



Navajo

A Collection of NavajoWOTD Mini-Lessons

Version 2

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Navajo: A Collection of NavajoWOTD Mini-Lessons

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Preface

You have in front of you a collection that began as a series of blog posts centered around the Navajo language. This book is meant to give you a simple and orderly way to read NavajoWOTD posts, each of which contains a unique word from Diné Bizaad (the Navajo language). Many posts exceed the “word-of-the-day” concept (WOTD), which means multiple words are given in a day. Hopefully you will find the excess more helpful than distracting.

You can access these word posts anytime at navajowotd.com and you can also follow the links in this book by simply clicking the specially-formatted words in blue. Nearly all posts have an accompanying sound byte for pronunciation, all hosted through a web-service called SoundCloud. You’ll find these audio clips at soundcloud.com/navajowotd and also attached to word posts.

If you bought or otherwise created an account on the Leanpub website to download this book, you’ll be eligible to receive periodical updates which include new content, updated formatting, additional sections, and generally things that will make the book better. NavajoWOTD relies heavily on the feedback of readers, so don’t hesitate to reach out and offer suggestions. Your feedback will make this a better resource for everyone.

Thank you for supporting NavajoWOTD.

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Front Cover

The photo background on the cover of this book was taken Winter 2013 at Flagstaff, AZ.

February 2012

Yá'át'ééh

Literally: it is good (alternatively: it is well).

This is considered the Navajo 'hello,' so it can be used to greet people.

It can also be used with 'shíł' as in 'shíł yá'át'ééh' to mean 'I like it.'

Mą'iiłitsxoo'í

Literally: orange-colored coyote

Today's word is 'fox.' As you might have guessed, there are two parts to the Navajo name: mą'ii (referring to the coyote) and łitsxoo'í (which refers to the color orange).

You may also notice a similar word 'mą'ii deeshgiizh,' which can refer to the Navajo name for the Jemez people of New Mexico!

Atsinilt'ish

Literally: (this one's complicated...)

This is the Navajo word for 'lightning' (also sometimes written as 'atsinil-tlish). It's also the word used for 'electricity.'

The 'tlish' part is most likely referring to a *sound*, such as a loud clap (or, you can imagine a metal pot falling onto the hard floor).

It's hard to say exactly what the 'atsinil' part references (shoot us an email if you know).

Nishfį

Literally: I am.

This Navajo word is considered a type of verb – the type that expresses a state of being (also known as a neuter verb). Navajo verbs nearly always combine the action part with the point of view of the speaker. Since the point of view changes, the form of the verb changes accordingly (a conjugation).

Here, take a look at the forms this verb takes:

1. nishłį
2. nílį
3. nilį
4. niidlį
5. nohlį
6. nilį
7. daniidlį
8. danohlį
9. danilį

Here are their English counterparts:

1. I am
2. You are
3. (S)he/it is
4. We two are
5. You two are
6. Those two are
7. We three are
8. You three are
9. Those three are (7+8+9 are also used when speaking of groups larger than three)

So how is the verb used? Simple! Diné nishłį. I am Navajo. Diné nílį. You are Navajo. And so on.

As you can imagine, this is used frequently in Navajo conversation to express identity.

Tónteel

Tónteel translates approximately to ‘water that is wide.’

It is the Navajo name for an *ocean*.

I’ll break the word down further. ‘Tó’ means ‘water’ and ‘nteel’ (pronounced “ntyehhl” with the “nt” part sounding like the end of “don’t”) means ‘it is wide.’ Both parts of the word are used widely across the Navajo language in conjunction with other words and descriptors to name similar things.

Tł'ée'honaa'éeí

I was once told this word meant: the one carried at night. This is a Navajo word for 'moon.'

There are two common Navajo words for moon, but tł'ée'honaa'éeí is the one most commonly mispronounced.

See, in Navajo, if small details aren't strictly observed (i.e. tł'ée'honaa'éeí -> **tleeh**onaa'éeí, as is commonly mistaken) you risk being remembered as foul-mouthed. The latter example just made the conversation somewhat *vulgar*, and thereby *inappropriate* in most circumstances.

Maybe another day we'll feature an example.

Dóone'é

Navajo people use this word to refer to your first clan, specifically, and then to the rest of your clans more generally.

The Navajo clan system is another level in identifying one's self to new people. Everyone has four clans: the first is inherited from the mother, the second is inherited from the father, the third is from the mother's father, and then the fourth is from the father's father.

If you share clans with another person, then that means you are more than likely related – or at least you are considered to be family in the Navajo way. Therefore, you should always ask for another's clans to make sure you aren't closely related before you make any move to get with them. Clans also serve a greater purpose.

The clan system has been amazingly effective in fostering a sense of familial belonging and friendliness among Navajo people. Shared clans are great for meeting new relatives and creating new relationships no matter where you travel.

Abíní

In English, the Navajo word *abíní* means *morning*.

So say you wanted to greet people with a "good morning," you can use the word for "it is good" to create the Navajo phrase, "Yá'át'ée'h¹ abíní!"

Níyol

Here in northern AZ, yesterday was quite *windy*.

¹<http://navajowotd.com/post/17937688676/yaat-eeh>

Yesterday didn't start out **windy**, but towards the mid-day and to the afternoon the **wind** started to pick up. When the **wind** blows, some places on the reservation experience dust storms and dust devils (twisters) because it's so **windy**. That's what **wind** does when **wind** blows I guess.

Wind sounds weird to me after I use it a lot, so that's why I prefer the Navajo word for wind: *níyol*. You can use *níyol* as either a noun or a verb in the same way you would use either wind or (it is) windy, respectively.

Diné

Literally: the people.

If you were to take a survey of the world's languages, you'd find that not a small majority of them have a word for 'the people,' and that word would most likely also function as the common name for the people of that culture. Which is just a way of saying that *Diné* is what you call a Navajo in the Navajo language.

You can also say *Dine'é* to refer to the Navajo Nation, or to the Navajo people as a tribe or group rather than as an individual. Apart from using *Diné* as a word for Navajo, there is a more general *diné* that can be used to describe other groups of people.

For example, *Naakai dine'é* is a clan (*dóone'é*²) that refers to the Mexican People, which denotes an ancestor of that heritage.

You will also see the word *dineh* written instead to avoid pronouncing it as "dine."

²<http://navajowotd.com/post/18309588528/doonee>