyuntùnda...
And the other people, um, would do it so slowly...

The narrator begins by setting up an opposition near to the hearts of Totontepecano people, between Totontepecanos and people from other towns (*viijnk jayuda* 'foreign people'). The narrator's fellow countrymen work quickly and competently, the foreigners work slowly. Then both the Totontepecanos and the foreigners are placed together in a single group—peons—in opposition to the plantation boss.

...Ax paa'tyük tse'e jè vintsön vyaajny:
...And so the boss said:

"Aaaj kum va'ache'e yö'öna Anyükojmit jayu, vè'èts, pe'tpits yö'öda
"Aaah, since these Totontepecanos, um, are so quick,

Jaty jaty tse'e tyun**kafee**pivda
Since they the pick coffee so very quickly

Ax vè'èmts n'it dü mo'yumda apöjkin juu' **maas** müjit" jüdü'üm.
I'd better give them larger containers to fill.

"**Kajha** juu' müjit.
Big boxes.

Jè'èts nmo'yumdap jè'èts y'apiv'ùtstap.
That's what we're going to give them to fill.

Ax kutse'e yakmujùydat, akijpxa che'e nmujù'yumdat,

And when they get paid, we'll pay them the same,

Ve'em juu' **laata** tü dü apiv'ùtsta, nay ve'em juu' **kajha** tü dü apiv'ùtstup."
As if they were just filling the tins, even though they are filling the boxes."

Ax ve'emük tse'e dü tùùndi.
And that's what they did.

Kuuktse'e **kafee** dü pikö̀jxti,
And when they finished picking coffee,

Ax ùmüke'e **esteee** yakmujùùydini.
Then, well, they paid them.

Juu'k tse'e Anyükojmit jayu ntijumüt tùùjtük kyajha dü apiv'uts müjit.
And the Totontepecanos, one could say for example, would fill six large boxes.

Jats viijnk jayu nay tùùjtük **laata** dü apiv'ùjtspa,
And the others would fill like six tins,

Pero mu... **este** pi'k muutskitse'e jüdü'üm jè **laata.**
But li..., um, they were little, thus, those tins.

Ax akijpxak tse'e yakmujùùyda.
And they would pay them the same.

Vanxüp ntijumüt, pön majk **peesu** ve'e yakmujùùyda y'ijt.
One could say for example that they would get paid 10 pesos.

Tù'kkö'öyji tse'e tum majk **peesu**.
Everyone would be given 10 pesos.

Ax **maas** may **maas** müjit **kajha**ts, jè'è yajit jayu y'apiv'ùtstup.
And they would fill many large boxes, the people from here.

Ka'amts jèm dü akèèga jats nayvanxüp yakmujùùyvat
It wasn't fair that they would give them the same amount

Ax jù'n jè'è juu' pi'kit **laata** tü dü 'apiv'uts...
As the people who filled the little tins...

And here the plantation boss decides that he can trick the Totontepecanos by paying them the same amount of money even though they work so much harder than everyone else.

...Ùmüke'e tù'k jè yaa'työjk vya'any.
...So then a man spoke.

Jè nde'm jayu dü nüüjma:
He said to the boss:

Aaaj nde'm jayu, jadi ka'a **maas** müjitap yö vè'è yö **kajha** jats ka'a yö **laata**—
"Aaah, sir, if these boxes are larger than these tins—

Chöjxts ööts mitse'e akijpxa xmujùy?
Why did you pay us (excl) the same?

Maas müjit xa yö **kajha** juu' ööts tü, nvè'è, dü n'apiv'uts
They were much bigger these boxes that we filled

Jats ni ka'a xi **laata**," jüdü'üm.
Than any of those tins were." thus.

"Nüyojkts ööts njù'yin xtukküda'aky!"
"We are owed better pay!"

Jüdü'ümüktse'e dü nüüjma.
That's what he told him.

Ax, ax kum Amaaxünts jèm jè jayu kyöts.
And, and since he was speaking in Spanish.

Ax jè tse'e jè nte'm jayu yajit jayu ve'e, nakyukojtsjup ve'em,
And the man, the man from here, he defended himself this way,

Jatse'e tyiya dü vintsova dü tukpum dü tuk'üü'v.
Struggling mightily [to express himself] anyway he could.

Jatse'e dü nüüjmi, Amaaxün dü nüüjmi:
And he said to him, in Spanish he said to him:

"Aaaj tii **senyoor**, jadi **laas kajhas son mas graandes** ni kadi **laata**—
"Aaah, sir, if the boxes are bigger than any of the tins—

Porkee ööts akijpxa xmujùy?!"
Why did you pay us (excl) the same?!"

Jüdü'ümts.
Thus.

When I played this recording for one of my neighbors in Totontepec—an elderly woman who feels intensely uncomfortable whenever she is obligated to speak in Spanish—she howled with delight. But why? Why do Totontepecanos, and my neighbor in particular, find this story so clever and amusing? The humor of the Huanteños who wanted to buy Spanish is quite transparent in spite of the fact that it has been translated from Quechua/Spanish into English. The protagonists do not find out that they have been swindled until it is too late, even though the audience can see the coming disaster from a mile away. Finding the humor in the tale of the coffee picker, on the other hand, requires some explanation.

Let me begin by focusing on the two instances of quoted speech found in the story. The first quote is a representation of what the coffee picker *would* have said to the plantation boss, had he simply been speaking in Mixe. The second is a representation of what he actually uttered when he attempted to voice his complaint:

(15) The coffee-picker's complaint

a. *Aaaj nde'm jayu jadi ka'a **maas** mïjitap yö vè'è yö **kajha** jats ka'a yö **laata,** chöjxts ööts mitse'e akijpxa xmujùy?*

Aaah, sir, if the **boxes** are **bigger** than the **tins**,
why did you pay us the same?

b. *Aaaj tii **senyoorr**, jadi **laas kajhas son mas graandes** ni kadi **laata, porrkee** ööts akijpxa xmujùy?*

Aaah, **sir**, if **the boxes are bigger** than any of the **tins**,
why did you pay us the same?

These two utterances are not terribly different. When the protagonist tries to speak Spanish, he actually manages to spit out most of a complete Spanish clause (*las cajas son más grande*s 'the boxes are bigger'). But he does so within the grammatical frame of a Mixe comparative construction. Then he falters and falls back on the Mixe verb phrase *ööts akijpxa xmujùy* 'you pay us (excl) the same."

The other two hispanicisms that the speaker employs, *porqué* 'why?' and *señor* 'sir', have probably been part of the linguistic repertoire of the average Totontepecano since the 17th century.

(16) Pure versus hispanicized Mixe

Mixe	Spanish	gloss
chöjx	*porqué*	'why?'
nde'm	*señor*	'sir'

These are not on-the-spot borrowings. Perhaps it will not come as a surprise that *porqué* and *señor* are two of the very favorite targets of Mixe language purists. That is to say, in Totontepecano purist discourse, the kind of discourse at which Ms. Gomez excels, these two pairs serve to distinguish hispanicized Mixe from pure Mixe. They have come to serve as register alternants.

I first realized what was going on when I caught up with Ms. Gomez for coffee (picked by someone else, thankfully) in Oaxaca City. We ended up commiserating over recent romantic failures, speaking in Spanish. When she asked what had gone wrong with my most recent relationship, I thought I would impress her, so I responded:

(17)	*tù'k*	***diyoos***	*dü= nöjava*
	only	God	3E= knows -dINC

She smiled broadly and said that I had learned a whole lot of Mixe since our last visit. I flushed with pride. "But you know what would sound even better?" she quickly added:

(18)	*tù'k*	*nde'yam*	*dü nöjava*
	only	1E= father -1INCL	3E= knows -dINC

She replaced the borrowed Spanish word ***diyoos*** with a Mixe near-equivalent which literally means "Our (inclusive) Father" /n-te'y-'üm /. Those readers who are familiar with Mexican Spanish will recognize that both versions of this expression are straight calques of the Spanish phrase "*Solo Dios sabe*," which is a constant refrain in Oaxacan discourse. But the point I would like to emphasize here is not that one form or another form is more authentic. The point is that in this bilingual context any given utterance can be made to sound more or less pure as the situation merits. A Totontepecano can always one-up somebody either through Mixe-izing the pronunciation, or through lexical replacement or even by manipulating word order and morphology.

So is it really just the hapless way that the coffee picker speaks violates the emerging norms of code purity that makes this story so humorous? As my knowledge of Mixe has improved I came to realize that the key is the couplet which introduces the coffee picker's plea for justice:

(19) Amaaxün tukpum tuk'üü'v

/tü= tuk- pùm -I/
3E= INSTR-'to make the sound of an explosive impact'-dINC

/tü= tuk- 'öö'v -I/
3E= INSTR-'to hurl it or whack it'-dINC

This is the sound symbolic verb root /pùm/ paired together with the transitive verb root /'öö'v/. Both are combined with the prefix *tuk-*, which adds an instrumental argument to

the clause (or in some cases an agentive argument), and both are fully inflected for person and aspect.

The resultant idiomatic meaning can be glossed roughly as "to struggle mightily to make X happen." It summons up a David-and-Goliath image of someone trying to lift an impossibly heavy load or a small child trying to get a large mule to budge from its place. However, it has become increasingly common to use this expression to refer to the kind of communicative act that Totontepecanos engage in when they struggle and struggle to express themselves in Spanish, when they are forced to use any means available to them, including code-switching and frantic gesturing, in order to make themselves understood. Hence, *Amaaxün tukpum tuk'üü'v* means something like 'beaten and battered Spanish.' When Totontepecanos beat up on Spanish among friends and kinfolk it provokes laughter and sympathy. But when they are speaking to foreign bosses and institutional gatekeepers, their use of battered Spanish can produce feelings of shame and humiliation.

Tukpum tuk'üü'v is one of a set of several dozen couplets found in Totontepecano Mixe. Analogues exist in all the other Oaxaca Mixean languages. These phrases consist of two complex stems that both take the same inflection and, in the case of verbs, share the same argument(s). Each of the two paired stems always has one morpheme in common with the other, such as a derivational prefix or incorporated noun root, and one which differs. The combined meaning of the two stems is never reducible to their individual meanings. They are most frequently used as adverbials of manner. Roots denoting body parts are especially common in these couplets. When I pointed this out to don Arelí (the founder of Totontepec's *Instituto Kong Oy*, and a former teacher of Ms. Gomez), he remarked that this just proves his point that Mixe is a much more

"humanistic" language than either Spanish or English. Here is an ample but by no means exhaustive set of additional examples:

(20) Totontepecano Mixe Couplets

vindaaya vinxoona *eye + lie eye+become_happy*	'flirtatiously'
xajmin xajxüp *underarm+approach underarm+recede*	'with wild gesticulations'
nas'ixa nasvoo'na *downward-look downward-stretch*	'gawking, with neck outstretched'
jumvinmay tivinmay *where+think what+think*	'while thinking bad thoughts'
mutun mupük *with-work with-earn*	'performing duty with good will'
anöma ayoka *mouth+say mouth+get_knocked_down*	'with a posture of sadness or defeat'
tù'k aaj tù'k joot *one mouth one stomach*	'with total sincerity'
mèjts viijn mèjts joot *two eye two stomach*	'with some reluctance'
mèjts aaj mèjts tü'ünjùt *two mouth two anus*	'with complete hypocrisy'

These couplets figure prominently in the all-important genres of speech making and song composition. They are a highly salient and valued rhetorical resource in Totontepec. They are, in short, exemplary forms of Totontepecano Mixe, and people who want to be considered gifted, articulate speakers need to learn to employ them with wit and clever timing.

The crux of my argument, then, is that it is the poetics of this juxtaposition of high Mixe with bumbling Spanish that makes the tale of the coffee picker so funny. When Totontepecano Mixe speakers such as Tulis use an expression like *Amaaxün tukpum tuk'üü'v* to describe someone's heroically flawed effort to speak Spanish they are snatching linguistic victory from the very jaws of defeat.

Coffee-picking, like the tale of the Huanteños who try to "buy Spanish," presents the acquisition of Spanish as an act of self-defense rather than acculturation. While these narratives decry the injustices perpetrated on them by powerful Spanish-speaking outsiders they also provide a coherent justification for becoming bilingual. Mixe and Runa audiences can laugh at the plight of these poor men when they get ripped-off by Spanish speakers, but they have no wish to find themselves caught in the same bind. The Totontepecanos coffee-pickers do not want to quit their jobs, they simply want their fair share of the money. And they are not criticized for speaking Mixe. Rather, they are made the object of ridicule because of their difficulty with Spanish. Nowhere is it suggested that a speaker must give up his local language in order to acquire the language of law and commerce.

One of my frustrations with many of the sociolinguistic studies now being conducted and published in Mexico is that so many of them have relied upon using domination and resistance as both a descriptive device and an explanatory framework. Every appearance of an indigenous expression gets coded as an act of resistance and each appearance of Spanish gets interpreted as an imposition. The ratio of the two supposedly provides us with a measure of how far Spanish domination has progressed in a given linguistic group. Then, depending upon the severity of the situation,

appropriate policy recommendations can then be made. Among other problems, such a simplistic approach disregards all humorous and ironic uses of Spanish. If we sincerely want to understand how processes of language shift and contact-driven linguistic change operate and how speakers experience them, then we need to take humor a little more seriously.

And an afternote: it turns out that young Totontepecanos who have been working in the United States describe their encounters with English in the same way that their parents and grandparents discuss the perils of speaking Spanish. When I went back and discussed this text with Tulis in the spring of 2000 she reported the following conversational snippet that she had overheard several days earlier. Speaker B and his two brothers earn a nice living doing construction work in Connecticut. B was preparing to leave town again and his cousin, speaker A, was asking B about how he manages to cross the border illegally and finds well-paying work:

(21) *Inglees jatukpum jatuk'üü'v*

A: ...kuutse'e jèp ado'om nnöjkxta
...When you (pl) travel there to the other side [i.e., the United States]

vintsotse'e jè jayu xjamööna kotsjada?
how in the world are you able to speak to those people?

B: Pach jèp xa öötse'e jatukpum jatuk'üü'v tyiya dü vintsova!
Well we just struggle like crazy (but without success) to do it any way we can!

A: Pach ve'em tse'e kum tso'oxa jème'e vintsove'e jayu xtunmööna kyotsjadat
Well yes, it must be really difficult to speak a lot with those people

ku ve'e jayu Inglees dü jaty ukpu jè'èda Amaaxün dü kakojtsuva...
since you don't know English and they don't speak any Spanish...

Here speaker B (or at least the person who performed this scene for me after the fact) uses *tukpum tuk'üü'v* together with the prefix *ja-* which conveys a sense of frustration or failure.

* * *

In this chapter I examined the history of contact between Mixe and Spanish in order to make sense of the present state of bilingualism and the extent to which Spanish has influenced the grammar and lexicon of Totontepecano Mixe. I concluded with an exploration of certain indigenous attitudes towards Spanish and the impact of Spanish on local linguacultures. I chose to focus two humorous tales about bumbling bilinguals because they offer a unique perspective on how speakers are working out their conflicted feelings about living in a world that is increasingly dominated by Spanish speakers.

The tale of the Coffee Picker was told to me by a young Totontepecana woman who grew up on the sociolinguistic "front lines" between Mixe and Spanish. Coming of age in the 1990s, she acquired a keen sense of bilingual language politics. In the chapter that follows I examine how Totontepecano children become adults and how coming of age in the last two decades has shaped the speech patterns and language attitudes of her peers in unexpected ways.

CHAPTER FIVE

VAJATYÖJKTA KIIXÜTÖ'ÖXTA: GROWING UP MIXE

On a sun drenched afternoon in Oaxaca City in the summer of the year 2000, I paid a visit to a Totontepecana friend of mine in the bakery where she and one of her older sisters both worked. Nineteen year old Mina was a member of Totontepec's "globalizano" generation. She was well educated, restless, and torn between her love for her home town and her ambitions to see and experience more of the world. Mina was born a year after the highway that connects Totontepec to the valley of Oaxaca was completed, the infrastructural improvement which made it conceivable for her to live and work in the city. She even attended two years of high school in Totontepec before dropping out to seek her fortune in the city. During my stay in Totontepec I lived just a few dozen meters down the hill from her parents' house, and I became an honorary godfather to her two year old nephew.

The construction of the highway may well be the defining event that separated Mina's generation from that of her parents. It has influenced the politics and economics of Totontepec in an untold number of ways. It has also helped to redefine what it means to be a young Totontepecano. Exemplifying this is the story of boy named Lencho, perhaps five years older than Mina, who became the central figure of an eponymous documentary film ("Lencho el Mixe") made by the Mexican Department of Transportation (SCT) about the arrival of the new highway and the changes it would

bring to the lives of Lencho and his peers. Now an adult, Lencho lives and works in the suburbs of New York City.

After I caught Mina up on all the latest news and gossip from home she began to tell me about a new co-worker that she was interested in, a young man who was also from a Zapotec town in the Sierra Norte. He was definitely a hot prospect, but she expressed concern that he enjoyed his urban lifestyle a little *too* much. To underscore her point, she suddenly shifted from Spanish to Mixe and told me the following joke:

Q: *Vintsoj nanyaxy jè tù'k **flecha** jats tù'k akojtsin?*
What does an **arrow** have in common with a cellular phone?

A: *Vè'è **este,** nanyaxyjada jats jyèpön jyayuva **pyaisano**va tü tsö'muyo'oy!*
Well, any old **Indian** can carry one around acting like a big shot!

I suppose that this is not such a great joke. Still, as a speech act it is rather remarkable. It plays off of the stereotype of the bow-and-arrow-wielding Native North American rather than the indigenous Oaxacan. As far as I am aware, there is no native Mixe term for arrow and Mina herself uses the Spanish word *flecha*. I think it is a safe bet that this joke originated somewhere north of the border and circulated far and wide before making its way into Mixe conversations. On the other hand, there is now a perfectly good, widely accepted Totontepecano Mixe word for cell phone: *akojtsin* in spite of the fact that cell phone signals are still years away from being able to reach the Sierra Mixe. One feature that *is* common to stereotypical portrayals of indigenous people on both sides of the border is that they are treated like living relics. Mina's joke offers a sly rebuttal by assuming that the listener already agrees that indigenous people can and do live 21st century lifestyles. The joke also speaks to the intersection of ethnicity and social class. It suggests that cell phones—once an elite commodity—are

now so widely available that even Indians from the Sierra can acquire them. Urban snobs who wave their cell phones around in order to distance themselves from their indigenous roots are not impressing anybody.

Finally, there is her neologism *jayuva pyaisanova,* which I have translated here as "Indian." A more literal translation of *jayuva pyaisanova* would be 'fellow countryman'. Totontepecanos regularly use the expression *paisano* 'countryman' as a cover term for referring to other indigenous people from the Sierra—be they Mixe, Zapotec or Chinantec. For many Mexicans, however, this term, and especially its truncated form *paisa,* has become somewhat pejorative and is frequently synonymous with *indio* or *campesino.*[1] Indeed, Mina translated this expression for me as *indio*, and not the more respectful term *indígena,* which she regularly employed.

In the barrio of Totontepec were Mina grew up, very few of the young people living there had remained in school past the sixth grade. Many of the young women had had their first child before the age of 20 and most of the young men in their late teens were already working as day laborers in construction or agriculture. Take, for instance, one of the families who lived just down the hill from her. On any given day her 18-year old neighbor Leví would be down in one of the valleys weeding his cornfield, or mixing cement at a home construction site for the going rate of 60-70 pesos a day. Or perhaps he might just be lounging around his house, lying on his bed—a few planks of wood covered with wool blankets—and horsing around with his 5-year old brother, Gama. Although he grew up in a Protestant family, he has become increasingly involved in the town cargo system, serving twice as a topil and now as a technical assistant and "roadie" for the municipal band. Levi's tomboy younger sister Carmita, who was easily

1. I credit Petra Shenk p.c. for first bringing this to my attention.

the brightest child I met during my entire time in Oaxaca, was struggling with whether to stay in school (which bored her to tears) or drop out and to help her mother and older sister around the house and in the fields.

Mina, age 17 when we first met, was exceptional in many ways. She was finishing her first year at the COBAO and was full of questions for me about *yanqui imperialismo*. And in the year 2000 Mina did something unprecedented. In the January fiesta she became the first woman in Totontepec to ride a bull in the *jaripeo* (rodeo). The jaripeo—one of the highlights of this fiesta—takes place in a makeshift corral built in the yard on the side of the church. Scrawny bulls from around the area where rounded up and temporarily housed in a nearby pen. Then young men take turns riding them, or attempting to ride them, while the crowd cheers them on. Bull-riding is not a full-blown rite-of-passage, but it has long been considered an event at which young men can prove there courage and virility and thereby publicly declare their fitness to find a bride and start a family. When Mina mounted a bull and rode it around the corral it had rather a different meaning. It was more like a declaration of independence—that unlike her two older sisters she would not be nursing a child next year and baking tortillas over the cooking fire in her mother's kitchen. Her act prompted a lot of commentary from the fiesta-goers, both admiring and critical.

* * *

In the following pages I dig deeper into the question of how youthfulness is constructed and construed in Totontepec and the role that language plays in these practices. I examine how the local cargo hierarchy and kinship have helped to structure age grades and intergenerational relations and how, as these institutions are being reshaped, relations between different age groups are being re-negotiated. I am

especially concerned here with how young Totontepecanos and their activities—including their language use—have caught people's attention. At the same time I explore how the generation of Totontepecanos that is currently coming of age understands the demands currently being placed on its members and how their language use reflects and responds to these pressures.

Age Grades and Intergenerational Relationships

The image reproduced below is currently on display at the *Servicios del Pueblo Mixe* (SER) website in the subsection that describes their program *Semana de Vida y Lengua Mixes* (SEVILEM).[2]

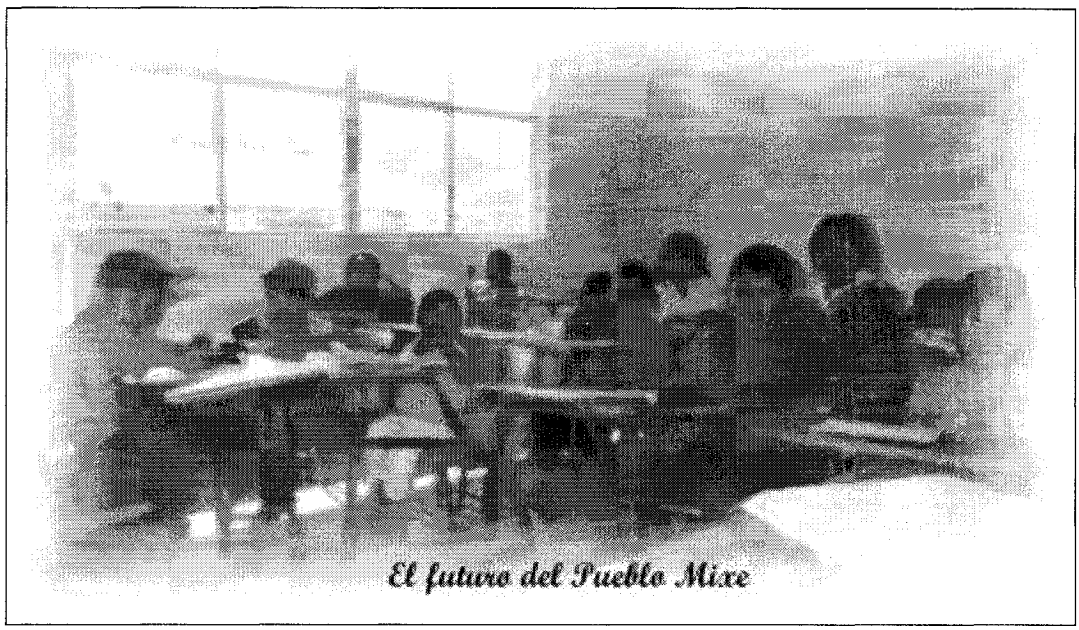

Figure 5.1. "The future of the Mixe people"

2. "Week of Mixe Life and Language." The address of the website is: http://www.laneta.apc.org/rci/ser/sevilem/principal.html. It should be noted that the participants in these workshops are actually far older than the children pictured here. To the best of my knowledge, no Totontepecanos have gotten to participate in any of these events. See Newling (2001:148-150) for a vivid description of a workshop on indigenous law.

The SEVILEM program consists of a series of week-long workshops dedicated to promoting the study of Mixe language and culture. The notion that "the children are the future" certainly sounds like a timeless truth, but it is, in fact, a relatively novel idea, and an even more recent arrival in the Sierra Mixe. Let me be clear that I am not in any way suggesting that Mixe parents were once particularly prone to neglect their children. I simply mean that it is only in the last several decades that children have been singled out for special attention in cultural development and reproduction projects.

Information about how Mixes once felt about their childhood and adolescence is scant. But here is what Ralph Beals observed in the town of Ayutla in 1933:

> Nowhere could I learn of any adolescent ceremonies. Neither male nor female children have this life crisis called to their attention. Girls are not isolated nor are they taken into the sweathouse. The process of maturity on the surface appears to be as naturally handled as growth. What psychological problems may arise beneath the surface I could not learn in the time available. I doubt if there are many. Like the other physiological changes, the Mixe treat it as a natural, unextraordinary event concerning which one is fully informed long before its occurrence.
>
> Few people have so little entertainment for their children as do the Mixe. Tales, which once must have formed part of the background of every Mixe child, have been reduced to fragments known only to a few. Spanish folk stories are practically unknown, as well. There are no games except those introduced in the past five years by the federal schoolteachers.
>
> The life of the Mixe child is entirely a preparation for adulthood. From earliest youth the child constantly accompanies its mother and later, a boy, his father…
>
> At an incredibly early age children begin assisting in the activities of their parents…
>
> By the time a child is nine or ten it has fully entered into all the economic activities of the household… (Beals 1973 [1945]:54).

The picture in contemporary Totontepec is not so different as to be unrecognizable. Human growth and development is described using the same terminology for referring to the ripening of fruits and vegetables. Adults are *tsa'amani*—fully ripened or mature.[3] Children are called *ùnük* 'child, soft' or *mùùtsknum* 'still little'. Totontepecano boys (*mixy*) and girls (*kiix*) spend most of their days in the company of same-sex family members, watching and then assisting almost as soon as they are capable. They spend their leisure time with their siblings, close cousins, and other kids in their neighborhood. These neighborhood peer groups are formed as soon as children are old enough to run and play and seem to persist to the extent that residence remains stable. Neighborhood residence far outweighs the question of whether a child attends the federal elementary school, the Catholic school, or no school at all as an organizing factor in play group formation.

Pubescent boys and girls are known as *vajatyöjk* and *kiixütö'öx*. In their early teens young Totontepecanos start to develop social identities that are partially independent of their household and immediate kin group. The influence of language use in their home takes a back seat to the language use of their peers and Mexican/North American mass media. When Totontepecano boys reach the age of 13 or 14 they are deemed eligible to become topiles. At the age of 18 both young men and young women are obliged to begin doing *kumùùn tùùmba* (*tequio*, community service) when called upon to do so. Those boys who no longer attend school begin devoting their time and energy to subsistence farming or leave to seek seasonal employment in large Mexican cities or the United States. Girls who do not continue with school often end up taking over many of their family's household chores, including the care of their younger

3. Compare: ku+tsa'am 'bald-headed' (lit. 'head+matured'). Fully grown livestock, in contrast, are rarely described as mature. Rather, they are 'fattened up' (*yeekani*).

siblings, and doing odd jobs for neighbors. A number of young women have also begun seeking employment outside of Totontepec.[4] Adolescents with musical talent are encouraged to join the town band. Gifted athletes (male and female) begin participating in local and regional basketball tournaments for cash prizes and prestige.[5] Other children and adolescents are selected to learn the traditional dances of the community and perform them at each fiesta. Totontepecano teens are quite modest in public settings when it comes to expressing interest in the opposite sex. The easiest way to tell that a boy and a girl are interested in each other is to observe that they never appear together in public. Another indication of interest is that a young man has begun helping out the girl's father in the fields, or stops by their house with gifts of food and firewood.

As soon as Totontepecano youths get married and/or have children of their own they become *yaa'työjk* 'men' and *tö'öxtöjk* 'women.' They will remain so until they are no longer able to fulfill all of their duties as male and female head of household, at which point they become known as *na'av* 'old men' and *amöjit* 'old women.' Although they are no longer economically active, elder Totontepecanos command a great deal of respect, are entitled to support from their children and grandchildren, and have unfettered access to Totontepec's *autoridades*. The Totontepecano social order remains basically geriarchic, but the economic clout of younger Totontepecanos has strained this arrangement somewhat.[6] Still, youthfulness in Totontepec has been apolitical by

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4. For an excellent description of Totontepecano migration in the period between 1940 and 1978, see Romer (1982). Migration rates increased significantly after Mexico's financial crisis in 1982 and, even more so after the bottom fell out of the regional coffee market in the 1990s.

5. Basketball is far and away the most important sport in the Sierra Norte; there are almost no places level enough and dry enough to support soccer. In 2003, despite their underdog status, the men's team from Totontepec won the prestigious Copa Juarez at the regional tournament in Guelatao, the birthplace of Benito Juarez.

6. In Frank Cancian's (1992) report on 27 years of socioeconomic change in the Tzotzil Mayan municipio of Zinacantan, one of his more interesting and important conclusions is that over this time

definition. Only adults participate in town governance, and when a young person starts to show an interest in politics this is viewed as a sign of maturation.

Age grading has been and continues to be a central feature of Mixe social organization (Hoogshagen & Weitlaner 1994 [1960]; Lipp 1991). Even in death, Mixes take care to bury the deceased according to their age. Mixe cemeteries, such as Totontepec's, are divided into sections; grandparents are buried at the head of the burial grounds, then come married adults, then come bachelors and bachelorettes, and those who died during birth or childhood are buried closest to the entrance (Lipp 1991:6-8).

Within the broad four term matrix of children, bachelors, adults, and elders, Totontepecano Mixe provides a rich set of finer distinctions. A number of terms, for example specify the age of unmarried women, ranging from the newly pubescent to old maids. And, increasingly children are distinguished by their level of physical size and maturity.[7] I summarize the possibilities in Table 5.1:

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period the close correlation between age and income was broken. Because younger men had taken up truck driving, construction and small business while their older counterparts continued to earn their living as corn farmers, it had ceased to be the case that older Zinacantecos controlled proportionally more wealth.

7. This increase has neatly coincided with the arrival of the local health clinic and regional hospital in nearby Villa Alta and their campaigns to lower infant mortality rates in the Sierra, as well as the concurrent introduction of various federal programs that provide subsidized food and school supplies to needy families with school-aged children.

Table. 5.01. Totontepecano Age Grade terminology

maax	baby
maax ùnük	baby (0-2 years old)
ùnük	child (1-12 years old)
kiix ùnük	little girl (1-12 years old)
pi'k ùnük	small child (2-5 years old)
mùùtsk ùnük	kid (5-15 years old)
vajütöjk	bachelor (15-22 years old)
kiixütö'öx	bachelorette (15-22 years old)
amöj kiix	older unmarried woman (25-35 years old)
möj kiixütö'öx	""
kiixütö'öx apet	""
yaa'työjk	(married) man
tö'öxtöjk	(married) woman
möj ùnük	50-ish years old person
na'av	old man
amöj	old woman
möjit jayu	elders

The distinctions that Totontepecanos make between children, young adults, married adults, and elders parallel the generational relations that a Totontepecano has at any given point in time with his children, siblings, parents, and grandparents. Totontepecano kinship is cognatic, and it features few distinctions between consanguines and affines. It groups together of cousins with siblings and parents with aunts and uncles. This is not entirely clear from the terminology, but it is very apparent in practice, as when Totontepecanos habitually refer to their cousins as "brothers" or "sisters" and—when pressed—their siblings as "real" brothers and sisters. Generational

grouping forms a more important structuring principle than lineal grouping. The same kinship terms are used for grandparents and grandchildren. Great-grandparents and great-grandchildren are also referred to with the same term.

Table 5.02. Totontepecano Mixe Consanguineal Kin Terminology

-2	-1	EGO's generation	+1	+2
ap *grandfather*	tee' *father*	ajch *son*	majntk *son*	ap *grandson*
ok *grandmother*	taak *mother* *granddaughter*	tsö'ö *sister*	naax *daughter*	ok
		uts *younger sibling*		
	öm *uncle*	mugo'ok *cousin (M/F)*	tsok majntk *nephew*	
	tak'ak *aunt*		tsok naax *neice*	

A number of derivational prefixes are used to distinguish consanguines from in-laws and from fictive kin, and one generation from another. The word for cousin, *mugo'ok* (Totontepecano Mixe does not distinguish cross-cousins from parallel cousins), is formed with the associative prefix *mu-*. The terms for husband and wife combine the roots for male /yaa'y/ and female /tö'öx/ with another associative prefix *nö-*: *nöyaa'y* (husband), *nötö'öx* (wife). The suffix *ku-* (OTHER) is used to form terms for adopted relatives and step-relatives, e.g.

(1) taak 'mother' kutaak 'step-mother, adopted mother'
ajch 'older brother' ku'ajch 'step-brother, half-brother'

Finally, terms for fictive kin such as godparents are formed using the prefix *jay-* (which perhaps is historically related to *jayu* 'person'):

(2)	ap	'grandfather'	jay'ap	'compadre'
	ok	'grandmother'	jay'ok	'comadre'

Vocative kin terms figure prominently in how Totontepecanos express respect and deference. In order to utter a proper respectful greeting in the Sierra Mixe a speaker needs to know two things. First, he needs to be able to calculate relative vertical location and trajectory: is he ascending or descending toward the person he will greet? Second, a speaker needs to be able to figure out which generation the addressee belongs to relative to himself. If a group of people you meet at a level place on the road belong to your grandparents' generation then he calls out:

(3) *Dyoos nana meep! Dyoos tata meep!*
God be with you grandmother! God be with you grandfather!

using *nana* and *tata*, the vocative forms for addressing one's grandparents or any member of their generation.

If he encounters people on the road who belong to his parents' generation then they are addressed as *te'* and *tak*, which are vocative expressions for 'father' and 'mother':

(4) *Dyoos te' meep! Dyoos tak meep!*
God be with you sir! God be with you madam!

On the other hand, if he is descending down the hill toward someone's house, and the heads of the household is someone who belongs to his parents' generation then he is obliged to call out:

(5) *öts ya ngüdaakpa, Dyoos öm meep! Dyoos ök meep!*
I'm descending here, God be with you uncle! God be with you auntie!

This holds true regardless of whether or not his actual aunt or uncle resides in that home.

If a speaker encounter someone from his own generation who merits a more formal greeting then he will employ a simple:

(6) *Dyoos meep!*
God be with you!

A child or group of children would not typically be greeted in this formal manner, but would be addressed by their nicknames, by the vocatives *mixy*! or *mex*! "hey, boy!" or else *jöx*! "hey you!" In informal contexts, men of any age may address each other as *mixy* (boy), but when outsiders such as Yalaltecos use this word to address a Totontepecano it has a strongly pejorative connotation. The guiding principle is that interactions between members of different age grades or generations require displays of respect and deference, but interactions with equivalents allow for and sometimes even demand joking and informality.

When the new preparatory school came to Totontepec, one of the first activities organized by the faculty was to lead the new students in a community wide campaign to revive and reinforce these greeting routines. A perception existed that they were falling out of use. Don Arelí, the founder of the school, and one of the teachers, who held a master's degree in ethnolinguistics from CIESAS, believed the word *meep* to be a corrupt form of *möötˀ* 'with' and taught the students to say *Dyoos möötˀ* instead of *Dyoos meep*. Or better yet, the Spanish-free version: *Nte'yam möötˀ* 'May our (incl) lord be

with you'. These alternative versions are recognized, but not as commonly used, and they identify the speaker as someone associated with the school.

Like other indigenous Mesoamerican communities, Totontepec's system of age grades is tightly interwoven with its political organization. Totontepec's cargo system continues to play a key role in the realization of local age categories and helps to define the rights and responsibilities that young Totontepecanos have vis-à-vis their community.

Civil-religious cargo systems have been the object of intense scrutiny by anthropologists and other social scientists who study Mesoamerican societies. Typically the focus is on the political and economic dimensions of these systems—how they function to redistribute wealth in a peasant community or how they allocate political authority. Far less attention has been paid to how cargo systems contribute to local systems of age grading, but the connection between cargos and age grades has certainly not gone unnoticed. Many observers have remarked that the rise of public schooling, labor migration and other symptoms of modernization have led to the reconfiguration and sometimes the decline of cargo hierarchies. The following is a fairly typical account of what has been taking place elsewhere in the Sierra Norte region of Oaxaca:

> The cargo organization [in the Zapotec town of Talea] has been changing from a more perfectly age-graded system, which was also more egalitarian (everybody had to start up the ladder as a policía), toward a more hierarchical system, which now has elements of class built into the selection procedures. To age and experience, we can now add schooling, and the ability to serve without compensation. If an individual enters the cargo ladder as a policía, he may ascend to the positions of regidor, síndico, alcalde or presidente. Educated men who enter the town service as secretaries never serve as policía or regidores, for these positions rank below that of secretario. As a group the policía express direct opposition

> and hostility toward those who did not work their way up from the office of policía (Nader 1990:32).

Nader's emphasis in her study is on widening class divisions and inequality in the Zapotec town of Talea. The parallels to the Totontepec case are clearly there. And like Talea, certain specialized offices in Totontepec, such as town secretary and treasurer, now require Spanish literacy and numeracy. This means that a disproportionate number of candidates for those positions are young.

Both cargo hierarchies and age grade systems are modes of construing an individual's life course as a progression through a series of stages or roles, and a mode of ascribing individuals to groups of contemporaries, who happen to be passing through the same age grade or cargo during the same historical moment. Hoogshagen Weitlaner (1994 [1960]) assert that Mixe cargo systems are dependent upon age grades. They note in this regard that one must pass through every single grade, but need not successfully complete each cargo level. What they miss is the great extent to which Mixe age grades are made meaningful in terms of cargo ranks. Whether or not every married, adult male with children has held a high ranking cargo or sponsored a fiesta, everyone recognizes that this is the time in a man's life when he ought to be seeking out these roles. The organization of his peer group or cohort is very much shaped by who has and has not held office. And whether or not every elderly Totontepecano serves actively as a principal, this is the ideal that they hold up.

And then there is that transitional moment that I described in some detail in Chapter Two in which every male Totontepecano goes from being considered too young or immature to become e.g. a topil to being considered a potential candidate for this cargo. This transition has been pivotal in distinguishing the age grade of child from

that of bachelor or youth (*vajatyöjk*)—much more so than any combination of physiological developments. Typically this happens around the age of 13, but it is up to the town council and principales (town elders) to decide when he is ready to take the next step. There are no ritual acts that mark this transition, and the young man gains no new rights or privileges as a result. The one profound change that takes place is that he must now follow the orders of the town's authorities when called upon to do so, even when they conflict with the wishes of his own parents.

The Influence of Public and Religious Schooling

During the period in which only six years of elementary education were available in Totontepec, boys were given one year of freedom after graduating from sixth grade before they become eligible for cargo duties. After much debate, the community decided to extend this relief to all Totontepecano children and young adults who are attending school and keeping up their grades. This means that a Totontepecano teenager receives a year free from any obligation after he graduates from highschool, then he must enter into the system. By prolonging how many years boys spend in school on average and by officially exempting students from cargo and other communal responsibilities, the age grade of bachelor has become distorted and its upper and lower bounds blurred. The onset of adulthood for many young men—becoming a *yaa'työjk*—has been delayed by as many as ten years. At the same time, the increasing participation of Totontepecana girls in middle school and beyond has delayed the age at which the average young woman obtains a marriage partner, which marks her entry into sociological adulthood and civil society in Totontepec.[8] School is replacing the cargo

8. School may, on the other hand, be having an impact on the pregnancy rates of young women since it has introduced more contexts in which Totontepecano adolescents are able to interact with the

system and (and for that matter the household and even the Church) as the institution which bears primary responsibility for structuring age differences for Totontepecanos between the ages of 5 and 25.

In Ralph Beals' description of childhood in Ayutla he remarks upon how the introduction of elementary schooling in Ayutla, a mere five years before his arrival in 1933, was already beginning to impact how children behave. He writes that they were loosing their "painful Mixe shyness", starting to dress in machine-made clothes, and playing childrens' games that they had learned from their teachers (1973 [1945]:55-57). By the time I first arrived in Tontepec in 1998 elementary schooling had for all intents and purposes become obligatory. Only an exceptionally small number of families failed to put their children through at least four grades of school. It is at age ten or eleven that young girls are deemed mature enough to help raise their younger siblings and young boys big and strong enough to contribute to household and agriculture work in a non-trivial way. Still, there was strong and increasing pressure for all Totontepecano children to complete all six years of elementary school. This pressure was both locally generated and came in the form of federal subsidy programs which gave extra supplements to families who kept their kids in school. A child's "graduation godparent", the adult who shepherds him or her through the sixth grade graduation ceremony, furnishes a graduation gift such as new shoes, and helps fund a fiesta to mark the occasion had become almost as important as the godparent that the child acquires for his or her baptism.

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opposite sex without adult supervision. However, I my sense is that this is being offset by their increased knowledge of and access to contraception and to alternative models of how and when to have children and begin a family.

By 1998, more than half of all Totontepecano children were also going on to attend and eventually graduate from the local telesecondaria (federal middle school). Attending preparatory school and then pursuing a *licenciatura* or other degree was still a rarity. The local preparatory school graduated its very first class in 1996, and several of that first class's members were people in their twenties who had returned to school after a long hiatus. By the time that the construction of the campus for the preparatory school had been completed in 2001 it had a student body of well over 200 pupils (several dozen of whom, it must be noted, came from neighboring towns), and most of the entering class had finished middle school within the last year or two. The sight of dozens of uniform-wearing teenagers racing off to high school in the morning and wandering home in bunches after classes let out for the day was becoming part of the daily rhythm of life in Totontepec.

The introduction of schooling in Totontepec also led to a profound reorganization of local spatial organization. As recently as the 1950s, a majority of Totontepecanos spent most of their year out in the rancherías and only came to the town center in order to go to the market and participate in civic and religious ritual. Up until this period of Totontepecano history the town center was an adult space. This changed dramatically with the advent of (nearly) mandatory elementary schooling. Three dormitories were built, two in the town center and one on the outskirts of town, and ranchería children ended up spending most of each year living in town. Hiking four or five hours to school each day and four or five back would have been prohibitively difficult. Now that Totontepec has become a much more centralized, nucleated community, two of the dormitories have been abandoned and most children live with their families all year round. The basketball courts built in front of the municipal

building and the public library built on the ground floor of that building both attract young people and provide spaces where they can socialize with one another. Outside of market days (Sundays) and days with important town meetings or fiestas, the center of town has come dominated by the activities and concerns of adolescent Totontepecanos. This is especially true during the early evening hours when they are doing homework, playing basketball, practicing their instruments and socializing on the way to/from Church and temple activities. The mandatory 10pm curfew introduced in the late 1990s means that adolescent socializing comes to an abrupt end each night around 9:30pm. It was introduced in part because this large concentration of unsupervised young people came to be viewed as a potential source of trouble—in the form of fights, drinking, and petty vandalism.

Next in importance to the role that the federal government played in introducing public schools into the community was the role played by the Salesian Catholic missionaries, who arrived in the 1960s. In addition to trying to reinvigorate Mixe Catholicism they set about building schools and cultural centers throughout the Mixe area. In Totontepec they built an elementary school and immediately set about the task of producing Totontepecano alumni who would go on to teach and run the school themselves (in contrast to the federal elementary school, which brings in outsiders to teach and does involve either the local authorities and parents in the selection process). Before the local middle school and preparatory school were built the Salesians sent many of Totontepec's most talented young students to continue their education in the Salesian boarding school built in Matagallinas (a two hour drive to the south of Totontepec) and elsewhere in the state of Oaxaca.

The Seventh Day Adventists have been in Totontepec for almost as long, but their focus on children and youth is a much more recent development. Initially, the Adventist missionaries seem to have specifically targeted older, ailing Totontepecanos for conversion, and through them, their close kin. They did this by convincing them that adopting a vegetarian diet—one that is free of alcohol, chili peppers, coffee and other "excitants"—would improve their health and, in so doing, bring them closer to God.[9] Because Totontepecano households are quite geriarchic, this was, to a certain extent, a very effective way to prosyletize. However, local Adventists experienced rather more difficulty starting new Adventist households, since their young adults had limited options for marriage partners within their own faith. In response to this problem, Adventist temples throughout the Sierra Norte area have begun to sponsor youth retreats (*concentraciones juveniles*) and summer youth programs that are implicitly designed to create a "dating market" by gathering together young Adventists from many different communities. I attended one such event in the spring of 2000 whose theme was "the *mayordomía* of your body and spirit." This choice of theme represented, among other things, a neat attempt to take a practice dear to the Catholic traditionalists—the *mayordomía* or ritual sponsorship—and repackage it as an individual's responsibility to take charge of his own physical and spiritual health.

Father Carlos Sitia, the first Salesian priest to reside full time in Totontepec, was said to have been a tireless promoter of Spanish-language education for the whole community in spite of the fact that his mother tongue was Italian and his Spanish was reported to be "thickly accented." Both the Salesians and Aventists emphasized the

9. Even today very few Totontepecanos are able to purchase meat on a regular basis and access to any livestock larger than chickens is extremely limited. So this Adventist prohibition against meat was quite easy to follow and made a virtue out of what had been a somewhat shameful sign of poverty. Giving up chili peppers has proven to be much more challenging.

importance of Spanish language literacy. However, for the Salesians this formed part of a broader civilizing mission. For the Adventists, Spanish language literacy made it possible for members of the congregation to read Adventist pamphlets and study biblical passages, and thus discover how they had been "misled" by the Catholic Church about e.g. which day of the week should be considered the sabbath.

In spite of the fact that the Salesians have been much friendlier to the idea of preserving and promoting Mixe culture (at least, certain aspects of it) and language use while visiting Adventist preachers have been down right hostile toward Mixe language and culture, I found that Adventist youths are speaking Mixe more often. In part this has to do with the fact that the Adventists found most of their converts amongst the people who lived furthest from the more hispanicized center of Totontepec. But it also has to do with the language ideology of the Adventists. Their religious practices emphasize spontaneous, sincere and intimate forms of prayer over rote recitation. And Mixe is still viewed as the code that best embodies the qualities of sincerity and intimacy.

In this vein I should mention that the linguists from the Summer Institute of Linguistics, who maintained an active presence in Totontepec through most of the 1950s and 1960s and continue to visit occasionally, had a negligible impact on religious practices and language use in Totontepec, but made a profound difference in the career trajectories of the young Totontepecanos that they worked over the course of their project in Totontepec. The SIL linguists encouraged them to stay in school, helped to finance their educations, and encouraged their interest in the Anglophone world. In the following section I talk about a young man who was and will probably be the last Totontepecano to be engaged in a serious and sustained way with the SIL.

Youthful Purism and Mixe Slang

Having explored how Totontepecanos define youth relationally—as a stage of life, the lowest on the cargo ladder, a position within a generational matrix—I now turn to the question of how young Totontepecanos understand themselves to be expressing their youthfulness through their activities, their styles and the words that they choose.

One of the defining features of youth language in Westernized, urban settings around the globe is supposedly its innovativeness and fascination with slang. Very little research has been done on youthful speech in the rural hinterlands, where it is presumed that traditionalism reins and the young people are counting the days till they can escape to the big city where they can express themselves freely. I began this chapter with Mina and her cellphone joke precisely because it hints at how much more complicated the reality of the situation is.

Young Mixes and other indigenous Mexicans find themselves in a double bind when they set out to express both their indigenous identity and their youthfulness. Their code choices are influenced by pervasive Mexican notions about the antiquity of their cultures. But they are also heavily influenced by popular ideologies of ethnic and linguistic purity. When Mixe, Zapotec, and Chatino youths speak their local language they risk sounding like living relics. But when they express themselves with Spanish or a hispanicized register of their indigenous language they risk being criticized by their peers and elders for "selling out." Some of their most creative solutions to this dilemma are to be found in their homegrown slang, which is inspired by global youth culture but built up out of local linguistic resources and informed by a purism that is forward thinking rather than nostalgic.

Much of what has been written about slang treats it as a by-product of symbolic domination. Bourdieu, in particular, approaches slang from the point of view of the language standardizers, arguing that what we usually label slang is nothing more than those linguistic expressions deemed too marginal or ephemeral by the linguistic powers-that-be to warrant inclusion in the dictionary (Bourdieu 1991:90-91). However, while his point is well taken, a number of provocative recent studies, such as Bucholtz (1997) and Pujolar (2001) have investigated slang from the point of view of those who use it, and in so doing, demonstrated their agency and creativity. Speakers' strategic deployment of slang evokes particular social groups and the values and practices stereotypically associated with them in order to accomplish a broad range of communicative actions.[10]

A defining feature of slang that has occasioned a great deal of comment is its fleeting popularity. One day an expression can be on everyone's lips and the next it seems to drop completely out of circulation. In his discussion of non-regular historical change caused by the daily fluctuation in the frequency that linguistic forms are used, Bloomfield (1984 [1933]:394) notes that most of these fluctuations are too subtle to observe. However, certain patterns, such as the "sudden rise and equally sudden disuse of popular slangy witticisms" are readily observable. If it is true that speakers are more readily aware of certain linguistic forms than others because they are e.g. discrete, unavoidably referential, and have readily deducible meanings (see Silverstein 1981; Preston 1996) then presumably speakers are more aware of certain kinds of historical linguistic change occurring than other types of change. The rise and fall of popular

10. See also Eble's (1996) book *Slang and Sociability*, who strongly advocates the study of slang in its social context, in spite of the fact her own research on American English slang is essentially an exercise in lexical semantics.

slang, while it may not have the impact on linguistic structure that, say, the leveling of a verb paradigm or the regular loss of a final vowel will, can become the focus of interested speakers who see in changes to their language implications for other facets of their lives.

Of course, speakers remember unfashionable slang long after it falls out of favor, and they will employ it precisely to evoke the historical moment when it was at the height of its circulation. Note, too, that unlike so many of the other metalinguistic expressions that English speakers have for talking about colloquial speech—jargon, cant, argot, etc.—we reserve the label "slang" for referring to the speech of particular historical periods, as in "Sixties slang" or "post-9-11 slang." The fact that slang is so deeply anchored to the socio-temporal context from whence it emerged makes it an invaluable—though, I think, sadly underutilized—resource for any investigation of historical change and historical consciousness.

Then there is the question of how new slang is generated. A common practice is to take thoroughly familiar expressions and redeploy them in subversive ways. Just as frequently, slang is derived from material associated with speakers who, by virtue of geography, generation, race, class or some other trait are socially distant. Sornig (1981) suggests that the linguistic material best suited to be used as slang should be accessible to speakers but only just barely, existing on the peripheries of their linguistic repertoires. Assuming that this is much more than a simple matter of aesthetics, what motivates speakers to draw their slang material from one source rather than another? In the Totontepecano case, the most potent new slang is emerging out of the scene surrounding the town brass band, and one of the most popular sources of lexical material is the speech of bandmembers' grandparents.

In the previous chapter I introduced Tulis, the academic star of the first graduating class of Totontepec's COBAO preparatory school. Her generational group not only exemplifies how the meaning of growing up in Totontepec has changed, it occupies a pivotal role in a broader series of social and economic changes that has transformed life in their community. This is what she and her contemporaries were raised to do, and they are all quite conscious of the responsibility that has been handed to them. Her contemporaries also have a distinctive way of speaking that may or may not change the way that Totontepecano Mixe will be spoken in the future.

One conversation with Tulis and a classmate of hers that made a lasting impression took place at the fiesta for the grand opening of the hotel *Yakmataamba* in Totontepec on a rainy Sunday in the fall of 2000.[11] We went to dance, drink toasts, and to listen to the town band perform several musical numbers prepared especially for the occasion. The hotel had been built on the outskirts of town, near the highway, by one of Totontepec's wealthiest residents. With so many Totontepecanos now living in Oaxaca City, Mexico City and other parts of Mexico and the United States, this local entrepreneur saw an opportunity. People needed a place to stay when they returned to the Sierra for fiestas, town assemblies and important family events. Until the road was built in 1979, the trek down to Oaxaca City took almost a week and required pack animals. Now that same journey could be made in five or six hours, and even the most resolutely urban Totontepecanos found the time to visit their relatives up in the mountains every so often.

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11. The name *yakmataamba* is built up from the compound stem /maav' + tan/ 'sleep + stay'. Adding the causative prefix *yak-* and then the agentive nominalizer *-pa* you get 'someone/something who causes you to spend the night.'

During a break in the musical performance, Honorio—one of the band leaders—wandered over to greet us. He turned to me and asked me in Mixe if I agreed with him that our friend Tulis was a complete *yökvinjuu'x*. Tulis laughed, and asked me if I understood. I gave her my puzzled look. Being the diligent teacher and that she is, Tulis insisted that I break it down into pieces. Okay, well, *yök* means 'black' and *vin* is a body part root that means 'eye' but can also mean 'in front of' or 'across the surface of.' As for *juu'x*—this turns out to be a participial form of a verb root that means 'to cover something with rags.' Altogether this is 'someone or something covered up in black rags.' Honorio, growing impatient, explained: "I called her a *darketa*!" Or as English speaking youths would put it, he had called Tulis a "Goth."

(7) yökvinjuu'x '*Darketa*' (Goth)

yökV + vin + jùù'x -I
black + SUPR + drape_with_rags -NOM

lit: 'someone covered in black rags'

Tulis later pointed out that while the Spanish expression *darketa* is derived from the English word dark, *yökvinjuu'x* is pure unadulterated Mixe. Both Honorio and Tulis, two of the most linguistically sophisticated members of their community, were aware of the etymology of *darketa* and appreciative of those facets of Mixe grammar that are most typologically distant from either Spanish or English, such as the use of incorporated body part roots to express spatial relations.

The first generation of Totontepecanos sent *en masse* to the brand new public and missionary schools suffered greatly, and later vowed that *their* children would be better prepared to succeed in school and in the encompassing Spanish-speaking world. The group of Totontepecanos who benefited from this attention—the generation to

which Honorio and Tulis belong—includes many of the most highly-educated, Spanish-literate members of the community. It also includes some of Totontepec's fiercest Mixe language purists. This should not come as a surprise since they have been raised to be conscious of the boundaries between Spanish and Mixe in a way that most of their parents were not.

In the linguistic anthropological literature on purism (see for example Berkeley 1998; Dorian 1994; Hill & Hill 1980; Jernudd & Shapiro, eds. 1989; Thomas 1991), this stance toward language has most often been ascribed to older speakers, and explained as a mode of asserting authority over linguistic production and, by extension, over those people who have more 'limited' access to the purest form of a language. The linguistic purism of young speakers is related but distinct. Their drive to establish and maintain clear boundaries between the linguistic varieties in their communicative repertoires is intimately bound up with their anxieties about their position vis-à-vis their peers in the social order of the institutions that govern their life, such as the school, and their eventual place in the adulthood social world. The purism of older speakers posits a previous historical era in which everyone spoke a more geniune, more expressive form of the language and finds in the words of their juniors evidence of linguistic decline and decay. Youthful purists, on the other hand, blame their parents' generation for mixing up the language because they did not know any better or did not have sufficient knowledge of the intruding language to defend their local tongue against its ravages.

Once one starts looking for examples of youthful purism in the literature, they are not hard to find. There exists a tendency to describe youth cultural practices and ways of speaking as irrepressibly hybrid and to imply that hybridity is inherently creative and counter-hegemonic. Yet careful studies of youth language have repeatedly

shown that young people can be tremendously conscious of linguistic boundaries and the implications of crossing them. We can turn, for example, to the ur-monograph on adolescence, Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa*. In an endnote she writes that adolescent Samoans:

> ... already show a very curious example of a phonetic self-consciousness in which they are almost as acute and discriminating as their elders. When the missionaries reduced the language to writing, there was no *k* in the language, the *k* positions in other Polynesian dialects being filled in Samoan either with a *t* or a glottal stop. Soon after the printing of the Bible, and the standardisation of Samoan spelling, greater contact with Tonga introduced the *k* into the spoken language of Savai'i and Upolu, displacing the *t*, but not replacing the glottal stop. Slowly this intrusive usage spread eastward over Samoa, the missionaries who controlled the schools and the printing press fighting a dogged and losing battle with the less musical *k*. To-day the *t* is the sound used in the speech of the educated and in the church, still conventionally retained in all spelling and used in speeches on occasions demanding formality. The Manu'a children who had never been to the missionary boarding schools, used the *k* entirely. But they had heard the *t* in church and at school and were sufficiently conscious of the difference to rebuke me if I slipped into the colloquial *k*, which was their only speech habit, uttering the *t* sound for perhaps the first time in their lives to illustrate the correct pronunciation from which I, who was ostensibly learning to speak correctly, must not deviate. Such an ability to disassociate the sound used from the sound heard is remarkable in such very young children and indeed remarkable in any person who is not linguistically sophisticated (Mead 1928:256-57).

In this fascinating description of the sociology of a phonological change, we see that the children of Manu'a recognized that the *t* had become a sociolinguistic indicator of religious affiliation, education level and even adulthood in Samoa. The *k*, meanwhile had become *their* sound.

Of course, what Mead says about the linguistic acuity of children is absolutely wrong. Disassociating "the sound used from the sound heard" is one of the things that

young language acquirers do first and best.[12] Suzanne Romaine's (1984) review of the sociolinguistic literature on childhood language use and her own work in Papua New Guinea convincingly demonstrates that children are cognizant of all kinds of sociolectal differences by age 9 or 10, several years before they themselves will begin to actively experiment with their use.

In the same vein, Rampton's (1995) work on adolescent code-switching in a multi-ethnic British city demonstrates in painstaking detail the existence of a complex sets of norms that British teens use to regulate who can use what code or mix which codes, in whose presence and in what sorts of social contexts. The striking fact is not that his teenagers "cross" the boundaries between the language varieties they claim as their own and codes that belong to others. Rather, it is that they move from one code to another in such a self-conscious and highly monitored fashion.

Annette Schmidt (1985:33) had a similar experience working with Aboriginal Australian youths. Adolescents from the Jambun settlement did not speak Dyirbal quite like their parents and yet refused to speak English like their Anglo-Australian peers. Amongst themselves they spoke their own kind of code that varied between one pole that Schmidt labeled Young Dyirbal (YD) and another pole that she called Jambun English. For a number of reasons, the young people that Schmidt studied accepted her as a member of the in-group and held her accountable to in-group norms of language use. When she tried to speak "Traditional Dyirbal" (TD) with them instead of YD one of the Jambun girls criticized her for trying to be "too flash." However, she was also

12. As evidenced by the widely reported "fis ~ fiš" phenomenon: students of language acquisition have observed that children who are not yet capable of pronouncing certain sounds will nevertheless complain when adult care givers try to imitate their childrens' pronunciation rather than uttering words in the proper adult fashion.

accused of showing off when she used educated Australian English in a context where Jambun English was more appropriate.

Purists from minority linguistic communities are often driven to create translation equivalents or to discover that such equivalents had existed all along in their language. Such is the case with Honorio's use of *yökvinjuu'x* to mean "Goth." They also note with pride that the expressive power of their language sometimes even exceeds that of the dominant language for referring to many contemporary phenomena. This is surely the case with e.g. the Mixe slang word *öxjen*, which succinctly denotes a person who wears his pants hanging so low that you can see his underwear.

In still other instances of youthful Totontepecano Mixe speech neither form (not even intonational contours) nor referential meaning is borrowed from Spanish. What has been imported is entirely perlocutionary—something that, for lack of a better term, we might as well call "attitude." Impeccably Mixe forms are being used to express the same sorts of youthful dispositions that Totontopecanos see and hear about on television and on the city streets. And not just any Mixe forms, but rather archaic ones, found only in the speech of elder Totontepecanos, have been specially singled out for this purpose.

A particularly nice example is the particle *pu'*, which lately has been combined with interrogative and relative pronouns to jokingly dismiss an interlocutor's question. It indicates that the speaker knows the answer but does not want to give it up:

(8) **Ti** xa ve'e jè'è? — **What** is that?
what FOC 3IND

Pu' ti! — Who wants to know?!
DISS what

cf. *Ka'a ti.* — *Not a thing/That's not it.*
Nitiya. — *Nothing.*

(9) **Jùma** mits mnüjkx? — **Where** are you going?
where 2IND 2=go-dINC

Pu' jùma. — Nowhere.
DISS where

(10) **Vinxüp** ko'on mits mjùùjy? — **How many** tomatoes did you buy?
how_much tomato 2IND 2=buy-dCOM

Pu' vinxüp. — None of your business.
DISS how_much

(11) Xim ja kiix **juu'** öts — There's the girl [**whom**] I
there DEM girl which 1IND

n'ix Pèèt tyüjkp. — saw at Pete's house.
1E=see-COM Pedro 3E=house-LOC

Pu' juu'. — WHAT-*ev*-er.
DISS which

Readers who have dwelt on matters of sound symbolism will immediately think of the English expression "pooh pooh" as in "to pooh pooh someone's suggestion." But the English translation that best conveys the rhetorical effect of this "dismissive" particle is the utterance "WHAT-*ev*er" with all of its attendant biting teenaged sarcasm. And as with comparable English utterances like "*what*-ever" or "as *if*" these Mixe expressions *can* be used by adults. However, when they do so, people find it puerile and even a little creepy.

According to the young speakers I spoke with, the way to use the dissmissive properly is to utter it with a mildly disgusted facial expression and a "*tono despectivo*" (a derogatory tone). Since non-responsiveness is extremely rude in Mixe society, dismissive speech can only really be used in a knowingly ironic manner and with someone of roughly equal status. Although this is not honorific language, its efficacy relies on the same semiotic processes theorized by Agha (1994), Irvine (1992), and Silverstein (1992). No Totontepecano would *actually* be this rude, so using the dismissive flouts the conventions in order to demonstrate the speaker's keen awareness of their existence. And in so doing, it serves as a backhanded assertion of solidarity. Superficially, this kind of joking around resembles another local speech genre known as *tukxi'ik*. However, the latter is quite distinct, because it involves superiors make fun of inferiors or seniors teasing their juniors in order to probe how quickly they loose their cool and become angry.

This dismissive particle came into widespread use in the spring of 1999 when Honorio started to use it. Members of the band and its hangers-on began to imitate him, and soon its use spread outward through Totontepec's adolescent social networks and upward through household and kin groups. Eventually even a few Seventh Day Adventists, who are not supposed to associate with the band, began to use it, too. The success of this little piece of slang opened the door to a variety of other witty kiss-offs, such as *ti mits tüxtùùnga* "none of your business!" and *kadi 'öts xne'em* which literally means "don't make a racket at me" but—judging from the shocked responses of several of the older Totontepecanos I spoke with— packs a much stronger rhetorical punch.

So how did the speech of a single young man come to be so influential? Second, and perhaps more intriguingly, where *did* he get his material from? The answer to the

first question involves the great importance of Totontepec's municipal band as a center of cultural reproduction. Even though its members play banged up, slightly-out-of-tune brass and wind instruments, their music never fails to move the audience to tears and joy. It cannot be any other way, since the band performs at all of the most important rites of passage in one's life: baptisms, graduations, weddings, political successions. Totontepecanos are fond of saying that the measure of a person's life is how long the band performs at his funeral, or that "a town without music is a town without a soul." One of the things that distinguish their band from the dozens of others found thoroughout Oaxaca is its rich history of original musical composition. Totontepecanos keep careful track of when certain musical pieces were composed and on what occasion they were first performed. Drunken arguments can ensue when parties disagree about the facts.

Honorio's reputation for musical talent and creativity predisposed his band-mates and their circle of friends to imitate him, and the band's biggest aficionados were apt to follow suit. His linguistic skills and musical talents were viewed as two aspects of the same creative capacity. When I first arrived in town, everyone I met insisted that I seek Honorio out. They explained that in addition to his other talents he is one of the few people who truly know how to write in Mixe. I learned that he first developed his interest in writing at the age of 16, when a Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) translation of several New Testament stories fell into his lap. Seeing his own language in print was a revelation. He sought out the translator and studied Mixe writing with him. He even began to systematically write down stories that he collected from town elders, proverbial wisdom and local history. Over the next several years Honorio grew increasingly aware of Mexican language politics, and he soon dropped the SIL

orthography in favor of the system advocated by the indigenous Oaxacan literati. He won a prize and a college scholarship in an INI (National Indigenous Institute) contest for translating the Mexican National Anthem from Spanish into written Mixe. He even found a way to earn a little income teaching Mixe writing at the local preparatory school. That is, until he decided to drop his linguistic pursuits and dedicate all of his energy to music.

Honorio's favorite source of old-time Mixe, I eventually found out, was his grandmother, an ill-tempered, half-blind monolingual Mixe speaker with a vast repertoire of stories and lore. Ever since he began to pay close attention to his grandmother he had been steadily mining her speech for the most antiquated, unfashionable expressions he could get his hands on. I also learned that his grandma and a few other survivors of her generation still used the particle *pu'* as a comparative conjunction. Typical members of Honorio's parents' generation were familiar with this older, unsarcastic sense of *pu'* but did not use it that way in their own speech. As Sornig (1981:8) points out in his monograph on slang, the use of lexical material for slang that is generationally distant rather than 'foreign' or otherwise distant from quotidian language use should not astonish us.

Honorio's linguistic ability is, perhaps, a product of what Jane Hill labels "the grandparent effect." This is the tendency for the very youngest speakers of heritage languages in indigenous communities to be the people who spent significant periods of their childhood living closely (or exclusively) with their grandparents (Hill 1998:179). I like Hill's term and would encourage its use, but with one caveat. Her discussion could be read to imply that young heritage language speakers are passive beneficiaries of their grandparents' knowledge. Honorio and several of his peers, on the other hand, have

actively sought out their grandparents in the hope of absorbing some of their linguistic ability.

To be sure, Mixe-based slang is certainly not the only game in town. There are also several historical layers of Spanish-based slang in local circulation. First there is material borrowed from the regional Spanish of the Valley of Oaxaca and its surroundings, and the small but potent set of expressions that come from Gulf Coast radio broadcasts. Although Totontepec lies well within the borders of Oaxaca state it is situated on the gulf coast side of the continental divide and the only radio broadcasts that reach it come from coastal towns like San Andres Tuxtla and Coatzacoalcos. A once popular but now waning routine was to employ an overgeneralized, parodic version of Veracruzano Spanish. Like Caribbean Spanish, this variety has softened *s to [h] or dropped it altogether, drops intervocalic /d/, velarizes many dental nasals and employs intonational contours that are wholly different from Oaxacan Spanish. So in place of *¿Adónde vas?* "Where are you (informal) going?" you might hear *A 'onde vah, compa?* "Where are you going, friend?" or perhaps: *pare[h]e que va llover* "it looks like it's going to rain" (from a popular song turned into a commercial jingle).

Currently, a much more important resource is *Chilango* (Mexico City style) Spanish and sometimes even *fresa* Spanish[13] which has been arriving in torrents via migration, satellite television and print media. By precisely varying the frequency with which they employ the interjection "*no mames*" (or the slightly more demur "*no manches*" used more by young women)[14] Totontepecano youths can occupy a variety of

13. In some ways *Fresas* are to Mexican society what "Valley Girls" were to Americans in the 1980s – young, wealthy, insuciant and urbane.

14. *No mames* literally means 'don't suck' and *no manches* means 'don't stain.' *No mames, güey* has the same rhetorical effect as "no way, man!" or "no fucking way, man!"

stances. Used sparingly, this catch-phrase can serve as an understated assertion of one's urbanity and casual familiarity with Mexican youth culture. Used incessantly, it can be a a merciless imitation of citified cousin who speaks little or no Mixe, wears expensive new clothes and only visits his hometown during fiesta time.

Older, regionally-based Spanish slang and colloquialisms are heard most frequently on the lips of middle-aged Totontepecano men and adolescent boys, and it evokes locally salient images of masculinity and *campesino* identity as well as Oaxacan-ness. In the larger context of Mexico, speaking Spanish like someone from Oaxaca associates that person with Mexico's rural, Indian past almost as surely as does speaking an indigenous language. Use of the newest Spanish slang, on the other hand, immediately distinguishes a speaker as someone who has spent a lot of time living in the city and has aspirations that extend beyond the local horizon. This urbane style if anything, is perceived as somewhat feminine in Totontepec.

Together, the polarization of popular Spanish into regional accents versus the Spanish of the Valley of Mexico and mass media and the polarization of young Mexicans who rely on one or the other styles to express themselves look a lot like the division of the American high school social universe into jocks and burnouts (Eckert 1988). While the jocks were oriented toward school and upper-middle class norms that reached beyond the Detroit metro area, the burnouts took their stylistic cues from the nearby urban scene. What is different in the adolescent Totontepecano scene is that Honorio and his peers are busily trying to forge a third way. Borrowing lexical material from older generations rather than from foreign sources is an attractive option for them, precisely because it allows for the play with distance and difference that gives slang its punch without the attendant risks associated with the use of foreign-isms. Moreover,

this strategy indicates a certain level of historical awareness that they are eager to put on display. The attitude that they have been trying to convey is one that is unimpressed with *campesino* Spanish because it sounds rough and uneducated and—worse still: it sounds like the way their fathers speak. But it is also a stance that is critical of citified Spanish because its use implies a rejection of local values. These young Totontepecanos are anxious to demonstrate their casual familiarity with urban life, but not their allegiance to it.

In other words, I am suggesting that practices such as using the particle *pu'* in this dismissive manner have became so popular so quickly is that they represent a type of creative linguistic resolution to the contradictory pressures that young Totontepecano purists now face. It provides a means of expressing solidarity and generational difference without using Spanish (it is okay to sound like your grandparents, as long as you distinguish yourself from your parents). And it serves as a vehicle for the expression of a modern adolescent sensibility imported from Mexican and North American mass media in a way that does not compromise their loyalty to the local. Borrowing expressions from another variety of Mixe, ironically or not, would have been practically unimaginable. And Spanish youth-isms and slang were widely available, but problematic in other ways because of people's ambivalence about Spanish's presence in their lives. Borrowing slang from English is a possibility that several young people have been exploring recently, but would have had a rather limited appeal. So Honorio looked to expressions that were generationally distant rather than dialectally or ethnically remote. It is not so much the antiquity of his grandma's expressions that made them attractive – it was a combination of their novelty and their impeccable Totontepecano pedigree.

Discussion

In this chapter I have explored how Totontepecano age-grading works in concert with Mixe kinship and Mixe civil-religious cargo hierarchies to locate persons relative to others within the local social order and define their rights and responsibilities with regard to each other and their community as a whole. This is seen most clearly in norms about the use of deferential titles and kin terms and the occasions in which the norms can be flouted. The introduction of public and religious schooling for nearly all Totontepecano children and the increasing average in the number of years that they spend in school has altered the timing and manner in which young men enter into the cargo system and changed what it means to be an adolescent in Totontepec in a fundamental way.

The first cohort to experience this new kind of adolescence, as a group, is now leaving that adolescence behind and taking up responsibilities as cultural and economic leaders in their community. Whether they will also advance in town governance remains to be seen, because their pursuit of advanced schooling and time spent away from the Sierra Mixe puts them at a disadvantage vis-à-vis their peers who dropped out of school, went straight to work, and formed a new household at a younger age. An essential irony here is that the very same forces that have led many young Totontepecanos to increased interest in the preservation of Mixe and greater recognition of its importance for Totontepecano civil society have made it more difficult for many them to participate in it.

Young Totontepecanos are being encouraged by their elders to maintain local values and practices. At the same time they are exhorted to acquire the skills and

experience (e.g. Spanish literacy) which will enable them to defend the community and finance its future development. As a result they not only number among the town's most literate and savvy users of Spanish, they can also be accomplished practitioners of Mixe purism. And they will readily take their peers and parents to task for using a Spanish form or—worse still—using a form belonging a rival dialect of Mixe—when a perfectly acceptable Totontepecano Mixe form is available. Unlike the middle aged and elderly Nahuatl speakers described by Jane and Kenneth Hill, whose purist rhetoric looks back with nostalgia to an idealized past, these youngsters are looking ahead to the future and trying to find ways to keep Mixe relevant.

One of the key components of this youthful purism is the project of making Totontepecano Mixe sound as different as possible from Spanish, potentially resulting in lasting divergent linguist changes of the sort I identified in Chapter Four. The other component is a penchant for borrowing linguistic material from their grandparents and then re-popularizing it or redeploying in ways that display a youthful sensibility rather than some sort of nostalgia for a bygone era. Thus practice is not the inevitable result of the contradictory pressures that young Totontepecanos face, but that it does at least represent an ingenious solution to their sociolinguistic dilemmas. And therein lies its popularity. Young Totontepecanos do not view their recent past as this time period in which unadulterated Mixe was spoken and Spanish hegemony had not yet taken hold. But they are finding their grandparents to be a treasure trove of linguistic riches.

The pivotal events and conflicts that have shaped the attitudes and practices of their generation have infused the sociolinguistic variation found in their community with distinct sets of meanings. Young Mixe purists code-switch all the time—certainly more then their parents do. Their parents are apt to employ Spanish grudgingly, as an

accomodation to non-Mixe speakers. As I pointed out in Chapter Four, many of them find using Spanish to be a anxiety-inducing experience. In contrast, a common refrain I heard during conversations with young people is that their switches into Spanish were the result of unfortunate lapses of concentration, or happened because they were being "too lazy" to speak Mixe. Their parents were the first generation of Mixes forced to attend Spanish-only public schools, and they came away from the experience with deep-seated linguistic insecurities. But this younger generation of Totontepecanos was raised to be bilingual. They have come of age in a period of indigenist activism and foment. Young Totontepecanos attend pan-Mexican and pan-American indigenist conferences, and they compete for scholarships to study intellectual property rights law in Oaxaca City. For the parents, speaking Totontepecano Mixe with outsiders was a way to assert their affiliation with the community of Totontepec, to identify themselves to their interlocutors. For the parents, speaking Mixe to outsiders performs this function, but it is also entails certain political commitments within the wider sphere of Mexican society.

The generational group now coming of age occupies a unique niche in Totontepec's ongoing language shift toward Mixe-Spanish bilingualism and perhaps the eventual decline and disappearance of Totontepecano Mixe. Their grandparents may well speak little Spanish at all. Their parents speak Spanish well, but with numerous insecurities. Their younger siblings, nieces, and nephews speak and hear Spanish all day long—both in school and at home—and must make an extra effort to learn Totontepecano Mixe. Mina, Honorio, and their contemporaries speak both languages avidly, and with a great deal of concern about the sometimes porous boundary that separates them.

CHAPTER SIX

TÙPÜJ: ADAPTATION

Totontepecanos find great value in their ability to adapt to difficult circumstances and to flourish in surprising places. This sentiment is exemplified by one of Noé Alcántara Gómez's bilingual songs, a melancholy tune entitled *Tùpüj* (Rain Flower):[1]

Flor de la lluvia en el campo olvidada
Que sin cultivos del jardinero tu eres preciosa
Solo la lluvia fecunda y buena te mima a ti
Regando perlas y brillantes en la alborada
Cuando la llamas pidiéndole protección a tu sed y a tu tristeza
Sola tu puedes vivir feliz en la hiriente roca
Pagando su eterna aridez con una bella flor
Quiero aprender como enseñas tu a la hiriente roca
Que con dulzura y alma dura puede nacer una flor

Mits pi'k tùpüj jaa'tyoki xa mits m'it
Ka'a pön mkexjü jats ka'a pön m'ixjü tsùj tse'e mpüj yö 'it naxviinji
Xa mits mjùùjntykin mojyjup ku 'it tyu'u
Jatse'e mnitu'u ax jù'n jayu ki mva'xji jaa'kùjx mitse'e öts n'ayùùk
Myaktukxööja tùpüj ya kajpün küjx
Mitsji xa ve'e tù'k mpöjp tsakojm jatse'e ja tsaaj xyakmöja
Mpöjptse'e xkujkùjtsja ku jùùjntykin mù'ùjü poodün jùùt
Mits xa ötse'e xtuk'ixp jats 'o'yipe'e oy joot oy ja'vin työkat jùma ko'oy joot
Jats tsaajavin yakmööda ku jayu jyùùjntyka naxviijn.

Rain flower in the forgotten field,
You are beautiful even without any gardener's efforts.
The good and fertile rain alone pampers you,

1. The following text was transcribed from a tape-recording of don Noé, made by Juan Arelí Bernal Alcántara in 2001. The English translation is my own.

Showering you with pearls and gems in the dawn,
When you call for it asking for protection from your thirst and your sadness.
Only you can live happily on the jagged rock
Paying its eternal dryness with a beautiful flower.
I want to learn how you teach the jagged rock
that with sweetness and a hard soul a flower can bloom.

The rain flower, that is, the orchid, is a particularly potent symbol in Totontepecano art and oratory. Thus it is an apt metaphor for thinking through the issues of cultural and linguistic survival. These blooms appeal to the Totontepecano imagination because they are such beautiful and delicate organisms. Yet they can grow on almost any surface: other plants, trees, even rocks. This property of orchids, their adaptability, evokes the central issue of ethnic persistence—can a group change and adapt and yet remain itself?

The Mixes have quite a reputation for resisting change. Spanish chroniclers and colonial historians documented (with a mixture of admiration and concern) the Mixes' fierce defiance of Zapotec, Aztec and Spanish dominion (e.g. Cortés 1971; Herrera y Tordesillas 1601-15; Burgoa 1989 [1674]; Gay 1982 [1881]). And Mixe cultural and linguistic conservatism continues to attract Mesoamericanists who are looking for survivals of pre-Columbian calendar-keeping, use of medicinal plants, and other practices (e.g. Carrasco, Miller, & Weitlaner 1961; Lipp 1991; Andrade 1995; Martin 1996). However, some scholars have argued that Mixe conservatism is largely a byproduct of isolation and backwardness, doomed to disappear as their "region of refuge" (Aguirre Beltran 1967) is inexorably drawn into national and international political-economic arrangements (Kuroda 1984; Hoogshagen 1987).

My contention throughout this dissertation has been that Mixe conservatism is best understood as an active and generative process, the product of a vigorous defense

of perceived cultural, linguistic and ethnic boundaries and not simply the result of inertia or lack of contact. In this regard it is illuminating to read the reports of longtime observers of Mixe society and compare their initial findings to their later reflections. In their original monographs on Mixe society, both Ralph Beals (1973 [1945]) and the Mexican anthropologist Solomón Nahmad-Sittón (1965) were focused on identifying and assessing signs of Mixe acculturation and integration into Mexican society. However in their most recent discussions of Mixe society (Beals 1973; Nahmad-Sittón 1994) they have modified their earlier positions. Beals, for example, writes in his introduction to the second edition of *Ethnology of the Western Mixe* that the most important matter he neglected to address in his original monograph was the surprising extent to which the Highland Mixes managed to compartmentalize aspects of their religious and ritual life. He goes on to suggest that the term "syncretism" is manifestly inappropriate for describing their contemporary ritual practices. He appeals to comments sprinkled throughout his original text, such as: "[t]he coexisting religions and rare contact with priests in most towns lead one to expect that Catholic rites would be shot through with pagan practices. They are not" (Beals 1973:64).

By way of contrast, Hill & Hill (1986) argue convincingly that it is the syncretic practices of Malinche people that have enabled them to sustain the Mexicano language over the centuries. They have managed over time to borrow useful elements of Spanish while "mitigating the potential dominating force of the Spanish ideological voice" (Hill & Hill 1985:402).

A closer analogy might be to the adaptive strategies of the Arizona Tewas, a small island of people living in the midst of a Hopi-dominated region that is in turn encompassed by Anglo-American and Hispanic-American society. The Arizona Tewas,

according to Paul Kroskrity (2000) maintain an ideology of "strict compartmentalization." Kroskrity's (2000) essay is an extended analysis of the language ideologies which informed Edward Dozier's (1951, 1956) writings on Arizona Tewa resistance and acculturation. Because Ralph Beals was Dozier's dissertation advisor, Kroskrity's critical discussion of Dozier's work is more than just thematically relevant here. Dozier believed that Arizona Tewa purism and compartmentalization were reactions to the stresses of Hopi, Spanish, and American hegemony. Kroskrity argues instead that Tewa ideas about purity should be seen as internally generated by the local theocracy and not as reactions to external pressures.

In the Totontepecano case, as I hope to have shown, the hegemony of the Spanish-speaking world over the Sierra Mixe is a much more recent and restricted phenomenon. For Totontepecanos the arrival of Spanish was viewed less as wholly new and unexpected development than as an echo of Zapotec dominion. Hill & Hill also argue that one of the primary reasons for the decline of Mexicano is that it has changed from a marker of a unique and valuable ethnic identity to the language of an oppressed people, a language of peasants and factory workers. This has not yet happened in the Sierra Mixe (or at least not to this degree), and part of the explanation must lie in a broader Mixe historical and ethnic consciousness which finds virtue in struggle and deprivation (Barabas & Bartolomé 1984). They express their identity precisely through their constant efforts to survive the harsh environmental conditions and the machinations of hostile neighbors. Mixe society flourishes in a place where few others would dare to live.

Anyone who has ever spent time in a Mixe community has come away impressed by their resistance to doing things syncretically. Even Totontepecanos, who

have a reputation for open-ness and a penchant for adopting foreign styles and practices, are driven to maintain sharp distinctions between what is Mixe and what is not. The Totontepecanos whom I met were not particularly worried about the consequences of assimilating Mexican culture, lifestyle, racial features, linguistic habits. Like the Arizona Tewa, Totontepecanos expand their linguistic and cultural repertoires in a controlled fashion in order to deliberately cultivate difference. What keeps them up at night is the fear of losing sight of what is distinctly theirs.

* * *

> [W]hat is happening now to children and childhood—in their locally unique, globally articulated forms—is less a reflex of political and economic changes than a crucial part of the puzzle, an important generative site for exploring and theorizing capitalist society and its historical dynamic.
>
> — Sharon Stephens (1995:21)

In this dissertation I set out to explore how Totontepecano notions of childhood, youth, and the role of adolescents in their community have undergone significant changes over the last four decades. Along the way I also hope to have also demonstrated how studies of youthful language use might benefit from a sustained dialogue with anthropological, cross-cultural studies of adolescence and systems of age categories. Heretofore, investigations into the ways young people speak have overwhelmingly focused on urban, multi-ethnic populations (e.g. Cheshire 2002; Samper 2002; Spitulnik 1998; Widdicombe & Wooffitt 1995). Hopefully this thesis will inspire others to seek out youth language in unlikely places.

The approach I took was to focus on youth as a cultural category situated in every instance within some broader local system of age categorization. From this vantage point the following questions surged forward: how are age categories reckoned and how are they reproduced? How does language use participate in these processes? How do certain ways of speaking come to be recognized as youthful? When does speaking youthfully become an issue for a group of people?

I began by investigating how and why the generation of Totontepecanos born in the late 1970s and early 1980s was raised to be sharply self-conscious of their local language and culture and their pivotal role in reproducing them. I then demonstrated how these sociological and cultural developments have helped to spur a series of changes, both at the level of patterns of language use and code choice and at various levels of linguistic structure. These developments have, for example, increased the frequency at which certain allophones are uttered, favored certain word-orders over others, favored certain lexical items over others, and led to various innovations in word-formation. Finally I argued that the mediating link between these socio-cultural changes and linguistic changes is to be found in peoples' deeply held beliefs about role of language in their lives.

Some Totontepecano ideas about language have evolved over centuries of life as an embattled ethnic minority living a challenging existence in small villages clinging to the slopes of high mountain peaks in Oaxaca's Sierra Norte region. One such belief is that language—speech to be more precise—belongs to the group rather than to any individual speakers. In other words, public speech in Totontepec does not belong to the "public domain." Rather, it is a communal possession, managed by the elected authorities of Totontepec. Another is the attitude expressed by the aphorism "*a cada*

quien lo suyo" (to each his own) and the marked preference that everyone speak their "own" language rather than feeling obliged to speak the language of their interlocutor or some lingua franca. This attitude appears to have been a longstanding feature of indigenous sociality in Oaxaca's Sierra Norte. There is an expectation that when people take up residence in a new community they are obliged to adopt the local norms of language use. One of the factors often mentioned in case studies on linguistic obsolescence is an attitude that speakers of a minority language are obliged to not to employ it in the presence of non-speakers because to exclude them from the conversation would be rude or threatening. Totontepecanos do not typically share this urge to accommodate non-speakers, nor do their neighbors.

Other Totontepecano stances toward language are much more recent developments. Such is the case with the youthful form of linguistic purism that I described in Chapter Five. Like other purist ideologies, youthful Totontepecano purism values linguistic expressions deemed to be pure Mixe over those which are deemed to be Spanish impositions or borrowings. However this purism is not like other documented cases of purist ideologies in that it is not particularly nostalgic and does not locate the best, purest Mixe in a real or mythical past era. Rather, it is explicitly forward-looking and finds value in innovation and creative language use. Much of the literature on youth describes youth culture and youth language as irrepressibly hybrid and implies that hybridity is inherently good, creative, and liberating. I have tried to argue here that under the right circumstances young people can also be tremendously conscious of linguistic boundaries and that this self-consciousness is not necessarily conservative or repressive.

Significant portions of Chapters Two and Three were devoted to contemporary cultural politics in the Mixe region and Totontepec's problematic position within the larger Mixe universe. The most striking matter here is the fierce, long-standing desire of the Mixes to present a united front to the outside world and how this squares with their internal conflicts over material and symbolic resources. Various understandings of Mixe linguistic variation are being enlisted in local debates about authenticity: whose variety of Mixe is the most pure and unchanged? About Spanish/Mexican hegemony: is Mixe variation a sign of richness and cultural vitality or the sad result of Spain's divide and conquer strategy? And about modernity: can Mixe be a written language? a medium of public education? the vehicle of a semi-autonomous Mixe nation-state? Because of Totontepec's size and location, its particularly divergent grammar, and its reputation for being the Mixe community most open to outsiders, it has been and continues to be a thorn in the side of all would-be Mixe nation builders. These competing visions of what it means to be Mixe, to speak Mixe and whether or not being Totontepecano implies automatic acceptance of some more encompassing Mixe identity or whether it can stand apart are precisely the stances that young Totontepecanos (especially the more ambitious and intellectual ones) are trying on for size.

In this regard, I wrote at some length about how many of the current discussions about language within the Mixe region dissolve into arguments about spelling. Scholars have argued that one of the reasons why spelling becomes the focus of so much attention is because of the visibility of the written word and its relative fixed-ness. It is further argued that the need to represent speech in writing is driven by models of what constitutes modern, civilized, etc. practices. I would add that spelling also becomes a source of so much concern because it figures so heavily into classroom activities and

the socialization of children. And to the extent that cultural survival is understood to require a special focus on the socialization of future adult culture-bearers and native speakers this becomes a source of anxiety.

In Chapters Three and Four I also endeavored to present a linguistically informed description of the ways in which Mixe grammar and patterns of language use have been re-shaped through contact with Spanish. One of the ironies—not lost on the Mixes—is that there have never been as many Mixe speakers alive as there are at this moment in history. And yet, it is being heard less and less within Mixe communities as the use of Spanish and the presence of Spanish language media become more commonplace. This is what has Mixe language activists so concerned. On the one hand, they feel inclined to point out that when the census neglects to count individuals younger than five it thus undercounts the actual number of Mixe speakers. Yet it is not necessarily the quantity of Mixe speakers that matters to them. The quality of their speech is an enormous issue.

Finally, in Chapter Five I examined some of the communicative practices of certain young Mixe-Spanish bilinguals and how they have been participating in contemporary contact-driven linguistic change. I discovered no Totontepecano label for the way that young Totontepecanos speak Mixe or an explicit recognition of their speech as a distinct sociolect or register. However, I did find that certain ways of speaking were associated with cargo of topil and with the joking familiarity of language use between peers. In its most innovative mode youthful Totontepecano speech is associated with the town's brass band, the institutional locus of expressive culture in this community.

I also discuss the profound differences between how young Totontepecanos have experienced Spanish-Mixe contact versus the experiences of their parents' generation and their grandparents' generation. For the oldest living cohort of Totontepecanos, Spanish was a code with relatively limited value, encountered mainly within the confines of Catholic ritual. Their children had much more painful encounters with Spanish elementary school classroom and the workplace, and these experiences left them feeling anxious and insecure about their ability to speak Spanish correctly. Their grandchildren feel much more comfortable with Spanish and are much more worried about getting Mixe right.

One of the great weaknesses of standard descriptions of intergenerational transmission of language and culture is a failure to recognize the importance of relations between children and their grandparents. Another has been to minimize the active, agentive role that younger generations play in the process. While the situation they find themselves in is not one of their own making, their attempts to navigate this sociolinguistic terrain and find new ways to flourish defy simplistic accounts of linguistic obsolescence as the cumulative result of failures in intergenerational transmission.

Cheshire (2002:27), who has tracked innovations in French and German such as the borrowing and calques of youthful English expressions such as the quotative "like" writes that:

> it is not clear whether these are really examples of a youth language, in which case—like the transitory vocabulary of youth slang—they will presumably die out as present-day young people get older, or whether they are examples of a more permanent language change led by younger speakers of the language.

It is even more unclear if the innovative uses of Mixe that I observed during my brief time in the Sierra Mixe represent the seeds of lasting linguistic change or fads of the moment. Also, to be perfectly honest, the evidence that I provided for my claims about Totontepecano purism and compartmentalism was largely anecdotal. My hope is that this thesis has set the stage for a more thoroughgoing investigation of communicative practices in and around Totontepec and the extent to which Totontepecanos ideologies of language are manifest in actual usage.

* * *

> They [Viacom, AOL-Time Warner, Disney, Sony, Vivendi, News Corp, Bertelsmann] look at the teen market as part of this massive empire that they are colonizing. You should look at it like the British Empire or the French Empire in the 19th Century. Teens are like Africa.
>
> — Robert McChesney[2]

McChesney is, of course, referring to North American and European teenagers. But there are also millions of teenagers *in* Africa—not to mention the youthful populations of Asia and Latin America—that large media corporations have in their sights. Across the developing world and in amongst the marginalized ethnic enclaves intense battles between local culture and globalized culture, between tradition and modernity, are increasingly being waged over the minds and bodies of young people. At number of distinctly modern institutions such as mass media, public schooling, and

2. This quote comes from an interview with McChesney aired on the PBS television documentary "Frontline: The Merchants of Cool." A transcript of the interview is available at the following address: http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/cool/interviews/mcchesney.html.

public health programs have converged to radically redefine the timing of and manner in which children become adults.

In the introduction to this dissertation I wrote about the hope expressed by many older Totontepecanos that the debut performance of their town's new youth band in the fall of 2000 would generate enough interest to guarantee the success of the newest crop of Totontepecano musicians. By accomplishing this they would be doing much more than simply guaranteeing the future of homegrown music in Totontepec. The founder of the Instituto Kong Oy, which provided the space in which the youth band rehearsed each day and stored their instruments every night is fond of saying that: "In Totontepec we say that we are born, we live and we die with music" (Bernal Alcántara 2001:44).[3] The "we" in this quote refers to a collection of individuals, each of which is, indeed accompanied at each stage of his or her life by music. The "we" also refers to the community itself. For Totontepecanos, reproducing their local musical tradition has become an indispensable part of reproducing their world and their way of life.

The timing of the debut concert was particularly auspicious because Joel Wilfrido Flores, a Totontepecano musician who lives in Mexico City, had just won a prestigious *premio nacional* (national fine arts prize) for his lasting contribution to Mexican music. And under the creative direction of a trio of young Totontepecano composers, the *banda juvenil* far surpassed everyone's expectations. That drizzly fall afternoon a succession of town leaders made speeches about the importance of teaching their children to be proud of their heritage. Maestro Joel Wilfrido Flores even sent a message offering his personal congratulations to the young musicians. Many Totontepecanos came away from the event feeling that the tide had turned slightly in

3. The original Spanish: "En Totontepec decimos que nacemos, vivimos y morimos con la música."

their favor. Even the *adventistas* were impressed; several of their children signed up for band practice the following week, and another group formed a rival choral group with mandolin accompanists.

When I returned for a brief visit to Totontepec in the summer of 2002, I ran into some of those same youths that had been reprimanded back in 1998 for wearing black rock'n'roll t-shirts and bandanas. They were now sporting brand new *banda juvenil* raincoats with a picture of their sacred mountain peak *Anyu Kèèts*, emblazoned on the back. Maintaining the upper hand in this struggle for local culture expression will require dedication and hard work. Fortunately, Totontepecanos, young and old, seem to relish this type of challenge.

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