

Obviation in Nishnaabemwin possessive forms reanalysis

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Main claim: There is no obviative morpheme in Nishnaabemwin, only inanimate plural suffix /-an/ and disjoint marker /-Vni/. This claim is extended to all Algonquian languages.

1. Nishnaabemwin

- An Algonquian language spoken in Southern Ontario, known as Odawa or Ojibwe
- No morphological cases on nominals. Obviation serves as disjoint reference (Grafstein 1984, Dechaine and Wiltschko 2002) when two animate nouns co-occur.
- An example of obviation in transitive clause:

(1) Zhaabdiis-an w-zaag-aa-n Tom
 John-obv 3-love TA-DIR-obv Tom¹
 'John, he loves him, Tom' (TS)²

2. Obviation in possessive

- Two genders: different markings when possessed by third persons. Obviation takes place in the possessive form of the animate nominal, but not inanimate.

(2)	AN		IN	
	his dog(s)	'w-nimosh- <u>an</u> ' 3-dog-obv	his house	'w-wigwam' 3-house
	his son(s)	'w-gwiiwzens- <u>an</u> ' 3-son-obv	his boat	'w-jiimaan' 3-boat
	his kettle(s)	'w-kik- <u>oon</u> ' 3-kettle-obv	his knife	'w-mokomaan' 3-knife

*w-nimosh

*w-gwiiwzens

*w-kik

¹ The abbreviations used in this work are: TA = transitive animate verb; TI = transitive inanimate verb; DIR = direct theme marking; INV = inverse theme marking; OBV = obviative; IN = inanimate; AN = animate; PL = plural; 1 = first person; 2 = second person; 3 = third person; 0 = inanimate person.

² The data marked TS are elicited from my language consultant, Terry Spanish.

- The presence of the obviative suffix neutralizes the number. The possessum can have singular or plural interpretation. An example of a sentence with third person possessor and third person possessum:

(3) Zhaabdiis o-zaag-aa-n do³-nimosh-an (TS)
 John 3-love-DIR-obv 3-dog-obv
 ‘John loves his dog (s)’

I argue that the morpheme /-an/ is not obviative but the inanimate plural morpheme marked on an animate noun. (To be discussed in 4)

- When the third person possessor is disjoint from the subject, the possessum is marked with /-(V)ni/ regardless of gender.

(4) mdaaswi gii-nsaawaad, mii dash iw gii-wdaapnamwaad iw wdeni
 ten killed AN and then that took out IN that 3-heart-*ini*
 ‘When they killed about ten (turtles), they took out their hearts (IN)’
 (Valentine, p.203)

(5) bezhig oshkiniigikwe ogii-wiijiwaan apane oosan odayini
 one young woman had someone with always 3-father-obv 3-dog-*ini*
 ‘A certain young woman always took along her father’s dog (AN)’
 (The Dog’s Children, p.56)

- (4) and (5) demonstrate that number is not distinguished by /-Vni/ either. As *heart* in (4) is plural but *dog* in (5) is singular. They are both marked with /-(i)ni/. The morpheme /-Vni/ marks on both inanimate nouns (4) and animate nouns (5).

I argue that the morpheme /-Vni/ is not obviative but the disjoint marker marked on both animate and inanimate nouns. (To be discussed in 7)

Summary

1. An animate nominal must be marked with the obviative /-an/ when possessed by a third person. But when its possessor is disjoint from the subject of the sentence, it is marked with /-Vni/.
2. An inanimate nominal is not marked with /-an/ but when the possessor is disjoint from the subject of the sentence, it is marked with /-Vni/.

³ *do*-is a third person marker, another form of *w*-.

3. /-an/ and /-Vni/ in the literature

- /-an/, when appears with an animate noun, is considered the obviative morpheme for as long as Algonquian grammar has been known. The obviative is a discourse marker indicating the non-central third person. Many have proposed that an obviative noun has the [obviative] feature (Halle & Marantz 1993, Dechaine 1999, Bruening 2005, etc.).
- Although inanimate nouns do not have an obviative marker, the verb is marked with /-Vni/. Therefore, it is said to be the marker for obviative possessors or further obviative.

Valentine, p.623:

“Inanimate nouns are not inflected for obviation, but verbs associated with them can be inflected to show obviation.”

- (6) aapji dash gii-mno-bmaadzi, gye go kina gii-maajaamgadni_{OBV} wdakjiwin
 really then AN felt well and all IN was gone his cold
 ‘He felt very well and all his cold had gone away’

The issues:

1. If /-an/ is the discourse marker for the peripheral noun, why should the possessum, which is the head of the noun, be at the periphery? Positing that an object of a transitive verb is marked obviative to show its peripheral status might be acceptable, but the same logic cannot apply to the possessive form since the possessum is the central referent, the thing being talked about.
2. Why is number neutralized when they are obviative?

Proposal:

1. Having ‘obviative’ as a separate category makes Algonquian grammar more complicated than it should be.
2. When a morpheme has a homophonous counterpart, we should assume they are the same morpheme unless it is absolutely impossible to unify them, a la ‘One form One Meaning’ Principle (Johns 1992) and Monosemy Principle (Cowper 1995).
3. I propose a unified account for /-an/ which also occurs as the inanimate plural marking and /-Vni/ as the conjunct disjoint suffix. All nouns marked with /-an/ are inanimate (and not obviative) and all nouns marked with /-Vni/ are disjoint (and not obviative).

4. The so-called ‘obviation’ serves to facilitate co-indexing and disjoint reference (reference tracking) in Algonquian because these languages lack morphological Cases and possess free word order. It disambiguates the Agent from the Patient.
5. To distinguish two animates without morphological Cases, the animate Agent stays animate and the animate Patient is marked with an inanimate marking.

4. Inanimate plural /-an/

- In Nishnaabemwin, plural marking differs between the animate and inanimate nouns.

(7) Comparison between the obviative and inanimate plural nouns

	Singular	Plural	Obviative	Gloss
Animate nouns	zhiishiib	zhiishiib-ag	zhiishiib- an	duck
	mnidoo	mnidoo-g	mnidoo- n	spirit
	pin(y)	pin-iig	pin- iin ⁴	potato
	kik(w)	kik-oog	kik- oon	kettle
Inanimate nouns	jiimaan	jiimaan- an	-	boat
	zenbaa	zenbaa- n	-	ribbon, silk
	nniinj	nninj- iin	-	my hand
	bkok(w)	bkok- oon	-	arrow

(Valentine, p. 180-184)

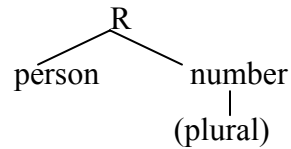
- The obviative suffix has the same form as the inanimate plural suffix.
- How to determine the gender of a noun:
 - a. Plural marker
 - b. Demonstrative
 - c. Intransitive verb
 - d. Transitive verb
- The obviative noun has the same plural marker and the same demonstrative as the inanimate noun. Even the suffix appearing on the verb is the same.

- (8) a. o-gii-ganawaaband-aa-**n** **aniw** mitigoons-**an**
 3-past-look at IN-dir-**IN pl** IN pl dem. bush- **IN pl**
 ‘He looked at those bushes (IN)’
- b. o-gii-bapasidiyeshka-waa-**n** **aniw** zhingibeny-**an**
 3-past-kick in the rump repeatedly-dir-**obv.** dem. helldiver-**obv.**
 ‘He gave that/those helldiver(s) (OBV) a couple of powerful kicks in the rump’
 (The Dog’s Children, p. 18)

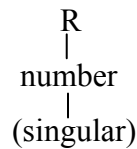
⁴ Vowel lengthening results from the final approximants of the stem (/w/ and /y/) assimilating to the vowel of the suffix: y + in → iin, w + on → oon.

- Assuming the Feature Geometry Theory (Harley & Ritter 2002, Cowper & Hall 2005), the animate and inanimate person differ in that the animate has a person node and the inanimate lacks it. The feature representations of animate and inanimate person are shown in (13):

(13) a. Animate third person



b. Inanimate third person



- The animate third person has a person and a number node. The inanimate third person has only one number node (therefore, cannot show person agreement). The values in the brackets are number specification. When the number node is underspecified, the referent receives its default interpretation. The default number for an animate person is singular and the default number for an inanimate person is plural.
- In a transitive inanimate clause (a clause with an inanimate object ‘John sees a boat’), the co-indexing is illustrated in (14):

(14) $\overbrace{\text{w-waabnd-aa-n} \quad \text{jiimaan} \quad \text{Zhaabdiis}}^{\text{he sees it, boat, John}}$
 3- see IN-dir-IN boat John

1. The third person prefix /w-/ has a person and number feature.
 2. The suffix /-n/, indicating inanimate agreement, has no person feature.
 3. Matching: match /w-/ with *Zhaabdiis* [person] [number] and /-n/ with *jiimaan* [number[sing]]
 4. **Once the co-indexing is established, all the nominals can be omitted.**
- In a transitive animate clause, the co-indexing cannot be done since both nominals have the same feature specification: both have [person] and both can be the antecedent of /w-/.

Feature matching with two animates:

(15) *w-waabm-aa mkwa Zhaabdiis 'he sees him, bear, John'

- To resolve this, one person must delete its person feature. Because the object is lower and c-commanded by the subject, the object nominal must delete its person feature by default.

(16) w-waabm-aa-n mkwa-n Zhaabdiis 'he sees it/them, bear(s), John'

[per] [num] [per][num] [per] [num]

3-see AN-dir-IN bear-IN pl John

1. Both nominals have [person] and can be linked to /w-/.
2. The object nominal deletes its [person] feature, only [number] is left.
3. When the number node is unspecified for an inanimate, it receives the plural interpretation. Therefore, the inanimate plural /-an/ is attached to the object nominal.
4. Matching: Match /w-/ with *Zhaabdiis* [person] [number] and /-n/ with *mkwan* [person][number]

No matter which order the nominals appear in, they will always be linked to the corresponding pronominal. Hence, the nominals are omitted once the co-indexing is established as long as they are paired up with the same person. When a new person is introduced, the co-indexing starts again by the subject being animate and object being inanimate.

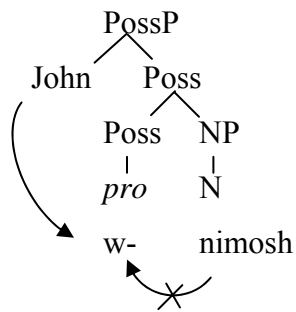
Obviation is the result of feature deletion to resolve co-indexing conflict.

If the obviative is the animate turned inanimate, how then do we explain why it takes VAI and VTA?

- The co-indexing happens after the object agreement takes place. The verb selects the object agreement right when it merges with the object. This is why the obviative still behaves like an animate person in this regards.

(I only show the derivation for a direct transitive clause and neglect the inverse transitive clause where the subject is obviative. It is assumed that in this case, the co-indexing is established in the previous sentence and thus the obviative stays obviative in the next sentence because it is still paired up with the same character.)

(21) *John w-nimosh 'John's dog'

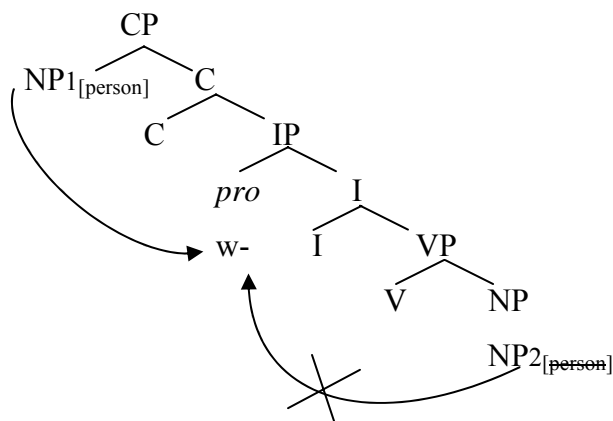


- But the co-indexing conflict happens here as well (regardless of how the interpretation would be). The possessum cannot have the feature [person]. Therefore, it must delete its [person] feature and is marked with the inanimate plural suffix: *John w-nimosh-an* 'John's dog'.
- The possessor can be separated from the possessed NP as long as it is licensed by co-indexing with the person prefix.

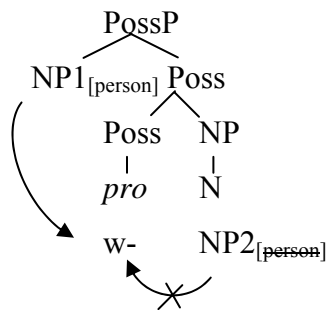
The parallel

- ❖ In a transitive clause, obviation resolves co-indexing conflict between two animate third person subject and object.
- ❖ In a possessive form, obviation resolves co-indexing conflict between two animate third person possessor and possessum.
- ❖ Both conflicts are resolved by deleting the person feature of the lower, c-commanded nominal and turning it into a (morphological) inanimate.
- ❖ Keep in mind that the agreement takes place in the syntax. Once the nominals move out of their thematic positions, the co-indexing takes place; therefore, there is no order in which nominal has priority in co-indexing. The c-commanding has the advantage of being linked to the person prefix due to its discourse function.

(22) Transitive



(23) Possessive



- The possessum is obviative because it is c-commanded by a third person. However, when the possessor itself is a c-commanded person, i.e. an obviative person, the possessum is marked with a disjoint marker. That means the /-an/ suffix also marks a co-reference between the subject and the possessor but /-Vni/ marks a disjoint reference between the possessor and the subject. This is dealt with next.

7. The disjoint morpheme /-Vni/

- Another possessive marking, previously considered a form of obviation is illustrated in (7) and (8), repeated below:

(7) mdaaswi gii-nsaawaad, mii dash iw gii-wdaapnamwaad iw wdeni
 ten killed AN and then that took out IN that 3-heart-*ini*
 'When they killed about ten (turtles), they took out their hearts (IN)'

(8) bezhig oshkiniigikwe ogii-wiijiwaan apane oosan odayini
 one young woman had someone with always 3-father-obv 3-dog-*ini*
 'A certain young woman always took along her father's dog (AN)'

- The morpheme /-ini/ also appears in the conjunct form to signal a disjoint subject:

(24) wekenish gaa-aamat Zhaabdiis zagawaad
 who past-see AN John smoke conj.
 'Who saw John smoking?' (TS)

(25) wekenish Zhaabdiis gaa-aamat zagawaa-ni-d
 who John past-see AN smoke-*ni*-conj.
 'Who did John see smoking?' (TS)

(26) Wgii-waabmaan dash niw zhiishiiban niibna bbaa-gomod
 he saw them then that duck-obv many float about conj.
 'He saw many ducks as he floated about' (Valentine, p.624)

- (27) Wgii-waabmaan dash niw zhiishiiban niibna bbaa-gom-ni-d
 he saw them then that duck-obv many float about-*ni*-conj.
 ‘He saw many ducks as they floated about’ (Valentine, p.624)

- When the possessor is disjoint from the subject of the sentence, the possessum is marked with /-Vni/, which also appears in the conjunct verb form indicating disjoint Agent from the subject.
- This can be accounted for if we posit that in both cases, /-Vni/ is the disjoint marker for both verbal and nominal.

8. Conclusion

- I have argued that the previously known ‘obviative’ morphemes /-an/ and /-Vni/ in the possessive form and the transitive clause are the same morphemes as the inanimate plural /-an/ and the disjoint marker /-Vni/.
- Two animate third persons must be made disjoint when they co-occur in both a nominal phrase and a sentence. One animate must delete its person feature and becomes inanimate.
- As for the disjoint marker, it is straightforward why a possessor NP needs to be distinguished when it is disjoint from the subject of the sentence. It is suggested that the disjoint morpheme /-Vni/ occurs in the different position from the plural marker /-an/ since they behave differently with regards to the locative morpheme /-ing/.
- The advantages of this analysis are:
 - (1) The possessor constraint can be accounted for. A sentence cannot consist of an obviative subject and an obviative subject because this causes co-indexing conflict. Two participants cannot be both inanimate.
 - (2) This also predicts that a sentence with an inanimate Agent is not possible. This is also the case since inanimate Agents must be incorporated into the verb.
 - (3) This proposal lifts up the burden of the grammar to have an extra grammatical category which is not attested in any other language families.
 - (4) If two morphemes look the same, it should be treated the same unless we cannot find their shared properties.

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