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ANOTHER MIXTECO TONE PUN

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In a previous paper¹ I presented a text in which there were several plays on words. This word play involved tone. Either a complete pun was involved, or, in most of the instances, words were used which were identical except for their tones. These near homonyms in word play were there called *tone puns*.

The present paper presents a further short text, in which an additional tone pun provides the point to the story. The narrators are the same—Narciso and Angel Merencias. The text will first be presented, and then a brief commentary explaining the pun.

TEXT AND LITERAL TRANSLATION

k^weⁿdú¹ ?əən sutù híín éáa ni-kà-sáa biko

[1. story one priest and man made feast]

?oⁿdè a-ná¹án ní-ìo ?əən sutù ?íó tù¹un-de [2. at long-ago was one priest is story-of-him] ná-nì-sáa-de híín éáa ni-kà-sáa biko pask^wá. [3. what-did-he with men made feast easter.]

te-nì-kù-žani kəbè kóo biko-ún. [4. and was-near day to-be feast-that-one.] te-nì-kana sutù-ún šinì éáa ká-kuu mažordomó, [5. and-called priest-that-one head men are master-of-feast,] nì-kà-s-ké-tá¹an-de tù¹unⁿdasa koo biko-ún, [6. they-put-words-together how would-be feast-that,] èi-kuní žakù¹ ?ità híín žukú¹ ñuè k^wi, [7. because-need few flowers and palm branches green,] ?áčí má-sutù-ún híín-de. [8. said the-priest-

that-one to-them.] te-biko-ún ké-há¹?á ?oⁿdé domiⁿgú žatà pask^wá hà-nání dómiⁿgú ramú, [9. and-feast-that-one begins at sunday back-of easter which-called sunday branches,] te-šⁿ-dó¹?ə ?oⁿdè má-dómiⁿgú pask^wá-ún. [10. and-makes-to-end at the-sunday easter-that-one.]

žúan-na te-nì-tá¹ú sutù-ún tiñu nuè-dé, ?áčí híín-de: [11. thereupon ordered priest-that-one word to-them, says to-them:] “van a buskar žukù ñuè k^wi para santo ramo,” ?áčí sutù-ún híín-de. [12. go hunt žukù ñuè k^wi for holy palm, says priest-that-one to-them.]

te-“si señor,” nì-kà-kači-de híín. [13. and yes sir, they-said to (him).]

te-nì-kee-de ká-no¹òn-de be¹e-de. [14. and went-they home house-theirs.] žúan-ná te-əⁿgà kəbè, te-nì-kee-de ká-hà-ⁿdúkú-de žukù ñuè k^wi híín ñerú-de [15. thereupon another day, and-went-they look-they brush ...green (palm) with pals -its] ná-tù¹un nì-ka¹án sutù-ún híín-de. [16. like said priest-that-one to-them.] ko-tú-ní-ká-hukù¹un ?inì-de hà-žukú¹ ñuè k^wi hikán sutù-ún nuè-dé, [17. but-not-understand-in-them that palms asks priest of-them,] èi-nì-kà-hani ?inì-de hà-žúku¹ ñú-k^wi kíⁿgožo-de, [18. because-thought in-them that-mountain-of-fox should-go-they,] te-nì-hà-kožo-de èi žuku-ún [19. and-went-they foot-of mountain-that-one] te-žúan nì-kà-hinì-de nuè ?óən ñù-k^wi. [20. and-then saw-they one fox.] te-nì-kà-hinu té-ží¹-de híín-tó. [21. and-ran very-fast-they after-animal.] te-nì-kà-ni¹in-dé-tè ká-ⁿdiso-de-tè [22. and-caught-they-animal carry-they-animal] ní-na-hà-kožo-de híín-tó nuè sutù-ún. [23. return-they with-animal to priest-that-one.]

te-nì-kà-kači-de híín sutù-ún: [24. and-said-they to priest-that-one:] “señor padre

¹ In IJAL 11.129 (1945) the phonetic symbolism has been explained, and more fully in IJAL 10.115 (1944). For the opposite type of text—one in which the Mixteco Indian makes errors in Spanish—see IJAL 11.219-24 (1945).

ya fwimos nosotros žuku ñú-k^wii," [25. sir father already went we mountain of-the-fox,] ñi-kà-ka[?]àn-de hífn. [26. said-they to (him).]

te-ni-kačì hífn-de, [27. and-said to-them,] "a ké indyo tan nesyo, [28. what indians so foolish,] yo les dihe ke fweran a buskar žukù ñuù k^wí ke son palmas verdes, [29. I you told that go to find žukù ñuù k^wí which are palms green,] i no žuku ñú-k^wii ke me tráen este maldito sorro," [30. and not mountain fox that to-me you-bring this miserable fox,] ?áčí sutù-ún hífn-de ñi-ka[?]àn nuù-dé hà-ní-kà-sá-kátá-de nuù. [31. says priest-that-one to-them said to-them because-mocked-they to (him).]

te-ni-kà-na-ki[?]in-de ?ičí ká-no[?]òn-de behe-de. [32. and-take-they road go-home-they house-theirs.] te-ni-ⁿdò má-sutú-ún kití ?inì hà-ná-tú-ká-ni[?]in-dé žukù ñuù k^wí čì-sa-ñù-k^wii ñi-kà-ni[?]in-dé [33. and-remained the-priest-that-one perturbed that-not-obtained-they palm branches but-just-fox obtained-they] hà-ní-kà-ha[?]àn-de žuku ñú-k^wii hà-ká-hà-ⁿdúkú-de žukù ñuù k^wí núú. [34. when-went-they mountain fox that-see-they palm branches supposed-to-have.]

ni-kuu. [35. complete-is.]

FREE TRANSLATION

The Story of Some Men Who Made a Feast

A long time ago there was a priest—so the story goes—who had some dealings with certain men one Easter time.

A festival was near at hand, and the priest called to him the men who were in charge. They arranged how the festival should be carried on. There would be needed a few flowers and palm branches. It would begin the previous Sunday—called Palm Sunday—and end on Easter Sunday.

So he said to the men, "Go hunt some žukù ñuù k^wí for Palm Sunday."

"Yes sir," they replied, and went home.

The next day they went with their comrades to the mountain to hunt for palm

branches, as they had been requested. However, they had not understood that it was palm branches which were asked for, but thought that they were to go to the mountain where foxes were—so there they went. Soon they saw a fox. They ran and ran after it, catching it; then they carried it back to the priest.

They said to him, "Father, we have gone to the mountain where the foxes were."

But he replied, "Oh what dumb Indians! I told you to go search for some žukù ñuù k^wí, which are green palms—and not žuku ñú-k^wii, for which you have brought me this miserable fox."

So they took the road for home, leaving him behind—disturbed because he had not obtained the palm branches, but had received a fox instead of the palms which they ought to have gotten.

That's all.

COMMENTARY

Foreigner's Mispronunciation of the Pertinent Words (Phrase 12):

(van a buskar) žukù ñuù k^wí (para santo ramo).

Go find some ...for Palm Sunday.

Native's Correct Pronunciation of the Pertinent Words (Phrase 7):

...(čì-kuní žakù ?ità hífn) žukù ñuù k^wí...
...because a few flowers and palm branches are needed...

Native's Misunderstanding of the Tones (Phrases 17-18):

ko-tú-ní-ká-hu-kù[?]un ?inì-de hà-žukù ñuù k^wí... čì-ni-kà-hani ?inì-de hà-žúku ñú-k^wii kí-ⁿgožo-de.

(But they did not understand that it should have been) palm branches, (but they thought that they were supposed to go to) mountain where the fox (was).

The word for fox is ñú-k^wii, with tone low on the proclitic and level tones on the second morpheme. *Mountain* is žuku,² with both

² The change from žuku to žúku is mechanical. Certain words, of which hà- *that* is one, have the power to cause certain tones of words which follow

syllables having level tones. In Mixteco, a frequent phrase type is to have one noun modified by a following noun. Thus, "Mountain fox", i.e., "mountain where the fox is", constitutes a very legitimate structure for them to understand.

The expression for *palms*, or *palm branches*, appears to be a similar type of construction, with an added modifier at the end. This additional modifier appears to be the adjective *k^wi green*. The word *žukù³*

them to change, provided that the following words are also of the requisite type. The lists which can or cannot cause changes are arbitrary ones, but are chosen from morphemes with one of four tone patterns such as the mid-low pattern of the innate full form of *hà-*. The morphemes which may have certain tones changed to others—usually to high—include all words with certain tone patterns, namely, those whose tones are mid mid (as here), or mid low, or low high, or low mid. For the mid mid form of *žuku*, see Phrases 19, 25, 30, 34. For detailed analysis of the tonal changes, see *Tone Languages*; for Mixteco grammar, see IJAL 10.113-38.

³ The innate tonal pattern of *brush* is mid low, as in *žukù*. The change to mid high *žukú* is a mechanical one following *hà-*. See note three. For similar change after *hín*, see Phrase 7. For the mid low form, see Phrases 12, 15, 29, 33, 34.

means *bush*, or *brush*, or *herb*. The meaning of its following modifier is not too certain. The modifier *ñuù* is probably a noun—because of its position in the construction—but the only word with this phonetic structure known to the Mixtecos of San Miguel el Grande⁴ is *ñuù* meaning *town*, which would appear to be unrelated to *palm branches*. Of the meaning of the phrase as a whole, however, there is no doubt; it appears frequently as a label for the small palm which grows wild in the lowlands surrounding this area, and which is imported by the local folks to weave into the hats and mats which are important in turn as some of the main items for export to Mexico as a whole.

The foreigner mispronounced the tone of *k^wi*, giving it a pattern of high to low tones—*k^wi*—instead of high to mid ones. This mistake in the usage of tones paralleled the falling intonation at the end of Spanish phrases, and opened the way for the misunderstanding reported. Instead of gathering palm branches, *žukù ñuù k^wi*, they chased down a fox on the mountain, *žuku ñú-k^wi*.

⁴ Of Oaxaca, Mexico.