The text was recorded on electro-magnetic tape on August 18, 1960. It was dictated to me by Clemente Zárate who resided in the village of San Matías Petacaltepec, Oaxaca. The story is one of the favorite myths of the Highland Chontal Indians of Oaxaca.

The symbols used in the transcription of the text have their usual linguistic values with the following clarifications: primary word stress is indicated by an acute accent: '; glottalized segments have an apostrophe following them: 't'; 'l' and 'c' are 'tl' and 'ts' respectively; 'W' and 'N' are voiceless 'w' and 'n' respectively; and, all words beginning with a vowel have a lightly articulated glottal stop preceding that vowel.
Highland Chontal Text

1. di-báʔa, kíya, l-ácol. 2. i i-ším-ba l-abodé. 3. mí-ba m-áy-wil', al-tef'i-láʔ. 4. ga-šancé-da g-emála-y i gúlwa-y.

5. i l-i-hów-ba, l-ácol i-def'-ki-m-bá, i-déf'-ba l-abodé. 6. l-i-gwáy-da a-gúlĩ, l-i-gwáy-ʔe-na l-ácol, i-mi-m-bá a-máfka do-šancé. 7. i-mí-ba, a-máfka ga-šancé bi-layg-emála-y, bi-layg-egúlwa-y.

8. i hów-ba u-yay-ʔe-m-bá, ma diʔwáʔa-ne l-ácol.

Literal Translation

1. it-is this the-turtle. 2. and he-saw-him the-vulture. 3. said-to-him my-uncle me-carry. 4. I-look-around-there hills valleys.

5. and when-it-finished the-turtle he-was-carried he-carried-him the-vulture. 6. when-he-arrived-there far when-he-was-brought-there the-turtle it-was-said-to-him happy you-look-around 7. he-said-to-him happy I-look-around the-little-hills the-little-valleys.

8. and finished he-was-passed-on very he-takes-him-on

Free Translation

Once upon a time there was a turtle. He saw a vulture. He said to the vulture, "Uncle, carry me! I want to see the hills and valleys."

And then, the turtle was carried by the vulture. When the turtle arrived at a distant place, the vulture said to him, "Are you happy at what you see?" The turtle replied, "I like to see the little hills and valleys."

And then the vulture carried the turtle on farther. The turtle


the-turtle. 9. carried. 10. when-he-brings-him-again-there like there far took-him-on it-was-said-to-him happy you-look-around. 11. he-said-to-him happy I-look-around. 12. he-said-to-him the-little-valleys the-little-hills. 13. finished he-passed-him-on-again.

14. when-it-finished he-said-to-him my-uncle it-smells excrement the-your-head. 15. he-said-to-him oh. 16. what you-said. 17. he-said-to-him no. 18. the-little-valleys the-little-hills. 19. finished very he-goes he-takes-him-on. 20. finished he-was-passed-on arrived-him-again-there far. 21. he-said-to-him my-uncle it-smells excrement the-your-head. 22. he-said-to-him oh. 23. what you-said. 24. said-to-him

was being carried. When the vulture carried him on farther, he said to the turtle, “Are you happy at what you see?” The turtle replied, “I like to look around.” The turtle said, “Especially the little hills and valleys.” Then the vulture carried him some more.

And then the turtle said to him, “Uncle, your head smells of excrement.” The vulture said, “Oh? What did you say?” The turtle said, “Nothing. Little hills and valleys.” Then he carried the turtle on some more. Then the vulture took him to a distant point. The turtle said, “Uncle, your head smells of excrement.” The vulture said, “Oh? What did you say?”
26. and when-it-finished very he-takes-him-on. 27. and finished he-said-again. 28. when-he-said-again the-word when-he-said-to-him my-uncle it-smells excrement the-your-head. 29. walk goat it-was-said-to-him then me-said word you.

30. and when-it-finished he-twisted-it the-his-back the-vulture and the-turtle fell-off the-ground. 31. there-is like this the-round the-rock he-hit-on-top-of-it-there the-turtle. 32. when-he-hit-on-top-of-it-there the-rock the-turtle it-broke the-his-shell one-time it-passed. 33. finished he-arose the-turtle his-meat he-stands not-there-is the-his-shell finished it-broke.

turtle said, “Nothing. Little hills and valleys.”

And then the vulture carried him on farther. And then the turtle said to him again, he said bad words, he said, “Uncle, your head smells of excrement.” “Get out of here, you rascal!” the vulture said, “You have insulted me.”

And then the vulture twisted his back and the turtle fell to the ground. There was a round rock that the turtle struck. When the turtle struck the rock, his shell broke into pieces. Then the turtle stood up without any shell since it was in pieces. A lion
34. arrived-again the-lion. 35. he-said-to-him the-lion I-will-eat-you. 36. he-said-to-him nothing not-me-eat. 37. if you-say I-will-eat-you well make-it. 38. make-it the-my-shell. 39. me-sew-it-for 40. well the-lion he-answered said-to-him I-will-make-up-you. 41. but it-fattens-you-let I-will-eat-you.

42. and when-it-finished the-lion gathered-it-together the-his-shell he-sewed-it. 43. the-turtle when-he-made-it the-his-shell like his-form. 44. he-sewed-it-together just pieces.

45. and when-it-finished he-passed-on the-turtle and came along and said, “I am going to eat you up.” The turtle replied, “No, you are not going to eat me. If you want to eat me, then put my shell back together. Sew it together for me!” Well, the lion answered and said, “I will fix you up. But when you get fat, I will eat you up.”

And then the lion gathered the pieces of the turtle’s shell together and put them in place. The turtle had his shell fixed up like it used to look. The lion sewed the shell together out of little pieces.

And then the turtle went on his way and the lion went on his
l-ayf-dalay-f'áy-na-g-o', ga-dé-h-na-?m-o?.

47. entónse, i-ším-ba přiméřo, di-guc'-'áf'-ya l-abóne. 48. di-de-h-á g-ebóne, l-acól.

49. i 1-i-hów-ba, gálšmu gwáy-go-?ma, i-ším-ba. 50. i-mí-ba či líŋka ga-de-h-na-?m-ó?. 51. i-mí-b áy-m-al-te-?ma.

52. i 1-i-hów-ba, e-bí-?i-m-ba g-ebóne, i-dé-ba gálšmu.

53. i 1-i-hów-ba, u-yáy-na-ba l-acól. 54. ay te-gí-yá?.

the-lion he-passed-on. 46. it-was-said-to-him the-time where my-meeting-you I-will-eat-you.

47. then he-saw-him first he-sits-on-top-of the-cactus. 48. he-is-eating-it his-cactus the-turtle.

49. and when-it-finished the-lion arrived-again he-saw-him. 50. he-said-to-him now certainly I-will-eat-you. 51. he-said-to-him not-me-eat.

52. and when-it-finished he-gave-it-to-him his-cactus he-ate-it the-lion.

53. and when-it-finished he-passed-on the-turtle. 54. not eaten.

way. The lion said, "Whenever I meet you again, I am going to eat you up."

Well, the first time that the lion saw him, he was sitting on a cactus. The turtle was eating the cactus.

And then, the lion appeared and saw him. He said to him, "Now I certainly will eat you up." The turtle said, "You are not going to eat me up."

And then the turtle gave him some cactus and the lion ate it.

63. i l-i-hów-ba, i-mí-ba, haní? lîŋka ay-ga-gway-yú-ma, pwes m-u-mle-?é-ma, do-dé-ha g-o-dúlu. 64. u-yáy-na-ba l-acól, i gál-šmu i-bané-ma, i-guc-i-ŋay-bó lan-dulú.

55. when-it-finished he-saw-him-again the-turtle. 56. this he-sees-them turkeys. 57. he-sees the-turkeys they-go-together many. 58. it-was-said-to-him the-turtle now certainly I-will-eat-you. 59. said-to-him nothing not-me-eat. 60. because I me-it-sat the-turkeys I-am-doing-them care. 61. if you-want me-eat well I-call-him-must-there the-its-owner turkey. 62. and he-arrive-here-let this he-will-see-them the-his-turkey then I me-eat.

63. and when-it-finished he-said-to-him if certainly not-I-arrive-here well you-get-hungry you-are-eating-it your-turkey. 64. he-passed-on the-turtle and the-lion he-remained he-sat-facing-them the-turkeys.

And then the turtle passed on his way. He had not been eaten.

And then the lion saw the turtle again. The turtle was taking care of some turkeys. He was taking care of some turkeys that were walking around. The lion said to the turtle, “Now I am going to eat you up.” The turtle replied, “No, you are not. I have been put here to take care of these turkeys. If you really want to eat me up, I must go call the owner of the turkeys. When he gets here and takes over again, then you can eat me up.”

Then he said to the lion, “If for some reason I do not come back and you are hungry, eat a turkey.” The turtle went on his way and the lion stayed and watched the turkeys.
65. and when it finished the lion it happened noon he got hungry he said nothing not he arrive will well I eat it let my turkey. 66. he arose the lion he chased it. 67. may he will grab it the turkey. 68. and the turkey he jumped up he flew away. 69. and not turkey just vulture. 70. he was deceived again that is all the lion.

71. and when it finished he passed on finished the turtle. 72. arrived there far entered the thicket.

73. and when it finished met him. 74. saw him again it was said to him the turtle now certainly I will eat you. 75. he said to him not me eat. 76. I see him baby me it sat.

And then the lion became hungry because it was noon and he said, “He is not coming back so I had better eat a turkey.” The lion arose and chased a turkey. He wanted to grab the turkey. And the turkey jumped up and flew away. And the turkey turned out to be a vulture. The turtle fooled the lion again.

Then the turtle kept on his way. He entered a thicket far away.

Then the lion met him again. When he saw him he said to the turtle, “Now I am certainly going to eat you up.” The turtle said, “No, you are not. I have been put here to take care of this
m-á-té-ʔma. 76. ga-šin-á g-abímiʔ, l-guc-íŋ-k'i-m-bá. 77. hániʔ o-bík'á l-té-h-na-ʔma, pwes ga-hó-k'í-wa-n-ci g-i-ʔmamáʔ. 78. pwes, di-gwáy-na-ní g-i-ʔmáma? l-abímiʔ, entóns al-té-h-na-ʔma áʔ?

79. i l-i-hów-ba, l-ácol ?u-yáy-na-b iyá i gál-šmu guc-i-né-ma l-abímiʔ. 80. i-mí-m-ba hániʔ ay-ga-gway-ná-ma m-u-mle-ʔé-ma pwes do-dé-l abímiʔ. 81. i l-ácol, u-yay-ná-ba hów-ba. 82. hów-ba gál-šmu i-ba menák'o i-gwá-ba, u-mle-gó-ma, pwes mehór ga-dé-h-wa-laʔ gálg-abímiʔ. 83. i-cawé-ma gál-šmu gal-méhuł, i-bul-guf-bá. 84. kwándo l-e-dom-ba gal-méhuł l-i-bul-gúf-b l-abímiʔ, i báñay g-oŋwáfla? di-cu-k'ó piya. 85. i-dúf-ko-fi-b á-špe

77. if you-want me-will-eat well I-call-her-let-there his-mother. 78. well she-arrive-here-let his-mother the-baby then me-will-eat.

79. and when-it-finished the-turtle he-passed-on again and the-lion sat-him the-baby. 80. it-was-said-to-him if not-I-arrive you-get-hungry well you-eat-it baby. 81. and the-turtle he-passed-on finished. 82. finished the-lion it-happened noon said it-is-hungry well better I-eat-it-let the-big-baby. 83. he-arose the-lion the-hammock he-picked-him-up. 84. when when-he-struck-it the-hammock when-he-picked-him-up the-baby and just hornets they-are-inside that. 85. he-picked-up many hornets. 86. he-was-bitten baby. If you want to eat me up, then I will go call his mother. When his mother gets here then you can eat me up.”

Then the turtle went on his way again and the lion took care of the baby. The turtle said to him, “If I do not come back and you are hungry, eat the baby.” Then the turtle went on his way. Then when it was noon, the lion said to himself, “I am hungry and I better eat up this big baby.” The lion stood up near the hammock and picked up the baby. The lion struck the hammock when he picked up the baby and there were many hornets inside the bundle that he thought was a baby. He stirred up the hornets.
They stung the lion. When they stung the lion, he jumped up and down and shouted and ran away and entered a thicket.

And then the turtle passed on his way again. The lion met him again. The turtle was sitting at a pool. The turtle said, “I am taking care of this cheese.” The lion said, “I am filled up with your lies and today I am going to eat you up.” The turtle replied, “You are not going to eat me up. This cheese has an owner and I am taking care of it. I will go and get him. I will go call the owner and when I bring him here, then you can eat me up.” Then he said to the lion, “If I should be late and I do not come back right away, then go ahead and eat the cheese. First,
98. do-šná-ŋwa ta lá-ha?, i gal-késu do-ʔwa-h-go-náʔma
do-té-ŋwa. 99. i-mí-ba hów’na. 100. t-ácol u-yáy-nà-ba.
101. i-ba u-mleʔé-ma gál-šmu, i-gwá-ba, ga-té-h-wa-la
gal-késu. 102. hów-ba k’o-h-máy-ba l-inʔnowaʔ, i-šná-ba
lá-haʔ. 103. i-gwá-ba oříta ga-ʔwá-h-go-ʔma gal-késu.

104. i l-i-hów-ba, šná-ba lá-haʔ, mán-a l-i-gúʔu
g-i-dúgaʔ gál-šmu. 105. i náda gal-késu ayʔ-g-i-ʔwa-h-máʔ
ásta dëntro.

106. i l-i-hów-ba gál-šmu, mán-a g-i-gúʔu, ndáf’-ba
l-i-gúʔu g-i-dugáʔ. 107. i ki gal-késu i-bané-ma kómo

you-are-eating-it the-cheese. 98. you are-drinking-it this
the-water and the-cheese you-will-approach-it you-are-eating-it.
99. he-said-to-him all-right. 100. the-turtle he-passed-on.
101. it-happened it-got-hungry the-lion he-said I-will-eat-let
the-cheese. 102. finished stooped-over the-pool he-drank-it
the-water. 103. he-said in-a-little-while I-will-approach-it
the-cheese.

104. and when-it-finished drank-it the-water full
the-his-stomach himself the-lion. 105. and nothing the-cheese
not-he-did-approach-it until inside.

106. and when-it-finished the-lion full his-stomach
exploded the-his-stomach himself. 107. and this the-cheese
it-remained like always. 108. and this not cheese for the-sky

drink the water and then you can get at the cheese and eat it.”
The lion said, “All right.” The turtle went on his way. When
the lion got hungry he said, “I ought to eat the cheese.” Then
he stooped over the pool and began drinking the water. He said,
“It will not be long until I get to that cheese.”

And then the lion drank the water and filled up his stomach.
But he still did not come close to the cheese, it was still inside.

Then the lion’s stomach exploded by itself and the cheese
remained in the pool. Actually there was no cheese but only the
síyémpre. 108. i ki á?i késu, pöř l-emá?a, gal-múl'a, i déntro l-in?núwa?, i-?wa-gí-. 109. pwes tódo al-késu g-i-?ik'. 110. fél-?mi-m-ba mí-m-ba ka a-késu. 111. i l-in?núwa? á-špe náda ay-g-i-šnáy-k' g-i-hów-?ne-?ma lá-ha?. 112. i l-ácol u-yáy-na-ba.


116. l-i-hów-ba, gál-šmu i-mí-ba, či líŋka ga-de-h-na-?m-ó?. 117. śwáy-go-da m-al-fel-lay-h-mo-l'i-?. 118. pwes l-ácol dalay?-é-ma i-mí-ba náda ál-te-h-na-?ma. 119. pwes, do-de-góf'-la gal-wóše. 120. mí-ba, de the-moon and inside the-pool it-appears. 109. well all the-cheese its-form. 110. lied-to-him it-was-said-to-him this is-cheese. 111. and the-pool much nothing not-he-drank-it not-he-finished-it the-water. 112. and the-turtle he-passed-on.

113. when-it-finished he-met-him-again. 114. the-turtle he-is-up-in the-organ-cactus the-top. 115. he-is-eating-it the-organ-cactus the-ripened the-its-fruit.

116. when-it-finished the-lion he-said-to-him now certainly l-will-eat-you. 117. filled me-lied-to-over-and-over. 118. well the-turtle answered he-said-to-him nothing me-will-eat. 119. well you-taste-it the-organ-cactus.

reflection of the moon in the pool. The moon looked just like cheese. The turtle lied when he said, “This is cheese.” And the pool was still there because the lion could not finish drinking it up. And the turtle passed on his way again.

Then the lion met him again. The turtle was perched on top of a cactus. He was eating the ripened fruit of the cactus plant.

Then the lion said, “Today for sure I am going to eat you up. I am filled up with all of your lies.” Well, the turtle replied, “No, you are not going to eat me up. Have a taste of
120. said-to-him what you-will-eat-it. 121. said-to-him I-will-eat-it. 122. finished he-hunted-it the-organ-cactus the-ripened he-peeled-it itself the-its-flesh. 123. finished he-said-to-him come-on you-close-eyes I-will-throw-it-in-it the-your-throat. 124. finished the-lion he-opened-it the-his-mouth and he-closed-eyes the-his-eyes he-threw-it-in-it the-his-throat the-organ-cactus. 125. finished he-ate-it. 126. he-said-to-him this what it-is-good. 127. he-said-to-him what more you-eat-it. 128. said-to-him more. 129. said-to-him the-its-fruit. 130. finished he-picked-it-off the-its-thorns hard. 131. the-big-green. 132. the-its-thorns hard. 133. he-threw-it-in-it the-his-throat. 134. was-said-to-him come-on you-close-eyes-again. 135. he-threw-it-in-it the-his-throat the-lion. 136. he-jumped-up he-shouted this cactus.” The turtle said, “Do you want some?” The lion replied, “I will eat some.” Then the turtle looked for some ripened cactus fruit and peeled it. Then the turtle said, “Close your eyes and I will toss it down your throat.” Then the lion opened his mouth and closed his eyes and the turtle tossed the fruit down his throat. Then the lion ate it. The turtle asked him, “Was it good?” The lion replied, “It is good.” The turtle asked him, “Will you eat more?” The lion replied, “More.” Then the turtle picked some more fruit, the really green fruit, the kind that has lots of thorns. He tossed it down his throat. The turtle said, “Close your eyes again!” And he tossed it down his throat. The lion jumped and shouted and ran and entered the
he-ran-away he-entered the-thicket. 137. and the-turtle he-passed-on.

138. and when-it-finished he-met-him the-turtle again. 139. saw-him he-is-pressing-against-it the-rock. 140. he-is-pressing-against-it the-rock hard. 141. he-said-to-him nothing not-me-eat. 142. because this the-rock me-placed I I-helper. 143. I-press-against-it the-rock if this it-will-fall-over. 144. said-to-him the-lion well if certainly you-are-pressing-against-it the-rock I I-go the-its-owner I-call-him-there. 145. and he-arrives-here-let this he-will-press-against-it the-rock and me-will-eat. 146. he-said-to-him if like this all-right. 147. finished the-turtle he-passed-on. 148. it-was-said-to-him the-lion if certainly not-I-arrive finished tired-you well you-run a blow thicket. The turtle passed on his way.

Then he met the turtle again. When he saw the turtle, he was pressing against a rock. The turtle was pressing hard against it. The turtle said, "You are not going to eat me up. I have been put in charge of this rock. I am pressing against this rock so that it will not fall." The turtle said, "If you will press against this rock, then I will go to see the owner and call him. When he gets here then he can press against the rock and you can eat me up." The lion said, "That is all right with me." Then the turtle passed on his way. He said to the lion, "If I do not get back
HIGHLAND CHONTAL


151. i l-i-hów-ba, l-ácol u-yáy-na-ba. 152. l-u-yay-ná-ba, i gál-šmu šo-gáy-da i l-ábik ú-šmas-ba. 153. i-há?a-b, i-fwíc'-ba. 154. i-gwáy-da do ū?wa a-gúli?, de-weló-ñe l-ábik, kómo siyémpře išpík' i la-ñe?. 155. ay-g-i-mef-ke-yá?.

156. i l-i-hów-ba, l-ácol ši-ŋó-no-ba. 157. de-bá-y g-óŋal. 158. i-mí-m-ba l-ónaŋ ká?a á-k'á řésiyo. 159. de do-dé-?ma. 160. bu-l'í-m-ba a-núli? i-mí-m-ba do-de-lá?. 161. i-dé-ba gál-šmu.

you-run. 149. you-shout and you-whistle. 150. the-rock it-will-fall-over.

151. and when-it-finished the-turtle he-passed-on. 152. when-he-passed-on and the-lion tired-him and the-rock he-released-it. 153. he-shouted he-whistled. 154. he-arrived-there like there far he-looks-at-it the-rock like always the-same it-is-firm. 155. not-it-fell-over.

156. and when-it-finished the-turtle saw-him-again. 157. he-breaks-it cocoroso-nut. 158. it-was-said-to-him the-cocoroso-nut this it-is-good very. 159. what you-will-eat-it. 160. given-to-him one it-was-said-to-him you-eat. 161. he-ate-it the-lion.

right away and you are tired, run hard! Shout and whistle! The rock will fall over.”

And the turtle went on his way. When he had gone, the lion was tired and he let loose of the rock. He shouted and whistled. He ran a distance and looked at the rock. It was as firm as ever. It had not fallen.

And then he saw the turtle again. The turtle was cracking nuts. The turtle said, “These nuts are delicious. Will you eat some?” He gave the lion a nut and said, “Eat it!” The lion ate it.
162. and when-it-finished said-to-him but I-will-eat-you.  
163. said-to-him not-me-eat. 164. now let-it-be-finished  
you-taste-it your-cocoroso-nut.

165. and when-it-finished it-was-said-to-him if you-like  
more the-your-testicles you-hold-it the-rock and you-pick-it-up  
the-other the-rock you-hit-it-on-it a blow. 166. well  
the-cocoroso-nut it-will-break you-will-eat-it. 167. finished  
the-lion the-his-testicles this picked-it-up the-rock and another  
the-rock he-picked-it-up he-hit-it-on a blow. 168. the-his-testicles the-lion they-broke finished fell-over  
died. 169. it-was-finished. 170. very this that-is-all.

Then the lion said, “But I am going to eat you up.” The  
turtle replied, “No, you are not. Today you must first taste some  
uts.”

And then the turtle said, “If you want some more, put your  
testicles on a rock and hit them with another rock. The nut will  
break and you can eat it.” Then the lion placed his testicles on  
one rock and picked up another rock and hit them. The testicles  
were smashed and the lion fell over dead. That was the end of  
him. This is all there is.
Resumen

Este cuento explica por qué una tortuga tenía su caparazón quebrado. El cuento también habla de unos encuentros de la tortuga con un león que quería comérsela. En cada encuentro, la tortuga engaña al león. Al fin, el león se mata a sí mismo.