

A CHINANTEC FABLE

Judi Lynn Anderson

Comaltepec Chinantec is one of several related Chinantec languages spoken in the State of Oaxaca, Mexico.¹ This text was first recorded on tape and later transcribed, while I lived in this mountain village. Isaac, a native speaker of this language, shared this story with me in 1972. He was about 25 years old at the time. I selected this text for semantic analysis because it seemed like a simple, straight-forward narrative text. It was only as I studied it further that I saw the overlay of another type of discourse, and I recalled what an anthropologist shared with me after he had spent some time in the village. He said that the men like to sit around the town hall in the evening relating stories which have moral endings. This text is an example of that tradition.

As I began the semantic analysis of the Chinantec text, I realized I had a well-formed narrative discourse, consisting of one scene with three episodes. The evidences for there being one scene are that there is one main participant throughout the text, a normal temporal sequence, and the whole text takes place within a short time span.

Each new episode was indicated by a change in location, a change in the secondary participants, and a change in the primary activity. These characteristics can be seen from Table 1.

¹Comaltepec Chinantec is one of the highland Chinantec languages. It is mutually intelligible with Quiotepec Chinantec (Robbins 1961, 1968). It is spoken by about 1200 people living in Santiago Comaltepec, District of Ixtlán, Oaxaca, and its ranch areas (some of them a considerable distance away). The lowland Chinantec languages are quite different and not mutually intelligible with the highland languages (Egland 1978.12-15).

The phonemes of Comaltepec Chinantec are listed here with orthographical symbols, where different, given in parentheses. Plain consonants: p, t, č(ch), k(c, qu), b, d, dz(ds), g, ʔ('), f, s, h(j), m, n, ñ, ŋ(ng), l, r, w(hu, ũ); preglottalized consonants (orthography) 'm, 'n, 'ñ, 'ng, 'l, 'g; aspirated consonants (orthography) jm, jn, jñ, jng, jl, jg. Vowels: i, e, ə(ea), ũ(u), ʌ(ø), a, o, u, ʔ(ɨ). Vowels may be nasalized: ă(ă). Tones are low (2), mid (3), high (4), and may occur in combination with each other and with or without the ballistic accent (').

**	EPISODE	LOCATION	PARTICIPANTS		PRIMARY ACTIVITY
	*	*	primary	secondary	*
S C	I	big mtn cave	mother fox	her baby	search for food
E N E	II	elsewhere	mother fox	burro	search for baby
O N E	III	far elsewhere	mother fox	wolf	teaching

Table 1. Structure of the fable.

My method of analyzing this text was to rewrite the text charting semantic propositions. I used this rigorous approach to assure that I was accounting for all the information the story teller intended to communicate, both overt and implied. In using this detailed analysis I hoped to discover some semantic properties of Chinantec. I assumed that both what is being said and how it is being said are significant. I stated all of these propositions in active voice and used finite verbs and direct speech. All of the implicit grammatical information of Chinantec is restored. I assumed that I would see the dynamics of the text as I recognized things in a different order or outcome than what I expected. As I got into the semantic analysis of this text, I did see a skewing in the final episode that was significant.

The whole discourse begins with a setting which places the text in time and space, as well as introducing the main participants and circumstances. In addition, each episode is introduced by a change in location and the introduction of the secondary participant unique to that episode. Each episode also includes an occasion and an outcome. The semantic outline for the setting:introduction and each episode:build-up follows. This is followed by the listing of the semantic propositions which it pertains to, and then the interlinear text on which it is based. A more detailed display of the semantic propositions and their composition and relationships is in the appendix.

Setting:introduction 1-7

when: once upon a time
 who: a mother fox and her baby
 what: dry season, nothing to eat

The propositional display of the setting: introduction follows.

A MOTHER FOX WITH HER BABY

1. One mother fox lived.
2. Mother fox had a baby.
3. Mother and baby were together.
4. The season was dry.
5. Not much food existed.
6. Mother Fox and baby had nothing to eat.
7. The mother and baby fox went to a big mountain.

The interlinear text on which these semantic propositions are based follows.

Jaang² gũfi²³ cõo'²⁴ jaang² yũũ² quiãã³ré'²
 one fox and one baby its

cõo² ya'²³ caliséng² jaang²
 one occasion existed one

gũfi²³ cõo'²⁴ jaang² yũũ² quiãã³ré'
 fox with one baby its

jõ mi²⁴ catf² jii² 'e quiũũ²,
 and when reached year which dry

jõ ja² 'e sea² jalé'² 'e nidõ'³ré'
 and not which have PL which will-eat-they

jõbã'¹ cangõlfiŋg⁴né'¹ fi²³
 then went-they to

cõo² mõ'² fe'².
 one mountain big

jõ mi²⁴ caguilfiŋg³né'¹ li²⁴
 and when arrived-they where

lfi²³ cõo² too²
 are one opening

jõ cajŋg'³ niquiã'⁴ 'i yũũ² dõ:
 and said mother-of the baby that

--Lab ninf'⁴
 --here will-sit-you

nijjón'³	jnea²⁴	car²	ti²³	nigñeán'²³n.
will-wait-for-you	me	until	reach	will-return-I
--Lajob	nijmee²⁴e	cajñg'³	'i	
--That's	will-do-I	said	the	
gñfi²³	yá²	dó.		
fox	baby	that		

A Fox and Her Baby

Once upon a time there was a fox and her baby. When it was dry season, and there wasn't anything to eat, then they went to a big mountain. And when they arrived at where there was a cave, the mother told her baby, "Sit here and wait for me until I return." "That's what I'll do," the baby fox said.

Episode I

intro:	8-9	They went to a cave.
occasion:	10-19	Mother fox leaves the baby.
outcome:	20-22	The baby disappears.

The propositions of Episode I are:

8. A cave existed.
9. The mother and baby fox arrived at the cave.
10. The mother fox commanded the baby fox (11-13).
11. You, Baby Fox, sit down here.
12. You, Baby Fox, wait for mother fox.
13. I, Mother Fox, will return here.
14. Baby Fox responded to mother fox (15-16).
15. I, Baby Fox, will sit here.
16. I, Baby Fox will wait for you, Mother Fox, here.
17. The Mother Fox left the cave.
18. The Mother Fox went to look for food.
19. The Baby Fox will eat that food.
20. In the afternoon Mother Fox arrived back to the cave.
21. Mother Fox had left her baby at the cave.
22. Baby Fox no longer was at the cave.
23. Mother Fox began walking places.
24. Mother Fox began looking for that baby of hers.

The interlinear text for this portion is as follows:

j _o	ngóbb³	'i	sé⁴ré'	dó,
and	went	the	its-mother	that

ngo'né'ʔʔré' jalé'ʔ 'e nidʔ'ʔ
 went-to-look-for-it PL which will-eat

 'i yuuʔ dɔ.
 the baby that

 Jɔ ca'lɔobʔ miʔʔ caguiéng'ʔné'
 and afternoon when arrived-back-she

 fiʔʔ liʔʔ caseǎngʔʔné' 'i jɔoʔʔré' dɔ,
 to where she-left-him the offspring-her that

 dsá' joʔ 'iiʔ seengʔ miʔʔ caguiéng'ʔné'.
 but no-longer whoever exist when arrived-she

 Jobá' canʔongʔné' ngiʔʔré'
 then began-she walk-she

 'nɔng'ʔʔné' 'i yuuʔ quiǎaʔré' dɔ.
 looks-for-she the baby her that

Then its mother went, searching for something for that baby to eat. In the afternoon, when she returned to where she had left that child of hers, he was no longer there. Therefore she began walking looking for that baby of hers.

Episode II

intro:	24-26	Mother fox goes elsewhere. She meets a burro.
occasion:	27-38	Mother fox dialogues with the burro.
outcome:	39-40	Mother fox doesn't find baby fox. Mother fox keeps looking.

The propositions for Episode II are:

25. Mother Fox met a burro.
26. Mother Fox asked the burro (27).
27. Have you, Burro, seen my Baby Fox?
28. That burro answered the Mother Fox (29).
29. How does your offspring appear?
30. The Mother Fox answered the burro with (31-36).
31. Baby Fox has coffee-colored feet.
32. Baby Fox has soft feet.
33. Baby Fox has ears.
34. Baby Fox's ears are delicate.
35. Baby Fox has fur.
36. Baby fox's fur is curly.
37. The burro responded to Mother Fox (38).
38. I, Burro, haven't yet seen Baby Fox.
39. Burro and Mother Fox separated from each other.

The interlinear text on which this is based follows:

J _o	mi ²⁴	caj _i ng' ²² ne'	jaang ²	bú' ⁴ ,
and	when	met-she	a	burro
j _o	cajmingf' ²² re':	Já ⁴		
COMMA	she-asked-him	¿not?		
mi ²²	caffin' ²²	yuu ²	quie ²² e?	
yet	saw-you	baby	my	
J _o	cañfi ²	'i	bú' ⁴	dó:
and	answered	the	burro	that
--¿Jial ²⁴	lfing ²²	j _o q' ²²		
-- how	to-be	offspring-your		
J _o	cañfi ² t _i	'i	g _o fi ²²	dó:
and	answered-again	the	fox	that
--Qui _e ²² re'	tii ²	cafee ²⁴	'e	'ua ²⁴ ,
--has-he	feet	coffee	which	soft
logua ²⁴ re'	'e	tii ²	j _o	jñá ⁴ re'
ears-his	which	delicate	and	fur-his
'e	si' ²² .			
which	curly			
J _o	caj _i ng' ²	'i	bú' ⁴	dó:
and	said	the	burro	that
--Ja ²	mi ²²	camán ²² nré'.		
--not	yet	saw-I-him		
J _o	casojm ² bré'	j _o ng.		
and	went-separate-ways-they	CLO		

When she met a burro, she asked him, "Haven't you seen my baby?" And that burro answered, "What is your offspring like?" And the fox answered, "He has coffee colored feet which are very soft, and fine, delicate ears, and curly hair." And the burro said, "I haven't seen him." So they went their separate ways.

Episode III

intro:	41-57	Mother fox went far. Mother fox meets a wolf.
occasion:	58-64	Wolf's charge.
outcome:	65-74	Mother's response.

The propositions for Episode III are as follows:

40. The Mother Fox went far.
41. The Mother Fox met a wolf.
42. The Mother Fox asked the wolf (43-44).
43. Wolf, you are my brother.
44. Have you, Wolf, seen my baby?
45. The wolf answered the fox (46).
46. Mother Fox, how does your baby appear?
47. The Mother Fox responded to the wolf (48-54).
48. Baby Fox has coffee-colored feet.
49. Baby Fox has soft feet.
50. Baby Fox has ears.
51. Baby Fox's ears are delicate.
52. Baby Fox's ears are perfect.
53. Baby Fox has fur.
54. Baby fox's fur is curly.
55. The wolf answered the Mother Fox (56-63).
56. Mother Fox, I, Wolf, haven't seen Baby Fox.
57. I, Wolf, have seen a baby fox.
58. Baby Fox appears different.
59. Baby Fox is ugly.
60. Baby Fox is very emaciated.
61. Baby Fox barely still stands.
62. Baby Fox is about to fall over.
63. Baby Fox hungers.
64. The Mother Fox answers the wolf (65-66).
65. Wolf, he, that Baby Fox, is my offspring.
66. Where did you, Wolf, see Baby Fox?
67. That wolf responded to the Mother Fox (68).
68. Why did you, Mother Fox, say (69).
69. Mother Fox's baby is pretty.
70. The Mother Fox responded to the wolf (71-73).
71. Don't you, Wolf, know (72-73)
72. Not even one person says to someone (73)
73. My offspring is ugly.

The interlinear text is as follows:

Jo	hufib ³	nf	ng6o ²³	'i
and	far	already	went	the
gũfi ²³	d6	mi ²⁴	cajng' ²³ né'	
fox	that	when	met-she	
jaang ²	'ie'dsinũ ⁴ .			
a	wolf			

J_Q cajmingf'ʔré': -- Ró'ʔu,
 and asked-she-him -- relative-my

¿Jáʔ miʔʔ cafin'ʔʔ yuuʔ quiéʔe?
 ¿not? yet saw-you baby my

J_Q caffiʔ 'i jó'ʔ dɔ:
 and answered the animal that

--¿Jialʔʔ lfingʔʔ yuuʔ qufi'ʔʔ?
 --how to-be baby your

J_Q cajng'ʔ 'i gúfiʔʔ dɔ:
 and said the fox that

--Quiéʔʔré' tiilʔ cafeeʔʔ 'e 'uaʔʔ,
 --has-he feet coffee which soft

loguaʔʔré' 'e tiiʔ 'e rɔʔʔ,
 ears-his which delicate which smooth

j_Q jfáʔʔré' 'e si'ʔʔ.
 and fur-his which curly

J_Q caffiʔ 'i 'ie'dsinúʔ dɔ:
 and answered the wolf that

--Jaʔ miʔʔ camánʔnré'.
 --not yet saw-I-him

'E jiéʔb'ʔ lfingʔʔ 'i nf camánʔn.
 which different to-be the already saw-I

Jaangʔ 'i gabʔ 'iʔ,
 a the ugly he

joʔ liingʔʔ jfing'ʔʔné'.
 no-longer to-be skinny-he-is

J_Q caffiʔ 'i gúfiʔʔ dɔ:
 and answered the fox that

--'Ibʔ jɔʔʔ.
 --he-is offspring-my

¿Jieʔʔ fiʔʔ liʔʔ cafin'ʔʔré'ʔ?
 ¿where? at where saw-you-him

J_Q cajng'ʔ 'i 'ie'dsinúʔ
 and said the wolf

d6: -- ¿JQ jialit'## café'## 'e 'ieng'##né'?
 that -- and ¿why? said-you that pretty-he-is

JQ caffi#tq 'i gúfi## d6:
 and answered-again the fox that

--¿Sú ja# ff'4 'e jfi'##
 -- if not know-you that only

jaang# dsea# ja# fé'r# 'e ga#
 one person not speak-they that ugly

jnéeng# j6qr##?
 appear offspring-their

That fox went a long ways and then she met up with a wolf. She asked him, "Brother, have you not seen my baby?" And that animal answered, "What does your baby look like?" And the fox said, "He has coffee colored feet which are very soft, ears which are delicate and mooth, and his coat is curly." And the wolf said, "I haven't seen him. I have seen someone who looked quite a bit different, one who is real ugly, who is really skinny." The fox answered, "That's my offspring. Where did you see him?" Then the wolf asked, "How come you said that he was beautiful?" The fox said, "Don't you know that nobody ever says their child is ugly?"

On one level the analysis of this text seemed tidy and well formed. However the point of the whole discourse was not just for narrative as entertainment but narrative with the purpose of teaching...an expository narrative. It seems like the whole purpose of this text is the thesis 'to a mother, all her children are beautiful or special'. To have only analyzed it as a narrative seemed to deny the deeper level of teaching which seemed the purpose of the whole story. However as I looked at it as an expository piece, the different parts didn't line up exactly like the episodes. There is an introduction with various buildups, but the thesis of the whole discourse is embedded in the final episode.

NARRATIVE	EXPOSITORY
intro 1-7	intro 1-7
episode I	buildup I
episode II	buildup II
episode III-----	buildup III

|-----thesis

In the third episode, the narrative is well formed as a narrative discourse, but the thesis of the expository discourse overlaying the narrative is embedded in this final episode, not as a coda, but as an integral part. There is no change in time, location, or participants from the rest of this third episode, nor is the thesis overt in either of the other two episodes.

Starting in the introduction and continuing throughout the text, the thesis is developed by vocabulary and example. There is a richness in vocabulary in the various terms used for mother and child. In the third episode, the wolf is addressed as 'brother' therefore allowing a 'family member' to bring the charge to the mother fox for calling her baby beautiful, and the mother fox in return to rebuke the wolf with the rhetorical question, which states the thesis of the expository text: Don't you know that to a mother none of her children are ugly?

The thesis of mothers and their children is also developed in the other episodes through the various activities of the mother fox. She is characterized as responsible to get food for her child, to find a safe place to leave him, to teach him by instructing him what to not do, to be concerned when he disappears, to actively go looking for him when he disappears. She fulfills all of these responsibilities expected of any mother.

In conclusion then, we have looked at this text whose basic purpose is to teach and we have seen that this is done by using narrative discourse. Jesus Christ used a similar method often when he taught using parables. The difference between this text and parables, however, is that the parables were all possible events, whereas in this discourse the animals take on human characteristics. This discourse is a fable, a short story with animals as characters, conveying a moral.

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