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**TECHNOLOGY, IDEOLOGY, AND EMERGENT COMMUNICATIVE
PRACTICES AMONG THE NAVAJO**

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**TECHNOLOGY, IDEOLOGY, AND EMERGENT COMMUNICATIVE
PRACTICES AMONG THE NAVAJO**

by

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**TECHNOLOGY, IDEOLOGY, AND EMERGENT COMMUNICATIVE
PRACTICES AMONG THE NAVAJO**

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This dissertation examines emerging cultural attitudes, language ideologies, and discursive practices among Navajos and Navajo speakers through the lens of new media technologies on the Navajo Nation. New media such as cell phones and the Internet are significant features of contemporary Navajo communities, and act as both a context for and medium of linguistic and cultural vitality and transformation. They have opened new

spaces for Navajo language use, generated emergent uses of the Navajo language, and increased the spaces of language contact and change. This dissertation explores the ways in which ideologies of language and technology have shifted and converged, and describes multiple instances of the transformative nature of technology through the mediation of communities. New technologies do not exist in a vacuum, and novel practices emerge from a wide range of existing observable styles, registers, and norms in Navajo communities.

Significant are the shifting geographies of communication, expansion of social networks, and increased circulation of bilingual Navajo *hane'*, or publicly shared “tellings” in the form of stories, jokes, and information that accompany them. This work analyzes the appearance of new media technologies in contemporary Navajo society within broader discourses of modernity and narratives of progress about, and among, Navajo communities. New technology is not incommensurate with existing practice; rather, emergent practices are part of the broader circulation of Navajo identities, defined here as a process linked to social activities, and emergent practices index the ways in which some Navajos are “doing” community in unexpected ways and unexpected places. New expressive forms and genres have appeared, including a migration to English emails by previously monolingual, illiterate elders, the transition of traditionally oral genres to widely circulated emails, and the appearance of locally created bilingual hip-hop music. These are crucial developments that have immediate implications for Navajo language vitality and cultural continuity.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This dissertation examines emergent communicative practices among some Navajos and Navajo speakers through the lens of new media technologies.¹ New media such as cell phones and the Internet are significant features of contemporary Navajo communities, and act as both a context for and medium of linguistic and cultural vitality and transformation. They have opened new spaces for Navajo language use, generated novel uses of the Navajo language, and increased the spaces of language contact and change. This work explores the ways in which ideologies of language, technology, and identity have shifted and converged, and describes multiple instances of the transformative nature of technology through communicative practices.

In its broadest sense, technology is anything material that humans make, or more broadly, anything that humans do. Technology is inextricably linked to discourses and processes of progress and change, of complexity, and of innovation and the future. If technology is viewed as the path to progress, then introducing new technologies into marginalized societies is their road to modernization. Such ideologies of the processually transformative nature of technology influence everything from research to representations. Technology as a reified entity possesses a great deal of symbolic power

¹ I use the terms ‘Navajo’ and ‘Diné’ interchangeably in this dissertation when referring in English to the people who identify themselves in English as either being Diné, Naabeehó, or Navajo. In Navajo, members of this group refer to themselves as being either *Diné* or *Naabeehó Diné*, but more often than not they identify first by clans. By using both ‘Navajo’ and ‘Diné’ I am following conventions of use observable in day-to-day interactions within Navajo communities.

in an increasingly interconnected world, and the introduction of new technologies into marginalized communities is often viewed as the catalyst for utopic futures or the destruction of tradition and authenticity.

Technology and media cannot be viewed in isolation from other sociocultural processes, and they are inextricably linked not only to discourses of progress and modernization, but discourses in the form of utterances, narratives, and a variety of written and oral genres as well. Discourses inform ideologies of language, of technology, and of identity; they are viewed here as legitimizing historical narratives (Foucault 1988, 1990), the “instances from which shared meanings are culled” (Urban 1991), and the specific, historically-constituted, individual and collective creative practices through which many aspects of sociolinguistic and sociocultural life can be garnered (Sherzer 1987). Discourses in a variety of forms have direct implications for the perpetuation of community, cultural continuity, and novel genres and forms of language use.

Ideologies, including language ideologies, are construed here as sets of attitudes or beliefs (Silverstein 1979), especially those that can be talked about and shared (Woolard 1998). Thus, with language, ideologies are both metadiscursive, i.e. talk about talk, as well as those beliefs that could be talked about but may not always be. Ideologies of technology, identity, and language converge in unique ways in everyday practices (de Certeau 1984) observable in Navajo communities, resulting in what I call here emergent or novel communicative practices (Hanks 1996; Hutchins 1995). These practices, discourses, and ideologies have direct implications for the mediation of community, the focus of this study, and they directly relate to language, community, and cultural

continuity—issues of great importance to many Native American communities (Strong 2004, 2005).

The overarching focus of this study is the mediation of community, and more specifically, the ways in which Navajo communities are perpetuated and mediated in a variety of contexts, across boundaries of geography and language, and through communicative practices. While community has been viewed as a sense of belonging (Weber, et al. 2002), or as existing across space and time in the imagination and tied to national languages (Anderson 1983), I view community as the *activity* of belonging reflected in those instances in which discourses are shared, and the processes and ideologies involved in the circulation and mediation of discourses (Samuels 2004; Spitulnik 1997). Specifically, I look at the ways in which genres of *hane'*, a concept in Navajo which is coming to embrace publicly shared “tellings” of various forms in a variety of mediums including jokes, stories, and information, form the basis for imagining and perpetuating community and language through shared discourses. These jokes and stories—and their mediation through new and extant media—are some of the ways in which some Navajos are “doing” community (Beier 2001), sharing stories about shared experiences, and engaging discourses on a broader level. The idea of “doing community,” of looking at community as an activity or process rather than an essentialized, imagined entity, provides the link between what has been called “the social circulation of media discourse” and the mediation of community (Spitulnik 1997).

Discourses of identity, technology, and progress often intersect in interesting, complex, and very unexpected ways; however, if new technologies are indeed

transformative, it is only because of social actors. I seek to understand the direct relationships between offline and online communities and interactions—the mediated and the “real world”—especially as they relate to broader discourses of the traditional and the modern, of Navajo and other. Thus, this dissertation is not a “cyberethnography” that approaches indigenous societies from fieldwork conducted in cyberspace, or indigenous constructions in/of online worlds (Christensen 2003; Morton 1998).² While these studies are valuable for looking at specific, new practices within the bounds of the Internet, I approach mediated spaces from the geographic and social networks extant in offline contemporary Navajo communities, and I provide detailed accounts of how discourses of technology and language ideologies affect the experience of community and communicative practices. Such descriptive ethnography is essential at this juncture, as extant theories of media and mediation are not appropriate for the case study under consideration here.

The Navajo Nation is an excellent site from which to look at both language and technology. It is a site where many new technologies were not widely available until recently, and where tensions between domains of appropriate use language shift to English are persistent concerns in local discourses. New technologies connect Navajos from around the world, yet individuals exhibit a range of beliefs about the benefits and pitfalls of technology. As a study of mediated community, my work brings the ethnography of Native American communities into new areas, transcending the pitfalls of

² Cyberspace, a term I avoid but which comes up often in the literature, refers to the space of interactions mediated by the Internet and is a term often attributed to William Gibson’s popular science fiction novel *Neuromancer*. I refrain from using the term due to its overuse and reification in the literature.

taking community cohesion for granted and traditional philosophy and language as reference points. I build upon Phillip Deloria's (2004) call to look for Native Americans in "unexpected places," as well as Anthony Webster's (2005) call to understand and look at Native American *languages* in unexpected places. This framework, grounded in the people, discourse, and lived experiences of Navajo communities, provides the most useful perspective for analyzing the issues of community as an activity, language as a resource, identity as a process, and self-representation as a necessity for each of these activities.

My project began in 2001, at a unique juncture of Federal policy and philanthropic efforts to modernize the communications infrastructure of the Navajo Nation,³ highlighted by the simultaneous appearance of federally subsidized cell phone access and public computer terminals linked to the Internet. At that time, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation began providing Navajo community centers with new computers and high-speed internet connections in an effort to bridge what has come to be known as the "digital divide."⁴ A concurrent federal mandate, known as "Universal Access" and subsidized by the Federal Communications Commission, began providing

³ I use the terms 'Navajo Nation,' 'Reservation,' and 'Rez' interchangeably in this dissertation when referring in English to the geopolitical borders of what is officially known in English and Navajo as "The Navajo Nation." The term "Navajo Nation" is used locally in English in more formal or political contexts, while "the Rez" is used locally in more personal, informal, or humorous contexts ("Navajoland" is sometimes used as well, but for me it indexes tourist literature, and indeed, is used on billboards and brochures promoting tourism). I follow emic conventions. In Navajo, the land is referred to as *Diné Bikeyá* or *Naabeehó Bikeyá* ("the People's land) and the entity known as "The Navajo Nation" is often referred to as *Diné Biwáashindóon* ("the Navajo's government") or "The Naabeehó Nation."

⁴ The "digital divide" references disparities in access to communications technologies among and between particular communities, those that most often are congruent with extant socioeconomic disparities. The term is most often associated with disparate access to the Internet.

low-cost cellular phone service to enrolled Native American tribal members, including Navajos, who live in areas not accessible to land-based phone lines. My intuition told me that these were indeed major developments with significant potential; my previous experiences on the Reservation relating to media, however, suggested to me that there would be many unintended consequences.

In this effort to understand processes of transformation, it is important to address what might be called the “social life” of technology (Appadurai 1986), the relationship between language and technology, and questions of disparate access to technologies in traditionally marginalized communities. In the case of the Navajo, many high-profile policy makers, politicians, and technical experts optimistically view new technologies as providing the Navajo Nation equal access to education, economic development, and health care (Clinton 2000; Powell 2002). These hopes and ideals reflect global discourses of technological empowerment, especially in traditionally marginalized areas of the world (Uimonen 2001). Such discourses retain a great deal of symbolic power, and both influence and mask local ideologies of technology. Some of these discourses are looking forward to positive ruptures or immediate transformations in local experiences of modernity, which is why they are often misguided. Many scholars, language activists, and Navajo speakers view new technologies as important tools in maintaining Navajo and other Native American languages (Eisenlohr 2004; Siroios, et al. 2001). Local ideologies surrounding new media technologies are not as well understood as they could be, and this work seeks to understand how emerging ideologies of

technology alter the frames and contexts of community and communicative practice in a traditionally marginalized, linguistic minority community.

At the very least, it can be said that the diffusion and acceptance of information and communication technologies are ideologically constituted and embedded in both local and global cultural and socioeconomic histories (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1996; Latour 1996; Winston 1998). Changes in Navajo practices perhaps are more dramatically noticeable than in the dominant society due to newer and higher degrees of “diversity, interconnectedness, and innovation, in the context of global center-periphery relationships” (Hannerz 1996:67). Local responses to internet technologies obviously vary, constricting or facilitating oppositional discourses (Gal 1989), such as the wide circulation of jokes commenting on institutionalized racism. They can also generate unintended consequences (Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1979), such as the case of a young teenager in Minnesota—having developed a computer virus spread globally over the Internet—seriously disrupting the Navajo Nation government, as well as wreaking havoc on the US government and large, multinational corporations (Long 2003).

In more marginalized communities, discourses of technological empowerment have been shown to influence, but not to determine, local perceptions of technology’s potential and strategies for its use (Uimonen 2001). The disjunct between material changes in societies such as the Navajo and our understanding of the nature of change is understandable, as anthropology tended to position communications media as peripheral to culture (Dickey 1997; Wilson and Peterson 2002). New research and writing, however, have begun to reverse this trend, forefronting mediated communications and

imagery as an integral part of global cultural capital flows in anthropological investigations (Askew and Wilk 2002; Ginsburg, et al. 2002) and an important factor in the study of language ideologies and communicative practice (Coupland 2001; Keating 2000; Keating and Mirus 2003b). As a descriptive ethnography engaging a matrix of voices and perspectives, this work contributes to the growing understanding of mediated communities as a historically-constituted, sociocultural and discursive process.

Early on, Joel Sherzer suggested that I frame my research to investigate Navajo language and culture through the *lens* of technology, and what follows in this dissertation is just that, an ethnography of mediated communities, defined as linking the ideologies, discourses, and practices of the mediated and the face-to-face. Exploring contemporary Navajo language, culture, and community in this way is a novel approach, but it is one grounded in the strong traditions of linguistic anthropology. As a linguistic anthropologist, I believe that something we might call culture, delineated by shared beliefs and practices, is transformed to a great extent through the language and discourse, in all senses of the word, of everyday people (Sherzer 1987, 1990b). Much has been written about Navajo culture, as well as the Navajo language, and the relationship of the Navajo language to worldview (Werner, et al. 1983; Witherspoon 1977). In contrast to the existing literature, looking at discourse as it relates to mediating technologies provides a glimpse into shifting ideologies of both language and technology, as well as broader sociocultural processes, including cultural continuity and the perpetuation of community, which are continuously in a state of transformation.

As a study of discourse and community, this work is grounded in contemporary ethnographies of communication which position studies of mediated communication and technology within local social and communicative practices (Goodwin 1994; Keating and Mirus 2003a; Miller and Slater 2000; Spitulnik 2002; Suchman 1999). It is also similar to classic ethnographies in Native American communities involving long-term explorations of specific communicative and social practices such as joking (Basso 1979) and poetics (Hymes 1981), while engaging issues in more recent scholarship such as Native language literacy as identity and empowerment (Bender 2002), what constitutes community in increasingly diasporic and shifting contexts (Foster 1991; Sarris 1993), and the relationship between identity, community, and popular culture (Samuels 2004).

My framework is distinctive in that I am approaching the research through the related issues of language ideologies, ideologies of technology, and the emergent practices related to, and embedded in, these attitudes, beliefs, and practices. I view emergent practices as novel forms, as activities which cannot be predicted but which result from observable, if not predictable, extant forms or technologies (Hanks 2005; Hutchins 1995; Syverson 1999). For example, Navajo speakers' and writers' choice of language when engaging new technologies such as email and new mediums such as writing index broader ideologies of language, and illustrate creative, emergent communicative practices which form the basis of this research. Furthermore, community members' use of technology, such as a new reliance on cell phones for locating lost herds of sheep, illustrates how novel practices are transforming "traditional" activities such as shepherding and associated geographies of communication.

The underpinnings of my approach to the Internet and other mediated communication came through my collaborations with Samuel Wilson on anthropological perspectives on the role of technology in culture and society. As we struggled to encapsulate disparate approaches to new media studies, we ended on the following note:

The internet and the communication media that depend on it are still in a period of innovation, experimentation, and rapid change. The ability for groups and individuals to interact at great distances raises interesting questions for those investigating the construction of identity, social interactions, and collective action—political or otherwise. The web has created a new arena for group and individual self-representation, changing the power dynamics of representation for traditionally marginalized groups such as Native Americans within the discourses of popular culture. The revolutionary claims made for the internet and the communications media it supports have faded in recent years. The realization has grown that while online communication may happen faster, over larger distances, and bring about the reformulation of some existing power relationships, the rapid and fundamental transformations of society that some foresaw have not come to pass. (Wilson and Peterson 2002:461-462)

I believe that the crux of this statement remains true to this day, and that this particular aspect of modernity and contemporary technological life is less about ruptures, an oft-used metaphor in discussions of the societal impacts of technology, and more

about continuums. Scholarly understanding of these ephemeral, transformative technologies as a continuation of extant phenomena is only beginning to emerge, and Federal policy and NGO decisions are being made which directly affect the lives of many people, not just Navajos, based upon unexamined assumptions about the potentials of cyberspace, new media, and new technologies in general. Some point to uncritical appropriations of popular rhetoric on technology in much of the scholarly Internet research, creating “multiple, diffuse, disconnected discourses which mirror the hype of popular cyberspace talk” (Hakken 1999:6).

This dissertation takes an ethnographic approach to these issues, an approach that is timely and indispensable as we begin to theorize the sociocultural implications of new communication technologies around the world (DiMaggio, et al. 2001; Miller and Slater 2000; Wilson and Peterson 2002). It is also hoped that this study will inform the debates on more applied considerations, such as the concerns of those involved in the NGO and Federal policy-making mentioned above, as well as the theoretical and methodological approaches of new media scholarship. In the Navajo case, this work illustrates how some community members use new media to recreate community in an increasingly dispersed population, and highlights the specific uses of language in mediated discourse. A more thorough understanding of such processes can inform those who view communications technology as a crucial tool for language maintenance or societal self-sufficiency.

This work explains the ways in which ideologies of language, identity, and technology have shifted and converged for Navajo community members. It explores subsequent instances of the transformative nature of technology on communicative

practices, cultural continuity, and the perpetuation of community. My research began with a wide range of questions, which I try to address in the following pages: Where do community members situate computers and other communication and information technologies in their daily lives? How are the tools of new media changing the contexts, frames, and geographies of communicative practices? How does technology alter the spacial relationships of language and power? Does it transform discourses and practices of tradition? How might new technologies alter novice-expert relations? How are the offline and online social worlds linked?

Mediated Discourse, Mediating Community

The concepts of media as activities and communications technologies as tools are notoriously difficult to separate, and rarely exist in isolation from broader narratives of technology and progress. I understand mediating technologies such as the Internet as “numerous new technologies, used by diverse people, in diverse real-world locations” (Miller and Slater 2000:1), that are “continuous with and embedded in other social spaces” where interactions “happen within mundane social structures and relations that they may transform but that they cannot escape into a self-enclosed cyberian apartness” (Miller and Slater 2000:5). Spitulnik (2001) suggests that perhaps “media is best defined by what it is not: face-to-face communication.” Current usage of the term media includes such subcategories as mass, alternative, print, broadcast, new, and electronic. New media are considered a subset of electronic media, namely digital-based electronic

media including multimedia CD ROMs, email, fax machines, the Internet, and video games (adapted from Spitulnik 2001:143).

The Internet is the space in which most computer-mediated communication occurs, referring to both the technical infrastructure which allows computers to network via wired or wireless signals, such as public TCP/IP networks, large-scale networks like AOL, and foundational protocols like HTML & XML; and the uses to which this infrastructure is put, such as the World Wide Web, electronic mail, or chatrooms (DiMaggio, et al. 2001:308). I distinguish between media as a locus of interaction, such as radio or the internet, and medium as a channel of expression, such as song, emails, or talk. Mazzarella suggests the term “mediation” to describe processes inherent in the production and circulation of media, a term which I will rely upon in particular contexts. Mazzarella outlines the issues in mediation by noting that

whether or not it is apprehended that way by its "users," a medium is a material framework, both enabling and constraining, for a given set of social practices. In this guise a medium is both dynamic and largely taken for granted. However, a medium is also a reflexive and reifying technology. It makes society imaginable and intelligible to itself in the form of external representations. Inseparable from the movement of social life and yet removed from it, a medium is thus at once obvious and strange, indispensable and uncanny, intimate and distant. (Mazzarella 2004:346)

As indicated above, my initial definition of “new communication technologies” was primarily focused on the Internet and related applications such as web surfing and email. It is very easy to reify material aspects of technology, and indeed many researchers privilege the material forms of new media such as the Internet and cyberspace, or rely on theories that rob users of agency, such as framing technology as a tool with users unaware of the tool itself. Thus conceived, agency, process, and imagination are lost. My own research began with the notion that newly donated, publicly accessible computers and high-speed internet connections in all 110 Navajo Chapter Houses (community centers) would have an immediate and dramatic impact. My consultants, however, consistently de-emphasized the computers themselves.

What they did emphasize were more practical concerns such as jobs, transportation, or communication, and broader discourses such as language or identity. This is not to say that new tools for communication are unimportant or masked in a false consciousness; what it does suggest is that users are more cognizant of the uses and impacts of technology than previously thought, or at least aware enough of new tools to de-privilege the central importance of material goods. Thus, I began to attach actors to processes, rather than attaching actors to material culture of technology, and with this shift in focus it became rapidly apparent that expanding social networks, shifting genres, and altered geographies of communication are crucial factors in understanding shifting communicative practice in Navajo communities.

Spitulnik grounds media in relationships that are “economically and politically driven, linked to developments in science and technology,...inextricably bound up with

the use of language” (Spitulnik 1993:293). My dissertation begins with the basic understanding that the Navajo language, or at least the *idea* of Navajo, is considered to be an integral part of individual and collective identity, what I refer to as “Navajoness” throughout this dissertation. There is a sense of pride with respect to the language among speakers and non-speakers alike, regardless of age, gender, or proficiency, which is due in part to the language’s difficulty and uniqueness—often underscored, for example, by stories and pride in the Navajo Code Talkers of World War II (House 2002). Like other indigenous languages, however, Navajo faces many internal and external obstacles to its use in the contemporary world, including the history of Federal Indian policy, language contact, and negative attitudes towards the language by some Navajos themselves (House 2002; Shonerd 1990:197). The ways in which such beliefs affect language use and media practices in new contexts was a primary question for my research.

Language endangerment issues are battlegrounds for other issues, including ethnic identity and discourses on cultural transformation, tradition, and what it means to be modern. Previous research has shown the ways in which Kuna chants and discourse are transformed within contemporary contexts (Sherzer 1990b), and how Ojibwe discourse is negotiated in bilingual, every day contexts between elders and new generations—and media technologies such as radio (Valentine 1995). In the Navajo case, emergent practices are often negatively compared to what is considered to be traditional or “standard,” a language ideal that in some contexts transforms into a narrow, officially sanctioned language standard. Woodbury suggests, however, that it is divergence, not convergence, which indexes vitality in an endangered language (Woodbury 1990).

I also began my project with a desire to research contemporary language use in Navajo communities, in all of its forms and variants. Thus language is central to this study, yet popular and scholarly ideologies have reified the concept of individual Native American “languages” existing in isolation (Pratt 1997). It is important to investigate the contemporary sociocultural contexts of languages in use (Anderson 1998), document the aesthetic and style shifts in these communities (Woodbury 1998), and explore local language ideologies which influence communicative practice in a changing world (Briggs 1992; Silverstein 1998). In my case study, the observable patterns of language use are much more complex than the oft-presumed dichotomy of “English vs. Navajo” would imply. Stories and talk flow from orality to literacy, and from English to Navajo, in forms and fashions that challenge and upset these dichotomies on a daily basis. My research takes these ideas into account and views the Navajo language as a unique and flexible resource for its speakers which must be understood in its own context (Woodbury 1998).⁵

When discussing the Navajo language with my consultants, the issue of Navajo identity, or Navajoness, invariably was raised. The concept of identity can suggest static homogeneity, and indeed it is a concept often reified in the literature, as well as by my own consultants. I view identity as a process that is viewed through activities, through people “doing” Navajoness, a perspective that recognizes the agency of individual Navajos from one situation to the next. Thus conceived, identity is a process that is

⁵ While language vitality is a concern for my research, I am aware that this is an ideological stance, and I am cognizant of the ways in which my background and agenda could influence my research (Collins 1998), transcriptions (Bucholtz 2000), and representations (Silverstein 1998).

marked by difference and sameness in symbolic expressions and observable in mediums such as narratives, jokes, dress, and everyday discourse. Just as I explore ideologies of language and technology, I utilize the concept of “ideologies of identity” to index what Navajos say about Navajoness, about the shifting paradigms of the traditional and the modern, as well as what Navajos say about the multiple other ways of being, and expressing, individual and collective “identities,” including, for example, “jocks,” “preppies,” “Americans,” “truck drivers,” “Indians,” or “computer geeks.”

Ideologies of identity can refer to beliefs about what some consider the symbolic prerequisites of Navajoness such as “checklists” of material or symbolic capital, i.e. dress, language, or other practices judged in determining what or who is really Navajo. They can also consist of legal requirements, such as the federally legislated determinant of Navajo identity in the form of official Tribal enrollment based on “blood quotient” and “census numbers.” That Navajos sometimes conceive of themselves as a broader Navajo Nation, in opposition to others (mainly Anglo-Americans), is part of the discourse of the socially situated self in opposition to “other” which is often associated with the processes of modernity (Berman 1982; House 2002). These issues are notoriously complex and will be examined further in the context of the data. My goal was not to look directly at identity or ideologies of Navajoness, yet as mentioned above, it was an oft-occurring theme in the context of discussions on language, technology, and community.

The data presented below illustrate the ways in which ideologies of identity are directly linked to community, discourse, and language, reflecting both foundational (Hymes 1972; Labov 1972) and reconceptualized (Keating 2001; Morgan 2004) ideas of

the speech community as an analytical unit, which highlight communicative competence, shared systems of signification and meanings, and inequalities among speakers. I did not take, however, the notion of any particular Navajo speech community as my preexisting primary point of reference; rather, I began with groupings of people, based more closely on familial and social groupings. These groups of interacting individuals are similar to what have been called “communities of practice” (Lave and Wenger 1991) in that they are unique groupings of social actors with specific and purposeful shared discourses, yet they are groups that exist within broader communities, both local and global.

More often than not, research on community, language, or Navajo identity is restricted to Reservation communities or to social or kinship networks operating within the geopolitical borders of the Navajo Nation. The notion of a “traditional boundary” for Navajo social and linguistic interactions is in itself a problematic concept, but this is understandable perhaps, due to the size of the Navajo Nation and its location on or near many significant traditional use areas, and the persistent trope of the supreme importance of land and geography to traditional, collective Indian identities (Basso 1996; Kelley and Francis 1994). While there is certainly truth to this notion, a consistent return to the unauthenticity of the geography/identity link denies individual (and perhaps less “traditional”) Navajos agency in creating and maintaining unique identities and communities. In my experience, Navajos living “off” the Reservation have varying degrees of attachment to specific geographic or geological features of the *Dinétah* or *Dinébikeyah*. One young consultant was perhaps extreme, but not alone, when she firmly

declared to me that “I think they should just sell off the whole damn place, piece by piece. It’s not doing any of us any good.”

As I state early on, community is as much an “activity” as it is a “place” (Beier 2001), and as an activity, community is “made” by social actors, by community members, in a variety of ways and in a variety of contexts. These social actors, of course, reflect a wide variety of sociolinguistic and socioeconomic profiles, and are represented by variations in age, beliefs, and gender. As my primary focus is discourses shared by a variety of people, I take all of the social variations mentioned above into consideration. For instance, gender is important in any study involving a range of community members. As an analytical framework and a lived experience, gender is very important in studies of language (Bucholtz, et al. 1999; Hall and Bucholtz 1995; Kiesling 1997), of technology (Ebo 1998; O'Brien 1999; Shaw 1997), and of Navajo and other Native American communities (Denetdale 2001; Frisbie 1982; Knack 2004; M'Closkey 2002). Gender is especially important in studies of Navajo cultural transformation (Deyhle and Margonis 1995; Hamamsy 1957; Joanne 1998; Lamphere 1989; McPherson 1994) and the role of Navajo *náádleehí*, so-called “two-spirits,” gays, or third-gender persons, in Navajo society (Epple 1998; Jacobs, et al. 1997).⁶

While my methodology and research design did not specifically situate gender as a central category of analysis, it played a crucial factor in my research. As a relatively young, unmarried Anglo male with no children, my cultural teachers, gatekeepers, and

⁶ Navajo Náádleehí are often considered to be the guardians of certain traditions as well as cultural brokers, and as with many community members with a variety of backgrounds, they played an important role as consultants and gatekeepers in this research.

caretakers were very often Navajo women—grandmas, mothers, sisters, and colleagues. Likewise, as a young Anglo male I had relatively easy access to male-gendered spaces such as sweat lodges or bars. Gender surfaces in other ways as well: The recurrence of “grandmas” indexing tradition, as well as the eldest generation, is reflective of the fact that Navajo society was traditionally matrilineal, and the fact that in the eldest age groups, men do not live as long as women. While Navajo women are much more likely than Navajo men to graduate from high school and pursue post-secondary education (Census 2000), my data did not reveal remarkable differences in attitudes or beliefs about either language or technology (all other things being equal), but neither was I looking for them specifically. Where gender is a crucial factor, in the subsequent discussion the issue is forefronted and analyzed as such.

The issues of language, community, identity, and representation among those called the Navajo will be discussed further in these pages. Suffice it to say that the issues are extraordinarily complicated and contentious for scholars, and that the issues are very personal for Navajo people directly related to them. What I am providing is a glimpse into these issues over the course of a particular period of time, within the framework of media technologies and emergent communicative practice. In my desire to de-center the material aspects of technology and the essentialized entities of identity and community, I am approaching the topic within the framework of discourse, ideology, and community outlined above.

Doing Fieldwork: Sights & Sites

My dissertation is a culmination of 14 years of being an observant participant, frequent guest, inquisitive intruder, and sometime community member on the Navajo Nation. From 1996 to 2002, I worked each summer on the Navajo Nation with Northwestern University's Ethnographic Field School (EFS) as both assistant director and teaching assistant. My first experiences with Navajo life and my introduction to field ethnography were as an EFS student in 1991, where I was "placed" in the Navajo Office of Government Development. As conceived by its founder Oswald Werner, EFS approached ethnography as a community-based process grounded in language, with research that should benefit the host communities on their own terms. Werner's philosophy has continued to anchor my research and writing.

From 1997-1999, I had a unique position on the Reservation as a DJ for KTNN, "The Voice of the Navajo Nation", and sister station KWRK 96.1 FM. I was a producer and co-host for the indigenous culture and arts program "Navajo Nights," and was the DJ known as "The Saint" during the afternoon drive-time hours on the Top 40 format of KWRK. During this time, I was also finishing my MA research on Broadcast Navajo, balancing public appearances and "remote" broadcasts from car dealerships with ethnographic research and various other projects doled out to me by the stations' general manager. These experiences, and the countless interactions with Navajo audience members that ensued, illustrated beyond a reasonable doubt the importance of media in contemporary Navajo life.

My previous research documented the recursive relationship between Navajo language radio programs, audience input, and language use (Klain and Peterson 2000b; Peterson 1997). This work was focused on the phenomenon of “Broadcast Navajo” and the potentials and pitfalls of maintaining language vitality through Navajo radio broadcasting. Broadcast Navajo is a locally-recognized genre characterized by specific codeswitching, calques, and unique registers due to the format of commercial radio, language variation, and various translation issues. It generates strong audience reactions to language use, resulting in rare forms of speech accommodation and inciting intense meta-discussions among Navajo speakers about appropriate language use. More importantly, perhaps, it illustrates the specific ways in which Navajo media have become an indelible part of contemporary Navajo culture.

Methodology

Fieldwork specific to my dissertation research involved a 22-month period of ethnographic work over the course of four years which involved participant observation, structured and unstructured conversations, and video recording of the spaces and interactions of technologies in use. Participants in this research were recruited through my existing social, professional, and kinship networks and represented a wide cross-section of the Navajo population in terms of age and gender, language repertoire, and socioeconomic and educational backgrounds. I also had regular conversations and

interactions with Hopis, Choctaws, Anglos,⁷ African-Americans, Zunis, Asian-Americans, Hispanics, and others who—by marriage or profession—are active members of many Navajo families and communities.⁸

Interviews and conversations occurred across the US Southwest from Austin to Phoenix to the Reservation. They happened in parking lots or on mountaintops over traditional tobacco, at kitchen tables and on *hooghan* floors,⁹ during long drives across the Reservation, and over the phone across the country. Sometimes these conversations were virtual mediations via instant messaging or email. In any case, recorded conversations were transcribed and translated as necessary, and unrecorded interactions were reconstructed in my field notes. In many cases, transcriptions and other texts such as emailed jokes were brought back to consultants for further clarification, ethnoaesthetic evaluations, and clearance on the use of specific quotes.

Fieldwork is never predictable, as humans are complex and hard to generalize, and the limits of ethnographic work by outsiders are well known in anthropology. Tapes are lost, computer files destroyed, batteries run out. Spontaneous, unrecorded conversations turn out to be the most significant and rich clarifications of research, yet they remain unrecorded and only partially recovered and reconstructed through

⁷ I use the terms ‘Anglo’ and ‘*Bilagáana*’ interchangeably when referring to English-speaking American citizens of European descent. ‘Anglo’ is the term widely used in local discourse in English, while ‘*Bilagáana*’ is the Navajo term generally considered to be a loanword stemming from the Spanish *Americano*. The discourse on Navajo conceptions of *Nihookáá Dine’é*, “peoples of the fifth world; earth surface people” (“race” in some dominant discourses) is beyond the scope of this work.

⁸ It should be noted here that these ethnic groups are not mutually exclusive categories, and that “being Navajo” can include sanguineal ties to any one or more of these groups. See below for a more detailed explanation and analysis.

⁹ A *hooghan* is a traditional Navajo dwelling either round or with six or eight sides, built of a variety of materials and in a variety of ways over time (see Chapter 3).

fieldnotes. Often, I would begin a conversation or interview with a seemingly innocuous question like “Diné k’éjigo ‘computer’ hash wolyé?” or “Dinébizadish há’át’íi bee ‘internet’ yáshti?” that would lead to a story or discussion on Navajo identity or language.¹⁰ Likewise, I would try to start a discussion on technology by asking “Tell me about your new cell phone,” which would lead to the fact that *Shimásani* (maternal grandmother) had to go to town and could I drive. Of course, there was boredom, and seemingly endless weeks of what, at the time at least, appeared to be unproductive days. Many of them. It was, however, always worth the wait.

My research design did not specifically include isolating myself “out on the Rez” in order to observe and interact with the real or the traditional; as I often mention, I did not intend to use traditional philosophy or language as my central point of reference. While I did not seek out the issues that directly relate to aspects of traditional Navajo beliefs, I also did not ignore them. When they did come up, they were usually very interesting, illuminating, and informative, and are included here where appropriate; what was most valuable for my research were those aspects of traditional knowledge which have been retained by a variety of community members, including apprentice healers. My approach was informed by the fact that the ideas and perspectives of a few key informants, centered in specific geographical areas such as Tsaile, have characterized much of what has been written recently about traditional Navajo beliefs and contemporary Navajo society. I wanted to research the issues from an alternate

¹⁰ Various ways of asking how one says “computer” or “internet” in Navajo.

perspective; that of the people who are experts at negotiating the nuances of Navajoness and everyday life, but who may not be considered by some to be “experts” in the sense of being traditional *hataali*,¹¹ including Diné College faculty, or also in my case, website designers and computer technicians.¹²

Recent critiques of research sites (Gupta and Ferguson 1997), as well as new Internet phenomena, have led anthropologists to ask new questions about “the field,” and new media research in particular requires adapting ethnographic methods to new technological environments (Jacobson 1999; Markham 1998; Ruhleder 2000). As a result, my research design extended beyond the physical spaces of traditional, geographic Navajo communities to include online, virtual interactions and circulating discourses of language and technology that lie beyond traditional or imagined boundaries of Navajo social and linguistic spaces. Alternatively, I investigated three related, diffuse “sites” of technology in action, which include formal institutions of representation such as the *Navajo Times* and Navajo Tourism; community and home-level interactions, including new kinship and community connections mediated by technology; and individual practices regarding self-expression and self-representation. I also conducted archival research in the Navajo Nation Museum Archives and the Zimmerman Southwest Library at the University of New Mexico.

¹¹ Usually glossed in English as “medicine man;” more accurately translated as “singer,” “healer,” or “chanter.”

¹² Some call this “from the bottom up” as it were; Werner & Schoepfle (1987) draw from Spradley in describing these different layers of knowledge as “lay” and “expert” knowledge.

My existing professional networks, as well as my analytical horizons, were broadened significantly by participating in the linguistics- and pedagogy-oriented Navajo Language Academy (NLA) workshops in the summers of 2003 and 2004. I also found collecting forwarded emails and keeping up with the local media to be a revealing part of my research and data collection.¹³ Listening to Navajo language radio stations KTNN and KGAK on a regular basis, as well as reading the English language *Navajo Times* and *Gallup Independent*, were activities vital to my research. Often, the *Navajo Times* would scoop a story on technology before I had had a chance to investigate, or I would follow a lead provided by stories from insightful and well-connected reporters like Levi Long, Marley Shebala, or Jan-Mikael Patterson. Furthermore, radio advertisements, letters to the editor, and political cartoons were essential means by which I could keep my finger on the mediated pulse of the Navajo Nation.

For a variety of reasons, I opted in the end not to restrict my research to any particular institutional or pedagogical setting; institutional environments are in themselves unique spaces which require particular considerations. First of all, my previous research had centered around broadcast institutions such as KTNN, and I simply wanted to do something different. Second, much of the research on the Navajo language already concerns schools and pedagogy (Field 2001; Lee and McLaughlin 2001; McCarty

¹³ I considered mass-forwarded emails to be in the public domain not requiring specific permission from users, while personal exchanges (i.e. one to one) were treated as any other personal interaction, falling under requisite IRB protocols.

2002); I felt that I could offer a different approach.¹⁴ Thus the boundaries of this research are not institutional, but I did not exclude institutions as they are a significant feature of everyday life among many community members. Just as technology is important in both everyday and institutional life, institutional settings are important contexts in the everyday life of many of my consultants. My research was bounded by the four social and kinship networks mentioned above and their mediated interactions, as well as by the topics of language and technology.

Participation

As with any non-Navajo staying on the Rez for any extended period of time, the question of “What are you doing out here?” inevitably arises. In the past, I had easier answers. However, my more solitary dissertation research proved a bit more complicated to rationalize, both for myself and others:

“I’m doing research on the Gates Computers. It’s for my dissertation.”

“Oh, *is it*?”¹⁵

Silence. “So, what is it do you do then?”

Imagine the consternation of hard-working folks when one explains that you kind of “hang out” and watch and try to talk to people about computers. It was new for me not

¹⁴ While educational institutions are a crucial factor in language teaching and an important site in the lived experiences of many people, sociolinguistic literature and research on the teaching of Navajo and other Native American languages tends to focus exclusively on traditional notions of literacy and formal secondary education (Cantoni 1996; Reyhner 1997). I am providing an alternative view, as schools constitute only one site of many for learning and teaching and are only part of the story.

¹⁵ Pronounced “izzit?,” it is a marker of Navajo English, and is, I think, an English gloss for *ásha níí?* In both Navajo and English it is a rhetorical device that can mark surprise, consternation, or a cue to the speaker that you’re still listening.

to have a tangible, easily explainable role in the community. Being a 30-something “student” doesn’t register with many folks, be they Navajo or not. While my original intention was to volunteer my time in various Chapter houses as a computer consultant/instructor, the practicalities and logistics of this proved beneficial to neither the community members nor me. The operating systems on many of these computers were “locked,” preventing any alterations or tampering with the preordained desktop settings. Furthermore, the flow of traffic to the public computers was minimal at best, especially when school was in session.

So what I did most often was participate in the activities of everyday life. I was a good “observant participant” (Spindler 1974), and I took notes, lots of them, and photographs. Most of the time this participation was informal, and notes would be made later; less frequent but more formal interactions occurred with a mini-disk recorder and notebook in hand. Much of my time was spent with four geographically dispersed extended families. I have come to know these families well over the past 14 years, and I am generally referred to as *shiyazh* (my son), *shitsooi* (my grandson), or the appropriate sibling term by family members. Likewise, I refer to these close consultants as *Shimá* (mom), *Shimásání* (maternal grandmother), or the appropriate term in this text.¹⁶ I have a place and a role in each of these families, as well as within certain communities and

¹⁶ I refrain from translating kinship terms into English, as Navajo mothers are not my *mom*, they are my *Shimá*. Furthermore, I wish to contextualize my place in *K’e* (clanship) without giving the appearance that I’ve “gone native.” I consider the alternative, “The women whom I call Shimá”, to be rhetorically awkward.

social networks; the nature of these relationships, of course, shifts over time and is in constant negotiation.¹⁷

Generally, I divided much of my time on the Reservation among those kinship and social networks mentioned previously, which represent a wide cross-section of socioeconomic, cultural, and linguistic variables. Daily life transitions with the seasons: not only those marked by an equinox, but also those marked by school being in session and by certain types of seasonal work. More often than not, daily routines consist of getting the kids off to school, driving to work (or driving to look for work), shopping, watching TV, and/or doing livestock or home-related chores. These seemingly mundane, secular, and non-heterogenous activities are the contexts in which identities and language are circulated, and where the relationships between language, community, and technology become most apparent.

In following the day-to-day activities of families, I made many trips traversing the Reservation to take care of business or to visit friends and family. I would often find myself traveling at a moment's notice to Phoenix or Albuquerque, taking the three- to five- hour drives (one way) in stride, as part of my kinship—and ethnographic—obligations. These trips to big cities, as well as major border towns such as Flagstaff, Arizona and Gallup, New Mexico, are a welcome diversion in the lives of many people

¹⁷ Taking such “kinship” relations seriously requires a long-term material and social commitment. I do not consider myself to be “adopted in,” as some non-Navajos—and more than a few anthropologists—consider themselves to be. The only clan affiliations I identify in Navajo social contexts are those of “Scottish” and “Scots-Irish.” Rather, I believe that I am in the community whatever I am expected to be at various times, and that is a good *yazh*, nice diversion, weird anthropologist, comic relief, babysitter, sheepherder, hay hauler, pain-in-the-ass, dumb *Bilagáana*, reliable safety net, good chauffeur, ready scapegoat, and—to the joy of my *deezhí* (little sister) and *Shimá* (mom) in Hunter’s Point—a darn good cook.

living on the Reservation, as well as a frequent necessity. Like many of my friends and family, I would look forward to a spontaneous trip to town, be it for a margarita in Gallup or a corn dog at Basha's in Pinon. These activities are also great events in which to observe speech play, language ideologies, and bilingual negotiations in action.

Of course I participated in traditional "doings," as well as sings and ceremonies. I've worked many a *ndáá*, *anáji*, and *kínaaldá*,¹⁸ although I usually limit my involvement to the social and logistical elements of such gatherings rather than the spiritual. The social aspects of ceremonies are not as well represented in the literature as the religious aspects; likewise, the laborious portions of ritual gatherings are not so exotic that they beg for analysis. Someone's got to herd the sheep while *shímasání* is tending to the needs of the patient and singer; someone has to chop the wood, haul the water, and chase dinner around the corral; someone's got to run into town for ice. There is a lot of waiting and sitting around. There is a lot of storytelling, joking, and gossiping as well. And eating. Arguably, the crux of familial and social interaction occurs around the cook fire, the restaurant, or the dinner table, where bilingual joking, intergenerational interaction, and gender divisions are readily apparent. I have also participated in the religious aspects when requested to do so, or when an invitation could not be politely declined, but I find activities outside of the ceremonial *hooghan* or *tipi* just as interesting as those within. In essence, data are everywhere.

¹⁸ In local usage, a "Doing" refers to either a Native American Church (NAC) meeting or a ceremony; a "traditional doing" or a "sing" generally refers only to a traditional Navajo ceremony, but not always as some Navajos consider NAC meetings to be traditional. *Ndáá* and *anáji* are alternate parts of the Enemy Way ceremony, usually glossed as "Squaw Dance" in local varieties of English. The "dance" is actually a one night, public, and social portion of the longer ceremony.

Ethical Commitments

The politics of research have changed dramatically in the last 25 years for scholars conducting any kind of research in Native American communities (Biolsi and Zimmerman 1997; Strong 2005; Thornton 1998; Toelken 1998; Whiteley 1998), and it is inappropriate for outsiders to delve deeply into certain issues, such as traditional philosophical or religious beliefs, or to document ceremonies. Other contentious issues center on who should be making statements about indigenous peoples or histories, or whether non-Native scholars should be doing ethnographic research at all—some would say it is no longer necessary, given the vast literature on these subjects. During the course of my research, I was instructed many times not to write about specific stories being told to me, that they were for “your own self and your own knowledge.” Furthermore, I myself consider it inappropriate to include details of particular ceremonial events, as well as some personal interactions and social gatherings. However, this personal knowledge and experience helps me to frame, contextualize, and describe my research and observations in ways that would otherwise be impossible.

As an Anglo outsider, I had to take care when eliciting individuals’ thoughts on language and identity. First of all, deconstructing an ideal of Tribal unity and legitimacy would do much more harm than good to the sociopolitical situation of the Navajo Nation. Secondly, I had to deal with what I considered to be contradictions in notions of Navajoness without upsetting or angering people, or by attempting to dig into the “real” roots of things that many consultants believe to “have always been that way.” Tradition is a charged concept for some Navajos, especially when the topic is brought up with non-

Navajos. Furthermore, the construction of ethnic identity or language ideologies is not something normally discussed in everyday contexts; when posed with questions about these issues, or when the issues came up in my questions about language or technology, my consultants were forced to think about it first themselves and then formulate answers they deemed appropriate for an Anglo anthropologist.

As a requirement of research on the Navajo Nation, I have obtained Class “C” Ethnographic Permits from the Navajo Nation Historic Preservation Department (HPD) every year since 1996, and certain facets of my research have been reviewed—often concurrently—by HPD, the Northwestern University Institutional Review Board (IRB), the Navajo Nation Health Research Review Board, and the University of Texas IRB. These reviews have included gaining approval from community members and submission of any paper prior to its publication or public presentation. HPD reserves the right to make suggestions and editorial comments to any manuscript or presentation.¹⁹

The “Navajo”

For the purposes of locating the Navajo, by this term I refer to the group of people who traditionally refer to themselves as *Diné*, whose pre-contact and current geopolitical land base spans the Four Corners region of the US Southwest. The simple act of locating and defining this group, however, is not so simple. The 2000 US Census reports that the

¹⁹ These guidelines continue to be ignored by some. At the Navajo Studies Conference in Durango in 2004, an HPD compliance officer remarked to me, with some frustration, “I don’t even know half these people. They never came to me for clearance” either on their presentations or their research. All regulations on research apply equally to both Navajos and non-Navajos.

almost 280,000 self-identified Navajos are living, not surprisingly, in all 50 states. There are also Navajos living around the globe, among them hundreds of Navajo warriors serving in military units in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere as part of the ongoing “War on Terror.” There are nearly 18,000 self-identified Navajos living in the Phoenix area alone (a number that is certainly low), or nearly 8% of the total Navajo population.²⁰ Navajos are the largest Native American population in the states of California, Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, and Colorado.

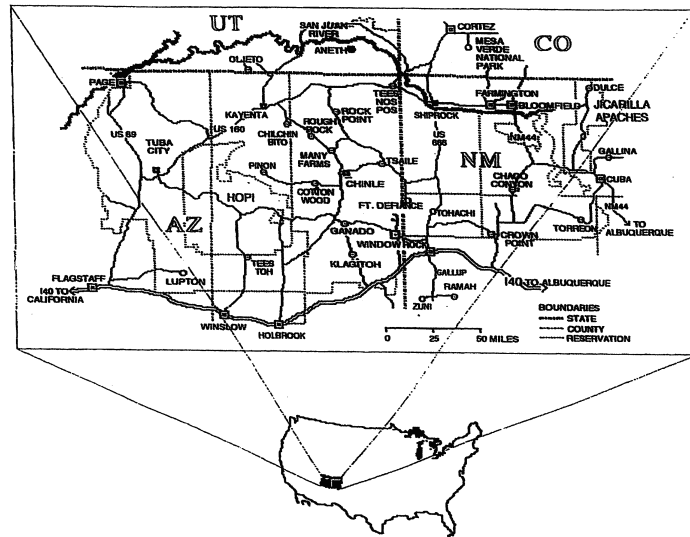


Figure 1: Map of the Navajo Nation.
Courtesy of Oswald Werner

²⁰ As with most Census data, this number is most likely inaccurate. The community coordinator for Navajos living in Phoenix estimates more than 25,000 Navajos actually live in Phoenix. In this case, when asked where they “live,” many Navajos are likely to respond with a location on the Navajo Nation, despite the fact that they may actually “stay” in Phoenix or elsewhere for work, over extended periods of time, on a regular basis. Weekly automobile commutes to Las Vegas, Denver, or even Los Angeles are not outside of the norm.

Geographically, the Navajo Nation is an area of more than 25,000 square miles—the size of West Virginia—located around the intersection of the states of Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico. The Navajo Nation is a relatively rural, arid region hundreds of miles from major population centers such as Phoenix or Salt Lake City. The Reservation was established in 1868 in a small section of what was part of the traditional use area of the Diné; subsequent additions and annexes have expanded this original land base extensively. The 2000 Census reveals that unemployment continues to exceed 50% of the adult population, which is generally young, as the median age is 24. Less than 50% of Navajo students complete secondary schooling through the 12th grade, and almost 50% of the population lives below the poverty line, figured at a per capita income of \$7,486. There are only a few small public libraries serving an estimated Reservation population of 180,000-220,000 people. Almost three-quarters of inhabited structures lack telephone service, and almost as many lack either electricity or plumbing.

The Navajo language is classified by linguists as Southern Athabaskan, part of the NaDene language group and closely related to Western Apache, Mescalero, Jicarilla, and Chiricahua; its closest northern relative is Sarcee, spoken near Calgary, Alberta. The linguistic data suggest a relatively recent split between northern and southern Na-Dene speakers, with migration into the US Southwest via the Pacific Northwest probably occurring within the last 1000 years (Young, et al. 1992:4).²¹ While the actual number of Navajo speakers has increased over the years, the percentage of speakers as a portion of

²¹ Traditional Navajo creation stories challenge this view and suggest that Navajos migrated from the Third or Fourth World onto the surface of the Earth, and have inhabited their current land use areas longer than some archaeological analyses suggest.

the Navajo population is rapidly decreasing as Navajo speakers rapidly shift to English (Slate 1993).

Much has been written about “the Navajo,” in both popular and scholarly literature, and they are the most photographed Indian tribe in North America (Faris 1996; Roessel 1996). They are also perhaps the most studied group of people in the world by anthropologists and linguists (Geertz 1977). Classic works in ethnography that have been written about Navajos represent foundational approaches in the field, including psychological anthropology (Kluckhohn and Leighton 1946), (Dyk 1996), religion (Reichard 1950), cognitive and visual anthropology (Worth and Adair 1997), the anthropology of art (Parezo 1983; Reichard 1997[1934]), the interpretive turn (Witherspoon 1977), and feminist anthropology (Lamphere 1977).

In recent times, however, Navajo studies has moved from the center to the periphery of anthropological theory and practice. Loius Lamphere has noted that there was a “battle for territory among the major ethnographers among the Navajo between 1930 and 1960,” and the conflicts went on well into the 1980s (Lamphere 1992:89). Of course, Navajos were not the only group fetishized, essentialized, or commodified by academics and popular writers; however, recent critiques and turns within the social sciences have yet to enter into much of Navajo studies (Faris 1993; Toelken 1998), and Navajos and Navajo scholars are only beginning to address these discourses (Denetdale 2004; Jacobs, et al. 1997; Martin 2001).

There remain, however, numerous texts and translations of traditional Navajo ceremonies and emergence stories (Haile 1938; Matthews 1994, 1995, 1997; Zolbrod

1984), and much has been written about virtually every aspect of Navajo existence, from history (Bailey and Bailey 1986; Iverson and Roessel 2002), philosophy (Farella 1984; McNeley 1981), and linguistics (Faltz 1998; Young 2000). There is an old Navajo joke about what constitutes a traditional Navajo family camp: Grandma, Grandpa, Mom and Dad, the aunts, the uncles, the kids—and an anthropologist.²² This vast corpus of literature is a double-edged sword: It allows for unparalleled comparative linguistic and historical research and allows Navajos to revisit certain “lost” aspects of traditional knowledge.²³ It also leads to certain aspects of Navajo knowledge being appropriated and privileged over others and certain tropes becoming ingrained in the imaginations of researchers, such as the “enduring” or “adaptable” Navajo (Bsumek 2004).

This dissertation does not take traditional Navajo philosophy as its exclusive reference point, nor does it assume the geographical confines of the Navajo Nation to be the core of contemporary Navajoness. Previous studies have noted the impact of the pickup truck on residence patterns (Chisholm 1986), or how an intense interest in basketball on the Reservation fits within, not outside of, more traditional relationships and interactions (Blanchard 1974). Contemporary Navajo life is often contextualized in terms of its connection to the past, such as the ways in which creation stories were used to explain, rationalize, or internalize events like the 1993 hantavirus outbreak or the

²² So much research continues to be done, especially by ethnographers (myself included), that I actually abandoned a field site due to the abrupt arrival of another graduate student, which would have put the total at not two, but *three* anthropologists working in the same senior center.

²³ Traditional Culture Specialists at Historic Preservation often refer to their library of Navajo texts with authors like Matthews, Haile, and Faris.

ongoing relocation of Navajos from now-Hopi lands (Schwarz 2001), or how traditional ways are used in contemporary health and healing (Csordas 1999).

History and stories about the past are extraordinarily important to some Navajos, especially when talking about the origins and meaning behind the Navajo language. However, history and tradition are not easily reconciled with shifting language ideologies, identities, or communicative practice. Analyzing all Navajo practice within a framework of traditional philosophy serves to fix Navajos in time and space. There was always contact and borrowing—thus the trope of the adaptable, enduring Navajos—but the interesting question is why cultural or linguistic introductions from the dominant Anglo society are currently considered most deviant from traditional modes.

Overview

The following pages are peppered with examples of joking, speech play, and anecdotes of my daily observations and interactions. They also include excerpts from emails sent to me by friends and colleagues. To some, many of these examples may appear to have nothing to do with either media or technology; that is, however, precisely the point. Technology does not exist in a vacuum, and new technologies are not isolated in a “cyberian apartness” (Miller and Slater 2000). With this framework of language, community, discourse, and ideology I aim to contextualize language and technology within broader sociocultural processes and experiences.

I begin my exploration in Chapter Two with Navajo variants of the academic concept of “language ideologies,” and offer some new perspectives on addressing this

issue. Language ideologies take on a central role in this discussion, as ideologies of both the researchers and the speakers themselves are crucial in understanding and contextualizing emergent practice. I then contextualize the contemporary Navajo language situation, including an overview of the history of language contact among the Navajo, as well as issues related to language vitality. I offer an approach to contemporary Navajo identity, communities, and language variation in terms of locally-recognized genres, styles, and variants.

Chapter Three provides an overview of the discourses of technology and tradition, which are closely aligned with discourses of modernity and narratives of progress. This chapter begins with a discussion of the Gates Foundation computers and efforts to bridge the digital divide on the Navajo Nation. I outline various approaches to the study of technology, language, and society, and position myself with those who view new media technologies as directly related to previously existing phenomena. Here, I describe and explore the ideologies of technology apparent in local Navajo and global discourses. The trope of the “adaptable” Navajo is critiqued, and various ways of contextualizing social change and the social life of technology are considered.

Chapter Four explores the phenomenon of self-identified “Techno-Indians” who engage new technologies by making it their own, and more importantly, by engaging in novel practices. This phenomenon is discussed as congruent with existing practice, yet enabling transformations. I give an overview of contemporary Navajo mediascapes, as well as specific ways in which social actors engage media—and each other—through communicative practices. Here I also discuss new literacies as an emergent form of self-

representation, linked to both ideologies of technology and to literacy. As literacy is a central component of most online interactions, I explore the relationship between orality, literacy, and literacy as ideology. The idea of *hane'* as a central component of Navajo conceptions and perceptions of both discourse and new mediating technologies is also considered.

In Chapter Five I integrate aspects of the concept of *Nihízaad niilyá*, or Navajo as a living language, into ideologies of identity and emergent practice, and illustrate the ways in which interactions between Navajo community members can be viewed as a “community of practice.” Mediating technologies facilitate alternate means of community cohesiveness and group interactions, as well as new geographies of communication and community, which will be described. I begin with an overview of *coinology*, or creating and explaining new terms and concepts in Navajo, as a central focus of emergent practice, illustrating the ways in which shifting ideologies of language and technology are manifested. As multilingual joking and in-group markers are found frequently in mediated communication, this chapter attaches speakers to processes of speech play, bilingualism, and identity, as well as new discourses such as Navajo language hip-hop made possible by shifting ideologies of language and technology.

Chapter Six offers some conclusions, and due to the tentative nature of these conclusions, suggests directions and questions for further research. It also considers the implications of this research for the ways in which scholars look at “Navajos” and Navajo communities, as well as the relationship between technology, cultural continuity, and language vitality.

Chapter 2: Níhízaad Niilyá: Navajo as a Living Language

Speak English!

Hasbídí bik'ínílish

“Pee on pigeons.”

I love this example. Or rather, I love what this Navajoized interpretation of a dominant language ideology indexes. As the story goes, boarding school students of old would always get yelled at by their teachers, in English, to “Speak English!” For many of these young Navajo speakers, the austere command “speak English” had phonological similarities with at least one Navajo phrase, *hasbídí bik'ínílish*, and they would run around repeating the Navajo ersatz to raucous laughter. This phrase can be glossed as “urinate on top of a mountain dove”; the alliteration with “pee” and “pigeons” perhaps sounds better in English, and that is part of the joke. Thus, “pee on pigeons” becomes a humorous, alteric, and arguably counterhegemonic commentary on institutional intrusions on language use.

Such bilingual, phonological twists are a genre of joking found quite often in everyday discourse among Navajo speakers, and this example illustrates bilingual speech play at its very best, used both as humor and as social commentary. These days, “speak English” indexes broader “English only” movements begun in highly contested, multiethnic spaces like Arizona, where increasing numbers of Spanish speakers have

motivated a certain portion of the populace to launch legislative defenses against perceived threats to the English language. In fact, this joke came up within the context of a discussion with Navajo language expert Irene Silentman on the most recent “English only” legislation in Arizona, Proposition 203.²⁴ We were talking about all of the ways in which Anglos have tried to control the language and speech of Native peoples, and the highly charged topic of the Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding schools immediately surfaced. BIA boarding schools, and counterhegemonic speech play such as the above example, are part of the shared discourses and experiences of many Navajo community members.

“Pee on pidgins” highlights both in-group and out-group ideologies about the Navajo language, as well as the experiences of colonialism and modernity which can influence local discourse and practice. As a gateway to broader discourses and novel practices, this chapter examines Navajo language ideologies from a variety of perspectives. First, I explore Navajo conceptions of the academic notion of linguistic ideology, which informs the rest of my study. Next I outline a range of ideologies, from “lay” or “folk” (Werner and Schoepfle 1987) understandings of the religious, philosophical, and sacred nature of the Navajo language, to the more general discourses of valor and contempt surrounding the Navajo language and Navajoness more broadly. Next, I discuss Navajoness as directly related to language ideologies, and offer an analytical framework for looking at locally recognized ideologies, identities, and genres

²⁴This act is also known as the. "English Language Education for Children in Public Schools," and will be discussed in detail below.

in relation to each other. This discussion is crucial for understanding technologically mediated interactions, as language use and language choice are directly related to the negotiation of identities and the continuity of community.

Language Ideologies

Language ideologies have direct implications for language use, and due to the potentials for a range of valuations of languages, dialects, and registers from speakers and non-speakers alike. They have direct implications for language vitality as well.

Language ideologies also influence—and are influenced by—beliefs about the propriety of a language in particular domains. In minority, indigenous language communities, local language ideologies can be influenced by seemingly conflicting discourses of progress and tradition, and while such ideologies can be shared within particular communities, their implementation and meaning are subject to constant variation among community members (Morgan 2004; Morgan 2001). In addition to influencing communicative practices and community building, metadiscursive practices have broader implications for issues such as the “social organization of technology” (Keating 2000), the construction of meaning in social practices (Hall 1996), the consequences of shifting spaces for language contact and change (Errington 1998), and participation within increasingly mediated and interconnected public spheres (Briggs and Bauman 1999).

In academic discourses, language ideology as a field of inquiry is often traced to Silverstein’s work illustrating how linguistic ideology understood as “rationalization” both affects and explains linguistic structure (Silverstein 1979). Earlier scholars also

noted the importance of speakers' metalinguistic commentaries and local organizations of grammar in any research (Hymes 1973; Stross 1974), and others have since suggested that any claim about the grammar of a language is ideologically constituted (Rumsey 1990), a view which I also hold. Silverstein defined the concept of linguistic ideology as "sets of beliefs about language articulated by the users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use" (Silverstein 1979:193).

As elaborated by subsequent scholars, language ideology studies must take into account variations within a community as well as seemingly contradictory statements within individuals (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994). For my own research, documenting and exploring the variation in Navajo language ideologies was fundamental to understanding emergent practices, as language ideologies often represent ethnoaesthetic judgments on broader discourses of tradition and change, and presage contemporary Navajo language use. As Woolard notes, "Notions of how communication works as a social process, and to what purpose, are culturally variable and need to be discovered rather than simply assumed. ...we emphasize language ideology as a mediating link between social structures and forms of talk" (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994:55).

Another component to the study of language ideologies are researcher ideologies, especially in indigenous and Native language studies (Silverstein 1996, 2000). Following Goodwin (1994), Kroskrity illustrates how professional discourses reify certain aspects of language, which he labels "professional language ideology" and defines as "the assumptions about language in general and indigenous languages in particular that shaped professional discourse within cultural and social anthropology, especially in the treatment

of language and identity" (Kroskrity 2000:). Collins warns against those who would "grant sciences of language a special status vis-à-vis ideologies of language" (Collins 1998).

Pratt (1997) also questions the reification of language, building upon what others have argued is the static notion of a speech community, a false, idealistic and "imagined" construction not reflecting reality (Keating 2001). Following Anderson's (1987) notion of the "imagined community," Pratt constructs an argument to show how linguists have falsely imagined their "linguistic utopias," without integrating agency and power relations into studies of language communities: "When seen as a site of social reproduction and struggle, language cannot be imagined as unified" (Pratt 1997:62).²⁵ Kroskrity's reexamination of linguistic work with Arizona Tewa illustrates how earlier scholars like Edward Dozier were products of the received wisdom of language, and illustrates, for example, how an underestimation of Tewa language ideologies impeded Dozier's ability to see how Tewa were creating identity through their discourse (Kroskrity 2000).²⁶

Ethnographies of communication in Southwest Native American communities have involved long-term explorations of specific communicative practices such as silence (Basso 1970), ceremonial speech (Kroskrity 1998), and the linguistic construction of space (Basso 1996), illustrating the important relationship between language vitality,

²⁵ See also Keating (Keating 2001) for a discussion of the critiques of speech community within the ethnography of communication.

²⁶ There is some inherent irony in this example as Ed Dozier was actually a Native ethnographer and a native speaker of a closely related dialect.

identity, and specific language ideologies. Kroskrity's case study of the Arizona Tewa, who live in a separate village on the Hopi's First Mesa, explores how identity and language contact are negotiated in multilingual contexts through "linguistic compartmentalization," "strict purism," and "indexing of identity." His research demonstrates the ways in which Tewa speakers control the effects of language contact from Hopi and English by framing language as sacred, as well as socially regulating the use of Tewa (Kroskrity 1993, 1998).

Language Ideology: A Navajo View

In the summer of 2003 I was giving a presentation on my dissertation research to the participants of a language seminar, in which I was explaining the concept of language ideology and how it was a central component of my research. As I was standing in front of the crowded room of Navajo linguists and language instructors, it dawned on me that—despite years of ethnomethodology training—I had never elicited Navajo terminologies for, or local perspectives on, this important area of academic inquiry. I reasoned that if I was truly going to understand the link between ideology and communication as a social process, then my consultants should be involved in the theory as well as the data. I mustered up the only gloss I could think of: *Saad bahane*’, or “stories about language.” There was no time for discussion of my gloss, or at least it was not as important to the audience as commenting on the inadequate and often humorous speech of Navajo DJ's on KTNN. I continued my research for another year with *saad bahane*’ as my frame.

On one level, *saad bahane'* as a gloss for language ideology does make perfect sense. *Diné bahane'* are “stories about Navajos,” or more accurately, Navajo creation stories. I wanted to get at all of the ways in which people think about and talk about the Navajo language, and it seemed to me that the idea of *hane'*, in all its forms and variants, was a good place to start. As it turns out, it was a good place to start, but the idea only began to scratch the surface. Most of my day-to-day consultants were very good at explaining and giving examples of specific ideologies from their own lives and experiences, and when I broached the topic in Navajo of *saad bahane'*, they seemed to know what I was getting at. In retrospect, consultants perhaps thought I wanted merely information or news about the Navajo language rather than broader attitudes or beliefs. In any case, the phrase seemed to work at the time.

At the same conference the following year, I began by asking the assembled experts what they thought of my translation of language ideologies, which sparked great discussion. What emerged was a dialogue about the nature of ideology itself, the nature of “language,” and an inherent link between beliefs about language and a belief *in* language. While some of them liked my idea of “stories about language,” the first suggestion to emerge from the group was *saad baa ntsáhákees*, glossed as “thoughts, or thinking about (thinking through) language.” However, for some who were present it did not index speakers’ beliefs or attitudes, just the process of planning or thinking.

This led to the idea of *saad beeháhodít'é*—“through language things are made ready, are together.” The verb (without the 1st postposition *bee*, “through it”) *háhodít'e* is generally associated with ceremonial preparations, and a transition to more esoteric

constructions of language ideology, at least for Navajo, was emerging. One consultant not affiliated with the NLA later explained that this particular concept “means things are together, that they are ready, in relation to ceremonies. When you’re having the medicine man over, the firewood, the food, whatever dirt or ashes you have to gather together, they have to be ready. Things can’t be out of place. That’s what háhodít’e means to me.”

The discussion at the NLA led, as most discussions of the Navajo language anywhere tend to do, to the idea that the language itself cannot be separated from the people who speak it, and from the traditional ceremonial knowledge and philosophy from which it stems. Most of my consultants, with a range of attachments to the religious or traditional aspects of Navajo, exhibit this same understanding of the language: *Diné bizaad* (“Navajo language”) is integral component of *Diné k’éjį* (“Navajo Way”), and often people refer to the language itself as *Diné k’éjį*.²⁷ So it was not unexpected when talk about the spiritual connotations of certain verb stems resulted in a concept of language ideology as *saad woodł3* (“beliefs in language,” as in to believe in something spiritually or philosophically). This concept also works because of the direct link to the English term ideology as it was being discussed. Finally, one participant who had remained quiet during much of the discussion offered her opinion. She was an elder in her community and a self-identified traditionalist, and suggested that we were going about it all wrong. “It’s living,” she said. “*Saad niilyá*. That’s referring to it as a living thing. That’s what it should be.”

²⁷ Likewise, *Bilagáana k’éjį* (Anglo ways) can be often be heard in place of *Bilagáana bizaad* (English) when referring to the English language.

Months later, I was showing my list of translations of “language ideologies” to Eddie, one of my regular consultants, for feedback and commentary. He was never formally trained in Navajo literacy, but had little problem figuring out the orthography; once comfortable with what was meant in my list, he thought about it for (what seemed like) a long time. “Why can’t it be all of these things? Why does it have to be just one?” I thought about this for a moment, and began wondering the same thing. He continued his explanation:

I mean they all make sense on a different level. I can see where they would all fit, where they would all fit different people at different times, for different situations. There are different levels of understanding, of meaning here. I bet if you took your chart here, you could find a place for each concept along a continuum like that, for each of these people.²⁸

I provide this detailed account of elicitation for many reasons, and will go into this idea further below, but I summarize by noting that first and foremost, this discussion demystifies the process of cultural learning in my own fieldwork. It also clarifies why I have chosen to organize discussions from *saad bahane*’ (stories about language) and *níhízaad niilyá* (“our language as a living thing placed down by the gods”), progressing from language issues to Navajo as a living language related to its *speakers*—or more accurately, its *users*. It is also a great example of how bilingual metadiscussions on language ideology can provide specific examples and case studies, which can augment

²⁸ He is referring to the illustration of language variation, Fig. 7, which we were discussing more generally.

and deepen our theoretical understanding of language ideologies (Werner and Schoepfle 1987). In this case, constructing a definition of—and paradigm for—Navajo language ideologies allows for a richer investigation into the processes of linguistic transformation. And finally, it illustrates how ideologies of language in the Navajo case can be grounded in such specific semantics and structures of the language as a verb stem.

Indeed, *saad niilyá* refers to the “old stories,” to the Navajo creation stories and the creation of the Navajo language itself. *Niilyá* is derived from the handling verb stem *lá*, which is utilized for discrete plural objects or for a single flexible, ropelike object. As an /l/ classifier with the /ni/ prefix, it implies that “O is set down, placed, created, provided (as the stars, moon, sun, game animals, at creation)” (Young, et al. 1992:362). *Saad* means word, words, or language, depending upon context. *Diné bizaad* are “words of the Navajo”, i.e. the Navajo language, with a phonological shift to [z] due to the bi prefix. *Saad* (“language”) is considered to be different than *y’áti* (“speech”); Witherspoon notes that *y’áti* is the outward representation of *saad*—there has to be language before there is speech (Witherspoon 1983).²⁹

Saad niilyá is both a way to look at and analyze Navajo language ideologies and a language ideology unto itself. It also illustrates that when considering Navajo language ideologies, especially from a more traditional perspective, it is imperative to avoid the Cartesian mind/body split, or to simply include language as an aspect or marker of culture or identity. As mentioned above, there is relatively little compartmentalization of

²⁹ While this interpretation may appear to be heavily influenced by structuralist paradigms, this relationship between language and speech is discussed often by my consultants.

the Navajo language, especially in traditional realms. Not only in terms of healing in Navajo, but also when looking at the relationship between language and identity, it is crucial to address the relationship between thinking, being, language, land, and livelihood. In other words, for many Navajos, language is inseparable from culture, even as both are in a constant state of transformation.

The Sacred & the Mundane

For many speakers, of course, the true meaning of *saad niilyá* goes beyond its relationship to the creation stories and traditional philosophy, and is not usually associated with the academic paradigm of language ideology. As one consultant explained, “There's a prayer that goes the way the phrase is stated and so this is said throughout the ceremony. I guess the important concept is that the holy people, *diyin dine'é nihá niinilaá*—the holy people laid (placed) the language for us.” This particular utterance, in combination with the larger prayer, indexes a central facet of traditional philosophy, and is repeated as part of a larger ceremonial context. The phrase *Saad, saad nizhónigo niilyá* can be repeated as part of this prayer, and it can be glossed roughly as “language is, words are, given to us in beauty.” Like many phrases in traditional Navajo ceremonies, this utterance is both performative and transformative, in the sense of what

many consider to be the healing power of words and language in traditional Navajo philosophy.³⁰

Indeed, the Navajo language is often referred to as a “gift from the *Diyin Diné*, the Holy People,” and, in English, its use and very existence is often referred to as “sacred” (Witherspoon 1977). As such, it is part of a larger category of *diné bá niilyáii*, “things that were created for the Navajo,” which includes *ko’* (fire), *tó* (water), *hataál* (ceremonies), *sin* (song), and *ch’iyáán* (food) (Werner, et al. 1983:589). As is the case with all of these elements from a traditional perspective, language is seen as a living, breathing entity to be treated with the utmost respect.

Many believe that the language has powers, and improper use of the language can affect one’s thoughts or actions, and at worst, can affect the thoughts of others, sometimes included in activities related to “jealousy” or “witching” (Kluckhohn 1944). *Doo da. Hak’iji ndooleeh* (“Don’t do it. It will come back on you”) is an oft-repeated warning about the consequences of thinking impure thoughts or talking about others. In healing rituals, *hataál* (chants or songs) are repeated by the singer and patient in a ceremonial hooghan, and in the ideal, closely resemble chants and songs placed down for the Diné. In traditional Navajo healing, Navajo is the *ideal* means of transformation and

³⁰Such prayers are not static, and are altered for specific contexts and are often individualized by speakers. This genre of Navajo has been exhaustively explored (Csordas 1999; Goddard and Reichard 1933; Kluckhohn and Wyman 1940; Lamphere 1992; Lewton 2000; Matthews 1887, 1894; McNeley 1981; Reichard 1950; Sapir, et al. 1942; Wyman and Haile 1957).

curing, suggesting an ideology like Kroskirty's "strict compartmentalization" where ideally English is excluded.³¹

Lorenzo Begaye,³² a young hataáí from the Chinle Valley, explained his conception of the Navajo language as it relates to healing, life, and the sacredness of language:

You can weave beautiful thoughts, healing thoughts, and you can heal people, oo diné ła haaji haazí [people get healed this way]. You can feel better. And that's how beautiful and sacred our language is. And even that is very sacred and has a lot of religious significance to it. Whereas westerners they have people that are psychologists, they have spiritual leaders, they have medical doctors, everything is separated. It's like you're taking the human body and totally taking it apart. It's like they totally dissected their language. But with Navajo language we have not dissected it, everything is still whole, where it still functions as a whole, where we can heal. It has healing powers. All of that is how our language is. (Lorenzo Begaye)

The notion of "dissecting" a language will be discussed further below. However, by mentioning the sacred and healing aspects of Navajo, Lorenzo's statement alludes to what some consider the cornerstone of traditional Diné k'ejí, that is, the concept of *Sq'ah*

³¹ My research indicates an increasing trend in traditional healing, in which a non-speaker will have a translator sit in on the ceremony. The effects and ramifications of this phenomenon are beyond the scope of this study.

³² There are two alternate spellings for this last name which appear in this work according to the individual's preference: Begay and Begaye.

naghai bik'e h0zh= (SNBH). This concept is a primary source of the ideology that language can make things happen, can heal, and is transformative. It can roughly mean a state of “universal beauty, harmony, and happiness” one reaches after living a long life in *h0zh=* o and dying of old age (Witherspoon 1983:572).³³ It is often referred to in a shortened form, *h0zh=*, which by itself indexes the entirety of the concept. SNBH is a foundational principal of the creation stories, and in fact, the words themselves (both *Sa'ah naghai* and *Bik'e hozho*) represent specific characters in these stories (*ibid.*).

Of course, not all metadiscursive ideologies are sacred, and speakers rarely overtly invoke philosophical paradigms in everyday practice. When discussing language ideologies with Navajos, Navajo speakers, and to a certain extent, those who research Navajo language issues, several recurring and more secular themes consistently emerge. The Navajo language itself is inevitably described as being “descriptive,” due to the precision of handling stems and other object-verb descriptors; as being “difficult,” due to phonology and the complex nature of verb structures; and—as shown above—as being “whole” or sacred due to its integral relationship to foundational philosophies of traditional Navajo culture and healing. These descriptors all represent specific ideologies about the language, or rather, the speech, in comparison with English speech, and will be explored further below.

³³ See also (Reichard 1950; Wyman and Haile 1957).

On Separating Language & Culture

When removed from more traditional spiritual or philosophical contexts, however, traditional concepts like *saad niilyá* and the framework of SNBH become contested paradigms. In some new incarnations, SNBH is the cornerstone of many pedagogical efforts at Diné College and some secondary schools which seek to infuse a more Navajo perspective into educational institutions. House (2002) suggests that the SNBH paradigm represents the balance and harmony needed for language vitality and cultural preservation, and that Diné College and other educational institutions should broaden the pedagogical uses of SNBH to include efforts at language maintenance. House explains that "...many Navajo young people no longer know their culture and its teachings and do not have knowledge of this paradigm as a resource to bring to bear on their troubles and challenges" (p. 90).

While many Navajos don't adhere to the strict compartmentalization associated with Hopi or Tewa, some Navajos believe that secular applications of the fundamental elements of Navajo culture are inappropriate. I was sitting outside a friend's house with my colleague Andy one day, discussing the creation of the Navajo language. The subject of Diné College came up, and Andy, a self-described traditionalist from the Utah portion of the Rez, told me that "the problem is that they're messing it all up. They don't understand what *sa'ah naghai bik'e h0zh=* really means. They're taking it out of context and twisting it so it doesn't work."

Andy is alluding in his statement to broader discourses on the Reservation regarding the appropriateness of teaching Navajo "culture" side by side with the Navajo

“language.” As previously discussed, many Navajos (not necessarily traditionalists) believe that there can be no separation between Diné k’ejí and Diné bizaad. The Whorfian link between language, culture, and environment is very strong in many traditional Navajo worldviews. For some, teaching the language by excluding essential frameworks such as h0zh= (“beauty/balance”) or *saad sani* (“old songs, sacred language”) is to not teach the language at all, or to teach the language without the appropriate framework for its deployment (see below). Andy’s frustration goes beyond educators; he said that he often felt alone in constant struggles against Navajo Christians and the Navajo Nation government on the importance of respecting traditional beliefs.³⁴

By challenging the teaching of language and culture, more conservative Christian paradigms also present challenges to Navajo language teachers who integrate culture with language. Thus, language maintenance issues become contested sites for other issues. While the fluidity between the three main “religions” on the Navajo Nation (“traditional,” Native American Church, and Christianity) has been documented (Aberle 1966; Csordas 1999; Garrity 2000; Lewton 2000), there appear to be more conservative ideas surfacing in discourses of education, tradition, and propriety. One day as I was waiting for an

³⁴ The rapid ascent of pentacostal and evangelical Christianity on the Navajo Nation are visible on drives across the Rez, both long and short. The ubiquitous presence of hand-painted signs indicating the next revival, camp meeting, or bible study far outnumber the humble signs indicating a “squaw dance” with its large arrow pointed towards the event (“squaw dance” is local usage, and while considered by some to be inaccurate, it is not considered derogatory as in other Native communities.). In a not-so-subtle nod to conservative Christian discourses nationally, the Navajo Nation council passed a resolution in 2005 banning gay marriage within its borders. This was in direct contrast to the views of many Navajos who take to heart traditional teachings, which say that Navajo *nádleehí* are an integral and important part of the culture, the bridge between Protection Way and Beauty way, male and female. The resolution was brought forth by the self-identified “born again” councilman from the border community of Ft. Defiance, and despite heartfelt protests from other councilmen and an initial “no” vote, was put into the Navajo Nation Code after Navajo President Joe Shirley’s veto was overridden by a newfound, nearly unanimous majority.

interview at a senior center in the heart of the Reservation, I struck up a conversation with a woman, Bessie, who had come to visit her mother. Bessie was a self-identified evangelical Christian, and was actually trying to subtly engage me in a conversation on Jesus Christ. Upon request I began telling her about my research into language, and how people might be learning it in new ways. At that point she brought up her daughter's Navajo class in elementary school, and she told me quite firmly that "I don't want my daughter to learn about all that witching stuff. Religion shouldn't be taught in the schools, that's what they always say. So why do they teach this stuff?"

The negative valuation of particular Navajo traditions notwithstanding, these disputes present challenges to schools and teachers devoted to Navajo language maintenance. Language teachers have reported to me that parents' aversions to a more traditional approach to Navajo language pedagogy are increasingly more frequent and more vocal. One concern many teachers have is that if Navajo is divorced from its cultural context, then what remains isn't really Navajo. This is an oft-repeated concern, and one which permeates the literature as well: "Native language is inseparable from cultural identity and spirituality. In some case, where schools in native communities are teaching native language and literacy, *clarity* about language, identity, culture, and spirituality is lost" (Lee and McLaughlin 2001:38-39). If separated from *culture*, the Navajo language will be limited to a kind of restricted code, allowing for a more rapid shift to English as the traditional domains for Navajo erode. This issue will only become more serious if new domains are excluded from ideologies on Navajo language use.

While many of the spiritual and philosophical ideas regarding the Navajo language discussed above have been exhaustively explored in other contexts (House 2002; Schwarz 2001; Witherspoon 1977), what is significant in the present approach are the ways in which many of these ideas persist in the lives and thoughts of non-specialists, of everyday people, when they talk about their language. It is important to consider which aspects of tradition are retained, and which particular aspects of tradition are employed in increasingly contested discourses of tradition and modernity, “outside” and “inside,” and “Navajo” and “other.” The viability or the incommensurability of the language—and its speakers—in a rapidly changing and interconnected world depends upon it.

Language & Identity

Although my research focused on popular culture and language in the context of communications media, issues of ethnic identity were always raised by my consultants. Many Navajos view the language as an integral part of being Navajo, an inescapable part of “knowing yourself, your clans, and your traditions.” That language is an emotional and important issue, and considered to be the main marker of Navajo ethnic identity, is not surprising, as “language is the prime symbol system...commonly relied upon so heavily (even if not exclusively) to enact, celebrate and ‘call forth’ all ethnic activity” (Fishman 1989:33). One young woman told a colleague of mine that “The Navajo language means everything, it’s me, that’s who I am. If I am tempted to do something, it

just reminds me of who I am.”³⁵ Woolard argues that language ideologies are directly linked to collective and individual identity:

...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. (Woolard 1998:3)

Many Navajos consider language to be within a person, part of a person, even if they lack basic proficiency in the language. Rex Jim, a Navajo educator and poet, told a group of students that “the gods have already given you the Navajo language; all you have to do is tap into it.” When speaking about Navajos who are not speakers of Navajo, consultants always phrased things in terms of “she lost *her* language” or “he doesn’t speak *his* language”. The following exchange between me and one of my consultants, Cheryl Bitoni, a Navajo woman in her 40s considered by her peers to be exceptionally fluent in both English and Navajo, reflects the view of many:

L.P.: What do you think of the younger generation’s Navajo? What do you think about this new language that’s emerging with English?

C.B.: I think we should stick with our Navajo language as fluently as we can because that is the language that identifies us as a culture. When we begin

³⁵ (JY Interview from Remes 1992)

incorporating other sounds, other words that are non-Navajo, we are going away from the identity that we have as Navajo people.

L.P.: So the language is your identity?

C.B.: Yes, it is. It defines us. That's all we have in the world. And if we lose everything else, at least we'll have our language that says, "Yeah, they're *Diné*".

Joshua Fishman has noted that the relationship between language and ethnic purity is very powerful "precisely because language is so often taken as a biological inheritance" (Fishman 1991:26). However, when I asked consultants about the sensitive topic of Navajos who didn't speak Navajo, almost all of them agreed that they were Navajo as well. Consider this exchange between me and a bilingual consultant in his late 40s:

LP: What about someone who is half-Navajo and doesn't speak the language?

BL: Yeah, they're Navajo.

LP: What about someone who is one-quarter Navajo, grew up in Los Angeles, and speaks only English?

BL: (Pause) Yeah, they're Navajo. You can't deny your roots. You can't deny who you are.

There are many other Navajos who reflect this ideology of identity and language. At a conference on Navajo language issues, one Navajo educator made this point to Navajo youth who were present: "You don't have to speak Navajo to be a Navajo or

Native American. You are already Native American; your skin is brown. It's in your blood" (Cantoni 1996:135). However, over the past 30 years there has been a shift in speakers' ideologies that two languages—Navajo and English—are necessary for negotiating the contemporary Navajo world. This is due in-part to a resurgence in pride as well as empowering uses of the Navajo language discussed below and in Chapter 4. Genevive Jackson, a well known politician and educator, co-organized a meeting designed to counter the impending Unz initiative in Window Rock in June 2000. Jackson said at the meeting that "A person that speaks two languages is worth two persons." However, as the exchange above indicates, speaking Navajo is no longer a prerequisite for Navajoness, yet the link between language ideologies and ideologies of identity both affect practice on an individual and group level.

It should be noted that even among non-speakers, the language itself is highly valued. However, in practice, this ideology of identity is more complex. A few years ago, I attended an informal gathering one evening of Navajo males in their early twenties where a discussion began between two of them about what constituted a Navajo. The instigator of the discussion was a Navajo-speaking youth who grew up on the Reservation, and the other one had grown up in Phoenix speaking only English. The "Rez Rat" was accusing the "Urban Indian" of not being a "real" Navajo because he didn't speak his language. The urban youth was defending his ethnicity based on his bilateral bloodlines and the fact that he could not help where he was brought up. The discussion soon erupted into a serious fistfight which had to be stopped. This anecdote

highlights the fact that passions can run deep when the subjects of language and ethnicity are discussed.

Vitality

There are a variety of factors involved in language shift in the Americas, including economics, politics, disease, coercion, and mandatory schooling (Hinton 2001; McCarty 1998; Silver and Miller 1997), and in each situation, the combination of factors has been different (Hymes 1973). In some cases, language choice—and ultimately language shift—is influenced by ideologically charged perceptions of Native identity informed by mainstream representational discourses (discussed in Chapter 3), and local Navajo dominant ideologies, both of which are examples of what Bourdieu calls dominant *orthodoxy* explored in Chapter 5 (Bourdieu 1977, 1991). Dorian suggests that "ideologies of contempt" describe one language's perceived inferior status, defined as both contempt for linguistic diversity and its speakers' social, political, or economic status (Dorian 1998). Shonerd's analysis of discrimination against Navajo and Navajo English speakers in Reservation schools shows how ideologies of contempt are reproduced in everyday institutional contexts (Shonerd 1990).

The apparent vitality of the Navajo language is due to the presence of an estimated 100,000-150,000 speakers. In fact, while Navajo is often viewed as a language that is not endangered due to the number of speakers, the evidence is clear that there is a massive language shift to English occurring on the Navajo Nation, especially in proportion to the total population and in relation to the age of existing speakers (Arviso

and Holm 2001; Holm 1996; Slate 1993; Spolsky 2002). This trend is of great concern to many Navajos themselves and is an ominous sign for Native languages in general, as Navajo is one of only a handful Native American languages that continue to have active child speakers (Silver and Miller 1997).

In fact, “there are more children speaking Navajo than children speaking all other indigenous US languages combined” (Krauss 1998:14-15). However, some studies suggest that “the majority of Navajo speakers today who choose to speak Navajo language most or all of the time are adults who are 30 years of age and older” (Lee and McLaughlin 2001:30). Generalizations like this are observable, for example, in laundromats, where parents in their twenties or thirties will interact with each other in Navajo, while speaking English to their children. Groups of youth hanging out, especially more cosmopolitan oriented youth, will invariably use English in interactions; however, those youth who could be considered locals use forms such as the “bilingual mixed code” described below. At the same time, however, English is becoming an internal prestige language, illustrated below and exemplified by grandparents who want to—or have to—learn English. This, to me, is significant and will be explored further.

The perceived causes of language loss, and thereby culture lost, are varied among my consultants. Anthropologists, linguists, and others have been implicated in the loss of language. One elder, a self-described traditionalist and community activist, told me that “White people run around paying for information...that’s why they don’t teach their grandchildren.” However, others challenge the discourse of language and culture loss on traditional grounds. One consultant commented about Navajos who dwell on language

loss: “People always talk about how we are losing our language. ‘*Nihizaad adindooleel*,’ they say [“Our language will be no more.]. You can’t say that. Otherwise you’re just saying what’s going to happen, or what you want to happen.” In this interpretation, Navajos themselves are killing their own language by talking about its death. The language has powers, and you have to watch what you predict.³⁶

Unemployment is extremely high on the Navajo Nation, and the drive for economic development in the form of mining, logging, and tourism is high, presenting a dilemma for those Navajos espousing a “traditional” lifestyle and language maintenance. One of my Auntie’s was discussing poverty and culture on the Navajo Reservation with me during an interview, and she told me that “At the same time you say preserve the culture, preserve the traditions. Yikes. It’s a balancing act every day. Right now I don’t know how balanced it is, because you have mouths to feed. How can you think about tradition and culture when you have mouths to feed? It’s pretty hard.” There are also negative valuations against Navajo identities, which directly impact language use. Reflecting Dorian’s “ideology of contempt,” some youth were reported to be ashamed of their Native identity. Reasons given to me included the impact of seeing negative images of Native Americans in the mainstream mass media and “seeing their people stumbling [drunk] around the streets of Gallup.” One consultant’s son, who is also part Anglo and part Hispanic, actually denies his Navajo roots:

³⁶ There is a traditional story, a prophesy in some cases, that I have heard often about a time in the future when there will be no more Navajo language. This, in turn, leads to the end of the Diné people.

He would use the other two [identities], because he's partially ashamed.

That's what these kids are. They're partially, I think, ashamed. They search for this Native identity, and I don't know what in the hell they're looking for.

Some guy on a pinto horse, with a buckskin, long hair—does that mean Native to them?

Hale noted that language loss is an important issue for many reasons, for the loss of a language is a loss to science and scholarship and an “intellectual wealth” for humanity. It is also, he noted, a personal loss and grief for those who have been unable to teach or learn their native tongues (Hale 1998). Mithun relates knowledge of linguistic diversity to a broader fundamental understanding of humanity (Mithun 1998), and Fishman notes that language is often an important, if not the only, marker of ethnic identity and political power (Fishman 1989). As Lorenzo commented about language loss: “And to think about how it would be to lose our language, it's the priceless treasure that we have, *ya*” (Begaye 2004).

Change is not incommensurate with ideas of tradition, and change in various forms has been accepted and even encouraged by Navajos over the centuries. The discussions above highlight the link between traditional language and culture, and true to the idea of *saad niilyá*, many conversations about language turn to land, livelihood, and various forces at play. Nichole, a mother of three, told a group of us that “if there's no more sheep, if there's no more farms, if there's no more springs, if I can't walk the land with my kids and show them the natural plants and the vegetation, that's what's going to

kill our language. That's what's going to kill our culture."³⁷ I believe it is not so much that some Navajos believe that change is bad; rather, it is the parameters of change, the perceived sources of change, that are antagonistic. Nanabah continued to say that "what people on the outside are doing to us is they're forcing us to change in ways that we don't want to change. They're forcing us to abandon that with which we're making a very basic living." As discussed earlier, the idea of "outside forces" affecting contemporary Navajo life is a constant theme for my consultants. The struggles between "inside" and "outside" forces usually index dualisms of on-Reservation and off-Reservation, or Navajo and non-Navajo.

At the beginning of the Chapter I mentioned the Arizona "English Only" movement, which culminated in Proposition 203, eventually ratified by Arizona voters statewide in 2000. This is another example of the locally identified outside forces at play. The initiative was sponsored by Ron Unz, a California millionaire and software entrepreneur who successfully brought forth similar legislation, Proposition 227, in 1998 in California. Like many such initiatives, Proposition 203 was put forth in response mainly to immigration from Mexico, but would affect all bilingual education, including—it was feared—Navajo immersion and bilingual Head Start programs for children. The effort was well-funded, with Unz providing more than 80% of the \$229,786 it took to get the initiative on the ballot and sell it to voters.³⁸

³⁷ This quote was elicited during a filmed interview for a movie I was producing, *Weaving Worlds*, directed by Bennie Klain. I include this quote, which appears in the movie, because of its poetry and potency.

³⁸ Crawford, James 2001, <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/JWCRAWFORD/az-unz.htm>. Visited August 12, 2005.

Some Navajos signed the petition, and there were young Navajos canvassing Window Rock that summer for signatures supporting the measure. Their rationale was seemingly logical, in that English is important for success in today's world, and hindering the ability to teach English in order to teach Navajo would benefit no one. Opponents of the proposition concerned about such ideological implications for Navajo language maintenance held a meeting that summer, where the contested issue produced compelling public evidence of shifting language ideologies among Navajo speakers—and just as interestingly—among writers.

Signs were posted and flyers distributed which read *Bilagáana bizaad dóó Diné bizaad, éí yá'át'ééh* (“both the Navajo and English languages are good”), and *Bilagáana bizaad téiyá, éí dooda!* (“No to English Only!”). These signs were in Navajo only. First of all, the appearance of so many orthographically correct Navajo phrases on public display represents the symbolic importance of literacy in Navajo, at least for some, in broader debates. This issue will be discussed further in Chapter 4. However, these examples also illustrate the shift in status for both English and Navajo as equally important and useful languages has developed over the past few decades. They also show the ways in which “outside” discourses must be addressed, that is, the extent to which interconnectedness influences practice on the Navajo Nation. As former Navajo Nation president Peterson Zah put it at the meeting, “We know that our language and culture are good and need to be preserved, but there are things happening off the reservation that impact our lives.”

During an interview with local reporters at the time, Navajo codetalkers and local heroes Teddy Draper and Jimmy Begay expressed dismay by the Unz initiative.³⁹ "When we started school in 1929," Draper said, "we were forbidden to speak Navajo. But, when the government got in trouble with Japan in 1942, they called on us to use our language to help win the war" (Carr 2001). Figure 2 is an illustration from the Navajo artist known as Hosteen, whose editorial cartoons appear regularly in the *Navajo Times* weekly edition. It a commentary on the English Only debates, illustrating the importance of the Navajo language. The two Navajo soldiers on the left (indexed only by the fact that they are speaking Navajo) are asking "I wonder how many Japanese are left over there?" The soldiers in the background (presumed to be Japanese) lament the fact that English only laws have not been passed. Hosteen is bringing history to the forefront of renewed debates on language. It is also a great example of language ideologies and literacy, in that standard Navajo orthography is used. Normally, Hosteen's cartoons are in English, or the local variety of Navajo English. Indeed, the verb tense in "I wish they had pass the English Only Law" in the English text is a characteristic of Navajo English.

³⁹ All of the surviving codetalkers are considered to be local heroes, and regularly appear at events and functions as guests of honor.



Figure 2: English Only Cartoon by Hosteen.

Courtesy of the *Navajo Times*.

Valorization

Perhaps not unexpectedly, and apart from overtly politicized events like the Unz initiative, the Navajo language is usually discussed in the context of comparisons to English. Such comparisons are brought to the forefront due to the dominance of English, both symbolically and practically, on Navajo practice; the bilingual nature of many interactions, including much intergenerational teaching; and the fact that my own research both highlighted the issue and was itself bilingual. House suggests that the binary opposition of Navajo vs. English, as well as the “valorization” of the Navajo language in relation to English, are alteric strategies employed by Navajos to counter negative stereotypes and years of colonial dominance.

For example, when Navajos quite seriously say that they "won" World War II through the use of their unique language, they are making an important ideological point about their history of loyalty and their contributions to the United States and its other citizens. However, this point is made at the expense of many other individuals and groups who also had something to do with the allied forces' victory" (House 2002:46).

What House fails to recognize, perhaps, is the point made by Hosteen in the lower left caption of the cartoon in Figure 2, which reflects Begay and Drapers' point made above: The small character in the corner states that "We help win the war, but we're treated like second class citizens!" That there is resurgent "pride" in the language among many Navajos, especially young people, is a relatively recent phenomenon, a result of heightened ethnic and linguistic awareness beginning with the locally-controlled schools movement of the 1960s and 1970s and events such as the declassification of the role of Navajo "Code Talkers" in World War II (McCarty 2002; McLaughlin 1992). In these cases, political consciousness among the Navajo and Native Americans in general heightened ethnic awareness and spawned local initiatives to counter the destructive Navajo language policies of the federal government.

As noted above, when Navajo speakers—as well as Navajos who do not speak Navajo—compare the Navajo language to English, several themes consistently emerge. One of the most frequent descriptors used in reference to Navajo is that it is "difficult." It is a source of pride for many Navajos that their language has been considered to be one of the most difficult languages in the world by some scholars, more than a few language

learners, and now, by many Navajos themselves.⁴⁰ This pride is felt by many Navajos regardless of age, gender, or proficiency due in part to the language's difficulty and uniqueness relative to English. When talking about translating advertisements from English on KTNN, my colleague John Chee put it this way: "When you want to explain something in English it's fairly simple. But to explain something in Navajo...it becomes cumbersome and long and detailed. You pretty much have to explain something in detail in Navajo."

Indeed, it is also argued (and has been stated to me on many occasions) that some scholars also considered Navajo to be one of the more interesting languages for study, evidenced by frequent mention of its unique grammatical features, complex verb structures, and phonology in texts. When Lorenzo was talking about Westerners breaking up their languages, and when Andy mentioned the disjunct between traditional modes and non-traditional uses of traditional modes, they were both referring to Western sciences of psychology and linguistics, respectively, topics that came up later with both consultants and subjects with which they had experience.

The topic of science "dissecting the language," as opposed to the *saad niilyá* approach of traditional Navajos, is often the source of heated debate. These conflicting discourses play out in many Native communities where academics are engaged in language issues (Collins 2004). In seminars I have attended, some Navajo speakers who lack advanced degrees in linguistics—or the willingness to engage—often neither

⁴⁰ Oswald Werner often points out that the Navajo language is "difficult" to learn only for non-Athabaskan speakers.

understand nor agree with an approach to language that breaks down speech into rules, morphemes, and phonemes. Sometimes the importance of such studies is apparant to them, sometimes not. The point is not that one approach should privilege the other, but rather that converging and conflicting ideologies of language create dissonance, the product of competing epistemologies.⁴¹

“Descriptive” is another recurring concept in any discussion of the Navajo language. Mary Manygoats, a Navajo in her early 50s who does not speak the language, told me at one point that “the Navajo language is so rich in description, that anybody who can pull it off and have somebody else understand it and see it visually is really creating something and accomplishing something” (Manygoats 1997). Larry Begay, a young hataali from the central portion of the Navajo Nation, reiterated the point, comparing Navajo to his understanding of English:

Navajo is a very descriptive language. It portrays the thoughts and ideas better than the English language. There’s more feeling in the language. Our language is far more colorful, *ya’*. Our language is colorful in the sense that when someone speaks to you in Navajo, the picture of the Mona Lisa and the

⁴¹ Leonard Faltz, the author of the well regarded *The Navajo Verb*, imparted a warning about complex analyses of grammatical structures stemming from linguistics: “If you break down the language so much and have to make lots of weird rules, then it suggests that the language is so complicated that children can’t learn it. You should simplify, NOT mystify” (2003).

Grand Canyon can be portrayed to you in your mind, in a few words, *ya'*. Our language is artistically and poetically beautiful.⁴² (Larry Begaye)

While Mary is a non-speaker of Navajo, Larry grew up as a bilingual speaker. His English is marked by inflections of a local genre often referred to as Navajo English, indexed by glottal stops, /p/ /b/ inversion, and particular subject/object disagreements. Nonetheless, I consider him to be a mother-tongue speaker of English. For Larry, Navajo is better suited for certain functions, such as description. Perhaps, despite growing up learning two languages simultaneously, Navajo is actually dominant for him. Certain ideologies are also indexed in such depictions of the Navajo language.

I believe that there are three main components of this ideology of “descriptive” in relation to Navajo. First is the fact that within one verb stem or a nominalized derivative, the hearer can visualize the size, shape, hierarchy, and in/animate status of the subject and object. Navajo comedian Vincent Craig has often referred to the Navajo language as “mental television” in the live performances I have attended, due in part to the specificity of grammatical features such as handling stems. The other is the fact that speakers often describe an object—or a place—in terms of what it does or what it looks like, or in the case of cell phones, what they make people do (see Chapter 4). In his work with Navajo poets, Webster provides numerous examples of poets who codeswitch into Navajo where the English term or conception is deemed inadequate, demonstrating what he calls the

⁴² *Ya'* is an affective particle often used in Navajo English and New Navajo, which can be glossed as “you know what I mean?” Some speakers consider its use in either Navajo or in English to be bad Navajo, new Navajo, or impolite speech.

incommensurability of Navajo and English (Webster 2004b, 2005). It has been reported by many scholars of Southern Athabaskan languages that an oft-repeated mantra is “you can’t translate that into English” (see also Samuels 2005).

Teenagers as well are extremely proud of the Navajo language and believe that speaking “real” Navajo, not the modern or “new” version mixed with English, is very important. One teenage girl who was learning Navajo related (in English) that “I’m a Navajo and I should read and write in my own language...I just wanna do it for myself and maybe pass it on to my children.” This also illustrates that some speakers’ ideologies are shifting to include literacy in Navajo as an important aspect of knowing the language (see Chapter 4), and shows that young people are engaged in language issues (see Chapter 5).

Navajo Ways of Speaking—and Being

Saad Niilyá implies that Navajo is a living language, and saad—language—exists before yashtí—speech. As yashtí is the outward manifestation of saad only possible with active users of the language, the language can only exist with its speakers and is directly tied to speakers’ identities. Therefore, the Navajo language itself must relate to speakers in unique and various ways, and there are numerous ways of speaking heard in contemporary Navajo communities, of course, these ways of speaking are increasingly written and read as well. Schaengold (2004) argues that there are three languages in use on the Navajo Nation today: Navajo, English, and what she terms “Bilingual Navajo,” a mixed code of Navajo and English. Schaengold’s work is the most thorough

sociolinguistic research to have been conducted on Navajo in the recent past, and the examples of Bilingual Navajo presented closely reflect my own data on emergent forms (below). Schaengold's data suggest a breakdown of five "speaker types" existing on the Navajo Nation:

Speaker Types

- I. Navajo only
- II. Navajo and English
- III. Navajo, English, and Bilingual Navajo
- IV. English and Bilingual Navajo
- V. English only

I have suggested my own continuum in Figure 3. While the idea of a linear language continuum is problematic as there exist "complex social rules for switching between and mixing items from two (or more) codes in a shared repertoire" (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985), a continuum remains a useful tool for visualizing complex phenomena. Figure 3 is a suggested continuum for the relationship between Navajo ways of speaking, and ways of being Navajo. It is an elicited chart derived from interviews, observations, and continuous feedback from consultants. The chart places locally recognized identities that for some Navajos directly correspond to ways of speaking. Significant differences may not exist between these speaker types, but it is important that some Navajos think of differences as existing and equate particular identities with particular ways of speaking.

Above, when Eddie questioned the Navajo perspective on language ideology as being limited to *saad niilyá*, he mentioned that local language ideologies could be viewed as a progression from *saad baa ntsáhákees*, ("thoughts, or thinking about language") to

saad beeháhodít'é (“through language things are made ready, are together”) to *saad niilyá*. He remarked that “if you took your chart here, you could find a place for each concept along a continuum like that, for each of these people.” This progression reflects the perceived continuum of language and identities between the traditional and modern, the cosmopolitan and the local. Based upon my work, I have suggested two ideologies which frame these discussions, that is the idea of Standard American English as an ideal form, as well as the notion of *saadsání* (old language, often referred to as *Nabahii bizaad*) as being the true standard or idealized form of Navajo, the form aspired to in ceremonial contexts in order to communicate with the Holy People. As many of my elderly consultants have said, “*Saadsání Diné K'ejí át'é*. [The old songs, the old words are the Navajo Way.]. That is the real Navajo.”

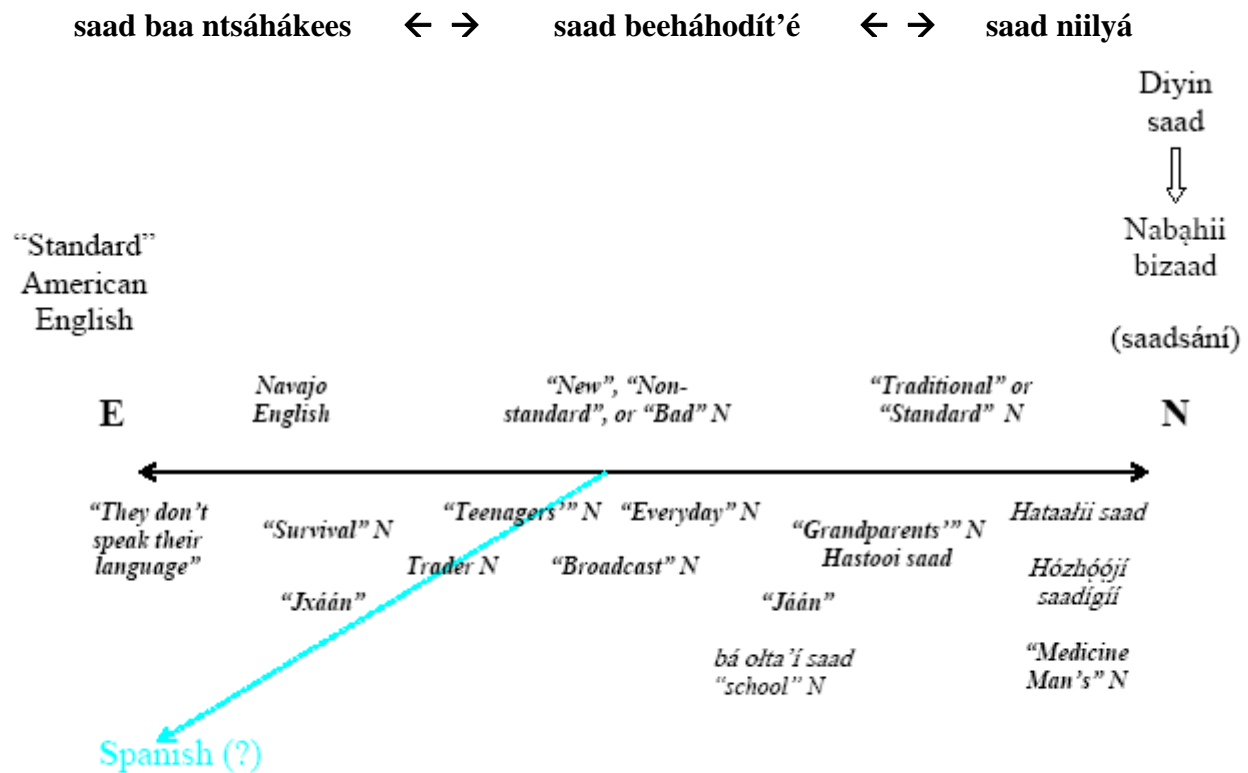


Figure 3: Suggested Navajo Language, Identity, & Ideology Continuum

“Standard” Navajo

A “standard” form of a language can be defined as the absence of stigmatized forms, but a standard form is also an ideal form of a language, existing primarily in the imagination. It is an ideology, a belief in a style that should supersede all other forms, and is a highly legitimizing ideal directly implicated in relations of language and power (Bourdieu 1991). There is a language ideal for everyday use, unanimously described by my consultants as the “old”, “real”, or “traditional” Navajo spoken by the oldest

generation. This differs from the notion of *saadsání* as the ideal for traditionalists, discussed above. Schaengold also defines Standard Navajo as the type of Navajo spoken by the elderly (Schaengold 2004); I prefer the term traditional. This form is characterized by extended lexical knowledge, especially of verbs, and little or no English borrowing. Almost all of my consultants judge their own language abilities in relation to the “traditional” Navajo, and many consider any deviance or lexical shortcoming to be “wrong” or as part of “new” or “slang” Navajo.

Although there are relatively few speakers of the “traditional” type of Navajo, and despite the fact that numerous elderly believe that they themselves do not speak real Navajo (below), this form has a great deal of symbolic power. For example, on our listener survey for KTNN radio (Peterson 1999) we asked participants for language proficiency. In many instances, people of various ages who were obviously (in our opinion) conversing fluently in Navajo in front of us would respond that they did not speak Navajo; when asked, they said they responded that way because they did not speak Navajo like their parents or grandparents (therefore they did not speak Navajo). Thus, there are stigmatized forms in Navajo, but the bases for evaluation of these non-standard forms are constantly in a state of transformation. I have spoken with many elderlies who emphatically state that they themselves speak bad Navajo, and do not speak it the way that *their* grandparents spoke.

However, even traditional Navajo is fused with loan words from Spanish, such as *béeso* (“money”) and *géeso* (“cheese”), as well as terms for relatively new concepts such as *chidí* (“car”). Some argue that the nature of the language itself has always

accommodated change (Sapir 1921; Reed 1944). Furthermore, this type of Navajo is subject to the same regional variations described above, as well as other variations among different speakers from the older generation. Gladys Reichard noted early on the immense phonological and lexical variation on the Navajo reservation (Reichard 1945), and other scholars have noted the ongoing incorporation of English loanwords into Navajo (Reed 1944; Sapir 1921). These studies illustrate how phenomena such as variation and loanwords were a part of the speech of today's traditional speakers, the elderly, when they were younger. What is lost with the formation of official standards, or the reliance of a "standard" as a frame of reference in scholarship are these variations.⁴³

For example, the debilitating condition known in English as arthritis is difficult for some monolinguals to pronounce, and unfortunately, it is a word they often have to use. Often, one can hear elders say *Arthur Yazzie sheiñt'í*, which is a Navajoized, contracted form of *Gizii shaa yinít'í*. Arthur Yazzie is a common name for an older man on the Navajo Nation; Yazzie is to Navajo what Smith is to the English. Like the phonological twist that transforms "English Only" to "pee on pidgins," the English "arthritis" is transformed into to Arthur Yazzie, and in this case, the objects are contracted from *shaa yin'it'í* to *sheiñt'í*. Grandparents, too, contract their speech, just as in emergent forms such as "New Navajo." This suggests that the standard, ideal forms of language rely on those elements that are chosen, or excluded, from ideologies of the ideal.

⁴³ As discussed below, Robert Young told a group of us that the deprivilizing of language variation was one of the unfortunate unintended consequences of the Navajo Language dictionaries.

Lexical variation will be discussed below in the context of coinology (Ch. 4), but it is important to understand the ideologies behind variation. When asked about language standards and semantic convergence, one consultant gave me her take:

Tódilchxóshí is one example. When I talk about 'pop,' I say *tódilchxóshí*, which means 'the water that bubbles.' But in Gallup area, I notice that they say *tólikání*, 'the sweet water, the tasty water.' That's how they say it. And we say *damóo yázhí* for Saturday ['little Sunday'], and some people say *yiska!ǵ damóo*, which means 'tomorrow is Sunday.' We just have different translations all the way across. One of our DJs, when he says *land*, he says *héya*. I say *kéya*. But he means *kÉyah*. But to me, that's the way he talks, that's his language.

What is significant here is the construction of others' ways of speaking as "his language" or as "that's the way he talks." This ideology reflects the notion of individual responsibility discussed in Chapter 3, *táá hwo ájit éégo*, and it is relatively rare that speakers will make aesthetic comments on older speakers. That would be talking about something going on in another's head, and that would be witching. The point is that the formulation of a standardized form is relatively new, a product of becoming modern, as what once was modern—the speech of the elderlies—has transitioned into the traditional, or the standard.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ "Elderlies" is local English usage referring to grandparents as a group or elders in general. The term "grandparents" usually indexes those over 75, not everyone whose children have had children themselves.

“School Navajo” is important in that it is fast becoming the standard in pedagogical contexts, due to the concerns of language maintenance programs, and especially to the “No Child Left Behind” education act passed by Congress and signed by President Bush in 2001. Because of this act, the Division of Diné Education in Window Rock has had to develop standards for Navajo to be integrated into pedagogical materials, so that standardized tests could be implemented evaluating students’ proficiency.⁴⁵ This is another example of what many Navajos consider to be the “outside” forces affecting what they ostensibly see as personal choice. In fact, the “No Child Left Behind” act is often wryly and jokingly referred to as “No Navajo Left Behind.” The joke is, they all know the Navajos will be left behind. Again.

Language Contact & Emergent Forms

Bereft of a written record, there is little known about the extent or effects of language contact on Navajo during the early migration and settlement period before the arrival of the Spanish.⁴⁶ However, Navajo creation stories, historical documents, and the archaeological record indicate intense contact between the Navajo and peoples speaking languages of the Uto-Aztecan, Kiowa-Tanoan, and Keresan families—especially after the

⁴⁵ This task is made much more difficult due to the complexity of the education system on the Navajo Nation, which includes BIA schools, Charter schools, private preparatory academies, parochial schools, three states with differing requirements, and at least six county school boards within those states operating public schools. Especially within the public school system, each entity has its own requirements and political contexts. Ed Yazzie, personal communication, 2005.

⁴⁶ Ascertaining structural, semantic, or other linguistic influences from this contact is virtually impossible. Some scholars believe that grammatical similarities between Navajo and Tewa, however, are more than coincidence, including like usage of relative clauses, classificatory verbs, and passive prefixes (Kroskrity 1982:64-65).

Pueblo Revolt of 1680 and the return of the Spanish in 1692 when Pueblo peoples escaped Spanish retribution by hiding out—and remaining—amongst what are today considered the Navajo clans (Voegelin, et al. 1967:440). There was also considerable contact between Navajos and Pueblos in the form of regular trade fairs, military alliances, and winter settlements of Navajos outside of Pueblo villages (Kroskirty 1982:66). Today, this contact can be seen lexically, for example, in some Navajo place names, “which are descriptively relevant to either Navaho or to Pueblo cultural Interests” (Voegelin, et al. 1967:439), descriptive clan names such as *Ts4Jj7kin7* (“Cliff Dwellers People clan”), *Naasht’4zh7 dine’4* (“Zuni clan”), or *Ooz47 T1chii’nii* (“Tewa-Hopi Red Running into the Water clan”), indicating the extent of interconnectedness, especially through marriage.

With the arrival of the Spanish in the 1500s came horses, sheep, and the Spanish language. While the lifestyle (and freedoms) of many Southwest peoples were dramatically altered, there were varying degrees of linguistic influence from Spanish. The Spanish were successful in conquering and converting many of the Pueblos, affecting bilingualism or complete language shift to Spanish in some cases. In the case of Navajo, however, there was never societal bilingualism, only an unknown number of slaves, women, or converted Catholics who served as interpreters for trade and sporadic negotiations with the Spanish and Mexican colonial governors; there is no documentation for the use of Spanish as a lingua franca for local indigenous peoples (Brandt 1982). In fact, Navajo has been documented as at least one means of communication between other

groups, including the Spanish and Hopi.⁴⁷ Due to the trade relationship between Navajos and the Spanish, there was a reasonable amount of lexical borrowing which can be seen today in “traditional” Navajo, mentioned above. Such borrowing seems to have been compartmentalized specifically to trade goods introduced by the Spanish.

One of the earliest linguistic phenomenon to arise from contact with Anglo Americans is a variety of Navajo known as Trader Navajo. The role of trading posts in the development of contemporary Navajo society cannot be understated, as traders brought new goods and services into the area, contributing to many economic, social, and political changes (McNitt 1962; McPherson 1992). Trader Navajo is characterized by limited lexical knowledge, a great deal of verb reduction in tense and aspect, and (sometimes humorous) phonological mistakes. According to Werner, Trader Navajo was spoken only by Anglo bilinguals; in his recorded data, Navajos never used Trader Navajo—in fact, they abhorred it. At most, some Navajos simplified their speech with traders, but this was not the norm.⁴⁸ As another indicator of language shift, trader Navajo has been replaced for the most part by English in today’s stores and trading posts. However, it can still be heard in radio advertisements made by older Anglo shop owners

⁴⁷ While Spanish remains a contact language in the New Mexican portions of the Navajo Nation and there are Navajos who are first language speakers of Spanish, there has been no research into this phenomenon. Referring to his work on trader Navajo, Ossy Werner told me that “I heard about, but could never find, traders whose native language was Spanish. That would hve been interesting.”Oswald Werner, personal communication, November 2000.

⁴⁸ Werner discounts the notion that Trader Navajo is a pidgin as it was relegated to the specialized domain of the trading post, by the fact that speakers couldn’t understand surrounding talk, and by the fact that Navajos never used it, not even in humor. “The clinching argument contra pidgin-hood is the fact that Navajos usually shopping at one trading post had difficulty understanding the trader at another less-frequented one. Someone suggested that Trader Navajo was more like kitchen Swahili, with each household developing its own idiolect and the “natives” learn to cope with it, just as the Navjaos learned to cope with Trader Navajo at the trading post they frequented.” (Werner personal communication 2002).

such as “Akali Dilwooshi” (the screaming, or announcing, cowboy), the owner of the Navajo Shopping Center in Gamerco, New Mexico, just north of Gallup.

Schaengold (2004) likens the bilingual mixed code of Bilingual Navajo to Michif in Canada, as it retains Navajo structure with English borrowing and loanwords. She attributes its origins to the boarding school population of the early to mid 20th century, as a type of “solidarity language” evolving from language contact (Leap 1993), and describes the development of Bilingual Navajo as follows:

The bilingual mixed code was formed by fluent bilinguals borrowing elements of English into Standard Navajo; as the grammar of the Navajo bilingual speakers changed to accommodate their knowledge of English, the grammar of the “matrix language” changed accordingly, and the grammar of Bilingual Navajo is slightly different from that of Standard Navajo. The structural changes are not extreme, however, and the grammar of Bilingual Navajo is certainly much closer to that of Standard Navajo than to that of English.

(Schaengold 2004:8)

This type of Navajo is described as having borrowed English content words, full noun phrases, and English verbs with the Navajo auxiliary *áshlééh*. Contrary to other scholars of Navajo, Schanegold does not see the rise of a mixed code as inherently destructive; rather, she notes, it is “maintenance in the midst of this shift” where “the creation of a mixed code by fluent bilinguals may be used to halt the rapid loss of

Navajo” (Schaengold 2004:2) This is due to the fact that the bilingual code may be more accessible to younger speakers and learners of the language.

New Navajo is an emergent practice, yet like most emergent forms of the Navajo language, it is almost invariably critiqued by its speakers and others in relation to traditional Navajo. The same can be said for various expressions of Navajoness. There are several locally recognized forms which are subsets of New Navajo and relate to certain identities such as “Teenage Navajo,” “Modern Navajo,” or “Navajo slang” This form is characterized by reductions in morphology and lexicon, convergence of phonology, the use of contractions, borrowing, and new terminology for more traditional concepts such as *tsxí* for *nizhooní* (“beauty”). Although there are relatively few speakers of the “traditional” type of Navajo, many view any deviance as “not really Navajo.”

My own data suggests what that there are varying degrees of language competence among Navajo youth, and that they term their version of Navajo as being the “New” or “Modern” Navajo; furthermore, many younger people indicate they cannot understand much of their parents’ or grandparents’ Navajo. Nora Curley, a bilingual consultant in her late 20s and a Navajo-language broadcaster gave me the following example from her own experience: “A lot of times when I’m sitting down with the medicine man, I can’t really understand, and they have to kind of pin themselves down to my level. I’m not saying that I’m behind, but they’re a lot older, there’s different ways of describing and talking about things.”

Yet while this “new” Navajo is characterized by verb reduction, borrowing from English, it does retain Navajo syntax and morphology.

- Ex. 1. Diné College biwebsitegóó.
 [Diné College-its website-towards it]
Go to the Diné College website.

The following examples are from Canfield (Canfield 1980)

- 1: Book [a' sh1 save 1n7l44h.
 Book one to me save make 2nd sing.
Save a book for me.
- 2: Naaltsos [1' sh1 hasht'e' nin7'ah.
 Book one to me in storage (adv.) move s.t.
Save a book for me.

In this example, “save me a book/notebook”, Ex. 1 represents new Navajo, while Ex. 2 is the dictionary entry (Young and Morgan 1987). Traditionally, the verb stem [l]eeh (make) is reserved for making things “hands-on”, like bread, but has spread to other uses:

- 3: Bah doo 1sh[44h da.
 Bread not 1st sing. Make (not)
- 4: Naaltsos a[ch'9' 1n7l44h.
 Book to itself 2nd sing. make

These new uses of leeh are taking the place of other verbs, but as one speaker told me, “only grandparents would talk like that. Not even my mom, who’s 65 and only talks Navajo, would say that.” Again, grandparents index the elderlies who are the eldest generation, mostly women in their 90’s.

5. Mom call ínílaa?
 [Mom-call-2nd past do]
Did you call mom?
6. Email write íléléh.
 [email-write-3pl. doing]
We’re writing an email.

Some argue that the lack of proficiency in standard forms indexes a “poverty of the stimulus” or “semilingualism.” Shonerd (1990) argues against theories of semilingualism and the strict analytical framework of the Navajo/English dichotomy that, for Shonerd, holds speakers to unrealistic ideals. He notes that “Navajo suffer not so much from language deficits as from differences vis-à-vis standard English and traditional Navajo” (Shonerd 1990:199). Much of this is due to the privileging of written texts in Navajo such as the dictionary, or of ceremonial language used by medicine men. However, what is interesting is the ideology of degradation over time of the language, illustrated by Curley’s comment above.

Conclusion

This chapter explored emergent Navajo language ideologies through the complex relationship between people, language, and life. Despite the fact that some of these ideologies are rooted in long standing ideas about Navajo philosophy, I call the ideologies under discussion here emergent as they illustrate new contexts and new ways of interpreting tradition. In addition, this discussion provided an introduction to some of the locally identified “outside” forces and discourses that many community members see as influencing transformations in Navajo communities, including language ideologies and language use. Navajo language ideologies are shared, to a certain extent, among many community members, and such shared ideologies are one marker of both community as shared discourse, and of speech community as shared discursive space marked by the activity of communication (Morgan 2004).

Navajo language ideologies are also bound and influenced by the colonial language English, and discourses and ideologies of Navajoness and Navajo language use do not exist in isolation from English. The fact that the Navajo language has come to symbolize Navajoness for many people is an ideology that binds many Navajo community members together, language proficiency notwithstanding. The fact that the “requirements” of Navajoness are shifting in conjunction with, or as a response to, language shift is an important phenomenon to consider for those interested in understanding the complexities of Navajo language shift as a sociocultural process. Like all expressions of collective and individual selfhood, Navajoness is a fluid, negotiated state dependent upon embodied individual practice, agency, socio-political forces, economics, and in- and out-group responses to representations of identity.

An important consideration for any research on indigenous languages in the Americas is the idea that native languages are not the only marker of indigenous identity (Fogelson 1998; Strong and Van Winkle 1996), and that despite language loss, many communities continue to express and recreate their identities and traditions in unique and creative ways, as teaching and learning take on many forms (Cruikshank 1998; Sarris 1993). In some cases, marked forms of English index a Native American identity (Anderson 1998; Leap 1977; Samuels 2004). In the Navajo case, Schwarz indirectly shows how Navajo beliefs and discourses are transmitted in English through the media, gossip, and social interactions, losing none of their importance for a unique and viable Navajo identity (Schwarz 2001).

Language ideologies inform the media and medium of activities related to new communications technologies, and are thus inseparable from the broader discourses of progress and technological transformation. I now turn to a discussion of the inherently complex issues of discourses of modernity and ideologies of technology as they relate to the mediation of contemporary Navajo discourses, and ultimately, to the social mediation of contemporary Navajo communities.

Chapter 3: The Social Life of Technology



Figure 4: Technology & Tradition. Photographer unknown.
Navajo Nation Museum [title my own].

Figure 4 is a well-known old photograph from the 1950's of a Navajo family riding in their clapboard wagon across the dry desert landscape. The woman is dressed in a velveteen blouse, holding a cradle board. A large drum for hauling water is in the back. They are passing beneath massive power lines, apparently on their way *somewhere* (one never knows with such photographs). Utility workers are present with their pickup truck, installing the transmission lines from the newly completed Navajo Generating Station.

The lines will carry power to the growing cities of Phoenix and Las Vegas. It is a posed image, ostensibly for propaganda purposes.⁴⁹ The juxtaposition of the traditional Navajo family with the signs of progress passing them by is blatant; however, it is not without some truth.

Today, one can watch planes fly overhead and those same power lines pass by home sites without electricity or running water. I have herded sheep and goats many times in the Chuska mountains between Lukachukai and Cove, near Buffalo Pass. Part of the sheep trail passes underneath the same massive power lines in the old photograph, emitting a loud crackling noise that breaks the silence of the abandoned mountain sheep camps. On my last trip, Shimá lamented that “No one comes up here anymore. None of the families bring their sheep here anymore. It’s just so quiet and lonely.” These days, the quiet is also broken by increased traffic from the newly paved road over Buffalo Pass.

The photograph, the power lines, and the lonely mountaintop resulting from shifting residence patterns are all products of local experiences with the concurrent processes of modernity and modernization. They illustrate the transformations resulting from increased interconnectedness, the transition to wage labor, and the colonial need to represent and recreate the Other. They are also all tied directly to technology and the transition to contemporary technological life, as automobiles, paved roads, electrification, and new communications technologies have transformed Navajo interactions and communicative practices dramatically over the past 100 years. These processes and

⁴⁹ James Faris suggested to me that there could be no irony implied in the photo, that “it reeks of something like “Exxon” or “Public Service Co of NM” illustrating the great strides being taken to bring the Navajo into the 20th century (Faris, personal communication 2005).

products of modernity reflect and create discourses and ideologies among, and about, Navajos and other traditionally marginalized peoples and their place in an increasingly interconnected world. Such discourses and ideologies have direct implications for language use, for the processes of identity and community making, and for the local applications of media and local understandings of the potentials and pitfalls of new communications technology.

This chapter discusses the discourses and ideologies of progress and modernization as they relate to the societal transformations of technology and mediated communication among the Navajo. I begin with a discussion of the discourses surrounding modernity, technology, and interconnectedness, and the role of the Gates computers and other efforts to bridge the digital divide. This includes a discussion on “equal access” to technology for traditionally marginalized communities. Next I turn to discourses of modernity and tradition which circulate in Navajo communities, illustrating how many Navajo community members themselves construct traditional and modern spaces, and how these conceptions speak to the ways in which new ideas and technologies are adapted and become Navajoized. I then turn to social theories of technology, and how technology is being reconciled in Navajo spaces, leading to the development of self-ascribed “Techno-Indians” as discussed in Chapter 4.

The Gift

On April 17, 2000, President Bill Clinton gave a speech in the parking lot of the Boys and Girls Club of Shiprock, New Mexico, on the Navajo Nation (Fig. 5).⁵⁰ The Shiprock club was chosen in part because it had a small but successful pilot program to bring Internet library resources and computer access to Navajo youth in the community.⁵¹ The speech was part of a series of events called the “New Markets Tour,” whereby the president visited several traditionally marginalized communities across the US to promote economic development. The purpose of the events, and the attention drawn to these impoverished areas, was to “spotlight the great potential for growth, profit, and economic opportunity in these untapped markets. It will also show how long-term partnerships can be used as a model for tapping this potential.”⁵²

⁵⁰ I include this photograph to highlight the monumental importance of the event to many Navajos at the time. It is also an extraordinary mix of Navajo imagery with a President of the United States, including the backdrop of a carefully placed Navajo rug and the outline of Shiprock in the background.

⁵¹ The director of the Shiprock club had also, coincidentally, been a college roommate of a very senior official in the Clinton administration.

⁵² http://clinton4.nara.gov/WH/New/New_Markets_Nov/. Visited August 14, 2005.



Figure 5: President Clinton in Shiprock, NM.
Courtesy of the Clinton Presidential Library.

The visit by Clinton to the Navajo Nation was significant in that it was only the second visit to Indian Country by a sitting president in 55 years,⁵³ and the president chose to talk about technology and progress. Not only did he talk about technology, he valorized it: Clinton told the assembled crowd of Navajos and dignitaries in Shiprock that “I am here because I believe the new technologies like the Internet and wireless communications can have an enormous, positive impact in the Navajo Nation. They can help you to leap-frog over some of the biggest hurdles to develop your economic and human potential” (Clinton 2000).

Clinton went on to state just how dramatic the changes could be for the Navajo: “They can make great distances virtually disappear. They can be a vehicle for job growth, for education, for health care, for employment opportunities. They can be the

⁵³ The first was also by Clinton to the Pine Ridge reservation, part of the same “New Markets” campaign, in November 1999. Prior to that, the last visit was in 1936, when Roosevelt visited a Cherokee reservation in North Carolina.

greatest equalizers our society has ever known” (Clinton 2000). This discourse reflects—and builds upon—previous discourses of the beneficial, transformational nature of electricity, roads, mandatory schooling, English, and indoor plumbing. In this case, centuries of marginalization can be erased with fiber optic cables and a high-speed link to the rest of the world—interconnectedness leads to self-reliance and prosperity.

Computers, cell phones, and other technologies are by no means new to the Navajo Nation. During my first fieldwork stay on the Navajo Nation in 1991, I was surprised to see expensive Macintosh computers in most of the Tribal offices in Window Rock.⁵⁴ The Tribe had chosen Macintosh computers in part because of their ability to handle a Navajo font—an important early indicator of a belief in the importance of Navajo language literacy in the new age of technology, and a direct indication of shifting ideologies of both language and technology. At that point, the “Web” was nonexistent, and popular uses of the Internet such as electronic mail or Usenet had yet to penetrate in many places. “Cell phones” were referred to as “car” or “mobile” phones, and, as in many other parts of the country, were a prestige marker and had yet to enter into mass use.

Since Clinton’s speech, a consortium led by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation have extended public access computers, software, technical support, and wireless broadband connections to all 110 Chapter houses and various community centers on the Navajo Nation (Siroios, et al. 2001; Tohtsoni 2001a) Project iHope, a group of

⁵⁴ I had made certain assumptions about the Navajo Reservation based on my nonexistent experience with any Native American community. Like others before me, perhaps, I was expecting my surroundings to be a bit more isolated.

government and private institutions in Shiprock, had plans to convert an unused radio tower on Mt. Taylor to high-speed, wireless Internet access serving the Navajo and Zuni reservations.⁵⁵ A concurrent and related mandate, subsidized by the Federal Communications Commission, continues to provide low-cost cellular phone service to enrolled Native American tribal members, including Navajos, who live in areas not accessible to land-based phone lines. And in 2001, the Navajo Communications Corporation expanded at-home dial up service to the Internet in select communities, and, more recently, DSL broadband connections.

The Gates computers fueled high expectations in many Navajo communities, reflecting the tone of President Clinton's speech that morning in Shiprock. Indeed the need for equalization, for Clinton's leapfrogging, was—and is—great. As of the 2000 census, more than 75% of homes lacked phone service, and many people spend hours driving or hitchhiking to leave messages for family or friends. Furthermore, only 10% of Navajos on the Reservation had Internet access, and only 15% had personal computers at home (Hardeen 2006). There were also limited options for obtaining information, as there are only a few public libraries on the vast Reservation.⁵⁶

Kelty (2000) views such transfers of new technology as inherently possessing attributes of the Maussian gift, as extracting a hidden exchange value from its recipients. In the Navajo case, the exchange value is increased interconnectedness—among Navajos

⁵⁵ To the best of my knowledge it was never implemented in the way it was conceptualized.

⁵⁶ Other tribes in the Southwest were recipients of Gates computers as well; however, in all cases the machines were placed in public libraries. Due to the small size of most reservations, as well as the more “urban” living patterns of many Pueblos, most residents have easy access to those libraries. This was not possible in the Navajo case (Siroios, et al. 2001).

themselves and between Reservation residents and the rest of the world. The Navajo Nation and its citizens have attained a great deal of symbolic power in broader, more global indigenous discourses of progress and technological advancement. Increased interconnectedness can become both empowering and problematic through increased circulation of representations and self-representations, and serves to intensify local debates on traditional and modern modes and identities. As both Navajos and others view the Navajo Nation as modern and connected, particular assumptions about the increasing socioeconomic and political status of the Reservation are made.

Because of the Gates computers, the Navajo Nation has become the global symbol of Indigenous connectivity. It was the first Indigenous nation to sign on to the United Nations' Indigenous Telecommunication Union, and Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr. represented the world's 370 million indigenous peoples before the UN General Assembly and during the related summit in Tunisia in 2005. Shirley also won the 2006 American Indian Leadership Award for "groundbreaking achievements and international relations" due to the Gates initiative (Hardeen 2006). The inherent danger of all this symbolic capital, as mentioned above, is an assumption that interconnectedness and technological transformation—the indicators of modernity—automatically lead to self-reliance, prosperity, and in this case perhaps, increased Tribal sovereignty.

“Access” to Technology

Equal “access” to technology is the foundational objective of the Gates initiative, the FCC cell phone mandate, and most efforts to bridge the digital divide—a divide that

Navajos could “leapfrog,” according to Clinton. Access has long been viewed by policy makers as merely a technical or logistical problem, resolved by installing computers and fast Internet connections in schools and homes (Wilson 2000). While not the first computers to appear in the area, the machines provided by the Gates initiative are some of the first public-access terminals outside of government offices, schools, or hospitals. This is significant, as these institutions are gatekeepers whose computers are not easily accessible for much of the non-student, non-government Navajo population; and as with many institutions, there are limitations placed on the public use of computers and the Internet. While many Navajo students are exposed to computers in some Reservation schools, they lack the opportunity to explore these technologies outside of the regulated pedagogical environment.

Placing the new computers in Navajo Chapter houses was a crucial element of the plan, as the Chapter house is the center of social and political life in many communities (Iverson 1981; Kelly 1968; Young 1978). A Chapter is the geographic political breakdown of both the Navajo Nation Government and the Bureau of Indian Affairs’ Agency system on the Reservation. The Chapter house acts as the local branch for many government services such as welfare and grazing committees, and provides a venue for dances, community gatherings, and public meetings. It is also a marked space for some Navajos, indexing the traditional or the local, and therefore is not necessarily appealing, especially for many Navajo youth or others who do not wish to identify with anything they consider to be traditional, “Rezzie,” or “Johnnie.”

Vitali (2002) offers the most comprehensive overview of the digital divide on the Navajo Nation, including the efforts by the Gates Foundation to equip and wire Chapter houses. In this case study, persistent infrastructure problems, user expectations, and the realities of life in a poor, rural area were cited as principal impediments to Internet penetration in the Lake Valley Chapter in New Mexico. My own research on the Gates project and the other new technologies in the summer of 2001 revealed some complex situations. In one Chapter house, the satellite Internet connection was constantly offline due to persistent power outages, blowing sand, and software glitches. In another Chapter house, the donated computers had been sitting in their boxes for several months because no one had set them up, since apparently “they were scared of it” (Yazzie 2001). One Chapter official told me that her technical support person never came, despite having been called repeatedly. In some areas, the Gates computers certainly had a rocky start.

However, once the technologies were operational, interesting things occurred. People with no home phones were setting up email accounts and communicating with off-Reservation Navajos and other friends. Small crowds gathered to watch teenagers surf the web, and then wanted to try out the technology themselves. Other teenagers, who did not view the Chapter house as “their” space, appeared uninterested. People began posting messages on discussion boards that were written in the language variety known as Navajo English, mapping knowledge of standard English orthography onto Navajo ways of speaking English. Furthermore, attempts were made at spelling out Navajo language greetings and clan affiliations, also mapped as above and without diacritics—an emergent folk orthography. These seemingly mundane events index shifts

in ideologies of language and technology, as computing technologies become appropriate spaces for written uses of the Navajo language.

These examples also illustrate the ways in which approaching the digital divide as a material problem are insufficient, since a comprehensive view of access must include users' technical abilities, including literacy, their understanding of the medium and its interconnectivity, as well as the ability to participate in, influence, and negotiate global discourses. It is also crucial to understand the practicality and usefulness of technology in users' daily lives; Vitali's work illustrates how shifting notions of the potentials of the Internet directly affect Navajo users' willingness to learn about, and keep using, the technology (Vitali 2002). In addition to the above views, I also conceptualize the issue of access to mediating technologies as inherently linked to communicative practices and language ideologies. The Navajo language and the varieties of English and Navajo English spoken by community members are seemingly incongruent with the text-based, English language paradigm of many computing interfaces, in some cases affecting online access. As most Navajo speakers are not literate in the Navajo language, and as Navajo fonts are inaccessible in online interfaces, there are some who believe that the Navajo language is inappropriate—or impossible—for such uses.

The experiences of modernity, as well as experiences with new technologies are not similar for all community members, of course, and disparities go beyond the generational differences discussed above. In 2002 I noticed a concurrent phenomenon to the Gates initiative in bridging the digital divide. It was then that I first noticed used personal computers for sale at the Gallup flea market. The flea market is a weekly event

important for many Navajos as a space for socializing, entertainment, and shopping, and throngs of people—not just Navajos—head out each Saturday to the market, just north of town. All kinds of vendors, including increasing numbers of Arab and South Asian traders selling Native jewelry and crafts, are usually present. A local favorite are the Navajo “mutton stands,” old travel trailers or plywood shacks which serve as kitchens for making roast mutton, frybread, and corn stew; the stands usually have tarps covering a small dining area.⁵⁷ Acoma Pueblo vendors also bring fresh tamales, home-grown produce, and Acoma yeast bread, and many a time I have made a special trip to the flea market for those Acoma tamales.

When I first came across the stand displaying rows of old computers, the vendor was explaining the virtues of a 386 IBM—suffice it to say that a 386 machine is quite outdated—to a young Navajo family. As is often the case, the young woman was engaging the salesman, inspecting the machines carefully, and posing questions about the quality of the machines. The computers ranged from \$150-\$500. The vendor, who wanted to remain anonymous, explained to me that “Most of my customers are Navajos from the Reservation. They don’t have computers up there. So I try to be here the first weekend of the month when they all get paid.” These computers are not marketed to wealthy Navajos, who are more likely to order a home computer from Dell.com or Gateway.com. Or rather, Navajos from higher socioeconomic classes might not consider buying computers at the flea market. Tamales, yes. Computers, no.

⁵⁷ Mutton stands can be found all across the Navajo Nation, in population centers and along the highways at major—and not so major—junctions.

The differences in socioeconomic standing among Navajo community members, both on and off Reservation, are wide, a topic not generally considered in the scholarship of Native communities. While more than half the Reservation population lives below the poverty line, there are certainly rich, famous Navajos, as well Navajo lawyers, doctors, and engineers living in cities across the world. At the same time, there are also Navajos on the Reservation with high status (medicine men, matriarchs) who may or may not have access to disposable wealth or to certain practices which would set them apart materially. Rather than look at these differences in term of class, an analytical tool not useful in the Navajo context, it is useful to begin an analysis with Hannerz's notion of "cosmopolitans" and "locals." While not a perfect model, it does transcend less-useful emic and etic constructions of traditionalist and progressive, rich and poor, or backwards and assimilated.

Cosmopolitanism is "a perspective, a state of mind, or—to take a more process-oriented view—a mode of managing meaning" (Hannerz 1996:102). Thus cosmopolitans are those who possess a willingness or ability to engage with diverse cultural experiences, possessing an intellectual and aesthetic openness that transcends local experiences bounded by geography or language. And since the concept implies a degree of transnationalism, they are at home in a variety of contexts. Based on their experience and translated into local application, cosmopolitans may be able to see possibilities and potentials in new media technologies that others may not see. Locals, on the other hand, may have a more inward-directed sense of aesthetics. They may be transnational in the sense that they have traveled off of the Navajo Nation or even abroad, have satellite TV

that beams the world into their living rooms, and have far-flung relatives who visit and send remittances. However, I do not mean to imply that cosmopolitans are “assimilated” or adhere only to “outside” values and norms, rather that they are willing to engage these values and norms. Their transnationalism may not translate into engaging new media technologies in the same way as members of other groups.

While these differences can be attributed in part to differing degrees of formal education and access to employment, such inequities are by no means new. In a conversation that began while gazing towards a mountaintop in Utah that was a home of the historic Navajo leader Manuelito, my Navajo colleagues began talking about *da’at’í*, “the wealthy ones.” [*da’at’iigi*: those with lots of wealth, *a’at’í*: rich one]. “You know,” began the conversation, “he [Manuelito] had a lot of *lower* Navajos working for him, herding his sheep.” I asked a colleague of mine, Roger, more generally about *da’at’í*, and he explained to me that for him,

They have knowledge, wives, lots of sheep, belongings, money, and a big pile of dirty clothes...(laugh).⁵⁸ People aren’t necessarily happy for them...there’s a bit of jealousy. Witchcraft is implied here, that’s why they have lots of wealth. They know something, they’re doing something that others don’t know. (Yellowhair 2004)

⁵⁸ By alluding to the piles of dirty clothes, Roger is referring to a moral lesson from the Creation Stories that says one must keep a tidy house without belongings cluttered about, lest the gods think you are rich and won’t reward you with further goods or well-being.

In more contemporary contexts, this group of people have been described to me variously (and negatively) as “Peabody brats,” children whose father or mother may have high-paying jobs at the Peabody Kayenta mine, a class marker, or as “uppity Navajos,” who are perceived to place a high value on what some Navajos consider to be marked Anglo ideas and material goods, reflecting the conception of cosmopolitanism as understood here. These ideologies of identity—these beliefs and attitudes about Navajoness—surpass traditional conceptions of Navajoness in that they reflect more recent transformations in Navajo communities more generally.

While there are differences in the phenomenology of ethnicity due to gender, age, class, and Western-style education among other variables, particular expressions of Navajoness that reflect cosmopolitan traits are often met with resistance. There are derogatory terms such as “apple” or “bilasáana” for those Navajos deemed to be more Anglo than Navajo (“apples” are red on the outside but white on the inside); these judgments are often made by those who consider themselves more traditional towards those whom they consider to be more cosmopolitan. A popular quip is *Bilasáana bilagáana bilikaan* (an apple like white people; he/she thinks they are sweet/tasty). A rural Navajo who is considered to be neither “traditional” nor “assimilated” is sometimes called “Jáán” (John):

A Jáán with a Navajo means somebody from the sticks who speaks [English] with a heavy accent, who is not really trendy, who goes out and feeds the sheep, waters the cows, grooms the horses, drives a truck, wears a squaw

dress, and is not real traditional. They're living in a hogan, but they're not totally assimilated and acculturated. (Yazzie 2001)

By alluding to what she considers not to be traditional, Yazzie is separating rural and poor from what she considers to be traditional, a distinction that is often not made. These sometime derogatory labels can be self-ascribed or applied by Navajos to other Navajos whom they consider to deviate from traditional ideals, and they have to do with people's interpretations about being Navajo and the differences in the expression of Navajo ethnic identity. Jáán is also used in various genres of joking to index being "Rezzie" in contrast to being modern, to being a local rather than cosmopolitan, inward looking rather than "outward." Just as locals are not necessarily the most traditional, however, cosmopolitans are not necessarily the group with high status or wealth. Too often, tradition becomes synonymous with poverty, and progress becomes associated with all that is *not* Navajo.

However, many of the initiatives to bridge the digital divide are geared towards the locals, towards those Navajos living on the Reservation, less interconnected and without access to communications media in their homes. My observation is that wealthier Navajos on the Reservation, especially those living in population centers, are more likely to have personal home computers and, where available, a dial-up internet connection—and increasingly, DSL or other high-speed connectivity. What is important here is that not only do Navajo communities as a whole have different experiences with modernity and contemporary technological life, so too do individual Navajos. Such differences

among and between Navajo community members themselves are crucial for understanding the wide range of transformations occurring in new mediated spaces.

The Road to Modernity

Just as they cannot be isolated from the discourses of modernity, computers and the internet cannot be analyzed separately from other mediating technologies, or from the more general material transformations of modernity. Unpaved roads, mud, and the lack of goods and services on the Reservation are frequent topics of conversation. Indeed, one of the most noticeable and noticed technological “advances” is road improvements, or, as more often is the case, the lack thereof. Of the estimated 100,000 miles of roadways on the Navajo Nation, only about 2,000 miles are paved (2000 Census). In the Window Rock area the resurfacing of Arizona Highway 264 to the “Summit” on the Defiance Plateau is one of the most noticeable improvements. Sidewalks, streetlights, and a nice turn lane greet residents and visitors alike. Sidewalks make a great parking lot during the Navajo Nation Fair, rodeos, and other celebrations. The Nation’s new wireless network linking government offices, the Tribal Council’s new laptop computers, and the availability of high-speed internet and DSL connections for home users in the area are all major changes providing links to an information “superhighway.” The asphalt roads, however, are used by everyone, and are the most visible signs of connectivity.

With her newly paved road over the Chuska mountains, Shimá is more connected than ever. She also has a new federally subsidized cell phone, which she can use in certain spots on the mountain. “But it’s easier now with the road,” she told me after it

was finished. “I just wish those diesels would stop coming up here.” The tractor trailers are invading her quiet mountain, as the new road facilitates an increasing amount of commerce. Increasing interconnectedness through asphalt is not without irony: The main roads leading off of the Reservation are four lane highways, leading to Gallup from Window Rock and to Farmington from Shiprock. These thoroughfares are often referred to jokingly as “the road to ‘Navajo Heaven’”; Navajo Heaven in this case is Wal-Mart.⁵⁹ Friends of mine have joked about the ease in which one can “get the hell off the Rez,” while a much shorter trip to the local Chapter house can be a nightmarish, muddy endeavor. The road to modernity, it seems, leads away from Navajo.

However, a sense of regret arises among many non-Navajos whenever a new, major road gets asphalt—or even a little one, reflecting a persistent sense of imperialist nostalgia (Rosaldo 1993). More than one anthropologist told me that it was “too bad” that the road over Buffalo Pass in the Chuska Mountains was finally being paved. Some Navajos, however, have a very different view. A few years ago, during the twenty year delay in surfacing the road, Shimá told me that “I wish they would just finish it. Who cares about that dumb owl? There aren’t any owls anyway.” Shimá was speaking in reference to environmental concerns which stalled the road’s progress, but for her and other Navajos, owls are a bad omen signifying death, and their presence is generally not welcomed anyway. For her, the road meant connectedness—an easier trip to the store, visitors and relatives to break the loneliness and isolation on the mountain tops.

⁵⁹ The importance of border town Wal-Marts to Reservation residents cannot be overstated. The Wal-Mart in Gallup, population 17,000, is the highest grossing store in the US.

The relationship between roads, modernity, and cultural change is complex, and was explored early on in Bernard Spolsky's Navajo Reading Study from the 1960's.

Spolsky's team concluded that

[f]amilies' access to paved roads, which at that time were far fewer in number than they are today, correlated directly to the young persons' speaking abilities. That is, the more access that the child and the family had to paved roads and all that they led to, the more apt the child and family were to speak English. Conversely, the more remote and isolated the family was from the many influences of the English-speaking world, the more apt the family members were to speak only Navajo. (Lee and McLaughlin 2001:28)

The changes in Navajo language use and residence patterns, of course, do not have a causal relationship to paved roads. With the advent of publicly funded schools, families transitioned to housing near major roads during the school year, so that their children could attend day schools rather than the dreaded boarding school. These days, the annual migrations to paved roads have become more permanent, and for a variety of reasons some Navajo families would rather live in town or in a housing development, where electricity, plumbing, and telecommunications are becoming the norm. These subdivisions of public housing dispersed across Reservation communities, which are often built by the Navajo Housing Authority with Federal funds, are creating new population centers and enclaves away from traditional population centers like Shiprock,

Tuba City, or Window Rock. At the very least many would reside near a paved road, lest they become completely isolated and stuck in the oft-inclement weather.⁶⁰

Discourses of Tradition, Ideologies of Progress

In the story presented at the beginning of the chapter, when Shimá lamented the solitary existence on the mountaintop under the power lines, she was commenting more about a shift in social interactions occurring as a result of shifting lifestyles. It is not the power lines that keep people from moving up there in the summer, nor is it the lack of power in the camps themselves. Rather, the traditional summer migration to mountain sheep camps is waning as fewer people subsist on the sheep economy and more families and young people seek opportunities off the Reservation. The traditional physical and geographic spaces of family, clan, and community relationships are shifting. These mountaintop camps are used more frequently for annual family reunions, occasional ceremonies, or as party spaces for local youth; however, due to their relative isolation and distance from Reservation borders or border towns, they are viewed as “traditional” spaces by many Navajos, conceptions which will be discussed further below.

⁶⁰ What used to be referred to by anthropologists in English as the Navajo “outfit,” a group of dwellings inhabited by a particular extended family, is sometimes referred to in English these days as the “ranch” or “at my grandma’s.” Many people live on “homesites,” one-acre parcels of leased land on which they can put a trailer or build a house, and often refer to their homesites simply as ‘homesites.’

Modernity & Modernization

While the focus of this study is mediated communication and community, broader technological changes and their subsequent influences on indigenous societies are often intertwined—rightly or wrongly—with discourses of modernity. These discourses, and the experience of modernity, are some of the shared elements that bind many Navajo community members together; many of the shared stories and experiences mediated by technology and presented below are based upon knowledge of shared discourses and experiences, such as racism, boarding schools, and economic marginalization that are products of modernity. The experience of modernity itself has been distinctive and inflected differently among Navajo communities when compared to other parts of the world, and while modernity is a shared experience, it is also experienced differently among Navajos themselves, as individuals exhibit a range of responses to broader discourses and processes.

Modernity is a process and a paradigm inextricably associated with progress and technology, stemming from the Enlightenment, yet the concept of modernity as both an academic paradigm and an historical process is notoriously hard to define (Rabinow 1996). Modernity is a processual phenomenon, a paradigm based in European intellectual thought marking the path to industrialization and progress, defined in-part by the power of reason and the control of nature, increased urbanization, class awareness, increased compression of time and space, creation of the nation-state, market economies, colonialism, and an increased desire for the material trappings of technological innovation and transformation (Harvey 1989). Mitchell suggests that the project of

modernity as begun in the West had a universalizing mandate, and that this understanding has led to simplifications of local experiences with modernity:

Modernization continues to be commonly understood as a process begun and finished in Europe, from where it has been exported across ever-expanding regions of the non-West. The destiny of those regions has been to mimic, never quite successfully, the history already performed by the West. To become modern, it is still said, or today to become postmodern, is to act like the West. (Mitchell 2000a:1).

I view transformations within Navajo communities as a type of “alternative modernity” (Gaonkar 2001), as the experience of modernity was, and is, shaped by particular, historically-constituted local processes. For this case study, Navajo experiences with telephones, electrification, and the automobile were very different from the experience of colonized peoples in for example, Mexico. I concur with those who view modernity as a lived experience rather than simply a theory (Appadurai 1996:), diverging from Appadurai in that I do not see modernity as less a “rupture” than a continuum (Hannerz 1996:44). This is the basis for my analyses of emergent practice, and my understanding of emergent practices leading to continuity and the recreation of community. Part of this approach is to view sociocultural and sociolinguistic transformations among the Navajo as a process or activity rather than a checklist of transformations within traditional modes towards the trappings of material “progress.” In the case of the Navajo, the transition to modernity can be marked by the creation of the

initial geopolitical boundaries of what would eventually become the Navajo Nation through the Treaty of 1868, by the arrival of the transcontinental railroads through the southern border of the Navajo Reservation in the 1880's (Weigle and Babcock 1996), by the increased marginalization of traditional economic modes through a transition to wage labor and economic incorporation (White 1983), and by the marketing, commodification, and secularization of traditional cultural products such as sandpaintings (Parezo 1983).

As colonialism was the engine of modernity for Navajo communities, a rise in the prestige and use of the English language, of Western formal education, and the imposition of new economic and sociocultural systems are also markers of modernity for the Navajo as a group, as are the arrival of technologies such as paved roads and rural electrification begun in the 1950s. Flores (2002) invokes the idea of the "Texas Modern" to explore changes in socioeconomic and political relations between Anglos and Mexican Texans in the 19th century, stemming from increased interconnectedness between the Alamo and the American imagination. The arrival of the Navajo "modern" is also marked by increased interconnectedness to a wider array of peoples, systems, and ideas. Hannerz describes increased interconnectedness as a defining characteristic of globalization, a concept inextricably linked to modernity and linked to the compression of time and space for global interactions. For Hannerz, globalization is itself problematic and the concept is often taken for granted, with "some tendency to resort to hyperbole and excessive generalizations, to tell a story of dramatic shifts between 'before' and 'after'" (Hannerz 1996:18). This can lead to other simplifications, as many people "tend

to take for granted that the local is to the global more or less as continuity is to change”(Hannerz 1996:19).

Indeed these dichotomous discourses of traditional and modern impact ideologies of language, identity, and technology. As contemporary indigenous identities are negotiated within these discourses, some Navajos speak of “living *in* two worlds,” and have often been described as “living *between* two worlds.”⁶¹ Such ideologies can be seen among the Yup’ik, who talk about living in *both* worlds (Fienup-Riordan 1990). Of course the contrasts and fluidity between Western and traditional modes are much more complex, yet such dualistic ideologies are very persistent. Figure 6 illustrates this point more personally and poignantly: In the early days of the Miss Navajo pageant, the title was given to both a “traditional” and “modern” queen.⁶² The Miss Navajo website explains that “both positions were prestigious, as it was the responsibility of each to bridge the gap between the outside world and the Navajo Nation. Using the tools of modern technology in practical ways which reflect our traditional values was inherent in their representations.” The clothing and dress of the modern contestants are in dramatic contrast to the traditional hopefuls.

⁶¹ This concept is poignantly illustrated by captioned photos with titles like “Automobiles and Covered Wagons: Navahos are between Two Worlds” (Kluckhohn and Leighton 1946:Frontispiece).

⁶² Miss Navajo is considered to be the ambassador of the Navajo Nation and is an important position, representing the Nation in local, national, and international contexts. The Office of Miss Navajo is situated within the executive branch of the Navajo Nation government. There are scores of such pageants and titles across the Navajo Nation, representing various regions, institutions, or events.



Figure 6: Miss Navajo float, during the Navajo Nation Fair in the 1950's.
Office of Miss Navajo, Navajo Nation Museum.

Other representations exhibit such dualistic discourses as well. The Milton “Jack” Snow photos and other collections in the Navajo Nation Museum in Window Rock contain thousands of photographs which—intentionally or not—serve to document the transition to modernity, contributing to discourses of primitivism. Snow was in the employ of the Bureau of Indian Affairs’ Navajo Service, and meticulously documented the government’s efforts at modernization. Indoor showers at newly built Chapter houses, rows of spotless toilets at boarding schools, and endless pictures of road improvements from the 1950s index the intense focus on material progress by the BIA. Indeed these photos are a sharp contrast to other pictures from the same collection of Navajos in hooghans or at sheep camps, with handwritten commentaries on the back such as “improper use of space” or “improper sanitation.”

Sill more photos of Navajos gawking at airplanes or gazing at automobiles from their wagons sets them apart in time, and presages the inevitable adaptation of such technologies into their culture. Navajo men, newly elected or appointed to Tribal or federal government positions, are shown with short hair and business suits, often interacting with Anglo agents or employees. The men, at least it is assumed, have bridged the divide and made *progress*. These photos were meant to document the narrative of progress, as Navajo men transitioned from herders to farmers to wage workers, the women would transition from weavers to domestics—both at home and in the service of Anglos (M'Closkey 2002). Likewise, photographs juxtaposing the noble savage (or savagely traditional) Indian with material aspects of Western modernity and progress become cemented into global discourses.⁶³

These photos are representations of the discourses of tradition and modernity, and must be seen as a basis for understanding the multiple self-representations that will be discussed in subsequent chapters.⁶⁴ Deloria suggests that such imagery ingrains the expectation of the timeless, primitive Indians being eclipsed by modernity and progress:

⁶³ Understanding such representations remains important, especially in the context of Native communities and peoples (Strong 2004). In the non-Navajo world, popular perceptions of “The Navajo” are often stylized, idealized, and quite romantic: An old grandmother weaving a rug under a tree, draped in silver and turquoise jewelry, flanked by her sheep and eager grandchildren; valiant Codetalkers, memorialized in the John Woo film *Windtalkers*; and the Mars-like landscape of Monument Valley all come to symbolize the Navajo. These images originate in important aspects of Navajo life at various times in history. It is important to note, however, that how Navajo institutions perceive this representation of themselves is reflected in their own tourist literature and symbolic economy (Zukin 1995), which portrays a “traditional,” romantic view of artistically-skilled Native Americans in the “Faustian contract” of indigenous media (Ginsburg 1991).

⁶⁴ For example, iconic images such as a Diné woman weaving under a shade have come to define the Navajo in the American popular imagination. Such photographs illustrate domesticity and gender roles in a matrix of dominant Anglo values. Representing women who are heads of a matrilineal economy and society solely as weavers and mothers strips them of their historical prominence and leadership in all aspects of Navajo society (Denetdale 2004; Faris 1996; Roessel 1996), and leads to gross simplifications.

“Primitivism, technological incompetence, physical distance, and cultural difference--these have been the ways many Americans have imagined Indians..., and such images have remained familiar currency in contemporary dealings with Native people” (Deloria 2004:4).⁶⁵

An important consideration for this study is that the experience of modernity is linked to the collective experience of the community. In the extreme case, modernity defines the community, as colonial powers establish ethnic and geopolitical boundaries for groups such as the Navajo, which continue to be limited and legitimized by dominant discourses including federally legislated land rights and categories of belonging. The processes of modernity are linked to representations, self-representations, and discourses among and about Navajo community members. Technology and modernization in their local forms in the Navajo experience are both the processes of modernity and the engines of change, yet are experienced differently by Navajo communities as a whole in comparison to other groups around the world. This experience of modernity is unique and is directly related to efforts in bridging the digital divides. Modernity is also experienced differently within and among Navajo communities, depending upon a variety of factors, including but not limited to, their particular ideologies of tradition.

⁶⁵ Mitchell argues that representation was a significant feature, and creation, of modernity. He illustrates how Others were created by the “double claim” of representation, that is we know an image is not by definition “real,” but we believe that what it represents is real. This belief in the unreal through the real has ramifications for the creation of broader discourses of modernity: “In sphere after sphere of social life, the world is rendered up in terms of the dualism of image and reality. This corresponds, in turn, to a series of other simplifications” (Mitchell 2000b:17).

The Navajo Core/Periphery

The juxtaposition of modern power plants with traditional clapboard wagons in the photo in Figure 4 creates a situation that is much more complicated than posed, stylized, or romanticized photographs convey. However, such dichotomous discourses have been—and remain—prevalent among many Navajos and non-Navajos alike. One thing that is poignant about the photograph is that it shows progress creeping in to the *interior* of the Reservation, into the realm of what is often conceived of as the traditional. The same is true for cell phones and Internet connections, which are now available in what are considered to be the more traditional and isolated spaces. There is a direct link in the minds of many Navajos and non-Navajos alike that rural and inaccessible somehow means more traditional or untouched, closely reflecting Fabian's analysis of the time/space, core/periphery anomaly in the postcolonial imagination (Fabian 1983).

I was sitting around one evening with Shimá, in what can be described as a less connected area of the Reservation—25 miles from the paved road and 10 miles from the nearest power line—one of those places often described as “up on the mountain” or “at grandma's.” Indeed, Shimá's house was located just across the wash, less than a mile away, but quite a drive around the wash. There were no school-aged children living in the area on a regular basis; the younger generations all lived in newer housing in the population centers of Chinle or Pinon. No electricity, no plumbing—one of those places like so many others where you have to haul the water in for everyday use. Shimá and I both had our laptop computers, operating on what little battery power we had left, and we were discussing my evolving dissertation. Actually, we were joking about how I was

going to write about those darn, unpredictable Indians—a favorite topic of joking amongst my Navajo friends and family. In order to make my situation appear more traditional and exotic, Shimá gleefully related her solution to this conundrum: “Just say you were in Pinon. Where the pavement ends and the Wild West begins!!”

There is a lot of truth to this statement, on many levels. While we were not actually in Pinon, it was the closest “town,” and the road from Pinon to Cottonwood (the main road out of town) is notoriously bumpy and pocked. Paved, yes, but in desperate need of a makeover, and all roads leading south or west are not paved.⁶⁶ In reality, Pinon is a fast-growing population center in the middle of the Reservation, not the Wild West, although it is considered to be very remote, and its inhabitants considered to be more traditional. Pinon is home to many relocates from the Navajo-Hopi Land Dispute,⁶⁷ and houses three large secondary schools serving a wide area and numerous students.

I have come across this dualistic construction of the Reservation quite often. In my Broadcast Navajo research, KTNN DJ’s working in Window Rock often talked of their listeners “in the remote areas,” “at the hooghan level,” “in the field,” or “out on the Rez.” As the capital of the Navajo Nation, Window Rock is actually on the Reservation, albeit on the border. But with its Tribal offices, hotel, shopping centers, and MacDonald’s, it can feel different than many other parts of the Rez. One KTNN announcer told me years ago that “we have to keep in mind that we’re talking to

⁶⁶ In the summer of 2005 resurfacing began on the road to Cottonwood.

⁶⁷ The Land Dispute is one of the defining events for the Navajo Nation, an ongoing dispute over land rights with the Hopi Tribe, in which thousands of Navajos were relocated off of traditional family use areas, often into suburban-style public housing units off of the Reservation (Benedek 1999; Brugge 1994; Kammer 1980).

thousands of people who are back home at the *hooghan* level on the Reservation who don't have television...they rely on their portable radios." Another announcer mentioned that "I guess my focus whenever I'm looking at translating something is, OK, how can a 70 year old grandma who's never left the reservation, sitting in her *hooghan*, how can that make her understand what the story is about." In a separate discussion of families who live in the interior of the Reservation, *Shimáyazhí* ("my aunt") told me that "You know those people way out there on the Rez, they live real traditional. You know they haul their water, look after the sheep, and they don't have any electricity or plumbing."

In contrast, Reservation border communities⁶⁸ such as Ft. Defiance, Window Rock, and Shiprock, New Mexico are considered by many Navajos and others to be much less traditional. These communities are important socioeconomic, political, and historic spaces and have been intense points of contact between Navajos and Anglos since the Treaty of 1868. They were among the first to receive phone connections and electrification, and they are also viewed as starting points for technological diffusion: At the turn of the 20th century, Indian Agents would use statistics on the increasing numbers of Anglo style square housing (*kin*) as opposed to the more traditional six- or eight-sided *hooghan*, to indicate the increasing numbers of "progressive" Navajos. This architectural style purportedly began in the Ft. Defiance/St. Michaels area and subsequently diffused

⁶⁸ I distinguish here between "border communities" on or near Reservation boundaries, and "border towns" off the Reservation such as Gallup and Farmington, NM or Flagstaff and Page, AZ.

outward across the Reservation (Bailey and Bailey 1986).⁶⁹ However, these larger, more urbanized communities are almost always viewed in opposition to more interior, “remote” parts of the Reservation—which are often referred to jokingly by the deictic *Jl44d44*. This phrase can mean anything from “over there” to “way, waaay over there,” depending upon the length of the vowels and the duration of the requisite lip-pointing gesture. This is an oft-repeated auto-Orientalist construction of the Other among many Navajos (Mazzarella 2003).

Border towns like Gallup, New Mexico are de-facto extensions of the Reservation, and are often viewed in opposition to the multiple reservations that surround it. Yet Gallup itself is undergoing visible transformations. One day, I was in town with the “family.” We did all of the usual errands, as well as go out to eat—a mutton sandwich and Acoma tamales at the flea market, of course. *Shidéezhí* (my little sister) was excitedly talking to me about the new Home Depot store in Gallup, which we subsequently visited.: “Being in there was like we were actually in a real city. It’s like we walked back outside and realized, ‘Oh yeah. We’re still on the Rez.’”

This dichotomy extends beyond the border towns and the Reservation itself. One consultant told me the story of her nephew, a young Navajo man of 20 who grew up near Phoenix, Arizona, whose parents are affluent urban professionals:

⁶⁹ Some Diné had previously lived in *kin*, the term originally used for Pueblo-style square housing. This term now applies now to most square housing, and some people also refer to their contemporary square housing and mobile homes as their *hooghan*.

They eat at trendy restaurants, drive a nice car, live in a great neighborhood, swimming pool. The kids went to school with other kids that are not predominantly anything—there's more of a mixture in the cities. But he comes up to the Reservation hungry for some kind of identity, because it's not in Tempe and his parents aren't supplying it. (Yazzie 2001)

Thus the further one gets away from the Reservation, the “less Navajo” these spaces appear. Likewise, the closer one gets to the Reservation, and to the interior of the Reservation, the more Navajo, isolated, and “traditional” they become in people's minds. This border-interior dichotomy is fixed in the discourse of technological diffusion, and is important for understanding ideologies of technology and language. The Navajo Nation, like the entire Southwest, has been (and still is) represented often as being rural, rugged, isolated, or desolate. The Southwest in particular occupies a unique place in the American imagination, temporally and geographically set apart from the urbanized coasts. It is at once a tourist destination, the last frontier, a marketable aesthetic, and an exotic wonderland (Dilworth 1996; Weigle and Babcock 1996). Likewise, if the remotest spot in the most remote part of the country can be found, then it—and its inhabitants—must also be the most pristine.

This dichotomy is important to understand, as it affects both Navajo and non-Navajo beliefs about language, tradition, and the potential impacts of new technology. There are assumptions that the Navajo people and language in the interior of the Reservation are more traditional or authentic, thereby more static, and that technological transformations will have a greater impact in these areas and on these people. Such

transformations are viewed by some people, both Navajo and non-Navajo, as being negative or detrimental to the maintenance of Navajo tradition. The case of paved roads illustrates this point.

“That’s not traditional”

There are multiple versions of an old story that I’ve encountered several times about an old medicine man in the Eastern portion of the Navajo Nation who predicted the material changes of the modern world. As the story goes, this wise old *cheii* said that people would be able to talk to each other without being next to each other. “There will be new paths with yellow corn pollen on one side and white corn pollen on the other. The *ye’ii*’s will watch over and protect the travelers.” In one sense, the massive metal sculptures that guide the transmission lines, such as the one in the old photo, do bear an uncanny resemblance to representations of Navajo *Ye’ii*’s (Holy People). The yellow and white corn pollen paths are said to be present day road striping, guiding travelers along the roads of modernity.

This story provides one example of the ways in which many Navajos believe the elders of the past could imagine a life of technology and mediated communication for the future generations. In contrast, however, many Navajos believe that today’s youth are losing conceptions of their past. As one consultant put it, “technology has just, they’ve put them [the youth] in a time machine, and gone through so many centuries until now, and they can’t look back and imagine how their grandmother and great grandfathers lived” (Begaye June 2004). Some families use the mountain sheep camps mentioned

above to teach younger generations about the traditional lifestyles of their grandparents and ancestors, leaving kids with a relative for the summer months. Just over the pass from Shimá, Gary Bitoni and his family have their own summer camp. A young weaver from the eastern portion of the Reservation, Gary and his family are some of the dwindling few who spend their summers on the mountain.

I come out here every summer. And sometimes I bring my niece and my nephew to bring more life. They have their daily life where there's a TV, a telephone, a computer, and X-box games. But for here it's a little different. Because there's livestock. There's horses. There's no running water. There's no electricity. So it gives them an atmosphere where our grandmother and our grandmother before them were raised. Here you have to do everything by hand. So in the future they'll be more self-sufficient, they won't lose their way.

While Gary's nieces and nephews live on the Reservation in a Navajo Housing Authority "project," their daily lives are infused with technology. Like many people from older generations, Gary thinks technology is making the youth soft, and that taking them into the interior of the Reservation, into the context of traditional shepherding, will make them stronger. In other words, some Navajos believe that further deviance from traditional lifestyles is making many Navajo youth less and less self-sufficient. This idea of self-sufficiency is an oft-repeated concept in traditional philosophy, *t'aa hwo ajit éégo*, glossed roughly as "it's up to you, it's up to the individual." Individual choice and

responsibility is very important in Navajo society, and it also influences language and grammar in such aspects as reported speech.⁷⁰

One great example of this is a story that floated around the community of St. Michaels and Hunter's Point for weeks in the summer of 2004. A distant relative of Shimá's, a young Navajo girl from the St. Michaels/Window Rock area, was planning her *kináaldá* (puberty ceremony) with her family. Although the family did have a traditional hooghan available for their use, they were scouting the area looking for a hooghan with running water and electricity, a requirement set by the young girl and her family to make the ceremony logistically easier. Older women from the community, when told of the situation, would always have a shocked reaction. One lady looked at me with astonishment and asked "What's with those kids these days? That's not how it's supposed to be done. That's not traditional."

This disconnect between the generations is often mentioned in terms of language and culture, in that intergenerational communication is often hindered by English or Navajo monolingualism, or the fact that, as is often repeated to me, "nobody wants to herd sheep anymore." The "grandmas" are almost always associated with the sheep, with monolingualism, and with the prestige variety of spoken Navajo—elements which often index traditional Navajos. Sheep are inextricably linked to tradition, and many Navajos and non-Navajos alike want at least some vestige of the traditional sheep and wool economy to remain. However, when the grandmas pass on or are no longer able to take

⁷⁰ For example, one cannot report what X is thinking in Navajo reported speech. For a general overview of this concept see (Lamphere 1977).

care of livestock, there is often no one willing or able to continue this laborious and time-consuming lifestyle. This disconnect manifests itself as dissonance for those expecting more continuity between past and present notions of tradition, or more ruptures between those elements considered to be exclusively Navajo or from the outside.



Figure 7: Otter on Language Ideology.

Courtesy of the *Navajo Times*.

Figure 7 is a self-representation from the perspective by a young Navajo artist Kee Terry, who was in his 20's at the time and lived in Phoenix. His character "Otter" is very popular for younger generations; Otter is the kind of youngster in the Coyote tradition with an acute eye and acumen for trouble, and he is a definite cosmopolitan.⁷¹ Grandma is present in many of the cartoons, representing the traditional and the local.

⁷¹ The popular Vincent Craig cartoon "Mutton Man" sometimes appeals more to the "boarding school generation," and indeed, that is what it's geared for, and from where the experiences behind the cartoon originate.

Otter's modern way of being often confuses or confounds Grandma, who often has to reconcile Otter's behaviors with her own outlook.

In Figure 7, it is Otter's way of speaking that is the source of consternation for Grandma: His English is marked by influences from the Hip-Hop culture ("Yo wassup?" and "Catch you on the fly"), phrases found in English usage among those under 30 in many parts of the US and the world. Such ways of speaking English are also novel practices, and Navajo youth often refer to these forms as "ghetto talk" or "gangsta talk," reflecting their perceived origins in some styles of African American speech.⁷² Although Grandma rarely speaks Navajo in the cartoons, her English is usually marked in the style of Navajo English, indexing the local and traditional. Her comment comparing her own speech with Otter's reflects this marked form: "Way, way back we talk 'gooder'...all of dem now are all 'somehow'." While the interaction is in English, I contend it is a commentary on the consistent discourse of the youth not knowing their language. In a twist, Otter shows that it is Grandma who doesn't know his language. What was once the modern, Navajo English, is now the traditional. Emergent forms have transitioned to the new "Navajo modern" (Flores 2002).

Societal Impacts of New Technologies

It is important to understand that technology and changing lifestyles, increased interconnectedness, and other aspects of contemporary technological life are displacing

⁷² Navajo youth are not alone in their depiction and description of these forms; these can be considered part of a national youth culture.

or transforming aspects of identity and tradition for some Navajos in unique ways. On a more personal level, Russ Bigman, a bilingual speaker and self-identified traditionalist in his 30's noted to me that

you have to fit being traditional into your lifestyle these days. Like when you have a ceremony, you're not supposed to take a shower for four days afterwards. That's so the healing can take place, that's what I was told. But nowadays, you just have to take a shower sometimes because of your job. You just can't go to work in town all chizzie ["dirty"]. (Bigman 2004)

In a discussion of technology and cultural change, one language instructor said something very interesting. She lamented that "the Navajo Code Talkers were replaced by a laser, by a machine. Especially with the technology around, there's no way you could use a living language for a code anymore." Lasers were a recurring theme, especially among older generations (over 40) when talking about technology and the future.⁷³ The most interesting aspect of this woman's statement, however, was her mention of the Navajo Code Talkers, a group of young Navajo marines in World War II trained to use their language as a code that would prove to be unbreakable. I have heard such statements on numerous occasions, that "with the technology these days, you couldn't use Navajo for that [as a code]." These statements may indeed be true, but as a recurring theme, it is important that in some views, technology has made the Navajo

⁷³ At this point, I am not certain about the significance of the recurring theme of lasers; I speculate, however, that it relates to traditional concepts of lightning and power as living entities, and thus the most accessible aspect of traditional philosophy to apply to particular aspects of technological transformation.

language obsolete for what is considered to be the defining valoric moment of the Navajo history of contact and a source of immense pride for the Navajo Nation.

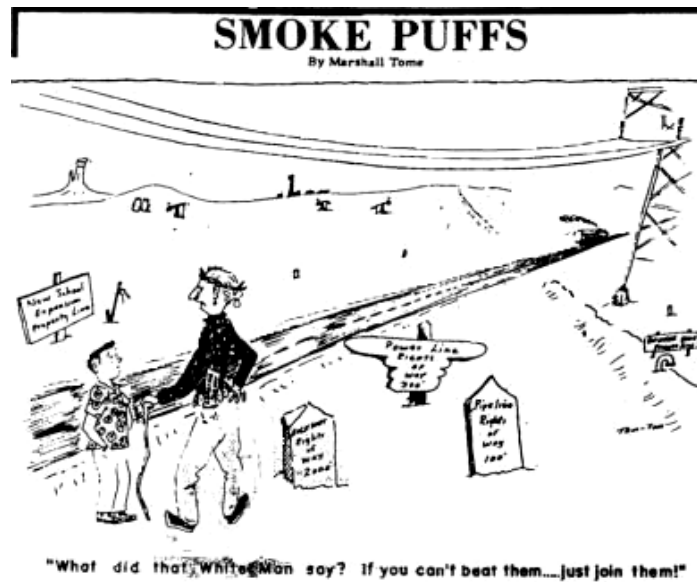


Figure 8: Smoke Puffs by Marshall Tome, 1963.

Courtesy of *The Navajo Times*.

Figure 8 is a political cartoon from the Navajo Times from 1963, during the height of efforts by the Rural Electrification Administration and the newly created Navajo Tribal Utility Authority to bring “A Light in Every Hogan.”⁷⁴ It is a local perspective from cartoonist and Tribal Council member Marshall Tome on the quickening pace of progress on the Reservation. Oil wells and a power plant can be seen

⁷⁴ For an in-depth discussion on the process and impact of rural electrification in Northern Arizona, see (Glaser 2002)

on the horizon. Signs dot the landscape marking the “right of way” for schools, roads, telephone poles, and gas pipelines, and an old cheii in traditional dress is asking a youngster (in more Western-style clothing) “What did that whiteman say? If you can’t beat them...just join them!”

The similarities between this cartoon and the photo in Figure 4 of the Navajo family in their wagon being eclipsed by transmission lines are striking. One is a representation of alterity, however, while the other is a self-representation, an interpretation of what were once rapidly visible changes to the Navajo landscape. The cartoon explicitly links technological progress with Anglo values, as the traditional Navajo must make way for the inevitable. The cartoon is a commentary on perceived assimilation in the face of material changes and increased interconnectivity. It is a reconciliation, however, not a resignation. That is not to say that all Navajos accept change, or welcome the transformations associated with increased interconnectedness, modernization, and contemporary technological life. One woman in her 40s told me that:

Navajos now want to be like everybody else. I mean, you have the old guard group, the older folks, who say let’s be a little more isolated, let’s protect our language, let’s not let industry come in, and let’s keep the kind of lifestyle that we’re used to and are comfortable with. But then you have this huge new population coming out that are screaming for progress. They want to be able to feed their families. So it’s a tug-of-war, constantly. It all centers around us becoming less isolated, I guess. (TM Interview)

This is not to say, however, that progress is equated by all Navajos with linguistic and cultural similarity with Anglo society. However, the material aspects of contemporary technological life are often directly implicated in societal changes among many so-called traditional groups, including the Navajo, and progress and change are often inextricably linked to the material aspects of culture. In relation to Navajo language use, Lee and McLaughlin suggest that “[t]he status and attraction of non-native cultural elements to native youths and their families are pushing out opportunities for native language acquisition” (Lee and McLaughlin 2001:38). The underlying assumption is that there are exclusive, authentic, or fixed domains for appropriate use of the Navajo language, and that those domains are somehow not compatible with new practices. Indeed, this idea of incommensurability in ideologies of language is a prevailing attitude, but it is not necessarily supported by the data presented here. I will return to this in Chapter 4, but again, interconnectedness and contemporary technological life are implicated by some scholars in language shift:

Simply put, the Navajo Nation is no longer isolated from the rest of the world. There is little question in the minds of many Navajo language activists that these aspects of modern living, while representative of progress and helpful in many other respects, are intimately and cumulatively connected to the social fact of less and less Navajo. This is especially the case among Navajo youth... (Lee and McLaughlin 2001:28-29)

As I mention above, however, there is not a direct causal relationship between technology itself and users' practices, and privileging tools denies agency to users of tools. My initial fascination with satellite dishes atop traditional hogans, or the appearance of Internet connections in isolated areas, was stilled by the continuous "so what" attitude exhibited by my consultants. While I began my dissertation work with a focus on the Gates computers and the Internet access valorized to the Navajo by President Clinton, the question of which "technological" advances are important to people on a daily basis began to surface almost immediately. Many of my consultants placed a far greater importance on a concern for more practical matters: "Who cares about the internet? I need a ride to work". Similarly, many Navajos de-privilege the material aspects of contemporary technological life, and they focus instead on the products and processes of tools such as new media technologies.

In considering the ways in which social actors incorporate new technology into their lives, scholars of new media technologies often rely upon the idea that new media are tools invisible to their users. Burbules and Callister note that many technologies are "invisible" to social actors as choices—they are a habitual part of everyday life (Burbules and Callister 2000:1-2). Hornborg suggests the idea of "machine fetishism" to describe the ways in which social actors and academics mask technology as neutral, or as mere cultural products, noting "the special way in which machines conceal significant aspects of social reality, while at the same time constituting that reality" (Hornborg 2001:146-147).

I am not arguing that there is an element of false consciousness among Navajos in relation to new technologies; rather, I contend that the Navajo experience with modernity and new technologies offers an alternate perspective from which to theorize new media technologies. What the Navajo case can show us is that users are not necessarily unaware of the technologies they use, rather, that their focus as users may be different than the focus of many researchers. With respect to the Navajo case, Farella warns that

[a]s Westerners we very often make the fundamental mistake of thinking in terms of the primacy of materialism and its associated technology. Thus, when we see a "native" working for wages and driving a pickup truck, we assume that he has, in some sense, become less of a native and more "Americanized." The converse error is also very often made. That is, when a Navajo goes to court on a grazing-permit violation or a Pueblo people exclude "foreigners" from a rite, we assume that they are trying to hold onto tradition. It seems to be that we are most often mistaken. (Farella 1984:202-203)

Thus it is more productive to analyze specific activities and practices, as well as the underlying processes, involved with the introduction of new media technologies into any given community. A closer look at cell phone practices of Navajo community members offers insight into the ways in which new tools are incorporated into existing practices, enabling new practices, and transforming the geographies and frames of interaction.

The Everyday Life of Cell Phones

In almost any conversation or interview about the internet, consultants invariably start talking about their new *ná áá' jáah* phones [lit. “one parcels out in small amounts”]. These phones take their name from commodity goods parceled out by welfare agencies, (“like the cheese!” quipped Shimá), and they resemble commodity goods such as cheese, powdered milk, and canned corn in that they are federally subsidized cell phones for Reservation residents. Jaah is the handling stem in Navajo for multiple small objects, and this name for a particular kind of cell phone is a joke based in reality for the phones’ recipients. Like the Gates computers, these phones are meant to bridge the material gaps in contemporary technological life, and they do provide an important lifeline for many sick or elderly, poor or isolated families in the interior of the Reservation. In fact, cell phones are now ubiquitous enough to be prominent topics in various genres of Navajo language joking, especially on Navajo terms for cell phones.

I will return to Navajo naming and joking practices for cell phones in Chapter 5, but is important to note here that many Navajos have more knowledge about where to get a good cell phone signal than where to access the Internet. For many, personal cell phones are often their first experience with a “home” phone, and cell phones appear to have changed the context and frames of communication more than the internet has at this point. Interactions that were once face-to-face are now done by phone, and phone calls no longer require driving to the nearest pay phone, often 20 miles or more on a dirt road from a homesite. Monolingual elders who would normally engage in face-to-face

interactions with bureaucracies, for example, are getting English speakers to mediate via cell phones instead.

Some of the more dramatic transformations resulting from technology can be found in Navajo sheepherding, an activity considered by most Navajos to be one of the ultimate markers of a more traditional lifestyle. While sheepherding and its associated ranching or pastoral lifestyle have undergone change due to many factors, including formal education, wage labor, and federal livestock reduction policies—all of which changed traditional family units and the sustainability of livestock rearing—it is the advent of all terrain vehicles (ATV's) and cell phones which have influenced more recent changes. While many Navajos have relied upon their pick-up trucks to aid in the time consuming task of herding or looking for lost herds of sheep, ATV's offer more mobility over rough, sandy, or muddy terrain than do traditional trucks. Rather than spending hours walking with, or looking for, livestock, herders can cover more miles in less time—and as some of my consultants believe—“have a lot more fun. It's better than sitting around in the hot sun all day.”

Cell phones have extended the eyes and ears of sheepherders, as lost herds are sometimes located with the help of family or neighbors living nearby. “Yeah, it's easier sometimes,” said my consultant Betty Manygoats. “You know, especially when the weather's bad. Now I can just call over there to my sister, and ask her to look out for my flock. It's better than always having to run around and looking for them, when I'm watching the kids, especially when those goats are being naughty and just run off.” Her sister lives on her own homesite about a mile or two away, over a hill—far enough that

before the existence of their working cell phones, it was impractical to rely on her sister to locate the sheep. Thus, cell phones have been integrated into previously existing practices, and not only to they save time, they bind kinship networks in new ways.

Of course such practices require that participating parties have both a cell phone and access to a good signal. However, the assurance of at least a minimal cell signal in many areas of the Reservation is steadily increasing, and easier access to cell phones on the Reservation has led to other transformations as well. In multiple examples of how previously existing modes of communication do not always form the basis of emergent practice, cell phones have actually replaced letter writing for some of my friends and consultants. Like many places around the world, perhaps, the letter writing model doesn't transition well to the email model, despite many obvious similarities and the immediateness of many email interactions. A great example is my friend Eddie Yazzie, a bilingual speaker in his 30s from the Western portion of the Navajo Nation. Like so many Navajos of his generation, Eddie lived with a Mormon family in California for several years in the mid 1980's. He was attending junior high school there, and his mother hoped he would benefit from life off the Reservation. While he was there, said Eddie, his mother wrote letters to him regularly from the Rez. "Now, I'm living away from the Rez again, and she just calls me all the time. She hasn't written me a letter in years."

The idea of emailing hasn't really been discussed. For many Navajos in rural areas, there is a sense that emailing, or getting to a computer, requires much more time and work than calling. In Eddie's mom's case, this is true because not only do they not

have a computer at home, she would have to rely upon younger members of the family to work the computer, and email, for her. The younger kids, says Eddie, do not like to go to the Chapter House anymore to use the computer, partly because the Chapter House is five miles away, and they don't have regular access to a car. Her family's subsidized cell phone makes it easy for her to keep in touch with far-flung children, from home, in a medium with which she feels more comfortable.

Her ability to call Eddie from the Reservation follows a trajectory similar to many other stories I have heard, as well as practices I have observed. During my first stay on the Reservation in 1991, I would have to join countless others in long lines at pay phones in gas stations or trading posts. It was a kind of a regular community event, and whole families would be waiting around while someone made phone calls; they were very good places to interact and meet people. Eddie's mom also had to do this, whenever she wanted to make a call, and she was lucky that the nearest pay phone was only a few miles away down a dirt road. In fact, the trading post with the phone would take messages for local residents, acting as a type of community switchboard and message center. However, Eddie's mom didn't have a car, and even a few miles to a phone is burdensome without a working vehicle, indeed, I have picked up many a hitchhiker who was just going into "town" to make a call.

The advent of cell phones is transforming other social aspects as well in Navajo communities. Upon my return to the Reservation in 1996, the community pay phone was still the only way for many people to make or receive calls. However, the jump in Navajo Housing Authority public housing units in that time meant that increasing

numbers of residents at least had access to a home phone line, if they were living in larger communities or population centers.⁷⁵ In my observation, this phenomenon did not have as dramatic an impact on the community phone banks as did the introduction of the federally subsidized cellular phones, which began to appear in noticeable numbers in 2001. Eddie's mom got one of the subsidized phones in 2002, yet like so many others, the only way she could use it was to drive 30 miles into Tuba City, the closest population center and the only location in that area with a cell signal. A year or so later, they were able to make calls from the local garbage dump, a few miles away, which became the community "phone booth"—mirroring the experience of Navajos in other areas with their roadside "phone booths."

"Now," says Eddie, "they can call me from home. That means whenever they're bored, or someone needs something, they can just call me up. I might as well just be living there, but I'm just far enough away from the Rez." Despite this story of obtrusive familial contact, in fact, the increasingly frequent interactions with family on the Reservation was one of the main reasons for getting a cellular phone, especially for my consultants living away from the Reservation in cities such as Phoenix or Albuquerque. What these instances of cell phone use begin to suggest are that the geographies and frames of interactions are shifting due to the use of new technologies, and that Navajo interactions through new media such as cell phones are expanding the idea of what

⁷⁵ It is important to note that access to a phone line in the home does not correlate to the number of homes with home phone lines. They are an expensive item for many people to pay for monthly on a fixed income, and may be considered a luxury more than a necessity. Even where available, landlines for most users are not subsidized by any local or Federal program.

constitutes a local community or familial network. This is the groundwork for the social mediation of community.

Valentine's Day & Navajo Social Change

Material transformations among the Navajo and the subsequent implications for Navajo culture and social organization have been exhaustively explored. In fact, the notion of change among the Navajo has led to a continuing trope of Navajo cultural adaptation—the “adaptable” Navajo (Bsumek 2004). Brugge, following Spicer, labels this process incorporativeness, suggesting that “entire technologies can be integrated into the culture without causing basic changes, and the culture can be adapted relatively easily to changing conditions” (Brugge 1963:22; Vitali and Whitehorse 2003:39). Parezo (1983) argues that Navajos undertake a form of cultural “rationalization” to incorporate new practices, such as making and marketing traditional, ceremonial forms like sandpaintings; cultural explanations are offered to refashion sandpaintings as appropriate cultural artifacts to sell in the market economy. Farella argues that if change is fundamental to *h0zh==j7*, and *h0zh==j7* is fundamental to traditional Navajo culture, then it is easy for Navajos to adapt to change since change is “essentially Navajo” (Farella 1984).

However, not all researchers accept change as a fundamental aspect of Navajo life, and I argue that neither change nor adaptation is unique to the Navajo as a group or to Navajo community members. The important consideration is that things have always changed, and the concept of change is a fundamental underpinning of *h0zh==j7* in some

traditional Navajo worldviews.⁷⁶ Subsequent scholars have analyzed changes among the Navajo in terms of hegemonic incorporation of dominant systems and beliefs. For example, House (2002) draws from Taussig's notion of the alteric and mimetic and deconstructs Navajo identity to illustrate what are, for her at least, inauthentic, Western elements found in "traditional" and contemporary Navajo society. In this analysis, the absorption of new ideas and material objects into Navajo society is framed as a type of mimetic choice disguised as hegemonic and economic incorporation.

When so much of contemporary Navajo practice appears to be voluntarily Western in unrecognized and unacknowledged ways, it is clear that long-term and persistent hegemonic incorporation has taken place. Through this process, Navajo-ness has been influenced, shaped, and—it would be no exaggeration to say—reinvented. To underscore the fact that truly successful incorporation results in the apparent naturalness and inevitability of elements and institutions of the hegemony, we have only to look at aspects of contemporary Navajo "traditional" identity that have Western (that is, Spanish and American) origins. (House 2002:24)

Again, there is an element of false consciousness attributed to Navajos, as they are themselves unaware of the "inauthentic" origins of basic cultural elements. This too

⁷⁶ *H0zh==j7* is generally glossed as "Beauty Way" and is situated in conjunction with *Nayééj7* ("Protection Way"). Both are considered integral components of the totality of *Diné K'ejí*, "Navajo Way." *H0zh==j7* is usually associated with the female and goodness, although along with its "opposite" incorporates elements that are at once male and female, good and evil, harmful and beneficial. See also (Farella 1984; Faris 1990).

has become part of the trope of the adaptable Navajo—that almost nothing in their existence is uniquely, historically, authentically Navajo. To be fair, House suggests that some changes, such as the ones listed above, “are now different enough to feel alteric” and are now “appropriate items or practices to carry counterhegemonic ideological weight” (*ibid.*). However, the overall goal of House’s work is to show how “the state asserts itself in insidious and hidden ways—as in the structure of institutions that appear and are identified as Navajo yet are, at their core, almost wholly Western” (p. 17). To deny that institutions such as the Miss Navajo pageant Day have Western origins is counterproductive. To frame any particular aspect of change as unacknowledged hegemonic incorporation, or to assert that Navajo-controlled institutions are somehow not “Navajo” enough, privileges the omniscient theorist and robs individuals (and groups) of imagination and agency.

In an example that brings this discussion back into the realm of everyday mediated interactions, I was sitting around talking one cold winter day with Shimá, who has admitted herself as being a cosmopolitan—at varying degrees and at various times in her life—a member the Navajo middle class and someone who identifies with a more urban aesthetic. Shimá had an internet connection at home. The weather patterns and the infrastructure of the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority permitting, her family has dial-up service on their old desktop computer at home.

“You know,” she said, “*shíháart* didn’t even do anything for me for Valentine’s day.” She looked really annoyed.

“His excuse was that he didn’t have money. But he could have done something over email. I mean, come on....he was like, ‘oh, you’re right...huh...’”

We laughed. I began taking notes, thinking about the implications of Valentine’s Day emails on the Rez. “*Shimá* would have liked it. But he’s just too Johnny.” Shima was obviously aware of the computer and Internet as tools available for communication, and despite the fact that the activity of sending—or expecting—a Valentine’s Day greeting is not considered to be a traditional activity, neither her use of computers nor her engagement with national days of significance make her less Navajo.

In another example that was related to me, a group of people were sitting at Shimá’s house one day, and her boyfriend was having a problem logging onto their computer. He was trying to download a recipe from his online email account, but as usual, the local telecomm provider Navajo Frontier was experiencing service interruptions due to the weather. It was the weekend, so the public computers were closed. “We don’t want to go over there anyway,” said Shima, referring to the fact that many people, including her, don’t like to use the public machines. He first called me (I was in Austin), then he called local friends, as well as friends in Albuquerque and Gallup, to no avail. This particular recipe was so important at the time that Shimá finally called her nephew in Phoenix, who was able to download the recipe easily with his high-speed connection. “He’s my nephew, so you know, he couldn’t say anything.” Once again, Navajo clan relationships and readily available cell phones and an Internet connection saved the day.

“We realized how important the Internet is. We took it for granted. Without it, we couldn’t do anything!” She laughed, and then she thought about the situation a bit more. “Boy, that’s really dumb, calling you all the way out there. My grandma never even used a recipe.” In fact, upon retelling the story to me, she could not remember what the recipe was for, but that is not the point. What is interesting about these events is that Shima was ultimately keenly aware of the importance, impact, and potential uses of the communications tools available to her. While her awareness of her daily reliance on the machines may have been lost until they were no longer available, she nonetheless deliberately made the attempt to use them in a variety of contexts.

What is most important about these events, however, is that they are specific instances in which Navajo community members were engaged with new technologies. What interests me is not that these activities deviate from traditional modes discussed above, but rather that they are part of everyday practice for many people. The fact that Valentine’s Day cards are sent over email between Reservation residents indicates at least some degree of transformation in Navajo society, especially when compared to previous practices, but it does not necessarily indicate that Navajos are any less Navajo, or that Navajo communities are risking continuity. The opposite, I argue, is the case, and this idea is explored in detail below.

Conclusion

Maintaining a semblance of what they consider to be a traditional lifestyle while being constantly bombarded by the trappings of contemporary technological life is a

complex undertaking for many Navajos. It also presents challenges to scholars trying to understand the place of “outside” elements in Navajo daily life, and more broadly, scholars dealing with global postcolonial change; I had to constantly reconcile my consultants’ dichotomous discourses of traditional and modern, while at the same time trying to overcome such ideologies myself. As with most peoples around the world, things have changed in all aspects of Navajo society over the past 150 years, but the changes brought about by roads, radios, televisions, travel, electrification, and other forms of interconnectedness are not always those of our expectations. While paved roads may be indirectly responsible for particular changes, the introduction of paved roads, telephones, or the Internet cannot be blamed for the shift to English among many Navajo community members. Many Navajos retain a strong sense of identity, and despite language shift, many Navajos continue to speak—and to learn—the Navajo language, despite increased interconnectedness and material, technological transformations.

The meanings and lived experiences of modernity and contemporary technological life among Navajo community members are complex, and can be contrary to many basic assumptions. So too are the ways in which individual social actors and communities as a whole incorporate technology into existing practices. Technology is transformative, and cell phones and the Internet are becoming fixtures in the everyday experiences of many Navajo community members. Furthermore, it is not anomalous to conceive of new media, Navajos, and mundane, commercialized holidays in the same realm. User ideologies of technology, which initially hindered some of the Gates initiatives, are extraordinarily important, and they go beyond the potentials of digital

greeting cards. Such ideologies ultimately have broader implications, as "[m]etadiscursive practices continue to be central means of authorizing particular conceptions of public spheres, citizenship, and political participation" (Briggs and Bauman 1999:482). Users of technology must understand the potentials and pitfalls of technology in order to truly localize them on a global scale.

What is important here is that these material and technological changes cannot be separated from aforementioned narratives of progress, just as the uses of new media cannot be separated from the ideologies of language and identity. In other words, as researchers we need to pay more attention to underlying processes extant in the adaptation of new communications technology. What the Navajo case can tell us is that despite a continuous engagement with reconciling traditional and non-traditional modes, users can be very aware of the tools of technology, and can have no problem engaging technology in ways that benefit themselves and their communities and ultimately transcending these modes. Not all incorporation leads to subversive, hegemonic incorporation as House suggests. This is the beginning of the story, of Navajos making technology their own, on their own terms, and in their own ways of speaking, writing, and sharing.

Chapter 4: Technoscapes and Techno-Indians



Figure 9: Navajo Nation Website Banner, 2004

For a few years from 2003 to early 2005, the Navajo Nation homepage on the World Wide Web welcomed visitors to the site with a picture of Window Rock, Navajo rugs, the Navajo Nation seal, and a friendly greeting (Fig. 9).⁷⁷ “Ya’at’eeh,” proclaimed the banner (“Hello”). “Welcome to the Navajo Nation.” Below this graphic banner was a Navajo phrase: “Han-eh t’eh bin’ye, doo non’tlahdah” [sic.], which glosses as “It’s only for news. It’s not difficult.” This salutation offered a few words of encouragement for legions of new websurfers in, and to, Navajoland. At the same time, the English salutation “Welcome to the Navajo Nation” greets travelers on billboards at major roads near Reservation borders. The transition of the greeting from billboards to the website could also be interpreted as proclaiming the space as Navajo, asserting Navajo “cyber-sovereignty” in the extraterra world of cyberspace (Vitali and Whitehorse 2003). All

⁷⁷ www.navajos.org

other portions of the website, including the remainder of the homepage text, were written in English.

This example highlights several important themes and issues regarding technologically mediated communities and emergent practices. First, language ideology as a factor in mediated communication is illustrated by the choice of codes for specific aspects of the site, as well as the fact that Navajo was used at all; the Navajo phrase, as will be explored below, is representative of increasingly emergent folk orthographies. Second, this example illustrates the convergence of at least three systems of social mediation (Mazzarella 2004), that of literacy, the Internet, and culture. This example also, as we shall see, highlights the construction of the internet as a Navajo space and a new space for interconnectedness, and more specifically, a space that is used for *hane'*—in the form of *publicly shared* stories and information. As it is a public resource and an institutional website, some Navajos interact with the official Navajo Nation webpage in the course of everyday life, either as part of their jobs or, as is often the case, to look at newly-posted government job listings.

Perhaps the most important consideration here is the fact that computing technologies are an inducement to literacy. Keyboards and textual interactions bring literacy to the forefront in online interactions, and can serve to reinforce literacy in both Navajo and English. Such mediated interactions also facilitate creative, experimental uses of written Navajo and English, and Internet spaces offer new forms and spaces for self-representation. Beyond this example, however, it is important to remember that mediated interactions are not limited to textual interactions, and that the Navajo language

itself is being enriched by technological innovations, in part by augmenting the lexicon and engaging speakers—and writers—in the process. You can talk about technology in Navajo just as you can use Navajo to communicate through technology.

This chapter considers these issues, and examines Navajo mediascapes and some ways in which speakers and writers are drawing upon all of their language recourses to engage electronically mediated self-representations. First, I explore the spoken realm of “coinology” (derived from konization), the practice of devising new terms—and new concepts—in Navajo, especially as they relate to technology. Next, I turn to the emergence of multiple Navajo mediascapes, as well as an explanation of hane’ as a link between media and discourse in some Navajo worldviews. The examination of mediascapes necessitates an examination of literacy as ideology, which involves linking the development of literacy in Navajo with broader narratives of progress, as well as looking at the ideologies inherent in orthography. Most importantly, I examine the idea of intertextuality, the ways in which the fluid relationship between orality and literacy can be seen, as well as the increasing convergence of mediated forms. The recurring theme is linking language ideologies to practices in mediated contexts, building the groundwork for a more in-depth examination of these ideas as they relate to the idea of “doing” community presented in Chapter 5.

The Symbolic Power of Online Orthographies

My research has revealed some complex situations regarding intertextuality and the fluidity of orality and literacy: Navajos and Navajo speakers are employing a variety

of language styles and Navajo/English mixes in textual online interactions, an interesting development because most Navajos have not been formally trained in the orthography of Navjao. Most of the emails I have seen or heard about are not written completely in Navajo, although many times certain markers such as greetings, closings, or kinship terminologies index Navajo identities or at least passing knowledge of important lexical markers.

On a symbolic level, the Navajo language that was once present on the Navajo Nation homepage on the web is important. As the symbol of Navajo sovereignty and self-determination, the presence of written Navajo in such a public space indexes one way literacy was becoming localized and Navajoized. I admit I had a hard time translating the Navajo text accompanying Figure 9 due to the orthography. The orthography used in the Navajo phrase deviates from the accepted version, and indicates that those speakers involved in the technical and artistic process of website design were not formally trained in standard Navajo orthography. (Although I am not a prescriptivist, the Tribal Council, as it was then known, adapted a standardized orthography in the 1970's based on the work of Robert Young and William Morgan.) I had to email my colleague and Navajo transcription expert Irene Silentman in Window Rock for help. She emailed me her gloss, which appears above on p. 129, and indicated that the correct spelling should be "Hane' t'e7iya7 biniye7. Doo nanitlh'a da".

This emailed transcription alone is an interesting case study, as it is based on an orthography developed by Oswald Werner, an anthropological linguist working on the Reservation from the 1960's to the 1990's. As Irene once had worked for Werner as a

transcription specialist, and I was once his student, we had a shared code with which to send emails in Navajo, or more often, emails with Navajo phrases. This was important, especially for orthographic accuracy, as diacritics are often hard to create in email protocols. In this example, I automatically knew that “7” indicated high tones and “lh” substituted for “l̥” (the “bar l” indicating a voiceless lateral).⁷⁸ When laid out next to each other, these alternate ways of writing the Navajo phrase on the website become apparent.

- | | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|
| (1) Original website text: | Han-eh t'eh bin'ye, | doo non'tlahdah |
| (2) Mediated by email: | Hane' t'e7iya7 biniiye7. | Doo nanitlh'a da |
| (3) “Standard”: | Hane' t'éiyá biniiyé. | Doo nanitl'a da. |

Line 1 is a direct representation of speech sounds in the sense that there are several contractions present which would not normally be represented in written genres such as school Navajo. The second person preposition is contracted from *nanitl'a* to *non'tlah*. As discussed in Chapter 3, such contractions are for some speakers a marker of

⁷⁸ There are several former consultants and students of Werner's who continue to use this orthography in email contexts. Werner explains the development of this orthography: “In 1964 at the Linguistic Institute held at Bloomington IN I attended a seminar taught by Paul Garvin (SUNY Buffalo) on Computational Linguistics. I wrote a paper on automatic recognition and stripping of enclitics off Navajo verbs so you could get at the stem. Computers then had no method of using diacritics and we used 7 for high tone and 8 for nasalization. We also used lh for the barred L and apostrophe for glottal stop. Then Sidney Lamb (Yale) pointed out that nasalization in Navajo was a long component, that is while nasalization there were syllables with v7v (high low) and vv7 (low high) nasalization was always over the entire vowel (v) and therefore the 8 could precede the nasal vowel—long or short. So horse [/?] would be lh8i7i7'. While we spent 14 months at Tsegi Trading Post (1967/68) we used a flexowriter that created punched one inch paper tape. At one time we had three Navajo transcribers and they loved the 7/8 system because it was so fast. The tapes were mailed to Northwestern and we received back concordances of interviews. Later Bill Nichols and I revised the computer method by making F the barred L, U and u glottal stop and r R high tone and v V nasalization. Thus horse became firvirvu and you did not have to use multiple strokes or take your hand off the keyboard. Bill has several fonts for this method. I have Diliwoo Normal and perhaps another one. This may be more than you wanted to know, but there it is.” (Oswald Werner, personal email communication, March 5, 2005).

New Navajo, yet they are present in other forms and genres including the speech of many elders who also use contractions in day to day interactions. Line 1, therefore, could also be considered a folk orthography in the sense that it is a direct representation of speech, the lack of diacritics notwithstanding.⁷⁹

I was talking about this example one day with a consultant of mine who worked in a Tribal office that deals with language and culture issues. She also thought the original text on the website was incorrect, and said, “I think he just wrote the way he would say it. Nobody over there knows how to write it the right way. You think the Navajo Nation could do better, but it’s like everything else they do. They need to teach the Tribal employees how to write. In English, too! (laugh).” This comment is striking on many levels. The first is her remark about indexing a perceived lack of English language skills, especially literacy, among Navajo Nation Employees. It is often noted in joking contexts that many Tribal workers speak *Jxáán* English (outlined in Chapter 3);⁸⁰ often, these jokes are derogatory and index a perceived unwillingness of some Tribal workers to learn, or to work.⁸¹

However, this statement is also a commentary on Navajo orthography, indexing the symbolic power seen as inherent by some Navajos in the Navajo Nation

⁷⁹ I have elicited multiple examples of the transformation of speech to written genres, and almost always, the Navajo writer will “clean up” the speech of the Navajo speaker. One Diné College language instructor related the following story to me: “I bring elders into the classroom to talk to my students. One thing I do is have the students transcribe what the elderlies are saying. They never write it down like they say it, they always have to clean it up.”

⁸⁰ Note that *Jxáán* can be considered derogatorily by some while *Jáán* may not be construed . The x expresses productive affect.

⁸¹ Such statements and sentiments are not specific to Navajos and reflect broader, mainstream discourses about government workers or bureaucrats.

government's position as representative of the Navajo people. Just as KTNN radio is held to a higher language standard than smaller, competing Navajo language broadcasters, so too is the Navajo Nation held to a higher standard of language use. Not the government itself, that is, but its outward representations of Navajoness.

Also noteworthy is the comment about the author writing it “the way he would say it.” This issue arises often when talking to, or about, Navajo speakers who never “learned” to write. Essentially, speakers often rely on their knowledge of English, and use their knowledge of English phonetics and orthography onto Navajo sounds to create the Navajo written form. As with the example presented in Chapter 2, “Nima bikaa nidiil yaad,” where the writer assumed the Navajo elongated vowel sound /ee/ should be written like the diphthong /ay/ as in *say* (thus leading to a long vowel /aa/), this writer heard the Navajo short vowel /a/ as the English /o/ as in *son*. Thus, the *nanitl'a* in Line 3 becomes *non'tlah* in Line 1. In my work with Broadcast Navajo, I found that while most broadcasters did not, and could not, write their scripts in Navajo, some DJs and reporters would attempt writing a Navajo language script when it was important, or if they had the knowledge (Peterson 1998). When they did write, and I asked about it, they would always report something along the lines of “I write it like I hear it.”⁸²

While such practices may make Navajo language literacy more widely available and accepted among Navajo speakers, they also irritate some of the Navajo language teachers with whom I have spoken. Some consider the written Navajo that does circulate

⁸² I have multiple examples of this phenomenon from a variety of contexts, involving Navajo speakers/writers from a variety of sociolinguistic backgrounds.

through media to be especially “poorly spelled” (Lee and McLaughlin 2001). I believe this is due to the symbolic power of the media, and to speakers or writers who appear in mass mediated contexts and are often held to higher language standards than other speakers or writers (Klain and Peterson 2000b). Of course, many of these aesthetic judgments are based on a comparison to the Young and Morgan dictionary and the so-called “school Navajo” described in Chapter 3. In the case of mediated orality, speakers are judged in comparison to grandparents’ Navajo, or “Standard” Navajo.

In my research with the producers, air talent, and audience of KTNN radio, I found a wide range of ideologies as they relate to language use and media. As it is owned and operated by the Navajo Nation and known as “The Voice of the Navajo Nation,”⁸³ KTNN possesses a great deal of symbolic power, especially in regard to language use, and it is often held to a higher language standard than everyday Navajo interactions or even other Navajo language media outlets.. This leads to beliefs that KTNN must use more formal and standard forms of the Navajo language, as audience members often look to KTNN as a source of correct usage, as a kind of dictionary or “school.” That announcers regularly deviate from perceived standards is often a point of friction between the audience and the station, which receives constant complaints about language use (see Peterson 1997, 1998, 1999; Klain and Peterson 2000).

⁸³ KTNN Radio Station Enterprise was established in 1984 as an “enterprise” of the Navajo Nation, a for-profit organization owned but not controlled by the Navajo Nation government, unlike the Division of Broadcast Services, which owns, operates, and controls NNTV 5. The Navajo Times used to be under the control of Broadcast Services, but is now an independent enterprise, ensuring editorial freedom (for a discussion of editorial freedom in relation to news reporting, see Klain and Peterson 2000). The entity that owns KTNN and KWRK is now known as Native Broadcast Enterprises.

Furthermore, there are some Navajos who believe that the language should not be used at all in any form of broadcasting, lest non-Navajos, especially Anglos, hear the language. One response we got in our listener survey was that “Those people should not be able to hear our language.” This ideology reflects what some Navajos consider to be the inherent sacredness of the language, the religious and philosophical nature of the language, making the language unsuitable for sharing with outsiders. It is also an ideology of valorization and resistance, reflecting a desire that some may have to retain local control over particular aspects of Navajoness.⁸⁴

Emergence of Navajo Literacy

The development of orthographies and literacy in Navajo has a similar history to that of other developments on the Navajo Nation outlined in Chapter 3, as well as similarities to the development of broadcasting in Navajo discussed above.

Orthographies were originally developed and utilized by government officials, scholars, and missionaries for purposes of assimilation and salvage ethnography; that is, as a tool for the transition to modernity and interconnection—or to prevent such a transition. As such, the processes and products of literacy go hand-in-hand with material and technological transformations that have occurred over the past 125 years, and are

⁸⁴ A growing body of work engages radio broadcasting and language ideologies in indigenous language communities, especially as it relates to cultural preservation (Brody 2000), emerging speech styles (de Gerdes 1998), and the politics of language and identity (Jimenez 2001). Ginsburg’s work with indigenous media production in Australia highlights the complexities of identity and self-representation within global mediascapes, which resembles a “Faustian contract” at times, as indigenous producers play into global representations of themselves (Ginsburg 1991, 1994). Within global indigenous mediascapes, language is a common concern among indigenous broadcasters, especially as it relates to broadcasting and language revitalization and standardization (Browne 1996).

certainly integral to practices relating to computers and the internet. However, what began as an “outside” introduction is in an ever increasing state of becoming Navajoized, as illustrated below.

While small written vocabularies of Navajo have existed since the 1850s, serious efforts to develop a Navajo orthography and language dictionary began in 1898, as Franciscan friars, based in St. Michaels, AZ, sought to teach their workers Navajo in order to spread Catholicism. Until 1933, the use of written Navajo was limited mainly to missionaries and anthropologists, as “Federal Indian Policy, directed as it was at the quick assimilation of Indian people, rejected the development and use of written forms of Indian languages as educational and communicational media” (Young 1993:52); while written Navajo was used in schools during this period, the schools were parochial and the instruction religious (Lockard 1995:22).

The initial orthographies, with their heavy use of diacritics and Slavic characters, were not meant for use by native speakers and could only be printed on a small number of specially-modified presses located, again, in government offices or with the Franciscan Friars in St. Michaels. It was the later development of a “practical” (popular) rather than a “technical” (linguist’s) orthography in the 1930s, known as the Harrington-LaFarge orthography, a version of which is still in use today, that “opened up at least the possibility of dialog in written Navajo” (Holm 1996:336).⁸⁵ This popular orthography gave Navajos the *potential* to control the production and content of texts with a writing

⁸⁵ Young (1993) notes that there were many competing orthographies used by Reichard, Sapir, Haile, and Hoijer, among other missionaries and scholars doing linguistic research on the Navajo Nation in the first half of the 20th century, and not all were concerned with Navajo users’ ease of use.

system designed for native Navajo speakers, one that could be printed with a slightly modified typewriter. The new orthography was made possible in part by a reversal in Federal policy in 1933, which among other things, allowed community-oriented schools on the Navajo Reservation (Beatty 1963) and in part by the development of several Navajo-language primers, books, a newspaper, and Young and Morgan's groundbreaking 1943 dictionary and grammar *The Navaho Language*.

However, as a result of the content of most of these texts, many Navajos consider these efforts to have been a direct result of the government's need to spread new livestock and grazing regulations and war propaganda (Austin-Garrison, et al. 1996:354).⁸⁶ After World War II, Federal policy changed once again towards total assimilation, and by the mid 1950s "the readers remained at the schools collecting dust, the original 1943 dictionary was even by then a collector's item, and the newspaper... was something of a curiosity. Because few people had been taught to read in Navajo, there were few readers" (Holm 1996:392). Efforts at Navajo literacy did not receive much institutional support again until the late 1960s with the formation of Navajo-controlled schools stressing initial Navajo literacy.⁸⁷

While Navajo oral traditions and storytelling continue in a variety of genres in face to face and mediated contexts, in both Navajo and English, McLaughlin observed that "to create a literature and to develop purposes for written Navajo—even oral

⁸⁶ In a talk in 2003, Robert Young also noted the link between his own work with William Morgan and the government's need for terminology related to livestock reduction.

⁸⁷ In 1966 the Rough Rock Demonstration School was established on the Navajo Reservation as an attempt at language revitalization; that same year, the established Rock Point Community School began programs in initial Navajo literacy (McCarty 1998).

Navajo—in the marketplace have both been very uphill battles” (Austin-Garrison *et al.* 1996:358). Within the print media, a relatively small but increasing amount of Navajo literature exists, but Navajo-language newspapers and periodicals, while available in the 1940s and 1950s, are currently nonexistent. Even the English-language *Navajo Times* has discontinued the Navajo-language page in its weekly editions due to financial constraints (Arviso 2004).⁸⁸

What is important about both the development of Navajo literacy, and the emergence of broadcasting in the Navajo language discussed below, is that both mediated forms began as “outside” forces which have now been to some extent Navajoized. Navajos with whom I have spoken generally do not consider KTNN, The *Navajo Times*, or their own attempts at Navajo orthography to be “outside” intrusions. However, comparisons are still made between literacy and colonialism, and aesthetic judgments are made based on writers’ “incorrect” use of the Navajo language. The question now is what happens when emergent practices in the offline context transition to online representations and interactions.

Literacy as Ideology

An integral part of studies in language ideologies and in the ethnography of communication, literacy has often been viewed in opposition to orality. Basso argued for ethnographies of literacy as part of ethnographies of communication, and noted that

⁸⁸ The March 3, 2006 issue of the *Navajo Times* included a Navajo Language page once again. As of this writing, I do not know if this will continue, or who is sponsoring it.

literacy must be viewed in context alongside other forms of communication (Basso 1974). Ong and Street elaborated on this for explorations into the relationship of modes of orality and literacy, where such distinctions are made ethnographically on a case by case basis (Street 1993). Sherzer pointedly notes how simplistic characterizations of oral vs. written discourse mask actually occurring processes, and that dichotomies of oral and literary language and speech fails to recognize processes and poetics apparent in a wide variety of Kuna discourse (Sherzer 1990a).

Schieffelin and Doucet's case study of Haitian kreole orthography illustrates how contested orthographies are sites of contested identity in both local and global contexts (Schieffelin and Doucet 1998). Bender illustrates how Sequoyah's syllabary has become emblematic of contemporary Cherokee identity, and suggests that divergent ideologies surrounding the syllabary illustrate much more about contemporary Cherokee life than previously believed (Bender 2002). This research also illustrates in a bilingual, contemporary indigenous context how literacy has transformed into a "diverse phenomenon," challenging dichotomous models of orality and literacy.

In the Navajo case, there have been numerous studies regarding literacy and language use. Following expanded formulations of diglossia as the relationship between prestige forms of language and realms or domains of use (Ferguson 1959; Fishman 1972), Spolsky and Irvine (Spolsky 1977; Spolsky and Irvine 1982) framed the Navajo language situation as a "special diglossia," where "Navajo is the preferred and appropriate language for oral use, and English the most frequently used language for writing" (Spolsky and Irvine 1982:74-75). This research mainly concerns language use

as related to pedagogy and dominant institutions, and was intended to inform bilingual education policy. However, they noted that “when the introduction of literacy is associated with a second language, an alien culture, and modern, technological functions, literacy in these new domains is preferred in the alien, second, or standard language” (Spolsky and Irvine 1982:76). As discussed above, this was the case with the development of Navajo orthographies and local literacies.

As the examples presented in this dissertation illustrate, this special diglossia has changed dramatically. While English remains the predominant code of choice for writing, Navajo can be seen more and more: I have seen T-shirts, billboards and road signs, hats, mutton stand signs, bumper stickers, and spray-painted “tags” on buildings and water tanks displaying Navajo orthography. In one of the most public examples, the New Mexico Department of Transportation changed the exit signs on Interstate 40 from the Spanish Cañoncito to the Navajo *Tó hájilée’e* satellite reservation, indexing both the community’s power in influencing such a change and the importance of identifying the space as Navajo. And in one of the most empowering examples I have seen, a fluorescent pink, spray-painted “tag” was left on a standard green and white highway sign that read simply “You are entering the “Navajo Reservation.” The word “Navajo” had been covered over by a very large, neon-pink *DINÉ*.

As discussed in Chapter 2 and revisited below, Navajo orality is no longer singular as a preferred prestige mode, and is being replaced in many contexts by English and symbolic practices of Navajo literacy. McLaughlin’s research on Navajo literacy in the fictionalized community of Mesa Valley also found that by the 1980s, instances and

ideologies of literacy had shifted beyond the special diglossia as institutions such as the local mission church and the community charter school had become indigenized.

At Mesa Valley political, economic, and social changes have allowed for an indigenization of the school and of written Navajo. Political changes stem from large-scale conditions of the social body. The Civil Rights and Red Power movements of the 1960s, and the development of Navajo independence and legislation promoting self-governance, in the 1970s, all made possible the school board's wresting of decision-making powers from the BIA and the simultaneous positioning of nonstandard language as a tool for self-determination. (McLaughlin 1992:159)

When discussing Navajo literacy and orthography, Robert Begaye compared the experiences of Navajos trying to learn English with non-Navajos' uses of Navajo on billboards promoting tourism in the area: He associated control of language issues and the development of Navajo orthography with tribal sovereignty. For him, colonialism and literacy are concurrent, interrelated phenomena; as he explained in an interview:

There are signs when you drive on I-40, different places, that are spelled in Navajo and they're wrong. And if we spelled a word wrong in English, our grades go down, or there's points marked off, and there's just certain ways, there's a standard form. But we don't tell them that, it's because our language is not written yet. It's not uniform, it just became standardized, just recently. It became standardized recently because these missionaries and

these white people—whoever—were murdering our language the way it was written and spoken, ya'. So as Navajo people we kind of had to put that together and try to make it uniform. And it's all those things, you know, if we were sovereign we wouldn't really have to answer to anyone except god, ya'a.

Again, outside forces are influencing changes on the Navajo Nation, and Roberts comment speaks to this by linking literacy with colonialism. Sovereignty equals control. It is not literacy per se that he is concerned with; rather, the perceived inequalities regarding local control of orthography is what concerns him. His statement also alludes to representation and self-representation, to the fact that Anglos access the local symbolic economy by putting up billboards selling the area to tourists—using Navajo words—and spell them wrong. Robert's statement reflects the idea of rhetorical sovereignty as outlined by Oren Lyons, who noted that "Rhetorical sovereignty is the inherent right and ability of *peoples* to determine their own communicative needs and desires in this pursuit, to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse" (Lyons 2000:449).

However, neither Robert nor Lyons address the issue of contested orthographic spaces within Navajo communities. Other examples of local literacy practices illustrate this point. While more formally educated Navajos who are literate in the language exchange emails in Navajo, both as an identity marker and to challenge each other on comprehension, comprehension is a different issue for others who may lack of knowledge in applying formal orthography. The symbolic power of institutional language is evident in such ethnoaesthetic judgments on language use. The example above of the Navajo

Nation homepage illustrates the ideologies inherent in the link between more formal or “correct” orthography and institutions with symbolic power.

The efforts at Navajo literacy and education outlined above have, at least on a symbolic level, changed perceptions of literacy among many Navajo speakers. Daniel McLaughlin’s (1992) study of Navajo literacy in a small community found that contrary to earlier hypothesis of nonacceptance, a high percentage of students and teachers believe that literacy aids in the understanding of Navajo language and culture, and understanding of the self (1992:155; see also Remes 1991). He also found at least some evidence to indicate that Navajo language literacy extends beyond the prevailing belief that it is limited to certain realms:

In all church and school domains, forms and functions for the written vernacular are surrounded and supported by ideologies of self-determination and self-empowerment. As a result along with the indigenization of written Navajo, possibilities of empowerment emerge, both as a means of self-confirmation and as a vehicle for the critical examination of society.
(McLaughlin 1992:12)

However, acceptance of literacy does not correlate directly with literacy itself. A large number of speakers are not literate in Navajo, and some still do not equate reading and writing Navajo with really “knowing” it. Most of my consultants and friends who are mother-tongue speakers of various ages and backgrounds have never taken a Navajo language course, and therefore, are not literate in Navajo, and many are not seriously

concerned about becoming literate. Even for those who are literate in Navajo, there are relatively few outlets for in-depth reading, limited to the Bible, a few works of literature (including children's books), occasional academic articles and textbooks, and—of course—dictionaries. And while many Navajo Christian churches use written Navajo, most churches teach only reading in Navajo, and not writing (Austin-Garrison *et al.* 1996:354). Even the Navajo Nation Government and Council, whose sessions and committee meetings are frequently conducted in Navajo, document all proceedings and laws in English only.

Literacy & the Social Life of Computers

The most readily available outlet that exists for literate Navajos or those willing to experiment with orthography is writing and creating their own materials, be they emails, letters, stories, or poetry (Webster 2004). Even for those who do not wish to create their own texts, any basic interaction with computer keyboards immediately brings the issue of literacy to the forefront. With many people, such interactions bring up the issues of both Navajo and English literacy. As most computer mediated interactions are textual, users need to have at least some command of English, and Navajo if desired, to write emails and interface with online protocols such as webmail applications or chat room programs.

Navajo language classes in schools and colleges certainly promote, and demand, creative writing from students, and students regularly employ computers for their coursework, and often publicly post or email their creations to each other. One Navajo

language instructor, a woman in her 60s working at a major university in the Southwest, explained how she communicated with her students.

My students email me all the time with questions. A lot of the time it's in Navajo, which is great, you know, because they need to use the language. I try to use the language all the time in class. But sometimes with the email even I have a hard time with it. I don't always know what they mean, because they're just learning the language. They don't have it yet. And you know, with email, you can't put the marks on the letters. So I have a hard time sometimes. You just kind of have to guess [at what they mean] sometimes. But you can't give them a hard time about it, you can't criticize them too much, because then they won't want to use the language. They need to learn the right way, but this way they're using it and they'll get there.

There are several important points about this statement. First of all, the issue that a literate native speaker of Navajo has a hard time understanding texts written without diacritics is interesting, although her "second guessing" of students' intentions and meanings is also implicated here. I will note that other literate, native-speaking consultants have also reported at least some difficulty in understanding emails they send to each other. The diacritics indicating high-tones, nasals, and nasal-high's associated with long or short vowels in Navajo can alter the lexical, aspectual, or object marker meanings of words, and as one consultant said, "you have to read into what they mean sometimes." The most important element of the statement about students' emailing in

Navajo was that “at least they’re using it [the language] and they’ll get there.”

Computers are an appropriate space for language use and language learning, and there is a recognition that college students—if they are going to engage the language—need to have a variety of modes and media available to them.

Not all writers of Navajo are students, of course, and as noted above, not all students utilize more standard forms of Navajo orthography. As with the example of the Navajo Nation homepage presented above, I have encountered numerous instances of adult (non-student) Navajo speakers who, although untrained in Navajo literacy, regularly use at least some Navajo terms and phrases in email text, especially for greetings, closings, and basic conversational turns. As with the previous example, these creative folk orthographies deviate significantly from “standard” Navajo orthography. However, unlike text on the Navajo Nation homepage—or the Broadcast Navajo spoken on KTNN—negative ethnoaesthetic judgments are not generally made about language use in these contexts. The following is one example representing countless emails that either I have received from Navajo speakers, or that have been shared with me:

```
>Ya'teeh shiyazh,  
>Hat ish ba nana?    We are just...  
>  
>Hagonee,  
>nima
```

Figure 10: Email Greetings & Closings

While emails written completely in Navajo may not have been the norm during my research, greetings, clan affiliations, and closings that frame English text were more frequent. Example 10 is illustrative of the phenomenon of mapping English knowledge onto Navajo phonology, with the writing of the greeting *yá'át'ééh* [glossed as “hello”] as “ya’ teeh.” Again, when I ask consultants why they chose to write Navajo words any particular way, the inevitable response was “I just write it like I hear it.” I have seen many versions of *yá'át'ééh*, including “ya’a’teeh,” “yatahey,” and “yat’eeh.” The same is true for the closing *hagóonee’* [glossed as “goodbye”], which I have seen in a variety of forms including “hagone” and “hagoonee.” However, the important point here is not that any particular way of writing is wrong, nor is it that the bulk of an email may not be written in Navajo at all. The important point is that Navajo *is* being used, and retained, in a new medium, and that users are employing strategies to write Navajo despite a lack of formalized training in official orthographies.

The social and linguistic impacts of new media practices have been investigated in a variety of ways, generally distinguishing between online (Internet) and offline interactions. Early work revealed changing communicative practices online, which were seen to be either limited (Hiltz, et al. 1986) or determined (Rice 1987) by the technology, positioning online communication away from other social interactions. The “chicken/egg question” is about whether online communications influences offline communications, or vice-versa (Cook 2004), and Keating notes that speakers incorporate new technologies of communication by making choices from existing communicative repertoires (Keating 2000:114). The most comprehensive overview of the language of new media is Crystal’s

(2001) synthesis of emergent communicative practices surrounding the Internet, which suggests that new varieties of language are indeed emerging from new technologies, described as a mix between oral and written forms of language. This examination reflects the research on email linguistics conducted by Barons, who suggests that email as a written form directly reflects oral vernaculars (Baron 1998).

The Navajo case is slightly different than most of the cases that have been considered. What the Navajo case can tell us is that indeed, online communication is derived from offline practices, but with the significant caveat that at least some of the Navajos engaging in Navajo language computer interactions were not previously writers of the language. While some speakers retain ideologies that separate the idea of truly *knowing* Navajo from Navajo literacy, there are a number of Navajos who engage literacy in everyday practice. The multiple examples of mediated communication in a variety of genres presented in this dissertation illustrate this point.

Thus my findings correlate with previous research by McLaughlin (1992), yet diverge somewhat to suggest that while Navajo literacy has become indigenized, formal orthographies remain associated with school and institutional domains, the “Book Navajo” or “School Navajo” described in Chapter 2. My argument is that in the Navajo case, the more “local” practices and control of the medium become, the more accepted they might become among a wider range of community members. The new medium has in the very least put literacy at the forefront, and it has offered some speakers the opportunity to try out writing the language. Thus, while the styles and forms may be similar to offline practices, at least in some cases, the medium has brought at least some

significant transformations. The transformations, however, are not all limited to the Navajo language.

Empowering Grandma

One phenomenon that best illustrates the significance of the potential impacts of technology is that of elderly Navajos learning to write and type English in some of the senior centers in the New Mexican portion of the Reservation. In the beginning of my research, I concentrated on the ways computing technologies can be used for Navajo language interactions, and because of the demographics of many of the computer users, I worked mostly with people under 50. While I spent countless hours in various Chapter houses, I had yet to see any elderlies actively engage the new computers. They would watch younger generations or laugh at hearing Navajo sounds coming through the speakers from a language learning program, but never actually engage the machines.

This changed when one of my long-term consultants, Gloria Curley, told me about the English as a Second Language (ESL) classes she was teaching in the Elk Water senior center. The fact that ESL was being taught at all surprised me, but the most surprising thing was that the Gates computers were an integral part of the instruction. Not only were the elderlies being instructed in English literacy, they were being instructed in using keyboards and the tools of online textual interactions. They were also doing it with the help of other bilingual, yet illiterate, elders. “They just love it,” Gloria said. “They knew that their grandkids were all into computers, but once they found out what they could do with them, they were suddenly interested in the English classes.

Before that, it was just a nice activity for them to break up the day.” Interestingly, the elderlies had associated computers with the English language, and of course, with their grandkids. “Once they got the hang of it, they knew they would be able to communicate with their grandkids, finally, in English,” Gloria continued. Before that, they couldn’t talk to them because the kids now don’t speak Navajo.” The generations are often separated by both geography and language.

In this case, technology has facilitated language learning and intergenerational communication. “My grandmas get teary eyed now, because they can finally talk to their gradkids,” said Gloria. This is important, as one of the root problems of intergenerational communication cited by my consultants is the lack of such communication. It also shows how some members of the oldest generations are willing to accommodate the youth and are not necessarily willing to fault them for their lack of Navajo language skills. It also illustrates how a compelling desire can facilitate the adaptation of technology, as well as an understanding of the ways in which technology can benefit users in everyday life. Before they knew just how the computers could help their lives, the grandparents were—at least publicly—less willing to engage with the technology.

There are other examples of shifting communicative practices resulting from this phenomenon that go beyond this unique example of speech accommodation. As a result of the ESL classes, the Elk Water elderlies began to feel empowered. For months, Gloria told me, the seniors had been complaining about the quality of services at the senior center. In the standard practice, they had made their concerns known to the center managers in person, as well as to the community at large in several of the monthly

Chapter meetings. Both of these strategies were conducted in spoken Navajo, as is the norm in many Chapter meetings, but to their dismay, no changes had been made to the center's policies. With the help of their new skills and new computers, they decided to draft a memo—in English—to local community leaders and service providers outlining their concerns about inadequate services and social opportunities.

While they had made their feelings known countless times orally, in the prestige mode of grandparents' Navajo, material response only came with the literate, English version of their plea. "They were angry, those managers, when they got that letter" said Gloria. "They were mad at me for teaching the elderlies how to write. Because it was written now, they couldn't just ignore it." This example clearly illustrates shifting language ideologies related to prestige forms. While the language of the elderlies is considered to be the prestige or standard form of Navajo (Chapter 2), in practice, this may not always be the case. Grandmas talking in Navajo in Chapter meetings does not carry as much weight as grandmas writing memos in English. Also illustrating language ideology is the fact that written Navajo was never considered an option for such a memo; the bureaucracy works in English, the computers are for English, and writing is in English. Thus, Gloria said, the memo should be in English.

While it was not a typical result from the introduction of the Gates computers, this story illustrates nonetheless the potentials and possibilities of the new technology. This process is certainly one of the unintended consequences of the newly donated technology, and grandmas can become Techo-Indians as well. It is also important to note that these events—most notably the ESL classes—happened in the New Mexican portion of the

Reservation, and that much of my own work was conducted in the Arizona portions of the Reservation. The state of New Mexico has better programs and funding for technology and ESL in public libraries, community centers, and, in this case, the senior center attached to the Chapter House. This, according to several consultants who work with public libraries and computing technologies, means that there are more opportunities for technology instruction for New Mexico residents, despite the fact that the Gates computers were donated to Chapters across the Reservation.

In a study of office workers in England, Brown and Duguid (2000) explore the role of individuals' "social fabric" in work situations when using new information technology. Despite those who believe individuals may not be adept at utilizing new technologies, they note that when it comes to computers and their applications, the facts of office life reveal a combination of "technological frailty and social resourcefulness" and people with a variety of skills that successfully integrated computers and technology into their social/work spaces (Brown and Duguid 2000). In other words, people rely on existing social networks and individual skills to learn and utilize new technologies.

Mediating Discourses & Bilingual Joking

Bilingual speakers who utilize Navajo in predominantly English language interactions may see such a transition to bilingual lay orthographies as natural. Speakers and writers of Navajo do not generally consult dictionaries for "correct" terminology or spelling; however, when they are used, the validity of expressions and terminology found there are often challenged and are not necessarily viewed as "correct". Until written

Navajo is in widespread practice—inter-generationally and across the lines of status and education—and has gained more institutional support, written standards could remain irrelevant to most speakers and emerging writers. What remains important to many at this point is speaking, creatively using words to describe new phenomena, and mapping certain Navajo speech genres onto extant orthographic knowledge.

Not all interactions mediated by computing and Internet technologies are original texts. Not surprisingly, one of the most popular uses of email is to forward Native or Navajo-themed jokes to friends, acquaintances, coworkers, and family. As with other forms of joking, these texts often require specific cultural or linguistic knowledge, but unlike traditional genres, they are electronically mediated and serve to bind together social and kinship groups in new ways. These genres also transcend the boundaries of mediated forms, as jokes can be told in face to face contexts, on the radio, and then be written down, facilitating emailing, sharing, and the wide circulation among email and social networks around the world. I have often heard Navajo and Native American comedians, both amateur and professional, perform some of these same emailed jokes at fairs and gatherings, in both Navajo and English.

>Subject: Elevator

>A Navajo boy and his father were visiting a mall for
>the first time.

>They were amazed by almost everything they saw, but
>especially by two
>shiny, silver walls that could move apart and then
>slide back together
>again.

>The boy asked, "What is this, Father?" The father
>(never having seen an
>elevator) responded, "Son, I have never seen anything
>like this in my life,
>I don't know what it is."

>While the boy and his father were watching with
>amazement, a fat old
>lady in a wheel chair rolled up to the moving walls
>and pressed a button.

>The walls opened and the lady rolled between them
>into a small room.
>The walls closed and the boy and his father watched
>the small circular numbers
>above the walls light up
>sequentially.

>They continued to watch until it reached the last
>number and then
>the numbers began to light in the >reverse order.
>Finally the walls opened up
>again and a gorgeous,
>voluptuous, young woman stepped >out.

>The father, not taking his eyes off the young woman,
>said quietly to his son... "Nima bika ni diil yeed!"

Figure 11: "Nima bika ni diil yeed" Email Forward, 2003.

One of my favorite bilingual examples, presented in Figure 11, came to me via email sometime in 2003.⁸⁹ I had heard the joke delivered completely in Navajo, which had to be explained to me at the time (I didn't get the directionals in relation to the metal doors, among other things). Unfortunately, it was a spontaneous performance and I was unable to record it. I have also heard the joke in English, and in fact, have received at least two versions of the same story via email, one with the punch line in Navajo, and one with Navajo and English. Like many online stories of this type, the text undergoes transformations, as subsequent senders place their own take on the text.

The punch line, of course, requires minimal competence in Navajo. In the oral English version, no translation for the Navajo punch line was provided. It was expected that all who laughed understood, and it was expected that all would understand. In fact, in the public performance of the joke I witnessed, all did understand. In the first email version I received, no translation was offered for the punch line, assuming at least some competence in Navajo literacy. In subsequent versions, which I received continuously from 2002-2006, the punch line was translated, and the last line reads

"Nima bikaa ni diil yeed! (Go get your mother!)"

or alternately, and what some may call "incorrectly,"

"Nima bikaa ni dil yaad! (Go get your mother!)"

⁸⁹ Email excerpts used throughout this dissertation are delineated by a top and bottom border. The aesthetic and text layout of the original email was retained as much as possible, in order to remind readers of the uniqueness of this textual genre. The > generally indicates that an email was a forward, and these were also retained as a reminder to readers.

In comparison to standard Navajo orthography, the verb would be considered to be misspelled (from yeed to yaad), and could perhaps even be translated differently; grammatically but nonsensically. The pronunciation of yeed is actually like “say” in English; perhaps the writer was relying on orthographic knowledge of English to construct the Navajo, and this mapping of Navajo onto English reflects the discussion at the beginning of the chapter.

Besides being a commentary on (or example of) chauvinism, one of the main premises of the joke is that audiences can reasonably believe, or at least easily imagine, an old Navajo man who has never seen an elevator. While such a belief could easily fall into Deloria’s anomalous expectation, many Navajos themselves realize, or believe, a certain disconnect between the oldest generation and technological advance. While this was certainly once true, and there is a dearth of elevators on the Reservation, most Navajos—however isolated—have probably seen an elevator, if not off the Reservation then at least in the Indian Health Service hospitals. This trope of isolation and ignorance is one that remains in circulation among some Navajos, and certainly among non-Indians. However, there is perhaps some truth to this belief: I have heard the story several times that when the Norwest Bank in Window Rock (now the Wells-Fargo Bank) first installed ATM machines, many of the elderlies were wondering who the little person was inside of the machines giving them their money.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ There may be nothing unusual about this trope which exists in many communities around the world (just the details differ); however, it is important for this case study as it represents the localized version of the trope.

The point is that numerous issues are indexed in seemingly mundane interactions such as an emailed joke. The circulation, representation, and intersection of issues like orality and literacy, traditional and modern, and Navajo and Western are incessantly complex, and incessantly transformative. The ways in which such jokes serve to enhance communities, identities, and representations will be explored further in Chapter 5. What is important here is the notion that language ideologies are important in studies of media, as “[t]he modes of language use in media do not come out of thin air, and they are always inherently ideological” (Spitulnik 2001:144). However, language ideologies as they relate to media cannot be separated from language ideologies in other realms, as well as ideologies of technology and discourses of modernity.

Joking Genres & Techno Indians

Figure 12 illustrates another way in which new technology has become socialized in some Native communities and social networks. The “top 10” list is a genre unto itself, made widely popular over the past 20 years by comedian and CBS *Late Show* host David Letterman. Texts such as these circulate widely over the internet, and are often geared for specific audiences, with very similar wording, including at least one version exploring so-called “Techno-Rednecks.”⁹¹

⁹¹ Jeff Foxworthy, a self-styled “redneck” comedian, made the genre “You might be a redneck if...” popular.

>Top Ten Signs You are a Techno-Indian
>
>10. You have several CPU's up on blocks in your living
>room.
>9. Your snag doesn't want to hear that lame old "my server
was down" >excuse anymore.
>8. You think a floppy disk slot crammed with sage will
>somehow increase >your connection speed.
>7. You send eeezzzzmail.
>6. Your mail address is DancesWithModems@hotmail.com
>5. Before you attend a powwow, you need to check its
>website first.
>4. Your mouse is coated with frybread grease.
>3. You ask chicks for their email address at powwows.
>2. You have a beaded zip drive.
>1. You now know a hard drive isn't just the road to
>Navajo Mountain!!
>
>

Figure 12: "Top 10 Signs You Are a Techno-Indian"
Email Forward April 2002.

The "Techno-Indian" joke is what some might refer to as hybrid of these two forms, the top 10 and redneck genres, and of course, has been localized and "Nativized." As humor, it is a statement of Natives having arrived in the information age; this type of joking works to make the "techno" world "one's own," not to imply that the two are separate, but to suggest that the disjunctive discourses separating Native Americans from Others have been reconciled. As a Native-authored text, the Techno-Indian list shows a link between mediated communication and identity. Many of the images in the text, such as frybread grease on a mouse (#4), the beaded Zip drive (#2), or the CPU on blocks

(#10) are frequently employed in this type of joking to put a Native twist on seemingly non-Native situations.

The reference to a CPU (the “central processing unit,” or the big gray box on PC’s) on “blocks” evokes the image of a rusted car on blocks in the yard, an oft-repeated stereotype of rural, lower-income households. The beaded Zip drive indexes Native arts, and it is true that some Natives have beadwork on numerous personal items such as pens, lighter cases, wallets, and key chains. The grease is a common hazard of eating frybread, the ubiquitous, fried, doughy treat eaten in Indian Country, and it is no stretch to picture it on a mouse. Many Navajo readers can relate to these elements in such humor, whether along class or ethnic lines. As Shimá explained, “It makes fun of Indians, it’s so stereotypical. That’s why it’s funny.”

While the provenance of many such Internet texts is hard to ascertain, this particular example is attributed to “Okiyapsni,” the penname for Dani Not Help Him, an Oglala Lakota who was living on the Pine Ridge Reservation at the time. While I received this via email in 2002, the earliest posting of this joke on the Internet I can find is from 1999 in the Southeastern Cherokee Council’s online publication *Talking Leaves*.

⁹² According to that posting, Not Help Him used to write these for her weekly radio show on the local Pine Ridge radio station, presumably KILI. Again, such flows exemplify the convergence and intertextuality of novel mediated forms.

⁹² <http://www.secci.com/TL/NOV99/Stories.htm#ten>. October 17, 2005.

```
>...2.  You have a beaded Zip drive
>and the number one sign you are a Technoindian
>
>DRUMROLL
>
>1.  You now know a hard drive isn't just the road to Red
>Shirt Table!
```

Figure 13: “Top 10 Signs You Are a Techno-Indian” Alternate Ending
Email Forward April 2002.

The original ending, Figure 13, follows the form of David Letterman’s nightly presentation more closely, with the lead in to the “number one” reason preceded by an audible drumroll, and all other elements remain similar to Figure 12. The example in Figure 13 deviates from the “original” by omitting drumroll and lead-in to #1, both signatures of the Letterman *Late Night* format. Figure 13 has also been localized and Navajoized, with a specific reference to the Navajo Reservation inserted in #1. The “hard drive” is now to Navajo Mountain instead of Red Shirt Table, a reference to a location on the Pine Ridge Reservation. Navajo Mountain is considered to be one of those isolated, traditional areas of the Reservation discussed above; the road itself was notoriously bad, dangerous, and often very muddy (it is also, coincidentally, one of the recently paved roads discussed above). The author of the change, cultural affiliation notwithstanding, had specific local knowledge, and the text was transformed at some point during its long

journey through numerous Navajo email lists.⁹³ The pre-asphalt reference to the drive to Navajo Mountain dates the quip, and the altered text in subsequent versions suggests that like traditional oral genres of storytelling, emailed stories are not static.

Mediating Identities

Identity and technology are linked in very interesting ways. In online interactions, some Navajos index identity by using locally specific user names or login names. Forwarded emails from Navajos around the world contain online identifiers such as rezboi, rezjohn, sheepherder, yazziegirl, johnnie67, and other such names which index particular offline Navajo identities. In the case of the elderlies who were learning to write English on the Gates computers, some of their desired online identities, which mark their offline experiences, were not possible. One story illustrates yet another link between the offline and online worlds, and as their instructor Gloria related to me, it all came back to the sheep:

and my oldest student, she was 91 or so, she really loved her sheep and her goats. You know how the elderlies really love their livestock, they see them as their own kids. Well when we were setting up grandma's eezmail account,⁹⁴ which was an interesting story by itself, getting the grandmas and

⁹³ Again, I am not suggesting that such email lists are limited to Navajos, or that Navajo lists exclude others. The interconnections between Navajo community members and others are immense, and ever-increasing.

⁹⁴ I use the alias "eezmail.com" to index the genre of email domain names. Eezmail.com comes from the "Techno-Indian" joke above. I do this to ensure privacy.

grandpas online. But she really wanted it to be *tl'ízi* [goat]. And we tried to write *tl'ízi*, but eezmail wouldn't let us do it because of those marks that you use. She was sad, but she said, 'Ok. I'll be *nalí* [paternal grandparent].

The reason grandma eventually chose *nalí* was because she viewed the email account primarily as a way to communicate with her grandchildren, in their own language—English—and in their own way—on the computer. The link between online and offline identities reflect discourses of community and tradition in a variety of ways. One day, I was with the “family,” and we were all entertaining ourselves by playing on their computer. It was way too windy and muddy to go outside; since we were in a non-ranching context, there was no reason to go outside. No livestock or outdoor chores to take care of. The computer itself is a very visible fixture in the dining room, visible from the kitchen and the living room. We were sitting around the kitchen table trying to figure out a new email address for Shimá.

“What about ‘Shimá at eezmail.com’? That’s the one I want.” We all laughed at the proposed name. She was the ultimate nurturing mom, and having the world—or at least the Navajo world—see her as such seemed appropriate. She thought about this for a minute, however, and became more subdued. “No, that’s no good. I need something serious for business, you know?” We all chatted about this for a moment, and of course, I began thinking of ways to resolve online Navajo identities with the requirements of more formal business discourses. I think this was all too much for Shimá, and she gleefully exclaimed, “What about ‘partyglaanii at eezmail.com’?” This username, derived from the Navajo *adláanii* (a believer, a “drunk”) would certainly index one of her

self-ascribed joking identities, but perhaps the implications of such a name would not be appropriate in all circumstances.

We all decided that it would be a good idea for her to just use her real last name.⁹⁵ However, the keystroke combination of Yazzie was already taken as a username on the domain, and so was k_yazzie, as well as any combination of her first name, last name, initials, and any version of a screen name with “yazzie” in the text. “What the hell,” she exclaimed. “It’s still not letting me. There are so many Yazzie’s. You know we even have the family website.” Apparently there are quite a few Navajos online with the name Yazzie, indexing the increasing popularity of email among the community but resulting in frustration for subsequent Yazzies who want to use their real name online. After multiple tries, Shimá began to get mad. “We can’t even sign up for an email address. I mean, I thought it was so simple. I think I’ve just been in the old school too long.” “Old school,” at least as Shimá uses the term, indexes all that is not hip, trendy, or modern; this useage is very different from any connotation of “traditional” vs. modern as she was not referring to “old school” Navajoness.

The endeavor switched to another marker of Navajoness, using clan names in online personas. She decided that she would be “Bitter Water Shimá,” indexing, in English, her maternal clan. Well, that was the original thought, anyway. After confirming her new online address, Shimá realized that “duh, I’m Salt born for Bitter Water”, meaning she’s really a “Salt Clan Shimá.” For her, online identity was important

⁹⁵ The last name used in these examples is a pseudonym. Yazzie is a very common last name in Navajo, like “Smith” in English, and this is the name Shimá chose to be used as her alias in this dissertation.

enough to get it right, even though most people, Navajo or not, would not be able to evaluate the accuracy of the designation without her specifically stating her clanship affiliation in an introduction/greeting sequence.

This example does, however, illustrate some interesting points about language use and online identity. Using *Shimá* in this context, i.e. “Bitter Water Shimá,” is actually grammatically appropriate codeswitching, but inappropriate in translation as she is mixing codes by mapping the Navajo “my mom” into the English “mom,” resulting in a gloss of “Bitter Water-my-mom.” This reflects a practice among some Navajos who refer to their moms as “my shimá.” While this could be considered inappropriate codewitching, the practice is observable, and interestingly, this form is never applied to other kinship terms: In New Navajo or Navajo English, relatives are often referred to as “my cheii” or “my nail” when speaking of “my grandpa” or “my maternal grandma,” respectively.

What is most revealing about the interactions above in terms of cultural expectations, however, is the fact that a Navajo woman living on the Reservation, a few miles from her own parents and having spent her childhood living with her grandma speaking Navajo, could not immediately pinpoint her own clan relationships. While many youth may not be aware of their own clans, many other Navajos would expect a 50 year-old woman living on the Reservation to know her position in the clanship system. Indeed, *K’è* (“clanship/reciprocity”) is often identified as one of the quintessential, emblematic markers of Navajoness (Kluckhohn and Leighton 1946; Lamphere 1977; Witherspoon 1970), one of the key concepts of identity that persist despite language loss.

I do not mean to scrutinize the personal and cultural knowledge of Shimá; rather, I suggest that the ubiquity of specific knowledge such as clanship and K'e among the Navajo may not be as prevalent as believed by some.

Despite this slight embarrassment (as she said, "My god, not knowing my clans! And you're an anthropologist!"), Shimá was so proud of getting her new eezmail address. As illustrated above, her previous online experiences made her understand the difference between a "business" address and one for personal use, but she was trying to negotiate an address that would fit both her online identities. Shimá spent hours trying out the new email program...it was hard to get her away from the computer.

"I'm so excited about my new email box," she said as she continued to set her user preferences for the new mailbox service.

"I was so old school all this time. Now I'm a techno with a new email account." She gave me an evil grin and proclaimed, "So now I guess I'm a techno Johnnie!" We all laughed until we cried. Shimá's proclamation that she was a "Techno Johnnie" was not only hilarious to us all, it was especially fascinating to me, as I found out later that she had never seen the joke above, "Top Ten Signs You are a Techno-Indian." Her statement about being a "Techno Johnnie" is a very Navajo take on this idea, and shows how this idea of technologically competent Native Americans poking fun at broader discourses about themselves is widely circulated.

What the examples of the practice of representing identity online may tell us is that the processes of identity making may be fundamentally shifting, at least in mediated contexts. Identity among the Navajo is usually discussed within face-to-face contexts, or

within the frame of its relationship to the “traditional” aspects of identity making. That is, Navajo identity is often discussed by Navajos themselves in terms of language or kinship, and it is often discussed by scholars in terms of the group or individual’s relationship to traditional modes of culture and life (see also House 2002). A new sense of who one is begins to emerge from mediated practices, from texts and images posted online. In her study of online identities and interactions, Turkle suggested that “as we become increasingly intertwined with the technology and with each other via the technology, old distinctions between what is specifically human and specifically technological become more complex” (Turkle 1995:21).⁹⁶

While the relationship between humans and computers, online and offline worlds becomes more complex, the Navajo case does not suggest that individuals see the line as becoming blurred. As discussed in Chapter 3, the data do not indicate that users are unaware of the tools of communication. In another example, online chat rooms and bulletin board protocols often ask for a users location. While surfing websites geared towards Native users, I have often come across the symbol “aREZona,” indicating that a particular user was from one of the numerous reservations in Arizona; in every instance, further details on users’ profiles indicated they were from the Navajo Nation.

⁹⁶ This work contributed to the notion of the “cyborg” popular in studies of mediated communication in the 1990s (Wilson and Peterson 2002).

Navajo Jedi

Getting a sense of “who one is” in mediated contexts is evident not only in Navajo screen names, but also in the texts that users create and circulate. The practice of forwarding emails such as the “Techno-Indians” or the elevator joke is part of the process of “doing community.” It is in these instances of mediating shared discourses that some Navajos are maintaining, expanding, and recreating community ties. They have shared experiences and perhaps even shared ideologies, and any particular mediated joke may index those ideologies, discourses, and experiences. Ideologies of language, identity, and technology are all evident in a range of emergent practices, and again, they influence everything from language use to choice of genre, media and ultimately, the medium.

The “you might be a Navajo Jedi if...” quip in Figure 14 is representative of a joking genre popular for Natives and non-Natives alike, and is a variant of the “you might be a redneck if...” lists mentioned in the discussion of Techno-Indians above. In this case, the joke is based on an icon of global popular culture, the original *Star Wars* trilogy of movies by George Lucas. This text illustrates the convergence of the ideologies of language, technology, and identity which inform emergent practices.

Delivered-To: leighton@mail.utexas.edu
Subject: Fwd: Navajo Jedi
X-Mailer: PHP
Date: Fri, 17 Nov 2003 10:24:44 (EDT)

>You might be a Navajo Jedi if...

1 >You think Jabba the Hutt looks like a super-size

>yei bi chei.
 2 >You refer to the Emperor as **chx'idii**.
 3 >You point to the Emperor and tell little kids
 >"Eeeyah!"
 4 >You refer to Yoda as **shi chei** or **shi nali**.
 5 >Your pretty sure the Jedi Academy is somewhere in
 >**Tsaile**.
 6 >You think "Obi Wan Kenobi" is a Hopi person.
 7 >You're pretty sure Jawas talk Hopi. And their short
 too!
 8 >You've ever hit a sheep with your landspeeder.
 9 >You think Princess Leia's hairstylists is Hopi.
 10 >All the bootleggers in south Tuba report to Jabba
 somehow.

Figure 14: "Navajo Jedi" Email Excerpt. November 2003.

Beginning with an analysis of the Navajo codeswitching, we begin to see the link between online and offline modes, as well as between the Navajo language and emergent cultural references. In Line 1, the joke is based on the fact that Jabba the Hutt is a massive, sluglike, gluttouous creature who is the head of a band of intergalactic renegades. Comparing him to a *yei bichei* is an interesting take; a *yei bichei* is a personification of the gods who dances during the winter ceremonial season. The comparison is made presumably because his head is somewhat in the shape of a yei mask, or his eyes and mouth somewhat resemble such a mask. In Line 2, the reference to the Emperor is more direct perhaps, as he was portrayed in the movies as an ugly, shrivled, greenish old man who oozes evil, and the comparison here to a Navajo *chx'iidi* ("witch/devil") is appropriate. Screaming the Navajo "eeyah" ["eew" or "yuk"] as in

Line 3 in the presence of the Emperor is also culturally appropriate. In Line 4, Yoda is the Jedi master who teaches a young Luke Skywalker about the Force, and the reference here is to the honorific kinship term for grandfather. All bases are covered here as the Navajo terms for both maternal and paternal grandfather are included. While not technically codeswitching, Line 5 referring to the Jedi Academy is a reference to Diné College (formerly Navajo Community College), whose main campus is located in the tiny community of Tsailé in the center of the Reservation.⁹⁷

The joke is funny for those with an understanding of Reservation life, and everyone under 60 I showed (or emailed) the joke to got both the Navajo and *Star Wars* references, and they laughed. This is another example of the mediation of shared discourses and experiences, and ideologies of both language and identity are quite evident in the codeswitching elements of the text. Moore (1988) suggests that certain semantic elements of indigenous languages become “tokens” of identity where other grammatical knowledge is lost. Silverstein (2003) argued that certain aspects of language become “emblematic” of identity, that is they are displayed or performed to index particular identities. Webster (2004, 2005) builds upon these arguments and notes the importance of codeswitching in contemporary Navajo poetry, as a marker of ethnicity and as an emergent practice. “Language becomes objects—words—that can be put on display to index a certain identity. And in writing, such objects become icons of standard versus folk orthographies. What they should not be are constraints.”

⁹⁷ I’m not sure if there ever was a “Jedi Academy” mentioned in *Star Wars*, but I could be mistaken here; It is my understanding that Jedis train individually as apprentices under a Master Jedi Knight. I believe the joke may actually refers to Starfleet Academy, often mentioned in the movies and series *Star Trek*.

This is an important point. While the author could have written the text completely in English (with much different results), he or she chose to include Navajo. This illustrates a variety of ideologies, including the belief that Navajo is appropriate for Internet communications and a belief that the Navajo written could be understood by a range of readers. Indeed, the codeswitching in this joke could probably be understood by most non-speakers with a basic knowledge of Reservation life. The same may not be true for members of younger generations who grew up in urban areas removed from the Rez, but one often hears non-speakers utilize the kinship terms, or refer to friends as *chx'iidi*, kind of like the word “bitch” is used in derogatory or some joking speech in English, but without the sexism. Once again, the orthography used for the Navajo is a type of “folk orthography” due to lack of the requisite diacritics for high tones and nasals, and more frequently, the mapping of Navajo phonology onto English orthography. As the examples presented in this chapter illustrate, rarely do emails contain these diacritics, as it is at best cumbersome to include them. Most likely, however, the lack of training in standard orthography is most often the reason for such omissions.

Humor of this nature can be analyzed in terms of verbal art and storytelling genres (Sherzer 1983, 1990b), Native American ethnopoetics and literature (Swann 1992; Webster 2004a), or as identity through humor (Basso 1979). However, such forms also reflect what some have called “hybrid” forms or genres (Kapchan and Strong 1999; Stross 1999), but I consider neither the topic of the joke nor the genre to be so “new” as I do its wide circulation through email. Just as Merle Haggard, George Jones, and Bob Marley have become a part of “growing up” for the San Carlos Apache (Samuels 2005), and therefore

have become part of their “culture,” the same can be said for Star Wars, George Jones, and David Letterman for many Navajos. Samuels suggests that the question is not how “Indian” and “non-Indian” expressive elements are combined, but rather, “What is unique about the aesthetic experience of popular culture in this community? What is this space that people desire, and how do they get there?” (Samuels 2005: 261).

Offline Experiences, Online Discourses

Figure 15, the “Top 10” list of “things you can’t say to a white person” is an interesting example of identity and power relations. While the joke is not themed specifically Navajo, it is a Navajo joke nonetheless, due to the fact that it is enjoyed by Navajos, and has been widely circulated by Navajo emailers (evidenced by the senders and recipients given names and screen names) to Navajos and their online social networks. Like the Native American Church, intertribal pow wows, and other pan-Indian cultural elements that have been Navajoized, more general Native humor is an integral part of contemporary Navajo storytelling and joking. The underlying theme of the joke is the inappropriate behavior of Anglos in interactions with Native. Basso noted that Apache jokers often portrayed the Whitemen as a buffoon, as rude, and “stunningly ignorant of how to comport himself appropriately in public situations” (1979:48). This joke reflects that genre subversively, positioning Natives in “the Whiteman’s” role by turning the tables, but it also plays on the irony by stating these are things you *can’t* say to a white person.

>Top 10 Things you Can't Say to A White Person Upon First Meeting:

- >10. How much white are you?
 - >9. I'm part white myself, you know.
 - >8. I learned all your people's ways in the Boy Scouts.
 - >7. My great-great-grandmother was a full-blooded white-Canadian princess.
 - >6. Funny, you don't look white.
 - >5. Where's your powdered wig and knickers?
 - >4. Do you live in a covered wagon?
 - >3. What's the meaning behind the square dance?
 - >2. What's your feeling about riverboat casinos? Do they really help your people, >or are they just a short-term fix?
 - >1. Oh wow! I really love your hair! Can I touch it?
-

Figure 15: "Top 10 things you can't say to a white person"

Email Forward, March 2002.

Like other mediated jokes, this "Top 10" list has multiple online variations, and has taken a life of its own. One online blogged version was posted by a self-identified Navajo blogger,⁹⁸ "blackmesarezgirl," where she introduces the joke in the following way:

⁹⁸ By indicating "self-identified," I do not mean to question the fact that she is Navajo; simply to show that in this instance, at least some aspect of her "offline" identity can be known, which is not often the case in virtual interactions.

as a native person, I am used to having other people ask me ridiculous questions when they find out I'm native American...i.e. "do you still live in teepees?"; "hey, i'm part cherokee"; etc....so I present to you....

Top 10 things You Can Say To A White Person Upon First Meeting:⁹⁹

The introduction made by blackmesaregirl reflects the comments made by some of my "offline" consultants, who do not consider this commentary to be as much *funny* as they do *real*. That is not to say Navajos and other Natives do not find this funny; rather, the laughter comes across as more muted, with nods of recognition. Jokes often reflect the real, especially those in genre of social commentary, and "in-group" or self-represented jokes are popular because, so to speak, "you can see yourself in it."

However, Basso noted that

what is unpleasant, of course, is the close relation between texts constructed by jokers vs. primary texts on which they have been modeled. ... Too often, Anglo-Americans have made Apaches "feel small," and being reminded of this, even in fun, is never entirely funny. (Basso 1979:71-72)

Indeed, these "questions" are merely twists on what many of my consultants have experienced in their day-to-day lives, especially when traveling or living away from the Reservation. When I showed this joke to Eddie, a friend of mine who lives in a metropolitan area off the reservation, he related the following story:

⁹⁹ http://blackmesaregirl.blogspot.com/2002_03_01_blackmesaregirl_archive.html October 17, 2005.

It happens all the time. I get approached by these white women who find out I'm Navajo and want to touch my hair or discuss my tribal virtues. This one time, I was on a flight from L.A. on Southwest Airlines. This woman sat next to me and began asking me about my nationality. I guess she thought I was Asian, and she really got excited when I told her I was Navajo. I was stuck in the middle seat in between two people, and she kept asking me questions. I made small talk with her for a bit and then I tried to ignore her with a magazine. She just kept staring at me and wouldn't stop. I got really uncomfortable. It was so bad I had to ask the stewardess if I could be reseated, which she did right away when I told her what was going on.

The fact that "stupid questions" are often posed to them is a constant complaint among my Navajo consultants. They can find it humorous and play along, treat it as genuine inquisitiveness and provide information, or, in the case above, they can find themselves in a downright obtrusive, insulting, and rude situation. Almost all of my friends and consultants have stories about a non-Indian stranger coming up to them and touching their hair, reflected in the #1 "thing you can't say." Eddie continued his story about inappropriate behavior:

This French woman I had in a class just came up to me and started touching my hair. Just like that, out of nowhere. I had known her because we worked on a project together that semester. When she found out I was Navajo she immediately cornered me and began bombarding me with questions about

where I grew up and stuff like that. While I was answering her questions, she began touching my hair and pulling it back behind my ear. I said my goodbyes and left her standing in the hall, gazing after me. It was weird.

Like the widely-circulated “Techno-Indian” Top 10 list discussed in Chapter 2, and as this last title suggests, this joke has multiple versions. It has had a long life in Internet circulation, with the earliest version posted in 1998. There are several elements that differ among the versions. First of all, there are alternate titles from the ones shown above, each with different connotations:

(1) Top 10 Things Native Americans Can Say to A White Person Upon First Meeting One:

(2) Top 10 Things You Can Say To a White Person Upon First Meeting:

(3) Top 10 Things To Say To A Non-Indian Upon First Meeting:

The different titles suggest a narrowing of the perceived audience for the joke, with Native Americans being unmarked in (2) and (3). Other versions also contain different elements in the text of the list. The great-great grandmother can be alternately Canadian, European, or American. Furthermore, specific items on the list have shifted over time, including variously:

8. I know I must be part white, I have such low cheekbones.
7. I’m trying to reclaim my white heritage. My great-great grandparents had to hide the fact that they were white.
9. I learned all your people’s ways in the Boy Scouts. (Order of the Bullet)

1. Hey, can I take your picture?

In keeping with the genre of the joke, the list can contain no more than 10 elements, so subsequent senders have modified and prioritized the list according to their own experience or aesthetic judgment. Rightly or wrongly, I've heard on numerous occasions that "I haven't met a white man yet who didn't say he was Indian"; it is a constant source of amusement to some Navajos how so many seemingly non-Native people could be related to a Cherokee Princess (#7).¹⁰⁰ I showed the joke again to Shimá, who had emailed it to me in the first place. She said that this joke reminded of her "back in the day, back when AIM was in the picture." She continued:

Yeah, the AIM days. It's so *angry*. But I guess it's funny too. I was just a wannabe AIM person. I couldn't be in it because my parents were too controlling. But you know Gerry, she ran away to Wounded Knee and all that to join AIM with this guy she met. She was hardcore. This joke is like that. That's just the way they were. Just hardcore."

Jokes such as these mark shared experiences, and shared identities in opposition to non-Native others. Basso argued that

by presenting the behavior of Anglo-Americans as something laughable and "wrong," by displaying with the help of butts how and why it violates the rights of others, they denounce these standards as morally deficient and

¹⁰⁰ While there are many people in the US with Indian ancestry, it is a particular ideology of identity for some Navajos that ancestry does not necessarily correlate to being Indian. Jokes about Cherokee heritage or questionable Indian identity are probably not as prevalent in other parts of Indian Country with differing histories of colonialism than the Southwest.

unworthy of emulation. In sum, joking performances make it emphatically clear that Whitemen and Western Apaches come to social encounters with conflicting ideas of what constitutes deferential comportment... ‘The Whiteman’ is a symbol of what ‘the Apache’ is not. (Basso 1979:64)

Another joke circulating around the same time period also reconciles the “Techno-Indian” experience discussed in Chapter 4 with broader shared experiences among Natives, especially those of racism and classism. While the narrative of Figure 16 has not been specifically Navajoized, the inserted comment “this is pretty good alright!” indexes knowledge of Navajo English. The quip highlights the feeling (and experience) of Native Americans and other minorities in that their unmarked job status is that of low-level custodial staff rather than engineers or professionals. It also positions Native Americans as considerate vis-à-vis Anglos, who are portrayed as rude in such social situations (see also Basso 1979).

```
>Subject: Fwd: Check this out
>
>ha ha this is pretty good alright!
>>
>>You could be an Indian if... you walk down the hall of a
>>big >corporation and someone asks you to mop up a mess
>>they >made. And of course you oblige and afterwards come
>>into >their office and hook up their network connection
to >>the >mainframe via a tcp/ip protocol over a fiber
>>backbone.
```

Figure 16: “You might be an Indian if...” email excerpt, 2002.

Conclusion

Ideologies of language, identity, and technology influence the creation of novel communicative forms. The Elk Water Chapter elderlies' belief that computers could help them communicate more effectively led to their engagement with both new media and English literacy. They localized the Internet by appropriating it as their space, transforming and expanding the geographies of their kinship networks and community to include their English-speaking grandchildren living off the Reservation. Their choice of language used in mediated contexts was informed by a belief that their grandchildren were either unable or unwilling to engage them in Navajo. In contrast, the creators of the Navajo Nation homepage localized the Internet by including Navajo text, indicating that the Web is an appropriate space for Navajo—and for Navajos. The same is true for the authors' of the “Navajo Jedi” and elevator jokes. They localized mediated spaces with new markers of Navajo identity, mediating shared discourses among a wide range of community members.

That Navajo community members are experimenting with folk orthographies by mapping their knowledge of English onto Navajo is an important development with implications for the vitality of the Navajo language. Despite risking some critique, users are putting themselves “out there” in mediated worlds, in Navajo, indexing again particular ideologies about Navajoness, language, and technology itself. These practices should be encouraged by anyone interested in Navajo language maintenance. Furthermore, offline experiences and offline discourses directly influence novel,

mediated forms. Experiences with racism and exoticism are some of the shared discourses resulting from the experience with modernity among many Navajo community members. The activity of sharing these stories through the Internet is one way in which the mediated and the face-to-face are linked, illustrating how Navajos are “doing” community in new contexts through mediated forms. They also illustrate how the processes and activities of identity making may be shifting as a result of interactions through new media tools. No longer is Navajoness marked solely by skin color, language, sheep, weaving, turquoise, kinship, ceremonial practices, traditional dress, or other face-to-face material or symbolic forms. Navajoness is being mediated by specific new media activities with specific frames of reference which serve to recreate community in novel, and unpredicted, ways.

Chapter 5: The Social Circulation of Shared Discourse

My sister's on-point for the Marines over there in Afghanistan. We're just waiting to get an email from her to make sure that she's OK.

Mary Bitoni, Hunter's Point, AZ, July 2002

And a big hello to all our warriors out there who might be listening from Afghanistan or Iraq, or wherever you are.

Unkown KTNN DJ, Window Rock, AZ, March 2006

These examples illustrate very poignantly the ways in which new media are integrated into Navajo communities in contemporary contexts. Both directly related to the “War on Terror” waged by the United States since 2001, and highlight the fact that Navajo communities are more dispersed than ever before. They also illustrate the direct ways in which mediated interactions facilitate kinship and social ties. I chose these examples specifically because of the respective dates I recorded each quote; the dates represent significant periods in the establishment of new media practices in Navajo communities. Mary’s statement in 2002 was directly on the heels of the Gates initiative, allowing her to receive emails in her local Chapter House. Thus, at the time her sister was shipped off to Iraq, a new medium allowed her to keep in relatively close contact. The KTNN announcer’s greeting came soon after the radio station went online in January 2006. The listening audience, always in the mind of a radio announcer, had greatly expanded in terms of both audience and coverage area. Both represent the activity of doing community, of sharing stories and bridging discourses in new media contexts.

This chapter explores the ways in which the social circulation of *hane'*, of shared stories and discourses indexing shared experiences, contributes to the mediation of community. It further illustrates the ways in which mediations and interactions between Navajo community members can be viewed as the activity of “doing community.” It will explore how ediating technologies facilitate alternate means of community cohesiveness and group interactions, as well as new geographies of communication and community. As multilingual joking and in-group markers are found frequently in mediated communication, this chapter attaches speakers to processes of speech play, bilingualism, and identity, and explores the ways in which novel forms can be integrated into aspects of the concept of *Nihízaad niilyá*, or Navajo as a living language, as discussed in Chapter 2. New discursive forms such as Navajo language hip-hop are made possible by shifting ideologies of language, technology, and Navajoness, and index some of the ways in which contemporary Navajo community members are doing the activities that construct community.

Media as Discourse

What emerged continuously from my research is that the traditional idea of *hane'* [stories, information, ‘it was told’] is one of the most significant aspects of any Navajo conception of communications technologies. *Hane'*, from the verb stem *ne'* (as an 1 classifier, thematically meaning “to tell”), is also a key descriptor in the terms for radio, telephone, tape recorder, and many other communication technologies, past and present (as will be discussed below).

Russ Bigman told me about his conception of hane' during a discussion of the mediated jokes and stories presented in Chapter 4. I was asking him if hane' could be applied to the Internet, or if was only meant for more traditional genres such as the Navajo Creation Stories, Dine Bahane'.

I think all of them are hane'. The thing is that these are stories and news or information that you share. They are only hane' if you share them with other people, and they understand them. So I don't think you have to separate anything whether it's talking to somebody or an email. On KTNN, when they're doing the Navajo news, they always say they're sharing information, hane'. The thing is is that it's public because it's not sharing if you keep it to yourself.

Most importantly, the repeated resurfacing of the idea of hane' in my research, as well as the other data illustrated in this work, allows for a new perspective on the study of mediated communities. This idea of the centrality of hane' really began one day when I was sitting around with Shimá and Shimásání in front of their house, waiting for the sun to let up enough to go out and look for the sheep. This particular family group lived in a more isolated location in the interior of the Reservation, and being 10 miles from the nearest power lines, they were in one of those areas without electricity, plumbing, and cell phone connections. Shimasání was telling another monolingual elder, her sister, that she was going to town to do some email. She said,

Kin bii' ałah ná'ádleeh'idi shiyázh bich'í' hane' ádííííł.
[house- -my son-towards him-story-1st future do]
I'm going to the Chapter House to send my son a story.

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. About a year after that, I was discussing a translation of the concept of “mass media” into Navajo with several consultants. The first idea they came up with was

hane' éí binaji kéyah ahí'hées tł'ó'ígíí
[stories that flow through the land and are tied together like a spider web].
mass media

Subsequent consultants have all indicated that the reference to “webs” in the nominalized tł'ó'ígíí is the perfect metaphor for interconnected mediums such as the internet. What is important here is the idea of networked hane', of interconnected tellings, stories, and other public information. Neither constraining nor deterministic, the semantic fact of hane' as a link between media, language, and discourse is, I think, noteworthy. This claim is further supported by the number of jokes and stories that regularly appear in email, which subsequently become favorite topics of “water-cooler” conversation at work in face-to-face contexts.

First, the idea of hane', of sending and telling stories, illustrates once again that processes, not only tools, are important for many Navajo community members in situating mediated communication technologies within their everyday lives. Furthermore, this idea places new mediating technologies as extensions of previously existing media and communication practices for some Navajos. That is, it is the practice of sending and sharing information that is important—which privileges the activity

associated with the tools over the tools themselves. Again, this is not to suggest an unawareness of the technologies of communication among Navajo users of technology, rather, that the end result is of most concern.

Emerging Mediascapes

In order to begin identifying extant categories of mediated forms that may not be the useful for the Navajo case, I make the distinction between the media—a forum for interaction—and medium—a channel of expression. For example, I consider radio to be the forum for interaction, and interactions often take the form of talk or song. This perspective was discussed in Chapter 1, and is made relevant by an understanding of Appadurai's notion of *mediascapes*. These mediascapes refer both to the “distribution of the electronic capabilities which produce and disseminate information..., which are now available to a growing number of private and public interests throughout the world, and to the images of the world created by these media” (Appadurai 1990:9). This idea takes into account both local and global contexts in relation to the production, distribution, and reception of information and media imagery.

Important for an understanding of Navajo mediascapes is the way Ginsburg draws upon the concept to situate the Australian Aboriginal film industry, which avoids “fetishizing” the local while retaining the “specific situatedness” of indigenous media use and production (Ginsburg 1994). This concept allows for a creative discursive space while avoiding the limitations of studies which view some indigenous media practices as inauthentic, assimilating, or socially destructive (Bowers, et al. 1990; Fair 2000; Mander

1991; Rada 1978). The idea of mediascapes privileges neither the “Navajo” nor the “technological” aspects of the phenomena, but rather the processes of mediation.

However, it must be remembered that Navajo mediascapes are inherently interconnected, and include many forms and alternatives available to most people in the US, including satellite TV, periodicals, and the World Wide Web, and that these alternatives are mediated predominately in English. Ideologies of media technology are tied to the ways in which speakers incorporate new technologies of communication into their everyday practices through existing repertoires, which influence new and emerging cultural practices (Hutchins 1995; Spitulnik 1998). Understanding such local processes of mediated culture and communication is crucial to understanding communicative practice, since

media provide ways of talking about modernity, deviance, collective identity, economics value, otherness, or any other phenomenon that falls within the horizons of a social formation, they ultimately provide ways of thinking about, experiencing, and acting on these phenomena. (Spitulnik 2001:144).

In the case of Navajo, research has shown that existing Navajo language media such as film (Klain and Peterson 2000a), broadcasting (Klain and Peterson 2000b; Peterson 1998), and the popular press (Austin-Garrison, et al. 1996; Webster 2004a) are crucial spaces for Navajo language use and self-representation. The research also indicates that these media fundamentally alter the nature of linguistic representations and

interactions, and speakers' ideologies and practices have shifted towards active engagement with these media as spaces for Navajo language use.

Convergence of Navajo Media

While media such as television, radio, and print are often described as being “one to many” media—indicating the mass nature of their dissemination and relative lack of content control on the part of consumers—online interactions such as email engage writers directly, and can be both “one to one” or “one to many.” There is an implication in much research that online interactions are substantially divergent from existing media practices, and that most online interactions are textual. New communications media, however, are not limited to textual interactions, and, as discussed in previous chapters, ideologies of media are not separate from ideologies of language and broader discourses that circulate within, and about, Navajo communities (Wilson and Peterson 2002).

In contrast to the traditional print media, the offline Navajo-language broadcast mediascape is strong, with one television station and several radio stations operating at least part-time in the Navajo language. The radio stations vary in size, scope and purpose and include Anglo-owned commercial stations in border towns; Christian stations operated by local churches; public stations funded by the CPB (Corporation for Public Broadcasting) with licenses owned by local Navajo school boards; and the Navajo Nation's own commercially-funded public stations. In fact, radio has become virtually indispensable to the Navajo: Former Navajo Nation President Peterson Zah has said that

“in the Navajo Nation, radio is the primary form of communication. It would be difficult to exist without it” (q.f. Keith 1995:99).

Radio broadcasting in the Navajo language has existed since its first documented debut in 1936, although prior to 1972 it was limited to small program blocks on stations in Reservation border-towns. The most widely heard original programming in the early years was “The Padre’s Hour,” produced by the Franciscan Fathers, the same order that introduced the systematic Navajo orthography discussed above (and the same fathers who controlled the early printing presses). KTNN Radio, “The Voice of the Navajo Nation,” is by far the largest Navajo language broadcaster in terms of signal range and listener base, and because it is owned by the Navajo Nation, is held to higher standards in terms of language and content. The fact that there are several radio stations broadcasting in the Navajo language suggests that the language is strong and vital—in this context—and indexes a large market for such programming (Peterson 1997, 1998, 1999).¹⁰¹ What is important here is the fact that radio has been localized, and that its importance in the social circulation of discourses cannot be understated. Another significant aspect of this discussion is that the more symbolic power that is attributed to a particular medium,

¹⁰¹ The Navajo Nation Government also owns and operates one television station, NNTV 5, run by the Office of Broadcast Services and subsidized by the Navajo government. NNTV 5 produces around four hours of Navajo-language programming per week, ranging from current events and human interest stories to live coverage of Navajo Nation Council sessions. I am currently unaware of any plans to transition the Navajo programming onto web broadcasts. While an important aspect of Navajo language broadcasting, NNTV 5 is only available to Navajo Communications Company cable subscribers, whose numbers have dropped from 5200 in 1995, to around 3000 in 2003. Current statistics are not available at this time. My own experiences indicate that large numbers of Navajo consumers are choosing *DirecTV* and other satellite TV companies over cable service, not only in locations where cable is not an option, which is a majority of the Navajo Nation.

differing ideologies about both the medium and the language used in the medium are apparent.



Figure 17: President Clinton Online in Shiprock.

Clinton is engaged in an audiovisual online interaction with a group from a more rural Chapter. The Navajo woman is unnamed. Courtesy of the Clinton Presidential Library.

Also of key importance here is the deconstruction of dualisms between online and offline communication, as well as between various mediated forms such as literacy, radio, emails, and face to face interactions. The convergence of mediated forms—such as the appearance in early 2006 of KTNN radio online, or the Navajo Times web-based edition several years prior—is an increasing phenomenon worldwide. While email remains the most popular use of the Internet and the Web, interactions are increasingly mediated on the Internet by cameras, microphones, and VOP telephones such as Vodaphone which bypass traditional phone companies and their associated infrastructure

by using the Internet.¹⁰² In fact, during Clinton's landmark visit to the Navajo Nation in 2000, he interacted from Shirock with students in the Lake Valley Chapter elementary school online, from 100 miles away, with a web-based camera (Fig. 17). These emergent phenomena suggest a rethinking of the analyses which privilege textual interactions found in the framework of Computer-Mediated-Communication (CMC) (Wilson and Peterson 2002).

However, textual interactions are important, including the *Navajo Times*' own immensely popular English-language online edition. Tom Arviso, editor of the Navajo Times, explained the evolution of this popular site:

We've been wanting to do a bigger online edition for a while. We always get letters about it, people wanting more of our print version online, you know all those Navajos living away from the Reservation who want the news from home. It's a really big deal, and already we get like 300,000 hits a day on the website. Especially now with the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, we have all these soldiers over there who want some news from home. There are so many Navajos over there it's unbelievable. And yes, to get the Navajo Times through the mail is expensive for some people, or they just don't want to wait for the news. You know, the most popular thing requested is that we put the local high schools' sports scores on the web, especially the basketball scores.

(Arviso 2004)

¹⁰² Even when a customer is using phone line-based Internet providers such as DSL, the VOP phone calls still bypass the infrastructure of traditional phone companies.

There are several important points in Tom's statement. First of all, it illustrates how many Navajo community members are making the transition to wanting to read the weekly Navajo paper online. While this may not seem out of the ordinary for people used to looking at news websites every day, it is a change in practice nonetheless, and it is another example of how the Internet, when geared to the Navajo context, becomes more relevant and necessary. It also illustrates yet another way that Navajo communities are mediated in contemporary contexts, and provides yet another example of how global situations such as the "War on Terror" impact Navajo community and kinship networks. The Internet allows Navajos from around the world to keep up with local news, and with each other, often in real time; the fact that basketball scores were of primary importance was no surprise to the paper's editor. The act of seeking out, and reading, local Reservation news is one way some Navajos are doing the activity of community in mediated contexts.

The situation with online Navajo radio broadcasts is similar. During my time at KTNN in the late 1990s, audience members—and potential audience members—would always ask us when we were going to go online and broadcast KTNN live over the Internet. The exact same reasons were given by listeners that were given for the Navajo Times' online version, i.e. that there are many Navajos living away from the Reservation and that they want to hear the news from home. In contrast to the *Navajo Times*, however, we were constantly told that there were people who just wanted to hear the Navajo language on a more frequent basis. They were homesick, and they wanted a piece of the Reservation within easy access. Immensely popular in its regular "real-

world” broadcasts, the fact that KTNN radio is now online¹⁰³ brings ideologies of *spoken* Navajo discussed in Chapter 2, as well as ideologies of media and language use in the media, into discussions of online communicative practice.

As I have already outlined, it is not necessarily appropriate to separate any of these particular new media practices, and this is exemplified once again in very mundane events. One day in April 2004, I was driving between Chinle and Window Rock, and I heard an advertisement on KTNN that I had never noticed. Tate’s Auto Center, in the border town of Winslow, Arizona, is a purveyor of used cars and a regular advertiser on KTNN and KGAK. Navajos are by far their largest market. This ad, which caused quite some excitement for me, was now telling people to go online and check out their inventory on *TatesAutoCenter.com*, “The new way to buy a car!”

The “old” way, which is by no means unique to the Navajo, is to be drawn onto the sales lot by hyped promotions, free hot dogs, and outrageous promises of unlimited, low-interest financing. As a former DJ myself, I used to sit at car dealerships every weekend, hyping the benefits of places with names like “The Home of Zero Down” on KTNN. And people would come. Whole families—grandpa, the kids, and all.

“We heard it on KTNN. Leecháá’i sidoh sha? [“What about the hot dogs?”].¹⁰⁴

What this simple advertisement illustrates is that commercial interests are realizing that more and more Navajos have access to internet connections and may be willing or able to use them to research their potential purchases rather than drive the

¹⁰³ <http://www.ktnnonline.com>.

¹⁰⁴ Leecháá’i sidoh is a calque from “hot dot.” For some speakers it is an appropriate term, for others, it is incorrect Navajo and a humorous vision of a steaming dog.

many miles to a used car lot. One of the most telling aspects of the advertisement is that it directs listeners to “Check it out at work!” The KTNN sales representative who wrote the ad realized that while most people lack internet connections at home, many government or Tribal employees have access via connections at work.

Even more telling is the fact that there is no mention of the website on the Navajo language versions of the ad. My previous work with Broadcast Navajo, as well as my years of recording such advertisements at KTNN, suggests that at some stage in the production process of the radio spot, either the sales representative or the Navajo-language announcer who was making the spot either couldn’t translate the idea of the “web” to effectively convey the information; didn’t have time to convey the information; or most likely, made a judgment that elderly, monolingual Navajo speakers would not access the Internet. Or at least that the elderlies wouldn’t make the effort, dragging a bilingual speaker to the Chapter house to go online, just to obtain information about a car they would rather see in person. Or perhaps the announcer realized that any information gained from a website visit would be conveyed to the grandparents, often the decision makers in such big-ticket purchases.

This example highlights several important issues, including the “convergence” of mediated forms, as well as a (perceived) generational gap in the acceptance of online interactions. It serves as a great example of how stories flow from one material medium to another, from spoken English to written English, to both spoken Navajo and English—and ultimately back again to unmediated interactions in the mundane space of a used car lot. It also illustrates that there exists no natural progression in adapting to technology—

the Information Superhighway is not always the best road to take, and all roads lead, in some form or fashion, back to face-to-face interactions.

However, as illustrated by the importance of cell phones, not all novel communicative forms are mediated by the Internet, and not all novel forms resulting from new technologies are mediated. Just as emergent online interactions are informed by extant practices, face-to-face interactions also are influenced by a wide range of mediated activities. As this case study illustrates, one cannot arbitrarily separate mediums such as cell phones and the Internet, and as technologies change to include spoken genres and broadcast media in online interactions, one cannot arbitrarily separate these media as well. These issues, as well as their relationship to the mediation of community, are addressed in the following sections.

Post-modern Geographies

On yet another normal, windy, dusty day on the Reservation, I was talking about some of the Navajo email forwards with Shimá and Shideezhí. In fact, we were talking about the “Top 10 things you can’t say to a white person” example discussed in Chapter 4, which due to its content, naturally brought up the issues of identity and race. Shideezhí began one of those family stories that seem to be only brought up at holidays, embarrassing anecdotes that families enjoy no matter how many times they have heard them before. The story was embarrassing to Shimá, but it was not embarrassing to Shideezhí. With no hesitation and with a big smile, she began her story:

“When I was younger and we were living in Phoenix, I always swore to my mom that I was white. When I was little, I didn’t want to be Indian.” Shimá gave her, and me, a nervous look.

“I don’t think she understood what Indian was,” Shimá explained. “She hated it. She *cried*, and she would say, ‘I’m white! I’m white! She would always cry and yell that.’”

Her daughter laughed and continued, “I think that’s because I hung out with white kids.” The laughter seemed to put her mom a bit more at ease. She explained her reaction to her daughter’s apparent confusion. “I used to go, ‘No, You’re *brown*, you’re *Indian*. You’re *Navajo Indian*.’ She just couldn’t take it. She was four.”

When they moved back to the Reservation a few years later, certain dimensions of her mother’s view on ethnicity became much more apparent to Shideezhí. “When we got back, there were all these brown people everywhere, and I was related to all of them!” At the time of this discussion, Shideezhí, who was 20, was living once again in Phoenix with her own daughter, who was just 10 months old. For her, the constant migrations between Phoenix and the Reservation began again after graduation from a high school on the Reservation. In fact, as she put it, “I got the hell of the Rez as soon as I could after graduating.” She was trying to go back to a community college and earn an associate degree, which she continued after the birth of her daughter.

Both women are completely reliant on their cell phones to keep in contact with each other. They both have the same cell phone plan with the same service provider based in Phoenix, although Shimá lives on the Reservation. “The service up here just

sucks. I tried to go local, to get a phone from Gallup, but they just don't know what they're doing." Like many other people, strategic planning went into their choice of cell phone providers in order to cut down on costs. Both of them get free calls between each other, so that they can keep in constant contact, which they religiously do. When she is visiting her mom on the Reservation, Shideezhí is on the phone constantly with her friends from Phoenix. "Oh my god, I would just die without my cellphone up here!" she proclaimed. "It's my lifeline."

I provide this story in its entirety because it shows one young Navajo woman's evolving sense of community, and her place within it. It also shows how the activity of communicating via cellphones are an important means of mediating disparate Navajo communities in contemporary contexts. Indeed, as discussed in Chapter 3, cell phones have become indispensable communication tools for many Navajo community members. The fact that a young woman living in a large city in the US uses a cell phone is not in itself extraordinary, whether she is Navajo or not. However, based on her practice, it is hard to discern whether it is more important for her to remain in contact with city life, or her family "back on the Rez." In other words, while she proclaims to need the connection back to the city, in practice she is also maintaining constant contact with the Reservation—to her mom, grandma, and other family members with whom she also regularly "visits."

This example also illustrates how technology is transforming the boundaries of Navajo communities. Space is changing because of cell phone and Internet technologies—interconnectedness is redefining both space and place. Foley's work on

and near the Tama (Fox) Reservation in Iowa illustrates the critical nature of flows and interactions across and within Native geopolitical boundaries (Foley 1995). Some Comanche communities privilege “communicating like a Comanche” as a major part of group membership, demonstrating that identities and networks are maintained and recreated despite the absence of a politically sanctioned, exclusive land base (Foster 1991). With an increasing number of Navajos living away from the geographic spaces of the Navajo Nation, community is maintained and mediated by communications technologies. It is in these instances of interaction—emailing, calling, and sharing jokes and stories—that cultural continuity and kinship ties are maintained. These examples highlight the fact that community is as much an “activity” as it is a “place” (Beier 2001), and as an activity, community is “done” by social actors, by community members, in a variety of ways and in a variety of contexts.

The addition of cell phones to sheepherding practices discussed in Chapter 3 also illustrates how new forms of geographic knowledge are emerging in conjunction with new technologies. The link between phones and sheep has been made possible by an ever growing number of cell towers across the reservation, with the most noticeable and rapid additions occurring since late 2004. During my long drives across the Rez, I have been constantly amazed at the pace of tower construction over the past few years. Even the most seemingly isolated areas in the interior of the Reservation, where there may be no immediately visible towers, are no longer very far from at least a working cell phone signal. Knowing the geography of cell phone signals is becoming an important part of local knowledge, as my consultants often spoke of specific areas with good cell phone

coverage as important spaces. Again, consultants' knowledge of where to get a cell signal often, and consistently, exceeded knowledge about how to access the internet. Shimáyazhí Edith, who lives in the Chuska mountains near Wheatfields, relayed to me that people in her area call certain stretches of the highway their "phone booth." Indeed, you could always see people, most of them local residents, stopped along the road to Tsaile, chatting on their cell phones.

A reanalysis of the "culture area" and "language area" maps for Apachean, Athabaskan, NaDene, or Navajo language and culture is perhaps important at this juncture. A revised map would include the appropriate shading or striping for Navajos living around the world, and for the significant numbers who have "migrated" to the Uto-Aztecan or Yuman culture areas around Phoenix or Tucson, the Algonquian areas of Chicago or New York, or the Salish areas of Seattle. Likewise, an extension of "traditional use" areas for Navajos would extend beyond the borders of the *Dinétaah* (the ancestral homelands in and around the river valleys of Northwestern New Mexico), or the current Reservation.

Likewise, many of these Navajos are speakers of the Navajo language, extending the boundaries of what constitutes the/a Navajo "language area." While older media such as letters and periodicals have linked Navajo speakers separated by geography, new technologies more immediately facilitate and mediate interactions between these disperse speakers of Navajo (and increasingly, writers), extending the geographic confines of any Navajo speech community. New technology is allowing increased mobility, with a connection to the ancestral homeland, the Reservation, when such connections are

desired. The question arises, do you stay connected only to remain Navajo, or does one stay connected to be a part of the social life, the community of the Reservation? Does it matter?

Hip Hop and Hózhó

Figure 18 is another cartoon from Otter reflecting ideologies of identity and social change. The illustration shows an older couple in the left frame, presumably “traditional” as indexed by their dress—velveteen blouse on the woman, and especially the headband on the man. They are complaining about the younger generation, who have chosen to emulate Anglo, Southwestern dress with cowboy hats, Wranglers, and “Acme boots.” In the frame on the right, the younger generation of old is chiding the youth about emulating Hip-hop culture, with baggy jeans and backwards caps.¹⁰⁵ There is also the presence of a square house in the frame on the right, marking the Navajo modern. It illustrates from a younger generation’s point of view that things change, and perhaps tells older generations to get over their incessant critiques.

¹⁰⁵ “Hip-hop” culture should not be confused with general “youth” culture in the US. There has been a transition in fashion styles since 2000 among trend-setting urban and suburban upper-middle class youth towards more tightly fitting clothing, and this is true on the Reservation as well. However, there remain numerous youth who retain the look of baggy clothing. As it has been explained to me by my consultants, several years ago baggy jeans would have indexed a “trendy” look among teenagers, who appropriated the style from hip-hop. For some youth the fashion is now out of date, for others it is a way of life.



Figure 18: “Otter” on Identity

It is significant to note, however, that the symbolic expressions of Navajoness by the generations harshest on youth differ significantly from those of the eldest generation, exemplified in Otter’s cartoon. Dress, language, and lifestyle in practice for many Navajos between the ages of 45 and 56 do not often conform to their own ideologies of a “traditional” identity.

But to say that San Carlos Apaches have held onto or lost certain traditions is not the same as saying that they have held onto or lost their identity. Identity is no longer tied exclusively to practices that are objectifiable as traditions, important as they are. ...the production and expression of identity are contextualized within the contradictions of everyday life in the contemporary reservation communities. (Samuels 2004:244)

Indeed, the contradictions of everyday life for Navajos on and off the Reservation are apparent in many of the examples presented in this work. Navajo youth are bringing a symbolic representation of their experiences to the foreground, presenting popular, “heterodox” discourses that suggest alternative visions of Navajoness, visions countering the multiple ideologies and discourses of Anglo—and Navajo—orthodoxy (Bourdieu 1977, 1991). The extent to which some version of the Navajo language will play a role in the future remains to be seen. Nonetheless, orthodoxy and doxa can be challenged with the creation of new heterodoxy, reflecting the experiences of alternate groups or classes. In the Navajo case, new identities, communities, and conceptions of Navajoness are [re]created by successive generations, as both the orthodoxy of circulating ideologies change, and the parameters of “structuring structures” shift. Ultimately it is the ways in which individual Navajos negotiate their own experiences with language and identity that is of importance, maximizing their symbolic capital in particular instances in particular points in time.

A good way to view this is through the emergence of Navajo language rap music. As discussed above, the Navajo electronic mediascape is a popular realm, and Navajo language CD-ROMs documenting Navajo place names and stories for use in educational institutions, as well as videos and DVDs with topics ranging from cultural issues to medical care, are available. One of the oldest and most persistent aspects of the electronic mediascape is the relatively large and ever-expanding number of musical recordings available on cassette and CD. Navajo-language artists and recordings—

ranging from traditional ceremonial music to contemporary folk/rock—have gained widespread local popularity, and, in some cases, national and international reputation.

Navajo language rap music is the product of shifting language ideologies and the advent of home computers: While there have been Navajo rap artists for many years, until recently there have been no rap songs performed or written in Navajo. This was due to the fact that some Navajo rappers spoke no Navajo, and those that could speak were intimidated due to harsh aesthetic and moralistic judgments they felt they would receive. In 2001 Tribe 2, a homegrown hip-hop crew from Newcomb, Arizona, produced the first recorded Navajo language rap song, using technology and software available on their home computers. While the group had never formally learned to write Navajo, they created their lyrics in a dialectic of orality and literacy with the help of their grandparents.

The lyrics to their all Navajo track “Haashdeeshliil” [sic.] follow:

- | | | |
|------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| (1) | Haal1 deeshn77[| What should I do? |
| (2) | Ch'44h 1sht'9 | I'm trying in vain |
| (3) | Shints7kees | My thoughts |
| (4) | Ha'1t'77 sh99 shits'33 siy9 | Something is blocking it |
| (5) | Naan1honeesht['iizhgo | It's curvy, the path |
| (6) | Shi[ooldah | I'm being taken along |
| (7) | Din4 bik4yah hooly4h7di | In Navajoland they call it |
| (8) | Tsi'dahiikah | We're wandering around aimlessly |
| (9) | T'11 1kw77j9 | Everyday |
| (10) | T'11 1kw77t['44' | Every night |
| (11) | Choh0y44' hwiisk3 | Things are going from bad to worse |
| (12) | T'11 nihi' nihidine'6 | Our own people |
| (13) | Nda'ahiniltseed | They are beginning to kill each other |

The overall feeling of these lyrics is that of a dream, of these ideas going through the speakers head. Irene Silentman likened it to poetry. “When Herman Cody does his

sheepherder's rap, it's really funny. People really laugh." However, Cody's "rap" is in the form of existing Navajo genres, such as the Mountain Song. What makes Tribe 2's music "rap" to some consultants is the subject matter associated with younger generations. One listener, a bilingual woman in her 50s known for her language skills suggested to me that "second language speakers couldn't make this up. You can tell by the words they use that they understand this. "These guys know." For example, line 5 does not index a path in the sense of a foot trail (although it could); rather, things curving in the speakers mind. However, there was some confusion for several listeners, as this line is a kind of Anglicized phrase. "he left out the subject person marker". Naaná[z]. "he might have been thinking of this in English."

Naan1honeesht['iizhgo

Nahoneesht['iizhgo

There are contractions in the lyrics that index for some consultants that this is a form of new Navajo, or at least it is a direct replication of speech with its use of contractions (see Chapter 4). *Shinsíkees* in line 3 is a contracted form of *shinitsíkees* with the preposition [ni] omitted. Line 11 is a contracted form of

Doo chohoo'ʷg00 h0y4e'j8 hw77d4esk3¹⁰⁶

Comprehending the meaning of the lyrics is similar to the difficulties in comprehending diacritic-free emails described in Chapter 4, but perhaps easier for many

¹⁰⁶ This phrase indexes all bad things in the Nation, including violence, alcoholism, murders, and drugs. It was suggested to me quite seriously that I not explore the phrase too much in my writing because of potential negative impacts.

speakers. One consultant stated that “you understand what they mean because of the flow of the words. You understand what they’re talking about even though they really shortened it.” Not everyone appreciates the lyrics in “Haashdeeshliil”: One elderly woman reacted angrily after hearing the music for the first time: “They mix hozhoji with killing. You’re not supposed to do that. They talk about tadadiin [corn pollen] with weapons and killing. If you do that, then bad things will happen.” She also went on to talk about the inappropriate use of certain gender-specific knowledge: “Women aren’t supposed to know about certain things in anaji. That’s men’s knowledge. That’s how I was taught.”

While the music impresses many listeners with its references to traditional culture, it disheartens others. All of my consultants agree, however, that the advent of Navajo language rap was both inevitable and necessary to attempt to engage younger generations with anything at all Navajo. That, of course, is from the perspective of older generations.

Coinology

Ken Hale once remarked that “the Navajo language is way ahead of any conceivable technology.” That is, all of the elements are present in the language to deal with emergent lifestyles and traditions, and as a result, loan words have been relatively absent from the Navajo lexicon (Young 1989:304). Young notes that where loanwords exist, they tend to be nouns, not verbs, at least “in integrated form, to function after the fashion of a root or stem, and to be inflected after the manner of a Navajo verb” (Young

1989:308). These days, it is hard to discern in Navajo speech the difference between a loanword and borrowing, as monolingual elderlies in their 90's who speak the prestige style of Navajo can be heard saying nouns in English such as "shovel" or "pop," or even place names in English such as Gallup or Pinon. They certainly know the Navajo ways of saying such things.¹⁰⁷

While some scholars problematize issues of language variation and change when addressing the issue of language maintenance, Ken Hale noted that "the safeguarding of linguistic and cultural diversity does not guarantee the unchanged perpetuation of existing traditions... In fact, a living tradition implies change" (Hale 1998:212). Not all change has negative impacts on language. Nanabah Manygoats, a 30 something mother of two who lives within 30 miles or so of Pinon, related her personal story in terms of language and culture: "Change is important. And change when it happens the right way, is good change. And in order for language to live, it must change. New words must be made. New ideas are formed, new ways of describing things."

One of the most revealing techniques I used in my research was to elicit and facilitate the coining of Navajo terminology related to technology. Discussions about such new terms were often lively, especially when two or more speakers were present. These exchanges inherently indexed speakers' language ideologies, reflecting the diversity of the participants' linguistic, demographic, and personal backgrounds.

¹⁰⁷ This is an interesting phenomenon but beyond the scope of this dissertation. I have explored reasons for codeswitching and borrowing in other contexts, which have to do with lexical knowledge, the domains, and time constraints. For example, some may feel it's quicker to say numbers in English. Also, many may not know numbers in Navajo, as handling stems indicate general quantities—enough for much daily practice, but handling stems are no good for phone numbers (Peterson 1997, 1998).

Emergent practice in the form of lexical expansion can be seen through the development of terms for new technologies. It is also a good way to look at certain genres of joking. One consultant, a Navajo linguist, referred to the process of creating new terms in Navajo as “coinology.”

Many speakers believe that the Navajo language is uniquely adaptable to change: “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 *ya’*. So our language gives birth to itself and life to itself” (Begaye 2004). Bakhtin (Bakhtin, et al. 1986) noted that all speech and utterances are essentially “quotations” from ancestors; in the Navajo case, this idea is poignantly illustrated by several of my consultants, who described the process of “making a word” as *saad ánálneéh*. Like so many other concepts in a Navajo language ideology, this idea has its origins in traditional philosophy. *Saad ánálneéh* can be glossed as “to fix again, to make it physical, to get back where you’re supposed to be.” *Saad álnééh*, which omits the position *ná-* (again), refers to a time “in the beginning,” as part of the Navajo creation stories, where words were created as the languages of the four directions and mountains came together to create Diné Bizaad (see chapter 3). Thus, it is not so much that the language is ahead of technology, but that all words and concepts have already existed, in some form, in previous worlds, as gifts from the gods.

At its most basic level, coinology is the development of a Navajo term for a word not extant in the standard lexicon, most often a term originally found in English. However, it is much more than translating terminologies; it is more often translating unfamiliar or previously non-existent cultural elements and is directly tied to the ideology

of Navajo as being ‘descriptive’. Due to the aspect of cultural translation as well as lexical, some Navajos do not consider expertise in coinology as necessarily coinciding with expertise in *speaking*. Navajo linguist Alice Neundorf noted that “we cannot always depend on the older people to help us develop new terms. Often they will not know the English word or concept for which the new term is needed” (1982: 272).

Language ideologies—and ideologies of technology—are both important in the process of coinology. Speakers’ choice of language, as well as beliefs about what any given technology can do, both influence the creation of new terms. Many of the early terms for communications technology introduced in the first half of the 20th century stem from the word *béesh*, which originally was translated as “flint.” Now, *béesh* also means “knife” or more generally “metal,” and is a consistent morpheme in numerous terms indexing tools or electronic goods. I suggest that in novel practices, *béesh* is coming to index the idea of technology more generally.

When speakers are thinking of new concepts or new terms, one woman noted that “*saad binákée náhane*, we can dig it up, we can retell its history.” Again, in order to get to the future, you have to go back to the past, a recurring theme in conversations with many Navajo speakers about both language and culture more generally. Thus, speakers who coined the initial terms that became standard or accepted were reaching back into history reflecting the concept of *saad ánálnééh*, devising such terms as *béesh hataalí* for record player (“singing metal”), *béesh bii yáti’ígíí* for phone (“you talk through the metal”), *beesh bee hane’i* (“you tell through the metal”) for telegraph, and then later, for the telephone.

My research (Peterson 1998) and Spitulnik (1996) have illustrated the fact that radio broadcasters are often a source for lexical coinage. One consultant gave me 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 same interview was conducted in Navajo and again in English. The subject matter pertained to the use of marijuana and other drugs on the Navajo Nation

And I mentioned cocaine specifically. And the way you say drugs in Navajo is *azéé tsi'na'iiláhi* [medicine that spins your head]. It puts it on the same level as medicine you get from the hospital, *azéé*, 'medication': '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'áan nahalinígíí* [medicine spins your head that looks like flour]. (Bennie Klain 1998)

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."

Not only are the broadcasters creating new terminology, but they are bridging culture and generation gaps by explaining such concepts to elders. Klain went on to say “that’s why I think my job is so unique, because I’m put in a position where I have to translate things that nobody else would ever be put in a position to have to translate, because we cover such a wide array of topics.” Rubin offered the term “language entrepreneur” to describe those persons who are “more innovative, risk-taking, and maximizing of their returns” regarding language use (1977:257). In a sense, Navajo-language broadcasters are language entrepreneurs within their community who exploit their language resources to create new ways of communicating in a relatively new medium. They are members of the speech community involved in Hymes’ notion of “full performance”, ways of speaking involving “the acceptance of responsibility to perform, to do the thing with acceptance of being evaluated” (Hymes 1974:443). However, as broadcasters, they can and must use language in non-traditional ways, yet are subjected to higher evaluations of language use and must—to some extent—accommodate accordingly (Peterson 1998).

The Lexicon of New Technology

Not all new terminologies originate from radio broadcasters, yet they are frequently the ones whose lexical formulations become known, as they are heard over a wide area by a variety of speakers. The first time I noticed a speaker create a translation for “cell phone” was in 2000, in an advertisement on KTNN for Cellular One. Prior to that time, none of my extended “families” on the Reservation, or at least those units 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. The DJ who recorded the ad I heard translated cell phone as *beesh bee halne*, (literally, ‘telling through metal’) or the term often used for a land line, i.e. traditional telephones. I asked about this translation at the time, wondering why the same term for phones and cell phones was being used.

“Won’t grandma get confused?” I asked, indexing monolingual speakers more generally.

“It’s just a phone. That’s all she wants to know.” The response was terse.

There are speakers who use the term *béesh bee halne’í* to reference a cellular phone, although many alternate ways of describing cellphones have emerged. Some speakers contend that such imprecise translations like the one above indicate a certain “laziness,” in that in this case, the distinction is not being made between a land line, with its limitations on mobility, and a cell phone. When I pressed the issue for a more accurate description of cell phone in Navajo, the following term arose:

Béesh bee hane’í bi béesh áłts’ozí adin
[metal-by means of it-one tells-its metal-thin rope-none]
cordless phone

However, in a situation that could only have been made so complicated by an outside researcher, I brought forth the idea that not all home phones are bounded by cords. Other speakers who were present, and the majority of consultants I subsequently asked, believed that lexical distinction in this case is a non-issue as these are the first phones many people have had; the function for them is that of a “phone,” so it is nothing special

and precision is not required. As a friend of mine put it, “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 culturally constructed.

Navajo linguist Alice Neundorf noted that often to speakers, new coinage in Navajo will appear awkward or too long, and indeed, I didn’t get much positive response from the above gloss. Neundorf also noted that coinology can often invoke humor. “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” (Neundorf 1982:272). 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 “*Diigłís*. That’s just crazy [lit: “crooked”].”

As mentioned earlier, description is both a key ideology and an observable phenomenon when talking about, or listening, to Navajo speech. Unlike the terms presented above indexing cell phones, the following coinages index behaviors associated with the use of cell phones; often, these terms are humorous, and garner laughter whenever they are mentioned. One day I was up on the mountain at Shimásání’s house. She and shicheii had recently acquired one of the subsidized cell phones. The phone, however, as is often the case, was actually useless inside of their house—my own experience indicated that there was no signal for many miles around. Shimá was present,

and she, Shimásání, and I were sitting around outside of the house, swatting flies and waiting for the hot summer day to cool off. I asked Shimá, in English, how they were able to use their new phone. She responded.

bi[hajigh1h7
[with it they walk up an elevated place]
cell phone

Apparently, shimsání knew what we were talking about, because everyone (except for me) started laughing. “That’s what they call it,” Shimá 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.” Many folks, 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 (see Chapter 5).

“Aoo’,” replied Shimásání in agreement. “Bił hajigháhí.” She continued to smile, put her hand to her ear as if she were talking on a phone. She was conspicuously eying me for a reaction. While I had heard such terms before, this was the point where I really began to understand what they really meant. “If they’re really in a hurry,” Shimá continued, “then it’s

bi[haj8 w0h7 7
[with it they run up an elevated place]
cell phone.”¹⁰⁸

Both women let out a huge laugh. I ran to my truck to get a pen. These creative terms for cell phones highlight the practice of having to go search for a signal, yet other

¹⁰⁸ I first heard this term from Don Mose at the NLA in July 2003. The fact that I began hearing such a wide variety of glosses for “cell phones” only within the past few years is indicative of the rapidly increasing importance the technology.

behaviors related to cell phone use also become the foundation for humorous glosses. On another occasion, 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

bi[n7]joo ba[7
[with it you go in a circular motion]
cell phone

This term for cell phones highlights the practice of a user positioning herself to get a good signal, moving her head around and spinning around. Speakers love to perform their translations as well. I first heard this term from Navajo linguist Ellavina Perkins and educator Don Mose at the NLA in July 2003. Years later, in the summer of 2005, I was helping a family dig holes for two new outhouses. This was a family, I will add, who did not know the specifics of my research. We were joking about the women’s progress in digging the hole vs. the men’s (I was with the women, who we thought, were doing much better than the men). One of the women present began performing what she considered to be these funny terms for cell phones.

“Hanáá baí,” 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. “Bił níjoo baí,” she continued, mirroring the same example presented above, indexing the “spinning” involved when trying to strengthen the signal. Again, everyone laughed. “That’s just crazy,” said one person present. Again, I ran to my truck to get a pen. Interestingly, there is not much about “talking” or “telling” in these humorous descriptions, quite unlike the coins for radio, telegraph, or previously

existing land lines. Nor is there a reliance on the term *béésh*. What these examples illustrate is *movement*, descriptions of people actually using the technology. What they also illustrate is doing community, sharing experiences and incorporating new technology.

When analyzing the differing terminologies for cell phones, one of the most interesting things that became apparent to me were the socioeconomic divisions revealed through such terminology. The very first term I heard specific to a cell phone was given to me by *Shimá*, who was excitedly talking to me about her new *ná áá' jáah* phone [glossed as “commodity phones”], those federally subsidized cell phones for Reservation residents. She explained to me that “it’s like the cheese, you know, when you go to the Chapter house every month to get your free government food. *Aá jaah*, they just parcel it out to you, piece by piece.” Indeed, *jaah* is a handling stem for multiple small objects, and is humorous in this context because it references a shared socioeconomic experience, and is a playful use of grammar: The handling stem for a cell phone would normally be *kaah*, indexing a single, bounded, solid object.

On another occasion I was talking about cell phone terminology with a group of Navajo educators, many of whom were cosmopolitan in their outlook and some of whom were more socioeconomically advantaged. None of them had ever heard the term *ná áá' jáah* used in reference to a cell phone, as they had purchased their own phones and calling plans apart from the subsidy program. One woman did come up to me later, though, and remarked that “You got me under my skin. I have one of those phones. I never thought of it that way.” The facts that cell phone terms are often an object of

joking and that there are so many terms for cell phones, indicate to me the importance of cell phones in contemporary Navajo society. Cell phones are attached to the body, and are more of a daily presence on the body. Furthermore, they are more ubiquitous, and ownership now crosses socioeconomic lines.

Unlike terms for earlier material goods or technologies that have been introduced onto the Reservation in the past century, like the example of various terms for soda pop given in Chapter 3, my observations indicate that many terms for cell phones—with the exception of class-specific terms—are seemingly ubiquitous, known and utilized in geographically diverse areas across the Reservation, in a wide variety of contexts, and by a cross-section of speakers.¹⁰⁹ 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, while converging variation in certain circumstances.

The terminology for computers and internet technologies was less varied at the time of my research, and often computers were equated with their perceived predecessor, the typewriter. When confronted with translating the concept of the Internet, the same KTNN announcer who gave the example of cocaine above related his frustration when faced with translating and explaining the concept of inter-networked computers.

¹⁰⁹ I make the specific exception of the Federally subsidized na aa jaah phones.

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

béesh lichíí béesh bee halne'í bá ánt'i'go bidiit'i'ígíí.
[red metal-telephone-the one-it is attached with a line-the one]
Internet

That's saying 'a computer that is hooked up to a telephone line'" .. (Bennie Klain 1998)

In the above example, *béesh lichíí* [lit. red metal, glossed as "copper"] is the term used for "computer," and this was not the only translation that has been created for either a computer or the Internet. This was, however, a relatively early term given to me in 1997, before Internet connections were remotely available in most homes, Tribal offices, or schools, as it predates the Clinton visit and beginnings of the Gates initiative in 2000. Since 2003, I have never heard this term for computer repeated. "It's not descriptive enough," said one bilingual consultant, a man in his 40s. "Lots of machines have copper wire in them." As this example illustrates, coined terms can vary widely, often depending upon how the speaker conceptualizes the purpose or function of the object itself, in this case, the functions of both computers and the Internet. Furthermore, the more prevalent a technology, the more widespread, the more speakers will be involved in coinology. Below is another term that I often heard for computer, both before and after 2002, based on the gloss for typewriter above:

b44sh bee ak'e'elch7h7 t'11 b7 nits4kees7g7
[the typewriter that has it's own thinking, that thinks on its own]

On one level, early personal computers were often used for word processing, and the keyboard, of course, resembles that of a typewriter at least in its basic layout.¹¹⁰ It is also a joke for some cosmopolitan that many more locally-oriented Navajos view computers as mere typewriters (Tohtsoni 2001b). “But it’s more than a typewriter” Shimá said to me. “I think of it as more like its own thing. Maybe say

b44sh t’11 b7 n7dii nits4kees7g77
[the metal that thinks on its own/that does its own thinking]
computer

instead.” I elicited other terms from consultants who followed this logic of a machine that “thinks”; the following example, however, omits the fact that a computer might be able to think “on its own.”

b44sh]ts4kees7g77
[thinking metal, without implying it does it on its own]
computer

While I have only elicited only a few terms for the Internet, they all relate to one of these forms for computer, with the idea of being “hooked up” or linked. However, one of my consultants, a bilingual man in his 40s known to be a joker, told me that “The internet, it’s like *jiits’ilidi*, like a feed bag. You stuff yourself [just like the translation for Furr’s Cafeteria in Gallup mentioned in Chapter 5].” Humor, as shown throughout this work, continues to play an important role in Navajoizing new concepts.

¹¹⁰ While it has been reported to me that some elderlies called computers “typewriters hooked up to a TV,” I have never actually heard that gloss in use, although it seems likely. I do not include it in this discussion because only the English gloss was reported to me.

Large desktop computers are the ones being described in the examples above. The future importance of portable (i.e. mobile) computers for Navajo society will certainly be a consideration when such technologies become more widely available; as of the time of my research, only the Tribal Council and some government workers had regular access to portable computers. However, their coinage into Navajo offers insight into the ways in which terminologies can transfer—such as béésh from flint to metal. Context plays an important part in this process; when asked about the term below, which I knew meant small typewriter. One bilingual consultant in her early 50s confirmed that the term is currently glossed in Navajo as “portable computer.”

Béésh bee ak’e’elchí álsisígíí
[metal-through it-one writes-it is small]
laptop

When I asked her 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 new terminologies. Further examples of coined words and concepts related to the Internet and web browsing I have elicited appear below:

Saad ahindateetígíí –
[words interrelated/linked]
hypertext

Bits’áníti’í
[]
link

Yáagó hił –
[it goes downward/downhill motion]
download

Bighanii / hooghanídí –
[its home / at home]
homepage

Bee ha'nitá
[by means of it one goes]
web browser

There are alternate processes in creating Navajo terms or concepts originating in English. Irene Silentman described to me what she called “to Navajoize”: To Navajoize English words is to “perform a kind of reanalysis” of the word, combining Navajo prefixes and English verbs—the structure is Navajo, the matrix is Navajo.” The “pee on pidgins” example above was Navajoized English. Local etymologies of terms differ from more academic analyses of lexical borrowing or creation, worth mentioning as they relate to this concept of Navajoizing. Navajo singer, writer, and entertainer Blackhorse Mitchell often mentions the example of the Navajo term *chídí* [“car”] as being misunderstood by outsiders in its etymology; it has always been considered by outsiders to be onomatopoeic. Mitchell suggests that the root of the term *chídí* actually comes from the verb stem for flatulent, *íd* (flatulent: *dl'íd*), thus leading to *chídí*.¹¹¹ Similarly:

Binoculars	→	Binai yilli	→	Bináágilii
			→	[to one's eyes one puts it-the one]
			→	<i>binoculars</i>

While the transformation of binoculars to Bináágilii could be analyzed in terms of borrowing or a new loan word, it is actually a concept that has been Navajoized, a

¹¹¹ I have collected numerous examples of local etymology vs. linguists' etymologies, including the term “*bilagáana*” as a loan word from the Spanish *Americano* vs. a Navajo form of “the ones we kill.” While this specific practice is beyond the scope of this dissertation, the phenomenon is worth mentioning as it is another great example of language ideologies at play.

product of the phonological twists described above. It is also noteworthy that unlike earlier loanwords from Spanish, many new technologies are being referenced in Navajo as opposed to English. Not by everyone, and not at all times, but especially with cell phone terminology, the phenomenon is persistent.

The Lexicon of Place

Not all newly coined terms 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. This reflects the older practice of naming a trading post after characteristics of its owner or unique characteristics of the location, and it also indexes the vitality of the Navajo language. New terminology for important spaces and places shows how conceptions of space are shown through speech play. Much like the coins for cell phones discussed above, humorously descriptive place names are a continuous source of laughter among speakers, and they require communicative competence in the form of shared codes as well as shared experiences.

The Navajo Nation has a recognized lack of large retail outlets, and as I mention earlier, trips “into town” to Gallup, Flagstaff, or Grants to go shopping frame much social interaction and can take up a lot of time. In urban meccas such as Gallup or Grants, you can take grandma to Y00’ajigh1 h1 (Wal-Mart, glossed as “the place where you get lost”), Ha’jii[t[’iid7 (K-Mart or Wal-Mart, “where you go through the racks of clothes”), and eat at ! saa’ de7l zh0d7 (Furr’s Cafeteria, “Where you slide your trays”).

Of course, if your *cheii* (grandpa) is with you on the trip, you're more likely to go to Hwe'1sdz33 bich'8' ch'44j7 ts'='7 instead (Wal-Mart, again, but glossed as "the place where you're peeking around the aisles looking for your wife"). You might also go eat at Awoon da jiil k11 ha (Furr's Cafeteria, again, but "you pick up whatever you want, make your own choices"), or eat lunch and shop for jewelry at the same time at nda a k1 h1' (Earl's Restaurant in Gallup, "where they bring around stuff").

It's not unusual for *Shimásaní* to jump in her *chídí* (car/pickup) and drive three hours to *Ná'nizhóozhí* (Gallup, NM, lit: bridge) to pay a bill that could have been put in the mail in a nearby town such as Piñon or Chinle. Herding sheep, doing chores, and yelling at *cheii* only go so far— Hazh diil wo'77 (either the flea market or Wal-Mart, glossed as "the place where you run around the aisles") means social interaction, catching up on the latest gossip with old friends and relatives. It also means buying necessities either unavailable or too expensive on the Reservation.

While new place names based on speech play have been outlined above, the speech of younger Navajos is expectedly quite different. A typical run to Gallup might go something like this, as it isn't unusual for *shíbro* (loanword glossed as "my brother" or "my pal." *shi*=1.poss.) and me to cruise the ride to G-Town and "make a run" (get beer) or go to Micky D's or "Trash Act" (Class Act, a popular watering hole in the mall in

Gallup), or to Navajo Heaven (Wal-Mart). Of course, 99XTC is blaring hip-hop all the way, and you're doing everything in your power not to appear too "Johnnie."¹¹²

"I'm Surfing"

I'm sitting in the computer lab at the Window Rock public library, located in the Navajo Nation museum. It is a very popular spot in this part of the Reservation to connect to the internet. For many users, the museum doesn't carry the same stigmas as using the computers in the Chapter House, as discussed in Chapter 2, as many of the local political and kinship issues can be avoided in this particular institutional space. The guy next to me is in his mid 20's or so, wearing the ubiquitous baggy jeans and a backwards baseball cap, markers of many youth worldwide. His friend, similarly clothed, walks up behind him and gives the Navajo call for attention.

"Shhhht!"

The guy on the computer turns around. Actually, several of us turn 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!" The conversation that followed is transcribed in Figure 19 ("I'm surfing") below:

1. John: Sup? Há'át'iish bananá?
["What are you doing?"]
What are you doing?

¹¹² Implies "someone from the sticks"; also "Rezzie." See Chs. 3 & 4 for detailed explanation and analysis.

2. Clinton: Bitaa'disk'aas.
[on top if it—I'm spread out]
I'm surfing.
3. A: Oh, izzit? (laugh)
4. A: Emailish send íínílaa?"
[Email send 2nd sing. past do]
Did you send the email?
5. B: "Dagá'."
[No]
No.
6. A: "Oh, izzit?"
7. B: "Bighaniigóó. Click it. Right there." Pause.
[Its home-towards it]
Click on the homepage.
8. B: TLC! Let's go!"

Figure 19: "I'm surfing" Transcript

This interaction highlights interesting facets of Navajo in use. The codeswitching is apparent in the greeting, and “hey, dude!” is a common greeting for many younger male English speakers in the US. While in some cases, the Navajo greeting *yá'át'ééh* becomes an emblematic display of identity for non-speakers, especially in public situations, some younger speakers of Navajo will often substitute something what has been described to me as something “cooler” in their interactions, or at least something bilingual. *Bitaa'dilk'aas* literally means “surfing,” as in “stretched out on top of something”. It is funny, but I have elicited the term several times from consultants to

mean “websurfing.” Likewise, some speakers translate the “mouse” of a computer as “na ,” literally “mouse.” “TLC” is popular youth slang and is short for the bilingual phrase “Tʉ, let’s cruise!” meaning “Come on, let’s go.”

Transformations, and new forms of language vitality and valorization emerge. In some cases, Navajo students maintain community and affirm identity through the use of Navajo in contested spaces such as multi-ethnic, off-Reservation high schools. In a conversation about the viability of Navajo, Irene Begay related the following story:

They always say that our language is dying, that our kids aren’t learning the language. And maybe that’s true for some people. But look at where I’m from, from Pintado, and all those kids who go to Cuba High School. They’re speaking their language, they’re learning their language. And I heard the same thing is true about Hopi High, that those Navajo kids over there speak Navajo so that they can band together as a group. Maybe it’s because of all the Hispanics there, or all the Hopi’s over there. I guess they don’t like Navajos. (Begay 2005 interview)

Interestingly, this does not seem to be the case in larger schools, or those in less overtly politicized contexts. Bill Nichols, a linguistic anthropologist and teacher at a public school on the reservation, noted that students speaking Navajo continuously receive harsh judgments from their peers, the dissonance apparent when seemingly competing ideologies of the traditional and modern, the local and cosmopolitan are at play. For example, why do young Navajos who *could* speak Navajo to each other choose

to speak English instead? Is it to disassociate from the traditional, local, or “backwards” Reservation identity and associate with a more modern, cosmopolitan, hip[-hop] crowd? It has been suggested that language is socially-marked and that actors project linguistic identity based on this in relation to desire for group membership (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985); however, this analysis masks other factors in the construction and “projection” of identity, as identity in a social world ultimately rests upon the judgment and inclusion of others. What is important for the case study here are the ways in which ideologies of identity interact with other ideologies and discourses to influence emergent communicative practice.

Conclusion

In a new medium, one can say things in ways that would not otherwise be possible. New media bring speakers and writers “near the edges,” such as Tribe 2 pushing the boundaries of language and traditional cultural elements in new mediated forms. Furthermore, mediated social networks allow for flows and overlapping networks otherwise not possible. The online versions of KTNN and the *Navajo Times* expand their reach both within and outside of their offline audience areas, and they illustrate the ways in which traditional ideas of “media” are not easily transferred to emergent Internet media applications. The convergence of orality and literacy, of “one-to-one” and “one-to-many” media, and of traditional broadcasting within the World Wide Web illustrate this point very clearly. Wireless computing, long-distance communication, and new

literacies allow for Navajo community members to reconnect and “do” community while remaining away from the Reservation.

Very important is the idea that the “offline” and “online” worlds are directly linked, and that not all transformations due to new technologies are mediated. Navajo coinology, especially new terms for cell phones and computers, shows how offline verbal art and speech play intersect with new technology, as well as with the ideologies of language, identity, technology. The local experiences with modernity and progress often result in interesting, complex, and very unexpected phenomena. However, if new technologies are indeed transformative, it is only because of social actors. And if media are considered by some Navajos to be interconnected hane’, publicly shared stories, then the social circulation of stories and discourses are a major intertextual link between the offline and online, the face to face and the mediated. The readers and senders of online storytellers are circulating mediated speech play to wide audiences, sharing technologically-mediated self-representations that are understood and bound in shared experiences and discourses. Like political cartoons and country music, these forms illustrate the social circulation of media discourse.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

It is precisely the development of new traditions which is most constant with the human purpose. And it is precisely where local languages are viable that new traditions develop.

(Hale 1998)

With computers, the Internet, and the increasing availability and ubiquity of cellular telephone services on the Navajo Nation, the pace and frequency of interconnectedness between Navajo community members and the rest of the world is in a state of dramatic transformation. Roads, electrification, and new communications technology have all paved the way for Navajos to enter what Manuel Castells has deemed the “network society” (Castells 1996). While the most isolated and “remote” Chapter houses on the Navajo Nation still lack landlines or even cell phone signals, they are all connected to the Internet via satellite. This opens the possibility for the most remote family in the most remote part of the Reservation, however conceived, to be connected to the world in their own backyard—or at least within an hour’s bumpy drive.

What this dissertation best illustrates are the ways in which ideologies of technology, language, and identity have transformed and can all be viewed in particular instances of emergent practice resulting from more recent experiences with contemporary technological life. Just as importantly, it highlights the ways in which emergent practices are related to, and embedded in, these attitudes, beliefs, and practices. Emergent practices are novel forms, and as activities undertaken by social actors, they cannot be

predicted. However, they can be observed, and they do result from observable practices, spoken ideologies, extant forms and genres of communicative practice. Navajo speakers' and writers' choice of language when engaging new technologies such as email and new medium such as writing index broader ideologies of language, and they illustrate these practices and ideologies in a concrete way.

For example, the numerous coined terms for cellular phones illustrate the importance of these tools to many Navajos in everyday life—cell phones are becoming requisite tools, and many Navajo community members view them as both viable and useful. The fact that some Navajos choose to create names for them in Navajo is telling of both the vitality of the language in contemporary contexts as well as the importance of the language for sharing particular discourses and maintaining a sense of community. Speakers could very easily incorporate a loan word, but the variety and breadth of terminologies, both joking and functional, illustrate not only that we are sharing the information, but that we are doing it in a very Navajo specific way.

The Elk Water Chapter elderlies' belief that computers could help them communicate more effectively led to their engagement with both new media and English literacy. They localized the Internet by appropriating it as their space, transforming and expanding the geographies of their kinship networks and community to include their English-speaking grandchildren living off the Reservation. Their choice of language used in mediated contexts was informed by a belief that their grandchildren were either unable or unwilling to engage them in Navajo. Likewise, the wide circulation of hane' in the form of email forwards indexes certain aspects of Navajo ideologies of language,

technology, and identity. While a majority of stories in these genres are written mostly in English, they address prevalent discourses among, and about, Navajo and Native American communities and histories. When users share these stories, they are engaging in the activity of community by including Navajo text, indicating that the Web is an appropriate space for Navajo—and for Navajos. This is most apparent in the ways in which genres of *hane*’ of various forms in a variety of mediums form the basis for imagining and perpetuating community and language through shared discourses.

The same is true for the authors’ of the “Navajo Jedi” and other jokes. They localized mediated spaces with new markers of Navajo identity, mediating shared discourses among a wide range of community members and mainly in the English language. Furthermore, offline experiences and offline discourses directly influence novel, mediated forms. Experiences with racism and exoticism are some of the shared discourses resulting from the experience with modernity among many Navajo community members. The activity of sharing these stories through the Internet is one way in which the mediated and the face-to-face are linked, illustrating how Navajos are “doing” community in new contexts through mediated forms. They also illustrate how the processes and activities of identity making may be shifting as a result of interactions through new media tools. Getting a sense of “who one is” in mediated contexts is evident not only in Navajo screen names, but also in the texts that users create and circulate.

The practice of forwarding emails such as the “Techno-Indians” or the elevator joke is part of the process of “doing community.” It is in these instances of mediating shared discourses that some Navajos are recreating community ties. They have shared

experiences and perhaps even shared ideologies, and any particular mediated joke may indexes those ideologies, discourses, and experiences. . The idea of “doing community,” of looking at community as an activity or process rather than an essentialized, imagined entity, provides the link between what Spitulnik has called “the social circulation of media discourse” and the mediation of community. This is the space of mediation for contemporary, diasporic, and disparate Navajo communities.

The novel forms and emergent identities associated with rapid change among Navajo communities are, despite seeming deviations from more traditional paradigms, continuous with preexisting practice. However, contemporary Navajo practices relating to language, identity, and community are influenced by ever increasing interconnectedness, as communicative practices are increasingly mediated in new forums for interaction and within shifting discourses. Emergent practices are directly related to discourses and ideologies of the traditional and the modern, Navajo and other, and “inside” and “outside” forces. These discourses and ideologies are directly tied to the broader processes of modernity, of interconnectedness, of transformations in economy, demographics, and power relations. The fact that the “requirements” of Navajoness are transforming in the face of language shift is crucial to understand for those interested in the complexities of Navajo language shift as a sociocultural process. All of the factors mentioned here influence the ways in which contemporary Navajo communities are mediated.

With an increasing number of Navajos living away from the geographic spaces of the Navajo Nation, community is maintained and mediated by communications

technologies. It is in these instances of interaction—emailing, calling, and sharing jokes and stories—that cultural continuity and kinship ties are maintained. These examples highlight the fact that community is as much an “activity” as it is a “place,” and as an activity, community is “done” by social actors, by community members, in a variety of ways and in a variety of contexts. Navajos are doing community rather than bound within it, and the traditional geographic, federally recognized space of the Navajo Nation is no longer the only boundary important to Navajo community members, or those engaged in their study.

The addition of cell phones to sheepherding practices discussed in Chapter 3 also illustrates how new forms of geographic knowledge are emerging in conjunction with new technologies, and it also illustrates the ways in which the geographies of communication are shifting. New forms of knowledge are not limited to geography, however, and the most visible new knowledge is the emergence of new literacies and new skills with the tools of communication. With Grandma learning both emails and English, new knowledges are leading to new empowering practices. The point is not that Navajos have made it “their own,” it is that individual Navajos have made it their own, whether empowering themselves against the dominant discourses of the Anglo-colonial Other or the bureaucratic, institutional Navajo clan cousin.

The importance of intertextuality and literacy in new communications media are also significant implications of this work. While text-based technologies can be an inducement to literacy, not all mediated communication is based on writing, and most instances of Navajo in everyday practice remains in oral forms and genres. However,

Navajo writing often begins as a form of orality that is transformed into text, and not all Navajo generated is oral, as Navajo language students, for example, utilize dictionaries in writing essays, indicating that intertextual flows are becoming regular, if not ubiquitous. Individuals draw from linguistic repertoires to negotiate new media and communications technology; however, in the lived experiences of many Navajos there is no room for orthographic prescriptivism, linguistic purity, or simplistic categories of Native identity. Seemingly contradictory ideologies of language and identity play themselves out through local and global discourse, in face to face and mediated forms.

That Navajo community members are experimenting with folk orthographies by mapping their knowledge of English onto Navajo is an important development with implications for the vitality of the Navajo language. Despite risking some critique, users are putting themselves “out there” in mediated worlds, in Navajo, indexing again particular ideologies about Navajoness, language, and technology itself. While some speakers retain ideologies that separate the idea of truly *knowing* Navajo from Navajo literacy, there are a number of Navajos who engage literacy in everyday practice. The multiple examples of mediated communication in a variety of genres presented in this dissertation illustrate this point. My findings correlate with previous research on Navajo literacy, yet diverge to show how despite indigenization, formal orthographies remain associated with school and institutional domains, contested and problematic spaces for some Navajos. I suggest that in the Navajo case, the more “local” practices and control of the medium become, the more accepted they might become among a wider range of

community members. These practices should be encouraged by anyone interested in Navajo language maintenance.

Increased interconnectedness can become both empowering and problematic through increased circulation of representations and self-representations, and it can promote intense local debates on traditional and modern modes and identities. As both Navajos and others view the Navajo Nation as modern and connected, particular assumptions about the increasing socioeconomic and political status of the Reservation are made, and due to the Gates initiative, the Navajo Nation has become the global symbol of Indigenous connectivity. The inherent danger of all this symbolic capital, as mentioned above, is an assumption that interconnectedness and technological transformation inevitably lead to prosperity and self sufficiency.

There are important implications for the study of media more generally as well. As indicated above, my initial definition of “new communication technologies” was primarily focused on the Internet and related applications such as web surfing and email. It is very easy to reify material aspects of technology, and indeed many researchers privilege the material forms of new media such as the Internet and cyberspace, or rely on theories that rob users of agency, such as framing technology as a tool with users unaware of the tool itself. Thus conceived, agency, process, and imagination are lost. This is not to say that new tools for communication are unimportant or masked in a false consciousness; what it does suggest is that users are more cognizant of technology than previously thought, or at least aware enough of new tools to de-privilege the central importance of material goods. It is apparent that expanding social networks, shifting

genres, and altered geographies of communication are crucial factors in understanding shifting communicative practice in Navajo communities.

Privileging the material aspects of contemporary technological life can fuel other discourses as well: Imaginations are fueled and stereotypes perpetuated when juxtaposing “new” technologies vis-à-vis “traditional” cultures. The categories of modern and traditional that become separated in many discourses of modernity are a continuous process of production rather than a checklist of traits. “Modern” and traditional are analytical frameworks in the Western interpretation of modernity. It is also problematic to continuously assert that some domains are more traditional or “Navajo” than others, as it restricts the possibilities and potentials for expansion and Navajoization of emergent domains. Again this thinking also reinforces, or is reinforced by, dichotomies of Navajo and other, traditional and modern. Indeed, such dichotomies are continuous sites and sources of struggle in contemporary Navajo society. Discourses of tradition are modified to cope with social changes, but not all ideologies and interactions are directly grounded in traditional discourses. Material and ideological aspects of Western modernity do alter power relations and sociocultural contexts, but not all aspects are unwanted or detrimental. Nor is there an inherent dichotomy between modernity and tradition, indigenous and Western, or for that matter, Navajo oral traditions and bilingual emails. Modernity is not only about rupture, more often than not, it is about continuity.

In cases like Navajo, the relegation of Native languages to traditional domains raises questions, however, about the viability of a given language in the face of shifting traditions. Emails and rap music are not considered to be traditional domains, but

Navajos do engage them, in Navajo. These phenomena are simultaneously creating new opportunities for self representation and emergent communicative practice, manifested in what I term new literacies, as well as increasing numbers of emergent forms, genres, and variants of limitless combinations of Navajo, English, and other ways of speaking in communicative repertoires. It is not the technology itself that bridges a digital divide; rather, the users themselves bridge or create divides that remain apparent despite increased interconnectedness. Technology can serve to highlight differences between traditional and modern, and reinforce divisions or connections with geography and history.

Again I turn to my collaboration with Samuel Wilson to summarize both my own framework and the numerous approaches to the study of the social life of technology:

Internetworked computers are cultural products that exist in the social and political worlds within which they were developed, and they are not exempt from the rules and norms of those worlds. On the other hand, the social uses of the internet, in the few years of its existence, have been astonishing and almost completely unanticipated by those who began networking computers in the 1960s. (Wilson and Peterson 2002)

In traditionally marginalized communities, transformations from contemporary technological life were perhaps more unpredictable, and for some people, perhaps unimaginable. Deloria suggested that we look for Indians in “unexpected places,” for if we cannot imagine or expect Native Americans to exist materially in a contemporary

world, then we certainly cannot imagine them to exist socially or politically. In a sense, I looked for, and found, Indians in expected places communicating in unexpected, or at least unanticipated, ways. That I also found Indian languages in unexpected places is exciting. Now that many Navajos and communities are interconnected and perceived to be “on their way,” however, the realization should be apparent that the digital divide is about a history of marginalization not easily overcome by a computer. People can have access to technology, but that does not mean they have arrived. Language use and language ideologies redefine the divide when people make fun of themselves using the technology, or their place in society or circulating discourses. History is still the story.

I have only begun to address important issues of the social role of technology, the relationship between language and technology, and the potentials of new media for Navajo language vitality. This dissertation contributes to several important areas of enquiry in anthropology, including the relationship of technology and media to society, contemporary representations of Native American texts and cultures. What I have provided is an ethnography of communications technology. The data that illustrate beliefs and practices surrounding the new media technologies and language use and illustrate specific, emerging communicative repertoires explicitly show the connections and disjunctures between local experiences with technology and more general technological discourses. Navajo mediascapes integrate new media with existing and emerging social, linguistic, and communicative practices. The evidence presented of the grandparents and hip-hop artists suggests emergent, localized forms of literacy, reflecting the bilingual, mixed nature of many observable face-to-face interactions. These new practices may

make Navajo mediated literacy more acceptable to a greater number of Navajos, in a variety of mediums and media, and ensure the vitality of the Navajo language and Navajo communities.

This work may also make alternate frameworks for the study of Navajo language and culture more acceptable. To suggest that Reservation spaces are no longer primary for some Navajos is not to diminish the importance of the Navajo Nation itself; rather, it reflects the reality of tens of thousands of Navajos who do not make the Navajo Nation their home. Furthermore, “authentic” Navajo language and culture are not confined to the interior of the reservation, limited to the eldest generations, existing only in Navajo. As those who self-identify as members of the Navajo Nation rise in both population and lower in age, it is crucial to take new contexts—whether mediated, urban, or English-language—into consideration. To do otherwise is to exclude a majority of the future population of the group we serve by doing research.

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