

LANGUAGE COURSE

Na'vi 1

A beginner's course in the constructed language of Avatar: sounds, nouns, pronouns, infixed verbs, sentences, questions and counting in base eight.

10 Chapters

Philip Osztromok

Generated with Claude

NA'VI 1

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Na'vi 1

Course 1 · Chapter 1 · Kaltxì!

Na'vi is the language of the blue-skinned people of Pandora in James Cameron's film *Avatar* (2009). You met it briefly in Constructed Languages 5 as an example of a language made for a story. In this course you will learn how it actually works, from its unusual sounds to the small pieces that are slotted into its words. Na'vi is a good language to study because it was designed to feel alien but to remain a real, learnable system, and a community of learners has since grown around it.

> **THE IDEA IN A BOX**
>
> Na'vi is a constructed language made by one linguist, Paul Frommer, for a film. It has its own sounds, its own word-building rules and its own grammar, and it has since been learned and expanded by a community.

Where Na'vi Comes From

Paul Frommer, a professor at the University of Southern California with a doctorate in linguistics, was hired by Cameron's production team to build the language. Cameron had written about thirty words himself, and Frommer worked out a full sound system, word-building rules and grammar around them. By the time the film was released in 2009, the vocabulary stood at about a thousand words. Since then, a learner community has worked with Frommer to expand it, and it now has well over two thousand.

The language took on a life of its own. Fans built websites, dictionaries and forums (the best known is LearnNavi.org), and translated songs and stories into it. Remember the point from Introduction to Linguistics 8: once people use a constructed language, it begins to grow.

A Language for a Story

Na'vi belongs to the family of *screen languages* that Constructed Languages 5 described. Like Klingon, it is **a priori**: built from scratch and not derived from an existing language (Constructed Languages 2 introduced the term). Its purpose is dramatic: a language that sounds right in the mouths of actors, suits a forest-dwelling people and does not sound like English.

	KLINGON	DOTHRAKI	NA'VI
Made for	*Star Trek*	*Game of Thrones*	*Avatar*
Creator	Marc Okrand (1984)	David J. Peterson (2009)	Paul Frommer (started 2005)
Type	a priori	a priori	a priori
A striking feature	object–verb–subject order	a harsh, plains-people sound	ejective consonants and infixes inside verbs

Writing Na'vi

Within the story, Na'vi is an unwritten language. For learners, it is written in the **Latin alphabet**, with a few special letters, and this course does the same. Three things are worth knowing now:

- **Three sounds are written with two letters:** *px*, *tx* and *kx* are sharp "popped" versions of *p*, *t* and *k*, called **ejectives** (Chapter 2).
- **The apostrophe is a letter:** ' stands for a catch in the throat, a glottal stop, as in the middle of "uh-oh".
- **There are no *b*, *d* or *g*.** Na'vi has no voiced stops, so any word you see with those letters is not Na'vi.

```
# the three ejectives: a sharp, popped p, t and k
px   tx   kx            Kaltxì   (hello)   has a tx

# the special vowels
ä   ì                     Kìyevame   (goodbye)   has a ì

# the apostrophe is a real sound
Na'vi   (the name of the people and the language)
```

Some writers use the letters *c* and *g* for the sounds that are written *ts* and *ng*. This course uses *ts* and *ng*, which is the version most learners meet, for example in *ngati* "you".

Your First Phrases

Here are some phrases to learn by sight now. You do not need to analyse them yet; each one will be taken apart in later chapters. The respellings after each phrase give a rough idea of the sound (Chapter 2 explains them properly).

NA'VI	MEANING	NOTE
Kaltxì	"hello"	the everyday casual greeting; say it as *kal-tx-ì*, with a popped t
Irayo	"thanks"	say it as *i-ra-yo*
Kìyevame	"goodbye" (literally "until we meet again")	say it as *kì-ye-va-me*
Oel ngati kameie	"I see you"	the film's best-known phrase; it means more than seeing with the eyes
Eywa ngahu	"Eywa be with you"	a blessing; Eywa is the goddess of Pandora
Srane	"yes"	
Kehe	"no"	

The little word *ma* is placed before a name or a title to address someone directly: *Kaltxì, ma Neytiri* means "Hello, Neytiri". You will see it in many forms of address.

WATCH OUT: "I SEE YOU" IS NOT "HELLO"

Many people think *Oel ngati kameie* is the Na'vi word for "hello". It is not: it is a special greeting that means a deeper recognition of the other person, close to "I understand who you are". The everyday casual word is *Kaltxì*. Use *Oel ngati kameie* when you mean it.

WATCH OUT: NA'VI IS NOT A CODE FOR ENGLISH

Na'vi is not English with swapped words. Word order, word building and even the shape of a verb are different. Translating word for word produces nonsense, so treat each chapter's grammar as a new system rather than a disguise.

How This Course Is Organised

The ten chapters move from the bottom up: sounds and spelling (Chapter 2), nouns (3), pronouns and greetings (4), verbs and the infix system (5 and 6), sentences and word order (7), questions and negation (8), numbers and time (9), and the people and the language (10). Every Na'vi example is given with a word-by-word gloss. At the end of each chapter, the Na'vi words and forms used are listed so you can check them against the community dictionary and Paul Frommer's own published notes.

Hands-On Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Match each Na'vi phrase to its meaning: (a) *Kaltxì*; (b) *Irayo*; (c) *Kìyevame*; (d) *Srane*; (e) *Kehe*; (f) *Oel ngati kameie*. The meanings are: no, I see you, yes, hello, goodbye, thanks.

View solution

EXERCISE 2

Explain who made Na'vi and why, and say whether it is a priori or a posteriori. Then say which of these could *not* be Na'vi words, and why: *bado*, *txon*, *kela*, *giga*.

View solution

EXERCISE 3

Using only the phrases in this chapter, write a short exchange in which one person greets another by name, the other answers, one gives thanks, and they part with a blessing. Copy every letter carefully, including the special letters and the apostrophes.

View solution

CHAPTER 1 QUICK REFERENCE

- **Na'vi**: created by Paul Frommer for *Avatar* (2009); a priori; now well over two thousand words
- Written here in Latin letters; *px, tx, kx* are popped consonants; ' is a real sound; no *b, d, g*

- Phrases: *Kaltxì* (hello), *Irayo* (thanks), *Kìyevame* (goodbye), *Oel ngati kameie* (I see you), *Eywa ngahu* (Eywa be with you), *Srane* (yes), *Kehe* (no)
- *ma* goes before a name or title to address someone

COMING NEXT

Na'vi 1, Chapter 2 takes the spelling apart: which sound each letter stands for, how syllables are built and where stress falls, with a pronunciation drill.

Na'vi 1

Course 1 · Chapter 2 · Sounds and Spelling

Chapter 1 gave you the first phrases and warned that Na'vi has a few unusual sounds. This chapter takes the spelling apart: which sound each letter stands for, how syllables are built, and how stress works. Na'vi was designed to sound alien without being impossible, so every sound here has a close cousin in a language you probably know. If any terms feel hazy, they are explained in Introduction to Linguistics, Chapters 2 and 3.

> **THE IDEA IN A BOX**
>
> Na'vi has 20 consonants and 7 vowels, with a spelling that is close to one letter or digraph per sound. The sounds new to English speakers are the three ejectives *px, tx, kx*, the glottal stop ', the vowels *ä* and *ì*, and the syllabic consonants *ll* and *rr*.

The Consonants

GROUP	LETTERS	LIKE ENGLISH?
Plain stops	*p, t, k*	like English *p, t, k* but with no puff of air
Ejectives	*px, tx, kx*	no: a sharp, popped version of *p, t, k*
Glottal stop	'	the catch in "uh-oh"
Affricate	*ts*	like the *ts* in "cats", but can start a word
Fricatives	*f, v, s, z, h*	yes
Nasals	*m, n, ng*	yes: *ng* is the sound in "sing", and it can start a word
Liquids and glides	*l, r, w, y*	mostly: *r* is a tapped or trilled r, *y* is the consonant in "yes"

That makes 20 in all. There is **no *b*, *d* or *g***. If you want a feel for the ejectives, say *p, t, k* while holding your breath, then release them with a small pop. The glottal stop is spelled with an apostrophe, as in *Na'vi* (Na-'-vi).

The Vowels and Diphthongs

LETTER	SOUND (APPROX.)	COMPARE
a	open front vowel	"a" in *father*
ä	a front a	"a" in *cat*
e	open-mid e	"e" in *bed*
i	long close i	"ee" in *see*
ì	short, lax i	"i" in *bit*
o	close-mid o	"o" in Spanish *no* (no glide)
u	u	"oo" in *moon* (sometimes shorter, as in *put*)

Four **diphthongs** (two vowel sounds in one syllable) are written *aw, ew, ay, ey*, as in *tsahaylu* and *Neytiri*. There is no *oy*. Elsewhere, **every vowel letter is its own syllable**, so a run of vowels is pronounced one at a time: the verb form *kameie* ("see", as in *Oel ngati kameie*) has four syllables, *ka-me-i-e*.

The Syllabic Consonants: ll and rr

Na'vi has two consonants that behave like vowels. ***ll*** is a syllabic "l" (a light l that forms a whole syllable), and ***rr*** is a syllabic, strongly trilled "r". You can hear the idea in English "bottle", where the final l carries the syllable. Because they are vowel-like, a word can contain *ll* or *rr* where you would expect a vowel.

Syllable Shape and Clusters

A syllable has an optional start, a vowel (or *ll* or *rr*), and an optional end. The most complex shape is two consonants, a vowel and one consonant, as in *skxawng* (a rude word for a fool). The rules for clusters are simple:

- A **two-consonant start** must begin with **f, s or ts**.

- The second consonant is one of **p, t, k, px, tx, kx, m, n, ng, r, l, w, y**. That gives 3 × 13 = 39 possible clusters, among them *fp*, *ft*, *fk*, *sk*, *tsk* and *fng*.
- The fricatives and the affricate (*f, v, ts, s, z, h*) can only start a syllable, never end one.
- Other consonants may begin or end a syllable. Between syllables you may meet any pair that fits these rules, as in *ik-ran* and *Na'-vi*.

```
# syllables: - marks the break
Na'vi       Na'-vi
ikran       ik-ran                (the mountain banshee)
kameie      ka-me-i-e             (every vowel is a syllable)
Kaltxì      Kal-txì               (tx is one consonant)
skxawng     skxawng               (CCVC: s + kx, then aw, then ng)
tsahaylu    tsa-hay-lu            (ts is one consonant; ay is a diphthong)
```

Stress

In Na'vi stress is **contrastive**: where it falls can change a word's meaning. The standard example is *túte* "person" against *tuté* "female person". Stress is learned with each word. It may move when a word is built from another (derivation), but it does **not** move when a word takes grammatical endings or infixes. Learners usually mark the stressed vowel in notes with an acute accent (*túte*) or underline it. Dictionary entries show where the stress falls, so check them when you meet a new word.

> **WATCH OUT: TX IS NOT "T" PLUS "X"**
>
> The letter *x* in *px, tx, kx* is part of a digraph, a spelling device for one sound. *Kaltxì* is Kal-txì, not Kalt-xì. The same is true of *ts* and *ng*. Never pronounce the *x* as a separate sound, and never read *ng* as "n + g" as in *finger*: it is the single sound in *sing*.

> **WATCH OUT: NA'VI SPELLING VARIANTS**
>
> You may see the sounds written with other letters, such as *c* for *ts* and *g* for *ng* (this form is used by linguists). This course uses *ts* and *ng*. Both forms mean the same sounds. Also, the in-story language has no written form, so every spelling you meet is a learner convention.

Pronunciation Drill

Say each word slowly, syllable by syllable, then at speed. Keep every vowel separate and give each consonant its own sound. The guide gives the syllables; for recordings and stress marks, use the community dictionary and Paul Frommer's own pronunciation notes.

# word	syllables	watch for
Na'vi	Na'-vi	the glottal stop
Kaltxì	Kal-txì	tx: popped t; ì: short i
Irayo	I-ra-yo	y is a consonant; stress is in the dictionary
Kìyevame	Kì-ye-va-me	ì short; y is a consonant
ngati	nga-ti	ng at the start; do not add a g
Eywa	Ey-wa	ey: a diphthong
Neytiri	Ney-ti-ri	ey; then i, i
ikran	ik-ran	ends in n
tsahaylu	tsa-hay-lu	ts then a; ay: a diphthong
skxawng	skxawng	s + kx at the start; aw; ng at the end

COMMON MYTHS

- **"Na'vi sounds like English with extra letters."** No: it has sounds English lacks (the ejectives, the glottal stop as a letter, syllabic *ll* and *rr*), and it lacks sounds English has (*b, d, g*).
- **"Stress is always on the second-to-last syllable."** That is a rule of Esperanto and some other languages. In Na'vi, stress is learned word by word.
- **"The apostrophe is just punctuation."** It stands for a consonant, and leaving it out changes the word.

Hands-On Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Divide each word into syllables: *Kìyevame, Irayo, tsahaylu, skxawng, Neytiri, kameie*. Mark every digraph (*tx, ts, ng, kx*) and every diphthong.

View solution

EXERCISE 2

Which of these syllable starts are possible in Na'vi, and which are not? (a) *fp* (b) *sk* (c) *tsk* (d) *ps* (e) *bt* (f) *fng*. For each failure, say which rule breaks.

View solution

EXERCISE 3

Explain in your own words why Na'vi is hard for English speakers. Name three sounds that English speakers must learn from scratch, one English sound that Na'vi lacks, and one spelling trap (a digraph or a letter that looks like English but is not).

View solution

CHAPTER 2 QUICK REFERENCE

- **Consonants (20)**: p t k, px tx kx, ', ts, f v s z h, m n ng, l r w y; **no b, d, g**
- **Vowels (7)**: a ä e i ì o u; **diphthongs**: aw ew ay ey; every other vowel letter is its own syllable
- **Syllabic** *ll* and *rr* act as vowels
- **Clusters**: only f, s, ts + (p t k px tx kx m n ng r l w y) at the start of a syllable (39 in all)
- f, v, ts, s, z, h can start a syllable but not end one
- **Stress** is contrastive and learned per word: *túte* "person", *tuté* "female person"

COMING NEXT

Na'vi 1, Chapter 3 turns to nouns: the plural prefixes, the endings that show a noun's job in the sentence, and how a Na'vi noun differs from an English one.

Na'vi 1

Course 1 · Chapter 3 · Nouns

Na'vi nouns carry a lot of information. Small pieces added to the front tell you *how many* and *which one*, and small endings added to the back tell you *what job the noun does in the sentence*. Because the job is marked on the noun, the word order can be free. This chapter takes the system apart piece by piece. It builds on the ideas of affixes and case from Introduction to Linguistics, Chapter 4.

> **THE IDEA IN A BOX**
>
> A Na'vi noun can have a **number prefix** (dual, trial or plural), a **pointing prefix** (this or that), and a **case ending**. Some prefixes change the first sound of the noun, a process called **lenition**.

Number: Dual, Trial and Plural

English knows "one" and "more than one". Na'vi has a special form for two, a special form for three, and a general plural for more. The number words are prefixes, and each is written with a plus sign in learner materials, which means "this prefix causes lenition":

NUMBER	PREFIX	EXAMPLE	MEANING
one	none	*tute*	person
two (dual)	*me+*	*mesute*	two people
three (trial)	*pxe+*	*pxesute*	three people
more (plural)	*ay+*	*aysute*	people

Notice that *tute* became *sute* after each prefix. That is lenition.

Lenition: A Softening of the First Sound

Some prefixes (and certain small words, which later chapters will meet) soften the first consonant of the word that follows. The changes follow a fixed table:

PLAIN SOUND	AFTER LENITION	EXAMPLE
px, tx, kx	*p, t, k*	an ejective softens to the plain stop (a word starting *px* would start with *p*)
p	*f*	*po* "s/he" → *ayfo* "they"
t	*s*	*tute* → *aysute*; *tokx* → *aysokx*
ts	*s*	*tsmukan* "brother" → *aysmukan*
k	*h*	a *k*-word becomes an *h*-word
'	deleted	a word starting with a glottal stop loses it
other sounds	no change	

After *ay+* the prefix may even be dropped, because the lenited noun alone already signals the plural: *aysute* and *sute* both mean "people". This "short plural" works for nouns that start with a sound that lenition changes.

> **WATCH OUT: LENITION CHANGES THE FIRST CONSONANT ONLY**
>
> Do not soften the middle or the end of the word: *tokx* becomes *aysokx*, with only the first *t* softened. Also, a noun that starts with a vowel or with a sound that lenition leaves alone takes the prefix and stays the same: the prefix *ay+* in front of such a noun gives, for example, *ayikran* "banshees" (*i* is a vowel).

This and That: fì- and tsa-

Two more prefixes point at a noun. **fì-** means "this" and **tsa-** means "that". They do not cause lenition: *payoang* "fish" becomes *fìpayoang* "this fish". The plural forms are **fay+** "these" and **tsay+** "those", and these do cause lenition, for example *faysute* "these people".

The Case Endings

A **case ending** shows the noun's job in the sentence. Na'vi marks the jobs with suffixes whose shape depends on whether the noun ends in a vowel or a consonant:

CASE	JOB	AFTER A VOWEL	AFTER A CONSONANT
Subjective	the one who acts or is, with no object	no ending	no ending
Agentive	the one who acts on something	*-l*	*-ìl*
Patientive	what is acted on	*-t* or *-ti*	*-it* or *-ti*
Dative	to or for someone	*-r* or *-ru*	*-ur*
Genitive	belonging to	*-yä* (*-ä* after o or u)	*-ä*
Topical	"as for …"	*-ri*	*-ìri*

One Noun, Every Case

A vowel-final noun and a consonant-final noun side by side (the forms below are built by the rules in the table):

```
# tute "person" (ends in a vowel)
subjective    tute
agentive      tutel
patientive    tutet / tuteti
dative        tuter / tuteru
genitive      tuteyä
topical       tuteri

# eylan "friend" (ends in a consonant)
subjective    eylan
agentive      eylanìl
patientive    eylanit / eylanti
dative        eylanur
genitive      eylanä
topical       eylanìri
```

Three Roles, Not Two

English marks "who" and "whom" only on a few pronouns (I/me, he/him) and uses word order for the rest. Na'vi marks the job on every noun, and it recognises **three** jobs where English sees two. This is called a **tripartite** pattern:

ROLE	NA'VI ENDING	ENGLISH
Subject of a verb with no object ("sleeps", "is")	none (subjective)	"I" (nominative)
Subject of a verb with an object ("sees you")	*-l* / *-ìl* (agentive)	"I" (same word as above)
Object ("sees you")	*-t* / *-ti* (patientive)	"me / you" (accusative)

Look at the famous greeting with this in mind. *Oel ngati kameie* is built from three parts, each of which you can now read:

```
# Oel ngati kameie   "I see you"
oe-l          I-AGENTIVE          (the one who sees)
nga-ti        you-PATIENTIVE      (the one seen)
kameie        see (with an infix, Chapter 5)

# the order can change because the endings show who is who
Oel ngati kameie.      Ngati oel kameie.      Oel kameie ngati.
```

The pronouns themselves (*oe* "I", *nga* "you") are the subject of Chapter 4.

Building Nouns with Endings

A few more endings and prefixes build new nouns from old ones. They are optional and regular, which is why a Na'vi vocabulary stays manageable:

PIECE	MEANING	EXAMPLE
-tsyìp	small, a diminutive	*utral* "tree" → *utraltsyìp* "bush"
-an / *-e*	male / female (optional)	*karyu* "teacher" → *karyuan* "male teacher", *karyue* "female teacher"
-o	"some"	*eylan* "friend" → *eylano* "some friend"
-yu	one who does the verb	*slele* "to swim" → *sleleyu* "swimmer"
fra-	"every"	attached in front of a noun

COMMON MYTHS

- **"Na'vi has no plural."** It has a singular, a dual (two), a trial (three) and a general plural with the prefix *ay+*.
- **"Word order in Na'vi is random."** It is free in the sense that the case endings carry the meaning, but the verb and the endings follow fixed rules. Chapter 7 shows what is free and what is not.
- **"Case endings are the same as English prepositions."** Some jobs are covered by endings (agentive, patientive, dative), others by small words (Chapter 7). Na'vi uses both.

Hands-On Exercises

EXERCISE 1

From *tute* "person" form (a) "two people", (b) "three people", (c) "people", (d) "this person", (e) "these people". From *po* "s/he" form the plural "they" with and without the prefix. Say which sound changed in each form.

View solution

EXERCISE 2

Give all six case forms of *eylan* "friend" and of *tute* "person". Then say in each case whether the ending depends on a vowel or a consonant, and why *eylanti* is also a possible patientive.

View solution

EXERCISE 3

Take apart *Oel ngati kameie*: name the agentive, the patientive and the verb, and say who sees whom. Then write two other word orders that mean the same, and explain in your own words why Na'vi can reorder the words but English cannot ("I see you" versus "You see I").

View solution

CHAPTER 3 QUICK REFERENCE

- **Number prefixes**: *me+* (two), *pxe+* (three), *ay+* (plural); all cause lenition
- **Lenition**: px/tx/kx → p/t/k; p → f; t, ts → s; k → h; ' is dropped
- **This/that**: *fì-*, *tsa-* (plural *fay+*, *tsay+*)
- **Cases**: agentive *-l / -ìl*; patientive *-t, -ti / -it, -ti*; dative *-r, -ru / -ur*; genitive *-yä / -ä*; topical *-ri / -ìri*; subjective: none
- **Tripartite**: three roles (subject with no object, subject with an object, object)
- Building: *-tsyìp* (small), *-an / -e* (male / female), *-o* (some), *-yu* (one who does the verb), *fra-* (every)

COMING NEXT

Na'vi 1, Chapter 4 covers the pronouns, including the "we" that includes you and the "we" that does not, takes *Oel ngati kameie* apart word by word, and adds polite phrases and short exchanges.

Na'vi 1

Course 1 · Chapter 4 · Pronouns

Pronouns are the first words most learners use, and Na'vi's pronouns hold two surprises for English speakers: the language has a different word for "we" depending on whether you are being included, and its pronouns take the same case endings as nouns. This chapter lays out the full set, takes *Oel ngati kameie* apart for good, and builds a few short greeting exchanges.

> **THE IDEA IN A BOX**
>
> Na'vi pronouns come in four numbers (one, two, three, more), separate "we" forms for including or excluding the listener, and the same case endings you met in Chapter 3.

The Basic Pronouns

PERSON	SINGULAR	DUAL (TWO)	TRIAL (THREE)	PLURAL (MORE)
1st, without you	*oe* "I"	*moe*	*pxoe*	*ayoe*
1st, with you		*oeng*	*pxoeng*	*ayoeng*
2nd	*nga* "you"	*menga*	*pxenga*	*aynga*
3rd (a person)	*po* "s/he"	*mefo*	*pxefo*	*ayfo* or *fo*

The number prefixes are the ones from Chapter 3 (*me+*, *pxe+*, *ay+*), and the lenition is the same: *po* becomes *mefo* and *ayfo*, with *p* softened to *f*. The third-person form is for people and animals. For things, Na'vi uses a demonstrative such as *tsa'u* "that (thing)".

We Include or We Exclude

English "we" hides a question: *does it include the person I am talking to?* Na'vi answers it in the word itself.

FORM	WHO IS INCLUDED	ENGLISH
oeng	you and I	"we two", including you

FORM	WHO IS INCLUDED	ENGLISH
moe	I and one other, not you	"we two", excluding you
ayoeng	I, you and others	"we all", including you
ayoe	I and others, not you	"we", excluding you

Languages with this feature are said to have a **clusivity** distinction. It is common in languages of the Pacific and the Americas but absent from English and most European languages. Try to imagine the English sentence "we are going to the market" said in two situations: inviting a friend along, and telling a friend that you and another person are leaving without them. Na'vi would use different words for each.

Other Pronouns

WORD	MEANING
sno	reflexive: "oneself" (himself, herself, myself)
fko	generic "one" or "someone"
tsa'u	"that (thing)", the usual stand-in for "it"

Pronouns do not change for gender: *po* means "he" and "she" alike. Where it matters, the optional forms *poan* "he" and *poé* "she" can be used, which mirror the male and female noun endings of Chapter 3.

Pronouns in the Cases

Pronouns take the same endings as nouns, with a few shape changes. A table for the three most useful ones:

CASE	*OE* "I"	*NGA* "YOU"	*PO* "S/HE"
Subjective	*oe*	*nga*	*po*
Agentive	*oel*	*ngal*	*pol*

CASE	*OE* "I"	*NGA* "YOU"	*PO* "S/HE"
Patientive	*oeti*	*ngati* (also *ngat*)	*pot*
Dative	*oer / oeru*	*ngar / ngaru*	*por / poru*
Genitive ("my, your, his")	*oeyä*	*ngeyä*	*peyä*
Topical	*oeri*	*ngari*	

Two things stand out. The genitive forms double as the words for "my", "your" and "his/her": *ngeyä* is "your". And the patientive of *nga* is *ngati* (as in the greeting), with a shorter variant *ngat*.

Taking the Greeting Apart

You can now read *Oel ngati kameie* in full, and invert it:

```
# I see you
Oel ngati kameie.
oe-l      I-AGENTIVE       (the one who sees)
nga-ti    you-PATIENTIVE   (the one seen)

# you see me: swap the pronouns, swap the endings
Ngal oeti kameie.
nga-l     you-AGENTIVE
oe-ti     I-PATIENTIVE

# the genitive doubles as "my / your"
oeyä      my          ngeyä     your          peyä     his, her
```

The verb *kameie* stays the same in both sentences. Its infix (the *ei* inside it) is covered in Chapter 5.

Polite Forms

Na'vi has formal pronouns for "I" and "you", used to show deference: ***ohe*** "I" and ***ngenga*** "you". They are used to speak respectfully to someone of higher standing, much like the formal "you"

of many European languages. For a beginner, the ordinary pronouns *oe* and *nga* are the right choice.

Short Exchanges

With the greetings of Chapter 1 and the pronouns above, you can read this short exchange. Two phrases are new: *Ngaru lu fpom srak?* "How are you?" and the answer *Oeru lu fpom* "I am well". Both use the dative pronoun, in the pattern "to-you there-is well-being" (*lu* is "to be"; *fpom* is "well-being").

```
# A meets B
A:  Kaltxì, ma eylan.            Hello, friend.
B:  Kaltxì!                      Hello!
A:  Ngaru lu fpom srak?          How are you?
B:  Oeru lu fpom. Irayo.         I am well. Thanks.
A:  Eywa ngahu.                  Eywa be with you.
B:  Kìyevame.                    Goodbye.

# word by word
ngaru    nga-ru     you-DATIVE
lu       is / there is
fpom     well-being
srak     (question marker)
```

WATCH OUT: DO NOT TRANSLATE "I AM" WORD FOR WORD

Na'vi often says "to me is ..." where English says "I am ...": *Oeru lu fpom* is literally "to me there is well-being". Likewise, the greeting *Eywa ngahu* is built around *nga* "you" plus an ending, so it is not a word-for-word match to English "be with you" either. The best habit is to learn the whole phrase first and take it apart afterwards.

COMMON MYTHS

- **"Na'vi has only one word for 'we'."** It has at least four, depending on number and whether you are included.
- **"Oel ngati kameie means hello."** It is a deep greeting, not an everyday word; *Kaltxì* is the casual hello.

- **"Pronouns are irregular."** Mostly they follow the same endings as nouns, with a few short alternatives such as *ngat* beside *ngati*.

Hands-On Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Choose the right pronoun: (a) You and I are going; (b) A friend and I are going, and you are staying; (c) All of us here, you too, are going; (d) The three of them are going; (e) She is going. Then give the word for "your" and for "my".

View solution

EXERCISE 2

Build the agentive and patientive forms of *oe*, *nga* and *po*, then write "She sees me" and "I see her" with the pattern of *Oel ngati kameie*.

View solution

EXERCISE 3

Write a short exchange of five lines in which two friends meet, ask how each is, answer, give thanks and part. Gloss every pronoun in your own exchange, and say which cases they are in.

View solution

CHAPTER 4 QUICK REFERENCE

- **Singular**: *oe* (I), *nga* (you), *po* (s/he), *tsa'u* (it)
- **We**: *oeng* (you and I), *moe* (two, not you), *ayoeng* (all, with you), *ayoe* (not you)
- **Number prefixes** on pronouns: *me+*, *pxe+*, *ay+*
- **Cases**: *oel, ngal, pol* (agentive); *oeti, ngati, pot* (patientive); *oeyä, ngeyä, peyä* (genitive: my, your, his/her)

- Other: *sno* (oneself), *fko* (one, someone); formal *ohe* (I), *ngenga* (you)
- Phrases: *Ngaru lu fpom srak?* (How are you?), *Oeru lu fpom.* (I am well.)

COMING NEXT

Na'vi 1, Chapter 5 starts the verbs: the verb root, where infixes go, and the tense infixes that put an action in the past, the present or the future.

Na'vi 1

Course 1 · Chapter 5 · Verbs and Infixes

Here is the most distinctive feature of Na'vi: its verbs change by having small pieces inserted *inside* them. Where English says "hunt, hunted, will hunt", Na'vi says *taron*, *t**ol**aron*, *t**ay**aron*. This chapter covers the basic idea, the tense and aspect infixes, and how to find the right place to put one. Chapter 6 adds the infixes that show the speaker's attitude. For the terms involved (affix, infix, tense, aspect), see Introduction to Linguistics, Chapter 4.

> **THE IDEA IN A BOX**
>
> A Na'vi verb never changes for who is doing it. Time, aspect and attitude are added as **infixes**, small pieces placed inside the verb root at fixed positions.

Verbs Do Not Agree With the Subject

English verbs change for the subject in the third person ("he hunts" against "I hunt"). Na'vi verbs never do. The verb *taron* "to hunt" is the same whether the hunter is "I", "you" or "they", since the pronoun or noun (with its case ending, Chapters 3 and 4) already says who it is. This makes Na'vi simpler than Klingon, where a prefix on the verb shows both subject and object (Klingon Grammar 1, Chapter 4).

What Is an Infix?

A prefix goes at the front of a word and a suffix at the end. An **infix** goes *inside*. English has only a joke version ("abso-bloomin'-lutely"); Na'vi uses infixes for every verb. To mark an infix, learners write it between angle brackets: *t<ay>aron* is the root *taron* with the infix *ay* placed after the first consonant.

```
# the root: taron  "to hunt"   (syllables: ta-ron)
taron            # hunts       (no infix)
t<ay>aron       # will hunt   (-ay- = future)
t<ol>aron       # hunted      (-ol- = perfective)
t<er>aron       # is hunting  (-er- = imperfective)
```

Where the Infix Goes

Verbs have two infix slots, called **position 1** and **position 2**:

POSITION	WHERE	WHAT IT CARRIES
Position 1	in the **second-to-last syllable**	tense, aspect (and mood, Chapter 6)
Position 2	in the **last syllable**	the speaker's attitude (Chapter 6)

Within its syllable, an infix goes **after the first consonant and before the vowel**. A root with one syllable has no second-to-last syllable, so both infixes go after the single starting consonant, one after the other. So to place a position 1 infix:

1. Divide the root into syllables (Chapter 2).
2. Take the second-to-last syllable.
3. Put the infix between its first consonant and its vowel.

```
# two syllables: the infix goes in the first syllable
ta-ron      →   t<ay>a-ron      =  tayaron
ka-me       →   k<am>a-me       =  kamame

# one syllable: the infix goes after the one starting consonant
lu          →   l<ol>u          =  lolu      (was)
```

The Tense and Aspect Infixes

Position 1 carries two meanings together: **when** (tense) and **how the action is seen** (aspect). Na'vi uses a five-point time scale that English lacks:

	PAST	NEAR PAST	GENERAL	NEAR FUTURE	FUTURE
Plain	*-am-*	*-ìm-*	*(none)*	*-ìy-*	*-ay-*
Perfective (completed)	*-alm-*	*-ìlm-*	*-ol-*	*-ìly-*	*-aly-*
Imperfective (in progress)	*-arm-*	*-ìrm-*	*-er-*	*-ìry-*	*-ary-*

The table can be read as a grid: pick the time column and the aspect row. Notice the pattern: the plain row has *m* for the past, *y* for the future; the perfective row adds an *l* and the imperfective row adds an *r*. For example, "was just hunting" is near past + imperfective: *t<ìrm>aron*.

One Verb Through the Grid

```
# taron "to hunt": position 1 (the forms below follow the table's pattern)
taron               hunts (general)
t<am>aron          hunted (past)
t<ìm>aron         just hunted (near past)
t<ìy>aron         is about to hunt (near future)
t<ay>aron         will hunt (future)
t<ol>aron         hunted / has hunted (perfective)
t<er>aron         is hunting (imperfective)
t<ìrm>aron        was just hunting (near past, imperfective)
```

Two Verbs You Know

kame "to see" is the verb inside the greeting. The greeting *kameie* is *kame* with the infix *ei* in position 2 (kam<ei>e: Chapter 6 explains *ei*). And *lu* "to be" is a one-syllable verb, so its infixes come right after the *l*:

```
# lu  "to be"  (one syllable: the infix goes after l)
lu             is
l<ol>u         was
l<ay>u         will be

# stress stays on the root vowel (Chapter 2)
lolú           was       (not "lólu")
```

WATCH OUT: THE INFIX GOES INSIDE, NOT ON THE FRONT

The commonest beginner mistake is to treat an infix as a prefix: *aytaron*. The correct form is *t<ay>aron*. Another is putting the infix after the vowel (*ta<ay>ron*). The rule is always: after the first consonant of the second-to-last syllable.

WATCH OUT: "GENERAL" IS NOT THE SAME AS ENGLISH PRESENT

The unmarked verb *taron* is the general form: it states the action plainly, with the time taken from the context. When time matters, add an infix. The "general" column is why Na'vi sentences often have no infix at all.

COMMON MYTHS

- **"Infixes are rare in languages."** They are less common than prefixes and suffixes, but they appear in several language families, including Tagalog.
- **"A Na'vi verb has a different form for each person."** No: the verb does not change for the subject at all.
- **"Na'vi has just past, present and future."** It has five points on the time scale, and a second dimension (aspect) on top.

Hands-On Exercises

EXERCISE 1

From *taron* "to hunt" build: (a) "will hunt"; (b) "just hunted"; (c) "is hunting"; (d) "was hunting a little while ago"; (e) "hunted" (perfective). Mark the infix in angle brackets and give its row and column in the grid.

View solution

EXERCISE 2

Divide each root into syllables, then place the infix: (a) *kame* + *ay*; (b) *lu* + *am*; (c) *rol* "to sing" + *ay*; (d) *ngop* "to create" + *er*. Explain which syllable you chose in each case.

View solution

EXERCISE 3

Decode: *t<ìrm>aron*, *l<ol>u*, *t<ay>aron*. For each, say the tense, the aspect, and the translation. Then explain why *Oel ngati kameie* looks as if it has no tense infix, and what the infix *ei* in it is doing.

View solution

CHAPTER 5 QUICK REFERENCE

- Verbs **do not agree** with the subject; the case endings on the nouns do that job
- **Infix** = a piece placed inside the verb; written <like this>
- **Position 1**: tense and aspect, in the second-to-last syllable; **position 2**: attitude, in the last syllable
- An infix goes **after the first consonant, before the vowel** of its syllable; a one-syllable verb takes both after its single consonant
- **Tense**: *-am-* past, *-ìm-* near past, none = general, *-ìy-* near future, *-ay-* future
- **Aspect**: *-ol-* perfective, *-er-* imperfective (with the tense: *-alm- -ìlm- -ìly- -aly-*, *-arm- -ìrm- -ìry- -ary-*)
- Examples: *taron, t<ay>aron, t<ol>aron, t<er>aron, l<ol>u*

COMING NEXT

Na'vi 1, Chapter 6 adds the second slot: the infixes that show the speaker's feeling (*ei*, *äng*), doubt and respect, the infixes that mean "cause to" and "oneself", and how to read a verb with two infixes.

Na'vi 1

Course 1 · Chapter 6 · Attitude and Voice

Chapter 5 showed how a verb gets its time. This chapter completes the verb: the second infix slot, where the speaker says *how they feel* about what they are saying, and the extra infixes in the first slot that turn a verb into "cause to", "oneself" or "the one who does it". By the end you can read a verb with two infixes and explain what each one is doing, including the one inside the greeting *kameie*.

> **THE IDEA IN A BOX**
>
> A Na'vi verb has two slots. **Position 1** holds tense, aspect, mood and voice. **Position 2** holds the speaker's attitude. The two can be filled together in one verb.

Position 2: The Speaker's Attitude

In English, a speaker shows feeling with a word or a tone ("happily", "unfortunately", a sigh). Na'vi builds it into the verb, in the **last syllable**:

INFIX	WHAT IT SHOWS	EXAMPLE
-ei-	the speaker is pleased about it	*kam<ei>e* "see" (gladly)
-äng-	the speaker is displeased about it	*l <äng>u* "was (ugh!)"
-ats-	the speaker is unsure it is accurate	marks doubt about the statement
-uy-	the speaker is showing respect	an honorific

Two small spelling rules: after the sounds *i, ì, ll* and *rr*, *-ei-* is written *-eiy-*, and after *i*, *-äng-* is written *-eng-*.

The Greeting Again

You can now see why *Oel ngati kameie* is a warm phrase and not a bare statement of fact. The verb *kame* "to see" is the plain verb; the infix *ei* in its last syllable adds the speaker's happiness to it.

```
# kame  "to see"   (ka-me)
kame                see                 (plain)
kam<ei>e            see, and I am glad   →  kameie
kam<äng>e           see, and I am not pleased   (built by the rule)

# taron  "to hunt"   (ta-ron): position 2 goes in ron
taron               hunt
tar<ei>on           hunt, pleased
tar<äng>on          hunt, displeased
```

Position 1: More Than Tense

Position 1, the second-to-last syllable, holds the tense and aspect infixes of Chapter 5 and a few more that change the verb's role:

INFIX	MEANING	EFFECT
-eyk-	causative: "make someone do it"	the doer moves into the dative; the thing acted on stays the same
-äp-	reflexive: "do it to oneself"	the object is the subject; used with the pronoun *sno* (Chapter 4)
-us-	active participle: "doing"	"the one who ..." as an adjective
-awn-	passive participle: "done"	"the thing that was ..." as an adjective

The reflexive and the causative can sit beside a tense infix, and then they come first: *-äp-* and *-eyk-* are placed before the tense infix. They can also combine, as *-äpeyk-*.

The Subjunctive

After a verb of wanting or ability, Na'vi marks the second verb with a **subjunctive** infix such as *-iv-*: the verb *yom* "eat" becomes *y<iv>om*, as in a sentence that means "the chef wants them to eat the food", where the word *new* "want" governs it. Several forms of this infix exist, one for each tense and aspect.

Putting It Together: Two Slots, Many Meanings

When a verb carries both slots, read it from the outside in. These two forms are examples:

```
# taron "to hunt"  (ta-ron)
t<ìrm>ar<ei>on     was just hunting, and I am pleased about it
t<ay>ar<äng>on      will hunt, and I am anxious or bored about it

# lu "to be"  (one syllable: both infixes follow the l, in order)
l<ol><äng>u         was (ugh!)       →  lolängú
```

The order is the same each time: first the infix for time, aspect or voice, then the infix for attitude. A one-syllable verb keeps them in that order after its single consonant.

WATCH OUT: AN ATTITUDE INFIX IS NOT A TENSE INFIX

kameie has no tense of its own: the *ei* is attitude. To say "I will see you, gladly", put the future infix in the first slot as well: the verb then carries one infix from each slot. Do not read *ei* as "I love" or "I understand": it marks only the speaker's pleasure about the action.

WATCH OUT: INFIXES ARE OPTIONAL

A verb with no infix is complete and correct. Learners often over-stuff verbs. Add an infix only when you need the meaning: *kame* alone is a normal verb, and *kameie* is a warmer version.

COMMON MYTHS

- **"Na'vi grammar has no way to be polite."** It has the honorific infix *-uy-*, the formal pronouns of Chapter 4, and fixed courtesy phrases.
- **"The attitude infixes are slang."** They are regular grammar, taught in the reference books like any other infix.
- **"You must use every infix."** A plain verb is normal and common.

Hands-On Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Using *taron* "to hunt", form: (a) hunt, pleased; (b) hunt, displeased; (c) will hunt, pleased; (d) was just hunting, displeased. Then do the same with *kame* for "see, displeased". Mark each infix and name its slot.

View solution

EXERCISE 2

Decode each form: *t<ay>ar<äng>on*, *t<ìrm>ar<ei>on*, *l
<äng>u*. Name each infix, its slot, and give a translation including the speaker's feeling.

View solution

EXERCISE 3

Explain in your own words how English and Na'vi show the speaker's feelings about an action, using the example of someone who is glad to see you and someone who is not. Say what Na'vi can express in one verb that English needs several words for, and one thing English does that Na'vi does not.

View solution

CHAPTER 6 QUICK REFERENCE

- **Position 2** (last syllable): attitude: *-ei-* pleased, *-äng-* displeased, *-ats-* unsure, *-uy-* honorific
- Spelling: *-eiy-* after i, ì, ll, rr; *-eng-* after i
- **Position 1** also holds: *-eyk-* causative, *-äp-* reflexive, *-us-* active participle, *-awn-* passive participle
- **Subjunctive** after "want" and "can": for example *y<iv>om*
- Order: voice or tense infix first, attitude infix second; one-syllable verbs take both after the first consonant
- *kameie* = *kame* + *ei* (plain "see" plus a glad speaker)

COMING NEXT

Na'vi 1, Chapter 7 brings nouns, pronouns and verbs together into whole sentences: the order of the parts, what is free and what is fixed, and how adjectives attach.

Na'vi 1

Course 1 · Chapter 7 · Sentences and Word Order

You now have the parts: nouns with case endings (Chapter 3), pronouns (Chapter 4) and verbs with infixes (Chapters 5 and 6). This chapter puts them into whole sentences. The big surprise for English speakers is that the order of the main parts is *free*. The case endings, not the position, tell you who did what.

> **THE IDEA IN A BOX**
>
> In English, "the dog bites the man" and "the man bites the dog" differ only in order. In Na'vi the endings carry that job, so the parts can move. What does *not* move freely is the small stuff attached to a noun: adjectives, negatives and similar modifiers.

Free Order, Held by Case

The agent takes *-l* (or *-ìl*) and the object takes *-t* or *-ti*. Because each role is marked on the word itself, you can reorder them. The reference grammars give the greeting in three orders, all meaning "I see you":

```
# agent = oel (I)   object = ngati (you)   verb = kameie
Oel ngati kameie.        I see you.
Ngati oel kameie.        I see you.
Oel kameie ngati.        I see you.
```

The usual order is agent, object, verb, and that is the order to use while learning. Free order is a feature you recognise when you read, and use later for emphasis.

ENGLISH	NA'VI
Order tells you the roles	Endings tell you the roles
"I see you" ≠ "You see I"	*Oel ngati kameie* = *Ngati oel kameie*
Verb after the subject, nearly always	Verb can move; no agreement to give it away
Adjective before the noun	Adjective before or after, joined with *a*

Adjectives: Joined with *a*

An adjective does not change for number or case. It is linked to its noun by the small piece *a*, written on the side next to the noun: before the noun the adjective ends in *-a*, after the noun it starts with *a-*. Either order is fine.

```
# kilvan "river"   ngim "long"
ngim-a kilvan       a long river
kilvan a-ngim       a long river

# as a statement, use lu "is" instead of the linker
kilvan ngim lu         The river is long.
```

The linker joins an adjective to a noun that is already in the sentence. To *say* that something is a certain way, you need the verb *lu* from Chapter 5, covered next.

The Verb *lu*: Being and Having

Na'vi has no separate word for "is" in each tense; the verb *lu* "to be" does the work and takes the same infixes as any verb.

```
# lu + adjective or noun
Fìtrr lu sìltsana trr.        Today is a good day.

# "has" is built from lu plus the dative of the owner
lu poru tstxo                    he/she has a name (literally: is to-him a name)
```

Compare English, which has a verb "to have". Na'vi says that the thing *is to* its owner, using the dative ending from Chapter 3 (*-ru* after a vowel). The Chapter 4 pronoun *poru* is the dative of *po*.

Showing Ownership and Topic

Ownership uses the genitive from Chapter 3 (*-yä*) and the possessive pronouns of Chapter 4 (*oeyä*, *ngeyä*, *peyä*). The **topical** ending *-ri* marks "as for X", and the reference grammar uses it

to let a speaker name a person first and then talk about a part that is theirs. "As for me, the nose is ..." is understood as "my nose is ...".

Topic is a good way to see that Na'vi is built around who and what you are talking about, not around a fixed slot for "subject". Use it sparingly while learning.

Words That Join a Noun: Adpositions

Words like "with", "in" and "to" can stand before the noun as separate words, or follow it joined on. *hu* "with" gives either *hu nga* or *ngahu*, and so the farewell blessing from Chapter 1, *Eywa ngahu*, is just "Eywa with you". The word *mì* "in" gives *mì sokx* "in the body"; joined on, it does not change the noun: *tokxmì*.

Some adpositions that come before a noun **lenite** it, with the same changes as Chapter 3: *px, tx, kx* become *p, t, k*; *p* becomes *f*; *t, ts* become *s*; *k* becomes *h*; and ' disappears. That is why a table of forms often shows a changed first letter.

WATCH OUT: FREE ORDER IS NOT NO ORDER

Only the main roles are free. An adjective, a negative word or a quantity word stays tied to the noun or verb it modifies. If you move a role to the front, make sure every role still carries its ending: a bare noun with no ending is read as the intransitive subject, not as an object.

WATCH OUT: DO NOT COPY ENGLISH "TO BE"

You do not need *lu* to link every adjective. Inside a noun phrase use the *a* linker; use *lu* only when the adjective is the statement ("The river *is* long").

COMMON MYTHS

- **"Free word order means anything goes."** The endings must be right, and modifiers stay put.
- **"Na'vi has no verb 'to have'."** It does not have the English word, but *lu* with a dative owner does the same job.
- **"You must use *-ri* to start every sentence."** Topic marking is optional emphasis.

Hands-On Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Write the three word orders of "I see you" (*oel*, *ngati*, *kameie*) that keep the meaning, and then show what would go wrong if you left the *-ti* off *ngati*. Say which order you would use as a beginner.

View solution

EXERCISE 2

Using *kilvan* "river" and *ngim* "long", write "a long river" in both orders, and then "The river is long". Explain which version uses the *a* linker and which uses *lu*.

View solution

EXERCISE 3

Explain in your own words how Na'vi says "she has a name" without the English verb "to have". Name the verb, the case ending and the pronoun form, and say how English and Na'vi differ.

View solution

CHAPTER 7 QUICK REFERENCE

- Word order is free; **case endings** mark the roles. Beginner order: agent, object, verb
- Adjective + noun: *ngim-a kilvan* or *kilvan a-ngim* (the *a* goes next to the noun)
- "X is …": *kilvan ngim lu*; *lu* takes the usual infixes
- "Has": *lu poru tstxo* (is + dative owner + thing)
- Topic: *-ri* ("as for …"); possession: *-yä*, *oeyä*, *ngeyä*, *peyä*
- Adpositions before or after the noun: *hu nga* = *ngahu*; some lenite the noun

COMING NEXT

Na'vi 1, Chapter 8 covers questions and negation: asking yes or no questions, using question words, saying "not", and giving short answers.

Na'vi 1

Course 1 · Chapter 8 · Questions and Negation

With Chapter 7 you can make statements. This chapter lets you ask, refuse and answer: yes/no questions, the family of question words that all begin or end in *pe*, the negator *ke*, and the two short answers from Chapter 1, *srane* and *kehe*.

> **THE IDEA IN A BOX**
>
> A yes/no question is a statement plus the small marker *srak* (or *srake*). A negative statement is the same statement with *ke* placed before the part you deny. The answers are *srane* "yes" and *kehe* "no".

Yes/No Questions: *srak(e)*

The marker means roughly "whether". It can go at the beginning or end of the clause. It is *srake* when something follows it and *srak* when it ends the clause. Speakers sometimes drop it and let their voice rise.

```
# the question from Chapter 1
Ngaru lu fpom srak?          Are you well?  (literally: do you have peace?)

# it is built like the "has" pattern of Chapter 7
lu   ngaru   fpom         "is to-you peace"
```

The question needs no special word order and no auxiliary verb. English "do you…?" and "are you…?" have no counterpart.

Question Words: the *pe-* Family

Each question word is built around *pe* ("which"). It can come before the noun it asks about or after it, and each has two shapes, for example *pesu* or *tupe* "who?".

ASKS ABOUT	FORM	ALTERNATIVE SHAPE
who?	*pesu*	*tupe*

ASKS ABOUT	FORM	ALTERNATIVE SHAPE
what? (a thing)	***peu***	*'upe*
what? (an action)	***pehem***	*kempe*
why?	***pelun***	*lumpe*
where?	***peseng***	*tsengpe*
when?	***pehrr***	*krrpe*
how?	***pefya***	*fyape*
what kind of?	***pefnel***	*fnepe*

```
Oeru pelun?                 Why me?
Pehem si nga?               What are you doing?
Kempe si nga?               What are you doing?   (same question, other shape)
Pelì'u poltxe nga?          What did you say?
```

The pattern is the same for all: the question word takes the place of the thing you do not know. *Pelì'u* asks about a word, so the question above is about something that was said.

Saying "Not": *ke*

Negation, of a noun phrase or a clause, is made with the particle *ke*, placed **before** the part it negates. Na'vi allows double negatives, so a negative sentence can carry more than one *ke*.

```
# ke + the thing denied
ke txep                 not a fire
Nga ke lu Txewì srak?   Is it true that you are not a Txewi?

# the pieces that carry a negative meaning
ke'u                    nothing
fuke                    or not
```

Short Answers: *srane* and *kehe*

Srane is "yes" and *kehe* is "no", used on their own to answer a yes/no question. The answer follows the *truth* of the statement, not its wording, which matters for negative questions: the question *Nga ke lu Txewì srak?* asks whether "you are not a Txewi" is true, so *srane* confirms the negative statement and *kehe* denies it.

```
# Q: is the statement true?   A: yes or no
Ngaru lu fpom srak?       Srane.            Yes (I am well).
Ngaru lu fpom srak?       Kehe.             No.

# Q: are you coming or not?   (ftxey = whether, fuke = or not)
Ftxey nga za'u fuke?
```

A question tag asks for agreement: *ke fifya srak?* "(is it) not this way?" in its long form, with shortened versions heard too.

WATCH OUT: THE ANSWER FOLLOWS THE STATEMENT

In English "Aren't you coming?" is answered with the opposite of what a literal reading suggests ("No, I'm coming" is confusing). In Na'vi, *srane* means "that statement is true" and *kehe* means "it is not". With a negative question the safest answer is a short sentence.

WATCH OUT: *KE* AND *KEHE* ARE NOT INTERCHANGEABLE

ke goes in front of a word or phrase; *kehe* stands alone as an answer. Do not put *kehe* before a verb.

COMMON MYTHS

- **"You must use *srak* in every question."** A question word or a rising voice can be enough.
- **"Question words come first, as in English."** They can stand before or after the noun.
- **"Double negatives cancel out."** In Na'vi they stack and stay negative.

Hands-On Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Explain how *Ngaru lu fpom srak?* is built, word by word, then give a short answer meaning "yes" and a short answer meaning "no". Say why Na'vi needs no word for "do" or "are" in the question.

View solution

EXERCISE 2

Match each English question to its Na'vi question word: who, why, where, when, how, what are you doing. Then say what *Oeru pelun?* and *Kempe si nga?* mean.

View solution

EXERCISE 3

A friend asks *Nga ke lu Txewì srak?*. Explain what is being asked, and which of *srane* or *kehe* you would answer if you are not a Txewi. Say how this differs from English.

View solution

CHAPTER 8 QUICK REFERENCE

- Yes/no question: add *srake* (clause start or middle) or *srak* (clause end); rising voice can replace it
- Question words: *pesu, peu, pehem, pelun, peseng, pehrr, pefya, pefnel* (or the *-pe* shapes)
- Negation: *ke* before the thing denied; double negatives stack; *ke'u* nothing, *fuke* or not
- Answers: *srane* yes, *kehe* no, following the truth of the statement
- "Whether…or not": *ftxey … fuke*

COMING NEXT

Na'vi 1, Chapter 9 turns to numbers and counting: the base-eight system, counting things and putting them in order.

Na'vi 1

Course 1 · Chapter 9 · Numbers and Counting

Na'vi counts in **eights**, not tens. The reason given for it is that the people have four fingers on each hand, which makes eight on two. This chapter teaches the numerals, shows how bigger numbers are built from smaller ones, and shows how to count things and put them in order.

> **THE IDEA IN A BOX**
>
> A number system is a choice of base. We count 1 to 9 and then start a new column at ten. Na'vi counts 1 to 7 and starts a new column at *eight*. "Ten" in Na'vi is therefore not a round number: it is eight plus two.

The Numerals 0 to 7

NUMBER	NA'VI	SHORT FORM (USED IN COMPOUNDS)
0	***kew***	
1	***'aw***	
2	***mune***	*me-*
3	***pxey***	*pxe-*
4	***tsìng***	*tsì-*
5	***mrr***	*mrr-*
6	***pukap***	*pu-*
7	***kinä***	*ki-*

Watch the stress, as in Chapter 2: *múne*, *pxéy*, *tsìng*, *mrr*, *púkap*, *kínä*. The numeral *mune* shortens to *me-*, not *mu-*, in compounds.

Eight and Beyond

The number eight is *vol*. Written in the system's own columns it would be "10": one eight and no ones. After that, each number is eight plus a unit, so 9 is "eight and one".

```
# decimal number = Na'vi
 8    vol
 9    voláw        (eight + one)
10    vomún        (eight + two)
11    vopéy        (eight + three)
12    vosìng       (eight + four)
13    vomŕr        (eight + five)
14    vofú         (eight + six)
15    vohín        (eight + seven)
16    mévol        (two eights)
```

The rule: to add 1 to 7 to a power of eight, drop the *l* of *vol* (except with 1) and **lenite** the first sound of the unit, the same changes as Chapter 3. That is why 12 shows *-sìng* (from *tsìng*, ts → s) and 11 shows *-péy* (from *pxey*, px → p). The endings of 14 and 15 are shorter than their numerals and have to be learned.

Multiples of Eight

```
# short form of the multiplier + vol
16    mévol          (2 × 8)
24    pxévol         (3 × 8)
32    tsìvol         (4 × 8)
40    mŕrvol         (5 × 8)
48    púvol          (6 × 8)
56    kívol          (7 × 8)
```

Every number up to 63 is a single word. The number 63 (seven eights and seven) is written as one long word starting *kivo-*.

The Big Round Numbers

```
# powers of eight
  8   vol            (8 × 1)
 64   zam            (8 × 8)
128   mezam          (2 × 64)
192   pxezam         (3 × 64)
```

```
  256   tsìzam          (4 × 64)
  512   vózam           (8 × 64)
 4096   zazam           (64 × 64)
```

Zam plays the part of our "hundred": it is the first number that is a column of its own. A multiplier of 2 to 7 goes in front of it, as with *vol*.

Counting Things

A number goes before the noun and is joined to it with the linker *a* from Chapter 7, which attaches to the number. The noun after the number stays **singular**, because the number already says how many.

```
# 'eveng = child
munea 'eveng        two children        (number + a + singular noun)
me'eveng             the two children     (dual prefix from Chapter 3)
```

Compare English, where "two children" has a plural ending as well. Na'vi gives the amount once, in the number. The dual prefix *me+* is for when the noun already means "the pair", not when a number is present.

Putting Things in Order: Ordinals

"First", "second" and so on add the unstressed suffix *-ve* to the short form of the numeral, with a few irregularities, and "third" and "eighth" use the longer forms.

```
'áwve       first         kíve        seventh
múve        second        vólve       eighth
pxéyve      third         voláwve     ninth
tsìve       fourth        vomúve      tenth
mŕrve       fifth         mévolve     sixteenth
púve        sixth
```

An ordinal in front of a noun takes the linker *a*, like an adjective: *'áwvea* or *a'áwve* beside the noun.

WATCH OUT: DO NOT READ THE NUMBERS AS DECIMAL

Vomún is *ten* in decimal, but it is eight-and-two, not a round number. *Pxévol* is 24 in decimal. When you meet a Na'vi number, think "how many eights, how many ones?"

WATCH OUT: THE NOUN STAYS SINGULAR

Do not add the plural prefix from Chapter 3 to a noun that follows a number. The number says the amount, so *munea 'eveng* is right and a plural noun after it is not.

COMMON MYTHS

- **"Base eight is harder."** The words are few, and the system is regular. The unusual part is the habit of tens, not Na'vi.
- **"The numerals are borrowed from English."** The basic numerals are Na'vi words; only the loanwords *'eyt* "eight" and *nayn* "nine" exist as English-based alternatives.
- **"There is no way to say zero."** There is: *kew*.

Hands-On Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Write in Na'vi the decimal numbers 9, 12, 16, 24 and 64, and explain how each is built out of eights and ones.

View solution

EXERCISE 2

Explain the rule for forming "eight plus a unit" using *vosìng* and *vopéy*. Then use the rule to build 20 (two eights and four), and say that it is built by the rule rather than seen in a source.

View solution

EXERCISE 3

Write "two children" in Na'vi and explain what is different from English. Then write the ordinals first to fourth.

View solution

CHAPTER 9 QUICK REFERENCE

- Base eight: *kew, 'aw, mune, pxey, tsìng, mrr, pukap, kinä*, then *vol* (8)
- 9 to 15: *vo-* + lenited unit (*voláw, vomún, vopéy, vosìng, vomŕr, vofú, vohín*); 16 is *mévol*
- Multiples: *pxévol* 24, *tsìvol* 32, *mŕrvol* 40, *púvol* 48, *kívol* 56
- Big numbers: *zam* 64, *mezam* 128, *vózam* 512, *zazam* 4096
- Counting: number + *a* + singular noun (*munea 'eveng*)
- Ordinals: *-ve* (*'áwve, múve, pxéyve, tsìve*, ...), with *a* before a noun

COMING NEXT

Na'vi 1, Chapter 10 is the last chapter: the culture behind the language, the people and their world, and a recap of everything in the course.

Na'vi 1

Course 1 · Chapter 10 · The People and the Language

The last chapter steps back from the grammar. A language is made for people, and Na'vi was made for a fictional people in a film. This chapter looks at the world the language belongs to, how it has grown since 2009, where to continue learning, and then recaps all ten chapters.

> **THE IDEA IN A BOX**
>
> Na'vi is a language built for a film and kept alive by a community. Its grammar is real and learnable, and the world it describes is invented. Learn the words as a language, and the culture as a story.

The World of the Na'vi

In the film *Avatar*, the Na'vi are the people of the moon Pandora. They live close to the forest and its animals, and their spiritual life centres on **Eywa**, the force that connects all living things. The clan seen in the first film is the Omaticaya, whose gathering place is the Tree of Souls. This is the film's setting, not a real culture, so it is best treated as the background to the language's phrases rather than as fact about people.

What "I See You" Carries

Chapter 6 showed that *Oel ngati kameie* is *kame* "see" with the happy infix *ei*. Fans and learner sites say that "see" in this phrase means more than eyesight: to see into someone, to understand them, to respect them. Treat that as a community reading of the phrase, not an official definition. The grammar tells you what is certain: a verb of seeing, spoken with a glad attitude.

A Language That Keeps Growing

QUESTION	ANSWER
Who made it?	Paul Frommer, a linguistics professor at the University of Southern California
When?	Created from 2005 for James Cameron's *Avatar* (released 2009)
How big was it at release?	About 1,000 words, of which James Cameron supplied about 30

QUESTION	ANSWER
How big is it now?	Over 2,600 words
Who adds words?	Frommer, working with the community's Lexical Expansion Project
How is it written?	The film's world has no writing; learners use the Latin alphabet

Frommer's choice of sounds, the ejectives *px, tx, kx*, came from three sets of sample sounds he built, from which the director chose. The community that grew around the film now contributes much of the vocabulary and many of the clarifications of grammar.

Dialects

The Na'vi of the first film speak the Forest dialect, which is the one this course teaches. The sequel *Avatar: The Way of Water* introduces a Reef dialect for the people of the sea. It differs in some words and sounds. Treat it as a reason to keep learning, not as a change to what you have learnt.

Where to Keep Learning

RESOURCE	WHAT IT OFFERS
Na'viteri (Frommer's blog)	New vocabulary and grammar clarifications from the creator
LearnNavi.org	Forums, lessons, a dictionary and a grammar guide
Kelutral.org	Lessons and a community
Reykunyu, Dict-Na'vi, fwew	Online dictionaries for looking up words
Horen Lì'fyayä leNa'vi	The reference grammar edited by William Annis

When a form in this course disagrees with a dictionary, trust the dictionary: it follows the creator's latest word.

Course Recap

WHAT NA'VI 1 COVERED

- **Chapter 1:** the language, the creator, and the first phrases: *Kaltxì, Irayo, Kìyevame, Oel ngati kameie, srane, kehe*
- **Chapter 2:** the sounds, the ejectives, the clusters and the stress
- **Chapter 3:** nouns: number prefixes, lenition, cases and the genitive
- **Chapter 4:** pronouns, including the "you and I" form and the formal forms
- **Chapter 5:** verbs and the tense and aspect infixes
- **Chapter 6:** attitude and voice: the second infix slot, *-ei-*, *-äng-*, the subjunctive
- **Chapter 7:** sentences: free order held by case, the *a* linker, *lu*
- **Chapter 8:** questions with *srak*, the *pe-* words, *ke*, and short answers
- **Chapter 9:** counting in eights, ordinals, counting things
- **Chapter 10:** the culture and where to go next

WATCH OUT: THIS COURSE IS A BEGINNER'S MAP

Several forms in this course were built by rule from the reference grammar and flagged as such. Before using a form in real writing or speech, check it against Na'viteri, LearnNavi.org or a current dictionary.

Hands-On Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Write a short introduction in Na'vi from this course's phrases: greet, say "I see you", thank, and say goodbye. Add one yes/no question with *srak*.

View solution

EXERCISE 2

Pick any Na'vi sentence from this course and take it apart: say which words carry case endings, which infixes the verb has and which slot each is in, and whether the word order could change.

View solution

EXERCISE 3

Explain in your own words three ways Na'vi differs from English that you found most surprising in this course, and one thing the two languages share.

View solution

COURSE COMPLETE

You have finished *Na'vi 1*. For another invented language with a very different design, see *Klingon Grammar 1*, or for the ideas behind languages like this, *Constructed Languages*.