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Special Language in Shoshoni Poetry Songs

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SPECIAL LANGUAGE IN SHOSHONI POETRY SONGS¹

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The language in Shoshoni poetry songs, called *newe hupia*, may differ substantially from ordinary speech in many ways, phonologically, morphologically, syntactically, semantically and pragmatically.

One minor but pervasive example is the diminutive-affectionate suffix *-ttsi*, often used on nouns and adjectives, which is almost always changed to *-ntsi* in poetry songs. It commonly indicates special emphasis denoting endearment, high esteem, reverence, affection, and warm feelings, as well as the notion of smallness. In both poetry songs and ordinary speech, Shoshonis often add the suffix to nouns to express their warm feelings for things in nature like *kamme(ttsi)*, 'jackrabbit', *yehne(ttsi)* 'porcupine', *yaha(ttsi)* 'ground hog', and *kwi'naa(ttsi)* 'bird', and for domestic animals like *satee(ttsi)* 'dog' and *punku(ttsi)* 'horse', but the use of *-ntsi* is much more common in songs than in ordinary speech.²

Poetry songs are also distinguished by the use of many obscure or obsolete words that are not used in ordinary speech and which many people do not know or understand, although some of the unique poetry song words may be understood in the context of the songs. However, sometimes even the singer doesn't know their meaning. Some examples of obscure words are given in (1).

(1) obscure song word		cp. ordinary word
<i>paipaateeyonneh</i>	'killdeer'	<i>pantei</i>
<i>pimmaa</i>	'bovine'	< ? Comanche <i>pimmorua</i> 'calf'
<i>pui'awatsi</i>	'spy (on)'	<i>watsippuih</i>
<i>totowaantsi</i>	'stand (pl)'	<i>topo'ihka</i>
<i>waantsi</i>	'wander'	<i>nemi</i> or <i>yeme</i> "
<i>yewampontsi</i>	'track'	<i>nampuih</i> or <i>nayaa</i>
<i>wahniki(n)</i>	'winnow'	<i>wettantani</i>
<i>wooyompa</i>	'splash' or 'worm'	<i>pakwittsu'ih</i> <i>wo'api(n)</i>

Other words like *hainna*, *hainneh*, *haainna*, *hainah*, *hainai*, *nai*, *yanna*, *ho*, and *noowaineh* are song words without meaning used to fill in and complement the rhythm and cadence, although some are also used somewhat like mantras to bless or make sacred the situation in which they are sung. And finally, sometimes *haiya wainna* and also less commonly *yaaya wainna* are used by singers at the end of songs to bless them, making them sacred.

¹ The data presented in this article are from Crum, Crum, and Dayley 2001.

² For the orthography used to write Shoshoni in this article, see Crum and Miller 1987 or Crum and Dayley 1993. The only unusual symbols are e for barred [i] and ai for [e] which often varies with [ai].

In addition, many ordinary words used in poetry songs undergo various degrees of change in pronunciation. The most typical changes are illustrated below. One common change is that nasals pop into ordinary words, especially replacing the first consonant of an identical consonant cluster (as is the case with diminutive *-ttsi* changing to *-ntsi*). For example:

(2)	song word		ordinary word	
	<i>huintsantsi</i>	<	<i>huittsaa(ttsi)</i>	'sage hen'
	<i>huumpi</i>	<	<i>huuppi(n)</i>	'stick, wood, tree'
	<i>huuntukkantu</i>	<	<i>huuttukkan tuu</i>	'under & through sticks'
	<i>nointsai</i>	<	<i>noitsai</i>	'sticky'
	<i>patsiwankatete(n)</i>	<	<i>pasiwakkatete(n)</i>	'sand dune'
	<i>pintsi</i>	<	<i>pitsih</i>	'suck'
	<i>tuantsi</i>	<	<i>tuattsai</i>	'baby, child, young'
	<i>tuumpantsuku</i>	<	<i>tuuppatsuku</i>	'mink'
	<i>waanka(n)</i>	<	<i>waakka(n)</i>	'at the junipers'
	<i>waimpentsi</i>	<	<i>wa'ippe(ttsi)</i>	'woman'
	<i>wenkatompi</i>	<	<i>wekkatookka</i>	'spread out'
	<i>winkum</i>	<	<i>wikkahku</i>	'break away'
	<i>yaanka</i>	<	<i>yaakka(n)</i>	'hold'

Often geminate or double consonants between vowels become single, and therefore voiced. For example:

(3)	<i>kwipipi</i>	<	<i>kwippikke(n)</i>	'shake, shiver'
	<i>potoo(n)</i>	<	<i>potto(n)</i>	'grinding stone'
	<i>tepana</i>	<	<i>teppanna</i>	'on the side of'
	<i>waaka(n)</i>	<	<i>waakka(n)</i>	'at the junipers'

Ss between vowels often become *ts*, phonetically [z]. For example:

(4)	<i>patsiwankatete(n)</i>	<	<i>pasiwakkatete(n)</i>	'sand dune'
	<i>totsa"</i>	<	<i>tosa"</i>	'white'
	<i>watsempi(n)</i>	<	<i>waseppi(n)</i>	'mountain sheep'

Glottal stops almost always disappear. For example:

(5)	<i>aiwan</i>	<	<i>aiwa'ih</i>	'like this'
	<i>waimpentsi</i>	<	<i>wa'ippe(ttsi)</i>	'woman'
	<i>paan</i>	<	<i>pa'an</i>	'above, over'
	<i>patui</i>	<	<i>pato'ih</i>	'wade'
	<i>pomia</i>	<	<i>pomi'ah</i>	'migrate'
	<i>toi</i>	<	<i>to'ih</i>	'emerge, go/come out/up'
	<i>yewannan</i>	<	<i>yu'aih</i>	'be warm'

Short vowels become long, even extra long, in syllables where the note is held. For example:

(6)	<i>opii</i>	<	<i>opi</i>	'there about'
	<i>paampintsi</i>	<	<i>pampi(ttsi)</i>	'head'
	<i>patakwiintsi</i>	<	<i>patekwittsi</i>	'tender young plants'
	<i>potoo(n)</i>	<	<i>potto(n)</i>	'grinding stone'
	<i>yotii(i)</i>	<	<i>yoti"</i>	'fly, arise (pl)'

Vowel clusters are often broken with intervening semivowels. For example:

(7)	<i>wiya</i>	<	<i>wia</i>	'mountain pass'
	<i>mukuwa</i>	<	<i>mukua</i>	'soul'

Sometimes words are shortened or attenuated in one way or another. For example:

(8)	<i>haai</i>	<	<i>hinna</i>	'something (obj)'
	<i>ta or tai</i>	<	<i>tamme(n)</i>	'we, our (incl)'
	<i>tuun</i>	<	<i>tenaa</i>	'down'

A few words are obviously changed to make them rhyme with other words in the same verse. For example:

(9)	<i>annitan</i>	<	<i>a'ni(n)</i>	'black ant'
	to rhyme with <i>hunnitan</i> 'red ant'			
	<i>nani</i>	<	<i>nanah</i>	'just, only'
	to rhyme with <i>naniyuu</i> 'be at peace with oneself'			

And many other words undergo seemingly patternless changes of one form or another. For example:

(10)	<i>aan kuantsi</i>	<	<i>aan kuhattsi</i>	'buck'
	<i>mononoo</i>	<	<i>monooh(kan)</i>	'hold in the mouth'
	<i>pintsi</i>	<	<i>pinnah</i>	'but'
	<i>pipuntu</i>	<	<i>pimpippu</i>	'go back'
	<i>puipaawoo</i>	<	<i>puiwoo</i>	'little green fish'
	<i>weyuu</i>	<	<i>weyaah</i>	'take'
	<i>yepatu</i>	<	<i>yepani</i>	'autumn, fall'
	<i>yoo</i>	<	<i>yuu(n)</i>	'soft, gentle'
	<i>yunka</i>	<	<i>yunah</i>	'take'
	<i>yuwaa</i>	<	<i>yewe"</i>	'swallow'

All of the changes in pronunciation apparently are used to make the song words more melodious and rhythmical. Leanne Hinton (1984:56) has called similar though by no means identical processes found in Havasupai songs "maximization of resonance". In Havasupai, maximization of resonance involves softening of consonants and a predominance of vowels, nasals and semivowels, not unlike what we have seen here in Shoshoni.

Some poetry songs can have completely different interpretations by native speakers. One example is the song entitled *Oyon Temp'i* 'Every Rock' presented at the end of this article. Its two different interpretations are possible because the song contains words that are not used in ordinary language but are similar to different everyday words with completely different meanings. As is the case in all languages, speakers carry a mental dictionary in their heads, but when they hear words of their own language that they don't know, they automatically attempt to decode them in the best way they can, given the context. However, this process doesn't always result in the same outcome.

The first interpretation makes reference to skipping stones, especially small flat cobblestones *patsittemp'i*, around in the water. In both interpretations *awān* is the song form of *awā'ih* 'like this'. In the first version, *toi* is the song form of *tawiih* 'throw'. *Patemmam pii* is a song phrase wherein *patemmam* is the song form of ordinary *pakateten* 'body of water, pool', and *pii* is the song form of the postposition *pai* 'around (in an undefined area)'. *Wooyompa* means 'splash' and is a song word but not related to any ordinary word. The normal word for 'splash' is *pakwittsu'ih*.

The second interpretation of the song is about turning rocks over in the water and watching white water worms come out from underneath the rocks. *Toi* is the song form of *to'ih* 'emerge, come up/out'. *Patemmampii* is a song word meaning 'water-rock creature' (< *pa-* 'water', *ten-* 'rock' plus *mampii* 'creature' not an ordinary word). *Wooyompa* is the song word in this interpretation for 'worm', and perhaps related to ordinary *wo'api(n)* 'worm, maggot'.

The two interpretations of the song are both compatible and possible because the song has words that are not used in ordinary language, but some are somewhat similar to different ordinary words, and therefore interpretable in different ways. And the song has two words that don't occur at all in ordinary language (i.e., *patemmampii* and *wooyompa*) and thus are open to interpretation.

Grammatically the songs often differ substantially in a number of ways from ordinary language. For one thing, they are usually attenuated in various ways making them more like telegraphese, with content words or morphemes predominating and with few or no function words and morphemes. For example, case suffixes on nouns and adjectives are often not marked and determiners such as demonstratives (of which Shoshoni has a rich array) are almost never used,³ and verbs usually have no or very few tense, aspect, and adverbial suffixes. And word order is often different from normal Subject-Object-Verb. For example, Object-Subject-Verb order may occur as in (11).⁴

³ What may seem as a striking contrast between Havasupai and Shoshoni songs is that in Havasupai demonstratives are all pervasive, as Hinton (1984:68) states, "The most pervasive lexical items in Havasupai songs are the demonstrative pronouns and demonstrative affixes." However, what I believe is important in both languages is the lack of use of full noun phrases in songs. In Havasupai apparently one cannot have "understood" noun phrases without any overt manifestation, so demonstratives are used to shorten or limit noun phrases by using demonstratives as pronouns. In Shoshoni it is possible in both ordinary and song language to have noun phrases not manifested at all but only understood. Apparently in Shoshoni songs, the preferred form is to have as many

- (11) *Sai paa weyaa.*
 boat water carry
 'Water is carrying the boat.'

OSV is not unheard of in Shoshoni but is rare and would normally require a case suffix on *sai*, and both nouns would usually take demonstratives also marking case, and the verb would take tense-aspect suffixes. A normal sentence meaning the same thing would be something like (12).

- (12) *Sute paa sukka sai'a weyaahpenni.*
 that water that-O boat-O carry-progressive
 'The water is carrying the boat.'

More commonly in songs, the subject is not mentioned at all but is either understood or left for listeners to interpret for themselves as in (13) and (14), and also (15) and (16).

- (13) *Pia kuitsunna yewapontsi.*
 big buffalo-O track
 'He [some hunter] was tracking big buffalo.'

- (14) *Upii katete hunum ma*
 there out of sight sit canyon in

tepui yantum ma.
 pine nuts-O winnowing basket with
 'There she sits in a canyon winnowing pine nuts.'

Sometimes there is no subject and no object at all as in (15), which immediately follows (13) in the 'Song of the Big Buffalo'. In normal speech, the use of a transitive verb without any object would be ungrammatical.

- (15) *Pui'awatsi yuukite.*
 spy moving away
 'He [big buffalo] spied him [the hunter], and he [the buffalo] moved away.'

Verb-plus-Object constructions also occur in songs, but as far as I know, never occur in ordinary speech. For example, sentence (16) has two instances of VO order with only the second direct object taking an objective case suffix.

unmanifested noun phrases as possible, as examples below indicate.

⁴ For discussions of Shoshoni grammar, see Crum and Dayley 1993 and Miller 1996.

- (16) *Yuwaa* *tuankam* *patewantsii* *yaanka* *yunkatu*
 swallow taste large grass seed hold take

patewantsiia.

large grass seed-O

'Taking seeds, holding them, tasting and swallowing large grass seeds.'

In some cases, normal noun phrase-plus-postposition constructions become simply postpositions as in (17).

- (17) *Paa* *tottsapikka* *tukkan* *naitu* *winkum*
 water make crashing sound down [here] from [mountain] break away

mantu.

toward [us]

'Water crashing breaks away downward from [the mountain] toward [us].'

And sometimes the postpositions are omitted altogether as in (18). In ordinary speech postpositions would have to occur where the x's are indicated in (18).

- (18) *Nean* *temap̄a* *tetsimmuuka [x]* *paa* *yamani,* *huumpi [x].*
 my having made sharp point water cross over wood
 'What I have made with a sharp point from wood crosses the water.'

I should note that the language in *puha hupia* 'power songs' (also called *nanisuntehai hupia* 'prayer songs' or *nattahsu'u hupia* 'medicine songs') is much more like ordinary language, if not identical with it, than the language in round dance, bear dance, *natayaa* and other songs from which I have been illustrating here. I should also mention that Hinton's (1984) study is the only other one that I know of that has documented substantial changes in song language from ordinary language. I would hope that students of other American Indian languages would take notice if song language is substantially different from ordinary language.

Oyon Tempi 'Every Rock'
Earl Crum

1st Interpretation

Oyon tempi @wan tempi
every rock this-like rock

Patemmam pii toi.
pool of water around throw

Oyon tempi patemmam pii toi
every rock pool of water around throw

Oyon tempi @wan tempi
every rock this-like rock

Patemmam pii toi.
pool of water around throw

Oyon tempi patemmam pii toi
every rock pool of water around throw

Totsappaa wooyompa
white-water splash

Patemmam pii.
pool of water around

Totsappaa wooyompa
white-water splash

Patemmam pii.
pool of water around

Oyon tempi @wan tempi
every rock this-like rock

Patemmam pii toi.
pool of water around throw

Oyon tempi patemmam pii toi
every rock pool of water around throw

Totsappaa *wooyompa*
white-water splash

Patemmam *pii*
pool of water around

Totsappaa *wooyompa*
white-water splash

Patemmam *pii.*
pool of water around

1st Interpretation

Every rock, rocks like this,
Throw around in the pool.
Throw every rock around in the water.
Every rock, rocks like this,
Throw around in the pool.

Throw every rock around in the pool.
They splash around
In the white water,
They splash around
In the white water.

Every rock, rocks like this,
Throw around in the pool.
Throw every rock around in the water.
They splash around
In the white water,
They splash around
In the white water.

2nd Interpretation

Oyon tempi aiwan *tempi*
every rock this-like rock

Patemmampii *toi.*
water-rock-creature emerge

Oyon tempi patemmampii *toi*
every rock water-rock-creature emerge

Oyon tempi aiwan tempi
every rock this-like rock

Patemmampii toi.
water-rock-creature emerge

Oyon tempi patemmampii toi
every rock water-rock-creature emerge

Totsappaa wooyompa
white-water worm

Patemmampii
water-rock-creature

Totsappaa wooyompa
white-water worm

Patemmampii.
water-rock-creature

Oyon tempi aiwan tempi
every rock this-like rock

Patemmampii toi.
water-rock-creature emerge

Oyon tempi patemmampii toi
every rock water-rock-creature emerge

Totsappaa wooyompa
white-water worm

Patemmampii
water-rock-creature

Totsappaa wooyompa
white-water worm

Patemmampii.
water-rock-creature

2nd Interpretation

From under every rock, rocks like this,
Water-rock creatures emerge.
From under every rock, water-rock creatures emerge.
From under every rock, rocks like this,
Water-rock creatures emerge.

From under every rock, water-rock creatures emerge,
White water worms,
Water-rock creatures,
White water worms,
Water-rock creatures.

From under every rock, rocks like this,
Water rock creatures emerge.
From under every rock, water-rock creatures emerge.
White water worms,
Water-rock creatures,
White water worms,
Water-rock creatures.

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REPORT 12

SURVEY OF CALIFORNIA AND
OTHER INDIAN LANGUAGES



PROCEEDINGS OF THE
50TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE

June 8-9, 2002
University of California at Berkeley

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