

Prominent internal possessors as proximate possessors

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Goals

A novel analysis of possession in Tundra Nenets (TN) in terms of **obviation**

- obviation governs the distribution of 3rd person nominals in a clause
- in Tundra Nenets (TN), obviation status is only coded on agreeing lexical possessors
- their distribution is restricted by principles found cross-linguistically
- ➡ contribution to the typology and morphosyntax of obviation

Introduction

Possession and PIPs

In Tundra Nenets, agreement with pronominal possessors is obligatory:

- (1) (*pida*) *wā̄sako*-*(*da*)
 3SG husband-3SG
 ‘her husband’

Agreement with lexical possessors is optional – both are **DP-internal**:

- (2) a. *Maša-h* *wā̄sako*
 Masha-GEN husband
 ‘Masha’s husband’
- b. *Maša-h* *wā̄sako-da*
 Masha-GEN husband-3SG
 ‘Masha’s husband’
- c. *Wera-h* (**yetři*) *weńako-x°danta* *pīn°ə-d°m*
Wera-GEN *always* *dog-ABL.3SG* be.afraid-1SG
 ‘I am (always) afraid of Wera’s dog.’

Agreeing lexical possessors are **prominent internal possessors (PIPs)**

Properties and distribution of PIPs

PIPs differ from other possessors in their properties and distribution

- being lexical, PIPs are 3rd person by definition
- the distribution of PIPs is syntactically restricted
- PIPs cannot co-occur with certain third person nominals in the clause

This suggests an analysis in terms of **obviation**:

- a grammatical system of reference tracking
- regulates the co-occurrence of 3rd person nominals within a clause
- a more salient 3rd person is called **proximate (PROX)**
- a less salient 3rd person is called **obviative (OBV)**

Obviation I

Aissen (2001) proposes two general properties of obviation systems¹

1. relative rank of 3rd persons determined by topicality, animacy, semantic role
2. syntactic processes are sensitive to the rank of 3rd persons

Aissen (1997, 2001) distinguishes between **morphological** and **syntactic** obviation:

- morphological obviation is overtly coded as PROX/OBV morphemes
- syntactic obviation refers to processes affecting multiple 3rd persons

▣ Tundra Nenets has morphological and syntactic obviation

¹Obviation is mostly found in Native American languages; see e.g. Dahlstrom (1986), Goddard (1990), Dryer (1992), Aissen (1997, 2001), Brittain (2001), Bruening (2001), Oshima (2007)

Obviation II

PROX and OBV indicate the relative rank of 3rd person nominals to each other

(3) Obviation hierarchy

proximate > obviative

- **Proximate Uniqueness**: in a certain syntactic domain (the ‘obviation span’), usually a clause, there is only one PROX referent (cf. *i.a.* Aissen 1997, Brittain 2001)
- **Default mappings** of PROX onto grammatical relations and referential status
 - animates are PROX, inanimate are OBV
 - possessors are PROX, possessed nouns are OBV
 - subjects are PROX, objects are OBV

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²Goddard (1990), Aissen (1997, 2001), Dryer (1997), Bruening (2001)

Proximate and obviative

Deviation from default mappings is often morphologically coded

- e.g. **direct** (subject-prominent) vs. **inverse** (object-prominent) verb forms

(4) *'-Tiy-a-l yaq mamam-ol, ...* [Passamaquoddy]
 3-say to-**DIR**-OBV QUOT 3.mother-**OBV**
 'She (PROX) said to her mother (OBV), ...' (Bruening 2001: 115)

- with obviative subjects and proximate objects, the **inverse** must be used

(5) *'-Tiy-uku-l yaq mamam-ol, ...* [Passamaquoddy]
 3-say to-**INV**-OBV QUOT 3.mother-**OBV**
 'Her mother (OBV) said to her (PROX), ...' (Newell 1979: 9, via Bruening 2001: 115)

Analysis

Proposal

Tundra Nenets mostly has a syntactic obviation system

- however, 3SG.POSS with lexical possessors is an overt PROX marker
- PIPs are **inherently** PROX
- PIPs are only licensed in the absence of another PROX nominal in a clause
 - otherwise a non-agreeing possessor is chosen
- one PIP per clause
- PROX is determined by grammatical function and semantic properties (Dryer 1997, Aissen 2001)

Sources of PROX in Tundra Nenets

Obviation status is determined by the following hierarchies, independently motivated in Tundra Nenets grammar

(6) **Animacy hierarchy**

animate > inanimate

(7) **Grammatical functions hierarchy**

subject > agreeing object > object > oblique

- highest 3rd person nominal on (6) and (7) is assigned PROX, lower ones OBV
- subjects and agreeing objects are generally topics in Tundra Nenets (TN)
- 3rd person pronouns are always animate

Obviation in Tundra Nenets: subject and object

In a simple transitive, the SBJ is **PROX** and the OBJ(+AGR) **OBV**

- (8) *Maša* (Wera-h) *ti-m* *ladə°* / *ladə°-da*.
 Masha Wera-GEN reindeer-ACC hit.3SG hit.3SG.SBJ>SG.OBJ
 ‘Masha hit Wera’s / a / the reindeer.’

- (9) [**Proximate** **Obviative**]
 | |
 SBJ **OBJ**

Obviation can lead to **passivisation** if OBJ’s referent is more topical than SBJ’s

- (10) *xada-wi°-q* *ŋæ-wi°-q*
 kill-PRF.PTCP-PL be-INFR-PL
 ‘They were killed.’

(Nikolaeva 2014: 244)

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Distribution of PIPs: subjects

3rd person subjects block PIPs

- (11) a. *məñ°* [*Wera-h ti-m* / *te-m-ta*] *ladə°-d°m*.
 I Wera-GEN reindeer-ACC reindeer-ACC-3SG hit-1SG
 'I hit Wera's reindeer.'
- b. *Maša* [*Wera-h ti-m* / **te-m-ta*] *ladə°*.
 Masha Wera-GEN reindeer-ACC reindeer-ACC-3SG hit.3SG
 'Masha hit Wera's reindeer.'

Distribution of PIPs: agreeing objects

3rd person agreeing objects block PIPs

- (12) a. *pidər°* [*Wera-h* *ńabako-m*] *ńu°ćaa-n°* / *ńu°ćaa-r°*.
 you.SG Wera-GEN sister-ACC kiss-2SG kiss-2SG>SG.OBJ
 'You kissed Wera's sister.'
- b. *pidər°* [*Wera-h* *ńabako-m-ta*] *ńu°ćaa-n°* / **ńu°ćaa-r°*.
 you.SG Wera-GEN sister-ACC-3SG kiss-2SG kiss-2SG>SG.OBJ
 'You kissed Wera's sister.'

Distribution of PIPs: subjects and agreeing objects

(11) and (12) motivate the position of PIPs among grammatical functions

(13) **Hierarchy of grammatical functions**

subject > agreeing object > PIPs > object > oblique

- Proximate Uniqueness rules out PIPs with nominals higher on (13)
- PIPs behave like a grammatical function between OBJ+AGR and OBJ

Deriving the distribution of PIPs: 1SG.SBJ and PIP

Obviation is only relevant for 3rd person, 1SG.SBJ does not block PIPs

- (14) *məñ°* [*Wera-h* *te-m-ta*] *ladə°-d°m*.
 I Wera-GEN reindeer-ACC-3SG hit-1SG
 'I hit Wera's reindeer.'

- (15) [Proximate Obviative]
 1SG.SBJ PIP
-

Any non-agreeing, lexical OBJ or OBL will be assigned **OBV**

Deriving the distribution of PIPs: 1SG.SBJ and PIP

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 I Wera-GEN reindeer-ACC-3SG hit-1SG
 'I hit Wera's reindeer.'

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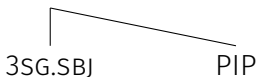
- (15) [*Proximate* *Obviative*]
 1SG.SBJ PIP OBJ
-

Deriving the distribution of PIPs: *3SG.SBJ and PIP

PIPs are not compatible with a 3rd person SBJ

- (16) **Maša* [*Wera-h* *te-m-ta*] *ladə°-d°m*.
 Masha Wera-GEN reindeer-ACC-3SG hit-1SG
 'Masha hit Wera's reindeer.'

- (17) ✗ [Proximate Obviative]




(16) is ungrammatical since more than one nominal is PROX

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PIPs are not compatible with a 3rd person SBJ

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 Masha Wera-GEN reindeer-ACC-3SG hit-1SG
 'Masha hit Wera's reindeer.'

- (17) ✗ [*Proximate* Obviative]
- 
- ```

graph TD
 A[Proximate] --- B[3SG.SBJ]
 A --- C[PIP]

```

(16) is ungrammatical since more than one nominal is PROX

## Deriving the distribution of PIPs: \*OBJ+AGR and PIP

PIPs are not compatible with OBJ+AGR, whether or not PIPs belong to the object NP

- (18) \**pidar*<sup>o</sup> [ *Wera-h*    *ńabako-m-ta* ] *ńu*<sup>o</sup>*ćaa-r*<sup>o</sup>.  
 you.SG    Wera-GEN sister-ACC-3SG    kiss-2SG>SG.OBJ  
 'You kissed Wera's sister.'

- (19) ✗ [ Proximate    Obviative ]
- 
- 2SG                      PIP                      OBJ.AGR

(18) is ungrammatical since more than one nominal is PROX



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 you.SG    Wera-GEN sister-ACC-3SG    kiss-2SG>SG.OBJ  
 'You kissed Wera's sister.'

- (19) ✗ [ *Proximate*    Obviative ]
- 
- 2SG                      PIP                      OBJ.AGR

(18) is ungrammatical since more than one nominal is PROX

## Distribution of PIPs: 3rd person pronouns

### 3rd person pronouns block PIPs

(20) a. (*pida*) *ńe°ka-m-ta*      *ńanta* *ńedaraə-d°m*  
 3SG    brother-ACC-3SG    3SG.DAT    send-PST.1SG  
 'I sent his/her brother to him/her.'

b. [ *Peta-h*    *ńe°ka-m*    /    \**ńe°ka-m-ta*    ] *ńanta* *ńedaraə-d°m*.  
 Petya-GEN    brother-ACC      brother-ACC-3SG    3SG.DAT    send-PST.1SG  
 'I sent Peter's brother to him/her.'

c. [ *Peta-h*    *ńe°ka-m*    /    *ńe°ka-m-ta*    ] *ńedaraə-d°m*.  
 Petya-GEN    brother-ACC      brother-ACC-3SG    send-1SG  
 'I sent Peter's brother.'

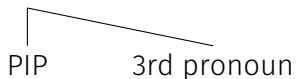
(20) motivates the role of animacy in obviation: 3rd person pronouns are PROX

# Deriving the distribution of PIPs: \*3rd person pronoun and PIP

3rd person pronouns block PIPs

- (21) [ *Peťa-h*    *ńe°ka-m*    /    \**ńe°ka-m-ta*    ]    *ńanta*    *ńedaraə-d°m*.  
          Petya-GEN brother-ACC    brother-ACC-3SG    3SG.DAT send-PST.1SG  
          ‘I sent Peter<sub>i</sub>’s brother to him/her\*<sub>j</sub>.’

- (22) ✗ [ Proximate    Obviative ]



(21) is ungrammatical since more than one nominal is PROX

# Deriving the distribution of PIPs: \*3rd person pronoun and PIP

3rd person pronouns block PIPs

- (21) [ *Peťa-h*    *ńe°ka-m*    /    \**ńe°ka-m-ta*    ]    *ńanta*    *ńedaraə-d°m*.  
           Petya-GEN brother-ACC    brother-ACC-3SG    3SG.DAT send-PST.1SG  
           ‘I sent Peter<sub>i</sub>’s brother to him/her\*<sub>j</sub>.’

- (22) ✗ [ *Proximate*    Obviative ]



(21) is ungrammatical since more than one nominal is PROX

# Why obviation?

Can the distribution of PIPs follow from binding principles?

- Principle A is not relevant, since competition does not involve anaphors
  - Principle B fails to rule out PIPs with non-coreferential pronouns
  - Principle C fails to rule out PIPs with non-coreferential DPs
- Principles A, B, C do not capture the distribution of PIPs

## Binding and obviation in TN

Principles A/B account for the unavailability of co-referential readings in (23)

- (23) [ *Wera-h* *ńe°ka* ] *śita* *ladə°*.  
 Wera-GEN brother 3SG.ACC hit.3SG  
 ‘Wera<sub>i</sub>’s brother<sub>j</sub> hit him<sub>\*i/\*j/k</sub>.’

With PIPs, even non-co-referential readings in (24) are ungrammatical

- (24) \*[ *Wera-h* *ńe°ka-da* ] *śita* *ladə°*.  
 Wera-GEN brother-3SG 3SG.ACC hit.3SG  
 intended: ‘Wera<sub>i</sub>’s brother<sub>j</sub> hit him<sub>k</sub>.’

- possessors c-command out of NP (cf. Despić 2013 on Serbo-Croatian)
- binding fails to explain the general ungrammaticality of (24)

# Binding and obviation in TN

3rd person pronouns block PIPs due to **violating Proximate Uniqueness**

(24) \**[ Wera-h ñe°ka-da ] śita ladə°.*  
 Wera-GEN brother-3SG 3SG.ACC hit.3SG  
 intended: 'Wera<sub>i</sub>'s brother<sub>j</sub> hit him<sub>k</sub>.'

⇒ syntactic repair: PIP can be **removed from the obviation span**

(25) *Wera-m, ñe°ka-da śita ladə°.*  
 Wera-ACC brother-3SG 3SG.ACC hit  
 'Wera<sub>i</sub>'s brother<sub>j</sub> hit him<sub>i/\*j/k</sub>,' lit. 'As for Wera<sub>i</sub>, his<sub>i</sub> brother<sub>j</sub> hit him<sub>i/\*j/k</sub>.'

Dislocation allows

- ⇒ coreference between PIP and object pronoun
- ⇒ free reference of object pronoun

## Interim summary: obviation in TN

The distribution of PIPs is syntactically restricted

- PIPs are blocked by 3rd person SBJ, OBJ+AGR and pronouns
- ▣▶ PIPs are **inherently proximate**
- ▣▶ they can only occur when there is no higher element (Proximate Uniqueness)
- ▣▶ PIPs behave like a special (clause-level) grammatical function
- ▣▶ binding principles do not account for distribution of PIPs



## Supporting evidence

## PIPs as clause-level grammatical functions

PIPs behave like grammatical functions in some other respects

- PIPs are more peripheral in the NP than non-agreeing possessors

- (26) a. *tuku<sup>o</sup> Wera-h ti*  
           this   Wera-GEN reindeer
- b. *Wera-h tuku<sup>o</sup> te-da*  
           Wera-GEN this   reindeer-3SG  
           both: 'this reindeer of Wera's'

- PIPs participate in switch-reference like grammatical functions
- PIPs can bind possessive pronominals like clause-level elements

## Properties of PIPs in the clause: PIPs and possessive pronouns

Subjects and sub-clausal nominals do not antecede possessive pronominals ...

- (27) [ *Maša-h wā̃sako* ] (*pida*) *xər<sup>o</sup>-m-ta xana<sup>o</sup>*.  
 Masha-GEN husband 3SG knife-ACC-3SG take.3SG  
 ‘Masha<sub>i</sub>’s husband<sub>j</sub> took his/her<sub>\*i/\*j/k</sub> knife.’

... but subjects can bind anaphors

- (28) [ *Maša-h wā̃sako* ] *xər<sup>o</sup>-ta xər<sup>o</sup>-m-ta xana<sup>o</sup>*.  
 Masha-GEN husband REFL-3SG knife-ACC-3SG take.3SG  
 ‘Masha<sub>i</sub>’s husband<sub>j</sub> took his/her<sub>\*i/j/\*k</sub> knife.’

## Properties of PIPs in the clause: PIPs and possessive pronouns

PIPs, however, can serve as antecedents for possessive pronominals ...

- (29) [ *Maša-h* *wā́sako-da* ] (*pida*) *xər°-m-ta* *xana°*.  
 Masha-GEN husband-3SG 3SG knife-ACC-3SG take.3SG  
 ‘Masha<sub>j</sub>’s husband<sub>j</sub> took his/her<sub>i/\*j/k</sub> knife.’

... but not anaphors

- (30) [ *Wera-h* *ńablako-da* ] *xər°-ta* *weńako-m-ta* *ladə°*  
 Wera-GEN sister-3SG REFL-3SG dog-ACC-3SG hit  
 ‘Wera<sub>i</sub>’s sister<sub>j</sub> hit his/her<sub>\*i/j/\*k</sub> dog.’ (cf. Nikolaeva 2014: 396)

→ PIPs show **clause-level prominence**, they are like clause-level non-subjects

- (31) *Wera-h* *ńīša* *Maša-n°h* (*pida*) *te-mta* *ńiqnga*  
 Wera-GEN father Masha-DAT 3SG reindeer-ACC.3SG give.3SG  
 ‘Wera<sub>i</sub>’s father<sub>j</sub> gave Masha<sub>k</sub> his/her<sub>\*i/\*j/k</sub> reindeer.’

# Conclusions

## Contribution to the typology of obviation

Tundra Nenets only marks obviation status on possessors

- ▶ only PROX is morphologically marked
- ▶ counterexample to (32)

(32) There are no languages which mark the obviation status of proximates (through nominal affixation) but not obviatives. (Aissen 2001: 24)

# Conclusions

Tundra Nenets shows a so far undescribed type of obviation

- Aissen's (1997) Proximate Uniqueness constraint is active in Tundra Nenets
- PROX is assigned to grammatical functions, but not coded on them
- a subset of possessors is **morphologically coded as PROX**
- PIPs “compete” with grammatical functions for PROX status
- clausal properties of PIPs indicate they behave like grammatical functions
  - correlates with prominent position in the NP
- only PROX is morphologically coded, not OBV

# Acknowledgements

## Thank you!

We gratefully acknowledge the support of the AHRC, project no. AH/M01078/1, “Prominent Possessors”.

**Abbreviations** 1=first person, 2=second person, 3=third person, ABL=ablative, ACC=accusative, AGR=agreement, DAT=dative, DIR=direct, GEN=genitive, INFR=inferential, INV=inverse, OBJ=object, OBL=oblique, OBV=obviative, PIP=prominent internal possessor, PL=plural, POSS=possessive, PRF=perfect, PROX=proximal, PST=past, PTCP=participle, QUOT=quotative, REFL=reflexive, SBJ=subject, SG=singular, TN=Tundra Nenets.

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