

How to form ideas in Na'vi

A difficulty that plagues many learners when they're first beginning to learn the Na'vi language is understanding how to circumlocute, or rephrase their intended idea, so that it can be said in Na'vi. Na'vi's lexicon is growing, but limited in scope for many ideas that we may try to convey here on earth. There are items or concepts that we have in English that the Na'vi would have no need of a word for. And vice versa, there are concepts in Na'vi that don't have a direct 1:1 translation back into English. Due to this, learning how to communicate your ideas from a "Na'vi frame of mind" is paramount when advancing from simple stock phrases to independently created ones.

Recently it has become clear that there is a need for some coaching on this front. I have decided to put together a collection of tips and tricks that myself and other advanced speakers use in order to reframe our English thoughts into Na'vi. I hope that you find them helpful in your journey.

"Translate meaning, not words."

The proverb above is one that you will hear quoted time and time again by old-hat teachers because it is the single most valuable way that we can summarize the skill of circumlocution.

Circumlocution is, put simply, using related ideas or concepts to convey a word or phrase that there is no direct translation for. Crucial to knowing how to use this process is to understand the intent of your sentence, not simply the English words. Challenge yourself to come up with the intended meaning of the following English proverb:

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

What were you able to come up with? Did it look something like **beauty is different to each person?** (highlight the gap to see the answer)

The original proverb doesn't translate directly into Na'vi because it's idiomatic and doesn't mean what the words literally say, but our new rephrase works nicely:

Fratuteri tìlor keteng lu, for every person, beauty is different.

You'll notice that the meaning is a bit more direct than the original English, which leads us nicely into point two.

Simplify, simplify, simplify

The simplest version of an idea is the one that is the most likely to be able to be translated into Na'vi. Unless you are working on a specific project where more detailed translation is required, or meaning will be lost by simplifying too far, try to condense your thoughts into their most simple form.

Try to simplify this idea into a more condensed version:

Everyone needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and to pray in. -
John Muir

If you were able to simplify it at all, you're on the way to overcoming your block in translating ideas. For me, my mind condenses it to (highlight the gap to see the answer):

Everyone needs beauty and bread, places to play and to pray.

This sentence is easily communicated in Na'vi (though it needs complex grammatical structures).

Frapol kin tìlorti sì hametsìti, sengti fte uvan sivi sì ivaho, everyone needs beauty and bread, (everyone needs) places to play and pray.

The original sentence is also able to be translated, however by simplifying the idea we avoid having to circumlocute, resulting in something like this:

Frapol kin tìlorti s̀ hamets̀iti, sengti a fko tsun uvan sivi s̀ ivalo, everyone needs beauty and bread, places where one can play and pray.

Simplification is the difference between having to use an attributive clause and not, and for new learners that can be a huge difference.

Study

It is a matter of fact that the more words you have memorized in Na'vi, the more you will be able to express yourself. The only way to build your arsenal is to study, there is no alternative or 'easy route'. Study. Make flashcards, use [Memrise](#), put sticky notes on household objects. Whatever works for you, make sure you're studying and building your vocabulary.

Practice

And of course, make sure you're practicing as you're studying. Practice helps reinforce the ideas and concepts you're building, and will reinforce these techniques. Translating songs or other more artistic works will inevitably force you to circumlocute because you have to decide on the writer's intent and then try to preserve that as you translate it into Na'vi.