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Imagining Navajo in the Boarding School: Laura Tohe’s *No Parole Today* and the Intimacy of Language Ideologies

In this article I investigate Navajo poet Laura Tohe’s uses of metapragmatic terms in three literary works found in her book *No Parole Today*. Tohe’s book focuses on the boarding school experience and is especially concerned with issues of language use. I argue that Tohe uses metadiscourses that both dramatize language use but also create affectively potent relations between speakers and the languages they use. These metadiscourses are implicit metadiscourses. Rather than explicitly stating that Navajo should be the language of social intimacy for Navajos, Tohe dramatizes such relationships. Such implicit metadiscourses gain added import when understood within the larger social fields of the Navajo Nation and current ideologies about the Navajo language.

On April 23, 2009, the *Navajo Times*, the paper of record for many Navajos, runs the headline, “Tongue-Tied: Navajo men say they’re not allowed to speak Native language at work,” above the fold. The article goes on to state:

But the men, who asked not to be identified in the newspaper for fear of retaliation, said the request [not to speak Navajo] feels like a violation of their rights and evokes the days when the BIA boarding school students had their mouths washed out with soap. (Yurth 2009:A-1)

Here the image of the boarding school functions as part of an explicit metadiscourse on language policies connecting the current experiences of language stigmatization with the Bureau of Indian Affairs’ (BIA) efforts to suppress Navajo at boarding schools. Yet, as I will show, just as the boarding school itself was a complex site for the ideological struggle about language, the image of the boarding school, as an implicit metadiscourse, also continues to haunt the contemporary discourse concerning the place of the Navajo language among contemporary Navajos.

To understand the contemporary metadiscourse of the Navajo about language, one must understand this haunting image of the boarding school that informs it: What kinds of metadiscourses about Navajo and the boarding schools circulate on the Navajo Nation? How, for example, are the Navajo language and the boarding school experience imagined through literary works? And what is the social work of such imaginative depictions of languages and concomitantly those that would use such languages? Taking a discourse-centered approach to language and culture (Sherzer 1987; Urban 1991), this article begins to engage such questions by investigating the
ways that Navajo poet Laura Tohe’s No Parole Today (1999) dramatizes language use in the boarding school context and in so doing creates an emotionally salient metadiscourse about both languages and language users and the links between them. Yet, unlike the above quote from the Navajo Times, Tohe’s characterological work in No Parole Today is often, though not always, an implicit metadiscourse on the role and value of languages (Agha 2003:257). That is, there is no explicit statement concerning the relative value of one language or another. Instead, Tohe presents an image of Navajos using language to create affective bonds between Navajos. There are tensions in the ways that both Navajos and non-Navajos imagine the Navajo language. Other images of the Navajo language and Navajos as language users also circulate. These images, often externally rooted, devalue and stigmatize Navajos and the languages they use (see Webster 2010).

The “data” for this article come primarily from three creative pieces by Tohe (1999). I supplement this with insights gained from ethnographic and linguistic fieldwork in 2000–2001, 2007, and 2008 on the Navajo Nation. The three pieces that form the focus of this article are:

1) the short story “So I Blow Smoke in Her Face” (Tohe 1999:25–29)
2) the poem “The Names” (Tohe 1999:4–5)
3) the poem “Sometimes Those Pueblo Men Can Sure Be Coyotes” (Tohe 1999:16–17)

I focus on this book by Tohe because it is set with the boarding school experience as backdrop and much of this book is a metadiscourse about the importance of language (specifically Diné bizaad [Navajo]) and language use. The boarding school is a particularly apt site for the investigation of such imagined dialogues because the boarding school was often explicitly about limiting the language options of Native Americans (Iverson 1998: 20) and, as we see in the Navajo Times article cited at the beginning of this article, it is still a potent image of language oppression for many Navajos.

In this article, I argue that language works as an affective register (Irvine 1990) to display an emotional bond between languages and their users. To understand such affective displays, we need to situate them in a language ideological framework because it is language ideologies that inform such language and affective associations (Kroskrity 2004). Building on Asif Agha’s (2003) work on the social and ideological work of characterological images, I argue that metadiscourses dramatize registers and create iconic relations between speakers and languages. Such iconic relations are mediated by affect, that is, the felt attachment that speakers have to their languages. To make this argument, I focus on a short story and two poems in No Parole Today and see how these metadiscourses variously create iconic relations between speakers and languages. In the case of the Navajo literary works, the boarding school experience works as a trope that gives these metadiscourses an intertextual linkage as a shared or potentially shared historical memory (see Hanks 1999). The use of Navajo in Tohe’s works, then, when used by Navajos, acts as an index of social intimacy. Such social intimacy is informed by and informs the historical memory of the boarding school experience. Note that, not only does Tohe create an image of Navajo as an index of social intimacy between Navajo speakers, but Tohe also creates, through the iconic relation between speaker and language, a social intimacy between speaker and language, this is the intimacy of language ideologies.

Navajos and Boarding Schools

The Navajo Nation, covering parts of Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah, is roughly the size of West Virginia. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, there are nearly 300,000 people who identify as Navajo. Of these people, 178,014 people identified themselves as speakers of Navajo, with roughly 120,000 of those identifying themselves as speakers of Navajo and as residents of the Navajo Nation. Rough numbers, then, give an
impression that the Navajo language is widely spoken (in fact, it is spoken in every state in the United States) by a significant number of speakers. However, as Navajo scholars such as Tiffany Lee (2007) and Ancita Benally (Benally and Viri 2005) point out, the Navajo language is a threatened language. It is threatened in the sense that young Navajos are not learning the language at a rate that will insure the continued use of the language. Also, despite a number of efforts over the years, literacy in Navajo is still rather limited (see McLaughlin 1992; Spicer 1962:456–457; Spolsky 2002).

The topic of Native Americans and the boarding school institutions has been much written about (see Adams 1997; Greenfeld 2001; Lomawaima 1995; Lomawaima and McCarty 2006; Trafzer, Keller, and Sisquoc 2006). My goal in this section is not to review the entire literature on boarding school practices, but rather to focus more narrowly on Navajo boarding school experiences. In many ways, Navajo boarding school experiences were both similar and different from the larger Native American boarding school trends (see Spicer 1962:441–444). Let me also note at the outset, as Alice Littlefield (2004: 327) has pointed out, the boarding school often presents an “apparent paradox.” Namely, that “former students often expressed positive attitudes towards these schools and even protested when such schools were closed” (Littlefield 2004:327). Tohe’s (1999) work, I would argue, presents a complex vision of the boarding school and of the ways speaking was and was not regimented (see also Webster 2009).

Peter Iverson (1998) recounts some of the motivations behind the boarding school system in the late 1800s. Iverson (1998:19) points out that, “proponents of these distant boarding schools argued that such isolation was necessary to remove children from the harmful, counterproductive influences of their home communities.” Native American children were removed from their homes and boarded at distant schools. One of the “counterproductive influences” was the use of their ancestral language. Commissioner of Indian Affairs J.D.C. Atkins was particularly clear on this point. As Iverson (1998:20) explains:

In 1887 he [Atkins] emphasized the government “must remove the stumbling block of hereditary customs and manners, and of these language is one of the most important elements.” He had made up his mind: ‘This language, which is good enough for a white man and a black man, ought to be good enough for the red man.’

In the initial phases of the boarding school, Navajo children—because of the geographic isolation of the Navajo Reservation—were less completely immersed in that system (Iverson 2002:81–86). For example, the infamous Carlisle Institute, Carlisle, PA, run by Richard Henry Pratt, and the addressee of Laura Tohe’s (1999:ix-xii) introductory letter, never had more than four dozen Navajos ever attend the school (Iverson 2002:83). Manuelito, an important Navajo leader, sent both his sons and a nephew to Carlisle. All three died, one son at Carlisle and the other son and nephew from tuberculosis back on the Navajo Reservation (see Denetdale 2007:82–83; Iverson 2002:83).

However, boarding school did not begin in earnest for Navajo children until the early twentieth century (Iverson 2002:118). Even then, a number of schools were built on the reservation. Though, as Spicer (1962:223) notes, “Navajos were either uninterested in or directly antagonistic to the boarding school at Fort Defiance [on the Navajo Nation].” If, as Henry Shonerd (1990:193) has noted, the “language policy for the Navajo . . . is best understood in light of an almost 400-year history of attempts to suppress language varieties indigenous to the culture,” then the early boarding school experiences were a part of that larger trend. It should however be noted that in the 1950s the attitude toward Navajo shifted from an active suppression to an attempt to support the Navajo language and Navajo literacy (Iverson 2002:172–174; Spicer 1962:456). In the 1950s, however, the trend for Navajos was a renewed use of boarding schools (Iverson 2002:193; Spicer 1962:443). This was the “Special Navajo Program” that sent thousands of Navajos to off-reservation boarding schools in places like Albuquerque, NM, Riverside, CA, Phoenix, AZ, and Chemawa, OR. Other
on-reservation boarding schools were also continued from the previous era. Galena Dick describes her experiences at the Chinle Boarding School (in Chinle, AZ, on the Navajo Nation) during the 1950s in the following manner:

We were forced and pressured to learn English. We had to struggle. It was confusing and difficult. Students were punished and abused for speaking their native language . . . If we were caught speaking Navajo, the matrons gave us chores like scrubbing and waxing the floors, or they slapped our hands with rulers. Some students had their mouths “washed” with yellow bar soap . . . This shows that even for Navajo adults like the dorm matrons, school was not a place for Navajos to be Navajo. (Dick and McCarty 1997:72–73)

Tellingly, Navajo matrons were complicit in the aggressive suppression of the use of Navajo. As Edward Spicer (1962:443) notes, “the major emphasis [was] on learning to speak, read, and write English.”1 As Robert Young (1970:226) writes, “during the 1950s, major emphasis in the Navajo education program was placed once again on the learning of English and the study of conventional subjects.” Federal policy and boarding school policies toward Navajo and English were capricious.

It should be noted that some Navajos wanted an education in English (see, e.g., Iverson 2002:196; Mitchell 2004) and that some Navajos viewed going to the boarding schools in a positive light (see Iverson 2002:195; Littlefield 2004). Some Navajos that I have spoken with about their boarding school experience have explained that they were not punished for speaking Navajo. However, this is not to say that they did not see the experience as one of silencing their voice (see Webster 2010). Also, as I have argued elsewhere (Webster 2009), Tohe links the boarding school experience with both oppression and with the nostalgia of youth as well. Finally, as Lomawaima (1995) argues and Tohe dramatizes, Native American students found a variety of ways to resist boarding school regimes. The boarding school was a complex site, and a variety of attitudes continue to inform discussions about the boarding school experience. Tohe presents one vision of the Navajo boarding school experience.

As Teresa McCarty (2002) has ably demonstrated, two of the persistent problems with the off-reservation boarding schools (and for that matter with on-reservation schools as well), was the lack of any encouragement for the expression of being Navajo and the lack of local control of the schools by Navajos. It is within this background that we need to understand the poems and narratives found in Tohe’s (1999) No Parole Today. For many Navajos, going to boarding school was like going to prison. That is the analogy of Tohe’s title. On the other hand, Tohe became aware of a second way of reading her title as “no speaking today” and she discussed that interpretation at a poetry performance in Window Rock, AZ, July 18, 2001. Here is the relevant excerpt (see Webster 2009). This is an explicit metadiscourse on the boarding school and language policy:2

(1) A this book I wrote
   Because I was in a boarding school
   Uh on the reservation at Crystal
   Uh where I lived for awhile and then was sent to the Albuquerque Indian School
   And lived there for
   Four years
   A this
   Title is called No Parole Today but I didn’t know at the time that it’s French
   Uh word meaning no voice
   Or no one to speak for you
   Uh and for me that’s what Indian schools were all about
   Was was assimilation
   And it was also the taking away of our language

Note that in the short story and one of the poems to be analyzed below, Navajo students at the boarding school do continue to speak Navajo. For Tohe, much of the
affective dimensions of Navajo are relatable to the trauma of the boarding school experience.

That the Navajo language is still a topic of concern for many Navajos needs also to be accounted for. Many Navajos that I have spoken with, but certainly not all, continue to see the Navajo language as a language under attack. Even Navajos who do not speak Navajo have sometimes told me that mainstream American society is attempting to suppress the Navajo language. During my fieldwork in 2000, the state of Arizona had a ballot initiative that meant to curtail the use of bilingual education in schools (see House 2002). I attended a number of public meetings led by Navajos about opposing the ballot initiative (see Webster 2009). Many Navajos linked the ballot initiative with the boarding school experience. About the same time as the ballot initiative was passing, a legal case in Page, AZ, involving the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and the banning of Navajo at a local restaurant also sparked controversy on the Navajo Nation (see Zachary 2005). Again, Navajos that I spoke with saw this as an affront to the Navajo language and concomitantly to Navajos. Note also that the headline and attendant article I cited at the beginning of this article also foregrounds the continued suppression of the Navajo language by outsiders (Yurth 2009). It also points to the way that contemporary concerns about language issues are often linked with images of the boarding school experience. Couple this with concern by many Navajos about the current language shift on the Navajo Nation (see Lee 2007) and one readily appreciates why many Navajos feel that Navajo is still under attack from outsiders (and nonoutsiders).

Not all Navajos valorize the Navajo language as especially useful (see Holm and Holm 1995; Lee 2007). For example, Navajo scholar Agnes Holm and Wayne Holm (Holm and Holm 1995:155) described some of these attitudes as follows, “In most schools and communities, Navajo does not have the ‘status’ that English does . . . thus begins the vicious cycle whereby the use of Navajo in school comes to acquire low status, as Navajo is equated with rurality, poverty, and lack of ‘cool.’ ” Holm and Holm (1995:155) go on to point out the Navajo becomes associated with “remedial” classes as well. As Field (2009:44) notes:

“elder speaker purism” (regardless of religious affiliation) is linked to powerful feelings concerning Navajo identity and group solidarity and is in direct opposition to a variety of language ideologies on the part of younger Navajos, be it linguistic insecurity, an emergent identity as speakers of “Navlish,” or a rejection of Navajo language entirely on the part of the very young.

McCarty et al. (2008:168) note that for some teenage Navajos, the Navajo language can be seen as “emblems of shame” or “useless.” Some Navajo Christians also are ambivalent toward the Navajo language. As Bernard Spolsky (2002:149) notes, some “Navajo Christian churches . . . oppose the teaching of Navajo in school for fear that it will bring with it the teaching of Navajo religious practices and beliefs.” I have heard such arguments at Navajo language conferences as well. On the other hand, a number of Navajos, both young and old, have explained to me that the use of Navajo terms is simply more affectively meaningful and feelingful than the use of English (see Webster Forthcoming). Such a language ideology, that sees Navajo as more feelingful than the use of English, stands in contrast to and in tension with the more prominent Anglo-American language ideology of linguistic paranoia. It also stands in tension with Navajo language ideologies that would “reject” the Navajo language. It should be clear that the languages that Navajos speak are an ideologically contentious issue.

Creating Intimate Characterological Images

I believe we can understand Tohe’s work as an implicit metapragmatic discourse on the intimacies, the affective relations, between speakers and the languages they
speak. That is, we can glimpse something of the ways felt attachments between speakers (or potential speakers) and their languages are imagined. Recent work by Agha (2003) on the ways Received Pronunciation (RP) was imagined in metadiscourses in 19th-century England, suggest an avenue to understanding the metapragmatic work that Tohe is engaged in. Among these metadiscourses, Agha (2003) singles out penny weeklies, popular handbooks, and literary works as aiding in the construction of a recognized register and the associated social values that align with that register. These literary works then “depict icons of personhood linked to speech that invite forms of role alignment on the part of the reader” (Agha 2003:257). That is, such metadiscourses that dramatize registers also create iconic relations between speakers (as imagined in the literary works) and the very languages, registers, dialects, etc. that they use.3 These are “characterological images” (Agha 2003:259), much like the images of Nootkas as described by Edward Sapir (1985 [1915]).

Sapir (1985 [1915]), long ago, noted the creation of affective associations, both humorous and disparaging, between linguistic forms and people through literary uses of reported speech (see also Hastings and Manning 2004). Sapir showed the ways that Nootka speakers could create mocking characterizations of people with physical defects through the uses of “consonantal play” (Sapir 1985:181) which are sometimes linked with the voices of mythic characters. Mythic characters speak in certain recognizable ways through the characterological images of “consonantal play” and those voices are then evoked through corresponding “consonantal play”—not quotations—in mocking terms of address or reference (sometimes disparaging and sometimes affectionately done). Such “consonantal play” then creates affective relations between language forms, registers, and characterological images. As Judith Irvine (1990:131) argues, “such conventions, linguistically expressed, represent a cultural construction of available emotions, personalities, and so on that are linked to other dimensions of culture and society.” Irvine (1990:128) argues for an understanding of “affective registers.” My argument extends the notion of register from a language internal focus, to a realization that in certain multilingual situations, the choice of language or languages can be seen as an affective display. In such cases, languages can sometimes become affective registers (see Webster 2006).

A crucial part of such dramatizations, or characterological images, concern the ways that language use is represented or reported, that is their metapragmatics. The work of Voloshinov (1986) has been particularly important in understanding the issues of direct and indirect reported speech. As Voloshinov (1986:115) notes, “reported speech is speech within speech, utterance within utterance, and at the same time also speech about speech, utterance about utterance.” Reported speech is then a metadiscourse. Michael Silverstein (1985) has analyzed the ways that verbs of speaking in Chinook model proper ways of speaking in narratives. Following on the work of Silverstein (1985), James Collins (1987) argues for an understanding of Navajo metapragmatic terms in mythic narratives.4 As Collins (1987:72) notes, “metapragmatic forms are valuable because they provide insight into the conceptual knowledge which the speakers of a language bring to bear on understanding the use of that language.” Robert Moore (1993:236) shows that in Wasco Coyote narratives, quoted speech, regardless of the language of the frame narrative, “must be given in Wasco.” In this way, according to Moore (1993:236–237), even “as the Wasco language falls rapidly out of use,” the language, through direct quotation in Wasco, becomes “an emblem of value.” Such uses of Wasco in reported speech are then implicit metadiscourses on the value of Wasco (in certain limited domains).

Metapragmatic terms, that is “reportive metapragmatics” (Dinwoodie 2007:16), create certain expectations of reported content. The juxtaposition of certain received or “normative expectations” (Collins 1987:72) with quoted material that misaligns is often used for humorous purposes. Collins (1987:72) gives the example below (see also Silverstein 1985:133):

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“Shut up,” he explained.

Here the content of the quoted form, the affective display that is, and the reportive metapragmatic term “explained” stand in contrast to certain received expectations. Such metapragmatic forms can aid in the construction of characterological images (Agha 2003:259). That is, the uses of such metapragmatic forms work to create social voices and stances for such imagined literary characters. We recognize a character as “playful” vs. “serious” by the uses of various metapragmatic terms (i.e., “jokes” vs. “explains”). Metapragmatic terms then also allow for affective displays as well. They can indicate the affective demeanor that a speaker (here an imagined speaker in a literary work) has to a hearer (here an imagined hearer in a literary work). When coupled with switches in language, such metapragmatic terms can work toward the establishment of recognizable affective registers. Such metadiscourses, of course, have real-world consequences. Miyako Inoue (2006), for example, has shown how a literary movement aided in the construction of what is now recognized as “Japanese women’s speech.” Japanese women began to align themselves with the quoted voices of women found in early-20th-century novels. Such early-20th-century novels were metadiscourses on the social value of languages and those (women) that would speak it.

Related to Irvine’s (1990:128) concern with “other dimensions of culture and society”, I would argue, is the need to understand affective displays within a language ideological framework. As Paul Kroskrity (2004:498) argues for language ideologies, they are “beliefs, or feelings, about languages as used in their social world.” They are, as Margaret Field (2009:41) states, always multiple. Language ideologies are also felt through and expressed through the agency of individuals (see Kroskrity 2009). Linguistic anthropologists would do well to attend to the feelings expressed through affective displays towards languages. John Haviland (2003:771) describes a prominent Anglo-American language ideology as “linguistic paranoia.” Haviland (2003:770) explains, “there is a political loading to the use of non-English as threatening, insulting, and—much like its speakers themselves—insubordinate.” Note the recursiveness and iconization (Irvine and Gal 2000) between languages and speakers.

In this prominent language ideology of “linguistic paranoia,” the use of a non-English language is understood as an affective display, in this case, an insult. The reverse, that is when subordinate people (e.g., Navajos) use a non-English language or languages (e.g., Navajo or Navlish), can also sometimes be seen as an affective display, in this case, social intimacy or the like. Such distinctions are not, however, categorical or totalizing. It is certainly also the case that within any group there will be levels of hierarchy and that such code switches can also work to alienate or marginalize as well (see Woolard 2004 for a review of the code switching literature). What is needed, rather, is to understand the language ideologies that inform such language and affective associations.

**Laura Tohe and Navajo Poetry**

Tohe’s creative work does not occur in a vacuum, either as it is situated within both broader discourses about the boarding school or within the larger context of contemporary Navajo poetry. When I conducted ethnographic and linguistic research on the emergence of written contemporary poetry on the Navajo Nation from 2000–2001, I often began interviews by attempting to elicit Navajo terms for poetry. The Navajo word most often suggested by Navajo poets and nonpoets was *hane’* (story, narrative). There is a sense to *hane’* that it must be publicly shared (see also Peterson 2006). Many Navajo poets mentioned as one central feature of contemporary Navajo poetry that it was meant to be shared (Webster 2009). Another feature of poetry that many Navajos commented on was that it was also emotionally intense language (Webster 2009).

In 1933 a short eight-line poem was published in *Indians at Work*, a U.S. government publication (Hirschfelder and Singer 1992). The poem was composed by a
collection of Navajo students at Tohatchi School, NM (on the Navajo Nation). This poem, “If I Were a Pony,” is one of the first published poems by Navajos, and it concerned the desire the students had of being free of the school (like the aforementioned pony). The poem was written in English. Other poetry in English would follow. Much of this poetry would be written in boarding schools and about the boarding school experience. In the early 1960s, for example, Blackhorse Mitchell would write poetry that expressed his frustrations with the boarding school and his desire to be free from the boarding school (see Mitchell 1967). Much of the critique of the boarding school would go unnoticed by Mitchell’s teachers (Webster 2010). Indeed, the BIA schools would encourage the writing of poetry by young Navajos as a way to teach them English (see Webster 2009, 2010). Gloria Emerson (1971, 1972) would publish politically engaged poetry in the overtly political The Indian Historian. During the 1970s more and more Navajos would begin to write poetry. In 1977, Nia Francisco would publish a poem in Navajo in the journal College English. In the 1980s and 1990s even more poetry would be published by Navajos; the poetry would appear in major literary journals as well as in university presses. By the mid to late 1980s individually authored books of Navajo poetry were appearing (see Francisco 1988; Tapahonso 1987; Tohe 1986).

Today there are a number of recognized Navajo poets. These poets include Luci Tapahonso, Rex Lee Jim, Gloria Emerson, Blackhorse Mitchell, Esther Belin, Sherwin Bitsui, Hershman John, and, of course, Laura Tohe. Some, like Rex Lee Jim, Luci Tapahonso and Laura Tohe, are recognized both on and off the Navajo Nation. Others, like Esther Belin, are more well known off the Navajo Nation than they are on the Navajo Nation. Few poets are full-time poets. Most have other jobs. Tohe, for example, teaches at Arizona State University.

Tohe grew up on the Navajo Nation but now lives off-reservation. Tohe attended the Albuquerque Indian School, a point she often makes at her poetry performances (Webster 2009). Tohe and many of the other poets are part of a Navajo indigenous intelligentsia and are thus linked with larger movements of indigenous intelligentsia and literary cultural-ethnic renaissances (see, e.g., Park 2007). Tohe as well as many of the other poets have performed their poetry for indigenous groups outside the United States. However, many Navajo poets, Tohe included, saw their poetry as directed towards Navajos and especially younger college-age Navajos. Here the link with hane’ (narrative, story) is particularly important. As a “story,” Navajo poetry needs to be publicly shared. Tohe once explained to me that boarding schools had tried to take the stories of Navajos away from them. Her poetry about the boarding school can thus be seen as a reassertion of the ability to tell stories. Her work, as a critique of the boarding school, also links with a persistent theme in Navajo poetry. Tohe’s poetry is also linkable with issues concerning Navajo nationalism and sovereignty (Webster 2009). The metadiscourses of Navajo and those that would use it can be understood within an argument that sees Tohe’s work as contributing to an imagined Navajo language community (see Webster 2009).

Many Navajo poets have had their poetry published by major university presses. Some have self-published or had their work published by small-scale local presses. For example, Tohe’s (2005) most recent book of poetry and prose was published by the University of Arizona Press. No Parole Today (Tohe 1999) was published by West End Press in Albuquerque, NM, but was distributed by the University of New Mexico Press. Her first book of poetry was published in 1986 by Nosila Press in Omaha, NE, and is largely out of circulation now. Tohe’s (2005) most recent book of poetry as well as No Parole Today were available for purchase at ’ahwééh/ gohlvééh (coffee/coffee) in the summers of 2007 and 2008 when I did more recent fieldwork on the Navajo Nation. ’ahwééh/ gohlvééh was a coffee shop in Shiprock, NM (on the Navajo Nation) run by Gloria Emerson that sold a number of books of poetry by Navajo authors and also sponsored poetry readings and the like. No Parole Today circulates from Navajo to Navajo as well. One Navajo woman that I know was...
reading *No Parole Today* in the summer of 2009 and planned to give a copy of it to her sister. Her sister had attended boarding school, whereas the Navajo woman had not attended boarding school. For the Navajo woman it was a literary work that documented something of the stories her sister had told her about the boarding school experience. For the sister it seemed to validate her experiences at boarding school.

The primary language that contemporary Navajo poetry is written in is English. This has to do with the issue that Navajo literacy is still rather limited. Indeed, poets like Tohe have actively begun to learn how to write in Navajo so that they can write poetry in Navajo. Tohe has been at the forefront of promoting the Navajo language in creative and literary works. During my initial fieldwork, Tohe had begun to perform poems written entirely in Navajo, and she had also published and performed poems that code switched into Navajo. Tohe was also taking classes at Diné College, Tsaile, AZ, to learn to write in Navajo. Like many Navajos, Tohe could speak Navajo but could not write Navajo. Many of Tohe’s poems are in English, and it is often through English that she asserts a Navajo identity. Unlike some Navajo poetry which is written entirely in Navajo (down to the page numbers) (see Jim 1995), Tohe’s poetry is often composed in both Navajo and English. In using both languages Tohe is able to create contrasting images of languages through her work. In writing in English, Tohe’s poems are also more accessible to the larger non-Navajo English speaking society, but they are also more accessible to many young Navajo readers who are not literate in Navajo. Indeed, for many Navajos who are not literate in Navajo, poetry composed in Navajo is still largely only accessed as an oral phenomenon. Navajo poets who write in Navajo often perform their poems on KTNN (the Navajo radio station) or at public venues. Many Navajo poets perform their poetry for Navajo audiences on the Navajo Nation.

“So I Blow Smoke in Her Face”

In this section I look at the reportive metapragmatic devices used in the short story, “So I Blow Smoke in Her Face” (Tohe 1999:25–29), and the ways such metapragmatic forms create metadiscourses about languages and language users. As we will see, through Tohe’s use of metapragmatic forms, she constructs an image of the boarding school as a place where Navajos are silenced and humiliated, but also a place where they assert their own voices at times and challenge the boarding school regimes. She accomplishes this characterological work through the creative deployment of both explicit metapragmatic terms and implicit characterological work that is interwoven with such explicit metapragmatic terms.

Tohe creates an emergent contrast in the short story between the metapragmatic terms *tell* and *tease* and *joke*. What we see from the use of *tell/told* is a construction of language use as a monologic critique or directive. On the other hand, the uses of *tease* and *joke* create an affectively salient mark of social intimacy between Navajos. Indeed, *tell* is the linchpin of this narrative, because it is precisely the narrator Vida’s thwarting of the dorm matron Mrs. Harry’s attempt to “tell” Vida off that is the climax of this story. Through Tohe’s repeated use of *tell* and the ways it contrasts with the more socially intimate uses of *tease* and *joke* affective expectations are created and characterological associations with those metapragmatic terms are also created.

The short story concerns the interactions between the narrator Vida (a Navajo girl), her cousin Viv, Édgar (the object of the narrator’s affection), and Mrs. Harry (one of the women in charge of the girls at the Albuquerque Indian School). The Navajo students are represented as positive and affable characters, ready icons of personhood for role alignment (Agha 2003). Importantly, neither Mrs. Harry nor Mrs. Chavez (another authority figure at the Indian School) are described as Navajo (contrast this with Dick’s statements above). In fact, Mrs. Harry is explicitly described as “a Heinz 57, an Indian who is from several different tribes” (Tohe 1999:28). The story
begins, however, on the Navajo Nation with the narrator and Viv riding horses and spending time with their Uncle. It then switches to events at the Albuquerque Indian School and then concludes again on the Navajo Nation. The opening and closing scenes on the Navajo Nation then contrast with the medial scene that concerns events at the Albuquerque Indian School.

The metapragmatic term *tease* occurs fairly early in the narrative, when Vida is still on the Navajo Nation. This section of the story involves the narrator and her cousin (Viv) riding horses on the Navajo Nation, “My uncle teases me because my legs are bowed” (Tohe 1999:25).

Shortly later, the use of *tell* also occurs without accompanying quoted speech, “Later, Uncle catches up and tells us we shouldn’t tire the horses out like that” (Tohe 1999:26). Note that *tell* is used to critique, while *tease* is used in an affective way that suggests a degree of social intimacy between uncle and niece.

The next section of the story moves to Albuquerque, NM, where the narrator and her cousin Viv are now attending the Albuquerque Indian School. In a brief interlude, the narrator and Viv are picked up by two “Chicanos” in “their low riders” (Tohe 1999:26). They “cruise” Central Avenue (a major thoroughfare in Albuquerque) until the boys “get serious” (Tohe 1999:26). Tohe then uses the metapragmatic term *tell* twice in the story. In both cases, there is no accompanying quoted speech. I have bolded the uses of *tell* for ease of reference.

(3) We drive down Fourth and I *tell* the driver to let us out. They don’t want to but when I *tell* them we’re government property and they could get in a lot of trouble, the door swings open. (Tohe 1999:27)

The action then switches to outside the dormitory window of Edgar. Here Viv and the narrator have snuck over to the boy’s dormitory and are standing outside the “steel mesh” window of Edgar’s room. This sequence begins with quoted speech, but without giving a metapragmatic term, “’Shhhhd, Edgar’” (Tohe 1999:27). The use of *shhhhd* here links back with a conventional way that many Navajos have explained to me as a way of attracting the attention of other Navajos, especially those of the opposite sex. There are a number of Navajo jokes that focus on the use of this form. Notice that Tohe makes no attempt to lexicalize this form. That is, she does not attempt to make this into a word by adding a vowel. This form is sometimes represented in writing as *shiid* (see, e.g., Morgan 1949:24).

Instead of Edgar coming to the window, Jasper (Edgar’s cousin) comes to the window. This is followed by another use of quoted speech but no internal use of a metapragmatic term. There is a metapragmatic term used in the quoted speech, “’Oh, hi Jasper. Edgar *hágo bidiní*’” (Tohe 1999:27). *Hágo* glosses as “come here” and *bidiní* glosses as “you tell him.” Glossed for ease of reading, the speaker (perhaps the narrator) says, “You tell him, ‘Edgar come here.’” Note, however, that the verb form is based on the verb stem –ní (to say) and not –ne’ (to tell). This is an example of what Field (2001) has termed a “triadic directive.” Field (2001) argues that triadic directives, which are directives through an intermediary, are the preferred way to give a directive between certain Navajos, many of whom have a *yáhásin*, or “bashful,” relationship (see also Aberle 1961:158; see also Field 1998). Most of the examples that Field (2001) focuses on are examples of teacher and student interactions. Thus, a teacher will tell a student to say “tell her ‘be tough’” where there will be an embedded quoted form within the utterance (see Field 2001:256). Here the speaker, a female student, tells Jasper what to say to Edgar. Jasper then leaves and returns with Edgar.

Edgar’s entrance also coincides with the use of a metapragmatic term and with quoted speech, “Edgar smiles at me from behind the mesh cover and says ‘cigarette-ísh nee hóló?’” (Tohe 1999:27). Edgar’s question can be glossed as “Do you have a cigarette?” *Hóló* (as it is sometimes written in dictionaries) glosses as “it exists.” *Nee* is the second person pronoun *n(i)-* plus the postposition –*ee* (with). *Nee hóló* glosses as “it exists with you.” The interrogative enclitic –*ísh* is attached to the English
lexical item “cigarette.” This is an indirect request for a cigarette (see Field 1998). Vida replies by giving Edgar a cigarette. The attaching of the interrogative enclitic to the English lexical item is an example of what Charlotte Schaengold (2003) has termed “bilingual Navajo” and what some of my consultants have termed Navlish (sometimes also Navglish) (see Webster 2009; see also Field 2009). Here an English lexical item takes on the morphology of Navajo affixes and clitics. Susan Foster et al. (1989:16) provide a similar example, where an English lexical item takes the interrogative enclitic –ish, “Everydayish náínlééh doo?” (Will you bring him/her everyday?). In my experience, the use of Navlish is not normally used in contemporary written poetry (Webster 2009). That it shows up in this short story, on the other hand, is of some interest.

Tohe then lets the reader in on something of the ethnography of speaking of the Albuquerque Indian School. There is an explicit metapragmatic explanation, “Is it time for your bedcheck?” I tease. It's just an expression that we use to make a joke” (Tohe 1999:27). Tohe here uses the metapragmatic term tease and then explains the meaning of the quoted material as being a “joke.”

Edgar then responds with the following, “I have dishpan hands,” he announces and puts his fingers through the mesh to show us” (Tohe 1999:27). The use of announce allows the reader to understand that Edgar is not taking up the teasing that Vida has begun but instead shifts the conversation to his “shriveled” fingers and “soft and pale” nails (Tohe 199:27). After Viv and Vida have looked at the evidence for his claim, Edgar adds the following, “I just got back from kitchen detail. They’re so clean I could operate with them,” he jokes and stares at his hands” (Tohe 1999:27).

Viv then responds immediately to his remark with “Hát’ilá naadeidágó? Was it bear meat again?” Viv asks. It’s a joke...” (Tohe 1999:27). The narrator then goes on to explain that various meat dishes served at the Albuquerque Indian School were called “bear meat” and “rubber meat.” The fact that Viv repeats the form in English may suggest that Edgar’s command of Navajo may be limited. Certainly Edgar seems comfortable using the Navajo interrogative enclitic, but not all speakers of bilingual Navajo are bilingual in Navajo and English (see Schaengold 2003). On the other hand, it may be an example of what Guillermo Bartelt (1982) has described as “rhetorical redundancy” for Navajo English. In this case, the redundancy appears to be used for humorous affect; first the Navajo and then the English form, in either language that meat is tough!

After a brief interlude, where the narrator reflects on the fact that she and Viv are breaking the rules to be at Edgar’s window and a discussion of seizing control of one’s life as modeled on taking care of cattle, Edgar does indeed show his ability to speak Navajo, “Níhíma nicháa’ho’doooshkeeł.’ Edgar teases back” (Tohe 1999:28). Here Tohe does not provide an English glossing of this form. In not providing an English translation, here and elsewhere in this story, she challenges a view of Navajo and English as referentially transparent (Haviland 2003:768). This form glosses as “our mother will catch you and scold you.” Nicháa’ha’doooshkeeł glosses “will scold you,” but one consultant I spoke with about this form suggested that there was a sense of “catching” as well suggested in the form. This may be a by-product of the use of the future tense on the verb stem. The phrase is based on the metapragmatic verb stem –keed “to scold, berate” (see Young and Morgan 1991:276). The use of níhíma (our mother) is a nonliteral use of this kinship term. Here it is applied to Mrs. Harry, the head matron, who is an “Indian” or as the narrator notes, “a Heinz 57, an Indian who’s from several different tribes” (Tohe 1999:28). While Indian, she is not explicitly described as “Navajo.”

Vida then responds, “Éí laa’. She’s had it in for me ever since I got back late from Christmas vacation,’ I say as I inhale” (Tohe 1999:28). The Navajo form is used to indicate agreement and acts as a form of conversational uptake. The narrator then switches to English after the use of the Navajo agreement. Edgar teases in Navajo, the narrator responds in Navajo and then switches into English.
The next two uses of metapragmatic terms concern indirect reports of things that Mrs. Harry “told” Vida to do. Note the parallelism in the two constructions as well, adding to the force of the directives.

(4) . . . she told me to mop up the water in the showers when it wasn’t my detail . . .

(5) . . . she told me to sweep the porch after Edgar walked me back from the rec hall . . .

This last example is then followed directly by quoted speech and metapragmatic terms. The “she” is Mrs. Harry again, “ ‘No sweeping, no TV,’ she said. I said okay and went into my room” (Tohe 1999:28).

Mrs. Chavez then enters the scene. Mrs. Chavez is the “girl’s dorm attendant” (Tohe 1999:28). After spotting Viv and Vida outside Edgar’s window, we get the following, “she makes her rounds and tells us to get back to our dorm. ‘Mrs. Harry wants to see you, Vida’ she says and looks at me” (Tohe 1999:28). Here the use of tells in describing Mrs. Chavez’s speech act echoes with the uses of told used to describe the speech acts of Mrs. Harry. Vida responds then, “ ‘Another month in the salt mines,’ I say sarcastically . . .” (Tohe 1999:28). Here Tohe provides the adverb sarcastically as an affective display of Vida’s stance toward Mrs. Chavez.

The next use of a metapragmatic term comes at the final confrontation between Mrs. Harry and Vida. Tohe uses the metalinguistic label “tell me off” for the speech act that Mrs. Harry is about to engage in, “She’s ready to tell me off, to shame and humiliate me again” (Tohe 1999:29). Mrs. Harry never gets the chance to “tell off” Vida. Instead, Vida blows “smoke in her face” (Tohe 1999:29). The use of tell off echoes with the six other uses of a version of the metapragmatic term tell. In each case, it is an utterance that is directed at the listener and is not meant to be opened up for response. Tohe creates an emergent image of “tell” as a monologic assertion, often in the form of critique or directives. To recap those forms: (1) the uncle uses tells to instruct Vida and Viv not to overwork the horses; (2) Vida uses tells twice to the Chicano boys when they get “serious,” first to “tell” them to drop she and Viv off and then to warn the boys that she and Viv are government property; (3) Mrs. Harry uses told twice in her punishments to Vida; and (4) Mrs. Chavez uses tells once when she catches Vida and Viv outside Edgar’s window. The final “telling” is, however, thwarted when Vida blows smoke in Mrs. Harry’s face. Here we see the setting up of rhetorical expectation and its subsequent thwarting (see Burke 1968; Hymes 2003; Woodbury 1985).

On the Uses of Navajo and Teasing

Having discussed in some detail the metapragmatic forms used in the short story by Tohe, I turn now to a discussion of the uses of Navajo within quoted speech in the story. Here I suggest that the use of Navajo and Navlish forms add both to a characterological image, but also that they are metadiscourses on the social value of Navajo and Navlish. These two processes are linked, I would argue, through the metapragmatic term tease. Before turning to a discussion of the uses of Navajo and Navlish in the short story by Tohe under discussion here, I want to preface that with a few remarks on “teasing” and Navajos.

Early on in my fieldwork, I sat down with a Navajo poet consultant for an interview. As we began talking, I noted that I was the repeated object of what Navajos call in English “teasing.” My Navajo consultant, who teased me a great deal himself, responded that in Navajo to be teased is a sign of affection and that it was a good thing that people felt comfortable teasing me. He added that had I not been teased so much, I should be concerned. Laura Tohe, in a poetry performance October 9, 2006, in Carbondale, IL, also discussed the issue of Navajos teasing me while I did fieldwork. Below is an excerpt from that performance (see Webster 2009 for more on this performance; = vowel lengthening):
(6) Tony
uhm
he was on the Navajo reservation my reservation
for about a year and a half and
he was
everywhere that we went
and I
als
almost like my own personal stalker
[LAUGHTER]
but
he was on the reservation so long that
we started to call him our in-law
[LAUGHTER]
and we used to tease him that
maybe you would find a Navajo woman on the reservation
[LAUGHTER]

This is, of course, not only a description of teasing me, but it is also an example of teasing me as well. Tohe teases me here by noting that I was sometimes known as her “personal stalker” and that I was sometimes encouraged to “find a Navajo woman.” Such examples of teasing are relatively common in my field recordings. They are an affective display, indicating a degree of social intimacy between myself and various Navajos that I have spent time with. Sometimes this teasing was in English and occasionally it was also in Navajo, especially when I mispronounced a Navajo word. Such teasing reminded me to be careful speaking Navajo. In “So I Blow Smoke in Her Face”, Tohe uses the metapragmatic term tease to establish an affectionate relationship between Vida and her (maternal) uncle. This is the classic “joking relationship” between maternal uncles and their nieces and nephews (see Aberle 1961; Kluckhohn and Leighton 1962). Nicknames, as Tohe’s (1999:25) example of Vida’s Uncle calling Vida “Wishbone” suggests, are an especially common form of teasing among many Navajos (see Aberle 1961:155; Kluckhohn and Leighton 1962:115). As Tohe once explained to me, “Navajos love to make up names for people.”

Donna Deyhle (1992) and Tiffany Lee (2007) have both discussed teasing within an educational setting. As Deyhle (1992) notes, “teasing among Navajo was a traditional form of social control.” According to Deyhle’s (1992) consultants, Navajos would tease each other for looking down on things Navajo and for not speaking Navajo. Deyhle (1992) also points out that teasing was also an expression of “cultural solidarity.” The use of teasing, as Deyhle (1992) notes, is often given as an explanation for why Navajos fail in school settings.

Lee (2007) adds to this discussion of Navajos, education, and teasing. As Lee (2007:28) notes, “Navajo people, like many Native communities, have used teasing to teach the norms and morals of their society. But this was typically done through the Navajo language.” Lee (2007:28) goes on to suggest that, “perhaps those nuances that make teasing less severe when done in the Navajo language do not come across the same way in English. In any case, today’s Navajo teenagers are much more sensitive to any teasing, and especially scolding, that they experience.” Some Navajos have told me that younger Navajos do not understand the social purposes of teasing. In Tohe’s short story, Navajos tease each other in both English and Navajo. The important factors here seem to be that both Edgar and Vida are Navajos, students, and there is an attraction between the two of them. The teases are also directed at the Indian School and Mrs. Harry and not at individual qualities of either Vida or Edgar.

We have also already encountered the use of a Navajo form nichá’a’ha’doooshkeel for “scold” in a teasing situation above. Tohe in fact uses the metapragmatic term teases in that example. “Scold” is also a salient metalinguistic label on the Navajo Nation. Examples of the use of the English word scold in joking situations could be given.
Here I provide an example by Navajo poet Luci Tapahonso at a poetry performance in Window Rock, AZ, July 18, 2001. The audience was primarily Navajo, with an emphasis on high school-aged Navajos.

(7) I’m going read
Uhm a number of some poems
That you’ve probably heard before
And that I’ve learned over the years
That I have to read or
Somebody’s gonna sco=ld me
[LAUGHTER]

The laughter after Tapahonso says “sco=ld” (with an extended vowel here), indicates that many of the Navajo in attendance understood this as a joke.

Finally, Lee (2007) adds an important bit of information concerning the participants involved in teasing and the interpretations of that teasing based on who is doing the teasing:

Teasing experiences, for the most part, have not been easily dismissed by a number of the students interviewed. Particularly when the source of the teasing was an older relative or another adult, the experience made the students feel demeaned, embarrassed, and defensive. (Lee 2007:20–21)

Teasing is sometimes given as an explanation for why young Navajos do not speak in Navajo (Deyhle 1992; Lee 2007). As Keith Basso (1979) long ago noted concerning joking imitations of White people by Western Apaches that have as their targets other Western Apaches, such forms of linguistic play are always “humorous” and “dangerous” (see also Sherzer 2002). The risk in teasing is that it is not interpreted as humorous, but as the veiled insult that always lurks there.

Let us now return to Tohe’s short story and the uses of Navajo and Navlish. The first use of Navajo in “So I Blow Smoke in Her Face” and comes when Vida (or Viv) uses a triadic directive in Navajo. As Field (2001) has noted, this is a polite and appropriate way to give a directive in Navajo (see Aberle 1961). Jasper is used as an intermediary to “you tell him, ‘Come here Edgar’.” It is the embedded metapragmatic term that signals this as a triadic directive. These are implicit metadiscourses on proper ways of speaking.

The next use of Navajo then follows when Edgar makes an indirect request for a cigarette from Vida. Here the use of the interrogative enclitic on the English lexical item creates a code-mixed form (Schaengold 2003; Webster 2009; Field 2009), that Navajos sometimes refer to as Navlish. Navlish is used by a number of Navajos, especially contemporary Navajos, in everyday conversations on and around the Navajo Nation. I have elsewhere argued that the use of Navlish in much contemporary Navajo discourse is often associated with affective displays of social intimacy and locality (Webster 2009). For example, Navajo comedian Vincent Craig often uses shiheart (my love) in a number of his comedic skits (Webster 2009). However, it is also often opened up to criticism from Navajo language purists (see Field 2009; Schaengold 2003; Webster 2009). Tohe’s use of Navlish here seems to signal a relaxed sociable moment between Edgar and Vida. It is not negatively evaluated here by Tohe or by any of the characters in the story. Here Tohe challenges, implicitly, any “elder speaker purism” by including the use of a code-mixed form that aids in a positive characterological image of “cool.”

Tohe next uses Navajo in the short story when Viv jokes about the meat served at the Indian School. Tohe signals this with her use of the explanatory metapragmatic label “it’s a joke” (Tohe 1999:27), which follows the use of Navajo and then the repetition in English of the joke. This is then followed by Edgar “teasing” Vida in Navajo. Tohe does not translate this reported speech into English. Again, the use of the Navajo kinship term, nihíma (our mother), in a nonliteral manner for Mrs. Harry as if she would be like one’s mother “scolding” her children is done here for humor-
ous effect. Vida then responds in Navajo with an agreement uptake and then switches to English to elaborate on Mrs. Harry. The use of the Navajo form nicháha' dooshkeel (scold), here marked for the future, in this teasing example, resonates with Lee’s (2007:28) contention that teasing in Navajo is “less severe” than teasing in English. The use of the metapragmatic term in Navajo seems to be part of the humor of the teasing. Certainly, Mrs. Harry was not going to “scold” Vida in Navajo (like, one expects, Vida’s mother would have done). The language of the tease thus contrasts with the expected language of Mrs. Harry’s scolding.

In the examples found in the short story, the uses of Navajo and Navlish are only found among the Navajo students. They are used for indirect requests, triadic directives, and teasing and joking. Their use suggests proper ways of speaking, social intimacy, and solidarity. They are dialogic. Here we see an emergent contrast with the uses of the metapragmatic term tell discussed above which seem to cluster around monologic directives, often in the form of reproaches. English can also be used for joking among the Navajo students. Thus, we cannot say that only Navajo is used for moments of social intimacy, but rather that Navajo is only used for moments of social intimacy. The use of Navajo in this short story then acts as an affective display of social intimacy. It is not the only way that such social intimacy can be displayed, but in all cases it contrasts with the use of the metapragmatic term tell. This story is then, following Agha (2003:257), a metadiscourse, an implicit metadiscourse, on the social value of using Navajo and Navlish. Tohe never explicitly states that Navajo or Navlish are the languages of social intimacy, rather she dramatizes this iconicity. To borrow from Moore (1993:237), they become affective “emblems of value.” It is also a way to imagine the boarding school experience. Like the rural Japanese women who encountered “Japanese women’s language” and a “modern” and “urban” lifestyle only through the images of the novel (Inoue 2006:103), young Navajos encounters with the boarding school experience are, in part, through such literary imaginings. This is the historical memory work of such imaginings.

On non-Navajos Speaking Navajo

I now turn to the two poems and the metapragmatic terms used in those poems and in the uses of Navajo in those poems. I begin with “The Names” and then discuss “Sometimes Those Pueblo Men Can Sure be Coyotes.” Like the use of tell me off, in which a named speech style is used in the short story, Tohe begins “The Names” with a metapragmatic term for a named speech style. “The Names” dramatizes the calling of role by a non-Navajo teacher, her mispronunciation of Navajo names, and the students’ muted response. “Calls roll” sets the stage for much of the following interaction in this poem. The teacher calls out various Navajo names and the students are forced to respond to the mispronounced form. There are no more metapragmatic terms that are used in this poem that are associated with quoted speech, though there are six zero marked quotatives and two more metapragmatic terms.

Tohe, however, does describe something of the responses that various Navajo students give. In so doing, she provides characterological images of the students and something of their affective displays toward the teacher; displays that the teacher either ignores or is unaware of. Tohe then begins, “Virginia Spears, the Algebra teacher calls roll” (Tohe 1999:4). We are informed by the narrator (Tohe) that the girl’s name is Virginia Speans. Speans replies, “Here. Soft voice/ She never corrects the teachers” (Tohe 1999:4). This is an affective display. The use of soft voice and the detail that Speans never corrects the teacher add affective poignancy to this moment. Tohe describes the quality of the voice to indicate the affective stance of Speans. She does not use metapragmatic terms to so do so. In fact she negates the metapragmatic term corrects here as well. Navajo children respond, they do not engage.

The description of the responses, as against an explicit metapragmatic term being used, is repeated throughout the poem. Here the teacher calls out the next name,
though no explicit metapragmatic term is used here, the teacher’s voice is linked with the opening metapragmatic term *calls roll*. Tohe (1999:4) presents, “‘Leonard T-sosie,’” without an accompanying explicit metapragmatic term. Tsosie responds with silence and a raised hand. And then the next student, “‘Mary Lou Yazzy. Are you related to Thomas Yazzy?’” (Tohe 1999:4). This question is then followed by a short exchange between Yazzie and the teacher, “‘Mary Lou with puzzled expression. ‘No.’/‘Oh, I thought you might be. He’s quiet too.’” (Tohe 1999:4). Tohe again describes Mary Lou’s expressive features without the use of an explicit metapragmatic term. This is again an affective display. The “puzzled expression” comes from the fact, which Tohe notes, that Yazzie is a very common Navajo last name. I will return to this point in the next section.

Finally, the teacher gets to Tohe, “‘Laura Tohe.’” (Tohe 1999:4). Tohe can only sink into her chair and imagine the teasing that she will get on the school bus, “to dread hearing it on the bus tossed around” (Tohe 1999:4). Here I would argue that *tossed* is a metapragmatic term. The use of *tossed* links it with the image of “kids playing keep-away” (Tohe 1999:4).

The lack of metapragmatic terms for the Navajo children creates an image that they are targets of talk, not co-participants in a dialogue. This is further reinforced by the affective images that Tohe presents of the replies, they are “silent,” “soft voice,” “puzzled,” and “sink.” And it is firmly established with the negation of the metapragmatic term *corrects* at the beginning of the poem. The Navajo students never speak Navajo in this poem. Unlike in the short story, where Vida resists Mrs. Harry’s authority, in this poem the students do not challenge the teacher.

“Sometimes Those Pueblo Men Can Sure be Coyotes” focuses on the adventures of two adolescent Navajo girls (Rena and the narrator) and Mister Kayate, a Pueblo man. Mister Kayate is the driver of the “G-car” (government car), as the girls “called it” (Tohe 1999:16), at the Indian School in Albuquerque. Puebloan peoples, historically, spoke a variety of Keresan and Kiowa-Tanoan languages, neither of which is related to Navajo (a Southern Athabaskan language). The incidents in this poem take place along Central, similar to the short story previously discussed. The girls telephone the Indian School to have a car sent to get them. The driver of that car is the Pueblo man Mister Kayate, a “handsome” man. Here is where quoted speech begins:

(8) when one of us said
Éí hastin ayóó baa dzólní’ this man is very handsome
Éí laa’ I agree (Tohe 1999:16)

Tohe begins this exchange with the use of the metapragmatic term *said*. When the speaker shifts in the above example, there is no attendant metapragmatic term to signal that shift. Thus the shift is accomplished through a zero quotative. The English here is for the clarification of the reader and is not to be understood as part of the actual quoted dialogue. This is made clear in the following line, “then we were making all kinds of comments about him in Diné” (Tohe 1999:16).

Diné, that is Diné bizaad or the Navajo language, is then to be understood through the metapragmatics here as the language of the interaction. That is crucial, because in the written version the next examples of quoted speech are given in English, “saying those things that 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” (Tohe 1999:16). The use of the opening metapragmatic terms *saying those things that adolescent girls say* places this dialogue within the speech style of “girl talk.” Tohe is clear here to indicate that this is nonserious talk. The affective display here is of social intimacy between two girls. The use of Navajo, or at least the description that Navajo is being used here, seems to solidify that affective bond.

Once Mister Kayate has taken the girls back to the Indian School he responds, “A’héhee’ a’l’ééke he said thank you, girls” (Tohe 1999:17). That Mister Kayate responds in Navajo indicates that he has understood the entire conversation that the two girls
have been engaging in with their use of Navajo. The metapragmatic term here, *said*, frames this as a form of quoted speech but it does not seem to indicate anything about the speaker’s affective stance. However, the linking of the Pueblo man with Coyote, a trickster in Navajo narratives (see Toelken and Scott 1981), seems to suggest a characterological image of Mister Kayate.

If Tohe presents a view of Navajo as the language of social intimacy in the short story, the two poems, on the other hand, challenge any simple association of Navajo as always aligned with intimacy and solidarity. When we look at “The Names” we see that the Algebra teacher repeatedly mispronounces Navajo names. Tohe gives both metapragmatic descriptions of those mispronunciations, “‘Leonard T-sosie.’/(His name is Tsosie.) Silent first letter as in ptomaine,” and, “Yazzie is a common Navajo name, like Smith or Jones./She rhymes it with jazzy and snazzy” (Tohe 1999:4). In each case, Tohe indicates the point of contrast between a Navajo pronunciation and a non-Navajo pronunciation. She then concludes by writing the Navajo names in the current Navajo practical orthography, indicating high tone and glottal stops.

(9) Tohe, from T’óhii means Towards Water.
Tsosie. Ts’ósí means Slender.
And Yazzie, from Yázhí, means Beloved Little One/Son. (Tohe 1999:5)

Such meanings are unavailable to the Algebra teacher, much as the pronunciations also appear to be unavailable to the teacher. What this poem highlights is the linguistic gulf between teacher and Navajo students.

Finally, the poem “Sometimes Those Pueblo Men Can Sure be Coyotes” also uses Navajo, here among adolescent school girls. The use of Navajo by the two girls indexes social intimacy between them. However, the response in Navajo by the Pueblo man, reminds readers that the use of Navajo can also be dangerous. That is, one must be careful with whom and in front of whom one uses Navajo. This is a metadiscourse on the careful use of Navajo in interactions. Note also that Tohe challenges, by making Mister Kayate a competent Navajo speaker, any naive view of Navajo as only being spoken by Navajos.7

On the Affects of Navajo

The boarding school was a complicated speech environment. Languages were at times overtly suppressed and at other times only nominally allowed. Tohe’s work is an attempt to creatively imagine that complicated speech environment. As Agha (2003:255) notes about such literary images of languages they “do not merely represent the realities of social life, they amplify and transform them into more memorable, figuratively rendered forms” (see also Bakhtin 1981:295; Williams 1977:46). These images are constructed by way of the metapragmatic terms used to describe speech and the languages used in that speech. Navajo students engage in affective displays, they tease and joke with one another. Maternal uncles may also tease. Non-Navajo teachers and dorm matrons, on the other hand, “call roll” and “tell” Navajo students what to do. Sometimes, like the trickster Coyote, they are listening in on the intimate conversations of adolescent girls as well. Matrons, on the other hand, humiliate and shame Navajo students. While the boarding school is a place where Navajos are silenced, in Tohe’s work it is also a place where Navajos can recognize and imagine a “Navajo” voice of resistance.

Tohe foregrounds the ways that the languages used also reveal telling affective relationships. When Navajo students use Navajo or *Navlish*, they use it in appropriate request making and indirect directives. They also use it when they joke and tease with each other. When non-Navajo teachers use Navajo they mispronounce the Navajo forms, embarrassing and shaming the Navajo students. When the Pueblo man uses Navajo he too embarrasses the young Navajo girls. When Navajo students use Navajo, they are displaying social intimacy and solidarity with each other. When non-Navajos use Navajo, they are embarrassing Navajo students either through igno-
rance of pronunciations or through their hidden knowledge of Navajo; that is they intrude into the secured domain of social intimacy created by Navajo students using Navajo (see Woodbury 1998). These are all implicit metadiscourses on languages and language users.

Note that in the published version, the use of only English to stand for what was said in Navajo suggests a “referential transparency” of semantic content between Navajo and English (see Haviland 2003:768). The use of only English also gives the impression of Navajo as secondary to English (see Meek and Messing 2007). All of this changes, however, in the oral performances of this poem that I have documented (Webster 2006). There Tohe gives this exchange in Navajo first and the English language is at best secondary to the Navajo. Such differences between the written versions and the oral versions puts into relief why we need to understand the ways such literary works are continually enacted and performed.

In the short story, the use of Navajo can be seen as an affective register. In the two poems, such a straightforward analysis of the use of Navajo is challenged and modified. It is modified by specifying who the speakers of Navajo are, that is in providing context and social situations in which such uses occur. In both cases, when Navajo is used by a non-Navajo, Navajo students are embarrassed. In both cases, those that use Navajo are not only non-Navajo, they also have positions of authority. Tohe’s short story is a metadiscourse on the emotional bond between Navajos and the Navajo language (including Navlish). The poems are cautions about the ways non-Navajos may (mis)use Navajo.

Some Navajos have told me that Navajo is a “dangerous language” and should be spoken with care. There are jokes that still circulate on the Navajo Nation concerning Indian Health Service doctors who were too eager to learn Navajo that they spoke inappropriately to elder Navajo women. On the other hand, Navajos have sometimes told me that the Navajo language is a more intimate language, a more feelingfully affective language. Navajo poets have talked to me about the “love” of certain Navajo words. Other Navajos have told me about the delight they take in hearing Navajo spoken. All of these statements concerning the feelings that speakers have toward their language are part of their language ideologies as well. In such statements, some Navajos express a language ideology that sees an emotional bond between Navajos and the Navajo language. As Kroskrity (2004) reminds us, we, as linguistic anthropologist, need to attend to the feelings that speakers have toward languages. These feelings can be positive, as the examples of Navajo used by Navajos here discussed suggest, or they can be negative, as Haviland’s (2003) discussion of “linguistic paranoia” makes clear or the uses of Navajo by non-Navajos in Tohe’s work or in the way some Navajos “reject” Navajo (Field 2009). In the EEOC “English-only” case, one of the arguments made by the restaurant owner, echoing the “linguistic paranoia” described by Haviland (2003), was that Navajos used Navajo to “insult” people and to make “crude” and “vulgar” statements (Zachary 2005:6). Tohe’s short story presents a radically different image of Navajo. In the story, English and its attendant metapragmatic term tell are used to “shame and humiliate,” while Navajo is used as an affective display of social intimacy. The iconicity here is between Navajos and using Navajo for social intimacy.\(^8\)

Lee (2007) and Deyhle (1992) have suggested that teasing may be one reason that young Navajos do not attempt to speak Navajo, that they become ashamed of speaking Navajo. As Lee (2007:22) aptly notes, “the policies of boarding schools and the general attitude of mainstream America assigned an inferior status to Navajo people, culture, language, and worldview.” The three literary works by Tohe discussed here, through implicit metadiscourses of characterological images, link positive social values and emotional attachments with Navajos speaking Navajo. Navajos are meant to identify with the Navajo students and the images of Navajo that they use. Rather than being seen as an emblem of shame (McCarty et al 2008), Tohe’s work is one way that positive values and emotional attachments towards being Navajo and using the Navajo language are circulated. Here Navajo becomes an affective emblem of value
Language ideologies are intimate, emotionally salient, because they can be deeply felt. Tohe’s literary works provide ways of imagining the intimacy, the affective resonance, between languages and language users.

Conclusion

Metadiscourses, literary or otherwise, always take place in real social contexts. As Agha (2003:242) notes, “contemporary mass media depictions are themselves the products of individuals caught up in larger historical processes” (see also Williams 1977). As the boarding school experiences become further removed from the lived experiences of Navajos and other Native Americans, such literary representations of the boarding school encounters take on more and more resonance. Such resonance is compounded as fewer Navajos learn Navajo. Understanding the kinds of social value, the metadiscourses about languages and language users, and the affectivity of languages that circulate through such discourse becomes important for understanding how Navajos, especially college-age Navajos, in this case, can imagine themselves in the role of boarding school students and as Navajo language users (more generally). Through Tohe’s work young Navajos can imagine the boarding school in particular ways, but they can also imagine ways of being Navajo and the Navajo language in particular ways. Tohe’s work is an implicit metadiscourse and dramatization on the ways that Navajos can be intimate with each other through Navajo. Such implicit metadiscourses resonant with a general ethos which I have heard among Navajos, that people should be left to make their own decisions and interpretations (Webster 2006, 2009).

Finally, Tohe has explained to me on a variety of occasions, “poetry is performance” (Webster 2009). While I have not seen Tohe perform her short story, I do know that the poems have circulated as both written speech events and as oral speech events as well. Tohe has performed both of these poems to largely college-age Navajo audiences at Dine College in Tsaile, AZ, on the Navajo Nation. These audiences are precisely the audiences that various Navajo and non-Navajo scholars have pointed to as having the most ambivalent attitudes towards the Navajo language and their own language abilities (see Field 2009; Lee 2007). In such performances, these poems have still further become part of a complex set of implicit metadiscourses on the social values and emotional attachments associated with speaking Navajo and those who would speak it.

Notes

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1. It is crucial to note, as Gina Harvey (1974:287) has noted, that the English that Navajos spoke in boarding school was not “standard English,” but was rather, what Harvey termed “Dormitory English,” an “alternative dialect.” By 1974, as Harvey notes, “Dormitory English” was no longer confined solely to boarding schools but could also be found in various parts of the Navajo Nation.

2. Lines, throughout this article for speech I recorded, have been segmented to indicate pause structure (see Evers and Molina 1998). I do this not to argue that Navajos always speak...
in poetic lines, but rather to suggest something of the cadence and rhythm of the speakers, that is to highlight something of an individual’s “voice” (see Blommaert 2006).

3. It is important here to reiterate a point made by Agha (2003:242), such investigations are not arguments about mass media determining “individual views.” Rather, the concern should be:

with the ways these representations expand the social domain of individuals acquainted with register stereotypes, and allow individuals, once aware of them, to respond to their characterological value in various ways, aligning their own self-images with them in some cases, transforming them in others through their own metasemiotic work. (Agha 2003:242)

These metadiscourses, which create by degrees alignments of social value with languages and languages users, are often “implicit” (Agha 2003:270). That is, as we look at the examples from Tohe below we will not see explicit statements that align the use of Navajo by Navajos with affectively intimate bonds, what we will encounter are value-laden characterological images (stereotypes, if you will) that are built up by way of metapragmatic terms and by the ways languages are used.

4. Collins treats all the narratives as of the same kind for his analysis. Thus he does not do a breakdown of the genres or kinds of narratives in which various metapragmatic forms occur. For example, John Watchman, who told two Coyote narratives to Sapir (Sapir and Hoijer 1942), does not use the verb stem –zin (to think) in either of those stories (see Webster 2008). As Joel Sherzer (1989) has shown for Kuna narratives, various verb forms may be indexes of different genres (see also Woodbury 1985; see also Kroskrity 1993). Collins’s analysis obscures such genre specific uses of metapragmatic verb stems. The use of various metapragmatic forms may also be an indicator of individual voice or act as forms of traditionalization (see Blommaert 2006; Hymes 2003; Johnstone 1996; on traditionalization see Bauman 1992; Kroskrity 1993; Webster 2009).

5. It should be noted that in Navajo, indirect reported speech does not occur. Reported speech only occurs as direct reported speech (Li 1986). In what follows, then, all reported speech that occurs using Navajo metapragmatic terms are understood as forms of quoted speech.

6. The one example of negative teasing, not explicitly identified by metapragmatic terms as “teasing” however, arises from the mispronunciation of Tohe’s name by the Algebra teacher. It seems of consequence that the metapragmatic label “tease” is not included in the poem.

7. I thank an anonymous reviewer for making this point to me.

8. Significantly, Tohe does not link the Navajo language to Navajo ceremonialism in any of these works. As noted earlier, some Navajo Christians are resistant to Navajo language instruction in schools because they believe that Navajo cannot be disentangled from Navajo philosophy/religion. Some Navajo poets do link the Navajo language with Navajo ceremonialism (Webster 2006).

9. This is not, however, to say that all of Tohe’s poetry is an implicit metadiscourse on language and language users. There are explicit metadiscourses as well, echoing the Navajo Times article cited at the beginning of this article, including Tohe’s (1999:2–3) story-poem “Our Tongues Slapped Into Silence” (originally published in the Journal of Navajo Education), where Tohe unequivocally states, “utter one word in Diné and the government made sure our tongues were drowned in the murky water of assimilation” (Tohe 1999:3). But, of course, Tohe does represent both Navajos and non-Navajos speaking Navajo in the boarding school context as well. Such explicit and implicit metadiscourses can and do work in tandem to create recognizable value-laden images of languages and language users.

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