

“At ahau” or “lal ahau”? Formal address in colonial Quiché¹

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Formal address in Mesoamerica

For early colonial and modern Mesoamerica numerous examples of politeness strategies and formal speech have been reported. The integration of respectful address into the pronominal system is typical for the Otomanguan languages of Oaxaca. For many languages and dialects in the Mixtecan, Zapotecan, Mazatecan and Popolocan families, the distinction between formal and familiar second person pronouns is documented. Sometimes, in third person reference special forms expressing respect can be found as well. In some varieties of Mixtec even special pronouns for the first person are used in formal situations.

Where such distinctions in the pronominal system are lacking, formality is not necessarily absent in the language. Generally speaking, throughout Mesoamerica formal social situations have highly marked linguistic forms. Etiquette played an important role in Classical Nahuatl. Morphologically, there are special reverential verbal forms, e.g. *momiquili in notà* “my father died” instead of non-reverential *mic* “he died”, and nominal suffixes indicating respect. Moreover, as can be seen in various books of Sahagún’s opus, formal discourse was highly ritualized. Modern Nahuatl dialects have similar systems as well.

In most Mayan languages, there is no morphological device for indicating respectful address. Formal speech is characterized by the frequent use of parallelism (see, e.g., Gossen’s (1985) work on Tzotzil speech genres). A survey on universal politeness strategies carried out by Brown and Levinson (1987) includes many examples from Tzeltal. It reveals the complexity of the politeness system of that language, which heavily relies on the interplay of modal particles and on a preference for indirect address and indirect statements. As Robertson (1987) has demonstrated, however, Mamean languages and neighboring Quiché represent an exception in that they developed a morphological formal/familiar distinction which intruded into the pronominal system.

The grammar of formal address in colonial and modern Quiché

In the modern dialect of Nahualá-Ixtahuacán (Mondloch 1978) the forms for the second person are as follows:²

1. I gratefully acknowledge the help of Gordon Whittaker, who went over what the author presumed to be English.

2. Except for vowel length, which has been omitted, modern Quiché examples are quoted in the practical orthography used in Mondloch (1978).

independent pronominal forms:

<i>at</i>	2nd person sg.
<i>lal</i>	2nd person sg. formal
<i>ix</i>	2nd person pl.
<i>alak</i>	2nd person pl. formal

bound pronominal forms:

<i>at-</i>	2nd person sg. absolutive case ³
<i>a(w)-</i>	2nd person sg. ergative case
<i>la</i>	2nd person sg. formal
<i>ix-</i>	2nd person pl. absolutive case
<i>i(w)-</i>	2nd person pl. ergative case
<i>alak</i>	2nd person pl. formal

Independent forms precede the noun, e.g. *ajc’ay* “seller”: *at ajc’ay* “you are a seller”, *ix ajc’ayib* “you (pl.) are sellers”. Bound forms are prefixed to noun and verb stems. In verbal morphology, pronouns come immediately after the tense-aspect marker and before the verb stem:

absolutive pronoun as subject of intransitive verbs:

<i>c-at-uxlanic</i>	you rest
<i>qu-ix-uxlanic</i>	you (pl.) rest

absolutive pronoun as object of transitive verbs:

<i>c-at-in-tzucuj</i>	I look for you
<i>qu-ix-in-tzucuj</i>	I look for you (pl.)

ergative pronoun as subject of transitive verbs:

<i>qu-in-a-tzucuj</i>	you look for me
<i>qu-in-i-tzucuj</i>	you (pl.) look for me

ergative pronoun as possessor:

<i>aw-ixokil</i>	your wife
<i>iw-ixokil</i>	your (pl.) wives

The grammar of bound formal pronouns differs notably from that of other pronouns. Independent usage is the same as described above: *lal ajc’ay* “you (formal) are a seller”, *alak ajc’ayib* “you (formal pl.) are sellers”. Bound forms are placed after the verb or noun as enclitics. Since case distinction is not present in formal pronouns, transitive verb forms are ambiguous (for details see Mondloch 1981):

<i>c-uxlan la</i>	you (formal) rest
<i>c-uxlan alak</i>	you (formal pl.) rest
<i>qu-in-tzucuj la</i>	I look for you (formal); you (formal) look for me
<i>qu-in-tzucuj alak</i>	I look for you (formal pl.); you (formal pl.) look for me
<i>ixokil la</i>	your (formal) wife
<i>ixokil alak</i>	your (formal pl.) wives

Several Quiché dialects which lack this formal pronominal set make use of the second person plural as formal forms (in the same way as, e.g., French *vous* is used).

3. The terms ‘absolutive’ and ‘ergative’ refer to case categories which have no relevance for the present discussion. For an explanation of these categories see Mondloch (1981) and Dürr (1987).

Usage in colonial Quiché seems to be approximately the same as described for the modern dialects. Examples of formal address can be found in the Título de Totonicapán, the Popol Vuh, the Rabinal Achi and in the letters published by Zimmermann (1956). In the Rabinal Achi there are numerous shifts between formal and regular address, indicating a complex sociocultural background for the rules of address. A treatment of this would be beyond the scope of the present paper. For that reason its usage in drama will not be treated here. The following discussion is restricted, therefore, to two long texts, the Título de Totonicapán and the Popol Vuh.⁴

Formal address in the Título de Totonicapán

Although the Título de Totonicapán has no more than twenty percent of the size of the Popol Vuh, examples of formal address are three times as frequent. Therefore, in this respect, it is convenient to place the Título before the Popol Vuh.

The author (or authors) of the Título directly address their readers three times using *alak* (appearing mostly as *allae* in the Título), e.g., *xchita chigu allae* “Listen, sirs!” (TT 15r). All other examples are from reported speech. In all cases, usage is unidirectional, i.e., in the response the regular second person pronouns are used. The occurrences are as follows:

1. In the mythical part which presents the biblical genesis Adam always uses formal address when speaking to God, e.g., *gamo chi ech la, lal nuchuch, lal nukahau* “Thanks be to you (*la*), my mother and father, sir (*lah*).” (TT 2v).

2. When tempting Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, the Devil addresses her as *lal eva* and later, including Adam, says: *are carah maui cag,æat etamabal allae, loo la* “he does not want your (*alak*) wisdom to be perfected, eat of it (*la*)” (TT 4r). There is no example showing whether Eve responds to her vis-à-vis formally or not.

3. When Moses attempts to reject his commission as prophet and leader he answers God using *lal ahau* (TT 5r). He addresses the Egyptian pharaoh in the same way as *lal ahau paraon* (TT 5v). In both cases, he employs the address for lords (*ahau* meaning “lord”).

4. In the mytho-historical parts paralleling the Popol Vuh, the ancestors of the Quiché lineages generally are addressed formally. The tribes ask the ancestors for fire: *xataba chiya allae zgin kaææ* “please give us some fire, sirs (*alak*)” (TT 9v). Immediately afterwards, the ancestors, in talking to all tribal leaders about separating the tribes, use the reflexive first person plural combined with the formal second person plural address: *xata ba chikahach εib, allae ahauab* “let us part, sirs” (TT 10r).

4. Editions of these colonial documents will be quoted in abbreviated form: Título de Totonicapán, Carmack and Mondloch (1983) as TT followed by leaf number; Popol Vuh, Schultze Jena (1944) as S, Tedlock (1985) as T plus page number. In the case of the Título, the translations are mine, in that of the Popol Vuh, Tedlock's. The transcription of Quiché is in accordance with the manuscript sources, which tend to be inconsistent.

5. When the hostile tribes send three girls to tempt the ancestors of the Quiché, these girls address the ancestors formally (TT 12v–13r):

“caniman allae, allae ahauab, mi xuhpe vg allae” ...
 “Be kind, sirs, we have just come to join you (*alak*)” ...
“vtzbala, yx kamial” ...
 “Very well, you (*ix*), our daughters.” ...
“chiya ta allae retal chiee”
 “Please give us a sign, sirs.”

6. When a war is planned against the Tzutujils, the Quiché warriors say to their lord, Gotuha: *chupatanih chi ech la, lal ahau* “(so that) they will pay tribute to you (*la*), sir”. Gotuha answers: *vtz mi xibano, yx koyeval* “Do (*it*) it well, you (*ix*) my warriors.” (TT 25r).

7. After this region has been successfully conquered, noble ranks are installed: *ri allae εamam εahol* “you (*alak*) are our grandsons and sons” (TT 25v).

8. Each of the allied lords, Gotuha and Ztayul, is formally addressed by two members of the nobility who want to create discord between these lords (TT 25v).

9. The last example of formal address occurs when part of the Quiché are sent away to colonize the country (TT 29r): *allae katz, alæ kachæ, ... chibe yeεuh alæ ronohel huyub taεah* “you (*alak*), our elder and younger siblings, ..., go (*alak*) to threaten the whole country”. The people, upset about this, have to be appeased: *catbec, at vatz nuchæ, mixbisonic ...* “you (*ah*) will go, you (*ah*) my elder and younger sibling, don't (*ix*) be sad ...” Note the contrast between the formality of the first situation and the shift to familiarity in the second.

Formal address in the Popol Vuh

The author of the Popol Vuh frequently uses reported speech, particularly in the mythical and mytho-historical parts. There are many dialogues with direct address, but formal address is rarely to be found:

1. Vucub Caquix returns home after he has been wounded with a blowgun pellet by the twins Hunahpu and Xbalanque. His wife asks him: *naquipa mi xcamou chi la?* (S20) “Who did this to you (*la*)?”⁵

2. Zaquinimac and Zaquinimatiz, pretending to be curers, talk to Vucub Caquix (S22; T93):

“apa quixpe vi, camam?”, *xgha cu ri ahau.*
 “Where do you come from,⁶ our grandfathers?”
 said the lord.

“xa oh tzucubei quib, lal ahau.” *xgha cut.*
 “We're just making our living, your lordship
 (*lal ahau*).” they replied.

“naquipa itzucubal? ma ivalcual, ri ivachbilan?”
 “Why are you working for a living? Aren't those

5. Tedlock's translation differs: “What have you got there?” (T92). He interprets *chila* as “there” whereas I prefer a reading *chi(c)* “already” and *la* “2nd person sg. (formal)” as direct object of the focus antipassive verb. Most translators have not taken into account the syntactic status of the verb, according to which the interrogative *naquipa* must be identified as the subject. The answer to this question confirms my interpretation.

6. I prefer a more literal translation to Tedlock's “Where are you headed?”.

your children traveling with you?"

"ma habi, lal ahau, e camam ri ..."

"No, they're not, your lordship. They're our grandchildren ..."

The discourse continues with several occurrences of the address *lal ahau* until the diagnosis for Vucub Caquix's toothache is given:

"vtzbala, lal ahau: chicop ba cacuxuuc.

xa choc vquixel, chel ri e la."

"Very well, your lordship. It's a worm, gnawing at the bone. It's merely a matter of putting in a replacement and taking the teeth (*e la* "your teeth") out, sir."

3. Hunahpu and Xbalanque, when directly addressing the god Huracan, use *lal ahau* and *lal vgux cah* "sir, Heart of Sky" (S32; T99).

4. The girl Xquic uses *lal* not only to address her father (S48; T115): *ma habi val, lal nucahau* "There is no child, my father, sir", but also her mother-in-law several times (S50–52; T117):

"mi xinvluc, lal chichu; in alib la ..."

"I've come, mother, madam (*lal*). I'm your (*la*) daughter-in-law ..."

"apa catpe vi vloc?"

"Where do you (*at*) come from?"

5. There is but one occurrence of *alac* in the whole Popol Vuh. The Xibalban lord Cuchumaquic "Blood Gatherer" uses the formal *alak* to address his fellow lords after they have told him what to do. Note the discrepancy between the address *ix ahauab* at the beginning and the final, formally consenting *alac ahauab* (S48; T115):

"are ri numeal go chi ral, ix ahauab, xa vhoxbal,"

xgha curi cuchumaquic, ta xoponic cug ahauab.

"This daughter of mine is with child, lords (*ix ahauab*). It's just a bastard," Blood Gatherer said when he joined the lords.

"vtzbala, chacoto vchi ri. ta ma cubijh, chipuz cut, chi naht chibe puzo vi."

"Very well. Get her to open her mouth. If she doesn't tell, then sacrifice her. Go far away and sacrifice her."

"vtzbala, alac ahauab."

"Very well, your lordships (*alac ahauab*)."

In the Popol Vuh another form of formal address can be found that has been mentioned before. In two cases a single person is addressed as second person plural:⁷ 1. Hunahpu and Vucub Hunahpu consistently address their mother (*chuch*) Xmucane as *ix chuch* (S40; T110). 2. Hunahpu and Xbalanque use *ix chuch* when speaking to their mother Xquic and *ix catit* when speaking to their grandmother (*atit*; S56–70; T121–133).

In all other cases, the regular second person pronouns are used. In the mythical sections, Hunahpu and Xbalanque speak to their enemies, the sons of Vucub Caquix and the lords of Xibalba, without using the formal set. At least in one instance, when Hunahpu and Xbalanque are trying to defeat the lords of Xibalba disguised as wander-

7. There is still another example where footmen use *igux* "your (pl.) heart" (S48) when speaking to the girl Xquic, the daughter of their lord. In the same speech they twice use the second person singular, so this example may be a slip of the pen for *agux* "your heart".

ing entertainers (S92; T151), this address is strikingly improper for their adopted status:

xeopon puch cug ahauab. quemocho chic, chiquixulela qui vach ...

And they came to the lords. Feigning great humility, they bowed their heads ...

"apa quixpe vi?" xevghaxic.

"Where do you come from?" they were asked.

"ma ba quetaon, at ahau."

"We've never known, lord (*at ahau*)."

Notably, in contrast to the Título de Totonicapán, the regular set is used when the tribes ask the Quiché for fire (S110; T174): *chicatzonoh ta, ve coc zcaquin iεae?* "... if we asked to remove a little something from your (*ɔ*) fire?". In the story reporting the temptation of the Quiché tribal gods by two girls sent to them by the rival tribes no direct address can be found.

Discussion

Regrettably, the data are not sufficient for a detailed interpretation. Many examples that could fill gaps in the system cannot be found even by taking into account the whole corpus of colonial Quiché documents. We may well know the conventions of written Quiché but those of spoken colonial Quiché are lost forever. The narrated contexts of reported dialogues in the texts mentioned cannot supply a substitute for the settings of true spoken interaction. Moreover, as can be seen from the different usage in the Título de Totonicapán and the Popol Vuh, the data reflect the respective author's idealized concept of usage and not genuine colonial usage. Therefore, the following statements on the usage of formal address in colonial Quiché have to be regarded as tentative.

Generally speaking, formal address corresponds to social hierarchy as manifested in Quiché public and family life. Formal address is unidirectional according to social hierarchy. Male members of the nobility are addressed formally by commoners. The formal set is used by females addressing their parents and parents-in-law. By way of contrast, males address their mothers and grandmothers neither formally nor familiarly, but rather by means of an intermediate category using the second person plural instead of the singular form. Unfortunately, there are no examples of sons addressing their fathers or of other interfamily address. But it seems probable that rules of address rely on gender and age distinctions roughly parallel to Quiché kinship terminology.

The examples hint at a second parameter for the use of formal address. In official situations, as e.g., in public consent, the formal set seems to be used even if the addressee is equal or inferior to the speaker whereas in less formal talk the regular pronouns are used. Speaking to gods, formal address is used in direct communication, but not in prayers. Therefore, the degree of formality of a situation or message, possibly related to a scale from public to private, seems to be relevant, too.

In addition to establishing degrees of formality of protagonists or situations mentioned in stories reflecting "real life" usage, as discussed above, formal address also has im-

portant functions in the plot. Depending on the requirements of the plot, address may be manipulated to indicate the character or the changing status of protagonists. Social inequality becomes evident in the use of address in the encounter of Zaquinimac and Zaquinimatiz with Vucub Caquix. It confirms the arrogance of Vucub Caquix, who pretends to be of lordly rank and to be the sun and the moon. Not only the old curers but also his wife address him formally, whereas he is crudely impolite to elder people and talks of himself in the first person plural (quite similar to the European 'plural of majesty'). Moreover, if one takes into account that the reader knows that Vucub Caquix will be cheated and that the real status of the protagonists is the reverse, the story becomes reminiscent of modern "rabbit and coyote" stories where a tricky underdog deceives the powerful.⁸ Thus, the manner of address corroborates the global theme of the story, which centres on the defeating of the presumptuous. Other examples could also be mentioned. In particular, the frequent shifts of address which can be found in the Rabinal Achi probably reflect an even more complicated dramatization of plot in this play.

It is clear, I hope, from the preceding discussion that even relatively marginal linguistic phenomena such as codes of politeness can offer interesting and significant insights into, by way of example, colonial Quiché texts and the culture reflected in them. It is unfortunate that most translators tend to neglect such fine distinctions.

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Zusammenfassung: Im mesoamerikanischen Kulturraum spielen besondere respektvolle Anredeformen, z.B. gegenüber Autoritätspersonen, eine wichtige Rolle. Der vorliegende Beitrag behandelt die für das koloniale Quiché im Popol Vuh und Título de Totonicapán belegten Anredeformen.

Resumen: En Mesoamérica, la manera de dirigirse a personas mayores o a las autoridades fue – y es hasta ahora – de gran importancia en situaciones de comunicación. El presente artículo versa sobre la manera de hablar respetuosamente en el quiché colonial recurriendo a los ejemplos que se encuentran en el Popol Vuh y en el Título de Totonicapán.

8. This pattern, which has been identified in a Coatzospan Mixtec story by Small (1979), seems to be widely distributed throughout Mesoamerica.