Rex Lee Jim’s ‘Na’asts’qqisi’
On iconicity, interwoven-ness, and ideophones

Anthony K. Webster
University of Texas at Austin

This article explores the ways that Navajo poet Rex Lee Jim uses ideophony in one of his poems. I argue that Jim’s use of an ideophone in its myriad forms (from nominalized noun to independent ideophone to verb stem) creates an interwoven-ness across lines that evokes an iconicity of sound and sense. I begin by describing something of the grammatical structuring and uses of Navajo ideophony. I then turn to a discussion of contemporary written Navajo poetry that uses ideophony and especially Jim’s poetry. I follow this with a discussion of the use of Navajo ideophony in literacy education and in competing views about the appropriateness of using ideophony in Navajo written literature.

Keywords: Navajo, ideophony, poetry, aesthetics, intimate grammars

Introduction

This article explores the ways that Navajo poet Rex Lee Jim uses ideophony in one of his poems. I argue that Jim’s use of an ideophone in its multiple forms (from nominalized noun to independent ideophone to verb stem) creates an interwoven-ness across lines and evokes an iconicity of sound and sense. While this kind of poetry is relatively rare in contemporary written Navajo, such examples do suggest the ways that ideophones can be understood as form-dependent expressions (Woodbury 1998). I begin, however, by describing briefly something of the grammatical structuring and uses of Navajo ideophony. I then turn to a discussion of contemporary written Navajo poetry that uses ideophony and especially Jim’s poetry. I follow this with a discussion of the use of Navajo ideophony in literacy education and in competing views about the appropriateness of using ideophony in Navajo written literature.
Navajo ideophones and onomatopoeia

Navajo is a Southern Athabaskan language spoken primarily (though not exclusively) in the American Southwest. It is closely related to other Apachean languages such as Western Apache and Chiricahua Apache. It is also related to Athabaskan languages spoken in Canada and Alaska (Northern Athabaskan) and Athabaskan languages spoken in Oregon and California (Pacific Coast Athabaskan). Estimates put the number of speakers of Navajo at over 100,000; even so, Navajo is a threatened language in the sense that children are not learning the language at a rate that will ensure the persistence of the lexical-grammatical code (House 2002; Benally and Viri 2005). The research described here is based on 15 months of linguistic and ethnographic fieldwork on the Navajo Nation in 2000–2001, studying the emergence of written Navajo poetry, and on six summers of further fieldwork starting in 2007 on Navajo poetics (including ideophony), theories of translation, and lingual biographies of Navajo poets.

The ethnographic literature on the Navajo has a number of suggestive discussions of onomatopoeia and its use (for a broader Southern Athabaskan comparison, see de Reuse 1997). Gladys Reichard (1950) comments that, “Navaho ritual contains many onomatopoeic elements, which may exist independently without ‘word content’ or may be stems, parts of words depending upon grammatical forms” (1950: 282). Here we see the use of ideophones in ritual, but also the way that they can be integrated into Navajo grammar (as verbs). According to Reichard (1950), the use of onomatopoeias and sound symbolism aids in making chants more aesthetically pleasing and hence more efficacious. As David P. McAllester notes, “the imitation of sounds and actions in the Shootingway myth recreates the powers they are associated with here and now in the performance of the ceremony” (1980: 20). Charlotte Frisbie adds that, “amidst the overwhelming symbolism in Navajo ceremonialism is that based on sounds” (1980: 355). Reichard (1944: 51) called this feature of Navajo beliefs, “sound power.” It seems clear that ideophony is intimately linked with a Navajo acoustemology (Feld 1996).

Navajos that I know will sometimes use the term *hodiits’a* ‘there is a sound’ to talk about onomatopoeia in Navajo (see also Austin-Garrison 1991: 48). *Hodiits’a* can be used to describe both onomatopoeia and echoes. According to one consultant, “in the use of Navajo language conversational-wise, a lot of times we speakers use the actual sound to describe the sound of the objects.” He also lamented that such usage was on the decline among younger Navajos. Some Navajo poets and educators have described the use of *hodiits’a* as like “movie sound effects” or more generally “sound effects.”

Navajo ideophones are, in general, monosyllabic in structure. Some are phonotactically interesting, such as *zghọz* ‘swishing sound, like a whip.’ The initial
consonant cluster of /zgh/ (where a voiced alveolar fricative is followed by a voiced velar fricative) is not a regular phonological combination in Navajo (it appears, then, to violate Navajo phonotactics).

In the 1940s, Clyde Kluckhohn and Dorothea Leighton (1946: 249–250) noted that, "an automobile is called by one of two terms (chídí or chuggí) which imitate the sound of a car." Here we see an onomatopoeia being used as a noun. Chídí is still the term for ‘automobile’ and has now been productively extended to airplanes as well (chídí naatáí ‘the chídí that flies about’) (chíd- has been described as onomatopoeic plus a nominalizing enclitic -i; another etymology suggests shiíchíd ‘it sits squatting’). However, as AnCita Benally and Denis Viri (2005: 91) note, the Navajo word chidítsoot (chidítsooxí) ‘school bus, the yellow chídí’ is being replaced by young Navajos with the English lexical item ‘bus.’ Here is a case where the productivity of the onomatopoeia is potentially being curtailed by the current language shift.

The second form – chuggí [chogí] – has fallen out of use (in fact, one reliable elder Navajo consultant had never heard of the term). One Navajo consultant did explain to me that chuggí had been used for slower automobiles and that chídí was used for faster automobiles. This perspective was then confirmed by other Navajo consultants when I suggested it as a possible explanation for why chuggí had fallen out of use. It is not surprising to see a front vowel /i/ associated with ‘speed, rapidity’ and a back vowel /u/ used for ‘slowness.’ This follows a general pattern of synesthetic sound symbolism, whereby front vowels tend to be associated with smallness and rapidity and back vowels tend to be associated with largeness and slowness (see Hinton, Nichols, and Ohala 1994: 4). I should note that another – playful – word for an automobile is tł’idí ‘the one that farts’ (see Peterson and Webster 2013). Here tł’id is sound symbolic of flatulence.

Most forms of ideophony in Navajo are onomatopoeic (simulating sound iconism). Many onomatopoeic forms can be used as a noun or as a verb stem, for example, -tł’iid ‘to fart, plural objects moving freely through the air’ (Young and Morgan 1987: 291), -ts’ōps ‘to suck’ or -wol ‘to gurgle.’ Onomatopoeias can be nominalized, as Navajo poet Laura Tohe evokes in one of her poems, through the use of the nominalizing enclitic -ii; as in gáaíi (gáagii) ‘crow’ (gáa ‘the cawing of a crow’ + -ii nominalizing enclitic). Another nominalized example, as Tohe first brought to my attention, concerns the word for ‘soda’ in Navajo tódilchxoshí (tó ‘water’, di- thematic prefix relating to sound -lchxosh ‘it is splashing, fizzing’, -i ‘the one’). Navajo ideophones seem most closely aligned with verbs, but they are also related or relatable to other word classes such as nouns (see, for other Athabaskan examples on this, Axelrod 1993; de Reuse 1997). -ts’ōps can be used in such verb constructions as ‘ahiits’ōps ‘to be kissing each other’ and ‘ádist’ōps ‘to be sucking on oneself (as on a wound).’ It can be nominalized as in (as I will discuss
below) *naatsʼposé* ‘mouse (the one that goes about sucking)’, *chősh ʼatsʼposé* ‘sucking bug’, and *tó yitsʼposé* ‘sponge (the one that absorbs water)’. And one of the deities in Navajo belief systems is *Haashchééh Tdíltʼposé* ‘deity who makes a sucking sound.’ As stand alone forms, onomatopoeic forms can optionally take the prefix *tsʼi-*(chʼi- in certain phonological environments): *tsʼitsʼös* or *tsʼposé*.

Navajo ideophones – when not used as verb stems or nominalized as nouns – tend to occur in reduplicated sets or triplets (sometimes also in pairs of reduplicated sets). In Navajo, often after the ideophones there is the form *yitsʼágo* or *yiistsʼá* which glosses as “it sounds, it sounded”. This device indicates that an ideophone has just been produced. It functions very much as a verb of sounding, indicating that what has preceded it was an ideophone. It is, however, not an obligatory device. Here is an example that I documented from a Navajo consultant (from now on throughout this article, I’ve bolded the ideophones):

(1) ‘*’ashkii abingo alizh nitʼ ééʼ*’ *chaazh chaazh* *yitsʼágo sizí* 
   boy in-the-morning one-urinates then CHAAZH CHAAZH it-sounds one-is-standing-up

   In the morning the boy went to the “bathroom” and he went *chaazh chaazh* standing up.

Here *chaazh chaazh* evokes the sound of a boy (*’ashkii*) urinating. The use of the classificatory verb stem *-zí* ‘one person is standing’ adds to the sense that the person urinating is a male (*si-* is the perfective neuter prefix + *-zí* ‘one actor is standing”).

The use of ideophones is especially appreciated in narratives and stories. Below is a stretch of discourse from a narrative told by Curly Tó Aheedlíinii that makes use of the ideophone *dil* which evokes the sound of hard object stomping on solid object. Porcupine has crawled inside of Elk so that Elk might carry Porcupine across a river. Porcupine plans on killing Elk once they have safely reached the other side of the river. Porcupine repeatedly asks Elk to stamp her feet so that Porcupine might hear the sound of foot on land and therefore know it is safe to kill Elk. The ideophone *dil dil* is the crucial signal for Porcupine that they have safely reached dry land. The ideophone – that is, the sound – here validates knowledge (it acts as an evidential). I have bolded the ideophone in the example. Note that after the ideophone, Aheedlíinii uses *yiistsʼá*. I have retranslated this example with the assistance of Blackhorse Mitchell.

(2) *Nikináádzeestal jini,* 
   *stamped (her) feet again, they say,* 

   She stamped her feet again, they say.
Navajo ideophones are used in a variety of genres among Navajos. They are used in ritual, in song, in mythic narratives, in day to day narratives and conversations, in place-names, and in nicknames (Webster 2009). They are interwoven throughout a variety of expressive genres. Ideophones are also salient poetic forms, inasmuch as many Navajo poets actively select to use such forms in their poetry and that in Navajo literacy classes and creative writing classes, the use of ideophones in poetry is often promoted.

From cranes to mice: Evoking sound in contemporary Navajo poetry

Since the late 1970s, Navajos have been publishing poetry written in both Navajo and in English with code-switching into Navajo (see Webster 2009). Much of this poetry is overtly influenced by poetic practices that can also be found in Navajo verbal art and many Navajo poets explicitly link their poetry with oral tradition (Webster 2009). Much of this poetry is also influenced by Western poetic traditions (Belin and Webster 2012). I want to now turn to two examples of the uses of ideophones in contemporary Navajo written poetry. Much contemporary written
Navajo poetry can also be, and is, performed orally. The first examples will be from poetry written in English, which then code-switches into Navajo for the ideophone. The example from Rex Lee Jim will be from a poem written in Navajo.

Here is an example of the use of an ideophone in Navajo poetry. The poem is by Navajo poet and scholar Gloria Emerson (2003: 33) and is titled ‘Table Mesa, NM.’ Here is the relevant excerpt from the poem. As with the above example, I have bolded the ideophone:

(3) of songprints
of w’u, w’u,
déli biyiin,
of first things, first  (Emerson 2003: 33)

In a footnote after the poem, Emerson (2003: 35) describes the sound as follows, “approximated sound of an approaching deity.” The next line glosses as déli’ ‘crane’ biyiin ‘its song’ or ‘songs of cranes’ (Emerson ibid.). As Emerson explained to me, this poem was meant as an attempt to “deify gravity” and the use of w’u, w’u was meant to be evocative of both the sound of Navajo deities, but also the sound of a crane taking flight over water. The use of the w’u, w’u in a reduplicative pair resonates with the earlier discussion of the form of Navajo ideophones.

Emerson’s example connects to the use of ideophones in Navajo ceremonialism. We can see a continuity of use between oral genres and contemporary written poetry; especially in the use of intertextuality. Emerson’s use of w’u, w’u intertextually links beyond the internal coherence of the poem to a broader set of Navajo aesthetic practices (ceremonialism, songs, narratives, and place-names). The use of ideophony is not a seamless carry-over from Navajo oral tradition. Rather, it is an actively selected poetic option.

Let us now take an extended look at an example from a poem that was written by Navajo poet Rex Lee Jim in Navajo. Besides being a poet and now a politician (at the time of this writing, Jim is vice president of the Navajo Nation), Jim is also a Beautyway singer (he performs the Beautyway Ceremony; see Frisbie and McAllester 1978). Unlike the previous poem, that switches into Navajo for the sound symbolic form, this poem is composed in Navajo and plays on the interwoven-ness in Navajo of the ideophonic form throughout the poem. I present the poem in Navajo and then an English glossing that I did in consultation with Rex Lee Jim. Embedded within this poem is also a pun. The opening line of the poem can also be heard as nááasts’qoṣ ‘to suck again, to perform a sucking rite again’ (see Webster 2013). I have described Jim’s use of punning in his poetry elsewhere, but here it is important to understand that sounds – both homophony and ideophony – are crucial components of Jim’s poetic achievement in this poem (Webster 2013). I have again bolded the ideophones.
As I noted earlier, the word for “mouse” in Navajo can be morphologically analyzed as something akin to ‘the one who goes about sucking.’ It is built up of an ideophone that has productively become a verb -ts'ǫqs ‘to suck’ and has then been nominalized by the use of a nominalizing enclitic -i ‘the one.’ Jim then uses that play-on-ideophone-turned noun in line 2, where the onomatopoetic word ts'ǫqs in a reduplicated form. Ts'ǫqs has, as far as I know, at least two interlinking evocations; one is the sound of sucking through a straw, the other is the sound of a kiss. This is interesting because some Navajos I discussed this poem with believed that na'asts'ǫqsí could not be analyzed into its constituent morphology. For them na'asts'ǫqsí meant only ‘mouse’ and not ‘the one who goes about sucking.’ The third line, as described above, is the conventional way to acknowledge that what has just been said is onomatopoetic. That line is also implicated in the consonance and alliteration that tumbles through the poem /ts'/. Glosses for this line included, “that's how it sounds,” “as it sounds,” and “it makes.” However, Rex Lee Jim in discussing the glossing suggested “sounding,” which suggests an on going activity. The fourth line can be glossed as something akin to “it kissed,” “it sucked,” or “to perform a sucking rite.” There is a certain amount of semantic ambiguity here that Jim is attempting to evoke and get readers and listeners thinking about.

Jim is playing with the meaning of ts'ǫqs and the sound /ts'/, and in doing so he is drawing on the various connotations and the semantic relations those connotations may evoke within the poem. The precision of meaning comes through its pragmatic and feelingful iconicity and not just through its referential or semantic content. It is the ideophone that links meaning and creates connections. It is evocative, through sound, of the connection. That is, Jim is, through this poem, highlighting what Anthony Woodbury (1998: 244) has termed “interwoven-ness.” Thus we see the ways that the verb-stem cum ideophone cum nominalized verb are all interwoven, resonating and reverberating off of each other. This interweaving of the ideophone throughout this poem creates a dense phonic texture. This dense phonic texture, the intermingling of sound and meaning, adds resonance to Roman Jakobson's (1960) contention that poetic language reveals the iconicity of language. Jim’s poem works because of the iconicity created through his
interweaving of ideophonic forms throughout his poem. Here we see the ways that the interwovenness of linguistic forms creates a set of affinities between forms, creating a sense, a felt sense of the non-arbitrariness of the sign (Bolinger 1940, 1949; Woodbury 1998: 257), or rather a felt iconicity across and through linguistic forms.

In fact, when I discussed this poem with Jim, he told me that one of the goals of his poetry was to make people think about language, “most of my poems are written to stimulate thoughts and that involves thinking about semantics and etymology.” Jim went on to state that one cannot “really translate” such forms from Navajo into English. A Navajo consultant, who I asked to translate this poem for me, left ts’ǫǫs, ts’ǫǫs in Navajo. He explained to me that the sound that a mouse makes as expressed in Navajo could not be translated into English. The iconicity of Navajo ideophony, it would appear, seems to work in Navajo. In fact, Jim has explained to me that “sound is very important” in his poetry. Navajo poet Blackhorse Mitchell, in discussing the use of the expressive velar fricative in some of Jim’s poetry, noted that “the validity of Navajo is in its sounds, not in the neat things it does” (see Mitchell and Webster 2011). Ideophones are said by some Navajo consultants, “to give an imagination to the listener.”

Jim uses ideophony in this poem to stimulate thoughts. Indeed, some Navajos that I have spoken with about Jim’s poetry have pointed to the semantic ambiguity that he evokes through his poetry as a positive aesthetic achievement. Rather than forcing a singular interpretation, they say, Jim opens up a number of competing senses that one can reflect upon. This, I might add, the not forcing of a singular interpretation, resonates with a general Navajo ethos that I have heard expressed as t’áá bí bee bóholníih (or in English, “it’s up to him/her to decide”). People should be allowed to make their own decisions and their own interpretations.

At a live performance of this poem by Rex Lee Jim to an audience composed primarily of Navajos, July 18, 2001, in Window Rock, Arizona, several Navajos in attendance smiled and laughed during this poem. One Navajo woman told me upon hearing this poem that it evoked the image of a little mouse going about kissing. When I asked another Navajo in attendance what she enjoyed about the poem, she told me she enjoyed the “way the sounds go together.” Here we can see the delight that comes from the use of ideophones.

Navajo ideophony can thus be deeply feelingfully iconic through its interwovenness – a potential “activated” by Jim’s poem – and yet, still further, has been valorized as a quintessential icon of Navajo poetics. Jim, I should add, is the only Navajo poet I know that uses such density of ideophones in his poetry, such as in the present poem, by interweaving each line, both with the consonantal rhyme of /ts'/, but also with the myriad forms of -ts’ǫǫs (from verb stem to independent ideophone to nominalized form).
Navajo ideophony and literacy education

Navajo ideophony has also been encouraged in the poetry of Navajo students learning Navajo literacy on the Navajo Nation, instructed by Navajo educators. This contrasts with published poetry found in Arrow, a publication of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which meant to highlight the creative writing of American Indians in the late 1960s and early 1970s. These authors and students were largely not taught by Native educators. There are no examples of ideophony in any of the poetry written by Navajo high school students found in Arrow (see Webster 2009).

One Navajo educator shared with me a number of unpublished poems that her students had written that use ideophones. One example, that she showed me and read to me used kaz, kaz for the sound of shearing sheep. This reduplicated form was then followed by yitsù́go. This poem thus used an ideophone in a reduplicative set and it was followed by the form yitsù́go; it was written for a Navajo language class at Diné College. Its use was seen, by the teacher that shared this with me, as a display of language command (Navajo) and of creativity and, of evocation. As she said about this poem, “you can really hear it when you read it.”

The use of ideophones can be found in contemporary Navajo poetry, both poetry written for Navajo literacy classes and poetry written by more well-known poets such as Rex Lee Jim, Laura Tohe, Luci Tapahonso, and Gloria Emerson. Indeed, ideophones are a part of the five senses-approach to creative writing. However, not all Navajo educators that I have spoken with felt ideophones were appropriate in written poetry. Thus, in a song book published in 2002 (LeeBoy 2002), the ideophones are not written in Navajo but rather described merely as “sound” (LeeBoy 2002: 15–16). One Navajo consultant (an educator) said that such sound symbolic and ideophonic forms should not be encouraged in Navajo writing (poetry or otherwise). This consultant evaluated ideophones negatively because they were not “like English literature.” By this, the consultant then suggested that English literature, as that consultant had been taught it, “really describes.” Here, my Navajo consultant echoed the point made by Samuels (2004) about modernist language ideologies, which sees language’s function as primarily referential or semantic. Ideophony, here then, evokes connections and thus fails to “describe.” This consultant appears to have internalized an educational bias against ideophony that is also on display in the Arrow publications. And it is here we see the potential fragility of Navajo ideophones when they are evaluated by outside aesthetic standards and linguistic ideologies.
Conclusions

Tucker Childs (2001:70) has argued, and I would agree, that ideophones, “are quintessentially social, the mark of local identity.” To this, however, I would add, intimacy. Here, the use of ideophony in Navajo place names and in Navajo poetry about home life evokes that sense of locality. The use of Navajo ideophones, because they can be negatively evaluated by non-Navajos and some Navajo educators, can also be seen as feelingfully evocative of the intimacies of grammar (Webster 2010). As Woodbury (1998) has suggested, there are a number of poetic devices that are dependent upon both the lexico-grammatical form of the language and the received conventions or traditions of use of those forms in concert (form-dependent expressions). That is, use and code cannot be adequately separated (as shown in, e.g., the connection of certain onomatopoetic forms with ritual or deities). Jim’s short little poem highlights the interwoven-ness of ideophony in Navajo, its form-dependententness. Indeed, the poem is predicated on that interwoven-ness, that form-dependententsness.

Furthermore, as Woodbury (1998:234) reminds us, “language choice” does not occur in a social or political vacuum. The decision to use ideophony in contemporary Navajo poetry places it in opposition to a more prevalent Western linguistic ideology (see Samuels, 2004). Examples of ideophony in narratives can be found in the collected Navajo texts of early anthropological linguists such as Sapir and Goddard and in texts collected by missionaries such as Haile (see Webster 2009). Such was not always the case. And, indeed, other expressive features of Navajo were sometimes erased from the linguistic descriptions of Navajo (see Mitchell and Webster 2011). In general, non-propositional or non-referential forms were often considered extra-linguistic or pre-linguistic. As Mphande (1992:119) notes for African ideophones, “ideophones are visibly absent from the African folk narrative texts translated under the influence of missionaries and missionary-trained scholars who were the pioneer researchers in the field of African language study.” Mphande goes so far as to describe the erasure of ideophony from the written records of early linguists and missionaries as “textual genocide” (1992:119). Likewise, the very visibility of Navajo ideophony in contemporary Navajo poetry is also noteworthy. Richard Watson (2000:401) points out that, “even a highly acclaimed African writer like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o uses few, if any, ideophones because of a European based education.” There certainly were no examples of Navajo ideophony in the Bureau of Indian Affairs publication Arrow, which meant to highlight Native writers (including Navajos) writing English language poetry. Now many Navajo educators actively promote the use of “sound effects” in the creative writing of Navajo students.
Navajo ideophony is aesthetically pleasing uses of language. Many Navajos have attested to that. However, for Navajo poets, the use of ideophony also stands in opposition to a Euro-American linguistic ideology that devalues such sound symbolic forms and uses (see Nuckolls 2006; see also Samuels 2004). It has often been argued that the use of ideophony appears “fragile” in language contact situations (Nuckolls 2006: 47; see also Childs 1996). Certainly the examples described for urban Zulu (Childs 1996; this issue) and for Runa speakers (Nuckolls 2006) attest to the potential fragility of ideophones. Several Navajo consultants were quite pessimistic about the continued use of such forms among younger Navajos. It was a potential loss that they were not pleased about. On the other hand, as with the use of ideophony in contemporary Mayan poetry described by Rusty Barrett in this issue, the active use of Navajo ideophony in a variety of poems, including poetry written in Navajo language writing classes, suggests an active resistance to that Western linguistic ideology. We might, then, see the use of ideophony in Navajo poetry as both an aesthetic expression and an art of resistance (Scott 1990). Such linked relations between feelingful connections with linguistic forms and perceived and real instances of stigmatizations of such forms can be thought of as “intimate grammars” (Webster 2010). Navajo ideophones can be, then, expressions of the intimacies of grammar.

The final chapter of Sapir’s (1921) Language is titled “Language and Literature” (p. 221ff.), and besides providing an inspiration to my own work over the years, Sapir here reminds us of the importance of literature and aesthetics to the study of linguistics and the cultural (see also Leavitt 2011). Sapir also emphasizes, echoing a position espoused by Boas, that “every language is itself a collective art of expression. There is concealed in it a particular set of esthetic factors – phonetic, rhythmic, symbolic, morphological – which it does not completely share with any other language” (Sapir 1921: 225). Jim’s interwoven use of ideophony in the short poem, quoted above, reminds us of that fundamental truth.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Rex Lee Jim, Martha Austin-Garrison, and especially Blackhorse Mitchell for useful comments about Navajo ideophony. I thank Charlotte Frisbie, Andy Hofling, Janis Nuckolls, Willem de Reuse, Joel Sherzer, and Tony Woodbury for useful comments on issues taken up in this paper. I thank Katherine Lahti and Rusty Barrett for helping to organize the 2012 LSA session in Portland, Oregon, from which this special issue has grown. Thanks also to my fellow panelists and to Mark Sicoli and Tony Woodbury for thought-provoking commentary at the session. I also want to thank the audience members
at the session for a lively – if lengthy – Q&A after the session was over. Funding was provided by a Wenner-Gren grant, a Phillips Fund grant from the American Philosophical Society, and a Jacobs Fund grant from the Whatcom Museum for fieldwork on the Navajo Nation from 2000–2001. More recent field research in 2007–2012 was aided by a Faculty Seed grant from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, a Phillips Fund grant from the American Philosophical Society, and a Jacobs Fund grant from the Whatcom Museum. Many thanks. Finally, I thank all the Navajo people who have taken the time to talk with me about ideophony and the Navajo language more generally. Research was done under permits from the Navajo Nation. Mistakes are still mine, though.

References


Barrett, Rusty. 2014. “Ideophones and (non-)arbitrariness in the K’iche’ poetry of Humberto Ak’abal.”


---

**About the author**

**Anthony K. Webster** is associate professor of Anthropology at the University of Texas at Austin. He is the author of Explorations in Navajo Poetry and Poetics (2009, University of New Mexico Press) as well as numerous articles on Navajo language, ethnopoetics, and culture in journals such as *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, *Language in Society*, *Anthropological Linguistics*, *Journal of Anthropological Research*, *International Journal of American Linguistics*, and *Journal of Folklore Research*. He is currently working on his second book (for the University of Arizona Press) – tentatively titled *An Ethnography of Navajo Poetry*.

**Author’s address**

Anthony K. Webster  
Department of Anthropology  
University of Texas at Austin  
Austin, TX 78712  
awebster@utexas.edu