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Poetic Devices in Navajo Oral and Written Poetry

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**“Atk’idáá’ Mǎ’ii Joodlosh, Jini”:
Poetic Devices in Navajo Oral and Written Poetry**

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Abstract. This article compares poetic devices of traditional Navajo oral poetry with those of contemporary written Navajo poetry, as well as the languages chosen by Navajo poets when employing these devices in literate media. It aims to improve our understanding of what points Navajo poets assert to be incommensurable across media and codes, and of how decisions on these matters vary from poet to poet. The article also discusses various issues concerned with Navajo language shift from an ethno poetic perspective.

1. Introduction. It has often been assumed that Navajo written poetry is influenced by Navajo oral poetry (Brill de Ramirez 1999). Indeed, most of the Navajo poets I have interviewed have stated that one of the primary influences on their poetry was, variously, the “oral tradition,” the “stories” they heard growing up, or what their grandparents had told them. To take Navajo poetry seriously, we must take these influences seriously as well. This article expands on my previous work (Webster 2004), by outlining a number of poetic devices found in Navajo oral narratives and comparing them to poetic devices found in Navajo written poetry, in order to identify which oral poetic devices are currently used in written poetry.

In addition, this article examines the language (English or Navajo) chosen by poets to express various Navajo poetic devices in their written work—in particular, opening narrative framing devices, as well as other ethno poetic organizing devices. Such devices seem markedly salient to native speakers and are therefore of special interest for assessing in what ways the oral tradition has influenced written poetry and how comparable those devices might be in the English and Navajo languages. The article also provides several examples of rhetorical poetic devices that are or are not transferred across codes.

In section 2, I comment on the language shift from Navajo to English that is now in progress in the Navajo Nation, paying particular attention to the relations between macrolevel (sociological) discussions and more microlevel (discursive) approaches, and considering how the language shift may influence the languages of Navajo poetry. Section 3 offers a brief history of written Navajo poetry. Section 4 enumerates in detail various poetic devices used in oral and written Navajo poetic traditions. Examples from both traditions show that many of the poetic devices found in Navajo oral poetry also appear in Navajo written poetry. I focus especially on opening frames in Navajo oral narratives and how they are used in Navajo written poetry. Finally, section 5 discusses the findings on the

use of oral poetic devices in written poetry and on language shift occurring from Navajo to English, and considers the implications that they may have for each other. Certain poetic devices, it seems, can be transferred across languages, while other devices are incommensurate.

2. Navajo language shift: macrolevel and microlevel approaches. Navajo is a threatened language in the sense that new speakers are not being created at a rate sufficient to ensure the continued existence of a specific overlapping lexical-grammatical code. Although the Navajo language has more speakers than any other Native American language in North America and is spoken in numerous states, including Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, New Mexico, Ohio, Texas, and Utah (to name those whose language situations I am personally familiar with), a steady language shift from Navajo to English is underway, as has been reported by a number of scholars (Slate 1993; Holm and Holm 1995; Dick and McCarty 1997; Dick 1998; Field 2001; Lee and McLaughlin 2001; House 2002; Spolsky 2002; Benally and Viri 2005).¹ Most of these studies report on social factors implicated in the language shift. Many follow the lead of Slate (1993) and posit ways of "reversing Navajo language shift." Slate, for example, suggests the promotion of the use of Navajo kinship terminology and clan names as a way to foster the family and community "nexus of Navajo" (1993:35). In other words, using the terminology of Woodbury (1993), Slate seems to argue for supporting Navajo "secured domains," which Woodbury defines as those language domains whose "habitual use reinforces existing social network structure[s] and provides for them a privileged social space in which shared ways can be retained, continued, and reworked" (1993:111). Besides kin terms and clan names, mythic names and place names might also be considered secured domains. Presumably, these secured domains would then foster that "nexus of Navajo." House (2002:100) critiques Slate's position by arguing (correctly) that there will never be pan-Navajo agreement concerning which domains are "secure" and which are not.

After surveying poetry published by Navajos, for example, we cannot say that poetry is a completely secured domain for Navajo. Certainly, following Urciuoli (1996), poetry is a domain where the Navajo language might be deemed aesthetically pleasing and nonthreatening by a non-Navajo dominant society that tends to oppose Navajo language use in "the workplace." But poetry is more likely to be written in English than in Navajo, reflecting the fact that literacy in Navajo is still limited (Dick and McCarty 1997; Lockard 1995; McLaughlin 1992). Nonetheless, poetry is a partially secured domain because Navajo code-switching (i.e., switching to Navajo within an English-dominant poem) does occur and clusters around certain lexical domains, such as place names, clan names, terms of reference (kinship terms), and mythic names (see also Moore 1988). In other words, although Navajos may not agree on which domains should be secured, written poetry does seem to contain a clustering of lexical domains

that are more likely to be represented in Navajo. I use the term “codeswitching” in a rather broad sense to cover any instance where Navajo language forms (lexical, morphological, or syntactic) are used in an English context. However, I exclude certain forms such as *hogan* which were, according to Matthews, already an “adopted English word in the Southwest” (1994:55) by 1897.

House’s (2002) counterargument suffers from the same problem she raises for Slate’s work. House wants to follow the Diné College model based on *Sa’ah Naaghái Bik’eh Hózhóón* (often known at Diné College by the acronym “SNBK”), but in doing so, she seems to imply that this phrase—central to much in Navajo philosophy—is understood in the same way everywhere.² Diné College teaches a particular approach to this philosophy, and not all Navajos I have spoken with can agree on its meaning or a “good” English translation. House also seems comfortable talking about “traditional” education and curriculum. Yet, despite its many good and empowering attributes, Diné College is after all based on, and certified by, Western educational regimes of knowledge.

Although House (2002) and Slate (1993) offer useful suggestions for “reversing Navajo language shift,” they, like other writers (e.g., Lee and McLaughlin 2001; Spolsky 2002), have relatively little to say about the actual linguistic details of that shift. To give one brief example, most writers would concur with Slate (1993) when he notes that it is significant that Navajo kin terms continue to be used (including in Navajo poetry). The terms *shimá* ‘my mother’, *shinálí* ‘my paternal grandparent’, and *shimásání* ‘my maternal grandmother’ are ubiquitous in the Navajo Nation, being used both by Navajos who speak Navajo and those who do not. Indeed, *shimásání* seems to have taken on a more general meaning of ‘elder woman’. However, kinship terms and the first person possessive *sh(i)-* ‘my’ are used in certain interesting ways in instances of codeswitching. Navajo humorist Vincent Craig often uses the term *shiheart* in his routines. This form is recognizable as the code-mixed form “my heart” (see Canfield [1980] for a discussion of code-mixing and for other Navajo examples). Norla Chee titles one of her poems “Shí Buddy” or ‘my buddy’ (2001:6). For many Navajos, both those who speak Navajo and those who do not, *shi-* as the first person possessive form is salient.

On the other hand, in recordings and video tapes, as well as in my notes, I also have a number of examples such as (1a) and (1b).

- (1a) “I learned this from my *nálí* . . .”
 “This is about my *shinálí* . . .”
- (1b) “*Shimásái* taught me this . . .”
 “My *shimásání* used to say . . .”

In such examples, different speakers exhibit variation in their use of the Navajo first person possessive form *shi-* together with the English first person possessive *my* versus the use of only the English possessive form and the Navajo lexical

stem instead. In such cases, does the speaker treat *shimásání* as an unanalyzable unit or as containing a first person possessive morpheme *shi-* that can then be omitted to avoid redundancy? The question here is how salient the Navajo first person possessive morpheme is for Navajos. In Navajo, kinship terms are inalienable and thus must have a possessive marking. The form *-nálí* cannot occur alone. The possessive marking can, of course, be a code-mixed form such as *my-nálí*. But “my *shinálí*” is redundant and can be compared to Collins’s (1985) examples from Tolowa, where the distinction between alienable and inalienable is being lost, and the third person form is becoming the default form to which one then attaches the first or second person possessive. The above examples could be evidence that nonspeakers of Navajo are losing the alienable-inalienable distinction. However, a full exploration of that issue is outside the scope of this article. The point here is that much of the work on language shift from Navajo to English has been on macrolevel social processes and not on specific microlevel linguistic details.

Benally and Viri (2005), Dick (1998), and Dick and McCarty (1997) offer Navajo perspectives on the current language shift situation. Dick (1998) focuses on a lingual autobiography³ of Navajo educator Galena Sells Dick and stresses the role of education in language maintenance, especially in the community of Rough Rock. She also stresses the role of literacy in Navajo language maintenance programs, as does Dick and McCarty (1997). That resources should be used for Navajo literacy is, of course, important. It should also be noted that literacy, in and of itself, is not a panacea for language shift. Today there are more documents written in Navajo than at any time in the past, and yet the shift towards English continues. Benally and Viri (2005) offer a complicated and nuanced picture of the state of the Navajo language. They argue that Navajo language is at a crossroads and that the potentials for renewal and decline both loom large. They also focus on analysis of the macrolevel rather than of microlevel usage, though they do note that certain lexical items (e.g., *chidiltsxoo’i*) are being replaced by English language forms (e.g., *bus*).

The pessimism reflected in some of Benally and Viri’s (2005) discussion can also be found in Spolsky’s (2002) reassessment of the state of the Navajo language. Navajo literacy, Spolsky states, “never managed to challenge the usefulness and appropriateness of English literacy . . . vernacular literacy, too, was co-opted into a force for language shift to English” (2002:157). He does, however, note that there are other media available to Navajos. For example, the Navajo radio station KTNN often has programming in Navajo (Klain and Peterson 2000). Likewise, a number of CDs have become available in Navajo. Texts written in Navajo are being published on the Internet. As Lee and McLaughlin (2001) note, new technologies have some potential as aids to the maintenance and renewal of Navajo. As with literacy, however, new technologies cannot be seen as a panacea for all that ails the Navajo language (Webster 2006a). As Benally and Viri point out,

On several levels, extinction seems to be looming for the Navajo language, but on other levels, the language appears strong and viable. Ultimately, the future of the Navajo language lies with its speakers. The language is theirs. The stories, songs, and prayers that come with the language are for them. . . . the Navajo language can survive if the speakers choose to keep it alive. [2005:107]

One question that needs to also be addressed is the extent to which "ways of speaking" can and do survive the shift from one lexical-grammatical code to another (Hymes 1990; Kwachka 1992; Field 1998, 2001). To this end, Margaret Field (2001) provides a microlevel analysis of Navajo interactive language practices. Field has suggested that triadic directives in Navajo may be more resistant to replacement than other elements in the language overall. Thus, even as speakers shift from Navajo to English, certain discourse routines may persist. For example, although the preferred way for Navajo poets to introduce themselves is in Navajo and by their clan names, some younger Navajo poets introduce themselves in English with the English glossing of clan names (although this is, in my experience, surprisingly rare). In this way, a discourse routine (the formulaic introduction by clan name) was maintained even in the face of a lexical-grammatical shift (see also Moore 1988, 1993, 2006).

In pursuing this line of investigation, I wish to make certain assumptions explicit. First, it is important, when comparing discourse routines (and here I mean poetics), to set a baseline for comparison (Watahomigie and Yamamoto 1998). Thus, here I describe a number of poetic devices found in Navajo verbal art and compare them with poetic devices found in Navajo written poetry. Since many poets stated that they based their poetry on the oral tradition, it is important to understand the poetic devices used in that oral tradition. In this way, we can see what is transferred from oral poetics to written poetics and what can and does remain in Navajo as well as what can be and is transferred into English.

As noted by Woodbury (1993, 1998), although work such as Field's is illuminating, it does not always directly examine what is not or cannot be transferred across codes. Hence, it tends to imply that all interactive routines, perhaps including poetics, can be transferred across codes, an implication not always borne out in actuality. For example, certain Navajos insisted quite adamantly to me that clan names or place names or both could not be translated into English, but had to be stated in Navajo. For these speakers, any translation of a clan name into English was a loss and not commensurate with the Navajo term. Another, somewhat different case of nonequivalence is that of *jini* 'they say, it is said', often noted as a crucial poetic device in Navajo narratives (Toelken and Scott 1981; Webster 2004). When I asked Blackhorse Mitchell, a Navajo poet, to translate some narratives for me, he decided not to translate this device into English, because he claimed that it was too cumbersome. It is not enough, then, to say that some devices (e.g., repeating words or phrases four times) can be transferred from one lexical-grammatical code to another. We must also point out places where the transfer is resisted, incomplete, or incommensurate.

Finally, the work of Field and others is an important corrective to the view that language and its loss only occur in absolute terms. It is an attitude that many Navajos share and feel deeply. This attitude is the "feelingful iconicity" of language (Samuels 2004:11). During my fieldwork, there was a proposition on the ballot in Arizona (Proposition 203, "English for the Children") that would have severely limited bilingual education (the measure passed). I attended several community meetings where people spoke passionately about the importance of their language and the meaning that their language had to them. The matter was about more than a lexical-grammatical code; it was about what it meant to be Navajo. I do not deny the power of such a deeply held sense of the "feelingful iconicity" of a language. However, Navajos also speak English and Navajo English, and they use those languages to express important feelingful identities as well. If we do not focus on what Navajos are actually doing with languages, we miss a great deal of what it means to be a contemporary Navajo. In some ways, the present article is a request for a return to the microlevel studies of Navajo that Reichard (1945, 1948) and Sapir (1932) pioneered.

3. Navajo poetry: a very brief history. In 1933, a brief eight-line poem, "If I Were a Pony," composed by a group of Navajo students at Tohatchi School, New Mexico, appeared in *Indians at Work*, a United States government publication (Hirschfelder and Singer 1992).⁴ It was one of the first poems published by Navajos. Other poetry would follow. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Blackhorse Mitchell (1967, 1969a, 1969b, 1972a, 1972b, 1972c), among others, published a number of poems in English about things Navajo, the future, the past, grandparents, and herding sheep. During the 1970s, more and more poets began to write poetry. In 1977, Nia Francisco published a poem in Navajo in the journal *College English*. From the 1980s on, poetry employing Navajo, Navajo English, English, and combinations of the three has appeared in major literary journals as well as in publications from university presses. A brief listing of some of the best known Navajo poets would include Rutherford Ashley (2001), Shonto Begay (1995), Esther Belin (1999), Sherwin Bitsui (2003), Vee Browne (2000), Norla Chee (2001), Gloria Emerson (2003), Nia Francisco (1988, 1994), Della Frank (Frank and Joe 1993), Rex Lee Jim (1989, 1995, 1998), Roberta Joe (Frank and Joe 1993), Luci Tapahonso (1987, 1993, 1997), and Laura Tohe (1999, 2005; Erdrich and Tohe 2002).

As the 1933 example suggests, much early Navajo poetry was supported by the government. Thus, for Navajo poets in the 1960s and 1970s, a crucial feature in their poetry was their ability to display a command of English. (Later, this would change and Navajo poets would write in Navajo to display a command of Navajo.) The importance of the use of poetry as a display of English language proficiency is suggested in the brief editor's note below from "Poet's Corner," a short-lived feature in *The Navajo Times* during 1962.

The following short poems were written by Eugene Claw, a Navajo Junior at Manuelito Hall and display a fine grasp of the English language as well as imagination and good poetic syntax. [*Navajo Times*, 16 May 1962:14]

Other examples could be cited from government publications, but this example should suffice to give a sense of the emphasis placed on poetry as a demonstration of English language competence. More recently, Diné College has published collections of poetry written in Navajo by students in the Navajo creative writing courses at Diné College (L. Begay 1998). Likewise, during the short-lived run of the "Navajo Page" in *The Navajo Times*, a number of poems were published in Navajo to highlight Navajo language literacy. In both cases, however, poetry was seen as an exemplar of language command (which, notably, was reckoned in terms of literacy).

Poets such as those listed above, however, write poetry not just as an exemplar of language command or literacy, but rather for a multitude of personal and social reasons. Hence, we need to understand what Navajo poetry may or may not be used for whatever its language. Certainly some poets who write in Navajo do so to create a corpus of literary materials in Navajo. Others write in Navajo purely, or at least primarily, for aesthetic reasons. They simply believe certain things sound better in Navajo. Concerning this distinction, Rex Lee Jim writes:

I write to make sense out of who's Navajo and who's Diné. I write to make sense out of this writing I think—am I feeling it?—the bottom line is that I write to communicate with myself. That's why I write mostly in Navajo. I only wish I could have written this in Navajo. [2000:243]

Again, since literacy in Navajo is still relatively uncommon, many Navajos write in English because they cannot write in Navajo. Laura Tohe, for example, was taking courses in Navajo literacy while I was doing fieldwork. Although she was fluent in Navajo, she did not write Navajo as well as she would have liked. Most of the poems in her 1999 book were in English with some codeswitching into Navajo. However, her most recent book of poetry (2005) is in both Navajo and English, and includes poems written entirely in Navajo. In a 1995 interview, Luci Tapahonso offered the following remarks about writing poetry:

I think because I learned how to write in English I um couldn't associate written poetry with Navajo although I think the process of writing poetry begins in Navajo for me because it seems to me my basic thought processes and basic um expression occurs in Navajo but because I learned how to write in English then my writing of poetry almost has to be in English, I don't associate written Navajo or I can't write written I have a real hard time writing in Navajo the written process has to be in English. [Luci Tapahonso, interview by Charles Bernstein, *Line Break*, 12 October 1995; my transcription]

I think Tapahonso's claims that her poetry is influenced by Navajo need to be taken seriously. In section 4.8, I adduce another quotation from her concerning

the oral tradition and its influence on her poetry, but many of the other poets I interviewed also stated that their written poetry was influenced by the Navajo language and by the oral tradition. In the next section, I enumerate and compare a number of poetic devices found in verbal art and in written poetry.

4. Navajo poetic devices: oral and written.

4.1. Chantways. Language has been a key concern of Navajo studies—specifically, many Navajo and non-Navajo researchers hold that the Navajo language is particularly important to understanding Navajo culture. The importance of language to Navajos was described and discussed as early as the work of Washington Matthews in the 1880s and 1890s (see Matthews 1994, 1995, 1997). Matthews (1994) was one of the first to call Navajos “poets.” He wrote of oral poets, but he also clearly stated that he believed that the Navajo language had the capacity to reproduce all of the formal poetic devices found in English, and possibly more (Matthews 1994:25; see also Faris 1994:189–91). When Matthews discussed “Navajo poetry,” he most often referred to the *hataal* ‘chants’ and *sin* ‘songs’ of the Navajo.⁵ Among the devices described by Matthews as typical of Navajo oral tradition was “repetition” (1994:28), by which he clearly meant the various forms of parallelism found within Navajo religious chantways (see Walton 1930; Reichard 1944; McAllester 1954, 1980; Witherspoon 1977; Frisbie 1980; Faris 1990; Field and Blackhorse, Jr. 2002).⁶ Parallelism has also been noted in Navajo written poetry (Webster 2004, 2006b). An example of parallelism in a Navajo chantway can be seen in (2); parallelism in a Navajo written poem can be seen in (3).

- (2) *Shikee biyá ních'i doo,*
Shijáád biyá ních'i doo,
Sits'úis biyá ních'i doo,
Shini' biyá ních'i doo,
Shinéé' biyá ních'i doo

‘Wind will be beneath my feet,
 Wind will be beneath my legs,
 Wind will be beneath my body,
 Wind will be beneath my mind,
 Wind will be beneath my voice’ (Field and Blackhorse 2002:224)

- (3) *Sa'ah naaghái bik'eh hózhóón nishłiigo naasháa doo*
Sa'ah naaghái bik'eh hózhóón nishłiigo naasháa doo

Tsilkeq̄h doo tídlnéehii nishłiigo naasháa doo
Ch'ikeq̄h t'áá attsxóní náádleełi nishłiigo naasháa doo

Tádidíín ashkii nishłiigo naasháa doo
Anitt'ánii at'ééd nishłiigo naasháa doo

K'os dilbit t'áá shee náhoodleełgo naasháa doo
Áah dilbit t'áá shee náhoodleełgo naasháa doo

Níttsá biká' t'áá shee naattingo naasháa doo
Níttsá bi'áád t'áá shee naattingo naasháa doo

Hózhóogo naasháa doo
Hózhóogo naasháa doo
Hózhóo naasháa doo
Hózhóo naasháa doo

'May I be Everlasting and Beautiful Living, walking
 May I be Everlasting and Beautiful Living, walking

May I be Unwounded Male Youth, walking
 May I be Everchanging Female Youth, walking

May I be Pollen Boy, walking
 May I be Ripener Girl, walking

May Dark Clouds continue to blanket me, walking
 May Dark Mist continue to blanket me, walking

May Male Rain continue to shower me, walking
 May Female Rain continue to shower me, walking

May I be Everlasting Beauty, walking
 May I be Everlasting Beauty, walking
 May I be Everlasting Beauty, walking
 May I be Everlasting Beauty, walking' (Jim 2000:236–37)

Jim's poem is self-consciously connected to chantways, both through the use of parallelism and through the concluding repetition of *Hózhóogo naasháa doo* and *Hózhóo naasháa doo* (Jim poetically translates both forms as 'May I be Everlasting Beauty, walking'). The first form occurs in a number of chantways; Matthews (1995:302) transcribed it as *hozógo nasádo* and translated it 'In beauty may I walk'. *Hózhóogo* 'in beauty' (in which *-go* is a subordinating enclitic 'in') is quite common on its own in a number of chantways.

The distinction between chantways and poetry is important because Navajo written poetry is often spoken of by Navajos as *hane'* 'story, narrative'. When I discussed poetry and Navajo poetics with Navajo poets and Navajos more generally, the most common Navajo term was *hane'*, while the most common English term was "poetry" (see Webster 2004). As with narratives, Navajos can also incorporate songs into poetry (Webster 2004). Luci Tapahonso, for example, often breaks into song in many of her poems (Webster 2005). Indeed, some of her songs take on features of Navajo lullabies. But *hane'* seems to be the most common general descriptive term.

4.2. Initial framing devices. In this section, I outline some features of Navajo narrative poetics, focusing primarily on initial framing devices, but discussing other poetic devices as well (for other studies of framing devices, see Hofling 1987; Scollon 1976). Framing devices in narratives tend to be relatively salient to native speaker awareness and are therefore logical points to investigate the presence or absence of transference across mediums and languages.

Many traditional Navajo narratives (Coyote stories, Emergence stories) begin with a number of framing devices. For example, *jó 'akódaa jiniłei* 'that's what they would say' and *'atk'idąą jini* 'a long time ago they said' both are used at the beginning of many traditional Navajo narratives.⁷ The use of these devices places the narrative in the past, connects it to the "voice of tradition," and acts as an epistemic distancing device. It allows Navajos to recognize that what follows will be set in a world that differs from the current world. Example (4) below shows *'atk'idąą* in the opening of a Coyote narrative told by John Watchman to Edward Sapir.

Another initial framing device concerns Navajo narratives that are about *Mą'ii* 'Coyote'. Coyote is a trickster figure among the Navajos, and though Coyote narratives are often humorous to various degrees, they are also important in a number of curing chantways and have deeper meanings than non-Navajos often assume (see Toelken 1971, 1987, 2002; Webster 2004). Here the framing device is a narrative-initial conjunction *'áádoo* 'and (then)', sometimes in combination with a verb of motion *-dlosh* 'to trot' (often in the progressive aspect)⁸ or sometimes in conjunction with the dubitative enclitic *-shíł*. The use of a temporal conjunction as a discourse marker frames a narrative as a part of a larger series of narratives. In Navajo, this series of narratives is often known as *Mą'ii jooldloshí hane* 'stories about the trotting Coyote'. On the other hand, *-dlosh* can sometimes act alone to mark a Coyote narrative and, indeed, Coyote can remain nameless in the opening frame. The naming of Coyote as *Mą'ii* or one of its many written variants can also frame a poem as a Navajo "Coyote poem" (see Webster 2004). Such devices are used both as a means to frame the narrative and as genre signatures (Shaul 2002).

Examples (4)–(12) show various opening formats of several Coyote stories. Examples (13)–(14) show how the openings of two Coyote poems relate to the oral formats. These examples were translated in consultation with Blackhorse Mitchell. Here I have translated *jini* as 'it is said' (following Mitchell when he did translate it), and have done so consistently (Morgan left it untranslated). I have also consistently translated *jooldlosh* as 'trotting along'.

(4) *'atk'idąą ma'ii jooldlosh, jini*
long.ago coyote trotting.along it.is.said (Sapir and Hoijer 1942:20)

(5) *Lah jí-go Mą'ii jooldlosh jini*
once day-in coyote trotting.along it.is.said (Morgan 1949:5)

- (6) *Lah jii-go Ma'ii jooldlosh jini*
once day-in coyote trotting.along it.is.said (Morgan 1949:10)
- (7) *Lah jii-go Ma'ii jooldlosh jini*
once day-in coyote trotting.along it.is.said (Morgan 1949:13)
- (8) *Lah jii-go Ma'ii jooldlosh nt'ée*
once day-in coyote trotting.along it.was (Morgan 1949:16)
- (9) *Lah jii-go Ma'ii jooldlosh*
once day-in coyote trotting.along (Morgan 1949:21)
- (10) *Aadóó ninaánaádaáh jini*
and.(then) he.was.running.around.again it.is.said (Haile 1984:100)
- (11) *Aadóó-shíí dah náadiidzá jini*
and.(then)-DUBITATIVE.ENCLITIC start.off again.set.out it.is.said (Haile 1984:101)
- (12) *Aadóó-shíí (dah) ...jini*
and.(then)-DUBITATIVE.ENCLITIC (start.off) ...it.is.said (Haile 1984:95, 97, 99, 103)
- (13) One day Coyote was trotting.
He was trotting, trotting. (Jim 2004:324)
- (14) And Coyote struts down East 14th (Belin 1999:3)

Within Coyote stories and other traditional Navajo narratives, place names also act as framing devices (Webster 2004). For example, many Coyote narratives begin at specific named locales within the Navajo homeland. The narratives then have Coyote move through a series of named and knowable locations. Likewise, many narratives concern events that occurred at the various named sacred mountains of the Navajo (see Jett 1995). Kelley and Francis (2005) have described Navajo myths as laying out “maps” of Navajoland, which thus serve as aids in “wayfinding” (see also Newcomb and Reichard [1937:69–74] on the “symbolism of locality” in the Shootingway). Webster (2004:80) suggests that the use of named locales in Navajo Coyote narratives are both an expression of Navajo ethnogeographical knowledge and a way to indexically ground the narrative as Navajo. Examples of narratives beginning with place names are given below in (15), from a Coyote narrative, and in (16), from the opening line of a version of the “Origin of the Night Chant.” Note that both examples use the clause-final form *jini*. (I have adapted the translations of these examples.)

- (15) *Nléi dibé ntsaa bee nástl'ahdégé' tséyaa hatso hoolyéédégé' náshjaa' hastiin jideeshzhee' lá jini.*

‘Somewhere in a draw of La Plata Range [Big Sheep], along a place called Big Rock Cave, Old Man Owl had started on a hunt [it is said].’ (Haile 1984:115 [Navajo])

(16) *Jó koji 'ab̄āh̄ilghozh hoolghe [wolyé], jini*

'Well, on this side, is a place called They Stand Up Sharply in a Row Along the Edge, it is said.' (Sapir and Hoijer 1942:137)

Place names occur in a number of written poems. Some poets write place names in Navajo and then give their English equivalent (often the English name for the place rather than a translation). Other poets write them in Navajo and give no English equivalent. Some give place names only in English. In the excerpt in (17), Norla Chee describes a place in the Chuska Mountains. She names the place only by means of what should be understood as an English gloss of the Navajo name. This poem also resonates with Basso's (1996) work on place naming practices among the Western Apache.

- (17) It smelled like sweaty horses, and
 salted fat wrapped in a cold tortilla.
 From these rides, my father says,
 they named the last hill,
 before it was a power station, Where Coyote Sits.
 He tells of memories that happened
 before the highway
 when rides into town had the heart of storytelling. (Chee 2001:38)

I discuss place names in written poetry further in section 4.6.

4.3. The quotative *jini*. Another device that is used to varying degrees by different narrators is the quotative *jini* 'they say, one says'. This form is the combination of the fourth person pronominal *ji-* 'one' and the verb of speaking *-ni* 'to say'. The fourth person is used mainly for people who are considered socially distant—the dead, for example (see Uyechi 1990). The form *jini* acts as a quotative device, indicating that the speaker does not have firsthand knowledge of the events described. Hence, one might expect it to be common in narratives. Indeed, in many traditional Navajo narratives *jini* occurs at the conclusion of every clause. Toelken and Scott (1981) and Webster (2004) argue that *jini* is a crucial ethnopoetic organizing device for Navajo Coyote narratives. Frisbie (1980:376) has pointed out that *jini* occurs in other Navajo "myths" as well (see also Faris 1994:188). In most of the examples already cited in this article, the quotative has its full form *jini*; however, it is often reduced to a single syllable *jn* or *jiin* in actual performance and in published poetry.⁹ Blackhorse Mitchell (p.c. 2006) has suggested that, whatever its form, *jini* should only be used at the beginning and end of Coyote narratives, where it serves as an opening and closing framing device. In Morgan's (1949) collection of Coyote narratives, *jini* is used sparingly at the beginnings of those narratives. The use of *jini* in written poetry resembles the more restricted use, i.e., only at the beginning, of the form in oral narratives. Examples from written poetry can be seen in (18) and (19).

- (18) *Na'izhdilkidgo t'ei hot ééhózin*
Áko láą, háádóo ma'ii haaldloozh jini
Shüigo doo baa hane' da

'Ask and you will know,
 And so, surely, from where does coyote start trotting, it is said?
 During summertime those stories are not told.' (Jim 1998:69)

- (19) *'inda ma'ii nachxoggo tlóódi naghá jiin'*
 'they said the coyote walked around outside that night pouting.' (Taphonso
 1987:31)

Native speakers are often aware of the quotative *jini*. For example, Mitchell explicitly explained to me when, where, and how often the form should be used at the beginning of Coyote narratives. Similarly, here is how Laura Tohe describes and exemplifies the use of *jini*. (Note also that in this quotation she begins the citations of stories with Navajo language place names.)

Jini, they say. We accept *jini* as part of our stories on simple faith. It's not important who said it, but that it was said. The stories become part of our collective memory. Our stories begin and end with *jini*. At *Ya'dziilzihi* is the place named after a contest where young men shot flocks of arrows toward the clouds to see who could shoot the farthest, *jini*. At *Séi Delehí*, lover's tryst took place on the wide sandy bed near the tamarisks, *jini*. [Tohe 2005:11]

Thus, *jini* is still a salient feature for many Navajos, used both in storytelling and in poetry (in their minds, also a kind of narrative).

4.4. Onomatopoeia. Another poetic device found in both narratives and chants is onomatopoeia (Matthews 1994:27). For example, the *wosh wosh* of a dove can be found in certain songs (Matthews 1994:27). The poem in (20), written by Rex Lee Jim, is based on the onomatopoetic word *tlig* 'click'.

- (20) *Tlig*
Niyol nee ní'ú'
Tlig
Nibeedí nee ní'ú'
Tlig
Tséghájooghatii nee ní'ú'
Tlig
Nikeéyah nee ní'ú'
Tlig
Nidiyin nee ní'ú'
Tlig
K'ad láą,
dah náá'diit'ahígíí bíi' doo
áadi sq' tichí' bidáádidoogáát

'Click
 I stole your breathing
 Click
 I stole your survival tools
 Click
 I stole your living goods
 Click
 I stole your land
 Click
 I stole your gods
 Click
 Now all is ready
 For the next shuttle flight
 The red star will keep it from returning.' (Jim 1998:8)

I have also discussed elsewhere (Webster 2006b) an example of onomatopoeia using the word *ts'qqs* 'suck' in a Navajo poem written by Rex Lee Jim. As noted there, Jim points out that one cannot "really translate" the onomatopoeic words into English. In general, it is a question of whether sound symbolic words can be translated between widely disparate languages. For, as Nuckolls has pointed out, sound symbolic forms "communicate not by referring but by *simulating* the most salient perceptual qualities of an action, event, process or activity" (2000: 235; emphasis in original). Can one transfer the "simulation" of sound across languages? Can one translate onomatopoeia? The poetry written in English by Navajo poets suggests that is not now being done.

4.5. Quoted Speech. Another poetic device is the repeated and regular use of quoted speech in many traditional Navajo narratives (Collins 1987). Narratives are thus often built up on quoted speech. Laura Tohe's poem "Sometimes Those Pueblo Men Can Sure Be Coyotes" (1999:16–17) is a case in point. In (21), I provide the relevant passage that shows that this poem is built on quoted speech in both English and Navajo.

(21) we had just pulled onto Central
 when one of us said
 Éi hastiin ayóo baa dzólní' this man is very handsome
 Éi laa' I agree
 then we were making all kinds of comments about him in Diné
 our enthusiasm running away with us
 saying those things adolescent girls say
 I wonder if he's married
 of course, these handsome men always have a woman
 how old do you think he is
 do you think he has children
 and on and on

we did this
 all the way back to the Indian School
 not ever thinking he might understand us
 until we got back

A'héhee' at'ééke he said thank you, girls (Tohe 1999:16–17)

In the oral performances I have recorded of this poem, Tohe raises the pitch of her voice when quoting the girls talking about the “Coyote” Pueblo man and lowers it slightly when reciting the man’s final response. These stylistic features aid in the humor of the poem; such sonic displays are lost in the written version.

4.6. Rhetorical four and sacred mountains. Another important device is the fourfold repetition of actions, actors, and objects (Reichard 1944; Kluckhohn 1960). Such things tend to occur four times, the fourth time drawing the event to a conclusion; for example, there are four sacred mountains that must be ordered correctly, there are four sacred directions, etc.

In Navajo cosmology there are at least four sacred mountains, each associated with a particular direction and color. The four sacred mountains are often cited in Navajo in English-dominant poems. An example appears in (22).

- (22) *Sis naajini* rising to the east,
Tsoodzil rising to the south,
Dook'o'ostíid rising to the west,
Dibé Nítsaa rising to the north (Tohe 2002:100)

Tapahonso’s poem “This Is How They Were Placed for Us” likewise retains Navajo place names. The first relevant passage is shown in (23).

- (23) By *Sisnaajini*, we set our standards for living.
Bik'ehgo da'iiná (Tapahonso 1997:39)

The poem concerns the origin, or emergence, of the traditions of Navajo people. *Sisnaajini* can be glossed roughly as ‘black belt crossway’. It is often associated with Blanca Peak in the Sangre de Cristo mountains. It is the Navajo sacred mountain of the east. The next line can be roughly translated ‘in accordance with life’. The place name, as Basso (1996) and others working with Athabaskan place names have pointed out, is quite descriptive—it presents a mental image, in this case, of a white mountain with a black streak running across it. Such place naming practices, using the Navajo word, argue for an earlier presence of Navajo people at the locations in question, subverting the ability of the United States to inscribe its will on Navajo sacred sites.¹⁰

Throughout the rest of this poem Tapahonso evokes each of the four sacred mountains, using the Navajo term for each. *Tsoo dzil* ‘cone-shaped mountain’, often associated with Mount Taylor near present day Grants, New Mexico, is particularly important to many Navajos. Not only is it the sacred mountain of

the south and associated with the symbolically important color turquoise, but, as the story goes, it was the mountain that Navajos returning from their four-year imprisonment at *Hwééldi* first saw, realizing on recognizing it that they were close to *Dinétaah*. It is often reported that upon seeing *Tsoo dzii*, the spirit of the Navajos was lifted and reinvigorated.

Moving in the prescribed manner, Tapahonso next singles out the sacred mountain of the west. She begins with the sentence in (24).

- (24) This is how they were placed for us
E'e'aahjigo, Dook'o'oostíid sida. (Tapahonso 1997:40)

The Navajo phrase can be roughly translated as 'To the west *Dook'o'oostíid* sits'. *Dook'o'oostíid*, often associated with the San Francisco Peaks just outside Flagstaff, Arizona, can be glossed as 'it has never melted and run off the summit'. In the word *sida*, *si-* is the third person and *-da* is the neuter perfective form for 'to sit, to be in position'. As Hoijer (1951) points out, Navajo distinguishes between verbs of movement (active)—which are by far the more numerous—and verbs of stasis (neuter)—which are fewer in number. Neuter verbs have one paradigm, whereas active verbs have a multiplicity of paradigms, including such aspectual categories as progressive, imperfective, perfective, iterative, and optative. Furthermore, again as Hoijer (1951) points out, neuter perfective forms seem to have the semantic connotation of the "withdrawal" of motion—something has come to rest. This implication, based as it is on a verbal distinction within Navajo, is hard to capture fully in English.

Finally, Tapahonso describes the sacred mountain of the north, *Dibé nitsaa*, often associated with Hesperus Peak and glossed as 'Sheep It-Is-Large'. In beginning with the sacred mountain of the east, then moving south, then west, and ending—where things must end—in the north, Tapahonso follows the correct order for mentioning the sacred mountains. One must begin in the east, where all things begin, and end in the north. Thus, her poem is an example of proper speech. She has not chosen the order of these mountains willy-nilly; rather, the order she employs reflects an ideology of proper speech, and also aids in perpetuating a form of proper speech by being an exemplar of it. Moreover, some Navajos are of the opinion that because these mountains are sacred and because their names are the quoted words of the ancestors, the names of the sacred mountains, like clan names, cannot be translated into English.¹¹ The sacred mountains and their attendant place names are efficacious precisely because they are Navajo. The English place names and translations lack that "sacredness."

As pointed out above, not all Navajo poets use place names in Navajo; sometimes one finds English names used for Navajo places. In (25), Maggie Bahe, a senior at Wingate High School in 1971, reflects upon the Vietnam War through the four sacred mountains. The mountains are again ordered in a circuit from east to north, but in this example they are all named in English. Bahe also

mentions a number of symbols associated with each particular mountain and direction, as well as the appropriate actions and movements of prayer.¹² Bahe thus appeals to all four directions both vocally and physically.

- (25) I raise corn pollen to the East
 Where Mt. Blanco is setting.
 I ask the White Stone to help my brother,
 To give him courage to live again this day.
 Again I turn to the South
 And let my tears go,
 Looking up to see the blue sky
 Where some of my brothers are looking down
 To see if I pray for my brother as I prayed for
 them.
 Smiling with pride that I did my duty for my
 brothers,
 I ask Mt. Taylor to protect my brother for the
 day.
 West, looking at San Francisco Peaks,
 I rise to my feet
 And let go of some of the corn pollen,
 Asking the Holy Shell to protect my brother
 From being hit.
 I want his body to be as hard as the Abalone Shell
 That nothing shall pass through.
 I kneel again to the North,
 Mt. Hesperus.
 This time asking for peace for the whole world. (Bahe 1971:5-6)

Repetition in fours (and twos) recurs throughout many of the poems as well as in oral narratives. An example of fourfold repetition in an oral narrative is seen in (26), again from Morgan (1949). Here we find quoted speech being used to bring about changes in the world—Coyote requests something four times and the world changes. This example comes from the beginning of a familiar Coyote narrative variously known as “Coyote and Skunk” or “Coyote Makes Rain” (see Hill and Hill 1945). Hamill (1983), in discussing a version of this narrative, cites its repetition as an example of a “Navajo syllogism.” Following Hymes (2003), I would call this narrative scene a “providential world.”

- (26) *’Áádóó M̄’ii ’ání,*
“Tó shíkee’ bik’i doolkq̄qh.
Tó shíkee’ bik’i doolkq̄qh.
Tó shíkee’ bik’i doolkq̄qh.
Tó shíkee’ bik’i doolkq̄qh.”
Tó bikee’ diilkq̄’ jini.

'Then Coyote said,
 "Rain cover my feet!
 Rain cover my feet!
 Rain cover my feet!
 Rain cover my feet!"
 The rain covered his feet, it is said'. (Morgan 1949:22)

4.7. Metanarrative exhortation *hááhgóóshíí*. A final device that should be pointed out is *hááhgóóshíí*. Toelken and Scott comment on the use of this form, which they gloss as '!!!' (1981:109). It is used in a number of Coyote narratives and seems to mark crucial sections of the narratives. In this respect, the device seems to call into relief key moments of the narrative and, as such, it functions much like a metanarrative exhortation (Nuckolls 1992:74). However, when I asked Blackhorse Mitchell to translate a narrative that contained this form, he left the form untranslated. I have not yet found this device used in written poetry. In (27) below, I present an example with this device narrated by Curly Tó Aheedliinii. (The translation is by Mitchell. I have edited that translation by including 'it is said' each time *jini* occurs—Mitchell largely left the quotative untranslated—and by bracketing Mitchell's insertions of "coyote" when the word does not occur in the Navajo version. The change in tense from 'it is said' to the final 'it was said' reflects Mitchell's translation of that form in the following section. Following Toelken and Scott [1981], I translate *hááhgóóshíí* as '!!!'.) This segment of the narrative is from the crucial moment when Coyote, having feigned death to trick the prairie dogs, jumps up and begins killing them after Skunk (*Gólízhii*) does what his name suggests he does (*go-* 'one', *-lízh-* 'urinate', *-ii* 'the').

(27) *Ákohgo shíí hááhgóóshíí níkidazhdíiljool jini*
Náhidíitah jini
Má'ii yéeni'
Tsahaatéeni' yíit haalwod jini
Hááhgóóshíí hata' níkidíiíhaal jini
La' hadádadziswod jini

'It made each !!! dancer kneel to clear their eyes, it is said.
 When [Coyote] got up, it is said.
 The Coyote
 Took out his club, it is said.
 !!! Then started clubbing down the dancers, it is said.
 Eventually some got away, it was said'. (Haile 1984:92)

4.8. An extended example of the interplay of poetic devices. Almost all of the poetic devices that I have described above for oral narratives and chantways can be found in written poetry. Webster (2004) describes how parallelism, quotative *jini*, place names, onomatopoeia, temporal conjunctions as openings, fourfold repetition as a recurrent trope, and breakthrough into song all occur in

various poems written by a variety of Navajo poets. They occur both in poems written in English and those written in Navajo. Place names, character names (such as *Ma'ii*), and *jini* often appear in Navajo in poems where English is the dominant language. In other cases, the English conjunction *and* does the work of the Navajo form *'áádo*, opening a poem and creating the sense that one has entered an ongoing series of narratives. A number of other instances of these phenomena appear in examples cited above.

The interplay of various poetic devices within a single narrative-like poem is exemplified by Laura Tohe's "In Dinétah" (2002:100–104). It shows how the initial formulaic framing device and parallelism can be used in Navajo written poetry (we should not be surprised to find a Navajo place name). The poem begins with (28).

(28) *Atkidaa' adajini nit'ee'* (Tohe 2002:100)

As noted in section 4.2, this formulaic device, roughly translated as 'Long ago according to them it used to be', is found at the beginning of many traditional Navajo narratives. Its appearance at the beginning situates this poem within a framework of traditional Navajo narratives, allowing Navajo readers and listeners to recognize it within a meaningful framework of prior discursive expectations (cf. Goffman 1974; Keane 1997). When I have seen Tohe perform this poem in public venues, she always utters the formulaic opening frame in Navajo. Such formulaic phrases as *atkidaa' adajini nit'ee'* and *jó 'akódaa jini'tei* can inspire thought and reflection. Luci Tapahonso describes *jó 'akódaa jini'tei* and the process of poetry composition as follows:

My poems always begin first in Navajo. So whatever form, they begin in Navajo. This might be a certain phrase, like today, for some reason, I was thinking a lot about this phrase which would be "Jó 'akódaa jini'tei." It seems like I would think of something, and in the end I would just somehow put at the end of that: "Jó 'akódaa jini'tei." "That's what they would say," I guess that's the way you would translate this. And I began to realize that as the phrase came into my mind more and more, that somehow that was the beginning of a poem. That line was going to be significant. And when I put it down in English, "Jó 'akódaa jini'tei, Jó 'akódaa jini'tei, Jó 'akódaa jini'tei," the way that that would finally appear in English might be, "That's what they would say," "That's what they would say," or it might be something else, like "A long time ago, they would say that a lot." So the English version would be different. However it finally ends up in English, the original part of it, the original thought, the spark of it, started in Navajo. [Luci Tapahonso, quoted in Binder and Breinig 1995:115–16]

Here Tapahonso explicitly connects written poetry and oral poetic traditions by employing the formulaic framing device *jó 'akódaa jini'tei*. Like *jini* in a number of poems about Coyote (Webster 2004), *jó 'akódaa jini'tei* and *atkidaa' adajini nit'ee'* are direct links between the oral tradition and the emergent written tradition. They are also direct links in Navajo.

I be
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Returning to Tohe's poem, another use of Navajo oral poetic devices can be seen at the end of "In Dinétah." Tohe concludes her poem with the lines in (29). This ending replicates that of a number of Navajo chantways (see Matthews 1995, 1997). 'In Beauty' is likely a translation of the Navajo form *hózhógo*, based on the key Navajo concept *hózhó* (see Witherspoon 1977; Farella 1984). The form *hózhógo* (here with a subordinating enclitic *-go*) is often glossed as 'beauty, harmony, peaceful'. When it occurs at the end of chantways, it normally occurs four times, as in (29). Field and Blackhorse (2002) and Webster (2004) have suggested that fourfold repetition gives a sense of "surrounding," because of a metonymic linkage with the idea of the four sacred directions. Since *dinétah* is understood as the land within the four sacred mountains, the chantlike conclusion of "In Dinétah" thus suggests surrounding and completion.¹³

(29) In Beauty it was begun.

In Beauty it continues.

In Beauty,

In Beauty,

In Beauty,

In Beauty. (Tohe 2002:104)

I have discussed "In Dinétah" in greater detail elsewhere (Webster 2005). For present purposes, two things are particularly noteworthy about it—the juxtaposition of genres and of languages. By beginning the poem in Navajo with a formulaic framing device characteristic of narrative, and ending it in English with the formulaic closing of a chantway, Tohe puts two genres (narrative and chantway) into dialogue (see Bakhtin 1986; see also Bauman 2004). Similarly, Tohe opens her poem in Navajo and closes it in English, thus putting the two languages into dialogue within the poem. Language is commonly viewed as an index (if not an icon) of identity—Navajos speak Navajo. This view was often expressed to me by Navajos, including Navajos who did not speak Navajo. The same view often shapes performance when Navajo poets who do not speak Navajo fluently nonetheless introduce themselves in Navajo. The use of Navajo can and does index Navajoness. However, as Tohe illustrates, Navajoness can also be indexed by traditional poetic devices that have been transferred into English. Moreover, Navajos can and do use English to index Navajoness even without traditional poetic devices. For example, elsewhere in her poem Tohe creates an intertextual link to Billie Holiday when she invokes "strange fruit,"¹⁴ connecting Navajo oppression and captivity to other historical examples of oppression. Likewise, when Tohe invokes the terms "Cat or Stomp" in another of her poems, she is using English to connect with a generation of Navajos who attended boarding schools. I had to ask Tohe about the meanings of "Cat" and

"Stomp"¹⁵ because those terms fell outside my stock of knowledge. Using English does not always or irretrievably index "colonizing ways of speaking." In general, I believe that Navajos have not simply been forced to speak English and passively accepted it. Rather, Navajos have engaged English and actively adapted it, whether by the use of traditional poetic devices transferred into English or by the use, literary and otherwise, of Navajo English.

5. Conclusions. In this article I have tried to show precisely how written Navajo poetry has been influenced by Navajo verbal art. I have been concerned with the use of various poetic devices in both written and oral Navajo traditions primarily for two reasons. First, Navajo poets themselves speak of the oral tradition influencing their poetry. If we are to take Navajo poetry seriously, we must actively engage discussions about Navajo poetry by Navajo poets. Second, many Navajos with whom I have worked speak of poetry in Navajo as *hane* 'story, narrative'. Thus, it seems useful to understand the relationship between poetry and storytelling; one way to understand this relationship is to determine which narrative devices they share. How is a Navajo poem *hane*? A number of ways have been suggested here. Another way in which Navajo poetry is similar to storytelling is that, like stories, Navajo poems are by and large meant to be shared. As Laura Tohe once explained to me, "poetry is performance" (p.c. 2000).

Of course, there are examples of Navajo poetry in which the visual nature of the poetry is more important than any oral performative component. For example, Esther Belin's poem "Check One" (1999:12) in (30).

- (30) Diné
 Other

This is a clear case of a poem that relies on the visual aesthetic at the expense of the performability of the poem (i.e., the oral aesthetic). I have never seen Esther Belin perform this poem before an audience. Obviously, the visual nature of writing lends itself to certain aesthetics that are lacking in the auditory realm (and vice versa) (see Webster 2006a). This poem is an intertextual reference to census questionnaires and other regimenting bureaucratic devices. As such, it plays with a literacy reference. Its influence is clearly from bureaucratic literacy conventions.

My second goal was to compare poetic devices in Navajo with their realization in written poems, in order to determine whether the lexical-grammatical code had changed, or whether a transfer of discourse routines across languages had taken place? Thus, following Field (2001), I wanted to know what was retained across the shift from Navajo to English. To this end, I discussed a number of poetic devices that are retained in this way, including the use of repetition, parallelism, and the rhetorical force of four. Other examples are the use of "and" by Esther Belin and "one day" by Rex Lee Jim in the openings of their "Coyote

poems." These reproduce the use of *'áádóó* 'and (then)' and *lah* 'once' in a number of Coyote narratives. Likewise, several Coyote poems begin in a similar manner as Coyote stories, with Coyote on the move (Webster 2004).

Not all the poetic devices outlined here transferred across languages. *Hááhgóóshíí* '!!!' does not appear in any of the written Navajo poems I have investigated. As a metanarrative exhortation, it may be quite difficult to transfer across languages. Likewise, even *jini* 'it is said' has not been transferred consistently across codes. As Mitchell explained to me, the form can be cumbersome and, indeed, in English translations it is often not translated at all. Other features of Navajo, such as sound symbolism, are also likely to be lost in English translations. For example, elsewhere I discuss the play of sounds in a poem by Rex Lee Jim about *na'asts'qosi* 'mouse' (Webster 2006b), a layering of sounds that is lost in a translation to English. In fact, the naming of animals seems a fruitful place to investigate such moments of incommensurability (see Landar 1961; Webster 2006b; Zolbrod 2004). The indexical framing devices, such as *Atkidaa' adajini nit'ee'*, do not appear to be transferable either; they work because they are Navajo. Likewise, the use of *Má'ii* (or one of its many variants) grounds a poem or narrative in Navajo traditions instead of a pan-American Indian "Coyote tradition" (see Bright 1993), thus localizing the poem.

One way to explain the lexical and syntactic objectification of Navajo poetic devices (cf. Moore 1988) that I have called "codeswitching" is to interpret it as the playing out of tensions between what can be transferred across languages and what cannot be transferred. Recall House's (2002) critique of Slate (1993), which argued that not all Navajos would agree on what was meant to be "saved." Looking at what Navajo poets retain in Navajo and what they can or will transfer into English allows us to understand what Navajo poets feel to be important features of Navajo, incommensurate with English, and what forms can be transferred between English and Navajo. That some poets consistently present the sacred mountains in Navajo, while other Navajos do not, tells us that individual Navajos vary with respect to their conception of incommensurability between codes. The rhetorical device of fourfold parallelism or repetition can be partly transferred. Triadic directives can be transferred. But metanarrative exhortations may not transfer across languages, as seen by the fact that Navajo poets do not attempt such transfers. They may even resist transference from an oral medium to a written medium.

Paying attention to what Navajo poets try to transfer across codes also allows us to gauge the felt connections to their languages. Many poems are explicitly about language and its importance—especially the importance of Navajo. One cannot read Laura Tohe's poem "Our Tongues Slapped into Silence" (Tohe 1999:2–3) without sensing the oppressive implications of English and the felt connections of poet and reader or listener to Navajo, a language actively being repressed (see Webster in press a). However, the poem is written in English. Nor can one read Tohe's poem "Names," excerpted in (31) below, about the

corruption of Navajo names in English, with its lesson on Navajo lexical semantics, without sensing the felt connections to language.

- (31) Tohe, from T'óhii means Towards Water.
 Tsosie. Ts'ósi means Slender.
 And Yazzie, from Yázhí, means Beloved Little One/Son. (Tohe 1999:5)

Felt connections to Navajo are similarly embodied in the exhortation in Norla Chee's poem "A Navajo Sing," excerpted in (32).

- (32) *Hataatii* sings over the patient.
 Someone whispers, in English

"Diné bizaad bee yádaalti"

This is an Enemyway. (Chee 2001:25)

The Navajo phrase can be glossed as simply the directive "Speak Navajo." And yet, we cannot deny the felt connections to language and identity found in many poems written in English by Navajo poets. It is the felt connections to language that matter. We also need to investigate the ways that Englishes are being used by Navajos to assert and circulate frameworks of meaning that we might term Navajoness.

Finally, Navajo is a threatened language, in the sense that new speakers are not learning the language at a rate that will ensure its continued existence. The literature reviewed in section 2 speaks to the macrolevel processes that are occurring. That is, it examines how education, government programs, economic factors, and the like, all conspired to impede the retention and perpetuation of Navajo speakers. Languages are, however, only clusters of individual speakers. With this in mind, Dick (1998) suggests the importance of understanding the lingual autobiographies¹⁶ of Navajo speakers and readers. Likewise, Field (2001) looks at the specifics of triadic directives (in Navajo, in English, or in combination) among Navajos. Recently, Paul Friedrich (2006) has argued for the centrality of ethnopoetics in language and culture studies. One of the hallmarks of ethnopoetics has been the investigation of the individual speaking subject. Another has been its careful attention to linguistic detail in verbal art. One way to approach the understanding of language shift and language death may be to use ethnopoetics, as I have attempted to do here, to understand the felt connections that speakers have with their languages. An examination of the poetic practices of a people may reveal what features of language (poetic potentials) they believe are and are not commensurate across different languages—that is, what linguistic features of a language are maximally salient, feelingfully evocative, and meant to be kept when speakers come in contact with another language. In short, it reveals what is meant to be in Navajo and what can be transferred into English. As examples discussed throughout this article suggest,

however, we should not expect agreement on what features can and cannot be transferred across languages. Macrolevel investigations that neglect more microlevel research such as ethnopoetics may miss the larger felt connections between speakers and their languages.

Notes

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1. The literature on language shift and both the macrolevel and microlevel analyses of that shift is extensive. On Athabaskan language shift, see Cook (1989, 1995), Pye (1992), Lanoue (1991), and Nevins (2004). For a useful rethinking of various tropes involved in discussions about language shift, see J. Hill (2002), the attendant commentary by Dorian (2002), England (2002), Fishman (2002), and Hinton (2002), as well as Chafe (2003). By "macrolevel analysis," I mean studies that examine overarching sociocultural factors (e.g., education, government, economics, religion, etc.). By microlevel analysis, I mean studies that examine individual discursive practices. My perspective is influenced by Joel Sherzer (1987) and Greg Urban's (1991) view of a "discourse centered approach to language and culture," as well as the earlier ethnopoetic work of Dell Hymes (1981, 2003).

2. The phrase can be glossed 'may I be everlasting and beautiful living' (Jim 2000: 232). For discussions of this phrase, see Jim (2000), Witherspoon (1977), and Farella (1984).

3. A "lingual autobiography" is the language history of an individual as it connects to his or her life history. It includes the languages that an individual has used, encountered, and discarded, as well as the people from whom they were heard or learned, and the locations at which they were encountered.

4. Navajos are not the only Native Americans writing poetry. Ronald Snake Edmo, for example, has published a collection of poems in both Shoshoni and English (Edmo 2001). He clearly sees one of the goals of his poetry to be the creation of a corpus of

written materials in the Shoshoni language. I thank Edmo for many useful conversations concerning his poetry. See Zepeda (1982, 1997, 2000) for examples of Tohono O'odham poetry, as well as linguistic and autobiographical information; Fitzgerald (2003) has analyzed word order in some of Zepeda's poetry.

5. In the present article, I normally use the English term "chantways," instead of the more usual "chant." My usage reflects the way in which Navajo chantways are spoken of and named in Navajo. In Navajo, chantways have names such as *Hózhóójí* 'Blessingway', *Tł'ée'jí* 'Nightway', *'Anna'jí* 'Enemyway', and *Má'ííjí* 'Coyoteway'. All of these forms end in the enclitic *-jí*, which can be glossed as 'in the direction of' or 'way'. (Thus, *Hózhóójí* consists of *hózhóó* 'blessing' plus *-jí*; *Tł'ée'jí* consists of *tł'ée'* 'night' plus *-jí*, and so on.) I use the term "chantways" only for reasons of linguistic fidelity, and not with any reference to principles that organize the various chantways (for the latter, see Wyman and Kluckhohn [1938], as well as Faris [1994]).

6. Other scholars, such as Hoijer (1971), Kluckhohn (1960), and Witherspoon (1977) have discussed the importance of categorization within Navajo semantics. Murray (1989) discusses the linguistic awareness that Navajos bring to bear concerning "ritual" and "ritual language"; the importance of actor awareness of linguistic structure is a crucial point in what follows (see also Silverstein 1981).

7. By "traditional Navajo poetic devices," I mean only those formal devices that have lingered in the text-artifact documented by linguists, folklorists, and anthropologists. For quite useful discussion of this topic, see Dinwoodie (1999). I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.

8. Barre Toelken states in a review of the manuscript of this article that, as far as he knows, *-dlosh* is used only for Coyote. That seems to be true in my experience as well. However, Coyote does take other verbs of running. In the Watchman narrative titled "Horned Toad and his Corn Patch" (Sapir and Hoijer 1942:16), Coyote makes his appearance in association with the verb form *-ghod* 'to run'. So it appears to be the case that *-dlosh* almost, if not always, occurs with Coyote and that Coyote can appear with both *-dlosh* and *-ghod*.

9. Hoijer (1945), critiquing the work of Gladys Reichard, claimed that final *n* in *jin* was actually a syllabic *ń* (thus, *jiní*) and that there was no form *jin* in Navajo. Reichard responded by pointing out that "most of my informants and many of the casual speakers I know use *jin*, as well as *jiní* and, more rarely, *jinń*" (1947:194). (I have updated Reichard's orthography by changing *dj* to *j*.) Toelken and Scott (1981) point out that the form can be reduced to *jn*. Although I have not investigated the point systematically, I suspect the form is both *jn* and *jinń*. Likewise, I agree with Reichard's estimates of the relative frequency of the forms *jin*, *jiní*, and *jinń*. Most often the form *jiní* is reduced to a single syllable in narratives (*jin*, *jn*, or *jinń*). My interpretation of McDonough (2003:106) is that the process whereby *n + i* → *ń* is a tendency and not an absolute. If that is the case, then *jin*, *jn*, and *jinń* are all plausible realizations of *jiní* in casual speech. The debate between Hoijer and Reichard is interesting not only for what it suggests about Navajo phonemics, but also as it relates to the creation of standard orthographies.

10. Mirkowich was one of the first to note that Navajo place names remain stable in the face of Spanish and English incursions (1941:313-14). He points out that Navajos used Navajo names for towns that had English or Spanish names and were founded by Spaniards or Americans. For example, they renamed Flagstaff, Arizona, as *Kin táni* 'Many Houses'. Thus, it seems to be a perduring feature of Navajo that place names are important.

11. Many of the sacred mountains have multiple names. I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.

12. This point was raised by Barre Toelken in reviewing this article.

13. Barre Toelken suggests that not only does Laura Tohe evoke *hózhǫ́*, but in the very act of repeating "In Beauty" four times, she "produces" *hózhǫ́*. I take this suggestion quite seriously. For more on the creative power of language, see Witherspoon (1977).

14. Billie Holiday (1915–59) was an African-American jazz singer. Her signature song, "Strange Fruit," originally a poem by Abel Meeropol, is a bitter commentary on racism and the lynchings that took place in the South—the strange fruit hanging from the trees were the bodies of lynched black men (see Margolick 2001). Tohe seems to be connecting racism and lynchings of African-Americans with the removal of the Navajos during the Long Walk.

15. When Tohe attended boarding school, "Cat" and "Stomp" were descriptive terms used by the students to identify different social groups. Cats listened to rock music and Stomps listened to country music (see Webster in press a).

16. A lingual autobiography is an individual's language history as it connects with his or her life history. It is the history of languages used, encountered, and discarded, people heard and learned from, and places and spaces where languages were encountered.

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The Origins of the Wakashan Classificatory Verbs of Location and Handling

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Abstract. The classificatory verbs typical of certain polysynthetic American language families pose a number of typological and diachronic conundrums. Only one source has been proposed in the literature so far—incorporated nouns—but an investigation of the phenomenon in the Wakashan family suggests that this cannot be their only source. A number of potential factors leading to the emergence of classificatory verbs are discussed and it is shown how new members of the category may still be in the process of forming today.

1. Two types of classificatory verbs. This article is concerned with the origin of classificatory verbs in the language family Wakashan. It does not deal with noun classifiers as found in quantified expressions, which Wakashan languages also have, but which do not overlap or interact at all with their classificatory verbs. Classificatory verbs as such are typologically rather rare, being associated with certain languages of the polysynthetic, head-marking type, especially those of North America. They provide a profile of the “figure”¹ of a situation or action, as opposed to the nature of the situation or action itself, distinguishing either the shape or the texture (also sometimes the animacy and number) of the arguments involved—which usually means the subject of predications of location or the object of predications of handling. They are distinct both from verbs into which classifier nominals have been productively incorporated and from classificatory (or “gender”) affixes, which generally appear to derive from incorporated nominals (northern Athabaskan languages have both; see Poser 2005). They are also, in principle, distinct from positional-orientational verb root systems such as those found in Mayan, Siouan, Muskogean, and some Papuan languages. Aikhenvald refers to the verbs of the latter type as type B suppletive classificatory verbs, i.e., “stance” verbs or “classificatory verbs distinguishing the S/O [subject of intransitive or object of transitive] argument in terms of its orientation in space (and its inherent properties),” as opposed to type A suppletive verbs, typical of Athabaskan-Eyak, i.e., “classificatory verbs distinguishing the S/O argument according to its inherent properties” (2000: 153–54). Although type B is much more widespread than type A, it is type A that I refer to here as “true” (or prototypical) classificatory verbs, and it is in this category that one may place most of the relevant items in the Wakashan languages. Their distribution outside of Athabaskan-Eyak is patchy and discontinuous, and the details (and extent) of usage vary considerably from language to language (see Fortescue 2002).²

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