Mostly Agree: Merge and Agree inside the Navajo verb word

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.

Grant Golland (research by Grok Bot) · 2026-10-27 · status: HYPOTHESIS (Agree inside, Merge at edges; one Merge site downgraded to OPEN; MA-2′(c) moved to P_INCH)

Abstract

Grant asked whether the Navajo verb word has Merge sites, places where something is built or moved, and not only agreement. This essay argues that most of what happens inside the word is Agree. The few Merge sites are at the left edges of domains. The 'start to' placeholder is the closest match anywhere on the site between a Navajo fact and a mid-level Minimalist term, an expletive filling an EPP or Edge requirement. Checking Chomsky's 2000/2001 definitions forced one revision: the placeholder cannot sit on the word's phase head.

Restated on the unified structure (2026-11-15): Merge sites and Agree sites inside the word are now the basis of Grant's hypothesis about the headedness mismatch (GRANT'S HYPOTHESIS, tested on the sourced template in §3.2). See https://navajo-decoded.grant-golland.workers.dev/unified-structure/#us-word (https://navajo-decoded.grant-golland.workers.dev/unified-structure/#us-word). The essay's data, judgments and citations are unchanged; it is kept as the record of what was argued then.

2026-11-11 audit pass 1

"Needs nothing to move" described a possible realization model, not evidence that V stays put. Earlier source phase/Agree conditions are labeled contrasts, not axioms. Light d, expletive placement, the MA/EF rule family and the identity of a Navajo T remain hypotheses. Test Grant's V→v→T and separate subject raising against PF merger/template filling on the same left-specifier vP/TP skeleton, preserving an explicit event LF. The old essay's full derivations remain OPEN for pass 2.

2026-11-13 audit pass 7

The pass-1 note above treats V→v→T and subject raising as a comparator to test against PF/template rivals. Since 2026-11-13 they are the working default in tensed clauses: VPISH frames where the arguments start so that syntax and semantics line up; it is not a word-order account. PF merger and template filling are kept only as labelled contrast, for how exponents line up inside the word, and the open question is what else has to move. The pass-1 note is kept as written. See the 2026-11-13 note and the pass 7 report.

1. The question

> Grant's note asks which Navajo template positions are Merge sites and which are Agree sites, and whether mid-level notions from Chomsky (EPP, feature inheritance, Multiple Agree) apply inside the word GRANT'S CONJECTURE . GRANT'S CONJECTURE

2. The data

A fourth-person subject leaves a third-person object with no prefix:

(1)

jishxash *3.4.bit* *‘That person bit it.’*

Willie 1991:124–125, (23)–(25). Copied from Fourth person: escape from the animacy scale, ex. (23b).

The causative *b-* sits on the incorporated postposition:

(2)

’Awéé’ *d-ee-za’.*

baby d-SPF:3-belch:PERF

‘The baby burped.’

Hale 1997, PDF p. 53 (page image), (41); “¬” restored as ł. Copied from Attached or separate? Procliticized vs detached postpositions, where the word ends, and which verb + postposition pairs are idioms (T43e), ex. (41a).

(3)

’Awéé’ *bi-di-y-é-sa’. (< b-d-y-s-´-sh-ł-za’)*

baby 3-d-y-SPF:1s-ł-belch:PERF

‘I burped the baby.’

Hale 1997, PDF p. 53 (page image), (41); “¬” restored as ł. Copied from Attached or separate? Procliticized vs detached postpositions, where the word ends, and which verb + postposition pairs are idioms (T43e), ex. (41b).

The 'start to' forms of HMP and Hale (*shiná’niidlóóh*, *’iná’niichah*, *’i’niichííl*, *bi’niichx’ǫ’*) are quoted in the working notes on the inchoative, from HMP (2b), (7b), (10a), (10d), (16a) SOURCED . SOURCED

3. The argument

Agree inside HYPOTHESIS . Three facts need nothing to move inside the word: HYPOTHESIS

1. The ordinary subject prefix is pronounced on Mode/Subject, which copies person and number from the slot where it was built (Hale 2003 n. 11).
2. A postposition's pronoun, including the inverse *bi-* in W&J (50b) *bitah*, is valued inside the PP.
3. The choice among *yi-*, *bi-* and Ø is made inside the word, before any noun arrives.

Merge at edges HYPOTHESIS . There are three candidates, all at the left edge HYPOTHESIS of a domain:

- HMP's "bumping" of an object into disjunct Position I;
- the deictic piece of a subject (*ji-*, *'-*, *ho-*);
- the role-less placeholder *'* that 'start to' adds when nothing fills its object requirement.

After the originals were read, the deictic piece was downgraded to open. Chomsky's feature inheritance allows it to be either Agree morphology on the top head or Merge by the top head's edge feature, and the two readings give the same strings.

The placeholder is an expletive HYPOTHESIS . Chomsky (2008:157) says an HYPOTHESIS edge feature that cannot be satisfied by movement "must be satisfied by EM, necessarily of an expletive since no argument role can be assigned", and that a head with no accessible goal shows "default morphology" SOURCED . HMP describe SOURCED exactly this.

4. Counter-evidence and revision

MA-2′(c) moves to P_INCH HYPOTHESIS . MI and DbP allow pure Merge of an HYPOTHESIS expletive only at a non-phase head like T: "If H is v/C, XP is not introduced by pure Merge" (MI (5a), p. 102) SOURCED . The rule MA-2′(c) had put the SOURCED placeholder in the qualifier layer, the word's phase head. That is exactly the excluded case. The rule moves back to P_INCH, where IN-8 first put it. Two facts fit a T-like head there: INCH's requirement is obligatory, and the position carries no role.

Not Hiraiwa's Multiple Agree SOURCED HYPOTHESIS . The object prefix reads two different things from two different goals. Hiraiwa's operation has one probe valuing one feature on several goals, and the probe shows only the closer goal (p. 79 n. 12). The site's "Multiple Agree" candidate is therefore something else.

SOURCED

HYPOTHESIS

5. Status

> Whether the deictic subject piece is Agree or Merge is open. So is whether the low participant under 'start to' raises or is reached in place (T37b), since no printed form rules out either OPEN .
>
> OPEN

References

1. Chomsky, Noam 2000. Minimalist inquiries: the framework. In Martin, Michaels & Uriagereka (eds.), Step by Step, 89–155. MIT Press. OPENED
2. Chomsky, Noam 2001. Derivation by phase (DbP). OPENED
3. Chomsky 2008 (p. 157 as recorded on the site). OPENED
4. Hiraiwa 2001. OPENED
5. Hale, Munro & Platero (inchoative manuscript; HMP), nn. 1–4, exx. (2), (7), (10), (16). OPENED
6. Hale, Ken 2003 (manuscript), n. 11, p. 10. OPENED
7. Hale, Munro & Platero 2000, MITWPL 3, pp. 97–116. NOT OPENED
8. Young & Morgan 1980. NOT OPENED

Working notes behind this essay: Merge and Agree inside the Navajo verb word: Merge sites, Agree sites, phases, and whether anything is [+MFS]-like (T40), The borrowed terms checked against their originals: what Rudin 1988, Hiraiwa 2001 and Chomsky 2008 actually define, and what that changes inside the Navajo verb word (T40b), The older definitions behind “edge feature”: what Chomsky 2000 and 2001 say about the EPP-feature, Match/Agree, activity and phases, and what that changes inside the Navajo verb word (T41e), 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), ‘Start to’ in Hale, Munro & Platero's own words: the participant's prefix goes first, the ’ is an object, and verbs with nobody low get a placeholder (T38a, T38b, T38d–g), Why ordinary subject prefixes sit on the tense-aspect head and the fourth-person, indefinite and areal subjects do not: one feature bundle, two places to pronounce it (T35c, T36g).

Static site, no tracking. Source: github.com/crimsonflower420/navajo-decoded (https://github.com/crimsonflower420/navajo-decoded). Design: palette, type and emblems by Artiste; front-end and WebDAV recommendations by Web Designer. Fonts: Gentium Book Plus, Source Sans 3, Noto Sans Mono (SIL Open Font License; license). Notation is provisional (standard Minimalist: vP/VoiceP, Spec-to-Spec movement, copies in angle brackets).