

Linguistics Challenge

Classical Nahuatl (Aztec)

Puzzle adapted by Tom Payne, from Farmer, Ann and Richard A. Demers. 1996. A Linguistics Workbook. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.



In many languages of the world, whole sentences can be expressed with a single word.

This is true in Classical

Nahuatl, the language of the Aztec Empire that flourished in what is now Mexico between 1325 and 1522 CE. In the following puzzle, try to divide each Nahuatl word into its various parts, and then fill in the translations at the end. Note: The symbol ":" after a vowel simply means that the vowel is pronounced longer than otherwise. It does NOT necessarily mean that the word must be divided at that point.

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Nahuatl Word	English translation	Nahuatl Word	English translation
1. nicho:ka	'I cry.'	10. tikochi	'You sleep.'
2. nicho:kani	'I am crying.'	11. ancho:kah	'Y'all cry.'
3. ankochinih	'Y'all are sleeping.'	12. tikochis	'You will sleep.'
4. tikochih	'We sleep.'	13. ticho:kayah	'We were crying.'
5. kochiya	'He was sleeping.'	14. cho:ka	'He cries.'
6. kwi:kas	'He will sing.'	15. kochini	'He is sleeping.'
7. ankochiyah	'Y'all were sleeping.'	16. ancho:kayah	'Y'all were crying.'
8. nicho:kas	'I will cry.'	17. ticho:kanih	'We are crying.'
9. cho:kayah	'They were crying.'	18. kwi:kah	'They sing.'

Now, considering the patterns you have noticed in the above words, translate the following into English:

19. tikwi:kani

Fill in the blanks.

20. nikwi:kaya

21. cho:kanih

Now translate the following English sentences into Classical Nahuatl (be sure to include the ":" symbol where appropriate):

22.

'They sleep.'

Your score.

23.

'I will sleep.'

24.

'You will cry.'

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