

Mrs. Minnie Showaway's "Coyote and the Dogs": Structure and meaning in a Sahaptin narrative

Henry Morrison

Tribal linguist, Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation in Oregon

Introduction: This paper consists of three parts: the text of a Umatilla Sahaptin myth by Mrs. Minnie Wesley Showaway, originally collected by Bruce Rigsby (and used here by his kind permission), a translation of this text, and an analysis. The text and translation are presented in verse form, according to procedures for the discovery of such form in oral texts which have been developed by Dell Hymes; the analysis explains and justifies this verse presentation and points out correspondances between the units thus discovered and the development of the semantic structure of the myth. The aim of the paper is to buttress Hymes' theory of "measured verse" by showing that (at least in this one instance) the structure discovered through application of Hymes' principles is isomorphic with the semantic burden of the myth.

Text:

- A(1) awtya mĩmi iwača čautanán áxʷay
anakuš ʷáaxʷ čí kákyatun
tunxʷtunx
čaw áxʷay tanán iwača
(2) anaku patamanwiya čaana tiičamna
ku patamanwiya kʷusikʷusina
ku načš ayat ku načš winš
panišayšana wałamałani ----
panišayšana kʷusikʷusiyayma kʷiini
(3) ku tanantya awku mĩmi pawača
anakuš čí iwa ʷáaxʷtun káky číkuuk
B(4) paqʷinunxana
"pakʷiyanəmš"
ku pamápalataxana kunki kʷusikʷusimiki wapáwatki
ʷáaxʷmiš wapawat
(5) patáwiyanaawiyawana
"aw kʷusikʷusimatyaxaš čí pawá"
patáwilaalakʷənʷana
anatunayaytya aw iwinaxama ʷáaxʷ čí wíwaniči káky
C(6) iwyáawiya spilyáy ikʷən
paqʷinuna
ipxʷina
"míš číkuš pawá?
pamáptpalatana
payaqaynača niityaw

- pamáwinaptpalatana kʷusikʷusimiki
kʷusikʷusini paqáwa"
pá ašwanana
(7) paqalakʷa kʷusikʷusima
pasamxana huuy
awku ipxʷina spilyáy
"ii ka awku kʷusikʷusima pawá
ku tanan patxanaša
ku čawšín paqʷinunxá ikʷən
ku taay kʷaykuš pawata awku?
čawtyamun pačakʷčkta kʷay anakuš tuntáatpas
awtya tóminwatya awata kʷusikʷusimí pəmmin
wáwnakšašpa"
(kutya pasəmwiʷanatyá kʷusikʷusima)
ku patamanwiya awku
"čawpamun ikuš wata
awtyapam wata kʷusikʷusi
anaku tanan iwyáawita
kupam paʷanita kʷusikʷusiyawticáwastyá"
páwilaalakʷa awku spilyayn
D(8) ʷáaxʷna patamanwiya
anakuš čí iwa káky ʷáaxʷtun
pawíwanica
iwinana awku
kʷaku maal awku iwinána
E(9) kʷyáam awku kʷusikʷusi patxanana awku
"tanán awiwaš čʷaapakʷa
kupam paqʷinuta
"ee kʷay iwa amúʷamu kʷusikʷusi"
kupam pawənpəta
kʷaypam awku iyawticáwas paʷanita
tanán iwəmta
ku iwəhwəktə
ataaxʷatanam tanána
ikušpam wata"
F(10) kʷay aw kʷaal
Translation:
A(1) Now long ago there were no people yet,
just all the kinds of creatures that are here,
all different sorts.
There were no people yet.
(2) When this earth was created,
the dog was created as well
and one was female and one male.
Waiłamałani and ---- were dwelling there,

- those two Dogs were dwelling there.
 (3) And the people that were long ago 10
 were just like all the sorts of creatures here today.
- B(4) The dogs would see
 "People are coming this way"
 and they would put on their dog costumes
 all sorts of costumes. 15
- (5) The people would come to their place
 "Oh, these are just dogs here, I guess!"
 They would leave them.
 All the creatures you could name would come this way.
- C(6) Coyote arrived there. 20
 He saw them,
 he thought,
 "How is it that they're like this?
 They've put on something,
 they've run into the house, 25
 they've put on dog-things,
 and suddenly they're dogs!"
 He followed them inside.
- (7) The dogs are gathering together.
 He spoke to them -- useless! 30
 And then Coyote thought:
 "Yes, although they're dogs
 they turn into people
 and no one sees that.
 And what's the point of their being like that? 35
 They'll just be dogs.
 No longer will they take off those things like
 clothes,
 now for good he'll have the dog-things on his
 body."
 (And dogs could speak then)
 And then he ordained: 40
 "No longer will you be this way.
 Now you'll be dogs
 when the people come
 and they'll make you their dog-companion."
 And then Coyote left them. 45
- D(8) All of them he ordained,
 all the sorts of creatures as they are now.
 He named them
 and then he went away,
 wonder just how far he went away. 50

- E(9) Then they turned into real dogs.
 "The people are coming close this way now
 and they'll see you:
 'ee that's a cute little dog!"
 and they'll pick you up 55
 and then they'll make you their companion.
 People will come this way
 and he will bark --
 you'll warn the people,
 that's how you'll be." 60

F(10) That's all

Analysis: This brief text has been divided into lines, verses (marked by numbers), and stanzas (marked by letters) according to principles discovered by Dell Hymes from an analysis of Chinookan texts. The eastern Chinookans were in close contact, culturally and socially, with Sahaptin-speaking groups, and Mrs. Showaway was originally from Tenino and had spent a good many years at Celilo, two Sahaptin villages in close contact with the Chinookan Wascos. Previous unpublished research by this author and by Virginia Hymes has established the existence of the "measured verse" patterning in Sahaptin texts in a form very similar to that initially discovered by Dell Hymes in Chinookan.

The discovery of the line, verse, and stanza units of "measured verse" is based on syntactic and semantic parallelism, change of actor, and pattern of action. Unfortunately, space does not permit a full exposition of the principles of "measured verse" and of the procedures for discovering it; for a complete explanation of these topics, the reader is referred to Hymes (1981, especially chapters 4, 5, 6, and 9). Here it will have to suffice to state that, in general, a line is considered to be marked by the presence (usually explicit, but sometimes implicit) of a finite verb; a verse, by the action of a single principal actor who is usually, although not always, the grammatical subject; and a stanza, by the presence throughout of the same two principal actors; actors can be either individual or collective. When the text is divided in this way, it is found that the same rhetorical pattern occurs frequently on both the stanza and verse levels; this is a triadic pattern of action, exemplified schematically in the sequence "Coyote started out/ he was going/ he arrived", in which the first unit (line or verse) describes the onset of an action, the second unit its continuation or ongoing nature, and the third unit its outcome. For mnemonic purposes, Hymes designates this pattern as "onset -- ongoing -- outcome" (1981: 320). It should be noted that the discovery procedures for the patterning marked out in this text are not mathematically rigorous; only in the interaction between the rhetorical pattern just mentioned and the syntactic and other criteria given previously does a patterning emerge which, as

Hymes notes, "is flexible in keeping with specific narrative situations, but inescapable," which recurs "at all levels of organization," and which "segments and organizes the material without discontinuity, without leftovers" (*ibid.*).

We will now explain and justify the organization of the text and translation as presented. Stanza A is an introduction which identifies most of the actors of the piece (but not Coyote): the animal people (*tanán* "people" in lines 1 and 4 of course refers to human beings) and the dogs. The principal actor in verse 1 is the animal people; they are explicitly the subject in lines 2 and 3 and implicitly so in lines 1 and 4, in which the denial of the presence of human beings establishes the narrative in the mythic time when animal people were actors in stories. This verse is marked off by structural symmetry; the words *iwača čaw-tanán axway* are repeated in line 4, with an inversion which places the verb *iwača* at the end. Furthermore, although there is no verbal similarity between lines 2 and 3, semantically they are parallel, in that both assert that the animal people were of all different species. This verse, therefore, is marked by an ABBA pattern.

In verse 2 the principal actor is the dogs. Here I have undertaken, not without hesitation but with, I believe, ample justification, to make an emendation in the text as spoken by Mrs. Showaway and recorded by Rigsby in order to eliminate a clearly extraneous element. In the original text, the words *ku paq' inunxana* "and they saw" precede the clauses here given as lines 8 and 10. The anacoluthon created at both points by these words indicates that Mrs. Showaway (who according to Rigsby's introduction to this text had some difficulty with sequencing at the beginning of her recitation) was anticipating the necessary *ku paq' inunxana* of line 12 and corrected herself twice in order to finish stanza A. Mrs. Showaway's self-correction at these two points goes far toward confirming the reality of the pattern of organization posited in the presentation of the text. At both places she could have continued the sentence begun with *ku paq' inunxana* without omitting any information essential to the story; in line 8 she simply gives the name of one dog, forgetting the other name; and lines 10 and 11 are a recapitulation of information already given. If, then, she felt compelled to correct herself and perform those lines, the reason cannot have been a need to supply additional narrative information; it must rather have been that she felt the need to fill out a formal structure. What this formal structure is becomes apparent if the two extraneous occurrences of *ku paq' inunxana* are deleted, as has been done here.

With this emendation made, verse 2 proves to have a symmetry of its own: the first and last two lines both involve repetition of a verb -- *patamarwiya* "ordained" or "created" in 5 and 6,

panišaysana "dwell" in 8 and 9. Furthermore, line 7 clearly has an internal verbal symmetry as well.

The principal actor of verse 3 is once again the animal people; hence the entire stanza is marked by strong symmetry. Not only does the third verse have the same actor as the first, but the two verses are verbally very similar; most of the words or morphemes in line 1 are found also in line 10, and a similar relationship holds between lines 2 and 11.

It can therefore be concluded that Mrs. Showaway corrected herself in line 8 in order to balance the first two lines of verse 2, and in line 10 to fill out the formal symmetry of the whole introductory stanza. This is strong evidence for the psychological reality of these "measured verse" structures.

With stanza B the narrator moves into the actual action of the story. Its actors are the dogs and the animal people generally, the former being the principal actor in verse 4, the latter in verse 5. Both verses are of four lines and display a certain formal resemblance to each other; but the symmetry here is not as marked as in the introductory stanza; this is not surprising, since story openings generally tend, in this as in other oral narrative traditions, to be more formulaic and more formally organized than the rest of the text. The second line is both verses 4 and 5 is in direct discourse. (Line 13 is not marked as being direct discourse by Rigsby, but both the present tense inflection and the presence of the cislocative suffix *-m-* show that it is in fact in direct discourse, as subordinate clauses after verbs of speech or perception invariably are in Sahaptin.) The fourth lines of each verse bear some resemblance to each other in their use of the stem *ʔaax* "all" (the final labialized uvular is unrounded before the following *m* in line 15); both lines indicate that all sorts of costumes (verse 4) or creatures (verse 5) are involved in the action. Verse 5 is held together by a parallelism between its first and last lines: both describe the coming of animal people to the dogs. This parallelism is not only semantic but also morphological; the verbs of both lines are built on the root *-wi-* "go". This fifth verse also shows a pattern of action which will recur later in the text. The people come (line 16), they perceive (17), they leave (18): the rhetorical pattern of "onset -- ongoing -- outcome" that was noted above, with the middle term ("ongoing") being a perception, as was often the case in other Sahaptin material analyzed by this author. This triadic pattern of arriving, perceiving or acting, and leaving recurs throughout the body of the story and serves to break it up into narrative units which coincide with the verse and stanza divisions made on syntactic criteria and on the basis of change of actors or place.

Such a pattern becomes immediately apparent in stanza C, in which the main action of the story takes place. Coyote arrives

at the dogs' place, he perceives and "recreates" them, and he leaves. This overall action is broken into two units by Coyote's leaving the point at which he originally arrives (presumably in front of the dogs' dwelling) to go into their house itself (line 28). Coyote is the principal actor (that is, the active character) in both units, and the dogs are, of course, the other actor. It is therefore clearly justified, in terms of our criteria, to regard lines 20 to 45 as one stanza. (Line 46 begins a new stanza in which the animal people are the other actor beside the principal actor, who is still Coyote.) It also seems justified, on the basis of the pattern of action found throughout the story, to regard line 28 as the end of a verse; in this way the stanza is separated into two verses, each of which has the same pattern of action as the whole stanza. This verse break is marked by an abrupt change in grammatical subject: line 29, like line 39, has as its subject the dogs, while the subject throughout the rest of the stanza is Coyote. Now line 39 is clearly an example of explanatory material which, Rigsby notes in his introduction, Mrs. Showaway introduced into the text for his benefit (and which presumably would not be present in a performance for a Native audience, who would be presumed to know that the dogs and other animal people of the mythic age could talk). For the moment, therefore, it will be left out of account in this analysis as an extraneous element -- although it will shortly appear that it is not as extraneous to the "measured verse" structure of this text as might appear at first glance. The first verse of this stanza is then seen to follow the familiar threefold pattern of arrival (line 20), perception (21-27), and departure (28). Verse 7, however, seems to have a fivefold rather than a threefold pattern. Line 29 describes what is happening inside the dog's house; being in the present tense (and having the root element -qa- "suddenly", which also occurs in the last line of Coyote's speech in line 27), it apparently represents Coyote's perception of the dogs coming together in the house (and should perhaps be written in quotation marks) and therefore indicates that Coyote is already in the house. In short, this line can be taken to indicate Coyote's arrival at the place of action of the verse; it is probably simply an "etic" representation of the "emic" unit "arrival". This is followed by an unsuccessful attempt to speak to the dogs, then by a perception (lines 31-38), then by Coyote's act of "ordaining" (lines 40-44), and finally by his departure (45). This fivefold pattern is reminiscent of pattern found in Chinookan narrative by Dell Hymes and by Virginia Hymes and myself in Sahaptin narrative; five is the pattern number in the Native Pacific Northwest.

Line 39 was, as noted, left out of account; it is simply explanatory and describes neither perception nor action. It is, however, not simply extraneous. Line 29, with its abrupt switch

of grammatical subject, may have been selected to fill the "arrival" slot in the verse in order to give a sort of balance to 39, which of course has the same grammatical subject. It appears that the pressure toward balance and symmetry operates even when material is introduced that would not appear in a normal native performance. This, of course, is what is to be expected if the rules that produce the verse structure are genuinely productive; they should operate to organize whatever material needs to be presented in a given performance.

In stanza D, the principal actor is still Coyote, but the actor who is the object of his activity is now the animal people. A threefold structure is realized in five lines: Coyote "ordains" the animals (lines 46-47), he names them with their various names (line 48; the element -wi- in the verb implies a plurality of names), and departs (lines 49-50). It can be legitimately be asked whether the depiction of his departure is extended (without any narrative necessity) into two lines in order to balance the two-line complex sentence with which the stanza opens.

In stanza E, the actors are once again Coyote and the dogs, at least overtly; Coyote is clearly the principal actor, the active agent, in line 51, for, although the dogs are grammatically the subject, the transformation described is Coyote's doing. His speech in lines 52-60 introduces another actor, who has not been mentioned since the first verse of the story: humanity. In fact humanity and dogs could be regarded as the actors of this stanza; Coyote merely narrates their interaction.

The formulaic story close is here regarded, following Hymes, as a separate unit. It could, however, be regarded as a substitute for the final ("outcome") element in stanza E (or as an "etic" representation of the "emic" unit "outcome"). The stanza would then have the usual threefold pattern of action: the dogs' transformation (line 51; "onset"), Coyote's perception of the consequences of that transformation (lines 52-60; "ongoing"), and the end of the story ("outcome").

The organizational pattern outlined here can explain an apparent illogicality in the text. In line 45, Coyote is described as leaving the dogs; yet in stanza E, after he has supposedly left them, he is described as addressing them. In terms of normal narrative sequence (as that is usually understood by literate writers of prose) this does not make sense; but it is in fact a simple consequence of the formal organization of the story. Line 45 serves not so much to depict a moment in the action as to mark off the end of a unit; it indicates that another unit with other actors follows. It might still be asked why stanza E follows D instead of preceding it; why does the narrator move from speaking of the dogs to speaking of the transformation of all animals (which might seem to be itself the culmination of the story) back to speaking once again of the dogs? The answer to this question can be found by considering the structure of relationships within the story; in so doing, one will

find that the units of meaning in the story correspond to the stanza divisions that have been made.

The first stanza simply introduces two actors without setting up any relationship between them; all the subsequent stanzas, however, depict a particular relationship between the two actors. In stanza B, the animal people clearly consider themselves somehow superior to the dogs, who are, in their term, "just dogs." Let us symbolize a relationship of this sort by the expression animals:dogs, in which the term on the left side of the colon is the superior or active term, while that on the right side is inferior or passive. Expressed in these terms, the relationships set up in stanzas C and D are Coyote:dogs and Coyote:animals respectively. While the overt actors in stanza E are Coyote and the dogs, in reality, as we have noted above, the stanza is concerned with the depiction of the relationship of humans to dogs, and the relationship set up is humans:dogs; it corresponds closely to the animals:dogs relationship of stanza B. Since, according to our notation, the relationship between the terms on the left and right sides of the colons is always the same, we are justified in using a symbol :: to denote equivalence of relationship and in setting up the following expression as a proportion: animals:dogs::Coyote:dogs::Coyote:animals::humans:dogs. This proportion expresses in summary form the relationships depicted successively in stanzas B through E.

Coyote thus serves as a middle term or mediator by which animals are moved from the left side of the first binary relationship to the right side of the third. Still more, however, is implied by this sequence of relationships. If Coyote is to dogs as Coyote is to animals, and Coyote is to dogs as humans are to dogs, then clearly humans are to dogs as humans are to animals; another element must be added to the proportion above: animals:dogs::Coyote:dogs::Coyote:animals::humans:dogs::humans:animals. This last element is not explicitly represented by a stanza in the narrative, but it is certainly present implicitly.

The story thus moves from a mythic world in which there are no people, or rather, in which animals are the only people, to one in which there is a twofold distinction of animals and people. This distinction is foreshadowed by the relationship of the animal people to the dogs in the mythic age; this relationship, however, is a fanciful one, a deception created by the dogs themselves. In short, the story tells of the humanization of the world, that is, of the differentiation of humanity from the animals and from nature generally. The mythic age is unitary, without opposition of human:animal; the human world is dualistic in this regard. The problem for the myth-teller is how to bring forth a dualistic world from a unitary one. Coyote is the indispensable mediator in this transformation, as the proportion above indicated: he is an animal who is capable of relating to other animals as humans relate to animals; he carries the human:animal contradiction

around with him in his very nature. The choice of Coyote for this role (here as elsewhere in Native North America) cannot be fortuitous; it may well spring from the fact that Coyote is so dog-like an animal, and dogs are, of course, known to North American peoples generally as domesticated, as part of the human world, hence as to some degree humanized; yet at the same time coyotes are unmistakably wild animals; contradiction, in short is inherent in their nature, just as it is in the myth.

It is now clear why stanza D is necessary and why it must precede stanza E: the Coyote:animals relationship must be established before the humans:dogs relationship can be understood to imply the human:animals relationship. Without that stanza, without the expression of the relationship Coyote:animals which brings the animals to the left side of the colon, the myth could be taken to imply that humans and animals are on the same plane. Hence, in this myth at least, the serial order of the narrative is essential to the expression of its meaning; the serial order is isomorphic with the structure of its argument. Each of the relational elements in the proportion given above (save the last) is expressed within a stanza, the stanza boundaries having been determined according to criteria developed in Hymes' theory of "measured verse". This correspondance between units of "measured verse" and the units of meaning in the argument of this myth is evidence of the reality and significance of the verse divisions made in the presentation of this text. It remains to seek to discover such correspondances between semantic structure and presentational form in other texts of this and other oral traditions. Bibliographic reference: Hymes, Dell. 1981. "In vain I tried to tell you" Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. Note on orthography: In the presentation of the text I have adopted Rigsby's orthography with the following exceptions: 1) the mark of glottalization ' is written after the affected consonant rather than over it as in Rigsby's text 2) ə has been substituted for i.

