

# Grammatical Analysis and Language Pedagogy: Challenges and Opportunities in Navajo Linguistics



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## About the NLA

The Navajo Language Academy, Inc. is a non-profit educational organization devoted to the scientific study and promotion of the Navajo language.

Members of the NLA have been working together since the early 1970s to further the goals of Navajo language scholarship through research on Navajo grammar, the development of pedagogical materials, and work in language planning. During the 1970s and 1980s, members of the NLA helped to organize and teach summer Navajo linguistics workshops at Hunters Point, Rough Rock, Tohatchi, Kinlichee, and Navajo Community College, Tsaile. The name Navajo Language Academy was adopted in 1997, and a non-profit corporation was formed in 1998. Workshops in recent years have been held in Rehoboth, NM, Blanding, UT, and Flagstaff, AZ.



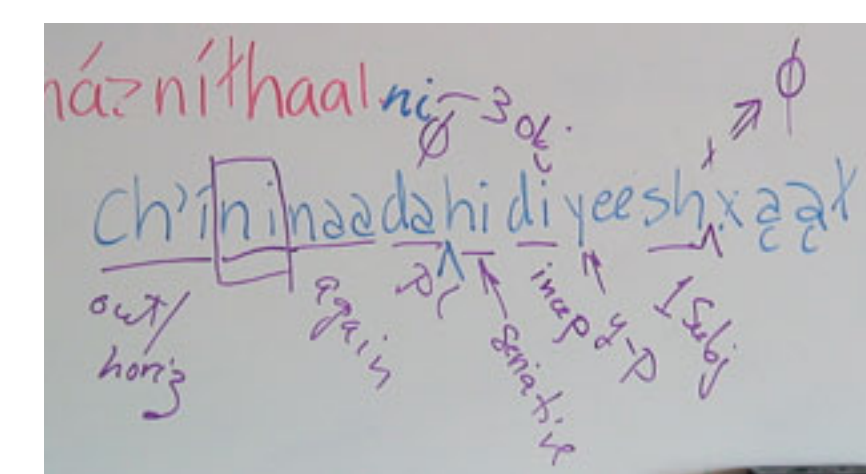
## Navajo Linguistics Workshops

### Our Workshops Offer

- A course in a different subfield of linguistics each year
- A course in Navajo verb structure
- Classroom techniques for teaching verb forms
- An overview of linguistics
- Colloquia by scholars
- Presentations and discussions of research in progress
- Discussions of language planning
- Time for collaborative linguistic research or lesson planning

### Participants include

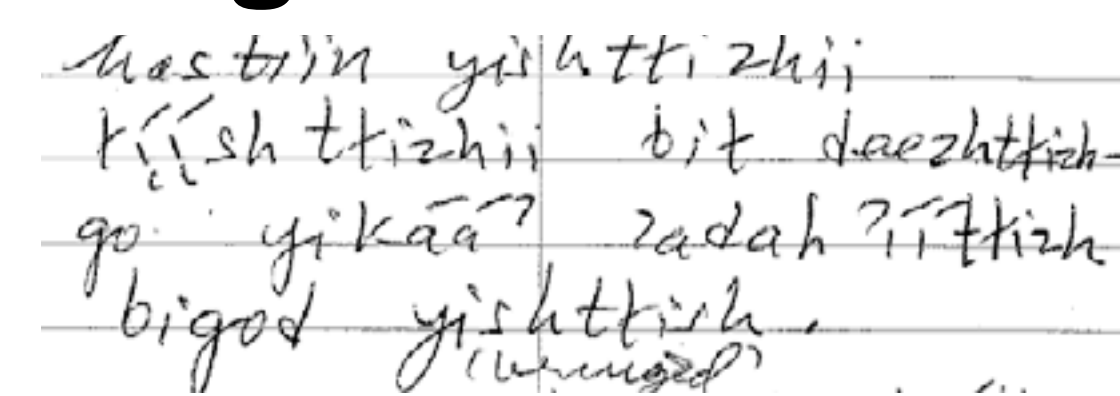
- Linguists
- Language Teachers
- Students
- Scholars



The NLA 2013 Summer Linguistics Workshop will be held from July 8-26. Location: TBA

Also on our website:

## Ken Hale Navajo Linguistics Archive



<http://www.swarthmore.edu/SocSci/tfernal1/nla/halearch/halearch.htm>

## Reference Grammar

### 5. Polarity Sensitivity/Polarity Items [An excerpt from chapter 10: Negation]

Certain words or expressions are sensitive to whether they appear in the scope of negation. Most expressions are not sensitive to this, but certain ones, Negative Polarity Items (NPIs), are grammatical, with a particular interpretation, only within the scope of negation. Others, Positive Polarity Items, are grammatical only outside it. NPIs are classified on a scale of strength based on how negative an environment must be in order for the NPI to appear in it.

Navajo negative indefinite pronouns are NPIs of a weak variety; there is a negative verbal enclitic that is a stronger type of NPI; and there are two minimizing expressions that are also strong.

#### 5.1 Negative Indefinite Pronouns

[See also chapter 4 and chapter 6 section 2.2.3.] Indefinite pronouns formed of an *h*-question word and the enclitic *da* (such as *háida* 'nobody/anybody' and *ha'á'á'ida* 'nothing/anything') are normally preferred inside the negative frame rather than the indefinite pronouns, such as *háishijí* 'someone' and *ha'á'á'íshijí* 'something', that have the enclitic *-shijí*:

- (1) a. Doo háida at' ééd yizts' qs da.  
neg noone girl 3-3-kiss.P neg  
No one kissed the girl.
- b. At' ééd doo háida yizts' qs da.  
girl neg noone 3-3-kiss.P neg  
The girl didn't kiss anyone.



#### 5.3 A Minimizer: *há'í ndi* (< *há'í* 'unity; *ndi* 'but' OR < *há'* 'some'; *í* 'anyone' *ndi* 'but')

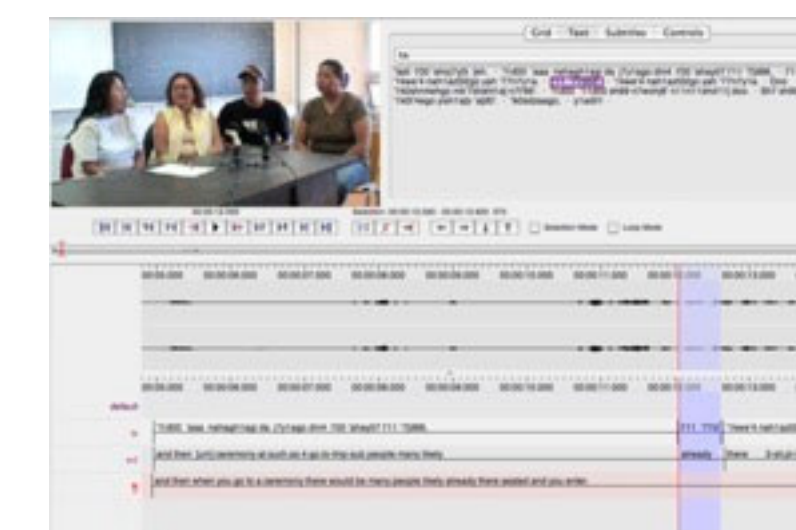
Minimizers are negative polarity expressions that add emphasis to negative assertions. English examples are '(not) a bit', '(not) in the least', '(not) a red cent'. *Lá'í ndi* is a minimizer that likely consists of the indefinite article *há'* along with the negative enclitic *-í*, that also serves as the incorporated counterpart of negative indefinite pronouns, and the conjunction *ndi* 'but':

- (20) Béeso *há'í ndi* doo naash' áa da.  
money MIN neg 3-1-carry.about.Imp neg  
I haven't so much as one dollar. (YM 1987:515)
- (21) Díí chidí bikee' *há'í ndi* doo dits' id da lá.  
this car 3-shoe MIN neg 3-tough.NI neg DISC  
Not a one of these tires is any good. (YM 1987:515)

*Lá'í ndi* is a fairly strict negative polarity item that is normally acceptable only within the negative frame. Without negation, *há'í ndi* is ungrammatical:

- (22) \*Béeso *há'í ndi* naash' á.  
money MIN 3-1-carry.about.Imp

## Documenting Conversations



Sample video recordings and transcriptions of Navajo conversations are available at the following webpage:

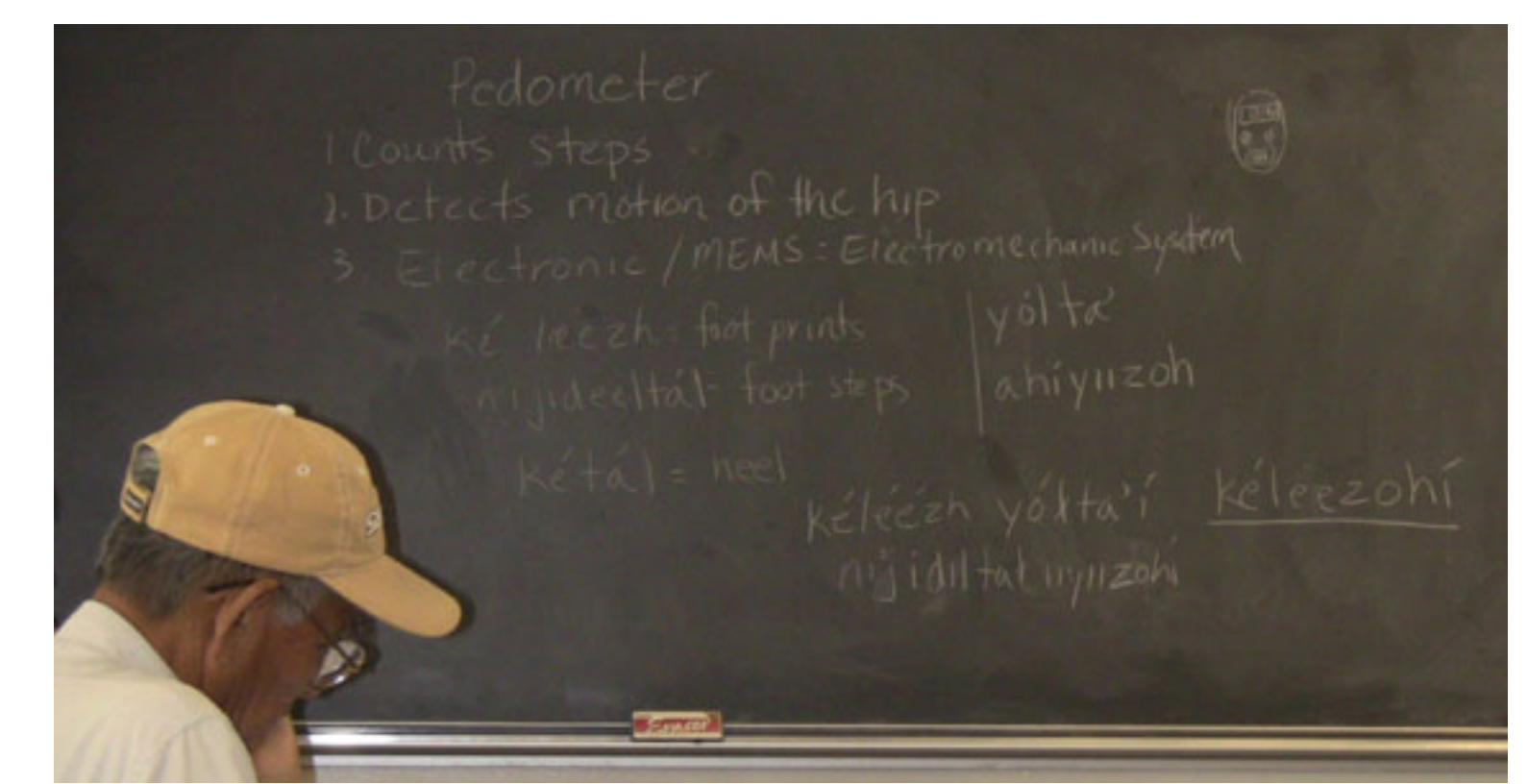
<http://www.swarthmore.edu/SocSci/tfernal1/nla/convers.htm>

## Neology

Developing technical terms for use in immersion schools



For concepts that lack words in Diné Bizaad, we describe them in a short paragraph and try various ways of extracting the most essential syllables. The now standard terms for 'vowel' and 'consonant' were developed in this way in the 1970's. *Zaáán* 'vowel' is built from parts of words for unobstructed airflow. *Zatlah* 'consonant' relates to obstructed airflow. These terms are widely used now, and there are even people who think the words are of old Athabaskan origin.



## For further information:

Visit our website at:

<http://www.navajolanguageacademy.org>

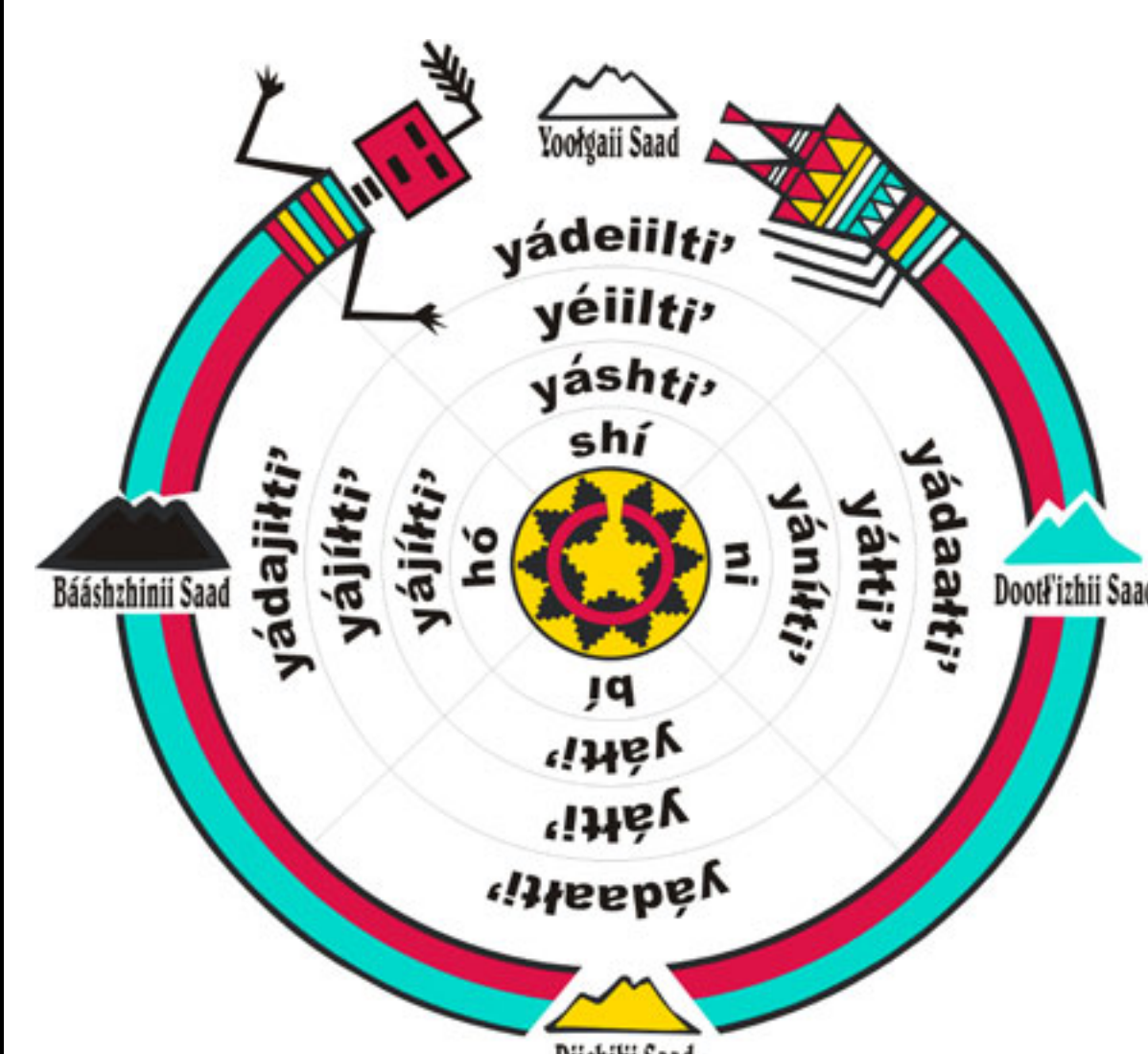
Snail mail:

Navajo Language Academy/ Diné Bizaad Naalkaah

PO Box 5411

Window Rock, Arizona 86515

## The Verb Wheel



Saad, Saad Nizhónigo Niilyá  
Hachóóí Sa

This is a verb chart developed by Clayton Long (San Juan School District in Blanding, Utah), a participant in the NLA workshops. The wedding basket in the center represents the hooghan, with its doorway in the east. Since the hooghan is the home, first person is oriented towards the east. Beyond the pronoun is the first person singular form of the verb 'speak'. The farther from home one travels the more people there are, so the dual form of the verb is outside the singular form, and the plural is outside of that. The south is the direction of warmth, which is how we respond to you, and so second person is to the south. The north is the direction of reverence and awe, and so fourth person is oriented in that direction. This chart is for the verb meaning 'speak'.

On our Website:

## Situational Navajo

A resource for language teachers using classroom situations as opportunities to teach verb forms to students.