

4. How it works

WHO is doing the action

In the WHO column of the Grandmother Chart, there are only ten possibilities for WHO is doing the action. Cherokee language can also say WHO is doing the action to someone or something else; an additional chart shows you the options for saying this at the beginning of the word (the WHO TO WHOM Chart.)

If we organize WHO is doing the action by the Cherokee patterns, this is what we find.

- Five ways of saying “I” am doing the action, by myself and with others.
 - I am doing the action
 - You (1 person) and I are doing the action
 - You (more than one person) and I are doing the action
 - S/he and I are doing the action
 - They and I are doing the action
- Three ways of saying “you” are doing the action.
 - You (1 person) are doing the action
 - You (2 people) are doing the action
 - You (3 or more people) are doing the action
- Two ways of saying other people are doing the action.
 - He, she, or it is doing the action
 - They are doing the action

| WHO | |
|------|-----------------|
| g- | I |
| in- | you and I |
| id- | all of us and I |
| ost- | s/he and I |
| ots- | they and I |
| h- | you (1) |
| ist- | you (2) |
| its- | you (3 or more) |
| - | he/she/it |
| an- | they |

When you learn these, you will be able apply them to hundreds of possibilities in the WHAT column, or you could say, hundreds of words for different actions. The possibilities for WHO stay the same.

One of the first things you might notice about this is that WHO is sometimes just one letter, not even a complete syllable. This is the pattern in Cherokee. These sounds attach to the next part of the word, in the WHAT column. In the space for “He/she/it” is doing it, there is a blank, because nothing goes there; that word just starts with WHAT is happening.

You might notice some additional patterns here. If “You (1 person) and I” are doing the action or “You (more than 1 person) and I” are doing the action, the word starts with *i-* both times. In addition, the words for “You” (2 people)” and “You (3 or more)” also start with *i*.

If “S/he and I” or “They” and I are doing the action, the word starts with *o* both times. When you see the “o” you know that WHO is doing the action includes someone who is not present.

As you make words with the Grandmother Chart, you can change WHO is doing the action while keeping the rest of the word the same.

| WHO | WHAT | HOW | WHEN | | |
|-----|------|-----|------|-------------------------|----------|
| g | e | g | a | I am going | ge ga |
| in | e | g | a | You and I are going | l ne ga |
| id | e | g | a | You all and I are going | l de ga |
| ost | e | g | a | S/he and I are going | o ste ga |
| ots | e | g | a | They and I are going | o tse ga |
| h | e | g | a | You (1) are going | he ga |
| ist | e | g | a | You (2) are going | l ste ga |
| its | e | g | a | You (3+) are going | l tse ga |
| - | e | g | a | S/he or it is going | e ga |
| an | e | g | a | They are going | a ne ga |

As you can see there are some differences from English. Cherokee has more ways to be specific about WHO is doing the action. In English, we can only say “I” by myself am doing the action, or “We” are doing the action. The English “we” is equal to four different distinctions in Cherokee. “You (1 person)” and I are doing the action; “You” (more than 1 person) and I are doing the action. When you use these, you are talking about someone who is present with you while you are speaking. When you use the Cherokee forms for “S/he and I” or “They and I” are doing the action, you are talking about people who are NOT present with you while you are speaking.

Likewise, English has only one way of saying “You” while Cherokee distinguishes between “You” one person, “You” two people, or “You” three or more people. The only trace of these distinctions are in Appalachian English, a remnant of Scottish border dialect, where people use “You” one person and “You’uns” more than one person. In southern English dialect, people

sometimes say: “You,” “Y’all” and “All y’all” to indicate plural. Neither of these are part of “standard” English as taught in public school.

When talking about another person doing the action, Cherokee does not distinguish among he, she, or it. There is just one way to say all of these when you’re talking about WHO is doing the action. Cherokee language has words for “man” *asgaya*, or “woman” *ageya*. There are words for boys and girls, boy teenagers and girl teenagers, aunts and uncles, and so on. Different genders are recognized, they just aren’t important when describing WHO is doing the action.