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Ofelia Zepeda: Generally people assume because my tribal affiliation is O'odham that I am from the Reservation, but I'm not. And this is a peculiar situation because non-Indians assume if you're not from the Reservation then you must be lesser. I've spent many times justifying or explaining why I'm not from the Reservation. That has a long history.

The community I was born and raised in was basically a farming community. The reason that I happen to be from there is simply because that's where my parents ended up. My parents are both what is called the Sonoran Papago. They are the O'odham people that happened to be living in what is now Sonora, Mexico. When the border went up, they became automatic Mexican citizens. But before, that whole land area was the traditional land of the people. So when they came into what is now Arizona of course they wouldn't go onto the Reservation, because that is not where they're from. So they basically went around the Reservation. This is very common if you look at some of the small farming and rural communities that are the border towns now of the O'odham Reservation. You'll find a lot of O'odham people that came in from Sonora, Mexico, who basically ended up as Sonoran Mexicans after the border went up.

And so as they came in, they settled there. That's

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what happened to my family. They settled just west of Casa Grande in a little farming town called Stanfield, Arizona. They were basically migrant workers, farm laborers, all their lives, and they still are at this time. So that's why I'm not from the Reservation. In fact Reservation O'odham people know us as being rural O'odham. They refer to that geographic region as "the place of cotton," "the cotton place" because it's primarily cotton farming communities. So when you say you're from Casa Grande or Eloy or Stanfield or Maricopa they'll say, "Oh, you're from the cotton place." It has a long enough history to be distinguished by the people themselves as a place to be from. So that's where I'm from. I'm not from the Reservation. Any relations I have who currently live on the Reservation live very close to the Mexico/U.S. border. The closest village, it's a little place called Menniger's Dam. That's where a lot of my father's elderly relatives and my mother's elderly relatives still live. It is about two miles from the fence. In fact my identification card for my tribal status in the tribe has an "ND" on there which says "no district." This means I don't have a residence, and I'm not eligible for residency there unless I go through some long petitioning or whatever. So my educational background is kind of interesting and it ends here basically not being from the Reservation.

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I went to public school the whole time. I went to a junior college for a little while, and then I came here to the University of Arizona. O'odham is my first language. As I have told many people, in the late sixties, early seventies, there were some publications being written in the O'odham language. These were written by non-O'odham people using O'odham speakers as consultants or whatever. I saw these things in bookstores and libraries. Being a speaker, I assumed that I should be able to read these pieces of writing. I did try but I found it to be a very frustrating exercise. I didn't realize that in order to read you must understand the system the text is using. The system needs to be taught to you by somebody who knows how it works. So what began my education in linguistics and language teaching is being a student of my own language, trying to become literate in the language. I worked with an elderly gentleman here in the Arizona State Museum who was retired at the time. He had been a minister out on the O'odham Reservation for many years, and he spoke O'odham, read and wrote O'odham. I knew he was around, because I have friends and relatives around in the Ajo area. They knew this man and referred me to him. So he was my first teacher.

After that my second teacher is probably one of the best teachers of O'odham linguistics and the field of linguistics in general, Professor Ken Hale from the

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Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He happened to be here as a visiting professor, and I met him. I spent a year working with him here, and then he left. That was the only length of time I spent with him, about a year. Other than that the rest of my training in my own language has been here on this campus in this particular department of linguistics. So as I finished, I stayed here, and in staying here I've been able to become somewhat diverse in the things that I do.

As language teacher, and having been a student of my own language, I saw how limited the literature was as far as anything that could be used in a classroom setting, for adult readers of O'odham especially. There was very little as well for younger readers written in the language. So many of us set out to try and start to create a literature. Some of us actually said that we should do this because you know people at that time were saying in order to create a literacy in the native language you have to have some kind of literature base. This is true. The only problem is it takes a great big mechanism to get that started and a lot of energetic people. Danny Lopez was one of my students, and we have worked together at different points doing this kind of activity. But it's a very hard machine to keep running when there's just so few of you. We're still just picking away at this time. Most of the texts have been songs and

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short pieces, the little poems and things, but again there isn't much being produced by those of us who are literate in the language. We are encouraging those O'odham speakers who have been my students or Danny's students to create some kind of literature, but it's sort of a hard thing to do. One needs always to be there, encouraging these people. That takes time, and I have not spent that much time on it. I've mostly been concerned with my own writing, not only the short pieces and the translation activities that I've been doing, but also the other part of my discipline, which is language research. I've been more successful with the language research basically from a scientific point of view. I've gotten more support, and I've been somewhat more productive in that area. It isn't always that easy to balance, but I try. So that's why I'm here. This gives you an idea of where I came from and how I happen to be here, at this place, at this time.

Larry Evers: In one of your pieces, you quote somebody who's written on O'odham history about the question of where people came from. Your response is people believe they came out of the earth. This reminded me of what Simon Ortiz and Luci Tapahonso were talking about in relation to thinking of themselves going back to that emergence point. What connection do you feel to that story yourself as a writer?

Ofelia Zepeda: That's something. This is something I

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thought about in fact when I started to write this piece. I guess about two years ago I was doing a lot of traveling out on the Reservation. I was out there at least three days a week all day long interviewing people. This was specifically for a dialect study of the O'odham language. There's one place where we went many, many times because it was an area in which we had very poor luck talking to O'odham speakers. There's a little village called Sil nakya or Saddle Hanging. There was a medicine man that lives there who I've worked with several different times. I went to visit him as we looked for other speakers. He was not a good candidate for the dialect study because he was severely deaf and partially blind. We needed both of those senses in order to do the study, but we spent some time talking to him, and we spent some time on the road to Sil nakya.

Sil nakya is sort of an interesting village. There's a blacktop road that comes off the main highway. It's still blacktop as it's heading towards Sil nakya, but a few hundred yards before you get into the village it just ends, because there's a big rugged wash there. Just before that blacktop ends, there's a little marker there, the kind of marker that the people use, the little rock markers. They say that that's one of those places, one of those places where the people came. And so I talked to him about that place for a little while. He says when you go by there, he

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says, you can stop, and you can ask for things if you want, but if you ask for something, you have to leave something. So one time we did that, but like I said, we spent a lot of time on that road. I remember that spot very well. There are other spots that people talk about, at bases of mountains and places like that, where they say there's a marker. Or else some people know that there's a place there where something important happened. It's usually a very early point in the history of the people. They don't say it's where we came out of, they just say it's where we were. Then we left from there. So it means it was a very early place for the people.

And so in my travels I got to know some of those, where they were. I knew they were out there, but usually people don't go to them. It's very difficult to find unless you know exactly where it is. Even local people from that area, they have a hard time finding them. But there's nothing there, really. It's just a "that's the place." They can point to it. Like I said, I became more familiar with some of those places. Like I said, a lot of them are right near the main blacktop roads. So we can imagine if people were still coming out now they would stand there and hitch a ride with you. We were just joking around with that. People would do that because people would always be standing along the road asking for rides, so if new people came out maybe

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they would do that too.

Larry Evers: What kind of audience exists for the new writing that you've been working on? In the Introduction to When It Rains, you discuss the significance of written words in O'odham. You say, "whether the expression is in a short letter or just writing down personal thoughts, it is thrilling to know that there is someone else out there who can read what we have put down on paper and share the experience with us. It is this new and significant and powerful experience with written words that we invite you to share here." What's this telling us about the audience for O'odham writing?

Ofelia Zepeda: At that time, like I said, there was such a small number of us who were literate in O'odham. We were all students of one another or else teachers of one another. At the time, I guess it was '82, all of us who had taught an O'odham language course were all together in this one place, this one summer. I can't remember if Danny Lopez was there, but certainly Ken Hale was there, and Albert Alvarez was there. These were all people from the very beginning who worked on O'odham. Rosilda Manuel was there, and Helen Ramon was there. They're all O'odham people. Most of them were students of Albert Alvarez or Ken Hale. Albert Alvarez was also a student of Ken Hale. We were such a small group. When we started writing that was the first time that anyone

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ever thought about writing something for somebody to read for absolute pure enjoyment. Before, for instance, Ken Hale was writing things in O'odham, but people would make fun of him. We thought he wrote unusual sentences even for O'odham, but only because he was looking for distinct features of the structure of the O'odham language. They would be grammatical, but it would be something, well, nobody would ever say that. But if they ever did, it would be an alright sentence. So that was the kind of stuff he would be writing and asking us to read. We'd read them and get a reaction.

But otherwise, like I said, this particular summer was the first time that we as a group thought about writing something that was purely for enjoyment purposes. It was such a small audience, and it was kind of fun, in fact, just to pass things back and forth. People got very excited. We were living in a dormitory and when we went back to our rooms, we revised what we did. They'd bring it back at nine o'clock, ten o'clock. People were still up late into the night. Early in the morning, people were still revising, because we were on a tight schedule. We wanted to get something together this particular summer. So at that time it was a very tight, small audience.

Since then that particular group of teachers and students of the O'odham language came back to the

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Reservation. They came back to their classrooms in the fall and started to build on this audience. We said, "Here are these things that one can read and you don't have to worry about the structure of the sentence or anything like that. If it's grammatical or ungrammatical or if the spelling is absolutely there or not." At that time, even now with Navajo, we're still moving towards standardization. So there's still a little bit of variety in the way we spell things. A person didn't have to worry about those types of things. The audience at that time was growing to include younger readers, mostly people in the schools, because those people were all affiliated with schools. Very few of them were affiliated with adult education or the college level. In fact, I was the only one, I guess, dealing with the college level population. So I was very excited to bring some of these things into my own classroom, to have the students learning O'odham or about O'odham from me read texts purely for enjoyment, not to have to worry about word order or whether it's grammatical or not.

And so it started to grow, but at that point, it was a very narrow, very small audience. We all knew each other. As far as things like letters were concerned, that is exactly what we did. We perpetuated a little part of the written language by writing to each other in O'odham. In the English language you can certainly take for granted just

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writing a letter, but for O'odham it's a real exciting. You're sort of inventing things: what's a salutation going to look like? What are you going to say? I was always struck by how one woman ended her letter in O'odham. She would just say "me," because in O'odham you don't say your own name orally. You don't repeat your own name. So she wouldn't even write her own name. She'd just say, "It's me." I always knew it was her, because that's the way she did it. Everybody else followed English conventions for letter writing and so forth. But it was an interesting development. Right now our literate population is still quite small. Most of them are still elementary age, junior high students, and then a very slow-growing adult reader population. More adult people are taking the O'odham class from Pima College or from here.

Vicki Broach: What about the Bible? Have people been reading the Bible in translation?

Ofelia Zepeda: Yes, the Bible is in translation. In fact that was one of my first texts. I thought that was a horrible piece of text for the O'odham language, because of the way there's lots of errors in interpretation and translation into the language. That is a whole other thing, but you can read it. There are people who do read it, but O'odham people are predominately Catholic. The Catholic people are not heavy Bible readers. If you're the other

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religions, you know, then you tend to use the Bible. But, again, not that many people are literate to want to read the Bible. They have the Bible, and the little stories. They're little, paper-thin stories. They're bible stories basically. I collected all of those because those were my texts.

Vicki Broach: What about church services? Are there any liturgies published in O'odham?

Ofelia Zepeda: Yes, they have some. But because church is all oral, they don't get accustomed to reading the prayers. They're normally done orally. They might follow along, but otherwise it's all oral. There's been very little incentive to read or to learn to read.

Larry Evers: Out of that group you were talking about, is that where this book, When It Rains, came from?

Ofelia Zepeda: Yes, it was primarily that group of people that came together. Some people who came and took an O'odham language class for the first time, they also contributed to the volume.

Larry Evers: To return to the question of audience, I was remembering the occasion when this book, When It Rains, was published in 1982. There was a reading at the tribal council chambers in Sells. You just about filled up the place. Would you talk about that reading?

Ofelia Zepeda: Yes. Actually I was apprehensive about how

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people would respond to our reading, first of all since I don't recall that there ever was such a book out there. We sent invitations out to all the various tribal offices to come to the reading, to see the book, or to buy the book and so forth. We put together a little program and invited some of the contributors to the volume to come and read from the book. It was a very nice program. We had a master of ceremonies, Mr. Joseph Enos, who's always very good about pulling things together. We had refreshments and so forth, but the readings were very interesting. They were accepted very, very well by the audience. The readers gave a little introduction to the piece that they wrote.

I remember one of the women, Mrs. Ramon, who's been a friend of mine for a long, long time. Both Helen Ramon and her husband contributed to the volume. Mrs. Ramon has had a lot of problems in her life, but she's one of those people who just keeps going on and on. She is very close to her parents, particularly her mother. Her mother was raised very traditionally and speaks beautiful O'odham. Mrs. Ramon writes beautiful O'odham, and she's also a beautiful singer. But when she introduced her piece, something related to her mother and her memories of her mother who had passed away, it was very emotional. The audience picked up on that and were very struck. There was this silence in the room when she read her piece. The moment just seemed to last for a

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long time, and it kept happening over and over again, even the ones that weren't so sad, even the fun ones. People just got caught up in them. It seemed for some of them there just wasn't enough. They wanted more. Some people later told me, "You know the little pieces you have they're not songs, but they're like songs in a way because they're short, because they describe things that we see, we understand." So people were very, very complimentary. They enjoyed the pieces very much. We got very good responses and feedback over all. Of course we gave away a lot of books, and we also sold quite a few.

After that we did have readings here in Tucson. It was usually me and a couple of the other contributors. People would always try to ask them to come in and read with me. And the response was interesting. In Sells, it was an O'odham speaking audience so they were able to sort of appreciate both the English and the O'odham text. But when it came to Tucson, you had one or two O'odham people in the audience and the rest were non-O'odham. We considered whether we should only read in English because we figured, "Why would we read in O'odham, they're not going to understand it." Somebody might say something about it, "Why are you reading in O'odham when we can't understand?" So we worried about it for awhile. Then we decided, we'll just go ahead and read it. When I read in O'odham, I like to ask

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the audience. I acknowledge the fact that they don't understand the language. But I just simply ask them to be patient and to listen to the language and what it sounds like. I don't know about the other speakers. I think that the forms have a particular kind of rhythm to them in the language that you don't get in regular spoken O'odham. I ask them to simply enjoy that and then I will give an English version of the same piece. The responses again were very, very good. People made peculiar comments about our language, you know, but we got used to that. They'd say it sounds like a language they heard in some exotic place or something like that. I think it's been a learning experience for the Tucson community. The community has come to our readings.

Larry Evers: I recall the first time I heard you and Danny Lopez read publicly in Tucson. It was the Tucson Poetry Festival down at the Temple of Music and Art. You were reading with Gary Snyder and Leslie Silko and other luminaries. You and Danny, I thought, really captured that audience. They were very appreciative.

Ofelia Zepeda: They loved it.

Larry Evers: I've heard you talk a couple of times about the process of creating a poem that has a version in both languages. I wondered if you'd talk with us about that process.

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Ofelia Zepeda: Yes, I started talking about things like that when I wanted to say that I was not translating from one language to the other. The reason I want to say that is because I want to make clear when you see my text, when it's in both languages, I'm not going from English to O'odham. That is not what I'm doing. A lot of people do that. They'll write something in the English language, and then translate it over into an American Indian language. Or they'll find not even their own piece but somebody else's piece that's in English and translate it over into the native language. Then they say this is something written in the native language. That work has its place. A lot of people do it, and it's certainly an acceptable thing to do. I prefer not to do that only because I like to think that I can create something in O'odham first. Something that's only in O'odham, that can only be in O'odham. It is a perfectly valid piece of work. I can have something start out in O'odham. The whole experience starts out in O'odham. The words that I use or play with are in O'odham only and English never comes in. That's the hard part, because it has to be a very conscious exercise.

English is always there. It's like a crutch, and you want to jump into it quickly sometimes. Perhaps it is much more convenient, easier. I don't know. For me it's a very conscious activity, creating something in O'odham. Then as

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the O'odham piece exists for me, it's possible to have an English piece be there as well. And in this case it's not merely a translation, going line by line. I tried that because that would be a very convenient thing to do, but as I tried it there were pieces that didn't come out right in English. They were fine, but it seemed there was something missing. So what I think that I do is I simply do another piece which happens to start out in English. The general information, the general thought, the general theme, or whatever of the O'odham piece, it still is there in the English. But it is not a translation. That's why I say I have an O'odham version and then I have an English version. Sometimes I have an O'odham version and I have no English version. It didn't happen or it didn't work. For me, thinking of the audience, I'm bound to do an O'odham one, and then I think, "Well, I ought to have an English one." So I'm working twice as hard as I would if this room were only O'odham speakers. They don't even have to be literate. Then I wouldn't have to worry about an English version. But I've gotten into the habit. Once I have an O'odham piece, I start thinking about an English piece that'll be like this one. So then I set them next to each other, and I say this is the English one of that. Unless you are literate in O'odham, you won't know that there is variation. You won't find every word you have in the O'odham piece in

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the English. Some things change, the general context is there.

Jeanne Armstrong: Following up on that, could you say something about the differences in how the languages work? That's one of the questions--if O'odham has special characteristics that you could do certain things with that language and the poetry that you can't do if you were writing the poem in English. I was thinking about this especially after what Luci Tapahonso said. If the native language has those qualities where a word is more condensed than in English.

Ofelia Zepeda: Well, yes, Athapaskan or the Navajo and, of course, Tlingit, the Alaskan language that we have experienced, they're very interesting in that they have a little stem and then they have all these affixes that attach. All those little affixes carry a whole bunch of information once they start stacking up, so it's very possible to get a lot of information packed into what appears to be a short word. But it is actually much more complicated than that. O'odham has somewhat short words, but they're not as rich, morphologically. Unlike Athapaskan languages, you can't stack up suffixes or affixes onto words. Of course we do have some affixes, but not as many as Athapaskan languages. The difference is not so much a difference in the structure itself as it is a difference in

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how it is used by the person who's created the song or the person who's created what they want to call poetry or a story. O'odham acknowledges people who can put words together in an interesting way, or with humor. There's other things going on, like for song texts.

There's a song text that I've been thinking about because Luis Salazar has been working on it. Luis has learned the rudiments of O'odham syntax. He can go through and show me this word means that and the other means that. But there's so much more there. So I give him background information, and then it becomes a little bit clearer. There's one line that stuck in my mind when we were working together last week. It is a line about somebody running and hearing songs. There was this verb. As you looked at it for the first time, the word only meant a sound. When you say "a ringing noise" in English you know that the sound lasts for a long duration of time, longer than just a ring, which is short. A ringing noise could go up and down the hall, sort of bounce around, so it resounds or something like that. So this little O'odham verb, it meant this sound was resounding back and forth. You could find it in the dictionary. That was fine, but the fact that it was in a song made it so much more descriptive of what this person was singing about, songs. I don't know in English if you can say there were songs in the air. You can sort of

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imagine it. There being fluid and beautiful and so forth songs in the air. But like I said, it was just a simple verb. It tried to capture that description of the songs going on for a long time, or forever, from the beginning of time, however you want to interpret it. It has all that possibility there. So I said it's not so much the word itself: you know you can look it up in the dictionary and find out what it means. But rather it's really how it was used. In this case in the song it was used in a very special way. It's not as mysterious as some make it out to be, but I think it's different.

Susan Stevens: I thought it was interesting that you wrote poems about the rain. I'm from the rain forest and all it ever does is rain there. We never wrote poems about it.

Ofelia Zepeda: It's probably because we don't have much rain around here. Very early on, when I first started writing in O'odham, one of the things I did do was transcribe songs. I transcribed Pima and O'odham songs. A lot of them were actually songs that were sung, and I transcribed them off recordings that I made. Those writings are probably the only ones that come as close to translation because that's what I set out to do, to translate them into English because no one ever had before. Well, other people, students, have translated them, but they don't come out the same way as mine do.

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Sharon Harrow: In a lot of your poems you have a lot of natural motion: the tumbleweed, the clouds, the rains. Do you have comments on that, the role of natural motion?

Ofelia Zepeda: Yes, I like that. In fact, I think I'm conscious of it and I try to use it. I like that kind of energy going on. I think out here in the desert it's very, very noticeable. I notice it especially in the summer time, when things can just be really quiet and then all of a sudden you have a huge thunderstorm right behind you. It's usually a good silence that happens. Then there's a big change in the weather. It's very, very noticeable out here. I remember my father used to always say when it became real windy, he'd say, "As soon as the wind stops it's gonna rain." It always did when he said that. I used to pay attention to the wind. It seems like something I tend to watch. I just like it.

O'odham people have always been out here. They have a good sense of the land and the environment and certainly of the weather. Summer, I think, they like the best. We like it best because it has the most variation in weather. It'll be a hundred and ten degrees you know, and they always made a comment about the weather. They'd say something, and the first thing they'd say of course it was in O'odham: "You know it's sure hot today." Or they'd say, "What are you guys doing out when it's so hot?" or something like that.

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They do think about the weather, and they do mention it. The pattern in their home and their community is very attuned to that heat. So it's easy to see the slowness in the middle of the day, but they're up really early when it's still cool. And they're up really late at night, somewhat late into the night, when it's cool. So that middle part of the day, especially when it's so hot, they just shut down. The metabolic rate goes down, I think. That's the way it was around my house when I was growing up. My parents are big believers in naps. We'd just go to sleep. That's about all you can do from one to three o'clock until it cools off again. Then you get back to work. So you have that stop or slowing down. I think it has to do with this place out here. The animals do it too, and the trees. Some of the plants do it too. They close up, and then they open up later.

Vicki Broach: Can I ask you about this poem that starts out "ba:ban"? The way I was reading it is that this first section in O'odham is then followed by an English section which I'm assuming somewhat translates that portion. Then there's this next part where you talk about the baby's new tennies and Merle Haggard and Hank Williams. I didn't see that as having any translation into O'odham. So there are places in these poems where there's O'odham that isn't translated into English. Is that central in some way to the

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meaning?

Ofelia Zepeda: Yes, that one I started only recently. This ban thing, the ba:ban lines are from a song. They're song texts. That's why they repeat. Otherwise I normally won't repeat too much like this one does. But the first part of it in O'odham is a song. The English part is sort of what the O'odham song says. It's fairly close. Then the last part is mine. It's only in English. So it's like two little pieces but they basically belong together. There was really no reason in this one to have an O'odham version of this second part.

Larry Evers: Do you want to read that poem?

Ofelia Zepeda: Do you want me to read this one?

Ba:ban ganhu ge ci:pia

am hema medk am ha-kakk'e

kut am hema medk am ha-kakke'e

ba:mt o ci:pia

kut am hema medk am ha-kakk'e

wa sa an wo:ba'o son oidag

Coyotes moving along over there

Coyotes moving along over there

Someone, go over there and ask them

Someone, go over there and ask them

Where are you guys moving to?

Running along the foothills

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Running along the foothills
 Someone, go over there and ask them
 Someone, go over there and ask them
 Where are you guys moving to?
 With baby's new tennies
 and her Merle Haggard and Hank Williams tapes
 in the Basha's grocery bag
 and his cowboy boots in another
 All worldly goods packed up
 moving
Kut am hema medk am ha-kakk'e
Kut am hema medk am ha-kakk'e
Ba:mt o ci:pia
 Someone, run over there and ask them
 Where are you guys moving to?

I don't sing. I used to tell people, I said, I know why I don't sing, neither one of my parents sang. My uncles used to sing, but I've never sung. I'll sing along with some of the O'odham tapes that some of my friends have done. I don't know if I'll ever sing. I used to tell one of the anthropologists, "I think one of these days when I'm older I'll sort of wake up and it'll be there." So I'm kind of waiting, otherwise I don't know how to make it come.

Gloria Bird: It helps to know it's an O'odham song. There were several things that I've noticed. One was the

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formality of the translation, and I ended up with a question about the last section. Are you just making an observation?

Ofelia Zepeda: Yes, actually there's a lot of things going on here. There's other background information. This particular song is, they say, a banilye, a coyote song. I found this song in a collection of songs that this medicine man was singing for an all-Anglo audience. He had an interpreter with him and he was doing different types of songs, you know, social dance songs. They finally got to curing songs, and they were talking about curing songs: what kinds of illnesses different ailments cause or what the effects are and so forth. Somebody said, "Are there coyote illnesses?" So he says, "Yes, there are coyote illnesses." And so they say, "Do you have a coyote curing song?" He said, "Yes," and he sang this one. But he also said that when you have an animal sickness, what you do when you cure this animal sickness, you sing a song that basically says that you are aware of this animal, that you can flatter him if you want to. You flatter him in your song. You say something good about them or you say something about their behavior.

You're very much aware when you watch coyotes they're always sort of running along, they're running along in groups. You figure they're a little pack, and they're moving from one location to another. So it's like a family,

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you know, moving from one part of the area to another area, for whatever reason. And so this song just simply observes the way that coyotes move as groups. And ci:pia, the verb they use here, ci:pia literally means--it's the verb you use when for instance you have to move, take all your furniture, your pots and pans, your beds, and everything. You know, load it all up in your truck and go, and then you start again. It's resettling, a moving van kind of thing. So he sings about the coyotes moving from one area to the other. He means they've taken everything they need to take and are going to start over again. That is not a bad thing to do sometimes.

And so that's what the song says. It observes them running along over there. But the question he ends up with is: you never know where they're going to show up next. A part of the song kind of says that. It's not clear who it is that he's telling. Actually in O'odham it translates as, "Why doesn't anyone ever go over there and ask them, 'Where are you guys going this time?'" I made it very informal, like you said. So if somebody went over there and there was this family of coyotes moving, maybe this is what they would look like, you know. They might have all these particular things with them moving. So it's fun in a way, and I thought it would be a nice thing to say about them. They're just always running out there. Most people think of them as

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pests, but maybe they are a real family, maybe they are gonna move, you know, so they put things in bags when they move, too. So I saw a bigger picture, a bigger story than what you have here.

????: Could you talk about growing up Catholic?

Ofelia Zepeda: Yes, certainly growing up Catholic, or what I call Sonoran Catholic, is important in my own experience. The people that I grew up with, and perhaps people that are a little bit older than I, this was certainly their experience. And I don't think there really is anything wrong with it. It was a very different experience, comparing my Sonoran Catholic raising to, say, being raised middle-class Catholic. There's a world of difference, which I later found out sort of by accident. I think this is something for O'odham people to think about critically, because it is a significant experience. A lot of times in the whole tribal society, they don't think about the influence of that religion on them and their history.

I don't practice very well. The thing is, it's very hard to break from it when you're raised with it. I still have it basically, and my family still does. It's very strong with my older sisters. I basically do still have it. Then again I think when I get older, it's going to come back much stronger. It seems to do that for other people. It's a very social thing, and not just a religious thing, you

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know. I now have a young student who's O'odham. She's not Catholic. She's some other religion, but she can't help but go to the Catholic things, because it has a lot of the O'odham accoutrements to it. It's nice to experience that, but if you're not Catholic you're not that involved.

O'odham people from other religions tend to come over for certain things, but they say they're not Catholic.

Larry Evers: That detail made me wonder about the term Sonoran Catholic because obviously O'odham Catholicism is very different from Mexican American rural village Catholicism. It's something apart from that, isn't it?

Ofelia Zepeda: Yes, what they ended up doing was taking, as usual, parts of that Mexican Catholic and they combined it into their own. If you ever look at any of the little churches out there, they never have priests out there. They don't have enough priests out there. The little churches are decorated in a very, very O'odham way. They have their own way of doing it. A good Mexican Catholic would probably be shocked with what O'odham people do with their churches, you know. But they did take a little from predominately Mexican Catholic, which is what they were exposed to first, and sort of O'odhamized it.

Dennis Selder: When Danny Lopez was here he said he felt that there was a real conflict between his O'odham religion and Catholicism; do you find the same conflict for yourself?

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Ofelia Zepeda: There are. They're there. It's not that I don't fight it. Maybe I don't make an issue of it. My family and I use medicine people, medicine men, but I never think twice about being Catholic when I do that. I mean it's a whole other thing. What bothers Danny is when people will not go to a medicine man because they think the church says they can't. Somebody from the church actually has told them they shouldn't do that, so they don't. But for some of us it doesn't make any difference. We do both equally and seem to be satisfied with that.

????: Could you return to talk about the power of language and differences in the way language is used or interpreted in O'odham communities?

Ofelia Zepeda: Yeah, I just did another essay, which I didn't include here because it has too many other people contributing to it and it needs too much background. It's a forward to a book on O'odham children's writing. It was a three year study done by Ken and Yetta Goodman here from the University on O'odham writing. I did the forward for that work and I did the same thing and talked about what other people have called the responsibility or whatever of language and when you use it and how you use it, and I talked specifically about how O'odham people seem to be very aware of the language. They give it a certain value. They acknowledge people who are good speakers. They know people

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who are terrible speakers also. They know people who talk too much. If you talk too much, you're very likely not a good speaker. So they have different measurements that exist. You hear about that quite a bit. They talk about words, and they know that you can do things with words. You can help somebody with words and you can hurt somebody with words. That's very clear to them, and they practice it.

Then more recently they've sort of transferred meaning about words and said things like, you can buy and sell words. Buying and selling simply means translating or re-interpreting things, government texts, into O'odham or whatever. They developed this whole system in thinking about it. Some of it's very old, some of it's very modern. The community, I think, as a whole is quite conscious of what they're doing with words. They know they have certain power. The one that is most obvious is when you cure, when you call the rain and things like that. But there are other things for everyday people, you know, when you use language. They do tell you, you know, you have to be careful. Just like other writers have said, you have to be careful what you say. Then you have to watch out what you hear also, but sometimes you don't have control over that.

In O'odham, much is indirect. People talk about speakers who think language, or speaking in general, is good, healthy for you. So if you practice it right,

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especially political language, if you practice it right, it's good for the whole. They have this mental health attitude about speakers. There are some speakers who are just eloquent, and you know that. They say that there was one man out there (he's passed away, and luckily we did interview him), people said this guy could be, you know, a disk jockey or radio announcer or something. He had this beautiful voice. It was a very nice sounding voice, so they liked that quality also. Then, of course, they make derogatory remarks about some people and the way they speak. You know some people, when they speak, they're very breathy. Especially O'odham women's speech just tends to be much more breathy. They breathe in when they speak, which is a characteristic women's speech has. A lot of people don't find it very attractive, because it's difficult to hear things like that. Oftentimes, for instance, when I do the radio announcement on KUAT, I do them in O'odham and in English. A lot of people who hear me have never seen me. They've only heard my voice. When they finally see me, they usually think I'm older. I don't know what in my voice says I'm older than what I am, but it's interesting.