

S/he’s Being Mean

Reviewed by JW Webster.

u²¹ne²³gu³²ja²

/u²¹/, v.i., Lexical Root, JW p.196-97, CED p.176

N/CMP+	-ne ²³ gu ³² j-	Present	
		a ²¹ gi ² ne ²³ gu ³² ja ²	<i>I’m being mean.</i>
		ji ²² ne ²³ gu ³² ja ²	<i>I’m being mean to him/her.</i>
		ja ² ne ³² gu ³² ja ²	<i>You’re being mean.</i>
		i ²¹ ji ² ne ²³ gu ³² ja ²	<i>Y’all’re being mean.</i>
		u ²¹ ne ²³ gu ³² ja ²	<i>S/he, It’s being mean.</i>
		u ²¹ ni ² ne ²³ gu ³² ja ²	<i>They’re being mean.</i>
		sgi ² ne ²³ gu ³² ja ²	<i>You’re being mean to me.</i>
		i ²¹ sgi ²² ne ²³ gu ³² ja ²	<i>You/Y’all are being mean to me/us.</i>
Past			
		a ²¹ gi ² ne ²³ gu ³² jv ²³ ?i ²	<i>I was being mean.</i>
		ja ² ne ²³ gu ³² jv ²³ ?i ²	<i>You were being mean.</i>
		u ²¹ ne ²³ gu ³² jv ²³ ?i ²	<i>S/he, It was being mean.</i>
Progressive Future			
		a ²² gi ² ne ²³ gu ³² je ³³ sdi ²	<i>I will be mean.</i>
		ja ² ne ²³ gu ³² je ³³ sdi ²	<i>You will be mean.</i>
		u ²² ne ²³ gu ³² je ³³ sdi ²	<i>S/he, It will be mean.</i>
Habitual			
		a ²¹ gi ² ne ²³ gu ³² jo ³³ ?i ²	<i>I’m [habitually] mean.</i>
		ja ² ne ²³ gu ³² jo ³³ ?i ²	<i>You’re [habitually] mean.</i>
		u ²¹ ne ²³ gu ³² jo ³³ ?i ²	<i>S/he, It’s [habitually] mean.</i>
		sgi ² ne ²³ gu ³² jo ³³ ?i ²	<i>You’re [habitually] mean to me.</i>
~IMM	-ne ²³ gu ³² j/i ²	Command	
		ja ² ne ²³ gu ³² ji ² †	<i>Be mean!</i>
Immediate Past			
		ja ²¹ gi ² ne ²³ gu ³² ji ² [ki ² la ³ wu ⁰]	<i>I was just mean.</i>
		ji ² ja ² ne ²³ gu ³² ji ² [ki ² la ³ wu ⁰]	<i>You were just mean.</i>
		ju ²¹ ne ²³ gu ³² ji ² [ki ² la ³ wu ⁰]	<i>S/he was just mean.</i>
INF	-ne ²³ gu ³² ?i ² sdi ²³ ?/i ²	Basic Infinitive	

† JW says that, as an additional method of distinguishing between IMM Command and IMM Past, many speakers will emphasize the final syllable of the Command form by saying it more loudly—whereas the IMM Past form will not.

		a ²² gi ² ne ²³ gu ³² ?i ² sdi ²³ ?i ²	For me to be mean.
		ja ² ne ²³ gu ³² ?i ² sdi ²³ ?i ²	For you to be mean.
		u ²² ne ²³ gu ³² ?i ² sdi ²³ ?i ²	For him/her to be mean.

Notes: Funnily enough, the root literally means “becoming white [at someone].” So, we know the word (at least as-Lexicalized to mean “being mean”) arose some time after Contact. The verb is built from the word for “white,” u²ne²³ga², modified with the CMP Stem of the Adverbial Suffix for “becoming,” which is /u³²j/. Tense Suffixes are attached directly to the end of this Adverbial Suffix.[†] This interesting, adjective-leaning etymology is likely why the verb has so few Stem Forms. There appears to be no meaningful way to distinguish between NCMP and CMP uses, except for those Tense Suffixes and constructions that are understood as exclusively one or the other—Habitual or Progressive Future forms for the NCMP, and CMP Future for the CMP.

Habitual Forms of the verb could be understood as a general statement of a person’s habit or character of “being mean”—i.e., you could use it *as an adjective* to *call someone* “mean.” However, the most common way to say someone *is* mean, rather than “acting mean,” is to use the Past Participle form [u²²/ne²²gu³³ji²da²] (Lit., “s/he *has been* mean,” or “she *is* [known to have been] mean”) as an adjective.

Because it’s a verb, this word refers specifically to the *action* of “being/acting” mean. The Habitual Form could be understood as a general statement of a person’s habit or character of “being mean,” in a basically adjectival way—but the most common way to say someone *is* mean, rather than “acting mean,” is to use the Past Participle form u²²ne²²gu³³ji²da² (Lit. “s/he *has been* mean”) as an adjective. The literal meaning of the past participle translates poorly into English, but u²²ne²²gu³³ji²da² could be literally translated as “he has mean-ed,” or “he is known to have been mean.”

Root Formula:

/ ne²³g / +

"White"

/ u³²j /

Adv. Suff.

Becoming, CMP

=

/ ne³³gu³²j /

=

Approx. Literal Meaning(s)

"One is Becoming White"

"One is Turning White"

Alternate Pronunciations: In North Carolina Cherokee, this verb is pronounced with either the /h/ Root Suffix or the /?/ Root Suffix. For example, “u²¹ne²³gu³²ha²,” and “a²¹gi²ne²³gu³?a².” (RRD p.57). Also, RRD lists a distinct IMM Command form: ja²ne²³gu³?gi².

Sentences:

Hlesdi. Do ja²ne²³gu³²ja².
/ not-will-be / really / you are being mean /
Quit. You’re being too mean. (CED)

Jadaksesdesdi, gihli u²¹ne²³gu³²ji²²da² unikaha.
/ watch out for yourself / dog / it has been mean / they have it /
Watch yourself, they have a mean dog. (CED)

Hlesdi yi²ja²ne²³gu³²je³³sdi².
/ not-will-be / you will be mean [hypothetically] /
Don’t be mean. (CED)

U²¹ne²³gu³²jv⁴ iyusdi uweji achuja, nigohilv gawonhdisgo^{’i}.
/ he has been mean / like that / his offspring / he-boy / always / he lectures him /
Because his son is so mean, he always lectures him. (CED)

[†] Compare this to “S/he’s in Agony,” a²¹gi²²hli²³yo³²ga², No. 068. That verb uses a very similar construction—“s/he is *becoming a dog*”—to express agony by referring to the way people in great pain yowl and whine like hurt dogs.

Tladv a²²gi²ne²³gu³²?i²sdi²³?i² yi²ji²lv²³qwo³²di².
/ definitely not / for me to be mean / I don't like it /
I really don't like being mean.

Tla osda yigi ja²ne²³gu³?i²³sdi² gesv'i. †
/ not / good / it isn't / for you to be mean / it is /
It's not good to be mean.

Ditiyohihi janahlvdi yijaduli, doyu unegujida ditiyohihi hiwahtvhdi jaduhlihesdi.
/ lawyer / for you to hire / if you want / really / mean / lawyer / for you to find him / you will want /
If you have to hire a lawyer, you want a real mean one.

Nigolv agwanto agwadali'I yuyosisa, u²¹ne²³gu⁴⁴ji³³da²he³³hno⁰ nigalsdisgesdi. ¶
/ always / I know / my wife / if she's hungry / because mean / she will become /
I always know if my wife is hungry because she gets mean. (CED)

Gadohv uyeihldi sgi²¹ne²³gu³²ja² kohiga? Gvnalvsdis?
/ what then / reason / you are being mean to me / today / did I make you mad? /
Why are you being mean to me today? Did I make you mad? §

Tlado yagilvgwd a²²gi²ne²³gu³²?i²sdi²³?i².
/ not really / I don't like it / for me to be mean /
I don't really like being mean.

Diniyohli u²²ni²ne²³gu³?i²³sdi² gesv tla yidedadeyohnv⁴⁴gi. ‡
/ children / for them to be mean / it is / not / we shouldn't teach them § /
We shouldn't teach children to be mean.

† JW Notes: Proscriptive statements are not typically expressed negatively, so this sentence and the one following it demonstrate somewhat abnormal speech patterns. Instead of saying one “shouldn’t be mean,” for example, it would be more characteristic of traditional speech to say something like “one *should* be kind.” JW gave the following example of a more normative proscriptive statement:

Degadahlinigohisdi gehesdi. / we all need to strenghten each other / it is / *We all need to strenghten each other.*

‡ This is a Superhigh Tone version of the /v²³gi²/ Past Tense Suffix, which JW says expresses an “uncertain” or sometimes “distant” past. That Suffix is used when the Past action is so far away (as in traditional storytelling) or otherwise unclear in the speaker’s mind that the speaker does not know *exactly* when it happened. So the /v²³gi²/ form equates basically to “[verb] happened *at some uncertain point in the past.*” When this Suffix takes the /44/ Tone, the resulting /v⁴⁴gi²/ Suffix expands that uncertainty out of the Past Time frame, so /v⁴⁴gi²/ equates to “[verb] *at any time.*”

§ JW Notes that, in this sentence, **tla yidedadeyohnesdi** / not / we all shouldn’t be teaching them / could be used equivalently to **yidedadeyohnv⁴⁴gi².**

¶ “If/then” statements like this will usually frame the “then” verb in the future tense, says JW.

§ I started this example sentence by writing it in English, and working backwards with JW to get the Cherokee. The original thing I wrote was “Why are you being mean today? Did I do something wrong?” JW said the second sentence—“did I do something wrong”—would be an abnormal speech pattern if translated literally, to the point that it was difficult to translate without making it overly cumbersome. JW noted that, because of the traditional aversion to moral judgments in Kituwah culture, most speakers he knows would not talk about having “done wrong.” Instead, it is more normal to ask more literal questions—“did I make you mad?” “Did I make a mistake?” And so on.