Events before nouns: the causative split, maintained states and the measure of a trip

2026-11-11 audit pass 2. Apostrophe fixes only. Navajo glottal stops typed as ' or ’ (for example in prefix names like ’a- and ’e’e-, or words like Awéé’) now print as ’ (U+02BC), and a build step no longer turns the closing quote of an English translation inside a Navajo row into a glottal stop (‘...the girls.’, not ‘...the girls.’). No form, gloss or translation wording changed.

2026-11-11 audit pass 4. Copied examples: the essay builder dropped the first Navajo word of every example it copied from a working note (for example Witherspoon’s *Hastiin łį́į́’ yiztał* showed as *łį́į́’ yiztał*, so each gloss sat under the wrong word). The words are restored exactly as the working note prints them; no form was changed. See the pass 4 report.

Interlinear rows whose form and gloss do not line up one-to-one were re-checked against the source page. Each is marked † with a note under its table: SOURCED where the source prints it that way, OPEN where the source cannot confirm it.

Grant Golland (research by Grok Bot) · 2026-10-27 · status: HYPOTHESIS (R2 fits H&P's sample; T4 OPEN; MAINTAIN patch; distance claim supported for English, untested for Navajo)

Abstract

Navajo verbs with one participant either do or do not have a plain ł- causative. The site's first hypothesis about which do failed on motion verbs. A two-entailment rule, R2, fits Hale & Platero's whole sample: a verb does not alternate if its sole participant is sentient and the predicate is atelic. The 'start to' diagnostic agrees with R2 on five of five verbs. This essay also covers verbs that maintain a state, which Dowty's selection principle handles but the site's own ADD-CAUSER rule did not. It ends with Grant's claim that the distance, not the vehicle, measures out a trip.

Restated on the unified structure (2026-11-15): every theta role is assigned inside vP; telicity is OPEN wherever there is no minimal pair; causatives and classifiers are not yet restated. See https://navajo-decoded.grant-golland.workers.dev/unified-structure/#us-map (https://navajo-decoded.grant-golland.workers.dev/unified-structure/#us-map). The essay's data, judgments and citations are unchanged; it is kept as the record of what was argued then.

1. The question

> Grant's working idea is that the event comes first: roles and their entailments are fixed before any noun links GRANT'S CONJECTURE . If that is right, which GRANT'S CONJECTURE event properties decide what a Navajo verb can do?

2. The data

Hale & Platero's alternating verbs pair a plain form with an ł-causative:

(1)

Tóshjeeh *si-ts'il.* *'The barrel shattered, broke to pieces.'*

`barrel` `SPF:3-shatter:PERF`

H&P 1996, exx. (4), (5), (6), (16). Copied from Which intransitive verbs take a plain ɬ-causer?, ex. (4a).

(2)

Łeets'aa' *sé-ɬ-ts'il.* *'I shattered the dish.'*

`dish` `3:SPF:1s-ɬ-shatter:PERF`

H&P 1996, exx. (4), (5), (6), (16). Copied from Which intransitive verbs take a plain ɬ-causer?, ex. (4b).

(3)

Tin *yí-yį́ʔ. (< -ghį́ʔ)* *'The ice melted.'*

`ice` `YPF:3-melt:PERF`

H&P 1996, exx. (4), (5), (6), (16). Copied from Which intransitive verbs take a plain ɬ-causer?, ex. (5a).

(4)

Yas *yí-ɬ-hį́ʔ. (< -ghį́ʔ)* *'I melted the snow.'*

`snow` `3:YPF:1s-ɬ-melt:PERF`

H&P 1996, exx. (4), (5), (6), (16). Copied from Which intransitive verbs take a plain ɬ-causer?, ex. (5b).

'Laugh' does not alternate. It takes the complex causative with the incorporated postposition, and the plain causative of 'burp' is starred:

(5)

'Awéé' *yi-dloh.* *'The baby is laughing.*

`baby` `PROG:3-d:laugh:PROG`

H&P 1996, exx. (10), (13). Copied from Which intransitive verbs take a plain ɬ-causer?, ex. (10a).

(6)

’Awéé’ bi-y-eesh-dloh. *‘I am making the baby laugh.’*

baby 3-y-PROG:1s-ɬ-d:laugh:PROG†

SOURCED † Segmentation note (2026-11-11 audit pass 4): Hale & Platero 1996 (10) prints *bi-y-eesh-dloh.* with the gloss “3-y-PROG:1s-ɬ-d:laugh:PROG”: the gloss names more morphemes than the form shows as separate pieces (fused or unwritten morphemes), so the two lines do not match one-to-one in the source. Kept exactly as printed.

H&P 1996, exx. (10), (13). Copied from Which intransitive verbs take a plain ɬ-causer?, ex. (10b).

(7)

**’Awéé’ d-é-sa’. (< … -ɬ-za’)* *‘I burped the baby.’*

baby d-SPF:1s-ɬ-belch

H&P 1996, exx. (10), (13). Copied from Which intransitive verbs take a plain ɬ-causer?, ex. (13).

3. The argument

R2 HYPOTHESIS . The schema page's rule ("vol/mov-dominant → complex") HYPOTHESIS fails on motion: 'float away', 'roll away', 'flow away' and 'fall away' all alternate. No single Dowty entailment predicts the split; Dowty reports the same about Rosen (p. 606). R2 fits the whole sample with no exceptions: a verb does not alternate if its sole participant is sentient and the predicate is atelic.

A second diagnostic agrees HYPOTHESIS . HMP's 'start to' forms agree on HYPOTHESIS all five overlapping verbs:

- 'dry up' and 'spoil' (alternating) shift their participant to object;
- 'cry' (non-alternating) takes an inserted ';
- 'sleep' and 'snore' keep the subject.

LINK-1 fits eight more HMP verbs.

MAINTAIN HYPOTHESIS . Verbs of holding something in place are not a problem for Dowty's selection principle, which counts entailments and does not need the object to change. The held object is weak, not impossible. They were a gap in the site's ADD-CAUSER rule, whose two cases were keyed to change against volition. MAINTAIN, with conditions C10 and C11, is the missing third case. HYPOTHESIS

The measure of a trip GRANT'S CONJECTURE SOURCED . Grant holds that in a motion event the distance phrase is the incremental theme and the vehicle is not. Three sources support this for English: GRANT'S CONJECTURE SOURCED

- Dowty, on *drive (a car) from New York to Chicago*: the incremental theme is the PATH.
- Krifka: movement "can be measured by the path".
- Hay, Kennedy & Levin, who use Grant's own wording.

4. Counter-evidence and cautions

- **The values are ours.** All entailment values were assigned by us from English glosses, and H&P's sample is illustrative, not a census HYPOTHESIS . HYPOTHESIS
- **H&P's own account is structural** (predicate vs non-predicate roots). R2 has not yet been shown to beat a lexical diacritic, so T4 stays open OPEN . OPEN
- **No Navajo test of the distance claim.** No opened Navajo sentence has both a vehicle and a distance. The only mile phrase is NLA entry 479. The Smith, Perkins & Fernald copy has a garbled text layer, so its forms are not reproduced here SOURCED . SOURCED

5. Status

> R2 is a hypothesis. It is supported by two diagnostics and still has to be tested on verbs outside H&P's sample with Dowty's (i)/(ii) tests OPEN . OPEN

References

1. Hale, Ken & Paul Platero 1996 (H&P), exx. (4)–(21). OPENED

2. Dowty 1991. Thematic proto-roles and argument selection. Language 67 (pp. 567–572, 606). OPENED
3. Krifka 1998. The origins of telicity (manuscript), pp. 9–10, 22, 25. OPENED
4. Hay, Kennedy & Levin 1999. SALT IX (preprint), pp. 13–15. OPENED
5. Smith, Perkins & Fernald 2007. Time in Navajo: direct and indirect interpretation. IJAL 73: 40–71 (text layer garbled). OPENED
6. Rosen (as reported by Dowty p. 606). NOT OPENED
7. Tenny; Young & Morgan 1987. NOT OPENED

Working notes behind this essay: Which intransitive verbs take a plain ł-causer?, Keeping a state vs bringing about a change, ‘We ran about two miles’: is the distance the incremental theme? Distance phrases in Navajo motion sentences, the vehicle, and the ‘but didn't get there’ test (T47), Who stays the subject when you add ‘start to’? The Navajo inchoative as a test of where a one-participant verb's participant starts out (T37b), Theta roles as arguments: the proto-role schema.

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