

The Structure of Oneida Words

Many of the citation forms in this dictionary are not full words. A dictionary of full words in Oneida would get impossibly large because of the extensive amount of grammatical prefixation on words. In fact, most Oneida words are combinations of quite a few pieces (morphemes) some of which have readily identifiable meanings and some of which serve a connecting or grammatical function. What follows is a brief description of this structure. A more complete description is in the Teaching Grammar

Verbs

Oneida verbs consist of a stem, which may be either simple (as simple as a single sound) or quite complex. The stem carries the basic meaning (action or state) of the verb. To the stem are added suffixes usually adding information about tense or grammatical aspect. Stems also have prefixes. All verbs must have a pronoun prefix. The forms of these pronoun prefixes are listed in the dictionary and they generally add information about the number, gender, and person of the subject and object of the verb. In addition there may be more prefixes, sometimes called pre-pronominal prefixes, attached before the pronoun prefixes. There are about a dozen of these, but there are hundreds of ways to combine them. The meanings they contribute to the verb are mostly adverbial although some are grammatically required with particular stems with no additional meaning. Their technical names are: dualic, iterative, cislocative, translocative, aorist (or factual), indefinite, future, partitive, coincident, contrastive, and negative. Their combination forms are listed in the dictionary, but their meanings and conditions of use are largely described in the grammar of Oneida.

The structure of the verb stems themselves all have to include a verb root, but that root may be augmented with several other grammatical or meaning segments in the following order. First there may be a reflexive element, required by some stems and optional in others. It has a number of meanings, most having to do with reflecting the action back to or for the subject (specified in the pronoun prefix). Then there may be an incorporated noun root (perhaps with a noun suffix) which often narrows the meaning of the verb, say from *washing* to *washing hands*, or from *eating* to *eating corn*, or from *running* to *running along a path*. The next slot is for the verb root itself. This specifies the core meaning of the action or state. Then there may be one or more grammatical suffixes which can further modify the basic verb meaning such as doing the action to or for someone (dative), making the action happen (causative), undoing an action (reversive), using a tool or place to do the action (instrumental), or doing the action in several places, times, or ways (distributive). These suffixes may occur in combinations and may have very specialized meanings when used with certain verb roots.

An Oneida verb consists thus of:

prefixes + verb stem + suffix

Prefixes consist of:

(combinations of pre-pronominal prefixes) + pronoun prefixes

Verb stems consist of:

(reflexive) + (noun stem) + verb root + (derivational suffixes)

For example: **waʔkheyatlihway/hahseʔ** *I gave them the responsibility*

waʔ- pre-pronominal prefix (aorist) indicates past tense

-khey- pronoun prefix indicates *I to them*

-atlihwayΛni- verb stem indicates action *to give responsibility to*
more literally the verb stem means *to place the matter for one*

-at- reflexive

-lihw- incorporated noun root meaning *the matter, issue*

-a- a grammatical stem joiner adding no meaning

-yΛ- a verb root meaning *to place*

-Λni/-hahs- dative suffix meaning action to or for someone (many grammatical pieces such as the dative have alternative forms and rules that specify when each is used)

-eʔ suffix indicating single action

Nouns

The structure of nouns is simpler than verbs. They are built from noun roots and in some cases the noun root itself makes a complete word. In most cases, however, the noun root has to have a prefix (usually **o-** or **ka-**) and often a suffix to turn the root into a complete word. These prefixes and suffixes don't add any special meaning but most roots are not complete without them. Many of these same noun roots can often be incorporated into complex verb stems. In such cases their form may be slightly altered or a suffix may be added.

It is also common for Oneida to use as a noun a word that is formally constructed as a verb. For example, there is a verb **yehyatúkhwaʔ** that means *one uses it to write with*. This word can be used as the description of an action or it can be used to refer to an object - a pen, pencil, or some other writing implement. Verbs used this way are called derived nouns and some develop specialized senses (or at least translations). **KawΛnaye·nás** as a verb means *it catches words*, but used as a derived noun it means *tape recorder*.

Particles

Any Oneida word that is not structurally a noun or a verb is called a particle. These typically do not have internal structure, although they are often used in combinations. Many correspond to English adverbs or conjunctions. They frequently have a variety of grammatical and discourse functions.