

Linguistics for Arapaho Students

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The following explains some basic linguistic terms that may help you learn Arapaho a little bit better, use the Arapaho dictionary better, or use the Arapaho grammar and textbooks better. This is NOT intended as a guide for learning Arapaho. It is a reference guide to help you understand grammar a little better. Many people learn Arapaho without knowing any of these things, so you don't have to know the following information in order to speak Arapaho. But if you want to use Arapaho dictionaries or textbooks, knowledge of the terms below may be helpful.

The terms below are ordered in terms of complexity: the later terms on the list assume you understand what the earlier terms mean, and the earlier terms may be used as part of the definition of the later terms. However, you can consult the terms in any order if you want, and skip earlier ones if you already know what they mean.

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1. *Noun and Verb*

A Noun is a word for a thing, such as ‘ball,’ ‘woman,’ ‘eagle,’ or ‘love’ (the emotion, not the action)

A Verb is a word for an action, such as ‘drink,’ ‘think,’ ‘hit,’ or ‘see,’ OR (in Arapaho) for a description, such as ‘big,’ ‘blue,’ ‘fast,’ or ‘hungry.’

Test: are the following nouns or verbs in English?

Run
Man
Bird
Fly
Sing
Dance
Mouse
Anger

Answers: V, N, N, V, V, V, N, N

One special feature of Arapaho is that many ‘nouns’ are actually descriptive verbs: that is, the word names a thing, but the actual content of the word is a description. Here are some examples:

Heenisono’	Giraffe (lit. ‘it has a long neck’)
Honookowuubeet	Elephant (lit. ‘it has a bent nose’)
Niinihencebkoohut	Car (lit. ‘it goes on it’s own’)
Niihooyoo’	Egg Yolk (lit. ‘it is yellow’)

2. *Animate and Inanimate*

Animate means ‘living, moving’, inanimate is the opposite. Every single noun in Arapaho is automatically either animate or inanimate. The reason that this is important is that the exact verb-word used depends on whether the noun is animate or inanimate.

An example:

Biixuut ‘shirt’ (a noun, inanimate)
He3 ‘dog’ (a noun, animate)

Say you want to use a verb-word ‘white’ to describe the shirt and the dog. Then you have to say:

Nonoo**coo**’ biixuut = a white shirt
Nonoo**keihit** he3 = a white dog

Similarly, say you want to use a verb-word ‘blowing (in the wind)’. Then you have to say:

Nooh’oobeese’ biixuut = a white shirt is waving in the wind
Nooh’oobeesi’ he3 = a dog is getting blown around by the wind

This means that you always need to know whether a noun you are using is animate or inanimate. All truly living things are animate, and most non-living things are inanimate. However there are some non-living things which are also treated as animate by Arapaho speakers. Here is a list:

Body Parts: artery, bloodclot, boil, calf, fingernail, hip, kidney, knee, pupil of eye, shin, skin, snot, stomach, testicle, toenail, waist, wart, vein

New Terms based on Extension or Analogy: car, wagon (< ceremonial wheel), cross (< North Star), month (< moon), tire, wheel (< ceremonial wheel), radio (< spirit)

Other New Terms: pen/pencil

Other Old Terms: rock

Old Cultural Items: backrest, ball, belt, centerpole of Sun Dance lodge, doll, door, drum, feather, glove/mitten, pillow, pipe, plume, quill, red ceremonial paint, rock, rope, shoelace, spoon, tipi pole, top, toy(?), ceremonial wheel, ceremonial whistle, white buffalo robe, dipper(?), rattle

Plants: aspen?, bean, cactus, canteloupe, carrot, currant, gooseberry, gourd, gum/sap, mint, onion, pea, peyote, pine, poplar, pumpkin, rice, rose hip/tomato, raspberry, squash, strawberry, tobacco, tree/cottonwood, turnip, vine, watermelon

Weather Elements: hailstone, snow, snowball, thunder, whirlwind, fog(?)

All Heavenly Bodies: sun, moon, star, Morning Star

All Ghosts and Spirits (biitei, biibeet, betee3oo, cei3wooo, 3iikon(?))

In the dictionary, nouns are normally labelled NA (noun, animate) or NI (noun, inanimate), so you should be able to figure this out. In some dictionaries, only animate nouns are labelled, so if there is no label, then assume the noun is inanimate. If you don't know, or don't have a dictionary, just ask a fluent speaker to describe the thing as being 'white' and see which of the two forms of the verb-word they use, as in the examples above with dog and shirt.

The other question you may have is, once I know a noun is animate or inanimate, how do I know what variety of the verb to use with it? In the dictionary, normally verbs are labelled as AI and II, or else used in example sentences with animate or inanimate subjects. AI means Animate Subject, Intransitive Verb (don't worry about the second part for now). II means Inanimate Subject, Intransitive Verb. So use AI verbs for animate things, II verbs for inanimate things.

Test: Are the following animate or inanimate in Arapaho?

Niiteheibetiit ('help')
Ho'onooke ('rock')
Tei'yoonehe' ('child')
Wo'oo3 ('leg')
Wo'oh ('shoe')
Hotii ('wheel')
Hesnoot ('hunger, famine')

Answers: I, A, A, I, I, A, I

3. *Singular and Plural*

Singular means one of a thing (a noun), Plural means more than one. So ‘dog’ is singular, ‘dogs’ is plural. Nouns are always either singular or plural in Arapaho, and you can see the difference by the way the word changes at the end.

He3	dog (singular)
He3ebii	dogs (plural)

There are two basic ways to make plurals with Arapaho nouns. One is to add –ii (or a version of this, –uu), to either animate or inanimate nouns:

Hebes	beaver (animate noun)
Hebesii	beavers (plural)

Ho3	arrow (inanimate noun)
Ho3ii	arrows (plural)

Wox	bear (animate noun)
Woxuu	bears (plural)

The one common variant on this is words ending in –V’. These change to –Vi for the plural (V = any vowel):

Besiise’	eye (inanimate noun)
Besiisei	eyes (plural)

Heeni’	ant (animate noun)
Heenii	ants (plural)

The other way is to add –no or –ho to inanimate nouns, --no’ or –ho’ to animate nouns:

Niiboot	song (inanimate noun)
Niibootno	songs (plural)

Wotoo	pants (inanimate noun)
Wotooho	multiple pairs of pants (plural)

Hisei	woman (animate noun)
Hiseino’	women (plural)

Nii’eihii	bird (animate noun)
Nii’e(i)hiiho’	birds (plural)

Notice that this makes transcription a lot easier. If you are dealing with an animate noun, you know the basic plural will *always* have a final stop (-no' for ex.), and for inanimate nouns, there will *never* be a stop (-no for ex.). You should be able to hear this difference, but knowing what should or should not be there is very helpful, and saves you having to wonder and ponder.

There is not really a way to predict what the plural will be, but the dictionary should show you the right form of plural to use. There are a few nouns (like 'dog') where you have to make slightly more changes or different changes, but those are relatively uncommon.

Test: Are the following singular or plural?

Disgust
Eggs
Nest
Mice
Child
Love
Feathers

Answers: S, P, S, P, S, S, P

4. *Prefix and Suffix*

A prefix is a small addition put on the beginning of a word. It is not a separate word – it can only be used added to a noun or verb. A suffix is a small addition put on the ending of a word. Like a prefix, it is not a separate word, and can only be used when added to a noun or a verb. The endings used to make a noun plural (-ii, -no, -no', etc.) are suffixes. Common prefixes in Arapaho are nih- (makes an action occur in the past, as in nih-noohobe3en, 'I saw you') and heet- (makes an action occur in the future, as in heet-ce'noohobe3en, 'I will see you again'). Other common prefixes are to show an object is possessed: ne-biixuut, 'my shirt,' he-biixuut, 'your shirt,' hi-biixuut, 'his/her shirt.'

Test: Do the following words have prefixes or suffixes?

Heesnee-noo	I'm hungry
Heebiyoo-no'	spoons
Koo-hesnee	is she hungry?
Betoooot-no	dances
Ne-bei'ci3ei'i	my money
Heet-yihoo-noo	I will go.

Answers: S, S, P, S, P, P and S

5. *Person*, as in “First Person,” “Second Person”

“First person” is the same thing as ‘I’ or ‘we’. “Second person” is the same thing as ‘you’ (singular or plural). “Third person” is the same things as ‘he’ or ‘she’ or ‘they’. This term is often used in textbooks or dictionaries.

You can also talk about verbs being singular or plural – if one person is involved in the action or description (I, you singular, he, she), then the verb is singular. If more than one person is involved (we, you plural, they), then the verb is plural.

You can combine the ideas of person and singular/plural as follows

	Singular	plural
1 st person	-noo (I)	-no’ (we, inclusive); -ni’ (we, exclusive)
2 nd person	-n (you)	-nee (you, plural)
3 rd person	-t (he, she)	-3i’ (they)

6. Past and Present and Future *Tense*

Tense is just a way of saying the time something is happening. If it’s going on right now, it’s present tense. If it already happened (‘I finished my homework’) it’s past tense. If it’s going to happen later (‘I’m going to to to the basketball game tonight’), it’s future tense. In Arapaho, put the prefix nih- on a word to make it past tense, and use the prefix heet- to make it future tense. For present tense, you have to use initial change (see following entry).

7. Initial Change

This is a term specific to Arapaho and related languages, and has no meaning in relation to English or Spanish. Initial change is a change that you make to a verb when you're NOT talking about past or future tense. In Arapaho, if something is happening RIGHT NOW, you have to have initial change with the verb.

Initial change works like this: if you have a verb that starts with a short vowel (hesnee, 'hungry,' 3onouhu, 'lazy,' cebisee, 'walk'), then that first short vowel becomes LONG in the sentence:

Heesnee-noo	I'm hungry
3oonouhu-noo	I'm being lazy
Ceebisee-noo	I'm walking

Compare this with:

Cebisee!	Walk! (not happening right now, someone is telling you to start)
Nih-cebisee-noo	I walked
Heet-cebisee-noo	I'm going to walk
Nih-3onouhu-noo	I was lazy
Nih-'esnee-noo	I was hungry

If you look in the dictionary, you should see lots of examples of this change in the example sentences for each verb. The easiest way to remember how to use initial change is this: if there is NO prefix before the verb (and it's not a command), then you have to do the initial change. Otherwise, the verb stays normal. Initial change "makes up for" the fact that there are no prefixes.

So what happens if the first vowel in the verb is already long? Then you have to add –en- right after the first letter of the verb, or –on- if the verb has –o- as the first vowel:

Noohob-	see
Nonoohob-e3en	I see you
Biin-	give
Beniin-e3en	I am giving it to you
Bii3ihi-	eat
Benii3ihi-noo	I am eating.

Compare the above with:

Bii3ihi!	Eat!
Nih-bii3ihi-noo	I ate
Heet-bii3ihi-noo	I'm going to eat

Test: Take the following commands and make them into present tense sentences,
With initial change:

Bene!	Drink!
Ceenoku!	Sit down!
Nihi'koohu!	Run!
Heeneti!	Talk!
Ciintoo!	Quit!
Hotoobe!	Eat it up!

Answers: beene-noo, I'm drinking, ceneenoku-noo, I am sitting down, niihi'koohu-noo, I am running, heneeneti-noo, I am talking, ceniintoo-noo, I am quitting, hotoobe-noo, I am eating it up.

In the dictionary, initial change is not specifically labelled in the examples. You have to recognize that there is a prefix (in which case there's no initial change) or not in the examples, and then make the necessary changes depending on exactly how you want to use the word. So if you want to say 'I flew' and you find in the dictionary ceebih'ohut 'he is flying', you see that there is no prefix, so the verb has initial change. The basic, unchanged form must be cebih'ohu, fly, so you'll need to say nih-cebih'ohu-noo, PAST-fly-I.

Test: go backwards from the following forms, with initial change, to a command, without initial change. If the first vowel is long, it has to become short. If the first vowel is short, then it will always be e + n or o + n, and you just take out the en or on.

Heniinkoohu-noo	I'm driving around
Tonoo'usee-noo	I'm stopping (walking)
Nookooyei-noo	I'm fasting
Hooxou'ei'oo-noo	I'm smiling
Beniiwoohu-noo	I'm crying

Answers: hiinkoohu, drive around!, too'usee, stop!, nokooyei, fast!, hooxou'ei'oo, smile!, biiwoohu, cry!

SPECIAL NOTE: Often, especially in more recent times, people leave off a prefix, but don't do initial change, so you can here people say niisi3ei-noo neyei3eino'oowuu'. They should say **neniisi3ei-noo neyei3eino'oowuu'** if they want to say 'I'm working at the school right now.' When they say niisi3einoo, they usually mean either 'I worked at the school' (past tense – better to say nih-niisi3ei-noo) or else 'I work there' (customarily, as a job, but I'm not actually working there this very moment – better to say nii-niisi3ei-noo). However, some younger people seem to rarely if ever do initial change, even when they are saying 'I'm working at the school right now.' But if you try to use the dictionary, you will see that all the examples have initial change where it should be. So don't get confused!

8. *Subject and Object, Intransitive and Transitive Verbs*

The subject of a verb/sentence is, most of the time, the same thing as the person or thing doing the action, or the thing being described. In the following sentences, the subject is underlined.

The dog is running.

The man sees the dog.

The man is strong.

The dog is very fast.

The car is red and white.

The car sped past.

As discussed under Animate and Inanimate, Arapaho verbs are different depending on whether the subject is animate or inanimate.

The object of a verb/sentence is, most of the time, the same thing as the person or thing that is being acted on, rather than doing the action. In the following sentences, the object is underlined.

The car hit the cow.

The boy threw the ball.

The woman is buying a pair of shoes.

The dog bit the man.

As you can see, in each sentence, the object has something done TO it, by someone else – the cow is hit BY the car, the ball is thrown BY the boy, the man is bitten BY the dog.

Test: In the following sentences, what are the subject and the object?

1. The boy played the drum
2. The woman beaded the mocassins
3. The mocassins are pretty.
4. The man bought a new car.
5. The car goes really fast.

Answers: 1. Subject: the boy, Object: the drum. 2. Subject: the woman, Object: the mocassins. 3. Subject: the mocassins, Object: none. 4. Subject: the man, Object a new car. 5. Subject: the car, Object: none.

An intransitive sentence has only a subject, no object. In the test above, #3 and #5 are intransitive sentences. More specifically, we could say that the verbs are intransitive, because the verbs ‘are’ and ‘goes’ do not involve doing something to anything else, whereas ‘play (an instrument)’ ‘bead’ and ‘bought’ are verbs that involve doing something to something else – they are transitive verbs. Another way of saying the same thing is that transitive sentences involve both a subject, doing something, and an object, to which something is done.

Test: Are the verbs in the following sentences transitive or intransitive?

The girl sold her car.
The horse is running around.
The dog chased the cat.
The cat ran away.
The radio is loud.
I turned off the radio.

Answers: T (object is ‘her car’), I, T (object is ‘the cat’), I, I, T (object is ‘the radio’)

These terms are important because in Arapaho, transitive verbs are different depending on whether the object of the verb is animate or inanimate. For example, with the transitive verb ‘see’:

Nonoohow-o’	I see it (something animate, a dog, for ex.; -o’ is a suffix meaning ‘I act on him/her’)
Nonoohow-oot	He sees her (-oot indicates one person sees the other)
Nonoohoot-owoo	I see it (something inanimate, a stick, for ex.; -owoo is a suffix meaning ‘I act on it’)
Nonoohoot-ou’u	They see it (something inanimate; -ou’u indicates ‘they act on it’)

So when you use an intransitive verb, you have to pay attention to whether the *subject* is animate or inanimate (see the section on Animate and Inanimate). When you use a transitive verb, you have to pay attention to whether the *object* is animate or inanimate. The dictionary labels transitive verbs as TA or TI, meaning transitive verb for use with an animate object, and transitive verb for use with an inanimate object.

9. Reduplication

Reduplication means you double the first part(syllable) of a verb. Here are some examples – notice the difference in meaning:

Nih-‘oo3itee-t	He told a story
Nih-‘oonoo3itee-t	He told stories
Nih-to’ow-oot	He hit him
Nih-tooto’ow-oot	He hit him over and over
Heesinihii-t	What she is saying
Heeneesinihii-t	Whatever stuff she is saying
Koo-ni’iini	Is it okay, is this good, can I go ahead?
Koo-Niini’iini	Are things good?
Toowoonee-t	He has a broken leg
Tonootowoonee-t	He has broken legs

Reduplication indicates that an action is done several times, or that a description applies to several different things. It “duplicates” or “multiplies” the action or the things involved in the action. The exact effect of reduplication changes depending on the specific verb involved. Reduplication is very common in Arapaho, including in the dictionary, so you should learn to recognize it when you see it or hear it, even if you can’t do it yourself right away when you speak.

How does it work? Take the first syllable of the word, then put the same consonant and two vowels on the beginning of the word:

Ni’iini > nii-ni’iini
To’ow- > too-to’ow

It’s a little different when the word starts with h-. In that case, the original h- at the start of the word turns into an n:

Hoo3itee- > hoo-noo3itee-
Heesinihii- > hee-neesinihii-

Finally, you still have to do initial change where it's required:

Towoonee- > too-towoonee-, BUT with initial change:

Towoonee-noo becomes toowoonee-noo 'I have a broken leg right now' (the short vowel becomes long)

Too-towoonee-noo becomes tonoo-towoonee-noo 'I have broken legs right now' (the long vowel of too- means you have to add an -on- into the word.

Test: Make reduplicated forms of the following commands:

1. bene! 'drink'
2. cebisee! 'walk'
3. ceno'oo! 'jump'
4. heeneti! 'speak'
5. koonooku! 'open your eye'

Answers: 1. beebene! 'have some drinks' 2. ceecebisee! 'walk back and forth' 3. ceeceno'oo! 'jump up and down' 4. heeneeneti! 'keep on speaking' 5. kookoonooku! 'open your eyes'

10. *Proximate and Obviative*

These are two terms that are used specifically with Algonquian languages like Arapaho (and Cheyenne, Blackfoot, Cree, etc.). They do not really have any meaning for English or Spanish.

In Arapaho, when you are talking about two different third persons ('this one guy' and 'this other guy'), you have to decide which one of them is more important. That one is called "proximate" and then the other one is "obviative". You actually change the nouns, with suffixes, to show what is the obviative noun. Note you only do this with ANIMATE things – if you have an animate and an inanimate thing, the inanimate one is automatically considered less important. Here are some examples:

Hinen	normal, proximate 'man'
Hinen-in	with suffix, indicates obviative 'some other man'
Hisei	normal, proximate 'woman'
Hisei-n	with suffix, indicates obviative, 'some other woman'
Hinen-no'	plural, proximate 'men'
Hinen-no	plural, obviative 'some other men'

This makes most sense in a sentence:

Hinen nonoohow-oot hisei-n
The man sees the woman (OBV)

Wox nih-biin-oot hinenin
The bear ate the man (OBV)

Nouns that have plural forms with –ii or –uu have this same ending/suffix to show they are obviative and obviative plural.

Nouns that have plural forms with –ho' or –no' are more complex. Here is a list:

'man'	'woman'	'bird'		suffix
Hinen	Hisei	Nii'eihii	proximate, singular	X
Hinen-in	Hisei-n	Nii'e(i)hio	obviative, singular	-(i)n, -o
Hinen-no'	Hisei-no'	Nii'e(i)hiiho'	proximate, plural	-no', -ho'
Hinen-no	Hisei-no	Nii'e(i)hiiho	obviative, plural	-no, -ho

11. *Long and Short Vowels*

All Arapaho vowels are either short or long. This refers to the actual time it takes to say a vowel. So in a word like bii3ihi 'eat!', the first –i- is held out roughly twice as long as the other i's in the word. You can almost count this. Listen to the word said slowly, and you can count to two during the first syllable, but only to one during the other syllables. This difference in length of vowels does not really exist in English (although you may notice small differences from vowel to vowel). Notice that the difference in length in Arapaho can completely change the meaning of a word:

Hisi'	Wood tick
Hiisi'	Day
Be	Friend!
Bee	Excrement
Toonoun-owoo	I am using it
Tonoun-owoo	I am holding it
Hocoo	Steak
Hoocoo	Devil

One of the things learners often do is pronounce every syllable of an Arapaho word the same length, as if it were an English word. You **MUST** not do this – it makes it very hard for someone else to understand what you're saying, and it sounds completely wrong. Because differences in length produce completely different words, native Arapaho speakers are very attuned to vowel length. If you pronounce something long where it should be short or short where it should be long, it completely throws them off.

If you're in doubt exactly how a word should be spelled or pronounced, look it up in the dictionary! There are many misspelled words posted all over the reservation because someone has not bothered to look up the spelling in the dictionary!

SPECIAL POINTER: when /i/ is pronounced short, it usually sounds much different from /ii/ pronounced long. The first one sounds like in bit or hit or sit, while the second one sounds like in beat or heat or seat. **HOWEVER**, when short /i/ is followed by an /-h/ or a /-'/, it often sounds more like in beat or heat or seat. Nevertheless, if you listen closely, it is still short in length, and length is what counts, not sound quality, so it still must be written short. This is a very common error, even among native speakers writing the language. The same is true to a lesser extent with the other vowels before /-h/ and /-'/.

12. Pitch Accent.

In English, words have an accent, which is indicated by stronger pronunciation on one or more syllables: you say resPECT, INdian, and MOUNtain. Arapaho has a similar feature, except rather than pronouncing one syllable louder or stronger, you raise the “pitch” of the syllable, so that it sounds “higher” than other syllables. This can be indicated by putting an accent mark over the syllable or vowels in question:

Hinóno’ éí	Arapaho
Nii’ éíhii	Bird
Nii’ e(i)híí-ho’	Birds
Ceebísee-t	He/she is walking
Ceeb(i)séé-3i’	They are walking
Nenéetéíhi-noo	I am tired
Nenéete(i)hí-no’	We are tired

As you can see from the preceding examples, the accent can change its place on a word, depending on whether it is a singular or plural noun, or whether the verb is singular or plural. When you are learning to speak, it is very useful to have pitch accents indicated, so you will know exactly how a word is said. Fluent speakers do not need to have pitch accents indicated, because it just comes naturally for them.

Note also that sometimes, when a syllable loses its pitch accent (as when bird becomes birds, or he/she is walking becomes they are walking), then a short syllable often basically disappears from pronunciation (especially short /i/ and /u/), while a long syllable (especially if it has two different vowels, like –ei- or –ou-) can become short. A long syllable can also have a falling pitch accent, as in tired – notice the accent is only on the first –e- of the second syllable.

SPECIAL POINTER: One tricky thing about Arapaho is that many people, when first writing the language, often tend to think that a syllable with pitch accent is long, even when it is short – pitch accent makes things “sound” long to a non-Arapaho ear. You must be very careful to distinguish pitch accent from actual LENGTH of the vowel. Get a native speaker to pronounce the following words and listen carefully:

Tecénoo	Door
Técenoo	Roll it out!
Hííne’ étii	Live!
Hííne’ (e)tíít	Life
Céé’ esé’ einóó’	Flower
Céé’ esé’ einóú’ u	Flowers

13. *Inclusive and Exclusive*

In Arapaho, when you say ‘we,’ , there are two different suffixes:

-no’ is INCLUSIVE, meaning you are including the people you are talking to when you say ‘we,’ , as when you talk to a group of Arapahos on the reservation (and you’re Arapaho too) and you say hiinóno’éini-no’ ‘we are Arapaho’.

But if you are off the reservation and talking to a group of people from other tribes, or white people for example, then you and your friends would say to them hiinóno’éini-ni’. This is EXCLUSIVE, because you are not including the people you are talking to. You are saying to the non-Arapahos ‘we (speaking) are Arapaho’ (but you are not).

Note that some people say hiinóno’éini-‘. Both /-‘/ and /-ni’/ mean exactly the same thing – they are just differences in pronunciation.

Here’s another example: if you’re on a basketball team and you want to tell the coach that he or she is working the players too hard, the players would say to the coach:

Nenéeteihí-ni’ we (the players talking to you) are tired
(but you’re obviously not including the coach – he or she is excluded)

If however you want to encourage your teammates during the game, then you might say:

Heetníh’onítowóó-no’ we will try our hardest and not quit
(here you’re including the teammates you’re talking to
In the ‘we’)