

## Verb conjugation in Stoney Nakoda: focus on argument-marking affixes

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**Background:** Stoney Nakoda is a language of the Siouan language family mostly spoken among Indigenous groups in the central United States, southern Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan. The few studies done on Saskatchewan Nakoda (aka Assiniboine) have reported a split-intransitive pattern in its argument-marking affixation system on the verb (Dixon, 1994; Schudel, 1997; Cumberland, 2006). This means that, depending on the active/stative status of the verb, it behaves similar to both nominative/accusative and ergative/absolutive languages; while active verbs can be either transitive or intransitive, stative verbs are mostly in the intransitive form with subject marking identical to the object marking of active transitive verbs (Table 1). Additionally, *y*-stem active verbs have been reported to have different subject markings with the *-y-* in the verb root only appearing in the case of third person null subject marker, as in Table 1 (Shaw, 1976; Schudel, 1997; Cumberland, 2006). However, in the present study, it was observed that the split-intransitive pattern in Morley Nakoda is not on clear semantic grounds.

Table 1 Saskatchewan Nakoda verb conjugation (examples from Schudel, 1997 & Cumberland, 2006, modified for clarification)

Active Intransitive	Active Transitive	Stative	Active 'y-stem'
<b>wa-naži</b> 'I stand'	úšina 'to pity': úši- <b>ø-wa</b> -na 'I pitied him/her'	<b>ma-yazaq</b> 'I am sick'	é- <b>mn</b> -aku 'I take'
<b>ø-naži</b> '(s)he stands'	wayaga 'to see': wa- <b>ma-ø</b> -yaga '(s)he sees me'	<b>ø-yazaq</b> '(s)he is sick'	é- <b>ø</b> -yaku '(s)he takes'

**This study:** This is a descriptive study aiming to investigate the verb conjugation system of Morley Nakoda specifically compared to the closely related dialect of Saskatchewan Nakoda (aka Assiniboine) with a focus on argument-marking affixes. To do this, the data are elicited from a native speaker of the language using pictures and direct English translation.

**Findings:** The elicited data in this study were in line with the reported literature with regard to the distribution of Nakoda intransitive verbs in two classes based on the morphological form of their argument-marking affixes, i.e. split-intransitive; type 1 has the same argument marker as the subject marker of transitive verbs, and type 2 has its single argument marker in the form of object marker of transitive verbs (Table 2). However, as illustrated in Table 2, there were both stative and active verbs among both morphological classes, which questions the classification being purely based on semantic features (active vs. stative).

Table 2 Morley Nakoda verb conjugations observed in the elicited transitive and intransitive verbs in the present study

Transitive	Type 1 Intransitive	Type 2 Intransitive
John a- <b>ø-wa</b> -pi=no. 'I hit John.'	Active: ma- <b>wa</b> -ni=no. 'I walk.'	Active: â- <b>mî</b> -chichi=no. 'I run.'
John a- <b>ma-ø</b> -pi=no. 'John hit me.'	Stative: <b>wa</b> -giksishi=no. 'I forget.'	Stative: <b>ma</b> -ti=no. 'I die.'

**Discussions and Conclusion:** Since there was no overt *-y-* in the third person forms of active verbs such as *to run* (â-**ø**-chichi=no. '(s)he runs.') which had type 2 argument markers (Table 2) and stative verbs such as *to forget* had type 1 argument markers, proposals of different behaviors of active *y*-stem verbs do not account for the elicited data. One probable hypothesis is that the language has undergone a historical change in its inflectional system from a semantically transparent active/stative system to a more form-based classification of the verbs mostly determined by phonological features. Additionally, although there was a positioned distinction of these morphological affixes (i.e. prefix vs. infix), no clear pattern was observed for this variation.

## References mentioned in the abstract

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