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**American Indian Culture and Research Journal**

**Title**

Native American Discourse: Poetics and Rhetoric. Edited by Joel Sherzer and Anthony C. Woodbury.

**Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4sv5n814>

**Journal**

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 12(3)

**ISSN**

0161-6463

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**Publication Date**

1988-09-01

**DOI**

10.17953

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**Native American Discourse: Poetics and Rhetoric.** Edited by Joel Sherzer and Anthony C. Woodbury. Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture 13. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987. 256 pages. \$39.50 Cloth.

These are highly specialized essays in linguistic anthropology, not to be confused with more accessible anthologies of translated texts, cultural studies, folklore caches, or literary criticism loosely collected under the term "ethnopoetics." Dell Hymes pioneered the method two decades ago: listening a second time to American Indian oral texts (poorly) translated as prose earlier in the century, in order to discover verse lines, stanzaic groupings, dramatic paces, and structural principles correlating with the cultural mindset that generated the texts in the first place. "Native American narratives, those at least that stem from valid performances, are organized in terms of lines, verses, and stanzas. The grouping of lines into verses, and of verses into stanzas, tends to follow, but not exclusively, the pattern numbers of the culture. Verses are often, but not always, overtly marked by the recurrence of a small set of initial elements" (22). There's a startling professional accuracy in Hymes' perceptions: "In my own experience, the power of Native American literature seems often to lie, not in decorative elaboration, but in uncanny selection. Images often enough are not recognized as images at first because they are not invented, but chosen" (25). What academics say about such sparse aesthetics is another matter entirely. A grammar of "structure and use," the editors posit at the outset, falls under the generic term *discourse* "rooted in an understanding of its linguistic, rhetorical, and cultural features in all of their complexity" (9). The last four words should be underlined. It's a big order, the metatext of several thousand given oral traditions in the Western Hemisphere alone. Such translators would uncover diagrams of discourse whose deeper structures are embedded in a grammar of performance.

Dell Hymes leads off, appropriately, with the Tonkawa (Texas) poetics of John Rush Buffalo's "Coyote and Eagle's Daughter," first translated by Hymes' UCLA mentor, Harry Hoijer (himself a student of Edward Sapir). The ethnological lineage here traces back through Benjamin Whorf to Franz Boas, though there's a prosaic catch. "We have allowed to stand a perpetration of the

cardinal sin," Hymes confesses, "the distortion of another cultural reality through imposition of categories of our own" (18). Thus, catechized in a verse-line approach, girded with a new diacritical typeface designed by Charles Bigelow, Hymes voids translations heretofore: "all the collections that are now in print must be redone" (19). It's a staggering premise. Does this delete the work of Demetracopolou and Densmore, for example, or the seventeen ethnographers "re-expressed" in Brian Swann's *Song of the Sky: Versions of Native American Songs & Poems* (Four Zoas 1983)? Are Leonard Bloomfield's brilliant Plains Cree translations of the 1920s to be swept aside as prose detritus, along with Howard Norman's recent Swampy Cree materials in *The Wishing Bone Cycle* (Stonehill 1976) and *Where the Chill Came From* (North Point 1982)? Some careful discriminations might be exercised in arrogating a hierarchy of texts starting with one's own.

"Hidden within the margin-to-margin printed lines are poems, waiting to be seen for the first time," Hymes insists (19). Perhaps so, but then again, line lengths alone hardly insure the "flash of intellect," as Mallarme said, in fine poetry. From ceremonial chantes, to healing meditations, to Dante's terza rima through Rilke's lyrics, "poetry" is less external structure or normative sense, than what W. B. Yeats called a "passionate syntax" and John (Lame Deer) Fire felt was seeing from the Lakota "heart's eye." Are we graphing straight lines, or parabolic curves? With the more profane Trickster materials, where does one catch the jump in discourse, the flick of a tail or flash of an eye? In short, how do we approach the live music in a poetic line? Structure alone won't carry the tare of poetic texture, tone, diction, imagery, rhythm, personal brilliance and cultural genius that goes into making a verse "line" rise up off the page. "A sad thing in recording these animal stories is the loss of spirit—the fascination furnished by the peculiar Indian vocal tradition for humor," Archie Phinney, the Nez Perce translator, wrote his teacher, Franz Boas in 1929. "Indians are better storytellers than whites. When I read my story mechanically I find only the cold corpse" (quoted in Gerald Ramsey, *Coyote Was Going There*).

Virginia Hymes echoes the line-verse premise in reworking Warm Springs Sahaptin texts from Oregon, collected half a century ago by Melville Jacobs, rerecorded and exhaustively analyzed this decade. It's like picking through an abandoned gold

field. "What seems to be basic to all oral performance we have looked at (including sermons, oratory, medicine show, and carnival spiels) is delivery as lines and grouping of at least some of those lines by parallel patterning and repetition" (99). Joel Sherzer goes south to the San Blas Kuna to transcribe and analyze variants of the same tribal stories. "In this respect I follow Hymes (1977) and others in arguing that discourse organized in terms of lines in poetry. This usage demystifies the term poetry and makes it available, as I believe is appropriate, for the verbal artistry of nonliterate as well as literate societies, colloquial and conversational speech as well as formal and ritual language" (136). For some poets, it might be argued, one difference between breakfast conversation and the inspired voice is a certain shading of mystery, or what Wallace Stevens called the "pheasant disappearing into the brush." Higher mathematical linguistics notwithstanding, supra-national dissections of verse can mar, if not murder the spirit in the letter. Sherzer asserts a stifling authority over the text. "Central to my approach here has been a controlled comparison of different verbal genres with the goal of describing the various structuring principles and processes involved in the actual performance of oral discourse" (137).

As in *Finding the Center* (1972), *The Spoken Word and the Work of Interpretation* (1983), and his new *Popul Vuh* (1987), Dennis Tedlock comes closest to ethnographic proof of his poetic hand in translation. "To have the alphabetically written text of an ancient performance is one thing, and to hear a full voice in that text is another" (141). Tedlock would add pause and intonation to scansion and structure in Quiché continuations of the *Popul Vuh*:

the maker, modeler,  
mother of, father of that which is alive, that which is human,  
with breath, with heartbeat,

Tedlock's Quiché out-take ends on a strangely prophetic note: "Ethnopalearographic enterprises are properly part of a larger reshaping of anthropological and linguistic field research along dialogical, collaborative lines, only in this case even the dead will be heard from" (173).

A bit academically abstruse, Anthony Woodbury concludes the quintet with a study of Central Alaskan Yupik. "Formally, three distinct types of recurrent, hierarchic organizations characterized

the components: nondiscrete hierarchy (in pause phrasing), discrete hierarchy (in prosodic phrasing and syntactic constituency), and numerically constrained hierarchy (in form-content parallelism in the narrative, and in a variety of components in the song)" (214). This is linguistics with a vengeance. "Do you picture it," a Zuni informant once asked Tedlock, "or do you just write it down?"

All discourse about the poetics of translation narrows to one cutting edge, regardless of the alleged accuracy of transliteration or structured depth into the "other": Does the verse work in its renewed form? If it doesn't, the translation has sidetracked its original into limbo. And how might the neglected condition of native texts be improved? Every social scientist who aspires to translate "poetry" might seriously study contemporary verse, try writing some in a workshop, and read gifted poets and translators working in American English this century (for example, Ezra Pound on the classics, W. S. Merwin on the moderns, Stephen Mitchell on Rilke). It helps to listen between the lines for the overtones that truly distinguish poetry. "Let each sing the panaceaic virtues of his verses," Anthony Mattina says in *Recovering the Word* (sequel anthology to Brian Swann's *Smoothing the Ground*, big collections to frame *Native American Discourse*), "but object when either appoints himself guardian of the texts . . . the worthiest texts will require the least architectural support."

*Aren tua:: = i = ll' nang::qerr:-lun'.*

[My, well now that's it, it's over.]

—Central Alaskan Yupik tale (232).

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**Southwest Indian Drypainting.** By Leland C. Wyman. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983. 343 pages. \$55.00 Cloth.

Anthropology seems to have finally found a reason for its existence besides cross-cultural analytical comparisons and vivisectionist philosophy, at least that seems to be the way the turf looks