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ABSTRACT

A Naishan Dene woman makes a semantic leap in equating mythological monsters with dinosaurs, not unlike the way someone might equate dragons with dinosaurs. The woman specifically discusses her reasons for equating these two concepts.

Keywords: creativity; folklore; Naishan Dene; hand games; Apachean language.

All cultures are confronted with a constantly changing world in terms of new objects being invented, new concepts appearing and even old things appearing suddenly from an unknown or forgotten past. As a result, each culture is confronted with finding ways to discuss these things and ideas. New words may be created (e.g. telephone) by compounding out of foreign terms (or even native terms as in German *fernsprecher*, tele=fern=distant and sprecher=speaker=akin to phone).

Such coinages were rampant in languages like Hebrew, in which revitalization meant finding words for a host of inventions and concepts that had developed since the language became somewhat "time-locked".

Occasionally, even spoken languages are suddenly confronted with a concept or thing which has no native equivalent. The means by which these new constructions come into existence are discussed in Barnett's book *Innovation*, in which several kinds of relationships between concepts are seen and used as analogies in new creation.

Leaps of imagination and creativity are not often documented in field work, so examples of such leaps are particularly interesting. This particular example occurred among the Naishan Dene with an extremely bright and perceptive Naishan Dene woman in her seventies. A little background is necessary to understand the event.

Naishan Dene mythology involves many stories. One involves the creation of the world, or perhaps more accurately, the way in which the world comes to be in its current shape.

One story belonging to the Naishan Dene creation mythology recounts how in that time which precedes the coming of people into the world, the monsters called *niizchre*[2] (/níízt∫è/) played hand games with the animals.

Hand games are well known on the Plains and are played by two teams who face off against one another in an arbor. Generally, score keepers sit at the end of the arbor looking down the space between the two teams. The teams gamble, often betting heavily on the game.

Two members on one team are each given a pair of short bones, one of which has a red stripe around it. Each player who has the bones hides them behind his back and then brings his hands out front. The bones are sufficiently long that the ends protrude outside of the hands, but the red stripe on the one bone is concealed.

As the side whose members have the bones starts to sing, the two players who are hiding the bones begin to swing their arms in front of them in a circular motion in time to the music.

A player on the other side has been chosen to guess which hands conceal the red stripe. By a variety of hand signals the guesser indicates which hands are thought to conceal the bones. Correct guesses score points until one team wins.

In this particular story set in mythological times, the arbor has been constructed on the banks of a stream. The monsters sit on one side with their

backs to the stream, while the animals sit on the other. The animals each bet on the outcome of specific sets of guesses. Skunk, for example, bets a stripe of fur down his back. He loses and as a result skunks today have a white stripe down their backs.

During the game, there is much activity which need not concern us here. It should be mentioned for those particularly interested in this folklore that Coyote is present at the hand game. He constantly slips in and out changing sides so that he is always on the side of the team that is winning at that moment.

As the game builds in intensity and moves toward its final moments, a huge rainstorm comes, and the creek on which the arbor has been constructed swells until the bank is washed away. The side of the arbor on which the *niizchre* are sitting

ent direction. Although it is clearly not "dinosaurs look like rocks", it is closer to the idea that *niizchre* become like dinosaurs. In addition, *niizchre* live before people do. The process of living and the process of turning to stone, rather than appearance seems to predominate in the association, and hence a kind of Apachean rule seems to be being followed. This parallels many studies showing that the Naishan, even after hundreds of years of separation from the other Apache, and a long association with the Kiowa, continue to pursue Apachean linguistic and cultural patterns.

It is unfortunate that the number of Naishan Dene speakers is extremely small — perhaps a half a dozen or so. It would have been interesting to see when and if the use of the term became a standard

3. Irene Poolaw (nee Chalepah), who has demonstrated the most incredible insight and perception into Naishan Dene language and culture and who is one of the most giving people I have ever met.

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