

“Please Read Loose”: Intimate Grammars and Unexpected Languages in  
Contemporary Navajo Literature [Abstract]  
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This paper uses Philip Deloria's *Indians in Unexpected Places* as a lens by which to understand the expectations and reviews of Navajo author Blackhorse Mitchell's *Miracle Hill*. Written in Navajo English, the book, from an introduction by T. D. Allen to a number of reviews of the book in the popular press, consistently misrecognized the language of Mitchell's book as dysfluent or a failure and thus dismissed the creative aspects of Mitchell's use of language. This paper focuses in on the reviews of the book as well as Mitchell's own discussions of what he was attempting to do in the poem “The Drifting Lonely Seed” included in the book. Rather than understand Mitchell's work as dysfluent, it can be understood as a critique of Western educational regimes that silenced or ignored Native voices. It is argued that it is through such stigmatized linguistic codes that an affective bond—an intimacy of grammar—can be forged between language users and their languages. While non-Navajos may devalue Navajo English or trivialize it, some Navajos see its use as creating an intimate sociality between Mitchell and themselves. Finally, it is argued that understanding the dominant outside expectations of American Indian languages (including Englishes) and what forms those languages can take may suggest something of the ways astonishing inequalities have been naturalized. The recognition of American Indian Englishes as languages worth taking seriously, as “beautiful Englishes” and intimate grammars, would be one useful starting point in destabilizing such inequalities.

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