

Formal and colloquial speech in Stoney Nakoda: Initial observations^{*}

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Abstract: This paper gives an overview of a few notable distinctions made between the colloquial and formal registers of Stoney Nakoda, also known as southern Stoney, a Dakotan language spoken in southern Alberta. Like many Indigenous languages spoken in small communities, Stoney Nakoda does not frequently make use of special politeness words in order to show respect, courtesy or formality, and instead alternative constructions or pronunciations can be used to convey these attitudes.

Keywords: Stoney, Nakoda, sociolinguistics, politeness

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

This paper focuses on the southern dialect of Stoney, also known as Stoney Nakoda, spoken primarily in the three communities that make up the Stoney Nakoda First Nation: Wapta Mnotha (Big Horn), Mîni Thnî (Morley), and Gahna (Eden Valley). These communities are located along the Rocky Mountains in southern Alberta. They refer to themselves as *Îyârhe Nakoda* ‘People of the Mountains’ or *Îethkabi*, and the language is typically referred to as *Îethka Îabi*.¹ There are also two northern dialects of Stoney spoken in central Alberta: *Isga* is spoken at Wakamne (Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation) and *Iithga* is spoken at Wihnemne (Paul First Nation), northwest and west of Edmonton respectively. The first author of this paper is from Mîni Thnî (Morley), which is the largest Stoney community.

Stoney is a Siouan language belonging to the Mississippi Valley, or Central Siouan, branch of the Siouan family. It belongs to the Dakotan group of languages within that branch, which formed a dialect continuum across the northern plains of North America, ranging from the north central United States to northwestern Alberta. Stoney shares some clear similarities with Assiniboine, which goes by several other names, including Nakona and Nakhóta, and is spoken in neighbouring Montana and Saskatchewan. Despite these similarities, there are still enough differences that Stoney and Assiniboine are classified as separate languages, however further research is needed to clarify their relationship. Stoney is the northwestern-most language of the

^{*}We would like to acknowledge the Stoney Education Authority and The Language Conservancy for making this work possible. The second author would also like to honour the memory of the first author, the late Lloyd Buddy Wesley, traditionally named Siyaga Ayitho (Swims for a Grebe), who passed away not long after this paper was presented.

¹The endonym *Îethka* is sometimes spelled with a y: *Îyethkabi*, *Îyethka Îabi*.

Siouan language family, which includes languages spoken as far south as the Gulf of Mexico (Biloxi) and coastal South Carolina (Woccon).

1.2. Politeness in Indigenous languages

Students interested in learning Indigenous languages often ask how to translate common indicators of politeness found in English and other European languages, such as *please*, *thank-you*, *you're welcome*, *ma'am*, *sir*, etc. In the course of teaching the Stoney Nakoda language, we have found that even though there are not many specific politeness terms, there are other ways of showing additional respect or being more formal.

In this paper we will focus primarily on morphosyntactic variation, but we will also consider the kinship lexicon, which includes shortened familiar versions for nearly every kinship term. There is of course extensive lexical and morphophonological variation beyond this, however these patterns are often limited to certain age categories or family dialects and therefore fall outside the scope of this paper. The morphosyntactic variation we document here involves the following types of grammatical structures: declaratives, imperatives, interrogatives, conjunctions, and relative clauses.

2. Kinship terms

Like other Dakotan cultures, the Stoney Nakoda kinship system is classified as a variation of the system used by the Haudenosaunee² people, where the ego's parents' same-gender siblings are referred to with terms similar to those used to address the parents themselves. Similarly, cousins are classified according to whether they are descended from a parental sibling of the same gender as the parent (parallel-cousins) or the opposite gender of the parent (cross-cousins). Parallel-cousins use the same kinship terms as siblings while cross-cousins have their own separate terms, often translated simply as *cousin* by Stoney Nakoda speakers.

As with other Indigenous North American cultures, awareness of kin relationships is very important in Stoney Nakoda culture, to the point where it can be considered rude to fail to address a relative using the correct kinship term. For this reason, familiarity with kinship terminology is very important to speakers and will be an important element of maintaining and revitalizing the Stoney Nakoda language. Virtually every kinship term has a standard version, used when speaking about a relative to someone else or when speaking to someone formally, and a shortened familiar version, that can typically only be used to address that relative directly. In addition, a few kinship terms have special alternative versions that are only used by younger children and are never used between adults. All of these diminutive kinship terms may sometimes be seen as 'slang' and as less noteworthy than their more formal versions, however we feel that

²This is still known as the *Iroquois System* in kinship scholarship, however *Haudenosaunee* is the autonym and generally preferred name for these people. This system is said to follow a bifurcate merging pattern, since the terms for aunts and uncles are bifurcated (split) based on the gender of the parent, but are also merged with the terms for the parents themselves (e.g. the mother and mother's sisters are addressed in a similar way, and likewise the father and father's brothers share the same or similar kinship terms). This means that the parents' same-gender siblings are addressed more like additional parents than as aunts and uncles, and their children are likewise addressed as siblings.

it is important to document them since they are very common in daily language use and are sometimes unpredictable from their longer forms.

The first-person possessive forms of the kinship terms are used both to address relatives and to refer to them in conversation, so they are generally the most common forms heard in the language and are therefore our focus here. In addition, terms for siblings and cross-cousins are gendered with regard to both of the related individuals. We use a following F and M to indicate the gender of the possessor, which is also the gender of the speaker in all of the examples given below.³

Table 1: Some Stoney Nakoda kinship terms and their diminutive variants

	Standard form	Familiar form	Children's form
my grandmother	<i>íkúsin/íkúsin</i>	—	<i>chízi</i>
my grandfather	<i>mîtûgásin</i>	—	<i>tadá</i>
my mother	<i>îná</i>	—	<i>nánâ</i>
my father	<i>adé</i>	—	<i>téde</i>
my daughter	<i>mîchúksi</i>	<i>mîchús</i>	—
my son	<i>mîchîksi</i>	<i>mîchís</i>	—
my older sister (F)	<i>mîchûn</i>	—	<i>chúchû</i>
my older sister (M)	<i>mîtâgén/mîtâgen</i>	<i>tâge</i>	—
my older brother (F)	<i>mîtimnón</i>	<i>mîtimno</i>	—
my older brother (M)	<i>mîchîn</i>	<i>chî</i>	<i>chîchî</i>
my younger sister (F)	<i>mîtâgán</i>	<i>mîtá</i>	—
my younger sister (M)	<i>mîtâksin/mîtâksín</i>	<i>tâksi</i>	—
my younger brother	<i>mîthûgan</i>	<i>mîthûn/mîthû</i>	—
my female cross-cousin (F)	<i>mîsepásin/mîsepásín</i>	<i>pásin</i> ⁴	—
my female cross-cousin (M)	<i>mâhâgásin</i>	<i>(mâhâga)</i> ⁵	—
my male cross-cousin (F)	<i>mîsichésin</i>	<i>(mîsiche)</i> ⁶	—
my male cross-cousin (M)	<i>mîtâsin</i>	<i>mîtâs</i>	—

³This paper makes use of the Stoney Nakoda orthography, which has the following notable features: *â*, *î*, and *û* are nasal vowels, *ch* and *j* are aspirated and voiced affricates respectively, *r* is a voiced pharyngeal approximant, *rh* is a voiceless pharyngeal fricative, *s* and *z* are voiceless and voiced alveolopalatal fricatives, *th* and *tḥ* are voiceless and voiced dental fricatives, and *y* is a palatal approximant. The stops *p*, *t*, *k* are always aspirated prevocally, but are typically unaspirated when following another consonant. The stops *b*, *d*, *g* are typically voiced but may rarely be voiceless unaspirated (this difference is not used to distinguish any minimal pairs). Adjacent vowels are typically interrupted by a glottal stop in slow speech, but this may be replaced by an appropriate glide or even slight diphthongization in faster speech. Stress is phonemic in Stoney, and primary stress tends to fall on the penultimate syllable in longer words. Stress is not marked in the practical Stoney orthography, but is shown in this paper for clarity.

⁴This term can also be used between unrelated female friends.

⁵This kinship term means *my sister-in-law (of a male)* and does not typically refer to a cousin.

⁶This kinship term means *my brother-in-law (of a female)* and does not typically refer to a cousin.

Note that the familiar and children's forms are used to indicate intimacy and are typically only used between immediate family members. Likewise, usage of the familiar forms for cross-cousins can depend on the closeness of the relationship, and therefore they tend to be used to indicate strong family ties or in more informal situations.

3. Declaratives

3.1. Gendered enclitics in Stoney Nakoda

Stoney Nakoda has a set of gendered endings that are used in a number of different grammatical constructions. These are classified as enclitics rather than suffixes in part because they always occur at the very end of a word or phrase, unlike most other suffixes. They are not distinguished orthographically from suffixes, and they typically do not receive stress or interact with the prosodic system at all (they appear to be largely extrametrical). We will document a number of these enclitics in what follows, as they play an important role in expressing formal and informal speech in Stoney Nakoda. Unfortunately our investigation into these enclitics is still preliminary, and although we have included the most common gendered enclitics, there are undoubtedly others that have not been documented yet.

The Stoney Nakoda dialects appear to be quite unique among the Dakotan languages in that the gender-specific enclitics are primarily used for communication within genders, rather than to indicate the gender of the speaker. It is therefore not too surprising to learn that Stoney also has 'neutral' enclitics, used in communication between speakers of different genders or in general situations.

Including a declarative enclitic is obligatory for most declarative assertions made in the language, so they occur at very high frequency. It is possible the declarative enclitics also act as evidentials to some degree by implying that the speaker has firsthand knowledge of the proposition, or at least believes the statement to be true, but more research is required in order to determine if this is indeed the case. When used without any other tense or aspect-marking suffixes, the declarative enclitics additionally convey a progressive (ongoing) or retrospective (just completed) meaning, depending in part on the semantics of the verb in question. We have developed our own terminology to describe the specific semantics and pragmatics of these enclitics: *intergender* or 'neutral' enclitics are used between people of different genders; *intrafeminine* enclitics are used between women; and *intramasculine* enclitics are used primarily between men. Note that the latter two are often referred to informally as simply 'feminine' and 'masculine', but this can be misleading as they are primarily used only when the speaker and addressees are of the same gender.

The intergender declarative *-ch* is used most frequently, as situations with listeners of multiple genders are the most common. Even though the enclitics are divided by gender, there are situations where females can use the intramasculine declarative, such as when addressing close male relatives, when speaking formally to a mixed audience, or when a female elder addresses a male elder. Also note that gender usage is based on the gender that the speaker identifies with rather than biological sex, so double-spirited, transgender, and other gender identities can be expressed to some degree through the speaker's usage of declarative enclitics. In addition, younger females may use the intramasculine declarative *-no* for a kind of 'tom-boy' effect, although this

Table 2: Stoney Nakoda declarative enclitics

	Enclitic	Usage	Abbreviation
Intergender	<i>-ch</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • between genders • in generic situations 	IG
Intrafeminine	<i>-chwe/-che</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • between women 	IF
Intramasculine	<i>-no</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • between men • when women address close male relatives • between male and female elders • when speaking formally to a mixed audience 	IM

does not appear to be very common. The pronunciation of the intrafeminine declarative enclitic varies between *-chwe* and *-che* within the community, most likely due to differences between families. Here are examples of all three declarative enclitics using the common greeting typically translated as ‘good day’.⁷

- (1) a. *Ába wathtéch*
 ába wathté=ch
 day to.be.beautiful=IG.DECL
 ‘Good day, Hello’⁸ (between interlocutors of different genders)
- b. *Ába wathtéche*
 ába wathté=che
 day to.be.beautiful=IF.DECL
 ‘Good day, Hello’ (between women)
- c. *Ába wathténo*
 ába wathté=no
 day to.be.beautiful=IM.DECL
 ‘Good day, Hello’ (between men)

Using the correct declarative enclitic for a particular situation is an important aspect of Stoney Nakoda culture, and if adult learners address same-gender elders using intergender enclitics they will typically be corrected. Also, intramasculine enclitics can be used when formally addressing an audience, or even when speaking more formally in a smaller group. Understanding how to employ these enclitics properly is critical to learning to speak Stoney, and so understanding these categories is integral to understanding many of the examples that follow. Here is a summary of the gendered enclitics that have been documented at this time, along with the affirmative and negative particles, which follow the same pattern of usage:

⁷Special abbreviations are required for the gendered enclitics: IG is used for intergender, IF for intrafeminine and IM for intramasculine.

⁸This phrase appears as though it could also mean ‘it is a beautiful day’, however that meaning typically requires a different translation since this construction is used as a greeting. The addition of the definite article *ne* ‘the’ can be employed to achieve that meaning: *ába ne wathtéch* ‘it is a beautiful day, the day is beautiful’.

Table 3: Some common gendered particles and enclitics in Stoney Nakoda

	Intergender	Intrafeminine	Intramasculine
affirmative particle	<i>hâ</i>	<i>hǎwe</i>	<i>haw</i> ⁹
negative particle	<i>hiyá</i>	<i>hiyáwe</i>	<i>hiyó</i>
declarative	<i>-ch</i>	<i>-chwe/-che</i>	<i>-no</i>
singular imperative	<i>-∅</i>	<i>-we</i>	<i>-wo</i>
plural imperative	<i>-m</i>	<i>-mwe</i>	<i>-bo</i>
nonpast polar interrogative	<i>-nî</i>	<i>-nîwe</i>	<i>-nûwo</i>
interrogative particle	<i>(hî)</i> ¹⁰	<i>hîwe</i>	<i>hûwo</i>

3.2. Formal declaratives using *hâ*

When making declarative statements speakers can optionally add the verb *hâ* ‘to be in an upright position, to stand’ in order to be even more formal.

- (2) *Ába wathtéya* *hâch*
ãba wathté-ya *hâ=ch*
 day to.be.beautiful-ADVR to.be.upright=IG.DECL
 ‘Good day, Hello’ (very formal, between interlocutors of different genders)

Adding a second verb requires the addition of an adverbializing suffix *-ya* to the initial verb *wathté-* ‘to be beautiful’, creating a complex verbal construction which might be more literally translated as ‘standing beautifully’ or simply ‘existing beautifully’.¹¹ This type of construction can then be combined with the gendered enclitics to generate informal, somewhat formal, and very formal versions of even this basic greeting:

Table 4: Combining *hâ* with declarative enclitics to express formality

informal between genders, used in a wide range of situations	<i>Ába wathtéch</i>
very formal between genders	<i>Ába wathtéya hâch</i>
informal between men or elders, or formally addressing an audience	<i>Ába wathténo</i>
very formal between men, or very formally addressing an audience	<i>Ába wathtéya hǎno</i>

⁹Note that *aw* is used to represent the diphthong [aʊ]. Phonemic diphthongs are generally thought to be prohibited in Stoney Nakoda, but *haw* ‘yes’ is always pronounced with a diphthong even in slow careful speech.

¹⁰The intergender interrogative particle *hî* appears to be used primarily for forming tag questions and to be ungrammatical with open questions, but more investigation is required in order to confirm this.

¹¹The suffix *-ya* is glossed as an adverbializer here, but it has other functions as well and generally facilitates building complex multi-verb constructions.

We see in this simple example that Stoney speakers can combine the gendered enclitics with auxiliary verbs like *hâ* to generate phrases with a wide range of formalities. These variations also provide some insight into the types of situations that are culturally salient, such as interactions within and between genders, between elders, and giving formal speeches. Note that the intramasculine enclitics are also used to express formality in certain situations, and so a more complete label might be *intramasculine/formal*.

4. Imperatives

4.1. Gendered imperative clitics

As seen in Table 3 above, there are five gendered imperative enclitics. Note that no enclitic is used to addressing a command to a single individual of a different gender, which is represented here by the null morpheme $-\emptyset$. This means that bare verb roots are typically used as imperatives, and speakers frequently require a declarative enclitic (e.g. *-ch*, *-chwe/-che*, *-no*) when translating infinitive or generic forms of verbs into Stoney.

Table 5: Imperative enclitics

	Intergender	Intrafeminine	Intramasculine
singular imperative	$-\emptyset$	<i>-we</i>	<i>-wo</i>
plural imperative	<i>-m</i>	<i>-mwe</i>	<i>-bo</i>

Note that while the intrafeminine plural is the combination of the intergender plural *-m* and the intrafeminine singular *-we*, the intramasculine replaces the *mw* sequence with a *b*. The following examples we see that the intramasculine singular imperative enclitic *-wo* can have different forms, depending on the formality of the situation:

- (3) a. *ya*
 ya= \emptyset
 go=IG.SG.IMP
 ‘go!’¹²
- b. *yáwe*
 ya=*we*
 go=IF.SG.IMP
 ‘go!’
- c. *yáwo*
 ya=*wo*
 go=IM.SG.IMP
 ‘go!’

¹²Exclamation points are not used in the Stoney Nakoda forms because that punctuation mark is associated with a raised voice, which is considered to be both culturally inappropriate and unnecessary due to the existence of the imperative enclitics. Note that while plain imperatives can come across as somewhat terse or even rude in English, this is not generally the case in Stoney Nakoda.

- d. *yo*
 ya=wo
 go=IM.SG.IMP
 ‘go!’

In (3c) we see that the longer form *yáwo* is maintained in formal settings, but that this command can be reduced to a single syllable in informal settings by dropping the *a* and *w*, as seen in (3d). Note that this same pattern is seen in Table 3 when comparing the negative particles: intergender *hiyá*, intrafeminine *hiyáwe*, contrasted with intramasculine *hiyó*, where the expected *-aw-* sequence appears to have been elided. This pattern appears to occur with all verbs ending in a final *-a*, but may be more prevalent with high frequency stems. It does not appear to affect verbs ending in other vowels.

4.2. The imperative verb *hújíya* ‘come here’

As with some other Dakotan languages, some verbs are only used in imperative situations, such as when requesting or commanding others to come closer to the speaker. In Stoney Nakoda this is expressed using the imperative verb *hújíya* ‘come here’, however the final *-ya* is only required in order to be polite (such as with elders), or in other formal situations.¹³ This elision interacts with the gendered enclitics and the reduction seen in (3) to generate an extensive inventory of formal and informal realizations of this verb.

Table 6: Formal and informal variants of the imperative verb *hújíya* ‘come here’

		Formal	Informal
singular	intergender	<i>hújíya</i>	<i>hújí</i>
	intrafeminine	<i>hújíyawe</i>	<i>hújíwe</i>
	intramasculine	<i>hújíyawo</i>	<i>hújíwo</i>
plural	intergender	<i>hújíyam</i>	<i>hújím</i>
	intrafeminine	<i>hújíyamwe</i>	<i>hújímwe</i>
	intramasculine	<i>hújíyabo</i>	<i>hújíbo</i>

While these forms are generally predictable, there are a few interesting exceptions to take note of. First, the stress shifts to the first syllable in the informal variants, which is atypical for truncated stems in Stoney Nakoda. Secondly, the informal singular intramasculine form follows the same reduction pattern seen in (3d), where an *-aw-* sequence has been elided.

5. Interrogatives

In Table 3 above there are two sets of interrogative morphemes: the nonpast polar interrogative enclitics used for creating yes/no questions, and the interrogative particles *hí*, *híwe*, and *húwo* that

¹³Note that *hújíya* can only be used in situations where the listener is physically nearby and can respond promptly; it is judged as ungrammatical when used over the phone, for example. An elaborated translation such as ‘come here (from your nearby position)’ might more faithfully capture the meaning of this verb.

can optionally be used with open questions (similar to *wh*-questions in English). The latter are considered to be independent particles rather than enclitics because they bear their own intrinsic primary stresses, however they otherwise function much like the enclitics. The other important distinction is that the interrogative particles are optional, and are generally only used in formal situations.

- (4) a. *Dokén yaǔ?*
 doken ya-û
 how 2SG-to.feel
 ‘How are you?’ (informal)
- b. *Dokén yaǔ hîwe/húwo?*
 doken ya-û hîwe/húwo
 how 2SG-to.feel Q
 ‘How are you?’ (formal between women/between men)

Note that this usage is distinct from other Dakotan languages, where the interrogative particles are typically mandatory, even in open questions (also known as *wh*-questions, or *d*-questions in Stoney Nakoda since all of the interrogative terms start with *d*). The intergender particle *hî* seems to be used primarily for forming tag questions, and does not appear to serve as a conventional interrogative particle at all, however more investigation is required in order to confirm this.

Note the *î* to *û* vowel change in both of the intramasculine interrogatives: intergender *-nî* and *hî* become intramasculine *-núwo* and *húwo*. While there are other cases of similar vowel changes particularly in informal speech, this is not a regular sound change throughout the language and the sequence *-îw-* does occur both within words and as a result of morphological processes (e.g. *îá* ‘to speak, to speak a language’, *îwá’ach* ‘I’m speaking, I speak it’).

6. Conjunctions and complement clauses

6.1. Conjunctions

By using different combinations of conjunctions, or by dropping them altogether, Stoney Nakoda speakers can indicate different degrees of formality. This is seen below, where the conjunction *gichí* ‘with’ can be dropped in very informal situations when only a pronoun and a proper name are being conjoined.

- (5) a. *Mîyé Valerie gichí*
 1SG.PRO Valerie with
 ‘Valarie and I’ (standard)
- b. *Mîyé Valerie*
 1SG.PRO Valerie
 ‘Valarie and I’ (very informal)

For longer lists, *gichí* is typically required, and additional conjunctions can optionally be included in order to indicate increased formality.

- (6) a. *Valerie Carson Shanice gichí*
 Valerie Carson Shanice with
 ‘Valerie, Carson and Shanice’ (standard)
- b. *Valerie nâgú Carson ehúna, nâgú Shanice gichí*
 Valerie CONJ Carson conj CONJ Shanice with
 ‘Valerie, Carson and Shanice’ (very formal)

Conjunctions can be difficult to translate, so they are not given precise glosses in (6b). Individual conjunction lexemes in Stoney often match best with short phrases in English, so we suggest the following translations for the conjunctions in (6b): *nâgú* ‘in addition to, and’; *ehúna* ‘also including’. Adding these conjunctions appears to be a way of embellishing an utterance, so a more stylistic gloss of this phrase might be: ‘In addition to Valerie, Carson is also included, along with Shanice’. Note that while this translation might come across as somewhat long-winded in English, adding these conjunctions is simply a way of expressing formality in Stoney Nakoda, and does not imply an overly pretentious attitude.

6.2. Complement clauses

Similar to the conjunction *gichí*, the complementizer *-cha* can be dropped in informal situations:

- (7) a. *dohá hînîgecha wakách*
 dohá hînîga=cha¹⁴ wa-ka=ch
 INTS¹⁵ be.bad=COMP 1SG-to.mean=IG.DECL
 ‘I mean that it was terrible’ (standard)
- b. *dohá hînîga wakách*
 dohá hînîga wa-ka=ch
 INTS be.bad 1SG-to.mean=IG.DECL
 ‘I mean (that) it was terrible’ (informal)

Dropping the complementizer also results in the use of the unablauted form of *hînîga* ‘to be bad’. More research is required in order to clarify the details of these patterns, as they may not hold across all situations.

7. Conclusion

In this paper we have seen a wide range of linguistic patterns that are used to express different degrees of formality in Stoney Nakoda. The choices speakers make with regard to kinship terms, gendered enclitics, conjunctions, complementizers and secondary verbs can all be used to indicate

¹³The complementizer *-cha* is treated as an enclitic in part because it does not receive stress. It also appears to trigger e-ablaut in Stoney Nakoda (contrary to some other Dakotan languages), causing *hînîga* ‘to be bad’ to become *hînîge* in this phrase.

¹⁵The intensifier *dohá* can typically be translated as ‘very, really’, but it frequently interacts with the semantics of the words it modifies, in this case the verb *hînîga* ‘to be bad’. It is probably more realistic to treat this combination as a verb phrase: *dohá hînîga* ‘to be terrible, to be awful, to be ugly, to be very bad’.

respect, the formality of the situation, or the familiarity between interlocutors. Many of the less formal patterns may appear to simply be reduced speech, however we want to emphasize that the Stoney Nakoda language is still used on a daily basis in these communities, including in formal situations such as feasts, eulogies, ceremonies, and powwows, as well as informal conversations. These different forms are frequently used by individual speakers, and elders often comment that different forms are acceptable depending on the situation. Since Stoney Nakoda is still so widely-spoken in the community, we felt it was important to document some of these usages in order to demonstrate the wide range of variation and to assist language learners in their effort to maintain the Stoney Nakoda language.

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