

LESSON ONE: GREETING

Transcript

Here's what the two people said:

Speaker 1: Nya:wëh sgë:nö'.
Hello.

Speaker 2: Do:gës, gadögweta'.
That's right, I'm well.

Speaker 1: Ónëhjih tgögë:nö'.
It's a long time since I saw you.

Speaker 2: Gë' heh ögö'asha' sagö:gë' ae'.
I'm really glad to see you again.

Vocabulary

Here are the words that show up in this conversation, in order of appearance:

nya:wëh	“thank you”
sgë:nö'	“well-being, peace, etc.”
do:gës	“that's right”
gadögweta'	“I'm well, in good health”
ónëhjih	“a long time ago”
tgögë:nö'	“since I saw you”
gë' heh	“really, very”
ögö'asha'	“I'm happy (about something)”
sagö:gë'	“I see you again”
ae'	“again”

Word Play

gadögweta' “I'm well, in good health”

This word begins with the *first person prefix g-* “I.” Then comes **-adögweta'**, which is the *stem*. This stem begins with **a**, so it's called an *a-stem*. That's important, because the beginning of the stem determines the shape of the person prefix that comes in front of it. Usually you can find the beginning of a stem by lopping off the first person prefix **g-**. (Later we'll meet a few cases where that doesn't work.) Here are a few other person prefixes you'll find with a-stems:

s-	“you”	sadögweta'	(usually a question) “How are you doing?”
yö-	“she”	yödögweta'	“she's well” (notice how yö- swallows up the a of the stem).
ha-	“he”	hadögweta'	“he's well” (ha- also swallows up the a of the stem).

One of the prefixes that can come in front of a person prefix usually has the shape **s-**, and it means that something happens “again,” so it’s been called the *repetitive prefix*. If we put it on the front of **gadögweta’** “I’m well” we get:

sgadögweta’ “I’m well again” (maybe I was sick for a while)

So now you know five related words:

gadögweta’ “I’m well”
sadögweta’ “are you well?”
yödögweta’ “she’s well”
hadögweta’ “he’s well”
sgadögweta’ “I’m well again”

tgögé:nö’ “since I saw you”

You already know the middle of this word, **-gögé-**, because it’s also in the middle of **ësgö:gë’ ae’** “I’ll see you again.” (Don’t worry yet about the length and accent of the vowels.) The **-gö-** part means “**I** (do something to) **you**”. The **-gë-** part means “see”. So **-gögé-** means “I see you.” The **-nö’** at the end of **tgögé:nö’** means I saw you at some time in the past. The **t-** at the beginning usually means “there”, but here it means something more like “when” or “since.” So **Önëhjih tgögé:nö’** means something like “it’s a long time since I saw you.”

sagö:gë’ “I see you again”

Here we’ve got another case of **-gögé-** “I see you.” Now you know three words that are built around it:

ësgö:gë’ “I’ll see you again” (in the future)
sagö:gë’ “I see you again” (right now)
tgögé:nö’ “since I saw you”

Both **ësgö:gë’** and **sagö:gë’** contain the **s-** “repetitive” prefix, meaning “again,” that we just met in **sgadögweta’** “I’m well again.” In **sagö:gë’** the **a-** after the **s-** belongs to a set of prefixes that includes the **ë-** at beginning of **ësgö:gë’** “I’ll see you again.” This **a-** means that my seeing you is a known fact, as opposed to seeing you in the future, which is only a prediction. You can see from these two words, **ësgö:gë’** and **sagö:gë’**, that the repetitive prefix **s-** comes *after* the future **ë-** (**ës-**) but *in front of* the factual **a-** (**sa-**).

If you just want to say “I’ll see you,” instead of “I’ll see you *again*,” you can delete the **s-** in **ësgö:gë’**, so it’s **ëgö:gë’** “I’ll see you.” You might think that “I see you (right now)” would be ***agö:gë’**, but it’s actually **o’gö:gë’**. There *is* a word **a:gö:gë’** (with a long **a:**) meaning “I should or I might see you,” but we’ll leave that for another day.

LESSON 2: LEARNING SENECA

Transcript

Here's what the two people said:

- Speaker 1:** **Dë'ëh ni:s nisájahak?**
What have you been doing?
- Speaker 2:** **Gadéyësta' Onödowá'ga:' gawë:nö'.**
I'm studying the Seneca language.
- Speaker 1:** **O'séyë'he't dih?**
Did you learn it?
- Speaker 2:** **Ostö:h, gano:ö'.**
A little, it's hard.
- Speaker 1:** **Ogwe:nyö:h dih, á:sgyësdë'?**
Can you teach me?
- Speaker 2:** **Ë:h, ga:nyó'shö'.**
Yes, anytime.

New Vocabulary

Here are the new words that show up in this conversation:

dë'ëh	what (in a question)
ni:s	you (sometimes just i:s)
nisájahak	you were doing it
gadéyësta'	I'm studying, learning, reading, going to school
Onödowá'ga:'	Seneca (sometimes just Nödowa'ga:' or even just Dowa'ga:')
gawë:nö'	language, speech, word
o'séyë'he't	you learned it
dih	(shifts attention; see below)
ostö:h	a little bit
gano:ö'	it's difficult, expensive
ogwe:nyö:h	it's possible
á:sgyësdë'	you could teach me
ë:h	yes
ga:nyó'shö'	whenever, anytime

Word Play

nisájehak “you were doing it”

Maybe you can already tell that the **s-** here means “you,” so the stem must be **-ajehak** “were doing it”. So what is that **ni-** at the beginning? It’s called the *partitive prefix*, but that doesn’t help. For now just keep in mind that this **ni-** is required at the beginning of certain verbs, including verbs that mean “do something.”

If you remember how to say somebody is doing well (**gadógweta’** and so on), you might already be able to say that “I” or “she” was doing something:

nigájehak I was doing it
niyójehak she was doing it

With “he” there’s an added twist, one that comes up often when another prefix like this **ni-** comes in front of the **ha-** prefix meaning “he.” The **h** drops out when it’s between two vowels, so instead of ***nihajehak** (the * means this *isn’t* what people say), the word turns out to be:

níájehak he was doing something

When people talk fast they’re likely to change **ia** to **ya:**, so you’re likely to hear:

nyá:jehak he was doing something

gadéyēsta’ I’m studying, learning, reading, going to school

Notice the different meanings this word can have. At this point you shouldn’t have any trouble saying that “you”, “she”, or “he” is studying etc. The stem, of course, is **-adéyēsta’** “is studying”.

sadéyēsta’ you’re studying, are you studying?
yödéyēsta’ she’s studying
hadéyēsta’ he’s studying

o’séyē’he’t you learned, *or* did you learn?

You shouldn’t be surprised that the way to say “I learned” is:

o’géyē’he’t I learned

If you chopped off the **g-** or the **s-**, you might think the stem is **-eyë'he't** “learned.” Unfortunately, the stem is actually **-yë'he't**. It's a **y-stem**. (The other verbs we've met so far have all been **a-stems**.) Worse than that, there happen to be two kinds of **y-stems**. This one is the kind that takes the “I” prefix **ge-** and the “you” prefix **se-**. We can add “she” and “he”:

wa'éyë'he't	she learned
wá:yë'he't	he learned

All these words begin with the factual prefix, which is sometimes **o'-** (in front of **ge-** and **se-**), sometimes **wa'-** (in front of **ye-** “she”, which loses its **y**), and sometimes **wa-** (in front of **ha-**, which loses its **h**). So we've got:

o'géyë'he't	I learned
o'séyë'he't	you learned, <i>or</i> did you learn?
wa'éyë'he't	she learned
wá:yë'he't	he learned

dih

This is one of those little particles whose meaning is impossible to translate into English. It generally serves to shift attention to something different, in this case to whether the friend learned Seneca.

ogwe:nyö:h	it's possible
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Notice that in Seneca you don't say “you can do it,” but “it's possible you could do it.”

á:sgyësdë'	you could teach me
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We've already met the prefix **o'-** (or **wa'-**, or **wa-**), which means that something is a fact, and **ë-**, which means that something is predicted to happen but hasn't happened yet. This word begins with the third prefix in the same set, and it means that something might happen but it might not. I don't know if you'll teach me, but it's a possibility. So, according to how certain something is, we've got these three different prefixes:

o'-, wa'-, wa-	factual
ë-	predictive
a:-	hypothetical

After the **a:-** in **á:sgyěsdě'** is **sg-**, which means **you** (do something to) **me**, in this case you teach me. That's pretty logical, if you think that **s-** means "you" and **g-** means "me." You already know the opposite combination, "**I** (do something to) **you**," which isn't logical. It's **gö-**, as in **ěsgö:gě'** "I'll see you again," or **tgögě:nö'** "since I saw you," or **sagö:gě'** "I see you" from Lesson 1.

LESSON 3: HELPFUL KIDS

The first person asks her friend what she thinks happened to her, and her friend answers that she doesn't know.

Speaker 1: **Sënóhdö' nögyá'dawëh nē:gē:h né:wa'?**
Do you know what happened to me today?

Speaker 2: **De'agënóhdö'. Dē' dih nesáya'da:wëh.**
I don't know. What happened to you.

Speaker 1: **Ga:nyo' sagyö' neh dwaknóhso:d,**
When I got home today,

ögí:waná:go' hodíkwaihse:h neh kéáwakshö'.
I was surprised that my kids had dinner ready.

Speaker 2: **Gē' nö:h heh o'dísa'nígóéhgwá't.**
It must have lifted your mind.

Speaker 1: **Ē:h do:gēs. I:' nö:h á:hö'öh agádæ'swi:yo:h.**
Yes. I'm the luckiest one.

Speaker 2: **Honödæ'swi:yo:h háé'gwah neh shéáwakshö'.**
Your kids are lucky too.

Speaker 1 **Wödóshö'öh næ:h i:s hēsáya'te:'.**
Soon it will be your turn.

Speaker 2 **A:gajö:gwah næ:h.**
I hope so.

New Vocabulary

sënóhdö'	you know, do you know?
nögyá'dawëh	what happened to me
nē:gē:h né:wa'	today
de'agënóhdö'	I don't know
dē'	what? (short for dē'ëh)
nesáya'da:wëh	what happened to you
sagyö'	I came back
neh	(particle)
dwaknóhso:d	where my house is
ögí:waná:go'	I was surprised
hodíkwáihse:h	they have made dinner
kéáwakshö'	my children

nö:h	I guess
o'dísa'nígöéhgwá't	it lifted your mind
i:'	I, me
á:hö'öh	the most
agádä'swi:yo:h	I'm lucky
honödä'swi:yo:h	they're lucky
háé'gwah	also (also há:'gwah)
shéawakshö'	your children
wödöshö'öh	sooner or later
nä:h	(particle, see below)
häsáya'te:'	it will be your turn
a:gajö:gwah	I hope so

Word Play

sénöhdö' “you know, do you know?”

By now you might recognize the **s-** as the person prefix meaning “you”. So the stem is **-énöhdö'**. However, this is a stem that takes *patient prefixes* instead of *agent* ones, and it gives us a chance to start getting acquainted with a few of them:

ag- “I” (instead of g-)	agénöhdö'	I know
go- “she” (instead of yö- or ye-)	gonöhdö'	she knows (go- swallows up the ë)
ho- “he” (instead of ha-)	honöhdö'	he knows (the same)

You might already have noticed the accent often falls on the second syllable, so we have **sénöhdö'** but **agénöhdö'**. That isn't the whole story, by any means, but it works a lot of the time.

në:gë:h né:wa' “today”

në:gë:h means “this” and **né:wa'** means “at this time”, and together they mean “today”.

de'agénöhdö' “I don't know”

This word begins with the negative prefix **de'-**. Then comes **agénöhdö'** “I know” that we just met. So the whole thing means “I don't know.” Notice that the accent shifts to the fourth syllable. Sometimes you'll hear **da'agénöhdö'**, beginning with **da'-** instead of **de'-**. You may be familiar with **di'gwa:h**, which is another way of saying “I don't know.”

sagyö ‘I came back’

The **g-** is the first person agent prefix, so the stem is **-yö** ‘came, arrived.’ The **sa-** is the same combination of the repetitive **s-** with the factual **a-** that we had in **sagö:gë** ‘I see you again’ in Lesson 1. Notice that ‘again’ and ‘back’ are treated in the same way.

dwaknöhsö:d ‘where my house is’

You may already know **aknöhsö:d** ‘my house’. The **d-** at the beginning is actually the same prefix we saw at the beginning of **tgögé:nö** ‘since I saw you.’ This word **dwaknöhsö:d** shows several things. First, **t** and **d** alternate with each other, so we had **tgögé:nö** with **t** at the beginning, but now we have **dwaknöhsö:d** with **d** at the beginning. Second, **k** and **g** alternate with each other too, so the first person patient prefix is **ag-** before a vowel (as in **agénöhdö**) but **ak-** before certain consonants, including **n** (as in **aknöhsö:d**). Third, the full form of the *first person patient prefix* is **wak-** (as in **dwaknöhsö:d**), not **ak-**, but the **w** at the beginning drops out, leaving **ak-**, when the **w** is at the beginning of a word (as in **aknöhsö:d**), and also after a glottal stop (as in **de’agénöhdö**).

kéawakshö ‘my children’

Compare this word with **ke:awak** ‘my daughter’ (literally ‘I have her as my child’) and **he:awak** ‘my son’ (literally ‘I have him as my child’).

agädä’swi:yo:h ‘I’m lucky’

Here we have the *first person patient prefix* **ag-** again, so the stem is **-ädä’swi:yo:h** ‘be lucky’. Maybe you can predict the following, where the **go-** and **ho-** swallow up the **a** at the beginning of the stem:

godä’swi:yo:h	‘she’s lucky’
hodä’swi:yo:h	‘he’s lucky’

honödä’swi:yo:h ‘they’re lucky’

This word begins with the *third person patient prefix* **hon-** meaning ‘they’. Notice that the **a** at the beginning of the stem **-ädä’swi:yo:h** changes to **ö** after the **n**. So the stem changes to **-ödä’swi:yo:h**.

shéawakshö “your children”

This means literally “you have them as children.” Notice also **she:awak** “your daughter” (literally “you have her as yourchild”) and **hesha:wak** “your son” (literally “you have him as your child”).

LESSON 4: WAITING TO PLAY

Girl: Ogwe:nyö:h ëgátši'wa:ë' gayá'daha'?'
Can I watch TV?

Mom: Jigos ya:e',
Later,

o:ya' sadí:wade:nyö',
you have other things to do,

ga:nyo' ëhšënë:da't,
when you finish,

da:h o:nëh ogwe:nyö:h ëhsátši'wa:ë' neh gayá'daha'.
then you can watch TV.

Girl: O:h, hó:gwa:h da:e' neh agyá:'se:'.
Oh, there comes my cousin.

Boy: Ogwe:nyö:h ëjátga:nyé'ha' asdeh?
Can we play outside?

Girl: Da'á:öh do'jih de'áknökdo:d.
I don't have time.

Boy: Ęgöyënö'ge:äd.
I'll wait for you.

Girl: Á:sgyenö:wö's gödaje' dih nä:h áéhniyënë:da't.
We'll finish sooner if you help me.

Boy: Nyoh, ëgöyenö:wö's.
OK, I'll help you.

Gödaje' dih nä:h ogwe:nyö:h ëjátga:nyé'ha'.
We can play sooner.

Dëhnyé:'ho:g dewá'ä:ö'.
We'll play catch with lacrosse.

Girl: Nyoh, në:dah waih neh yödéksagöewáta'.
OK, here's the towel.

Boy: Jajá'dasno:wä:d.
Let's hurry up!

Girl: Nē:dah waih neh gadzē'.
Here's the plate.

Boy: A:gye:h, dawága'sē's.
Oh oh, I dropped it.

Girl: O'wadädzö:??
Did it break?

Boy: Ę:h, do:gēs.
Yes, that's right.

Girl: Ha'degagö:n nä:h ěhsísgä:wa:g.
You'll have to sweep it up.

Boy: Ga:weh dih nä:h neh yesgä:wa:kta'?'
Where's the broom?

Girl: Si:gwa:h heyótsosgwa:d tga:nyo:d.
It's standing over there in the corner.

Boy: Hēge:go' ěgísgä:wa:g.
I'll go get it and sweep it up.

Girl: Gwe:h o:nēh o'sajē:no'kdē'?'
Did you finish now?

Boy: Ogwe:nyö:h o:nēh nä:h ějátga:nyé'ha'.
Now we can play.