This paper was sparked by questions that I have encountered in the course of teaching Ojibwe to university students. I encourage a communicative approach and use authentic Ojibwe phraseology in teaching the language. Learning exercises contain numerous samples of discourse designed to familiarize students with the Ojibwe way of framing thoughts. This means that students see other types of words besides verbs and verbal constructions that frequently come into play. These include adverbs and various particles, although these do not occupy a central place in the curriculum.

The activities involve translation which of course presents its own limitations. English dominates the speech and thought patterns of the students. In their initial attempts to express themselves in Ojibwe, students naturally model their speech on English turns of phrase. Word-for-word translations, however, cannot capture entirely the picture to be painted of events and people’s reactions. The meaning of a word in isolation often has little relationship with the meaning of a phrase containing that word. For example, the phrase *aabdeg sa naa gnamaa*, an expression which may be translated as ‘hopefully’, contains the words *aabdeg*, generally said to mean ‘must’ or ‘have to’, and *gnamaa*, generally said to mean ‘maybe’.

Translation, however, poses another more major problem. This has to do with connotations of words. Perhaps this is better described as an issue of semantics. The challenge of teaching a second language is to get the learner to envisage things in the language — that is to apprehend a situation by seeing in his mind and feeling in his heart the meaning carried by the words that describe the situation fully. Underlying the physical picture are assumptions, and unconscious reactions; in the backdrop are other circumstances and sequences of developments; shaping each situation are events that have occurred previously. This multi-dimensional picture cannot be captured succinctly in written text, but its various elements
determine the words used to paint that picture.

In teaching Ojibwe, I have found some words to be very commonplace, and certain of them to be very sensitive to the context. In this paper I present some of these words and outline the different interpretations that are possible for each. Then I examine the factors that seem to govern the choice of Ojibwe word. This analysis is presented from the perspective of a mother-tongue speaker who has not received any formal linguistic training: no linguistic models have been brought to bear on the analysis. No doubt the explanations can be phrased more clearly and precisely by one with a background in linguistics, but perhaps this presentation will provide some data for a more comprehensive study of the subject.

This paper will focus primarily on adverbs and particles. I have selected nine ideas for examination. I choose the term ideas since words that are identified as one part of speech in one language can, of course, function as another part of speech in another. I will introduce the ideas in terms of their English gloss where possible; otherwise, I will introduce them in terms of the communicative function they serve. The ideas will be presented in alphabetical order: ‘anyway’; ‘apparently’/‘evidently’; ‘but’; coincidence; hope; ‘later’; ‘now’; ‘until’; and ‘well’.

**Anyway**

Rhodes (1985) gives *maanoo* for ‘anyway’. Three other dictionaries examined do not have ‘anyway’ as an entry. There is also another word, *booch*, that is used. Rhodes glosses this as ‘sure, must’; Nichols and Nyholm (1995) gloss it as ‘it is necessary, it is certain’. In Wikwemikong, both *maanoo* and *booch* are used, but not interchangeably; they are not synonymous in the dialect spoken there. Speakers instinctively know in what instances *maanoo* is the correct word and when *booch* must be used. Here are some examples with *maanoo*:

*Gaawii ndi-zhayaasii wii-zhaayaanh, maanoo dash wii go nga-zhaa.*
‘I don’t feel like going, but I’ll go anyway.’

*Ndamtaa wii go, maanoo dash wii go kwejim.*
‘He’s busy, but ask him anyway.’

*Gchi-piichaa, maanoo dash wii go bizhaan.*
‘It’s late, but come over anyway.’

In these examples, *maanoo* seems to be the most appropriate word —
booch would not make as much sense. In the following examples booch is required:

Gretzky gii-damna, booch dash wii go gii-bkinaagewag Toronto.
‘Gretzky played, but Toronto won anyway.’

Niiwing gii-mgishin Sebastian Britten, booch dash wii go gii-bkinaage.
‘Sebastian Britten fell four times, but he won anyway.’

Gaawii ngii-de-giizhbiigesii, booch dash wii go ngii-passiw.
‘I didn’t finish writing, but I passed anyway.’

In the situations described by these examples, there are two kinds of feelings involved. In the first set of examples, there is a sense of reluctance or imposition: the speaker either feels reluctant, or sees something as a bit of an imposition. In the second set, that feeling is absent: people generally don’t feel reluctant about winning a game or passing a test. Winning and passing are not undesirable outcomes from the winner’s perspective — these outcomes provide a deep feeling of satisfaction.

In both types of situations, there are perceived obstacles. In the first set of examples, this might be illness, busyness, or one’s desire to call it a day. There is a sense of acquiescence or wanting to be a “good sport” in going ahead in spite of these obstacles. In the second set, one is seeking to overcome obstacles for competitive reasons. Perhaps then, the determining factor is whether the feeling about the decision or outcome is related to a sense of acquiescence or a sense of satisfaction. If the motivation is acquiescence, maanoo is used; if there is particular satisfaction with the outcome, the appropriate word is booch.

There is another use of anyway in English that reflects another feeling or reaction. This occurs in situations where results or outcomes that one had hoped for were not achieved, and the reaction seems to be an attempt to rationalize the situation as a way of handling the disappointment. The following examples describe scenarios that cause disappointment, and remarks that someone might say in response:

[Scenario: something was stolen, broken or ruined.]  
Gaa ge go naa booch ngii-bshigendziin.  
‘I didn’t like it anyway.’

[Scenario: one found out about some significant event after the fact.]  
Gaa ge go naa booch nwii-zhaasiinaaba.  
‘I wasn’t going to go anyhow.’
[Scenario: someone is soothing another who has missed out on buying a raffle ticket for a fabulous prize.]

_Gaa ge go naa booch gdąa-gii-bkinaagesii megwaach._

‘You probably wouldn’t have won anyway.’

One final example is more difficult to explain. This might be said when one person notices something that another is interested in and which otherwise is just cluttering up the basement:

_Yaan; gaa ge go naa booch gegoo ndi-naabjitoosiin._

‘Have it; I don’t have any use for it anyway.’

_Booch_ occurs here perhaps because there is in some sense an element of satisfaction that someone has found some use for something that was otherwise considered useless. There is not a sense that one is reluctantly acquiescing, that he or she is being imposed upon. Perhaps it is for these reasons that _maanoo_ would definitely not make sense in this last example.

In English, _anyway_ is also used in one other way:

Anyway, I was standing there...
Anyway, I’ll call you.
Anyway, there she was...

In these instances, _anyway_ is a more neutral interjection; by that, I mean that it doesn’t suggest any particular feeling on the part of the speaker. There seems to be no word or phrase in Ojibwe that fulfils this particular function.

_Apparently/evidently_

The analysis for these words is very tentative. I am familiar with two Ojibwe words, _iidig_ and _giiyenh_, both of which can be interpreted as either ‘apparently’ or ‘evidently’. Again, however, there is a big semantic difference between the two Ojibwe words. _Iidig_ is used when people have some evidence that they deem sufficiently solid from which they can infer something to be true, as illustrated in the following sample scenarios and remarks:

[Upon finding that somebody that was expected to be there is gone.]

_Gaa-maajaat iidig._

‘He’s left apparently.’
[Upon learning that Paul’s going to go to a meeting that another was expected to attend.]

Paul sa iidig waa-zhaat.
‘I guess Paul’s going to go.’

[Upon realizing that I had apparently misunderstood something.]

Gaa-npaaji-nsastamaanh sa iidig.
‘I’ve evidently misunderstood.’

In each of these situations, there is some direct evidence seen firsthand that demonstrates the apparent truth of something.

The second word, giiyenh, is used, it seems, when evidence is hearsay and not firsthand. The person receiving the information has not personally seen the truth of it:

[I’m telling another what I heard or found out from Cheryl or someone else.]

U of T giiyenh wii-zhaa Cheryl.
‘Cheryl’s evidently going to U of T.’

[I heard on the radio or TV that it’s supposed to rain.]

Wii-gmiwan giiyenh.
‘It’s supposed to rain apparently.’

[I’ve heard that Ovide Mercredi is coming.]

Ovide Mercredi giiyenh wii-bi-giigda graduation pii teg.
‘Ovide Mercredi is apparently going to come and speak at the graduation.’

Apparently and evidently do not appear among the English entries in the dictionaries compiled by Rhodes (1985) or Nichols and Nyholm (1995). The word iidig is glossed as ‘supposedly’ by Rhodes. My observation of the usage of iidig and giiyenh would lead me to assert that ‘supposedly’ is probably a more accurate gloss of giiyenh and that iidig should be glossed as ‘evidently’, at least in the language as it is spoken in Wikwemikong. Giiyenh indicates that something is hearsay or secondhand information to the receiver; iidig has no connotation of hearsay.

But

The usual words for ‘but’ are shwii go and swii go, which seem to be contractions of dash wii and sa wii plus go. The choice is definitely not arbitrary. For some situations, Ojibwe speakers instinctively say shwii go rather than swii go. In some of the following examples I use though,
another English word that is often used in place of *but* (*however* is also sometimes used instead):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Gbishgendaan shwii go?} & \quad \text{‘But you do like it?’} \\
\text{Nga-zhaa shwii go?} & \quad \text{‘But I will go?’} \\
\text{Nga-zhaa swii go.} & \quad \text{‘But I will go.’} \\
\text{Oo-damnan; gsinaa swii go.} & \quad \text{‘Go and play; it’s cold though.’} \\
\text{Bizhaan; gaa swii go nga-yaasii.} & \quad \text{‘Come over; I won’t be here though.’}
\end{align*}
\]

The factor seems to relate to the finality of a decision or circumstances. In the first two examples shown which are questions, the speaker is seeking confirmation of something about which he/she is not entirely sure or convinced. The sentences in which *swii* is used relate to circumstances or decisions that have been established or determined with certainty. If the first Ojibwe sentence were rephrased as *Gbishgendaan swii go*, it would then suggest that it is definitely known that the person being addressed likes the object.

In the last two examples — ‘it’s cold though’ and ‘I won’t be here though’ — it is harder to pinpoint how rephrasing *swii* to *shwii* would affect the picture. It doesn’t seem to affect the presumed certainty of the facts, so finality or certainty does not seem to be the only determining factor governing the choice between *shwii* and *swii*. Perhaps the choice is arbitrary in some circumstances.

**Coincidence**

Only Rhodes (1985) and Nichols and Nyholm (1995) list an Ojibwe adverb for ‘coincidence’. Rhodes gives *naanhitaa* under the entry *coincidence*; Nichols and Nyholm have an entry under *happen* (as in the phrase *happen to be*), *nangwana*, but this Minnesota Ojibwe word is not used in Wikwemikong. *Naanidaa* and *naanbena* are the forms commonly used in Wikwemikong. The criterion for the choice between the two is straightforward — *naanidaa* has a positive or neutral connotation; with
naanbena, the sentiment is clearly displeasure:

*Naanbena gii-oo-biigshkaa ndoo-daabaan wi pii.*
‘My car just happened to break down then.’

*Naanbena gii-maajbiisaa pii waa-ni-maajaayaang.*
‘It started raining just when we were going to leave.’

*Naanidaa gii-bmibza.*
‘She just happened to be driving by.’

*Naanidaa gii-bi-dgoshin.*
‘He just happened to arrive.’

The first two examples describe unfortunate happenings or coincidences; the last two examples illustrate developments that are viewed positively.

**Expressions of hope**

Hope is expressed in English with the verb *hope* and the adverb *hopefully*. In Ojibwe, there are three ways of expressing this idea. Rhodes (1985) gives one — the adverb *ambegish* — which he indicates as being the Walpole Island and Curve Lake version. This seems to be basically the same as the Wikwemikong word *begish*, which is also said in another way, *benoogish*. Wilson (1874) also gives the same word, only spelled differently. The verb is *bgosendam*, which all four dictionaries give and which is also used in Wikwemikong. There is a third distinctive way of expressing hope, however, that none of the dictionaries include, the phrase *aabdeg sa naa gnamaa*. The following examples show how the three expressions would be employed:

*Begish naa wiiba mnookmig.*
‘I hope that it’s spring soon.’

*Aabdeg sa naa gnamaa nga-passiw.*
‘I hope that I’ll pass.’

*Ndoo-bgosendam wii-mno-maajiishkaayin.*
‘I hope for you to do well.’

The expressions *begish/benoogish* and *aabdeg sa naa gnamaa* seem to be interchangeable. They have an interesting effect on structure, however: the use of *begish/benoogish* dictates a different type of verbal structure (the conjunct) than that dictated by *aabdeg sa naa*, which requires an independent clause.
The verb *bgosendam* is not as readily interchangeable with the other two expressions. The determining factor seems to be degree of fervency: it seems that the verb is generally not used to express hope concerning matters of relatively trivial importance such as snowfall. It can, however, be used for such matters if the outcome has a greater or special significance. In such cases as a farmer's crops suffering from a severe dry spell, or an applicant to law school writing the LSAT test, 'hope' can be expressed more profoundly in the following ways:

*Bgosendam wiiba wii-gmiwininig.*
‘He’s hoping that it rains soon.’

*Ndoo-bgosendam wii-passwiyin.*
‘I’m hoping that you pass.’

*Begish* and *aabdeg sa naa* on the other hand may be described as casual expressions of hope.

*Later*

There are several ways of saying 'later' in Ojibwe: *baamaa, pii, and naagach*. They are often used in combination, as *baamaa pii* and *baamaa pii naagach*. Rhodes (1985) and Nichols and Nyholm (1995) both include all these versions. Baraga (1878–80) gives *panimaa naagach*. Wilson’s dictionary (1874) does not have this adverb. Here are some examples:

*Ga-waabmin pii.*
‘I’ll see you later.’

*Baamaa na go gdaa-giihtiitaami?*
‘Could we finish later?’

*Baamaa pii nga-bi-bskaabii.*
‘I’ll come back later.’

*Baamaa naagach nga-bizhaa.*
‘I’ll come over later.’

*Baamaa pii naagach da-bi-dgoshin.*
‘He’ll get here later.’

One factor that seems fairly definite is a sense of deferral which is present in all the examples containing *baamaa*. In the first example, where *baamaa* is not used, the speaker is not deferring the action. For example,
if a person’s plans for the day entail a trip to the store in the morning, then
go to the post office, and later, going to Canadian Tire (the trip to
Canadian Tire is not being consciously deferred — it’s just coming up later
in the course of the day), the person would say:

Canadian Tire dash miinwaa pii nwii-zhaa.
‘Then later I’m going to go to Canadian Tire.’

If some visitors are in town who will be coming to visit someone later in
the day,

Wii-bi-nbwochewewag naagach.
‘They’re going to come and visit later on.’

In this scenario, there was no pre-arranged time for the visit; the visit is not
being postponed.

The choice between pii and naagach seems to be largely arbitrary.

Now

There are three main options for ‘now’ in Ojibwe: megwaa, mbe, and
nongo. Nongo is included in the dictionaries by Baraga (1878–80), Nichols
and Nyholm (1995), Rhodes (1985), and Wilson (1874). Rhodes includes
megwaa as well. Mbe appears in none of these dictionaries. Other terms
do appear under the entry now, although not in all the dictionaries: there
is bjiinag, which Nichols and Nyholm gloss as ‘just now’, and zhgo, which
Rhodes glosses as ‘by now’. These two words I would consider as a
separate category from the first three mentioned. Bjiinag is used to
indicate that something has happened or was done just a short time ago.
Rhodes notes this accurately under the entry just. Zhgo is used by speakers
from Wikwemikong to indicate that something is just about to happen or
to be done.

The words that frequently come into play when I teach introductory
Ojibwe are megwaa, mbe and nongo. The criterion guiding the choice is
clear-cut. Nongo is used when the idea is ‘nowadays’ or ‘these days’. Of
course, another common gloss for this is ‘today’, which is the meaning that
most students learn first. Students are exposed to statements and questions
such as:

Ndoo-skooniw nongo.
‘I’m going to school today.’
Nakii nongo.
‘She’s working today.’

Aaniish ennakiiyin nongo?
‘What are you doing today?’

However, nongo also comes up when people speak about what people are doing, or how things are these days. Often, elders are heard to say about life nowadays:

Gwetaani-mno-yaami nongo.
‘We are so well off now.’

Nongo, gaawii waya wii-gtigesii.
‘Now, no one wants to farm.’

Mbe and megwaa are more apt to cause confusion as they can not be easily clarified with other brief contextual information in the way that now (meaning ‘nowadays’) can be readily explained. Nonetheless, the criterion for the choice between mbe and megwaa is also very straightforward. Mbe is used when the action has not commenced; megwaa is used when the action has begun, in other words, when it is in progress, as shown in the following examples:

Mbe oo-nbaan.
‘Go to bed right now.’

Mbe sa ndaa-oo-nbaa.
‘Well, I should turn in now.’

Mii go mbe ni-maajaat.
‘He’s leaving right now.’

Mbe bi-wiisnin.
‘Come and eat now.’

Nbaa megwaa.
‘She’s sleeping right now.’

Nwiisnimi megwaa.
‘We’re eating right now.’

Giigdawag megwaa.
‘They’re talking right now.’

Aapji go megwaa nde’ekos.
‘I’m really tired right now.’
In the first four examples, the actions have not yet commenced. In the next three, the actions have commenced and are in progress; the last example describes a state, but again, the person is already in the state described.

One aspect of the explanation for the use of *mbe* — that it is used when the action has not yet commenced — might suggest that this word is interchangeable with *zhgo*. It is not, and this fact could perhaps be made clear if *zhgo* were glossed as ‘just about’.

**Until**

This word is translated as *biinish* in the four dictionaries. Baraga (1878–80) and Wilson (1874) also give another word, *nanaazh*. This seems to have disappeared from the lexicon of Wikwemikong, if it ever was used there. However, the word *baamaa* or the phrase *baamaa pii* is used in certain instances. The criterion determining this is negation. In an affirmative sentence, the word is *biinish*. *Baamaa* is required where English uses a negative construction; *biinish* cannot be used in this instance:

5:00 *biinish ko-nakiiwag.*
‘They work until 5:00.’

*Biiinish gii-nbaat gii-gindaasa.*
‘She read until she fell asleep.’

*Baamaa pii gizhiitaayaanh nwii-ni-maajaa.*
‘I’m not going to leave until I finish.’

*Baamaa eshkwaakmigak ngii-ni-giiyemi.*
‘We didn’t go home until it was over.’

The last two examples cannot employ *biinish*. It would not make sense to say *Gaawii nwii-maajaasii biinish gizhiitaayaanh* or *Gaawii ngii-giiyesiimi biinish eshkwaakmigak*.

There is another common English use of *until*:

I can’t wait until I see you.
I can’t wait until she gets here.
I can’t wait till I find out.

Expressions using *until* in this way do not occur in Ojibwe speech. If we are anxiously awaiting something or particularly looking forward to some event, we use a verb that indicates this feeling of anticipation, *naagaazi,*
wewiibendam or zhgajbiiyaa/zhgajbiitoon. To express our eagerness or impatience, we would say:

\[
\text{Nwewiibendam wii-waabminaa.} \\
\text{‘I’m in a hurry to see you.’}
\]

\[
\text{Nnaagaaz wii-bi-dgoshing.} \\
\text{‘I’m looking forward to her arriving.’}
\]

\[
\text{Nzhagjibiitoon wii-gkendmaanh.} \\
\text{‘I’m waiting impatiently to find out.’}
\]

**Well**

Rhodes’s translation, weweni, illustrates one way of handling this idea in Ojibwe. Here well is synonymous with *properly*. Thus, one can tell a child such things as:

\[
\text{Weweni zhibiigen.} \\
\text{‘Write properly.’}
\]

\[
\text{Weweni gesbisjigen.} \\
\text{‘Tidy up well.’}
\]

\[
\text{Weweni gziiyaabdewan.} \\
\text{‘Brush your teeth well.’}
\]

Two other ways of expressing this idea are the preverbs *mno-* and *ntaa-*.

**ntaa-** seems to be used generally with performative verbs, *mno-* with stative verbs. So, to tell that someone is good at something, speakers say such things as:

\[
\text{Ntaa-ngama.} \\
\text{‘She sings well.’}
\]

\[
\text{Ntaa-giigda.} \\
\text{‘He speaks well.’}
\]

\[
\text{Enwek sa na ntaa-niimwag!} \\
\text{‘Do they ever dance well!’}
\]

To indicate that something or someone is in a state of wellness, or is of good quality, people say:

\[
\text{Nmino-zhayaa.} \\
\text{‘I’m feeling well.’}
\]
Mnobiigaade.
‘It’s well-written.’

Gdoo-mnotaagos.
‘You sound well.’

Well is also used as an interjection. In this function, it has various Ojibwe translations: nii naa, aaniish naa or simply aani. Those familiar with the language of Wikwemikong will see the potential for confusion with the question How? and the greeting Hello. In the following examples, note that the first four English sentences would be said in an offended tone of voice:

Gaawii nii naa ngii-gkendziin.
‘Well, I didn’t know.’

Gii-wiindmoon nii naa.
‘Well, I told you.’

Nwii-zhaanaaba nii go naa.
‘Well, I was going to go.’

Nga-wiindmawaa nii go naa.
‘Well, I will tell him.’

Aaniish naa, ndaa-maajaa sa.
‘Well, I should get going.’

Aaniish naa, nga-zhaa sa iidig.
‘Well, I guess I’ll go then.’

Aanii?
‘Well?’

A sense of offence then seems to be the criterion that dictates the use of nii naa. In the first four sentences, the person might feel as if he’s been reprimanded, or that his judgement or reliability has been questioned in some way. If this feeling is absent, aaniish naa is used for the interjection.

Aanii creates some funny misunderstandings. For instance, when I was a girl, my mother was hemming up my dress. I was standing on a chair as she was pinning it up, when at one point she looked up and said “Aanii?” The downward inflection of the voice on questions also creates confusion. Rather puzzled, I replied “Aanii”, meaning ‘Hi’. “Why is she greeting me as if I’d just arrived?” I wondered. With some exasperation, she replied
“‘Aaniish naa? ’ndi-kid’ (‘I’m asking, ‘How’s that?’!’). Another person related a similar misunderstanding between her father and brother as they were trying to get a TV through a doorway. The father at one end called out to his son, “Aanii?” Like me, the son replied “Aanii.”

IMPLICATIONS

The existence of two or more Ojibwe equivalents to an single English adverb leads to some practical questions. How can students learn these sorts of intricacies? Adding the missing terms to a dictionary can partly address the problem. However, for some, the explanation of the usage requires several words. They can perhaps be addressed to a greater extent in a grammar text. Obviously, however, learning how to make the right choice is best done the way speakers learn it. For adult learners, however, immersion is often not a viable option. Thus, instructors play a crucial role — and for those instructors who are faced with these sorts of questions for the first time, the rules are not at all clear. This paper I hope provides some useable guidelines. And perhaps the questions left unanswered can find an answer in another reader’s analysis.

REFERENCES


