

There

KUTCHIN

GRAMMAR

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Part A: THE SIMPLE SENTENCE

1. The Intransitive Sentence

Possibly the simplest grammatical construction in Kutchin and one that is similar to English is the subject-predicate construction, using a noun and a verb. This can be illustrated by the following sentences:

dinjii dhidii	'The man is staying'
tr'injaa dhidii	'The woman is staying'
tr'injaa ch'a'aa	'The woman is eating'

These are similar to English, because the words occur in the same order as English, first the noun, then the verb. They are different from English, because there is no article which means 'a' or 'the' in these sentences, or anywhere in the Kutchin language.

From the above sentences we note that dhidii 'stay' and ch'a'aa 'eat' are verbs, but there are some words that are not verbs in English, but are used as verbs in Kutchin.

dinjii nizii	'The man is good'
tr'injaa nidii	'The woman is heavy'

Both nizii 'good' and nidii 'heavy' are verbs, as will be seen later in the grammar when we learn how to change subject pronouns.

When a verb in Kutchin occurs without a noun, it is understood that the subject is 'he, she, it', even though there is nothing to indicate this: e.g.,

dhidii	'He (she, or it) is staying'
nidii	'He (she, or it) is heavy'

The sentence dinjii dhidii 'The man is staying' is an assertion or statement of fact. Sometimes it is necessary to change this sentence to make a question. In English we change the order of the sentence and raise our voices; e.g., 'Is the man staying?' In Kutchin to make a question we add the word nik'ee in the sentence and/or raise our voices at the end of the sentence.

Nik'ee dinjii dhidii?	'Is the man staying?'
Nik'ee tr'injaa ch'a'aa?	'Is the woman eating?'
Nik'ee nidii?	'Is it heavy?'

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The above illustrations are all simple questions. We may also ask specific questions such as 'what?, where?, who?, when?, etc.' by adding words with these meanings to the beginning of the sentence,

juu ahhaa? 'Who is walking?'

nijin dhidii? 'Where is he staying?'

Sometimes it is necessary to change a sentence to deny the assertion, that is, to make it negative. In English we do this by putting the word 'not' before the verb; e.g., 'the man is not staying'. In Kutchin, we add the word kwaa to the sentence.

dinjii dhidii kwaa 'The man is not staying.'

Joe nidii kwaa 'Joe is not heavy.'

ch'a'aa kwaa 'He is not eating.'

Kutchins have words for 'yes' and 'no' as we do in English.

aahq', dhidii 'Yes, he is staying.'

akwaa, nidii kwaa 'No, he is not heavy.'

Kutchins answer positive questions the same as we do in English.

nik'ee dhidii? 'Is he staying?'

aahq', dhidii 'Yes, he is staying.'

or

nik'ee nidii? 'Is he heavy?'

akwaa, nidii kwaa 'No, he is not heavy.'

Kutchins do not answer negative questions the ^{same} as we do in English.

nizij kwaa? 'Is it not good?'

aahq', nizij kwaa 'Yes, it is not good.'

or

tth'aai ch'a'aa kwaa? 'Is he still not eating?'

akwaa, ch'a'aa 'No, he is eating.'

2. The Transitive Sentence

In English the sentence 'he is drinking the water' contains an object; i.e., 'water' is the object of the action of 'drinking'. Some Kutchin verbs require an object and they are called transitive verbs.

dinjii nah'in	'He is looking at the man.'
chyy dinji	'He is drinking water.'
tr'i ahtsii	'He is making the canoe.'

When an object occurs it is placed ahead of the verb. If both a subject and an object occur, the subject comes first.

dinjii tr'i nah'in	'The man is looking at the canoe.'
tr'injaa chyy dinji	'The woman is drinking the water.'

Transitive verb forms with subjects 'he, she, it' such as those listed cannot be said without their objects; i.e., nah'in, dinji, ahtsii are meaningless to Kutchins unless a noun object is present.

In English when we wish to substitute a pronoun object 'him, her, it' for the noun object it is a matter of substituting words.

'He is drinking the water' becomes 'he is drinking it'

'it' substitutes for 'the water'

In Kutchin, this is done by substituting a prefix in the verb for the noun in the sentence.

dinjii nah'in	'He is looking at the man.'
yəh'in	'He is looking at him.'
or	
chyy dinji	'He is drinking the water.'
yiinji	'He is drinking it.'
or	
dinjii tr'i ahtsii	'The man is making a canoe.'
dinjii yahtsii	'The man is making it.'
yahtsii	'He is making it.'

For the student learning to speak Kutchin the most practical form to memorize is the form containing the direct object pronoun such as; yaah'in, yiiniĭ, yahtsii, yiitth'ak. The forms ^{that} cannot be said without a noun object can then be obtained by dropping the pronoun ya- and then adding a-, d- or nothing.

yaah'in becomes nah'in

yiiniĭ becomes diiniĭ

yiitth'ak becomes diitth'ak

yahtsii becomes ahtsii

The verbs with objects that we have studied so far have all had objects in 3rd person singular, ya- 'him, her, it'; i.e.,

gee'yoaḡhtan 'He is teaching him.'

yiitth'ak 'He hears him.'

yaah'in 'He see him.'

Objects may also occur in the 1st person singular by replacing ya- with sha- 'me'.

geeshoḡhtan 'He is teaching me.'

shiitth'ak 'He hears me.'

shḡḡh'in 'He sees me.'

Objects may also occur in the 2nd person singular by replacing ya- with na- 'you'.

geenoḡhtan 'He is teaching you.'

niitth'ak 'He hears you.'

naḡḡh'in 'He sees you.'

Objects may also occur in the 1st person plural by replacing ya- with dana- 'us'.

gedanoḡhtan 'He is teaching us.'

diniitth'ak 'He hears us.'

danaḡḡh'in 'He sees us.'

Objects may also occur in the 2nd person plural by replacing ya- with nakhwa- 'you (pl.)'.

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geenakhwoq̄ahtan	'He is teaching you (pl.).'
nakhwiitth'ak	'He hears you (pl.).'
nakhwq̄ah'in	'He sees you (pl.).'

Objects may also occur in the 3rd person plural by replacing ya- with va- and then adding ga- 'them'.

geegavoq̄ahtan	'He is teaching them.'
giviitth'ak	'He hears them.'
gavaq̄ah'in	'He sees them.'

Objects may occur in the indefinite third person. This is formed by replacing ya- with ch'a- 'something'.

ch'iitth'ak	'He hears (something).'
geech'oq̄ahtan	'He is teaching (something).'
ch'a'aa	'He is eating (something).'

Objects may occur in the reflexive, indicating the action is done to oneself. This is formed by replacing ya- with ada- 'self'.

yaq̄ahjat	'He scares him.'
adaq̄ahjat	'He scares himself.'

or

nał'in	'I see him.'
adadaq̄al'in	'I see myself.'

Special Note about Stems and Classifiers

The last syllable of the Kutchin verb is called the stem. This contains the main meaning of the verb. Next to it there frequently appears a classifier l, h, or d-effect. All Kutchin verbs divide into 4 categories, depending on whether there is a classifier l, h, d-effect or no classifier at all. The classifier or it's effect is most readily seen in the first person singular forms.

ih-tree	'I'm crying.'	No classifier, stem -tree
al-gal	'I'm running.'	l classifier, stem -gal
al-tsit	'I'm catching, grabbing.'	h classifier, stem -tsit
ishinii	'I'm drinking (needs obj.)	d-effect classifier, stem -nii

Classifier d is very frequently fused to the stem so as to make it difficult to see it. The "effect" of the classifier d in changing the first consonant of the stem and effecting grammatical changes, is more easily seen than the classifier itself. This is why the classifier d is called d-effect.

In the illustration adaghjat (see middle of pg. 5), when ada- is added to a verb having classifier h, h becomes l.

Other uses of the classifier will be explained as they occur.

3. Noun Possession

In English, a noun is possessed by placing the words 'his, her, its' ahead of it. A noun is possessed in Kutchin by adding a prefix to the noun.

srii	'knife'
vizrii'	'his knife'

or

ik	'parka'
vi'ik	'his parka'

or

dzyir	'mittens'
vidzyir'	'his mittens'

It will be observed that when some words are possessed a suffix ' (glottal) is added to the noun. As you note above, this does not always occur. Note the following where it does not occur.

va'at	'his wife'
vidinjik	'his moose'

Other forms of the possessive prefix are sha- 'my', na- 'your', ya- 'his, her, its', da- 'his own', dii- 'ours', nakhwa- 'ours, yours' (pl.)', goo- 'theirs', ch'a- 'somebody's'.

shakwe'	'my foot'
nadaa'əʃi	'your axe'
dagwach'aa'	'his own clothes'
nakhwati'	'our, your father'

goolik	'their dog(s)'
ch'iki'	'somebody's head'

ya- 'his, her, its' is used to distinguish between persons, when there is more than one third-person (his, her, its) being mentioned in the sentence.

vizhe dhidii	'He is staying at his house.'
yizhe dhidii	'He is staying at his (somebody else's) house'

Certain variant forms of the possessive prefixes do occur in certain words, although these may be predictable on the basis of fusion. But because there seems to be only a small number of them, they can probably be just as easily memorized individually as they are discovered: e.g.,

vantsj	'his nose'
viinji'	'his son'
voondee	'his older brother'

4. Modifiers of Nouns

Demonstrative words are used to modify nouns. These occur before the noun just the same as in English.

zhik dinjii	'that man'
zhik łain	'that dog'
jii dinjii	'this man'
jii łain	'this dog'
aai dinjii	'that man'

Demonstrative words can also be used by themselves as the subject of the sentence.

jii dinjii nitsii	'this man is big'
jii nitsii	'this one is big'

The Kutchin numerical system is based on ten. However, numbers above five are very seldom used. The number follows the noun.

łain ch'ihłak	'one dog'
dinjik neekweę	'two moose'

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luk tik	'three fish'
dinjii dḡḡ	'four people'
neegḡḡ ch'ihkoonli'	'five foxes'

When combined with demonstratives, the word order looks like this:

jii srii neekwḡḡ	'these two knives'
aai dachan dḡḡ	'those four logs'

Adjectives, which occur before the noun in English, occur after it in Kutchin.

dinjii lḡḡ	'many men'
tr'injaa chan	'the woman too'
tr'injaa chan ginkhii	'the woman too is talking.'