One proximate per clause? Obviation, rank and Hale's general b-

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 (R4/R5 fit all checked data except residue OP-9; OPEN items listed)

Abstract

Aissen 2000 analyses Navajo yi- and bi- as obviative and proximate pronouns, with exactly one proximate per span. Saxon prints clauses with two bi- prefixes, which that analysis does not predict. This essay reconstructs the repair the site adopted: yi- marks an object

outranked by an on-tier subject, and bi- is the elsewhere form (R4/R5). It shows that R4/R5 is Aissen 1997's direct/inverse comparison applied word by word, and that it coincides with Hale's description of b- as the 'general' third-person object.

Restated on the unified structure (2026-11-15): obviation is restated through the inverse Move (H3), the one-noun default (H4″) and the third-person linking rule (H31). 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

Aissen 2000 treats *yi-* and *bi-* as obviative and proximate non-subject pronouns, with exactly one proximate per span (fn. 15, §4.1, §7) SOURCED . Can that rule SOURCED survive clauses with more than two third persons?

2. The data

Aissen's thing-subject clause:

(1)

diné dził yooí.

man mountain YI-sees

Aissen 2000, (13a, b) and (16a, b), both citing Hale 1973 (RTF, SIL IPA93 decoded). Copied from One “main” third person per clause? Aissen 2000 re-read against the two-bi- sentences (T61e), ex. (1).

(2)

dibé tó 'abíił 'éél.

sheep water BI-swept off

Aissen 2000, (13a, b) and (16a, b), both citing Hale 1973 (RTF, SIL IPA93 decoded). Copied from One “main” third person per clause? Aissen 2000 re-read against the two-bi- sentences (T61e), ex. (2).

Saxon's (38), from Young & Morgan, has two *bi-* forms in one clause:

(3)

Bił *biná'eeł.*

`b-with` `b-float around`

Saxon 2003 p. 354, (38), citing Young & Morgan 1987:227. Copied from Three third persons on Aissen's 1997 tier: ranked obviatives, and a direct/inverse check made word by word (T62d), ex. (2).

Hale's causative examples, where the causative P's agreement takes the verb word's only object slot:

(4)

Shí *ashkii* *bi'iiss²á.*

`1SG` `boy` `b-'-y-Ø-sh-¬-y²á`

Hale 1997, PDF p. 58, (50a, b); (49b), (51b) p. 58. Copied from Hale's "general" b-: the workshop text behind "Hale 2000:70–71", and whether it is the subject-relative yi- (T62e), ex. (3).

(5)

Hastiin *ashkii* *yi'iis²á.*

`man` `boy` `y-'-y-Ø-Ø-¬-y²á`

Hale 1997, PDF p. 58, (50a, b); (49b), (51b) p. 58. Copied from Hale's "general" b-: the workshop text behind "Hale 2000:70–71", and whether it is the subject-relative yi- (T62e), ex. (4).

(6)

**Hastiin* *ashkii* *bááh yiyiis²á.*

`man` `boy` `bread` y_{AGRc}-y_{AGRo}-y-$Ø_{M}$-$Ø_{AGRs}$-¬-y²á

'The man makes the boy eat bread.' (49b), Hale's star; (51b), with one agreement prefi

Hale 1997, PDF p. 58, (50a, b); (49b), (51b) p. 58. Copied from Hale's "general" b-: the workshop text behind "Hale 2000:70–71", and whether it is the subject-relative yi- (T62e), ex. (5).

3. The argument

Aissen's rules, applied as stated, predict one *yi-* in Saxon's (38) and (39). Both prefixes are *bi-* HYPOTHESIS . Repairs R1–R3 fail. HYPOTHESIS

> R4 fits every datum checked except a residue called OP-9 HYPOTHESIS : HYPOTHESIS

- *yi-* marks an object outranked by the subject on the same tier;
- *bi-* is used elsewhere.

R4 agrees with Aissen on all clauses with two third persons, so the possessor results in Essay 4 are unaffected.

Aissen 1997 supports the move. Her 1997 framework allows one proximate and several ranked obviatives. Its direct/inverse distinction compares subject and primary object once per verb SOURCED . R4, restated positively as R5, is that comparison applied to SOURCED Navajo prefixes. Perkins (8b) shows the comparison is made once per word, not once per clause, which places it in rule set A HYPOTHESIS . HYPOTHESIS

Hale's text agrees. Hale's workshop text calls *b-* the "general" third-person object marker. On his account *y-* needs a third-person object "in the c-command domain of a clausemate third person subject" SOURCED . That rule is relative to the subject and SOURCED assigned object by object, like R4/R5. It uses c-command where they use rank, and the two coincide under the site's BR HYPOTHESIS . HYPOTHESIS

4. Counter-evidence

- **"One proximate" fails as a general rule.** The clauses with two *bi-* prefixes contradict "*bi-* = the one proximate or topic". The site's ranking results stand only for animate subjects HYPOTHESIS . HYPOTHESIS
- **Rival patterns for thing-on-thing clauses.** Creamer and Perkins give different patterns for clauses where one thing acts on another (OP-10) OPEN .
- **Hale's rule and spoken-noun order.** Applied to the order of spoken nouns, OPEN Hale's rule is contradicted by Creamer (c23) against Perkins (32). Applied to pronominal slots, it survives HYPOTHESIS . HYPOTHESIS

5. Status

> Still open OPEN : OPEN

- how two inanimate obviatives are ranked;
- the both-obviative test;
- whether any Navajo form shows Obv1 against Obv2 directly;
- the printed Hale 2000 pages.

References

1. Aissen, Judith 2000. Full RTF with footnotes. OPENED
2. Aissen, Judith 1997. On the syntax of obviation. Language 73(4): 705–750. OPENED
3. Saxon, Leslie 2003. WECOL 2001, vol. 13 (citing Perkins and Young & Morgan). OPENED
4. Hale, Ken. Workshop text hale023 (= Hale 2000:70–71 as cited by Saxon, HYPOTHESIS), PDF pp. 16–27, 58. OPENED
5. Hale, Ken 2000 (printed pages). NOT OPENED
6. Creamer 1974. Ranking in Navajo nouns. OPENED

Working notes behind this essay: One “main” third person per clause? Aissen 2000 re-read against the two-bi- sentences (T61e), Three third persons on Aissen's 1997 tier: ranked obviatives, and a direct/inverse check made word by word (T62d), Hale's “general” b-: the workshop text behind “Hale 2000:70–71”, and whether it is the subject-relative yi- (T62e), Two ways to put the object first: Saxon 2001 on bi- inversion vs Focus Movement, and whether the fronted patient sits in an A-position (T60c).

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