Music and Meaning in Three Zapotec Songs*

Kathryn Goldberg

Bryn Mawr College

Senior thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
of Bachelor of Arts in Music at Haverford College

April 2018

*I would like to thank my music advisor, Professor Richard Freedman, for his dedication to my project throughout its development. I would also like to thank my linguistics advisor, Professor Brook Danielle Lillehaugen, for her unyielding mentorship and guidance. I would like to thank my consultant, Gario Ángeles for his time and for sharing his music with me, as well as Moisés García Guzmán, Loida Contreras Hernández, and Dr. Felipe H. Lopez for their support and assistance with the transcription and translation of my interview with Gario Ángeles.
# Contents

**Abstract** 4

**List of Figures** 5

**List of Musical Examples** 5

**Introduction** 6

**First Hearings** 7

**Words, Sounds, and Music: How Sound is Reflected in Music** 11
- Teotitlán del Valle Zapotec 11
- Tone and Music 12
- Phonation and Music 14
- Rhythmic Stress and Music 15

**Words, Sounds, and Music: Meaning in the Songs of Gario Ángeles** 17
- How I Read and Hear a Song 17
- “Rabante Luy” 21
- “Luy Naou” 26
- “Vainchieya te Lag” 30

**Zapotec Music: Ángeles’s Place in the World of Music** 34
- Connecting Ángeles to Others 35
- Music as Language Activism 40

**Conclusion** 43

**Appendix** 45

**A Music Transcriptions** 45
- Transcription 1 Gario Ángeles, “Rabante Luy,” transcription by Kathryn Goldberg 46
- Transcription 2 Gario Ángeles, “Luy Naou,” transcription by Kathryn Goldberg 49
- Transcription 3 Gario Ángeles, “Vainchieya te Lag,” transcription by Kathryn Goldberg 52

**B Lyrics and Translation, with timings** 54
- Lyrics and Translations 1 Gario Ángeles, “Rabante Luy,” translation by Kathryn Goldberg 54
- Lyrics and Translations 2 Gario Ángeles, “Luy Naou,” translation by Kathryn Goldberg 56
- Lyrics and Translations 3 Gario Ángeles, “Vainchieya te Lag” translation by Kathryn Goldberg 58
C Sound Recordings

   Sound Recording 1 Gario Ángeles, “Rabante Luy,” m4a file. Copyright Gario Ángeles.
   Sound Recording 2 Gario Ángeles, “Luy Naou,” m4a file. Copyright Gario Ángeles.
   Sound Recording 3 Gario Ángeles, “Vainchieya te Lag,” m4a file. Copyright Gario Ángeles.

D Interview Transcripts

   Interview Transcript 1 Gario Ángeles, interview in Spanish by Kathryn Goldberg, Teotitlán del Valle, June 15, 2017.
   Interview Transcript 2 Gario Ángeles, English translation of interview by Kathryn Goldberg, Teotitlán del Valle, June 15, 2017.

Bibliography
Abstract

This study explores different types of meaning in three songs by Gario Ángeles in the popular music genre in Teotitlán del Valle Zapotec, an endangered indigenous language spoken in Oaxaca, Mexico. I examine the spoken language’s interaction with melodic and rhythmic patterns in Ángeles’s songs, with a particular focus on how tone is manifested in the vocal melody. I find that the needs of the spoken language are not prioritized, and music and language are equally important, working together to coexist on parallel tracks. I explore the specifics of the songs: how they are organized, how the words and music interact with each other, and how these relationships shape the listener’s understanding of the songs as a whole. Finally, I step back to consider the broader cultural meanings that circulate through these songs. I examine the ways in which Gario Ángeles uses his music as a form of language activism, to valorize the Zapotec language by using universally recognized harmonies, structures, and themes to bridge the gap between local and universal, and with it between tradition and modernity.
List of Figures

**Figure 1** Map of Central Oaxaca. Hiroto Uchihara and Ambrocio Gutierrez, “El sistematonal del zapoteco de Teotitlán del Valle: ¿por qué un sistema de dos niveles presenta tantos desafíos?” (Presentation at the Second Workshop on the Sound Systems of Mexico and Central America, Mexico City, Mexico, 2016): 5

**Figure 2** Church in Teotitlán del Valle, photo taken by Kathryn Goldberg, Summer 2017

**Figure 3** Gario Ángeles and Kathryn Goldberg, Oaxaca City, photo taken by Jaime Metzger, October 2017

List of Musical Examples

**Example 1** Gario Ángeles, “Rabante Luy” Pre-Chorus with Isolated Items, mm. 11-15

**Example 2** Gario Ángeles, “Rabante Luy” Verse 1 with Isolated Items, mm. 1-3

**Example 3** Gario Ángeles, “Vainchieya te Lag” Chorus 1 with Isolated Items, mm. 13-16

**Example 4** Gario Ángeles, “Rabante Luy” Verse 1, mm. 1-10

**Example 5** Gario Ángeles, “Rabante Luy” Pre-Chorus 1, mm. 11-15

**Example 6** Gario Ángeles, “Rabante Luy” Chorus 1, mm. 13-19

**Example 7** Gario Ángeles, “Luy Naou” Verse 1, mm. 1-10

**Example 8** Gario Ángeles, “Luy Naou” Chorus 1, mm. 18-29

**Example 9** Gario Ángeles, “Vainchieya te Lag” Verse 1, mm. 1-12

**Example 10** Gario Ángeles, “Vainchieya te Lag” Chorus 1, mm. 9-22
Introduction

“I am Zapotec. And it’s my first language. And automatically, although I didn’t necessarily want to, nature… and I feel good because it’s part of me.”¹ Gario Ángeles explained to me his reasons for writing songs and singing in his variety of Zapotec, a family of endangered languages indigenous to Oaxaca, Mexico. I had been curious about what prompted his decision to sing in Zapotec; he criticized my use of the word “decide” and, with it, my presumption that it was a conscious choice on his part. In the above quotation, he expresses in earnest the importance of Zapotec being his first language, that the words and music just came to him without a decision to write the music. According to Ángeles, the music simply came out of him and he felt good about it, because it was part of himself. Fascinated by these claims, I was interested to know more about how these particular words and melodies came together, and what they meant for Ángeles and for others.

Three of Ángeles’s songs in Zapotec, along with their meanings, are the focus of this study. I start by explaining my personal relationship with this project, and how I became interested in Zapotec and in music in Zapotec. I then delve into the deepest level of my study of meaning in Ángeles’s music. At the most fundamental level, I ask about the sounds of the language and how they are manifested in vocal music. This is an especially interesting question for a tone language, in which the pitch of the spoken language is essential to meaning. Indeed, my Senior Thesis in Linguistics, “Lexical Tone and Melodic Pitch in the Music of Teotitlán del Valle Zapotec,” explores the relationship between the spoken language and its interaction with

¹ Gario Ángeles, interview by Kathryn Goldberg, Teotitlán del Valle, June 15, 2017, paragraph 5. For a transcript of portions of this interview, along with an English translation (with help from Dr. Felipe H. Lopez), see Appendix D. All subsequent statements attributed to Ángeles in this thesis come from this interview, and will be cited by paragraph number.
melodic and rhythmic patterns in Ángeles’s songs.\(^2\) I summarize the results of that work here, which serve as a point of departure for the consideration of the words as poetry, and of the expressive and formal dimensions of their connection with Ángeles’s settings of them. I deal with the specifics of the songs—how they are organized, how the words and music interact with each other, and how these relationships shape the listener’s understanding of the songs as a whole, no less than the individual words they convey. Finally, I step back to consider the broader cultural meanings that circulate through these songs. I ask what meaning the songs as a whole have in the context of the musical world. What does it mean that Gario Ángeles is one of the only Zapotec people who write songs in their native language? That he uses a western popular idiom when it comes to genre of music? How does this decidedly non-indigenous musical vocabulary affect the reception of the text, though we have no evidence of a pre-colonial Zapotec music? What role, furthermore, does Ángeles’s music play in the valorization of Zapotec as an indigenous endangered language? These questions and more will be explored in the final section of this study. Before tackling these larger issues, however, I turn to my first encounters with Zapotec and Ángeles’s music.

**First Hearings**

My exposure to Zapotec languages, and Teotitlán del Valle Zapotec in particular, was first and foremost as a linguist. I traveled to Oaxaca, Mexico to do fieldwork on Valley Zapotec languages, and I went into the project knowing that I was interested in the relationship between language and music, which were my two primary areas of study in my undergraduate career. I

was particularly interested in knowing about the music in this group of indigenous communities, so before I departed, I did as much research as I could to prepare. I searched online for examples of Zapotec music, and, though the varied reliability and clarity of websites such as YouTube were limiting to my search, I encountered a good deal of music in Zapotec languages. However, from what I could gather, most of the Zapotec music I found originated in the Isthmus, a region almost three hundred kilometers southeast of the Tlacolula Valley, the area of focus of my project (see Figure 1 with Teotitlán del Valle circled).

**Figure 1** Map of Central Oaxaca. Hiroto Uchihara and Ambrocio Gutierrez, “El sistema tonal del zapoteco de Teotitlán del Valle: ¿por qué un sistema de dos niveles presenta tantos desafíos?” (Presentation at the Second Workshop on the Sound Systems of Mexico and Central America, Mexico City, Mexico, 2016): 5
I also came across Oaxacan artists known for their songs in indigenous languages of the region, such as Susana Harp and Lila Downs. However, as people who are not native speakers of Zapotec, their work, while important for the valorization of indigenous languages, was not useful for my particular project, which examined questions that only a native speaker’s instincts in singing could shed light upon. Before I arrived in Oaxaca, I had heard two of Gario Ángeles’s songs on YouTube: “Rabante Luy” and “Luy Naou.” It was not until I arrived, however, that I made personal connections with people who knew his family. I was put in touch with him and traveled to his pueblo, Teotitlán del Valle, to speak with him (See Figure 2). According to Gario’s older brother Edison, Gario would be too shy and quiet to want to talk with me. However, once I sat down with Gario and asked him questions about his music in Zapotec, that could not have been further than the truth (see Figure 3). In order to fully digest what Ángeles told me about his personal involvement in the songs, however, it is essential as well to consider the background and character of Zapotec itself.

---

5 “Gario Angeles (audio en vivo) Rabante Luy, Luy Naou,” live video of two Zapotec songs by Gario Ángeles, February 6, 2017, video, 5:13, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j9f-1A_0mEQ.
Figure 2 Church in Teotitlán del Valle, photo taken by Kathryn Goldberg, Summer 2017

Figure 3 Gario Ángeles and Kathryn Goldberg, Oaxaca City, photo taken by Jaime Metzger, October 2017
Words, Sounds, and Music: How Sound is Reflected in Music

*Teotitlán del Valle Zapotec*

Zapotec is a family of indigenous languages in Oaxaca, Mexico, part of the larger Otomanguean family, and Teotitlán del Valle Zapotec is just one of many varieties within the Zapotec language family.\(^6\) Refer to Figure 3 for a map of Central Oaxaca, including Teotitlán del Valle.\(^7\) This language, along with other Otomanguean languages, is a tone language, which means that meaning depends on pitch of the spoken syllable. This in itself raises several questions. How do music and language interact when pitch is essential to both? Which, if either, prevails when lexical tone and melodic pitch overlap? In my earlier study I found a highly variable relationship between melody and tone, in that it is not consistent in a way that would suggest that the lexical tones determine the contours of the melody. The musical and linguistic aspects of the language function in parallel; both remain comprehensible. This theme will be relevant later in that other seemingly conflicting elements of this music work together well.

Other scholars have studied the relationship between tone and tune, but no one has asked this question of a Zapotec language. Some find that genre has an impact on the prioritization (or lack thereof) of lexical tone when words are set to music.\(^8\) Linguist Murray Schellenberg, whose specialty is in the intersection of music and language in tone languages such as Mandarin and

---


\(^7\) Hiroto Uchihara and Ambrocio Gutierrez, “El sistema tonal del zapoteco de Teotitlán del Valle: ¿por qué un sistema de dos niveles presenta tantos desafíos?” (Presentation/Lecture at El Segundo Taller Sobre los Sistemas de Sonido de México y Centroamérica, Mexico City, Mexico, 2016): 5.

Cantonese, notes that “as the [song’s] function becomes more focused on the music… the primacy of the language seems to decrease and that of music takes precedence.” In other words, more “speech-like” types of music may tend to preserve the lexical tone, while less “speech-like” genres may not. There is only one other recent study of this nature focused on an Otomanguean language. A. Raymond Elliott examines the relationship between melodic pitch and lexical tone in children’s songs in Chicahuaxtla Triqui. He finds, in this genre, that “lexical tone frequently takes a second place to melodic tune.” Presumably the meaning of the words would then be somewhat obscured without context. I have demonstrated that this is also the case in Teotitlán del Valle Zapotec. However, I look at it in a different way, whereby neither music nor language is prioritized; rather, both coexist successfully. This section will also touch briefly on other elements of the language, outside of tone, that have the opportunity to interact with music.

_Tone and Music_

Zapotec languages are tone languages. This means that there are words that, except for their tone, would be identical, but have entirely different meanings. For example, in Teotitlán del Valle Zapotec, the basic word za can mean two different things, depending on whether the pitch of the

---

11 Ibid., 23.
speaker’s voice is low and level, or low and falling; za (low level)\textsuperscript{13} means “cloud,” while za (low falling)\textsuperscript{14} means “grease.”\textsuperscript{15}

I set out to determine how tone is manifest in a vocal melody when Teotitlán del Valle Zapotec is sung. One basic problem of this work was deciding what constituted, for example, a “falling” or “rising tone” with respect to a musical melody. Would it be determined by the notes associated with each syllable or word? And if there was only one note per syllable, how would the melodic context of adjacent words and notes work as a proxy for the tone of the syllable or word itself? While these questions cannot all be answered fully in this study, they serve as a starting point for further research in this field. Example 1 represents a segment of my musical transcription of the first pre-chorus in one of the songs, “Rabante Luy.”\textsuperscript{16}

Example 1 Gario Ángeles, “Rabante Luy” Pre-Chorus with Isolated Items, mm. 11-15

\textsuperscript{13} Brook Danielle Lillehaugen and Janet Chávez Santiago et al. Teotitlán del Valle Zapotec Talking Dictionary (website), version 1.1, Living Tongues Institute for Endangered Languages, 2016, \url{http://talkingdictionary.swarthmore.edu/teotitlan/?entry=585}.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., \url{http://talkingdictionary.swarthmore.edu/teotitlan/?entry=416}.
\textsuperscript{15} Uchihara and Gutierrez, “El sistema tonal del zapoteco,” 8.
\textsuperscript{16} All musical examples are taken from my own transcription of the audio recordings of Ángeles’s songs. The full transcriptions can be found in Appendix A of this study. The time markings in the transcriptions refer to the audio recordings, which can be found in Appendix C of this study.
The circled notes in the example above correspond to the words that I have deemed reliable isolated items for various reasons discussed in my previous study. We can be fairly certain of the tones of these words, and can use this knowledge to examine how the tones come into play when the words appear in the music. In this short example, we see that guk ("when") which has a rising tone, falls on a B, and, though it is incapable of rising because it falls on only one note, nevertheless is on a relatively high note for the range of the song. The rest of the phrase descends in melody afterward. The next time guk appears, however, it is in a melodic sequence two beats later, and on a note lower than previously. Te ("so that") has a high tone, yet falls on a note that is lower than the notes both before and after it. Led ("side") and nes ("way") are directly next to each other in the song, and have a high and low tone, respectively. However, the relationship between these two words’ tones is not reflected in the melody, as led is on a lower note (F sharp) than nes (G). This is just one short example of the many times that tone and melody do not seem to correlate, as the tone language remains comprehensible despite its musical representation in ways that might seem to ignore or contradict the expected melodic inflections.

Phonation and Music

Tone is, of course, not the only element of language that could be examined in relation to vocal music. It is important to note that Zapotec languages also present distinctions between different types of phonation. These phonation types may include many other types of vowels other than plain vowels. For example, there are breathy vowels, in which the glottis is more open; creaky, in

---

18 Ibid., 21-22.
which the glottis is more restricted; and checked, in which the vowel is followed by a glottal stop.\textsuperscript{19} I focus briefly on a different musical moment within the same the song “Rabante Luy,” this time from the first verse, and represented by Example 2.

\textbf{Example 2} Gario Ángeles, “Rabante Luy” Verse 1 with Isolated Items, mm. 1-3

The circled notes this time are on the words \textit{yu ’u}\textsuperscript{20} “you are inside’ and \textit{le ’n}\textsuperscript{21} “inside,” both of which include a glottal interruption, as can be heard when the words are spoken aloud, not sung. These words can be heard on the Talking Dictionary for Teotitlán Del Valle online. However, the listener detects no hint of a glottal interruption in these words when they are sung. This small instance illustrates another example of the priorities of music overriding those so significant in spoken language, to suggest a parallel but co-existent relationship between the entities of music and language.

\textit{Rhythmic Stress and Music}

Lastly, whereas syllabic stress is often important in a spoken language, I find one useful example that shows that Ángeles’s music and, with it, poetry, may not exhibit as much of an importance

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., http://talkingdictionary.swarthmore.edu/teotitlan/?entry=2410.
to syllabic stress when it is translated to rhythm within the meter of the song. In Example 3, in the song “Vainchieya te Lag,” the same word rinidan (“they say”) is used in two different musical contexts and with two different stressed syllables.

Example 3 Gario Ángeles, “Vainchieya te Lag” Chorus 1 with Isolated Items, mm. 13-16

The first time rinidan appears, the stress is on the first syllable ri-, because of the placement and length of the notes within the beat. The second time, on the other hand, the stress is on the second syllable -ni-. It is, of course, possible that another native speaker of Teotitlán del Valle Zapotec might listen to this line and find the sound of one of these iterations of this word odd. However, based on this one example of Gario Ángeles’s instincts in composition, it would seem that in this language, syllabic stress, along with other elements, functions independently of the music, in that it works within the music even if it functions differently than it would in speech. In the same way, as we will see later, other larger contrasting elements of the music function together in the music to contribute to the larger meaning of the songs in a cultural context. First, however, it is necessary to consider the surface-level meanings of the songs through lyrics, as well as the implied meanings through harmony, melody, and extra-musical sounds.
Words, Sounds, and Music: Meaning in the Songs of Gario Ángeles

It is necessary to turn from the relationship between phonetic elements and music to the relationship between words and sounds. I give an overview of each song, including words from Ángeles himself, and then examine how the form, harmony, text, and other sounds contribute to the meaning of the song. These songs, entitled “Rabante Luy,” “Luy Naou,” and “Vainchieya te Lag,” were, as of August 2017, the only three songs Gario Ángeles had recorded in Zapotec. In the recordings, Ángeles himself performs the vocals, and a few different friends of his, whom he did not name to me, provided the guitar. While the songs do have elements of locality and cultural specificity, as I detail below, they generally involve a subject matter familiar to all: expressions of conventional longing or separation. These songs are, first and foremost, love songs. They do not tell stories, they are not particularly political, nor are they humorous. These songs can and do have different meanings for different people, whether they be Ángeles himself, members of the Zapotec community, or those outside the Zapotec community.

How I Read and Hear a Song

This project presents particular difficulties in analyzing music; one risks overlooking key elements of culture and style by analyzing these three popular songs in the way that one might examine art music of the West. However, some methods traditionally used by music scholars for analyzing classical music prove useful. For this reason, I turn to music theorist Edward Cone for a broad overview of thinking about music and words in an art music context. I supplement this, however, with scholarship on the popular music genre, particularly by Keith Negus regarding the

---

22 See Appendix C for sound recordings of all three songs.
music of Bob Dylan, for guidance about how to go about analyzing popular music in a scholarly way.

At first glance, Edward Cone’s essay seems irrelevant to my study in that it places a heavy emphasis on the dichotomy of text and music as two separate entities. This supports the above idea that music and language can co-exist separately but work together on parallel tracks. While it could be true that text and music function as two entities, there is the added complexity that for his music, the text and music share an author. Furthermore, Ángeles’s process is relatively uncertain. Did he write the lyrics first, and then compose a melody? Did he come up with a tune, and then find words that would fit? Or did the process fit into more of a gray area in between the two? I certainly do not know the answers to these questions, and it is possible that even Gario Ángeles himself is not sure of the chronology of his compositional steps.

Though Cone does not deal with the popular music style, as is the focus of this paper, his description of music’s gradual turn from the “freely articulated music of the sixteenth century” to “tight, logical, self-sufficient structures” shows that music now can illuminate the text in important ways, holding its own importance. While each of Ángeles’s songs is structured in a very clear way, with respective stanzas and refrains musically identical to one another, the only difference being the actual text, there are clear points at which the music illuminates the text, as will be explored in this section. Cone describes such a shift as “the triumph of the musical over the poetic form,” as music is no longer determined by language.

---

24 Ibid.
music is not determined by language in the songs of Gario Ángeles, and we will see later in this section instances where music and language work together to create meaning.

To turn to an approach for the analysis of popular music, particularly that of Bob Dylan, Keith Negus takes issue with most scholars’ refusal to do more than acknowledge vocal gestures and other musical features of Bob Dylan’s music. Most people insist on the words’ precedence over the music; Negus writes, “it has been interesting to register just how many authors do acknowledge that the songs are more than words, but then quickly and conveniently ignore this fact in order to discuss the songs purely in terms of the lyrics…”25 Of course, in my study of the popular songs by Gario Ángeles, I aim to strike a balance by examining the relationship between music and lyrics, rather than insisting on conceptualizing them as two separate entities. Indeed, the musical elements of popular music tend not to be acknowledged as part of the art of the music, which is why many focus on the words and poetry, coming to the conclusion that it is the words that are impressive when it comes to popular music. Negus writes that popular music is often thought of as “formally simplistic and repetitive.”26 However, this is based on our view of what is worth considering when it comes to analysis of music. According to Negus, “Just because Dylan’s various vocal inflections, bluesy slides, microtonal shifts of pitch, and irregular rhythms and phrasing cannot be clearly notated using western classical musical notation does not mean they are not worthy of extensive study.”27

Negus’s stance above applies directly to my study. I chose to use standard western notation in order to transcribe the melody of Gario Ángeles’s songs, which was particularly

26 Ibid., 75.
27 Ibid., 74.
useful for my previous study, because it was overwhelmingly concerned with pitch. Therefore, it was largely necessary to represent only the melody and was acceptable to use a standard form of notation used for art music as well. As we turn to the songs—melody, accompaniment, and sound elements, too—it is necessary to examine and discuss those elements present in the music that not only are not represented in the transcription of the melody line, but may not even be able to be displayed accurately using western notation at all. For example, the song “Luy Naou” opens and closes with the sounds of crickets chirping, with no apparent relationship to the rhythm or meter of the song. However, as we will see, the crickets have a significant meaning and connection to the subject matter of the song. The sounds disappear once the voice enters the song, existing to set the stage of perhaps an early morning atmosphere. Furthermore, before the voice enters, we hear the sounds of a phone being dialed, this time rhythmically and melodically in sync with the song. The subject matter of the song involves the singer addressing someone from afar, asking the person who she is. These sounds are clearly important to the meaning of the song, even though they cannot be represented very well by standard notation. Similarly, in the song “Vainchieya te Lag,” the rhythm and meter are based on a continuous sound of a loom whose pattern perseveres throughout the song. The sound of the song begins with footsteps approaching the loom, setting it up, and beginning the rhythmic loop of the loom’s process. This

28 The gender of the person is not clear based on the song lyrics; however, the addressee of the song seems to be female, based on the language Ángeles used in describing the song to me (Appendix D, paragraph 24).

29 Find transcriptions by the author of all three songs in Appendix A. They in no way reflect a way that the songs “should” be performed, as would a musical score. While there are many elements of the songs that could be included in the transcriptions, I use a relatively simple approach, focusing on melody, harmony, and rhythm. Rhythms, notes, keys, and harmonies are the closest approximation to what is heard in the original recording. I notate to the best of my ability in text the other elements, which are just as important as those notated using standard western notation.
also relates to the theme of the song, which is about the narrator weaving a rug with the image of a person’s face on it. These extra-musical elements, if you will, contribute in a very important way to the meaning of the song, just as Bob Dylan’s “bluesy inflections” and “vocal inflections” do.

After a general explanation of some of the choices I have made in conceptualizing and notating music for this study, it is time to turn to an overview and analysis of the first song, “Rabante Luy,” using general methods explored above.

“Rabante Luy”

“Rabante Luy” means “I miss you a lot.” It is a song in which the speaker asks their beloved when they will return. I avoid gendered language here based on Ángeles’s own description of this particular song. When prompted, he explained that the song is based on an interaction he viewed in the market in the pueblo, in which two older women asked another when her husband would return, presumably from the United States. The woman assured the other two that he would return soon, but they reacted skeptically. Gario Ángeles has said that this song is from the point of view of the lonely woman, who longs for her husband to return. It is important to note that regardless of Gario Ángeles’s intent for the meaning of the song, it holds different, and just as important, meaning, for every listener. The impressions and meanings are ultimately left to the listener to judge; it is not necessary to follow Ángeles’s stated aims or meanings.
The point of view of this song is rather ambiguous, because a man’s voice sings the song, but Ángeles based this song from the point of view of a woman.

“When will you return? When will you be here?... Basically, it’s about nothing more than that, than the longing of the woman. That her husband is away. So, the first subject, it’s called “Rabante Luy.””

The content of this text is very obsessive in that it involves the speaker complaining about being unable to stop thinking about a person. The repetitive nature of the text increases this obsessive quality. Interestingly, Zapotec (along with other Otomanguean languages) makes heavy use of repetition in spoken conversation, another aspect of this music, other than the language itself, which is inherently Zapotec. It begins with a two-bar introduction setting the simple harmonic and rhythmic stage of D major through quarter note strumming in the guitar (see Example 4). Then the verse begins, the harmonic tempo steady at a chord change every bar. The verse includes a simple progression of I-iii-V-I. The text, melody, and harmony repeat for the second two lines of this verse.

Txi gabania tui, luisiu yu’u le’n kie. When I am waking up, only you are inside my head.
Ketru rutiplazdia re zugua tuizia’a sre. I can’t handle being alone here like this anymore.
Txi gabania tui, luisiu yu’u le’n kie. When I am waking up, only you are inside my head.
Ketru rutiplazdia re zugua tuizia’a sre. I can’t handle being alone here like this anymore.

---
30 See Appendix D, paragraph 22.
The end of the verse is signaled by a change in rhythm, with a more rhythmically dense pattern in the leading into the pre-chorus. The harmonic tempo also increases, at two chord changes per measure. The pre-chorus begins with two questions in sequence, the first for half of one measure on IV, and the second half in V, and an answer to the musical and text question in a one-bar response going from IV to I (see Example 5). The second two lines, just as in the verse, repeat word for word, this time with one key difference: where the second line in the pre-chorus ends on the third scale degree, the end of the pre-chorus ends on the tonic in a full bar. This gives a different sense of finality to the repeated line, “Te gazon led nes, nes nia duson,” the second time, than the incomplete, unresolved nature of the first time.
When will you return? When will you be home?
So that we can walk down the road hand in hand.

When will you be home?
So that we can walk down the road hand in hand.

Example 5 Gario Ángeles, “Rabante Luy” Pre-Chorus 1, mm. 11-15

The chorus shares the harmonic tempo of the pre-chorus, the melody jumping up to the tonic (see Example 6). This chorus consists of an emotional statement—“Ana xhixhite, yu’u le’n kie”—in one measure, going from I to IV, and then a repeat of the text of the first half of the first bar but with a different ending. The melody is a simple sequence a step down from the first bar, this time harmonized going from V back to I. These two lines repeat exactly, and a final repetition of the first part of each line repeats twice for a final line, the first half harmonized by IV and the second half by V. In this way the end of the chorus itself is presented as a musical question, answered with the entrance of the next verse, with an introductory bar of I. This happens through the incompleteness in the harmonic sequence; we expect the refrain to end on the tonic, and instead it ends on the dominant. This contributes to the cyclical nature of the theme; the speaker wakes up every day the same, and cannot get rid the image of the beloved addressee.
Ana xhixhite, yu’u le’n kie,  
Back then and every day, you are in my head.
Ana xhixhite, reste sre.  
Back then and every day, I wake up like this.
Ana xhixhite, yu’u le’n kie,  
Back then and every day, you are in my head.
Ana xhixhite, reste sre.  
Back then and every day, I wake up like this.
Ana xhixhite, ana xhixhite.  
Back then and every day, back then and every day.

The second verse is structured the same as the first, with the two lines repeated exactly, along
with their melody and harmony.

Ranalaste txeky, txi zuguo’n rupun,  
I remember well back then, when we were together,
Axt nasa’a reste, txi rugie lau.  
Very happily I wake up, when I see your face.
Ranalaste txeky, txi zuguo’n rupun,  
I remember well back then, when we were together,
Axt nasa’a reste, txi rugie lau.  
Very happily I wake up, when I see your face.

The next pre-chorus is almost identical to the first, except that the answer to the musical and
textual question is slightly different. Rather than wishing for the return of the person in order to
walk hand in hand down the street, this time is quite more intense: the speaker wishes to hug and
kiss the person. However, the melody and harmony remain the same. Interestingly enough,
Ángeles shared with me that these lyrics, including the content about kissing, took a significant
risk, especially in light of the song being from the point of view of a woman. He told me that, when he performed this song live, many Zapotec women turned “red, red,” because that kind of language, “feelings, of love, and being in love, in Zapotec… it’s strange.”

Guk gabiuu? Guk zugua’u? When will you return? When will you be home?
Te ke’eza’a te lui, gaua te ru’u. So that I can hug you once, and kiss your mouth.
Guk gabiuu? Guk zugua’u? When will you return? When will you be home?
Te ke’eza’a te lui, gaua te ru’u. So that I can hug you once, and kiss your mouth.

The second and third choruses match the second in content and structure. This time, the second chorus’s musical question is answered by the entrance of a repetition of that chorus, rather than a new verse. At the end of the last chorus, the dominant harmony persists, and is resolved instrumentally; the voice does not resolve to the tonic but the guitar is given a bar of strumming on I and a final I chord to finish the song. This is significant to the theme of the song, in that the voice of the melody does not resolve, just as the constant longing persists inside the speaker’s head.

“Luy Naou”

“Luy Naou” is another song in D major—in fact, in one YouTube video of a live performance, “Rabante Luy” transitions smoothly right into “Luy Naou.” Before the guitar and vocals begin, the song features the sounds of crickets chirping, allowing for the atmosphere of perhaps the early morning or dusk. When the guitar enters, so does the sound of a phone being dialed, followed by sound of a phone ringing. These two calls, that of the crickets found in nature and the universal sound of the phone ringing, work together to the stage for a song directed at

32 See Appendix D, paragraph 22.
33 See Appendix D, paragraph 22.
34 “Rabante Luy, Luy Naou,” live video of two songs.
someone, and, sure enough, the lyrics from the start ask, “Who are you?” Just like “Rabante Luy,” the content has an obsessive quality. It asks repeatedly who the person is, and why she refuses to leave the singer’s head. The verses are relatively simple, only alternating between D major and G major.

The lyrics are simple as well, in that they repeat rather than there being new content for each verse. This song, Ángeles reveals, is specifically for young people. It is based on his own story, when he knew someone but only for a fleeting second. Again, this backstory is not essential to our understanding of the song, but interesting to put into context of the composer’s mindset. The repetitive content increases the obsessive quality of the song, especially as the musical question of “who are you?” at the end of the first verse resolves from the dominant directly into the beginning of the next verse (see Example 7). At the end of the second verse, which is lyrically almost identical, the words say “I already know who you are,” rather than asking, “Who are you?”

Tu lau, te bain naza’a teu le’n xkarlienia?  What is your name, who makes my soul happy?
Tu lui, te kedridiediu le’n xigaba?  Who are you, that you won’t leave my head?
Tu lui, tu lui?  Who are you? Who are you?

Tu lau, te bain naza’a teu le’n xkarlienia?  What is your name, who makes my soul happy?
Tu lui, te kedridiediu le’n xigaba?  Who are you, that you won’t leave my head?
Tu lui? Anana tu lui,  Who are you? I already know who you are,
Anana tu lui.  I already know who you are.
Example 7 Gario Ángeles, “Luy Naou” Verse 1, mm. 1-10

The refrain is about the answer of the question asked obsessively in the previous two verses (see Example 8). Intense, it jumps up to a higher vocal register unexpectedly, after an extra measure of buildup in the guitar, breaking the four-bar phrase. It is harmonically more interesting, with not only I, IV, and V represented, but also iii and vi. Again, at the end of this refrain, at “my soul trembles,” it has the feeling of incompleteness, lyrically and musically, as it ends on the dominant, resolving to the beginning of the next verse. This lyrical incompleteness is made even clearer by the time the next refrain comes around, when the last line is complete with an additional line, to complete “Txiru racte xkarlienía” with “Yub nia lo stuy.”

Lui nou ni rikaza, You are who I want,  
Lui nou ni zunagua. You are who I hope for.  
Lui nou ni rikaza, You are who I want,  
Lui nou ni zunagua. You are who I hope for.  
Txiru racte xkarlienía. And my soul trembles.

---

35 See Appendix A, Transcription 2, Rehearsal N.
The next verses are identical to the previous verses, the first verse asking who the person is, and the second answering. The fact that the words are exactly the same as the first time around increases the obsessive quality of the song.

The final choruses are the same as the first, except that the phrase, “and my soul trembles” is completed with “to see you again,” resolving to I. This repeats several times, and then the chorus repeats. Before the chorus repeats for a final time, however, the faint sound of a heartbeat can be heard. This is especially significant considering the words directly preceding: “And my soul trembles to see you again.” Even for listeners who do not speak Zapotec, the anxious sound of a heartbeat can be understood very clearly. This entire song is even more repetitive than the others, contributing to the obsessive quality of the content. It ends with a return of the heartbeat, as well as the cricket sounds, which are absent other than at the outset and the very end, bringing it back to the beginning. This song exhibits some of the most salient

---

36 See Appendix A, Transcription 2, Rehearsal N.
examples of non-musical sounds becoming musical in the context of the song, and helping the
listener to understand a sense of universality from the song’s content.

“Vainchieya te Lag”

This song’s meter and rhythmic pulse are based around the sound of a loom used for weaving
rugs, something for which the pueblo where this song originated is known. The song begins with
the sound of footsteps approaching the loom, stopping in front of it, and getting it set up to start
weaving. At the moment that the mechanism’s rhythm begins, so does the rhythm of the guitar,
in a lyrical melodic pattern. As in the previous song, this song uses a non-musical sound in a
musical way in order to tie together content and music. These two bars without voice set the
stage of the chord progression of the verse (see Example 9). The percussion of the loom cuts out
in the very last beat before verse starts, and then resumes as the voice enters. This intensifies the
start of the vocal portion of the song, drawing the listener’s attention further to the rhythm of the
loom. Much as in “Rabante Luy,” these verses consist of two measures repeated for the second
line with the exact same harmony and melody, only different words. The second two lines are the
exact same as the first two, including words and music. The only difference in the second half of
the verse is the loom cuts out toward the end of the final line, perhaps signaling the end of the
verse and a transition into the chorus.

Banytxieya te laj cun lau,    I wove a rug with your face,
Gudie kulin ni rini xcalnau. I dyed the color that speaks of how you are.
Banytxieya te laj cud cau,    I wove a rug where you are,
Gudie culur ni rini xkalnou. I dyed the color that speaks of how you are.
For the chorus, Ángeles employs a denser, rich guitar strumming pattern, as opposed to the bare picking pattern in the verse (see Example 10). The fact that this is so different texturally is reflected in the text as well. Each refrain seems to bring us out of the physical action of the weaving process and into the singer’s head. The change in tense further intensifies this difference; the narrative of the weaving process is in the past tense, while the look into the singer’s thoughts is in the present tense, always persisting. This contrast between past and present within the same space will return in the final section, regarding tradition and modernity coming together for the purpose of language advocacy. The loom is still silent; this is clearly a different section. As we heard at the words “ana xhixhite” in “Rabante Luy,” the melody of this refrain starts relatively high, moving downward melodically through sequencing until the bottom. Then those lines repeat exactly, and an extra measure of “sruta nau” is added onto the
end, which draws the listener’s attention to the line, and shows how earnest the speaker is in expressing the beauty of the addressee.

Axtxekyte rinidan na,
Ana rinidan zeky,
Sruta nau.
Axtxekyte rinidan na,
Ana rinidan zeky,
Sruta nau.
Sruta nau.

Axtxekyte rinidan na,
Since way back then they have told me,
Ana rinidan zeky,
They tell me it’s true,
Sruta nau.
How beautiful you are.
Axtxekyte rinidan na,
Since way back then they have told me,
Ana rinidan zeky,
They tell me it’s true,
Sruta nau.
How beautiful you are.

Example 10

When the second verse comes in, one might expect a return of the prominent loom. Though he does return to the soft guitar pattern, the loom is still absent. This verse differs from the first in that, rather than including a verbatim repetition of the first two lines, the second two lines feature different lyrics from the first two. Aptly, the loom returns precisely on the word “traly,” which
means “loom”. Ángeles repeats the last part of this verse, “baguba bi,” re-harmonized and as almost an afterthought, an addition to the phrase. It matches the sentiment of “I took in air,” because not only does the singer’s voice become more faint and breathy, but he seems to linger on that moment in the song just as one might stop to take a breath, the music mimicking speech. This brings us back to my earlier questions about the relationship between music and language; though we did not see any clear reflection of tone, phonation, or syllabic stress in the vocal melody, here is an excellent example of a different kind of connection between music and speech—that is, through rhythm and phrasing. At this point, the loom has cut out again and the texture is considerably more bare.

A basa rugueu, guatibia du. I returned from the riverbank, I went to wash the thread.
Gulesa ladi bania ganili. I lifted the rug, I made the bobbin.
Basabtxeya lady, biua lo traly. I prepared the warp, I placed it on the loom.
Txi bizunia ru’u baguba bi. When I reached your mouth, I took in air.
Baguba bi. I took in air.37

The second chorus is much the same as the first, with a few words exchanged here and there.

This time, however, on the repetition of “Axtxekyte rinidan na” the loom returns and the song is at its peak texture. This is significant right after the long pause because of the breath mentioned above. “Sruta nau” is repeated once more than the end of the previous refrain.

Axtxekyte rinidan na, Since way back then they have told me, 
zekyka rinidan txeky, So they have told me then, 
Sruta nau. How beautiful you are. 
Axtxekyte rinidan na, Since way back then they have told me, 
Ana rinidan zeky, They tell me it’s true, 
Sruta nau. How beautiful you are. 
Sruta nau. How beautiful you are.38

37 See Appendix A, Transcription 3, Rehearsal E.
38 See Appendix A, Transcription 3, Rehearsal G.
The loom cuts out after the final “sruta nau” and then returns. Finally, there is a sort of coda which consists of the beginning of a new verse: “A babe te laj kud kau” (I already finished a rug where you are).\textsuperscript{39} Since this is not about the process of weaving the rug, but about the narrator having finished the rug, the song is over, albeit somewhat abruptly. The rhythm of the loom finishes, it is audibly closed, and Ángeles’s work is complete.

Though the song seems to be over for the listener, Ángeles revealed that the song is incomplete, explaining the somewhat sudden ending.\textsuperscript{40} He credits his friend for having the idea to use the loom as rhythm, and for the guitar performance; unfortunately, his friend was obligated to leave unexpectedly, for reasons on which Ángeles did not elaborate, and the pair never had the chance to finish recording the song. This song, like the other two, exhibits a range of devices besides words, including those in the rhythm, meter, and non-musical-turned-musical sounds in order to give meaning and intelligibility to a wide audience.

\textbf{Zapotec Music: Ángeles’s Place in the World of Music}

Having considered the individual sounds within the lyrics and how they are represented, as well as the meaning within the structure and content of the songs, we have experienced a taste of the different meanings that these songs have. Now, to consider the interplay between the universal and the local: through discussion of the musical vocabulary, the conventional poetic stance of longing or isolation, and the crickets, cell phone sounds, and heartbeat, I draw attention to things that are generic and understood by all. We have also seen those elements that are more specific to Ángeles’s pueblo and cultural identity, including his variety of Zapotec used in all three songs,

\textsuperscript{39} See Appendix A, Transcription 3, Rehearsal I.
\textsuperscript{40} See Appendix D, paragraph 26.
the sound of the loom that not everyone might recognize, and even some of the subject matter. Having considered these elements of locality and universality, it is prudent to take a step back and examine the meaning that these songs as entities may convey in a larger cultural context, regardless of Ángeles’s intent. Ethnomusicologist Bonnie C. Wade reminds us that “no one doubts” that music is meaningful, but it is the way in which music has meaning that is more unclear. Ángeles’s music holds meaning—not only for himself, but to those who listen to his music as well. There can be many different kinds of meanings to music and on many different levels. What does it mean that Gario Ángeles has chosen to write his music in Zapotec and not in Spanish? What does it mean that the subject matter of the songs, according to Ángeles’s context, is so inherently tied to Zapotec culture and locale, but in some ways permeates every popular song? And what does it mean that Ángeles chose a western popular idiom for the genre of his music? In order to explore these questions in this final section, I turn to distinguished ethnomusicologists Theodore Levin and Mark Slobin, as well as linguist Brook Danielle Lillehaugen for insight.

Connecting Ángeles to Others

There are few examples of song in Zapotec, even fewer in Tlacolula Valley Zapotec, and still fewer in Teotitlán del Valle Zapotec. During my field work and subsequent studies, I learned of four artists who sing in Tlacolula Valley Zapotec: Gario Ángeles, his brother Román Hipólito,42

---


and local teacher Serafín Martínez from Teotitlán del Valle, and Paola Hersan\textsuperscript{43} from Santiago Matatlán. There could certainly be more, but even if there are twice or three times as many as I am aware, the number is still very low.\textsuperscript{44} Notably, Ángeles’s own brother, Román Hipólito, has also written a song in Zapotec, and is one of the only other people from the pueblo of Teotitlán del Valle who has done so. Even Ángeles knows of very few people in the pueblo who sing in Zapotec:

Yes. Here in the pueblo there are two people who [sing in Zapotec]. Me, who started first, and later, my brother started to. My brother is older than I am. He felt connected; when he listened to the songs, he said, “Oh, I have to make one like this” because he had been trying to write songs in Spanish. And he said, “I feel connected.” He doesn’t live here, he lives in [the United States]. Anyway, he felt connected and said, “I’m going to be inspired by this, my Zapotec is very beautiful.” So, he did it in Zapotec. We are the two people who sing in Zapotec, as far as I know.\textsuperscript{45}

Interestingly, Hipólito’s style is very different from Ángeles’s style. His song has a fast tempo and features the popular brass band sound that permeates the pueblo through various parades and processions every day. Like his brother’s music, but in a very different way, Hipólito’s songs feature elements that connect to their hometown of Teotitlán. Although Ángeles claims that he and his brother are the only two people in the pueblo who have written songs in Zapotec, his own friend, Serafín Martínez, a local teacher of Zapotec, was kind enough to sing me a song that he has written, intended for dancing. Even without instruments, I could gather that it relies heavily on meter, and consists of speaking rhythmically rather than singing a melody. Martínez has not recorded this song as Ángeles and his brother have. It was unclear to me why he has not recorded

\textsuperscript{44} See Goldberg “Lexical Tone and Melodic Pitch” for a table of known Valley Zapotec singers and songs, 9.
\textsuperscript{45} See Appendix D, paragraph 5.
his song, whether he wishes to keep it local and for the pueblo, or whether he has not had the means. This shows that it is quite possible that more people have set Zapotec to music, even in the small pueblo of Teotitlán del Valle, and certainly there must be other people who sing in neighboring Zapotec varieties as well.

I was at first surprised to hear in Ángeles’s songs a musical idiom so familiar. Perhaps I expected to find music that was marked in some way, through harmonies, rhythms, and textures commonly heard in Mexico and Latin America. Instead, I found the conjunction of Zapotec and music that just as easily could have been heard in any North American café rather surprising. These assumptions, of course, beg a vital question: What “should” Zapotec music sound like? Such concerns are new to the study of Zapotec music specifically (which, after all, has not been the subject of much formal consideration), but they are emerging as central to the work of ethnomusicologists. Bonnie C. Wade, for instance, brings up the idea of “authenticity,” which originated in relation to folk music, and “generally involve[s] a link to tradition or at least to some idea about ‘the past.’” Yet this issue of authenticity is a complex issue. Is Ángeles’s music “Zapotec music” because it is sung in Zapotec and by a native speaker of Zapotec? Does it matter that it takes not from a Zapotec or other regional music tradition but from the western popular music genre? There is no way to know what pre-colonial Zapotec music was like, because all records of it were eradicated by colonialism. Theodore Levin, in his fieldwork in Central Asia, wished to find tradition, but instead found that tradition is created in the present. He “hoped to assemble a living musical-ethnographic map that chronicled the way musical life

---

46 Wade, *Thinking Musically*, 145.
reflects the often fluid boundaries and identities that divide and unite the various social groups that live there.\footnote{Theodore Craig Levin, \textit{The Hundred Thousand Fools of God: Musical travels in Central Asia (and Queens, New York)} (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), xiii.} To illustrate his mistake in assuming the static nature of tradition, he gives the example of whom he calls “Uzbekistan’s undisputed queen of pop,” Yulduz Usmanova, who shares some surprising similarities to the work Gario Ángeles is doing.\footnote{Ibid., 77.}

Unlike Ángeles, Usmanova was trained classically in the Conservatory, but felt a strong connection to the folk music she had heard when she was younger. She claims she “hung around with old women, just listening carefully.” This was something that I perhaps expected to find in my fieldwork in Oaxaca. I thought I might encounter some lullabies or similar genres sung around the home by older Zapotec women; some of my questions to Ángeles were prompted by these expectations. As I found no trace of “traditional” Zapotec music, nor did Ángeles base his music on a “Zapotec” music, Usmanova’s situation differs from Ángeles’s. Because of her strong connection to the “folk songs of those uneducated women whom [she’d] hung around with as a child,” she explains, she decided to apply to Conservatory, but eventually returned to the inspiration of the folk songs she had been so drawn to as a child.\footnote{Ibid., 81.} She cared deeply about cultivating interest, especially among the young, in the national instruments and the sounds of the folk music.

Usmanova knew, and Levin came to realize, that traditions “cannot survive exclusively among the old.”\footnote{Ibid., 77.} She therefore had to find a way to renovate while preserving the tradition that she valued and yearned for future generations to appreciate and carry on. Levin quotes another
musician, Munâjât Yulchieva: “There’s so much Europeanization around us… Young people just want to be entertained.”

Usmanova told Levin the story of her first folk song that she “turned into a rock song.” She explains, “I took a little bit of it and put it at the beginning of my own song, and added a faster part. Listeners liked it, and so I did more things like that. I used our national instruments.” Her goal, she says, was to “extract folk music from its source and get people to listen to it.” This may seem very different from Gario Ángeles’s goal, because Ángeles’s music is complete innovation, rather than preservation of a certain music that is in danger of being lost. However, I demonstrate that he has a similar goal in mind, but with language as the focus.

Whereas it is the sound of the folk music Usmanova wished to preserve, Ángeles sees music as a way to use what many see as an outdated language or one “stuck in tradition” in a new way that young people will understand and subscribe to. Specifically, he wrote “Luy Naou” for the younger generation. He told me that “the majority of the young people… aren’t interested in Zapotec anymore.” He hopes, with his music, to turn that around. Instead of invoking a Zapotec identity through music, he uses a western popular music idiom to spur interest in the language that he wants to prevent from disappearing. Not only do the lyrics bring out the cultural significance he hopes to portray in the use of the language and the lyric content itself, but he uses a loom in “Vainchieya te Lag” as an instrument. This gives a very different sound for the listener; someone who does not know what a loom sounds like would not know what kind of

52 Ibid., 80.
53 Ibid., 82.
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
56 See Appendix D, paragraph 24.
percussion is being used in the song, and even someone who is familiar with the process and the
sound may not recognize it in this context. This sound ties together the language, which is
specific to this particular pueblo, Teotitlán del Valle, with the tradition of weaving, also specific
to Teotitlán. This use of something typically associated with the past being used for something
very new is a perfect transition into the idea of music as resistance to language endangerment.

Music as Language Activism

I was curious to know more about how Gario Ángeles saw the cultural implications of his work.
The quotation below was prompted by my request for a description of the song “Luy Naou”
(You Are), which he has said is intended for young people.57

Because the majority of the young people, or adolescents, than other generations, aren’t
interested anymore in Zapotec. So, in the school I don’t know, or in their houses, they
forgot Zapotec… When I went to school… they prohibited me from speaking Zapotec.
They prohibited all of us… I can’t leave my language. My first… I can’t avoid it…
Because it was part of me, they wanted to take it from me. So, I grew up with that, and
maybe because of that I said, “I’m going to make a song,” and I did it.58

The lyrics of his songs were intimate, even personal. But he nevertheless saw his use of Zapotec
as something bound up with cultural, no less than personal, identity. Ángeles is one of the
younger native speakers of Zapotec in his pueblo. Because of the punishment for speaking
Zapotec in schools, which he mentions in the above quotation, fewer and fewer children are
acquiring the language. There are efforts by language activists to valorize Zapotec so that it is no
longer endangered, and Ángeles is doing his small part in a much bigger effort to reverse the
endangerment. Yet Ángeles’s work is unique in several ways, and though these examples

57 See Appendix D, paragraph 24.
58 See Appendix D, paragraph 24.
illustrate language valorization through new ways of choosing to use language, none of them quite capture the creative balancing act heard in the songs.

Linguist Brook Danielle Lillehaugen details the project “Voces del Valle,” which involves using social media platforms, specifically Twitter, to write and encourage others to write in Zapotec and other endangered Oaxacan languages. She calls this use of language online “a form of language activism” and details the success of the program that “has been of growing interest and has resulted in many workshops on digital language activism.”59 As I have alluded to above, Zapotec is often seen as a less important or practical language in the modern day, as many people try to keep it boxed into the past as a “traditional” language. Lillehaugen proudly lists the use of Twitter as “another plus for languages that are sometimes devalued and seen to serve little purpose outside of their local area.”60 In the same way, Ángeles takes a language that is devalued, losing speakers in the younger generation, and adds a new light to it.

Gario Ángeles is somewhat of language activist himself, using his skills as a musician to write music in his native tongue, rather than Spanish, which he speaks equally well, in order to preserve his language. He spoke rather passionately with me about this effect:

But what I wanted to achieve is that others come out. That they write poems in Zapotec, that they make books, that they sing music in Zapotec. I would want that… I hope little by little by little, but it’s getting lost. It’s getting lost.61

Gario Ángeles has said that he did not choose to write music in Zapotec, that it just happened because it naturally came to him in his first language. However, if such is true, he certainly used

60 Ibid., 385
61 See Appendix D, paragraph 24.
that organic process as a means to an end about which he cares deeply. Ethnomusicologist Mark Slobin is concerned with the phenomenon of “small musics” coming together in a larger context, in the issue of local versus global. Of course, Gario Ángeles’s is an instance of the opposite: a globally understood medium—music—used as a vehicle for local sounds and meanings. Indeed, writes that “today music is at the political, from the refugee mother’s lullaby to the ‘Star-Spangled Banner’ at the baseball games.”62 This is certainly true, and although I mentioned above that Ángeles’s music is not overtly political, it can be seen that way, as a form of resistance against the Spanish language’s dominance over indigenous Mexico. Theodore Levin mentions his goal to “explore the musical landscapes that lay beyond the folk troupes, where musicians performed not for a paycheck but one of a sense of service to community and to God.”

63 Ángeles has shared that he sings in Zapotec because the language and music comes to him naturally, presumably rather than for any kind of money or fame. This does not, however, make his actions any less intentional, as can be seen by his strong words for the valorization of the Zapotec language. Scholars such as Levin and Slobin address points that, at first, seem on too grand a scale for the small, relatively unknown music of a song-writer from Teotitlán del Valle, but after a closer look, actually pertain directly to the exact kind of music that Ángeles represents.

Similar to Slobin, anthropologist and ethnomusicologist Amanda J. Weidman mentions the dichotomy between modernity and tradition. Modernity, she says, “operates…by defining itself as representative of rationality, progress, change, and universality, in opposition to

63 Levin, Hundred Thousand Fools of God, xv.
‘tradition,’ a category which comes to stand for all that is irrational or emotional, stagnant, ancient, and local.”⁶⁴ This connection between modernity and universality, as well as that between tradition and locality, can be seen in the mindset that many have about Zapotec languages. Ángeles, by using universally recognized harmonies, structures, and themes, does his part to bridge the gap between local and universal, and with it between tradition and modernity.

Conclusion

Through a wide range of the implications of the word “meaning,” we have seen on various levels the “meanings” that Gario Ángeles’s Zapotec songs hold. Through seemingly different lenses, from the linguistic analysis of the representation of linguistic elements in vocal music, to the broad cultural meaning of Ángeles’s songs in a larger musical context, I have shown that all of the different types of meaning can be connected. The fact that music and language seem to operate on parallel comprehensible tracks, as shown by the first section, is related to the success of an unexpectedly universal genre and subject matter in conjunction with a language typically seen as “traditional” or “ancient.” Ángeles uses universal and timeless themes, such as love, loss, and longing, to reach a potentially vast audience, while doing it through the lense of his own language and personal context. He also combines generic, understood sounds that have pre-decided meanings such as the sounds of crickets for loneliness, the sound of a heartbeat for anxiety, and the sound of a phone dialing for an unanswered call, with local sounds such as the loom and the language itself to make those particular sounds more intelligible. Furthermore, unlike others in his area making similar efforts, he chooses a popular style of music that

represents a more global genre than the marked “Mexican” genres others may use, and perhaps in so doing it avoids sounds that otherwise might sound too “colonial,” in the local context.

While Ángeles is “political” in the sense that he sings in Zapotec in a Spanish colonial context, he eases that political message by choosing a non-“Spanish” medium for his songs, perhaps so that the opposition is not so bold. Gario Ángeles may claim that he writes in Zapotec simply because it comes naturally to him, and that is certainly true, but his Zapotec songs hold a much greater meaning not only for those within his community but also those outside of it as part of the larger musical world.
Appendix

A Music Transcriptions
Transcription 1 Gario Ángeles, “Rabante Luy,” transcription by Kathryn Goldberg

Rabante Luy

Words and music by Gario Ángeles
Transcription by Kathryn Goldberg

Lui no! ni ri-kaz, luinou ni zu-nagwa. Lui

ni ri-kaz, lui nou ni zu-nagwa. Txi-ru rac-te xkar lie-nia, yub ni-a lau stuy. Txi-ru rac-te xkar-lie-nia, yub ni-a lau (heartbeat sounds)

ni ri-kaz, lui nou ni zu-nagwa. Luinou ni ri

stuy. Txi-ru rac-te xkar- lie-nia, yub ni-a lau stuy.
Transcription 3 Gario Ángeles, “Vainchieya te Lag,” transcription by Kathryn Goldberg

Vainchieya te Lag

(footsteps and sound of setting up loom before song begins)

Words and Music by Gario Ángeles
Transcription by Kathryn Goldberg
Lyrics and Translations 1 Gario Ángeles, “Rabante Luy,” translation by Kathryn Goldberg

A (0:00)
Txi gabania tui, luisiu yu’u le’n kie.
Ketru rutiplazdia re zugua tuizia’a sre.

When I am waking up, only you are inside my head.
I can’t handle being alone here like this anymore.

B (0:18)
Txi gabania tui, luisiu yu’u le’n kie.
Ketru rutiplazdia re zugua tuizia’a sre.

When I am waking up, only you are inside my head.
I can’t handle being alone here like this anymore.

C (0:34)
Guk gabiuu? Guk zugua’u?
Te gazon led nes, nes nia duso’n.

When will you return? When will you be home?
So that we can walk down the road hand in hand.

D (0:41)
Guk gabiuu? Guk zugua’u?
Te gazon led nes, nes nia duso’n.

When will you return? When will you be home?
So that we can walk down the road hand in hand.

E (0:49)
Ana xhixhite, yu’u le’n kie,
Ana xhixhite, reste sre.

Back then and every day, you are in my head.
Back then and every day, I wake up like this.

F (0:56)
Ana xhixhite, yu’u le’n kie,
Ana xhixhite, reste sre.

Back then and every day, you are in my head.
Back then and every day, I wake up like this.

G (1:02)
Ana xhixhite, ana xhixhite.

Back then and every day, back then and every day.

H (1:05)
Ranalaste txeky, txi zuguo’n rupun,
Axt nasa’a reste, txi rugie lau.

I remember well back then, when we were together,
Very happily I wake up, when I see your face.

I (1:19)
Ranalaste txeky, txi zuguo’n rupun,
Axt nasa’a reste, txi rugie lau.

I remember well back then, when we were together,
Very happily I wake up, when I see your face.

J (1:36)
Guk gabiuu? Guk zugua’u?
Te ke’ez’a te lui, gaua te ru’u.

When will you return? When will you be home?
So that I can hug you once, and kiss your mouth.

K (1:42)
Guk gabiuu? Guk zugua’u?
Te ke’ez’a te lui, gaua te ru’u.

When will you return? When will you be home?
So that I can hug you once, and kiss your mouth.

---

65 All rehearsal numbers correspond to the transcriptions (Appendix A). All timings refer to the audio recordings (Appendix C).
66 All lyrics translations were done with help from Moisés García Guzmán.
Ana xhixhite, yu’u le’n kie,
Ana xhixhite, reste sre.
Back then and every day, you are in my head.
Back then and every day, I wake up like this.

Ana xhixhite, yu’u le’n kie,
Ana xhixhite, reste sre.
Back then and every day, you are in my head.
Back then and every day, I wake up like this.

Ana xhixhite, ana xhixhite.
Back then and every day, back then and every day.

Ana xhixhite, yu’u le’n kie,
Ana xhixhite, reste sre.
Back then and every day, you are in my head.
Back then and every day, I wake up like this.

Ana xhixhite, yu’u le’n kie,
Ana xhixhite, reste sre.
Back then and every day, you are in my head.
Back then and every day, I wake up like this.

Ana xhixhite, ana xhixhite.
Back then and every day, back then and every day.
Lyrics and Translations 2 Gario Ángeles, “Luy Naou,” translation by Kathryn Goldberg

A (0:05)
B (0:17)
Tu lau, te bain naza’a teu le’n xkarlienia?
Tu lui, te kedridiediu le’n xigaba?
C (0:29)
Tu lui, tu lui?

What is your name, who makes my soul happy?
Who are you, that you won’t leave my head?
Who are you? Who are you?

D (0:35)
Tu lau, te bain naza’a teu le’n xkarlienia?
Tu lui, te kedridiediu le’n xigaba?
E (0:47)
Tu lui? Anana tu lui,
Anana tu lui.

What is your name, who makes my soul happy?
Who are you, that you won’t leave my head?
Who are you? I already know who you are,
I already know who you are.

F (0:55)
Lui nou ni rikaza,
Lui nou ni zunagua.
G (1:11)
Lui nou ni rikaza,
Lui nou ni zunagua.
Txiru racte xkarlienia.

You are who I want,
You are who I hope for.
You are who I want,
You are who I hope for.
And my soul trembles.

H (1:26)
Tu lau, te bain naza’a teu le’n xkarlienia?
Tu lui, te kedridiediu le’n xigaba?
I (1:38)
Tu lui, tu lui?

What is your name, who makes my soul happy?
Who are you, that you won’t leave my head?
Who are you? Who are you?

J (1:44)
Tu lau, te bain naza’a teu le’n xkarlienia?
Tu lui, te kedridiediu le’n xigaba?
K (1:56)
Tu lui? Anana tu lui,
Anana tu lui.

What is your name, who makes my soul happy?
Who are you, that you won’t leave my head?
Who are you? I already know who you are,
I already know who you are.

L (2:05)
Lui nou ni rikaza,
Lui nou ni zunagua.
M (2:19)
Lui nou ni rikaza,
Lui nou ni zunagua.

You are who I want,
You are who I hope for.
You are who I want,
You are who I hope for.
N (2:32)
Txiru racte xkarlienia,
Yub nia lau stuy.
Txiru racte xkarlienia,
Yub nia lau stuy.
Txiru racte xkarlienia,
Yub nia lau stuy.
And my soul trembles
To see you again soon.
And my soul trembles
To see you again soon.
And my soul trembles
To see you again soon.

O (2:50)
Lui nou ni rikaza,
Lui nou ni zunagua.
You are who I want,
You are who I hope for.

P (3:05)
Lui nou ni rikaza,
Lui nou ni zunagua.
Txiru racte xkarlienia,
Yub nia lau stuy.
You are who I want,
You are who I hope for.
And my soul trembles
To see you again soon.

Q (3:17)
Txiru racte xkarlienia,
Yub nia lau stuy.
Txiru racte xkarlienia,
Yub nia lau stuy.
Txiru racte xkarlienia,
Yub nia lau stuy.
And my soul trembles
To see you again soon.
And my soul trembles
To see you again soon.
And my soul trembles
To see you again soon.
Lyrics and Translations 3 Gario Ángeles, “Vainchieya te Lag” translation by Kathryn Goldberg

A (0:19)
Banytxieya te laj cun lau,
Gudie kulur ni rini xcalnau.
I wove a rug with your face,
I dyed the color that speaks of how you are.

B (0:32)
Banytxieya te laj cud cau,
Gudie culur ni rini xkalnou.
I wove a rug where you are,
I dyed the color that speaks of how you are.

C (0:45)
Axtxekyte rinidan na,
Ana rinidan zeky,
Sruta nau.
Since way back then they have told me,
They tell me it’s true,
How beautiful you are.

D (0:57)
Axtxekyte rinidan na,
Ana rinidan zeky,
Sruta nau.
Sruta nau.
Since way back then they have told me,
They tell me it’s true,
How beautiful you are.

E (1:17)
A basa rugueu, guatibia du.
Gulesa ladi bania ganili.
I returned from the riverbank, I went to wash the thread.
I lifted the rug, I made the bobbin.

F (1:30)
Basabtxeya lady, biua lo traly.
Txi bizunia ru’u baguba bi.
Baguba bi.
I prepared the warp, I placed it on the loom.
When I reached your mouth, I took in air.

G (1:46)
Axtxekyte rinidan na,
zekyka rinidan txeky,
sruta nau.
Since way back then they have told me,
So they have told me then,
How beautiful you are.

H (1:58)
Axtxekyte rinidan na,
Ana rinidan zeky,
sruta nau.
sruta nau.
sruta nau.
Since way back then they have told me,
They tell me it’s true,
How beautiful you are.
How beautiful you are.
How beautiful you are.

I (2:24)
A babe te laj kud kau.
I already finished a rug where you are.
C Sound Recordings

Sound Recording 1 Gario Ángeles, “Rabante Luy,” m4a file. Copyright Gario Ángeles.

Sound Recording 2 Gario Ángeles, “Luy Naou,” m4a file. Copyright Gario Ángeles.

Sound Recording 3 Gario Ángeles, “Vainchieya te Lag,” m4a file. Copyright Gario Ángeles.

67 All sound recordings can be found at the following web site: https://sites.google.com/view/goldbergzapotecsongs
**D Interview Transcripts**

**Interview Transcript 1** Gario Ángeles, interview in Spanish by Kathryn Goldberg, Teotitlán del Valle, June 15, 2017.68

1 Kathryn Goldberg: ¿Por cuánto tiempo ha estado cantando usted… en general, o en zapoteco?

2 Gario Ángeles: Empecé hace como tres años y medio. Hace tres años y medio escribí mi primera letra en zapoteco, que se llama “Rabante Luy,” que significa “te extraño mucho.” Y a partir de ahí, empecé a cantar un poco de tiempo. Empecé a ir a eventos, y pero después de ahí, dejé de cantar como dos años. Dejé de cantar. Y hace poco como dos meses, con mi… cómo volver a empezar mi primera presentación corta en el pueblo.

3 KG: ¿Por qué decidió cantar en zapoteco?


5 KG: Pero, no hay muchas personas que cantan en zapoteco, ¿no?


7 KG: ¿Sabe si hay personas que cantan a sus hijos, en zapoteco, pero no necesariamente escribieron una canción, no formal?

8 GA: Quizá en casa. Quizá en casa, posible. Hay padres que enseñen a sus hijos a hablar zapoteco y expresarse en zapoteco, y hacer quizá letras, o tratar de hacer canciones para niños. Quizá sí, muy posible. No he escuchado una que diga yo, pero sí he visto padres que enseñan a sus hijos zapoteco. Pero entonces, posiblemente enseñan a cantar. Posible. No sé.

9 KG: ¿Y cuántas canciones ha escrito usted en zapoteco? O en general, en español y en zapoteco.

10 GA: En español sí tengo algunas. Pero, no las he grabado. En zapoteco, tengo tampoco los he grabado. Las que he grabado ahorita las que tengo ahorita grabados ya son tres. Las que están en proceso son como cuatro más zapoteco. Pero como dejé de hacerlo, por muchas circunstancias, en dos años, y yo ya no, como… hay muchas cosas. Pero dije yo, “no, no…” Pero ahorita, le digo, es la naturaleza misma, es el… y… me gusta. Cuando ando en el pueblo a veces, camino,

68 Transcription made with the help of Loida Contreras Hernández, Moisés García Guzmán, and Dr. Felipe H. Lopez. The spoken Zapotec has been indicated in square brackets, untranscribed. For access to the sound recording of the original interview, contact the author.

11 KG: ¿Cuáles son, pues, yo sé que usted dice que es como naturaleza que usted canta y escribe en zapoteco. ¿pero hay algunas dificultades de cantar en zapoteco o de escribir letras en zapoteco? ¿Para que las canciones puedan... ser entendidas por la gente?


13 KG: Y, hay una pregunta sobre las letras, o la letra. ¿Puede decirme, o grabar, sola las letras de las canciones? Porque... quiero estudiar que sucede cuando una lengua que tiene los tonos en la lengua... que sucede cuando canta en la lengua, y ¿hay tonos que desaparecen, o...? Entonces, es... por eso... Pregunté, “¿hay dificultades?” porque...

14 GA: Eso es muy importante. Porque a veces hay palabras que decimos en zapoteco. Al momento de cantarlos, como los tonos, varían, a veces tenemos que subir o bajar, ¿no? Y la
métrica de la música. A veces es un poco… para… no es difícil cantarlos, sino que… Ubicarlo en la música… en el… la música ya está, y tratar de llevar con… sin perder la esencia del zapoteco. Como que… tratar de llevarlo, eso es lo difícil. No tanto cantarlo así, cuando lo canto así sin música no hay problema. Al momento de ubicarlo en los tonos en la métrica, es cuando digo… “Mm, tengo que variarle un poco aquí, variarle allí.” Pero, sin ser… para que sea entendido, sin pasarme de… y que sea entendido. Entonces, sí hay unas palabras que sí tengo que variar un poco. O alargar o subir el tono, para que quepa en él. Pero tampoco puedo pasarme mucho porque si no pierdo la… y no hay entendimiento. Entonces, sí hay cosas que ubicar, cositas pequeñas que quepan. Pero ahora hacerlo en zapoteco más antiguo. Hay zapoteco más antiguo. Eso es lo que trato de lograr ahora. Porque es más hablado. Es mi expresivo el zapoteco. Algunas cosas. Entonces, ahora es al revés, como yo cantarlo, y después, meterlo en la música. Que la música vaya conforme a lo que yo estoy diciendo. Porque si es al revés, yo tengo que hacerlo voz. La música está, simplemente hacer voz. Ahora, al revés, primero cantarlo, y después meterle la música, conforme al sonido. Entonces, claro que lleva más trabajo porque tengo que encontrarle la… Pero es más claro. ¿No? Entonces, sí. Y es más natural.

15 KG: Porque usted es… pues, es su primera lengua, entonces es natural de cantar y saber cuáles son las… no reglas, pero algo así.


17 KG: Es diferente. Es un diferente zapoteco.

18 GA: Varia un poco. Y, las nuevas generaciones que a veces hablan zapoteco, entre zapoteco, español, inglés… no es claro. Entonces, dice, “Ah…” Pues, se habla diferente. Por ejemplo yo, cuando hablo con un amigo, se usa un zapoteco más actual. Cuando se habla con una gente mayor, es ahí donde se hablan los zapotecos más que dices. “¿Qué dijiste?” Osea… Eso como… “¿Qué estás diciendo?” Hay palabras que muy profundas. Entonces, hay que tratar de agarrarle un poco de la base, que es el zapoteco antiguo. Y meterlo entre… porque si agarro puro el antiguo y empiezo hablar como cantarlo, la mayoría no me va a entender de los jóvenes, porque van a decir… que… “No entiendo.” Entonces, también al momento de cantar, tengo que cantar para que entiendan todos. Que sea más fácil, el entendimiento. En sí, lo que trato ahorita de hacer… es que el mensaje sea importante. Es, sobre todo, a veces la música todo… muchas cosas. Como que es mucho. Pero el mensaje. ¿No? No tanto ritmo. No. Sino, que sea el mensaje. Ahora, lo difícil, como yo lo decía, es lograr de que yo empiece a cantar. Sin métrica. La primera fue sin tiempo. No tiene tiempo. No es (metrónomo). Es como… salía. A veces iba más rápido, a veces más lento, conforme yo me sentía al decirlo. Entonces, quizá fue por eso que la gente le gustó, y se sintieron como que dijo a este… Siento parte, ¿no? Es porque nos fuimos como… y eso me gusta mucho. Para… quiero lograr eso. Al momento que logré eso de alcanzar que surja, que fluya como naturalmente. Sin tiempo. Sin miedo a los tonos. Sin métrica. Quiero decir lo que quiero decir expresarlo como yo quiero decirlo lo más importante es… quiero… es el mensaje. Poder transmitirlo. Poder transmitirlo, en el momento que yo logré transmitirlo a las otras personas. En situaciones diferentes. Es cuando puedo yo ya sentirme satisfecho y decir, “Lo he logrado.” Esa interpretación que yo quiero. Eso es una parte que quizá fuera de las reglas.
Porque, pues, la música tiene reglas y tiene… entonces, quizá pueden decir, “Ooh, está quebrantando las leyes.” Pero el mensaje es muy importante.

19 KG: ¿Puede decir la letra de las canciones? ¿Las palabras?

20 GA: Voy a tratar de traducirlas, este… La primera, voy a tratar de traducirla.

21 KG: Pues, en zapoteco.

O con la novia es un poquito raro. Entonces más en español. Entonces yo dije esa parte. Tratando de que la mujer le dijera al hombre. Y aquí la esposa le está diciendo al hombre. Entonces se repite la segunda parte, “[zapoteco]” “¿Cuándo regresas? ¿Cuándo vas a estar? ¿Por qué?” “[zapoteco].” Básicamente, trata nada mas de eso, del extrañar de la mujer. De que está fuera su esposo. Entonces, el tema primero, que se llama “Rabante Luy.”

23 KG: Bueno. ¿Y la segunda canción?


25 KG Ah, no conozco esta canción. Conozco a las otras, pero no esta canción.

26 GA: Esa la escribi, esa… lo hice con un amigo. Y la idea es básicamente la base, era resaltar mi pueblo, Teotitlán. Básicamente era eso, que he crecido con los que lo hacen. El sonido del

27 KG: Interesante.

quiero tocar. No se quieren tocar. Pero es necesario, para el bien de nosotros. Para que aportemos
un poquito. Y en eso estoy, ya quizá no voy a cantar mucho a la soledad, al amor, y ya voy a
meterme más en lo... Lo que quiero decir, pero ya es más difícil, porque ya es contra. Es tocar
cuerdas sensibles. Y esas, cuando tacas allí, puede ser perjudicial. Entonces, mi hermano, tengo
un hermano que sacó una canción muy bonita. Habla de su niñez, de lo que vivió, está muy
bonito. Pero a los dos nos, pues, ahorita, ya a los dos.
Kathryn Goldberg: How long have you been singing… in general, or in Zapotec?

Gario Ángeles: I started about three and a half years ago. Three and a half years ago I wrote the lyrics to my first song in Zapotec, named “Rabante Luy,” which means “I miss you a lot.” And from that point on, I started to sing a little. I started to go to events, but after that, I stopped singing for about two years. I stopped singing. And about two months ago, with my… it’s like starting over with my first short presentation in the pueblo.

KG: Why did you decide to sing in Zapotec?

GA: Why did I decide to? That wording “I decided to.” I am Zapotec. And it’s my first language. And automatically, although I didn’t necessarily want to, nature. So, only nature knows, and I feel good because it’s part of me.

KG: But, there aren’t many people who sing in Zapotec, right?

GA: Yes. Here in the pueblo there are two people who do. Me, who started first, and later, my brother started to. My brother is older than I am. He felt connected, when he listened to the songs, he said, “Oh, I have to make one like this” because he had been trying to write songs in Spanish. And he said, “I feel connected.” He doesn’t live here, he lives in [the United States]. Anyway, he felt connected and said, “I’m going to be inspired by this, my Zapotec is very beautiful.” So, he did it in Zapotec. We are the two people who sing in Zapotec. As far as I know.

KG: Do you know if there are people who sing to their children, in Zapotec, but didn’t necessarily write a song, formally?

GA: Maybe in the house. Maybe in the house, it’s possible. There are parents who teach their children how to speak Zapotec, and express themselves in Zapotec, and maybe create lyrics, or try to make songs for children. Maybe yes, it’s very possible. I haven’t heard anyone that I would say… but yes I’ve seen parents who teach their children Zapotec. So, possibly they teach them to sing. Very possible. I don’t know.

KG: And how many songs have you written in Zapotec? Or in general, in Spanish and in Zapotec?

GA: In Spanish I have some. But I haven’t recorded them. I have some [songs] in Zapotec that I haven’t recorded. So far I have recorded three. There are about four more in process, in addition to the Zapotec ones. But I stopped doing it, because of many circumstances, for about two years, and I didn’t… there are many things. But I said, “No, no…” But now, I tell you, it’s nature itself, it’s… and… I like it. When I’m walking around in the pueblo sometimes, I walk, I have friends, and sometimes I yearn, and without wanting to I come to want to write. So, it’s inevitable to write again. So right now I’m writing, and now I have solid drafts of two Zapotec
themes that are ready. Solid drafts. So, I only need to incorporate the voice, to sing. But the lyrics are already there. In Zapotec.

10 KG: What are, well… I now that you said that it’s like nature that you sing and write in Zapotec, but are there some difficulties of singing in Zapotec or of writing lyrics in Zapotec? So that the songs can be understood by the people?

11 GA: So, I’m going to tell you about the first song. One day I was in the market of the pueblo, and I saw a situation. A woman. Here it’s customary to bring a basket, a rebozo, in order to go shopping. What she’s going to eat for breakfast, to eat that day. All of the women are used to this. So, in front of me, there were… two women arrived. Like the woman in front. And the two women asked the first, and said, “So when is he coming back?” “Guc guedran?” And she said, “He’s coming soon.” And she said, “Amer gued.” “Let’s see if you’re right. You told us the same thing a year ago.” But in Zapotec. “Zicy guc.” She said, “[Zapotec]” “Yes, but now he’s really coming.” They were talking about the husband of the woman who was alone. And I saw that. That conversation. But the moment that they left, the woman was left kind of sad, “[Zapotec]” She said, “I miss my husband, because he is in the United States.” In that moment I was moved by that, and I hadn’t about writing that day. I hadn’t thought about it. But in that moment that I saw the situation and I saw her, how she remained pensive. And I saw that, and I kind of empathized with her. And the first lyrics came out. I grabbed my notebook, and (mimics writing). “[Zapotec]” Totally focused. “[Zapotec]” You wake up in my mind. “[Zapotec]” Alone. It took me about… I don’t know, very little time. Only the lyrics. It wasn’t difficult. Because it flowed. And then, I had it all. “[Zapotec]” I had the melody. It was a question of one night. Little guitar, and voice, we recorded it. It didn’t take us much time, five minutes, ten minutes. Three takes and it was done. And it flowed out. Only the melody was left. (mimics guitar). And it was done. The next day, a friend came over and he took it with him. And they put it on the radio. That’s when everyone heard it. But that was one of the songs that I didn’t have to force. I only let it flow. Then, in that regard, I don’t think it is difficult, because I thought in Zapotec. I thought in Zapotec, and I wrote in Zapotec, without thinking. Then they asked me for the translation. That I sing it in Spanish. And I said, “How can I do it in Spanish? Because I thought it, I lived it in Zapotec. So the words that I used then… very difficult… how to try to say the same Zapotec word in Spanish. It was very difficult for me. Then I translated it best I could, in more… um… in a form more… how can I call it? More simple. So that the people who know Spanish could more or less understand it. But in itself, to translate in Zapotec, like I wrote, like I… what I tried to say… I have to explain it. I have to explain it, I have to say, it’s this… I said this. I said that for this. It’s not…like this in Spanish. So there are things that I wrote in Zapotec. Up to three lyrics. When I wrote it, it was in Zapotec.

13 KG: And there’s a question about the lyrics. Can you tell me, or record, just the lyrics of the songs? Because… I want to study what happens when a language that has tones in the language… what happens when you sing in the language, and are there tones that disappear, or…? So, it’s… because of this… I asked, “Are there difficulties?” because…

14 GA: That is very important. Because sometimes there are words that we say in Zapotec. At the moment of singing them, the tones vary, sometimes we have to raise or lower, right? And the meter of the music. Sometimes it’s a little bit… it’s not difficult to sing them, but… to locate
them in the music… in the… the music already is there, and trying to carry with… without losing the essence of the Zapotec. How to try to carry it, that’s what’s difficult. Not so much singing it that way, when I sing it that way without music there’s no problem. At the moment of locating it in the tones in the meter, that’s when I say, “Hmm, I have to vary it a little here, vary it a little there.” But, without being… so that it can be understood, without passing… and that it is understood. So, yes there are some words that do have to vary a little. Or to enlarge or raise the tone, so that it fits in it. But neither can I spend much time because if I don’t lose the… and there’s no understanding. So, yes there are things that locate, little things that fit. But now to do it in an older Zapotec. There is an older Zapotec. That is what I try to achieve now. Because it is more spoken. The Zapotec is very expressive. Some things. So, now it is upside down, how I sing it, and then, put it in the music. That the music goes conforms to what I am saying. Because if it is upside down, I have to do the voice. The music is there, simply do the voice. Now, upside down, first singing it, and then adding the music, conforms the sound. So, of course it brings more work because I have to find the… But it is more clear. No? So, yes. And it is more natural.

15 KG: Because you are… well, it is your first language, so it is natural to sing and know what are the… not rules, but something like that.

16 GA: There is Zapotec, in… that older people speak. That is, it’s an old Zapotec. That there are many very profound things. Very profound. There is a Zapotec that we speak more between young people.

17 KG: It’s different. It’s a different Zapotec.

18 GA: It varies a bit. And, the new generations that sometimes speak Zapotec, between Zapotec, Spanish, English… it’s not clear. So, they say, “Ah…” well, it’s spoken differently. For example, I, when I speak with a friend, a more current Zapotec is used. When I speak with an older person, it’s there that the Zapotecs are more spoken. “What did you say? Um…well… what are you saying?” There are words that are very profound. So, you have to try to get for yourself a little bit of the source, that is the older Zapotec. And put it in… because if I just take all the old Zapotec and I start to talk and sing like that, most of the young people aren’t going to understand, because they’re going to say, “What? I don’t understand.” So, also at the moment of singing, I have to sing so that everyone understands. So that it will be easier, the understanding. What I am trying right now to do, is that the message is important. It is, about everything, sometimes the music is many things. It is a lot. But the message. No? Not as much rhythm. No. But, that it is the message. Now, the difficulty, like I said, is achieving what I started to sing. Without meter. The first was without time. It doesn’t have time. It isn’t (makes metronome sounds). It’s like… it left. Sometimes it was more fast, sometimes more slow, it agrees to what I felt to say. So, maybe it was because of this that the people liked it, and felt like it said …. felt part, right? It’s because we went like… and that I liked a lot. In order to… I want to achieve this. At the moment that I achieved that of reaching that arose, that flowed like naturally. Without time. Without fear of the tones. Without meter. I want to say what I want to say, to express it how I want to say, the most important is… I want… is the message. To be able to transmit it. To be able to transmit it, in the moment that I achieved transmitting it to the other people. In different situations. It’s when I can feel satisfied and say, “I’ve achieved it.” That interpretation is what I want. That is a part that maybe is outside of the rules. Because, well, music has rules
and has… so, maybe they can say, “Oh, he’s breaking the laws.” But the message is very important.

19 KG: Can you say the lyrics of the songs? The words?

20 GA: I will try to translate them. The first, I’m going to try to translate it.

21 KG: Well, in Zapotec.

22 GA: Yes. In Zapotec. Later to say why I said it. That is, in Zapotec I am trying to say that. But in Spanish I have to grab that little word and say, “This and that. So, the first was…it’s named “Rabante Luy.” I miss you a lot. Because of the situation that happened with the woman. It stayed there thoughtful. And she said, “[Zapotec]” “When will you return?” “[Zapotec]” “When will you be in my house?” “[Zapotec]” “Always upon waking up.” “[Zapotec]” “You wake up in my mind.” “[Zapotec]” It says, “I can’t take it anymore. To be here.” “[Zapotec]” “Together, holding hands down the street.” Because I said that part. In my pueblo, I don’t know if it’s so in other pueblos, I suppose so, but in my pueblo, we have a thing that’s called… there’s a lot of machismo. Where… so, sometimes, the women don’t… there is no man that takes the hand of the woman through the street. Maybe, I don’t know, pride, or… there are many things. Very small, and stroll through the street. The woman almost always goes separated. That is one… because I said. The woman is saying to her husband, “arrive in…” she wants, longs for that. That when her husband returns, they’ll go out on the street, holding hands, because, those two women who were there, they were arguing that it was a lie, that her husband would return. Because they are doubting that they still live together. There are many situations here. The husbands are, and don’t return, or I don’t know when. So the women are alone. So it is very difficult. So, the women that are asking, saying, “We’ll see if it’s true.” And what the woman who is alone is trying to say is that… they will see that yes. And in order for them to see that, it’s that “we’re going to walk down the street. Holding hands, so that they see that it is true.” That is, “We are going to walk through the pueblo, to show them that we are still together.” Because of this I say, “[Zapotec]” “Every day you are in my mind.” “[Zapotec]” “All days, and every day.” The second part says… the second part that says… there is a part that I like a lot. Where it says… the woman asks her husband that when he returns, she wants to kiss him. She is asking for a kiss. That part, when I sang it, in Zapotec, the women who listened to it, it made them red, red. “Oh, it can’t be that you said that! You shouldn’t have said that!” Why? Because they are private things. That says, “Together.” Private. You can’t say it like that. But, it isn’t so bad. Simply, a woman does not say that to the husband. A woman doesn’t say it. “[Zapotec]” “I want to hug you.” “[Zapotec]” “Kiss your lips.” A woman is saying that to her husband. Here in the pueblo, that I know of, maybe in private yes, in private when it’s the two of them. But like that to say, “Oh it’s a lot,” causes pain. It says, “No, you don’t have to say that word.” Maybe the man can say it but a woman, saying to her husband, no. But I said it, because I wanted that the woman to release. And to be more free and to express her feelings. Because of this I described. So that the women when they heard it, would say. And already would tell him. In that they are silent. What I have said is that they are silent. Of course. More freedom, right? To express herself. Because there is not much. When they are in private, or they say many things in Zapotec, it’s like… things, more than feelings, of love, and being in love, in Zapotec… it causes a little… it’s strange. Or with a girlfriend it’s a little strange. So more in Spanish. So I said that part. Trying so
that the woman would say to the man. And here the wife is saying to the man. So the second part repeats. “[Zapotec]” “When will you return? When will you be here? Why?” “[Zapotec]” Basically, it’s about nothing more than that, than the longing of the woman. That her husband is away. So, the first subject, it’s called “Rabante Luy.”

23 KG: Okay. And the second song?

24 GA: The second song? The second is a … What was the second that I did? “Luy Naou” “[Zapotec]” That I brought out. Because that I lived. It’s an experience. I knew a person, and that was like… we talked. At night. And talked. But I didn’t know her. We knew each other for one moment. “[Zapotec]” “What is your name? Because you made me be reborn inside.” “[Zapotec]” “Who are you?” “[Zapotec]” “That you don’t leave my mind.” “[Zapotec]” “Who are you? What is your name?” I did it more for adolescents, for young people. And that pleased more for the young people. They felt more identified. Because it is in the stage that they are living. And basically I wanted that too. Because the majority of the young people, or adolescents than other generations, aren’t interested anymore in Zapotec. So, in the school I don’t know, or in their houses, they forgot Zapotec. So much so, that now, it is even harder than Spanish. So, they’re almost not interested by Zapotec. So, what I tried to do is include a form of their experiences, too. Because they are a part of what I lived, I said, “Okay… Others are experiencing this too.” So I said, then, it was more for them. No. “[Zapotec]” “You are who I hope for.” “[Zapotec]” That is, to say, “[Zapotec]” It’s like saying, “my… the cravings of my spirit.” Or “of my soul.” I have cravings to see you. I can’t rest and there is something here… that I want to see you, no? That emotion. Or that passion, whatever it can be called. “[Zapotec]” To see you again. So, it’s more dedicated to the young people. And it’s… basically that, dedicated in order to influence it. And I think that that part… a part I am satisfied. Sometimes we put a little bit so that others go and start to be interested in Zapotec. And I said, “Okay…” And I already gave the entrance that they listen, that they sing, and that others follow. And that there be more Zapotec. I, when I went to school, I, when I went to the school, in elementary school, they prohibited me from speaking Zapotec. They prohibited all of us. They made us go up to the blackboard, and, if we spoke Zapotec (rapping noises). So, I grew up with that. When I left there, I understood that it was…. I couldn’t stop speaking my language. My first [language]… I can’t avoid it. I understood that… I said, “No… it was very bad what they were doing.” Because it was part of me, they wanted to take it away from me. So, I grew up with that, and perhaps because of that I said, “I’m going to write a song.” And I did it. No? Why? Well, it’s part of me, of my culture, of me, of me. So, that part, yes it made me think a while. Because there weren’t many people who were interested in Zapotec. And after that song, I listened to many sing it. And then now they find me in the street and I’m glad. But what I wanted to achieve is that others come out. That they write poems in Zapotec, that they make books, that they sing music in Zapotec. I would want that. Not just men, women. So, but… I hope little by little by little, but it’s getting lost. It’s getting lost. And the third. The third I wrote… it’s called “Vainchieya te Lag.”

25 KG: Ah, I don’t know this song. I know the others, but not this song.

26 GA: That one I wrote, that one… I did it with a friend. And the idea is basically the base, it was to highlight my pueblo, Teotitlán. Basically it was that, that I have grown up with those that
do it. The sound of the loom. The sheet, to weave… all the processes, and that always is normal. I had some looms here and I said, why not…. in place of putting a battery base, we put the loom of the base. And my friend says, “I’m going to weave.” Okay. We do it. So, we record, the loom with the pedals, that it has, and start like that. (makes sounds) with the time, but weaving. And with the guitar. So we took the sound of the loom, weaving and there we put the guitar and I sang. So, that song says, “[Zapotec]” “I wove a rug.” I didn’t put it, here they are accustomed to say, they say, “[Zapotec]” But when, “[Zapotec]” like that it’s said normally. But when you talk with a more trustworthy person, you say “lag.” It’s a little different, the translation. “Lady.” It’s translated like “clothes. Fabric.” You can translate it like that. “Lag.” It’s translated like “sheet.” It’s when we say “[Zapotec]” It’s like saying, “I wove a sheet.” “[Zapotec]” Or between sheets. It has a lot of… you have to… put it, I say it’s very interesting. How to be able to say it, to translate it? “[Zapotec]” And I talk of all of the processes that happen, it’s because they happen normally here, from bringing the wool to the river. I mention that the wool is brought to the river that it’s washed, the wool, after it’s arrived at the house, and it’s made all of the process of, what to call it… before weaving, not of the thread on foot. After putting it on the loom, well, all of the processes talk in this song. No? And after later, I enter with the rug. So basically I talk, in this third song, I talk of Teotitlán, of the rug that it gives us and the sound. Because of this I put the sound of the loom, that identifies us and that makes us feel. But in that, I talk of Teotitlán… And that that didn’t finish. I stopped it, and my friend left. And we didn’t finish it well. So we stopped there how it is. But it lacked. Right now they are asking that I finish it. Because there is a contest in Mexico. They say, “Why don’t you do it? And finish it?” Possibly but… And like that. So, they’re parts that now I’m revising. The new themes. I say. “There are many things that have to be discovered.” There’s a lot. Many things that I have to say. Now the problem is. When I think it in Zapotec what I’m writing now I am thinking in Zapotec. I say, “I want to say this.” Now the problem is in finding the words to say. In Zapotec. How do I say this? It’s here, I want to say it in few words, and in Zapotec. That’s one. And now the translation soon they will ask me for the translation that is another. It is a little complicated, this aspect, but now I am with that, I say, “Okay, I want to send this message.” To give this, I want to help in other forms. No? As much in… there are many things I can do. Maybe it was two years I didn’t sing. And when I sang, again, I did in the pueblo. It has a little. And (shaking) because I had never been in front of the pueblo. And maybe some did know me for singing, excuse me, but they didn’t know me. And that day, there many knew me. And they said, “Oh, it’s you! It’s you that sang!” But, I did feel very…. because it was my people. And it’s more difficult when it’s your family. It’s more difficult.

27 KG: Interesting.

28 GA: And now, well, that passed. So I say, it’s an experience, and I feel more calm. And now the new themes, yes I say, will I do it or not do it? There are themes that are… I say, “it’s very good but…” I say to a friend, and he says, “Why don’t you sing alone?” And a friend said, he says, “This we need in the pueblo.” And I tell him, “I have one.” I tell him. But it’s very strong. “Why?” He says. Ooh! Very strong. And I. They bring me from the pueblo. Say, “We’re going to take you from the pueblo… if I say so.” No? I say, because they’re going to tell you, “No no no. That isn’t said. So they’re things that at best, sometimes I shut up or I say. Yes, but yes, there are many things. It would be good to say it, so that there’s more… this way we can… more…
use a little more the… and say “oh, this can be done” or “this one shouldn’t do” or “this yes.”

For the common good. Because there are questions of… there’s the question of putting it in politics. Very difficult, that I don’t want to play. They don’t want to touch. But it is necessary, for the good of us. So that we contribute a little. And in that I am, maybe I’m not going to sing much of the solitude, of love, and I’m going to do more in the… in what I want to say, but it’s more difficult, because it’s against. It’s to touch sensitive cords. And those, when you touch there, it can be harmful. So, my brother, I have a brother who left a very pretty song. He speaks of his childhood, of what he lived, it’s very pretty.
Bibliography


https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SLcZMJ4wBHQt=36s.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZtlTO81-N80.


https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j9f-1A_0mEQ.


https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ITt_0MhnjKc.


https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p-9aQHCbOhc


Uchihara, Hiroto and Ambrocio Gutierrez. “El sistema tonal del zapoteco de Teotitlán del Valle: ¿por qué un sistema de dos niveles presenta tantos desafíos?” Presentation at the Second Workshop on the Sound Systems of Mexico and Central America, Mexico City, Mexico, April 1, 2016.
