TAMAKASTI: A GULF NAHUAT TEXT
HOWARD W. LAW
Summer Institute of Linguistics

INTRODUCTION

The following legend is known and told by a few people in the Nahuat speaking village of Mecayapan, Veracruz, a village of about 2,000 people. This text was given to the investigator by Víctor Cruz, a man of about 32 years of age who speaks Spanish with some fluency. All work was done under the auspices of the Summer Institute of Linguistics.

The consonant phonemes of this dialect are: p, t, k, ?, b, d, g, kw, s, ʃ, h, ɾ, ñ, 1, r, w, y. The phonetic values of these letters are approximately those of the same letters in Spanish. ɾ = ts, ʃ = sh, h (as in English), ? = simple ɾ = ch, glottal closure, ñ = voiced velar nasal.

The vowel phonemes are: i, iː, e, eː, a, aː, o, oː: in which the symbol : indicates length. The long vowels in this paper are transcribed as double vowels aa, ee, ii, oo for convenience in printing: The phonetic quality of the vowels is approximately that of the same Spanish vowels except that e is more lax and open, oː: is closer and more rounded approaching the Spanish u.

Normal stress occurs on the penultimate syllable. Irregular stress is marked with an acute accent, thus ’. Enclitics are separated from the word they follow by a hyphen as in sekān-sañ

The main character of the legend is named Tamácasti. He is an important figure in the folklore of the Gulf Nahuat speakers; he seems to be almost all-powerful, is able to change from a human to a bird and perhaps to other animals, speaks several languages, and is never bested in any contest. This text as told seems to give explanation to the origin of many things such as insects, “dead” stones, and the lizard’s split tongue. There are numerous vague similarities to European folktales.¹ From the point of the visit to the king, through the rest of the narrative, the general flavor is European.

[FREE ENGLISH TRANSLATION]

The she-devil had a daughter who fell in love with a bird that talked. She was so much in love she wanted to marry him. Her mother said, “I don’t want any fooling around. So if you don’t want to marry me, then I’m going.”

Since the bird talked, he danced upon the girl. Therefore, he wasn’t worth anything; he knew what he had done. Later he came again and said to the girl, “Well, we’ll still get married.” The grandmother said, “This daughter of mine doesn’t want anyone to bother her. She has a lot of work to do. She is making a lot of napkins.” After that the young man didn’t come back because he knew she had a baby.

The she-devil learned of this and after she saw that her daughter was pregnant she became angry. She told her daughter, “As soon as the child is born we are going to grind it and leave it on the red-ant hill because I don’t want this girl to see her child.” Indeed after the child was born she cooked it and ground it up. She made it into a small ball and threw it on the ant hill.
Tlalocan


siempre inón konetsiin tajto sej iwaan pepetska. kijli, “amo xineekwaakan. sej xineesasalowikan nonakayo porke wi? sej noye? ilama neeitaki”


Three days later she went to see if the red-ants had eaten it. She found it whole. When she saw it whole, she said, “Why haven’t the red-ants eaten it?” The baby had told the red-ants, “Don’t eat me because my grandmother will come again. Where they have taken off my flesh, stick it back on again.” Indeed in three days his grandmother returned and when she saw that the red-ants had not eaten him, she took him again. She went to throw it in the big arroyo for the fish to eat. As the threw it in, she saw the fish swallow it. She went home.

The child spoke to the fish and said, “Don’t eat me. Stick my flesh back on again because my grandmother is coming again to see me.”

In three days she came and found him whole again. She took him again. Her daughter says, “Who knows why neither the fish nor the red-ants will eat him.” His grandmother said, “Then we are going to leave him to the black ants.” But not even the black ants ate him. He told them, “Don’t eat me. Come and put my flesh back on me.” And when his grandmother came again she found him whole. The black ants had not eaten him either. So she took him again and carried him to her house. She tells her daughter, “The black ants didn’t eat him
ni tsika?. así es ke tiawi tikawatij ipan lagunaj. oompa makikwaa tee iga tee ya welitis kikwaa.” yej kitajkalito? ipan lagunaj.


kiji itajwewe, “zikchiwili un baul” i kakijke ipan inón baul

either. So we are going to leave him on the lake. There let whatever will eat him.” So she threw him on the lake.

Three days later she went to see him. She found it floating on the lake shaped like an egg. She saw her daughter come to see what had happened. His mother said, “I told you, ‘Let’s not cook it!’ Who knows what my son might be doing (what might be his work).” She said, “You see now, neither red-ants nor fish have eaten him.” “Today,” she said, “today we are going to catch him with a net.” They took two nets and tried to catch him, but couldn’t. Finally they tired and his mother cried. She went away crying because she was not content. She continued to follow him—you see, he fled—in order to get near him. After a while his grandmother saw that she just couldn’t catch him and so she said, “Let him stay there now.” His mother said, “I won’t be happy until I catch him. Then I can rest.” Then she continued to follow him. Since the boy could hear, he took pity on his mother crying and following after him. Finally she caught him and then she became content and they took him to their house.

His grandmother said, “Make a trunk.” In it they put him. After
inón piyooteksis. a los 30 días rebentarój inón baul. kwando iga yajki rebentaroto? inón baul naseroj diferentes animal.


thirty days the trunk burst open. When it burst, many different animals were born.

Inasmuch as his father went away, his mother didn’t know he had left. After a week he came and found the boy’s grandmother weaving. The boy’s mother wasn’t around. She had gone to the arroyo. Since where she was weaving there was a nanchi tree, this bird flew around there. His grandmother wasn’t aware of it. But she realized that she no longer could weave. She said, “What is happening to me that I can’t weave any more? Why is it happening to me like this? Perhaps my daughter’s child is keeping me from weaving.” Since this was the season of the nanchi fruit, she picked a ripe one. As soon as it fell to the ground she picked it up and ate it. She said, “Oh, how delicious is this nanchi and so big! Perhaps my grandchild knocked this down for me.”

Afterwards she didn’t try to weave anymore. She said, “Satan’s lice are biting me.” Then she cut off all her hair to get rid of the lice. She was bald-headed then. Seeing that she was bald, the bird picked a ripe nanchi and threw it down on her head. The nanchi fell and punished the boy’s grandmother. You see, he was mad because
garo iye'ilama. no ves kwesiwi iga kimana? iwaan iga kitisi?. ayá? mixnesti inón konetsiin yej yajki sej.


kijli iye?, “aman nejwa niwalaj. nejwa aneeanke, aneetiske. aman si, niwalaj. mimitisserbiko.” kikli iye?, “maneechiliwilli nomaatatsiin (de itena?) notajwewe kichiwilli.”


she cooked and ground him. She didn’t see him. He went away again.

In a week he came again. He found her alone. His mother had gone to wash. His grandmother made fried bananas. So he became a cat. He cried that he wanted to eat bananas. The grandmother scolded him for wanting to eat bananas. He stole a banana anyway. She said, “Perhaps the cat isn’t a cat.” The boy threw the fried banana at her. Afterwards the boy smiled because his mother arrived. He threw the banana at his grandmother because she was blind in one eye. She was happy when she heard that her son had done it.

The boy tells his mother, “Today I have come. You cooked me; you ground me. Today, indeed, I have come. I have come to serve you.” His mother says, “You may make me my net (of spider web). My grandmother makes them.”

He said to his grandmother, “With your permission, I’m going to get water in the arroyo.” He went to the arroyo. Two different kinds of birds angered him. He went home and told his grandmother, “My grandmother should make me a bow.” His grandmother made him a bow. He told his grandmother, “Now I have my bow; I’m going to the arroyo to find those that embarrassed me.” When he arrived in the
arroyo with his bow and arrows, he shot all those that embarrassed him. When he had gathered them all together in one place, his grandmother came. She came to tell him, “You’ve killed our chickens.” He told his grandmother, “It made me angry that they embarrassed me.” (It is said that today they all live again.)

His grandmother saw that the black ants were already devouring the birds. They no longer had their eyes. He said, “I’m going to resurrect all of them again.” Immediately he cut the seed of a certain tree for eyes for the birds. The ants had eaten all the birds’ eyes. That made the grandmother mad because she said, “Now they won’t live again.”

He gathered them together again and jumped over them several times and then they became alive. Therefore, those that embarrassed him esteemed him. He said, “Today you are happy that you slept.” Later he says, “Let whoever can catch you catch you.” This is the council he gave them.

His grandmother saw that her rooster crowed again. Her daughter said, “Who knows what idea our son has that he has awakened all our chickens again.” Tamákasti went home. He says to his mother, “I killed all those fools. You see, they made me mad; that’s why I


killed them. Now I'm going to resurrect them if they won't embarrass me any more. I'll kill them once and for all if they embarrass me.”

"Awaken them today," says his mother, "so we can eat them." His grandmother was mad because he knew more than they because they couldn't resurrect those whom they killed.

His grandfather talks with the boy's grandmother and says, "I think we should eat our son." But since Tamáskasti immediately learned of their plan, he borrowed the bat that he might kill his grandfather. Tamáskasti and his grandfather slept together. His grandmother said, "Our son is big. Let's eat him."

About eight o'clock his grandmother said, "Go fetch some water." He went to get the water. The old man was asleep in the bamboo attic. His wife says, "I guess that's my son's blood dripping." It wasn't her son's blood—it was the old man's blood. When she saw the blood dripping, she opened her mouth and drank the blood. When she was full, she called her husband. She says to him, "Come, drink our son's blood. How delicious it is!" She didn't hear him answer, so she went up into the attic. She sees that it is her husband that is dead.


Tamákasti hasn’t yet returned from the arroyo because his grandmother had obliged him to fetch water. When he arrived, she says, “My son, perhaps you killed your grandfather.” He says to her, “How could I kill him seeing that I went to the arroyo!” She says to him, “Your grandfather has died. I said, ‘Perhaps you killed him.’” He tells her, “It wasn’t I.” She says, “Well, anyway your grandfather has died. Let him die. You are going to fill the two caldrons.”

When the caldrons were full, she put them on the fire so she could eat her son. She was going to throw him into the caldron. When his grandmother saw that the caldron was boiling, she says to her son, “Put on more wood so that the caldron will boil. Go get some wood so that it will boil.” He says, “I’m not going to get it. Go get your own wood.” He didn’t obey his grandmother.

She called him again, “Come, son. Come and fan the fire.” He tells her, “You fan the fire.” When she fanned the fire, he grabbed her leg and threw her in the caldron. He put on more firewood until it boiled. Nothing remained but her bones. He took her bones and made a big fire and burned them together with his grandfather. When
sentati iwaan itajwewe. kwando kawi nexti-sañ kinejnechkoj inón inexyo? iyepilama iwaan itajwewe.


there was nothing left but ashes, he gathered the ashes of his grand-father and grandmother.

Then he got someone to throw out the ashes. The toad says, “I'll throw them out.” He says to him, “If you throw them out, throw them across the ocean so they won't remain on this side.” The toad says, “I'll throw them wherever you say.” The toad carried them away to the other side of the ocean. But he didn't really carry them across the ocean; he merely arrived at the edge of the shore. There he threw down the trunk of ashes. When he threw it down, it burst open. Nothing but animals of many kinds were born — mosquitoes, flies, and gnats. For this reason there are many today.

Tamakásti saw that he hadn't thrown it where they had told him. Another animal says, “I'll leave it on the other side of the ocean.” But the lizard deceived him; he couldn't carry it either. He met the linnet and said that he was a messenger, but he deceived him because he was going to leave the ashes on the other side of the ocean. Tamákasti arrived at the shore and learned that the lizard was a messenger. He didn't take the trunk but since he met with the skunk, the skunk took it and went to throw it across the ocean. The lizard


así es ke yejwa kipensaro iga yawi kitati itaj tamákasti. yej kijli iye?, “añ si, nia nikitati notaj, porke nej nia nimonamiktiti nochaŋ, porke notaj yawipta-ya neetatanlii notaj iga nejwa nexeixmati notaj, porke mucho tiempo aip-ya wi? de allí yawi jilgero de correo este kan onó? notaj iga makimati iga nej oompa-ya nia?. a las once del diaj llejwa nia nasiti ichaŋ notaj.”

ke va a hacer! yejwa medio del camino siawi?. motali ipan te? kochi?, amo maka de cuenta ke si kitolo?. cuando isako una ves akitoloj te? i cuando que kikixti su espadaj kikixtilli iyalmaj (inón te?) iga para ver amo ma rebibiro nunca niga mas nunca

returned. When he arrived he says to Tamákasti, “I left it across the ocean.” Of course, it wasn’t true. The lizard deceived him.

Three days later the skunk arrived at Tamákasti’s house. He says, “I found the lizard struggling with the trunk; it was too heavy; he couldn’t carry it. So I did him a favor. I took it and left it across the ocean.” For this reason he disowned the lizard. He split his tongue in two and that’s the reason the lizard has a split tongue today. You see Tamákasti got mad at him.

Tamákasti decided to go see his father. He told his mother, “Now I’m going to see my father because I’m going to get married at my house. Two days ago my father sent for me to come for it has been a long time since he came here. The linnet will go to tell my father that I’m coming. I will arrive at his house at 11 A.M.”

That wasn’t how it happened! Half way there he got tired and sat on a stone. He slept and did not realize that the stone swallowed him. When he awakened he wasn’t completely swallowed. He grabbed his sword and cut out the stone’s heart so that it would never live

asito? ichañ rey. kisaludaroj. a medio de la conversación kijli, “te iga yejwa nemi.” kijli que, “porke iga ipiltsiin tapensaro ichañ rey.” kijli el rey que, “si nejwa anikonoserowa el joven nejwa nikneki manikonoser el joven. xikijli iga mawiki.” así es que pues itaj moma? de cuenta. yejwa yajki con pensar komo yejwa pobre ni itsotsol akipia yej achi bueno. kipia vergüenza iga asiti ichañ rey. como kijli? itaj, “tiene que tiawi porke ikkon-ya neejli el rey. así es que tiawi.” yajki iwaan itaj. asito? ichañ rey. tasaluda-

again or get bigger. His father was waiting for him, but he didn’t appear. “A stone has swallowed him,” he says. This is what is keeping him.” The linnet goes again and immediately informs Tamáktsci’s father that Tamáktsci says “A stone swallowed me, but the stone will never live again.” He starts out again and meets the fox. He tells the fox he shall be his best man because he’s going to get married. He says, “Go to where my father is because you’re going to be my best man.” The fox goes to his house and tells his father he is to be the best man. He arrives with a band of musicians who are all wasps. He says to his father, “Are you going to solicit the princess for me?” The father says he will.

His father goes to see the king. He greets him and in the middle of the conversation the king asks what he wants. He answers that his son is thinking about marrying the princess. The king says, “If I don’t know the young man, I want to get acquainted with him. Tell him to come here.” Thus his father learned and the son went to see the king, poorly dressed and sad. He was embarrassed to arrive at the king’s palace, but his father told him they had to go, because that was what the king said. They arrived at the palace and greeted the
The king says, "Does this youth want to marry my daughter?" The son said to his father, "You see, father, the king is going to belittle me." Tamákasti tells the king, "I'm in love with your daughter. Would you do me the favor of giving me your word that I can marry your daughter?" The king answers, "There is a wager for whoever can." The Southwind also came to ask for the princess. Thus there were two of them contending for the princess. So Tamákasti says, "I'm just a poor boy and perhaps I won't be able to win the wager, but I'm going to do what I can so that I can marry your daughter." When the prince saw that he was poorly clothed, she said to her father, the king, "I won't marry that fellow." She preferred to marry the Southwind. Her father told her, "One of the two will win the wager and that is the one you will marry."

A week later Tamákasti's father returned and asked when the wager would be. The wager was to be the next Sunday and there would be another one to try for the princess. His father returned and told Tamákasti. He said, "The wager will be held on Sunday and so next Sunday we will go." Tamákasti said, "Father, it will embarrass you if they make a fool out of me, but the king won't be able to."
neetantearoske nowan. el rey anetantearo.” kijto itaj, “ke tikmati-
ya te apuesto yawi onoti inón diaj.” kijli, “ayá nikmati pero si al caso oompa tiawi tikitati. primero makijto? yej nento oompa no?. oompa yawi motantearios iwaan tonalejekat.”

así es que asito? las ocho de la mañana oompa ichaq rey. asike. kisalucharojke. kijliaki, “buenos dias, mi señor Zacarías ma-
estad.” i panojke kaliji. así es que el pobre joven nemi bien choreado. así es que motali iteno-ja itaj tamákasti. kijto el rey, “aman como ken nigaj amonoke nejwa nikneki ximatíkan te de lo que kipia nolptsiin. yej iga akimatis te de lo ke kipia nolpitsin kitomaroj 25 balasos mosta a las ocho de la mañana.” entonces kijli tamákasti, “aman nikneki maníkmati a? yej primero walaj yej tajtaniko.” kijli el rey, “tejwa ultimo tiwalaj sierto. pues así es que tejwa tia tineijliti despues. así es que makijto primero tonale-
ejekat te de lo que kipia nolpitsin.”

así es que kijto tonalejekat, “nejwa nikmati te de lo que kipia mopltsin.” i entonces cuando kijto tonalejekat, “mopltsin kipia escondido un anillo di oro.” pero kijli yej, “en que lugar kipia.” kijto tonalejekat, “kipia a la izquierda ipan ipierna.” i ayej cierto. así es que en seguida kikitskichke los soldados. kiwigake al pan-

father said, “What, do you know what the wager is?” He answered, “No, I don’t know what it is, but perchance we shall see. First let the other one try and see if they can make a fool out of him.”

Thus it was that they arrived at eight o’clock on Sunday morning at the king’s palace. They arrived and greeted the king, “Good day, my lord Zacarías majesty.” They went inside and Tamákasti was dripping wet; he sat beside his father. The king said, “Now that we are all here I want to know what it is that my daughter has. The one that doesn’t know will be shot twenty-five times tomorrow at eight o’clock in the morning.” Then Tamákasti said, “Now I want to know who it was that came first to ask for your daughter.” The king answered, “It is true that you were the last one to arrive, and so you will be the last one to speak. The Southwind will be the first.”

The Southwind spoke, “I know what your daughter has. She has a ring of gold hidden.” But the king asked, “Where is it hidden?” The Southwind answered, “It is hidden at the left on her leg.” But it wasn’t true. Thus immediately the soldiers grabbed him and took him to the
teon. kijli, “mosta tej a las ocho horas de la mañana tiktomaro 25 balasos.” así es que choka tonalejekat que porque yawi-ya mikití.

pues, kijli tamákasti, “si iga atikmati amo ximomtereo a lo bruto.” “si iga anikmati nejwa nikijto anikmati te de lo de que kipia la princesa.” así es que kijto el rey, “nejwa nikmatisneki inañ si iga tejwa maj tikmati te de lo que kipia la princera.” kijli tamákasti, “nejwa nikmati te de lo que kipia la princesa.” kijli, “kipia una estrella di oro a la derecha.”

kijli el rey, “pues, así es que tejwa tik ganaroy el apuesto pero mas ahorita anyawi amonamijtiti este inín ocho días.” yej kijli, “está bien, mi señor rey. entonces inín ocho días nimonamiktiske.”

pues como tonalejekat kipia sus hermanos yejamen kijilito el rey que porque aquel joven kijtowa. “que porque yejwa no digo inón katinarowa este mas todabia. sewo? apuesto wel katinarowa.” así es que kimati el rey iga kijtowa ijkón. pues, así es que kitititanili en segunda iga mamopresentaro sej ichan rey. asito ichan rey yejwa tasaludaroj. asi? motali. i despues kijli el rey, “nejwa niwalaj nikmatiko te iga tinetitanili.” kijli el rey, “pues, tikmatís joven que tejwa tikijtotinemí. que no digo inón apuesto-san no más tikinarowa este mas todabia tikinarowa wel. así es que kijli, “que nejwa nunca nikijtotinemí. a?kon mitsijliko.” kijli yej, “pues, nejwa, atinetajtanto. así es que mosta a las ocho tiawi

cemetery and told him, “Tomorrow morning at eight you will be shot twenty five times.” The Southwind cried because he was going to die. The king warned Tamákasti, “If you don’t know, don’t rush in like a fool.” Tamáakasti said, “If I didn’t know, I would tell you I didn’t know. The princess has a gold star at her right.”

The king said, “Well you have won the wager and so you both shall be married a week from now.” “That’s fine,” said Tamákasti, “We shall marry in a week.”

However, the Southwind had his brothers and they told the king that Tamákasti was going around saying that he could win even more wagers. So the king sent for Tamákasti. When he arrived he asked the king why he had sent for him. The king said, “You are going around saying that you can divine even more wagers.” Tamáakasti answered the king, “I never have gone around saying that. Who told you?” The king said, “Don’t ask me any questions. Tomorrow at eight
tikchiwatij sewo? apuesto.” kijli yejwa, “pues, nejwa nikjugarowa el apuesto de lo que tejwa tinejli. así que a las ocho nigaj nono? iwan notaj.”


kijti tamákasti, “así es que el palacio notatki que si niktani el apuesto.” entonces kijto el rey, “motatki el palacio. nikneki xineijli te de lo que kipia nopiltsiin.” kijli tamákasti, “sabe usted, rey, te de lo que kipia mopiltsiin. kipia sembrado se caña en medio del palacio i inón caña de siete colores. si tikneki matitejkawikan este kan ono? mopiltsiin para ver iga ximoconformaro.” kijli el rey, “ke si es sierto. el apuesto yajki legal porque nejwa nikijto? anka atikmatiaya. pues, nopiltsiin kipia sembrado sierto tajko kajli.” “pues, así es que si tikneki tiawi tikitati kan ono? mopil-

o'clock there will be another wager.” Tamákasti said, “I will play at all the wagers you tell me. Tomorrow at eight o'clock I will be here with my father.”

The next day Tamákasti and his father were there. The king said, “Today we shall have this wager. If I lose, I won't be worth anything. I'm going to offer you this palace. If I lose, I'll leave with only the clothes I have on.” He told him, “Make out a document. Then those that were gossiping about me will be shot, too?” The king answered, “For them there is no pardon because I also will leave with just the clothes I have on.” The others were shot at that point.

Tamákasti said, “Then the palace is mine if I win the wager?” The king answered, “The palace is yours. I want to know what it is that my daughter has.” “You know what your daughter has, king,” said Tamákasti. “She has a sugar cane plant of seven colors planted in the middle of the palace. If you like, let us climb up to where your daughter is that she might confirm it.” The king said, “It is true.


The wager was legal because I said earlier that you didn’t know. was legal because I said earlier that you didn’t know. Indeed, my daughter has it planted in middle of the house.” “If you let us go where your daughter is. You didn’t know what wisdom I had.”

**They arrived there and Tamákasti says, “Do you want to see where flowers this sugar cane of seven colors?” He answered, “I’d like to see it.” He said, “This sugar cane that your daughter planted is ready to flower.” When the lightening flashed, Tamákasti’s mother arrived. When the king saw again, there was a palace much bigger than his and of pure gold. They didn’t know how it would flower. The king said, “Now, indeed, I’m not worth anything. I’ll be leave- like, let us go where your daughter is. You didn’t know what wisdom ing now for my region wherever I can go.” So he saddled an old broken down horse that was about to fall and went who-knows-where. Those who gossiped about Tamákasti were shot with twenty-five shots. The fiesta began for Tamákasti’s wedding and it lasted eight days.**