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"I'm a woman but I *know* God leads my way": Agency and Tzotzil evangelical discourse

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ABSTRACT

For indigenous Tzotzil Protestants in Chiapas, the emergence of a new discourse about God is restructuring social interactions. Discourse data point to an arresting intersection of Protestant beliefs, discourse strategies, and gender. This case study supports recent theorizing in language and gender concerning the need to attend to shifting identities and contexts where gender can become less salient. The performance of a Protestant identity in which gender is transcended opens up new possibilities for agency, particularly for women who otherwise lack sanctioned authority. Strategic manipulation of Protestant discourse in verbal performances allows one woman to enact a position of moral authority that empowers her to pursue an innovative plan. As an important means through which Tzotzil Protestants dictate and create their lives, praying in the evangelical world provides a useful site for the study of unusual kinds of performative utterances. (Protestantism, Tzotzil, prayer, speech acts, gender and language, discourse analysis, agency)*

INTRODUCTION

In the highlands of Chiapas, Mexico, new rhetorical practices are taking shape among indigenous Tzotzil converts to Protestantism. *La` jk'opantik dios xkut* '(Come and) we'll talk to God, I told them', says an evangelical Tzotzil woman, telling a story about a noteworthy use of prayer in her personal life. Although the phrase *k'opantik dios* 'let's talk to God' is one she regularly uses several times a day before beginning one of the joint prayers that are standard evangelical practice, this is not only a religious prayer. As the following case study shows, her words have more than a religious function. There is an extraordinarily fine line between the secular and the religious in an all-Protestant village that is dedicated to living out the word of God in daily life. The strong belief in God held by community members in general can sometimes be taken advantage of by one person seeking to influence others. Building on the notions that attention to language is a useful methodology for examining questions of personal agency, and that the study of language and gender is particularly well situated to make contributions here (Ahearn 2001), in this article I analyze a way that evangelicals can

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maneuver to affect others by bringing God into a conversation. A speaker who highlights a religious identity from which she can draw greater authority renders gender immaterial.

A fitting place to examine a particularly visible agency is where cultures are being actively changed, contested, and reinvented, such as in situations of religious conversion. Protestantism has a general meaning of nonconformity and transformation through personal choice. Often, "conversion separated people from the mainstream and allowed for the development of an ethos divergent from the norm" (Brusco 1995:47). For example, Brusco writes that in Colombia, the primary way this ethos diverges is by reordering gender roles.

Scholars of evangelical Protestantism in Latin America have often pointed to a paradoxical increase in gender equality among Protestants, despite its overtly patriarchal doctrine. Some research proposes that evangelicism grants women a kind of "moral autonomy," leading to their greater independence within the family, and thus accords women greater power (Flora 1975; Gill 1990; Steigenga & Smilde 1999:173).[1] (A counterexample is Zapotec women, whom Sault 2001 argues are reluctant to convert because they already enjoy considerable public status, particularly through godparenthood rituals, from which evangelicals are required to abstain.) Women who are drawn to convert "re-evaluate their personal identity and . . . establish a new sense of self" (Gill 1990:710). If, however, "it is through language that a person negotiates a sense of self within and across different sites at different points in time" (Norton Pierce 1995:13), then the absence of studies on the role that language plays in the construction of this newly gendered Protestant self is remarkable. The phrase "moral autonomy" certainly conjures images of women who speak their minds, believe in the truth of what they say, and are confident that what they say deserves to be taken seriously. In my own research, I have found prayer to be a key arena in which women give voice to such sanctimonius sentiments.

In this article, I provide evidence for one Tzotzil Protestant woman's new sense of self and autonomy, using discourse data. Taking a cue from work on language and gender, I believe it could be enlightening to examine the role that language plays in the construction of identities in order to elucidate how women are not just empowered, but empowering THEMSELVES in Protestant contexts. What identities are women crafting that change the meanings of gender in Protestant contexts, and what does language have to do with this development? Gender and language studies emphasize personal agency, viewing gender as an actively directed self-representation, but research on Protestantism in Latin America has tended to describe the result more than the process, approaching the shift in general terms without investigating what active role individuals might play in this reinterpretation of gender roles. It becomes important to ask, How are women's ACTIONS creating these changes? And since a "sense of self" is largely created through language, what might looking at linguistic practices reveal about this process? If identity is an activity or a performance rather than an attribute, as has

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been noted for gender (Butler 1990, Romaine 1999), then it becomes imperative to begin thinking of changing gender roles not just as something that happens, but as something that people make happen.

Laura Ahearn, in her recent review "Language and agency," writes that scholars interested in processes of agency have much to gain by focusing on linguistic data: "Attending closely to linguistic structures and practices [can reveal] . . . how social reproduction becomes social transformation." Moreover, language and gender is one particularly promising track "for the development of a more sophisticated understanding of agency" (2001:130–31). Bucholtz et al.'s discussion of the history of language and gender shows a move to make room for agency: Women have gone from being passive victims of linguistic oppression to become active language users whose "voices interrupt the dominant discourse and subversive identities break through" (1999:6). Agency has thus come to the fore in language and gender studies, and it may help fulfill Cameron's (1996:33) and Gal's (1995:175) hope that language and gender studies should be as informed as much by social theory as by empirical sociolinguistics.

Language and gender scholars see agency as the way that "people actively constitute their own social identities and relations" (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1995). The investigation of identity as it is produced in discourse was brought in as a counter to essentialist explanations for gendered behavior. The idea of emergent, changeable, or multiple identities is one that has been noted by scholars currently working in gender and language as well as by sociolinguists (Milroy 1987, Le Page & Tabouret-Keller 1985, Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992, Meyerhoff 1996), who suggest that different identities may be more or less salient in different domains. Sociolinguistic studies that examine a range of relevant facets of identity are important because they have the potential to decenter gender as the most significant fact defining a speaker's linguistic patterns, and because they provide case studies of contexts in which gender is backgrounded. Researchers seek "a more contextualized understanding of how people mobilize linguistic resources for their interactive projects" (Goodwin 1999:390). The new theoretical language, which uses expressions such as "individual goals," "linguistic strategies," and "mobilization," clearly resonates with the social-science notion of agency.

In a discussion of agency, we benefit from distinguishing an "actor" from an "agent": "An actor refers to a person whose action is rule-governed or rule-oriented, whereas an agent refers to a person engaged in the exercise of power in the sense of the ability to bring about effects and to (re)constitute the social world" (Ahearn 2001:113). Thus, an agent changes things, while an actor merely follows the script. This distinction is particularly applicable to language and gender research. In feminist theory, agency is bound up with "how gender identity is a durable but not immutable phenomenon" (McNay 2000:2). Certainly those who study talk should be willing to see the inconstancy of personae, especially as these are expressed in speech; yet some language and gender research suggests

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that one's gender identity is always equivalent in importance to other identities, thus perpetually reproducing a gender dichotomy. Some scholars celebrate the fact that there are many ways of doing "feminine," but they refrain from considering whether and how a person might avoid having "woman" be a foregrounded aspect of her identity at all. It is as if, no matter what other identity may be relevant in the moment, gender identity is a shadow twin that trudges stubbornly beside us, refusing to recede into the background. I am interested in showing how speakers might make "womanness" matter less than other aspects of identity for strategic purposes. Linguistic resources not only produce gender differentiation and gendered selves, but can also contest a gendered identity as the only available subject position. We perform masculinity and femininity, but is it possible to perform an AGENDERED self – not one that denies gender, but one to which gender is irrelevant? Women do not always have to do being women; doing gender in ways that subvert gender ideologies means throwing away the old codes entirely. Cameron critiques Butler's notion of agency as subversive repetition: "Playing with the codes just keeps the codes in play" (1997:32). Adopting the notion of agency as a research imperative forces us to look harder for practices that transform current hierarchies rather than those that reproduce them, albeit in new ways.

Hall and Bucholtz (1995:9) characterize productive new analytical stances for language and gender research which focus on agency: the study of women's innovative use of language to subvert the dominant gender paradigm, and the study of how women construct social identities and communities that are not determined in advance by gender ideologies. In these ways, gender and language research can truly get at agency as transformation rather than reproduction. In line with the latter stance, I will show how one woman, Lucía, constructs a social identity not determined in advance by prescribed gender roles and uses it to gain access to agency.

In this introduction, I have suggested that one way of bringing sociolinguistic work into conversation with the problem of changing gender roles in Protestant Latin America is to focus on how agency is shaped by or linked to particular performances of identities. I show that individual expertise in talking to and about God provides one woman with a kind of status that makes up for the insufficient power of her gender identity. At crucial moments, her identity as a believer becomes the major point of reference around which she structures interaction. By foregrounding this identity, she makes gender less relevant and opens a path to greater social influence. Hence I argue that agency is made available through the performance of a certain identity and can be observed at the micro-level in discourse. I will first provide background details on the community of study. Second, I move to examples and explanation of some of the functions of prayer as a social discourse. In the third section, I present the text around which the main argument is organized. Through close analysis of this text, I offer evidence that strategic use of evangelical discourse lets one speaker inhabit multiple

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identities, allowing her to overcome gender as a factor of primary relevance and leading to her greater personal agency.

"WE BELIEVED THE WORD OF GOD"

The Tzotzil language belongs to the family of Mayan languages, and early anthropological work made much of the idea that many cultural traits inherited directly from the once-great Mayan civilization could still be observed in places like the Tzotzil *municipio* of Zinacantán (e.g., Vogt 1970:1–2). Culturally, Tzotzil people have managed to remain quite distinct from the surrounding Spanish-speaking world despite centuries of intensive contact. They are usually monolingual corn producers and live in dispersed villages throughout the highlands of Chiapas, Mexico. The religious beliefs traditionally held by Tzotzil speakers, though subsumed under the rubric of Catholicism, are mainly indigenous, including beliefs about supernatural causes of illness, ancestor spirits, different types of souls, and shamanistic curing. This syncretism of indigenous religion and Catholicism has endured for centuries. However, the past two decades have brought a change to the highlands that has been strong enough to shake that balance. Unconventional communities have been formed by Tzotzil speakers who have converted to evangelical Christianity. These evangelicals (following the Latin American designation for Protestant converts, *evangélicos*) entirely reject both indigenous and Catholic religious practices and systems of power, and many have been violently forced to leave their ancestral hamlets.

The focus of this study is Vualtik, a community settled entirely by indigenous Protestant converts originally from the Tzotzil *municipio* of San Miguel Mitontic (hence the designation "Miguelero" for this group). The bulk of the fieldwork on which this analysis is based was carried out over four months in 1996 when I lived full time with a Presbyterian family in this community. The investigation was expedited by two and a half years of prior intensive language study begun in early 1994. I returned to the highlands for three months in 1997 and followed that stay with shorter visits in 1999, 2000, and 2001. In all, I spent eight months in close association with Tzotzil Protestants.

The San Miguel converts left their home villages in Mitontic after months of being jailed, psychologically tortured, and even physically harmed. After leaving Mitontic, they spent about five years in San Cristóbal de las Casas, the commercial center of the highlands. Conditions there were crowded for them, and they began to look for land on which to start a new village and farm. After a long period of unsuccessful searching, the evangelicals, helped by a connection with a government official through missionaries, were given the land that would become Vualtik. When invited out to the land for the first time to see "if their hearts could arrive there," they were pleased to see a place where everything could grow, including luxury foods such as tropical fruits. After thanking God in prayer for the gift of land, the people moved out to begin building their new village in July 1994.

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Vualtik at the time of this research had about 400 inhabitants, mostly Presbyterian with a small group of Pentecostals. The two groups have different houses of worship and appear to have only limited social contact with each other. The religious leaders in Vualtik are called *ancianos*[2] 'elders'. They are the officials who conduct services, assist with community decisions, and travel to attend meetings and maintain relationships with the larger political and Protestant world. As they phrase it, their function is to look out for (*ventain*) all of the believers under their charge and teach them how to follow God's word in daily life. The Presbyterians had a council of seven ancianos, all men.

There are no women ancianos, and the explanation I was given for this (by a male anciano) is that women 'don't know reason' (*mu sna'ik rason*). Women in traditional Tzotzil communities frequently hold positions of power as shamans and occasionally as political leaders.[3] With the renunciation of shamanism and the acceptance of an exclusively male committee of religious leadership, Protestantism offers few if any options for women to assume publicly powerful positions in the community. However, everyone now has access to another, newly defined source of potential religious power: Praying is no longer a restricted genre fully mastered only by specialists.

K'OPANTIK KAJVALTIK: LET'S TALK TO GOD

In traditional Tzotzil communities, typically the only people who are adept at praying ('pray' is expressed as a phrase, *k'opon* + *dios* 'talk to God' in Tzotzil) are shamans (frequently women) and ritual leaders. These authorities mediate the ordinary person's access to God, the saints, and the ancestors. Laughlin (1996:110) records the dream of a nonspecialist Zinacantec woman in which she is scolded by its supernatural residents for presuming to pray at a roadside shrine. She is told that "only the elders, only the shamans can cross themselves here . . . how would you know how to pray?"

The removal of traditional constraints on legitimate settings, themes, and speakers for prayer has led to a virtual explosion of the genre's domains in the evangelical Tzotzil world. Praying is a nearly constant activity for Protestants, and it pervades my field study data to an extent that was impossible to anticipate. In Vualtik, I was surrounded by prayer in a way that I had never before experienced. One thing that was stressed to me more than anything else during my time in Vualtik was that talking to God is the responsibility of each one of us. Praying is a "cultural focus," a "domain in which meanings, forms, and values are especially heavily elaborated" (Bauman 1983:10). For the Miguelero Protestants, the prominence of prayer as a spiritual practice for each mature individual is demonstrated by its frequency and centrality in daily life. Its meanings branch out exponentially into all facets of evangelicals' lives. Not only do people pray several times a day, but they talk ABOUT praying almost as often. For example, it is common to hear evangelicals telling each other *k'opono Dios* 'talk to God' when they are

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taking leave of each other. Members of the community emphasize to one another the importance of praying, for all needs, all the time. A typical sermon might include an injunction by a preacher to 'Talk to God, EVERY MINUTE,' *k'opono dios, jujulikel*. It is probably true to say that one can never pray enough as a Tzotzil Protestant. Prayer has gone from being a rhetorical practice with a restricted domain to one with a highly elaborated domain.

As a minimum, everyone is expected to pray every day at certain agreed-upon times, like waking up, eating a meal, going out to the fields to work, and going to sleep. In case of sickness and on days when religious services are held, prayers are generally much longer and the number of actual prayers said in the day doubles or triples. One can use prayer for something as modest as protection from stepping on a thorn while working as readily as in the most critical circumstances of life and death. Similar to Robbins's description of the Urapmin practice of Protestant prayer, there is a "constant resort to prayer in all situations … and people are constantly innovating prayers in situations that make them feel the least bit anxious" (2001:903–4).

Praying gives people a form of agency when they are confronting physical or other types of problems. In case of sickness, one no longer has to hire an expensive shaman to supplicate on behalf of the sick person. Anyone can pray for healing, and in fact, praying is the only way to manifest healing in the Tzotzil Protestant worldview. Protestant missionaries believe that faith healing is the single most powerful catalyst for the majority of conversions in Chiapas, because of a longstanding indigenous belief that illness has supernatural causes which require supernatural rather than physio-medical cures (Sterk 1992a). God alone is believed to heal people, and the ways that he[4] is referred to and addressed in Protestant prayer reflect his role as the physician of the people: *jpoxtavanej* 'healer of people', *jkoltavanej* 'liberator of people', *jloktor* 'doctor'. If people have ailments, this is believed to be because they don't pray enough. When children are taught to pray, they are given a voice in the first person: Each person must use his or her own voice to address God. A child not yet two years old gets some premature instruction from her mother in what to say (1 = first person; IMP = imperative, pt = politeness particle):

(1) Instruction on praying (1=first person affix, IMP=imperative, pt=politeness particle):
K'opan-o me k-ajval-tik: "K-ajval, `ip-un x-k-a`i" `ut-o.

talk_to-IMP pt 1-lord-1pl. 1-lord sick-1 asp-1-feel tell-IMP
'Please talk to our Lord: "My Lord I feel sick," tell him.'

Praying is linked to power and strength, and hence it is not surprising that words uttered in prayer are believed to possess an active power of their own. One of the things people typically pray for is that the power of God should enter their minds and bodies to strengthen and protect them. One missionary believes that the elaboration of prayer for evangelicals stems from the traditional Tzotzil worldview, in which prayer is the principal resource for power. Protestant discourse holds that

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God's power can be accessed through prayer in order to transform situations. Frequently, requests for God's assistance in prayer are accompanied by the phrases *xu`avu`un skotol* 'you can do everything / everything is possible through you' and *ech'em tamuk'ul tatzatzale* 'your greatness, your strength are unsurpassed'. Praying, in turn, carries a special force to reorder circumstances and interactions; for example, praying will bring God to one's immediate and total defense in case of danger. Words in prayer are granted the power to shape reality.

History would seem to play a role in this intense focus on and faith in prayer's unfailing powers. Converts in a neighboring village with which the first Miguelero converts had extensive contact tell a story of a time when the community leaders planned to kill all the Protestants. However, they were not able to open the "heavily barred" doors of the converts' houses, although these had been secured only with the customary piece of thin twine (Sterk 1992b:12). The converts took this as a sign that their prayers had been answered. Stories like this one undoubtedly contribute to the strong present-day belief in the power and effectiveness of prayer. Prayer could also be seen as responsible for the converts' finding the land on which to build their village. After three years of unsuccessful searching, a leader told the people to pray more fervently so that land would be found. Not long afterward, they not only found land but received it as a free gift from the government.

The process of learning to talk to God is never complete. The most sophisticated evangelicals are always open to new knowledge and guidance on how to do it. Presumably, this could also be knowledge of new contexts in which it is fitting to address God. This openness of prayer as a form of communication makes it an endless source of spiritual innovation and inspiration, a continual journey toward deeper connection and closeness to God.

Not only is prayer the outward sign of a constant inner striving to be always nearer to God, it is also the determining practice that defines one as a member of the community: Being a full-fledged participant in an evangelical community means being a person who prays. Since prayer is now an activity that everyone does together, it has become the fundamental communal event. The communal nature of prayer comes across in the phrase most commonly used to initiate prayer, *k'opan-tik kajval-tik*, 'Let's talk to our Lord'; the construction here uses the inclusive 'we' suffix [-tik] twice, clearly inviting others to be a part of a group activity. For evangelicals, the practice of praying constructs a group identity: Evangelicals are people who talk to God. Because prayer is a path that leads them eternally toward greater divine life while reinforcing a sense of belonging within the group, one understands why this practice is so compelling to evangelicals.

PRAYING AS DIALOGIC

Traditional (non-Protestant) Tzotzil prayer follows a special format that is steadfastly prescribed. Composed entirely in parallel couplets, it "is the language of authority and expertise in ritual . . . it requires expertise to use" (Haviland 1992:58).

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Its effectiveness, in fact, derives from the external features that characterize it – setting, style, and cadence, features that allow it to generate cosmic heat (Gossen 1976:51). This "ritual language" is difficult to learn and use because of the strict syntactic frame it requires. Its strict syntactic order indicates its role in the maintenance of social order (Gossen 1976:45; Haviland 1996). Couplets have a long history as definitive of fine rhetoric throughout Mesoamerica. In addition to being entirely fixed in form, traditional prayer has a very fixed content. The prayer-makers recycle couplets that are standardly used and rarely make up new ones. Thus, the themes that traditional prayer treats are expected and conventional. Traditional prayer is tied to ritual settings where it is offered by a specialist in its refined language.

Such restrictions, however, are irrelevant to Protestant Tzotzil, who have adopted an entirely different ideology of prayer. Access to God is readily, equally available to every person. Prayer can be in anyone's voice, not just a shaman's, and ideally should be in everyone's voice, as praying all together is the norm. Shamans, curing ceremonies, and drinking (ritual as well as social) are all forsworn by converts. The traditional altars that used to be the quintessential location for praying are never used. Not only has prayer been decoupled from ritual in Vualtik, but people also have the freedom to pray about practically anything. The couplet structure of prayer that makes it elegant and honorific has been maintained to some extent, but the different functions of prayer have led to a freer structure. Prayers no longer have to be composed entirely in couplets, but community members believe it is most appropriate if they include many paired constructions.

That couplets are no longer definitive of prayer for evangelicals demonstrates that the notion of prayer has shifted from being dependent on form to an emphasis on content. Now, what is said matters more than how it is said. According to the traditional ideology of ritual language, this language would lack cosmic heat owing to its lack of formal constraints, and hence it would be unthinkable as a medium for communicating with spiritual beings. The bodily aspect of praying has remained similar in that it is done out loud, either sitting or kneeling, but in Protestant prayer the eyes are closed and often covered with a hand or shawl. This contrasts with traditional Tzotzil prayer, in which the eyes are open (Gossen 1976:52). This shift is common in Protestant conversions. Keane (2002:77) writes that Sumbanese Protestants are distrustful of formulaic couplets passed down unchanged from the ancestors, instead believing that prayer should come from the heart and be spontaneous, and closing the eyes is symbolic of that. With the Protestant emphasis on a personal relationship to God, prayer should express personal sentiments found by looking inward rather than ritualized, formulaic ones. While traditional Tzotzil prayer conveys a group sentiment, Protestant prayer expresses an individual one.

In part because of uniquely Protestant elaboration of norms for prayer, prayer fulfills some interesting functions in social interaction. One of the factors that makes prayer more "conversational" for evangelicals is the fact that the tradi-

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tional marked tempo and sing-song intonation are mostly gone from their style of praying. Whereas traditional ritual language is spoken rapidly and with stress and pitch patterns that differ markedly from everyday speech (Gossen 1976:44), sometimes making it difficult to understand even for native speakers, evangelical prayer sounds more like ordinary talk and is for the most part clearly enunciated, so that it is easily understood by anyone in the same room. In Protestant praying, it is the ideal that people all pray AT THE SAME TIME. This type of prayer exhibits a striking dialogism: Since everyone prays out loud, they can hear each other's prayers, and even seem to expect that others present will be listening. People sometimes respond to others' current prayers in their own simultaneous praying. Examples of this are the echoing of another's words or phrases with minor variation, and the tendency to list the names of everyone present in a request for their health and gain. Thus, a certain ethic of reciprocity seems to govern the content of the genre. The active participation of the hearer, an idea emphasized by Voloshinov (1973:2), acquires new meaning in a speech practice like Protestant prayer, where those who listen must at the same time be actively speaking/praying. Although the all-together-now frame on one level enacts a fundamental equality among praying believers, I have also observed cases in which one person was able to claim power through prayer and exert influence over others. These cases are the subject of my analysis.

It was not unusual in situations that I observed for simultaneous prayer to be used to communicate messages to other people. Speech is nominally addressed to God, but virtually always heard and understood by a human audience. For example, prayer provides a way for family members to express tensions to each other. Robbins writes about a similar use of prayer to resolve conflicts when others present with whom one is in dispute "are expected to understand that what is said is in some respects addressed to them" (2001:908).

An example of how dialogic praying can be was provided when a baby got sick during one of my visits, eventuating what might be termed a "healing crisis." The sickness was believed to be caused by bottled-up resentment or anger in the heart of the baby's mother, Marta,[5] toward her mother-in-law, the baby's grandmother. Everyone knew the problems these two had – Marta hadn't been talking to her mother-in-law at all, and hadn't really been of help to her in the two and a half years of her marriage to date. This interpersonal tension had been simmering, also affecting other family members' evaluations of Marta, and was now believed to be making the baby sick. The ensuing event suggests that the most culturally appropriate way to resolve and release the tension was through joint prayer.

When Marta finally came to try and make peace with her mother-in-law for the baby's sake, prayer was a central activity. Both women prayed together several times throughout the night, each loudly so that the other (and other family members?) could hear, both letting their feelings and their apologies be heard in a mutually negotiated rhythm in which each could hear the other's utterances without appearing to stop speaking themselves. A joint prayer that serves this reconcilia-

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tory function is like hearing and talking at once: One must simultaneously listen to the other's words and construct something like appropriate responses to them, all with no noticeable time lag. The effect was as if the two were having a conversation with each other, even though all of their remarks about each other were phrased in the third person. Even though Marta was barely seventeen, with not half the experience of praying that her mother-in-law had, she was able to keep up and never fell silent. She maintained the outpouring of emotion – sprinkled with couplets – for the duration, her voice repeatedly breaking into (exaggerated?) tears and then regaining stamina with new, louder requests for forgiveness. While the mother-in-law was able to enact a position of authority by voicing her knowledge of the girl's waywardness in tones of moral disappointment, competently praying also gave the daughter-in-law the opportunity to make amends and earn recognition as a morally upright person again. As long as she repented and acted on the recognition that what was needed was her own praying to repair her relationship with God, the family's admiration for her could be restored. Praying within earshot of other family members was an apparently sincere step toward reconciliation.

In a similar instance, a woman and her daughter-in-law, Gloria, were not getting along. Thus, when Gloria's baby fell and hit her head, Gloria was blamed. In the mother-in-law's prayer for the baby, all her criticism came out as she implied that Gloria had been angry or sullen and thus neglectful in the care of her child. Both family members were praying at the same time; Gloria prayed much more softly and was all but silent during the lines that refer to her, given below:

(2) A mother-in-law prays with her daughter-in-law

mi i`ilin, mi yanij yo`nton sme` kajval
'if she was angry, if her heart was out of sorts, Lord'

pere veintino ti jo`ote dyos
'but you take care of this, God'

mu me [xav]ak' ti xbat ta tilel, ta tzanel, ta k'ak'ob-bakel, kajval, dyos ku`un
'Don't let her go to the place of burning, to the place of combustion, to the place of burning bones, my God'

Ja no jech xtok kajval ta melel
'It's really just like this, too, Lord, in truth'

Mi `o no`ox kajval bu ta xk'opoj, ta xlo`laj ti yo`nton ek'e dyos…
'If in fact, Lord, it is talking, it is gossiping, her heart as well God [i.e. she's unhappy]…'

mu smeltzaj, mu xtuk'ulaj ti snuk'e
'it won't be fixed, it won't be straightened out, her voice'

The line about the daughter-in-law's voice refusing to 'straighten out' refers to her manner of talking and is a criticism of her social behavior – she isn't polite or respectful, she doesn't talk in a good way. (Saying that someone 'talks well', *lek xk'opoj*, is a high compliment and implies that they are a properly socialized, likable person.) It may also be a direct reference to Gloria's style of praying, which is "shy," including many silences and using an extremely quiet voice. One

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cannot be a fully admired or competent member of the community without praying confidently.

By expressing her disapproval in the form of a prayer, the mother-in-law can inform Gloria that her etiquette is unacceptable while avoiding a direct confrontation. The daughter-in-law is not obligated to respond since the words were not technically addressed to her, although responses of a sort seem to be expected. There is considerable pressure on her to ask for forgiveness, because this is supposedly what God wants us to do. Although the ideal for prayer is that all participating voices are equal, in this case the mother-in-law rather harshly reasserts her position of greater power in the relationship by assuming the stance of moral judge and using prayer to convey biting criticism and disapproval. This example is more a threat than a prayer, a warning that if Gloria doesn't shape up, she will be sent straight to Hell. The weight of God's authority added to the mother-in-law's judgment serves to make the interaction doubly intimidating, and this daughter-in-law is just not up to the challenge.

The previous example of Marta and her mother-in-law's dramatic and tense praying, although stemming from a similar external situation, was more reconciliatory. Even though one person was blamed, that person claimed responsibility and asked forgiveness in a voice that was as loud, forceful, and rhythmic as her accuser's – Marta didn't miss a beat. A marathon of both parties airing grievances before God becomes somehow cathartic. In this type of responsive prayer, in which voices answer to each other within one prayer situation, response is nearly obligatory, and while both daughters-in-law were given the opportunity to respond, only Marta really used it to her advantage, making the first example much more noteworthy for its contribution toward mending the relationship. Thus, the success of prayer as a method for healing social breaches hinges on both parties' responsiveness. It is this particular kind of dialogism that I believe is exemplified by Protestant prayer as a social discourse.

LUCÍA'S STORY

The following text, interspersed with discussion, is Lucía's telling of how she arranged her son's marriage. The account was tape-recorded at her hearth. She arranged this marriage without the assistance of the typical bride-petitioning party, having been refused this assistance because her son wanted to marry the younger sister of a still-unmarried girl, a morally suspect choice. Going to petition alone for a bride as a single woman (Lucía is divorced) is an especially ambitious undertaking.

I am interested in the way this told event is imagined and constructed as an illustration of the kinds of possibilities for agency that exist in a community that is in the process of redefining itself, as this newly founded all-Protestant Tzotzil village is. Other levels of analysis, such as how Lucía chooses to narrate the events to me and structures the telling as narrative, may be dealt with in future work. Since this

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analysis is based on a retelling of social interaction, and not tape-recorded as it takes place live, what I attempt is somewhat complicated and faces disadvantages. It relies on Lucía's memory of what was said some months earlier, yet she prefers to frame the interactions as direct quotes (a convention of Tzotzil recountings), even where voices are embedded within voices. Lucía may have embellished or omitted some parts of the story so that she comes out sounding more heroic and more in control than she may actually have been. This is something I believe all people tend to do in order to portray themselves in a positive light and preserve their self-esteem.

Nonetheless, I choose to view this story as a fairly accurate version of what transpired. It also provides data about how an individual reflects on, interprets, feels about, and represents events, circumstances, and possibilities, which a tape-recording of events simply as they occur cannot always do. Lucía told this story to me very seriously and in great detail, taking pains to reconstruct what she and others had said with all of the stylistic nuances. I saw that she was proud of herself for coming up with such an elegant solution to her intimidating problem. When I played the tape of her story to transcribe it back at home, it was clear how much she had been able to accomplish with just the choice of a few words. The story first captured my attention because it reveals how Lucía uses prayer to solve a serious social dilemma. Upon further reflection, I became more interested in the uses of religious discourse outside of prayer that are reflected in the text: the way Lucía self-consciously points to her positioning as a woman, and juxtaposes that powerlessness with the powerfulness of God in a piece of extremely persuasive rhetoric (lines 54–63).

By way of background, Lucía is an unusual woman in the community. At age fifteen, she had the courage to run away from a bad marriage and go to Mexico City, where she learned Spanish (knowledge of Spanish is rare among older Tzotzil women) and worked for three years. Upon her return to Mitontic, her sister's husband offered to marry her and she accepted. (It was not uncommon for a man to have more than one wife in Mitontic, but it was uncommon for the two wives to be sisters.) Later, the family was one of the first to convert to Protestantism in their homeland, making them natural religious leaders as the movement grew. Others came to their house to find out how they were managing to avoid curing ceremonies, learned that prayer could cure them, and asked Lucía and her sister to pray for them, too. The sisters were skilled in many valued activities and were thus widely admired.

Eventually, Lucía decided that if they were to follow evangelical doctrine devoutly, the polygamous arrangement would have to end. Since Lucía was the second wife, she would be the one to leave. Her divorced state is very difficult for her because men are the primary providers of the staple corn and money in a Tzotzil family. She has had more than her share of worries about where resources for herself and her children will come from. Lucía's disadvantaged social position forces her to be resourceful in solving the problems of life, and she believes her primary resource is God.

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Lucía is also unusual in that she is recognized as a very eloquent and sought-after prayer leader; others still come to her and ask her to pray for them when they are sick. Such expertise in praying is not something that everyone has. Although Lucía is a person to whom praying seems to come naturally, we might wonder whether her lack of other sources of status helped lead to the development of this admired identity. That Lucía is better at praying than some other people gives her a certain status, which she can draw upon to overcome the weakness inherent in her gender identity in situations where she requires a more powerful persona, as her story will illustrate.

A current technique in discourse analysis has been to locate the presence of several different "voices" even within the speech of a single narrating speaker. For example, in "The voices of Don Gabriel," Hill (1995:115) follows Bakhtin's proposal that a speaker constantly comes upon "languages" and not a single "language" as she orients herself in a heteroglossic universe: "consciousness finds itself inevitably facing the necessity of HAVING TO CHOOSE A LANGUAGE" (Bakhtin (1981:295). Like Don Gabriel in Hill's article, Lucía represents many voices in the text, and she also assumes different voices herself, each one a conscious "active choice" (Hill 1995:139). The most actively chosen one is the voice that calls God into the conversation each time she wants to exert extraordinary influence. Another way to view different "voices" in a text is as resources a speaker uses to construct different identities in response to her interactional needs.

Starting the story, which I asked to hear because of my interest in speech genres and how Protestantism may be changing them, Lucía tells me that she went to ask the ancianos if they would like to go "visiting" with her. Custom dictates that when a family goes to ask for a bride, they should be accompanied by a respectable additional person who will do all of the fancy talking that the occasion requires, and the people who play this role in Vualtik are the ancianos. They agree, and then ask where she is planning to go. I begin the transcript after distractions that keep her from launching into the flow of her story subside, and she picks up the thread again after a short pause, beginning the telling in earnest.

(3) Lucía's story

1 *Va`ne, ali– "ja` nox y`un, yu` `o k'usi chakalbot," xkut ti j`abteletike.*
'So listen, so– "it's just that there's something I need to tell you," I said to the ritual elders.'

2 *"K'usi," xi.*
'"What is it," they said.'

3 *"Mu jna` `un, mi xata avokolik ku`un,*
'"I have no way of knowing if you will get into trouble on my account,'

4 *mi xalajik ta `utel,*
'if you will be badly reprimanded,'

5 *es que ta jk'ankutik ti mukile," xkut.*
'because we want the younger sister [to marry my son]," I said.'

The desired girl was a daughter of the neighboring family. The problem was that the girl had an older sister who had not yet married. In Tzotzil communities, there

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is a strong moral ideal that an older sister marry before a younger one. Choosing the younger girl when her more mature sister still has no husband is insulting to the older sister and her family. In addition, being too choosy about a wife is thought improper. Lucía expresses with a couplet (lines 3 and 4) her understanding of the ancianos' desire not to get in trouble. She also prefaces her speech with 'I have something to tell you', a variation of which tends to occur as a preamble to conversations in which something is being requested of a superior by someone with lower status. In each episode of the narrative (the first being her conversation with the ancianos, and the second with the parents), Lucía begins her exchange formally and hesitantly, careful to attend to hearers' negative face: She is aware that what she is about to say may be unwelcome and is apologetic for the imposition. We will see later that in each instance there comes a point when she invokes God by referring to him directly (lines 61 and 70). Immediately prior to this point, there is an abrupt shift in tone, and Lucía suddenly sounds strikingly self-confident and assured rather than humble and imploring, as if even her private decision to bring in God already gives her strength and lends her words decisiveness (lines 54–61, 69). I argue that it is her public alignment of self with God that produces this shift in identity, in which Lucía goes from being a single woman with very few resources to a competent prayer person who can claim a special relationship with God. Following is the ancianos' response to her self-conscious request:

(4) 6 *"Aa," xi. Vueno i, laschi`in sba ta lo`il skotolik xkaltik.*
'"Oh," they said. And so they all talked amongst themselves, we`ll say.'
7 *"K'usi ta jnoptik," xut sbaik.*
'"What do we think," they said to each other.'
8 *"Mi ta la xba jak', mi ta la chijbate te ta vu`lal va` x`elane,*
'So then are we going to go and ask, then are we to go visiting there since that's the way it is,'
9 *ti ja` ta sk'anik ti mukile, ma`uk ta sk'anik li vixile," xi.*
'that they want the younger sister, they don't want the older sister," they said.'
10 *i, stak' tal ti yane: "vweno pe k'usi ta xkutik u`un, pe mi, ati jech xibat ka`tik une,*
'and, someone else answered, "Well what can we do, but if, say we end up going,'
11 *ta spas ka`tik k'usi xijyalbutik tale," xi ti yane, yan este Enrique `Ortes, le` ta jot.*
'maybe they'll say something (bad) to us," the other said, Enrique Ortes, (he lives) up there.'
12 *Bweno li yan xtoke, "pwes timi jta jvokoltike, mi lijlaj ta `utele,*
'Then someone else said, "Well what if we get into trouble, if we get scolded to death,'
13 *pwes yu`un te xnel ku`untik `u bi," xi ti yane.*
'well then surely we'll finish the affair (anyway)," another said.'
14 *`Ora `un, ja` ba stak' tal este `oy Sevastian `Ortoñes. Ja` mismo ja` smuk li Margaritae.*
'Now then, it was Sevastian Ortoñes who went to answer. He's the one who's Margarita's brother.'

Since Sevastian is the brother of the mother of the desired girl (Margarita), which he makes clear to everyone in line 26 by using the kinship term *jvix* 'my older sister' to refer to her, he is obviously motivated to protect his kin and himself from the embarrassment of going to them with an indecorous petition:

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(5) 15 *`Entonse ba stak' tal: "veno ti vu`une," xi, "ta xkal ava` ta jamal," xi.*
'So he went and answered: "Well as for me," he said, "I'll tell you openly," he said.'
16 *"Ati k'usi ta snop ti ko`ontone," xi, "mu`yuk ta jmuk'," xi.*
'"As for what my heart is thinking, I'm not going to hide it," he said.'
17 *"K'usi chaval," x`ut yu`un li xchi`iltak xkaltik.*
'"What are you saying," he was asked by his companions, we'll say.'
18 *"Pe ti vu`une," xi, "k'elavil," xi.*
'"But as for me," he said, "look here," he said.'
19 *"Lajnop xa lek ta ko`onton," xi . "MU JK'AN xibat ta jak'ol," xi.*
'"I've already thought hard about it to myself." he said. "I DON'T WANT to go petitioning" he said.'
20 *"MU JK'AN XIBAT," xi. "Es ke ti li`i, ja` mi yututike," xi.*
'"I DON'T WANT TO GO. It's that in this case, what if they reprimand us," he said.'
21 *"Ja` mi `utvane," xi cha`ne.*
'"It's if they start reprimanding," he said, see.'
22 *"`Entonse, ati mi lik yalbutik tal: 'k'elavil, k'usi xtal at'ujik,*
'"Then, what if they start saying to us: 'Look here, how is it that you've come to choose,'
23 *k'usi xtal a- a- a- at'ujik ti jtzebe,*
'How have you come to. .to . . . to . . . to choose [from among] my daughters?'[6]
24 *Mi ch'iem vakax, mi ch'iem tuluk', mi ch'iem ka`, chitom?'*
'Are they [lit. have they grown up] cows, are they turkeys, are they horses, pigs?!'
25 *Mi xijyututike, te lilaj `u bi." xi ti Sevastiane.*
'If they denounce us, we'll surely come to an end that way," said Sevastian.'
26 *"`entonse, `asta li` xtoke, mi ba yalbeik pastor, mi ba stik' jmultik ta pastor ti, ti jvixe,*
'"Then, even this too, what if they go to tell the pastor, if my, my sister exposes our sin to the pastor,'
27 *ntonse tey lilaj `u bi, lajemutik taj moj ti li`i,*
'then there we'll be finished, we'll be history because of this,'
28 *ja` yu` ti vu`une jamal ta xkal ava`iik mu jk'an xibat ta jak'ol," xi.*
'That's why I'm telling you all upfront, I don't want to go petitioning," he said.'
29 *`Entonse veno ti yantike, te tz'ijajtik.*
'And so then all of the others were just sitting there meekly;'
30 *Te tz'ijajtik ti yantike.*
'The others were sitting there with their heads bowed in silent agreement.'

Notice how Sevastian invokes the voice of the parents, comparing the daughters to farm animals, as a way to criticize Lucía (lines 23–24). This resonates with Hill's observation that "reported speech is a particularly appropriate site for the embedding of evaluation" (1995:118), although here it is even reported IMAGINED speech. Lucía represents Sevastian representing the parents as speaking in couplets, a style that is also "appropriate to righteous denunciation . . . parallel structure in Zinacanteco speech is a frequent feature of scolding and denunciation" (Haviland 1989:30–1). Lucía draws on couplets even for this retelling because couplets are definitive of angry speech. Anger is also conventionally expressed in narrative through reported angry speech: "A skilled narrator imports the evocative power of a speaking style, investing his characters with emotional states and tones by demonstration rather than by description" (Haviland 1996:191–2). The possibility of imminent and biting criticism is made real and made to loom large with Sevastian's invented, projected speech. The anticipated denunciatory speech is not totally effective, however, because the others still contest Sevastian's decision:

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(6) 31 *“veno k’usi ta jpastik `un che`a,” xi ti yantike.*
‘“Well what are we going to do then,” said the others.’

32 *“pes ti vu`une, ja` jech `o li ko`ontone,” x, “mu jk’an xibate, yu` mu jk’an xibat `o,” xi.*
‘“Well me, my heart isn’t going to change,” he said, “I don’t want to go, and that’s final,” he said.’

33 *“Pes mi chabat ti vo`oxuke, pes vo`oxuk xalajik `u bi,*
‘“But if all of you go, then all of you will sure get in trouble,’

34 *te xa lakuch [un bat] ti jmultike, lijlaj `o ta jmoj ne.“*
‘there you’ll bring shame on all of us, we’ll all be done for.“’

35 *“pere veno, k’usi xkutik `u`un ti jvixtik une, k’usi xkutik u`un,*
‘“Okay then, but what should we tell our older sister,[7] what indeed can we tell her,’

36 *yu`un me ta xbatik ya` cha`ne,” xi li yantik chkaltike.*
‘because she does want to go you know,” said the others we’ll say.’

37 *“Pero ti vu`une, yu`n mu`yuk `o; ja` no k’usi ta jamal ta xkal ava`yuk chi`iltak, jamal ta xkal ava`yuke,*
‘“But I say there’s no way; I’ll just tell you all frankly, brothers, clearly I will say it so that you hear,’

38 *ak’o batuk stuk ta jak’ol ti jvixtike,” xi.*
‘let our older sister go alone to petition for the bride,” he said.’

39 *“Muk’ `o xba jchi`intik,” xi.*
‘“We won’t go along with her,” he said.’

40 *“Mi tey laj tal ta `utele, mi tey laj tal ta majele,*
‘“If she gets done in by scolding there, is she gets done in by hitting there,’

41 *`entonse mu jventatikuk mi ja` no la skontrain sba entre jch’unolajeletik no`oxe.*
‘then it’s not our problem if they dispute each other just between believers.’

42 *Mi tey lik yut sbaik, mi tey lik – k’usi albatike,*
‘If they start criticizing each other there, if they start – to have this said amongst them,’

43 *le`e mu jventatik [to tal], muk’ `o tijeltik li vu`untike,” xi ti Sevastiane.*
‘that’s not our business, we’re not involved,” said Sevastian.’

44 *“Aa,” xi ti yantik, “pes veno, ja` no mi jech, xk’ot ta pasele,” xi ti yantike.*
‘“Oh,” said the others, “Well fine, if that’s the way it is going to happen,” said the others.’

45 *“Pe vu`une, ja` jech ta xkale,” xi ti Sevastiane.*
‘“But me, this is what I propose,” said Sevastian.’

46 *“Ak’o batuk stuk ta jak’ol ti jvixtike, ak’o ba sjak’ ya`i ti k’usi x`albate,” xi,*
‘“Let our older sister go alone to petition, let her go and ask to see what she is told,” he said,’

47 *“’Ora mi ya`i ich’unbate, `entonse xu` xtal yik’utik `u bi, chijbat xa `ek `u bi,” xi.*
‘“Now if she hears that she is respected, then she can come take us, we’ll go then too,” he said.’

48 *“Veno, pe na no jech `u bi,” xiik `un. `Ora ba stak’ ti Enrique ti k’e bu la`ay nax `une,*
‘“All right, that sounds good,” they said. Now Enrique went to answer, the one you visited earlier today,’

49 *“Veno jechuk ti mi jech ta jnoptik ti li`i,” xi,*
‘“All right so be it if that’s what we think about this,” he said,’

50 *Pere AHORA k’alal mi ch’unbat stuke, mi tak’bat ta stuke, mi ta kich’tik `ik’ele*
‘“but NOW when she is regarded alone, if she is answered alone, if we receive the summons,’

51 *Pes TIENE QUE chijbat mu jechuk chijlo`lavan,” xi cha`ne, xi `un.*
‘Well we HAVE to go, it can’t be that we are just being false with people,” he said you see, he said indeed.’

52 *“Mo`oj chijbat,” xi.*
‘“No, we will go,” they said.’

53 *`Ora [ba–] jun reja resku`, ikak’ komel `un, lajyuch’ ti j`abteletike.*
‘Now [I brought in] a case of soda, I gave it to them, the ritual elders drank it.’

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Soda is exchanged as a replacement for the alcohol that traditionally seals all serious transactions. Lucía gave them the soda when they agreed to do something for her, but says in a self-pitying tone in response to one of my queries, *pe va`ne, jtuk lital ta jak'ole* 'But you see, I came alone to petition'; i.e., "even though I gave them the soda, I didn't get much out of it." The ancianos refuse Lucía's formal request that they accompany her. Although it is not traditional for someone like Lucía to go alone to petition, here they endorse it because they feel that in this case, their authority is at risk of being undermined through the criticism of other community members or, worse, of senior pastors from outside the community should word get back to them.[8] Sevastian, the one who is related to the bride's family, exercises tremendous power through his rhetoric, and is perhaps singlehandedly responsible for foiling Lucía's plan through his ability to silence many of the others and hold them unified behind his decision. In line 43, paralinguistic features of Lucía's voice reflects some of her anger toward Sevastian when she says *xi ti Sevastiane*, something like 'said that SEVASTIAN'. Enrique, who urges the others to make good their word, is a friend of Lucía's and speaks in her defense. She draws him in close socially by noting that I visited him earlier in the day, thus evoking my sympathy. This draws a sharp contrast between the troublesome Sevastian and 'our friend' Enrique. She in turn does not passively accept the fate meted out to her, and just as Sevastian borrows the neighbors' voices to embed his own evaluation and give his decision power, Lucía's courageous response invokes another "voice" that also gives her power:

(7) 54 *`Entonse, "ti li`cha`e" xkut, "jechuk." xkut.*
'So, "Well as for this," I said, "So be it." I told them.'
55 *"Ti k'usi chapasike, pasik." xkut.*
'"Whatever you're all going to do, do it." I told them.'
56 *"Vu`une, muk' `o chavalik chixi`e, mu`yuk chixi`," xkut.*
'"Me, let there not be any of you saying that I'm afraid, I am not afraid," I told them.'
57 *"Vu`une, xu` mi chibat jtuke, xu`," xkut.*
'"Me, I can perfectly well go alone, I can," I told them.'
58 *"Mi tey lilaj tal ta majele, lajkun," xkut.*
'"If I get done in by a beating there, let me get beaten," I told them.'
59 *"`Ati li`i, jna`oj," xkut.*
'"About this, I already know," I told them.'
60 *"Vu`une `antzun ti chavilikun pero JNA'OJ ti buch'u primero ti jba`yubel ta xbat ku`une,*
'"Me, I'm a woman as you all see but I KNOW who goes first, who goes before me on the path,'
61 *`UNICO DIOS," kut cha`ne.*
'It's ONLY GOD," I told them you see.'
62 *"`An, jech `u`un," xi.*
'"Oh yes, isn't that so," they said.'
63 *"`Entonce ti li` ne, timi muk' `o xba achi`inikun, ta xibat tana, mu`yuk ta jmak k'ak'al," xkut.*
'"Then as for this, if you're not going to accompany me, I'll go this very day, I'm not wasting time," I said.'

By stating that she is willing to risk even 'getting beaten up' (although such an outcome is probably unlikely), Lucía uses what may be standard defiant rheto-

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ric.[9] She tells them that she will do it that same day, without fear, and that she already KNOWS that God will lead and accompany her, even if they won't. Lucía is painfully aware that because she is a woman, she is at a disadvantage, given that it is men who have the sanctioned authority to act in this community. The fact that everyone has an equal relationship with God, however, brings the authority hierarchy into question: Sure, she is a woman, but she is also a believer supported by God, and perhaps this identity is stronger than her gender identity. In fact, I believe it is paradoxically at the very moment when she explicitly states that she is a woman, when she says "I am a woman BUT," that she accomplishes this shift to an agendered identity. She deftly draws everyone's attention to one fact – that she is a woman – only then to prove to them why this fact is no longer important: because God is with her. It is as if she says, "You may doubt me for this reason (which I am aware you are likely to fixate on), but for this next reason (to which I am now going to direct your attention), EVERYONE HAS TO BELIEVE ME." The order of this phrasing, "I am a woman BUT I KNOW who is first," says that being a woman doesn't matter for what comes after. We can imagine that when "God" accompanies someone, it is probably irrelevant whether that person is male or female (as a robust history of female religious sages embedded within deeply male-dominated religions around the globe can attest); it is "God" that captures our attention, rendering the person who is accompanied somehow mystically protected and elevated, above and beyond her simple human identity.

Lucía invokes God (line 61) to give her somewhat unacceptable situation a stamp of moral authority. In using the Spanish word *único* 'only' for added impact, she emphasizes that there is only one true source of authority, and she has it (*primero* in line 60 is also somewhat emphatic by virtue of being Spanish). In this community, God is a transcendent authority to which all other authorities are subordinate. Because God is called into the picture – as a figure who will march right along with Lucía on the path and lead her when she goes to petition – all other considerations seem trivial, spineless, even impotent. Lucía makes it clear to the elders that her own authority, so long as it rests in God, is enough for doing what she wants done. She restores her jeopardized dignity by letting everyone know that no matter what they do or think, they can be sure that God is with her on this one. Notice how this shift in tone from self-effacing woman to confident believer will occur again in the next section of the transcript, as soon as Lucía draws God into the interaction.

Despite Lucía's performance of self-confidence, one wonders what other options are really available to her. She has no husband to go with her, a fact that places her in a doubly disempowered position. She can't possibly go alone to the neighbors and just blurt out that her son wants the younger daughter's hand. Because her right to perform this act of petitioning is in question, she must be extremely careful about how she phrases her request. Her lack of seniority means that she must choose some strategy that will add the required authority to her speech in order to license the act. After addressing the parents with stylized greet-

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ings and finding them free, she tells them she will be back in a minute and goes to bring her son and sister, who was her co-wife before they converted,[10] although Lucía is the one who does the talking. Again there are stylized greetings, and then:

(8) 64 *li`ochkutik koxibalkutik.*
'The three of us went in.'
65 *Va` k'alal lik jk'opan, teke`,*
'And, when I started to address them then, here goes,'
66 *"Li` ta jk'oponot jun jomin, ta jk'oponot junme`,*
'"Here I'm speaking to you, Uncle, I'm speaking to you, Aunt,'
67 *mu jna` mi xyanij tavo`ontone, mi sok tavo`ntone," xkut cha` ne.*
'I don't know whether your hearts will turn contrary, whether your hearts will break," I said, see.'

Here Lucía structures her speech in couplets, a special way of talking associated with "formal" situations and with certain kinds of specialists, like shamans and village leaders, so that it carries an air of authority and seriousness (Haviland 1996); it is also deferent, as the quintessential way to address supernaturals. Like the similar pre-speech she makes to the ancianos, this is a way for Lucía to express regret or reluctance to impose. She does this by admitting that she is impinging (Brown & Levinson 1987:187–8), in effect saying "I know this will upset you," showing that she understands their desire not to be deprived of their daughter (a concern in any conventional marriage arrangement), or to remain with the unmarried older daughter, and hence lose face by going against tradition, although they don't know this yet. Choosing intransitive constructions like 'your hearts will get upset' rather than transitive ones like "I will upset you" or "you will reprove me" is a way to avoid referring to herself as the agent of deleterious activity.[11]

(9) 68 *"K'usi `un?" xi.*
'"What is it?" they said.'
69 *"Pe li`i, mu`yuk to ta xkaltik `un, muk' `o to chijlo`(il)ajkutik*
'"But as for this, we won't yet say it, we won't yet talk about it.'
70 *PRIMERO la` jk'opontik dios," kut.*
'FIRST let's talk to God," I said.'
71 *"Pe k'usi ta xkalbetik ti yos `une," xi.*
'"But what will we tell God?" they said.'
72 *"Pe ti sna`oj xa ti yos ti k'usi ta jk'anbetike," xkut.*
'"But God already knows what we are asking him for," I said.'

The 'we' throughout is inclusive, and implies that those present are of one mind and have a common, agreed-upon purpose in praying. With her use of the first person inclusive suffix,[12] Lucía coaxes her hearers into having the same desires as she does. Perhaps by praying in unison, their thoughts can be brought into unison. Inclusive 'we' as a rhetorical strategy suggests "for our mutual benefit, although what is really meant is 'I'" (Brown & Levinson 1987:203). Lucía subtly plants the seed in the mind of her hearers that what she wants is what they want: There are no cross-purposes here.

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Another strategy discussed by Brown & Levinson "is to phrase the [face-threatening act] as if the agent were other than Speaker" (1987:190). Lucía does this when she says "God already knows what we are asking him for," suggesting that it is God rather than Lucía who has a marriage arrangement in mind (she does the same thing when she tells the ancianos that God will go to petition with her). Claiming to know God's will and to be in alignment with it is a very powerful rhetorical strategy in a community where everyone is striving to live in such a way as to gain God's approval, and prays daily to "do what his heart wants." But it is not powerful enough to get Lucía unquestioning, immediate compliance with her request. The others' resistance to praying here shows that it is a MARKED CHOICE for Lucía to suggest prayer at the beginning of a visit with no explicit reason given. It is not typical for people in this community to visit each other and launch into praying immediately. The husband is portrayed as putting up more resistance, asking again to be told directly, as if struggling to maintain the upper hand in the interaction. It is his wife who finally nudges him into giving in to Lucía's request.

(10) 73 *"`Aa," xi. "Pe k'usi smelol?" xi ti jome.*
'"Oh," they said. "But what's it about?" my uncle said.'
74 *"Veno, `oy `un," xkut. "Pe ja` no mi xyanij avo`onton," xkut.*
'"Well, there really is something, but it's just that your hearts might get upset," I said.'
75 *"`Aa," xi. "Jechuk, la` la jk'opantik ti yose," xi ti yajnile.*
'"Oh," they said, "All right, come on let's talk to God like she says," said his wife.'

She takes pains to convince her audience to pray with her because praying is a group activity in which others present must agree to participate.[13] The switch from ordinary discourse into prayer can happen only by agreement. This obligatory agreement seems closely related to McDermott & Tylbor's notion of "collusion":

> Collusion refers to how members of any social order must constantly help each other to posit a particular state of affairs, even when such a state would be in no way at hand without everyone so proceeding. Participation in social scenes requires that members play into each other's hands, pushing and pulling each other toward a strong sense of what is probable or possible, for a sense of what can be hoped for and/or obscured. (1995:219)

McDermott & Tylbor's explanation provides clues as to why Lucía is so adamant that they must first pray, and why she feels capable of talking about the issue only in a prayer. By asking them to pray with her, Lucía pulls her listeners toward a particular view of the world. As soon as they agree to pray, they help her to posit the affairs she speaks about therein: Seemingly, by agreeing to pray with her they might also be tricked, as it were, into AGREEING with what it is that she says in the prayer. Praying as genre operates under the assumption that the many different praying voices are attuned to one another and unified behind a singular overarching purpose (one striking feature of the use of prayer as an outlet for argument with daughters-in-law). It is this façade of harmony that functions to conceal or

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smooth over potential disagreements between those present. Collusion is a helpful way to look at the power of prayer, because for its use to be effective, everyone present must "constantly help each other" to posit simultaneous prayer as the current state of affairs. While collusion carries with it the idea that participants must INTEND to cooperate to produce certain effects, I think prayer as a set frame is less dependent on the intentions of participants. Robbins writes that Urapmin Protestants understand rituals "to commit those who participate in them to the goals at which they are aimed. This commitment is grounded in participation itself and is not a function of the intentions of participants. One cannot pray for something without committing to wanting it to happen" (2001:906). Thus, when the parents agree to pray, they agree to want what Lucía wants; hence it is little wonder this makes them nervous.

The quotation on achieving collusion alludes to dynamic maneuvering ("pushing and pulling"), which, I want to emphasize, is an important part of Lucía's use of prayer. Lucía is grasping for authority against rather serious odds, and one source of influence that is available to her is language or genre choice. The central part of this text is Lucía's decision to frame her petition for the desired bride in prayer, and this shows that prayer as a genre must carry some significant rhetorical force that warrants this decision. Much as collusion pulls people toward a sense of what is possible, genres embody particular "forms of thinking" (Bakhtin 1981:289); thus, the choice of this genre predisposes her audience to think about and receive what she is saying in a particular way.

(11) 76 *Va`, lajk'opankutik yos `un.*
'So, then we prayed.'
77 *Va`i, k'alal ya`i xa lajk'oponkutik yos `une, komo lajkalbe ti yose,*
'Listen, when we prayed, then they heard it already, because I said to God,'
78 *"Kajval, ja` jech ti li`i, yu`un ja` li` ta xnupin ti kole,*
'"My Lord, this is how it is here, because it's here my child is getting married,'
79 *xchi`uk ti jun xnich'on ti anich'on le` eke," xkut ti kajvaltik xkaltike…*
'with their one child, your child there, too," I said to Our Lord as we say…'[14]
80 *`i va` jech k'alal lajk'oponkutik yos `une.*
'So that's how it was when we prayed.'

The parents are informed about the coming wedding by participating in a conversation that is mostly between Lucía and God, where they hear her tell "God" about the marriage. It is noteworthy that the word for bride-petitioning in Tzotzil is *jak'ol*, literally 'asking', but here Lucía avoids the whole problem of having to ask and her own lack of legitimacy as a person who can ask by NOT asking, and instead TELLING. At first sight, this would seem to display flagrant disregard for the norm of politeness governing this type of interaction. We must remember, however, that she is not really telling the parents, but is purportedly telling God, which makes the speech act more complicated.

Prayer is, of course, addressed to God, and this matter of a transcendent addressee has been previously discussed in the philosophy of language. Bakhtin's notion of a superaddressee, a third party to all dialogue whose understanding is

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unfaltering and just, has often been compared to God. Morson & Emerson (1990:135) note that different groups have different and changing images of a superaddressee, but I think it is beyond doubt that Tzotzil evangelical society's image of the "ideally responsive listener" is in fact God. "The superaddressee embodies a principle of hope" (Morson & Emerson 1990:135), and by making a point of including God, Lucía not only expresses but attempts to manifest concretely her hope that her petition will be successful. She calls God to be a witness in the absence of other official witnesses and lets his presence provide the moral condonement. Lucía's request for prayer is a request for "a change in [the] frame for events" (Goffman 1981:128), and the act of praying shifts participants' "footing." Changing the frame obliges everyone to assume a different stance toward the event and creates "significant shifts in alignment of speaker to hearers" (Goffman 1981:127). Lucía uses God to put herself in a different relationship to her listeners, speaking from a position of religious power and borrowing God's authority when no earthly authority is available to her.

Praying in this Tzotzil society carries a special meaning as a sign in itself. Praying is positively valued – it is a virtuous act of communication – and it is this evaluation of which Lucía takes advantage in her solution to her problem. Hence, choosing a language in this instance is a moral choice (Hill 1995:97): Any words that are (partly) God's must be good and must be true. Meaning is created in the protective shelter of God's presence. We can imagine that calling on God and directing speech to him creates a metaphorical space in which anything said automatically falls under his blessing, BECAUSE it is said in prayer. Prayer is a conduit that passes subjects which it contains into the realm of divine acceptance.[15]

The actual prayer must have been longer, since part of the definition of a good Tzotzil prayer is that it be long (the Lord's prayer, while supposedly instructive, is considered useless as a teaching aid, having "only some seven or eight words in it"). Notice that Lucía has not yet mentioned which daughter is being asked for. This information comes right after they finish praying, and it is addressed to the parents directly, not to God:

(12) 81 *"Veno ja` jech li`i, `oy jlo`ilel ta atojolal," xkut cha`ne.*
'"Well this is how it is, there is something I need to say here before you," I said you see.'

82 *"K'usi `un," xi.*
'"What is it," they said.'

83 *"Pes ja` ta sventa ti le` eke, `oy ti jkereme, i `oy atzebe `ek," xkut.*
'"Well concerning that as well, I have a son, and you have a daughter as well," I said.'

84 *"`Entonce ti jkereme, li` ik'ot li yo`ontone, li` ik'ot ti sate," xkut cha` ne.*
'"Then my son, here is where he set his heart, here is where he set his sights," I said you see.'

85 *"`Aa," xiik. "veno, mu k'usi xu` ta xkal," xi,*
'"Oh," they said. "Well, what can we say," they said,'

86 *"Stalel ti tzebetik," xi "i stalel ti jun kerem ta xnupine," xi.*
"Girls are just like that," they said, "and the boy who will marry is just like that," they said.'

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87 *"Jech," xkut. "Pe ja` no `oy yan ti ka`yeje," xkut.*
'"That's right," I said. "But there is just something else you're hearing from me," I said.'
88 *"K'usi `un," x.*
'"What then," they said.'
89 *"`Es ke ja` ta jk'ankutik ti mukile," xkut. "Ja` ta jk'ankutik ti mukile."*
'"It's that we want the younger sister," I said. "It's the younger sister that we want.' "
90 *"`Aa," xi.*
'"Oh," they said.'
91 *"`Ati li` ne," xkut, "k'elavil," xkut. "`Oy ti vixile, mu`yuk to malijem, ch'abal to,*
'"But here," I said, "listen," I said. "There is the older sister, she hasn't yet taken a husband, not yet,'
92 *pero ti li` ne, mu k'usi xkut, ja` ti jkereme ja` ti bu stak' chi`inel ta xil ti tzebe," xkut.*
'but as for this, what can I do, it's my son who sees which girl he feels will be companionable," I said.'
93 *"`Entonse ja` tey k'ot yo`on jkerem ti li` ta mukile," xkut.*
'"And so it's there that my son's heart landed, here at the younger sister," I said.'

I will end the transcript here and summarize the rest of the story. At this point, Lucía's son goes to bring in a case of Coca-Cola, which Lucía invites everyone to drink. (Coke is exchanged as a Protestant replacement for the alcoholic beverages that seal all serious transactions in non-evangelical communities.) Knowing the symbolic value of accepting this offer – in effect, assent to the engagement – the mother refuses. She wonders aloud how she can be expected to drink the soda alone, saying the ancianos will be angry that people are arranging marriages without them. Lucía tells them not to say that she has come alone, because she has spoken with the ancianos, who have sent her and instructed her in what to say; they did so because they were afraid of being reprimanded for asking for the younger sister. Lucía then brings the ancianos to "prove she is not lying," and they ask the parents to receive the soda and think about whether they are willing to go along with Lucía's request. Sevastian explains why they were not able to come earlier, and as soon as the parents drink the soda, the marriage is arranged.

Although the petition was successful, the arranged union did not escape the stigma of its unconventionality. The bride's mother did not want the usual *conjunto* 'Protestant musical group' to play at the wedding. Perhaps this was out of sympathy for her older daughter, who was enraged by the engagement (although she happily married later). Or perhaps it was a show of humility to the rest of the community, in whose eyes it might not have been appropriate to host a full-blown celebration for a less than fully respectable engagement. In a society where social convention is constraining to the point that most people do not openly express their opinions on things, we may never know how others viewed the marriage. At least, it is apparent that Lucía and her son got what they wanted, largely through Lucía's rhetorical prowess.

The powerful sway held by evangelical discourse means that it can be drawn upon to make one's own intentions more legitimate. This rhetoric is put to work in "the ongoing negotiation of individual and community identity across different activities and contexts" (Maybin 2000:198). But actively directing and manipu-

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lating this discourse requires a certain degree of rhetorical skill; hence, access to God for these purposes may be less equal than it appears at first sight. Including God in her discourse allowed Lucía to maneuver in an unprecedented way: By highlighting the closeness of her relationship with God, she made the ancianos seem small and cowardly while she appeared brave and righteous. By foregrounding her identity as a competent prayer leader, she assumed a social role influential enough to ask for a bride for her son. Thus, this story illustrates the way in which a new discourse about God provides Protestants with a unique tool for fashioning their social lives.

THE STRATEGIC VALUE OF PRAYER

As a discursive tool, prayer can certainly function as a politeness strategy. It is indirect in that "the addressee [appears to be] other than the Hearer" (Brown & Levinson 1987:190): 'you' now refers to God and not any human audience. By making her own son the subject of the sentence 'it's here my child is getting married,' Lucía avoids referring to the parents at all (the only reference to them in the prayer is the third person possessive prefix *x*-, on *xnich'on* 'their child'). Scholars often link indirectness with politeness and even conclude that "the major motivation for being indirect at all is politeness" (Brown & Levinson 1987:139). Prayer as Lucía uses it is an indirect form that Protestantism has made available for social uses. By addressing her speech to God, Lucía avoids having to face her future co-parents alone with a direct request; she does not even have to make eye contact with them. But is Lucía's use of prayer just politeness? Her use of this indirect form indexes her less than powerful position, but that indirectness turns out to be very powerful by having real effects in the world.

In fact, I would argue that Lucía's speech in prayer is PERFORMATIVE: It accomplishes something in that it establishes a contract. A key theoretical notion is that language is action and power rather than an object of contemplation or communication (Bourdieu 1991:36). In speech act theory, a performative utterance is one that is neither true nor false, because by its being uttered, it brings about the condition that it states (Austin 1961). While speaking the story 'it's here my child is getting married,' Lucía simultaneously asks for the girl's hand and creates an engagement, which will be in place unless the parents disagree with it. Even though there is no performative verb in Austin's sense, it is somehow still possible to substitute "My child will hereby be getting married" or "I hereby set up an engagement," and the intention is preserved. (The ability to insert *hereby* before the verb is one diagnostic of performative verbs; Austin 1961:230.)

Searle 1976 has attempted to classify all the fundamental types of illocutionary acts (i.e., speech acts). One of the ways he does so is by discerning whether what he calls the "direction of fit" of the utterance is either "word-to-world" or "world-to-word" (1976:3–4). That is, is the speaker trying to get the propositional content of the words to match the world, or the world to match the words?

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I think it is clear in Lucía's case that she is attempting to get the world to match the words, to create an engagement through the act of stating its existence: 'It's here my child is getting married.' Her speech act is a declarative in that its performance "brings about a fit by the very fact of its successful performance" (1976:14). However, declaratives almost always require an extralinguistic institution (such as the church) in which the speaker occupies a special place (1976:14). Searle allows few exceptions to this principle, but one that he does concede (in a footnote) is God: "Another class of exceptions are supernatural. When God says 'Let there be light' that is a declaration" (1976:15). Presumably God didn't need an institution to lend his speech act the proper authority. This exemption for God allows for some interesting possibilities in Tzotzil Protestant speech acts, in that Lucía apparently substitutes God as the institution that allows her speech act to be felicitous. Declaratives not requiring institutional support are probably common in many other kinds of prayer. Traditional Tzotzil prayer has *joybij talel tanichim bae, joybij talel tanichim sate* 'Your flowery face is turned this way, your flowery countenance is turned this way' (Gossen 1974:198), which directs the deity's beneficent gaze rather than simply describes it, much as an English Christian prayer might say "We are filled with your blessing and your radiance" as a performative.

Bourdieu writes, "Illocutionary acts as described by Austin are acts of institution that cannot be sanctioned unless they have, in some way, the whole social order behind them" (1991:74). The social order in Lucía's case is ambiguous: Is it institutional authority, or social order as defined by ongoing interaction with God? That Lucía's illocutionary act is effective provides evidence that an alignment with God can productively define social order.

> The belief of everyone which pre-exists ritual, is the condition for the effectiveness of ritual. One only preaches to the converted. And the miracle of symbolic efficacy disappears if we see that the magic of words merely releases the 'springs'–the dispositions–which are set up beforehand. (Bourdieu 1991:126)

The "springs" are not released without a hitch – the extralinguistic institution that would warrant the success of her petition is not available to Lucía. One of the rules for a speech act to be successful is that "the convention invoked must exist and be accepted" (Austin 1961:224). There is no convention for creating an engagement without an intermediary, even if God is brought in as a sort of intermediary, and so the parents still insist that the ancianos come (which they do).

It is not just Lucía's prayer that led to the success of the engagement, but what is fascinating is that she CHOSE TO USE PRAYER, successful or not. In her view, it was her inclusion of God through prayer that gave her a fighting chance at petitioning alone. Clearly, she believed she knew the "dispositions" of her audience to be such that invoking God would be a propitious approach. And it was: She was received seriously by the parents, she was not ridiculed or criticized. Perhaps she

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chose prayer because it would not be permissible to question or criticize what someone says in a prayer, a communicative act in which the speaker speaks sincerely from the heart (Keane 2002).

By framing her discourse in language addressed to God, Lucía elevates the speech act to a spiritual level where it acquires a mysterious force, almost like "the divine word, the word of divine right, which, like the *intuitus originarius* which Kant ascribed to God, creates what it states" (Bourdieu 1991:42). Lucía's prayer with her prospective co-parents "borrows" that power to shape the world from God. An evangelical Tzotzil prayer can house a unique kind of performative utterance that has exceptional effects in the world because of the supreme efficacy that resides in God. The overarching ideology from which Lucía's act draws its effectiveness is the communal ideology that PRAYING IS EFFECTIVE, an effectual way to ask for what one wants. But it is not just mentioning God that has rhetorical force; it is the ability to weave him skillfully into the conversation that exerts such subtle influence. Having seen that Lucía can gain status in the community and power in specific interactions through her rhetorical ingenuity, we can imagine that there are many more social situations in which referring or deferring to God could be pivotal.

DOUBLE-VOICING IN CONSTRUCTING AUTHORITY

Hill & Irvine write that "one of the principal ways in which utterances come to be seen as authoritative concerns speakers' ability to create 'double-voiced' utterances (to use Bakhtin's term) that manage to add the moral weight of other voices to their own" (1992:6). When Lucía invokes God's voice to construct a more powerful persona for herself, she is using the technique of "double-voicing": She adds the weight of God's voice to her own, so that her speech acquires convincing authority. There is clearly some way in which a voice invoking God or addressed to him in prayer creates the illusion that God is in fact present; he becomes an addressee or an invisible companion whose spoken presence has the ability to transform circumstances absolutely. The passage in which Lucía invokes God in front of the elders (line 60) points to the subtle ways in which God's posited presence has the potential to restructure social interaction. The unique type of dialogism or emergent meaning in God's presence can turn events upside down, causing an immediate switch in social relationships. Voices shift and are realigned when a transcendent voice is added: One cannot deny the power of God's voice – present in the Bible, interpreted by people, or claimed to be known by people – to shape interaction. Bakhtin imagines a "ray-word" that, on its way to its object, passes through all prior evaluations of that word and gets refracted by them. "The social atmosphere of the word, the atmosphere that surrounds the object, makes the facets of the image sparkle" (Bakhtin 1981:277). If that word is "God," we can imagine that all of the evaluations glinting off of it could be mesmerizing. Lucía's voice becomes nearer to God's voice as it unfolds spectral

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layers on the path to its divine object. The significance of God and praying is woven by "thousands of living dialogic threads" (Bakhtin 1981:276), so that drawing God into an exchange or cleverly placing sensitive information within a prayer in an otherwise emotional or tense social environment has the potential to transfix listeners.

LANGUAGE, GENDER, AND PROTESTANTISM

Sociolinguists have suggested that we cannot assume gender as a stable, unchanging identity but must rather attend to multiple identities (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992), noting that speakers use the resources of their language to express a significant complex of different identities, or different facets of a fluid social identity (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller 1985; Milroy 1987:115). Different identities can even surface at various moments within a single speaker's discourse, and "we need to identify key points in discourse at which different identities seem to be more salient for a speaker" (Meyerhoff 1996:218). Looking at the transcript of Lucía's story, I see a cyclical flux of at least two identities, which we can call "unassuming woman" and "prayer person," and both turn up in instances of reported speech of self; I will also refer to these identities as "tones."[16]

Sociolinguists interested in the multiple identities of speakers theorize that these identities will co-occur with certain linguistic "markers," or socially emblematic forms. Meyerhoff (1996:218) has suggested that linguistic markers that index a particular identity will increase in frequency when that identity is salient. The first identity I find in the text is that of Lucía as a solitary woman, encountered in the beginning of each interaction. This identity co-occurs with negatives and polite phrasing, which is evident in the couplet frames ('I DON'T KNOW if you'll get in trouble//if you will be scolded', lines 3–4; 'I DON'T KNOW if your hearts will go bad//if your hearts will turn contrary', line 67). In particular, the marker of this identity is a negative of the verb 'to know', which conveys a sense of uncertainty on the part of the speaker: *mu jna` mi. . .* 'I don't know if . . .'. It is also characterized in the text by a preamble, which adds more deference – 'I have something to tell you' (line 1) or 'I'm talking to you' (line 66). Overall, this tone (tone 1) is deferent: It is the appropriate way to speak to authority, to humble oneself, to show respect.

The second identity is that of Lucía as a prayer person accompanied by God, and it surfaces when Lucía invokes God as a participant who is leading her in this endeavor. In this persona, Lucía states the way things ARE (God WILL accompany her when she goes to petition, lines 60–61; her child IS getting married to their daughter, line 78). This identity is marked by POSITIVE statements of knowing: *jna`oj* '[About this] I already know'( in line 59 and again in 60, and *sna`oj xa* 'God already knows [what we are asking him for]'() in line 72. Tone 2 is confident and independent; it is this tone that Lucía uses when she wants to act with influence. In both sections of the text, the cycle is repeated, in that Lucía uses tone 1 in

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introducing her topic, and then switches to tone 2 as she moves toward and then suggests the inclusion of God as participant.

One interesting point about these identity shifts is the way they may be functioning as a shield or buffer "as needed protection against communicative assault" (Meyerhoff 1996:220). Lucía is in an extremely vulnerable position, which becomes evident when the ancianos begin to criticize her. It is easy to see her self-righteous response to them, which uses her identity as a believer centered in God's will, as her only available defense. Going alone to petition, Lucía is again in a precarious position, and she is fully aware of the possibility that she will be harshly scolded. We must notice her "ability to shift the focus of an interaction from one identity to another ... because it provides the best psychological protection" (Meyerhoff 1996:220). Lucía is a woman, as she both painfully and proudly announces (line 60), and she is also a woman with no husband, which may make the powerlessness of her gender position even more bitter. The event discussed in this article suggests that conscious self-identification as a believer and individual expertise in talking to God are ways that Tzotzil Protestant women can overcome that position.

Women in traditional Tzotzil societies who are aware of their lack of a public, authoritative voice sometimes comment metapragmatically on this fact, although it does not keep them from speaking their minds, in a tone similar to Lucía's 'I am [only] a woman BUT...' (Haviland 1996:181). Returning, however, to the research that "suggests that evangelicism provides women with a kind of moral autonomy that supports women's increasing independence in the domestic sphere" and points to the potential of conversion to transform gender relations and accord women greater power (Steigenga & Smilde 1999:173), perhaps now we can see ways that evangelicism, when examined at the discourse level, provides a more public space in which women can speak. It is hard to imagine that a lone woman in a pre-conversion environment could ever speak up successfully as a bride-petitioner. But for evangelicals, the role of speaking to God – Lucía's strategy – is agendered. The present study highlights the possibility that women in an evangelical Tzotzil community also enjoy a new kind of "moral autonomy" which may even extend beyond the domestic sphere when necessary. The use of Protestant discourse to validate speakers' schemes and the fleshing out of prayer as a new rhetorical practice both offer new possibilities for seizing power and enacting agency through speech.

Brusco 1995 has previously suggested that the reordering of gender roles through Protestant conversion in Colombia occurs when men give up their masculine (or *machista*) ethos and enter the more feminine ethos of evangelicism (feminine in that it is characterized by moral virtue, asceticism, and domesticity). Although Brusco emphasizes a transformation in men's roles that affects women's roles positively, she does not stress a woman's active participation in this reinterpretation of men and women's roles. Women are not directly empowered nor are their roles transformed, since evangelicism teaches them to be what they

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are already expected to be – moral and virtuous beyond reproach and invested in domestic life. The shift in women's status depends completely on how men shift relative to them: Their roles are changed only indirectly, via their changed men.

The kind of empowerment of women that I am proposing Protestant discourse offers in Vualtik is somewhat different. The shift that I describe is due to the AGENDERED status offered by the social role of a devout believer. In this essay I have described a single woman's active role in crafting a God-focused identity that lends her more legitimacy in the public sphere. I emphasize the transformation of her role independent of men and the household, a transformation that results from her own agency. I want to argue from Lucía's example that gender cannot be presumed to be an irreducible, overarching identity. We must understand gender in perspective as one facet in the complex range of ways in which speakers negotiate their multiple identities in daily life (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992).

CONCLUSIONS

I have examined in detail a case in which an indigenous Mexican woman is able to draw upon the resources provided by her cultural context to create an identity, that of a prayer person, in which gender is unimportant. In her Tzotzil community, the narrative of evangelical Christianity is stressed in many ways in daily life and restructures social interactions in profound and sometimes surprising ways. This society is involved in an ongoing dialogue[17] with God, the most obvious example of which is the countless prayers addressed to him that are spoken in the community each day. The act of praying is more than DIalogic, if we include God's, speaker's, and other speakers' voices. Speaking to God is one preferred means to communicate with other people.

The people of Vualtik have chosen prayer as their language par excellence. Since it is no longer a speech genre primarily reserved for use by specialists, prayer now fulfills important social functions. Lucía's story gives one of the best examples of the powerful social resource that prayer can be when its text is designed to incorporate others. The case of Lucía as a solitary female bride petitioner armed only with her skill in praying illustrates the potential of Protestant discourse to negotiate with an existing structure and to change cultural meaning. Through underscoring her role as co-author with God, Lucía is able to assume a moral stance in which God has already condoned the union even if social structure doesn't. She resists the old structure, but since she is in alignment with the new one – God as the only necessary authority – her action is effective. Even though she subverts norms at one level, at a superordinate level she puts herself in alignment with what Protestants believe most deeply – that praying is the most important thing one can do.

Prayer has come to define self-empowerment, and in prayer, language precipitates powerful action. The case of Tzotzil Protestant prayer has led us to recon-

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sider some classic descriptions of performative utterances. It is not a certain type of verb that is definitive, but the frame in which we find it that makes an utterance performative. To Tzotzil Protestants, words spoken in prayer are possibly the most real and the most important action one can take in the course of a day; thus, they are quite willing to treat them as performative.

I suggest that the practice of praying and a new discourse about God in general offer new possibilities for agency. McNay defines agency as "the ability to manage actively the often discontinuous, overlapping or conflicting relations of power" (2000:16). There is nothing that makes the option of taking up this discourse specific to women. However, because most women have less authority than men, I suggest that discourse tactics may be more important to their exercise of agency. Phonological differences in the speech of men and women have been argued to be due to women's need for symbolic capital (Eckert 1990). Women are cast upon their linguistic resources in a way that men are not whenever they desire to convince others of the adequacy of their authority, status, or power. Nevertheless, Protestantism provides both women and men with a new discursive tool: When speakers claim new identity positions by signaling an alignment with God, they are able to accomplish certain social goals. Boissevain, in his classic treatment of social networks, writes "in every conflict situation there is an asymmetrical relationship between those with more and less power. Those with less power, the opposition, are obliged by the situation to innovate and change things . . . Thus the seeds of change are present in every conflict situation" (1974:223–24). Since it is those with less power who are obliged to "innovate and change things," I believe it is women's use of discursive resources that is likely to expand in new directions – another argument against the hackneyed notion of women's linguistic conventionality.

I have attended to the identities formed and represented in a narrative, which may even have crystallized for Lucía in her telling this story to me. Poststructuralist theory sees identity formation as self-narration, a gathering of events into a meaningful structure, rather than a mapping of social categories onto the 'I' (McNay 2000:81). This situation points up the need to consider what agency is from the agent's point of view. From an outsider's perspective, Lucía's actions may look like individual agency, but one must recognize that it is the collective discourse that makes her actions possible. One must also wonder whether the Tzotzil actor would conceive of her action as individual agency; perhaps she believes that she is merely an agent of God's will, which is the Protestant ideal. As Ahearn stresses, "It is important to ask how people themselves conceive of their own actions and [to what forces] they attribute responsibility for events" (2001:113); that is, researchers must ask what agency means not only for themselves but also for the people they work with. In Lucía's speech, she attributes agency to God, implying something along the lines of "God already wants this to happen, and I am just going along with it." As the researcher, I can also see that she has the agency that she does because of her individual rhetorical skills. This example

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shows just how complex agency can be, and that agency has the potential to unmask the intricacy of language and power in interaction that other approaches may fail to reveal.

McNay argues for a conception of agency that goes beyond simple resistance to include a creative dimension: "Individuals may respond in unanticipated and innovative ways which may hinder, reinforce or catalyse social change" (2000:5). What I hope to have impressed upon the reader is the innovativeness and the creativity of one woman's action – necessitated by power differences and conflict – and its inherent implications for social change. I also want to suggest that a concrete way to observe, measure, and talk about agency and about the changes in gender roles that come with Protestantism might be to focus on the way that different aspects of identity come into play in different contexts to enable people to accomplish things in their day-to-day lives. This is a project to which spoken discourse elegantly opens itself, as we seek a "more dialogical understanding of the temporal aspects of subject formation" (McNay 2000:4).

Can the possibilities of Protestant discourse and prayer as a source of agency for women be widespread? Not many women are as charismatic or independent as Lucía, with her history of sovereignty and her recognized excellence at praying. In addition, Lucía's husbandless status motivates her to establish herself as powerful in ways married women might not be motivated to do. Lucía's struggle with her own position, which she articulates herself in line 60 onward, leads her to use language in novel and dramatic ways. The extent to which prayer and other kinds of Protestant discourse empower other women, and whether they use these in similar ways, is the topic of study currently under way. It remains to be seen whether others will use the rhetorical resources provided by Tzotzil Protestant ideology to do similarly dramatic work in their social lives, but with prayer as one of the main focusing events of this community – what people do when they come together, as well as why they meet – it is likely that they will continue to invent uses for prayer that further interpersonal goals. And we can be sure that social roles for women will not go unchanged as they find new ways to align their voices with the "good new Word." [18]

NOTES

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[1] Hernández Castillo writes that for Mam Jehovah's Witnesses in Chiapas as well, "women have acquired a new role in the community ... [the movement] has broadened the universe of women's

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participation and revalued their intellectual capacity, giving them new responsibilities in the public sphere" (2001:88–9).

[2] The orthography I use for Tzotzil is similar to that of Spanish, with the addition of /x/, which is pronounced [sh], glottalized consonants /C'/, and the glottal stop represented by apostrophe /'/. In place of Spanish [c] or [qu], I use /k/, and where Spanish has [s], [c] or [z], I use /s/ (except in some proper names or borrowed words).

[3] Another consequence of conversion is that there are no longer any female deities, as are represented for example in the traditional ancestral figures, the *totilme`il* (father-mother). Even the Tzotzil term for 'moon', *jch'ulme`tik* 'our holy mother', has been replaced by the Spanish loan *luna*. Rosenbaum 1993 writes that a close relationship with transcendental beings gives women a "claim to power in societies where the cosmic and social orders are bound to each other." What effects might this lack of culturally validated models and sources of feminine spiritual power have on women? Perhaps it motivates them to seek alternative sources of validation. I show how a close relationship to the Protestant God can be emphasized as a way to claim power.

[4] Although Tzotzil does not mark pronominal gender, God in this context is clearly male: Community members either pray to Jesus, or to his father, *Jeova*.

[5] All names have been changed to protect villagers' privacy, except for that of Lucía Méndez López, by her explicit request.

[6] The stuttering here is due to the fact that Lucía is unable to think of a word synonymous with *t'uj* 'choose' that should replace it in the second line in order to make this a true couplet. She finally resorts to simple repetition.

[7] This *j-vix-tik* 'our older sister' is Lucía. The future bride's mother is referred to as *jvix* 'my older sister' by Sevastian earlier in the transcript. *Jvixtik* is a conventionally polite term of reference.

[8] It is interesting that the ancianos don't tell Lucía to forget it and find another bride for her son. They seem capable of supporting the marriage as long as it does not put THEIR reputations in jeopardy, as we will find out.

[9] John Haviland, personal communication

[10] Her sister's present husband is the father of Lucía's children, but presumably he could not come because he is a *diácono* in the church. It is also likely that Lucía did not want him to come.

[11] See Brown & Levinson (1987:194) on passives and agent deletion.

[12] Tzotzil marks both inclusive and exclusive first person plurals grammatically, so that this difference is encoded linguistically and not merely implicated pragmatically.

[13] One also wonders whether it would be possible to REFUSE a request to pray in this community. Thanks to Eugene Hunn for pointing this out to me.

[14] I have excluded my question to Lucía about why she told them her son was getting married when they hadn't yet answered the petition. She said it was because she knew that they would agree.

[15] In Catholicism, the magical power of confession to earn one forgiveness makes use of a similar principle. God blessed the union at the exact moment in which "he" heard about it in prayer.

[16] There is a correspondence between these "tones" and Hill's (1995) "intonational shadows," but while Hill examines intonational contours as sites of possible privileged glimpses into a speaker's interior state, I glean my tones from Lucía's choice of language style and view them as necessarily under her conscious manipulation.

[17] A longstanding theological debate is whether prayer is dialogue or monologue. Goody 1995 argues that it is dialogue because this is how the human mind will prefer to conceive all actions.

[18] "The good, new Word"– *ti lekil ach' k'op* – is a Tzotzil reference to Protestant doctrine.

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