

Nice Use of Words

Deuteronomy 6:4-5

Ízrel dine'é nohkíinii, da'íísínółts'áá'; Bóhólníihii nihiDiyin God t'áá bí t'éí Bóhólníihii nílí.⁵
Áko Bóhólníihii nihiDiyin God ayóó'ádeínóh'núigo nihijéí t'áá át'é bee áádóó nihii' sizíiinii
t'áá át'é bee índá nihe'adziil t'áá át'é bee ayóó'ádeínóh'ní. (Deuteronomy 6:4-5)¹

Comment: Notice especially the word *ayóó'ádeínóh'núigo* ("loving"), in line 2. It provides a preview at the beginning of the verse (*Áko Bóhólníihii nihiDiyin God ayóó'ádeínóh'núigo . . .*, "So, loving the Lord your God . . .") which is taken up and matched by a summary at the end of the verse (*. . . t'áá át'é bee ayóó'ádeínóh'ní, ". . . with all of [this] you [must] love Him"*). The verse could survive the deletion of *ayóó'ádeínóh'núigo* leading into the last clause, but doing that would render it ordinary.

Psalm 68:17

Tsindaabaas bijáád naakiígíí yee dah deínéehii éí diyingo naal'a'í naadiindi míl, áádóó míldi ałk'i náámíilgo ánéeláá'. Dził Sáinaigi Bóhólníihii diyingo hólónígi át'éego éí bitahgi hóló. (Psalm 68:17)

Comment: In Psalm 68:17 I like the whole first sentence, but especially the numbers. The Sentence could be translated literally as, "Those who bear up [these] chariots are angels who number twenty thousand, and thousands upon thousands." Alternatively, one could say, "one thousand upon another." This latter gloss might make indifferent or even clumsy English, but in Navajo it is wonderfully evocative.

Isaiah 1:18

K'ad hágo haa'íshá' dít baa nídít'ííł, ní Bóhólníihii. Azhá nihibaahági át'éii éí t'áá íyisí lichxíí' nidi, yas nahalingo ligai dooleek; azhá diłhíilgo lichxíí' nidi aghaałgaiigi át'éego ligai doo. (Isaiah 1:18)

Comment: The second sentence of Isa 1:18 is exquisite. Literally it reads, "Even if your sin is really red, it will be white like snow; even if it is dark red it will be white like white wool." The extra sparkle here has to do with the reference to wool. Not all wool on the reservation is white. Some sheep are black. So just saying "wool" doesn't convey the whole idea. The comparison is between whiteness and, not just wool, but white wool.

2 Corinthians 6:13

Nábidinínáádéé' nihí ałdó' danihijéí bee ayóó'ádanihíínóh'núí le'; ha'áłchíní bich'í' yájítí'ígí át'éego yáshtí'go ádíshní. (2 Corinthians 6:13)

¹ Navajo Bible quotations are from *Diyin God Bizaad. The Holy Bible in Navajo*. Revised edition. New York: American Bible Society, 2000.

Comment: The last clause of 2 Corinthians 6:13 has a three-fold repetition of the idea of speaking: *ha'átchíní bich'í' yájíłti'ígi át'éego* ("Like one speaking to his children") *yáshti'go* ("as I speak") *ádíshní* ("I say thus"). In English this might seem like overstatement, but in Navajo the repetition is sensitive and just nice.

1 Timothy 1:17

Doo nihonít'i'góó hoogáańi biyi' Aláahgo Naat'áanii, doo daatsaahii, doo yit'íinii, t'áá bí t'éi Diyin God [hóyáanii], hool'áagóó ahóyéel'áagóó ı̄ niljı̄ doo, ında baa ha'niih doo! T'áá ákót'ée doo. (1 Timothy 1:17)

Comment: This verse is much more elegant in Navajo than in English, or in Greek. There is a four-fold repetition of the nominalizer *-ii* ("the one who") before pauses in the first clause, and then a three-fold repetition of the future marker *doo* ("will be") before pauses in the second clause. The four members of the first series are *Aláahgo Naat'áanii* ("King"), *doo daatsaahii* ("immortal"), *doo yit'íinii* ("invisible"), and *hóyáanii* ("wise"). The three members of the second series are *ı̄ niljı̄ doo* ("honor"), *baa ha'niih doo* ("glory"), and *T'áá ákót'ée doo* ("Amen"). The English (NIV in this case) says all the right things, but in Navajo the words rhyme. I think of a paean of praise as praise coming in waves. That's what this verse does in Navajo. The natural poetry of the lines is punctuated with slight pauses and – read correctly – the effect is powerful.

2 Timothy 2:11-13

Kóhá'núinii éi t'áá aaníi: Hoł dasinii'náago, hoł ałdó' dahinii'náa doo; ¹² hada'íinılńúigo, hoł ałdó' nihídahólnúih doo; doo hwééhasin da hodii'núigo, hó ałdó' doo hwééhasin da nihizhdidoonı̄; ¹³ hada'íinı̄dlı̄i bi'oh náádleeł nidi, hó t'éi t'áá áłahjı̄ ha'ahódlı, háálá t'áá hó ts'ídá doo áts'áájı̄ jódle' át'ée da. (2 Timothy 2:11-13)

Comment: I don't have space in this comment to do justice to the structure of the present passage, but let me just point out that there is some sound symbolism at work in the sequence of verb stems. The artistry is enhanced when the endings are added (*-náago*, *-náa doo*; *-núigo*, *-niih doo*; *-núigo*, *-niit*), at least in the early clauses, but here is a summary of just the stems:

Verse	Stem (1)	Gloss (1)	Stem (2)	Gloss (2)
Vs. 11	-ná	"die"	-ná	"live"
Vs. 12a	-ní	"endure"	-níih	"rule"
Vs. 12b	-ní (Ipfv)	"say"	-niit (Fut)	"say"
Vs. 13a	-dlı	"faithful"	-dleeł (Prog)	"become"
Vs. 13b	-dlı	"faithful"	-dle' (Opv)	"be"

In this sequence all the stems in the first column are open (CV), while the openness of the stems in the second stem column undergoes a gradual shift from open (CV), to closed with the weakest of final consonants (CVh), to closed with a continuant (CVł, twice), and then closed with an obstruent (CV'). This much has to do with stem finals. (I'm ignoring differences of length and tone here. There's a pattern involving tone as well.) In regard to stem initials, notice that initial consonants in the two columns match in every row. In the first three rows both stems begin with *lnl* (a sound which does not stop the flow of air) and in the last two rows they both begin with *ldl* (a sound which does stop the flow of air but then releases it). Thus, (1) the initial consonants match and (2) become gradually stronger, if we could put it that way, in regard to

the way they restrict the flow of air. The vowels in the first three rows also (1) correspond across columns and (2) in the last two rows, where the vowels do contrast, they do so in corresponding ways.

At the beginning of the passage notice that *dasinii'náago* (lit., "having died") and *dahinii'náa doo* ("will live") look almost identical in Navajo. The two words have widely different derivations, but they look almost identical. Across the remaining rows there is a gradual increase in the level of difference or contrast between columns. The cumulative effect of these background considerations does not force itself on the attention, but on reflection it is simply magical. Perhaps the translators were not thinking of such things as they worked, but the effect is the same as if they were.

Hebrews 8:8

Nidi Diyin God éi diné ba'át'e' yik'ee doo bił hóozhòdgdóó ání: Jó'akon, Ízrel dine'é índá Júdah dine'é bee aha'deet'á ániidíígíí bee bił ahadadi'deesht'áańii baa hodoolzhishígíí bich'í' yoołkááł, ní Bóhólníihii. (Hebrews 8:8)

Comment: The thing I like about the wording here is the layered way in which the coming of the new covenant is referred to. First we have an untensed reference to the covenant as being new (*bee aha'deet'á ániidíígíí*, "the covenant which is new," i.e., "new covenant"), then a reference to the covenant as being future (*bee bił ahadadi'deesht'áańii*, "the covenant which will be made"), then a reference to the time for it approaching (*baa hodoolzhishígíí*, "the time which will come"), then another reference to time (*bich'í' yoołkááł*, "the day is approaching") in which the post position *bich'í'* (lit., "up to it") brings the level of expectation or sense of waiting to a climax. The cumulative effect of all of this is some truly elegant Navajo.

James 1:7

Diné ákójít'éii éi t'áadoo le'é Bóhólníihii bits'áádéé' nídideeshlééł t'áadoo jiníziní nijigháa doo. (James 1:7)

Comment: This verse would have been complete without the last two words, but putting them on bring the verse to life. In this way, "Don't let him think . . ." becomes, "Don't let him go around thinking . . .," which might not sound special in English, but the Navajo turn of phrase is nice.