1 Introduction

- Hän is an Athabaskan language with only six remaining speakers, spoken in Eagle, Alaska, US and in the Dawson City area, Yukon Territory, Canada.

- There has been much discussion in past years about the distribution of Athabaskan object pronouns.

- Like other Athabaskan languages, Hän has two third person object pronouns, which are used as verbal prefixes and prefixes to postpositions.

- In other Athabaskan languages, the two third person object pronouns are distributed based on topic, focus, animacy, voice, and/or obviation.

- By contrast, Hän’s direct object pronouns can be predicted from syntax alone.

- However, as when the same two pronouns act as objects of postpositions, the distribution of yē- and wē- is based on person and animacy features, combining the behavior of Hän direct object pronouns and the behavior of postpositions in Gwich’in, a nearby Athabaskan language.

- We provide here a description of the distribution of Hän pronouns, as well as a comparison to the accounts provided for other Athabaskan languages.

2 Hän Direct Objects

- Athabaskan languages are known to have two third person singular object pronouns
  - They are generally referred to as Y-/B- pronouns, from the proto-Athabaskan pronouns ye- and we-
  - Their distribution varies greatly from language to language and has been the subject of many papers.
  - However, we contend that, even among a wide variety of behaviors from other Athabaskan languages, the distribution of Hän’s pronouns is significantly different from the behavior of any other documented Athabaskan language.
Hän, like the other Athabaskan languages, has two 3rd person singular object pronouns

- yê- and wê-
- In keeping with Athabaskan literature, we will gloss these with Y- and B- to clearly demonstrate how Hän compares with the other languages shown.

Background: Hän is an SOV language.

- There is no scrambling.
- Non-wh objects can only occur before subjects in the case of hanging topic left dislocation.

Object pronouns are used when the object DP is not adjacent to the verb. Adjacent object DPs, no matter how large, are not used with yê- or wê-.

(1) a. Overt object

łayy shär nähtthè’
dog bear barked.at
‘The dog barked at the bear.’
Unavailable: ‘The bear barked at the dog.’

b. Pronominal object/no overt object DP

łayy yê-nähtthè’
dog Y-barked.at
‘The dog barked at it.’
Unavailable: ‘It barked at the dog.’

c. Hanging topic left dislocation

shär łayy yê-nähtthè’
bear dog Y-barked.at
‘The bear, the dog barked at it.’
Unavailable: ‘The bear barked at the dog.’

Object pronouns are used when the object is not overtly specified or if the object is in some other way non-adjacent to the verb (hanging topic left dislocation, adverbs intervening, etc.).

(2) Percy [eey shär łayy yê’aww]DP (*yê-)jehk’ah

that bear dog Y-bit (*Y-)3sgS.shot
‘Percy shot the bear that the dog bit.’

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1 The exception is the third person plural object pronoun, which can occur in a surprisingly wide variety of locations within the sentence.
• Differences in use between yē- and wē-:
  o yē- is used when the subject is 3rd person
  o wē- is used elsewhere

(3)  
(a) yē- *(used when the subject is 3rd person)*
   yē - dādāhch’ee
   Y - 3sgS.depend.on
   ‘He/she depends on him/her.’

(b) wē- *(used when the subject is 1st or 2nd person)*
   wē - dādōkch’ee
   B - 1sgS.depend.on
   ‘I depend on him/her.’

3 Some Other Athabaskan Direct Object Pronouns

• In all other Athabaskan languages, 3rd person object pronouns are only used when the subject is also 3rd person.
  o So, the same conditions which lead to the use of yē- in Hän license the use of either pronoun in other Athabaskan languages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject features</th>
<th>Hän pronoun</th>
<th>Other Athabaskan pronouns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st or 2nd person</td>
<td>Y-</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd person</td>
<td>B-</td>
<td>Y- or B- depending on other features</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• Assuming 3rd person object and subject, object pronouns in other Athabaskan languages are used...
  o always (in Apachean languages)
  o only when there is no overt object DP at all (in Northern languages)

(Rice & Saxon 2001)

Hän, by comparison:
  o Hän uses 3rd person object pronouns whenever the object is not adjacent to the verb.
  o When the subject is 1st or 2nd person, other Athabaskan languages use no object pronoun and Hän uses wē-.

• In the Apachean languages, yi-/bi- alternation has been argued to encode animacy (Hale 1973) or topicality/focus (Platero 1974, Thompson 1996, Uyechi 1996, Rice and Saxon 2001, Hale, Jelinek, and Willie 2003)
  o Below, we will show some examples of the arguments for topicality, with the data mirrored in Hän, thereby showing that topicality does not affect Hän pronouns.
**Jicarilla Apache (Uyechi 1996):**
- *y*ī- appears when the subject is topical, as in (4)
  - The question that elicits (4) as an answer provides evidence for the topicality of the subject noun phrase *ishkiyįį* ‘boy’
- *bi*- occurs when the object is topical, as in (5)
  - In (5), the object *chééé* ‘girl’ is more topical, shown by the question that elicits this sentence as an answer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jicarilla Apache</th>
<th>Hän</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(4) a. <em>ishkiyįį</em>  <em>chééé</em>  <em>yaa'į</em></td>
<td>b. <em>chaa</em> t’ēgaa <em>noh’įį</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>boy          girl          Y-sees</td>
<td>boy     girl     sees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘The boy sees the girl.’</td>
<td>‘The boy sees/is looking at the girl’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Answer to ‘What is the boy doing?’)</td>
<td>(Answer to ‘What’s the boy doing?’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Uyechi 1996: 127)</td>
<td>(Uyechi 1996: 127)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) a. <em>chééé</em>  <em>ishkiyįį</em>  <em>maa’į</em></td>
<td>b. <em>t’ēgaa</em> <em>chaa</em> yēnoh’įį</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>girl          boy          B-sees</td>
<td>girl     boy     Y-sees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘The girl is seen by the boy.’</td>
<td>‘The boy sees the girl’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Answer to ‘What’s happening with the girl?’)</td>
<td>(Answer to ‘What’s happening with the girl?’)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Navajo (Rice & Saxon 2001):**
- The Navajo data below shows that the topicality analysis extends to cases in which both subject and object are pronominal
  - In (6), the pronominal subject is topical and the verb is marked by *y*ī-
  - In (7), the object of the verb ‘kick’ is more topical than the subject, so the verb is marked by *bi*-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Navajo</th>
<th>Hän</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(6) a. <em>yizتا</em></td>
<td>b. <em>yēkhetdonayy</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y-kicked</td>
<td>‘Y-kick.PROG’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘He (topic) kicked him.’</td>
<td>‘He’s (topic) kicking him’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Answer to ‘What did he do?’)</td>
<td>(Answer to ‘What is he doing?’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Rice &amp; Saxon 2001: 1)</td>
<td>(Rice &amp; Saxon 2001: 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) a. <em>bista</em></td>
<td>b. <em>yēkhetdonayy</em> (<em>wēkhetdonayy</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-kicked</td>
<td>‘Y-kick.PROG’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘He kicked him (topic).’</td>
<td>‘He’s kicking him (topic)’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Answer to ‘What happened to him?’)</td>
<td>(Answer to ‘What’s happening to him?’)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4 Postpositions

- Hän uses the same two pronouns as 3rd person singular objects of postpositions.

- Just like with direct objects, the objects of postpositions are sensitive to the person features of the subject. Assuming all else is equal, we once again see that:
  - yë- is used when the subject is 3rd person
  - wë- is used elsewhere

(8) yë-khayy dhejaa  
 3sgO-on sit
  ‘She/he is sitting on it/him/her.’

(9) wë-khayy dhihjaa  
 3sgO-on 1sgS.sit
  ‘I am sitting on it/him/her.’

4.1 Animacy features

- Like direct objects, objects of postpositions do not react in any way to focus, topicality, or voice. However, they are subject change based on the animacy features of the subject.

- In Hän’s closest linguistic/geographic neighbor, Gwich’in, the Y-/B- alternation behaves in a similar way (Thompson 1996).
  - Many Hän speakers also speak Gwich’in, as it is the closest neighbor to Hän geographically. Hän speakers often refer to Gwich’in as “that language from down the river” and have told us that the two languages are mutually intelligible for the most part.

- Gwich’in pronouns only occur as objects of postpositions

- The Y-/B- alternation in Gwich’in is conditioned by the animacy features of the subject
  - In (10), the subject is ‘Susan’, an animate subject; the oblique object is Y- (whose Gwich’in reflex is y¼a-)
  - Meanwhile, in (11), the subject is the inanimate kii ‘rock’, and the oblique object is marked by B- (Gwich’in reflex va-)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gwich’in</th>
<th>Hän</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(10) a. Susan y-akak nadhat</td>
<td>b. Susan yë-kayy náthhát</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y-on stand</td>
<td>Y-on stand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Susan is standing on it/him/her.’</td>
<td>‘Susan is standing on it.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(11) a. kii v-akak nànaii</td>
<td>b. Tthee wë-kayy nádänayy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rock B-on fell</td>
<td>rock B-on fell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘A rock fell on it/him/her.’</td>
<td>‘A rock fell on her.’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Thompson 1996: 86)
• The above examples show that the Y-/B- alternation for object pronouns is conditioned by the animacy features of the subject.²

• This sensitivity to subject animacy features in Hän is only relevant when the subject is third person.
  o When the subject is 1st or 2nd person, wē- is used.
  o When the subject is third person:
    ▪ Animate subjects → yē- is used
    ▪ Inanimate subjects → wē- is used

• Person features are sometimes considered to be included on animacy scales (Hale 1973, Aissen 1999, among others). Unfortunately, while this scale involves a clear dividing line for Hän direct object pronouns, the objects of postpositions do not cleanly adhere to this scale:

  (12) Direct Objects:

  Subject: 1st person 2nd person 3rd person animate 3rd person inanimate
  wē- yē- wē-

  (13) Objects of Postpositions:

  Subject: 1st person 2nd person 3rd person animate 3rd person inanimate
  wē- yē- wē-

4 Summary

• The behavior of Hän’s direct object pronouns deviates from all other Athabaskan languages.
  o Other Athabaskan languages base the variation of Y-/B- pronouns on topic, focus, or voice distinctions
  o Hän, on the other hand, bases the variation on the person features of the subject

• On the other hand, Hän’s postpositional objects consider both the person features and the animacy of the subject.

• Thus, the objects of postpositions share at least one property (sensitivity to the animacy of the subject) with Hän’s closest neighbor, Gwich’in. Either…
  o …Hän retained this animacy sensitivity over time, originating prior to the split with other Athabaskan languages
  o …or Hän has regained this distinction from proximity with Gwich’in.

² Data not provided here: the animacy features of the object do not affect pronoun choice.
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