Using a Native Language Reference Grammar as a Language Learning Tool

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Introduction

This article is a case study in using a reference grammar as a language learning tool. Currently for many Indigenous communities, the main goal of community language work is creating a new generation of speakers (Kipp, 2009). In order to achieve this goal, the community language activists must develop appropriate lessons using language resources. Ideally fluent speakers would provide the needed language information. But some language communities rely on language resources developed by linguists, anthropologists and missionaries. Often times it is almost impossible for community members to understand and use these language resources. This difficulty is due to many reasons such as the use of: linguistic jargon; different writing systems; and different dialects (Hinton, Vera and Steele, 2002). I use the Ute Reference Grammar (Givon, 1980) throughout this case study.

Hinton, Vera and Steele's (2002) guidelines

For this case study I follow the Hinton, Vera and Steele's (2002) guidelines for working with language resources for Indigenous language learning and teaching. The following are their guidelines (81):

1. Ignore most of the explanations and labels and instead look for examples.
2. Don't read the grammar cover to cover; instead, look in the table of contents for sections that will allow you to understand how to put together simple sentences. Start with the section on verbs and skip to the parts that talk about the verbal affixes (verb endings, etc.).
3. Finally, go to your speaker with any examples you get from the grammar book. Your speaker may say things differently from what is written there, for many good reasons. Your speaker should be your main source, not the book.

I offer one important tip before I begin the case study.

Learn the writing system

As a first step, it is necessary to learn the writing system used in the language resource. If you are using several resources, it may be necessary to learn many different writing systems. As with learning to read and write English, learning the writing system for your Indigenous language takes hard work and commitment. It is like many other traditional skills such as beadwork or basket-making which take time and commitment to master but are well worth the effort.

As an Indigenous community member with twenty-two years of language work as a language learner, teacher and linguist, I highly suggest that you make and use flash cards to help you memorize the writing system. I use 3" by 5" index cards and a dark marker to make flashcards. I have created many sets of flashcards which I carry with me and pull out while waiting at a red light; in a waiting room or just before I go to sleep. In Figure 1 below I show the front and back of a Ute flashcard.
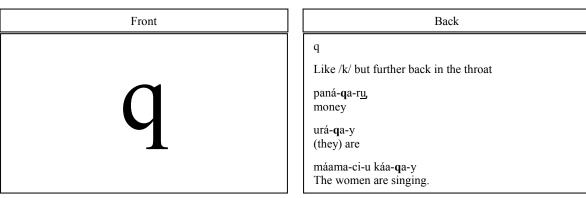
Front	Back
q	q Like /k/ but further back in the throat paná-**q**a-ru̱ money urá-**q**a-y (they) are máama-ci-u káa-**q**a-y The women are singing.

Figure 1. An Example of a Ute Flashcard (Givon, 1980, p. 11, 39)[1,2]

Notice that on the back of the flashcard I included four things:

    a.   the symbol[3];
    b.   an English example if it is an English sound. If it is not an English sound, provide a description of how to pronounce the sound;
    c.   a few common words with that sound in them;
    d.   at least one common phrase with that sound in it.

It can be daunting to learn the writing system for your language especially if it has many different sounds but it is crucial. Learning the writing system provides you with the key to creating much needed language material. Practicing with your flashcards daily will help speed your mastery of the writing system.

It is important that your language teaching focuses on mastering speaking skills before writing skills (Hinton et al, 2002). This means that as an Indigenous language teacher you should teach using maximum and varied exposure to spoken language. In other words, do not develop worksheets where your students sit in a quiet room tracing letters all day. I sadly witnessed this in an immersion kindergarten classroom. Instead develop interesting immersion lessons which encourage your students to speak the language daily.

Examples from the verb section

In this section, I present several Ute examples from the verb section of the grammar and discuss what we learn from them. Before we start this exploration, I want to explain the way the Ute language examples are presented here. The Ute examples consist of three parts: 1) the Ute example; 2) the gloss which is a breakdown of the parts of the word with linguistic labels and 3) the English translation. The linguistic labels are a bit scary so focus on what the language examples teach you about how to put together words and sentences. It is important to notice that in the gloss Givon (1980) uses dashes [-] to indicate the different parts of the Ute words. If we used dashes to indicate the different parts of English words, '*reapplying*' would look like '*re-apply-ing*.' I tried to line up the part of the Ute words with the gloss to make them easier on the eye.   Givon uses the accent mark [́] to indicate the stressed vowel. Each word has a stressed vowel "which is pronounced more prominently ('more vigorously') than any other vowel in that word" (Givon, 1980, p. 5).

Examples of Ute sentences

If you want to create the next generation of Indigenous language speakers, your students must learn how to create sentences. The first four Ute examples that Givon (1980) presents in the verb section provides important information about how to form Ute sentences. See (1) below.

(1) Ute Sentence Examples (Givon, 1980, p. 39)
a. <u>Singular</u>   *mamá-ci̱ káa-y*
                    woman   sing-IMM[4]
                    'The woman is singing.'

b. Underline: Plural   *máama-ci -u káa-qa -y*
                    PL[5]-woman-PL sing-PL-IMM
                    'The women are singing.'

c. Singular   *mamá-ci̱ ku̱múyi tu̱sú-y*
                    woman   corn   grind-IMM
                    'The woman is grinding corn.'

d. Plural   *máama-ci -u   ku̱múyi tu̱sú-kwa-y*
                    PL-woman-PL corn   grind-PL-IMM
                    'The women are grinding corn.'

The first thing these examples show us is that the subject of the Ute sentence is the first word in the sentence. The subject is the person or thing doing the action. Examples (1c) & (1d) show that the object of the sentence *ku̱múyi*, 'corn' is the second word of the sentence. In all these examples, the verb is the last word of the sentence. Next let's look at what these examples teach us about Ute words.

Ute nouns
     Let's look at the Ute nouns from (1) repeated as (2) below. These examples show the difference between the singular and plural words for 'woman'.

(2) Singular and Plural Noun: 'woman' (Givon 1980: 39)
		Ute	Gloss	English
a.	Singular	*mamá-ci̱*	woman	'woman'
b.	Plural	*máama-ci-u*	PL-woman-PL	'women'

These examples show us that Ute nouns are made of different parts. The singular noun *mamá-ci̱*, 'woman' consists of two parts. The first part of the noun is the root *mamá-* which provides the meaning of the word. Next is *-ci̱*. It is unclear what the *-ci̱* means or why it is there. Notice that the last vowel *-i̱* of the word is underlined. If a Ute letter is underlined, it is said without vibrating your vocal folds. This may be called a devoiced, silenced or whispered sound (Givon 1980). In English, the sound [z] is pronounced with vocal fold vibration while the sound [s] is pronounced without vocal fold vibration. You can feel the vibrations if you place your hand on your Adam's apple and say the sound [z]. Try saying the voiceless [s] and you should not feel the vibrations.
     The plural noun *máama-ci-u*, 'women' consists of four parts. The first part is the noun root *máama-* which is different from the singular root *mamá-*. It seems to be a combination of the noun root *mamá-* and a plural marker that made the first vowel twice as long. In other words, in order to change a singular noun into a plural noun, the first vowel of the word is doubled and the stress moves forward. The second part is *-ci* which is still a mystery. The vowel *-i* is not underlined so it is pronounced with vocal cord vibrations. The last part of a plural noun is the *-u* which is the plural marker. This is similar to the plural marker *-s* we use in English to make singular nouns plural as in *dog* versus *dog-s*. The four parts of the Ute nouns that we know of so far are shown in Figure 2 below.

Plural Marker	Noun Root	?	Plural Marker
double 1st vowel-		*-ci*	*-u*

Figure 2. Parts of a Ute Noun: 1st Version

As a language teacher, you need to provide your learners with enough exposure to different words and phrases to ensure that they develop the ability to say both singular and plural words and phrases. If you imagine that the plural noun is based on the singular noun, then you need to compare them to see what changes are necessary. It seems there are three steps for turning a singular noun into a plural noun. The steps are listed in (3) below:

(3) Changing a Singular Noun to a Plural Noun: 1st Version

      a.   double the first vowel of the word
      b.   pronounce the vowel at the end of the word regularly instead of devoiced
      c.   add the plural marker *-u* to the end of the word

Next we will explore the Ute verbs presented in (1).

Ute verbs
      Next let's look at the verbs from (1) repeated here as (4).

(4) Singular & Plural Verbs: 'sing' (Givon, 1980, p. 39)

	Ute	Gloss	English
a. <u>Singular</u>	*káa –y*	sing-IMM	'sing' singular
b. <u>Plural</u>	*káa-qa-y*	sing-PL-IMM	'sing' plural

The singular verbs *káa–y*, sing-IMM, 'sing' in (4a) has two parts. The first part is the verb root *káa* and the second is the *-y* which tells us the action is happening at the moment of speech. This second part *-y* is called a tense marker because it tells when the action happened. In (4b) the plural verb *káa-qa-y*, sing-PL-IMM, 'sing' has three parts. The first part is the verb root *káa-*. The second part is a plural marker *-qa*. The third part is the *-y* which tells us when the action is happening. Let's examine the next verb in (5).

(5) Singular & Plural Verbs: 'dry' (Givon, 1980, p. 39)

	Ute	Gloss	English
a. <u>Singular</u>	*tuṣú-y*	dry-IMM	'dry' singular
b. <u>Plural</u>	*tuṣú-kwa-y*	dry-PL-IMM	'dry' plural

The singular verb *tuṣú-y*, dry-IMM, 'dry' in (5a) have two parts. The first part is the verb root *tuṣú* and the second is the *-y* which indicates the action is happening at the moment of speech. In (5b) the plural verb *tuṣú-kwa-y*, dry-PL-IMM, 'dry' have three parts. The first part is the verb root *tuṣú-*. The second part is a plural marker *-kwa*. We do not know why there are two different plural markers *–qa-* and *–kwa-* for verbs. The third part is the *-y* which tells us when the action happened. Figure 3 below summarizes that parts of Ute verbs that we know of so far.

Verb Root	Plural Marker	Tense Marker
	-qa *-kwa*	*-y*

Figure 3. Parts of a Ute Verb: 1st Version

To summarize, it seems that both nouns and verbs in Ute are made of several parts. What is interesting is that the plural marker for nouns *-u* is different from the plural marker for verbs *-qa,- kwa*.

More Ute sentences
      Let's continue our exploration of more singular and plural Ute sentences to see what else we can learn.

(6) More Ute Sentences (Givon, 1980, p. 39)

<u>Singular</u>		<u>Plural</u>
a. *tuá-ci̱ 'iví -(y)*	b.	*piisci-u 'iví -kya-y*
child drink-IMM		children drink-PL -IMM
'The child is drinking.'		'The children are drinking.'

c.	*tuá-ci̱ suwáay-(y)*	d.	*piisci-u suwáay-kya-y*
	child happy -IMM		children happy -PL -IMM
	'The child is happy.'		'The children are happy.'
e.	*ta'wá-ci̱ po'ó̱-y*	f.	*táa-ta'wá-ci-u po'ó̱-qwa-y*
	man write-IMM		PL-man -PL write-PL-IMM
	'The man is writing.'		'The men are writing.'

The examples of Ute sentences in (6) follow the patterns that we saw earlier with the subject first followed by object and the verb last.

Ute nouns part 2

Let's see if the new nouns follow the same pattern as the earlier example. The steps for changing a singular noun to a plural noun are repeated from (3) above as (7) here.

(7) Changing a Singular Noun to a Plural Noun: 1st Version

    a. double the first vowel of the word
    b. pronounce the vowel at the end of the word with vocal fold vibrations instead of devoiced
    c. add the plural marker *-u* to the end of the word

Let's compare the new singular and plural nouns to see if the steps describe the process correctly. The nouns from (5) are repeated in (8) and (9) below.

(8) Singular and Plural Noun: 'child' (Givon, 1980, p. 39)

		Ute	Gloss	English
a.	Singular	*tuá-ci̱*	child	'child'
b.	Plural	*piisci-u*	children	'children'

In (8a) the singular noun *tuá-ci̱*, 'child' is made of two parts. The noun's root is *tuá-*. The next part is *-ci̱*. It is still unclear what the *-ci̱* means or why nouns have it in them. Again the last vowel of the word *i̱* is devoiced. In (8b) the plural noun *piisci-u*, 'children' has a completely different noun root from the singular noun root *tuá-*, 'child.' The plural marker *-u* is the same as the plural nouns we discussed before. As far as the steps proposed for changing a singular noun to a plural noun, only the last two steps work for this word. This means that language learners must memorize the two different noun roots for some words such as *tuá-ci̱*, 'child' and *piisci-u*, 'children.' Let's explore the next new noun shown in (9).

(9) Singular and Plural Nouns (Givon, 1980, p. 39)

		Ute	Gloss	English
a.	Singular	*ta'wá-ci̱*	man	'man'
b.	Plural	*táa-ta'wá-ci-u*	PL-man-PL	'men'

In (9) the singular noun *ta'wá-ci̱*, 'man' is made of two parts: the noun root *ta'wá-* and the mystery *ci̱*. The plural noun *táa-ta'wá-ci-u*, 'men' is made of four parts. The first part is *táa-* which Givon (1980) glosses as a plural marker. It appears that this plural marker is a copy of the first two sounds of the noun root *ta'wá-* with the first vowel doubled[6]. The second part is the noun root *ta'wá-*. The third part is the mysterious *-ci* with a voiced *i*. The last part is the plural marker *–u* which we have seen before. With this word, the steps are a bit more complex. The second version of the steps are listed below in (10).

(10) Steps for Changing a Singular to Plural Noun: 2nd Version
    a. maybe double the first vowel; or replace the noun root with a completely different noun root; or copy the first two sounds of the noun root and double the first vowel;
    b. pronounce the vowel at the end of the word with vocal fold vibration instead of devoiced
    c. add the plural marker *-u* to the end of the word

From these few nouns it appears that a Ute language learner has to memorize the singular and plural forms of some words which should not be a problem is they are immersed in a rich, varied language environment. Figure 4 summarizes the new information about the parts of a Ute noun.

Plural Marker	Noun Root	?	Plural Marker
1. Double 1st vowel	Use a different root	*-ci-*	*-u*
2. Copy 1st 2 sounds & double 1st vowel			

Figure 4. Parts of a Ute Noun: 2nd Version

To summarize, Figure 4 says that there could be three different types of plural nouns. The first type consist of the noun root with a doubled first vowel which a plural marker, *-ci* and the plural marker *–u*. The second type consist of a completely different noun root, *-ci* and the plural marker *–u*. The third type consists of a plural marker which consist of a copy of the first two sounds of the noun root, the noun root, *-ci* and the plural marker *–u*. Creating a plural Ute noun can be complicated so it is important that your students have many varied opportunities to hear and used them.

Ute verbs part 2
        Next let's look at the verbs from (6) repeated here as (11).

(11) Singular & Plural Verb: 'drink' (Givon, 1980, p. 39)
                Ute   Gloss   English
a. Singular   *'ivi-(y)*   drink-IMM   'drink'
b. Plural   *'iví-kya-y*   drink-PL-IMM   'drink'

The singular verb *'ivi-(y)*, drink-IMM, 'drink' in (11a) have two parts. The first part is the verb root *'ivi* and the second is the *-y* which indicates the action is happening at the moment of speech. In (11b) the plural verb *'iví-kya-y*, drink-PL-IMM, 'drink' have three parts. The first part is the verb root *'iví-*. The second part is a plural marker *-kya*. We do not know why there yet another plural marker for verbs. The third part is the *-y* which tells us when the action happened. The verb in (12) has the same pattern as (11) with *-kya* as the plural marker.

(12) Singular & Plural Verb: 'to be happy' (Givon, 1980, p. 39)
                Ute   Gloss   English
a. Singular   *suwáay-(y)*   happy-IMM   'happy'
b. Plural   *suwáay-kya-y*   happy-PL-IMM   'happy'

In the plural verb *po̱'ó̱-qwa-y* 'write,' in (13) we seen yet another plural marker *–qwa*.

(13) Singular & Plural Verb: 'write' (Givon, 1980, p. 39)
                Ute   Gloss   English
a. Singular   *po̱'ó̱-y*   write-IMM   'write'
b. Plural   *po̱'ó̱-qwa-y*   write -PL-IMM   'write'

As with the formation of plural nouns, the formation of plural verbs may be complex. Figure 5 below summarizes that parts of Ute verbs that we know of so far.

Verb Root	Plural Marker	Tense Marker
	-qa *- kwa* *-kya* *-qwa*	*-y*

Figure 5. Parts of a Ute Verb: 2nd Version

The parts of a Ute verb can consist of three parts: the verb root; plural marker if the subject is plural and a tense marker. Next let's explore more parts of the verb.

More parts of a Ute verb
        The examples in (14) provide very important information your students need to become fluent and creative in their language. A fluent speaker is able to talk about things that have happened as well as things that did not happen. In other words, Indigenous language curriculum needs to provide the learners with the tools to speak their minds without limitation. Being able to use negation (NEG) properly is an essential skill. An example of negation in English is changing 'I am hungry' to 'I am not hungry.' Negation changes a positive sentence into a negative sentence.

(14) Negation (Givon, 1980, p. 41)
a.   *táata'wá-ci-u wúu̧ -xâ̧ -y*
        PL-men   -PLwork-PL-IMM
        'The men are working'

b.   *táata'wá-ci-u **ka** -wúu̧ -xâ̧ –y   **-wa***
        PL-men   -PLNEG-work-PL-IMM-NEG
        'The men are not working'

c.   ***kac** -ámu̧ wúu̧ -xâ̧ -y   **-wa***
        NEG-they work-PL-IMM-NEG
        'They are not working'

Example (14a) is an affirmative plural sentence used for comparison with the negated sentences in (14b & c). In (14b) the negative sentence consist of a noun and a verb. The verb ***ka**-wúu̧-xâ̧–y-**wa**,* 'not working' PL, is made up of five parts. The first and last parts, *ka-* and *–wa*, are the two negating parts. This is like the '*ne pas*' negation in French. The second part *-wúu̧,* 'work' is the verb root. The third part is the plural marker *-xâ̧*. The fourth part is the tense marker *–y.* In example (14c) the negative sentence is made up of a pronoun and a verb. What is interesting is that the first negating element *kac-* is added to the pronoun *–ámu̧* instead of on the verb as in (14b). The verb is made up of four parts: the verb root *wúu̧*; the plural marker *-xâ̧*; the tense marker *-y*: and the second negation part *-**wa***. Figure 6 contains the new parts that could be in a Ute verb.

Negation	Verb Root	Plural Marker	Tense Marker	Negation
ka-		*-qa* *- kwa* *-kya* *-qwa*	*-y*	*-wa*

Figure 6. Parts of a Ute Verb: 3rd Version

Final verb examples
        For a language learner to master their Indigenous language, they need to learn how to talk about actions, states or events that have happened in different period of times. It would be a disservice to not teach them these skills. In (15) Givon (1980) provides examples of verbs in three tenses: present which he glosses at IMM; past which he glosses as ANT; and future which he glosses a future. It is very important to notice that these verbs have the subject pronouns attached at the end of them. If English were to do this, the sentence '*I am singing*' would look like '*sing-ing/am-I*.'

(15) Immediate Tense Verbs (Givon, 1980, p. 43)
        <u>Affirmative</u>   <u>Negative</u>
a.   káa –y **-in**   b.   ka -káa -xâ-wa **-amu̲**
        sing-IMM-**I**   NEG-sing-PL-NEG-**they**
        'I am singing'   'They are not singing'

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The immediate tense means the action is happening at the moment of speech. The affirmative example (15a) the verb is made up of three parts: the verb root *káa-, 'sing';* the immediate tense marker *–y*; and the singular subject pronoun *–in*. In the negated example (15b) the verb has five parts. The negation parts are the first and fourth parts, *ka-* and *–wa*. The verb root *–káa, 'sing'* is the second part. The third part is the plural marker *–xâ*. Last is the plural subject pronoun *–am<u>u</u>*, 'they' It is important to notice that this verb does not have an immediate marker. Let's add is new information to our parts of the Ute verb Figure 7.

Negation	Verb Root	Plural Marker	Tense Marker	Negation	Subject Pronoun
ka-		*-qa* *- kwa* *-kya* *-qwa*	IMM *-y*	*-wa*	1st *-in* 3rd PL *–am<u>u</u>*

Figure 7. Parts of a Ute Verb: 4th Version

Next let's look at the anterior tense verbs.

The anterior tense refer to an action that happened before the moment of speech (Givon, 1980, p. 106). Two verbs in the anterior tense are shown in (16).

(16) Anterior Tense Verbs (Givon, 1980, p. 43)

<u>Affirmative</u>   <u>Negative</u>

a.   káa -xâ   **-'u**   b.   ka   -káa –na   **-'u**

     sing-ANT-**he**   NEG-sing-ANT/NEG-**he**

     'He sang'   'He didn't sang'

The anterior verb in (16a) consists of the verb root *káa- 'sing'*; the anterior tense marker *–xâ*; and the singular subject pronoun *–'u, 'he'*. The negative anterior verb in (16b) is made up of four parts. The first part is the first negation marker *ka-*. The second part is the verb root *–káa*. The third part is a combination of the anterior and negation markers *–na*. The final part is the singular subject *-'u,* he.

Negation	Verb Root	Plural Marker	Tense Marker	Negation	Subject Pronoun
ka-		*-qa* *- kwa* *-kya* *-qwa*	IMM *-y* ANT *-xâ*	*-wa*	1st *-in* 3rd PL *–am<u>u</u>*

Figure 8. Parts of a Ute Verb: 5th Version

Finally let's look at two future tense verbs.

In Ute, the future tense marker is made up of two different parts; *-vaa* and *–ni*. See the verbs in (17).

(17) Future Tense Verbs (Givon, 1980, p. 43)

<u>Affirmative</u>   <u>Negative</u>

a.   káa –vaa -ni   **-am<u>u</u>**   b.   ka   -káa –vaa-'wa -ni   **-am<u>u</u>**

     sing-FUT-FUT-**they**   NEG-sing-FUT-NEG-FUT-**they**

     'They will sing'   'They will not sing'

In example (17a) the verb is made up of four parts: first the verb root *káa-*; the two future parts *–vaa* and *–ni*; and last the plural subject pronoun *–am<u>u</u>, 'they'*. In the negated verb in example (17b) the verb is made of six parts. The negating parts are the first *ka-* and fourth *–'wa* parts. The verb root *káa-, 'sing'* is second. The third and fifth parts, *–vaa* and *–ni* are the future tense markers. The final part is the plural subject marker *–am<u>u</u>, 'they'*. These examples demonstrate the parts that could make up a Ute verb.

Conclusion

      By exploring several examples of Ute sentences in the verb section of a Ute Reference Grammar, we learned important information about the language. The information is listed below in (18).

(18) Ute Language Information Learned
      a. The subject of the sentence is the first word of the sentence.
      b. The object of the sentence is the second word of the sentence.
      c. The verb is usually the last word of the sentence.
      d. Nouns can be made up of two to four parts.
      e. There are several changes can happen in some plural noun roots.
      f. Verbs can be made up of two to five parts.
      g. Verbs can be negated by add two negation parts.
      h. Verbs can include the subject pronouns as part of them.
      i. Future verbs are made of two parts: *–vaa* and *–ni*.

This is a very beginning understanding of the Ute verb system and much more exploration is necessary to truly master it. Your students need to hear and practice creating these types of sentences on a regular and interesting basis. This is where your creativity and determination will serve you well. This concludes this case study in using the 1980 Ute Reference Grammar as a language learning tool.

Notes
[1] Givon (1980) used dashes (-) to mark the different parts of the Ute words. In his grammar, he includes a second-line that includes linguistic terms to describe the different parts of the words. I have excluded that information here.
[2] Givon (1980) used the accent (') to indicate where the stress is. A stressed vowel is pronounced with more emphasis compared to the other vowels in the word.
[3] I use 'symbol' because some languages use letters, numbers and other symbols in their writing systems.
[4] IMM-stands for 'immediate' which is tense-aspect marker. A tense marker tells when the action happened. An aspect marker tells how the action happened. In Ute the immediate suffix tells us that "the action is in the middle of taking place during the time of speech" (Givon, 1980, p. 86).
[5] PL-stands for 'plural' which refers to three or more animate nouns (Givon, 1980, p. 23).
[6] The linguistic term for copy parts of a word is reduplication.

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