Special Language in Shoshoni Poetry Songs

Jon P. Dayley

Boise State University

Publication Information


This document was originally published in Report 12: Survey of California and Other Indian Languages - Proceedings of the 50th Anniversary Conference by the Survey of California and Other Indian Languages, Department of Linguistics, University of California - Berkeley. Copyright restrictions may apply.

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8h62v7tj
SPECIAL LANGUAGE IN SHOSHONI POETRY SONGS

JON P. DAYLEY

Boise State University

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

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

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

(1) obscure song word | cp. ordinary word
---------------------|---------------------
papapaateeyonneh     | 'killdeer'           | pantei
pimmaa               | 'bovine'             | < ? Comanche pimmorua 'calf'
pui'awatsi           | 'spy (on)'           | watsippuih
totowaantsi          | 'stand (pl)'         | topo'ihka
waantsi              | 'wander'             | nemi or yeme"
weyampontsi          | 'track'              | nampuuih or nayaa
wahni(n)             | 'winnow'             | wettanani
woooyompa            | 'splash' or          | pakwittsu'ih
                     | 'worm'               | wo'api(n)

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

¹ The data presented in this article are from Crum, Crum, and Dayley 2001.
² For the orthography used to write Shoshoni in this article, see Crum and Miller 1987 or Crum and Dayley 1993. The only unusual symbols are e for barred [i] and ai for [e] which often varies with [ai].
In addition, many ordinary words used in poetry songs undergo various degrees of change in pronunciation. The most typical changes are illustrated below. One common change is that nasals pop into ordinary words, especially replacing the first consonant of an identical consonant cluster (as is the case with diminutive -\textit{ttsi} changing to -\textit{ntsi}). For example:

(2) \begin{tabular}{lll}
\textit{huiintoantsi} & \textless huiitssa(\textit{ttsi}) & 'sage hen' \\
\textit{huumpi} & \textless huupp(\textit{n}) & 'stick, wood, tree' \\
\textit{huuntuukantu} & \textless huuttukkan tuu & 'under & through sticks' \\
\textit{noitssai} & \textless noitsai & 'sticky' \\
\textit{pasitwankatete(n)} & \textless pasiwaakkatete(n) & 'sand dune' \\
\textit{pints} & \textless pitsi & 'suck' \\
\textit{tuantsi} & \textless tuatts & 'baby, child, young' \\
\textit{tuumpantsuku} & \textless tuuppatsuku & 'mink' \\
\textit{waanka(n)} & \textless waakka(\textit{n}) & 'at the junipers' \\
\textit{waintpentsi} & \textless waippe(\textit{ttsi}) & 'woman' \\
\textit{wenkatompi} & \textless wekkaatookka & 'spread out' \\
\textit{winkum} & \textless wikkahku & 'break away' \\
\textit{yaanka} & \textless yaakka(\textit{n}) & 'hold'
\end{tabular}

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

(3) \begin{tabular}{lll}
\textit{kwipipi} & \textless kwippikke(n) & 'shake, shiver' \\
\textit{potoo} & \textless potto(n) & 'grinding stone' \\
\textit{tepama} & \textless teppanna & 'on the side of' \\
\textit{waakka(n)} & \textless waakka(\textit{n}) & 'at the junipers'
\end{tabular}

\textit{S}s between vowels often become \textit{ts}, phonetically [\textit{z}]. For example:

(4) \begin{tabular}{lll}
\textit{pasiwankatete(n)} & \textless pasiwaakkatete(n) & 'sand dune' \\
\textit{tota"} & \textless tosa" & 'white' \\
\textit{watsempi(n)} & \textless waseppi(n) & 'mountain sheep'
\end{tabular}

Glottal stops almost always disappear. For example:

(5) \begin{tabular}{lll}
\textit{awwan} & \textless awa'i\textit{h} & 'like this' \\
\textit{waintpentsi} & \textless waippe(\textit{ttsi}) & 'woman' \\
\textit{paan} & \textless pa'an & 'above, over' \\
\textit{pattai} & \textless patio'\textit{h} & 'wade' \\
\textit{pomia} & \textless pom'i'ah & 'migrate' \\
\textit{toi} & \textless tou'\textit{h} & 'emerge, go/come out/up' \\
\textit{ywanna} & \textless yu'\textit{aih} & 'be warm'
\end{tabular}
Short vowels become long, even extra long, in syllables where the note is held. For example:

(6)  
\begin{align*}
opii & < \ opi & & '\text{there about}' \\
pauampintsi & < \ pampi(ttsi) & & '\text{head}' \\
patakwintsi & < \ patekwittsi & & '\text{tender young plants}' \\
potoo(n) & < \ potto(n) & & '\text{grinding stone}' \\
yotii(i) & < \ yoti'' & & '\text{fly, arise (pl)}'
\end{align*}

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

(7)  
\begin{align*}
\text{wiya} & < \ wia & & '\text{mountain pass}' \\
mukuwa & < \ mukua & & '\text{soul}'
\end{align*}

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

(8)  
\begin{align*}
\text{huai} & < \ hinna & & '\text{something (obj)}' \\
ta or tai & < \ tamme(n) & & '\text{we, our (incl)}' \\
tuun & < \ tenaa & & '\text{down}'
\end{align*}

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

(9)  
\begin{align*}
\text{annitan} & < \ a'ni(n) & & '\text{black ant}' \\
\text{to rhyme with hunnitan 'red ant'}
\end{align*}

\begin{align*}
nani & < \ nanah & & '\text{just, only}' \\
\text{to rhyme with naniyuu 'be at peace with oneself'}
\end{align*}

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

(10)  
\begin{align*}
an kuantsi & < \ aan kuhatti & & '\text{buck}' \\
mononoo & < \ monooh(\text{kan}) & & '\text{hold in the mouth}' \\
pintsi & < \ pinnah & & '\text{but}' \\
pipuntu & < \ pimpippu & & '\text{go back}' \\
puipaawoo & < \ puiwoo & & '\text{little green fish}' \\
weyuu & < \ weyaah & & '\text{take}' \\
yepatu & < \ yepani & & '\text{autumn, fall}' \\
yoo & < \ yuu(n) & & '\text{soft, gentle}' \\
yunka & < \ yunah & & '\text{take}' \\
yuwaa & < \ yewe'' & & '\text{swallow}'
\end{align*}
All of the changes in pronunciation apparently are used to make the song words more melodious and rhythmical. Leanne Hinton (1984:56) has called similar though by no means identical processes found in Havasupai songs "maximization of resonance". In Havasupai, maximization of resonance involves softening of consonants and a predominance of vowels, nasals and semivowels, not unlike what we have seen here in Shoshoni.

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

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

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

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

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

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

101
(11) *Sai paa weyaa.*
   boat water carry
   'Water is carrying the boat.'

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

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

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

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

(14) *Upii katete hunum ma*
   there out of sight sit canyon in
   *tepui yantum ma.*
   pine nuts-O winnowing basket with
   'There she sits in a canyon winnowing pine nuts.'

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

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

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

__________________________
unmanifested noun phrases as possible, as examples below indicate.

* For discussions of Shoshoni grammar, see Crum and Dayley 1993 and Miller 1996.
(16) **Yuwa**  *tuankam*  *patewantsii*  *yaanka*  *yunkatu*
swallow  taste  large grass seed  hold  take

*patewantsiiya.*
large grass seed-O
'Taking seeds, holding them, tasting and swallowing large grass seeds.'

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

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

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

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

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

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

1st Interpretation

Oyon tempi gîwan tempi
every rock this-like rock

Patemmam pìi toi.
pool of water around throw

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

Oyon tempi gîwan tempi
every rock this-like rock

Patemmam pìi toi.
pool of water around throw

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

Totsappaa wooyompa
white-water splash

Patemmam pìi.
pool of water around

Totsappaa wooyompa
white-water splash

Patemmam pìi.
pool of water around

Oyon tempi gîwan tempi
every rock this-like rock

Patemmam pìi toi.
pool of water around throw

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

104
Totsappaa wooyompa  
white-water splash

Patemmam pii
pool of water around

Totsappaa wooyompa
white-water splash

Patemmam pii.
pool of water around

1st Interpretation

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

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

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

2nd Interpretation

Oyon tempi giwan tempi
every rock this-like rock

Patemmampii toi.
water-rock-creature emerge

Oyon tempi patemmampii toi
every rock water-rock-creature emerge
Oyon tempi  qiwan  tempi
every rock  this-like  rock

Patemmampii  toi.
water-rock-creature  emerge

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

Totsappaa  wooyompa
white-water  worm

Patemmampii
water-rock-creature

Totsappaa  wooyompa
white-water  worm

Patemmampii.
water-rock-creature

Oyon tempi  qiwan  tempi
every rock  this-like  rock

Patemmampii  toi.
water-rock-creature  emerge

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

Totsappaa  wooyompa
white-water  worm

Patemmampii
water-rock-creature

Totsappaa  wooyompa
white-water  worm

Patemmampii.
water-rock-creature
2nd Interpretation

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

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

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

REFERENCES


