

## THE A → E CHANGE

In Dakota, certain words end in a sound that we will call a *changeable A*: this final *a* can, and often does change to an *e* depending on the context the word is used in. For example,

yuhá he?	háu yuhé	ihmú sápa waŋ	ihmú sápe kiŋ
Does he have it?	Yes he has it.	a black cat	the black cat

The active core *yuhá* and the stative core *sápa* have a changeable *a* as their last sound: in writing, when words such as these are not part of a sentence, we will write this changeable *a* as an uppercase *A*, as in *yuhÁ*, *sápA*.

Ablaut, or the change of one vowel into another vowel in certain circumstances is a fairly common process in languages, and English is no exception. English occasionally uses ablaut to mark the tense of a verb; think *sing*, *sang*, *sung* or *give*, *gave*, *given*. It also uses ablaut to mark singular vs. plural from time to time, in cases such as *man*, *men* or *goose*, *geese*. Ablaut in English even occurs when certain affixes are attached to a word, although the process is often masked by the ridiculousness of English spelling: think of the words *photograph* and *photography*. Can you tell which vowel underwent ablaut here? It's easier if we spell them out phonetically: *fótograf* vs *fotágrafi*.

In Dakota, the ablaut process is much simpler than in English, where many different types of ablaut are left over in 'exception words' from older varieties of the language. Dakota has a single ablaut, which we

will call the *a-e* change, which changes certain *as* or *aŋs* into *es*, in a regular and predictable way. In the western Lakota dialect, the ablaut process is slightly different, where a changeable *a/aŋ* may become not just an *e*, but also an *iŋ*, depending on context. As a quick example of this (as we will not discuss the ablaut situation in Lakota in depth here), consider the verb *yatkÁŋ*, in both its Dakota and Lakota ablaut forms:

bdatké	datkáŋ he	yatké kte
blatké	latkáŋ he	yatkíŋ kte
I drank it.	Did you drink it?	He will drink it.

First off, which kind of words can undergo the *a-e* change in Dakota? The only words which have the ability to ablaut are those which end in a changeable *A*; and unfortunately for second language learners this isn't always predictable. When learning a new word which ends in an *a*, it must also be learned whether or not this *a* is changeable. Some examples of words which do end in a changeable *A* are as follows:

aphÁ	smÁ	káǵA
She waited for him.	It is deep.	She made it.

Some example sentences showing these words in their *a* form and *e* form are below.

tokštá aníphe kte	bdé kiŋ de smé	de chíčičaǵe do
They'll certainly wait for you.	This lake is deep.	I made this for you.
amáyapha he	bdé smá waŋ	de chíčičaǵapi do
Are you waiting for me?	a deep lake.	I made this for you guys.

And here are some examples of words which end in an *a*, but that *a* is not changeable.

ophá	ská	ayúta
He joined her.	It is white.	She stared at him.

Thus, even in the situations above where we saw the *a*'s switch to *e*; these words retain their *a*.

tokštá ónipha kte	wíyaka kiŋ de ská	ačhíyuta do
He will certainly join you.	This feather is white.	I am staring at you.
ómayapha he	wíyaka ská waŋ	ačhíyutapi do
Are you going to join me?	a white feather	I am staring at you guys.

However, while it must be learned whether or not a particular *a* is changeable; there are general patterns which help with this. For example, the causative endings *ya* and *khiyA* both end in a changeable *A*, and so all causative verbs formed using these end in a changeable *A* as well. Some examples are

špaŋyÁŋ	hiyúkhiyA	ğuyÁ
to cook something	to send something there	to burn something

After getting used to the *a-e* change in Dakota, it is tempting to assume that if you hear a verb that ends in an *e* sound; that this *e* sound is actually an *A* in ablaut form. This is usually true (as it would be if you heard *špaŋwáye*, *hiyúmayakhiye*, or *ğúúŋye*) but one must be careful here. Some Dakota verbs actually end in an *e*, and thus retain the final *e* in all forms. Some examples appear below

wašté	waštépi	odé	odépi
It is good.	They are good.	He looked for it.	They looked for it.

If instead it was assumed after hearing *wašté* and *odé* that these were actually ablaut words, the incorrect forms *\*waštápi* and *\*odápi* would be guessed for their plural forms.

In short, when learning new words, take the time to find out whether or not they end in a changeable *A*: it's not always easy to guess!

## THE A-E CHANGE AND QUESTIONS

In English, we saw that ablaut can be used to mark many different things; from the tense of a verb to the plurality of a noun. What then, does the *a-e* change mark in Dakota? The most important thing, upon first getting comfortable with the *a-e* change, is the difference between

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statements and questions. If a word ending in a changeable *A* is used in a question, it remains unchanged; but used in a statement that *A* becomes an *e*. For example;

wanyáŋka he	wanyáŋke	yatkán he	yatké
Did he see her?	He saw her.	Did she drink it?	She drank it.

This change of *as* to *es* in statements even occurs when the statement endings *do/ye* are present.

špaŋyáŋ he	špaŋyé do	niháŋska he	maháŋske ye
Did he cook it?	He cooked it.	Are you tall?	I am tall.

In fact, the *a-e* change does enough to mark the difference between statements and questions, that when asking a question using a word ending in a changeable *A*, the question particle *he* can even be left off, and the meaning is still clear:

de yakáŋa	omáyakaŋniŋa	ób yaškáta
Did you make this?	Did you understand me?	Did you play with them?
de yakáŋe	očíčaŋniŋe	ób waškáte
You made this.	I understood you.	I played with them.

## WHEN DO CORES CHANGE?

The above is actually a special case of a much more general pattern: whether words with a changeable *A* end in an *a* or an *e* is determined by the word, ending, or *core marker* that follows them. Statements are either followed by nothing (just a period) or the core marker *do/ye*, and both of these cases cause an *e* ending. Questions are followed by the question marker *he*, which causes an *a* ending.

Below is a collection of some of the most common *e*-ablaut triggers; if words ending in a changeable *A* are followed by one of these words, the *A* becomes an *e*. Note this list is far from comprehensive.

## YA / YAŃ

Like the English suffix *-ly*, the suffix *ya/yaŃ* takes stative cores in Dakota and turns them into adverbs. Because this suffix triggers *e*-ablaut, any changeable *A* coming directly before it becomes an *e*. Some examples are as follows:

wičákhA	wičákheya	anáǰmA	anáǰmeya
to tell the truth	truthfully	to keep it secret	secretly

## ŠNI

This is the equivalent of the English word *not*, and directly follows whichever core is to be negated. It is also an *e*-ablaut trigger.

wašpáŃyAŃ	škátA	iyéyA
to cook	to play	to find something
wašpáŃwaye šni	ób yaškáte šni	iyémaye šni
I didn't cook.	You didn't play with them.	He didn't find me.

## S'A

This enclitic follows verbs, and gives the meaning of *often*, or *habitually*. It causes changeable *A*'s to become *e*'s. This enclitic often can form nouns out of verbs; turning a verb *V* into the noun *V-s'a*, which has the meaning *one who V's often*. For example:

wíhaŃbdAŃ	wíhaŃbde-s'a	wóyatkaŃ	wóyatke-s'a
to dream	a dreamer	to drink	an alcoholic

Also, it may be used at the end of a sentence stressing that the event being talked about happens often, or time and time again.

okíyakA	héčhed omákiyake-s'a
to tell somebody something	He often told me such things.

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## КИҢ

This roughly translates as *the*, although in Dakota it is used for many more purposes than its English equivalent. The case of interest here is in making relative clauses: here it is used much like the English words *that, who, which*:

káǵA	eyÁ	wanyánkA
to make something	to say something	to see something
waháŋpi wakáǵe kiŋ	táku ehe kiŋ	wañbdáke kiŋ
the soup that I made	that which you said	the thing I saw

The same holds for the variant *k'uŋ*, it also forces changeable A's to become *e*'s.

okíyakA	očhíciyake k'uŋ he
to tell someone something	that which I'd told you

## КИҢHÁŋ

A postposition meaning *when*, *kiŋhán* also causes changeable A's to become *e*'s.

iyéyA	iyéwaye kiŋhán iyómakphi kte
to find something	When I find it I will be happy.

## KTÁ

The future enclitic *ktA* also causes words which come immediately before it to change to their *e*-forms, if they have one.

wanyánkA	okáħniǵA	káǵA
to see something	to understand something	to make something
wačhíyaŋke kte	ečádaŋ očhíčaħniǵe kte	de wakáǵe kte
I will see you.	Soon I will understand you.	I will make that.

Note that *ktA* itself ends in a changeable *A* - above we have seen the form *kte* because it comes at the end of a sentence. But in other situations, ablaut does not occur and it remains *ktA* (however, it still triggers ablaut in the word before it).

waŋmáyadake kta he	omákaħniġe kta he	de yakáġe kta he
Will you see me?	Will he understand me?	Did you make this?

## WAČHÍŋ

The verb *wačhíŋ* is an auxiliary verb which, when preceded by other verbs, adds the meaning of *intending to do it* or *planning to do it*. Some example sentences follow:

yA	óič'iyAyé	wašpáŋyAŋ
to go	to help oneself	to cook
yé waúŋčhíŋpi	óič'iyé wačhíŋpi	wašpáŋye waučhíŋ
We tried to go.	They tried to help themselves.	He tried to cook.

## KAPÍŋ

This auxiliary verb also causes the preceding verb to ablaut, and adds the meaning of *reluctant to do so* or *don't feel like doing it*

niwÁŋ	kiŋhdÁ	ħtaní
to swim	to go back (home)	to work
niwé wakápiŋ	kiŋhdé kapíŋ	ħtaní uŋkápiŋpi
I didn't feel like swimming.	He was reluctant to go back.	We didn't feel like working.

## A LIST OF WORDS CAUSING A-E CHANGE

Above we have looked at many examples of the occurrence of *e*-ablaut in words, by giving example sentences for some of the most commonly used ablaut trigger words. The list of examples above is far from comprehensive however; so below is a list of even more words which trigger

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*e*-ablaut in words that precede them. (This list is also far from comprehensive, unfortunately)

First, a list of some enclitics which cause *e*-ablaut when they follow the main verb in a sentence:

da / daŋ	do	hče / hča / hčij	kte
little / tiny	it is so	really / very	will
s'a	s'e	šni	ye
often / habitually	in the manner of	often / habitually	it is so

The following conjunctions and articles cause *e*-ablaut:

kiŋ	k'uŋ	kiŋháŋ	k'uŋháŋ
the	the aforementioned	when	when (past)
héčhiŋhaŋ	k'éyaš	k'a	kaíš
if	but /nevertheless	and	but

Also, the following auxiliary verbs cause ablaut in the verb before them.

kapíŋ	kiníča	dakA	kúnzA
to be reluctant	to have an urge	to regard as	to pretend
phíča	ší	wačhíŋ	-yA / -khiyA
its possible	to command	to intend to	causative suffix

## WHEN DO CORES NOT CHANGE?

So far we have seen many examples of when words with a changeable *A* end up ending in an *e*. But when do they not? As mentioned before, this also depends on what the following word is: some words do not trigger ablaut, and thus cause the original *a* ending to occur. We already saw one example of this: the question word *he*. Here are some others.



**-PI**

Probably the most important example of an enclitic which does not cause ablaut is the plural suffix *-pi*, which occurs often in verb conjugation

sdodyÁ	sdodyápi	yÁ	yápi
to know	they know	to go	They go.
wanjányka	wanjánykapi	niwÁŋ	niwánpi
to see something	They see it.	to swim	They swim.

**WAN**

Words ablaut before *kiŋ*, the Dakota word for *the*. They do not ablaut before the word *wan*, however, which is the word for *a/an*.

sápA	šŋka sápa wan	háŋskA	wichášta háŋska wan
to be black	a black dog	to be tall	a tall man

**ČHÍŋ**

The verb *čhiŋ* is an auxiliary verb which translates as the English verbs *want/need*. It is one of only two Dakota verbs (the other being *okíhi*) for which double-conjugation occurs; the idea *I want to go* would be rendered as *I go, I want* for example.

sdodyÁ	wašpányAŋ	niwÁŋ
to know it	to cook	to swim
sdodwáya wačhíŋ	wašpányan čhíŋ	yaniwan yačhíŋ
I want to know it.	He wants to cook.	You want to swim.

**OKÍHI**

This auxiliary verb carries the meaning of *to be able to, to be capable of*. It is also one of the rare words which causes double-conjugation.

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iyéyA to find something	héčhuŋ ktA (he) will do that	ókiyA to help someone
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iyéwaya owákihi šni I can't find it.	héčhuŋ kta okíhi He'll be able to do that.	ómayakiya oyákihi he Can you help me?
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## AWÁČHIŊ

This auxiliary adds the meaning of *to have been thinking about doing*.

čhethí ktA (he) will make a fire	chethí kta awáčhaŋmi I thought about making a fire.
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## COMMAND FORM

Like questions, commands do not cause ablaut, so verbs with changeable *A* retain their *a* ending. There are four different command enclitics in Dakota, depending on if the speaker is male or female, and if they are speaking to an individual or a group. The enclitics are as follows

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
MALE	wo	po
FEMALE	-	pi

None of these cause ablaut, as can be seen in the examples below, with the verbs *kahíŋtaA*, *to sweep*, and *iyáyaA*, *to leave*.

kahíŋta wo	kahíŋta po	iyáya wo	iyáya po
kahíŋya	kahíŋta pi	iyáya	iyáya pi

## REDUPLICATION

Reduplication, or doubling of one of the syllables in a word, is a common grammatical process in Dakota, and often affects whether or not a word ablauts. Reduplication can never turn a non-ablauting word into a word that does ablaut; for example

ptéčedan

It is short.

pteptéčedan

They are short. (inanimate)

ptéčedan kiŋ hé

that short one

pteptéčedan kiŋ hená

those short ones

However, if a word does ablaut, its reduplicated form may or may not. Luckily, it is not a random process, and there are relatively simple patterns for when an ablauting word retains or loses its ablaut.

Given a contracting word that ablauts, its reduplicated form continues to ablaut as well. For example,

sápA

(it is) black

sab:sápA

(they are) black

iyéčhiŋkopte kiŋ sápe

The car is black.

thahé kiŋ sab:sápe

Buffalo horns are black.

However, non-contracting words lose the ability to ablaut after reduplication, even if they did before. Some examples are below.

háŋskA

(it is) tall

čhaŋ kiŋ de háŋske

This tree is tall.

háŋskaska

(they are) tall

pheží kiŋ háŋskaska

The grass is long.

aphÁ

to hit

itóhna amáphe

He hit me in the face.

aphápha

to tap repeatedly

hiŋyété éd amáphapha

He tapped me on the shoulder.

## PREFIXES

Forming a new word out of an existing one by adding prefixes can also change whether or not the word ablauts. Like reduplication, adding a prefix can never cause a non-ablauting word to ablaut, but it can turn an ablauting word into a non-ablauting word. Two examples of this are below; *aphÁ*, and *níčA* both end in a changeable *A*, but after adding the prefixes *i-* and *a-*, they no longer ablaut.

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aphÁ	amáphe	iyápha	čhaŋ waŋ iyámapha
to hit something	He hit me.	to strike against	I bumped into a tree.
níčA	mázaska maníče	aníča	thiyópa aníča
to be lacking	I am out of money.	to obstruct	He blocked the door.

## CHANGES IN NOUNS

Ablaut is usually a process that comes to mind when thinking about cores, but it can also occur in nouns; specifically when those nouns are formed out of cores. One common process of noun creation is adding the prefix *o-* to a core, which creates a noun with the meaning *the location where (core) occurs*. If the original core ends in a changeable *A*, after adding the prefix *o-*, the noun form will end in *e*. Some examples are below.

naphÁ	onáphe	čhaphÁ	očáphe
to run away	refuge	to stab	wound
naħmÁ	onáħme	aphÁ	oáphe
to hide something	hiding place	to strike it	hour
niwÁŋ	oniwe	ğuyÁ	oğúye
to swim	swimming pool	to burn	a brand (on cattle)

Another noun-forming process which causes words ending in a changeable *A* to end in *e* is the attachment of the prefixes *i-*, *wi-*, which form a noun carrying the meaning of the *instrument for (verb)ing*. Some examples are below

chaphÁ	wíčhaphē	kahíŋtA	ičáhiŋte
to stab something	fork	to sweep	broom
ğiyÁ	wíğiye	khad:yÁ	wíkhadye
to make brown	brown paint	to heat up	coffee maker/teapot

The prefixes *wičhó* and *wó* form a noun from a core, its meaning is easiest to grasp from a list of examples. Nouns formed this way end in *e*, if the original core was an ablauting word.

waš'ákA	wówaš'ake	wičákhA	wówičakhe
to be strong	strength	to be truthful	a fact
sdodyÁ	wósdodye	ihánjbdA	wóihanjbde
to know something	knowledge	to dream	a dream
wóhdakA	wičhówohdake	ksápA	wičhóksape
to converse	a narration	to be wise	human wisdom
iwánǵA	wóiwánǵe	iwanǵanǵkA	wóiwánǵanǵke
to ask	a question	to inspect	an example

However, the word *wóyuha*, which means *belongings*, is an exception to this rule, it ends in an *a* even though it is derived from the ablauting verb *yuhÁ*, to have.

Given a noun which regularly ends in an *a*, the possessive prefix *tha-* meaning *his/her/its* causes this final *a* to become an *e*. Words that already end in *e* stay that way. For example:

hanǵpa	thahanǵpe	šúnjka	thašunǵke	owánǵka	thowanǵke
shoe	his shoe	horse	her horse	bed	his bed

One must be careful here however, there are two prefixes pronounced as *tha-* in Dakota: the possessive one mentioned above (a contraction of *tháwa*), and also the animal-prefix *tha-* meaning *ruminant*, or *hooved animal*. Some examples of this syllable occurring in actual animal names are below:

thathánǵka	thańčá	thá	thańčáskadaǵ
buffalo	deer	moose	sheep

Used as a prefix on other nouns, it is usually attached to body parts and gives the meaning of "this body part is from a ruminant". For simplicity,

This may have something to do with the fact that *yuha* does not ablaut in other dialects of Dakota

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*tha-* will be glossed below as *a deer's ---*, although it applies equally well to any ruminant.

This use of *tha-* causes ablaut in precisely the opposite direction as before: body part words which end in *e* are changed to end in *a* after *tha-*. Words that already end in an *a* stay that way. For example:

siŋté	thasiŋta	šupé	thašúpa
tail	a deer's tail	intestines	a deer's intestines

This actually allows the two identical-sounding prefixes to be used without ambiguity in many cases: consider the Dakota word for heart, *čaŋté*.

čaŋte	thačháŋte	thačháŋta
heart	his heart	a deer's heart