

SPEECH PLAY AND LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES IN NAVAJO TERMINOLOGY DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

In this article we combine a concern with speech play and language ideologies to investigate contemporary Navajo terminology development. This article presents some recent cases of lexical elaboration in context, and argues that neologisms in Navajo are often fleeting, shifting, or humorous practices that reflect and recreate individual agency, intimate grammars, and local language ideologies. They also reflect an unexpected continuity in what is considered to be a context of rapid language shift. Such practices are one form of resistance to English and should be seen as a sociocultural, rather than purely referential, phenomenon.

Keywords: Navajo; Speech play; Language ideologies; Neologisms; Mischievous grammar.

The structures of languages have never been wholly satisfactory to their users, for they have never let them rest.

Dell Hymes, "Speech and language: On the origins and foundations of inequality among speakers" (1973: 72)

1. Introduction

In 1982, Alyse Neundorf (1982: 271), Navajo linguist and poet, suggested guidelines to Navajo speakers on the art and science of developing neologisms in Navajo¹. These

¹ We wish to thank Ana Nalwood, Irene Silentman, Bennie Klain, Tillman Long, Karen Halona, Buddy Lee, Oswald Werner, Tazbah McCullah, Roseann Willink, Ellavina Perkins, Selena Manychildren, the late Ernie Manuelito, Rex Lee Jim, Larry King, Blackhorse Mitchell and our many other teachers and consultants over the years who wish to remain anonymous. We are grateful also to the late Alyce Neundorf, to whom this article owes a great deal, and to Derek Milne and Aimee Hosemann for their careful readings and insights. We thank an anonymous reviewer for a number of useful suggestions. All mistakes and errors remain our own.

guidelines were at once practical, such a “write it down in Navajo or have someone write it down for you; “encouraging, as in “everyone should participate in developing new terms, because it is a learning process;” as well as cautionary, as “new terms fall by the wayside and are forgotten.” These statements allude to the realities of what are often fleeting, spontaneous, and context-dependent practices linked to individual agency, creativity, and a variety of linguistic ideologies. While terminology development in minority language contexts is often associated with “top down” efforts at language planning – often associated with “modernizing” an indigenous language (see Spolsky and Boomer 1983) – neologisms in Navajo – as with other communities – often occur in less formal, non-institutional situations, or as spontaneous individual efforts necessitated by domains encountered by educators, poets, broadcasters, or health care providers². When new terms do emerge in Navajo, variation is often apparent, reflecting Gladys Reichard’s (1945: 168) observation that among Navajo speakers, “since many individuals see a new object or idea differently many of their neologisms get into use.” Of course not all newly coined terms enter into widespread use, nor are they necessarily meant to. An understanding of how emergent terminologies circulate and vary, the local language ideologies that inform their creation and use, and the sociocultural work that they do is crucial to understanding the contexts and practices of languages in use in endangered and minority language communities.

The existence of emergent terms and borrowings related to transformations in the lifeways and material cultures of indigenous communities such as the Karuk (Bright 1952), the Yaqui (Spicer 1943), the Tewa (Dozier 1956; Kroskrity 1978) and more recently the Kiowa (Neely 2012) has been well documented.³ Sapir (1921: 209) suggested a propensity for Athabaskan speakers to resist loanwords and borrowings in language and culture contact situations, arguing that speakers “found it easier to create new words by compounding afresh elements ready to hand,” alluding to a kind of

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² As of this writing, the Navajo Nation did not have any single institutional structure or “language academy” charged with lexical development or language standards. However, there are ongoing efforts by, for example, various health organizations to standardize medical terminology, as well as structures for standardization for court interpreters and election officials guided by the various needs and certifications of the numerous federal, state, and county jurisdictions that overlap the Navajo Nation. Standards for pedagogical materials and testing due to the federally mandated “No Child Left Behind” policy are being addressed by the Navajo Nation Department of Diné Education and numerous local and state school boards, a topic well beyond the scope of this paper. The degree to which many writers and speakers of Navajo accept, or are aware of, contemporary Navajo-led institutionalized approaches to lexical development remains unclear. It will be interesting to see the degree to which current trends towards standardized curriculum materials effect variation, but if extant language ideologies in at least some form, they should be a building block, rather than a constraint, to further variations in coinages and speech play.

³ For a comparative perspective of what is often called “lexical acculturation” in Native American languages, see Brown (1999).

indigenous purism illustrated by Basso's (1967) classic examination of lexical set extension in Western Apache automotive terminology. A similar set extension - using body-part terms for automobile parts - would later be described by Neundorf (1982) for Navajo as well. Young (1989) examined the ways in which Navajo lexical derivatives have been built upon extant verb roots through calques, semantic augmentation, or new formulations, suggesting the language itself was grammatically predisposed to purism while being inherently suited to lexical development and semantic shifts. However, the idea of an innate Athabaskan resistance to loans or borrowing has been countered by other studies into the existence of, for example, upwards of 400 Russian loanwords in Dena'ina (Krauss and Golla 1981); marginalized, "nonstandard" ways of speaking Kaska that include codeswitching and loanwords (Meek 2010); or the heteroglossic practices of a range of Navajo speakers codemixing and incorporating borrowings and loanwords from English (Field 2009; Webster 2008, 2009a, 2010c; Schaengold 2004; Holm, Holm, and Spolsky 1971).⁴ In the Navajo case, despite what many warn are increasingly rapid shifts to English and diminishing contexts for Navajo (Lee and McLaughlin 2001; Spolsky 2002; Lee 2007; House 2002; Benally and Viri 2007), Navajo speakers and writers continue to create new terms and phrases in Navajo for a variety of reasons and in a variety of ways, or ascribe extant terms to new referents in processes of semantic shift. As the Hymes (1973) opening epigraph should remind us, these are salient phenomena that have broader implications for understanding linguistic vitality, and they are indexical of agency and an unexpected continuity in the face of rapidly shifting linguistic ideologies and practices (Kroskrity 2009; Hill 1993).⁵

Rather than seeing new terms and phrases - what might best be subsumed under the rubric of emergent terminological formations - as just "words for things" or indexical of "adaptation" or "acculturation," we need to understand them as ways of creating common sociality through agency, humor, and speech play that reflect and renew the linguistic forms and ideologies that inform such practices (Field and Kroskrity 2009). Or what Webster (2010c) has termed "intimate grammars." While the grammatical processes of Navajo terminology development have been well documented, which include the reformulation and augmentation of verb roots or the addition of nominal enclitics or prefixes to verb stems and the compounding of basic nouns with another basic noun, stem, or postposition (Neundorf 1982: 274; Young 1989), what are not as well understood are the ways in which these practices occur and

⁴ We note here that a heteroglossic practice like "Navlish" dates back at least to the turn-of-the-last century. For example, Father Berard Haile's Navajo consultant was known by - among other names - as *Cha(r)latsoh* 'Big Charlie' (Bodo 1998: 82). This form combines "Charlie" with the adjectival enclitic *-tsoh* 'big.' Note that like the coinages - or emergent terminological formations - we describe here, many Navajos (and non-Navajo linguistic anthropologists) have multiple situational, playful, and emergent names and nicknames. Some stick, some do not.

⁵ This is not to say that all transformations in Navajo communities are met with Navajo neologisms, as English codeswitching and loanwords are also encountered and used by a range of monolingual and multilingual speakers from a variety of backgrounds, and they often occur where generally accepted Navajo equivalents exist; for example, Benally and Viri (Benally and Viri 2007: 91) note the increasing use of the English for school bus *chidiltsooi* ('yellow car'), or in their example, *chidiltsoo'i* ('dirty yellow/orange car') (on the creative and expressive use of the velar fricative -x- see Mitchell and Webster 2011). Like neologisms, however, "loanwords" can also be fleeting and fall out of use (Spolsky and Boomer 1983). Furthermore, the requisite intersection of domain knowledge and linguistic skills for Navajo language potentials to be actualized is not always realized (Klain and Peterson 2000; Peterson 1997).

are encountered in everyday heteroglossic contexts.⁶ In other words, we need to rethink neologisms and the creation of new terminologies as social and cultural, not merely referential, practices. In this article we address the ways in which some speakers create, use, and joke with descriptive phrases and fleeting neologisms in Navajo, focusing primarily on terms related to the material aspects of contemporary technological life in the early 21st century. We argue that through the close examination of emergent lexical variations, relevant language ideologies, and the contexts for terminology development and speech play, we can challenge the received wisdom of an impending and inevitable language loss and inform projects that engage linguistic vitality. We further argue that these practices need to be understood within the social, economic, and political fields in which they are embedded, emergent in the broader context of linguistic, linguistic ideological, and sociocultural transformations.

2. “I’m surfing”

In the summer of 2004, Peterson was sitting in the computer lab at the library located in the Navajo Nation Museum in Window Rock, AZ. From the late 1990s on, the library had become a very popular - and at times the only - public access connection to the Internet in the area. In 2004 there were only a handful of computers situated together on tables near the entrance to the library, and there was always a wait. A man sitting at the computer next to Peterson was perhaps in his mid to late 20’s, wearing baggy jeans and a backwards baseball cap. An apparent friend of his, similar in age and fashion, walked up behind him, giving him one of the Navajo calls for attention or recognition.

(1) A: Sh::t!

The guy on the computer turned around. Actually, several of us turned around, thinking we were the ones being summoned. The guy on the computer greets his friend with a smile, a handshake, and a hearty “Hey, dude!” Here is the conversation that followed:⁷

(2) A: S:up? Há’át’iish ba’naná? [ha’át’íílá baanániná]
 ‘What’s up? What is going on?’ (2.0)

(3) B: Bikáá’désk’qqs. ((Turns to the computer))
 On top of spread out
 ‘I’m surfing.’⁸

⁶ We are employing Bakhtin’s notion of *heteroglossia* here as articulated by Jane Hill (1993: 69), who suggests that “we should assume that speakers confront ‘heteroglossia’, which is not necessarily sorted out into a clearly delineated system of codes.”

⁷ In what follows, we remain faithful to the way that the forms were said and rely less on how they might be written based on the standardized spellings found in Young and Morgan (1987). More than one Navajo that Webster has worked with has deferred to Young and Morgan as the “correct” spelling. We are not interested in “correct” spellings here, but in ways of speaking - which are necessarily complicated. Where we are aware of alternative forms, we have included them in brackets throughout the text. 2p=second person, (5.0) = time in seconds, -inter. enclitic =interrogative enclitic, V:=extended vowel not phonemic, doubling of vowel (VV)=long phonemic vowel.

- (4) A: Oh, iz:it? ((laughter. They continue to look at the computer))
(5.0)
'Oh, really?'
- (5) A: Emailísh send únílaa? [í'iinilaah]
Email-inter. enclitic send 2p past make happen
'Did you send the email?'
- (6) B: Dagá'. [ndaga']
No
'No.'
- (7) A: Oh, iz:it? (10.0) ((leans closer and takes the mouse in hand))
'Oh, really?'
- (8) B: Bighaniigóó. [bighangóó](5.0) Click it. Right? there." (10.0)
It's home-towards it
'Go to the homepage.'
- (9) A/B: (inaudible)
- (10) B: TLC! Let's go!

This interaction is a good example of contemporary discursive practices among some Navajo bilingual speakers. It is reflective of shifting and emergent grammars, exhibits frequent codeswitching, and is illustrative of what some have called the bilingual code or "Navlish" (also "Navalish" and "Navglish") encountered among speakers in a variety of contexts (Schaengold 2004; Webster 2009a, 2010c). The codeswitching is apparent in the greeting "Sup" (apheresis of the English 'What's up?') followed by the Navajo 'What are you doing?' (Line 2); the English borrowings within a Navajo sentence structure (verb modal 'send' and noun 'email' with a Navajo interrogative enclitic -ísh) 'Did you send the email?' (Line 5); and the bilingual Navajoization of the term "TLC" (Line 10), a popular playful reduction among some speakers for the phrase "Tí, let's cruise!" meaning 'Come on, let's go.' What we would like to focus on in this example, however, are the utterances in which "new" terminologies appear (Lines 3 and 8).

In Line 3 *Bikáá'désk'qqs* is a calque from the English "surfing," and as it is encountered here, means 'on top of it I am stretched out.' It is apparently funny to both parties, most likely calculated to be humorous, and can easily be interpreted as an "off color" joke. The phrase says something about the verbal prowess of the speaker, Navajo language ideologies of description, and the bilingual skills of both, and it is phonologically similar and derives from the same verb root as *bitaa'dilk'qqs* 'choose among things set out before you' often used by speakers to describe surfing the Internet (Young, Morgan, and Midgette 1992: 345). In Line 8, another calque, *bighaniigóó*, indicates that one should 'move towards its home', that is, towards a 'homepage.' What may be significant here is that Peterson has encountered all of these terms numerous times in interaction and from a variety of bilingual consultants as one way to talk about a website's homepage and surfing the internet, the former derived as a humorous calque from the English "surfing," itself a semantic shift in English from the early 1990s.

⁸ One Navajo consultant, in looking over the transcript for us, suggested that *bitaa'disk'qqs* "browsing" was the more appropriate term. Here *bitaa'disk'qqs* suggests picking out something, like items on a counter at a store, from an array of objects, hence "browsing" (see Young, Morgan and Midgette 1992: 345). As we discuss below, the form that Peterson heard suggests being "on top of it I am stretched out."

Neundorf (1982: 272) noted that “If you are like many Navajo bilinguals, you will find that some of these terms will sound “funny” and create cross-cultural humor. These are often the best terms, since they readily catch on with the general public.” Indeed, use of “new” terms often generates laughter, either in the form of recognition, as in “Oh yea, that’s a good idea,” or outright amusement or disgust, as in “*Diigis*” ‘that’s just crazy.’ “I’m surfing” is a good example of heteroglossic humor and a good example of play on a term that may well have staying power, if only in joking, which is in itself significant. As Hill (1993: 69) notes, “we should assume that speakers confront ‘heteroglossia’, which is not necessarily sorted out into a clearly delineated system of codes” resulting in unexpected and misrecognized uses as the grammars of these two languages continue to leak (Webster 2009a, 2010b, 2010c). That the two utterances directly related to surfing the Internet were in Navajo is significant. The interaction is also reflective of numerous local language ideologies at work as they relate to emergent discursive practices.

3. Navajo language ideologies

Echoing Whorf’s (1950) observations on the Hopi language and the study of physics, Ken Hale once remarked that “the Navajo language is way ahead of any conceivable technology.”⁹ That is, all of the elements are present in the language to deal with emergent lifestyles, traditions, and technologies, mirroring a Bakhtinian (1981) perspective that all speech and utterances can be viewed as quotations from ancestors. For example, Young (1989: 311) suggests that by utilizing extant Navajo verb derivations, “[t]ravel by any conceivable means can readily be described by drawing upon an appropriate root that describes the action in terms of the physical characteristics of the vehicle involved, the rate of speed, manner of movement or other distinctive features.” Many Navajos - speakers and non-speakers alike - believe that the Navajo language is uniquely structured to engage shifting contexts and new ideas. As Jimmy Begaye (pseudonym), a bilingual consultant and apprentice healer described to me, “our language adapts to situations, we can use one word, two words, three words, and make it one word and come up with something new...so our language gives birth to itself and life to itself.” Such statements by scholars and cultural experts are part of the range of language ideologies surrounding terminology development in Navajo.

Language ideologies as articulated by Kroskrity (2004: 498) include “the beliefs, or feelings, about languages in their social world,”¹⁰ and an understanding of heterogeneous linguistic ideologies is crucial for engaging issues such as linguistic vitality and identity (Leonard 2011), language socialization (Bunte 2009), and emergent practices such as lexical development; without this understanding, as Field and Kroskrity (2009: 10) have stated, we “cannot hope to understand Native American languages and the ways speakers use them, change them, and renew them.” Indeed, as

⁹ Personal communication from Ted Fernald and Ellavina Perkins in 2002 and 2009.

¹⁰ Within this definition, Woolard’s (1998: 3) classic definition is also assumed, that “ideologies of language are not about language alone. Rather, they envision and enact ties of language to identity, to aesthetics, to morality, and to epistemology. Through such linkages, they underpin not only linguistic form and use but also the very notion of the person and the social group, as well as...fundamental social institutions.”

Neely's (2012) work concerning Kiowa language ideologies and neologisms shows, we cannot separate the two from each other without doing a disservice to both. For some Navajo speakers, the ideologies and tropes that resonate in practice and metapragmatic observations include the ideas that the language is variously whole, sacred, healing, descriptive, difficult, adaptable, disappearing, individualistic, iconic of identity, ripe for humor, accepting of variation, and incommensurate with English. These ideologies reflect and recreate what Kroskrity (1998a) notes is the important interplay between "discursive" (actively engaged or contested) and "practical" (highly naturalized or dominant) language ideologies. That there are so many ideologies articulated here about the development of new nouns is no surprise as they "display an unavoidable referentiality that makes them more available for folk awareness and possible folk theorizing" (Kroskrity 2004: 506).

Jimmy Begaye's statement above about language giving birth and life unto itself reflects an idea we have encountered often: *Saad niilyá* 'language – it was placed down,' which can be glossed as the idea of Navajo as 'a living language.'¹¹ Like some of the other language ideologies encountered in Navajo communities, *saad niilyá* 'a living language' has its origins in traditional philosophies and creation stories, in this case referring to the creation of the Navajo language itself. *Niilyá* is derived from the handling stem *-lá*, which is utilized for discrete plural objects or for a single flexible, ropelike object. In this usage, it implies that an object "is set down, placed, created, provided (as the stars, moon, sun, game animals, at creation)" (Young, Morgan, and Midgette 1992: 362). Young and Morgan (1987: 669) write the following, "*Niilyá* is of frequent occurrence in the legends with reference to the placing of sacred mountains and other features of the world at creation." As such, words are part of what some consider to be a larger category of *diné bá niilyáii* 'things that were created/placed down for the Navajo,' where various elements of traditional Navajo personhood and existence were placed down by deities for the use of the Navajo, including *kʔ* 'fire,' *tó* 'water,' *hatáál* 'ceremonies,' and *sin* 'song' (Werner, Manning, and Begishe 1983: 589). As is the case with all of these elements from some traditional perspectives, language can be seen as a living entity to be treated with the utmost respect, and such beliefs lead to the recurring ideology of the language as being "whole" or "sacred" due to its integral relationship to foundational philosophies of traditional Navajo culture and healing.¹² This idea does not preempt agency or speech play, as Witherspoon (1983) suggests it is through the individual that "speech" is actualized utilizing the resources of "language," and as Reichard (1945) suggests the creative, successful, and persuasive actualization of "language" that is held in high regard by many speakers. Indeed, as Webster has been told, linguistic dexterity and creativity is a highly valued way of speaking for some Navajos. As Rex Lee Jim explained to Webster regarding the use of Navajo in his poetry and the relationship between poetry and language on February 2, 2001:

¹¹ Benally and Viri (2005) invoke the phrase Navajo as "a living language" as well, but in English with no Navajo equivalent provided.

¹² Witherspoon (1977) and House (2002) have explored the relationship between traditional philosophies and Navajo language ideologies and practice, focusing on alternate interpretations of the broader philosophical concept of *Sq'áh naaghái bik'e hózhó* (SNBH). See also here Jim (2000).

- (11) Poems grow just like people and in that situation the language becomes a way to explore, to discover, to create, to celebrate, and ultimately to live...Language in many ways is sort of like a tool, an organizer to allow certain expressions to take place. It's like a filter...and to a certain degree we have control over how to shape the filter, which is the language we use.

When discussing terminology development with consultants who have described the process as *saad ánálnééh* 'to remake words.' *Saad ánálnééh* 'to remake words' has been glossed to Peterson as "to fix words again, to make it physical, to get back where you're supposed to be." *Saad álnééh* 'to make words,' which omits the morpheme *ná-* 'again,' can also - just as *saad niilyá* 'a living language' discussed above - refer to a time "in the beginning," as part of some Navajo creation stories where words and language came into being. Another way to look at it, as Roseann Willink, a former Navajo language instructor at UNM, described it in 2002 is *saad binákée náhane* [*saad beená'ákée' náhane*] 'word-it's history- again tell', as she explained, "we can dig it up, we can retell its [a word's] history." There is a recurring theme that getting to the future requires looking to the past, another Bakhtinian perspective echoed in conversations with some Navajos and Navajo speakers about both language and life more generally. Thus, for some speakers it is not so much that the language is ahead of technology, or is grammatically predisposed to new constructions, but that all words and constructions have already existed or exist in some form, in the words of the language itself, perhaps as gifts from deities, or at least as previous utterances that could be revisited. Such ideologies among speakers could speak to the "predisposition" to engage semantic shifts, new formulations, and lexical augmentations over borrowings and loans. Of course, as Navajo consultants were sometimes quick to point out, playing with words can also be fun.

Clearly, not all metadiscursive ideologies are rooted in sacred or traditional philosophies, and speakers and community members have varied relationships and understandings of "traditional" modes. It should also be clear that speakers rarely articulate philosophical paradigms in everyday practice, and that practice rarely equates to ideals. When discussing language ideologies with Navajos, Navajo speakers, and those who research Navajo language issues, several recurring and more secular themes consistently emerge, which are by no means homogeneous. The Navajo language itself is inevitably described as being "descriptive," due to the precision of handling stems, morphemes, and other grammatical features; "difficult," due to phonology and the complex nature of verb structures; and, "better" or more suitable than English or other languages for use in a variety of contexts. Speakers and non-speakers alike exhibit pride in these elements considered to be integral to the language, and it is a special source of pride that the language has been considered to be one of the most difficult in the world by some scholars, more than a few language learners, and now, by many Navajos themselves, leading to what House (2002) has described as problematic linguistic "valorization" masking dire linguistic realities.¹³ These descriptors all represent specific ideologies about the language in comparison to English, sometimes in contexts of

¹³ Oswald Werner has often pointed out that Navajo is a difficult language to learn only for non-Athabaskan speakers.

valorization, further highlighting what is seen by some speakers and writers as the incommensurability of Navajo and English especially in more performative or public contexts (Webster 2006, 2009a). Thus there is a solid ideological foundation for the use and development of Navajo terms, whether they are utilized in Navajo, English, or heteroglossic forms such as Navlish.

Acknowledgment, awareness, and acceptance of linguistic variation among Navajo speakers are also crucial for understanding the emergence and circulation of new lexical constructions. While linguistic variation may have been misrecognized by some foundational scholars or omitted from canons (see Field 2009), Reichard (1945: 145) asserted that linguistic diversity in Navajo was so widespread that “if its distribution were different, we should classify it as a dialect.” Early linguistic documentation and accounts of Navajo creation stories also point to a history of linguistic diversity (Matthews 1897; Franciscan Fathers 1910), and based upon historical and contemporary evidence, Saville-Troike (1974: 82) suggested that variations in phonology, lexicon, and morphology have occurred across time, geography, and between and amongst families, clans, and peer groups, and account for the development of multiple terminologies. Saville-Troike also suggested that documenting these variations is integral to developing pedagogical materials and to emerging standardization efforts. The acceptance of at least some linguistic diversity, despite erasure through claims of heterogeneity or elder purism, seems to be a consistent norm that relates directly to agency and speech play in lexical development. Notable exceptions to acceptance can occur in institutional contexts such as radio broadcasting (Klain and Peterson 2000), education (House 2002) or contemporary written poetry (Webster 2008), where, for a variety of reasons, audiences, educators, or elders sometimes hold speakers or learners to seemingly unattainable degrees of homogeneity and linguistic purity.¹⁴ However, the contexts of media and pedagogy are also where the need for new terminologies has often been heightened, where new terms are very often actively created, and where a variety of speaking and writing styles come into contact in what are often unequal relations of power and expectations.

Finally, many of the forms we discuss throughout have morphology that is easily identifiable and analyzable by speakers. While this may seem a minor point, we wish to note that such analyzable or transparent forms may be both a Navajo aesthetic and a more broadly Athabaskan aesthetic practice. Kari (2010: 200), for example, has noted that Athabaskan place names are “nearly always analyzable and informative.” Even when those place names are documented as having a deep time depth. Kari sees this analyzability as an aid to wayfinding and a form of conservatism. We do not disagree. However, we would note, following Basso (1996: 45-46), that Athabaskan place names are also an aesthetic practice and a part of that aesthetics resides in their analyzability. Part of the aesthetic delight that Navajos take in neologisms is to be found in their

¹⁴ Note that an ideological aversion to variation in these contexts is not necessarily met by speaker accommodation. Peterson (1998, 2006) and Klain and Peterson (2000) examined multiple ways in which speakers critique other speakers or writers of Navajo, especially when they are linked to the Navajo Nation government, as is the case with KTNN Radio announcers. Webster (2010a: 295) notes how such critiques in the form of puns are often aimed at non-Navajos and non-speakers trying to speak the language, including missionaries, teachers, or anthropologists, as a form of resistance. We follow Webster (2010a) and suggest that in the institutional contexts under consideration it is not necessarily the individual speakers who are being critiqued, but the institutions themselves.

analyzability.¹⁵ That such forms are analyzable, however, should not suggest that they may not also be punned, or as some Navajos have described this way of speaking to Webster as *saad aheelt'éego diits'a* 'words that resemble each other by sound' (on punning in Navajo see Sapir 1932; Webster 2009a, 2010a). In this respect, Navajo words are both descriptive and ambiguous.

4. Semantic shifts and variation

Many of the early "top-down" efforts at Navajo terminology development in the 1900s were directly related to colonial enterprises such as missionization and conversion, the imposition of governmental structures and institutions, war propaganda, or the implementation of colonial projects such as livestock reduction where "agents of change used the Navajo language to give their activities some degree of authenticity" (Spolsky and Boomer 1983: 250). Perhaps the most famous example was the creation of a neologism for 'God' as *Diyin 'Ayói 'Át'éii* (*diyin* 'holy' 'ayói' 'exceedingly' 'át'éii' 'that which is') by the Franciscan Fathers in consultation with local Navajos (Bodo 1998: 4). Contact with English, increasing interconnectedness, and increased engagement with the trappings of contemporary technological life are all factors in Navajo terminology development. Relating to coinages and variation in "generally accepted" newer terms, Neundorf (1983: xvi) suggested that "words that have come from English language/Navajo language contact are the most likely to have multiple words." Generally accepted and oft-encountered variations for such terms include words for airplane (*chidí naat'a'i* 'flying car' and *béesh naat'a'i* 'flying machine'), soda pop or cola (*tólikání* 'tasty/sweet water', *tódilchxóshí* 'bubbly/popping water' and the less documented *tólicxhí'i* 'red water'),¹⁶ and the oft-cited *ahwééh/gohwééh* variants for the Spanish loanword for coffee.¹⁷ While there are many more to be sure, such examples also point to the fact that there is often no one way to say X in Navajo, nor is it perhaps necessary as speakers and writers can be both tolerant and welcoming of such lexical variations.

By 1910 Berard Haile and the Franciscan Fathers of St. Michaels, AZ had documented numerous "new" terms for material goods introduced to the area in the early 1900s including *béesh bii' yáti'igíí* 'phone' ('apparatus-into which- one speaks-the one'), *beesh halne'igíí* for telegraph ('talking wire' sic.), and *béesh bee' bik'e'elchíhi* for 'printing press, type' (Franciscan Fathers 1910: 270).¹⁸ Wall and Morgan (1958) and Young and Morgan (1951, 1980, 1987) documented at least two

¹⁵ We thank an anonymous reviewer for encouraging us to make this point more explicit.

¹⁶ These terms can also reference 'juice,' 'wine,' Kool-aid, or 'champagne' among other possible referents in context.

¹⁷ While the latter is often considered a phonological variation for the Spanish loanword, discussions and dictionaries usually omit *dewhééh*, another form Peterson has encountered among some speakers in the Forest Lake/Blue Gap/Pinon (AZ) area, used sometimes to distinguish coffee grounds from liquid coffee. Webster has heard coffee referred to as *jaa'i* 'the ear.' This term is most commonly associated with 'coffee pot,' but can - through synecdoche - be applied to 'coffee' as well. Webster was told that the term derived from the resemblance of the shape of the handle on a coffee pot with a human ear.

¹⁸ We have updated the orthography used; interlinear translations are the originals. We thank Blackhorse Mitchell for his help on some of these forms.

other forms for telegraph and four different coinages for telephone, including the one above as well as what has become one of the more widespread and accepted terms, *beesh bee hane'i* 'apparatus-through it-one tells-the one' addressed further below.¹⁹ Speakers who coined such terms were reaching back and reformulating extant words or morphemes, i.e. Sapir's 'elements ready to hand,' also reflecting the ideologies of *saad ánálnééh* 'remaking words' and, of course, description. As they have in the past, new technologies and material goods allow for recombinations of extant words and morphemes as well as semantic shifts; such terms have often incorporated the lexeme *béesh* 'metal' (also 'knife'), which by most accounts is a semantic shift from 'flint' (Hoijer 1948) that has also come to mean 'apparatus, instrument, machine' (Young and Morgan 1987), which also can now be glossed as 'computer,' 'laptop,' or 'cellphone' in some contexts.

Semantic shift and variation are also evident in more contemporary terms and phrases for computers, cell phones, and the Internet. A form encountered by Peterson for computer first in 1991 (still in use by at least a few consultants by 2002), based on the word for typewriter (itself based on the 1910 term for printing press) was *béesh bee ak'e'elchihí t'áá bí nitsékeesígíí* [*béesh bee ak'e'alchihí t'áábí nitsékeesígíí*] 'the typewriter that has its own thinking'. On one level, early personal computers were often used for word processing, and the keyboard resembles that of a typewriter in its basic layout, perhaps leading to its association with typewriters.²⁰ "But it's more than a typewriter" Carol, a bilingual consultant in her 50s, said when Peterson inquired about computers in 2002. "I think of it as more like its own thing. Maybe say *béesh t'áá bí nídii nitsékeesígíí* ('machine-on its own-it thinks-the one') instead," omitting reference to writing or typing and resulting in a truncated form. Other terms that followed this logic of a machine that "thinks," both with and without reference to typewriters or writing, but after 2002 we began encountering an alternate, truncated form *béesh ntsékeesígíí* 'machine-it thinks-the one' in a variety of contexts. Neundorf (1982) and Spolsky and Boomer (1983) suggested that new terms might appear awkward or too long and would most likely undergo truncation over time, a good sign that a particular formulation has gained at least some wider spread acceptance, which indeed this latter term had.

Shifting contexts are of course integral to semantic shift; when asked about the term *béesh bee ak'e'elchí alsisígíí* 'machine-one writes with it-which is small' (glossed as 'portable typewriter') in comparison to similar words for computers, Carol again confirmed that the term could be glossed in Navajo as "portable computer." When asked how that could be, she replied, "Nobody uses a typewriter anymore. That's why to me, it means portable computer. You just know what it is." Thus context and experience are crucial in the mutual understanding of shifts, and can lead to further truncations, observed in spaces like Tribal offices, of for example "*Díí béesh alsisígíí shaa ná'aah* 'Give me that laptop ('small machine');' or broader shifts in context and meaning, such as when an elderly consultant stated in 2004:

¹⁹ Here we have substituted the original nominal enclitic /é/ for /í/ following the convention in Neundorf (1983).

²⁰ While it has been reported to Peterson that some monolingual elders have called computers "typewriters hooked up to a TV," he has never actually encountered that variation in use, although it seems possible; it is, however, steeped in expectations of naiveté and technological incompetence (see Deloria 2004). Webster has not encountered such a form either.

- (12) “*Kin bii’ alah ná’ádleeh’idi shiyázh bich’i’ hane’ ádííííí’*
 Chapter House-my son-to him-news/stories-1p fut. make happen
 ‘I’m going to the Chapter House to send my son some news.’ Here she
 meant that she was going to the Chapter House with her daughter, and
 her daughter would type out an email in English for her that would then
 be sent to her son.²¹

Peterson (1998, 1997) and Klain and Peterson (2000) explored the role of Navajo radio broadcasters in creating new terms. In a story related elsewhere, former KTNN news anchor Bennie Klain related his frustration to Peterson when confronted with translating the concept of the Internet in 1998, which meant explaining the concept of inter-networked computers to listeners:

- (13) I thought, God, how do you explain this? And then I took a step back and looked at it and said well, the Internet is a computer hooked up to a phone line and you communicate through that phone line. In Navajo *béésh lichíí béésh bee halne’i bá ánt’i’go bidiit’i’ígíí* [‘red metal-telephone-the one-it is attached with a line-the one’]. That’s saying ‘a computer that is hooked up to a telephone line’

In the above example, *béésh lichíí* ‘metal-red,’ often glossed as ‘copper’ or ‘machine,’ was the term used for computer. This was, however, a relatively early term encountered in 1998, before Internet connections, and often personal computers, were available in most homes, Chapter houses, or schools on the Navajo Nation.²² “It’s not descriptive enough,” said another bilingual consultant and former bilingual KTNN announcer in his 40s, in a relatively rare critique of another announcer’s coinage. “Lots of machines have copper wire in them.” As the example of “computer” illustrates, coined terms can vary widely, often depending upon how the speaker conceptualizes the purpose, function, or appearance of the object itself, in this case, of both computers and the Internet. It should also be noted that this “neologism” was also meant, as with many terms coined by radio announcers, to describe and explain in detail an idea or item some listeners may have never encountered.

Before leaving the topic of semantic shift, it is important to note that there have also been other kinds of shifts. While *béésh* provides a good example of the way that Navajos have expanded the semantic meaning of a term, we also need to be aware of narrowing as well. Even, we might add, as an overt form is maintained (Field 2009; see also Kroskrity 1998b). Werner, Manning and Begishe (1983: 585) note that following the influence of English, *tsídii* was becoming generalized as the generic for *all* ‘birds’ by younger Navajo speakers in the 1970s and 1980s, when it seems to have had a more specific sense of ‘small birds’ for older speakers. This is a subtle way that English has influenced Navajo semantics. The Navajo lexical item maintains its onomatopoeic

²¹ Similar constructions can be found in Young and Morgan (1951) for the sending of telegraphs. 1p=first person, fut.=future.

²² Peterson did not encounter this term for ‘computer’ after 2003. Early in his research he had only encountered a few terms for the Internet, they all relate to one of these forms for computers, with the idea of being “hooked up” or linked.

overt form - recognizable by Navajos that Webster has spoken with about *tsídii* - but has shifted its semantics to be in more alignment with English semantics.

5. “Mental television”

The late comedian Vincent Craig (Apache/Navajo) would often refer to the Navajo language as “mental television” in his live performances, and as mentioned above, description is a recurring trope for Navajo and an important one for translation. Facility in description is also considered indexical of a good speaker and of finesse in the language, and is an important element in the creation of new terminologies. As an example, the first time Peterson encountered a translation for “cell phone” was in 2000, in an advertisement on KTNN for Cellular One. Prior to that time, none of his extended networks on the Reservation, or at least those with Navajo speakers, had access to a cell phone. Cellular One, a local service provider, was often linked with the federally subsidized phone service on the Reservation and had started promoting the initiative. The announcer who recorded the ad translated cell phone as *béésh bee halne’i*, one of the terms often used for traditional telephones, the other being *béésh bee hane’i*. Peterson asked a radio announcer who happened to be with him at the time about this translation, wondering why the same term for phones and cell phones was being used.

“Won’t grandma get confused?” Peterson asked, referring to older, monolingual speakers more generally.

“It’s just a phone. That’s all she wants to know.” The response was terse. There are many speakers who have used and continue to use the term *béésh bee halne’i* ‘phone’ to reference a cellular phone. However, some speakers contend that iterations like the one above are imprecise, especially from radio announcers, and indicate a certain “laziness,” which in this case being that the distinction was not made between a landline, with its limitations on mobility, and a cell phone. When pressed on the issue for a more accurate description of a cell phone, the following was offered up

- (14) *béésh bee hane’i bibéésh áłts’ozí adiní*
 machine by-means-of-it one-tells its-metal thin-rope none
 “cordless phone”

However, in a situation that could only have been complicated by an outside researcher, the response brought forth the idea that there are phones not bounded by cords that are not necessarily cell phones. Other speakers who were present, and the majority of consultants subsequently asked, believed that lexical distinction in this case was a non-issue as cell phones are the first phones many people have had regular access to; the function for them is that of a “phone,” so it is nothing special and precision is not required. As Peterson’s friend put it to him at the time, “Who cares how it [the phone] works, as long as it works? You’re getting too specific.” This comment is perhaps ironic in the face of the common language ideology of Navajo necessarily being highly “descriptive,” yet it is exemplary of the fact that description itself is relative, and culturally and socioeconomically constructed. Indeed, it should be noted that many Navajo poets that Webster (2009a; see also Mitchell and Webster 2011) has worked with have praised Navajo for its “ambiguity,” that proper use of the language does not

force an interpretation onto the listener. Listeners are given the opportunity to draw their own connections and a singularity of reference is not always the goal (Webster 2010a).

In a story Peterson has related elsewhere, former KTNN news anchor Bennie Klain gave the following example from an interview with a Navajo-speaking woman who was the head of the Native American Bureau of the International Chiefs of Police Association. The interview was to be aired on various public service and news programs and the interview was conducted twice, once in Navajo and again in English. The subject matter pertained to the use of marijuana and other drugs on the Navajo Nation. As Klain explained,

- (15) And I mentioned cocaine specifically. And the way you say drugs in Navajo is *azéé tsi'na'iiláhi* ['medicine head-it spins-it']. It puts it on the same level as medicine you get from the hospital, *azéé* , 'medication [medicine]': 'Medication that makes your mind go crazy, or makes you do crazy things.' And that was the term I used, I said a drug or medication that makes you do crazy things that looks like flour, it's a fine powder like flour. That just blew her away. I said
azéé tsi'na'iiláhi ak'áán nahalinígíí.
 [medicine head-it spins-it flour looks-like-the-one]
 "cocaine"

Although the woman interviewed spoke Navajo and worked on a daily basis with terms like drugs and cocaine, "she had never been put in a position to have to translate 'cocaine' before. I think it blew her mind because for one thing...She knew the term was about drugs but it took it to another level where it was made more clear to the listener who only spoke Navajo who wouldn't know what cocaine was to begin with." In a related example, a *Navajo Times* story in 2007 discussed a Navajo Nation Division of Health methamphetamine educator who came up with the term *áltah náázh béézh* ('you boil it and cook it') for crystal methamphetamine, which is quite similar in appearance and effect to cocaine. While her coinage is also descriptive, unlike the other example it refers to boiling, its process of manufacture.²³ Although she had consulted the Navajo Medicine Man's Association, the form was contested nonetheless (or misrecognized) as being too close to a ceremonial language term for the making and boiling of traditional medicines for some speakers (Yurth 2007).

6. Contexts for speech play and mischievous grammars

Whether or not any of the aforementioned terms will become widely accepted or transformed remains to be seen. Like the interlingual puns described by Webster (2010a), many neologisms are fleeting. There is often a process of negotiation and reformulation, both conscious and unconscious, as well as changes over time. Yet new constructions can also occur spontaneously in humor, in discussions, and in mundane

²³ We suggest that the proliferation of 'meth labs' on the Navajo Nation has made its method of manufacture a more salient descriptor in many cases than its appearance or effects. Neundorf (2006: 313) provides two additional forms for methamphetamine that both seem to stress its crystalline character (*niłts'íí* 'crystalline').

conversations exhibited by the first example of “surfing” the Internet. They are also a form of speech play, which Sherzer (2002: 1) describes as “the manipulation of the elements of language” against a range of grammatical and cultural possibilities that are “simultaneously humorous, serious, and aesthetically pleasing.” Description is a ripe area for speech play, and it is in speech play that we can clearly see the creation of common sociality, subversive forms, and the linguistic ideologies that inform such uses. For example, one day in the summer of 2004 Peterson was up on the mountain at a friend’s mother’s house. She and her husband had recently acquired one of the federally subsidized cell phones. The phone, however, as is often the case, was actually useless at their homesite - Peterson’s own experience in the area suggested there was no signal for many miles around. Peterson’s friend’s mother was present, and she, her mother, and Peterson were sitting around outside of the house, swatting flies and waiting for the hot summer day to cool off. Peterson asked Carol how they were able to use their new phone. She responded, “*Bil hajigháhi*” ‘with it-elevated place-they walk up.’ Everyone except for Peterson started laughing. “That’s what they call it,” Carol said. “They go up the mountain over there if they really have to make a call. It’s a lot shorter than going into town.”

“*Aoo*’ (‘yes’),” replied her mom, a monolingual speaker, in agreement. “*Bil hajigháhi*.” She continued to smile, put her hand to her ear as if she were talking on a phone. She was conspicuously eying Peterson for a reaction. While we have heard such terms before, for Peterson this was the point where he really began to recognize what they meant. “If they’re really in a hurry,” Carol continued in prosody designed for comedic effect, “then it’s *bil hajiwóhi*’i (‘with it they run up an elevated place’).”²⁴

Both women let out a huge laugh. Peterson ran to his truck to get a pen to document this fleeting interaction. These creative terms for cell phones highlight the practice of having to search for a cell phone signal on the Reservation, a new form of local geographic knowledge. Many people, even in the less-interconnected areas of the Reservation, are able to find a cell signal, and have detailed knowledge about where to go to get a signal. Other behaviors related to cell phone use also become the foundation for speech play, as when another bilingual consultant in her 40s was describing cell phone users to me. “You know how people go when they can’t get a signal, or they’re just talking to the air and spinning around, that’s *bil níjoo balí* (‘with it you go in a circular motion’).” This term for cell phones highlights the practice of a user positioning oneself to get a good signal, moving one’s head around and spinning around, and, it would resurface often. For example, in the summer of 2005, Peterson was helping another family dig holes for two new outhouses. He and they were joking about the women’s progress in digging the hole vs. the men’s (Peterson was with the women, who it was thought, were doing much better than the men). One of the women present pulled out her cellphone - despite the lack of a signal in the area - and began a linguistic performance.

“*Hanáá balí*,” she said (‘it’s whirling around you’). She began to spin her hand around her waist, as this term highlights the practice of putting the phone on a belt clip. Everyone laughed. “*Bil níjoo balí*,” she continued, mirroring the same example presented above, indexing the “spinning” involved when trying to strengthen the signal.

²⁴Peterson first encountered this term from Don Mose and Ellavina Perkins at the Navajo Language Academy in July 2003 as they were going over his notes about other translations.

Again, everyone laughed. “That’s just crazy,” said one person present. Again, Peterson ran to his truck to get a pen to document a fleeting interaction. Interestingly, unlike the examples above, there is not much about “talking” or “telling” in these humorous descriptions, nor is there a reliance on the lexeme *béesh* ‘metal, apparatus.’ What these examples illustrate is movement - humorous descriptions of people’s behavior with cell phones. In a related example, a consultant, a bilingual man in his 40s known to be a talented joker, recounted that “the internet, it’s like *jiits’íldi*, like a feed bag. You just stuff yourself.” Humor, often encountered, plays an important role in Navajoizing new concepts, and again, it reflects and recreates language ideologies and lends to the creation of a common sociality.²⁵

Take as another example, when Webster was working with Navajo consultants to translate some of the poetry of Rex Lee Jim (1995: 35), one consultant was particularly amused by Jim’s use of *hózhóónshchíín* for ‘plastic’ in a poem. Here *hózhóón* ‘beauty’ has been combined with the adjectival enclitic *-shchíín* ‘facsimile.’ As with the examples discussed above, other terms for plastic also circulate. Both Young and Morgan (1987: 423) and Neundorf (1983: 623) give a Navajo form for ‘plastic’ as *tó doo bidéelníni* ‘that which is impervious to water.’ Some of what Webster’s consultant found so amusing about Jim’s use of *hózhóónshchíín* was that it evoked a whole host of other terms that use the adjectival enclitic *-shchíín* (e.g., *awéeshchíín* ‘doll, facsimile of a baby’) and that it appeared to be a bit of social commentary about Anglos who create ‘facsimiles of beauty.’ Webster’s consultant had just heard a report about the making of plasma televisions releasing a little known, but potentially dangerous chemical into the environment. ‘Plastic,’ like the plasma televisions, was an example of, as he said, “fake beauty.” That *hózhóónshchíín* as ‘plastic’ challenged the Anglo dominant status quo, revealing that ‘plastic’ was not real beauty, was particularly satisfying for him.²⁶

Another noteworthy observation revealed through cell phones and speech play was that of socioeconomic disparities. The first term Peterson encountered outside of broadcasting that was specific to cell phones was given to him by a friend, who was excitedly talking to him about her new *ná áá’ jáah* [*na’ajaah*] phone ‘commodity phone,’ the federally subsidized cell phones for Reservation residents. She explained to Peterson “it’s like the cheese, you know, when you go to the Chapter house every month to get your free government food. *Áá jáah* [*ada’ajaah*], they just parcel it out to you, piece by piece.” This term can also be heard often in English dominant interactions, as in “Where’s my *ná áá’ jáah* phone!?” Indeed, *-jaah* in this usage is a handling or motion stem for multiple small objects (Young, Morgan, and Midgett 1992: 255-261), which in this context indexes the practice of government officials handing out small bits of commodity food to needy recipients, a usage not found in

²⁵ While we have by no means encountered or documented all of the possibilities, further examples of coined words and concepts related to the Internet and web browsing that Peterson has encountered include *saad ahindateetígíí* [words interrelated/linked] ‘hypertext’; *bits’ánítí’i* ‘link’; *yáagó híl* [it goes downward/downhill motion] ‘download’; and *bee ha’nitá* [by means of it one goes] ‘web browser.’

²⁶ *Hózhóónshchíín* and some of the other examples in this paper could be classified as nonce coinages. That is, they are used for a particular situational context (in this case a poem) and are not necessarily meant to be repeated. It is, however, an open question about whether or not they will “catch on” as it were. Given the figurative, descriptive and fleeting nature of some of the other examples, it might be equally useful to think of them as idiomatic coinages.

dictionaries of course. The handling stem for a cell phone or other such bounded object would normally be –‘□, indexing a single, bounded, solid object (Young, Morgan, and Midgette 1992: 11). The use of –*jaah* instead of –‘á (this is humorous in this context because - by refiguring the handling stems - it is a playful use of grammar; it is a critique of government policies of doling items out to Navajos; and it is indexical of a shared socioeconomic experience. On another occasion, Peterson was talking about cell phone terminology with a group of Navajo professionals, none of whom had ever heard the term *ná áá’ jáah* used in reference to cell phones. Most of them had purchased their own cell phones and calling plans apart from the Federal subsidy program; however, one woman did come up to Peterson later and said, “You got me under my skin. I have one of those phones. I never thought of it that way.”

The use of the handling stem –*jaah* in this context - a commentary on Federal subsidy programs and socioeconomic status - or *hózhóónshchíín* in the previous example are what Webster (2010b) has called “mischievous grammar.” They are expressively satisfying forms that subvert the status quo through speech play. Webster (2010c, 2012) has begun to describe a number of linguistic forms, processes and practices as intimate grammars (see also Suslak 2010). These are linguistic ways of doing things with languages that Navajos have felt attachments to, which are satisfying to some degree and yet are, also, potentially simultaneously marginalized ways of speaking in relation to some dominant expectations. When such intimate grammars challenge or subvert the status quo, not only are they intimate grammars, they are also, we would argue, mischievous grammars.

Contested etymologies for extant terms can also illustrate potential mischievous grammars at play. For example, Navajo contains numerous onomatopoeic verb forms, and ideophony and sound symbolic constructions can also be important aspects of speech play and performance (Webster 2009b), as well as for the creation of new terminologies. While there are many examples of this, including *gáagii* ‘crow,’ local etymologies of terms can also differ from more academic analyses of lexical borrowing or creation. Navajo singer, writer, and entertainer Blackhorse Mitchell often mentions the example of the Navajo term *chidí* ‘car’ in his public performances as being misrecognized by outsiders in its etymology; as he has noted in his setup to the routine, *chidí* has often been considered to be onomatopoeic, iconic of the unique exhaust on a Model T. In one such performance Mitchell suggested that the root of the term *chidí* derives from the same verb stem related to flatulent and air emitting from a pipe, *líd* (flatulent: *tl’íd*), thus leading to *chidí*, itself iconic but more complex than simple sound symbolism would imply.²⁷ Such alternate etymologies are not necessarily anomalous; Neundorf (1982) states unproblematically that *chidí* derived from a verb root and a nominal enclitic (without specifying which verb), while Young, Morgan, and Midgette (1992: 85) suggest it is possible that *chidí* is derived from *chid*, a verb root meaning ‘to squat,’ as in the practice of riding in the back of a pickup truck. These etymologies also suggest the ways in which agency and speech play may have been misrecognized in the

²⁷ See Webster (2009b: 137) for a discussion of *chidí* vs. the alternate form *chuggí* which has fallen out of use. We have encountered numerous examples of local etymologies vs. linguists’ etymologies, including the term “*bilagáana*” as a loan word from the Spanish *Americano* vs. a Navajo form of “the ones we kill.” It’s accuracy in relation to translation or historical linguistics aside, the phenomenon is worth mentioning as it is a great example of counterhegemonic critiques and language ideologies at play. See Samuels (2001) for a discussion of this phenomenon in Western Apache.

creation of new terms, and are illustrative of the kind of discursive awareness that speakers.

Not all coinages are related to material goods, of course. Joking and speech play can be found on a regular basis in the coining of terms for popular locations such as restaurants, stores, or gas stations, a continuity in practice among speakers naming a trading post after characteristics of its owner or unique characteristics of the location. Webster and two Navajo friends, for example, were heading into town for dinner when Webster asked where they were going to eat. The driver replied that they were going to “*tl’id* restaurant.” This bilingual name evokes a frequent side-effect of eating at that particular restaurant. Or for example, one of Peterson’s friend’s 90 year old mother would invariably declare on Saturday mornings, “*Yóó’ajigháhágóó diiyá* (‘I’m going to Wal-Mart’) literally referring to ‘the place where you get lost,’ or alternately “*Hazh diil wo’úgóó diit’ash*,” meaning “Let’s go to [either] the flea market/Wal-Mart,” (‘the place where you run around the aisles’).²⁸ Are these then the words for “Wal-Mart” in Navajo? What about the alternate form *Ha’jiil tl’iidí* ‘where you go through the racks of clothes’ (formerly K-Mart, which closed in Gallup, or now Wal-Mart)? These terms are certainly referential and highly descriptive, but they are much more than that. Like the coinages for cell phones discussed above, humorously descriptive place names are a continuous source of speech play and laughter among speakers as ways of creating common sociality by sharing experiences and perspectives.

While some lexical variations are considered geographic, like the example of various terms for soda above, our observations indicate that the many coinages for cell phones - with the exception of class-specific terms - are more ubiquitous, at least among our consultants and friends, known and utilized in geographically diverse areas both on and off of the Navajo Nation, in a wide variety of contexts, and by a cross-section of speakers. Increased interconnectedness and regular communication between disparate groups of family, friends, and co-workers may allow for the creation, retention, and spread of new terminologies in new ways, while allowing for some convergence. It is apparent, however, that speech play, description, and a resolve by some speakers and writers to say it or write it in Navajo against a background of other linguistic possibilities that include English - at least for the time being - are important considerations.

7. Conclusions

All of this might beg the question, “What is the word for computer in Navajo?” For that, we have no answer, as of course there is not but one term for computer. It also may be the wrong question to ask. With emergent terminologies as with many things Navajo,

²⁸ Other forms relating to popular destinations in Gallup, NM include *Hwe’ásdzáq bich’í’ ch’ééjí ts’ó’í* (Wal-Mart, again, but glossed as ‘you’re peeking around the aisles looking for your wife’); *ásaa’ deil’zhodí* (Furr’s Cafeteria, “Where you slide your trays”); *Awoon da jiil káa ha* (Furr’s Cafeteria, again, but “you pick up whatever you want, make your own choices”); and *nda a ká há’* (Earl’s Restaurant in Gallup, ‘where they bring around stuff,’ i.e. the ever-present jewelry vendors). We thank Ana Nalwood, Buddy Lee, Irene Silentman, Ellavina Perkins, Rosann Willink, and Don Mose for bringing many of these forms - and their importance - to our attention.

variation, creativity, and fleetingness tend to be the norm, and speakers often enjoy hearing others' creations, whether intended as serious or humorous and whether they have "staying power" or not. We would also suggest the need to question whether or not the concepts of "neologisms" or "terminology development" fully encapsulate the range of practices described herein which are clearly social phenomena rather than just referential tools. Yet the continued occurrence of new terms and formulations are salient and significant practices, especially as they often occur in English dominant conversations, heteroglossic utterances, or emergent forms such as Navlish. They also provide contexts for continued engagement with novel forms through language socialization and sharing; and are a space for agency and the recreation of shared sociality.

They also counter the expectations of linguistic failure or loss and the inability of Navajo or other Native peoples to maintain heritage languages that often frame discussions of indigenous language communities (Webster and Peterson 2011). As we (Webster and Peterson 2011: 8) note elsewhere, "Not only do the expectations about Native peoples imagine them as technologically incompetent, but also such racist expectations imagine Native people as "linguistically incompetent," or unable to maintain heritage languages, speak multiple languages, or speak correctly in colonial languages." Woodbury (1998) suggested that it is divergence, not convergence, which indexes vitality in endangered language contexts, Ken Hale noted that "[i]n fact, a living tradition implies change" (Hale 1998: 212). English, for example, has been a resource for Navajo linguistic creativity (see Webster 2009a, 2010a). Indeed the practices we have described are Navajoized responses to material, socioeconomic, or cultural transformations. They should not be seen as indexical of linguistic "acculturation" or the unfortunate trope of "adaptable" Navajo; rather, they are iconic representations of ideologies, creativity, and agency at play. The example of the two young men surfing the Internet illustrates how "new" Navajo terms can emerge in heteroglossic conversations, a significant finding as new constructions are not limited to any one code or way of speaking among community members. This kind of awareness with especially nouns illustrates the "potential for certain structures of language to become objects of awareness which can be made subject to speakers' ideological treatment" (Kroskrity 2004: 506).

Neundorf (1982: 271-2) also suggested that speakers "are all responsible for collecting, creating, and spreading new terminology." The range of coinages, from nonce coinages to idiomatic coinages, created by Navajo speakers has not always been documented, and indeed, it would be virtually impossible to document in one place all potential and actualized terms, phrases, and shifts. It is apparent, however, that new forms are indeed spread, taught, and enjoyed in a variety of contexts and in a variety of ways, including iPod recordings, social networking websites such as Facebook, and face-to-face interactions. What is important is to understand how these processes work in contexts of language shift and increased interconnectedness, and to ensure that speakers and writers of Navajo feel free to create, play, and share at will. In conclusion, we turn again to Reichard (1945: 168) and her astute observation that Navajo speakers creating new terms "may look forward to unlimited enrichment which, though the despair of the learner, is a perpetual satisfaction to the users who appreciate its genius."

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