

Navaho Linguistics for Quantum Hardware Education

Onri Jay Benally

December 2023

This document is written by Onri Jay Benally, an Indigenous American born and raised on the Navaho tribe (Diné Bikeyah). Its purpose is to develop and collect Navaho terms associated with quantum information science and technology (QIST), highlighting on quantum hardware engineering. As you may find, this development is motivated by the drive not only exploit linguistics as a way of better understanding emerging technology, but to also serve as a tool to contribute to the quantum community at large. With that, it may be possible to form a model around this effort in order to break down barriers to entry when it comes to approaching or incorporating oneself into the field of QIST.

If you are interested in learning Navaho, the first section of this document will cover some basic ideas about the language. This will be followed by some examples of how one might think about names and labels from the Indigenous American perspective. It may be worth noting that although Navaho is considered to be a Tier 5 or Category 5 language in terms of difficulty for native English speakers, practicality is our main concern.

Creative Commons License

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.



Towards Using Linguistics for Quantum Hardware Comprehension

The Navaho language is highly descriptive, has a heavy presence of verb usage, and is rich in consonant clusters and tonality. It is important to note that the many biomes and topographical differences found on the tribal lands are contributing factors to the various Navaho dialects. This is especially true for the mountainous regions, where pronunciation and modern spelling can vary in a slight manner.

As you may or may not know, the Navaho language was only practiced through oral expression for thousands of years in what is now called North America. Not until relatively recent history did Navaho linguists and language experts decide to pick a written form that could adopt Navaho phonetics. So far, the Latin script (commonly used to write English alphabets) has been the default for writing since then. There are other scripts or writing systems such as Cyrillic (commonly used to write Slavic alphabets, including Russian) that can express Navaho phonetics as well, however it is not actively taught or practiced in the tribe. Either way, the spelling of words are expected to be pronounced phonetically.

For example, it is generally known that Diné has two English spellings: Navaho and Navajo (both pronounced the same). The letter (j), used in the word Navajo, is exclusive to the spelling of the word. If one observes (j) in any other Diné word, then it should be pronounced the same as the English letter (j) or its linearized form (dzh). Keep this in mind.

Virtually all English words can be translated into Navaho based on the depth of understanding and functionality of the word. Thus, when a new English term is coined or invented, a Navaho description can be given and verified by sharing it with another Navaho speaker who should understand what one is saying with context.

In the era of rapidly advancing science, technology, and art, one can express new Navaho terms by simply spending some time to consider the semantics, followed by documenting or producing a shareable form of the new term. Such is the case for topics like quantum mechanics and quantum engineering, provided as examples in this repository. Over time, this GitHub page is expected to retain a fair amount of content for driving explanations of advanced and technical topics of today (especially quantum), in Navaho.

Towards a Language for Quantum Hardware Comprehension

From idea to practice...

	English Term	Navaho Term
Initial Idea	Computer	Béesh = Metal łichíí' = Red Nitsékees = Think
Final Version	Computer	Béesh łichíí' Nitsékeesí = [A piece of copper that thinks]

Figure 1: *Computer* in Navaho.