



Núu-'apaghapi 102 class notes: Ute pronouns

Speakers usually use pronouns when the noun in question has already been mentioned, or is considered known to the hearer. English pronouns are relatively simple, and are divided as follows:

(1) English pronouns:

role:	SUBJECT		OBJECT		POSSESSOR	
number	singular	plural	singular	plural	singular	plural
speaker	I	we	me	us	my	our
hearer	you	you	you	you	your	your
other(M)	he	they	him	them	his	their
other(F)	she	they	her	them	her	their
inanimate	it	they	it	them	its	their

Ute has a much richer system of pronouns, losing one distinction (gender) but gaining many more. First, for the four English **demonstrative pronouns** 'this,' 'that,' 'these' and 'those' Ute has the following array of 18 forms:

(2) Ute demonstrative pronouns:

	near-speaker		away-visible		away-invisible	
	subject	object	subject	object	subject	object
inanimate:	'í-chá	'i-cha-y	má-rə	ma-rə	'ú-ru	'u-ru
	'this'	'this'	'that'	'that'	'that'	'that'
animate-SG:	'í-na	'i-na-y	máa	máa-y	'ú	'u-wa-y
	'this'	'this'	'that'	'that'	'that'	'that'
animate-PL:	'í-mə	'i-mə	má-mə	ma-mə	'ə-mə	'u-mə
	'these'	'these'	'those'	'those'	'those'	'those'

Ute personal pronouns show even more distinctions, and are divided into two sets. The first set is that of **independent pronouns**, which are full words that carry a word stress ('accent').

(3) Ute independent pronouns (SUBJECT)

person	singular	dual	plural
1st	nə 'I'	támi 'we' (incl. you)	táwi 'we' (incl. you)
		némə 'we' (excl. you)	
2nd	'əmə 'you'	məni 'you-pl.'	
3rd-vis.	máa-s 's/he'	má-mə 'they'	
3rd-invis.	'uwa-sə 's/he'	'u-mə-sə 'they'	

(4) Ute independent pronouns (non-subject)

person	singular	dual	plural
1st	nəna-y 'me'	tami 'us/our' (incl. you)	tawi 'us/our' (incl. you)
		némə-y 'us/our' (excl. you)	
2nd	'əmə-y 'you'	məni 'you-pl/your'	
3rd-vis.	máa-y 'him/her'	ma-mə 'them'	
	máa-y-a-s 'his/hers'	ma-mə-a-s 'their'	
3rd-invis.	'uwa-y 'him/her'	'u-mə 'them'	
	'uwa-y-a-s 'his/hers'	'umə-a-s 'their'	

The second set is that of **clitic/suffix pronouns**, which are much shorter, carry no stress, and must be attached to the end of some other word. Further, they can indicate either subject, object or possessor without change of form.

(5) Ute clitic/suffix pronouns

person	singular	dual	plural
1st	-n 'I/me/my'	-rámi 'we/us/our' (incl. you)	-ráwi 'we/us/our' (incl. you)
		-nəmə 'we/us/our' (excl. you)	
2nd	-m 'you/your'	-amə 'you/your'	
3rd-vis.-AN	-a 's/he/her/him/his'	-amə 'they/them/their'	
3rd-invis.-AN	-u 's/he/her/him/his'	-amə 'they/them/their'	
3rd-INAN	-aqh 'it/its'	-aqh 'they/them/their'	
	-ukh/-ku 'it/its'	-ukh/-ku 'they/them/their'	

Some examples of the use of the clitic pronouns are:

Possessor:

múa-n 'my father', pía-n 'my mother', piwa-n 'my spouse', tuachi-n 'my child'
 múa-m 'your father', pía-m 'your mother', piwa-m 'your spouse', tuachi-m 'your child'
 múa-nəmə 'our father', pía-u 'his/her mother', kani-amə 'their house'

Subject:

toghoyi-n 'I am well' təkə-yi-n 'I am eating' págha-nhkwi-chaa-n 'I'm taking off'

Object:

magha-qa-n '(he/she) fed me' magha-qa-m '(he/she) fed you'
 magha-qa-amə '(he/she) fed them' táa-qhay-ku '(he/she) kicked it'

This is your language 'ícha-'ara məni 'apaghapi 'ura-'ay

2. Written language

púupa-'uru

'apaghapi

'inia-sapa

pə'ə-ta-vaa-na

By Tom Givón

Ute Language Program

Most of the 6,000 or so languages of the world have never been written till recently, and have survived and thrived and been transmitted from one generation to the next in their natural spoken form. Writing systems were not invented before ca. 4,000 BC, and they were first invented independently in only five major centers of early agriculture – Mesopotamia (Iraq), Egypt, China, India, and Meso-America (Maya). These centers first developed complex, large-scale societies where the preservation of larger bodies of knowledge became a pressing issue, given the limitations of human memory. The types of cultural knowledge that prompted the development of these early writing systems involved business transactions, legal codes, religious knowledge, histories, or technology and science.

Until recently, the bulk of the population of most societies – even those where literacy had existed for millennia – were illiterate. It is only with the rise of modern universal education in the 20th century that literacy became more widespread. And even in a presumably literate societies like our own, most people spend the bulk of their lives speaking rather than writing. And while the human brain has already been configured by evolution over the past 1 million years to process spoken language, it is not likewise configured to process writing. Rather, portions of a brain center originally designed for **visual object recognition** are re-configured, through life-time experience, to process written language.

In adapting the Ute language to writing, our first task was to analyze the sound system of the language, a sound system that is rather different from that of

English. In then developing an alphabet that would reflect Ute sounds, we were guided by several principles:

- **Economy:** There shouldn't be more symbols than sounds.

- **Consistency:** The same spoken sound should always be rendered by the same letter.

- **Clarity:** Each sound should be rendered by only one letter, and each letter should correspond to only one sound.

- **Transfer:** If the learners are already literate in another language, their knowledge of writing in their first language should be capitalized on as much as possible, especially in areas where the sounds of the two languages are similar.

- **Distinctness:** If the learners are already literate in another language, the new writing system should also emphasize the differences between the two sound systems, wherever they are truly distinct.

- **Meaning-support:** In spoken language, it is useful that words with different meanings are coded by different sounds, minimally at least one different sound, as in the English words *pat/bat/rat/mat/chat/hat/sat/cat/ta t/fat/rat/vat* etc. A writing system should ideally strive for such differential treatment of words. But many languages have glaring examples of ambiguity, where words that may be distinguished in the writing system are pronounced the same in the spoken language, as in the English *write/wright/right/rite*. This is why when people tell me "Why don't you make Ute writing as simple and easy as that of English?" I chuckle. English is one of the most difficult writing systems on the planet, with massive violations of all the principles listed above. Still, we need to remember that these principles often conflict with each other, so that a good writing system is necessarily a **practical compromise**.

We also need to remember that **attitudes** matter. First, the attitude of the old speakers. When we started our work on Ute in the 1970s, many of the old speakers refused to join the Ute Language Committee. Their reason, in addition to mistrust of the stranger-linguist, was often given as: "Our

language has always been spoken. It should not be written down."

When the late Ralph Cloud finally decided to join the Ute Language Committee one year after its inception, his reasons were given in a speech to the committee: "Our children don't learn the language the old way at home anymore. If we don't put it into writing now, it will be lost to future generations."

Second, the attitude of the learner. It takes incredible motivation and heaps of hard work to learn a second language, especially in adulthood. It goes against the grain, both culturally and neurologically. This is especially true in the context of a small minority swamped by a dominant majority culture. So whether you are already a speaker of Ute and want to learn how to write it, or you want to learn the language from scratch, an enormous amount of commitment and hard work will be required.

Literacy is not just the rendering of spoken sounds into written symbols. As a culture develops writing, it also develops a new style of communication. Spoken language is marked by short chunks, less complex grammar, pauses, repetitions, loop-backs, and the occasional rule-breaking glitch. The time-pressure of oral communication is considerable, with both speaker and hearer having to cope with memory limitations, wandering attention and external noise – all at an average production speed of ca. 250 milliseconds per word and 1-2 seconds per 'thought'. Written language, on the other hand, allows correction, revision, editing and re-phrasing, with the reader privy only to the clean final draft, and then having ample time to re-read or pause and reflect.

The grammar and style of spoken language have been shaped, over millions of years of human evolution, to cope with the time-pressure and memory/attention limitations. When a language develops literacy, it also develops the grammar and style appropriate to the new communicative instrument. In effect, it develops a new **genre** of communication. Societies with a long tradition of literacy have done this long ago. For Ute, the immense task of coming up with the appropriate written genre is still ahead of us.

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