Which postpositions does the voice rank? Instruments, beneficiaries and the causee

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.

2026-11-11 audit pass 6. This essay said the instrument *bee* occurs "in both 3/3 sentences found". The second sentence (NLA 92) is 3/3 only by its translation; its gloss line marks a first-person subject and has "3-for" under *bee*. The essay now says so, marks that point OPEN, and limits the prediction to what the data support. See the pass 6 report.

Grant Golland (research by Grok Bot) · 2026-10-27 · status: HYPOTHESIS (IP-1 contradicted, replaced by IP-1′; P1 survives a weak test; causee b- SOURCED)

Abstract

Some Navajo postpositions alternate between y- and b- with the voice, like the verb's own object, and others do not. This essay follows the site's attempts to say which are which. The first rule, IP-1, was contradicted by Willie's 'lead for' and 'roll to' pairs and replaced by IP-1′: a PP belongs to the verb complex when the voice ranks its object together with the verb's participants. The instrument 'with (a thing)' never alternates in the sentences found, and a causative's incorporated postposition keeps its own b-.

Restated on the unified structure (2026-11-15): a postposition is [PP DP P^{0}]: grammatical P agrees with its specifier, lexical P has no probe (H64). See https://navajo-decoded.grant-golland.workers.dev/unified-structure/#us-nominal (https://navajo-decoded.grant-golland.workers.dev/unified-structure/#us-nominal). The essay's data, judgments and citations are unchanged; it is kept as the record of what was argued then.

1. The question

Willie's "grammatical" postpositions take pronoun objects and belong to the verb complex (MVS), the domain of the voice alternation. Which postpositional phrases, then, are ranked by the voice?

2. The data

'Lead' with 'for' alternates with the voice (Willie p. 95):

(1)

'ashkii	*'at'ééd*	*łį́į'*	*yá*	*yoolóós*
boy	girl	horse	3.for	3.3.lead [sing. +animate]

Willie 1991 p. 95 (PDF p. 101, page image at 300 dpi), (85)/(86). Copied from Hale's "general" b-: the workshop text behind "Hale 2000:70–71", and whether it is the subject-relative yi- (T62e), ex. (1).

(2)

'ashkii	*'at'ééd*	*łį́į'*	*bá*	*yoolóós*
boy	girl	horse	3.for	3.3.lead [sing. +animate]

Willie 1991 p. 95 (PDF p. 101, page image at 300 dpi), (85)/(86). Copied from Hale's "general" b-: the workshop text behind "Hale 2000:70–71", and whether it is the subject-relative yi- (T62e), ex. (2).

The person-marking 'with' alternates in NLA sentences:

(3)

’Ashkii yázhí éí bimá kingóó yił yi’ash.

`boy little TOP 3-mother store-to 3-with 3-walk.du.Prog`

‘The little boy and his mother are walking to the store.’

NLA Postposition Lexicon, accompaniment and goal lists, entry 1992 (speaker Sammie Largo). Copied from Does the yi-/bi- voice reach the instrument? Every third-person sentence in four NLA postposition lists: -ł alternates yił/bił, the instrument is only bee, and the postposition of a verb + P unit stands next to the verb (T50a, T49b–d), ex. (1992).

(4)

Jáan Mary bił baghan.

`John Mary 3-with 3-live`

‘Mary lives with John.’

NLA Postposition Lexicon, accompaniment list, entry 2 (speaker Tyler Tinhorn). Copied from Does the yi-/bi- voice reach the instrument? Every third-person sentence in four NLA postposition lists: -ł alternates yił/bił, the instrument is only bee, and the postposition of a verb + P unit stands next to the verb (T50a, T49b–d), ex. (2).

The instrument 'with (a thing)' is *bee* in both sentences found. The first is 3/3 on every line. The second is 3/3 only by its translation: its gloss line marks a first-person subject ("3-1-hit.P") and has "3-for" under *bee*, so whether it is 3/3 is `OPEN` : OPEN

(5)

Tsinaabąąs bee nida’abąąsgo shi’dizhchį́.

`wagon 3-with pl-3-drive.I-GO 1-pass-born.P`

‘I was born when wagons were being used.’

NLA Postposition Lexicon, instrumental list, entry 1953 (speaker Ron Gene; no printed source given). Copied from Does the yi-/bi- voice reach the instrument? Every third-person sentence in four NLA postposition lists: -ł alternates yił/bił, the instrument is only bee, and the postposition of a verb + P unit stands next to the verb (T50a, T49b–d), ex. (1953).

(6)

Shimá sání lééchąą'í tsin bee nidiiłhaal.

`1-grandma dog stick 3-for 3-1-hit.P`

'My grandma hit the dog with a stick.'

NLA Postposition Lexicon, instrumental list, entry 92 (speaker Tyler Tinhorn; no printed source given). Copied from Does the yi-/bi- voice reach the instrument? Every third-person sentence in four NLA postposition lists: -ł alternates yił/bił, the instrument is only bee, and the postposition of a verb + P unit stands next to the verb (T50a, T49b–d), ex. (92).

A causative's incorporated postposition keeps its own *b-* under a first-person causer:

(7)

'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).

3. The argument

IP-1 is contradicted HYPOTHESIS . The site's first rule, IP-1, said a PP is inside the MVS only when its object is a participant the verb's stem describes. But you can lead a horse without leading it for anyone, and the 'for' PP still alternates with the voice. Willie says the inverse has scope "over the verb word and any associated postpositonal phrases" (p. 208, her spelling) SOURCED . That is contradicting data under a sourced diagnostic.

IP-1′ replaces it HYPOTHESIS . A PP is inside the MVS when the voice ranks its object together with the verb's participants. A PP whose object is never ranked, such as the rope you rope with, is on the clause side. That explains NLA's *… bee dibé síníloh*, where a noun stands between the instrument PP and the verb.

Prediction P1 survives its first test HYPOTHESIS . No *yee* for the instrument occurs in any of the four NLA lists SOURCED . If the instrument were ranked, *y-* would be expected in the first sentence, and in the second too if its translation is right. HYPOTHESIS SOURCED

The causee SOURCED HYPOTHESIS . Under a first-person subject, all ten causative verb words found mark a third-person causee with *b-*, while plain ł-transitives show Ø. Hale & Platero: "as if attached to an incorporated postposition". The site's reading is that a P's agreement keeps its own table after incorporation. Animacy is not the condition (car vs dish), which contradicts Saxon's "animate". SOURCED HYPOTHESIS

4. Counter-evidence and cautions

- **P1 is weak.** It rests on two sentences. In (92) the NLA gloss line says the subject is first person while the translation says it is the grandmother. The instrument postposition might simply have no *y-* form HYPOTHESIS . HYPOTHESIS
- **Intransitives.** Willie p. 97 seems to contradict pp. 63 and 94. Read at the level of the whole MVS, it says that an MVS with one argument slot has no inverse. That reading fits every example but is not proven HYPOTHESIS . HYPOTHESIS
- **A spelling discrepancy (erratum).** The 'lead' verb is printed *yoolóós* on some site pages (Willie p. 95 rows) and *yoołóós* on others (Willie (29), p. 64, and the verb-by-verb summary). This essay quotes each row as its page prints it. Which spelling Willie prints on each page has not been re-checked against the page images, so no correction is made here OPEN . OPEN

5. Status

> Still open OPEN : OPEN

- what decides which roles get ranked: animacy, or the kind of relation;

- whether the causee *b-* is obligatory;
- fourth-person causers;
- whether speakers extend the 'travel with' pattern to new verbs.

References

1. Willie, MaryAnn 1991, pp. 39–41, 57–64, 94–100, 208, 224. OPENED
2. Willie, MaryAnn & Eloise Jelinek 2000, p. 270. OPENED
3. Navajo Language Academy. Navajo Postposition Lexicon, semantic lists (Wayback captures). OPENED
4. Hale, Ken 1997 (hale023), PDF pp. 31–33, 52–58. OPENED
5. Hale, Ken & Paul Platero 1996 (vdoc.pub text). OPENED
6. Saxon, Leslie 2003, fn. 12, (42). OPENED
7. Young & Morgan 1987. NOT OPENED

Working notes behind this essay: Willie's grammatical postpositions checked verb by verb: which postpositional phrases belong to the verb complex (the voice decides, not the verb alone), and the spell-out rule rewritten with the word as its first domain (T49f, T49h), Does the yi-/bi- voice reach the instrument? Every third-person sentence in four NLA postposition lists: -ł alternates yił/bił, the instrument is only bee, and the postposition of a verb + P unit stands next to the verb (T50a, T49b–d), Can a noun stand between a postposition and its verb? bee dibé síníloh, Willie's uninterruptible verb complex, and where a postpositional phrase is merged (T49), Attached or separate? Procliticized vs detached postpositions, where the word ends, and which verb + postposition pairs are idioms (T43e), What is a Navajo postposition (P, functional, T, C?), and are verb + postposition units phrasal verbs? Sources, derivations, phrase-level lexicalization (T32), Can a one-participant verb have a grammatical postposition and an inverse? Willie 1991 p. 97 vs p. 94, five licensing conditions tested, phrase-level lexicalization (T32e), ‘With me it went’: is the -ił “transportation” pattern a productive pattern or an idiom, and who is the subject when you travel? (T45f), Why 'I make the baby laugh' keeps bi-: the causee's prefix belongs to the postposition (T64f), Hale's “general” b-: the workshop text behind “Hale 2000:70–71”, and whether it is the subject-relative yi- (T62e).

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