



# Gekinoo' amaadiiwigamig Ojibwemowin Lesson 1: Maajitaadaa (Let's get started)

Michael Waasegiizhig Price, TEK Specialist  
Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission



Giishpin ganawendan gidinwewininaan, giga-  
ganawenimig aadizookaan gaa-ganawendang  
Anishinaabemowin.

If you take care of the language, the spirit-keeper  
of the language will take care of you.

Tobasaanakwad Kinew



# Ojibwemowin is a verb-based language.

Learning to conjugate verbs is the core of the Ojibwe language.

There are four types of verbs in Ojibwe:

- ▶ Verb Animate Intransitive (VAI)
- ▶ Verb Inanimate Intransitive (VII)
- ▶ Verb Transitive Animate (VTA)
- ▶ Verb Transitive Inanimate (VTI)

What are the differences?

# Comparison of English verbs and Ojibwemowin verbs

- ▶ I see a deer.
- ▶ I see two deer.
  
- ▶ I see a car.
- ▶ I see two cars.

Notice that the verb “see” does not change.

- ▶ Ni-**waabamaa** waawaashkeshi.
- ▶ Ni-**waabamaag** niizh waawaashkeshiwag.
  
- ▶ Ni-**waabandaan** odaabaan.
- ▶ Ni-**waabandaanan** niizh odaabaanan.

Notice that there are two verbs: **waabam** and **waabandan**.

And, the verbs and objects are conjugated to reflect plurality.



## Animate vs. Inanimate verbs

Animate verbs are used for things that are living.

Example: waawaashkeshi, waabizheshi, naabekwa, asin.

Inanimate verbs are used for things that are non-living according to the language.

Example: car, leaf, root, house, water.

## Indigenous Perspectives of Animacy

Rock – asin – are considered living; therefore one would use animate verbs in talking about rocks.

Ingii-**waabama**ag niizhwaaso-asiniig biinikamigaag.

I saw seven rocks lying on clean ground. (VTA verb)

Ingii-**maawanjitoon** nibi. (VTI verb)

I collected water.

Many would argue that water is animate and gives life, but the language defines water as inanimate.

Of the four sacred elements, rock, wind, fire and water, only rock is animate.



# Ojibwemowin Syntax

Syntax – the arrangement of words or phrases to create well-informed sentences in a language.

English syntax: noun > verb > direct object

Syntax is not as important in Ojibwe language, meaning there is no predetermined arrangement of words.

The speaker can choose how to communicate and the first word usually carries the emphasis of the communicate.



## Example of Ojibwe Syntax

English: I saw a wolf this morning.

Ojibwemowin:

- ▶ Ingii-**waabamaa** ma'iingan zhebaa.
- ▶ Ma'iingan ingii-**waabamaa** zhebaa.
- ▶ Zhebaa ma'iingan ingii-**waabamaa**.





## Pronouns in Ojibwemowin

1st person – me, I, myself

2<sup>nd</sup> person – you, you all, you guys

3<sup>rd</sup> person – he, she, they, them

(Ojibwemowin has a 4<sup>th</sup> person that we will explore later)

Niin – me

we (niinawind, giinawind)

Giin – you

you all - giinawaa

Wiin – him/her

them/they - wiinawaa



## Examples of pronoun usage

**Bakade** – He/she is hungry.

Nim**bakade** – I am hungry.

Gib**akade** – You are hungry.

**Bakadewag** – They are hungry.

Nim**bakademin** – We are hungry (excluding you).

Gib**akademin** – We are hungry (including you).