

Moving from Words to Simple Sentences

Beginning language learners have little difficulty understanding single words in a new language. Their bigger challenge is putting words together to form sentences. The minute they try to create simple sentences, they are faced with the "grammar" of the language.

Keep it simple!

Learning is easier when the language being learned has the same sentence structure as the language the student is used to. For students studying Native American languages such as Sahaptin, students are faced with a sentence structure that is different, and words that are rich in prefixes and suffixes.

Example:	The magpie / is / on top of / the tree.
	xwíimichnik áy'ay iwá patát-pa
	on top of magpie is tree -location

The language learner is not used to the sentence starting with "on top of," or why there needs to be a "-pa" on the word 'tree' to show location. Too much grammar explanation in the same lesson can become confusing. Because of this, it is wise and helpful to the student, to introduce only one detail at a time, with only one change in the sentence at a time in any given lesson.

Example:	When we want to show location in Sahaptin, we add "-pa." (in,on,at)
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iníit-pa	is located at the house
pchish-pa	is located at the door
patát-pa	is located at the tree
wána-pa	is located at the river

This does not reflect all of the meanings and uses of "-pa." It focuses on only one interpretation meaning where something is located.

This simple rule is very easy for students to grasp and apply. It is the teacher's task to encourage the students to practice this rule with carefully chosen vocabulary that permits the rule to be applied without difficulty.