

How to use Alabama verbs: an introduction

WOLF-Lab @ Harvard

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1 Introduce yourself!

Question: Chi-holchifa-k naas-ooli?

Answer: Cha-holchifa-ya _____.

- You can see that there are small pieces within each word.

(1)	Chi-holchifa-k naas-ooli?	(2)	Cha-holchifa-ya _____?
	your-name- what-it.is		my-name-
	'What is your name?'		'My name is _____'

- We will call these little pieces **morphemes**.

Now turn to your group and introduce yourself!

2 Talking about the present & the past

- **Verbs** can attach different **morphemes** to themselves.
- It's useful to distinguish at least two types:
 1. **agreement morphemes** tell us who is involved in the action;
 2. **tense morphemes** tell us when and how the action is performed.

(3)	a. I am danc-ing .	(4)	a. Ava is danc-ing .
	b. I often dance .		b. She often dance-s .
	c. Yesterday I danc- ed .		c. Yesterday Ava danc- ed .

- Alabama has many agreement and tense morphemes!
- One very useful morpheme is **hchi**: is signals present tense!
- You can use **hchi** to ask questions (q) and to answer them:

- | | |
|---|--|
| (5) Ava-k bitli-hchĩ ?
Ava- dance-present.q
‘Is Ava dancing?’ | (6) ay, Ava-k bitli-hchi .
yes Ava- dance-present
‘Yes, Ava is dancing.’ |
|---|--|

- Alabama questions come with a special tune, and a snotty nose.
- We write this snottiness as a squigly line: **hchĩ**.
- Notice also that “Ava” appears with **-k**. That’s another morpheme!
- You will see it on some words below, but we will discuss it another time.

- Another very useful pair of morphemes is **ti** and **hchõ**: they talk about the past!
- We use **hchõ** to ask about what happened, and **ti** to tell what happened.

- | | |
|---|---|
| (7) Ava-k bitli-hchõ ?
Ava- dance-past.q
‘Did Ava dance?’ | (8) ay, Ava-k bitli-ti .
yes Ava- dance-past
‘Yes, Ava danced.’ |
|---|---|

- Questions with **hchõ** have again the special tune, and a snotty nose.

Now let’s practice together how to talk about present & past!

Choose a verb:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hompani ‘play’ • chiyahli ‘walk’ • chokkooli ‘sit’ • chootli ‘jump’ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hinakahli ‘wait’ • ilakomayli ‘swim’ • ilkowaali ‘move around, jiggle’ • afaaka ‘laugh’ |
|--|--|

Exercise. Choose a verb, and ask the person on your right about whether the raccoon is doing this action. Answer the person on the left.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>(9) sawa-k ____?
raccoon- ____
'Is the racoon ____-ing?'</p> | <p>(10) ay, sawa-k ____.
yes, raccoon- ____?
'Yes, the raccoon is ____-ing.'</p> |
|---|--|

Exercise. Choose a verb, and ask the person on your right about whether the dog did this action. Answer the person on the left.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>(11) ifa-k ____?
dog- ____
'Did the dog ____?'</p> | <p>(12) ay, ifa-k ____.
yes, dog- ____?
'Yes, the dog (did) ____.'</p> |
|---|--|

3 Verbs that end in *-li*

What are Agents?

- 'Agents' are the ones who perform an action.

② **Question**

Who's the Agent in the sentence: *Ava gave the book to her friend*

- In English, the verb doesn't change much depending on the agent. But in Alabama, they do!
- Different verbs behave differently depending on how they look like.
- There are three special groups of verbs:
 - *-ka*
 - *-chi*
 - *-li*

We will first look at the most common type of verbs: ones that end in *-li*!

Alabama	English
bit.li	To dance
chiyah.li	To walk
chokkoo.li	To sit
choot.li	To jump
hinakah.li	To wait
ilakomay.li	To swim
ilkowaa.li	To move around, to jiggle
itabat.li	To crawl
ilaasih.li	to wash yourself
kafih.li	to work hard, to try your best
too.li	to play a game (like stickball)
haatanat.li	to spin around (exactly once)

- For *-li* verbs, when we talk about ourselves (I or me), we add another *-li* suffix *in between* the verb and the tense.

- (13) **anok** bit.li-**li**-hchi (14) **anok** ilakomay.li-**li**-hchi
 I dance.li-I/me-ing I swim.li-I/me-ing
 ‘I am dancing.’ ‘I am swimming.’

- If I’m talking about what *you*, *y’all*, or *we* are doing, we drop *-li* and add an *agent marker*.

- (15) a. **you** are dancing.
 b. **y’all** are dancing.
 c. **we** are dancing.
- (16) a. **isnok** bit-chi-hchi
 b. **hasnok** bit-hachi-hchi
 c. **kosnok** bit-hili-hchi



Remember!

When we want to add *-chi*, *-hachi*, or *-hili*, we have to drop the *-li* first!

- There’s one more agent that Alabama verbs change for: When we want to talk *They* are doing.

- Instead of a suffix, we optionally add a *ho-* before the dictionary form.

(17) **akkohok ho-bit.li-hchi**
 they they-dance.li-ing
 'They are dancing.'

-li Verbs Summary:

English	Alabama	English	Alabama
I am dancing	bit.li-li-hchi	We are dancing	bit-hili-hchi
You are dancing	bit-chi-hchi	Y'all are dancing	bit-hachi-hchi
He/She/It is dancing	bit.li-hchi	They are dancing	ho-bit.li-hchi

*Now you try changing the verbs for **agent**!*

Exercise. Using the following dialogue, ask the person to your right the question and have them answer with a new verb that ends in *-li*. An example answer is shown below.

(18) A: am-oklak _____-ti. isnok _____-hcho?
 my-friend _____-ed. You _____-ed
 'My friend _____. Did you _____?'

(19) B. ey, anok _____-ti.
 yes, I _____-ed
 'Yes, I _____-ed'

Choose a verb:

- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| • bit.li 'To dance' | • itabat.li 'To crawl' |
| • chiyah.li 'To walk' | • ilaasih.li 'to wash yourself' |
| • chokkoo.li 'To sit' | • kafih.li 'to work hard, to try your best' |
| • choot.li 'To jump' | • too.li 'to play a game' |
| • hinakah.li 'To wait' | • haatanat.li 'to spin around' |
| • ilakomay.li 'To swim' | |
| • ilkowaa.li 'To jiggle' | |

Example.

- (20) A: am-oklak kafih.li-ti. isnok kafih-chi-hcho?
 my-friend try.your.best-ed. You try.your.best-ed
 'My friend tried his/her best. Did you try your best?'
- (21) B. ey, ana kafih.li-li-ti
 yes, I try.my.best-I-ed
 'Yes, I tried my best.'

Exercise. Using the following dialogue, ask the person to your right the question and have them answer with a new verb that ends in *-li*. An example answer is shown below.

- (22) A: am-oklak _____-ti. hasnok _____-hcho?
 my-friend _____-ed. Y'all _____-ed
 'My friend _____. Did y'all _____?'
- (23) B. ey, kosnok _____-ti.
 yes, We _____-ed
 'Yes, we _____-ed'

Choose a verb:

- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| • bit.li 'To dance' | • itabat.li 'To crawl' |
| • chiyah.li 'To walk' | • ilaasih.li 'to wash yourself' |
| • chokkoo.li 'To sit' | • kafih.li 'to work hard, to try your best' |
| • choot.li 'To jump' | • too.li 'to play a game' |
| • hinakah.li 'To wait' | • haatanat.li 'to spin around' |
| • ilakomay.li 'To swim' | |
| • ilkowaa.li 'To jiggle' | |

Example.

- (24) A: am-oklak chiyahli-ti. hasnok chiyaa-hachi-hcho?
 my-friend walk-ed. Y'all walk-ed
 'My friend walked. Did y'all walk?'
- (25) B. ey, kosnok chiyaa-hili-ti
 yes, We walk-ed
 'Yes, we walk-ed'

EXTRA EXERCISE! At home, do this with a friend or family member! Using the following dialogue, ask the question and have them answer with a new verb that ends in *-li*. An example answer is shown below.

- (26) A: ana _____-ti. akkohok _____-hcho?
 I _____-ed. they _____-ed
 'I _____-ed. Did they _____?'
- (27) B. ey, akkohok _____-ti.
 yes, they _____-ed
 'Yes, they _____-ed'

EXTRA EXERCISE Example

- (28) A: ana too.li-li-ti. akkohok ho-tooli-hcho?
 I play-I-ed. they play-ed
 ‘I play-ed. Did they play?’
- (29) B. ey, akkohok ho-tooli-ti.
 yes, they play-ed
 ‘Yes, they play-ed’

4 What is a Syllable?

- All words in Alabama (and English, too!) are made up of **consonants (C)** and **vowels (V)**
- Consonants and vowels are grouped into **syllables**
- Each syllable **must** have at least one vowel. This vowel can be either **short** or **long**.
- There can also be one consonant before and after the vowel, but no more!
- We can write syllables using C’s and V’s. The biggest possible syllable in Alabama is CVVC.
- Verbs can end in various types of syllables. Those are: CVV.CV, CVC.CV, iCV, and CVCV. Today, we will talk about CVV.CV and iCV.

***Be Careful!***

Even though it’s written with two letters, **CH** only counts as **one** consonant!

5 iCV Verbs

- iCV verbs have **two syllables**

- The first syllable is just **i** and the second syllable has **one consonant** and **one vowel**.
- Sometimes, you have to add special prefixes to these verbs when you use them!
- Drop the **i** and add either **il-**, **is-**, or **has-**, if I'm talking about what **we**, **you**, or **y'all** are doing
- For example, the conjugation of the verb *ila* 'to come' looks like this:

English	Alabama	English	Alabama
I came	ila-li-ti	We came	il-la-ti
You came	is-la-ti	Y'all came	has-la-ti
He/She/It came	ila-ti	They came	ila-chi-ti

Exercise. Give the person on your left a pronoun from the list below, and it's their job to conjugate the verb appropriately. Then, switch roles!

(30) *anok* 'I'; *isnok* 'you'; *akkok* 'that one'; *kosnok* 'we'; *hasnok* 'y'all'; *akkohok* 'they'

6 CVV.CV

- Another type of verb in Alabama are CVV.CV verbs. Can you see why these are called CVV.CV?

Alabama	English
hinaata	to lead
choopa	to buy
hooba	to steal

- CVV.CV verbs are made up of a consonant, two vowels, a consonant, and a vowel.
- The agent morphemes for **"we"**, **"you"**, and **"y'all"** are inserted *inside* the verb, between the long vowel and the second consonant.

English	Alabama	English	Alabama
I am leading	hinaata-li-hchi	We are leading	hinaa-l-ta-hchi
You are leading	hinaa-s-ta-hchi	Y'all are leading	hinaa-s-ta-hchi
He/She/It is leading	hinaata-hchi	They are leading	hinaata-hchi

Exercise. Using the following dialogue, ask the person to your right the question and have them answer with a new verb. An example answer is shown below.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>(31) isnok ____-cho?
 you ____-question?
 'Did you ____?'</p> | <p>(32) Inkobi, anok ____-ti.
 no, I ____-past?
 'No, I did ____'</p> |
|---|--|

Exercise. Using the following dialogue, ask the person to your right the question and have them answer with a new verb. An example answer is shown below.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>(33) hachi-k ____cho?
 ya'll ____-question?
 'Did ya'll ____?'</p> | <p>(34) Inkobi, posno-k ____ti.
 no, we ____-past?
 'No, we did ____'</p> |
|--|--|

Example.

- (35) isnok **hinaa-s-ta-cho**?
you lead-you-lead-past
'Did you lead?'
- (36) inkobi, anok **choopa-li-ti**.
no, I buy-me-buy-past?
'No, I bought'

7 Summary

- We have covered a lot today! We now know how to:
 1. Introduce yourself in Alabama
 2. How to change verbs to talk about the past and present, and for questions and statements.
 3. What an agent is.
 4. What a syllable is
 5. How to change *-li* verbs.
 6. How to change *iCV* verbs.
 7. How to change *CVV.CV* verbs.
- Agent agreement is a difficult aspect of the language to tackle with, so you should be proud to have arrived this far.
- Don't be disheartened if you found this challenging, learning languages is always difficult! The more practice you do, the easier it will become. With practice, you will be able to express so many ideas in Alabama!
- Have fun!